



GEORGIA

June 2022



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DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
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A man in a chokha woolen coat
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Map of Georgia
CIA

Chapter 1 | Geography



The fields, hills, and mountains of the Svaneti region
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Introduction

Georgia is positioned on the border between Europe and Asia. The Caucasus Mountains dominate Georgia's northern and southern borders, traditionally acting as the dividing line between the two continents. The mountains also form an enclave along the shores of the Black Sea. Because Georgia balances the divide between the East and West, it has found itself continually on the periphery of competing world powers. Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Persians, Turks, and Russians have made their way to Georgia over the centuries, leaving a legacy of distinct cultural influences.¹ Even the country's name is derived from its history of foreign occupation—Georgia is called *Sakartvelo* in its native language, but the name “Georgia” (used by the outside world) came either from the term *Gurj*, used by Persians and Arabs, or from the earlier Greek word *geos*.²

¹ Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 25.

² Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 14.

Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

At 69,700 sq km (26,911 sq mi), Georgia is slightly larger than West Virginia. The country shares a border of 894 km (556 mi) with Russia to the north. A coastline of 310 km (193 mi) along the Black Sea forms its western border. Georgia's southern border runs alongside Turkey in the west for 273 km (170 mi) and Armenia in the middle for 219 km (136 mi). The 428 km (266 mi) border with Azerbaijan encompasses Georgia's southeastern, eastern, and northeastern sides.³

Georgia is geographically divided by the Greater Caucasus Mountains in the north, the Lesser Caucasus in the south, and the coastal lowlands in the west.⁴ The Greater Caucasus range, which spans the northern part of the country and forms a natural border with Russia, is a series of high peaks and gorges. The chain's peaks reach more than 5,000 m (16,404 ft) and are covered in snow, even during the summer.⁵ These mountains are home to Georgia's highest point, Mount Shkhara, which rises to 5,193 m (17,037 ft).^{6, 7}

Dense swampland once dominated the coastal lowlands but a series of improvement projects in the early 20th century, including the installation of drainage canals and river embankments, have made the area a vital agricultural asset. Rivers originating in the Caucasus Mountains crisscross the lowlands and empty into the Black Sea. The lowlands are warm, but the cool waters of the Black Sea ease the summer heat. In winter the Greater Caucasus Mountains shield the lowlands from the arctic cold. The Lesser Caucasus Mountains, as the name implies, are not as steep as their northern siblings; they form a natural border with Georgia's southern neighbors.^{8, 9, 10, 11}

The Kartli Plain lies in the center of the country, between the two mountain ranges. The Likhi Mountains, which extend from the Greater to the Lesser Caucasus ranges, form a natural divide between the western and eastern regions of the country. In the largely uninhabited eastern areas of the country, the mountains taper off into an area of river basins and plateaus.^{12, 13, 14}

Climate

Georgia's climate is considered subtropical with variations by region. A major contributor to the mild climate is the Greater Caucasus Mountains, which block cold air from the north. In the west of the country, the Black Sea provides an inflow of moist, warm air. The west sees about 1,000–2,500 mm (40–100 in) of rainfall per year, with fall and winter being the wettest seasons. The west experiences warm and mild winters with temperatures no lower than 0°C (32°F); temperatures are even warmer on the Black Sea coast. In the summer, temperatures average around 22°C (71°F). Regions at higher elevations experience a cooler climate.^{15, 16, 17}

- 3 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," World Factbook, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 4 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 8.
- 5 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 16.
- 6 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," World Factbook, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 7 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 8 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 9 Stratfor, "The Geography of the Caucasus," 25 June 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geography-caucasus>
- 10 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 11 G. Melvyn Howe et al., "Transcaucasia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 11 August 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Transcaucasia>
- 12 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 11.
- 13 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 14 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
- 15 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 20.
- 16 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 17 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

East of the Likhi Mountains, the climate tends to be more continental.¹⁸ This part of the country is drier, with 406–1,422 mm (16–56 in) of rainfall per year. Winters here are the driest time of year and most rainfall occurs in late spring. The lowest temperatures occur in January, at 0–3°C (32–37°F), while the highest temperatures, about 25°C (77°F), are experienced in July.^{19, 20}

Bodies of Water

Black Sea

The Black Sea is a massive saltwater inland sea that stretches between Europe and Asia. Its only connections to the rest of the world's seas are the Turkish straits, the Bosphorus, and the Dardanelles. The sea measures about 1,014 km (630 mi) from east to west and approximately 531 km (330 mi) from north to south, except for the area where the Crimean Peninsula juts into the sea, cutting the north-south measurement in half.²¹ The Black Sea greatly influences the climate, agriculture, and economics of Georgia. Noted for its citrus, tea, and wine production, Georgia owes much of its agricultural success to the subtropical winds generated by the sea and the protection from colder, northerly winds afforded by the Greater Caucasus Mountains.²²

Once considered an endless source of life and natural resources, the Black Sea now suffers from both manmade pollution and an overabundance of organic matter deposited by the many rivers that flow into it. Bacteria that normally feed on the organic matter can no longer do so—they resort to a process that creates hydrogen sulfide, a hazardous gas reeking of rotten eggs. Because of these problems, 90% of the Black Sea is a sterile environment, devoid of life beneath its seemingly calm waters.^{23, 24}

Rivers and Lakes

Georgia has some 25,000 rivers. The Mtkvari River (also known as the Kura) is the longest in Transcaucasia. It originates in Turkey, runs through Georgia and Azerbaijan, and empties into the Caspian Sea. Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, was founded on the banks of the Mtkvari.^{25, 26, 27, 28, 29}

The Rioni River, in Georgia's central lowlands, is the country's second-longest. In Greek mythology, it was the waterway navigated by Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. The Inguri River forms a natural border for the autonomous region of Abkhazia in the northwest region of the country. Georgia has more than 850 lakes.^{30, 31, 32, 33}

18 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, Republic of Georgia (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 20.

19 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

20 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., Georgia: A Country Study (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

21 Neal Ascherson, Black Sea (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 3–4.

22 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., Georgia: A Country Study (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

23 Neal Ascherson, Black Sea (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 3–4.

24 Philippe Lecrenier and Alice Cameron, "The Black Sea Has Lost More Than a Third of Its Habitable Volume," Phys.Org, 2 September 2016, <https://phys.org/news/2016-09-black-sea-lost-habitable-volume.html>

25 Michael Spilling, Cultures of the World: Georgia (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 11.

26 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 25.

27 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., Georgia: A Country Study (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

28 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Kura River," 16 March 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kura-River>

29 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., Georgia: A Country Study (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

30 Michael Spilling, Cultures of the World: Georgia (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 11.

31 Richard Plunkett and Tom Master, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Melbourne, Australia: Lonely Planet, 2004), 25.

32 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., Georgia: A Country Study (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

33 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Inguri Dam," 22 August 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Inguri-Dam>

Major Cities³⁴

City Name	Population ³⁵
Tbilisi	1,154,314
Batumi	169,095
Kutaisi	135,201
Rustavi	128,680
Sukhumi (Aqwa)	65,530
Gori	45,557
Poti	41,498
Zugdidi	41,494
Tskhinvali	32,699

Tbilisi

Georgia's capital Tbilisi was founded in the fifth century CE as the capital of the Kingdom of Georgia. It is situated along the Mtkvari River in the eastern part of the country. Its chaotic history tells of control by successive conquering empires: Persians, Byzantines, Ottomans, and Russians. During the brief period of Georgian independence between the world wars of the 20th century, Tbilisi reemerged as the capital and remained so throughout Soviet rule and into post-Soviet independence.³⁶

A thoroughly modern city, Tbilisi boasts the oldest university in the Caucasus, Tbilisi State University, as well as numerous other state and private institutions of higher learning. A major center for scientific research during the Soviet era, the city is home to more than a hundred research facilities today.^{37,38} Additionally, it serves as the political, economic, intellectual, and cultural center of the country. Tbilisi produces approximately one-third of Georgia's industrial output and is a major engineering center for the building of locomotives, agricultural machinery, and electrical equipment.^{39,40}

Batumi

Batumi is Georgia's most important port, its second-largest city, and the capital of the autonomous republic of Adjara. The city is located along a gulf in the Black Sea, roughly 15 km (9.3 mi) north of Turkey. The city's history dates back to the first millennium BCE. Like many cities in the Caucasus, it has been ruled by various empires vying for control of the region.⁴¹ Some of the city's economic activities are oil refining, shipbuilding, zinc plating, and citrus and tea growing. The city is also a seaside resort known for its beautiful gardens.^{42, 43, 44, 45}

34 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

35 World Atlas, "The Largest Cities in Azerbaijan," n.d., <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-biggest-cities-in-azerbaijan.html>

36 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tbilisi," 23 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tbilisi>

37 Richard Stone, "Bacteriophage Therapy. Stalin's Forgotten Cure," *Science* (New York, 2002), 298 (5594): 728-31.

38 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tbilisi," 23 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tbilisi>

39 BBC News, "Anger as Georgia Evicts Refugee Families from Capital," 20 January 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12239326>

40 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tbilisi," 23 July 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tbilisi>

41 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Batumi," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Batumi>

42 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 14

43 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Batumi," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Batumi>

44 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

45 In Your Pocket, "Batumi History Overview," 2014, https://www.inyourpocket.com/Batumi/History-Overview_73148f

Kutaisi

Kutaisi, Georgia's third-largest city, lies along the Rioni River where the river emerges from the Caucasian foothills. Kutaisi dates back to a Greek colony in the seventh century BCE. According to legend, it was the ancient home of the Golden Fleece, and the adjacent Rioni River allowed Jason and his Argonauts to sail in from the Black Sea. Kutaisi functioned as the capital for some of the autonomous Georgian kingdoms before being replaced by the more strategically secure Tbilisi. The distinctive 11th-century Bagrati Cathedral sits perched upon Ukimerioni Hill near the center of the city. Gelati, a 12th-century monastic complex, stands nearby. These religious sites are as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition to being a center for coal mining and automotive industries, Kutaisi is also the country's western center for agriculture.^{46, 47, 48, 49, 50}

Rustavi

Rustavi is located just south of Tbilisi on the Mtkvari River. Although human settlement on the site goes back to the Bronze Age, the present-day city was developed by the Soviets in the mid-20th century, centered around a giant metallurgical plant. Today, the city is charting its post-Soviet, post-industrial path. New neighborhoods with modern infrastructure have sprung up beside communist-era apartment blocks. The city's main park contains the ruins of a fifth-century fortress and its museum exhibits artifacts charting the city's ancient history. Rustavi hosts an annual international theater festival.^{51, 52, 53}

Sukhumi

Sukhumi, the capital of the separatist-held autonomous republic of Abkhazia, was built on the ruins of the ancient Greek Black Sea colony of Dioscurias.⁵⁴ Having once been the center of Georgia's tourist industry, the city boasts several former Soviet resorts, spas, and *dachas* (vacation homes). However, following the onset of ethnic conflict and rebellion after the fall of the Soviet Union, the city's allure as a resort destination diminished. Recurring clashes with the central government of Georgia have left facilities in a state of disrepair.⁵⁵ Before these hostilities, the city had a thriving multiethnic population of nearly 120,000. As in most of Abkhazia, nearly all of Sukhumi's citizens of Georgian ethnicity were forcibly expelled or killed.^{56, 57}

Gori

Gori serves as the capital of the Shida Kartli administrative region. The city sits in the east, near the border with South Ossetia. Although located just 76 km (47 mi) west of Tbilisi, Gori is on the frontlines of Georgia's internal conflict with South Ossetian separatists. During the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the city was heavily damaged in the fighting and briefly occupied by Russian and South Ossetian troops. This occupation led to a mass exodus of

46 UNESCO World Heritage Center, "Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery," n.d., <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/710>

47 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, Republic of Georgia (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 91.

48 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

49 Michael Spilling, Cultures of the World: Georgia (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 14.

50 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Kutaisi," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kutaisi>

51 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Rustavi," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Rustavi>

52 Georgian Travel Guide, "Rustavi," n.d., <https://georgiantravelguide.com/en/rustavi>

53 Olga Pinchuk, "Rustavi, Georgia: History of a Mono-town," Open Democracy, 6 June 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rustavi-georgia-monotown-history/>

54 Tim Burford, Georgia (Chalfont St. Peter: Bradt Travel Guides, 2008), 197.

55 Dorota Gierycz, Mysteries of the Caucasus ([S.l.]: Xlibris Corp., 2010), 62.

56 City Population, "Georgia," 2 January 2020, <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/georgia/cities/>

57 Per Gahrton, Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 68.

citizens from the city, some of whom have not returned. Gori is also strategically important because it is situated along Georgia's principal east-west highway and is home to the Gori military base.^{58, 59, 60, 61}

Poti

Poti is located on Georgia's Black Sea coast, at the mouth of the Mtkvari River. The modern city was built on the site of an ancient Greek colony in late 19th century, with its development bolstered by railroads and an artificial harbor.

Today, Poti is an important Black Sea port and fishing hub. The city boasts charming historical architecture and cultural institutions that celebrate local folklore.^{62, 63}

Zugdidi

Zugdidi is the capital of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti administrative region and is located approximately 318 km (198 mi) west of Tbilisi in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. The city is historically associated with the aristocratic Dadiani family, who rose to preeminence in western Georgia during the 16th-century occupation by the Ottoman Empire. Much of the architecture in the city dates back to that era.^{64, 65, 66}

Situated just across the Inguri River from the breakaway region of Abkhazia, Zugdidi has long been a city where political passions run deep. Many Georgians who were forced out of Abkhazia have relocated to the city and its immediate environs. Like Gori, the city was occupied briefly by Russian forces during the Russo-Georgian War of 2008.^{67, 68, 69}

Tskhinvali

Located 100 km (62 mi) northwest of Tbilisi in the Shida Kartli administrative region, Tskhinvali is the administrative headquarters for the breakaway region of South Ossetia.⁷⁰ The city became the center of the emerging Ossetian separatist movement in the waning years of the Soviet Union. Following Soviet collapse in 1991, the separatists launched an armed conflict against the Georgian government with Russian support and declared South Ossetian territory under their control to be an independent republic with Tskhinvali as its capital.⁷¹ The city has served as a flashpoint ever since and its population has dropped precipitously.^{72, 73, 74}

58 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," World Factbook, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

59 Michael Schwartz, Andrew E. Kramer, and Anne Barnard, "Russian Forces Capture Military Base in Georgia," New York Times, 11 August 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/world/europe/12georgia.html>

60 Amnesty International, "Georgia: In the Waiting Room: Internally Displaced People in Georgia," 04 August 2010, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/40000/eur560032010en.pdf>

61 Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in Svante E. Cornell and Frederick Starr, eds., *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 153.

62 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Poti," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Poti>

63 Georgian Travel Guide, "Poti," n.d., <https://georgiantravelguide.com/en/poti>

64 Per Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 92, 164.

65 Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in Svante E. Cornell and Frederick Starr, eds., *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 153.

66 National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, "Dadiani Dynasty: The Zugdidi Residences," 2011, <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/dadiani/en/zugdidi.html>

67 Per Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 92, 164.

68 Johanna Popjanevski, "From Sukhumi to Tskhinvali: The Path to War in Georgia," in Svante E. Cornell and Frederick Starr, eds., *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 153.

69 National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, "Dadiani Dynasty: The Zugdidi Residences," 2011, <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/dadiani/en/zugdidi.html>

70 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Tskhinvali," 9 May 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tskhinvali>

71 Per Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 58–60.

72 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 165–66.

