



JOURNALISTS' SAFETY BEFORE THE 2024 ELECTIONS

**Tbilisi
2024**



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September 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The authors would like to acknowledge Elene Ergeshidze for her assistance in the quantitative data analysis presented in the document.

This publication was funded by the European Union and co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Center for Media, Information and Social Research and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and BMZ.

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INTRODUCTION

As the 2024 elections approach, journalists are facing a rapidly deteriorating media environment. The 2024 World [Press Freedom Index](#) by Reporters Without Borders, highlights a significant decline in the country's performance. In 2023, Georgia ranked 77th out of 180 countries with a score of 61.69 points, however, by 2024, it had fallen to 103rd place with the score dropping to 53.05 points.

The deteriorating situation is primarily due to the adoption of the Georgia's Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, commonly known as the "Foreign Agents" law, which a large portion of Georgian society has labeled as the "Russian Law." Over the past two years, the Georgian government has introduced the law twice. After the first attempt in 2023, the draft law was [withdrawn](#) following mass public protests and international criticism. However, in 2024, the law was [enacted](#) despite widespread protests and condemnation from [international organizations](#) and [officials](#).

According to various local and international organizations, as well as press freedom and human rights experts, the law [stigmatizes](#) and marginalizes independent media, limits freedom of speech and expression, and [shrinks civic space](#). Notably, the [reintroduction](#) of the "Foreign Agents" law happened just six months before Georgia's parliamentary elections.

In November 2023, the European Union issued an official recommendation to grant candidate status to the country, marking a significant event for its future. However, following the adoption of the "Foreign Agents" law, the [European Council's conclusion](#) on June 27, 2024, stated that *"the law adopted on transparency of foreign influence represents backsliding on the steps set out in the Commission's recommendation for candidate status. The European Council calls on Georgia's authorities to clarify their intentions by reversing the current course of action which jeopardizes Georgia's EU path, de facto leading to a halt of the accession process."*

The discussion and adoption of the Foreign Agents law occurred amidst peaceful protests against the legislation. During the coverage of these protests, many journalists faced interference in their reporting and [became](#) victims of violence. In addition, journalists, along with some Georgian citizens protesting the law, became [targets](#) of telephone harassment, threats, assaults on the street, and offensive posters displayed at their homes or offices. According to the [Ombudsman of Georgia](#), *"the attacks on representatives of opposition parties, journalists, and participants of the rally show signs of persecution based on political activity and opinion."*

The [Nations in Transit 2024](#) report by Freedom House, an influential international organiza-

tion, notes that Georgia's score remains unchanged from last year at 3.04. However, the report warns that *"Autocratizing hybrids like Hungary, Serbia, and, to a lesser extent, Georgia are on their way to becoming Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes based on the reporting methodology."*

The following study by the Center for Media, Information, and Social Research reflects the experience and security situation of journalists in Georgia in the run-up to the 2024 elections. The report examines in detail the risks, challenges, threats, and expectations faced by media representatives. The findings reveal a media landscape that is battling for its survival and preservation of democracy amidst growing authoritarianism.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used in the research.

Survey

For this research, the research team collected quantitative data through a survey questionnaire administered in June and July 2024. The questionnaire, based on the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) framework for assessing journalist safety, consisted of 26 questions. A total of 106 respondents participated in the survey. The questionnaire was distributed to

journalists and editors from central and regional media outlets. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. The results of the online survey are non-representative.

Profile of Survey Participants

The age group from 25 to 34 years is most widely represented in the study (44%), the next largest group is the age group from 35 to 44 years (33%). Three quarters of respondents (75%, 79 out of 106) were women. The research primarily included reporters (45%), followed by multi-media journalists (22%), editors (21%), and TV anchors (19%). More than half of the respondents are based in Tbilisi (63%). Additionally, over half of the participants have more than 10 years of experience in the media, while a quarter have between 6 and 10 years of experience. In terms of employment, 59% of participants work in online media, 49% in TV stations, 10% in radio, and 4% in newspapers (respondents could select multiple options for this question). 93% of respondents were employed full-time during the research period.

Interviews

Qualitative research data were collected through in-depth interviews with 15 media representatives. These representatives work in both national and regional media outlets, including television, online media, radio, and print media, located in Tbilisi and various regions of Georgia.

JOURNALISTS FACING CHALLENGES ALONE

"No one protects me; I stand alone. I live knowing that the police exist, yet we also understand that they won't come to our aid when we find ourselves in trouble," says a director of the media organization that became the target of attacks in April and May.

"Before, I don't recall a situation where calling the police resulted in no response. But now I can say for sure that they are deliberately trying to make us, as media representatives, feel vulnerable if we continue our current work." This quote comes from a critical TV journalist who reflects on an incident that occurred in May. Despite repeatedly notifying the police about the potential danger posed by masked individuals hiding in cars outside the TV station, no action was taken by them.

