

**2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA: REGIONAL
CHARACTERISTICS OF STATISTICAL ANOMALIES IN VOTER TURNOUT**

Giorgi Gogsadze

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University,
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,
Department of Human Geography, Georgia,

giorgi.gogsadze@tsu.ge

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0618-5299>

Eleonora Tchania

Vakhushti Bagrationi Institute of Geography,
Department of Human Geography, Georgia,

eleonora.tchania@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5352-0710>

Abstract

The main goal of the paper is to reveal regional (geographical) characteristics of statistical anomalies in voter turnout of 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia. The research findings are primarily based on the analysis of official data of 2024 parliamentary elections and demographic statistics provided by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat). The research shows that the biggest election irregularities happened in Western Georgia, particularly in mountainous districts. However, statistical anomalies in election results should be carefully considered, as they may not solely indicate election fraud but could also stem from deficiencies in statistical database, particularly when outdated or inaccurate voter list is used.

Key words: Parliamentary elections, voter turnout, statistical anomalies, Georgia.

Introduction

Many politicians and experts believe that Georgia has experienced a backsliding of democracy over the past 2–3 years, culminating in the unfairly conducted 2024 parliamentary elections by the ruling government. It is important to review the significant political developments that occurred during the governance of the "Georgian Dream" (GD) party. After coming to power through elections in 2012, the coalition government of "Georgian Dream" sought to improve the human rights situation and strengthen the country's Western orientation. Newly elected authorities created favorable conditions and an environment for developing entrepreneurship, business, and trade. The most notable achievement of the government was the state-sponsored universal health care insurance program, which benefited a significant portion of society. This progress was reflected in reports released by authoritative international organizations and funds (Gogsadze, 2016, pp.128-129). In 2014, Georgia signed an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the European Union.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, "Georgian Dream" participated as an independent political organization and achieved a convincing victory. The party strengthened relations with the European Union, despite ceasing cooperation with pro-Western parties, including the "Republican Party of Georgia" and the "Free Democrats." As a result, starting in 2017, Georgian citizens began enjoying visa-free travel to EU countries. Furthermore, in 2018, the Parliament adopted a constitutional amendment stating that *"The constitutional bodies must take all necessary measures within their competence to ensure Georgia's full integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization"* (Constitution of Georgia). In 2021, the government announced its intention to officially apply for EU membership in 2024.

The political situation in Georgia changed radically starting in 2022, coinciding with Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The Georgian government did not officially condemn Russia's actions. Additionally, the ruling party began copying anti-democratic legislation from Russia, signaling that the country was moving toward an anti-Western development path, although the government formally continued to speak about EU integration. On December 15, 2023, the European Council agreed to grant candidate status to Georgia on the condition that the government implements nine steps necessary for further EU integration (EC Spells Out Nine Steps for Georgia, 2023). This decision surprised the leadership of "Georgian Dream," as they believed the country would not receive candidate status due to the government's recent anti-European attitudes and actions. Moreover, the granting of candidate status occurred despite the Georgian authorities making insignificant progress on implementing the "nine steps." In response, Bidzina Ivanishvili returned to politics, becoming the honorary chairman of "Georgian Dream" and personally leading the decision-making and implementation of key political actions. The government's anti-democratic and anti-Western policies intensified further.

In the spring of 2024, amidst widespread protests, Parliament adopted the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence." Officially, the law aimed to identify NGOs receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad as foreign agents to prevent foreign interference. In practice, however, it enabled the authorities to suppress independent media, political opposition, and civil society institutions. The European Union and the United States urged the Georgian Parliament to reject this and other undemocratic laws, but their calls had no effect. Amid deteriorating relations between the Georgian government and Western countries, "Georgian Dream" blamed the "Global War Party" (GWP), which they claimed was part of the "deep state" ('Party of global war', 2025). Furthermore, GD leaders argued that the war in Ukraine was inspired

and initiated by the GWP. Interestingly, a significant portion (about 34%) of Georgian society believes in the existence of the GWP (Chkhetiani, 2025).

During the election campaign, "Georgian Dream" introduced two main slogans:

- No to War – Choose Peace;
- To Europe with Dignity.

