

# FAQ and Misconceptions about Georgia

In recent years, Georgia has been subject to several misguided perceptions about its political and governing systems. As a small country located in a geopolitically challenging region, Georgia often struggles to capture the sustained attention of policymakers and opinion leaders. This lack of attention has led to widespread misconceptions and a superficial understanding of the country's problems, which have broader regional implications.

This article addresses some of the most frequently asked yet misguided questions about Georgia. These misconceptions distort the country's reality and contribute to formulating ineffective policies that fail to address the real issues and sometimes even reinforce them.

## Misconceptions about Public Opinion and Elections

Let us start with one of the most widespread

questions: "If the vast majority of Georgians are pro-Western and pro-democracy, how has the Russia-friendly Georgian Dream (GD) party remained in power for over a decade, winning every election since 2012?" This question is even more relevant today after the official results of the 26 October parliamentary elections attributed almost 54% of the votes to the Georgian Dream.

***The latest elections demonstrate how state machinery, party propaganda, and various voting fraud schemes distorted the choices of the Georgian people.***

This question reflects a typical yet simplistic assumption that Georgia's political system allows for free and fully informed electoral choices, reflecting the public's overwhelming pro-Western stance. The latest elections demonstrate how state machinery, party propaganda, and various voting fraud schemes distorted the choices of the Georgian people. In fact, this whole volume is dedicat-



**SHOTA GVINERIA**  
Contributor

Ambassador Shota Gvineria joined the Baltic Defence College as a lecturer in Defence and Cyber Studies in July 2019. He is also a fellow at the Economic Policy Research Center since 2017. Previously, Amb. Gvineria held various positions in Georgia's public sector, including Deputy Secretary at the National Security Council and Foreign Policy Advisor to the Minister of Defense. From 2010-14, he served as the Ambassador of Georgia to the Kingdom of the Netherlands and later became the Director of European Affairs Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Amb. Gvineria, with an MA in Strategic Security Studies from Washington's National Defense University, also earned MAs in International Relations from the Diplomatic School of Madrid and Public Administration from the Georgian Technical University.



ed to precisely such malpractices by the Georgian Dream.

But let us explore this issue in greater detail. Various [polls](#) show that 80% of Georgians support EU membership. At first glance, with such a solid European-minded population, the Russia-friendly Georgian Dream should not have maintained power for such a long time, already entering its fourth term.

What we must not overlook is that for years, the Georgian Dream has pursued a carefully crafted narrative publicly supporting European integration while implementing policies that aligned Georgia with Russia. This deceptive strategy masked the party's authoritarian tendencies for years, allowing it to maintain power despite the population's pro-Western leanings. In 2020, the GD campaigned with the promise to submit the EU membership application by 2024 and boasting its pro-European credentials, often referring to signing the Association Agreement and DCFTA with the EU, as well as visa liberalization with the EU as exclusively Georgian Dream's achievement.

It was not until Russia's war against Ukraine that the Georgian Dream's true agenda became evident as the party openly sided with Russia's rhetoric, exposing and enhancing its anti-democratic practices and importing Russian-type legislation, targeting NGOs and sexual minorities. There are two reasons why this transformation happened. First of all, Bidzina Ivanishvili, a Russia-enriched oligarch, seemed to believe that Ukraine's loss was inevitable and, therefore, sided with the potential winner - Putin's Russia. Secondly, as the prospect of EU membership became real, the EU requested reforms that jeopardized the GD's grip on power. Thus, the EU reforms were shelved to the benefit of total control of state institutions and undermining of the challengers of Ivanishvili's power - independent state institutions, opposition parties, free media, and civil society organizations.

The false paradox of simultaneous popular support for the EU and for the Georgian Dream has confused Western leaders and questioned whether or not Georgians are making an informed choice about the European path. This misconception helped [legitimize](#) the elections held under massive disinformation, voter intimidation, vote buying, and the misuse of administrative resources. Each election conducted under these conditions has been prolonging the regime's hold, enabling further erosion of democratic institutions and entrenching Ivanishvili's authoritarian rule.

**Many irregularities, including a massive breach of vote secrecy, carousels, voting en masse with other people's ID cards, and other electoral violations, affected the outcome, granting 54% to the declared winner - the Georgian Dream.**

The 2024 October parliamentary elections showed how the popular will can differ from the election outcomes. Many irregularities, including a massive breach of vote secrecy, carousels, voting en masse with other people's ID cards, and other electoral violations, affected the outcome, granting 54% to the declared winner - the Georgian Dream. The details of the fraud are described explicitly throughout this volume.

