

The cover features a light grey background with abstract shapes. On the left, there is a large, irregular blue shape. On the right, there is a vertical grey bar and a light blue vertical bar. The title is centered in a bold, dark blue font.

**SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE AND
THE EROSION OF FREEDOM
OF EXPRESSION IN GEORGIA**

2026

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER



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I - Legal Repression against CSOs and Media

Between 2024-2025 the Georgian government has adopted repressive laws like the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and the amendments to the Law on Grants. While Georgia's so-called "foreign agents" laws are officially justified as promoting transparency regarding foreign influence, in reality, they impose severe constraints on civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and independent media by stigmatizing and restricting foreign funding by imposing excessive obligations related to registration, reporting, and labelling and by introducing criminal liability.

On February 19, 2025, the Georgian Dream registered a legislative package in Parliament aiming to significantly limit the mandatory involvement CSOs in public governance and decision-making processes. These changes mark a formal recognition of the government's ongoing practice of excluding civil society from policy-making and transparency mechanisms. The legislative amendments: Remove CSOs from various public selection and consultation processes; Limit civil participation in appointing officials to key institutions such as the High Council of Justice, the Legal Aid Service, and Public Broadcaster's Board; Replace or dilute the role of CSOs with academic institutions or undefined organizations, without a clear legal distinction.¹

The explanatory notes to these laws repeat disinformation narratives with explicit references, such as: "global developments surrounding USAID have revealed that NGO involvement in public decision-making hinders the effective functioning of the state"² - thereby reinforcing the initial hostile environment toward civil society and legitimizing their exclusion from governance processes. This legislative shift reflects the institutionalization of a long-standing practice of excluding independent voices and aims to weaken public oversight, transparency, and the principle of inclusive governance. By redefining or eliminating civil society's role across sectors, these amendments signal a clear turn away from democratic standards, undermine Georgia's commitments under its EU Association Agreement, and consolidate authoritarian control over public institutions.

- Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence

In February 2023, a parliamentary group linked to the ruling Georgian Dream party introduced two restrictive draft laws "On Registration of Foreign Agents" and "On Transparency of Foreign Influence" which required CSOs and independent media receiving over 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power." This triggered widespread peaceful protests across Georgia. Following mass protests and

¹ Parliament of Georgia. Legislative Drafting Package No. 07-3/32/11, registered 19 February 2025. <https://info.parliament.ge/v1/law-drafting/package/21885>

² Parliament of Georgia. Explanatory Note to the Draft Bill "On Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament of Georgia". 19 February 2025. <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/381178>

international opposition, the bills were withdrawn. However, nearly identical legislation was reintroduced in March 2024 and adopted on 28 May 2024, despite a presidential veto and international criticism.³

The law imposes burdensome registration and reporting requirements, with fines up to 25,000 GEL (approximately €8,000) for non-compliance.⁴ Its adoption triggered daily protests, violently dispersed by authorities using tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets. Activists were arbitrarily detained and ill-treated, while civil society faced smear campaigns and vandalism. The crackdown intensified after the Prime Minister suspended EU accession talks following flawed parliamentary elections, signaling a deepening assault on civic freedoms and democratic expression.⁵

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- Foreign Agents Registration Act

On 1 April 2025, the Georgian Parliament adopted the “Foreign Agents Registration Act” (FARA), which took effect on 31 May.⁶ The law significantly restricts civil society by imposing vague and broad criteria that may target anyone receiving foreign funding, regardless of the amount.

FARA requires persons or entities engaged in “political activities” for a “foreign principal” to register as “foreign agents” with the Anti-Corruption Bureau. Staff involved must also register as “related persons.” Registration is mandatory within ten days of beginning relevant work and is published online.

The Bureau can enforce registration and halt unregistered activities. Registrants must submit detailed biannual reports and declare changes within ten days. All public materials must be labelled as produced by a foreign agent, reinforcing stigma.

Violations carry fines of up to 10,000 GEL (approximately €3,200) and prison terms of up to five years. Failing to follow labelling rules may result in fines of 5,000 GEL (approximately €1,600) and up to six months in prison.

- Amendments to the Law on Grants

Amendments to the Law “On Grants” adopted from April 2025, impose strict controls on foreign funding for Georgian civil society.⁷ With few exceptions, any foreign grant to a

³ European Commission, “Statement by the High Representative with the European Commission on the final adoption of the law on transparency of foreign influence in Georgia”, 28 May 2024 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_24_2945. Also, European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), “Georgia. Urgent Opinion on the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence”, Opinion No. 1190/2024, CDL-PI(2024)013, 21 May 2024, available at [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI\(2024\)013-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-PI(2024)013-e).

