

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2022

Georgia

PARTLY FREE

58
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	22 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	36 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

60 /100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.

Note

The numerical scores and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are examined in separate reports. Freedom in the World reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the [report methodology](#) and [FAQ](#).

Overview

Georgia holds regular and competitive elections. Its democratic trajectory showed signs of improvement during the period surrounding a change in government in 2012–13, but recent years have featured backsliding. Oligarchic influence affects the country's political affairs, policy decisions, and media environment, and the rule of law is undermined by politicization. Civil liberties are inconsistently protected.

Key Developments in 2021

- In April, European Council (EC) president Charles Michel brokered an agreement between the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party and opposition groups, effectively ending an parliamentary boycott that began in late 2020. However, GD withdrew from the agreement in July.
- Anti-LGBT+ rioters broke into the offices of nongovernmental organization (NGO) Tbilisi Pride in July, destroying property and injuring 53 media workers preparing to cover a subsequently cancelled pride parade. One of the injured individuals died later that month.
- In August, the State Security Service (SSS) was revealed to have surveilled several hundred individuals, including journalists, activists, politicians, and members of the clergy, reportedly tracking the personal activities and communications of their targets. The SSS and the government denied wrongdoing.
- In October, former president Mikheil Saakashvili, who was convicted in absentia of abuse of power while living abroad, was arrested upon his return to Georgia. Saakashvili engaged in a hunger strike, which he agreed to end in November.

- Georgians voted in local elections in October, with the ruling GD winning 19 of 20 mayoral races. Observers called the elections peaceful but noted the misuse of official resources, intimidation, and allegations of vote buying among other problems.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

2/4

Georgia has a dual executive, with the prime minister serving as head of government and the president as head of state. Under constitutional changes approved in 2017, the president elected in 2018 is to serve a six-year term, after which a 300-member electoral college comprising national lawmakers and regional and local officials will choose presidents.

In 2018, Salome Zourabichvili, a former foreign minister supported by GD, won about 60 percent of the vote in the second round of the presidential election, defeating Grigol Vashadze, a former foreign minister running for the opposition United National Movement (UNM). While the electoral environment was largely peaceful, significant problems in the preelection period and voter intimidation on election day marred the quality of the runoff. Abuse of administrative resources and limited instances of vote buying and ballot-box stuffing were reported. Outside many voting stations, the presence of GD activists created an intimidating atmosphere. Just days before the runoff, a charitable foundation controlled by former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili, then the GD chairman, promised to write off the debts of about one in six eligible voters.

The president formally appoints the prime minister, whom Parliament nominates. Giorgi Gakharia, the prime minister since late 2019, resigned in February 2021, objecting to the court-ordered arrest of UNM leader Nika Melia. Gakharia was succeeded by defense minister and former prime minister Irakli Gharibashvili.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

2/4

The unicameral Parliament is composed of 150 members, with 120 selected through nationwide proportional representation and 30 directly elected in single-member districts. This system was introduced in 2020; previously, nearly half of lawmakers were elected in single-member districts. All members serve four-year terms.

In the October 2020 parliamentary elections and November runoffs, GD won 90 seats, including all 30 single-member district seats. The UNM-led coalition won 36, all via proportional representation, and seven smaller groups won the remaining seats. Election observers, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), considered the vote competitive but noted numerous shortcomings, including the use of administrative resources, vote buying, interference with observers, disorganized precinct-level electoral commissions, preelection and election-day violence, violations of voting secrecy, and widespread intimidation.

In November 2020, opposition parties announced a boycott of that month's runoff and refused to enter the new Parliament. Voter turnout for the runoff stood at 26 percent, the lowest recorded since independence. Opposition members who were elected declined to take their seats until an agreement between the government and opposition was brokered with the support of EC president Michel in April 2021. GD withdrew from the agreement in July, however.

Local elections took place in two rounds in October 2021, with GD winning 19 of 20 mayoral races. International and local observers called the elections generally peaceful, but noted the misuse of administrative funds, the preelectoral dismissal of government employees for supporting opposition candidates, intimidation of candidates and voters, and extensive allegations of vote buying. Two opposition parliamentarians requested that their mandates be terminated after the local elections.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented

The country's electoral laws are generally fair, and the bodies that implement them have typically done so impartially. However, GD's dominance in precinct-level commissions, complicated complaints procedures, and short timelines for filing complaints impair election quality.

