

# The Georgia Governance Index 2024



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი  
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



Kingdom of the Netherlands



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**Tbilisi  
2025**



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## About

**The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)** is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia. It also encourages public participation in civil society-building and developing democratic processes. The organization aims to become a major center for scholarship and policy innovation for the country of Georgia and the wider Black Sea region. To that end, GIP is working to distinguish itself through relevant, incisive research, extensive public outreach, and a bold spirit of innovation in policy discourse, and political conversation.

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# Abbreviations

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ACB	-	Anti-Corruption Bureau
CEC	-	Central Election Commission of Georgia
CFSP	-	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS	-	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	-	Council of Europe
DoD	-	Department of Defence
DRG	-	Diagnosis-Related Group
ECHR	-	European Court of Human Rights
EEAS	-	European External Action Service
EP	-	European Parliament
EU	-	European Union
EPF	-	European Peace Facility
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
GGI	-	Georgia Governance Index
GIP	-	Georgian Institute of Politics
GRECO	-	Group of States Against Corruption
GYLA	-	Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
ICC	-	International Criminal Court
IDFI	-	Institute for Development for Freedom of Information
IDP	-	Internally Displaced Person
IRI	-	International Republican Institute
ISFED	-	International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
MEGOBARI Act	-	Mobilizing and Enhancing Georgia's Options for Building Accountability, Resilience, and Independence Act
MEP	-	Member of European Parliament
MFA	-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA	-	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MOH	-	Ministry of the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

# Abbreviations

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- MRDI - Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia
- NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- NBG - National Bank of Georgia
- NDI - National Democratic Institute
- NSC - National Security Council of Georgia
- ODIHR - OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- OECD/ACN - OECD Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- OGP - Open Government Partnership
- OSCE/ODIHR - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe / The OSCE  
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- PACE - Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
- PAR - Public Administration Reform
- SIGMA - Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
- SSA - Social Service Agency of Georgia
- SSG - State Security Service of Georgia
- TI - Transparency International
- UN - United Nations
- US - United States
- US-SOCEUR - US. Special Operations Forces in Europe

## Executive Summary

The Georgia Governance Index (GGI) evaluates Georgia's governance in four principal domains: democracy and human rights (democratic governance), the efficiency of state institutions (effective governance), socio-economic policies (socio-economic governance), and foreign and security policy (external governance). While concentrating primarily on Georgian state institutions, the GGI also examines the roles of other entities, such as political parties and civil society organizations.

Despite the numerous global and regional indices that feature Georgia, a detailed, country-specific annual review of Georgia's governance performance remains absent. To date, no Georgia-focused research has undertaken such an analysis. The GGI not only complements international indices with its methodology and empirical data but also offers a distinctive perspective from within the country, alongside innovative methodological approaches. The index aims to inform the Georgian public and various stakeholders about the country's democratic and economic developments, responding to the growing demand for an all-encompassing report on these issues.

Methodologically, the GGI integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods and epistemologies. Its scoring system derives from the GGI Expert Survey, conducted with 47 experts from various fields in Georgia, and is enhanced by qualitative research performed by the GIP team.

The current report represents the fourth iteration of the GGI. Similar to the previous reports, the 2024 report presents negative trend acceleration with unfavorable outcomes of the state of democracy in Georgia. In the past year, Georgia saw a drastic deterioration in governance across various sectors, fueled by government efforts to tighten authoritarian control, resulting in near-total state capture. Popular resistance acts as the ultimate check on power; however, this troubling trend has eroded the country's democratic institutions, weakened the rule of law, and undermined public trust in government accountability. The rise in political and ideological divergence, escalating radicalization, the ruling party's use of demonization tactics, and the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence have further eroded democratic resilience and led the country to deep political crisis. Additionally, the government's actions have strained Georgia's relationships with its Western partners, jeopardizing its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. As a result, the low scores in the Expert Surveys were expected, as they mirror the ongoing political crisis in the country. However, we also recognize that not all aspects which influence all areas of governance—from foreign policy to democratic governance and from economic development to effective governance can be fully captured through numerical scores alone. The report covers the period until November 28, 2024, when GD announced stopping EU negotiations, followed by accelerated repressive measures in the country. Escalation of violence against peaceful protesters, attacks against media, civil society and expert community, including some of those interviewed for this Index, could not be included in the report, as the situation was still unfolding at the time of writing.

# Key findings

## Democratic Governance

- The country's democratic governance score deteriorated significantly. Experts saw the performance of civil society as a comparatively positive element. However, its effectiveness was hampered by increasing societal divisions, extreme political radicalization and anti-democratic actions by the ruling party, further exacerbated by the introduction of a new draconian transparency law.
- Single-party dominance, state capture and deep political divisions, hinder the democratic process. The ruling party weakened democratic norms by changing Central Election Commission composition rules to diminish opposition influence, removing gender balance requirements for candidate lists, and passing a "Bill on the Protection of Family Values" which was criticized for limiting free expression.
- The legitimacy of the 2024 parliamentary elections was challenged domestically and internationally. The international observer missions cited serious shortcomings, including inappropriate use of state resources, voter intimidation, pressure on civil society and independent media, use of force against the opposition, and indications of state capture.
- Governmental checks and balances were further undermined with ongoing conflict between the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party and the outgoing president, Salome Zurbishvili. The end of the year was marked by the controversial election as a president of a candidate closely aligned with the ruling party's partisan interests, further consolidating GD's control over key institutions.
- 2024 saw a sharp escalation in brutality of police force against protesters, and incidents targeting independent media and civil activists. No law enforcement officials has been held responsible.

## Effective Governance

- Georgia faced significant challenges in maintaining a monopoly on the use of legitimate force in 2024. This was largely due to the ongoing Russian occupation and the frequent illegal detentions of Georgian citizens by occupation forces. Rising internal security concerns also played a role.
- A perceived decline in institutional effectiveness, highlighted by the state's inadequate response to violence against protesters, has further eroded its authority and control. This was compounded by the expedited passage of coercive legislation in

December 2024, aimed at cracking down on protests. The introduction of such punitive measures to suppress peaceful dissent marks a deeply troubling escalation in the government's assault on human rights and democratic freedoms.

- As in previous years, Bidzina Ivanishvili continued to exert significant informal influence over state institutions throughout 2024, hindering transparent and effective governance. This influence persisted despite his formal return to politics in late 2023.
- Legislative changes, including a controversial tax law on “offshore zones”, believed to serve Ivanishvili’s private interests, raised concerns about undue influence and further complicated the governance landscape. The law is believed to facilitate the inflow of illicit funds into Georgia, potentially turning the country into a hub for black money while also providing a mechanism for Ivanishvili and his associates to shield their wealth from Western sanctions.
- Corruption control in Georgia worsened in 2024, as evidenced by a lower score on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and numerous reports of high-level corruption.
- U.S. sanctions on members of the Georgian judiciary underscored international concerns about corruption, while changes to campaign finance regulations that appeared politically motivated raised concerns about fairness and transparency in the electoral process.

## **Social and Economic Governance**

- In 2024, Georgia continued to experience economic trends such as increased trade with former CIS countries (especially Russia), currency depreciation, high unemployment and poverty rates, and a weakened international investment climate.
- Political developments further exacerbated the negative economic trends. Controversial legislation, perceived compromises to judicial integrity and the independence of the National Bank, and concerns about election fairness, along with subsequent public demonstrations, damaged Georgia’s international reputation and investment climate.
- Despite challenges, socio-economic governance received the highest score (40.45) among the areas evaluated by the GGI survey in 2024. This relatively positive result is attributed to sustained economic growth and declining scores in other governance areas.
- Healthcare policy received the lowest score (29.31), followed by the labor market and economic framework (37.50), indicating significant weaknesses in these areas.

- Tax and budget policy achieved the highest score, reflecting overall economic growth and increased tax revenues.
- The divergence between high scores for tax and budget policy and low scores for healthcare and labor, highlights systemic issues in the Georgian economy, particularly the unequal distribution of economic growth and its limited benefits for the broader population.

## External Governance

- Georgia's external governance experienced a significant decline in 2024. The overall GGI score in this area fell from 26.42 to 18.74, reflecting a marked deterioration in expert assessments.
- The postponement of work toward EU accession negotiations represented a major setback for Georgia's European integration goals. This decision effectively halted progress on reforms, financial cooperation, and political relations with Western countries. The EU Commission had already halted Georgia's accession plan in July 2024 citing Tbilisi's rejection of Western values and the government's continuous inflammatory rhetoric.
- Relations with the United States were severely strained, with the strategic partnership being suspended by Washington. This was attributed to perceived anti-democratic and anti-Western actions by the Georgian Dream government, leading to open political confrontation.
- For the first time since the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the NATO declaration did not mention Georgia's membership perspective, signaling a potential shift in the Alliance's stance.
- The Georgian Dream government appeared to be moving closer to illiberal actors. This included increased engagement with Russia, often through shared narratives, while China and Iran emerged as alternative partners amid growing international isolation.
- Self-imposed isolation and shift in foreign policy negatively impacted Georgia's defense and security policy due to the loss of support from traditional strategic partners who had been actively involved in funding, equipping, and training the country's defense sector.

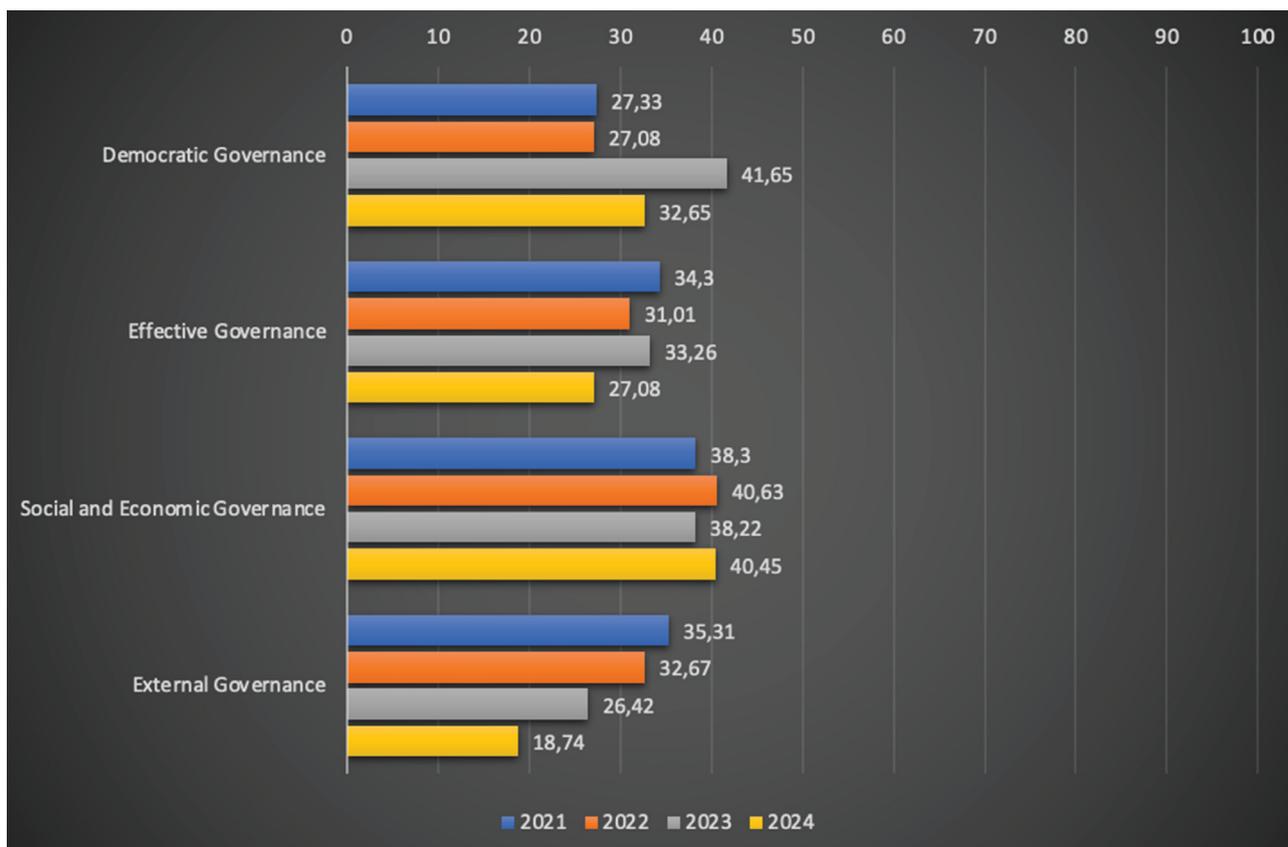
## Introduction

The 2024 Georgia Governance Index (GGI) assesses Georgia's governance performance across four key domains: **democracy and human rights** (democratic governance), the **efficiency of state institutions** (effective governance), **socio-economic policies** (socio-economic governance), and **foreign and security policy** (external governance). This report, the fourth iteration of the GGI, analyzes developments in these areas during a year characterized by notable shifts in both domestic and international contexts. The index uniquely combines quantitative data from an expert survey of 47 Georgian professionals with qualitative analysis, providing a nuanced, in-country perspective that complements existing international indices.

