



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 Kobakhidze, 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 conviction of Nika Gvaramia, head of opposition-leaning TV station in May 2022. However, as reported by the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled out Mikheil Saakashvili's application regarding his ill-treatment and improper medical treatment in the penitentiary system and found that no special circumstances relating to respect for human rights in this case. Also, the widely reported arrest of Nika Melia, the then 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 ECtHR 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.

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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.
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal location is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- a grant of asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave is likely, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely to be certified 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.

This Note does not cover the situation in the Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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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 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).

1.1.4 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.
- 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. 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. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 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 Kobakhidze. 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. 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 people 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 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 have occurred, 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 Ukraine after spending nearly a decade abroad, was convicted on corruption charges and subsequently imprisoned. However, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled out Saakashvili's application regarding his alleged ill-treatment and improper medical treatment in the penitentiary system and found that no special circumstances relating to respect for human rights in this case. 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 then 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 reportedly 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 883 protests and 46 riots in Georgia between 6 October 2021 and 6 October 2023, 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 (then) proposed 'foreign agents' law. Critics, including EU policy leaders, claimed it would limit press and civil society freedom and impact the country's EU candidacy. In response to the public's reaction, the government initially dropped the bill. However, it was enacted on 3 June 2024 (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 [the then] Prime Minister Garibashvili's on 5 July 2021, as reported in an article by Agenda.ge, 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 A person with a well-founded fear of the state is unlikely to obtain protection.
- 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 A person with a well-founded fear of the state is unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 For further guidance on considering internal relocation, 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.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **13 September 2024**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

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

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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 Kobakhidze, former chair of the ruling Georgian Dream party, who was nominated by parliament as prime minister in February 2024 following the resignation of his predecessor, Irakli Garibashvili^{6,7}.

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

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

² FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (A1), 25 April 2024

³ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (A1), 25 April 2024

⁴ CIA, [World Factbook Georgia](#) (Government), 7 August 2024

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

⁶ BBC, [Georgia country profile](#), 4 June 2024

⁷ Politico, [Georgia appoints critic of West as PM](#), 9 February 2024

clash. Since the parliamentary elections of October and November 2020, the stand-off has become yet more intense.⁸

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.’⁹

7.1.6 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 10 March 2023:

‘Polarization among Georgia’s political parties is undergirded by economic polarization, a source of social and political exclusion which reinforces the isolation of citizens from their political parties. In 2022, Georgia’s parties were more divided than ever. They are unable to collaborate or build consensus around demands for jobs, improved healthcare and housing. Economic polarization has led to a stark urban-rural divide and exclusion of ethnic minorities in the regions from political life.

‘The link between Georgia’s political class and the Georgia people is broken. Georgia’s political parties have failed to develop a social and political base among citizens. Differences between the parties are personal rather than ideological. The democratization model promoted by Western governments has been unable to prevent Georgia’s move toward a hybrid or competitive authoritarian regime. Democratic backsliding is a partner of political polarization.’¹⁰

7.1.7 Freedom House (FH), in its report - Nations in Transit 2024 – Georgia, 18 April 2024, noted:

‘Political polarization has been a major problem in recent years and persisted in 2023. The GD’s decision not to lower the 5 percent threshold for representation in Parliament ahead of the 2024 elections could deepen polarization and benefit both the GD and the UNM—the two parties most often accused of deepening political divisions in Georgia. These parties, along with their splinter groups and media allies, exacerbate polarization by demonizing their political opponents and refusing to cooperate with each other. Consequently, societal polarization and bipartisan political radicalization are intertwined in Georgia. Smaller parties struggle to survive due to the intense polarization, as well as the 5 percent threshold. But aside from a few mergers, the opposition appeared to lack a cohesive strategy to win the 2024 elections.’¹¹

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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

⁸ Carnegie Europe, [Divided Georgia: A Hostage to Polarization](#), December 2021

⁹ ECFR, [Lost in the Dream: How the EU can end the political deadlock in Georgia](#), 26 January 2022

¹⁰ EurasiaNet, [Elections Are Not Enough: Georgia Needs a New Model of ...](#), 10 March 2023

¹¹ FH, [Nations in Transit 2024 – Georgia](#), 18 April 2024

social belonging, origin, property and title, place of residence.¹²

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...¹³

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...¹⁴

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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.¹⁵

8.2.2 On 30 December 2023, Civil Georgia, a Tbilisi-based free daily news website run by Georgian non-governmental organisation (NGO) UN Association of Georgia, reported:

'Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder and patron of the ruling Georgian Dream party, has been elected its honorary chairman during the unscheduled party congress today. ... This marks the return of Ivanishvili to at least a semi-formal political role after he announced the decision to [quit politics "for good"](#) in 2021. Georgia is heading into parliamentary elections in the fall of 2024. Ivanishvili's informal role behind the scenes has generated criticism both within the country and abroad about the oligarch pulling the strings of the ruling party leadership. "De-oligarchisation" remains one of the tasks Georgia has to fulfill to advance towards the EU.¹⁶

8.2.3 The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Georgia Parliamentary Elections 26 October 2024: Odihr Needs Assessment Mission Report 20-24 May 2024, 28 June 2024, noted:

'To participate in the elections, parties must first register with the [Central Election Commission] CEC. All political parties met by the [OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights] ODIHR [Needs Assessment

¹² CoE, [Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#), 27 May 2004

¹³ CoE, [Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#), 27 May 2004

¹⁴ CoE, [Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#), 27 May 2004

¹⁵ CoE, [Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#), 27 May 2004

¹⁶ Civil Georgia, [BREAKING: Ivanishvili Elected GD Honorary Chair](#), 30 December 2023

Mission] NAM stated their intention to nominate candidates. Women remain underrepresented in public and political life with only 27 of the current 139 MPs and 3 out of 64 elected mayors being women. Following the 2024 amendments, which removed special legislative measures to promote women's participation, party lists are no longer required to comply with gender quotas. Several parties stated that regardless of this they will try to keep to internal gender quotas voluntarily.¹⁷

(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."¹⁸

- 9.1.2 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, 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.¹⁹

- 9.1.3 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

¹⁷ OSCE, [Georgia Parliamentary Elections 26 October 2024: Odihr Needs ...](#) (page 2), 28 June 2024

¹⁸ OSCE, '[Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR ...](#)' (page 2), 5 March 2021

¹⁹ OSCE, '[Georgia Parliamentary Elections 31 October 2020: ODIHR ...](#)' (pages 4 & 5), 5 March 2021

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” 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.’²⁰

9.1.4 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.’²¹

9.1.5 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), an independent foundation under private law, based in Germany which analyses and compares transformation processes towards democracy and inclusive market economy worldwide, in its 2024 Country Report – Georgia, 19 March 2024 (covering the period from 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, noted:

‘During the 2020 parliamentary elections, the OSCE noted that “fundamental freedoms [...] were respected, but allegations of pressure on voters and blurring of the boundary between the ruling party and the state were pervasive,” which diminished public confidence in the electoral process. Prior to the [October 2020] election, the opposition staged massive protests, prompting a compromise mediated by U.S. and EU ambassadors. This compromise introduced greater elements of a proportional system, with 120 out of the 150 members of parliament now being elected through party lists, as opposed to the previous 75. However, the 2020 elections were burdened by legal shortcomings, a hastily implemented new system, and COVID-related restrictions. These factors ultimately led to the opposition’s refusal to recognize the election results and sparked renewed protests.’²²

9.1.6 The US State Department (USSD), 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Georgia, 23 April 2024, noted:

‘In its March 2021 final report, the OSCE mission assessed the October elections were competitive and, overall, fundamental freedoms were respected but stated “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. The mission particularly highlighted concerns regarding ruling party dominance in election

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

²¹ ECFR, [Lost in the Dream: How the EU can end the political deadlock in Georgia](#), 26 January 2022

²² BTI, [2024 Country Report – Georgia](#) (page 9), 19 March 2024

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.” The OSCE did not observe the November runoff elections, and most domestic observer groups significantly scaled back their observation efforts or did not observe in light of the boycott of the runoffs by opposition parties.²³

9.1.7 Freedom House (FH), in its report - Freedom in the World 2024 - Georgia, 25 April 2024, noted:

‘In the October 2020 parliamentary elections and November runoffs, GD won 90 seats, including all single-member districts. A UNM-led coalition won 36 seats via proportional representation, and seven smaller groups won the remaining seats. Opposition parties boycotted the runoff, which saw 26 percent turnout, the lowest since independence. Opposition members then boycotted Parliament for a time, but by the close of 2022 most had taken their seats.

