

# GEORGIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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## 2019

Tracking Development  
of Sustainable  
Independent Media  
Around the World



# GEORGIA

## AT A GLANCE

### GENERAL

- **Population:** 3,729,600 (National Statistics Office of Georgia)
- **Capital city:** Tbilisi
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Georgian 86.8%, Azeri 6.3%, Armenian 4.5%, other 2.3% (2014 Population Census)
- **Religion (% of population):** Orthodox Christian 83.4%, Muslim 10.7%, Armenian-Apostolic 2.9%, other 1.2%, none 0.5% (2014 Population Census)
- **Languages (% of population):** Georgian (official) 87.6%, Azeri 6.2%, Armenian 3.9%, Russian 1.2%, other 1% (2014 Population Census)
- **GNI (2017-Atlas):** \$14.04 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- **GNI per capita (2017-PPP):** \$ 10,110 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2017)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.8% (male 99.8%, female 99.7%) (2015 est., CIA World Factbook)
- **President or top authority:** President Salome Zurbishvili (since December 16, 2018)

### MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations nationwide:** Print: 218 newspapers: 16 daily, 52 weekly, 37 monthly (National Statistics Office of Georgia, [www.geostat.ge](http://www.geostat.ge), 2017); Broadcast: 91 active radio broadcasting licenses, 98 television broadcasters, 30 multiplex operators (Georgian National Communications Registry: [www.registry.gncc.ge](http://www.registry.gncc.ge), accessed in December 2018)
- **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** Total circulation 60.4 million (National Statistics Office of Georgia, [www.geostat.ge](http://www.geostat.ge), 2016) *Rezonanse* (4,000–5,000 daily), *Kviris Palitra* (average 55,000 weekly) (individual newspaper claims)
- **Broadcast ratings (audience share):** Highest-rated television channels: Rustavi2 5.07%, Imedi 4.69%, GDS 1.15%, Channel 1 0.84%, TV Pirveli 0.64% (TVMR GE, 2018)
- **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** The estimated revenue of the television advertising market in 2018 reached GEL 66.22 million (approximately \$25.4 million), for radio GEL 8.5 million (approximately \$ 3.2 million) (Georgian National Communications Commission, analytical portal, 2019). Unknown for print.
- **News agencies:** Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse (representatives), Bloomberg (local representative), info 9, Black Sea Press, Iveroni, NovostiGruzia, Sarke, Interpressnews, Iprinda, Kavkazpress, Media News, Prime Time News, Pirveli, Georgian Business Consulting News, Georgian HotNews, GeoNews, Expressnews, World Sport, ambebi.ge, Business Press News, Droni.ge, epn.ge, agenda.ge, Aianews.ge, Kakheti Information Center, Primetimenews.ge, Kvemo Kartli Information Center, Mtkheta-Tianeti Information Center, For.ge, Frontnews.ge, Civil.ge, Economic.ge, marshalpres.ge, bpi.ge
- **Internet subscribers:** 817,743 (Georgian National Communications Commission, December 2018)

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### SCORE KEY

**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2-3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3-4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.



Most of the issues that Georgia's media sector faced in past years persisted this year:

Journalists struggle to access public information, they exercise self-censorship, and they must make do with poor technical facilities. These factors are compounded by a contracted advertising market and increased competition for the advertising revenue that is available. As a result, the country's score fell from 2.31 in 2018 to 2.25 in 2019, reflecting lower scores for Objectives 1 through 4 (freedom of speech, professionalism, plurality of news, and business management), with Objective 4 the lowest scored at 1.57. There was slight improvement in the score for Objective 5 (supporting institutions), which signifies the active engagement of Georgian civil society groups' and professional associations' efforts to promote the interests of the media, along with support of the media by international donors.

Georgia began 2018 with the president's veto of a bill that would have directed more advertising to the public broadcaster and exempted it from some public procurement requirements. Civil society groups and private media protested some lawmakers' attempt to give the low-rated Georgian Public Broadcasting, or GPB, a boost, but parliament overrode the president's January veto a month later. The year ended with the ascension of the country's first woman president after a campaign that took a dreadful toll on media standards. Georgia's capital city of Tbilisi along with second city Telavi were roiled by protests over a perceived miscarriage of justice and alleged electoral fraud.

During the October presidential election, Imedi TV, one of the country's two leading channels, beefed up its political programming to oppose Grigol Vashadze, the candidate from the United National Movement (UNM). The UNM ruled Georgia from 2004 to 2012. The other leading channel, UNM-aligned Rustavi2, attacked Vashadze's opponent, Salome Zurbishvili, the candidate from the ruling Georgian Dream Party who went on to win the race.

The past year saw attempts to regulate free speech and expression as legislators proposed bills to regulate creative works on the one hand and to impose criminal charges for insulting religious feelings on the other. Neither bill passed.

While finding reliable statistics is challenging, MSI panelists perceived that there were more attacks on journalists in 2018 than in the past couple of years, including physical assaults during the

elections and by far-right groups. Members of the far-right Kartuli Marshi movement attacked Rustavi2 journalist and anchor Giorgi Gabunia after he mentioned Jesus Christ in a joke that made fun of former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) unveiled a disputed analysis, based on the declared revenues of broadcasters, that claimed the country's advertising market has grown steadily since 2012. Still, Georgia's media rest on a weak foundation, illustrated by the closure last year of Iberia TV when its owners' other businesses could no longer support the channel. The observed trend of the year is the growth of online advertising revenue, most of which, our panelists said, flow to such global actors as Google and Facebook.

The highly respected Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE) serves an ombudsman role and last year handled dozens of complaints from media professionals, public officials, and the general public.

Most of the previous years' problems persisted in 2018: Journalists struggle to access public information, exercise self-censorship, and must make do with poor technical facilities. Civil society and donor organizations continue to provide funds and other aid to spur development of a sustainable media industry. Against the backdrop of these events the country's score fell from 2.31 to 2.25. The drop is a result of lower scores for Objectives 1 through 4: freedom of speech, professionalism, plurality of news, and business management.

