



FROM FOREIGN-AGENT LAW TO PROTEST CRACKDOWNS:

Assessing Georgia's Media and Information Environment

2024

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This study was developed as part of the 2025 annual report “Vibrant Information Barometer” (VIBE) by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). For years, this research was supported by the USAID, but in 2025 it was terminated following the decision of the United States Government.

The methodology of this study is based on four principles: 1) Information Quality - looks at how (and what types) of information are produced by both professional and non-professional producers, including examining content quality, content diversity, and the economic resources available to produce content. 2) Multiple Channels, How Information Flows – looks at how information is transmitted or disseminated through formal and informal information channels, including looking at the legal context for free speech, safety of journalists, and access to diverse channels and types of information. 3) Information Consumption and Engagement - looks at how people consume information, freedom of expression, media and information literacy, digital privacy and security, and how relevant the information is to the user, and general public's trust. 4) Transformative Action - looks at how information guides behavior - how information is used and what actions it informs, including how information is used in decisions and actions by individuals, civil society, and government, regardless of whether the information is disseminated along ideological lines, and regardless of whether individuals or groups are motivated to use that information to initiate change. Each principle includes five indicators.

VIBE uses a scoring system, where a group of panelists assign scores to various indicators:

1. Highly Vibrant (31-40): Quality information is widely available in this country. People have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information; they recognize and reject misinformation.
2. Somewhat Vibrant (21-30): Quality information is available in this country and most of it is editorially independent, based on facts, and not intended to harm. Most people have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information, although some do not. Most people recognize and reject misinformation, although some do not.
3. Slightly Vibrant (11-20): Quality information is available on a few topics or geographies in this country, but not all. While some information is editorially independent, there is still a significant amount of misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech in circulation, and it does influence public discourse. Most people do not recognize or reject misinformation.
4. Not Vibrant (0-10): Quality information is extremely limited in this country. The vast majority of it is not editorially independent, not based on facts, or it is intended to harm. People do not have the rights, means, or capacity to access a wide range of information; they do not recognize or reject misinformation; and they cannot or do not make choices on what types of information they want to engage with.

To provide the country’s assessment and scores, experts from various outlets, civil society organizations, academia and independent media and communications specialists were invited to participate in a focus group discussion. Their identity remains anonymous.

OVERALL COUNTRY SCORE: 12

INTRODUCTION

Events like adoption of the so-called “foreign agents” and “anti-LGBT” laws, election rigging, suspension of the country’s EU accession process, accusations against the government of deviating from the pro-Western course in pursuit of Kremlin interests, unprecedented violence against journalists, civil activists, and citizens during demonstrations, and an incessant flow of government disinformation and malinformation have dramatically worsened the information environment and created existential threats to media and civil society in Georgia in 2024.

The elections held on October 26 ended with the Georgian Dream party claimed it had secured a majority of votes, in contradiction to the findings of local and international observers, civil society and opposition parties, whose reports cited voter intimidation, fear of reprisal and widespread procedural fallacies. The results of the elections have not been recognized by local and international actors. The crisis deepened a month later, when on November 28th, the Georgian Dream [announced](#) its decision to defer on the EU accession negotiations until 2028.

Over the course of several months the European Parliament [adopted](#) several critical resolutions, expressing concerns about the developments in the country and suspended the process of Georgia’s integration into the EU. Furthermore, the U.S. and several EU states issued sanctions against some of the Georgian Dream officials.

During the year, journalists who covered protest actions and voiced their criticism, activists and citizens who participated in large-scale peaceful demonstrations, were beaten, detained, and hauled into courts. More than 130 journalists sustained physical injuries, damages to their equipment, mainly from law enforcement and also individuals allegedly affiliated with the Georgian Dream party during the anti -”foreign agents” law protests in Spring and pro-EU protests in November-December. These attacks have gone unaddressed by investigative bodies, worsening the climate of impunity and further undermining fundamental rights and freedoms in Georgia.

Overall, the findings suggest a decline in media freedom indicators and a shrinking civic space as reflected in a country score of 12.

PRINCIPLE 1. INFORMATION QUALITY

Principle score: 11

In 2024, government-controlled outlets disseminated anti-Western propaganda and disinformation, while reliable and fact-based reporting was confined to a handful of independent online media outlets. Persistent malinformation and hate speech spread by the government, and underfunding of news media, remained a constrain to high-quality content production.

Indicator 1: There is quality information on a variety of topics available

The research participants agree that the media infrastructure in the country faces challenges, although they admit that no significant changes have occurred from the last year. According to one of the panel participants, publishing houses and equipment are scarce, with one printing house holding a monopoly, making the process inaccessible for many. Alternative paper supplies are unavailable domestically, forcing those requiring large print volumes, mostly books rather than media, to outsource production to countries like Turkey.

Director of a Tbilisi-based TV station observed that while tools for content production, such as cameras and computers, are available, financial constraints hinder broadcasters from accessing these resources. She stated that broadcasting infrastructure, like multiplexes do exist although costs for their utilization are high, adding that television channels have faced increasing difficulties in paying for multiplex services, a trend that has worsened over the current year and is expected to have significant consequences on media industry. A panel member observed that unlike independent media outlets, pro-government media are much better equipped. According to CRRC's 2024 [survey](#), television remains the first main source of information for receiving news about Georgia's current events. However, this preference declines among younger age groups, with the majority of 18-25 year-olds [citing](#) social media and Internet as their first main source of information.

Journalism is offered as a field of study at some public and private universities, where enrollment is open and unrestricted. A panel member noted that the number of high achieving students among entering journalism faculties is declining, attributing the decline partly to hostile environment faced by journalists. Regarding professional training, a representative of a media support organization noted that 2024 was particularly challenging for journalists, when such events as the adoption of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" or "foreign agents" law, left them with little time or capacity to focus on professional growth. "...We spent the whole year thinking about survival in every direction," explained the panel member.

