Georgia's 2024 Election Subversion Campaign: Strategies Used in Electoral Fraud

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Author's Declaration

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Abstract

The study investigates how electoral fraud was used to subvert Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections, contributing to democratic backsliding and undermining the country's European integration path. The study addresses the question: How were the 2024 election results manipulated, and what strategies did the ruling party employ? A qualitative methodology is used, combining theoretical literature analysis with document review, media investigations, and expert interviews. The findings reveal a combination of conventional and novel fraud strategies, including vote buying, coercion, misuse of electronic technologies, and the creation of "voter dossiers" using unauthorized state data. Notably, manipulation occurred mainly during the pre-election campaign through legislative, administrative, and financial resource mobilization. These findings highlight how hybrid regimes like Georgia's increasingly employ sophisticated methods to retain power while formally preserving democratic institutions.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction

Autocratic Expansion

Manipulation of elections is a critical and one of the most widespread steps in the process of autocratization. It undermines public trust in the voting process as a democratic institution and helps autocrats to seize power. The vote rigging that was conducted at the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia is important to study for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrates what innovative tools the 21st century autocrats use to undermine democratic institutions and maintain power. Secondly, Georgia occupies a significant geopolitical position as a transition country situated between the global power of Russia and its ongoing aspirations toward Europe. Elections in such a context play an existential role, as they determine the extent to which the democratization process can advance.

The global rise of autocratic powers in recent years presents a significant threat to democratic governance. According to the V-Dem Institute (compiles multidimensional democracy indices since 2016 based on over 500 indicators), 72% of the world's population lived under autocracies by 2022, marking a dramatic shift in global political dynamics (V-Dem Institute 2025). This highlights the troubling rise in autocratization where democracies experience a gradual shift toward authoritarian practices such as undermining electoral integrity, the rule of law, and individual freedoms. In 2024, 45 countries were described as "autocratizers", with 27 of these having been democracies at the start of their transitions toward authoritarianism (V-Dem Institute 2025). The institute draws attention to an alarming trend: the "fatality rate" of democratic regimes is now 67%.

Autocratization is not limited to a specific region, but it rather has a contagious effect. This phenomenon is particularly evident in neighboring countries with authoritarian regimes, where

an electoral success by an autocratic leader serves as a model and a source of inspiration. The success of an authoritarian leader in a bordering country can erode democratic norms and inspire similar shifts in the local political power (Chan 2024). The spillover effect can be seen in the case of Georgia, where the 2024 elections were criticized because of alleged electoral fraud and adoption of laws analogous to those in Russian legislation ("foreign agent" bill, banning "LGBT propaganda" law).

Furthermore, populism, one of autocratic governance drivers, finds a fertile ground in many democracies. According to research, the rise of populist movements has been instrumental in the decline of democratic norms (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Populist leaders tend to erode democratic institutions and undermine the checks and balances which are essential to the functioning of a democracy. These trends have been evident in Georgia, where populist rhetoric has been used to justify violation of democratic norms and facilitate the centralization of power. However, the Georgian government is one of many examples of populist rhetoric disseminating and facilitating autocratic inclinations. Thus, the book "How Democracies Die" can be considered prophetic as it reflects upon the scenarios which can take place after the 2020 elections in the US. The second scenario unveils the current world order: Trump gets elected as president for a second term and continues down the road of democratic derailment (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). The authors call these circumstances "the darkest" as they contribute to the erosion of democratic institutions. Therefore, these challenges to democracy (autocratization and dissemination of populism) underscore the importance of understanding the forces that contribute to the rise of autocracies with electoral fraud playing a crucial role in this process.

Pivotality of Elections for Democratic Regimes

Elections are the cornerstone of democratic governance, serving as the primary mechanism through which citizens exercise their political will. The essential role of elections is highlighted

in fundamental works on the functioning of democracies. Free and fair elections are vital for defining and maintaining a democratic system (Dahl 1998). Elections allow for the peaceful transfer of power, provide accountability to elected officials, and ensure that government policies reflect the preferences and needs of the population. Without elections that are free from manipulation and fraud, the legitimacy of democracy is called into question. Dahl's concept of "polyarchy" outlines a set of institutions that form an ideal type of democracy (Dahl 1998). In this framework, elections do not only serve to select leaders, but are integral to the functioning of democratic institutions.

The relationship between democracy and economic development is explained in detail by Amartya Sen. He emphasizes that political freedoms and democratic processes are essential for fostering development and social justice (Sen 1999). In the case of Georgia, the integrity of the electoral process is crucial not only for the democratic system, but also for the country's future development and its aspirations for European integration.

In addition to ensuring accountability, elections play a crucial role in reinforcing democratic institutions. According to research, elections are essential for creating *stable* democratic institutions (Diamond 2008). Competitive elections force politicians to be responsive to the needs of voters and help foster a culture of fair political participation (Stokes 2001). Thus, the institution of elections is critical to study as they influence multiple factors in democratic regimes: citizens' political will, economic development, stability of institutions and just political involvement.

The rise of autocracies around the world in recent years has undermined democratic regimes, eroding the very foundations that uphold democratic values. As democratic systems face increasing challenges, the integrity of elections becomes a critical area of focus. Electoral fraud, particularly in developing countries and non-stable democracies, has proven to be a significant

factor in undermining the democratic transition and enabling the rise of authoritarian leaders. The case of Georgia's 2024 elections serves as an example of how electoral fraud can disrupt the democratic process, influence political stability, and foster the conditions necessary for autocratic rule. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of electoral fraud, especially in transitional democracies like Georgia, is crucial for safeguarding democracy worldwide.

Contextual Background: Democratic Backsliding of Georgia

The ruling party Georgian Dream — Democratic Georgia was established in April 2012 by the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili who held businesses in Russia including bank Rossiysky Kredit. He collected $2.6 billion selling some of these assets between 2003 and 2006, and sold the rest for $1.5 billion in 2012, in the run-up to Georgia's parliamentary elections (Thornber 2025). Initially formed as a coalition of diverse opposition groups, Georgian Dream aimed to challenge the dominant United National Movement (UNM) led by then-President Mikheil Saakashvili (who is now imprisoned). The party capitalized on public discontent with the UNM's increasingly authoritarian governance and human rights concerns, including high-profile prison abuse scandals (*OSW Centre for Eastern Studies* 2024). In the 2012 parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream secured a decisive victory with 54.97% of the vote, marking the first peaceful transfer of power through elections in Georgia's post-Soviet history. Ivanishvili briefly served as Prime Minister before stepping down in 2013, though he has remained the party's de facto leader, exerting significant influence over Georgian politics. Georgian Dream's ideology has evolved over time. Initially, the party positioned itself as center-left and pro-European, even holding observer status in the Party of European Socialists. However, over the years, Georgian Dream has adopted a more conservative and nationalist stance, emphasizing traditional Georgian values and the role of the Orthodox Church. This ideological shift led to its expulsion from the European social-democratic bloc in 2023. Key figures in the party include Irakli Kobakhidze, the current party chairman and Prime Minister, and Mamuka Mdinaradze, the

parliamentary majority leader. During Georgian Dream's rule the post of the prime minister has been taken over seven times with Giorgi Garibashvili and Irakli Kobakhidze being the two latest prime ministers. For the record, Giorgi Gakharia, who is now a leader of his own opposition party, was a prime minister representing Georgian Dream in the parliament in 2019-2021.

Under Georgian Dream's leadership, Georgia's **electoral integrity** has deteriorated. The 2020 parliamentary elections were overshadowed by allegations of vote-buying, intimidation, and administrative abuses. Although international observers acknowledged some improvements, they also noted that the electoral environment was heavily skewed in favor of the ruling party (OSCE 2021). The opposition's subsequent boycott of parliament further highlighted a crisis of legitimacy. While the elections during the first terms of the party were seen as quite fair and transparent, the independent exit polls of the later elections were in more contradiction with the results of the Central Election Commission. Consequently, the popularity of the party decreased over the years, even according to the official results (Table 1). However, the 2024 election results published by the CEC indicate a sharp rise in the vote for Georgian Dream by at least 5%.

