

FAST-TRACKING BILLS

GEORGIAN DREAM'S PATH AWAY FROM EUROPE

The **Georgian Dream** government has already torn apart the spirit of Georgia's Constitution, blatantly disregarding **Article 78**, which enshrines the country's European aspirations. Now, they're fast-tracking laws to ban face coverings and suppress protests, following Kobakhidze's jaw-dropping **declaration** to abandon EU accession talks. These authoritarian moves, set to take full effect by month's end, expose a **systematic erosion of fundamental rights**.

HERE'S A CLOSER LOOK AT THE GRADUAL DISMANTLING OF DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES THROUGH THE RECENT RAPID CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES:

1. PUBLIC SERVICE LAW AMENDMENT

The Georgian Dream government is fast-tracking a change to the Law of Public Service, which would allow for a **major reorganization** of the public sector. This move comes after internal disagreements at Tbilisi City Hall, where some employees **opposed** the government's recent shift in foreign policy about the suspension of the European Union accession process.

In response to the unprecedented signature campaign/strike at City Hall, Kakha Kaladze, the mayor of Tbilisi and a member of Georgian Dream, remarked, "I expected this; we've announced a **reorganization at the City Hall**, and relocations are planned. May God bless everyone on their way." His statement highlighted the growing tension within City Hall, where employees had expressed their opposition to the government's EU stance.

The proposed law amendment is seen as a strategy by the government to consolidate control over key public sector positions, sparking concerns about political patronage and a lack of transparency.

2. ELECTORAL CODE REFORM

In response to significant losses in major cities like Tbilisi and Rustavi during the October 2024 local elections, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party is pushing for amendments to the Electoral Code aimed at guaranteeing its success in the upcoming **2025 local elections**. By **reintroducing majoritarian seats and lowering electoral thresholds**, the government seeks to **replicate the 2017 election system**, which had previously ensured their dominance in local politics.

The proposed changes come after Georgian Dream realized the risk of further losing urban areas, where opposition support has been growing.

The government's decision to return to the old system is seen as a way to bolster their chances of **retaining control in key regions**. By altering **the Electoral Code** to favor the majoritarian system, the ruling party ensures a structural advantage that could severely limit the opposition's ability to compete.

3. RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

This is part of a broader effort to suppress public dissent and limit the ability of opposition groups to challenge government policies:

∅ A new law regulating the import, production, and sale of pyrotechnics in Georgia is advancing quickly. With this legislation, the **use of pyrotechnics will be subject to strict licensing**, raising concerns that it targets protesters by restricting their ability to use these materials for symbolic resistance. This is part of a broader effort to control and suppress public dissent.

∅ A controversial new law could **ban face coverings**, including masks worn by protesters. This legislation is a direct attack on the right to protest, while special forces are allowed to wear masks without identification. Such a law not only **infringes on civil liberties but also exposes peaceful protesters to further state violence**, as it eliminates their ability to protect themselves from **tear gas**.

∅ A proposed law to **ban lasers** during protests is also a part of a broader effort to control protest tactics. With no stages, microphones, or formal organization, demonstrators rely on simple, creative tools like lasers to make their voices heard. The government justifies the measure by claiming lasers obstruct law enforcement, but in reality, it **limits protesters' ability to express dissent peacefully and creatively**, further stifling grassroots opposition.

4. POLICE REFORM

The Georgian Dream government's reforms to the Law on Police and Military Service are alarming. The proposal allows the Ministry of Internal Affairs to **hire police personnel without competitive selection**, leading to fears of politicization and the creation of a loyalist force. This could worsen the already problematic reliance on "titushki"—unqualified street thugs hired by the government to suppress protests and intimidate citizens. The situation is spiraling as the government **increasingly depends on these lawless enforcers**, leading to a dangerous precedent for authoritarian regimes, where power shifts to unaccountable street mobs, eroding democratic integrity.

5. DELEGATE DISTRICT BUREAUS

The creation of delegate bureaus for MPs elected via proportional representation is a major shift in Georgia's electoral landscape. This change effectively **revives the majoritarian system under a new name**, giving disproportionate power to ruling party delegates.

The move will further consolidate Georgian Dream's control over local governance and could directly impact election fairness, making it harder for opposition parties to compete effectively.

Under a genuinely democratic system with a multi-party structure, such bureaus would allow various political parties to have local representation and the ability to mobilize resources. However, in Georgia's current **one-party-dominated environment**, this change serves the interests of the one ruling Georgian Dream party **alone**.

Since **Georgia no longer operates under a majoritarian system**, the implementation of such a bureau system effectively works in the favor of the Georgian Dream, giving them disproportionate control over local governance. This shift makes it nearly impossible for opposition parties to compete on a level playing field, as the bureaus will allow the ruling party to consolidate power at the local level without any meaningful opposition.

Additionally, this reform is strategically timed to influence **the upcoming 2025 local elections**. By giving Georgian Dream delegates control over administrative resources, the party will be able to use state funding and resources to easily support its election campaign, particularly in key municipalities and Tbilisi.

As you can clearly see, Georgia's political trajectory mirrors the constitutional erosion witnessed in Poland and Belarus, where rapid, controversial legal changes paved the way for authoritarian control.

Poland's (1981) martial law, long ago justified by a claim of national security, was really a power grab, undermining constitutional rights. Belarus's (2020) laws restricting demonstrations, though more recent, followed a strikingly similar pattern, using swift legal amendments to stifle opposition and consolidate power.

Georgia's ruling party seems to be following this playbook, pushing fast-tracked bills that weaken democratic institutions and the judiciary. If unchecked, these constitutional breaches risk seamlessly aligning Georgia with Russia's authoritarian model, directly threatening its sovereignty.