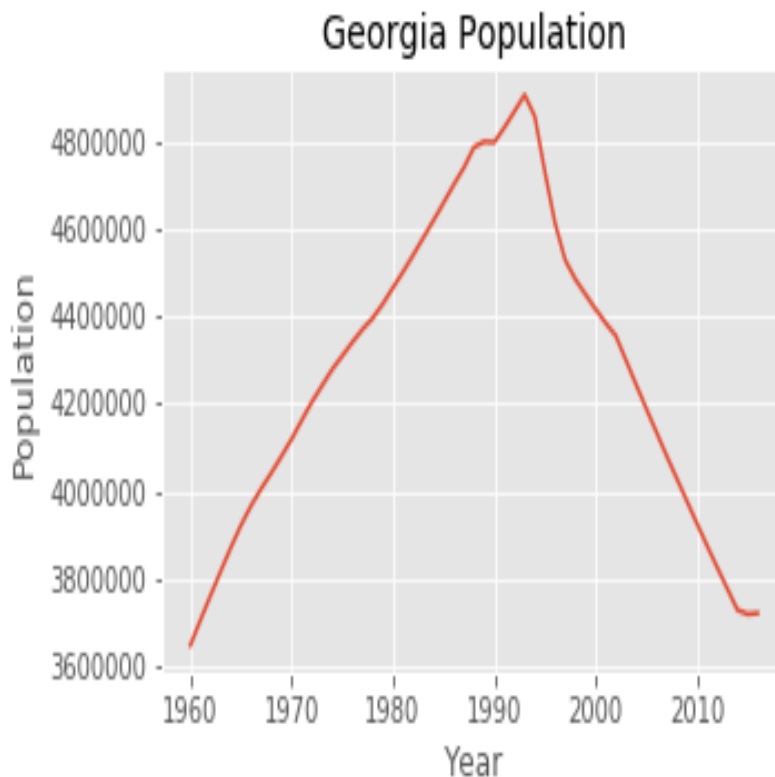


Georgia



Georgia ([listen](#)); Georgian: საქართველო, translit.: sakartvelo, IPA: [sɑkʰɑrtʰvɪlɔ] ([listen](#))) is a country in the Caucasus region of Eurasia. Located at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe, it is bounded to the west by the Black Sea, to the north by Russia, to the south by Turkey and Armenia, and to the southeast by Azerbaijan. The capital and largest city is Tbilisi. Georgia covers a territory of 69,700 square kilometres (26,911 sq mi), and its 2017 population is about 3.718 million. Georgia is a unitary semi-presidential republic, with the government elected through a representative democracy. During the classical era, several independent kingdoms became established in what is now Georgia, such as Colchis and Iberia. The Georgians adopted Christianity in the early 4th century. A unified Kingdom of Georgia reached the peak of its political and economic strength during the reign of King David IV and Queen Tamar in the 12th and early 13th centuries. Thereafter, the kingdom declined and eventually disintegrated under hegemony of various regional powers, including the Mongols, the Ottoman Empire, and successive dynasties of Iran. In the late 18th century, the eastern Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti forged an alliance with the Russian Empire, which directly annexed the kingdom in 1801 and conquered the western Kingdom of Imereti in 1810. Russian rule over Georgia was eventually acknowledged in various peace treaties with Iran and the Ottomans and the remaining Georgian territories were absorbed by the Russian Empire in a piecemeal fashion in the course of the 19th century. During the Civil War following the Russian Revolution in 1917, Georgia briefly became part of the Transcaucasian Federation and then emerged as an independent republic before the Red Army invasion in 1921 which established a government of workers' and peasants' soviets. Soviet Georgia would be incorporated into a new Transcaucasian Federation which in 1922 would be a founding republic of the Soviet Union. In 1936, the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved and Georgia emerged as a Union Republic. During the Great Patriotic War, almost 700,000 Georgians fought in the Red Army against the German invaders. After Soviet leader Josef Stalin, a native Georgian, died in 1953, a wave of protest spread against Nikita Khrushchev and his de-Stalinization reforms, leading to the death of nearly one hundred students in 1956. From that time

on, Georgia would become marred with blatant corruption and increased alienation of the government from the people. By the 1980s, Georgians were ready to abandon the existing system altogether. A pro-independence movement led to the secession from the Soviet Union in April 1991. For most of the following decade, post-Soviet Georgia suffered from civil conflicts, secessionist wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and economic crisis. Following the bloodless Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia strongly pursued a pro-Western foreign policy; aimed at NATO and European integration, it introduced a series of democratic and economic reforms. This brought about mixed results, but strengthened state institutions. The country's Western orientation soon led to the worsening of relations with Russia, culminating in the brief Russo-Georgian War in August 2008 and Georgia's current territorial dispute with Russia. Georgia is a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development. It contains two de facto independent regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which gained very limited international recognition after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Georgia and most of the world's countries consider the regions to be Georgian territory under Russian occupation.

== Etymology == "Georgia" probably stems from the Persian designation of the Georgians – *gur* in the 11th and 12th centuries adapted via Syriac *gurz* and Arabic *ur* and *urzan*. Lore-based theories were given by the traveller Jacques de Vitry, who explained the name's origin by the popularity of St. George amongst Georgians, while traveller Jean Chardin thought that "Georgia" came from Greek *γεωργία* ("tiller of the land"). As Prof. Alexander Mikaberidze adds, these century-old explanations for the word Georgia/Georgians are rejected by the scholarly community, who point to the Persian word *gur* ("wolf") as the root of the word. Starting with the Persian word *gur*, the word was later adopted in numerous other languages, including Slavic and West European languages. This term itself might have been established through the ancient Iranian appellation of the near-Caspian region, which was referred to as Gorgan ("land of the wolves"). The native name is Sakartvelo (საქართველო; "land of Kartvelians"), derived from the core central Georgian region of Kartli, recorded from the 9th century, and in extended usage referring to the entire medieval Kingdom of Georgia by the 13th century. The self-designation used by ethnic Georgians is Kartvelebi (ქართველები, i.e. "Kartvelians"). The medieval Georgian Chronicles present an eponymous ancestor of the Kartvelians, Kartlos, a great-grandson of Japheth. However, scholars agree that the word is derived from the Karts, the latter being one of the proto-Georgian tribes that emerged as a dominant group in ancient times. The name Sakartvelo (საქართველო) consists of two parts. Its root, *kartvel-i* (ქართველ-ი), specifies an inhabitant of the core central-eastern Georgian region of Kartli, or Iberia as it is known in sources of the Eastern Roman Empire. Ancient Greeks (Strabo, Herodotus, Plutarch, Homer, etc.) and Romans (Titus Livius, Tacitus, etc.) referred to early western Georgians as Colchians and eastern Georgians as Iberians (Iberoi in some Greek sources). Today the full, official name of the country is "Georgia", as specified in the official English version of the Georgian constitution which reads "Georgia shall be the name of the State of Georgia." Before the 1995 constitution came into force the country's name was the Republic of Georgia.

== History ==

=== Prehistory === The territory of modern-day Georgia was inhabited by *Homo erectus* since the Paleolithic Era. The proto-Georgian tribes first appear in written history in the 12th century BC. The earliest evidence of wine to date has been found in Georgia, where 8000-year old wine jars were uncovered. Archaeological finds and references in ancient sources also reveal elements of early political and state formations characterized by advanced metallurgy and goldsmith techniques that date back to the 7th century BC and beyond. In fact, early metallurgy started in Georgia during the 6th millennium BC, associated with the Shulaveri-Shomu culture.

