



Post-Election Environment: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

October 26 to November 26, 2024



Post-Election Environment: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality, and Secularity

October 26 to November 26, 2024

The document is prepared by the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)
www.tdi.ge/en



Contents

- Key Findings 4
- Georgian Dream Manipulates with the Orthodox Church and Religion 5
- Transfer of State Property to the Patriarchate10
- Patriarch and Orthodox Clergy Support the Georgian Dream.....10
- Some Orthodox Clergy Slam Georgian Dream for the Alleged Election Fraud13
- Speculations about the Orthodox Church in propagandist, pro-government media14
- Xenophobia Toward Ethnic Minorities14

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

The parliamentary election in Georgia was held on October 26, 2024.

The present report covers the period from **October 26 to November 26, 2024**.

Also, read the reports on monitoring the pre-election environment regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity [from August 25 to September 25](#) and [from 25 September to 25 October](#).



The report was prepared by the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI) within the USAID Unity Through Diversity Program, which is implemented by UNA Georgia with the financial support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the TDI and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the USAID and UNA Georgia.

Key Findings

The ongoing monitoring revealed that on the day of the 2024 parliamentary election and in the subsequent period, the ruling party, Georgian Dream, carried out propaganda against human rights, democracy, and the West. Central topics of this propaganda, as in the pre-election period, were the protection of the Georgian Orthodox Church, “values,” and “traditions.” According to their statements, the West and liberal values pose a threat to Georgian identity, while the Georgian Dream defends these values, the Orthodox Church, and Christianity.

During the monitoring period, the main narratives of the Georgian Dream in the context of the Orthodox Church and religion included:

Messages related to religion and traditional values:

- *The 2024 parliamentary elections were a choice between godlessness and spirituality, Christianity and unbelief, foreign identity and traditional values;*
- *The results of the parliamentary elections reflect the victory of the national government, as the government stands on the side of God and faith;*
- *The goal of the Georgian Dream is to protect faith and traditional values.*

Anti-opposition messages:

- *The opposition fights against traditions and the Georgian Orthodox Church, so it has been defeated.*

Explicit anti-Western messages:

- *The West forces us to abandon faith and traditions;*
- *The West finances radicalism, the fight against the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Patriarch, and LGBT propaganda.*

Foreign Relations:

- *Values of the US. President Donald Trump and the Georgian Dream are in harmony; Americans and Georgians voted for faith.*

Even though the parliamentary election results are not legitimately or constitutionally recognized either within the country or by democratic countries and Western partners, on November 16, Patriarch Ilia II congratulated the Georgian Dream on its “overwhelming victory.” For its part, the Georgian Dream used the Georgian Patriarchate's congratulations in public statements to legitimize the parliamentary election results. On November 25, the first session of the illegitimate one-party parliament was attended by representatives of the Patriarchate, including Archpriest Andria Jaghmaidze, Head of the Public Relations Department of the Patriarchate, Archpriest Mikael Botkoveli, and Protopresbyter Giorgi Zviadadze.

Key pro-government and anti-Western narratives by Orthodox clergy representatives of the Patriarchate during and after the election day included:

- *Parliamentary election and its outcomes: the saving of Christian values and the Church;*
- *Parliamentary election: a choice between God and the West/Western politicians;*
- *Europe is imposing its agenda on us;*
- *By criticizing the election results, the West tries to provoke unrest in Georgia;*
- *By supporting the Georgian Dream government, the Georgian people chose the path of the Lord.*

A few Orthodox Church clergy issued critical statements regarding the alleged widespread falsification of the parliamentary election and its results.

Following the dissemination of reports about alleged electoral fraud and the announcement of the results, xenophobic comments against ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis from Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions became more frequent on social media.

Georgian Dream Manipulates with the Orthodox Church and Religion

On October 26, the day of the election, and in the post-election period, the leaders of the Georgian Dream actively continued to use the name of the Church and narratives around Christianity, national identity, “family values,” and “traditions” for anti-Western messaging. In their statements, the political opposition has been portrayed as fighting against national values, the Georgian Dream government has been presented as the guardian of these values, and the West has been accused of financing radicalism and fighting against the Orthodox Church and the Patriarch. The Georgian Dream described the parliamentary election as a “victory of the Georgian people”, the “national government,” and “Christian values.”

At its session on November 16, the Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) [approved](#) the summary protocol of the final results of the October 26 parliamentary elections. On the same day, in an [official statement](#) from the Patriarchate of Georgia, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II [congratulated](#) the Georgian Dream on its “decisive victory in the elections.”

