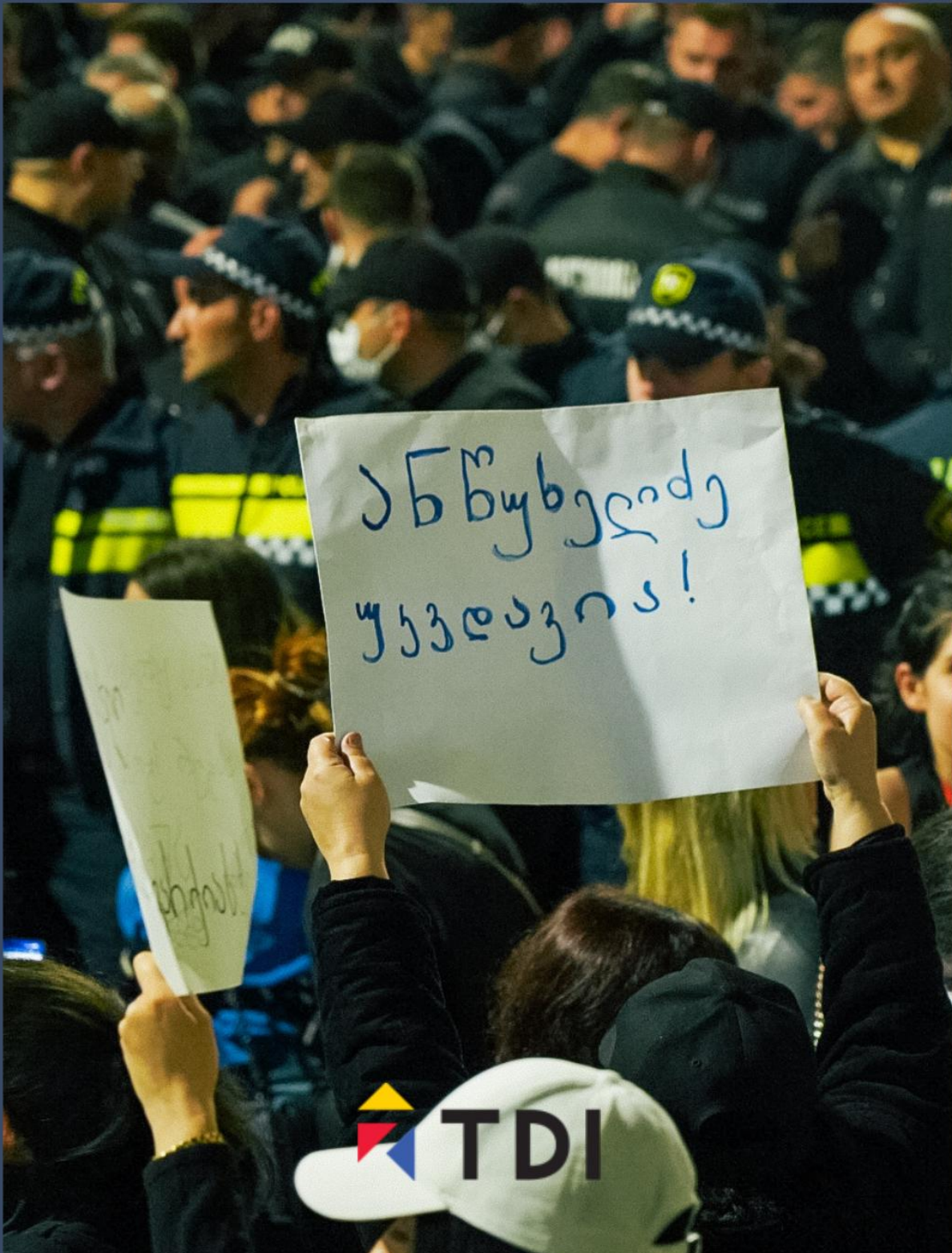


Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

March 2025



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Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)

www.tdi.ge/en



The Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI) continues to monitor the environment regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity. This includes monitoring statements and activities by political parties, politicians, public figures, and clergy.

The present report covers **March 2025**

You can also access the 2024-2025 reports on monitoring the pre-election and post-election environments regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity:

Pre-election period (2024)

[August 25 to September 25](#)

[September 25 to October 25](#)

Post-election period (2024)

[October 26 to November 26, 2024](#)

[November 26 to December 26, 2024](#)

2025

[December 26, 2024- January 31](#)

[February](#)

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Key Findings

During the reporting period, the Georgian Dream government continued, as in previous months, its anti-Western and anti-human rights rhetoric. A central component of this rhetoric was the use of pseudo-religious narratives and manipulation in the name of the Orthodox Church. In their statements, the government portrayed the so-called “War Party” and “Deep State” as forces attacking Georgia’s independence, traditions, and values. They claimed that this mission was being carried out by non-governmental organizations, demonstrators, and political opponents, depicted as supporters of “liberal fascism.”