Panel participants underscored that political influence on the mainstream media undermine content quality. They also noted that in 2024, the extent of unethical and manipulative content on pro-government media reached unprecedented heights. According to the pre-election media [monitoring](#) carried out by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE) with the financial support from the European Union, national broadcasters were heavily polarized and those affiliated with the government "openly ran anti-Western and disinformation campaigns. They disregarded even minimal professional standards of journalism".

Most panel members noted that in 2024, there was a significant decline in fact-based reporting across all media platforms. According to the chief editor of an online news outlet, one of the reasons for this is an increasingly restricted access to information from government officials and public institutions, highlighting a long driven trend of media's restricted access to public information. Several panel members observed that government's hostility towards independent media compelled them to take sides. "Because of this situation, the media landscape ended up splitting into two camps – pro-government media and everyone else," notes a panel member.

The overall body of content includes local, national, regional, and international news, with national media focusing on national events and regional media on local events. Nevertheless, the content in 2024 was impoverished and dominated by the stories on the "foreign agents" law, its implications and events surrounding it, especially that it happened during the pre-election period.

Panelists highlighted that despite numerous challenges, critical national outlets, some regional media, and independent online media continue holding the government accountable. Independent news media which in 2024 produced professional and ethical content included Netgazeti.ge, Batumelebi.ge, Publika.ge, On.ge, Mtisambebi.ge, OC Media, JamNews, and Radio Tavisupleba (RFE/ RL's Georgian service).

Journalists are held responsible for unethical and unprofessional reporting through either self-regulating bodies or the GCJE. In 2024, GCJE reviewed 51 cases, including some carried over from 2023. In total 45 complaints were submitted to GCJE during the year. GCJE's first principle on accuracy was violated most frequently, appearing in 30 of the 51 cases. One of the panel members noted that citizens express their dissatisfaction with disinformation and propaganda shared by pro-government media on social networks.

Indicator 2: The norm for information is that it is based on facts

The panel participants agree that the Georgian Dream's anti-Western propaganda, manipulation and disinformation permeated nearly every aspect of the country's socio-political and economic spheres, domestic and international policies. An [analysis](#) of the content from pro-government, pro-Russian, and anti-liberal media outlets during the pre-election period carried out by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) identified 4,055 anti-Western comments on social media. Of these, 32.9% targeted "the collective West", 23.3% focused on the United States, 11.5% criticized the European Union and Europe, and 9.7% were directed at non-governmental organizations. The report further states that it was for the first time that the Georgian Dream party and its affiliates openly accused the West and the so-called [Global War Party](#) of interfering in the elections and attempting to delegitimize its results.

Social media is rife with disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda, reflecting the polarized information space. Social media [monitoring](#) during the pre-election period carried out by International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) concluded that together with the official pages of politicians, some 76 Facebook pages were engaged in unofficial political campaigning. Among these, 42 pages were dedicated to discrediting political entities, with 21 targeting opposition parties and 21 targeting the ruling party or the government. Additionally, 31 pages were supportive, including 16 backing the ruling party/government and 15 supporting the

opposition. Three of the pages were identified as fake media outlets. According to the same document, undeclared ads on Facebook, without proper indication of the payer's credential remains a problem. The report states that per *Meta's* ad library, 218 ads were published on anti-opposition, pro-government, and fake media pages. Most of them were declared without indicating the real payer and 13 political ads on these pages did not mention the payer's identity at all.

Adoption of the “foreign agents” law was accompanied by a plethora of disinformation and anti-Western [propaganda](#) by the government authorities, and was aimed at presenting critical media and non-governmental organizations that are primary targets of this law as serving foreign interest, threatening Georgian traditions and country's sovereignty. A panel member noted that Georgian Public Broadcaster's coverage of the law was supportive of the government's position, therefore encouraged anti-NGO and anti-Western sentiments. “It is grotesque that the station [GPB] is backed by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU),” the panel member added.

The lack of independent media in a minority-populated community further intensified the spread of disinformation, a panelist stated. The panelist recalled that when the so-called “Russian law” was discussed at the parliament, and also during the pre-election period, the mainstream Azerbaijanian media fed the Azerbaijani speaking communities of the region with propaganda narratives that aligned with those of the Georgian Dream. The panelist further explained that one of the main propaganda messages was “Azerbaijan needs peaceful Georgia, therefore, you should choose peace.”

Disinformation was spread regarding the protest actions that unraveled in connection to the [rigged](#) elections and the Georgian Dream's [announcement](#) that the country will suspend to participate in negotiations and accept budgetary grants from the European Union until 2028. According to a fact-checking [platform](#) Myth Detector, on December 1, the government-controlled *Imedi TV* disseminated a fake photo from the protest rally in Tbilisi, claiming a protester was with a ballistic weapon.

The pervasiveness of these narratives on social media has forced media outlets to rethink their content strategies. One panelist, a digital content manager explained that his outlet had stopped using quote cards featuring evaluative statements from government officials. Even though such posts generate substantial user engagement, they also amplify official messaging. Instead, the outlet chose to focus on using fact-based statements only.

Some panelists were concerned about a troubling trend where Facebook removes pages or materials based on reports from trolls and bots, hindering media outlets' ability to reach and engage audiences. Dozens of stories from *Mtis Ambebi* were deleted from the outlet's Facebook page, including those covering the 2023 environmental disaster in the village of [Shovi](#). These stories were critical of the government and had drawn verbal [attacks](#) from high-ranking officials. *Mtis Ambebi* managed to recover some of these stories later.

Indicator 3: The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm

While Kremlin and its proxies create and disseminate disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech, a more troubling trend is Georgian officials' adoption of the same communication

approaches, panel members observed. In August 2024, *Meta* [reported](#) about removing 76 Facebook accounts, 30 pages, and 11 accounts on Instagram. The network originated in Russia and targeted Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and violated *Meta*'s policy against coordinated inauthentic behaviour. In Georgia, the network spread critical posts about the protests against the “foreign agents” law and supported the ruling party.