In their public speeches, representatives of "Georgian Dream" emphasized that the Global War Party sought to involve Georgia in the Ukraine-Russia war, which would be devastating for Georgian society. They claimed that the ruling party prevented this attempt and maintained peace in the country. Unfortunately, the opposition did not challenge this narrative or engage in public discussions about it, leaving some voters with the impression that "Georgian Dream's" position on peace and war was correct.

Against this political backdrop, the 2024 parliamentary elections were held, with the official results as follows:

- The Georgian Dream: 53.9%
- Coalition for the Change: 11.0%
- United National Movement (UNM): 10.2%
- Lelo: 8.8%
- Gakharia for Georgia: 7.8%
- Others: 8.3%

According to the Central Election Commission's results, "Georgian Dream" secured 89 parliamentary mandates out of 150 (Report on Georgian Parliamentary Elections, 2024, p.122). These results were unexpected not only for Georgian voters and NGOs but also for foreign

politicians and experts. Sociological surveys conducted during the election campaign and exit polls – on election day indicated that "Georgian Dream" was expected to receive slightly over 40% of the vote.

Four opposition parties that won parliamentary mandates announced they would not enter Parliament. Additionally, the opposition called on the public to participate in anti-government protests. However, despite these calls, few people protested the election results. Soon, the opposition received unexpected gift from "GD" itself. On November 28, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the decision of the GD political council to suspend Georgia's EU integration process and reject EU budgetary assistance.

It is noteworthy that mass protests were organized not by the political opposition but by civil society (including independent media) and students. Clearly, alongside the government crisis, there is also a lack of trust in the opposition in Georgia. What caused this latter issue? The authors believe that the opposition failed to establish adequate contact with the public during the pre-election period. None of the political organizations offered voters a program (or ideas) aimed at addressing pressing socio-economic issues. The opposition did not engage in discussions with the ruling party on the issues of war and peace. It failed to convince Georgian society that the European Union is a guarantor of peace and development, not inspiring Georgia's involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war.

The ruling party's decision shocked a large part of Georgian society, especially since EU integration was one of "GDs" key election slogans. Moreover, the European Union has always provided significant assistance to Georgia. Between 2019 and 2024, the EU allocated €517 million to various Georgian governmental institutions and €46 million to civil society organizations (Beneficiaries of EU Assistance in Georgia 2024). In authors' view, the Georgian government

abandoned real EU integration for several reasons, the most significant of which is their desire to govern the country through undemocratic methods and corruption. The "nine steps" particularly emphasize the creation of approaches and institutions that ensure:

- A free, fair, and competitive electoral process;
- A holistic and effective judicial reform;
- The institutional independence and impartiality of the Anti-Corruption Bureau;
- A multi-sectoral, systemic approach to de-oligarchization.

Mass protests in Tbilisi and other cities began after the decision to abandon Georgia's EU integration process, despite constitutional commitments (Constitution of Georgia, Article 78). Protesters introduced two main demands: new elections and freedom for all detained activists. Arbitrary detentions of protesters and opposition leaders persist, with media representatives specifically targeted by law enforcement authorities wearing black masks and unidentifiable informal violent groups. During the non-stop protests, police authorities detained more than 500 individuals, and several hundred reportedly suffered ill-treatment (2025, Chronicle of Repression).

Amid protests and criticism from Western politicians, the government adopted even more undemocratic laws and procedures. In September 2024, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the honorary chairman of the GD party, declared his intention to dismantle what he called the "collective UNM" to block "attempts to impose pseudo-liberal values from abroad." Ivanishvili claimed such a move was necessary to protect Georgia's sovereignty and preserve its cultural identity. In response, Parliament created a Temporary Investigative Commission to identify systemic crimes under the previous UNM government (GD Announce Creation of Parliamentary Commission, 2025).

GD developed a draft law aiming to ban parties that create a “*common hostile purpose against the country.*” If adopted and enforced, the main opposition parties would no longer be allowed to participate in any elections (GD to Ban Opposition Groups, 2025).