This incident was also [mentioned](#) by other journalists, one of whom noted, *"It's frustrating the state institution doesn't even show up, not even for appearances."*

Journalists participating in the research state that, in recent years, the issue of safety has become particularly topical for media representatives, and is directly affecting to the state of freedom of media in the country. According to them, the feeling of insecurity stems from the current political climate, legislative chang-

es, inadequate response of the state to crimes against media representatives, disinformation campaigns directed at media by government officials, and the overall narrowing of space for freedom of expression.

"Freedom of expression is no longer safe; it is already being restricted in various ways in the country," says the editor of one of the online media outlets.

"If you're a journalist, you're in danger because of your work. It doesn't really matter what topic you are working on. Because you're a journalist, you're seen as a bad person, and this has changed a lot, especially since the initiation of the law ["foreign agents" law]," notes the editor of one of the online media outlets.

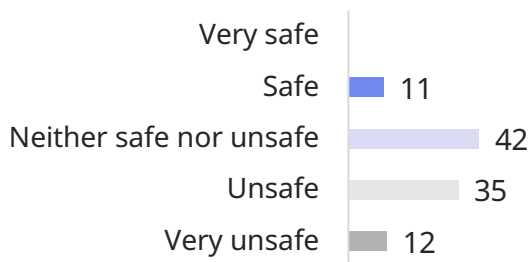
"The environment is so hostile for the media that it can become extremely dangerous. In the past, the governments in Georgia had some degree of checks and balances - for instance, the opinions and decisions of the West carried significant weight. Now, the situation is worsened by the fact that our government has abandoned all accountability systems," says the director of one of the television companies.

Several participants in this research noted that safety issue for journalists in Georgia came to the forefront after the events of [July 5 and 6](#), 2021, when journalists were at-

tacked en masse by homophobic, pro-Russian groups. [According](#) to non-governmental organizations, those responsible for the attacks have not been brought to justice.

According to one participant of the research, if until now the main challenges of the media were lack of financial stability, organizational sustainability, access to information, today security has been added to these issues, and it is much more important.

IN GENERAL, HOW SAFE DO YOU FEEL WHILE CARRYING OUT YOUR PROFESSIONAL DUTIES?(%)



47% of surveyed journalists feel unsafe while performing their professional duties. 42% state that they feel neither safe nor unsafe, and only 11% consider themselves safe. Additionally, 91% believe that media representatives are more at risk than those in other professions. The feeling of insecurity is similar in the regions and in Tbilisi. However, in Tbilisi, over half of the surveyed journalists (52%) say they feel either very unsafe (13%) or unsafe (39%), whereas among regional media representatives, 38% consider themselves very unsafe (10%) or unsafe (28%).

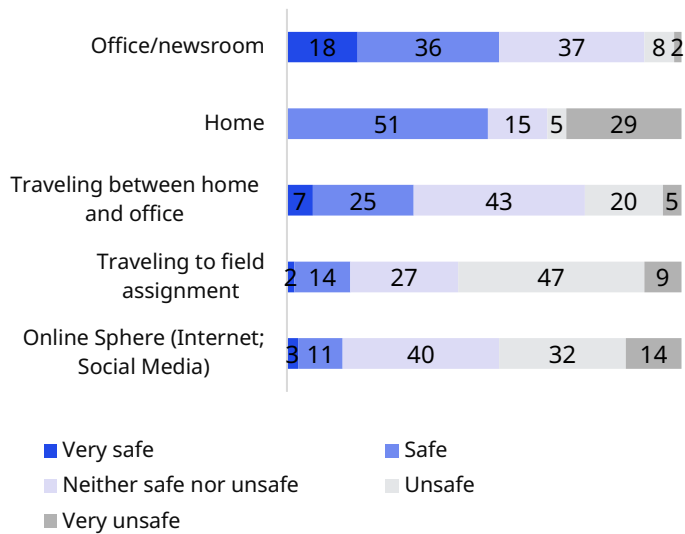
The interviews and survey results highlight the difficult experiences media representatives have endured over the past six months. One interviewee of this research - a founder and editor of an online media outlet - stated, *"...the work environment has become toxic and extremely dangerous."*

"It's a big challenge knowing that someone might confront you on the street. You walk down the street every day, and it's very difficult to constantly think about that," says one of the online media journalists in an interview.

"You might go out into the street with a microphone, and just because you're holding it, someone might beat you or even kill you, and no one will intervene. There are constant attacks, insults, blackmail, interference in your personal life, and surveillance through mobile phones—it's very difficult," says a TV director and journalist.