The 2024 GGI findings indicate a decline in overall governance performance compared to the previous year. Three out of four domains registered lower scores, reflecting a complex interplay of internal political dynamics, socio-economic factors, and evolving international relations (figure 1). Democratic governance, which had shown an improvement in 2023, experienced a decrease, with its score falling from 41.65 to 32.65 (figure 1). While civil society continued to demonstrate relative strength, according to expert assessments, its impact was constrained by factors such as heightened political and ideological divergence and new repressive legislation affecting non-governmental organizations. The effectiveness of state institutions also faced challenges, as reflected in a decreased score for effective governance (figure 1).

Issues related to the state's monopoly on the use of legitimate force, influenced by both the ongoing Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali region) and internal security concerns, contributed to this decline. The informal influence on governance and perceptions of the decline in institutional integrity were also further exacerbated and noted as significant factors.

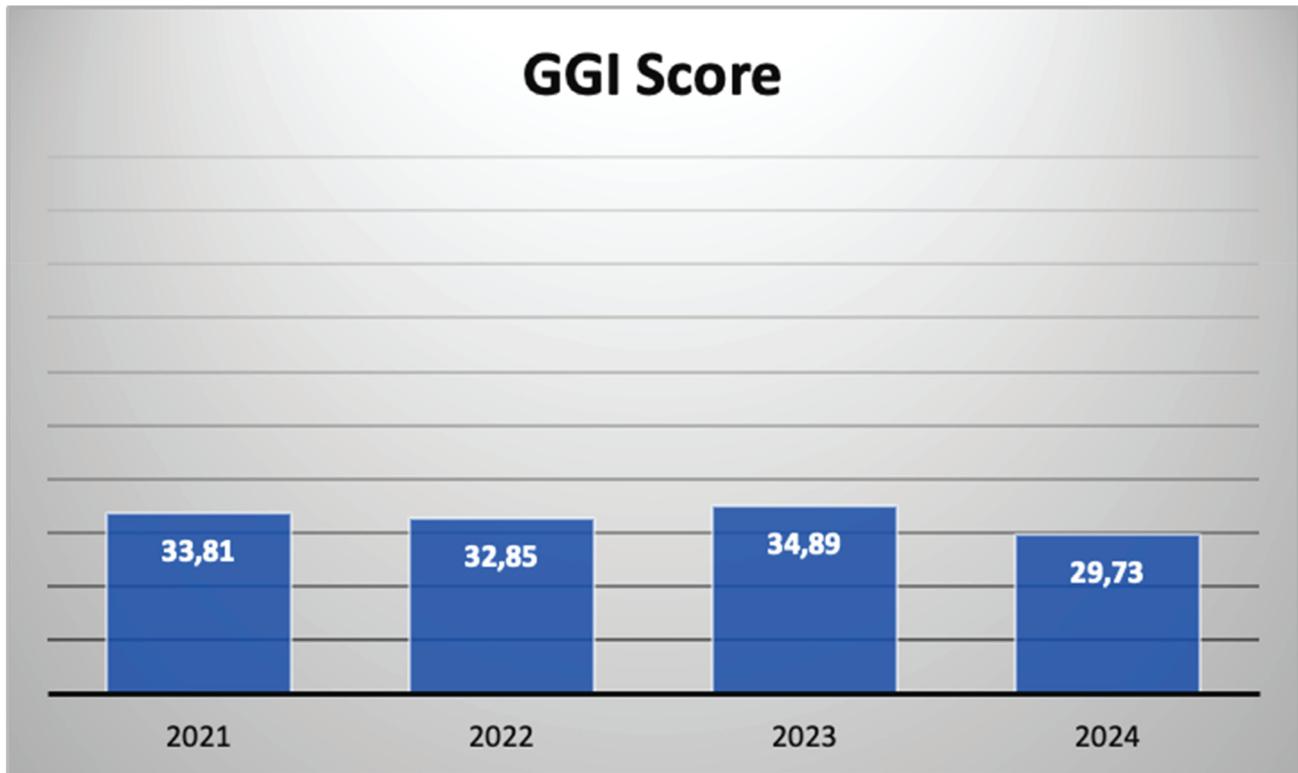
Figure 1: How would you assess Georgia's performance in the governance areas in 2024 (standardized on a scale of 0-100 (best))?



In the socio-economic sphere, the 2024 GGI documented a mixed picture. Despite a relatively higher score compared to other domains (40.45), disparities persisted, and certain areas such as healthcare and labor market policies received low assessments. While macro-economic indicators, like sustained economic growth, contributed to a higher score in tax and budget policy, these gains did not translate uniformly across all segments of society, highlighting ongoing structural challenges. Nevertheless this was only area which did not experience a decline in the expert survey, and in fact, its score actually increased slightly, from 38.22 to 40.45 (figure 1)

The most pronounced shift was observed in the domain of external governance where the score dropped significantly, from 26.42 to 18.74 (figure 1). This decline reflects developments in Georgia's relations with the European Union and the United States, including the postponement of discussions regarding EU accession negotiations and the abolishing of the strategic partnership with the U.S. Furthermore, Georgia's absence from the NATO membership perspective in the 2024 declaration indicates a shift in the country's Euro-Atlantic integration trajectory. As a result of the decline in three governance areas out of four, the overall 2024 GGI Score has declined by 5 points compared to that for 2023 (figure 2).

Figure 2: GGI Score (standardized on a scale of 0-100 (best))



The 2024 GGI underscores the interconnected nature of Georgia's domestic and foreign policy challenges. The findings suggest a need to carefully examine the factors contributing to the decline observed in governance performance across all domains. This report provides a detailed analysis of the data collected, offering a comprehensive overview of the state of governance in Georgia in 2024. It aims to serve as a resource for understanding the complexities of the Georgian context and for informing discussions on potential policy responses and future development pathways.

## Methodology

The goal of the Georgia Governance Index (GGI) is to study Georgia's performance in four governance areas: democratic, effective, social and economic, and external. In doing so, the report aims to identify the main challenges and gaps, but also the main positive developments in different governance areas of Georgia, and to provide policy-relevant recommendations on how to mitigate the risks and improve governance quality.

This index is aimed at a wide audience including politicians and political parties, civil society representatives, think-tanks, NGOs, political foundations, international organizations, international and domestic observers, as well as at the wider public with an interest in Georgian governance affairs. The index was presented in Tbilisi with the aim of better informing the Georgian public and international community about the challenges inherent in Georgia's governance and democratization processes. It also sought to place Georgia's reforms in an international context and advocate for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. The index will help strengthen the accountability of government and political actors to their constituents, and to promote more transparent governance. Additionally, it will help the Georgian government receive constructive feedback from Georgian think tanks, civil society and the expert community on their policies and planned reforms. For civil society, this index will provide a platform to voice their concerns and provide constructive policy suggestions.

### Conceptualization

In terms of the conceptual framework, the GGI utilizes the concept of “embedded democracy”, which was developed by German political scientist Wolfgang Merkel. Embedded democracy consists of five partial regimes: civil rights, political rights, electoral regime, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern (Merkel 2004). The five regimes are embedded within each other internally, and further connected to other contextual conditions externally, such as civil society, stateness and socio-economic requisites (Merkel 2004). Merkel's conceptual framework is used in the majority of the indices and rankings that measure different aspects of democracy. Some rankings have even been specifically modelled on the concept (e.g. Democracy Barometer). Embedded democracy as a concept consists of several partial regimes which cover aspects of democratic and effective governance and includes economic and stateness-related contextual conditions while still maintaining a focus on democratic credentials. In the GGI, we account for all partial regimes and context requisites to measuring the state of good governance in Georgia. However, we added one additional dimension not envisaged within Merkel's concept of embedded democracy: external governance with a focus on Euro-Atlantic integration and peaceful management of security risks. While foreign and security policy is not usually included as a metric in democracy or good governance indices, its incorporation here adds an important methodological and empirical missing link. Georgia, as an EU candidate, depends significantly on the EU and the US for institutional and political support in its process

of democratization. The literature on democratization often mentions practices such as lesson-drawing, emulation, conditionality, diffusion, and adoption of democratic norms to underline the external dimension of democratization. Based on this, it is assumed that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and democratization are positively correlated, and a degree of Euro-Atlantic approximation as well as peaceful management and adaptation to security risks can be considered as one of the criteria or prerequisites of further democratic consolidation.

## Index Structure

Based on the conceptual framework of embedded democracy, the Georgia Governance Index (GGI) examines the performance of Georgia in four key areas of good governance. Each of the key areas are further divided into subcategories, which are then individually analyzed by the authors of the index, and scores are assigned by the respondents to the survey.

- Democratic governance (democracy and human rights)
  - o Civil and political rights
  - o Electoral regime
  - o Horizontal accountability
  - o Civil society and non-state actors
  
- Effective governance (stateness and state institutions)
  - o The monopoly on the use of legitimate force
  - o Informal governance and alternative forms of legitimacy
  - o Prevention of corruption
  - o Effectiveness of the public administration
  
- Socio-economic governance (social and economic policies)
  - o Public services and competition
  - o Tax and budget policy
  - o Social Policy
  - o Social care and healthcare
  
- External governance
  - o European Integration
  - o Advancing Relations with NATO and the USA
  - o Responsiveness to external regional and global changes
  - o Security Governance

The detailed definitions of individual categories and subcategories are provided in the glossary, at the end of the report

## **Research Methods**

The index utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The survey of policy experts was used as the main quantitative research tool to measure Georgia's performance in individual categories and sub-categories. The survey data is further supplemented by qualitative content analysis of Georgia's performance in each category. The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods as well as the triangulation of these research results were further supported by a robust review process which involved both local and international experts of surveys and indices.

### ***Expert Survey***

Respondents to the index's survey included scholars and academics, policy experts, representatives of civil society, and the members of the think-tank community. In each area about 10 respondents were selected, based on the criteria of political impartiality and academic or policy-relevant subject area expertise.

Respondents from academia were selected based on the following criteria:

- At least one publication on Georgia in a peer-reviewed journal excluding predatory-publishing journals and financed articles;
- No affiliation with a political party or movement.

Respondents from civil society and the policy community were selected based on the following criteria:

- Co-authorship of reports & analysis about relevant topics related to Georgia and/or frequent public appearances in Georgian/international media;
- No affiliation with a political party or movement.

The expert survey was conducted using Google Forms and was fully anonymized. The experts were asked to grade Georgia's performance in respective issue areas in different categories, as well as to provide their views on major challenges, steps forward and needed reforms.

### ***Narrative Analysis***

These expert surveys are supplemented by qualitative content analysis carried out by the GIP team, which consists of resident and affiliated junior and senior analysts. The qualitative analysis draws on content analysis of primary and secondary sources (governmental documents, reports, interviews, speeches, meeting protocols and newspaper articles). To supplement desk research-based data analysis, several semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with area experts. Each part of the narrative analysis underwent a multistep review process by local and international experts. The narrative analysis part of

this study does not influence the grading scores for the respective issue areas, but is utilized to augment the findings with additional expert assessments.

### ***Limitations***

There are a few important methodological limitations to be acknowledged. Firstly, this is only the fourth issue of the index and therefore comparable only to three reports from 2021-2023. Hence, we cannot yet conduct a multiyear comparative analysis. Secondly, this is a single country case study which also lacks an external point of reference or comparison to other countries. The study does analyze, however, different governance categories and subcategories which allows a multi-sectoral comparison of the country's progress (or regression). In terms of data collection, the authors of the study struggled to find up-to-date data on recent developments. Finally, since the report is mostly qualitative with a small-N semi-quantitative survey, we cannot exclude that some information may contain academically biased perspectives.