According to a report by Human Rights Watch, the situation in Georgia in 2024 was marked by:

- Repressive legislation;
- Limitation of Freedom of Expression and Assembly;
- Violence against Activists;
- Law Enforcement Abuses and Impunity.

The report also noted that police, the general prosecutor’s office, and courts act not as governmental institutions but as GD party units (Hassan, 2025).

Simultaneously with the deterioration of domestic affairs, drastic changes in foreign policy were observed. For many years, the GD government moved toward the West, particularly the EU. However, in the last 2–3 years, the US-Georgia strategic partnership has been suspended, the EU cut financial aid, and political relations with the acting authorities have been minimized, including the intention to stop visa-free movement of Georgian citizens to EU countries. Instead, GD has strengthened relations with Russia and China. Clearly, Georgia is moving deeper into the Russian sphere, leaving itself alone and vulnerable in the face of its aggressive northern neighbor. Is the country able to tackle this challenge alone without Western partners?

Research methods and approaches

The study focuses on identifying regional aspects of statistical anomalies in voter turnout (VT) during the 2024 parliamentary elections. The research questions are as follows:

- Is it possible to identify statistical anomalies in VT in the 2024 parliamentary elections?
- What kinds of statistical anomalies are revealed, and to what extent?
- Can geographic (regional) characteristics of statistical anomalies in VT be highlighted?

The main method applied in this research involves the collection, processing, and analysis of data related to Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections. To identify statistical anomalies in these elections, the first step was to determine the number of voting-age population (18+) in the administrative regions and municipalities of the country. For this purpose, official statistics from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) were used. In the next stage, the data obtained through this method were compared with the official data provided by the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia, the leading organ of the Election Administration of Georgia. Geostat statistical information was also used to analyze the dynamics of international mobility (emigration and immigration) of Georgia's population.

In describing the rules and procedures of election administration, the study refers to Georgian legislation, primarily the Election Code of Georgia (Organic Law of Georgia, 2020). Reports released by various international organizations and local NGOs provided a solid basis for assessing the administration of the 2024 parliamentary elections in Georgia. These include reports developed by the Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission (OSCE – ODIHR, 2024), International Republican Institute (IRI Preliminary Statement of the 2024 Georgia Parliamentary Elections), National Democratic Institute (NDI Presents Preliminary Statement on Georgian Elections, 2024), International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy

(Georgia's 2024 Parliamentary Elections: Final Monitoring Report, 2025), and Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (Georgia's 2024 Parliamentary Elections, 2025).

The study primarily investigates various aspects of voter turnout (VT). Electoral studies typically employ two types of voter turnout: 1) Registered turnout: The ratio between the number of voters and the number of registered voters; and 2) Voting-age population (VAP) turnout: The proportion of voters divided by the number of citizens above the legal voting age (Comsa, 2017, p. 38). The Georgian election authorities traditionally use the "registered turnout" method.

To create a geographical visualization (mapping) of the research results, it was first necessary to obtain relevant spatial information, such as regional boundaries, naming attributes, coding, etc. Information published by CEC Georgia and Geostat was used as data sources. Open software (QGIS) and OGC tools were employed to join spatial and numerical information, resulting in the creation of a base map. Adobe Illustrator was used for the final cartographic design of the map.

It is important to note that parts of Georgia's internationally recognized territory, namely Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia), are beyond Georgian jurisdiction due to the deployment of Russian troops and are considered occupied territories. Therefore, parliamentary elections are not held there, and data for these territories are absent.

One of the main tasks of the paper was to conduct an academic discussion by introducing a conceptual (theoretical) framework for the research. Particular attention was paid to critically reviewing academic works dedicated to electoral studies.

In recent decades, voter turnout has gained more attention as an academic topic than voting itself. In post-communist societies, numerous factors affect VT, including:

- Post-communist demobilization and political disenchantment;

- Weakness of civil society institutions and political parties;
- Deteriorated socio-economic conditions;
- Population mobility, primarily mass emigration;
- Political stakes;
- Election fraud.

Research on rigged elections is especially important for less democratic societies, including former Soviet countries. Generally, the coverage of rigged elections receives significant attention worldwide, but this issue is less studied from a scientific perspective. A few years ago, the Venice Commission developed a report on identifying electoral irregularities (Report on Identification of Electoral Irregularities, 2019). The document notes that statistical anomalies in election results may not only be caused by administrative manipulations but also by statistical errors and other factors (ibid: 14).

