

GEORGIA'S SLIDE INTO AUTHORITARIANISM

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Formerly regarded as a leading democratic example among post-Soviet states, the Republic of Georgia is now veering dangerously toward authoritarian rule. In recent years, the Georgian Dream party has entrenched its authority by undermining institutional oversight, stifling dissent, curbing press freedoms, and marginalizing political opposition. Tactics such as rigged elections, selective prosecutions, and harsh suppression of civil society have fostered an atmosphere of intimidation and control. As the country drifts further from its Euro-Atlantic ambitions, the erosion of democratic norms has become increasingly apparent and alarming.

The regime possesses a broad arsenal of tactics to suppress its critics. The entire state machinery operates in service of the government's interests and is controlled by deeply entrenched, corrupt officials. Utilizing criminal elements to intimidate and target opposition figures is a longstanding method of control.¹ Individuals who speak out are frequently removed from their jobs, subjected to police harassment, or imprisoned without fair legal procedures. Any expression of dissent or unauthorized disclosure of information is viewed as a direct threat. The regime's heavy-handed response to peaceful protests and its treatment of internal critics underscore its deeply authoritarian, corrupt, and repressive nature. Actually, physical force and torture are a norm for Georgian law enforcement. Nino Lomdzharja, the Georgian Omdurman,

¹ For example, "on the territory adjacent to the parliament building, there were still several excesses. For example, unknown people in masks beat Irakli Kordzai, an activist of the youth radical organization Why. He was attacked by masked criminals, beaten with rubber truncheons, after which the young man was taken to the hospital. В Грузии продолжается акция протеста оппозиции (Opposition rally continues in Georgia). Radio Liberty, April 10, 2009. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/1606154.html>

reported that in 2020, the treatment of citizens by police officers during administrative detentions worsened.²

In 2021, the Georgian government intensified its crackdown on the opposition. On February 23, riot police stormed the headquarters of the main opposition party, the United National Movement, and arrested its leader, Nika Melia, further escalating the country's ongoing political crisis. Authorities used tear gas to disperse his supporters, some of whom had barricaded themselves inside the building alongside Melia. He was ultimately dragged out by riot police.³ Melia faced charges of inciting violence during the 2019 protests, allegations he firmly denies as politically motivated. His arrest sparked a wave of demonstrations, which were met with a heavy police presence. On March 2, 2021, seven protesters were detained outside the Georgian Parliament in Tbilisi for allegedly disobeying police orders during an anti-government rally.⁴

In October 2021, Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, claimed victory in 19 out of 20 mayoral races, including in the capital, Tbilisi. While the Central Election Commission chief, Giorgi Kalandarishvili, described the elections as competitive, free, and transparent, opposition groups and independent observers raised serious concerns. Transparency International reported up to 150 electoral violations, ranging from minor infractions to more serious irregularities. Denouncing the results, United National Movement leader Nika Melia called on supporters to gather in Tbilisi to coordinate a collective response, declaring, "No one should have the illusion

² 487 страниц от Народного защитника (487 Pages from People's Defender). Ekho Kavkaza, April 1, 2021. <https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/31182329.html>

³ Nika Melia, Georgian opposition leader, is arrested at party HQ. BBC, February 23, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56167147>

⁴ Helena Bedwell. Police in Georgia Storm Opposition Party HQ to Arrest Leader. Bloomberg, February 23, 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-23/police-in-georgia-storm-opposition-party-hq-to-arrest-leader>; Seven detained at opposition rally at parliament. Agenda.GE, March 2, 2021. <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2021/563>

that they can get away with rigged, violent and insulting elections.”⁵ Electoral manipulation has become a recurring feature of Georgia’s political landscape, further eroding public trust in democratic institutions.