An important area of concern has been the **politicization of state institutions**, particularly the judiciary and the prosecutor's office. Georgian Dream has been accused of consolidating

Year	Party/Coalition	Vote Percentage
2012	Georgian Dream Coalition	54.97%
	United National Movement (UNM)	40.34%
	Others	4.69%
2016	Georgian Dream — Democratic Georgia	48.68%
	United National Movement (UNM)	27.11%

	Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	5.01%	
	Others	19.20%	
2020	Georgian Dream — Democratic Georgia	48.22%	
	Strength Is in Unity (led by UNM)	27.18%	
	European Georgia	3.79%	
	Others	20.81%	
2024	Georgian Dream — Democratic Georgia	53.93%	
	Coalition for Change	10.92%	
	United National Movement (UNM)	10.12%	
	Others	25.03%	

Table 1: The results of the elections in Georgia in 2012-2024. The data is obtained from the official website of the Central Election Commission

control over the judiciary by appointing loyal judges and resisting reforms aimed at ensuring judicial independence. Thus, in July 2021, the Georgian Parliament, dominated by Georgian Dream (84 out of 150 seats), appointed six judges to the Supreme Court for lifetime tenures. This move was made despite international criticism that the selection process lacked transparency and contradicted the EU-brokered April 19 agreement aimed at judicial reform (Social Justice Centre 2024). Civil society organizations, including the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, argued that GD was "rushing" these appointments to keep loyalists in the judiciary before broader reforms could take effect (Civil Georgia 2021).

The prosecutor's office has also been selectively used against opposition figures and civil society activists, eroding the principle of equality before the law. Nika Melia, a prominent opposition leader and chairman of the UNM, was charged in 2019 with inciting violence during the June protests. In February 2021, after he refused to pay an increased bail, a court ordered

6

his pre-trial detention. The then-Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia resigned, citing disagreement over Melia's arrest. Subsequently, police stormed the UNM headquarters and arrested Melia, an action widely criticized by international partners as politically motivated (Roth 2021).

Independent media and civil society organizations have faced increasing pressure. Critical outlets such as "Mtavari Arkhi" and "TV Pirveli" have reported harassment, legal challenges, and surveillance. For instance, in September 2021, a Mtavari Arkhi cameraman, Levan Ablotia, was reportedly thrown from a second-floor window during an altercation at the Georgian Dream party office (Radio Tavisupleba 2021). The incident was part of a broader pattern of violence against journalists covering political events. At the same time, pro-government media have played a role in spreading disinformation and discrediting dissenting voices. Civil society organizations that receive foreign funding have often been labeled as tools of the "radical opposition" or "foreign agents".

Another feature of backsliding has been the **suppression of dissent**. Peaceful protests, including large-scale demonstrations in 2019 and 2021, have been met with excessive police force. Georgian riot police employed tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds. Reports indicate that over 800 rubber bullets were fired into the crowd without prior warning, leading to approximately 275 injuries, including 73 police officers (*OC Media* 2023). Among the injured were at least two individuals who suffered eye injuries resulting in the loss of vision. Notably, 20-year-old student Mako Gomuri and Giorgi Sulashvili, an employee of the TV station Rustavi 2. Authorities have also failed to adequately protect the rights of LGBTQ+ activists and other marginalized groups, particularly during planned equality marches.

Perhaps, the turning point in the long-lasting democratic regression has been the introduction of the "foreign agents" law, modeled after similar legislation in Russia. It was initially adopted

by the parliament in the first reading in March 2023. The proposed bill sought to stigmatize NGOs and media receiving foreign funding. These efforts provoked mass protests and condemnation from Western governments and human rights organizations, who warned that the law would severely damage Georgia's democratic credentials. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, called it "incompatible with EU values and standards" (EEAS 2023). Human Rights Watch criticized the bill for violating fundamental human rights norms, stating that its adoption would severely harm Georgia's civil society and escalate the human rights crisis (Human Rights Watch 2025). The protests showed massive outrage with significant clashes between demonstrators and police, and three days later the bill was withdrawn. Nevertheless, a year after, the ruling party registered the bill for the parliamentary discussions — that is when the second wave of the protests began. After the 2-month long rallies the law was eventually adopted, and the demonstrants agreed on redirecting their focus on elections. It was after the election results were announced that the third wave of the protests began. Up to 200,000 people in Georgia went to the streets to protest against the win of the ruling party "Georgian Dream" having been in power for 13 years now (Visioner 2024). Georgian citizens demanded to hold new fair and free elections, withdraw the "foreign agent" law and release detained citizens, journalists, and activists (more than 30 people are currently detained on criminal charges).

Finally, Georgian Dream's **ambiguous foreign policy** has strained Georgia's long-standing Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Despite strong public support for EU and NATO integration, GD has stalled on key reforms and occasionally employed anti-Western rhetoric. Thus, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of Georgian Dream, has described a so-called "Global War Party" that allegedly controls Western institutions like NATO and the EU. He claims this group seeks to manipulate Georgia and Ukraine into conflicts with Russia. In April 2024, Ivanishvili warned voters against Western powers pushing Georgia into war, likening their influence to that of a

"Global War Party" (Papachristou and Light 2024). Meanwhile, public support and aspirations for the EU remain solid among Georgians: 81% of the population support the path towards EU membership (Zinc Network 2023).

As for the opposition at the 2024 elections in Georgia, it was mainly represented by four parties which gained the majority of votes: "Coalition for Change", "Strong Georgia", "United National Movement", "For Georgia". The "Coalition for Change" which gained the most votes out of all opposition parties (11%, according to the official results of the Central Election Commission) was formed by the union of three liberal and pro-Western parties. One of the leaders, Nika Gvaramia, served as a Member of the Parliament from 2004 to 2007 and a First Deputy Prosecutor General, and is a prominent Georgian lawyer, journalist, and opposition politician. The "United National Movement" (UNM) was founded by the former president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, who is currently imprisoned. It is now led by Tina Bokuchava, a Member of the Parliament since 2012 known for strong pro-European stance and vocal criticism of the ruling Georgian Dream party. The United National Movement (UNM) and Georgian Dream have been long-standing rivals, contributing to the highly polarized political landscape in Georgia. "For Georgia" was founded by former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia after his departure from the Georgian Dream party. "Strong Georgia" is a centrist coalition led by the "Lelo for Georgia" party and includes several other pro-European parties. It positions itself as distant from both the ruling Georgian Dream party and the UNM, advocating for EU integration and limiting Russian influence.

The electoral system functioning in Georgia is fully **proportional,** according to the constitution. It implies that the country represents a single multi-mandate district, meaning that 150 mandates are distributed across the entire Georgia. There is a single party list, and mandates are allocated to parties based on the distribution of votes. Parliamentary seats are distributed in proportion to the percentage of votes each party receives nationwide. This system is designed to ensure a

more accurate reflection of public will, giving smaller parties a fairer chance to gain seats and limiting dominance by large parties. It was first in 2019 when the Parliament introduced changes to the election code suggesting shifting from the previous majoritarian to the proportional system (Civil Georgia 2019). In such paradigm, half of the candidates were elected proportionally, and the other half — through single-member districts (majoritarian). In majoritarian districts, voters chose individual candidates, where they needed over 50% of the vote to win. This favored larger parties (especially Georgian Dream), since they could win many single-member districts even with relatively low nationwide support.

The Central Election Commission, as of 2024, comprises 17 members: one chairperson, 7 professional (non-partisan) members, and 9 party-appointed members, each nominated by a qualified political party (Civil Georgia 2024). A chairperson is nominated by the president, based on recommendations from a selection commission and confirmed by the parliament with a 3/5 majority (90 out of 150 MPs). Professional members are also nominated by the president from a shortlist selected by a public competition, and are appointed by the parliament, again with a 3/5 majority. The Commission should be an independent body separate from the government: however, for 2024 elections, 8 out of 17 CEC's members were affiliated with the ruling party, according to ISFED (ISFED 2024).

Understanding how electoral fraud functions in hybrid regime countries such as Georgia is key to defending democracy on a global scale. Electoral fraud, particularly in emerging democracies, has proven to be a significant factor in undermining the democratic process and enabling the rise of authoritarian leaders. This research explores the tools used by the autocratic regime in Georgia to manipulate election results, which, as a result, undermined both the democratization process and the country's European integration efforts.

Methodology

To explain the methodological framework of this research, it is essential to outline the **research question.** It is formulated as follows: **How were the results** of Georgia's 2024 Parliamentary Elections **altered,** and **what electoral fraud strategie**s did the ruling party use to achieve the current outcome?