‘Election observers including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) considered the October 2020 vote competitive but noted shortcomings including ruling-party dominance in election commissions; voting stations crowded by party-affiliated observer groups, mostly linked to GD; campaign-finance rules that disadvantaged new and small parties; and highly polarized media coverage.’²⁴

9.1.8 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 in Georgia, as at August 2024²⁵:

- Citizens
- European Socialists
- For Georgia
- Georgian Dream
- Girchi
- Law and Justice
- Lelo for Georgia
- National Democratic Party

²³ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#), 23 April 2024

²⁴ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#), 25 April 2024

²⁵ CIA, [‘World Factbook – Georgia’](#) (Government), updated 7 August 2024

- People's Power
- Progress and Freedom
- Republican Party
- State for the People
- Strategy Aghmashenebeli
- United National Movement or UNM
- Victorious Georgia

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.'²⁶

10.1.3 Freedom House (FH), in its Nations in Transit 2024 report, noted:

'Throughout the year [2023], opposition parties faced numerous challenges, including an uneven playing field with the ruling party. Opposition parties also struggled to attract undecided voters due to their failure to present a clear vision and concrete policies that would make them an appealing alternative to the GD, as well as occasional intraparty struggles and defections. In January, during leadership elections within the largest opposition party, UNM, Nika Melia was replaced by Levan Khabeishvili. Many observers viewed the outcome as an indication of former party members' continued influence, including former defense minister David Kezerashvili, who owns shares in the opposition TV network Formula and was allegedly involved in a billion-dollar scamming network, according to a BBC investigation.

'In a TV interview shortly before the interim elections, Nika Melia himself alleged that former Interior Minister Ivane Merabishvili and ex-Defence Minister Davit Kezerashvili were secretly conspiring against him, including in the upcoming party leadership race. Melia asserted that the November 9 demand for internal party elections, which the party accepted, was completely orchestrated by Merabishvili and Kezerashvili, long-time allies of the party's founder and former president Mikheil Saakashvili, in an effort to ensure Melia's competitor Levan Khabeishvili secured the leadership position.'²⁷

10.1.4 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 report, noted: 'No laws prevent women or members of ethnic and religious minority groups from participating in politics.'²⁸

(See: [Formation of political parties](#))

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

²⁷ FH, [Nations in Transit 2024 – Georgia](#), 18 April 2024

²⁸ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (B4), 25 April 2024

10.2 Georgian Dream (GD) ruling party

10.2.1 Wilson Center, an American based think tank providing non-partisan counsel and insights on global affairs to policymakers, noted in an undated article: '[The] Georgian Dream is a coalition of political parties funded and led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, who made billions in Russia in the 1990s and returned home. The United National Party is led by Saakashvili, who in 2003 led the peaceful Rose revolution which overthrew President Eduard Shevardnadze. Saakashvili served as president for the next decade.'²⁹

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.'³⁰

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 informal leader and not to the state institutions or the constitution of Georgia."³¹

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.'³²

10.2.5 Reporting on the level of poverty in Georgia, The World Bank (WB) in its April 2024 assessment, noted:

'Georgia has made notable gains in income growth and poverty reduction over the past decade. As a result of sound macroeconomic management,

²⁹ Wilson Center, [Rough and Tumble of Building Democracy in Georgia](#), no date

³⁰ Global Voices, [The Georgian Dream party is not every Georgian's dream](#), 6 July 2023

³¹ IWPR, [Georgia's Political Crisis Intensifies](#), 23 February 2021

³² New Europe, [Understanding Georgia's current political situation](#), 26 February 2021

GNI per capita (constant 2017 USD) increased from \$9,580 [£2,700³³] in 2010 to \$15,880 [£4,500³⁴] in 2022. Poverty ... declined from 70.6% in 2010 to an estimated 47.7% in 2022. The job market experienced a strong recovery, with unemployment falling from 20.6% percent in 2021 to a record low of 16.4% in 2023, which was estimated to positively impact poverty levels.³⁵

10.2.6 Civil Georgia, reported on 9 January 2024:

'Amendments to the ruling Georgian Dream party's statute, approved at the party's December 30 congress, were published on January 8. The [updated statute](#) introduces an "Honorary Chairman" position, currently held by party founder Bidzina Ivanishvili, who was elected as such at the congress. The updated statute formalizes the powers that Ivanishvili has always had, being in politics, albeit behind the scenes.

'On December 30, Bidzina Ivanishvili officially [returned to politics](#) for the third time, becoming "honorary chairman" of the "Georgian Dream" party. Speaking at the GD party congress, Ivanishvili said that the reason for his return was "to protect the excessively strong team from human temptation."

'Opposition parties, however, [said](#) that Ivanishvili's comeback was a formalization of his semi-formal governance, that he had never actually left politics, and that his return showed Georgian Dream's loss of power ahead of crucial parliamentary elections in 2024.³⁶

10.2.7 The same source further noted:

'The statute bestows upon Ivanishvili's a range of powers, formalizing the concentration of power in one hand, without outlining the accountability mechanisms for the party's "Honorary Chairman." To emphasize Ivanishvili's contribution to the country and the ruling party, the document states that the party congress will elect a person "who has rendered special services to his country and the party" to the position of "Honorary Chairman" and this person is "the main political advisor to the party."

'The thus customized status of 'honorary chairman' goes beyond symbolic recognition, formalizing Ivanishvili's tangible influence and positioning him as the party's 'center of gravity', as he declared upon his third return to politics.³⁷

(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 president³⁸. He retired from active politics in 2013 and left Georgia for

³³ Xe.com, [9,580 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#), 10 September 2024

³⁴ Xe.com, [15,880 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#), 10 September 2024

³⁵ The World Bank, [The World Bank in Georgia](#), 9 April 2024

³⁶ Civil Georgia, ["Honorary Chairman" to Formally Wield Power According to GD ...](#), 9 January 2024

³⁷ Civil Georgia, ["Honorary Chairman" to Formally Wield Power According to GD ...](#), 9 January 2024

³⁸ Fuller, E, Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Mikheil Saakashvili](#), 8 July 2024

Ukraine³⁹. For information on his treatment on return from Ukraine in 2021 see [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#).

Fuller, E, Encyclopaedia Britannica, [Mikheil Saakashvili](#), 8 July 2024

[Mikheil Saakashvili | Biography, Politicians, History, & Facts | Britannica](#)

10.3.2 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 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.’⁴⁰

10.3.3 The BTI 2024 Country Report – Georgia, noted: ‘Former president Mikheil Saakashvili remains a polarizing figure in Georgia, even while incarcerated. His significant influence within his UNM party has hindered a comprehensive evaluation of his legacy. Although a sizable minority of the electorate continues to support him, a majority of Georgians do not wish to see his return to power.’⁴¹

10.3.4 There has been disunity within the UNM during recent years. In November 2023, Nika Melia, former chair of UNM and several supporters refused to sign a ‘manifesto of unity’, as requested by the UNM chair, Levan Khabeishvili. In response, Khabeishvili stated on 26 November that Melia was no longer a member of UNM. Nika Melia announced on 7 December that he was leaving UNM to form his own party.^{42 43}

10.3.5 In June 2024, Levan Khabeishvili announced that, following a physical assault by police during the demonstration of 30 April- 1 May, against the foreign agents law, he was stepping down as UNM party leader. He presented Tina Bokuchava as the party’s new chairman, saying that he would take on the post of the chairman of the political council^{44,45}.

10.3.6 Civil Georgia reported ‘According to Khabeishvili, the election of the party’s leadership will be held in February 2025, as scheduled.’⁴⁶

³⁹ OSW, [Saakashvili and The Georgian Opposition. The State of Play](#), 1 February 2023

⁴⁰ OSW, [Saakashvili and The Georgian Opposition. The State of Play](#), 1 February 2023

⁴¹ BTI, [2024 Country Report – Georgia](#) (page 10), 19 March 2024

⁴² Civil Georgia, [Former UNM chair quits party civil.ge, 8 December 2023](#)

⁴³ OC Media, [nika-melia-no-longer-a-member-of-the-party, 27 November 2023](#)

⁴⁴ Civil Georgia, [Tina Bokuchava to Replace Levan Khabeishvili as UNM Chair](#), 8 June 2024

⁴⁵ Georgia Today, [Tina Bokuchava to replace Khabeishvili as UNM Chair](#), 10 June 2024

⁴⁶ Civil Georgia, [Tina Bokuchava to Replace Levan Khabeishvili as UNM Chair](#), 8 June 2024

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.’⁴⁷

10.4.2 Eurasianet, 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.’⁴⁸

10.4.3 JAMnews, a media platform that brings together professional journalists reporting on news stories from around the Caucasus, noted in an article, dated 21 November 2022:

‘What is the opposition’s problem, according to the opposition itself?... Politicians usually avoid talking about their own mistakes. It is much easier to discuss the mistakes of others. We asked representatives of the opposition what mistakes it is making today. “There is a missing link between the opposition and the voters. When most voters say they would like a new political proposal, it means that they do not see anything interesting in the current political field. The opposition devotes a lot of time to internal discussions or discussions of the strategy, and at this time people have problems that no one from the opposition talks about,” Salome Samadashvili from Lelo says.

