

Georgia: 500 Days of Protest, Crackdown and Resilience

# ANATOMY OF REPRESSION

In less than two years, **Georgia's** government weaponized the police, courts, the law and press to crush dissent.

This is how it happened and how people fought back.

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# INTRODUCTION



**"It is not the prison that scares me. Under those repressive laws, the regime can always find a pretext to put people in prison. What scares me is what I will find outside once I am released. Will I find a country still fighting for freedom, democracy and a European future, or a country taken over by propaganda... That is why we have to fight until the end."** Mzia Amaghlobeli, journalist and founder of Batumelebi and Netgazeti.<sup>1</sup>

*Photo: Mzia Amaghlobeli at her trial, holding a book by Maria Ressa "How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future," in Georgian @Batumelebi*

At the beginning of 2024, Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD), faced a profound political dilemma. Having governed continuously since 2012, the party was experiencing declining public support on the eve of parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2024.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the prospect of further EU integration following Georgia being granted European Union candidate status in December 2023 also posed new challenges. While supported by an overwhelming majority of the Georgian population,<sup>3</sup> EU accession required enabling fairer political competition, judicial independence, and strengthening the rule of law. Such reforms were increasingly at odds with GD's growing efforts to consolidate power and prolong its stay in office.<sup>4</sup>

Confronted with this prospect, GD, under its founder, billionaire oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, chose a path of authoritarian regression. Drawing on methods long associated with authoritarian practices in Russia<sup>5</sup> and Belarus<sup>6</sup>, the ruling party sought to entrench its rule through a combination of police violence, repressive laws, and the suppression of dissent. Beholden to the governing authorities rather than citizens, the state apparatus followed unwaveringly, and national institutions failed to act as a counterweight.

Now, two-and-a-half years later, the ongoing crackdown has affected large numbers of people across society and driven an unprecedented contraction of what was, until recently, a vibrant civic space. The human rights organizations and independent journalists have been targeted, while the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly have been severely restricted. Dissent and peaceful protest have become increasingly dangerous and punishable both in law and practice.

The shift to authoritarian practices also represents a departure from the trajectory Georgia had pursued since independence. Since regaining independence more than 35 years ago, despite periods of sustained political turbulence and conflict, successive Georgian governments formally affirmed their commitment to international human rights obligations and pursued integration with international institutions.

In 2012, Georgia passed a major political milestone when GD came to power and the previous ruling party, the United National Movement, conceded defeat. The new government committed to continuing the country's path toward European integration while seeking to stabilize relations with Russia. Despite a

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<sup>1</sup> Batumelebi & Netgazeti, "I'm Not Afraid of Imprisonment, I Am Afraid of What I Will Find Outside", 18 November 2025, <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/articles-in-english/595389/>.

<sup>2</sup> Opinion polls conducted on the eve of the elections showed even lower support for Georgian Dream (34–36 percent), while the combined opposition was predicted to win a majority. See: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "As Georgians Protest Election Results, What Next?" Carnegie Endowment, October 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia- Eurasia/politika/2024/10/georgia-elections-results>; see as well: Georgian election result makes no statistical sense, say Western pollsters - BBC News.

<sup>3</sup> International Republican Institute (IRI), *Georgian Survey of Public Opinion: September–October 2023* (Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 15 November 2023), <https://www.iri.org/resources/georgian-survey-of-public-opinion-september-october-2023/>.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, 8 November 2023, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/2023-communication-eu-enlargement-policy_en); see as well: Tina Dolbaia, Reform and Resistance: Georgia's Path to EU Candidacy, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), 6 April 2023, <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/reform-and-resistance-georgias-path-to-eu-candidacy/>

<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International has documented how Russia's 2012 Foreign Agents Law was used to dismantle independent civil society over the following decade, a model explicitly drawn upon by Georgian Dream. See: Amnesty International, *Russia: Tightening the Screws: Russia's Expanding Anti-NGO Laws* (Index: EUR 46/049/2017), 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *Belarus: The Human Rights Crisis Deepens: Repression and Retaliation Against Human Rights Defenders, Civil Society Organisations and Trade Unions*, EUR 56/4637/2021, 7 September 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/4637/2021/en/>.

fraught trajectory, the course yielded tangible milestones: the EU Association Agreement in 2014, visa-free travel in 2017, and candidate status in 2023.

However, since 2019 Georgia has experienced repeated political crises and large-scale public protests, reflecting deepening public dissatisfaction with governance. During this period, authorities have increasingly resorted to measures that restrict dissent and shape public discourse, raising serious concerns about the state of human rights and the rule of law in the country.<sup>7</sup>

In 2022, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the Georgian government's widely perceived reluctance to fully align with EU policies towards Russia, contributed to growing tensions both at home and with international partners.<sup>8</sup> Domestically, concerns mounted over the ongoing concentration of power by the ruling party and the weakening of checks and balances. Civil society organizations, independent media, and the political opposition reported increasing pressure, while legislative and policy initiatives raised the alarm about shrinking civic space.<sup>9</sup>

This was to come to a head dramatically in spring 2024. In April that year, GD reintroduced a so-called Foreign Agent Law, nicknamed by protesters the "Russian Law," based on its similarity to the Kremlin's 2012 law that smothered civil society in Russia. According to multiple local experts, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe<sup>10</sup> and others<sup>11</sup>, the law was a clear attempt to stifle civil society, independent media and others perceived as hostile by GD.

The law had been proposed in 2023, but withdrawn in the face of a huge public backlash.<sup>12</sup> This time, GD pushed the law through, employing unlawful police force, violent proxy groups acting with impunity, and a steady drumbeat of propaganda.<sup>13</sup> The law was passed in the teeth of weeks of continuous protests, which were often violently dispersed by the police, and set the stage for the further authoritarian consolidation that was to follow. In 2024 GD claimed the majority in contested parliamentary elections, which took place amid a crackdown on critics<sup>14</sup> and widespread election irregularities.<sup>15</sup>

Since then, GD has responded with the full toolkit of authoritarian repression: weaponizing disinformation, repressive laws, police force and the misuse of the justice system to entrench its rule and silence dissent.

While Georgia has long grappled with human rights challenges, especially during political shifts, the current surge in the scale and intensity of these incidents represents a profound and historic escalation. This crackdown has also taken increasingly violent forms. All three branches of the government have been implicated in widespread abuses, including acts committed by state agents such as torture and other ill-treatment. At the same time, the ruling party's consolidated control over oversight institutions has hollowed

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<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International Report 2021/22: The State of the World's Human Rights (London: Amnesty International, 2022), p. 171 (Georgia chapter), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/4870/2022/en/>; see as well: Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World's Human Rights (London: Amnesty International, 2023), pp. 177–179 (Georgia chapter), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/5670/2023/en/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Georgia did not align with the EU's restrictive measures regarding Russia..." see: European Commission, Georgia 2023 Report, SWD(2023) 697 final (Brussels: European Commission, 8 November 2023), pp. 7–25, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD\\_2023\\_697%20Georgia%20report.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_697%20Georgia%20report.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International Report 2022/23: The State of the World's Human Rights (London: Amnesty International, 2023), pp. 177–179 (Georgia chapter), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/5670/2023/en/>.

<sup>10</sup> Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on the Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, CDL-AD(2024)020 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, May 21, 2024; endorsed at 139th Plenary Session, June 21–22, 2024), [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2024\)020-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2024)020-e).

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Stop the Bill 'On Transparency of Foreign Influence' that Threatens Civil Society," 16 April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/georgia-stop-the-bill-on-transparency-of-foreign-influence-that-threatens-civil-society/>.

<sup>12</sup> The 2023 bill was withdrawn by the Georgian Dream ruling party on 9 March 2023, following three consecutive nights of mass protests in Tbilisi: Amnesty International, "Georgia: Repressive 'Foreign Agents' Bill Withdrawn after Protesters Brutally Dispersed," 9 March 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/georgia-repressive-foreign-agents-bill-withdrawn-after-protesters-brutally-dispersed/>.

In spite of a concerted government disinformation campaign, even after a year polling showed 68% of Georgians considered the law unnecessary and 73% believed it would harm EU integration: Edison Research/Formula TV poll, May 2024, <https://bm.ge/news/edison-research-mosakhleobis-68-michnevs-rom-rusuli-kanoni-sachiro-ar-aris>.

<sup>13</sup> The law was reintroduced on 3 April 2024, passed by parliament on 14 May 2024, and came into force after parliament overrode President Zourabichvili's veto on 28 May 2024: Amnesty International, "Georgia: Dark Day as Parliament Bulldozes Adoption of Repressive 'Foreign Influence' Bill," Amnesty International, 14 May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/georgia-dark-day-as-parliament-bulldozes-adoption-of-repressive-foreign-influence-bill/>.

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Elections Marred by Severe Reprisals and Risk of Further Violence," 3 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/georgia-elections-marred-by-severe-reprisals-and-risk-of-further-violence/>.

<sup>15</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, International Election Observation Mission, Georgia — Parliamentary Elections, 26 October 2024: Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, 27 October 2024: the mission found that the elections "took place in a polarized environment and were marred by a number of serious irregularities" and did not fully meet OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards, <https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/588667>. An exit poll conducted by Edison Research found a 13-point gap between its results (41% for GD) and the official result (54% for GD) that "cannot be explained by normal variation alone": <https://www.edisonresearch.com/edison-research-2024-republic-of-georgia-exit-poll/>.

out accountability mechanisms, making justice and redress for victims of human rights violations increasingly difficult to obtain.

Despite these multilayered repressive measures, for more than 500 days people across Georgia have continued to protest peacefully, returning to the streets daily in defiance of violence, arrests, and intimidation, and refusing to abandon their demands for a better future. Their continued peaceful resistance is a testament to the resilience of Georgian society and the enduring demand for rights, dignity, and justice and accountability, even as the risks associated with peaceful activism continue to escalate.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This report is based on research conducted by Amnesty International between December 2025 and March 2026, supplemented by prior monitoring undertaken between December 2024 and September 2025, including trial observations of 20 administrative proceedings and nine high-profile criminal trials related to protest participation.

The report focuses on periods of intensified human rights violations in Georgia, notably March–April 2024 and November–December 2025, when the state’s response to protests was particularly severe. Amnesty International researchers were present in Georgia for significant portions of these periods, witnessing many events firsthand.

The research draws on a combination of primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through interviews with more than 50 individuals directly affected, including journalists, medical professionals, detained protesters, defence lawyers, civil society leaders, and organizers of protester support networks. Testimonies, observations, and secondary sources have been widely cross-referenced, and patterns of human rights violations were analysed to distinguish systemic violations from isolated incidents.

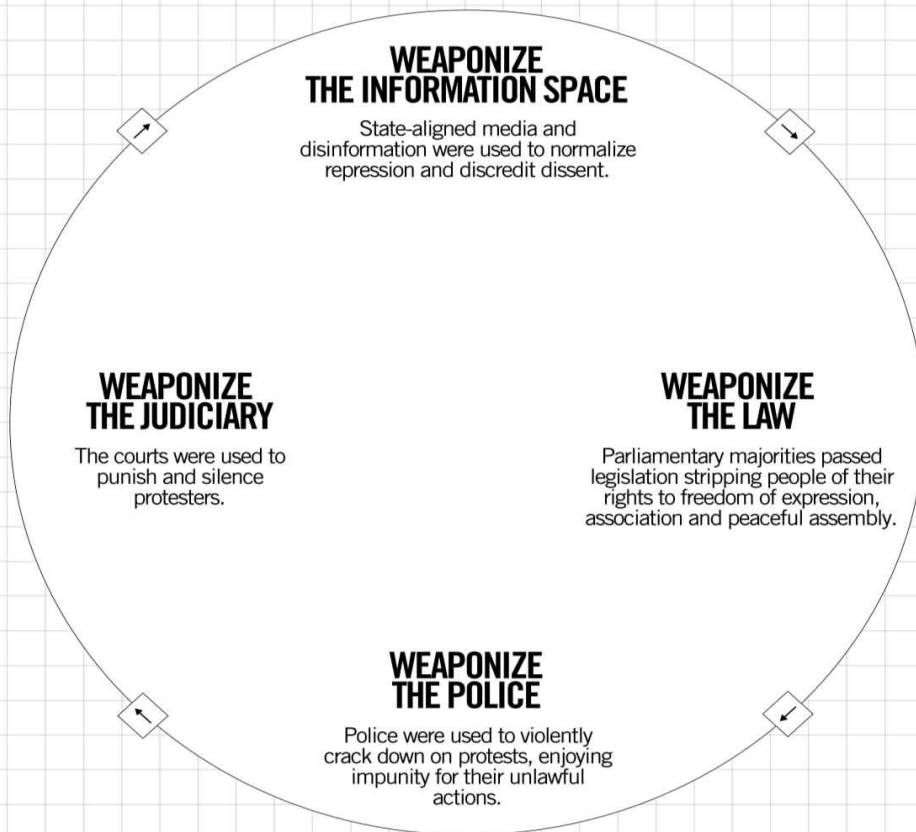
Secondary sources include reports from the Georgian Public Defender’s Office (the office of the human rights ombudsperson), from Georgian human rights and civil society organizations, academic and think-tank publications, media coverage, official government statements, and information from OSCE and United Nations human rights mechanisms.

The report draws heavily on monitoring and extensive documentation carried out by local human rights organizations, including the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), the Social Justice Centre (SJC), and other prominent Georgian NGOs who have provided legal and other assistance to hundreds of victims of human rights violations during the protests but have since come under immense pressure as a result of government imposed arbitrary restrictions.

Finally, this report does not attempt to provide a full picture or comprehensive account of all human rights violations committed in the course of the ongoing human rights’ crackdown in Georgia. The violations documented here are illustrative rather than exhaustive: the toolkit of authoritarian practices extends beyond the four dimensions examined in this report and beyond those publicly expressing dissent and involved in protest.

# THE GOVERNMENT TOOLKIT OF REPRESSION: 4 KEY METHODS

In the last two years, Georgia's government weaponized the police, courts, the law and media as tools to crush dissent.



# WEAPONIZING DISINFORMATION



Street poster with Eka Gigauri of Transparency International, center of photo, alongside other civil society leaders, including Giorgi Tabagari in Tbilisi, Georgia, June 7, 2024. The caption reads: "The homeland is not for sale!" ©Henry Ridgwell/VOA.

**“We should look at the bigger picture: In addition to the police, prosecutors and legislature, the propagandists and propaganda machines play a crucial role... You need to persuade the public that the repressive legislation is necessary, and to persuade the public you need very harsh propaganda.”** Eka Gigauri, the director of Transparency International Georgia.<sup>16</sup>

Over the last three years, the Georgian government has increasingly used the information space to limit scrutiny and deflect accountability while tightening its grip on power. Disinformation has been deployed both to justify crackdowns and as a tool of punishment itself, turning media into instruments of retribution against critics using smears and intimidation campaigns and other malign tactics.

The Georgian information space has also been weaponised to support government policies, laying the groundwork for repressive laws and practices. A drumbeat of disinformation has been deployed not only to justify these measures, measures which restrict and criminalize dissent and peaceful protest, but also to normalize and excuse widespread police violence and systemic abuses.

In parallel, the government has increasingly undermined Georgia’s once diverse and pluralistic media, crowding out independent and critical media through new restrictive laws and other coercive practices to consolidate control over the media landscape and marginalize dissent. According to Georgian media freedom watchdog, the Centre for Media, Information and Social Research, since 2024, Georgia has witnessed an “incessant flow of government disinformation and malinformation”.<sup>17</sup>

The decline of independent media has allowed the Georgian authorities to dominate the national narrative through government-controlled and government-aligned media. By using these outlets to marginalize dissent and avoid public scrutiny, the state has built what critics call a system of "government by disinformation". This environment has, in turn, reinforced a “propaganda-to-punishment pipeline” where the authorities use smear campaigns and disinformation to portray critics as “enemies”, “traitors” or

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International interview with Eka Gigauri, Director, Transparency International Georgia, Tbilisi, 2 December 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Centre for Media, Information and Social Research (CMIS), *From Foreign-Agent Law to Protest Crackdowns: Assessing Georgia’s Media and Information Environment*, 2024 Tbilisi, 2025 <https://cmis.ge/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Georgian-media-and-information-environment-2024.pdf>

“threats to civic peace”, and then pipeline the manufactured hostility to justify punishment, harassment, violence, arbitrary fines, investigations or prosecutions.<sup>18</sup>

Disinformation orchestrated or amplified by state actors can undermine human rights, especially when used to consolidate power and silence dissent. By portraying civil society actors, protesters and independent media as “foreign agents” or threats to national security, the authorities can discredit and intimidate people from exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Under international human rights law, states must refrain from spreading disinformation and must protect individuals from grip on power. Disinformation has deployed harmful false narratives, including those disseminated by third parties where authorities know, or ought reasonably to know, that the claims are false.<sup>19</sup>

## NARRATIVE AS WEAPON: GOVERNMENT BY DISINFORMATION

**“In Georgia, disinformation operates in a coordinated ecosystem in which fringe actors seed false narratives, pro-government media amplify them, and authorities later convert them into policy, repression, or investigations.”** Mikheil Benidze, civil activist and former head of International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED).<sup>20</sup>

Georgia’s government has relied on disinformation to create confusion, gain support for abusive policies, and to smear critics. This has given rise to a system described by media experts as “government by conspiracy theory”, where false narratives are deployed to justify any policy or excuse any human rights violation. Two main narratives have dominated the Georgian government’s disinformation campaigns in recent years: the “second front” narrative and the “Global War Party” narrative (the latter of which is increasingly referred to as the “deep state”). Both narratives emerged after the ruling party reportedly found itself at odds with public opinion on two critical issues: the war in Ukraine and EU integration.<sup>21</sup>

When Ukraine and Moldova were granted EU candidate status that year, but Georgia was not, mass demonstrations erupted in protest at the government’s perceived failure to implement reforms and meet the requirements.<sup>22</sup> In response, the government pushed the narrative that they were being unfairly punished by the so-called “Global War Party” for refusing to open a “second front” by involving Georgia in a war with Russia in support of Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

Over the next two years, these narratives became the basis both for repression and for new repressive legislation. Legislation such as the “Transparency of Foreign Influence Law”, the Grants Law and others were framed as necessary for peace and national security.<sup>24</sup> When pushing through the anti-CSO Transparency of Foreign Influence law, GD’s statement explicitly pointed to NGOs’ alleged support for involving Georgia in a war with Russia as one of the reasons it was necessary.<sup>25</sup> Violence against demonstrators, opposition politicians, and CSO activists was justified by portraying these individuals as traitors working against national interest and for the “Global War Party.”<sup>26</sup> In turn, all western criticism of

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<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International interview with Mikheil Benidze, civil activist and former head of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Tbilisi, 2 December 2025.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, Human Rights Council, Disinformation and Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Irene Khan, A/HRC/47/25, 13 April 2021, paras. 18–24, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/47/25>.

<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International interview with Mikheil Benidze, civil activist and former head of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), Tbilisi, 2 December 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Caucasus Barometer, “EU Support in Georgia,” *Caucasus Barometer*, Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRR) Georgia, 2023, <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/EUSUPP/>.

<sup>22</sup> European Council, *European Council Conclusions on Ukraine, the Membership Applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, Western Balkans and External Relations*, 23 June 2022, para. 13 (“The European Council is ready to grant the status of candidate country to Georgia once the priorities specified in the Commission’s opinion on Georgia’s membership application have been addressed”), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/european-council-conclusions-on-ukraine-the-membership-applications-of-ukraine-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia-western-balkans-and-external-relations-23-june-2022/>.

<sup>23</sup> Irakli Kobakhidze, interview with Georgian Public Broadcaster (ITV), 28 December 2022, <https://itv.ge/news/irakli-kobakhidze-saqartvelos-mimart-arsebobs-raghac-gansakutrebuli-interesi-rac-ar-arsebobs-moldovis-belarusis-mimart-es-ertaderti-interesi-aris-meore-fronti/>. See as well: Civil Georgia, “Kobakhidze on ‘Second Front’ Narrative,” Civil Georgia, 19 January 2023, <https://civil.ge/archives/522057>.

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Stop the Bill ‘On Transparency of Foreign Influence’ That Threatens Civil Society,” *Amnesty International*, 16 April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/georgia-stop-the-bill-on-transparency-of-foreign-influence-that-threatens-civil-society/>.

<sup>25</sup> Georgian Dream, “საპარლამენტო უმრავლესობის განცხადება” [Statement of the Parliamentary Majority], Facebook post, 3 April 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=986233129534152&id=10004424219889](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=986233129534152&id=10004424219889).

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Social Justice Centre lawyers, Tbilisi, December 19, 2025.

the Georgian government's actions or threats of potential sanctions could be dismissed as punishment for the country refusing to open a "second front".<sup>27</sup>

From 2023 on, political figures and pro-government media increasingly smeared NGOs as "traitors" and "foreign agents" undermining national interests. By repeatedly associating civil society with illicit money, foreign interference, and framing them as hostile to "national values", authorities sought to foster public distrust and framed NGOs that received funding from international sources as threats to sovereignty, tradition, and religion.<sup>28</sup>

Alongside smearing NGOs and promoting geopolitical conspiracy narratives, the authorities and government-aligned media ramped up a programme of scapegoating and stigmatization against LGBTI people to divert attention, sow division and ultimately entrench power. They portrayed LGBTI rights and gender equality as a foreign-imposed agenda threatening "traditional values", the safety of children and the overall social order. Through stigmatizing rhetoric, activists and human rights defenders, especially those defending minority rights, were framed as "dangerous", "immoral" or "anti-national". This messaging not only deepened social divisions and fostered discrimination but also helped to marginalize dissent and weaken solidarity across protest movements.<sup>29</sup> These conspiracy narratives paved the way for the adoption, in September 2024, of the Law "On the Protection of Family Values and Minors",<sup>30</sup> banning any public expression or assembly deemed to "promote same-sex relationships", with effects extending far beyond LGBTI people.<sup>31</sup>

Government-aligned media outlets, particularly *Imedi TV* and *POSTV* and (reported to be financed by the ruling party's founder<sup>32</sup> and a ruling party MP<sup>33</sup>) have played a central role in amplifying these narratives, accusing NGOs and independent media of using illicit funds to support violent protests.

In several cases, pro-government media outlets have themselves appeared as instruments of repression, not merely by amplifying official narratives, but by appearing to help to provoke, escalate or legitimize attacks against government critics. Their coverage and conduct have at times blurred the line between journalism and intimidation: individuals targeted in pro-government media have subsequently faced harassment, violence or even criminal proceedings.

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<sup>27</sup> European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO), "The Fearmongering 'Global War Party' and Other Tools of the Georgian Ruling Party's Propaganda to Discredit the US and the EU", 14 October 2024, <https://edmo.eu/publications/the-fearmongering-global-war-party-and-other-tools-of-the-georgian-ruling-partys-propaganda-to-discredit-the-us-and-the-eu/>.

<sup>28</sup> Amnesty International interview with Social Justice Centre lawyers, Tbilisi, December 19, 2025.

See as well: Civil.ge, "Kobakhidze Says 'Global War Party' Uses EU Visa Threat to Open Second Front in Georgia," July 18, 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/693168>.

<sup>29</sup> Gender Barometer Caucasus, Gender-Related Attitudes in Georgia (Tbilisi: CRRG Georgia, 2023), <https://genderbarometer.ge/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Gender-Publication-ENG-web.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Law of Georgia on the Protection of Family Values and Minors, adopted September 17, 2024, Legislative Herald of Georgia, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/6171895>.

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Halt Legislative Assault on LGBTI Rights," September 18, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/georgia-halt-legislative-assault-on-lgbti-rights/>.

