Kingdom of the Netherlands

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INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
IDFI

Internet Freedom in Georgia 2013-2014

Institute for Development of
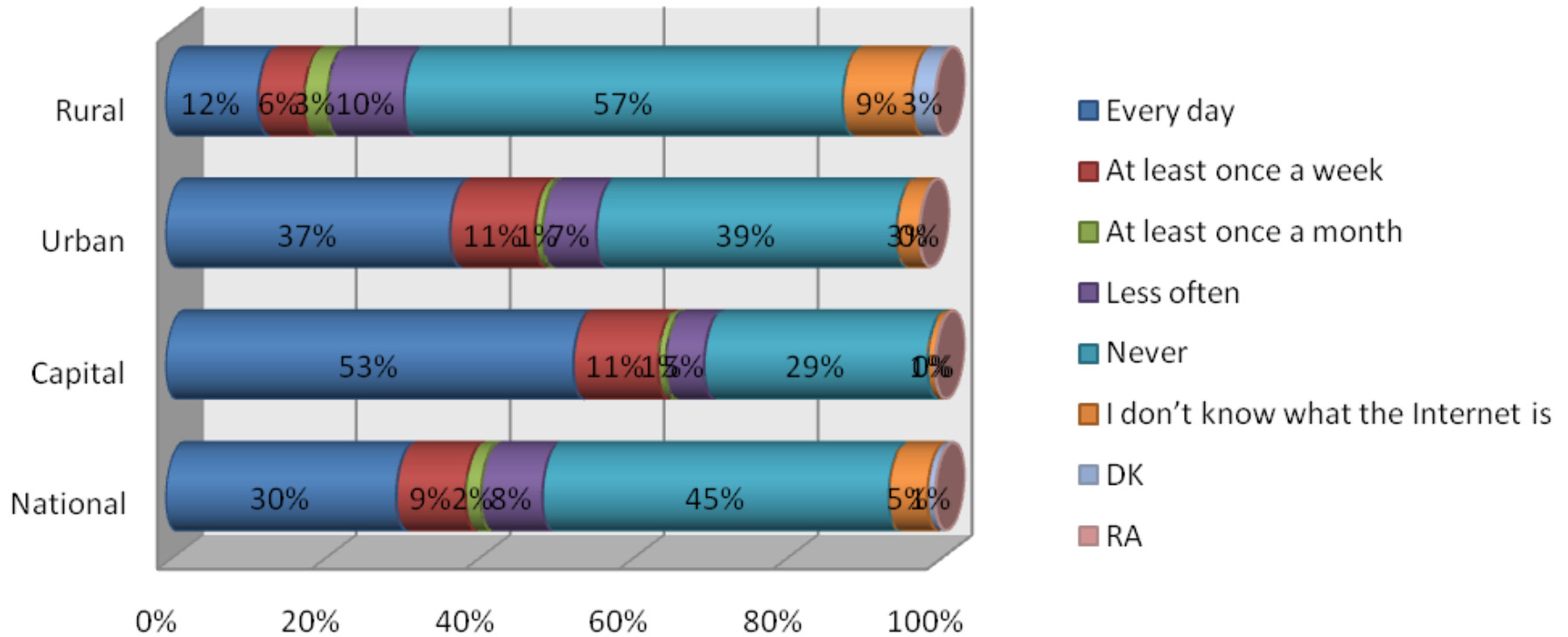Freedom of Information (IDFI)

