

Georgian Elections Observatory 2024

Debunking Pre-Election Propaganda Narratives



About the Project

The Georgian Elections Observatory (#GEObservatory24) is a short-term initiative focused on fact-checking pre-election narratives in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections on October 26. Unlike traditional fact-checking platforms, this project goes beyond verifying individual claims by analyzing entire narratives. It combines political analysis with fact-checking and media analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pre-election discourse. The project is supported by the Fojo Swedish Media Institute in collaboration with the Investigative Media Lab (IML) and the UG Security, Policy, and Nationalism Research Center (UGSPN).

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in these stories do not necessarily reflect those of the listed organizations.

The linked titles lead to <https://medialab.ug.edu.ge/en/elections>

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ANTI-WESTERN NARRATIVES



Don Fontijn/Unsplash

Anti-Western narratives in Georgia, frequently promoted by the ruling party, have deep roots in Soviet-era propaganda. In modern Georgia, these narratives are often revived to justify policies that discredit civil society organizations, critical media, and pro-democracy groups by labeling them as foreign agents or Western puppets. The ruling elite uses this discourse to shift focus away from

Russia's occupation of 20% of Georgian territory, instead portraying Western demands for democratic reforms as threats to Georgia's sovereignty and national identity, while at the same time softening their stance toward Russia. This allows them to manipulate nationalist sentiments, positioning resistance to Western liberal values as a patriotic duty, while downplaying Russia's ongoing influence and aggression.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

From Calculated Ambivalence to Anti-Western Stance

Anti-Western narratives in Georgia originate from the imperial rule of the Soviet Union. These narratives regarding issues of national identity and traditions, as well as towards state sovereignty, were an integral part of the Soviet anti-Western discourse. After the restoration of Georgian independence, the West became not only a source of physical survival and development of statehood but was also constitutionally recognized as a chief foreign policy priority. At the same time, anti-Western discourse has coexisted with official pro-Western policies in contemporary Georgia and has largely been rooted in cultural anxieties and ultra-nationalist narratives.

While pro-Western and pro-Russian policies and narratives acquired mutually exclusive content, especially after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the current Georgian government has attempted to determine its foreign policy course ambivalently in relation to these two spaces. This policy was aimed, on the one hand, at maintaining the level of integration with Western organizational structures and thus at mobilizing pro-European voters locally; and on the other hand, at encouraging a softened tone towards Russia and anti-Western, ultra-nationalist sentiments. Recently, Georgia's ruling elite has been actively using anti-Western rhetoric both to divert attention from other political issues in the pre-election period, and to instrumentalize public polarization, all the while supporting (covertly or overtly) pro-Russian narratives.

Historically, the anti-Western narrative developed within the Soviet Union painted the Western world as an evil, immoral empire characterized by interference in the internal affairs of other countries and causing destabilization or conflict. In the post-Soviet space, the enduring influence of these narratives has been amplified by pro-Russian and ultra-nationalist forces, which have continuously worked to undermine the pro-Western orientation of countries like Georgia. At the same time, Russia's strategic disinformation campaigns have played a critical role in portraying Western liberalism as incompatible with Georgia's Orthodox Christian values and national identity.

However, this dual strategy is not unique to Georgia: it reflects a broader pattern seen in illiberal regimes, where political elites use Western integration as a bargaining chip for leveraging the local pro-Western electorate, without fully committing to the reforms associated with it. In this context, anti-Western narratives within the country have coexisted together with publicly acclaimed, albeit selective, engagement with the West and EU integration processes. At the same time, after Russia's aggressive invasion of Ukraine, the ruling political elite in Georgia has been moving further away from the West in both its international and local political appeals. In terms of the latter, the anti-Western sentiments, discrediting of liberal democracy, and framing of Western values as conflicting with Georgian ones have defined the contemporary anti-Western discourse. This discourse, in turn, creates the necessary ground for local legislative changes adopted with anti-Western pathos to be portrayed as the defense of Georgian values, making the rejection of Western liberalism synonymous with patriotic duty.

The issue of state sovereignty and related discussions can be considered central to observing the foreign policy shift in the country. At first glance, it is paradoxical that the issue of sovereignty is discussed not in relation to Russia, which occupies twenty percent of the country's territory, but primarily problematized in discussions about the West. Similar dynamics can be observed in the government's frequent references to defending Georgia's sovereignty from external interference, portraying Western demands for democratic reforms as intrusions into the country's internal affairs. It is within this context that the so-called "Agents Law," adopted in 2024, should be considered. The law, modeled after Russian legislation, targets NGOs and media outlets that are essentially dependent on foreign—in this case, Western—funding in their work towards overseeing governance and providing balanced media coverage.

The softening of political messages and overall policy towards Russia is a key to deconstructing the contemporary anti-Western discourse. In this case, too, paradoxical dualism defines the scene: while Georgia's official policy remains committed to restoring territorial integrity and rejecting Russian occupation, the ruling party has been notably cautious in its criticism of Russia, especially as a central actor of the conflicts (as opposed to blaming the previous government). Moreover, in the government's discourse, rapprochement with the single most important source of aggressive wars in the region is considered a way towards peace and stability for Georgia.

In conclusion, anti-Western discourse in Georgia is a complex and multifaceted political tool that reflects a range of strategies, from "calculated ambivalence" to upholding Soviet anti-Western discourses. The anti-Western, ultra-nationalist, and illiberal rhetoric of a government leaning towards closer relations with Russia coexists with its publicly claimed ambition of Georgia's EU integration. As such, anti-Western sentiments are an important component of Georgian political and public life and will thus remain a potent political force, requiring open discussion and systematic debunking should the country ever consider rapprochement with the West.

Fact-Checking: Media Analysis

1.

Ivanishvili versus Georgian Dream leaders: Who accuses whom of financial blackmail?

Bidzina Ivanishvili claims that the ruling party has never accused the US or the European Union of financial blackmail. But what have Georgian Dream leaders actually said?

“The US Embassy cannot point to any instance where I, personally, or any other leader of Georgian Dream, accused the US or the European Union of financial blackmail.” This excerpt is from a [statement](#) released by Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder and honorary chairman of Georgian Dream, on October 1. Ivanishvili’s statement was a response to a Facebook post by the US Embassy in Georgia regarding the Credit Suisse case.

Earlier that day, the US Embassy [posted on social media](#), questioning why Ivanishvili was misleading the Georgian public about the Credit Suisse case. “Bidzina Ivanishvili knows that the money related to Credit Suisse is tied up in courts in Bermuda and Singapore, not the US. So why is he telling Georgians a different story?” the embassy’s post stated.

Bidzina Ivanishvili is [suing Credit Suisse](#) in multiple jurisdictions, seeking approximately \$800 million in damages. He argues that the actions of ex-banker Patrice Lescaudron resulted in significant financial harm. The Georgian billionaire claims that his family’s accounts at Credit Suisse have incurred total losses exceeding \$1.2 billion.

The next phase of [the dispute began](#) following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, when reports emerged that the bank had frozen an account belonging to Ivanishvili, valued at \$3.54 billion. The account was frozen due to suspicions that the funds might be of Russian origin.

In his lengthy statement responding to the US Embassy’s Facebook post, Ivanishvili emphasized that when Georgian Dream leaders spoke of bank account theft and financial blackmail, they never implicated the US or the European Union. Instead, they consistently attributed the blackmail to what they called the “Global War Party.”

“We did not accuse the US or the European Union of financial blackmail, even when Credit Suisse used a European Parliament resolution as another excuse to withhold the money. In fact, we’ve repeatedly clarified that by the Global War Party, we did not mean the US or the EU,” said Bidzina Ivanishvili. “However, we did specify that the Global War Party has significant influence over politicians and bureaucrats both in the US and the European Union.”

In fact, the leaders of Georgian Dream have not only suggested that the US and the European Union were behind the “blackmail,” but have also directly accused Western partners of orchestrating Ivanishvili’s financial robbery.

Who do the leaders of Georgian Dream blame for Ivanishvili’s “robbery”?

The European Parliament

In November 2022, [Irakli Kobakhidze stated](#) on the Georgian Public Broadcaster that Bidzina Ivanishvili was under constant threat. “Sometimes it’s the EPP, sometimes they threaten him in the European Parliament... They expect something from him, and because he refuses—because he won’t re-enter politics against his will—they are resorting to informal means of blackmail, essentially imposing informal sanctions. His money is parked in Switzerland,” Kobakhidze said, implying that Ivanishvili had been pressured by the European Parliament to open a second front against Russia.

A few days ago, Tbilisi’s mayor Kakha Kaladze spoke openly again about the “pressure to open a second front.” [He stated](#) that the “de facto sanctioned” Ivanishvili is being denied access to his own money due to political blackmail aimed at compelling him to open a second front against Russia.

“The question arises: who or what is blocking these funds, and why hasn’t he received his money back? Bidzina Ivanishvili is de facto sanctioned. They are blackmailing him with the fate of the country, pressuring him to open a second front and to join the sanctions,” said Kaladze.

The European Parliament, one of the EU’s key institutions, passes legislation together with the Council of the European Union. Its members are elected by citizens of EU member states through direct universal suffrage every five years. The statements made by Kobakhidze and other leaders against the European Parliament amount to accusations that the EU is attempting to blackmail Ivanishvili.

USA

In April 2024, journalists [asked Mamuka Mdinaradze](#), the executive secretary of Georgian Dream and leader of the party’s parliamentary faction, whether he anticipated sanctions from Western partners. This inquiry followed the party’s decision to proceed with adopting the so-called Russian law despite widespread protests and strong international criticism. In response to a question about the country’s Western partners, Mdinaradze stated: “What more can Bidzina Ivanishvili be sanctioned for? Two billion have been frozen, they bankrupted one of Switzerland’s most successful banks because of this, and he is effectively under sanctions.”

The Prime Minister has also made similar statements on multiple occasions. During a meeting with Georgian journalists in New York, [Irakli Kobakhidze remarked](#) that this blackmail against Ivanishvili would continue with the announcement of sanctions.

“The blackmail against Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili continues. He is already under de facto sanctions, with \$2 billion frozen in Europe. Now, this blackmail is taking on a new form, as we are hearing threats of formal sanctions. These individuals will not achieve their goal,” Kobakhidze stated.

On September 22, [Voice of America \(VoA\) reported](#) that the United States had developed sanctions against Ivanishvili and was considering imposing them in the near future. According to VoA, this information was confirmed by two high-ranking US government officials and two additional sources close to the administration.

Prior to this, Secretary of State Antony Blinken had addressed the issue of sanctions. [On September 16](#), the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on two Georgian officials: Zviad Kharazishvili (Kharaba), head of the Special Tasks Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and his deputy, Miller Lagazauri. Sanctions were also applied to Konstantine Morgoshia and Zurab Makharadze, who are associated with “Alt-Info.” Additionally, the US State Department imposed visa restrictions on over sixty Georgians and their family members deemed to be responsible for, or contributing to, the undermining of democracy in Georgia.

Blinken [stated](#) that this process was not over and that the United States would “continue to consider additional actions in response.”

European Banks

[Kakha Kaladze has accused](#) European banks of robbing Bidzina Ivanishvili. The general secretary of Georgian Dream and mayor of Tbilisi removed his own assets from foreign financial institutions, stating that he no longer trusts them following their alleged “robbery” of Ivanishvili.

“Bidzina Ivanishvili has been sanctioned. The reality is clear: a person who has won various lawsuits still cannot reclaim his money. This is a political decision. Unfortunately, there is no justice in today’s world. Just look at how they have treated Ivanishvili and what has been done to him. He has been robbed, in every sense of the word. Why should I trust them? Of course, I don’t trust them,” said Kaladze.

