

**EROSION OF CIVIC SPACE AND  
FREEDOMS IN GEORGIA:**

**PATTERNS OF REPRESSION AND  
INTIMIDATION**

**2026**

HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER



AUTHOR: Nino Chaladze

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## Origins of the Human Rights Crisis

### - Targeting Civic Space

Freedom of expression and an open civic space are essential for democracy in Georgia, enabling public scrutiny of government actions and the protection of fundamental rights. However, the Russian-inspired “foreign influence” laws introduced in 2023 have severely undermined these freedoms by stigmatizing civil society and the media. Despite this, civil society actors have refused to comply and continue to challenge the laws through domestic and international mechanisms, resisting political efforts to silence critical voices, damage reputations, and restrict free expression.

At the outset, CSOs and individuals critical of the government were stigmatized with labels such as “enemies of the church” and “LGBT propagandists,” accompanied by intimidation and harassment. After May 7, 2024, repression intensified: citizens opposing the repressive law, along with their family members, received persistent threatening and abusive calls from anonymous numbers. Soon, the attacks moved into the public space, with hate graffiti and targeted vandalism against of CSOs, political opponents as well as the homes of activists. For instance, posters appeared on the walls of Human Rights House Tbilisi were depicting CSO directors with hostile inscriptions like “Destroyers of the country”, followed by offensive graffiti scrawled across its facade, fence, gate, and even the asphalt in front of the building. This incitement was allegedly led by a member of the Georgian Parliament from the “Georgian Dream” party. Thus, such campaigns culminated in physical assaults: between May 5–11, 2024, for instance attacks on a National Teacher’s Award laureate, the executive director of the Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information, a TV crew, and activists opposing the “Russian law”. Further incidents included the severe beating of the biker march organizer, etc.<sup>1</sup>

### - Elections and organised violence

The parliamentary elections held on 26 October 2024 represent the peak of anti-human rights policies and the consolidation of control over democratic institutions. Widespread irregularities including procedural breaches, obstruction of election observers, violations of ballot secrecy, and undue influence on voters point to a systemic pattern of electoral manipulation by the ruling party.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Election Code of Georgia, no one may gather or count voters within 100 meters of a polling station, and any attempt to bribe, coerce, or intimidate voters is prohibited

<sup>1</sup>HRC, Annual Report, 2024, P 7-8; <https://www.hrc.ge/files/380anual2024eng.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Georgian CSOs, Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, P 9; [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf)

and subject to criminal liability. Despite these safeguards, HRC monitors observed violations, where unauthorized people checked voters, restricted their ability to vote, coordinated voter lists, and in some cases dictated choices in the polling booth. These actions, alongside broader coercion and intimidation, illustrate a deliberate effort to manipulate the electoral process and suppress dissent.<sup>3</sup>

In Georgia, the issue of so-called Titushki is no longer seen as isolated incidents. Instead, assaults carried out by informal groups have become frequent, organized, and increasingly dangerous. Since 2023, these groups have targeted individuals who express critical views, including journalists, opposition figures, civil society representatives, and ordinary protestors, with the aim of intimidating and silencing dissent. Testimonies from protest participants and video evidence indicate that during these violent episodes, police patrols were often nearby but failed to intervene, even when citizens requested assistance. Such inaction raises serious concerns. Incidents since spring 2024, and particularly the coordinated attacks after November 28, 2024, demonstrate a deliberate and systematic effort to target individuals with critical views. Without decisive condemnation and accountability, such violence risks becoming entrenched in Georgian society.<sup>4</sup>

## - Suppression of Dissent

Since 2023, and particularly during the 26 October 2024 parliamentary elections, the Georgian Dream government has systematically undermined fundamental rights, consolidating control over democratic institutions and suppressing dissent.

**Freedom of assembly** was heavily restricted. Between 28 November and 8 December 2024, police dispersed demonstrations seven times, using excessive force including water cannons, tear gas, pepper spray, and rubber bullets without warnings or legal justification. Officers were unidentifiable, wore masks. Protesters suffered serious physical and psychological harm. Systematic ill-treatment and torture were widespread, with victims reporting beatings, humiliation, sexual threats, and psychological abuse. The Public Defender's Office documented 282 alleged cases of ill-treatment between 28 November 2024 and 28 January 2025, and nearly 78% of interview respondents reported experiencing police violence. **Freedom of expression** was similarly attacked. Journalists covering protests were verbally and physically assaulted, had equipment seized or damaged, and faced administrative or criminal prosecution. Informal groups affiliated with the government targeted media representatives, opposition activists, and protestors, while state-controlled media propagated disinformation and marginalized critical voices. The **right to liberty and a fair trial** was systematically undermined. In November- January Over 1,600 individuals faced administrative proceedings,