Alongside its anti-Western and anti-opposition propaganda messages, the Georgian Dream used the Patriarchate’s declared support for the Georgian Dream as a source of public legitimacy for the election results.

The Patriarch's Support: A source of "public legitimacy" for the Georgian Dream

On November 17, Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, on behalf of the party, expressed gratitude to the Patriarch for his congratulations:

"The cooperation between the state and the Church is very important to us, and we value it very much. Every message contained in the Patriarch's statement is significant to us, and naturally, we will act accordingly."

Mamuka Mdinardze, Chairperson of the parliamentary majority, Georgian Dream faction, November 17: "It can be said that the election held in Georgia has legitimacy not only from OSCE/ODIHR and other observers that made positive assessments **but also through popular legitimacy, and this high degree of popular legitimacy is ensured by the position of the Patriarchate and the Patriarch himself.** [...] I will be straightforward – his [the Patriarch's] position as a living saint - and we should no longer shy away from saying this - was naturally far more significant than anyone else's."

Giorgi Volski, a parliamentary majority member, November 17: "This is not just a standard congratulation; it is a blessing for both the opposition and the majority to reconsider the current situation and take steps for the benefit of the country. This level of confrontation is undoubtedly a concern for everyone, including the Patriarch, for whom this issue is especially important. Despite this appeal, we do not expect constructive actions from those who are characterized by such aggressive attacks on the Georgian Church."

Guram Macharashvili, a parliamentary majority member, November 17: "We saw the statement from the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, where he congratulated the Georgian Dream on its victory and simultaneously wished for the government and opposition to make joint decisions for the benefit of the country. How could any reasonable person object to unity and shared love for the homeland? But the United National Movement, by its nature, cannot inherently tolerate anything Georgian."

Levan Machavariani, a parliamentary majority member, November 17: "Yesterday, we saw the congratulation from His Holiness [Patriarch]. It is very pleasing. His Holiness called on opposition parties to find a way to cooperate for Georgia's sake. However, I strongly doubt that they [the opposition] will heed the Patriarch's words. For years, we have been hearing many of them curse the Patriarch, sanctities, and the Church. Therefore, the Patriarch is not an authority figure for them."

Key narratives

The 2024 parliamentary election: A choice between godlessness and spirituality, Christianity and unbelief, foreign identity and traditional values

Shalva Papuashvili, Chairperson of the illegitimate¹ (2024 convocation) Parliament, November 25, at the first session of the illegitimate parliament: “The October 26 parliamentary election was also held as a de facto referendum. The Georgian people faced a clear choice: [...], to choose a foreign identity or traditional values...”

Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, October 26, made a comment to the media on election day: “Today we are choosing between good and evil; today we are making a choice between godlessness and spirituality.”

Tea Tsulukiani, number six on the Georgian Dream electoral list and former Minister of Culture and Sport made a Facebook post on October 29: “(Still) sisters and (still) brothers, when will you learn politics? Let’s set aside for a moment the debate on the validity of dichotomies; in a choice between war and peace, Christianity and unbelief, you got a 54-11 difference (you will acknowledge reality; what else have you got left?!)...”

Parliamentary election results: the victory of the national government, as the Georgian Dream stands on the side of God

Shalva Papuashvili, Chairperson of the illegitimate Parliament, November 25: “This was and remains a battle of David and Goliath, where truth, wisdom, and love for the homeland prevailed because we stand on the side of God, the homeland, and the people.”

Mamuka Mdinardze, Chairperson of the parliamentary majority, Georgian Dream faction, October 26, an address to the voters at the Georgian Dream’s evening gathering on the election day: “Today, another page of history was written, where we, Georgians, declared that it must be a tradition, it must become a tradition that no one but a national government will ever win in Georgia. Therefore, long live our country, our national identity, and everything Georgian!”

¹On November 25, 2024, despite questions regarding legitimacy, the Georgian Dream majority recognized the mandates of all 150 deputies of the new Parliament. On November 28, the Georgian Dream Parliament unanimously voted with 84 votes to express confidence in the government, led by Irakli Kobakhidze.