The Georgian Dream also increasingly referred to Western partners and countries as “foreign forces.” The government advanced accusations that these actors aimed to draw Georgia into a war, instigate political revolution, and destroy national traditions and values. In this narrative, Georgian Dream presented itself as the defender of faith and national identity against these ‘external threats’.

As a positive trend, similar to previous reporting periods, Orthodox clergy continued to issue statements condemning violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators. They criticized those responsible for the repressions and expressed open support for Georgia’s pro-European path.

1. Manipulation with Religion and Identity by Georgian Dream

As in the pre-reporting period, Georgian Dream continued to manipulate pseudo-religious narratives, presenting itself as the political force defending Christianity and traditions. In this context, opponents, human rights defenders, media, and civil activists were [labeled as](#) "fighters against the Church, Orthodoxy, and religion," "agents," and "liberal fascists."

During the reporting period, the Georgian Dream party, through an expedited process, adopted unconstitutional and undemocratic repressive laws, including amendments to the [Laws](#) on "Gender Equality," "Public Service," and "Broadcasting," as well as to the Criminal Code. Under the amendment to the Parliament's Rules of Procedure, the participation of non-governmental organizations in decision-making processes will no longer be mandatory. In addition, a new legislative [initiative](#) was introduced to amend the Organic Laws on "Political Associations of Citizens" and the "Constitutional Court of Georgia," which would enable the Georgian Dream-dominated Parliament and Court to ban existing or future opposition parties.

When discussing the need for these legislative changes, Georgian Dream and its satellite actors manipulatively invoked the name of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Their central propaganda message was that a "War Party" and the "Deep State" were fighting against Georgia's independence, traditions, and values through the financing of NGOs and other mechanisms. According to this narrative, any opponent of the Georgian Dream is a supporter of "liberal fascism." For example, Georgian Dream's Prime Minister [Irakli Kobakhidze](#) stated: *"We will not allow the success of liberal fascism in our country. Everything is in accordance with legal principles, and anyone protesting these laws is a supporter of liberal fascism and of the party of war and hate in our country."*

1.1. Anti-Western and Propaganda Narratives Regarding Support from Partner Countries

The West: a “foreign force” fighting against faith and traditions

One of Georgian Dream’s main narratives is that there is a "global ideology" fighting against Georgia’s sovereignty, Orthodoxy, and family values. For this propaganda, three terms are actively used: "global war party," "Deep State," and "liberal fascism." In reality, this narrative is based on conspiracy theory, which itself relies on an anti-liberal and anti-democratic world paradigm. At the forefront are accusations that the goal of these forces is to involve Georgia in a war, to organize political revolution, and to destroy traditions and values. Georgian Dream presents itself as the defender of [faith and nationality](#) in opposition to these forces.

According to Georgian Dream’s statements, the "global party of war," "deep state," and "liberal fascism" are promoting "LGBT propaganda" in Georgia, "destroying traditions," and fighting against the "Church," the "Patriarch," and the "Patriarchate" — all allegedly with the financial support of "foreign forces" and the efforts of Georgian Dream’s opponents (the political opposition, civil sector). Georgian Dream leaders also draw an equivalence between the West and the occupying Russian government, portraying Georgia in an isolated context where the national interest and the interests of partner countries do not align.

Mamuka Mdinardze, Member of Parliament from Georgian Dream and Chair of the Georgian Dream Parliamentary Faction, March 31:

"[...] Whoever serves others’ interests, no matter who that other may be — whether it is our northern neighbor and occupier, someone from the West, the East, or the South — it no longer matters. Everyone has their own interests. In many cases, it is impossible for your interest to coincide with others’ interests."

Guram Macharashvili, Member of Parliament from Georgian Dream, March 11:

"Georgia is the first country in the world where we raised our voices, armed our people with the truth, and declared that there should be no war in Ukraine, and that war is even more unacceptable in Georgia. We said that peace is better than war, that LGBT propaganda is imposed upon us, and that the destruction of traditions is financed by foreign forces."

Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, March 20:

"[...] Attacks on the Patriarchate, the Patriarch, faith, and the Church were happening through foreign financing. This happens not only in Georgia but in any country where the global party of war fails to push through its interests; immediately after, insults and attacks begin."

Davit Kartvelishvili, Member of Georgian Dream’s satellite party "People’s Power," March 16:

"The genocide of Christians and other religious minorities in Syria, carried out before the eyes of the entire 'progressive' world, is nothing more than another crime against humanity committed by

the same 'deep state' — aimed at weakening sovereign states, provoking foreign interference, and increasing the influence of radical Islamism."