What does People’s Power say?

Despite the leaders of Georgian Dream explicitly blaming the West in the dispute between Ivanishvili and Credit Suisse, they maintain a relatively cautious tone. However, what Kobakhidze, Kaladze, and Ivanishvili imply indirectly is explicitly stated by the People’s Power movement.

This political union formally separated from Georgian Dream in 2022, yet it has consistently made decisions and statements that align with the political agenda of Georgian Dream. For instance, the law on Foreign Influence was officially developed by People’s Power, although Georgian Dream leaders have admitted that it was actually their initiative. Additionally, leaders of People’s Power occupy prominent positions on the 2024 parliamentary list for Georgian Dream.

People's Power has been particularly vocal in the dispute between Ivanishvili and Credit Suisse. Its leaders have not only accused the West of blackmailing Ivanishvili but also issued a special statement calling for a reassessment of Georgia's EU membership prospects in light of the ongoing dispute.

"We support the calls from individual experts for a broad discussion on all issues related to the ongoing developments within the European Union, including its value transformation and, consequently, Georgia's future within the EU," [reads a 2023 statement](#) issued by People's Power.

2.

Pre-election Instrumentalization of Religion: Who Is (Not) Fighting Against the Church?

Another example of right-win populist rhetoric from the Georgian Dream party is its manipulation of religion. The ruling party adopted its role as guardian of the Church ahead of the elections, even proposing an [initiative](#) to declare Christianity the state religion. One of the arguments for adopting the law on the transparency of foreign influence was the protection of the Georgian Church and Patriarchate, with the ruling party claiming that non-governmental organizations were working against them.

On August 21, the leader and founder of the party, [Bidzina Ivanishvili](#), stated that “the parliamentary elections of October 26 are a kind of referendum, where our fellow citizens must choose... between moral decline and Christian values.”

On August 25, Speaker of Parliament [Shalva Papuashvili](#) remarked, “It is obvious how much financial and human resources are being spent in the fight against faith, traditions, and national identity. How fiercely they battle against the church.... Do we pray in our shrines, or do we worship the gods of others?”

Similar rhetoric was repeated by the Speaker on several occasions. On [September 19](#), he said, “Today, they want to strip us of this very identity, so that we no longer know who we are, what we believe, or who we belong to. Then, they will tell us who we should be and what we should believe.” And again on [September 29](#), he added, “They cursed our King Erekle, defiled our wine, insulted our church. This is their European way. They want to turn us into a godless, ahistorical, impersonal group of people.”

Who Is (Not) Fighting Against the Church?

The Georgian Dream party has consistently [blamed](#) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for fighting against the church before the elections. They claim that these NGOs do not represent national interests but are agents of foreign forces, and their alleged battle against the Church is supposedly driven by the agendas of their Western donors. However, in reality, the West plays a significant role in preserving Georgia’s Church and cultural identity, as demonstrated by the restoration of numerous historical monuments through European and American grants.

[The U.S. Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Heritage Preservation \(AFCP\)](#)

The fund was established in 2001 to protect cultural heritage sites globally. Over the past twenty-one years, the United States has provided \$2 million for the restoration of Georgian cultural monuments through this fund. Some of the key [projects](#) include:

[Gelati Monastery](#): Restoration of frescoes, stabilization of the architectural structure, strengthening of plaster and painting layers, salt removal, covering with glazed ceramics, and cleaning of stone slabs.

[Khakhuli Karedi](#): Conservation of the icon and preparation for a new exhibition.

[Arbo St. George's Church and Tirdznisi Trinity Church \(conflict zone\)](#): Rehabilitation of churches damaged during the August war.

[Museum of Ethnography and History of Svaneti](#): Rehabilitation of preserved icons.

[Two Monasteries on the Western Outskirts of the Gareja Desert](#): Restoration of White Desert frescoes.

[Twelfth-to-Thirteenth Century Gospels](#): Restoration of metal-plated covers of the Gospels of Berti, Tskarostavi, and Tbeti.

[Uplistsikhe](#): Identification of critical areas, implementation of a complex monitoring system, and measures to prevent mountain rock collapse.

[Atenis Sioni](#): Rehabilitation of the building and its paintings.

[Monastery of the Cross](#): Conservation of the damaged paving stone on the facades of the main church.

Moreover, with the support of the United States, the earthquake-damaged [Ikorta](#) church was rebuilt, and the [Fitareti](#) church was rehabilitated.

[Civil Society Foundation \(formerly Open Society Foundation\)](#)

The Civil Society Foundation (formerly the Open Society Foundation) [funded](#) 365 projects for the preservation of cultural heritage with \$1,500,000 over twenty years, including the strengthening of Skhalti Cathedral, Tskhavati Monastery, Alexander Neveli Cathedral of Abastumani, and the Church of the Virgin Mary of Fudznari; the restoration of the fresco of the angel of Kintsvisi; providing description and archival of the wall paintings of St. Nino Bodbe church, Tedzmi church, and Aspindza church, as well as the Davit Gareji and Bethany Monastery frescoes; and photo fixation of the emergence of Mount Sina.

Other Western grants financed the restoration of various churches and sacred objects. For example, with the help of the [Council of Europe](#), the restoration of the Nikosia monastery took place, and with funding from the [Netherlands](#), the flood damage caused to the Alaverdi Cathedral was eliminated, and the twelfth-to-thirteenth century wall paintings of the Ikvi Cathedral were restored.

This is just a small list of the aid that Western funds provide for the preservation of unique Georgian culture.

In parallel with Western assistance, the condition of Georgian cultural heritage monuments in territories occupied by Russia is deteriorating. For instance, in 2011, [Dranda](#) church, located in the Dranda village of Gulripshi municipality near Sokhumi, was whitewashed, ten silver doors and windows were installed, and the earth layer surrounding the temple was completely removed. Similarly, the [Ilori](#) Cathedral was plastered in white, sacrificing its unique Georgian frescoes and inscriptions. Throughout history, Russia has consistently damaged temples in conquered territories, such as the Bedia Temple, where the fresco of [Bagrat III](#) was damaged. Moreover, Russia continues to vandalize churches in Ukraine. According to the [New York Times](#), Russia has destroyed more than 900 schools, churches, and hospitals since the start of the war.

While the ruling party accuses NGOs and their donors of fighting against the Church, one of Georgia's most important religious sites, the [Gelati](#) Monastery, is in a dire state. Its roof, wall paintings, and the unique mosaic of the Virgin Mary are in urgent need of restoration. Water now leaks from the damaged roof, further eroding the medieval frescoes and wall paintings. According to a journalistic [investigation](#), Gelati's current state is a result of nepotism and official indifference. After inadequate efforts by the Ministry of Culture, the Georgian Patriarchate assumed responsibility for the restoration [process](#), but delays persist, leaving the priceless artwork vulnerable.

A further clear example of the manipulation of religion and the Church is the illegal [wiretapping](#) of Georgian Church officials by the State Security Service, underscoring the government's exploitation of religious institutions for political gain.

3.

EU's Defense of Democracy Package and Foreign Agents Law

On October 11, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze [stated](#):

“The ‘Transparency Law’ was initiated in the European Union, similar to the one we proposed in Georgia, which, including by EU representatives, was labelled the ‘Russian Law.’ The justification for this was that by halting the adoption of a similar law in the EU, they would not be able to pressure Georgia to withdraw its own version. Is this not a revelation? People openly admit the law is good but say it shouldn’t apply to Georgia, so they reject it for themselves.”

On December 12, 2023, the European Union indeed [adopted](#) the “Democracy Protection” package. A central part of this package is a proposal for a directive on the “transparency of interest of representatives’ activities carried out on behalf of third countries.”

Representatives of Georgia’s ruling party often [compare](#) this directive to the “Russian law” they proposed in Georgia. According to the Speaker of the Parliament [Shalva Papuashvili](#), the EU directive has a “spirit and content” similar to the Georgian draft law. However, despite some similarities, the EU directive and Georgia’s law are fundamentally different.

The EU directive aims to prevent foreign interference and disinformation. It targets entities that represent the interests of third countries, such as lobbyists, and seeks to standardize transparency practices across EU member states. Its focus is on ensuring common transparency standards throughout the EU.

In contrast, Georgia’s “foreign agents” law targets organizations that receive foreign funding, particularly civil society groups and media outlets. The EU directive does not single out entities based on their foreign funding status, nor does it focus specifically on NGOs or media. Furthermore, the EU directive includes safeguards to ensure proportionality and prevent discrimination or stigmatization. It also protects fundamental rights, like freedom of expression and association. This contrasts with the Georgian Dream party’s law of 2023, which aimed to discredit civil society and critical media by labelling them as “agents.”

Unlike the EU directive, the Georgian law is not part of a broader package to protect democracy or transparency. It stands alone and, according to its initiators, aims to increase transparency around foreign funding for NGOs and political opponents of the ruling party.

Finally, the claim that the EU rejected its law because of Georgia is baseless. The EU began discussing its directive in September 2022. In her State of the Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that a proposal on foreign financing was already under development. While initially expected in spring 2023, consultations on the directive are still ongoing

4.

The Anti-Western Narratives of Georgian Dream: The EU versus the Soviet Union

Western institutions often criticize the current government of Georgia for its democratic backsliding. In response to this criticism, representatives of the ruling party have launched verbal attacks on Western institutions. On October 14, the mayor of Tbilisi, [Kakha Kaladze](#), said, “What they [the European Union] are framing and doing is no different from the Soviet Union—why does Europe have a price? The fact is that there are different states with their own cultures and traditions; if we put all this under one line and are forced to conform in the same way, what does it matter whether it’s the Soviet Union or the European Union?”

Representatives of the ruling party have made similar statements on other occasions. In February 2023, prime minister [Irakli Kobakhidze](#), speaking about a European Parliament resolution, said, “I don’t know what is wrong with the European Parliament. We were as careful as possible about the institutions of the European Union, which is why we focused on specific MEPs. In this case, the public can see that this is a systemic problem with the institution known as the European Parliament. This is a very serious problem. Frankly, even the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union would be envious of such a decision. I clearly remember the late 1980s, when the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union’s meetings were broadcast. What happened there is the same as what is happening today with the previous two resolutions of the European Parliament.” Non-democratic forces often equate the European Union with the Soviet Union to fuel Euroscepticism and deflect criticism. Although drawing such a parallel is absurd, the governmental forces frequently use this narrative to strengthen their anti-Western sentiments.

European Union ≠ Soviet Union

The European Union and the Soviet Union differ fundamentally in terms of principles, values, governance style, and structure.

Voluntary Association ≠ Forced Association

The European Union is several decades old and today unites twenty-seven member states. Joining or leaving the EU is entirely voluntary and based on the will of each state. As part of the enlargement process, prospective members must align their economic and political structures with EU standards, with compatibility with democratic principles being paramount. States can also make the decision to leave the organization, as demonstrated by the [UK’s exit](#) in 2020. In contrast, the [Soviet Union](#) was formed through the forced union of fifteen states, including Georgia, which was occupied in 1921. Despite constitutional provisions, it was practically impossible for states to leave the Soviet Union. Attempts by [Hungary](#) in 1956 and [Czechoslovakia](#) in 1968 to exit the Warsaw Pact and move away from Soviet control were brutally suppressed.

Democracy ≠ Totalitarianism

Democratic governance, protection of human rights, and a market economy are core values of the European Union, as established by the [Copenhagen](#) criteria for EU membership in 1993. The EU is a democratic organization where decisions are made by democratically elected representatives of its member states. By contrast, the Soviet Union was a totalitarian state dominated by the Communist Party, where decisions were made by an authoritarian leader. Under this regime, freedom of speech, human rights, and democratic values were severely restricted. Elections were largely symbolic and did not represent true popular rule.