Respondents note that if in previous years journalists from critical TV stations were often the primary targets of aggression from government officials, this attitude has recently extended to online media as well: *"Now we have become more of a priority [...] whereas before, they had no interest in what was written in online media."*

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU FEEL SAFE AT THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS? (%)



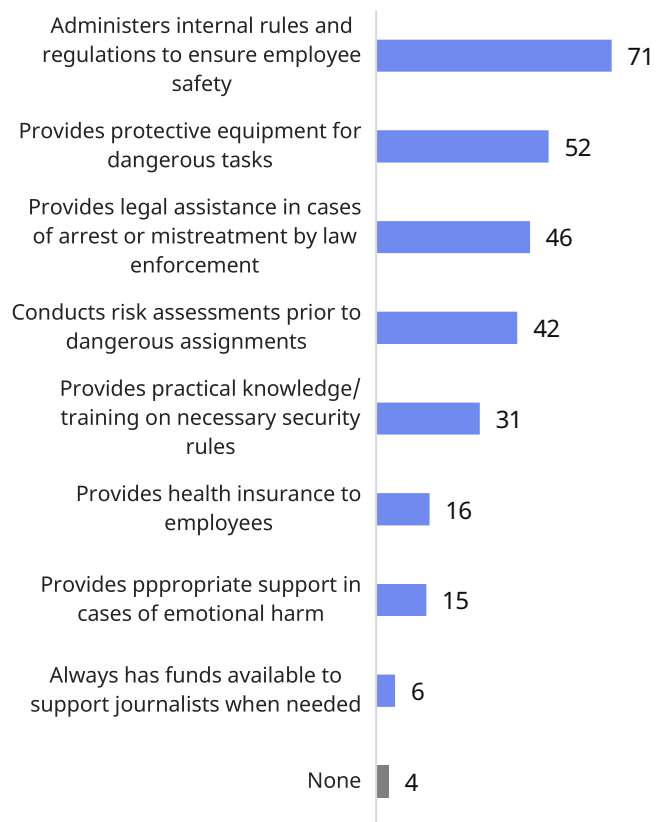
Journalists feel safest at home and at work. 51% feel safe at home, and 36% feel safe in the newsroom or office, though only 18% report feeling very safe in the newsroom or office. 29% consider themselves very unsafe at home. None rated their home as a very safe place. Notably, in the newsrooms or offices, 2% reported feeling very unsafe, and 8% reported feeling unsafe—these responses came exclusively from women. While working in the field, 47% of journalists feel unsafe, and 9% feel very unsafe. Only 14% of interviewees consider themselves to be very safe or safe online.

Despite the pressure, the majority of journalists note that the attacks have a small impact on them personally; however, they have affected organizations' security policies. As one journalist explains, the policy has been

strengthened: *"We have more discussions before going to protests about what kind of equipment to bring, and we often check in with each other about our locations and feelings of safety. We also keep the contact information of lawyers in case we need assistance."*

According to another interviewee, certain steps were taken in their newsroom to ensure journalists' safety: *"We are now better prepared for assignments with more equipment, and we've also undergone training. There are also mental health services available, and in this regard, effectiveness has improved somewhat."*

MY MEDIA ORGANIZATION IN GENERAL: (%)



Note: Respondents were allowed to select more than one answer.

71% of respondents state their organization follows rules and regulations to ensure employee safety. According to 52%, the organization provides protective equipment for dangerous tasks, while 46% say it offers legal assistance in cases of arrest or improper treatment by law enforcement. Additionally, 42% report that their organization conducts risk assessments before hazardous assignments. In the event of emotional harm, only 15% mentioned the possibility of receiving support from their organization, and just 6% identified a fund used to assist journalists when needed.

Most organizations provided the necessary preparation to respondents for reporting on rallies. More than half of the interviewees - 52% - prepared for risk assessments while covering demonstrations. Additionally, 38% studied the use of special equipment, while another 38% went through the protocol for coordinating with editors. Furthermore, 34% learned the protocol for action in emergency situations, 29% were trained in digital security tools, and 27% received legal training to better understand their rights during reporting and/or in case of arrest. Only 6% reported receiving training in stress management.

FROM THE FOLLOWING, WHAT TYPE OF PREPARATION DID YOUR ORGANIZATION OFFER FOR COVERING DEMONSTRATIONS?
 (% OF RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATED PARTICIPATION IN PROTESTS; MULTIPLE RESPONSES APPLY)



A total of 93 respondents

JOURNALISTS AT PROTESTS

“Before, when I identified myself as a journalist or a representative of the press, the reactions were different, they [law enforcement] would say ‘Don’t touch her, let her go.’ What I see now is the opposite,” one online media journalist tells us.

Our respondents also noted other instances of interference encountered by journalists during the protests.

“I was standing in Zubalashvili Street when [special forces] suddenly stormed in without warning. I saw them beating someone, and when they noticed me, one of them told the other, ‘Get her out of here,’ and they threw me out,” says the online media editor.

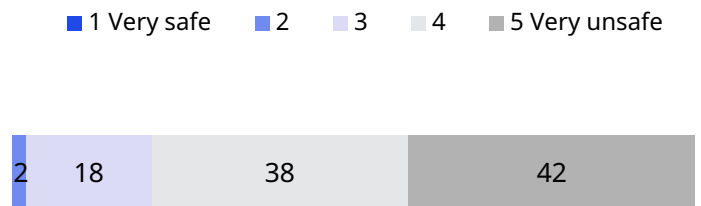
The director of one TV station notes that *“...the system was much more ruthless during these particular protests.”* An online media journalist adds, *“this year, the number of instances when we weren’t allowed to work has significantly increased.”*

“As for the surveillance, we know for sure that there’s a silver car parked in front of the office constantly, and we know it’s surveilling us. But we’ve gotten used to it,” says one of the regional media directors.