7 June 2014

Internet Freedom in Georgia

- Internet User's Profile
- Internet Infrastructure Projects
- Internet Legislation
- Media and Info-activism
- Technical filtering and blocking of websites
- Self-censorship
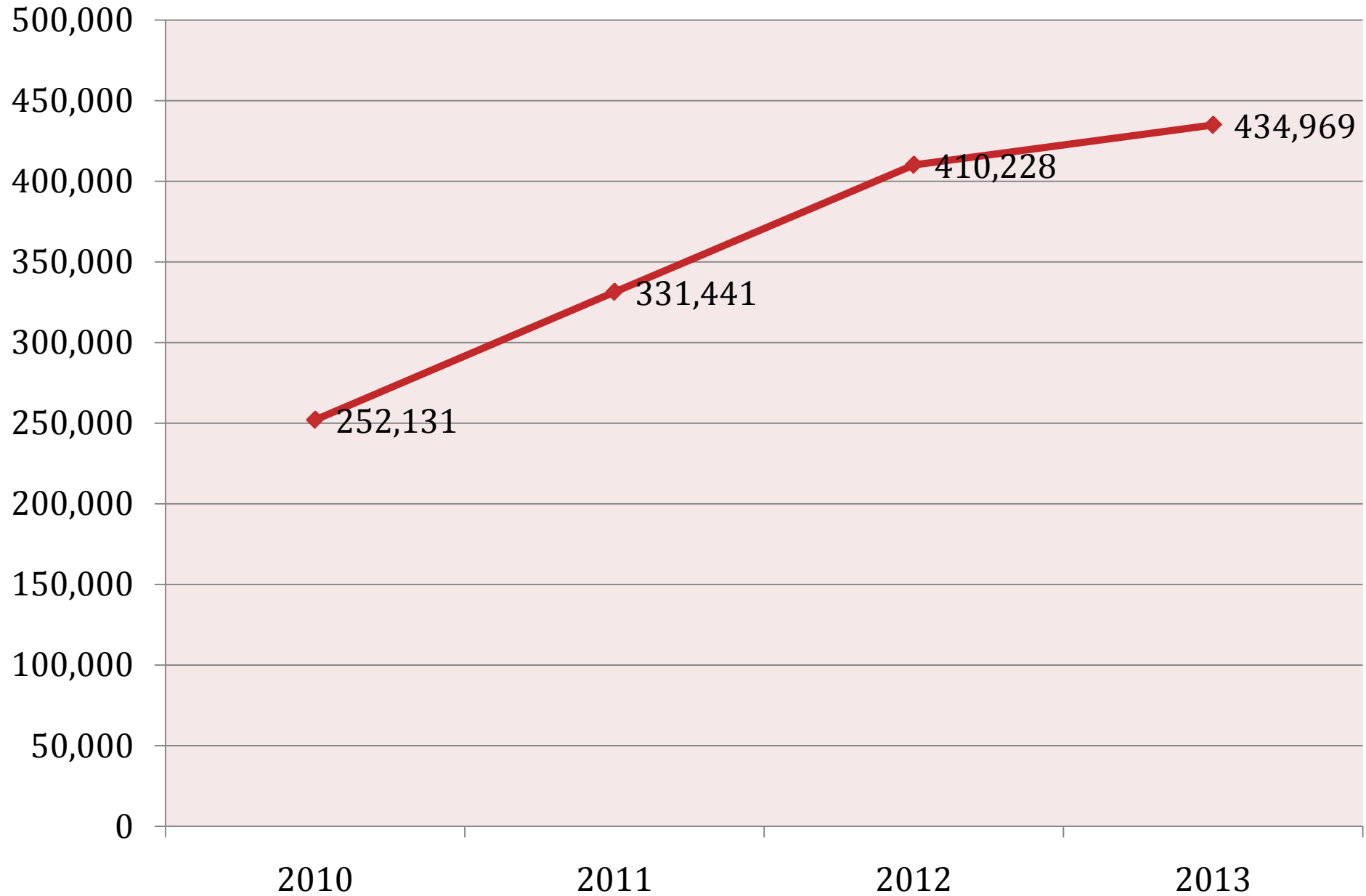- Internet Users' Rights and their Violations