Market Economy ≠ Planned Economy

The European Union operates on the principles of a market economy, which includes some degree of regulation but allows economic activity to be conducted within the framework of a free market, with protections for private property and competition. By contrast, the Soviet Union had complete state control over the economy, private property did not exist, and economic hardship and goods shortages were common. The European Union, on the other hand, is characterized by prosperity and welfare states.

Sovereignty ≠ Centralized Control

Member states of the European Union retain their sovereignty and have a mandate to pursue independent policies. Even under EU regulations, such as those governing trade or environmental policies, member states maintain their independence. In the Soviet Union, the fifteen republics formally retained statehood but had little autonomy, as they were ultimately governed by the central authority in Moscow.

Multiculturalism ≠ Monoculturalism

The European Union is founded on the primacy of human rights, with a special emphasis on the rights of minorities and protection from any form of discrimination. The EU safeguards and promotes the cultural identities of small nations. Moreover, the EU supports non-member states in the preservation and strengthening of their cultural heritage; this includes [Georgia](#). By contrast, the Soviet Union not only violated minority rights but also restricted the political and cultural identities of its nations, emphasizing the promotion of Russian culture. One notable example of this is the USSR's attempt in 1978 to replace Georgia's state [language](#) with Russian.

FEAR OF WAR

**WORSE THAN WAR IS THE VERY
FEAR OF WAR.
- SENECA THE YOUNGER -**

Georgian Dream (GD) has promoted a meta-narrative claiming that without their governance, Georgia would face war. This narrative amplifies fear, presenting GD as the only option to preserve peace while manipulating public sentiment about EU membership and Western alliances. Political leaders have repeatedly claimed that Georgia initiated the 2008 August War, referencing a misinterpretation of a European Council resolution. This narrative, echoed by pro-government media, distorts the resolution, which neither assigns blame to Georgia nor justifies Russia's actions, instead recognizing Russia's occupation and ethnic cleansing. This disinformation, intended to instill fear of renewed conflict, positions GD as the party preventing war, while twisting international reports to justify their claims.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The Utility of War-Fear Manipulation

If we look at the process of meta-narrative formation by Georgian Dream (GD)—which, in a nutshell, can be framed as “without us (GD) in power, there will be war in Georgia”—it becomes strikingly evident how structurally well-developed the GD information campaign is, with its messages and contextual focuses uniquely serving a particular target group (audience). Starting with the general claim that all competing political parties will push Georgia onto a path to war, the logic of their argumentation continues with attributing the risk of war to a mythical “global war party,” which is supposedly difficult to attribute to a particular country or institution, but is powerful enough to shape the global policy of the West. Consequently, Georgia’s wish to join the EU and other Western institution is presented as an act of Georgian good will, in which no general conditions of membership will apply to the country: that is, Georgia will join the EU only with “dignity.” If this is not possible and the EU insists on enforcing its rules, then Georgia, according to GD, will choose to preserve its “dignity,” refuse the membership, and maintain a strategic balancing position between major powers including the West, Russia, and China. In this way, the “war versus peace” narrative turns into an effective “information trident,” with which the triggered psychological fear of war is accompanied by the political promise of future membership in EU and NATO, and the invocation of “practical benefits or losses” to be compensated if necessary, via strategic non-alignment. From this perspective, the GD approach—while not perfect—truly appears the best available, better than anything offered before.

Despite the fact that GD's fear-mongering efforts slowly came to public attention immediately after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it only became evident in late 2023 and early 2024 that GD had failed in pushing its previously chosen primary message of anti-LGBT propaganda: as a result, it quickly jumped on war-fear messaging by significantly intensifying its information campaign. This can partly be attributed to the failed efforts by Georgian Dream to sabotage Georgia’s EU candidacy status by not implementing the Charles Michel plan (and the respective nine steps outlined by the Commission), along with the European Union’s decision to grant candidate status. It appears that GD was looking for a much “stronger” move that would, on the one hand, significantly alienate the EU, thereby effectively blocking the country’s membership negotiations; on the other hand, any such move had to provide a formal justification of noncompliance for the domestic audience and create the twin psychological and political dilemma of “no to GD means war” for the upcoming parliamentary elections. This move was found when the ruling party introduced the so-called Russian Law (officially the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence), which saw the vast majority of public organizations and NGOs labeled as foreign agents, receiving foreign financing and pushing for the supposed Western agenda of opening a second front: that is, starting war against Russia.

It is evident that there is no other topic left powerful enough to capitalize upon and mobilize support. GD abandoned all the other issue areas on which political parties typically focus to formulate their

electoral programs and promises. From the perspective of rationality, the GD decision can be justified, since the party has nothing to present to the electorate and no serious achievements to be proud of. Therefore, due to the significant decline in GD's popularity since the adoption of the Russian Law, the persistent popular belief that joining the EU is a necessity, and the fact that any other (economic, social, etc.) electoral topic could be very damaging to GD itself, the "preservation of peace" message remains the only one that can potentially dominate and trump all the others. This assumption appears even more convincing as, much like Russian propaganda, the GD information campaign relies heavily on half-truths, manipulation of facts, and simple wordings that leave strong psychological imprints and affect basic perceptions. For instance claims that a "global war party" is the major culprit (not Russia) in starting the war in Ukraine finds a fertile ground in Georgia and is further pushed by GD, as it points to the West and its inability to provide enough military support to defeat Russia, alongside its unwillingness to accept Ukraine and Georgia into NATO to prevent and stop Russian aggression, as clear evidence of Western weakness, manipulation of Ukraine, and intention to keep the war going.

Fact-Checking Narratives Media Analysis

1.

"Georgia started the August War" and other disinformation narratives in GD's pre-election campaign

On August 14, the Political Council of Georgian Dream issued a [statement](#), declaring:

“We cannot forget that the National Movement was the first to acknowledge the start of the August 2008 war by signing the European Council resolution and subsequently agreeing to the Tagliavini report, which described Russia’s military intervention as a retaliatory and legally justified action.”

Shortly after, on September 15, the same narrative was [echoed](#) by the pro-government media outlet POSTV, which reported:

“On behalf of the National Movement, the beginning of the August 2008 war was recognized and signed by Giorgi Kandelaki, Chiora Taktakishvili, Giorgi Gabashvili, Giorgi Targamadze, and Akaki Minashvili.”

This narrative was [reiterated](#) by Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze during a briefing on September 17, where he stated:

“The war was started by Saakashvili’s regime, a fact later acknowledged by the leaders of his government. You are likely familiar with the Council of Europe resolution, which clearly states that the Saakashvili regime initiated large-scale hostilities on August 7. It goes on to explain that this was followed by a retaliatory attack by Russia.”

A similar [claim](#) was made by the leader of the ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, in Kvemo Kartli on September 19 during a pre-election speech:

“The 2008 war was started by the nationalists under external orders. Yet, none of them even attempted to justify themselves.”

On the anniversary of the fall of Sokhumi, Prime Minister Kobakhidze [echoed](#) these sentiments, stating:

“In 2008, the Saakashvili regime started the war, a fact later confirmed when they signed the European Council resolution. The resolution explicitly states that the Russian Federation responded to the Saakashvili regime’s attack with a counterattack. How, then, is Russia not guilty of the war? It occupied our territories, but the Saakashvili regime initiated the conflict.”

In fact, [the resolution](#) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe does not assign blame to either side for starting the war. In the eighth paragraph, which addresses the outbreak of the war, it states:

“The Assembly believes that truth is a precondition for reconciliation. Since the facts surrounding the outbreak of the war are disputed by both Georgia and Russia, they should be established, in an objective manner, by an independent international investigation. The Georgian authorities have indicated that they would welcome such an international inquiry and the Russian members of parliament have also indicated that they would not object to this proposal. This investigation should not be limited to the outbreak of the war, but should also focus on the years leading up to the conflict.”

The part of the resolution that the official media presents as an acknowledgment of Georgia starting the war in fact only refers to the transition to the full-scale escalation of the conflict. Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the resolution clarify that the war was preceded by significant escalation, as well as a deterioration in the security situation, and that the use of military force became one possible scenario for the parties involved.

The resolution of the Council of Europe not only denies that Georgia was responsible for starting the war, but it is also one of the first international documents to strongly condemn the recognition of the occupied territories. It refers to the Kremlin’s actions as an occupation and highlights Russia’s failure to prevent ethnic cleansing in areas effectively controlled by its military forces. It is also worth noting that during the final vote on the document, the Russian delegation voted against it, as the accusations it contained were unacceptable to them.

The resolution does not state that Georgia started the war. Therefore, the claims made by Irakli Kobakhidze and other leaders of the ruling party based on this resolution, suggesting that Georgia initiated the 2008 war and that the current government has admitted this, do not align with reality. These statements represent a disinformation narrative that distorts the actual content and context of the document.

Political Manipulation of the August 2008 War’s Start Date

On the sixteenth anniversary of the August War, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze visited Mukhatgverdi cemetery on August 8, instead of August 7, and [remarked](#):

“I don’t think these speculations about the date are serious. You will remember that our political opponents marked this date on August 8 for years, and then, after some time, they decided that August 7 was the actual start of the war. These are baseless speculations, meant only to create division within society.”

Additionally, the ruling party issued a [statement](#) on August 7, accusing the previous government of artificially changing the war’s start date:

“The National Movement designated August 8 as the start of the war, and their official commemorations were held on that day. A few years ago, however, the radical opposition decided to change the date, declaring August 7 as the beginning of the war.”

It should be noted that other members of the ruling party, along with their supporters, still consider August 8 as the start date of the war.

In fact, the Georgian government at that time initially recognized August 7 as the start date of the war. This was confirmed by the commemoration event [held](#) in August 2009, which marked the anniversary of the war’s beginning and took place on August 7.

Additionally, on August 6, 2009, in connection with the anniversary of the August War, the Georgian authorities [published](#) a report detailing the events at the onset of the conflict. The report states that on the morning of August 7, at 03:41, approximately 150 Russian armored vehicles and military trucks entered Georgian territory through the Roki Tunnel. In response, the Georgian armed forces opened artillery fire later that same day, at 23:50, under the order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Therefore, the official position of the Georgian government regarding the start date of the war has consistently been August 7, corresponding to the entry of Russian military forces through the Roki Tunnel into Georgian territory. It is also important to note that during his time in office, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili [held](#) anniversary events commemorating the war on August 7.

Moreover, paragraph 4 of the European Council [resolution](#) clearly states that the war began on August 7, 2008. However, it also notes that this was “the result of a serious escalation of tension, with provocations and ensuing deterioration of the security situation, which had started much earlier.”

Naming August 8 as the start date of the war aligns with Russian propaganda, as Russia [does not acknowledge](#) its entry into Georgian territory on August 7. Instead, it claims that it only began a “counterattack” after Georgia's “invasion” of South Ossetia on August 8.

False Claims About US Support in the August 2008 War

Pro-Russian groups and supporters of the ruling party have been spreading the false narrative that the United States only aided Georgia with “water and diapers” during the August 2008 war.

On August 15, Goga Khaindrava, a film director and supporter of Georgian Dream, echoed this disinformation, [stating](#):

“Society should understand that America and NATO trained the Georgian army to use it for their own security purposes. That’s why they first deployed it in various missions, and then, in 2008, during the war that was provoked, they abandoned a humanitarian water deposit.”

