

REPRESSION OF OPPOSITION AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN GEORGIA,

2025–2026

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The political and human rights situation in Georgia underwent a significant deterioration during 2025 and 2026, prompting growing concern among international organizations, democratic institutions, and human rights advocates. While political polarization has long been a feature of Georgian public life, developments during this period reflected a substantial expansion of state measures directed against opposition parties, independent media outlets, civil society organizations, journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens engaged in peaceful political expression. The cumulative effect of these developments has been the emergence of an increasingly restrictive political environment characterized by the concentration of political power, weakening institutional safeguards, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and the growing use of legal and administrative mechanisms to suppress dissenting voices.

One of the most significant developments was the government's response to the large-scale anti-government demonstrations that began in late 2024 following the decision of the Georgian Dream government to suspend negotiations concerning Georgia's accession to the European Union.

The decision was widely perceived by many Georgians as a departure from the country's longstanding pro-European orientation and generated sustained demonstrations throughout 2025. Law enforcement authorities responded with increasingly forceful measures. By October 2025, police had detained hundreds of individuals participating in antigovernment protests. Domestic and international observers documented numerous allegations involving arbitrary detention,

excessive use of force, physical abuse, intimidation, procedural irregularities, and other forms of mistreatment directed against demonstrators. Human rights organizations expressed concern that law enforcement agencies were increasingly functioning as instruments of political control rather than neutral institutions responsible for maintaining public order and safeguarding constitutional rights. This development reflects the broader trend toward increasingly authoritarian governance in Georgia, characterized by the concentration of political power, weakening institutional checks and balances, growing pressure on political opponents and civil society, and the expanding use of state institutions to suppress dissent and protect the interests of the ruling political establishment.

The consequences of political opposition intensified further in November 2025. On November 6, prosecutors initiated criminal proceedings against eight of Georgia's most prominent opposition figures, including former President Mikheil Saakashvili, alleging participation in a conspiracy to overthrow the government. The charges carry potential prison sentences of up to fifteen years. At the time the charges were announced, six of the accused individuals were already in custody. The prosecutions generated widespread concern among legal experts, international observers, and human rights organizations, many of whom viewed the proceedings as politically motivated efforts to marginalize opposition leadership and consolidate political control. These concerns were reinforced by the fact that only one week earlier Georgian Dream had petitioned the Constitutional Court to prohibit the country's three largest opposition parties from participating in political life. The simultaneous use of criminal proceedings and attempts to eliminate major opposition parties through judicial mechanisms represented one of the most serious challenges to political pluralism in Georgia since independence.

Alongside measures directed against opposition politicians, the Georgian government adopted a series of legislative initiatives that substantially curtailed media freedom and expanded

state influence over public discourse. During the spring 2025 parliamentary session alone, the Georgian Dream-controlled legislature enacted multiple laws affecting media organizations, civil society groups, and freedom of expression. Among the most consequential measures was the so-called Foreign Agents Registration Act. Although government officials portrayed the legislation as analogous to the United States Foreign Agents Registration Act, numerous legal scholars, media experts, and international observers emphasized the significant differences between the two frameworks. The Georgian legislation specifically targets media organizations and nongovernmental entities receiving foreign support, requiring them to register as agents of a foreign power while imposing substantial financial penalties and potential criminal liability for noncompliance. Organizational directors and governing board members may face imprisonment if registration requirements are not satisfied. In practice, the legislation has significantly strengthened the government's capacity to monitor, regulate, and exert pressure upon independent media outlets and civil society organizations, thereby expanding state influence over the public sphere, discouraging critical reporting, constraining independent advocacy, and narrowing the space available for dissenting viewpoints and public debate.

The consequences of this legislation are particularly significant within the Georgian context. Independent media organizations have historically relied upon international grants and foreign assistance because of the limited size of the domestic advertising market, unequal access to financial resources, and the competitive advantages enjoyed by media outlets aligned with the authorities. By stigmatizing foreign-funded organizations and exposing them to severe legal, financial, and administrative consequences, the legislation threatens the long-term viability of independent journalism. Numerous observers have warned that the law could effectively dismantle a substantial portion of Georgia's independent media sector by depriving media

organizations of essential sources of funding. Beyond its financial impact, the legislation contributes to a broader climate of intimidation and uncertainty in which journalists, editors, and media owners must operate under the constant threat of regulatory action, financial penalties, criminal liability, and political pressure, thereby undermining media pluralism, public accountability, and the free exchange of information essential to a democratic society.

Additional amendments to the Georgian Broadcasting Law further expanded governmental influence over media activity. These amendments prohibit broadcasters from receiving foreign funding, including grants, co-financing arrangements, and payments associated with public interest programming. Simultaneously, the legislation grants the National Communications Commission extensive authority to review media content and evaluate issues such as impartiality, fairness, factual accuracy, and rights of reply. Critics have argued that these provisions create significant opportunities for political interference in editorial decision-making and enable regulatory bodies to exert pressure on media organizations critical of government policies. Concerns regarding the application of these powers intensified when Georgian Dream filed complaints against major independent television channels, including Formula, Pirveli, and Mtavari Arkhi, objecting to their characterization of political detainees and criticism of state institutions. Although sanctions were ultimately not imposed in those cases, the proceedings demonstrated the government's willingness to employ regulatory mechanisms to pressure critical media outlets.

