



MINORITIES IN 2012 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OBSERVATORY



Electoral results in minority regions

In the 1st October 2012 elections, the largest minority groups Azeri and Armenian voters remained strong supporters of the United National Movement (UNM), with the party winning in all ethnic minority dominated districts. In the predominantly Armenian districts of Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda (Samstkhe-Javakheti) and Tsalka(Kvemo Kartli) the UNM received an average of 74,7 % of votes. In the Azeri districts of Marneuli, Dmanisi and Bolnisi (Kvemo Kartli) the UNM received an average of 71,91% votes compared to a national average of 40,34%. The electoral precincts of Ninotsminda and Marneuli had the highest share of votes for the UNM across the entire country. In Marneuli, Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki, ethnic minority candidates running on UNM tickets were elected as majoritarians.¹ It seems therefore that the UNM managed to gain substantial support across the largest minorities.

Electoral results in districts with non ethnic Georgian majority (2012)

District (largest ethnic group)	Georgian Dream	UNM	Others	Voters Turnout
Akhalkalaki(AR)	21,29%	76,54%	2,17%	54,55%
Ninotsminda (AR)	17,13%	79,59%	3,28%	60,07%
Tsalka (AR)	28,28%	67,82%	3,90%	35,59%
Marneuli (AZ)	17,42%	78,91%	3,67%	43,98%
Dmanisi (AZ)	25,78%	69,83%	4,39%	53,47%
Bolnisi (AZ)	29,49%	66,99%	3,52%	48,44%
National Average	54,97%	40,34%	4,69%	60,80%

¹CEC Summary: http://cesko.ge/files/2012/SUMMARY_PROTOCOL_2012.pdf

This success can be explained through a strong Soviet legacy of voting for the ruling party and the ability of the UNM to cooperate with local elites. Another aspect is that there is still insufficient knowledge in the minority areas about the electoral and political system of Georgia. However, prior to the elections, efforts have been made by the Central Elections Committee as well as by the political parties themselves to promote knowledge about the electoral procedures and the competing parties and their programmes. The cooperation of local elites with the ruling party might have determined the outcome of the elections in these districts beforehand. For example, the majoritarians of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda belong to the most influential individuals in their respective precincts. However, they had such a position already before becoming MPs in the Georgian parliament. Their political engagement just institutionalized the influence they already had in their districts. The majoritarian of Ninotsminda left the UNM shortly after elections and the same is expected to happen with the two other ethnic minority majoritarians.² This shows that the UNM reached only a rather limited level of influence in minority regions that relied heavily on their cooperation with local elites. With the victory of Georgian Dream in the elections, the UNM has not much to offer to minority leaders anymore and in consequence lost their support.

In the predominantly Georgian Kareli district, an Ossetian was elected as a Georgian Dream majoritarian. This candidate, , has little affiliation with this minority community though and is widely known in Georgian society as a former Olympic gold medalist in wrestling and more recently as vice president of the national Olympic committee.

The electoral behavior of smaller minorities somewhat differed from Azeris and Armenians in Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti.³ Kists in the Pankisi Gorge (Akhmeta) predominantly supported Georgian Dream. Georgian Dream received the majority of votes in sampled Ossetian villages in the Gori district, although the results were not as clear as in the Kist communities. Among Udis and Avars, the UNM received a higher share of votes than Georgian Dream, still Georgian Dream managed to receive a relatively high share of votes among these two groups. Differences can be observed in the electoral behavior of Azeris in Kvemo Kartli and other parts of the country. In all sampled Azeri villages in Lagodekhi and in Tsalka, Georgian Dream received less than 10% of votes, which is not even half of the share it managed to receive in Marneuli, Dmanisi and Bolnisi.

Voter turnout

The voter turnout in minority districts was significantly lower than national average. From the minority-majority districts in Kvemo Kartli only Dmanisi had a turnout of more than 50 %. In Javakheti, turnout was higher but still below national average of 60,8 %⁴

However, some observers claim that in reality the turnout was much lower in these areas than reported.⁵

² Expert interviews

³ Analysed precincts: 18.5, 18.8, 18.23, 32.69, 32,70, 16.12, 16.11, 16.13, 15.18, 15.21, 25.22

⁴ <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/2012/VoterTurnout-CEC.pdf>