73 BBC News, "Anger Smoulders in Rebel City Rubble," 14 August 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7558619.stm>

74 Democracy & Freedom Watch, "South Ossetia Hit by Population Crisis as Birth Rate Drops 20% in Five Years," 22 February 2018, <https://dfwatch.net/south-ossetia-hit-population-crisis-birth-rate-drops-20-five-years-49986>

Environmental Issues

Some of the most pressing environmental concerns facing Georgia are air pollution, solid waste management, and climate change. In a 2018 study measuring air pollution mortality rates, Georgia was among the top three worst-performing European countries, with a rate of 101.8 deaths per 100,000 people. The air in Tbilisi is laden with toxic substances such as nitrogen dioxide, a chemical compound that causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. In 2016, an alarming 20% of the city's population suffered from a respiratory disease.^{75, 76, 77, 78}

Some 75% of Georgia's waste ends up in landfills, almost double the European Union average of 38%. Only a fraction of Georgia's landfills employ environmental protection measures. Unprotected landfills contaminate groundwater and pollute the air with dangerous chemicals. Solid waste recycling programs are underdeveloped. Only about 5% of the country's waste ends up being properly recycled, the rest becoming unnecessary landfill waste. The government is addressing these problems with initiatives to phase out existing landfills, build 10 modern, sanitary landfills, and create recycling infrastructure and incentives that by 2025 will allow 50% of plastic waste to be recycled.^{79, 80, 81}

Climate change poses a significant threat to Georgia's varied and unique ecosystems. Rising temperatures may increase droughts and hamper agricultural productivity, as well as negatively impact ski resorts, an important part of the growing tourism industry. In 2000, a drought in the east of the country caused USD 200 million in economic losses. Georgia has made numerous policy commitments to bolster environmental protection, including a targeted 15% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 as part of the Paris Climate Agreement. A series of recently passed laws aim to protect forests and biological diversity, improve management of water resources, and create environmental accountability.^{82, 83, 84, 85}

- 75 Georgian Journal, "Georgia No. 1 among the Countries That Have Deadliest Air Pollution," 28 June 2016, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/32635-georgia-no-1-among-the-countries-that-have-deadliest-air-pollution.html>
- 76 Georgian Journal, "Tbilisi among Dangerous Cities in Europe Where Air Pollution Is High," 8 May 2018, <https://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/34468-tbilisi-among-dangerous-cities-in-europe-where-air-pollution-is-high.html>
- 77 Prathap Nair, "Tbilisi Comes Up for Air," Bloomberg City Lab, 1 June 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-01/environmental-activism-blooms-in-tbilisi-georgia>
- 78 Thea Morrison, "WHO 2018 Survey: Georgia Takes 70th Place in Terms of Air Pollution Deaths," Georgia Today, 11 July 2018, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11226/WHO-2018-Survey%3A-Georgia-Takes-70th-Place-in-Terms-of-Air-Pollution-Deaths>
- 79 Dato Parulava, "How Georgia Is Changing Its Approach to Waste Disposal with EU Support," EU Neighbors East, 4 June 2018, <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/eu-in-action/stories/how-georgia-changing-its-approach-waste-disposal-eu-support>
- 80 Vladislav Vorotnikov, "Tbilisi or Not Tbilisi, That Is the Question," Recycling & Waste World, 9 October 2016, <https://www.recyclingwasteworld.co.uk/in-depth-article/tbilisi-or-not-tbilisi-that-is-the-question/147034/>
- 81 Waste Statistics, "Waste Generation, 2018," Eurostat: Statistics Explained, 8 December 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Waste_statistics
- 82 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 83 Climate Links, "Climate Risk Profile: Georgia," USAID, May 2017, <https://www.climatelinks.org/resources/climate-change-risk-profile-georgia>
- 84 Ellie Martus and Selam Petersson, "Can Georgia Develop a Strong Policy on Climate Change?" Open Democracy, 2 March 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/can-georgia-develop-strong-policy-climate-change/>
- 85 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

Natural Hazards

The Alpine-Himalayan collision belt is most active in the Caucasus Mountains. As a result, Georgia, along with most of Transcaucasia, is highly prone to earthquakes.⁸⁶ In a given year the area experiences multiple minor earthquakes. Many of the country's buildings do not meet seismic construction standards. Due to the region's active fault lines, an earthquake of significant strength is possible.⁸⁷

In Georgia's mountains, rapidly changing weather can cause sudden snowstorms, even in the summer; avalanches are also a potential danger. Given the significant number of rivers, flooding can be a concern as well.⁸⁸ The prevalence of extreme wet and dry conditions means that floods and landslides are regular occurrences. In 2014 and 2015, flooding and landslides disabled transportation routes between Georgia and Russia and caused USD 50 million in damage in the Tbilisi area.^{89, 90, 91}

86 Gülden Erkut and Stephen Mitchell, *The Black Sea: Past, Present and Future: Proceedings of the International, Interdisciplinary Conference, Istanbul, 14–16 October 2004* (London: British Institute at Ankara, 2007), 21.

87 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

88 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 100.

89 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

90 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

91 Dave Petley, "Tbilisi, Georgia: A Landslide Dam-Break Flood Killed 19 People," *American Geophysical Union*, 21 June 2015, <https://blogs.agu.org/landslideblog/2015/06/21/tbilisi-1/>

Georgia in Perspective

Geography Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The Republic of Georgia is slightly larger than the U.S. state of Texas. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Georgia's overall climate is considered subtropical, with variations by region. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Georgia is one of the only countries in the world to have fewer than 100 rivers within its borders. ☐ True ☐ False
4. The capital of Georgia is Tbilisi. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Sukhumi is the capital of the separatist-held autonomous republic of Abkhazia. ☐ True ☐ False

Georgia in Perspective

Geography Assessment Answers

1. False:
At 69,700 sq km (26,911 sq mi), Georgia is slightly larger than West Virginia.
2. True:
A major contributor to Georgia's mild climate is the Greater Caucasus Mountains, which block cold air from the north. In the country's west, the Black Sea provides an inflow of moist, warm air.
3. False:
Georgia has some 25,000 rivers. The Mtkvari River (also known as the Kura) is the longest in Transcaucasia.
4. True:
Tbilisi was founded in the fifth century CE as the capital of the Kingdom of Georgia. It is situated along the Mtkvari River in the eastern part of the country.
5. True:
Recurring clashes with the central government of Georgia have left the city and its facilities in a state of disrepair.

Chapter 2 | History



Gelati Monastery built in the 12th century by King David IV
Wikipedia / ilan molcho

Introduction

Historic Georgia emerged from the ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Kartli-Iberia. After coming under Roman influence, the region adopted Christianity in the fourth century. Centuries of successive domination by the Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, and Turks followed. From the 11th to the 13th centuries, a unified Georgian kingdom asserted regional domination. After a crippling Mongol invasion in 1236, Georgia came under the influence of the Ottoman and Persian empires. Imperial Russia took control of the region in the 19th century. After a fleeting moment of independence following World War I, Russian dominance was reasserted and Georgia became a Soviet Republic. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia once again became independent. The country's aspiration for European integration has been held back by intractable ethnic strife, deep political divisions, and conflicting Russian interests, which reached a crescendo with a stinging military defeat in 2008. Today, Western integration remains a priority even as Georgia's democratic norms are tested by an increasingly power-hungry and unpopular ruling party.^{1, 2}

¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

² Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Ancient History

Anthropologists estimate that human habitation in what is present-day Georgia dates back 1.8 million years. In 2002, a fossilized skull was discovered of what is believed to be a transitional species between *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*; this remarkable find supports the general timeline accepted by many anthropologists.³

Although the peoples whom historians refer to as proto-Georgians first emerged in written history during the 12th century BCE, ancient site names, as well as archaeological and linguistic evidence, indicate a regional ethnic lineage going back to prehistory.⁴ The languages of the various Georgian subgroups appear to be completely unrelated to any language outside of Transcaucasia, lending support to the theory of isolated evolution.⁵

In the first millennium BCE, Greco-Roman historiography referred to the emergence of two ancient Georgian kingdoms, known as Kartli-Iberia and Colchis. In ancient Greek mythology, Colchis was home to the Golden Fleece, as mentioned in the legend of Jason, the mythical leader of the Argonauts. Following the Roman Empire's subjugation of Transcaucasia in 66 BCE, these Georgian kingdoms became Roman vassal states for approximately four centuries.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

Between the third and seventh centuries CE, Georgia was caught between the powerful and ever-expanding Persian and Roman (later Byzantine) empires. In the mid-third century, the ascendant Sasanian (or Sasanid) Empire took control of the kingdom of Kartli-Iberia and imposed Persian culture and the Zoroastrian religion on the region. Around 330 CE, Kartli-Iberia embraced Christianity, strengthening its ties to the Byzantines. Over time, Persian and Byzantine regional power waxed and waned, frequently forcing Georgian rulers to choose fealty to one side or another and accept conversion to either Christianity or Zoroastrianism. In 645 the Arabs conquered Tbilisi, marking the ascent of a third major power and introducing Islam to the region.^{10, 11, 12, 13}

3 G. Philip Rightmire, Adam P. Van Arsdale, David Lordkipanidze, "Variation in the Mandibles from Dmanisi, Georgia," *Journal of Human Evolution* 54:6 (June 2008): 904–8.

4 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 4.

5 Roger D. Woodard, *The Ancient Languages of Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4, http://books.google.com/books?id=J-f_jwCgmeUC&pg=PA4#

6 Charles Piddock, *Republic of Georgia* (Milwaukee, WI: World Almanac Library, 2007), 14.

7 Apollonius and Richard Hunter, *Jason and the Golden Fleece: the Argonautica* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1993).

8 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

9 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

10 G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 466.

11 *Encyclopædia Iranica*, "GEORGIA ii. History of Iranian-Georgian Relations," 7 February 2012, <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/georgia-ii-history->

12 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

13 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Medieval and Early Modern History

In 813 Armenian Prince Ashot I, part of the Bagratid dynasty, became ruler of Georgia with Byzantium's blessing. The Bagratids would position Georgia as a regional power and establish an intermittent reign that would last for almost a thousand years. King Bagrat III (reigned 960–1014) unified Kartli-Iberia, Abkhazia, and other smaller entities into one Georgian kingdom.^{14, 15} He also built the Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. King David IV (reigned 1089–1125), commonly referred to as David the Builder, followed the lead of his predecessors by reclaiming Georgian lands after expelling the Seljuk Turks and expanding Georgian power.^{16, 17}

Queen Tamara (reigned 1184–1213) was the first female monarch of Georgia. Her reign is considered the golden age of Georgian history. She led her forces to victory over invaders from surrounding Muslim territories and expanded the Georgian kingdom to include portions of present-day Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Russia.^{18, 19} A consummate stateswoman, Tamara played a pivotal role in the creation of the Empire of Trebizond, lending Georgian troops to her cousin Alexios I Megas Komnenos and effectively creating a buffer state between the Byzantine Empire and Georgia.^{20, 21, 22}

Georgia's rise to greatness was short-lived. Mongol incursions began during the reign of Tamara's son, Giorgi IV. Although Giorgi met the invaders with massive force at Khunani, the Georgians were soundly defeated and the young king was killed. By 1236, the Georgian kingdom had once again sunk into oblivion after succumbing to successive Mongol invasions.^{23, 24}

The fragmented territories of Georgia were subsequently ruled by various nobles, vying for control with one another and courting foreign allies. Successive attempts to reunify the kingdom throughout the 15th century met with failure because of internal dynastic battles and persistent skirmishes with hostile neighbors. In 1453 the Ottoman Turks seized Constantinople and the Trebizond territory. Farther afield, Europe expanded its sphere of influence as explorers traveled to the Western Hemisphere and the Far East. Explorations in these newfound lands resulted in a devaluing of the Caucasus region's land trade routes and Georgia's strategic importance to the rest of Europe.^{25, 26, 27}

By the early 16th century, the Ottoman and Persian empires completely subjugated Georgian lands. At the Peace of Amasya treaty in 1555, the two powers formally delineated their respective spheres of influence, with the western portion falling under Ottoman control and most of the eastern portion going to the Persians. Many Georgians were converted to Islam, and some areas—particularly in Abkhazia and Ajaria—remain Muslim strongholds today. The treaty only briefly restrained the two sides and by 1578 the Ottomans were once again determined to conquer all

14 Nagendra Kr. Singh, *International Encyclopaedia of Islamic Dynasties* (New Delhi, India: Anmol Publications, 2002), 395.

15 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Bagratid Dynasty," 21 January 2105, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bagratid-dynasty-Armenian-dynasty>

16 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

17 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

18 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 39–40.

19 Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times: Volume I, The Dynastic Periods from Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 252, <http://books.google.com/books?id=EeBKxex7QyUC&pg=PA252#>

20 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

21 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

22 Michael Goodyear, "Queen Tamar," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, 20 January 2020, https://www.ancient.eu/Queen_Tamar/

23 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

24 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

25 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 46.

26 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

27 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

of Georgia. They were met with swift resistance from Persian adversaries and many nobles of eastern Georgia but eventually proved victorious.^{28, 29, 30}

The 17th and 18th centuries were marked by a continued fight for domination as the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian empires and the occasional Georgian nationalist leader struggled to establish control. In 1747, the Kartli-Iberia and Kakheti kingdoms seized upon Persian weaknesses and unified under the Bagratid kings; this created a sizeable Caucasian empire that surpassed the traditional boundaries of Georgia. Georgia was unable to withstand the Ottomans on its own, however, and promises of protection from the Russian empire to the north were not fulfilled. With the death of Erekle II (reigned 1744–98), Georgia's independence vanished again.^{31, 32}

Russian Domination

In 1800, Czar Paul of Russia annexed the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom in violation of a previous guarantee of Georgian territorial sovereignty. The next year, his successor, Alexander I, abolished the kingdom altogether, fully incorporating eastern Georgia into the Russian empire.^{33, 34} Within eight years, western Georgia was also brought into the Russian Empire, and throughout the rest of the 19th century, other lands comprising what is present-day Georgia were added.^{35, 36}

Georgians of all classes chafed under Russian rule. A conspiracy led by Georgian nobles was quashed in 1832, as was a peasant revolt in 1841. The nationalism that swept through much of Europe in the mid-19th century found fertile ground in the minds of the first generation of Georgian intelligentsia to be educated in Russian universities, especially in St. Petersburg. Most prominent among them was Ilia Chavchavadze. Using the Georgian language as a tool, he and other young intellectuals brought the nationalist literature of Europe to the Georgian masses and sought to instill a collective identity. Georgia's nationalist movement was further radicalized by the harsh "Russification" policies of Czar Alexander III, who ascended to the throne in 1881.^{37, 38, 39, 40}

Throughout the 19th century, the Georgian economy became more industrialized and shifted toward capitalism. In reaction to these fundamental changes and the resurgent nationalism inspired by three generations of Russian-educated intellectuals, a strong Marxist movement took root. Because of the economic servitude of the Georgian workers, who lagged behind Russians and Armenians in economic opportunity, the Marxist intellectuals were able to tap into a strong popular resentment toward the empire.^{41, 42, 43}

28 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

29 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

30 Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 155.

31 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

32 Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 155.

33 David Marshall Lang, *The Last Years of the Georgian Monarch, 1658–1832* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 184.

34 Nikolas K. Gvosdev, *Imperial Policies and Perspectives towards Georgia, 1760–1819*, St. Antony's series (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 2000), 85–95.

35 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

36 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

37 Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country* (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 68–71.

38 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

39 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

40 Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 50–51, <http://books.google.com/books?id=6X745rS5Ci8C&pg=PA50#>

41 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 144–145.

42 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

43 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Independence

With the tumult in Russia in the early 20th century, especially the 1905 Russian Revolution, the empire gradually lost control over Georgia and the rest of Transcaucasia.⁴⁴ After the onset of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing Russian Civil War, Georgians took advantage of the situation and declared independence on 26 May 1918.^{45, 46}

The newly installed moderate left-wing government, although popular among most Georgians, was flawed and weak. The economy was in shambles and Georgia found itself on the losing side of World War I, having taken a pro-German stance. To make matters worse, the government pursued policies hostile to ethnic minorities like Armenians, Russians, Abkhazians, South Ossetians, and Ajarians, to bring them more firmly under central control.^{47, 48, 49} Although the Soviets recognized Georgia's independence in 1920, peaceful coexistence between the two countries was short-lived. In 1921 the Red Army invaded; the government could not mount a serious defense, and once again the Georgians were absorbed into another empire.^{50, 51, 52}

Soviet Georgia

To minimize nationalist tendencies in the Caucasus, the Soviets initially incorporated Georgia into the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Republic, along with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Soviets imposed forced collectivization of agriculture and began Georgia's massive transition from an agrarian society to one that was largely industrialized and urbanized. Alongside the centralized state economy, a shadow "second economy" that supplied otherwise unavailable goods and services developed and endured.^{53, 54}

Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, a native of Georgia, maintained an iron political grip on the republic. Under his rule, however, Georgian language and culture were protected from the Russification efforts imposed throughout the rest of the Soviet Union. Georgian anti-Soviet sentiments persisted and erupted in the 1924 August Uprising; the Soviets brutally suppressed the uprising, killing some 4,000 Georgians. In the following years, Stalin killed tens of thousands of Georgians and deported many more, as part of a Soviet Union-wide campaign to purge dissidents. Two other native Georgians—Lavrenti Beria, the chief of the Soviet secret police, and Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a senior economic official—played key roles in maintaining Moscow's control over Georgia.^{55, 56, 57, 58}

44 Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 53, <http://books.google.com/books?id=6X745rS5Ci8C&pg=PA53#>

45 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

46 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

47 Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 65, <http://books.google.com/books?id=6X745rS5Ci8C&pg=PA65#>

48 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

49 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

50 Glenn L. Roberts, *Commissar and Mullah: Soviet-Muslim Policy from 1917 to 1924* (Boca Raton, FL: Dissertation.com, 2007), 146–147.

51 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

52 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

53 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

54 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

55 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 222–236.

