



STATEMENT OF THE NDI INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSION TO GEORGIA'S OCTOBER 21, 2017 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

October 22, 2017
Tbilisi, Georgia

INTRODUCTION

This preliminary statement is offered by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) election observer delegation to Georgia's October 21, 2017 local government elections. The delegation included observers from five countries and was led by Karl Inderfurth, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State; Per Eklund, former EU Ambassador to Georgia; Margaret Curran, former MP for the UK Labour Party; Rhine McLin, former mayor of Dayton, Ohio; Nina Jankowicz, democracy, governance, and communications specialist; Aleksandra Kuratko-Pani, independent elections and parliamentary development expert; Donald Brownlee, campaign manager for fifth-term Virginia Congressman Gerald Connolly; Melissa Muscio, Program Director, NDI; Ebru Agduk, Deputy Director, NDI-Turkey; and Laura Thornton, NDI Global Associate and Senior Director of the Institute's office in Tbilisi. This statement builds on the findings of 12 long-term observers and two analysts focusing on election administration and disinformation, as well as NDI's July [pre-election assessment mission](#).

The aims of NDI's election observation mission are to accurately and impartially assess various aspects of the election process; examine the broader political environment and factors that could affect the integrity of the process; and offer any recommendations to support peaceful, credible elections and public confidence in the process. The Institute has undertaken its mission in accordance with the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* and its accompanying *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*, which have been endorsed by 52 leading international election observation organizations.

The delegation would like to stress that this statement is preliminary in nature. The official results are yet to be finalized, and electoral challenges, if any, are yet to be lodged and adjudicated. The people of Georgia will ultimately determine the credibility and legitimacy of their elections. NDI will continue to monitor electoral developments and will issue further statements, if needed.

SUMMARY

Georgia has significant democratic achievements to its credit, including peaceful transfers of power in 2012 and 2013, and the 2016 elections were widely viewed by the public as orderly and well-administered. The legislative and electoral framework is largely in line with international standards and conducive to the conduct of democratic elections. The country is anchored by a thriving and respected civil society sector, which is arguably its greatest democratic asset. Importantly, Georgians have strong aspirations to deepen their integration into the community of Western democracies and hold themselves to a high standard, and they ask others to hold them to that standard as well. It is in this vein that this delegation offers its assessment.

Georgia's local government elections have taken place in the broader context of growing debate and concern about one-party dominance and threats to political pluralism. With a constitutional majority in parliament, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party recently passed new constitutional amendments, local self-government changes, and election law reforms in a limited timeframe and without the support of opposition, civil society, or the President.¹ The country's democracy also struggles with a weak checks and balances, doubts about judicial independence, and challenges in the media environment. Opposition parties of disparate ideologies have issued joint statements registering their concerns about these issues and the overall state of democratic governance. For its part, the government has acknowledged the need for further reform in several areas, but in carrying out its efforts to date has neglected to secure broad-based consensus. This environment colored the view of contestants as they entered the campaign period and perpetuated the polarization between the governing party on one side and opposition parties and local civil society organizations on the other.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) fulfilled its administrative responsibilities, carrying out its duties in a timely, efficient, and transparent manner. Observers reported a good-faith effort to improve the capacity of officials at lower levels of the commission. Civil society organizations were active, monitoring the process, filing complaints, and suggesting improvements. Parties were able to register and campaign freely, in most cases.

Election day progressed without much incident, and Georgian voters, poll workers, party activists, and candidates demonstrated their commitment to democracy by participating peacefully. While isolated cases of disruption and counting discrepancies were reported by observers, the technical aspects of these elections were sound in most instances, in keeping with past progress in this area. Preliminary figures show turnout slightly higher than previous elections at 45.65 percent compared to 43.31 percent in the 2014 local elections.

These elections followed a campaign largely devoid of meaningful competition. The playing field was uneven, with the ruling GD receiving approximately 90 percent of all campaign donations and enjoying the greatest media visibility,² including coverage of government achievements and events. In contrast, opposition parties faced a lack of resources and significantly lower visibility and reach. A sense of resignation pervaded their campaigns. Opposition parties and nonpartisan

¹ For more detailed analysis of these reforms, please see NDI [pre-election assessment mission](#).