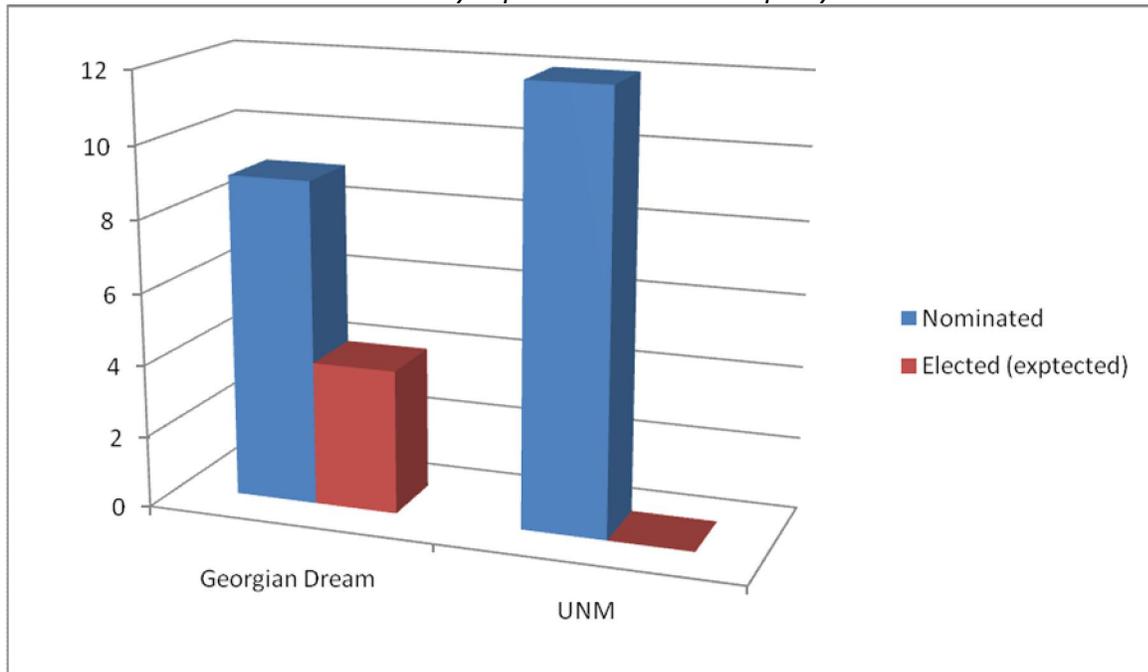
⁵ Expert interview

Party list representation of ethnic minorities

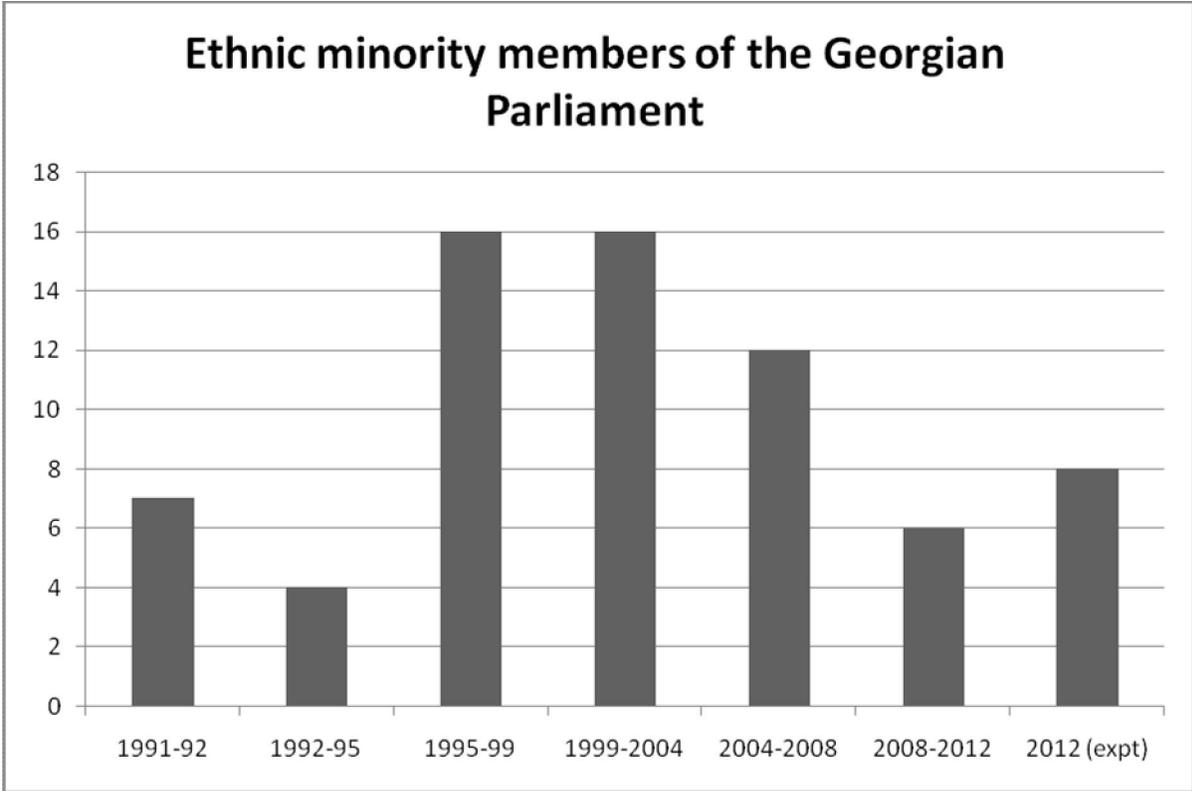
Apart from the four majoritarian MPs, minorities will be included in the parliament through a number of party list candidates from Georgian Dream. Georgian Dream nominated nine ethnic minority candidates for their party list and three of them were elected straight into the new parliament (one Azeri, one Armenian and one Kurd). An additional Azeri candidate is expected to enter the parliament when the ministers have been approved and therefore lose their seats. He is expected to be approved on November 9th.

