



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Georgia: Political parties and affiliation

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Executive summary

In general, protesters, journalists, supporters and members and leaders of opposition political parties and/or their family members are unlikely to be of interest to the authorities and subject to treatment that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm.

High-profile government opponents and managers of media channels opposed to the government may be subjected to verbal and physical assaults, politically-motivated prosecution and imprisonment and their cases overseen by a judiciary subject to political influence. However, to establish a claim on this basis, a person would need to demonstrate a flagrant violation or a flagrant denial of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In general, conditions in Georgia are not such as to reach this very high threshold. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

Georgia is a parliamentary democracy with the first female president, Salome Zourabichvili as head of state. Parliament is headed by Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili, led by the Georgian Dream party, the ruling coalition since 2012. The multi-party system allows for the formation and registration of political parties, with over 80 active political parties in existence.

Arbitrary arrest and detention on politically motivated charges occur, particularly of high-profile individuals such as the October 2021 detention of former president Mikheil Saakashvili, after return from exile, and the conviction of Nika Gvaramia, head of opposition-leaning TV station in May 2022. However, the widely reported arrest of Nika Melia, the chairman of the United National Movement (UNM) in February 2021 who was charged with inciting violence in 2019 anti-government demonstrations and detained, was found by the European Court of Human Rights to not be politically motivated.

The Constitution and legislation provide for an independent judiciary, although its impartiality is affected by state interference. Since 2022, substantial legal reforms regarding anti-corruption have been introduced, including passing of legislation to establish an Anti-Corruption Bureau. Cases involving low and-medium level officials have been successfully prosecuted, along with some high-level examples.

The Constitution allows for freedom of speech and assembly which is generally respected. Large-scale protests on a range of topics took place in different areas in 2021 and 2022. Although there are some examples of excessive force by police, arrests, use of administrative detention, fines and restriction on movement, the majority of protests continue peacefully.

The country has a diverse, albeit politically-polarised media environment. Social media is used by the public, activists, bloggers and journalists to share content, debate political issues and organise protests without legal penalties. However, the government uses online surveillance to monitor political content, post anti-democratic and anti-western propaganda on social media and harass, intimidate and interfere with critical media outlets. In some cases journalists experience physical abuse from the state, including by government officials, although this is not systemic.

This Note does not cover the situation in the Russian breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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Assessment

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is information in the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state actors because of their actual or perceived political opinion.
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a grant of asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave is likely, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

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1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed political opinion.
- 2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.3 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3. Risk

3.1 Risk from the state

- 3.1.1 In general, protesters, journalists, supporters and members of opposition political parties, and/or their family members, are unlikely to be subject to treatment that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm. However, the level of risk will depend on the particular profile of the person, the party they support and the area it operates in, their activities, the nature of the threat and how far it would extend. The vast majority of political activities, protests or online activity are carried out without incident; where there is some sort of state response or interference with these rights, it is not sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to engage the Convention. Each case must be considered on its own facts.
- 3.1.2 High-profile opponents of, and managers of media channels opposed to, the government may be subjected to verbal and physical assaults, politically-motivated prosecution and imprisonment and their cases overseen by a judiciary subject to political influence. However, to establish a claim on this basis, a person would need to demonstrate a flagrant violation or a flagrant denial of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to a fair trial). In general, conditions in Georgia are not such as to reach this very high threshold. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.3 Georgia is a parliamentary democracy with the first female president, Salome Zourabichvili as head of state. The executive branch reports to the prime minister and the constitution establishes a parliament responsible for all legislative activities of the government, and a separate judiciary (see [Political system](#)).

- 3.1.4 The Georgian Dream (GD), the ruling coalition since 2012, is governed under Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. The opposition coalition led by the United National Movement (UNM) holds the next largest number of seats. In the parliamentary elections held on 31 October 2020, 66 political parties across Georgia registered to field candidates in an election that was considered, in general, to be competitive and respectful of fundamental freedoms. Allegations of voter intimidation and electoral fraud resulted in opposition parties initially refusing to enter parliament. However, challenge to the results in all districts were rejected in the courts and by the end of 2022 most MPs had taken up their seats (see [Georgian Dream \(GD\) ruling party](#)).
- 3.1.5 The UNM is the main opposition force, and although smaller parties are able to form (80 are said to be active). They are generally unable to gain much widespread support and can face legal barriers, financial constraints, resourcing challenges, harassment, pressure and intimidation. According to the Public Defender's office in the 2021 period before local elections, 69 individuals were dismissed from local government or allegedly harassed on account of their political views. GD affiliated groups have been known to put up 'blood-stained posters' to vilify the opposition and activists before elections. In June 2023 there were reports of 6 critics of the government being subjected to physical attacks reported to be instigated or planned by the ruling party to intimidate opponents, a practise denied by the GD (see [State treatment of opponents, Activists and critics](#), [Freedom of expression](#), and [Freedom of assembly](#)).
- 3.1.6 Surveillance takes place in both public and private settings. In September 2022, it was reported that the State Security Service had carried out surveillance of opposition politicians on behalf of the ruling party, mainly during 2020-2021 (see [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#)).
- 3.1.7 Arbitrary arrest and detention on politically motivated charges occur, particularly of high-profile individuals such as the October 2021 detention of Mikheil Saakashvili, the former president of Georgia. Saakashvili was detained upon his return from exile after spending nearly a decade abroad, was convicted on corruption charges and subsequently imprisoned, where he has reportedly faced torture, poor prisons conditions and deteriorating health. The US State Department noted in 2022 that the government held political prisoners and detainees, although scale and extent of the practice is unclear, as the majority of sources consulted focus on the few reported high-profile cases (see [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#)).
- 3.1.8 The arrest of Nika Melia in February 2021, the chairman of the UNM, was widely reported as politically motivated. He was charged with criminal offences for inciting violence at 2019 anti-government demonstrations when protesters stormed parliament, released on bail in May 2021 and later detained. However, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), in their September 2023 judgement ([Melia v Georgia](#)) found his pre-trial detention was lawful and that the authorities did not display an ulterior motive to punish his political activities or remove him from the political scene, subsequently finding no breach of Melia's human rights (see [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#)).
- 3.1.9 The Constitution and legislation provide for an independent judiciary, although its impartiality is affected by state interference. However, in [Melia v](#)

[Georgia](#) the ECtHR found allegations of politically motivated proceedings in the domestic courts to be unfounded. In December 2021, parliament abolished the State Inspector's Service, an independent body investigating abuses by law enforcement, and in its place created two new independent agencies with the responsibility of investigating law enforcement abuse of power and overseeing data privacy. Since 2022, substantial legal reforms regarding anti-corruption have been introduced, including passing of legislation to establish an Anti-Corruption Bureau. Cases of corruption involving low and-medium level officials have been successfully prosecuted. Although there are examples of alleged high-level corruption that have not been investigated, cases have been resolved through the courts including, amongst others, the conviction of a deputy minister, deputy district prosecutor, governors and members of local councils (see [State bodies](#))

- 3.1.10 The Constitution allows for freedom of speech and assembly which is generally respected, although freedom of assembly is upheld 'unevenly'. Large-scale protests on a range of topics took place in different areas in 2021 and 2022. Although there are some isolated examples of excessive force by police, arrests, use of administrative detention, fines and restriction on movement, they are typically proportionate and reasonable measures to control crowds and/or enforce the law. The majority of protests continue peacefully. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reported 935 instances of political violence (which can include abduction/forced disappearance, attacks and sexual violence) and protest events in Georgia between 6 October 2021 and 6 October 2023, including 883 protests and 46 riots, of which 6 events which involved violence against civilians and no fatalities (see [Protesters](#)).
- 3.1.11 In March 2023, police in Tbilisi used water cannon and teargas on protesters in response to some demonstrators throwing stones, petrol bombs at police and damaging barriers outside the parliament building, opposing the government's proposed 'foreign agents' law that critics, including EU policy leaders said would limit press and civil society freedom and impact the country's EU candidacy. In response to the public's reaction, the government dropped the bill (see [Protesters](#), [Freedom of expression](#), and [Freedom of assembly](#)).
- 3.1.12 Georgians generally enjoy freedom of expression and the country has a diverse, albeit politically-polarised, media environment. Social media platforms are used by members of the public, activists, bloggers and journalists to share content, debate political issues and organise protests without legal penalties. However, the government uses online surveillance to monitor political content, post anti-democratic and anti-western propaganda on social media and to harass, intimidate and interfere with critical media outlets. The Public Defenders Office (PDO), media observers, NGOs, and opposition parties claim some criminal prosecutions targeting critical media sites or their owners are politically motivated. Journalists can be prevented from reporting on key issues and face censorship, harassment, verbal abuse and dispersal when reporting on public events or posing critical questions ([see Journalists, bloggers and online activists](#)).
- 3.1.13 In some cases, journalists experience physical abuse from the state, including by government officials. A statement by Prime Minister Garibashvili's on 5 July 2021, was considered by some to condone violence

against the media community. Senior members of media organisations can face politically motivated arrests, such as the prosecution of Nika Gvaramia, head of opposition-leaning TV station Mtavari Arkhi who was sentenced for 3.5 years imprisonment in May 2022. CPIT did not find any sources reporting on any other arrests of senior members of media organisations. (See [Journalists, bloggers and online activists](#), [Social media](#) and [Television and journalism](#)).

- 3.1.14 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) operate freely, challenge government policy, actively contribute to reforms and are involved in government-monitoring processes. Some organisations can be subjected to smear campaigns and there have been examples of exclusion from policy forums but generally, especially in Tbilisi and Batumi CSOs are able to run effectively (see [Civil society](#), [Detention and prosecution](#) and [Judiciary](#)).
- 3.1.15 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to obtain protection from the authorities.
- 4.1.2 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 For further guidance on considering internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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Country information

About the country information

This contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment.

The structure and content of this section follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

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Section updated: 10 October 2023

7. Political system

7.1 Overview

- 7.1.1 Georgia is a parliamentary democracy. The constitution provides for an executive branch that reports to the prime minister, a unicameral parliament, and a separate judiciary¹.
- 7.1.2 The president is Salome Zourabichvili, a former foreign minister who was sponsored by the Georgian Dream (GD) party, and defeated Grigol Vashadze, (United National Movement (UNM)) in the 2018 presidential elections². The president acts as the head of state and according to 2017 constitutional amendments will hold office for 6 years before being replaced by a president chosen by a 300-member electoral college made up of national MPs and regional and municipal leaders^{3,4}. The next presidential election is due to take place in 2024⁵.
- 7.1.3 The Prime Minister is Irakli Garibashvili who formed a government in February 2021, following the resignation of Giorgi Gakharia⁶.
- 7.1.4 Carnegie Europe, which focuses on European foreign and security policy analysis, in its report - Divided Georgia: A Hostage to Polarization, December 2021, noted: 'Over the past decade, the fight in Georgia between the current ruling party Georgian Dream and its predecessor, the United National Movement—and in particular between their respective leaders Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili—has become a winner-takes-all clash. Since the parliamentary elections of October and November 2020, the stand-off has become yet more intense.'⁷
- 7.1.5 According to the European Council on Foreign Relations, reporting in January 2022: 'Its political system has become ever more dysfunctional, with its key players unwilling or unable to move ahead with democratic reforms.'⁸

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¹ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (Executive Summary), 20 March 2023

² Freedom House (FH), '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (A1), 2023

³ Freedom House (FH), '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (A1), 2023

⁴ CIA, '[World Factbook Georgia](#)' (Government), 25 September 2023

⁵ Georgia Today, '[PM: Next Parliamentary Elections Will Be Held in 2024](#)', 16 March 2021

⁶ BBC News, '[Georgia country profile](#)', 31 May 2023

⁷ Carnegie Europe, '[Divided Georgia: A Hostage to Polarization](#)', December 2021

8. Legal context

8.1 Constitution

8.1.1 Article 14 of the [Constitution](#) states:

‘Everyone is free by birth and is equal before law regardless of race, colour, language, sex, religion, political and other opinions, national, ethnic and social belonging, origin, property and title, place of residence.’⁹

8.1.2 Article 19 states:

- ‘1. Everyone has the right to freedom of speech, thought, conscience, religion and belief.
- ‘2. The persecution of a person on the account of his/her speech, thought, religion or belief as well as the compulsion to express his/her opinion about them shall be impermissible...’¹⁰

8.1.3 Article 28 states:

- ‘1. Every citizen of Georgia who has attained the age of 18 shall have the right to participate in referendum or elections of state and self-government bodies. Free expression of the will of electors shall be guaranteed...’¹¹

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8.2 Formation of political parties

8.2.1 Article 26 of the [Constitution](#) states:

- ‘2. Citizens of Georgia shall have the right to form a political party or other political association and participate in its activity in accordance with the Organic Law.
- ‘3. The formation and activity of such public and political associations aiming at overthrowing or forcibly changing the constitutional structure of Georgia, infringing upon the independence and territorial integrity of the country or propagandising war or violence, provoking national, local, religious or social animosity, shall be impermissible.’