² See [UNDP/EU media monitoring results](#).

domestic observers describe the reasons for disparities as the pressure on potential opposition donors and the misuse of state administrative resources, while the ruling party maintains that they were simply better organized, more effective at fundraising, and had a more compelling vision. Regardless, such an imbalance, combined with a lack of extensive policy messages and debates in most of the country, hindered a real contest of ideas and values. The outcome was widely viewed as a foregone conclusion by many contestants and civil society organizations.

According to preliminary results as of 11:00 am on October 22, GD won 55.65 percent of the proportional vote, up from 50.82 percent in 2014. The party swept most of the majoritarian seats in *sakrebulo* (local council) races. United National Movement (UNM), European Georgia (EG), and Alliance of Patriots (AoP) passed the four percent threshold in proportional races for *sakrebulo*s. In the mayoral races, GD won in the first round in four out of five self-governing cities, including Tbilisi, and 53 out of 59 self-governing municipalities. Only six run-offs with the participation of GD candidates will take place in November.

With these preliminary results, Georgia appears to have reinforced governance marked by one party's dominance at all levels of elected office. This has characterized successive Georgian governments since independence and poses a challenge to democratic governance going forward. With the further consolidation of power in one party, prospects for vibrant and pluralistic democracy are at risk. The responsibility, of course, lies with country's leaders to create an environment that promotes a genuinely inclusive governing processes and strengthens democratic checks and balances.

ELECTION DAY FINDINGS

On August 21, the President of Georgia announced local elections would be held on October 21. Voters elected 2,058 members of 64 local legislative councils and 64 mayors in 59 self-governing communities and five self-governing cities for a four-year term. There is wide variance in district sizes for local government elections. For example, in Zugdidi municipality, the smallest district, with 550 registered voters, has roughly 21 times more voting power than the largest district, with 11,375 registered voters. This vote inequality undermines the one person, one vote principle in many areas.

In addition to a high number of accredited observers and party, candidate, and media representatives,³ the CEC also appointed 783 representatives to monitor district election commission (DEC) and precinct election commission (PEC) activities on election day; likewise, the DEC appointed 239 representatives to monitor PEC activities. This follows established practice in prior elections and is also in line with the recommendation of the NDI interim report.

Election day generally proceeded in an orderly manner and NDI observers reported mostly transparent and calm processes at visited polling stations. Preliminary voter turnout was 45.64 percent, slightly higher than in 2014 local elections (43.31 percent). Polling officials worked diligently over long hours to fulfill their responsibilities. While international and domestic

³ The CEC accredited 54,389 party and candidate observers; more than 4,820 media representatives from 72 different outlets; and 20,641 nonpartisan monitors from 71 organizations. In addition, 581 international observers from 30 groups received accreditation.

monitors observed isolated cases of electoral violations, some of them serious, it is unclear whether any of them would have had a material impact on the overall election results. However, in Marneuli district, a high number of violations and problems were reported by domestic observers, parties, and the media.

At numerous PECs, NDI observers witnessed party representatives standing behind registrars and recording data on people who voted. The CEC maintained this practice was legal as long as they did not interfere in the PEC work or take photos or videos of the voters' private data on the lists. However, NDI observers reported voters' protests, while domestic observers and electoral contestants called on the election officials to eliminate this practice due to potential voter intimidation or influence.

NDI observers reported that the precincts they observed opened on time or with minor delays, generally following the prescribed rules. Civil society election observers as well as party and candidate representatives were present in the vast majority of precincts visited. As in previous elections, NDI observers noted multiple instances of individuals accredited as nonpartisan observers identifying themselves and acting as party representatives potentially undermining credibility of citizen observation efforts.

Polling procedures were generally followed and the process was inclusive and transparent, despite occasional overcrowding. NDI observers did report some irregularities, most notably several instances of voters being instructed whom to vote for, problems with the secrecy of vote, as well as abuse of assisted voting procedure for proxy voting. Few problems emerged with voter lists in observed precincts.