When asked how they felt while covering the demonstrations against the “Foreign Agents” law, 42% of the 93 respondents reported feeling very unsafe, and 38% felt unsafe, while only 2% said they felt safe during the coverage.

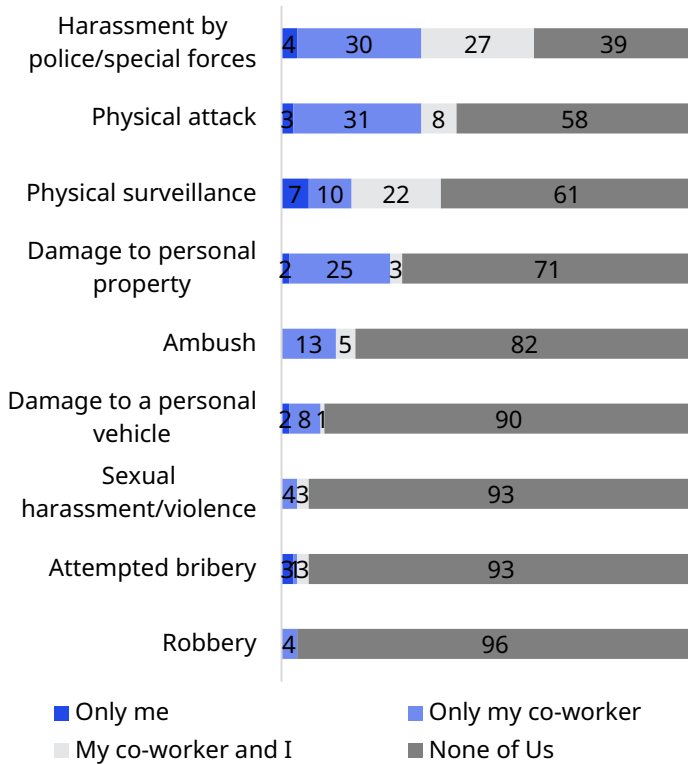
HOW SAFE DID YOU FEEL WHEN COVERING DEMONSTRATIONS?

(% OF RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATED THAT THEY PARTICIPATED / COVERED THE PROTEST ACTIONS)



61% of respondents reported that they and/or their co-worker experienced harassment from the police or special forces. 42% said they and/or their co-worker faced physical attacks. 39% mentioned that they and/or their co-worker had been subjected to surveillance. According to 30% of respondents, their and/or their co-workers’ personal property was damaged, and 18% reported that they and/or their co-workers were ambushed.

IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS, HAVE YOU OR A CO-WORKER EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING RELATED TO YOUR PROFESSION? (%)

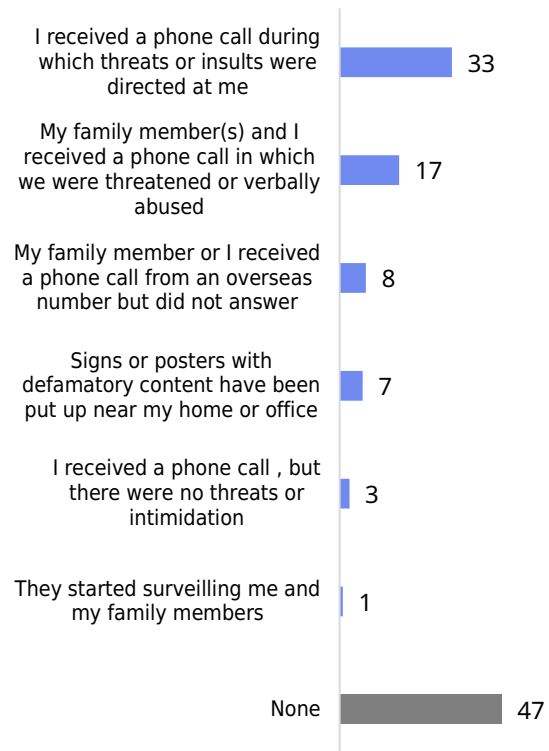


JOURNALISTS TARGETED BY THREATS, DISCREDITATION, DISINFORMATION, AND SECRET SURVEILLANCE

Amid ongoing discussions of the draft “Foreign Agents” law and as thousands of peaceful demonstrators protested in the streets, journalists, civil society actors, opposition party members, and citizens reported receiving insulting and threatening [phone calls](#). At the homes and offices of two [investigative journalists](#) and several representatives of civil society, strangers hung offensive posters and made

similar inscriptions. Personal cars of some of these people were also vandalized, painted with offensive language. In public places, [journalists](#), representatives of civil society, and [activists](#) were faced physical violence.

DURING OR AFTER THE DISCUSSION OF THE LAW (%)



The survey results revealed that 33% of respondents received a phone call in which they were subjected to threats or insults. According to the survey, 17% of respondents reported that both - they and their family members received phone calls, during which they were threatened or insulted. 8% stated that neither they nor their family members answered calls from unknown numbers.

