Georgia's Media Environment and Internet Freedom in International Assessments - 2026

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The quality of media and internet freedom in Georgia has changed significantly for the worse in recent years. Local observers and international organisations both point to a deteriorating political, legal and security environment for journalists.[3] The decline in internet freedom stems less from technical restrictions than from unfavourable conditions for online expression and civic activity.

In the 2026 World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Georgia ranks 135th out of 180 countries, down from 114th in 2025. Over the same period, Georgia's score in Freedom House's Freedom on the Net index fell from 70 to 68. This moved the country from the "Free" category to "Partly Free". The decline also showed in Freedom House's broader index of political rights and civil liberties. Georgia received 51 points in 2026, against 55 the year before.

These results rest on different methodologies, so comparing them directly would be wrong. However, they do point to a common trend: the environment for freely producing, distributing and receiving information in Georgia is being increasingly restricted. To understand this trend, it helps to separate three dimensions of media freedom: technical ability to distribute information, independence of journalists and media organisations, citizens' ability to express opinions publicly without expecting legal or other pressure. Georgia still has a pluralistic media space, independent online outlets operate, and citizens can access the main social platforms. Yet the country's positions in international indices worsen from year to year.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is a non-profit international organisation founded in 1985. Its aim is to strengthen media freedom, pluralism and independence worldwide. To assess press freedom, it divides its questionnaire into five main areas: political context, legislative framework, economic context, sociocultural context and safety.

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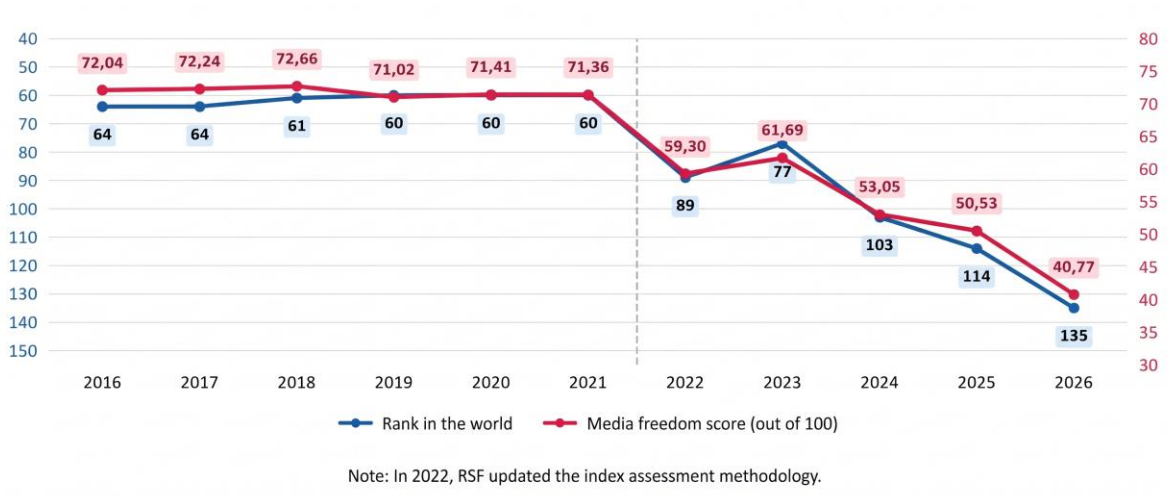
[3] Center for Media, Information, and Social Research (CMIS). The State of Journalists' Safety in Georgia – September 2025 – August 2026. https://cmis.ge/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/THE-STATE-OF-JOURNALISTS-SAFETY-IN-GEORGIA_2026_final.pdf

According to the RSF's methodology,[4] the reporting period for assessing countries is January to December. If a sudden interference in media freedom or severe repressive steps occur between the assessment and publication, the relevant indicator is updated. Such events could include a new war, a coup, attacks on journalists or other major events. If the index has already been published, the update comes after publication. For the 2026 index the reporting period is January–December 2025. The 2026 scores therefore reflect events of 2025.

The index scores conditions from 0 to 100 (where 0 is the lowest). The assessment uses quantitative indicators, such as attacks on journalists, the number of journalists injured and the number of journalists deprived of liberty. It also assesses the qualitative situation in each country and territory through a questionnaire available in 25 languages. In the qualitative part, media freedom specialists fill in the questionnaire, including journalists, researchers, academics and human rights defenders. The questionnaire is completed separately for each indicator and contains more than 100 questions in total.[5]

Chart 1: Georgia in the RSF Press Freedom Index, 2016–2026



Source: Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

[4] Reporters Without Borders. The methodology used for compiling the World Press Freedom Index 2026. Via link: https://rsf.org/en/methodology-used-compiling-world-press-freedom-index-2026

[5] The Georgian-language description of RSF's research methodology is taken from the Gnomon Wise policy document "Regulations Financially and Substantively Harmful to Broadcast Media and Their Alternatives" (2023). Authors: Davit Kutidze and Malkhaz Rekhviashvili.
Available at: https://gnomonwise.org/ge/publications/policypapers/150

Alongside the fall in the overall score, regression is visible in every indicator. Compared with the previous year, the 2026 scores in political context dicreased from 34.25 to 28.02, in economic context - from 37.44 to 34.46, in legal context - from 57.80 to 46.92, in social context - from 56.88 to 49.60, and in journalists' safety - from 66.31 to 44.85.