Domestic observer groups reported several instances of their representatives being temporarily denied access to the PECs, limitations to observer rights, and a few cases of direct threats by other observer groups, party representatives, or unknown individuals. Key violations reported by civil society groups included instances of voters being instructed whom to vote for inside the PECs, refusal of PECs to register complaints, failure to apply ink or check voters' fingers for ink, voters allowed to vote without proper IDs, problems with mobile voting, late opening of PECs, and the presence of unauthorised individuals inside the PECs. Parties, candidates, and domestic observer groups informed the delegation about expulsion of their representatives from several PECs, as well as several instances of physical confrontations at polling stations, although the full scale has yet to be verified at the time of writing.

In most observed PECs, the counting process was reported to be generally calm and orderly. However, NDI observers reported several cases of serious procedural violations, errors and delays resulting from lack of officials' understanding of the procedures, as well as instances of involvement of self-declared party-affiliated observers in the count.

Over 300 complaints were filed with the election administration on election day, mostly on procedural violations.

On Sunday, October 22, the CEC announced provisional results showing second rounds will be required in six districts. The Commission published PEC summary protocols on its website in a timely manner.

CAMPAIGN ENVIRONMENT

Twenty-two parties and five coalitions fielded 12,902 candidates for proportional lists and, together with 201 initiative groups, nominated 369 mayoral and 4,727 majoritarian candidates. Despite numerous parties and candidates participating, the election campaign was marked by a striking lack of visible competition in the majority of the country, although events that took place were largely able to proceed without obstruction. Parties and candidates seemed either overly confident in, or resigned to, a particular outcome.

GD's presence was pervasive through advertisements, campaign materials, and media coverage, including the advantage of positive and plentiful reports on government projects and events held during the campaign period. The party received up to 90 percent of all donations⁴ and employed teams of coordinators across the country, with NDI long-term observers reporting one coordinator for about every 200 voters in certain districts. GD leaders explained their financial advantage by pointing to their superior fundraising skills and vision. By contrast, opposition parties faced a scarcity of funds, describing donors' expressed hesitancy to contribute. Both parties acknowledged the advantage of incumbency and possible benefits of contributing to the ruling party.⁵ Given their financial constraints, the opposition parties used their state funding to focus on door-to-door canvassing, small-scale meetings, free air-time, and low-cost social media, and concentrated their efforts in districts they viewed as competitive. Both the ruling party and opposition parties claim their opponents did not declare all donations.

Opposition parties also faced a significant number of candidate withdrawals, with many candidates providing dubious reasons. This hindered competition in several locations. By the October 9 deadline, the CEC data showed that 457 candidacies were withdrawn,⁶ including 240 from party lists, 196 from majoritarian races, and 21 from mayoral races.⁷ Almost all of them were from the opposition. In one district, all 17 candidates from EG withdrew, many providing the excuse of a study mission abroad, though no such mission can be verified. Even after the deadline, opposition parties reported candidates withdrawing under pressure, including 15 from UNM and 30 from EG. Opposition parties stated that they either received no explanation from their candidates for withdrawal, many refusing to even talk to the party, or stated that their candidates withdrew because of intimidation, allegedly by the state security services. Opposition parties acknowledged that intimidation was exceedingly difficult to substantiate. As a result of the withdrawals, there were several majoritarian districts in which GD ran completely unopposed.

NDI observers noted that neither the ruling nor opposition parties presented messages or policy solutions that seemed distinctive or particularly compelling to an already disillusioned and

⁴ [See interim report of the State Audit Office on 2017 Municipal Elections.](#)

⁵ Joint ISFED, TI and GYLA Evaluation of the Pre-Election Environment: 15 out of 31 companies that donated to the ruling party were awarded state contracts in 2017 through a simplified procurement, totaling GEL 2,145,022, while they donated GEL 1,021,793 in favor of the party. According to the Transparency International – Georgia, some of the natural persons that donated in favor of the ruling party were affiliated with 70 legal entities that were awarded at least a single state contract through a simplified public procurement in 2017.