Social media pages and accounts promoted and amplified the messages that were intended to harm, panel members say. “There are YouTubers and TikTokers who repeat Kremlin propaganda messages one after another, spreading the government messages one after another. A lot of money is spent on this. This is a large information industry encouraged and financed by the government,” one of the panel participants noted.

Adoption of the “Law on Family Values and Protection of Minors” dubbed as “anti-LGBT” law was also accompanied by a coordinated effort on behalf of the Georgian Dream party to instill fear towards LGBT individuals and use this fear to control public sentiments, some panel members said. According to the Media Development Foundation's [report](#), one of the targets in this regard was Michael Roth, chairman of the German Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee. He was depicted as an enemy of Orthodoxy following his criticism of the “foreign agents” law, and his personal life and marriage emerged in smear campaigns by government-controlled broadcasters and in social media.

Politically motivated smear campaigns against individuals and organizations are highly common in Georgia. On February 20, 2024, Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili publicly [demanded](#) that the EU Delegation explain why an investigative piece by *Mtis Ambebi*'s editor Gela Mtivlishvili was a semi-finalist in the “EU Prize for Journalism” competition. Mtivlishvili's article, “Crime in Shovi,” details public officials' mishandling of the disaster at the Shovi resort that claimed 33 lives. Papuashvili alleged that the article is “full of intentional lies”.

Information shared on *Sinamdvileshi* (In Reality), a Georgian Dream-run Facebook page, continues labeling the opinions of civil activists, critical media, opposition politicians and opinion leaders as “false” content.

In 2020 Facebook launched a fact-checking program in Georgia, which is carried out by MDF's Myth Detector (www.mythdetector.ge) and Grass's (factcheck.ge). Since the launch of this mechanism, mainstream media outlets have been more likely to correct false information spread on social media after fact-checkers flag them, as Facebook's algorithm restricts their ability to place ads.

Indicator 4: The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse

Content diversity has declined in 2024 as media organizations focused primarily on covering the most pressing issues in the country. “What diversity can we talk about? We keep relying on the same respondents, and there have been several issues throughout the year monopolizing our attention, leaving no room for other topics,” a panel member stated. Marginalized groups, such as gender and ethnic minorities, are almost absent from mainstream media coverage, appearing in the news only once they attain national significance. The exceptions are a few online media outlets,

which try to address the needs and interests of these groups. Panel members observed that the “anti-LGBT” law, which bans the so-called “LGBT propaganda” serves to restricting freedom of expression and threatens the overall inclusivity of the content.

During periods of acute political tensions, in-depth or documentary-style content—especially focusing on marginalized groups – religious, ethnic and gender minorities became less relevant, one panel member stated. “We were forced to shelve the coverage, adapt somehow our editorial strategies and produce the content on the topics that might have interested the public at that moment. The result is that we received very homogenous content,” a panel member added. Another panel participant lamented that mainstream broadcasters seldom engage regional experts in their reports, prioritizing easily accessible sources from the capital. She added that such an approach narrows public discourse, generating frustration among those who seek inclusion and understanding.

No official data exists on the diversity or gender balance of Georgia’s media sector, but men dominate as founders of media organizations. While women hold many operational roles—such as directors, producers, editors, and journalists—the majority of camera operators remain men. There is a huge disparity between the pay of journalists working for regional and national media outlets, with those working in national media outlets receiving much higher salaries than those working in the regions.

Indicator 5: Content production is sufficiently resourced

The pressure that government authorities exerted and the crisis that ensued made it impossible for media outlets to achieve financial stability. Politicized advertising, donor intimidation, relentless disinformation, and attacks on journalists created conditions so unfavorable to media representatives that even high-level management were unable to ensure a healthy media functioning, panel members observed. Adoption of the “foreign agents” law made the media outlets’ sustainability even less viable. The law aims to label any organization that receives funding from donor organizations as „organizations pursuing the interests of a foreign power.” “The government’s intention was to weaken us. By adopting this law, they intend to restrict our access to donor money,” a panel participant remarked.

According to the official [data](#), the advertising market plunged in 2022 and saw a slight rebound in 2023. An analysis by Transparency International Georgia [highlights](#) that this uptick in revenues took place at the expense of pro-government broadcasters - *Imedi TV*, *Media Holding*, and *PosTV*. “Government-controlled stations maintain exclusive advertising arrangements, and businesses choose to advertise solely with them, sidelining independent media entirely,” one panel participant stressed. Contrary to the them, the advertising revenues of the three critical broadcasters *Mtavari Arkhi*, *Formula TV*, and *TV Pirveli* decreased over the past years. Some panelists noted that they themselves chose not to cooperate with those businesses that supported the Georgian Dream party during the adoption of the “foreign agents” law. One panel member recalled withdrawing the application from a bidding, where such companies were involved.

Another panelist complained that independent media in the regions are oftentimes underfunded as both donors and private sector are willing to spend less in the regions.

Georgian media compete with social networks and online content creators who produce and promote their materials. Many businesses choose to focus on advertising through their own social media channels bypassing traditional media outlets. This happens because of the lower advertising costs. Some panelists criticized these strategies, noting that while they secure audience reach, they do little to foster their trust. The director of a TV station added that legacy media have been slow with adapting to modern trends of diversification of revenue sources, such as producing entertainment content to increase audience, as media in Georgia are mostly oriented on survival. Throughout 2024, Georgian Public Broadcaster remained the best funded media outlet. Besides public funding, GPB has received a sizable portion of advertising money over the past several years. In 2024, its budget was GEL 159, 252,847 (approximately USD 93 million), which also included the costs for the construction of a new building space.

PRINCIPLE 2. MULTIPLE CHANNELS: HOW INFORMATION FLOWS

Principle score: 13

Despite formal guarantees of free speech and rising internet access, panelists reported a series of grave constraints undermining pluralism and transparency. Physical violence against journalists, “foreign agents” and “anti-LGBT” laws, violence against journalists, and selective provision of government data create an increasingly repressive environment. As a result, many Georgians struggle to access credible, fact-based perspectives.

