



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

November 26 - December 26, 2024



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Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)

www.tdi.ge/en



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, public figures, and representatives of different religious communities.

The present report covers the November 26 - December 26, 2024 period.

You can also access the reports on monitoring the pre-election and post-election environments regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity from [August 25 to September 25](#), [September 25 to October 25](#), and [October 26 to November 26, 2024](#).

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Content

- Key Findings 4**
- Manipulation In the Name of the Orthodox Church and Identity by Georgian Dream and Its Satellites..... 8**
- Propaganda of Patriarchate Regarding Protests12**
- Manipulation in the Name of Religion and Dissemination of Deceit15**
- Statements from Orthodox Clergy Condemning Violence and Supporting Protesters18**
- Statements from Non-Dominant Religious and Ethnic Communities and Clergy Regarding the Protests20**

Key Findings

Following the alleged massive falsification of the 26 October parliamentary elections, on 28 November, Georgia's illegitimate Prime Minister, Irakli Kobakhidze, declared that Georgia's European integration and negotiations with the EU on the accession process [would be halted](#) at least until 2028. This sparked immediate public protests and continuous demonstrations across Georgia. Georgian Dream has repeatedly attempted to [suppress](#) peaceful protests [violently and unlawfully](#). Over 500 individuals participating in peaceful protests have been [detained](#). Among them, more than 300 have been subjected to [beatings, torture, and inhuman treatment](#). The court found all individuals arrested under administrative procedures guilty of offenses and imposed severe sanctions against them. Meanwhile, not a single member of the police officers has been held accountable.

Meanwhile, the demonstrations have transcended the immediate goal of safeguarding Georgia's Western path and EU integration process, becoming a broader struggle for freedom and the foundations of democracy, statehood, and justice.

Monitoring the environment regarding freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularity indicates that the Georgian Dream's anti-European and anti-human rights propaganda heavily relies on manipulating religious narratives. Leaders of the Georgian Dream actively try to discredit peaceful protests, persist in anti-Western propaganda—particularly in the context of Christianity—and use the support of the Georgian Orthodox Church to legitimize themselves. To blur the lines of values, Georgian Dream and its affiliates employ various manipulative techniques, including preemptively "claiming" terms that opponents might use against them (e.g., fascism) and associating these terms with ideologies they oppose (e.g., liberalism).

The propaganda of the illegitimate government is reinforced by the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church, certain Orthodox clergy, and the government-controlled propaganda media. During the reporting period, the most notable examples were coordinated and orchestrated misinformation campaigns portraying peaceful, pro-European demonstrations as "Red Terror" and labeling demonstrators as "Bolsheviks" fighting against the Orthodox Church. All these narratives are characterized by an anti-Western context, framing Europe as the antithesis of Christianity, spirituality, and national values.

The attitude of the Georgian Patriarchate towards the demonstrations was also significant. Throughout this period, neither the Patriarchate nor its Public Relations Department expressed clear support for individuals who were beaten and tortured by law enforcement. They limited themselves to issuing general statements condemning violence. These declarations demonstrated loyalty to the illegitimate government and perpetuated a false narrative of internal social hostilities and "violence from both sides."

To be noted, the Georgian Orthodox Church [endorsed](#) the ruling party's policy before the October 26 vote, while Patriarch Ilia II [congratulated](#) the Georgian Dream with "overwhelming election victory."

During the protest period, alongside the use of the Orthodox Church for populist-propagandist purposes, the illegitimate government continued transferring state property to the Patriarchate.

The National Agency of State Property of Georgia transferred ownership of non-agricultural land plots (in total, 19,023 square meters) and buildings to the Patriarchate for a symbolic price of 1 GEL through direct sale. These properties are located in the town of [Manglisi](#), [Kutaisi](#), the village of [Chogha in Chkhorotsku Municipality](#), and the town of [Bakuriani in Borjomi Municipality](#). Additionally, a non-agricultural land plot measuring 3,877 square meters in the village of Pirveli Maisi in Khobi Municipality was granted for a term of 99 years under an usufruct agreement without charge.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia [provided](#) financial assistance of 140,000 GEL (one hundred forty thousand GEL) to the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church's Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary¹.

