

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8806>



Georgia

# Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP - January 2025 -

Publication date: Saturday 4 January 2025

---

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

---

**Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government? What do the protests mean for the left in Georgia and internationally?** *Posle* (Ilya Budraitskis) and *Tempest* (Ashley Smith) talk to Georgian activists and scholars Ia Eradze [1], Luka Nakhutsrishvili [2] and Lela Rekhviashvili [3] about Georgia's mass protests

— **The people of Georgia have risen up in a new mass protest movement against the Government. The roots of it are, in part, a response to the results of the recent election that brought [Georgian Dream](#) back into power. What did they run on? What were the opposition parties and what were their platforms? Were people satisfied by those options?**

**Luka:** We are in the midst of a mass democratic uprising against the Georgian Dream government. Hundreds of thousands peacefully protest in the main square in Tbilisi and in cities and towns throughout the country. In the past two weeks, we have seen protest marches held across all of Tbilisi at all times. More and more professional groups and neighborhoods have started to self-organize. This is unprecedented in our recent history.

The immediate root of the protests is the profound crisis of legitimacy produced by the ruling party who is following the script that Viktor Orbán used in Hungary to turn its government into an authoritarian regime. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it made a complete U-turn to adopt Euroscepticism, embrace right-wing nationalism, advocate reactionary gender politics, propel conspiracy theories into the political mainstream and express open sympathies with Russia.

Georgian Dream ran on a platform of fear mongering, deploying the slogan “choose peace, not war” paired with images of a flourishing Georgia on one side and on the other a destroyed Ukraine. Their implication was clear; if you vote for the opposition Georgia will end up invaded and occupied by Russia.

As for Georgian Dream's base, while it lost a lot of its voters who are sympathetic to EU-integration, it has gained support among far-right nationalist voters, who approve of their anti-LGBT law, oppose Washington's supposed plan to drag Georgia into a global war, and express hostility to EU bureaucrats they claim are violating Georgian sovereignty. The rest of their voters supported them out of fear of war, which Georgian Dream cynically manipulated.

The four main opposition parties coalesced into coalitions to challenge Georgian Dream in the election. They are parties of the technocratic establishment, most of them affiliated to the previous government, and proved unable to address the grievances of the vast majority. Most voters don't like them and voted for them tactically to defeat Georgian Dream or at least stop them from winning an outright majority and ruling on their own.

— **In the end, Georgian Dream did win a majority amidst wide scale allegations that it had rigged the results. Is that true?**

**Luka:** Yes. Polls indicated it would remain the largest party but without enough votes to independently form a government. No one predicted it would win with 54 percent of the vote. To ensure that result, it resorted to every authoritarian trick imaginable, basically turning the vulnerable social condition of most of the population, which it has systematically reproduced, into an instrument of power.

The party organized what we call a voting carousel to help their supporters vote in multiple places to drive up their

---

## Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

---

results. Georgian Dream also bullied people into voting for it with the threat of cutting off people's access to our minimal social welfare system, including medical care. They intimidated workers in the public sector like schoolteachers with the threat of losing their jobs.

Georgian Dream then overrode the lawsuit that the president had filed to declare the elections unconstitutional because of mass violations of election laws. They didn't even wait for the decision by the court they control to convene the parliament, something that clearly violates the Constitution. Georgian Dream thus did everything to further exacerbate the crisis of legitimacy engendered by how openly and badly they rigged the election.

**— The trigger of the uprising is Georgian Dream's decision to suspend the process for accession to the European Union. Why did it decide to do this, especially given that a majority of Georgians support integration?**

**Ia:** Georgian Dream likely suspended the accession talks because it faced little protests after its rigging of the election. It also does not want to agree to the EU's conditionalities for democratic reform, which would threaten their hold on power. Finally, Russia no doubt put pressure on it behind the scenes.

Their suspension of talks has transformed the situation and awakened people like me who were shocked by the election results. I felt paralyzed for about two weeks. I couldn't do anything. There were demonstrations after the elections, organized by opposition parties, but they were not that large.

**“The small turnout was a result of collective paralysis. It took weeks for people to grasp the enormity of the rigging that gave Georgian Dream such a victory.”**

Frustration began to accumulate under the surface. Georgian Dream's announcement of the suspension of accession talks, which violates our Constitution, broke the dam of welled up anger and it has burst forth throughout the country.