Internet User's Profile

- About 45% of Georgian population have access to internet (2012, ITU)
- 87 882 Wireless, 434,969 Wired (2013, GNCC)
- 30% of Georgians access the Internet every day
- Despite the growing number of internet users, accessibility of wired internet has not seen significant positive changes over the past years
- Lack of market diversification: dominance of companies for both wired internet (Caucasus Online and Silknet) and mobile internet (Geocell and Magticom)
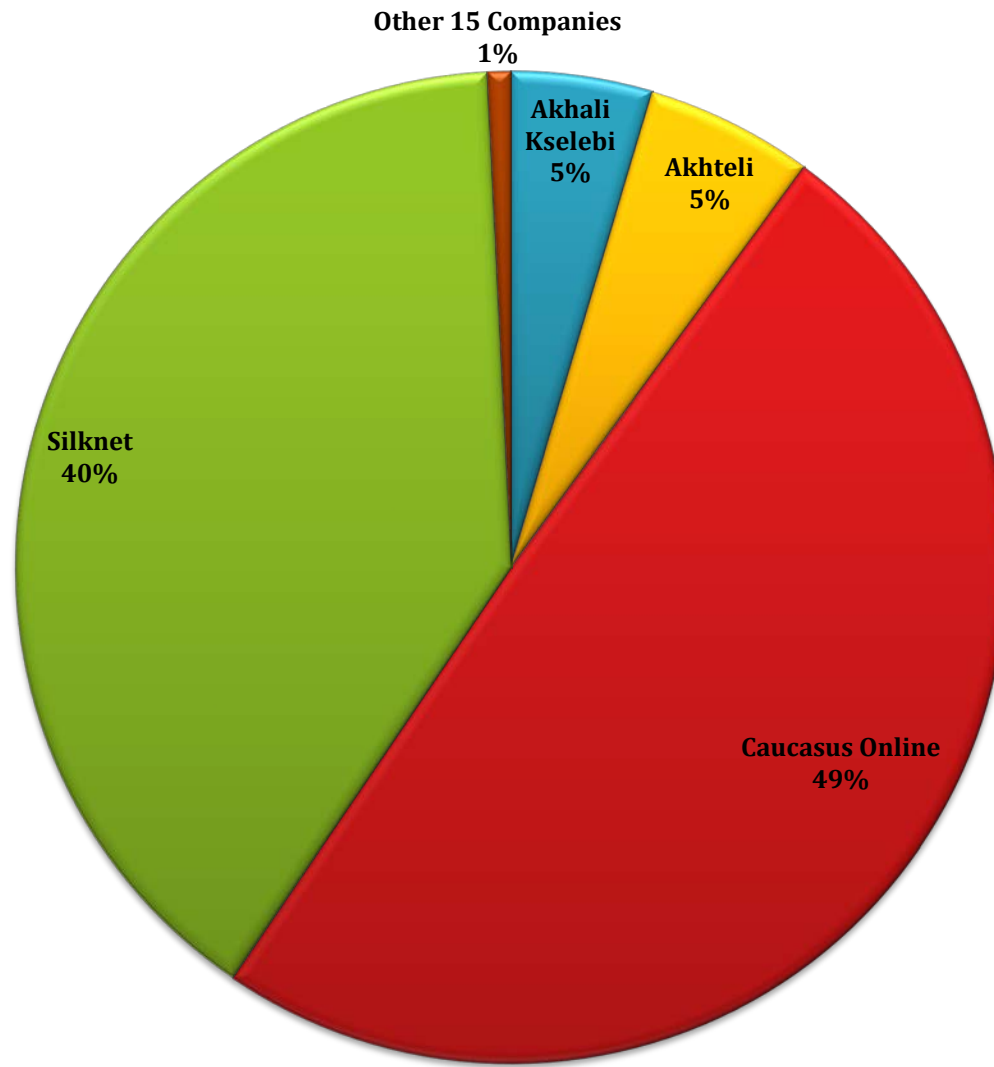
How Often Do You Use the Internet? (2013)

Rural: Every day 12%, At least once a week 6%, At least once a month 3%, Less often 10%, Never 57%, I don't know what the Internet is 9%, DK 3%

Urban: Every day 37%, At least once a week 11%, At least once a month 1%, Less often 7%, Never 39%, I don't know what the Internet is 3%, DK 0%

Capital: Every day 53%, At least once a week 11%, At least once a month 1%, Less often 3%, Never 29%, I don't know what the Internet is 0%, DK 1%

National: Every day 30%, At least once a week 9%, At least once a month 2%, Less often 8%, Never 45%, I don't know what the Internet is 5%, DK 1%

Legend:
- Every day
- At least once a week
- At least once a month
- Less often
- Never
- I don't know what the Internet is
- DK
- RA

Number of Wired Internet Subscriptions
(As of October 2013, GNCC)