In reality, the United States was the first to take significant steps to assist Georgia during the conflict. On August 9, the US [assisted](#) Georgia by transporting more than 800 soldiers and eleven tons of cargo from Iraq back to Georgia. Furthermore:

-
1. On August 13, US President George W. Bush [announced](#) that the United States was launching a humanitarian mission to aid Georgia, utilizing US air and naval forces. The primary objective of this plan was to protect Tbilisi Airport and seaports from further Russian attacks;
 2. As part of the humanitarian mission, several ships arrived in Georgia, including the USS Arleigh Burke, equipped with RIM-67 Standard ER (SM-1ER/SM-2ER) missile launchers and Harpoon missiles, the USS Mount Whitney (LCC/JCC 20) from the Blue Ridge class, and the Hamilton-class Coast Guard cutter USCGC Dallas (WMEC-716);
 3. The United States was the first country to announce immediate financial support for Georgia, which was soon [followed](#) by \$750 million in aid from the International Monetary Fund. Additionally, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) [allocated](#) \$250,000 for emergency assistance to help approximately 10,000 people affected by the conflict;
 4. On August 12, the first UN humanitarian mission [delivered](#) thirty-four tonnes of aid to Georgia. The EU also [activated](#) its civil protection mechanism, through which eleven European countries provided food, medical supplies, blankets, and shelter. Spain [contributed](#) €500,000 to assist the displaced, while the Latvian government [sent](#) medical supplies worth 20,000 lats;
 5. On August 14, Estonia [sent](#) €250,000 worth of humanitarian aid and medical personnel. Alongside this aid, they also [dispatched](#) computer technology experts to assist Georgian specialists with the security of their electronic communications.

Thus, the narrative that the West only provided Georgia with water and diapers is again false and part of a broader Russian disinformation campaign.

2.

In the Footsteps of Georgian Dream's “Unprecedented Peace”

As Georgia approaches the elections, the ruling party, Georgian Dream, touts “unprecedented peace” as its main achievement, yet the grim facts beyond the political rhetoric tell a different story.

One month before the elections, Georgian Dream’s new billboards appeared on the streets of the Georgian capital Tbilisi. This time, the authorities chose to visualize familiar propaganda messages by using images of buildings and churches destroyed by Russian bombs in Ukraine. According to the billboards, the people of Georgia now face a stark choice between war and peace, with war symbolized by the opposition and peace embodied by Georgian Dream.

“This will be an election between peace and war. The guarantor of peace, of course, is Georgian Dream,” said Irakli Kirtskhalia, deputy chairman of the Georgian Dream parliamentary faction, in August.

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze stated that comparing war and peace today is a matter of principle. “It is fundamental for society to make the right choice, as depicted in these images—something that has been avoided at great cost,” Kobakhidze told reporters on September 27.

The topic of peace has become particularly prominent since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since February 2022, the word “peace” has frequently appeared in political speeches by the government and its affiliated groups. The ruling party continually reminds voters how Georgian Dream has successfully maintained unprecedented peace and stability in the country.

“From the very first day of our historic victory on October 1, 2012, an unprecedented twelve years of continuous peace were established in our country—something that no other leader has achieved since the restoration of independence. We had no wars and lost no additional territories,” said Irakli Gharibashvili, the chairman of Georgian Dream, during a regional campaign event in Gori.

Examining the facts behind the “unprecedented peace” rhetoric

During these twelve years of “unprecedented peace” under Georgian Dream’s rule, occupying forces have killed Georgian citizens, kidnapped thousands, and illegally appropriated millions of square meters of land. Barbed wire now divides residential areas and cemeteries. Many have lost their homes and sources of income, and access to quality healthcare and medications remains severely limited.

Creeping occupation, abduction, and a struggle for survival: this is the daily life of those residing near the occupation line. Amid these harsh realities, the government appears largely powerless, leaving citizens utterly vulnerable.

Tamaz Ginturi is one of the latest victims of the occupation forces in Georgia. The fifty-eight-year-old Georgian citizen was killed by Russian forces in November 2023, shot twice in the back after lighting candles at the Lomisi temple. His companion, Levan Dotiashvili, was kidnapped.

In 2018, Russian border guards declared the Church of St. George of Lomisi to be occupied, forbidding residents of Mejriskhevi, Zerti, and Bershueti from approaching the church where they once prayed. The occupying authorities sealed the church door and covered it with construction foam.

A few weeks after the murder of Tamaz Ginturi, another Georgian citizen fell victim to the occupation regime, this time in occupied Abkhazia. On December 9, 2023, forty-three-year-old Vitaly Karbaya was severely beaten by members of the so-called “Abkhaz militia” near the Gali market. Vitaly, who suffered broken ribs, died the following day in a hospital in Sukhumi.

In 2022, Gennady Bestaev died after being transported from Tskhinvali prison to Tbilisi in an unconscious state. He had received a three-year prison sentence for crossing the occupation line, even though the barbed wire of the occupation regime cut through his yard.

Prior to this, four others lost their lives due to the actions of the occupation regime: Davit Basharuli in 2014, Goga Otkhozoria in 2016, Archil Tatunashvili in 2018, and Irakli Kvaratskhelia in 2019.

According to official data, in just the last eleven years, Russian occupation forces have illegally kidnapped at least 2,418 citizens of Georgia.

Official data on the extent of land appropriated by the Russian forces through creeping occupation remains unknown, as the government does not publicly comment on it. However, according to incomplete data from Davit Katsarava, head of the anti-occupation movement Strength in Unity, Russian occupiers have seized over 60 million square meters of land in Shida Kartli since 2012.

Citizens of Georgia living beyond the occupation line face difficult conditions. Medicines and high-quality medical services are generally unavailable to them. Given their often-complicated health issues, rapid patient transport is vital, but crossing the occupation line is anything but easy.

In 2023, a one-and-a-half-year-old child died while being transported from Akhagori to Tbilisi after delays in obtaining permission to cross the occupation line. There were issues with the child’s birth certificate. Ultimately, the parents were able to bring the child to Georgian-controlled territory through the Odzisi-Mosabruni checkpoint. Tragically, the child died near Mtskheta, on the way to Tbilisi.

Thousands of illegal actions and crimes committed by the occupation regime in Georgia almost always go unanswered by the Georgian Dream government. This inaction stems from a policy of non-provocation and a cautious approach toward Russia.

The “Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list,” established after Archil Tatunashvili suffered over one hundred injuries and was tortured to death in Tskhinvali prison, is also a subject of criticism. This list is intended to include individuals involved in the kidnapping, torture, and murder of Georgian citizens. However, the government has not responded to the opposition’s request to add representatives of the Russian government to the list. Additionally, those suspected of the brutal murders of Ginturi and Karbaya are also not included.

For those living near the occupation line—people constantly at risk of illegal detention, kidnapping, and loss of their homes and livelihoods—the government’s only response is a policy of caution and non-provocation toward Russia. Locals argue that the current situation, where Georgian citizens can be killed or kidnapped at any moment and the occupation line can shift at any time, cannot be considered peace. For many, what Georgian Dream calls “peace” today is nothing of the sort, but rather complete adaptation to the aggressive policies of the occupation regime.

3.

The Truth Behind Government Officials' Actions During the 2008 War

During the last few years, government [representatives](#) and [individuals](#) associated with them have frequently spread information suggesting that, during the 2008 war, high-ranking officials and members of parliament fled the country.

On July 20, 2020, during the nomination of candidates for the subsequent parliamentary elections in October, the current chairman of the Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, [said](#) in a speech:

“The National Movement not only failed to protect the people during the crisis but also abandoned them to their fate... I remember how they fled the battlefield and the country... these people are now clinging to the past, their main goal being to seize power and exact revenge.”

The same narrative was [echoed](#) by the then-Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Natia Turnava:

“When discussing how to handle a crisis, don’t pretend that you have a better solution than we do. In August 2008, some of the leaders of your political party fled to various borders, leaving the country.”

On October 15, 2024, the executive secretary of Georgian Dream, Mamuka Mdinaradze, [reiterated](#) this narrative during a speech at a regional campaign event in Zugdidi, stating:

“Where there was fighting, their leaders were not there. No one could reach the Red Bridge—if there was a fight, we fought harder than anyone!”

The narrative promoted by current government representatives, which has circulated for several years, contains inaccuracies. While some individuals affiliated with the government of the time did cross the border during the war, none of the decision-makers permanently fled the country. In fact, some who crossed the border returned almost immediately after.

In 2014, Irakli Sesiashvili, a Georgian Dream MP and chairman of the Defense and Security Committee, [published](#) a list of the departures and returns of former government officials between August 7 and August 14, 2008. According to Sesiashvili, the list was requested by the temporary parliamentary commission investigating the August war and obtained from the Border Protection Department. The document is archived in parliament.

According to the list [published](#) by Sesiashvili, several officials returned to Georgia on August 9, including Davit Bakradze, the then-chairman of parliament; Giga Bokeria, the secretary of the Security Council; Bakur Kvezereli, the Minister of Agriculture; and Giorgi Meladze, a member of parliament.

August 10 saw more government figures cross the border and return, including Nino Kalandadze, a member of parliament; Nikoloz Rurua, the Minister of Culture and Monument Protection; and Koba Subeliani, the Minister of Internally Displaced Persons, Resettlement, and Refugees.

Nikoloz Rurua returned to Georgia from the United States on August 10. His brother, Giorgi Rurua, later [confirmed](#) this on Facebook, stating that he had requested information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The document shows that Nikoloz Rurua returned to the country via the Red Bridge, Georgia's border with Azerbaijan, on August 10.

We can therefore state that the narrative spread by representatives of the current government, claiming that high-ranking officials fled the country during the August 2008 war, is not entirely accurate. While some officials did cross the border, the majority returned shortly thereafter, as confirmed by official records. Importantly, none of the decision-makers within the executive branch abandoned the country during the war.

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY



Territorial integrity. Despite Georgia’s non-recognition policy supported by Western partners, ruling party’s focus on territorial integrity lacks a clear strategy and appears more of a political tool to secure electoral support rather than a viable solution. The absence of any detailed explanation regarding the constitutional changes needed for territorial restoration raises concerns that the proposed model may involve concessions to Russia’s preferred outcome—a confederation of independent states, rather than reunification under Georgia's constitutional framework.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Georgian Dream's election campaign is increasingly becoming a weird animal which has nothing to do with typical electoral competition, in which competing parties try to trump each other with promises of tangible benefits that voters can expect in the near future. Instead, it decided to completely focus its efforts on two major messages: the first of these sees GD threatening Georgian society with a high chance of war with Russia if other parties win the elections and control the government; and the second demands the regular voter to "provide" blindly a constitutional parliamentary majority for GD in order finally to solve the problem of Georgia's territorial integrity.

Apart from the absurdity of the situation in which GD, while demanding a constitutional majority, actually never explains why it needs this majority and what constitutional changes it plans, the very attempt to link a positive solution to the problem of the occupied territories with the necessity of changing the country's constitutional fabric appears not only futile and unrealistic, but impertinent and brazen. During its twelve years of rule, GD never bothered to formulate or offer even a vague formula for the restoration of territorial integrity, in which any general aspects of dealing with the Russian factor or the problems of approaching separatist regimes were made public. Furthermore, the political opposition frequently demanded the ruling party initiate the process of strategy development and consequently was always accused of being too radical and counterproductive. The non-recognition policy adopted by Georgia's Western partners largely worked because of their cooperation and collaborative efforts to block and minimize the chances of recognition, which would directly result in a global victory for Russian foreign policy aims and cause a diplomatic chain reaction of recognitions.