=== Antiquity === The classical period saw the rise of a number of early Georgian states, the principal of which was Colchis in the west and Iberia in the east. In Greek mythology, Colchis was the location of the Golden Fleece sought by Jason and the Argonauts in Apollonius Rhodius' epic tale *Argonautica*. The incorporation of the Golden Fleece into the myth may have derived from the local practice of using fleeces to sift gold dust from rivers. In the 4th century BC, a kingdom of Iberia – an early example of advanced state organization under one king and an aristocratic hierarchy – was established. After the Roman Republic completed its brief conquest of what is now Georgia in 66 BC, the area became a primary objective of what would eventually turn out to be over 700 years of protracted Irano–Roman geo-political rivalry and warfare. Colchis, later known as Lazica was the battlefield of the Lazic War fought between the Byzantine Empire and Sasanian Persia. From the first centuries A.D, the cult of Mithras, pagan beliefs, and Zoroastrianism were commonly practised in Georgia. In 337 AD King Mirian III declared Christianity as the state religion, giving a great stimulus to the development of literature, arts, and ultimately playing a key role in the formation of the unified Georgian nation, The

acceptance led to the slow but sure decline of Zoroastrianism, which until the 5th century AD, appeared to have become something like a second established religion in Iberia (eastern Georgia), and was widely practised there. In the ensuing period, until the course of the 7th century, what is now Georgia remained dominated by the Romans and Sasanians. === Middle Ages up to Early Modern Period === Located on the crossroads of protracted Roman–Persian Wars, the early Georgian kingdoms disintegrated into various feudal regions by the early Middle Ages. This made it easy for the remaining Georgian realms to fall prey to the early Muslim conquests in the 7th century. Despite the capture of Tbilisi in 645 AD by Muslims, principality of Iberia retained considerable independence under local rulers. The stage of feudalism's development and struggle against foreign invaders saw the unification of the Georgian lands and the rise of a single Georgian feudal monarchy under the Bagrationi dynasty in 11th century. The Kingdom of Georgia reached its zenith in the 12th to early 13th centuries. This period during the reigns of David IV (c.1089–1125) and his granddaughter Tamar (c. 1184–1213) has been widely termed as Georgia's Golden Age or the Georgian Renaissance. This early Georgian renaissance, which preceded its Western European analogue, was characterized by impressive military victories, territorial expansion, and a cultural renaissance in architecture, literature, philosophy and the sciences. The Golden age of Georgia left a legacy of great cathedrals, romantic poetry and literature, and the epic poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", the latter which is considered a national epic. David suppressed dissent of feudal lords and centralized the power in his hands to effectively deal with foreign threats. In 1121, he decisively defeated much larger Turkish armies during the Battle of Didgori and liberated Tbilisi. At the height of its dominance, the Kingdom's influence spanned from the south of modern-day Ukraine, to the northern provinces of Persia, while also maintaining religious possessions in the Holy Land and Greece. The 29-year reign of Tamar, the first female ruler of Georgia, is considered the most successful in Georgian history. Tamar was given the title "king of kings" (mepe mepeta). She succeeded in neutralizing opposition and embarked on an energetic foreign policy aided by the downfall of the rival powers of the Seljuks and Byzantium. Supported by a powerful military élite, Tamar was able to build on the successes of her predecessors to consolidate an empire which dominated the Caucasus, and extended over large parts of present-day Azerbaijan, Armenia, and eastern Turkey as well as parts of northern Iran, until its collapse under the Mongol attacks within two decades after Tamar's death in 1213. The revival of the Kingdom of Georgia was set back after Tbilisi was captured and destroyed by the Khwarezmian leader Jalal ad-Din in 1226. The Mongols were expelled by George V of Georgia, son of Demetrius II of Georgia, who was named "Brilliant" for his role in restoring the country's previous strength and Christian culture. George V was the last great king of the unified Georgian state. After his death, different local rulers fought for their independence from central Georgian rule, until the total disintegration of the Kingdom in the 15th century. Georgia was further weakened by several disastrous invasions by Tamerlane. Invasions continued, giving the kingdom no time for restoration, with both Black and White sheep Turkomans constantly raiding its southern provinces. As a result, the Kingdom of Georgia collapsed into anarchy by 1466 and fragmented into three independent kingdoms and five semi-independent principalities. Neighboring large empires subsequently exploited the internal division of the weakened country, and beginning in the 16th century up to the late 18th century, Safavid Iran (and successive Iranian Afsharid and Qajar dynasties) and Ottoman Turkey subjugated the eastern and western regions of Georgia, respectively. The rulers of regions that remained partly autonomous organized rebellions on various occasions. However, subsequent Iranian and Ottoman invasions further weakened local kingdoms and regions. As a result of incessant wars and deportations, the population of Georgia dwindled to 250,000 inhabitants at the end of the 18th century. Eastern Georgia (Safavid Georgia), composed of the regions of Kartli and Kakheti, had been under Iranian suzerainty since 1555 following the Peace of Amasya signed with neighbouring rivaling Ottoman Turkey. With the death of Nader Shah in 1747, both kingdoms broke free of Iranian control and were reunified through a personal union under the energetic king Heraclius II in 1762. Heraclius, who had risen to prominence through the Iranian ranks, was awarded the crown of Kartli by Nader himself in 1744 for his loyal service to him. Heraclius nevertheless stabilized Eastern Georgia to a degree in the ensuing period and was able to guarantee its autonomy throughout the Iranian Zand period. In 1783, Russia and the eastern Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti signed the Treaty of Georgievsk, by which Georgia abjured any dependence on Persia or another power, and made the kingdom a protectorate of Russia, which guaranteed Georgia's territorial integrity and the continuation of its reigning Bagrationi dynasty in return for prerogatives in the conduct of Georgian foreign affairs. However, despite this commitment to defend Georgia, Russia rendered no assistance when the Iranians invaded in 1795, capturing and sacking Tbilisi while

massacring its inhabitants, as the new heir to the throne sought to reassert Iranian hegemony over Georgia. Despite a punitive campaign subsequently launched against Qajar Iran in 1796, this period culminated in the 1801 Russian violation of the Treaty of Georgievsk and annexation of eastern Georgia, followed by the abolition of the royal Bagrationi dynasty, as well as the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Pyotr Bagration, one of the descendants of the abolished house of Bagrationi, would later join the Russian army and rise to be a prominent general in the Napoleonic wars.

=== Georgia in the Russian Empire === On 22 December 1800, Tsar Paul I of Russia, at the alleged request of the Georgian King George XII, signed the proclamation on the incorporation of Georgia (Kartli-Kakheti) within the Russian Empire, which was finalized by a decree on 8 January 1801, and confirmed by Tsar Alexander I on 12 September 1801. The Bagrationi royal family was deported from the kingdom. The Georgian envoy in Saint Petersburg reacted with a note of protest that was presented to the Russian vice-chancellor Prince Kurakin. In May 1801, under the oversight of General Carl Heinrich von Knorring, Imperial Russia transferred power in eastern Georgia to the government headed by General Ivan Petrovich Lazarev. The Georgian nobility did not accept the decree until 12 April 1802, when Knorring assembled the nobility at the Sioni Cathedral and forced them to take an oath on the Imperial Crown of Russia. Those who disagreed were temporarily arrested. In the summer of 1805, Russian troops on the Askerani River near Zagam defeated the Iranian army during the Russo-Persian War (1804–1813) and saved Tbilisi from reconquest now that it was officially part of the Imperial territories. Russian suzerainty over eastern Georgia was officially finalized with Iran in 1813 following the Treaty of Gulistan. Following the annexation of eastern Georgia, the western Georgian kingdom of Imereti was annexed by Tsar Alexander I. The last Imeretian king and the last Georgian Bagrationi ruler, Solomon II, died in exile in 1815, after attempts to rally people against Russia and to enlist foreign support against the latter, had been in vain. From 1803 to 1878, as a result of numerous Russian wars now against Ottoman Turkey, several of Georgia's previously lost territories – such as Adjara – were recovered, and also incorporated into the empire. The principality of Guria was abolished and incorporated into the Empire in 1829, while Svaneti was gradually annexed in 1858. Mingrelia, although a Russian protectorate since 1803, was not absorbed until 1867.