Most people are not protesting just about EU accession. We are out in the streets to stop an authoritarian government from continuing to run roughshod over our Constitution, our rights, and our livelihoods. We are protesting to defend our democracy against Georgian Dream's transformation of every state institution from the schools to the courts into tools to serve its interests and those of the oligarchs that control it.

The government has responded to our uprising with utter brutality. They have started raiding people's homes to find people they claim are planning a revolution. They've arrested some opposition leaders. The regime is becoming more autocratic by the day. Up to 500 people have been arrested and most of them were beaten up, some were tortured (even the public defender judged the treatment of many detainees to be torture). In the last few days, we see people being kidnapped from the streets by police. Among the prisoners are professors, university and school students, artists, and doctors.

**— What are the protests like? What groups and classes of people are involved and why is accession to the EU important to them? Were these the same that protested the special law? What are the protesters' main demands?**

**Ia:** They are huge. A large percentage of the country's 3.8 million people have joined the demonstrations. In Tbilisi, which has a population of about a million people, every day throughout the day and into the night there are at least 100,000 people protesting and on some days over 150,000.

## Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

---

They are much larger than the spring protests against the foreign agent law and they are not just in Tbilisi. They are taking place throughout the country, not only in major districts, but also in small towns in the countryside.

And they are far more diverse than the spring protests. People of all ages have joined the movement. Young people are out in force, but also everyone else. Different classes of people from professionals to workers are in the demonstrations. It's really beautiful to behold.

Everyone realizes the danger we face. I'm part of an initiative that organizes actions to defend education. Countless other groups in different sectors of society are doing the same. None of this is very coordinated. It's like streams of separately organized initiatives converging into massive protests.

There is not even organized chanting during the day. Many of the protests are just silent defiance of the government. The energy, however, is amazing.

**“But the movement is gradually finding its collective voice; it already has articulated two basic demands: new elections and the immediate release of all imprisoned protesters and activists.”**

I do want to stress that amidst this spontaneity, people are beginning to organize in small initiatives that come together in the demonstrations. In however decentralized fashion, planning is going on, targets are being chosen, and a movement is being organized.

For example, protests have targeted a range of public institutions to challenge their slander against the movement or their indifference to the brutality of the regime. Among these institutions is the Public Broadcaster, the country's main national theatre, the Ministry of Education, the Writers' House, the National Cinema Center, the Justice Palace, and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement.

In some cases public servants have joined those demonstrating outside, which was very moving to witness. Public servants have also started signing petitions and organizing marches notwithstanding pressure from a government that aims to erase the line between party loyalty and state institutions.

The opposition parties play next to no role right now in the movement. They have been sidelined despite what the western media say. People have been telling a joke that these parties should at least do something like provide hot tea at the demonstrations.

**— These protests seem very similar to the Maidan uprising in Ukraine. Those began among students and then when they faced brutal repression the movement spread rapidly to the rest of society turning into a militant mass uprising that toppled the government. With splits in the government including resignations and opposition politicians joining the protests, do you think the Georgian uprising could follow the same trajectory?**

**Luka:** It's clearly escalating. The government has turned to surveillance, raids, and brutal repression. But no one's been scared off the streets. The movement is now demanding, not new elections, but that the government itself must go and now. The mass sentiment is it's either us or them. It's at a tipping point now and we'll see if it escalates to challenge Georgian Dream's capacity to rule.

As for similarities with the Ukrainian Maidan, ironically, it is Georgian Dream who follows the Maidan script — from cancelling EU talks like Yanukovich did to banning masks and mobilizing street thugs. They seem unable to make

---

## Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

---

sense of the current uprising as anything other than an attempt by its internal and external enemies to “Maidanize” Georgia. This obsession with Maidan might be one of the reasons why the government has failed miserably to understand — and to quell — these protests.

