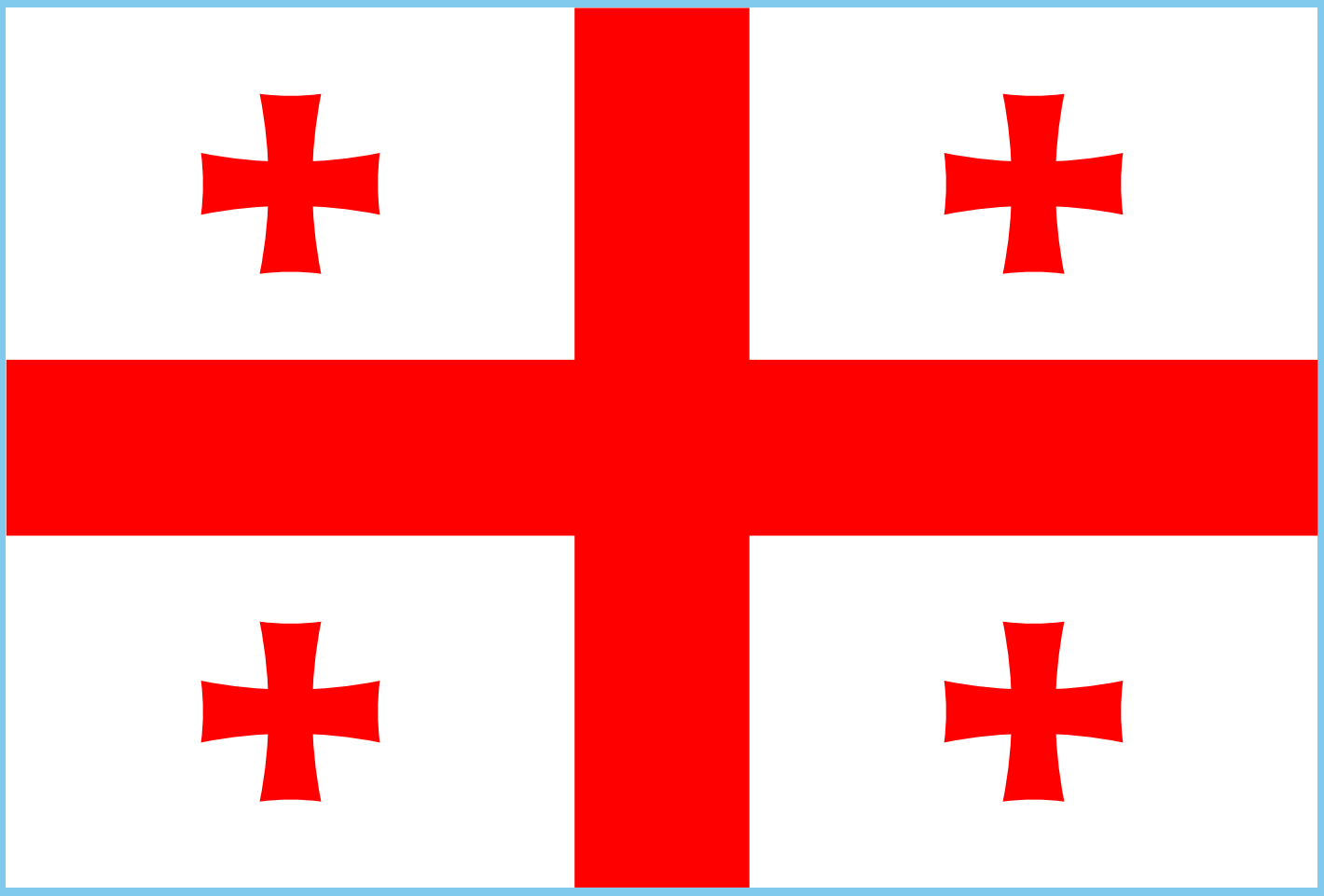
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Civic Space Report
October 2026



Nino Kalandadze

Civic Space Report Georgia

4liberty.eu Civic Space Report 2025/2026

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Civic Space Report 2025/2026

Georgia

Country Score: **Hostile**

Country Trend: ↘

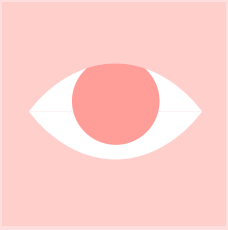
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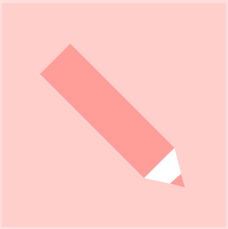
Cluster A: 1.20
A1 Equal treatment: 1
A2 Political recognition as partners: 1
A3 Refrained authorities from smearing: 1
A4 No weaponization of state powers: 1
A5 Transparent and open public institutions: 2



Cluster B: 1.40
B1 Free establishment and operation: 2
B2 CSOs enjoy a safe space: 1
B3 Liberty of resourcing: 1
B4 Enabling fiscal environment: 2
B5 Free expression of criticism: 1



Cluster C: 1.60
C1 Citizens trust: 2
C2 Present in media: 2
C3 Free engagement: 1
C4 CSOs embedded in communities: 2
C5 Freedom of assembly: 1



Cluster D: 1.00
D1 Decision-making participation: 1
D2 Timely consultations: 1
D3 Policies for cooperation: 1
D4 Free advocacy: 1
D5 Government listens: 1

Civic Space Report – Georgia

Introduction

Since late 2024, the civic space in Georgia has come under increasing pressure from the Georgian Dream government. Its domestic and foreign policy has become progressively more illiberal and anti-Western, most notably in the decision to postpone EU accession negotiations until 2028. At the same time, the government has increasingly portrayed critical civil society organizations, independent media and the political opposition as agents of hostile foreign interests, seeking not only to restrict their activities but also to undermine their legitimacy. (Sputnik Georgia, 2026b) A growing body of legislation has been introduced along the lines of Russia's "foreign agents" framework, while enforcement powers have been concentrated in an Anti-Corruption Bureau accountable to the Prime Minister. The authorities have also maintained a sustained police crackdown on the protest movement that emerged after the decision to postpone the accession process. In November 2025, the European Commission concluded that Georgian CSOs were operating in "a repressive environment which increasingly deteriorates" and described Georgia as a "candidate country in name only." In December 2025, CIVICUS downgraded Georgia's civic space rating to "Repressed", following its earlier downgrade to "Obstructed" in 2024 (European Commission, 2025; CIVICUS Monitor, 2026).