Due to their remote positions on the party list, none of the 12 minority candidates of UNM has made it to the parliament. That might be an indicator that the UNM likes to include ethnic minorities only if they help to strengthen the party's general powerbase e.g. the inclusion of influential local elites in Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki. The smaller parties like the Georgian Labor Party, the Christian Democrats and the New Rights also included ethnic minority candidates on their party list. However, no minority candidate was prominently featured on any of them. The best party list position of an ethnic minority candidate on the lists of the two major parties (Georgian Dream and UNM) was number 35 for an ethnic Kurdish candidate of Georgian Dream. This shows that the party list inclusion of ethnic minorities did not have priority to any political party at the 2012 elections. Therefore it seems that a genuine representation of minorities has only to limited extend been achieved by main political actors in Georgia.

Minority representation on the party lists



In addition to the eight minority candidates, there are two MPs with a Polish last name. These candidates are descendants of members of the Tsarist army who settled down in Georgia. They consider themselves as Georgian and should not be counted as ethnic minority MPs. One of the appointed ministers has Ukrainian roots but he was not elected into parliament. Nonetheless, the number of ethnic minority MPs will most likely increase to eight compared to six in 2008.

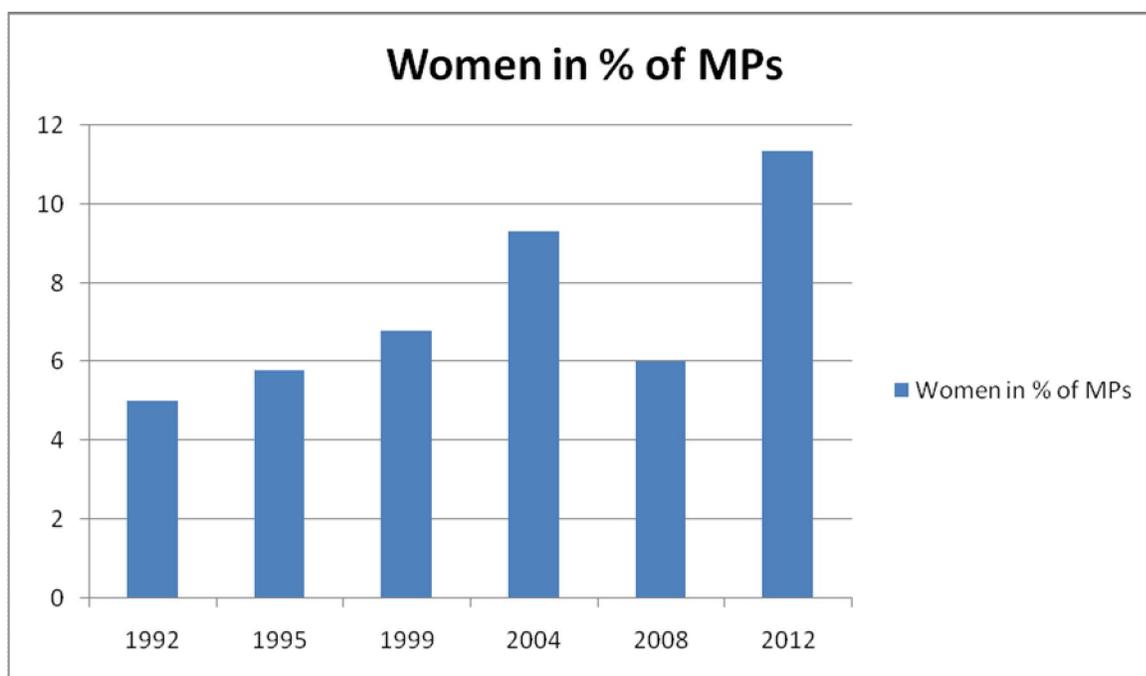


Gender balance in the Georgian parliament

Women account for approximately 53% of the population of Georgia.⁶ As a result of the recent parliamentary elections 17 women have been elected into parliament, accounting for only 11,33 % of the MPs . 11 of them were elected through party lists and only six as majoritarian