=== Declaration of independence === After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was established with Nikolay Chkheidze acting as its president. The federation consisted of three nations: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. As the Ottomans advanced into the Caucasian territories of the crumbling Russian Empire, Georgia declared independence on 26 May 1918. The Menshevik Social Democratic Party of Georgia won the parliamentary election and its leader, Noe Zhordania, became prime minister. Despite the Soviet takeover, Noe Jordania was recognized as the legitimate head of the Georgian Government by France, UK, Belgium, and Poland through the 1930s. The 1918 Georgian–Armenian War, which erupted over parts of Georgian provinces populated mostly by Armenians, ended because of British intervention. In 1918–1919, Georgian general Giorgi Mazniashvili led an attack against the White Army led by Moiseev and Denikin in order to claim the Black Sea coastline from Tuapse to Sochi and Adler for the independent Georgia. The country's independence did not last long. Georgia was under British protection from 1918–1920.

=== Georgia in the Soviet Union === In February 1921, during the Russian Civil War, the Red Army advanced into Georgia and brought the local Bolsheviks to power. The Georgian army was defeated and the Social Democratic government fled the country. On 25 February 1921, the Red Army entered Tbilisi and established a government of workers' and peasants' soviets with Filipp Makharadze as acting head of state. Georgia was incorporated into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, alongside Armenia and Azerbaijan, in 1921 which in 1922 would become a founding member of the Soviet Union. There remained significant opposition to the Bolsheviks in Georgia, which was unindustrialized and viewed as socially backward, and this culminated in the August Uprising of 1924. Soviet rule was firmly established only after the insurrection was swiftly defeated. Georgia would remain an unindustrialized periphery of the USSR until the first five-year plan when it would become a major center for textile goods. Later, in 1936, the TSFSR was dissolved and Georgia emerged as a union republic: the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Joseph Stalin, an ethnic Georgian born Ioseb Besarionis Dze Jugashvili (იოსებ ბესარიონის ძე ჯუგაშვილი) in Gori, was prominent among the Bolsheviks. Stalin was to rise to the highest position, leading the Soviet Union from 3 April 1922 until his death on 5 March 1953. In June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union on an immediate course towards Caucasian oil fields and munitions factories. They never reached Georgia, however, and almost 700,000 Georgians fought in the Red Army to repel the invaders and advance towards Berlin. Of them, an estimated 350,000 were

killed. After Stalin's death, Nikita Khrushchev became the leader of the Soviet Union and implemented a policy of de-Stalinization. This was nowhere else more publicly and violently opposed than in Georgia, where in 1956 riots broke out upon the release of Khrushchev's public denunciation of Stalin and led to the death of nearly 100 students. Throughout the remainder of the Soviet period, Georgia's economy continued to grow and experience significant improvement, though it increasingly exhibited blatant corruption and alienation of the government from the people. With the beginning of perestroika in 1986, the Georgian Communist leadership proved so incapable of handling the changes that most Georgians, including rank in file Communists, concluded that the only way forward was a break from the existing Soviet system. === Georgia after restoration of independence === On 9 April 1991, shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Council of Georgia declared independence after a referendum held on 31 March 1991. On 26 May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was elected as the first President of independent Georgia. Gamsakhurdia stoked Georgian nationalism and vowed to assert Tbilisi's authority over regions such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia that had been classified as autonomous oblasts under the Soviet Union. He was soon deposed in a bloody coup d'état, from 22 December 1991 to 6 January 1992. The coup was instigated by part of the National Guards and a paramilitary organization called "Mkhedrioni" ("horsemen"). The country became embroiled in a bitter civil war, which lasted until nearly 1995. Eduard Shevardnadze (Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1985 to 1991) returned to Georgia in 1992 and joined the leaders of the coup — Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani — to head a triumvirate called "The State Council". Simmering disputes within two regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, between local separatists and the majority Georgian populations, erupted into widespread inter-ethnic violence and wars. Supported by Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia achieved de facto independence from Georgia, with Georgia retaining control only in small areas of the disputed territories. In 1995, Shevardnadze was officially elected as president of Georgia. During the War in Abkhazia (1992–1993), roughly 230,000 to 250,000 Georgians were expelled from Abkhazia by Abkhaz separatists and North Caucasian volunteers (including Chechens). Around 23,000 Georgians fled South Ossetia as well, and many Ossetian families were forced to abandon their homes in the Borjomi region and moved to Russia. In 2003, Shevardnadze (who won re-election in 2000) was deposed by the Rose Revolution, after Georgian opposition and international monitors asserted that 2 November parliamentary elections were marred by fraud. The revolution was led by Mikheil Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania and Nino Burjanadze, former members and leaders of Shevardnadze's ruling party. Mikheil Saakashvili was elected as President of Georgia in 2004. Following the Rose Revolution, a series of reforms were launched to strengthen the country's military and economic capabilities. The new government's efforts to reassert Georgian authority in the southwestern autonomous republic of Ajaria led to a major crisis early in 2004. Success in Ajaria encouraged Saakashvili to intensify his efforts, but without success, in breakaway South Ossetia. These events, along with accusations of Georgian involvement in the Second Chechen War, resulted in a severe deterioration of relations with Russia, fuelled also by Russia's open assistance and support to the two secessionist areas. Despite these increasingly difficult relations, in May 2005 Georgia and Russia reached a bilateral agreement by which Russian military bases (dating back to the Soviet era) in Batumi and Akhalkalaki were withdrawn. Russia withdrew all personnel and equipment from these sites by December 2007 while failing to withdraw from the Gudauta base in Abkhazia, which it was required to vacate after the adoption of the Adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty during the 1999 Istanbul summit. === Russo–Georgian War and since === Tensions between Georgia and Russia began escalating in April 2008. A bomb explosion on 1 August 2008 targeted a car transporting Georgian peacekeepers. South Ossetians were responsible for instigating this incident, which marked the opening of hostilities and injured five Georgian servicemen. In response, several South Ossetian militiamen were hit. South Ossetian separatists began shelling Georgian villages on 1 August. These artillery attacks caused Georgian servicemen to return fire periodically since 1 August. At around 19:00 on 7 August 2008, Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili announced a unilateral ceasefire and called for peace talks. However, escalating assaults against Georgian villages (located in the South Ossetian conflict zone) were soon matched with gunfire from Georgian troops, who then proceeded to move in the direction of the capital of the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia (Tskhinvali) on the night of 8 August, reaching its centre in the morning of 8 August. One Georgian diplomat told Russian newspaper Kommersant on 8 August that by taking control of Tskhinvali, Tbilisi wanted to demonstrate that Georgia wouldn't tolerate killing of Georgian citizens. According to Russian military expert Pavel Felgenhauer, the Ossetian provocation was aimed at triggering the Georgian response, which was needed as a pretext for premeditated Russian military invasion. According to