<sup>32</sup> Transparency International Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili Has Been Financing Imedi TV for Years, 1 October 2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/bidzina-ivanishvili-has-been-financing-imeri-tv-years>.

<sup>33</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Center Georgia (CRRG Georgia), Media Landscape Audit, Caucasus Tactics Against Disinformation (CATA-GI), <https://catagi.ge/knowledge-base/media-landscape-audit>.

## The case of Vitali Guguchia: activist targeted by state aligned media



Shop owner Vitali Guguchia became a target after a video of him arguing with a pro-government MP went viral online. Much of the online reaction mocked the MP, drawing further attention to Vitali Guguchia.

Shortly afterwards, a crew from the broadcaster *POSTV*, majority-owned by the MP in question,<sup>34</sup> arrived unannounced at Guguchia's home in rural western Georgia. Vitalii Guguchia told Amnesty International that the crew consisting of several persons entered his family's yard without permission during a funeral, made insulting comments including to his family members, and refused to leave. Vitali Guguchia went into his family's yard to speak to the journalists. According to him, a verbal confrontation ensued after the crew refused to leave when Guguchia declined to continue the interview. The confrontation then escalated into violence, with the cameraman from Post TV attacking and kicking Vitali Guguchia.<sup>35</sup>

On 5 August 2024, Vitali Guguchia was charged with assaulting a journalist and obstructing his work, while the cameraman who he claimed attacked him faced no investigation. The Zugdidi City Court set bail at GEL 50,000 (US\$ 18,300), more than 20 times the average Georgian monthly salary.<sup>36</sup> Vitali Guguchia was forced to fundraise to pay this bail.

On 25 February 2026, one day after the UK imposed sanctions on *POSTV* for spreading disinformation, the court acquitted Vitali Guguchia of all charges involving assault and preventing the work of a journalist.<sup>37</sup> However, the attack on him and the harassment of his family have not been effectively investigated.

*Photo: Vitali Guguchia during an interview. ©Formula TV*

<sup>34</sup> Transparency International Georgia, "Economic Interests of the Georgian MP Viktor Japaridze," Transparency International Georgia, 13 October 2022, <https://transparency.ge/en/post/economic-interests-georgian-mp-viktor-japaridze>; see as well: BM.GE, "Ex-Members Of Georgian Dream Acquired 52%-Share Of POSTV," BM.GE, 4 October 2022, <https://bm.ge/en/news/ex-members-of-georgian-dream-acquired-52-share-of-postv/117759>.

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International interview with Vitali Guguchia, online, February 2026. Partial footage of the incident aired by Formula TV: <https://www.facebook.com/TVFormula/videos/3754752854813367/> (at 5:18–5:58).

<sup>36</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), "Average Salary in Georgia: GEL 2,271," GeoStat, [date], <https://sakartvelosambebi.ge/en/news/geostat-the-average-salary-in-georgia-is-2-271-gel>.

<sup>37</sup> Interpressnews, "ზუგდიდის საქალაქო სასამართლომ ვიტალი გუგუჩია გაამართლა" ["Zugdidi City Court Acquits Vitali Guguchia"], Interpressnews (in Georgian), 25 February 2026, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/862911>.

## SPEECH TO ACTION: “THE PROPAGANDA-TO-PUNISHMENT PIPELINE”

**“It is a logical scheme: they create a narrative and use the media to push it aggressively. We were branded as a threat to national interests by a Prime Minister and pro-state media. [Then] in 2023, posters appeared calling me an ‘agent’ and a ‘traitor’... I was interrogated and accused of ‘sabotage’...”** Tamta Mikeladze head of the NGO Social Justice Centre<sup>38</sup>

Independent civil society organizations have documented how false narratives are first circulated in government-aligned social media spaces, then amplified by “experts” on pro-government TV channels, creating pretexts for repression.<sup>39</sup> The spread of such false and misleading narratives through government-aligned media has, in many cases been followed by direct attacks and other forms of harassment against those labelled “enemies of the people”,<sup>40</sup> demonstrating the close links between online disinformation and real-world violence.<sup>41</sup>

Since 2023 Amnesty International has documented a series of attacks on government critics, protestors and activists that followed coordinated smear campaigns. In July 2023, at least six government critics reported being subjected to physical attacks that appeared coordinated. The attacks were publicly condoned and apparently encouraged by senior ruling party members.<sup>42</sup>

In May 2024, more than 100 human rights defenders, journalists, civil society representatives and opposition figures reported receiving anonymous threatening phone calls raising concerns about illegal access and use of state personal data.<sup>43</sup> In the days that followed, a coordinated wave of intimidation targeted civil society organisations, independent media outlets and opposition political parties across Tbilisi. Offices, homes and vehicles associated with government critics were vandalised, while posters and graffiti branding individuals as “agents,” “traitors” and “enemies of the state” appeared on buildings and at private residences. Following the incident, Georgian Dream MP Dimitri (Dito) Samkharadze published a social media post in which he listed targeted organisations, shared a 10-minute video depicting the vandalism of their offices, and issued explicit threats of further retaliation against government critics.<sup>44</sup> To date, neither the MP nor any other individual has been investigated or charged in connection with the attacks. In the same period, over a dozen activists, many of whom participated in protests, were violently attacked, ambushed and injured by unidentified assailants, resulting in serious injuries. In one strikingly violent example, activist Zuka Berdzenishvili was severely beaten near his home hours after the parliamentary speaker publicly accused him of participating in a politically motivated campaign against the ruling party.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Amnesty International interview with Tamta Mikeladze, December 2025.

<sup>39</sup> International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), “Production of Disinformation under the Name of Experts,” ISFED, 17 July 2024, <https://isfed.ge/eng/sotsialuri-mediis-monitoringi/dezinformatsiis-tsarmoeba-eqspertebis-sakhelit->

<sup>40</sup> Sakartvelos Ambebi, “Ivanishvili on Banning Opposition Parties: ‘One Who Is an Enemy of the People Should Be Banned,’” Sakartvelos Ambebi, 22 October 2024, <https://sakartvelosambebi.ge/en/news/ivanishvili-on-banning-opposition-parties-one-who-is-an-enemy-of-the-people-should-be-banned>

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International interviews with Eka Gigauri, Transparency International Georgia, Tbilisi, December 2025; and with Mikheil Benidze, Tbilisi, 2 December 2025.

<sup>42</sup> Amnesty International, The State of the World’s Human Rights 2023/24 (London: Amnesty International, 2024), 117, see as well: Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities Must Address Violent Attacks Against Critics and Bring Perpetrators to Justice,” May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/georgia-authorities-must-address-violent-attacks-against-critics-and-bring-perpetrators-to-justice/>;

<sup>43</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities Must Address Violent Attacks Against Critics and Bring Perpetrators to Justice,” 9 May 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/05/georgia-authorities-must-address-violent-attacks-against-critics-and-bring-perpetrators-to-justice/>.

<sup>44</sup> The Facebook post of Georgian Dream MP Dimitri Samkharadze dated 21 May 2024: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=423357193946251>; Dimitri (Dito) Samkharadze, Facebook post, 31 May 2024; OC Media, “Georgian Dream MP Admits to Attacks on NGO and Opposition Offices,” 31 May 2024, <https://oc-media.org/georgian-dream-mp-admits-to-attacks-on-ngo-and-opposition-offices/>.

<sup>45</sup> Amnesty International, The State of the World’s Human Rights 2024/25 (2025)p. 176.

Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities Must Immediately Investigate Attacks on Government Critics,” Amnesty International, 11 June 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/06/georgia-authorities-must-immediately-investigate-attacks-on-government-critics/>.

## The Case of Giorgi Tabagari: from smear campaign to intimidation



In spring 2024, Tbilisi was plastered with posters depicting the faces of NGO leaders and opposition figures speckled with blood and the slogans “stateless traitors” and “spies who insult the Church”. Giorgi Tabagari, a prominent LGBT rights campaigner, was one of the persons featured on public banners even though he had not worked at an NGO for almost four years. “I was leaving Tbilisi that day and from my house to the airport my face was everywhere”, he told Amnesty International.

In the early hours of 18 May 2024, unknown people visited the house of Giorgi Tabagari’s father in Tbilisi, an address Giorgi had been registered at several years previously but no longer resided at. Apparently, the

perpetrators’ source of information for the purpose of this attack was the non-public, official record. They graffitied and stencilled offensive and threatening messages throughout the communal areas of the building. “The stencils said ‘faggot’ and ‘traitor’ and so on. My father lives on the sixth floor, and they stencilled the entire stairwell up to his floor.”

They also targeted the car belonging to Tabagari’s father, stencilling obscene messages, breaking off the wing mirrors and slashing the tyres. “Of course it makes you afraid, of course it makes you self-censor”, he says of the chilling effect of the posters. Despite filing a police report and the widespread presence of CCTV in the area, no one was prosecuted.<sup>46</sup>

In August 2025, smearing attacks against civil society intensified still further. Officials and government-aligned media increasingly framed civil society support to protesters as financing violence: the Prosecutor’s Office alleged that NGO funds had been used to “equip” protesters who committed “violent acts against law enforcement”,<sup>47</sup> while *Imedi TV* claimed NGOs were “arming activists”<sup>48</sup> and later alleged that foreign funds were channelled through Georgian NGOs to finance “radical rallies”.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, these smear campaigns were intended to delegitimize the vital work of human rights organizations that pose a challenge to power by mobilizing public opinion and limiting scrutiny of the authorities.

This shift from smearing NGOs as “foreign agents” to accusing them of violating the law also laid the groundwork for a new wave of administrative and legal harassment discussed in the following chapters, including the freezing of bank accounts of several leading NGOs, criminal investigations and demands for sensitive personal information.

*Photo: activist Giorgi Tabagari. ©Formula TV*

<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International interview with Giorgi Tabagari, online, January 2026.

<sup>47</sup> Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia, Statement of the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia, 27 August 2025, <https://pog.gov.ge/news/saqartvelos-prokuraturis-gantskhadeba-4982?lng=eng>

<sup>48</sup> Imedi TV News, “NGO Scheme in Georgia: Organising Protests, Arming Activists, Undermining Law,” Imedi News, 29 August 2025, <https://info.imedi.ge/en/politics/6609/ngo-scheme-in-georgia-organising-protests-arming-activists-undermining-law>

<sup>49</sup> TV Imedi, “სამშობლოს ღალატის ფასი” [The Price of Betraying the Homeland], report by Saba Khvichia, Imedis Kvira [Imedi Week], broadcast 20 July 2025, <https://www.imedi.ge/ge/video/198735/imedis-kvira--20-ivlisi-2025-tseli> For English see: Civil Georgia, “Imedi TV: EU Commission Bypassed FARA to Fund Georgian NGOs”, 20 October 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/707506>

## The Case of GCRT: when defending human rights becomes a crime



The Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT) is one of Georgia's leading anti-torture organizations, providing psychological, medical and legal support to survivors of torture and other ill-treatment. Since the 2024 protest crackdown, GCRT has also been part of wider civil society efforts to document police violence and support victims of arbitrary detention, torture and other human rights violations, coordinating documentation of torture and other ill-treatment. According to GCRT's head Lela Tsiskarishvili, it was this human rights and protest-related work that led to her organization becoming a "main target" of the authorities.<sup>50</sup>

On 19 October 2025, *Imedi TV* aired a report alleging that European Commission funding had been channelled through GCRT and other Georgian NGOs to finance "radical rallies" in contravention of Georgian law. The report claimed that the European Commission had transferred and alleged that GCRT then distributed funds to other groups "financing protests".<sup>51</sup> Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze praised *Imedi TV's* reporting,<sup>52</sup> while a senior ruling party MP claimed the alleged scheme confirmed that "European structures are sponsoring internal terrorism in Georgia".<sup>53</sup>

The United Against Torture Consortium, of which GCRT is a member, later condemned what it described as a smear campaign against anti-torture organizations, stating that *Imedi TV* had falsely accused GCRT of "supporting terrorism" with European Commission funds.<sup>54</sup>

By portraying a torture rehabilitation centre as linked to terrorism, the authorities stigmatized both the organization and the people who rely on it. For survivors of torture and other violence, confidentiality and trust are essential. Public accusations of this kind risk deterring victims from seeking psychological, medical or legal help, particularly in a context where the authorities have already sought access to sensitive personal data held by NGOs. The smear campaign against GCRT unfolded alongside escalating administrative and judicial cases opened against civil society in general. In September 2025, more than 20 Georgian CSOs, including GCRT and other organizations providing legal and psychosocial support to victims of torture and other ill-treatment, received requests from the authorities to present extensive documentation, including grant agreements, donor information, activity reports and work contracts, as well as the personal data of beneficiaries.<sup>55</sup>

*Photo: Lela Tsiskarishvili, Executive Director of the Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), receives the Franco-German Human Rights Prize @GermanyUN, 10 December 2025.*

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights House Foundation, "Torturers and Their Handlers Are Being Rewarded by the Georgian Authorities: Interview with Lela Tsiskarishvili," 11 February 2025, <https://humanrightshouse.org/interviews/torturers-and-their-handlers-are-being-awarded-and-rewarded-by-the-georgian-authorities-interview-with-lela-tsiskarishvili/>.

<sup>51</sup> Imedi TV, broadcast report on GCRT and European Commission funding, October 19, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/tvimerdi/videos/815615384166519/>.

<sup>52</sup> Liza Mchedlidze, "Kobakhidze Accuses Foreign Funded Groups of Trying to Obstruct Georgia's Economic Projects," *The Messenger*, 25 November 2025, [https://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/6030\\_november\\_25\\_2025/6030\\_liza.html](https://www.messenger.com.ge/issues/6030_november_25_2025/6030_liza.html).

<sup>53</sup> Primetime, "Rati Ionatamishvili: This Is Proof That European Structures Are Financing Domestic Terrorism in Georgia". (in Georgian), 20 October 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Redress, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and Omega Research Foundation (United Against Torture Consortium), *Georgia: Escalating Harassment of Anti-Torture NGOs and Journalists Threatens Survivors' Right to Redress and Justice*, 29 October 2025, <https://redress.org/news/georgia-escalating-harassment-of-anti-torture-ngos-and-journalists-threatens-survivors-right-to-redress-and-justice/>.

<sup>55</sup> Amnesty International interview with Lela Tsiskarishvili, online, January 25, 2026. See as well: REDRESS, "Georgia: Escalating Harassment of Anti-Torture NGOs and Journalists Threatens Survivors' Right to Redress and Justice," October 2025, <https://redress.org/news/georgia-escalating-harassment-of-anti-torture-ngos-and-journalists-threatens-survivors-right-to-redress-and-justice/>.

## WEAPONIZING THE LAW



Protest rally against foreign agents law 1 May, 2024. ©Guram Muradov/Civil.ge

**“That’s when you also realize why it is that most repression in Georgia comes through laws, rather than authorities just randomly stopping you in the streets and arresting you ...Instead of directly crushing you, they outlaw your existence, amendment by amendment, procedure by procedure. And when you are finally crushed, it’s with the sense that it’s not them, but YOU who did something wrong: you were the one who didn’t follow procedures, who wasn’t perfect or smart enough to navigate the maze.”** Nini Gabritchidze, editor of online publication Civil.ge.<sup>56</sup>

Georgia’s ruling party has used its parliamentary majority to fast-track successive laws without meaningful consultation or adequate scrutiny, despite repeated concerns from civil society and international human rights bodies, including the Venice Commission, OSCE/ODIHR, and UN human rights experts that found the proposed amendments to be incompatible with international human rights law and standards.<sup>57</sup>

Beginning in spring 2024, the Georgian parliament has passed package after package of legislation specifically aimed at restricting and punishing peaceful protest and stifling dissent. Key measures used to suppress the right to freedom of association include 2025-2026 amendments to the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia and Law on Political Associations of Citizens; the 2024 Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence; the 2025 Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA); and the 2025 and 2026 amendments of the Law on Grants. The right to freedom of expression, including media freedom, has also been curtailed via vastly expanded defamation laws and restrictions on journalistic activity. New laws and amendments to the Administrative Offences and the Criminal Codes have rolled back the right to freedom of peaceful assembly by imposing draconian penalties on protest-related activities such as standing on the pavement or wearing a scarf or medical mask to a protest.

<sup>56</sup> Nini Gabritchidze, written communication with Amnesty International, April 9, 2026.

<sup>57</sup> Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on the Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, CDL-AD(2024)020 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 21 May 2024).

Venice Commission, Opinion on the Law on the Registration of Foreign Agents, the Amendments to the Law on Grants and Other Laws Relating to “Foreign Influence”, CDL-AD(2025)034 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 15 October 2025).

Those new laws, framed as promoting transparency, protecting national sovereignty or enhancing financial oversight have in fact been used to restrict civic space. Adopted without meaningful consultation, they have introduced vague definitions, prior-approval requirements and onerous and intrusive reporting obligations for NGOs.<sup>58</sup> This has promptly translated into unwarranted monitoring of NGOs, frozen bank accounts, threats of criminal prosecution of their leaders and staff, and the stigmatization of their ordinary human rights work as “foreign influence”, “political activity” or even “sabotage.”

Regardless of their formal justification, those laws are intended to exert undue control over civil society, silence criticism, strict citizens’ oversight of the authorities’ actions, erode public accountability to entrench authoritarian practices. Their adoption and enforcement effectively move the country to rule-by-law, where those in power can arbitrarily create and apply the law as they choose.

## **SHRINKING CIVIL SPACE: THE LEGISLATIVE ASSAULT ON FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION**

In April 2024, the ruling Georgian Dream party announced that it intended to reintroduce a draft law to parliament that would force any non-commercial legal entity receiving more than 20% of its income from abroad to register as an “organization pursuing the interests of a foreign power”.<sup>59</sup>

Near identical legislation had been tabled a year prior but had been withdrawn in the face of a major public backlash.<sup>60</sup> Both in 2023 and 2024, critics of the law nicknamed this the “Russian Law” owing to its similarity to Russia’s Foreign Agents Law.<sup>61</sup>

From the outset, Georgian Dream were explicit that the bill, known officially “On the Transparency of Foreign Influence”, was designed to bring civil society to heel.<sup>62</sup> In addition to registering as “agents of foreign influence”, targeted organizations would have to submit to invasive monitoring from the Ministry of Justice.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, NGOs would have to agree to disclosing information such as names and personal details of all potential beneficiaries in potential breach to their right to private and family life and the protection of personal data.<sup>64</sup>

The law was passed in the face of intense street protests and widespread criticism from the international community and Georgian civil society.<sup>65</sup> After parliament over-rode President Zourabichvili’s veto on 28 May 2024, the law came into force, and NGOs were given a deadline to register by 1 August.<sup>66</sup> Despite the severe financial penalties envisaged for failing to comply, the vast majority of Georgian civil society organizations at the time refused to register as “organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power”. A coalition representing some 400 NGOs published an open letter stating, “we will not obey the Russian law”.<sup>67</sup> In response, in 2025 the Georgian government adopted harsher tactics and more restrictive legislation: the amendments to the Law on Grants and the Foreign Agents’ Registration Act (FARA).

Adopted on 1 April 2025 and in force from 31 May 2025, FARA marked a sharp escalation. Unlike the 2024 Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, FARA extends liability to individuals as well as entities. It requires anyone deemed to be acting at the order, request, direction or control of a “foreign principal” to register as an “agent of a foreign principal” if they engage in broadly defined activities, including “political activities”. The law defines such activities expansively, covering any act intended to influence the

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<sup>58</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Stop the Bill on Transparency of Foreign Influence that Threatens Civil Society,” April 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/04/georgia-stop-the-bill-on-transparency-of-foreign-influence-that-threatens-civil-society/>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> In December 2022 a draft law was proposed in parliament by People’s Power, a satellite party of Georgian Dream, and withdrawn in March 2023 following mass protests. See OC Media, “Georgian Dream Withdraws Foreign Agents Bill,” OC Media, March 9, 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Amnesty International, “Russia: Four Years of Putin’s ‘Foreign Agents’ Law to Shackle and Silence NGOs,” November 25, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/11/russia-four-years-of-putins-foreign-agents-law-to-shackle-and-silence-ngos/>.

<sup>62</sup> Georgian Dream, “Statement on the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence,” Facebook post, 3 April 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=986233129534152&id=100044424219889](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=986233129534152&id=100044424219889).

<sup>63</sup> Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on the Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, CDL-PI(2024)013 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, May 21, 2024), [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)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “What Georgia’s Foreign Agent Law Means for Its Democracy,” CFR, May 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/what-georgias-foreign-agent-law-means-its-democracy>.

<sup>66</sup> Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, Legislative Herald of Georgia, enacted May 28, 2024, <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6171895>.

<sup>67</sup> Civil Society Forum of Georgia and others, “We Will Not Obey the Russian Law,” open letter signed by approximately 400 NGOs, July 2024, <https://csf.ge/en/statement-we-will-not-obey-the-russian-law/>.

government, state agencies or even “any section of the public” on domestic or foreign policy. Combined with intrusive disclosure obligations, financial penalties up to GEL 10,000 (US 3700) and/or up to five years’ imprisonment, the law gives the authorities a powerful tool to intimidate, monitor and potentially prosecute civil society actors, media workers, activists and others engaged in legitimate public advocacy.

In parallel with FARA legislation, the Georgian government moved to control and starve defiant NGOs of funding through amendments to the Law on Grants, also passed in April 2025. The amendments introduced a requirement for prior government approval for all foreign grants. This gave the authorities extensive new powers to monitor compliance, including the ability to seek court-authorized asset seizures and request financial records, personal data and other sensitive information. These powers created intrusive reporting obligations and increased the risk of arbitrary interference with the rights to freedom of association and privacy.<sup>68</sup>

Further amendments to the Law on Grants passed in March 2026 expanded both the definition of grants and penalties for non-compliance. Under the expanded definition “grants” now include any monetary or in-kind transfer intended—or merely believed—to exert influence on state policy or on any segment of Georgian society. As a result, previously standard professional activities such as hiring local experts for research, providing technical assistance, or funding the Georgian branches of international organizations now require prior government approval. Georgian journalists working for international outlets could be targeted, as indeed could any international organization working in Georgia, except those with diplomatic accreditation. Failure to obtain prior government consent makes these routine civil and professional interactions punishable by heavy fines, hundreds of hours of community service, or up to six years in prison.<sup>69</sup>

As part of a coordinated campaign to intimidate, defund and effectively criminalize the work of independent civil society, these laws were weaponised through the courts targeting organisations providing legal, financial and human rights assistance to victims of human rights violations especially in the context of protests.

Citing the new Grants law among other legal provisions, between 17 and 23 June 2025, Georgian courts issued orders to eight organizations requiring them to submit legal, personal, financial and personal data on beneficiaries retroactively covering the period from January 2024, before the Law on Grants amendments had entered into force.<sup>70</sup> The appeals court rubber-stamped the requests without substantive examination, requiring the organizations to hand over the information under threat of criminal liability.<sup>71</sup> More than 80 civil society and media organizations have reportedly received monitoring initiation letters under the new grants law since 2025, proceedings that expose them to coercive information demands, heavy fines and potential criminal liability.<sup>72</sup>

Other pre-existing laws have also been weaponised. Based on a request from the Prosecutor's Office, in March 2025 the Tbilisi City Court ordered the freezing of the bank accounts of five foundations as part of a criminal investigation under sabotage and national security provisions of the Criminal Code, on allegations that the organisations had financed protest-related activities resulting in violence and property damage.<sup>73</sup>

In August 2025, seven further civil society organisations had their accounts frozen and their representatives summoned for questioning under a similar criminal investigation, invoking accusations of

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<sup>68</sup> International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Brief on Georgia's Draft Amendments to the Law on Grants, 11 April 2025, pp. 2–5; European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Georgia – Urgent Opinion on the Amendments to the Law on Grants, CDL-AD(2025)034, 2025, paras. 31–47.