The role of the courts is particularly important in assessing this trajectory. Unlike in some of the comparator cases examined under this methodology, Georgian courts have not acted as an effective check on the government's legislative agenda. No domestic court has invalidated the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or the expanded powers of the Anti-Corruption Bureau. This is significant

given the Venice Commission's finding that the foundational law does not meet the requirements of legality, legitimacy and proportionality necessary to justify restrictions on freedom of association and expression.

The picture that emerges is therefore one in which formal and practical restrictions have developed together. This is not simply a case of legal protections remaining formally in place while their implementation becomes increasingly restrictive. The legal framework itself has been changing, while administrative enforcement, public pressure and the treatment of protesters have moved in the same direction. For the purposes of this assessment, that distinction matters: the deterioration of civic space in Georgia is visible both in the rules governing civil society and in the conditions under which organizations and activists are expected to operate.



Cluster A – Institutional and Political Environment and Narratives of CSOs

A1 – Equal treatment

Standard. *The state treats all CSOs equally with regard to their establishment, registration and activities, and does not restrict organizations because they express views critical of officials or policy without privileging loyal or government-organized/funded entities (GONGOs).*[1]

Article 22 of the Constitution of Georgia guarantees freedom of association, and an association may be dissolved only by a court decision. (Constitution of Georgia, 1995) Until 2024, organizations could receive domestic and foreign funding without prior government approval; this changed with the June 12, 2025 amendment to the Law on Grants, which requires prior government consent to receive foreign funding, subject to certain exceptions. (Law of Georgia on Grants, 2025) The Council of Europe's Venice Commission, in a formal urgent opinion, found that the underlying Transparency of Foreign Influence Law fails all four tests required to justify restricting association and expression rights under the European Convention: legality, legitimacy, necessity/proportionality, and non-discrimination — and recommended the law's repeal. (Venice Commission, 2024)

After the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence was adopted in May 2024, organizations receiving at least 20% of their funding from abroad were required to register as "organizations carrying the interests of a foreign power" — a category consisting almost entirely of government-critical, foreign-funded organizations and media. (BTI Blog, 2024; Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence, 2024) The ruling party simultaneously discussed a grant fund for registered organizations, with the Prime Minister thanking those who registered "on their own initiative" (Netgazeti, 2024a) — rewarding compliance under the same law that penalized these organizations, revealing an aim to halt independent operations while incentivizing GONGOs, channeling state resources toward loyalists while critical organizations remain under registration, disclosure, and funding restrictions. In practice, only a small fraction of affected organizations registered — approximately 1.6% of those eligible — while the vast majority publicly refused, declaring their disobedience in a joint statement as a form of civic resistance to the law. (JAMnews, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2026a)

In November 2025, the State Grant Management Agency announced 17 winning organizations, receiving a total of GEL 1,657,775 (approx. EUR 564,000) — roughly GEL 100,000 (approx. EUR 34,000) each, though four had been established only in 2025. Combined with the Prime

Minister's framing of registration as a form of loyalty worthy of reward, this suggests that the fund was intended to replace critical organizations with government-aligned ones—consistent with Civil Georgia's reporting on a broader effort to substitute Western donor grants with state funding for preferred organizations. (Civil Georgia, 2025a) Regional civil society has been especially hard-hit: of 114 community organizations active in 2024, only 37 remained operational in 2025 (Human Rights Watch, 2026a). In September 2026, Prime Minister Kobakhidze announced that the Agency would be wound down and closed by the end of the year, stating that NGOs are an "artificial phenomenon invented for foreign political intervention"—a statement suggesting that, in the government's view, the state grant replacement strategy had already served its purpose and was no longer considered necessary. (InterPressNews, 2026a)

The Anti-Corruption Bureau's expanded powers (banking information, personal information, grant audits, fines) (Civil Georgia, 2026a) sit uneasily with its head being a Prime Minister appointee — a mechanism Transparency International Georgia itself says fails to guarantee independence. (Transparency International Georgia, 2022)

Trend. The trend is negative: the legal framework has moved consistently toward greater state control since 2024, from the original registration requirement to the Bureau's expanded, unaccountable enforcement powers, with no offsetting reforms in the same period.

Score 1 – Hostile: registration and disclosure requirements, and the Bureau's enforcement powers, have expanded since 2024 with no offsetting reform.

A2 – Political recognition as partners

Standard. *Public institutions and officeholders recognize CSOs as legitimate, independent democratic actors and engage them as partners rather than adversaries.*

The relationship between the government and civil society has deteriorated substantially since the first introduction of the Law on Transparency in 2023 — a version withdrawn after mass protests, then reintroduced and adopted in 2024. Government rhetoric has increasingly portrayed CSOs as politically motivated actors "controlled by external forces," foreign "agents," or involved in attempts to destabilize the country, and officials have repeatedly accused CSOs of preparing or supporting a coup.

Since the introduction of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence,[2] cooperation between the authorities and CSOs has effectively collapsed: on April 25, 2024, 126 NGO and media organizations jointly announced they would suspend cooperation with the government until the bill was withdrawn. (Venice Commission, 2024)

Trend. The trend is negative: recognition has moved from adversarial rhetoric in 2023 to organized non-cooperation and targeted restrictions by 2024–2025, with no period of improved relations in between.

Score 1 – Hostile: formal non-cooperation (126 organizations) and targeted electoral-purpose scrutiny have replaced any partnership relationship.

A3 – Authorities refrain from smearing civil society organizations

> ***Standard.*** *Officials and state bodies refrain from stigmatizing, vilifying, or delegitimizing rhetoric and smear campaigns against CSOs (e.g., "foreign agents," "enemies"), including in state-supported media.*

The Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence itself has been central to this process. The original version required organizations receiving at least 20% of their funding from foreign donors to register as "foreign agents." Following sustained public opposition, the government withdrew that

version and replaced “agent” with “organization carrying the interests of a foreign power.” (Civil Georgia, 2026b) The terminology changed, but the stigmatizing aim remained.

The government has made stigmatizing civil society organizations a recurring feature of its political communication. When referring to CSOs, officials have used terms such as “foreign influence,” “external forces,” “Deep State orders,” and “local office of the global war party” — portraying organizations receiving foreign funding as instruments of foreign interests, supporters of the opposition, or facilitators of political unrest.