56 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

57 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

58 Amy W. Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 67–87.

In 1936 the Soviet Union dissolved the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Republic and Georgia became a full Soviet republic. During World War II, Georgia was an important source of manpower and materiel for the Soviet war effort. Georgians rallied to the Soviet defense and helped prevent the Germans from overrunning the Caucasus and gaining control of the strategic Baku oilfields. Nearly 400,000 Georgians died in the conflict.^{59, 60, 61, 62}

Following Stalin's death in 1953, Georgia maintained respect and nostalgia for the former dictator even as the rest of the Soviet Union embarked on a program of de-Stalinization under new leader Nikita Khrushchev. During an unsanctioned gathering in Tbilisi in 1956 to commemorate Stalin's death, Soviet troops opened fire, killing dozens of people. The incident led to schisms within Georgia's communist party and marked a fundamental transition toward a deeper national identity that would last throughout the rest of Soviet Georgia's existence.^{63, 64, 65, 66}

In 1972, Eduard Shevardnadze was appointed chairman of the Georgian communist party and took on the task of eradicating rampant corruption in the Georgian system. Shevardnadze deftly balanced Moscow's demands against Georgian interests and instituted mild economic reforms that led to increased agricultural and industrial output. In 1977, the Soviets arrested several Georgian political dissidents as part of a crackdown on nationalist organizations. Instead of suppressing Georgian nationalism, these arrests widened its appeal among the populace and stifled Shevardnadze's efforts to grant more freedoms to ethnic minorities. In 1983, major anti-Soviet protests took place in commemoration of the bicentennial of Georgia's annexation to the Russian Empire. Once again, dissident leaders were jailed.^{67, 68, 69}

With the opening of Soviet society under Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) starting in 1985, Georgian nationalist movements grew in size and prominence, increasing the apprehension of ethnic minorities. At the same time, nationalism was rekindled among many ethnic minorities, especially in Abkhazia, and sporadic episodes of violence erupted. In April 1989, after the Abkhazians petitioned Moscow to become a Soviet republic—a move that would have removed territory from Georgia—anti-Soviet demonstrations erupted in Tbilisi. The government's response was remarkably swift and brutal, with 20 demonstrators killed and hundreds more wounded. This event, known as the Tbilisi Massacre or the April Tragedy, deepened Georgians' resentment of Moscow and led the Georgian communist party to adopt an openly Georgian nationalist line.^{70, 71, 72, 73}

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- 59 Michael Spilling and Winnie Wong, *Georgia* Cultures of the World series (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2009), 30–31.
60 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
61 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
62 Agenda.ge, "Georgia Marks 72st Anniversary of End of WWII," 9 May 2017, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2017/901>
63 Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 198–199.
64 Georges Charachidze, "The Riots at Tiflis: An Analysis," *Caucasian Review* 3 (1956): 99–104.
65 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
66 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
67 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 305–309.
68 Mark Kipnis, "The Georgian National Movement: Problems and Trends," *Crossroads: Trends and Issues in Contemporary Society* 1 (Autumn 1978): 202–203.
69 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
70 Stephen Jones, "Border Disputes and Disputed Borders in the Soviet Federal System," *Nationalities Papers* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 56.
71 Stephen Jones and Robert Parsons, "Georgia and the Georgians," in Graham Smith, ed., *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States* (New York: Longman, 1996), 300–301.
72 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>
73 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Independence and Civil Strife

Growing unrest following the Tbilisi Massacre forced the Georgian government to hold early elections in 1990. These were the first multiparty elections in Georgia since the demise of the short-lived Republic of Georgia in the early 20th century. Nationalist groupings won an overwhelming majority of the vote and stalwart nationalist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia became Georgia's leader. The communists retained only a handful of seats, and the nationalists quickly dismantled anything associated with the Soviet domination of Georgia.⁷⁴ After 98% of voters supported independence in a referendum, Georgia declared independence on 9 April 1991, the second anniversary of the Tbilisi Massacre. The Soviet Union dissolved by the end of that year.^{75, 76}

The new government's belligerence toward ethnic minorities soon touched off a series of secessionist movements within the autonomous regions of the country. In January 1991, Gamsakhurdia ordered Georgian forces into South Ossetia to subdue opposition to Tbilisi, setting off a yearlong conflict. After Georgia's attempts to regain control over the disputed territory failed, a Russian-brokered ceasefire ended confrontation and established a joint peacekeeping force. However, scattered acts of violence continued, and tens of thousands were driven from their homes.⁷⁷

While dealing with the situation in South Ossetia, Gamsakhurdia was deposed by paramilitary units loyal to opposition groups who found his behavior erratic and despotic. Gamsakhurdia fled the country and led his faction in absentia as Georgia slipped into a civil war that would last until 1993. Amid the conflict, Eduard Shevardnadze returned from abroad after serving as Soviet foreign minister and was selected to lead the new government.^{78, 79}

With the Georgians defeated in South Ossetia and distracted by civil war, the Abkhazian leaders seized an opportunity to declare independence. The Georgian military—beset by various problems and recognizing that Russia was actively engaged on the side of the Abkhazians—was not up to the task. The rebels gained de facto control of the autonomous republic.⁸⁰ As they had in South Ossetia, the Russians agreed to supply a peacekeeping force for Abkhazia.^{81, 82}

74 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 324–326.

75 Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*, Post-Soviet Politics series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 64.

76 Per Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 80–81.

77 Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*, Post-Soviet Politics series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 53–56.

78 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

79 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

80 Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon, 2001), 170–174.

81 Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Georgia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994), <http://countrystudies.us/georgia/>

82 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

The Shevardnadze Administration

When Georgia emerged from civil and ethnic conflict in 1993, its territorial integrity was shattered, its infrastructure and economy were in shambles, and its independence was threatened by Russia's support for the breakaway republics. Shevardnadze set out to rebuild. A new constitution was adopted in 1994, creating a more powerful chief executive and introducing a new currency.⁸³ That same year Georgia joined the Collective Security Treaty, an alliance of former Soviet states.⁸⁴

After winning presidential elections in 1995, Shevardnadze worked to bring Georgia closer to the West. He sought assistance from Western Europe and the United States, attracting much-needed capital and aid for rebuilding Georgia. A centerpiece of his effort was a proposed Transcaucasian oil pipeline connecting the Caspian oil reserves of Azerbaijan to Black Sea ports in Turkey, with Georgia serving as a conduit.⁸⁵ In 1999, Georgia withdrew from the Collective Security Treaty to pursue membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). That same year, Georgia became the first Caucasian country admitted to the Council of Europe.^{86, 87, 88}

Entering the 21st century, Georgia's Western aspirations were uncertain. Recurring conflicts in the autonomous regions and the souring of the economy plagued the country. In October 2002, Georgian forces mounted a major campaign aimed at removing any Chechen fighters from the Pankisi Kheoba Gorge, where many Chechens from Russia had settled seeking refuge from the deadly war in their homeland.⁸⁹ In 2003, work began on the Georgian portion of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline, which would become operational in 2006.⁹⁰

Corruption and favoritism permeated the Shevardnadze administration. Many of the young, Western-educated intellectuals whom Shevardnadze had cultivated and groomed for governance were upset at his inability to counter these influences. Among those who joined the opposition in protest was Mikheil Saakashvili, an American-educated lawyer and Shevardnadze's former justice minister. Saakashvili used his new position as the chairman of Tbilisi's city government as a platform from which to criticize the Shevardnadze administration.⁹¹

83 Tim Burford, *Georgia* (Chalfont St. Peter, England: Bradt Travel Guides, 2008), 22.

84 Collective Security Treaty Organization, "From the Treaty to the Organization," n.d., <https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/>

85 S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, *The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Oil Window to the West* (Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2005).

86 Tomas Valasek, *Military Cooperation between Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova in the GUUAM Framework* Caspian Studies Program policy brief, no. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Caspian Studies Program, Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2000).

87 Karena Avedissian, "Fact Sheet: What is the Collective Security Treaty Organization?" EVN Report, 6 October 2019, <https://www.evnreport.com/understanding-the-region/fact-sheet-what-is-the-collective-security-treaty-organization>

88 Council of Europe, "Georgia // 47 States, One Europe," n.d., <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/georgia>

89 Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Georgia: Situation in Pankisi Gorge Raises Tension, Speculation," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 20 February 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1098867.html>

90 Fariz Ismailzade, *Russia's Energy Interests in Azerbaijan: A Comparative Study of the 1990s and the 2000s* (London: GMB, 2006), 22.

91 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

The Rose Revolution and Rising Tensions with Russia

In the 2003 parliamentary elections, Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) ran in opposition to Shevardnadze's allies. The pro-Shevardnadze factions were declared winners, but the elections were found to be fraudulent by international observers. When Shevardnadze refused to address the election irregularities, throngs of peaceful antigovernment demonstrators filled the streets of the capital and other cities to denounce Shevardnadze's government and demand a new election. In a dramatic turn of events, Saakashvili and other opposition members, brandishing roses, barged into parliament and intimidated Shevardnadze off the podium as he was inaugurating the new legislature. The Rose Revolution, as the events came to be known, led to Shevardnadze's resignation and the emergence of Saakashvili as the preeminent opposition leader.^{92, 93, 94}

In the presidential and parliamentary elections held in spring 2004, Saakashvili and the UNM swept to power in staggering numbers. Saakashvili toughened the government's stance on Georgia's territorial integrity and ramped up his overtures to the West to counter Russia's influence. He faced down the longtime leader of the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria, Aslan Abashidze, who retreated to Russia. In 2005, U.S. President George W. Bush visited Tbilisi and promised assistance in dealing with Georgia's struggles.^{95, 96, 97}

Despite Saakashvili's reformist, pro-Western ethos, his administration was from the start beset by allegations of human rights abuses and corruption. The stifling of an opposition TV station and allegations of pressure tactics against inquisitive journalists undermined strong freedom of speech laws. While the government investigated corruption among its political opponents, massive graft was tolerated within its ranks. One whistleblower revealed that corruption among military officials was so pervasive that it threatened the army's effectiveness. In 2007, Saakashvili forcibly broke up massive demonstrations in Tbilisi opposing his increasingly unpopular rule. The following year, he was narrowly reelected in an early presidential contest called by the opposition.⁹⁸

92 Per Gahrton, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), 105–112.

93 Frederik Coene, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2010), 38.

94 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

95 Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 91.

96 Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese, *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures* (London: Routledge, 2010), 25.

97 Ronald Kessler, *In the President's Secret Service: Behind the Scenes with Agents in the Line of Fire and the Presidents They Protect* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2009), 233–234.

98 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

The Russo-Georgian War and Its Aftermath

From 2006 through the summer of 2008, Georgia witnessed increased tensions with its autonomous republics and Russia. Antagonizing moves by Russia, such as banning the import of Georgian wine, severing some travel and communication links with Georgia, and doubling the price of Georgia-bound natural gas, were met almost tit-for-tat by Georgia with its own maneuvers, such as temporarily detaining Russian army officers on spying allegations and blocking Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organization. Further exacerbating tensions, in 2006 South Ossetians passed a referendum in favor of independence. In March 2007, Russia carried out an air and ground attack in Georgia's Kodori Valley, targeting Chechen refugees and a Georgian government building used by the pro-Georgia Abkhazian government in exile.^{99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105}

On 29 April 2008, after NATO officially welcomed Georgia's aspirations for membership in the organization, Russia declared it was deploying more forces in the breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. Russia claimed that the Georgian government was preparing to attack the rebels of those regions.^{106, 107, 108} In April and May, Russia further increased tensions by expanding diplomatic relations with the breakaway republics and deploying hundreds of additional troops.¹⁰⁹

In this tense climate, skirmishes between South Ossetian and Georgian forces during the first week of August led to a Georgian military campaign to bring the area back under government control. Russia quickly responded by repelling the Georgian offensive and penetrating deep into territory beyond the autonomous republics. Russia occupied several key Georgian cities and bombed military and civilian targets in what has come to be known as the Russo-Georgian War. Actual combat lasted five days; Georgian forces were outnumbered by Russian forces and received no direct assistance from ostensible allies.^{110, 111} The conflict caused the deaths of over 800 civilians and soldiers and the displacement of about 200,000 Georgians from South Ossetia.¹¹²

- 99 Robert Parsons, "Georgia/Russia: Georgian Agriculture Minister in Moscow for Talks on Wine Ban," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 13 April 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1067641.html>
- 100 Robert Parsons, "Georgia: Russia Threatens to Ban Wine Imports," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 March 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1067256.html>
- 101 Anya Ardayeva, "Russian Officers Detained in Georgia on Spy Charges," Global Security, 20 September 2006, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/library/news/2006/intell-060929-voa01.htm>
- 102 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Gazprom Seeks to Double Gas Price for Georgia," 2 November 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1072466.html>
- 103 Jim Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 2009), 3.
- 104 Vladimir Socor, "When Stability Is Uncomfortable: Air Attack on the Upper Kodori Valley," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 4, no. 55 (20 March 2007), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=32602](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=32602)
- 105 Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 126.
- 106 Global Security, "Abkhazia—Path to War," n.d., <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/abkhazia-1.htm>
- 107 Jim Nichol, *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, 2009), 15.
- 108 Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 126.
- 109 Roy Allison, "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to 'Coerce Georgia to Peace,'" *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008): 1149.
- 110 Council of Europe, *Parliamentary Assembly—Working Papers—2008 Ordinary Session, Fourth Part, 29 September–3 October 2008* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2009), 123.
- 111 Merle Wesley Shoemaker, *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2009* (Harpers Ferry, WV: Stryker-Post Publications, 2009), 222.
- 112 Congressional Research Service, "Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy," 23 October 2020, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45307.pdf>

Even after signing a French-sponsored ceasefire on 19 August, Russian forces took 20 Georgian troops prisoner at Poti in western Georgia and confiscated several American military vehicles that had been used in U.S.-Georgian training exercises.¹¹³ In another sign of its continued belligerence, on 26 August Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent nations.¹¹⁴ The following year, Georgia formally withdrew from the Commonwealth of Independent States, a Russia-dominated association of former Soviet countries.^{115, 116}

Georgia's military defeat exacerbated Saakashvili's already dwindling popularity. Persistent antigovernment street demonstrations calling for his resignation were undeterred by his promises of further reforms. In May 2009 authorities quashed a military mutiny and coup plot that they claimed was backed by Russia.^{117, 118, 119}

Much of the anti-Saakashvili opposition coalesced around the newly formed Georgian Dream (GD) party, led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, GD convincingly bested UNM, taking control of the legislature and making Ivanishvili prime minister. Saakashvili's retreat became complete the following year when, facing corruption investigations from the new government, he left the country after completing his presidential term.¹²⁰

Recent Events

GD's rise to power coincided with a constitutional change that shifted power from the president to the prime minister, who represented the ruling party in parliament. After briefly serving as prime minister, Ivanishvili stepped down and later became GD party chairman. A string of GD prime ministers followed, who observers agree were controlled or influenced from behind the scenes by Ivanishvili.^{121, 122}

GD's popularity gradually declined following 2012, and critics accused it of attempting to consolidate power at all levels of government. GD was able to increase its majority in parliament in the 2016 elections, due partly to changes in the rules defining representation in the electoral system. In the 2018 presidential elections Salome Zurbishvili, a GD-backed candidate, became Georgia's first female president. Opposition to GD grew in 2019 when a Russian lawmaker was allowed to deliver a speech in parliament, an unacceptable development to many Georgians still reeling from the 2008 military conflict. In the wake of the incident, the government brutally dispersed anti-GD street protests but did make concessions in the form of some high-profile resignations and mild electoral reforms. In 2020 the government was praised for its competent handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²³

113 Jim Nichol, *Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 2009), 8.

114 Anders Åalund, S.M. Guriev, and Andrew Kuchins, *Russia After the Global Economic Crisis* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2010), 189.

115 *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Commonwealth of Independent States," 24 July 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-of-Independent-States>

116 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

117 Associated Press, "Russia Blamed for Georgia Mutiny," CBS News, 5 May 2009, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-blamed-for-georgia-mutiny/>

118 Tony Halpin, "Georgian Leader Mikhail Saakashvili Claims to Have Crushed Army Mutiny," *Times*, 6 May 2009, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/georgian-leader-mikhail-saakashvili-claims-to-have-crushed-army-mutiny-d62cpp7k530>

119 Charles Bremner, "Vladimir Putin 'Wanted to Hang Georgian President Saakashvili by the Balls,'" *Times*, 14 November 2008, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/vladimir-putin-wanted-to-hang-georgian-president-saakashvili-by-the-balls-mbz2p0mjilz>

120 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

121 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

122 Isabelle Khurshudyan, "Georgian Opposition Leader Arrested, Deepening the Political Crisis in the South Caucasus Country," *Washington Post*, 23 February 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/georgia-opposition-arrested-melia/2021/02/23/fe20a7ee-75b0-11eb-9489-8f7dcd51e75_story.html

123 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

In the October 2020 parliamentary elections, GD retained its parliamentary majority, albeit with a reduced number of seats. The opposition UNM claimed voting irregularities and refused to recognize the election results. In February 2021, authorities arrested UNM's leader on charges of inciting the violent protests of 2019; the move triggered a political crisis and deepened divisions between GD and UNM.^{124, 125, 126}

124 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

125 Isabelle Khurshudyan, "Georgian Opposition Leader Arrested, Deepening the Political Crisis in the South Caucasus Country," *Washington Post*, 23 February 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/georgia-opposition-arrested-melia/2021/02/23/fe20a7ee-75b0-11eb-9489-8f7dacd51e75_story.html

126 Associated Press, "Ex-Soviet Republic Georgia's Parliament Appoints New Premier," 22 February 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/biden-cabinet-irakli-garibashvili-georgia-tbilisi-cabinets-668c5338339be04aa4428440117288e3>

Georgia in Perspective

History Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The Rose Revolution led to the downfall of the Shevardnadze regime. ☐ True ☐ False
2. The first female monarch in Georgia was Queen Tamara. ☐ True ☐ False
3. Georgian territories voluntarily joined Russian Empire as its influence grew in the region in the 19th century. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Soviet Russia violently seized Georgia in the early 20th century. ☐ True ☐ False
5. The transition from Soviet rule to independence upon the fall of the Soviet Union was peaceful. ☐ True ☐ False

Georgia in Perspective

History Assessment Answers

1. True:
Nation-wide protests erupted over irregularities in Shevardnadze's 2003 election victory. Saakashvili and other opposition members, brandishing roses, barged into parliament and intimidated Shevardnadze off the podium as he was inaugurating the new legislature, thus giving the movement its name.
2. True:
Queen Tamara's reign (1184–1213) is considered the golden age of Georgian history. Tamara led her forces to victory against surrounding Muslim powers and significantly expanded the Georgian kingdom.
3. False:
In 1800, Russian czar Paul annexed the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom in violation of a previous guarantee of Georgian territorial sovereignty. The next year, Russia abolished the kingdom altogether and absorbed eastern Georgia into the Russian empire.
4. True:
In 1921, the Red Army invaded; the Georgian government could not mount a serious defense, and once again, the Georgians were absorbed into another empire.
5. False:
Sporadic episodes of violence erupted as Georgian nationalist movements clashed with ethnic minorities in places such as Abkhazia.