**OBJECTIVE 1:  
FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH**

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The score for this objective slid by 0.06 from last year. Contributing to this slight decline were: first, amendments to the law on broadcasting giving GPB greater access to advertising revenue and loosening public control over its procurement process; second, the government’s attempts to impose more control over freedom of expression; and third, attacks on journalists.

The Georgian constitution and laws that cover free speech and access to public information meet internationally accepted standards, but these laws are selectively enforced, panelists said. Media analyst Zviad Koridze noted that, although several attempts by members of parliament to introduce bills to restrict speech and expression failed, it is easy to imagine them passing in Georgia’s overheated political climate, once the public had been primed for them.

In March, a conservative member of parliament proposed punishing those who insult religious feelings or desecrate religious sites or symbols with a fine or prison term. In May, two ruling party lawmakers proposed that courts be allowed to ban creative works that incite national, ethnic, religious, and racial hatred; preach war and violence; or propagate pornography. Civil society groups, along with workers in creative industries, blasted the proposal, which parliament rejected. “We’ve been attacked from all sides, and we’re holding on by the skin of our teeth,” said Mamuka Andguladze, a media program manager at Transparency International Georgia (TI). Along similar lines, the GNCC sent a proposal to parliament to give itself authority to act against hate speech on radio or

television if a broadcaster’s own self-regulatory body fails to quash it, something that currently happens only in extraordinary circumstances. Panelists considered this a worrying proposal, and media figures have warned it could allow the regulator to put improper pressures on broadcasters.

In February, Georgia’s parliament adopted hotly contested amendments to the law on broadcasting that allow GPB to purchase media products or services without public tenders, to double advertising airtime, and to expand the types of programming that can have commercial sponsors. The president, civil society groups, and some private media said the legislation would give an unfair advantage to GPB, which also receives public money, and would weaken public oversight of the broadcaster. The GNCC, however, said the amendments would lead to improved service of public interest. In 2018, GPB’s budget was GEL 50 million (\$19 million). Panelist Natia Kuprashvili, chairwoman of Journalism Resources Center and director of the Alliance of Broadcasters, said the lack of public control over GPB’s procurement activities would render its expenditures opaque.

Another critical panelist, Kavkasia TV Director Nino Jangirashvili, called the amendments “unprecedented.” “It was clear that the decision was political,” she said, noting that every media outlet except GPB had opposed it.

Before and during the two rounds of voting in the presidential election, the communications commission improperly aimed to regulate or influence campaign advertising, according to Transparency International Georgia. Further, Kuprashvili said conflicting interpretations of laws bedeviled broadcasters during the campaign. For instance, she said that the GNCC required broadcasters to monitor the contents of political advertising, even though the law on political

advertising does not obligate them to do so. Jangirashvili said the GNCC still accused five broadcasters of violating the law by airing political advertisements that it said contained hate speech.

**Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.**

**FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS**

- ▶ Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- ▶ Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- ▶ Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- ▶ Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- ▶ State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- ▶ Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- ▶ Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

In addition, the regulator issued a statement dictating to channels the amount of time they were to allocate to each presidential candidate, even as it acknowledged that broadcasters were apportioning time according to existing legal requirements.

In the run-up to the elections, the GNCC told broadcasters to verify the credibility of public opinion polls they commission, under threat of punitive sanctions. In turn, Transparency

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International Georgia said the regulator should “refrain from imposing disproportionate demands on the media” and warned the requirement could make respondents worry about the confidentiality of their answers and therefore make it more difficult for pollsters to get honest answers in the future. “It is unrealistic that journalists would verify the credibility of the research,” said panelist Tamar Kintsurashvili, director of the Media Development Foundation.

Some panel members said the courts and law enforcement agencies frequently asked journalists to reveal their sources last year. Kintsurashvili said authorities were sending “frightening” signals to whistleblowers and journalists, citing the case of a Rustavi2 journalist who aired video of a former prosecutor (and at the time director of the Post TV channel) driving drunk. The interior minister said everyone involved, including the whistleblower, “who used the material to gain certain electoral advantages” should be punished.

In addition, the chairwoman of parliament’s Legal Issues Committee has threatened to seek a ban on the distribution of secretly recorded materials, which would deal a severe blow to investigative journalism. Lawmaker Eka Beselia made her threats as secret recordings were playing a role in the presidential campaign.

The government’s consistent rhetoric against pro-opposition television station Rustavi2 continued in 2018. High-ranking officials accused Rustavi2 of distorting reality by exaggerating every negative development. In a television interview, former Prime Minister Ivanishvili, a towering figure in Georgian politics, said, “If we switched off Rustavi2 today, we’d see nothing but progress and prosperity in the country.” During the acrimonious presidential campaign, Speaker of Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze said Rustavi2 practices “the Russian-style politics of brainwashing, which corresponds to propaganda,

the practices perfected by the Russian channels.”

The long-running, high-stakes fight over control of Rustavi2 dragged on. In April, the channel reported that the Justice Ministry had asked the European Court of Human Rights to lift a temporary freeze on a Georgian court’s 2017 ruling that control of the channel be handed over to its former owner. The Strasbourg court stepped in to block the transfer until it could rule on the merits of the case. Kibar Khalvashi is suing to take over the channel, which he says the UNM illegally stripped from him when it was in power. Khalvashi is widely seen as an ally of Georgian Dream, the UNM’s bitter foe. Lawyers for Rustavi2 said the Justice Ministry’s appeal improperly contained complaints about the channel’s independence and fairness.

In 2018, the GNCC drafted a media literacy strategy and established a media literacy academy. Several NGOs complained that the drafting process had not included all the relevant parties and said the draft does not take into account the limitations on Georgian organizations. Led by the former head of Radio Free Europe’s Georgian service, the Media Academy will offer courses to media managers, producers, and journalists; develop media criticism; raise media literacy generally; and establish a media lab to support digital media startups.