Main Propagandistic Narratives on Identity and Religion by Georgian Dream and Its Satellite Party People's Power

Open Anti-Western Messages

- The European Union uses financial aid as "blackmail" against the Georgian Dream;
- The West is godless;
- The politicization of children (referring to youth participating in protests) is funded by the West, where faith and family values are undermined;
- Radical European politicians trample on our national values.

Manipulating National Interests and "People's Legitimacy"

- The law against "LGBT propaganda" [legislation restricting fundamental human rights] reflects Georgian national interests, and the Orthodox Church and the majority of society support it.

¹ In 2024, during the pre-election period in September and October, the government transferred ownership of 11,062 square meters of non-agricultural land and buildings to the Orthodox Church, along with granting 217,008 square meters of agricultural and non-agricultural land under a 99-year usufruct agreement free of charge. In the post-election period, from November to December, the government transferred ownership of 29,341 square meters of non-agricultural land and buildings to the Orthodox Church. Additionally, it granted 28,451 square meters of agricultural land under a 15-year usufruct agreement and 3,877 square meters of land under a 99-year usufruct agreement free of charge.

Manipulation of Identity to Discredit Liberals

- Georgian Dream opponents are followers of the ideology of "liberal Fascism" and are enemies of the Church.

Demonization of CSOs Using Religion and the Patriarchate

- NGOs, with support from foreign states, fund radicalism and extremism, attack the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Patriarch, faith, and traditions.

Discrediting the President in an Anti-Western Context

- President Salome Zurbishvili insults the Church and is controlled by foreign powers.

Discrediting Pro-European Protests in a Religious Context

- The goal of young demonstrators is not to protect the European path but to insult faith.
- Comparisons with the "Red Terror": Demonstrators are modern Bolsheviks attacking the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Narratives of the Patriarchate and Certain Orthodox Clergy

The Georgian Patriarchate and its Public Relations Department issued multiple statements about the violence at pro-European demonstrations, none of which explicitly condemned the beating and inhumane treatment of peaceful protesters by law enforcement. The Georgian Patriarchate reinforced the Georgian Dream propaganda about the "violence from two sides" and the polarization of society; it urged the protestors to respect the boundaries of expression and called on law enforcement to show more "patience."

After hundreds of people were beaten and subjected to degrading treatment, on December 13, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II broadly condemned violence against all individuals without identifying or naming the victims. The Patriarch emphasized the need to strengthen a "European-type national state" based on traditional values.

Discrediting Pro-European Demonstrations in an Anti-Western Context:

Certain Orthodox clergy in their discourse often use the technique of a *false dilemma*, forcing people to choose between preserving their identity and aligning with Europe. These narratives aim to discredit pro-European demonstrations by framing them within an anti-Western context.

During the reporting period, under this category, the following thematic messages emerged:

- The West is a restless "friend" (with connotations of being an enemy);
- Protest is an anti-Christian uprising orchestrated by the West.

Manipulating Religion to Portray Protesters as Blasphemers:

During one of the protest performances where demonstrators burned a coffin and effigy symbolizing Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Georgian Patriarchate's Public Relations Department and other Orthodox clergy, using religious manipulation, accused protesters of blasphemy.

Equating Protesters with Bolsheviks Attacking the Georgian Orthodox Church:

The Patriarchate and some Orthodox clergy (alongside the Georgian Dream and propaganda media) engaged in a campaign of exaggeration and misinformation, comparing demonstrators to Bolsheviks.

Statements by Other Orthodox Clergy and Different Religious Communities

Notably, certain Orthodox clergy issued critical statements about the Georgian Dream's decision to abort EU accession and condemned violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators while expressing support for them.

The members of the Council of Religions under the auspices of Public Defender also condemned the brutal violence against demonstrators, highlighting the importance of Georgia's European integration, guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia.

On 7 and 25 December, leaders and representatives of different religious and ethnic communities in Georgia marched on Rustaveli Avenue to protest violence and show solidarity with tortured and beaten demonstrators. Various religious leaders also made several public statements in different formats.