The current electoral system for Parliament was introduced in June 2020 and first implemented in the that year's elections. The new system expanded the use of proportional representation and reduced the vote threshold for entering Parliament via proportional representation from 5 percent to 1 percent.

Several electoral-code amendments were passed in June 2021, though the UNM and Lelo for Georgia parliamentarians both declined to vote for them, saying they did not fully comply with the Michel-brokered agreement. Elements related to selection of Central Election Commission (CEC) members were rolled back by the GD-controlled Parliament in December. Further reforms to the electoral system were still being debated year's end.

In August 2021, Parliament selected Giorgi Kalandarishvili to head the CEC and selected two commissioners in a session boycotted by opposition members. A two-thirds vote failed to materialize in three previous attempts to select a chair.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

2/4

While Georgia hosts a dynamic multiparty system, opposition parties increasingly face undue barriers to political competition. A pattern of single-party dominance since the

2000s has inhibited the development and stability of competing groups. In 2019, Mamuka Khazaradze, the founder of one of Georgia's largest banks, and his business partner were charged with money laundering two weeks after Khazaradze stated his intention to form a political party. That party, Lelo for Georgia, won four seats in the 2020 parliamentary elections, though Khazaradze himself remained under investigation as of year's end.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?	2/4
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Georgia last underwent a peaceful transfer of power between rival groups in 2012–13, when GD defeated the UNM in parliamentary and presidential elections. A faction of the UNM split off in 2017, leaving smaller parties that are less capable of mounting a credible challenge.

Opposition parties and members experienced significant intimidation and harassment in 2021. UNM leader Melia was arrested in February on charges related to antigovernment protests held in 2019, though he was released from pretrial detention in May. Also in May, former prime minister Gakharia launched the For Georgia party. For Georgia members faced police harassment, surveillance, arrests on politically motivated charges, and dismissal from government jobs. Security services reportedly intimidated candidates of the Girchi party and others into withdrawing from the October 2021 local elections.

Under the Michel-brokered agreement, GD agreed to hold elections in 2022 if it received less than 43 percent of the vote in the 2021 local elections. GD subsequently withdrew from the agreement in late July, removing a negotiated pathway for the opposition to gain power through elections.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because an opposition party leader was arrested over protest activity, while members of other parties were subjected to intimidation, threats, and loss of employment.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are	
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external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

2/4

Ivanishvili, the wealthy businessman who founded GD in 2011, resigned as party chairman and premier in 2013, but remained the party's primary financial backer and continued to control it informally. His successors as prime minister and party chairman were close confidants and former employees. Bidzina Ivanishvili was reelected as GD chairman at a party congress in 2018 and remained in that post until January 2021, when he resigned and left party politics.

Recent elections have featured allegations of various forms of vote buying and intimidation, including pressure on public employees and recipients of social benefits to support the ruling party.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

2/4

No laws prevent women or ethnic and religious minorities from participating in politics. Electoral reforms introduced in 2020 included a gender quota for the proportional-representation component of parliamentary elections; at least one in every four candidates on a party's list must be a woman. Nevertheless, women's and minority interests remain underrepresented at all levels of government. Although a woman became president in 2018, women won only 31 seats in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Ethnic minority groups make up an estimated 13 percent of the population, with ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis forming the largest communities. However, few parliamentarians are members of ethnic minority groups.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative

representatives determine the policies of the government?

2/4

The ability of elected officials to determine and implement government policy has been impaired by the informal role of Ivanishvili, who has exerted significant influence over decision-making after leaving office. His de facto authority was demonstrated in 2018, when then prime minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili resigned due to disagreements with Ivanishvili.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

2/4

While petty corruption has become less common, corruption persists. It has allegedly taken the form of nepotism or cronyism in government hiring and procurement. The lack of independence among law enforcement bodies and the judiciary impedes the effective application of anticorruption laws. Successful cases against high-ranking officials and those close to them remain rare.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

3/4

Government operations are generally subject to scrutiny by auditing bodies, the media, NGOs, and the public. However, the Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information, a Georgian advocacy group, reports that access to public information has been uneven since 2010. While public officials declare assets, the Georgia chapter of Transparency International warned in 2020 that the monitoring of such declarations is inconsistent and does not focus on conflicts of interest or potential corruption.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?