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On October 1, 2021, former President Mikheil Saakashvili returned to Georgia to take part in the elections and was immediately taken into custody. Initially, the authorities denied that he had entered the country, but Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili later confirmed his detention, stating, “The third president of Georgia, the wanted Mikheil Saakashvili, has been arrested and imprisoned.” A Georgian human rights ombudsman who visited him in custody reported that Saakashvili had begun a hunger strike and views himself as a political detainee. President Salome Zurbishvili has publicly stated that she will not grant him a pardon.⁷

⁵ Georgian ruling party wins mayoral elections, opposition cries foul. Reuters, October 31, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgian-ruling-party-wins-mayoral-elections-opposition-cries-foul-2021-10-31/>

⁶ For example, “on the territory adjacent to the parliament building, there were still several excesses. For example, unknown people in masks beat Irakli Kordzai, an activist of the youth radical organization Why. He was attacked by masked criminals, beaten with rubber truncheons, after which the young man was taken to the hospital. В Грузии продолжается акция протеста оппозиции (Opposition rally continues in Georgia). Radio Liberty, April 10. 2009. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/1606154.html>

⁷ Mikheil Saakashvili: Georgian ex-president arrested returning from exile. BBC, October 1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58767420>



Georgia's former President Mikheil Saakashvili has been arrested on his return from exile. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58767420>

The Georgian government actively targets political opponents and individuals associated with former President Mikheil Saakashvili. For the past three decades, Georgia has struggled to establish a genuine democracy, and the authorities continue to use all available mechanisms, legal and extralegal, against both perceived and actual critics of the regime.

On May 16, 2022, the Tbilisi City Court sentenced Nika Gvaramia, a member of the Labor Party and the owner and director of the pro-opposition Mtavari TV channel to three years and six months in prison for alleged “abuse of power” during his tenure at the Rustavi 2 television station. He was also fined 50,000 Georgian lari (approximately \$16,500 USD) for embezzlement. The charges stemmed from a claim that, as Rustavi 2’s director, Gvaramia secured a vehicle through an advertising agreement and used it for personal purposes. Prosecutors alleged that this arrangement violated his fiduciary responsibilities and financially harmed the company.

Gvaramia, a former legal representative of Saakashvili, has been a vocal opponent of the ruling Georgian Dream party. He was initially charged on September 6, 2020, along with Kakha Damenia, former financial director of Rustavi 2, and Zurab Iashvili, director of Inter Media Plus.

Amnesty International condemned the verdict, stating: “The sentencing of Nika Gvaramia is a blatant act of politically motivated prosecution in retaliation for his dissent and criticism of the authorities. He now faces years of imprisonment as the government escalates its crackdown on opposing voices. Nika Gvaramia must be released immediately.” The organization expressed concern that the case lacked the legal grounds for a criminal conviction, a view echoed by Transparency International and Georgia’s Public Defender, both of whom monitored the trial. As the case moves through the appeals process, these critical concerns must be addressed.⁸



Mikhael Saakashvili in the hospital.

https://www.google.com/search?q=saakashvili+hospital&rlz=1C1CHBF_enUS762US762&sxsrf=AJOqlzWtxU3lZ1erq8RG_qG8ggyYGYxHEQ:1677244970074&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwid2JG1oK79AhU0k4kEHRqqAzMQ_AUoAnoECAEQBA&biw=1920&bih=969&dpr=1#imgsrc=x4m7-CFB5M-4_M&imgdii=vgnhDBchHPBV1M

In January 2023, Mikheil Saakashvili, while in custody, was transferred to a hospital on the outskirts of Tbilisi. He was suffering from symptoms consistent with dementia and severe muscle atrophy. “My health is in deep trouble,” Saakashvili wrote in a letter to a journalist. “In addition to many alarming symptoms, what truly devastates me is the severe memory loss.”