⁴ Legislative Herald of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, (adopted 28 May 2024) <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895?publication=0>

⁵ Human Rights Center, Persecution Against Civil Society Organizations, 2024. <https://www.hrc.ge/files/350346339Persecution%20of%20CSOs-eng.pdf>

⁶ Legislative Herald of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Foreign Agents Registration Act; <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6461578?publication=0>

⁷ Legislative Herald of Georgia, On Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Grants, Draft Law, April 16, 2025, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6475816?publication=0>

Georgian organisation or individual now requires prior approval from the government or its designated authority. Donors must submit the full grant agreement in advance, which must be reviewed within ten days - though the law sets no criteria for approval or denial.

Receiving unapproved grants is prohibited and treated as an administrative offense, punishable by a fine equal to double the grant amount. The Anti-Corruption Bureau enforces the law with broad powers, including adopting regulations, demanding financial and personal data, questioning individuals, and interrogating them before a magistrate. If a violation is suspected, the Bureau files an offense report with the court and can immediately freeze assets including bank accounts matching the fine amount. Courts have 15 days to confirm the seizure.

II - Erosion of Freedom of Expression

The one-party Parliament led by 'Georgian Dream' has actively pursued legislative measures that further limit freedom of assembly and expression. **The main changes have affected three key legal acts: the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia, the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, and the Criminal Code of Georgia.**⁸

- Increased Administrative Penalties

Amendments to Code of Administrative Offenses that entered into force on 6 February 2025⁹ significantly increased fines and detention periods, clearly aiming to discourage protest participation.

significantly increased administrative fines and detention periods clearly aimed at discouraging protest participation rather than protecting public order. The maximum term of administrative detention was quadrupled from 15 to 60 days, particularly for offences commonly used against peaceful protesters, such as disorderly conduct, disobeying police orders, and vandalism. For repeated acts of vandalism, detention can now reach 60 days (up from 5).

Fines for misconduct have also tripled from 1,000 to 3,000 GEL (approximately €320 to €960), and the definition of 'disorderly conduct' was broadened, making it easier to penalize individuals based on vague or subjective interpretations of misconduct. Notably, Article 173, frequently used to arrest protesters, was amended to introduce harsher penalties, including

⁸ Radio Tavisupleba, (2025, February 7). Mikheil Kavelashvili Signed Amendments Restricting the Protest and the Freedom of Expression. Retrieved April 10, 2025 <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33306634.html>

⁹ Parliament of Georgia, (2025, February 6). Parliament Endorsing Amendments to Code of Administrative Offenses in III Reading. <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/parlamentma-administratsiul-samartaldarghevata-kodeksshi-tsvlilebebis-paketi-mesame-mosmenit-miigho>

detention of up to 60 days or fines of 2,000–5,000 GEL (approximately €640–€1,600) for insulting or harassing police officers. These punitive changes are likely to have a chilling effect on the rights to peaceful assembly and expression.¹⁰

- *Silencing Speech on Social Media*

Article 173 of the Administrative Offenses Code has been supplemented with Article 173¹⁶, which prohibits insulting or disrespectful behavior directed at politicians, officials, state servants, individuals equated with state servants, or public servants. This includes verbal insults, defamation, offensive gestures, or other disrespectful acts committed during the performance of official duties or in connection with such duties. Sanctions under Article 173¹⁶ range from fines of 1,500 to 4,000 GEL (approximately €480–€1,280) or administrative detention of up to 45 days. In the case of repeated offenses, penalties increase to fines of 2,500 to 6,000 GEL (approximately €800–€1,920) or administrative detention from 5 to 60 days.

On June 6, 2025, member of Georgian Dream announced that the party would initiate legal action against anyone using offensive or mocking language toward its members.¹¹ Following this statement, and based on complaints submitted by Georgian Dream MPs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated dozens of administrative proceedings under Article 173¹⁶ of the Code of Administrative Offenses, targeting individuals for social media posts allegedly insulting political officials.

As a result of the initiated proceedings, individuals including journalists, activists, and civil society representatives were fined 4,000 GEL (approximately €1,280) for social media posts allegedly insulting members of the ruling party.¹² Examples include referring to an MP as a “slave” in a Facebook post¹³, sharing a video with the caption “A slave passed by”¹⁴ and publishing posts deemed insulting toward multiple parliamentarians.¹⁵

¹⁰ Human Rights Center, Legislative Amendments Restricting Freedom of Assembly and Expression and Findings of the Monitoring; p 5-6. 2025 <https://www.hrc.ge/files/reports/397report%20eng.pdf>

¹¹ First Channel, Irakli Kirtskhalia: “We will file a complaint with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to ensure that no one can promote hate speech aimed at discrediting state institutions or spread terror in the public space.” June 6, 2025.

