

Belarus Tajikistan  
Latvia Estonia  
Uzbekistan Moldova Armenia

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STRATEG**EAST**  
WESTERNIZATION  
INDEX  
2026

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Azerbaijan Georgia  
Turkmenistan Kazakhstan  
Ukraine Lithuania  
Kyrgyzstan

Belarus Tajikistan  
**Latvia Estonia**  
Uzbekistan Moldova Armenia

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STRATEGEAST  
WESTERNIZATION  
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Azerbaijan Georgia  
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Kyrgyzstan

# ABOUT STRATEG EAST

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StrategEast is a leading independent institution developing Eurasia’s digital economy, in collaboration with international financial institutions, development agencies, global tech companies, and Eurasian governments.

StrategEast is a non profit organization with offices in the United States, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan.

## LEARN MORE ON OUR WEBSITE:

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# INTRODUCTION

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I am pleased to present the 2026 edition of the StrategEast Westernization Index, our flagship study measuring the depth and direction of Westernization across Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Since its inception in 2018, the Index has served as an analytical tool for governments, international financial institutions, development agencies, and think tanks seeking to understand not aspirations, but structural alignment with Western political, legal, economic, and social models in post-Soviet Eurasia.

**This edition is published under circumstances fundamentally different from those surrounding our previous release. If the 2022 Index captured the region on the eve of a historical rupture caused by full-scale invasion**

**of Ukraine, the 2026 Index reflects a Eurasia that has already crossed a point of no return. Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine has ceased to be an extraordinary shock and has instead become a defining structural force shaping state behavior, institutional trajectories, and geopolitical choices across the entire region we study.**

For Ukraine, the war has been an existential test. A country that should have been focused on development, reform, and convergence has been forced instead to defend its sovereignty, its people, and its future at immense human and economic cost. Yet even under martial law and wartime constraints, Ukraine’s Western orientation has not weakened; it has become institutionalized. Westernization for Ukraine is no longer a reform agenda or a policy choice — it is a matter of survival and state continuity.

The consequences of the war extend far beyond Ukraine. Moldova has been structurally drawn into European legal, economic, and security frameworks. The Baltic states have seen their long-standing Western anchoring confirmed as a strategic necessity rather than a historical legacy. Across

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the region, the collapse of the old equilibrium — built around Russian power, mediation, and post-imperial inertia — has produced sharply diverging national trajectories.

One of the most consequential developments captured by this Index is the erosion of Russia’s role as a regional gatekeeper. Military overstretch, sanctions, and diplomatic isolation have reduced Moscow’s ability to arbitrate conflicts, enforce loyalty, or monopolize trade and security choices. This shift is particularly visible in the South Caucasus, where the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Karabakh and the launch of direct Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations have fundamentally altered the region’s political geometry. For the first time in decades, states previously constrained by Russian mediation are exercising greater room for sovereign decision-making and diversified external partnerships.

The Index also documents a growing institutional polarization across Eurasia. The former “middle zone” of hybrid balancing systems is shrinking. On one end of the spectrum, Western-anchored democracies and accession-track states are embedding European norms into the core of their political, legal, and economic systems. On the other, entrenched authoritarian regimes are consolidating closed models that actively resist Western institutional standards. Between these poles, Central Asia illustrates a distinct pattern of selective modernization: administrative capacity, digital governance, and economic openness advance without corresponding political liberalization or judicial independence.

At the same time, Westernization can no longer be understood solely through the lens of formal institutions. Social and cultural Westernization continues to expand through mobility, education, labor migration, and digital connectivity — even where political systems remain closed. Large segments of societies across the region now operate within Western information, professional, and cultural ecosystems regardless of domestic institutional constraints. This growing gap between societal orientation and state practice represents one of the most important long-term dynamics shaping Eurasia’s future.

The 2026 Westernization Index reflects a region that no longer follows a single trajectory. Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia have fragmented into distinct and increasingly irreversible paths defined by war, institutional choices, and external alignment. In this environment, Westernization is no longer a slow cultural drift or a symbolic aspiration. It is a strategic and institutional decision that determines whether states integrate into open democratic systems.

By capturing these dynamics across political, legal, economic, cultural, and lifestyle dimensions, the Westernization Index 2026 offers not only a comparative measurement of proximity to the West, but a deeper assessment of how far each country has moved away from — or remains embedded within — systems that constrain sovereignty, freedom, and development.

*Sincerely,*  
*Anatoly Motkin*  
*President, StrategEast*



# INDEX METHODOLOGY

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## HOW THE SCORE IS DETERMINED

Westernization is a process of social change whereby societies adopt Western patterns of political development, legal functioning, economic relations, cultural discourse, and lifestyle. The Westernization Index is a tool aimed at measuring the level to which post-Soviet countries and societies, with the exception of the Russian Federation, have adopted, accepted, or were permeated by Western culture in all key areas for each country. The Index is based on a series of elements and benchmarks that helped us assess the adoption and implementation of the Western model by looking at five key areas:

1. Political Westernization.
2. Economic Westernization.
3. Legal Westernization.
4. Language and cultural Westernization.
5. Lifestyle Westernization.

We limited the Index to the five areas we believe are most critical to examine, although we accept that we could have expanded this to include even more areas for a more robust analysis. Each area (which has multiple sub-areas) is weighted differently within the Index to capture the relative importance of each sector to the overall Western transition. The weight of each of the first three areas is 25%, the fourth 15%, and the fifth 10%. The maximum possible score is 100%, which represents full Westernization.

The Index is based on two complementary types of analysis. First, we rely on qualitative expert assessments provided by our researchers, and second, on quantitative data publicly available from open sources. These two methodologies are combined in order to reflect countries' complete Westernization status. Our organization partnered with local experts in each country who authored the qualitative assessments.

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In order to ensure that the experts' analysis is consistent across countries, common guidelines and data sources are used in reports and evaluations. Based on these guidelines and the combined quantitative and qualitative data, experts assigned scores within each sub-area. These scores were then reviewed in two steps: first by the project coordination team, and then by the third-party expert. The two-tier review is meant to decrease the likelihood of subjectivity and to ensure that the data are comparable.

Scoring was carried out through a multistage process which included analytical contributions from different research teams to ensure a balanced scoring process. The experts preparing country profiles calculated and suggested preliminary scores according to strict indicators. The proposed points were reviewed and adjusted by a research team in StrategEast. This made it possible to unbundle the research and scoring process and calibrate and weight scores in order to avoid any possible bias from the country experts.

The scoring process is based on the tested methodology used in the Nations in Transit Report by Freedom House and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index by Bertelsmann Foundation. The scores reflect the consensus of each section's author, the StrategEast research team and reviewers and academic advisers. In cases when consensus was not reached, the score was decided by StrategEast.

The overall process was organized into four phases, beginning with data collection and experts' assessment. Second, the data and qualitative analysis are subjected to the two-step review. Third, changes are made to each country profile to ensure that the data and the scores are comparable. Fourth, the data and the assessment are analyzed and compared across all countries and sectors to ensure that all trends, similarities, and differentiations are identified.

The Westernization Index was developed by a team of over 20 people, including experts from the countries studied and the project management group.

# WESTERNIZATION INDEX

## SCORING RUBRIC

### POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION, 25 POINTS

#### DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM, 10 PTS

High: 8–10 | Mid: 3–7 | Low: 0–2

#### A “High” score (8–10) indicates:

- Free and fair elections
- High levels of media and press freedom
- No restrictions to new political party formation/registration

#### PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT, 8 PTS

High: 6–8 | Mid: 3–5 | Low: 0–2

#### A “High” score (6–8) indicates:

- Parliamentary parties support European integration
- Parliamentary parties support NATO integration
- Parliamentary parties support trade with Western powers

#### PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION, 7 PTS

High: 6–7 | Mid: 3–5 | Low: 0–2

#### A “High” score (6–7) indicates:

- Public opinion polls indicate high support for EU integration
- Public opinion polls indicate high support for NATO
- Public opinion favors strong alliances with Western powers

### LEGAL WESTERNIZATION, 25 POINTS

#### CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (5–6) indicates:

- High level of compliance with the Venice Commission’s international standards
- Close cooperation and engagement with the Venice Commission and its recommendations

#### INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS, 7 PTS

High: 6–7 | Mid: 3–5 | Low: 0–2

#### A “High” score (6–7) indicates:

- A strong, independent judiciary system with little corruption or external pressure from political actors
- A high ranking on the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index

#### HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (5–6) indicates:

- Legislation protecting human rights
- Enforcement of legal human rights protections
- Favorable reviews from human rights organizations

#### NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (6–7) indicates:

- Judges display a willingness to conflict with prior prosecutions in appropriate situations, rather than simply duplicating indictments

## ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION, 25 POINTS

### EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION, 7 PTS

High: 6–7 | Mid: 3–5 | Low: 0–2

#### A “High” score (6–7) indicates:

- Membership in the European Union
- Membership in the World Trade Organization

### EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (5–6) indicates:

- High ranking on the Index of Economic Freedom
- High ranking on the Corruption Perception Index

### WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (5–6) indicates:

- Major trading partner with Western nations and the EU

### WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY’S ECONOMY, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (5–6) indicates:

- Support for Western foreign direct investment (FDI)
- Western FDI contributes a major portion of total FDI

## LEGAL WESTERNIZATION, 25 POINTS

### USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE, 2 PTS

High: 2 | Mid: 1 | Low: 0

#### A “High” score (2) indicates:

- The country’s native language uses a Latin script
- English signage is frequently used in public

### PROFICIENCY IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST, 6 PTS

High: 5–6 | Mid: 2–4 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (5–6) indicates:

- Proportion of the population proficient in the most common languages of the West (English, German, French, Spanish)
- Government promotes the study of foreign languages

### SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION’S MOVIE THEATRES AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA, 7 PTS

High: 6–7 | Mid: 3–5 | Low: 0–2

#### A “High” score (6–7) indicates:

- Western TV dominates airtime
- Western movies dominate cinema showings
- Widespread use of Western social media channels like Facebook
- Western social media is not blocked by the government

## LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION, 10 POINTS

### PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES, 5 PTS

High: 4–5 | Mid: 2–3 | Low: 0–1

#### A “High” score (4–5) indicates:

- High share of the population has traveled to the West
- High share traveling abroad for business or education
- High share traveling abroad for vacation

### PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES, 3 PTS

High: 3 | Mid: 1–2 | Low: 0

#### A “High” score (3) indicates:

- Strong presence of Western restaurants and fast-food chains
- Strong presence of Western supermarket chains
- Strong presence of Western clothing brands

### MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE, 2 PTS

High: 2 | Mid: 1 | Low: 0

#### A “High” score (2) indicates:

- A high share of the country has smartphones
- A high share regularly access Internet on their phone

## WHY THIS STUDY DOES NOT INCLUDE RUSSIA

While academic and research interest in Russia has always been significant, such interest in other former Soviet states has been limited. By focusing on all other post-Soviet countries with the exception of Russia, StrategEast's Westernization Index is intended to help generate balanced and multi-faceted attention on the region. By excluding Russia, we do not assume that Russia is more or less Westernized than other post-Soviet states and societies. Rather, the objective is to draw attention to all other former Soviet countries and to the development they have undergone since the collapse of the USSR.

## METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

Every Index, including this one, has certain methodological limitations which are inevitable and derive from the difficulties described below. However, the goal is not to cover every possible aspect of Westernization in the countries of the former USSR, but rather to analyze major trends and create a propitious foundation for robust and in-depth research in the future. Further, the report aims to create a more informed basis for policy debate about how to support the transition in the post-Soviet countries and increase attention to the region. We encourage readers to use this Index with these points in mind.

While writing this report, the research team identified several issues that posed challenges to comparing certain data and trends. These include the following:

### YEAR/PERIOD COVERED BY THE DATA

Certain authors proposed data covering all of 2022-2025; others gave figures for the first half or first quarter of 2025. For example, this inconsistency is visible in the data on investments, trade, and other areas that require concrete data. Thus, it should be noted that the report does not provide data for the entirety of 2025, since the data were not yet released at the time of analysis. While the authors focus their analysis primarily on the trends of recent years, they also cover the effects of Westernization which were caused by events that took place much earlier (for example, in the 1990s).

### DATA ON FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) BY ORIGIN

Although the authors refer to the official data provided by statistics offices, this data does not specify when FDI is actually the result of domestic money reinvested through countries with a special fiscal regime such as Cyprus, the Netherlands, or Austria. This may explain the high levels of FDI in certain countries, and the experts give their own perspective on the (re-invested) FDI in the report.

#### **DIFFERENT SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION DATA**

There is no data from certain countries when measuring public opinion of Western civilization. While all the authors have provided data about citizens' attitudes towards the West, these data are derived from different types of surveys. Moreover, the questions are often asked differently from one country to the next. Since there is no survey that covers the entire post-Soviet region and uses the same methodology, we had to use the most appropriate source for each country.

#### **LACK OF EXTERNAL SOURCES**

Several authors could not cite external sources for data in the entertainment field (for example, the number of US or European films in cinemas or on TV). The markets in these countries may be too small to be analyzed by monitoring media/communications companies. In these situations, we chose to rely on the observations made by local authors who are deeply familiar with the situations in their home countries.

In some very rare and exceptional cases, the authors obtained information from informal discussions with officials, but they are not able to refer to the data since there was no agreement on citation. Moreover, in some cases it is difficult to cite a source for a certain observation or phenomenon. Countries like Ukraine or Lithuania benefit from various news sources and a diverse media environment. In the case of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, however, there are fewer sources providing reliable data on a daily basis.

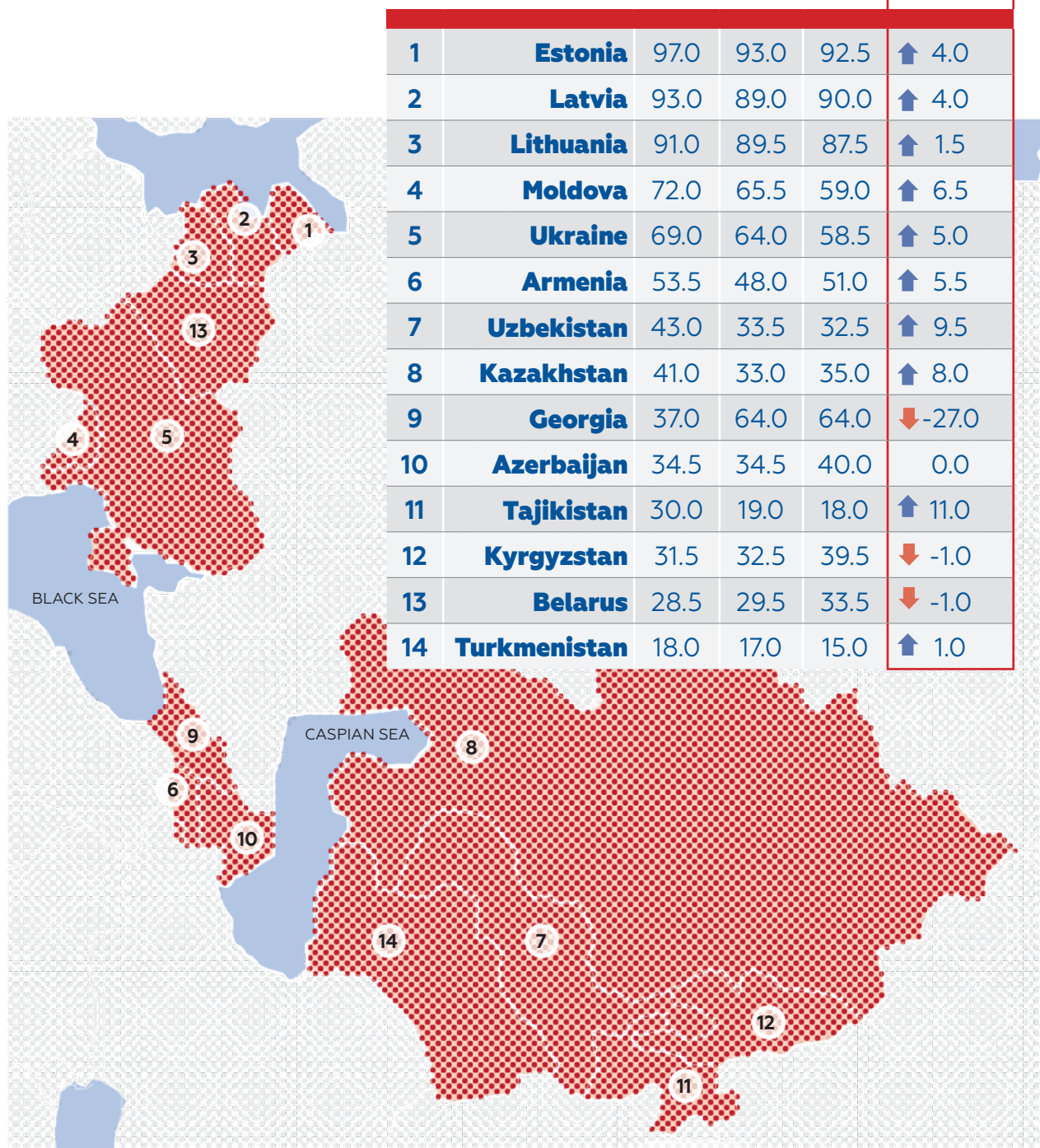
#### **QUANTIFICATION OF TRAVEL TO WESTERN COUNTRIES**

Producing consistent data on Western travel represents another methodology issue. Considering that a large number of travelers use air transportation, and the majority of them use multiple connecting flights, there is no reliable data regarding travelers' final destinations. Many people from the post-Soviet region travel for work and not necessarily for tourism. Also, the figures provided might include multiple trips by the same person, which could be misleading.

# SUMMARY OF 2026 EDITION

## SCORES

(BASED ON A 1-100 SCALE)



## WESTERNIZATION INDEX BY CATEGORY, POINTS

Rank	Country	Political (out of 25)	Legal (out of 25)	Economic (out of 25)	Language and Cultural (out of 15)	Lifestyle (out of 10)	Total (out of 100)
1	<b>Estonia</b>	23.0	25.0	25.0	14.0	10.0	<b>97.0</b>
2	<b>Latvia</b>	23.0	22.0	23.0	15.0	10.0	<b>93.0</b>
3	<b>Lithuania</b>	22.0	22.0	24.5	12.5	10.0	<b>91.0</b>
4	<b>Moldova</b>	19.0	16.0	21.0	8.0	8.0	<b>72.0</b>
5	<b>Ukraine</b>	18.5	13.0	18.0	11.0	8.5	<b>69.0</b>
6	<b>Armenia</b>	13.0	11.0	13.5	10.0	6.0	<b>53.5</b>
7	<b>Uzbekistan</b>	8.0	11.0	12.0	7.0	5.0	<b>43.0</b>
8	<b>Kazakhstan</b>	7.0	7.0	15.0	6.0	6.0	<b>41.0</b>
9	<b>Georgia</b>	8.0	5.0	9.0	9.0	6.0	<b>37.0</b>
10	<b>Azerbaijan</b>	4.5	3.0	12.5	9.0	5.5	<b>34.5</b>
11	<b>Tajikistan</b>	5.0	4.0	8.0	8.0	5.0	<b>30.0</b>
12	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	6.0	5.0	9.0	6.5	5.0	<b>31.5</b>
13	<b>Belarus</b>	4.5	4.0	7.0	7.5	5.5	<b>28.5</b>
14	<b>Turkmenistan</b>	3.0	4.0	5.0	4.5	1.5	<b>18.0</b>



# **CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS**

## REGIONAL MEGATRENDS

### WAR AS THE DEFINING STRUCTURAL FORCE

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has become the gravest threat to every state in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, and the defining event of the region's contemporary history. For Ukraine, the war has been an existential ordeal: a country that should have been focused on development has instead been forced to defend its home, its people, and its sovereignty, suffering enormous human and economic losses as a result of Russian aggression. For Europe and for countries bordering Russia, the war has required a fundamental rethinking of security, energy systems, and strategic priorities in order to support Ukraine and/or to protect their own stability.

The war is no longer a temporary disruption but a permanent condition shaping political systems, economic structures, and foreign policy choices across the region. Ukraine and Moldova have been structurally pulled into European security, legal, and economic frameworks, while even more distant states have been forced to reconsider their dependence on Russia as a political, military, and economic hub. The previous regional equilibrium built around Russian power and post-imperial inertia has collapsed, replaced by sharply diverging geopolitical and institutional trajectories.

### THE EROSION OF RUSSIAN GATEKEEPING

A second defining megatrend is the rapid decline of Russia's ability to control regional outcomes. Military overstretch, sanctions, financial strain, and diplomatic isolation have sharply reduced Moscow's capacity to enforce loyalty, arbitrate conflicts, or act as the primary center of gravity for trade and security. Where Russia once acted as the unavoidable intermediary for political and economic decisions, it is now increasingly bypassed or ignored.

This shift is most visible in the South Caucasus. The settlement of the Karabakh conflict, the withdrawal

of Russian peacekeepers, and the launch of direct Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations have dismantled Moscow's central role in the region. For the first time in decades, Yerevan and Baku are able to shape their security, transit, and economic relations without Russian mediation, supported by Western and Turkish diplomatic engagement. Russia's attempts to retain leverage through pressure on diasporas, energy, and information space now face clear limits due to its weakened capacity.

Central Asia is experiencing a similar, though more gradual, change. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have expanded Western and Chinese partnerships while reducing their exposure to Russian dominance. Moscow remains a relevant actor, but it no longer monopolizes political or economic choices.

### INSTITUTIONAL POLARIZATION

The region is undergoing a rapid polarization between Western-anchored systems and entrenched authoritarian regimes, with the disappearance of the former "middle zone" of balanced hybrid models. The Baltic states, Ukraine, and Moldova are firmly embedded in Western political, legal, and economic frameworks. In these countries, European integration, regulatory convergence, and Western security alignment are no longer contested strategic options but structural features of statehood.

At the opposite end, Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan have consolidated closed authoritarian systems that actively resist Western institutional norms. These regimes are increasingly isolated from European legal, political, and civil society networks, relying instead on repression and limited external partnerships to sustain stability.

Georgia represents a destabilizing anomaly. Its society remains overwhelmingly pro-European, but its state institutions are drifting toward authoritarian governance and confrontation with the EU. This widening gap between public orientation and political practice has pushed Georgia out of the accession-driven reform track, weakening its traditional role as the South Caucasus's most Western-linked state.

Central Asia has converged around a model of selective modernization: Western standards are adopted in finance, trade, and digital governance, but not in political competition or judicial independence. This has produced administratively capable but politically closed systems that are economically connected to the West without being institutionally Westernized. A notable exception is Kazakhstan's Astana International Financial Centre, where an independent court operating since 2018 applies English common law. This court is staffed by senior judges from England and Wales, and it delivers enforceable rulings in commercial disputes, demonstrating that limited but functional judicial independence is possible within a special institutional framework.

## ECONOMIC RE-ANCHORING AND CORRIDOR POLITICS

The war and the weakening of Russian power have reshaped the region's economic geography. Countries anchored to Europe have deepened their integration into EU markets, logistics, and financial systems. Ukraine and Moldova have redirected the bulk of their trade and transit toward the EU, while the Baltic states remain fully embedded in European economic structures.

In the South Caucasus, the weakening of Russian control over transport and energy corridors has opened new opportunities for Armenia and Azerbaijan to diversify trade and infrastructure links toward Europe and Turkey. Azerbaijan's export economy is increasingly tied to European energy markets, while Armenia is developing new logistics, service, and transit connections as part of a broader re-orientation away from Russian gatekeeping.

Central Asia is also diversifying its trade and investment routes, with Western, Chinese, and regional corridors competing for influence. In contrast, Belarus and Turkmenistan remain locked into narrow, politically constrained economic networks with limited Western integration.

## SOCIAL WESTERNIZATION THROUGH MOBILITY AND DIGITALIZATION

Even where political and legal Westernization is limited, social and cultural Westernization continues to expand through migration, education, and digital connectivity. Labor mobility toward the EU, student exchanges, Western media consumption, and global digital platforms have created large populations across the region with daily exposure to Western norms, lifestyles, and information ecosystems.

This is especially pronounced in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia, where Western reference points increasingly shape social aspirations and professional life. In Central Asia, urban populations show similar patterns, even as political systems remain closed. More authoritarian states, including Belarus and Turkmenistan, increasingly attempt to manage or restrict this exposure, recognizing its long-term political and cultural impact.

## A FRAGMENTED AND IRREVERSIBLE REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia no longer form a single coherent geopolitical space. Western-anchored democracies, hybrid reformers, fragile sovereignty-builders, and entrenched autocracies coexist but follow fundamentally different trajectories. These paths are increasingly locked in by war, institutional choices, and external alignments. In this environment, Westernization is no longer a slow cultural drift but a strategic and institutional decision that determines whether states align with the democratic West and move toward open, integrated systems, or effectively side with Russia's aggressive geopolitical agenda and remain bound by authoritarian control and external domination. The Westernization Index therefore captures not only proximity to the West, but the depth of each country's escape from or entrenchment within systems of imperial dependence and domestic repression.

# 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION

## POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION POINTS, OUT OF 25

<b>Estonia</b>	23
<b>Latvia</b>	23
<b>Lithuania</b>	22
<b>Moldova</b>	19
<b>Ukraine</b>	18.5
<b>Armenia</b>	13
<b>Georgia</b>	8
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	8
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	7
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	6
<b>Tajikistan</b>	5
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	4.5
<b>Belarus</b>	4.5
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	3

### 1.1 DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM

By 2025, political freedom across the region is defined by a widening split between consolidated democracies, wartime governance under democratic legitimacy, hybrid managed systems, and closed authoritarian regimes. The Baltic states remain firmly democratic, with competitive elections, strong media pluralism, and institutional checks that meet Western standards, while Moldova sustains competitive electoral politics even as Russian interference and vote-buying schemes remain a systemic pressure on the integrity of the process. Ukraine, despite martial law and the suspension of elections due to the full-scale war, preserves a functioning parliamentary system, pluralistic political life within wartime constraints, and a broadly legitimate public consensus around the state's Euro-Atlantic course. Georgia stands out for a sharp democratic regression: formal institutions remain, but repression of opposition, pressure on media and civil society, and punitive state practices have produced a level of political closure increasingly comparable to authoritarian systems. Armenia and Azerbaijan enter a new post-war phase in which the reduction of Russia's coercive footprint, the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from the Karabakh, and the shift to direct Yerevan-Baku dialogue have expanded the room for sovereign decision-making and external partnerships, but this opening coexists with fragile institutions and heightened sensitivity to security narratives. Central Asia continues to display "administrative modernization without political liberalization:" Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan combine improved state capacity and partial governance reforms with restricted competition and controlled public space, while Kyrgyzstan completes a marked drift away from earlier pluralism toward electoral authoritarianism. Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan remain locked into entrenched authoritarian rule, with elections serving regime legitimation, independent politics largely eliminated, and civic space severely curtailed.

**TABLE 1.1**Degree of political freedom  
Points, out of 10

Estonia	10
Latvia	9
Moldova	9
Lithuania	8
Armenia	6
Ukraine	5.5
Uzbekistan	3
Kazakhstan	2
Azerbaijan	1
Belarus	1
Georgia	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
Tajikistan	1
Turkmenistan	0.5

**TABLE 1.2**Pro-Western parties in parliament  
Points, out of 8

Lithuania	7.5
Estonia	7
Latvia	7
Ukraine	7
Moldova	6
Armenia	3
Georgia	2
Kyrgyzstan	2
Uzbekistan	2
Belarus	1
Kazakhstan	1
Tajikistan	1
Turkmenistan	1
Azerbaijan	0.5

## 1.2 PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT

The parliamentary map in 2025 shows a strong consolidation of pro-Western legislative majorities in the countries closest to the EU trajectory and a disappearance of openly pro-Russian platforms where Russia has become the core security threat. Ukraine's parliament is fully consolidated around EU and NATO integration, with pro-Russian parties removed under wartime legal frameworks and no remaining faction advocating an alternative geopolitical orientation; Moldova similarly sustains a pro-European parliamentary majority that frames its mandate around completing EU accession negotiations, despite around 24% of parliamentary seats being held by a political bloc advocating closer alignment with Russia. In the Baltic states, a broad Euro-Atlantic consensus remains the baseline across mainstream parties despite coalition turbulence and the presence of disruptive populist actors. Georgia's parliamentary picture is structurally different: pro-Western representation is reduced and constrained amid opposition exclusion and escalating pressure on pro-European political leaders. Armenia and Azerbaijan's post-war settlement dynamics and the shift to direct bilateral talks, supported by international facilitation in 2025, reduce Russia's role as a political gatekeeper and encourage parliamentary agendas oriented toward sovereignty-building and diversified external cooperation, including with Western partners and Turkey, even if party systems differ in how explicitly they articulate "pro-Western" identity. Central Asian legislatures generally lack ideologically pro-Western parties but still support functional Westernization through policy lines linked to trade rules, regulatory convergence, and selective cooperation frameworks; in the region's closed autocracies, parliaments remain fully subordinated to executive power, with no meaningful Western-oriented political forces represented.

## 1.3 PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Public opinion reveals a layered pattern: strong values-based Western identification in the Baltic states; security-driven Western alignment in Ukraine; divided but steadily European-leaning sentiment in Moldova; and a widening gap between society and state in Georgia where popular pro-EU attitudes coexist with institutional backsliding. Ukraine's public remains overwhelmingly supportive of EU and NATO integration, though perceptions of Western fatigue and doubts about long-term resolve increase under wartime strain; Moldova shows majority support for EU accession alongside weak support for NATO, reflecting the impact of Russian disinformation and long-standing neutrality narratives. The post-war opening

**TABLE 1.3**

Public opinion of Western civilization

**Points, out of 7**

Latvia	7
Lithuania	6.5
Estonia	6
Ukraine	6
Georgia	5
Armenia	4
Kazakhstan	4
Moldova	4
Azerbaijan	3
Kyrgyzstan	3
Tajikistan	3
Uzbekistan	3
Belarus	2.5
Turkmenistan	1.5

and the reduction of Russia’s direct leverage have enabled Armenia and Azerbaijan to expand their external options, and public sentiment increasingly treats Western cooperation as a pathway to security, mobility, and economic opportunity, even if societies remain cautious about formal bloc alignment; the key shift is that opinions are now shaped less by Russia as a “security provider” and more by sovereign choice, direct regional connectivity, and pragmatic partnerships with the West and Turkey. In Central Asia, Westernization is often aspirational and lifestyle-driven — education, technology, and quality-of-life standards — while geopolitical preferences remain multi-vector or neutral. In Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, information control and repression suppress open pro-Western expression, but digital exposure and migration-related contacts continue to sustain a latent reservoir of Western-oriented aspirations that has little institutional outlet.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION

### LEGAL WESTERNIZATION

#### POINTS, OUT OF 25

<b>Estonia</b>	25
<b>Latvia</b>	22
<b>Lithuania</b>	22
<b>Moldova</b>	16
<b>Ukraine</b>	13
<b>Armenia</b>	11
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	11
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	7
<b>Georgia</b>	5
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	5
<b>Belarus</b>	4
<b>Tajikistan</b>	4
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	4
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	3

### 2.1 CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION

Constitutional convergence with European standards is increasingly split between (a) EU members and accession-track states that work inside European legal ecosystems, (b) hybrid systems that selectively borrow legal language without rebalancing executive power, and (c) entrenched autocracies where constitutional design primarily protects regime dominance. The Baltic states remain fully aligned with European constitutional norms and rule-of-law practices, while Moldova continues accession-driven alignment through reforms of the electoral and justice frameworks under ongoing European scrutiny. Ukraine maintains formal constitutional anchoring to EU and NATO membership and continues to work with the Venice Commission on high-stakes constitutional justice reforms even under wartime constraints, though implementation risks remain.

Georgia is the clearest negative outlier among EU-associated states: legislative moves targeting civil society and “foreign influence” have been assessed by the Venice Commission as incompatible with key democratic standards, accelerating divergence from European constitutional benchmarks. Armenia’s constitutional order remains closer to European models than most post-Soviet peers, while Azerbaijan’s framework remains firmly authoritarian, indicating fundamentally different baselines for constitutional Westernization. Central Asia shows selective convergence: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan incorporate international rights language and procedural guarantees but preserve strong presidential dominance and weak checks and balances, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain structurally misaligned with European constitutional expectations. Belarus and Turkmenistan remain outside European constitutionalism altogether, with constitutional structures subordinated to personalized executive power.

**TABLE 2.1**

Constitutional compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission

**Points, out of 6**

Estonia	6
Latvia	6
Lithuania	5
Ukraine	5
Armenia	4
Uzbekistan	4
Kazakhstan	3
Moldova	3
Azerbaijan	1
Belarus	1
Georgia	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
Tajikistan	1
Turkmenistan	1

**TABLE 2.2**

Independence of the courts

**Points, out of 7**

Estonia	7
Lithuania	6.5
Latvia	6
Moldova	4
Ukraine	3
Uzbekistan	3
Armenia	2.5
Kazakhstan	2
Belarus	1
Georgia	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
Tajikistan	1
Turkmenistan	1
Azerbaijan	0.5

## 2.2 INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS

Judicial independence remains the clearest legal dividing line in 2025. The Baltic states retain EU-standard judicial integrity and institutional safeguards, while Moldova and Ukraine continue integrity-based reforms (including vetting and internationally supported selection mechanisms) to reduce political and oligarchic capture — still uneven, but directionally aligned with Western rule-of-law expectations. Georgia is moving in the opposite direction: its judiciary is widely described as captured by entrenched informal networks and vulnerable to executive interference, which undermines public trust and the credibility of legal remedies.

In the South Caucasus, Freedom House describes Armenia’s courts as affected by systemic political influence and corruption, with judges reportedly pressured toward convictions and with extremely low acquittal rates — showing that even a “Partly Free” status can coexist with major rule-of-law deficits. By contrast, Freedom House describes Azerbaijan’s judiciary as corrupt and subservient to the executive, with politicized cases against activists and journalists illustrating the absence of meaningful independence. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have improved court transparency and digitalization, but politically sensitive cases remain constrained by executive and prosecutorial dominance; Kyrgyzstan’s democratic contraction reinforces similar pressures. In Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, courts function as extensions of executive and security power, placing them far outside Western rule-of-law models.

## 2.3 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION

Across the region, the formal presence of rights provisions increasingly diverges from enforcement capacity and political intent. EU members and accession-track states (Baltics, Moldova, Ukraine) continue legislative alignment with European human-rights and anti-discrimination frameworks, supported by accession conditionality and external monitoring, even as wartime governance in Ukraine and corruption legacies in Moldova keep enforcement uneven. Georgia’s legislative direction has expanded tools that chill civic space and stigmatize independent organizations, reinforcing the growing gap between constitutional guarantees and actual protection of rights.

**TABLE 2.3**Human rights legislation  
Points, out of 6

Estonia	6
Latvia	6
Moldova	5
Lithuania	4.5
Ukraine	4
Uzbekistan	3
Armenia	2.5
Kyrgyzstan	2
Turkmenistan	1.5
Azerbaijan	1
Belarus	1
Georgia	1
Kazakhstan	1
Tajikistan	1

**TABLE 2.4**Number of acquittals  
Points, out of 6

Estonia	6
Lithuania	6
Latvia	4
Moldova	4
Armenia	2
Georgia	2
Belarus	1
Kazakhstan	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
Tajikistan	1
Ukraine	1
Uzbekistan	1
Azerbaijan	0.5
Turkmenistan	0.5

In the South Caucasus, Armenia’s “Partly Free” status reflects a comparatively more pluralistic environment than most post-Soviet systems, but rights concerns remain salient in practice. Azerbaijan represents the opposite pole: human-rights organizations document sustained repression of civil society and intensified crackdowns on critical voices, including arrests and prosecutions of activists and journalists, underscoring the structural disconnect between law-on-paper and law-in-action. Central Asia shows partial legislative modernization (especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan), but enforcement remains politically bounded; in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, rights commitments are largely declarative under pervasive control, and Belarus remains a paradigmatic case of law used as a repression instrument.

## 2.4 NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS

Acquittal rates continue to serve as a practical proxy for whether courts can contradict prosecutors and political expectations. In the Baltic states, acquittals are a normal feature of independent adjudication consistent with EU standards. Moldova’s own data indicate acquittals remain infrequent (around 1.93%), reflecting a still conviction-oriented system despite ongoing reforms; Ukraine’s broader rule-of-law indicators similarly point to persistent structural weaknesses in criminal justice despite reform cycles. Georgia’s politicized judicial environment supports the broader diagnosis of selective justice, where acquittal space is constrained in sensitive cases. Armenia’s justice system is characterized by extremely low acquittal rates and persistent political influence over judicial outcomes, indicating that courts still tend to favor the prosecution and the state in sensitive cases, despite formal reform efforts. Azerbaijan, in turn, operates a highly centralized and executive-controlled judicial system in which politically sensitive prosecutions, especially against critics, activists, and independent voices, leave little practical space for acquittals or genuinely independent adjudication. In Central Asia, acquittals remain uncommon, especially in criminal cases — even where administrative and commercial procedures have modernized; in Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, acquittals are virtually nonexistent, illustrating justice systems designed for conviction rather than adjudication.

## 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION

### ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION

POINTS, OUT OF 25

<b>Estonia</b>	25
<b>Lithuania</b>	24.5
<b>Latvia</b>	23
<b>Moldova</b>	21
<b>Ukraine</b>	18
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	15
<b>Armenia</b>	13.5
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	12.5
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	12
<b>Georgia</b>	9
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	9
<b>Tajikistan</b>	8
<b>Belarus</b>	7
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	5

### 3.1 EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION

By 2025, economic Westernization is structured around formal integration into Western-oriented trade regimes and informal access to diversified markets. The Baltic states are fully integrated into the EU single market and operate under Western competition, customs, and regulatory frameworks, while Moldova and Ukraine are associated with the EU through Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, and both have WTO membership that anchors their trade regimes in multilateral rules. Georgia is also a full member of the WTO and maintains DCFTA ties with the EU, but its political estrangement from Brussels has moderated the pace of deeper economic alignment. Armenia is a WTO member, while Azerbaijan remains in the WTO accession process, but both are capitalizing on the post-war reduction of Russian trade gatekeeping to diversify external partnerships with Western markets and Turkey, even though neither holds an EU Association Agreement. Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) combine WTO membership with a multi-vector economic orientation, balancing Russia and China with selective engagement with Western markets, while Uzbekistan pursues a similar multi-vector strategy but remains outside the WTO, continuing accession negotiations. Belarus and Turkmenistan remain weakly integrated into Western trade frameworks due to sanctions, extensive state control, and limited regulatory compatibility.