**“When the cases are interesting to the media I represent and to investigative journalists, why shouldn’t we be allowed to access the court hearings directly?” Gela Mtivlishvili said.**

Technically, anyone can launch a television station in Georgia since the 2015 digital switchover, which abolished licensing for television stations. But the process is not straightforward. For instance,

Kuprashvili said it is not public knowledge how many frequencies are available in the country, which raises questions about the transparency of the process.

There are no particular barriers for new players to enter the Georgian media market, and tax rules treat the media like any other industry. One panelist, however, said tax collectors treat different media differently. Kuprashvili, who represents a majority of regional broadcasters, said tax officials “turn a blind eye” to the considerable tax debts of national channels Imedi TV and Rustavi2 but will move much more quickly against regional outlets. Kuprashvili and Jangirashvili also complained that channels must pay the standard 18 percent VAT (value-added tax) rate on political campaign ads and public service advertising—a certain amount of which they are obligated to air free of charge.

Although there are no published statistics for 2018 for Georgia, panelists said physical attacks on journalists increased in 2018. For example, in late 2018, a journalist from Rustavi2 was shoved out of the office of the No to Nazism movement after inquiring about the movement’s funding sources. The channel said some of its equipment was damaged during the incident. TI and the GCJE condemned the incident, and TI noted that Rustavi2 journalists are frequent targets of violence. “Such actions send the wrong message to society, that journalists can be treated with contempt,” said Nata Dzvelishvili, executive director of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics. She said journalists were attacked during the presidential campaign as well. A reporter for TV Pirveli said she was smacked in the face while trying to record members of No to Nazism bussing voters to their polling places. In addition, a journalist with the news website on.ge said a campaign worker for Georgian Dream presidential candidate Salome Zurabishvili hit her

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arm to prevent her from recording at a polling station.

The growing strength of Georgia's far-right movements in 2018 was bad news for journalists. In March, Rustavi2 host Giorgi Gabunia became a target after making a quip about Ivanishvili, the former prime minister, that involved the mention of Jesus Christ. Members of the reactionary Kartuli Marshi movement besieged Gabunia in the television station's parking lot, accusing him of insulting their faith and demanding a public apology. Six of the attackers were arrested, and one journalist covering the incident was briefly hospitalized. Panelist Nestan Tsetskhladze, editor of *netgazeti.ge*, complained that "even though the case went to court, interfering with a journalist's work doesn't appear among the charges brought against these people."

In November, a court overturned the convictions of four Georgian photographers who had been accused by the UNM government in 2011 of spying for Russia. While records from the 2011 court case remain sealed, in its decision to overturn those convictions the court said the photographers had been targeted for taking pictures of security forces violently breaking up a peaceful demonstration and that they had been tortured into confessing. "This was a fair resolution of this case, which the public has waited for years, but the files are still classified, and we don't know what exactly these people were convicted of," Koridze said.

Panelists also recalled the 2017 incident of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli's abduction from Tbilisi and handover to the repressive Azerbaijani government. Georgian law enforcement's connection to the case has still not been investigated, Kintsurashvil said.

The public broadcaster elected four members to its board of trustees early in the year. Panelist Ia Mamaladze, publisher of *Guria News* in western

Georgia, ran unsuccessfully for one of the seats. She called the process "highly politicized" and said the ruling coalition was looking for candidates it could control, even though she had been the most highly rated of the field.

The Media Advocacy Coalition, a project of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, blasted GPB's management for sending an investigative documentary to an ad hoc parliamentary investigative committee, the public defender's office, and several NGOs for review before airing it. The film looked at the unsolved killings of two teens during a street fight in late 2017. The acquittal of suspects in the case led to major protests in the spring amid charges of a cover-up. GPB's management said it wanted to ensure airing the film would not impede the investigation.

"The fact that a 'relevant department' of the public broadcaster lacks the ability to make an editorial decision independently, in accordance with the law, and without interference from political and other interest groups demonstrates the incompetence of the management, misguided internal standards and procedures that threaten journalists' freedom of expression, especially for investigative reporters at the public broadcaster," the Media Advocacy Coalition said.

Gela Mtvlishvili, editor of *reginfo.ge*, complained about GPB's exclusive right to record court hearings (which is granted to other media if GPB is not present).

"When the cases are interesting to the media I represent and to investigative journalists, why shouldn't we be allowed to access the court hearings directly?" he said, adding that he had unsuccessfully asked the courts to allow online media to record hearings.

The panelists who are journalists said some state agencies throw up roadblocks for reporters

seeking public information and access to public officials. Dzvelishvili said the Ministry of Justice and the agencies under it are "almost inaccessible to journalists." "When journalists approach them for comment, they tell the journalists to send their inquiries in writing. This keeps the journalists from preparing critical materials on time and getting responses to critical questions," she said.

Georgian law requires public bodies to release public information within 10 days of a request, sooner if the request is urgent. But panel members said that does not happen. Zura Vardiashvili, editor of the online *Liberali.ge*, said the mayor's press office in the eastern city of Signaghi once took 19 days to respond to a written request for information, well after the story's deadline. Mtvlishvili said about 30 percent of the nearly 400 requests he submitted in 2018 were ignored. He also said it has become difficult for journalists to get information on expenditures by employees of public institutions other than top-ranking officials and middle management. Agencies say releasing such information would reveal personal information, but Mtvlishvili called that argument "an improper interpretation of who public authorities are and what the public interest is."

In March, the Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), a watchdog group, released the findings of its annual research on public agencies' compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. IDFI said 88 percent of the 7,728 requests it submitted in 2017 received responses, although nearly 13 percent of those were incomplete. The least compliant agency was a revenue agency, while the interior and justice ministries showed significant improvement.

Libel is a civil issue, and if proved, the broadcasting law requires an outlet to give equal time to rebuttals to statements that it disseminated

and are found to be libelous, regardless of whether a journalist or a source made the statement. For example, the Pirveli and Iberia television channels were forced to air programs repudiating statements made on their airwaves by Shalva Natelashvili, leader of the Georgian Labor Party, against Justice Minister Tea Tsulukiani that a court deemed libelous. Panelists said the requirement to “counterprogram” amounts to interference in an outlet’s editorial decision-making process.