The campaign has extended beyond organizations to individual CSO leaders. Physical attacks on CSO offices followed the same pattern (see A4 for the June 2024 campaign and its Georgian Dream MP admission). Stigmatizing graffiti also appeared near CSO offices, describing organizations as “enemies of the nation,” “foreign agents,” and “Soros’s agents.” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2024c) The intimidation extended beyond public campaigns into private life: Front Line Defenders documented that more than 100 Georgian human rights defenders and CSOs received coordinated threatening phone calls in May 2024 alone, often from numbers spoofed to appear foreign, with callers also targeting defenders’ family members. (Front Line Defenders, 2024)

Trend. The trend is negative: stigmatizing rhetoric has escalated from contested legal terminology in 2024 to coordinated, large-scale intimidation campaigns reaching defenders’ families by mid-2024, with no indication of reversal since.

Score 1 – Hostile: state rhetoric and coordinated intimidation campaigns against CSOs and their families are sustained and unreversed.

A4 – No weaponization of state powers

Standard. *The state does not deploy institutional powers — audits, inspections, tax, security or law-enforcement bodies, or emergency measures and principles such as transparency, fiscal due diligence or privacy protection and the like — selectively or disproportionately to pressure CSOs because of their activities or views.*

Under the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the Anti-Corruption Bureau received access to organizations' funding, bank accounts, and activities (the Bureau was later folded into the State Audit Office, effective March 2, 2026). (Civil Georgia, 2026c)

State institutions have increasingly been used to place administrative and financial pressure on civil society organizations, disproportionately affecting those that investigate corruption, monitor elections, or criticize the government. The Bureau used its powers extensively against major watchdog organizations, demanding financial documentation, payroll information, and personal data. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2025a) In August 2025, authorities seized the financial accounts of seven major organizations. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2025b; Human Rights Watch, 2026a) Earlier, on September 24, 2024, Bureau head Razhden Kuprashvili classified Transparency International Georgia and NGO Choose Europe as "subjects with a declared electoral purpose." (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2024d) ISFED and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) came under similar scrutiny. This designation proved short-lived but revealing: the Bureau reversed course on October 2, 2024, the day after PM Kobakhidze publicly called for reconsideration — not an independent correction but proof the ostensibly independent Bureau bends to the Prime Minister's will. (Ambebi.ge, 2024)

Physical attacks have accompanied administrative pressure: Georgian Dream MP Dito Samkharadze acknowledged responsibility for a campaign targeting 22 media, political, and civil society organizations, publishing video of masked individuals carrying out the attacks. (OC Media, 2024)

Trend. The trend is negative and escalating: the Bureau's targeting expanded from a single, briefly reversed designation in September 2024 to systematic financial demands against six organizations and asset freezes against seven more within the following year.

Score 1 – Hostile: Bureau enforcement escalated from an isolated designation to systematic financial demands and asset freezes within a year.

A5 – Transparent and open public institutions

Standard. *Public institutions operate transparently and proactively provide access to information, enabling CSOs and citizens to scrutinize decisions and/or access to decision-making and hold authorities accountable.*

Georgian legislation formally guarantees access to public information. Article 10 of the General Administrative Code establishes the right of everyone to access information held by administrative bodies, subject to exceptions concerning state, professional, or commercial secrets and personal data. (General Administrative Code of Georgia, 1999)

Actual access to information has increasingly diverged from this legal standard, particularly for watchdog organizations. According to IDFI, of 7,582 requests submitted to 374 public institutions in 2022, only 58% received a response, just 35% within the statutory ten-day period, and 69 institutions answered none at all. (IDFI, 2022) The situation worsened in 2023: of 1,255 requests over five months, only 94 (7%) received a response. (iFact, 2024) Measurement did not continue after 2024, though further deterioration is presumed. An amendment to the Law on Common Courts, effective June 30, 2025, prohibited photography, filming, and broadcasting in court yards, buildings, and hearing rooms without permission. (MediaChecker, 2025) Parliament further restricted media access through its accreditation system. Rules introduced by Parliament

Speaker's order in February 2023 — and significantly tightened by further amendments in June 2026 — require journalists to stop questioning a member of parliament the moment the official declines to comment; violation results in accreditation suspension. The June 2026 amendments allow accreditation to be revoked for the entire media organization, not only the individual journalist, and increased the maximum suspension from six months to one year. Under these rules, over 15 journalists from independent outlets had their parliamentary accreditation suspended or revoked in the two months prior to the amendments alone, effectively barring critical media from covering parliamentary proceedings. (Transparency International Georgia, 2026c; Civil Georgia, 2026i)

The Georgian Court Watch's 2023 Court Efficiency Index gave judicial transparency a score of only 23%: courts fail to publish rulings, information is hard to obtain, the High Council of Justice no longer publishes minutes or allows attendance, and the judiciary publishes no annual reports. (Georgian Court Watch, 2023) The growing use of closed court hearings is a further obstacle for public-interest litigation and judicial monitoring — several high-profile cases, including those of special-forces officers accused of violence, former State Security Service head Grigol Liluashvili, and former Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, were heard behind closed doors. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2023)

Trend. The trend appears negative based on the 2022-2023 data available, though this cannot be confirmed with certainty for 2024-2026 since systematic measurement of response rates did not continue after 2024.

Score 2 – Obstructed: formal transparency guarantees exist, but documented response rates were already poor and post-2024 data is unavailable.



Cluster B – Legal and Financial Framework for Civil Society Organizations

B1 – Free establishment and operation

Standard. *Everyone can freely establish, join or participate in a CSO; CSOs are free to determine their own objectives and activities; and where registration as a legal entity is required, the procedure is clear, simple, quick and inexpensive. The state does not interfere in the internal governance and operations of CSOs; any monitoring, inspection or reporting is defined by law, proportionate to the CSO's size and activities, and not onerous.*

At the formal legal level, establishing a civil society organization remains relatively straightforward: CSOs register as non-commercial, non-profit legal entities, and the process requires only a limited set of founding documents — a charter, the founders' consent, and copies of founders' and board members' identification. (Civil Georgia, 2026d) State approval is therefore not required to establish a CSO.

The same registration and prior-consent requirements that apply generally to foreign-funded organizations also apply here (see A1 for the underlying legal detail and figures) — extending state oversight from external funding sources into what was previously an internal governance decision for each organization.