### 3.2 EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS

Ease of doing business remains one of the clearest practical indicators of economic Westernization. The Baltic states provide transparent, predictable, and widely accessible regulatory environments consistent with EU standards. Moldova and Ukraine have strengthened digital governance, tax administration, and business registration, though corruption and judicial enforcement gaps persist. In the South Caucasus, Georgia continues to offer relatively open business conditions on paper, but political interference and

**TABLE 3.1**

EU and WTO membership  
or association  
**Points, out of 7**

Estonia	7
Latvia	7
Lithuania	7
Moldova	7
Ukraine	7
Armenia	4
Kazakhstan	4
Georgia	3
Kyrgyzstan	3
Uzbekistan	3
Tajikistan	2
Azerbaijan	1.5
Turkmenistan	1.5
Belarus	1

**TABLE 3.2**

Ease and transparency  
of doing business  
**Points, out of 6**

Estonia	6
Lithuania	5.5
Kazakhstan	4
Latvia	4
Moldova	4
Uzbekistan	4
Armenia	3.5
Azerbaijan	3
Ukraine	2.5
Belarus	2
Georgia	2
Kyrgyzstan	2
Tajikistan	2
Turkmenistan	1

selective enforcement have weakened confidence among independent firms and Western investors. Armenia maintains a comparatively competitive environment within the region, with reforms aimed at improving transparency and attracting diversified investment after the post-war opening, whereas Azerbaijan's economy remains heavily shaped by state influence, limited contract enforcement, and political barriers that constrain independent business activity outside the energy sector. Central Asia shows a mixed picture: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have made administrative efficiency gains, but opaque institutional influence and weak courts continue to distort competition; Kyrgyzstan's regulatory volatility further undermines investor confidence. Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan persist as environments where state dominance and political favoritism make Western-style private-sector development structurally difficult.

### 3.3 WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS

The Western share in national trade structures varies sharply across the region and closely reflects each country's institutional and geopolitical alignment. The Baltic states and Moldova are deeply embedded in EU supply chains, with the European Union accounting for the dominant share of both exports and imports, while Ukraine's wartime economy has reoriented decisively toward European markets and transit routes, making the EU its primary external trading partner. In the South Caucasus, Georgia remains the most institutionally EU-linked trade economy through its DCFTA framework, even as political tensions with Brussels shape the pace of deeper convergence; Azerbaijan is structurally tied to Europe on the export side, with the EU serving as its largest export market, primarily for hydrocarbons, while European goods play a more limited role in its imports; Armenia, by contrast, has only a single-digit EU share in overall trade, with Europe more important as a source of imports than as an export destination and with recent trade patterns strongly influenced by re-export flows and shifting regional logistics. In Central Asia, Russia and China continue to dominate trade, but Western goods, technologies, and standards have gained footholds in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, especially in machinery, consumer goods, and services. In Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, Western products remain marginal, with domestic markets largely supplied by Russian, Chinese, and regional partners.

**TABLE 3.3**

Western share in the sales of goods

**Points, out of 6**

Estonia	6
Latvia	6
Lithuania	6
Moldova	5
Ukraine	5
Azerbaijan	4.5
Kazakhstan	4
Armenia	3
Georgia	2
Kyrgyzstan	2
Tajikistan	2
Uzbekistan	2
Belarus	1.5
Turkmenistan	1.5

**TABLE 3.4**

Western investment in the country's economy

**Points, out of 6**

Estonia	6
Latvia	6
Lithuania	6
Moldova	5
Azerbaijan	3.5
Ukraine	3.5
Armenia	3
Kazakhstan	3
Uzbekistan	3
Belarus	2.5
Georgia	2
Kyrgyzstan	2
Tajikistan	2
Turkmenistan	1

### 3.4 WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY

Western investment remains concentrated in countries combining predictable regulation with geopolitical alignment and institutional transparency, but regional dynamics — especially in the South Caucasus — are shifting rapidly. The Baltic states, Moldova, and Ukraine attract the bulk of EU, U.S., and international financial institution capital, with Ukraine and Moldova receiving major Western funds tied to accession and reconstruction needs. In the South Caucasus, Georgia historically served as the most attractive destination for Western investment, but political and legal uncertainties have begun to erode that position. More recent periods showed volatility in inflows in Armenia, but new regional peace and connectivity initiatives — including prospective transit corridors and diplomatic engagement with Western institutions — are expanding investment opportunities in technology, trade infrastructure, services, and high-value sectors and could catalyze renewed interest from Western firms. Azerbaijan continues to attract substantial foreign capital, notably in energy, transport, and infrastructure projects, with Western investors active particularly where legal protections and partnership frameworks exist, and the EU positioned as a key economic partner supporting diversification and export capacity beyond hydrocarbons. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan remains the principal recipient of Western investment in energy, mining, and finance, while Uzbekistan is emerging as a reform-oriented destination; both nonetheless continue to balance Western capital with strong Chinese and regional investment. Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan remain largely excluded from sustained Western private investment due to sanctions, weak rule of law, and high political risk.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION

### LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION

POINTS, OUT OF 15

<b>Latvia</b>	15
<b>Estonia</b>	14
<b>Lithuania</b>	12.5
<b>Ukraine</b>	11
<b>Armenia</b>	10
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	9
<b>Georgia</b>	9
<b>Moldova</b>	8
<b>Tajikistan</b>	8
<b>Belarus</b>	7.5
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	7
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	6.5
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	6
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	4.5

#### 4.1 USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE

The Baltic states have long operated fully in Latin-based national languages aligned with European communication standards, while Moldova's use of Latin script in Romanian reinforces its institutional and cultural integration with the EU. Ukraine's Ukrainian-language Latinization initiatives remain symbolic rather than systemic, but the broader shift away from Russian linguistic dominance continues. In the South Caucasus, both Georgia and Armenia use unique non-Latin scripts (Georgian and Armenian) that are deeply tied to national identity rather than geopolitical orientation, meaning that Latinization is not a relevant indicator of Westernization in their cases; Azerbaijan, by contrast, uses a Latin-based alphabet for Azerbaijani, reinforcing its linguistic separation from Russian influence and facilitating international and Western communication. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan continue their state-driven transitions from Cyrillic to Latin alphabets as part of broader post-Soviet de-Russification and internationalization strategies, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain primarily Cyrillic-based, reflecting stronger institutional and cultural attachment to the Russian sphere. Belarus continues to privilege Cyrillic despite the historical existence of the Latin-based own script, and Turkmenistan formally uses a Latin alphabet but remains culturally isolated from Western informational space, illustrating that script alone does not guarantee Westernization.

#### 4.2 PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH)

In the Baltic states, English is widely used in higher education, government, and the private sector, supported by EU mobility and labor market integration. Ukraine and Moldova have seen rapid growth in English proficiency among younger and urban populations, driven by European integration, labor migration, and wartime international engagement. In the South Caucasus, Georgia maintains one of the highest levels

**TABLE 4.1**

Use of the Latin alphabet in the native language

**Points, out of 2**

Azerbaijan	2
Estonia	2
Latvia	2
Lithuania	2
Moldova	2
Turkmenistan	2
Uzbekistan	2
Armenia	1
Belarus	1
Georgia	1
Kazakhstan	1
Tajikistan	1
Ukraine	1
Kyrgyzstan	0.5

**TABLE 4.2**

Proportion of the population proficient in the most common languages of the West (English, French, German, Spanish)

**Points, out of 6**

Latvia	6
Estonia	5
Armenia	4
Georgia	4
Lithuania	4
Ukraine	4
Azerbaijan	3
Belarus	3
Tajikistan	3
Uzbekistan	3
Kazakhstan	2
Kyrgyzstan	2
Moldova	2
Turkmenistan	1

of English usage in the region due to long-standing Western educational and civil society links; Armenia shows strong growth in English skills in the IT, services, and diaspora-linked sectors, while Russian remains influential due to labor and migration ties; Azerbaijan’s English proficiency is concentrated among urban professionals and students, with broader society still relying primarily on Azerbaijani and Russian. In Central Asia, English and Western language education has expanded significantly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, especially in elite schools and universities, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan lag behind and remain heavily Russian speaking in professional and interethnic communication. Belarus and Turkmenistan show limited penetration of Western languages outside private education and elite circles, reflecting state-controlled educational priorities.

#### 4.3 SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION’S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Access to and consumption of Western media and digital platforms remains a powerful indicator of cultural Westernization. The Baltic states are fully embedded in Western audiovisual and digital ecosystems, with American (Hollywood) and European films, Western television content, and unrestricted use of global platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter) forming the core of popular media consumption. Ukraine and Moldova display similarly high exposure to Western media and social networks, amplified by wartime reliance on Western information channels and diaspora connectivity. In the South Caucasus, Georgia has a strong Western media presence in cinemas, streaming platforms, and online spaces despite political pressures on broadcasters; Armenia’s population is highly engaged with Western digital platforms and streaming services, particularly among younger and urban users, while Azerbaijan allows broad access to Western online platforms but maintains tighter control over traditional media, resulting in a mix of global digital consumption and state-managed broadcast content. In Central Asia, Western films, series, and social networks are widely consumed in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, primarily via online platforms, although Russian-language media remains highly influential. Kyrgyzstan displays similar but less pronounced patterns. In Tajikistan, Western cultural consumption is present mainly through digital platforms and among younger audiences but remains constrained by state regulation, censorship, and the dominance of Russian and

**TABLE 4.3**

Share of Western products in the nation's movie theaters and on TV channels, share of Western internet sites and social media

**Points, out of 7**

Estonia	7
Latvia	7
Lithuania	6.5
Ukraine	6
Armenia	5
Azerbaijan	4
Georgia	4
Kyrgyzstan	4
Moldova	4
Tajikistan	4
Belarus	3.5
Kazakhstan	3
Uzbekistan	2
Turkmenistan	1.5

regional media, while Turkmenistan continues to severely restrict access to global media, sharply limiting Western cultural penetration. In Belarus, increasing internet controls and repression of independent media have significantly reduced the visibility of Western content in the public sphere, pushing Western cultural consumption into private and online spaces.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION

### LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION

#### POINTS, OUT OF 10

<b>Estonia</b>	10
<b>Latvia</b>	10
<b>Lithuania</b>	10
<b>Ukraine</b>	8.5
<b>Moldova</b>	8
<b>Armenia</b>	6
<b>Georgia</b>	6
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	6
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	5.5
<b>Belarus</b>	5.5
<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	5
<b>Tajikistan</b>	5
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	5
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	1.5

#### 5.1 PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES

The Baltic states exhibit the highest levels of Western travel, as EU citizenship enables routine mobility for work, study, and tourism. Moldova and Ukraine also show very high levels of Western travel, driven by labor migration, refugee flows, education, and long-term residence in EU countries, with the European Union now serving as the dominant destination for cross-border mobility. In the South Caucasus, Georgia stands out for widespread Western travel due to visa-free access to the EU and long-standing people-to-people ties; Armenia has seen steadily rising Western mobility through its large diaspora networks, professional migration, and expanding educational and business links with Europe and North America; Azerbaijan displays a far more concentrated pattern, where travel to Western countries is largely confined to urban elites, business communities, and students, with limited population-wide exposure. In Central Asia, Western travel remains comparatively low due to cost, visa barriers, and the dominance of Russia- and China-oriented labor migration, although Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan show gradual growth in business and student travel to Europe and North America. In Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, political restrictions, economic constraints, and visa barriers sharply limit population-level travel to Western countries.

**TABLE 5.1**

Percentage of the population who have visited Western countries

Points, out of 5

Estonia	5
Latvia	5
Lithuania	5
Moldova	4
Ukraine	4
Armenia	2
Azerbaijan	2
Georgia	2
Kazakhstan	2
Uzbekistan	2
Belarus	1.5
Kyrgyzstan	1.5
Tajikistan	1
Turkmenistan	0.5

**TABLE 5.2**

Presence of Western franchise companies

Points, out of 3

Estonia	3
Latvia	3
Lithuania	3
Ukraine	2.5
Armenia	2
Azerbaijan	2
Belarus	2
Georgia	2
Kazakhstan	2
Moldova	2
Tajikistan	2
Kyrgyzstan	1.5
Uzbekistan	1
Turkmenistan	0.5

## 5.2 PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES

The spread of Western franchises in food, retail, hospitality, and services provides a visible indicator of consumer-level Westernization. The Baltic states are fully integrated into Western corporate and retail ecosystems, while Moldova and Ukraine host a growing presence of European and American brands despite wartime disruptions in Ukraine. In the South Caucasus, Georgia remains the most Westernized consumer market, with a dense presence of international franchises and service companies in its major cities; Armenia has experienced a noticeable expansion of Western-linked franchises and service brands in retail, food, and hospitality, supported by its more open business climate and growing international connections; Azerbaijan hosts many global brands, particularly in Baku, but their presence is highly concentrated and shaped by state-centered economic management, limiting broader diffusion across society. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan has the most extensive network of Western franchises, followed by Uzbekistan, where market liberalization has attracted new international retail and service brands; Kyrgyzstan shows more limited penetration, while Tajikistan and Turkmenistan remain largely closed to international franchise expansion. In Belarus, sanctions and isolation have significantly reduced the visibility and operation of Western consumer brands.

## 5.3 MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE

Digital connectivity underpins Westernized lifestyles by enabling access to global media, communication platforms, and digital services. The Baltic states, Moldova, and Ukraine have high levels of mobile internet coverage and smartphone use, supporting deep engagement with Western platforms, e-commerce, and online services, even under wartime conditions in Ukraine. In the South Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan all display high smartphone penetration and widespread mobile internet access, but the social meaning of connectivity differs: Georgia and Armenia allow relatively open use of global platforms and digital services, reinforcing exposure to Western media and networks, while Azerbaijan combines high technical connectivity with tighter state oversight, periodic restrictions, and a more controlled information environment. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have rapidly expanded mobile internet coverage and smartphone usage, while Kyrgyzstan follows similar trends more slowly, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan lag behind

**TABLE 5.3**

Mobile internet coverage, smartphone usage

**Points, out of 2**

Armenia	2
Belarus	2
Estonia	2
Georgia	2
Kazakhstan	2
Kyrgyzstan	2
Latvia	2
Lithuania	2
Moldova	2
Tajikistan	2
Ukraine	2
Uzbekistan	2
Azerbaijan	1.5
Turkmenistan	0.5

due to infrastructure constraints and tighter state control. In Belarus, widespread smartphone use coexists with heavy digital surveillance and repression, limiting the broader social and political impact of connectivity.



**WESTERNIZATION  
INDEX OF POST-SOVIET  
STATES**

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
13.0/25	11.0/25	13.5/25	10.0/15	6.0/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 13/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 6/10

From 2022 to 2025, Armenia’s political trajectory was shaped by the post-Karabakh security reset and a search for greater strategic autonomy from Russia. This became more feasible as Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine significantly reduced Moscow’s capacity to project power in the South Caucasus. In this context, Armenia and Azerbaijan effectively closed the Karabakh conflict in 2023, removing a key structural constraint on Armenia’s foreign policy. This enabled Yerevan to initiate pragmatic normalization with Baku and Ankara and to deepen engagement with the EU and the United States, despite continued pressure from Russia.<sup>2</sup> Armenia’s Western orientation became more explicit in 2025 with the adoption of a law launching an EU accession process.<sup>3</sup> U.S. involvement in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace track, including President Donald Trump’s hosting of both leaders in Washington in summer 2025 to sign a peace

declaration,<sup>4</sup> further underscored the South Caucasus’ growing relevance for Western cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

Institutionally, Armenia remains pluralistic but not consolidated. Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2025 keeps Armenia “Partly Free” at 54/100 (Political Rights 23/40; Civil Liberties 31/60), signaling competitive politics alongside persistent governance weaknesses.<sup>6</sup>

The OSCE/ODIHR assessment of Armenia’s 2021 early parliamentary elections (still defining the 2024–2025 political balance) found fundamental freedoms “generally respected,” contestants able to campaign, and election day assessed positively overall, while noting polarization and a negative campaign tone.<sup>7</sup> Overall, Armenia’s political system in 2025 is competitive but fragile, exposed to security shocks and polarization rather than authoritarian closure.

### 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 3/8

Armenia’s parliament does not contain a stable, ideologically consolidated pro-Western bloc. The ruling Civil Contract majority enables a Western-leaning policy line but frames it primarily as pragmatic sovereignty and security diversification rather than as a coherent integration doctrine. Parliamentary dynamics are increasingly shaped by the approach of the next national vote: Armenia’s parliamentary elections are expected to take place on 7 June 2026, according to public remarks by the Chairman of the Central Election Commission.<sup>8</sup>

Opposition representation further limits pro-Western coherence. The largest opposition force, The Armenia Alliance led by former president Robert Kocharyan, is widely described as a pro-Russian coalition.<sup>9</sup> Kocharyan’s close personal ties with Vladimir Putin and his advocacy of a Russia-oriented foreign-policy path for Armenia are well documented.<sup>10</sup> Another pro-Kremlin opposition pole is associated with former president Serzh Sargsyan through the I Have Honor alliance,<sup>11</sup> built around the Republican Party and its leadership networks.

Pro-Kremlin pressure is reinforced by extra-parliamentary actors. In June 2025, Russian–Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan was arrested<sup>12</sup> on allegations of publicly calling for the illegal seizure of power; subsequent reporting documents his announcement of plans to form a new political force from detention.<sup>13</sup> Analytical

monitoring further warns that the 2026 elections constitute a focal point for Russian destabilization and information operations.<sup>14 15</sup> As a result, Armenia’s parliament functions as an enabling rather than agenda-setting institution for Westernization in a highly polarized environment.

### 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 4/7

Public opinion in 2024–2025 shows a measurable tilt toward the EU and Western partnerships, largely driven by security disappointment and expectations of practical benefits. The EU Neighbours East Annual Survey 2024 reports that 62% of Armenians trust the EU and 78% describe EU–Armenia relations as good.<sup>16</sup> The same survey’s Armenia factsheet indicates 56% hold a positive image of the EU (with 9% negative).<sup>17</sup> These are high figures by Eastern Partnership standards and provide a supportive societal backdrop for Western engagement.

Independent polling points in the same direction. The International Republican Institute’s (IRI) October

2024 release highlights majorities supporting EU membership as an idea and frames it as a future-oriented preference, alongside continued anxiety over security and peace talks.<sup>18</sup> Yet the attitudinal structure remains pragmatic: survey messaging emphasizes prosperity, mobility, and resilience rather than deep normative convergence. This is consistent with Armenia’s hybrid Westernization profile: high receptivity to Western cooperation, but not yet a settled “civilizational consensus,” particularly given fears of retaliation and the costs of strategic realignment.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 11/25

### 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 4/6

Armenia’s constitutional framework formally reflects European parliamentary standards, including a strengthened role for parliament and a constitutionally independent judiciary.<sup>19</sup> However, Venice Commission opinions emphasize that constitutional guarantees remain vulnerable in practice. In its joint opinion on judicial disciplinary reform, the Commission explicitly warned that broad grounds for disciplinary liability and weak safeguards at the initiation stage could enable selective pressure on judges, especially in politically sensitive cases.<sup>20</sup>

These concerns materialized in practice during 2022–2024, when several judges involved in high-profile corruption and protest-related cases faced disciplinary scrutiny for procedural violations that Armenian legal NGOs and professional associations described as routine but selectively enforced.<sup>21</sup> In

particular, the Armenian Helsinki Committee’s 2023 and 2024 rule-of-law assessments noted<sup>22</sup> a pattern whereby disciplinary proceedings were initiated shortly after judicial decisions that attracted political or public controversy. The reports stressed that, while not all proceedings resulted in sanctions, the timing and selectivity of enforcement created a perception of pressure and raised concerns about a chilling effect on judicial independence.<sup>23</sup> In public comments in 2024, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stressed that establishing fairness and justice in Armenia remains challenging, stating that although institutional and legislative reform has been pursued, there is still public dissatisfaction with the performance of the law enforcement and judicial systems, implicitly signaling executive concern about the pace and outcomes of judicial transformation.<sup>24</sup> A 2024 Venice Commission

opinion reiterates that disciplinary bodies' discretion must be narrowly circumscribed to avoid de facto constitutional erosion of judicial independence.<sup>25</sup> Taken

together, Armenia's constitutional compliance remains real but incomplete, justifying a mid-range score.

## 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 2.5/7

Judicial reform remains a declared priority, but credible monitoring continues to flag vulnerability to political and institutional pressure. Freedom House's Armenia profile confirms the country's hybrid regime positioning (Global Freedom score 54/100 in 2025), indicating incomplete rule-of-law consolidation rather than entrenched authoritarian control.<sup>26</sup> Venice Commission material and related reform monitoring underline that disciplinary and integrity frameworks are sensitive: design flaws or broad interpretation standards can translate into informal leverage over judges.

Quantitatively, Council of Europe/CEPEJ "Justice Dashboard" reporting provides structural context: in 2024 Armenia had 10.4 professional judges

per 100,000 inhabitants and 12.2 prosecutors per 100,000; both are below the Eastern Partnership average for prosecutors, reflecting capacity constraints and institutional imbalance risks.<sup>27</sup> OECD anti-corruption monitoring also records that the Supreme Judicial Council reviewed 31 disciplinary cases in 2023–2024, with 10 resulting in termination of judicial powers, and notes stakeholder concerns about overly broad interpretation and disproportionate sanctions in some proceedings.<sup>28</sup> Taken together, Armenia's courts remain more independent than in authoritarian systems, yet are insufficiently insulated from political and institutional pressure.

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 2.5/6

Armenia's human rights framework is anchored in Council of Europe obligations and maintains a functioning national human rights institution (Human Rights Defender/Ombudsperson), including annual reporting to parliament.<sup>29</sup> Yet enforcement weaknesses persist, especially around ill-treatment allegations and accountability. The UN Committee Against Torture review materials note large volumes of proceedings and weak court follow-through: in one official discussion summary, "by 2024, 386

criminal proceedings were investigated and one case referred to court," illustrating a bottleneck between investigation and adjudication in torture-related cases.<sup>30</sup> U.S. State Department reporting for Armenia (covering 2024) also flags persistent issues around effective investigation of abuse allegations; the report references court-level criticism of failures to investigate torture claims properly.<sup>31</sup> Armenia is not characterized by systematic dismantling of rights, but enforcement remains weak and accountability uneven.

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 2/6

Acquittal rates provide a hard proxy for prosecutorial dominance and judicial willingness to contradict the prosecution. Official reporting by Armenia's Prosecutor General's Office states that in 2024, 9,830 criminal cases were examined and concluded in courts, and "acquittals were issued in only 1.8% of the cases concluded in court."<sup>32</sup> This is substantially higher than in authoritarian countries, but still low by European standards, indicating

that convictions remain the overwhelming norm. This figure aligns with a broader pattern where institutional reform exists but has not yet produced a decisively adversarial criminal justice equilibrium. In a StrategEast Westernization Index terms, a sub-2% acquittal rate is incompatible with high rule-of-law convergence and supports a low-to-mid score even in a comparatively freer political environment.

## 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 13.5/25

### 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 4/7

Armenia is institutionally embedded in the rules-based global trade order: it has been a WTO member since February 5, 2003, which anchors tariff bindings and non-discrimination commitments typical of Western-oriented market systems.<sup>33</sup> In EU relations, Armenia does not have an Association Agreement or a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), but cooperation is structured through the EU–Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which provides a framework for regulatory approximation and sectoral alignment without membership-style obligations.<sup>34</sup>

The post-2023 security reset has also produced a new layer of EU economic engagement. In April 2024 the EU announced a 270 million EUR Resilience

and Growth Plan for Armenia, and in July 2025 EU leaders stated that Global Gateway investments in Armenia are expected to reach 2.5 billion EUR, explicitly framing this as resilience and connectivity support.<sup>35</sup> These commitments, together with the ongoing discussions between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the United States on the establishment of the Zangezur transport corridor,<sup>36</sup> signal deepening Western economic linkage. However, the absence of an Association Agreement/DCFTA track, the continued importance of non-EU markets, and Armenia’s persistent dependence on Russia keep the country structurally more distant from Western and European institutions.

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 3.5/6

Armenia’s business environment in 2025 combines improved administrative capacity and anti-corruption progress since 2018 with persistent governance constraints that limit full convergence with Western “rules-first” market standards. Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index 2024 assigns Armenia a score of 47/100 (rank 63/180), unchanged year-on-year, indicating that perceptions of public-sector corruption remain a structural risk rather than a resolved challenge.<sup>37</sup>

The EBRD’s Armenia Country Strategy 2025–2030 similarly frames the business climate and corporate governance as key constraints, emphasizing policy dialogue to strengthen competition conditions and governance standards.<sup>38</sup> This evidence supports a mixed, hybrid assessment: Armenia performs better than most authoritarian comparators, but still faces uneven rule enforcement, market concentration in some sectors, and limited predictability in regulatory practice.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 3/6

Armenia’s trade orientation in 2024–2025 remains diversified, but the EU’s quantitative share is moderate rather than dominant. The European Commission reports that in 2024 the EU represented 7.5% of Armenia’s total trade; the EU accounted for 4.7% of Armenia’s total exports and 9.7% of total imports.<sup>39</sup> This profile indicates real commercial linkage with Western markets, but not deep integration comparable to countries whose trade is structurally EU-anchored.

At the same time, the EU goods factsheet shows that EU exports to Armenia in 2024 reached 2.004 billion EUR while EU imports from Armenia were 410 million EUR, producing a large EU trade surplus.<sup>40</sup> This asymmetry suggests Armenia is more integrated as a destination for Western goods than as a high-value exporter to the EU. Overall, Western trade exposure is meaningful but not transformative; it supports moderate economic Westernization, while Armenia’s wider trade structure continues to reflect non-EU dependencies and post-2022 regional reconfiguration.

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 3/6

Western investment in Armenia is significant through European institutions and EU-backed infrastructure plans, but foreign direct investments (FDI) inflows remain volatile and not consistently high. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) reports cumulative investment in Armenia of 2.772 billion EUR across 236 projects, with a private-sector share of 61%, illustrating a substantial Western institutional footprint in finance and real-sector modernization.<sup>41</sup> In parallel, EU leadership statements in 2025 reiterated that Global Gateway investments in Armenia are expected to

reach 2.5 billion EUR, reinforcing Western capital engagement via blended finance and international financial institutions partnerships rather than purely corporate FDI.<sup>42</sup>

However, UNCTAD's country profile data show Armenia's FDI inflows at about 138.5 million USD in 2024, pointing to a relatively modest inflow year and confirming that investment remains sensitive to security risk, market size, and regional uncertainty.<sup>43</sup> Western investment is strategically present, but not yet broad enough, stable enough, or diversified enough to signal deep structural convergence.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 10/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 1/2

Armenia does not use the Latin alphabet for its native language; Armenian is written exclusively in the Armenian script, which functions as a core element of national identity and statehood. The Armenian alphabet, created in the early 5th century, is used consistently across education, public administration, legislation, and media, and there are no state policies aimed at introducing Latinization.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Armenia's script

choice should not be interpreted as cultural isolation. Armenian-language digital content is widely interoperable with global platforms, and Latin script is commonly used for transliteration in passports, international travel documents, and digital interfaces targeting foreign users. Armenia's strong national script tradition therefore neither advances nor fundamentally obstructs Western cultural engagement.

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 4/6

Western language proficiency, particularly English, represents one of Armenia's stronger cultural Westernization indicators. According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Armenia ranks 52nd out of 113 countries with an EF EPI score of 498, placing it in the "moderate proficiency" band and above the global average.<sup>45</sup> This performance is significantly stronger than that of several neighboring post-Soviet states and reflects sustained demand for English in higher education, IT, and internationally oriented services.

Structural data reinforces this picture. English is widely taught as a compulsory or near-compulsory foreign language in Armenian secondary schools,

and it dominates private education, international programs, and the rapidly growing technology sector. At the same time, proficiency remains unevenly distributed: urban youth and professionals demonstrate substantially higher competence than rural populations and older cohorts. Russian continues to function as a second language for parts of the population, particularly in informal and regional contexts, moderating the speed of full linguistic Westernization. The latest full-scale study (2022) on knowledge of the French language indicates that in Armenia about 10,105 people (approximately 0.34% of the population) are "francophones" (have a confident command of French).<sup>46</sup>

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTIONS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 5/7

Armenia's cultural consumption environment in 2024–2025 is characterized by high exposure to Western media and digital platforms, supported by extensive internet penetration and relatively open access to global content. According to Digital 2025: Armenia Report, internet penetration reached approximately 80% of the population, with over 2.37 million active internet users and more than 1.6 million social media user identities.<sup>47</sup> Global platforms dominate the Armenian digital space: YouTube,

Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are among the most widely used services, while Western streaming services and online media are easily accessible.

Cinema and entertainment markets further reinforce this pattern. Armenian cinemas rely heavily on Western (primarily U.S. and European) film distribution, with Hollywood productions accounting for the majority of box-office releases, supplemented by European festival films and co-productions.<sup>48</sup> Unlike in more restrictive environments, there are no systemic bans or censorship mechanisms targeting Western cultural products.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 6/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 2/5

International mobility toward Western countries increased after 2022, despite persistent structural constraints linked to income levels, visa regimes, and unequal access to cross-border travel. According to Schengen visa statistics published by the European Commission, Armenian citizens submitted 100,352 applications for short-stay visas in 2024 (an increase of 24.88% compared to 2023), of which 86,634 were granted, corresponding to a refusal rate of approximately 12%.<sup>49</sup> This indicates a relatively stable level of access to the Schengen

area compared to regional peers.

While detailed nationality-specific data on visa types are not publicly disaggregated, Schengen-wide statistics show a high prevalence of multiple-entry visas, suggesting that a portion of Armenian applicants belong to a recurrent group of travelers rather than representing purely one-off mobility.<sup>50</sup> At the population level, international travel remains socially uneven and concentrated among higher-income, urban, and internationally connected groups.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

Western consumer brands and franchise companies are widely present in Armenia, especially in Yerevan, and play a visible role in shaping urban lifestyle patterns. Major global franchises such as KFC, Pizza Hut, Domino's, Adidas, Nike, Levi's, Zara, H&M, and numerous Western retail and service brands operate through local partners.<sup>51</sup> Their continued presence through 2024–2025 reflects Armenia's openness to Western consumer culture and relatively predictable operating environment compared to more restrictive regional markets.

Retail and service-sector data indicate that Western franchises are not limited to luxury segments but increasingly target middle-income consumers, reinforcing lifestyle convergence with European urban norms.<sup>52</sup> Shopping malls, food courts, and entertainment venues in Yerevan replicate Western formats and consumption patterns, particularly among younger demographics. Geographic concentration remains a limiting factor: outside the capital, the density of Western franchises declines sharply.

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

Armenia demonstrates near-universal access to mobile connectivity and smartphones, placing it firmly within the technological baseline of Westernized lifestyle environments. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), mobile cellular subscriptions reached approximately 110 per 100 inhabitants in 2024, exceeding one subscription per person and indicating market saturation.<sup>53</sup> DataReportal's Digital 2025: Armenia reports smartphone ownership levels above 80% of the adult population and mobile internet penetration above 80% overall.<sup>54</sup> Fourth-generation

(4G/LTE) coverage is effectively nationwide, while early 5G testing and pilot deployments began in 2024–2025, particularly in Yerevan.<sup>55</sup> High mobile connectivity enables widespread use of Western digital services: online banking, e-commerce, ride-hailing, streaming platforms, and cross-border digital work.

Unlike more restrictive environments, Armenia does not impose systemic barriers on access to global digital platforms. As a result, digital lifestyle Westernization is both technically complete and socially embedded.

# Azerbaijan

# 34.5/100

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
4.5/25	3.0/25	12.5/25	9.0/15	5.5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 4.5/25

### 1.1 POLITICAL FREEDOM 1/10

By 2025, Azerbaijan remains a consolidated authoritarian political system characterized by extremely limited political rights and civil liberties. According to Freedom in the World 2025, the country is rated “Not Free” with a score of 7 out of 100, reflecting the absence of meaningful political competition, systematic restrictions on fundamental freedoms, and the near-total dominance of the executive branch over the political system.<sup>56</sup> Political power is concentrated in the presidency and a narrow ruling elite, while parliament, courts, and regional administrations operate as subordinated institutions rather than independent centers of authority.<sup>57 58</sup>

Electoral processes in Azerbaijan do not function as mechanisms of political alternation. OSCE/ODIHR election observation reports on the early presidential election of February 2024 document a restrictive political environment marked by limitations on freedoms of expression, association,

and assembly, as well as the absence of genuine political alternatives for voters.<sup>59 60</sup> These deficiencies are not episodic but structural, reflecting long-term institutional design and enforcement practices that prevent elections from fulfilling democratic functions.<sup>61 62</sup>

Crucially, the geopolitical transformations of 2022–2025 — including Azerbaijan’s increased autonomy in foreign policy and reduced dependence on Russia — have not resulted in domestic political liberalization. Comparative democracy datasets indicate stagnation or regression in political freedoms during this period.<sup>63 64</sup> Political stability continues to be maintained through coercive capacity, elite management, and information control rather than institutional accountability or public consent. This demonstrates that external geopolitical realignments have not translated into internal democratic convergence.

### 1.2 PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 0.5/8

The Milli Majlis (Parliament) of Azerbaijan does not function as a representative legislative body reflecting political or ideological diversity. International democracy assessments consistently describe the legislature as institutionally subordinated to the executive, with minimal oversight capacity and no meaningful role in shaping public policy through debate or opposition.<sup>65 66</sup> Parliamentary activity is largely

confined to the formal endorsement of executive decisions, and legislative elections do not produce pluralistic representation.<sup>67 68</sup>

Structural barriers effectively exclude independent political forces — including potentially pro-Western or reform-oriented parties — from parliamentary participation. OSCE/ODIHR reports identify restrictive candidate registration procedures, unequal campaign conditions, limited access to media, and pressure on

opposition figures as systemic obstacles to competitive elections.<sup>69 70</sup> These factors prevent the emergence of parliamentary actors capable of articulating alternative policy agendas or advocating democratic reform and European integration.

Parliamentary composition and behavior cannot be interpreted as indicators of political Westernization.

### 1.3 PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 3/7

Public attitudes toward Western institutions in Azerbaijan during 2024–2025 exhibit a pragmatic and internally inconsistent pattern. The EU Neighbours East Annual Survey 2024 reports that 65 percent of respondents expressed a positive image of the European Union, the highest level recorded since the survey series began in 2016.<sup>73 74</sup> This suggests relatively high public awareness of the EU and its role as an external partner. However, the Spring 2025 survey reveals significant ambivalence. While 61 percent of respondents described relations between Azerbaijan and the EU as good, only 25 percent reported a positive image of the EU as an institution; 37 percent expressed a neutral view and 10 percent a negative one.<sup>75</sup> This discrepancy indicates that favorable assessments of bilateral

Cooperation with Western actors, including the EU and the United States, is framed exclusively at the executive level as pragmatic foreign policy rather than as a subject of ideological alignment or democratic debate. The absence of parliamentary pluralism reinforces the conclusion that political Westernization in Azerbaijan is negligible at the institutional level.<sup>71 72</sup>

relations do not translate into deeper normative or emotional support for the EU. Survey data further show that public support for closer engagement with the EU is driven primarily by material and mobility-related incentives. In 2025, respondents identified economic development assistance (49 percent), education and exchange programs (40 percent), and visa facilitation (32 percent) as the main factors that would improve their attitude toward the EU. These findings demonstrate that public opinion toward Western civilization in Azerbaijan is largely transactional, emphasizing tangible benefits rather than democratic values or institutional convergence. From an analysis perspective, this limits the contribution of public opinion to political Westernization.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 3/25

### 2.1 CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 1/6

Azerbaijan's constitutional framework remains fundamentally incompatible with core European standards of separation of powers and institutional checks and balances. International governance assessments emphasize that the constitution entrenches a dominant presidency with extensive authority over the judiciary, prosecution, and security institutions, resulting in structural subordination of legislative and judicial branches to the executive.<sup>76 77</sup>

The Venice Commission's opinion on the 2016 constitutional amendments provides authoritative confirmation of these concerns. The Commission explicitly highlighted the expansion of presidential powers, extended term lengths, and weakened institutional safeguards as factors undermining

democratic accountability and judicial independence.<sup>78</sup> These design features continue to shape Azerbaijan's governance model in 2025.

Between 2022 and 2025, no substantive constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening institutional autonomy or aligning governance structures with European constitutional standards have been recorded in above-mentioned international assessments. Despite cooperation with the EU in energy and connectivity, constitutional convergence has not been prioritized domestically. As a result, legal Westernization remains limited to formal international commitments without corresponding institutional transformation.

## 2.2 INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 0.5/7

Judicial independence in Azerbaijan remains severely constrained both institutionally and in practice. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International consistently document politically motivated prosecutions, due-process violations, and the use of courts as tools to suppress dissent, particularly targeting journalists, opposition figures, and civil society actors.<sup>79 80 81</sup>

Comparative rule-of-law indices confirm that these deficiencies are systemic. The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2025 places Azerbaijan among the weakest global performers

on indicators related to judicial independence, constraints on government powers, and protection of fundamental rights.<sup>82</sup> These results reinforce the conclusion that judicial dependence is structural rather than the product of isolated misconduct. The absence of an independent judiciary undermines legal accountability and public trust in the legal system. Courts do not function as neutral arbiters between citizens and the state, nor do they provide effective remedies for rights violations. Within the StratEast Westernization Index framework, this constitutes a major barrier to legal convergence with European norms.

## 2.3 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 1/7

Although Azerbaijan is formally a party to major international human rights conventions, enforcement gaps remain structural and persistent. International reporting documents the restrictive application of legislation governing media, non-governmental organizations, and public assembly, with enforcement disproportionately targeting critics of the authorities.<sup>83 84 85</sup>

Between 2022 and 2025, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch recorded continued arrests and prosecutions of journalists and activists under charges widely assessed as politically motivated, contributing to widespread self-censorship and

contraction of public space. The U.S. Department of State's 2024 Human Rights Report corroborates these findings, citing arbitrary detention, lack of fair trial guarantees, and systematic restrictions on freedom of expression.<sup>86</sup>

Despite periodic official statements on reform, international monitoring indicates no measurable improvement in enforcement practices. Legal commitments therefore remain largely declarative, and human rights protection does not meet European standards in either substance or implementation.

## 2.4 NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 0.5/6

Acquittal rates in Azerbaijan remain extremely low and provide a clear quantitative indicator of prosecutorial dominance in the Azerbaijani justice system. According to publicly reported court statistics for 2023, Azerbaijani courts issued 225 acquittal verdicts out of 15,344 criminal cases, meaning that acquittals accounted for approximately 1.47 percent of all adjudicated cases, while convictions were delivered in over 98.5 percent of cases.<sup>87</sup> Although this represents an increase in the absolute number of acquittals compared to previous years, it reflects marginal change from a historically very low baseline rather than a structural shift in judicial behavior.

The Council of Europe's CEPEJ Evaluation of European Judicial Systems (Azerbaijan – 2024)<sup>88</sup> documents institutional characteristics commonly associated with weak judicial independence and limited constraints on prosecutorial power. Taken together, these sources indicate that Azerbaijani courts rarely issue decisions contradicting prosecutorial positions, particularly in politically sensitive cases. Within the StratEast Westernization Index framework, acquittal rates at around 1.5 percent constitute strong evidence of systemic rule-of-law deficits.

## 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 12.5/25

### 3.1 EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 1.5/7

By 2025, Azerbaijan remains outside the institutional framework of deep economic integration with both the European Union and the World Trade Organization. Relations with the EU are not anchored in an Association Agreement or a DCFTA and are instead based on sectoral cooperation, primarily in energy, which does not require broad regulatory convergence or binding market-governance commitments.<sup>89 90</sup> This model allows Azerbaijan to benefit from selective access to European markets while preserving domestic policy discretion.