Access to foreign information sources and the Internet is unrestricted. In its 2018 Freedom on the Net report, Freedom House gave Georgia relatively high marks, scoring it 25 on a 0-to-100 scale, with 100 being most repressive. Most freelance journalists cannot access press briefings in public institutions because they lack accreditation, which is almost impossible to obtain without being nominated by an employer. Tsetskhladze said journalists who are not registered at any organization do not have access to the Central Elections Commission in order to report on elections.

There are no barriers to entry into the journalism profession.

**OBJECTIVE 2:  
PROFESSIONAL  
JOURNALISM**

2.23

**Journalistic professionalism took a beating this year, as the political divisions exacerbated by the presidential election weighed on the standards of major media. One of the largest national television stations became a mouthpiece for the ruling party while the largest pro-opposition channel was unrelentingly critical of it. Throughout the media, there were egregious violations of professional and ethical standards, visual manipulations, and opinionated coverage.**

**In addition, the mushrooming of online media platforms has led to a deterioration of standards, panelists said.**

Jangirashvili said the elections “wiped out” professionalism in the Georgian media. “There was complete hysteria. ... If Rustavi2 was at least trying to keep its news programs under control, Imedi TV was completely bonkers,” she said. On October 30, when the field of 25 candidates was narrowed to two in the first round of balloting, Imedi announced it would work in “emergency mode” to help the Georgian Dream candidate, Salome Zurbishvili, defeat the UNM’s Grigol Vashadze. “Imedi TV and its owners have personally experienced what it means to have United National Movement in the leadership,” an announcement by the channel read. “That is why Imedi TV is changing its programming and will work toward ensuring that the regime will never come back.”

Dzvelishvili said there were excesses on all three national channels (GPB, Imedi, and Rustavi2). “On the talk shows, journalists only invited guests who agreed with them; there were no critical opinions; there was offensive language by the [director general/talk show anchor] of Rustavi2, etc. ... Everybody was literally working in emergency mode,” she said.

Panelists called GPB’s live talk show in July with Ivanishvili, former prime minister and leader of the ruling Georgian Dream Party, a travesty. They said the host asked few questions—and no tough ones—and let Ivanishvili go on at length.

Civil society monitors of the media during the campaign said the main national television channels’ coverage was dominated by attacks on candidates. For example, Rustavi2 depicted Zurbishvili as a traitor acting in Russia’s interests, while Imedi TV called Grigol Vashadze “Putin’s project.” On GPB,

regular programming was cut for a talk show about the elections that mostly hewed to the government’s narrative, the monitors’ report said. The number of manipulative stories produced in violation of ethical standards also increased. Unlike on these three channels, the monitors said election coverage on TV Pirveli and Adjara TV was balanced and impartial.

Media monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in the second round of elections found one-third of Imedi TV’s news coverage attacked the UNM candidate, 23 percent focused on the Georgian Dream Party, and 9 percent on that party’s candidate. Rustavi2 was a mirror image, with about one-third of its coverage attacking the Georgian Dream Party, 17 percent attacking the government, and nine percent attacking the Georgian Dream candidate; 24 percent was neutral coverage of the UNM candidate. GPB Channel 1 displayed bias against UNM and its candidate, and depicted Georgian Dream and its candidate favorably.

As for online media, some panelists complained about some websites’ practice of creating flimsy stories out of Facebook posts or statuses. Kinsturashvili and Mtivlishvili said the problem grows with the proliferation of such websites. Dzvelishvili said it is not clear if most media, including most television and radio stations, have formal codes of ethics, which are legally required for broadcasters. Natia Kapanadze, director of Adjara TV, said her outlet made a promotional video to educate the public about ethical standards and show them what to do when they spot violations.

One tool for media self-regulation in Georgia is [mediacouncil.ge](http://mediacouncil.ge), which was launched by an association of regional media outlets in 2016. The council is a forum for discussion of and awareness-raising about ethical and professional standards, and it accepts complaints about violations of

standards. But panelist Natia Kuprashvili said the council has not attracted much attention and has handled only a few cases. Most recently, it worked with the GCJE on a complaint against a producer and a talk-show host for TV 25. A main witness in a case involving a conspiracy to murder the country's foremost religious leader complained that the show had discussed his alleged links to the plot without inviting him to appear and had misrepresented the facts. In May, the GCJE and the council ruled for the complainant.

**Journalism meets professional standards of quality.**

**PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS**

- ▶ Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- ▶ Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- ▶ Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- ▶ Journalists cover key events and issues.
- ▶ Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- ▶ Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- ▶ Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- ▶ Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

Kuprashvili said media outlets file complaints against one another with the GCJE instead of appealing to one another's in-house complaints bodies. For instance, last year Rustavi2 General Director Nika Gvaramia filed a complaint against the news director and presenter of the program

*Parallel 42* of GPB Channel 1 for referring to him as a supporter of the UNM-backed presidential candidate, Grigol Vashadze.

Panelists said plagiarism happens regularly in Georgian media. Mtvlishvili said media outlets often use his reports without giving due credit. "I'm one of those exceptions who claims ownership and appeals to the courts," he said. Kintsurashvili and Dzvelishvili said the line between news reporting and paid content, usually from the government, is often difficult to find.

Panelists disagreed on the prevalence of self-censorship and to what extent reporters must adhere to their media outlets' positions on issues. Nino Zhizhilashvili, host of the *Politmetri* political talk show on TV Pirveli, said that during the 2018 elections journalists for certain media were compelled sometimes to voice the position of that media outlet. "It is an important detail when the owner takes a stand and the employee repeats it," Kintsurashvili added. During the run-up to the presidential election, Tamar Chikhladze, anchor of the *Qronika* news program, left Imedi TV in protest over its editorial policy.