8.2.2 The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index, BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia, 23 February 2022, noted:

‘According to the State Audit Office there are in total 263 political parties registered in Georgia, out of which only 80 are in fact active. 66 successfully registered to run in the 2020 parliamentary elections, which under a new election code delivered a more pluralistic parliament...’

‘Political parties are not membership-based organizations, and without a democratic intraparty structure, they do not represent major segments of society. Instead, they use populist slogans to mobilize the population in support. The GD is led, formally or informally, by [Bidzina] Ivanishvili, while former president Saakashvili still influences UNM. All other parties are clientele groups formed around a front man (the only female exception, Nino

⁹ CoE, [‘Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)’](#), 27 May 2004

¹⁰ CoE, [‘Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)’](#), 27 May 2004

¹¹ CoE, [‘Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)’](#), 27 May 2004

Burjanadze, with her “Democratic Movement – United Georgia” failed to win any seats).¹²

(See [Political parties](#))

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9. Parliamentary elections

9.1.1 The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE) - Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report, 5 March 2021, noted:

‘On 31 October, Georgia held parliamentary elections under a revised electoral system with 120 members of parliament proportionally elected nationwide and 30 elected in single-member constituencies. The reduced threshold of one per cent for parliamentary representation increased the competitiveness of the pre-election environment, with many new parties entering the political arena...

‘The Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions issued by the [International Election Observation Mission] IEOM on 1 November concluded that the elections “were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected. Nevertheless, pervasive allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the state reduced public confidence in some aspects of the process.”¹³

9.1.2 The BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia, 23 February 2022, noted about the parliamentary elections:

‘66 political parties registered to contest parliamentary seats, and 490 candidates stood in the 30 majoritarian districts. During the pre-election period – besides COVID-19 pandemic restrictions – the polarized climate between GD and the United National Movement (UNM) intensified with a competition of opinion polls by biased TV stations. The personalities of individual candidates and negative PR [public relations], rather than political programs, dominated the campaign...

‘However, due to alleged election fraud almost all opposition parties refused to enter parliament. At the opening of its 10th convocation, only the ruling GD faction was present. At a later date, four former Alliance of Patriots members, and two from the "Citizens" party took up their seats.’¹⁴

9.1.3 The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in its report - Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report, 5 March 2021, stated:

‘Shortly after preliminary results were announced, the eight opposition parties that surpassed the parliamentary threshold rejected the election results, alleging widespread electoral fraud. The parties boycotted the second round of elections and threatened not to take part in the new parliament, calling for new elections to be held under the new CEC leadership. Over the week following election day, several protests were held,

¹² BTI, [‘BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia’](#) (page 17), 23 February 2022

¹³ OSCE, [‘Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR ...’](#) (page 2), 5 March 2021

¹⁴ BTI, [‘BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia’](#) (pages 9 & 10), 23 February 2022

including at the headquarters of the CEC. Following the conclusion of the complaints and appeals process in the commissions and courts and the rejection of challenges to the results in all districts, the CEC announced the final results for the first round of elections on 13 November. Seven parties unsuccessfully challenged the final results in court. In 17 districts, second rounds for majoritarian races were held on 21 November.¹⁵

- 9.1.4 US State Department, '2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Georgia' (USSD HR Report 2022), 20 March 2023, reporting on the elections, noted:

'The [OSCE] mission particularly highlighted concerns about ruling party dominance in election commissions. Other problems included widespread reports of intimidation of party supporters and public-sector employees. The OSCE also reported continuing shortcomings in the complaints and appeals process, concluding that "the systemic rejection of the majority of complaints on formalistic grounds significantly limited the opportunity to seek effective legal remedy."¹⁶

- 9.1.5 Freedom House (FH), in its report - Freedom in the World 2023, noted:

'In the October 2020 parliamentary elections and November runoffs, GD [Georgian Dream] won 90 seats, including all 30 single-member district seats. The UNM [United National Movement] -led coalition won 36 seats, all via proportional representation, and 7 smaller groups won the remaining seats. Opposition parties boycotted the runoff, and voter turnout for that election round stood at 26 percent, the lowest recorded since independence. Opposition members who were elected declined to take their seats until an agreement between the government and opposition was brokered with the support of European Council (EC) president Charles Michel in April 2021. GD withdrew from the agreement in July 2021, however. By the end of 2022 most politicians had taken their seats.¹⁷

- 9.1.6 Freedom House, in its report - Nations in Transit 2023 - Georgia, stated: '... [T]he political opposition had ended its boycott of Parliament following the 2020 elections since many parties and MPs had shifted their positions due to changes within party fractions. By year's end, the number of MPs had increased to 141 (out of the statutory limit of 150 seats) in the country's unicameral Parliament.'¹⁸

- 9.1.7 On 20 April 2021, Politico, a US-based politics focused newspaper, reported:

'The Georgian government and opposition party leaders agreed [on 19 April] to end a political standoff and signed an accord brokered by European Council President Charles Michel...

'Melia's party [The UNM] refused to endorse the agreement, but enough MPs, including from United National Movement, signed on individually that it meant parliament would finally be able to convene and function following the disputed election in October.

'Giga Bokeria, a leader of the opposition European Georgia party who did not sign on to the deal, said the agreement was "incomplete and inadequate"

¹⁵ OSCE, '[Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR ...](#)' (pages 4 & 5), 5 March 2021

¹⁶ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (Section 3), 20 March 2023

¹⁷ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (A2), 2023

¹⁸ FH, '[Nations in Transit 2023 – Georgia](#)' (National Democratic Governance), 24 May 2023

because it failed to address the broader problem of politically motivated prosecutions and underlying weaknesses in the country's political system. Bokeria also said that the president's statement suggested that she was going along reluctantly. ...

'The agreement ... calls for a menu of reforms, including a new power-sharing agreement in parliament, as well as a plan to raise the vote threshold required for lifting the parliamentary immunity of MPs. The agreement also calls for changes to the electoral system, including fully proportional parliamentary elections.'¹⁹

9.1.8 The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), reported in January 2022: 'In spring 2021, EU Council President Charles Michel led efforts to broker an agreement between political parties. His commitment sent a clear political message to Georgians that the EU cares. But his work turned out to be in vain, as the UNM never signed the agreement and Georgia Dream eventually withdrew from it.'²⁰

9.1.9 FH in its report - Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia, further noted:

'Electoral reforms introduced in 2020 included a gender quota for the proportional-representation component of parliamentary elections; at least one in every four candidates on a party's list must be a woman. Nevertheless, women remain underrepresented at all levels of government. Although a woman became president in 2018, women won only 31 seats in the 2020 parliamentary elections. Ethnic minority groups make up an estimated 13 percent of the population, with ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis forming the largest communities. However, few parliamentarians are members of ethnic minority groups.'²¹

9.1.10 The final results of the Parliamentary elections can be found on the OSCE's - [Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report](#) (page 38).

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10. Political parties

10.1 Overview

10.1.1 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) listed the significant political parties and their leaders, as at September 2023²²:

Political party	Party leader
Alliance of Patriots	Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi
Citizens Party	Aleko Elisashvili
Democratic Movement-United Georgia or DM-UC	Nino Burjanadze
European Georgia-Movement for Liberty	Giga Bokeria
For Georgia	Giorgi Gakharia

¹⁹ Politico, '[EU brokers deal to end political deadlock in Georgia](#)', 20 April 2021

²⁰ ECFR, '[Lost in the Dream: How the EU can end the political deadlock in Georgia](#)', 26 January 2022

²¹ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (B4), 2023

²² CIA, '[World Factbook – Georgia](#)' (Government), updated 25 September 2023

Political party	Party leader
Georgian Dream-Democratic Georgia	Irakli Kobakhidze
Girchi-More Freedom	Zurab Japaridze
Labor Party	Shalva Natelashvili
Lelo for Georgia	Mamuka Khazaradze
New Political Centre-Girchi	Iago Khvichia
Republican Party	Khatuna Samnidze
Strategy Aghmashenebeli	Giorgi Vashadze
United National Movement or UNM	Levan Khabeishvili

10.1.2 In February 2021, 10 News, an American news website, reported:

‘Both Georgian Dream and United National Movement are pro-Western and have the stated goals of establishing better relations with possible eventual membership in NATO and the European Union. ‘But the UNM denounces Ivanishvili’s [Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder of Georgian Dream] ties to Russia and claims the party pursues pro-Russia policies. The issue is highly contentious in light of a five-day war between Georgia and Russia in 2008 and Russia’s control of the separatist Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.’²³

10.1.3 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted: ‘No laws prevent women or members of ethnic and religious minority groups from participating in politics.’²⁴

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10.2 Georgian Dream (GD) ruling party

10.2.1 Al Jazeera, reporting in October 2016, noted: ‘Originally a coalition of six parties, Georgian Dream was founded by [Bidzina Ivanishvili, a former prime minister], who made his fortune in Russia. The party came to power in 2012, ending the nine-year rule of Saakashvili’s UNM.’²⁵

10.2.2 According to Global Voices, an international community of writers, bloggers and digital activists translating on what is being reported in the worldwide media, noted in an article dated 6 July 2023: ‘Ivanishvili is a key figure in Georgian politics. He made his fortune in the pre-Putin era in Russia and founded the Georgian Dream party in 2012. While Ivanishvili publicly announced his decision to leave politics in 2021, some believe he is still calling the shots behind the scenes.’²⁶

10.2.3 In February 2021, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting quoted Thornike Gordadze, a lecturer at the Paris Institute of Political Studies, who suggested that Georgian Dream’s politics are driven by the interests of its oligarch founder, Bidzina Ivanishvili:

“The Georgian Dream government is a typical post-Soviet agglomeration of personalities with no clear ideology, values or geopolitical orientation,” he said. “The party is entirely dominated by an oligarch, whose wealth equals 40 per cent of Georgia’s GDP. The personal and financial security of this oligarch is the main objective of this party, as members are loyal to their

²³ 10 News, ‘[Georgian opposition leader arrested, protesters set up camp](#)’, 23 February 2021

²⁴ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (B4), 2023

²⁵ Al Jazeera, ‘[Georgia elections: Georgian Dream party faces off UNM](#)’, 9 October 2016

²⁶ Global Voices, ‘[The Georgian Dream party is not every Georgian’s dream](#)’, 6 July 2023

informal leader and not to the state institutions or the constitution of Georgia.”²⁷

- 10.2.4 In February 2021, New Europe, an independent news outlet reporting on the EU, provided an opinion on the Georgian Dream party:

‘According to the most cynical political traditions in Georgia’s political history, the Georgian Dream completely squandered the political capital that they earned when the public gave them a massive mandate in 2012. The voters who helped the Georgian Dream sweep to power a decade after the Rose Revolution never received the social justice they were promised. Instead, they were forced to live through an unfocused economic program, clannish rule in the judiciary system, rampant nepotism in the civil service, decreased direct foreign investments, a devaluation of the national currency, and clear signs of state capture. Furthermore, there are no signs that the ruling party has any plan to overcome the poverty and hopeless situation in Georgia.’²⁸

- 10.2.5 Freedom House, in its report - Nations in Transit 2023 - Georgia, stated: ‘The extreme, marginalizing rhetoric of the ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD), impeded parliamentary actors from working collectively on significant policy and legislative recommendations from Western partners.’²⁹

(See [Anti-government protesters](#) and [Ethnic Russians](#))

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10.3 United National Movement (UNM)

- 10.3.1 Mikheil Saakashvili, a former president of Georgia, created the United National Movement (UNM) political party in 2001. Before losing the 2012 legislative elections to the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition, the UNM alliance ruled Georgia for nine years, from 2003 to 2012, with Saakashvili serving as its president³⁰. He retired from active politics in 2013 and left Georgia for Ukraine³¹. For information on his treatment on return from exile in 2021 see [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#).

- 10.3.2 The BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia, 23 February 2022, noted that the former president Saakashvili still influences UNM³².