“The problem is that they say one thing and do another, they say a third and they do a fourth. Nothing breeds nihilism in society like inconsistency. Because of its inconsistency the opposition is unable to consolidate its electorate and to replace nihilism with optimism,” Kakha Kemoklidze, a member of the For Georgia party, stated.

⁴⁷ NE Global, [Understanding Georgia’s current political situation](#), 26 February 2021

⁴⁸ Eurasianet, [Rise of Georgian alt-right group sparks fear of unrest](#), 23 March 2022

“This country is ruled from the shadows, Ivanishvili’s regime is a shadow regime. The government, of course, speaks, but we know that it does not express its own opinion. And the people we see in positions have nothing to do with them. Lack of accountability is the main problem in this country. Unfortunately, the same thing happened to the opposition,” Tamar Chergoleishvili, European Georgia, said.

“At this point, we have two tasks: to restore faith in action and to explain to people that we do not have a European perspective under the rule of the Georgian Dream,” Elene Khoshtaria, of the Droa party, said.⁴⁹

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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 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.’⁵⁰

11.1.2 In February 2021, Nika Melia, the [then] 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?”’⁵¹

11.1.3 The judgement in the case of Melia v. Georgia in the European Court of Human Rights (ECTHR), 7 September 2023, concerning ‘allegations under

⁴⁹ JAMnews, [What is wrong with Georgian opposition](#), 21 November 2022

⁵⁰ Public Defender of Georgia, [Report of the Public Defender of Georgia, On ...](#) (page 12), no date

⁵¹ The Guardian, [Police arrest Georgian opposition leader after storming party HQ](#), 23 February 2021

[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 Articles⁵².

11.1.4 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 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...'⁵³

11.1.5 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 [the then] 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

⁵² ECtHR, ['Melia V Georgia' \(judgement\)](#), 7 September 2023

⁵³ ECtHR, ['Melia V Georgia' \(137, 140, 143\)](#), 7 September 2023

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) [£9,200⁵⁴] 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 to ₾40,000 (\$15,268) [£12,250⁵⁵] 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.'⁵⁶

- 11.1.6 In October 2021 Mikheil Saakashvili, the former president of Georgia was detained upon his return, after spending nearly a decade abroad, which included a period as a regional governor in Ukraine⁵⁷. 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"^{58,59}.
- 11.1.7 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.'⁶⁰
- 11.1.8 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

⁵⁴ Xe.com, [30,000 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#), 6 October 2023

⁵⁵ Xe.com, [40,000 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#), 6 October 2023

⁵⁶ Agenda.ge, [ECHR ruling confirms legitimacy of opposition leader's arrest by ...](#), 7 September 2023

⁵⁷ FT, [Video of emaciated Mikheil Saakashvili prompts stand-off between Georgia ...](#), 5 July 2023

⁵⁸ BBC, [Mikheil Saakashvili: Georgian ex-president arrested returning from exile](#), 1 October 2021

⁵⁹ Reuters, [Returning home, Georgian ex-leader arrested after call for election ...](#), 1 October 2021

⁶⁰ OSW, [Saakashvili and The Georgian Opposition. The State of Play](#), 1 February 2023

imprisonment as the fulfilment of a vendetta against him by his political rival, the oligarch Bizdina Ivanishvili.⁶¹ (For information on the treatment of Mikheil Saakashvili whilst in detention see [Detention and prosecution](#))

11.1.9 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 Edzgeradze, a deputy for the United National Movement in the Tbilisi Sakrebulo (City Council). ... Law enforcement 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.’⁶²

11.1.10 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 report, noted:

‘While Georgia hosts a dynamic multiparty system, opposition parties can face barriers to political competition, including legal harassment, intimidation, and physical violence. A number of violent attacks against opposition figures took place in 2023. In June, Zurab Japaridze, leader of the Girchi–More Freedom party, was assaulted en route to a youth summer camp where he was scheduled to speak to participants. One individual was arrested in connection with the attack; the hotel hosting the camp was also vandalized.

‘In September, following a disagreement with a GD member at a Tbilisi City Council meeting, a UNM councilor was attacked in the street. He said he believed the attack was related to the earlier confrontation; several people were arrested.

‘In November, two opposition figures were fired upon in separate incidents. UNM activist Humbat Jalilov was shot and wounded in Marneuli, with a UNM spokesperson characterizing the attack as an intimidation attempt by the GD. Former mayor of Dmanisi Municipality Giorgi Tatuashvili said gunshots were fired at his car, and similarly claimed the attack was linked to GD.’⁶³

11.1.11 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

‘Several incidents of violence targeting opposition party figures and activities occurred. Examples included two attacks on Zurab Japaridze, leader of Girchi-More Freedom, assaulted during the March [2023] protests against the draft foreign-agents law and again on June 17. The latter attack was followed a few hours later by another violent incident in which a mob threw rocks at a hotel where an institute affiliated with the party was conducting a summer youth-training camp. The camp organizers held authorities responsible for the attack, reporting that a progovernment media outlet had arrived at the training site before the mob and that police took 40 minutes to arrive. None of the perpetrators of the violence were prosecuted.

‘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

⁶¹ The Guardian, [Gaunt and ghostly, Georgia’s jailed ex-president nears death in ...](#), 16 April 2023

⁶² Civil Georgia, [Six Charged with Violence against Tbilisi Sakrebulo Deputy](#), 24 September 2023

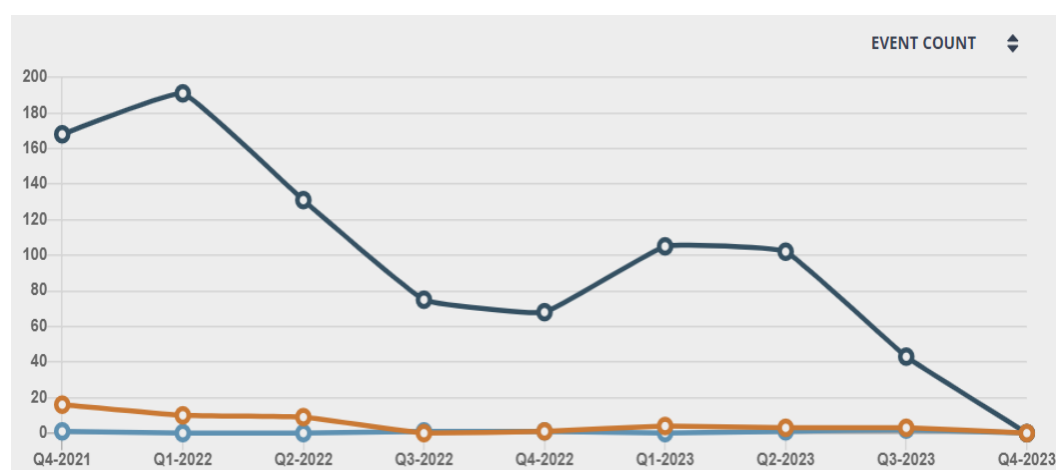
⁶³ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (B1), 25 April 2024

main obstacles to political participation. In September [2023], canvassers from United National Movement were physically assaulted, allegedly by supporters of ruling Georgian Dream party, while distributing pamphlets protesting the name change of a local square in Chokhatauri, Guria Region. United National Movement party officials claimed the assault was intended to intimidate their supporters. The Ministry of Internal Affairs opened an investigation into the incident but none of the perpetrators were prosecuted.⁶⁴

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11.2 Protesters

11.2.1 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 fatalities⁶⁵.



11.2.2 On 10 November 2021, Civil 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] 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

⁶⁴ USSD, [2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Georgia](#) (section 3), 23 April 2024

⁶⁵ ACLED, [Dashboard \(Georgia\)](#), 6 October 2023

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.”⁶⁶

- 11.2.3 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.’⁶⁷
- 11.2.4 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.
- 11.2.5 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.’⁶⁸
- 11.2.6 Citing other sources, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), in its August 2022 Migration Drivers Report: Georgia as a Country of Origin noted:
- ‘Mass demonstrations took place in Georgia in June and July 2022, including 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

⁶⁶ Civil Georgia, [46 Detained at Opposition Rallies](#), 10 November 2021

⁶⁷ HRC, [Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations - Summary ...](#) (page 22), 19 January 2022

⁶⁸ HRC, [Monitoring the Protest Demonstrations - Summary ...](#), (pages 5 & 6), 22 June 2022

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 [the then] Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili. The Shame Movement, a pro-democracy civil society group, has mobilised, been present, or helped organise these protests.⁶⁹

11.2.7 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).⁷⁰

11.2.8 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 the previous night, there were no signs of demonstrators throwing petrol bombs or stones at police officers.⁷¹

11.2.9 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

⁶⁹ EUAA, [Migration Drivers Report: Georgia as a Country of Origin](#) (page 8), 18 August 2022