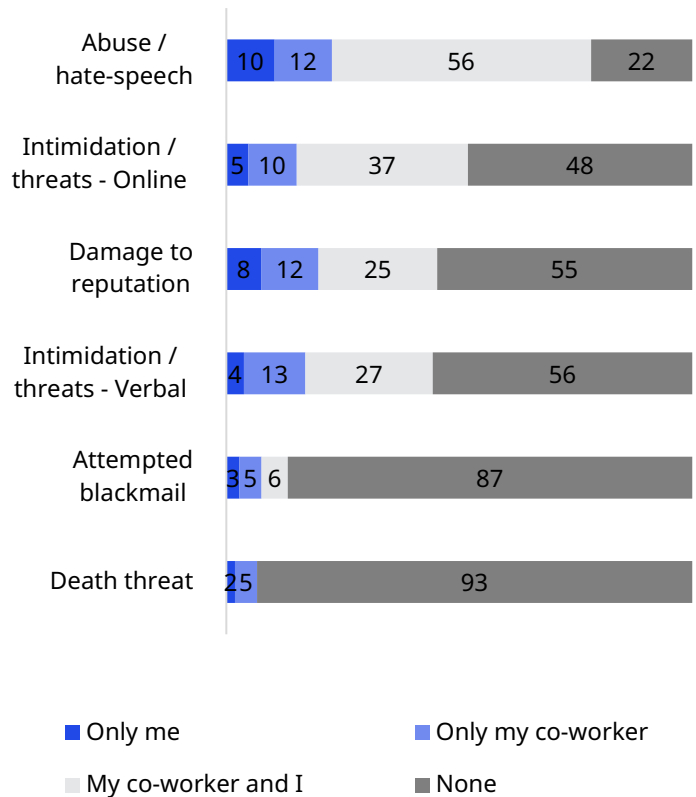
Phone calls from unknown, "generated" numbers were made to journalists, activists, ordinary citizens, and their family members, threatening them for their activities or simply for participating in protests.

"When the first calls started, they called my mom, and the calls came from a Ukrainian number. I didn't receive any calls myself," says a director of a regional radio station.

"Morning, afternoon, evening, midnight - they called my colleagues. The journalists were called, [the journalist's] mother was also called, they used offensive language, it was terrible... They told her that 'You don't love your country, you are a traitor'...", says the editor of a regional online media, suggesting that similar calls were made at central and regional levels, with local participants involved in the latter.

"At first, I didn't know what was going on, so I answered twice. Both times, I heard terrible swearing, and the main message was, 'Why do you call Russian law, when it is actually a European law of transparency?'" says the director of one of the media organizations.

IN THE PAST 6 SIX MONTHS, HAVE YOU OR A CO-WORKER EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RELATED TO YOUR PROFESSION? (%)



78% of respondents reported experiencing insults or hate speech, with 56% stating that both they and their co-workers had similar experiences. 52% reported that they and/or their co-worker had experienced intimidation or threats in the digital space. 45% of respondents reported experiencing damage to their reputation. 44% of respondents reported experiencing verbal intimidation/threats. Both men and women, in Tbilisi and the regions, reported all types of incidents in similar proportions.

Cases of derogatory and insulting inscriptions and posters found near the homes and offices of two investigative journalists, as well as on the car of one journalist, remain uninvestigated.

“This indicates that the government hates us and harbors animosity towards us. Through such actions, the government is trying to stir up hatred within the community, including our own, to incite animosity against us,” says the founder and editor of one of the online media outlets.

82% of respondents reported that aggression from the government towards them has increased, with 53% stating that it has increased significantly, while 29% indicated that it has increased to some extent. Media representatives in Tbilisi perceive a higher level of government aggression compared to those in the regions (91% in Tbilisi versus 66% in the regions).

Journalists participating in the research report that government officials often spread disinformation about them. Disinformation campaigns carried out by pro-government groups are especially common on social networks. One of the editors from a regional media outlet emphasizes, *“In the comments, online discussions—they abuse us and question what kind of journalists we are. This has become a very common occurrence.”*

“When the [Foreign Agents] law was passed,

they wrote to us directly, asking, ‘Didn’t you shut down already?’” said the director of one of the regional online media outlets.

The director and journalist from one of the television companies mentioned in an interview that “government propagandists” regularly post on their TV station’s TikTok page to create misleading impressions about the content they distribute.

“Earlier, they might have made ironic comments towards us, but now they dedicate entire posts on social networks to us. On any ordinary day, you might find your name mentioned, accompanied by mockery. This isn’t just an angry comment; we see that we are part of some agenda,” says one of the online media journalists.

“One of the troll pages called Sinamdvileshi (In Fact) posts personal photos and writes about us in offensive, humiliating, and aggressive ways,” says the online media editor.

According to the co-founder of one online media, in 2024, their media outlet appeared on the page of “In Fact” twice: once it targeted the editor-in-chief and the second time one of the journalists. *“...It came out as a hate campaign; pro-governmental media stations and some pages shared it,”* says an online media editor.