- 10.3.3 The Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), a think tank based in Warsaw which undertakes independent research on the political, economic and social situation in Central and Eastern Europe, Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia, noted in an online article dated 1 February 2023:

‘The UNM remains the most important political force in the Georgian opposition, but according to polls it can currently only count on at most 15% of the vote. ... The new chairman of the UNM, the 35-year-old parliamentarian and relatively low-ranking activist Levan Khabeishvili, has announced that his priority will first and foremost be ‘grassroots work’ and the structural strengthening of the party. To this end, its youth wing is to be reformed (the setting up of a political school has been announced) and the women’s wing strengthened. A greater role in the party is to be played by

²⁷ IWPR, ‘[Georgia’s Political Crisis Intensifies](#)’, 23 February 2021

²⁸ New Europe, ‘[Understanding Georgia’s current political situation](#)’, 26 February 2021

²⁹ FH, ‘[Nations in Transit 2023 – Georgia](#)’ (National Democratic Governance), 24 May 2023

³⁰ Agenda.ge, ‘[№5 United National Movement](#)’, 6 October 2016

³¹ OSW, ‘[Saakashvili and The Georgian Opposition. The State of Play](#)’, 1 February 2023

³² BTI, ‘[BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia](#)’ (page 17), 23 February 2022

local branches, a political council, an advisory body and expatriate activists. Khabeishvili has devoted more space to these issues than to the party's political programme, which so far seems unchanged: liberal reforms in the country and a course toward the West and European integration. All this is intended to lead to electoral success in 2024.'³³

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10.4 Smaller opposition parties

10.4.1 NE Global, an international news organisation covering global politics, reported on 26 February 2023:

'Political parties that have recently emerged have all shared the fate of the more established parties in regards to credibility. The founder of the liberal Lelo party, Mamuka Khazaradze, is the co-founder of Georgia's TBC Bank. He is strongly affiliated with the country's strict banking policy and the confiscation of property for creditors because of unpaid debts. The right-wing libertarian positions of the party known as Girchi are unacceptable in most cases and, generally, do not represent the wishes of the majority of the population.

'As it stands now, the opposition apparently has a limited number of loyal voters to enough headway in any of the country's elections. Furthermore, the opposition's last attempt to organize a mass protest rally immediately after the elections in November mostly fell flat.'³⁴

10.4.2 Eurasianet, a U.S. based independent news organisation, providing news, information and analysis on countries in Central Asia, the Caucasus region, Russia and Southwest Asia, noted in an article dated 23 March 2022:

'The group, Alt-Info, in November [2021] launched a new political party called the Conservative Movement. The party then began opening dozens of offices across Georgia. The quick expansion of the group – which many Georgians see as pro-Russia – has taken place just as Russia was preparing and launching its invasion of Ukraine. In Georgia, where many fear they could be Russia's next target, the group's rise has been provocative and threatening, sparking a strong backlash. Alt-Info had already become notorious in Georgia for its illiberal views drawn from religious conservative ideas. It also advocates for friendlier ties with Russia, anathema to pro-Western Georgians.'³⁵

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11. State treatment of opponents

11.1 Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties

11.1.1 The Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia (PDO), Report of the Public Defender of Georgia On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2021, stated:

'In 2021, the Public Defender reviewed 161 new cases of alleged discrimination, most of which - 17% - involved cases of alleged

³³ OSW, '[Saakashvili and The Georgian Opposition. The State of Play](#)', 1 February 2023

³⁴ NE Global, '[Understanding Georgia's current political situation](#)', 26 February 2021

³⁵ Eurasianet, '[Rise of Georgian alt-right group sparks fear of unrest](#)', 23 March 2022

discrimination on political grounds. According to the information available to the Public Defender's Office, in the pre-election period of the local self-governments of 2021, 69 individuals were dismissed or allegedly harassed on account of their political views, which amounted to discrimination. The Public Defender has become aware of four cases where the acting principals of public schools have not had their employment contracts extended possibly for political reasons.³⁶

- 11.1.2 The USSD HR Report 2022 noted: 'During the year, opposition parties reported an uneven playing field due to lack of finances and obstacles to fundraising, the ruling party's control of administrative resources, and deep polarization – including pressure and intimidation – as main obstacles to political participation.'³⁷
- 11.1.3 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted: 'While Georgia hosts a dynamic multiparty system, opposition parties can face barriers to political competition, including legal and other harassment.'³⁸
- 11.1.4 In February 2021, Nika Melia, the chairman of the United National Movement was arrested by riot police. The Guardian reported:
- 'Georgian police have stormed the country's opposition party headquarters and arrested their leader, escalating a political crisis ... that government critics say risks a descent into authoritarianism. ... Footage broadcast on Georgian television showed Melia being dragged from the building. He is charged with inciting violence at 2019 anti-government demonstrations when protesters stormed parliament and faces nine years in prison. His supporters have said that the charges are politically motivated...
- 'The decision to arrest Melia caused misgivings among government supporters. Giorgi Gakharia, a member of Georgian Dream, resigned as prime minister last week over a court decision to arrest Melia, saying it could lead to protests and harm the wellbeing of the country's citizens. In his place, Georgian Dream nominated Irakli Garibashvili, a former defence minister and ally of Ivanishvili, who quickly ordered the arrest of Melia at his party headquarters. After the raid, Garibashvili called Melia "an ordinary criminal" and asked: "When did the political party become a safe haven for such criminals?"'³⁹
- 11.1.5 The judgement in the case of Melia v. Georgia in the European Court of Human Rights (ECTHR), 7 September 2023, concerning 'allegations under [Articles 5 and 18](#) of the Convention that the domestic courts' decision ordering the applicant's pre-trial detention was unjustified and unnecessary for the purposes of the criminal proceedings against him and that it had the goal of keeping him out of political life' found no violation of those Articles⁴⁰.
- 11.1.6 The court found:
- '...importantly, however, as regards the allegation that the authorities had wished to remove the applicant from the political scene in Georgia, the Court cannot overlook the fact that the domestic courts, relying on the importance

³⁶ Public Defender of Georgia, '[Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, On ...](#)' (page 12), no date

³⁷ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (Section 3), 20 March 2023

³⁸ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (B1), 2023

³⁹ The Guardian, '[Police arrest Georgian opposition leader after storming party HQ](#)', 23 February 2021

⁴⁰ ECTHR, '[Melia V Georgia](#)' (judgement), 7 September 2023

of protecting the applicant's right to liberty and security, initially rejected the prosecutor's application to have pre-trial detention imposed on the applicant... As concerns the initial conditions attached to bail, while they appear to have been extensive, the authorities did not restrict the applicant in carrying out his parliamentary mandate, engaging with the media and the public, and carrying out a pre-election campaign which earned him a renewed seat in Parliament ... In fact, it appears that the criminal proceedings against the applicant were suspended in order to allow him to participate properly in the parliamentary elections... The trial court also granted his application to have identity documents returned to him for that purpose... Accordingly, and emphasising the fact that the present case does not cover the criminal proceedings pending against the applicant, the Court does not consider that through the mere fact of charging the applicant as part of those [criminal] proceedings, the authorities pursued the ulterior purpose of removing him from the political scene in the country...

'...criticism of the detention order and the subsequent arrest process, especially considering the undisputed refusal by the applicant and his supporters to allow the implementation of the order, cannot be indicative, within the meaning of the standard of proof used by the Court, of an ulterior motive on the authorities' part, whether that of removing him from the political scene or that of punishing him for his political activities...

'In sum, although the applicant's detention was ordered against the backdrop of bitter political antagonism between, on the one hand, the UNM and other opposition parties and, on the other hand, the ruling Georgian Dream party, the various points cited by the applicant, taken separately or in combination with each other, do not form a sufficiently homogenous whole for the Court to find that the applicant's detention pursued a purpose not prescribed by the Convention...'⁴¹

11.1.7 Agenda.ge, an English-language news platform based in Georgia reported on 7 September 2023:

'The European Court of Human Rights on Thursday ruled legitimate the arrest and detention of opposition leader Nika Melia for incitement to violence during protests in Tbilisi back in June 2019. The Ministry of Justice of Georgia said the court's ruling "proved" Melia's arrest and preventative detention - during demonstrations sparked by the presence of Russian MPs in the Georgian Parliament - had been "both legal and in complete accordance" with the European Convention on Human Rights ("ECHR") standards. The Court also ruled there were no political motives in Melia's arrest and did not share the arguments of the applicant.

'Former leader and now member of the United National Movement parliamentary opposition, Melia was charged with "organising group violence, heading a group and participation in violence" during the rallies. He was then released on a ₾30,000 (\$10,000) [£9,200⁴²] bail in June 2020, ordered to wear an electronic monitoring tag, prohibited from leaving home without informing law enforcement, and barred from making public statements in public spaces and communicating with witnesses. However, Melia violated the conditions of his bail by publicly removing his tag, leading

⁴¹ ECtHR, '[Melia V Georgia](#)' (137, 140, 143), 7 September 2023

⁴² Xe.com, '[30,000 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#)', 6 October 2023

to €40,000 (\$15,268) [£12,250⁴³] being added to his bail in November 2020. He refused to pay the amount, with Tbilisi City Court ruling in February 2021 that he be remanded into custody for failure to post bail. He was released on May 10, 2021 after posting the bail.

‘The Ministry said the European Court “fully agreed” with its position on the case and with the evidence submitted, and decided no violation of articles of the European Convention had occurred against Melia.’⁴⁴

11.1.8 In October 2021 Mikheil Saakashvili, the former president of Georgia was detained upon his return from exile after spending nearly a decade abroad, which included a period as a regional governor in Ukraine⁴⁵. From 2004 to 2013, the pro-Western Mr. Saakashvili served as the country's leader but was later found guilty in absentia of corruption charges, which he vigorously contested. Prior to the municipal elections on Saturday [2 October], he released a video on Facebook on Friday 1 October claiming to be back in Georgia. The government initially denied he had returned but late on the Friday the Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili confirmed in a statement that "the third president of Georgia, the wanted Mikheil Saakashvili, has been arrested and sent to jail"^{46,47}.

11.1.9 The Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), reported in February 2023:

‘Mikheil Saakashvili retired from active Georgian politics in autumn 2013, and shortly before the formal end of his second presidential term he left the country. In the following years he was mainly based in Ukraine; among other things, he led the administration of the Odesa region, and since May 2020, the National Reform Council by appointment of President Volodymyr Zelensky. At the turn of October 2021, on the eve of local elections in Georgia, he returned there across illegally, was detained, taken into custody and later imprisoned. ... While in exile and later in prison, the former president became – and still is – a point of reference for both Georgia’s opposition (he formally led the UNM until spring 2019) and its government.’⁴⁸

11.1.10 The Guardian reported on 16 April 2023: ‘[Mikheil Saakashvili] wanted to re-enter politics in his home country, but on arrival in October 2021 was immediately arrested, after being convicted in absentia of abuses of power. He was transferred from prison to hospital last May. Many see his imprisonment as the fulfilment of a vendetta against him by his political rival, the oligarch Bizdina Ivanishvili.’⁴⁹ (see for information on the treatment of Mikheil Saakashvili whilst in detention see [Detention and prosecution](#))

11.1.11 On 24 September 2023, Civil Georgia, a Tbilisi-based free daily news website run by Georgian non-governmental organisation (NGO) UN Association of Georgia, reported:

‘The Georgian Prosecutor’s Office has charged six people with gang violence against Irakli Edzgvradze, a deputy for the United National Movement in the Tbilisi Saskrebulo (City Council). ... Law enforcement

⁴³ Xe.com, ‘[40,000 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#)’, 6 October 2023

⁴⁴ Agenda.ge, ‘[ECHR ruling confirms legitimacy of opposition leader's arrest by ...](#)’, 7 September 2023

⁴⁵ FT, ‘[Video of emaciated Mikheil Saakashvili prompts stand-off between Georgia ...](#)’, 5 July 2023

⁴⁶ BBC, ‘[Mikheil Saakashvili: Georgian ex-president arrested returning from exile](#)’, 1 October 2021

⁴⁷ Reuters, ‘[Returning home, Georgian ex-leader arrested after call for election ...](#)’, 1 October 2021

⁴⁸ OSW, ‘[Saakashvili and The Georgian Opposition. The State of Play](#)’, 1 February 2023

⁴⁹ The Guardian, ‘[Gaunt and ghostly, Georgia's jailed ex-president nears death in ...](#)’, 16 April 2023

officials arrested the defendants on 23 September. They are charged with subsections “b” and “c” of the first part of Article 126 (violence committed in a group and against two or more persons) of the Penal Code, which carries a sentence of up to two years’ imprisonment.’⁵⁰

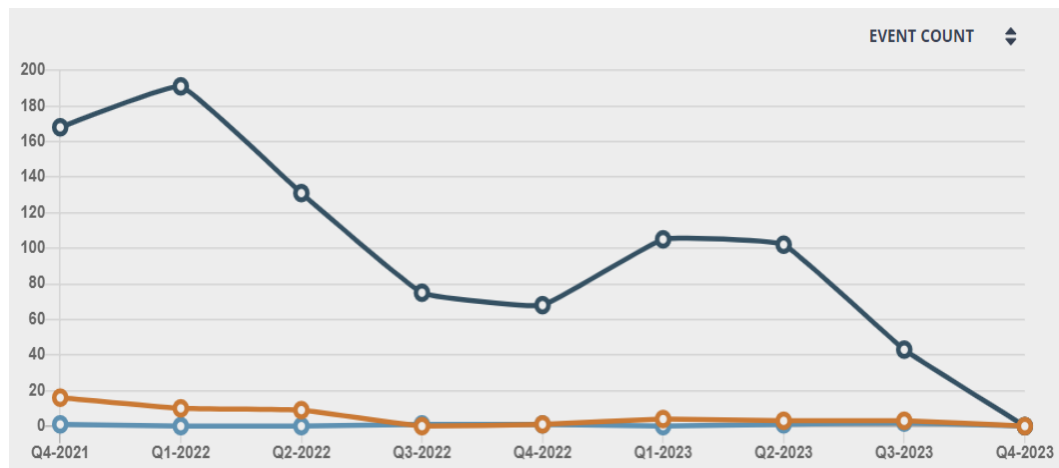
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11.2 Protesters

11.2.1 The BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia, 23 February 2022, noted: ‘The GD [Georgian Dream Party] majority did not exercise self-restraint or stick to democratic standards. The state has violently dispersed several demonstrations led by a growing opposition.’⁵¹

11.2.2 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects information on all reported political violence and protest events in Georgia. The following graph shows events recorded between 6 October 2021 and 6 October 2023. Out of a total of 935 events in this period, 883 were protests, 46 were riots and 6 events over the 2-year period involved violence against civilians. There were no recorded fatalities⁵².