Azerbaijan's prolonged non-membership in the WTO is a key indicator of limited economic Westernization. Although the country applied for WTO accession in 1997 and formally resumed negotiations in recent years, accession has been delayed for nearly three decades.<sup>91</sup> The delay reflects not only technical complexity but also domestic

political-economy considerations. Independent analysts<sup>92</sup> point to resistance from entrenched monopolistic and state-affiliated economic actors in Azerbaijan who benefit from tariff protection, discretionary regulation, and limited competition. WTO membership would require binding commitments on tariff reductions, market access, and non-discriminatory treatment that could undermine these interests. Official Azerbaijani discourse frames the delay in precautionary terms, emphasizing the need to protect domestic producers from import competition and avoid economic shocks before the economy is "ready" for full liberalization.<sup>93</sup> WTO documentation confirms that negotiations continue under a Working Party framework, but accession remains conditional on deeper legislative and institutional alignment with WTO rules.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.2 EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 3/6

Azerbaijan's business environment in 2025 combines modern administrative capacity with structural governance constraints that limit transparent, rule-based market functioning. The EBRD's Azerbaijan country strategy for 2025–2030 underscores persistent issues around governance and the investment climate and positions policy engagement and institutional reform as key constraints alongside investment priorities.<sup>95</sup>

Corruption risk indicators remain weak. Transparency International's CPI 2024 gives Azerbaijan a score of 22/100, a level typically associated with high perceived public-sector

corruption and elevated risks of informal practices in state-business interactions.<sup>96</sup> Enterprise-level evidence also points in the same direction: the World Bank Enterprise Survey country materials provide firm-reported indicators on corruption exposure and administrative pressure, useful as quantitative proxies of day-to-day risks faced by companies.<sup>97 98</sup> Together, these sources support a defensible conclusion that business transparency remains constrained and that legal predictability and competition conditions do not match the rule-based standards typical of highly westernized market economies.

### 3.3 WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 4.5/6

Azerbaijan's trade structure is strongly oriented toward the European Union, but in a way that is overwhelmingly driven by hydrocarbons rather than diversified integration into European value chains. The European Commission's trade profile states that the EU is Azerbaijan's main trading partner, accounting for around 41.2% of Azerbaijan's total trade; the EU is also the biggest export market, receiving 63.3% of exports, while representing 13.2% of imports.<sup>99</sup> The asymmetry is crucial for interpretation: the EU is disproportionately important for exports, while imports are more distributed, indicating a classic commodity-export pattern.

This structure implies a "transactional" type of Western economic linkage. High export

dependence can coexist with limited internal market transformation if export revenues concentrate in the state and strategic sectors while non-oil segments remain weak. The EBRD's country assessment (Transition Report 2025–26) emphasizes<sup>100</sup> that diversification beyond oil and gas remains a core challenge, reinforcing that trade orientation alone does not automatically produce broad-based Westernization of economic institutions. Therefore, the Western share in trade is high in headline terms, but its qualitative impact is constrained by concentration in a single sector, limited technology transfer outside hydrocarbons, and weak integration into higher value-added European production networks.

### 3.4 WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 3.5/6

Western investment in Azerbaijan is substantial in strategic energy but limited as a driver of diversified modernization across the economy. EU materials and official statements underline the centrality of the Southern Gas Corridor and Azerbaijan's role as a key supplier to EU markets. In the European Commission's press statement of April 2025, it is reported that Azerbaijan and SOCAR supplied more than 25 billion cubic meters of natural gas, including about 13 bcm to EU member states, and that this represented a 57% increase from the 2021 level<sup>101</sup> in absolute volumes. EU energy-security materials similarly note that gas supplies from Azerbaijan to the EU via the Southern Gas Corridor increased by more than 40% from 2021 to 2024, highlighting rapid growth of this corridor in Europe's diversification strategy.<sup>102</sup> These are hard quantitative anchors showing deep functional integration with western energy demand and infrastructure.

However, this investment and integration is sector-specific. The EBRD's 2025–2030 strategy and transition assessment provide structured evidence that broader private-sector development and diversification remain constrained by governance, institutional, and competition factors, limiting the scale and composition of western FDI outside hydrocarbons. UNCTAD country profile data also provide a quantified macro picture of investment flows: the UNCTAD Data Hub reports recent FDI inflow values for Azerbaijan and situates them within broader financial flow indicators, supporting evidence-based discussion of whether investment is rising, volatile, or concentrated.<sup>103</sup> Azerbaijan shows high western-linked investment relevance in energy and transit, but only limited embedding in broader western innovation, services, and manufacturing ecosystems, which is typical of a resource-export model rather than a convergent market economy.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 9/15

### 4.1 USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 2/2

Azerbaijan's use of a Latin-based script for the Azerbaijani language is a fully institutionalized feature embedded in education, public administration, and official documentation, and it supports interoperability with global digital standards. Encyclopedia Britannica describes the writing-system history and the post-Soviet restoration of Latin script, providing a credible baseline reference that this is a long-established national standard rather than a recent policy change.<sup>104</sup> The Latin script functions as a structural facilitator: it reduces dependence on Cyrillic-centered information ecosystems and lowers practical barriers to participating in global (often English-dominant) digital and educational environments.

At the same time, it is analytically important not to over-interpret script as value convergence. Alphabet choice can reflect state-building, identity consolidation, and geopolitical differentiation rather than adoption of Western democratic norms. Therefore, this indicator is scored primarily as a technical-cultural enabler (integration into global communication practices) rather than as direct evidence of political or civic Westernization. In Azerbaijan's case, the Latin script can coexist with a restrictive media and civic environment, meaning the script supports access and interoperability but does not itself produce pluralism or open public discourse.

### 4.2 PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 3/6

Western-language proficiency in Azerbaijan, particularly English, remains limited in population penetration and comparatively low on international benchmarks. According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Azerbaijan ranks 94th out of 123 countries and regions, with an overall EF EPI score of 454, which is below the global average of approximately 488. In specific skill areas, EF data show that Azerbaijani respondents scored 468 in reading, 435 in listening, 453 in writing, and 457 in speaking indicating low to moderate proficiency compared with countries that exhibit higher cultural Westernization.<sup>105</sup> In practical terms, English competence is concentrated among urban youth, internationally connected professionals, and people linked to multinational companies, higher education, and globally oriented services. Where language proficiency remains concentrated, Western cultural influence tends to be uneven: strong in capital-city professional circles but weaker in regional and lower-

income segments. Additionally, Russian continues to retain functional utility in parts of business and regional networks, which can reduce incentives for a rapid mass transition to English as the primary second language. The net result is a cultural Westernization profile that is real but limited: English supports outward mobility and elite-level global integration but does not create a society-wide linguistic shift comparable to EU-integrated environments.

Accurate data on knowledge of other European languages, in particular French and German, have not been available in recent years. However, it can be noticed<sup>106</sup> the popularity of Germany as one of the most significant, after Turkey and Russia, destinations for foreign education of students from Azerbaijan. In addition, the German Goethe Institute is actively operating in Baku, and the German Reading Room has also been opened with more than 2,000 thousand members as of 2025.<sup>107</sup>

## 4.3 SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN NATIONS' MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS; THE SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 4/7

Azerbaijan's cultural Westernization is characterized by a split between high technical access to global platforms and strong institutional constraints on media freedom and public discourse. On the access side, connectivity indicators show that infrastructure enables mass consumption of global digital content: internet penetration reached about 89% of the total population in early 2025,<sup>108</sup> with over 64.9% of people active on social media and approximately 89.4 active mobile broadband subscriptions per 100 people,<sup>109</sup> indicating near-universal mobile internet access.<sup>110</sup> More than 84% of the population owns a mobile phone, further supporting digital connectivity. Additionally, improvements in fixed broadband infrastructure have raised average speeds to around 79 Mbps, facilitating consumption of high-bandwidth content and access to international platforms. Despite this high connectivity, institutional constraints limit the civic and public impact of these channels.

However, institutional conditions sharply limit how far this translates into open public debate and pluralistic cultural politics. Freedom House's

Freedom on the Net 2025 country report classifies Azerbaijan's internet environment as "Not Free," documenting legal pressure,<sup>111</sup> surveillance concerns, and constraints on online expression that reduce the civic impact of digital access. Reporters Without Borders' 2025 materials place Azerbaijan among the lowest-ranked countries in press freedom and describe a repressive media environment that restricts independent journalism.

However, in Azerbaijan, Western products gain significant exposure through western social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, which collectively dominate the digital landscape. As of January 2026, Facebook leads the market with a 28,8% share, followed closely by YouTube at 22,5% and Instagram at 21,2%.<sup>112</sup>

This combination produces a Westernization pattern that is consumption-heavy but discourse-light: people can access western platforms and cultural products, but institutional repression limits the formation of independent civic networks and constrains the public significance of Western informational narratives.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 5.5/10

### 5.1 PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 2/5

Available evidence indicates that travel from Azerbaijan to western countries remains socially concentrated and constrained by visa regimes and costs. The primary quantitative source for assessing EU-oriented mobility is the European Commission's DG HOME Schengen visa statistics, based on consular reporting and border-control data.<sup>113</sup> According to official Schengen statistics for 2024, Azerbaijani citizens submitted 90,634 applications for uniform short-stay visas, of which 81,326 visas were issued, including 37,335 multiple-entry visas (MEVs). The non-issuance rate stood at 9.7%, while MEVs accounted for 45.9% of all issued visas,

indicating that repeated travel is concentrated among a limited group of frequent travelers rather than reflecting mass mobility. In addition, only 190 limited territorial validity visas (LTVs) were issued, underlining the selective nature of exceptional travel permissions.

When related to Azerbaijan's total population, these figures confirm that travel to western countries does not constitute a widespread social practice. At the EU level, more than 9.7 million Schengen visas were issued globally in 2024, reflecting post-pandemic recovery, but Azerbaijan-origin travel remains modest within this broader rebound.

## 5.2 PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

Western franchise presence in Azerbaijan is measurable but limited and concentrated in urban consumer spaces. Emporium, a major department store in Baku, offers products from more than 500 international brands,<sup>114</sup> including multiple western designer labels, indicating demand for global consumer goods in urban retail. Furthermore, more than 40 Rossmann stores, part of a large German chain, operate through partnerships with local companies, underscoring selective adoption of western retail franchises. These figures show that western franchises exist and attract urban consumers, but they remain niche and highly localized, with limited penetration outside Baku and limited impact on broader market structures.

Quantitative investment data reinforce this pattern. UNCTAD FDI statistics show that non-energy foreign direct investment in Azerbaijan remains limited, with wholesale and retail trade accounting for only a small single-digit share of total FDI inflows, far below hydrocarbons and related infrastructure. EBRD assessments further note that governance risks, limited competition, and regulatory discretion constrain the scalable expansion of franchise-based business models beyond premium locations. As a result, western franchises in Azerbaijan operate as symbols of urban consumer modernity, not as drivers of nationwide lifestyle transformation or inclusive market Westernization.

## 5.3 MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE AND SMARTPHONE USAGE 1.5/2

Digital lifestyle Westernization in Azerbaijan is strong on technical access but constrained in emancipatory effects. The ITU DataHub provides quantified evidence of high mobile connectivity: active mobile-broadband subscriptions are reported at 89.4 per 100 people (2024), and the share of individuals owning a mobile cellular telephone is reported at 84.3% (2023), indicating widespread device and access penetration.<sup>115</sup> Such connectivity enables Westernized consumption patterns: e-commerce, global media streaming, participation in international social platforms, and access to Western entertainment and cultural reference points. It also supports modern service use (digital payments, app-based transport, online education), which are typical markers of lifestyle modernization.

However, connectivity does not equal digital freedom. Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2025 country report documents that the online environment is "Not Free," citing restrictive pressures and constraints that limit independent civic mobilization and reduce the political and social autonomy effects that digital connectivity can produce in freer environments. As a result, Azerbaijan's digital lifestyle Westernization is best characterized as technical and consumer-oriented: people are connected and can access global platforms, but the restrictive information and legal environment limit the development of independent networks and open political communication that often accompany deeper Western social modernization.

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
4.5/25	4/25	7/25	7.5/15	5.5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 4.5/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 1/10

The cycle of repression launched after the 2020 presidential election has not been interrupted. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, in his 2025 report, described a complete absence of freedoms of association, expression, and peaceful assembly, against a background of systematic repression and ill-treatment of more than 1,200 political prisoners.<sup>116</sup> International indices reflect this entrenched authoritarianism: Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2025 again rates Belarus as “Not Free” with a total score of 7/100, placing the country among the worst performers both globally and in the post-Soviet region.<sup>117</sup> Reporters Without Borders’ 2025 World Press Freedom Index ranks Belarus 166th of 180 states, noting the intensification and systematisation of persecution of media workers since the 2020 and January 2025 elections.<sup>118</sup> Repressive practices remain wide-ranging. “Anti-extremism” and “anti-terrorism” provisions are routinely used to prosecute any form of dissent, including donations to solidarity funds, social-media activity, and cooperation with independent media and human rights initiatives in exile. Reports by Belarusian NGOs document a new wave of cases in 2025 against people who sent information on Russian military movements to the monitoring project Belarusian Hajun.<sup>119</sup>

Within this context, the 26 January 2025 presidential election was the least competitive in Belarus’s modern history. Only loyalist candidates

were allowed to run, with no genuine opposition figures on the ballot. Candidate messaging in state-controlled media largely echoed government narratives, focusing attacks on “extremists” and the opposition in exile. The EU, UK, and other Western countries refused to recognise it as free and fair and responded with additional targeted sanctions.<sup>120</sup>

The only limited positive development has been the stabilisation of a practice of pardoning political prisoners, including in the framework of dialogue with the United States. The most high-profile case was the release of Siarhei Tsikhanouski a prominent blogger and activist, husband of exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, jailed in 2020 after announcing plans to run for the presidency and released on June 21, 2025<sup>121</sup> Tsikhanouski was freed together with 13 other political prisoners immediately after a Minsk visit by U.S. Special Envoy Gen. Keith Kellogg, who met Lukashenko as part of renewed U.S.–Belarus contacts. At the very end of 2025, several other political prisoners were also released, including Viktor Babaryka, Maria Kalesnikava, and Ales Bialiatski. Since mid-2024, several waves of releases have brought the total number of pardoned or otherwise released political prisoners to several hundred. However, human-rights groups such as Viasna stress that around 1,200–1,300 people remain behind bars on politically motivated charges, as new arrests offset the releases.<sup>122</sup>

## 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 1/8

The parliament formed following the 2024 elections does not include a single pro-Western party or individual MP.<sup>123</sup> All four parties that obtained seats – Belaya Rus, the Communist Party, the Republican Party of Labour and Justice, and the Liberal Democratic Party – are explicitly loyal to Lukashenko and support a pro-Russian foreign-policy vector.<sup>124</sup> Following the 2023 party reform and forced re-registration, all opposition and pro-Western parties were eliminated from the legal political field. As a result, the new parliament is

even more ideologically homogeneous than its predecessors and offers no institutional voice for Western-oriented positions. Western parliaments and organizations do not maintain inter-parliamentary cooperation with the Belarusian parliament, which they do not recognize as democratically elected. Domestically, the legislature plays no meaningful role in shaping core internal or foreign-policy decisions and routinely approves all bills drafted by the Lukashenko administration and the government.

## 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 2.5/7

Public opinion data for 2025 come from only two publicly available independent internet surveys: the Chatham House poll (January 2025) and the ISANS “Belarus monitor” (September 2025). Taken together, they show that Belarusians’ attitudes toward the West and the EU remain more positive than the government’s rhetoric, but are embedded in a foreign-policy environment still dominated by Russia. Attitudinal questions show that around 37% of Belarusians express a good or very good opinion of EU countries, while only about 14% hold explicitly negative views; the largest group (around half of respondents) remains neutral, indicating

neither strong rejection nor open enthusiasm.<sup>125</sup> At the level of strategic orientation, however, the balance is less favorable to Western integration. When asked about geopolitical alliances, 53% choose an alliance with Russia, 14% with the EU, and 29% neutrality. The Chatham House survey nonetheless records a broad, cross-camp readiness for rapprochement with the West: around 60% of respondents say they would support Belarus “making greater efforts to improve relations with EU countries,” with the share of opponents to such steps, in both domestic and foreign policy, not exceeding 15%.<sup>126</sup>

# 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 4/25

## 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 1/6

Belarus continues to be governed by the Constitution as amended by the 2022 referendum, and the implementation of this reform has confirmed the concerns previously expressed by the Venice Commission. In its 2022 Final Opinion, the Commission identified numerous procedural, substantive, and structural deficiencies, stressing the over-concentration of powers in the hands of the president and the lack of effective checks and balances, and recommended a holistic revision of the Constitution once conditions for free and

pluralistic public debate are restored.<sup>127</sup> By 2025, no steps in this direction had been taken. At the same time, the parliament adopted in January 2023 a law implementing the constitutional provisions on the All-Belarusian People’s Assembly, a new body that the Commission considers to have broad and heterogeneous powers liable to encroach on the competences of other state organs and to undermine the principle of the separation of powers.<sup>128</sup>

## 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 1/7

Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2025 notes that "the judiciary and other institutions lack independence and provide no check on President Alexander Lukashenko's power".<sup>129</sup> The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2025 ranks Belarus 105th of 143 countries overall and 137th on constraints on government powers, underscoring growing political interference in

the justice system.<sup>130</sup> In January 2025, a group of UN special rapporteurs expressed alarm at the proliferation of trials in absentia. It stressed that Belarus's legislation on such proceedings "ignores the basic guarantees of a fair trial provided for by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights", further confirming the lack of judicial independence.<sup>131</sup>

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 1/7

Officially, Belarus in 2025 continues to proclaim broad constitutional and treaty-based protection of rights, but it remains outside the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights. Belarus remains the only country in Europe that retains and applies the death penalty, which was expanded in 2023 to cover high treason by officials and military personnel.<sup>132</sup> In 2025, a series of incremental legal acts further narrowed civic space: new rules allow children to be deemed in a "socially dangerous situation" if parents possess "extremist materials",<sup>133</sup> criminalise publication of information

on troop movements,<sup>134</sup> extend insult/defamation provisions to a former president,<sup>135</sup> remove public access to online court schedules,<sup>136</sup> and tighten media regulation.<sup>137</sup> During Belarus's fourth-cycle Universal Periodic Review in November 2025, UN bodies and stakeholders highlighted these trends as evidence of persistent misalignment with the ICCPR and other core treaties, pointing in particular to overbroad extremism legislation, restrictions on religious and civic associations, and systemic due-process violations.<sup>138</sup>

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 1/6

According to the latest judicial statistics published by the Supreme Court, in 2024, the courts considered 29,162 criminal cases, issued verdicts, and convicted 31,410 people, while only 60 individuals were acquitted, which the court itself reports as 0.19% of those convicted.<sup>139</sup> This follows the same pattern as previous years: in 2023,

there were just 47 acquittals against about 33,700 convictions<sup>140</sup>, and in 2022, only 33 acquittals against 38,206 convictions, an acquittal rate of 0.09%.<sup>141</sup> The slight numerical increase over time does not change the substance of the system, which continues to function as one in which virtually every criminal prosecution ends in conviction.

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 7/25

## 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 1/7

Belarus applied to join the WTO in 1993, but since the 2020 crackdown and Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the process has effectively stalled.<sup>142</sup> In March 2022, a group of WTO members (including the EU, UK, Canada, Japan, and others) declared Belarus "unfit for WTO membership" and said they would no longer consider its accession

application, while the EU and its partners also formally suspended all work related to Belarus's WTO accession.<sup>143</sup> In February 2024, a government resolution removed WTO accession from Belarus's foreign economic priorities for 2025. Belarus still does not seek an Association Agreement with the EU; relations remain based on the 1989 EEC–

Euratom–USSR trade and cooperation agreement. On 28 June 2021, in response to EU sanctions, Minsk suspended its participation in the EU’s

Eastern Partnership initiative, and this suspension remained in place in 2025.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 2/6

By 2025, international indices indicate further deterioration in Belarus’s business climate and institutional environment. The Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom 2025 gives Belarus a score of 48.9, ranking it 152nd in the world and classifying the economy as “repressed”, with consistently low component scores for property rights and government integrity and an assessment that weak rule of law and pervasive state control undermine entrepreneurship and investment.<sup>145</sup> The Economic Freedom of the World 2025 report

places Belarus around the 121st position out of 165 countries, in the group of states with the least economic freedom.<sup>146</sup> Amid Belarus’s slide in these economic-freedom indices to the lower global tier over the past three years, the growing use of de facto nationalisation and asset seizures<sup>147</sup> and documented politically motivated reprisals against business owners<sup>148</sup> justify a downgrade of the Ease and Transparency of Doing Business score from 2.5 (in the 2022 Westernization report) to 2.0.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 1.5/6

By 2025, Belarus’s trade structure had become heavily reoriented toward Russia and other Eastern partners, with Western markets reduced to a marginal role. In 2021, the EU still accounted for about 20% of Belarus’s merchandise trade and was its second-largest trading partner. Still, successive Western sanctions and countersanctions since 2022 have more than halved that share and sharply reduced Belarus–EU trade. According to the European Commission, by 2024, the EU represented only 10.5% of Belarus’s total goods trade, while

Russia’s share had climbed to 65.7%.<sup>149</sup> Analysts suggest that 60–65% of Belarusian exports now go directly to Russia and that Russian ports and infrastructure handle the overwhelming majority of Belarus’s external logistics. At the same time, Minsk increasingly channels trade with China through Russian territory.<sup>150</sup> Given this sharp and sustained decline in the Western share of Belarus’s trade compared to the early 2020s and the clear structural pivot of trade flows to the East, the score for this indicator is downgraded from 2.0 to 1.5.

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY’S ECONOMY 2.5/6

According to the most recent official data for 2024, foreign investors put about 6.9 billion USD into the real sector of the Belarusian economy, of which Russia accounted for 24.9%, the UAE 14.3% and Cyprus (a usual proxy for offshore companies with Russian or Belarusian owners) 13.1%.<sup>151</sup> They were followed by China at 4.3%, Germany at 3.5%, and the Netherlands at 2%. Poland

and Bulgaria rounded out the top eight investors with 1.3% and 1.26% respectively. The Ministry of Economy reports that in the first half of 2025, so-called “friendly” countries provided 80.6% of all foreign investment and 75.0% of FDI, with “unfriendly” (primarily Western) states reduced to a clear minority share.<sup>152</sup>

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 7.5/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 1/2

Belarus does not use the Latin alphabet as an official script: both state languages, Belarusian and Russian, are written in Cyrillic. In 2023 the authorities effectively removed the traditional Belarusian Latin alphabet (Lacinka) from official use: a new instruction on the transliteration of geographical names replaced the earlier requirement to use historical Lacinka with an English-style Latin transliteration from Belarusian or Russian, and the head of Lukashenko's Administration explicitly justified abandoning

Lacinka as a response to "Western liberal values" allegedly imposed through Latinization.<sup>153</sup> Latin characters are still used on some new signs and maps as neutral transliteration for foreign readers, but without the diacritics and historical orthography of Belarusian Lacinka. In general, the position of the Russian language remains very strong: according to the 2019 census, 71.3% of the population report Russian as the language normally spoken at home, and only 26% Belarusian.

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENCY IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 3/6

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Belarus remains in the moderate proficiency band, with an EF EPI score of 533 and a global rank of 41st, down from 33rd in 2023 and 35th in 2024, which indicates a slight decline in relative position despite still outperforming most non-Baltic post-

Soviet states.<sup>154</sup> There is no newer representative survey of all foreign languages, but 2019 census data indicate that roughly 450,000 people reported knowledge of English and 138,000 of German with much smaller numbers for French and Spanish.<sup>155</sup>

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 3.5/7

Belarusians watch television less often than in 2021-2022, but viewing remains concentrated on a narrow set of state Belarusian and Russian channels. In September 2025, 54.0% of respondents said they watched TV every day (down from 56.4% in April 2024), with the bulk of the audience going to Belarus 1, ONT, STV, and NTV-Belarus, which rebroadcast large volumes of Russian content; films and series are the preferred content.<sup>156</sup> Cinema repertoires remain heavily reliant on Western products: distributors interviewed in 2024 stated that "practically 99% of Hollywood blockbusters still reach Belarusian cinemas" despite sanctions.<sup>157</sup>

Internet and social media use, by contrast, is close to universal and provides broad access to

Western content. According to Digital 2024/2025: Belarus, there were around 8.2–8.3 million internet users at the start of 2025 (about 91–92% of the population) and roughly 6.3 million social media user identities (about 70% of the population).<sup>158</sup> The ICT Development Index 2025 of the International Telecommunication Union gives Belarus 90.7 points, placing it in the upper tier of digitally developed countries.<sup>159</sup> In 2025, the most popular social networks among Belarusian internet users are TikTok (95% reach), YouTube (81%), and Instagram (64%), followed by VKontakte (35%) and Odnoklassniki (27%). At the bottom of the ranking are Facebook (11%) and LinkedIn (16%), while platforms like X/Twitter and Snapchat have only marginal audiences.<sup>160</sup>

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 5.5/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 1.5/5

According to a 2025 Belstat summary, Belarusian citizens made 4,691,900 trips abroad in 2024.<sup>161</sup> Almost half of these trips (2,061,200) went to CIS countries, predominantly Russia, while journeys to non-CIS destinations fell from 3,183,600 in 2023 to 2,630,700 in 2024 despite the opening of new routes. Among non-CIS destinations, Turkey accounted for 32.1% of trips, Egypt for just over 20%, the UAE for 14%, and only one EU country

– Italy – appeared in the leading group with “up to 10%” of trips, with the remaining 18% dispersed across many other states. Sanctions, visa restrictions, long lines at land crossing points, the dismantling of air links with the EU, and the reorientation of tour operators toward “friendly” markets mean that visits to Western countries remain limited for most Belarusians.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

By 2025, the presence of Western franchise chains in Belarus had become mixed: a number of flagship brands formally withdrew from the market, but many Western products and brand names remain visible in retail and advertising. For example, McDonald’s ceased operations in Belarus in 2022; its 25 restaurants were rebranded as Mak.by in April 2023, keeping a very similar menu and visual style under a Belarusian operator.<sup>162</sup> At the same time, Burger King and KFC continue to operate through local franchisees, and major Minsk malls still host international fast-food chains alongside domestic networks.

Overall, while the direct corporate presence of Western franchise chains has shrunk since 2021 and some projects (such as the planned Leroy Merlin hypermarket)<sup>163</sup> have been effectively frozen, the situation is still better than in Russia. In fashion and lifestyle retail, many Western brands that left Russia remain present in Belarus: Zara, Bershka, Pull&Bear, Reserved, Cropp, Mohito, Sinsay, Mango, Nike, Adidas, Calvin Klein, Gucci, Burberry, and others are explicitly advertised as attractions for Russian “shopping tourists” in 2025.<sup>164</sup>

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

According to Belstat’s 2025 data, the number of mobile cellular subscriptions reached about 11.9 million at the end of 2024, or 130 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, up from 125 per 100 in 2021.<sup>165</sup>

The Ministry of Communications reports that by mid-2024–early 2025, 3G services covered 99.9% of the population and 4G/LTE services were available to around 99% of Belarusians, while the number of cellular subscribers approached 12 million.<sup>166</sup>

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
23/25	25/25	25/25	14/15	10/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 23/25

### 1.1 DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 10/10

Freedom House continued to classify Estonia as Free in 2025, maintaining very high scores for political rights and civil liberties, reflecting free and competitive elections, the absence of structural barriers to party formation, and robust institutional checks.<sup>167</sup> Estonia’s democratic system remained firmly anchored in Western political norms: the 2023 Riigikogu (parliament) election results continued to shape coalition politics throughout 2025, with parliamentary actors governing within a stable constitutional framework and strong protections for political pluralism.<sup>168</sup>

In 2025, Estonia adopted a constitutional amendment removing local voting rights for non-EU

citizens — a security-driven change debated across party lines. While controversial domestically, the reform reflected a broader strategic recalibration in response to the regional security environment following Russia’s war against Ukraine. The measure was passed by broad parliamentary majorities and signed by the President, illustrating political consensus on safeguarding electoral integrity while highlighting ongoing domestic debates on inclusion and minority rights.<sup>169</sup> In 2025, Reporters Without Borders ranked Estonia second globally in its World Press Freedom Index, with a score of 89.46/100, highlighting its world-class levels of media pluralism, legal protections and journalist independence.<sup>170</sup>

### 1.2 PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT 7/8

The entire pro-government coalition and most opposition parties remained firmly supportive of EU membership, NATO commitments, and deeper Western integration. Estonia continued to play an active role in shaping EU security, cyber, and energy policy, and all mainstream parliamentary blocs consistently framed their foreign-policy agendas within a Euro-Atlantic consensus. Although some populist actors questioned specific EU policies, parliamentary polarization did not fundamentally challenge Estonia’s Western alignment.

Estonia’s participation in the June 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague and its sustained advocacy for increased allied defence spending reflected the parliament’s cross-party consensus on transatlantic security.<sup>171</sup> Legislators also supported the government’s position in the May 2025 Baltic Defence Ministerial in Ämari, reaffirming collective deterrence with Latvia and Lithuania. The Riigikogu’s foreign affairs agenda thus demonstrated continuity with long-standing Western commitments.<sup>172</sup>

## 1.3 PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 6/7

Public surveys in 2025 continued to show strong alignment with Western institutions: support for NATO remained at approximately 79% and pro-EU sentiment stayed robust at around 60%, driven largely by security perceptions and Estonia's economic integration with Western markets. Trust in Western partners — especially Nordic countries and the EU — remained high across most demographic groups.<sup>173</sup>

These attitudes reinforced a political climate in which anti-Western narratives had limited space to gain traction. Younger Estonians and urban populations displayed even higher levels of trust in Western institutions, reflecting generational consolidation of Western identity. Public opinion therefore acted as a stabilizing force, underpinning the country's strategic direction during a period of increased geopolitical uncertainty.<sup>174</sup>

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 25/25

### 2.1 CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 6/6

Estonia maintained full alignment with the Venice Commission standards in 2025, continuing its long-standing engagement with European constitutional norms and legal expert bodies. The Venice Commission provided feedback on Estonia's evolving constitutional framework, especially regarding local voting rights and judicial governance, and the government demonstrated willingness to incorporate its recommendations.<sup>175</sup>

The European Commission's 2025 Rule of Law Report (Estonia country chapter) reaffirmed Estonia's high level of compliance with EU legal standards, noting the transparency of constitutional and legislative procedures, effective public consultations, and the continued stability of democratic institutions, thereby confirming Estonia's strong legal harmonization with Western governance models.<sup>176</sup>

### 2.2 INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 7/7

Estonia ranked among the best-performing countries in the region on judicial independence metrics. The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index and the European Commission assessments continued to place Estonia near the top of EU member states in areas such as judicial integrity, absence of political interference, and efficiency of court procedures. Institutional safeguards — merit-based appointments, transparent procedures, and strong anti-corruption frameworks — remained intact.<sup>177</sup>

A notable case in 2025, in which several high-ranking police officials were acquitted by the Harju County Court (a decision upheld on appeal), highlighted judicial willingness to depart from prosecutorial arguments when warranted. This reinforced international perceptions that Estonia's courts operate independently and resist political or administrative pressure.<sup>178</sup>

### 2.3 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 6/6

Estonia preserved a comprehensive framework for the protection of civil, political, and social rights, supported by consistent enforcement mechanisms and independent oversight institutions. Key legislative provisions remained aligned with EU law, including

data protection, anti-discrimination measures, and freedom of expression protections. Human-rights bodies noted Estonia's continued efforts to expand services for vulnerable groups.<sup>179</sup>

International organizations reaffirmed Estonia's strong record: Amnesty International's 2024/25 report highlighted broad respect for civil liberties; the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) emphasized

Estonia's robust rights framework in its 2025 assessment. While issues such as minority-language education reforms remained sensitive, the overall trajectory remained positive.<sup>180</sup>

## 2.4 NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 6/6

Judicial statistics for 2025 indicated stable acquittal rates consistent with EU averages, reflecting an independent judiciary that assesses cases on their merits rather than adhering closely to prosecutorial positions. Courts demonstrated a readiness to challenge insufficiently substantiated indictments, particularly in complex corruption or administrative cases.<sup>181</sup>

The acquittal of senior police officials in 2025 underscored this dynamic, as courts evaluated evidence rigorously and delivered decisions independent of public or political expectations. These cases reinforced international assessments that Estonia's judiciary meets Western standards of impartiality and due process.<sup>182</sup>

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 25/25

## 3.1 EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 7/7

Estonia's economic framework in 2025 remained fully embedded in EU internal-market rules, WTO disciplines, and Eurozone governance. EU membership shaped regulatory standards, competition policy, and trade patterns, with over two-thirds of Estonia's exports directed to EU markets. Finland, Latvia, Sweden, and Germany remained Estonia's principal trading partners.<sup>183</sup>

In 2025, Estonia signed a 295.5 million EUR Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) grant agreement to accelerate Rail Baltica construction, reinforcing its integration with EU transport corridors.<sup>184</sup> Participation in the EU-LAC Digital Alliance High-Level Dialogue (Tallinn, May 2025) further highlighted Estonia's role as a promoter of EU digital governance abroad.<sup>185</sup>

## 3.2 EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 6/6

The 2025 Index of Economic Freedom ranked Estonia 8th globally and 5th in Europe, scoring 78.9, driven by transparent regulation, strong property rights, and predictable tax policy.<sup>186</sup> Estonia also scored 76/100 in the 2024 Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), ranking 13th worldwide — among the strongest anti-corruption performers in the region.<sup>187</sup>

Throughout 2025, Estonia prioritized digital

governance and stable tax policy as tools to preserve a favourable business environment despite global economic headwinds. The government's focus on green transition investments and technological innovation strengthened Estonia's appeal to Western investors. This focus on digital transformation, secure infrastructure, and innovation underpinned Estonia's resilient business environment, with firms continuing to invest in growth even amid global economic uncertainty.<sup>188</sup>

## 3.3 WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 6/6

Estonia's trade structure remained heavily oriented toward Western partners in 2025, with the European Union accounting for the majority of both imports and exports. The Nordic countries,

Germany, Benelux states and other EU members dominated Estonia's goods trade, particularly in machinery, electronics/communication equipment, wood products (timber) and related services.<sup>189</sup>

Western dominance in trade persisted despite global market volatility. Estonia's integration into EU supply chains and its strong transport-logistics

position ensured that Western markets remained central drivers of its economic model.<sup>190</sup>

### 3.4 WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 6/6

Western foreign direct investment continued to represent the overwhelming share of Estonia's FDI stock, driven by Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden), Germany, and the Netherlands. Key investment sectors included ICT, green tech, logistics, and financial services.

Although global FDI contracted in 2024–25, Estonia demonstrated resilience due to its digital governance infrastructure and regulatory stability. The International Trade Administration's 2025 Investment Climate Statement highlighted Estonia's transparency, rule of law, and technology orientation as principal factors sustaining Western investor confidence.<sup>191</sup>

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 14/15

### 4.1 USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET 2/2

Estonian uses the Latin alphabet, and Western-style signage, branding, and digital communication

are ubiquitous.<sup>192</sup> English-language materials are widely used across public and private sectors.

### 4.2 PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 5/6

Estonia continued to rank in the "high proficiency" band of the EF English Proficiency Index, with English, German, and increasingly French offered throughout the education system. Language education reforms strengthened English instruction in secondary schools and professional training programs.<sup>193</sup>

These trends reinforced Estonia's cultural and economic integration with Western Europe. Younger generations, in particular, displayed high levels of English fluency, facilitating cross-border mobility and digital globalization.<sup>194</sup>

### 4.3 SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTIONS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 7/7

Western cultural content dominated Estonia's media environment in 2025. Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, and Amazon Prime remained widely used, while TV and cinema content was primarily Western.<sup>195</sup> The Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival 2025 continued to feature predominantly European and North American productions, reinforcing Estonia's cultural links with the West.<sup>196</sup> Western social media platforms — Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and X —

remained fully accessible and widely adopted, with no state-imposed restrictions.<sup>197</sup> Estonia's digital media consumption patterns thus closely resembled those of Northern and Western Europe.<sup>198</sup>

At the same time, 2025 saw active policy attention to bilingualism and the integration of Russian-speaking communities — efforts that aimed to reconcile cultural Westernisation with internal cohesion. In 2025, Estonia began phasing out Russian-language instruction in schools, with the

intention of replacing it entirely with Estonian-only instruction by 2030. This signals a shift in integration policy, despite the government framing the move as a means of fostering shared identity and social cohesion.<sup>199</sup> Cultural dynamics therefore exhibit two interacting trends: an accelerating outward orientation through language, digital media, and the consumption of Western cultural products,

and a domestic agenda to manage minority integration, ensuring that Western cultural affinity does not become a source of internal exclusion. The broader trajectory is the consolidation of Western cultural norms, while policymakers wrestle with the issue of minority inclusion in a security-conscious environment.<sup>200</sup>

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 10/10

### 5.1 PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 5/5

Outbound mobility remained extremely high in 2025: 73% of Estonian residents' foreign trips were to EU countries, with 58% for holidays and 14% for business, reflecting strong social and economic linkages with Western Europe. High mobility was facilitated by Schengen membership and strong transport links.<sup>201</sup>

Western travel remained embedded in lifestyle norms in Estonia, with outbound tourism to

EU destinations accounting for the majority of international trips and holiday travel to countries like Finland, Sweden and Germany remaining popular.<sup>202</sup> Tourism and leisure travel continued to be significant for Estonian residents, while education and professional exchanges through programs like Erasmus+ facilitated cross-border mobility and cultural exchange, reinforcing Estonia's cultural convergence with Western Europe.<sup>203</sup>

### 5.2 PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 3/3

Western retail, food-service, and clothing brands maintained a strong presence in Estonia in 2025, especially in Tallinn and other urban centres. International fashion labels such as H&M, Zara, and Nike feature prominently in major shopping centres like Viru Keskus and Ülemiste Keskus, while global food-service brands such as KFC, McDonald's operate multiple urban outlets across the country.<sup>204</sup>

Modern malls and retail environments in urban Estonia continue to converge with Nordic and broader Western European standards. Western-style malls, cafés, and service models dominate urban consumption patterns, with international brands and integrated shopping-leisure spaces reflecting Western consumer norms.<sup>205</sup>

### 5.3 MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE AND SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

Estonia maintained extremely high levels of digital connectivity: mobile penetration exceeded 100%, smartphone usage was near-universal, and nationwide 4G/5G coverage supported an advanced digital-services ecosystem.<sup>206</sup> The 2025 dynamic is one of deepening digital-first Westernisation. Estonia's public education and digital policies, including the introduction of AI in schools, have further embedded Western-style technology adoption and consumer habits into daily life. This has increased the rate at

which Western media, retail, and social practices spread across age groups.<sup>207</sup> In addition, Estonian public and private celebrations are increasingly incorporating Western traditions and aesthetics. Holidays such as Christmas and Halloween<sup>208</sup> are widely celebrated with Western-style decorations and events.<sup>209</sup> Cultural festivals and city-wide public gatherings often feature Western music, cuisine and entertainment, which reinforces everyday exposure to Western lifestyle norms.