One interesting aspect of electoral studies is determining the impact of elections malpractices on voter turnout. Opinions on this issue vary. Voter turnout is directly proportional to the level of democratization in a country (e.g., Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017, p. 350). On the one hand, intimidation or bribery of the electorate (or parts of it) by the authorities may increase turnout. On the other hand, if voters believe their participation will not influence the election results, turnout decreases (Dahlberg, Solevid, 2016). It is important to note that some researchers (e.g., Baghdasaryan et al., 2017, p. 35-36; Dahlberg, Solevid, 2016, p. 489) argue that voter turnout may be high in cases of low or moderate corruption, but in cases of high levels of election fraud, turnout drops significantly. Additionally, how the electorate perceives fraud is more important than the objective characteristics of the rigged elections (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017, p. 364).

It is noteworthy that several academic studies have been dedicated to identifying irregularities in Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections (e.g., Chikhladze, 2025; Gutbrod, 2024; Osmanov et al., 2024; Pertaia et al 2024; Udot, 2024). The authors of these studies attempted to identify statistical anomalies in the elections using quantitative methods. Moreover, in some of the mentioned works authors calculated the extent of election fraud, specifically indicating the number of non-existent votes recorded.

The goal of the given research was not to determine the number of fraudulent votes. The next chapter provides a review and analysis of general and regional patterns of statistical anomalies in VT during Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections.

Results and discussion

Electoral studies examining the relationship between democratic development and voter turnout (VT) in post-communist countries have noted the emergence of "post-communist demobilization" in the late 1990s (e.g., Kostadinova, 2003; Kostelka, Blais, 2018). The primary cause of this phenomenon was widespread voter disillusionment, stemming from ineffective political processes and the unethical behavior of governments and politicians (e.g., Norris, 1999; Rose, 2004; Hanspeter, 2008).

One of the key issues in electoral studies is determining the impact of socio-economic conditions on voter turnout. On the one hand, it can be hypothesized that unfavorable material conditions mobilize voters. On the other hand, poverty can lead to political nihilism, reducing participation (Radcliff, 1992). There is no consensus on this issue, but most researchers agree that both factors play a role (e.g., Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Blais, 2000; Kostadinova, 2003; Fornos et al., 2004). In Georgia, material hardship negatively affects voter turnout, but indirectly. A

significant portion of the impoverished population is forced to migrate abroad for employment, reducing the country's electorate.

Many electoral studies indicate a clear correlation between VT and high political stakes (e.g., Downs, 1957; Riker, Ordeshook, 1968; Tullock, 1967; Pacek et al. 2009; Solijonov, 2016). Voters in the new democracies of Eastern Europe tend to actively participate in elections, especially when a change in power is anticipated. Historically, high political stakes have had the greatest impact on voter turnout in Georgia (see Figure 2). This was most evident in the 1990 and 2012 parliamentary elections, both of which resulted in changes in government. Notably, this trend applies not only to parliamentary elections but also to local elections (Gogsadze et al. 2023, p. 61).

Empirical evidence shows that voter turnout is generally higher in rural areas than in urban centers (e.g., Geys 2006; Henderson; McEwen, 2010; Cancela, Geys, 2016). In Georgia, rural voters are typically more active than urban voters. In the 2020 parliamentary elections, voter turnout in major cities (Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi) was significantly lower than the national average (Gachechiladze, Gogsadze, 2022 p. 217). However, official data from the CEC for the 2024 elections indicate that VT in the two largest cities (Tbilisi and Batumi) exceeded the national average (October 26, 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia).