Thus, if there was no prior strategy developed by GD to solve the territorial problem, and it is not up to the GD government to secure this non-recognition policy globally, the question of why GD raised this topic to the top of their electoral agenda—and why now—becomes critically important. Since seeking a constitutional majority implies a need to change the constitution and is directly linked to the future structure and construction of the state in terms of territory, administration, and normative aspects of state governance, the promise and demand posed by GD—with no follow-up explanation whatsoever—can only mean that a radical change of the formula for territorial organization and unity is being drafted. Given how frequently Russia refuses to withdraw its official decision to recognize the separatist regions as independent states, along with its clear insistence on solving the issue based on bilateral negotiations between Georgia and the separatist regions as equal (independent) parties (states), the possibility of a solution based on a confederacy of independent states becomes a very real option: indeed, the only option. Understandably, the GD is not ready to reveal this to its audience in the run up to elections.

Fact-Checking Narratives Media Analysis

1.

Restoring territorial integrity: A matter of Russia’s political will or a new constitutional model?

The leaders of Georgian Dream assure voters that a new constitutional model is needed to restore territorial integrity. However, the official strategy of the Georgian government concerning the occupied territories presents a starkly different reality. According to the document, restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity is not possible without Russia’s political will. Yet Russian officials consistently remind the leaders of Georgian Dream that the Kremlin has no intention of reconsidering its stance.

One of the key messages from Georgian Dream ahead of the elections is the restoration of territorial integrity. Leaders of the ruling party emphasize to voters that securing a constitutional majority is essential for the country, arguing that it is the only path to reclaiming the Russian-occupied territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

“In the current circumstances, both domestically and globally, there is a strong chance that we can restore the country’s territorial integrity. For this, a constitutional majority is crucial to implement the necessary reorganization,” [said](#) Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze in August.

Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder and honorary chairman of Georgian Dream, expressed a similar sentiment.

“On October 26, if we secure a constitutional majority, the Georgian Dream team is prepared to transition the country to a constitutional model that will enable us to fulfill our long-standing dream—to see a united and strong Georgia once again!” Ivanishvili [stated](#).

Why has restoring territorial integrity not been possible until now?

The document published on the official website of the Government of Georgia— [State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation](#)—provides an answer to this question.

This official government document states that following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation played a pivotal role in fueling conflicts in Georgia, directly participating in hostilities and consistently obstructing international resolution efforts.

“The war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 illustrated that the primary nature of the conflicts on the territory of Georgia is of an international character,” states the government’s official document.

The strategy further notes that the occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, along with policies aimed at the annexation of these areas, complicates the reconciliation process between the different peoples of Georgia and the peaceful reintegration of the occupied territories into Georgia’s constitutional ambit.

The comprehensive strategy published on the official government website indicates that currently, 20 percent of Georgia is under occupation, with Russia being the primary aggressor. The document implies that the existence of a peaceful and united Georgia as a neighbor to Russia is not in the Kremlin’s interests.

What do we hear from Russia?

The Kremlin explicitly states that it is entirely unacceptable for Russia to restore Georgia’s territorial integrity. In September, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov made it clear that the Kremlin is only prepared to assist in normalizing relations with Georgia, Abkhazia, and the Tskhinvali region as three independent countries.

“They [Abkhazia and Tskhinvali] are neighbors of Georgia, and some form of contact is inevitable. If all parties are interested in normalizing these relations and securing a non-aggression agreement, we will be ready to help,” [Lavrov stated](#).

Other Russian officials have also weighed in on this topic, and Russian media have actively published articles regarding one of the key pre-election promises of Georgian Dream.

One of the latest pieces, titled “[Russia Excludes the Return of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia](#),” appeared on September 24 on gazeta.ru, a Russian state media website. The article referenced comments from Konstantin Zatulin, first deputy chairman of the committee of the State Duma for the CIS and relations with Russian nationals abroad.

“Before the elections, the ruling party Georgian Dream decided to announce a new approach, specifically an apology to the Ossetians for Saakashvili’s aggression in 2008. This move serves not only international purposes but primarily domestic political reasons. They are attempting to draw voters’ attention to the deadlock Saakashvili created with his aggression,” said the Russian MP.

He further stated that Tbilisi should not expect Abkhazians and Ossetians to be prepared for “unification” with Georgians.

“That train left a long time ago. Abkhazia and South Ossetia will not return to Georgia,” Zatulin asserted.

What do we hear from the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali?

Georgian Dream's messages regarding the restoration of territorial integrity were promptly [addressed](#) from occupied Abkhazia. The so-called "Foreign Ministry" of Abkhazia asserted that, instead of indulging in stereotypes about Georgia's territorial integrity and other mythical terms that do not reflect reality, Georgian politicians should prioritize establishing diplomatic relations with Russia.

"As for the potential for any kind of relationship with the neighboring state of Georgia in the future, our position remains unchanged. Georgia should recognize the Republic of Abkhazia as a sovereign and independent state and sign a legally binding document on the non-use of force," the statement read.

The former de facto leader of the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region, Eduard Kokoyty, who served as "president" during the August war, [responded](#) to Bidzina Ivanishvili's apology initiative.

At a pre-election meeting in Gori, Ivanishvili stated that he owes an apology to the "Ossetian sisters and brothers."

"We will surely find the strength within ourselves to apologize for the fact that, in accordance with the task, the treacherous National Movement in 2008 engulfed our Ossetian sisters and brothers in flames," Ivanishvili [said](#).

According to Kokoyty, "Georgia should recognize the independence of South Ossetia, sign all necessary agreements regarding peace and the non-renewal of hostilities," and also return the Truso and Gudo valleys.

In Tskhinvali, officials assert that "Georgia has occupied the historical Ossetian lands."

CONSPIRACY THEORIES



Getty Images

Global War Party. The ruling Georgian Dream party has created the term "Global War Party" to label Western critics, opposition parties, and foreign partners, particularly in the EU and NATO, as part of a conspiracy aiming to destabilize Georgia and provoke conflict, similar to the situation in Ukraine. The "Global War Party" is a conspiracy theory crafted by Georgian Dream to manipulate public opinion by instilling fear of foreign interference and war. The strategy aims to shift focus from domestic issues, and foster anti-Western sentiment, diverting attention from the government's shortcomings. It mirrors rhetoric commonly used in Russian disinformation campaigns, which portray the West as a destabilizing force.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

In the modern political landscape, conspiracy theories have become a powerful tool used by political actors to manipulate public opinion, especially during election campaigns. During these periods, the public becomes more engaged with political processes and societal polarization often intensifies. In this context, conspiratorial narratives serve as effective tools for political actors to mobilize their base, discredit their opponents, and shift attention away from their own shortcomings. The effectiveness of these narratives largely depends on their ability to generate a sense of crisis and tap into the public's underlying fears.

Moreover, conspiracy theory-based narratives provide political actors with the flexibility to shape their content according to the context that is most advantageous at a given time. While the use of conspiracy theories in politics is not a recent phenomenon, their prevalence has increased significantly in the digital age, where information circulates rapidly and public trust in government institutions has sharply declined.

In Georgia, the pre-election campaign of the incumbent party, Georgian Dream, has exemplified this approach through the deployment of the politics of fear and its own “Global War Party” conspiracy. While its meaning remains intentionally vague, the strategy behind it offers insight into how conspiracy theories can be weaponized by political elites.

A well-crafted conspiracy narrative can unify a segment of the electorate and mobilize supporters by exploiting societal fears. Georgian Dream's “Global War Party” narrative taps into widespread concerns about foreign intervention and the potential loss of national sovereignty. This narrative heightens the sense of imminent danger, presenting a crisis scenario convincing voters that powerful global forces seek to destabilize Georgia's “stable and peaceful” environment and drag the country into conflict—implicitly referencing Russia's aggressive war in Ukraine. In Georgia's case, this narrative resonates with a portion of the population that is skeptical of foreign assistance, harbors anti-Western sentiments, and views the reforms necessary for liberal democracy as interference in the country's internal affairs. By exploiting these fears, the “Global War Party” narrative reinforces a sense of national self-preservation, which in turn strengthens support for the ruling party.

Conspiracy theories are frequently employed as a defensive mechanism against criticism. When a political party or figure faces public scrutiny, such theories can redirect attention to unrelated issues. In the case of Georgia's ruling party, the “Global War Party” narrative serves to shift the focus away from tangible domestic concerns, setting the party's agenda as the primary topic of debate. After twelve years in power, Georgian Dream lacks a clear record of success, making their future prospects appear weak when viewed through this lens. Consequently, they attribute any failures in domestic or foreign policy to vague, influential international forces: the “Global War Party.” Simultaneously, this narrative dominates the discourse to such an extent that it leaves little room for other political actors to set their own agendas or engage in meaningful discussions on different issues. As a result, the

election campaign becomes devoid of intellectual or ideological debate, with the conversation largely revolving around fear-based narratives.

Finally, conspiracy theories often rely on “us versus them” dynamics, fostering an environment of polarization. They enable politicians to create clear distinctions between an in-group (supporters) and an out-group (opponents), reducing complex political realities to simplistic, black-and-white narratives. The “Global War Party” narrative in Georgia exemplifies this by presenting a false dichotomy: it suggests that peace is guaranteed by the ruling party, while war and chaos are inevitable if the opposition takes power. This strategy not only strengthens the ruling party’s core voter base, particularly in polarized societies, but also frames political opponents and external actors as existential threats to the nation’s stability.

Conspiracy theories rooted in fear are not a new phenomenon and tend to be particularly effective during pre-election periods. Elections often amplify uncertainties about the future, making voters more vulnerable to narratives that evoke fear or a sense of impending crisis. Similar strategies have recently been employed in various countries, such as Hungary and Slovakia, where populist or nationalist parties frame elections as existential moments for national security and survival. In doing so, political elites position themselves as the final line of defense against foreign control or globalist conspiracies, reinforcing their leadership as essential for the protection of the nation.

In conclusion, the use of conspiracy theories in pre-election campaigns serves as a tactic for political actors to mobilize support, deflect criticism, and deepen societal divisions. In Georgia, the “Global War Party” narrative exemplifies how these strategies can be exploited, with the content of the narratives being manipulated and adjusted to fit the ruling party’s agenda.

Fact-Checking Narratives Media Analysis

1.

The Global War Party

On September 2, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze told journalists at the government administration:

"We need to make peace with everyone, including the Global War Party, once interests shift."

It is worth noting a statement made by Irakli Kobakhidze nearly a year earlier, in May 2023, where he said:

"There is no alternative to fighting the Global War Party, even though it carries serious risks, including personal risks."

Who exactly does the ruling government refer to as the “Global War Party,” and why has it now become necessary to “mend relations” with them?

On April 29, 2024, during a meeting in support of the “Transparency of Foreign Influence” initiative, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the honorary chairman of Georgian Dream, mentioned the “Global War Party” six times. Ivanishvili views this group as the main threat to Georgia’s sovereignty and claims it holds decisive influence over the European Union and NATO.

It is important to note that the term “war party” was used by members of the ruling team even before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. Mamuka Mdinardze, chairman of the Georgian Dream faction, once stated:

"We are pursuing a policy that we can call a peace policy. Meanwhile, we can freely label the National Movement as the 'war party.'"

The term “Global War Party” was first introduced by the current Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, on November 8, 2022, when he remarked:

"There is a 'Global War Party,' whose representatives include odious MEPs. Their only goal is to provoke the same situation in Georgia that is happening in Ukraine."

After Kobakhidze’s statement, the same narrative was echoed by both Georgian Dream deputies and representatives of People’s Power, a group affiliated with the ruling party, which is known for its anti-Western rhetoric.