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<sup>3</sup> HRC, MONITORING REPORT OF 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA: ELECTION VIOLATIONS IN THE REGIONS INHABITED BY ETHNIC MINORITIES, 2025, P 5-9; <https://www.hrc.ge/files/376parlel2024-eng.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>HRC, Attacks by Informal Punitive Groups on Protest Participants and Individuals with Critical Views, 2025, P 15; <https://www.hrc.ge/files/396TITUSHKEBI-eng.pdf>

including minors and people with disabilities. Legislative amendments increased detention terms and fines, and courts issued blanket decisions without proper evidence review. Criminal charges further criminalized peaceful protest. **Other repressive measures** included large-scale dismissals of public servants, arbitrary searches of homes and offices, and enforced disappearances during protests, systematically targeting civil society, media, and political opponents. **State institutions**, including law enforcement and the judiciary, supported or tolerated these violations, with ineffective investigations fueling impunity. High-ranking officials were publicly rewarded despite involvement in repression. The capture of the judiciary and ongoing threats from Foreign Influence laws further restricted democratic freedoms.<sup>5</sup>

## 2025: Escalation of Repression

### - Mass Persecution and Legislative Intimidation of Protesters

Since January 2025, the Georgian Dream party has used a tenfold increase in fines to persecute protest participants. **Civil activists, journalists, politicians, and cultural figures have been repeatedly fined 5,000 GEL (around 1,800 EUR) for road-blocking**, including journalist Mariam Nikuradze (20,000 GEL, around 7,200 EUR), singer Paata Burchuladze, actor Bacho Kajaia, activist Nino Kalandia (30,000 GEL, around 10,800 EUR), writer Akaki Veltauri (145,000 GEL, around 52,200 EUR), and activist Nika Narsia (105,000 GEL, around 37,800 EUR). Courts fined minors, children of 2008 war heroes, and journalists performing their duties, often interpreting sidewalk presence as road-blocking. Notices were delivered at night or early morning, and total fines from November 28, 2024, to March 18, 2025, reached approximately 2 million GEL (around 720,000 EUR). Activist Mariam Sichinava was fined over 70,000 GEL (around 25,200 EUR) for mask-wearing and pyrotechnics. The government deployed facial and emotion recognition cameras to surveil protesters. Eight protesters detained at Tbilisi Mall on February 2-4 were re-arrested under criminal charges. From May to June 2025, **fines and detention targeted activists** including Mariam Sichinava, Keren Esebua, Tornike Skhvitaridze, Ani Kavtaradze, Miranda Bagaturia, Ana Kurashvili, Albi Kordzaia, Beka Papashvili, Tatia Apriamashvili, Lika Lortkipanidze, Magda Mamukashvili, Nadim Khmaladze, Nika Narsia, and journalist Gela Mtivlishvili. On June 6, 2025, **social media posts criticizing Georgian Dream led to fines** against journalist Eka Mishveladze, TV host Misha Mshvildadze, human rights defender Baia Patariaia, activist Ana Subeliani, journalists Vakho Sanaia, Vika Bukia, politician Elene Khoshtaria, and journalist Dea Mamiseishvili (3,000-4,000 GEL, around 1,080-1,440

<sup>5</sup> Georgian CSOs, Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, P 9-15; [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20CRISIS%20IN%20GEORGIA%20-%20final.pdf)

EUR). These measures demonstrate coordinated legislative, judicial, and technological tools to intimidate, punish, and surveil citizens exercising their right to assembly and expression.<sup>6</sup>

## - Harassment of Human Rights Defenders and Activists

In 2025, the Georgian Dream party resumed arbitrary investigative actions against civic activists. On January 31, search and seizure operations were conducted at the homes of Nikoloz Latsabidze and Dato Futurize, who were accused of publicly inciting violent actions and writing slogans on several building facades in Tbilisi. Personal belongings, including clothing, were seized, and Nikoloz Latsabidze faced restrictions on access to legal counsel and his freedom of movement. On February 2, one day before the planned Tbilisi Mall protest, authorities carried out searches at the homes of Ilia Glonti and Nancy Voland (Kristina Botkoveli), administrators of the Facebook group “Daitove,” as well as at the apartments of civic activists Isako Devidze, Nini Kekelidze, and Sandro Chitanava. Ilia Glonti was denied a lawyer during the search, while Isako Devidze, detained administratively the same day, was also denied legal counsel. Nancy Voland experienced a rights-violating search: she was forced to undress, prevented from recording the procedure, and her mother’s mobile phone was confiscated, requiring emergency medical attention. Personal property seized during these searches included Nancy’s computer, which stored her drawings and projects, and five laptops plus 2,000 GEL belonging to Isako, which had been taken as a loan for his mother’s surgery.