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Subscriptions	252,131	331,441	410,228	434,969

Tbilisi

Internet User's Profile

- Internet penetration is the significant challenge for the regions of Georgia
- Low internet accessibility still remains one of the fundamental challenges for development of [new technologies, electronic governance and generally, sustainability of online media.](#)
- Main challenges:
  - Low speed of internet
  - Inappropriate prices for services
  - Inadequate infrastructure
  - Economic burden
  - Lack of needed skills

Internet Infrastructure in Georgia

- Three periods:
    - 1990s, all providers were connected with Russia, and the only web-site was that of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences
    - Pioneer providing companies e.g. Kheta (www.kheta.ge), "Goodwillcom"
    - Fibre-optic network

First Georgian Web-site

Government strategies for internet development

- E-Georgia strategy and action plan 2014-2018
  - Development of e-services
  - E-participation and open government
  - Development of internet infrastructure
- Concept of regional internet development in Georgia
  - Providing internet to mountainous regions of Georgia
  - Establishing free Wi-Fi in touristic zones of Georgia

E-Georgia strategy and action plan 2014-2018

- Led by Data Exchange Agency (DEA)
- Infrastructure – broadband access
  - 70 % of households is with broadband access by 2018, the rest of the population has access to broadband infrastructure via Public Service Halls, Kiosks, Community Centres, public libraries.
  - 40% of individuals using selected mobile devices to access the Internet by 2016
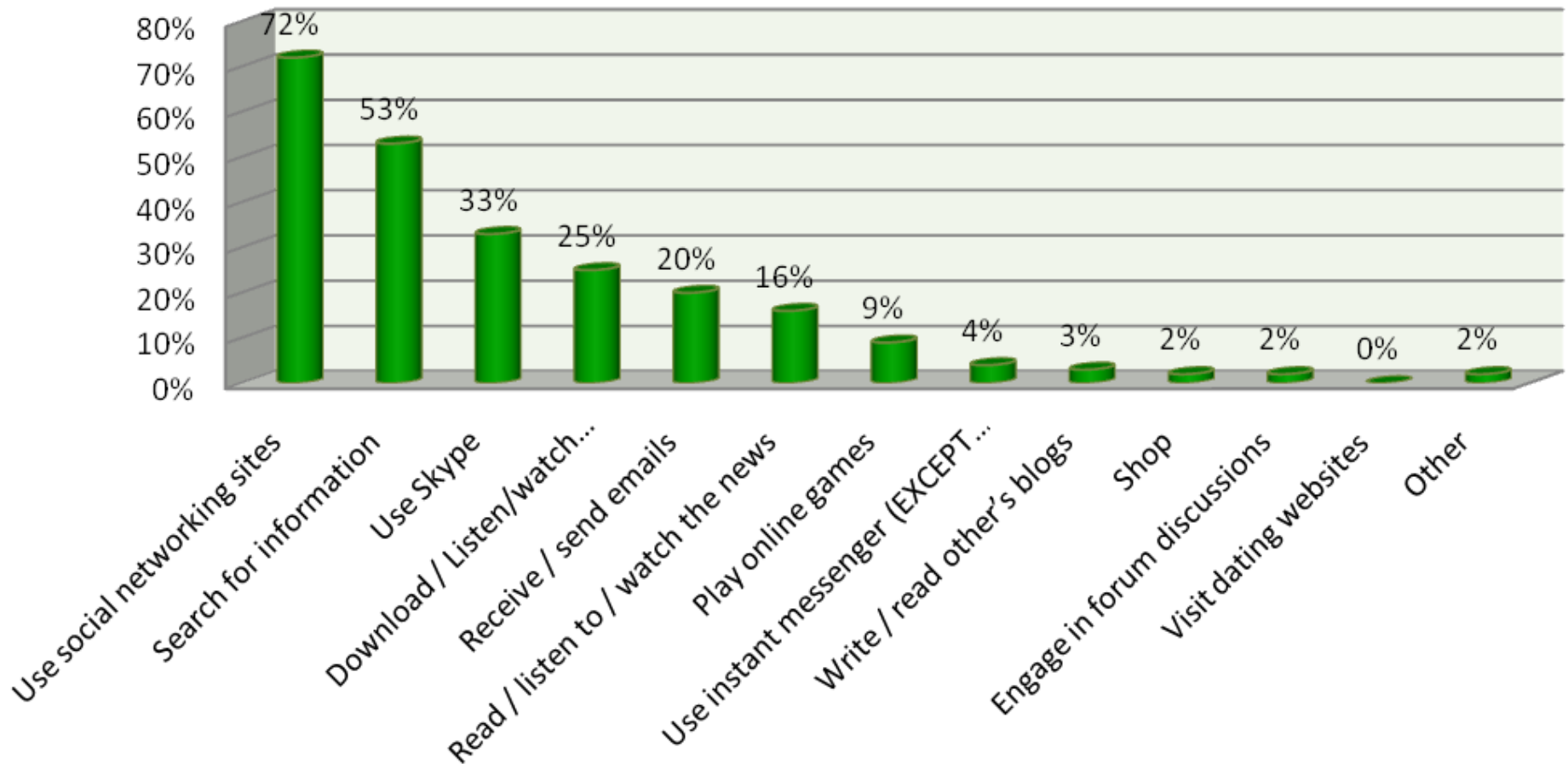 - 98% of population coverage with basic broadband in 2018