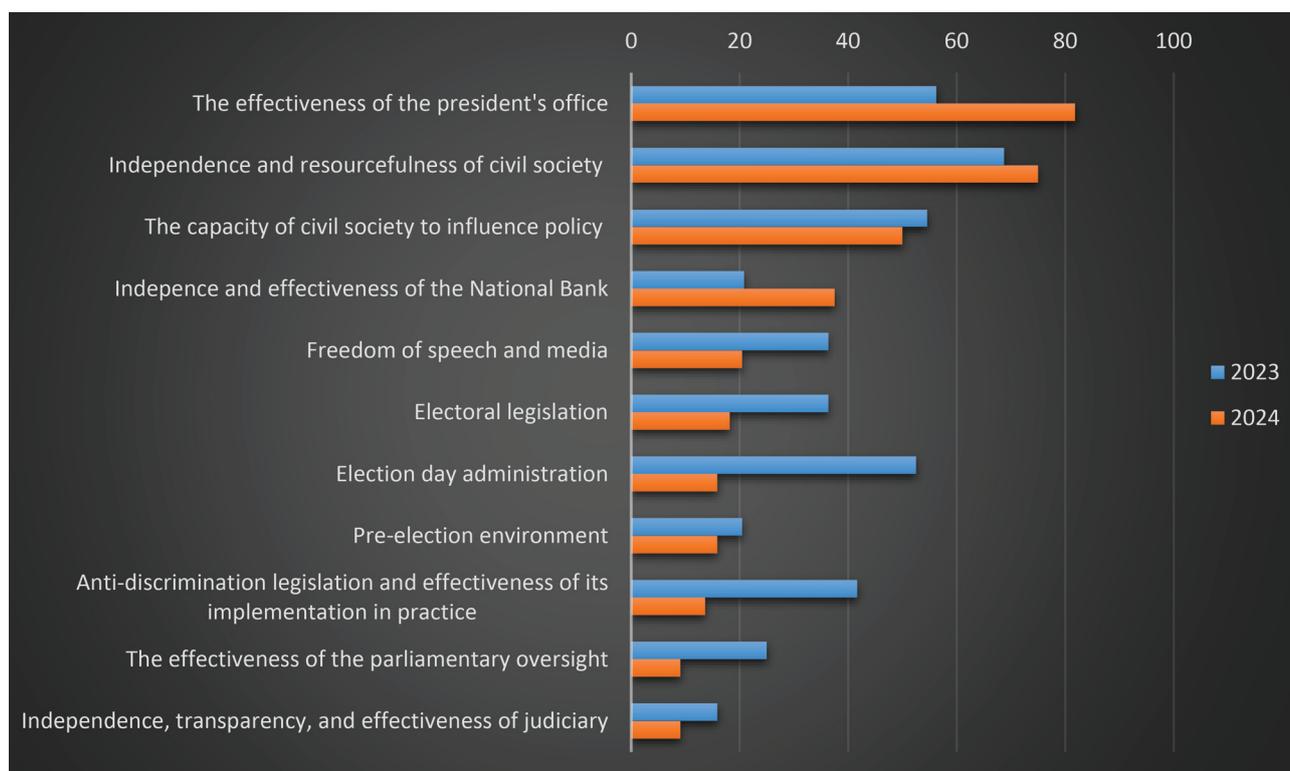
# Democratic Governance



### Key Findings and Main Challenges

- Amidst democratic backsliding, democratic governance score fell by almost 10 points. Despite a drop in scores, civil society was assessed by experts as a relatively strong performer in democratic governance. However, civil society's effectiveness has been challenged by rising polarization, political radicalization, demonization by the ruling party, and adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence.
- Political polarization and domination by a single party continue to pose problems for democratisation. Several actions taken by the ruling party have undermined the democratic processes, including: amending rules for the Central Election Commission, taking power away from opposition representatives; abolishing the requirement for political parties to include as every fourth candidate on their lists a member of the opposite gender and adopting the "Bill on the Protection of Family Values" which undermines freedom of expression.
- The 2024 parliamentary elections are contested both internally and externally. The OSCE/ODIHR final report indicates that the combination of procedural issues, allegations of manipulation, and the lack of effective dispute resolution mechanisms led to widespread distrust in the results and a deepening political crisis, which subsequently challenged its legitimacy.
- Horizontal accountability was diminished by the ruling party's attempt to undermine the fifth President, Salome Zourabichvili. GD leadership later decided to replace the outgoing president with a candidate loyal to the ruling political elite.
- 2024 saw an alarming increase in violence against protesters by riot police, attacks on critical media and activists, with none of the law enforcement officials being held accountable.

Figure 3: How would you assess Georgia's performance on the following issues related to democratic governance in 2024 on a 100-point scale, where 100 means very effective and 0 means very ineffective?



The year 2024 was marked by a significant decline in democratic governance, representing a clear setback for the country. By the end of the year, along with the suspension of the EU membership talks, violent suppression and arrest of protesters, as well as adoption of a whole set of amendments, the country spiralled further towards authoritarianism. These alarming tendencies were reflected in the GGI Expert Survey score for democratic governance, which fell from 41.65 to 32.65 (on the scale of 100). In terms of the individual indicators, despite a slight drop, according to the experts, civil society still remains the best performer in democratic governance.

As has been the trend for many years now, this year also was marked by political polarization and radicalized political discourse. Further persistent challenges include the continued monopoly on power by the ruling party and lack of a functioning checks and balances system in the country.

In 2024 Georgia also saw parliamentary elections, the results of which lack recognition both internally and externally. As of writing this report, the international legitimacy of the newly elected parliament remains contested, creating challenges to democratic consolidation in the country. Horizontal accountability was further diminished by the Georgian Dream's decision, amidst continuous protests, to proceed with the plan of replacing President Salome Zourabichvili. This action was taken despite questions regarding the legitimacy of the parliamentary election results and hence the subsequent political processes

## Civil and Political Rights

In 2024, Georgia had not made any substantial progress in terms of civil and political rights. On the contrary, the country saw a sharp decline in these areas, especially in the last couple of weeks of the year. In 2024, as in the previous year, challenges were more acute in the area of political rights. While fundamental civil rights are more or less upheld in the country, the lack of effective mechanisms of oversight over law enforcement and security authorities remains a problem, as evidenced by the increase in violence from the riot police against the protesters throughout the year. During the spring protests, opposition political leaders and activists, including Levan Khabeishvili, Aleksandre Elisashvili, and David Katsarava, were violently beaten by the riot police (Tabula 2024), while some others were attacked by unidentified group of men in the streets near their homes (Civil Georgia 2024a). Riot police forces used brutal methods to suppress protests in November of 2024 as well. Beating and inhumane treatment of demonstrators was observed while they were being held in custody. As of the time of writing, none of the law enforcement officials involved in the incident of violence and abuse of power have been identified and held accountable. In the spring of 2024 civil and political activists critical of the ruling party were receiving threatening calls from unidentified numbers. The amount and the scale of these incidents suggest the possibility of coordination with state institutions (News.on.ge 2024a). At the time of writing, no one has been held responsible for this campaign of intimidation.

These incidents have undermined the freedom of assembly and expression of every citizen, regardless of their sex, religion, faith, political opinion or sexual orientation, that is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia. In this regard, 2024 also saw increased attacks on representatives of the critical media. According to Transparency International Georgia, throughout the year there were almost 200 cases of verbal or physical violence against journalists, 80% of which have taken place since the end of October 2024 (Transparency International Georgia 2024a). In 2024, due to the ruling party's homophobic rhetoric and law proposals in the pre-election period, the organizers of Tbilisi Pride Week were not able to hold any event (Civil Georgia 2024b). Additionally, despite the condemnation from major human rights' organizations and watchdogs, the so-called Bill on the Protection of Family Values was adopted by the ruling party in the autumn of 2024 (Civil Georgia 2024c). Thus, further undermining freedom of expression, assembly and potentially establishing censorship in the media, academia, and the cultural sphere.

2024 also saw a major decline in the World Press Freedom Index. According to the Reporters without Borders, Georgia moved down from 77th to 103rd place (Reporters Without Borders 2025).

In 2024, parliament abolished the requirement that at least one of every fourth persons on a political party list should be of a different gender to the majority. This move caused major criticism from local non-governmental organisations, as according to them, it undermines women's rights and goes against Georgia's European aspirations (News.on.ge 2024b).

In 2024, despite still performing better than the regional or even world average on an economic freedom score, according to the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, Georgia's ranking decreased by 0.3 point. Thus, the country remains in the "moderately free" category (The Heritage Foundation 2024). The continuous drop in scores in those areas, along with the increasing trends of authoritarianism, may affect the country's investment climate.

## Electoral System

2024 was a decisive electoral year for Georgia. It was supposed to see the first-ever fully-proportional elections of the legislative body, thus potentially creating conditions for a true coalition government (for the first time since the restoration of independence). Within two years prior to election day, a number of steps were made that were meant to increase trust in the results. More specifically, in 70 percent of districts voting was held electronically, considerably increasing the efficiency and the speed at which the preliminary results could be made available. However, several moves made by the ruling party undermined trust in the process (Gutbrod 2024). In February 2024, amendments accepted by the parliament removed from the President the mandate of nominating Central Election Commission's (CEC) staff members and transferred it to the legislative body. Furthermore, the Deputy-Chairman post intended for a representative of the opposition was abolished and the threshold for the Chairman to be elected for the full term was lowered (Civil Georgia 2024d). These amendments go against the European Commission's recommendations issued for Georgia in December 2023 (ibid). In 2024, two other important amendments were introduced that have affected the credibility of the election results. More specifically, the functions of the members of the polling station commission were to be determined a week in advance of the polling day, thus giving the authorities the ability to exert pressure beforehand (Radio Liberty 2024a). Furthermore, the CEC was given power to take decisions with a simple majority, thus taking power to influence the decision-making process (ibid) away from the opposition party representatives.

Additionally, the credibility of the elections was undermined by challenges faced by the Georgian diaspora abroad. The electronic voting system did not permit remote voting with the use of ID cards, thus requiring Georgian citizens living abroad to physically go to the polling stations. In some cases, particularly in larger countries, this posed significant difficulties as it required covering long distances. In addition, the limited number of polling stations caused hours-long queues.

According to the International Republican Institute's (IRI) final report, the elections were "fundamentally flawed", affected by the misuse of state and administrative resources, voter intimidation, oppression of civil society, critical media, and political opposition as well as elements of state capture (IRI 2024). Similarly, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe expressed serious concerns in its final report regarding the ruling party's uneven advantage over its competitors as well as incidents of voter intimidation and vote

buying (OSCE 2024). The lack of both internal and external legitimacy of the election results created a major political crisis that as of writing continues to deepen.

## **Horizontal Accountability and System of Checks and Balances**

In Georgia, as a parliamentary republic, the legislative body has the power of oversight over various branches of government. One of the important mechanisms to strengthen accountability is the Minister's Hour where a specific minister must report to MPs and answer their questions. According to the timetable of the Parliament created in February, the Minister's Hour was scheduled to be held 12 times in 2024. However, only 7 reports are available on the Parliament's website (Parliament.ge 2024). This data indicates that between January and October 2024, MPs used the power of interpellation – the power to formally ask questions of members of the executive – twice, both instances initiated by the opposition MPs (ibid).

In 2024, as in previous years, political polarization and the dominance of the ruling Georgian Dream party in every branch of government posed challenges to the effective functioning of the system of checks and balances as well as horizontal accountability. The positive development was Bidzina Ivanishvili's formal return to politics by becoming the honorary chairman of the ruling party and even leading the party list. However, the changes in the internal regulations of the party that gave the right to the honorary chairman to nominate, to a certain extent, the candidate for the Prime Ministership undermines this process. In other words, the amendment granted an excessive power to the honorary chairman without taking more active office within the party bureaucracy.

The erosion of the system of the checks and balances was further amplified by the conflict between the President and the government. The relationship between the two branches of government remained strained and haunted by the ruling party's attempt to have the president impeached over unauthorized foreign visits a year before (Politico 2023).

Although in 2024 Georgian Parliament adopted several amendments to the Law on Common Courts, according to the European Commission, they did not fully address the recommendations for a comprehensive reform of the High Council of Justice (HCJ) and the Supreme Court, including integrity checks. While the law addresses some disciplinary issues for judges, it does not tackle judicial reform holistically. Additionally, the appointment of a new Prosecutor-General and Supreme Court judges raised concerns regarding alignment with European standards (European Commission 2024). The European Commission also welcomed the strengthening of immunity and protection of the head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) and whistle-blowers, yet finds the ACB's current institutional design insufficient to ensure independence or political neutrality, as well as lacking the capacity to investigate high-level corruption cases (ibid).

## Civil society

Civil society and non-state actors in 2024, similarly to previous years, have been playing a crucial role in keeping society and the international community alert over the democratic backsliding unfolding in Georgia. This is reflected in the ruling party's attempt to silence civil society by the adoption of a so-called law on transparency that implies heavy fines for non-compliance. Furthermore, this law is being used by the ruling party to demonize the non-governmental sector in the public eye and discredit any criticism directed towards the government. The Georgian government's plan to establish a special fund for non-governmental organizations (Tabula 2024b) should also be perceived in this regard as an attempt by the ruling party to reward non-state actors loyal to it, while silencing critical voices. Although civil society in Georgia is dynamic and active in mobilizing protests and pointing at abuse of power or violation of law from the authorities, it does not have the capacity to transform or reverse the increasingly authoritarian tendencies. For example, all tiers of the court, including the Constitutional Court, have rejected civil society's appeal on the annul election results about violations of the secrecy of votes (Civil Georgia 2024e).