The pattern of arbitrary search and seizure continued throughout 2025. On February 24, the home of sports commentator Sandro Tsnobiladze was searched. On March 18, the residence of civil activist Levan Gatiashvili was also targeted. On March 31, activist Luka Kintsurashvili was subjected to a personal street search and taken to a police station without lawful grounds. On April 24, the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Finance carried out searches at the offices of the trade union “Labor,” at the home of its founder Giorgi Diasamidze, and at Hualing, where a union assembly had recently been held. These actions appeared linked to the union’s ongoing support for pro-European protests and assistance to miners from Chiatura.<sup>7</sup>

## - Suppression of Solidarity Initiatives and HRDs

The implementation of administrative fines has taken on a distinctly punitive role. Judicial decisions are increasingly issued without proper evidence, and the escalating fines serve to intimidate the public. Beyond direct coercion, these measures create a chilling effect, undermining citizens’ ability to participate meaningfully in democratic processes. In response to such violations, citizens organized solidarity funds as a form of collective support for the

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<sup>6</sup> Media Institute, Persecution of protest participants (legislative changes and existing practice), 2025, P 6-8; <https://mediainstitute.ge/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/persecution-of-protest-participants.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Media Institute, Persecution of Human Rights Defenders Through Arbitrary Investigative Actions, 2025, p 1-2; <https://mediainstitute.ge/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Persecution-of-Human-Rights-Defenders.pdf>

protests. This included the efforts of the Tbilisi Human Rights House, which the Georgian Prosecutor's Office controversially treated as criminal activity, accusing it of sabotage, attempted sabotage under aggravating circumstances, aiding foreign-controlled entities, financing activities against Georgia's constitutional order and national security, and providing other forms of material support. Through these superficial investigations and arbitrary actions such as account freezes and searches Georgia's criminal justice system is increasingly being leveraged to suppress civil society. Additionally, the selective enforcement of laws by investigative authorities and courts threatens the core principles of justice.<sup>8</sup>

On March 17, 2025, the bank accounts of several foundations and civil society organizations including Human Rights House Tbilisi, Nanuka Foundation, Prosperity Georgia, For Each Other 24/7, and the Shame Movement were frozen for providing assistance to protest participants in paying fines. On the morning of April 29, 2025, simultaneous searches were conducted at the homes of Aleko Tskitishvili (Executive Director, Human Rights Center), Nanuka Zhorzholiani (founder, Nanuka Foundation), civil activists Mariam Bajelidze and Mariam Geguchadze (Shame Movement), Lasha Arveladze (Prosperity Georgia), and Guga Khelaia (For Each Other 24/7). These actions followed a Prosecutor's Office investigation launched on February 8, 2025, based on a statement by United Neutral Georgia, targeting aggravated sabotage, attempted sabotage, and assistance to foreign-controlled organizations. Aleko Tskitishvili was interrupted near his home, his phone confiscated, and his apartment searched, with seizure of his work laptop and legal documents.; Mariam Bajelidze's apartment was accessed initially through deception and threats; she was not informed of the legal basis, her lawyer was excluded, and she was seven months pregnant with her minor child present.; Mariam Geguchadze was denied the presence of herself and her lawyer during the search.; Nanuka Zhorzholiani's apartment, searched from 8 a.m., proceeded without her lawyer; her minor child and father were present, alongside Special Investigative Service employees.

On August 27, the Georgian Prosecutor's Office, within the framework of what has been widely criticized as politically motivated investigation, froze the bank accounts of seven independent organizations that work in Georgia, serve Georgian citizens, and fight for the country's European future. The justification provided for the freeze was that these organizations allegedly assisted victims of mass torture, prisoners of conscience, and citizens who had been arbitrarily fined. However, the ruling itself was unlawful, lacking any factual or legal reasoning, and was instead based solely on empty and unsubstantiated quotations. The targeted organizations include the Civil Society Foundation, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Democracy Defenders, the Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), Sapari, and the Social Justice Center.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> HRC, Investigative and Procedural Measures Employed for the Punishment of Civic Solidarity ,2025, P 18,

<https://hrc.ge/files/400Solidarity%20ENG2.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Social Justice Center, Despite Asset Freezes and Repressions, Georgian NGOs Will Continue Our Work, 27.08.2025;

<https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/qadaghebis-a-represiebis-miukhedavad-chven-ar-shevtsqvett-sakmianobas>

In September 2025, within the framework of this investigation, the prosecutor questioned the heads of non-governmental organizations before a magistrate judge, including Aleko Tskitishvili,<sup>10</sup> Baia Pataraiia,<sup>11</sup> Eka Gigauri,<sup>12</sup> and others.