Some panelists said Georgia's poorly paid journalists are vulnerable to lavish influence campaigns that could include free trips to conferences, information tours, or trainings at attractive destinations, funded by public agencies. "For a journalist who can hardly afford GEL 50 for a hotel stay, this is a gift. This is how a journalist's loyalty can be bought by a state organization," Mtvlishvili said.

Still, in a media landscape strewn with ethical pitfalls, some outlets were respected for their quality and depth. They include Liberal.ge, netgazeti.ge/ Batumelebi.ge, on.ge, OC.media.ge, *Samkhretis Karibche*, RFE/RL, and some others.

In general, media cover all major events and

issues. Mtvlishvili said news websites hunt for stories in social media, with some even creating separate menu logs of Facebook comments by public officials and others. Online media compete not only with large television stations, but also with social media users and citizen journalists. "Anyone can turn on the camera, and it's all there," Dzvelishvili said.

Broadcast media mostly follow the country's political agenda, Dvelishvili said. Most outlets rarely work to find stories on their own. An exception, she said, is Rustavi2, which tries to raise certain issues and then make public officials respond to them and explain. She also noted that GPB's Channel 1 has found a way around criticism that it avoids certain topics by allotting them 30-second video treatments with no explanatory voiceover.

**"It is an important detail when the owner takes a stand and the employee repeats it," Kintsurashvili added.**

Different Georgian media tell the same stories in such radically different ways that the Mediachecker.ge analysis site has a feature titled "Parallel Realities" to examine how Rustavi2 and Imedi TV approach the same stories. "The stories aren't covered because they're seen as major events, but because the media outlets want to put their own spin on them," Koridze said, noting, for example, that Imedi TV buried in the 25th minute of a newscast a major development from the prosecutor's office regarding the deadly 2017 street fighting that precipitated protests last year.

Journalism is among the lowest-paid professions in the country. Salaries vary between private and public media outlets and across different regions, but the average monthly wage of a journalist is around \$500.

News and information programming is not eclipsed by entertainment shows, and panelists said the country has enough news and talk shows.

Television channels generally have poor technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news, panelists said. Jangirashvili said she worries that her channel, Kavkasia TV, will be “hit with a major technical crash.” Nino Nakashidze, deputy director of Rustavi2, said her channel works with old camcorders and cassette tapes. Zhizhilashvili said TV Pirveli’s technical updates are supported by donor funds. Vardiashvili said Liberali.ge could use better cameras and camcorders for better-quality multimedia stories. Imedi TV has relatively high-quality facilities, compared with others. At the end of 2018, GPB took a loan for GEL 45 million to upgrade its equipment.

Some media do specialized reporting but usually not very well. Most business-related pieces fall under the category of paid content, Jangirashvili said. Kuprashvili noted that regional broadcasters have begun to cover agriculture-related topics. “This way we strengthened coverage of agricultural issues, and we were able to attract donors and businesses as well. ... Now we’re thinking of starting an agricultural channel and feeding it with journalistic content from the network of regional media,” she said. The initiative is run by the Journalism Resource Center. For many years, the small Monitor (monitori.ge) studio has produced quality investigative content that has received local and international praise. In 2018, Monitor teamed up with Radio Free Europe to produce a program titled *Freedom Monitor*.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

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**Georgia has a pluralistic media scene, with hundreds of outlets providing a range of views. But the media’s political connections and polarization reached a peak in the period between the first and second rounds of voting in the 2018 election. Monitors found that the largest national broadcasters have become blatantly partisan and have exacerbated the country’s divisions. Kuprashvili said that in this atmosphere, small media outlets struggle to be heard. “There was an impression that there are only two media, with two opinions, and these two don’t give way to alternative opinions,” she said, referring to Imedi and Rustavi2.**

Despite the rise in online news consumption in the past few years, television remains the major source of information for Georgians. Imedi, GPB Channel 1, and Maestro have been pro-government, while Rustavi2 is an outspoken government critic associated with the United National Movement. Kavkasia TV and TV Pirveli occupy the center, and Obiektivi TV reflects the ultranationalist views of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. Iberia TV went off the air in late 2018 after its owner allegedly suffered financial losses.

Ia Mamaladze, the *Guria News* publisher, said newspapers still play a key role in informing the public. She said Internet access is too expensive for some and is even inaccessible in some rural areas. The two largest Internet providers, Silknet and Magticom, charged their subscribers a monthly fee of approximately \$10 on average (GEL 26–27) for fiber-optic Internet in 2018. The price for 1GB mobile Internet service was approximately \$2 (GEL 5–7).

In addition to cost, infrastructure and technological issues prevent some from getting online. Countrywide infrastructure needs improvement, and the Internet is slow, some panelists said. According to the National Statistics Office, 69.5 percent of households have access to the Internet, typically via a fixed broadband connection. In 2015, the Ministry of Economy launched an Internetization project and established the nonprofit Open Net to take charge of building broadband infrastructure. The project, which allegedly cost \$150 million, was to be supported by Georgian Dream leader Ivanishvili’s Cartu Fund, but Koridze said it is unclear if he will complete it. Dzvelishvili, of the GCJE, said broadcast reception—and access to Georgian broadcasters—can be spotty in border regions.

Only a handful of local news agencies gather and distribute news to media outlets. Panelists agreed that most Georgian agencies do not function as traditional news agencies, instead passing along information fed to them by the government. “We don’t have news agencies, like Reuters, that are editorially independent, gather information on their own, and distribute it,” Jangirashvili said. Koridze said news agencies will distribute government press releases unaltered with no indication that they are not the product of news-gathering. “This makes such news agencies effectively PR platforms,” he said.

Dimitri Avaliani, an editor at *JAMnews*, and Mamaladze said most news websites act as aggregators, collecting information from various sources. Vardiashvili said the main goal of news agencies is to garner as many clicks as possible and attract advertisers. “To reach their desired numbers, these news agencies are [lifting Facebook posts made by] public figures to create scandalous headlines, which will spread across the Web and attract an audience.”