To provide a solid theoretical foundation, a **literature review** was conducted on the conceptualization of electoral fraud, its categorization, and the key factors influencing the success of electoral manipulations. The concept of electoral fraud was defined based on the works of Leemann and Bochsler, Schedler, Levin and Alvarez, and Lehoucq. A comprehensive typology of vote rigging was provided by Lehoucq. Finally, the determinant factors were identified in the studies of Ziblatt, Magaloni, Ananyev and Poyker, Rundlett and Svolik, and Higashijima. The literature review helped to formulate expectations regarding some of the strategies revealed in the empirical part of the research.

The **empirical discussions** section presents the contextual and detailed evidence of electoral fraud committed during the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia. Two methods were employed in this part: document analysis and expert interviews. The empirical material includes reports from the Central Election Commission, independent expert organizations, media investigations, and a set of expert interviews.

Expert research was provided by

- ISFED (International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy), Georgia's leading election monitoring non-governmental organization which has been observing national elections since 1995;

- Edison Research, a provider of audio, election and market Research based in the US which has been conducting exit polls in Georgia since 2012;

- HarrisX, a global market research, data analytics, and strategy consulting company with a headquarters in the US which is the second among two vote count organizations having carried out exit polls of the 2024 elections in Georgia

Media material included investigations conducted by 1) Batumelebi, an local independent online newspaper founded in Batumi; 2) Netgazeti, an independent Georgian online media outlet established by journalists Mzia Amaghlobeli (who is now a political prisoner) and Eter Turadze; 3) TV Pirveli, a mainstream independent TV channel in Georgia.

Four expert interviews were conducted for the study with:

- Shota Narsia, an ISFED researcher with 7-years of experience in election monitoring;

- Zviad Adzinbaia, Senior Consultant for Policy and Technology at HarrisX having led the exit poll for Georgia's 2024 elections

- Sandro Bakuradze, an observer in Tbilisi, Nadzaladevi district;

- Aleko Amzashvili, an observer in Tbilisi, Saburtalo district with 30 years of experience in observing elections

In conclusion, the study addresses the research question by comparing the theoretical expectations from the literature with the empirical findings. The research shows that while some theoretical expectations were confirmed, the study also revealed context-specific peculiarities and novel strategies of electoral manipulation during Georgia's 2024 elections. One of the key findings concerns the role of the pre-election campaign and the mobilization of legislative, administrative, and financial resources by the ruling party.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Conceptualization of Electoral Fraud

The theoretical background to the Georgian case of subverted elections is based on explaining the **nature and causality of electoral fraud**. In this regard, two types of scholarly works can be identified: ones which broadly describe the phenomenon of election rigging building a theoretical framework around it (definition, categorization, causality) and those that analyse particular cases of subverted elections in different non-democratic countries. The literature review in this research serves to **build expectations** regarding the nature, type, and causes of the fraudulent practices observed during the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia. It aims to help **explain the successful implementation of manipulative strategies** in the voting process.

The scholars studying electoral fraud struggle to provide a consensual definition of the term. Thus, Leemann and Bochsler refer to Schedler (Schedler 2002) who conceptualizes election fraud as **misconduct that can occur in many different instances of the election process,** taking various forms (Leemann and Bochsler 2014). In their interpretation, these irregularities can arise at different stages of the electoral process — including the pre-election period, election day itself, and the vote-counting phase. These incidents may occur within central or local election authorities and manifest in various forms.

The challenges of conceptualizing electoral fraud are touched upon in the article of Levin and Alvarez where they refer to the definition provided by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. According to it, election tampering is **a deliberate wrong-doing by election officials or other electoral stakeholders, which distorts the individual or collective will of the voters**

(Levin and Alvarez 2012). The authors highlight the complexities in establishing a clear and consistent definition due to the relative nature of election fraud and the varying contexts in which it occurs. Indeed, the concept of fraud varies depending on the contextual, cultural and political factors — what qualifies as fraudulent interference in the electoral process in one country in a particular moment in history can be considered a standard practice in another.

Lehoucq who provided a comprehensive basis for understanding the nature, magnitude, and causes of electoral fraud defines it as **clandestine efforts to shape election results** (Lehoucq 2003). Based on these three definitions of election tampering there can be identified two key actors and actions central to the concept. These actors are electoral stakeholders and voters, and these actions are misconduct of the election process (committed by electoral stakeholders) and the voting procedure (taken on by voters). This outline emphasizes the main factors to examine when analyzing strategies used in electoral manipulation.

What is important for the current research is the **approach towards studying electoral fraud.** Lehoucq distinguishes six sources for examining election rigging. The first group of sources are called "objective" and include surveys, ethnographic, and interviews; the second is considered "partisan" and involves memoirs, denunciations of fraud from parties, and newspaper accounts. In this research, expert interviews conducted for the empirical part can be categorized as "objective" sources, and media material together with public disclosures form a "partisan" group of sources.

1.2. Outline of Key Factors for Analysis: Categorization and Causality

In his article, Lehoucq identifies 47 types of electoral fraud based on Costa Rica's elections conducted in 1901–1946 (Lehoucq 2003). This, is by far, the broadest **categorization** of electoral manipulative practices, although it is founded on obsolete data. However, Lehoucq also outlines a number of common fraudal practices worldwide which include:

- Voter intimidation or coercion;

- Stuffing ballot boxes with fraudulent votes;

- Purging voter registries to exclude opposition voters;

- Vote buying and distribution of gifts to influence voters;

- Setting up parallel polling stations or manipulating vote tallies;

- Procedural violations such as improper opening/closing of polling stations or failing to ensure ballot secrecy;

Ziblatt's article provides valuable insight when analyzing the causes of vote tampering. The author argues that socioeconomic inequality, political competitiveness and electoral institutions are key factors leading to electoral subversion (Ziblatt 2009). He claims that the disconnection between "de jure political equality" established by formally democratic institutions and "de facto **unequal distribution of social power**" substantially contributes to vote fraud. For this reason Ziblatt calls election subversion a "soft underbelly" of political scientists who largely focus on studying formal democratic institutions (Ziblatt, 2009). Another factor which determines the possibility of electoral fraud is **a political race:** the more competitive elections are, the higher is the chance that the election may be rigged. Finally, **institutional frameworks** also play a role — according to Ziblatt, corrupt elections are more likely to happen in majoritarian or plural single-member systems than in proportional ones.

Beatriz Magaloni's paper also outlines key factors of committing electoral manipulations by applying a metaphor of a strategic game (Magaloni 2010). The author identifies main **stakeholders** (ruling autocrat, opposition parties and voters) and **institutional rules** that define outcomes of the game. As the majority of scholars, Magaloni agrees on the proposition that autocrats hold elections as a tool to enhance legitimacy. With that, the decision to commit fraud depends not only on the ruling autocrat, but on the **opposition mobilization** and the possibility of **voters** expressing their **dissatisfaction** towards the rigged election (resistance, arising protests).

What is important to look at on the stage of the literature review is the importance of the geographical allocation of fraud. Ananyev and Poyker test the idea that authoritarian regimes manipulate elections to produce pretentious victories through manipulations, aiming to discourage the opposition from mounting any serious challenge to their rule (Ananyev and Poyker 2022). Their empirical analysis of the 2011 Russian Parliamentary elections shows that more fraud occurred in pro-regime strongholds, contrary to the theory of intimidation. The theory implies that voter fraud is expected to occur in areas where it is costly to carry out — otherwise, even a weak regime could manage to implement it (Ananyev and Poyker 2022).

Rundlett and Svolik focus on the micro-level dynamics of electoral fraud, arguing it is often driven by **local operatives, not central commands**. Due to incentive misalignments, these agents may **oversupply or undersupply fraud,** rarely aligning with the incumbent's optimal strategy (Rundlett and Svolik 2016). This explains why fraud can occur even when unnecessary and why it may fail to secure victories. Their statistical evidence from 2011–2012 Russian elections supports this model.

16

Higashijima explores how dictators balance electoral manipulation and **economic distribution** (Higashijima 2022). He argues that strong autocrats with broad **economic resources** rely less on coercion and fraud. Conversely, when elections are poorly designed, they can backfire, leading to coups, protests, or opposition victories. This theory is supported by cross-national data and case studies from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

2. Empirical Discussions

2.1. Statements of the Officials

In order to analyse what kind of electoral fraud was committed in the previous parliamentary elections in Georgia, it is essential to examine the statements of the government's officials and the Central Election Commission (CEC) to understand the official standpoint of the state.