According to Paragraph 5, Subparagraph "a" of Article 86 of the Parliamentary Rules of Procedure, the name of a person whose election as a Member of Parliament has been appealed to the Constitutional Court of Georgia or to a common court of Georgia will not be included in the decree of the Parliament recognising the powers of MPs. Since the legality of the election of all individuals elected in the parliamentary elections of October 26, 2024, has been challenged by the President of Georgia to the Constitutional Court, which has not yet ruled on the issue, the Parliament was not authorized to recognize the mandates of the elected individuals based on the election results. Therefore, the recognition of the mandates of the elected Members of Parliament on November 25, 2024, and the expression of confidence in the government on November 28, 2024, were unlawful. Given that the recognition of parliamentary mandates was unlawful, under Article 38 of the Constitution, both Parliament and the government are unauthorized, illegitimate and, therefore, unconstitutional.

Georgian Dream's goal: Protecting faith and traditional values

Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, November 1: “Homeland, language, faith - this is both the plan and the goal!” With this statement on the social network, Papuashvili responded to a joint statement of the political opposition regarding their action plan.

Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia, November 5: “The sole target of this propaganda is Christianity itself. We want to protect traditional values, the interests of minors, our faith, and our traditional religion, and that is what the law [on Family Values and the Protection of Minors] that we are adopting serves.”

The opposition fights traditions and the Orthodox church, which is why it has lost

Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, November 7: “We have recently seen attempts by the opposition to insult, diminish, and erase from memory everything Georgian, traditional, and historical and replace it with foreign values, foreign historical figures, and in general, replace the Georgian history and our heroes with the histories of other nations. We saw how the Georgian people responded to all this on October 26, putting all those who insulted our heroic kings, traditions, and religion in their place - where forces that have nothing in common with our homeland belong.”

Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, November 8, a comment on the meeting of the political opposition with the EU Ambassador: “It is not possible that the Georgian people legitimize a political group that rejects everything Georgian, that erases our history, and fights against our Church, for whom the interest of Georgia means nothing and who can simply exchange it for the interest of another country. For them, Georgia is of no value.”

Levan Kochloshvili, member of the political party People's Power, November 18: “One thing is clear: the radical opposition's place of worship is Brussels, while the house of worship of the government chosen by the majority of the Georgian people is the Church of Christ. Their moral face is Michael Roth, who has entered into same-sex marriage multiple times, while our spiritual leader is the 91-year-old wise Patriarch, the guarantor of Georgia's identity, whom homeland-less agents consider the nation's main enemy.”

The West forces us to abandon faith and traditions

Sozar Subari, Chair of the People's Power party, November 8, on “Imedi LIVE”: “The current trend, the mainstream path that Western leaders are forcing us to follow, contradicts humanity's centuries-old achievements. They are pressuring us to abandon our national identity, traditional values, and faith. This is precisely why they insist so strongly that we repeal the law we enacted on ‘Protecting Minors and Family Values.’”

The West finances radicalism, the fight against the Orthodox Church and Patriarch, and LGBT propaganda

Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, November 19: “So-called friends from abroad are doing everything to fund radicalism, revolutionary scenarios, polarization, and confrontation among people. The fight against the Church; and the fight against the Patriarch.”

Tamar Chiburdanidze, member of the People's Power party, November 8: “When you openly declare that you follow the path of Ilia [Chavchavadze] while simultaneously working against your country with foreign funds, that is not Ilia’s path! When you promote LGBT propaganda and fight against the Church and faith, that is also not Ilia’s path!”

Message on the U.S. presidential election: Values of Donald Trump and the Georgian Dream are in harmony; Americans and Georgians voted for faith

Levan Machavariani, member of the parliamentary majority, November 7: “In Donald Trump’s case, this may turn out to be simpler, as our values are in complete harmony. In this case, the American people, like the majority of our population, voted for peace, voted for traditional values, voted for faith, culture, identity, and so forth. Consequently, the values Donald Trump speaks of are in full alignment with the values of the Georgian Dream, and in this regard, we are, of course, even more pleased.”

From opposition parties, on November 17, Teona Akubardia, a member of the opposition political party Gakharia for Georgia, commented on the Patriarch's congratulations. She emphasized the Patriarch’s role in the field of spirituality and at the same time, the non-interference of the Georgian Orthodox Church in secular affairs:

“As for the Patriarch, even though he has an important role, position, and respect in terms of the spirituality of our country, of course, there is a concordat, which means the Church does not interfere in secular affairs. The Patriarch’s desire for peace is something we all share. In this situation, it is hard to imagine peace when violence reigns in the country, when police force is used against young people, when the right to protest is interfered with, and when the freedom of elections is hijacked by Ivanishvili.”

Transfer of State Property to the Patriarchate

In the post-election period, the government continued transferring property to the Patriarchate, parallel to using the Georgian Orthodox Church for populist and propagandist purposes.