Indicator 6: People have Rights to create, share, and consume information

The panelists noted that although Georgia’s constitution formally guarantees freedom of speech and press, recent developments have undermined people’s ability to create, share, and consume information. Reports of escalating violence against journalists—particularly those covering pro-EU protests or investigating state-linked abuses—underscore the lack of accountability with which authorities operate. Despite government denials, domestic and international organizations and media [view](#) these attacks as part of a growing pattern of hostility toward the media.

During the pro-EU mass protests in November-December, [over 90](#) media representatives were [attacked](#), severely injured, detained or obstructed while covering the protests, reflecting an alarming environment for independent reporting. TV Pirveli’s Maka Chikhladze and her cameraman, for example, were brutally assaulted by an allegedly government-affiliated gang, so called “Titushki”, with police apparently complicit. Other media representatives were from independent and critical outlets such as Publika.ge, Radio Liberty, Formula TV, TV Pirveli and others. Majority of incidents were captured on camera, such as the severe injuries sustained by Formula TV’s Guram Rogava who was attacked by a riot police member. Media workers from Netgazeti.ge, OC Media, Mtavari Arkhi, JAMNews, and Georgian Public Broadcaster also fell victim to this [escalating hostility](#) and experienced physical assaults, verbal abuse, or obstruction while police violently dispersed rallies. Earlier in Spring, during the protests against the adoption of the “foreign agents” law, more than 30 journalists were [injured](#). Additionally, unknown individuals covered the entrances to the offices and houses of two journalists with posters and

graffiti [calling](#) them “foreign agents.” A non-governmental organization, Transparency International Georgia, [counted](#) more than 200 cases of attacks on journalists in 2024.

Earlier in May 2024, the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence”, called in Georgia as “Russian Law” or “foreign agents” law, was adopted despite large protests and [calls](#) by EU officials. The law [compels](#) media outlets receiving more than 20% of their revenue from abroad to register as “implementing organizations of foreign power interests,” fueling suspicions that donor-funded journalism is being labeled as foreign propaganda. This measure impacts dozens of critical media including primarily online outlets whose main funding comes from international donors—an arrangement that has helped them maintain some neutrality in a highly polarized media environment. The “Russian Law” creates an existential [threat](#) to freedom of expression and media freedom”, says a panelists, who is also a legal expert. Another panelist described the law’s chilling effect: “We had a blind person hosting a program for people with disabilities, but this year we were refused because we’re already associated with the problem.” She added that the legislation fosters self-censorship, pressures journalists’ sources, and creates a hostile environment, all of which undermine the work of the media.

Further restricting free expression, the “Law on the Protection of Family Values and Minors,” [enforced](#) in December, 2024, imposes censorship on media and education. Its vague definition of “LGBT popularization” prohibits positive or exemplary depictions of same-sex relationships or non-binary gender identities in media, advertising, universities, and in communication with minors. Demonstrations that might be seen as endorsing LGBT issues are effectively outlawed. The panel members note that by introducing an “objective observer” standard, authorities can classify academic or media content as “propaganda,” thereby undermining free expression, research and teaching in media and universities.

One of the panelists observed that her outlet had access to large numbers of data during the pre-election period, revealing how the Georgian Dream party collected voters’ personal information with a motive to rig the elections. “This became a problem, as we were requested to reveal the information sources,” the panelist added.

Through escalating violence against journalists, foreign-agent branding, and anti-LGBT provisions, Georgia’s legal and social environment for information-sharing has grown increasingly repressive, panel members concluded.

Indicator 7: People have adequate access to channels of information

Internet freedom in Georgia declined in 2024, dropping two points to a score of 74, largely due to online intimidation and cyberattacks targeting media outlets and protesters against the “Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence,” Freedom House [reports](#). Despite these setbacks, the online environment is still deemed “free,” reinforced by strong internet access, minimal website blocking, and few arrests for protected online speech. Household internet penetration reached 91 percent in 2024—up from 89 percent in 2023—with coverage higher in urban areas (94.5%) than in rural ones (87.5%) according to the [National Statistics Office](#).

Panelists, however, underscored significant regional disparities. “In Adjara’s mountainous municipalities, once you’re beyond city limits, Internet quality and coverage drop sharply, and power outages are common,” said a panelist representing a media organization in one of the Georgian regions. Others echoed similar concerns, noting lack of local media outlets that leaves communities dependent on politicized broadcasters or online channels. One of the panel members, a representative of a TV station observed that “people with disabilities, as well as linguistic and religious minorities, often lack the targeted information they need,” adding that digital resources could help but require better infrastructure. Although urban areas enjoy comparatively reliable connectivity, political polarization still narrows the range of credible online sources. As one of the panelists puts it, “the numbers might look good on paper, but people in remote areas are still cut off from the kind of information that makes participation in civic life meaningful.” Ultimately, while access statistics appear strong, technological shortfalls and economic disparities continue to exclude segments of the population from truly diverse, fact-based information channels.

Indicator 8: There are appropriate channels for government information

Open government and transparency laws exist in Georgia, but panelists emphasized that these frameworks rarely operate as intended. Media’s access to public information remains a [challenge](#). Ministries and other public institutions often ignore requests for public information or respond belatedly with incomplete data. As one of the panelists remarked, “You end up spending weeks chasing documents that should be a matter of public record—by the time you finally get them, they are either incomplete or irrelevant.” The panel noted that cooperation with state agencies’ press services has become nearly impossible; instead of offering information, these offices frequently reply with ironic or mocking remarks, disregarding basic ethical standards. “You have to brace yourself emotionally before calling the municipality’s press office,” said one panelist, “because you’re expecting to be belittled.”