Chapter 3 | Economy



A market stall, Tbilisi
Flickr / lasserbua

Introduction

In 2019, Georgia had a gross domestic product (GDP) purchasing power parity of USD 55.776 billion, giving its economy a global rank of 112 out of 228 countries. GDP is the overall value of all goods and services created by an economy within a certain period. In recent years economic growth has been consistent, averaging 5% per year between 2015 and 2019. Many Georgians remain connected to the land, harking back to their agrarian past, but today the country must import most of its food products. Signs of Soviet-era industrialization are also abundant, but the factories and giant steel mills currently employ a fraction of their mid-20th century workforces. In the wake of liberalizing economic reforms after the turn of the millennium, foreign investment has flowed in, and mining and services such as tourism and finance have grown in importance. Georgia has leveraged its strategically important geographical location to become a westward conduit for oil and natural gas. It has signed beneficial trade agreements with Europe while maintaining a fragile economic relationship with Russia, its imposing neighbor and sometimes enemy. But the impressive economic progress has produced uneven material benefits for many Georgians and come at a significant cost to labor rights and workplace safety.^{1, 2, 3}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 2 CultureGrams World Edition, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
- 3 World Bank, "Georgia: Overview: Country Context," 5 April 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>

Agriculture

Agriculture makes up only 8.2% of Georgia's GDP but utilizes 55.6% of the labor force. The main agricultural products are milk, grapes, corn, potatoes, wheat, watermelons, tomatoes, citrus fruits, barley, and apples. Sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs are the primary livestock, with poultry, bees, and silkworms also significant. Only 5.8% of the land surface is used as arable land, while 27.9%—mostly in the mountainous regions—is used as permanent pasture for livestock.^{4, 5}

Georgia's agriculture sector is performing below potential. After independence, land reform led to the privatization and distribution of much of the country's farmland to small-plot rural family farms. Many family farms are used primarily for subsistence farming and are under-cultivated or farmed with outdated methods and equipment. Under the Saakashvili administration, a strong emphasis was placed on industrial and urban development, with the countryside valued primarily as a tourist destination. Domestic food production was neglected; irrigation services, crucial for valuable fruit and vegetable crops, declined. Between 1991 and 2016, food production decreased by three-fourths, and today Georgia imports 80% of its food.^{6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11}

Since coming to power in 2012, the Georgian Dream party has prioritized agricultural development. Initiatives include low-interest agricultural loans, marketing traditional food products abroad, a small-farm cooperative law, improved irrigation technology, and increased social assistance for mountain communities, where herding is a primary occupation. As a result, Georgia's cultivated land has increased by some 600,000 hectares (1,482,632 acres), and hundreds of agricultural enterprises have been established or expanded.^{12, 13, 14, 15}

Winemaking occupies a distinguished place in Georgia's economy. The practice dates back approximately 8,000 years, making Georgia the world's oldest wine producer. Over the centuries, about 500 grape varieties have been developed. After stagnation in the post-independence period, Georgia's wine industry is flourishing, with a surge of international interest and investment. Between 2006 and 2018, the number of registered wineries increased

- 4 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 5 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 6 Rati Kochlamazashvili, "The 'Achilles' Heel' of Georgia's Agriculture: Incomplete Land Registration," *Georgia Today*, 15 April 2019, <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/15253/The-%E2%80%9CAchilles%E2%80%99-Heel%E2%80%9D-of-Georgia%E2%80%99s-Agriculture%3A-Incomplete-Land-Registration>
- 7 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
- 8 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," *Open Democracy*, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 9 I. E. Meskhia, "Food Security Problems in Post-Soviet Georgia," *Annals of Agrarian Science* Volume 14, Issue 2, June 2016, Pages 46-51 (ScienceDirect, June 2016), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1512188716000105>
- 10 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector," 8 October 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>
- 11 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 12 Asian Development Bank, "Realizing the Urban Potential in Georgia: National Urban Assessment Executive Summary," 2016, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/186168/urban-potential-georgia-exec-sum.pdf>
- 13 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," *Open Democracy*, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 14 I. E. Meskhia, "Food Security Problems in Post-Soviet Georgia," *Annals of Agrarian Science* Volume 14, Issue 2, June 2016, Pages 46-51 (ScienceDirect, June 2016), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1512188716000105>
- 15 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector," 8 October 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>

twelve-fold. Wine exports are also on the rise, although still below the levels of major wine producers like France and Italy.^{16, 17, 18, 19}

Forests cover nearly 40% of Georgia. The forests are primarily deciduous, meaning the trees shed their leaves seasonally; oriental beech is the most common tree species. Deforestation, although not considered an urgent problem, has increased since independence. Illegal logging, primarily for firewood, is the primary contributor to deforestation. Georgian forests have also been damaged by livestock grazing and military conflicts. The government's forestry policy attempts to protect forests while promoting the development of a sustainable timber industry.^{20, 21, 22}

In 2018, 2.4 million tons of fish were produced in Georgia. The aquaculture sector produces primarily rainbow trout, a cold-water fish suitable for the country's pools and ponds and popular with consumers. The main species fished from the Black Sea is anchovy. Fish consumption in Georgia is low, at 7.3 kg (16 lbs) per person yearly, compared to the European rate of 21.3 kg (47 lbs) per person. Despite the low demand, some 85% of the fish consumed in Georgia each year is imported.^{23, 24}

Industry

Industry constitutes 23.7% of Georgia's GDP and employs 8.9% of the labor force. Steel, machine tools, electrical appliances, mining, chemicals, and wood products are the primary industries. Major steel-producing metallurgical plants are located in Rustavi and Zestaponi. The machine-building sector produces locomotives, earth-moving equipment, and specialized products like tea-harvesting machines for the agriculture sector. Other significant manufacturing sectors are food and beverages, chemicals, rubber and plastics, wood and paper, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and furniture.^{25, 26, 27}

The rapid industrialization of the Soviet era was followed by mass deindustrialization after 1991. New government policies promoting privatization, deregulation, and foreign capital attraction led to the downsizing or shuttering of dozens of major industrial facilities. The industrial workforce shrank from 643,000 in 1987 to 116,000 in 2015.²⁸

16 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

17 Nicholas Anthony DeMarco, "Sustainable Agriculture in the Republic of Georgia," Borgen Project, 22 December 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/sustainable-agriculture-in-the-republic-of-georgia/>

18 Lisa Granik, "Understanding the Georgian Wine Boom," *SevenFiftyDaily*, 29 July 2019, <https://daily.seventyfive.com/understanding-the-georgian-wine-boom/>

19 Lana Bortolot, "Why Georgian Wines Are among the Most Unique on the Planet," *Forbes*, 9 December 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lanabortolot/2018/12/09/why-georgian-wines-are-among-the-most-unique-on-the-planet/?sh=428ec880cb09>

20 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

21 World Bank, "South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia: Private Enterprises in the Forest Sector," 14 January 2020, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33238/South-Caucasus-Armenia-Azerbaijan-and-Georgia-Private-Enterprises-in-the-Forest-Sector-A-Survey-of-the-Private-Sector-in-Wood-Production-and-Processing.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

22 Konstantine Bziava and David Gubeladze, "Georgia's Forestry Sector: Current Problems and Ways Forward," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2003, <http://www.fao.org/3/XII/0608-B1.htm>

23 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "National Aquaculture Sector Overview: Georgia," 2 March 2006, http://www.fao.org/fishery/countrysector/naso_georgia/en

24 Europe for Georgia, "Fisheries and Aquaculture in Georgia (Industry Research)," 16 July 2020, <http://eugeorgia.info/en/article/832/fisheries-and-aquaculture-in-georgia-industry-research/>

25 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

26 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

27 Enterprise Georgia, "Manufacturing 2019," 2018, <http://www.enterprisegeorgia.gov.ge/uploads/files/publications/5cadacc5beb1b-3-PRINT-Manufacturing-2019-small.pdf>

28 Olga Pinchuk, "Rustavi, Georgia: History of a Mono-town," *Open Democracy*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rustavi-georgia-monotown-history/>

The Rustavi Metallurgical Plant outside Tbilisi is one of Georgia's best-known industrial facilities and emblematic of the country's modern economic trajectory. The Soviets established the plant in 1948 as the first full-scale metallurgical complex in the South Caucasus, meant to support the regional oil industry. In the 1950s, it was the largest producer of seamless steel pipes in Europe; it also produced aluminum products, pig iron, coke, and rebar. At its peak, it employed 20,000 people. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the plant declined and ceased operations in 1999. Production resumed in 2011 after the plant came under a British-Georgian private company's ownership and underwent a major rehabilitation. Today the plant employs some 1,300 people and produces seamless pipes, fittings, metal structures, and iron casting. Its products are exported to neighboring countries as well as the European Union (EU), the United States, and Russia.^{29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34}

Energy

Georgia ranks a modest 80th globally for its proven hydrocarbon reserves, with 35 million barrels of crude oil and 8.495 billion cu m (299 billion cu ft) of natural gas. Neighboring oil-rich Azerbaijan, by comparison, ranks 18th for crude oil and 25th for natural gas. Georgia's hydrocarbons consumption is also relatively low, with 27,000 barrels per day of refined petroleum products and 2.294 billion cu m (81 billion cu ft) of natural gas.³⁵

Georgia has capitalized on its geographic location to become a transit country for oil and natural gas flowing westward from Azerbaijan and other regional oil producers to Turkey. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, completed in 2006, delivers crude oil from a marine terminal on Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coast through Georgia to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. In 2018 the pipeline transported 255.7 million barrels of oil. The South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) runs along the same route as the BTC pipeline and delivers natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field to Turkey. The SCP also began operating in 2006 and is part of the Southern Gas Corridor, a series of pipelines that delivers Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe. After a 2018 expansion, the SCP's capacity rose to 23.4 billion cu m (826 billion cu ft) of natural gas per year. The pipelines have given Georgia access to hydrocarbons at below-market prices and strengthened the country's strategic importance to Europe.^{36, 37, 38, 39, 40}

The bulk of Georgia's electricity needs is met by hydropower, which accounts for as much as 90% of the country's electricity generation during years with heavy rainfall. The Inguri hydropower plant is Georgia's largest electricity generator and the largest hydroelectric powerplant in the South Caucasus. Along with the nearby Vardnili plant, it can supply up to half of Georgia's electricity needs. The two plants are located at the boundary with the separatist region of Abkhazia; through an agreement between the separatists and the central government in Tbilisi, the two

29 Rustavi Metallurgical Plant, "Company Profile," 2012, <http://www.rmp.ge/en/about-us/company-profile/>

30 D&B Business Directory, "Rustavi Steel LLC," Dun & Bradstreet, n.d., https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles/rustavi_steel_llc.b90083e1819d107b71987cac65d3195c.html

31 George Tsereteli, "Trump Should Grant Georgia an Exemption from Steel Tariffs," National Interest, 16 June 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/trump-should-grant-georgia-exemption-steel-tariffs-62597>

32 Rustavi Metallurgical Plant, "History & Heritage," 2012, <http://www.rmp.ge/en/about-us/history-heritage/>

33 Georgian Travel Guide, "About Rustavi Metallurgical Plant," n.d., <https://georgiantravelguide.com/en/rustavi-metallurgical-plant>

34 Global Energy Monitor Wiki, "Rustavi Metallurgical Plant," 10 July 2020, https://www.gem.wiki/Rustavi_Metallurgical_Plant

35 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

36 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

37 Southern Gas Corridor, "South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP)," n.d., <https://www.sgc.az/en/project/scp>

38 Fariz Ismailzade, *Russia's Energy Interests in Azerbaijan: A Comparative Study of the 1990s and the 2000s* (London: GMB, 2006), 22.

39 Reuters, "Turkey and Azerbaijan Mark Completion of TANAP Pipeline to Take Gas to Europe," 30 November 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-energy-tanap/turkey-and-azerbaijan-mark-completion-of-tanap-pipeline-to-take-gas-to-europe-idUSKBN1Y40CP>

40 Daily Sabah, "Azeri Oil Flow through Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Exceeds 3.4B Barrels in 14 Years," 2 June 2020, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/energy/azeri-oil-flow-through-baku-tbilisi-ceyhan-pipeline-exceeds-34b-barrels-in-14-years>

plants are Abkhazia's primary source of electricity. Most of the rest of Georgia's electricity is supplied by more costly gas-powered thermal power plants.^{41, 42, 43, 44}

After independence, Georgia's energy system became plagued by corruption and inefficiency, leading to the deterioration of the power grid, limited electricity availability to households, and widespread power theft. Regulatory reform in the mid-2000s introduced a new payment system and divided the sector into separate generation, transmission, and distribution companies. The changes improved efficiency and allowed for an uninterrupted power supply throughout the country. Today, the government is continuing its power grid improvement and modernization efforts to meet an increased energy demand.^{45, 46, 47}

Natural Resources

Mining contributes 1.1% to Georgia's GDP and employs some 30,000 people. Georgia has significant manganese mineral deposits, with a major mine located in the center of the country at Chiatura. The most notable coal deposits are found in Tqvarcheli and Tqibuli. Georgia has also identified metal deposits of copper, zinc, gold, and barite, and underground resources of marble, limestone, bentonite clay, and carbonated mineral water.^{48, 49, 50, 51}

During the Soviet era, Georgia's mines were part of the Soviet centralized economy and supported industries such as steel production. Today, the country's mineral extraction market is driven by private investments, with the government auctioning mineral licenses. Mining in Georgia is considered underdeveloped and the government has been working to reform the rules governing the mining sector to increase transparency and attract investment. In 2014 the government approved gold mining activity that led to the destruction of Sakdrisi, a fragile historic site in the south of the country believed to contain one of the world's oldest gold mines, dating back almost 5,000 years.^{52, 53, 54}

- 41 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 42 Mariam Lobjanidze et al., "Enguri and Vardnili Hydropower Plants (Hpps) and Abkhazian Demand: A Difficult (And Costly) Puzzle for Georgia," Financial, 4 March 2019, <https://www.finchannel.com/opinion/analysis-3/77071-enguri-and-varnili-hydropower-plants-hpps-and-abkhazian-demand-a-difficult-and-costly-puzzle-for-georgia>
- 43 JAM News, "Most Important Power Station in Georgia to Shut Down for Three Months of Repairs," 25 November 2020, <https://jam-news.net/most-important-power-station-in-georgia-to-shut-down-for-three-months-of-repairs/>
- 44 Natia Amiranashvili, "Stop Energy Losses: Enguri Hydropower Plant Undergoes Rehabilitation with EU Support," EU Neighbours East, 16 November 2018, <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/eu-in-action/stories/stop-energy-losses-enguri-hydropower-plant-undergoes-rehabilitation-eu>
- 45 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 46 Asian Development Bank, "Assessment of Power Sector Reforms in Georgia," 2015, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/161067/georgia-psr-report.pdf>
- 47 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Power Grid Enhancement Project," 25 June 2014, <https://www.ebrd.com/work-with-us/projects/esia/power-grid-enhancement-project.html>
- 48 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 10 September 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>
- 49 Reginald Davey, "Georgia: Mining, Minerals and Fuel Resources," AZO Mining, 16 November 2012, <https://www.azomining.com/Article.aspx?ArticleID=238>
- 50 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Georgia Mining Sector Development Programme, Phase I," November 2018, http://www.nam.gov.ge/files/file_1432723.pdf
- 51 Agenda.ge, "Georgia's Offer to Businesses in Mining," 12 February 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/442>
- 52 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Georgia Mining Sector Development Programme, Phase I," November 2018, http://www.nam.gov.ge/files/file_1432723.pdf
- 53 IGF, "Georgia Joins IGF as 73rd Member, Reforms Mining Sector for Sustainable Development," 2 July 2019, <https://www.igfmining.org/announcement/georgia-joins-igf-as-73rd-member-reforms-mining-sector-for-sustainable-development/>
- 54 Democracy and Freedom Watch, "What was lost when a mining company destroyed the ancient Sakdrisi site?" 8 September 2015, <https://dfwatch.net/what-was-lost-when-a-mining-company-destroyed-the-ancient-sakdrisi-site-38139>

Services

The services sector makes up 67.9% of Georgia's GDP and employs 35.5% of the workforce. In addition to tourism, the sector is driven by hotels, restaurants, domestic trade, financial services, transport, and telecommunications.^{55, 56, 57}

In recent years Georgia has become an attractive location for international IT companies. Some of the main draws are a simplified tax system that favors the IT sector, reliable internet infrastructure, and willing cooperation from national and local authorities in the form of numerous private-public partnerships. Tbilisi, in particular, is turning into a hub for tech startups, with a proliferation of coworking spaces and accelerators. Several cryptocurrency mining companies have also set up operations in Georgia, attracted by low electricity rates for their energy-intensive activity. In 2017 Georgia ranked second globally in cryptocurrency mining, behind China.^{58, 59, 60}

In recent years, Georgia has become a favored shooting location for international filmmakers. The Georgian movie production sector offers world-class services, professional crews, and stunning architectural and natural backdrops for lower costs than other established European locations. The Georgian government is lending its support by offering generous rebates on feature film and television series production costs. In 2018, the country hosted about twice as many foreign movie productions as in the previous year.^{61, 62, 63}

Tourism

Georgia's natural beauty, mild climate, diverse topography, and rich culture and history make it a desirable tourist destination. Tusheti National Park in the Greater Caucasus Mountains offers stunning mountain vistas and historic sheepherding villages. Tbilisi is a modern city that encompasses ornate Byzantine churches and narrow medieval streets lined with carved wooden houses. The Gudauri ski resort in the Greater Caucasus has come to rival its better-known Western European counterparts with a long ski season and nearly 32 km (20 mi) of slopes. On the Black Sea coast, Batumi offers beach resorts and ancient Greek ruins.^{64, 65, 66, 67}

