

Georgia Meets International Human Rights Day without Human Rights

Introduction

Georgia marks December 10, 2025 – an international Human Rights Day – virtually without human rights. On the one hand, repressive legislative changes, methods of its implementation, and on the other hand, the absence of independent institutions have led to an extreme human rights crisis. Georgian Dream's repressive policies and practices of recent years have turned Georgia into an authoritarian country in 2025.

The actions taken by Georgian Dream in 2025, which have nothing to do with the protection of human rights, are a continuation of the policy started in 2024. Following the rigged parliamentary elections in 2024 and the events that took place in November-December,¹ in 2025 the party has been completely disregarding, among other rights, the right to vote, the right to association, freedom of the media, the right to a fair trial, freedom of assembly and expression.

Despite numerous alleged cases of torture and inhuman treatment by law enforcement officers and violent groups in November-December 2024, there has been no identified/investigated case in 2025. According to the investigation conducted by the highly reputable international media outlet, the BBC, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia used a prohibited chemical substance to quell peaceful demonstrators in November-December 2024. Regarding the alleged heinous crime, Amnesty International issued a statement, in which it strongly criticized Georgian Dream's repressive policy and called on the relevant actors to conduct an international investigation.

In 2025, the number of political prisoners detained under criminal law increased by 81. Among them are political party leaders, media representatives, people of various professions and civil activists. In parallel with the tightened laws, administrative proceedings were launched against more than 1,000 individuals.

During the reporting period, Georgian Dream used all the resources at its disposal to confront politicians and representatives of the civil sector. Along with the legislative amendment banning political parties, criminal prosecutions have been launched against leaders of opposition political parties on charges of sabotage, aiding and abetting a foreign state in hostile activities, financing activities directed against the constitutional order of Georgia and the foundations of national security, and calling for the violent change of the constitutional order of Georgia and the overthrow of the state authorities. In addition, by seizing the accounts of civil society organizations and launching an investigation against human rights defenders in the so-called "face mask case," Georgian Dream is trying to finally destroy free and critical thought in the country.

The complete regression of human rights in 2025 is obvious in the critical assessments of international actors as well. On December 4, 2025, Human Rights Watch, an international human

¹ For the first time in the last decade, in November-December 2024, the police violence used in the process of quelling and arresting protesters was assessed as torture and inhuman treatment.

rights organization, published an article stating that Georgian Dream criminalized protest and dissent through legislative amendments and their practical enforcement.

Against the backdrop of the adoption of repressive laws (usually in an expedited manner), criminalization of the rights of assembly and expression, illegal arbitrary detentions, biased justice, absence of independent institutions, and persecution of media representatives, NGOs, civil activists, and political parties, it is extremely difficult to assess the human rights situation in Georgia in 2025. Nevertheless, we will briefly review several key rights and issues, the existence/protection of which is particularly important from the point of view of the country's democracy.

1. Freedom of assembly and expression

During December 2024 and 2025, a particularly large number of repressive legislative amendments were enacted to restrict freedom of assembly and expression.

- Administrative sanctions have been increased for blocking roads, disfiguring the appearance of the territory, unauthorized purchase and use of pyrotechnics, vandalism, petty hooliganism, disobedience to the order of a law enforcement officer/state representative, violation of the rules of assembly and demonstration (including covering a face with a mask, possessing pyrotechnics, laser radiation devices), and insulting a state political official
- The concept of an organizer of an assembly has been expanded and has been defined as the initiator of an assembly or demonstration, as well as a person who leads and/or otherwise organizes the holding of an assembly or demonstration. It becomes possible to consider an active participant in the rally as an organizer and extend the norms of the Administrative Offences Code, which concern the organizer's liability, to him/her
- The maximum term of administrative detention has been increased 4 times - up to 60 days
- In some cases, financial penalties have increased 10 times - the fine for blocking a road has increased from GEL 500 to GEL 5,000, which is twice the average monthly salary in Georgia. Since October 17, a number of administrative offences have been punishable only by administrative detention
- Repeated actions by a person subject to administrative punishment for violating the rules of assembly/demonstration have been criminalized
- It has been prohibited to hold an assembly or demonstration in a closed space or building if the owner does not consent in advance in writing
- It has been prohibited to block bridges, tunnels, overpasses, and important transport nodes determined by the municipality
- Along with blocking traffic, it has also been prohibited to restrict the movement of people
- It has been prohibited to erect a temporary structure if it creates a danger, hinders the work of the police, harms the functioning of organizations, or isn't necessary for holding an assembly