“The government selectively invites journalists to briefings. They do nothing to improve openness or accountability,” said a panelist from the TV station. Participants observed that officials often cater to favored, pro-government media outlets, reinforcing biased access and limiting pluralism in the public sphere. Some panel members described defunct institutional websites as deliberate obstacles, while journalists also cited bureaucratic regulations or vague rationales for denied requests. Panelists further criticized the court system’s ineffectiveness in resolving public information disputes, which can stretch on for months or even years.

In 2024, under controversial parliamentary accreditation [rules](#), the Georgian Dream party’s Members of the Parliament requested and obtained temporary [suspensions](#) of critical outlets’ journalists’ accreditations. These rules prohibit replacing those journalists, thereby hindering the work of their organizations. During the same period, following the adoption of the “foreign agents” law and the Georgian Dream’s decision to suspend the EU accession process until 2028—which sparked mass demonstrations—Parliament repeatedly invoked heightened security measures and ultimately [banned](#) online media from operating on its premises.

These issues directly hinder the media’s capacity to investigate public affairs and hold officials to account. [According](#) to the research report of the Center for Media, Information, and Social Research, 82% of surveyed journalists reported difficulties obtaining comments, 79% faced

obstacles in accessing public information, and 61% encountered problems accessing public institutions.

Indicator 9: There are diverse channels for information flow

Although formal legislation aims to prevent ownership concentration and promote diversity, panel members described a market where large conglomerates—Magticom, Silknet, and Selfie—[dominate](#) internet, mobile, and cable distribution. Laws require licensed broadcasters to publish ownership documents on the Communications Commission portal, and the Law on Broadcasting formally bans offshore-registered businesses from owning licenses in Georgia. However, participants noted that these provisions are often ignored, revealing a disconnect between legal requirements and their actual enforcement.

The Communications Commission, tasked with regulating the sector, was widely perceived by the panel as politicized, selectively enforcing rules against independent media while allowing pro-government stations to operate with impunity. A recent monitoring [report](#) by the Media Ombudsman criticizes the Commission for rulings that allegedly favor the ruling Georgian Dream party. The report reveals that the Commission repeatedly initiates fines against media at the party's request, courts routinely uphold the Commission's demands, and Commission's [Mediacritic](#) platform aligns its editorial policy with pro-government messages.

Additional hurdles, such as vague licensing procedures, high costs associated with distribution networks such as multiplexes, and frequency-allocation barriers, further undermine diversity. Panel members recounted how cable operators sometimes exclude particular channels under dubious “technical” pretexts, impeding new voices and innovative content formats from reaching audiences.

The Public Broadcaster, theoretically devoted to public interest, maintains a disproportionately large budget including advertising revenues, yet fails to provide truly impartial content, according to the panel. According to the GCJE's pre-election monitoring [report](#), the GPB's editorial policy demonstrated bias in favor of the government, providing only superficial fulfillment of its legal obligation to host political debates. Rather than offering balanced, in-depth discussion of party platforms, its news program *Moambe* served as a platform for anti-Western rhetoric, homophobic content, and conspiracy theories propagated by the ruling party. During pro-EU demonstrations, protesters took the unprecedented step of [demanding](#) airtime on the Public Broadcaster to discuss the ongoing political crisis. The protesters criticized the GPB for favoring pro-government narratives and neglecting audiences especially in remote regions who rely solely on GPB for news. Some GPB employees, including journalists and TV show hosts, expressed solidarity with the demonstrators and [requested](#) additional programming time to facilitate broader public debate.

Indicator 10: Information channels are independent

While Georgia's legal framework nominally provides for editorial independence, panelists stressed that these laws have little effect in practice. Ownership structures, precarious financial models, and the broader political climate combine to make genuine independence elusive.

According to several panel members, even highly regarded television stations are forced to operate at a financial loss and thus rely heavily on their owners' willingness to fund them. A panel participant noted that "owners' decisions—often guided by personal or political interests—determine whether a station survives," because advertising revenue alone is [insufficient](#) to keep outlets afloat. As a result, editorial decisions frequently reflect owners' agendas, turning media into an instrument of political influence rather than a platform for impartial reporting. A few online outlets manage to uphold professional journalistic standards but have been stigmatized under the newly adopted "foreign agents" law further undermining their editorial freedom and financial stability.

Panelists discussed several closures or anticipated closures in 2024. In late December, co-directors at *Mtavari TV*, which is known for its critical stance toward the ruling party, [announced](#) they could no longer finance the station. Director General Giorgi Gabunia [alleged](#) that co-owner Zaza Okuashvili—embroiled in business disputes—was attempting to appease the ruling party's founder Bidzina Ivanishvili by taking the channel off the air during a critical political moment. The far-right channel *Alt Info* was also abruptly [shut down](#) by its owners after poor election results, which critics interpret as evidence that politically driven outlets can quickly disappear once their goals remain unmet. Furthermore, *Channel 24*, owned by the family of ex-Georgian Dream MP and millionaire businessman Shota Shalashvili, declared reorganization just one month after going on air. Journalists said the channel effectively closed, some of them never received wages. One reporter [reflected](#), "I naively believed an independent channel could exist here. I should have known better."

Even the Public Broadcaster (GPB), which could offset these political pressures with its substantial budget, was criticized as underperforming. Protests outside GPB [demanded](#) airtime for balanced public discussions, with demonstrators accusing the network of broadcasting pro-government content. Some GPB journalists and producers sided with the protesters, [urging](#) the broadcaster's leadership to provide more neutral coverage.

PRINCIPLE 3. INFORMATION CONSUMPTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Principle score: 11

During the year, violations of privacy rights and brutality against civil society and peaceful protesters reached unprecedented levels. The panelist noted that the population lacks the skills to assess the quality of the media they consume, and the state has no strategy or intention to alleviate media literacy. Even though the Internet and social media are freely available for anyone to register, privacy and digital safety concerns remain. Independent media outlets struggled with limited resources to engage with their audiences.