The Facebook page “In Fact” is a platform operated by the communications department of

the Georgian Dream party, created on June 9, 2021. On the “About” page, it states that the organization verifies news related to political processes and responds to the spread of disinformation. Its aim is to expose various media outlets that serve as conduits for disinformation. According to the independent fact-checking platform “[Myth Detector](#),” sponsored posts on the “In Fact” page can be found targeting government critical TV stations TV Pirveli and Mtavari Channel.

Journalists participating in the research believe that following the initiation of the “Foreign Agents” law, they are under widespread covert surveillance.

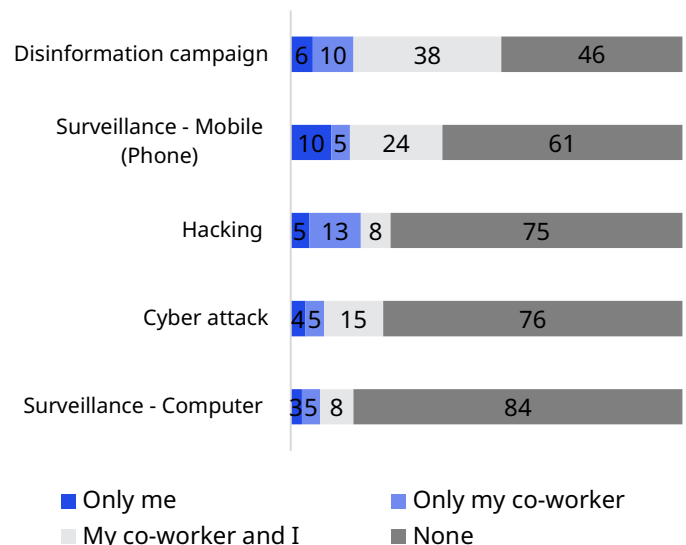
“Sometimes it might be that we are surveilled even through protected networks. Even though we try to communicate using maximum security measures—not through open sources, but through so-called protected apps—I remember several instances over the last three months when I arranged interviews with respondents on sensitive topics. I arrived at the agreed location, but government agents intercepted me before the meeting could take place, scaring off the respondents,” says the representative of the regional online media outlet.

The editor-in-chief of one of the online media outlets recalled an incident in which the content of a private conversation among her two

colleagues was leaked to her by a journalist from a pro-government TV company. According to her, *“this is an environment where you don’t feel safe anywhere.”* Her colleagues noted that this *“unequivocally proves the surveillance on phones.”* However, they find it even more concerning that information obtained through surveillance is being disseminated, and that *“they are providing information to their pro-government media to suppress you and bring you down.”*

54% of respondents reported that they and/or their co-workers were victims of a disinformation campaign. 39% mentioned surveillance on mobile phones, 25% experienced hacking, and 24% said they were targeted by a cyber-attack. 16% of respondents noted surveillance on computers.

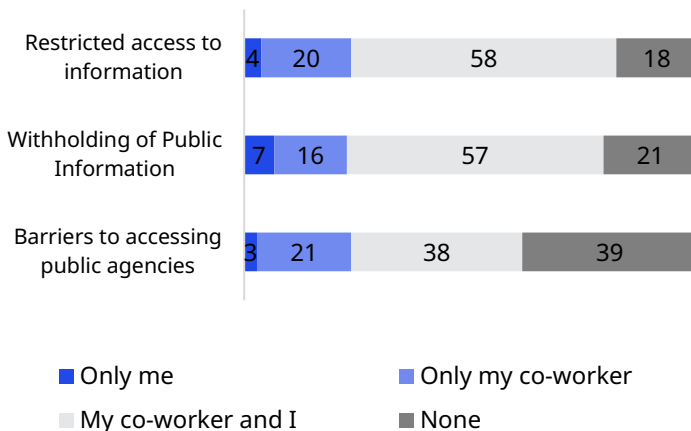
IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS, HAVE YOU OR A CO-WORKER EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RELATED TO YOUR PROFESSION? (%)



JOURNALISTS FIGHTING FOR ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION AND INSTITUTIONS

In general, 82% of respondents identified the issue of accessing information, such as obtaining comments, as a problem. Among them, 58% reported that they and their co-workers have had similar experiences. 79% of respondents mentioned experiencing restrictions on access to public information, while 61% reported restrictions on access to public institutions. The experience of restricted access to public agencies was noted more frequently in Tbilisi (76%) compared to the regions (36%).

IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS, HAVE YOU OR A CO-WORKER EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RELATED TO YOUR PROFESSION? (%)



“They don’t provide us with public information, we can’t obtain interviews, and we have no way left to ask the government anything. They used

to give us small comments before, but even that is impossible now. Others are following this example,” notes one of the online media journalists, adding that obtaining information from a large private company had not been a problem throughout many years of a professional relationship. *“In the past few years, every time I’ve asked, they say, ‘Yes, we’ve received your inquiries,’ but they don’t deliver or they don’t deliver on time; they have no interest. I’ve heard the same from others.”*

The editor of a regional online media outlets frames the government’s attitude towards the media in a broader context: *“If the government denies you access to public information and refuses any engagement, it stifles freedom of speech.”*

According to the monitoring carried out by the [Center for Media, Information and Social Research](#), between 2023 and 2024, out of 1,863 Freedom of Information requests made by various media organizations to public agencies in Georgia, only 764 were answered within the time limit stipulated by law, while 762 requests remained unanswered.