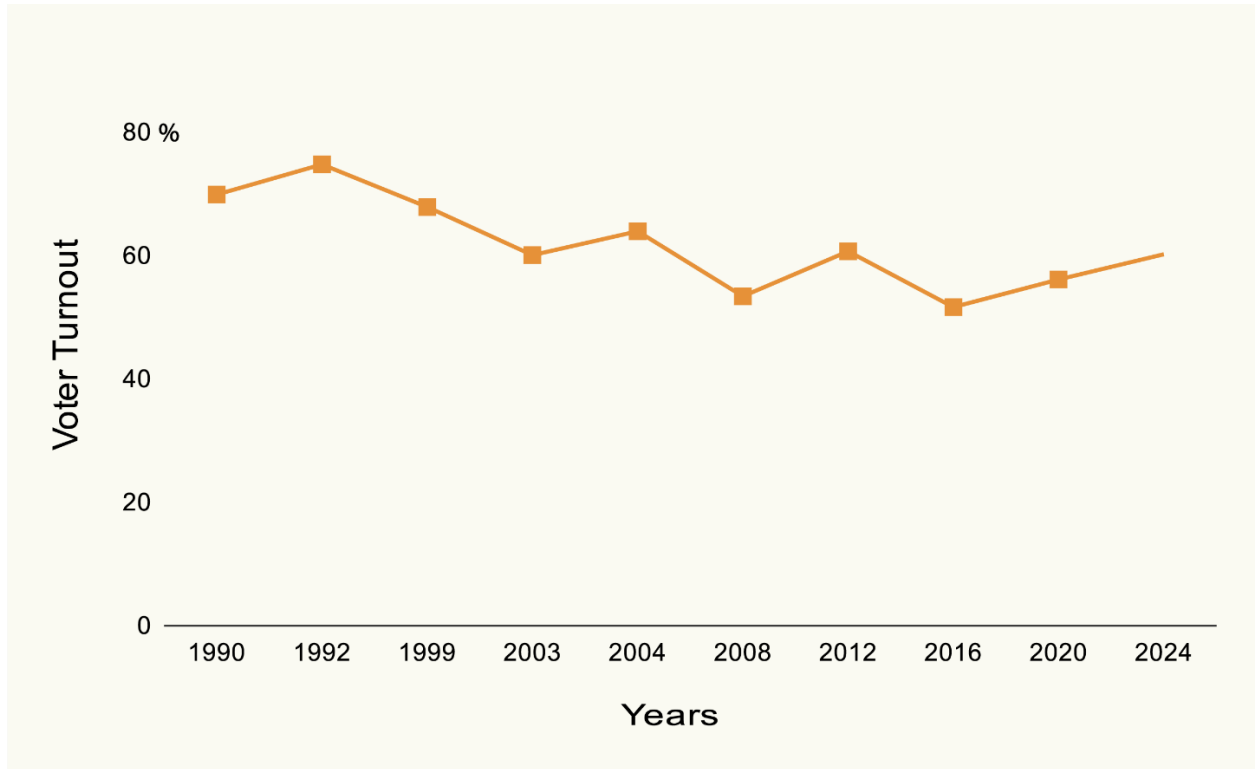


Figure 1. Parliamentary Elections of Georgia: Dynamics of Voter Turnout (1990-2024)

Source: own work based on official data provided by Central Election Commission of Georgia.

In general, contested elections lead to higher VT (Blais, 2006, p. 122). Lioy and Dawson (2020, p.12) in their comparative analysis of voter turnout in Central Asia and the Caucasus, note that absenteeism in these regions is caused by weak opposition and non-competitive political environments. In Georgia, elections at all levels have historically been competitive, with many parties participating. However, this trend is changing. For the October 4, 2025 municipal elections, only 14 parties registered to participate, significantly fewer than the 43 parties registered for the same elections four years earlier. Additionally, two major opposition parties—Coalition for the Change and UNM—boycotted the 2025 municipal elections. This political nihilism stems from

the fact that the ruling GD party controls administrative and financial resources, as well as Georgian Public Broadcasting. Furthermore, opposition parties suffer from intellectual and organizational weaknesses and lack coordination among themselves. This raises the question: Is Georgia developing a non-competitive political environment?