⁷⁰ Meduza, [Georgia’s murky ‘transparency’ bill The ‘foreign agent’ draft law that ...](#), 14 March 2023

⁷¹ The Guardian, [Protesters and police clash in Georgia for second day over ...](#), 8 March 2023

"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".⁷²

11.2.10 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) [[£600](#)⁷³] 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.'⁷⁴

11.2.11 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,

⁷² Sky News, [Georgia drops controversial 'foreign agent' bill after two days of ...](#), 9 March 2023

⁷³ Xe.com, [2,000 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#), 6 October 2023

⁷⁴ Eurasianet, [Georgian government criticized over brazen crackdown on freedom of ...](#), 5 June 2023

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.’⁷⁵

11.2.12 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 whereabouts of their clients and were not allowed to see them in the first hours following their arrest.’⁷⁶

11.2.13 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

⁷⁵ FIDH, [Georgia: End Arbitrary Prosecution and Protect Freedom of Expression](#), 23 June 2023

⁷⁶ WOAT, [Georgia: End arbitrary prosecutions and protect freedom of expression](#), 22 June 2023

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.'⁷⁷

11.2.14 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.'⁷⁸

11.2.15 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 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, [the then] 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

⁷⁷ Eurasianet, [Rise of Georgian alt-right group sparks fear of unrest](#), 23 March 2022

⁷⁸ Eurasianet, [Rise of Georgian alt-right group sparks fear of unrest](#), 23 March 2022

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.⁷⁹

11.2.16 BTI, in its 2024 Country Report – Georgia, noted:

‘The problematic practice of arresting demonstrators for minor offenses such as petty hooliganism and disobedience continues to infringe on the freedom of assembly without proper justification. This is due to Georgia’s enforcement of the Code of Administrative Offenses inherited from Soviet times, which does not meet the standards of a fair trial. Conversely, the government has displayed tolerance toward protests by nationalist and violent groups. For instance, during the annual “Tbilisi Pride” event on July 5/6, 2021, such groups disrupted the proceedings, and the state failed to protect the participants. Consequently, an angry mob harmed 54 journalists, and one cameraman later succumbed to injuries. The subsequent criminal investigation has progressed slowly.’⁸⁰

11.2.17 HRW, in its World Report 2024, noted:

‘Riot police used water cannons and massive amounts of tear gas to disperse thousands of peaceful demonstrators who spontaneously gathered to protest the “foreign agents” bill [in March 2023]. The PDO [said](#) these measures were disproportionate and [unnecessary](#). The Special Investigation Service (SIS), which investigates instances of abuse of office, launched an investigation into police conduct during the protests after receiving 124 complaints about [abuse](#). The investigation was pending at time of writing.’⁸¹

11.2.18 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

‘The PDO and NGOs reported that authorities often used disproportionate force when managing and breaking up rallies and used the administrative code to detain demonstrators. ... According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, articles 166 and 173 on petty hooliganism and disobedience of a police order appeared to have been used on multiple occasions to arbitrarily restrict the rights to peaceful assembly and expression, including of human rights defenders.’⁸²

11.2.19 On 17 April 2024, Amnesty International (AI) reported: ‘

‘Responding to news that police in Georgia violently dispersed an overwhelmingly peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi, where protestors rallied against the controversial “foreign influence” bill, Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said:

“What we witnessed in Tbilisi yesterday was a brutal retribution against people for exercising their right to protest peacefully. The authorities act as if it is their prerogative to decide when people can or cannot protest and deploy riot police to disperse and arbitrarily arrest the protestors using violence. On several occasions, police were seen chasing and hitting fleeing

⁷⁹ (VoA), [Thousands Rally in Georgia's Tbilisi Against Government](#), 9 April 2023

⁸⁰ BTI, [2024 Country Report – Georgia](#) (page 11), 19 March 2024

⁸¹ HRW, [World Report 2024 – Georgia](#), 12 January 2024

⁸² USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 2), 23 April 2024

protestors with truncheons, surrounding and beating them mercilessly while on the ground.”...

‘Tensions between peaceful protesters and police, which progressed throughout the day on 16 April 2024, ended with law enforcement violently dispersing demonstrators by using unnecessary force without warning. Police officials were seen using tear gas and administering beatings, including against journalists. At least two injuries have so far been reported: an employee of the Interior Ministry and a cameraman from Rustavi 2 TV, who inhaled tear gas. According to officials, police detained 11 people, citing violations of public order. Secretary General of the opposition party LELO, Irakli Kupradze, is reported to be among those detained. Amid the unrest, Parliament delayed voting on the “On transparency of foreign influence” bill, rescheduling the consideration for 17 April 2024.’⁸³

11.2.20 On 3 June 2024 Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), an American government-funded international media organization, reported that the ‘Foreign Agent’ Bill was enacted to come into force:

‘Georgia's divisive "foreign agent" piece of legislation has become law despite weeks of mass protests and warnings from the United States and the European Union that the move jeopardizes the Caucasus country's path toward North-Atlantic integration. The law was [published](#) in Georgia's Legislative Gazette on June 3 shortly after being signed by parliament speaker Shalva Papuashvil.

‘Prior to that, Georgia's pro-Western President President Salome Zurbishvili had refused to endorse the measure after it was returned to her. On May 28, a parliamentary vote overrode her veto of the bill from May 18. According to Georgia's constitution, if the president doesn't endorse the law after an override by lawmakers, the parliament speaker then has the right to promulgate it...

"Emotions have subsided and many of the citizens who joined the protest of the radical opposition have already seen that, in fact, the law of transparency will increase the responsibility and accountability of nongovernmental organizations and their financiers, will improve the political system, weaken disinformation, reduce radicalism and polarization," Papuashvili said on June 3 as he announced the move at a briefing in parliament. The law came into force partially after its publication. It will come into force in full within 60 days, after government agencies have carried out the necessary preparatory work.’⁸⁴

11.2.21 On 5 September 2024 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), reported:

‘Human rights defenders in Georgia have faced a wave of repression in 2024 that shows no sign of abating, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, said today. “In late 2023, I visited Georgia to examine the environment for human rights defenders in the country, and things stood on a precipice,” Lawlor said. “Since then, the situation has deteriorated drastically.”

‘The Special Rapporteur cited the targeting of human rights defenders during

⁸³ AI, [Georgia: Police must be held accountable for use of excessive force against ...](#), 17 April 2024

⁸⁴ RFE/RL, [Despite Mass Protests, Georgia's 'Foreign Agent' Bill Becomes Law](#), 3 June 2024

the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence by Parliament earlier this year. The law, enacted on 28 May 2024 despite widespread popular protests in the country, places Georgia in violation of its human rights obligations concerning freedom of association and expression. It came into force on 1 August 2024.

“As the Government railroaded the ‘foreign agent law’ through Parliament, human rights defenders came under vicious, targeted attack,” Lawlor said. “They were physically attacked, subjected to threatening phone calls, and human rights organisations and their individual members saw their offices and homes painted with threats and smears.”

‘The Special Rapporteur stressed that these attacks were conducted with impunity, and in some cases, appear to have been encouraged by public statements from high-ranking Government officials. On 11 June 2024, Zuka Berdzenishvili, one of the founders of the pro-democracy “Shame Movement”, was brutally assaulted, leaving him hospitalised. The attack came shortly after the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Pauashvili, accused Berdzenishvili, and others who had spoken out against the foreign agent law, of terrorism.

“Government officials and members of the ruling party publicly smearing human rights defenders as enemies of the people continues to be a major problem in Georgia,” Lawlor said. “These statements encourage and legitimise attacks against human rights defenders, and in the Georgian context, it appears increasingly clear this is what they are intended to do.”⁸⁵

(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.’⁸⁶ (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.

⁸⁵ OHCHR, [Georgia: Targeted and sustained repression of human rights ...](#), 5 September 2024

⁸⁶ Eurasianet, [Georgian government accused of promoting political violence](#), 22 June 2023

‘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, Iliia II, has become a commonly cited excuse for those attacking and harassing critics of the Church and of the Georgian-Dream-led government.’⁸⁷

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

‘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. [The then] 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](#).’⁸⁸

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 2023⁸⁹.

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.’⁹⁰

⁸⁷ OC Media, [Two government critics reportedly attacked in Georgia](#), 28 June 2023

⁸⁸ Civil Georgia, [Ruling Party Condones Violent Assaults on Critics](#), 28 June 2023

⁸⁹ HRC, [Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged Political Motives ...](#), 29 June 2023

⁹⁰ HRC, [Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged ...](#) (page 50), 29 June 2023

11.3.6 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

‘There were instances in which the government restricted public figures, political opponents, and journalists from criticizing the government or discussing matters of public interest. For example, Nika Gvaramia, founder and former general director of the largest opposition-leaning television station Mtavari Arkhi, was incarcerated from May 2022 until he was pardoned by the president on June 22. He had been convicted on charges of abuse of power. Amnesty International and local NGOs asserted his conviction raised concerns for media freedom.’⁹¹

(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 Agenda.ge, reported on 5 July 2021 about a statement by the former Prime Minister Garibashvili which was considered by some to condone violence against the media community:

‘[The then] Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili says that the conduct of the Tbilisi Pride march at 6 p.m. today “is not reasonable” because it may lead to civic confrontation.’ He also stated earlier today that the country’s former President Mikheil Saakashvili and the “radical opposition” are likely standing behind the march and ongoing rallies in central Tbilisi. He stated that the country’s Interior Ministry has already offered Tbilisi Pride organisers hold the march at a different location and not on central Rustaveli Avenue. Garibashvili said that the rights of all individuals are protected in Georgia that is why the anti-discrimination law has been adopted and the definition of marriage has been specified in the country’s constitution.