2/4

The media environment is pluralistic but partisan. Although free expression is broadly allowed, the government has become increasingly aggressive towards journalists.

In July 2021, anti-LGBT+ rioters broke into the offices of Tbilisi Pride, which was organizing the city's LGBT+ pride parade, and injured 53 media workers covering the event. Cameraman Aleksandre Lashkarava, who was one of the injured, died later that month. Officials engaged in antimedia rhetoric after the attack, with Tbilisi mayor Kakha Kaladze calling Georgian news programs "psychological violence" in late July. Journalists critical of the government's conduct were denied access to press events.

The government engages in the surveillance of journalists. In August 2021, television station Mtavari Arkhi (Main Channel) reported that the SSS had surveilled and recorded the conversations of journalists along with politicians, members of the clergy, and civil society activists.

Journalists at publicly funded or owned outlets face dismissal for criticizing the GD government. In August 2021, the Georgian Public Broadcaster dismissed news anchor Irakli Absandze after he criticized the government's response to the Tbilisi Pride riot.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

2/4

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion but grants unique privileges to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Georgia's religious minorities—among them Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, and Muslims—have reported discrimination and hostility,

including from Georgian Orthodox priests and adherents, and are insufficiently protected by the state.

Members of the clergy were among those surveilled by the SSS according to August 2021 press reports, with the SSS reportedly tracking their communications with journalists and diplomats along with their personal activities.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

3/4

Academic freedom is generally respected. However, in 2018, Georgian authorities froze the assets of the International Black Sea University and prevented it from accepting students for the new academic year, citing tax arrears that the institution allegedly owed. The asset freeze was eventually lifted after the debt was paid, though the university maintained the tax claim was unlawful. The university is associated with the Turkish Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen, which the Turkish government has declared a terrorist organization. In 2017, Georgian authorities closed two schools associated with the movement, citing regulatory violations. The seemingly disproportionate and arbitrary nature of the enforcement actions raised suspicions that they were carried out under Turkish pressure.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

2/4

Georgians generally enjoy freedom of expression, including in their online communications. However, watchdog groups have expressed concerns that state agencies can conduct surveillance and data collection without adequate oversight. A 2017 law created a new electronic surveillance agency under the SSS that can fine service providers for failure to cooperate with its work.

In August 2021, the SSS was revealed to have engaged in widespread surveillance of public figures, including journalists, activists, clergy members, and politicians. Multiple individuals confirmed the authenticity of their conversations after they were leaked in

September. Ombudsman Nino Lomjaria publicly stated that several hundred people were surveilled by the SSS. The government and the SSS both denied wrongdoing, though prosecutors launched an investigation in mid-September.

In March 2021, several people accused authorities of harassing them after criticizing musician Bera Ivanishvili, the former GD chairman's son, on social media. Their accusations came after TV Pirveli aired an undated conversation in which Ivanishvili, his father, and the head of the Special State Protection Service discussed the targeting of internet users, including minors.

In recent years, multiple public figures—including opposition and ruling party politicians—have been subjected to intimidation through the threatened or actual release of surreptitiously recorded sex videos, contributing to an atmosphere that deters free expression on politics.

Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because Georgian security services were reported to have engaged in widespread surveillance of individuals, including journalists, clergy members, and diplomats, and to have used such surveillance to intimidate perceived opponents.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	2/4
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Freedom of assembly is often respected, though police sometimes respond to demonstrations with excessive force.

LGBT+ groups' right to assembly are rarely protected, however, and LGBT+ events are rarely held. In July 2021, anti-LGBT+ rioters met little resistance from police when they broke into the offices of Tbilisi Pride, destroying property and attacking journalists who prepared to cover the day's events. The parade was consequently cancelled. The government previously declined to guarantee protection for a planned LGBT+ rally in

Tbilisi in 2019, while right-wing protesters gathered outside the offices of an LGBT+ pride organization and reportedly vandalized its exterior in 2020.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

3/4

Civil society sector is fairly robust. Some groups are included in policy discussions, though others report facing political pressure, largely in the form of public criticism by government officials. Civil society advocates were also revealed to be targets of SSS surveillance in August 2021.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

2/4

Workers are legally allowed to organize, bargain collectively, and strike, though there are some restrictions on the right to strike, including a ban on strikes by certain categories of workers. Legal protections against antiunion discrimination by employers are weak and poorly enforced in practice.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

2/4

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.