It is common for government officials to refuse to comment. For years, government representatives have also [declined](#) to participate in pre-election debates on pro-opposition channels. According to one journalist, this par-

ticularly harms the information environment during the pre-election period, affecting people who need information to make informed choices: *“There is no room for healthy polemics. The problem is that you don’t have the other side in the [pre-election] debate, leaving no space for meaningful discussion to emerge.”*

On February 6, 2023, the Parliament of Georgia approved a [procedure](#) for the accreditation of mass media representatives at the initiative of the Speaker of the Parliament. According to media representatives and human rights defenders, this procedure imposes significant restrictions on journalists and includes sanctions for them. On June 6, 2024, the [Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics](#) issued a statement stating that Parliament uses this rule as a “punitive tool” against critical media.

“You are restricted from working in the Parliament; you don’t have the opportunity to ask questions. How is the media free when, if you try to ask a government representative a question, they will make you leave the building?! There is no clearer example of the government’s attitude towards critical questions and the media,” says a journalist from one of the TV companies.

The responses to the question about whether journalists sought help from various organizations are as follows: 39% approached the media organization they work for, 28% con-

tacted non-governmental organizations that advocate for journalists’ rights, 25% turned to a lawyer or advocate, 16% reached out to law enforcement agencies, and 3% consulted a psychologist. 30% selected “none.” Among those who chose “none,” 44% reported the incident publicly, 32% did not consider the problem serious enough to seek help, and 24% stated they did not reach out to anyone because they believed no one could help them.

IF YOU EXPERIENCED ANY OF THE MENTIONED INCIDENTS (PHYSICAL, LEGAL, ONLINE, PSYCHOLOGICAL, OR OTHER), WHERE DID YOU SEEK HELP? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY) (%)



According to one of the journalists whose professional activity was obstructed by law enforcement while covering the protest, noted that the investigation was initiated against the police under the article of abuse of power: *“They did not even recognize the interference in journalistic activities. Furthermore, in my case, it was clearly about the interference; it was directly recorded on camera.”*

IMPACT OF THE "FOREIGN AGENTS" LAW ON JOURNALISTS AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS

"The State Security Services are against us; they illegally listen to our phones. The police are against us and do not protect us at all. A high-ranking member of parliament is threatening us, saying, 'We will beat you', and state institutions will come after us under this Russian law," says an online media editor.

In both the interviews and in the survey, journalists highlighted various problems that the adoption of the "Foreign Agents" law could cause, which has heightened their sense of insecurity. The most significant issue is the ability to provide the public with information on matters of the public interest.

"When all our resources are diverted to survival, we cannot focus on investigative journalism; our attention is completely consumed by that. And that was the government's goal too: to shift our agenda and reduce our efforts in publicizing their criminal activities," says the founder and editor of the online media outlet.

Another editor-in-chief of the online media points out, *"Now, when the media has to play a critical role in informing citizens, it faces challenges and problems that may prevent it from doing so effectively—issues related to security,*

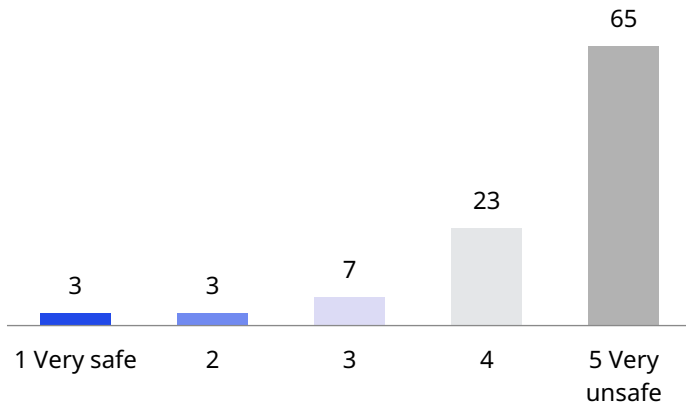
resources, and the overall environment for media representatives."

A respondent from one of the TV companies also addresses the pressure on the media through resource constraints: *"That's why they label us as agents; the whole idea is to induce a sense of shortness of breath, preventing us from having any opportunity to breathe, while our European friends are denied the right to help us."*

According to the respondents, the government's propaganda against journalists over the years has contributed to the perception of this profession as "unfavorable" and "dangerous" in the public's mind, leading to a decline in the number of people entering the field. *"Young people now believe that they don't want journalism; they don't want to work in this profession,"* says the editor of the regional online media outlet.

Although the vast majority of interviewed journalists anticipate that the enactment of the law would lead to an increase in financial, physical, and digital threats, as well as intimidation and harassment by the authorities, they emphasize, *"We still have the motivation to work and the desire to continue despite the heightened risks. [The pressure] has the opposite effect on us; it reinforces our sense that we are doing something very important,"* notes one online media journalist.