Internet Legislation

- Georgian legislation regarding internet regulation can be regarded as one of the liberal and less restrictive ones
- "Anarchically free" internet
- Lack of resources & readiness of society to regulate internet
- Need for common standard of internet regulation (speed and quality, not content)
- Concerns of political independence and economic interests of the regulatory body
- Laws not properly executed
- Great leverage to market actors
- Poor legislative culture of users

Media and Info-activism

- Online media and social networks has become a significant source of alternative information for some parts of citizens in the country

- Peaceful protests were planned and organized on social networks

- Most browsed web-pages in Georgia: Facebook.com, Google.com, Youtube.com, Google.ge and Odnoklassniki.ru.

Most frequent activities using the internet

Activity	Percentage
Use social networking sites	72%
Search for information	53%
Use Skype	33%
Download / Listen/watch...	25%
Receive / send emails	20%
Read / listen to / watch the news	16%
Play online games	9%
Use instant messenger (EXCEPT...	4%
Write / read other's blogs	3%
Shop	2%
Engage in forum discussions	2%
Visit dating websites	0%
Other	2%

Technical filtering and blocking of websites

- Technically there are many ways by which the state, regulatory body or providing companies can filter or block websites.
- There is no direct censorship, filtering and blocking of websites
- Friendly or threatening calls, offences, appeals, warnings, blackmail take place
- A few cases of blocking websites:
  - Blocking of Russian websites during 2008 August war
  - Film "Five Days of War" about 2008 August war
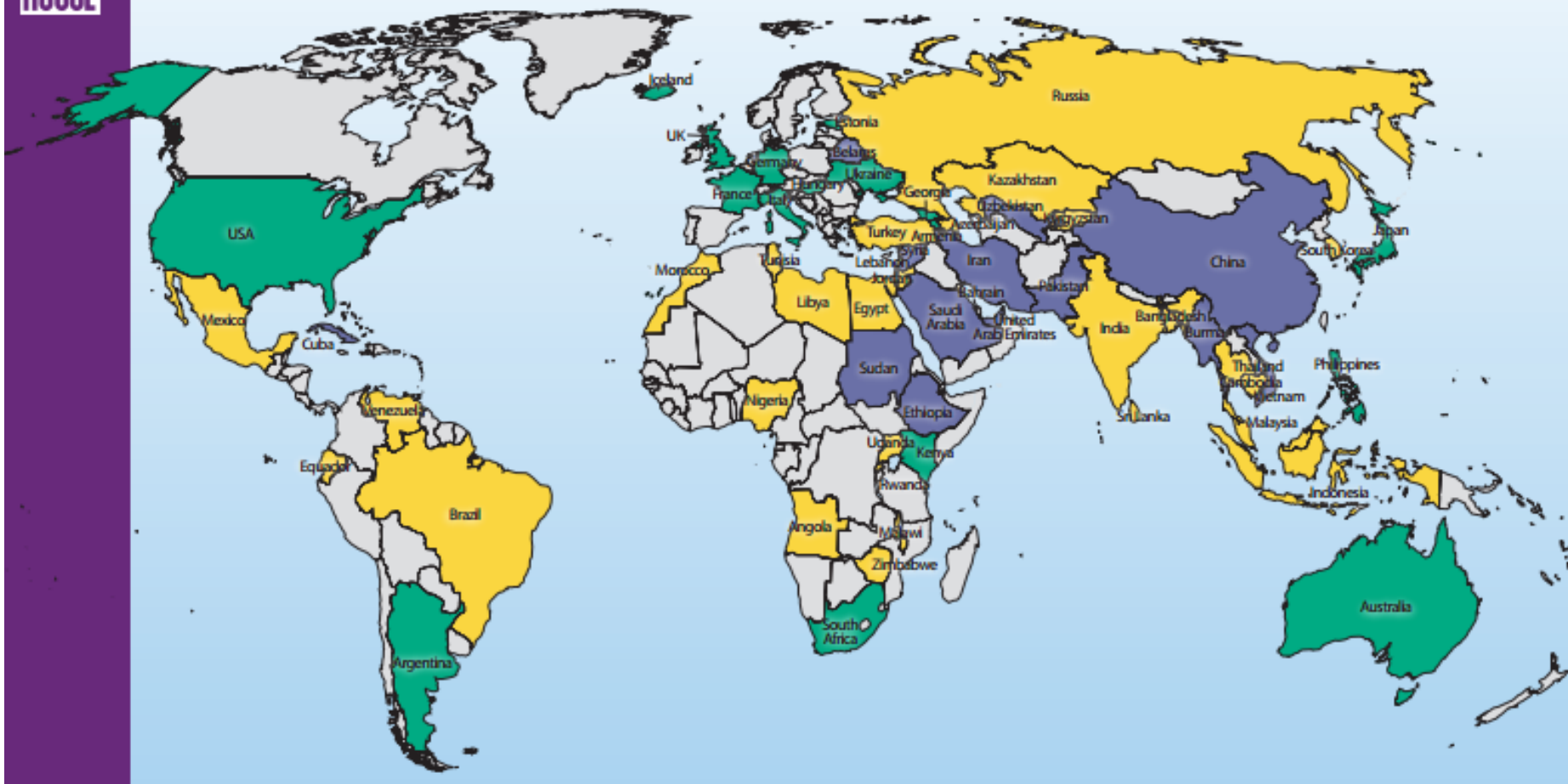- Cases of violation or threats rarely appealed in court or regulatory body