**— Georgia seems trapped between various major imperial powers — the US, EU, Russia and China — because of its role as a transit site for global trade. Explain Georgia’s role in global capitalism. Would Georgia Dream’s suspension of EU accession change its position in global capitalism? Would it become more integrated into Russian capitalism?**

**Lela:** Georgia is a typical peripheral country, in which imperial powers have facilitated creation of a predatory economic system masquerading as development. The EU and the US have significantly shaped the country’s political economy since the early 1990s, contributing to creation of unsustainable contradictions. On the one hand, they want Georgia to be democratic, but on the other, they and local capitalists, especially the most powerful oligarch, Ivanishvili, want to plunder the country for profit.

Their development program is impossible to implement and sustain a democracy. Why?

**“Because the plunder and impoverishment provokes opposition, one that challenges the development strategy. To contain that resistance requires repression and with that a turn to authoritarianism.”**

The energy sector is a good example of this contradiction, especially since Georgia’s becoming an “energy hub” and part of a “green” energy corridor is currently a common goal of the EU and the Georgian government. In the 1990s, but especially since the Rose Revolution of 2003, Western governments, aid agencies (e.g. USAID) and development banks (e.g. World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) have played a major role in creating state institutions that would facilitate privatization and deregulation of the energy sector.

By 2008, Georgia had privatized all but 2 of its up to 50 Soviet inherited hydropower plants. While Western institutions supported privatization and the creation of an FDI-dependent economy, it was predominantly Russian capital that actually bought up power plants and energy distribution facilities.

When the opportunities to attract FDI through privatization dried up, the government — again in cooperation with Western actors — began to promote greenfield hydropower plants as part of the EU’s green transition agenda. By 2024, the government had signed contracts for 214 new hydropower plants across the country, even if existing capacities almost cover domestic electricity demand. To attract financial capital, it offered land and water resources at nominal prices and promised that the state would protect investors from a range of financial, regulatory, and political risks.

Given the extractive nature of the new hydropower projects, local popular movements have succeeded in opposing and sometimes cancelling or obstructing such projects, especially the large ones such as Namakhvani, Nenskra, Khudoni.

The government got a new impetus to revive all the opposed hydropower plant projects and to propose new ones in 2022, when the EU started creating a “green energy corridor” across Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary, and committed to finance undersea electricity cable on black sea. European institutions, most notably the European Energy Community, have participated in the planning activities through which the Georgian government declares electricity exports to be key to their development agenda and committed to building all previously contested large hydropower plants.

## Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

---

**“Throughout these 15 years since the new hydropower was promoted as a “green transition” agenda and developmental panacea,”**

a range of local capitalists have learned how to benefit from the construction process, some linking new plants to cryptomining, hence creating a strong local lobby for continued expansion of the sector.

Georgian Dream declares anti-hydropower opposition movements to be one of its main enemies. They openly declare that consolidation of power, including the adoption of the Foreign Agents Law, is important to suppress such opposition to Georgia’s economic development.

This is what I mean when I say that the developmental agenda that the Georgian government has elaborated in collaboration with the Western powers and also to the benefit of other, including Russian and Chinese capital (which is not featuring in energy but is prominent in transport infrastructures), is hard if not impossible to implement democratically. So Georgian Dream, much like its political predecessors, turns towards authoritarianism, to be able to better serve the interests of local and international capital.

When we insist that breakdown of the EU integration is dangerous, this is not because we are unaware of the problematic consequences of the EU integration, or that we are unaware how right-wing populism is shaking Europe’s core and peripheral economies alike, and how many European countries are trashing their commitment to human rights, international law, the UN, the ICC, and the ICJ in carrying out their joint war, their genocide, in Palestine.

Instead, for us it is crystal clear that the current authoritarian consolidation serves to unroll the same problematic economic development agenda with an even more brutal face, suppressing any possibility of even protesting against it. This means being Europe’s periphery without being protected from the worst effects of this peripherality by the most basic mechanisms of protection of social and political rights.

Now what about Russia and China? We can’t really say much about Russia, because all the deals they have done have been behind the scenes, not in public. Did Russia put pressure on Georgia? It’s likely but we don’t have the details on its nature. We can clearly observe, however, that Russian officials express satisfaction with the disintegration of EU-Georgia relations.

China has also been quiet, but its economic interests are clear. It views Georgia as a transit site that enables it access to Europe’s market. Georgia is important especially after Russia’s imperialist invasion of Ukraine cut off China’s northern route to Europe.