⁶ A total of 91 women withdrew from the races, including 67 from proportional and 24 from majoritarian contests.

⁷ Some of the individuals were contesting more than one election simultaneously.

apathetic public,⁸ with the exception of Tbilisi. While broad topics were highlighted, such as environment, pensions, and economic development, there was little contrast or complexity presented in proposed solutions, making it challenging for voters to make informed choices based on policy or vision. Some campaigns were notable for integrating anti-Western and xenophobic messages, particularly the AoP and United Democratic Movement (UDM), according to media monitoring reports.⁹ Although a few televised debates in the final days of the campaign highlighted exchanges between parties and candidates on issues, long-term observers reported that often debates, particularly outside of Tbilisi, were simply spots in which candidates presented short remarks but did not interact with their opponents or engage in challenging questioning from moderators or one another. Media outlets reported that the parties requested this format in some cases. NDI observer discussions with citizens confirmed that the lack of issue-based dialogue perpetuates voting decisions based on personality or history.

While the campaign activities were modest, Tbilisi stood out as a city where mayoral candidates actively addressed issues raised by residents and proposed more concrete solutions. Opposition presence was more visible with billboards, posters, and television spots. All mayoral candidates agreed to participate in debates. In the last two weeks, Tbilisi also became energized over a vote in the city sakrebulo to grant land plots to a company affiliated with the former Prime Minister, Bidzina Ivanishvili, for the sum of one *lari*. The decision became one of the opposition's main talking points in the final days of the campaign and a theme of protests, and several activists and one opposition candidate were detained. While for most of the campaign, Ivanishvili's presence was not clearly felt, this incident reflects ongoing concerns about his influence over decision-making that is still a trigger point for many.

The campaign environment was generally peaceful throughout the country. There were instances of obstruction of campaign activities and destruction of posters, however, reported by both opposition and ruling parties. In addition, there were isolated incidents of violence. Two days before the election, a GD candidate and several activists were shot in front of their campaign office in Kizilajlo village of Marneuli district. GD leaders dismissed the importance of this event to the delegation, explaining that it was not political but rather a business-related dispute and not linked to elections. Any violence this close to election day can raise tensions and serve as a deterrent to voters. The limited number of other reported incidents mainly targeted opposition candidates, activists, and offices. While investigations have been launched in some cases, no final resolution has been reached at this time. Any delays of justice send a signal of impunity across the country and may fail to deter further escalation of violence in the future.

⁸ According to NDI's July 2017 public opinion poll, 62 percent of Georgians were undecided which political party they would vote for in the upcoming elections.

⁹ See Media Development Fund' report on [Monitoring of Hate Speech and Anti-Western Sentiments in pre-Election Discourse](#)

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Women made up approximately 37 percent of proportional, 16.5 percent of majoritarian, and 13.5 percent of mayoral candidates.¹⁰ GD nominated only two women mayoral candidates in 64 constituencies, while UNM, EG, and AoP nominated seven candidates each. When asked by the delegation about the recruitment process, party leaders claimed it was difficult to find experienced women who were willing to run and acknowledged the need to begin preparing women years in advance in anticipation of the next elections. However, the delegation notes that numerous trainings have been held for women interested in seeking greater leadership roles since the last local elections in 2014. While candidate selection processes vary by party, overall they lack transparency, equal competition, clear criteria, or merit-based procedures, which makes it difficult for women -- and other qualified individuals -- to compete on a level playing field.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION AND COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The structure of the election administration remains unchanged for these elections. In addition to the CEC, there are 73 DECs and more than 3,600 precinct election commissions PECs.¹¹ The CEC has generally administered the elections in line with the legal framework and in a transparent manner. The Commission took several positive steps to address past concerns and recommendations, and also conducted extensive training programs, not just for election officials, but also for judges, local administration representatives, observers, party and candidate representatives, journalists, and others. To ensure transparency of their work and the electoral process in general, the CEC conducted regular open meetings and published decisions and updates on its activities as well as detailed information about complaints on its website. To address issues faced by marginalized communities, the CEC continued programs aimed at supporting the electoral participation of women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities.