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
8/25	5/25	9/25	9/15	6/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 8/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 1/10

In recent years Georgia’s authorities moved away from the Euro-Atlantic track and increasingly adopted a Kremlin-style governance playbook: constraining civil society, tolerating violence and intimidation against critics, and normalizing hostile anti-Western narratives. The European Council explicitly warned that the Georgian government’s “transparency of foreign influence” law represented democratic backsliding and that the government’s course was de facto halting the EU accession process.<sup>210</sup> In its Georgia Report 2025, the European Commission stated that Georgia “further derailed from the EU path,” documented repressive action against protesters, civil society, independent media and the opposition, and noted “hostile anti-EU rhetoric often echoing Russian-style disinformation”.<sup>211</sup> The same report recalls that Georgia’s leadership suspended the accession process until 2028 and confirms the resulting deep political crisis. Freedom House downgraded Georgia to 55/100 in Freedom in the World 2025 (down from 58), reflecting a continuous measurable decline in political rights and civil liberties<sup>212</sup>. The European Parliament warned that Georgia’s “turn towards authoritarianism” and “increasing alignment with Russia” is becoming a security threat.<sup>213</sup> The EU diplomacy and reporting also highlight Georgia’s low foreign policy alignment, including non-alignment with EU sanctions against Russia. In 2024, then EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the EU would also downgrade political contacts with Georgia and consider freezing

government aid, because the “foreign agent” law was moving the country away from the EU, while increasing support to civil society and independent media.

A 20 December 2024 report<sup>214</sup> by Georgia’s European Orbit and the University of Georgia Human Rights Center documented more than 450 protester detentions during the November 28 – December 18, 2024 pro-EU protests, stating that detainees reported torture, abuse and degrading treatment, that women detainees faced sexual harassment and threats by law enforcement, that around 80 journalists were assaulted, courts showed systematic bias and impunity for police, criminal cases were opened against peaceful participants, masked “titushki” (violent pro-government groups named after the people that targeted protesters during the 2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine)<sup>215</sup> carried out attacks, and new laws expanded police powers.

Following a BBC Eye investigation<sup>216</sup> into the use of tear gas and toxic substances against largely peaceful protesters in November–December 2024, Amnesty International raised<sup>217</sup> serious concerns over a subsequent wave of intimidation targeting experts, eyewitnesses, journalists, and human rights defenders in Georgia. Amnesty International warned that the alleged use of potentially harmful and possibly banned chemical agents, combined with pressure on those documenting the abuses, points to systematic violations of freedom of expression and accountability obligations.

## 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 2/8

Following the 2024 parliamentary elections, pro-Western representation in Georgia's parliament was reduced to a single political force. Several explicitly pro-European opposition parties publicly alleged large-scale electoral falsification and irregularities and, despite surpassing the 5% electoral threshold, collectively refused to take up their parliamentary mandates, citing the lack of legitimacy of the electoral process.<sup>218</sup> As a result, only the party For

Georgia eventually entered parliament, represented by 12 members of parliament,<sup>219</sup> leaving pro-Western forces marginalized within the legislature. In 2025, the situation further deteriorated as opposition leaders were arrested<sup>220</sup> and the ruling party publicly signaled its intention to ban certain opposition parties and individuals associated with them, constituting a direct assault on political pluralism and competitive parliamentary politics.<sup>221</sup>

## 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION ON WESTERN CIVILIZATION 5/7

The 2025 Annual Survey conducted under the EU Neighbours East program shows<sup>222</sup> that Georgian public support for the European Union and Western integration remains strong despite political turbulence. According to the EU's survey, if a referendum were held today, 74% of Georgians would vote in favor of EU membership, with only 5% opposed, and 80% believe that EU membership would bring more benefits than drawbacks to the country, indicating robust normative support for Western integration among the population.

The survey also finds that the EU continues to be Georgia's most trusted international partner, trusted by 67% of respondents, and awareness of EU support to Georgia remains high at around 70%, illustrating sustained popular confidence in the EU's role. Beyond the raw figures, respondents associate EU membership with peace and security, a better future for their children and improved quality of life, reflecting deep societal aspirations for alignment with Western values and standards of living despite political setbacks.

# 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 5/25

## 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 1/6

Legislation adopted in Georgia in 2023–2025 demonstrates clear non-conformity with constitutional and European democratic standards. In its Opinion of 15 October 2025, the Venice Commission concluded that the Law on the Registration of Foreign Agents, amendments to the Law on Grants and related “foreign influence” acts are coercive, stigmatizing and incompatible with democratic pluralism.<sup>223</sup> The Commission identified violations of legal certainty as key concepts are vaguely defined, enabling arbitrary enforcement, and found disproportionate interference with freedom of association and expression through excessive reporting, intrusive disclosure

requirements and severe sanctions, failing the proportionality test under the Constitution and the ECHR.<sup>224 225</sup> Mandatory registration and labelling were assessed as stigmatizing civil society and independent media, producing a chilling effect on public debate.<sup>226</sup> These findings build on the Commission's urgent 2024 opinion recommending repeal of the law. Despite consistent criticism from the EU, OSCE and Council of Europe bodies, the law was adopted after the presidential veto was overridden,<sup>227</sup> and the Constitutional Court did not suspend it, prompting litigation before the European Court of Human Rights, where the Venice Commission intervened as a third party.<sup>228</sup>

## 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 1/7

Judicial independence in Georgia remains severely compromised, reflecting a long-term failure of structural reform and entrenched political influence over the courts. Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2025 reports that executive and legislative interference persists, alongside low transparency and weak professionalism in judicial proceedings.<sup>229</sup> The Freedom House's report notes that a narrow group of influential judges, primarily court chairs and members of the High Council of Justice, exercise disproportionate control over appointments, case distribution and disciplinary decisions, reinforcing a closed "clan" system. In 2023, the United States

imposed sanctions on four Georgian judges for corruption and for "undermining the rule of law and the public's faith in Georgia's judicial system," an unprecedented step underscoring systemic capture of the judiciary.<sup>230</sup> In April 2024, the Tbilisi City Court upheld an appeal by a group of judges and halted an Anti-Corruption Bureau investigation into their asset declarations, further reinforcing perceptions of judicial self-protection and impunity.<sup>231</sup> Together, these developments indicate that courts increasingly function as instruments of political and corporate interest rather than as independent guarantors of constitutional rights.

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 1/7

Georgia's human rights legislation deteriorated further in 2024–2025, reflecting a systematic rollback of constitutional safeguards. Freedom in the World 2025 classifies Georgia as "Partly Free" with a score of 55/100, a three-point decline compared to 2024, including 21/40 for political rights and 34/60 for civil liberties.<sup>232</sup> Freedom House attributes the decline to restrictive laws, abuse of administrative penalties and shrinking space for dissent. During this period, the ruling Georgian Dream party adopted a package of legislative amendments that expanded state control over expression, protest and civil society.<sup>233</sup> Amendments to defamation and court-related legislation strengthened protections for

public officials, weakened safeguards for journalistic sources and broadened "contempt of court" provisions to penalize criticism of judges, including online speech.<sup>234</sup> Protest-related administrative offences were reclassified in ways that allow custodial penalties, while amendments to the Criminal Code introduced travel bans applicable retroactively, including minor convictions. In parallel, access to grants was placed under tighter state control and successive "foreign influence" and grant-related laws<sup>235</sup> were advanced to constrain independent NGOs, reinforcing a coercive legal environment incompatible with international human rights standards.<sup>236</sup>

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 2/6

Available court statistics indicate a formal increase in acquittal rates in Georgia, though their interpretation remains constrained by structural weaknesses of the justice system. According to Geostat's Unified Reports on Criminal Justice Statistics, in January–October 2025 courts of first

instance delivered 2,362 verdicts after hearings on the merits. Of these, 403 resulted in full acquittals ("not guilty") and 152 in partial acquittals, producing a full acquittal rate of 17.1% and a partial acquittal rate of 6.4%.<sup>237 238</sup>

## 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 9/25

### 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 3/7

Georgia has been a member of the WTO since June 2000. In June 2025, a ceremonial event dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Georgia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) was held at the headquarters of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva, Switzerland. WTO membership provides an opportunity for global integration and Georgia continues to sign preferential trade agreements with markets within and outside the region. The country has numerous free trade agreements covering quality markets of over 2.3 billion consumers and providing increased market access for the Georgian private sector.<sup>239</sup>

As for relations with the European Union, an Association Agreement was signed between Georgia and the European Union in 2014, and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement was implemented in 2016.<sup>240</sup> Since 2017, Georgian

citizens have been able to travel to the Schengen area without a visa and have the right to stay for up to three months. In December 2023, Georgia received the status of a candidate for the European Union, although subsequent anti-democratic actions by the Georgian government have seriously damaged the country's European integration process.<sup>241</sup> In November 2025, the European Commission presented its Enlargement Report<sup>242</sup>, which reads that "Following the conclusions adopted by the European Council in December 2024, the Georgian government's actions have, de facto, put the country on hold in its EU accession process. The democratic backsliding has continued, and the Commission therefore only formally refers to Georgia as a candidate country. The Georgian government must show the will to reverse course and return to the path of EU accession."

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 2/6

Georgia ranks 25th out of 165 countries in the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of the World 2025 report, scoring 7.69.<sup>243</sup> The assessment, which reflects conditions in 2023, places Georgia among the higher-performing economies globally, particularly in areas linked to market openness and regulatory flexibility.

Across the five key pillars, Georgia performs strongest in freedom to trade internationally (19th place) and regulatory quality (14th place), as well as access to hard currency (40th place). Its weaker areas remain the size of government (48th) and especially the legal system and property rights protection (56th), which continues to be one of the

country's most significant structural vulnerabilities.

According to the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, Georgia ranks 35th out of 184 countries in 2025, with an overall score of 69 points out of 100. Within the regional comparison, Georgia places 20th out of 44 European countries, reflecting a mixed performance across key economic governance indicators. In the 2025 assessment, Georgia is categorized as a "moderately free" economy,<sup>244</sup> indicating a generally open market environment, but also areas where institutional weaknesses and policy constraints continue to limit higher levels of economic freedom.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 2/6

The share of the EU member states and, accordingly, the EU in Georgia's foreign economic trade is decreasing every year.<sup>245</sup> According to the

National Statistics Service of Georgia, in January-September 2025, Georgia's foreign trade turnover in goods amounted to 18,545 million USD, which

is 9.1% more than in the corresponding period of the previous year.<sup>246</sup>

Of this, exports amounted to 5,151.4 million USD (increased by 7.7%), and imports amounted to 13,393.7 million USD (increased by 9.7%). The negative trade balance in January-September 2025 amounted to 8,242.3 million USD, which is 44.4%

of foreign trade turnover. In January-September 2025, the share of CIS countries in exports was 70.3%, that of EU member states – 11.9%, and that of other countries – 17.8%.<sup>247</sup> In January-September 2025, the share of EU member states in imports was 25.1%, CIS – 17.9%, and other countries – 57.1%.<sup>248</sup>

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 2/6

In the second quarter of 2025, foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Georgia amounted to 580.1 million USD, representing a 12% year-on-year decline, according to preliminary data from the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).<sup>249</sup> Equity capital accounted for 123.6 million USD (21.3% of total FDI), while reinvested earnings reached 466.6 million USD (80.4%), confirming the continued dominance of reinvestment over new capital inflows.<sup>250</sup> The United Kingdom was the largest reported investor with 242.7 million USD (41.8%), followed by Turkey with 54 million USD (9.3%) and the Czech Republic with 38.3 million USD (6.6%); together these three countries accounted for 57.7% of total FDI in the second quarter of 2025.<sup>251</sup>

At the same time, the unusually large share attributed to the UK is widely assessed as reflecting capital transfers from British offshore jurisdictions rather than new Western investment. Transparency International Georgia reports that following U.S. sanctions imposed on Bidzina Ivanishvili<sup>252</sup> on 27 December 2024, his family began transferring assets from offshore companies registered under British jurisdiction to Georgia in early 2025.<sup>253</sup> In January 2025, a motion was introduced in the UK House of Commons calling on the government to impose sanctions on Ivanishvili, citing concerns over democratic backsliding and the use of offshore structures.<sup>254</sup> This context suggests that a significant portion of “Western” FDI recorded in 2025 represents repatriated domestic capital, limiting its contribution to genuine Western economic integration.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 9/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 1/2

The Georgian script is one of the oldest continuously used writing systems in the world.<sup>255</sup> On 30 November 2016, the living culture of the three writing systems of the Georgian alphabet was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.<sup>256</sup> As a result, Georgia does not use the Latin alphabet

as an official script. At the same time, English has acquired a significant functional role. English is widely used alongside Georgian in higher education and professional environments, and a growing number of academic programs are delivered fully or partly in English.<sup>257</sup>

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 4/6

English, rather than Russian, has become the first foreign language for the younger generation in Georgia. Ever since Russia's intervention in the

Tbilisi-separatist conflict in the early 1990s, and especially since Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the start of Russia's war against Ukraine, the

Russian language has been associated with Russian imperialism for a significant part of the population<sup>258</sup>. This shift is clearly demonstrated by the 2025 unified national entrance examinations for higher education. According to official data published by Forbes Georgia on the basis of the National Assessment and Examinations Center, 32,536 applicants chose to take the foreign-language exam in English, while only 1,163 selected Russian. Other European languages remain marginal: 196 applicants chose German and just 28 chose French,

confirming the overwhelming dominance of English among prospective students.<sup>259</sup>

International benchmarks support this trend. In the EF English Proficiency Index 2024/2025, Georgia scored 541 points and ranked 35th out of 123 countries worldwide, placing it in the “moderate proficiency” category.<sup>260</sup> Survey data further show a strong generational divide: English proficiency is significantly higher among younger cohorts, while Russian remains dominant mainly among older generations educated during the Soviet period.<sup>261</sup>

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 4/7

According to a report published by DataReportal, in 2024, Facebook had 2.85 million users in Georgia, Instagram had 1.65 million, and TikTok had 2.58 million users aged 18 and older. It is worth noting that Facebook restricts the use of its platform to people under the age of 13, and data from 2024 confirms that 85.5% of the audience eligible to use the platform in Georgia used Facebook.<sup>262</sup> As of early 2024, Facebook's advertising audience in Georgia comprised 48.2 percent men and 51.8 percent women. As for Georgian Instagram users, information published in Meta's advertising tools indicates that at the beginning of 2024, 1.65 million people aged 13 and older used Instagram.

Accordingly, 54.4% of the “eligible” audience uses this social network. In 2024, women accounted for 58.5 percent of Instagram users in Georgia, compared to 41.5 percent men.<sup>263</sup> TikTok is one of the most popular platforms, and Georgia is not lagging behind this trend. ByteDance's advertising resources show that at the beginning of 2024, 86.2% of the local internet user base, or 2.52 million people, were TikTok users.<sup>264</sup> At the beginning of 2024, 48.7% of TikTok's advertising audience in Georgia was female, while 51.3% was male.<sup>265</sup> At the same time, approximately 81% of the Georgian population has access to the Internet, of which more than 2 million people have access to Facebook.<sup>266</sup>

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 6/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 2/5

In the second quarter of 2025, foreign trips made by resident visitors to Georgia amounted to 564.3 thousand. This figure is 0.4 per cent higher than the data for the same period in 2024<sup>267</sup>. In the same period, the largest share of visits, 34.9 percent, was made to visit friends/relatives of Georgian residents in foreign countries<sup>268</sup>. The majority of visits were to Turkey and the Russian Federation, with 201.3

thousand and 106.3 thousand visits, respectively.<sup>269</sup>

At the same time, the number of visits from Georgia to the EU has been increasing in recent years, the main reason for which is the introduction of a visa-free regime for Georgian citizens in the Schengen zone since 2017. In particular, in the first quarter of 2025, the number of visits to EU countries by Georgian resident visitors aged 15 and older was

88.6 thousand. In 2024, visits to the EU increased by 13% compared to the previous year to 378.5 thousand.<sup>270</sup> The number of visits from Georgia to the EU has fluctuated in recent years but shows a clear upward trend after the pandemic period.

Following a drop to 186.5 thousand visits in 2022, travel rebounded sharply to 333.9 thousand in 2023 and reached 378.5 thousand in 2024, indicating continued strong mobility toward the EU.<sup>271</sup>

## 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

Despite Georgia's deteriorating relations with Western democracies, Western franchise chains are still operating in Georgia as of 2025. For example, McDonald's Georgia now operates 18 restaurants and employs over 1,000 people.<sup>272</sup> At the same time, other foodservice chains, notably Burger King and KFC, continue to operate through local franchises, with each company represented by 3 outlets,<sup>273 274</sup> while major shopping malls in various

Georgian cities still host international fast food chains alongside domestic chains.

Overall, the direct corporate presence of Western franchise chains has not diminished. Despite the sharp decline in Western investments in the country's economy, many Western brands are still present in Georgia: Carrefour Georgia, Zara, Pull&Bear, Sislay, Nike, Adidas, Calvin Klein, Gucci, Burberry.<sup>275</sup>

## 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

According to the Georgian Communications Commission, the number of mobile phone subscribers (individuals and legal entities) in 2024 amounted to 6.14 million. It is worth noting that in the last 10 years the number of mobile subscribers has increased by 13.7%, namely, 10 years ago,

there were 5.4 million registered mobile services in Georgia.<sup>276</sup> This means that a large part of the Georgian population owns more than one SIM card. According to the Ministry of Communications, by mid-2025, the share of the population owning a smartphone was 84.9%.<sup>277</sup>

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
7.0/25	7.0/25	15.0/25	6.0/15	6.0/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 7/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 2/10

Kazakhstan’s recent political trajectory has been shaped by two events: the 2019 resignation of longtime president Nursultan Nazarbaev and the nationwide unrest<sup>278</sup> of January 2022, which began in the city of Zhanaozen over energy prices and escalated into broader economic and political protests. Although President Kasym-Jomart Tokaev pledged reforms after the crisis, Kazakhstan remains authoritarian: Freedom House rates it “Not Free” (23/100)<sup>279</sup> in 2025, and Reporters Without Borders ranks it 141st of 180.<sup>280</sup> State control over mainstream media persists, and a 2024 media law — despite minor improvements — tightens regulation by mandating registration and physical presence for online outlets, expanding restrictions on foreign journalists under vague extremism clauses, and introducing broad media monitoring based on undefined values, increasing risks of censorship and self-censorship.<sup>281</sup>

Two new pieces of Kazakhstan legislation also indicate a shrinking of democratic public spaces. The first is a proposed law<sup>282</sup> banning “LGBT propaganda” that would impose administrative

charges on any publication portraying LGBTIQ+ people positively. The bill was approved by the Senate and signed<sup>283</sup> by the president on December 30, 2025. The second, labeled as “law on crime prevention”, would allow ordinary citizens to be recruited and paid by the government to report violations of “standard behavior and morality” — de facto acting as vigilantes. The law was similarly passed on December 30, 2025. While Astana officially states it follows a policy of multi-vector diplomacy to maintain its independence, the new anti-LGBTIQ+ law is a copy of the 2013 Russian legislation. The bill on crime prevention opens the door to the culture of reporting citizens that is now encouraged by Russian authorities to denounce those opposing Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.<sup>284</sup>

In parallel, there are an estimated 40 political prisoners in Kazakhstan in 2025.<sup>285</sup> Most of those men and women are connected to the 2022 national unrest, or to banned opposition parties. Activists fighting for the rights of ethnic Kazakhs or Uyghurs in neighboring China also face harassment from the state.<sup>286</sup>

## 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 1/8

One of the major consequences of the January 2022 unrest was the June 2022 referendum<sup>287</sup> that granted more power to the Majilis (Parliament). Consequently, snap parliamentary elections took place in March 2023.<sup>288</sup> While on paper, Kazakhstan might appear as a country enjoying multipartyism, all parties present in the lower house gravitate around the ruling Amanat party<sup>289</sup> (previously known as Nur Otan), which secured nearly 54% of the vote — a record low figure, though. All the four other parties represented in parliament (Auyl, Respublica, Aq Jol, People’s Party of Kazakhstan) are considered openly supportive of president Tokaev,<sup>290</sup> while the fifth one, the Nationwide Social Democratic Party, is a more independent left-leaning party. In terms

of foreign policy, this means that they all advocate for a continuation of the “multi-vector” strategy, defined as an equidistance from Russia, China and the West.

In terms of cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstani parliaments, the EU-Kazakhstan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) meets regularly in Brussels and Astana. Cooperation has been strongly enhanced after the March 2020 ratification of the EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), which entered into force on 1 March 2020 and provides a reinforced legal framework for structured political, economic and parliamentary dialogue between the European Union and Kazakhstan.<sup>291</sup>

## 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 4/7

Public perceptions of the West in Kazakhstan shifted markedly after Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Moscow’s long-standing tolerance of nationalist rhetoric questioning Kazakhstan’s territorial integrity — particularly regarding the north — has reinforced security concerns, with over 40% of respondents identifying Russia as a threat.<sup>292</sup> By contrast, attitudes toward China are generally more favorable: Beijing is viewed more positively<sup>293</sup> than Washington, although around half of the population still maintains an

overall positive view of the United States.<sup>294</sup> Pro-Western and pro-Ukrainian sentiments are more pronounced among younger generations. Overall, when asked to choose an external alignment between Russia, China, and the West, roughly 20% of respondents on average express a preference for the West.<sup>295</sup> A clear majority of respondents (70%) prefer a balanced alignment between the West, Russia, and China rather than a clear orientation toward a single bloc.<sup>296</sup>

# 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 7/25

## 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 3/6

Kazakhstan is not a full member of the Council of Europe but has cooperated with the organization since 1997 and participates in selected mechanisms, including the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), of which it has been a full member since 2012.<sup>297</sup> In its most recent substantive legal assessment concerning Kazakhstan, the Venice Commission examined the

draft constitutional law “On the Commissioner for Human Rights” and acknowledged certain improvements, while explicitly warning that the institutional design still lacks sufficient safeguards to guarantee independence from the executive, particularly regarding appointment procedures, dismissal grounds, and budgetary autonomy. The Commission also stressed that these shortcomings

reflect broader systemic issues related to checks and balances and remain relevant for Kazakhstan's constitutional framework.<sup>298</sup>

Kazakhstan last amended its constitution through a nationwide referendum in 2022, partly in response to the unrest of January that year. While the reform package formally reduced the privileges of former president Nursultan Nazarbaev and redistributed some powers in favor of parliament, international

legal assessments indicate that these changes did not fundamentally alter the concentration of power within the presidential system. In practice, political dominance by the ruling Amanat party and the loyalty of other parliamentary forces to the executive limit the effective impact of parliamentary empowerment, resulting in a presidential–parliamentary hybrid rather than a genuine shift toward parliamentary governance.<sup>299 300</sup>

## 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 2/7

According to Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2025,<sup>301</sup> the judiciary in Kazakhstan cannot be described as independent, given that the president "nominates or directly appoints judges based on the recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Council, which is itself appointed by the president. Judges are subject to political influence, and corruption is a problem throughout the judicial system." Judicial independence remains structurally compromised due to the dominant influence of the executive branch over courts and prosecutors, undermining access to fair trials and effective legal protection.<sup>302</sup>

In parallel, in 2024, the Coalition against Torture in Kazakhstan received 347 complaints of torture and ill-treatment, which resulted in just four torture convictions. While 57 cases and 45 suspected officials were officially registered, outcomes remain opaque, reflecting systemic impunity and low public trust in the judiciary.<sup>303</sup>

The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index 2025 ranks Kazakhstan 65th of 142 countries overall<sup>304</sup> and 102nd on constraints on government powers. Another alarming trend is a proposed law that would label NGOs as foreign agents, also inspired by a similar bill passed in Russia in 2012.<sup>305</sup>

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 1/7

Kazakhstan's constitution formally guarantees fundamental human rights, and the abolition of the death penalty in 2021 marked an important step toward alignment with international human rights standards.<sup>306</sup> The country ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was positively noted during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.<sup>307</sup> However, stakeholder submissions to the UPR 2025 underline a persistent gap between formal legislation and real-world implementation. Victims of human rights violations rarely receive effective remedies, compensation, or rehabilitation, while alleged perpetrators in most cases avoid accountability, reinforcing a systemic culture of impunity.<sup>308</sup>

Criminal legislation contains overly broad and vague definitions of "extremism" and "terrorism,"

which are routinely used against journalists, civil society activists, lawyers, and opposition figures, despite the absence of violence or genuine security threats.<sup>309</sup> International human rights organizations report persistent restrictions on freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, with restrictive laws selectively enforced to suppress dissent and independent civic activity.<sup>310</sup> Domestic oversight mechanisms, including the national human rights institution, do not fully comply with the Paris Principles and lack the independence and authority required for effective protection of rights.<sup>311</sup> Overall, despite formal legal reforms and repeated acceptance of UPR recommendations, Kazakhstan's human rights legislation continues to function largely on a declarative level, failing to provide effective safeguards or accountability in practice.

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 1/6

Official statements from Kazakhstan’s judiciary indicate that the overall acquittal rate in criminal cases remains extremely low, with only about 3–5 % of cases resulting in acquittal at trial level, according to the Supreme Judicial Council’s jury chair.<sup>312</sup> Broader judicial statistics and analyses confirm a longstanding pattern of very low acquittal rates (often under 2%), especially in non-jury proceedings, reflecting a pervasive bias toward conviction within the criminal justice system.<sup>313</sup> Independent commentary by legal practitioners notes that many acquittals handed down by juries are overturned on

formal or procedural grounds at appellate stages, further limiting effective acquittals.<sup>314</sup> Such patterns are consistent with systemic issues identified by researchers: a dominant pro-accusation culture and minimal judicial autonomy, factors inherited from the Soviet-era penal culture that contribute to distrust in judicial outcomes and high conviction rates.<sup>315</sup> The persistently low acquittal rates illustrate structural barriers to fair adjudication and raise questions about adherence to the presumption of innocence and due process in Kazakhstan’s criminal courts.

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 15/25

## 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 4/7

Kazakhstan became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2015, joining as the WTO’s 162nd member state, which marked a key step in integrating its economy into global trade frameworks.<sup>316</sup> The same year, December 2015, Kazakhstan and the European Union (EU) signed the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) — the first agreement of its kind between the EU and a Central Asian country.<sup>317</sup> The EPCA was ratified by all EU Member States and the European Parliament and entered into full force on 1 March 2020, providing a comprehensive legal basis for cooperation across trade, economic policy, justice and home affairs, energy, transport, environment, and other areas. This agreement elevated bilateral ties beyond the previous

Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and was intended to strengthen cooperation on political dialogue, economic integration, and norms aligned with EU standards.<sup>318</sup>

In April 2025, Kazakhstan participated in the first-ever EU–Central Asia Summit held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where EU and Central Asian leaders, including Kazakhstan’s president, endorsed deeper strategic cooperation and regional engagement across economic development, connectivity, and political dialogue.<sup>319</sup> The summit underscored the EU’s commitment to expanding its strategic partnership with Central Asia, with Kazakhstan positioned as a key partner in the region’s engagement with Europe.

## 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 4/6

According to the Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom 2025, Kazakhstan scored 63.8, placing it in the upper third of 184 assessed countries and classifying the economy as “moderately free”.<sup>320</sup> The report notes that Kazakhstan’s economic freedom score is above both the global and regional averages, reflecting relatively favorable regulatory and market conditions in the Central

Asian context. Compared to 2024, the score increased by 1.8 points, indicating modest year-on-year improvement in the business environment.

At the same time, the Index highlights persistent weaknesses affecting transparency and predictability, including state dominance in key sectors, corruption risks, uneven enforcement of regulations, and limited judicial effectiveness, all

of which continue to constrain fair competition and investor confidence. These structural issues are corroborated by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, where Kazakhstan scored 40 points and ranked 88th out of 180 countries, pointing to systemic corruption risks

that directly undermine transparency in business operations and public administration.<sup>321</sup> As a result, while formal regulatory conditions for doing business are comparatively stable, deficiencies in rule of law and governance significantly limit the practical impact of economic liberalization measures.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 4/6

According to European Commission trade statistics, the European Union is Kazakhstan's largest trading partner, accounting for the largest share of the country's total external trade.<sup>322</sup> In 2024, total EU-Kazakhstan trade in goods amounted to approximately 45 billion EUR, reflecting a year-on-year increase compared to 2023. The EU remains the primary destination for Kazakhstan's exports, particularly in energy and raw materials, and the leading source of foreign direct investment, reinforcing the EU's dominant role in Kazakhstan's external economic relations.

Kazakhstan has officially declared its commitment to complying with international sanctions regimes, including those imposed on Russia, and the EU continues to monitor trade flows and sanction-circumvention risks in the region.<sup>323</sup> At the same time, Kazakhstan maintains significant trade relations with non-Western partners, including Russia and China, reflecting a diversified and multi-vector trade structure rather than exclusive Western economic orientation.<sup>324</sup>

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 3/6

According to data published by the National Bank of Kazakhstan, the gross inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Kazakhstan in 2024 amounted to about 17.2 billion USD, marking a decline compared with previous years' totals but confirming the continued role of FDI in the economy.<sup>325</sup> Official breakdowns show that Russia was the largest investor in FDI flows for 2024, accounting for the biggest share among individual countries.<sup>326</sup> Other significant investors included the Netherlands, South Korea, Belgium and China, each contributing substantial investment flows

in the same year, reflecting a diversified group of major partners.

FDI inflows were concentrated in mining, manufacturing and trade sectors, indicating continued external investor interest in Kazakhstan's natural resources and industrial base.<sup>327</sup> While Western countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium figure among major investor origins, the overall investment picture reflects a broader mix of global sources, including regional and East Asian economies.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 6/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 1/2

Like other Central Asian states, Kazakhstan has undergone several alphabet changes throughout its history, shifting from Arabic to Latin and later to Cyrillic, with the latter two transitions imposed by Moscow during different periods of the Soviet rule. As an independent state and a member of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), which promotes closer cultural and linguistic cooperation among Turkic countries, Kazakhstan has entered a transition phase from the Cyrillic to the Latin script.<sup>328</sup> The Latin alphabet is still rarely used in public communication, while government

institutions, official websites, and the education system continue to rely predominantly on Cyrillic for the Kazakh language.

Russian, although not designated as a state language, may be used officially under the 1995 Constitution and remains widely spoken, particularly in urban areas, including among many ethnic Kazakhs, who currently constitute approximately 71% of the population. Overall, an estimated 90% of the population possesses at least some knowledge of Russian, underscoring its continued societal and communicative significance.<sup>329</sup>

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 2/6

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Kazakhstan remains in the very low proficiency category, with an EF EPI score of 417 and a global ranking of 107th, indicating limited functional command of English among the general population. The report places Kazakhstan below both the global and European averages, confirming the weak penetration of English as a working or professional language.

At the same time, Chinese is gaining importance as a foreign language, driven by expanding economic ties with China and facilitated by the mutual visa-free regime introduced in 2023, which has increased business, educational, and tourism exchanges. Chinese language proficiency also carries symbolic weight at the elite level, allowing for the strengthening of ties with a key trading partner at an informal level between the leaders and elites of countries.

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 3/7

TV remains a popular source of information: 65% of the population watches it daily, with an average daily viewing of close to 3 hours that has remained stable in the past few years.<sup>333</sup> While Russian and Russophone channels are available, the government is promoting the use of Kazakh language in Kazakhstani TV channels. The top channels include First Eurasia Channel, KTK, NTK, 31 Channel, Mir and Astana.

Cinema attendance is growing steadily, reaching

23 million viewers in 2024. While Kazakhstan maintains a robust domestic production of movies, 53% of movies were imported, representing a mix of Russian, Hollywood and other Asian movies.<sup>334</sup>

The most popular<sup>335</sup> social media platforms are TikTok (over 15 million accounts), closely followed by Instagram (12.4 million), and Facebook, at 2.6 million users. One of the fastest-growing audiences is on LinkedIn, reaching 1.7 million people. Russian platforms have a very limited outreach.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 6/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 2/5

In 2024, more than one million citizens of Kazakhstan travelled abroad for leisure purposes, according to official tourism and border statistics.<sup>336</sup> The most popular destinations were Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, Thailand, China, and Georgia, reflecting a strong preference for visa-free or simplified-visa destinations, primarily outside the Western political and economic space. Travel to EU countries remains constrained by visa

requirements. In 2024, approximately 180,000 residents of Kazakhstan applied for Schengen visas, representing an increase of nearly 13 % compared to 2023.<sup>337</sup> Despite this growth, the overall number of Schengen visa applicants remains limited relative to total outbound travel volumes, indicating that travel to Western Europe constitutes only a modest share of international mobility among Kazakhstan's population.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

Western franchise companies are widely present in Kazakhstan, which has often served as an entry market for international brands in Central Asia, particularly in the food service and retail sectors. Major Western food and beverage franchises operating in the country include KFC, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Popeyes and Coca-Cola,<sup>338</sup> all of which

maintain active operations through local franchise or bottling partners.

Western retail brands are also present in Kazakhstan's major urban centers, including Zara, H&M, Adidas and Marks & Spencer, reflecting sustained consumer demand for Western consumer goods<sup>339</sup> and lifestyle brands.

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

Kazakhstan's mobile communications market is highly saturated. According to the World Bank telecommunications data, the number of mobile cellular subscriptions exceeds the total population, reflecting widespread smartphone ownership and multi-SIM usage. In 2024, Kazakhstan recorded over 25 million mobile cellular subscriptions, while the population remained around 20 million.<sup>340</sup> According to national ICT statistics, the number of mobile internet users reached approximately 19.3

million, approaching universal adult coverage.<sup>341</sup>

Expanding mobile connectivity presents structural challenges due to Kazakhstan's very low population density, estimated at around 8 people per square kilometer, one of the lowest levels globally.<sup>342</sup> Despite this constraint, 3G and 4G networks cover most populated areas, and state programs prioritize extending high-speed mobile internet to rural and remote regions.<sup>343</sup>

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
6/25	5/25	9/25	6.5/15	5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 6/25

### 1.1 DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 1/10

The trend away from democracy set by the new leadership that took power in Kyrgyzstan in late 2020 continued its course throughout 2025. The country was classified as “Not free” in the Freedom in the World 2025 index by Freedom House, scoring 26 out of 100 for political rights and civil liberties combined, in steady worsening for the fifth year in row.<sup>344</sup> The Bertelsmann Transformation Index of 2024 defined Kyrgyzstan as a “moderate autocracy”, ranking 75th among 137 countries in transformation in terms of political transformation.<sup>345</sup>

The erosion of political freedom in Kyrgyzstan was evident in many areas. The parliament virtually ceased to feature any overt criticism of the executive institutions, and especially of President Sadyr Japarov and his main political ally – the security chief Kamchybek Tashiev. All media outlets, individual journalists and popular bloggers, covering political themes, faced imminent persecution for open

criticism of the latter two figures, taught by the examples of dozens of such critics silenced through arrests and punitive sentences, like the journalists of Kloop and Temirov Live groups, and a general climate of self-censorship set in.<sup>346</sup> Political parties practically ceased to be institutions of political mobilization independent of government. Members of the former president’s Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, one of only two openly oppositional groups, were arrested on mere allegations of electoral misconduct in 2024 city council elections in Bishkek and then arrested again upon questionable evidence of conspiracy against the government in run-up to the parliamentary elections of November 2025. The other opposition party, Butun Kyrgyzstan, holding 4 seats in the outgoing parliament, had its outspoken leader jailed, sentenced and released conditionally in 2024, and became inconsequential both in the parliament and outside it.<sup>347</sup>

### 1.2 PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT 2/8

The predominant view in the parliament, including some members of the Alliance party, is mildly nationalist, cautiously pro-Russian and moderately critical of the West – in other words, very pragmatic and not committed to any discrete ideological position.<sup>348</sup>

In the snap parliamentary elections of November 2025 – happening one year ahead of schedule – political parties were not featured. According to the new election law adopted earlier in 2025, the parliament is filled by members elected in 30 districts, each delegating the three top winners. While parties

could nominate their candidates in any or all districts, no party chose to do so.

Overall, the situation has worsened significantly since 2021, when relatively pro-Western political parties like Reforma, Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and Ata-Meken socialist party ran in several elections (one national and multiple local) in 2021 and 2022, although did not win any seats.<sup>349 350</sup> Only one party could be nominally identified as open to Western principles and values – Alliance party.

## 1.3 PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 3/7

With contraction of political and civic freedoms, the reliability of the scarcely available public opinion polls is increasingly an issue. The single most regularly conducted opinion poll, conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) for over 10 years, came to a halt in 2025 with the dissolution of USAID – IRI’s main funding source – and its last published opinion poll of January 2024 carried indirect data on Kyrgyz public views of Western civilization. Namely, to the question “What is your opinion of the following national and international institutions?”, the three international institutions, all widely perceived in Kyrgyzstan as representing the West, received low favorable responses. USAID scored among them (41% favorable, 13% unfavorable, and 46% undecided/uninformed), followed by the United Nations (41% favorable, 21% unfavorable and 38% undecided/uninformed) and while the OSCE was the last, mostly for being unknown (26% favorable, 12% unfavorable and 62% undecided/uninformed).<sup>351</sup>

Generally, three broadly spread public opinion tracks – nationalist, Islamic and pro-Russian – collectively dominated the public opinion and each of them, coming from somewhat different angles,

carried an anti-Western outlook within it. Criticism of anti-democratic political trends in Kyrgyzstan being essentially a matter of Western or Western-affiliated local voices, the government of Sadyr Japarov tended to voice open anti-Western rhetoric, and it was allied therein with heavy Russian anti-Western propaganda freely and widely reaching the Kyrgyz society. In general public perceptions, as observable in social media discussions, the negative attitudes toward Western civilization were anchored on views against inclusion (sexual and gender), pluralism (especially against NGOs and media critical of government) and cultural amelioration (driven by perceptions of threat to national culture and identity).<sup>352</sup>

All being said, there is a small share of the population that is strongly (for ideological, value and cultural reasons) or pragmatically (for educational, business and travelling preferences) pro-Western – while no direct statistical or sociologically researched evidence is available, some proxy indications from surveys such as the IRI Kyrgyz public opinion polls and the Democracy Perceptions Index would suggest that such views would be held by well below half of the population.<sup>353</sup>

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 5/25

### 2.1 COMPLIANCE WITH REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 1/7

The critical recommendations of the Venice Commission (made jointly with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) – such as pertaining to separation of powers among branches of government, independence of the judiciary, and as well as serious procedural violations in the drafting process – were almost blankly ignored and, indeed, the central government institutions, including the parliament, actively avoided engagement with the Venice Commission during the constitutional drafting and debate period.<sup>354</sup> The Venice Commission opinion was requested by

the Ombudsman and civil society organizations. An institution that generally cooperated closely with the Venice Commission – the Constitutional Court (CC) – became victimized by the new system of government in 2023, when the all-powerful office of the president initiated and got a new law passed through the parliament, according to which the decisions of CC – defined as “final” in the Constitution – could be revised by the Court if the president requested, or new circumstances arose, or a decision contradicted national mores and values.<sup>355</sup>

## 2.2 INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 1/7

The court system of Kyrgyzstan has continued to be severely dominated by the executive – and specifically, by the presidential office and its de facto repressive arm, the State Commission for National Security – and issuing decisions in strict accordance with the preferences of the government.<sup>356</sup> The courts' lack of dependence is both legal – due to constitutionally provided broad powers of the president in appointing and removing judges at all levels of the system – and political. Political dependence has been a key characteristic of the post-2021 steep hierarchy across the whole system of government, where the president and the head

of SCNS, viewed as the ruling tandem, enjoy universal deference.