<sup>69</sup> Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Law on Grants, Legislative Herald, March 2026, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/31510?publication=37>; Amnesty International, “Georgia: Ruling Party Proposes Laws to Criminalize Foreign Funding for Civic Activity,” February 2026, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/02/georgia-ruling-party-proposes-laws-to-criminalize-foreign-funding-for-civic-activity/>.

<sup>70</sup> The June 2025 court orders cited three legal bases — the Law on Grants, Article 34<sup>1</sup> of the Organic Law on Political Associations of Citizens, and Article 201<sup>3</sup> of the Law on Combating Corruption: p.8 Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), *Human Rights Situation in Georgia 2025*

<sup>71</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Court Order on Five Independent NGOs a Blow to Freedom of Association,” 20 June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/georgia-court-order-on-five-independent-ngos-a-blow-to-freedom-of-association/>; see as well: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/commissioner-is-concerned-about-intrusive-inquiries-into-ngos-that-are-at-odds-with-georgia-s-human-rights-commitments>.

<sup>72</sup> Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), *Human Rights Situation in Georgia 2025* (Tbilisi: GYLA, 2025), [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20SITUATION%20IN%20GEORGIA%202025.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/HUMAN%20RIGHTS%20SITUATION%20IN%20GEORGIA%202025.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities Freeze Accounts of Organizations Supporting Protesters, to ‘Kill the Peaceful Protests,’” March 20, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/03/georgia-authorities-freeze-accounts-of-organizations-supporting-protesters-to-kill-the-peaceful-protests/>.

sabotage, assisting hostile foreign entities and financing activities directed against Georgia's constitutional order, some carrying sentences of up to 15 years.<sup>74</sup>

The impact of Georgia's new restrictive laws and the arbitrary measures initiated under them has been prompt and devastating. Eka Gigauri, head of Transparency International Georgia, told Amnesty International that after more than 25 years of service, her organization has effectively been silenced after the passing of these laws. "We have already closed all our offices across the country," she said. "In fact, it is no longer possible for civil society organizations to operate in Georgia."<sup>75</sup>

Their case is not an exception: several of the country's most established organizations are struggling to survive as successive waves of restrictive legislation and other regulatory pressures flowing from them have systematically eroded their capacity to seek funds and operate. Most prominent human rights organisations with deep institutional knowledge and public trust have been forced to downsize, suspend core activities or shift to emergency, survival-mode operations. What was once a diverse and resilient civic space is increasingly being hollowed out—leaving fewer independent voices able to provide oversight, scrutinize the government's human rights record, deliver services or hold authorities to account.

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<sup>74</sup> While refusal to comply with FARA led to the opening of investigations, the investigations themselves were launched not under the provisions of FARA and the newly amended Grants Law, but under provisions related to 'sabotage,' stemming from allegations that these organizations had provided support to protesters. See Amnesty International European Institutions Office, "EU Should Respond to Georgia's Crackdown on Civil Society," <https://www.amnesty.eu/news/eu-should-respond-to-georgias-crackdown-on-civil-society/>.

<sup>75</sup> Amnesty International interview with Eka Gigauri, Director, Transparency International Georgia, Tbilisi, 2 December 2025.

## The Case of the Social Justice Centre (SJC): from watchdog to target



The Social Justice Centre (SJC), a prominent voice for minority rights, labour justice, and the environment has been severely affected. SJC became a prime target under the new restrictive laws for its role in politically sensitive causes.

According to its director, Tamta Mikeladze, the organization's grassroots presence and its ability to mobilize communities became a source of increased hostility from the government especially during the widespread nationwide protests.<sup>76</sup> Ruling party officials and pro-government media portrayed the organization's leadership as a threat to national interests, accusing them of undermining economic development, deepening divisions and supporting unrest, accusations that were followed by investigations.

Prosecutors aggressively interrogated Tamta Mikeladze over social media posts supporting protests and threatened liability under new protest laws that broaden the definition of an "organizer".<sup>77</sup> Prosecutors also questioned the organization's purchase of basic protective equipment including masks, eye protection and helmets for staff members and legal monitors attending protests where police were known to be using excessive force (see section below), framing these purchases as potential financing of violence or preparing for disorder. When the SJC's bank accounts were frozen after prosecutors had launched a politically motivated probe into "sabotage", the organization was effectively paralyzed. Its finances and access to resources were blocked, making it impossible to maintain its previous scale of operation.

"After freezing the bank accounts, I can say that financially our organization is fully paralyzed. They killed our organization, our institution... At this stage, we are continuing our work on a voluntary basis." Tamta Mikeladze told Amnesty International.<sup>78</sup>

Under international human rights law, civil society organizations have the right to seek, receive and utilize resources from national, foreign and international sources an essential component of the right to freedom of association. States must not criminalize or delegitimize activities in defence of human rights on account of the origin of funding; furthermore, restrictions impeding the ability of associations to pursue their statutory activities constitute an interference with the right to association.<sup>79</sup>

Measures imposing burdensome administrative obligations on civil society organizations including those that restrict their ability to seek, receive and utilize financial resources and stigmatize organizations by labelling them as "foreign agents" directly interfere with the right to freedom of association. They also restrict their right to freedom of expression by inevitably affecting the capacity of organizations and their representatives to engage in public debate, defend human rights and hold government accountable.

While independent bodies may have a legitimate reason to examine associations' records to ensure transparency and accountability, such procedures must not be arbitrary, must respect the rights to non-discrimination and privacy, and must not over-scrutinize associations through onerous and bureaucratic reporting requirements failing which they put at risk the independence of associations and the safety of their members.<sup>80</sup>

*Photo: Tamta Mikeladze, Programme director, Social Justice Centre @Personal*

<sup>76</sup> Amnesty International interview with Tamta Mikeladze, Director, Social Justice Centre, online, December 8, 2025.

<sup>77</sup> Venice Commission, Georgia – Amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations (adopted February 6, 2025), CDL-REF(2025)013 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, February 12, 2025), <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF%282025%29013>; Amnesty International, EUR5604502025 (London: Amnesty International, October 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/EUR5604502025ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> Amnesty International interview with Tamta Mikeladze, Director, Social Justice Centre, online, December 8, 2025.

<sup>79</sup> Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly A/RES/53/144, Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Art. 2.1, 1999, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf>.

<sup>80</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, 2012, UN Doc. A/HRC/20/27, para. 65, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A-HRC-20-27\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A-HRC-20-27_en.pdf).

## PROSCRIBING PROTEST: LEGISLATIVE ASSAULT ON FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Since 2023, Georgia has witnessed a consistent tightening of the laws governing freedom of assembly, resulting in a situation in which peaceful assembly is no longer a protected right, but a punishable offense. By February 2026, the threat of imprisonment for merely occupying a sidewalk has effectively outlawed almost any symbolic dissent and visible protest.<sup>81</sup>

The authorities responded to waves of street protests in 2024 with unprecedented violence (see section below). However, rather than stemming the wave of protest, widespread police abuses had the opposite effect, leading to more people coming to demonstrations angered by the scenes they had witnessed on television the previous night.

The failure of police violence to stem the protests necessitated a change of strategy from the authorities. What followed was a suite of legal amendments to the laws on assemblies and manifestations which sought to suffocate the protest movement by making it legally and financially unsustainable. Starting from December 2024, the Georgian parliament rushed to pass multiple waves of legislative amendments, resulting in successive layers of legislation that have transformed routine protest activity into conduct carrying criminal-level consequences and granted police sweeping powers to interfere with public gatherings at every stage.

The amendments to the Administrative Offence Code passed in December 2024 introduced a tenfold increase in fines for some of the ordinary protest activities. Penalties now stand at GEL 5,000 (about US\$ 1,800, over twice Georgia's average monthly salary) for standing or protesting peacefully on the road. Repeat offenders have to pay up to GEL 15,000 (about US\$ 5,600). Penalties were also imposed for covering the face, thus making it more difficult for protestors to wear protective equipment to escape the effects of tear gas. The latter also reportedly facilitated the use of facial recognition cameras that have been employed to identify and fine demonstrators.<sup>82</sup> The same amendments granted police broad preventive powers to detain individuals for up to 48 hours on the basis that they had previously been implicated in an administrative offence and are deemed likely to reoffend--grounds incompatible with the prohibition on arbitrary arrest.<sup>83</sup> In February 2025 new amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences quadrupled the maximum period of so-called administrative detention from 15 to 60 days.<sup>84</sup>

The amendments also subjected spontaneous assemblies to notification requirements and indoor gatherings to prior written consent, contrary to international human rights standards requiring equal protection for spontaneous assemblies, which should be facilitated and allowed to proceed without being dispersed simply for failing to comply with notification requirements and that organizing or participating in spontaneous assemblies, should not lead to administrative or criminal sanctions. The amendments also introduced new offences, including "verbal insults" to public servants, including police being punishable by up to 45 days detention, a provision that has had a chilling effect not just on freedom of assembly but on freedom of expression (see below). The fines became immediately enforceable upon issuance and are only subject to courts' review upon appeal. In July 2025, the law introduced administrative administrative detention for up to 60 days for anyone with unpaid prior fines who committed even a minor further assembly-related offence.<sup>85</sup>

These punitive laws were widely applied, targeting protestors that had gathered on the roadway of Rustaveli Avenue in front of parliament every night until the time of writing and since November 2024. Fines were handed out in an arbitrary way, often based on evidence gathered from facial recognition cameras which was unquestioningly accepted by judges. In many cases, fines were handed down to

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<sup>81</sup> Amnesty International UK, "Georgia: Symbolic Acts of Protest Targeted by Draconian New Law," Amnesty International UK, 19 December 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/georgia-symbolic-acts-protest-targeted-draconian-new-law>; international Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), Briefer on the Draft Law Amending the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Manifestations (Washington, DC: International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, October 2023), <https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/10.2023-EWMI-CSEP-ICNL-Briefer-Draft-Law-Amending-Assemblies-and-Manifestations-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> Masha Borak. "Georgia's Surveillance Cameras under Scrutiny amid Anti-Government Protests." Biometric Update, 20 February 2025, <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202502/georgias-surveillance-cameras-under-scrutiny-amid-anti-government-protests>

<sup>83</sup> Human Right Watch. Laws Effectively Criminalize Peaceful Protests," December 4, 2025, HRW. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/04/georgia-repressive-laws-effectively-criminalize-peaceful-protests>.

<sup>84</sup> Parliament of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences of Georgia (საქართველოს კანონი „საქართველოს ადმინისტრაციულ სამართალდარღვევათა კოდექსში ცვლილების შეტანის შესახებ“), adopted 6 February 2025, <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/378775>.

<sup>85</sup> Parliament of Georgia, Law on Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences, July 2025, <https://info.parliament.ge/#law-drafting/31310>

people who had merely stepped out into the road, and very often fines were issued to people who were standing in the road after it had already been blocked by police (see judiciary section, below). Thousands of protestors were fined GEL 5,000 (about US\$ 1,800), the maximum financial penalty, for blocking the road, many of them repeatedly. The Georgian Young Lawyers Association reported that a total of two million GEL (about US\$ 740,000) of fines had been issued between December 2024 and March 2025.<sup>86</sup>

Several interviewed protestors told Amnesty International that they were unaware of having been fined because the notices were not delivered by post or because the police otherwise failed to inform them, causing them to miss the deadline for appeal. Others reported that overdue fines resulted in delays when trying to cross the state border and the freezing of their assets, including bank accounts and even public transport cards.

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<sup>86</sup> JAMnews, “Fines Issued to Protesters in Georgia Reach 2 Million Lari,” *JAMnews*, 19 March 2025, <https://jam-news.net/fines-issued-to-protesters-in-georgia-reach-2-million-lari/>

## The Case of Giorgi Chanturia: financial ruin for peaceful protest



Teacher and civic activist Gota Chanturia has reportedly accrued more than USD 130,000 after being fined several times for participating in ongoing protests.

Gota Chanturia has taken part in protests in Tbilisi since November 2024 and has faced numerous administrative fines for protesting peacefully. Between 11 February 2025 and 29 September 2025, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued 73 separate fines against him for allegedly blocking roads during demonstrations, totalling GEL 315,000 (approximately USD 160,000). Courts have treated each alleged offence as a separate case, thereby significantly inflating the overall financial burden for the same “violation.” The court found Gota Chanturia guilty of obstructing the road based on brief surveillance footage showing him peacefully standing on the roadway near the parliament. According to his lawyer, the court imposed an excessive fine despite court records indicating that in most instances roads had already been partially or fully

closed by the police by the time he joined the march. The court decision merely confirmed the amount of fines issued by the Interior Ministry, without any further assessment or justification.

“The whole thing with fines became so utterly absurd that I eventually stopped counting them... there is no way I can ever repay them. It is simply their way of terror and attempt to stop us from protesting. During marches, the surveillance cameras were installed everywhere. Then notices of fines began arriving with a screenshot of me standing in the street... weekly, sometimes even daily. It was the same for my 60-year-old father, we probably now face more than GEL 500,000 (approximately US\$ 186,000) in fines as a family.

They already started the enforcement measures. My bank accounts are frozen, I cannot earn a living, and at any moment they could arrest me and seize our home. I am a father of three young children, yet the court did not take any of this into account. These decisions do not just punish me they punish my entire family, stripping away any prospects of having any future in our country.” Gota Chanturia told Amnesty International.

In October 2025 the penalties were made harsher still. Certain assembly-related offences, including blocking roads and covering one’s face with a mask or any other means during assemblies became punishable by administrative detention of up to 15 days for participants and 20 days for organizers. Certain repeated protest-related administrative offences, including repeated failures to comply with police orders and repeated violations of assembly-related restrictions, were criminalized and made punishable by prison terms of up to two years. ODIHR expressed concern that some of the newly introduced offences provide for imprisonment as the sole sanction, eliminating the possibility of fines or other alternative penalties.<sup>87</sup> The law was passed in an expedited manner, and police immediately began to arrest and imprison anti-government protestors. Within days, dozens of protestors were held in detention for blocking the road, a number that at the time of writing is thought to be in the hundreds.<sup>88</sup>

*Photo: Gota Chanturia protesting in front of Parliament, Tbilisi on May 10, 2025. @AP Photo/Zurab Tsertsvadze*

As with previous waves of repressive legislation, these amendments failed to stop the protests. Demonstrators detained for standing on the roadway on Rustaveli Avenue, instead took to nearby, smaller streets which were more difficult for the authorities to control. On 8 December 2025, parliament introduced harsh penalties for standing on the pavement, or any “areas of movement of people or transport.”<sup>89</sup> The amendments also introduced requirements that permission be sought from the Ministry of Interior (MIA) for staging a protest, whereas previously it had only been necessary to notify the local authority. The person requesting permission would be deemed the organizer of the protest and be subject

<sup>87</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Urgent Opinion on the Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code of Georgia (as adopted on 16 October 2025), 12 November 2025, pp. 18, 21, 38–39, [https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/2025-11-12%20-%20FINAL%20ODIHR%20Urgent%20Opinion%20on%20Amendments%20on%20FoPA\\_Georgia\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://legislationline.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/2025-11-12%20-%20FINAL%20ODIHR%20Urgent%20Opinion%20on%20Amendments%20on%20FoPA_Georgia_ENGLISH.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Round Up Protesters as New Restrictions on Public Rallies Take Effect,” Amnesty International, 20 October 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/10/georgia-police-round-up-protesters-as-new-restrictions-on-public-rallies-take-effect/>.

<sup>89</sup> Parliament of Georgia, Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations (საქართველოს კანონი „შეკრებებისა და მანიფესტაციების შესახებ“ საქართველოს კანონში ცვლილების შეტანის თაობაზე), Parliamentary Draft Law, <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/407273>.

to still more severe penalties in case of violating the rules. The amendments were passed in all three readings in just two days, giving no time for consideration or debate on measures severely restricting peaceful assembly.<sup>90</sup> By January 2026, protestors began to be jailed for standing on the pavement.

## The Case of Mikheil Zakareishvili: 14 days in prison for peaceful protest on a sidewalk



Mikheil Zakareishvili, an activist and lawyer, is one of the first four protestors to be given a custodial sentence of 14 days solely for protesting peacefully on a public pavement under the new law. His case, however, is not unique. Dozens of peaceful protestors in Georgia have since been fined or imprisoned under the new restrictive law for peacefully standing and protesting on a sidewalk.

On 12 December 2025, anticipating the adoption of new restrictions on protests, Mikheil Zakareishvili notified the Ministry of Internal Affairs of his intention to hold a series of brief protests on the pavement of Rustaveli Avenue on 17 December, in full compliance with the legal requirement to provide advance notice. The MIA did not respond within the legally mandated timeframe, nor did they propose any alternative location.

On 17 December, Mikheil Zakareishvili along with hundreds of others gathered peacefully on the pavement of Rustaveli Avenue. The assembly remained peaceful and did not obstruct any movement of pedestrians or vehicle traffic.

On 24 December, prosecutors summoned Mikheil Zakareishvili and 22 other peaceful protestors to court. According to him, during the proceedings, prosecutors acknowledged that the MIA had failed to fulfil its legal obligation to respond to the protest notification and conceded that there was no concrete evidence that either Mikheil Zakareishvili or other protestors had caused any obstruction to pedestrians. The court nevertheless sentenced Mikheil Zakareishvili and four others to 14 days' administrative detention based on the prosecution's speculative claims that their presence on the sidewalk posed a "theoretical" obstruction to the public.<sup>91</sup>

Peaceful protests are a vehicle to express dissent and challenge those in power. Under international human rights law, those engaging in a peaceful assembly must not be subject to the threat of criminal or administrative sanctions solely for their participation in a protest as the detention would be rendered arbitrary, while criminal sanctions to those engaged in peaceful assemblies have a chilling effect on the enjoyment of this right.

*Photo: Police officers drawing up an administrative offence protocol against Mikheil Zakareishvili and confiscating his medical mask during a protest in October 2025  
@Commersant.ge*

<sup>90</sup> Civil Georgia, "Disputed Parliament Tightens Protest Rules, Extends Restrictions to Pedestrian Areas," Civil Georgia, 10 December 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/714235>.

<sup>91</sup> Amnesty International interview with Mikheil Zakareishvili, lawyer and activist, online, 9 February 2026.

## TAKING OFFENCE: LAWS RESTRICTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

As part of their efforts to quell the protest movement, the Georgian parliament has also enacted a series of laws that penalize even mild criticism of the authorities. By imposing liability for expression that would ordinarily be protected under international human rights law, these measures restrict public debate and create a chilling effect, whereby criticism of the authorities carries serious legal and financial consequences.

In March 2026, Parliament adopted amendments introducing criminal liability for “extremism against Georgia’s constitutional order”, including systematic public acts aimed at establishing the perception that Georgia’s constitutional order or constitutional bodies are illegitimate. The law was adopted in the aftermath of the widely contested 2024 parliamentary elections, whose results have been rejected by much of the opposition in Georgia and questioned abroad. Most opposition parties have refused to take their seats in parliament in protest and continue to call for new, free and fair elections. Although no prosecutions under this specific provision had been publicly reported by mid-May 2026, its adoption creates a clear chilling effect by threatening criminal liability for political speech and criticism of the state.

This form of criminalization of dissent followed earlier restrictions that had already narrowed the space for protest, criticism and public debate and which began in earnest in February 2025, when parliament passed amendments to the Administrative Offences Code. Among other problematic provisions, amendments introduced a new offence under Article 173<sup>16</sup>: directing “verbal insults, cursing, or other offensive actions” against state officials during the performance of their official duties. Amendments also increased the possible length of administrative detention fourfold, from 15 to 60 days for this and other provisions.<sup>92</sup> These offences are vague and allow for arbitrary or discretionary interpretations that pose further restrictions on the right to freedom of expression.<sup>93</sup>

Under international human rights law and standards, expressions that may be regarded as deeply offensive, shocking or insulting are still protected under the right to freedom of expression.<sup>94</sup> In fact, the UN Human Rights Committee has recognized that the mere fact that forms of expression are considered to be insulting to a public figure is not sufficient to justify the imposition of penalties. Sanctions for political expression or other criticism of the authorities, including the at the highest level, are inherently incompatible with human rights and can have a chilling effect on freedom of expression.<sup>81</sup>

In July 2025, dozens of Georgians began to be fined around US\$ 1,500 for posting or sharing comments critical of the government on social media, directly undermining their constitutional right to freedom of expression.<sup>95</sup> The authorities proactively applied this provision to suppress criticism, instil fear and disincentivize individuals and organizations from participating in public life in their quest to further entrench power.

In several reported cases, court documents indicated that administrative cases were initiated based on police detectives reviewing the Facebook pages of individuals and determining that their posts insulted politicians in violation of Article 173(16) of the Administrative Offences Code.<sup>96</sup> These provisions have been applied widely to target those the Georgian authorities find undesirable. Many of those targeted were known opposition activists, demonstrating that the provisions were designed to punish protest and dissent. Many others were fined merely for sharing others’ posts or for posting pictures of insulting graffiti. Still others were fined for one-word posts, describing Georgian Dream MPs as “slave” or “traitor”.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Code of Administrative Offences of Georgia, Article 173<sup>16</sup>, as amended by Parliament of Georgia, Law on Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences, the Criminal Code of Georgia, and the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, 6 February 2025, <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/374936>; for analysis see: Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), “Georgian Dream Restricts Many Aspects of the Right to Protest,” GYLA, 12 December 2025, <https://gyla.ge/en/post/qartuli-ocneba-protestis-uflebis-bevr-aspeqts-zgudavs>.

<sup>93</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Assessment of Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences of Georgia, ODIHR-GAL/587466 (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 13 February 2025), <https://www.odihr.pl/legislative-support/587466>.

<sup>94</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34: Article 19: Freedoms of Opinion and Expression, CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September 2011, para. 11, <https://undocs.org/CCPR/C/GC/34>.

<sup>95</sup> Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, “Six Georgian Journalists Face Fines Over Social Media Posts,” Alert No. 107642586, Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, 17 June 2025, <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107642586>.

<sup>96</sup> Radio Tavisupleba (RFE/RL Georgian Service), “პოლიციამ ადმინისტრაციული ჯარიმების გამოსაწერად ფეისბუქის გვერდები შეისწავლა” [“Georgian Police Reviewed Facebook Pages to Issue Administrative Fines”], Radio Tavisupleba (in Georgian), 17 June 2025, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33442360.html>.

<sup>97</sup> OC Media, “Listing the Facebook Posts that Led to Fines under Georgia’s Government Insult Ban,” OC Media, 17 June 2025, <https://oc-media.org/listing-the-facebook-posts-that-led-to-fines-under-georgias-government-insult-ban/>.

In a further escalation of its efforts to suppress critical expression, on 1 June 2026 the Georgian authorities established a dedicated Division for Combating Hate Speech within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The unit is tasked with the systematic and proactive monitoring of "hate speech, offensive campaigns and aggressive communication" across all forms of public communication, acting on its own initiative rather than in response to complaints. Monitoring will reportedly cover not only social media but also conversations and street interviews. No official regulations governing the unit's powers or the criteria for determining what constitutes "hate speech" have been published.<sup>98</sup> The move comes on top of the existing administrative offence of insulting a public official, already used to detain and fine dozens of critics, and signals a shift towards permanent, institutionalized surveillance of public expression.