Is there a correlation between high turnout and support for incumbents? Empirical studies conducted over the past decades have contributed significantly to this discussion, revealing no positive correlation between these variables (e.g., Grofman et al. 1999; Vaishnav, Guy 2018). In the three parliamentary elections held between 2012 and 2020, the ruling party did not receive more than half of the votes in the proportional segment (party lists). In 2012, under conditions of high turnout, the opposition won the elections. This created the impression that the Soviet-era tradition of incumbents enjoying significant advantages in elections, especially during high turnout, had been left behind. However, this trend appears to have resurfaced in Georgia, as evidenced by the official results of the latest parliamentary elections, where high turnout was a significant factor in the ruling party's victory, particularly in electoral districts where VT was over 70%.

For a long time, electoral studies paid little attention to the connection between migration and VT. In reality, population mobility directly affects a number of population and, consequently, a size of electorate (e.g., Comsa, 2017; Wigginton et al. 2019). The collapse of communist regimes led to mass emigration from Eastern Europe to more developed regions. This large-scale migration caused a decline in VT in the European young democracies during the 2000s. On the other hand, many emigrants retain their citizenship but face subjective barriers to participating in their home country's elections. The main obstacle is a distance from place of their residence to polling station.

Embassies and consulates are typically located in one or two cities in the host country, while migrants are dispersed across the entire territory. Remote electronic voting has not yet been introduced in most Eastern European countries. The Georgian Diaspora faces the same problem.

Emigration since the 1990s has played a negative role in reducing Georgia's population. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia's population decreased by approximately 1.5 million people (see Figure 2), despite a population's positive natural movement rate. Population exodus was extremely high in 2022–2023, with about 370,000 people leaving the country (Geostat, 2024).

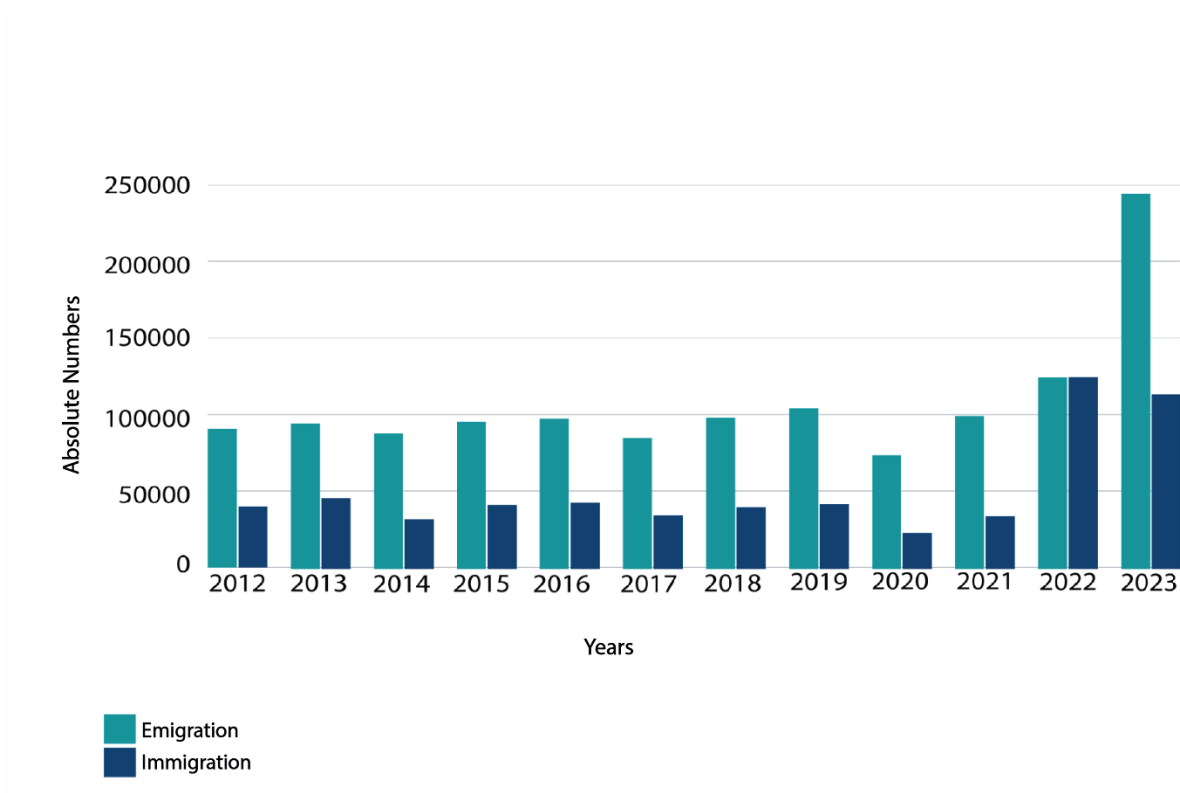


Figure 2. Dynamics of Emigration and Immigration in Georgia (2012–2023)

Source: Own work based on data provided by the National Statistics Office of Georgia.