Saakashvili suspects he was deliberately poisoned and recalled falling into a brief coma

⁸ Georgia: Sentencing of pro-opposition media owner Nika Gvaramia a political motivated silencing of dissenting voice. Amnesty International, May 17, 2022. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/05/georgia-sentencing-of-pro-opposition-media-owner-nika-gvaramia-a-political-motivated-silencing-of-s-dissenting-voice/>

following an earlier transfer to a different prison clinic. In December, his legal team released a toxicology report that indicated the presence of heavy metals in his system, with the toxicologist concluding that he had likely been poisoned.⁹

The controversial detention and ongoing imprisonment of former President Mikheil Saakashvili has become a stark symbol of Georgia's democratic backsliding, drawing international criticism and reflecting broader concerns about the rule of law in the country. The European Union has highlighted the pervasive influence of oligarchs, particularly Bidzina Ivanishvili, and the deep political polarization that continues to fuel social tensions and foster a hostile political environment in Georgia. "Georgia used to be a favored project of America and the West. Now the toy is broken, and nobody pays much attention to it," remarked Shota Utiaishvili, a former government official and current fellow at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, a Tbilisi-based think tank.

The ruling Georgian Dream party has aligned itself with former members who formed a more radical, openly anti-Western faction in parliament known as Power of the People. This group promotes rhetoric and policies that closely mirror Kremlin strategies, including a controversial draft law aimed at labeling certain organizations as "foreign agents." The movement has even gone so far as to accuse the United States of plotting to overthrow the Georgian government.

In what observers see as an effort to maintain favor with Vladimir Putin, the Georgian authorities have refused to impose sanctions on Russia or return an anti-aircraft missile system originally provided to Georgia by Ukraine in 2008. "I don't understand why the Georgian government has tethered itself to the Kremlin," said Ben Hodges, a former commander of U.S.

⁹ Georgia is drifting into the Kremlin's orbit. *The Economist*, January 31, 2023.
<https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/01/31/georgia-is-drifting-into-the-kremlins-orbit>

forces in Europe, during a visit to Tbilisi.¹⁰ Protests against the “foreign agent” legislation escalated in May 2024, resulting in clashes with law enforcement and the arrest of at least twenty demonstrators.¹¹

In 2024, political repression in Georgia has intensified, reflected in a growing number of incidents underscoring the government’s efforts to stifle opposition voices and civic activism. Both political opponents and activists have faced physical violence, arbitrary arrests, and systematic intimidation from state-aligned forces as well as unidentified actors. In June 2024, for example, well-known activists such as Niko Managadze of the Student Movement for Freedom¹² and Tsotne Koberidze from the opposition party Girchi–More Freedom¹³ were assaulted. In addition, figures like Khatuna Beridze of the NGO “Alternative” and civic-minded businessman Ioseb Babaevi have been targeted through questionable criminal charges and persistent harassment. Babaevi’s detention has drawn particular scrutiny due to allegations of police misconduct and manipulated evidence.

The ruling Georgian Dream party, dominated by influential figures like Bidzina Ivanishvili, continues to exert significant influence over the political landscape, deepening polarization and undermining democratic institutions. This has led to rising public frustration, frequent demonstrations, and growing calls for political reform.

¹⁰ Georgia is drifting into the Kremlin’s orbit. *The Economist*, January 31, 2023.

<https://www.economist.com/europe/2023/01/31/georgia-is-drifting-into-the-kremlins-orbit>

¹¹ Georgia protests: Riot police face off against foreign influence bill demonstrators. BBC, May 13, 2024.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-69001339>

¹² In Tbilisi, Niko Managadze, a student and the organizer of the protest action "Meet the Prime Minister," was beaten. JamNews, June 8, 2024. <https://jam-news.net/in-tbilisi-niko-managadze-a-student-and-the-organizer-of-the-protest-action-meet-the-prime-minister-was-beaten/>

¹³ Tsotne Koberidze: They were waiting for me at the bus stop near my house: they tried to beat me with electric shocks, but they failed. InterPressNews, June 8, 2024. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/131928-tsotne-koberidze-they-were-waiting-for-me-at-the-bus-stop-near-my-house-they-tried-to-beat-me-with-electric-shocks-but-they-failed/>

One of the most controversial developments was the adoption of the so-called “Foreign Agents Law” on May 28, 2024, widely seen as an instrument to suppress dissent. Even before the law’s passage, a climate of fear was spreading, with escalating threats directed at its critics, including politicians, activists, and ordinary citizens. These acts of intimidation have included physical assaults, harassing phone calls, and online abuse. The ruling party and government officials have either implicitly condoned or openly ignored these actions, contributing to an increasingly hostile and dangerous environment for dissenting voices.