## The Case of Afgan Sadigov: journalist deported for speaking out



Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov was arrested for social media posts criticising the police in April 2026. On 1 April, Afgan Sadigov, a dissident who had been living in exile in Georgia, published a Facebook post criticising the police: "Where there is dictatorship, police officers are ready to sell everything and trample on anyone for the sake of a salary and shoulder boards — and they do so with pleasure, wholeheartedly and with pride." He accompanied the post with videos that included footage of Georgian police officers.<sup>99</sup>

Late at night on 4 April, Afgan Sadigov was arrested at his home by Georgian police. He was taken to a court hearing at 4 am, found guilty of insulting a police officer on social media and ordered to be expelled from the country. He was fined GEL 2,000 (about US\$ 750) and deported to Azerbaijan in the early hours of 5 April, 2026.<sup>100</sup> On 9 June 2026, Afgan Sadigov was arrested in Baku, Azerbaijan in connection with the same criminal case for which Azerbaijani authorities had previously sought his

extradition from Georgia. The arrest came just over two months after Georgian authorities deported him, relying on Azerbaijan's earlier claim that the investigation had been discontinued. His arrest confirmed long-standing concerns that he would face politically motivated prosecution if returned to Azerbaijan.

*Photo: Afgan Sadigov in the courtroom. @Mindia Gabadze*

<sup>98</sup> Civil Georgia, "Interior Ministry's Anti-'Hate-Speech' Division Starts Operating with Ten Staffers," Civil Georgia, 1 June 2026, <https://civil.ge/archives/736426>.

<sup>99</sup> JAM News, "Afgan Sadygov Expelled from Georgia," JAM News, April 5, 2026, <https://jam-news.net/afgan-sadygov-expelled-from-georgia/>.

<sup>100</sup> International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), "Georgia: MFRR Denounces Sadygov's Deportation as a Stark Example of Transnational Repression against Journalists," IFJ, April 2026, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/europe/article/georgia-mfrr-denounces-sadygovs-deportation-as-a-stark-example-of-transnational-repression-against-journalists>.

## The case of Albi Kordzaia: activist imprisoned for speaking out



Activist Albi Kordzaia has faced custodial sentences for publicly criticizing a Georgian police officer and an MP in two different instances.

On 4 June 2025, Albi Kordzaia was sentenced to ten days of administrative detention for allegedly insulting a public official under Article 173(16) of newly amended Administrative Offences Code.<sup>101</sup>

This charge relates to a peaceful protest held on 11–12 April 2025, outside an MP's private residence. The protest was held in response to the MP's comments regarding a national hero that many found disparaging. On 11 April, police blocked an attempt by some 30 activists to protest in front of the MP's house. The following day, Albi Kordzaia and a friend returned to the protest venue outside the house of the MP with a loudspeaker, challenging the statements made by the MP and referring to her as a "Russian", and a "traitor".

On 23 June 2025, Albi Kordzaia received a phone call informing her that she was being charged with insulting a public official during the 12 April protest. In a highly unusual move, the proceedings against her were initiated by the Prosecutor's Office based on internet monitoring and video recordings of the protest. At the trial, the police officer who drew up the administrative offence report testified that he had seen the video on a social network and identified Albi Kordzaia using specialized software.

The prosecution claimed her actions, and specifically the use of the words "Russian" and "traitor", constituted an insult that "exceeded the boundaries of free speech". Notably, the MP in question never filed a complaint herself; instead, the Prosecutor's Office unilaterally decided on her behalf that the official felt insulted. The court agreed with the prosecution, finding Albi Kordzaia guilty of insulting a person in public authority, ruling that her actions "exceed the boundaries of freedom of expression and violated the public officials right to private and family life".<sup>102</sup>

Shortly after her release, on 7 July 2025, Albi Kordzaia was given another administrative detention order this time for an alleged insult of a police officer. These charges were brought by a police officer following their shorter than two-minute verbal confrontation. On 28 June, in a hotel lobby in Batumi, Albi Kordzaia recognized the police officer as a witness whose testimony had resulted in 21-year-old activist Mate Devidze being sentenced to four years and six months in prison. In publicly available footage of the confrontation, Albi Kordzaia asks the policeman before he enters the lift: "Are you not ashamed? You made a false statement against the young boys and now you are here vacationing in Batumi".<sup>103</sup>

The following day, when Albi Kordzaia had already returned to Tbilisi, the Batumi City Court conducted a hearing in her absence, finding her guilty of "an insult to a police officer" and ordering five days of administrative detention.

*Photo: Albi Kordzaia at the interview ©Formula TV*

<sup>101</sup> Venice Commission, Georgia – Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations (text), CDL-REF(2025)012 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2025), [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2025\)012](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2025)012).

<sup>102</sup> Amnesty International online interview with Albi Kordzaia, March 20, 2026.

<sup>103</sup> Footage of the confrontation between Albi Kordzaia and the police officer in Batumi, Instagram, news.on.ge (in Georgian), 28 June 2025.

## LAWS STRANGLING INDEPENDENT MEDIA



Protest sign at a demonstration in front of the Georgian parliament. ©Guram Muradov/Civil.ge

**“Freedom of expression has always come under attack, and there were always attempts to change the law. But now we face an existential threat.”** Mamuka Andguladze, chair of the Media Advocacy Coalition<sup>104</sup>

Against this backdrop of intensifying efforts to restrict dissent by critics and political opponents, parliament has also adopted a package of legislation aimed at consolidating control over the information space, undermining the independence of media institutions, restricting their operation, and curbing their ability to hold power to account.

On 26 June 2025, amendments to the Law on Speech and Expression removed vital protections for journalists that had been in place for more than two decades. Amendments to the Broadcast Law simultaneously choked sources of funding for critical TV outlets and imposed vague and arbitrary guidelines on “fairness and impartiality” that could silence already beleaguered news sources.

Under the changes to the media law, defamation no longer requires proof of harm, and the burden of proof has shifted to defendants to prove their innocence. By also revoking protections for source confidentiality, the legislation effectively dismantles key safeguards for the press and public discourse.<sup>105</sup> Defamation ceased to be a criminal matter in Georgia in 2004, a key provision that protected journalists and other media workers, who often worked out of small outlets that are chronically underfunded, from legal threats from politicians and big business. By rolling back this key provision, the Georgian government are paving the way for strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP) suits, an increasingly worrying tactic that bring vexatious legal actions with the aim of silencing, intimidating or deterring critical reporting.

The new amendments also undermine qualified privilege, which protected journalists and media outlets from civil defamation claims if they had taken reasonable steps to ascertain the truth of their statements and if they intended to protect the public interest. Without such protections, media outlets find themselves at the mercy of a judicial system which in turn has been weaponized by the authorities to crush dissent (see below).

With television being the main source of news for most people in Georgia, the amendments to the Law on Broadcasting adopted in April 2025 have significantly restricted access to free and independent

<sup>104</sup> Amnesty International interview with Mamuka Andguladze, Tbilisi, December 8, 2025.

<sup>105</sup> Amnesty International interview with Mamuka Andguladze, head of the Media Advocacy Coalition, Tbilisi, 12 December 2025.

information. The amendments also impose a blanket ban on foreign funding for broadcasters, prohibiting direct or indirect financing by international sources.

The amendments also impose vague obligations on fairness and impartiality, shifting enforcement responsibility from media self-regulatory bodies to the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), a state structure. The GNCC has already used these powers to file complaints against *Formula TV* and *TV Pirveli*, objecting to their use of terms such as "illegitimate parliament", "oligarchic regime", or "regime prisoners" with possible sanctions ranging from warnings to licence revocation.

The GNCC, which had previously focused on technical regulations, has increasingly acted as a political censor.

Mamuka Andguladze, chair of the Media Advocacy Coalition, highlighted this change as well as the double standard with which it is being applied. "For the last 20 years, the Communication Commission has had restricted competencies to technical areas and not to content. Now, in summer, GD [Georgian Dream] filed a complaint against independent media outlets for using the terms like 'oligarch' and 'regime'... They said you have to distinguish between facts and opinion, they did not fine [the media outlets] but they established that they violated the law, so the fact has been established. Then, just recently, an NGO filed a [defamation] complaint against [government-aligned] *Imedi TV*, because of their reporting. But the Communication Commission said *Imedi TV* can do that because it's free political expression," Andguladze told Amnesty International.<sup>106</sup>

Independent media outlets have been further squeezed financially through restrictions on foreign grants and new funding laws. As mentioned above, amendments to the Law on Grants and the Foreign Agent Registration Act now require prior government approval for receiving foreign funding, discouraging international support and leaving outlets without vital resources. At least 20 outlets have launched urgent fundraising campaigns, while others report frozen bank accounts despite complying with their financial obligations. Broadcasters such as *Mtavari Arkhi*, a major media outlet, were forced to cease broadcasting by May 2025, citing financial and political pressure. The two remaining major critical broadcasters, *TV Pirveli* and *Formula TV*, also face the risk of closure, while 17 regional broadcasters reported being unable to resume broadcasting in 2025 due to financial hardships following restrictive laws.<sup>107</sup> Several remaining independent outlets told Amnesty International that they are now operating in a precarious "survival mode" marked by staff cuts, shrinking resources, and administrative harassment.<sup>108</sup>

Media pluralism is a vital part of the right to freedom of expression and the public's right to be informed. This requires more than just ensuring that there are multiple media outlets. Media pluralism implies a diversity of content that reflects as far as possible the variety of opinions encountered in society. Closing down media outlets critical of the authorities has the particularly insidious effect of silencing dissent and undermining transparency and accountability. When critical outlets close, there are fewer opportunities for individuals to learn about government wrongdoing and other failures that may trigger popular discontent or opposition. The lack of independent media further limits opportunities for alternative narratives to reach audiences and challenge power, allowing state officials to further entrench their control.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Transparency International Georgia, "Key Findings: Advertising Market 2024–2025," Transparency International Georgia, 17 July 2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/key-findings-advertising-market-2024-2025>.

<sup>108</sup> Amnesty International interview with Netgazeti's Editor Tamar Rukhadze and journalist Irma Dimitradze, Tbilisi, 9 December 2026.

<sup>109</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34 on Article 19: Freedoms of Opinion and Expression, CCPR/C/GC/34, 12 September 2011, para. 14, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/gc34.pdf>; UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Report to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/17/27 (Geneva: OHCHR, 16 May 2011), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc1727-report-special-rapporteur-promotion-and-protection-right-freedom>.

## The case of *Netgazeti/Batumelebi*: founder imprisoned, funding threatened



*Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti* are among Georgia's longest-standing independent media outlets. The former was founded in Batumi in 2001 by journalists Mzia Amaghlobeli and Eter Turadze, and *Netgazeti* was launched in 2010 to expand this work to a national audience. The outlets are known for their investigative journalistic work and public-interest reporting on politics, corruption, human rights and social issues. Their critical reporting has frequently brought them under pressure from the authorities.

This pressure intensified after *Batumelebi/Netgazeti's* founder, Mzia Amaghlobeli, was arrested in January 2025 during protests in Batumi and later sentenced to two years' imprisonment for slapping a police officer following an unfair trial. Since her arrest, their journalists have reported being targeted by smear campaigns and harassment by the authorities. In July 2025, days before Mzia Amaghlobeli was sentenced, the authorities temporarily seized *Batumelebi* and

*Netgazeti's* bank accounts, citing tax debt, before lifting the measure after an international outcry.

The new restrictive legal framework has further deepened the pressure. Like many independent Georgian media outlets, *Batumelebi* and *Netgazeti* have relied on international grants in a limited and politically sensitive advertising market. According to *Netgazeti* and *Batumelebi's* deputy director, Tamar Rukhadze, the new laws designating them as foreign agents and amendments in grants legislation has created serious legal and financial risks by restricting access to foreign funding, exposing them to large fines and potential criminal liability.

**"They are toughening the legislation week by week, adopting one restrictive law after another. Journalists cannot receive their salaries for months... The legal situation in Georgia today is such that almost anything you do as a journalist can lead to arrest or a criminal investigation,"** journalist Irma Demetradze who works for these outlets told Amnesty International.

The combined effect of these restrictive laws has not only created legal and financial burdens but has created a chilling effect through uncertainties and threats of sanctions that put at risk independent media's ability to continue their reporting and coverage.

*Photo: Netgazeti/Batumelebi Journalist Irma Dimitradze protesting for the release of her colleague. @OC media*

## The case of *OC Media*: the cost of independent journalism



*OC Media* is an independent online media outlet covering Georgia and the South Caucasus, with a focus on politics, human rights and social justice.

*OC Media* journalist Mariam Nikuradze told Amnesty International that the combined impact of the “foreign influence” and FARA laws and amendments to the Law on Grants has badly impacted her outlet and forced it, like many other independent ones, to look for new and creative ways of funding to support their work, including crowdfunding. At the same time, some smaller and more vulnerable regional media outlets have been forced to shut down.

The latest amendments to the Law on Grants, however, call into question even the possibility of using crowdfunding to save struggling media outlets, as the

new rules require prior government approval for a wide range of activities linked to any foreign support and funding.

“This new amendment is specifically targeted to eliminate all these kinds of initiatives”, Mariam Nikuradze told Amnesty International. “It criminalizes so many things, even going to a conference and speaking publicly abroad may be punishable if you don’t request and receive permission from the government... You can face prison of up to six years”.

According to her, the impact of these laws goes beyond finances and make it harder for journalists to report on cases of public interest. Online media are often kept out of Parliament when important decisions are being made, and some journalists have had their accreditation suspended after complaints from MPs. The June 2025 restrictions on filming trials has also made it harder for the public to follow politically sensitive cases, especially cases against protesters.

**“It has never been so dangerous to be a journalist in Georgia. We are almost at the point where we will have to decide whether to go into exile or go to prison... The challenges come from every direction: physical security, restrictive legislation, digital security, criminal prosecution, government hate campaigns, financial instability and the shrinking space for our work,”** she told Amnesty International, describing the cumulative impact of the new laws and subsequent harassment as an existential threat to independent journalism in Georgia.<sup>110</sup>

*Photo: OC Media's Mariam Nikuradze being treated in an ambulance during the 28-29 November 2024 protests. @Personal Archives*

<sup>110</sup> Amnesty International online interview with Mariam Nikuradze, journalist, *OC Media*, 25 February 2026.

# WEAPONIZING THE POLICE

**“Masked men, representatives of the Special Forces brutally beat and tortured peaceful protesters in the streets, in full view of the world. It was live-streamed on television and social media, a shocking display of state-sanctioned violence.”** Lela Tsiskarishvili, Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims <sup>111</sup>

Over the past two years, the Georgian police force, particularly its special units, have been transformed from an institution responsible for maintaining public order into an instrument of repression against government critics. Suppressing the right to peaceful assembly became a critical way to shield the government from potential threats to their power by further narrowing the ways in which individuals are able to express disapproval or opposition towards the authorities.

Police have widely used unlawful force, arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, while allowing unchecked violence by pro-government groups against protesters. In an effort to instil fear and send a chilling message of control, law enforcement agencies have deployed inherently abusive equipment to carry out acts of torture and other ill-treatment as a form of intimidation. Thousands of people have been affected. The rule of law has been eroded as pro-government groups have attacked opposition politicians, journalists and peaceful protesters with impunity. Detained protestors have been subjected to severe beatings, with hundreds of cases amounting to torture and other ill-treatment.

This pattern of abuse has been reinforced by the institutionalisation of impunity through the dismantling of oversight mechanisms and the persistent failure to effectively investigate violations by ordinary police and command responsibility from leadership. This has enabled a coordinated and state-sanctioned pattern of collective punishment against protesters and political opponents.

## POLICING AS PUNISHMENT: UNLAWFUL AND PUNITIVE USE OF FORCE



**“We were encircled by police officers, within moments, they surrounded me, threw me on the ground, kicking my face and head. I screamed and blacked out... The next thing I remember I woke up in the hospital I could not believe it was a policeman who did this to me...”** Zviad Maisashvili, a young activist beaten by special forces officers on Rustaveli Avenue on 30 November 2024 <sup>112</sup>

Photo: Zviad Maisashvili, a young potestor beaten by special forces officers in Tbilisi. ©Tabula

<sup>111</sup> Lela Tsiskarishvili, "Torturers and Their Handlers Are Being Awarded and Rewarded by the Georgian Authorities," interview, Human Rights House Foundation, February 11, 2025, <https://humanrightshouse.org/interviews/torturers-and-their-handlers-are-being-awarded-and-rewarded-by-the-georgian-authorities-interview-with-lela-tsiskarishvili/>

<sup>112</sup> Amnesty International online interview with Zviad Maisashvili, December 2024.

Throughout both waves of protest in 2024, law enforcement officials used unlawful force not merely to disperse assemblies but to punish and deter participation in peaceful protests in clear violation of international human rights standards on the use of force and the prohibition of ill-treatment. Hundreds of peaceful protesters were arbitrarily detained and subjected to unlawful and brutal dispersal tactics including beatings and other forms of ill-treatment, with many sustaining serious injuries such as fractures, concussions, and head trauma.<sup>113</sup> The vast majority of protesters reported being tortured and otherwise ill-treated by the police.<sup>114</sup>

Masked and heavily equipped riot police routinely surrounded peaceful protestors, dragging them behind police cordons, and beating with batons, fists, and kicks. Protesters were kettled, escape routes were blocked, and those attempting to flee were chased by officers equipped with batons, tear gas, and pepper spray, then assaulted on the ground and severely beaten.<sup>115</sup>

Protestors interviewed by Amnesty International during the November-December 2024 protests reported several instances where police forced them to pass through “beating corridors”, formed by lines of 10 to 30 officers who struck them as they walked through. Such incidents were also documented by the Omega Foundation and local monitors in the early hours of 30 November 2024. During one such incident documented by the Omega Foundation, police deliberately surrounded approximately 100–200 protesters, creating a crush and deploying pepper spray against those trapped inside; as people began to fall during the crowd surge, the only means of exit was through a “beating corridor,” further underscoring the deliberate and punitive nature of these actions.<sup>116</sup> Protestors consistently reported targeted blows to the head, face, ribs, and kidneys, by several officers simultaneously, often after they had been restrained or were no longer resisting.<sup>117</sup>

In one widely reported incident, publicly available footage that went viral showed masked riot police beating protester Zviad Maisashvili near the Rustaveli Metro Station on 30 November 2024. The footage shows officers continuing to kick him, including in the head, after he had lost consciousness and was lying motionless on the ground. He sustained serious injuries, including fractures and concussion.<sup>118</sup> In another widely circulated case, live footage captured police attacking a journalist from behind, punching him in the head and knocking him to the ground (See the case of Guram Rogava, below).

On 3 December 2024, after visiting detained and injured protesters, Georgia’s Public Defender reported that most detainees described extremely harsh police treatment, raising concerns that police had intentionally used unlawful force for the purpose of punishment, potentially amounting to torture. He noted that “most of them have serious injuries to the face, eyes, and head”, which “practically excludes” the possibility that police had used necessary and proportionate force, while the location, nature and severity of the injuries created “a credible impression that the police are using violent methods against citizens for the purpose of punishment”.<sup>119</sup>

Authorities frequently justified these unlawful actions by alleging protester violence. According to monitors, police routinely sought to create a pretext for their punitive actions, where according to people who took part in the protests “typically, Ministry of Internal Affairs would try to create a formal basis for dispersing the rally by physically or verbally confronting and provoking the citizens”.<sup>120</sup> However, despite sporadic and isolated instances of protesters throwing water bottles and fireworks at police in response to aggressive

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<sup>113</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Actions in Tbilisi Amount to Yet Another Punitive Assault on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly,” EUR56/8845/2024 (London: Amnesty International, November 29, 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/8845/2024/en/>; see as well: OSCE/ODIHR, Moscow Mechanism Report on Georgia, ODIHR.GAL/9/26/Corr.1 (Vienna: OSCE, March 12, 2026), [https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official\\_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report\\_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia\\_0.pdf](https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia_0.pdf).

<sup>114</sup> Public Defender of Georgia, statement, November 29, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1Jhrbtkggx/>; Public Defender of Georgia, statement, November 29, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1YwQE6vy2H/>.

<sup>115</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Actions in Tbilisi Amount to Yet Another Punitive Assault on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly,” EUR56/8845/2024 (London: Amnesty International, November 29, 2024), 4, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/8845/2024/en/>

<sup>116</sup> World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and United Against Torture Consortium, Briefing Note: Georgia (Geneva: OMCT, October 2025), 8, <https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/OMCT-Briefing-Note-Georgia.pdf>.

<sup>117</sup> GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, 28 November 2024–28 February 2025 (Tbilisi, 2025), 74, [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)

<sup>118</sup> Footage of Zviad Maisashvili being beaten by police: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DC-rySbBEFG/>; see also Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Actions in Tbilisi Amount to Yet Another Punitive Assault on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly,” EUR56/8845/2024, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Public Defender of Georgia, “Public Defender’s Statement”, 3 December 2024, <https://www.ombudsman.ge/eng/akhali-ambebi/241203081257sakhalkho-damtsvelis-gantskhadeba>.

<sup>120</sup> Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), Human Rights Crisis in Georgia (Tbilisi: GYLA, 2025), 28, [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 unlawful police tactics, as well as homophobic and sexist threats, the protests remained largely peaceful.<sup>121</sup>

Forensic evidence collected by the international NGO Omega Research Foundation and local monitors, based on examinations of around 100 protesters, also does not support claims of mutual confrontation but instead indicates a coordinated pattern of widespread beatings, often inflicted after individuals were under police control, amounting to torture and other ill-treatment. Findings show a consistent pattern of trauma, with an unusually high prevalence of head and facial injuries such as fractures, concussions, and soft tissue damage alongside neurological harm, pointing to deliberate targeting of the head. In addition, bruising and abrasions on the lower body, particularly the backs of the thighs, further support accounts that individuals were beaten or stomped on while restrained or after being forced to the ground, with injury patterns aligning with testimonies of abuse inflicted while victims were subdued.<sup>122</sup>

## CHOKING THE PROTESTS: UNLAWFUL AND PUNITIVE USE OF LESS LETHAL WEAPONS



Photo: Police firing tear gas at anti government demonstrations in Central Tbilisi. @GIORGI ARJEVANIDZE/AFP via Getty Images

<sup>121</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Brutal Crackdown on Protesters and Journalists in Georgia: 'They May Have Broken Our Bones, but They Won't Break Our Spirits,'" EUR56/8845/2024 (December, 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/8845/2024/en/>; OSCE/ODIHR, Moscow Mechanism Report on Georgia, ODIHR.GAL/9/26/Corr.1 (Vienna: OSCE, March 12, 2026), 4, [https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official\\_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report\\_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia\\_0.pdf](https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia_0.pdf); Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Civil Rights Facing Increased Police Terror (Tbilisi: GYLA, December 27, 2024), [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Independent Forensic Expert Group (IFEG), Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), Human Rights Center (HRC), with research support from Omega Research Foundation, Preliminary Mission Findings: Georgia, December 2024, 20 December 2024, <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/storage/2025/01/Preliminary-mission-findings-Georgia-Dec-2024-Final.pdf>.

## TEAR GAS, PEPPER SPRAY AND PLASTIC BULLETS

**“They were aiming [the guns firing plastic bullets] at people’s faces...I had my hand over my forehead when [the plastic bullet] hit me near the wrist — they were aiming straight for my face. My hand deflected the shot, otherwise it would have hit me in the face...”** <sup>123</sup> Konstantine Chakhunashvili, doctor, on being hit by plastic bullet during the protest on 1 May 2024.