11.2.3 On 10 November 2021 Civil Georgia, a Tbilisi-based free daily news website run by Georgian non-governmental organisation (NGO) UN Association of Georgia, reported:

‘Police [have detained 46](#) people gathered for opposition rallies at various government buildings across the capital, Tbilisi. The protesters at the Security Service, Health and Justice Ministries have gathered to protest the government’s [sic] treatment of the imprisoned ex-president, Mikheil Saakashvili [see [Detention and prosecution](#)]...

‘The Ministry of Interior said on November 10 that protesters “exceeded the limits allowed by the law on freedom of assembly and expression and made attempts to block the entrances of the administrative bodies.” Chief of the Patrol Police Vazha Siradze, said protesters were detained for administrative offenses, including disobeying a lawful request from the police, insulting police officers, petty hooliganism, and blocking administrative [sic]

⁵⁰ Civil Georgia, ‘[Six Charged with Violence against Tbilisi Sakrebulo Deputy](#)’, 24 September 2023

⁵¹ BTI, ‘[BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia](#)’ (page 3), 23 February 2022

⁵² ACLED, ‘[Dashboard](#)’ (Georgia), 6 October 2023

buildings...

'Some confrontations and detentions also occurred outside the Health Ministry, where protesters were demanding for Saakashvili to be allowed to be treated in a civilian clinic.

'Some heated verbal exchanges took place outside the Justice Ministry as well, where UNM MP Levan Khabeishvili and Teimuraz Kupatadze, Deputy Director of Tbilisi Police Department, [verbally confronted](#) each other. UNM MP accused the police official of corruption, while Kupatadze slammed Khabeishvili for "showing off for the cameras."⁵³

- 11.2.4 The Human Rights Center (HRC) Georgia, in its Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations (Summary Report) covering 2021, published on 19 January 2022, noted: 'The monitoring of the rallies held during 2021 revealed numerous facts of disproportionate police force mobilization, arrests, use of administrative detention, and fines, as well as the disproportionate restriction of freedom of movement of protesters.'⁵⁴
- 11.2.5 For further details about each of the protest demonstrations cited by the Human Rights Center (Georgia) see: '[Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations \(Summary Report\), 2021](#)' (pages 8-17), 19 January 2022, and '[Right of Peaceful Assembly and Manifestation in Georgia: Main flaws in law and practice](#)', 2021.
- 11.2.6 The HRC further reported in their Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations - Summary Report (April- June 2022), published on 22 June 2022:
- 'Having observed 7 protests held during the reporting period, we may say that the majority of them were peaceful on the part of the protesters. In exceptional cases, the actions of protesters did not reach the threshold where the risk of wrongdoing would be imminent. In some cases, there was a tendency when the resistance from the protester was provoked as a result of the repressive approach by the police force. In such cases, by a general assessment, the behavior of the protesters was of a nature and quality proving their participation in the protest to be legitimate both under the national law and also in terms of respecting the right to freedom of peaceful assembly under Article 11 of the ECHR...
- 'The court hearings on the cases of administrative offenses monitored by HRC reveal that the participants of peaceful assemblies were mainly arrested under Article 166 (petty hooliganism), Article 173 (disobedience to a lawful order of a police officer), and Article 150 (defacement of the image of the self-governing unit) of the Code of Administrative Offenses. In recent years, human rights organizations including HRC managed to document the cases of restricting the right to assembly and freedom of expression through the mentioned articles of the Code.'⁵⁵
- 11.2.7 Citing other sources, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), in its - Migration Drivers Report: Georgia as a Country of Origin, 18 August 2022, noted:
- 'Mass demonstrations took place in Georgia in June and July 2022, including

⁵³ Civil Georgia, '[46 Detained at Opposition Rallies](#)', 10 November 2021

⁵⁴ HRC, '[Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations - Summary ...](#)' (page 22), 19 January 2022

⁵⁵ HRC, '[Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations - Summary ...](#)', (pages 5 & 6), 22 June 2022

a gathering of an estimated 120 000 people on 20 June to express support for the country's EU ambitions. An estimated 35 000 demonstrators gathered outside the parliament on 3 July to call for the government to resign due to its failure to obtain EU candidate status. Protestors have called for former Prime Minister and founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, to relinquish the executive power he maintains in the country. Ivanishvili is understood to be the richest man in Georgia and is widely believed to maintain control over the government despite having no official political position. As of June 2022, at least four cabinet members were close associates of Ivanishvili, including Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. The Shame Movement, a pro-democracy civil society group, has mobilised, been present, or helped organise these protests.⁵⁶

11.2.8 Meduza, an independent Russian news website, reported in March 2023:

'Last week, the Republic of Georgia found itself on the cusp of adopting a new law for "transparency in foreign influence," more commonly referred to as a "foreign agent" law, and widely believed to be modeled on Russia's repressive legislation. If passed, the bill would have required the media and NGOs even partly financed from abroad to register as "agents of foreign influence." It would also have compromised Georgia's entry into the E.U. and NATO...

'On March 2, the Georgian parliament's committees for External Relations and Security began deliberating on the draft legislation. While this happened, protesters gathered outside the parliament on Rustaveli Prospect. Inside the parliament building itself, opponents of the bill whistled scornfully at the sight of its initiators...

'The protest started at 6 p.m. Activists and members of the political opposition blocked both entrances to the parliament building, chanting: "No to the Russian law!" and "Slaves!" The police arrested several protesters, and other demonstrators soon tried to stop a police car carrying detainees. Fighting broke out between protesters and the police. By the end of the day, 36 people had been arrested, including several journalists (though interfering with the work of the media is itself a crime in Georgia).⁵⁷

11.2.9 On 8 March 2023, The Guardian reported:

'Thousands of people clashed with police on the streets of Georgia's capital for a second day to rally against a "foreign agents" law that critics say would limit press freedom and undercut the country's efforts to become a candidate for EU membership.

'Protesters carrying Georgian, EU and Ukrainian flags gathered outside the parliament building in Tbilisi on Wednesday and shouted: "No to the Russian law." Demonstrators also blocked the city's central Rustaveli Avenue, after a call from the main opposition party, the United National Movement, to gather there.

'Later on Wednesday [8 March], hundreds of police, many carrying riot shields, used water cannon and teargas on protesters for the second night in a row as clashes again broke out in Tbilisi. Some demonstrators threw stones and pushed over barriers outside the parliament building, but unlike

⁵⁶ EUAA, '[Migration Drivers Report: Georgia as a Country of Origin](#)' (page 8), 18 August 2022

⁵⁷ Meduza, '[Georgia's murky 'transparency' bill The 'foreign agent' draft law that ...](#)', 14 March 2023

the previous night, there were no signs of demonstrators throwing petrol bombs or stones at police officers.⁵⁸

11.2.10 On 9 March 2023, Sky News reported: 'Georgia's ruling party said it will drop a controversial bill on "foreign agents" after two days of violent protests. The ruling party, named Georgian Dream, said in a statement it would "unconditionally withdraw the bill we supported without any reservations". It cited the need to reduce "confrontation" in society but denounced "lies" told about the bill by the "radical opposition".⁵⁹

11.2.11 Eurasianet, reported on 5 June 2023:

'Fears of a crackdown are rising in Georgia following a series of instances of extraordinary restriction of the freedoms of assembly and expression. Rallies were held in Tbilisi over the weekend of June 3-4 to show discontent toward arbitrary police conduct in various episodes during the previous week. This conduct includes what many see as Kremlin-style moves like detaining peaceful protesters for holding banners and preventing a demonstrator from setting up a protest tent.

"It is concerning that the Georgian public is witnessing such a negative trend undermining the fundamental principles of democracy and practically annulling the basic right to freedom of expression," 20 Georgian human rights watchdogs said in a [joint statement](#) on June 3.

'The backlash peaked as images spread of police detaining peaceful protesters for no discernable [sic] reason on the night of 2-3 June. ... A total of seven peaceful protesters were detained on June 2, including prominent Georgian human rights advocates. Some activists reportedly sustained injuries during the process. Images show police officers forcefully detaining and [confiscating](#) banners from the protesters. [One video showed](#) Edvard Marikashvili, a lawyer and head of the Georgian Democracy Initiative, a local NGO, being detained for holding a blank sheet of paper...

'The concerns about the rising crackdown, however, started emerging earlier. In late May, police prevented a protester from setting up a tent near the parliament building. That protester, Beka Grigoriadis, has been calling for the release of his son who is standing trial for allegedly throwing a petrol bomb at police forces and setting a police car on fire during [March protests](#) against the adoption of controversial foreign agent laws. ... After days of struggling to set up a tent, Grigoriadis, too, was detained and [fined](#) 2,000 Lari (about \$770) [[£600⁶⁰](#)] for allegedly disobeying police orders. He was [finally able](#) to set up a tent on June 3, under the protection of a human chain that protesters formed around him. On June 3, several people were also detained in Batumi, where activists gathered in solidarity with those detained the previous day in Tbilisi...

'Those detained in Tbilisi were released after two days in custody. Police told them they faced administrative charges including petty [hooliganism](#) and police disobedience. No court hearing has taken place yet, and it is unknown when or whether they will be tried.⁶¹

⁵⁸ The Guardian, '[Protesters and police clash in Georgia for second day over ...](#)', 8 March 2023

⁵⁹ Sky News, '[Georgia drops controversial 'foreign agent' bill after two days of ...](#)', 9 March 2023

⁶⁰ Xe.com, '[2,000 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#)', 6 October 2023

⁶¹ Eurasianet, '[Georgian government criticized over brazen crackdown on freedom of ...](#)', 5 June 2023

11.2.12 The International Federation for Human Rights reported on 23 June 2023:

'On 2 June 2023, a peaceful protest took place in front of the parliament building in the capital Tbilisi, organised by the Georgian civil society group GEUT ('stubborn'). The activists were holding paper banners, calling for the respect of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and expressing their criticism against the Georgian authorities. In response to the action, police arbitrarily arrested at least seven protesters, including four human rights defenders: Saba Brachveli, lawyer and employee of the Open Society Foundation; Eduard Marikashvili, Chairperson of the Georgian Democracy Initiative; Nika Romanadze, civil society activist; and Shota Tutberidze, lawyer of the Tolerance and Diversity Institute. Police also detained at least three more civil society leaders, including Levan Nishnianidze - member of the "Girchi-More Freedom" party.

'Among the seven detainees, one was holding a copy of the Georgian constitution, and another was holding a blank sheet of paper at the protest action. Some protesters were holding banners where they modified the first name of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, resulting in a pronunciation that resembled an inappropriate word. The police damaged or confiscated these banners during the arrests, used excessive force, and failed to provide the grounds for detentions, as well as to explain detainees their rights. Moreover, the lawyers of the detainees were not informed about the whereabouts of their clients and were not allowed to see them in the first hours following their arrest.

