



Georgia: One Year of Protests Over EU Accession

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Summary

In November 2024, Georgia's prime minister announced that the government would suspend its efforts towards European Union accession until 2028. In response, demonstrators took to the streets in Tbilisi and in other cities. Demonstrations in Tbilisi occurred near government buildings, universities, and major thoroughfares, and early demonstrations included violent clashes between police and protesters. The U.S. Embassy temporarily restricted movement during key demonstration times and areas and later advised Embassy personnel to avoid demonstrations. Over the past year, Georgian authorities enacted laws to deter demonstrations, including fines and the detention of activists, political opposition members, and journalists. Criticism of the government and government officials was also restricted. Nonetheless, up to 500 people continue to protest nightly in the capital city (typically in the evening near the parliament building). While these protests have become predictable in location, size, and timing, the protest movement is unlikely to abate unless the ruling party reconsiders its stance towards EU accession. This report examines the more than 365 days of protests in Georgia, and how this small but sustained protest movement may impact the private sector.

Background

Since 2012, Georgia's government has been led by the Georgian Dream (GD) party. Founded and chaired by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, the party originally declared its platform as socially conservative, economically leftist, and pro-EU, though elements of the party supported a more pragmatic and less confrontational approach to relations with Russia. Georgian Dream and smaller parties in its coalition have held a majority in parliament since that time.¹ Since taking power, civil society experts have noted that the Georgian Dream party and its leadership began to increasingly take measures to consolidate power. The party has been accused of influencing the judiciary, revising local governance and electoral laws to favor themselves, and repressing anti-government protests, including in June 2019 following the invitation of a Russian parliamentarian to speak at the Georgian Parliament. In October 2020, Georgia experienced a political crisis following a disputed parliamentary election, but Georgian Dream retained a majority in parliament.

Since Russia's further invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Georgia has maintained its tenuous political position between Russia (which continues to occupy approximately 20 percent of Georgia's territory) and the EU. The country applied for European Union membership in 2022, noting a

¹ Politico, [Who is running Georgia?](#), April 2023.

majority support for the measure by pro-EU voters, and was accepted as a candidate for membership in December 2023.² While Georgia has largely adhered to international sanctions on Russia and hosted refugees from Ukraine, the nation declined to impose its own bilateral sanctions on Russia. Georgia has also increased its economic ties with the country, including re-establishing direct flights and lifting visa restrictions in 2023.

In 2024, Georgia passed multiple laws targeting foreign funding to media outlets and non-governmental organizations. EU leaders publicly decried these laws as “democratic backsliding,” and thus antithetical to EU values. In response, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze declared the party’s decision to suspend efforts towards EU accession, postponing talks until 2028 and declining EU budget support.³ At the same time, observers noted multiple reports of irregularities and voter intimidation during the October 2024 parliamentary election, which Georgian Dream won.⁴ Since that time, Georgian Dream has taken further anti-democratic steps to consolidate power.

One Year of Protests

In November 2024, following Georgia’s parliamentary election and immediately after the Prime Minister’s announcement halting Georgia’s EU accession process, demonstrators took to the streets in Tbilisi. Demonstrations predominately occurred in the evening hours near the parliament building between Freedom and Republic Squares, and at their height, tens of thousands of protesters surrounded the parliament building, with some throwing fireworks and stones at the building and towards police. Authorities responded with tear gas and water cannons. Masked pro-government protesters (locally called *titushki*) and police beat pro-EU demonstrators and journalists, breaking and stealing their equipment.⁵ In the first two weeks of the demonstrations, over 450 people were arrested. NGOs and the government ombudsman reported law enforcement assaulted and tortured detainees. Authorities subsequently passed laws to criminalize road-blocking and criticism of government officials (including banners or pro-demonstration graffiti), and the government banned fireworks, laser pointers, and masks at protests.

Smaller demonstrations continued into the spring of 2025. In some instances, GD politicians and judges were harassed in public.⁶ The government sought to block protests by criminalizing civil-society organizations, and in several instances, police raided the homes of demonstration organizers and funders and opposition members. The Georgian government deployed a camera network in Tbilisi to utilize facial recognition software to identify protestors, empowering Georgian authorities to conduct further raids and arrests weeks or months after a demonstration. The summer saw ongoing nightly demonstrations in central Tbilisi, with

² IRI, [IRI Georgia Poll Finds Strong Support for EU Membership, Disapproval of Russian Presence, Distrust in Political Parties](#), November 2022.