In particular, by the decree issued by the Georgian government on [November 11](#), the LEPL National Agency of State Property granted the Georgian Patriarchate two state-owned agricultural (arable) land plots of 17,370 square meters and 11,081 square meters in the village of Ozhio, Akhmeta Municipality, on a 15-year basis under a free usufruct agreement.

By the decree of the Government of Georgia dated [November 18](#), the LEPL National Agency of State Property transferred to the Patriarchate a non-agricultural land plot of 318 square meters and the building on it, located in the village of Opshkviti, Tskaltubo Municipality, for a symbolic price of GEL 1 through a direct sale.

By the decree of the Government of Georgia dated [November 22](#), the LEPL National Agency of State Property similarly transferred a 10,000-square-meter non-agricultural land plot located in Ialghuja, Marneuli Municipality, to the Patriarchate for GEL 1 through a direct sale.

Patriarch and Orthodox Clergy Support the Georgian Dream

Only the Georgian Dream recognizes the results of the October 26 parliamentary election, while the opposition that cleared the electoral threshold and the President of Georgia describe the election as fraudulent. International partners are calling on the government to [investigate](#) the disputed election results objectively. However, the election administration and judiciary rejected most complaints of Georgian [observer missions](#). Against this backdrop, the Georgian Dream faces the legitimacy problem of the October 26 elections domestically and internationally.

The Patriarch and the Georgian Orthodox Church recognized the Georgian Dream's "victory."



Although the parliamentary election results have not been recognized as legitimate either within the country or by democratic nations and Western partners, on November 16, after the approval of the final protocol by the Central Election Commission of Georgia, **Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II [congratulated](#) the Georgian Dream on their "overwhelming victory" in the election:**

["The Central Election Commission has completed the process of announcing the results of the elections, confirming the victory of the Georgian Dream party with a large majority of votes. We warmly congratulate them on this success\[...\] Everything in this](#)

world is by God's will. What matters is that synergy is created between us and the Lord," - read the statement.

On November 21, the Metropolitan of Khoni and Samtredia, Saba Gigiberia, commented on the Patriarch's congratulatory message during his sermon. He said that it is not necessary for the election results to be recognized internationally:

"A few days ago, the Patriarch blessed our country, blessed the government, and stated that the election was held and we should accept the results that have actually occurred. [...] For one simple, straightforward reason - if we love our country, we should want peace and development for it. Who more than the Patriarch should tell us, so to speak, about the legitimacy of these events? Is it really necessary for someone from America, Europe, Russia, China, or wherever else to tell us that we are good people, we did everything right, and now we should continue living peacefully?!"

On the day of the parliamentary election and after that, the Georgian Dream enjoyed the support of many Orthodox clergy. They linked the Georgian Dream's "victory" to protecting the Orthodox Church and preserving Christian values and traditions. However, the political opposition and the West were portrayed in their narratives as a collective force fighting against these values.



On November 25, the first session of the illegitimate one-party parliament was attended by the Head of the Public Relations Department of the Patriarchate, Archpriest Andria Jaghmaidze, as well as Archpriest Mikael Botkovelevi and Protopresbyter Giorgi Zviadadze.

Photo: Formula TV

Key narratives

Parliamentary elections and its outcomes: The saving of Christian values and the Georgian Orthodox Church

Shio Mujiri, the patriarchal locum tenens and Metropolitan of Senaki and Chkhorotsku, October 26, a comment on the parliamentary elections: "I want to bless our country, Georgia, and wish it peace, prosperity, development, and a path of righteousness because today we see that the events in the world are unfolding in such a way that for the nation to secure a worthy place in the future world order, it is necessary to save and preserve the main values. These are our Christian values and the church. I hope that today's day, today's election, will be a guarantee and a great step forward towards this goal."

Stepane Kalaijshvili, Metropolitan of Chkondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi, October 27: “Christianity has maintained its place in Georgia. Today, it is incorrect to say that we were choosing between the West and Russia. This is a lie. We were not choosing between the West and Russia. The choice was between sodomy and Christianity. And this choice ended in favor of Christianity.”

The blessing of Bidzina Ivanishvili

Shio Mujiri, the patriarchal locum tenens and Metropolitan of Senaki and Chkhorotsku, November 23: “May God bless everyone who participated and donated towards the construction of this cathedral [Trinity Cathedral]. I especially want to acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili, whose involvement and contributions played a decisive role in the construction of this cathedral.”