According to RSF, Georgian media are diverse but sharply polarised politically. Media owners often influence editorial policy. Independent regional and community broadcasters face financial difficulties. Gradually strengthened regulatory mechanisms let the authorities scrutinise media content closely, which raises the risk of censorship. RSF treats the political crisis, especially the events after the 2024 parliamentary elections, as a major factor in the decline. It says government representatives increasingly refuse to cooperate with critical media and try to discredit and intimidate them. RSF pays particular attention to the "foreign influence" legislation, the restriction of foreign funding for broadcasters, and the expanded powers of the regulator (the Communications Commission). RSF also rates media economic sustainability negatively. In a limited advertising market, many outlets depend on international donors. Foreign funding restrictions, regulatory pressure and the advantages of state-funded media threaten independent outlets. RSF notes more frequent verbal abuse, physical attacks and intimidation of journalists. Ineffective investigation of violent incidents is especially problematic, as it entrenches impunity and encourages self-censorship.[6]

Therefore, according to the RSF's assessment, the decline in press freedom in Georgia has several interrelated causes: political pressure, restrictive legislation, weakened financial independence and worsening journalist safety.

Data from the **Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)** project also point to worsening media and expression freedom in Georgia. The project's Freedom of Expression and Alternative Sources of Information Index assesses more than media freedom. It also covers the conditions for expressing and spreading differing political views in society.[7]

The index runs from 0 to 1, and a higher value means better freedom of expression. It combines nine indicators covering different aspects of media and expression freedom. Nmely, government attempts to censor the media, harassment of journalists, media self-censorship, political bias, possibility of criticising the government, representation of differing political views in the media. Moreover, the index

[6] Reporters Without Borders. Press Freedom Index 2026, Georgia. Via link: https://rsf.org/en/country/georgia

[7] Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem). March, 2026. Codebook. Via link: https://www.v-dem.net/documents/70/codebook_v16.pdf

assesses citizens' ability to discuss political issues freely, and academic and cultural freedom of expression. It thus treats freedom of expression in a wider context, not only the conditions of journalists' professional work.

Over the last decade, V-Dem data[8] show Georgia's score was relatively stable in 2015–2022, ranging between 0.86 and 0.91. The situation worsened from 2023. The index was about 0.88 in 2022. It fell to 0.85 in 2023, 0.7 in 2024 and 0.69 in 2025. In three years Georgia thus lost about 0.19 points. Against the earlier stability, this is a significant change.

Chart 2: Georgia in V-Dem's Freedom of Expression and Alternative Sources of Information Index, 2015–2025



Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem); Freedom of Expression and Alternative Sources of Information Index

V-Dem's Democracy Report 2026[9] treats restriction of freedom of expression as one of the most common features of autocratisation. Of 44 countries undergoing autocratisation in 2025, 32 saw a significant worsening in government censorship of the media, 28 saw a decline in academic and cultural freedom of expression, 26 saw stronger media self-censorship, 25 saw greater pro-government political bias in the media, 23 saw a significant worsening in harassment of journalists. This data demonstrates that freedom of expression is often restricted in several interrelated ways. The V-Dem report names Georgia directly among the countries where harassment of journalists and of dissenting people in general rose significantly. This matters because it indicates that the problems are not limited to media outlets. They also affect citizens' freedom of political expression. Given events in

[8] Via link: https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/
[9] Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute. DEMOCRACY REPORT 2026 - Unraveling The Democratic Era? Via link: https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf

Georgia, the index's decline can be seen in the context of growing legal, political and physical pressure on the media and civic space.

Freedom House's annual reports (Freedom in the World) also describe negative trends in media and expression freedom. The organisation assesses these issues under civil liberties, using two separate indicators. The first (D1) measures how free and independent the media are. The second (D4) measures how far citizens can express views on political and other sensitive issues without fear of surveillance, intimidation or retribution. Both are scored from 0 to 4, where a higher score means better freedom.