While most parties view the Commission as professional at the national level, opposition parties consistently raised concerns about potential bias within the district and precinct levels of the body. While the CEC has conducted extensive trainings for most members, NDI observers noted continued confusion about appropriate procedures, even among experienced members, especially during the count. The CEC itself noted difficulties in recruiting qualified applicants.

There are several bodies responsible for addressing complaints during the campaign period. These include the CEC, the State Audit Office (SAO), the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), prosecutors, local administrations, and the court system. In addition, the Inter-Agency Commission on Free and Fair Elections (IACFF) is tasked with preventing and responding to violations of election legislation by public servants and provides a forum for political subjects to air concerns. The Commission can then refer issues to responsible bodies and make recommendations.

¹⁰ Based on final CEC data, women comprise 50 out of 369 mayoral candidates, 780 out of 4,727 majoritarian candidates, and 4,755 of 12,902 positions on proportional lists.

¹¹ Commissions on each level have 13 members, from which seven are nominated by political parties receiving the highest amount of state funding.

Complaints resolution mechanisms remain an issue of concern for both domestic observer groups and political contestants, who claim their complaints are frequently dismissed, often due to a narrow interpretation of existing laws. It is a complex and often resource-intensive system, with multiple responsible bodies, which leads to a lack of clarity on the appropriate avenue for recourse. There are tight deadlines for submission of complaints and narrow restrictions on who can file them.

Prior to election day, 141¹² complaints, applications, and appeals were filed with the election administration and courts. The complaints allege violations including misuse of administrative resources, unlawful campaigning by public servants, and improper administrative conduct. In addition, 15 complaints were filed with the SAO and three were initiated as a result of the SAO's internal media monitoring. By October 2, 43 applications were submitted to the IACFF.¹³ With regard to filing complaints, opposition parties claim a lack of resources to investigate and describe difficulty obtaining evidence from reluctant witnesses. In addition, opposition parties and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed a lack of confidence that applications submitted to the IACFF and complaints submitted to the CEC would be adequately addressed. They told the delegation that a forum such as the IACFF is useful, but it requires greater political will for it to operate effectively.

The most significant complaint from parties and observer groups reported to NDI observers was the alleged misuse of administrative resources. This is an entrenched problem in Georgia that predates the current government. Commonly voiced concerns include scheduling of budgetary expenditures and infrastructure projects for the pre-election period; mobilization of public employees, especially teachers, to attend rallies and recruit supporters; and use of government buildings and equipment for campaign purposes. GD leaders pointed out that the Prime Minister issued multiple warnings and a letter to public officials not to use their office for electoral purposes.

While the most prevalent examples of abuse of state resources may not represent a direct violation of the law, they may violate the principle of establishing a clear separation between the party and the state as well as between official functions and campaign activities. Opposition parties and NGOs explain that in these elections, the CEC's narrow interpretation of laws related to the use of administrative resources and unlawful campaigning resulted in dismissals of complaints, with decisions relying on technicalities to waive concerns. One example was a highly publicized international charity football match that was held, with the participation of some of the world's most famous players. It was considered one of the biggest events during the campaign and took place with the assistance and participation of the GD Tbilisi mayoral candidate, who played in the game. The CEC dismissed a complaint that it qualified as a campaign activity because campaign materials were not passed out or references made to the election during the event itself, though several players publicly endorsed the mayoral candidate shortly after the match.

¹² 22 complaints were filed with the CEC, 113 with DEC's, and six with the courts. Of these, 49 cases are currently under review, 21 cases were at least partially satisfied, 70 cases were dismissed or not satisfied, and one was withdrawn by the plaintiff.

¹³ Out of 43 applications submitted, four were referred to the SAO, 11 to the Prosecutor's Office, 27 to the CEC, 17 to the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, and 11 to the Ministry of Education and Science. The number of referrals differs from those applications submitted to the IACFF because some may have been referred to multiple bodies, according to their mandate.