The results obtained by the CEC show that the total vote cast at the parliamentary elections held on October 26, was **2,111,834** ballots (CEC, 2024). According to the official results (Figure 1), the ruling party, **Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia,** received more than one million votes — **1,120,053** (53.93%). The opposition **Coalition for Changes** followed with **229,161 votes** (11.03%), while the **Unity–National Movement** received **211,216 votes** (10.17%). The bloc **Strong Georgia – Lelo, For People, For Liberty!** gathered **182,922 votes** (8.81%) and, and **"Gakharia for Georgia"** collected **161,521 votes** (7.78%). The polling stations abroad, however, illustrate *a different outcome.* Out of **95,910 Georgian citizens** registered, 34,574 **participated** in the election (turnout of 36%). The **Coalition for Changes** received the highest number of votes (**11,406**), followed by the **Unity–National Movement** with **6,824 votes**, and the **Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia** with **4,628 votes** (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Giorgi Kalandarishvili, a chairperson of the CEC, dismissed allegations of vote manipulation, stating that "there was no tangible proof indicating that the elections were manipulated" (Sophiko Megrelidze 2024). This narrative was echoed at the highest levels of government. In the interview with the BBC, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze called the election a "landslide" win and emphasized that although "irregularities happen everywhere", they were insignificant and did not affect the final results. Kobakhidze claimed that out of 3,111 polling stations, problems were observed in only a few precincts. He praised the new electronic vote-counting

system as a technological safeguard, asserting that it left "zero space for manipulation" (Irakli

Kobakhidze 2024).

№	Title of the Political Party	Number of Votes Received	%	Number of Mandates Received
3	The Party of Georgian Unity and Development	3 892	0.19	
4	Coalition for Changes Gvaramia Melia Girchi Droa	229 161	11.03	19
5	Unity-National Movement	211 216	10.17	16
6	European Democrats	7 955	0.38	
8	Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	50 599	2.44	
9	Strong Georgia - Lelo, For People, For Liberty!	182 922	8.81	14
10	Georgian Labour Party	15 103	0.73	
12	Our United Georgia	1 845	0.09	
16	Change Georgia	12 528	0.60	
17	Georgia	2 780	0.13	
20	Free Georgia	4 145	0.20	
21	Tribuna	2 483	0.12	
23	We	2 593	0.12	
25	Gakharia for Georgia	161 521	7.78	12
26	Left Alliance	1 260	0.06	
27	Georgian's Unity	4 500	0.22	
36	Girchi	62 223	3.00	
41	Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia	1 120 053	53.93	89

Figure 1: Official 2024 parliamentary election results published by the Central Election Commission. Source: Report by the Central Election Commission on the Georgian Parliamentary Elections, 2024.

№	Title of the Political Party	Number of Votes Cast
3	The Party of Georgian Unity and Development	43
4	Coalition for Changes Gvaramia Melia Girchi Droa	11 406
5	Unity-National Movement	6 824
6	European Democrats	118
8	Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	584
9	Strong Georgia - Lelo, For People, For Liberty!	5 108
10	Georgian Labour Party	525
12	Our United Georgia	26
16	Change Georgia	285
17	Georgia	33
20	Free Georgia	58
21	Tribuna	12
23	We	40
25	Gakharia for Georgia	3 089
26	Left Alliance	12
27	Georgian's Unity	115
36	Girchi	1 390
41	Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia	4 628

Figure 2: Summary of voting results from polling stations set up abroad for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia. Source: Report by the Central Election Commission on the Georgian Parliamentary Elections, 2024.

Title of the Political Party	Number of Votes Cast	Percentage of Total Votes (%)
The Party of Georgian Unity and Developmen	43	0.13
alition for Changes Gvaramia Melia Girchi Dr	11406	33.27
Unity-National Movement	6824	19.91
European Democrats	118	0.34
Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	584	1.7
Strong Georgia - Lelo, For People, For Liberty	5108	14.9
Georgian Labour Party	525	1.53
Our United Georgia	26	0.08
Change Georgia	285	0.83
Georgia	33	0.1
Free Georgia	40	0.12
Tribuna	12	0.04
We	40	0.12
Gakharia for Georgia	3089	9.01
Left Alliance	12	0.04
Georgian's Unity	115	0.34
Girchi	1390	4.06
Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia	4628	13.5

Figure 3: Summary of voting results from polling stations set up abroad for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia, adjusted to percentages.

2.2. Analysis of Reports by Vote Count Organizations, Media Investigation Material, and Expert Interviews

Vote Count Organizations Reports

Contrasting with the official rhetoric, independent expert organizations pointed out systematic inaccuracies with the official election results. **HarrisX** is one of the two vote count organisations which conducted exit polls for Georgia's 2024 elections. It is a global market research, data analytics, and strategy consulting company with a headquarters in the US and offices in Toronto and London. The HarrisX's exit poll involved over 12,000 Georgian voters. Their analysis revealed a national discrepancy of over 8%, equivalent to approximately 172,523 votes, between the exit poll results and official data published by the CEC (HarrisX, 2024). According to HarrisX, this gap cannot be explained by statistical variance, non-response bias, or methodological flaws. The analysis identified 27 electoral districts with

20

discrepancies too large to be considered random or incidental (Figure 4). One of the most illustrative examples was the district of Marneuli. Thus, in 2020 parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream gained 48% of the vote, according to the official CEC results. In 2024, the figure accounted for 80% (the CEC's count), and only 40%, according to HarrisX. The variance of 40% is characterized as both statistically improbable and impossible. The credibility of the HarrisX findings is underlined by the methodological rigor of their research. Conducted at 125 randomly selected polling locations, the survey was demographically weighted and conducted by trained local interviewers. For comparison, the U.S. national exit polls' sample by HarrisX covers 15,000 voters (12,000 in the Georgian case) in a population 100 times larger than Georgia's. The outcomes are largely consistent with the results of the only other exit poll conducted by a non-Georgian polling organization, Edison Research (HarrisX, 2024).

Region	District	GD Vote 2020 (ElectionsData.ge/data)	GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia)	GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX)	VARIANCE: GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia) vs. GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX)	GD Vote 2020 (ElectionsData.ge/data)	GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia)	GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX Estimates)	VARIANCE: GD Vote 2024 (Election Administration of Georgia) vs. GD Vote 2024 (HarrisX)
Tbilisi	01.Mtatsminda	43%	42%	30%	+12%	13,003	14,699	10,586	+4,113
	02.Vake	41%	38%	28%	+10%	25,237	28,997	21,022	+7,975
	03.Saburtalo	41%	39%	27%	+13%	30,908	37,705	25,412	+12,293
	04.Krtsanisi	44%	49%	36%	+13%	9,086	11,002	8,073	+2,929
	05.Isani	42%	45%	33%	+12%	23,110	28,778	20,880	+7,898
	06.Samgori	42%	45%	34%	+11%	29,782	36,999	27,607	+9,391
	07.Chughureti	45%	44%	33%	+11%	14,188	17,941	13,519	+4,422
	08.Didube	44%	42%	30%	+12%	17,169	17,290	12,366	+4,924
	10.Gldani	39%	41%	32%	+8%	27,876	34,993	27,785	+7,208
Kakheti	11.Sagarejo	50%	66%	49%	+16%	11,442	16,313	12,244	+4,069
	12.Gurjaani	52%	62%	49%	+13%	16,935	20,094	15,806	+4,288
	13.Sighnaghi	53%	63%	37%	+25%	9,503	11,319	6,717	+4,602
	16.Kvareli	47%	57%	23%	+34%	8,459	9,851	3,966	+5,884
	18.Akhmeta	43%	56%	26%	+30%	7,017	8,778	4,087	+4,691
Kvenmo Kartli	22.Marneuli	48%	80%	40%	+40%	21,451	34,328	17,263	+17,065
	23.Bolnisi	68%	81%	55%	+26%	18,173	20,788	14,158	+6,631
	28.Dusheti	53%	59%	44%	+15%	7,338	8,889	6,636	+2,253
	32.Gori	52%	57%	42%	+14%	32,945	37,474	27,966	+9,508
	35.Khashuri	46%	52%	38%	+14%	12,572	14,800	10,810	+3,990
Samtskhe - Javakheti	40.Akhalkalaki	65%	88%	59%	+29%	12,270	18,187	12,132	+6,055
Imereti	54.Samtredia	54%	62%	36%	+26%	13,651	15,432	8,987	+6,445
	58.Tskaltubo	44%	58%	45%	+13%	12,205	16,624	12,853	+3,771
	59.Kutaisi	41%	47%	35%	+12%	29,219	38,095	28,363	+9,733
Samegrelo - Zemo Svaneti	67.Zugdidi	47%	51%	42%	+9%	25,110	27,789	23,113	+4,676
	68.Tsalenjikha	47%	48%	24%	+24%	6,700	7,200	3,599	+3,601
	70.Poti	50%	52%	32%	+20%	10,909	11,290	7,011	+4,279
Adjara	79.Batumi	42%	50%	39%	+11%	32,305	45,593	35,762	+9,830
Total	Total	46%	51%	36%	+15%	478,563	591,247	418,724	+172,523

Note: Statistical variance in these 27 Districts has been tested at a 95 percent confidence interval, revealing that the variance observed is highly improbably or impossible.