As the crucial parliamentary elections set for October 26, 2024 approached, political repression increasingly became a defining feature of both the campaign period and the broader political environment in Georgia. Acts of intimidation and aggression against government critics have become almost routine, highlighting the depth of the crackdown on dissent.

A series of incidents in late May 2024 illustrate the escalating hostility:

May 31: Vitali Guguchia, whose video confronting Georgian Dream MP Viktor Japaridze went viral after he criticized the “foreign agents” bill as a Kremlin-style law, became the target of a smear campaign by the pro-government outlet POSTV. A film crew arrived in Guguchia’s village in Samegrelo, where reporter Natia Beridze accused him of past covert activity under the UNM government. The situation escalated into a physical altercation between Guguchia and the cameraman. The Special Investigative Service opened a case under Article 154 of the Criminal Code for alleged obstruction of journalistic work.

May 31: Giorgi Ushikishvili, a well-known singer and outspoken critic of the government and the foreign agents law, was harassed while driving—pursued and verbally assaulted. The next day, the same individual messaged him on Facebook, referencing the incident and warning him about his stance on Georgia’s path toward EU integration.

May 31: Multiple opposition figures and their relatives received threatening phone calls. Among those targeted were UNM members Tina Bokuchava and Ani Tsitlidze, the mother of Ana Buchukuri from the For Georgia party, the mother of Droa party member Tata Khundadze, and several Girchi–More Freedom representatives. Tamar Belkania, Deputy Mayor of Tsalenjikha, also reported that her child received a threatening call.

May 31: Georgian Dream MP Dimitri (Dito) Samkharadze publicly claimed responsibility for orchestrating a campaign of intimidation against government critics and civil society groups. In a video posted to Facebook, he showed a man defacing the offices of anti-government activists with vulgar and threatening graffiti. Samkharadze described the action as retaliation against what he called “neo-fascists,” referencing earlier graffiti targeting the homes of Georgian Dream MPs that labeled them “slaves” and “traitors.”

Samkharadze also published a list of civil society organizations and political groups that he identified as future targets. Among the NGOs listed were: the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), Tbilisi Pride, Sapari, the “Step” Movement, the “Shame” Movement, Courtwatch, Mtis Ambebi, Studio Monitor, the “Talga” Movement, the Civil Society Foundation, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Transparency International – Batumi, and Green Sector. Political parties and branches singled out included: Lelo for Georgia, Girchi – More Freedom, Droa, the youth wing of Lelo for Georgia, the central office of the United National Movement (UNM), Ahali, and their respective regional offices in Batumi. Samkharadze’s statement was publicly supported by People’s Power MP Guram Macharashvili, Georgian Dream MP Davit Kacharava, and pro-government POSTV co-founder and TV host Shalva Ramishvili, all of whom endorsed the targeting and warned of further pressure.

June 1: Around 2:30 a.m., a group of 30–40 individuals vandalized the central office of the United National Movement. UNM leader Levan Khabeishvili shared a video of the destruction via Facebook Live, stating that security guards fired shots into the air to disperse the attackers. According to Khabeishvili, the assailants acted in coordination with police and the State Security Service. The Ministry of Internal Affairs opened an investigation under Article 187 of the Criminal Code, related to property damage.

June 2: Tsotne Koberidze, a young opposition figure from Girchi – More Freedom, was approached near his home in Tbilisi by two unidentified men armed with electric shock devices. Koberidze managed to resist the attack, and the assailants fled after bystanders intervened. That same day, civic activist and Tbilisi Pride co-chair Ana Subeliani received a suspicious call from a stranger offering to give her 150 GEL (approximately \$55) worth of strawberries. When she refused to meet, the caller became verbally abusive and aggressive.