Nonetheless, as of writing, civil society and non-state actors remain dynamic and active in the political processes in the country. Following the last two years of protests, it has evolved and transformed even further, involving more grass-root movements and youth, making it harder for the authorities to crack down on civil society. In 2024 grassroots mobilization played a crucial role in providing legal and financial assistance to those who have been arrested or fined by the authorities throughout the spring and autumn protests. Yet, the law on "Transparency of Foreign Influence", once fully implemented, has the potential to drastically inhibit the third sector's ability to continue in such support.

As in the previous year (2023), Georgia's key challenge in democratic governance remained the lack of judicial independence and impartiality, one-party domination on all levels of government, and state capture. The 2024 parliamentary elections, deemed fundamentally flawed by international observers, further exacerbated the crisis, resulting in a lack of both domestic and international legitimacy for the ruling party.

In 2024, incidents of large-scale intimidation targeting opposition politicians and civil activists increased, alongside cases of violent assaults by riot police. Despite an official launch of investigations, none of those responsible were held accountable. These challenges are also reflected in the decline of the GGI score in democratic governance.

However, President Zourabichvili managed to maintain the independence of the President's institution despite her limited capabilities. Which was also reflected in the expert survey. Overall, most of the experts surveyed for the report named reform of the judiciary, electoral reforms, reversing authoritarian trends, and strengthening of horizontal accountability as some of the priority areas for the upcoming year.

### *Developments since November 28, 2024*

The democratic score reflects events unfolding prior to 28th of November, 2024. After the Georgian Dream's decision to suspend European integration and the violent suppression of subsequent protests, the country spiraled further into violence, polarization, radicalization and authoritarianism. In December, Parliament adopted laws that considerably limited freedom of expression by imposing heavy fines and banning a number of items at the demonstrations, including face coverings and fireworks. Additionally, these laws granted police the authority to arrest individuals based solely on suspicion. Another amendment facilitates dismissal of public sector employees, while a separate change in the law makes it easier to recruit personnel for the police (Interpressnews 2024a). The last two months have also seen an increasing number of arrests, administrative fines and intimidation of opposition party members, critical media, and civil activists. The major challenge to democratic government, as of writing, is the legitimacy of the newly elected Parliament - this remains under question both internally and externally and thus, puts under question the legitimacy of the newly elected President.



# Effective Governance

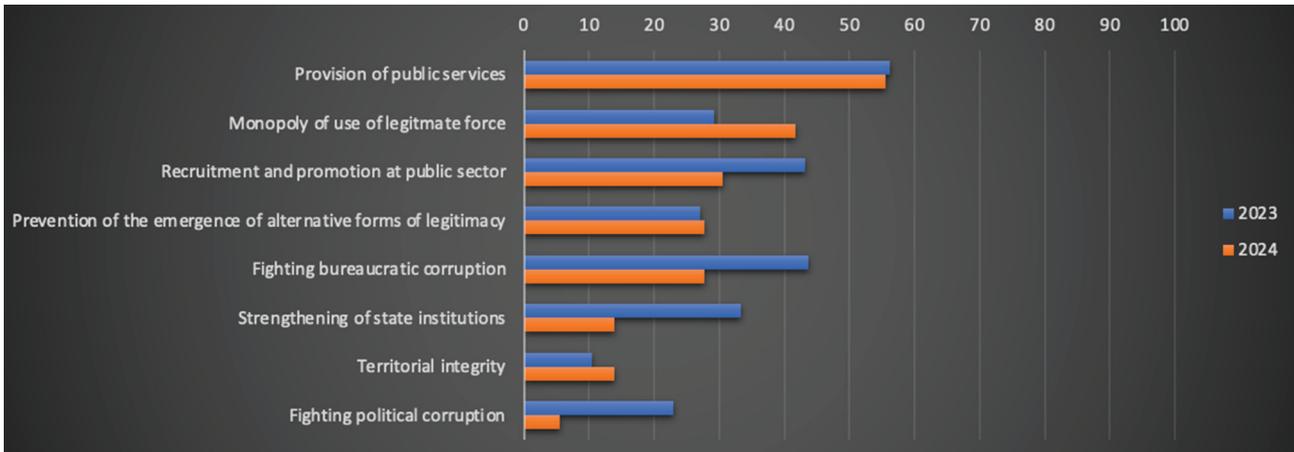


### Key Findings and Main Challenges

- In 2024 Georgia's performance in terms of the monopoly on the use of legitimate force remained substantially flawed, largely due to the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and frequent detentions of Georgian citizens along the borders. However, this element was further weakened by escalating security threats, such as alleged transfers of material through Georgian territory and cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure, and signs of institutional decline, such as insufficient state responses to violence against protestors by unidentified individuals.
- Regarding informal governance and alternative forms of legitimation, Bidzina Ivanishvili's extensive influence over state institutions remained a major challenge. Despite his formal return to politics at the end of 2023, Ivanishvili's informal influence over institutions undermined transparent and effective governance in the country throughout 2024. The situation was further exacerbated by legislative amendments believed to benefit Ivanishvili's private interests, such as tax code amendments providing tax benefits for transferring offshore assets to Georgia.
- In 2024, the situation regarding Corruption Control in Georgia deteriorated. Most notably, 2024 saw a decline in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score, numerous allegations and evidence of high-level corruption, US sanctions against representatives of Georgia's court system, and politically driven regulation of pre-election campaign financing.
- In 2024, Georgia demonstrated progress in expanding digital services, a critical aspect of modernizing public service delivery. Despite the absence of a comprehensive legal framework for coordinated digital governance, public service delivery was among the more successful areas of public administration reform. The sector scored relatively well in the Global Competitive Index (GCI) survey (55.56), reflecting the government's focus on enhancing citizen access to services.
- Public administration reform efforts incorporated gender-sensitive objectives, with programs aimed at promoting women's career development in traditionally male-dominated sectors like defense. This reflects a broader commitment to inclusivity and equality in public administration. However, recruitment and promotion practices in Georgia's civil service became less transparent and accountable in 2024, with the GGI survey scoring this indicator at a low 30.56. This trend toward a more closed system undermines efforts to enhance institutional integrity and may be contributing to high staff turnover and reduced trust in public institutions. These issues are compounded by recent legislative amendments that simplify dismissals and weaken civil servants' rights to contest terminations, raising concerns about political interference and job insecurity.
- In October, Georgia's membership in the multilateral initiative, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) was suspended due to legislative actions undermining civil liberties and fundamental rights. This development represents a significant set-

back for the country’s reputation in governance and transparency. It overshadowed earlier progress, including the adoption of an OGP Action Plan in 2023. The suspension signals a failure to meet international expectations and highlights challenges in aligning governance practices with democratic standards.

*Figure 4: How would you assess Georgia’s performance on the following issues related to effective governance in 2024 on a 100-point scale, where 100 means very effective and 0 means very ineffective?*



According to the 2024 Georgian Governance Index (GGI) Expert Survey, the component of effective governance scored 27.08 out of 100, making it the second-worst performing area after external governance (18.74). Figure 4 displays experts’ assessments for each of the eight indicators of effective governance. Compared to 2023, most indicators of effective governance deteriorated. Experts assessed that in 2024, Georgia’s performance significantly worsened in the following indicators: provision of public services, fighting bureaucratic corruption, recruitment and promotion in the public sector, strengthening of state institutions, and fighting political corruption. The following two indicators remained largely unchanged compared to 2023: prevention of the emergence of alternative forms of legitimacy and territorial integrity.

## The monopoly on the use of legitimate force

The most pressing issue with respect to the monopoly on the use of legitimate force remains de facto absence of power of the Georgian government in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2024, the Russian forces in these occupied areas continued to detain Georgian citizens, almost on a monthly basis, throughout 2024 - almost every month at least one Georgian citizen was detained by the occupation regimes (Civil Georgia 2024f) Such incidents, coupled with the killings of Georgian citizens by Russian border guards in late 2023, continued to undermine the Georgian government’s monopoly on the use of legitimate force.

Amid the growing number of incidents of detainment and killings by Russian forces, the

Georgian government was continually accused of refraining from taking robust actions, either domestically or through international diplomatic mechanisms (Interpressnews 2023b). Considering Georgia's further deteriorating international standing by the end of 2024, and a credible threat of international isolation from the democratic world, the prospects for the Georgian government making any progress in establishing monopoly on the use of legitimate force in the occupied regions appear even gloomier.

The monopoly of the use of legitimate force was further undermined by security concerns throughout 2024. In February 2024, the State Security Service (SUS) of Georgia claimed to have intercepted a threat involving explosives being transferred from Ukraine to Russia through Georgian territory (Civil Georgia 2024g). Additionally, early 2024 witnessed cyber-attacks targeting critical national infrastructure, including the hacking of the President's website in February. The hackers left the message, "Hacked by COZY BEAR, Glory to Russia," highlighting cybersecurity vulnerabilities and the persistent external threats posed by Russia (Radio Liberty 2024b). These incidents reflect the ongoing fragility of Georgia's territorial integrity, stability and security in the face of external aggression.

Another challenge to Georgia's monopoly on the use of legitimate force was the violence perpetrated by unidentified individuals against protest participants. During the April-May protests and mass demonstrations following November 28's aborting of the EU accession negotiations with the EU "until 2028", dozens of instances were reported where unidentified individuals attacked and physically assaulted demonstrators. The state's response to these incidents was widely criticized as extremely weak and, in some cases, deliberately absent (Radio Liberty 2024c). Such occurrences signal institutional decay and an alarming erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of legitimate force.

## **Informal Governance and Alternative Forms of Legitimation**

Despite the fact that by the end of 2023, Bidzina Ivanishvili formally entered politics again, informal governance remained one of the most problematic aspects of effective governance in Georgia throughout 2024. More specifically, it is widely believed that Bidzina Ivanishvili exerts extensive influence on key state institutions regardless of his limited formal power as an honorary chairman of the ruling party.

Bidzina Ivanishvili's nominal re-entrance to politics after he announced that he had left politics 'for good' in 2021 can hardly eliminate questions and concerns regarding informal governance in the country. On December 30, 2023 Bidzina Ivanishvili was elected as an honorary chair of the ruling Georgian Dream party (Civil Georgia 2024h). The Georgian Dream party congress amended the statute of the party that states that the honorary chair is 'the main political advisor to the party' and equipped the honorary chair with power to nominate the country's prime ministerial candidate (Georgian Dream 2023a). In response, opposition figures argued that Ivanishvili has never left politics and the formal re-entrance does not alter the informal dynamics of governance in the country (Civil Georgia 2024i).

Moreover, 2024 witnessed some legislative actions that were largely deemed as serving the private interests of Bidzina Ivanishvili. Most notably, the parliamentary majority utilized the fast-track legislative procedure and passed tax code amendments (Parliament of Georgia 2024a). The law provided tax benefits to those who transferred their offshore assets to Georgia. An MP from the ruling party who initiated the project claimed that there was increasing pressure and stricter regulations on offshore financial assets and capital, and Georgia would economically benefit by welcoming companies registered in tax havens (Parliament of Georgia 2024b). Observers noted that it was not entirely clear whose interests these amendments were serving. Allegedly, Bidzina Ivanishvili could potentially benefit from the new law allowing the bringing of offshore capital into Georgia easily and thus evade Western sanctions (Civil Georgia 2024j).

## **The control of corruption**

Expert assessments as well as all the other sources for evaluating the control of corruption in Georgia point in one direction – the control of corruption in Georgia significantly worsened in 2024. In 2024, Georgia’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score dropped from 56 to 53 (Transparency International Georgia 2024b). Georgia, even though still one of the leaders in the region, had not scored that low on the CPI since 2015. This decrease in the CPI score is another signal of a deteriorating corruption situation in the country.

High-level corruption remains another significant issue. In 2024, Transparency International of Georgia (TI-Georgia) conducted an investigation and found that companies connected to the ruling Georgian Dream party were involved in public tenders worth 1.1 billion GEL (Transparency International Georgia 2024c). This raises concerns about the hijacking of state resources by political elites and economic elite linked to the ruling party. According to TI-Georgia, the Georgian government refused to disclose information on decrees throughout the previous year (Transparency International 2024d). Some of those decrees were related to the transfer of state property and the decision to conceal this information from the public poses a clear corruption risk.