'Marikashvili, Romanadze and Brachveli were taken to Telavi's temporary detention facility, while others were held in the detention facility in Dusheti. Authorities released Marikashvili, Romanadze and Brachveli after 48 hours of pretrial detention - the maximum term allowed by the legislation - while the remaining detainees were released several hours earlier.

'After their release, the seven detainees were accused of the administrative charges of "hooliganism" and "disobeying the order of police" (Article 166 and Article 173 of the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia, respectively). The first trial hearings were conducted on 6 June. Further hearings were postponed for several weeks... If found guilty, the human rights defenders will either face fines or administrative arrest of up to 15 days.'⁶²

11.2.13 The World Organisation Against Torture reported that:

'Georgian law enforcement authorities arbitrarily arrested seven activists peacefully exercising their right to protest in front of the parliament building in capital Tbilisi on June 2, 2023...

'Among the seven detainees, one was holding a copy of the Georgian constitution, and another was holding a blank sheet of paper at the protest action. Some protesters were holding banners where they modified the first name of Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, resulting in a pronunciation that resembled an inappropriate word. The police damaged or confiscated these banners during the arrests, used excessive force, and failed to provide the grounds for detentions, as well as to explain detainees their rights. Moreover, the lawyers of the detainees were not informed about the

⁶² FIDH, '[Georgia: End Arbitrary Prosecution and Protect Freedom of Expression](#)', 23 June 2023

whereabouts of their clients and were not allowed to see them in the first hours following their arrest.’⁶³

11.2.14 The right-wing, anti-Western group, Alt-Info has dramatically expanded its presence in Georgia and in the summer of 2021 was one of the key forces organising anti-queer pogroms in Tbilisi in response to attempts to hold a Pride event in the city. Eurasianet reported in March 2023:

‘The resulting violence left dozens of journalists injured, one of whom later died. Police largely stood aside during the violence. While they ultimately detained many suspects in the attacks, no charges have been brought against the figures who were documented as having incited the mobs. That sense of impunity has hung over the rise of the Conservative Movement, as locals who have protested the appearance of its offices in their communities have received violent threats in return.’⁶⁴

11.2.15 Eurasianet further reported:

‘The protests [involving Alt-Info] have had varying effects. In Khulo, an alpine community in southwestern Georgia’s region of Adjara, the group was evicted from its newly rented office after the landlord learned what the group did and stood for. In Kobuleti, a seaside town in the same region, March 22 protests against Alt-Info erupted into physical confrontation, with activists saying they were attacked by an aggressive group of men for demonstrating against the party. Protesters against a local branch in Mestia, the main town of the mountainous northwestern region of Svaneti, also reported being physically attacked.

‘Particular concerns have been raised around the safety of Samira Bayramova, an ethnic Azerbaijani activist who spray painted the flags of Ukraine and the European Union on the walls of the Conservative Movement [a political party launched by the group Alt-Info] office in Marneuli, in the southern region of Kvemo Kartli where many Azerbaijanis live. ... Police have opened an investigation into threats against the activist, but nobody has been held responsible so far, reported the watchdog group Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association. In a statement, the group argued that the impunity the far-right groups have enjoyed since last summer’s violence has encouraged the latest threats and acts of violence while also eroding trust in law enforcement.’⁶⁵

11.2.16 On 9 April 2023, Voice of America (VoA) reported:

‘Demonstrators gathered outside the Georgian parliament for a rally organized by the country’s main opposition force, the United National Movement (UNM), founded by jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili. Protesters waved Georgian, Ukrainian and European Union flags and held a huge banner that read "For European future." The crowd chanted "Long live Misha!" referring by his diminutive to Saakashvili, who is serving a six-year jail term for abuse of power — a conviction that international rights groups have condemned as politically motivated. Doctors have said the pro-Western reformer is at risk of death from a litany of serious conditions which he developed in custody. The ruling Georgian Dream party’s government faces

⁶³ WOAT, ‘[Georgia: End arbitrary prosecutions and protect freedom of expression](#)’, 22 June 2023

⁶⁴ Eurasianet, ‘[Rise of Georgian alt-right group sparks fear of unrest](#)’, 23 March 2022

⁶⁵ Eurasianet, ‘[Rise of Georgian alt-right group sparks fear of unrest](#)’, 23 March 2022

accusations of jailing opponents, silencing independent media, covertly collaborating with the Kremlin and leading the country astray from its EU membership path.

'Addressing the rally, UNM chairman Levan Khabeishvili listed protesters' demands that included the "liberation of political prisoners and implementing reforms" demanded by the EU as a condition for granting Tbilisi a formal candidate status. ... The ruling party has insisted it remains committed to Georgia's EU and NATO membership bids, enshrined in the constitution, and supported — according to opinion polls — by 80% of the population. But party leaders have stepped up anti-Western rhetoric after Washington last week banned visas for four powerful judges in Georgia over alleged corruption.'⁶⁶

(See [Freedom of assembly](#) and [Freedom of expression](#))

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11.3 Activists and critics

11.3.1 On 22 June 2023 Eurasianet reported:

'An intensifying series of physical attacks has raised concerns that Georgia's ruling force may be resorting to violence to silence its critics. Numerous incidents were reported over the past few days where those critical of the government were attacked or threatened by individuals or violent groups. The attacks are believed to be incited and even orchestrated by the authorities in their attempts to stigmatize and intimidate opponents, a trend that saw a particular [boost following the defeat](#) of the ruling party's controversial foreign agent laws.'⁶⁷ (See [Protesters](#))

11.3.2 On 28 June 2023, Open Caucasus Media (OC Media), a multimedia platform providing news from North and South Caucasus, reported:

'After two government critics were attacked, the ruling Georgian Dream party have blamed the country's political opposition, civil society groups, and foreign embassies for inspiring Georgians to harass and attack government critics. Misha Mshvildadze, a prominent government critic and co-founder of the opposition-aligned TV station, Formula, was reportedly assaulted yesterday at a Carrefour supermarket in Tbilisi. The attack is currently [under investigation](#) by Georgia's Interior Ministry.

'Speaking on Formula, Mshvildadze [stated](#) that at least one unidentified man snuck up on him from behind and punched him in the face, and that the attacker mentioned his 'swearing at the Patriarch'. The TV anchor, who was pictured with bruises on his face following the incident, said the man continued to hit him after he fell.

'In recent years, "disrespecting" the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Ilia II, has become a commonly cited excuse for those attacking and harassing critics of the Church and of the Georgian-Dream-led government.'⁶⁸

11.3.3 Civil Georgia, reporting on 28 June 2023, noted:

⁶⁶ (VoA), '[Thousands Rally in Georgia's Tbilisi Against Government](#)', 9 April 2023

⁶⁷ Eurasianet, '[Georgian government accused of promoting political violence](#)', 22 June 2023

⁶⁸ OC Media, '[Two government critics reportedly attacked in Georgia](#)', 28 June 2023

'The last ten days saw at least six attacks on the ruling party critics. While officially they were carried out by "outraged citizens," the ruling party condones and encourages them. ... The Georgian Dream has resorted to such tactics in the past. After GDs came to power, prominent figures of the departing administration [were attacked](#) in the streets. PM Garibashvili's statement on July 5, 2021, was seen by many as condoning violence against the media and the LGBT community, which ended in a [violent pogrom](#). Attempts to dehumanize opponents were often made before elections when GD-affiliated groups traditionally put up "[blood-stained posters](#)" to vilify the opposition and [civic activists](#).'⁶⁹

11.3.4 The Human Rights Center (Georgia), in its - [Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged Political Motives - Summary Report](#), 29 June 2023, provided details of the outcomes of the monitoring of 31 court proceedings of cases regarding criminal and administrative offenses including civil litigations with alleged political motives between 1 July 2022 and 25 June 2023⁷⁰.

11.3.5 In its Summary Report conclusion, the HRC, stated:

'Like in the previous reporting period, the monitoring of the court hearings and evaluation of the information directly related to the cases, identified for the current year the flaws in the judicial system. These include the following: non-uniform approach of the court to respecting the time-limits stipulated by the procedural law, technical malfunctions of the courtrooms, delays in opening the hearings, and adjournment of the proceedings. Further, the monitoring found the problems with respecting the right to healthcare of the convicted/accused persons, and challenges with fully adhering to the principles of equality of arms and adversarial proceedings, and respecting the right of the accused to prompt justice, etc...

'The proceedings on cases of administrative offenses face the significant challenges in terms of the following issues: ensuring public hearings, disseminating information about the hearing in an appropriate manner, frequently unsubstantiated, "general-purpose" written requests by the administrative body requesting the court to hold persons administratively liable, which, oftentimes, are not supported by a body of objective and convincing evidence.'⁷¹

(See [Detention and prosecution](#), [Freedom of assembly](#) and [Freedom of expression](#))

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11.4 Journalists, bloggers and online activists

11.4.1 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), in its 2023 World Press Freedom Index (WPF), noted:

'Verbal and physical assaults on journalists are frequent, including by senior government officials, especially during election campaigns. A sustained and brutal assault on 50 reporters during homophobic counter-demonstrations in July 2021, in front of impassive [s]ecurity forces, marked an unprecedented

⁶⁹ Civil Georgia, '[Ruling Party Condone Violent Assaults on Critics](#)', 28 June 2023

⁷⁰ HRC, '[Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged Political Motives ...](#)', 29 June 2023

⁷¹ HRC, '[Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged ...](#)' (page 50), 29 June 2023

setback. The lack of transparency and progress in the investigation of the event, as well as the three and a half year sentence for the director of an opposition TV channel, Nika Gvaramia, speak to the impunity enjoyed by those who commit crimes against journalists.⁷²

11.4.2 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted: ‘In May 2022, Nika Gvaramia, head of the opposition television channel Mtavari Arkhi (Main Channel), was imprisoned on charges of abusing his position while working at Rustavi 2 TV station. The charges were widely viewed as politically motivated. ... There continue to be reports of officials denying access to journalists critical of government.’⁷³

11.4.3 The USSD HR Report 2022 noted on Nika Gvaramia’s conviction:

‘Amnesty International also stated Gvaramia’s conviction highlighted “mounting concerns over declining media freedom in Georgia.” On May 18, 42 domestic organizations stated, “the imprisonment of Nika Gvaramia is perceived as a warning and threat to other independent media outlets to stop critical coverage of the government’s performance, to cease watchdog activities, and to refrain from the disclosure of facts that are undesirable to the government.” On December 7, following the appeals court decision to uphold Gvaramia’s sentence, the PDO stated that “political motivation is clear” in the case and Article 18 of the European Convention on Human Rights was violated.’⁷⁴

11.4.4 In its World Report 2023, HRW reported:

‘The authorities claimed that [Nika Gvaramia’s] managerial decisions brought less profit to the company. The decision was largely criticized by Georgian civil society as unlawful and politically motivated. Georgia’s public defender argued that a decision by the director of an enterprise, even a harmful one, cannot be subject to criminal liability, and called for the case to be dismissed. In November, the appeals court upheld the decision.

‘There were numerous attacks against journalists and instances of interference in their work. In March, several assailants attacked Ema Gogokhia, a reporter for Mtavari Arkhi, and her cameraman in Zugdidi, as they were filming municipal employees removing a drawing of the Ukrainian flag from the façade of a political party’s office. The Special Investigation Service (SIS) launched an investigation into the interference.

‘In June, two assailants attacked TV Pirveli cameraman Murman Zoidze in Batumi. SIS arrested two people in connection with the incident.

‘In July, the Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into an incident in which an MP allegedly physically attacked TV Pirveli’s founder, Vakhtang Tsereteli.

‘In May, three journalists fired by Georgian Public Broadcasting, the national broadcaster, accused the station’s management of censorship and “gross interference” in editorial policy, particularly over materials critical of Russia. Days later, another former journalist from the station made similar

⁷² RSF, ‘[World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\): Georgia](#)’, 2023

⁷³ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (D1), 2023

⁷⁴ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (Section 2A), 20 March 2023

accusations.⁷⁵

11.4.5 The USSD HR Report 2022 further noted:

‘Journalists, NGOs, and the international community raised serious concerns regarding the government’s respect for freedom of expression [See [Freedom of expression](#)]. ... A significant number of journalists reported during the year that government officials either prevented them from covering public events or did not provide them with key public information when requested. For example, on March 19, TV Pirveli journalist Natalia Kajaia was not allowed to enter Parliament soon after having posed critical questions to Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili. On March 22, opposition-leaning media were not allowed to enter the National Gallery during Minister of Culture Tea Tsulukiani’s official visit. In September Business Media Group journalist Telara Gelantia was not allowed to cover a government meeting...

