



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2024

Georgia

PARTLY FREE

58
/100

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

LAST YEAR’S SCORE & STATUS

58 /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 competitive elections and hosts lively media and civil society sectors. However, oligarchic influence affects the country's political affairs, and opposition figures have faced physical attacks. Corruption in government persists and media freedom is undermined by intimidation and pressure against journalists. Executive and legislative interference in the courts remains a substantial problem, as does a lack of transparency and professionalism surrounding judicial proceedings.

Key Developments in 2023

- In March, large-scale street demonstrations took place after lawmakers from the ruling majority introduced a “foreign agents” bill, which would require individuals, media outlets, and independent groups to register as “agents of foreign influence” with the Justice Ministry if they received at least 20 percent of their funds from abroad. Rights groups said the “foreign agent” designation could be invoked to stigmatize legitimate civic activity. The bill also introduced new forms of civil and criminal liability for violators. Following protests, the government withdrew the measure.
- Nika Gvaramia, a television station operator and politician who was jailed in 2022 on what were widely viewed as politically motivated charges, was pardoned in June.
- A number of opposition figures were beaten or shot at during the year.
- Bidzina Ivanishvili, Georgian Dream (GD) party founder and Georgia's richest person, reentered politics and was elected honorary GD chair at an

unscheduled party congress in December. Ivanishvili had stated in 2021 that he was leaving politics permanently.

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
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The prime minister serves as head of government, with primary executive powers. The president serves as ceremonial head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Under constitutional changes approved in 2017, the president elected in 2018 will serve a six-year term. Thereafter, a 300-member electoral college comprising national lawmakers and regional and local officials will choose presidents.

In 2018, Salome Zourabichvili, an independent former foreign minister supported by Georgian Dream (GD), won about 60 percent of the vote in the second round of the presidential election, defeating Grigol Vashadze, a former foreign minister and candidate of the United National Movement (UNM). While the electoral environment was largely peaceful, significant preelectoral issues 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. GD activists created an intimidating atmosphere outside many voting stations. Days before the runoff, a charitable foundation controlled by former prime minister Ivanishvili, then 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 2019, resigned in 2021, objecting to UNM leader Nika Melia’s arrest. Defense minister and former prime minister Irakli Gharibashvili succeeded Gakharia.

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. Members serve four-year terms. Starting in 2024, legislative elections will feature a fully proportional system.

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.

A3 0-4 pts**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?****3/4**

The country's electoral laws are generally fair, and the bodies that implement them have typically done so impartially. However, experts say electoral laws contain shortcomings, and the composition of electoral commissions is a regular point of contention.

In June 2023, Parliament passed measures under which the president’s role in nominating Central Election Commission (CEC) members, who are officially nonpartisan, was transferred to the speaker of parliament, and the previous requirement for a two-thirds majority vote for CEC member appointment was removed in favor of a simple majority vote. Critics say the changes effectively granted the GD, which has a significant parliamentary majority, outsized influence over CEC appointments. President Zourabichvili vetoed the legislation shortly after it was passed. Parliament in July overrode the veto, in apparent violation of parliamentary voting rules: according to journalists who counted the number of lawmakers present against the chamber’s voting display, more GD members voted than were actually present. Additionally, they said, not enough lawmakers were present to legally overturn a presidential veto.

A Venice Commission opinion on continuing electoral reforms in Georgia, issued in December 2023, acknowledged progress but noted concern that the “legislative process” on CEC reforms “does not ensure the broadest possible consensus.” The opinion also noted deficiencies in constituency delineation, restrictive requirements to run for office, high donation limits “affecting the level playing field,” and a need for improved systems for managing electoral disputes, campaign finance regulation, and preventing voter intimidation.

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
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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.

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 transfer of power between rival groups in 2012–13, when GD defeated the UNM in parliamentary and presidential elections. Since then, factions of the UNM have split off, leaving smaller parties that are less capable of mounting a credible challenge.

Voter intimidation and vote buying inhibit opposition parties from gaining power via elections. Opposition parties and members have experienced significant intimidation, harassment, and violence.

In September 2022, the television channel Pirveli reported on leaked documents its journalists said showed surveillance activity by the State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) against the UNM and other opposition parties.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	2 / 4
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Recent elections have featured allegations of vote buying, improper use of state resources, and intimidation, including pressure on public employees and

recipients of social benefits to support the ruling party. Wealthy unelected figures such as GD founder Bidzina Ivanishvili exert significant political influence.

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
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No laws prevent women or members of ethnic and religious minority groups 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 four candidates on a party’s list must be a woman, with this share set to rise in future elections. Nevertheless, women remain underrepresented in government.

Ethnic minority groups make up approximately 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
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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 since leaving office. Political polarization also obstructs the functioning of government.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	2 / 4
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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 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.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	3/4
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Government operations are generally subject to scrutiny by auditing bodies, the media, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the public. However, access to public information remains uneven. While public officials declare assets, declarations are regularly incomplete.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	2/4
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The media environment is pluralistic but highly partisan. Government figures are often aggressive toward critical journalists, and have pressured unfriendly and independent media outlets.

In June 2023, Nika Gvaramia, the head of the opposition television channel Mtavari Arkhi (Main Channel), was freed from prison by presidential pardon. Gvaramia was imprisoned in 2022 on charges of abusing his position while working at Rustavi 2, which were widely viewed as politically motivated.