Parliamentary election: a choice between God and the West/Western politicians

Iakob Iakobashvili, Archbishop of Bodbe, November 9: “Perhaps many of those who left and sided with the opposition or were angry with the government or were great admirers of the National Movement and did not really realize what they were getting into... here, **the choice was either to choose God or Viola von Cramon, or to choose God or Mr. Scholz, or to choose God or Mr. Macron**”... “What happened here was that people, who perhaps were not great supporters of the [Georgian] Dream, saw that they were to go against God, against conscience, those who understood what was happening. Those who did not understand and acted as hotheads should listen [to us] and, if we are not right, let them ask their consciences.”

Europe is imposing its agenda on us

Iakob Iakobashvili, Archbishop of Bodbe, November 23: “They tell us - do not even think about joining the European Union unless you repeal the family values law. They are giving me a choice, posing the issue to me, like Saint George, that in order to live well they have to admit us somewhere, and we should again act on their whims.”

By criticizing the election results, the West tries to provoke unrest in Georgia

Iakob Iakobashvili, Archbishop of Bodbe, November 3: “Some complaints have been made regarding our election inside or outside [our country] [...] Those people, I am talking about European Parliament members, speak and often adopt something [resolutions] against Georgia. They are trying to bring unrest to Georgia, and I am not ashamed to say this. They think that if Russia destroys Ukraine, it will be someone else’s turn next. These are very small countries, and they do not want Russia to come to their countries. From their perspective, they act rightly because they are patriots of their own countries; do not send our country to the slaughterhouse.”

Thanks to the government and the people who chose the path of the Lord

Theodore Chuadze, Metropolitan of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti, November 8: “I want to express my great thanks to the highest officials of our country, our homeland, who are trying to lead our country along the path of Ilia the Righteous, and my great thanks to our people who have preferred to be with the Lord and to walk the path of the Lord over any welfare, any other kind of recognition.”

Some Orthodox Clergy Slam Georgian Dream for the Alleged Election Fraud

Some members of the Orthodox Church clergy have issued critical statements about the [widespread alleged fraud](#) and the results of the parliamentary elections.

Saba Intskirveli, Bishop of North America, October 28: “If the decision is not free, if someone votes in the election for a bribe or promised job, that person is self-serving and cannot be useful to the homeland, the country, or the people.”

Giorgi Abdushelishvili, Archpriest of Ruis-Urbnis Diocese, October 27: “What this liar Ivanishvili and the liar government did yesterday was unimaginable for all of us. No one could have imagined that there would be such rigging of the election.”

Zaza Tevzadze, Priest, November 18: “What the Georgian Dream did is the hijacking of society. It is treating all these subjects as nothing. This does not fit into anything. What we are left with and can do is refuse to tolerate it or accept it. If society tolerates it, we will find ourselves in a grave situation [...] We have an enemy, a very skilled and powerful force, the Russian Empire, which has no counterbalance in the world because it knows how to weaken society. This is a very treacherous enemy.”

Speculations about the Orthodox Church in propagandist, pro-government media

The government-controlled propagandist media have also reinforced the government's anti-opposition messages and manipulation of the Orthodox Church-related topic. For example, on November 17, [Irakli Chikhladze](#), Deputy Director of the TV company "Imedi" and host of the program "Imedi's Week," discussed Patriarch Ilia II's congratulations to the Georgian Dream and, at the same time, referred to the opposition as the enemy of the Church and the ruling party as the defender of the Church.

"Each message is very important, and we will act accordingly," Irakli Kobakhidze said. [...] It is clear that the radicals will not accept the Patriarch's message, as unfortunately, for all these years, a segment of the opposition has been engaged solely in discrediting the Church and His Holiness."

Xenophobia Toward Ethnic Minorities

Following the announcement of the election results by the Central Election Commission on election day and in the subsequent period, xenophobic and discriminatory statements towards ethnic minorities have been identified in public discourse. These statements were primarily related to the quantitative advantage of Georgian Dream votes in the regions populated by ethnic minorities.

Even though, according to the CEC data, a high percentage of votes in favor of the Georgian Dream was also recorded in [other districts](#) predominantly populated by ethnic majorities, the authors of texts and comments posted on social media generalized accusations against ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians, blaming them for the electoral fraud.

Social media commenters wrote about the residents of Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti, stating that "Armenians and Azerbaijanis decided the future of our country."

Xenophobia was also evident during the pre-election period. Pro-government propagandist media and representatives of the government-affiliated People's Power resorted to Armenophobia and attempted to discredit political opponents based on their association with other ethnicities (for more on this, see TDI's [pre-election monitoring report, p. 19](#)).