‘The number of cases of violence against journalists due to their reporting decreased compared with 2021, when more than 50 journalists were assaulted in July. According to the Media Advocacy Coalition and the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, there were 11 cases of such attacks as of December 12. Examples of such attacks included the June 30 physical assault of Vato Tsereteli, the founder and owner of TV Pirveli, by the chair of Parliament’s Legal Committee, Anri Okhanashvili. The Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into the incident. Okhanashvili stated he was provoked by Tsereteli, who “got the response he deserved.” The Coalition for Media Advocacy expressed concern over the violent act and called on the ruling party for accountability and to end attacks on journalists.’⁷⁶

11.4.6 Citing other sources, the EUAA Report of 18 August 2022, stated:

‘Under Georgian law, political parties are not permitted to own media outlets, although owners “often have close ties to political leaders”. Media criticism of authorities is reportedly responded to “with censorship, raids and intimidation.” On 7 June 2022, the European Parliament published a resolution on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia, stating that the Parliament had serious concerns about the “aggressive rhetoric and discriminatory treatment towards the media representatives by members of the Georgian government and of the ruling party”, and noting that there is an ongoing “divisive rhetoric” from the Georgian Dream party that “weakens Georgia’s resilience.”⁷⁷

11.4.7 Civil Georgia, reported in an article dated 20 September 2022:

‘On 17 September, “TV Pirveli” ... published the leaked materials that seemingly document massive surveillance of the opposition parties by the State Security Service of Georgia (SSG), at the behest and for the benefit of the ruling “Georgian Dream.” The journalists say the video surveillance files, audio messages of conversations between undercover agents and their bosses, electronic messages and other materials mostly cover the period of 2020-2021, with some files extending to 2022.

‘The files, recordings, photos and videos shown in the media report

⁷⁵ HRW, [World Report 2023: Georgia](#), 27 July 2023

⁷⁶ USSD, [‘HR Report 2022: Georgia’](#) (Section 2A), 20 March 2023

⁷⁷ EUAA, [‘Migration Drivers Report: Georgia as a Country of Origin’](#) (page 9), 18 August 2022

document surveillance of most opposition parties. More specifically:

- **‘The United National Movement**: Khatia Dekanoidze, was reportedly under close personal surveillance, not only while on political functions (party meetings, field encounters with supporters) but also in her personal life (conversations with her mother, visits to doctors). The surveillance was both undercover tailing, and electronic...
- **“Lelo for Georgia”**: political party **created by businessman Mamuka Khazaradze** in September 2019, apparently was closely surveilled, especially through infiltration among the activists and volunteers which were hired during the launch. The infiltrated agents, mostly students operating on orders of their SSG handlers, recorded videos of Khazaradze in private settings with his party colleagues, such as restaurants, as well as during the meetings with supporters and activists held to establish the new party branches in provinces. Infiltrators also targeted the closed social media groups created by the party, to report on internal discussions.
- **“For Georgia”**: according to the report, following the defection of the ex-prime minister Giorgi Gakharia, the operatives scrambled to infiltrate the closed social media group of his supporters and worked overtime to identify the potential members of the nascent “For Georgia” party.
- ‘Additionally, surveillance of **Giga Bokeria**, leader of the European Georgia, **Shalva Natelashvili**, leader of the Labour Party, **Giorgi Vashadze** “Strategy Agmashenebeli”, **Zurab Japaridze** of Girchi is also reported. This happened through tailing, and illicit recordings, sometimes during highly private occasions, such as – in Natelashvili’s case – family funerals. Giorgi Vashadze was, allegedly, also tailed during his visits in Ukraine.
- ‘One case of surveillance of the US **Ambassador Kelly Degnan** by two undercover agents was reported, during the opening ceremony of the new McDonalds fast food outlet.
- ‘The report said the recordings also show, that the “Georgian Dream” leaders were also under surveillance, but no specific corroborating evidence was shown.’⁷⁸

(See [Freedom of expression](#))

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11.5 Detention and prosecution

11.5.1 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted: ‘Human rights watchdogs and the ombudsman have expressed concern about the physical abuse of detainees during arrest and in police custody... Violence and harsh conditions in prisons remain problems.’⁷⁹

11.5.2 The USSD HR Report 2022 noted:

‘The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government’s observance of these prohibitions was

⁷⁸ Civil Georgia, [Reports of Massive Surveillance, Infiltration of Opposition ...](#), 20 September 2022

⁷⁹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (F3), 2023

uneven, and reports of selective or arbitrary arrests continued...

'[Non-governmental Organisations] NGOs and opposition parties stated the government held political prisoners and detainees. The [Public Defenders Office] PDO, NGOs, opposition parties, and international groups including Amnesty International and the Committee to Protect Journalists criticized the May 16 prison sentence of Nika Gvaramia, head of opposition-leaning TV channel Mtavari Arkhi as politically motivated. Opposition party members considered former President Mikheil Saakashvili to be a political detainee.'⁸⁰

11.5.3 The USSD HR Report 2022 further noted:

'The PDO, some media watchers, NGOs, and opposition parties expressed suspicion that a number of other criminal prosecutions against critical media outlets or their owners also were politically motivated. Such prosecutions included the 2019 charging of Avtandil Tsereteli, the father of TV Pirveli's founder, for his alleged involvement in a money laundering case, along with the founder of TBC Bank and his deputy, Badri Japaridze, who were both leaders of the opposition party Lelo. In January Tbilisi City Court found the three guilty of fraud and sentenced them to seven years in prison. The court vacated the sentence due to the statute of limitations. Observers expressed concern that convicting someone of a crime past the statute of limitations and then vacating the sentence was highly unusual. On February 15, ruling party MPs voted to terminate Japaridze's parliamentary mandate based on his conviction.

'In August the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), in response to a ruling party appeal, fined Mtavari Arkhi 118,688 Georgian lari (GEL) (\$42,300) [£36,500⁸¹] and issued warnings to critical media outlets Formula TV and TV Pirveli for airing a clip titled "Going Home to Europe," which the GNCC considered a political ad that could only be aired during a pre-election period. ...Mtavari noted the ad did not appear to meet the legal definition of a political ad because it did not encourage a vote for or against a candidate or an issue on a ballot. Watchdogs considered the fine "alarming" and "incompatible with the management principles of a modern, democratic state"... Two court cases with freedom of expression implications remained pending [in the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court].'⁸² (See [Freedom of expression](#) and [Television and journalism](#))

11.5.4 On 2 February 2023, the BBC reported:

'World leaders have called for the release of jailed former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili after he appeared emaciated at a court hearing. Mr Saakashvili - who appeared via video at Wednesday's hearing - was sent to prison in 2021. He was convicted of committing abuses of power while in office. He says the charges were politically motivated. Since his imprisonment, his health has deteriorated significantly and he has alleged he was poisoned by authorities.

'Mr Saakashvili was arrested in 2021 after making a surprise return to Georgia by smuggling himself into the country on a ferry from Ukraine. He called for mass anti-government demonstrations, but was quickly arrested by

⁸⁰ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (Section 1D &1E), 20 March 2023

⁸¹ Xe.com, '[118,688 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#)', 6 October 2023

⁸² USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (Section 2A), 20 March 2023

Georgian authorities. He was convicted in absentia of abuses of power while in office. He was imprisoned in October 2021 and then moved to a private clinic in May last year. The Georgian Justice Minister Rati Bregadze said he was self-harming and his condition was a result of his refusal to eat...

'Empathy, an organisation supporting victims of torture in Georgia, alleged on 1 December that Mr Saakashvili had been diagnosed with illnesses "incompatible with imprisonment" and that Georgian and foreign medical experts had found evidence of heavy-metal poisoning.

'On Thursday, the European Parliament debated Mr Saakashvili's health, where the European Commissioner for Budget and Administration, Johannes Hahn, said the Georgian government was obliged to provide him appropriate healthcare.'⁸³

11.5.5 On 7 April 2023 Politico published a response from Mikheil Saakashvili about his treatment whilst in detention: 'I have been systematically tortured, physically and psychologically, and there is currently evidence of heavy metal poisoning in my body. I now suffer from a bewildering array of over 20 serious illnesses, all of which developed in confinement.'⁸⁴

11.5.6 The Guardian reported on 16 April 2023:

'Locked up in a Tbilisi hospital, [former president] Mikheil Saakashvili is slowly wasting away... Photographs and video of Saakashvili in hospital show him gaunt and confused. A recent report from independent experts suggested his health has deteriorated severely and he will soon face irreversible organ damage. Since his arrest, he says, his weight has halved to 60kg. ... His team also claim the former president has been poisoned with heavy metals in prison and is subjected to regular torture. Asked to elaborate on these allegations, Saakashvili wrote: "Was beaten up. Taken to prison 'hospital' with most violent criminals and dragged through their [illegible] where they were non-stop spitting and then during 10 days couldn't switch off light as they would immediately scream death threats."⁸⁵ (see also [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#) for further information on Mikheil Saakashvili, and [Judiciary](#))

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Section updated: 31 October 2023

12. State bodies

12.1 Police

12.1.1 In 2021, the Global Organised Crime Index (GOCI) stated that, 'Major reforms have almost weeded out low-level corruption in law enforcement; however, as with the judicial system, law enforcement bodies lack independence from political interference. Reportedly, law enforcement agencies, including specialized units, are often understaffed and lack the ability and experience to effectively respond to organized crime threats.'⁸⁶

12.1.2 The USSD HR Report 2022 noted: 'The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Security Service have primary responsibility for law enforcement and

⁸³ BBC, '[Mikheil Saakashvili: The former Georgian president's condition has ...](#)', 2 February 2023

⁸⁴ Politico, '[I am a political prisoner in Georgia, and I am dying](#)', 7 April 2023

⁸⁵ The Guardian, '[Gaunt and ghostly, Georgia's jailed ex-president nears death in ...](#)', 16 April 2023

⁸⁶ GOCI, '[Organised Crime Index Profile: Georgia](#)' (page 4), 2021

the maintenance of public order. ... There were indications that at times government officials did not maintain exclusive control of domestic security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.’⁸⁷

12.1.3 In its World Report 2023, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported:

‘Impunity for abuses by law enforcement persisted. In December 2021, parliament hastily abolished the State Inspector’s Service, an independent body investigating abuses by law enforcement, instead establishing two new separate bodies tasked with probing abuse of power by law enforcement and monitoring data privacy, respectively.

‘The sudden decision followed the opening of an investigation by the state inspector into possible ill-treatment and violations of data protection laws regarding jailed ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili. The Council of Europe commissioner for human rights, Dunja Mijatović, called on parliament to reject the bill as it lacked “proper consultation with the relevant stakeholders [and] undermined the independent functioning of the body.”’⁸⁸

12.1.4 The report further noted instances of alleged ill-treatment by the police:

‘By October, the Ombudswoman’s Office received 70 complaints of ill-treatment by prison staff or police. The authorities have been investigating 61 of them. The office petitioned the investigative body to launch investigations into the remaining cases. None had resulted in criminal prosecution at time of writing...

‘In May, Giorgi Mzhavanadze, one of the leaders of Shame Movement, a youth protest group, alleged that policemen at a Tbilisi police station handcuffed and physically and verbally abused him after he arrived to collect a fine notice. The Special Investigation Service, which investigates instances of abuse of office, opened an investigation, while the Interior Ministry claimed it had detained Mzhavanadze for disobedience.’⁸⁹

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12.2 Judiciary

12.2.1 The Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order noted in an August 2023 report to the UN Human Rights Council that ‘The Independent Expert is concerned about allegations of the lack of independence of the judiciary, in particular the role of the High Council of Justice in the appointment and control of judges. The Independent Expert welcomes the efforts aimed at judicial reform and encourages all concerned parties to work towards the conclusion of the reform process.’⁹⁰

12.2.2 The PDO 2021 annual report noted: ‘Similar to the previous years, administration of prompt and effective justice remains a significant challenge. The terms for decision-making in the courts of general jurisdiction and the Constitutional Court do not meet the standards set by the right to a fair

⁸⁷ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (Executive Summary), 20 March 2023

⁸⁸ HRW, [World Report 2023: Georgia](#), 12 January 2023

⁸⁹ HRW, [World Report 2023: Georgia](#), 12 January 2023

⁹⁰ OHCHR, ‘[Visit to Georgia Report of the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Livingstone Sewanyana*, **](#)’, 11 August 2023

trial'.⁹¹

- 12.2.3 The European Commission (EC), in its Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Commission Opinion on Georgia's application for membership of the European Union, 17 June 2022, noted:

'Four successive waves of reform have improved the legal framework regarding the functioning of the judiciary and the capacity and organisation of the Georgian justice system. However, progress on justice reforms and their implementation has now stalled and some backward steps have been taken. Public perception of the independence of the judiciary has deteriorated. Georgia has not yet adopted a strategic framework for justice reform post-2020.

