# Gay rights at the heart of Georgia's crucial election



Tomorrow, Georgia will hold its parliamentary elections, a significant event that could influence the nation's trajectory towards the European Union or potentially pivot it towards Russia's influence, which would have a major impact on the rights of the country's LGBTQ+ population. These elections are regarded as the most consequential since Georgia gained independence from the Soviet Union over three decades ago.

The ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD), led by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, is seeking to secure a fourth term in office. However, their campaign is being hotly contested by a fractured opposition that has united under four electoral groups, although they have stopped short of forming a single party. They have, however, pledged to a "charter" proposed by President Salome Zourabichvili, which prioritises institutional reforms necessary for EU membership.

Recent political dynamics reveal a critical juncture for Georgia. The country's status as an EU candidate is under threat, primarily due to a contentious law on NGO transparency which Brussels fears could be used to stifle civil society. This has stalled Georgia's EU progression, further complicated by GD's controversial policies. The government has been accused of clamping down on LGBTQ+ rights, threatening to outlaw opposition parties, and condemning Western interference in the nation's affairs. These actions contradict the supposed commitment to EU accession.

The opposition, meanwhile, has cited polls suggesting that GD may only secure one-third of the vote, though GD remains optimistic about possibly achieving a "constitutional majority" in parliament. However, analysts warn of the uncertainty surrounding these polls, noting that voter turnout will be crucial, and a dispute over the election outcome appears likely.

The European Union has already frozen Tbilisi's accession negotiations and withheld €121 million in aid due to the current political climate. Although the United States has taken actions such as sanctioning officials involved in this summer's protest crackdowns, the EU has yet to impose similar punitive measures. Nonetheless, Paweł Herczyński, the EU ambassador to Georgia, has expressed regret over the deteriorating relations, marking them as historically low.

In the event of an election perceived as unfair, or if GD attempts to retain power unduly, the EU will face pressure to consider sanctions against Ivanishvili and his associates. There could be potential obstacles, such as a veto from Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, known for his support of the Georgian billionaire.

The election's outcome will undeniably raise questions about Georgia's future path, particularly if GD emerges victorious. Observers may question whether the EU's approach has been too lenient and if strategic missteps led to Georgia drifting away from European integration.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/georgia-statement-spokesperson-parliamentary-elections_en> - Corroborates the importance of democratic standards and the impact of electoral processes on Georgia's EU integration, as observed in the 2020 parliamentary elections.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/48b2e3da-35c5-482c-a345-d4b5a49345da> - Discusses the significance of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia and their implications for the country's EU future.
* <https://www.gmfus.org/news/georgians-confront-transformed-reality-ahead-parliamentary-elections> - Highlights the crucial opportunity for Georgian voters to shape their political future through the upcoming elections and the context of EU integration.
* <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/georgia-prepares-divisive-election-determine-future-europe-115133888> - Details the divisive nature of the election, the role of Georgian Dream, and the impact of the 'foreign influence law' on EU relations.
* <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/10/25/georgias-election-sees-voters-choose-between-russia-or-europe.html> - Explains how the election forces voters to choose between a future aligned with Russia or the European Union, reflecting the current political dynamics.
* <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/georgia-statement-spokesperson-parliamentary-elections_en> - Mentions the revised legal framework and the need to address shortcomings in the electoral framework, relevant to the current electoral context.
* <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/georgia-prepares-divisive-election-determine-future-europe-115133888> - Describes the opposition's unity and their pledge to a charter proposed by President Salome Zourabichvili, focusing on institutional reforms for EU membership.
* <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/10/25/georgias-election-sees-voters-choose-between-russia-or-europe.html> - Discusses the contentious law on NGO transparency and its impact on Georgia's EU candidacy, aligning with Brussels' concerns.
* <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/georgia-prepares-divisive-election-determine-future-europe-115133888> - Details the government's actions that contradict EU accession commitments, such as clamping down on LGBT+ rights and threatening opposition parties.
* <https://www.gmfus.org/news/georgians-confront-transformed-reality-ahead-parliamentary-elections> - Highlights the uncertainty surrounding the election outcome and the potential for disputes, emphasizing the importance of voter turnout.