Figure 4: Summary of variances between HarrisX exit poll results and the Central Election Commission results across 27 districts. Source: HarrisX Final Georgia 2024 Exit Poll Analysis.

Edison Research, a provider of audio, election and market Research based in the US, has been conducting exit polls in Georgia since 2012. Edison's polls have closely aligned with official outcomes with an average deviation of under 2% across five elections (Figure 5). However, in 2024, the organization reported a 13% difference between their exit poll and the CEC's results for Georgian Dream. The Executive Vice President of the research centre stated that the 13-point difference cannot be explained by normal variation alone and suggested local-level manipulation of the vote (Edison Research, 2024). The analysis highlighted that the deviation from expected results was most extreme in rural polling stations. It concludes that vote manipulation occurred primarily at the polling station level facilitated by structural weaknesses and a lack of oversight. Additionally, the national surveys of the Edison Research from 2023–2024 predicted Georgian Dream underperforming their 2020 vote by around 10% (instead they overperformed it by 6%, according to the CEC vote count), further undermining
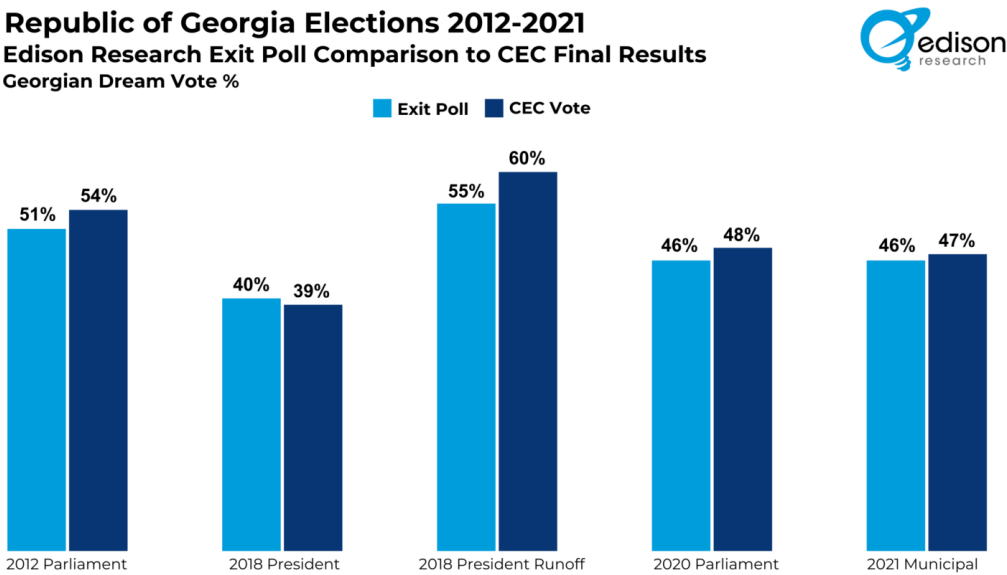
Figure 5: Comparison of Edison Research exit poll results with the official results from the Central Election Commission in 2012, 2018, 2020 and 2021.

the plausibility of the official results. It must be noted that both organizations, HarrisX and Edison Research, conduct exit polls at the requests of clients. For the 2024 elections, these

clients were local media outlets — TV Formula (Edison Research) and Mtavari Arkhi (HarrisX). Besides, it must be noted that the results of international vote count organizations, generally, differ from the official outcomes (Hyde 2011).

ISFED (International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy) is Georgia's leading election monitoring non-governmental organization (OSCE, USAID and the Council of Europe are among partners) which has been observing national elections since 1995. It provided a comprehensive documentation of violations committed at the 2024 parliamentary elections. Their report highlights a defective pre-election environment marked by voter intimidation, illegal data collection, and pressure which undermined the principles of democratic elections (ISFED 2024).

ISFED documented 16 cases of alleged vote-buying, 14 of which were linked to Georgian Dream. They criticized the introduction of "delegate" candidates, a legislative innovation that distorted the proportional electoral system by giving certain Georgian Dream candidates localized campaigning advantages (as in the previous majoritarian system). ISFED noted administrative violations in the election commissions: a significant part of individuals (8 out of 17) appointed to election commissions were employees of state-funded institutions with ties to the ruling party. Moreover, the CEC's resolution from August 2024 altered the procedure for allocating duties among precinct election commission members. This implied that the roles of commission members on election day were predetermined and known in advance which facilitated the success of electoral manipulations.

The use of electronic technologies in the election, introduced as a tool to increase efficiency and transparency, was another major concern. The organization reported that the

implementation was non-transparent and lacked stakeholder involvement — political parties and monitoring organizations were not given the opportunity to participate in both the software development and the audit process (ISFED 2024).

In its report, ISFED draws special attention to the pre-election campaign, which determined the fraudulent character of the elections. The organization reported widespread cases of voter intimidation, such as confiscation of ID cards (for limiting voter participation), physical violence, threats, and intrusions into opposition offices. The organization also reported that, alongside the creation of so-called "voter dossiers", managers in public sector institutions and some private organizations directed their employees to draw up lists of individuals who were presumed to support the ruling party and submit these lists to higher authorities. What is more, Georgian Dream had an evident advantage in campaign financing. The party began collecting funds before the official campaign period, bypassing financial transparency and oversight mechanisms. As a result, Georgian Dream outspent all other parties combined, demonstrating significant financial imbalance in the electoral competition (Figure 6).

Election day itself also saw a number of violations. ISFED reported 76 breaches of the secrecy of voting, 30 instances of illegal removal of observers, 12 cases of multiple voting, and 2 documented cases of ballot stuffing. Additionally, 167 violations were recorded outside polling station perimeters, including organized voter transportation, coercion, and voter tracking. In 31% of polling stations, party coordinators tracked voters. The alleged vote-buying and cases of violation of the inking procedure rose from 4% and 2% in previous elections to 13% and 9% in 2024. Observers highlighted procedural violations on the outer perimeter of polling stations such as collecting voters' personal data, campaigning, mobilization and transportation of voters.