“MEGOBARI Act” – “Hostile Act”

On March 27, the U.S. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee supported a bipartisan bill concerning Georgia — the [“MEGOBARI Act.”](#) This bill had been introduced on March 5 by senior Democratic and Republican leaders. It enjoys bipartisan support and includes both a plan to support the people of Georgia and measures (including sanctions mechanisms) to counter Georgian Dream’s anti-democratic and anti-Western policies. On March 22, [a march was held](#) in Tbilisi in support of the U.S. MEGOBARI Act. Citizens participating in the march carried U.S. and Georgian flags, as well as photos of President Trump and senators who supported the MEGOBARI Act. Members of Georgian Dream reacted to the Act and the supportive march, describing them as a ["hostile act."](#)

[Guram Macharashvili](#), Member of Parliament from Georgian Dream, March 22: *"This act should not be called the 'MEGOBARI' Act,' but rather the 'Betrayal Act' or the 'Unfriendly Act.' A true friend does not go against traditions, nor oppose partnership and peace in our country. This act supports war, LGBT propaganda, and the return of the United National Movement to Georgia."*

[Irakli Cheishvili](#), Member of Parliament from Georgian Dream, March 22: *"To openly oppose religious faith, family values, to support LGBT propaganda in the country, and at the same time hypocritically seek the support of the current U.S. President — this is exactly the true face of the struggling opposition! The so-called 'MEGOBARI Act,' by its content, supports the Deep State’s agents in Georgia and those who slander Donald Trump."*

Freezing of Charity Funds

On March 17, based on a court ruling, the Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia [froze](#) the bank accounts and funds of several charitable organizations operating in Georgia. The investigation was launched following a request by the organization of Vato Shakarashvili, a propagandist for Georgian Dream. According to [statements](#) from Georgian Dream’s Prosecutor’s Office and its leaders, the purpose of these foundations was to promote and facilitate violence and to undermine state functions. In reality, alongside other charitable activities, the foundations aimed to support citizens and their families who had been repressed for participating in peaceful demonstrations.

Commenting on the case, [Irakli Zarkua](#), a Member of Parliament from Georgian Dream, repeated Georgian Dream’s anti-Western messages and manipulatively invoked the name of the Orthodox

¹ The word “megobari” in Georgian means a “friend”

Church: *"For us, this is a decoded scenario, and we are not interested in it. No matter who finances them or what funds they create, the Georgian people know that they are standing on the side of revolution, chaos, and disorder, while the nation, the Church, and the public are focused on the unity of the country."*

1.2. State Funding of the Patriarchate

During the reporting period, alongside the populist use of the Orthodox Church for political purposes, the Georgian Dream government continued and increased the funding allocated to the Orthodox Church's Patriarchate. It is noteworthy that the increase in the transfer of state-owned property and other financial resources to the Patriarchate coincides with ongoing political developments, which may indicate a desire to secure political legitimacy and loyalty from the dominant religious institution.

By the Georgian Government's [decree](#) dated March 14, 2025, an amount of 43,035,000 GEL was allocated to the Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia, including its higher educational institutions, vocational and general educational establishments, and charitable foundations affiliated with the Patriarchate. [Compared to 2024](#), this type of funding has increased by 8 million GEL, and [compared to 2023](#), by 9,684,787 GEL.

In addition to this, the Patriarchate of Georgia receives annual financial assistance from the state [budget](#) (25,000,000 GEL) and from local municipalities. Besides financial aid, the transfer of state property to the Patriarchate also continues.

2. Statements by Orthodox Clergy Condemning Violence and Supporting Demonstrators

The positive trend continued during the reporting period, with a segment of the Georgian Orthodox Church clergy maintaining a critical stance toward Georgian Dream's anti-European course, condemning violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators, and openly expressing support for them.

Statements on Repression Against Demonstrators:

Archimandrite [Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), March 2:

"They are chasing their own citizens with 5,000 GEL fines, and these fines and imprisonments thunder against this unjust regime. [...] These prisoners, these fine people, are the ones exposing this regime the most, because the conspiracy of this regime against its own people has become publicly evident. If this regime had any sense, it would not be persecuting its own people like this, but they are frightened and, to cover their cowardice, they are chasing people and fining them for incomprehensible reasons."

Archimandrite [Dorothe Kurashvili](#), March 23:

"...Do not seek the truth among the powerful; seek the truth among those crucified for love, for love of the nation, for love of freedom, for love of independence. Seek God among them — God is with them, God resides within them, and not among those who kill, who imprison, who oppress. God is not with them and never will be."

Archimandrite [Ilia Jinjolava](#), March 28:

"There was violence, there was anger. Now, there is even more violence — fighting with brutal methods, unimaginable fines imposed by unjust 'courts,' a shadow of fear prevailing everywhere. This is exactly what they want. Everyone realizes it, but remains silent. Even the supporters of violence and injustice realize it — they applaud and sneer under compulsion, but sooner or later, this evil machine will crush them too."

