

Protesters in Georgia Demand Saakashvili's Exit

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A man bearing the Georgian and U.S. flags in the protest on Sunday outside the presidential residence in Tbilisi. **Shakh Aivazov**

TBILISI, Georgia — More than 1,000 people protested outside of the Georgian president's residence in Tbilisi on Sunday to demand that he immediately resign and hand over executive power to the speaker of parliament.

Presidential elections are due to take place in October, but this schedule in effect will give President Mikhail Saakashvili, who was elected to a second five-year term in January 2008, a sixth year in office.

On Jan. 10, opposition groups and NGOs announced that more than 1 million of Georgia's 4.6 million citizens had signed a petition calling for Saakashvili's resignation.

Saakashvili, who is barred by law from seeking election to a third term in office, saw his party

take a beating in Georgia's national election in October 2012, and the president's popularity has since fallen sharply.

During Sunday's demonstration, protesters waved anti-Saakashvili banners, handed out leaflets and encouraged newcomers to sign petitions calling for the president's ouster. The Unanimity for the Rights of Society, an NGO that has been a leader of the campaign against the president, vowed to have its members camp outside of the presidential palace for up to 10 days, if Saakashvili doesn't resign by midnight.

While Saakashvili began his first term riding on a strong anti-corruption campaign, enduring high unemployment and poverty, coupled with what many perceive as a turn toward authoritarian political tactics, have changed how many Georgians see their president.

"He built himself this huge palace, while thousands of Georgians are only starting to earn themselves enough for a piece of bread," said Temuri Tevzadze, a 45-year-old engineer who took part in Sunday's protest. Tevzadze also accused Saakashvili of tinkering with Georgia's constitution, leaving it riddled with inconsistencies.

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