The Georgian Dream party attempted to suppress the protests that have been going on continuously on Rustaveli Avenue for a year with disproportionate financial fines. There have been cases when the GEL 5,000 fine has been issued to one person dozens of times, which brings the final amount of the fine to several hundred thousand of laris. However, since large-scale financial pressure failed to suppress the protests, the Georgian Dream party criminalized cases of repeated violations of the law. 61-year-old Zurab Menteshashvili is the first person in the history of Georgia to be tried under criminal law on charges of blocking a road twice. The court applied pre-trial detention against him, a completely unfounded and disproportionate measure. The use of the strictest measure is politically motivated. According to the Court of Human Rights and international standards (e.g. *Letellier v. France*, *Clooth v. Belgium*, *Ilijkov v. Bulgaria*), detention should be an extreme form and it can be justified only when there is no possibility of achieving the goal with a lighter measure. In such a case, the court is obliged to use alternative measures. Otherwise, Articles 5 (Right to liberty and security) and 6 (Right to a fair trial) of the European Convention are clearly violated. Criminalization of freedom of assembly contradicts the Constitution of Georgia and the practice of the European Court, according to which peaceful demonstrations should not be subject to sanctions that entail deprivation of liberty.

In 2025, arbitrary arrests of peaceful protesters have become particularly frequent. The most frequently used article is Article 173 of the Soviet-era Administrative Offences Code, which pertains to the disobedience to the lawful order of a police officer. In relation to this norm, the standard of proof in court is particularly low, as judges are guided only by the testimonies of police officers and use the strictest sanction - detention – against peaceful demonstrators. This situation has been especially alarming after the legislative amendments of October 17, 2025, as committing the same action for the third time became an act punishable by the Criminal Code.

After October 17 alone, administrative proceedings were launched against over 200 peaceful demonstrators on the grounds of blocking the road, disobeying the lawful order of a police officer, and covering their faces. Of these, in more than 140 cases, the court applied the most extreme measure of sanction - administrative detention.

Against the background of the adoption of new draconian legislative amendments against the participants in the assembly, the cases of torture and use of excessive force against protesters in late 2024 and early 2025 remain uninvestigated. So far, no law enforcement official has been prosecuted, despite the fact that there are television footage showing severe beating of people, intentional infliction of health harm, and as the BBC's journalistic investigation suggests, the use of a chemical substance banned since the 1930s. The State Security Service launched an investigation into the latter under Article 333 of the Criminal Code, which pertains to the abuse of official authority, and Article 319, which refers to the assistance to a foreign organization in hostile activities. Immediately after the investigation began, the injured persons, human rights defenders, and relevant specialists were summoned to the agency for questioning.

2. The Right to a fair trial

Georgian Dream's Parliament, through legislative amendments carried out in 2025, further strengthened the power of the judicial clan loyal to it and limited public hearings. In particular:

- The Independent Inspector Service has been abolished and disciplinary proceedings against judges will be led by the Secretary of the High Council of Justice
- The terms of office and powers of court chairmen, chairmen of panels/chambers have been increased
- “Improper performance of duties” has been returned as a disciplinary offence and the right of a judge to request public disciplinary proceedings has been abolished
- The measure provided as a disciplinary punishment - salary deduction – has been increased from 10% to 50%
- The terms of judges’ transfer have been increased to 5 years
- Broadcasting, photographing and video recoding in the court building, including in the court yard, have been prohibited and their exclusive use has been granted only to the court and persons authorized by it
- Court acts will be made public only after the final decision is made in the relevant case
- The number of managerial positions has increased. The chairmen of the appellate, district (city) courts have 2 deputies, one of whom may be appointed by the council as the first deputy
- The obligation of the members of the High Council of Justice to publish the evaluations of judicial candidates has been abolished, and the voting will be held secretly, at the closed session, instead of an open session
- The salary of judges has increased from GEL 10,512 to GEL 14,600

With the amendments developed, Georgian Dream promotes the hierarchical organization of the judicial system, helps members of the clan loyal to it to strengthen their power. At the same time, it tries to limit the dissemination of information about the work of the court as much as possible.

The bias of the court has been evident in the process of considering the cases of persons arrested during the protests. Court sessions often took place in the middle of the night, and the judge did not grant motions to postpone the sessions. In their speeches, representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not justify how proportionate the detention sanction they requested was to the nature of the action. In all cases, the judges granted the agency’s request regarding the detention sanction. As a rule, the court almost never used a verbal reprimand as a form of punishment, despite the fact that it is granted this authority by law in cases of minor offences or first-time commission of administrative offences. The court used administrative detention against over 100 people, more than 50 of them against women. In addition, the court monitoring showed cases of artificially delaying cases, groundless use of pre-trial detention, and restrictions on the right of defence.