- 55 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 56 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 57 Nordea, "Georgia: Economic and Political Overview," March 2021, <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/georgia/economical-context>
- 58 Alina Rozanova, "Georgia's Start-Ups Are Ready for Investment. Time for VCs to Take Note," *Emerging Europe*, 13 October 2020, <https://emerging-europe.com/voices/georgias-start-ups-are-ready-for-investment-time-for-vcs-to-take-note/>
- 59 Konstantin Rabin, "Georgia—A Strange Place for a Good Fintech Opportunity," *Finextra*, 30 July 2019, <https://www.finextra.com/blogposting/17687/georgia---a-strange-place-for-a-good-fintech-opportunity>
- 60 Andrew North, "How the Tiny Nation of Georgia Became a Bitcoin Behemoth," *NPR*, 23 April 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/23/597780405/how-the-tiny-nation-of-georgia-became-a-bitcoin-behemoth>
- 61 Leo Barraclough, "Country of Georgia Makes Pitch to Become Major Filming Destination," *Variety*, 9 February 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/artisans/spotlight/brighton-4-1202693167-1202693167/>
- 62 George Melikishvili, "Unearthing Georgia's Growing Popularity as a Filming Location," *Location Guide*, 4 May 2018, <https://www.thelocationguide.com/2018/05/unearthing-georgias-growing-popularity-as-a-filming-location/>
- 63 David Lobzhanidze, "Georgia Seeks to Put Itself on Movie Map," *BBC News*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-44084133>
- 64 SJ, "Best Things to Do in Batumi, Georgia," *Chasing the Donkey*, 4 March 2021, <https://www.chasingthedonkey.com/best-things-to-do-in-batumi-georgia/>
- 65 Georgian Travel Guide, "About Old Tbilisi," n.d., <https://georgiantravelguide.com/en/old-tbilisi>
- 66 Crazy Tourist, "15 Best Places to Visit in Georgia," 26 January 2020, <https://www.thecrazytourist.com/15-best-places-visit-georgia/>
- 67 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Tourism," 10 August 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-tourism>

In recent years the government has made significant efforts to facilitate international tourism, including easing the process for obtaining entry visas, modernizing roads and other infrastructure, bolstering the hotel industry, and offering tax incentives to tour operators. The efforts paid off, with tourism accounting for 7.5% of GDP growth in 2018–19. In 2019, 4.8 million international tourists visited Georgia, a 16% increase over the previous year. Most of the tourists were from neighboring countries, but arrivals from Western Europe and the United States were also significant.⁶⁸

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a solid blow to Georgia's flourishing tourism industry. The border closures, flight cancellations, and other pandemic restrictions and containment measures cost the sector between USD 1.2 and 2.8 billion from 2019 to 2020. August 2020 saw a 96% drop in international visitors over the previous year. In response, the government partnered with commercial banks to craft a stimulus package to encourage economic recovery.^{69, 70, 71}

Trade

Since 1988, Georgia has maintained a negative balance of trade, meaning that the value of its imports surpassed its exports. A major contributor to the negative trade balance is that the country imports most of its packaged food products. In 2019, the balance of trade was –9.01% of GDP, a steady reduction since a seven-year high of –17.04% in 2015. Georgia's persistently weak export offerings are indicative of the country's as-yet incomplete economic transformation.^{72, 73, 74} Georgia's major export partners are Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, China, Turkey, and Ukraine. Primary exports include copper, cars, iron alloys, wine, and packaged medicines. Major import partners are Turkey, China, Russia, Azerbaijan, the United States, and Germany. The primary imports are cars, refined petroleum, copper, packaged medicines, and natural gas. In June 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, exports fell by 14% and imports by 22% year-on-year.^{75, 76}

Despite its small size, Georgia's geographic location makes it an ideal trade partner to Russia and Europe. Georgia has long maintained strong trade relations with Russia and other former Soviet states; before 2006, Russia received 92% of Georgia's wine exports. In 2014, Georgia signed a comprehensive free trade agreement with the EU, marking a significant trade expansion with the West. Georgia has had to implement legislation and regulations to make its food products adhere to EU regulations. Between 2010 and 2018, the value of Georgian exports to the EU increased by 136%. In addition to the EU, Georgia has free trade agreements with Turkey, China, Hong Kong, the

68 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Tourism," 10 August 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-tourism>

69 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Tourism," 10 August 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-tourism>

70 Giorgi Lomsadze, "Georgia Experiences Its First Wave of COVID-19," Eurasianet, 18 September 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-experiences-its-first-wave-of-covid-19>

71 Marta Mills, "Covid19 and Tourism in Georgia—Early Impacts and Government Response," Resilient Destinations, 20 April 2020, <https://www.resilientdestinations.com/blog-database/covid19-and-tourism-in-georgia-early-impacts-and-government-response>

72 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector," 10 August 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>

73 Global Economy, "Georgia: Trade Balance, Percent of GDP," 2021, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Georgia/Trade_balance/

74 World Bank, "Georgia: Overview: Country Context," 5 April 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>

75 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

76 Agenda.ge, "Georgian Central Bank Relaxes Monetary Policy, Cuts Refinancing Rate to 8%," 5 August 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2458>

European Free Trade Association, and the Russia-led Commonwealth of Independent States; these agreements make Georgian products accessible to one-third of the global consumer market.^{77, 78, 79, 80, 81}

Banking and Finance

Banking

Georgia's national currency is the lari (GEL). One lari is divided into 100 tetri.⁸² In January 2022, USD 1 was worth GEL 3.06.⁸³ In 2019, public debt stood at USD 6.45 billion, 42.64% of GDP. In 2020 the government took out additional loans to cover emergency funding in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a result, the country's debt reached 55% of GDP.^{84, 85, 86}

Georgia established its first central bank in 1919; the current institution, the National Bank of Georgia (NBG), was established in 1991. The NBG sets financial policy to maintain financial stability and protect the rights of consumers and investors. The bank also works closely with the EU and other international financial institutions to implement regulatory best practices.^{87, 88}

In the past, the NBG tightened fiscal policy when the value of the lari dropped following internal political instability or strained relations with Russia. After 2012, fiscal discipline was relaxed as the new Georgian Dream administration increased social spending. In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the bank eased lending restrictions on commercial banks but did not reduce interest rates, due to fear of inflation.^{89, 90, 91, 92, 93}

77 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>

78 International Trade Administration, "Georgia—Country Commercial Guide: Agricultural Sector," 10 August 2020, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/georgia-agricultural-sector>

79 Lali Gogoberidze, "EU-Georgia DCFTA: Results after 5 years and perspectives," 3DCFTAs, 24 September 2019, <https://3dcftas.eu/op-eds/eu-georgia-dcfta-results-after-5-years-and-perspectives>

80 Agenda.ge, "What Countries Does Georgia Have a Free Trade Agreement With?" 10 February 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/417>

81 Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen, "Export of Wines From Republic of Georgia to U.S. on the Rise," *Forbes*, 16 August 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theworldwineguys/2019/08/16/export-of-wines-from-republic-of-georgia-to-us-on-the-rise/?sh=1651544214cf>

82 Lonely Planet, "Georgia in Detail: Money and Costs," n.d., <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/georgia/a/nar-gr/money-and-costs>

83 XE, "Convert 1 USD to GEL," 27 January 2022, <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=GEL>

84 Aaron O'Neill, "Georgia: National Debt from 2015 To 2025* in Relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP)," Statista, 1 April 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/441752/national-debt-of-georgia-in-relation-to-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>

85 Aaron O'Neill, "Georgia: National Debt from 2015 to 2025 (In Billion U.S. Dollars)," Statista, 1 April 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/531589/national-debt-of-georgia/>

86 Agenda.ge, "Georgia's Foreign Debt Increased by 6.1 Bln GEL, Domestic Debt by 1.8 Bln GEL," 9 June 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1798>

87 Knoema, "National Bank of Georgia," n.d., <https://knoema.com/atlas/sources/NBG>

88 Givi Adeishvili, "The Rise and Rise of the Georgian Banking Sector," *Emerging Europe*, 20 March 2018, <https://emerging-europe.com/georgia-2017/the-rise-and-rise-of-the-georgian-banking-sector/>

89 Agenda.ge, "Georgian Central Bank Relaxes Monetary Policy, Cuts Refinancing Rate to 8%," 5 Aug 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2458>

90 Margarita Antidze, "Georgia's Central Bank to Tighten Monetary Policy until Prices Stabilize: Central Bank Chief," *Reuters*, 19 September 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-c-bank/georgias-central-bank-to-tighten-monetary-policy-until-prices-stabilize-central-bank-chief-idUSKBN1W41M8>

91 International Monetary Fund, "Policy Responses to COVID-19," 20 March 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

92 Yaroslava Babych et al., "COVID-19 | The Case of Georgia," *Free Network*, 21 May 2020, <https://freepolicybriefs.org/2020/05/21/covid-19-georgia-case/>

93 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

Georgia's banking system is considered well capitalized and trustworthy. The system is made up of 15 commercial banks and some 75 microfinance organizations. There is a significant concentration at the top, with the two biggest banks accounting for over 70% of assets. Foreign capital makes up 80% of the sector's total assets. The high number of microfinance organizations was helpful for the country's transition to a market economy, but it is expected to diminish as the sector becomes more tightly regulated.^{94, 95, 96, 97} In 2019 the two co-founders of TBC Bank, one of the country's two biggest banks, were charged with laundering over USD 16 million in a sprawling scandal that pitted the ruling party against its detractors and involved lucrative seaport and transportation construction projects.^{98, 99, 100}

Finance

In 2019, foreign direct investment (FDI) into Georgia reached USD 1.3 billion, an amount similar to 2018. The country's total FDI stock in 2019 was USD 19 billion, some 37% of GDP. FDI is defined as investment across borders in which an investor from one economy significantly controls or influences a business enterprise in another economy. The primary recipients of FDI in Georgia are extractive industries, trade, finance, and renewable energy. Their biggest investor is Azerbaijan, primarily due to the two countries' shared oil and gas pipelines. Significant investments also come from Cyprus and Luxembourg. Due to its geographic location and free trade agreements with Europe, Georgia is seen by many Asian countries as a gateway to the European market. Tax and legislative advantages and a liberalized economy make Georgia attractive to foreign investors. According to the World Bank's 2020 Doing Business Report, Georgia ranks as the seventh-easiest place in the world to do business.^{101, 102, 103, 104}

- 94 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 95 OECD iLibrary, "Access to Green Finance for SMEs in Georgia: Annex A. Georgia's Banking Sector," 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/6a9277a0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/6a9277a0-en>
- 96 Givi Adeishvili, "The Rise and Rise of the Georgian Banking Sector," Emerging Europe, 20 March 2018, <https://emerging-europe.com/georgia-2017/the-rise-and-rise-of-the-georgian-banking-sector/>
- 97 Slava Boiarkina, "Georgian Banks: A Detailed Overview and Comparison of the Top 5 Banks in Georgia by Terms of Service," GEOLN, 21 January 2020, <https://geoln.com/invest-in-georgia/georgian-banks-rating>
- 98 Margarita Antidze, "Georgia's Prosecutors Charge TBC Group's Chairman with Money Laundering," Reuters, 24 July 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tbc-bank-probe/georgias-prosecutors-charge-tbc-groups-chairman-with-money-laundering-idUSKCN1UJ2KP>
- 99 Transparency International Georgia, "History of the Investigations Launched against the Founders of TBC Bank and the Anaklia Port—Updated," Transparency International, 27 May 2020, <https://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/history-investigations-launched-against-founders-tbc-bank-and-anaklia-port-updated>
- 100 Dominik Istrate, "Founders of Georgia's TBC Bank Step Down in Wake of Money Laundering Charges," Emerging Europe, 25 July 2019, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/founders-of-georgias-tbc-bank-step-down-in-wake-of-money-laundering-charges/>
- 101 Cornell Law School, Legal Information Institute, "Foreign Direct Investment," n.d., https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/foreign_direct_investment
- 102 Dong Yan, "China's Strategy in the Caucasus," Eurasianet, 5 April 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/chinas-strategy-caucasus>
- 103 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 104 OECD iLibrary, "Access to Green Finance for SMEs in Georgia: Chapter 3. Georgia's Sustainable Infrastructure Investments," 2019, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c9c594ac-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/c9c594ac-en>

Standard of Living

Georgia ranked 61 out of 189 countries on the 2020 UN Human Development Index, which measures a country's standard of living based on key dimensions. Georgia spends about 7% of its GDP on health expenditures, but over half of the money spent on health per person comes out of patients' pockets. Life expectancy at birth is 77.25 years, 81.52 years for females and 73.18 years for males.^{105, 106, 107}

The infant mortality rate is 15.1 deaths per 1,000 live births; the maternal mortality rate is 25 deaths per 100,000 live births. While the infant mortality rate has been decreasing in recent years, it is still higher than regional averages. Since 2017 Georgia has made concerted efforts to improve maternal and newborn health and perinatal care standards.^{108, 109}

Major causes of death are primarily noncommunicable diseases, including ischemic heart disease, stroke, hypertensive heart disease, lung cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. The significant risk factors that drive most death and disability are high blood pressure, dietary risks, tobacco, high fasting plasma glucose, and high body-mass index. The incidence of tuberculosis, 80 per 100,000 people, has decreased in recent years but remains higher than the regional average. Incidences of HIV/AIDS have been on the rise since 2000.^{110, 111, 112}

About 20% of Georgia's population lives below the poverty line. Over 11% of children under 5 suffer from malnutrition. In 2019 the average monthly income for a Georgian household was USD 368. Many households are deeply in debt, and over 70% of Georgians borrow money to meet basic needs. Most of the country's poor live in rural areas, and the lack of employment alternatives to subsistence agriculture is seen as a major obstacle to improved living standards. Nevertheless, Georgia has earned praise for improving the citizens' living standards in recent years, with the poverty rate being reduced by half between 2007 and 2019.^{113, 114, 115, 116}

105 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

106 United Nations Development Programme, "Human Development Index (HDI) Ranking," n.d., <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>

107 IHME, "Georgia," 2019, <http://www.healthdata.org/georgia>

108 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

109 World Health Organization Europe, "Georgia: Profile of Health and Well-being," 2017, https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/351731/20170818-Georgia-Profile-of-Health_EN.pdf

110 IHME, "Georgia," 2019, <http://www.healthdata.org/georgia>

111 World Health Organization Europe, "Georgia: Profile of Health and Well-being," 2017, https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/351731/20170818-Georgia-Profile-of-Health_EN.pdf

112 United Nations Development Programme, "Georgia," n.d., <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/GEO>

113 McKenzie Hamby, "Top 10 Facts about Poverty in Georgia," Borgen Project, 23 September 2018, <https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-poverty-in-georgia/>

114 World Bank, "Georgia: Overview: Country Context," 5 April 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>

115 Agenda.ge, "2019 Data: 19.5% Of Georgia's Population under Absolute Poverty Line," 29 May 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1685>

116 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>

Employment

Pre-pandemic figures for Georgia's unemployment rate vary, ranging from 11.8% to 14.4% out of a total labor force of nearly two million. Although considered largely successful, Georgia's liberalizing post-independence economic reforms have failed to significantly reduce unemployment or create meaningful material improvements for economically battered rural residents.^{117, 118, 119} Observers also point to the government's manipulation of definitions in its labor statistics to make the employment rate appear higher than it is. For example, all Georgians who own land are considered self-employed, regardless of whether they have the ability or resources to farm the land or otherwise benefit from it. The self-employed compose nearly 60% of those the government considers employed. After the strict COVID-19 measures enacted at the end of 2020, the unemployment rate climbed to 20.4%.^{120, 121, 122, 123}

In 2006, Georgia's newly installed reformist government abolished the country's labor inspectorate, responsible for setting and enforcing labor safety regulations, in an effort to deregulate the labor market and attract badly needed international investment. After the move, workplace deaths increased by 74%, particularly in the mining and construction sectors. The government also weakened other worker protections, thereby allowing employers to draw up exploitative work contracts, impose onerous production quotas, demand long working shifts, withhold overtime pay, easily fire employees, and reduce benefits and pensions. After coming to power, the Georgian Dream party reintroduced some worker protections and reinstated the labor inspectorate in 2015. Nevertheless, labor regulations remain below international standards and tragic workplace accidents continue.^{124, 125, 126}

Starting in the 2010s, Georgians stepped up opposition to unsafe and precarious working conditions. Numerous protests and strikes have been held across a broad range of economic activities, including steel mills, processing plants, seaports, coal mines, mass transit services, supermarket chains, and bookstores. The protestors seek to draw attention to low wages, breaches of contracts, and substandard work environments. Another common refrain is a demand for more government regulation of the labor market. Georgia's most significant labor organization, the Georgian Trade Unions Confederation, contains 21 trade unions representing 150,000 members.^{127, 128, 129, 130}

- 117 Aaron O'Neill, "Georgia: Unemployment Rate from 1999 to 2020," Statista, 1 April 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/441436/unemployment-rate-in-georgia/>
- 118 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 119 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>
- 120 *Financial*, "Does Georgia Have One of the Largest Shadow Economies in the World?" 12 March 2018, <https://www.finchannel.com/opinion/72052-does-georgia-have-one-of-the-largest-shadow-economies-in-the-world>
- 121 Olga Pinchuk, "Rustavi, Georgia: History of a Mono-town," Open Democracy, 6 June 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rustavi-georgia-monotown-history/>
- 122 Sopiko Japaridze, "Georgian Land, Georgian Freedom," Open Democracy, 21 September 2017, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/georgian-land-georgian-freedom/>
- 123 Nordea, "Georgia: Economic and Political Overview," March 2021, <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/georgia/economical-context>
- 124 Human Rights Watch, " 'No Year without Deaths': A Decade of Deregulation Puts Georgian Miners at Risk," 22 August 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/08/22/no-year-without-deaths/decade-deregulation-puts-georgian-miners-risk>
- 125 Olga Pinchuk, "Rustavi, Georgia: History of a Mono-town," Open Democracy, 6 June 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rustavi-georgia-monotown-history/>
- 126 Inge Snip, "Georgia: Retail Workers' Protests Give Labor Movement Momentum," Eurasianet, 24 February 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-retail-workers-protests-give-labor-movement-momentum>
- 127 Georgia Trade Unions Confederation, "History," 9 December 2020, <http://gtuc.ge/en/%e1%83%a9%e1%83%95%e1%83%94%e1%83%9c%e1%83%a1-%e1%83%a8%e1%83%94%e1%83%a1%e1%83%90%e1%83%ae%e1%83%94%e1%83%91/%e1%83%98%e1%83%a1%e1%83%a2%e1%83%9d%e1%83%a0%e1%83%98%e1%83%90/>
- 128 Olga Pinchuk, "Rustavi, Georgia: History of a Mono-town," Open Democracy, 6 June 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rustavi-georgia-monotown-history/>
- 129 Inge Snip, "Georgia: Retail Workers' Protests Give Labor Movement Momentum," Eurasianet, 24 February 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/georgia-retail-workers-protests-give-labor-movement-momentum>
- 130 Agenda.ge, "Labour Unions in Georgia Demand Better Working Conditions," 1 May 2019, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/1166>