What is particularly notable is that the term “Global War Party” began to be applied not only to European parliamentarians but also to representatives of the broader Western alliance, including the current US Ambassador, Kelly Degnan. Eka Sepashvili, a member of the People’s Power party, stated to the media:

"I believe [Kelly Degnan] is an agent because she is advancing the agenda of the Global War Party."

The ruling party and its affiliates frequently attribute any criticism from Western partners, as well as actions taken by local opposition parties, to the agenda of the “Global War Party.” A prime example of this is the failure to obtain EU candidate status in 2022, for which Irakli Kobakhidze blamed the Global War Party. In his statement, Kobakhidze explained:

"I won't name it, I can't name it, because I don't want to cause embarrassment... We cannot blame the European Union for this, because the EU has a fragile decision-making process. Even if just one out of 27 countries dissents, candidate status cannot be granted. We can't fault the European Union, but we can blame the Global War Party for influencing the EU's decision-making."

Although the ruling party avoids directly naming who is behind the “Global War Party,” it is clear they believe that the collective West is at the root of it. This term echoes rhetoric commonly used in Russia, where politicians and propagandists frequently reference the “collective West” as a source of various perceived threats. Like Georgian Dream’s vague use of the “Global War Party,” the term “collective West” in Russian discourse is not clearly defined, making it difficult to pinpoint exactly who or what is being targeted.

It is evident that the term “Global War Party” is part of a conspiracy theory created by Georgian Dream and closely aligned with Russian information operations. This connection has not gone unnoticed by Georgia’s strategic partners. As Estonia’s Foreign Minister, Margus Tsahkna, pointed out:

"It's no joke because this is serious — it's the Kremlin's narrative. Debating this here only spreads a false and misleading narrative, one pushed by the Kremlin, and that is something we do not want to engage with."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Gabrielius Landsbergis, shares the same perspective. During his visit to Georgia, he stated:

"The only war party is in Moscow. This is the party that attacked Georgia in 2008, attacked Ukraine in 2014, and is currently waging war against Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is our duty — those who value freedom — to fight this party and win this war."

Similarly, the EU Ambassador to Georgia, Paweł Herczyński, responded to the ruling party's claims about the influence of the "Global War Party" on Brussels:

"The EU is a party of global peace. We know where the Global War Party is — it is in Moscow. Russia invaded Georgia in 2008, it invaded eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea in 2014, and in 2022, it launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia also uses hybrid tactics to destabilize and create chaos across the globe — in Africa, the Middle East, and beyond."

In reality, the "Global War Party" is a conspiracy theory promoted by the ruling Georgian Dream party, a tactic often used by authoritarian regimes to consolidate their power. By fabricating the idea of a "Global War Party," Georgian Dream seeks to instill fear in the public, suggesting that the "collective West" is attempting to drag Georgia into war. This conspiracy serves a dual purpose for the ruling party: first, it distracts the public from real issues by shifting focus to imaginary threats; and second, it distances Georgia from its strategic Western partners, pushing the country closer to Russia's influence.

INSTRUMENTALIZING IDENTITY

RELATED ISSUES



Tbilisi Pride Photo

Anti-LGBT law. The ruling party's narrative around LGBT "propaganda" is part of a broader strategy to stoke cultural fears and consolidate power. By framing LGBT rights as a threat to Georgian traditions and minors, they aim to galvanize conservative voters ahead of elections and divert attention from socio-economic and governance issues. The anti-LGBT law fits within a larger anti-Western discourse, portraying Western liberalism as a corrupting force that threatens Georgian national identity and religious values. This narrative positions the ruling party as defenders of traditional values, while fueling skepticism towards Western institutions. In this case, LGBT rights are used as a wedge issue to polarize society and distract from deeper governance problems.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The anti-LGBT law passed in the pre-election period of 2024 in Georgia should be considered from two perspectives: that of the broader anti-Western information campaign, on the one hand, and that of the instrumentalization of identity politics and “politics of fear,” on the other. This legislation aligns with a broader global trend in which illiberal regimes use culturally divisive issues to consolidate power by stoking societal fears. Such forces resort to the approach of instilling and intensifying fear in society by invoking cultural and identity issues as a tool to consolidate their power. As seen in countries like Hungary, Russia, and Poland, such laws are frequently introduced as part of a pre-election strategy for several purposes: diverting attention from acute socio-economic issues; attracting an ultra-conservative electorate; presenting one’s party as a defender of national values and traditions; aggravating the feeling of fear and the perception of being in a critical social situation; and increasing polarization in society through dividing it into “us” and “others.” Moreover, because of its timing, this issue should be perceived as a pre-election campaign that aims to influence the electorate’s feelings and emotions by instrumentalizing them.

In Georgia, these narratives echo the deep-rooted cultural anxieties regarding national identity, on the one hand, and deliberately paint an image of an external or internal enemy, on the other. Along with their active involvement in international political processes, the anti-Western narratives spread in Georgia have been intertwined with identity issues. These deep-seated narratives and consequent propaganda, combined with scant information about Western organizational structures, create fertile ground for the instrumentalization of this law and any accompanying political discourses in the pre-election period. The Georgian Orthodox Church, which has considerable influence in Georgian society, also plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion on these matters, often aligning itself with anti-LGBTQ stances and anti-Western narratives.

Anti-Western sentiments are part of Georgian political discourse, especially as the country has sought closer ties with European and Euro-Atlantic structures. In this discourse, Western values are presented as a threat to Georgian traditions, religious beliefs, and national identity. This fear is largely related to cultural homogenization and the supposed devaluation of national values. The anti-LGBTQ law fits neatly into this narrative, as it allows the government to portray itself as the guardian of Georgian identity against Western liberalism, which is often painted as a corrupting force promoting “untraditional” lifestyles.

A good example of the instrumentalization of such policies is in Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s government passed a law in 2021 banning the portrayal of LGBTQ topics in schools and media aimed at minors. The adoption of this law was also preceded by narratively contrasting Hungarian and Western values, all the while presenting Hungary as the guardian of Christian values in contrast to the morally corrupting influence of Western liberalism. Thus, the Hungarian government succeeded in stoking existing cultural fears and channeling them into electoral support,

while also curbing civil liberties for certain groups in society. The Georgian case can be viewed through the same prism: the ruling party's fear-mongering campaigns serve to divert attention from matters of corruption, social issues, and democratic backsliding. Instead—in the name of protecting family values—the ruling parties try to maintain power via exploiting fears related to identity. Before Hungary, Russia had long used similar narratives to justify its anti-LGBTQ laws, declaring its defense of “Russian traditional values” (against Western cultural influence) at the constitutional level.

As such, the adoption of the anti-LGBT law is part of the strategy that political theorist Ruth Wodak calls the “politics of fear.” Utilizing this strategy, governments leaning towards authoritarianism use fear to manipulate public opinion, construct an image of internal and external enemies, or create/inflate crises in order to consolidate power. In the Georgian context, the LGBTQ community has frequently been presented as the convenient “other” whose rights and liberties are restricted, all while the ruling party positions itself as the defender of the nation's moral composition.

In conclusion, this law must be seen as part of a broader authoritarian playbook that uses identity politics and the “politics of fear” to consolidate power. The law's timing, mere months before the parliamentary elections, underscores its political purpose: to galvanize conservative voters, distract from governance issues, and create a narrative of cultural protectionism against Western liberalism. Drawing on examples from Hungary, Russia, and Poland, it is clear that this strategy is not unique to Georgia but rather part of a wider trend in which illiberal governments exploit societal fears to maintain control. In the face of these developments, the real danger lies not only in the erosion of minority rights, but also in the gradual undermining of democratic institutions and civil liberties.

Fact-Checking Narratives Media Analysis

1.

Pre-election Instrumentalization of Anti-LGBT Sentiments and Family Values

Does LGBT propaganda exist?

The founder and main figure of the ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, stated on August 21 that Georgian Dream needs a constitutional majority to prohibit, at the constitutional level, “the so-called same-sex civil partnership, the adoption of a child by an LGBT couple, the conduct of gender change operations, and the production of LGBT propaganda in the media or in schools.” This narrative was echoed in a statement from the party council published just a day earlier:

After the adoption of the constitutional law, no one will ever be able to impose on us the so-called same-sex marriage, the legalization of civil partnerships, the adoption of a child by a same-sex couple, gender reassignment surgery, the legal recognition of genders other than man and woman, the propaganda of pseudo-liberal ideology in educational institutions and mass media, and other vices that have already led many countries to very serious consequences.

On September 9, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze identified the protection of minors as the main goal of the anti-LGBT propaganda law, stating that “there is no question of restricting human rights; the only thing that is restricted is the use of crude propaganda that has very strange goals.”

Propaganda is the dissemination of information, facts, arguments, half-truths, or lies aimed at influencing public opinion. Representatives of the ruling party do not clarify what exactly is meant by “LGBT propaganda,” although it is not difficult to conclude that they refer to advocacy for the rights of the LGBT community, the protection of their freedom of expression (one manifestation of which is the Pride festival), and the promotion of their acceptance by openly discussing their identities and orientations. The fundamental rights of the LGBT community, including freedom of expression, are therefore labeled as propaganda by the ruling party. However, when discussing this type of propaganda, they do not specify the precise forms it takes, as specifically naming such actions would contradict the anti-discrimination law adopted by Georgian Dream itself. Moreover, there is no evidence that representatives of the queer community, activists, or organizations defending the LGBT community have encouraged anyone, especially minors, to change their gender or sexual orientation.

The term “LGBT propaganda” itself originates from Russia, and the official definition of such a term in Western sources is less relevant. A law banning LGBT propaganda was passed in Russia in 2013, serving to censor and marginalize vulnerable groups, manipulate family sentiments, and strengthen an authoritarian regime.

Is it possible to change an individual's orientation or identity through propaganda?

On August 21, Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that “anti-Christian forces are trying to erase the identity of nations, states, and people. Their goal is to turn a person into a being devoid of dignity and morality, who will not have any national, religious, or personal identity; one should not even know for sure whether one is a man or a woman.” Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili made a similar statement on August 25: “Are we raising our sons to be men and our daughters to be women, or are we confusing them to the point that they don't even know their own gender?” Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze added on September 18: “Now we have adopted the second law, which regulates the simplest thing: that a man should be a man and a woman should be a woman. A man should be called a man, and a woman should be called a woman, and this is also declared a Russian law.”

Representatives of the ruling party claim that they will protect minors from LGBT propaganda that encourages them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. This claim is based on disinformation that suggests a person's sexual orientation or gender identity can change due to ideology or external pressure. Scientific studies and statements by medical organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Psychological Association (APA), assert that sexual orientation and gender identity are formed by a complex combination of biological, genetic, and environmental factors, and they do not change based on exposure to any type of information.

So-called conversion therapy, which aims to change a person's sexual orientation, has been evaluated by the American Psychological Association as ineffective and harmful, as this therapy can cause psychological issues and cannot change one's sexuality. As for the increase in the representation of the LGBT community, this trend promotes the acceptance of the queer community and their integration into society, rather than a deliberate transformation of traditional orientations.

Can LGBT propaganda cause the “extinction of the nation”?

Mamuka Mdinaradze, chairman of the Georgian Dream parliamentary faction, stated on September 3 that “for centuries, all conquerors in this country tried to destroy the nation, and yet we are here, we speak Georgian, and this country and the Georgian people exist. LGBT propaganda can erase this in exactly two to three generations.”

Mdinaradze refers to the reduction of the birth rate when talking about the “extinction of the nation,” which he links to LGBT propaganda. He claims that LGBT propaganda will change the sexual orientation of young people, preventing them from reproducing. This claim, however, is based on misconceptions and emotional manipulation.