In parallel court in Georgia has ordered independent civil society organizations to submit highly sensitive information about beneficiaries protected through their human rights work, as well as information on their activities and grants, to the Anti-Corruption Bureau.<sup>13</sup>

### **- Government's Grant Agency Initiative**

The Georgian government has established a new State Grant Management Agency, with an initial budget of 20 million GEL (around 7,200,000 EUR). The agency is tasked with distributing state funding to NGOs that register under the newly adopted "agents law." According to the government decree, the agency will employ up to 10 staff members, including a chairperson, deputy, and department heads, with salaries set significantly above the national average (for example, the chairperson will receive 10,585 GEL per month, around 3,810 EUR, while the deputy will earn 8,760 GEL, around 3,150 EUR). The agency's 2025 budget amounts to 510,200 GEL (around 183,500 EUR) for its first eight months, nearly half of which will go toward salaries, and the rest is allocated to goods and services, though no details are specified. The 20 million GEL (around 7,200,000 EUR) allocated from the state budget will cover both the agency's operational costs and the grants it distributes, with decisions on allocation made in line with government resolutions.<sup>14</sup>

Instead of genuinely supporting independent civil society, this initiative is designed to channel state resources exclusively toward so-called GONGOs (government-organized NGOs) that serve as extensions of the ruling party, while silencing or starving critical and independent voices. The disproportionate salaries for agency leadership (over five times the national average) further highlight how public money is being diverted to consolidate control rather than foster real civic engagement. With vague provisions on how the funds will be spent and ultimate discretion left to the government, the 20 million GEL budget is far more likely to be used as a political tool for loyalty-building and propaganda, rather than for the genuine development of Georgia's vibrant civil society.

According to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Guidelines on Standards, in some countries it is common practice for the state to fund the non-governmental sector, but "the assistance system must be transparent," it must be equally accessible to everyone, and organizations "should participate in the development of legislation and policies regarding state funding and support." The OSCE/ODIHR guidelines

<sup>10</sup> Radio Tavisupleba, 11.09.2025; <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33527742.html>

<sup>11</sup> IPN, 09.09.2025; <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/848236-baia-pataraiia-gamokitxvaze-satitaod-irchoda-chemi-peisbuk-postebi-zalian-araseriozuli-iqo-kitxvebi-iqo-ziritadad-imaze-ratom-veer-rom-adamianebs-gapicvis-shekrebis-da-gamoxatvis-tavisupleba-akvt/>

<sup>12</sup> Radio Tavisupleba, 17.09.2026; <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33533009.html>

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International, Georgia: Court order on five independent NGOs a blow to freedom of association, 19.06.2025; [Georgia: Court order on five independent NGOs a blow to freedom of association - Amnesty International](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/georgia-court-order-on-five-independent-ngos-a-blow-to-freedom-of-association/)

<sup>14</sup> Radio Tavisupleba, 20.05.2025; <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33419574.html>

state that: “Discrimination against organizations based on their field of activity must be excluded”; “Any practice that excludes organizations from state funding schemes is unacceptable”; “It is essential to avoid ‘state capture’ and to maintain organizational independence.” The guidelines also emphasize the right of NGOs and associations to “freely seek, obtain, and use resources.”

In fact, the Georgian government’s policies have created a highly challenging environment for civil society organizations, especially affecting regional areas. For instance, ISFED has announced that it can no longer carry out election monitoring for the first time, stating that the country largely lacks the conditions necessary for free, fair, and competitive elections. The organization’s report on the pre-election environment highlights weaknesses in political context, legislation, the electoral system, and media coverage, noting that international and local non-partisan observation is severely restricted. ISFED also points out increased governmental pressure on local observer organizations, limitations on observers’ rights by the Central Election Commission, and intensified control over election commissions by the ruling party. In this context, ISFED warns that the upcoming local elections may carry serious risks of political crisis and lack of legitimacy, reflecting broader challenges faced by civil society in Georgia.<sup>15</sup>

#### - Pressure on Journalists and Independent Media

In 2025, journalists were repeatedly fined and harassed under the pretext of “artificially blocking the road.” On 3 January, Euronews journalist Davit Kekenadze was fined 5,000 GEL (around 1,800 EUR), followed on 4 January by Mtavari Arkhi journalist Aleksandre Sajaya, on 17 January by Tabula journalist Nikoloz Chiraqadze, on 22 January by Radio Free Europe journalist Eka Kevanishvili, whose fine was later annulled, and on 14 February by Tabula journalist Beka Jigurashvili. In January and February, around fifteen journalists were fined, with two of them found guilty by the Tbilisi City Court and ordered to pay 5,000 GEL (around 1,800 EUR) each.