Georgian intelligence, and several Russian media reports, parts of the regular (non-peacekeeping) Russian Army had already moved to South Ossetian territory through the Roki Tunnel before the Georgian military action. Russia accused Georgia of "aggression against South Ossetia", and launched a large-scale land, air and sea invasion of Georgia with the pretext of "peace enforcement" operation on 8 August 2008. Russian airstrikes against targets within Georgia were also launched. Abkhaz forces opened a second front on 9 August by attacking the Kodori Gorge, held by Georgia. Tskhinvali was seized by the Russian military by 10 August. Russian forces occupied the Georgian cities of Zugdidi, Senaki, Poti, and Gori (the last one after the ceasefire agreement was negotiated). Russian Black Sea Fleet blockaded the Georgian coast. A campaign of ethnic cleansing against Georgians in South Ossetia was conducted by South Ossetians, with Georgian villages around Tskhinvali being destroyed after the war had ended. The war displaced 192,000 people, and while many were able to return to their homes after the war, a year later around 30,000 ethnic Georgians remained displaced. In an interview published in Kommersant, South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity said he would not allow Georgians to return. President of France Nicolas Sarkozy negotiated a ceasefire agreement on 12 August 2008. On 17 August, Russian president Dmitry Medvedev announced that Russian forces would begin to pull out of Georgia the following day. Russia recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia as separate republics on 26 August. In response to Russia's recognition, the Georgian government severed diplomatic relations with Russia. Russian forces left the buffer areas bordering Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 8 October and the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia was dispatched to the buffer areas. Since the war, Georgia has maintained that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are Russian-occupied Georgian territories. == Government and politics == Georgia is a representative democratic semi-presidential republic, with the President as the head of state, and Prime Minister as the head of government. The executive branch of power is made up of the President and the Cabinet of Georgia. The Cabinet is composed of ministers, headed by the Prime Minister, and appointed by the President. Notably, the Ministers of Defense and Interior are not members of the Cabinet and are subordinated directly to the President of Georgia. Giorgi Margvelashvili is the current President of Georgia after winning 62.12% of the vote in the 2013 election. Since 2015, Giorgi Kvirikashvili has been the Prime Minister of Georgia. Legislative authority is vested in the Parliament of Georgia. It is unicameral and has 150 members, known as deputies, of whom 75 are elected by plurality to represent single-member districts, and 75 are chosen to represent parties by proportional representation. Members of parliament are elected for four-year terms. Five parties and electoral blocs had representatives elected to the parliament in the 2008 elections: the United National Movement (governing party), The Joint Opposition, the Christian-Democrats, the Labour Party and Republican Party. On 26 May 2012, Saakashvili inaugurated a new Parliament building in the western city of Kutaisi, in an effort to decentralise power and shift some political control closer to Abkhazia. The elections in October 2012 resulted in the victory for the opposition "Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia" coalition, which President Saakashvili acknowledged on the following day. Although considerable progress was made since the Rose revolution, former President Mikheil Saakashvili stated in 2008 that Georgia is still not a "full-fledged, very well-formed, crystallized society." The political system remains in the process of transition, with frequent adjustments to the balance of power between the President and Parliament, and opposition proposals ranging from transforming the country into parliamentary republic to re-establishing the monarchy. Observers note the deficit of trust in relations between the Government and the opposition. Different opinions exist regarding the degree of political freedom in Georgia. Saakashvili believed in 2008 that the country is "on the road to becoming a European democracy." Freedom House lists Georgia as a partly free country. In preparation for 2012 parliamentary elections, Parliament adopted a new electoral code on 27 December 2011 that incorporated many recommendations from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Venice Commission. However, the new code failed to address the Venice Commission's primary recommendation to strengthen the equality of the vote by reconstituting single-mandate election districts to be comparable in size. On 28 December, Parliament amended the Law on Political Unions to regulate campaign and political party financing. Local and international observers raised concerns about several amendments, including the vagueness of the criteria for determining political bribery and which individuals and organizations would be subject to the law. As of March 2012, Parliament was discussing further amendments to address these concerns. === Foreign relations === Georgia maintains good relations with its direct neighbours (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey) and is a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the World Trade Organization, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the

Community of Democratic Choice, the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asian Development Bank. Georgia also maintains political, economic, and military relations with France, Germany, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, and many other countries. The growing U.S. and European Union influence in Georgia, notably through proposed EU and NATO membership, the U.S. Train and Equip military assistance program, and the construction of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline have frequently strained Tbilisi's relations with Moscow. Georgia's decision to boost its presence in the coalition forces in Iraq was an important initiative. Georgia is currently working to become a full member of NATO. In August 2004, the Individual Partnership Action Plan of Georgia was submitted officially to NATO. On 29 October 2004, the North Atlantic Council of NATO approved the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) of Georgia, and Georgia moved on to the second stage of Euro–Atlantic Integration. In 2005, by the decision of the President of Georgia, a state commission was set up to implement the Individual Partnership Action Plan, which presents an interdepartmental group headed by the Prime Minister. The Commission was tasked with coordinating and controlling the implementation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan. On 14 February 2005, the agreement on the appointment of Partnership for Peace (PfP) liaison officer between Georgia and NATO came into force, whereby a liaison officer for the South Caucasus was assigned to Georgia. On 2 March 2005, the agreement was signed on the provision of the host nation support to and transit of NATO forces and NATO personnel. On 6–9 March 2006, the IPAP implementation interim assessment team arrived in Tbilisi. On 13 April 2006, the discussion of the assessment report on implementation of the Individual Partnership Action Plan was held at NATO Headquarters, within 26+1 format. In 2006, the Georgian parliament voted unanimously for the bill which calls for integration of Georgia into NATO. The majority of Georgians and politicians in Georgia support the push for NATO membership. George W. Bush became the first sitting U.S. president to visit the country. The street leading to Tbilisi International Airport has since been dubbed George W. Bush Avenue. On 2 October 2006, Georgia and the European Union signed a joint statement on the agreed text of the Georgia–European Union Action Plan within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Action Plan was formally approved at the EU–Georgia Cooperation Council session on 14 November 2006, in Brussels. In June 2014, the EU and Georgia signed an Association Agreement, which entered into force on 1 July 2016. On 13 December 2016, EU and Georgia reached the agreement on visa liberalisation for Georgian citizens. On 27 February 2017, the Council adopted a regulation on visa liberalisation for Georgians travelling to the EU for a period of stay of 90 days in any 180-day period.

=== Military === Georgia's military is organized into land and air forces. They are collectively known as the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF). The mission and functions of the GAF are based on the Constitution of Georgia, Georgia's Law on Defense and National Military Strategy, and international agreements to which Georgia is signatory. They are performed under the guidance and authority of the Ministry of Defense. The military budget of Georgia for 2017 is 748 million, by 78 million more than in 2016. The biggest part, 62.5% of the military budget is allocated for maintaining armored forces readiness and potency development. After its independence from the Soviet Union, Georgia began to develop its own military industry. The first exhibition of products made by STC DELTA was in 1999. STC DELTA now produces a variety of military equipment, including armored vehicles, artillery systems, aviation systems, personal protection equipment, and small arms. During later periods of the Iraq War Georgia had up to 2,000 soldiers serving in the Multi-National Force. Georgia also participated in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. With 1,560 troops in 2013, it was at that time the largest non-NATO and the largest per capita troop contributor. Over 11,000 Georgian soldiers have been rotated through Afghanistan. As of 2015, 31 Georgian servicemen have died in Afghanistan, most during the Helmand campaign, and 435 were wounded, including 35 amputees.