“I want to say that holding the march is the constitutional right of the people and we understand this. The state has done its utmost to ensure the safety during all their events in previous days. However, the march scheduled today carries risks of civic confrontation because the march is unacceptable by the vast majority of the country’s population. That is why I believe that the conduct of the march on Rustaveli Avenue is not reasonable,” Garibashvili said.

‘Dozens of protestors against the Tbilisi Pride march have already gathered on Rustaveli Avenue, demolishing opposition tents in front of the parliament set up to protest election-related issues in previous days. Demonstrators have also thrown eggs and bottles at the office of civic movement Sirtskhvilia (shame) which supports the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer] LGBT community. Leader of Republican Party Leader Khatuna Samnidze has criticized Garibashvili for his statement and said that such statements encourage violence.’⁹²

11.4.2 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

⁹¹ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 2), 23 April 2024

⁹² Agenda.ge, [PM Garibashvili: holding Tbilisi Pride march unreasonable, may lead to ...](#), 5 July 2021

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.”⁹³

11.4.3 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 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.

⁹³ EUAA, [Migration Drivers Report: Georgia as a Country of Origin](#) (page 9), 18 August 2022

- ‘The report said the recordings also show, that the “Georgian Dream” leaders were also under surveillance, but no specific corroborating evidence was shown.’⁹⁴

11.4.4 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), in its 2024 World Press Freedom Index assault (WPFI), noted: ‘Verbal and physical assaults on journalists are frequent, including by senior government officials, especially during electoral campaigns. A sustained and brutal on about 50 reporters during homophobic counter-demonstrations in July 2021, in front of impassive security forces, marked an unprecedented setback. The lack of transparency and progress in the investigation speaks to the impunity enjoyed by those who commit crimes against journalists.’⁹⁵

11.4.5 Politico, reported on 23 June 2023:

‘Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili has pardoned a prominent opposition journalist who spent more than a year in jail, amid pressure from the EU, U.S. and international NGOs seeking to secure his release. In a [statement](#) issued Thursday evening, the president of the South Caucasus nation announced she had “signed the act pardoning Nikoloz Gvaramia,” a high-profile critic of the government who was sentenced to three and a half years behind bars in May 2022. Zourabichvili said she made the decision to intervene after the Supreme Court [declined](#) to hear Gvaramia’s appeal. “I am not going to give any explanation for this decision, it is my discretionary right and I am using it today,” she added.’⁹⁶

11.4.6 Human Rights Watch (HRW), in its World Report 2024 – Georgia, 12 January 2024, noted:

‘Numerous threats and attacks [targeted](#) media professionals. By October, the SIS had received 37 complaints and launched 12 investigations into unlawful interference with journalistic activities. In June, an assailant beat Misha Mshvildadze, a Formula TV co-founder and host. The assailant later claimed in his social media post that the attack was in response to Mshvildadze’s criticism of the Georgian Patriarchate. Police arrested the perpetrator, and in September, the SIS closed any further investigation, referring the case to court. In [October](#), a court sentenced the perpetrator to 6 months in prison.’⁹⁷

11.4.7 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

‘There were reports of violent physical attacks, threats of violence, harassment, and defamation lawsuits against journalists throughout the year. There was also a lack of accountability in such cases.

‘On June 27, Misha Mshvildadze, one of Formula TV’s shareholders and anchors, was physically attacked while entering a supermarket in Tbilisi. Authorities arrested one person in connection with the attack. According to Mshvildadze more individuals were involved, including members of the [State Security Service of Georgia] SSSG. The public defender and media rights groups condemned the attack and called for urgent investigation to identify the perpetrators. On September 12, the Special Investigation Service

⁹⁴ Civil Georgia, [Reports of Massive Surveillance, Infiltration of Opposition ...](#), 20 September 2022

⁹⁵ RSF, [World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\): Georgia](#), 2024

⁹⁶ Politico, [Georgian president pardons jailed journalist after EU, US outcry](#), 23 June 2024

⁹⁷ HRW, [World Report 2024 – Georgia](#), 12 January 2024

closed the case without any further action...

‘Journalists were also subjected to threats of violence. According to the Media Advocacy Coalition, after Gela Mtvlishvili, a reporter from online media site Mtis Amebebi, was subjected to verbal criticism by ruling-party figures August 3 for his reporting on the Shovi landslide, local officials threatened to “throw him in the water,” and he received death threats.

‘Journalists were often subjected to defamation lawsuits. According to the Georgian Democracy Institute (GDI), there was a growing tendency for government representatives or persons associated with the government to initiate defamation lawsuits against media outlets critical of the government. The report noted 38 such cases for 2021-2023, which GDI considered to be aimed at discrediting critical media outlets and discouraging them from expressing critical opinions. Transparency International/Georgia reported these cases were often decided very quickly and imposed high fines on outlets.’⁹⁸

- 11.4.8 Freedom House, in its report - Freedom in the World 2024, stated that the government frequently acts aggressively towards critical journalists and has put pressure on media outlets that are hostile towards it⁹⁹.

(See [Activists and critics](#) and [Freedom of expression](#))

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11.5 Detention and prosecution

- 11.5.1 The Ministry of Justice of Georgia reporting on 4 April 2022 on the detention of former president Mikheil Saakashvili, noted:

‘Minister of Justice, Rati Bregadze spoke on Imedi TV about the exclusion of Saakashvili's application from the list of cases considered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). According to Rati Bregadze, the decision of the Strasbourg court, leaves no doubt that there are no special circumstances that indicated torture and inhuman treatment.

“The application referred to the third article, which deals with torture. In this context, they requested an additional investigation, in which they wanted him to be immediately transferred to the clinic and this application to be continued to be considered in the future. The court also appealed to the defense and set a deadline of December 8, that they should present additional evidence before this specific deadline,” said Rati Bregadze. According to the Minister, this decision in Strasbourg unequivocally confirms that there are no special circumstances that pointed to and still indicate torture and inhuman treatment...’¹⁰⁰

- 11.5.2 Agenda.ge reported on 20 November 2022:

‘The special penitentiary service on Sunday said it had not been provided with any official report, confirming the authenticity of information disseminated by the imprisoned former president Mikheil Saakashvili’s lawyer about the possible poisoning of the prisoner. The statement of the penitentiary service responded to the claims of Saakashvili’s lawyer Valeri Gelbakhiani, asserting that Saakashvili had been poisoned and the foreign

⁹⁸ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 2), 23 April 2024

⁹⁹ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (D1), 25 April 2024

¹⁰⁰ Ministry of Justice of Georgia, [Rati Bregadze: “Decision of the Strasbourg Court ...”](#), 4 April 2022

experts' conclusion confirmed this fact, adding Saakashvili himself had had "suspicions" about it "a long time ago". The service said Saakashvili had been receiving "appropriate medical" care under the respective supervision in hospital and urged everyone to "refrain" from spreading "unverified and unsubstantiated" information to "avoid" misinforming the public.¹⁰¹

11.5.3 Reporting on 21 December 2022, Agenda noted:

'Malkhaz Urtkmelidze, the Head of the Medical Department of Georgia's Special Penitentiary Service, on Wednesday said the conclusions of a medical study on the condition of the imprisoned former President Mikheil Saakashvili rejected the possibility of poisoning of the former official. Made following claims by a part of Saakashvili's entourage on the former official having been poisoned during his detention, the comment by Urtkmelidze noted the results of the report, compiled by the United States-based [National Medical Services] NMS Labs.

'The official said the results of the laboratory's examination had shown the examined toxic substance in the system of the patient was "not present in the body in a poisonous amount". [In the conclusions of the report] both the minimum limit and the acceptable norm [for the substance] are indicated. It turned out that the numbers they provided in the laboratory [...] are below the norm", Urtkmelidze pointed out.