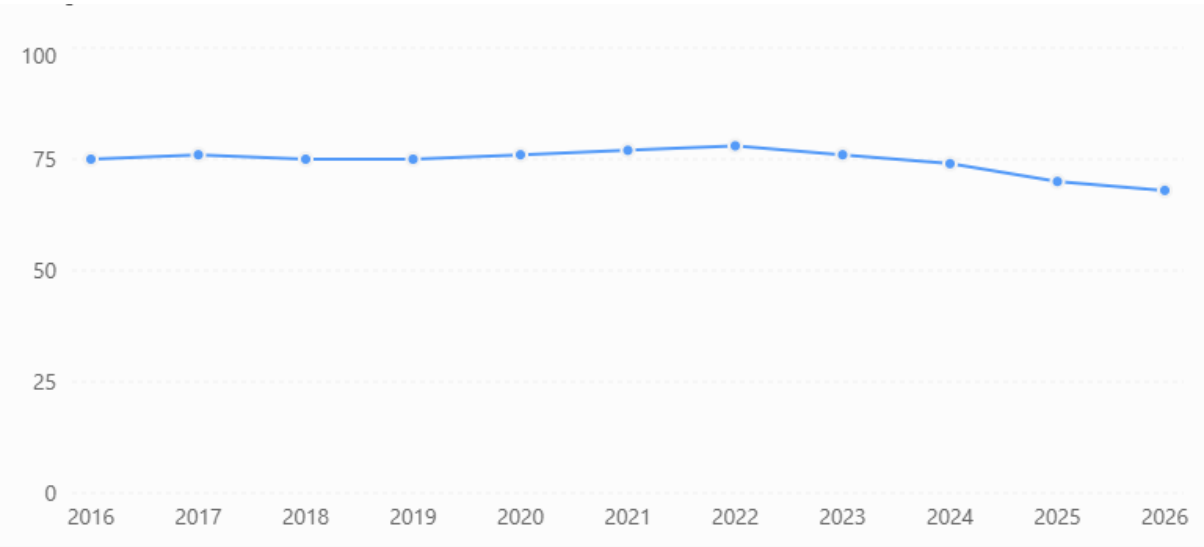
In Freedom House's 2022–2026 reports, both indicators score 2. Although the numbers stayed unchanged, the narrative parts of the reports indicate a gradual worsening. The sharpest changes appeared in 2024–2025. Physical pressure on journalists and citizens was joined by new legal restrictions and by financial and administrative barriers for independent outlets. According to Freedom House's 2025 report, the adoption of the "foreign influence transparency" law placed additional legal and administrative obligations on media outlets and NGOs receiving more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign sources. The organisation viewed the law as a significant restriction on independent media and civil society. Violence against journalists grew especially frequent that year, during coverage of protests. Freedom House cites Transparency International Georgia: in 2024 alone, about 200 cases of beating, harassment and threats against journalists were recorded. These cases were linked to demonstrations against the "foreign influence transparency" law, as well as to the parliamentary elections and pro-European protests. Freedom House's 2026 report pays particular attention to growing legal and financial pressure on independent media. In February 2025, “Mtavari Arkhi”, a television company known for editorial policy critical of the government, stopped broadcasting. Officially this was due to a financial crisis, but the channel's journalists argued the crisis was artificially created to serve the government's interests. In August of the same year, Mzia Amaglobeli, co-founder of “Batumelebi” and “Netgazeti”, was sentenced to two years in prison. Restrictions on covering court proceedings also took effect in the same period.[10]

As noted above, negative trends also appear in internet freedom. In Freedom House's 2026 Freedom on the Net report, Georgia's score fell two points from the previous year, from 70 to 68. The country therefore moved from the "Free" category to "Partly Free". This continues a negative trend of recent

[10] Freedom House (2026). Freedom in the World 2026 — Georgia. https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2026

years. In 2022, Georgia's internet freedom was scored at 78, and by 2026 the figure had fallen 10 points.[11]

Chart 3: Georgia in Freedom House's Freedom on the Net index, 2016–2026



***Note**: Score from 0 to 100; a higher score means more freedom.*

Source: Freedom House

Freedom House says the 2026 decline mainly reflects government restriction of online activism and the expression of critical views. Two indicators worsened by one point each. Namely, citizens' ability to mobilise online and offline (B8). Freedom House attributes this to restrictions on protest activity and the use of facial recognition technology to recognise and identify demonstrators. Indicator of punishment of citizens for views expressed online (C3) was decreased or one point. According to the report, fines, summons to investigative bodies, searches and other punitive measures have become more frequent against social media users and journalists critical of the government. The organisation also notes that internet access in Georgia remains relatively high and that penetration has improved. The decline in internet freedom is therefore linked mainly not to technical restrictions or access problems, but to limits on political expression and civic activity in the digital space.

[11] Freedom House (2026). Freedom on the Net 2026 — Georgia. https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-net/2026

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A joint analysis of the assessments by several international organisations shows that media, expression and internet freedom in Georgia have worsened significantly in recent years. The organisations use different methodologies and cover different aspects, but their results point to the same negative trend. The decline that began in 2023 is especially notable, and it became more pronounced in 2024–2026.

The problems described above, suggest several mechanisms of pressure acting at once. They make critical media's work harder and also hurt citizens' ability to express their views freely. In such an environment, what matters is not only whether legal guarantees of freedom exist, but also whether people can use these rights without expecting negative consequences. Internet freedom is relevant here. Georgians keep their access to digital platforms, yet the conditions for online expression and civic activity are worsening. Technological access and real freedom of expression are therefore different matters.

Therefore, media pluralism, independent online outlets and access to social platforms still exist in Georgia. However, the legal, economic and security conditions in which journalistic output is created and distributed are worsening. The analysis of international assessments shows this is not a temporary fluctuation. It is a systemic and sustained tendency of decline.