The misconception about Georgia's political system often leads to another misguided question: "If the Georgian Dream has been winning elections in Georgia for the last 12 years, does this not mean that they represent the Georgian people as a democratically elected government?"

The problem is that this question assumes that the electoral victories alone attest to the Georgian Dream representing the people's will. However, this representation does not happen in a genuinely democratic process. While the Georgian Dream has consistently won elections, these results must

be understood in the context of systemic issues that compromise the fairness of the political and electoral process. Over the past decade, elections in Georgia have been marked by widespread disinformation campaigns, voter intimidation, misuse of state resources, and media control, all of which skew the playing field in favor of the ruling party. Furthermore, the 2016 and 2020 elections were heavily distorted in favor of the incumbent because of the majoritarian component of the elections. In 2016, the Georgian Dream's 48% support translated into a constitutional majority, while in 2020, similar support gave them an overwhelming majority because of the 30 “bonus” majoritarian MPs. It is not surprising that the Georgian Dream dragged its feet to transition to a fully proportional electoral system.

The repeated victories of the Georgian Dream are not purely a reflection of popular support but rather the result of a heavily manipulated system in which opposition parties face significant barriers. We have discussed this in detail in the previous [edition](#) of *GEOpolitics*. The ruling party's grip on institutions—such as the judiciary and the media—creates an environment where genuine political competition is stifled, and the electorate's ability to make free and informed choices is severely limited.

## Misconceptions about Domestic Politics and the Opposition

Georgia's friends often ask, “Is there a real alternative to the Georgian Dream? The opposition seems weak and fragmented, lacking a strong leader. Do people even trust the opposition parties?”

The main misconception here is that the opposition's fragmentation and the lack of a single charismatic leader make them an unviable alternative to the Georgian Dream. In fact, unlike many European countries or other countries in the region,

the Georgian political system evolved from a bipartisan (the United National Movement [UNM] and the Georgian Dream) to a multi-party system. The elections of 2024 have shown that four opposition parties, representing and appealing to various segments of the population, have garnered almost 40% of the votes (if we consider the official results), and most likely even more, considering the scale of [fraud](#) and irregularities.

***One of the reasons why the “fragmentation” of the opposition spectrum happened is that the Georgian Dream has strategically chosen to demonize its primary foe – the UNM and President Mikheil Saakashvili, resorting to arrests, political persecutions, and physical assaults throughout the last 12 years.***

One of the reasons why the “fragmentation” of the opposition spectrum happened is that the Georgian Dream has strategically chosen to demonize its primary foe – the UNM and President Mikheil Saakashvili, resorting to arrests, political persecutions, and physical assaults throughout the last 12 years. Fragmentation of the UNM due to these attacks was unavoidable as many of its offshoot political centers attempted to reinvent themselves by distancing themselves from the UNM, trying to increase the opposition voter base. The breaking off of European Georgia (now back with the UNM) and Strategy the Builder (also back with the UNM) led to the diversification of the electoral base for the opposition parties in 2016 and 2020. In the first round of the 2018 presidential elections, two prominent opposition party candidates (the UNM and European Georgia) received almost 50% of the votes. However, these breakups of the largest opposition party were insufficient to appeal to a vast majority of voters who voted against the UNM in 2012.

Since 2020, however, the opposition base has genuinely diversified, and for the first time, in the 2024 elections, Georgian voters were offered a choice of four political centers. If one did not like the parties that originated from the UNM (like the Coalition for Change, based around new parties – Ahali, Droa, and Girchi-More Freedom), then they could opt for Lelo (a mixture of businessmen and liberal politicians) or the GD's former prime minister Giorgi Gakharia's party – For Georgia. Unsurprisingly, the GD has been trying to [dub](#) all political opponents as the “collective UNM” and scare away the disenchanted GD voters or undecided voters from supporting the opposition. However, the opposition is stronger today than ever, and the electorate is offered diverse political choices despite the pressure, intimidation, and coercion from the ruling regime.