⁶ <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/16187.html>

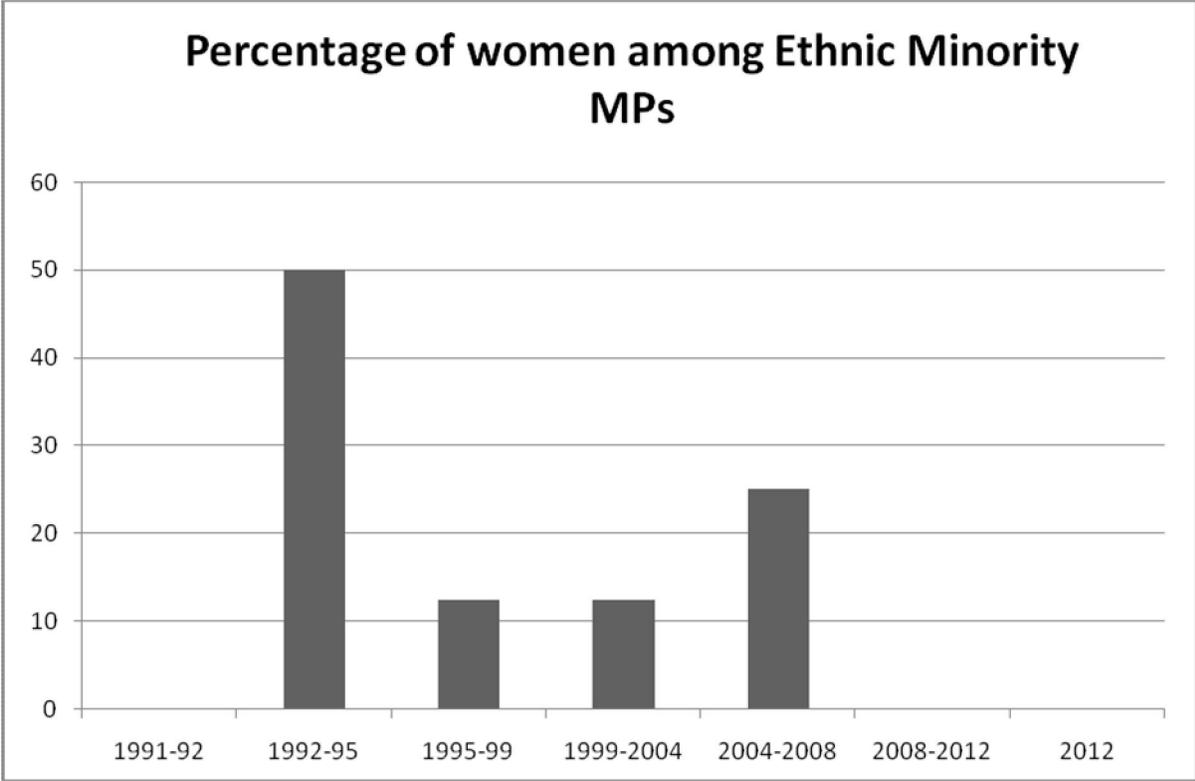
candidates. 11 female MPs belong to Georgian Dream coalition which has 85 parliamentarians while six female MPs belong to the United National Movement (65 MPS). This is the highest number in history of post-independence Georgia and almost twice as high as after the elections in 2008. Still, the increase has happened on a very low scale as women remain heavily underrepresented in the parliament. It should be noted that prior to the elections significant attempts by several influential NGOs have been made to strengthen gender equality in the Georgian political arena. For example, the NDI agreed with political leaders of various parties to sign an action plan to increase women's participation.⁷



All of the current female MPs are ethnically Georgian. In the past, the share of women among ethnic minority candidates has been very low but significantly higher than for non-minority women, exceeding 30% after the 1992 elections only. While female Georgian Jews and Abkhazians have been relatively well represented, only one female Armenian has ever made it into the parliament. Russian and Azeri Women were never represented in the Georgian parliament. Minority women without the backing of influential families or individuals had almost no access to the parliament. Consequently, minority women seem to be double marginalized in the political arena. This observation is supported by the low share of minority women among the election commissioners in minority majority districts at the 2012 elections.

⁷ http://www.ndi.org/Georgian_Political_Parties_Agree_to_Win_with_Women

Again, the marginalization of Azeri women exceeds the level of marginalization of other minorities by far. In the ethnic Armenian districts of Ninotsminda and Akhalkalaki minority women accounted for 39,5% of the commissioners, while in the predominantly Azeri districts of Gardabani, Marneuli and Bolnisi ethnic minority women made up only 13,5%.⁸



⁸ CEC Midterm Report on Activities Planned and Implemented for Simplifying and Supporting Electoral Processes for Ethnic Minority Voters for the Elections of the Parliament of Georgia of October 1, 2012