Indicator 11: People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools

Several concerning events made panelists conclude that 2024 was alarming in terms of privacy protections and security. The "foreign agents" law poses a threat to privacy rights, because of the provisions that were [added](#) into the legal document unbeknownst to civil society and public, and

which became a public knowledge only after its adoption. According to one of such provisions, an authorized individual within the Ministry of Justice shall be entitled to access all necessary information, which includes special categories of personal data. Failure to provide such information will result in a fine amounting to GEL 5,000 (approximately USD 1850). “Even in the case if media faces no issues at all, this aspect [i.e. threat to personal data] would still be considered a serious challenge for the media sector,” one panel participant commented. Another unsettling issue of the year was a wave of insulting and intimidating phone calls that journalists, activists and their family members as well as protesters [received](#) in parallel to their participation in protests against the “foreign agents” law in Spring. According to the Personal Data Protection Service, the calls were disguised using “Caller ID spoofing”, the real numbers were concealed and instead, and the targets received calls as if they were generated from different foreign countries. The Service stated that it [referred](#) to the General Prosecutor’s office for investigation, explaining it appeared to be deliberately planned, carried out in an organized manner, and therefore carried the signs of a criminal offense. Several panel members believe that these calls were backed by the Georgian Dream officials.

One panel participant observed that the Operational Technical Agency (OTA) under the authority of State Security Services, which can be used to obtain information from telecommunication companies as well as have indirect access to individuals’ and companies data, remains a problem at the legislative level. Some panelists stated that there were several cases when illegally obtained information allegedly from secret surveillance, were transferred to a third party or made public. For example, panelists recalled a case when two journalists’ mobile exchange was promptly handed over to a government-controlled television station, which then attempted to blackmail the journalists, although unsuccessfully.

Digital security training and tools were available to media outlets and other professional content creators during the year. There is IREX’s SAFE program and the Information Integrity Program of ZINC Network provided such trainings on-demand to media outlets and civil society organizations. “But there is a problem of human resources, which restricts the media to not having time and resources to implement these protocols in practice,” one panelist noted.

The state’s ability to ensure protection from cyber interference has once again been called into question after it was revealed through an investigative story from Bloomberg media, that Russia had been carrying out widespread [hacking](#) of nearly every Georgian government agency and major companies between 2017 and 2020, including of individual government officials and telecommunications providers.

Indicator 12: People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate

The Communications Commission (ComCom) is entitled to implement the media literacy policy in the country. From 2022, UNICEF, ComCom and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia have been [implementing](#) the project to integrate media literacy in school education. “When the state is not on your side, in fact, the state is conducting illegal surveillance and spreading disinformation, these activities in schools is a drop in the Ocean,” one panelist noted. According to [Myth Detector](#), between March 2023 and July 2024, the Communications Commission’s media literacy platform *Mediacritic.ge* mostly targeted the media outlets critical of

the government. Their analysis of 139 articles shows that it often aligned with the Georgian Government's positions, sometimes also criticized respondents rather than journalists, ignored the evidence demonstrating Georgian Dream's control over the agenda of several national broadcasters, and questioned modern Western media ostensibly to create the false impression that only traditional democracies face such difficulties.

Some panelists cautioned that it has become difficult to enter certain public places or bring young children to media literacy trainings. "When a parent hears on pro-government TV that NGOs are enemies of the people, that we are plotting revolution or coup d'état, they will be hesitant to send their children to our trainings," one panel participant added. One of the panel members mentioned that her organization was denied access into a municipality building in Khulo in the Ajara Autonomous Republic, where a library - an American Shelf - is located.

Indicator 13: People engage productively with the information that is available to them

In 2024 the ruling party faced allegations of torture, unlawful detention, and inhumane treatment of protest participants. Journalists, activists and members of the public, who criticized government policies and participated in peaceful protests were targeted through different means, including smear campaigns, threats, physical and verbal violence and detention. In Spring, when the discussion of "foreign agents" law was ongoing, journalists, activists, and citizens protesting against the law, became targets of telephone harassment, threats and [assaults](#). For example, Giorgi Kldiashvili, executive director of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), was verbally and physically [assaulted](#) by an unknown man while speaking to journalists on May 7. Offensive posters were [displayed](#) and inscriptions were made at the homes and offices of several NGO representatives, academics and two investigative journalists. The posters and inscriptions read: "enemy of the country", "foreign agent" etc. Journalists, activists, opposition members, citizens and their family members received insulting and intimidating phone calls, where an unknown voice denigrated them, called them "enemies", swore at them, and threatened in different ways. The Public Defender of Georgia released a [statement](#), noting that "the attacks on representatives of opposition parties, journalists, and participants of the protest rally show signs of persecution based on political activity and opinion..."

During the pro-EU peaceful protests in November-December, the Ministry of Internal Affairs [reported](#) either detaining or initiating administrative proceedings against 372 protest participants. The [statement](#) of the Special Investigation Service (SIS), a governmental organization responsible, among others, to investigate crimes committed by law enforcement, and crimes against journalists, opened a case against physical attacks on media, other forms of illegal interference in the professional activities of journalists, on alleged abuse of force against protesters against law enforcement. Some panel members emphasized the ineffectiveness of the SIS due to the politicization demonstrated by its decisions. The Georgian Young Lawyers Association [concluded](#) that SIS's investigations "do not comply with international human rights standards, including the Istanbul Protocol, and there is no publicly available information on the accountability of law enforcement officers."

In December, the Parliament of Georgia, composed of only Georgian Dream MPs [adopted](#) amendments to the law on Assemblies and Demonstrations banning demonstrators from wearing masks or using certain technical devices and pyrotechnics, and increased fines against other types

of violations, such as organizing a manifestation in a prohibited place, or blocking the roadways etc. The Georgian Young Lawyers Association [released](#) an analysis of these amendments, emphasizing that by introducing such disproportionate restrictions and penalties, the Georgian Dream party “...tries to intimidate the public,” and warned that these sanctions are highly likely to be used not to protect public order, but to suppress free expression and assembly rights.