In all of the most recent opinion polls in Kyrgyzstan the respondents named the courts as among the most corrupt institutions: in the 2024 IRI poll, the courts were ranked only second to the Traffic Control agency, and 78% of respondents considered them as very corrupt or somewhat corrupt.<sup>357</sup> In 2025 World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index Kyrgyzstan ranked 104th among 143 countries, its score declining to 0.45 in a 0 (weaker) to 1.0 (stronger) rule of law index range.<sup>358</sup>

## 2.3 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 2/6

The laws are in place that provide and protect human rights in the Kyrgyz legislation. These range from the Constitution to the many laws and international treaties that Kyrgyzstan has joined. Even the drastically changed Constitution of 2021, which contains stark elements of retreat from democratic government, provides for a wide range of standard human rights provisions.<sup>359</sup> But the trend toward tightening the legal space for political freedoms and civil rights has tended to engulf many of the essential human rights principles. Two legislative initiatives in 2025 threatened to worsen human rights protections. One of them, already signed into law and awaiting implementation, provides for the merger of the National Center for Prevention of Torture (NCPT) – the national mechanism tasked with implementing the country's obligations under the Convention Against Torture, pursuant to the Optional Protocol of CAT – with the Office of the Ombudsman. While both institutions are concerned with human rights protection, NCPT's specialized and internationally recognized work against the use of torture in Kyrgyzstan's penitentiary and pre-trial detention facilities stood to be wasted in a period when torture concerns are on the rise.<sup>360</sup> According to the second initiative, raised by President Japarov in the Fall of 2025, Kyrgyzstan may end up returning

to the use of the death penalty, thereby leaving the Optional Protocol of ICCPR on banning of capital punishment and amending the Constitution that currently bans its use.<sup>361</sup>

However, the bulk of problems with human rights in Kyrgyzstan is with enforcement of protections or, at least, with observance of human rights by the state.<sup>362</sup> As the rule of law and judicial integrity have weakened the observance of human rights has likewise deteriorated. In most instances, failures result from gross neglect and disregard for human rights; however, in cases of political significance – particularly those involving individuals persecuted for exercising freedom of expression or political rights—abuses are intentional.<sup>363</sup> In 2025, numerous petitions and appeals by international human rights organizations to the Kyrgyz authorities addressed violations of the rights to a fair trial and to respect for human dignity, particularly in cases involving arbitrary and disproportionate legal proceedings and the systematic use of pre-trial detention. Numerous petition and appeal campaigns of international human rights organizations in 2025 to Kyrgyz authorities concerned the violated rights of people to fair trial and to respect of their human dignity in processes of arbitrary and disproportionate lawsuits against them and systematic use of pre-trial detention across the board. The 49th session

of the Universal Periodic Review, held in April 2025, examined Kyrgyzstan under its fourth review cycle and highlighted the shrinking civic space. The April 2025 49th session of Universal Periodic Review

session considered Kyrgyzstan for the fourth cycle, and highlighted the shrinking of civic space, gender-based violence and torture-related problems as areas of particular concern.<sup>364</sup>

## 2.4 NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 1/6

In Kyrgyzstan, the court system has traditionally shown a strong bias toward indictment; according to some estimates, acquittal rates (“not guilty” verdicts) in courts of first instance have been as low as 2 percent or less in recent years. A modest improvement has been observed more recently. In a 2023 speech, President Japarov noted a “significant rise” in the number of acquittals, suggesting that this change indicated a trend toward greater judicial impartiality.<sup>365</sup> But neither he, nor other sources recently provide numbers of acquittals in Kyrgyz courts, at primary or appeals levels.

In June 2024, a Kyrgyz court acquitted 27 individuals in the “Kempirabat case.” They had been arrested in 2022 for protesting a border agreement with Uzbekistan that included the transfer of the Kempirabat water reservoir, and

many spent months in pre-trial detention. The judge stated that there was no evidence of a crime; however, observers believe the acquittals were politically driven and followed a period in which the government had already sent a clear message that protests against major policy decisions would be punished.<sup>366</sup>

Several other politically motivated cases were similarly deemed to have been decided on political grounds. In these cases, defendants — typically individuals who had publicly criticized the country’s leadership — received lighter sentences than expected, often interpreted as gestures of “magnanimity” after having been held in detention for a period on charges that were unfounded from the outset, as in the case of journalist and blogger Kanyshay Mamyrkulova.<sup>367</sup>

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 9/25

## 3.1 EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 3/7

Kyrgyzstan became a member of WTO in 1998 as the first post-Soviet country to get there. It got membership in one of the fastest accession processes, taking only about three years. The benefits of its WTO membership, however, were a point of much debate and misgivings in the country.<sup>368</sup> Occasional disputes also arose, such as with Kazakhstan — a fellow member of both WTO and the Eurasian Economic Union (a Russian-led group) — over the latter’s hurdles in letting goods pass through its territory.<sup>369</sup>

But being in Central Asia, far away geographically from Europe and within the close orbit of Russian and Chinese geopolitical spheres of influence, Kyrgyzstan is not a country in pursuit of EU. At

the level of cooperation without associational implications, Kyrgyzstan has remained as active as before in interaction with the European Union. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan-EU relations saw an upgrade in mid-2024 when, after several years of slow progress, the relationship was sealed in an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), as opposed to previous PCA level. Kyrgyzstan has also continued to be granted the GSP+ conditions for trade with EU markets.<sup>370</sup>

A novel consideration hit Kyrgyzstan in 2025: after mounting suspicions of assisting Russia in evasion of Western sanctions, several Kyrgyzstani entities — two state-run banks, most importantly — were put in Western (US, UK and the EU) sanctions lists.<sup>371</sup>

### 3.2 EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 2/6

The Kyrgyz government carried out a large-scale tax and regulation reforms in 2021-2024, and the outcome was a modest general improvement, especially for small and medium enterprises many of which were eligible to notably light tax duties.<sup>372</sup> However, getting to that result involved unstable regulatory policies for a period<sup>373</sup> – some of which continued in 2025 – and overcoming the resistance of numerous sectors of business to the requirements of fiscal transparency, such as maintaining electronic registries of goods, sales and taxes.<sup>374</sup>

The government reforms in economic and especially fiscal governance coincided with, and much of the positive effect of the latter was undermined by the arbitrary repressive activities of the security apparatus, primarily the State Committee for National Security (SCNS). Acting putatively against corruption, SCNS turned into an unchecked punitive institution, raiding numerous enterprises for any of tax and customs duty arrears, smuggling or improper declaration of imported goods, illegal acquisition of real estate, and more.<sup>375</sup> In 2025, a routine and nearly daily news in Kyrgyzstan was of SCNS having confiscated, de-privatized and nationalized some private property, mostly under

extremely obscure legal circumstances.<sup>376</sup>

In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, Kyrgyzstan ranked 146th out of 180 countries with a score of 25 out of 100, continuing a downward trend. In 2023, Kyrgyzstan scored 26/100 and ranked 141st, and in 2022 it scored 27/100 and ranked 140th. This shows a gradual decline<sup>377</sup> in both score and relative position over the past three years.<sup>378</sup> Heritage Foundation, too, highlighted corruption and weak rule of law as some of the most problematic elements in Kyrgyzstan as it ranked the country 115th out of 184 and defined it as “mostly unfree” in 2024 Index of Economic Freedom (IEF).<sup>379</sup> Accurately reflecting the trends in Kyrgyz economic governance, the country’s best scores in IEF in 2024 were in “Tax burden” and “Fiscal health”, but its worst performances were in “Judicial effectiveness”, “Property rights” and “Government integrity”. Thus, by 2025, while SMEs were relatively safe and doing well under the easy and light tax duties, large companies were regularly under duress, their owners and investors actively in process of, or considering, relocation out of the country.

### 3.3 WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 2/6

In 2024, the United Kingdom was Kyrgyzstan’s largest export destination, accounting for 33% of its total exports – nearly all of the amount was related to Kyrgyz gold exports, sold at the London gold market. The UK was followed by Russia (26%), Kazakhstan (10%) and Uzbekistan (8.9%).<sup>380</sup> In terms of imports, however, no Western country figured among the top of Kyrgyzstan’s partners: China (47%), Russia (20%) and Kazakhstan (6.6%) were the three top origins of imports. Importantly, Kyrgyzstan ran a major trade deficit, imports being nearly three times more than its exports. In 2023, the Kyrgyz gold was sold in Switzerland, and therefore, almost exactly the same share of export and the top placement in export destinations went to Switzerland.<sup>381</sup>

While Kyrgyzstan is a beneficiary of the EU GSP+ trade facility for nearly 10 years, the ability of Kyrgyz businesses to use those opportunities has been slow, posting exports of only about 5 million euros to EU markets.<sup>382</sup> The reasons for the limited exports were said to be the difficulty of compliance with EU goods standards, the cost of logistics and the limited supply capacity of Kyrgyz companies (especially in the agricultural sector). Overall, the limited volume of Kyrgyz-Western trade would be due to unfavorable price differentials (in importing goods from the West) and the high competition, logistical and regulatory hurdles for the Kyrgyz producers (in exports to Western markets).

### 3.4 WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 2/6

In 2025 and in the immediately preceding period, no major Western investment deal was sealed in Kyrgyzstan. The only noteworthy case was that of an American railway construction company slated to invest in that sector in Kyrgyzstan to a prospective amount of \$3 billion.<sup>383</sup> The project was not practically started yet in late 2025, albeit the bilateral commitment to it was reaffirmed during Kyrgyz president's visit to Washington, DC.

Overall, the flow of FDI into the Kyrgyz economy

was moderately growing, albeit at a slower pace than the outflow of FDI from Kyrgyzstan to foreign countries. By June 2025, the National Statistical Committee reported inflow of FDI in the amount of over \$562 million, and outflow of FDI of over \$284 million. Within those modest amounts, the Netherlands were the second largest net origin of FDI in the Kyrgyz economy in 2025, with over \$40 million invested, following China (about \$100 million) and followed by Türkiye (about \$30 million).<sup>384</sup>

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 6.5/15

### 4.1 USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 0.5/2

Kyrgyzstan continues to use Cyrillic as Kyrgyz language alphabet and has not announced any plans of switching to Latin in the near future. Given the significant influence of Russia in the country's cultural sphere, and Moscow's strongly negative and outspoken reactions<sup>385</sup> to recent legislative measures promoting the use and proficiency of the Kyrgyz language, it is likely that Russia would once again exert its influence to prevent Kyrgyzstan from

switching to the Latin alphabet.

Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Organization of Turkic States where the main actor is Türkiye. Turkish President Erdogan reminded his Kyrgyz counterpart that Kyrgyzstan was the only country in the OTS not using the Latin alphabet, while presenting to the gathered leaders a novel by the renowned Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov printed in a common Turkic Latin script.<sup>386</sup>

### 4.2 PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 2/6

Kyrgyz and Russian are by far the dominant two languages spoken and used in all areas in Kyrgyzstan. In the 2024 public opinion poll by IRI, when asked in which language they preferred getting political information, English did not figure at all, going within the "Other" category, while "Kyrgyz" got 80% and Russian – 17%.<sup>387</sup> While learning English remains a popular educational path for the Kyrgyz youth – especially in the capital and major cities – and communicative ability at a very basic level of English has been spreading due to increased tourist inflow, English proficiency has not improved.

According to EF English Proficiency Index in 2025,

Kyrgyzstan ranked 101st among 123 countries (placed among the "very low proficiency" group) and scored 443 points – well below the world average of 488 points.<sup>388</sup> That proficiency score in 2025 was also showing a decline from the previous index when Kyrgyzstan had scored 14 points higher. English is the widest spoken Western language in the country and is a mandatory foreign language taught in the overwhelming majority of schools starting in elementary grades. In the remaining schools (those not teaching English), German, French and Spanish are taught as mandatory foreign language courses; they are also offered at very few language learning centers, but the numbers of speakers of these languages would be miniscule.

## 4.3 SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 4/7

Western cultural products – movies and music – are strongly present and continue to be either the most popular or among the most popular in theatres and on TV. The offerings of the movie theatres in Kyrgyzstan – such as the Cinematica group, which owns most of the theatres – are about 50/50 products of the West (overwhelmingly Hollywood) and of local (Kyrgyz) producers.<sup>389</sup> Others, such as Russia, Korean, Turkish or other, are rare. Kyrgyz viewers get to watch many of the most popular Hollywood movies with very little delay after their release in the West and watch them mostly in Russian translation. Genres tend to be mostly action, drama/comedy and animated films, with sci-fi, biopics and historical dramas featured much less. There is relatively less prominence of Western products on TV – the numerous TV channels tend to specialize, and while some run mostly Western products, many others are either very eclectic or offer Russian, Turkish, Korean and other shows; the soap opera/series field is represented by Chinese, Turkish, Korean and, recently, Kazakh productions, while popular Western series, like Games of Thrones and House of the Dragon, have found their followers in Kyrgyzstan, too.<sup>390</sup>

Internet and social media use among the Kyrgyz residents is heavily bent toward Western sites and platforms. While percentage breakdown is not available across different social platforms, the impressive numbers are provided in the regularly

updated Global Digital Reports at DataReportal.<sup>391</sup> The Western platforms absolutely dominate the Kyrgyz users' preferred social media usage, these include: Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, Threads – and the much less popular X, BlueSky and others. After the 2025 changes in TikTok's ownership, it was viewed as a Chinese platform. The platform has been banned in Kyrgyzstan for unclear reasons. Access to TikTok via VPN was widespread. Telegram has been a much less popular platform compared to Facebook, Threads and Instagram, although it is more popular than X. WhatsApp is by far the most common messenger application.

A somewhat different situation exists in TV programming and channels. While cable subscription services carry many of the standard Western news and entertainment channels – for example Euronews, BBC, MTV and dozens of others – as parts of their packages, the most watched channels available for free are in default packages, and tend to be local and Russian.<sup>392</sup> The standard group of free TV channels and free TV services nationwide, do not have any Western channels, however these include central Russian “propaganda” channels. What offsets such a lopsided situation in TV channels offerings is that increasingly, the population in Kyrgyzstan does not rely on TV for their information. They get this information more and more via internet-carried sources.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 5/10

### 5.1 PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION THAT HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 1.5/5

No aggregate statistic is available on the numbers or shares of population travelling abroad. Both outbound and inbound tourism, have been growing industries. Kyrgyz citizens have tended to view travel abroad, such as vacations or sightseeing

visits, as a normal and desirable element of an interesting life. However, due to the cost and visa requirements, Western countries are not among the top travel destinations of people for leisure and vacation travel. Some of the more popular

destinations include Egypt, UAE, Turkey, Vietnam and China. Speculatively overall, not more than 5% of Kyrgyzstan's population is likely to have travelled to the Western countries.

Besides leisure purposes, people travel to the West for education and work (seasonal foreign worker programs). Among the Kyrgyz youth for university studies the most popular destinations are the United States, Great Britain and European countries

where English-based education is offered or whose language the applicants speak or can learn – for example, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Austria. Korean, Chinese, and Turkish universities are steady recipients of Kyrgyz students, and they are growing in popularity. In the last 3-4 years, growing numbers of Kyrgyz citizens (several thousand) have applied for and been granted opportunities to go for seasonal agricultural work to the UK and European countries.<sup>393</sup>

## 5.2 PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 1.5/3

Kyrgyzstan has not seen the arrival of many more Western franchise companies since the previous years. This is mainly due to the limited purchasing power among the population and the likely limited size of the market. KFC is the most widely available and highly popular fast-food franchise working in Kyrgyzstan for some 10 years. Papa John's pizza stores, which are another brand operating for some years yet less popular and with fewer locations. The French coffee and pastry shop franchise, Paul, was opened more recently and still operating. Several hotel brands (Hyatt, Sheraton, Novotel and

Ramada) have opened, one of each, at various times in the past and are operating. Talks are taking place of more to arrive – such as the Movenpick hotel – but as yet this has not materialized. Western clothing brands, such as Levi's, Mango and New Balance, are presented in the Kyrgyz market. They are represented by resale carriers without direct franchise from the brand. The internet market has grown, with numerous buyers becoming niche businesses, which has further offset the urgency of demand for Western original products.<sup>394 395</sup>

## 5.3 MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE AND SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

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Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
23/25	22/25	23/25	15/15	10/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 23/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 9/10

Latvia is generally assessed as having free, competitive, and credible elections, with a professional election administration and outcomes that are accepted by stakeholders. In the 2025 Freedom House report, the electoral process receives the highest possible score (4/4), and political pluralism and participation also receive top evaluations in three of the four sub-indicators. The only area rated slightly lower, at 3/4, concerns whether all segments of the population — including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other groups — enjoy full political rights and equal electoral opportunities.<sup>397</sup>

The Freedom House’s reference concerns a segment of the population that does not hold Latvian citizenship and therefore lives under a distinct legal status as “non-citizens”.<sup>398</sup> These individuals possess a Latvian-issued “non-citizen passport” but do not have voting rights, and at the beginning of this year, there were 165,871 non-citizens registered in the country. Although Latvia has long faced criticism for maintaining this category, it is important to note that all non-citizens have access to a naturalization process, which has been open since 1 February 1995. Since the launch of naturalization, the authorities have received 152,638 applications covering 166,219 individuals. By decision of the Cabinet of Ministers, 150,497 people have been granted Latvian citizenship, including 14,696 minors who were naturalized together with their parents.<sup>399</sup> This demonstrates that ethnic minorities, including the Russian-speaking population often referenced in criticism,

are not legally prevented from obtaining full political rights. In the current geopolitical context, such criticism does not align with Latvia’s national security interests.

Alongside Latvia’s strong record of free and fair elections, steps have been taken to further reinforce political integrity. Progress on lobbying regulation continues, though key clarifications have been delayed. New pre-election campaigning rules also raise maximum penalties for violations, enhancing oversight and transparency.<sup>400</sup> At the same time, the delay in creating a full lobbying register and the easing of disclosure rules indicate a slowdown in improving political transparency. These setbacks risk creating gaps in oversight of interest-group influence at a time when democratic resilience and public trust are especially vital.<sup>401</sup>

Internally, the issue debated is also the level of democracy in political parties themselves. According to the Transparency International Latvia, the Latvian political parties face persistent challenges of weak internal democracy, with decision-making often concentrated in narrow leadership circles. Low and passive membership further limits meaningful participation in candidate selection and program development. In addition, transparency gaps and unclear safeguards create risks of opaque influence and inconsistent accountability within party structures.<sup>402</sup> Such challenges persist, yet the very existence of this public discussion signals a growing maturity of Latvia’s democratic culture, demonstrating increasing expectations for transparency, accountability, and member participation.

Latvia is generally assessed as having a high level of media freedom, with strong constitutional and legal safeguards and a comparatively safe operating environment for journalists, while facing some medium-risk issues around market conditions, self-regulation, and security-driven policy pressures on pluralism. Freedom House scores the country 3/4 on media independence, noting that journalists operate in a generally safe and uncensored environment.<sup>403</sup> Similarly, the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) places Latvia 15th of 180 countries in its 2025 World Press Freedom Index (score 81.82), describing a “fairly free and safe environment”. At the same time, according to Reporters Without Borders, the main concern is related to the legal dimension. The reference made here is related to a

court decision on banning Russian media in exile “TV Rain”. Another challenge addressed in this specific index concerns access to reliable Russian-language content for Russian-speaking audiences.<sup>404</sup> Though experts and the indexes’ authors also acknowledge geopolitical context and the security considerations shaping its information space.

According to the reports, other challenges, which persist, include market-structure risks, uneven self-regulatory effectiveness. EU monitoring also notes episodes with potential chilling effects, such as the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau’s requests to media outlets, underscoring that while Latvia’s media system is fundamentally free, it faces structural and contextual pressures that require continuous oversight.<sup>405</sup>

## 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 7/8

Seven political parties are currently represented in the Latvian Parliament (Saeima). Only one of them openly promotes anti-EU or anti-NATO narratives. The party Stabilitātei! (For Stability) stands out in particular, as its leader is under investigation for deliberately inciting hatred and discord between Latvians and Russians;<sup>406</sup> its representatives have repeatedly voiced negative statements about EU integration, neighbouring countries, and other

Western allies, questioning their democratic credentials and amplifying anti-Western narratives. Another party that raises potential concerns regarding its geopolitical orientation is the populist Latvija pirmajā vietā (Latvia in the First Place) party, due to positions expressed in public debates — such as opposition to dismantling railway links with Russia<sup>407</sup> as well as its leaders’ possible past family business ties to Russia.

## 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 7/8

Public support for Western institutions and the transatlantic community continues to persist in Latvia, with clear preferences for a values-based European Union and a strong, unified Euro-Atlantic security framework. Surveys show consistently high approval of EU membership: both Kantar (May 2025) and Eurobarometer (Q1 2025) report that 67% of Latvians view EU membership positively or believe the country has benefited from it,<sup>408</sup> while only 19% express negative perceptions.<sup>409</sup> Expectations toward the EU are equally strong, with 76% of respondents calling for a greater EU role in protecting citizens from global crises and security threats, and a majority supporting deeper EU unity

and shared resources.<sup>410</sup>

At the same time, confidence in NATO’s readiness to defend Latvia is more cautious: a Norstat poll from March 2025 shows that only 10% of Latvians “definitely” believe allies would send troops in a crisis and 33% “tend to believe” so, while 41% doubt such intervention.<sup>411</sup> The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung’s Security Radar 2025 confirms that Latvia remains fundamentally aligned with Western partners, yet public opinion is fragmented along linguistic lines: 71% of the general population view Russia as a threat, compared with just 8% of Russian-speaking respondents, while 52% of the latter see the United States as a threat (versus

28% overall). Despite these internal divides, 74% of Latvians believe the country cannot defend itself without allies, highlighting strong reliance on NATO, and while 77% see ending the war against Ukraine as essential for Europe's security, 67% reject military intervention as a general solution, favouring deterrence and collective defence.<sup>412</sup>

These findings and other research show that Latvians have a strong alignment with the West, while this perception coexists with cautious realism and notable internal fragmentation based on linguistic belonging. While support for the EU and NATO remains high, a clear gap persists

between valuing Western institutions and trusting that allies would provide direct military assistance in a case Russia would attack. Divergent threat perceptions between Latvian- and Russian-speaking communities further illustrate parallel information environments that complicate national cohesion. At the same time, the public increasingly expects the EU to assume a more active protective role and recognises that Latvia's security fundamentally relies on collective defence, signalling both strategic dependence and a growing view of the EU as a geopolitical actor.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 22/25

### 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 6/6

Latvia's Constitution demonstrates a high level of compliance — both de jure and de facto — with the standards set by the Venice Commission. The system de jure and practically corresponds closely to the principles outlined in the Venice Commission's Rule of Law Checklist, including clarity and accessibility of laws, limits on executive discretion, procedural fairness, and effective access to justice.

The constitutional framework also reflects Venice Commission's guidance on judicial appointments, tenure protections, disciplinary procedures, and the institutional independence of the courts. In the electoral sphere, Latvia fully adheres to the Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.

### 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 6/7

In terms of independence of courts, Latvia provides a high level of independence. The World Bank Prosperity Data360 indicators show that Latvia maintains consistently strong judicial independence, outperforming both regional and global averages across key measures.<sup>413</sup> V-Dem's Judicial Independence indicator also places Latvia in the high category.<sup>414</sup> World Justice Project data confirm stable protection from improper government influence and effective enforcement of civil justice<sup>415</sup>. Although the WEF ranking of 74/141 suggests space for refinement, the overall evidence indicates high institutional independence and low corruption within Latvia's judiciary.<sup>416</sup> The European Commission also notes one persisting concern:

Latvia has not yet strengthened safeguards in the Supreme Court appointment process to prevent political influence, an issue highlighted since the 2022 case where the Latvian Parliament rejected a judicial candidate without justification or the possibility of judicial review. According to the data presented in the report, perceptions of judicial independence in Latvia remain at a medium level among both the public and businesses. In 2025, 42% of the population and 41% of companies considered the independence of courts and judges "fairly high or very high." However, this is significantly lower than in 2021, when 56% of the public and 53% of businesses shared this view.<sup>417</sup>

According to the Transparency International

Latvia, Delna, and the European Commission highlight a broad set of unresolved issues in Latvia's anti-corruption and political integrity framework, noting that Latvia's Corruption Perceptions Index score has stagnated between 57 and 60 over the past five years — 59 in 2024 — indicating persistent

public-sector corruption. A key weakness, shared by both the Commission and Delna, is the continued delay in implementing the Transparency of Interest Representation Law, which signals insufficient political will to ensure openness regarding whose interests influence decision-making.<sup>418</sup>

### 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 6/7

De jure Latvia has a comprehensive human-rights legal architecture that aligns with international and European standards. Latvia has established a broadly compliant legal framework for human rights, covering equality and non-discrimination, protection from torture and ill-treatment, rights of asylum-seekers and refugees, anti-discrimination and minority-rights protections, and domestic-/gender-based violence. The institution of the national human rights defender (the Ombudsman), under the relevant Ombudsman Law, provides a statutory mechanism for promoting human rights awareness, monitoring state compliance, investigating rights violations (including in closed institutions such as prisons or detention centres), and filing recommendations or complaints.<sup>419</sup>

As for the situation de facto, several recent reports and reviews reveal certain challenges in the implementation and enforcement of those legal protections. For example, according to the Freedom House, Latvia meets highest standards in providing political rights in terms of electoral process (except criticism towards Latvia's approach to non-citizen status, civil liberties (except media rights- and academic freedom, where the score for performance is 3 out of 4), association and organizational rights, personal autonomy and individual rights (except equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation, where the score for performance is 3 out of 4)<sup>420</sup>.

An emerging challenge is related to the human rights protection in the internet environment. According to the most recent report released on

March 2025 by European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, between January 2021 and November 2023 the Latvian Centre for Human Rights (LCHR) identified 2,414 instances of hate speech on Latvian internet platforms. Of those, 50% targeted LGBT individuals, 20% targeted people based on ethnic or national origin, 18% were xenophobic, 6% concerned skin colour, and 2% religion.<sup>421</sup>

The 2025 legal-literacy study shows that although 55% of Latvia's residents believe they are well informed about their rights, significant gaps persist across core human-rights-related areas. Public awareness of state legal provides space for improvements with 64% reporting they do not know when they are entitled to free legal assistance, and 52% find it difficult to understand state-provided legal information. Knowledge is particularly low in debt collection (52% poor), data-protection violations (53% poor), and how to initiate legal or court procedures (52% poor). Latvia's overall legal-literacy index averages 9.97/16, indicating only moderate rights awareness.<sup>422</sup> This highlights a need for clearer communication and stronger human-rights education.

Concerns in Latvia have also been raised by the parliamentary debates and vote in autumn 2025 on withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, as well as by pressure exerted by certain political parties on the non-governmental sector and the media. While these developments have not yet resulted in any de facto changes, they warrant continued monitoring due to their potential future impact.

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 4/6

Based on the Latvian Prosecutor General's 2024 report, the Prosecution service submitted cases to court against 6,714 defendants, including 240 minors. They will be called to account for a total of 12,611 criminal offences. In comparison, in 2023 a total of 5,052 cases were submitted to court involving 9,945 criminal offences, and the year before those 5,072 cases involving 8,689 offences. In 2024, 31,044 criminal proceedings were initiated in the country, which is also the number of proceedings placed under prosecutors' supervision. Last year, prosecutors took over 4,057 criminal proceedings involving offences of particular public concern.

In 2024 courts delivered acquittal judgments in 36 criminal cases, and in another 2 cases the criminal proceedings were terminated because

the prosecutor withdrew the charge (in one case after new circumstances emerged during trial and in another after clarification of circumstances during trial), i.e., 38 case outcomes ended without conviction. These acquittal-type outcomes were issued mostly in first-instance courts (25 cases), with 6 cases decided in the appellate instance, while 7 cases resulted in acquittal only after the Supreme Court (Senate) decision and a rehearing in the appellate instance. For the 36 acquittal-judgment cases, the report attributes 34 to prosecutors and courts reaching different assessments of the evidence and 2 to deficiencies in the pre-trial process. The same section's time series indicates 38 "opinions on reasons for acquittal outcomes" in 2024, compared with 24 in 2023 and 41 in 2022.<sup>423</sup>

## 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 23/25

### 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 7/7

Latvia's economic Westernization in 2025 is much affiliated with its integration into the EU and the WTO, and which together determines to a certain extent the country's regulatory, trade, and market orientations. WTO membership helps to embed Latvia into the global rules-based trading system, guaranteeing predictability for exporters and market access to non-EU partners. Through EU membership, Latvia operates within the EU Single Market. It means that Latvia's market is fully aligned with Western regulatory standards governing competition policy, state aid,

financial supervision, consumer protection, digital services, environmental regulation, transport, and labour mobility.<sup>424</sup> Membership in the Eurozone strengthens monetary stability and investor confidence, while EU structural and recovery funds remain key drivers of Latvia's green and digital transformation. Latvia's engagement in emerging EU strategic programmes – such as the European Defence Industry Programme, the European Defence Fund, and digital innovation under EU framework- further embeds Latvia into Western economic and security value chains.

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 4/6

Latvia demonstrates a generally favourable and transparent business environment. It is considered one of the more open and investment-friendly economies in Central and Eastern Europe, but persistent structural challenges — particularly in the judiciary, public procurement, and administrative

capacity — continue to affect investor confidence. According to the Economic Freedom Index, Latvia is ranked by 72 index points, which is higher than average globally.<sup>425</sup>

Ease of doing business is strongly supported by Latvia's highly digitalized public administration,

where services such as company registration, tax declarations, licensing, and e-signatures are conducted almost entirely online. According to the European Commission's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2024, Latvia ranks above the EU average in digital public services with 87,22 points out of 100, especially in e-government interoperability and cross-border services.<sup>426</sup>

Transparency indicators have improved, but still, there is a space for further improvement. Latvia's regulatory processes are highly aligned with Western transparency standards, including mandatory public consultations, open data requirements, and impact assessments. However, there are certain concerns related to procurement oversight nationally and uneven implementation of anti-corruption policies at the municipal level. To address these issues, several steps on both governmental and non-governmental levels are being taken. For example, in September 2025 Latvia joined six national competition authorities to launch together with the OECD and the European Commission a joint project to strengthen public procurement oversight and improve the detection and prevention of cartel behaviour. This will empower to enhance transparency and cooperation across countries and will improve the ability to identify risks early and

safeguard fair competition.<sup>427</sup>

On corruption perception and business integrity, Latvia performs moderately well but faces stagnation rather than improvement. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2024, Latvia scores 59/100 with 20% of people who thought corruption increased in the previous 12 months and 9% of public service users paid a bribe in the previous 12 months.<sup>428</sup>

In terms of investment climate, the European Commission's Country Report Latvia 2024 stresses that the business environment benefits from well integration in single market, stable macroeconomic policy, Eurozone membership, and predictable regulatory conditions, but remains challenged by both labour and skills shortages, difficult business environment with cumbersome business regulations, slow licensing in construction, and court delays in commercial cases.<sup>429</sup>

This data signals that although Latvia's business environment in 2025 reflects a mature and largely transparent market economy supported by strong digital governance and alignment with EU regulatory standards, yet its competitiveness remains constrained and several challenges need to be addressed.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 6/6

Five main import and export partners are EU countries and over 2/3 of exports go to EU markets, according to the Latvian Central Statistics Bureau, 2025,<sup>430</sup> demonstrating that a strong majority of Latvia's foreign-trade flows remain tied to Western markets. This high share of exports to the EU reflects

both Latvia's economic integration into the EU Single Market and the orientation of its export industries (timber/wood products, machinery and equipment, mineral fuels, etc.) towards the Western and Northern Europe. It is determined also by Russia's aggression and the geopolitical shifts in general.

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 6/6

Western investment plays a structurally significant role in Latvia's economy, with the total stock of foreign direct investment reaching 26.3 billion euros by the end of 2024, confirming the deep embedment of Western capital in key sectors. For example, Latvian Investment and Development Agency's data shows that in the first half of 2025,

the agency attracted 156 million euros in new foreign investment, generating 545 new jobs, reflecting continued interest from European and other advanced-economy investors.<sup>431</sup> These inflows are concentrated in professional and technical services, finance, real estate, manufacturing, and trade, indicating a diversified portfolio rather than

dependence on a single sector.

The banking system is highly integrated into investment and financial markets in general. According to OECD, “Scandinavian banks have been important players in Latvia and other Baltic countries since the 1990s”.<sup>432</sup> Thus, the dominance

of Scandinavian banks affects investment patterns and macro-financial dynamics, including providing loans and demonstrates deep integration of the Latvian financial system into Northern European space.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 15/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 2/2

Latvia uses the Latin alphabet. The Latvian alphabet consists of 33 letters and includes several

diacritic marks (ā, ē, ī, ū, č, ģ, ķ, ļ, ņ, š, ž) that represent specific Latvian phonemes.

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 6/6

According to Eurostat, Latvia stands among the strongest performers in Europe in terms of foreign-language proficiency within the working-age population. In 2022, 95% of adults aged 25–64 reported speaking at least one foreign language, placing Latvia firmly among the EU’s top performers. Only 5% of the population reported knowing no foreign language; 26.4% reported knowledge of one language; 52.6% reported two languages; and 16% reported three or more.<sup>433</sup> These figures significantly exceed EU averages.

Older generations tend to speak Russian, while younger generations predominantly acquire English. For English, which is the most widely learned foreign language, 46% of speakers rate their knowledge at the highest proficiency level; 40% understand simple texts and can express themselves with basic vocabulary; 12% can use familiar everyday expressions; and 3% report knowing only a few

words or phrases. German, typically the second most common foreign language, shows a more moderate but still substantial proficiency pattern: 25% assess their knowledge at the highest level; 34% understand simple texts and can communicate in basic terms; 22% use common conversational expressions; and 19% know only a limited number of words or phrases<sup>434</sup>.

Latvia’s formal education system mandates the teaching of foreign languages in both basic and secondary school curricula. According to national standards, general secondary education programs require students to study the first foreign language and the second foreign language alongside the national language and other core subjects. The first foreign language is English, as for the second language the most chosen is German, which is followed by French and Spanish.

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION’S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 7/7

In 2024, Latvian cinemas screened 402 films from across the world, with U.S.-produced films remaining the dominant segment, attracting 1,391,340 viewers and continuing to lead overall

audience demand. However, the year also marked a notable shift in market composition: the share of American productions decreased from 77.33% in 2023 to 66.43% in 2024, largely due to the rising

popularity of Latvian films. In contrast, the market shares of European films (10.95%) and films from other countries (3.08%) remained relatively stable, fluctuating by less than one percentage point compared to the previous year.<sup>435</sup>

Latvia's TV consumption data from Autumn 2024 shows a shift toward digital viewing, with interactive internet TV now used by 51% of households, while traditional platforms continue to decline: paid terrestrial TV has fallen to 20% and cable TV to 17%. The most-watched channels are TV3 (50%), which is owned by US Investment company, and two public broadcasters – LTV1 (46%), and LTV7 (39%)-, yet public broadcaster viewership continues to shrink in line with global trends, even though 55% of residents still watch LTV1 or LTV7 at least occasionally. Viewing habits remain strongly driven by news (85%) and entertainment (74%), with older, Latvian-speaking, and lower-income groups

watching TV more frequently, while younger audiences increasingly rely on digital platforms,<sup>436</sup> reinforcing broader shifts in Latvia's Western-oriented media consumption.

A total of 77 % surveyed Latvian residents use WhatsApp, 65% use Facebook, 64 % use YouTube, 35 % use Instagram. Non-Western platforms such as TikTok (30 % residents consume TikTok content) and Telegram (18 %) are also widely used, but do not reach levels of the Western platforms.<sup>437</sup> Western internet sites are not that widely used and still the most popular ones are local. The first 20 most used internet sites are not Western ones.<sup>438</sup> Despite this, an analysis of internet portals shows that content is shaped by the agendas of mainly Western news agencies in the news sections, as well as by the alignment of cultural, sports, and other entertainment content with Western lifestyle norms.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 10/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 5/5

While official statistics do not quantify what share of the population has ever visited Western countries since Latvia is part of the Western hemisphere, as for now the country is experiencing rising outward mobility. In 2024 residents made a total of 2.3 million trips abroad (one-day or longer). Common international destinations include neighbouring EU states and major Western countries, such as Italy, Germany, Spain and

others. Latvia's full integration into the Schengen Area – and the resulting high levels of mobility to Western Europe - clearly signal its deep embedding within the Western geopolitical and socio-economic space. But the mobility patterns for travel and living within Euro space suggests broad-based access and familiarity with Western societies, supporting cultural exchange and language acquisition.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 3/3

Latvia's inclusion in the European Single Market and its stable business regulations continue to attract a wide presence of Western franchise companies across retail, hospitality, and services. As of 2025, global chains such as McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Subway, Domino's Pizza, and Hesburger operate multiple outlets in Latvia, embedded in both major cities and regional

centres. This reflects not only consumer demand for Western-style products but also confidence on the part of multinational franchises in Latvia's legal and economic environment. It also serves as a practical indicator that Latvia functions as part of the Western economic space, benefiting from market efficiencies, cross-border supply chains, and consumer alignment with Western standards.

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

According to the European Commission, Latvia continues to advance its digital infrastructure at a rapid pace. Over the past year, national 5G coverage expanded by 33%, reaching 71.1%, underscoring the speed of deployment of the next-generation connectivity. Progress is equally visible in fixed broadband development: the number of 1 Gb/s subscriptions is growing faster than the EU average, reflecting strong consumer uptake and improving network capacity. At the same time, Latvia is investing to meet EU benchmarks for very-high-capacity fixed networks and fiber-to-the-premises availability, reinforcing long-term competitiveness and nationwide digital inclusion.<sup>439</sup>

According to the annual survey on use of information and communication technologies in households carried out by the Central Statistical Bureau (CSB), an increasing number of residents

use electronic identification (88.9%) and artificial intelligence (35.1%), and one in five (20.1%) evaluates and verifies information available online.<sup>440</sup> In Latvia, more people are choosing to pay by mobile phone, making this payment method more popular than the European average. According to a study by the European Central Bank (ECB), 8% of all payments at point-of-sale checkouts in Latvia are made using a mobile phone, while the average in the eurozone is only 6%.<sup>441</sup>

This data demonstrates a society steadily transitioning toward a mature digital ecosystem. At the same time, the increasing use of mobile-based payments and higher-than-EU-average uptake of digital services highlight strong public readiness to integrate technology into everyday life, reinforcing Latvia's digital competitiveness, which in certain positions is higher than "old" Western countries.