Against the background of the consolidation of power in the judicial system and the court's bias towards Georgian Dream, the story of a former judge about political orders and the methods of pressure exerted on judges remains uninvestigated.

3. Freedom of political parties

2025 was an unprecedented year for Georgia, given the widespread arrests of politicians and the Government's stated desire to ban specific political parties it finds unacceptable. To achieve this goal, the following changes were made to Georgian legislation:

- The Constitutional Court has been allowed to ban a party using simplified procedures if its stated purpose and/or nature of its activities (including the personnel) substantially repeat the stated purpose and/or nature of activities (including the personnel) of an already banned party.
- Persons associated with a political party banned by the Constitutional Court have been banned from party activities (including founding a party, holding a party leadership position), holding state-political and political positions, and running for elections. In addition, parties have been prohibited from receiving donations from these persons.

In addition to preparing and adopting the above-mentioned amendments, Georgian Dream also filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court to ban specific parties - the National Movement, Ahali and Lelo.

Criminal cases were launched against the political leaders who refused to appear before the Georgian Dream's parliamentary investigation commission: Irakli Okruashvili, Givi Targamadze, Badri Japaridze, Mamuka Khazaradze, Zura Japaridze, Giorgi Vashadze, Nika Melia, and Nika Gvaramia were all sentenced to several months in prison. Later, Elene Khoshtaria was also arrested on charges of damaging the election banner of Tbilisi mayoral candidate Kakha Kaladze. Despite the fact that failure to comply with the demands of an investigative commission belongs to the category of less serious crimes and the composition of this action and the punishment established for its commission indicate that the said action does not constitute an act dangerous to society, accordingly, the judge could have applied a non-custodial sentence. However, the court granted the prosecutor's motion against all persons without an exception and sentenced all of them to imprisonment. It is also worth noting that the Georgian legislation contains a flaw in this regard - namely, failure to comply with the lawful demands of the temporary investigative commission - can be assessed as both an administrative offence and a crime. It would be more appropriate for the court to apply the norm that restricts freedom less.

Along with the legislative amendment banning political parties, criminal prosecutions were launched against leaders of opposition political parties on charges of sabotage, aiding and abetting a foreign country in hostile activities, financing activities directed against the constitutional order of Georgia and the foundations of national security, and calling for the violent change of the constitutional order of Georgia and the overthrow of the state authorities.

4. Media freedom

As of 2025, the rights of critical media in Georgia have been disproportionately restricted. During the year, alarming cases were reported regarding oligarchic influences, pressure and intimidation of journalists by the Georgian Dream party.

The legislative amendments and new regulations adopted by Georgian Dream's Parliament have led to a number of restrictions since the beginning of 2025, including:

- Media outlets have been prohibited from receiving international grants without the consent of an authorized state agency. Violation of this rule entails both financial and criminal liabilities.²
- The powers of the Communications Regulatory Commission have significantly increased. It can impose fines or suspend/revoke the broadcasting license of media outlets for violations.
- Broadcasting, photographing and audio/video recording in the courts, courtrooms, and adjacent areas, have been prohibited, unless expressly permitted by the court

Along with the legislative changes that contradict international human rights standards, Georgian Dream's restrictive state policy towards independent media outlets created a repressive environment.³ Over 600 attacks on various media representatives were reported.

In January 2025, Mzia Amaglobeli, the founder of Batumelebi and Netgazeti, a journalist and the winner of numerous international awards for media development, was arrested on criminal charges.

During the year, there have been numerous cases of obstruction of official activities,⁴ disciplinary sanctions,⁵ administrative fines, and arrests.⁶ Among them, a number of media workers were fined

² In 2025, the Anti-Corruption Bureau demanded provision of details of grant agreements signed or in force from April 16, 2025 from independent online media platforms - "Project 64", "Mtis Ambebi", "Realpolitik", and "ifakt", as well as the Media Development Fund and the Charter of Journalistic Ethics, along with Georgian NGOs. The letters did not indicate clear legal grounds, which created a precedent for politically motivated and arbitrary influence.