Establishing a CSO remains formally simple; the significant change is what follows registration.

Trend. The trend is negative: since 2024, operating and obtaining funding has grown steadily more difficult without government intervention, with no reversal in this trajectory to date.

Score 2 – Obstructed: registration itself remains simple, but the same foreign-funding restrictions from A1 apply once a CSO is established.

B2 – CSOs enjoy a safe space and protection from arbitrariness

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs are protected against arbitrary or politically motivated suspension, dissolution or sanction; such measures rest on clear legal grounds, proportionality and independent judicial review.*

Since the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence in 2024, enforcement has focused particularly on organizations working on corruption, human rights, and election monitoring: the Anti-Corruption Bureau — and, from March 2, 2026, the State Audit Office — was empowered to request donor lists, financial transactions, and staff and beneficiary personal data from any organization— including, in one case, personal data on minors and photo/video material, requested from the youth organization "Future Academy" via court order. (On.ge, 2025a; JAMnews, 2025b) Prominent targets included TI Georgia, (TI Georgia, n.d.) GYLA, (GYLA, n.d.) and ISFED, among others (see A4 for the parallel September 2024 designation of these organizations). (ISFED, n.d.)

The cumulative effect has been a growing "chilling effect," with organizations scaling back or terminating activities amid regulatory pressure and funding uncertainty, and donors struggling with the added bureaucracy. In October 2025, the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) announced it was suspending operations "indefinitely," with its director attributing the decision to both operating under restrictive laws and the country's broader democratic trajectory. (Civil Georgia, 2025b) In January 2026, Rights Georgia, a watchdog organization with 29 years of experience,

also ended its activities — withdrawing from 200 ongoing cases involving victims of violence and femicide and approximately 500 cases concerning people affected by the August 2008 war. (Civil Georgia, 2026e)

Trend. The trend is negative: enforcement actions and organizational closures have both continued into 2026 with no sign of stabilization since the law's 2024 adoption.

Score 1 – Hostile: enforcement actions and organizational closures have continued into 2026 with no stabilization.

B3 – Liberality of resourcing

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs are free to seek, receive and use financial and material resources from domestic, foreign and international sources, public or private, with no distinction in treatment between foreign/international and domestic resources, and without stigmatization.*

The ability of civil society organizations to obtain financial resources has deteriorated sharply since 2024, when foreign-funded organizations became subject to the registration and disclosure requirements described in A1 (Matsne, 2024) — creating a strong disincentive to rely on foreign funding given the political stigma attached to the designation. The situation became more restrictive in 2025, when amendments to the Law on Grants required prior state consent before a foreign grant could be received (see A1) — giving the authorities considerable influence over access to foreign resources. (Law of Georgia on Grants, 2025)

At the same time, the authorities created a state-funded alternative for organizations registered under the new framework (see A1) — leaving organizations dependent on foreign donations facing registration and stigmatization, while those loyal to the authorities could receive direct state support.

Georgian civil society has also become a casualty of collapsing international funding relationships that this legislative environment helped trigger. Georgia had been the largest recipient of USAID assistance in the South Caucasus ($110 million in 2024 alone). (European Leadership Network, 2024) That funding was cut as part of the global suspension of USAID programmes — a decision driven by U.S. domestic politics rather than by Georgia's own legal changes. By contrast, the EU froze €30 million and halted Georgia's accession process specifically in response to the same law (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2024e), while the U.S. separately paused more than $95 million in assistance to the Georgian government on related grounds (Civil Georgia, 2024a). The government's public welcome of the incoming U.S. administration's global USAID suspension (Global Voices, 2025) suggests that the broader shift in international funding may have aligned with, rather than threatened, its agenda, alongside a wider donor shift involving German political foundations, EU institutions, and U.S. agencies. Whether specific European or U.S. private funders also withdrew because of the law itself, rather than for unrelated reasons, could not be independently confirmed from public sources.

Trend. The trend is negative: access to resourcing has narrowed at each step since 2024, from registration requirements to prior-consent rules to a collapsing international donor base.

Score 1 – Hostile: registration, prior-consent rules and a collapsing donor base have narrowed access to resourcing at each step since 2024.

B4 – Enabling fiscal environment

Standard. *CSOs and their donors enjoy a favorable and stable tax environment that supports CSO resourcing and encourages philanthropy. Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism measures, and sanction regimes are applied to CSOs proportionately and on a risk basis.*

Georgia's tax system does not, in itself, create major additional obstacles for CSOs. Under Georgian law, grants and donations received by a CSO are exempt from profit tax. Organizations nevertheless pay income tax on employee salaries and VAT when their economic turnover exceeds GEL 100,000. (OC Media, 2026a)

The exemption therefore applies to grants and donations rather than to the organization as a whole. Salaries remain subject to taxation in the same way as in other organizations. (Legal.ge, n.d.) Employers are also required to make a further 2% contribution to the pension fund from their own resources. (National Bank of Georgia, n.d.)

These provisions are applied largely as written: no pattern of discretionary tax audits, AML/CFT misuse, or selective enforcement against CSOs on fiscal grounds has been documented, in contrast to the Anti-Corruption Bureau's use of financial-oversight powers detailed in A4 and B2. The gap between formal rule and lived experience that characterizes most other standards in this report is largely absent here. Domestic philanthropy remains structurally underdeveloped, however: Georgia's tax code offers no incentive for individual giving, and only around a third of CSOs report receiving corporate support (ECNL, 2022) — meaning the exemptions above apply to a funding base that was already thin, well before the 2024–2025 legal changes reduced foreign funding.

Taxation is not the principal obstacle facing civil society in Georgia — the tax framework itself remains relatively manageable. However, the Standard requires not only a workable tax treatment but a framework that actively encourages philanthropy; Georgia's lacks the latter, since, as noted above, domestic philanthropic capacity remains structurally thin. The more serious restrictions on CSO resourcing arise from the legislation governing how organizations can raise and receive funds, particularly foreign grants (see A1, B3), rather than from taxation itself.

Trend. The trend here is neutral to stable: unlike most other standards in this report, the tax framework itself has not been amended in a more restrictive direction during the assessment period.

Score 2 – Obstructed: the tax treatment of grants and salaries is workable, but the framework provides no incentive for private philanthropy, leaving CSOs reliant on a structurally thin domestic funding base.