In 2023, new provisions regarding dress code and security levels for the parliament building prompted concern that the rules could be invoked to deny journalists access. Legislation adopted in October 2023 that expands the authority of the National Communications Commission (NCC) to issue fines and suspensions was criticized by local rights groups and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) as potentially enabling censorship.

The Ministry of Culture has increasingly been involved in efforts to suppress cultural expression. In 2023, this took the form of taking steps to ensure that government loyalists oversee institutions in literature (a Tbilisi museum dedicated to writers who died during the Soviet era); film (the National Film Center); and music (the state conservatory in Tbilisi).

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 (GOC). Georgia's religious minorities have reported discrimination and hostility, including from GOC priests and adherents. Batumi's Muslim community has faced years of legal obstruction from local regulators and other officials, preventing the construction of a new mosque. In September 2023, amendments to the Defense Code removed exemptions from alternative military service for clergy, except for GOC clergy.

The SSG surveilled members of the clergy, according to 2021 press reports, tracking communications with journalists and diplomats and 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, university student protesters sometimes face surveillance and intimidation. Scholars can also face pressure for their views. In June 2023, Levan Berdzenishvili, a politician and literary scholar, was egged and verbally harassed in Tbilisi for his views on Georgian history, and a number of times during the year far-right groups prevented him from lecturing.

School principals and teachers regularly face pressure to campaign for the ruling party during elections. In 2023, there were widespread allegations that the government prevented the appointment of certain school principals due to their political views. Institutions associated with the Turkish Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen have faced official pressure or even closure in recent years. (The Turkish government blames Gülen's movement for a 2016 coup attempt in Turkey.)

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 express their views without fear of overt state or other retribution. However, concerns about state surveillance have emerged in recent years. In 2021, the SSG was revealed to have engaged in widespread surveillance of journalists, activists, clergy, and politicians, and multiple involved individuals later confirmed the authenticity of leaked conversations. In 2022, the television station Pirveli published leaked documents implicating the government in an SSG operation targeting opposition parties. Watchdog groups remain concerned that state agencies conduct surveillance without adequate oversight. In a report released in 2022, the Caucasus Research Resource Center, an NGO, found that while very few Georgians (6 percent) believe they are being personally surveilled by the security services, 36 percent believe their phone calls are tapped some or all of the time.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?**2/4**

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.

LGBT+ groups’ right to assembly is rarely protected. In 2021, anti-LGBT+ rioters met little resistance from police when they broke into Tbilisi Pride’s offices, destroyed property, and attacked journalists. In July 2023, shortly before the Tbilisi Pride Festival was to begin, far-right groups broke into the venue and destroyed materials, prompting festival organizers to cancel the event. Police had pledged to protect the site and had deployed there with crowd control equipment, but stood by while the attack took place.

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 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. In 2022, several parliamentarians proposed a “foreign agents” law that would require individuals, nonprofits, and media outlets that receive at least 20 percent of their funding from abroad to register as “agents of foreign influence.” Rights groups said the “foreign agent” designation could be invoked to stigmatize legitimate civic activity; the bill also introduced new forms of civil and criminal liability for violators. In March 2023, the bill passed its first reading in the parliament. Large-scale protests erupted in response, leading to its withdrawal.

In September 2023, the parliament speaker sent a letter to at least one of the donors of independent media outlet OC Media, complaining that the outlet had refused to publish an opinion piece he had written. (OC Media said he had sought

a commitment that they would publish the piece before he submitted the text.) Separately, the SSG in October interrogated NGO workers who had attended a US Agency for International Development (USAID) training; the Georgian security agency had alleged that the training was part of a US government coup plot. Earlier, in 2021, NGO workers were revealed to be targets of state surveillance.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	2/4
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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 employer antiunion discrimination are weak and poorly enforced.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	2/4
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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.”

The High Council of Justice (HCoJ) nominates Supreme Court judges, whom Parliament approves. A judicial self-governing body elects most council members. 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.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?**2/4**

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 politically motivated.

Georgian authorities arrested former president Mikheil Saakashvili upon his return to Georgia in 2021; Saakashvili had been convicted of abuse of power in absentia in 2018 and sentenced to six years in prison. In 2021 and 2022, he was prohibited from attending several hearings related to new charges.

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 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."

F4 0-4 pts**Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?****2/4**

A 2014 law provides protection against discrimination based on various factors, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity, but it is enforced unevenly. Women and people with disabilities frequently experience employment discrimination.

LGBT+ people face societal discrimination and have been targets of serious violence. Transgender people 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
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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 be abducted, tortured, or killed by the territories’ local security forces. 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
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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
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Most personal social freedoms are respected, but some rights of vulnerable groups including LGBT+ individuals, children, and women are inadequately upheld. Constitutional changes approved in 2017 define marriage as “a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of creating a family.” No law allows civil unions for same-sex couples. Transgender people report experiencing severe social stigma and are at risk of violent attack.

A 2017 amendment codified the legal minimum age for marriage as 18, without exception, but it is not always enforced.

Domestic violence remains a problem in Georgia. The response from police is often inadequate, though changing attitudes contribute to more frequent reporting and better 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
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Unsafe conditions and inadequate legal protections for workers continue to contribute to a high rate of workplace deaths and injuries. In 2020 and 2021, Parliament passed labor reforms 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. However, according to the US State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons Report 2023*, the government has continued its enforcement efforts and meets the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking.



On Georgia

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Country Facts

Population

3,713,000

Region

Eurasia

Global Freedom Score

58/100 **Partly Free**

Internet Freedom Score

76/100 **Free**

Other Years

2023

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