³ Back in September 2024, the Communications Commission granted 22 complaints filed by the Georgian Dream party against various independent media outlets. On June 2, 2025, the Georgian Dream party filed complaints with the Communications Commission against independent media broadcasters - Formula TV and TV Pirveli. The party complained about their use of terms such as "illegitimate parliament," "illegitimate government," "oligarchic regime," and "regime's prisoners," which it interpreted as challenging the legitimacy of the Georgian Dream Government. In July 2025, the Commission found Formula to be a violator, but exempted it from administrative liability.

⁴ On April 30, 2025, Formula TV representatives Eliso Jariashvili and Tata Porakishvili had their accreditation to work in the Georgian Parliament suspended for one month.

⁵ Tamar Mshvenieradze, Ioseb Katsitadze, Kakha Melikidze, and Irma Chubinidze were subjected to disciplinary penalties for criticizing the Public Broadcaster's pro-government bias.

⁶ In October 2025, Tbilisi City Court applied administrative detention against journalists Vakho Sanaia and Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani.

for “blocking the road” while they were covering protests or for publicly expressing their opinions on social media. There have also been cases of physical and verbal attacks on media representatives in connection with their professional duties.⁷ Obstructing a media representative in the performance of his/her professional duties represents a criminal offence. Despite numerous such incidents, no investigation has been launched into any of the cases.

This planned strategy of discrediting the media, intimidating its sources, and using state security and government media as a tool has the profound effect of punishing those who speak out about alleged or confirmed cases of fundamental human rights violations, and suppresses the public’s right to receive information about the investigation of alleged crimes committed by state officials, identification and punishment of responsible persons in accordance with the law, which is a hallmark of the authoritarian erosion of press freedom.

5. Freedom of association

The freedom of association of independent civil society groups, especially those organizations that carry out human rights activities, has faced significant threats in Georgia in recent years.

Particularly alarming in terms of restrictions on freedom of association was the adoption of amendments to the Law on Grants and the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA).

The Foreign Agents Registration Act requires civil society groups and media outlets to register as “foreign agents.” Violation of this obligation carries severe criminal penalties, including high fines and up to five years in prison, including for natural persons.

In parallel, Georgian Dream tightened controls on foreign funding with the April 2025 amendments to the Law on Grants, which require a government approval to receive grants.

Enforcement of these restrictive legal provisions has been accompanied by a campaign of harassment and intimidation. Since late 2024, human rights organizations have faced physical attacks, threats, anonymous nighttime phone calls, and vandalism near their houses and offices with the word “agent.” In addition, the authorities have used legal mechanisms for political purposes:

- In March and August 2025, the Prosecutor’s Office froze the bank accounts of several NGOs and human rights groups on charges of politically motivated “sabotage” and “abetting a foreign organization”.
- During the reporting period, searches were conducted at the homes/offices of human rights defenders in gross violation of the requirements of legislation.

⁷ Over the past 7 years, over 80 attacks have been carried out on TV Pirveli’s employees. In September, during a demonstration held at the election headquarters of Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze, supporters of the ruling party attacked peaceful protesters, including journalists. Hungarian journalist Laszlo Mezes was injured during the attack. His phone was taken away and he suffered serious physical injuries. Publika.ge journalists Aleksandre Keshelashvili and Keto Mikadze were also beaten. Netgazeti journalist Ketevan Khutsishvili was verbally and physically abused by a police officer.

- In June 2025, the Anti-Corruption Bureau requested confidential, sensitive information from a number of NGOs, including Sapari, Social Justice Center, Transparency International Georgia, and others, on vulnerable beneficiaries who receive legal or other human rights services from these organizations, indicating active enforcement of the new restrictive laws.
- Throughout 2025, without any relevant legal arguments, the Anti-Corruption Bureau requested detailed information from dozens of human rights, media and research organizations, including the Democracy Research Institute, about projects ongoing or started as of April 16, 2025. Among them, special categories of personal data were requested.

In addition, with the mediation of the Prosecutor's Office, Tbilisi City Court froze the bank accounts of 7 non-governmental organizations within the framework of the so-called „face mask case“. In addition, the heads of these organizations were questioned before a magistrate judge. In this regard, the BBC's journalistic investigation is particularly noteworthy, which states that during the crackdown on protests, the Ministry of Internal Affairs allegedly used a prohibited chemical substance, which is alarming from the point of view of human health.

6. The right to vote

Following the large-scale fraud during the 2024 parliamentary elections, the 2025 local self-government elections became a formality. The majority of opposition political parties did not participate in them. Voter turnout was extremely low. The 2025 elections were held without objective international and local observers.