B5 – Free expression of criticism

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs, activists and journalists can express opinions and criticism freely, online and offline, and are protected from SLAPPs, legal intimidation and disproportionate sanctions.*

Freedom of expression has deteriorated significantly since 2024. Georgia's position in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index fell 48 places in three years, from 77th in 2023 to 135th in 2026 (out of 180 countries). (Civil Georgia, 2026f) A TI Georgia report documented more than 180 cases of violence and intimidation against journalists in the first nine months of 2025, with courts and law enforcement reflecting partisan interests through unlawful detention and impunity for perpetrators. (Tabula, 2025a) A parallel stigmatization campaign uses terms such as "external influence" and "local office of the global war party." A February 2025 amendment to the Code of Administrative Offenses (Article 173[16]) classified insults directed at officials as an administrative offense, under which courts fined six journalists in June 2025 over critical social media comments about Georgian Dream lawmakers; in May 2026, the government announced a new Interior Ministry unit tasked with proactively monitoring public communication for "hate speech" and referring cases to court (JAMnews, 2026a; JAMnews, 2026b) — compounding a media environment already narrowing in plurality and independence (see C2).

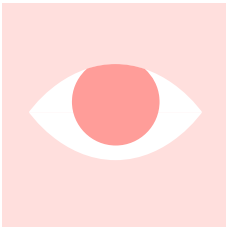
The most severe developments concern restrictions on protest. Since February 2025, the government has passed numerous laws limiting the

right to protest, (Publika, 2025a) including raising maximum administrative detention to 60 days — twice the 30-day limit in Russia and Belarus. (GYLA, 2025) A second road-blocking offense carries a one-year sentence, a third, two years. (Tabula, 2025b)

Under this framework, people have been detained on Rustaveli Avenue for holding a blank banner, standing near Parliament, or simply standing on the sidewalk. (Transparency International Georgia, 2026a)

Trend. The trajectory is consistently downward, with each successive protest-law amendment narrowing the space for lawful dissent further than the last.

Score 1 – Hostile: press-freedom ranking, journalist prosecutions, and protest-related detentions have all worsened sharply since 2024.



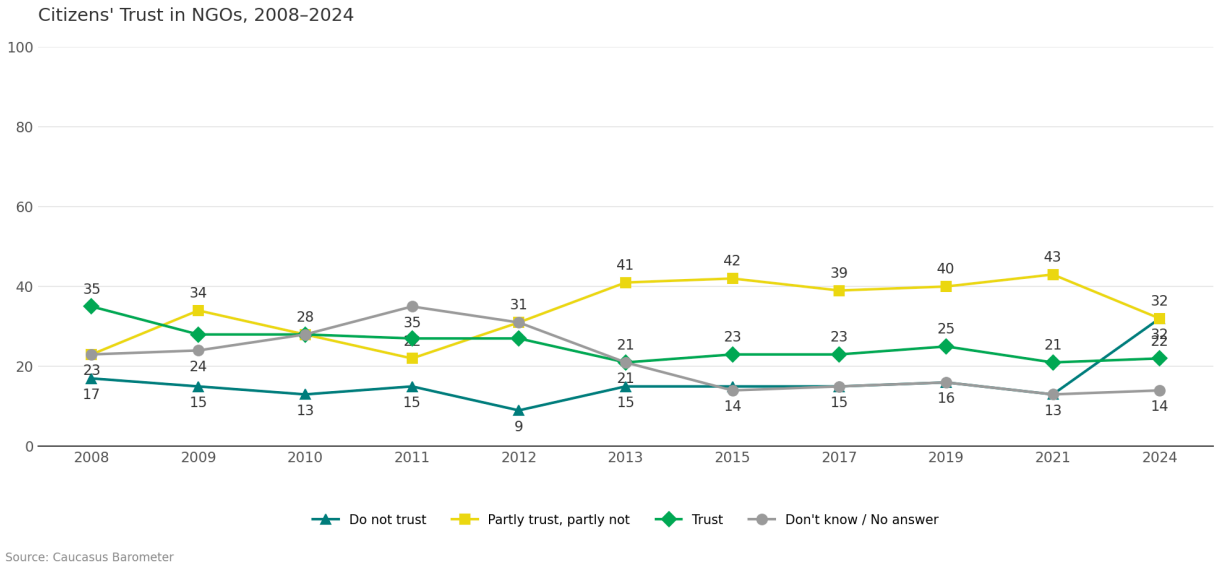
Cluster C – Public Participation and Perceptions of Civil Society Organizations' Work

C1 – Citizens' trust

Standard. *Citizens broadly trust CSOs and regard them as legitimate, valuable contributors to public life.*

Measuring citizens' trust in Georgian civil society has become increasingly difficult due to a scarcity of public opinion polling since 2024. The most recent Caucasus Barometer data reveals a fragmented landscape: 32% of

citizens express distrust toward NGOs, an equal 32% remain ambivalent, 22% report full trust, and 14% decline to answer. (Caucasus Barometer, 2024) Compared to previous years, this marks a clear decline in trust alongside a measurable rise in skepticism.



Citizens' trust in NGOs, 2008–2024. Source: Caucasus Barometer

This erosion of credibility is not merely an organic shift in public sentiment. A 2025 CRRC study demonstrates that the "global war party" narrative, actively propagated by Georgian Dream, directly fuels anti-Western and conspiratorial attitudes, serving as a primary driver of hostility toward the non-governmental sector. (CRRC Georgia, 2025) Given the state's overwhelming advantage in media resources and propaganda, organizations that lose public trust struggle to rapidly mobilize support against smear campaigns, leaving them acutely vulnerable to state-led disinformation.

Trend. Looking ahead, the trend is negative: intensified dehumanization campaigns by authorities, coupled with the sector's mounting financial and organizational crises, point toward a continued downward trajectory rather than stabilization.

Score 2 – Obstructed: trust is fragmented (32% distrust, 22% trust) and declining amid state-driven disinformation.