¹² TV Pirveli; Tamar Chergoleishvili fined 4,000 GEL for Facebook status. June 17, 2025.

<https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebi/sazogadoeba/103614-tamar-chergoleshvili-peisbuk-statusis-gamo-4-000-larit-daajarimes>; Tabula; Eka Mishveladze fined 4,000 GEL for a Facebook post. July 13, 2025. <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/736625-eka-mishveladze-facebook-postis-gamo-4-000-larit>; Radio Liberty; Court fines TV host Misha Mshvildadze 4,000 GEL for a post. June 12, 2025.

<https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%90-%E1%83%9B%E1%83%A8%E1%83%95%E1%83%98%E1%83%9A%E1%83%93%E1%83%90%E1%83%AB%E1%83%94%E1%83%AA-%E1%83%93%E1%83%90%E1%83%90%E1%83%AF%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94/33441258.html> TV Pirveli; Judge Enukidze fines Ana Subeliani 4,000 GEL. June 17, 2025. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebi/sazogadoeba/103626-ana-subeliani-mosamartle-enukidzem-4-000-larit-daajarima>; Tabula; Journalist Dea Mamiseishvili fined 3,000 GEL for a Facebook post about Mdinardze. June 12, 2025. <https://tabula.ge/en/news/736594-mdinaradzeze-facebook-postis-gamo-zhurnalisti-dea>; Legislative Herald of Georgia, On Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, 06/02/2025 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6407621?publication=0>

¹³ Interpressnews; Judge Fines Vakho Sanaia 4,000 GEL.

June 20, 2025. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/841649-vaxo-sanaias-mosamartlem-4000-lariani-jarima-daakisra>

¹⁴ Interpressnews; Court fines TV host Vika Bukia 4,000 GEL. June 18, 2025. <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/841453-sasamartlom-telecmaqvan-vika-bukias-4-000-lariani-jarima-daakisra>

¹⁵ Formula TV; Baia Patariaia fined 4,000 GEL for Facebook posts. June 18, 2025. <https://formulanews.ge/News/126789>

Dozens more proceedings are ongoing against individuals for posts expressing critical opinions about government officials. Court practice so far indicates a clear pattern of convicting individuals under Article 173¹⁶, often treating political criticism as an administrative offense. This pattern constitutes a grave threat to the fundamental right to freedom of expression and represents a deliberate strategy to intimidate and silence journalists, activists, and opposition voices. The deployment of administrative and legal penalties to stifle legitimate criticism not only undermines democratic norms but flagrantly violates Georgia's binding commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights. Such actions amount to state-sanctioned repression, eroding the rule of law and fostering an environment of fear and self-censorship. Persisting in these practices jeopardizes the core democratic values of transparency, accountability, and pluralism, and constitutes a direct assault on civil liberties guaranteed by international law.

- Amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations

Recent legislative amendments indicate the government's intent to significantly limit citizens' rights to freedom of assembly and expression.¹⁶ Under the revised law, if a protest is planned on a roadway or is likely to obstruct traffic, organizers must notify the relevant authority at least five days in advance. Failure to do so results in a fine of 5,000 GEL (approximately €1,600), increasing to 6,000 GEL (approximately €1,920) for repeat violations. The maximum administrative detention has also increased from 5 to 60 days. Notable changes have been made to Articles 9, 11, and 11¹ of the Law.

Article 9 now prohibits holding a protest inside a building without the owner's written consent and expands the ban on blocking infrastructure such as buildings, roads, bridges, tunnels, railways, and transport hubs, especially when such actions disrupt operations or traffic. Authorities may require relocation of protests to avoid such disruptions.

Article 11 extends the ban on deliberately obstructing movement to include both pedestrian and vehicle traffic. New provisions prohibit installing temporary structures that pose safety risks, hinder police, disrupt institutions, or are unnecessary for the protest.

Violations can lead to fines of up to 15,000 GEL (approximately €4,800) or 20 days of detention. For repeated offenses, the fine rises to 20,000 GEL (approximately €6,400) or detention of up to 60 days. Law enforcement can now classify any structure, including protest stages, as a threat and dismantle or confiscate it, imposing severe penalties on organizers. Penalties have also increased for blocking court entrances or protesting near judges' residences or within court premises. Organizers face fines of 5,000 GEL (approximately €1,600) or up to 60 days detention.