The decline in birth rates in developed countries is not caused by LGBT propaganda or the growth of the queer community, but rather by economic factors, access to contraception, and the emancipation of women over the last century. As raising children is associated with economic challenges, and as education and employment have become more accessible to women, birth rates have naturally declined. Furthermore, it is impossible to change a person's sexual orientation through any form of propaganda, which means it cannot influence birth rates in the way Mdinaradze suggests.

Does propaganda lead to an increase in the size of the LGBT community?

On September 4, Irakli Kobakhidze stated: “Statistics show something else. In fact, after the spread of [LGBT] propaganda, the number of LGBT people in the respective countries exceeded 20%.”

As mentioned above, it is impossible to change sexual orientation or gender identity through external influence or ideology. Accordingly, no form of propaganda can directly influence the growth of the queer community. The increase in the number of people openly identifying as LGBT is due to the strengthening of acceptance, the advocacy for their rights, and the empowerment of the community. Since stigmatization and marginalization of the queer community are less frequent in Western countries, and social pressure is reduced, people of different orientations feel more comfortable coming out.

Is the West imposing the LGBT agenda on us?

On September 18, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze stated:

In the perception of Georgian society, the European Union and the United States of America cannot be associated in any way with LGBT propaganda or with such an ideological current, the purpose of which is not positive for society... When we hear criticism without any argument, of course, this becomes a subject of concern. Why should a high-ranking representative of the European Union or the United States of America criticize a draft law that is solely dedicated to the protection of family values and the interests of minors?

Representatives of the ruling party avoid directly accusing Western institutions of promoting LGBT propaganda. However, on September 26, Guram Macharashvili, leader of the People’s Power movement, openly claimed that “just as LGBT propaganda was legalized in Ukraine, Germany, and unfortunately in Greece, they want to legalize this law in Georgia.”

The protection of human rights and freedom of expression are fundamental values of democracy. The emancipation of the LGBT community and their protection from discrimination are important issues for modern Western democracies. In recent years, the ruling party’s indifference to discriminatory crimes against the queer community, restrictions on their freedom of expression, and the recently passed homophobic law have been frequently criticized by Western leaders. Western institutions often call on Georgian Dream to protect the basic rights of the LGBT community and prevent their stigmatization.

However, there is no evidence that Western leaders have forced the Georgian authorities or society to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, make gender reassignment surgery mandatory for minors, or legalize same-sex marriage. Furthermore, there are EU member states where same-sex marriage is still not legal. Despite this, the ruling party has perceived calls to protect human rights—particularly those of the queer community—as part of an LGBT propaganda agenda, which is tied to a disinformation campaign directed against the West.

“European Standard”



Over the past twelve years, Georgian Dream’s administration has promoted **the narrative that it has established an independent judiciary in Georgia, aligned with European democratic standards.** Yet, a contrasting view has emerged, as Western partners and domestic watchdogs raise alarms about “clan rule” within the judiciary, alleging that a tight-knit group of judges loyal to the ruling party exerts outsized influence over court appointments and decisions. Key judicial figures with connections to Georgian Dream hold lifetime appointments, and the Supreme Council of Justice is criticized for lacking transparency, with sessions closed to the public and independent oversight restricted. Recent sanctions imposed by the United States on Georgian judges for corruption have intensified calls for judicial reforms, which the government has resisted, arguing that vetting judges conflicts with constitutional principles. This apparent entrenchment of partisan loyalty within the courts has fueled concerns that the judiciary is being used to suppress dissent and shield the government from accountability, challenging the democratic foundations Georgian Dream claims to uphold.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

A well-functioning state depends on the strength of its independent institutions, which uphold democracy, ensure accountability, and safeguard citizens' rights. Among the most essential of these are the judiciary, electoral commissions, media, anti-corruption agencies, and central banks. The judiciary guarantees the rule of law by preventing abuses of power and ensuring the fair enforcement of laws. Electoral commissions certify the trustworthiness of election results, a cornerstone of democratic governance. A free press acts as a watchdog, holding leaders accountable and ensuring public access to unbiased information. Anti-corruption agencies help maintain government integrity by preventing the misuse of public resources. Central banks stabilize the economy through independent monetary policies, fostering economic confidence and sustainability. When these institutions lose their independence, states become susceptible to authoritarianism, corruption, and a collapse in public trust.

Among these institutions, the judiciary plays a pivotal role, serving as a pillar of democracy. An independent court system ensures that the rule of law is upheld, individual rights are protected, and equality before the law is enforced. It guarantees that both public officials and private citizens are held accountable, while also curbing overreach by the executive and legislature. Courts provide essential checks on power by reviewing government actions, safeguarding civil liberties, and ensuring that laws conform to constitutional principles. When free from political interference, the judiciary cultivates trust in the legal system, which reinforces social stability and encourages investment by assuring both citizens and businesses that the law will be applied impartially.

Authoritarian regimes, however, actively work to dismantle institutional independence in order to consolidate power. Their primary target is often the judiciary, as an impartial legal system can overturn arbitrary decisions, prosecute corruption, or block unconstitutional actions. To avoid these constraints, authoritarian governments weaken courts by appointing loyalists, altering legal frameworks, or intimidating judges into compliance.

Several European countries have recently experienced democratic erosion, with governments asserting control over institutions intended to remain independent. Since 2010, Viktor Orbán's Hungarian government has gradually undermined the independence of the judiciary, media, and electoral systems. A new body, the National Judicial Office (NJO), was created to manage the courts, with its head given the authority to appoint and promote judges, circumventing existing checks. The sudden lowering of the judiciary's retirement age also forced experienced judges to step down, allowing the government to fill these positions with loyal appointees.

Similarly, in Poland, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) has implemented reforms since 2015 that dismantled judicial independence, drawing criticism from the European Union for undermining the rule of law. PiS targeted the Constitutional Tribunal, which oversees the legality of legislation, by appointing loyal judges and giving the executive control over judicial appointments. The government

also introduced disciplinary mechanisms to pressure judges who challenged its policies. Reforms to the Supreme Court further lowered the retirement age of judges, enabling the government to remove and replace key judicial figures.

Turkey offers another example, where President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has systematically dismantled independent institutions, especially following the failed coup attempt of 2016. Under the pretext of a state of emergency, Erdoğan's government purged tens of thousands of judges, prosecutors, academics, and civil servants, replacing many of them with loyalists. The judiciary was transformed into a tool of the regime, used to suppress opposition and dissent, consolidating the ruling party's grip on power.

As authoritarianism becomes increasingly transnational, regimes learn from one another, and the Georgian Dream government has similarly undermined the independence of the judiciary to consolidate its control. Key judicial appointments have favored individuals aligned with the ruling party, raising serious concerns about political interference. A small group of powerful judges, known as the "judicial clan," has been empowered to exert significant influence over court decisions and appointments. Attempts to reform the High Council of Justice, responsible for overseeing judicial conduct, have been either stalled or merely cosmetic, allowing political interests to shape the judiciary. Moreover, cases involving opposition leaders, activists, and independent media have often been handled in a biased manner, indicating that the judiciary is being used as a tool to silence dissent and safeguard government interests.

The Georgian Dream government employs these tactics to maintain power by neutralizing opposition voices and controlling key institutions that could challenge its authority. By ensuring the loyalty of the judiciary, the government avoids legal scrutiny of its actions and creates a protective shield against political accountability, thus prolonging its rule while maintaining a semblance of legitimacy.

By capturing the judiciary, regimes like these eliminate checks on their authority, using the courts to legitimize policies that restrict fundamental freedoms. When independent institutions are compromised, public trust deteriorates and democratic principles are gradually dismantled. Courts under authoritarian control are often repurposed to justify political repression, punish opponents, and silence critical voices, all while maintaining an illusion of legality.

In sum, a good state is not only defined by the laws it enacts but by the impartial enforcement of those laws through independent institutions. The judiciary, in particular, is vital to democracy, as it ensures the rule of law and prevents the concentration of power. In contrast, authoritarian regimes thrive by undermining these institutions—especially the courts—as part of a strategy to consolidate control. The defense of judicial independence is, therefore, essential to the preservation of democratic governance.

Fact-Checking Narratives Media Analysis

1.

Twelve years on: European-style judiciary or clan rule?

Georgian Dream claims that, in twelve years, the governing team has built a justice system aligned with European standards. Yet the imposition of sanctions on judges, persistent accusations of clan rule, and the disregard for recommendations from European partners paint a contrasting picture.

One of the key pre-election promises made by Georgian Dream in 2012 was to free the judiciary from political influence and ensure the independence of judges. Twelve years later, the government's message to voters has evolved. The leadership now claims that Georgian Dream has successfully established a system where state institutions operate professionally and the judiciary meets European standards.

“I am proud that, together with you and with the continued support of the Georgian people, we have built a country over these twelve years where the government serves the people, and all institutions fulfill their responsibilities professionally; a country where every citizen or visitor can live with dignity, regardless of their ethnic or religious background; a country where we have made significant progress in every sector, whether healthcare, social services, the economy, or beyond; a country where law enforcement agencies and the justice system meet European standards,” [said](#) Bidzina Ivanishvili, honorary chairman of Georgian Dream, on October 10.

An independent judiciary is the cornerstone of any democratic state and the primary guarantor of the rule of law. It ensures the proper functioning of all institutions and plays a crucial role in securing fair elections. Beyond resolving specific disputes, the judiciary protects the integrity of the electoral process, upholds voters' will, and safeguards democratic principles.

Today, however, the term “clan rule” is often used to describe Georgia's judiciary. This criticism [comes](#) not only from local organizations but also from Western partners.

What kind of justice system has Georgian Dream created in twelve years?

Multiple organizations focusing on judicial matters have assessed that the Supreme Council remains as opaque today as it was before 2013. The current leadership of the Supreme Council of Justice has effectively [barred](#) the monitoring of sessions and restricted access to public information, both proactively and upon request.

Georgian Dream has fully [staffed](#) the Supreme Court with its own preferred judges, all of whom hold lifetime appointments. Notably, Nikoloz Marsagishvili was appointed almost a year in advance.

Although the interviews with Supreme Court candidates were broadcast live, concerns about their integrity and qualifications persisted. Observers such as OSCE/ODIHR, the US Embassy, and the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Monitoring Group noted that some candidates lacked sufficient legal expertise and failed to demonstrate due impartiality.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) [Third Interim](#) Report stated that the High Council of Justice’s application, background checks, and interview procedures fell short of international standards. The OSCE also highlighted a lack of political will to address systemic issues in the judiciary, noting only minimal efforts to improve its effectiveness.

In 2015, Levan Murusidze was [appointed](#) as a judge of the Court of Appeal on a three-year probationary term. His name is tied to several high-profile cases, including the murder of [Sandro Girgvliani](#) in 2006. In this case, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg partially upheld the Girgvliani family’s claim, concluding that the investigation into his death “clearly lacked the necessary independence, impartiality, objectivity, and thoroughness.”

The European Court expressed “surprise” that neither the prosecution nor the local courts attempted to uncover key facts in the case.

On April 5, 2023, the United States imposed sanctions on Levan Murusidze, the judge in the Girgvliani case, for “abuse of public office” and “involvement in significant corrupt activities.” Two current judges, Mikheil Chinchaladze and Irakli Shengelia, along with former judge Valerian Tsertsvadze, were also sanctioned.

[All three sitting judges](#) sanctioned by the US State Department for “significant corruption” hold lifetime appointments and can serve until the age of sixty-five. Levan Murusidze is eligible to serve until 2040, Irakli Shengelia until 2041, and Mikheil Chinchaladze until 2043.