'The constitutional and legislative frameworks, in principle, guarantee the independence of the judiciary and its impartiality, including specific guarantees for judges. Codes of ethics for judges and prosecutors are in place, as is a complaint mechanism. A system of verification of asset declarations of judges and prosecutors exists, but its practical implementation needs fine-tuning...

'... The number of judges (329) and the number of prosecutors (414) is low compared to the European averages of 21 judges/12 prosecutors per 100,000 inhabitants (9 judges and 12 prosecutors per 100,000 inhabitants for Georgia). Judges are trained at the High School of Justice, which is assessed as adequate. Prosecutors are trained by the General Prosecutor's Office.'⁹²

- 12.2.4 The USSD HR Report 2022 noted:

'Although the constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, there remained indications of interference in judicial independence and impartiality. Judges were vulnerable to political pressure from within and outside the judiciary on cases involving politically sensitive subjects or individuals.

'The PDO, the nongovernmental Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary, and the international community continued to raise concerns regarding a lack of judicial independence. During the year they highlighted problems, including the influence of a group of judges primarily consisting of High Council of Justice (HCOJ) members and court chairs that allegedly stifled critical opinions within the judiciary and obstructed proposals to strengthen judicial independence. NGOs referred to this group of influential, well-connected, and nonreformist judges as the "clan." Other problems they highlighted included the impact of the HCOJ's powers on the independence of individual judges, manipulation of the case distribution system, a lack of transparency in the High Council's activities, and shortcomings in the HCOJ's appointments of judges and court chairpersons. In analyzing four waves of judicial reform and other changes in the law since 2013, civil society stakeholders agreed that the reforms were ineffective due to the lack of political will to foster an independent judiciary, since a large majority of positive changes in the law remained

⁹¹ PDO, [Report of the Public Defender of Georgia...](#) (p10), 2021

⁹² EC, '[Communication from the Commission to the European ...](#)' (pages 7 & 8), 17 June 2022

unimplemented or only partially implemented.’⁹³

12.2.5 The report continued:

‘The independence of individual judges remained compromised through levers primarily within the judiciary by an influential group of judges pejoratively referred to as the “clan,” on behalf of the authorities. Such levers included problematic selection, appointment, and disciplinary processes; promotion processes; the lack of authority of individual courts to select their court chairs; manipulation of the randomized case assignment process; transferring judges from one court to another; instructions on how to rule in specific court cases; and pressure. During the year, some former judges publicly stated they had faced pressure from senior judges to rule a particular way in specific court cases.

‘NGOs warned that the authority to select individual court chairs remained with the HCOJ... the HCOJ entrusted the chairmanship position to a closed circle of judges...

‘A lack of transparency in the court system also undermined public trust in the judiciary. Access to court decisions remained restricted since courts ceased publishing decisions in 2020. A 2019 Constitutional Court ruling obliged Parliament to provide public access to court decisions by the standards established by the Court.

‘In addition, there were credible allegations that some influential “clan” members were corrupt... According to [various] reports, some of the country’s most influential judges either failed to fully declare all assets or declared assets that significantly exceeded their declared income.’⁹⁴

12.2.6 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted:

‘Despite ongoing judicial reforms, executive and legislative interference in the courts remains a substantial problem, as does a lack of transparency and professionalism surrounding judicial proceedings.

‘... Over the past five years, Supreme Court nominations have featured criticism of opaque processes and allegations of unqualified nominees, and consequent boycotts of confirmation votes by opposition lawmakers. In 2022, two judges considered close to the ruling party were elected to the High Council of Justice, following the sudden resignations of two other members. Their election was criticized by opposition parties as reflecting further capture of the judiciary by a small number of influential judges.’⁹⁵

12.2.7 Amnesty International (AI), in its Report for 2022/23 on Georgia noted that:

‘Growing government influence over the judiciary, the use of selective justice and the politically motivated prosecution of political opponents and critical media remained ongoing concerns.’⁹⁶

12.2.8 The USSD HR Report 2022, noted: ‘The constitution and law provide for the right to a fair and public trial. The PDO reported numerous violations of the right to a fair trial, and NGOs noted this right was not enforced in some high-

⁹³ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (Section 1E), 20 March 2023

⁹⁴ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (Section 1E), 20 March 2023

⁹⁵ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (F1), 2023

⁹⁶ AI, ‘[Amnesty International Report 2022/23; The ...](#)’ (Unfair Trials), 27 March 2023

profile, politically sensitive cases.⁹⁷ (See [Detention and prosecution](#))

12.2.9 JAMnews, reporting on 15 May 2023, noted: ‘All international reports say that the judiciary in Georgia is an instrument of political influence.’⁹⁸

12.2.10 Freedom House, in its report - Nations in Transit 2023 - Georgia, stated: ‘The EU recommendations include an effective judicial reform strategy and action plan; addressing political polarization; functioning and independent state institutions; improved fight against corruption...’⁹⁹

12.2.11 The Human Rights Center (Georgia), in its - Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged Political Motives - Summary Report, 29 June 2023, noted: ‘Similar to 2021, challenges persist with respect to compliance with the national and international standards of the right to a fair trial. Moreover, since 2022, the number of court proceedings with alleged political motives involving leaders of political parties, representatives of civil society and media have increased.’¹⁰⁰

(See [Detention and prosecution](#))

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12.3 Corruption

Transparency International (TI), an NGO committed to combating corruption, in its 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks Georgia at 41 out of 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring at 56 out of 100 on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)¹⁰¹.

12.3.1 The below chart shows Transparency International’s ranking and scoring of Georgia from 2018 to 2022 Transparency International¹⁰².

Year	Ranking	Score
2018	41	58
2019	44	56
2020	45	56
2021	45	55
2022	41	56

12.3.2 The European Commission report of June 2022, noted:

‘Georgia has introduced substantial legal reforms regarding anti-corruption, approximating to EU acquis and international norms. It is a participating state of the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the Anti-Corruption Network of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/ACN). Georgia is a party to all key international anti-corruption conventions, including the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC). Corruption remains an issue that requires continued attention.

‘An important number of cases of corruption involving low and-medium level

⁹⁷ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (section 1E), 20 March 2023

⁹⁸ JAMnews, ‘[How the Georgian Judicial System Fell Under Western Sanctions](#)’, 15 May 2023

⁹⁹ FH, ‘[Nations in Transit 2023 – Georgia](#)’ (National Democratic Governance), 24 May 2023

¹⁰⁰ HRC, ‘[Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged ...](#)’ (page 6), 29 June 2023

¹⁰¹ TI, ‘[Corruption Perceptions Index - 2022](#)’

¹⁰² TI, ‘[Corruption Perceptions Index - 2022](#)’

officials have been successfully prosecuted, primarily in the public procurement field...

'There are no specialised law enforcement, prosecution services or specialised courts dealing with the fight against high-level corruption. More needs to be done to strengthen investigations in this area. The anti-corruption entity is part of the State Security Services. Current implementation of the policy is on-going, but the anti-corruption policy in Georgia is negatively affected by the fact that the National Anti-corruption Council has not met since 2019. As of the beginning of 2021, the secretariat of the Council was moved from the Ministry of Justice to the Government Administration and remains understaffed...

'As regards the track record of high-level corruption cases, a total of 28 verdicts have been issued since 2020, out of which 21 were convicted for corruption, including a deputy minister, deputy district prosecutor, governors and members of local councils.'¹⁰³

12.3.3 Transparency International reported on 21 April 2023:

'On November 30, 2022, the Parliament of Georgia passed the package of legislative amendments, which envisaged the creation of the Anti-Corruption Bureau. According to the new legislation, the distribution of the functions of the state bodies was changed, and part of the anti-corruption functions was unified under a single institution. The Anti-Corruption Bureau's key responsibilities are as follows: monitoring of political party finances, monitoring of asset declarations of public officials, and drafting the National Anti-corruption Strategy and Action Plan.'¹⁰⁴

12.3.4 Transparency International (TI), in its report - CPI 2022 for Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Growing security risks and authoritarianism threaten progress against corruption, 31 January 2023, noted:

'... [I]n recent years, Transparency International Georgia's monitoring [identified](#) dozens of cases of alleged high-level corruption that have not been investigated; the nature, scope and increasing number of these cases point to an alarming conclusion that high-level corruption in Georgia is taking the form of kleptocracy, where officials systematically use political power to appropriate the country's wealth and undermine all critical voices, including political opposition, media and civil society. Government representatives have even resorted to aggressive rhetoric against civil society that exposes corruption.'¹⁰⁵

12.3.5 The USSD HR Report 2022, also noted:

'As of September 30, 90 public servants had been charged with corruption, including 55 employed at local municipality administrative agencies. Cases included five senior local officials, including the first deputy head of the SSSG [State Security Service of Georgia], one mayor, one city council head, and one city council member. Investigations remained open in two high-profile corruption cases involving two former ministers: Dimitry Kumsishvili and Zurab Alavidze. Some observers considered the investigations politically motivated. The investigations lacked transparency, and authorities did not

¹⁰³ EC, '[Communication from the Commission to the European ...](#)' (page 8), 17 June 2022

¹⁰⁴ TI, '[Analysis of the Law on the Fight against Corruption](#)', 21 April 2023

¹⁰⁵ TI, '[CPI 2022 for Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Growing security risks and ...](#)', 31 January 2023

update the public on their progress.’¹⁰⁶

12.3.6 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted:

‘Corruption persists in form of nepotism and cronyism in government hiring and procurement. The lack of independence among law enforcement bodies and the judiciary impedes the effective application of anticorruption laws. Successful cases against high-ranking officials and those close to them remain rare. The State Inspector’s Service, a key body responsible for investigating official corruption, was disbanded in late 2021, with the initiative launched in the parliament as its outspoken leader was on maternity leave. An anticorruption body proposed in parliament in 2022 by GD was criticized by the opposition and good-governance groups over appointment procedures that failed to guarantee independence from the ruling party.’¹⁰⁷

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12.4 Avenues of redress

12.4.1 Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted:

‘The law guarantees due process, but associated safeguards are not always respected. The ombudsman’s office has reported a failure to fully implement Constitutional Court rulings on due process matters, administrative delays in court proceedings, the violation of the accused’s right to a presumption of innocence, failure to observe rules surrounding detention and interrogation, and the denial of access to a lawyer upon arrest. Multiple government opponents have faced prosecutions in recent years that were widely seen as selective or politically motivated.’¹⁰⁸ (See [Judiciary](#))

12.4.2 The Freedom House report further noted: ‘Human rights watchdogs and the ombudsman have ... noted the lack of an independent system for supervising police conduct and addressing claims of mistreatment. ... A 2018 law established the State Inspector’s Service (SIS), which was tasked with investigating police abuses. In December 2021, the government passed legislation to replace the SIS with two entities, which the state inspector described as “punishment of the service for its independence.”’¹⁰⁹

12.4.3 The USSD noted the government took attempts to investigate some officials for human rights violations, but impunity persisted¹¹⁰.

12.4.4 The BTI 2022 Country Report noted: ‘...[The] UNM called for a “storm on the parliament” on 20 - 21 June 2019. Georgian riot police stopped the protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas. While demonstrators were sentenced, no formal investigation of law enforcement was launched.’¹¹¹

12.4.5 The BTI 2022 Country Report further added:

‘The State Inspector’s Office (SIO), an independent body tasked with investigating abuses committed by law enforcement and established in 2018, finally became operational in November 2019. According to Human Rights Watch 2021, by August 2020, the SIO had received over 1,300 reports of

¹⁰⁶ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (section 4), 20 March 2023

¹⁰⁷ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (C2), 2023

¹⁰⁸ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (F2), 2023

¹⁰⁹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (F3), 2023

¹¹⁰ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (Executive Summary), 20 March 2023

¹¹¹ BTI, ‘[BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia](#)’ (page 11), 23 February 2022

alleged abuses by law enforcement and other officials. It launched criminal investigations in 168 cases, mostly into abuse of authority, but also inhuman and degrading treatment. However, analyzing its first annual performance, NGOs doubt its independence, since it does not initiate investigations, but relies on a supervising prosecutor. Its narrow mandate excludes any authority to investigate possible crimes committed by the minister of internal affairs or the head of the State Security Service. Furthermore, its investigative jurisdiction does not encompass crimes committed by law enforcement, because here it lacks procedural precedence.