***What further contributes to the relative weakness of the opposition parties is a consistent lack of financial resources. The state funding of the political parties is limited and makes it impossible to campaign in a normal, unhampered way.***

What further contributes to the relative weakness of the opposition parties is a consistent lack of financial resources. The state funding of the political parties is limited and makes it impossible to campaign in a normal, unhampered way. The consolidation of power under one party leads to a scarcity of resources available for the opposition, making it difficult for them to establish coherent party structures. Additionally, the private sector is often hesitant (or scared) to fund or support opposition parties, weakening their ability to build motivated leadership and professional activism. As a result, politics rarely becomes a primary profession or source of income for politicians, significantly impacting their commitment and dedication. The disproportion in resources is best visible during

the elections when the ruling party outspends all opposition parties taken together and also beats it in mobilizing supporters, outdoor ads, social media spending, or TV advertisements.

Yes, the opposition parties still have access to independent media outlets, one feature of Georgia that still makes it different from full-fledged authoritarian states like Belarus or Russia. The critical media's affiliation with the opposition parties ensures that their voices are heard. However, the state propaganda machinery, through the GD-affiliated Imedi TV, Rustavi 2, and PosTV, is much more powerful and resourceful. Moreover, the opposition-minded TV stations are constantly under attack and underfunded; their viability depends on the cash inflow from the founders, ads from the continually decreasing ads market, or the sheer enthusiasm of the management and journalists, whose safety is constantly in danger.

Finally, many Western friends who are used to seeing a united opposition in their countries often apply the same logic to Georgia. But the reality is that in Georgia, there is no single opposition, no single opposition leader, and no ideological coherence among various parties challenging the government. And this is highly likely to remain for the years to come. In fact, even referring to the opposition in a singular term is misleading. The more correct expression would be – opposition parties.

## The Myth of Polarization

Georgia's friends are often worried about a deep polarization in Georgia which is viewed as an internal issue that needs to be resolved. “Western partners cannot help you here” – is a primary concern. Naïve interlocutors also inquire what the government and opposition are doing to reduce the polarization and what could Georgia's partners do to resolve this.

This concern is based on the misconception that

political polarization in Georgia is solely an internal matter without recognizing that the ruling party, the Georgian Dream, actively contributes to and benefits from this division. While the government and the opposition indeed bear responsibility for not fostering a more cohesive political environment, polarization has become a strategic tool for the Georgian Dream to maintain power. Therefore, it will never do anything to depolarize.

***The ruling party labels anyone critical of its policies as part of the “collective National Movement,” demonizing the opposition and portraying them as enemies of the state and the people.***

The ruling party labels anyone critical of its policies as part of the “collective National Movement,” demonizing the opposition and portraying them as enemies of the state and the people. Recently, the “agents of the foreign powers,” “stateless politicians,” and “war lovers” have been more often used labels. Just before the election, the rhetoric of the Georgian Dream leaders shifted from demonization to the promise of arrests and banning of the opposition parties. In a typical whataboutist fashion, the Georgian Dream leaders refer to the example of Moldova and Ukraine, arguing that the EU candidate states have banned the opposition parties before and received no reprimand from the EU.

Such demonization has consistently undermined normal political processes and closed any space for dialogue or debates in the parliament or the media. Moreover, the government restricts the opposition’s access to pro-government media outlets, including the public broadcaster, allowing it to participate only in controlled media and institutional environments that the GD dominates while avoiding appearances on independent TV channels. As a result, the media landscape is divided, with government-controlled channels attacking

the opposition and independent outlets criticizing the government. These echo chambers, sterilized from the real debate on political content, have now become so entrenched that it would take an inhuman effort to dismantle them as long as the one-party rule in Georgia stays in place.

As this volume’s guest contributor Hans Gutbrod famously [called](#) it, Georgia has no polarization but “vicious refeudalization“. Gutbrod argued that polarization falsely suggested equivalence between opposing political forces and was a misleading concept because of systematic power consolidation by the Georgian Dream, ongoing surveillance and intimidation, control of media and judiciary, violence, and jailing of political opponents.

After every national election in Georgia, in which the government consolidates power further and attacks opponents, Western friends step in with the narrative of reversing polarization. Notably, the European Union’s intervention in the post-2020 election crisis was centered around depolarization and the political agreement masterminded by Charles Michel was all about reducing internal political tensions. The fact that the agreement did not work should have been a good lesson for the EU; however, in 2022, it reimposed the condition of depolarization as part of the reforms to be undertaken for the progress of European integration.