Statements on Georgian Dream's Propaganda that Georgia Started the 2008 War:

On February 5, the Georgian Dream Parliament [supported](#) the establishment of a "Temporary Investigative Commission to Examine the Activities of the Regime and Political Officials in Office Between 2003-2012." On March 26, the Commission's mandate was [expanded](#) to cover the period from 2003 to the present. During the reporting period, the Commission summoned generals and discussed Russia's invasion and occupation of Georgia (the August 2008 war). Those leading the questioning and Georgian Dream [leaders](#) often clearly implied that Georgia was responsible for starting the war, contradicting the findings and decisions of [the European](#)

[Court of Human Rights \(ECHR\)](#) and [the Hague Court](#). Some Orthodox clergy members commented critically on Georgian Dream's accusations against Georgia regarding the war.

For instance, Orthodox priest [Grigol Tchejia](#) wrote on his Facebook page on March 29: *"Georgia is our home — it does not belong separately to the 'National Movement' or, even less, to the 'GD', it belongs to all of us together." He emphasized the actions of the "Empire of Evil" (Russia) against Georgia, stating: "Saying that we started the war is an insult to our home."*

Archimandrite [Gabriel Ghurtskaia](#), on March 29, also responded via his Facebook page to the detention of a demonstrator holding a poster that read ["Antsukhelidze is immortal."](#) He wrote: *"Antsukhelidze² is a hero!!! Russia is the occupier, and its supporters are traitors to Georgia."*

Archimandrite [Ilia Jinjolava](#), on March 30, likewise posted on social media: *"Evil seeks to weaken precisely those institutions [the army and the Church] that ensure the nation's spiritual and physical resilience. The Church and the army grow stronger when society defends faith and truth. Today's battle is not only political or economic — it is a battle for the soul, dignity, and truth."*

² Giorgi Antsukhelidze served in the Fourth Infantry Brigade. During the August 2008 war, at the age of 23, he was taken prisoner and, after brutal torture, was beaten to death by Ossetian separatists.

3. Propagandistic and Anti-Western Statements by Some Orthodox Clergy

Some members of the Orthodox Church clergy continued, in their sermons and public speeches, to express rhetoric supporting the government and opposing civil society, human rights, and the European Union. They portrayed the pro-European protest demonstrations, ongoing continuously since November 2024 in Tbilisi and other cities, as a "forced and orchestrated process" and accused the West of "importing disorder" into Georgia.

For example, the **sermons delivered by Archbishop Iakob Iakobashvili of Bodbe** on March [2](#), [9](#), and [30](#) were based on anti-Western messages and on discrediting Georgian Dream's opponents:

Message: The West is interfering in Georgia's internal affairs:

"When there is so much chaos in the world and yet you find time for this little Georgia, you must either be Christ himself or a great intriguer. I laughed — yesterday I saw that someone from Sweden expressed sympathy [for the protesters]. I want to tell foreigners: take care of your own nations, and if you want good relations with us, leave us alone."

Discrediting Georgia's Fifth President, Salome Zurbishvili:

"I am surprised by the former president — traveling around Estonia and saying various things. Remember, you are a mother of children, and others have children too. Whose blood are you planning to sacrifice for your goals?"

Metropolitan Stephane Kalajishvili of Tskhondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi continued anti-Western and Georgian Dream-aligned rhetoric during his sermons on March [9](#), [15](#), and [22](#), similar to his previous addresses:

Message: The West aims to instigate civil strife in Georgia and artificially sustain civil protest:

"They want to import civil confrontation. All their forces are trying to breathe life into those few people standing in the streets, shouting nonsense that elections were not held properly and demanding new elections. They are saying all kinds of foolish things... Foreign ministers, some countries, are making statement after statement just to somehow keep the fighting spirit alive among those standing [at the rallies]."

Message: The West attacks values in Georgia, while the Georgian Dream government defends them:

"The government is acting correctly today — God forbid if this course changes, because then new betrayals will come... [The West wants] us to repeal the law that was introduced to protect the sanctity of the family. Why should we repeal it? Clearly, they want to attack the family."

Spreading conspiracy theories about the demonstrators to discredit them:

"They [the protesters] wanted to declare themselves the voice of the people, shouting right in the middle of Europe... They want people to be imprisoned so that they can later make martyrs out of them."

Bishop Spiridon Abuladze of the Skhalta Eparchy also spread anti-Western messages during his sermons on March [12](#) and [30](#). He referred to the European Union and all its supporters as "satanic" and "depraved forces," while portraying Georgian Dream as Georgia's defender who "exposes and dissociates itself from satanic Europe."