During the waves of protest in April and May, and again in November and December 2024, police used tear gas, pepper spray, water cannons and rubber bullets against largely peaceful demonstrators in which protesters and journalists suffered burns, temporary vision loss and other injuries.<sup>124</sup>

According to eyewitness testimonies and reports of local monitors, these measures were deployed unlawfully in circumstances where there was no imminent threat of serious violence or widespread disorder. In addition, in most instances, the measures were deployed without adequate warning or opportunity for protesters to safely disperse, in violation of both Georgian law and international standards.<sup>125</sup>

Police sprayed irritants directly into the faces of protesters as they were attempting to flee or when they were already detained, resulting in eye burning, respiratory problems, nausea, chest pains and other complications. Such unlawful use of pepper spray on restrained individuals therefore had no crowd control purpose and amounted to punitive use designed to inflict additional unnecessary pain on protesters.<sup>126</sup>

Kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs), commonly known as rubber or plastic bullets, were deployed by the police both during the April-May 2024 and November–December 2024–2025 protests. Their use was reported by several protesters and documented by media and local monitors. At least eight individuals on 1 May 2024 alone reported being shot by KIPs, including on the face and head area, sustaining injuries, including one person sustaining eye injuries while protesting peacefully. Journalists covering the protests also suffered injuries consistent with KIPs.<sup>127</sup> Images of spent cartridges reportedly from the May 2024 protests were identified by the Omega Research Foundation as originating from Turac, a Turkish manufacturer of multiple-projectile munitions. Multiple projectile ammunition is inherently inaccurate, indiscriminate, and does not comply with the UN Guidance on Less Lethal Weapons, or the 2024 UN Model Protocol for Law Enforcement and should never be used by law enforcement.<sup>128</sup>

Georgian police also used tear gas repeatedly during protest dispersals between 28 November and 7 December 2024. In most cases, local monitors and eyewitnesses report that the irritant was deployed without prior warning or without giving protesters safe exit routes to disperse with its use, lasting between two and ten hours.<sup>129</sup> In addition, tear gas was used in areas where protesters were tightly contained with no exit routes, causing panic and resulting in skin burns, respiratory distress and other injuries.<sup>134</sup>

Protesters also reported that police fired volleys of tear gas canisters directly into crowds at close range, often targeting the faces of the protesters. Available footage from the protests also show gas cannisters being fired down onto the crowd from the roofs of nearby buildings, a practice that is unlawful and against the manufacturers’ instructions: those for tear gas capsule GL 202, reportedly identified by the TV company Formula, state that this weapon must be fired at a 45-degree angle, as firing this weapon directly at a person can cause serious injury or death.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Konstantine Chakhunashvili, Facebook post, 1 May 2024,

<https://www.facebook.com/constantine.chakhunashvili/posts/pfbid0N6PMhH2ftYSW2ATJZQME1iAnJeFqtqPACummhgYpy3Unrx8jf5BsCkm83BBpo7ikl>; See as well: Konstantine Chakhunashvili, interview with TV Pirveli, 2 May 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=297963636581836>.

<sup>124</sup> Amnesty International interviews with protest participants April 15–30, 2024; see also GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia.

<sup>125</sup> GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, 28 November 2024–28 February 2025 (Tbilisi, 2025). [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).

<sup>126</sup> TV Pirveli, “რუსთაველის გამზირზე აქციის მონაწილეების მისამართით რეზინის ტყვიებს სვრიან” [“Rubber Bullets Fired at Protest Participants on Rustaveli Avenue”], TV Pirveli (in Georgian), 1 May 2024, <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebi/politika/67995-rustavelis-gamzirse-aqtsiis-monatsileebis-misamartit-rezinis-tkviets-ismria>; see as well: GYLA, Human Rights Crisis in Georgia, p. 33.

<sup>127</sup> TV Pirveli, “Rubber Bullets Fired at Protest Participants on Rustaveli Avenue,” video footage, 1 May 2024, <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebi/politika/67995-rustavelis-gamzirse-aqtsiis-monatsileebis-misamartit-rezinis-tkviets-ismria>.

<sup>128</sup> Omega Research Foundation (@Omega\_RF), post on X May 12, 2024, [https://x.com/Omega\\_RF/status/1790728347162456476](https://x.com/Omega_RF/status/1790728347162456476); OMCT/United Against Torture Consortium, “Georgia: Stop Police Brutality and Effectively Investigate Allegations of Torture,” May 23, 2024, <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/storage/2024/05/UATC-Georgia-23-05-24-Final.pdf>.

<sup>129</sup> GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia, 29.

<sup>130</sup> Formula TV, video report, “რით ვვარბევს და ვვწამლავს ივანიშვილის რეჟიმი?” [“With What Is Ivaniashvili’s Regime Cracking Down on Us and Poisoning Us?!”), Facebook, 9 December 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=889481786601585>.

## The Case of Aleksandre Tirkia: "A Shot Made to Kill"



In the early hours of 3 December 2024, Aleksandre Tirkia, a 22-year-old tattoo artist, was standing peacefully on Rustaveli Avenue in Tbilisi with a friend when riot police began dispersing the crowd with tear gas. He and his lawyers told Amnesty International that he attempted to leave but found every route blocked: the avenue and all surrounding side streets had been sealed off by a police cordon.

At approximately 03:28, a tear gas canister struck him directly on the left side of his head. He lost consciousness immediately. Live footage broadcast by *TV Pirveli* captured the moment of impact and shows helmeted, masked officers aiming canisters directly at demonstrators at close range. The same footage shows Aleksandre with his face already covered in blood as bystanders rush to help him.

"It was a shot made to kill. They fired tear gas at us. My eyes burned terribly, and it became very difficult to breathe. I tried to leave but we were surrounded. We were blocked on all sides front, back, even the side alleys. That's when the gas canister hit me. I began feeling unbearable pain in my head. I was in such agony that that moment vanished from my memory", he told Amnesty International

Admitted to Ingorokva University Clinic, he was found to have multiple skull and facial fractures, traumatic subdural hemorrhage, focal brain injury, and severe damage to his left eye.<sup>134</sup> He underwent emergency surgery and was reportedly kept in a medically induced coma for more than week after being admitted to the hospital.

More than a year on, he retains only 10% vision in his left eye with no guarantee of recovery. A large bone fragment is missing from his skull. He requires further surgery to repair trigeminal nerve damage and takes daily painkillers for chronic pain. He has been diagnosed with PTSD.

"I was afraid that I would not be able to fully recover and return to my usual lifestyle. I had nightmares... I was ashamed of my appearance, I didn't want to go out, see friends, and I walked around only with glasses and a hat so that no one would notice me."

He has been compelled to abandon his profession and emigrated abroad for safety and access to medical care. Rehabilitation costs beyond initial emergency surgery have been met only through his family's support and community donations. Despite video evidence clearly showing officers firing directly at protesters, no police officer has yet been identified or charged for these acts.

"It is already clear to me that the government does not intend to hold the guilty parties accountable. On the contrary, they are shielding them with ineffective and flawed investigations, which further intensifies my sense of injustice."

*Photo: Alexandre Tirkia after being hit by a tear gas cannister fired by police while protesting peacefully on 3 December 2024 on Rustaveli Avenue, Tbilisi. © Batumelebi*

## WATER CANNONS AND CHEMICAL IRRITANTS



Photo: Protesters on the run from tear gas. 3 December, 2024 @Guram Muradov/ Civil.ge

**“Water from the canon hit me from the front, all over body and face. Water had some substance mixed in similar to pepper spray, very powerful, it left me immobilised... After that day, I had daily nosebleeds for five months... This was not normal... I always had questions about what it was, and after the BBC investigation came out, it answered some of them...”** Mariam Nikuradze, journalist, OC Media<sup>131</sup>

In spring 2024, and again during the November–December 2024 protests, law enforcement authorities used water cannons unlawfully against demonstrators as protests remained largely peaceful without serious threats of public disorder justifying the dispersal of the entire demonstration.

In several instances, water cannons were used without prior warning and in locations where demonstrators had no viable means of dispersal or retreat.<sup>132</sup> On 1 and 2 December 2024, water cannons were deployed at the very beginning of protests with no warning.<sup>133</sup> Even when warnings were given, such as on 7 December 2024, police immediately began using the water cannons without leaving protestors time to disperse.<sup>134</sup>

Georgian authorities’ use of water cannon was not just unlawful. In breach of international and domestic guidelines, as well as manufacturers’ instructions, tear gas and unknown chemical agents were mixed into the reservoirs of water cannons, which were then used excessively against protestors.<sup>135</sup>

The standards for the use of water cannons were lowered by the MIA in 2022, allowing police forces to deploy water cannons and chemical irritants simultaneously.<sup>136</sup> In practice, according to the MIA, this means mixing tear gas in the water cannon reservoir together with a solvent to make the tear gas dissolve (the solvent has yet to be specified by the Georgian authorities).<sup>137</sup>

Mixing chemical irritants with water cannons in this manner is a highly dangerous tactic. Amnesty International's position has been unequivocal that adding chemical agents to water cannons is inherently

<sup>131</sup> Mariam Nikuradze online interview with Amnesty International 25 February 2026.

<sup>132</sup> GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia, 27.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>135</sup> Publika, “სუსის მტკიცებით, 2024 წელს ცრემლსადენი გაზი გამოიყენეს” [“According to the State Security Service, Tear Gas Was Used in 2024”], Publika (in Georgian), 6 December 2025, <https://publika.ge/susis-mtkicebit-2024-cremlsadeni-gazi-gamoiyenes/>.

<sup>136</sup> Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), Civil Rights Facing Increased Police Terror (Tbilisi: GYLA, 27 December 2024), 13, [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf).

<sup>137</sup> Civil Georgia, “SSG Press Conference on Toxic Chemicals,” Civil Georgia, 5 December 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/713733>.

dangerous and that it should be prohibited, as the health risks involved increase with higher concentrations and prolonged exposure.<sup>138</sup> The practice is untested and unsafe, with no established limits to ensure chemical concentrations remain within permissible levels. Mixing water cannons and tear gas, under the pretext of them being “less lethal”, could produce an effect that is substantially more prone to be lethal, or to have long term harmful effects on those exposed.

Furthermore, chemical irritants are intended to induce dispersal by prompting individuals to escape their effects. Saturating clothing with chemical agents, particularly when combined with water, significantly impedes escape, defeating the legitimate purpose of their use. Additionally combining water cannons with chemical irritants makes it difficult to control quantity and the length of exposure, compounding the risks involved.<sup>139</sup> It also violates the duty of law enforcement agencies and their personnel to minimize harm and injury.<sup>140</sup>

In December 2025, the *BBC* released a documentary alleging that one of the substances used was cyanide benzoate, known as camite, a WW1-era chemical weapon.<sup>141</sup> The investigation drew on multiple sources, including testimonies, among them a former police officer responsible for overseeing police weaponry with direct knowledge of the chemicals allegedly used, along with expert opinions, procurement records, and medical documentation, which found long term health effects of exposure by protesters who reported being sprayed by unidentified chemicals from water cannons.<sup>142</sup>

Following public outcry over the BBC investigation, the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG) announced on 1 December 2025 that it had opened an investigation into the allegations. Within days, the SSSG publicly rejected the BBC’s findings as “complete and deliberate disinformation” and stated that only CS gas mixed with propylene glycol had been used during the dispersal operations of 4–5 December 2024. The authorities did not publicly clarify what substances, if any, had been used during other dates where protest were dispersed using water cannons.<sup>143</sup>

Simultaneously, the SSSG also opened an investigation into alleged “spreading of false information harmful to state interests”. In the course of the latter investigation, those who provided evidence or testimony to the *BBC* were questioned by the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG) before judges in an unusually intrusive process that appeared designed to intimidate witnesses rather than conduct an effective investigation.

Regardless of the type of additional chemicals, mixing tear gas into water cannons is dangerous and was unjustified during any of the instances in which it was used. This practice also goes against the MIA’s own guidelines, which states that “it is prohibited [for a representative of a law-enforcement agency] to use water cannons, rubber bullets and tear gas in respect of the participants in an assembly or demonstration simultaneously, or in parallel to one another.”<sup>144</sup>

Amnesty International has urged the authorities to effectively investigate the allegations of unlawful use of force, including of water cannons and chemical irritants, and has called for an international mechanism of inquiry into the alleged use of toxic chemicals against protesters and to impose a complete embargo on the sale of policing equipment and weapons used against protestors by Georgian officials.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Actions in Tbilisi Amount to Yet Another Punitive Assault on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly,” EUR56/8015/2024 (London: Amnesty International, May 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EUR5680152024ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>139</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Human Rights Handbook on Policing Assemblies* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2016), 102, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/5/226981.pdf>.

<sup>140</sup> Amnesty International, *Amnesty International’s Position on the Use of Chemical Irritants in Law Enforcement* (London: Amnesty International, 2021), 20, <https://www.amnesty.nl/content/uploads/2021/07/Amnesty-position-paperchemical-irritants.pdf>.

<sup>141</sup> BBC, “When Water Burns,” BBC Eye Investigations, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2025/bbc-eye-when-water-burns>.

<sup>142</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities Target Witnesses amid Allegations over the Use of Toxic Chemicals Against Protesters,” Amnesty International, 2 December 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/georgia-authorities-target-witnesses-amid-allegations-over-the-use-of-toxic-chemicals-against-protesters/>.

<sup>143</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, *Moscow Mechanism Report on Georgia*, ODIHR.GAL/9/26/Corr.1 (Vienna: OSCE, March 12, 2026), 137, [https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official\\_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report\\_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia\\_0.pdf](https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia_0.pdf).

<sup>144</sup> Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Order No. 1002, *Instruction on the Conduct of Employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia during Assemblies and Manifestations*, Art. 9(1)(p) and Art. 9(2), as cited in *Tsaava and Others v. Georgia*, European Court of Human Rights (Grand Chamber), Applications Nos. 13186/20 and others, Judgment of 11 December 2025, paras. 147–148, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-233412>. See as well: Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), “GYLA Responds to the Statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs” (in Georgian), 21 October 2024, <https://www.gyla.ge/en/post/saia-Shinagan-saqmeta-saministros-gancxadebaze-21octomberi>.

<sup>145</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Authorities Target Witnesses amid Allegations over the Use of Toxic Chemicals Against Protesters.” Public Statement, 5 December 2025. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/0549/2025/en/>.

## The case of Konstantine Chakhunashvili: probing the doctor not the harm



Konstantine Chakhunashvili, a doctor and protest participant himself, began a medical study after observing frequent nosebleeds and other symptoms in those who had been exposed to high levels of tear gas and adulterated water from water cannons during protest dispersals in 2024.

He and his colleagues conducted an observational case-control study between 9 January and 1 March 2025, surveyed by 347 protest participants that had been exposed to gas, 69 of whom then underwent clinical evaluation. His findings showed that electrocardiogram abnormalities were significantly more

frequent in the exposed group, indicating potential cardiopulmonary effects and that at least “two respiratory cases—hypersensitivity pneumonitis and unresolved pneumonia were clinically linked to exposure”. Their study, published in November 2025 in *Toxicology Reports*, a peer-reviewed journal, found that nearly half of participants experienced longer-term effects such as persistent cough, shortness of breath and skin irritation, with some showing changes in the lungs and heart.<sup>146</sup>

The study was featured in the above-mentioned BBC documentary *When Water Burns*. On 2 December 2025, less than 24 hours after the BBC documentary aired, Konstantine Chakhunashvili was summoned by the SSSG. His co-authors David Chakhunashvili and Gela Ghunashvili were also questioned, as were representatives of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and Transparency International Georgia, both of which had provided publicly available information to the BBC about effects observed in the protestors after being targeted by water cannons.

Konstantine Chakhunashvili told Amnesty International that the questioning focused on his academic background, publications and motivation rather than their medical findings, describing it as “an attack on academic freedom” apparently aimed at intimidating those documenting injuries and collecting evidence.<sup>147</sup>

At the time of the writing, the investigation into the alleged assistance to hostile foreign entities targeting witnesses and sources of the BBC investigation remained pending.<sup>148</sup>

*Photo: Doctor Konstantine Chakhunashvili @Georgia Today*

<sup>146</sup> Konstantine Chakhunashvili et al., “Collateral Damage: Cardiovascular and Respiratory Implications of Tear Gas Deployment During Peaceful Protest,” *Toxicology Reports* 14 (November 2025), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214750025002859>.

<sup>147</sup> Amnesty International interview with Konstantine Chakhunashvili, physician, December 2025; see as well:

Amnesty International, “Georgia: Government’s Alleged Use of Toxic Chemicals Against Protesters Calls for International Investigation,” December 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/georgia-governments-alleged-use-of-toxic-chemicals-against-protesters-calls-for-international-investigation-and-complete-embargo-on-all-policing-equipment/>.

<sup>148</sup> State Security Service of Georgia, Press Briefing at the State Security Service of Georgia, 6 December 2025, <https://ssg.gov.ge/news/1060/brifingi-saxelmtsifo-usafrtxoebis-samsaxurshi>; Civil Georgia, “SSG Press Conference on Toxic Chemicals,” 6 December 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/713733>.

## OUTSOURCING THE VIOLENCE: VIOLENT PROXY GROUPS ATTACKING PROTESTERS

Beginning in spring 2024, groups of unidentified men, often masked and dressed in similar black clothing, began to attack protesters, and civil society activists.<sup>149</sup>

These violent mobs, who many eyewitnesses and victims describe as “acting in alliance with the police,” are widely believed to be comprised mostly of off-duty policemen (often from the special police forces), organized crime figures and other individuals affiliated with the ruling Georgian Dream party.<sup>150</sup> Attacks by masked unidentified groups during the April-May 2024 crackdown consisted in unknown individuals targeting protest participants, organizers, and their family members near their homes or on the streets, subjecting them to severe beatings. Such attacks became more widespread and still more violent during the protests in November and December 2024, reportedly taking place almost on daily basis.<sup>151</sup> Several violent attacks on protesters took place in broad daylight in the streets around Rustaveli Avenue in the immediate vicinity of uniformed police.<sup>152</sup>

Some attacks were recorded on camera, showing assailants operating openly and without fear of consequences.<sup>153</sup> Victims and eyewitnesses told Amnesty International that the groups appeared to be “well-trained and coordinated” with the police.<sup>154</sup> Far from investigating such crimes, in several cases uniformed police were standing directly adjacent to where severe physical assaults were taking place and did nothing to stop them.<sup>155</sup>

The deployment of police-affiliated informal groups appeared to form part of a deliberate strategy to intensify the intimidation of protesters through the outsourcing of violence, enabling the authorities to employ violent, often criminal, means while seeking to distance themselves from direct responsibility. The documented failure of law enforcement bodies to prevent these attacks, identify perpetrators, or conduct effective investigations strongly suggests official acquiescence and coordination where state-linked informal groups supplement, or in some cases supplant, formal policing in the exercise of coercive force.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Civil Georgia, “Unidentified Men Attack Protesters,” Civil Georgia, 12 May 2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/604767>.

<sup>150</sup> Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Civil Rights Facing Increased Police Terror (Tbilisi: GYLA, 27 December 2024), 13, [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf).

<sup>149</sup> GYLA, GCRT, HRC et al., “Preliminary Findings on the Investigation of Torture and Ill-Treatment Against Protesters in Georgia from 28 November to 20 December 2024,” GYLA, December 2024, <https://gyla.ge/en/post/tsameba-da-araadamanurimopkroba-saerto-gancxadeba>; Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Committing Shocking Human Rights Violations amid Ongoing Crackdown on Protesters,” December 17, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/georgia-police-committing-shocking-human-rights-violations-amid-ongoing-crackdown-on-protesters/>.

<sup>152</sup> An attack on journalist Mindia Gabadze took place with police just meters away: Formula English. Video footage of the attack on Publika journalist Mindia Gabadze, Instagram Reel, 9 December 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DDPQLhvwNJQ/>.

<sup>153</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Committing Shocking Human Rights Violations amid Ongoing Crackdown on Protesters,” December 17, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/georgia-police-committing-shocking-human-rights-violations-amid-ongoing-crackdown-on-protesters/>.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>155</sup> In the same attack on journalist Mindia Gabadze, attackers can be seen running past police who make no attempt to apprehend them: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2264242413951380>.

<sup>156</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Police Committing Shocking Human Rights Violations amid Ongoing Crackdown on Protesters,” December 17, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/georgia-police-committing-shocking-human-rights-violations-amid-ongoing-crackdown-on-protesters/>.

## The case of journalist Maka Chikhladze: violence masked in plain sight



On 7 December 2024, after first attacking the offices of an opposition party, a raid in which CCTV showed several people being brutally beaten, masked men were spotted by journalist Maka Chikhladze and her cameraman Giorgi Shetsiruli, who were live on TV *Priveli* on the street where the raid on the opposition office had taken place. While the camera was still recording, the group of men approached Maka Chikhladze. One of them grabbed her neck and threw her to the ground whereupon she was surrounded by the group who began to kick her while shouting sexist abuse.

The group then attacked the cameraman, Giorgi Shetsiruli, beating and kicking him on the ground where he was left covered in blood. Both were hospitalized with concussion and other injuries.

Throughout the attack, uniformed police were present just meters away but did not attempt to stop the attack or arrest the perpetrators.

“They were well-trained and coordinated, possibly members of the security forces. The police witnessed the incident and simply left. There is no longer any law enforcement you can ask for help when you are attacked”, Maka Chikhladze told Amnesty International. To date, no one has been identified or prosecuted for torture.

Photo: TV reporter Maka Chikhladze attacked by masked men during a live broadcast @TV *Priveli*

## “POLICE TERROR:” WIDESPREAD ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT OF THE PROTESTORS



Photo: An activist holding photos of people abused by police during the protests, 13 December 2024. @TV Pirveli,

Unlawful use of force against protesters in the street is only a small part of the wave of violence meted out by the Georgian authorities to opposition politicians, journalists, activists and protestors in 2024 and 2025. Out of sight, law enforcement officials subjected detained protestors to torture and other ill-treatment, leaving many with broken bones, fractures, and concussions.

The scale of abuses during arrest and detention and the near-total impunity for the perpetrators, indicates a coordinated state policy to punish those challenging the government.<sup>157</sup> International human rights monitors report that the use of abusive force by police has in fact been encouraged by the authorities.<sup>158</sup>

Amnesty International documented several cases during November- December 2024 protests, where personnel from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, including riot and criminal police as well as commanding officers, inflicted severe physical violence and psychological coercion against demonstrators and subjected them to inhuman and degrading treatment in detention. This included sustained beatings, with knuckledusters, forcing detainees through gauntlets where they would be beaten by multiple police officers, painful stress positions, withholding medical care, death threats or threats of sexual violence. Detainees were sometimes held incommunicado for hours. These tactics targeted a wide range of individuals, including minors and people with disabilities.<sup>159</sup> The Council of Europe's Committee for the

<sup>157</sup> GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections, 28 November 2024–28 February 2025 (Tbilisi, 2025), [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).

<sup>158</sup> Human Rights House Network / EU Neighbours East, “Torturers and Their Handlers Are Being Awarded and Rewarded by the Georgian Authorities: Interview with Lela Tsiskarishvili,” [date], <https://humanrightshouse.org/interviews/torturers-and-their-handlers-are-being-awarded-and-rewarded-by-the-georgian-authorities-interview-with-lela-tsiskarishvili/>.

<sup>159</sup> Amnesty International, Georgia: Brutal Crackdown on Protesters and Journalists in Georgia: “They May Have Broken Our Bones, but They Won’t Break Our Spirits” (Index: EUR 56/8845/2024), 13 December 2024, pp. 6–11, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/8845/2024/en/>.