C2 – Pluralistic representation in media

Standard. *CSOs are represented in the media fairly and pluralistically, with access to diverse, independent outlets that report on their work without systemic bias.*

An April 2026 broadcasting law amendment banned foreign funding for broadcasters, directly forcing "Formula" to cancel its early-morning programming. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2026)

Media coverage of Georgia's civil sector reflects the country's sharply polarized information landscape. Independent media generally provides robust, impartial coverage, regularly hosting sector representatives. However, the institutional and financial fragility of these outlets worsened significantly between 2025 and 2026: the television channel "Mtavari Arkhi" ceased broadcasting entirely in May 2025 following a funding crisis. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2025c) Even independent online media struggles to survive on public donations; the "Sinatle Media" coalition (22 outlets) raised a mere 100,000 GEL over three months in 2025 to maintain operations amid relentless discrediting campaigns. (InterPressNews, 2025a)

Conversely, pro-government media consistently frames civil society through a biased lens, systematically denying airtime to civic representatives and frequently spearheading smear campaigns. Notable examples include a March 2026 attack on the former Public Defender, falsely alleging she asked the German ambassador to revoke Georgia's visa liberalization, (MythDetector, 2026a) alongside similar campaigns against journalist and Netgazeti editor-in-chief Mzia Amaghlobeli, now a political prisoner, and broader accusations that civil society acts as a foreign agent or coup facilitator. (MythDetector, 2026b; Imedi News, 2026; Netgazeti, 2026a; Amnesty International, 2026)

A 2025 MDF Georgia study found that 45% of respondents primarily consume news from pro-government channels, compared to just 23% for independent outlets, while 26% avoid television news entirely. (MDF Georgia, 2025)

Trend. The trend is negative: independent outlets have lost both funding and audience share since 2025, while state pressure on broadcasters has continued into 2026.

Score 2 – Obstructed: independent outlets remain active but are losing funding and audience share to pro-government media.

C3 – Free engagement

> ***Standard.*** *Citizens can engage freely and safely in civic activities — volunteering, activism, donating, protest — and such participation is socially accepted and not penalized.*

A March 2026 legal change explicitly banned legal entities from engaging in public political activity. (BM.ge, 2026) Under the amendments, a legal entity found to have engaged in political activity outside its core business purpose faces an administrative fine of GEL 20,000, escalating to criminal liability for repeat violations (Georgia Today, 2026) (see D4). According to legal experts, the wording of the legislation is vague and it's hard to determine exactly what conduct might give rise to criminal liability (BLB, 2026), which is a ground for selective justice and political persecution.

Civic engagement in Georgia grew markedly more perilous between 2025 and 2026, as new legislation severely curtailed avenues for public participation. Authorities have increasingly weaponized laws restricting freedom of expression, sentencing dozens to administrative detention merely for standing on sidewalks or blocking roads. (Transparency International Georgia, 2026b; Netgazeti, 2025) In May 2026, activist Zurab Menteshashvili became the first person criminally convicted

under the tightened protest legislation, sentenced to nine months for repeatedly "blocking the road"; released July 31, 2026, he said he would continue protesting. (Publika, 2026) A second person was similarly charged in Zugdidi in March 2026, before release via a plea agreement. (OC Media, 2026b) The broader environment for free expression has similarly degraded. Courts now routinely issue summonses, fines, and administrative detentions against activists, journalists, and ordinary citizens for their social media posts, (Tabula, 2026; Ambebi.ge, 2026; Formula News, 2025a; Publika, 2025b) while police regularly detain individuals over protest banners. (Civil Georgia, 2026g) Beyond legal restrictions, civic activists face organized violence from both unpunished criminal groups and law enforcement officers employing excessive force. (Tabula, 2025c; Tabula, 2025d; Tabula, 2025e; Human Rights Watch, 2026b) Law enforcement routinely fails to investigate these incidents.

Donations historically sustained Georgian civic activism, but a March 2025 prosecutor-ordered freeze on protest-support funds (see C5) now leaves similar fundraising efforts at risk of the same fate, (Tabula, 2025f) drastically chilling citizen philanthropy. While volunteer activity remains technically legal, active participation in civic life now entails significant personal safety risks, driven by a sharp rise in political violence over the past two years.

Trend. The trend is negative and worsening: each successive year since 2024 has added new legal and practical barriers to civic participation, with no countervailing improvement identified.

Score 1 – Hostile: criminal liability for protest, organized violence against activists, and frozen donation channels have made civic participation actively dangerous.

C4 – CSOs embedded in communities

Standard. *CSOs are embedded in their communities and able to mobilize grassroots support, public solidarity and cross-sector backing in defense of civic space.*

Georgian civil society previously demonstrated strong grassroots mobilization capacity, particularly during the 2023–2024 mass protests against restrictive legislative initiatives. (Civil Georgia, 2024b) Civil society organizations played a leading role in initiating a broad-based movement that united students, artists, educators, (Tabula, 2024) medical professionals, (Netgazeti, 2024b) athletes, and prominent public figures. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2024f) Although this diverse coalition successfully forced the regime to temporarily back down in 2023, Georgian Dream ultimately adopted the re-initiated repressive legislation in 2024 despite renewed public outcry.

As authoritarian consolidation accelerated through 2025 and 2026, the sector's operational capacity has been severely weakened by critical funding shortages, pervasive state control, and the constant threat of political persecution: some organizations have dissolved entirely, others have relocated abroad, and the state has frozen the bank accounts of several more. (Human Rights Watch, 2026c) Today, Georgia's civic sector occupies its weakest position since the country's independence. The sector retains a rich, accumulated legacy of solidarity and cross-sectoral cooperation. Nevertheless, the institutional paralysis induced by sustained state repression currently prevents organizations from translating that experience into effective, on-the-ground action, leaving communities without vital advocacy.

Trend. The trend is clearly negative, with no sign of stabilization: capacity has eroded continuously since 2024 rather than reaching a new equilibrium.

Score 2 – Obstructed: grassroots mobilization capacity that peaked in 2023–2024 has eroded continuously under funding and security pressure.