Manipulation In the Name of the Orthodox Church and Identity by Georgian Dream and Its Satellites

The illegitimate government and parliamentary majority attempt to portray the self-organized, peaceful demonstrations that began on November 28 as an "externally fuelled" movement. Protesters are being labeled as "modern Bolsheviks," allegedly waging a war against the Orthodox Church and faith. Simultaneously, the GD continues to discredit non-governmental organizations and the President within an anti-Western framework. The European Union is depicted as a coercive force "blackmailing the Georgian Dream," while "radical European politicians" are portrayed as adversaries of national identity, family values, and religious beliefs. In contrast, their narrative positions the Georgian Dream as a party enjoying "popular legitimacy" and the support of the Patriarchate.

Georgian Dream and its affiliates use manipulative tactics, including the "reverse accusation" technique, for propaganda. For instance, they preemptively "claim" terms that their opponents might use against them (e.g., fascism, Soviet tactics, and repression) and associate these terms with ideologies they oppose (e.g., liberalism) to blur value distinctions. For example, the illegitimate Parliamentary Speaker Shalva Papuashvili likened the "radicalism" of protesters to the Soviet regime that tortured Patriarch Ambrosi Khelaia, a prominent Orthodox dissident of the time.

The following key messages and thematic narratives emerged from the Georgian Dream and its affiliated political entities:

Open Anti-Western Messages:

- The EU uses financial aid as blackmail against the Georgian Dream, and European integration should not be considered a charity

[Irakli Kobakhidze, Georgia's illegitimate Prime Minister, November 28](#): "We are a proud and dignified nation with a rich history. Consequently, we categorically reject considering EU integration as a charity that the EU should grant us... We see European politicians and bureaucrats using allocated grants and loans to blackmail Georgia..."

- The West is godless, while the Church in Georgia cannot be defiled

[Tamar Chiburdanidze, member of People's Power, December 10](#): "In the Pechersk Lavra, they hung their photos instead of icons of saints. On Rustaveli Avenue, during the Christmas fast, they burned an icon of the Savior instead of praying! Georgians must avoid the wrath that befell Ukrainians! Godlessness has overrun and trampled everything valuable in the West, but every fall is followed by resurrection! Georgia belongs to the Lord, and Ukraine will not repeat itself here, nor will the Church be defiled. We will overcome this ordeal with faith and wisdom!"

- The politicization of children is funded by the West, where faith and family values are under attack

[Dimitri Khundadze](#), member of the illegitimate parliamentary majority, December 3: “They have started to dismantle Georgian identity in schools. Everyone must know—activists, directors, teachers, parents, or their instigators—that the politicization of children and using them as shields in these processes is political pedophilia and a grave crime against future generations. These processes originate and are funded from places where dignity, faith, family values, and traditions passed down through generations are attacked.”

- Radical European politicians trample on our national values

Frequent individual attacks by the Georgian Dream and the parliamentary majority target specific Western politicians who criticize the Georgian Dream. During the reporting and previous periods, one prominent target was Michael Roth, Chairman of the Bundestag’s Foreign Affairs Committee, who was portrayed as an enemy of Orthodoxy and subjected to personal discrediting campaigns (See [Savalan Mirzoev](#), member of the illegitimate parliamentary majority, December 14 commentary).

[Aleksandre Dalakishvili](#), member of the illegitimate parliamentary majority, November 30: “A group of radical European politicians is trying to trample on Georgian values and turn us into instruments in conflicts between great powers, where the interests of small countries are secondary.”

Exploiting National Interests and “People’s Legitimacy”:

- Legislation against "LGBT propaganda" [legislation restricting fundamental human rights] reflects Georgian national interests and is supported by the Orthodox Church and the majority of society

[Mamuka Mdinaradze](#), chairman of the illegitimate parliamentary majority faction Georgian Dream, November 28: “...During the referendum, the Georgian people supported the idea that this law is not Russian but stems from Georgian national interests. Yes, the law against LGBT propaganda is Georgian, national, and not only supported by the Georgian Dream, not only by the Orthodox Church but by the entire Georgian people and the vast, solid majority of society.”