June 4: Civic activist and businessman Ioseb Babaevi, owner of the anti-occupation “Resto Bar” and known for sending humanitarian aid to Ukraine, was controversially detained in Gori. He was charged under Article 236 of the Criminal Code for the alleged illegal possession of firearms. However, his lawyer and local supporters claim the weapons were planted by the police, who reportedly beat and insulted Babaevi during his detention. When he appeared in court on June 6, visible injuries were noted on his head. Judge Levan Darbaidze ultimately acquitted Babaevi, ruling the investigation unlawful.

June 5: Khatuna Beridze, an activist and leader of the NGO *Alternative*, was arrested and later released on parole after publicly calling Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and Adjara regional leader Tornike Rizhvadze “slaves” and “traitors” while they were walking along Batumi Boulevard.

June 6: Nino Kalandia, an activist affiliated with the organizations Talgha and the Georgian Down Syndrome Association, reported a threatening encounter in the lobby of her apartment building. A man approached her and asked when she would stop her activities, followed by a direct threat. Kalandia responded assertively, confronting him loudly, which caused the man to back down and leave. She has also received multiple threatening phone calls in recent weeks.

June 7: Niko Managadze, a representative of the Student Movement for Freedom and a participant in a protest against Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's lecture at Tbilisi State University, was assaulted in broad daylight. Speaking to the media outlet Publika, Managadze recounted that he had just left the university and was waiting to cross the street when someone struck him from behind. Several other men quickly joined in, surrounding and beating him until passers-by intervened. Witnesses recorded video footage clearly capturing the attackers' faces.

June 9: Mariam Tsitsikashvili, a researcher with GRASS—Georgia's Reforms Associates, was detained at the airport on administrative charges of petty hooliganism under Article 166, following a verbal exchange with People's Power MP Viktor Japaridze regarding his support for the foreign agents law. Tsitsikashvili and her companion Irina Gurgenchashvili, who was not involved in the incident, were prevented from boarding their flight and had their passports confiscated.

June 10: Several men dressed in black reportedly loitered outside the residence of Zurab (Girchi) Japaridze, leader of the opposition party Girchi—More Freedom, apparently waiting to attack him. Neighbors noticed the suspicious group and alerted others. Gia Japaridze, Zurab's brother—who had previously been assaulted by government-linked thugs—shared details about the situation on social media. When journalists from TV Pirveli arrived to investigate, the men

claimed they were maintaining public order and left quickly. This marked the third targeted incident against Zurab Japaridze in the past month; in one case, he fired a warning shot into the air to deter attackers.

June 11: Zuka Berdzenishvili, an activist and son of Davit Berdzenishvili, a leader of the Republican Party, was violently attacked by three individuals near his home. During the assault, one of the perpetrators threatened to kill him, saying, “I’ll shoot you in the head.” The attack came just two hours after Parliamentary Speaker Shalva Papuashvili published a social media post naming Berdzenishvili and others affiliated with EU-funded NGOs and media, accusing them of conducting a politically motivated campaign of “terror” against lawmakers who supported the foreign agents law.

June 13: Civic activist Beqa Papashvili was assaulted after publicly calling Georgian Dream MP Beqa Odisharia a “Russian slave” and a “traitor” while at a grocery store. According to Papashvili, Odisharia was accompanied by bodyguards who prevented him from approaching the MP. Minutes after Papashvili exited the store, three men confronted and physically attacked him. He reported that one of the assailants identified himself as Odisharia’s son. These events have heightened international alarm, as Georgia’s ongoing erosion of democratic norms and human rights poses a serious threat to its aspirations for deeper integration with the European Union and NATO.

June 14: Ivane Chkhikvadze, EU Integration Program Manager at the Civil Society Foundation and Georgia Country Consultant for the European Endowment for Democracy—who had testified at the June 4 U.S. Congressional hearing—was aggressively confronted at the airport by pro-government individuals and propagandist media figures. Video footage captured them hurling insults, calling him names such as “Sergo Orjonikidze,” “slave,” “traitor without a

homeland,” and “Soros-paid agent.” One individual, reportedly a member of the ruling party's youth wing, accused him of disloyalty: “Weren’t you ashamed to speak out against your country?” and “Didn’t you feel uncomfortable asking for sanctions?”