On October 24, the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Finances [searched](#) the houses and the office of two researchers of the U.S. think-tank Atlantic Council, whose work is concerned with the analysis of Kremlin’s information operations in Georgia. Their equipment were seized and bank accounts were frozen. According to the Ministry, their case was concerned with an alleged tax evasion by the company hired by the Atlantic Council. Nevertheless, according to one of the researchers, “the only thing they [Investigative Service] mentioned [during the inquiry] is that they are interested in my organization, the Atlantic Council, an American non-governmental organization,” *Civil.ge* reported.

Panel members stated that even if public can still express themselves more freely on social networks, these discussions often devolve into insults. Some panel members observed that public polarization has become so pronounced that the exchange of opinions on social networks appears to have no meaning at all. Some panelists noted about the negative impact of trolls and bots. One panel member said that trolls aim at discouraging the people from being interviewed by the media, clarifying that “not everybody is resistant to and can withstand bullying.” One of the panelists stressed that his organizational policy allows only hiding commentaries if an attempt of swaying the discussion on certain issues is identified. “Blocking such commenters is never effective either, because if you cut off one head of a dragon, ten more will grow back,” the panelist added.

Indicator 14: Media and information producers engage with their audience’s needs

For years, panelists have complained about the two broadcasting audience measurement companies, which provide contradictory data. Nielsen’s licensee TVMR and Kantar Media’s licensee Tri Media Intelligence (TMI) offer audience data for national television broadcasters, although for years, media industry representatives have criticized TMI for serving the interest of the ruling party. One of the panel members cautioned that TVMR, whose revenues depend on *Mtavari Arkhi*, *Formula TV* and *TV Pirveli*, could face financial setbacks due to financial hurdles faced by two of these channels. The panel member further added that TMI’s data was officially utilized in state procurement decisions related to advertising services. According to this panelist, when the state procurement relies on a “politicized” measurer, it diminishes the chances of broadcasters not aligned with the government to compete.

Insufficient data makes it harder for media outlets to upgrade their strategies and align their content to audience needs. One panel member noted that measurers mostly provide ratings to determine which type of program is more acceptable or appealing to the viewer, noting that such data contain only basic information and include age groups, social class, and gender only.

Independent quality media outlets foster audience engagement by ensuring open feedback processes are in place, such as moderated online comment sections and letters to the editor,

embracing the interests of their audiences. Most media outlets utilize free audience measurement resources like Google and social media analytics.

Indicator 15: Community media provides information relevant for community engagement

Two community radio stations function in the regions with predominantly ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani populations, Radio NOR and Radio Marneuli, producing ethical and fact-based reporting.

According to the Georgian law on broadcasting, community broadcasting must serve the community's interests, involve local representatives in the broadcasting process, and include minority perspectives. The law further stipulates that community broadcasting should not be oriented towards profit generation. Despite this, none of these two community radios depend financially on community support. One panel member added that these outlets are supported by donor money. "What matters for the community media in Georgia is that it should care about the community, and we strive to do that," a panelist noted.

Some panelists mentioned that several small, local media outlets serve the same purpose and share the values similar of those carried by community media, but without a formal status. These outlets produce the content for their local audience and try to contribute to their development.

PRINCIPLE 4. TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

Principle score: 12

Despite occasional breakthroughs such as large-scale demonstrations largely encouraged by credible reporting, panelists describe a heavily polarized information environment where manipulated coverage and "foreign agent" labeling marginalize independent outlets. Government officials often dismiss investigative findings, limiting civil society's ability to enact meaningful change. Donor-supported media and NGOs struggle with legal and financial pressures, while citizens, facing pervasive disinformation and selective access to data, remain vulnerable to partisan narratives. This combination of factors impedes evidence-based policymaking and diminishes the transformative potential of information.

Indicator 16: Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines

The panel describes Georgia's information ecosystem as highly polarized and dominated by partisan outlets, preventing meaningful cross-ideological dialogue, depriving society of quality news. The government-controlled channels like *Imedi TV* are [criticized](#) for spreading false information and acting as platforms of Russian propaganda, with META [designating](#) the online pages of *Imedi TV* and the far-right *PosTV* as potential sources of fake news. Another national broadcaster, the *Georgian Public Broadcaster*, was also criticized for its pro-government stance—prompting protesters to demand airtime for public discussions during the post-election period.

Even though online platforms offer “islands” of independent content, they lack a broad audience in Georgia’s TV-centric media environment. [According](#) to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, only 35.8% of rural residents and 52.4% of urban dwellers (46.6% overall) use the Internet to read news online. A panel participant noted that the recently introduced “foreign agents” law further stigmatizes donor-supported, higher-quality online media by labeling them beholden to foreign interests rather than impartial providers of fact-based reporting—a tactic that discredits smaller, more balanced outlets and undermines their potential to bridge ideological divides.

Audiences remain largely within their informational bubbles, rarely seeking alternative perspectives. In this climate—where skepticism and cynicism thrive—the “foreign agents” narrative and government-led discreditation of critical media heighten fragmentation, hindering the possibility of genuine debate, transformative dialogue, and an inclusive exchange of ideas.

Indicator 17: Individuals use quality information to inform their actions

Panelists noted that, in critical moments—such as the pro-EU protests sparked by the Georgian Dream’s announcement to pause EU negotiations—Georgians have shown the ability to evaluate information critically and act accordingly. The massive turnout of peaceful demonstrators, in the hundreds of thousands, attests to the public’s trust in factual reporting over partisan or manipulative narratives. In one [well-publicized](#) case, a resident from a mountainous region, faced with contradictory coverage on pro-government channels like *Imedi TV* and PosTV, decided to travel to Tbilisi in person to witness the large-scale demonstrations—an example of the public’s capacity for independent verification.