In addition, the following legislative amendments made during the reporting period made the right to vote a formality even at the legislative level:

- Georgian citizens abroad will no longer be able to go to polls
- Observers will be restricted from moving freely around the polling station and verifying voters' identities
- The number of deputies to be elected to local government bodies from proportional lists has been reduced and the number of majoritarian deputies has been increased
- The electoral barrier in local government elections has been increased to 4%
- Photographing and video recording at the polling station will be carried out without audio monitoring

The single-party Parliament formed after the 2024 elections worked with particular frequency on the amendments to the Election Code and finally Georgian Dream approved the updated text of the code. The changes are oriented precisely towards strengthening the single-party power and arranging the electoral system in such a way that Georgian Dream will be in a maximally privileged position, and it will be difficult to detect violations during the elections.

The unprecedented difficulty of Georgian emigrants in participating in the elections means fewer votes cast against Georgian Dream, since the support for Georgian Dream in the polling stations abroad was the lowest (approximately 13%). This change represents a complete disregard for the principle of universality.

Restricting audio recording, restricting observers' right to verify ID cards, and restricting their freedom of movement within the polling station will almost completely eliminate the possibility of detecting fraud schemes.

7. Criminal liability of minors

For years, organizations focused on human rights and social care have been calling for the introduction of approaches based on the child's best interests, care and support. Nevertheless, over the years, both the social and rights situation of minors has deteriorated.

Particularly alarming in this regard is the draft law "On the Rehabilitation and Support for Minors in Conflict with the Law", developed by the Georgian Dream party in November 2025, which provides for the creation of a closed special institution called "Rehabilitation and Support House for Minors", which is intended for children aged between 10 and 18.

The explanatory note to these amendments cites the lack of an "effective mechanism" or "effective levers" relating to children's issues as the reason for the establishment of the institution, which, considering the existing legislative framework, is inaccurate and misleading.

- In June 2015, the Juvenile Justice Code was adopted, which consolidated approaches tailored to the needs of children in conflict with the law.
- In 2020, the Juvenile Referral Center was established within the Ministry of Justice. The main focus of the center was working with juveniles who have not reached the age of criminal responsibility and have complex behavior.

Instead of eliminating difficulties related to the implementation of enforcement mechanisms and strengthening child welfare systems,⁸ the Georgian Dream party chose a punitive approach. The announced closed rehabilitation facility represents an institution of restriction of freedom, where, according to the proposed initiative, a minor may be held for a long period of time. This approach contradicts both international standards and the legislation in force in the country, as well as the principle of the development of each child in a peaceful and caring environment.

8. Gender equality

In 2025, one of the most vulnerable targets of institutionalized discrimination has been the LGBT community. The legislative package "On Family Values and Protection of Minors" adopted in

⁸ According to the 2024 data, 369,924 children under the age of 18 were registered in the Unified Database on Socially Vulnerable Families, of which 270,712 received subsistence assistance. In 2025, this number increased. These figures reveal that the country has an alarming situation in terms of child welfare.

September 2024 introduced broad restrictions that grossly violate the rights to equality, freedom of expression, and human health.

In February 2025, the Georgian Dream party introduced a package of amendments aimed at removing the terms “gender” and “gender identity” from legislation and public documents.

Against the backdrop of the mass political protests that began in late 2024, the situation of women participating in peaceful protests is alarming. Women activists have been subjected to sexist abuse and degrading treatment, including being stripped naked and strip-searched in places of detention. Under international human rights standards, systemic stripping of a person for search amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and, in some cases, may amount to torture.

9. Abolition of state institutions

The absence of independent institutions is particularly noticeable in 2025. Not a single institution financed by the state budget is performing a real function. In parallel with pursuing party interests, Georgian Dream abolished institutions that were created during the European integration process, based on the recommendations of the European Commission, the obligation of which should have been the fight against corruption, protection of personal data and immediate response to cases of abuse of authority by representatives of law enforcement agencies.

It was clear from the day of their establishment that the Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Special Investigation Service and the Personal Data Protection Service were not performing their real function.

In no case was an alleged corruption case identified by the Anti-Corruption Bureau. All the resources of the agency (especially since 2025) were spent on the persecution of the civil sector.

In addition, despite numerous cases of obvious violence, the use of disproportionate force during protests, illegal arrests and physical punishment by the police, the Special Investigation Service did not identify a single responsible person.

Despite the agencies' pursuit of party interests and disregard for real obligations, in 2025 Georgian Dream openly rejected even the formal existence of the institutions that were created within the framework of the European Commission's recommendations.