Self-censorship

- Abstaining from freely expressing your opinions about different topics
- Voluntary and involuntary
- Journalists and Civil service
- Journalism vs. civic activism
- Private opinions vs. position of an editorial office
- Formal agreements
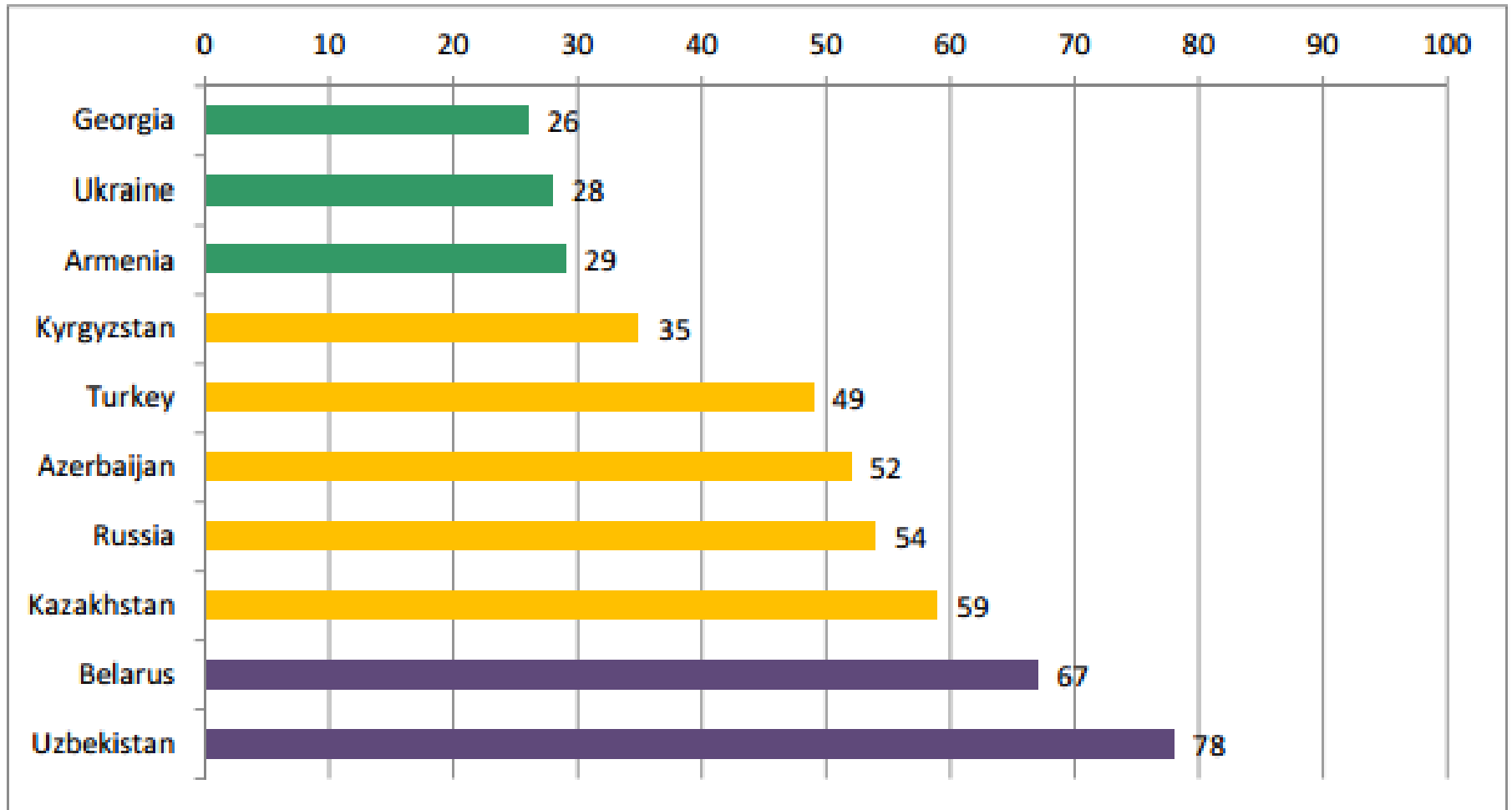
Internet Users' Rights and their Violations

- Georgian internet is ranked as "Free" along with the USA, UK and Estonia (2013, Freedom House)

- Cases when internet activities led to verbal and/or physical violence against students, regulation of internet activities or dismissal of the employees still take place

FREEDOM ON THE NET 2013
A GLOBAL ASSESSMENT OF INTERNET AND DIGITAL MEDIA

EURASIA (0 = Most Free, 100 = Least Free)

Country	Value
Georgia	26
Ukraine	28
Armenia	29
Kyrgyzstan	35
Turkey	49
Azerbaijan	52
Russia	54
Kazakhstan	59
Belarus	67
Uzbekistan	78

Case of LEPL of the Ministry of Justice

- Dismissal of the head of a Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL) of the Ministry of Justice was apparently reaction of the Ministry on an article published in an online magazine.

- Following the dismissal two managers of the LEPL spread information in the social network, that they were threatened and pressed by the Ministry in response to their critical statuses about dismissal of their director.

Cases of students

- Students of one of the leading private universities, Free University, have published a post on their problems on a students' blog, www.reactori.wordpress.com. The administrators of the blog received threats on both Facebook page and blog, were "advised" and demanded to remove the post as it was "incorrect" by one of the students of Free University.

- There is a blog created by law students of Tbilisi State University about issues surrounding their university life and the student self-government www.studentebi.com. In spring of 2012 the vice- president of the student self-government at Tbilisi State University claimed that the blog did not have right accents, and that it created negative PR against student self-government. Consequently, two bloggers, Z.M. and T.U. were beaten in the office of the student self- government.