

Report on International Observation Mission: Municipal elections of Georgia

By Commissioner Reginald Jokhan

The Municipal Elections in Georgia were held on Saturday, October 4, 2025. Fiji was invited as an observer to this election, and I had the honour of participating in this mission.

Arrival and Preliminary Activities

I arrived in Tbilisi, Georgia, on September 30, 2025. The formal program commenced on October 2 with an official dinner, followed by a sightseeing tour of Tbilisi on October 3 for all participants. That afternoon, we visited the Central Elections Commission (CEC) of Georgia, where we met Mr. Giorgi Kalandarishvili, the Chairperson, and toured the facility, including the secure warehouse used for final vote counting.

Observations on Election Day

On October 4, our group convened at 7 am and visited a precinct located in a school to observe the opening of the elections. We inspected the voting machines, noting their security (zip-tied and tagged), and watched as voters underwent a verification process using electronic devices. If a voter was not registered at that precinct, a machine alarm would sound, and the individual was directed to the correct polling station. Voters received guidance on the voting process, and ballot secrecy was maintained throughout. Voting documents were scanned into a machine, and preliminary results were transmitted electronically to the warehouse. After voting, polling officers manually recounted votes to cross-checked against machine printouts.

Election Statistics and Participation

- 12 political parties registered party lists in Tbilisi (out of 17 applicants)
- 9 mayoral candidates in Tbilisi; 112 mayoral candidates across 63 municipalities
- 2,228 Majoritarian candidates overall, with 160 in Tbilisi
- 32 Majoritarian candidates from initiative groups
- 3,513,818 registered voters
- 27 local observer organizations with 8,103 local observers
- 28 international observer organizations with 81 international observers
- 73 media organizations and 984 media representatives
- 3,061 polling stations: 2,284 with electronic voting, 777 with manual processes

Voter Education

Voter education took different forms to cover a wide spectrum of voters. These included:

Educational projects targeted for anyone interested in elections.

Non-election period was used to support the creation of a pool of potential election officials.

Courses were run for election administrators.

CEC electoral schools were set up.

Project “Elections and young voters” was implemented in public schools for students in their final year of study.

Electoral law courses were run in higher educational institutions.

Youth camps were held.

Inclusive Elections – prioritising youth and first-time voters

More than 47,000 young individuals who exercised suffrage for the first time this year.

Several initiatives were taken which included:

Special address by the CEC Chairperson to first time voters.

Regional meetings were held within the project “Youth Advisory Councils Of Georgia – From idea to change”.

Meetings were held in Youth Camps.

Meetings were held with the young representatives of the ethnic minorities.

Inclusive elections – For the ethnic minority

310 precincts were set up in the areas where the ethnic minorities lived.

Election informational videos were translated and broadcasted on the local radio.

Comprehensive language support in ballot papers, voter lists for the ethnic minorities.

Inclusive Elections – For persons with disabilities

Adapted polling stations with ground-level access of ramps.

Information videos in sign language.

CEC website adapted for screen readers.

Specially adapted voting booths.

Wheelchair voters were allowed to apply for accessible voting stations up to 11 days before the elections.

For the blind and visually impaired voters, easy to read materials, ballot frame template and magnifying glasses were made available at the polling booths.

Informational meetings were held for blind voters and voters with visual and hearing impairments.

There was extensive engagement with the media throughout the process.

Nationwide mock elections

On 13 September, nationwide mock elections were carried out in 207 precincts, involving 1,500 election commission members and technical personnel.

They simulated the elections day procedures, including logistics, equipment set-ups and the transmission of voter turnout data.

This exercise tested all three components: electronic voter authentication, ballot casting, secure results transmission and counting.

In 2024 the preliminary results were announced in 1 hr and 45 minutes. In 2025, the preliminary results were announced in less than 2 hrs.

Technologies used in this election

An international company “Smartmatic” was used for the electronic voters and transmission of results. This had the following advantages:

It simplified the polling day procedures (registration, voting, counting).

It provided fast and accurate searching of voters in the unified list of voters.

It prevented second-time multiple voting.

It provided the voters the ability to register at any available polling registrar in the polling station.

Results:

Lowered risk of procedural violations and less complaints submitted.

Reduced the time for announcing the preliminary results (less than 2 hrs).

Provided higher accuracy of election results.

Minimised the possibility of human error.

Increased transparency.

After elections: We visited the warehouse infrastructure for technologies. It was set up for the counting of votes and was linked to all 3061 polling stations. The preliminary results were announced within 2 hrs while the physical counting of votes and verification took place at the polling stations.

Challenges and Mitigation

The election faced challenges such as managing election-related information flow and combating disinformation/misinformation. Georgia implemented a new disinformation registry platform and collaborated with the public defender to proactively address these issues. Despite these challenges, the elections proceeded smoothly and transparently.

Conclusion

Georgia's 2025 municipal elections demonstrated a strong commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and technological advancement. The observation mission provided valuable insights into best practices for electoral processes and the effective integration of technology in elections.

Finally, I would like to add that on the morning of the elections, after we visited the polling station I was interviewed by the media, wanting to know what I thought of the setup. I told them that I thought the setup was very good, the machines were well secured, and the voter verification process was very thorough. However, I told them that I could not comment on the elections overall.

I was interviewed again after the elections were over and manual counting was complete at a polling station. They wanted to know my views on the counting and verification process. I told them that the process of electronic results and the verification process through manual counting was, in my view meticulous and transparent which I found very appealing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Akshay', followed by a horizontal line and a period.