They also observed voter tracking, aggressive mobilization, and physical intimidation (ISFED 2024).
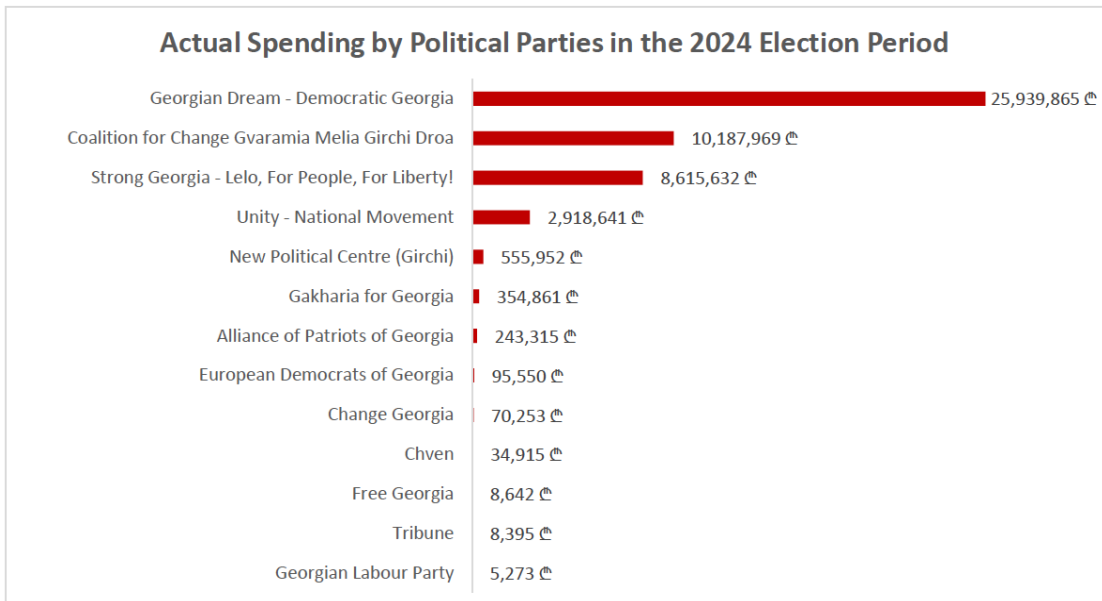
Actual Spending by Political Parties in the 2024 Election Period

Party	Amount
Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia	25,939,865 ₾
Coalition for Change Gvaramia Melia Girchi Droa	10,187,969 ₾
Strong Georgia - Lelo, For People, For Liberty!	8,615,632 ₾
Unity - National Movement	2,918,641 ₾
New Political Centre (Girchi)	555,952 ₾
Gakharia for Georgia	354,861 ₾
Alliance of Patriots of Georgia	243,315 ₾
European Democrats of Georgia	95,550 ₾
Change Georgia	70,253 ₾
Chven	34,915 ₾
Free Georgia	8,642 ₾
Tribune	8,395 ₾
Georgian Labour Party	5,273 ₾

Figure 6: Allocation of campaign financing by political parties in the 2024 election period. Source: ISFED Final Monitoring Report on Georgia's Parliamentary Elections

The OSCE's Election Observation Mission echoed these findings. With 529 observers from 42 countries, the OSCE concluded that the elections were characterized by an uneven playing field, pressure, and tension (OSCE PA 2024). They criticized the financial imbalance between Georgian Dream and other parties, the hostile media environment, and the chilling effect of the recently adopted "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence". At the same time, the OSCE praised the peaceful conduct of election day and the presence of a diverse range of candidates (18 parties). However, these were the only positive features of the elections noted by the OSCE's Observation Mission. The organization highlighted imbalances in financial resources, manipulative legislative amendments, abolishment of gender quotas and subsequent decline in female candidates. They also reported cases of public sector employees and other groups having experienced vote intimidation along with the opposition parties being threatened by Georgian Dream to be banned in case they win the elections. The OSCE concluded that while the vote

offered a choice, the context in which it occurred severely compromised its democratic integrity.

Media Analysis and Investigation

Among a wide range of media material unveiling the manipulations conducted at the elections, this research suggests looking at three pieces from three different media outlets.

Batumelebi, an independent online newspaper founded in Batumi, obtained internal documents from Georgian Dream's offices, which revealed detailed and intrusive voter profiling. The documents included personal data such as employment history, social welfare benefits, healthcare usage, criminal records, and voting history. These records were compiled using data from state ministries, including Justice, Health, Education, Internal Affairs, and Finance, indicating misuse of government resources. The documents also included lists of "influential people" — often school principals, public administrators, or state employees. In one regional database obtained by Batumelebi, information was listed for 57,308 registered voters. The extent and granularity of the data collection point to a mechanism of voter control and micro-targeting, where state power and personal relationships were used to engineer electoral outcomes (Batumelebi 2024).

Netgazeti is an independent Georgian online media outlet established by journalists Mzia Amaghlobeli (who is now a political prisoner) and Eter Turadze. The media outlet conducted its own investigation into the systematic confiscation of voter ID cards. Ana Tsitlidze, a member of the United National Movement and head of its Zugdidi office (the western part of the country), led public briefings highlighting these violations. She claimed that Georgian Dream campaigners each were tasked with collecting 200–300 ID cards. Allegedly, ID confiscation

targeted opposition voters and those with unclear political allegiances. In rural areas (where it is easier to target dissent voters), coordinators reportedly approached citizens receiving social assistance, warning them that refusal to surrender their ID cards could result in the loss of benefits or dismissal from public employment.

TV Pirveli is one of the mainstream independent TV channels in Georgia with "Nodar Meladze's Saturday" being a widely known investigative programme. Their journalists' team revealed audio evidence of cash transactions between election commission members. In Tbilisi's Gldani district, a conversation was recorded in which two registrars discussed receiving money from someone named Aleko. The recording was made by one of the voters as he heard how the registrar, Eliso Beshidze, talked on her phone's speaker mode about receiving a sum of money (TV Pirveli 2024). The recording reveals that registrars had received uneven payments and were trying to determine how funds had been distributed (they suspected that some commission members were getting more than others and were trying to clarify the exact amounts). A registrar plays an important role in the voting process: they verify identification, issue ballots, and oversee the voting process and they are directly appointed by the CEC.

Another investigation concerns "village development funds" (aimed at socially vulnerable citizens) rapidly established across 22 villages in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections. According to the documents obtained by TV Pirveli journalists, these funds were created between September 27 and October 10, just weeks before election day (October, 26). For example, in the village of Ruispiri a fund was registered under the name of three individuals, one of whom was Davit Sarajishvili. TV Pirveli's team talked to the mother and wife of Sarajishvili who stated that he had no involvement in the fund's activities. Instead, the initiative reportedly came from the village's mayor, a representative of the ruling Georgian Dream party,

who used Sarajishvili's name without his active participation. They revealed that the founders had no access to bank accounts, and they were not aware of any transactions. Moreover, Sarajishvili's mother confirmed that on election day, Davit and other nominal fund founders transported voters to polling stations in minibuses encouraging them to vote for Georgian Dream. According to testimonies, residents were threatened with the loss of social assistance if they did not comply.

Findings from the Interviews

This section presents the findings obtained through interviews with individuals directly engaged in the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia.

Evidence from ISFED: Violations of the Democratic Elections Principles

Shota Narsia, a 29-year-old researcher at the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), has been involved in election monitoring since 2018. He articulated the organization's mission in "monitoring, researching and reporting elections" since 1995, with a focus on legislative frameworks, electoral institutions and voter behavior. While ISFED generally refrains from using the term "fraud" due to its legal weight, Narsia emphasized that the 2024 elections were heavily marred by pre-election and voting-day manipulations that altered the electoral environment.

Narsia pointed out the irregularities in several dimensions: legislative framework, the structure and work of the election commissions, electoral procedures, and election results. Thus, he commented on the introduction of the "delegate" institution which ISFED declared unconstitutional. The researcher explained that the amendment to the electoral code was in contradiction with the proportional character of the parliamentary elections. The proportional

system implies that there is a single party list, and mandates are allocated to parties based on the distribution of votes. Without constitutional amendments, designating additional districts beyond administrative ones is impossible. The Georgian Parliament amended the electoral code, granting political parties the right to nominate candidates as "delegates" in these districts, which were designated in an annex to the electoral code. This annex listed 30 electoral districts and closely mirrored the abolished majoritarian system from 2020. This legislative maneuver enabled Georgian Dream to exploit localized campaign strategies and present their delegate candidates as successors to previous majoritarian MPs. No other parties submitted delegate candidates, further strengthening Georgian Dream's regional advantage.

The researcher also highlights the adjustments made to the functioning of the election commission. Thus, before 2024 elections, roles in the commission were assigned on the voting day, one hour before polling stations opened. This process determined who would serve as flow regulator (in charge of controlling the flow of voters), registrar, ballot box handler etc., keeping the assignments unknown until then. This process helped prevent manipulation, as no one had prior information. Prior to the 2024 parliamentary elections, the Central Election Commission (CEC) changed this rule, scheduling the assignments a week in advance against election law. This advance timing gave those aiming to rig the elections sufficient time to pressure commission members through intimidation, threats, or bribes, forcing them to follow illegal directives. Besides, Narsia highlights that violations extended into the staffing of electoral commissions. ISFED found that 8 out of 17 members of the Central Election Commission were affiliated with Georgian Dream.

