

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Georgia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	6	6	0	Democ:	7	7	0	Autoc:	1	1	0	Durable:	19			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	GRG	CCODE	372	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	5	3	4																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
			9 April 1991 (Ind.)																						
Polity Fragmentation: Yes, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (10-15%)																									
Constitution	1995																								
Executive(s)	President Mikhail Saakashvili (NMD); initially directly elected in 2004; reelected, 5 January 2008, 53.5%																								
Legislature	Unicameral: Supreme Council (235 seats; 75 directly elected, 150 proportionally elected, 10 represent displaced persons from Abkhazia; most recent elections, 21 May 2008) National Movement – Democrats (NMD): 119 Joint Opposition (National Council, New Rights): 17 Other parties: 14 Members elected in single-seat constituencies: 75 Members representing displaced from Abkhazia: 10 (Note – exact party loyalty of 85 directly elected members not known) The Constitution provides for an upper house to represent the interests of the regions and autonomous republics but has postponed convening this body until Georgia has regained Abkhazia and South Ossetia.																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Georgia was a founding member of the Soviet Union. However, in 1991 the National Assembly, led by Georgian nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia, seceded from the USSR. Gamsakhurdia was elected president in

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

1991 but was quickly deposed as conflict escalated between the government and rival militias. With the help of Russian forces peace was restored to the capital city and Eduard Shevardnadze, a member of the former Soviet elite, was appointed head of the newly formed State Council and, in October 1992, was elected chairman of the parliament. After the adoption of a new constitution in 1994, in November 1995 Shevardnadze was elected to the restored post of president of the republic. In the subsequent years the democratic institutions in Georgia became increasingly fragile as President Shevardnadze sought to consolidate his personal political power. In a vain attempt to restructure the electoral laws to create a more level playing field prior to the April 2000 presidential elections, opposition parties tried to pressure the government to postpone these elections. The government rejected this plea. The conduct of the April 2000 presidential election was roundly criticized by international observers who cited serious electoral irregularities, including ballot stuffing, media bias, and lack of transparency in both vote counting and tabulation. International observers noted that while the outcome of the election, which was won by Shevardnadze, probably reflected the will of the people, nevertheless, it was far from free or fair in conduct.

Since the flawed 2000 elections the president has actively sought to name a potential political successor. While he insisted that he would remain in power until his term ended in 2005, Shevardnadze quit his position as leader of Georgia's ruling Citizens' Union of Georgia movement (CUG) in September 2001. By 2003 popular support for Shevardnadze had waned significantly as his efforts to limit state corruption, which bordered on kleptocracy, were commonly perceived to have failed.

Amidst growing discontent over the corruption of the Shevardnadze government, legislative elections were held on 2 November 2003. When international observers noted significant voting irregularities, thousands of protestors took to the streets. As the official government tally indicated a CUG victory in the parliamentary polls, protestors seized the parliament building and demanded the resignation of President Shevardnadze and the annulment of the legislative results. While the president maintained his hold on power for three more weeks, by November 24 he had resigned and Nino Burjanadze, the outgoing speaker of parliament, assumed the post of interim president. The Supreme Court subsequently annulled the results of the November poll and scheduled presidential and legislative elections for January and March 2004.

Mikhail Saakashvili, a long-time critic of the Shevardnadze government and crusader against corruption and poverty, easily won the January presidential election with ninety-six percent of the vote and was inaugurated president on 25 January 2004. Despite the unusually high margin of victory, international observers praised the elections as free and fair. Saakashvili, a former protégé of Shevardnadze and ex-government minister, launched the anti-regime National Movement in 2001 which provided him with a political power base from which to challenge his former boss and, ultimately, ascend to the presidency. In an effort to put to rest the political instability of the country, all major political actors unified around and endorsed a Saakashvili candidacy. Public demonstrations against the government in late 2007 triggered a crackdown on the opposition and an international backlash that led to the scheduling of early presidential elections. Saakashvili won the 5 January 2008 election with 53% of the vote in the first round, temporarily quieting the opposition. The subsequent war in the breakaway South Ossetia and Abkhazia ethnic enclaves in August 2008 and, particularly, the intervention by Russia forces initially rallied Georgians against the foreign intervention but appear to have reinvigorated opposition to President Saakashvili in the aftermath.

Executive Constraints: Substantial Limitations (5)

President Shevardnadze dominated the political arena in Georgia during his tenure in office. While the legislature provided a substantial constraint on the powers of the chief executive, nonetheless, it remained subordinate to most executive branch initiatives. Despite the ruling CUG's division into three distinct factions, President Shevardnadze was able to use his political skills to hold this coalition together in the face of rising party discord and falling personal popularity, until the tumultuous events of November 2003.

While most political observers expect the "Rose Revolution" to increase the level of horizontal accountability in Georgia, the March 2004 legislative elections initially produced little challenge to the executive power of President Saakashvili (known to Georgians as Misha). The elections of 28 March were won by the National Movement-Democrats (NMD), the party supporting President Saakashvili. The NMD unites President Saakashvili's National Movement, Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania's United Democrats, the Republican Party, supporters of Parliamentary Chairperson Nino Burjanadze and some supporters of the late President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Union of National Forces. The NMD won 67% of the vote, while no other party won more than 7.6%. Only the NMD and the Rightest Opposition party polled more than 7%

of the vote, the threshold necessary to gain representation. Under the proportional representation system, the pro-President party won 135 seats and the Rightest Opposition garnered fifteen. The new Georgian parliament also included eighty-five members selected from single-member constituencies, who were elected in the November 2003 elections and were not required to run for reelection.