Moreover, alleged involvement of the judicial system in corruption constitutes another serious concern with respect to effective governance and the control of corruption, in particular. In 2024, the US government imposed sanctions on Georgian judges due to involvement in corruption. This constituted an unprecedented move by the US government to target individuals in Georgia’s judicial system. The EU Commission’s report for 2024 on Georgia highlighted that the integrity of the highest judicial bodies remains a key challenge (EU Commission 2024 p. 32).

Oversight of party and campaign finance is another key area where Georgia performed poorly in 2024. An Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) was created in 2023, but throughout 2024, and especially during the pre-election campaign of the 2024 Parliamentary elections, the actions of the ACB and its application of legal provisions were deemed selective and

inconsistent (OSCE 2024 p. 3). Moreover, the ACB designated certain civil society organizations as entities “with a declared electoral goal”, but later changed this particular decision following the request from the Prime Minister (OSCE 2024 p. 3). Taken together, the ACB’s actions raise a question about its political independence and further undermine the effective institutional tools to control corruption in the country.

Concern about corruption was also highlighted in the EU Commission’s report for 2024 on Georgia. The report underlined the importance of system reform to tackle corruption, especially high level corruption. It pointed out that Georgia has ‘some level of preparation’ and has made ‘limited progress in the reported period’ (EU Commission 2024 p. 5). However, the report argued that Georgia’s anti-corruption framework needed more institutional independence.

## **Effectiveness of the public administration**

In 2024, Georgia continued to implement the Public Administration Reform (PAR) strategy for 2023-2026 (Legislative Herald of Georgia 2023). This initiative aimed to enhance policy planning, human resources management, and public service delivery, aligning with the European Union’s principles of public administration as developed by OECD/SIGMA (2023). Despite progress, significant challenges persisted. Issues included the involvement of public servants in political activities, the concentration of power in the hands of a single group, informal governance, and the continued weakening of institutional independence. These challenges, coupled with difficulties in implementing reforms effectively, hampered the overall progress of public administration reform.

As a result of the GGI Expert Survey filled out by December 2024, the effectiveness of public administration received a 43,06 score which shows a 6-point decrease in comparison with the previous year. In this component, two indicators of public service delivery were assessed which received a 55,56 score, and recruitment and promotion in the public sector received a 30,56 score. In terms of public service delivery, there is a very slight decrease in the score compared to the previous year, and in fact, the services sector is one of the most successful areas with regard to implementing public administration reform in Georgia. Georgia is expanding its digital services, yet a comprehensive legal framework and coordinated governance for digital initiatives are lacking. Challenges remain in ensuring quality control and cost management in public service delivery. Addressing these gaps is crucial for meeting the evolving needs of citizens and businesses (European Commission 2024).

No tangible progress has been observed in terms of recruitment and promotion in the civil service in 2024, and the system has become more closed instead of providing greater transparency and accountability, which may explain the decline in the score. Moreover, it should be hereby mentioned that since the GGI Survey results were ready by the end of November, the developments in December were not reflected in the scores. Had they been counted, there is a high probability that the overall score of effective governance would have been

lower. In particular, the Georgian Parliament expedited amendments to the Law on Public Service, simplifying processes for reorganization, dismissal, and employee evaluation. These changes include biannual employee evaluations with penalties for unsatisfactory performance, expanded use of administrative contracts, and restrictions on civil servants' rights to contest dismissals resulting from reorganizations (Business Media 2024a). The amendments were passed amid tensions following public protests, including from civil servants, against the government's decision to suspend EU negotiations until 2028. Critics, including the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFIa), argue that these changes aim to discourage dissent among civil servants and undermine constitutional rights (IDFI 2024b). As a result, some public sector employees who openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the shift in the country's foreign policy trajectory, as announced by Irakli Kopakhidze on November 28, started reporting through social media and media interviews about receiving notifications from the state agencies on the termination of their employment contracts from January (Radio Liberty 2024d).

Even before making the amendments to the legislature related to public administration, there had already been several setbacks in terms of the wider cooperation by Georgia in good governance initiatives. In October, Georgia's membership in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) was suspended due to legislative actions that undermined civil liberties and fundamental rights. This suspension occurred during the second phase of OGP's response policy, triggered by Georgia's failure to implement recommendations issued in May within the given timeframe. This development overshadowed earlier progress, including the adoption of the 2023–2025 Action Plan under the OGP in December 2023, which aimed to improve public access to government data, transparency, and accountability.

In March, Georgia updated public administration principles. The European Commission's report highlighted the need to strengthen the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Council's management role and improve the integration of regulatory impact assessments into decision-making, which remains incomplete. Although institutional structures for policy development are in place, with progress in policy planning, challenges such as high staff turnover and capacity constraints persist. Academia and civil society also contributed, exemplified by the Network of Institutes of Schools & Public Administration in Central & Eastern Europe (NISPAcee) conference in May 2024 on horizontal practices in public administration.

Public service management continues to face issues as key entities like the Civil Service Bureau and regulatory bodies are not fully covered by public service legislation, undermining reform coherence. Laws on public service and labor remuneration have modernized HR management, while decentralization efforts were supported by the Local Self-Government Code and the Decentralization Strategy 2020-2025.

Accountability is a pressing concern, with low implementation rates for oversight bodies' recommendations and legal gaps limiting access to public information. Public financial management has improved under the 2023-2026 strategy, with gains in transparency

and auditing, though alignment between programme budgeting and operational planning needs strengthening.

Gender-sensitive objectives have been incorporated into key policies, and programs promoting women's career development in defense were introduced. However, women occupy only 38% of high-level civil roles in the Ministry of Defence and just 6.1% in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, according to 2023 data. There was an attempt of the Civil Service Bureau through its Action Plan 2024 to support creation of sustainable public institutions, emphasize on values, and integrity, however, in practice not much has been done in these directions.

To improve the effectiveness of public administration in Georgia for 2025, experts emphasize several priorities. Strengthening governance at the municipal level through decentralization is vital to ensure that local administrations are empowered and capable of meeting regional needs. Depoliticizing the civil service is equally critical, as reducing political influence will enhance impartiality and operational efficiency across public institutions.

Improving policy development and coordination is another key area, with a focus on building institutional capacity to implement coherent and effective strategies. Human resources management within the civil service must also be addressed to attract and retain qualified personnel, which is essential for increasing efficiency and overall performance. Finally, strengthening public service delivery mechanisms is necessary to provide citizens with transparent, reliable, and accessible services, fostering trust and confidence in public institutions.



# **Social and Economic Governance**



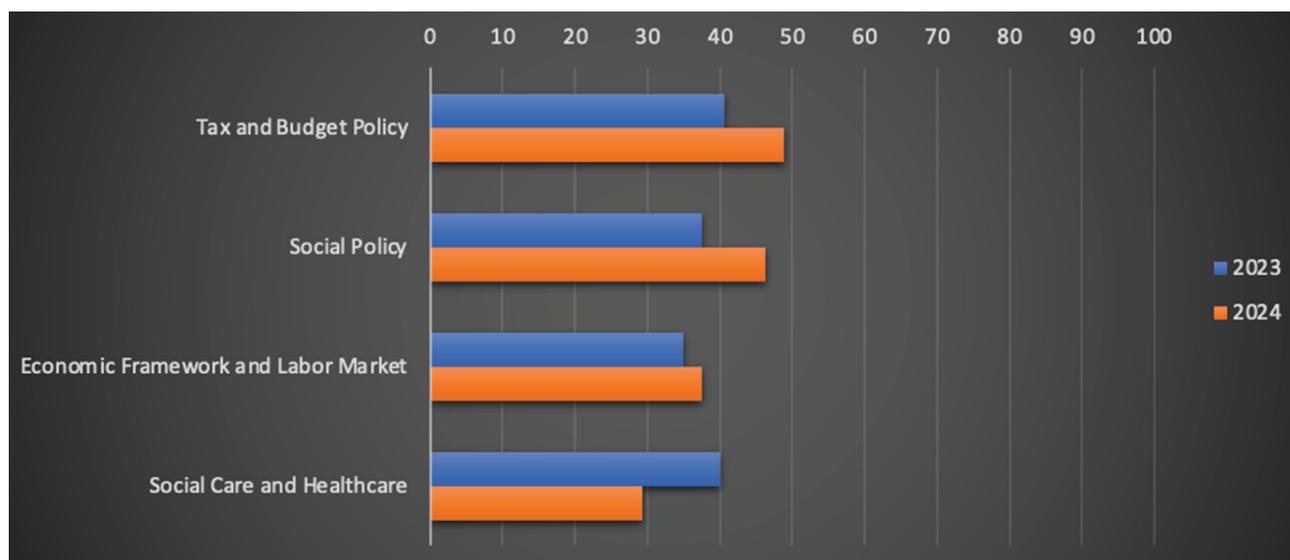
### Key findings and challenges:

- In 2024 adverse trends observed in the previous year, including increased trade with former CIS countries (including Russia), currency depreciation, high unemployment and poverty rates, and a damaged international investment climate, were further exacerbated by political developments. Adoption of the controversial legislation contradicting European and democratic values, compromised judicial integrity, undermined independence of the National Bank of Georgia, rigged elections, and subsequent public demonstrations have all further tarnished Georgia's international reputation and investment climate.
- As a result of democratic backsliding, Georgia has lost a significant amount of financial aid from key allies and partners, including the EU and the US. This loss will have profound negative repercussions on the country's economy, further exacerbating its economic challenges and already hindered development.
- The overall score for socio-economic governance in 2024 stood at 40.45. Among the governance areas evaluated by the GGI survey, socio-economic governance received the highest score. This relatively positive result is attributed to sustained economic growth, as well as declines in scores across other governance areas.
- Healthcare policy received the lowest score (29.31), followed by labor market and economic framework (37.50). In contrast, tax and budget policy achieved the highest score, reflecting overall economic growth and the associated increase in tax revenues. However, this divergence highlights systemic issues in the Georgian economy, such as the unequal distribution of GDP growth and its limited benefits across the broader economy.
- In 2024, Georgia made efforts to address homelessness through targeted initiatives, including providing housing to 200 displaced internally displaced (IDP) families in Kutaisi and 65 families in Tbilisi, as well as launching a state program in January aimed at supporting large families living in poverty or without permanent housing. However, on the other hand, systemic challenges in social protection persisted, such as the violent eviction of displaced families on Kekelidze Street, which highlighted the inadequacy of current housing policies. Additionally, informal sector workers continued to face low wages and poor labor protections, underscoring the structural weaknesses in the system.
- Improvements were made in funding for critical healthcare services, such as the removal of the 25,000 GEL annual cap on cancer treatment expenses and the elimination of the requirement for patients to bring medications themselves during hospital stays, which marked an important step toward more equitable healthcare access. However, the slow implementation of the Diagnosis-Related Group (DRG) funding system led to widespread dissatisfaction among hospitals and pharmaceutical companies. This resistance, combined with unaddressed gaps in primary healthcare and delays in reforms to improve access to essential medicines, left

significant areas of the healthcare system underdeveloped and unable to meet the needs of the population.

- The unemployment rate dropped to a historic low of 13.8% by the third quarter of 2024, reflecting significant progress in job creation. This achievement largely resulted from state programs like the “Public Works Employment Promotion,” which artificially created workplaces. Despite improvements in unemployment and poverty rates, income disparity remains a critical challenge. Over 56,000 individuals earned less than 300 GEL monthly, and 355,366 earned below 1,200 GEL, underscoring the uneven distribution of economic benefits and highlighting systemic inequities. Moreover, strikes, including a 43-day hunger strike and a protest by over 4,600 employees at “Evolution Georgia,” revealed deep-seated dissatisfaction with workplace discrimination, poor conditions, and bullying. These incidents underscore the urgent need for labor reforms and improved conflict resolution mechanisms.

Figure 5: How would you assess Georgia’s performance on the following areas related to socio-economic governance in 2024? (Standardized on a scale of 0-100 where 100 means “very effective” and 0 means “very ineffective”)



In 2024, as in previous years, social and economic governance emerged as the highest-performing indicator in the GGI Expert Survey, outpacing the other three governance areas. However, compared to 2023, there was minimal progress in this domain, with the overall score declining slightly from 40.6 to 40.45 (out of 100 points). Among its components, social care and healthcare policy received the lowest score (29.31), followed by labor market and economic framework (37.50). Tax and budget policy, on the other hand, achieved the highest score, reflecting the overall economic growth and a related increase in tax revenues.

A notable disparity persists between the scores of individual policy areas within social and economic governance, with a significant 30-point gap between tax policy (the highest) and healthcare policy (the lowest). This discrepancy highlights a lack of alignment across socio-economic policies, with varying levels of effectiveness and impact.