Further restrictions emerged through amendments to Georgia's Law on Grants. Under the revised framework, foreign grants may not be distributed within Georgia without prior governmental approval. Donors are required to submit detailed information concerning proposed grants to the Anti-Corruption Bureau, which possesses broad authority to approve or reject

funding initiatives. Organizations receiving grants without government authorization may face financial penalties equal to twice the value of the funding received. Critics have argued that these provisions create a mechanism through which authorities may selectively restrict financial support for organizations engaged in investigative journalism, election monitoring, civic education, legal advocacy, and other activities viewed as politically inconvenient.

Freedom of expression was further constrained through amendments to the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression. The revised provisions altered longstanding defamation standards by shifting the burden of proof to defendants and increasing potential liability for critical statements concerning public officials. The amendments also significantly weakened protections for confidential journalistic sources by permitting courts to draw adverse conclusions when journalists refuse to disclose source information. Several journalists were subsequently summoned to court and fined for social media posts critical of government representatives. These developments have generated concern regarding the emergence of a chilling effect on independent reporting and public criticism of government policies.

Simultaneously, amendments to the Organic Law on General Courts substantially restricted transparency in judicial proceedings. The legislation prohibits most forms of video and photographic recording within courtrooms, courthouse corridors, and surrounding areas, while requiring special authorization from the High Council of Justice for media coverage of court proceedings. These restrictions were implemented at a time when public interest in politically sensitive prosecutions involving opposition figures, activists, and government critics was exceptionally high. Critics have argued that limiting media access to judicial proceedings reduces transparency, undermines public confidence in the judiciary, and restricts independent scrutiny of politically significant cases.

Civil society organizations have likewise encountered increasing pressure. Human rights groups, election monitoring organizations, legal advocacy institutions, and independent civic associations have frequently been portrayed by government representatives as agents of foreign influence or participants in efforts to destabilize the state. Such rhetoric has contributed to a climate of hostility toward independent civil society actors and has raised concerns regarding attempts to delegitimize organizations engaged in monitoring government conduct and promoting democratic accountability. Observers have noted similarities between these developments and patterns previously observed in other post-Soviet states experiencing democratic regression.

Particularly significant were amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Manifestations adopted in December 2025. These provisions substantially expanded the authority of law enforcement agencies to regulate public demonstrations. Organizers are now required to notify the Ministry of Internal Affairs at least five days before any planned assembly. Police are authorized to require demonstrations to be relocated, postponed, or modified if they determine that an event may interfere with pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Law enforcement officers may also issue binding instructions during demonstrations and impose sanctions on participants who fail to comply. Violations may result in administrative detention, while repeated offenses may trigger criminal prosecution carrying potential prison sentences of up to one year.

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The practical consequences of this legislation are particularly significant within the Georgian context. Independent media organizations have historically relied upon international grants and foreign assistance because of the limited size of the domestic advertising market, unequal access to financial resources, and the competitive advantages enjoyed by media outlets aligned with the authorities. By stigmatizing foreign-funded organizations and exposing them to severe legal, financial, and administrative consequences, the legislation threatens the long-term viability of independent journalism. Numerous observers have warned that the law could effectively dismantle a substantial portion of Georgia's independent media sector by depriving media organizations of essential sources of funding. Beyond its financial impact, the legislation contributes to a broader climate of intimidation and uncertainty in which journalists, editors, and media owners must operate under the constant threat of regulatory action, financial penalties,

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If current political trajectories persist, there is a substantial likelihood of further deterioration in the human rights situation in Georgia. The growing concentration of political authority, the weakening of institutional checks and balances, increasing pressure on independent media and civil society organizations, and the expansion of discretionary powers vested in law enforcement and regulatory bodies collectively create conditions conducive to additional restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms. Comparative political science research demonstrates that democratic erosion is frequently a cumulative process, in which measures initially directed against political opponents, journalists, civic activists, and other critics of the government gradually expand to encompass broader segments of society. Once institutional safeguards are weakened and mechanisms of accountability diminished, the capacity of state authorities to employ legal, administrative, and coercive instruments against perceived opponents tends to increase significantly.

Under such circumstances, further limitations on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, media independence, and political participation become increasingly likely. Continued weakening of judicial independence, greater reliance on politically motivated investigations and prosecutions, expanded surveillance capabilities, and broader restrictions on peaceful public activity could substantially reduce opportunities for citizens to engage in open political discourse and hold public officials accountable. These developments would likely increase the vulnerability of opposition figures, journalists, human rights advocates, civil society representatives, and ordinary citizens engaged in peaceful political activity. From a broader historical and political science perspective, the current trajectory raises serious concerns

regarding the consolidation of increasingly authoritarian forms of governance and the erosion of democratic institutions, legal protections, and internationally recognized human rights standards within Georgia.

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