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
22/25	22/25	24.5/25	12.5/15	10/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 22/25

### 1.1 DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 8/10

Lithuania remains a high-performing electoral democracy. Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2025 report rates the country 89/100 (“Free”),<sup>442</sup> with strong scores for political rights and civil liberties. Elections are competitive, the media landscape pluralistic, and civil society vibrant. There is no evidence of systemic restrictions on opposition parties, independent journalism or peaceful protest; formal guarantees broadly match those of established Western democracies. However, 2025 revealed some fissures in political trust and coalition stability. The government crisis around Prime Minister Gintautas Paluckas<sup>443</sup> and the subsequent formation of a broad, ideologically heterogeneous coalition<sup>444</sup> exposed problems of party governance and discipline. Public opinion data collected by Baltijos tyrimai for ELTA across the year show a striking and consistent pattern. Throughout 2025, public trust in Lithuania’s main political institutions remained low and unstable, with modest fluctuations rather than any clear recovery. At the start of the year (late January–early February), 42% of respondents trusted the government while 50% distrusted it, and only 29% trusted the Seimas compared with 63% who did not.<sup>445</sup> In spring (April and then late May–early June), government trust stayed at about 42%, but negative evaluations grew: by early summer, a majority of people already rated the work of the courts (49%), the government (55%) and the Seimas (64%) negatively.<sup>446</sup> Over the summer and into early autumn (late August–early September), trust slipped further to 38% for the government and 29% for the Seimas, and in October it reached its lowest point of the year,<sup>447</sup> with just 33% trusting the government and 27% trusting the Seimas, while

roughly two-thirds expressed distrust. In the last wave (late November–early December),<sup>448</sup> trust recovered slightly to 38% for the government and 30% for the Seimas, but distrust still stood above 60%, confirming that confidence in the country’s political leadership remained structurally weak.

Throughout these waves, the ranking of institutions is remarkably stable: police, armed forces, Church, presidency, and municipalities consistently enjoy majority trust (often between 57–76%),<sup>449</sup> courts and media divide opinion, while the government and parliament sit at the bottom of the table. These data suggest that citizens are highly critical of the performance of elected elites and coalition politics, but remain broadly confident in core state institutions and constitutional order. Combined with the strong pro-EU and pro-NATO attitudes captured by Eurobarometer and national security polling, this justifies a high, though not maximal, score of 8/10 for political freedom and system legitimacy.

Worthy of special mention is the late-2025 scandal in Lithuania, when ruling coalition partners registered amendments to change how the leadership of the public broadcaster LRT is appointed or dismissed — moves widely seen as an attack on media freedom. The proposals triggered a broad civic backlash, including mass protests and a record-setting petition, mobilising society in defence of the broadcaster’s independence.<sup>450 451</sup> Under sustained public pressure (and mounting criticism), the planned changes were ultimately paused/suspended. This episode demonstrated society’s resilience and determination to defend democratic values.

## 1.2 PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT 7.5/8

Across the party spectrum, strategic consensus on Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic orientation remains exceptionally strong. All major parliamentary parties – social democrats, conservatives, liberals and agrarians – support NATO and EU membership, sanctions on Russia and Belarus, and sustained assistance to Ukraine.

In January 2025, the Seimas adopted a resolution on the continuity of Lithuania's foreign and security policy, which condemns Russia's war against Ukraine and explicitly reiterates the commitment to allocate at least 0.25% of GDP annually to Ukraine's defence and security sector on a long-term basis. Shortly afterwards, the State Defence Council (VGT) agreed that Lithuania would spend between 5% and 6% of GDP on defence each year from 2026 to 2030<sup>452</sup>, with a later-specified target of 5.25% of GDP in the 2026 budget proposal,<sup>453</sup> with the draft budget planning around €4.8 billion, or 5.38% of GDP, for the Ministry of National Defence.<sup>454</sup> This trajectory – far above NATO's 2% benchmark and supported by a narrow majority of the public (51% in favour and 39% against a 5.38%-of-GDP defence budget in a November 2025 Vilnius poll<sup>455</sup>) – would make Lithuania one of the Alliance's most defence-intensive economies.

The inclusion of the radical national-populist Nemuno Aušra (PPNA) in the governing coalition

injected illiberal rhetoric into debates on culture and migration and brought an explicitly anti-system actor into government, complicating coalition management and straining relations with mainstream pro-Western parties.<sup>456</sup> Ongoing investigations into the party's alleged illegal campaign financing, links to business actors tied to Russian capital and accusations of intimidation of critics have further damaged its legitimacy and raised concerns about adherence to rule-of-law norms.<sup>457</sup> In response, the civic movement Kultūros Asamblėja has emerged as a prominent actor mobilising protests and public campaigns against what it frames as democratic backsliding and the attempted capture of cultural policy, helping to reframe culture as a frontline of democratic defence.<sup>458</sup> Nevertheless, parliamentary arithmetic, public opinion, civil-society mobilisation and presidential influence have so far combined to contain attempts to deviate from the Euro-Atlantic consensus, and foreign and security policy fundamentals – support for NATO, EU integration, sanctions and aid to Ukraine – have remained stable, suggesting that Lithuania's Western alignment is socially and institutionally anchored despite the presence of a disruptive coalition partner. This broad elite alignment with Western strategic priorities warrants a score of 7.5/8.

## 1.3 PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 6.5/7

Survey data show a robust and nuanced pro-Western orientation. On the one hand, as noted above, citizens are dissatisfied with the performance of national political institutions. On the other hand, they express strong support for Western alliances and values:

- A defence opinion poll commissioned by the Ministry of National Defence and published in February 2025 reports that 90% of Lithuanians evaluate NATO membership positively, 89% support the presence of Allied troops in Lithuania, 85% back the deployment of a German brigade, and 71% support military assistance to Ukraine.<sup>459</sup>

- Eurobarometer 103 finds that 63% of Lithuanians trust the EU, significantly above the EU average of 52%, and that 70% are optimistic about the future of the Union – among the highest levels in the bloc.<sup>460</sup>
- 92% of respondents agree that people in Lithuania have “a lot of things in common”, and 74% say the same about people in the EU, indicating a strong sense of shared European identity and cohesion.<sup>461</sup>

These attitudes co-exist with widespread pessimism about domestic politics and the economy. But they clearly demonstrate that

discontent is directed at national elites and policy outcomes rather than at the Western democratic model or geopolitical alignment. The population

remains structurally pro-Western and security-focused, especially in relation to the Russian threat, justifying a high score of 6.5/7.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 22/25

### 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 5/6

In 2025, the Venice Commission did not issue any country-specific requirements or criticism regarding Lithuania's human rights legislation, suggesting that the overall framework broadly meets European standards. Lithuania's Constitution, extensive ratification of human rights treaties, and functioning national institutions justify a high score for its legislative framework and enforcement. The Ministry of Justice is implementing measures to enhance the quality of legislation and make legislative practice more consistent. The mandate of the Parliamentary Ombudspersons was extended

in November 2024 to include the role of 'National rapporteur on trafficking in human beings', and resources have been further reinforced. The Judicial Council has formally presented a proposal to amend the Constitution to secure its right of constitutional appeal concerning legislation impacting the judiciary. However, concerns remain among stakeholders regarding the effective participation of civil society in decision-making processes, particularly at the local level, which highlights a need to systematize consultative practices.<sup>462</sup>

### 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 6.5/7

The 2025 EU Rule of Law Report<sup>463</sup> notes that perceived judicial independence is high, judicial appointments function without major delays and the justice system is efficient and highly digitalised, even though concerns remain about resources, legal aid and lawyer-client confidentiality. The courts' own 2024 activity report<sup>464</sup> underlines that only around 1.4% of all rulings were modified or overturned and that the share of electronically processed civil and administrative cases has reached roughly 92%, indicating both robust decision quality and advanced digitalisation, rather than politicisation.

The level of perceived judicial independence in Lithuania is high among the general public

and average among companies. Overall, 60% of the general population perceives the level of independence of courts and judges to be 'fairly or very good' in 2025, a figure that has increased since 2024 (56%) and 2021 (55%). However, the perceived independence among companies has slightly decreased since 2024 (from 62% to 58% in 2025). Procedures for judicial appointments across all instances are taking place in good time, with further steps taken to improve the transparency of the process. The judicial map reform was completed in January 2025 and is expected to balance the workload among courts. The justice system is highly digitalised, contributing further to its efficient performance.<sup>465</sup>

### 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 4.5/6

The overall human rights situation in Lithuania remains good and stable. Nevertheless, a few areas remain not fully resolved. Remaining shortcomings include the continued stalemate over the Istanbul Convention,<sup>466</sup> gaps in policy implementation

on gender-based violence, and ongoing debates over LGBT+ rights.<sup>467</sup> At the same time, the legacy of restrictive measures towards asylum seekers and irregular migrants,<sup>468</sup> as well as incomplete implementation of ECtHR judgments on LGBTI rights

and legal gender recognition,<sup>469</sup> show persistent gaps between law and practice. These outstanding reforms, rather than structural defects in the legal

system, are what currently prevent Lithuania from reaching a “perfect” score.

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 6/6

There are no credible indications in 2025 of systematic political interference in criminal justice or the use of courts to persecute opposition figures, journalists or activists. The effective investigation and prosecution of corruption offences continues. The courts’ own 2024 activity report notes that the average acquittal rate for all offences is

around 1.5%. However, the report highlights that the acquittal rate in corruption cases remains substantially higher than for other offences (around one fifth of defendants acquitted, compared to the 1.5% average), which points to challenges of prosecutorial effectiveness rather than political manipulation.<sup>470</sup>

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 24.5/25

## 3.1 EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 7/7

Lithuania is a full member of both the European Union and the World Trade Organization, with no opt-outs from core EU economic policies. Euro area membership, participation in the internal market

and adherence to common competition, state-aid and trade rules firmly anchor Lithuania in Western economic and regulatory frameworks. This deep integration merits the maximum score of 7/7.

## 3.2 EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 5.5/6

Lithuania’s economic freedom score in the 2025 Heritage Index is 74.6, which places the country 16th worldwide and 10th out of 44 in the Europe region, well above both the global and regional averages.<sup>471</sup> This “mostly free” rating reflects a liberal economic environment supported by relatively strong rule of law, an open investment regime and high degrees of business and trade freedom. The 1.7-point improvement compared to the previous year also indicates that Lithuania is not only maintaining but gradually expanding its level of economic freedom within the broader Western economic space. Transparency International’s Corruption

Perceptions Index likewise places Lithuania among relatively low-corruption countries, although still some distance from the best-performing Nordic and Western European states.<sup>472</sup> International risk and insurance assessments<sup>473</sup> describe the overall business environment as very strong, but persistent vulnerabilities in areas such as public procurement and parts of the public sector mean that regulatory and transparency standards are not yet “world-leading”. Taken together, these indicators support rating Lithuania’s ease and transparency of doing business in the “high” category, while stopping short of a perfect score.

## 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 6/6

Foreign trade data confirm a nearly complete decoupling from the Eastern economic sphere and a clear Western orientation of Lithuania’s trade.<sup>474</sup> In January–September 2025, exports to the EU-27 reached about €19.0 billion, accounting for 69% of total exports, while the euro area alone

absorbed 48.2% of exports. When the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway and other OECD partners are added, Western markets take an estimated around 85% of Lithuania’s exports. Exports to Belarus represented only 1.7% of total exports and fell by 44.7% year-on-year; exports to

Russia remain negligible due to sanctions and self-imposed restrictions.

Imports show a similar pattern: 67.6% of all imports come from EU-27 partners (with 45% from the euro area), and Lithuania's main trading partners on both the export and import side are almost entirely EU and transatlantic economies –

Latvia, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Estonia, the United States, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Trade with Eastern neighbours and non-Western suppliers, such as Belarus on the export side or China (5.3% of imports), constitutes only a small fraction of Lithuania's overall trade, underscoring the structural Westernization of its foreign trade flows.

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 6/6

In 2025, Lithuania made a qualitative leap in strategic Western economic integration by becoming a key node in Europe's defence rearmament. A joint venture with Germany's Rheinmetall launched construction of a major 155mm artillery ammunition plant in Baisogala, with planned investment exceeding €180 million and capacity to produce tens of thousands of shells annually from 2026.<sup>475</sup> In November 2025, Lithuania and Rheinmetall signed a memorandum of understanding for a propellant production facility and Centre of Excellence, which will manufacture energetic components and combustible cartridge cases, further locking Lithuania into the European Defence Industrial Base.<sup>476</sup>

These projects are financed via Western capital markets and European financial institutions. Lithuania routinely issues Eurobonds for budget and defence financing, and partners such as the Nordic Investment Bank provide long-term credit for

infrastructure and defence-related investments.<sup>477</sup> Western FDI is concentrated in manufacturing, shared services and IT; 2025 developments show the defence industry emerging as a new strategic sector. In Q2 2025, Lithuania's inward FDI stock is overwhelmingly dominated by Western investors: the top twenty origin countries are all EU, EEA or transatlantic partners such as Germany, the Netherlands, Estonia, Sweden, Latvia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The five largest investors are Germany (€5.6 billion, 13.8% of total FDI), the Netherlands (€5.5 billion, 13.6%), Estonia (€3.9 billion, 9.6%), Sweden (€3.6 billion, 8.8%) and Latvia (€2.8 billion, 6.8%), which together account for just over half of all FDI in Lithuania (around 52.5%).<sup>478</sup> Taken together, these Western investors account for well over 90% of the total FDI stock in the country. By contrast, Russia's share is only about 0.7% and Belarus's about 0.6%, so their combined contribution of roughly 1% is economically marginal and politically negligible.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 12.5/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 2/2

Lithuania's linguistic and cultural sphere is firmly Western-oriented. The Lithuanian language itself uses a modified Latin alphabet, which places it

within the broader family of Western and Central European languages and facilitates the learning and use of other Latin-script languages.

### 4.2. PROFICIENCY IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 4/6

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Lithuania scores 543 points (moderate proficiency), ranking 33rd worldwide and clearly

above the global average of 488.<sup>479</sup> According to the Lithuanian country results of Special Eurobarometer 540 "Europeans and their

languages”,<sup>480</sup> 44% of Lithuanians say they can speak English well enough to hold a conversation, 12% say the same for German and 3% for French, while 62% report conversational Russian and 11% Polish. A narrower national survey on language skills in 2025<sup>481</sup> provides a more detailed picture: 26% of respondents state that they speak, read and write English fluently and a further 14% can communicate in English though reading and writing are difficult, meaning that about 40% have at least conversational English and only 36% report no knowledge of the language. For German, 3% are fully fluent and 6% can communicate, with another 7% able to read and 13% understanding spoken German; for Polish, 5% are fluent and 10% can communicate in the language. Russian remains the historically dominant foreign language (34% fluent, 28% able to communicate, 9% able to read and 14% understanding spoken Russian), but its lead over English is narrowing, especially among younger cohorts.

English remains the dominant first foreign language in schools and universities, while

education policy and practice increasingly prioritize German, French and other EU languages over Russian.<sup>482</sup> Government policy actively promotes Western foreign languages. English is taught as the first foreign language in almost all schools and was studied by around 85% of upper secondary students in 2022. A 2024 decree allows Spanish to be offered as a first foreign language from 2026 alongside English, German and French, and Lithuania and Spain have launched programmes to train additional Spanish teachers and expand learning opportunities.

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the share of pupils studying Russian as a second foreign language has fallen sharply: in Vilnius city schools the number dropped from 14,834 to 7,062 in two school years, and more than 100 schools nationwide no longer offer Russian at all.<sup>483</sup> At the same time, demand for German has reached record levels in both schools and the labor market, as Germany has become Lithuania’s largest foreign investor and businesses increasingly seek employees with strong German-language skills.<sup>484</sup>

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATRES AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 6.5/7

Western audiovisual products clearly dominate Lithuania’s media landscape. In cinema, U.S. films account for roughly two-thirds of all admissions, with non-domestic European films adding about 12 per cent and Lithuanian productions just over 20 per cent, leaving only a marginal share for films from non-Western countries.<sup>485</sup> Since 2022 the Seimas has repeatedly prolonged a ban on the retransmission of Russian and Belarusian TV and radio channels, so the most-watched television channels are either Lithuanian public and commercial broadcasters or pan-Baltic and European networks, while Russian channels survive only on the margins via satellite or illicit online viewing.

A 2025 study<sup>486</sup> shows that Lithuanians now consume an average of 4.5 different video channels or platforms, 1.3 of which are paid. More than 80

per cent of respondents report watching traditional Lithuanian TV channels and 78 per cent watch YouTube; smaller but still significant shares have watched Go3 (36 per cent), Netflix (27 per cent), TikTok (26 per cent) and news portals’ video content (21 per cent) over the previous 12 months. Almost every household subscribes to at least one paid video service, with Go3 and Netflix together reaching about 1 million viewers.<sup>487</sup> These figures confirm that domestic viewing is increasingly embedded in a Western-dominated streaming ecosystem rather than in any post-Soviet or Russian one.

Daily use of Western social media platforms further underlines this Western orientation. Around three-quarters of the population use Facebook at least once a day, with substantial and rising daily

audiences for YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, while no Russian platforms appear among the leading networks.<sup>488</sup> Combined with the absence of government blocking of Western platforms, this

pattern justifies assigning Lithuania a high score on the index measuring the share of Western TV, film, internet sites and social media.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 10/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 5/5

Recent data from the State Data Agency show that Lithuanians made 2.27 million trips abroad in 2024, about 100,000 more than in 2023 and equivalent to roughly 0.8 foreign trips per resident; the main destinations were Turkey, Latvia, Poland, the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway, all in the EU/NATO or wider Western space.<sup>489</sup> Statistics

on tour-operator trips confirm that most overnight package holidays go to Mediterranean EU or NATO partners such as Turkey, Greece and Egypt.<sup>490</sup> Taken together, these figures indicate a high proportion of the population travelling to Western countries for vacation, business and education.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 3/3

Across all three sub-dimensions of this indicator – fast food, supermarkets and clothing – Lithuania clearly falls into the “high” category: Western (mainly EU and U.S.) franchise companies are deeply embedded in everyday consumption and shape the look and feel of Lithuanian urban life.

In quick-service restaurants, Lithuania hosts a dense network of Western brands. The Finnish chain Hesburger operates around 64 outlets in Lithuania, giving the country the second-largest number of Hesburger restaurants after Finland and cementing the chain’s status as the leading hamburger brand in the Baltic region.<sup>491</sup> U.S. giants – McDonald’s, KFC, Subway and Domino’s Pizza – are present in major cities and shopping centres and together dominate the international fast-food segment. Overall, the pattern is one of strong Westernization of eating-out habits, with a slightly greater weight of European than American brands.

In food retail, Western European supermarket groups hold a dominant position alongside the Lithuanian-founded market leader Maxima. IKI (owned by Germany’s REWE Group) runs more than 230 supermarkets and is the second-largest chain in the country by store count. Lidl, part of Germany’s Schwarz Gruppe, has over 70 stores

and has very quickly climbed into the top tier by revenue, reflecting the rapid spread of the German discount model. Rimi – until recently owned by Sweden’s ICA Gruppen and now being sold to Denmark’s Salling Group – operates around 90 supermarkets in Lithuania, while Norwegian-owned Narvesen adds a dense layer of Western convenience kiosks. Taken together, this means that a large share of Lithuanian grocery spending flows through EU-based retail groups, underlining a high level of structural economic Westernization in everyday shopping.

The clothing and broader lifestyle segment is even more clearly Western-dominated. All major Lithuanian malls are anchored by Inditex brands such as Zara, Bershka, Pull&Bear, Stradivarius and Massimo Dutti, as well as by H&M. Scandinavian fashion brand Lindex is well represented, while Polish discounter Pepco has built a nationwide network of low-cost clothing and household-goods stores, playing a similar role to Primark in Western Europe. In footwear and sportswear, customers have easy access to the full range of global U.S. and EU brands – Nike, Adidas, Puma and others – via chains such as Deichmann and Sports Direct, both of which operate multiple outlets in Lithuanian cities.

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

According to the Communications Regulatory Authority (RRT), by late 2024 5G networks already covered around 99.7% of households and over 94% of the country's territory – among the best results in the EU. In Q2 2025, 73.2% of mobile internet users relied on LTE (4G) and 19.8% on 5G, and the number of 5G users had doubled compared to the previous year, with 5G carrying about 22% of all mobile data traffic and the average user

consuming 42.6 GB of data per month – roughly a quarter more than a year earlier.<sup>492</sup> DataReportal's 2025 and 2026 reports show that the number of mobile connections in Lithuania was equivalent to 137% of the population in early 2025 and still 127% in late 2025, while median mobile download speeds climbed to 123.3 Mbps, up 37.5% year-on-year, signaling deep digital integration into Western consumer patterns.<sup>493</sup>

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
19/25	16/25	21/25	8/15	8/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 19/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 9/10

The 2024 presidential elections and 2025 parliamentary elections in Moldova were competitive and successfully organized by the relevant authorities. According to the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission final report,<sup>494</sup> the presidential elections provided “a choice between genuine political alternatives” and the contestants campaigned in a free electoral environment. National observers, such as the Promo-LEX Association, highlighted that for the parliamentary scrutiny “election administration functioned with general transparency, and election day was well organized overall”.<sup>495</sup>

Despite visible progress related to the functioning

of the electoral democracy, in the last years the political environment was heavily affected by the wide Russian electoral interference and disinformation campaigns. In 2024 alone, it is estimated that Russia has invested more than 200 million euros or almost 1% of Moldova’s gross domestic product in vote buying schemes, illegal financing of political structures and disinformation activities on social media.<sup>496</sup> As such, while political freedom is built on a solid legislative and institutional framework, the challenges related to external influence over the electoral spectrum still persist and need to be confronted accordingly by governmental authorities.

### 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 6/8

The new structure of the legislative body after the parliamentary elections held on 28th of September 2025 includes a pro-European parliamentary majority formed by the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) with 55 mandates out of 101. Following the validation of the elections by the Constitutional Court, PAS invested in a new government on 31st of October.<sup>497</sup> Their main electoral thesis focused on finalization of Moldova’s EU accession negotiations by the end of 2028.

Beside PAS, other self-entitled pro-Western parliamentary factions are Alternativa, with 8 representatives, Our Party and Democracy at Home, each with 6 members. All these three

structures have announced their support for Moldova’s EU accession, but have not campaigned actively in support of the constitutional referendum for European integration. Their close links with Russian proxies and willingness to engage with Russia in terms of energy or trade, raise serious concerns about their integrity and actual intentions. Therefore, about 75% of Parliament members are backing the EU accession process, with limited engagement from the smallest parties on this dimension. As such, the vast majority of the pro-European electorate in Moldova remains attached to PAS, since no other credible and popular political alternatives have arisen in the last years.

### 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 4/7

One of the most credible opinion polls in Moldova is the Public Opinion Barometer, published yearly by the Institute for Public Policies (IPP).<sup>498</sup> According to the latest opinion poll, published in September 2025, if a referendum on Moldova's accession to the European Union were to be held next Sunday, 52,7% of the respondents would vote for accession.<sup>499</sup> However, only 23,3% are backing NATO accession, given the wide disinformation campaigns led by Russia against NATO and lack of relevant political parties that are promoting stronger engagement with NATO.<sup>500</sup>

When it comes to the attitudes towards Western countries and Ukraine, every second respondent has a positive attitude towards Romania, 54% towards EU, 35% towards Ukraine and 27% towards NATO.<sup>501</sup> Neutral attitudes are predominant for the last two, signaling the lack of critical thinking and propaganda about Ukraine and NATO, but also the societal division between West and East. On the other hand, Russia is perceived in a positive manner by 38% of the respondents, while 57% have a neutral or negative attitude towards Moscow.<sup>502</sup>

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 16/25

### 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 3/5

Since 2022, Moldova has made progress with regard to the compliance to the Venice Commission requirements. In this regard, a few significant laws refer to the voting of a new Electoral Code in December 2022,<sup>503</sup> development of the legislation for the vetting of judges and prosecutors in 2023, but also integrity and accountability of the judiciary, anticorruption and intelligence bodies. The most important pieces of legislation have been consulted with the Venice Commission and have benefited from improvements following the opinion of the Venice Commission experts.

Furthermore, the compliance to the Venice Commission standards is under careful scrutiny from the European Commission. Following the EU's recognition of Moldova as a candidate country in June 2022, it set out nine measures to be implemented to facilitate the country's advancement to the next stage of EU accession. One of the measures referred to the implementation of OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission's recommendations.<sup>504</sup> With the advancement of the EU accession negotiations, Moldova's constitutional compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission will further increase.

### 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 4/7

According to the country report of the European Commission for Moldova, published in November 2025 as part of the enlargement package, Moldova has some level of preparation in the area of judiciary.<sup>505</sup> The report points out the ongoing implementation of the vetting reform, aimed at evaluating the integrity and ethics of the judges and prosecutors. Started in 2022, this reform should be finalised by the end of 2026, according to the activity program of the current government.<sup>506</sup> Until now, the reform has generated visible results in terms of appointment of new members at the regulatory

bodies of the Supreme Council of Magistracy and Supreme Council of Prosecutors, as well as a new composition of the Supreme Court of Justice. The evaluation of judges and prosecutors is still ongoing and the implementation of the reform needs to be assessed based on the independence and integrity of those who will pass the vetting process.

While Moldova has made significant steps towards improving the independence of the courts and their depoliticization, the justice system is still affected by corruption scandals and toxic connections between fugitive oligarchs, on the one side, and judges

and prosecutors, on the other. The investigation of the high-level corruption cases is advancing slowly, raising concerns about the professionalism and ethics of the relevant justice institutions.

### 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 5/7

Human rights legislation in the Republic of Moldova has evolved steadily over the past decade, driven largely by the country's commitments under the Association Agreement with the European Union and its participation in Council of Europe mechanisms. The Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, and Moldova is party to major international instruments such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN human rights treaties.

Areas such as the protection of detainees' rights, independence of the judiciary, freedom of expression, and non-discrimination, particularly regarding vulnerable groups like ethnic minorities,

Nonetheless, the political will to advance the justice reform shown by the leadership of the country provides the ground for sustained progress in the coming years.

persons with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, remain under scrutiny from international monitoring bodies. During 2024, the People's Advocate Office received a total of 1,001 petitions, of which 76 petitions were registered by the PAO Representatives in Balti, Cahul, Comrat and Varnița. Of these, 832 petitions (approximately 83%) were addressed to the People's Advocate, while 169 (around 17%) were directed to the People's Advocate for Children's Rights.<sup>507</sup> At the same time, recent reforms connected to EU accession negotiations have accelerated legislative alignment, including new measures on transparency, anti-corruption, and strengthening procedural rights.

### 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 4/6

According to recent data from the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Moldova, acquittals constituted only about 1.93% of all criminal cases or roughly 19 acquittals per 1,000 cases, indicating that the vast majority of trials result in conviction rather than acquittal.<sup>508</sup> This low acquittal rate is consistent with historical analyses of judicial practice in Moldova suggesting conviction-oriented adjudication and limited use of acquittal even

where evidence might be insufficient.

In terms of appellate review, trends suggest some volatility in how acquittals are treated at higher court levels. Acquittals remain infrequent, and when they do occur, they may be vulnerable to reversal, reflecting pressures within the judiciary to align with prosecutorial outcomes. These patterns have implications for perceptions of fairness and the right to a fair trial in Moldova.

## 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 21/25

### 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 7/7

Signed in 2014, Moldova–EU Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) established the baseline for increased economic cooperation between the two sides. Under the DCFTA, most tariffs on goods traded between Moldova and the EU have been eliminated and barriers to trade in services reduced,

creating preferential access that goes beyond typical free trade arrangements. It also obliges Moldova to gradually align its trade-related legislation, such as customs policy, product standards and regulatory frameworks with EU standards.

Moldova became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2001. Throughout the last 24

years, Chisinau has reached a high rate of trade liberalization, with 147 liberalized sectors out of 155.<sup>509</sup> In 2016, Moldova has become the 84th country out of 155 which ratified the Trade

Facilitation Agreement.<sup>510</sup> Overall, WTO participation has contributed to Moldova's integration into global value chains and has complemented its deeper trade ties with the EU through the DCFTA.

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 4/6

Based on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings, Moldova has generally performed relatively well in comparison to regional peers, with a ranking around 48th out of 190 economies, reflecting progress such as streamlined business registration processes, expanded e-government services, and reforms in tax and social contribution systems that have reduced time and cost burdens for entrepreneurs.<sup>511</sup>

External assessments underscore that while legal reforms and digitization efforts are underway, weak

institutional capacity and slow implementation of anti-corruption measures remain key impediments to fully transparent and predictable business operations. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Moldova scored about 43 points, ranking 78th globally, 37 positions higher compared to 2020.<sup>512</sup> This suggests that, in the last few years, fewer business leaders have viewed corruption as a blocking issue, though it remains a factor that can distort competition and regulatory enforcement.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 5/6

The EU is by far the main commercial partner of Moldova. In 2024, Moldovan exports to the EU accounted for about 65.6% of all exports, showing a strong export orientation toward the European market.<sup>513</sup> Moldova's exports to the EU amounted to 2.4 billion euros in 2024, while imports from the EU reached the level of 5.1 billion euros.<sup>514</sup> Both the exports and the imports are mainly focused on industrial goods, such as machinery, chemical and mineral products and transport equipment. Agricultural products have a low share in the sales of

goods to the EU market.

The reorientation of trade logistics following disruptions related to the war in Ukraine has accelerated Moldova's pivot toward EU markets, even in regions such as Transnistria, where in 2024 over 80% of exports were directed to EU countries.<sup>515</sup> Despite strong export performance toward the EU, Moldova continues to run a significant trade deficit, partly because imports from the EU remain high. Preliminary data indicate Moldova's trade deficit reached around 5.51 billion U.S. dollars in 2024.<sup>516</sup>

### 3.4 WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 5/6

EU member states have an extensive share of foreign direct investments in the Moldovan economy, estimated to 85%. According to the Investments Agency, by the end of September

2025, the total stock of foreign direct investments reached 6.2 billion U.S. dollars, indicating an increase of 14.4% compared to the end of 2024 or 786,5 million US dollars in one year.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 8/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 2/2

After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Moldova officially returned to the Latin alphabet, reflecting both a cultural reorientation towards Romania and Europe and a reclaiming of

national identity. Today, the Romanian language Latin script is used in all official documents, schools and universities, media and literature, making it a pivotal element of the national identity.

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 2/6

Proficiency in Western languages in the Republic of Moldova remains noticeably lower than proficiency in Romanian/Moldovan and Russian, according to data linked to the 2024 national census.<sup>517</sup> While the census primarily focuses on mother tongue and usually spoken language, official data indicates that the majority of the population (around 87%) report knowledge of Romanian/Moldovan as a language they know and about 68% report knowledge

of Russian, a second spoken language in the country. In contrast, opinion polls show that only about 13.4% of the population reported knowing English, which is the most widely taught Western language, with significantly smaller shares likely proficient in other Western languages such as French, German, or Spanish. These figures suggest that Western languages are known by a relatively modest proportion of the population compared with Romanian and Russian languages.

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 4/7

The landscape of internet use and social media in Moldova shows a strong orientation toward Western platforms and global networks. As of early 2025, there were an estimated 1.88 million active social media user identities — roughly 63% of the total population — using social media platforms. Social networks such as Facebook and Instagram are among the most widely used platforms. Facebook in particular reached approximately 50% of the total population and about 62.6% of local internet users, while Instagram's reach was around 40% of the total population and roughly 50% of internet users by late 2025 data.<sup>518</sup>

Meanwhile, broadcast television still reflects a mix of influences. A recent media market analysis reported that about two-thirds (67%) of TV channels retransmitted in Moldova broadcast entirely or partially in Russian, with a smaller share of 21% coming from Romania and even fewer channels directly from Western countries such as the United States or the United Kingdom.<sup>519</sup> This suggests that, while Western entertainment products (e.g., Hollywood films and Western series on cable and streaming) are highly visible in theaters and accessible via various TV platforms, overall TV broadcasting remains linguistically and culturally diverse, with significant Russian content.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 8/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 4/5

Since the visa-free travel regime between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union (Schengen Area) came into force on 28 April 2014, millions of Moldovan citizens have taken advantage of it to visit Western Europe. Over the past decade, more than 2.1 million or about 70% of the Moldovan citizens traveled to EU countries without needing a visa, making a total of approximately 31.2 million trips, which averages out to more than

15 trips per individual traveler over 10 years.<sup>520</sup>

These figures reflect wide utilization of the visa-free regime, which allows short-term stays of up to 90 days in most EU and Schengen states with just a biometric passport.<sup>521</sup> The widespread use of the visa-free regime has facilitated tourism, family visits, education, work opportunities, and cultural exchange across Europe.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

The presence of Western franchise companies is noticeable but still relatively limited compared to larger European markets. For example, German-owned Metro Cash & Carry and Kaufland are present, with Kaufland operating around 9 stores countrywide as of 2025, contributing to a retail sector where the top 10 chains account for 940 outlets overall.<sup>522</sup>

In the fast-food and hospitality sectors, Western franchise brands have a more visible but modest footprint, concentrated mainly in the capital,

Chişinău. The KFC brand, operated under a master franchise by Sphera Franchise Group, runs three restaurants in Moldova, all in Chişinău, showing slow but steady expansion in Western quick service presence. Other globally recognized franchises such as McDonald's are reported historically to have had some presence, but their network in Moldova is very limited compared with neighbors and many international food franchises seen in larger markets are absent or represented by a very small number of outlets.<sup>523</sup>

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

Mobile internet coverage in the Republic of Moldova is extensive and increasingly growing, reflecting strong technological adoption across the country. According to the latest statistics, in 2024, there were approximately 4.24 million active mobile connections in Moldova, equal to about 125 % of the total population, indicating that many people use more than one SIM or device.<sup>524</sup> Roughly 93% of connections were on broadband networks (3G/4G/5G), proving that high-speed mobile internet is widely available.<sup>525</sup>

Smartphone usage is also key to this mobile internet ecosystem. Data from governmental authorities show that the vast majority of mobile internet access is through smartphones, with 96.8% of SIM cards used for mobile internet belonging to smartphone users.<sup>526</sup> In practical terms, this means that nearly all mobile broadband users in Moldova rely on smartphones to go online, making mobile devices the dominant gateway to the internet for social media, streaming, e-commerce, messaging, and other digital activities.

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
5/25	4/25	8/25	8/15	5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 5/25

### 1.1 DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 1/10

Tajikistan’s political freedom in 2025 remains among the most restricted in the post-Soviet space, reflecting the consolidation of a personalist authoritarian regime under president Emomali Rahmon. The country’s constitution guarantees civil and political rights, but these guarantees are largely nominal. Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2025 report again rates Tajikistan as “not free”, assigning it an overall score of 5/100 (0/40 for political rights and 5/60 for civil liberties), placing the country among the “worst of the worst” regimes globally in terms of political rights and civil liberties. This indicates the absence of genuine pluralism, competitive elections, or opposition participation.<sup>527</sup> The electoral framework is tightly controlled by the state, with the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda functioning under the direct influence of the executive branch. Elections serve primarily as legitimizing exercises for the ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan rather than as mechanisms of democratic accountability.

The judiciary and security apparatus systematically suppress dissent, while restrictive laws on assembly, religion, and media eliminate the preconditions for political competition.

This entrenched lack of political freedom has a chilling effect on civic participation and international engagement. Civil society organizations operate under constant scrutiny, with most forced to register under restrictive laws or risk closure. The absence of an independent press and the widespread surveillance of social media further limit the space for public debate. International observers, including the OSCE and the European Union, continue to note that Tajikistan has yet to implement meaningful electoral reforms aligned with Venice Commission recommendations. Consequently, the country’s absence of progress in Freedom has become a principal obstacle to its political Westernization and to the expansion of partnerships with the EU under frameworks such as the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA).<sup>528</sup>

### 1.2 PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT 1/8

Tajikistan’s parliament — the Majlisi Oli — is dominated entirely by pro-presidential forces, leaving no room for pro-Western or reform-oriented political parties. The ruling People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) holds the vast majority of seats, while the remaining positions are occupied by minor satellite parties such as the Agrarian Party and the Party of Economic Reforms, which operate within a narrow ideological spectrum supportive

of the government’s policies. Independent political parties with Western-leaning platforms, such as the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT), face systemic harassment, registration barriers, and occasional arrests of their members.<sup>529</sup> The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) — formerly the main opposition party — remains banned since 2015, its leaders imprisoned or exiled, effectively erasing pluralism from the political landscape.

Right now (after the 2025 parliamentary elections) there are five political parties represented in Tajikistan's lower house of parliament (Majlisi namoyandagon, 63 seats): People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) (49 out of 63); Agrarian Party of Tajikistan (7 out of 63); Party of Economic Reforms of Tajikistan (5 out of 63); Socialist Party of Tajikistan (1 out of 63); Democratic Party of Tajikistan (1 out of 63).<sup>530</sup> All of these parties are considered pro-government; there is no genuine opposition party in the current parliament (the Islamic Renaissance Party remains banned, and the Social Democratic Party again did not win seats).

The absence of pro-Western political actors reflects not only state repression but also the lack

of structural incentives for Western alignment in Tajik politics. As the StrategEast Westernization Report 2024 observes, "Tajikistan's political elite has aligned its legitimacy more closely with security and stability than with democratic reform".<sup>531</sup> This orientation prioritizes regime preservation over integration with Western democratic institutions. Parliamentary debates rarely address issues such as human rights, rule of law, or European partnership; instead, political discourse remains focused on national unity, traditional values, and security. Without the legalization of genuine opposition and the institutional protection of political pluralism, the emergence of pro-Western political movements in Tajikistan remains unlikely in the near future.

### 1.3 PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 3/7

Tajikistan's political environment has grown increasingly restrictive in recent years. Previously mentioned reports by Freedom House<sup>532</sup> and Amnesty International<sup>533</sup> document continued constraints on media, so reliable public opinion polling is limited.

On one hand, deeply ingrained traditional norms and the influence of conservative religious and media narratives contribute to ambivalence toward Western liberalism, secularism, and gender equality. Russian-language media — still the dominant information source for most citizens — often reinforces anti-Western sentiment<sup>534</sup> by portraying the West as morally decadent or hostile to traditional family values.