'The former President has been receiving treatment at the Vivamedi clinic in Tbilisi since May 12, after he was moved from the Gori Military Hospital - where he was transferred in late November 2021 from the hospital of the Gldani No.18 prison. The latter, in turn, served as his detention location after his move from the Rustavi No.12 prison, the initial detention venue, in early November last year. Saakashvili was arrested in Tbilisi in October 2021 on his clandestine return to Georgia ahead of municipal elections. He has been serving a six-year term for abuse of power in two separate cases stemming back to his time in office...¹⁰²

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 Georgian authorities. He was convicted in absentia of abuses of power while in office. He was imprisoned in October 2021 and the 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

¹⁰¹ Agenda.ge, [Special penitentiary service: official report confirming former ...](#), 20 November 2022

¹⁰² Agenda.ge, [Special Penitentiary Service official: medical report on ...](#), 21 December 2022

"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.'¹⁰³

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.'¹⁰⁴

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."¹⁰⁵ (see also [Supporters, members, and leaders of opposition parties](#) for further information on Mikheil Saakashvili, and [Judiciary](#))

11.5.7 Agenda.ge, further reported on 23 March 2023:

'Malkhaz Urtkmelidze, the head of the medical department of the Special Penitentiary Service of Georgia, on Tuesday said the country's imprisoned former President Mikheil Saakashvili had not yet submitted any complete request to involve the Polish doctors in his treatment. Urtkmelidze called on the former President to fulfil all medical recommendations of the doctors "for his own interest", and noted the patient still refused to take medicines or follow parenteral nutrition, as well as any other medical interventions.

'The clinic Vivamedi appealed to the Special Penitentiary Service last week to evaluate the "expediency" of Saakashvili's "further stay" in hospital. According to the clinic's statement, since last year's October, the patient has been refusing the proposed medical treatment regimen, "especially if it may have a positive effect on his health".¹⁰⁶

11.5.8 On 12 May 2023 Agenda.ge reported:

'Georgian Justice Minister Rati Bregadze on Friday [12 May] said the European Court of Human Rights had rejected the imprisoned former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's request to be transferred to Poland's capital Warsaw for treatment. At a press briefing, Bregadze said Saakashvili's lawyers had sent a request to ECHR on April 11 asking for

¹⁰³ BBC, [Mikheil Saakashvili: The former Georgian president's condition has ...](#), 2 February 2023

¹⁰⁴ Politico, [I am a political prisoner in Georgia, and I am dying](#), 7 April 2023

¹⁰⁵ The Guardian, [Gaunt and ghostly, Georgia's jailed ex-president nears death in ...](#), 16 April 2023

¹⁰⁶ Agenda.ge, [No complete request submitted by ex-Pres. Saakashvili for ...](#), 23 March 2023

support in requesting postponement of the rest of the former President's sentence on health grounds and his transfer to Poland for continued medical care. The Minister said Saakashvili's lawyers had subsequently also appealed to the ECHR against the ruling by Tbilisi Court of Appeals in March, which in turn upheld the earlier verdict of Tbilisi City Court denying Saakashvili release or postponement of the rest of his sentence on health grounds.

'Bregadze said the ECHR ruling, published today, had neither accepted the request for transfer abroad nor instructed the Georgian authorities to move the former official to another treatment facility within the country, stressing the decision had confirmed the Government's actions in his treatment in detention had been "correct and in accordance with the highest standards of human rights". He also said Saakashvili, who has been undergoing treatment at the Vivamedi civilian clinic in Tbilisi since May 2022, could be transferred back to a penitentiary facility in case of an "appropriate decision" by the doctors involved in his treatment.'¹⁰⁷

11.5.9 Politico, reported in an article dated 23 May 2024:

'The European Court of Human Rights ruled today that authorities in Georgia acted properly in 2014 when bringing criminal charges for abuse of power and complicity in criminal battery against former president Mikheil Saakashvili. The ECHR stated that "the authorities' honest desire was to bring the applicant to justice for his wrongdoing and that, in the absence of sufficient evidence to the contrary, the allegation of an ulterior motive is unsubstantiated."

'Saakashvili is currently serving a six-year sentence after being convicted in 2018 of ordering riot police to beat Georgian MP Valery Gelashvili in 2005, and for pardoning interior ministry staff convicted in the 2006 murder of bank employee Sandro Girgvliani. The former president, who served from 2004 to 2013, was arrested when he returned to Georgia in October 2021 after spending seven years in self-imposed exile.'¹⁰⁸

11.5.10 HRW, in its World Report 2024, noted: 'In June, police [detained](#) several activists, including members of prominent human rights groups, on charges of petty hooliganism and disobeying police order for holding banners that intentionally distorted the first name of the prime minister, blank posters, and a copy of the constitution. After 48 hours, police released them. In September, courts [fined](#) them for petty hooliganism and disobeying police.'¹⁰⁹

11.5.11 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 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.'¹¹⁰

11.5.12 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

'The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her

¹⁰⁷ Agenda.ge, [ECHR has rejected Saakashvili's request for transfer to Poland for ...](#), 12 May 2023

¹⁰⁸ Politico, [European Court affirms Georgia's jailing of former leader Saakashvili](#), 23 May 2024

¹⁰⁹ HRW, [World Report 2024 – Georgia](#), 12 January 2024

¹¹⁰ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (F3), 25 April 2024

arrest or detention in court. The government's observance of these prohibitions was uneven, and reports of selective or arbitrary arrests continued...

'Reports of arbitrary detentions continued. For example, the [Public Defenders Office] PDO reported that several civil activists and NGO representatives were arrested for holding protest posters and blank papers while peacefully protesting the prime minister's [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] NATO summit statement. NGOs identified several instances of individuals arrested and later convicted for administrative violations related to demonstrations in which they did not participate. The PDO assessed administrative detention of demonstrators in many cases did not meet the proportionality requirements. The PDO reported that some of the administrative arrests were arbitrary. ECHR found several administrative arrests to be arbitrary.'¹¹¹

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12. State bodies

12.1 Police

12.1.1 The USSD, in its HR Report 2022 noted: 'The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Security Service have primary responsibility for law enforcement and 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.'¹¹²

12.1.2 The Global Organised Crime Index (GOCI), in its 2023 Georgia profile noted:

'There are special units within the Georgian central criminal police department to tackle organized crime, especially human trafficking and drug-related offences. Georgia's state security service is tasked with fighting terrorism and organized crime. The prosecutor's office conducts its operative, administrative and investigative responsibilities in an effective and independent manner. Even though local policing agencies lack the necessary investigative and digital forensic skills and capacities, especially outside the main cities, police corruption lower down the hierarchy is not a major issue due to anti-corruption reforms. Civilian authorities have effective control over the security forces and over internal mechanisms to investigate corruption. However, as with the judicial system, law enforcement bodies suffer from political interference and therefore lack independence. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies (including special units) are often understaffed and lack the ability and experience to effectively respond to organized crime threats.'¹¹³

(See: [Corruption](#))

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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

¹¹¹ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 1D), 23 April 2024

¹¹² USSD, [HR Report 2022: Georgia](#) (Executive Summary), 20 March 2023

¹¹³ GOCI, [Organised Crime Index Profile: Georgia, 2023](#), no date

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.’¹¹⁴

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 trial’.¹¹⁵

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.’¹¹⁶

12.2.4 JAMnews, reporting on 15 May 2023, noted: ‘All international reports say that the judiciary in Georgia is an instrument of political influence.’¹¹⁷

12.2.5 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.’¹¹⁸

12.2.6 The GOCI's 2023 Georgia profile noted:

¹¹⁴ OHCHR, [Visit to Georgia Report of the Independent Expert on the promotion of a](#), 11 August 2023

¹¹⁵ PDO, [Report of the Public Defender of Georgia...](#) (p10), 2021

¹¹⁶ EC, ‘[Communication from the Commission to the European ...](#)’ (pages 7 & 8), 17 June 2022

¹¹⁷ JAMnews, [How the Georgian Judicial System Fell Under Western Sanctions](#), 15 May 2023

¹¹⁸ HRC, [Monitoring the Court Proceedings of Cases with Alleged ...](#) (page 6), 29 June 2023

‘Executive and legislative interference in the courts remains a substantial challenge, despite ongoing efforts towards judicial reform. The independence of the judicial system is further affected by secrecy and by informal negotiations that take place behind closed doors, which altogether create a lack of transparency. Cronyism and the suppression of dissent by dominant judicial groups (evident in political cases) are additional challenges. The judiciary is also understaffed, with a backlog of cases.’¹¹⁹

12.2.7 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted: ‘The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary did not consistently enforce this right. The PDO reported numerous violations of the right to a fair trial, and NGOs noted this right was not enforced in some high-profile, politically sensitive cases.’¹²⁰ (See [Detention and prosecution](#))

12.2.8 The USSD HR Report further noted:

‘Although the constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, the government did not respect judicial independence and impartiality in politically sensitive cases. Judges were vulnerable to political pressure from within and outside the judiciary on cases involving politically sensitive subjects or individuals. According to the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, confidence that the judiciary was free of improper government influence remained low.

‘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. 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. Some former and current judges publicly stated they had faced pressure from senior judges to rule a particular way in specific court cases...