Nonetheless, in day-to-day life, many people still rely on emotionally charged or fear-based content circulated by often manipulative media. According to [Caucasus Barometer](#) 2024, pro-government *Imedi TV* leads the list of the most trusted broadcasters for news and politics. The panel highlighted that reliable information sources struggle with financial constraints and restricted access to public data, while official statements sometimes include misleading claims. Fact-based journalism exists only in limited “islands,” leaving most citizens vulnerable to misinformation. As one of the panelists, a representative of a media outlet remarked, “Even that 30–35% support for the Georgian Dream party, had the elections not been rigged, shows that many people are simply not reached by quality information.” Consequently, although Georgians are capable of critical thinking during pivotal moments, widespread manipulative reporting and a lack of robust alternatives continue to hamper informed civic engagement.

Indicator 18: Civil society uses quality information to improve communities

In the lead-up to the 2024 parliamentary elections, many NGOs served as election [observers](#), attempting to document alleged vote rigging. According to panelists, however, these efforts fell short. “NGOs tried to prepare thoroughly,” said a panelist, who represents a media support organization, “but could never fully anticipate the extent of manipulations.” He added that the Georgian Dream’s discrediting of civil society and media created existential challenges.

Despite these hurdles, civil society organizations played a pivotal role in [documenting](#) severe injuries and possible torture of demonstrators by security forces during pro-EU rallies in November

and December, sharing detailed evidence with the media and public. They also provided the public with regular updates on the status of hundreds of detained protesters, offering legal support and assisting families in locating arrested protest participants.

Although some NGOs still produce analysis, policy briefs, and fact-based reports, widespread propaganda and mistrust limit their impact on voters. Panelists noted that while coordination among NGOs sometimes reaches unprecedented levels—particularly in the face of electoral misconduct or major legislative changes, this unity often emerges reactively. In the 2024 elections, civic observers [documented](#) irregularities, yet their findings did not affect official outcomes.

Ultimately, civil society’s ability to drive community improvements through quality information remains limited. In this atmosphere, critical reports are dismissed, independent research is overlooked, and public engagement remains sporadic. Until credible data and transparent governance become the norm, civil society’s capacity to inform and transform Georgia’s communities will remain constrained.

Indicator 19: Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions

Panelists agreed that Georgia’s government continues to avoid evidence-based policymaking, relying instead on disinformation and partisan rhetoric to justify decisions. Although open government and transparency laws theoretically require authorities to consult stakeholders and provide credible data, panel members noted that little of this occurs in practice. “We see no sign that the government even attempts to rationalize its policies or consider reliable evidence,” remarked a panelist “and this has only worsened over the past year.” An example of an incorrect information spread by the ruling party is the statement released by the Georgian Dream Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, who in his televised [address](#) dismissed the EU Foreign Affairs Council’s December 16 decision to suspend visa liberalization for Georgians with diplomatic passports, and expressed gratitude to Hungary, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, and Romania for going against the decision. The next day, Romania, Italy and Spain each refuted Irakli Kobakhidze’s statement, and condemned the “inaccurate” information and “disinformation” spread by him.

Disregard for civil society and media engagement has reached its peak in 2024. The Georgian Dream government chose not to notify critical media outlets about press briefings, selectively collaborated with pro-government media, and excluded other stakeholders from the process of drafting or amending laws. Journalists and NGO representatives faced frequent verbal harassment. The example of Dimitri Samkharadze, a ruling party MP, publicly [admitted](#) his party’s responsibility for insulting graffiti on offices of independent media, NGOs, and opposition parties—and threatened government critics once again via social media, showcases this disregard. Officials did not provide an adequate response to the issue. Such tactics, panelists argued, underscore how officials set an artificial agenda driven by smear campaigns rather than facts or public input.

According to the panel, the government increasingly ignores the core values of the Open Government Platform and holds press conferences only with favored outlets. Policies are formed behind the closed doors, with no credible feedback mechanism to promote the course based on

objective data. Meanwhile, whistleblowers and investigative journalists operate in a climate of fear and intimidation, further isolating the government from unbiased information sources. The result, panelists concluded, is that most laws and decisions fail to reflect real societal needs, fueling public distrust and rendering evidence-based policymaking virtually nonexistent.

Indicator 20: Information supports good governance and democratic norms

Under normal circumstances, quality information should strengthen good governance and democratic norms by revealing abuses and prompting accountability. In Georgia, however, panel members described a setting where such transformative potential is systematically undermined. Media outlets and civil society may expose government misconduct or human rights violations, but officials mostly ignore evidence and dismiss investigative findings.

Since the 2024 elections, journalists have extensively [covered](#) hundreds of protester detentions, allegations of [torture](#) and severe bodily harm, and [documented](#) concrete evidence of electoral [fraud](#). Although mass arrests of demonstrators attracted [international](#) concern, not a single police officer was [charged](#), suggesting that political loyalties overshadow rule-of-law principles. In a [statement](#) the Georgian Young Lawyers Association emphasized what they called “systemic inaction by investigative bodies”, stating: “..to date, there has been no proper investigation nor identification of those responsible for the abuses of power by law enforcement officers during both the protests against the so-called “Russian law” and the subsequent rallies after November 28.”

The constitutional court [rejected](#) appeals by president and opposition MPs claiming violation of the constitutional principles of secrecy of the vote and universal suffrage in the 26 October parliamentary elections.

Recalling the trends from the previous year, panelists observed that the Georgian Dream’s pattern of neglecting criticism remains unchanged. Investigations rarely yield policy changes or resignations, and calls for transparency often go unheeded. Quality information alone can’t force accountability if the authorities refuse to acknowledge evidence or engage with the media, the panel notes. Ultimately, the disconnect between fact-based reporting and governmental response weakens the link between information and democratic health, leaving Georgia’s citizens with limited recourse to enforce good governance and protect their fundamental rights. The international election observer missions such as [OSCE/ODIHR](#), [International Republican Institute](#) (IRI) and [National Democratic Institute](#) (NDI), each reported harsh obstructions to the democratic processes and procedural violations during pre-election period and on the election day, naming such problematic issues as voter intimidation and coercion, suppression of civil society, opposition parties and journalists etc.