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Mtivlishvili said that if there is a shortage of national news agencies, there are small regional ones that gather information specific to certain communities. Mtis Ambebi, for instance, serves Georgia's remote, mountainous towns and villages, such as Javakheti, Pshavi, Tusheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Svaneti, and Lechkhumi. Mtvlishvili said many large media outlets pick up its feed.

### Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.

#### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS

- ▶ A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- ▶ Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- ▶ Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- ▶ Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- ▶ A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- ▶ State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.
- ▶ Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.

The *Georgia and the World* newspaper, known for its pro-Russia and anti-West sentiments, co-hosted a Kremlin-funded media forum in Tbilisi last year. Similar events were organized in 2013 and 2014 in Tbilisi by the same groups. Dzvelishvili said it is noteworthy that the number of Georgian media outlets participating has not grown over the years.

Most panelists said the public broadcaster betrayed its mission of public service during the recent campaign season by becoming a mouthpiece for the Georgian Dream Party and the government. "Members of the ruling party and the government used GPB's air for promoting their narrative," Dzvelishvili said.

Private broadcast media produce their own news and information programming and mostly rely on foreign sources for international news.

Broadcasters are required by law to make their ownership public, but Kuprashvili said information about the real owners is still known to a small circle of interested parties. The law also prohibits public officials from owning media properties and prohibits offshore registration for media operating in Georgia. "Most people don't know who can and can't own media. The provisions in the law on broadcasting are technical and aren't properly enforced," Kuprashvili said.

Print and online media are not required to disclose their ownership, which raises questions about their transparency as well, Jangirashvili said.

In early 2018, Zhizhilashvili, the *Politmetri* host on TV Pirveli, told a closed meeting between representatives of the media and NGOs that the channel had gotten "alarming signals" from the government, aimed at "changing the content of the station." The case was mysteriously resolved with the help of former high-ranking government officials, according to an investigation by Netgazeti.ge.

In October, Iberia TV went off the air after its owner said the authorities were trying to shut down the channel, which was critical of the government. Management said the channel could no longer pay its bills and accused the authorities of artificially creating financial problems by imposing unfair financial obligations on the Omega Group, which

owns Iberia TV. Members of the ruling Georgian Dream Party countered that the channel's owner threatened to blame the government for the shutdown if some of his business's tax debts were not forgiven.

Jangirashvili said the communications commission has ignored the illegal market concentration created by a 2017 merger of the Imedi and Maestro newsrooms.

**"There was an impression that there are only two media, with two opinions, and these two don't give way to alternative opinions," Kuprashvili said, referring to Imedi and Rustavi2.**

Some ethnic minorities in Georgia have access to media in their own language. Specifically, two Armenian-language television stations and several radio stations and news websites serve residents in the southern Samtskhe-Javakheti region. South of Tbilisi, the predominantly Azeri town of Marneuli gets Azeri-language programming from Radio Marneuli and Radio Ivrisi. In the Pankisi Gorge to the north, community radio Way broadcasts news in the Georgian and Chechen languages, though it does not have a wide reach, Kuprashvili said.

In 2018, the Journalism Resource Center launched the Russian-language TOK TV in Samtskhe-Javakheti, but Kuprashvili said it lacks the funds to cover many local issues. Samkhretis Karibche, which serves the Meskheta region in southern Georgia, and Radio Nori in the Samtskhe-Javakheti share news content.

The public broadcaster has moved its minority-language programming from television to online. Kuprashvili said that a few years ago GPB Channel 1 started an Armenian-language news program at her

suggestion: “We helped develop strong journalists, who were hired by other media after they were fired by the GPB.” She said taking those programs off the air is a violation of the channel’s legal obligations to broadcast programming for and by minorities.

Most Georgian media do not follow international events systematically. “We still focus on our local priorities and are less interested in international events, unless these events are somehow connected with Georgia,” Nakashidze said. She said Rustavi2 airs the *Kviris Shuadze* (Sunday Afternoon) program, which mostly covers international events. Kapanadze mentioned that Adjara TV airs a Sunday news show, which also covers international events called *Main Events of the Week* (*Mtavari Acharaze*), which gets good ratings. For the past few years, netgazeti.ge has had a section with updates on events from the three South Caucasus countries.

**OBJECTIVE 4:  
BUSINESS  
MANAGEMENT**

1.57

**The media market saw little change in 2018, with the GNCC measuring a slight drop in broadcasters’ advertising revenues from GEL 69.1 million to GEL 66.2 million (approximately \$25 million). The major business-related events of the year in media were changes to the law on broadcasting and the GNCC’s look at trends in ad revenues from 2012 to 2017, which caused a stir among the media players.**

Early in the year, the commission released long-awaited, self-reported figures showing a 14 percent decline in broadcasters’ ad revenue for 2017, but the agency simultaneously released an analysis showing that the advertising market had grown in

2017. GNCC accounted for the apparent discrepancy by saying advertising agencies’ service fees had gone up, so that while advertisers were paying more, that increase was not going into the coffers of media outlets.

The analysis also blamed a steep slump in the market in 2015 on the declared drop in Rustavi2’s advertising revenues. In both 2015 and 2017, the regulator said the market decline was “artificial.”

In a televised briefing with journalists, Zura Gumbaridze, executive director of the Intermedia advertising agency, called the commission’s methodology “incorrect” and denied that ad agencies’ service fees had risen in 2017.

Panelist Dzelishvili and others saw an ulterior motive in release of the analysis, which came shortly after a controversial new law went into effect, allowing the public broadcaster to run more advertising. Critics say the document was meant to downplay concerns about increased competition for a shrinking pool of revenue. Jangirashvili said she testified about such concerns during deliberations on the new law and before the GNCC released the 2017 figures, but the speaker of parliament dismissed her as “a liar and a party activist.”