In carrying out its mandate, the SAO representatives noted gaps in the legal framework¹⁴ preventing them from properly investigating campaign finance. The SAO also cited lack of adequate resources to fully investigate the complaints. They are highly reliant on information from other entities, such as banks, ministries, the revenue service, and even international businesses, including Facebook, which creates delays and obstacles to obtaining necessary evidence.

The growth of social media as a source of information means its impact on the political and electoral environment has become increasingly important. There are gaps in the regulatory framework in this regard, hindering investigation of potential abuses during the campaign. For example, sponsored ads on Facebook for or against candidates or fueling potential disinformation cannot be traced to the source or recorded as contributions. Further, although the law prohibits campaigning by public servants during working hours, the CEC has maintained that it cannot regulate social media posts in support of or against candidates by officials, which was an occurrence in these elections.

MEDIA AND INFORMATION SPACE

Television remains the primary source of information for the majority of citizens, although the role of online media is growing.¹⁵ Over the past couple of years, the shrinking space for balanced, comprehensive political coverage in Georgia -- due to legal challenges and financial barriers facing Rustavi 2, the consolidation of media outlets, financial difficulties impairing regional media, and the restructuring and cancellation of many political programs at the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) -- has been well-documented.¹⁶

In the pre-election period, the main media outlets fulfilled promises to provide coverage of election campaigns. Media organizations also played an important role in monitoring the election process and exposing violations in several instances. TV channels aired weekly political discussion programs and both regional and national media outlets broadcast debates with the participation of most political contestants. Some of the smaller opposition parties reported a lack of access to these programs.

The GNCC has been accused of failing to disclose information on the revenues (advertisements, sponsorships, and donations) of broadcasters. The agency, which is required by law to publish quarterly reports, has not shared any data since March, making it impossible for observer groups to effectively monitor the media's financial transparency and track campaign donations. While the GNCC explains that there were technical errors in the revenue declaration files of two broadcasters, it notably has not published data on any station.

¹⁴ For example, there are no legal requirements for banks to report data on independent candidates to the SAO and in these elections the TBC bank initially refused to disclose requested information.

¹⁵ According to NDI public opinion polls conducted in April and June 2017, 88 percent of Georgians obtain news from TV, with Rustavi 2 and Imedi ranked as the most trusted TV channels. By comparison, 42 percent of Georgians obtain their news from the internet, and 19 percent from newspapers.

¹⁶ See Media Development Foundation (MDF) report [Pre-Election Financial Media Environment 2017](#); TI Georgia report [Media Advertising Market - Changes and Challenges in 2016](#); TI Georgia [statement on Rustavi 2 Case](#); TI Georgia report [Georgian Media Environment from 2012 Parliamentary Elections till Present](#)

Disinformation, emanating from television, social media, and political campaigns, has become a more prominent feature of Georgian political life in recent years. It tends to frame the West as a threat to Georgian identity; the EU as a source of migrants and terrorism; NATO as an aggressive force; and the Russian Federation as a fellow Orthodox country serving as a counterweight to the West.¹⁷ NDI observers have not detected an increase in disinformation that departs from typical campaign rhetoric in the pre-election period. Although using false or misleading narratives, efforts to target specific candidates or parties seemed to represent heightened political tension in the country, not necessarily a coordinated hostile disinformation campaign emanating from beyond Georgia's borders. However, the country lacks a clear regulatory framework, such as the electoral code not covering online content, to address disinformation campaigns. This gap, coupled with a polarized media environment and increasing reliance on social media, presents a vulnerability for Georgia going forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the spirit of international cooperation and on the basis of these pre-election and election day observations, the NDI delegation respectfully offers the following recommendations. The delegation notes that many recommendations from previous elections have not yet been adequately addressed and expresses its sincere hopes that they will be considered to improve future elections.