Notably, Levan Murusidze returned to the High Council of Justice [for a second term](#) on October 23, 2022. Alongside him, Dimitri Gvritishvili, considered an influential figure in the so-called “court clan,” also serves on the Council. Their reappointments were backed by an overwhelming majority at the Conference of Judges.

According to the watchdog organization [Georgian Court Watch](#), in a judiciary where over one hundred positions remain vacant, even the notion of competitive appointments has become futile. Interest in becoming a judge in Georgia appears to be steadily declining.

[Georgia’s Association of Young Lawyers](#) has assessed that the Supreme Council of Justice includes three mechanisms that allow the so-called “Judicial Clan” to control the system:

-
- A nepotistic system of appointing judges;
 - The appointment of court chairpersons driven by personal interests;
 - Disciplinary proceedings used to punish judges who act independently.

What does the European standard mean?

Following the granting of European Union candidate status to Georgia, the European Commission [added](#) a new component to its recommendations concerning the judiciary. Georgian authorities were tasked with assessing the integrity of certain judges. To facilitate this process, a system must be established that allows international experts to evaluate judicial conduct.

In the European Union, this process is known as “vetting.” This integrity verification mechanism should be [temporary](#) and applied only to judges holding significant positions within the judicial system.

However, the government has expressed its intention not to implement this recommendation. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze has deemed vetting unacceptable, arguing that it “contradicts the Constitution.”

“We have judges appointed for life, whom no one can remove until they reach the age limit. Any initiative that contradicts the principle of a judge’s lifetime appointment inherently conflicts with the Constitution,” Kobakhidze [stated](#).

Anti-Liberalism



Christina Animashaun/Vox

The Georgian Dream government has increasingly used the **concept of “pseudo-liberalism” and even “liberal-fascism”** to portray liberal values as a destructive foreign influence threatening Georgia’s Orthodox Church, family structure, and national identity. This narrative frames Western ideals as part of an insidious agenda aimed at eroding traditional values, with terms like “liberal-fascism” painting liberalism as an ideological force of repression rather than inclusion. By aligning themselves as defenders of tradition, Georgian Dream deflects attention from domestic challenges while mobilizing nationalist sentiments, thereby discrediting opposition groups and Western partners as agents of a foreign agenda. Mirroring strategies employed by authoritarian regimes in Russia and Hungary, the government appropriates conservative values to justify illiberal policies, consolidating control by curtailing freedoms and diminishing democratic principles. In this way, Georgian Dream’s invocation of “pseudo-liberalism” and “liberal-fascism” serves both as a tool of social control and a shield against accountability.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

In recent years, the Georgian Dream government has adopted the rhetoric of “pseudo-liberalism” as a political tool to attack opposition parties, civil society organizations, and even Western institutions. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, alongside other prominent figures like Bidzina Ivanishvili, has framed pseudo-liberalism as a sinister force attacking Georgia’s traditions, promoting “LGBT+ propaganda,” and eroding the country’s core values. This pattern—where governments criticize liberalism while simultaneously engaging in illiberal practices—is not unique to Georgia. In fact, it is a hallmark of many authoritarian and hybrid regimes, which use such rhetoric to legitimize their control by masking repression as a defense of tradition.

Liberalism, by design, limits the scope of state power. It promotes pluralism, protects minority rights, and ensures a balance of power through democratic institutions. This framework inherently threatens regimes that aim for unchecked control. Authoritarian or hybrid regimes often respond by framing liberal values as external impositions that contradict “traditional” societal norms.

In the Georgian context, Georgian Dream paints liberalism as an invasive ideology that undermines the Orthodox Church, destroys family values, and threatens the national identity. Their invocation of terms like “pseudo-liberalism” or “liberal fascism” is a form of political projection: while the government claims to defend Georgian identity against external threats, it enacts policies that restrict freedoms, such as limiting civil society through “foreign agent” laws and diminishing the independence of state institutions. The government’s pseudo-conservatism, therefore, serves to consolidate power by silencing critics and mobilizing nationalist sentiment.

This is not a uniquely Georgian phenomenon. In **Russia**, Vladimir Putin has long branded Western liberalism as decadent, portraying LGBT+ rights as symbolic of a broader cultural decline. This narrative legitimizes crackdowns on dissent by framing opposition figures and human rights organizations as agents of a foreign ideology. Similarly, **Hungary’s** Viktor Orbán has accused the European Union and liberal NGOs of promoting “liberal fascism” to undermine Hungary’s sovereignty, positioning himself as a defender of “illiberal democracy.”

While attacking liberalism, these authoritarian governments often present themselves as champions of conservatism; however, this is merely a facade, better described as pseudo-conservatism. Pseudo-conservatism—where regimes portray themselves as defenders of tradition while eroding democratic norms—serves multiple purposes. First, it provides a unifying identity for the population, centered around nationalism, religion, and family values. In Georgia, this means aligning the government with the Orthodox Church, presenting any criticism of the Church as an attack on Georgian identity. By painting political opponents and civil society as enemies of tradition, the government shifts public discourse from structural issues—such as poverty, corruption, or the rule of law—to cultural and moral debates.

Secondly, pseudo-conservatism allows authoritarian regimes to selectively adopt liberal rhetoric. Georgian Dream speaks of “human rights” and “the rule of law” in public discourse but distorts these principles in practice. For example, their rhetoric of defending “family values” masks discriminatory policies against minority groups, while the “transparency of foreign influence” law restricts NGOs under the guise of accountability. This selective use of liberal terminology creates confusion, making it harder for citizens and external observers to clearly identify the erosion of democratic principles.

The Hungarian case offers a parallel: Orbán’s government loudly asserts its “sovereignty” and “democracy” while undermining judicial independence and silencing the free press. This rhetorical strategy blurs the lines between democracy and authoritarianism, allowing regimes to maintain the appearance of legitimacy while consolidating control.

In Georgia, the attack on liberalism serves another critical function: it shifts blame for domestic challenges onto external forces. Prime Minister Kobakhidze’s statements reflect this strategy, framing liberalism as a product of Western interference that threatens Georgian traditions. By positioning themselves as defenders of the nation, Georgian Dream portrays opposition parties and civil society actors as puppets of foreign agendas, thereby delegitimizing dissent.

This pattern is also evident elsewhere. In **Russia**, liberal opposition figures are often labeled “foreign agents” working against national interests. Similarly, Orbán’s government depicts the European Union as an imperial force attempting to reshape Hungary’s identity through liberal values. These narratives create a sense of external threat, rallying nationalist sentiment and justifying domestic repression.

To sum up, the Georgian Dream government’s use of pseudo-liberalism as a rhetorical tool reveals a broader trend among authoritarian and hybrid regimes. By attacking liberalism, these governments present themselves as protectors of tradition and national identity. However, their actions often contradict the very values they claim to uphold, replacing pluralism with conformity and accountability with authoritarian control.

The concept of “pseudo-liberalism” functions as a mirror. While regimes accuse their opponents of promoting insincere liberalism, they themselves engage in pseudo-conservatism—appropriating tradition to stifle dissent and mask their own illiberalism. Georgia, like other states with authoritarian tendencies, offers a case study in how power is consolidated through a combination of cultural conservatism, political projection, and selective rhetoric. Understanding these dynamics is essential, not only for holding such governments accountable but also for recognizing the subtle ways in which authoritarianism disguises itself as a defense of tradition.

Fact-Checking Narratives Media Analysis

1.

Twelve years on: European-style judiciary or clan rule?

Georgian Dream: Pseudo-Liberals Against Pseudo-Liberalism

In recent years, Georgian Dream has often used the term “pseudo-liberalism” when criticizing the opposition, civil society, and Western partners.

On October 22, Prime Minister [Irakli Kobakhidze](#) claimed that “as for pseudo-liberal propaganda, this is the most serious problem on a global scale.” He made a similar [statement](#) in September:

The entire collective “United National Movement,” which includes the relevant parties, relevant NGOs, and relevant media, is directly involved in spreading pseudo-liberal ideology. One of the main aspects of this ideology is LGBT propaganda.... They constantly attack the Orthodox Church. One of their main objectives is to damage the reputation of the Church, which they cannot achieve, though they continue to address this topic. These parties are directly opposed to traditional values in Georgia. Therefore, it’s not just that they overlook something: they directly oppose traditional values, the values in our country.

[Bidzina Ivanishvili](#) also spoke about pseudo-liberalism on August 25: “The agents here enthusiastically defend and spread pseudo-liberal ideology, whose goal is to destroy all traditional values, completely deprive people of their dignity and morality, and create a mass of the lowest-rank slaves with a single psychology.”

What Is (Pseudo) Liberalism?

[Liberalism](#), the foundation of modern Western civilization, is a political ideology centered on liberty, human rights, equality before the law, private property, and accountable government. According to members of Georgian Dream, pseudo-liberalism includes elements such as LGBT+ propaganda, attacks on the Orthodox Church, opposition to traditional values, and efforts to [“create a mass of low-ranking individuals with a single psychology.”](#) (Read more about LGBT propaganda [here](#).)

Liberalism places significant importance on human rights and freedoms, with liberal values protecting minority rights and opposing discrimination. Under liberalism, freedom of expression is upheld, the rights of the LGBT+ community are safeguarded, and their integration into society is supported.

Liberalism supports freedom of religion. Accordingly, persecution and discrimination based on a person's religion are not permitted. At the same time, liberalism promotes diversity and pluralism, allowing different religions and confessions to coexist peacefully in liberal democracies. However, liberalism also upholds the importance of a secular society, where the state and religion are kept separate.

Although liberalism often seeks progress and change—which may involve re-evaluating outdated traditions—it also supports cultural pluralism and respects the unique cultural characteristics and traditions of different societies.

Regarding “creating a mass with a single psychology,” the foundation of liberalism is individual freedom, including freedom of thought and belief. In a liberal system, individual differences are neither persecuted nor subject to forced transformation, while equal rights and the full integration of diverse individuals into society are guaranteed. Transforming individuals into part of a homogeneous mass is not a goal aligned with liberalism; rather, it is a characteristic of [fascism](#).

The prefix “pseudo-” suggests untruthfulness or insincerity within a concept. As such, the term “pseudo-liberalism” is used to describe a political phenomenon that theoretically aligns with liberal values but, in practice, contradicts them. Pseudo-liberals often pursue policies that restrict individual freedom, equality, and the rule of law, even though they may publicly claim to uphold liberal values.

“Pseudo-liberalism” is not commonly used in academic literature and appears more frequently in media and political commentary, though similar concepts exist in political theory, such as [illiberalism](#) or illiberal democracy. The term can also serve as an alternative for describing the democratic facade constructed in hybrid and authoritarian regimes. One example of this is modern Hungary, whose Foreign Minister [Péter Szijjártó](#) used the term “pseudo-liberalism” in an interview with the Imedi television station.

Representatives of Georgian Dream often speak publicly about human rights, the rule of law, and the core values of liberalism; however, their policies frequently undermine these values. For example, their law on “[family values](#)” promotes discrimination against vulnerable groups; their [initiative](#) to declare Christianity the state religion violates secular principles and the rights of other religious confessions; and their “[transparency of foreign influence](#)” law restricts civil society and dissent. Additionally, the [capture](#) of all government branches and regulatory bodies by the ruling party undermines the rule of law and threatens the principle of democratic checks and balances. The policies of Georgian Dream themselves manifest pseudo-liberalism, though they accuse the opposition and civil society of promoting it.

It can therefore be concluded that in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, consolidated powers discredit liberal groups by accusing them of pseudo-liberalism, even where they may sometimes manifest it themselves.