Narsia also underscored the strategic importance of the commission member roles. Flow regulators, who check for ink markings indicating whether a voter has already cast their ballot,

were seen breaching rules by some observers. Those who had already voted are marked on their finger, indicating they should not be allowed into the polling station again. Among other violations at the voting day, the researcher notes breaching the rules in the outer perimeter of polling stations. Within a 100-meter perimeter, it is prohibited to physically obstruct, register, or gather voters. According to the ISFED observers, there were mass gatherings, registrations, and control of voters' will, mainly by Georgian Dream coordinators who asked voters whom they voted for and reminded them to vote for Georgian Dream.

Discrepancies Between HarrisX Exit Poll and the CEC's Results

Zviad Adzinbaia, a 33-year-old consultant at HarrisX, led the exit polling for Georgia's 2024 elections. HarrisX was commissioned by Mtavari Arkhi and the Media Freedom Fund. Adzinbaia stressed that clients had no influence over results and that polling followed strict methodological protocols.

After detecting an 8–9% discrepancy between the exit poll and CEC's official data, HarrisX conducted a follow-up study without contractual obligation, driven by its commitment to data integrity. The national discrepancy of over 8% (about 172,523 votes) was deemed statistically significant. HarrisX requested an explanation from the CEC, but received no response. Adzinbaia concluded that the 8% gap was "the number that changed the outcome of the election".

Testimonies from Observers

Sandro Bakuradze, a lecturer and first-time election monitor, observed minor irregularities in Tbilisi's Nadzaladevi district. He noted suspicious gatherings in the outer perimeter of the

polling station (which are not allowed by law) and "honest voter mistakes" such as an attempt of family members to vote together or with an outdated ID card. He admitted having heard of efforts to influence voters, including rumors of tampered ballots. He believed the final result (opposition victory with 57% in Tbilisi) reflected local preferences.

Aleko Amzashvili, an observer since 1995, criticized the diminished authority of election monitors. Observers can no longer request ID, reducing oversight and enabling possible fraud. He staffed 12 stations in Saburtalo, where, as he highlighted, 14 of 15 commission members were from Georgian Dream. He also noted secrecy violations due to poor ballot paper quality and called it a notorious "infamous marker problem", but did not witness direct fraud like ballot stuffing or vote buying.

Findings

As mentioned in the literature review section, Lehoucq presents a **categorization** of common **six fraudulent practices worldwide**. Thus, this research speaks about at least five types of these violations at the elections in Georgia. According to the ISFED, OSCE reports, media investigative material and expert interviews conducted for this research, the identified strategies for committing electoral fraud can be categorized in the table below.

Type of Electoral Fraud *(Lehoucq's typology: Lehoucq, 2003)*	Occurrence (+) / Absence (-)	Cases	Sources
Voter intimidation or coercion	+	- ID confiscation - Engagement of employees in budget-funded agencies (teachers, public servants) through coercion - Organized voter transportation and voter tracking	- ISFED report - Media investigation - Interview with the ISFED researcher - Interview with the observer
Stuffing ballot boxes with fraudulent votes	+	- Multiple voting - Ballot stuffing	- ISFED report - Media investigation - Interview with the ISFED researcher
Purging voter registries to exclude opposition voters	-		
Vote buying and distribution of gifts to influence voters	+	Bribing	- ISFED report (share of bribes having increased to 13%) - Interview with the ISFED researcher

			• • Media investigation (audio recording of the conversation on the distribution of money to registrars)
Setting up parallel polling stations or **manipulating vote tallies**	- / +	• Inaccuracies in election results (voter turnout exceeding 100%) • Discrepancies with the exit polls (8% and 13% discrepancies with the HarrisX and Edison Research)	• ISFED report • Interview with the ISFED researcher • Vote count organization exit polls • Interviews with the vote count organization representatives
Procedural violations such as improper opening/closing of polling stations or failing to ensure ballot secrecy	+	• Markers' stain on the ballot paper • Signatures found on the digitized copies of ballot papers	• ISFED report • Interview with the ISFED researcher • Interviews with the observers

Table 2: Categorization of Fraudulent Practices Identified in the Analysis of 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia

The **political and socioeconomic conditions** explored in Ziblatt's framework (Ziblatt 2009) are applicable to the Georgian case where the index of economic inequality, Gini coefficient, is quite high — 0,56 out of 1 (Our World in Data 2023). This implies that a significant portion of the wealth or income is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of people. The unequal distribution of financial power is one of the main characteristics of the political regime in Georgia governed by a group of oligarchs. De-oligarchisation is a major obstacle to reforms in Georgia (Kakachia et al. 2017) and a key priority to undertake on the way to EU membership, according to the EU Enlargement Policy (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia 2022).

33

Unequal social power indeed contributes to a higher chance of election falsification in the Georgian case as the government consisting of oligarchs obtain enormous financial resources in contrast with the opposition parties and civil society which makes the latter end up in a weaker and more vulnerable position. The **institutional framework,** according to Ziblatt, also determines the success of electoral fraud (Ziblatt 2009). As the theory says that corrupt elections are more likely to occur in majoritarian or plural single-member systems than in proportional ones, it becomes clear why the ruling party changed the legislation (which implied the implementation of the fully proportional system), so that some principles of the previous majoritarian system were still in action. These changes also apply to the structure and work of the election commission which is highly affiliated with Georgian Dream: 8 of 17 members in the CEC were associated with the ruling party; the legislation regarding the roles of election commission members was also changed prior to the elections in favour of the potential electoral manipulations.

Another essential factor outlined in the literature review is the nature of **political competition** (Magaloni 2010). 2024 elections in Georgia were highly competitive based on voter engagement and party representation. The voter turnout in Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections was reported at 60.20% which accounts for 2,1 million Georgian citizens out of total 3,6 million (CEC 2024). The party list was indeed quite diverse with 18 parties in total where four major opposition parties took the lead having gained 37,8%, according to the Central Election Commission, and 52%, according both to Edison Research and HarrisX — independent vote count organisations. Therefore, in a highly polarized political system such as Georgia, a political race is inherently competitive which consequently intensifies the ruling party's incentive to maintain its hold on power.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of the research, Magaloni highlights that the decision to commit electoral fraud depends not only on the government, but the **opposition and voters** themselves (Magaloni 2010). As for opposition mobilization in Georgia, it is generally considered weak despite the collective decision of several small, but influential parties to form coalitions ahead of the elections. Besides that, the opposition parties accepted the proposal of the president Salome Zurabishvili to sign the "Georgian Charter" on May 26, 2024 (the Independence Day of Georgia). It is a type of manifesto which seeks to consolidate opposition parties under a common framework to restore democratic governance and advance the country's European Union integration aspirations. However, the opposition failed to meet some significant expectations of Georgian voters.

Firstly, they did not present a clear response and an alternative solution to the primary idea which Georgian Dream based their election campaign on. After the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine and especially throughout the election race the ruling party was promoting the narrative that the Western allies are eager to open a "second front" in Georgia against Russia. The election campaign banners depicted ruined Georgian landscape with a writing "Say no to war, choose peace!". This strategy worked on sentiments of the population who vividly remembers two wars with Russia (of 1992-1993 in Abkhazia and 2008 August war in South Ossetia). The opposition did not provide a clear statement regarding this conflicting area in Georgia ignoring concerns of a number of voters and blindly proclaiming aspirations to Europe.

Secondly, the opposition assumed that the elections will not be rigged and they will truthfully win them in spite of minor allegations of fraud during previous 2020 elections, according to OSCE (OSCE 2021). Thirdly, the opposition did not take a central role in mobilizing mass anti-government protests. People from various social groups gathered by themselves, and the

creation of a large online platform with over 250,000 participants (which became a main online tool for mobilizing a protest in Georgia) by a local painter only proves that. As for **voters' possibility of expressing dissatisfaction towards the elections**, it is limited due to police violence and surveillance towards the protesters. For these reasons, it can be assumed that weak opposition mobilization and the limited opportunity for voters to voice their discontent serve as accelerants in the ruling party's decision to commit electoral fraud.

