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[Media Freedom in the Caucasus](#)

May 3 is World Press Freedom Day, and an occasion to look at how the three countries are doing in terms of press freedom. Freedom House has released a [comprehensive report](#) with detailed summaries.

In the Caucasus, these are the results

- Georgia is ranked 122, and as "partially free"
- Armenia comes in at 142, and considered "not free"
- Azerbaijan shares the rank of 164th with Russia, both described as "not free"

By comparison, Latvia is at 31, Turkey 105, Ukraine 112, Saudi Arabia 178 and China 181.



In regional rankings, Georgia's cup is at least half full. In Freedom House's map (see above), it is a little yellow speck. Except for the Baltics, only Ukraine is doing better among post-Soviet states. In this relative post-Soviet ranking, Armenia follows after Georgia. Azerbaijan is not far down that list, lagging behind Moldova and Kyrgyzstan. In other words, the Baltics are way ahead, the Caucasus trails after Ukraine, but generally does better than Russia, Belarus or Central Asia (with Bishkek sneaking ahead of Baku).

So much for the rankings. Freedom House actually provides an extensive [summary of the methodology](#), describing how they evaluate the legal, political and economic environment for press freedom. The weightings are plausible and including the economic environment for press freedom makes a lot of sense.

The narrative summaries provide details to back up the claims. Extensive libel laws in Armenia make it possible for powerful people to suppress criticism. Similarly, Freedom House says that defamation lawsuits seem to be a favorite method of silencing critical journalists in Azerbaijan. The interior minister alone brought five cases last year. But the report also documents several cases of intimidation, beatings, and one unresolved high-profile murder in Baku. In Georgia, a mix of government pressure and journalist self-censorship remain a problem. Not documented, but certainly a factor, is the sheer clumsiness of the Georgian government in handling the media: journalists tell

farcical stories about hunting down basic information from government representatives.

In all of the countries, the commercial viability of independent media limits the freedom of expression. An independent Public Broadcaster is a desirable solution, but the very notion of independence is both a precondition and a result of a more mature democracy.