

Saakashvili Opponent Leads Georgian Presidential Race With 80% of Votes Counted

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Margvelashvili and his daughter surrounded by the media after casting their votes in the Mtsminda district.

The leader of the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, Georgy Margvelashvili, has a strong lead in the race to succeed Mikheil Saakashvili as Georgia's president following Sunday's elections.

Margvelashvili, who led Georgian Dream to victory over Saakashvili's United National Movement party in the 2012 parliamentary elections, had 62.19 percent of the vote as of Monday morning with 81 percent of votes counted, Interfax reported. David Bakradze, the candidate from the former ruling party, was in second place with 21.86 percent, while Nino Burdzhanadze from the Democratic Movement — United Georgia party was third with 10.04 percent.

Voter turnout failed to reach 50 percent on Sunday, but because there is no minimal turnout figure in Georgia, the 46 percent is enough for the results to be deemed valid. By Georgian

law, a presidential candidate needs to secure more than 50 percent to win in the first round.

Georgia's Central Elections Committee did not find any serious violations with the voting process, the committee's head Tamara Zhvaniya said after the polls closed. The committee has 19 days to release the final results of the election, though this could be done much sooner if no serious complaints about voting fraud arise.

The large Georgian diaspora in Russia was not able to vote in the elections because of severed diplomatic ties between the two countries.

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