Constitutional changes enacted in 2008 reduced the number of MPs from 235 to 150. Under the new constitution, 75 of these seats were to be elected according to the party list system and the other 75 in single mandate constituencies. The 2008 legislative elections saw President Saakshavili's United National Movement win a landslide victory. Only 17 opposition deputies decided to participate in the 150-seat parliament, while 16 other deputies who won seats decided to boycott the body. While the legislative branch holds significant powers, under the tenure of President Saakshavili the executive branch has clearly dominated the political arena.

The judiciary, led by a Supreme Court, is largely independent of executive influence, and its members are elected by Parliament, on the advice of the president.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Persistent Overt Coercion (8)

While over thirty parties operate in Georgia (many with large military wings), these parties tend to be based on personal loyalty rather than ideology. For example, Shevardnadze's political party, the CUG, is dominated by former nomenclatural apparatchiks who served with the former president under the old Soviet system. Shevardnadze used his position of power and his ties to the CUG to politically neutralize virtually all challenges to his rule during his tenure in office. Criticism of his iron-handed approach to politics and his inability to tackle the problem of corruption, however, led to massive street protests in recent years and, ultimately, to the collapse of his presidency. While most political forces in the country rallied around the election of Mikhail Saakashvili as president in the January 2004 election, it is still too early to tell if this reflects a fundamental change from the factional nature of politics that has defined this country in the post-Soviet era or is simply a passing phase of conciliation between factional contenders for power.

These personalistic parties stem from a long history of ethnic, clan and personality struggles that continue to define Georgian politics. While the political arena is much calmer today than it was in the early 1990s, nonetheless, it is far from stable. Separatist conflict, coup attempts, and street protests are all part of the factional nature of Georgian politics. Also contributing to the factional nature of Georgian politics are the nationalist struggles in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that continue to be waged in this country.

In the wake of the collapse of the Shevardnadze regime, President Saakashvili has sought to unify Georgia and pressure the breakaway republics to bow to central political authority. Tensions between the central government and the regions of Adjara escalated to the brink of armed conflict after the newly elected president of the semi-autonomous region barred President Saakashvili from entering Adjara. After the removal of the leader of Adjara, Aslan Abashidze, in early May 2004, and the reincorporation of that territory under central government authority, tensions between the central government and South Ossetia deteriorated. While President Saakashvili unveiled a proposal of political autonomy for South Ossetia in January 2005, the breakaway republic's leadership rejected this proposal, repeating demands for full independence. President Saakashvili has also indicated that a similar proposal for political autonomy for the region of Abkhazia would only be forwarded if Georgian refugees who fled fighting in 1993 were allowed to return. Tensions between the central government and the breakaway enclaves increased markedly in 2008 amid accusations that Georgia was preparing to invade the enclaves and forcibly reintegrate the territories. Tensions came to a head when Georgian armed forces invaded South Ossetia on 7 August 2008 and were forcibly repelled by intervening Russian armed forces; Russian forces also moved into Abkhazia to expel Georgian forces from that enclave. On 26 August 2008, President Medvedev of Russia signed decrees recognizing the independence of the two enclaves.

On 25 September 2007, former-Defense Minister Irakli Rekhviashvili, who had been removed and reassigned on 10 November 2006 and subsequently resigned, went on independent television and accused the government of serious improprieties. He was arrested on September 27 and this sparked a major demonstration in the capital, Tbilisi, the following day calling for his release and the resignation of President Saakashvili. Public demonstrations continued until the President declared a state of emergency and ordered security forces to disperse the protesters and shut down all independent media on November 7, a move that brought immediate and concerted international pressure on the government. On November 8, the President announced early presidential elections would be held on 5 January 2008 (previously scheduled for December 2008). On 16 November 2007 the state of emergency was lifted but restrictions continued to

silence independent media. Although the Saakashvili government claimed to win a mandate in the January 2008 presidential and May 2008 legislative elections, the subsequent loss of the war with Russia in August 2008 has renewed opposition calls for the president's resignation. The EU-sponsored Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFMCG) issued its report on the August 2008 war in September 2009; it concluded that Georgia ignited the conflict by attacking separatists in South Ossetia, but that Russia had provoked violence in the enclave for years and exploited its consequences. It also claimed that, while there was no evidence of a Russian invasion planned prior to Georgia's bombardment of the South Ossetia capital commencing on 27 August 2008, the Russian military response was disproportionate to its legal right to defend its peacekeepers.

In mid-October 2010 the Georgian parliament adopted amendments to the Constitution that moved the political system closer to a parliamentary republic and made the prime minister, not the president, the most powerful figure in the government. These reforms are the culmination of a process started in June 2009 with the convening of a constitutional commission. While all significant political parties were invited to participate in the constitutional reform process, most refused to participate. In many respects the opposition was caught off guard and did not hold a unified position on the potential impact of the proposed reforms. While the opposition had historically criticized the super-presidential structure of the Georgian political system, many were now convinced that any transformation of the system toward a parliamentary structure would strengthen Saakashvili's hold on power. Some critics of the government have argued that the constitutional changes give President Saakashvili, whose second and last term as president comes to an end in 2013 (at which time he will only be 46 years old), the opportunity to continue running the country as prime minister. They look to the model of governance enacted by Putin in Russia as the ultimate goal of Saakashvili. The power of the prime minister in this system stems from the difficulties associated with removing the head of government from office under the new constitutional order. In order to replace a standing prime minister the legislature must form a new majority of three-fifths to support a new prime minister and hold that majority for a least two months. The changes are to come into effect in 2013. In November 2010 the Georgian opposition parties and the ruling United National Movement (EEM) reached agreement on the structure of talks aimed at reforming the electoral system. Fifteen opposition parties have agreed to participate in the process.