Prevention of Torture (CPT) documented a similar, consistent pattern of detainees being handcuffed and repeatedly beaten by groups of masked officers while being subjected to threats of rape.<sup>160</sup>

Georgian human rights organizations have described the authorities' conduct during as "police terror".<sup>161</sup>

Public Defender's Office findings show the mass scale of human rights violations: during December 2024 protests alone: of the 460 persons arrested, 300 reported being physically abused, and 80 required hospitalization.<sup>162</sup> The overall number of detained persons reporting ill treatment rose from 20–30% in 2019–2023, to 78–88% in 2024–2025 meaning almost nine in ten reported physical abuse.<sup>163</sup>

Detained protesters interviewed by Amnesty International in December 2024 consistently pointed to the planned and coordinated nature of the police violence, pointing to a pattern of organized state violence. Protestors reported that officers used handheld radios to coordinate beatings, with officers openly threatening them with death and rape and discussing the details of the beatings and injuries. Beatings were carried out by multiple officers taking turns, with others supervising directing or filming it. Many protestors also described pre-arranged modifications to vehicles used to transport detainees, dubbed "torture vans", made to facilitate ill-treatment: benches replacing seats, driver areas partitioned off and windows covered. Inside these vans, detainees, already restrained, reported being beaten until losing consciousness.<sup>164</sup>

Most detained protesters were arrested arbitrarily, either at protest sites or while returning home. Some had no involvement in the protests. For example, 23-year-old Davit Abuladze, a deaf protester, was attacked by police on his way home on 3 December 2024, then beaten further inside a police vehicle.<sup>165</sup> Others, like Giorgi Chutkerashvili, reported being stunned by tear gas and dragged behind a police cordon, beaten, threatened with violence and rape, and having personal belongings stolen.<sup>166</sup> Human rights activist Gia Jvarsheishvili told Amnesty International he was attacked by six riot police officers while standing peacefully, before being severely beaten in a specially modified police vehicle.<sup>167</sup>

A group of international and a Georgian human rights NGOs reported on the November–December 2024 events that "[t]he forensic evidence reveal[ed] a distressing pattern of trauma among victims, with facial and head injuries being particularly prevalent" and highly consistent with victims' allegations above, also supporting the conclusion of "a coordinated policy and practice of systematically torturing and ill-treating protesters and supporters."<sup>168</sup>

In almost all several hundred reported cases, beatings and other physical attacks, insults and other degrading treatment, some of which amounted to torture or other ill-treatment, were carried out by police officers wearing face masks and black uniforms without insignia, with some body cameras reportedly switched off, which effectively served as a structural marker of institutional impunity. Even where alleged perpetrators were visible or identifiable, such as in the case of publicly available footage allegedly showing the Head of the MIA's Special Tasks Department punching a restrained protester, the authorities have failed to investigate these abuses effectively or to bring those responsible to justice.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Council of Europe, European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), "Council of Europe Anti-Torture Committee (CPT) Publishes Report on its 2024/2025 Visit to Georgia," 17 February 2026, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-cpt-publishes-report-on-its-2024/2025-visit-to-georgia>.

<sup>161</sup> Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Civil Rights Facing Increased Police Terror (Tbilisi: GYLA, [date]), [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/CIVIL%20RIGHTS%20FACING%20INCREASED%20POLICE%20TERROR.pdf).

<sup>162</sup> Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2024 (Tbilisi: Public Defender's Office, 2025), 89, <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2025040121291438156.pdf>.

<sup>163</sup> Public Defender's Office of Georgia, letter no. 25/1280, February 15, 2025, cited in GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia, [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).

<sup>164</sup> World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), and Partnership for Human Rights (PHR), Briefing Note: Torture and Ill-Treatment During Protests and Suppression of Political Dissent in Georgia in November–December 2024 (Geneva: OMCT, March 2025), <https://www.omct.org/site-resources/files/OMCT-Briefing-Note-Georgia.pdf>.

<sup>165</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Police Actions in Tbilisi Amount to Yet Another Punitive Assault on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly," EUR56/8845/2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/8845/2024/en/>.

<sup>166</sup> Amnesty International, Georgia: Brutal crackdown on protestors and journalists in Georgia (London: Amnesty International, 13 December 2024), Index Number: EUR 56/8845/2024.

<sup>167</sup> Gia Jvarsheishvili interview with Amnesty International December 2024. see as well Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT), "აქციის წამებავამოვლილი მონაწილე: გაია ჯვარშეიშვილი" ["Protest Participant Who Survived Torture: Gia Jvarsheishvili"], Facebook video, 5 December 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/gcrt.georgia/videos/3036823536488360/>.

<sup>168</sup> Omega Research Foundation, Preliminary Mission Findings: Georgia, December 2024, 4, <https://omegaresearchfoundation.org/storage/2025/01/Preliminary-mission-findings-Georgia-Dec-2024-Final.pdf>.

<sup>169</sup> JAM News Caucasus (@JAMnewsCaucasus), post on X (formerly Twitter), February 7, 2025, <https://x.com/JAMnewsCaucasus/status/1886090982430523566>.

The visibility of such conduct by commanding officers, combined with the anonymity afforded to rank-and-file officers, suggests that the widespread abuse by police was carried out in an environment where accountability was neither expected nor feared.

### **HUMILIATION AS A WEAPON: THREATS, INSULTS AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

In addition to inflicting physical injuries, law enforcement officers employed methods clearly intended to cause humiliation and mental suffering. Threats, insults and other degrading treatment reportedly accompanied physical violence at every stage: during arrest, transport in police vehicles and detention at police stations. Detained protestors described persistent and deliberate acts of intimidation and humiliation, including being hit in the genitals, mocked and forced to witness the beating of others. Protesters also described being strip searched, threatened with rape, and sexualized insults including homophobic slurs during street beatings, in transfer and in detention.

Women protesters were subjected to unlawful and degrading strip searches as part of a broader pattern of gender-based violence used to intimidate and punish those participating in protests.<sup>170</sup> Although in June 2025 the Ministry of Justice announced amendments removing the requirement of full body stripping during prison searches, following a challenge by the Public Defender before the Constitutional Court, women activists report that invasive strip searches have continued in practice in prisons, police custody and in the context of protest-related detentions. Such conduct may, in certain circumstances, amount to torture and other ill-treatment that is absolutely prohibited under international human rights law. None of the instances of unlawful strip searches have been effectively investigated by the authorities.

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<sup>170</sup> Amnesty International, *Georgia: From Insults to Assaults: Weaponizing Gender-Based Violence against Women Protestors in Georgia* (London: Amnesty International, 23 May 2025), EUR 56/9417/2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/9417/2025/en/>.

## The case of Nancy Woland: gendered reprisals to intimidate woman activist



Nancy Woland is a painter and pro-European activist who, from spring 2024, has administered a grassroots Facebook group supporting protesters across Georgia. The group crowdfunded accommodation for demonstrators travelling from the regions, raised funds to cover administrative fines imposed on protesters, and procured legal protest supplies including raincoats, gas masks and food. Prior to any police action being taken against her, the group had been the subject of reports on pro-government media alleging it was foreign-funded, and the Prime Minister subsequently characterised it publicly as a group seeking to “change the government through violence”.<sup>171</sup>

On 5 December 2024, a plainclothes officer approached Woland in the street while a fellow group member's home was being searched nearby, drawing her aside before two uniformed officers appeared. She was taken to her own home, where a search was conducted in the presence of her lawyer. Her phone was seized, and officers cited screenshots of her social media posts, among them a single-word post reading “rebellion”, as the grounds for accusing her of planning group violence.<sup>172</sup>

The second search, on 3 February 2025, took place the day after Nancy Woland had posted a social media announcement of a forthcoming protest. According to her, officers arrived with equipment to force entry. The personal search, requiring her to undress, was conducted by two female officers while her lawyer was held in a separate room. Nancy Woland told Amnesty International that she was too humiliated to call out to him: “I was so frustrated and so humiliated that I didn't say anything to my lawyer. He was in another room”.<sup>173</sup>

Nancy Woland recalled that following the strip search, a male officer who had played no part in the search itself entered and addressed her rudely. When she objected, he became aggressive and made a remark of ambiguous but threatening nature: “You go with me to the prosecutor's office now, or I will do some ugly things”. The police seized various items during the search, including her computer, her mobile phone, protest scarves bearing EU symbols, and a camera recently bequeathed to her by her grandfather. During the same search, officers physically assaulted Nancy Woland's mother, throwing her to the floor in an attempt to seize her phone and delete video footage of the proceedings she had recorded.

In the aftermath, pro-government media published images taken during the search mocking Nancy Woland's appearance and her partial Armenian heritage. She temporarily left Georgia following a further summons to the Prosecutor's Office as a witness in a case involving charges of sabotage and group violence, a procedural status she and her lawyer understood as a potential precursor to formal accusation and arrest. According to Nancy Woland, the searches left her unable to sleep in her own home and suffering stress-related physical symptoms.

At the time of writing, the criminal investigation into the case of sabotage alleging that activists, civil society organizations and political actors supported or encouraged protest-related violence and acted against state interests is ongoing.

*Photo: Nancy Woland @Personal Archives*

<sup>171</sup> Civil Georgia, “Kobakhidze on Police Entry into Opposition Offices,” Civil Georgia, [date], <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/135689-irakli-kobakhidze-on-the-entry-of-the-police-into-the-offices-of-several-parties-these-are-more-preventions-than-repressions/>.

<sup>172</sup> Amnesty International interviews with Nancy Woland in person and online. December 2025 and February 2026.

<sup>173</sup> Amnesty International Interview with Nancy Woland, December 2025.

## IMPUNITY BY DESIGN: FAILURE TO INVESTIGATE AND HOLD PERPETRATORS ACCOUNTABLE



Photo: Former head of Georgia's Special Tasks Department, repeatedly implicated in the violent crackdown on protesters being awarded a state honour @Georgian News

**“These are not isolated, spontaneous incidents by few policemen abusing their authority; it is a well-directed, organized punishment of protesters by hundreds of policemen. I could hear them shout “the fun is going to start now” getting us to the van.”** Lazare Maglakelidze, detained and beaten during December 2024 protests.<sup>174</sup>

The Georgian authorities' approach has effectively legitimized, rewarded, and reinforced unlawful use of force by police, embedding impunity at the core of policing activities. In all but a handful of cases, officers who are alleged to have committed human rights violations do not face effective investigation, and some are rewarded and promoted. In the very few cases where some officers were investigated, there has been no attempt to investigate command responsibility for unlawful use of force, in spite of clear evidence.

This approach has transformed impunity into a structural driver of repression, encouraging further violations.

Despite extensive, credible, and publicly documented evidence of torture and other ill-treatment, including, videos, eye witness testimonies and medically documented serious injuries inflicted by law enforcement officials, the authorities have largely failed to hold police officers publicly accountable.<sup>175</sup> Such impunity extends from officers directly involved in human rights violations in the streets to senior commanders, encompassing both direct perpetrators and those bearing command responsibility.

High-ranking police officers implicated in documented assaults on peaceful protesters and journalists, including the Special Tasks Department head, filmed beating a bound detainee, and Batumi police chief who has been recorded verbally abusing detained journalist Mzia Amaglobeli, not only evaded accountability but were promoted and rewarded.<sup>176</sup>

Official data is also very telling of the authorities' approach, which sustains systemic impunity. In 2024, complaints of police misconduct reached record levels, with over 2,100 allegations filed—an

<sup>174</sup> Amnesty International, Online interview with Lazare Maglakelidze, December 2024.

<sup>175</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, Moscow Mechanism Report on Georgia, ODIHR.GAL/9/26/Corr.1 (Vienna: OSCE, March 12, 2026), [https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official\\_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report\\_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia\\_0.pdf](https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia_0.pdf).

<sup>176</sup> Zviad Kharazishvili, former head of the Interior Ministry's Special Tasks Department, was also reported to have admitted beating protesters and said he had a “list” of people to be targeted. See Radio Tavisupleba/RFE-RL, 25 April 2025, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33395982.html>.

unprecedented increase compared to previous years. Yet criminal proceedings were initiated, and subsequently stalled, against only 31 officers, with no public disclosure regarding their progress or outcomes. At the same time, individual police officers were financially rewarded: the Ministry of Internal Affairs distributed more than 16 million GEL (approximately US 6 million) in bonuses and nearly 169 million GEL (approximately US 63 million) in salary supplements, far exceeding allocations to any of the other national ministries.<sup>177</sup>

In May 2026, a handful of serving police officers were arrested for alleged crimes committed against protestors. The Prosecutor General's Office announced the identification and arrest of five law enforcement officers accused of attacking a politician, a protester, and a journalist during the 2024 anti-government protests on 7 May. The announcement, which followed an investigative report by TV Formula, marks the first publicly known case of police officers being held accountable for abuses committed by law enforcement during the demonstrations.

The accused officers include three former and one current special forces officer, as well as one current employee of the Security Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The accused are allegedly implicated in three prominent cases: that of journalist Guram Rogava (see below); activist Zviad Maisashvili who was brutally kicked while unconscious; and opposition leader Levan Khabeishvili, who had his facial bones crushed and teeth knocked out while protesting on Rustaveli Avenue. All five have been charged with "abuse of power with the use of violence". One is also charged with "unlawfully obstructing a journalist's professional activities resulting in harm to health or other serious consequences". The charges carry a penalty of five to eight years' imprisonment.<sup>178</sup>

The accused officers were remanded to pre-trial detention in closed hearings, denying the public the opportunity to be informed on the conduct of the case. According to prosecutors, the officers charged in the Zviad Maisashvili and Guram Rogava cases admitted guilt in court.<sup>179</sup>

Speaking of the arrests, Zviad Maisashvili said that no investigator had contacted him and that it was unclear on what evidence the accused were arrested.<sup>180</sup> Guram Rogava also questioned the announcement, noting that the person identified by Formula TV was not among those named in the Prosecutor General's statement, also noting the failure of the investigation to include those who gave the orders and "protected the offenders".<sup>181</sup>

The prosecution of the five police officers, while a step in the right direction, addresses only a fraction of the documented widespread violations by police forces and do not change the overall picture of impunity and lack of accountability for alleged police crimes. Hundreds of victims still face little or no prospect of justice, especially as already limited oversight mechanisms that existed to address police abuses were dismantled in 2024 and 2025.

The abolition of the Special Investigation Service (SIS) in July 2025 in particular signalled this policy of impunity.<sup>182</sup> While many human rights monitors agreed that the service lacked genuine independence and did not meet its purpose of an impartial investigation mechanism for allegations against law enforcement agencies, its dissolution in the aftermath of the police's abusive response to mass protests sent a clear signal that the authorities had no intention of strengthening accountability of law enforcement agencies. This decision directly contradicted recommendations made by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which repeatedly called Georgian authorities not to adopt the legislative package abolishing the

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<sup>177</sup> Radio Tavisupleba/RFE-RL Georgian Service, "They Use Violence, Give False Testimony, Receive Bigger Bonuses, and Face Less Accountability: A Portrait of the Georgian Police", Radio Tavisupleba, 25 April 2025, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/33395982.html>.

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/05/georgia-justice-and-accountability-require-more-that-criminal-charges-against-five-police-officers-for-assaulting-protesters/>.

<sup>179</sup> Georgian Public Broadcaster (ITV), "Law Enforcers Charged with Physical Assault of Journalist Rogava, Youngster Maisashvili Sent to Prison," 9 May 2026, <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/law-enforcers-charged-with-physical-assault-of-journalist-rogava-youngster-maisashvili-sent-to-prison/>.

<sup>180</sup> Kavkaz-Uzel, "Georgia's Watchdog Organization Calls for Investigation of Police Officers," Kavkaz-Uzel, 6 December 2024, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/75065>.

<sup>181</sup> OC Media, "Georgia Charges Five Officers over Attacks during 2024 Anti-Government Protests," OC Media, May 2026, <https://oc-media.org/georgia-charges-five-officers-over-attacks-during-2024-anti-government-protests/>.

<sup>182</sup> Council of Europe, European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), "Council of Europe Anti-Torture Committee (CPT) Publishes Report on its 2024/2025 Visit to Georgia," 17 February 2026, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-cpt-publishes-report-on-its-2024/2025-visit-to-georgia>.

SIS and instead to strengthen its independence and effectiveness to improve accountability for abuses committed by state agents.<sup>183</sup>

The ongoing impunity is also reinforced by institutional obstruction. Human rights organizations and lawyers representing victims of torture and other ill-treatment regularly report arbitrary delays, procedural failures and mismanagement of evidence in cases brought against police officers. This includes victims routinely facing delays or refusals in being granted formal victim status, depriving them of access to case files, the ability to submit evidence, or the right to challenge official inaction before a court. In other cases, complaints reportedly remain under “preliminary review” for prolonged periods, enabling prosecutors to avoid opening formal investigations and shielding cases from judicial oversight.<sup>184</sup> Other reported obstacles include failure by the relevant authorities to secure or preserve evidence, delaying medical and forensic examinations, and concealing or destroying information from cameras and electronic devices. Officer identification has been obstructed, and witnesses left unexamined.<sup>185</sup> In addition, many investigations into 2024 protest-related violations were conducted under abuse-of-authority provisions rather than torture or other ill-treatment offences, despite evidence suggesting that the conduct may have amounted to torture or inhuman treatment. Human rights organizations argued that this legal classification failed to reflect the gravity of the abuses and risked undermining accountability.<sup>186</sup>

By obstructing investigations, denying victims procedural rights, dismantling oversight mechanisms, and rewarding those implicated in abuses, the authorities have entrenched impunity for torture and other ill-treatment committed against protesters, enabling a spiral of human rights violations that send a chilling message of fear and leaving victims without justice or effective redress.

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<sup>183</sup> Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, *Tsintsabadze Group v. Georgia* (Application No. 35403/06), Decision adopted at the 1534th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (Human Rights), CM/Del/Dec(2025)1534/H46-13, 18 September 2025, <https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/ENG?i=004-5830>.

<sup>184</sup> Amnesty International interviews' with lawyers of alleged police ill-treatment. See as well: GYLA et al., *Human Rights Crisis in Georgia Following the 2024 Parliamentary Elections*, 28 November 2024–28 February 2025 (Tbilisi, 2025), [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).

<sup>185</sup> Social Justice Center, *Unpunished Violence: Demonstrably Ineffective Investigations of Police Violence Cases during the 2024 Protests – Interim Report* (Tbilisi: Social Justice Center, December 10, 2025), <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/>.

<sup>186</sup> Social Justice Center. “The Investigation of Systemic Violence and Torture Cases Against the Protesters Is Demonstratively Ineffective.” 28 May 2025. <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/protestis-monatsileebis-mimart-sistemuri-dzaladobisa-da-tsamebis-sakmeebze-gamodzieba-demonstratsiulad-araefektiania>.

## The case of journalist Guram Rogava: police violence in plain sight



On 28 November 2024 *Formula TV* journalist Guram Rogava had been broadcasting live from Rustaveli Avenue for most of the day. He was broadcasting footage of police beating unarmed protesters who were already on the ground when a masked uniformed police officer without identification badges ran up behind him and hit him with a gloved fist on the back of the head. The blow sent Rogava crashing against the kerb, fracturing seven vertebrae and causing a brain injury.<sup>187</sup>

Guram Rogava believes he was deliberately targeted because of his journalistic work: he recalls being threatened by a group of violent thugs earlier in the day, being told by a masked man “see what happens to you later, Rogava”.<sup>188</sup>

Guram Rogava was granted victim status only 19 days after the attack. When he asked the investigators whether they had obtained CCTV of the incident, he was told that none of the many cameras on Rustaveli Avenue were working that night. When he asked whether the

investigators had interviewed any of the police officers deployed on Rustaveli Avenue that night, he was told that such interviews would not be important to the investigation.

In spite of the fact that the attack took place in the centre of Rustaveli Avenue, was captured on video by multiple journalists, and was broadcast live, there was no earnest attempt by the Georgian authorities to investigate the matter or take effective action against the police officer responsible until some of the alleged perpetrators were demonstrably exposed by *Formula TV*.

Guram Rogava believes that this deliberate failure to investigate allegations against police is a political directive from the leadership of the government, reinforced by the rhetoric from the senior ruling party politicians describing his beatings as a “little incident” and falsely claiming that he had been swearing at the police prior to the attack.

As mentioned above, in May 2026 a police officer was arrested over this incident, reportedly admitting guilt in a closed-door hearing in court. The arrests followed a report from *Formula TV*, where Guram Rogava works, that claimed to have identified the perpetrator. According to Guram Rogava, the police officer arrested for attacking him is not the same individual identified by *Formula TV*'s investigation.<sup>189</sup>

*Photo: Guram Rogava in hospital with broken vertebrae and a head injury following the attack @Formula TV*

<sup>187</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/05/world/video/georgia-tbilisi-journalist-injured-protests-shukla-digvid>

<sup>188</sup> Amnesty International interview with Guram Rogava, journalist, *Formula TV*, Tbilisi, December 10, 2025.

<sup>189</sup> OC Media, “Georgia Charges Five Officers over Attacks during 2024 Anti-Government Protests,” OC Media, May 2026, <https://oc-media.org/georgia-charges-five-officers-over-attacks-during-2024-anti-government-protests/>

## WEAPONIZING THE COURTS



Photo: A banner requesting to free all unjustly arrested. @Guram Muradov

**“Has a single riot officer been arrested for beating people lying helpless on the ground? Have they been held accountable for kicking that curly-haired boy’s head like a football? Is that not a crime? Why is it only a paper or bottle we tossed into the air that is treated as a crime? How can this be justice?”** Revaz Kiknadze, activist arrested for participating in pro-European rallies.<sup>190</sup>

### “COURTS WITHOUT JUSTICE:” JUSTICE SYSTEM MISUSED TO PUNISH DISSENT

Over the past years, the government has employed a range of authoritarian practices aimed at undermining the institutions intended to provide accountability and serve as a check on power. With rare exceptions, the entire justice system, and notably the courts, has become a key facilitator of the government’s growing repressive tactics.

Rather than acting as a bulwark against repressive legislation and abusive practices, the courts have routinely disregarded the injustices embedded in new laws and regulations, failing to consider or remedy the undue restrictions they impose on human rights. By applying and enforcing these measures without meaningful judicial scrutiny or oversight, the courts have enabled the enforcement of restrictive laws incompatible with international human rights law and standards.

In their handling of political and protest-related cases, courts’ practice has also repeatedly fallen short of fundamental fair trial guarantees and Georgia’s obligations under international human rights law. Criminal convictions and administrative punishments are routinely handed down following unfair trials marked by widespread due process violations, relying overwhelmingly and often exclusively, on the evidence of a single partial source, typically the police. Widespread violations of fair trial and effective reversal of the burden of proof from prosecution to defendants has seen thousands of people subjected to administrative fines and custodial sanctions without any meaningful assessment of their legality, necessity or proportionality.

Since the start of the large-scale protests in November 2024, more than 100 people remain behind bars having been sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials on protest related charges. Many of these convictions bear the hallmarks of rubber-stamp justice: due process sidelined, equality of arms and effective defence rights disregarded, legal reasoning used to justify outcomes that appear to have been

<sup>190</sup> *Publika.ge*. Revaz Kiknadze, closing statement at the appeals court hearing, 2 March, 2026: <https://publika.ge/me-rom-korumpirebuli-diqtatoruli-mtavroba-ar-miyvars-amitom-var-damnashave-rezo-kiknadzis-sityva-saapelacioshi/>.

predetermined. The harsh penalties, including prison sentences, imposed on government critics point to a broader pattern in which judicial processes are used to send a chilling message to individuals to deter them from participating in protests, especially in contrast to the stark failure by the courts to act on widespread evidence of human rights violations committed against protesters, including allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

Together, these developments have transformed the judiciary into what activists widely refer as “უსამართლო სასამართლო” - “courts without justice” - where judicial authority is wielded not to protect or restore rights, but to punish dissent and legitimize and perpetuate the very injustices they exist to remedy.

## ARBITRARY FINES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETENTION

**“The absurdity of these court decisions is clearest in joined cases, where one person is tried for both “blocking the road” and standing on the pavement. The judge asks: “Why were you on the road? Why didn’t you move to the pavement?” but then, in the same decision, punishes them for standing on the pavement.”**<sup>191</sup>

Mikheil Zakareishvili, lawyer sentenced for standing on the pavement.