¹⁶ Legislative Herald of Georgia, On Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, 06/02/2025
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6407621?publication=0>

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has been granted broader powers to disperse protests. Under the amended Article 11¹, the Ministry now has full authority to reopen blocked roads or restore traffic during demonstrations, replacing the role previously held by municipal authority. In addition, the amendments empower the Ministry to prohibit assemblies that promote or “popularize” topics related to gender identity, sexual orientation, or incest.

- Amendments to the Law on Common Courts

On 26 June 2025, amendments to Georgia’s Organic Law on Common Courts were adopted¹⁷, significantly limiting media and public access to judicial proceedings and undermining the principle of open justice.

The new provisions ban all photo, video, and audio recordings or broadcasts in court premises unless conducted by the court or its authorized representatives. Dissemination of such materials is now fully at the discretion of the court. Additionally, recording or live-streaming a hearing requires prior approval from the High Council of Justice for each specific case an impractical and restrictive mechanism, particularly for short-notice hearings.

Access for independent and international monitors has also become more limited, with courts at times allocating small rooms to deliberately restrict attendance at hearings of public interest.

These changes obstruct public oversight of high-profile cases, contradict international standards of judicial transparency, and weaken public trust in the justice system. Following the restrictions, there has been an increase in reported verbal and physical abuse by court marshals against journalists and observers, with no response from oversight bodies.

- Criminal Code as a Tool for Silencing Dissent

The Georgian Dream government quickly passed changes to the Criminal Code¹⁸ that further enable using the justice system as a political tool. Punishments have become tougher for certain crimes, and new aggravating factors were added.¹⁹

A new offense (Article 353²) criminalizes attacks or similar acts against political officials, state servants, or equivalent persons, punishable by up to three years in prison. If committed repeatedly, by groups, in front of minors, or using dangerous methods like explosions or fire, the sentence increases to six years.

Additionally, amendments to Articles 222 and 330 now allow the government to define “strategic or special importance” objects by ordinance. On February 1, 2025, just before a

¹⁷ Legislative Package of Amendments to the Law on Common Courts. <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/394549>

¹⁸ Parliament of Georgia, (2025, February 6). Parliament Endorsing Amendments to Criminal Code of Georgia in III Reading <https://parliament.ge/en/media/news/sakanonmdeblo-organom-siskhlis-samartlis-kodekshi-tsvilebis-shetanis-shesakheb-kanonproekts-mesame-mosmenit-mkhari-dauchira>

¹⁹ Legislative Herald of Georgia, On Amendments to the Criminal Code of Georgia, 06/02/2025 <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6407666?publication=0>

major planned protest, the government added key roads to this list effectively criminalizing road blockades and leading to the arrest of eight protesters.²⁰

These changes show that criminal law is being misused to intimidate the public and suppress protests, undermining democratic and legal principles. The Georgian Dream is weaponizing legislation to weaken human rights protections and silence opposition.

Currently, the Tbilisi City Court is handling multiple politically motivated cases. In all cases, courts have uncritically upheld prosecution requests for pretrial detention without due consideration of defendants' personal circumstances, including their age, health, employment, social vulnerability, or lack of criminal records. Among those detained are young people under 21, sole providers for ill or vulnerable family members.

In two high-profile cases, civil activists²¹ face charges of organizing or participating in group violence during protests. However, no police witness has confirmed the existence of coordinated violent groups, and the evidence often lacks proof of intent or participation. Some officers reported injuries without identifying perpetrators, while others were harmed after the accused were already detained or absent. Accelerated court proceedings raise concerns about due process and the intent to deliver verdicts before pretrial detention expires. The use of the justice system as a tool of repression not only threatens democratic institutions but also erodes public trust in the rule of law.

²⁰ "Publika", The Court Imposed Bail to 8 people Arrested near Tbilisi Mall, 10/04/2025; <https://publika.ge/tbilisi-moltan-dakavebul-8-pirs-sasamartlom-sapatimro-girao-sheufarda/>

²¹ Radio Tavisupleba. [Andro Chichinadze, Onise Tskhadadze, Rezo Kiknadze and Others Remain in Detention]. Published May 1, 2025. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33402159.html> Also Radio Tavisupleba, Video Presented as Evidence Against Zviad Tsetskhladze Has No Sound – He Is Accused of Organizing Violence, July 23, 2025. <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33481904.html>