C5 – Freedom of assembly

> ***Standard.*** *Everyone can freely enjoy the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, organizing and participating in assemblies (including online), without unwarranted interference.*

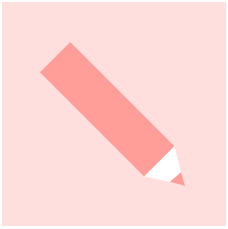
Over the past two years, a confluence of factors has stripped Georgian citizens of their freedom of assembly and association. Authorities have deployed brutal police violence against demonstrators, (Human Rights Watch, 2024) including documented cases of sexual violence against female protesters. (OC Media, 2025) Thousands of demonstrators have faced detention and heavy fines, (Civil Georgia, 2026h) and the judiciary has become increasingly politicized. (Civil Georgia, 2026h) Furthermore, the government has tacitly or explicitly enabled organized criminal groups to target demonstrators, contributing to a landscape with over 90 political prisoners (Transparency International Georgia, 2025a) and more than 150 politically motivated detentions according to Amnesty International. (Amnesty International, 2026)[3] Laws governing expression have tightened to the point that merely standing on a sidewalk in protest is now illegal. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2024g)

The scale is quantifiable: GYLA documented that fines imposed on protesters for "blocking roads" reached GEL 2 million (approximately $715,000) between November 28, 2024 and March 18, 2025 alone, an increase in the applicable fine from GEL 500 (approx. EUR 170) to

GEL 5,000 (approx. EUR 1,700). Under a politicized judiciary and security apparatus, any citizen choosing to protest automatically risks severe financial penalties or up to 60 days of administrative detention.

Trend. The trend is sharply negative: fines have risen from a GEL 500 (approx. EUR 170) baseline to levels now 35 times the monthly subsistence minimum within roughly two years, with detention periods and criminal liability expanding over the same window.

Score 1 – Hostile: fines, detention limits, and criminal liability for peaceful assembly have all expanded sharply since 2024.



Cluster D – CSOs as Policy Makers

D1 – Right to participate in decision-making including in the policy cycle

> ***Standard.*** *Everyone has the right to participate in decision-making, and authorities use various mechanisms to ensure meaningful public and CSO participation, with redress for non-compliance. There is regular, open, and effective participation of CSOs across the policy cycle (development, implementation, monitoring); any CSO may participate without discrimination, with timely access to relevant information.*

Government Resolution No. 629 (December 20, 2019) makes public consultation mandatory before any government policy document can be approved (Article 9), requiring stakeholder notification and a summary report of results. (Government of Georgia, 2019) This baseline covers

executive policy-making only — not parliamentary legislation, which follows separate procedures and is where the laws discussed below (the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), the Grants Law) were passed.

By 2026, civil society in Georgia is entirely excluded from the decision-making process. Civil society's last genuine attempt to influence legislation was the 2023 Agents Law hearings, where sustained protest forced a temporary retreat; since 2024, however, Georgian Dream has passed the re-introduced and subsequent laws unilaterally, ignoring the recommendations of international bodies like the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission. (Social Justice Center, 2025) Compounding this isolation, the Parliament of Georgia amended its Rules of Procedure on February 6, 2025, abolishing the rule mandating civil society participation in decision-making. (Transparency International Georgia, 2025b) The political landscape compounds this exclusion: with three of the four opposition parties refusing their 2024 mandates and the fourth soon ceasing participation, parliament operated as a de facto single-party body, cutting off civil society and formal opposition alike (Transparency International Georgia, 2025c)— opposition party Gakharia for Georgia's later return to parliament did not alter this dynamic. For the past two years, Georgian Dream has legislated unilaterally through accelerated procedures devoid of consultation.

This exclusion extends to the international arena. When Georgian civil society attempts to advocate on the country's behalf abroad, it faces severe backlash, including public attacks and accusations of sabotage or treason. (Formula News, 2025b; IPress, 2025) For example, the pro-government outlet "Imedi" recently characterized an analytical article on Iran by Giorgi Kandelaki as an act of treason. (Imedi TV (Facebook), 2026)[4]

Trend. The trend is negative, moving consistently in one direction: from performative consultation in 2023 to formal abolition of the participation requirement itself in 2025, foreclosing reversal through ordinary political means.

Score 1 – Hostile: the legal requirement for CSO participation in decision-making was formally abolished in February 2025.

D2 – Timely consultations and equal participation

Standard. *Consultations are launched early, allow adequate time, and supply the information needed for substantive input. Participation is adequately resourced and accessible (online and offline), so that grassroots and under-resourced CSOs are not excluded due to limited means.*

Civil society not only lacks timely consultation but is actively barred from meaningful participation in policymaking. While a consultation mechanism technically remains on the books, it functions purely as a decorative formality. The Foreign Agents Registration Act illustrates this clearly: registered on February 27, 2025, the bill passed all three readings by April 1 — a rushed, month-long process that bypassed genuine public discussion. (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2025a) A similar pattern emerged with the Law on Grants: backed at first reading in April 2025, and fully adopted by June 12 without public consultation. (JAMnews, 2025a) Ironically, the law itself grants the government a mere 10-day deadline to approve a grant — a stark contrast with the zero time allotted for public deliberation. (JAMnews, 2025a)

Consequently, civil-sector involvement in decision-making is functionally nonexistent — not merely delayed or under-resourced, but absent as a matter of practice. Since the requirement for CSO involvement was itself abolished by the February 6, 2025 amendment to Parliament's Rules of Procedure (see D1), (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2025d) there is no formal channel through which grassroots or under-resourced organizations, which depend most on guaranteed rather than discretionary consultation, could participate even if the political will existed.

The shift is from bad faith to no obligation at all: where 2023's discussions were at least performative, consultation is now formally, not merely practically, absent.

Trend. The trend is negative: this represents a clear escalation from evasion to outright legal abolition of the consultation requirement.

Score 1 – Hostile: consultation is formally, not just practically, absent, with major laws passed without public input.

D3 – Policies encourage cooperation with CSOs

> ***Standard.*** *State policies actively facilitate cooperation with CSOs: there is a strategy/policy on cooperation, and transparent consultative bodies that genuinely feed into decision-making.*

Formal institutional mechanisms for state-civil society cooperation have been systematically dismantled. Between November 2024 and October 2025, parliament abolished the Open Government Council and eliminated the requirement for parliamentary committees to submit annual action plans. Legislative proposals are no longer debated in committee; instead, they are routed directly to MPs. (Transparency International Georgia, 2025c) Furthermore, working-group minutes and detailed meeting information have vanished from official websites. (InterPressNews, 2025b) The government also abolished the "Minister's Hour" and the institution of thematic inquiry. During the reporting period, no committee summoned an official for a hearing, and MPs submitted a total of only four parliamentary questions. (InterPressNews, 2025b) As Transparency International Georgia concluded, parliament "has finally refused to cooperate with civil society and has adopted laws whose purpose is the abolition of Georgian NGOs." (InterPressNews, 2025b) In April 2026, the Open Government Partnership permanently suspended Georgia, concluding that "the conditions necessary for participation in OGP, including an enabling environment for government and civil society collaboration, are no longer present." (Open Government Partnership, 2026) The Anti-Corruption Bureau's oversight functions were themselves restructured during this period, folded into the State Audit Office effective March 2, 2026 (see A4, B2) — consolidating, rather than diffusing, the state's oversight powers over CSOs.