Depending on how the ongoing post-election political crisis in Georgia unfolds, leaders in the West will definitely attempt to reintroduce “depolarization” yet again as a task for the Georgian political elite. Doing so would be a dramatic mistake. Any talk of depolarization, while Ivanishvili promises to shut down the opposition parties, prosecute “collective UNM,” and destroy NGOs, is music to the ears of the Georgian Dream leaders.

Equating a bully with the victim and calling on both to refrain from violence is not the best strategy to prevent the bully from further abuse. Giving

a correct diagnosis to the Georgian political context will considerably influence how successful Western policies are vis-à-vis the authoritarian Georgian government post-2024 elections.

## Misconceptions about the Judiciary

Georgia's friends often have stereotypical visions of Georgia's judiciary system. For years, we have seen puzzled Western decision-makers wondering why there was no trust in the judiciary system and why should the local judicial remedies not be used fully, taking into consideration that Georgia implemented several waves of the EU and US-supported judicial reforms and adopted many legal instruments aimed at increasing judicial independence.

This misconception assumes that adopting European-style institutional reforms and establishing formal judicial structures guarantees true judicial independence and impartiality. While Georgia has indeed implemented several waves of reforms, a powerful judicial elite (known as the Clan) has colluded with the ruling party and made the courts fully subordinate to the Georgian Dream.

Despite adopting the European model for the High Council of Justice, which (on the paper) equips judges with self-governance powers, autonomy, and independence from the executive and legislative branches or political interests, the actual situation is dramatically different. The Clan, a group of influential judges connected with the ruling party, consolidated influence within the judiciary, making it virtually impossible for the regime's opponents to seek justice. In this, Georgia is like the former communist states of the CEE, where hierarchically organized career judiciaries with the legacy of "telephone justice" were given broad self-government powers through judicial councils only to empower judicial elites at the expense of judicial independence.

The true extent of this control became evident during the controversial Supreme Court appointments in 2019, when major Western powers, including the EU, [condemned](#) the process as severely flawed and akin to "packing" the court with loyalists. Civil society efforts to document the Clan's influence have revealed the troubling depth of judicial clientelism, which threatens the judiciary's independence from within.

As a result, millions of euros and dollars allocated by international partners for reforms were misused. Rather than fostering independence, these resources allowed a group of empowered individuals to consolidate their influence in the judiciary, further entrenching control for the regime's benefit and undermining reform efforts. Among such loyalists is the current [head](#) of the Supreme Court – Ivanishvili's personal lawyer in his previous life and the senior judges [sanctioned](#) by the US for corruption charges. The Appeals Court and the Constitutional Court are also stacked with party loyalists. The Constitutional Court has consistently ruled along party lines, with a recent high-profile case being the impeachment of the President. At the city court level, some select independent judges can go against the system at the expense of their safety and reputation. One of the recent examples was a decision of the Tetrtskaro city court, which [annulled](#) 30 precincts in Tetrtskaro and Tsalka because of the infringement of voter confidentiality. However, the prompt appeal of the Central Election Commission to the Appeals Court, prompt grouping of the cases and their allocation to the judges with dubious reputations, and the swift [overturning](#) of the first instance court's decision are the most recent examples of the total government control of the judiciary.

This misconception of a relatively independent judiciary has been fueled by the significant reduction in petty corruption in the court system, where everyday cases rarely involve bribery, unlike in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Howev-

er, when the political or economic interests of the ruling elite are at stake, any judicial decision can be influenced. This erodes the fundamental principles of democracy and undermines the balance of power, allowing Ivanishvili and his proxies to consolidate control.

Moreover, this dynamic creates a culture of impunity for regime loyalists, weakening accountability. As a result, state-building efforts in all sectors are hampered. Civil society, the private sector, and political pluralism cannot thrive, stifling political life and preventing change through fair, democratic processes. Consequently, there is no confidence in the judiciary. Civil society actors, while appealing to unjust laws and going through the whole cycle of seeking justice in the country, increasingly feel that they are wasting time and resources.

## Misconceptions about Foreign Policy

The most prominent misguided question about Georgia's foreign policy is whether or not the European Union or NATO should continue the advancement of Georgia's integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures while risking provoking Russia into another military "special operation."