Research by Transparency International Georgia shows a huge jump in the public broadcaster’s advertising and sponsorship revenue from the first three quarters of 2017 to the same period in 2018, from GEL 500,239 (\$189,000) to GEL 2,450,112 (\$924,000). According to GNCC data in 2017<sup>1</sup> the public broadcaster’s annual revenues from advertising and sponsorship totaled GEL 848,091 (\$320,000) and in 2018 it reached GEL

2,877,898<sup>2</sup> (\$1.1 million). If the third and fourth quarters’ revenues are compared in 2017<sup>3</sup> and 2018<sup>4</sup>, the difference is approximately four times more in 2018 (an increase from GEL 495,967 [[\$187,000] to GEL 2,355,396 [[\$888,000]]). This came after the law changed and also coincided with elections

There is a dearth of revenue and revenue sources for media in Georgia. Most terrestrial broadcasters make money from advertising and sponsorship, which covers only a fraction of their costs. Eighty-one percent of the advertising market is split between Rustavi2 and Imedi TV. Advertising revenues dipped slightly in the first three quarters of the year, compared with the same period in 2017, according to the Transparency International Georgia report. Regional broadcasters’ advertising revenues fell by 13 percent in the first three quarters of 2018, compared with the same period of the previous year.

In an effort to diversify their revenue streams, in 2017 Rustavi2 and Imedi TV demanded that cable operators pay to redistribute their programming. Kuprashvili said small media outlets were left out of the deal. Similarly, Rustavi2 tried to leverage its streaming online content for a share of subscription fees from myvideo.ge, the country’s most popular video portal, Nakashidze said. The talks failed, and Rustavi2 took its content off myvideo.ge. Nakashidze said myvideo.ge had been taking traffic away from Rustavi2’s own website. Imedi TV followed suit.

Because the single-largest source of funding for media is media owners’ other businesses, Jangirashvili

1 <https://analytics.gncc.ge/ka/statistics/?c=broadcasting&f=revenue&exp=tv&sid=598660>

2 <https://analytics.gncc.ge/ka/statistics/?c=broadcasting&f=revenue&exp=tv&sid=598659>

3 <https://analytics.gncc.ge/ka/statistics/?c=broadcasting&f=revenue&exp=tv&sid=598661>

4 <https://analytics.gncc.ge/ka/statistics/?c=broadcasting&f=revenue&exp=tv&sid=598662>

said the media industry is “unsustainable.” She cited the 2018 shutdown of Iberia TV after its owners’ other businesses came under financial pressure.

**Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.**

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS**

- ▶ Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- ▶ Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- ▶ Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- ▶ Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- ▶ Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- ▶ Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Nakashidze said that before the financial troubles caused by a cascade of actions taken against Rustavi2 as a result of the ownership battle over the company, the channel was “self-sufficient, capable of sustaining itself through its own revenues.” Nakashidze and Jangirashvili said the biggest blow to ad revenues was changes to the broadcasting law in 2015, limiting advertising time to 12 minutes per hour of broadcasting.

Some panelists said advertisers and ad agencies do not respond effectively to the market. It is unusual, for instance, to study audience demographics before deciding where to place an ad. Jangirashvili said advertisers chase after high ratings regardless of audience demographics and

correspondence between the advertising message and target audience. “They don’t pay attention to what they can gain from small media channels; they don’t study their target segments. That’s why small media have a difficult time growing.”

In 2018, the Intermedia advertising agency retained its position as a seller of airtime on Rustavi2 and its affiliated channels, while Imedi TV started selling its own airtime. Small broadcasters, including regional ones, must do their own selling.

Vardiashvili said most funding for the Liberali.ge website comes from donor funds and a much smaller percentage from advertising. He said the proceeds from any increase in online advertising flow mostly to Google and Facebook. Nakashidze said at least 10 percent of Rustavi2’s income comes from digital advertising. “That’s why we switched on live broadcasting on our website. Imedi TV did the same thing,” she said.

Mamaladze said she worries about the dire advertising situation for print media. She said she had tried to subsidize *Guria News*’s production and operation costs with other businesses, such as printing services and stationery, with little success.

Most government subsidies go the media that are not critical of the government, and procurement procedures and allocation of the funds to the media are opaque. Kuprashvili said that last year was the second in a row that the government had conducted a consolidated process for placing advertising and buying other airtime, which discriminates against regional media because “no one knows how the process works. The procedures are vague.”

Two audience measurement companies provide media with audience data: TVMR GE, Nielsen Television Audience Measurement’s official licensee, and Tri Media Intelligence, an affiliate of the global media research firm Kantar

Media, launched in 2016. TVMR GE monitors 450 households, with 200 in Tbilisi and 250 in six other cities. Kantar Media surveys 600 households, half of which are in Tbilisi, the other half in six other cities. The market is divided between these measurers, although there are some that use both. For example, from the two large channels Rustavi 2 cooperates with TVMR only, while Imedi TV uses the service from both. Neither company measures the audience for regional media, which, in addition to other factors, makes it difficult for regional broadcasters to attract advertisers.

**“They [advertisers] don’t pay attention to what they can gain from small media channels; they don’t study their target segments. That’s why small media have a difficult time growing,” Jangirashvili said.**

Kuprashvili said the Alliance of Broadcasters—the union of 21 regional broadcasters—signed an agreement with Kantar Media last year. Monitoring local television and radio would have cost GEL 50,000, and online media less, but the group was forced to abandon the project because it could not come up with the funds, she said.

**OBJECTIVE 5:  
SUPPORTING  
INSTITUTIONS**

2.54

**Several professional associations, along with civil society groups, work to promote the interests of journalists and media outlets. The list includes the Media Advocacy Coalition, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Transparency International Georgia, GCJE, Media Club, Alliance of Broadcasters, and the Media Development**

**Foundation. This is the only objective for which the score increased slightly in 2018, from 2.52 to 2.54.**

The Alliance of Broadcasters, representing 21 regional television and radio stations, was among the most vocal opponent last year to legislation allowing more advertising on the public broadcaster. "We need trade associations to help the market sustain media organizations," alliance director Kuprashvili said. In addition to advocating for regional media, the alliance facilitates joint content production, procurement, advertising sales, and content sharing among its members.

**Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.**

**SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:**

- ▶ Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- ▶ Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- ▶ Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- ▶ Sources of newsprint NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- ▶ Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- ▶ Printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

The increasing number of appeals to the GCJE suggest the organization's growing reputation as a self-regulatory mechanism for the press. Executive Director Dzvelishvili said that in 2018, the GCJE fielded 62 complaints, 26 of which were from individuals, 12 from NGOs, five from politicians, and the rest from journalists and state agencies. Dzvelishvili said the charter is a board member of the Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe and the Media Self-Regulatory Organizations Network, which covers the South Caucasus, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Russia.

Some panelists said civil society and international organizations play a major role in Georgian media development. "If not for them, Rustavi2 wouldn't have existed at all," Nakashidze said. In turn, she said, critical media create a platform for civil society groups to air their concerns. Dzvelishvili said such groups are quick to react to issues concerning the country's media, of which there are many. "There are so many problematic issues about the media, we [GCJE] don't have the human resources and sometimes even the competency to respond to all of them," she said.

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association started the Media Advocacy Coalition a couple of years ago to improve the media environment in Georgia.

A few major donors continue to support media-related projects. The Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF)'s Media Program supports reporting on good governance, human rights, and democratic values. OSGF also helps its partner media improve management and business practices through training and consultancy. In addition, the foundation supports journalists in ethnic minority communities.

In 2018, Internews Georgia expanded an earlier project to support independent media in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine to more countries and

launched a competitive grant program for multimedia reporting. The project includes training for media managers and consultants and aims to give all audiences in Georgia better access to information by strengthening local media and encouraging audience outreach.

The Media Development Foundation (MDF) is another organization aimed at supporting media literacy, freedom of expression and self-regulation in Georgia. In 2018, the organization started a project with funding from the US Embassy in Tbilisi called Media Literacy Youth Lab for Responsible Media Consumption to promote critical thinking in media consumers, enhancing skills to distinguish quality media products from manipulated media content and raise awareness on the importance of fighting fake news. MDF also runs an online platform, Myth Detector, funded by USAID through East-West Management Institute's ACCESS program. Myth Detector tracks and debunks disinformation disseminated in the media.

The Media for Transparent and Accountable Governance Program, funded by USAID and run by IREX, aims to shore up reporting standards, help regional media become sustainable, and get more balanced reporting to residents of Georgia's occupied territories, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Georgian Media Partnership Program, run by IREX and funded by the US State Department through the Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy in Tbilisi, sponsors professional exchanges between Georgian and US journalists.

A few journalism schools offer an education that meets the needs of the market. The Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) and Caucasus University stand out for producing a small number of highly skilled journalists. Otherwise, the journalism curriculum at most schools is outdated, However, the universities still have challenges related with the

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teaching materials. There are not enough textbooks in the Georgian language, and while some foreign-language textbooks have been translated into Georgian in the past few years, but they do not always reflect the local situation. Dzvelishvili said it is not uncommon that instructors in journalism schools do not confer with one another to see what or how they are teaching.

**“The availability of international trainings for Georgian journalists has increased, and if a journalist is proactive, he or she can easily go abroad to sharpen their skills,” Dzvelishvili said.**

The Multimedia Education Center in Tbilisi, established and run by USAID and IREX, serves students from journalism schools at GIPA, Caucasus University, International Black Sea University, and other universities. Several years ago, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Caucasus International University established multimedia centers.

For the past three years, GIPA's journalism school has held trainings in media literacy, multimedia skills, and business and social entrepreneurship for high-schoolers from the Armenian and Azeri communities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. The project is funded by the US State Department and taught in the children's native languages.

There are so many training opportunities for journalists in Georgia that Dzvelishvili said the supply exceeds demand. “The availability of international trainings for Georgian journalists has increased, and if a journalist is proactive, he or she can easily go abroad to sharpen their skills,” she said.

Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are apolitical. Mamaladze said presses are concentrated in Tbilisi and are expensive. Koridze said there are no printing services in the major cities of Batumi, Kutaisi, and Poti.

Since 2012, all cable operators and telecommunication companies owning cable infrastructure in Georgia have been required to carry the signal of all licensed television stations, in order to prevent certain channels from being effectively blacked out. Kuprashvili said they can create artificial barriers for small media outlets. For example, a small television station like TOK TV that receives Internet service from Akhtel telecommunications must also pay market heavies Silknet and Magticom for such things as obtaining a static IP address (GEL 1,000, about \$384] and a monthly Internet access fee of GEL 250 (about \$96). “I could have streamed my content with any IP operator without purchasing their Internet services. This service is expensive and unaffordable for small media,” Kuprashvili said.

### List of Panel Participants

**Mamuka Andguladze**, media program manager, Transparency International Georgia

**Dimitri Avaliani**, editor, *JAMnews* Georgia, Tbilisi

**Nata Dzvelishvili**, executive director, Georgian Charter of Journalism Ethics, Tbilisi

**Nino Jangirashvili**, director, Kavkasia TV, Tbilisi

**Natia Kapanadze**, director, Adjara TV, Batumi

**Zviad Koridze**, independent media analyst, Tbilisi

**Natia Kuprashvili**, chairwoman, Journalism Resource Center, Alliance of Broadcasters, Tbilisi

**Ia Mamaladze**, publisher, *Guria News*, Chokhatauri

**Maia Mikashavidze**, director, multimedia project, Internews Georgia, Tbilisi

**Gela Mtvlishvili**, director, *reginfo.ge*, Gurjaani

**Nino Nakashidze**, deputy director, Rustavi2, Tbilisi

**Nestan Tsetskhladze**, editor, *netgazeti.ge*, Tbilisi

**Tamar Kintsurashvili**, Executive Director, Media Development Foundation, Tbilisi

**Nino Zhizhilashvili**, journalist and host of *Politmetri*, TV Pirveli

**Zura Vardiashvili**, editor, *Liberali*, Tbilisi

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