Rather than fostering collaboration, Georgian Dream's recent strategy focuses on maximizing restrictions on civic space. This is evident in the steady adoption of restrictive laws, (Transparency International Georgia, 2025b) state-sponsored discrediting campaigns, (Amnesty International, 2026) and the tacit encouragement of violence and persecution against activists. (Amnesty International, 2026)

Transparency International Georgia's one-year review (2024–2025) confirms that this regression is consistent, not episodic.

Trend. The trend is clearly negative: cooperation mechanisms have been dismantled one by one over a sustained 18-month period rather than through a single event, and TI Georgia's own review found no reversal within that window. The systematic closure of the legislative process directly reinforces the exclusion detailed in D1 and D2: without consultative bodies, civil society lacks even the basic means to stay informed, let alone exert influence.

Score 1 – Hostile: consultative bodies and reporting mechanisms have been dismantled systematically since late 2024.

D4 – Free advocacy and watchdogging

> ***Standard.*** *CSOs can freely conduct advocacy, watchdog and campaigning activities to influence policy and opinion, without these being restricted, taxed or reclassified as prohibited "political" activity.*

Civil society currently confronts two primary obstacles in executing its advocacy and watchdog functions: severe financial constraints driven by repressive laws, frozen bank accounts, and the suspension of foreign funding; and organized, often violent, public smear campaigns. A March 2026 law goes further, imposing administrative fines (rising to criminal liability on repeat violations) on any legal entity found to have engaged in political activity outside its stated purpose (Georgia Today, 2026) — CSOs are covered as legal entities, though the statute itself does not

name them specifically (see C3). Authorities apply these restrictive laws with calculated selectivity, targeting watchdog organizations that pose the greatest threat to state impunity — most visibly TI Georgia, targeted through both the "declared electoral purpose" designation and demands for financial documentation from six leading watchdog groups (see A4). (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2024d; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Georgia, 2025a) The state has also blocked specific advocacy funding at the source: it rejected a UK Embassy-funded project supporting four Georgian organizations monitoring the 2025 municipal elections, which Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili publicly attacked as "funding extremism, hatred, and propaganda." (Human Rights Watch, 2026a)

The state has also directly curtailed election monitoring, a cornerstone of civic watchdogging. April 2025 amendments to the election law banned polling station observers from photographing or filming inside the polling station and from requesting voter identification, changes that ISFED assessed as substantially undermining effective electoral observation. (ISFED, 2025)

Trend. The trend is negative: restrictions on advocacy have expanded consistently since 2023 — from broad legislative frameworks to targeting specific functions like election monitoring and anti-corruption research — confirming a deliberate design to neutralize accountability activities, not incidental overreach.

Score 1 – Hostile: financial pressure, targeted designations, and curtailed election monitoring have deliberately narrowed advocacy and watchdog functions.

D5 – Government listens

Standard. *Public authorities give CSO and public input genuine consideration and provide reasoned, traceable feedback on how contributions affected the final decision.*

Over the past two years, Georgian authorities have not once incorporated civil society's positions into decision-making. Georgian Dream openly rejects collaboration with the sector, routinely labeling CSOs "agents of foreign influence" or "conduits of foreign interests." International recommendations fare no better: the Venice Commission urged withdrawal of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" in May 2024, and PACE co-rapporteurs reaffirmed in November 2025 that this law and subsequent legislation (FARA, the Law on Grants) violate European standards — both calls remain unfulfilled. (Council of Europe, 2024; Council of Europe, 2025)

The most measurable indicator of this institutional deafness is parliament's handling of the Public Defender's reports: the 2025 resolution completely ignored 44 recommendations from the 2024 report, mirroring the preceding year's pattern of disregard — a pattern that continued into June 2026, when parliament merely "took note of" the Public Defender's latest report without any obligation to act on it. (Public Defender's Office of Georgia, 2024; Sputnik Georgia, 2026a)

This absence of a feedback mechanism is structural, not incidental: neither domestic institutions like the Public Defender nor external bodies like the Venice Commission or PACE can trigger a reasoned policy response.

Trend. The trend is negative and consistent rather than worsening further: non-responsiveness has held steady at essentially zero across 2024, 2025, and 2026 rather than fluctuating.

Score 1 – Hostile: CSO and Public Defender input has been consistently disregarded with no functioning feedback mechanism since 2024.

Conclusion

Read together, the 20 standards point to one overarching conclusion: the period from January 2025 to June 2026 is best understood as a period of cumulative pressure rather than one defined by a single decisive event.

Legislative changes, administrative measures and increasingly hostile political rhetoric have reinforced one another over time. During this period, civil society has had to operate under the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and its successor, the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Further restrictions have followed through extensive amendments to the Law on Grants, including a requirement for government pre-approval of foreign funding. A State Grant Management Agency has also been established to channel public funding toward government-aligned organizations. Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Bureau has been given broad powers to freeze assets, require the disclosure of personal and beneficiary information, and designate organizations as having a "declared electoral purpose." These formal measures have been accompanied by sustained public attacks on named CSO leaders by senior government officials, as well as an increasingly punitive response to protest activity, including fines, detentions and criminal prosecutions.

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Endnotes

1 Note on scope: for the purposes of this assessment, "civil society organizations" refers to independent, non-governmental organizations rather than the full international definition of civil society (which can include government-affiliated bodies). Incentivizing GONGOs in the Georgian context specifically means rewarding organizations loyal to the government; government-affiliated organizations are not treated as part of civil society here given their lack of independence.

2 Dubbed the "Russian law" for its resemblance to Russia's 2012 Foreign Agents Law.

3 The cited figures on political prisoners rely on different methodologies. Transparency International's data reflects a verifiable list of currently detained individuals based on Council of Europe criteria, whereas Amnesty International's figure encompasses anyone deprived of liberty through politically motivated proceedings since late 2024, regardless of subsequent release or case closure.

4 Imedi TV is designated on the UK Consolidated Sanctions List (reference RUS3393) for the dissemination of Russian disinformation. UK Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation: https://search-uk-sanctions-list.service.gov.uk/designations/RUS3393/Entity.

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