June 17: Leri Darjania, a close associate of civic activist Datuna Danelia, was brutally attacked by a group of approximately seven men early in the morning. Danelia reported the assault on social media, stating: “At 8 a.m., my friend and fellow activist Leri Darjania was ambushed and beaten by Georgian Dream's street enforcers.” Darjania sustained a broken nose and additional facial injuries, requiring hospitalization.

June 22: Activist Niko Gaprindashvili was ambushed and beaten by three men wielding batons, resulting in a concussion and other injuries. The attack followed the announcement of a planned protest against the Georgian Manganese mining company, scheduled for June 30.

June 25: The United National Movement (UNM) regional office in Poti was vandalized. Davit Khomeriki, head of the local UNM branch, reported that the office’s double-glazed windows had been shattered by repeated blows with heavy objects.

June 25: Kote Abdushelishvili, an activist involved in organizing the June 30 demonstration against the Georgian Manganese mining company and a member of the movement to save the village of Zodi, was attacked in broad daylight by three masked men in central Tbilisi.

June 30: Residents of Chiatura municipality in Georgia’s Imereti region plan to hold a protest against Georgian Manganese, citing the company’s mining operations as a direct threat to the survival of their village.

July 2: The Tbilisi City Court ordered pretrial detention for Omar Okribelashvili and Saba Meparishvili, who were arrested during the May 14 protests against the controversial

“foreign agents” law. Both men are being prosecuted under Part 2 of Article 187 of the Georgian Criminal Code, which pertains to group-based destruction or damage to property—a crime punishable by three to six years in prison. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, they intentionally damaged an iron security barrier placed near the Parliament building.

July 3: Davit Katsarava, leader of the anti-occupation group Power is in Unity, who was severely beaten during the May 14 protests and subsequently hospitalized for surgery, received a court summons for July 5, likely for administrative charges. Katsarava shared on social media that he expects a politically motivated trial, describing it as a “kangaroo court,” and claimed that police officers conveniently switched off their body cameras at the moment they alleged he insulted them.

July 5: Katsarava further revealed that following his violent assault and while en route to the hospital, authorities informed him that he was being charged with administrative offenses under Article 166 (petty hooliganism) and Article 173 (disobeying lawful police orders).

July 10: Lazare Grigoriadis, who was among those detained and reportedly beaten during the May 14 demonstrations when the foreign agents law was passed in its third reading, was fined 2,300 GEL by the Tbilisi City Court.¹⁴

These incidents underscore the growing normalization of politically motivated intimidation and harassment in Georgia, as the ruling party intensifies efforts to silence dissent ahead of the elections.

Georgia’s parliamentary elections, held on October 26, 2024 became a flashpoint of political unrest and controversy. The ruling Georgian Dream party claimed victory with around

¹⁴ 2024: Chronicle of Repression. Civil Georgia, July 10, 2024. <https://civil.ge/archives/611538>

54% of the vote, securing a parliamentary majority.¹⁵ However, the election process was marred by widespread accusations of electoral fraud, including voter bribery, ballot-stuffing, and physical intimidation at polling stations. Both domestic opposition groups and international observers raised serious concerns about the legitimacy of the vote.¹⁶ Critics had long warned that Georgian Dream would employ every possible tactic, legal and otherwise, to retain control, reflecting a broader pattern of entrenched, undemocratic political maneuvering.

In late November 2024, Georgia was rocked by mass civil unrest following the government's controversial announcement to suspend negotiations for European Union accession until 2028. The decision sparked outrage across the country, with demonstrators accusing the government of deliberately derailing Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.¹⁷ In the capital, Tbilisi, thousands gathered outside the parliament building, where tensions quickly escalated into violent clashes. Riot police deployed tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd, while protesters responded with fireworks and makeshift barricades. The clashes led to widespread injuries and arrests - nearly 300 individuals were detained, and at least 26 people, including three police officers, were hospitalized.¹⁸

The crisis deepened when several opposition figures, including Nika Gvaramia of the Coalition for Change, were detained during the protests. Gvaramia was reportedly beaten unconscious while in custody, sparking further outrage and igniting a wave of follow-up