Although social and economic governance continues to rank as the second-best performing area overall, its score remains well below the halfway mark on the 100-point scale, underscoring persistent weaknesses and unaddressed challenges in Georgia's socio-economic policy landscape.

## **Economic Framework and Labor Market**

### ***GDP growth***

The average real GDP growth rate for the first eleven months of 2024 reached 9.4% (Geostat, 2024a). This marks an increase compared to the growth rate recorded in 2023 and significantly exceeds Georgia's estimated potential growth rate of 5%.

Economic projections for the year align closely with this strong performance. The World Bank forecasts an annual growth rate of 7.5% by the end of 2024 (World Bank, 2024a), while the Asian Development Bank (ADB) projects a slightly lower but comparable growth rate of 7% (ADB, 2024).

Growth was primarily driven by robust aggregate demand, encompassing both private and public consumption. Private consumption continued to play a leading role in driving demand, albeit at a slower pace compared to previous years. Public consumption, on the other hand, saw a significant boost, fueled in part by election-related expenditures.

On the supply side, the services sector emerged as the key contributor to growth. Notable gains were observed in transport and storage, hospitality, information and communications, and education services (Geostat, 2024a).

### ***Inflation***

The annual inflation rate continued to decrease. According to the World Bank assessment, annual headline inflation dropped to 1% in August 2024, well below the 3% inflation target set by the National Bank of Georgia (NBG). This was positively evaluated by the experts surveyed (GGI Expert Survey on Socio-Economic Governance 2024). In response to the declining inflation rate, the NBG reduced the monetary policy rate to 8% (by 150 bps), below the policy rate registered in 2023.

However, the consumer price index (CPI) recorded a 1,1% rise compared to the previous year (Geostat, 2025). As in previous years, inflation was mainly driven by price increases in food, tobacco and non-alcoholic as well as alcoholic beverages (Geostat, 2025). Other sectors that increased prices were transport, utilities and healthcare (Geostat, 2025).

## *Trade FDI and money transfers*

According to preliminary estimates by Geostat, Georgia's foreign trade increased by 6.6% in 2024 compared to 2023. However, import growth outpaced export growth, leading to a further expansion of the trade deficit, which exceeded 9 billion GEL—the highest since 2020 (Geostat, 2024b).

The composition of Georgia's trade followed the trends observed since 2022. The EU's share in Georgia's exports fell further, dropping from 12% in 2023 to just 8.5% in 2024. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries saw their share grow from 65.5% to 68.9%. On the import side, the EU accounted for a larger share (26.5%) than the CIS (19.5%) (Geostat, 2024b).

Among export destinations, Kyrgyzstan ranked highest, receiving 19.4% of Georgia's exports, followed by Kazakhstan (13.2%), Azerbaijan (11.1%), and Russia (10.5%). For imports, Georgia's main sources were Turkey (16.6%), the United States (12.1%), Russia (10.8%), and China (9.8%) (Geostat, 2024c). Trade in passenger cars, particularly second-hand vehicles, along with consumer electronics, dominated Georgia's exports (over one-third) and imports (over one-fifth). These products are primarily imported from the United States, the EU, and Japan, and are subsequently re-exported to markets within the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), including Russia.

The trends suggest that increased trade may be fueling Russian demand or facilitating routes for Russian goods to reach other markets via Georgia. This raises concerns that Georgia could potentially act as a channel for circumventing sanctions, effectively becoming a sanction-resistant trade corridor with Russia (Akhvlediani, 2024).

Expert survey suggested the need to utilize the potential of the "Middle Corridor" better. Their recommendations also pointed to the need to expand global trade through free trade and investment agreements, and to advance transport and digital infrastructure to improve the connectivity and competitiveness of the country. Experts also recommended greater public participation in infrastructure development by incorporating citizens' input into project planning and implementation, ensuring transparency and adherence to international standards (GGI Expert Survey on Socio-Economic Governance 2024).

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows showed a declining trend in 2024, with a 55.2% drop in the third quarter compared to the same period in 2023. This decline is primarily attributed to reductions in equity and reinvestments. The main FDI partners remain the Netherlands, Malta, and the UK. In terms of sectoral distribution, FDIs were concentrated in manufacturing, energy, and trade, while investments in real estate experienced a decrease. Remittance inflows also contracted, falling by approximately 30% in 2024. This decline was driven by a sharp 71% drop in transfers from Russia (ADB, 2024). However, remittances from the EU, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) showed growth during the same period (World Bank, 2024b).

## ***Labour market***

Unemployment in Georgia during the third quarter of 2023 stood at 13.8%, a decrease from the annual rate of 16.4% recorded in 2022. This marks the lowest unemployment rate in the past decade. However, the rate remains high, considering that approximately one-third of the labor force is self-employed. This includes a significant portion of workers in the agricultural sector, particularly in remote areas and regions of Georgia. Additionally, informal employment outside the agricultural sector is notably high, reaching 27.6% (Geostat, 2024d).

As in previous years, the labor force participation rate is higher among men than women, though unemployment remains more prevalent among men.

In the third quarter of 2023, the average nominal salary grew by 10.9% (201.3 GEL), reaching 2,056.7 GEL. However, a significant gender pay gap persists, with men earning approximately 800 GEL more than women during the same period. The highest salaries were reported in the information and communications sector, as well as in scientific and technical activities. Regionally, Tbilisi offers the highest salaries, while wages in other regions are almost half of those in the capital (Geostat, 2024d).

According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) polls, low salaries and a dearth of job opportunities are identified as the major reasons for emigration from Georgia in search of better employment opportunities. According to the latest polls, 16% of the individuals surveyed had considered emigrating. (NDI, 2023).

## **Fiscal policy**

Sustained growth in tourism and transit trade since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continued to contribute to the increase in fiscal revenues. In addition, in 2024 the country registered an increase in tax revenues from gambling (World Bank 2024c). However, the growth in fiscal expenditures due to election-related spending is forecasted at 31%, which surpasses the growth of fiscal revenues, resulting in an increased budget deficit at the end of 2024.

The current account deficit grew as a result of a drop in exports and remittances, mainly from Russia. This was also reflected in the depreciation of the Georgian currency, the Lari (GEL), by 4.1% against the USD before the elections. In December, following the outbreak of protests in Tbilisi after the elections, the GEL fell to its lowest (2.87 against the USD) since 2022 (World Bank, 2024d).

The weak coordination between monetary and fiscal policies was noted as a critical concern by experts, highlighting the damage to the reputation and accountability of the National Bank of Georgia as particularly troubling (GGI Expert Survey on Socio-Economic Governance 2024).

## Social Policy

In 2024, Georgia stood at a crossroads in its social and economic development, navigating a landscape of both progress and persistent challenges. The year marked some advancements in reducing unemployment and poverty rates, but the latter remains alarmingly high. According to World Bank estimates, the poverty rate has declined from 47.7% in 2022 to 43.6% in 2023. (World Bank, 2024e). But noting that almost half of the population lives under the World Bank international poverty line of 6.85 USD a day is concerning.

According to the NDI polls, one in ten Georgians struggles to afford basic food, while one in four can only manage to cover food expenses, leaving no room for other necessities. The situation is even more alarming in regions with ethnic minority populations, where a quarter of residents reportedly face difficulty in providing food for their families (NDI, 2023).

In 2024, the budget included increased allocations for pensions, providing a modest rise of 50 GEL for individuals aged 70 and above, and 20 GEL for those under 70. Additionally, the budget allocated a slight increase for social programs supporting people and children with disabilities. However, the rise in monthly financial assistance remained limited, amounting to no more than 50 GEL (approximately 20 USD) per month (Business Insider, 2023).

According to the GGI Expert Survey results, in 2024, within socio-economic governance, social policy and inclusion alone scored 46,2 which is an improved result by 3 points in comparison to the 2023 score. This could be explained by the increased number of citizens employed within the framework of the so-called “Public Works Employment Promotion” state program. However, systemic issues such as income inequality, labor unrest, and environmental exploitation continued to demand attention.

To be more precise, while analyzing the situation in Georgia concerning unemployment and social assistance, by the third quarter of 2024 Georgia recorded significant progress in reducing unemployment, with rates falling to 13.8% - a historic low in recent decades (Trending Economics 2024). This milestone was accompanied by increased reliance on social assistance programs, as the number of recipients rose to 684,432 by October, constituting 18.4% of the population (DRI 2024). Among these individuals, approximately 230,000 were involved in state employment programs, which allowed them to retain assistance for up to four years. While the government allocated 70 million GEL in October 2024 for social programs, marking a 4.6% increase from the previous year, questions arose regarding the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of these measures. Despite declining unemployment, income inequality remained a pressing concern. Over 56,000 individuals earned less than 300 GEL monthly as of September 2024, and 355,366 earned below 1,200 GEL, underscoring the challenges of achieving equitable economic distribution (M2B 2024). These disparities were compounded by the uneven benefits of economic growth, leaving vulnerable populations at a disadvantage.

Poverty alleviation efforts showed signs of progress, with the share of the population living

below the absolute poverty line declining from 15.6% in 2022 to 11.8% in 2023 (Business Media 2024b). However, sustaining this trend required addressing systemic barriers that hindered long-term improvements for vulnerable groups. Alongside the reduction of poverty, the number of socially vulnerable individuals has reached a record high. 18.4% of the population (680,833 people) receive subsistence assistance from the state. (FactCheck.ge, 2024) Meanwhile, the year was punctuated by labor unrest, reflecting deep-seated grievances within the workforce. Notable incidents included a 43-day hunger strike by Shukruti residents in September and October (Civil Georgia 2024k), as well as a strike by 4,621 employees of “Evolution Georgia” in July, who protested workplace discrimination, substandard conditions, and bullying (OC Media 2024b). These events highlighted the urgent need for labor reforms and better conflict resolution mechanisms.

Georgia also grappled with broader challenges that shaped its social and economic landscape. Employment programs often fostered dependency on state resources rather than promoting genuine workforce development (World Bank 2024f). Environmental exploitation emerged as another pressing issue, with privatization policies frequently sidelining local communities and neglecting the long-term consequences of resource depletion. Additionally, tax code amendments favoring offshore asset repatriation risked exacerbating inequality and fostering corruption (Civil Georgia 2024j). Emigration of skilled workers further weakened the domestic labor market, while stark urban-rural disparities hindered cohesive national development (GGI Expert Survey on Socio-Economic Governance 2024).

In the realm of social policy, the expert survey stressed the importance of job creation, focusing on expanding opportunities in the private sector. Pension reform was also highlighted as essential to improving living standards, with a proposed increase in social pensions to 1,000 GEL, deemed feasible within the current budget framework (GGI Expert Survey on Socio-Economic Governance 2024).

## **Social Protection and Healthcare**

The year 2024 saw Georgia taking steps to address pressing social and healthcare issues, particularly in housing, labor rights, and medical access. While there were some positive developments, progress was modest and fell short of addressing the systemic challenges facing these sectors. As a result of the 2024 GGI Expert Survey, the average score of social protection and healthcare is 29,3 which is an approximately 3 point decrease in comparison to the 2023 scores. The back in the result could be explained by the circumstances that not much was been done in Georgia in the field of social protection in 2024, and secondly, the implementation of diagnosis-related groups of services (DRG) is proceeding very slowly, and from time to time dissatisfaction being is expressed both by hospitals and pharmaceutical manufacturers due to shortcomings in its administration..

## ***Social Protection***

In 2024 there were a couple of initiatives with regards to addressing homelessness and improving housing for the vulnerable population in Georgia. For example, in October approximately 200 displaced families in Kutaisi were provided with housing, and 65 families in Tbilisi received newly constructed or renovated apartments. Earlier, in January, a targeted state program was launched to support large families living in poverty or without permanent housing, aiming to address systemic homelessness. Employment initiatives by the State Employment Support Agency, such as forums held in major cities such as Tbilisi, Zugdidi, Batumi, Marneuli, and Telavi, aimed to bolster job opportunities for economically vulnerable groups. However, challenges persisted. In January, a violent eviction on Kekelidze Street highlighted the ongoing struggles of displaced families and the shortcomings in housing policies.

Moreover, the systemic issues in labor rights and working conditions remained problematic. Many workers, particularly those in informal sectors, continued to face low wages, inadequate social protections, and limited labor rights. These structural weaknesses hinder the realization of equitable social protection across the country.