=== Law enforcement === In Georgia, law enforcement is conducted and provided for by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia. In recent years, the Patrol Police Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has undergone a radical transformation, with the police having now absorbed a great many duties previously performed by dedicated independent government agencies. New duties performed by the police include border security and customs functions and contracted security provision; the latter function is performed by the dedicated 'security police'. Intelligence collecting in the interests of national security is now the remit of the Georgian Intelligence Service. In 2005, President Mikheil Saakashvili fired the entire traffic police force (numbering around 30,000 police officers) of the Georgian National Police due to corruption. A new force was then subsequently built around new recruits. The US State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law-Enforcement Affairs has provided assistance to the training

efforts and continues to act in an advisory capacity. The new Patruli force was first introduced in the summer of 2005 to replace the traffic police, a force which was accused of widespread corruption. The police introduced an 022 (currently 112) emergency dispatch service in 2004. === Human rights === Human rights in Georgia are guaranteed by the country's constitution. There is an independent human rights public defender elected by the Parliament of Georgia to ensure such rights are enforced. Georgia has ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2005. NGO "Tolerance", in its alternative report about its implementation, speaks of a rapid decrease in the number of Azerbaijani schools and cases of appointing headmasters to Azerbaijani schools who don't speak the Azerbaijani language. The government came under criticism for its alleged use of excessive force on 26 May 2011 when it dispersed protesters led by Nino Burjanadze, among others, with tear gas and rubber bullets after they refused to clear Rustaveli avenue for an independence day parade despite the expiration of their demonstration permit and despite being offered to choose an alternative venue. While human rights activists maintained that the protests were peaceful, the government pointed out that many protesters were masked and armed with heavy sticks and molotov cocktails. Georgian opposition leader Nino Burjanadze said the accusations of planning a coup were baseless, and that the protesters' actions were legitimate. == Administrative divisions == Georgia is divided into 9 regions, 1 city, and 2 autonomous republics. These in turn are subdivided into 67 districts and 12 self-governing cities. Georgia contains two official autonomous regions, of which one has declared independence. Officially autonomous within Georgia, the de facto independent region of Abkhazia declared independence in 1999. In addition, another territory not officially autonomous has also declared independence. South Ossetia is officially known by Georgia as the Tskinali region, as it views "South Ossetia" as implying political bonds with Russian North Ossetia. It was called South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast when Georgia was part of Soviet Union. Its autonomous status was revoked in 1990. De facto separate since Georgian independence, offers were made to give South Ossetia autonomy again, but in 2006 an unrecognised referendum in the area resulted in a vote for independence. In both Abkhazia and South Ossetia large numbers of people had been given Russian passports, some through a process of forced passportization by Russian authorities. This was used as a justification for Russian invasion of Georgia during the 2008 South Ossetia war after which Russia recognised the region's independence. Georgia considers the regions as occupied by Russia. Both republics have received minimal international recognition. Adjara under local strongman Aslan Abashidze maintained close ties with Russia and allowed a Russian military base to be maintained in Batumi. Upon the election of Mikheil Saakashvili in 2004 tensions rose between Abashidze and the Georgian government, leading to demonstrations in Adjara and the resignation and flight of Abashidze. The region retains autonomy, as a sign of Ajaria's reconnection with the central Georgian government, the Georgian Constitutional Court was moved from T'bilisi to Batumi. == Geography and climate == Georgia is situated in the South Caucasus, between latitudes 41° and 44° N, and longitudes 40° and 47° E, with an area of 67,900 km² (26,216 sq mi). It is a very mountainous country. The Likhi Range divides the country into eastern and western halves. Historically, the western portion of Georgia was known as Colchis while the eastern plateau was called Iberia. Because of a complex geographic setting, mountains also isolate the northern region of Svaneti from the rest of Georgia. The Greater Caucasus Mountain Range forms the northern border of Georgia. The main roads through the mountain range into Russian territory lead through the Roki Tunnel between Shida Kartli and North Ossetia and the Darial Gorge (in the Georgian region of Khevi). The Roki Tunnel was vital for the Russian military in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War because it is the only direct route through the Caucasus Mountains. The southern portion of the country is bounded by the Lesser Caucasus Mountains. The Greater Caucasus Mountain Range is much higher in elevation than the Lesser Caucasus Mountains, with the highest peaks rising more than 5,000 meters (16,404 ft) above sea level. The highest mountain in Georgia is Mount Shkhara at 5,068 meters (16,627 ft), and the second highest is Mount Janga (Dzhangi–Tau) at 5,059 m (16,598 ft) above sea level. Other prominent peaks include Mount Kazbek at 5,047 m (16,558 ft), Shota Rustaveli 4,860 m (15,945 ft), Tetnuldi 4,858 m (15,938 ft), Mt. Ushba 4,700 m (15,420 ft), and Ailama 4,547 m (14,918 ft). Out of the abovementioned peaks, only Kazbek is of volcanic origin. The region between Kazbek and Shkhara (a distance of about 200 km (124 mi) along the Main Caucasus Range) is dominated by numerous glaciers. Out of the 2,100 glaciers that exist in the Caucasus today, approximately 30% are located within Georgia. The term Lesser Caucasus Mountains is often used to describe the mountainous (highland) areas of southern Georgia that are connected to the Greater Caucasus Mountain Range by the Likhi Range. The area can be split into two separate sub-regions; the Lesser Caucasus Mountains, which run

parallel to the Greater Caucasus Range, and the Southern Georgia Volcanic Highland, which lies immediately to the south of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains. The overall region can be characterized as being made up of various, interconnected mountain ranges (largely of volcanic origin) and plateaus that do not exceed 3,400 meters (11,155 ft) in elevation. Prominent features of the area include the Javakheti Volcanic Plateau, lakes, including Tabatskuri and Paravani, as well as mineral water and hot springs. Two major rivers in Georgia are the Rioni and the Mtkvari. The Southern Georgia Volcanic Highland is a young and unstable geologic region with high seismic activity and has experienced some of the most significant earthquakes that have been recorded in Georgia. The Krubera Cave is the deepest known cave in the world. It is located in the Arabika Massif of the Gagra Range, in Abkhazia. In 2001, a Russian–Ukrainian team had set the world depth record for a cave at 1,710 meters (5,610 ft). In 2004, the penetrated depth was increased on each of three expeditions, when a Ukrainian team crossed the 2,000-meter (6,562 ft) mark for the first time in the history of speleology. In October 2005, an unexplored part was found by the CAVEX team, further increasing the known depth of the cave. This expedition confirmed the known depth of the cave at 2,140 meters (7,021 ft). === Topography ===

The landscape within the nation's boundaries is quite varied. Western Georgia's landscape ranges from low-land marsh-forests, swamps, and temperate rainforests to eternal snows and glaciers, while the eastern part of the country even contains a small segment of semi-arid plains. Forests cover around 40% of Georgia's territory while the alpine/subalpine zone accounts for roughly around 10 percent of the land. Much of the natural habitat in the low-lying areas of western Georgia has disappeared during the past 100 years because of the agricultural development of the land and urbanization. The large majority of the forests that covered the Colchis plain are now virtually non-existent with the exception of the regions that are included in the national parks and reserves (e.g. Lake Paliastomi area). At present, the forest cover generally remains outside of the low-lying areas and is mainly located along the foothills and the mountains. Western Georgia's forests consist mainly of deciduous trees below 600 meters (1,969 ft) above sea level and contain species such as oak, hornbeam, beech, elm, ash, and chestnut. Evergreen species such as box may also be found in many areas. Ca. 1000 of all 4000 higher plants of Georgia are endemic in this country. The west-central slopes of the Meskheta Range in Ajaria as well as several locations in Samegrelo and Abkhazia are covered by temperate rain forests. Between 600–1,000 metres (1,969–3,281 ft) above sea level, the deciduous forest becomes mixed with both broad-leaf and coniferous species making up the plant life. The zone is made up mainly of beech, spruce, and fir forests. From 1,500–1,800 metres (4,921–5,906 ft), the forest becomes largely coniferous. The tree line generally ends at around 1,800 metres (5,906 ft) and the alpine zone takes over, which in most areas, extends up to an elevation of 3,000 metres (9,843 ft) above sea level. The eternal snow and glacier zone lies above the 3,000 metre line. Eastern Georgia's landscape (referring to the territory east of the Likhi Range) is considerably different from that of the west, although, much like the Colchis plain in the west, nearly all of the low-lying areas of eastern Georgia including the Mtkvari and Alazani River plains have been deforested for agricultural purposes. In addition, because of the region's relatively drier climate, some of the low-lying plains (especially in Kartli and south-eastern Kakheti) were never covered by forests in the first place. The general landscape of eastern Georgia comprises numerous valleys and gorges that are separated by mountains. In contrast with western Georgia, nearly 85 percent of the forests of the region are deciduous. Coniferous forests only dominate in the Borjomi Gorge and in the extreme western areas. Out of the deciduous species of trees, beech, oak, and hornbeam dominate. Other deciduous species include several varieties of maple, aspen, ash, and hazelnut. The Upper Alazani River Valley contains yew forests. At higher elevations above 1,000 metres (3,281 ft) above sea level (particularly in the Tusheti, Khevsureti, and Khevi regions), pine and birch forests dominate. In general, the forests in eastern Georgia occur between 500–2,000 metres (1,640–6,562 ft) above sea level, with the alpine zone extending from 2,000–2,300 to 3,000–3,500 metres (6,562–7,546 to 9,843–11,483 ft). The only remaining large, low-land forests remain in the Alazani Valley of Kakheti. The eternal snow and glacier zone lies above the 3,500-metre (11,483 ft) line in most areas of eastern Georgia. === Climate ===