**— So given this transit hub situation, how have all these powers that have a stake in Georgia for different reasons, how have they responded to the uprising and the crisis now for them in Georgia, China, Russia, U.S., European Union?**

**Luka:** In the worst-case scenario, the EU will abandon putting normative, political pressure on Georgia to democratize and continue doing business with Georgia even under this wretched government like they do with those in Azerbaijan, Serbia, and other Central European and Central Asian countries. Serbia might be a particularly salient case as a country that seems permanently stuck in the accession process. While denouncing Serbia’s authoritarianism, the EU stipulates unpopular contracts regarding the extraction of lithium in the country.

Campists abroad or our local sovereigntists might interpret this as the West finally leaving a sovereign country alone.

---

## Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

---

But in reality, this will be a problem for us, because the normative horizon of democracy, associated with the European framework, is an indispensable tool to put popular pressure on a government that is otherwise bent on crushing democracy altogether. In this sense, the EU, for protesters, is a symbol of rule of law, civil rights, and equality.

At this point, on a mass level, the striving towards Europe and the language of “defending Georgia’s bright, European future” seems to be the only language available for articulating demands for democracy and social justice. The question then is how the people will rearticulate these in case the European horizon actually collapses? How do we and can we fight for political democracy and economic equality isolated from the norms of democracy and human rights emanating from the “collective West”?

**— In this dynamic situation, what do you think the Georgian left, social movements, and unions should be advocating? Is there any possibility of forging a political alternative on the left to challenge Georgian Dream and the pro-capitalist opposition parties?**

**Luka:** Our first task is to build the struggle and maintain it. The government’s authoritarian response to our movement is driving people to think about strategies and tactics that the liberal opposition have tried to discredit like a general strike to preserve our democracy.

The left, social movement organizations, and unions do not have the capacity now to give political coherence and infrastructure to this mass movement. So, people are almost entirely focused on daily protest tactics, not big political projects and larger discussions of strategy and tactics.

**— What position should the international left take in this situation? And what can we do to help Georgia’s struggle for self-determination, democracy, and equality?**

**Lela:** The international left actually faces the same question as the Georgian left — how to transcend the obscuring framework of a conflict between the EU and Russia. The key is to understand and explain how geopolitical rivalries are squeezing peripheral countries.

**“No one on the left should expect any of the imperial powers — the US, EU, Russia, and China — to serve our interests.”**

Whatever their rivalries, they share a predatory agenda and will support an authoritarian regime to ensure they can carry it out. Importantly, the inter-imperial competition and struggle for hegemony creates new risks and vulnerabilities for the peripheral states that need to be taken seriously.

It would be nice for the international Left to engage with more Georgian leftists and activists. At this point, there is a strong tendency for much of it to search out people who confirm its inaccurate and misleading framework that Western imperialism is the sole culprit, indict a mass popular movement as its catspaw, and exonerate the local oligarchic regime.

If the international left follows these people’s lead it will end up supporting Georgian Dream’s rule over peripheral capitalism. Some on the Western left would benefit from stopping being so self-centered and limiting their critique to Western imperialism alone. I’m not asking them to not criticize the West; but to do it more seriously and to criticize non-Western actors as well. That’s the only way to uphold a consistent position to oppose not just the West but capitalism and imperialism without exception.

## Why have people of Georgia massively risen up against the Government?

---

25 December 2024

Questions were prepared by Ashley Smith (Tempest) and Iliia Budraitskis (Posle.media). We publish an abridged version of the interview from [Posle](#), the full interview can be accessed on the [Tempest website](#).

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

---

[1] Ia Eradze is a political economist, with a research focus on finance in the post-socialist space. She is currently an associate professor at the Georgian Institute for Public Affairs (GIPA) and a CERGE-EI Foundation teaching fellow. She is also a researcher at the Institute for Social and Cultural Research, Ilia State University.

[2] Luka Nakhutsrishvili teaches critical theory at Ilia State University Tbilisi and is a researcher and project coordinator at the Institute for Social and Cultural Research at the same university. He studies projects of modernity, popular resistance, and revolutionary culture in Georgia and the Caucasus.

[3] Lela Rekhviashvili is a researcher at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, specializing in political economy and regional geography, with a regional focus on post-socialist Eastern Europe and Eurasia.