## ***Healthcare***

Reforms to the DRG funding system were a central focus of Georgia's healthcare policy in 2024. Health Minister Mikheil Sarjveladze announced a revised scheme in September, allowing patients to choose between universally funded healthcare services or a co-payment mechanism for VIP-level care. Additionally, funding for high-cost intensive care cases, including treatments for pulmonary edema and respiratory failure, was increased (ITV Georgia 2024). However, these reforms faced resistance, with clinics preparing in October for litigation against the Ministry of Health due to alleged shortcomings in the DRG system. In particular, access to essential medicines was hampered by delays in implementing reference pricing reforms. The DRG funding system, while beneficial in some areas, left gaps in coverage for high-quality surgical procedures. Primary healthcare reforms, crucial for a resilient system, also remained unimplemented, leaving this sector underdeveloped and unable to meet the needs of the population. Some of the clinics argued they were unfairly accused of incorrect diagnoses, leading to disputes over reimbursement rates. These disagreements have resulted in numerous cases heading to court, as clinics claim proper diagnoses were made (Business Media 2024c).

Responding to patient advocacy earlier in the year, the government removed the 25,000 GEL annual funding cap on cancer treatments and eliminated the requirement for patients to provide their own medications during hospital stays. By July, the Ministry made certain efforts to address medication shortages, cautioning importers and pharmacies of potential state interventions if delays persisted (Radio Liberty 2024e).

In July, Georgia launched a state program for managing Hepatitis B, offering free services

to patients (Business Insider Georgia 2024). Minister Sarjveladze emphasized the rights of children and persons with disabilities as top priorities, alongside early diagnostic initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to preventive healthcare. Dialysis services were expanded in underserved regions, ensuring better access for patients in remote areas. In terms of infrastructure improvements, in October the Ministry announced plans to rehabilitate the Republican Hospital's main buildings and construct a new facility on its premises (Imedinews 2024). On October 17, a new infectious disease hospital was inaugurated, symbolizing a significant step toward modernizing Georgia's healthcare system (Agenda.ge 2024).

For 2025, to enhance social protection policies, experts recommend a multifaceted approach focusing on housing policy development, targeted social assistance, and the improvement of municipal services. Addressing homelessness and the lack of affordable housing should be a priority, with programs aimed at providing sustainable housing solutions. Alongside this, establishing a legal framework for eviction regulations and tenant protections would safeguard the rights of vulnerable populations.

A more precise assessment model for identifying individuals living below the poverty line is essential to ensure that targeted social assistance effectively meets their needs. Additionally, reforming the subsistence allowance system is critical to depoliticizing social protection mechanisms and fostering equitable distribution. Experts also emphasize the need for a cohesive housing policy and the harmonization of municipal social services across the country. Establishing a standardized minimum service package would ensure consistency and reliability in the provision of social assistance nationwide.

In healthcare, the recommendations highlight the need for systemic reforms to strengthen primary healthcare, a foundational aspect of an effective health system. Efforts to refine reference pricing for medications should continue, with the aim of improving affordability and ensuring access to essential medicines for all citizens. Furthermore, the development of public healthcare facilities must be supported to enhance the quality and reach of healthcare services. These measures would collectively contribute to a more robust and inclusive healthcare system, better equipped to meet the needs of Georgia's population (GGI Expert Survey on Socio-Economic Governance 2024).

### ***Consequences of Georgia's Democratic Erosion on International Financial Support and Cooperation***

Georgia's democratic erosion in 2024 has led to significant losses in financial support and international cooperation from its key allies and partners. The EU cancelled €121 million in financial aid earmarked to support Georgia's economy and advance its EU integration. Similarly, the US suspended over \$95 million in aid due to the country's anti-democratic actions (Politico, 2024a,b). Other major partners, such as Germany, also severed ties, suspending development projects worth €237 million (Georgia Today, 2024). The German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development further announced a freeze

on all new development cooperation projects, loan agreements, and approvals, in response to Prime Minister Kobakhidze's decision to halt Georgia's EU integration process until 2028 (Civil Georgia, 2024l).

The suspension of this critical financial aid will have profound negative repercussions on Georgia's economy. The benefits associated with this assistance—intended to support economic development and modernization—will be lost, exacerbating existing economic vulnerabilities. This comes amid already troubling economic trends, including declining FDIs and an unstable currency, and a deteriorating international reputation that further erodes investor confidence.

These developments signal a troubling trajectory for Georgia. Democratic erosion not only isolates the country from its Western allies but also risks further cessation of economic partnerships, leaving Georgia increasingly marginalized from its Western allies. Without repealing all anti-democratic legislation and undertaking meaningful judicial reforms to strengthen rule of law, human rights protection and democratic path of the country, Georgia's economic and geopolitical prospects are likely to remain precarious.

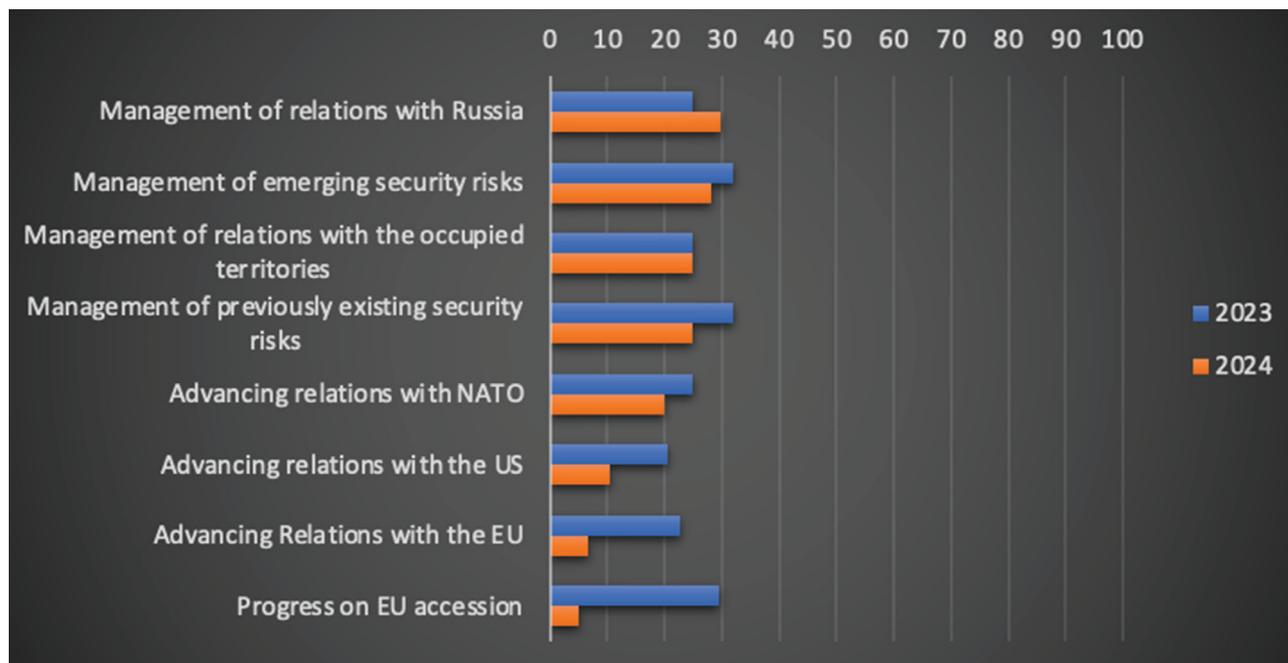
# External Governance



### Key findings and challenges

- The year of 2024 marks an unprecedented backsliding in all the dimensions of foreign and security governance in Georgia. The overall GGI score given to the area of external governance by experts fell from 26.42 to 18.74 points out of a possible 100.
- The decision to postpone efforts to begin accession negotiations with the EU represents a historically negative benchmark in Georgia's EU approximation process. This move effectively halts any prospects for Georgia's future EU integration, leading to a cessation of reforms, international cooperation, and financial aid, while also damaging political relations with Western countries.
- Georgia's approximation with the US also suffered unprecedented damage, with Washington annulling the strategic partnership due to Georgian Dream's anti-democratic and anti-Western shift. As a result, political relations deteriorated, developing an openly confrontational tone at the highest presidential level.
- For the first time since the 2008 Bucharest summit, the NATO declaration has left out the traditional mentioning of Georgia's membership perspective. The move was seen as effectively dismantling what used to be a Tbilisi-Kyiv duo, as the two countries' applications for years had largely been discussed in tandem.
- Leaning towards illiberal actors has become conspicuous under the Georgian Dream government: rapprochement with Russia through the deepening ideological and geopolitical alignment has intensified. China and Iran remain alternative partners in a trend of international isolation.
- The defense and security dimension suffered notable damage as Georgia lost its traditional strategic partners, who had played key roles in funding, equipping, and training the country's defense sector.

Figure 6: How would you assess Georgia’s performance on the following issues related to foreign policy and security in 2024 on a 100-point scale, where 100 means very effective and 0 means very ineffective?



From the perspective of external governance and security, Georgia’s state policy is assessed through four indicators: (1) Approximation with the EU, (2) Advancing relations with NATO and the US (3) Responsiveness to external regional and global changes, and (4) Security governance. This section of the report measures the performance of Georgia in the aforementioned four areas throughout the year, based on narrative analysis and expert surveys. Compared to 2023, the external governance score regressed notably and fell from 26.42 to 18.74 points out of a possible 100 (Figure 1), leaving Georgia’s External Governance at the bottom of the table, well below the remaining three governance areas of the GGI 2024. The most critical criteria assessed, with the lowest 5 points (out 100), is the EU accession (considering the methodological limitation of the present Index, which allowed experts to measure the area before the November 28 statement about postponing working on EU accession talks) (Figure 6).

## Approximation with EU

The year of 2024 marked an unprecedented fall in Approximation with the EU category. A negative trend is observed in both directions – integration with the EU and relations with the EU.

The EU integration process was slowed and the EU was dissatisfied that Georgia registered a low level of alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Herczynski 2024a) and a poor level of meeting other points of the nine conditions given on the granting of candidate status during the first half of 2024. Subsequently, in March it was announced that no interim report about Georgia’s accession progress was to be published

by the EU Commission. No interim report means no advancement in terms of further accession steps. But April 2024 proved to be a benchmark for EU integration. The accession process is officially frozen, according to the stated position of the EU (Herczynski 2024a), as a result of the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and the Law on Protection of Family Values and Minors. Reintroduction of the draft law in April 2024 received an immediate reaction from the EU External Action Service, different EU institutions, individual MEPs and individual EU country officials. Concerns were shared by most of the EU institutions, as well as individual officials (European Parliament 2024a; Michel 2024; Seimas of Lithuania 2024; Council of the European Union 2024). In 2024 the EP adopted two critical resolutions about Georgia's democratic backsliding - in April and in October (European Parliament 2024a; European Parliament 2024b) - led by two Plenary debates (European Parliament 2024c). While Tbilisi attempted to balance this by enhancing its alignment with the CFSP and addressing its geopolitical vulnerabilities, the European Commission's October report highlighted a persistent challenge. Georgia's alignment rate with the relevant statements of the High Representative on behalf of the EU and Council decisions was notably low, at just 49% (European Commission 2024a). This low alignment rate with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains a significant challenge for Georgia's European path (Kakachia, Lebanidze, Skardziute-Kereselidze, Samkharadze 2024). The European Commission did not recommend that the Council of Europe should move Georgia on to the Accession Negotiations stage (European Commission 2024).

Even though the newly appointed Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze paid his first visit to Brussels in January 2024, the overall reaction of the Georgian Government was mostly defensive and confrontational. The GD officials insisted that the controversial laws would make Georgia's European path "smoother" (Kobakhidze 2024a), while the EU officials and leaders of EU member states such as the German Chancellor Sholtz, clearly stated that the controversial laws were not the way of the EU approximation (EU Delegation Georgia 2024a; Herczynski 2024b). The EU decided to freeze EUR 30 million from the European Peace Facility (EPF). As ambassador Herincinsky stated, EU-Georgia relations are "at such a low point when they could have been at an all-time high" (EU Delegation Georgia 2024b).

Political relations with the EU also experienced a further decline. Relations with the EU member states were also strained bilaterally. Germany stopped "any new financial commitments to Georgia, has halted its military's participation in the Noble Partner exercise previously canceled by the U.S., and canceled an important legal conference, all due to the recent anti-Western decisions of the Georgian Dream" (Civil Georgia 2024m). As a result of contested parliamentary elections Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade stated, the Swedish government decided to suspend cooperation between the two countries (Sweden Herald 2024).

In early November, a joint delegation of European MPs from eight European countries, responsible for foreign policies in their respective states, visited Georgia. Georgian parliamentary speaker Shalva Papuashvili reacted to the visit by the EU countries' key parliamentarians by denouncing it. In his extended post on X platform he suggested that "The whole

idea of the visit is political partisanship” and “some of the delegation members and other foreign politicians have continuously and purposefully violated Georgian legislation by publicly campaigning against Georgia’s governing party and in support of the opposition, trying to illegally influence the citizens’ will” (Papuashvili 2024).