The climate of Georgia is extremely diverse, considering the nation's small size. There are two main climatic zones, roughly corresponding to the eastern and western parts of the country. The Greater Caucasus Mountain Range plays an important role in moderating Georgia's climate and protects the nation from the penetration of colder air masses from the north. The Lesser Caucasus Mountains partially protect the region from the influence of dry and hot air masses from the south. Much of western Georgia lies within the northern periphery of the humid subtropical zone with annual precipitation ranging from 1,000–4,000 mm (39.4–157.5 in). The precipitation tends to be uniformly

distributed throughout the year, although the rainfall can be particularly heavy during the Autumn months. The climate of the region varies significantly with elevation and while much of the lowland areas of western Georgia are relatively warm throughout the year, the foothills and mountainous areas (including both the Greater and Lesser Caucasus Mountains) experience cool, wet summers and snowy winters (snow cover often exceeds 2 meters in many regions). Ajaria is the wettest region of the Caucasus, where the Mt. Mtiral rainforest, east of Kobuleti, receives around 4,500 mm (177.2 in) of precipitation per year. Eastern Georgia has a transitional climate from humid subtropical to continental. The region's weather patterns are influenced both by dry Caspian air masses from the east and humid Black Sea air masses from the west. The penetration of humid air masses from the Black Sea is often blocked by mountain ranges (Likhi and Meskheti) that separate the eastern and western parts of the nation. Annual precipitation is considerably less than that of western Georgia and ranges from 400–1,600 mm (15.7–63.0 in). The wettest periods generally occur during spring and autumn, while winter and summer months tend to be the driest. Much of eastern Georgia experiences hot summers (especially in the low-lying areas) and relatively cold winters. As in the western parts of the nation, elevation plays an important role in eastern Georgia where climatic conditions above 1,500 metres (4,921 ft) are considerably colder than in the low-lying areas. The regions that lie above 2,000 metres (6,562 ft) frequently experience frost even during the summer months. === Biodiversity === Because of its high landscape diversity and low latitude, Georgia is home to about 5,601 species of animals, including 648 species of vertebrates (more than 1% of the species found worldwide) and many of these species are endemics. A number of large carnivores live in the forests, namely Brown bears, wolves, lynxes and Caucasian Leopards. The common pheasant (also known as the Colchian Pheasant) is an endemic bird of Georgia which has been widely introduced throughout the rest of the world as an important game bird. The species number of invertebrates is considered to be very high but data is distributed across a high number of publications. The spider checklist of Georgia, for example, includes 501 species. Slightly more than 6,500 species of fungi, including lichen-forming species, have been recorded from Georgia, but this number is far from complete. The true total number of fungal species occurring in Georgia, including species not yet recorded, is likely to be far higher, given the generally accepted estimate that only about seven percent of all fungi worldwide have so far been discovered. Although the amount of available information is still very small, a first effort has been made to estimate the number of fungal species endemic to Georgia, and 2,595 species have been tentatively identified as possible endemics of the country. 1,729 species of plants have been recorded from Georgia in association with fungi. The true number of plant species occurring in Georgia is likely to be substantially higher. == Economy == Archaeological research demonstrates that Georgia has been involved in commerce with many lands and empires since ancient times, largely due its location on the Black Sea and later on the historical Silk Road. Gold, silver, copper and iron have been mined in the Caucasus Mountains. Georgian wine making is a very old tradition and a key branch of the country's economy. The country has sizable hydropower resources. Throughout Georgia's modern history agriculture and tourism have been principal economic sectors, because of the country's climate and topography. For much of the 20th century, Georgia's economy was within the Soviet model of command economy. Since the fall of the USSR in 1991, Georgia embarked on a major structural reform designed to transition to a free market economy. As with all other post-Soviet states, Georgia faced a severe economic collapse. The civil war and military conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia aggravated the crisis. The agriculture and industry output diminished. By 1994 the gross domestic product had shrunk to a quarter of that of 1989. The first financial help from the West came in 1995, when the World Bank and International Monetary Fund granted Georgia a credit of USD 206 million and Germany granted DM 50 million. Since the early 21st century visible positive developments have been observed in the economy of Georgia. In 2007, Georgia's real GDP growth rate reached 12 percent making Georgia one of the fastest growing economies in Eastern Europe. The World Bank dubbed Georgia "the number one economic reformer in the world" because it has in one year improved from rank 112th to 18th in terms of ease of doing business. The country has a high unemployment rate of 12.6% and has fairly low median income compared to European countries. The 2006 ban on imports of Georgian wine to Russia, one of Georgia's biggest trading partners, and break of financial links was described by the IMF Mission as an "external shock". In addition, Russia increased the price of gas for Georgia. Around the same time, the National Bank of Georgia stated that ongoing inflation in the country was mainly triggered by external reasons, including Russia's economic embargo. The Georgian authorities expected that the current account deficit due to the embargo in 2007 would be financed by "higher foreign exchange proceeds generated by the large inflow of foreign direct