In the first decade of this century, the former Soviet Union (excluding the Baltic states) experienced the greatest democratic regression among global regions. This downfall was primarily characterized by less competitive, unfree, and unfair elections (e.g., Puddington, 2010, p. 140). The power change through ballot box in 2012 raised hopes that democratic development in Georgia was irreversible. Between 2012 and 2020, national and subnational elections were conducted in a competitive environment and were deemed free and fair, according to final reports by the OSCE-ODIHR observation mission. However, the assessment of the latest parliamentary elections was sharply negative. OSCE-ODIHR observers noted issues such are: voter intimidation, pressure on public employees, vote buying, electoral violence, lack of vote secrecy, and lack of transparency in election dispute resolution (Georgia: Parliamentary Elections, 2024).

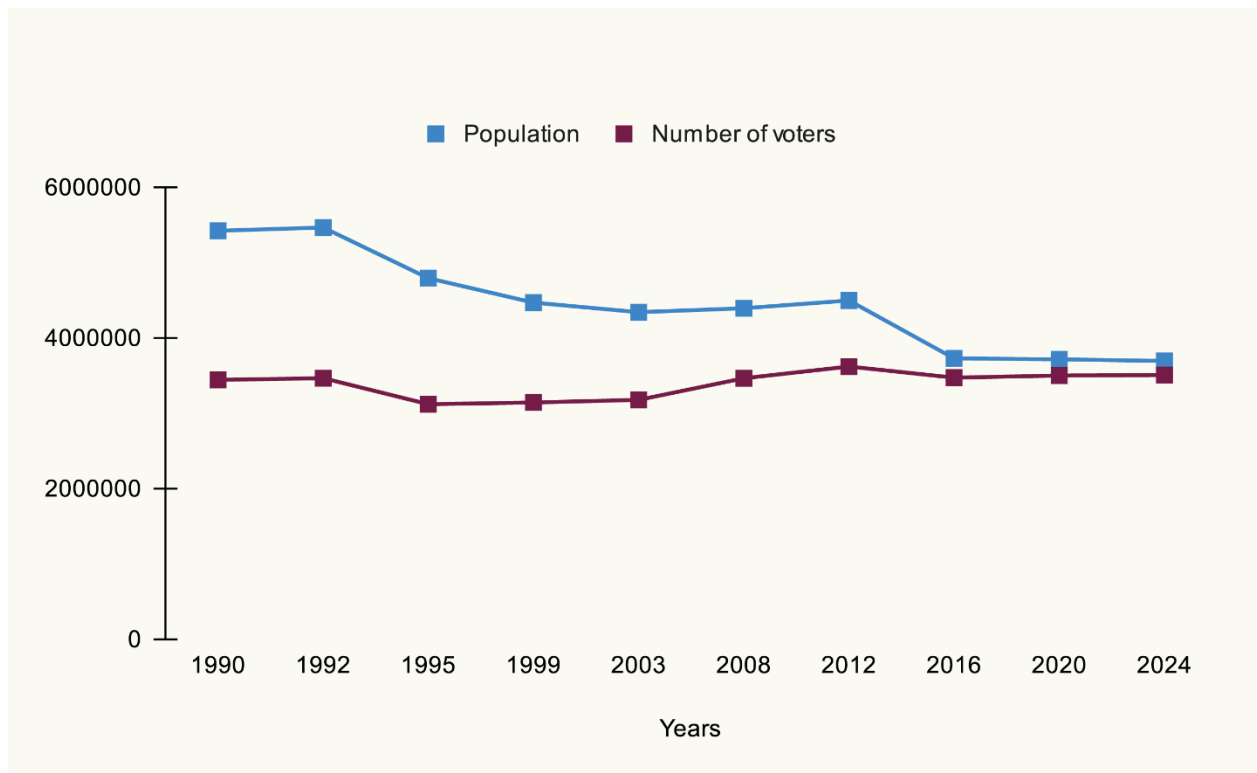


Figure 3. Dynamics of Population and Number of Voters in Georgia (1990-2024)

Source: own work based on data provided by Central Election Commission) of Georgia and National Statistics Office of Georgia.