Under the constitutional framework that took effect after the 2018 presidential election, the High Council of Justice rather than the president nominates Supreme Court judges; Parliament then approves the judges. A judicial self-governing body

elects most council members. In 2018, the council presented a list of Supreme Court nominees, but a coalition of NGOs criticized the process's apparent opacity and the nominees' quality. The head of Parliament's legal affairs committee resigned over what she called an "unacceptable" process soon after. In late 2019, Parliament confirmed 14 justices, though opposition members did not participate in the vote. Observers, including from the Council of Europe, criticized the appointments, saying the candidates were neither qualified nor impartial. Parliament passed further judicial reforms in 2020, preempting an opinion from the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

The GD government agreed to institute judicial reforms under the Michel-brokered agreement, though the government withdrew from the agreement in July 2021. Parliament appointed six Supreme Court justices in mid-July, ignoring the agreement. Another four were appointed in December, despite calls from the European Union to continue a judicial-reform program. In September, the Georgia chapter of Transparency International criticized the GD government's decision to reverse changes to the selection process for the prosecutor general, saying it did so to retain unilateral control.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

2 / 4

The law guarantees due process, but the related safeguards are not always respected. The ombudsman's office has reported problems including 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. A number of government opponents have faced prosecutions in recent years that were widely seen as selective or politically motivated.

Former president Mikheil Saakashvili, who had been convicted of abuse of power in absentia in 2018, was arrested by Georgian authorities upon his return to the country in October 2021. Saakashvili was prohibited from attending several hearings related to

new charges in November, prompting criticism from the ombudsman and the US State Department.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

2/4

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. Violence and harsh conditions in prisons remain problems.

A 2018 law established the State Inspector's Service (SIS), which was tasked with investigating police abuses, but it was not independent from the prosecutor's office. In December 2021, the government passed legislation to replace the SIS with two entities, which the state inspector described as "punishment of the Service for its independence." The SIS will be dissolved in 2022 under the legislation.

Former president Saakashvili faced apparent mistreatment after his October 2021 arrest. In November, footage of Saakashvili being physically dragged into a prison hospital against his will was aired by the State Penitentiary Service (SPS). While the SPS claimed that Saakashvili had mistreated personnel, Saakashvili claimed that he was physically attacked.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

2/4

A 2014 antidiscrimination law provides protection against discrimination on the basis of various factors, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity, but it is enforced unevenly. Women and people with disabilities suffer employment discrimination, among other problems.

LGBT+ people face societal discrimination and are increasingly the targets of serious violence. Transgender people in particular receive little protection, and prosecutors

rarely designate crimes against transgender people or other minorities as hate crimes, despite evidence supporting such designations.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

4 / 4

There are ongoing restrictions on travel to and from the separatist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and individuals who approach their de facto borders can face detention, generally for short periods. Georgians also faced COVID-19-related movement restrictions, including a curfew, during part of 2021. Georgians are otherwise free to travel and change their place of residence, employment, and education without undue interference.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

3 / 4

The legal framework and government policies are generally supportive of private business activity. However, protection for property rights remains weak, and deficiencies in judicial independence and government transparency hamper economic freedom.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

3 / 4

Personal social freedoms are generally respected. However, constitutional changes approved in 2017 define marriage as “a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of creating a family.” There is no law allowing civil unions for same-sex couples.

Domestic violence remains a problem in Georgia, and the response from police is often inadequate, though changing societal attitudes have contributed to more frequent reporting and some improvements in enforcement in recent years. Spousal rape is not specifically criminalized.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2/4

Unsafe conditions and inadequate legal protections for workers continue to contribute to a high rate of workplace deaths and injuries. In 2020, Parliament passed a labor reform law that introduced new rules for overtime, shift breaks, and other working conditions, while strengthening the labor inspector’s office.

Georgia is a source, destination, and transit country for human trafficking linked to sexual exploitation and forced labor. Displaced people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia are among the populations most vulnerable to trafficking. However, according to the US State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons Report 2021*, the government has continued its enforcement efforts and improved its performance on victim assistance.



On Georgia

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

58/100 **Partly Free**

Internet Freedom Score

77/100 **Free**

Other Years

2021

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