## Advancing Relations with NATO and the USA

In 2024, a significant downturn was observed in advancing relations with NATO and the United States. This negative trend was evident in both areas: Euro-Atlantic integration and US-Georgia relations.

In terms of Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgia saw a radical decline, as illustrated in the NATO Washington Summit declaration. PM Kobakhidze paid his first official visit to NATO headquarters, and in March 2024, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg traveled in Georgia in the framework of his three-day visit to the South Caucasus states (Government of Georgia 2024a). Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Air Force General Charles Q. Brown Jr. stated at a joint press conference with U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III that NATO is “deeply concerned” about Russia’s influence in Georgia (US DoD 2024). The Law on Transparency of Foreign Agents also created concerning issues for NATO: the Parliamentary Assembly issued a statement calling for immediate withdrawal of the law on Foreign Agents (NATO PA 2024). Eventually, as a result of domestic democratic backsliding by Georgia, the political dimension of relations with NATO has halted (Kakachia, Lebanidze, Kandelaki 2024). In terms of the Euro-Atlantic integration, for the first time since the 2008 Bucharest Summit Decision, the declaration adopted by the heads of state of the allied countries on July 11, skipped the notion that “Georgia will become a member of the Alliance with the Membership Action Plan as an integral part of the process” (NATO 2024). This omission underscored the deteriorating trajectory of Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Relations with the United States have become increasingly strained, as evident in several key areas of bilateral engagement. A notable flashpoint was the introduction of a bill on the transparency of foreign influence by GD MPs. This move drew immediate reactions from the US State Department and Congress (Miller 2024; Helsinki Commission 2024; Foreign Relations Committee 2024). Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze received bipartisan letters from US senators and members of the House of Representatives, warning that adoption of the law could compel policymakers to reconsider US policy toward Georgia (United States Senate 2024; Congress of the United States 2024). A historical deterioration in bilateral relations was marked by the cancellation or refusal of various high-level meetings. In early April 2024, a Georgian parliamentary delegation visited the United States and held meetings with State Department officials, senators, congressmen, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia (Civil Georgia 2024n). However, almost simultaneously, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze declined an invitation from US leaders to discuss the strategic partnership. The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) justi-

fied this decision, stating that the invitation did not align with the “spirit of partnership” between the two countries (MFA of Georgia 2024a). A critical moment in the decline of bilateral diplomacy occurred in September 2024, when the US President Joe Biden disinvited Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze from a reception for world leaders and senior UN officials during the UN General Assembly.

Irakli Kobakhidze repeatedly propagated conspiracy theories targeting U.S. officials. In one of his statements on X, he expressed “sincere disappointment with the two revolution attempts of 2020-2023 supported by the former US Ambassador” (Kobakhidze 2024b). In response, the United States initiated a comprehensive review of all US-Georgian cooperation. The US State Department imposed visa restrictions on dozens of Georgian officials, while the Treasury Department sanctioned four Georgian individuals, including two senior Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) officials responsible for the violent suppression of peaceful protests. Additionally, the US cut over \$95 million in aid to the Georgian government, and the Noble Partner military exercise was postponed indefinitely (U.S. Department of State 2024b; U.S. Department of State 2024c). In July, the US Congressional Foreign Affairs Committee passed Georgia sanctions legislation, known as the MEGOBARI Act. The Georgian People’s Act, currently under discussion, proposes holding Georgian government officials and individuals accountable for corruption, human rights abuses, and actions contributing to democratic backsliding in Georgia (Congress 2024b).

## **Responsiveness to External Regional and Global Challenges**

Responsiveness to external challenges can be observed in two sub-categories: regional and global challenges. Russia’s focus on Georgia appears to have increased, with Russian officials and public figures frequently expressing approval of the undemocratic developments occurring in Georgia. Tbilisi has even been described as a “relatively friendly” state by Russian officials (Pressria 2024). According to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, “Russia intends to further facilitate the normalization of ties with Georgia” (Tass.ru 2024a). Similarly, Russian officials such as Maria Zakharova and Valentina Matvienko, Chair of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly, have reiterated Moscow’s openness to advancing this normalization process (Mid.ru 2024). Notably, Kremlin representatives—including spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, and Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin—have welcomed the reintroduction of the Foreign Agents law, a stance that contrasts sharply with the criticism from Georgia’s Western partners. The lifting of the visa regime by Moscow further accelerated Georgia’s rapprochement with Russia (Tass.ru 2024b). Georgian officials, however, have largely refrained from openly addressing the Kremlin’s overtures to “normalize” relations. Georgian Dream avoided mentioning Russia in its pre-election campaigns, governmental statements, and official strategies, signaling an apparent intent to sidestep public discussion on the matter.

Another significant player in Georgia’s external relations is China, with which Georgia es-

tablished a strategic partnership in 2023. Despite a series of bilateral visits at various levels, no major breakthroughs have been achieved in diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, a notable development occurred in February 2024, when China introduced visa-free travel for Georgian citizens (Government of Georgia 2024b). Georgia also took a controversial step by demonstrating political goodwill toward Iran when a high-level Georgian delegation, including Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and First Vice Prime Minister/Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Levan Davitashvili, attended the inauguration ceremony of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (Government of Georgia 2024c; Benson 2024).

Trilateral formats involving Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as bilateral relations with Armenia, continue to develop steadily. Georgian officials have made several high-level visits to Baku (set of sources from MFA), and Turkey remains one of Georgia's most important strategic partners, engaging through various cooperative frameworks. Additionally, Tbilisi and Yerevan finalized a strategic partnership agreement in January 2024 (Garibashvili 2024).

## Security Governance

Governance effectiveness in managing relations with the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained highly problematic throughout the year, marked by extrajudicial kidnappings of Georgian citizens by the occupation forces (see the Effective Governance chapter). Signs of creeping occupation persisted: in early January, new military trenches were observed in the occupied Tskhinvali region near the village of Gremiskhevi in the Dusheti municipality (Katsarava 2024). The Georgian government faced significant challenges, including its inability to prevent Russia from holding presidential elections in the de facto territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), in collaboration with Georgia's Western partners, condemned the opening of polling stations on Georgian territory (MFA of Georgia 2024b; Civil Georgia 2024o). The government issued several pointed statements regarding South Ossetia and Abkhazia, suggesting a potential opportunity to restore territorial integrity and expressing willingness to risk Western sanctions in pursuit of the country's "reunification." This included the possibility of constitutional amendments to adapt Georgia's governance and territorial arrangements to new realities (Kakachia 2024). A pivotal moment in the management of relations with the occupied territories occurred when Bidzina Ivanishvili made a pre-electoral statement suggesting that the Georgian people "should apologize to [their] Ossetian and Abkhazian brothers and sisters" (Jamestown Foundation 2024). In response, officials from the so-called South Ossetian administration demanded "real steps" from Georgia and even proposed considering additional Georgian territories as Ossetian (Netgazeti. 2024). In addition to the security risks posed by the Russian occupation, the ongoing war in Ukraine further heightened security threats. According to a statement from the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG), the Antiterrorist Department launched an operational search, resulting in the seizure of special explosive devices and a large quantity of explosives

shipped from the Ukrainian city of Odessa to Georgia, with plans for transfer to Russia via the Dariali border crossing (SSSG 2024).

Georgia hosted the US-led multinational special operations drills, Trojan Footprint 2024, organized by the US Special Operations Forces in Europe (US-SOCEUR) (MoD 2024a). However, on July 5, the US Department of Defense announced the indefinite postponement of the Noble Partner exercise (US Department of State 2024d). Following the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, military drills, exercises, and defense cooperation, including funding for defense initiatives, were put on hold. Trilateral formats remain a crucial element of Georgia's security. In September, Batumi hosted a Defense Ministerial meeting with the Defense Ministers of Georgia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan (MoD 2024b). Turkey continues to be one of the most important contributors to Georgia's security capacity. In 2024, the Georgian Defense Forces received new VURAN armored personnel carriers, built to NATO standards, as part of a bilateral agreement with Turkey (MoD 2024c).

### ***Developments since November 28, 2024***

Since late November 2024, Georgia's foreign governance has taken a sharp downward turn across nearly all dimensions. On November 28, Georgian Dream Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the party's decision to suspend efforts to begin EU accession negotiations "until 2028." He also stated that the cabinet would reject all EU budget support (Civil Georgia 2024p). This decision marked a significant reversal in Georgia's overall foreign policy direction. On November 30, the US suspended its Strategic Partnership with Georgia (US Department of State 2024). In early December, Germany decided to halt approval or commissioning of new development cooperation projects with Georgia and to refrain from signing any new loan agreements (BMZ.de 2024). Additionally, the three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—announced that they had "jointly agreed to impose national sanctions against those who suppressed legitimate protests in Georgia" (Landsbergis 2024). Critical reactions came from various international organizations, including resolutions from the Council of Europe (CoE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and announcements from the OSCE/ODIHR and the Helsinki Commission. In response, Georgian officials were included on the Magnitsky List, and the EU imposed visa restrictions on diplomatic passport holders. Hungary and Slovakia, however, expressed their support for the Georgian Dream government. French President Emmanuel Macron made an attempt to engage in negotiations with Bidzina Ivanishvili, the honorary chairman of the Georgian Dream party. However, the Georgian Dream spread misinformation about the content of their phone call, and as a result, the previously scheduled follow-up communication between the sides did not take place, as reported by open sources (Georgian Dream 2024b; OC Media 2024a). December 2024 also marked a symbolic act of international self-isolation, as the Georgian government chose not to invite ambassadors to the ceremonies marking the opening of the new parliament and the inauguration of GD-elected President Mikheil Kavelashvili on December 29th, held at the Palace of Parliament in Tbilisi.

## Conclusion

The 2024 Georgia Governance Index (GGI) provides a detailed assessment of Georgia's performance across four key governance categories: democratic governance, effective governance, socio-economic governance, and external governance. This fourth iteration of the GGI indicates a general trend of decline across most areas of governance, reflecting a period of notable challenges for the country. The findings highlight a complex interplay of domestic political dynamics, socio-economic factors, and evolving international relations.

In the area of **democratic governance**, Georgia's score decreased from 41.65 in 2023 to 32.65 in 2024. This change reflects shifts in areas such as civil and political rights, the electoral system, and the balance of power. The 2024 parliamentary elections were observed to have procedural irregularities, including the use of administrative resources, allegations of voter intimidation, and concerns regarding the independence of the Central Election Commission (CEC). The introduction of the "Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence" also generated discussion regarding its potential negative impact on civil society and freedom of expression.

**Effective governance** also saw a decline, with the GGI score moving from 33.12 to 27.08. This category encompasses the state's capacity to maintain order, manage public resources, and deliver public services. The ongoing Russian presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia continued to be a factor in Georgia's ability to fully exercise its sovereignty. There were frequent detentions of Georgian citizens along the administrative boundary lines with the breakaway regions, with nearly monthly incidents throughout 2024. Internal security issues also presented challenges. Questions regarding informal influence on governance persisted, despite Bidzina Ivanishvili's formal return to a political role. In the area of corruption control, Georgia's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score changed from 56 to 53, and several instances of alleged high-level corruption were reported.

**Socio-economic governance** presented a more varied picture. While this area received the highest score among the four categories (40.45, a slight increase from 38.22 the previous year), it encompassed both progress and ongoing challenges. Economic growth was observed, driven in part by trade, including with former CIS countries. However, this growth did not uniformly benefit all segments of the population. For instance, as of September 2024, over 56,000 individuals earned less than 300 GEL per month, and 355,366 earned below 1,200 GEL. The poverty rate remained a concern, with World Bank estimates indicating that 43.6% of the population lived below the poverty line as of 2023. Healthcare policy received a relatively low score (29.31) within this category, with issues related to access, funding, and the implementation of reforms being noted.

The most pronounced shift was observed in **external governance**, where the GGI score decreased from 26.42 in 2023 to 18.74 in 2024. This category covers Georgia's international relations and its engagement with global challenges. Discussions regarding the EU accession process were postponed, impacting the pace of reforms and cooperation with

European partners. Notably, for the first time since 2008, the NATO declaration did not include a specific reference to Georgia's membership prospects. Relations with the United States also experienced changes, with a review of bilateral cooperation initiated by the US and a suspension of over \$95 million in aid.

The findings of the GGI can serve as a resource for understanding the complexities of the Georgian context and for informing discussions on potential responses and future development pathways. In summary, the 2024 GGI findings suggest a pressing need for sustained attention to several critical areas, including the erosion of democratic processes, the ongoing state capture of institutions, deepening socio-economic disparities, and the sharp deterioration of international relations leading the country to selfisolation . The index underscores the interconnected nature of these challenges, which have further escalated by the time of publishing this report.

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