In March, April, and May, more than fifteen journalists were fined again. Among them, TV Pirveli’s photojournalist Giorgi Mosiashvili was fined twice, while OC Media founder Mariam Nikuradze was fined four times, totaling 20,000 GEL (around 7,200 EUR), despite wearing visible press identification and carrying professional equipment.

On 11 January, Batumelebi and Netgazeti co-founder Mzia Amaglobeli was unlawfully detained in Batumi for placing a sticker, later fined 2,000 GEL (around 720 EUR) on 18 March and 1,000 GEL (around 360 EUR) on 18 June. On 12 January, she was charged with “violence against police” and sentenced to two years in prison, in a case involving falsified documents, false witnesses, and political motivation. Around the same period, the authorities froze Batumelebi’s bank accounts, which international organizations such as Amnesty International

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<sup>15</sup> Euronews, 21,08,2025; see [Link](#)

and IPI condemned as discriminatory. Cameraman Guram Murvanidze was also detained while covering the protests.

Journalists documenting protests and police violence were frequent targets. On 2 February, near Tbilisi Mall, reporters from Radio Marneuli, Mediachecker, Guria News, and Media April were obstructed. TV Pirveli's journalist Diana Chirgadze and her cameraman, as well as Mtavari Arkhi's Dea Mamisaishvili, were abused. Cameraman Niko Kokaia was injured, and journalist Khatia Samkharadze was attacked by Mirza Kezevadze, then deputy head of GD, who seized and damaged her phone. On 4 February, OC Media's Givi Avaliani almost had his phone seized, Publika's photojournalist Natia Alaverdashvili was assaulted by police, and NEWS.On.ge editor Vancent Khabeshvili was attacked. The car of Mtis Ambebi was vandalized, and its editor Gela Mtvilishvili was harassed and later attacked on 15 March.

Critical journalists also faced dismissals at the Public Broadcaster. On 4 February, Vasil Ivanov-Chiqovani was removed from presenting the evening news, and on 11 April he and Nino Zautashvili were dismissed after a "disciplinary probe." Several staff members were sanctioned, five were fired on 13 May, four more on 1 August, and on 30 August Meri Shikhashvili was dismissed immediately after returning from maternity leave.

The ruling party used legislative changes to restrict media. On 2 June, Georgian Dream filed complaints against Formula, TV Pirveli, and Mtavari Arkhi for using phrases such as "illegitimate parliament." On 3 July, the Communications Commission found all three outlets in violation. On 27 June, a ban on photo, video, and audio recording in courts took effect, closing access to trials. Amendments in June also allowed fines for insulting public officials, with journalists Eka Mishveladze, Vakho Sanaia, Vika Bukia, Misha Mshvildadze, and Dea Mamisaishvili fined between 3,000 and 4,000 GEL (around 1,080–1,440 EUR).

SLAPP lawsuits increased after changes to the defamation law shifted the burden of proof to defendants. Tea Tsulukiani sued TV anchor Nanuka Zhorzholiani, while Kartu Bank sued TV Pirveli demanding not to be called "oligarch's" bank.

Other cases included the detention of TV Pirveli cameraman Lasha Jioshvili on 19 February and Indigo journalist Saba Sordia on 6 April, both fined 2,500 GEL (around 900 EUR). On 3 September, during a protest near Kakha Kaladze's headquarters, Publika's Mindia Gabadze was insulted by MP Beka Odisharia, while editor Lika Zakashvili was verbally and physically attacked by party members. On 8 September, at another protest, Publika's Aleksandre Keshelashvili and Keto Mikadze were assaulted, Netgazeti's Ketevan Khutsishvili was beaten by police, and OC Media's Mariam Nikuradze and Studio Monitori's Ketu Tutberidze were splashed with water, while Hungarian journalist Laszlo Muzes was attacked.<sup>16</sup>

Since 28 November 2024, not a single perpetrator of violence against media representatives has been identified or punished.

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<sup>16</sup> Media Institute, *Persecution of Media and Journalists*, 2025