investment" and an increase in tourist revenues. The country has also maintained a solid credit in international market securities. Georgia is becoming more integrated into the global trading network: its 2015 imports and exports account for 50% and 21% of GDP respectively. Georgia's main imports are fuels, vehicles, machinery and parts, grain and other foods, pharmaceuticals. Main exports are vehicles, ferro-alloys, fertilizers, nuts, scrap metal, gold, copper ores. Georgia is developing into an international transport corridor through Batumi and Poti ports, Baku–Tbilisi–Kars Railway line, an oil pipeline from Baku through Tbilisi to Ceyhan, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) and a parallel gas pipeline, the South Caucasus Pipeline. Since coming to power Saakashvili administration accomplished a series of reforms aimed at improving tax collection. Among other things a flat income tax was introduced in 2004. As a result, budget revenues have increased fourfold and a once large budget deficit has turned into surplus. As of 2001, 54 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line but by 2006 poverty decreased to 34 percent, by 2015 it is 10.1 percent. In 2015, the average monthly income of a household was 1,022.3■ (about \$426). 2015 calculations place Georgia's nominal GDP at US\$13.98 billion. Georgia's economy is becoming more devoted to services (as of 2016, representing 68.3 percent of GDP), moving away from the agricultural sector (9.2 percent). In regards to telecommunication infrastructure, Georgia is ranked the last among its bordering neighbors in the World Economic Forum's Network Readiness Index (NRI) – an indicator for determining the development level of a country's information and communication technologies. Georgia ranked number 58 overall in the 2016 NRI ranking, up from 60 in 2015. === Tourism === Tourism is an increasingly significant part of the Georgian economy. In 2016, 2,714,773 tourists brought approximately US\$2.16 billion to the country. According to the government, there are 103 resorts in different climatic zones in Georgia. Tourist attractions include more than 2,000 mineral springs, over 12,000 historical and cultural monuments, four of which are recognised as UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi and Gelati Monastery, historical monuments of Mtskheta, and Upper Svaneti). === Transport === Today transport in Georgia is provided by rail, road, ferry, and air. Total length of roads excluding occupied territories is 20,553 kilometers and railways – 1,576 km. Positioned in the Caucasus and on the coast of the Black Sea, Georgia is a key country through which energy imports to the European Union from neighbouring Azerbaijan pass. Traditionally the country was located on an important north-south trade route between European Russia and the Near East and Turkey. In recent years Georgia has invested large amounts of money in the modernization of its transport networks. The construction of new highways has been prioritized and, as such, major cities like Tbilisi have seen the quality of their roads improve dramatically; despite this however, the quality of inter-city routes remains poor and to date only one motorway-standard road has been constructed – the ■ 1. The Georgian railways represent an important transport artery for the Caucasus as they make up the largest proportion of a route linking the Black and Caspian Seas, this in turn has allowed them to benefit in recent years from increased energy exports from neighbouring Azerbaijan to the European Union, Ukraine and Turkey. Passenger services are operated by the state-owned Georgian Railways whilst freight operations are carried out by a number of licensed operators. Since 2004 the Georgian Railways have been undergoing a rolling program of fleet-renewal and managerial restructuring which is aimed at making the service provided more efficient and comfortable for passengers. Infrastructural development has also been high on the agenda for the railways, with the key Tbilisi railway junction expected to undergo major reorganisation in the near future. Additional projects also include the construction of the economically important Kars–Tbilisi–Baku railway, which was opened on October the 30th, 2017 and connects much of the Caucasus with Turkey by standard gauge railway. Air and maritime transport is developing in Georgia, with the former mainly used by passengers and the latter for transport of freight. Georgia currently has four international airports; the largest of which is by far Tbilisi International Airport, hub for Georgian Airways, which offers connections to many large European cities. Other airports in the country are largely underdeveloped or lack scheduled traffic, although, as of late, efforts have been made to solve both these problems. There are a number of seaports along Georgia's Black Sea coast, the largest and most busy of which is the Port of Batumi; whilst the town is itself a seaside resort, the port is a major cargo terminal in the Caucasus and is often used by neighbouring Azerbaijan as a transit point for making energy deliveries to Europe. Scheduled and chartered passenger ferry services link Georgia with Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Ukraine. == Demographics == Like most native Caucasian peoples, the Georgians do not fit into any of the main ethnic categories of Europe or Asia. The Georgian language, the most pervasive of the Kartvelian languages, is neither Indo-European, Turkic nor Semitic. The present day Georgian or Kartvelian nation is thought to have resulted from the fusion of aboriginal, autochthonous inhabitants with

immigrants who moved into South Caucasus from the direction of Anatolia in remote antiquity. Ethnic Georgians form about 86.8 percent of Georgia's current population of 3,713,804 (2014 census). Other ethnic groups include Abkhazians, Armenians, Assyrians, Azerbaijanis, Greeks, Jews, Kists, Ossetians, Russians, Ukrainians, Yezidis and others. The Georgian Jews are one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world. Once Georgia was also home to significant ethnic German communities, but most Germans were deported during World War II. The 1989 census recorded 341,000 ethnic Russians, or 6.3 percent of the population, 52,000 Ukrainians and 100,000 Greeks in Georgia. Since 1990, 1.5 million Georgian nationals have left. At least 1 million emigrants from Georgia legally or illegally reside in Russia. Georgia's net migration rate is -4.54 , excluding Georgian nationals who live abroad. Georgia has nonetheless been inhabited by immigrants from all over the world throughout its independence. According to 2014 statistics, Georgia gets most of its immigrants from Russia (51.6%), Greece (8.3%), Ukraine (8.11%), Germany (4.3%), and Armenia (3.8%). In the early 1990s, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, violent separatist conflicts broke out in the autonomous region of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region. Many Ossetians living in Georgia left the country, mainly to Russia's North Ossetia. On the other hand, more than 150,000 Georgians left Abkhazia after the breakout of hostilities in 1993. Of the Meskhetian Turks who were forcibly relocated in 1944 only a tiny fraction returned to Georgia as of 2008. The most widespread language group is the Kartvelian family, which includes Georgian, Svan, Mingrelian and Laz. The official languages of Georgia are Georgian, with Abkhaz having official status within the autonomous region of Abkhazia. Georgian is the primary language of 87.7 percent of the population, followed by 6.2 percent speaking Azerbaijani, 3.9 percent Armenian, 1.2 percent Russian, and 1 percent other languages. In the 2010, the United States federal government began the Teach and Learn English with Georgia program of promoting English literacy in elementary school. The goal was to import English speakers from across the world to ensure that all children in Georgia spoke English in four years and replace Russian as a second language. ===

Religion === Today 83.4 percent of the population practices Eastern Orthodox Christianity, with the majority of these adhering to the national Georgian Orthodox Church. The Georgian Orthodox Church is one of the world's most ancient Christian Churches, and claims apostolic foundation by Saint Andrew. In the first half of the 4th century, Christianity was adopted as the state religion of Iberia (present-day Kartli, or eastern Georgia), following the missionary work of Saint Nino of Cappadocia. The Church gained autocephaly during the early Middle Ages; it was abolished during the Russian domination of the country, restored in 1917 and fully recognised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1989. The special status of the Georgian Orthodox Church is officially recognised in the Constitution of Georgia and the Concordat of 2002, although religious institutions are separate from the state, and every citizen has the right of religion. Religious minorities of Georgia include Muslims (10.7 percent), Armenian Christians (2.9 percent) and Roman Catholics (0.5 percent). 0.7 percent of those recorded in the 2014 census declared themselves to be adherents of other religions, 1.2 percent refused or did not state their religion and 0.5 percent declared no religion at all. Islam is represented by both Azerbaijani Shia Muslims (in the south-east) ethnic Georgian Sunni Muslims in Adjara, and Laz-speaking Sunni Muslims as well as Sunni Meskhetian Turks along the border with Turkey. In Abkhazia, a minority of the Abkhaz population is also Sunni Muslim, alongside the faithful of the revived Abkhaz pagan faith. There are also smaller communities of Greek Muslims (of Pontic Greek origin) and Armenian Muslims, both of whom are descended from Ottoman-era converts to Turkish Islam from Eastern Anatolia who settled in Georgia following the Lala Mustafa Pasha's Caucasian campaign that led to the Ottoman conquest of the country in 1578. Georgian Jews trace the history of their community to the 6th century BC; their numbers have dwindled in the last decades due to high levels of immigration to Israel. Despite the long history of religious harmony in Georgia, there have been instances of religious discrimination and violence against "nontraditional faiths", such as Jehovah's Witnesses, by followers of the defrocked Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili. In addition to traditional religious organizations, Georgia retains secular and irreligious segments of society (0.5 percent), as well as a significant portion of religiously affiliated individuals who do not actively practice their faith. Despite that Georgian major population are Orthodox Christians and some minor discrimination against people with different faith, country is very tolerant to other religions. For example, Tbilisi's Leselidze Street on has a church, mosque, and synagogue next to each other. ===

Education === The education system of Georgia has undergone sweeping modernizing, although controversial, reforms since 2004. Education in Georgia is mandatory for all children aged 6–14. The school system is divided into elementary (six years; age level 6–12), basic (three years; age level 12–15), and secondary (three years; age level 15–18), or alternatively vocational studies (two years).