On the other hand, Tajikistan officially declares its commitment to cooperation with EU countries. For instance, EU is becoming involved in labor and economic collaboration, focusing on programs

designed to create jobs for Tajik labor immigrants,<sup>535</sup> that can create better image of Europe. The duality produces "aspirational Westernization without ideological alignment".<sup>536</sup> While Tajik citizens may aspire to Western standards of living and governance, they do not necessarily endorse Western political models or cultural norms. Public discourse on democracy and human rights is often shaped by state-controlled narratives emphasizing stability and sovereignty over liberal freedoms. Nonetheless, increased digital connectivity and exposure to Western education programs, particularly through EU-funded initiatives such as Erasmus+ and Central Asia Education Platform, are gradually broadening perspectives among younger generations. These emerging social trends, if sustained, could become a long-term catalyst for deeper societal Westernization in Tajikistan.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 4/25

### 2.1 CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 1/6

Tajikistan's constitutional and legislative framework diverges significantly from the democratic principles upheld by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. While the 1994 Constitution (amended in 2016) formally guarantees the separation of powers, political pluralism, and judicial independence, in practice these provisions remain largely declarative. The most recent constitutional amendments extended presidential term limits and allowed lifelong rule for President Emomali Rahmon, entrenching the concentration of power in the executive branch. According to the Venice Commission's 2016 Opinion on Tajikistan's Constitutional Amendments, the reforms undermined checks and balances by expanding presidential authority over the judiciary and parliament, while limiting the autonomy of local

governance structures.<sup>537</sup>

Subsequent assessments by the OSCE/ODIHR have reaffirmed these concerns, noting that Tajikistan's legal and institutional frameworks "fail to ensure genuine political competition or meaningful public participation in decision-making".<sup>538</sup> Despite periodic dialogues with European institutions, the government has not undertaken the substantive constitutional or legislative reforms necessary to align with Venice Commission standards on judicial independence, electoral integrity, and fundamental freedoms. This non-compliance has hindered Tajikistan's progress toward Western legal harmonization and remains a central obstacle to deeper engagement with the EU under the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) framework.<sup>539</sup>

### 2.2 INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 1/7

Judicial independence in Tajikistan remains severely compromised by executive interference and systemic corruption. The Freedom in the World 2025 report assigns the country a score of 0 out of 16 for the "Rule of Law" indicator, citing the subordination of the judiciary to the executive and the security services.<sup>540</sup> Judges are appointed and dismissed by the president, often based on loyalty rather than professional competence, which erodes public trust and institutional credibility. The U.S. Department of State's 2024 Human Rights Report

documents frequent cases of politically motivated prosecutions, coerced confessions, and a lack of due process protections, indicating a pervasive culture of judicial dependency.<sup>541</sup>

This politicization of the courts has deep economic and social consequences. Investors face an unpredictable legal environment where contracts and property rights lack protection, while citizens encounter limited recourse against abuses of power.

### 2.3 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 1/6

On paper, Tajikistan has ratified most of the international conventions required for the EU's GSP+ trade status, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture. However, the implementation of these commitments remains superficial and inconsistent. The European External Action Service (EEAS) noted in its 2023 joint statement

that Tajikistan must "refine its human rights and fundamental freedoms agenda" and strengthen national mechanisms to ensure compliance with UN and OSCE recommendations.<sup>542</sup> Domestic legislation, such as the Law on Public Associations (2022) and the Law on Countering Extremism, continues to be applied selectively to restrict the activities of NGOs, journalists, and political activists.

Human rights organizations report a pattern of arbitrary detentions, restrictions on religious practices, and intimidation of human rights defenders. The OSCE/ODIHR and Amnesty International<sup>543</sup> have raised repeated concerns about the use of vague legal definitions of “extremism” and “foreign influence” to suppress dissent.

## 2.4 NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 1/6

The near-total absence of acquittals in Tajikistan’s criminal justice system starkly illustrates the lack of judicial independence and due process. According to data compiled by the U.S. Department of State and local legal observers, the acquittal rate in Tajik courts is consistently below 1%, one of the lowest in the world.<sup>544</sup> This statistic reflects systemic judicial bias in favor of the prosecution and the absence of procedural safeguards for defendants. Trials often rely heavily on confessions obtained under duress,

Despite the establishment of an Ombudsman’s Office, it lacks independence and resources to operate effectively. Until Tajikistan enacts genuine legislative safeguards — such as explicit protections for freedom of expression, association, and religion — its human rights framework will remain largely symbolic and far from European legal standards.

and defense lawyers face intimidation and limited access to case materials. The Freedom House 2025 assessment describes this phenomenon as “a justice system designed for conviction, not adjudication”.<sup>545</sup>

The negligible number of acquittals also has chilling implications for human rights. It reinforces impunity for law enforcement agencies and undermines public confidence in the fairness of the courts.

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 8/25

## 3.1 EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 2/7

Tajikistan has been a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) since March 2013, marking a key milestone in its gradual integration into the global trading system. However, despite this formal accession, its practical compliance with WTO norms remains uneven. The WTO Trade Policy Review (2024) highlights that Tajikistan has made only limited progress in aligning its customs regulations, intellectual property laws, and standards regimes with international best practices. Non-tariff barriers, bureaucratic procedures, and weak institutional capacity continue to constrain the benefits of WTO membership. These shortcomings are compounded by the country’s limited export diversification — dominated by raw materials and labor-intensive goods such as aluminum, cotton, and hydropower

— which leaves it highly vulnerable to external shocks.<sup>546</sup>

In its relations with the European Union, Tajikistan remains a beneficiary of the Standard GSP scheme but aspires to graduate to the enhanced GSP+ status.<sup>547</sup> However, accession to GSP+ is conditional on the effective implementation of 27 international conventions covering human rights, labor rights, and environmental protection. As the European External Action Service (EEAS, 2023) emphasized, Tajikistan’s limited progress in governance and rule of law continues to delay this process.<sup>548</sup> Strengthening legal compliance and administrative transparency will therefore be critical to realizing the full economic potential of its multilateral and European partnerships.

## 3.2 EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 2/6

The business environment in Tajikistan remains challenging, characterized by pervasive corruption, weak regulatory enforcement, and limited access to finance. Although the World Bank's 2025 Economic Update notes an 8.2% GDP growth rate, it also warns that such expansion "does not reflect structural improvements in competitiveness or the business climate".<sup>549</sup> Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face excessive licensing requirements, unpredictable taxation, and discretionary inspections by state agencies. These practices, combined with opaque public procurement and the dominance of politically connected conglomerates, deter both domestic entrepreneurship and foreign investors. According to the World Bank Enterprise Survey (2024), over 60% of firms identify corruption

as the single greatest obstacle to doing business in Tajikistan.<sup>550</sup>

Institutional reform efforts — such as the National Development Strategy 2030 — have promised to simplify business registration and modernize customs procedures. Yet implementation has been inconsistent. Digitalization of public services and e-governance initiatives remain underdeveloped; only 56.8% of the population has reliable internet access.<sup>551</sup> The lack of judicial independence and effective contract enforcement continues to undermine investor confidence. Meaningful improvement will require not only technical modernization but also a clear political commitment to transparency, fair competition, and anti-corruption enforcement.

## 3.3 WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 2/6

Tajikistan's trade composition reflects its geographic and geopolitical orientation, with limited penetration of Western markets compared to regional neighbors. In 2023, total trade turnover with the European Union amounted to approximately USD 401.5 million,<sup>552</sup> representing less than 10% of the country's foreign trade, while trade with Russia exceeded USD 1.5 billion.<sup>553</sup> The bulk of exports to the EU consists of raw aluminum, cotton, and small quantities of textile goods, whereas imports from the EU largely comprise machinery, pharmaceuticals, and food products.<sup>554</sup> By contrast, the majority of consumer goods and intermediate inputs sold in Tajikistan originate from Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran. This asymmetric trade structure reflects both logistical barriers and a lack of competitive domestic industries aligned with European standards. The

limited Western share in domestic sales is also linked to weak distribution networks and the absence of modern retail infrastructure. Western brands and franchises are scarce, with most urban markets dominated by Chinese, Russian, and Turkish products. Efforts to increase exports to Western markets have been constrained by poor quality control, limited certification capacity, and outdated production technologies. However, there are emerging opportunities in niche sectors — such as organic agriculture, textiles, and renewable-energy components — where EU demand and sustainability standards could align with Tajikistan's natural advantages. To capitalize on these opportunities, the government must invest in logistics, trade facilitation, and standardization agencies capable of meeting Western market requirements.

## 3.4 WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 2/6

Western foreign direct investment (FDI) in Tajikistan remains marginal, overshadowed by the dominant roles of China and Russia. According to the World Bank data, the majority of external

financing flows into large-scale infrastructure and energy projects funded through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with Western capital accounting for less than 5% of total FDI inflows between 2019

and 2024.<sup>555</sup> Most Western investors have been deterred by the country's small domestic market, weak rule of law, and high perceived corruption risk. Existing Western investments are concentrated in the telecommunications, financial services, and light-manufacturing sectors, often through joint ventures with international development institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

The government has sought to attract Western capital by emphasizing hydropower potential, renewable energy development, and tourism. Projects such as the Rogun Hydropower Plant, supported by the World Bank and Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), demonstrate a growing — if cautious — interest from international financiers.<sup>556</sup> However, these investments remain driven by multilateral rather than private capital. The absence of reliable legal protections and the lack of investor-state dispute mechanisms aligned with Western standards continue to limit private-sector engagement. Establishing a stable regulatory framework, improving corporate transparency, and negotiating bilateral investment treaties with EU member states could significantly enhance Tajikistan's attractiveness to Western investors and reduce its over-dependence on non-Western sources of capital.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 8/15

### 4.1 USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 1/2

The Tajik language, written in the Cyrillic alphabet since the Soviet reforms of 1940, remains one of the most visible markers of the country's cultural and geopolitical orientation. Despite sporadic discussions about reintroducing the Latin alphabet, particularly in academic and diaspora circles, there has been no official policy shift toward Latinization.<sup>557</sup> Unlike Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan — which have adopted Latin script as a symbol of post-Soviet national modernization — Tajikistan has maintained Cyrillic due to its continued cultural and economic interdependence with Russia.

However, informal Latin usage is gradually increasing among younger Tajiks, especially in digital communication and social media.

The spread of smartphones, online education platforms, and Western entertainment content has familiarized youth with Latin script as part of global digital literacy. English-language signage, Latin transliteration in text messages, and hybrid forms of online writing are increasingly common in urban areas such as Dushanbe and Khujand. While these trends are far from official reform, they represent a subtle cultural Westernization through digital media exposure rather than state-driven language policy. The ongoing prevalence of Cyrillic, however, continues to limit linguistic integration with Western academic and technological systems, keeping Tajikistan closely tied to the post-Soviet information space.

### 4.2 PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 3/6

Foreign language proficiency in Tajikistan remains limited, though it is growing steadily, particularly in English. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2024),<sup>558</sup> Tajikistan ranks among the lowest globally, with an estimated 6–8% of the adult population possessing basic English proficiency.

Nonetheless, demand for English education has expanded rapidly, driven by youth aspirations for higher education abroad, migration opportunities, and global digital connectivity. English has become the dominant foreign language in schools and universities, while French, German, and Spanish

remain confined to a handful of a few institutions and cultural centers supported by foreign embassies (e.g., Alliance Française Dushanbe and Goethe-Institut Almaty).

In particular, in 2025 the French Embassy in Tajikistan, in collaboration with the Swiss Cooperation Office, organized Francophonie Days in Tajikistan, during which French films were shown, as well as a performance of French musicians.<sup>559</sup>

However, rural-urban disparities remain stark, with most English speakers concentrated in Dushanbe. Limited teacher training and insufficient access to modern materials hinder broader language adoption. Expanding Western language education — particularly English — is therefore both a social and economic imperative for Tajikistan’s integration into global academic, business, and digital networks.

### 4.3 SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION’S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 4/7

Tajikistan’s cultural consumption patterns reveal a cautious openness to Western media, constrained by state regulation and the dominance of Russian and regional entertainment content. Domestic television remains heavily state-controlled, with limited airtime devoted to Western films, documentaries, or cultural programs. The majority of imported audiovisual material originates from Russia and Turkey, reflecting linguistic accessibility and cultural familiarity. Western films — primarily Hollywood productions — constitute less than 15% of total screenings in Tajik cinemas, according to local distributors. Censorship regulations, as well as limited dubbing and distribution capacity, further reduce Western media penetration.

In contrast, digital platforms provide a more dynamic space for Western cultural engagement.

According to Datareportal’s Digital 2025: Tajikistan report, over 56.8% of the population has internet access, with Facebook and Instagram ranking among the most visited Western platforms.<sup>560</sup> Western social media networks serve as crucial channels for youth exposure to global trends, education, and entertainment. However, the state frequently restricts access to these platforms during politically sensitive periods, reflecting ongoing control over the digital sphere. As Freedom House (2025) observes, “internet freedom in Tajikistan remains severely constrained by arbitrary censorship and surveillance”.<sup>561</sup> Despite these challenges, the growing online consumption of Western content signals a slow but steady cultural westernization driven from below — by users, not institutions.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 5/10

### 5.1 PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 1/5

International travel remains a privilege for only a small segment of Tajik society, reflecting economic constraints, visa barriers, and limited air connectivity. According to the World Bank and UNWTO data, fewer than 3% of Tajik citizens have ever traveled to Western countries, with most outbound mobility directed toward Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkey for labor migration rather than tourism or education.<sup>562 563</sup> High visa fees,

lengthy application procedures for the Schengen area, and limited direct flights from Dushanbe to European destinations further restrict access. Students, diplomats, and NGO representatives constitute the bulk of travelers to Western Europe and North America. Their exposure to Western institutions — universities, training programs, and professional exchanges — often results in the

transfer of modern managerial practices and civic norms back to Tajikistan, albeit within small circles.

Government initiatives such as scholarships under EU Erasmus+ and bilateral education programs have modestly increased the number of Tajik citizens studying in Europe and the United States.

For instance, as for 2024, some 25 universities in Tajikistan actively participated in Erasmus+ projects, fostering international partnerships with universities from eight countries.<sup>564</sup> This educational mobility plays a disproportionately influential role in the diffusion of Western values, languages, and lifestyles, even if the overall numbers remain limited.

## 5.2 PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2/3

The commercial footprint of Western franchises in Tajikistan remains modest, dominated by a handful of fast-food, retail, and hospitality brands concentrated in the capital. International chains such as KFC and Hilton have established a presence in Dushanbe, while others — Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestlé, and Procter & Gamble<sup>565</sup> — operate through local distributors rather than direct franchises. The small domestic market, weak purchasing power, and complex licensing requirements deter further Western investment in the consumer sector.

Nevertheless, urban youth culture increasingly

mirrors global consumer trends through imported goods, fashion, and digital retail platforms. The proliferation of e-commerce and social media marketing has allowed Tajik consumers to access Western brands online, bypassing traditional retail barriers. Locally owned cafés, gyms, and coworking spaces often emulate Western aesthetics, reflecting aspirational alignment with global lifestyles. Strengthening intellectual property protection and easing customs procedures could encourage greater franchise penetration, enhancing both cultural exchange and private-sector modernization.

## 5.3 MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

Tajikistan's rapid digital transformation is one of the most tangible indicators of lifestyle Westernization. As of early 2025, mobile-internet coverage reached approximately 90% of the population, and smartphone penetration surpassed 65%, according to Datareportal's Digital 2025 report.<sup>566</sup> This connectivity revolution has profoundly altered social behavior, particularly among youth and urban populations, facilitating exposure to Western news sources, entertainment, and communication platforms. Social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube — all Western in origin — serve as key venues for cultural consumption and civic discourse. Online freelancing, digital marketing, and remote work are emerging lifestyle trends that connect Tajik citizens to global labor markets and value systems.

However, persistent challenges temper this progress. Internet costs remain high relative to income, and state restrictions on content undermine

digital freedom. Freedom House (2025) continues to classify Tajikistan's internet environment as "not free," citing frequent disruptions and surveillance.<sup>567</sup> Nonetheless, the diffusion of smartphones and social media has fostered unprecedented access to Western ideas, creating a generational divide between digitally connected youth and older, state-media-dependent demographics.

The lifestyle dimension of Westernization in Tajikistan illustrates both subtle transformation and structural resistance. While political and legal barriers remain entrenched, social modernization is progressing through the diffusion of Western consumption patterns, digital connectivity, and educational exchanges. The emerging middle class and youth population are increasingly adopting global habits — healthy lifestyles, gender inclusivity, environmental awareness, and technological fluency — that align with Western social norms. Yet the scope of this transformation is limited by

low incomes, restricted mobility, and an enduring post-Soviet cultural framework.

Tajikistan's future trajectory will depend on whether these lifestyle changes evolve into institutional reforms. Expanding opportunities for travel, education, and digital entrepreneurship

could anchor a new generation more oriented toward global values. As Western cultural exposure continues to grow — primarily through digital ecosystems rather than formal politics — the seeds of a gradual, bottom-up Westernization are being planted across Tajik society.

# Turkmenistan

18/100

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
3/25	4/25	5/25	4.5/15	1.5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 3/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 0.5/10

Turkmenistan’s political system is highly centralized, with executive authority concentrated in the presidency and enforced through a controlled state bureaucracy. Legal and administrative restrictions on expression, assembly, and association significantly constrain journalists, civil society, and political freedoms. The absence of political competition and the presence of extensive surveillance limit citizens’ ability to express dissent or influence decision-making, resulting in a closed political environment where participation is largely confined to state-managed channels.

Turkmenistan’s political system is highly personalized, with power concentrated in the presidency. Under current president Serdar Berdimuhamedov, limited technocratic initiatives such as digital programs, infrastructure projects, and international engagement have sought to project an image of modernization, but these measures have remained largely cosmetic. Core political structures are unchanged, with centralized authority and strong security control continuing to restrict independent civic activity. In parallel, the current president’s father, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, continues to chair the Halk Maslahaty (People’s Council), the highest representative political body in Turkmenistan. Constitutional amendments have also granted<sup>568</sup> him the formal status of “National Leader of the Turkmen People,” providing far-reaching authority over domestic and foreign policy and, in practice, positioning him as the most influential political figure in the country.<sup>569</sup>

Freedom House characterizes Turkmenistan as a repressive authoritarian state, where political rights and civil liberties are largely absent in practice, elections are tightly managed to secure near-unanimous outcomes for the leadership, the economy remains state-dominated, corruption is systemic, religious freedoms are restricted, and political dissent is not tolerated.<sup>570</sup>

International alliance of civil society organisations CIVICUS, in collaboration with International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) and the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), reports a continued decline in rights and freedoms in Turkmenistan from June to November 2025.<sup>571</sup> Turkmen authorities continue to target politically “inconvenient” individuals, restrict freedom of expression, and tightly control internet access. State media project an image of prosperity that contrasts with ongoing socio-economic and human rights challenges, while reports indicate transnational repression of dissidents abroad. Citizens are often compelled to participate in state events under threat of sanctions.

A report by The Tor Project highlights how Turkmenistan has transformed strict internet censorship into a profit-driven enterprise.<sup>572</sup> Authorities reportedly disrupt internet access to sustain control over online information while generating demand for costly VPN and circumvention tools.

According to Reporters Without Borders’ 2025 Press Freedom Index, Turkmenistan ranks 174th

out of 180 countries, underscoring the country's extremely restrictive media environment.<sup>573</sup>

Turkmenistan's limited engagement in international dialogues, particularly with the EU, remains one of the few avenues to address human rights and political freedoms, though tangible domestic improvements are minimal. During the 17th EU–Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogue in Brussels on 17 June 2025,<sup>574</sup> discussions were

focused on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms, and gender equality. The EU acknowledged Turkmenistan's cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on forced and child labor, steps on statelessness, and planned reforms on women's, children's, and disability rights, while calling for stronger measures on anti-discrimination, domestic violence, decriminalization of same-sex relations, detention conditions, media freedom, and civil society space.

## 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN PARLIAMENT 1/8

The Halk Maslahaty (People's Council), established in January 2023, serves as Turkmenistan's highest legislative body, responsible for adopting the constitution, approving amendments, guiding domestic and foreign policy, and reviewing the President's annual addresses.

Although nominally a multi-party system, political pluralism remains largely symbolic, as officially registered parties operate within boundaries set by the ruling establishment. This configuration limits competitive politics and constrains the development of independent institutional checks on executive power.

For much of its post-independence history, Turkmenistan was dominated by a single political party: the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT). Established in 1991 as the successor to the

Communist Party of Turkmenistan, the DPT long functioned as the sole legal party, consolidating political power and supporting the policies of the presidential administration.

Since 2012, Turkmenistan has formally initiated the development of a multi-party system. Two new parties have been registered alongside the DPT. The Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan was created to represent business interests and promote private sector development, ranking second in prominence after the DPT. The Agrarian Party of Turkmenistan was established to advocate for agricultural workers and contribute to the development of the country's agricultural sector.

Despite the participation of these parties in political life, in practice, the DPT continues to dominate the political landscape.

## 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 1.5/7

No publicly available independent surveys exist for 2025, limiting direct measurement of Westernization. Available evidence indicates little adoption of Western values. Official discourse emphasizes neutrality, cultural self-reliance, and limited engagement with the outside world, keeping norms such as political openness, civic participation, and pluralism distant. Independent or dissenting ideas are tightly constrained, yet the younger generation shows growing curiosity and exposure to alternative perspectives.

A key factor sustaining authoritarian stability is the

regime's ability to enforce ideological dominance and exercise control over cultural life. By shaping collective narratives, directing educational content, regulating cultural institutions, and suppressing competing identities or beliefs, the state limits the emergence of alternative viewpoints capable of mobilizing opposition.

However, despite the regime's closed nature, the fact that closer ties with the West have been established in recent years, as well as the neutral tone towards the EU and the US<sup>575</sup>, allow for a rating of 1.5.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 4/25

### 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 1/6

Turkmenistan's political framework is formally defined by its 1992 Constitution, which establishes the country as a sovereign, democratic, secular state based on republican principles. In practice, however, these democratic provisions have been largely subordinated to authoritarian control, with constitutional structures and legal norms shaped to consolidate executive power rather than ensure genuine political pluralism or citizen participation.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of OSCE in 2023 mentioned that the political landscape continues to lack genuine

pluralism and all parties contesting the election supported the President<sup>576</sup>. According to the report, recent constitutional reforms, reduced the already marginal role of the legislature<sup>577</sup>. The President also appoints members of the Central Election Commission and judges, even formally undermining institutional independence.

Overall, Turkmenistan's constitutional framework and practice demonstrate minimal substantive compliance with the requirements of the Venice Commission.

### 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 1/7

The State Concept for the Development of the Judicial System (2022-2028) seeks to enhance the legislative framework, improve judicial qualifications, upgrade court infrastructure, and expand international legal cooperation. Efforts to digitize the judiciary are ongoing, with approximately 94 courtrooms equipped with audio and video cameras, covering more than 90% of courtrooms in the country.<sup>578</sup>

On 12 April, the Mejlis approved several laws and amendments, including a new edition of the Law "On the Court."<sup>579</sup> The revised Law of Turkmenistan "On Courts" introduces several formal improvements, reflecting both developments in national legal thought and partial alignment with international standards.<sup>580</sup> The law enhances formal protections by broadening equality before the law, reinforcing the presumption of innocence, expanding the right to challenge public authorities, and guaranteeing language access. However, practical implementation is constrained by a judiciary and political system tightly controlled by the executive.

Key provisions also introduce family judges at district and city levels and establish Judicial Boards for Family Matters within higher courts, aiming to strengthen family justice, ensure fair trials in family cases, and promote family stability. The OSCE has expressed support for judicial reforms in Turkmenistan, noting that the establishment of family courts serves a unique purpose in the justice system and could improve access to justice in family-related cases.<sup>581</sup>

Despite these limited developments, judicial independence in Turkmenistan remains extremely constrained, reflecting broader weaknesses in the country's rule of law. According to Freedom House, Turkmenistan's judiciary remains weak and ineffective, lacking independence and plagued by corruption and incompetence, primarily serving the interests of the regime rather than protecting citizens' rights.<sup>582</sup> The Maxinomics Rule of Law Index ranks Turkmenistan near the bottom globally (182nd of 189 countries), with a score of -1.41 on a scale from -2.5 to 2.5, indicating a severely weakened rule of law.<sup>583</sup>

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 1.5/7

Turkmenistan has enacted a new Law “On the Unified State Voter Register,” which took effect on 1 January 2026.<sup>584</sup> The law introduces a centralized digital voter registry to ensure more accurate accounting of eligible voters and strengthen electoral integrity. Oversight of elections is vested solely in the Central Election Commission, which functions without evident autonomy. Despite formal similarities to open systems, the lack of independent oversight limits the framework’s relevance to Western-style governance.

The Law of Turkmenistan “On Combating Human Trafficking” was also updated to reflect

modern standards and requirements, aiming to strengthen legal frameworks for preventing and addressing trafficking. Additionally, according to the U.S. Department of State’s 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report, Turkmenistan does not fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking but has made significant efforts toward addressing the issue. As a result of these efforts, the country was upgraded to the Tier 2 Watch List from its previous Tier 3 status, reflecting some efforts to combat trafficking, particularly concerning forced labor in the cotton sector and public works.<sup>585</sup>

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 0.5/6

Judicial statistics in Turkmenistan are scarce and often unreliable, primarily due to state control over the data and the lack of independent oversight.

In 2023, the number of convicts in Turkmenistan decreased by 4.5% compared to the previous year,

with a further 3% decline in 2024, due to measures offering alternatives to custodial sentences, such as parole and commuted sentences. The occupancy rate in state prisons stood at 83%.<sup>586</sup>

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 5/25

## 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 1.5/7

Relations between the EU and Turkmenistan are governed by an Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters, which came into force in August 2010. This agreement, along with other joint documents such as the Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation, established various dialogue platforms covering areas like trade, human rights, energy and environment. In 2019, the EU opened a fully-fledged Delegation, signaling a shared strategic interest in deepening bilateral relations. The EU aims to strengthen cooperation with Turkmenistan through the ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which would facilitate enhanced dialogue and cooperation across multiple sectors.

EU–Turkmenistan relations are steadily deepening, with cooperation advancing both bilaterally and within the Central Asia–European Union multilateral framework. This trajectory was underscored at the first EU–Central Asia Summit, held on 4 April 2025 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, which convened leaders from the European Union and the five Central Asian states — Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. During the summit, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the World Trade Organization accession processes of both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, highlighting trade integration as a key pillar of regional cooperation.<sup>587</sup>

The EU and Turkmenistan convened their 24th

Joint Committee on 7 November in Ashgabat. The discussions focused on progress in bilateral relations, with particular attention to trade, connectivity, energy, and environmental cooperation, among other areas.<sup>588</sup> Both sides underscored the potential benefits of expanding economic engagement. The EU reaffirmed its support for Turkmenistan's accession to the World Trade Organization, including via ongoing and forthcoming technical assistance programs.

Moreover, Turkmenistan: Enhancing Trade Resilience and Integration Project, funded by the EU, aims to strengthen policymakers' capacity for the WTO accession process. The project provides support in preparing negotiation documents, implementing national legislative reforms, and

organizing training sessions for both government officials and the private sector.<sup>589</sup>

In its bid to integrate into the global trading system, Turkmenistan has taken a series of formal steps toward accession to the WTO. In 2013, Turkmenistan officially established a state commission for WTO accession and was granted observer status in July 2020. The country's official application to join the WTO was formally submitted on 24 November 2021. During a General Council meeting on 23 February 2022, WTO members approved its application, granting it the status of an acceding country ("active observer"). A Working Group was also established to oversee Turkmenistan's WTO accession process, but it has yet to hold its first meeting.

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 1/6

The Independent Country Programme Evaluation–Turkmenistan 2025 report by UNDP highlights that, although there were notable improvements, especially in trade facilitation, systemic issues such as limited access to finance and underdeveloped value chains have limited the overall effectiveness.<sup>590</sup>

According to the U.S. State Department's 2025 Investment Climate Statements, Turkmenistan is considered high risk for U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) due to nearly total government control of the economy, strict foreign travel and currency controls, endemic corruption, opaque and burdensome bureaucratic processes, and a weak commercial law and regulatory framework.<sup>591</sup>

The Heritage Foundation's 2025 Index of Economic Freedom assigns Turkmenistan a score of 47.1, ranking the country 162nd worldwide. While this reflects a 0.8-point improvement compared to the previous year, Turkmenistan remains 37th out

of 39 economies in the Asia–Pacific region, with its performance below both global and regional averages. The economy continues to be classified as "repressed" under the 2025 Index.<sup>592</sup>

According to the World Bank, Turkmenistan's main economic challenge is converting its hydrocarbon wealth into diversified, sustainable, and inclusive growth. To achieve this, the country needs a market-based diversification strategy, focusing on business environment reforms, reducing market distortions, and addressing exchange rate overvaluation. This would promote private sector growth, increase productivity, and create jobs. Additionally, reforms are needed to improve SOE (State-owned enterprises) governance, enhance public investment management, better target social spending, link public wages to performance, and boost governance and transparency.<sup>593</sup>

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 1.5/6

Turkmenistan's economy continues to demonstrate steady growth. In 2024, gross domestic product (GDP) exceeded 68.7 billion USD,

reflecting a 6.3% increase compared to 2023. Foreign trade turnover reached 19.8 billion USD (exports totaling 12.1 billion USD and imports 7.7

billion USD)<sup>594</sup> and 14.1 billion USD during the first eight months of 2025.<sup>595</sup>

Turkmenistan's foreign trade turnover with the European Union exceeded 1.1 billion EUR in 2024, with EU exports to Turkmenistan consisting of machinery, transport equipment, and chemical products, and Turkmen exports primarily mineral raw materials.<sup>596</sup> By the end of 2024, trade between the U.S. and Turkmenistan reached 218.5 million USD, marking a 93.8% increase compared to 2023. Turkmenistan's main exports to the U.S. include textiles, chemical products, and oil and gas equipment, while the U.S. supplies aircraft, electronics, and agricultural machinery.<sup>597</sup>

However, Turkmenistan's trade orientation remains heavily concentrated toward China. By the end of 2024, total trade turnover between the two countries reached 10.6 billion USD, representing an 11% increase compared to 2023.<sup>598</sup> Among Central Asian countries, Turkmenistan is the most

dependent on China, with trade accounting for 55% of the country's total foreign trade turnover.<sup>599</sup> Bilateral trade reached 8.34 billion USD between January and October 2025, reaffirming Beijing's position as one of Ashgabat's principal trading partners.<sup>600</sup> Turkmen exports — predominantly natural gas — accounted for over 7 billion USD, underscoring a persistent structural dependence on energy exports and a pronounced trade imbalance. Gas deliveries via the Central Asia–China pipeline system continue to anchor the strategic partnership, with Turkmenistan retaining its status as the region's largest supplier of natural gas to China. Trade growth has been driven by rising Chinese energy demand and deepening cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, while infrastructure modernization and export diversification remain critical to rebalancing trade and expanding future engagement.

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 1/6

By the end of 2024, total investment in Turkmenistan's economy exceeded 12.1 billion USD, representing a 9% increase year-on-year. Foreign direct investment accounted for 11.6% of total investment, up 1.4 percentage points compared to 2023, and amounted to over 1.4 billion USD, reflecting an almost 25% annual increase. In the first eight months of 2025, total investment reached 8.3 billion USD, indicating continued investment momentum. Investment priorities are concentrated in the oil and gas sector, petrochemicals, energy, construction, and the agro-industrial complex.<sup>601</sup>

Turkmenistan draws the majority of its foreign investment from China, with smaller shares from Malaysia, Turkey, and the UAE. There is growing European interest in Turkmenistan's alternative energy, chemical, and transport infrastructure projects. A key strategic area highlighted at the Samarkand summit was the development of sustainable transport links. The EU reaffirmed its commitment to invest up to 11.5 billion USD in

Central Asian infrastructure through the Global Gateway program, with particular emphasis on the Trans-Caspian route. For Turkmenistan, this presents an opportunity to leverage the Turkmenbashi International Seaport, which currently handles 17–18 million tons of cargo annually, to enhance regional connectivity and trade.

A notable development was the announcement that the European Investment Bank (EIB) and Turkmenistan had begun negotiations on a framework agreement, which would enable the bank to operate directly in the country for the first time.<sup>602</sup> This represents a strategic milestone, as access to European financing could facilitate the modernization of Turkmenistan's energy and transport infrastructure.

In this context, as Turkmenistan negotiates WTO membership, alignment with the European economic framework enables the country to open new markets, standardize products, and reduce trade barriers.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 4.5/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 2/2

Following Azerbaijan's example, Turkmenistan adopted a modified Latin alphabet for the Turkmen language in 1993, a move that symbolized aspirations for cultural independence and modernization. The alphabet consists of 30 characters, including eight with diacritical marks, and does not employ digraphs.

In Turkmenistan's case, the Latinisation process was primarily political, symbolizing a break from the Soviet era and the dominance of the Russian language, rather than a deliberate strategy to facilitate broader global or international integration.<sup>603</sup>

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 1/6

English proficiency in Turkmenistan remains limited, largely restricted to selective, externally supported programs. Since 2024, a UK-Turkmenistan partnership under the Accelerating English Language Learning in Central Asia initiative has linked Nottingham Trent University with the Dovletmamet Azadi Turkmen National Institute of World Languages, embedding inclusive methodologies in the Pre-Service English Teacher Training (PRESETT) curriculum to enhance teacher preparation and support for diverse learners.<sup>604</sup> The U.S. Embassy supports English education through teacher training, curriculum development, and

resources. Its American English Program (AEP) provides intensive year-long instruction aimed at CEFR B2 proficiency, offering a platform for cross-cultural engagement with American values and native speakers.<sup>605</sup>

The 2025 EF English Proficiency Index classifies Turkmenistan as a low-proficiency English country, with a score of 456 and a global ranking of about 91st.<sup>606</sup> This result is consistent with regional patterns in Central Asia, where neighboring states also rank in the low or very low proficiency range, including Kyrgyzstan (101st, 443), Uzbekistan (104th, 429), Kazakhstan (107th, 417), and Tajikistan (110th, 409).

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 1.5/7

In Turkmenistan, Western film screenings remain limited and do not constitute a core component of the cinema market. The exhibition is dominated by national productions, alongside Russian and Turkish films and television series, which are widely broadcasted on state television and shown in cinemas. While selected Hollywood movies occasionally pass state censorship, they are typically screened on a limited basis and often with delays.

According to Kepios/DataReportal, Turkmenistan had 388,000 active social media accounts in October 2025, representing approximately 5.1% of the country's population at year-end.<sup>607</sup> Analysis reveals

that social media user identities in Turkmenistan grew by 184,000 (+90.1%) from late 2024 to the end of 2025. Focusing on demographics, data from leading social media platforms shows that, by the end of 2025, 376,000 social media users aged 18 and above were active in Turkmenistan, representing 7.7% of the adult population. Of these users, 53.6% were female and 46.4% male.

As of November 2025, Turkmenistan had 466,300 Facebook users (7.3% of the population), with 54.5% women; 447,400 Instagram users (7% of the population), with 55.2% women; and 74,950 LinkedIn users (1.2% of the population).<sup>608</sup>

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 1.5/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 0.5/5

Turkmen citizens primarily travel abroad for work, with Turkey and Russia as the main destinations. In 2024, Turkmenistan ranked among the top five countries for tourist visits to Russia, with 57,400 entries on tourist visas, a 65% increase from 2023 (34,700).<sup>609</sup> Additionally, since early 2025, at least 122 Turkmen citizens have reportedly been recruited to fight in Ukraine alongside Russian forces,<sup>610</sup> highlighting the intersection of labor

mobility and regional security dynamics.

On June 4, 2025, the White House issued a presidential proclamation restricting certain visas for Turkmenistan.<sup>611</sup> Given that only a small percentage of Turkmen citizens travel to Western countries, these restrictions are likely to further limit opportunities for international travel, including visits to the United States.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 0.5/3

Foreign investment in Turkmenistan remains limited and heavily concentrated in the energy sector, where U.S. and European involvement is primarily represented by major operators such as ENI and Dragon Oil, as well as key service providers including Halliburton.

Foreign retail and franchise expansion in Turkmenistan largely occurs through distribution or licensing, rather than conventional franchise units.

European franchised chains are largely absent, with most brands entering via imports or local distribution. U.S. brands such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Levi's operate primarily through local bottlers or licensing partners, without full-scale fast-food, restaurant, or retail franchise outlets. This pattern reflects market and regulatory constraints limiting traditional franchise expansion.

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 0.5/2

Internet access in Turkmenistan remains severely constrained by state controls. Connection speeds are intentionally limited, widespread blocking restricts access to commonly used applications and websites, and effective circumvention tools such as virtual private networks (VPNs) are difficult to obtain and maintain. Collectively, these measures significantly impede the population's ability to access information and digital services.

The state-owned provider, Turkmentelecom, maintains a monopoly over internet services, exercising exclusive control over fixed broadband and mobile data networks.<sup>612</sup> This centralized structure enables extensive government oversight and control of online activity.

Turkmenistan has officially launched a 5G mobile

network in the city of Arkadag, marking a limited and highly localized deployment of next-generation mobile communications.<sup>613</sup> The deployment was carried out in partnership with the Chinese technology firm Huawei, representing a notable technological upgrade following the introduction of 4G+ services in February 2025. However, Turkmenistan in general continues to lag behind regional peers in mobile broadband infrastructure. While neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have achieved near-universal 4G coverage, and Tajikistan has reached 80 percent, 4G availability in Turkmenistan remains limited to approximately 67 percent.<sup>614</sup> This gap highlights structural deficiencies in network expansion and underscores broader constraints on digital connectivity within the country.

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
18.5/25	13/25	18/25	11/15	8.5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 18.5/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 5.5/10

Political freedoms in Ukraine in 2025 remain partially restricted due to martial law introduced in February 2022. National elections were postponed because conducting presidential or parliamentary polls during full-scale war would pose security risks and limit access for refugees, IDPs, and frontline soldiers. Although debated, surveys show most Ukrainians viewed postponement as appropriate.<sup>615</sup> The institutional framework continues to function: the parliament operates normally, opposition parties are present, and the Central Election Commission maintains professional standards. In September 2025, the parliament (Verkhovna Rada) resumed live broadcasts of plenary sessions on the Rada TV channel and YouTube for the first time since the suspension of coverage following the full-scale invasion in 2022. Yet the mixed electoral system used in 2019 was criticized as prone to manipulation and vote buying. Some opposition MPs face restrictions such as travel limits or asset freezes.

The Freedom House’s 2025 report classifies Ukraine as “Partly Free” with 51/100 overall and 23/40 for political rights, a decline from pre-war levels driven by the suspension of elections (the rating applies only to government-controlled territories. In previous years, the figure was lower because it included newly occupied territories).

Bans on political parties have targeted only organizations that justified or supported Russia’s aggression. Since 2022, courts have dissolved more than a dozen pro-Russian parties under wartime legislation. Some former MPs from banned parties remain active in new parliament groups.<sup>616</sup> Public

opinion strongly supports limiting actors linked to the aggressor state, including depriving pro-Russian MPs of mandates (90%).<sup>617</sup>

Ukrainian media remain pluralistic but operate under wartime constraints. The state centralized major TV channels via the “United News” telethon, and the 2022 Media Law, which entered into force in 2023, expanded the National Council’s powers to impose temporary restrictions on unregistered online outlets without a court decision in cases of gross or systematic violations as defined by law. Freedom House sees risks of administrative pressure, while RSF (Reporters Without Borders) argues the law aligns with EU standards. In the 2025 RSF Index, Ukraine ranks 62/180 with a political score of 64.43 and a safety score of 46.82, reflecting wartime risks, economic fragility, and reporting restrictions, especially at the frontline.<sup>618</sup> Freedom House also notes pressure associated with the telethon format on major TV channels and the President’s Office.

According to the European Commission’s 2025 Enlargement Report, the electoral framework remains conducive to post-war elections. Several OSCE/ODIHR recommendations have been implemented, while outstanding ones require further reform. Future elections will need measures to secure voting rights for displaced citizens and military personnel, update the voter register, strengthen media freedom and editorial independence, bolster resilience to cyber and disinformation threats, and reform political advertising rules.<sup>619</sup>

## 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 7/8

Compared with the situation described in the 2022 Index - when the parliament still included the explicitly pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life (OPZZh) and some senior MPs publicly advocated closer ties with China - the 2025 Verkhovna Rada is fully consolidated around a pro-EU and pro-NATO position. No party with an alternative geopolitical orientation remains represented. Most MPs who previously belonged to banned pro-Russian parties (e.g., former members of OPZZh) now publicly uphold Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic course or act without promoting pro-Russian policies.