Parliament

- Parliament should undertake election law reforms to address long-standing election observer recommendations, particularly to correct the unequal vote weight in majoritarian districts for local elections, improve composition of election administration to ensure impartiality and clarify ambiguities and close loopholes in the provisions related to the misuse of administrative resources, campaigning, and complaints resolution process. Such efforts should be carried out in an inclusive and transparent manner.
- Parliament should consider addressing gaps in the legislation related to information space and online media.
- Parliament should explore ways to increase the human resources of the SAO to ensure adequate and comprehensive analysis of political finances and provide timely information to the public.
- Parliament should consider updating the legal framework to ensure equal campaign opportunities and administrative requirements of independent candidates.
- Parties in parliament should consider proposals for parliamentary mechanisms to mandate greater gender representation.

Election Administration

- In addition to legal review by the parliament, the election administration should engage in a dialogue with political actors and civil society prior to the next elections to ensure that abuses of administrative resources for campaigning are more broadly captured.
- The CEC should immediately address reported irregularities in several districts and determine, where needed, the possibility of reruns particularly in those races where the outcome could be affected.

¹⁷ Media Development Foundation (MDF) [Anti-Western Propaganda](#), 2016.

Political Parties

- Parties should make every effort possible to provide adequate evidence to substantiate claims of electoral violations, abuse of state resources, and pressure and intimidation, and pursue available mechanisms for seeking redress.
- Party leaders and candidates should continue to express zero tolerance of any use of violence or intimidation by their supporters, sanction the participants, and cooperate with authorities to investigate incidents.
- Political parties should consider democratizing their internal candidate selection procedures to ensure broad involvement from a diverse representation of party membership, including in the regions. Parties should present clearly defined criteria, enhance transparency of decision-making, and facilitate equal opportunity for merit-based competition.
- Political parties should recruit, train, nominate, and support a greater number of women in winnable seats for subsequent elections and further develop party infrastructure to promote more women to leadership roles. Parties should consider introducing and adhering to internal quotas to increase women's participation.

Judiciary and Law Enforcement

- Whistleblower protection measures should be considered to encourage victims of electoral and political intimidation and pressure to come forward and file complaints.
- Prosecutors and judges should ensure impartial, timely application of justice to the cases of violence during the 2016 and 2017 elections to help deter such violations in the future.

Media

- The public broadcaster, GPB, should consider broadcasting political talk shows and parliamentary debates outside of the electoral period and providing regular access to non-parliamentary parties to ensure a broad spectrum of political viewpoints to the public.
- Media outlets should consider more extensive training of journalists, specifically to pursue more investigative and in-depth reporting and probing lines of inquiry.

THE DELEGATION AND ITS WORK

The eight-member NDI delegation arrived in Tbilisi on October 16 and held meetings with national political leaders, candidates, election officials, senior government officials, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, the media, and the diplomatic community. On October 20, NDI deployed 11 observer teams to eight regions across Georgia where they met with local government, election, political, and civic leaders. On election day, NDI observed opening, voting and counting processes in more than 100 polling stations across the country. The observers reported regularly on developments around the country and returned to Tbilisi to share their findings.

This delegation builds on the work of a pre-election assessment, which issued a [statement](#) in July 2017, and a team of 14 long-term election observers who, since August, have visited approximately all 64 districts and conducted more than 700 meetings with government and election officials, candidates and political party representatives, civil society organizations, media representatives, and international and diplomatic missions in Georgia. NDI has also observed campaign events,

trainings of election officials, as well as sessions of the CEC and the IACFF. NDI will continue to observe developments through the run-off elections.

NDI wishes to express its appreciation to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which have funded the work of this delegation. In addition to the international observation activities, NDI supported the election monitoring efforts of International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED).

The NDI delegation consulted with other international delegations, including the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as Georgian nonpartisan citizen election monitoring organizations such as ISFED, Transparency International (TI), Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), and Public Movement - Multinational Georgia (PMMG). The delegation is grateful for the cooperation it received from voters, election officials, candidates, political party leaders, domestic election observers, and other civic activists.

NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. NDI has observed more than 200 elections in every region in the world, including numerous assessments in Georgia since 1992.

NDI CONTACT INFORMATION

Laura Thornton, lthornton@ndi.org (+995 599 566 852)

Diana Chachua, dchachua@ndi.org (+995 577 779 639)