Students with a secondary school certificate have access to higher education. Only the students who have passed the Unified National Examinations may enroll in a state-accredited higher education institution, based on ranking of the scores received at the exams. Most of these institutions offer three levels of study: a Bachelor's Program (three to four years); a Master's Program (two years), and a Doctoral Program (three years). There is also a Certified Specialist's Program that represents a single-level higher education program lasting from three to six years. As of 2016, 75 higher education institutions are accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Gross primary enrollment ratio was 117 percent for the period of 2012–2014, the 2nd highest in Europe after Sweden. Tbilisi has become the main artery of the Georgian educational system, particularly since the creation of the First Georgian Republic in 1918 permitted the establishment of modern, Georgian-language educational institutions. Tbilisi is the home to several major institutions of higher education in Georgia, notably the Tbilisi State Medical University, which was founded as Tbilisi Medical Institute in 1918, and the Tbilisi State University (TSU), which was established in 1918 and remains the oldest university in the entire Caucasus region. With enrollment of over 35,000 students, the number of faculty and staff (collaborators) at TSU is approximately 5,000. Georgia's main and largest technical university, Georgian Technical University, as well as The University of Georgia (Tbilisi), Caucasus University and Free University of Tbilisi are also in Tbilisi. == Culture == Georgian culture evolved over thousands of years from its foundations in the Iberian and Colchian civilizations. Georgian culture enjoyed a renaissance and golden age of classical literature, arts, philosophy, architecture and science in the 11th century. Georgian culture was influenced by Classical Greece, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the various Iranian empires (notably the Achaemenid, Parthian, Sassanian, Safavid and Qajar empires), and later, from the 19th century, by the Russian Empire. The Georgian language, and the Classical Georgian literature of the poet Shota Rustaveli, were revived in the 19th century after a long period of turmoil, laying the foundations of the romantics and novelists of the modern era such as Grigol Orbeliani, Nikoloz Baratashvili, Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Vazha-Pshavela. The Georgian language is written in three unique scripts, which according to traditional accounts were invented by King Pharnavaz I of Iberia in the 3rd century BC. Georgia is known for its folklore, traditional music, dances, theatre, cinema, and art. Notable painters from the 20th century include Niko Pirosmiani, Lado Gudiashvili, Elene Akhvediani; notable ballet choreographers include George Balanchine, Vakhtang Chabukiani, and Nino Ananiashvili; notable poets include Galaktion Tabidze, Lado Asatiani, and Mukhran Machavariani; and notable theatre and film directors include Robert Sturua, Tengiz Abuladze, Giorgi Danelia and Otar Ioseliani. === Architecture and arts === Georgian architecture has been influenced by many civilizations. There are several different architectural styles for castles, towers, fortifications and churches. The Upper Svaneti fortifications, and the castle town of Shatili in Khevsureti, are some of the finest examples of medieval Georgian castle architecture. Other architectural aspects of Georgia include Rustaveli avenue in Tbilisi in the Haussmann style, and the Old Town District. Georgian ecclesiastic art is one of the most notable aspects of Georgian Christian architecture, which combines the classical dome style with the original basilica style, forming what is known as the Georgian cross-dome style. Cross-dome architecture developed in Georgia during the 9th century; before that, most Georgian churches were basilicas. Other examples of Georgian ecclesiastic architecture can be found outside Georgia: Bachkovo Monastery in Bulgaria (built in 1083 by the Georgian military commander Grigori Bakuriani), Iviron monastery in Greece (built by Georgians in the 10th century), and the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem (built by Georgians in the 9th century). One of the most famous late 19th/early 20th century Georgian artists was primitivist painter Niko Pirosmiani. === Media === Television, magazines, and newspapers in Georgia are all operated by both state-owned and for-profit corporations which depend on advertising, subscription, and other sales-related revenues. The Constitution of Georgia guarantees freedom of speech. As a country in transition, the Georgian media system is under transformation. The media environment of Georgia remains the freest and most diverse in the South Caucasus, despite the long-term politicisation and polarisation affecting the sector. The political struggle for control over the public broadcaster have left it without a direction in 2014 too. A large percentage of Georgian households have a television, and most have at least one radio. Most of Georgia's media companies are headquartered in its capital and largest city, Tbilisi. === Music === Georgia has an ancient musical tradition, which is primarily known for its early development of polyphony. Georgian polyphony is based on three vocal parts, a unique tuning system based on perfect fifths, and a harmonic structure rich in parallel fifths and dissonances. Three types of polyphony have developed in Georgia: a complex version in Svaneti, a dialogue over a bass background in the Kakheti region, and a three-part

partially-improvised version in western Georgia. The Georgian folk song "Chakrulo" was one of 27 musical compositions included on the Voyager Golden Records that were sent into space on Voyager 2 on 20 August 1977.

=== Cuisine === Georgian cuisine and wine have evolved through the centuries, adapting traditions in each era. One of the most unusual traditions of dining is supra, or Georgian table, which is also a way of socialising with friends and family. The head of supra is known as tamada. He also conducts the highly philosophical toasts, and makes sure that everyone is enjoying themselves. Various historical regions of Georgia are known for their particular dishes: for example, khinkali (meat dumplings), from eastern mountainous Georgia, and khachapuri, mainly from Imereti, Samegrelo and Adjara. In addition to traditional Georgian dishes, the foods of other countries have been brought to Georgia by immigrants from Russia, Greece, and recently China.

=== Sports === The most popular sports in Georgia are football, basketball, rugby union, wrestling, judo, and weightlifting. Historically, Georgia has been famous for its physical education; the Romans were fascinated with Georgians' physical qualities after seeing the training techniques of ancient Iberia. Wrestling remains a historically important sport of Georgia, and some historians think that the Greco-Roman style of wrestling incorporates many Georgian elements. Within Georgia, one of the most popularized styles of wrestling is the Kakhetian style. There were a number of other styles in the past that are not as widely used today. For example, the Khevsureti region of Georgia has three different styles of wrestling. Other popular sports in 19th century Georgia were polo, and Lelo, a traditional Georgian game later replaced by rugby union. The first and only race circuit in the Caucasian region is located in Georgia. Rustavi International Motorpark originally built in 1978 was re-opened in 2012 after total reconstruction costing \$20 million. The track satisfies the FIA Grade 2 requirements and currently hosts the Legends car racing series and Formula Alfa competitions. Basketball was always one of the notable sports in Georgia, and Georgia had a few very famous Soviet Union national team members, such as Otar Korkia, Mikhail Korkia, Zurab Sakandelidze and Levan Moseshevili. Dinamo Tbilisi won the prestigious Euroleague competition in 1962. Georgia had five players in the NBA: Vladimir Stepania, Jake Tsakalidis, Nikoloz Tskitishvili, Tornike Shengelia and current Golden State Warriors center Zaza Pachulia. Other notable basketball players are two times Euroleague champion Giorgi Shermadini and Euroleague players Manuchar Markoishvili and Viktor Sanikidze. Sport is regaining its popularity in the country in recent years. Georgia national basketball team qualified to EuroBasket during the last three tournaments since 2011.

== International rankings == The following are links to the international rankings of Georgia.

== See also == Outline of Georgia (country) Index of Georgia (country)-related articles

== Notes ==

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