Georgian courts have played a central role in the state’s response to protests by arbitrarily imposing heavy penalties on demonstrators under the provisions of the increasingly restrictive Administrative Offences Code (see section above). Thus, since the start of the daily demonstrations in 2024, courts have subjected thousands of protesters to severe penalties, including administrative detention ranging from one to 30 days and/or substantial fines.<sup>192</sup> These penalties have frequently been applied not to sanction unlawful conduct but as punitive measures aimed at discouraging participation in protests.

Rather than conducting careful and individualized assessments of evidence and the specific conduct alleged, judicial decisions in many cases appear to rely on a presumption of guilt linked to the defendants’ mere presence at the protests, without credible proof of a genuine offence by an individual, treating participation in demonstrations itself as sufficient grounds for punishment rather than a fundamental human right.

The sanctions available under the Administrative Offences Code, including fines of up to GEL 15,000 (US\$ 5,600) and detention of up to 60 days, are comparable in severity to criminal penalties. Yet they are imposed through administrative proceedings that require a considerably lower evidentiary threshold and provide fewer procedural safeguards than criminal trials.<sup>193</sup> This application of the administrative legal framework significantly increases the risk of arbitrary punishment that seems to be part of the authorities’ strategy to quash dissent and shield themselves from accountability.

Although the government has refused to disclose comprehensive data on protest-related fines and detentions, reported official statistics indicate that the overall use of administrative detention increased by 27 percent in 2025 compared with the previous year.<sup>194</sup> Human rights defenders attribute this rise largely to the application of restrictive legislation against protesters, often without meaningful judicial scrutiny.<sup>195</sup>

The financial impact of these sanctions has also had a significant chilling effect. Hundreds of individuals have been reportedly fined with sums exceeding GEL 10,000 (approximately US\$ 3,690) which is

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<sup>191</sup> *Batumelebi/Netgazeti*, Facebook post [in Georgian], [date], <https://www.facebook.com/batumelebi/posts/>.

<sup>192</sup> “Legislative amendments restricting freedom of assembly were actively enforced in practice, evidenced by 8,200 alleged offences identified under Article 174<sup>1</sup> of the Code of Administrative Offences.” Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2025 (Tbilisi: Public Defender’s Office, 2026), 12, <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2026040108450417707.pdf>.

<sup>193</sup> *Engel and Others v. the Netherlands*, App. Nos. 5100/71 et al., European Court of Human Rights, Judgment of June 8, 1976; see also European Court of Human Rights, Guide on Article 6 – Right to a Fair Trial (Criminal Limb) (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, updated [year]).

<sup>194</sup> The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Tbilisi City Court refused requests by local watchdogs (GYLA and IDFI) to provide statistical data on protest-related administrative cases. Information provided to Amnesty International by GYLA, [date].

<sup>195</sup> 2025 წელს ადმინისტრაციული პატიმრობების ისტორიული მაქსიმუმი დაფიქსირდა – ნონა კურდოვანიძე [“Historical Peak of Administrative Detentions Recorded in 2025 – Nona Kurdovanidze”]. *Batumelebi / Netgazeti*. March 10, 2026. <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/608402/>.

approximately 35 times the official subsistence minimum of GEL 283<sup>196</sup> (approximately US\$ 100), placing a severe economic burden on those affected.<sup>197</sup>

For many protesters exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the fines imposed have been prohibitively high particularly where courts have issued repeated penalties.

The level of injustice, arbitrariness and absurdity at the heart of Georgia's protest-related administrative proceedings is manifest from the court practice whereby peaceful protesters are punished for standing on the road, with courts reasoning that they should have moved their protest to the pavement while, at the same time, other peaceful protesters are sanctioned precisely for standing on the pavement. In one case, the court treats the availability of the sidewalk as proof that there was "no necessity" to stand on the road; in another, it treats standing on that same sidewalk as an offence. The result is an effective criminalization of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly itself.

### The cases of Amiran Kadjaia and Sandro Megrelishvili: no place for protest



Photo: Amiran Kadjaia @Personal Archives

A court found Amiran Kadjaia liable of "artificially blocking the road" under Article 174 of the Administrative Offences Code, fining him GEL 5,000 (US\$ 1,800). The court's decision relied on a police report (a so-called administrative offence protocol) and video recording, simply showing him standing on the road, while dismissing the defence's argument that he was exercising his right to peaceful protest and the road was already blocked by the protests when he joined. Without conducting any assessment of the necessity or proportionality of the fine, the court simply found him liable by concluding that "taking into account the space available on the sidewalk, there was no necessity to block the road".<sup>198</sup>

Yet in the case against Sandro Megrelishvili, the same logic was reversed: he was punished precisely for standing on the pavement and sentenced to four days administrative detention.

On 17 December 2025, Sandro Megrelishvili was identified as an alleged administrative offender through facial recognition cameras for standing on the pavement during an ongoing daily protest on Rustaveli Avenue. He was unaware of committing any alleged offence at the time and only learned of the allegations against him after being summoned to court several days later.



Photo: Sandro Megrelishvili @Batumelebi

At the hearing on 16 January 2026, the MIA presented approximately 30 minutes of video footage showing Megrelishvili standing on a largely empty pavement (with the upper section of Rustaveli Avenue remaining visibly clear in the video footage). The footage itself indicated that pedestrian movement was not obstructed. Nevertheless, the MIA argued both that he hindered pedestrian movement and that his mere presence on the pavement without authorization constituted an offence. The latter argument was not part of the original charges and was introduced during the hearing, leaving the defence unprepared to effectively challenge it.

On 23 January 2026, the court found that Sandro Megrelishvili presence on the pavement "created an obstruction and prevented the free movement of the people", in violation of Article 11 of the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations, sentencing him to four days of administrative detention. Five other individuals who were co-defendants in the same case were each sentenced to five days of administrative detention for alleged obstruction of pedestrian movement while standing and protesting peacefully on the pavement.

<sup>196</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), "Subsistence Minimum in Georgia," GeoStat, 2025, <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/791/saarsebo-minimumi>.

<sup>197</sup> Venice Commission, Urgent Opinion on Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offences and the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations of Georgia, CDL-AD(2025)XXX (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, [date]), paras. 46–50, [URL].

<sup>198</sup> Court case, On file.

## POLITICALLY MOTIVATED PROSECUTIONS AND UNFAIR TRIALS

**“The predominant purpose of these cases is to punish dissent... In more than 58 case trials monitored by our organizations, the [evidence presented by the] prosecution did not meet the standard of 'beyond a reasonable doubt' or even of 'reasonable suspicion'... The guilty verdicts were handed out without evidence that would convince an objective person of the individuals' guilt, failing to satisfy the standard necessary for a conviction. This, along with signs of selective justice, reveals both a critical deficit in judicial independence and the failure to balance the public interests and rights against misuse of criminal law for political persecution...”** Tamar Oniani, head of GYLA<sup>199</sup>



Of the hundreds of protesters arrested during demonstrations in 2024 and 2025, most were initially subjected to police abuse, charged with administrative offences, and either fined or sentenced to several days of detention before being released. In several prominent cases, however, the authorities pursued criminal charges, leading courts to impose pretrial detention and lengthy prison sentences on more than 100 protesters.

Photo: Activists holding posters requesting release of prisoners. @TV Pirveli

Similar to administrative proceedings, the criminal justice system has been instrumentalized by the authorities to target dissent. While not a new phenomenon, this has become especially apparent during the widespread protests and growing public and political discontent in 2024-2025.

Through politically motivated prosecutions and violations of fair trial rights in protest-related cases, Georgian courts have failed in their role as impartial arbiters of the law and have instead enabled the weaponization of the justice system for political ends, with many activists and human rights defenders reporting that courtrooms and judicial procedures have been reduced to “theatres of the absurd”.<sup>200</sup> Such efforts to politicize or otherwise limit judicial independence naturally hamper the ability of the courts to provide justice and accountability and to serve as a check on executive power.

### ARRESTS AND IMPRISONMENTS OF POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

The targeting of opposition leadership serves as a striking example of the weaponization of the courts. International human rights monitors, including most recently the Moscow Mechanism, have routinely expressed concern regarding selective and sometimes arbitrary use of criminal law aimed to suppress dissent. At the same time, this practice has a particularly chilling effect on people who disagree with government policies.<sup>201</sup> In 2025, the courts imposed custodial sentences on multiple opposition leaders and former government officials for refusing to cooperate with a highly politicized parliamentary commission. Political figures Zurab Japaridze, Mamuka Khazaradze, Badri Japaridze, Giorgi Vashadze, Nika Gvaramia, Nika Melia, Giorgi Targamadze and Irakli Okruashvili were sentenced to terms of seven to eight months in prison for refusing to testify before a commission which they argued was used as an instrument of intimidation rather than legitimate parliamentary oversight. These politicians also rejected the legitimacy of the parliamentary elections of October 2024 and thus considered the parliamentary commission itself inherently illegitimate.<sup>202</sup>

<sup>199</sup> AI written communication with Tamar Oniani, head of GYLA, June 2026.

<sup>200</sup> Footage of court bailiff confrontation, Instagram reel, [date], <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJmVwP2t4fz/>.

<sup>201</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, Moscow Mechanism Report on Georgia, ODIHR.GAL/9/26/Corr.1 (Vienna: OSCE, March 12, 2026), [https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official\\_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report\\_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia\\_0.pdf](https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/documents/official_documents/2026/03/odgal0009c1%20ODIHR%20NV%2082-2026%20report_Moscow%20Mechanism%20invoked%20in%20respect%20of%20Georgia_0.pdf).

<sup>202</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Crackdown on Government Critics Deepens as Another Opposition Politician Is Jailed,” June 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/georgia-crackdown-on-government-critics-deepens-as-another-opposition-politician-is-jailed/>.

## The Case of Levan Khabeishvili: From Police Violence to Arbitrary Imprisonment



Another opposition figure, Levan Khabeishvili, was arrested on 11 September 2025 on politically motivated charges of bribery and public incitement to the overthrow of state power.<sup>203</sup>

The charges stemmed from televised comments he made in July 2025, in which he stated that police officers who refused to follow unlawful orders to use force against protesters would be eligible for a USD 200,000 bonus under a future government.<sup>204</sup> Despite the clearly political and rhetorical nature of these remarks, which were broadcast openly to the public rather than delivered as a private inducement, the authorities charged him with “promising, offering, or granting money to an official”, a crime carrying a sentence of four to seven years in prison under Part 2 of Article 339 of Georgia’s Criminal Code. The prosecution also brought additional

charges under Article 317 of the Criminal Code of Georgia for public calls aimed at overthrowing the government or violently changing the constitutional order accusing him of allegedly “urging citizens to take actions aimed at overthrowing the government,” since June 2025.<sup>205</sup>

According to his lawyer, the presiding judge rejected bail and ordered his pretrial detention without meaningful justification. Furthermore, acting on a request from the State Security Service, since September 2025, the court imposed a total ban on family visits, correspondence, and telephone calls for the duration of more than six months while his trial was ongoing. Such restrictions on communicating with the outside world have prevented him from having any contact with his family and young children. The restriction appears to be unnecessary and punitive in nature and has subjected him to additional and unnecessary hardship and suffering while in detention.

On 21 May 2026, the court sentenced Levan Khabeishvili to two and a half years’ imprisonment on charges of incitement to overthrow the government and sabotage. Before announcing the verdict, the judge reclassified the original bribery charges into charges of sabotage under Part 1 of Article 318. Such last-minute reclassification of charges raised additional fair trial concerns, as it denied the accused the ability to launch an adequate defence.<sup>180</sup> According to his defence, Levan Khabeishvili was sentenced in absence of any evidence of crime or an intent to commit a crime and that his conviction was based solely on his televised political speech. On 20 May, Levan Khabeishvili pleaded not guilty to all charges, stating before the court that he was being prosecuted and imprisoned solely because of his political activism and views. “There is nothing in the case except my public statements [...],” no victim in this case, there is no object to whom I would have transferred anything, and there is no benefit that I would have received,” he told the court.<sup>180</sup>

Another emblematic case, where political expression was treated as a criminal matter is the case of Elene Khoshtaria, leader of the *Droa* party, who was sentenced to one year and six months’ imprisonment for writing a slogan on an election poster. She was found guilty of damaging property valued at approximately 570 GEL (US\$ 210); an offense typically handled through administrative proceedings.<sup>206</sup>

Similar to the cases above, Elene Khoshtaria’s sentence is politically motivated, intended to punish her for her political expression. The severity of her punishment appears related not to material damage, but to her political opinion.<sup>207</sup>

*Photo: Opposition leader Levan Khabeishvili suffering broken facial bone after being beaten by police during protests on 1 May 2024. @UNM*

<sup>203</sup> <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/unm-member-levan-khabeishvili-sentenced-to-pre-trial-detention/>.

<sup>204</sup> Levan Khabeishvili, televised address, July 25, 2025, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP3bGXwvT7Q>; see also Civil Georgia report on Khabeishvili’s arrest.

<sup>205</sup> Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia, statement on charges against Levan Khabeishvili, as reported in Georgian Public Broadcaster (1TV), “UNM’s Khabeishvili Charged with Inciting Overthrow of State Government,” 13 September 2025, <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/unms-khabeishvili-charged-with-inciting-overthrow-of-state-government/>.

<sup>206</sup> Transparency International Georgia, “The Arrest of Elene Khoshtaria Represents Another Act of Abuse of the Criminal Process,” Transparency International Georgia, 15 September 2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/post/arrest-elene-khoshtaria-represents-another-act-abuse-criminal-process>.

<sup>207</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Opposition Politician Elene Khoshtaria Given Politically Motivated Prison Sentence for Graffiti,” March 2026, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/03/georgia-opposition-politician-elene-khoshtaria-given-politically-motivated-prison-sentence-for-graffiti/>.

## WIDESPREAD VIOLATIONS OF FAIR TRIAL RIGHTS

The systemic failure to ensure fair trials in cases where protesters have been accused of criminal offences has resulted in dozens of unsafe convictions, leaving individuals deprived of liberty without a realistic prospect of effective remedy. The courts have consistently imposed harsh prison sentences following proceedings that fall far short of international fair trial standards.

Amnesty International<sup>208</sup> and local human rights watchdogs<sup>209</sup> who observed protest-related trials routinely found that allegations of criminal conduct or violence by protestors in most cases relied overwhelmingly on offence reports and testimony from police officers. In many instances, the cases lacked or did not consider on merits other evidence including witnesses' testimonies.<sup>210</sup>

Similar concerns have also been repeatedly raised by the Georgian Public Defender in relation to these trials noting that when the evidentiary record consists almost entirely of materials produced by the same state agency whose members were involved in the arrest or protest dispersal operation, and the defence lacks a realistic opportunity of challenging that material or presenting counter-evidence, the fairness of the proceedings is seriously undermined.<sup>211</sup>

The principle that police testimony and documentation are by themselves insufficient for establishing guilt is central in preventing the burden of proof from shifting unfairly to the defendant. Recent rulings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) found Georgian courts in violation of the right to a fair trial by relying on uncorroborated police accounts and thereby placing an undue burden on defendants to prove their innocence.<sup>212</sup>

Another particularly worrying trend involves the use of drug-related charges based on questionable evidence against protest participants, often resulting in long-term imprisonment of activists following unfair trials. In several cases, courts imposed severe sentences on protesters based on allegedly fabricated drug charges. Amnesty International is aware of at least six individuals charged under Article 260 of the Criminal Code with illegal possession of drugs in particularly large quantities, carrying sentences of eight to 20 years or life imprisonment. Of these, Giorgi Akhobadze, Tevdore Abramov and Nikoloz Katsia have been acquitted, while Anton Chechin, Artem Gribul and Anastasia Zinovkina received prison sentences of eight years and six months each.

In all these cases, activists were arrested and accused of possessing drugs based on undisclosed tip-offs. The police then "discovered" the drugs during searches conducted without video documentation, in breach of the rules. All these six protesters denied the accusations, and alleged the drugs were planted on them (prior to the search "witnessed" by interpreters). Georgian law also requires the presence of witnesses during such searches. In the cases of Anton Chechin, Artem Gribul and Anastasia Zinovkina, all of whom are Russian citizens who speak little or no Georgian, the "witnesses" during their searches were the interpreters engaged by the police. In none of these cases did police film the searches.

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<sup>208</sup> Amnesty International monitored at least nine criminal and 20 administrative trials in Georgia, including relevant court documents and decisions, between December 2024 and June 2026.

<sup>209</sup> Several local human rights organizations conducted detailed monitoring and analysis of hundreds of protest-related cases from early 2024, including GYLA, Social Justice Centre, and others. For published findings, see GYLA et al., Human Rights Crisis in Georgia.

<sup>210</sup> Court Watch Georgia, "Pro-European Rally Cases," Court Watch Georgia, 3 May 2025, <https://courtwatch.ge/en/articles/pro-european-rally-cases>

<sup>211</sup> Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia: 2025 (Tbilisi, 2026), <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2026040108450417707.pdf>.

<sup>212</sup> *Mekvabishvili v. Georgia*, App. No. 37567/23, European Court of Human Rights, Judgment of January 20, 2026, <https://www.echr.caselaw.com/en/echr-decisions/mekvabishvili-v-georgia-conviction-of-a-demonstrator-for-failure-to-comply-with-lawful-police-orders-conviction-based-solely-on-police-officers-testimony-without-the-production-of-video-footage/>.

## The case of Anton Chechin: a convenient suspect

Anton Chechin, a 26-year-old Russian dissident fled Russia after participating in anti-government protests and became an active participant in protests in Georgia in November 2024. On 18 November 2024, he reported being temporarily detained during post-election protests and warned by police officers against demonstrating. Two weeks later, on 3 December 2024, plainclothes officers arrested him near his home, allegedly finding 4.3 grams of Alpha-PVP, a synthetic stimulant, in his jacket pocket. According to Anton Chechin, officers placed him in a car and slipped the bag of the substance into his pocket.<sup>213</sup> According to his lawyer, police presented no video of the search, while the court failed to examine the allegations of drugs being planted and the potential conflict of interest in the case of the police-provided interpreter acting as the witness.<sup>214</sup> Anton Chechin maintains his innocence and claims the drugs were planted on him by police. In September 2025, he was sentenced to eight and a half years of imprisonment.<sup>215</sup> Artem Gribul and Anastasia Zinovkina were also given the same sentences after trials that repeated these same fair trial violations.



Photo: Anton Chechin in the courtroom @Publika

## The case of Andro Chichinadze: an inconvenient protest face



The violations of the right to a fair trial are also evident in the case of actor and activist Andro Chichinadze, and ten other protestors. In September 2025, they were sentenced to prison terms of up to two and a half years for allegedly participating in “group public disturbances”. From the outset, the proceedings were compromised by a flagrant breach of the presumption of innocence, as high-ranking government officials publicly branded them as criminals well before any judicial determination was reached. The prosecution pressed “group violence” charges

against them for eight months to justify their pre-trial detention, only to suddenly reclassify them to the lesser offense of “group public disturbance” at the final hearing when it became clear that no evidence of coordinated violence (a key element of the crime) had been provided.

In several cases, the court-imposed state-appointed counsel on the defendants against their will, denied their defence teams adequate time for preparation, and arbitrarily excluded from the evidence the testimonies by police officers who could not identify the defendants or attribute any specific harm or damage to their actions.<sup>216</sup>

Photo: Andro Chichinadze in the courtroom @Publika

<sup>213</sup> Letter of Anton Chechin addressed Amnesty International on 12 May 2025. On file.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Civil Georgia, “Russian Citizen Sentenced to 8.5 Years in Jail on Serious Drug Charges Linked to Georgian Protests,” Civil Georgia, 2 September 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/698400>.

<sup>216</sup> Amnesty International, “Georgia: Drug Charges against Activists,” EUR56/0298/2025 (London: Amnesty International, 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/0298/2025/en/>.

In almost all cases involving protest participants, courts imposed and subsequently upheld pretrial detention as a blanket measure. Courts granted prosecution motions for detention without meaningful consideration or individualized justifications regarding flight risk or public safety as well as the accused persons' individual circumstances, including their personal characteristics, age, health, family responsibilities, financial situation, and other relevant factors.<sup>217</sup> Such prolonged and insufficiently justified detention failed to demonstrate the necessity and proportionality of the measures of deprivation of liberty and appeared instead to be purely punitive.

The experience of journalist Mzia Amaglobeli highlights the severe consequences of this approach. Arrested in January 2025 merely for placing a protest sticker, she was later released and re-arrested for slapping a police officer. Her requests for bail were repeatedly arbitrarily rejected in prompt remand hearings where no due consideration was given to the defence's arguments. During her pre-trial detention and the subsequent imprisonment, her health, specifically her eyesight, deteriorated to a critical state in another example where detention appeared to be punitive in nature.<sup>218</sup>

The courts' disregard for legal safeguards extends to juvenile and young adult protesters. Georgian law requires the application of juvenile justice procedures for defendants under the age of 21, prioritizing the least restrictive measures and shortest possible detention periods. However, these protections while widely applied in other non-protest related cases, have been uniformly ignored in cases against protest participants, pointing to deliberate discriminatory treatment on the basis of the defendants' political opinions. The case of Saba Jikia and others illustrates this pattern. Nineteen-year-old Saba Jikia was arrested on 5 December 2024 and remanded in detention in a swift hearing, similar to other remanded protesters, without due consideration of either the grounds for his pretrial detention or of alternative restraining measures. Following his trial in July 2025, the judge imposed a prison sentence closer to the maximum penalty of over four years in prison for allegedly kicking a riot police officer, despite the officer's own testimony in the court that he had suffered no injuries.<sup>219</sup> Similar failures to apply juvenile justice provisions were documented in the cases of Mate Devidze, Omar Okribelashvili, Irakli Miminoshvili, Zviad Tsetskhladze, Nikoloz Javakhishvili, and Giorgi Giorgadze. This appears to be a deliberate policy of discriminatory treatment of protest participants.

With few exceptions, courts have imposed custodial sentences in those cases involving symbolic acts of protest or dissent without an individualized assessment of whether deprivation of liberty was lawful, necessary and proportionate, including in cases involving minor alleged offences or negligible damage to property. In 2024, young protestors Omar Okribelashvili and Saba Meparishvili were sentenced to two years and six months in prison for damaging temporary police barriers valued by the prosecution at approximately 400 GEL (US\$ 140).<sup>220</sup>

Where many detained protesters appeared before judges with visible injuries or made allegations of torture or other ill-treatment, courts routinely failed to acknowledge or record their allegations, inquire into the origin of the injuries, ensure prompt independent medical examination, and refer the matter for independent investigation. They also largely failed to treat with caution any police evidence potentially obtained under duress. Instead, courts routinely failed to act on such allegations and continued to rely on testimony and evidence presented by the same law

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<sup>217</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Escalating Repression and Arbitrary Arrests Threaten Right to Protest," 31 October 2025, Georgia: Escalating repression and arbitrary arrests threaten right to protest - Amnesty International.

<sup>218</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Georgian Journalist May Lose Eyesight in Jail," EUR5601592025 (London: Amnesty International, July 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/EUR5601592025ENGLISH.pdf>.

<sup>219</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Jailing of Teenage Protester Raises Fair Trial Concerns," July 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/georgia-jailing-of-teenage-protester-raises-fair-trial-concerns/>.