Outlook

In 2020, after initial success containing the virus, Georgia became one of the 20 hardest-hit countries in the COVID-19 pandemic; the GDP shrank by about 5%. The government enacted a timely social and capital spending package to counteract the effects of the virus. Although the measures led to increased debt and a higher deficit, the economy is expected to recover the 5% loss in 2021. For long-term economic development, Georgia must rely on continued infrastructure development, support for entrepreneurs, business transparency, and strong professional education. The main areas for growth are tourism, transportation, agriculture, and hydropower. Continued reforms to ensure compliance with trade agreements with Europe indicate closer and more beneficial future economic ties between Georgia and the West.^{131, 132, 133}

131 Nordea, "Georgia: Economic and Political Overview," March 2021, <https://www.nordeatrade.com/en/explore-new-market/georgia/economical-context>

132 World Bank, "Georgia: Overview: Country Context," 5 April 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>

133 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

Georgia in Perspective

Economy Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. The percentage of Georgia's workforce involved in agriculture is just under 15%. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Forests cover more than 40% of Georgia's territory. ☐ True ☐ False
3. The industry sector collapsed with the fall of the Soviet Union and has not recovered. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Georgia ranks a modest 80th globally for its proven hydrocarbon reserves. ☐ True ☐ False
5. The services sector accounts for the largest portion of Georgia's GDP. ☐ True ☐ False

Georgia in Perspective

Economy Assessment Answers

1. False:
Agriculture makes up only 8.2% of Georgia's GDP but utilizes 55.6% of the labor force. The main agricultural products are milk, grapes, corn, potatoes, wheat, tomatoes, citrus fruits, barley, and apples.
2. True:
Georgia's forests are found primarily in the rugged, mountainous regions far from the densely populated areas. Deforestation has increased since independence.
3. False:
Industry weathered the transition to independence and now constitutes 23.7% of Georgia's GDP and employs 8.9% of the labor force. Steel, machine tools, electrical appliances, mining, chemicals, and wood products are the primary industries.
4. True:
Georgia uses approximately 27,000 barrels per day of refined petroleum products and 2.294 billion cu m (81 billion cu ft) of natural gas. Its proven hydrocarbon reserves consist of 35 million barrels of crude oil and 8.495 billion cu m (299 billion cu ft) of natural gas.
5. True:
The services sector makes up 67.9% of GDP and employs 35.5% of the workforce. The sector is driven by tourism, hotels, restaurants, domestic trade, financial services, transport, and telecommunications.

Chapter 4 | Society



Georgian folklore dancers in Batumi
Flickr / Tomislav Medak

Introduction

Because Georgia is situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgian society reflects varied influences on its culture. Protective of their unique heritage, Georgians have been highly selective about which influences they have adopted and which they have rejected. They have withstood centuries of foreign domination but managed to retain a vibrant and distinctive culture. The historically shifting borders and rulers have led to the country being the home of several ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities, some of whom are at odds with the Georgian majority. As Georgia begins to flourish after a difficult post-independence period, it must deal with persistent patriarchal attitudes while sharing its rich cultural traditions with the rest of the world.^{1, 2, 3}

- 1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," World Factbook, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- 2 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>
- 3 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," Encyclopædia Britannica, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

Ethnic Groups

Georgia's mountainous terrain has allowed for the preservation of multiple ethnic identities. Roughly 86% of the population is ethnically Georgian, while the remainder includes more than 80 other ethnicities.^{4, 5}

Georgia's ethnic minorities include Azeri, Armenians, Russians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Yazidis, Ukrainians, Kists, and Greeks. Azeris are the largest minority ethnic group, at 6.2% of the population. Armenians represent a small but economically significant ethnic group. Making up about 3.9% of the overall population, they reside primarily in the Samtskhe-Javakheti administrative region in the major cities. Abkhazians inhabit the autonomous region of Abkhazia in the country's northwest, where they make up about half of the population. The Ossetians are the majority population in the breakaway region of South Ossetia. They are an Indo-Iranian people who view their identity as separate from the Georgian state. The Ajarians of the Ajaria autonomous region in Georgia's southwest are mainly Muslim, as are the Abkhazians and Ossetians; however, the Ajarians are ethnically Georgian.^{6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14}

Several ethnic subgroups are prominent in some of the country's rural areas. Russians and early Soviets classified Georgia's Mingrelian population as distinct from Georgians, but since the 1930s, Mingrelians have been recognized as ethnically Georgian.¹⁵ Mingrelians speak a Caucasian language related to Georgian, but because there are substantial differences in languages, speakers of one language cannot understand the other language speakers.^{16, 17} Mingrelians occupy much of the coastal lowlands in western Georgia, many in rural settlements.^{18, 19}

The Svans are another Georgian ethnic subgroup that, like the Mingrelians, have been recognized as Georgian since the 1930s.²⁰ The Svan language, related to Georgian and Mingrelian, is oral and not written.²¹ Svans now self-identify as Georgian. They live almost entirely in the mountainous territory of Svaneti, which borders Abkhazia to the west and Russia to the north.²²

4 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999), 30.

5 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

6 Carlos Quiles Casas, *A Grammar of Modern Indo-European: Language and Culture, Writing System and Phonology, Morphology, Syntax* (Badajoz: DÑGHÜ, 2007), 69.

7 Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 323–27.

8 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

9 Central Intelligence Agency, "Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region," Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, Republic of Georgia Maps (Austin: University of Texas, 1995), map, <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/ethnocaucasus.jpg>

10 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 1999), 31.

11 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 56–58.

12 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

13 Ronald Grigor Suny et al., "Georgia," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 25 February 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Georgia>

14 Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization, "Abkhazia," 16 February 2015, <https://unpo.org/members/7854>

15 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 54.

16 Everyculture, "Mingrelians—Orientation," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Orientation.html>

17 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 240.

18 Everyculture, "Mingrelians—Settlements," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Mingrelians-Settlements.html>

19 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 240.

20 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 54.

21 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus*, (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 185.

22 Everyculture, "Svans—Orientation," n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Russia-Eurasia-China/Svans-Orientation.html>

Languages

Georgian

Georgian is the most prevalent of the South Caucasian languages and is not part of any major European or Asian language groups.²³ It emerged as a written language in the fourth century CE, primarily as a means to convert Georgians to Christianity. Georgian has historically been written in a wide array of different scripts. Today it is almost exclusively rendered in the Mkhedruli (military) script, which uses 38 letters.²⁴ Numerous dialects are spoken both within and outside Georgia. The dialect spoken predominantly in and around Tbilisi is considered the standard and used for instruction and in media.²⁵

Azeri

Azeri is a Turkic language spoken in various parts of Southwest Asia, especially in Azerbaijan. It was commonly spoken in much of Transcaucasia during the Persian domination of the area. In Georgia, Azeris speak a North Azeri variant.²⁶ The language has many dialects, with the Borçali dialect predominating in Georgia.²⁷

Armenian

Armenian is an Indo-European language with its unique script and is the official language of Armenia. Armenians in Georgia speak the Eastern variant of the language.²⁸ Armenia is most prevalent in Tbilisi or the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of southern Georgia.²⁹

Abkhaz

The Abkhaz language belongs to the Northwest Caucasian languages. It has no relationship to Georgian; instead, it is closely related to the languages of other Caucasian peoples living in southern Russia.³⁰ Although Abkhaz was previously written in the Georgian Mkhedruli script, Abkhazians have been using the Cyrillic alphabet since they declared independence.³¹

Ossetic

An Indo-Iranian language spoken in the Northern and Southern Caucasus, Ossetic has been significantly influenced by the surrounding unrelated languages, most recently Russian.³² The language is divided into two dialects, with the eastern dialect prevailing among Georgia's South Ossetians. A modified Cyrillic script is used to write Ossetic.³³

23 Michael Spilling and Winnie Wong, *Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2009), 87.

24 Richard Gillam, *Unicode Demystified: A Practical Programmer's Guide to the Encoding Standard* (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 2003), 252–253.

25 Glanville Price, *Encyclopedia of the Languages of Europe* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 76–77.

26 Neil Bermel, *Linguistic Authority, Language Ideology, and Metaphor: The Czech Orthography Wars* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007), 14–15.

27 Said Ethem, "The Turks of Borçali in Georgia: Ethnic Identity in Borderland" (master's thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2010), <http://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12611650/index.pdf>

28 Jasmine Dum-Tragut, *Armenian: Modern Eastern Armenian* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2009), xiii.

29 Central Intelligence Agency, "Ethnolinguistic Groups in the Caucasus Region," Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, Republic of Georgia Maps (Austin: University of Texas, 1995), map, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/ethnocaucasus.jpg>

30 James Minahan, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups Around the World, Volume I, A–C* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 8.

31 Mikhail S. Blinnikov, *A Geography of Russia and Its Neighbors* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 197.

32 Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies, "Iranian Languages: Ossetic Language," n.d., <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Languages/ossetic.htm>

33 Alan S. Kaye and Peter T. Daniels, *Phonologies of Asia and Africa: (including the Caucasus)* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 707–708.

Russian

Russian was the official language while Georgia was governed by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Although Georgian remained the first language of most ethnic Georgians, Russian did replace some of the minority languages and today remains the official language of communication in Abkhazia.^{34, 35} In Abkhazia, and to a lesser extent South Ossetia, most of the media is in Russian. The steady stream of Russian immigrants after Russia's recognition of Abkhazian independence in 2008 has contributed to the use of Russian.³⁶ In South Ossetian and Abkhazian schools, many courses are taught in Russian.³⁷

Religion

Georgian Orthodox Church

The Georgian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous (independent) branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church has more than a dozen independent arms, the most wellknown being the Russian and Greek churches. Like other Eastern churches that split from western Christianity in the 11th century, the Georgian church does not recognize the Catholic pope's authority. Its religious practice includes rituals such as burning incense and praying before important icons. Georgian is typically the language of church services.^{38, 39, 40}

According to tradition, Christianity was brought to Georgia by a woman known as Saint Nino, who gained the queen of Kartli's confidence by curing her of an unknown illness. The queen's husband converted after he was enshrouded with darkness while hunting and prayed to the Christian God for deliverance.⁴¹ As the religion spread, it replaced Greek paganism in the west of the country and Persian Zoroastrianism in the east.⁴² The local church quickly became autonomous and today remains one of the oldest Christian denominations in the world.⁴³

The Georgian Cross, identified by its downward-angled arms, is a prominent national icon. Legend has it that this unusual shape comes from Saint Nino who, when entering Georgia for the first time, fashioned a cross using vine branches and strands of her hair. Icons of Georgia's patron saint, Saint George, are also common. Saint George, a third-century CE martyred Roman soldier, is typically depicted clad in armor, slaying a dragon.^{44, 45}

The Georgian Orthodox Church's prominence has not shielded it from scandal and controversy. Its significant wealth, including extensive real estate holdings, is readily apparent, and critics have accused it of opaque business dealings and gross corruption. The church's leadership appears divided over the impending succession of Patriarch Ilia II, its long-serving leader and perhaps the most respected public figure in the country. In 2017 a senior priest

34 Hooman Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 237.

35 Tom Trier, Hedvig Lohm, and David Szakonyi, *Under Siege: Inter-Ethnic Relations in Abkhazia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 42.

36 Dorota Gierczyk, *The Mysteries of the Caucasus* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp, 2010), 19.

37 Revaz Givievich Gachechiladze, *The New Georgia: Space, Society, Politics* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 99.

38 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

39 John Meyendorff, "Eastern Orthodoxy," Encyclopædia Britannica, 23 March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy>

40 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 72–73.

41 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 71–72.

42 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 28.

43 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

44 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 73, 75.

45 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Georgian Orthodox Church," 22 January 2015, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Georgian-Orthodox-church>

was sentenced to nine years in prison over a murky plot, allegedly involving high-ranking political and church figures, to assassinate the patriarch's secretary. In 2019, an archbishop lost his position in the wake of a pedophilia scandal.^{46, 47, 48, 49, 50}

Yet the church retains its prestige and influence. Throughout Georgia's tumultuous post-independence history, warring political factions have repeatedly turned to Patriarch Ilia for mediation and sought the church's blessing. In April 2020, the church defied a national state of emergency and held nationwide Easter church services despite government directives for citizens to remain at home to prevent the spread of COVID-19.^{51, 52, 53}

Russian Orthodox Church

Christianity arrived in Russia much later than Georgia, but the Russian branch grew substantially as the Russian empire's might increased.⁵⁴ Many viewed Russia as a "Third Rome" and its leaders as defenders of the faith after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The Russian Orthodox Church remains the largest of all the Eastern churches, with adherents throughout the former Russian Empire. About 10% of Georgians are Russian Orthodox.^{55, 56, 57}

Armenian Apostolic Church

The Armenian Apostolic Church was founded at the beginning of the fourth century. This church split from neighboring Eastern Orthodox groups in the sixth century.⁵⁸ Apostolic Armenians compose about 2.9% of Georgia's population and are the largest such group outside of Armenia. Their churches are modestly decorated and often have ostrich eggs suspended from the ceiling to signify hope and resurrection.^{59, 60}

- 46 Mike Eckel et al., "Attempted Murder, Alleged Sodomy, Poison Pills: A Plague of Scandals Consumes Georgia's Orthodox Church," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 5 November 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgian-orthodox-church-scandal-sodomy-poison/30254591.html>
- 47 RFE/RL's Georgian Service, "Georgian Archpriest Convicted of Planning to Poison Patriarch's Aide," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 5 September 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-priest-convicted-planning-kill-patriarch-secretary/28717886.html>
- 48 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>
- 49 OC Media, "New Allegations against Georgian Orthodox Church as Archbishop Accused of Sexual Assault," 6 November 2019, <https://oc-media.org/new-allegations-against-georgian-orthodox-church-as-archbishop-accused-of-sexual-assault/>
- 50 Dustin Gilbreath and CRRC, "Analysis: Church Scandals Have Hurt Trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church," OC Media, 3 August 2020, <https://oc-media.org/features/analysis-church-scandals-have-hurt-trust-in-the-georgian-orthodox-church/>
- 51 Wojciech Górecki, "The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch. The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics," Centre for Eastern Studies, 18 May 2020, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2020-05-18/autumn-georgian-patriarch-role-orthodox-church-georgia-and>
- 52 Giorgi Lomsadze, "Georgia's Nightmare before Easter," Eurasianet, 16 April 2020, <https://eurasianet.org/georgias-nightmare-before-easter>
- 53 Neil Hunter, "Georgia's Defiant Orthodox Church Will Host Easter Worshipers despite Lockdown," CNN, 17 April 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/17/europe/georgia-orthodox-easter-intl/index.html>
- 54 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Russian Orthodox Church," 26 February 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Orthodox-Church>
- 55 Encyclopedia.com, "Third Rome," 8 November 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/christianity/christianity-general/third-rome>
- 56 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 75.
- 57 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Russian Orthodox Church," 26 February 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Orthodox-Church>
- 58 Encyclopædia Britannica, "Armenian Apostolic Church," 17 June 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Armenian-Apostolic-Church>
- 59 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 76.
- 60 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

Islam

Many of Georgia's neighbors—including Turkey, Azerbaijan, and the Caucasus region of Russia—are predominantly Muslim. Georgia, too, has its Muslim communities, making up about 10.7% of the population. The minority populations of Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the autonomous republic of Ajaria, are largely Muslim, as is Georgia's Azeri population. While most of the country's Muslims follow the dominant Sunni sect, the Azeris are primarily Shia.^{61, 62}

Other religions

Georgia has small populations of Protestant Christians and Roman Catholics. Jehovah's Witnesses and other congregations considered nontraditional have been the target of persecution and attacks. For centuries, the country had a small Jewish community, although much of that population has migrated to Israel in recent decades.^{63, 64, 65, 66}

Cuisine

The Georgian diet relies heavily on vegetables and a wide variety of herbs. The main vegetables are beans, cucumbers, cabbage, and eggplant. Beef, lamb, chicken, and pork—luxuries once reserved for feast days—are now commonly eaten. Favorite fruits include melons, apples, grapes, figs, pears, cherries, tomatoes, and peaches. Walnuts are used extensively, and a yogurt called *matsoni* often accompanies meals.^{67, 68}

The culinary traditions in the eastern and western parts of Georgia reflect the historical trends of conquest. The westerly region is characterized by Turkish and Mediterranean culinary influences and a propensity for vegetarian cuisine. *Lobio*, for example, is a dish made of various kinds of beans seasoned with herbs and spices.⁶⁹ Foods in the western part of Georgia also tend to be spicy, seasoned with hot peppers, coriander, tarragon and dried marigold petals.⁷⁰

Meals prepared in the eastern part of the country tend to be heavier and more meat-oriented (typically lamb and chicken), reflecting Persian influence. Wheat bread is preferred over cornbread; sheep cheese is preferred over cheese made from cow's milk.⁷¹

Georgian shish kebab, known as *mtsvadi*, is the most common grilled food in the country. Lamb, beef, or pork is skewered and grilled with vegetables; the meat may be grilled fresh or after marinating overnight. *Satsivi* is a dish of fried turkey or chicken in a walnut sauce. Other favorite foods include *khachapuri*, cheese enveloped in a wheat dough, and *churchkhela*, chestnuts, walnuts, or almonds with a grape syrup coating.^{72, 73}

61 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 41.