³ EurasiaNet, [Tbilisi thumbs nose at West](#), May 2025.

⁴ AFPC, [Georgia’s Aborted EU Accession: A Political Crisis](#), December 2024.

⁵ NPR, [A year on, protesters in Tbilisi, Georgia refuse to accept pivot to Russia](#), December 2025.

⁶ GlobalVoices, [Georgia marks a year of protests](#), December 2025.

hundreds of protestors arrested, injured, or detained without charges.⁷ Most major opposition leaders were arrested and imprisoned in June and July 2025 for their refusal to testify in front of a parliamentary investigative commission into the alleged crimes of the pre-2012 United National Movement government; another opposition leader was arrested in September for vandalizing a Georgian Dream campaign poster. In November, almost all major opposition leaders were charged with sedition, which carries a 15-year sentence if convicted.

Despite these penalties, small daily demonstrations continue, predominately near the parliament building along Rustaveli Avenue in central Tbilisi in the evening hours. Over the past year, an estimated 1,600 people have been detained or arrested during or following these protests; approximately 50 remain in jail, with most convicted of criminal charges. There have been over 200 reported injuries to protestors and to police, although there have been no fatalities.⁸ While the daily demonstrations have declined in size, protestors have vowed to maintain the frequency of their action until EU accession is once again considered.

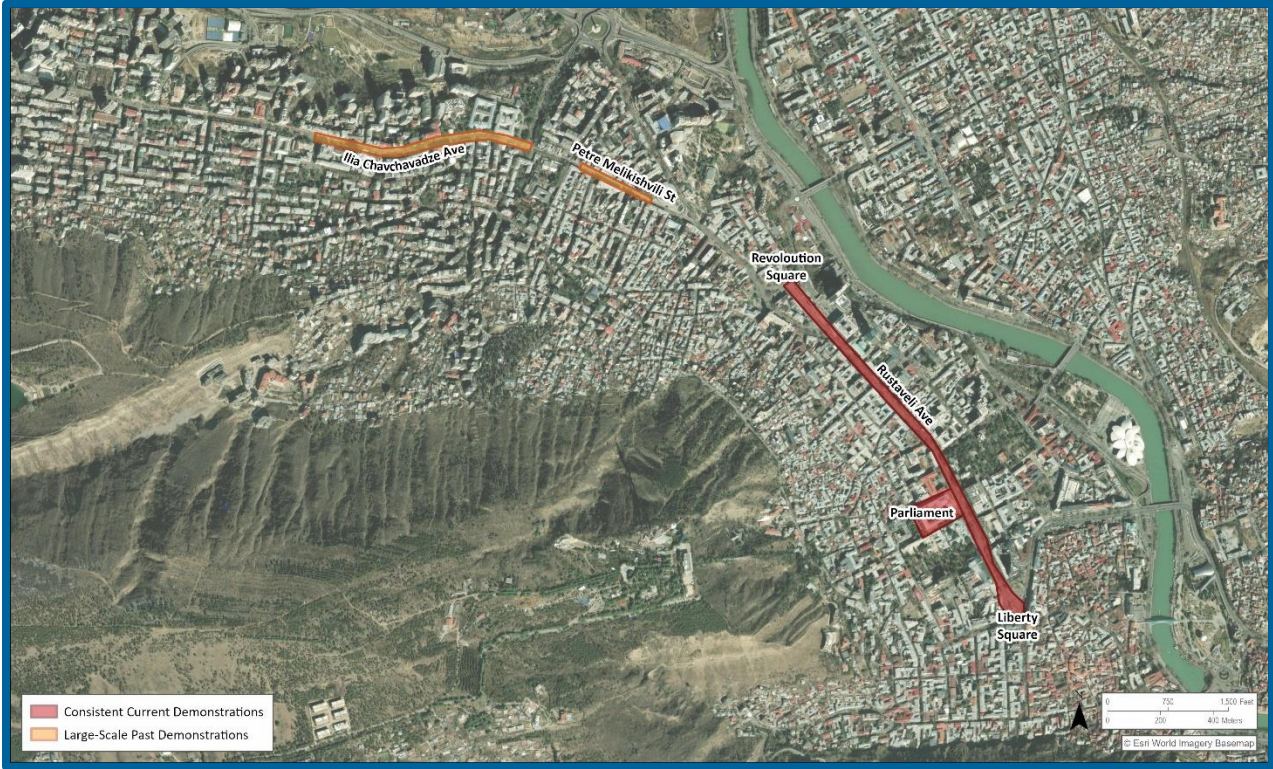


Figure 1: Map showing common locations of past and current demonstrations

⁷ JAM News, [Georgian Dream moves to further tighten protest rules](#), September 2025.