<sup>220</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Criminal Justice System Abused to Suppress Protests," January 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/georgia-criminal-justice-system-abused-to-suppress-protests/>.

enforcement bodies implicated in the abuse.<sup>221</sup> This was seen, for example, in the case of imprisoned activist Saba Skhvtaridze who appeared in court bearing visible bruises on his face and in his body when he made allegations of torture and other ill-treatment. In his case, the court accepted the testimony and other evidence against the defendant as presented by police officers, including those accused of torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>222</sup>

## CLOSING THE DOORS ON JUSTICE: RESTRICTING PUBLIC SCRUTINY



Police and court bailiffs preventing public and journalists from entering the court building to observe the trial of arrested opposition leader Zurab Girchi Japaridze, 22 May 2025 @Batumlebi

**"Our case became a textbook example of politically motivated justice. You do not need to know the case materials to see it; it is obvious at a glance. That is precisely why these hearings were closed, because anyone watching could easily see its sheer absurdity".<sup>223</sup>** Andro Chichinadze, imprisoned actor and activist.

### RESTRICTIONS ON ACCESS TO COURT PROCEEDINGS

Beyond unfair trials and unsafe convictions, the courts have compounded the injustice by actively closing themselves off from public scrutiny. Hearings have been restricted, physical access to court buildings limited, and independent observers and human rights defenders have been often prevented from carrying out long-standing trial monitoring activities. New rules requiring prior authorisation for recording or broadcasting court proceedings, combined with the routine failure to publish information on hearings and rulings, have made independent monitoring and media coverage of high-profile protest trials increasingly difficult.

While courts may legitimately restrict access where strictly necessary to maintain order or protect the interests of justice, any such restriction requires specific justification and must be proportionate. Blanket closures that deny access to the general public and the media violate the right to a public hearing.<sup>224</sup> The

<sup>221</sup> Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), Politically Motivated Cases in 2024–2025 (Tbilisi: GYLA, 2025), [https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads\\_script/publications/pdf/2024-2025%20wlebsi%20politikurad%20motivirebuli%20saqmeebi\\_eng.pdf](https://admin.gyla.ge/uploads_script/publications/pdf/2024-2025%20wlebsi%20politikurad%20motivirebuli%20saqmeebi_eng.pdf)

<sup>222</sup> Amnesty International, "Georgia: Justice for Tortured Georgian Protester: Saba Skhvtaridze," EUR56/9543/2025 : <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/9543/2025/en/>.

<sup>223</sup> Publika, "ანდრო ჭიჭინაძის საბოლოო სიტყვა: 'თქვენ არ განიხილავთ მხოლოდ ჩვენს საქმეს, განიხილავთ, თუ რა ფორმით იარსებებს ქვეყანა'" ["Andro Chichinadze's Final Statement: 'You Are Not Only Considering Our Case; You Are Deciding What Kind of Country This Will Be'"], 5 March 2025, <https://publika.ge/andro-chichinadzis-saboloo-sityva-tqven-ar-ganikhlavt-mkholod-chvens-saqmes-ganikhlavt-tu-ra-formit-iarsebebs-qveyana/>.

<sup>224</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 32 on Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Right to Equality before Courts and Tribunals and to a Fair Trial, CCPR/C/GC/32 (Geneva: UN Human Rights Committee, August 23, 2007), paras. 28–29 (the public and media may be excluded only in specific, limited circumstances; blanket restrictions are incompatible with the guarantee of a public hearing), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-32-article-14-right-equality>;

cumulative effect has been to shield proceedings from scrutiny, undermining the principles of open justice, transparency and the right to a fair trial.

Until June 2025, independent media outlets regularly broadcast and reported on trials of protestors, making fair trial violations and politically motivated proceedings visible to the public. This public exposure created reputational pressure on both the government and the judiciary, including judges already sanctioned by the USA and several European states for corruption and politically motivated rulings.<sup>225</sup>

From January 2025, trials themselves began to attract a great deal of media attention and were regularly attended by foreign diplomats. As a result, in June 2025 the government introduced legislative amendments banning filming in courtrooms.<sup>226</sup> Human rights defenders monitoring the trials as well as the Georgian Public Defender voiced serious concerns that the amendments curtailed the principle of public hearings, judicial transparency and openness.<sup>227</sup> In planned further amendments, all recording and note taking devices are to be banned from courts, including mobile phones and laptops.<sup>228</sup>

In addition to these restrictions, the judges themselves also closed hearings in several instances to everyone except the parties, impeding the access of families, journalists, and other observers. In the trial of Andro Chichinadze and others, observed by an Amnesty International representative, the judge closed the hearing after a family member asked for a break after defendants hadn't had any food for a long time. Similarly, in the case of "sabotage" against eight opposition leaders, the judge closed the hearing following a similarly minor remark from the public.

Another change that has contributed to the weaponization of the administration of justice in Georgia was the transformation of the physical infrastructure of the judicial system into a hostile environment for the media, the public, and the lawyers and families of defendants in high profile cases. With intense public attention on many protest-related cases, the Georgian judiciary opted to obstruct open justice by holding hearings in the smallest courtrooms available.

An Amnesty International representative observed the proceedings against the opposition leader Zurab "Girchi" Japaridze, where additional police officers including the special tasks unit were deployed to secure the court premises. Hundreds of people gathered at the court building to attend the trial, but court bailiffs locked the doors of the entrance to the courtyard, leaving the public out in the street. Even Zurab Japaridze's lawyer was not allowed to access the courtroom for a considerable length of time. Despite the high public interest in the case, the proceedings were held in one of the smallest courtrooms available, with a capacity of just 15 people. The court bailiffs and police officers used unlawful force, including beatings, to prevent people from accessing the courtroom, causing injuries to several.

Similar concerns were reported in other cases of detained protestors, where final hearings were held in cramped courtrooms that effectively restricted public access and triggered confrontations with bailiffs. In the cases of Mate Devidze<sup>229</sup> and Giorgi Mindadze, overcrowding and the exclusion of observers reportedly led to clashes in which several people were injured and at least one person was detained.<sup>230</sup>

## **BAILIFF VIOLENCE AND THE INTIMIDATION OF COURT OBSERVERS**

Restrictions on access to hearings have been accompanied by increasing reports of violence inside and around court buildings. According to lawyers from Partnership for Human Rights, many people that raised allegations of being assaulted by court bailiffs have asked prosecutors to investigate, but none has been granted victim status. Several defence lawyers and activists told Amnesty International that violence by court bailiffs has become more frequent since the start of the protests.

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<sup>225</sup> Transparency International Georgia, *Sanctioned Georgian Dream Representatives and Propaganda TV Channels*, 24 March 2026, <https://transparency.ge/en/post/sanctioned-georgian-dream-representatives-and-propaganda-tv-channels>.

<sup>226</sup> Parliament of Georgia, Draft Organic Law of Georgia on Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia on Common Courts (Registration No. 07-3/74/11, 3rd Reading), adopted June 26, 2025 (Tbilisi: Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2025), <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/394549>

<sup>227</sup> Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, Report of the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia, 2025 (Tbilisi: Public Defender's Office, 2026), 12, <https://ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2026040108450417707.pdf>.

<sup>228</sup> Eurasianet, "The Walls Are Closing In on Civil Society Groups and Media in Georgia," Eurasianet, [date], <https://eurasianet.org/the-walls-are-closing-in-on-civil-society-groups-and-media-in-georgia>.

<sup>229</sup> Civil Georgia, "Activist Mate Devidze Sentenced to 4.5 Years in Prison," Civil Georgia, June 12, 2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/686243>

<sup>230</sup> Footage of confrontation with court bailiff: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eanCID7QHs>.

## The case of Nino Datashvili: on trial for trial monitoring



One of the most telling examples is the case of Nino Datashvili, a teacher and civic activist.

On 9 June 2025, Nino Datashvili was present at the Tbilisi City Court to show solidarity with eight individuals standing trial in connection with their participation in the 2024 protests. Her lawyers told Amnesty International that she was standing peacefully in the public waiting area making no attempt to enter the courtrooms when she was approached by the court bailiff, who told her to leave the premises. When she asked for a legal basis for his order to leave the building, four male bailiffs surrounded her, grabbed her without warning, and dragged her toward the exit as she continued to resist. Following this confrontation, Nino Datashvili

was forced to the ground, her hands wrenched behind her back, and she was physically thrown from the building while bailiffs shouted verbal abuse.

On the same day, Nino Datashvili complained about her ill-treatment by the court bailiffs, filing a petition to the now abolished Special Investigative Service (see above). However, several days later, on 20 June 2025 she herself was arrested at her home and charged with assaulting an officer, a charge that carries a prison sentence of four to seven years.<sup>231</sup>

Nino Datashvili's lawyers filed a motion at the court, requesting her release on bail based on medical evidence showing that she suffered from chronic, debilitating pain stemming from a 2019 spinal surgery that made her detention incompatible with her medical condition.

According to her lawyer, the court has rejected the request for bail without due consideration and upheld her pre-trial detention, citing "risks of absconding, witness tampering, and committing new crimes" without individual reasoning or justification. The prosecution then used the medical records that had been submitted by her lawyers in order to request Nino Datashvili's psychiatric examination during the trial. The judge granted the request, authorizing her forcible admission to a psychiatric institution for 20 days. On 6 August 2025, state forensic experts examined her in prison without her consent and in the absence of her lawyer.

Nino Datashvili's health deteriorated severely while in detention, with her back pain leaving her largely immobile and incapable of attending her court hearings even online.

Her treatment provoked widespread public condemnation, with civil society organisations and international human rights bodies calling for her immediate release and an investigation into the alleged ill-treatment she had suffered.<sup>232</sup> Following sustained public pressure and international outcry, she was released on bail on 29 October 2025 after more than three months in prison. At the moment of writing, the assault charges against Nino Datashvili remain pending. If convicted, she faces a prison sentence of up to seven years. Investigation into her alleged ill-treatment by court bailiffs remains ineffective to date.

**"The authorities seem to have repurposed the use of forced psychological examinations, a tactic from the Soviet era against the dissidents to intimidate the activists who dare to scrutinize the courts."** Nino Datashvili's lawyers told Amnesty International.<sup>233</sup>

*Photo: Nino Datashvili being thrown out of the Tbilisi City Court. @TV Pirveli*

<sup>231</sup> Article 353 of Georgia's Criminal Code Criminal Code of Georgia "Resistance, threat or violence against protector of public order or other government representative": Parliament of Georgia, *Criminal Code of Georgia*, English translation: <https://policehumanrightsresources.org/content/uploads/2016/08/Criminal-Code-Georgia.pdf>.

<sup>232</sup> UN Special Procedures, Communication to the Government of Georgia concerning Nino Datashvili (AL GEO 4/2025), 1 October 2025. <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=30375>.

Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH-OMCT), Georgia: Arbitrary Detention and Judicial Harassment of Pro-Democracy Activist Nino Datashvili, Urgent Intervention, 2 September 2025, <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/georgia-arbitrary-detention-and-judicial-harassment-of-pro-democracy-activist-nino-datashvili>.

<sup>233</sup> Interview with lawyer Nino Gabodze. 9 December, 2025.

# CONCLUSION

In a short period, Georgia's authorities have built a sophisticated architecture of repression. What took many years to develop in other contexts has been assembled in Georgia with striking speed: a coordinated system in which disinformation, restrictive laws, abusive policing and weaponized judicial processes reinforce one another in a quest to entrench power. Smear campaigns turn critics into enemies. Laws turn dissent into an offence. Police abuses make protests physically dangerous. Courts then perpetuate this spiral of injustice by fostering impunity and rubberstamping the government's repression.

The human cost has been severe. Thousands have experienced arrest, hundreds of people have been beaten in the streets, humiliated in detention and subjected to torture or other ill-treatment. More than 150 people have been imprisoned following politically motivated and unfair proceedings, with little prospect of finding justice. Many people who joined peaceful protests have been subjected to arbitrary detentions and financial ruin through excessive fines simply for standing on the road or even in the pavement, for wearing a mask, criticizing an official, or refusing to leave public space. Others have been silenced or forced to live under constant fear of arrest, prosecution or retaliation.

Civic space has been severely restricted. Human rights defenders and civil society organizations that protecting the victims of abuse have themselves become targets. They have been threatened, attacked, investigated, had their accounts frozen, offices closed and staff reduced. Independent journalists have been physically targeted, harassed, prosecuted, cut off from funding and pushed into "survival mode".

Since spring 2024, and especially since the mass daily protests that began on 28 November 2024, the authorities have used the full machinery of the state to deter, punish and extinguish dissent. The information space has been weaponized to brand civil society organizations, independent media, opposition figures and protesters as "foreign agents", "extremists" or "threats to national security". These narratives have not remained rhetorical. They have often been followed by harassment, physical attacks, investigations, prosecutions, asset freezes and other punitive measures.

Lawmakers have been central to this transformation. Successive legislative amendments, adopted at speed and with no meaningful consultation, have unduly restricted the rights to freedom of association, expression, including media freedom, and peaceful assembly. Measures framed as protecting "transparency", "sovereignty", "public order" or "family values" have in practice imposed intrusive state control, introduced sweeping police powers, heavy fines, administrative and criminal liability, suffocating Georgia's once vibrant civil society.

The police have been given a new legal architecture to increase its coercive force. Law enforcement has repeatedly used unlawful and punitive force against largely peaceful protesters, including beatings and arbitrary arrests. The misuse of less lethal weapons has affected thousands of protestors and injured many more. Hundreds of detained protesters have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. The coordinated nature of these abuses points to a state-sanctioned pattern of punishment. Impunity has been central to this pattern. Despite extensive evidence of police abuse, effective investigations have been rare. Senior officials implicated in violent crackdowns have avoided accountability while the dismantling of already limited oversight mechanisms has further weakened the prospect of justice.

The judiciary has reinforced this cycle of injustice against activists and protestors. Georgia's courts have effectively enforced and legitimized the criminalization of peaceful protest. Thousands have been subjected to severe penalties, including ruinous fines and custodial sanctions, while more than 150 protesters, activists and government critics have been imprisoned after proceedings marked by serious fair trial violations. Increasingly shielding themselves from any meaningful public scrutiny, courts have been turned into tools of rubber-stampers of injustice: punishing dissent, financially exhausting protesters and giving repression the veneer of legality.

As this report shows, this is not a chain of isolated abuses but rather a system of authoritarian practices intended to entrench power, where the formal appearance of the rule of law remains intact but its substance has been hollowed out. The authorities must immediately end their use of authoritarian practices and reverse this course: end the misuse of laws and state institutions against critics, ensure justice for those imprisoned after unfair proceedings, guarantee accountability for torture and other abuses, and provide full reparation to all those harmed.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS: WEAPONIZING DISINFORMATION

### To the Georgian Government

- Cease smearing campaigns against independent media and journalists, civil society leaders, opposition politicians, and other activists. Where such smearing has led to harassment, property damage, physical attacks, or violation of the presumption of innocence or has otherwise influenced legal processes, all those affected must receive full and adequate reparation, including truth, restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, and guarantees of non-repetition.
- Ensure that all state officials, including members of government and parliament, refrain from participating, amplifying or engaging in disinformation campaigns that aim to stigmatize human rights defenders and other individuals to undermine their work or as preparation for state enforcement action.
- Conduct effective investigations into all reported cases in which public smearing and disinformation campaigns have been associated with physical attacks on individuals and their property with a view to bringing to account, in fair trial proceedings, all those responsible, including those who commissioned the campaign.
- Cease the use, and threats of use, of tax investigations, funding inquiries, and abuse of other regulatory mechanisms as instruments of harassing and delegitimizing media outlets.

### To the EU, Council of Europe and Other International Partners

- Maintain and expand support to NGOs, human rights defenders and media outlets affected by smearing and disinformation campaigns. This includes through public statements and other forms of political support, flexible emergency funding, media literacy initiatives and support to capacity building for media and civil society, while safeguarding the right to freedom of expression and media pluralism.
- Ensure that diplomatic and strategic communications continue to counter smear campaigns against NGOs, HRDs and media and facilitate the continued dissemination of material by independent media and civil society organizations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: WEAPONIZING THE LAW

### To the Georgian Government

- Repeal the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and recent amendments to the Law on Grants, and ensure that all national legislation regulating civil society organizations is brought in full conformity with Georgia's international human rights obligations regarding the right to freedom of association, including the right to seek, receive and utilize resources from foreign and international sources.
- Remove any regulations requiring civil society organizations to obtain prior authorization to receive funding from foreign or international sources, or that require the disclosure of personal data of the recipients.
- Unfreeze the bank accounts of all civil society organizations targeted for their criticism of the authorities or their receipt of international funds and drop all related charges against them.
- Ensure that administrative and reporting requirements are not arbitrary or discriminatory, and are respectful of the right to privacy of associations and their members.

- Repeal the amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Manifestations and the Administrative Offences Code that have effectively criminalized peaceful protest, including provisions related to severe financial penalties;
- Repeal the February 2025 provisions penalizing verbal insults directed at public officials, and the March 2026 law criminalizing the questioning of the legitimacy of constitutional bodies.
- Repeal the June 2025 amendments to the Law on Speech and Expression and ensure that journalists are effectively protected against vexatious defamation lawsuits.
- Repeal the April 2025 amendments to the Broadcasting Law that ban foreign funding of broadcasters and impose vague content obligations enforced by the government-controlled GNCC, in conformity with the recommendations of the Venice Commission.

### To the EU, Council of Europe and Other International Partners

- Call on the Georgian government to repeal and amend the repressive legislation that is unduly restricting the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.
- Ensure that Georgia's EU accession process and the EU's broader relations with Georgia under the EU-Georgia association agreement, are firmly anchored in respect for human rights, including the restoration of civic space, the right to protest and media freedom.
- Support the work of the Venice Commission and other international human rights mechanisms in assessing Georgia's legislative programme and press the Georgian government to implement their recommendations in full.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: WEAPONIZING THE POLICE

### To the Georgian Government

- Conduct prompt, thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigations into all allegations of unlawful force during protests, including the use of tear gas, water cannons, and batons by police.
- Ensure that police fully comply with domestic and international law governing the use of less-lethal weapons, including the requirements that dispersal orders be issued only in the case of widespread violence, with adequate warning and that demonstrators be given a viable means of retreat before any special measures are deployed, and that chemical irritants not be deployed repeatedly in the same place.
- Immediately prohibit the mixing of chemical irritants of any kind into water cannon reservoirs. Impose a moratorium on the use of water cannons at civilian demonstrations pending the outcome of an independent investigation into all deployments during the 2024 and 2025 protests.
- Cooperate fully with an independent international investigation into the chemical substances deployed against protesters in 2024 and 2025, should such an investigation be initiated. Irrespective of the investigation, disclose publicly the full composition of all agents used, including the solvent mixed with tear gas in water cannon reservoirs.
- Conduct prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigations into all reported attacks by informal groups, that targeted protesters, journalists, and opposition figures throughout 2024 and 2025. Conduct similar investigations into reports of police officers witnessing but failing to intervene in such attacks, as well as any allegations of officials directing or facilitating such attacks and other violence. Ensure that every person reasonably suspected of such abuses is brought to account, in fair trial proceedings.
- Ensure prompt, thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of people detained during the protest crackdowns of 2024 and

2025 and since, including against those allegedly directly implicated and those bearing command responsibility. The investigation must extend to senior commanders who directed or acquiesced.

- Establish an oversight, complaints and investigation body with the mandate and genuine independence in conducting such investigations, in full conformity with Georgia's obligations under international human rights law. Such a body must be structurally and functionally independent of the executive, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Security Service and the Prosecutor's Office amongst others.

## To the EU and other International Partners

- Impose an immediate and comprehensive embargo on the sale and transfer of all policing equipment to Georgia, including less-lethal weapons, surveillance technology, and vehicles, until an independent investigation into the use of chemical agents and other unlawful and abusive use of force by police has been completed, those responsible are held to account, and credible accountability mechanisms are in place.
- In line with the recommendations of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism, support the documentation, investigation and prosecution of human rights violations and crimes under international law being committed in Georgia, including by exploring opportunities at the domestic, regional and international level.
- Take steps to initiate investigations by the OPCW allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons against protesters to the OPCW and press for Georgian cooperation with any resulting investigation.
- Put pressure on the Georgian authorities to ensure effective action on violence by informal groups associated with the police, and against obstruction of accountability, building on the measures already taken by the USA and individual EU member states.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: WEAPONIZING THE JUDICIARY

### To the Georgian Government

- Conduct an independent review of all criminal convictions of protesters and activists imposed since April 2024. All convictions found to have resulted from unfair proceedings must be quashed and those imprisoned released, until and unless well-founded charges are brought against them and their remand is imposed in fair trial proceedings.
- Review all penalties imposed in administrative proceedings for alleged offences committed during the protests in 2024-2026, and ensure that no administrative penalties are applied solely for exercising the right of peaceful assembly; that any person wrongfully penalized and/or penalized in violation of their right to a fair trial receives full and adequate reparations, and that any further application of administrative law, and the use of administrative proceedings, against protest participants, including the use of facial recognition evidence, is fully compliant with fair trial proceedings and subject to meaningful judicial scrutiny.
- Pending the necessary repeal of the legislative provisions that restrict and penalize the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, take steps to ensure that courts and prosecutorial authorities adopt internal guidelines to refrain from sanctioning and prosecuting such actions.
- Restore full and free public access to judicial proceedings, and bring any restrictions on filming in court buildings and the use of mobile phones and laptops in courtrooms in full compliance with Georgia's obligations under international law. Ensure that hearings in protest-related cases are held in rooms large enough to accommodate the media, diplomatic observers, and the families of defendants.

## To the EU, Council of Europe and Other International Partners

- Establish a sustained international monitoring presence in Georgian courtrooms for all protest-related and politically sensitive criminal proceedings, including through OSCE, Council of Europe, and EU observers, and publish regular public reports on compliance with fair trial guarantees
- Support NGOs, human rights defenders, journalists and protesters facing persecution solely for exercising their human rights, including through legal assistance, relocation support and the facilitation of the registration of NGOs working in exile.
- Request prison visits and the monitoring of detention conditions of all arbitrarily imprisoned protesters, journalists and opposition figures.
- The CoE Committee of Ministers should give priority to the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights' judgments concerning HRDs and civil society, under enhanced supervision, in line with Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 - which calls for "paying special attention within the Committee of Ministers to the execution of judgments concerning human rights defenders and the enabling environment for human rights work."
- The CoE local office in Tbilisi should actively engage with civil society and human rights defenders in line with CM Rec 2018/11 which indicates that local offices should "promote civil society's, NHRIs' and human rights defenders' work and give visibility to key judgments of the Court, and recommendations of the Commissioner, the Venice Commission, and Parliamentary Assembly concerning human rights defenders."
- CoE Action Plans and Cooperation Programmes should include the protection of human rights defenders and activities towards the implementation of ECtHR judgments.
- Ensure the implementation of the relevant recommendations on Georgia from the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and the Venice Commission, among others.

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# ANATOMY OF REPRESSION

## GEORGIA: 500 DAYS OF PROTEST, CRACKDOWN AND RESILIENCE

Georgia is facing most serious erosion of human rights and civic space as the ruling party resorts to authoritarian practices to preserve its grip on power amid growing public discontent.

Since the start of the country's continuous protest movement more than two years ago, thousands of people have been arbitrarily detained and fined, hundreds subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, and more than 150 imprisoned following unfair and politically motivated proceedings. Yet for more than 500 days, protesters across Georgia have continued to return to the streets, refusing to abandon their demands for rights, dignity and a better future.

*Anatomy of Repression: Georgia's 500 Days of Protest, Crackdown and Resilience* examines the coordinated system driving this crackdown: disinformation that turns critics into enemies; restrictive laws that criminalize dissent and shrink civic space; policing that makes protest physically dangerous; and courts that perpetuate the cycle of injustice while giving repression the veneer of legality.

The report calls on Georgia's authorities to reverse course immediately and on the international community to recognize and respond to this deliberate system of repression with the urgency it demands.