62 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

63 Tim Burford, *Georgia with Armenia: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Guilford, CT: The Globe Pequot Press Inc, 2002), 45.

64 Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State, "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Georgia," 2019, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/georgia/>

65 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 77.

66 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 13 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

67 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 36.

68 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

69 Peter Nasmyth, *Georgia: In the Mountains of Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 103.

70 George Tarkham-Mouravi, "Culture of Georgia," *Everyculture.com*, n.d., <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Georgia.html>

71 Simon Richmond, et al., *Russia & Belarus* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet, 2003), 109.

72 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 84.

73 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

Khinkali dumplings are popular throughout Georgia; they are made with seasoned meat or cheese encased in tender dough. The filling is wrapped together into a topknot. When eaten, the dumpling is held by the topknot, and the knot itself is not consumed. The dumpling's quality is based on flavor and the number of pleats in the dough.⁷⁴

Wine is an essential element of Georgia's dining culture. The millennia-old viticulture and winemaking tradition is a significant point of pride for Georgians. Traditional winemaking involves fermenting the wine for up to several years in large jars called *kvevri* that are buried underground or in small artificial hills (*marani*). Georgian wines are a much-desired commodity among enthusiasts, especially in the former Soviet republics. They continue to play a significant role in Georgian social and domestic foodways. More potent local alcoholic drinks include *chacha*, frequently referred to as wine vodka and often homemade. It boasts an alcohol content of nearly 50%.^{75, 76}

Many aspects of Georgian cuisine bear a striking resemblance to Northern India, an interesting foreign influence whose origin is not yet fully understood. Clay ovens, cast-iron skillets, curry spice blends, and some culinary terms are similar between the two regions.⁷⁷

Traditional Dress

Georgians wear traditional clothing on holidays, weddings, and other special or cultural occasions. The *cherkeska* is a traditional men's tunic that reaches the knees and is paired with high, soft leather boots. Cylindrical cases for ammunition cartridges are sewn into both sides of the tunic's chest. Tunics are frequently accented with a *khanjali kindjal*, a double-edged dagger that historically served as a secondary weapon for Georgian warriors. Woolen hats complete the ensemble. Traditional dress for women comes in a variety of colors. Women's tunics are ornately decorated with chains and buckles of precious metals and worn with a headscarf.^{78, 79, 80, 81}

Everyday clothing is highly westernized and similar to the clothing worn in Russia and other former Soviet republics. Trousers and button-down shirts are standard, as are business suits. In rural areas and among older people, colors tend to be more muted and conservative than in urban areas. High-quality clothes that look sharp are prized. Jeans are commonly worn.^{82, 83, 84}

74 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 114.

75 Weissmann Travel Reports, *Weissmann Travel Planner for Western and Eastern Europe, 1994–1995* (Austin, TX: Weissmann Travel Reports, 1994), 79.

76 Patrick E. McGovern, "Georgia as Homeland of Winemaking and Viticulture," in Ori Z. Soltes, *National Treasures of Georgia* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1999), 58–59.

77 Darra Goldstein, *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 36.

78 Michael Spilling and Winnie Wong, *Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2009), 67.

79 Edward Strachan and Roy Bolton, *Russia & Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Sphinx Books, 2008), 178.

80 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 59.

81 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

82 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999).

83 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2004).

84 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

Gender Issues

Georgian society is patriarchal, with defined gender roles for women and men. Compared to attitudes in other European and Western countries, Georgians do not consider gender equality to be a significant issue. Men view cooking and cleaning as women's work and will seldom help with such chores. Women are also primarily responsible for the raising of children. Female labor participation—at about 58%—is about average for the region and slightly above that of Eastern European countries. Women are most often employed in education, medicine, science, media, or agriculture.^{85, 86} In 2010 the Georgian government passed a law prohibiting gender-related discrimination and establishing gender equality provisions within the workplace.^{87, 88}

Female-led households accounted for approximately 26% of Georgian households in 2015. Even with anti-poverty measures implemented by the government, these homes fared worse than households led by males. Poverty in male-led households decreased from roughly 35% to 20%, while in female-led households, the decline was from 38% to 24%. This pattern is present in both urban and rural areas.⁸⁹ Inheritance rights are also more vulnerable for women because of discrimination resulting from the country's patrilineal kinship system. For example, if a woman becomes a widow, she typically will move in with her deceased spouse's family and is expected to forego any inheritance rights.⁹⁰

Domestic violence is a significant concern in Georgian households; it is estimated that one in seven Georgian women experience domestic violence in their homes. Progress toward addressing violence against women has been hindered by social attitudes, distrust of the justice system, and a persistent culture of silence.^{91, 92, 93} The government has established that acting on gender prejudices while committing a crime is an aggravating factor, but this stipulation is rarely enforced. While sexual assault is illegal in Georgia, the law does not explicitly address spousal rape.^{94, 95}

Underage marriage is a persistent issue in Georgian society. In 2019, 14% of the adult female population consisted of Georgians married under the age of 18, a statistic that has remained consistent in recent years. Georgia's child-marriage rates are the highest in the region and just below the worldwide average.⁹⁶ The highest concentration of underage marriages occurs in rural areas and among ethnic minorities.⁹⁷

85 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <https://online.culturegrams.com/>

86 Michael Spilling and Winnie Wong, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 67.

87 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, "Georgia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," 11 March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>

88 Asian Development Bank, "Georgia: Country Gender Assessment," December 2018, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/479186/georgia-country-gender-assessment.pdf>

89 World Bank, "Georgia: From Reformer to Performer: A Systematic Country Diagnostic," 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/496731525097717444/pdf/GEO-SCD-04-24-04272018.pdf>

90 OECD, "Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Report for Eurasia: Chapter 3. Discrimination in the Family," n.d., <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/60bb29a4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/60bb29a4-en>

91 CultureGrams, "Georgia," 2020, <http://online.culturegrams.com/index.php>

92 UN Women Georgia, "One in Seven in Georgia Experiences Domestic Violence, New National Study Finds," 6 March 2018, <https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/03/one-in-seven-women-in-georgia-experiences-domestic-violence-new-national-study-finds>

93 Council of Europe Office in Georgia, "Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in Georgia," 30 September 2019, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence-in-georgia>

94 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, "Georgia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," 11 March 2020, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/georgia/>

95 Asian Development Bank, "Georgia: Country Gender Assessment," December 2018, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/479186/georgia-country-gender-assessment.pdf>

96 OECD, "Social Institutions and Gender Index, SIGI 2019 Report for Eurasia: Chapter 3. Discrimination in the Family," n.d., <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/60bb29a4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/60bb29a4-en>

97 Caucasus Research Resource Center, "Policy Bulletin: Child Marriage in Georgia: Economic and Educational Consequences," January 2019, http://crrc.ge/uploads/tinyMCE/documents/PolicyBriefs/Early_Marriage_Policy_Brief.pdf

Georgia's LGBT community faces adversity in the country's conservative society. In 2020, Georgia ranked 30th among 49 European countries for protecting against LGBT discrimination. While discrimination against sexual orientation is illegal, LGBT people are usually met with staunch rejection from family members and intense opposition from society. They are often insulted with the term "pederast" and portrayed as a threat to the national identity. Anti-LGBT efforts, sometimes violent, are led by the Georgian Orthodox Church and the far-right Georgian March party. In recent years, pro-LGBT activists, based primarily in Tbilisi, have seen some progress, with the emergence of several gay-friendly nightclubs and the screening of a movie about a gay relationship. In 2019, organizers braved threats of violence to hold a small pride parade outside of the interior ministry.^{98, 99, 100, 101}

Arts

Folk Music and Dance

Georgia is known for its unique folk music. The traditional style is primarily vocal but often includes instrumental accompaniment, especially by guitar or drum. Song motifs tend to be distinctly regional and often are about agricultural, spiritual, or occupational topics.¹⁰² The Georgian government has encouraged folk arts as a means of promoting Georgian nationalism. The same approach has also been used by the breakaway regions, which have promoted their regional arts to represent their separate historical and cultural heritages.¹⁰³

Literature

Shota Rustaveli's 13th century chivalric poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* is regarded as Georgia's greatest example of poetry and a source of philosophical lessons of virtue and chivalry. The work came at the height of Georgia's medieval golden age, a time when many epics and courtly romances were written. The poem's advice that "Everything you give away remains yours and everything you keep is lost forever" is part of the Georgian people's national identity, a sentiment expressed through traditional hospitality and kindness.^{104, 105, 106}

The early 20th century saw the emergence of Georgia's most significant literary genius, Vazha-Pshavela (pseudonym of Luka Razikashvili). His narrative poems *Host and Guest* and *The Snake Eater* portrayed human tragedy through the lens of Caucasian folk myth and were influential on a generation of younger writers. The late Soviet era produced two important novelists, Chabua Amirejibi and Otar Chiladze, whose literary activity continued after independence. The works of contemporary writers, such as the novelist Aka Morchiladze (pseudonym of Giorgi Akhvediani) and the playwright Lasha Bughadze, reflect Georgian literature's increasing affinity with English and American influences.¹⁰⁷

98 Andrew Roth, "Georgia Prepares for First LGBT Pride amid Threats of Violence," Guardian, 16 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/16/georgia-prepares-for-first-lgbt-pride-tbilisi-amid-threats-of-violence>

99 Rayhan Demytrie, "LGBT Rights: The Film about Gay Love Shaking up Georgia," BBC News, 23 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50821544>

100 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Small LGBT Pride Rally Held in Tbilisi," 8 July 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-s-gay-pride-parade-cancelled-after-threats-received/30043630.html>

101 Agenda.ge, "ILGA-Europe: Georgia Ranks 30th among 49 Countries in Terms of Protecting LGBT People," 15 May 2020, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1526>

102 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 123–124.

103 Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country* (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 85–88.

104 Zoran Pavlović and Charles F. Gritzner, *Republic of Georgia*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 57.

105 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus*, (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 19, 31–32.

106 Donald Rayfield, "Georgian Literature," Encyclopædia Britannica, 30 July 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Georgian-literature>

107 Donald Rayfield, "Georgian Literature," Encyclopædia Britannica, 30 July 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Georgian-literature>

Film

The first Georgian feature film was shot in 1912. During the Soviet era, Georgia solidified and expanded its film industry. In 1958, Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying*, a World War II love story, won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. In the present day, the 2017 film *My Happy Family*, an international coproduction by Nana Ekvimishvili and Simon Gross, won critical plaudits at the Sundance Film Festival and was distributed by Netflix. The movie focuses on a middle-aged woman who takes the unprecedented step of moving out of the apartment she shares with her extended family to live on her own, drawing attention to the disproportionate sacrifices and efforts expected of women.^{108, 109, 110}

Sports and Recreation

Soccer, rugby, basketball, and wrestling are among the most popular sports in Georgia. Like most Europeans, Georgians are especially enthusiastic about soccer. Georgia has its own nationwide league, the Georgian Football Federation, and a national team that competes internationally.^{111, 112, 113} Among the country's best-known players is Giorgi Kinkladze. Dubbed the "Maradona of the Caucasus" for his inspired dribbling skills and diminutive size, he rose to the top of the domestic soccer league in the 1990s and went on to play for major European clubs.^{114, 115}

Over the last several decades, rugby has gained in popularity, primarily because of its similarity to a traditional Georgian sport known as *lelo*. *Lelo* dates back centuries and often pitted a team of bachelors or young men against a team of married or older men.^{116, 117} Other traditional Georgian sports include *tskhemburti*, a polo-like game played on horseback, and *chidaoba*, a form of jacket wrestling. Georgian wrestling is part dance and is performed to music.^{118, 119}

The high and rugged Greater Caucasus range appeals to international and local mountaineers, trekkers, mountain bikers, and skiers.¹²⁰ In Svaneti, Georgia's northwest mountain area, mountain climbers are well regarded. Hunting is also highly esteemed.^{121, 122, 123} Playing chess is a popular non-athletic activity.¹²⁴

108 Leo Barraclough, "Country of Georgia Makes Pitch to Become Major Filming Destination," *Variety*, 9 February 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/artisans/spotlight/brighton-4-1202693167-1202693167/>

109 George Melikishvili, "Unearthing Georgia's Growing Popularity as a Filming Location," *Location Guide*, 4 May 2018, <https://www.thelocationguide.com/2018/05/unearthing-georgias-growing-popularity-as-a-filming-location/#>

110 Matt Fagerholm, "My Happy Family," *RogerEbert.com*, 4 December 2017, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/my-happy-family-2017>

111 "Georgian Football Federation," 2010, <https://www.gff.ge/en>

112 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 124.

113 National Football Teams, "Georgia," 2021, <https://www.national-football-teams.com/country/70/2021/Georgia.html>

114 Rory Smith, "The Myth of the Next Maradona," *New York Times*, 29 November 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/29/sports/soccer/diego-maradona-lionel-messi.html?action=click&module=Features&pgtype=Homepage>

115 Omar Saleem, "Unfit, Awkward and Inconsistent: The Unbridled Genius of Giorgi Kinkladze," *These Football Times*, 18 September 2018, <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2018/09/18/unfit-awkward-and-inconsistent-the-unbridled-genius-of-georgi-kinkladze/>

116 USSR '88: Yearbook (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1988), 322.

117 Victor E. Louis and Jennifer M. Louis, *Sports in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 39.

118 Margaret Kaeter, *The Caucasian Republics* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 124.

119 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 104–105.

120 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 103.

121 Roger Rosen, *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (New York: Odyssey Publishing Ltd., 1991), 188.

122 Martin F. Price, *Cooperation in the European Mountains: The Caucasus* (Cambridge: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 2000), 43–44.

123 Dirk Sijmons, et al., *Greetings from Europe: Landscape & Leisure* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2008), 126.

124 Michael Spilling, *Cultures of the World: Georgia* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999), 105.

Georgia in Perspective

Society Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Ethnic Georgians are the largest ethnic group in the country. ☐ True ☐ False
2. Abkhaz, the language of Abkhazia, is written in the Cyrillic alphabet. ☐ True ☐ False
3. The Georgian Orthodox Church is a branch of Roman Catholicism. ☐ True ☐ False
4. Traditional Georgian cuisine relies heavily on vegetables and herbs. ☐ True ☐ False
5. The cherkeska is a traditional dress for women which comes in a variety of colors. ☐ True ☐ False

Georgia in Perspective

Society Assessment Answers

1. True:
Roughly 86% of the population is ethnically Georgian, while the remainder includes more than 80 other ethnicities.
2. True:
Although Abkhaz was previously written in the Georgian Mkhedruli script, Abkhazians have been using the Cyrillic alphabet since they declared independence.
3. False:
The Georgian Orthodox Church is an autocephalous (independent) branch of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church has more than a dozen independent arms.
4. True:
The main vegetables are beans, cucumbers, cabbage, and eggplant. Beef, lamb, chicken, and pork—luxuries once reserved for feast days—are now commonly eaten.
5. False:
The cherkeska is a traditional men's tunic that reaches the knees and is paired with high, soft leather boots.