According to CEC Georgia official data, the number of voters in the 2024 parliamentary elections was almost 3.5 million, with 2,060,412 participating in voting on the territory of the country, resulting in a VT of nearly 59%. How accurate is this figure? Using population statistics from Geostat, we calculated the number of voting-age individuals (18+). According to our estimates, the number of voters should be around 2,780,000, making the VT approximately 75–76%. It is doubtful that anyone would agree that a country experiencing a persistent and significant population decline could have such a high VT. Moreover, Vt exceeding 70% has not been recorded in Georgia since 1992 (see Figure 1).

Statistical anomalies become clearer when reviewing VT figures at regional level. Figure 4 provides information on VT by regions based on official data and the authors' estimates. Differences are quite significant (about 30 percentage points) in regions of Western Georgia: Imereti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, and Racha-Lechkhumi. Notably, foreign and local observers identified significant election irregularities in these regions.

Table 1

**Voter turnout by selected election districts:
comparison of official data and the authors' estimate**

Electoral districts / municipalities	Official VT	VT calculated by the authors
Tsageri	67	123
Kazbegi	60	122
Lentekhi	57	116
Oni	66	114
Ambrolauri	70	107
Ninotsminda	59	101
Baghdati	61	101
Tkibuli	62	99
Vani	62	99
Khoni	64	98
Senaki	59	95
Tskaltubo	58	92

Source: own work based on data provided by Central Election Commission of Georgia and National Statistics Office of Georgia.

Statistical anomalies are even greater at the subregional, i.e., electoral district (municipality) level. Table #1 shows that in several districts, the number of votes cast exceeded the possible number of voters. This is particularly evident in small mountainous municipalities (top six in the given table). Traditionally, VT is high in small municipalities where "social identity"

plays a role. However, the given VT figures defy logic. Statistical anomalies are also extremely high in relatively populous lowland areas (e.g., Tskaltubo, Senaki). In our view, official data are most accurate in the capital city, Tbilisi. From an electoral perspective, Tbilisi is the most pluralistic area in Georgia. Importantly, a significant portion of opposition observers were concentrated in Tbilisi, which significantly reduced opportunities for electoral manipulations.

Conclusion and recommendations for further research

The most significant finding of this research is the identification of substantial statistical anomalies in voter turnout. The geography of these anomalies was also revealed, with Western Georgia, particularly mountainous regions, showing the highest anomalies.

It is important to note that statistical anomalies are not necessarily caused solely by deliberate actions of central authorities, local governments, election administration, or the ruling party to manipulate election results. Electoral anomalies can also result from poor administration, such as the use of inadequate statistical database. In Georgia, outdated and flawed voter lists remain the Achilles' heel of election administration.

Unfortunately, the problem of election manipulation in Georgia cannot and will not be resolved solely by local civil society. This is evidenced by the apparent reluctance of the Central Election Administration to invite OSCE-ODIHR to observe the October 2025 local elections. The West must increase pressure on the Georgian government and election administration to improve the management of electoral processes.

Additionally, local NGOs, academia, think-tanks, and individual experts should continue studying electoral processes, including statistical anomalies. Research should take a more specific approach, focusing on regions, municipalities, and settlements. Furthermore, attention should not only be paid to objective factors and outcomes affecting elections but also to how electoral

processes, including election fraud, are perceived by the public. In this regard, analyzing and evaluating the results of the upcoming local elections will be crucial. Specifically, identifying the real turnout level in municipal elections will reveal whether Georgian society shares the view that the 2024 parliamentary elections were conducted with irregularities.

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