¹⁵ Nini Gabritchidze. Official Results of 2024 Vote: What They Show. Civil Georgia, October 10, 2024. https://civil.ge/archives/631386?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁶ Felix Light. Georgian ruling party defies protests, boycott to re-open parliament after disputed election. Reuters, November 25, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgian-ruling-party-defies-protests-boycott-re-open-parliament-after-disputed-2024-11-25/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁷ პარლამენტთან აქცია გრძელდება: პოლიცია წყლის ჭავლს იყენებს, მიმდინარეობს დაკავებები (Protest continues near Parliament: Police use water cannon, arrests underway). Sputnik, December 1, 2024. https://sputnik-georgia.com/20241201/parlamenttan-aqcia-grzeldeba-policia-wylis-wavls-iyenebs-mimdinareobs-dakavebebi-291186796.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹⁸ Felix Light. Demonstrators again converge on Georgia's parliament after the country's EU bid was suspended. AP, December 3, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgian-pm-says-pro-eu-revolution-attempt-has-failed-protests-persist-2024-12-03/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

demonstrations.¹⁹ The authorities' harsh response was widely viewed as an assault on civil liberties and a tactic to silence dissent. President Salome Zourabichvili voiced support for the demonstrators and condemned the government's retreat from EU integration, urging the defense of democratic principles. In contrast, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze dismissed the protests as subversive attempts to destabilize the state, insisting that the administration's actions aligned with Georgia's national interests.

Further controversy surrounded the December 14, 2024, presidential election, in which Mikheil Kavelashvili, an ex-professional footballer and member of the ruling Georgian Dream party, was elected unopposed through an electoral college dominated by the ruling bloc. The opposition boycotted the process, denouncing it as illegitimate and accusing the government of widespread electoral fraud, including foreign interference. Many critics claimed that both the presidential and parliamentary elections were manipulated with Moscow's influence, further straining Georgia's democratic credibility on the international stage.²⁰

Georgia, once celebrated as a model of democratic transformation in the post-Soviet landscape, is now increasingly characterized by authoritarian governance. Under the leadership of the Georgian Dream party, crucial democratic institutions have been systematically weakened. Judicial independence has eroded, the media landscape has narrowed, and civil society faces mounting pressure. Opposition voices, ranging from political leaders to grassroots activists, are routinely met with threats, legal retaliation, and, at times, physical violence. These developments reflect a calculated campaign to suppress dissent and entrench political dominance.

¹⁹ Marc Bennets. Georgian opposition leader 'beaten unconscious by police'. The Times, December 4, 2024. <https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/georgian-opposition-leader-beaten-unconscious-by-police-s7drd7h3c?region=global>

²⁰ Lasha Gamjashvili. Georgian Dream turns into Georgian Nightmare: election fraud, escalating protests, and a confrontation with the EU. New Eastern Europe, December 19, 2024. <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2024/12/19/georgian-dream-turns-into-georgian-nightmare-election-fraud-escalating-protests-and-a-confrontation-with-the-eu/>

Mass arrests, politically charged prosecutions, and the violent dispersal of peaceful demonstrations signal the steady unraveling of democratic standards. The regime's use of hostile rhetoric, branding opponents as traitors or foreign agents, has deepened social divisions and created a culture of fear. Laws like the controversial “foreign agents” bill have further curtailed civic space and reinforced the government's grip on power. While civil society and Western partners have repeatedly expressed alarm, the government continues to disregard calls for reform and accountability.

Georgia's growing departure from democratic norms threatens not only its internal cohesion but also its broader aspirations for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The resilience of its citizens, who continue to mobilize in defense of democracy, stands in stark contrast to the state’s increasing authoritarianism. Without meaningful political change and the restoration of fundamental freedoms, Georgia risks isolating itself from the international community and forfeiting the democratic progress it once proudly symbolized.

The country is sharply polarized along political lines, with the ruling party actively working to silence dissenting voices. The political atmosphere is highly charged, and there is widespread anticipation of further government actions aimed at marginalizing the opposition.

May 7, 2025