Chapter 5 | Security



Georgian soldiers and U.S. Marines board an MV-22B Osprey
U.S. Department of Defense Photo

Introduction

In its efforts to strengthen its economic and defense capabilities, Georgia has sought support from Western powers (including the United States), encouraged private investment, joined international organizations, and worked cooperatively with its South Caucasus neighbors. Oil and natural gas pipelines run through Georgia and connect the Caspian Sea reserves, primarily in Azerbaijan, with Black Sea ports in Turkey, and this makes Georgia critical to geopolitical and economic stability in the South Caucasus. The United States and its allies have a vested interest in assuring Georgia's continued progress as a democratic, Western-oriented state. They are also committed to helping Georgia address internal security conflicts and outside threats that could undermine stability throughout the region. Georgia's integration into Western institutions should help steer the region in a pro-Western direction, away from the influence of Iran or Russia.^{1, 2, 3}

1 Cory Welt, "Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 14 April 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45307.pdf>

2 International Crisis Group, "Georgia and Russia: Why and How to Save Normalisation," 26 October 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/b90-georgia-and-russia-why-and-how-save-normalisation>

3 Central Intelligence Agency, "Georgia," *World Factbook*, 30 April 2021, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>

U.S.-Georgia Relations

Georgia sees its strong relationship with the United States as a critical component in its Western aspirations and its defense against Russian belligerence. A strategic partnership signed in 2009, in the wake of Georgia's war with Russia, guides the two countries' bilateral relations. U.S. presidential administrations and members of Congress regularly express support for Georgia's territorial integrity and condemn Russia's occupation and recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgian and U.S. officials meet yearly as part of strategic partnership plenary sessions and working groups. The United States is one of Georgia's major trade partners, with vehicles leading American imports to Georgia and iron and steel being Georgia's main exports to the United States.^{4, 5}

Since independence, Georgia has been a major recipient of U.S. foreign and military aid. Aid increased in the aftermath of the 2008 war with Russia, reaching USD 1.4 billion in 2008–09, consisting primarily of humanitarian and emergency relief. Since 2017, U.S. aid has averaged USD 124 million per year. Aid has also taken the form of military assistance and training, infrastructure improvements, education and vocational training, agricultural development, and a headquarters for Georgia's national disease control center.^{6, 7}

Georgia and the United States have a close and longstanding military relationship. The United States contributes to Georgia's border and maritime security through several bilateral and regional programs. Georgia made substantial troop contributions to the U.S.-led operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The two countries' militaries have held regular joint exercises since 2011, focusing on interoperability and counterinsurgency capabilities. In 2017, Georgia purchased 400 Javelin portable anti-tank missiles from the United States for an estimated USD 75 million. The United States continues to support Georgia's aspirations to join NATO.^{8, 9}

Relations with Neighbors

Armenia

Georgia and Armenia have friendly bilateral relations, but both countries agree there is room for growth. Since independence from the Soviet Union, the two countries have pursued differing geopolitical orientations. While Georgia has forged close ties with the West and championed the principle of territorial integrity in response to the separatist movements within its borders, Armenia has remained within Russia's sphere of influence and has emphasized the principle of self-determination as central to the resolution of its territorial disputes with Azerbaijan. Samtskhe-Javakheti, a majority ethnic Armenian region in southern Georgia, is another source of tensions; the region's Armenian residents claim that Tbilisi ignores their minority rights and is not acting to improve economic development there. Cooperation between the two countries has picked up since 2018 when a reformist prime minister came to power in Armenia. Plans include boosting trade and cooperating on energy and transportation projects.¹⁰

4 Cory Welt, "Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 14 April 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45307.pdf>

5 Franziska Smolnik, "The Strategic Partnership between Georgia and the United States: Vision Wanted," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, December 2020, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2020RP15_Georgia_UnitedStates.pdf

6 Cory Welt, "Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 14 April 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45307.pdf>

7 USAID, "Georgia: Our Work," 4 March 2021, <https://www.usaid.gov/georgia/our-work>

8 Cory Welt, "Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 14 April 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R45307.pdf>

9 Alexis Mrachek, "Top Five Priorities for the U.S.–Georgian Relationship in 2020," Heritage Foundation, 31 January 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/top-five-priorities-the-us-georgian-relationship-2020>

10 Natalia Konarzewska, "Armenia Seeks Re-Energized Ties with Georgia," Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, 15 April 2020, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13614-armenia-seeks-re-energized-ties-with-georgia.html>

Azerbaijan

Georgia and Azerbaijan have a close strategic partnership, driven by the fact that together they form a crucial east-west land corridor connecting the Black and Caspian seas, and therefore Europe and Central Asia. This strategic cooperation is perhaps best embodied by the oil and gas pipelines that span the two countries, transporting hydrocarbons from east to west. Both countries are wary of Russian attempts to assert influence over the strategic corridor. The close ties have endured despite diverging post-independence political evolutions, with Azerbaijan becoming increasingly authoritarian and Georgia maintaining democratic norms. One notable point of contention between Georgia and Azerbaijan has been the David Garej monastery complex, whose location is divided between the two countries. Both claim the site as integral to their respective historical heritages, and the border running through the site has not been properly demarcated.^{11, 12}

Russia

The uneasy relationship between Georgia and Russia goes as far back as 1801 when the Russian empire first moved to annex Georgia. Since Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russians have supported the secessionist movements in Georgia's South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions. Tbilisi sees this support as part of Russia's strategy to obstruct Georgia's integration with the West. Russian forces have been in the two breakaway republics since the early 1990s, in effect occupying about 20% of Georgia's territory. The animosity reached a crescendo in 2008 with the brief Russo-Georgian War and Russia's recognition of the two regions' independence. Relations improved slightly after 2012 as the Georgian Dream administration pursued a more balanced stance in Georgia's relations with Russia and the West. Renewed contacts between the two countries focused on humanitarian issues and trade, avoiding contentious topics like the two breakaway regions. Trade rebounded after Russia lifted previously imposed economic restrictions, and by 2020 Russia was the destination of 13% of Georgia's merchandise exports.^{13, 14, 15, 16}

Turkey

Georgian diplomatic relations with Turkey date back to 1921, soon after Turkey emerged as a state from the defunct Ottoman Empire. Today, strong economic ties and shared oil and gas pipelines have strengthened the two countries' friendship. A free trade agreement has helped make Turkey Georgia's top import partner, and in 2018 trade between the two countries topped USD 1.7 billion. Tbilisi and Ankara both espouse the principle of territorial integrity when dealing with internal secessionist movements. The two countries' diplomats maintain an ongoing dialogue as part of many bilateral and multilateral initiatives.^{17, 18}

- 11 Svante E. Cornell, "Are Georgia-Azerbaijan Relations at Risk?" *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 30 July 2019, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13583-are-georgia-azerbaijan-relations-at-risk?.html>
- 12 Fariz Ismailzade, *Russia's Energy Interests in Azerbaijan: A Comparative Study of the 1990s and the 2000s* (London: GMB, 2006), 22.
- 13 Cory Welt, "Georgia: Background and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, 14 April 2021, <https://fas.org/srgp/crs/row/R45307.pdf>
- 14 Amy Mackinnon, "A Flickering Beacon of Democracy in Russia's Backyard," *Foreign Policy*, 27 November 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/27/georgia-georgian-dream-ivanishvili-russia-democracy/>
- 15 International Crisis Group, "Georgia and Russia: Why and How to Save Normalisation," 26 October 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/georgia/b90-georgia-and-russia-why-and-how-save-normalisation>
- 16 Associated Press, "A Brief Look at the History of Russia-Georgia Relations," 21 June 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/2fcbe15e50924aac9d45b60890cf6a82>
- 17 Daily Sabah, "Georgia Praises Ever Expanding Relations with Turkey," 9 February 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/georgia-praises-ever-expanding-relations-with-turkey>
- 18 Mustafa Kırıkcıoğlu, "Georgian Ambassador to Ankara: Turkey Is Closest Friend and Strategic Partner of Georgia," *Daily Sabah*, 25 May 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2019/05/25/georgian-ambassador-to-ankara-turkey-is-closest-friend-and-strategic-partner-of-georgia>

Police

Georgia's law enforcement body is the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). The MIA is divided into multiple components that handle different aspects of its mission, including crime prevention and response, traffic safety, emergency response, and border and maritime security. All Georgian police officers receive their training at the MIA Academy. The State Security Service, a separate agency, is tasked with counterterrorism, protecting national interests, ensuring economic security, and fighting corruption and organized crime.¹⁹

Georgia's unpopular and predatory post-independence police force underwent a major reform after Mikheil Saakashvili came to power in 2004. The bloated MIA was slimmed down and restructured. Some 16,000 officers were fired, including the entire traffic police. The newly established police forces recruited new officers who were not connected to old patronage and criminal networks. The officers received new equipment and training to facilitate competence, and drastically higher salaries to eliminate incentives for taking bribes. As a result of the reforms, crime rates fell significantly, public trust in law enforcement increased, and Georgia became known as one of the world's safest countries. The reforms required significant investments, which came from foreign aid and domestic business professionals.^{20, 21, 22}

Despite the extensive reforms, some police abuses and excesses persisted. During the Saakashvili administration, the police forces' newfound anticorruption zeal was channeled against the president's political opponents, leading to allegations of excessive force and contributing to his eventual downfall. After the Georgian Dream party took power, allegations of using law enforcement for political purposes continued. In the summer of 2019, riot police brutally suppressed demonstrations by the political opposition in Tbilisi.^{23, 24, 25}

Military

The Georgian Defense Forces are made up of the Land Forces (including aviation), Special Forces, and the National Guard. The naval forces have been merged with the country's coast guard, which falls under the interior ministry. In 2021 Georgia had a total military manpower of 25,400 personnel, of which 20,000 were active duty and the rest paramilitary. By law, the military cannot exceed 37,000 members. Military service is compulsory for Georgians between 18 and 27 years of age; the minimum conscription service obligation is 12 months. As of 2021, 860 Georgian soldiers were participating in the NATO mission in Afghanistan.^{26, 27, 28}

19 OSCE Polis, "Country Profile: Georgia," n.d., <https://polis.osce.org/country-profiles/georgia>

20 Mikheil Saakashvili, "I Abolished and Rebuilt the Police. The United States Can Do the Same," *Foreign Policy*, 11 June 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/11/abolish-police-georgia-brutality-crime/>

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23 Daniel Kharitonov, "Police Reform in Georgia," Stanford University, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, n.d., <https://fsi.stanford.edu/publication/police-reform-georgia>

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25 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>

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The Georgian military is acquiring modern weapons and equipment from the United States and Western Europe to replace its outdated Soviet and Russian stockpiles. The defense ministry aimed to have all weapons in compliance with NATO standards by the end of 2021. The Land Forces have 163 tanks, 585 armored vehicles, 73 self-propelled artillery pieces, 83 towed artillery pieces, and 50 rocket projectors. Air power consists of 66 aircraft, over half of which are helicopters. Naval forces consist of nine offshore patrol vessels. In 2019, Georgia's military expenditure was 2.3% of GDP.^{29, 30, 31}

The Defense Forces' most significant responsibility is territorial defense, primarily against the threat posed by Russia. The military defeat to Russia in 2008 still looms large for Georgian military planners. Georgia's overall poor performance in the conflict undermined its claims as a valuable potential NATO member. After the war, the military set out to rebuild and expand its shattered capabilities with Western equipment and expertise. Air defense systems, anti-armor rockets, and night-vision equipment were priorities. The streamlined and modernized fighting force gained combat readiness and professionalism through ongoing joint exercises with the United States and other Western partners.^{32, 33, 34, 35, 36}

Cybersecurity

The Data Exchange Agency (DEA), a part of the justice ministry, handles Georgia's cybersecurity. The DEA's cybersecurity responsibilities include identifying, responding to, and analyzing cybersecurity threats. Observers consider Georgia's cybersecurity policy insufficient to address constantly evolving cyber threats. In September 2020, Georgia held its first ever cybersecurity forum, a gathering of relevant national agencies and representatives of foreign governments and international institutions, to examine cyber threats and policy options.^{37, 38, 39, 40}

Not surprisingly, Russia is seen as Georgia's most urgent cyber threat. In 2019, Georgia's cyber vulnerability was made evident when a large-scale cyber-attack disabled and defaced thousands of websites, including those of government agencies, academic institutions, media organizations, corporations, and banks. The attack was later

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35 David Axe, "In 2008, Georgia's Missile Crews Bloodied the Russian Air Force—Now They're Getting Ready to Do It Again," *Forbes*, 14 September 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/09/14/in-2008-georgias-missile-crews-bloodied-the-russian-air-force-now-theyre-getting-ready-to-do-it-again/?sh=33f7a45d2f77>

36 Giorgi Shaishmelashvili, "Russia's Permanent War against Georgia," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2 March 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/03/russia-permanent-war-georgia/>

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39 Financial, "Georgia's First Cyber Security Forum Was Held in Tbilisi," October 2020, <https://www.finchannel.com/world/georgia/78419-georgia-s-first-cyber-security-forum-was-held-in-tbilisi>

40 Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, "Cybersecurity Reform in Georgia: Existing Challenges, International Practice and Recommendations," 23 September 2020, https://idf.org/en/cyber_security_reform_in_georgia_existing_challenges_international_practice_and_recommendations

traced to an organization within Russia's military intelligence service. Georgia's national elections are also seen as prime targets of Russian attacks and online disinformation campaigns.^{41, 42, 43, 44}

Smaller-scale cybercrime is a persistent problem in Georgia; according to government data, cybercrime doubled from January to September 2019. Criminal actors seek to exploit the country's substantial cryptocurrency mining industry. Electronic attacks targeting banks and individual credit cards are also known to occur.⁴⁵

Issues Affecting Stability

South Ossetia and Abkhazia

The Russia-backed separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia pose an ongoing and significant threat to Georgia's internal stability. The two regions, making up about 20% of Georgia's territory, are strategically located: Abkhazia contains over half of Georgia's Black Sea coastline, and South Ossetia is bisected by a major north-south transport route to Russia. Armed conflicts in the early 1990s and 2008 produced large numbers of internally displaced persons, mainly ethnic Georgians forced to flee the two regions. Georgians who remained face harassment and denial of freedom of movement and political rights. Moscow extended Russian citizenship to the two regions' inhabitants, a move used to justify Russian military intervention in 2008. After the 2008 military conflict with Georgia, Russia bolstered its military presence in the two regions and recognized their independence. Despite warming relations between Georgia and Russia since 2012, the two regions remain tense flashpoints, with occasional escalations in rhetoric and military mobilizations.^{46, 47, 48, 49}

Pankisi Gorge

The Pankisi Gorge lies on Georgia's border with the Chechnya region of Russia. The gorge is home to the Kist people, a predominately Muslim minority related to the Chechens. In the early 1990s, rebels fighting Russia in Chechnya used the gorge as a refuge and hideout, leading to heightened tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow. The region also became a haven for criminals, with several abductions for ransom of international business professionals in the early 2000s. Starting in 2013, hundreds of the region's residents left for Syria to join the Islamic State terrorist group. In recent years, the region has tried to leave behind its reputation for lawlessness and Islamist

- 41 Tinatin Japaridze, "No More Complacency: A Robust Cybersecurity Strategy for Georgia Is Overdue," European Leadership Network, 5 October 2020, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/no-more-complacency-a-robust-cybersecurity-strategy-for-georgia-is-overdue/>
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- 43 Financial, "Facebook Removed Russian Fake Accounts Targeting Multiple Countries Including Georgia," October 2020, <https://www.finchannel.com/world/georgia/78417-facebook-removed-russian-fake-accounts-in-multiple-countries-including-georgia>
- 44 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>
- 45 U.S. Department of State, Overseas Advisory Council, "Georgia 2020 Crime & Safety Report," 11 May 2020, <https://www.osac.gov/Content/Report/b682698d-a56d-4f5f-b8d5-18a8a60e08d4>
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- 47 Euractiv, "Georgia Demands Release of Doctor Detained by Separatists," 18 November 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgia-demands-release-of-doctor-detained-by-separatists/>
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extremism, emphasizing its cultural similarities to the rest of Georgia and promoting its natural beauty as a tourist attraction.^{50, 51, 52, 53}

Political Instability

Georgia's fragile democratic political system is being challenged by election irregularities and government misuse of power. In the October 2020 parliamentary elections, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party won a narrow victory. Following allegations of voting irregularities by international observers, the opposition United National Movement (UNM) refused to participate in the second round of elections or to take the seats it won outright, opting instead to encourage antigovernment demonstrations. The UNM decision turned the Georgian legislature into a rubber stamp for GD and set an expectation that political change is more likely to come through street protests than through the ballot box.^{54, 55, 56}

In February 2021, Georgian police arrested UNM leader Nika Melia on a technical charge, reinforcing the reputation of Georgia's ruling parties for using force to intimidate critics and opponents. GD's informal leader, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, has long been at odds with former president Mikheil Saakashvili, the now-exiled founder of UNM. Immediately before Melia's detention, the sitting prime minister resigned, stating his objection to the impending arrest; he was promptly replaced by an Ivanishvili loyalist who had the arrest carried out. Melia was released on bail in May 2021 after intervention from the European Union.^{57, 58, 59}

Outlook

Georgia's primary security challenge is territorial integrity. The breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain intractably at odds with Tbilisi. Russia, the two regions' primary benefactor and supporter, appears content to perpetuate the tense and volatile status quo as part of its goal to hinder Georgia's Western integration. Georgia continues to appeal to the United States and Western Europe for support and inclusion; however, despite increased cooperation, aid, and encouraging gestures, Georgia has yet to be granted its coveted memberships in NATO and the European Union. Domestically, the ruling GD party has prioritized pragmatic economic development over confrontational rhetoric, but the party's harsh stance toward political opponents and its unaccountable leadership point toward further erosion of the rule of law.^{60, 61, 62}

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59 Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, "Georgia's Melia Says Opposition Faces Huge Decision On Reentering Parliament, Plans To Speak With Saakashvili," 14 May 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-melia-saakashvili-parliament/31254343.html>

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Georgia in Perspective

Security Assessment

Read the following statements and answer True or False

1. Since their independence, Georgia and Azerbaijan have emerged as ideological opponents in the South Caucasus. ☐ True ☐ False
2. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is Georgia's law enforcement agency. ☐ True ☐ False
3. In 2019, Georgia's cybersecurity defenses stopped a large-scale cyber-attack. ☐ True ☐ False
4. The Pankisi Gorge is predominately populated by ethnic Russians. ☐ True ☐ False
5. Georgia was granted NATO membership in 2018. ☐ True ☐ False

Georgia in Perspective

Security Assessment Answers

1. False:
Georgia and Azerbaijan have a close strategic partnership, driven by the fact that they form a crucial east-west land corridor connecting the Black and Caspian seas. Their strategic cooperation is embodied by the oil and gas pipelines that span the two countries.
2. True:
The MIA's missions include crime prevention and response, traffic safety, emergency response, and border and maritime security.
3. False:
The attack was partially successful, and it disabled and defaced thousands of websites. It was later traced to an organization within Russia's military intelligence service.
4. False:
The Pankisi Gorge is home to the Kist people, a predominately Muslim minority related to the Chechens. In the early 1990s, rebels fighting Russia in Chechnya used the gorge as a refuge and hideout, leading to heightened tensions between Tbilisi and Moscow.
5. False:
Georgia continues to appeal to the United States and Western Europe for support and inclusion; however, despite increased cooperation, aid, and encouraging gestures, Georgia has yet to be granted memberships in NATO or the European Union.

Georgia in Perspective

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Georgia in Perspective

Final Assessment

“To receive a certificate of completion for this course, please complete the final assessment on the DLIFLC website.”