‘The lack of accountability for law enforcement abuses persists, particularly with regard to incidents that occurred before the SIO became operational. Investigations into the June 2019 protests at the parliament remained largely one-sided. The Public Defender’s Office (PDO) found that the investigation “only focused on offenses committed by rank-and-file police officers but failed to objectively or fully assess command responsibility.”¹¹²

12.4.6 Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), reported in January 2022:

‘Frustrated by a lack of justice at home, many victims of alleged police brutality in Georgia have turned to the ECHR [European Convention on Human Rights]. "Cases have been on the shelf for years, where there are cases of violence against citizens by police officers, and Georgia has already lost a number of cases in Strasbourg due to the fact that such cases are not effectively investigated here," Eka Kobesashvili, a lawyer with the NGO, Human Rights House, told RFE/RL's Georgian Service. Between 2004 and 2021, [the ECHR heard 14 cases](#) concerning alleged police brutality and whether such cases had been properly investigated. In 12 of those cases, the ECHR found that authorities had failed to properly investigate the charges...

‘Efforts to clean up the system recently suffered a setback, activists and others warned, when Georgian Dream used its majority in parliament to pass legislation to abolish the State Inspector's Office, an independent body tasked with investigating police abuse. The party introduced the bill on replacing the office -- tasked with investigating offences by law enforcement, as well as personal data protection cases -- with two new bodies on December 25, 2021. In justifying the action, Mamuka Mdinaraze, a member of the Georgian Dream party, said investigative and personal data protection functions, unified under the former agency, were "not compatible." On January 13, the controversial bill was signed into law by Georgian President Salome Zurbishvili, despite appeals by NGOs and Western governments to reject it.’¹¹³

12.4.7 Amnesty International (AI), in its Report for 2022/23 on Georgia, opined on the abolishment of the State Inspector’s Service to investigate human rights violations by the police and replaced with two new agencies: ‘The moves were criticized by civil society as leading to less effective and less independent agencies, negatively impacting on the state’s ability to effectively investigate human rights violations by police, including allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and deaths in custody, or to ensure justice

¹¹² BTI, ‘[BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia](#)’ (page 14), 23 February 2022

¹¹³ RFE/RL, ‘[Alleged Police Beating Of Deaf Boy In Tbilisi Shocks Nation, ...](#)’, 29 January 2022

for these crimes.¹¹⁴

- 12.4.8 The USSD HR Report 2022 stated: Lack of accountability ... continued for the inappropriate police use of force against journalists and protesters during June 2019 demonstrations...¹¹⁵

(See [Detention and prosecution](#) and [Police](#))

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Section updated: 31 October 2023

13. Societal freedoms and activities

13.1 Freedom of assembly

- 13.1.1 Article 25 of the [Constitution](#) allows for freedom of assembly¹¹⁶. Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted: 'Freedom of assembly is upheld unevenly, with police sometimes responding to demonstrations with excessive force. In 2022, there were large-scale rallies in favor of Georgia's EU [European Union] membership bid, and against the authorities for their failure to secure EU candidate status.'¹¹⁷

- 13.1.2 The USSD HR Report 2022, noted: 'Human rights organizations expressed concern, however, regarding provisions in the law, including the requirement that political parties and other organizations give five days' notice to local authorities to assemble in a public area, thereby precluding spontaneous demonstrations. The PDO and NGOs reported that police sometimes restricted, ineffectively managed, or failed to protect freedom of assembly.'¹¹⁸

(See [Protestors](#))

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13.2 Freedom of expression

- 13.2.1 Article 19 of the [Constitution](#) allows for freedom of expression¹¹⁹. According to Freedom House, freedom of speech is generally permitted, but the government frequently acts aggressively towards critical journalists and has put pressure on media outlets that are hostile towards it¹²⁰. The USSD HR Report noted that, in its report covering 2021, the Public Defender's Office observed that the absence of 'proper statistics' on crimes against journalists in the nation made it difficult to understand the scope of the issue¹²¹.

- 13.2.2 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom on the Net 2021, noted:

'There are few laws that assign criminal or civil penalties for online expression, but online journalists and activists can be sued for defamation, and a law related to incitement is vulnerable to being abused to prosecute people for legitimate online activities. Defamation was decriminalized in 2004, but the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression and the Law on

¹¹⁴ AI, '[Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The ...](#)' (Torture and other ill-treatment), 27 March 2023

¹¹⁵ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (Executive Summary), 20 March 2023

¹¹⁶ CoE, '[Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#)', 27 May 2004

¹¹⁷ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (E1), 2023

¹¹⁸ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (section 2B), 20 March 2023

¹¹⁹ CoE, '[Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#)', 27 May 2004

¹²⁰ FH, '[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)' (D1), 2023

¹²¹ USSD, '[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)' (section 2A), 20 March 2023

Electronic Communications provide for civil penalties for those found guilty of making defamatory statements online...

‘Georgians are generally free to express themselves online without fear of legal penalties, but a number of prosecutions for online activity raised concerns in the past. The authorities periodically investigate internet users who threaten violence online, and civil society groups say their response can be disproportionate.’¹²²

(See [Protestors](#), [Activists and critics](#), and [Detention and prosecution](#))

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13.3 Social media

13.3.1 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom on the Net 2021, noted:

‘The online media environment in Georgia is increasingly diverse, and content on a wide range of topics is available. ... Although the Georgian online audience has grown significantly in recent years, there are few bloggers who create content that influences the political debate or sparks widespread discussion online. In general, most of the political debates and discussions are held on Facebook through public and private groups...

‘According to 2019 CRRC [Caucasus Research Resource Center] survey results, 65 percent of respondents use the internet to access social media platforms. Facebook is the most popular platform in Georgia, especially for political discussions. Bloggers and journalists increasingly use Facebook to share their content and engage readers on current events. Activists and others also use it as a tool for discussion about political and social developments. ... However, television remains the dominant medium. IREX [A nonprofit organisation committed to global development and education] notes that “the largest national broadcasters have become blatantly partisan and have exacerbated the country’s divisions...

‘During the coverage period, online platforms, especially Facebook, were effectively used to organize protests and mobilize around a number of issues. Although the COVID-19 pandemic limited the size and scale of these protests, activists continued to use online tools to raise concerns about ongoing political events.’¹²³

13.3.2 Freedom House further added: ‘State surveillance of internet activities threatens Georgians’ privacy rights. The government has reportedly monitored opposition figures, independent journalists, and exiles from other countries living in Georgia.’¹²⁴

13.3.3 The USSD HR Report 2022 noted:

‘The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, but concerns remained regarding unauthorized surveillance.

‘There were credible allegations the ruling party employed bots and trolls to manipulate social media discourse about democracy and NGOs advocating democratic reforms. For example, in a May 22 op-ed on news website civil.ge, analyst Hans Gutbrod wrote, “Government-affiliated outlets and bots

¹²² FH, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2021](#)’ (C2 & C3), 21 September 2021

¹²³ FH, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2021](#)’ (B7 & B8), 21 September 2021

¹²⁴ FH, ‘[Freedom on the Net 2021](#)’ (C5), 21 September 2021

flood social media with hateful messaging, much of it antidemocratic and anti-Western.” In a September 15 civil.ge interview, TI Georgia Executive Director Eka Gigauri said, “Since the ruling party actively engages its hired ‘experts,’ as well as the social media trolls and bots on an industrial scale in its campaign, perhaps it is achieving some results in terms of public opinion.”¹²⁵

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13.4 Television and journalism

13.4.1 The World Press Freedom Index (WPFI), an annual ranking of countries compiled and published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), ranks Georgia at 77 out of 180 countries, with a score of 61.69 for 2023 based upon the organisation's own assessment of the countries¹²⁶, placing Georgia in the ‘problematic’ category.¹²⁷

13.4.2 RSF’s WPFI described Georgia’s media landscape as:

‘...diverse and, at the same time, highly politically polarised. Manipulation, hate speech and disinformation are widespread in the media, especially on television, the main source of information. Media owners often control editorial content, as seen with Rustavi 2, a TV channel whose editorial line changed completely after it was handed over to a former owner. Regional and community radio stations are growing in strength, while the print media’s readership is in decline and that of online news outlets is on the rise...

‘The country is undergoing a new and serious political crisis following contested legislative elections in October 2020. This environment favours sustained competition for control of television networks. Georgian law prohibits political parties from owning media, but the big networks generally defend the interests of their owners, who often have close ties to political leaders. The same goes for state-owned media, which are subject to interference by the authorities. At the same time, the authorities often refuse to respond to media that criticise them and sometimes resort to censorship, raids, smear campaigns and intimidation.’¹²⁸

13.4.3 Freedom House, in its in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia report, noted: ‘The media environment is pluralistic but highly partisan. Although free expression is broadly allowed, the government is often aggressive toward critical journalists, and has pressured unfriendly media outlets.’¹²⁹

13.4.4 In its report - Nations in Transit 2023 - Georgia, Freedom House stated: The European Parliament ... raised concerns over “serious undermining of media freedom, which is part of the broader trend of democratic backsliding in the country,” and called on the government to take necessary steps.¹³⁰

(See [Detention and prosecution](#))

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13.5 Civil society

¹²⁵ USSD, ‘[HR Report 2022: Georgia](#)’ (section 2A), 20 March 2023

¹²⁶ RSF, ‘[World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\): Georgia](#)’, 2023

¹²⁷ RSF, ‘[Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023](#)’ 2023

¹²⁸ RSF, ‘[World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\): Georgia](#)’, 2023

¹²⁹ FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (D1), 2023

¹³⁰ FH, ‘[Nations in Transit 2023 – Georgia](#)’ (National Democratic Governance), 24 May 2023

13.5.1 According to a European Commission report from June 2022, ‘Georgia is well developed, diverse, vibrant and enjoys freedom to operate. The country’s legal framework provides an enabling environment for an active civil society.’¹³¹ Freedom House in its Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia, concurred, stating: ‘Civil society is fairly robust. Some groups are included in policy discussions, though others face political pressure including criticism and exclusion from policy dialogue.’¹³²

13.5.2 The BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia, 23 February 2022, noted:

‘The civil society sector keeps growing in numbers and in capacity but remains primarily concentrated in Tbilisi and Batumi. It has only weak links with the broader population. ... Over the last few years, but especially during the parliamentary election campaigns of 2016 and 2020, the GD ruling party and the government reluctantly collaborated or consulted with civil society. They more often rejected civil society’s criticism as politically biased in an increasingly polarized environment. Due to the relatively weak roots of NGOs in society, they are easily targeted by ruling populist politicians.’¹³³

13.5.3 Freedom House, in its report - Nations in Transit 2023 - Georgia, stated:

‘Amid efforts by governing elites to discredit and exclude them, civil society organizations (CSOs) nonetheless remained actively involved in reforms and government-monitoring processes. The nongovernmental sector was successful not only in participating in significant decisions at the state level, such as public defender selection, but also in affecting government practices such as access to public information. In addition to formal nonprofit organizations, Georgian civil society was also represented in 2022 by informal solidarity movements that emerged from wider society, such as the initiative “Step Towards Europe.”

‘Continuous smear campaigns targeting nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) highlighted an alarming trend of distrust and political attempts at delegitimization. During the year, both active and former members of the ruling GD launched smear campaigns against CSOs over financial transparency, preparing the ground for the proposed law on “foreign agents”. The GD party leader claimed that NGO funding is used to oppose the government and plan a campaign to demand a “technical government.” ...

‘Illiberal, far-right groups remained visible and increasingly represented on the political scene in 2022. These groups publicly engaged in violent, nativist, and homophobic rhetoric. Furthermore, they expressed pro-Russian tendencies and stood at the fore of spreading disinformation on Russia’s war in Ukraine.’¹³⁴

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¹³¹ EC, ‘[Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, ...](#)’ (page 6), 17 June 2022

¹³² FH, ‘[Freedom in the World 2023: Georgia](#)’ (E2), 2023

¹³³ BTI, ‘[BTI 2022 Country Report – Georgia](#)’ (pages 18 & 39), 23 February 2022

¹³⁴ FH, ‘[Nations in Transit 2023 – Georgia](#)’ (Civil Society), 24 May 2023

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

All the COI included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s). Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared and contrasted to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

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Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The Home Office uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Political system
 - Overview
- Legal context
 - Constitution
 - Formation of political parties
- Parliamentary elections
- Political parties
 - Overview
 - Georgian Dream (GD) ruling party
 - United National Movement (UNM)
 - Smaller opposition parties
- State treatment of opponents
 - Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties
 - Protesters
 - Activists and critics
 - Detention and prosecution
- State bodies
 - Police
 - Judiciary
 - Corruption
- Societal freedoms and activities
 - Freedom of assembly
 - Freedom of expression
 - Social media
 - Television and journalism
 - Civil society

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from **4 December 2023**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

Updated county information and assessment

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Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

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Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration
1st Floor
Clive House
70 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EX
Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

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