Parliamentary fractions consistently vote for legislation required under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the EU accession process. The 2025 EC Enlargement Report<sup>620</sup> confirms cross-party support for Ukraine’s EU trajectory, describing the Rada as actively involved in driving reforms across key chapters of the acquis. No parliamentary party opposes NATO membership. While individual MPs may differ on sequencing, institutional design, or specific reform approaches, none advocates a departure from the Euro-Atlantic course. This places Ukraine among the most consistently pro-Western legislatures in the region.

## 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 6/7

Public-opinion data from 2025 show strong structural support for Ukraine’s Western orientation. Support for EU accession stands at 74%,<sup>621</sup> while 81.7% – and 92.5% of likely referendum voters – would vote “yes”. NATO accession also garners 68.5% support (82.9% among likely voters), with a +61.8 positive/negative perception balance of NATO.<sup>622</sup> On the level of identity, 57% prefer the European model of development. EU countries dominate in terms of positive sentiment, reflecting broadly pro-Western attitudes.<sup>623</sup>

However, confidence in Western resolve has weakened. A KIIS (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology) report shows an increase in the share of Ukrainians who believe Europe is “tired” and inclined to pressure Ukraine toward an unfavorable peace from 27% to 36%, and similar views about U.S. policy increased from 38% to 52%. Trust in the U.S. as a reliable ally dropped from 42% to 38%, despite enduring positive attitudes toward the country overall.<sup>624</sup>

# 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 13/25

## 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 5/6

Ukraine continues to engage with the Venice Commission on laws of constitutional significance, building on the 2019 constitutional amendments (Law No. 2680-VIII) that fixed EU and NATO membership as a strategic objective.<sup>625</sup> A major step was the adoption of Law No. 3277-IX, which introduced a new procedure for selecting judges of the Constitutional Court with the participation of international experts.<sup>626</sup>

In its latest opinion CDL-AD(2025)044-e, the Venice Commission welcomed this reform as an

important improvement, but noted that several provisions still carry risks of arbitrary application, vague disciplinary grounds and potentially overbroad interpretation, which may create vulnerabilities in later disciplinary stages. The Commission therefore called for clearer safeguards to ensure coherence and genuine independence.<sup>627</sup>

At the same time, Ukrainian expert organizations argue that some Commission recommendations, while based on universal European standards, do not fully reflect Ukraine’s post-authoritarian

judicial context. They stress that standards such as broad judicial self-governance or narrowly framed disciplinary liability can, in Ukrainian conditions, reinforce impunity rather than protect independence. Experts also note that earlier Commission opinions on Constitutional Court selection required subsequent clarification following

civil society feedback illustrating the need for continuous dialogue and contextual adaptation.<sup>628</sup>

Overall, Ukraine shows political will to follow the Commission's guidance, but the effectiveness of reforms will depend on implementation, particularly in disciplinary procedures and integrity checks.

## 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 3/7

Despite multiple reform cycles, Ukraine's judiciary continues to exhibit structural weaknesses that undermine its independence. This is reflected in the 2025 World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, where Ukraine ranks 125th of 143 on the subfactor "Government powers are effectively limited by the judiciary" (score 0.31), far below the global (0.52) and regional (0.36) averages.

Ukraine's broader rule-of-law performance also remains weak: the overall score is 0.48 (90th of 143), with particularly low results in Absence of Corruption (0.33; 117th) and Criminal Justice (0.37; 97th). These indicators point to persistent risks of political influence and corruption within judicial institutions.<sup>629</sup> According to the European Commission's 2025 Ukraine Report, Parliament's failure to appoint internationally vetted candidates to the Constitutional Court, the ongoing

politicization of the Prosecutor General's position, and systemic deficits in integrity-based judicial and prosecutorial appointments further constrain judicial independence.<sup>630</sup> Freedom House similarly notes that reform efforts "have often stalled or fallen short of expectations."<sup>631</sup>

Some progress has occurred, including the relaunch of the High Council of Justice and the High Qualification Commission of Judges, as well as the adoption of Law No. 3277-IX on a more transparent selection procedure for Constitutional Court judges — but implementation remains uneven. By late 2024, nearly 2,000 judicial vacancies were still unfilled, contributing to severe case backlogs and limited access to justice. Wartime conditions have intensified these pressures, with judges and court staff killed or displaced due to Russian attacks (Freedom House, 2025).

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 4/6

According to Freedom in the World 2025, Ukraine remains "Partly Free" with a Civil Liberties score of 28/60, reflecting wartime restrictions and persistent structural enforcement gaps.<sup>632</sup> Despite this, Ukraine maintains alignment with European human rights standards as a party to the ECHR and continues EU-driven legislative reforms in anti-discrimination, gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups. In 2025, the Ministry of Justice renewed consultations with civil society to update the National Human Rights Strategy and prepare the 2026–2028 Action Plan.

The 2025 Shadow Report on Chapter 23 highlights key implementation shortcomings: the absence of

an updated human rights strategy, inconsistent procedural safeguards in the justice system, delays in establishing a reparations mechanism for war-related violations, and insufficient transparency and inclusiveness in policymaking. The report stresses the need for stronger institutional capacity to ensure effective rights protection under wartime conditions.<sup>633</sup>

Under martial law, Ukraine continues to apply temporary restrictions under Article 15 of the ECHR. On 4 April 2024, the government submitted a revised derogation notification that narrowed the list of suspended rights and restored the full application of several Convention guarantees, including

freedom of thought and religion, the prohibition of discrimination, the right to an effective remedy, and safeguards concerning restrictions on political activity of foreigners. Remaining derogations

mainly concern freedom of movement, freedom of assembly and certain aspects of property rights, and are justified by wartime security conditions.<sup>634</sup>

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS – 1/6

The share of acquittals that enter into legal force in Ukraine remains extremely low. According to official statistics of the Supreme Court, in 2024 courts issued 61,434 convictions, while only 163 individuals were acquitted — approximately 0.27%.

The trend is consistent across previous years: in 2023, there were 206 acquittals against 66,684 convictions (0.3%), and in 2022 — 172 acquittals out of 49,679 verdicts (0.3%).<sup>635</sup>

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 18/25

## 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 7/7

Ukraine has been a full member of the World Trade Organization since 2008, meeting all accession commitments and participating actively in WTO bodies and negotiations. Its relationship with the European Union is governed by the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement, which entered fully into force in 2017 and anchors deep political association and economic integration through the DCFTA.

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion, Ukraine applied for EU membership on 28 February 2022 and was granted candidate status in June 2022. Formal accession negotiations opened on 25 June 2024, and by September 2025 the country had completed the screening of its legislation for compatibility with the EU acquis. Ukraine also remains engaged in broader EU cooperation formats, including the Eastern Partnership.<sup>636</sup>

## 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 2.5/6

The Economic Freedom of the World 2025 report (2023 data) ranks Ukraine 143rd of 165 countries with an overall score of 5.24/10, reflecting weak legal protections, regulatory unpredictability, and limited economic freedom (legal system and property rights - 4.57; regulation - 4.58).<sup>637</sup> Ukraine also performs poorly on the Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2024, scoring 35/100 and ranking 105th worldwide, which indicates persistent governance vulnerabilities and limited transparency in public administration.<sup>638</sup>

Historical data from the World Bank’s Doing Business 2020 placed Ukraine 64th globally, showing some pre-war reform progress which has been weakened by wartime disruptions and

institutional fragility.<sup>639</sup> International assessments, including the U.S. State Department’s 2025 Investment Climate Statement, note progress in administrative simplification and digitalization but highlight enduring structural barriers such as persistent problems in the judiciary, uneven regulatory enforcement, risks of unwarranted inspections and capital restrictions imposed during martial law. These issues continue to undermine transparency and predictability for investors.<sup>640</sup> The Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom remains suspended for Ukraine due to wartime conditions, preventing comprehensive cross-year comparisons.<sup>641</sup>

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 5/6

Ukraine's trade structure is firmly oriented toward Western markets. The European Union remains Ukraine's largest trading partner: in 2024, the EU accounted for over 50% of Ukraine's total trade in goods, including 59.5% of exports and 50.4% of imports, according to the National Institute for Strategic Studies.<sup>642</sup> The EU Trade Directorate data similarly confirm that the EU continues to represent more than half of Ukraine's overall goods trade, consolidating its role as Ukraine's dominant Western trading partner. Ukraine's deepening integration

with the EU is driven by the DCFTA and by the near-total collapse of trade with Russia, whose share has fallen to negligible levels since 2022.<sup>643</sup> Ukrainian exports to the EU are mainly composed of agrifood products and metal ores.<sup>644</sup>

Despite a modest decline in exports to the EU in early 2025 (-6.1%), due to wartime logistical constraints, the EU continues to account for well over half of Ukraine's total trade, underscoring Ukraine's high level of commercial alignment with Western markets.<sup>645</sup>

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 3.5/6

Western capital remains the dominant source of Ukraine's foreign direct investment (FDI), although wartime risks and structural weaknesses continue to constrain new inflows. According to the National Bank of Ukraine (NBU), most FDI stock is formally attributed to Cyprus, the Netherlands and Switzerland – jurisdictions widely used for roundtripping. The NBU estimates that around 24% of all FDI inflows in 2010–2024 consisted of reinvested Ukrainian funds routed through these jurisdictions. Among ultimate investor countries, the largest FDI stocks in 2024 originate from Poland, France, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and Austria.<sup>646</sup>

Net FDI inflows reached USD 3.33 billion in 2024 (around 25% less than in 2023), with 72% comprising reinvested earnings indicating very limited entry of new investors.<sup>647</sup> The investment climate remains difficult: the European Business Association's Investment Index rose to 2.70/5 compared to 2.49 in 2024, yet 71% of surveyed businesses still assess conditions as unfavourable due to wartime risks, corruption and judicial unreliability. At the same time, 72% of companies already operating in Ukraine report plans to continue investing.<sup>648</sup>

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 11/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 1/2

Ukraine's official language, Ukrainian, is written exclusively in the Cyrillic script; the Latin alphabet has no official status, and recurring proposals to introduce a Ukrainian Latin script have never gained institutional traction. Latin transliteration appears only in functional contexts, such as standardized romanisation of proper names in passports, maps and public signage, but it does not substitute Cyrillic in domestic use. A limited shift to Latin script has occurred only within minority-language policy: in April 2024 the Government approved a new Crimean

Tatar orthography based on the Latin alphabet, replacing the previously used Cyrillic version.<sup>649</sup> This change applies solely to a minority language and does not affect the status of Ukrainian.

In the commercial sphere, English-language branding and Latin-script naming conventions are widespread, especially among cafés, bars and consumer brands, but this reflects market trends rather than any formal Latinisation. Overall, Cyrillic overwhelmingly dominates written communication in both public and private domains.

## 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 4/6

According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Ukraine ranks 45th globally with a score of 526, remaining in the moderate proficiency category.<sup>650</sup> Survey data indicate a substantial gap between self-reported and functional skills: a 2023 KIIS poll found that while 51% of adults claim some knowledge of English, only 23% can read, write, and communicate at an everyday or professional level; 14% report some knowledge of German and 7% of French.<sup>651</sup>

Government policy increasingly prioritizes foreign language acquisition. In June 2024, Ukraine adopted a law designating English as a language of international communication, introducing mandatory English proficiency requirements for

certain public officials, expanding its use in public services, and strengthening English instruction across the education system – from preschools to secondary schools.<sup>652</sup> In 2025, the Government approved a national program to promote English in 2026–2030.

Despite these measures, overall proficiency in Western European languages remains uneven. English language visibility in public spaces is expanding, but population-wide skills still fall short of the “high proficiency” threshold. Overall, Ukraine demonstrates a moderate but steadily improving level of Western language competence, consistent with a mid-range score.<sup>653</sup>

## 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN THE NATION'S MOVIE THEATERS AND ON TV CHANNELS, SHARE OF WESTERN INTERNET SITES AND SOCIAL MEDIA 6/7

Western media products maintain a dominant position in Ukraine's cultural and digital space. Western films continue to lead cinema screenings, as American (mostly Hollywood) and European productions form the core of Ukrainian box-office revenues,<sup>654</sup> while domestic films account for a smaller share.<sup>655</sup> On television, Western content such as films, licensed entertainment formats, and series remains widely broadcast alongside Ukrainian programming, supported by long-standing licensing contracts with U.S. and European distributors. The TV and video market is dominated by local and Western streaming platforms (OTT Video), such as MEGOGO, Sweet.TV, Netflix, which offer a huge selection of Western films and series.<sup>656</sup> Content consumption is shifting from traditional TV to online services.

Western platforms dominate Ukraine's online ecosystem. Digital 2026 Ukraine reports 35.3 million internet users (89.6% penetration) and 23 million active social media identities (58.5% of the population). YouTube (~23M users), TikTok (~19M users), Facebook (~14.2M), Instagram (~12.6M) and LinkedIn (~6.3M) are fully accessible and retain a strong position in entertainment, communication, and advertising markets.<sup>657</sup> Telegram remains the top platform for news (used by 72% for news; 81% for communication), reflecting wartime habits rather than government policy.<sup>658</sup> Crucially, no Western platforms are blocked, and Western-produced media content dominates key segments of cinema, television, and social media consumption.

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 8.5/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 4/5

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, Ukraine has experienced the largest forced displacement in Europe since World War II.<sup>659</sup> According to UNHCR, over 5 million Ukrainian refugees were hosted across Europe at the end of 2024, primarily in Germany (1.2 million), Poland (991,200) and Czechia (388,400).<sup>660</sup> Independent assessments estimate that around 5.2 million Ukrainians remained abroad as of late 2024.<sup>661</sup> In September 2025, 4.3 million Ukrainians held temporary protection status in EU member states.<sup>662</sup>

UNHCR data show that 52% of Ukrainian refugees have made short-term return visits to Ukraine, reflecting intense two-way mobility with EU countries.<sup>663</sup> Combine this with Ukraine's visa-free regime with the EU that existed since 2017 under which Ukrainians made nearly 49 million visa-free trips to EU countries between 2017 and 2020.<sup>664</sup> This is a reflection of broad real-world exposure of Ukrainians to Western societies through travel, work, study and family networks.

### 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 2.5/3

By 2024–2025, Western franchise companies retain a strong but uneven presence in Ukraine. Western fast-food chains remain the most visible segment: McDonald's continues expanding and reached 118 restaurants nationwide in 2025,<sup>665</sup> while KFC operates actively through local franchisees and plans further openings.<sup>666</sup> Hesburger has also maintained operations and invested in production capacity near Kyiv.<sup>667</sup>

Although Western supermarket franchises are largely absent, METRO Cash & Carry, a German wholesale retail chain, has remained active in Ukraine throughout the war. The small Polish chain Best Market has expressed interest in expanding when security conditions allow, but this does not constitute substantial market presence.<sup>668</sup>

A few Western chains left after the invasion, most

notably IKEA, which closed its pick-up points and a city store in 2022. Western clothing and lifestyle brands, however, show the strongest post-invasion rebound. In April 2024, Inditex fully returned to Ukraine: online stores relaunched on 2 April and physical stores of Zara, Pull&Bear, Bershka, Stradivarius, Massimo Dutti, Oysho and Zara Home reopened on 3 April across Kyiv and other major cities in Ukraine.<sup>669</sup> H&M also resumed operations and now maintains multiple active stores in Kyiv and Lviv.<sup>670</sup> Poland's LPP Group (Reserved, Cropp, Mohito, House, Sinsay) has maintained a strong footprint and continues to open new stores, with Sinsay showing some of the fastest expansion on the market.<sup>671</sup> The Danish brand JYSK has kept nearly all its Ukrainian stores open and continues planned development.

### 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

According to the Digital 2025 report, Ukraine maintains very high levels of mobile connectivity and smartphone penetration despite wartime disruptions. As of January 2025, the country had 56.4 million active mobile connections, equivalent to 147% of the population, reflecting widespread use of multiple SIM cards. Mobile broadband coverage is almost universal: 94.1% of all connections operate on high-speed 3G/4G/5G technologies, indicating strong nationwide access.<sup>672</sup>

Smartphone usage is likewise exceptionally

high. The 2025 Internews Ukraine survey found that 91% of Ukrainians use a smartphone as their primary device for accessing information and communication. Mobile-based digital services also remain highly developed. The Diia e-government platform continues to expand its functionality, with the number of registered mobile users exceeding 23 million by late 2025 (against a population of 38.3 million). This reflects both widespread smartphone adoption and deep integration of mobile digital services into everyday life.<sup>673</sup>

Political Westernization	Legal Westernization	Economic Westernization	Language and Cultural Westernization	Lifestyle Westernization
8/25	11/25	12/25	7/15	5/10

## 1 | POLITICAL WESTERNIZATION 8/25

### 1.1. DEGREE OF POLITICAL FREEDOM 3/10

Uzbekistan’s political system in 2025 remains hybrid, being formally pluralistic and increasingly modernized administratively, yet still characterized by dominant-party rule and constrained political competition. Freedom House’s Freedom in the World 2025 again categorizes Uzbekistan as “Not Free,” assigning the country a total score of 12/100 (2/40 for political rights and 10/60 for civil liberties), placing it in the lower tier globally.<sup>674</sup> Although the large-scale repression characteristic of the period prior to 2016 has not returned following the change of president, political pluralism remains limited, and the state continues to exercise strong regulatory control over political expression. The constitutional amendments adopted in 2023, implemented throughout 2024–2025, preserved the centrality of the presidency and did not introduce safeguards comparable to those in Western democratic systems. However, public administration reforms — such as improvements in digital governance, service delivery, and administrative transparency — have expanded civic access to state institutions and introduced governance elements aligned with Western standards.

In 2025, the state of freedom of expression and

association in Uzbekistan showed both progress and ongoing challenges.<sup>675</sup> The country continues to collaborate with UN human rights mechanisms, including the Special Procedures system and the follow-up processes to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). However, there has not been a country visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers since the last official mission in 2019.<sup>676</sup> Independent bloggers, legal advocates, and civil society monitors are now operating in a significantly more open environment than they did before 2016. Nonetheless, reports from domestic groups such as Ezgulik<sup>677</sup> and the Public Foundation for Support and Development of National Mass Media indicate that administrative pressure, online monitoring, and targeted intimidation remain prevalent.

Importantly, unlike fully authoritarian states, Uzbekistan has maintained technical cooperation with the OSCE/ODIHR on electoral administration and political party registration. While this cooperation differentiates Uzbekistan from more closed systems, the absence of competitive opposition and continued executive dominance limit the overall progress in the country.

### 1.2. PRO-WESTERN PARTIES IN THE PARLIAMENT 2/8

Uzbekistan’s registered political parties — UzLiDeP, Milliy Tiklanish, Adolat, the People’s Democratic Party, and the Ecological Party — do not promote explicitly pro-Western ideological platforms or call for alignment with Western political

blocs. The parties endorse the development agenda articulated in the “Uzbekistan–2030 Strategy,” and ideological differentiation remains limited. At the same time, several parliamentary actors have consistently supported policy reforms that intersect

with Western governance norms: WTO accession, transparency in public procurement, judicial and administrative reforms, investor protection, digital market regulation, and alignment with EU technical standards. These policy preferences, while not framed as “pro-Western,” represent functional Westernization through institutional convergence.

Institutionally, the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) maintains broad cooperation with Western partners, particularly through contacts with the European Parliament, national parliaments of EU member states, and various EU-funded projects.

Parliamentary committees take part in dialogues on trade, environment, digitalization, and justice under the framework of the EU–Uzbekistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), as well as in training activities and study visits supported by European and other international donors. These platforms do not create explicitly pro-Western parties in an ideological sense, but they do encourage the gradual adoption of international — often Western — standards in areas such as rulemaking, oversight, and policy evaluation. This functional convergence supports awarding a non-zero but low score (2/8).

### 1.3. PUBLIC OPINION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION 3/7

Public-opinion data collected across 2025 by regional and international survey institutions — including the Eurasia Group Foundation<sup>678</sup> — show that Uzbeks increasingly favour Western models in education, technology, health standards, and governance, even as strategic geopolitical attitudes remain cautious. According to a nationally representative survey conducted in Uzbekistan after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, positive perceptions of the United States are particularly strong among younger respondents. In the 18–29 age group, 60% reported<sup>679</sup> a positive view of the U.S., compared to 56% for Russia and 61% for China, traditionally regarded as a friendly partner. Among urban youth, support for Western-style education, university mobility, and labour migration to Europe increased<sup>680</sup> notably in 2025, reflecting

strong cultural and aspirational Westernization.

Geopolitical preferences, however, remain pragmatic. Eurasia Group Foundation surveys from 2025 indicate that only 10–14% of respondents explicitly support foreign-policy alignment with the EU or U.S., while the majority favours neutrality or multi-vector balancing.<sup>681</sup> Western countries are perceived primarily as sources of opportunity, innovation, and quality-of-life improvements rather than political role models. Nevertheless, the rising presence of Western cultural content through YouTube, Instagram, Netflix, and TikTok — platforms whose penetration rates expanded<sup>682</sup> further in 2025 — continues to reshape societal attitudes, especially among citizens aged 18–35. This mixed but positive orientation supports a moderate score.

## 2 | LEGAL WESTERNIZATION 11/25

### 2.1. CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE VENICE COMMISSION 4/6

Uzbekistan continued implementing its 2023 constitutional reform during 2024–2025. The constitutional amendments approved<sup>683</sup> by referendum on 30 April 2023 expanded the legal framework for human rights and social guarantees, with observers noting intentions to enhance rights protections and institutional obligations.

According<sup>684</sup> to OSCE/ODIHR, the referendum process was technically well prepared and aimed at strengthening rights and freedoms. Despite remaining limitations<sup>685</sup> in pluralism, the reform reflects ongoing legal modernization. Although Uzbekistan is not a member of the Council of Europe, cooperation continued through EU and

Council of Europe rule-of-law engagements on judicial reform and legislative alignment.<sup>686</sup> In 2025, Uzbekistan continued legal and regulatory reforms through the updated “Uzbekistan – 2030” Strategy, which was prepared in a new edition by the end of the year. The revision reflects the government’s intent to align national policies with international legal standards and development priorities.<sup>687</sup>

Nevertheless, gaps remain between constitutional text and practical institutional balance. Independent legal experts note that the 2023 referendum expanded social and procedural rights but did not significantly redistribute executive power or strengthen parliamentary oversight to levels recommended by the Venice Commission in

comparable assessments. While the Constitution now includes explicit prohibitions on torture, protections against unlawful detention, and guarantees of judicial independence, implementation mechanisms — particularly prosecutorial oversight and judicial accountability — remain underdeveloped. The government’s collaboration with UN human-rights bodies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) follow-up procedures<sup>688</sup> in 2025, demonstrates political willingness to continue alignment with global standards, justifying a relatively high score compared to other post-Soviet states outside the Council of Europe.

## 2.2. INDEPENDENCE OF THE COURTS 3/7

Judicial independence in Uzbekistan remains in transition, with meaningful improvements in transparency and digitalization but continuing structural constraints, especially in cases involving politically sensitive matters. The World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index 2025 ranks Uzbekistan 81st out of 143 countries, with an overall score of 0.50, representing a modest improvement of three positions compared to 2024.<sup>689</sup> Throughout 2025, the Supreme Court expanded the e-court system, increased public access to decisions in commercial and administrative courts, and strengthened professional development for judges through various international cooperation initiatives.

At the same time, the judiciary continues to face long-term institutional challenges typical of transitioning legal systems. Observers note that, while impartiality in commercial and civil disputes has improved, criminal courts continue to show limited independence, reflecting the historically strong role of prosecutorial oversight. International partners — including the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the OSCE, and bilateral development agencies — remain engaged in supporting judicial training, ethics, and digitalization. Although structural reforms are ongoing, Uzbekistan’s sustained cooperation with international organizations and its modernization of court procedures contribute to a cautiously positive, upward-trending assessment.

## 2.3. HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION 3/6

Uzbekistan made notable progress in aligning its human-rights legislation with international standards between 2023 and 2025. The adoption of the Law on Equality and Combating All Forms of Discrimination (2023), the Law on the Protection of Women from Violence, and amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code contributed to strengthening procedural guarantees and expanding protections for vulnerable groups.

In 2025, Uzbekistan continued implementing recommendations from the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and engaged actively with UN human-rights mechanisms in areas such as prevention of ill-treatment, freedom of expression, and access to legal aid. The Ombudsman’s Office further broadened its monitoring and advisory functions, supported by cooperation with multilateral partners, including UNDP and EU-funded rule-of-

law initiatives (UNDP Uzbekistan).<sup>690</sup>

At the same time, as noted in recent assessments by international observers, implementation remains an ongoing challenge typical of transitioning legal systems. Independent reviews highlight a positive trend: large-scale arbitrary detentions have become rare compared to previous decades, while a limited number of isolated incidents affecting journalists, civic activists, or online commentators continued to

be documented in 2024–2025.<sup>691</sup> Certain areas of civic activity — such as NGO registration and public assembly — remain regulated through formal procedures that occasionally limit operational flexibility. Overall, the combination of legislative improvements, institutional modernization, and remaining enforcement gaps supports a balanced, mid-level assessment.

## 2.4. NUMBER OF ACQUITTALS 1/6

Uzbekistan’s acquittal rate remains low, although it has improved compared to earlier decades. According to the 2024–2025 judicial statistics released by the Supreme Court acquittals in criminal cases remain below 2%, reflecting the enduring dominance of prosecutorial culture inherited from the Soviet-era system. In the first half of 2025 approximately 204 persons were acquitted by Courts<sup>692</sup>, that indicates decline. While procedural safeguards have expanded, and court hearings are more transparent than before 2016, the inertia of a conviction-oriented judicial mindset persists. The Supreme Court’s annual reviews emphasize

improvements in civil and commercial justice, but criminal acquittals remain rare, especially in cases involving state institutions or allegations of corruption.

Western organizations such as the World Justice Project, UNODC, and the American Bar Association (ABA ROLI) note that although Uzbekistan’s legal reforms are promising, the core challenge lies in shifting institutional culture and ensuring genuine adversarial balance.<sup>693</sup> The low acquittal rate, combined with slow progress in altering prosecutorial dominance, justifies a low but slowly improving score.

# 3 | ECONOMIC WESTERNIZATION 12/25

## 3.1. EU AND WTO MEMBERSHIP OR ASSOCIATION 3/7

Uzbekistan intensified its engagement with Western economic institutions in 2025, with WTO accession negotiations reaching their most advanced stage since the country reactivated its application in 2020. Uzbekistan made steady progress toward concluding WTO accession negotiations at the Working Party meeting on 5 November 2025.<sup>694</sup>

The government has declared WTO accession a strategic priority under the “Uzbekistan–2030” Strategy and continues receiving technical assistance from USAID’s Trade Program<sup>695</sup> and the EU’s Expert Facility on Trade<sup>696</sup> Cooperation with the European Union deepened following the signing of the EU–Uzbekistan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) on 24 October 2025.<sup>697</sup>

The EPCA — once fully signed — will be the

most comprehensive legal framework between Uzbekistan and the EU, covering trade, environment, justice, digital governance, and sustainability standards.<sup>698</sup> Uzbekistan remains a beneficiary of the EU’s GSP+ preferential trade regime, which requires compliance with 27 international conventions on human rights, governance, and labor standards. Still, Uzbekistan is not an EU Associate Member and remains outside any Western-led trade blocs. The country continues balancing between diverse partners, including China, South Korea, the Gulf states, and the EU. Although the trajectory clearly points toward increased alignment with Western trade rules, the lack of finalized WTO membership and formal EU association keeps the score at 3/7.

### 3.2. EASE AND TRANSPARENCY OF DOING BUSINESS 4/6

Uzbekistan's business climate reforms remained one of the strongest Westernization drivers in 2025. The country continued deep regulatory simplification through its "New Regulatory Policy" framework, rolling out systematic impact assessments, risk-based inspections, and the "Digital Business Portal" for licensing and permits. International financial institutions — including the EBRD, IFC, and Asian Development Bank — noted significant improvements in the predictability of administrative procedures, transparency of public procurement, and the quality of digital-government services. The government also advanced work on aligning national technical regulations with EU standards, especially in food safety (Codex), pharmaceuticals (GMP), and consumer-protection frameworks.

Despite these positive trends, several structural challenges persist. The private sector continues to experience regulatory uncertainty, occasional intervention by sectoral agencies, limited competition in strategic industries, and inconsistencies between national and local government decisions. Although Uzbekistan no longer appears in the discontinued World Bank Doing Business Index, the EBRD Transition Report 2024–2025<sup>699</sup> highlights improvements in corporate governance, investment transparency, and access to finance but notes that rule-of-law limitations and uneven enforcement remain key obstacles (EBRD Transition Report). The combination of extensive modernization efforts, expanding Western cooperation, and persistent structural issues justifies a high mid-range score of 4/6.

### 3.3. WESTERN SHARE IN THE SALES OF GOODS 2/6

Western consumer goods retain a visible but limited presence in Uzbekistan's retail market. Demand for Western electronics (Apple, Samsung U.S. models), pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and premium clothing brands continues to grow, driven by rising incomes, the expansion of malls in Tashkent and Samarkand, and the proliferation of online marketplaces serving Western-oriented consumers. The spread of e-commerce platforms such as Asaxiy, Uzum, and AliExpress cross-border channels facilitates imports from the EU, UK, and U.S., though these flows remain significantly smaller than imports from China, Turkey, South Korea, and regional suppliers. According to State Statistics Agency data<sup>700</sup> for 2025, imports from the EU

represent a modest but gradually increasing share — roughly 10–12% of total imports — compared to China's dominant position exceeding 20%.

Western automotive brands (Volkswagen, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Opel, Renault) appear mainly in the premium segment and are limited by high import tariffs. The domestic market continues to be dominated by GM Uzbekistan models and Asian brands such as BYD, Chery, and Hyundai. Western household goods, cleaning products, and packaged foods have a niche but stable presence in upper-middle-class consumption patterns. Overall, Western goods hold a minority but rising segment of the consumer market, justifying a 2/6 score.

### 3.4. WESTERN INVESTMENT IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY 3/6

Western investment flows into Uzbekistan increased modestly in 2025. The EBRD remained one of the country's largest institutional investors, with its portfolio surpassing 3 billion euros, focusing on renewable energy (solar and wind), green

transport, SME finance, and water-management infrastructure.<sup>701</sup> The European Investment Bank (EIB) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) expanded financing for climate resilience, banking-sector modernization, and industrial

upgrades. The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) announced<sup>702</sup> new exploratory projects in logistics, agribusiness, and digital infrastructure. European private investment is present<sup>703</sup> in pharmaceuticals, textiles, agrifood processing, logistics, and hospitality, including hotel chains such as Hilton and Marriott.

However, Western FDI remains lower than investments from China, Russia, Turkey, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Chinese capital dominates in energy, mining, and telecommunications; Gulf funds

are increasingly active in green-energy PPPs and industrial zones; and Korean companies maintain a longstanding presence in automotive, chemicals, and banking. Structural constraints — including regulatory unpredictability, currency risks, and the limited depth of domestic capital markets — continue to limit large-scale Western private-sector inflows. Nevertheless, the expanding involvement of Western development-finance institutions and growing Western participation in renewable energy and ESG-aligned sectors justify a moderate score of 3/6.

## 4 | LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL WESTERNIZATION 7/15

### 4.1. USE OF THE LATIN ALPHABET IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE 2/2

Uzbekistan remains one of the few post-Soviet countries — outside the Baltic states — that has formally adopted the Latin alphabet as the state script. While the full transition has taken longer than initially planned, the government reaffirmed<sup>704</sup> in 2021, 2023, and again in 2024–2025 its commitment to complete implementation across public administration, education, media, and legal documentation. Latin script is already dominant in all official communications, school curricula, and digital platforms, and is used consistently by younger generations. The 2025 monitoring review by the State Language Agency confirmed that over 90%

of new state signage, websites, and educational materials now use Latin script exclusively.

Despite occasional coexistence with Cyrillic in informal settings — particularly in older print materials and user-generated social media content — the trajectory of Latinization remains stable and irreversible. Urban centers, universities, and government portals operate almost entirely in Latin, placing Uzbekistan among the most Western-aligned linguistic environments in the region. Because the adoption of the Latin script represents a direct structural Westernization of national written culture, Uzbekistan receives the maximum score.

### 4.2. PROPORTION OF THE POPULATION PROFICIENT IN THE MOST COMMON LANGUAGES OF THE WEST (ENGLISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, SPANISH) 3/6

English proficiency continued to rise across Uzbekistan in 2025, driven by strong government prioritization, the expansion of private language centres, and increasing student mobility to Europe and the U.S. According to the EF English Proficiency Index 2025, Uzbekistan scores 429 points and ranks 104th out of 123 countries, placing it in the “low” proficiency band, below the global average of 488.<sup>705</sup> English-medium programs in schools and universities expanded significantly, with new partnerships established between Uzbek institutions and European universities, including those in Germany, Italy, Poland, the Czech Republic,

and the Baltic states. Demand for IELTS and TOEFL preparation increased in 2025, with testing centres reporting higher volumes of test-takers compared to 2023–2024.

However, proficiency disparities remain large between urban and rural areas, and between younger and older generations. While tens of thousands of Uzbek students now pursue degrees or vocational training in Western countries — supported by government scholarships, private financing, and work-study schemes — English proficiency in the general population lags behind East European or Caucasus levels. Knowledge of

German, French, and Italian remains limited to niche groups, mostly students, tourism workers, and professionals. Although the trajectory is strongly

positive, especially among youth aged 15–30, the structural gap between major cities and the regions justifies a moderate score of 3/6.

### 4.3. SHARE OF WESTERN PRODUCTS IN MOVIE THEATERS, TV, AND SOCIAL MEDIA 2/7

Western cultural content is widely available in Uzbekistan, particularly through streaming services, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, though its prevalence varies widely by platform. In cinemas, Western films — especially Hollywood action, animation, and comedies — constitute a significant part of box-office earnings. Cinema operators and cultural organisers in Tashkent report strong audience interest in Western film content. European film festivals showcased<sup>706</sup> dozens of movies from EU countries as part of the 2025 program, and U.S.-produced films such as recent Hollywood family and animated features routinely appear in local cinema listings. Nonetheless, the availability of certain Western distributors is inconsistent due to licensing issues and logistical obstacles, resulting in an irregular release timetable compared to Turkish, Korean, and domestic films.

On television, things are different. The main TV channels in Uzbekistan mainly focus on local programming and popular Turkish dramas and Korean series. While some Western shows and documentaries

can be found on smaller channels or special packages, they don't play a major role on national TV.

In the digital world, the situation looks more favourable for Western content. A Social media statistics for Uzbekistan 2025 report<sup>707</sup> found that a rapidly growing share of Uzbekistan's population is online and engaged with digital platforms. By late 2025, internet penetration was estimated at close to 90% of the population, and active social media user identities (across major platforms) amounted to roughly 38 % of the total population, indicating expanding exposure to global online content, including Western cultural offerings. However, access to Western culture can vary by age and location. In rural areas, people tend to prefer local or regional content, such as Turkish and Korean films and shows. Language barriers also limit access for some groups. Overall, while Western cultural influence is strong in urban online spaces, it isn't as widespread in traditional media, which receives a mixed evaluation (2 out of 7).

## 5 | LIFESTYLE WESTERNIZATION 5/10

### 5.1. PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION WHO HAVE VISITED WESTERN COUNTRIES 2/5

Uzbek citizens' outbound mobility increased in 2025, although travel to Europe and North America remains limited compared to regional destinations. According to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, 7.6 million citizens travelled<sup>708</sup> abroad for tourism purposes in 2025, an increase of 22.2% compared to 2024. Most trips were to neighbouring Central Asian countries, Russia, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia, indicating that regional mobility continues to dominate outbound flows.

Growth<sup>709</sup> in longer-distance travel reflects gradual diversification linked to education, labour migration and expanding international partnerships. Still, the proportion of the total population that has travelled to the EU, UK, or North America remains modest when compared to travel to Turkey, the Gulf States, South Korea, and neighboring countries. Air connectivity continues to influence mobility patterns: while direct flights to Germany,

France, and the UK expanded in 2025, most travel to Western countries still requires transfers through cities like Istanbul, Dubai, or Abu Dhabi. Visa requirements and the overall cost of travel limit

accessibility for lower-income groups. Although travel to the West is increasing steadily, its limited accessibility for large segments of the population warrants a score of 2 out of 5.

## 5.2. PRESENCE OF WESTERN FRANCHISE COMPANIES 1/3

Western franchise companies are increasingly present in Uzbekistan's retail and service sectors, though their presence remains limited. The hospitality industry shows the most significant penetration of Western brands, with international hotel chains such as Hilton, Hyatt, Radisson, Accor, and Marriott expanding into key cities like Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. This growth is further supported by a rise in international tourism, including heritage travel linked to UNESCO initiatives and the "Tourism Year of Uzbekistan 2024-2025."

In the consumer goods sector, Western brands such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestlé, L'Oréal, Adidas, and Nike have established strong distribution networks. However, these brands often operate through local partners rather than maintaining a direct corporate presence.

On the other hand, Western fast-food and retail franchises remain underrepresented in Uzbekistan. Unlike in countries like Kazakhstan or Georgia, Uzbekistan has not yet attracted major restaurant chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, or Starbucks. Efforts to introduce global retail brands into shopping centers have yielded mixed results, primarily due to high market-entry costs and regulatory complexities. According to 2025 commercial real estate reviews, Asian brands — especially those from Turkey and Korea — dominate the food service and mid-range retail sectors.

While the presence of Western franchises is noticeable and continues to expand, it is not yet substantial enough to be considered structurally significant, resulting in a score of 1 out of 3.

## 5.3. MOBILE INTERNET COVERAGE, SMARTPHONE USAGE 2/2

Uzbekistan is recognized as one of the most digitally connected nations in Central Asia, characterized by near-universal mobile network coverage and a swift adoption of digital consumption habits reminiscent of Western societies. According to the 2025 Digital Uzbekistan Report, mobile penetration rates have surpassed 104%, smartphone usage exceeds 85%, and internet penetration approaches 80% nationwide.<sup>710</sup> The predominant mode of internet access for users is via smartphones, reflecting usage patterns similar to those found in many Western economies. The expansion of 4G coverage, along with the ongoing implementation of 5G pilot projects in Tashkent and Samarkand, further reinforces these trends.

Digital platforms are the primary conduit for the diffusion of Western lifestyle elements, encompassing streaming services, e-commerce, social media, and digital banking. The country continues to allocate substantial investments to enhance digital public services, which, in turn, foster Western-style digital literacy. Mobile payment systems, online shopping, and engagement with global social media are prevalent among the youth, effectively connecting Uzbekistan with global lifestyle and consumer trends. Given that digital coverage and smartphone penetration meet or exceed standards typically associated with Western middle-income societies, Uzbekistan is awarded the maximum score (2/2) for this indicator.

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