‘In June, parliament adopted a legislative judicial reform package. The nongovernmental Coalition for the Independent and Transparent Judiciary stated that the law failed to address major challenges in the judiciary.’¹²¹

12.2.9 Freedom House (FH), in its Nations in Transit 2024 report, noted:

‘Judicial reform is a key issue that Georgia must address to become an EU member. Despite some minor progress, both the Venice Commission and the EU have said Georgia must comprehensively reform the judiciary to tackle issues such as widespread judicial corporatism, which is known as the “Judicial Clan.” The US State Department’s decision to sanction Georgian judges over corruption allegations further highlights the fundamental

¹¹⁹ GOCI, [Organised Crime Index Profile: Georgia, 2023](#), no date

¹²⁰ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 1E), 23 April 2024

¹²¹ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 1E), 23 April 2024

problems in the judicial system. Most importantly, reforming the High Council of Justice (HCoJ) to address “judicial corporatism and self-interest” within the council remains a central issue.¹²²

12.2.10 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 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. A small group of judges are generally accepted to control the judiciary; they were sanctioned in April 2023 by the US State Department for corruption and “undermining the rule of law and the public’s faith in Georgia’s judicial system.” ... Over the past five years, Supreme Court nominations have drawn criticism of opaque processes, allegations of unqualified nominees, and opposition lawmaker boycotts of confirmation votes.’¹²³

(See [Detention and prosecution](#))

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12.3 Corruption

12.3.1 Transparency International (TI), an NGO committed to combating corruption, in its 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks Georgia at 49 out of 180 countries and territories around the world by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, scoring at 53 out of 100 on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)¹²⁴.

12.3.2 The below chart shows Transparency International’s ranking and scoring of Georgia from 2018 to 2023 Transparency International¹²⁵.

Year	Ranking	Score
2018	41	58
2019	44	56
2020	45	56
2021	45	55
2022	41	56
2023	49	53

12.3.3 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 officials have been successfully prosecuted, primarily in the public

¹²² FH, [Nations in Transit 2024 – Georgia](#), 18 April 2024

¹²³ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (F1), 25 April 2024

¹²⁴ TI, [Corruption Perceptions Index - 2023](#)

¹²⁵ TI, [Corruption Perceptions Index - 2023](#)

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.'¹²⁶

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.'¹²⁷

12.3.5 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.'¹²⁸

12.3.6 The Human Rights Centre, in its report - State of Human Rights in Georgia, 2023, published in 2024, noted:

'The Law of Georgia "On Fight Against Corruption" is approximated to the EU standards. Georgia has made some progress in the fight against corruption; For example an Anti-corruption Bureau was established, combining several anti-corruption functions in a single body, among them submits relevant proposals against corruption to the parliament.

'However, in September 2023, the Speaker of the Parliament requested the opinion of the Venice Commission on the anti-corruption bureau related

¹²⁶ EC, [Communication from the Commission to the European ...](#) (page 8), 17 June 2022

¹²⁷ TI, [CPI 2022 for Eastern Europe & Central Asia: Growing security risks and ...](#), 31 January 2023

¹²⁸ TI, [Analysis of the Law on the Fight against Corruption](#), 21 April 2023

provisions of the Law of Georgia "On Fight Against Corruption" According to the Venice Commission, the law does not provide for the appropriate degree of independence of the Anti-Corruption Bureau. The bureau's competences require additional guarantees in the law, as it is tasked with supervising the financing of political parties and monitoring the declarations of assets and interests of high-level officials.

'According to the European Commission, Georgia has not yet developed a new national anti-corruption strategy or action plan. Additional efforts are needed to defeat corruption in order to eliminate the corrupting influence on the political, legal and economic spheres.'¹²⁹

12.3.7 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted: 'There were credible allegations that some influential "clan" members were corrupt. Several investigative journalists' reports highlighted corruption in the judiciary, specifically relating to unexplained income of judges. Some of the country's most influential judges reportedly either failed to fully declare all assets or declared assets that significantly exceeded their declared income.'¹³⁰ (see [Judiciary](#))

12.3.8 The USSD HR Report further noted:

'The law provided criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally did not implement the law effectively. There were reports of high-level government corruption...

'NGOs continued to cite weak checks and balances and a lack of independence of law enforcement agencies among the factors contributing to allegations of high-level corruption. On November 3, Transparency International/Georgia listed 151 uninvestigated cases of alleged corruption involving high-ranking public officials or persons associated with the ruling party. As of September [2023], 99 public servants were charged with corruption.

'NGOs assessed there were no effective mechanisms for preventing corruption in state-owned enterprises and independent regulatory bodies. NGOs continued to call for an independent anti-corruption agency outside the authority of the SSSG, alleging its officials were abusing its functions.

'In February, the new Anti-Corruption Bureau became operational to facilitate the fight against corruption. According to Transparency International/Georgia, the law did not grant the bureau investigative powers, which remained with the Anti-Corruption Agency under the SSSG and the Prosecutor's Office. The law established that the bureau was accountable to both parliament and the Inter-Agency Anti-Corruption Council. Leading civil society organizations raised concerns that the new bureau would neither have sufficient independence nor authority to be effective.'¹³¹

12.3.9 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 report, noted:

'Corruption persists in the form of nepotism and cronyism in government hiring and procurement. The lack of independent law enforcement bodies and an independent judiciary impedes the effective application of anticorruption laws. Successful cases against high-ranking officials and

¹²⁹ HRC, [State of Human Rights in Georgia, 2023](#) (page 35), 2024

¹³⁰ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 1E), 23 April 2024

¹³¹ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 4), 23 April 2024

those close to them are rare. The State Inspector's Service (SIS), a key body responsible for investigating official corruption, was disbanded in 2021, with the initiative launched in Parliament as its leader was on maternity leave. The Venice Commission found in a December 2023 report that the institutional design of the Anticorruption Bureau, established in late 2022 and which replaced some SIS functions, left it susceptible to political influence—notably by the prime minister, who selects its head and has broad powers to dismiss them.¹³²

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12.4 Avenues of redress

12.4.1 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.¹³³

12.4.2 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted: 'The government took steps to investigate some officials for human rights abuses, but impunity remained a problem.'¹³⁴

12.4.3 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 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

¹³² FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (C2), 25 April 2024

¹³³ RFE/RL, [Alleged Police Beating Of Deaf Boy In Tbilisi Shocks Nation, ...](#), 29 January 2022

¹³⁴ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (Executive Summary), 23 April 2024

politically motivated.¹³⁵

12.4.4 The Freedom House report further noted:

‘Human rights watchdogs and the ombudsman have expressed concern about the physical abuse of detainees during arrest and in police custody, and 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 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.”¹³⁶

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

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13. Societal freedoms and activities

13.1 Freedom of assembly

13.1.1 Article 25 of the [Constitution](#) allows for freedom of assembly¹³⁷.

13.1.2 The Human Rights Centre, in its report - State of Human Rights in Georgia, 2023, published in 2024, noted:

‘Authorities may terminate an assembly only if it assumes an unlawful character. According to the Law of Georgia "On Police", the police shall ensure safety of the participants of meetings, demonstrations, and other mass events;.

On December 14, 2023, the Constitutional Court of Georgia recognized as unconstitutional the normative content of Article 8 of the Law of Georgia "On Assemblies and Demonstrations", which provided for the obligation to notify the executive body of the municipality no later than 5 days before the assembly/demonstration. In some cases, when taking into account the spontaneity of the assembly, it is not possible to fulfill the obligation of prior notification within this period, the legislative record should not become the basis for limiting the freedom of expression.

‘In 2023, a number of assemblies organized by civil activists, political parties and civil movements were held in Tbilisi. Several notable violations of freedom of assembly and expression were also observed. The Human Rights Center monitored a number of assemblies, which was later reflected in the interim report on the monitoring of assemblies.¹³⁸

13.1.3 HRW, in its World Report 2024, noted: ‘In [October](#), the GD rushed through amendments to the law on rallies and demonstrations, granting police broad discretion to disband or detain protesters who try to erect non-permanent “structures,” such as tents and stages. Failure to comply would result in a 500 Georgian lari (GEL) (about US\$190) [$\text{£}140^{139}$] fine or up to 15 days’ detention.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (F2), 25 April 2024

¹³⁶ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (F3), 25 April 2024

¹³⁷ CoE, [Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#), 27 May 2004

¹³⁸ HRC, [State of Human Rights in Georgia, 2023](#) (pages 8, 9), 2024

¹³⁹ Xe.com, [500 GEL to GBP - Convert Georgian Lari to British Pounds](#), 11 September 2024

¹⁴⁰ HRW, [World Report 2024 – Georgia](#), 12 January 2024

13.1.4 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 report, noted: ‘Freedom of assembly is upheld unevenly, with police often responding to demonstrations with excessive force. In March 2023, large-scale rallies were held against a proposed “foreign agents” law, with police using tear gas and water cannons to disperse protesters. At another demonstration, in June, a democracy activist was arrested for holding a blank piece of paper; he was found guilty of petty hooliganism in September.’¹⁴¹

13.1.5 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

‘The constitution and law generally provided for freedom of assembly. 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. This provision was challenged by the PDO before the Constitutional Court in 2021; however, the case remained pending. The PDO and NGOs reported that police sometimes restricted, ineffectively managed, or failed to protect freedom of assembly. The ECHR found several violations of the right to peaceful assembly based on the government’s nonproportional interference, arbitrary arrest of peaceful protesters, or sanctioning of demonstrators...