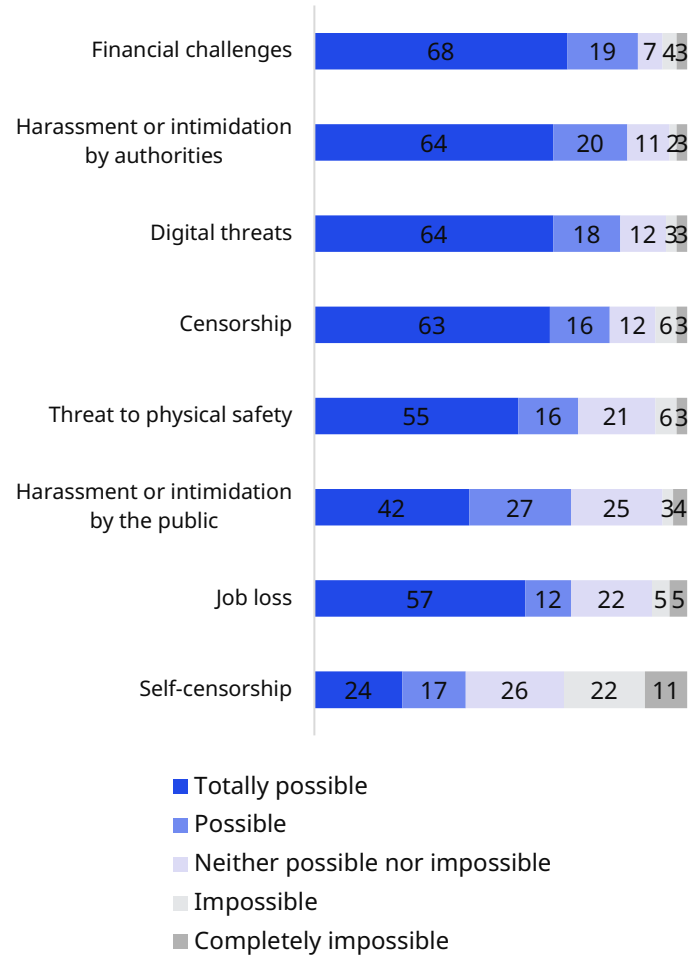
HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR SENSE OF SECURITY AFTER THE ADOPTION OF THE LAW?



65% of the respondents consider themselves very unsafe, and 23% consider themselves unsafe under the conditions imposed by the “foreign agents” law. The feeling of insecurity is equally high in Tbilisi (63%) and the regions (69%).

The majority of survey participants expect various threats, including financial challenges (87%), harassment or intimidation from the authorities (84%), digital threats (82%), censorship (79%), threat to physical safety (71%), harassment or intimidation by the public (69%), and job loss (69%). The largest portion of respondents (33%) also stated that self-censorship would not affect them in any way.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU EXPECT THE CHALLENGES LISTED BELOW TO AFFECT YOU PERSONALLY AFTER THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE LAW? (%)



Another journalist expresses her own attitude towards the profession, stating: *“There are times when I’m afraid that special forces are approaching, and when they have rubber bullets. I’m scared, but I have never thought of running away. I love my profession. This [fear] has never affected me.”*

Commitment to their work drives media professionals to resist the mounting pressure: *“We*

will counter whatever force they use against us,” says an online media editor. One TV journalist says, *“If you let fear guide you, you will have to run, hide, and surrender, but I have overcome that fear.”*

Amid the existing threats, journalists emphasize the importance of mutual cooperation: *“Solidarity will be crucial during this time; we must stand united,”* says the editor of one of the online media outlets.

In interviews, journalists often highlight the support of the audience and society as a whole. As one online media editor notes, *“... it’s true that the law was passed, but public opinion is with us...”*

According to another journalist, *“Our audience’s awareness has also increased [...] People support us more; I’ve noticed more respect and positive sentiments. [...] I believe that the government’s excessive aggression has turned public support towards the media. People’s attitudes are changing, and solidarity is growing.”*

“This Russian law has truly had an awakening effect, and our audience has multiplied. The messages and the content we receive have become much more frequent; people are writing to us. In short, it’s good that we exist, and they are satisfied and happy that we are broadcasting,” says a TV journalist.

SUMMARY

This research highlights the sharp deterioration of press freedom in Georgia before the 2024 elections. Journalists representing critical media outlets have to work in an unprecedentedly hostile environment. It should also be noted that the introduction of the “Foreign Agents” law only deepened the already existing crisis, which reflects the wider trend of attempts to suppress freedom of speech and independent journalism in the country in general.

The results of the research reveal that the majority of journalists in Georgia feel very unsafe. Physical violence, discreditation campaigns, restriction of information, and surveillance have become part of the daily reality for those who have an obligation to hold those in power accountable. This fact is not limited to a specific region or type of media but is felt everywhere, which emphasizes the systemic nature of the problem. Considering all this, the future of independent journalism is under threat. However, despite these challenges, journalists remain committed to act and fulfill their duties to the public, a responsibility that is especially crucial in the pre-election period to support and promote democratic processes.

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