⁸ BBC, [They can't crush our protests, vow Georgians after year of resistance](#), November 2025.

Outlook

For a decade, the Georgian Dream party sought to thread the needle between favorable economic dealings with Russia and a strong diplomatic relationship with the EU, but over the last three years, Georgia's government has isolated itself from its Western partners. Georgia has conducted increasing outreach with China and other autocratic regimes, and Georgian leaders have espoused talking points that mirror Kremlin propaganda. Georgia's media laws and crackdown on demonstrations have been schismatic to the country's relationship with the EU. Because the GD party has not signaled a change in these policies, protests are likely to continue indefinitely in Tbilisi, however the size of daily demonstrations is currently limited to a few hundred participants. The demands for a pro-EU/pro-Ukraine stance remain an animating force in Georgia's urban populace, and the heavy police response to demonstrations over the past year have further galvanized protestors; many of the daily demonstrations in recent months have focused on alleged police brutality and calls to release all political detainees and hold new elections, rather than geopolitical issues.

Georgia's turn from the EU also constricts their consumer and trade base, potentially impacting future stability. Police clashes have reduced consumer and investor confidence, and the appearance of economically aligning with Russia has exposed organizations in Georgia to reputational risk.

Private-Sector Impact

OSAC members in Tbilisi may face some transit delays and other disruptions due to continued protests. However, as demonstrations tend to be in predictable locations, in most cases avoiding demonstrations is feasible by monitoring traffic patterns, social media, and general observation. While there generally have not been reports of additional government scrutiny for U.S. or EU-based travelers to Georgia, authorities have denied entry to a number of journalists and other foreigners they believe to have been supportive of protests. Travelers should be aware that some Georgian citizens may harbor anti-U.S. sentiment, as the Georgian government frequently blames alleged foreign influence for demonstrations; avoiding overt displays of nationality is advised to reduce the risk of drawing unwanted attention. While some OSAC members reported having storefronts or facilities vandalized, it is unclear whether these were targeted incidents. For a brief period in late-2024, the U.S. Embassy restricted movement for personnel in the frequently demonstrated area, between Freedom Square and Republic Square along Rustaveli Avenue. That restriction is lifted, but all Embassy personnel are required to avoid demonstrations.

OSAC members operating in Georgia should be prepared for a period of business risk. While GD has announced intentions to resume its efforts towards EU membership following the 2028 parliamentary election, the party's current foreign policy actions are moving farther from, not closer to, Europe. Some OSAC members reported attempted infiltrations by pro-Russian media outlets during national elections and other nationwide events. Evacuation and contingency plans, while not immediately necessary, should be considered in case of a drastic change in the

geopolitical situation. OSAC members should also consider the reputational risks to their organizations and executives that may come from ties to GD, the Georgian government, or Russia.

The U.S. Department of State recommends travelers do not travel to the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The United States and most other countries consider these regions part of Georgia. However, de facto local authorities claim independence, and Russian troops and border guards occupy both regions. Attacks, criminal incidents, and kidnappings have occurred in and around the area. While none of the activity has been anti-American in nature, there is a high risk of wrong-place-wrong-time incidents. The U.S. Department of State also cautions U.S. citizens against travel to the Pankisi Gorge region (north of the villages of Matane and Chorale, to the border with Russia, including the city of Duisk) because of the current security environment and the potential for civil unrest. There are restrictions on U.S. Embassy personnel traveling to within five kilometers of this region due to the risks of civil unrest and terrorism.

Additional Information

For more information on the security environment in Georgia and across Europe, contact [OSAC's Europe Team](#).

- OSAC Country Page: [Georgia](#)
- OSAC Country Security Report: [Georgia](#)

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