***The core misconception here is that accepting Georgia into the EU or NATO would automatically provoke a war with Russia. However, the reality is more nuanced. As Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine has demonstrated, what provokes Russia is not bold and principled decisions but perceived weakness and opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities.***

The core misconception here is that accepting Georgia into the EU or NATO would automatically provoke a war with Russia. However, the reality is more nuanced. As Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine has [demonstrated](#), what provokes Russia is not bold and principled decisions but perceived weakness and opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities. Russia acts when it sees a chance to further its objectives, not when faced with unified and determined opposition from the EU and NATO. As further [demonstrated](#) by the quick accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, NATO enlargement facilitates stability and deters Russia from further destabilizing regions, not the other way around.

This misconception's grave and far-reaching consequence is the unnecessary protraction of Georgia's NATO integration process and ample opportunities for Russia to [meddle](#) with democratic processes. Delaying Georgia's accession based on fears of provoking Russia only plays into Moscow's hands. On the one hand, it empowers Russia with the tool to exert influence over European and Euro-Atlantic structures by stalling enlargement through destabilization. On the other hand, this delay fuels frustration, fatigue, and depression inside Georgia and other countries of the region. As clearly evidenced by the massive interference in the [Moldovan](#) and [Georgian](#) elections in 2024, the protracted integration processes create exploitable vulnerabilities, often causing the weakening of democracy.

This is why the issues of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity and its integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures should have been explicitly decoupled long ago. While integration into NATO or the EU does not mean the occupation of Georgia's lands by Russia will be resolved immediately, it would undoubtedly strengthen Georgia's sovereignty and democratic resilience. A comprehensive strategy is required to address territorial



disputes without holding back Georgia's progress toward EU and NATO membership. A clear focus on [coherently](#) enhancing security and stability rather than giving Russia further leverage by delaying integration is even more critical in the aftermath of controversial elections.

While pro-Russian forces in Georgia are trying to alter election results and tighten the regime's grip on power, it is of utmost importance to empower pro-democracy forces and reassure Western-minded public by highlighting an unambiguous alternative to Russian control. The European and Euro-Atlantic integration process should not be a reward for perfect governance but a pathway that helps countries strengthen their institutions, democracy, and the rule of law. A clear and decisive path toward integration, supported by international partnerships, would weaken Russia's ability to use occupation as a tool of influence and will prevent further destabilization in the region.

## What Needs to Change?

While there are many other misguided questions surrounding Georgia and its politics, there is one that can help sum up the fundamental difficulties Georgia has been facing on its path toward building a democratic, prosperous, and secure country: if the Georgian people overwhelmingly support democracy and are united in their desire for a European future, why has the government not been able to consolidate and overcome its internal deficiencies?

The misconception here is not that the question is wrong but that it fails to grasp the multifaceted, interconnected problems Georgia faces fully—problems often exploited and aggravated by Russia's massive hybrid warfare strategy.

While the Georgian people are pro-democracy and united in their European aspirations, the country's

ability to consolidate and overcome internal deficiencies requires resources, skills, and experience often lacking within the country. A significant challenge lies in the lack of continuity and coherent long-term planning which should be guided by a unified national identity and shared national interests. However, the ruling elites have instead fueled polarization and divisions as a means to retain power, hindering national cohesion.

The legacy of seven decades of Soviet occupation has also left deep scars, making it difficult for Georgian society to form a consensus on national values and interests. Soviet-era quasi-identities, imposed through indoctrination, still clash with traditional values, creating vulnerabilities that modern Russian propaganda successfully exploits. Russia's hybrid warfare strategy builds on these historical weaknesses, deepening societal divisions.

***Georgia's lack of experience in democratic governance, particularly in building solid checks and balances and decentralizing power, has hindered the development of effective self-governance. The political system has become overly centralized, preventing the emergence of diverse leaders from local and regional levels.***

Moreover, Georgia's lack of experience in democratic governance, particularly in building solid checks and balances and decentralizing power, has hindered the development of effective self-governance. The political system has become overly centralized, preventing the emergence of diverse leaders from local and regional levels.

The weak educational system further complicates this issue. Teachers, one of the most vulnerable and underpaid groups, cannot foster criti-

cal thinking or impart strong democratic values. While younger generations educated abroad have made strides, systemic educational reforms are still needed to equip future generations with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate these complex challenges.

In summary, there are no quick fixes to Georgia's internal and external problems. However, a cor-

rect understanding of the country's problems, its governance system, and deficiencies can be a good ally for the Western partners to craft policies and responses to the crises and Russia's influence operations in Georgia and the wider region. Rose-colored glasses must be removed if the collective West is to become a serious alternative to Russia's hybrid warfare in Georgia ■