The Georgian case proves the relevance of Ananyev and Poyker's findings on **geographical allocation of the electoral fraud**: the larger scale of manipulations was observed in pro-regime strongholds (Ananyev and Poyker 2022). According to HarrisX report, the variance between their and CEC's results is the largest in rural areas such as Marneuli (40% discrepancy), Kvareli (34%), Akhmeta (30%) and Samkhret-Javakheti (29%). In these regions the ruling party gained the overwhelming support of the voters, according to the Central Election Commission's results: in Akhalkalaki, the share of Georgian Dream voters accounts for substantial 88%, 81% in Bolnisi (home to mining activities, particularly in copper and gold extraction supported by the ruling party), and 80% in Marneuli (Figure 4). Thus, according to the estimates of discrepancies from both vote count organizations, the electoral manipulations were more widespread in regions, where the official results show the larger support for the ruling party. Besides, the importance of the geographical allocation is reflected in the breaching of the principle of universality, pointed out by Shota Narsia in the interview. The ruling party did not satisfy the request of voters to open additional polling stations, as it is harder to manipulate the voting process abroad. The results also prove that: Georgian Dream gained only 13,5% of the vote abroad (Figure 3).

In Rundlett and Svolik's model the focus is placed on **local operatives and the amount of fraud supplied** (Rundlett and Svolik 2016). In the interview, the ISFED researcher, Shota Narsia, pointed at the *strategic importance of the commission member roles.* Thus, the flow regulators and registrars played a crucial role in ensuring that electoral procedures undergo righteously, in accordance with the rules. In practice, some procedures were violated because of the dishonesty of some members in the election commissions. As for the amount of electoral fraud committed, it must be said that the discrepancy of the overall vote cast accounts for 8%, according to HarrisX exit poll (HarrisX 2024). The variance for the proportion of votes given to the ruling party ranges between 9,5-13%, as counted by Edison Research and HarrisX. Therefore, it can be assumed that Georgian Dream effectively executed just enough manipulation to secure an election win, without presenting an overwhelming victory.

Higashijima argues that authoritarian leaders with substantial **economic resources** tend to use less coercion and manipulation (Higashijima 2022). In the Georgian case, this hypothesis does not hold. The ruling party obtains a range of financial, legislative and executive resources which rather facilitated the success of electoral fraud, than deterred it. Roughly 20% of the new parliament is made up of economic elites: 16 MPs are millionaires, and one — Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder of Georgian Dream — is a billionaire (Radio Tavisupleba 2024). Together with that, according to the ISFED report, the share of bribes having occurred at the elections accounts for 13% (ISFED 2024). The report illustrates that the ruling party relied heavily on their power resources to conduct successful electoral manipulations: Georgian Dream spent more than all other parties put together, highlighting a major financial disparity in the election (Figure 6). Under these well-designed circumstances, the mass protest backfired despite the government's economic and political power.

Nevertheless, the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia are marked by highly innovative and deeply intrusive strategies which were not described in the analysed literature and do not fit in any of the categorizations above. Among these peculiar tactics is the creation of extensive **voter dossiers** compiled through unauthorized access to government databases. According to Batumelebi media outlet, uncovered internal documents revealed that ruling party operatives had collected detailed personal profiles (including healthcare records, employment history, social assistance, and criminal data) on tens of thousands of citizens. This granular and cross-sectoral data harvesting represents a technologically innovative form of voter control. In connection with this comes **the use of electronic technologies** as instruments of psychological pressure and procedural obscurity. The opposition political actors and non-governmental organizations were excluded from the development and auditing phases. The technologies themselves, ranging from ballot scanners to surveillance cameras, fueled a perception that votes were traceable, effectively deterring part of citizens from voting. Perhaps, the most creatively manipulative initiative was the foundation of the **"village development funds"** established in 22 rural communities in the weeks preceding the election. These funds, presented as supporting local populations, were nominally registered under citizens who were neither informed nor involved. Fund representatives organized voter transportation and issued threats of benefit withdrawal for non-compliance. This tactic exemplifies a hybrid of social policy and political coercion. These strategies highlight a shift toward technologically and bureaucratically sophisticated forms of electoral manipulation, where the line between the ruling party and the state is erasing.

Conclusion

Concluding the observations from above, it can be affirmed that the success of electoral fraud at the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia was based on a variety of manipulative techniques and determinant factors outlined in the literature which formed certain expectations for the outcomes of this research. The methods of conducting fraud included 1) voter intimidation or coercion; 2) stuffing ballot boxes with fraudulent votes; 3) purging voter registries to exclude opposition voters; 4) vote buying and distribution of gifts to influence voters; 5) setting up parallel polling stations or manipulating vote tallies; and 6) procedural violations such as improper opening/closing of polling stations or failing to ensure ballot secrecy (Lehoucq 2003). The social, economic and political factors influencing the decision to commit fraud and its successful implementation involve: institutional framework (Ziblatt 2009); unequal social power (Ziblatt 2009); competitiveness of the political race (Ziblatt 2009); opposition mobilization and opportunity for voters to voice their discontent (Magaloni 2010); geographical allocation (Ananyev and Poyker 2022); local operatives and amount of fraud (Rundlett and Svolik 2016); and financial resources (Higashijima 2022). Despite the fact that all these factors were important for influencing the success of electoral manipulations, there are **two aspects** which played a pivotal role specifically in these elections: **institutional/legislative framework** and **financial resources.** One of the main findings of the research is the **prioritization of the pre-election campaign** over the actual election day and voting process. The ruling party put a considerable amount of their resources into formatting the legislative rules of the electoral game by introducing the "delegate candidates" and changing the CEC's working mechanisms and schedules. Furthermore, the oligarchic character of the ruling party's convocation reflects the amount of financial input used for campaign financing, the so-called "village development funds", bribing and desinformation (spreading fake news on

39

technological innovations being able to identify which parties the voters elected). Besides, there were **peculiar strategies created by the ruling party** such as collecting voter dossiers, using electronic technologies for pressure and obscurity and foundation of the nominal "village development funds" used for voter intimidation. These tools are hard to categorize as they represent novel advanced techniques of electoral fraud. Moreover, they are harder to detect in comparison to traditional ballot stuffing because the final choice is still made by real voters, although under coercion, intimidation, bribing and, sometimes, violence

This research finds how a blend of traditional vote manipulations (applied on a relatively small scale) with the new technological and socioeconomic coercion deliver a success for perpetrators of fraud and undermine a crucial democratic institution such as fair and free elections. The mobilization of legislative, administrative and financial resources during the pre-election campaign was of high importance for the success of the vote rigging at the elections in Georgia, and played a more significant role than a number of relatively minor inaccuracies on election day and the processing of the election results. To the misfortune of the opposition actors, the ruling party played a smart and well-designed game committing the exact amount of manipulation to secure an election win relying on multiple tests, supported by a clear theoretical rationale (Leemann and Bochsler 2014).

The study contributes to the broader understanding of contemporary electoral fraud by demonstrating how hybrid manipulation strategies (blending traditional vote-rigging techniques with novel legislative, technological, and financial instruments) can effectively undermine democratic processes. While prior literature has emphasized structural, institutional, and contextual determinants of fraud, this study highlights the strategic shift toward pre-election manipulation, particularly through legal reforms and financial domination, as a more decisive

factor than election-day violations. The findings emphasize the growing sophistication of electoral subversion by documenting these advanced and less detectable forms of manipulation (voter dossiers, misuse of electronic systems, and pseudo-development funds). This research expands existing typologies of electoral fraud and offers insights into how modern autocratic actors adapt to democratic constraints while maintaining authoritarian control.

Unfortunately for Georgia's democratization, the success of electoral fraud has resulted in the parliament composed of only 101 members instead of the statutory 150. 79 of them are members of the Georgian Dream and account for 78% of the whole parliament's convocation (Parliament of Georgia 2025). The rest four parties are allies of the ruling party, whereas the opposition refused to take up their mandates in protest of the election results. Recently, on May 31, 2025, the infamous FARA law (on companies and individuals receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad) came into force. Unlike the earlier "Foreign Influence" law, which imposed administrative fines, the new version includes criminal penalties such as imprisonment of up to five years for non-compliance, and extends to individuals, not only organizations. It is uncertain what perspectives on democratization and European integration Georgia has in these circumstances. European leaders do not attend meetings with Georgian Dream representatives, and the European Parliament's official statement says that the Georgian authorities are self-proclaimed and have no legitimacy (European Parliament, 2025). It seems that the path towards EU membership can only be restored with meeting the protesters' demand for new elections.

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