‘The PDO stated that the use of the administrative code “in many cases did not meet the requirements of necessity and took the form of unjustified interference with freedom of assembly.” The Tbilisi Pride event scheduled for July 8 was disrupted and canceled after approximately 3,000 far-right demonstrators marched to the event to counterprotest and looted the space. Despite assurances from the Ministry of Internal Affairs that police would protect the event, counterdemonstrators breached the perimeter and police evacuated the Tbilisi Pride organizers. According to [Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association] GYLA, the July 8 violent counterdemonstration organizers also organized the violent attacks against journalists and civic activists in July 2021.’¹⁴²

(See [Protestors](#))

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13.2 Freedom of expression

13.2.1 Article 19 of the [Constitution](#) allows for freedom of expression¹⁴³.

13.2.2 The Human Rights Center (HRC), in its report - State of Human Rights in Georgia, 2023, published 2024, noted:

‘Although Georgian citizens and civil society representatives enjoy freedom of speech, continuous attacks on journalists and media representatives by the government and opposition political representatives on the one hand, and on the other by far-right groups, have created a hostile media environment. Also, the frequent tendencies of public agencies or government representatives to make delayed decisions or to refuse to provide information upon request are problematic. Moreover, there are court

¹⁴¹ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (E1), 25 April 2024

¹⁴² USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 2), 23 April 2024

¹⁴³ CoE, [Constitution of The Republic Of Georgia \(As amended in February 2004\)](#), 27 May 2004

proceedings against the owners of critical media.¹⁴⁴

13.2.3 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom on the Net 2023 report, 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 Electronic Communications provide for civil penalties for those found guilty of making defamatory statements online.

‘The unlawful use or dissemination of personal data online resulting in “considerable damage” is illegal under the criminal code, with penalties of up to four years in prison.

‘In 2015, amendments to the criminal code criminalized “public calls to violent actions” aimed at “causing discord between religious, racial, ethnic, social, linguistic, or other groups” under Article 239. Violations of Article 239 are punishable by fines and community service. Repeated offenses resulting in injury or death are punishable by up to five years in prison. Despite the narrow framing of this provision, human rights defenders have claimed that it could be selectively applied to punish legitimate expression online. Other criminal-code provisions also apply to online activities.¹⁴⁵

(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 2023 report, noted:

‘There are few restrictions on online assembly, and digital mobilization is a regular feature of political life. Political and civil society groups frequently post calls to action on social media platforms and use them to communicate with their supporters. During the coverage period, online platforms, especially Facebook and TikTok, were effectively used to organize protests and mobilize around several issues. [For example] In March 2023, several days of street protests were held against the “foreign agents” bills, which would have impacted entities that received more than 20 percent of their annual income from foreign sources. ... In addition, online mobilization played a vital role in organizing demonstrations supporting Ukraine and EU integration, including a rally held in late June 2022...

‘The existence of government-affiliated groups and individuals spreading disinformation on social media platforms to influence public opinion has been documented by local observers in recent years. This tendency has worsened further during the coverage period, especially after the EU’s June 2022 refusal to grant candidate status to Georgia and the formal split of several ruling political party deputies from the Georgian Dream faction in October 2022. Disinformation campaigns have targeted CSOs and online media outlets.¹⁴⁶

13.3.2 The Freedom House report noted: ‘State surveillance of internet activities

¹⁴⁴ HRC, [State of Human Rights in Georgia, 2023](#) (page 15), 2024

¹⁴⁵ FH, [Freedom on the Net 2023 – Georgia](#) (C2), 4 October 2023

¹⁴⁶ FH, [Freedom on the Net 2023 – Georgia](#) (B5, B8), 4 October 2023

threatens Georgians' privacy rights. The government has reportedly monitored opposition figures, independent journalists, and exiles from other countries living in Georgia.¹⁴⁷

13.3.3 The same source further reported: 'Facebook is the most popular platform in Georgia, especially for political discussions. Some 43 percent of respondents to a CRRC survey conducted in February 2022 study said that the internet was their primary source for information.'¹⁴⁸

13.3.4 The USSD HR Report 2023 noted:

'The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, but concerns remained regarding unauthorized surveillance online. In May, Meta suspended 80 Facebook accounts, 26 pages, nine groups, and two Instagram accounts associated with the government's Department of Strategic Communications for "coordinated inauthentic behavior." According to Meta, this network originated in Georgia and targeted domestic audiences.'¹⁴⁹

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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 103 out of 180 countries, with a score of 53.05 for 2024 based upon the organisation's own assessment of the countries¹⁵⁰, placing Georgia in the 'difficult' classification¹⁵¹. Comparatively, Georgia ranked at 77 out of 180 countries, with a score of 61.69 for 2023¹⁵², where it was in the 'problematic' classification¹⁵³.

13.4.2 RSF's 2024 WPFI described Georgia's media landscape as:

'... [D]iverse 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 was the case with Rustavi 2, a TV channel that changed its editorial line after its handover to a former owner. Regional and community radio stations struggle with funding problems, 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 is conducive to sustained competition for control of television networks. Although Georgian law prohibits political parties from owning media outlets, 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

¹⁴⁷ FH, [Freedom on the Net 2023 – Georgia](#) (C5), 4 October 2023

¹⁴⁸ FH, [Freedom on the Net 2023 – Georgia](#) (B7), 4 October 2023

¹⁴⁹ USSD, [HR Report 2023: Georgia](#) (section 2), 23 April 2024

¹⁵⁰ RSF, [World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\): Georgia, 2023](#)

¹⁵¹ RSF, [Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023](#), 2023

¹⁵² RSF, [World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\): Georgia, 2023](#)

¹⁵³ RSF, [Methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2023](#), 2023

sometimes resort to censorship, raids, smear campaigns and intimidation.¹⁵⁴

- 13.4.3 According to Freedom House, in its in its Freedom in the World 2024 report, ‘The media environment is pluralistic but highly partisan’.¹⁵⁵

(See [Detention and prosecution](#))

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13.5 Civil society

- 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.’¹⁵⁶

- 13.5.2 BTI, in its 2024 Country Report – Georgia, noted:

The civil society sector is steadily growing in terms of both numbers and capacity. However, it remains primarily concentrated in Tbilisi and Batumi and has limited connections with the broader population.

‘During the COVID-19 pandemic, NGOs struggled to influence the political agenda. They aimed to bring about significant reforms in the judiciary and electoral system to alleviate political tensions and prevent further societal polarization. However, the ruling GD government and its supporters initiated a smear campaign against leading watchdog NGOs, primarily accusing them of corruption. This campaign reached its zenith with the attempt to introduce the “Law on Agents of Foreign Influence,” which ultimately failed to pass. The GD government does not endorse politically constructive interactions between the state and civil society, as outlined in the EU’s 12-point candidate catalog.’¹⁵⁷

- 13.5.3 Freedom House (FH), in its Nations in Transit 2024 report, noted:

‘The annual EU enlargement progress report released in November characterized Georgian civil society as “well developed, diverse, vibrant and continu[ing] to enjoy the freedom to operate, albeit in an increasingly hostile environment.” The legal framework, including light registration and reporting requirements, a special tax regime, and strong freedom of association, creates an environment conducive to robust civic activity. However, civil society organizations (CSOs) struggle to remain financially viable, and often lack grassroots support, which contributes to low public trust towards them.’¹⁵⁸

- 13.5.4 Freedom House (FH), in its Freedom in the World 2024 report, noted: ‘Civil society is fairly robust. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are included in policy discussions, though many face political pressure including surveillance, criticism, and exclusion from policy dialogue.’¹⁵⁹

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¹⁵⁴ RSF, [World Press Freedom Index \(WPI\): Georgia](#), 2024

¹⁵⁵ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (D1), 25 April 2024

¹⁵⁶ EC, [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, ...](#) (page 6), 17 June 2022

¹⁵⁷ BTI, [2024 Country Report – Georgia](#) (page 18), 19 March 2024

¹⁵⁸ FH, [Nations in Transit 2024 – Georgia](#), 18 April 2024

¹⁵⁹ FH, [Freedom in the World 2024 – Georgia](#) (E2), 25 April 2024

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](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

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

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared 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 **3.0**
- valid from **1 October 2024**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section 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 following a review by the IAGCI.

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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 them 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:

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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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