Exploiting Identity to Discredit Liberals:

- "Liberal Fascism" attacks the Georgian Orthodox Church

*[Irakli Kobakhidze](#), illegitimate Prime Minister, December 14: “These same people have proven that godlessness is their signature, and this is the face of **liberal fascism**. Some people have been drawn into liberal fascism, and this is a tragic phenomenon.”*

[Sozar Subari](#), *People's Power*, December 13: "In reality, the fight against the Church was embedded in the foundation of liberalism, and it is entirely logical that Georgian **liberal fascists** would eventually reach the point where they openly declared war against the Church."

[Giorgi Kakhiani](#), *an illegitimate parliamentary member*, December 13: "**Liberal fascism** seems to have no bottom, and each day may bring something worse and worse. [...] Imagine what would happen if they had power now and were in government—what kind of attitude they would have towards the Church and dissenting opinions..."

Exploiting Religion and the Patriarchate to Demonize NGOs:

- **NGOs Fund Radicalism and Attack the Patriarchate, Faith, and Traditions**

On December 16, in an interview with the TV channel Imedi, [Mikheil Kavelashvili](#), the illegitimate President of Georgia, elected by the illegitimate parliament, stated that "Georgia, through its government, is a defender of its national interests," with the Patriarchate playing a particularly significant role in this. According to him, "externally inspired" non-governmental organizations oppose and "attack" such a strong institution.

Similarly to previous periods, Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze also accused non-governmental organizations of fighting against religion and the Orthodox Church.

[Kakha Kaladze](#), *Mayor of Tbilisi*, December 3: "[...] The public must know who these countries and NGOs are that spend money, for example, on training young people to be radicals to engage in extremist organizations. We see how much attack has occurred on the Church, our faith, and everything valuable to us—our culture, our past, our traditions."

Discrediting the President in an Anti-Western Context:

- **President Zurabishvili Insults the Church and is Controlled by Foreign Powers**

[Guram Macharashvili](#), *member of the illegitimate parliamentary majority*, December 3: "[Salome Zurabishvili] insults the army, the Church, the police, and the Georgian people. Once again, I repeat, this individual proves daily that behind the radical actions stands her foreign master."

Discrediting Pro-European Protests in a Religious Context:

- **Demonstrators Insult Christianity**

On December 10, the government propaganda channel Imedi TV reported that on December 9, protesters brought a coffin to the country's main avenue depicting Jesus Christ, placed it in front

of the Christmas tree near Parliament, and set it on fire. The propaganda media omitted the fact that the [coffin was burned with an effigy of Georgian Dream honorary chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili](#). The illegitimate government and parliamentary representatives used this propaganda to discredit peaceful protests.

Representatives of Georgian Dream and affiliated politicians ([Mamuka Mdinaradze](#), [Eka Sepashvili](#), [Giorgi Volski](#), [Rati Ionatamishvili](#), [Nino Tsilosani](#), [Goga Khaindrava](#), [Giorgi Tsutskiridze](#), [Archil Gorduladze](#)) claimed that the coffin depicted "the Savior," "the Lord," and "Christian values." They portrayed demonstrators as anti-religious and disrespectful of Christianity while presenting the Georgian Dream as the defender of these values.

- **Parallels with the "Red Terror": Demonstrators are Modern Bolsheviks Attacking the Church**

The leaders of Georgian Dream and affiliated politicians used the exaggerated/misinformation campaign related to Archpriest Shalva Kekelia to speculate in the name of the Church and discredit peaceful demonstrators. (See the chapter [Manipulation in the Name of Religion and Dissemination of Deceit](#)).

- **The Goal of Young Demonstrators is Not to Protect the European Path but to Disregard Faith**

[Tamar Chiburdanidze](#), member of People's Power, December 1: *"The opposition, supposedly fighting for lost votes and Europe, is gradually revealing its true intentions. The youth returned with the same banners and slogans as in previous years. This is the real reason for their protests and not so-called lost Europeanness. 'Language, homeland, unity' remains relevant and is still the main slogan of the opposition's protests. Faith has already been removed, and the next thing they will do is to remove language."*

[Archil Gorduladze](#), an illegitimate parliamentary member, made a similar statement on December 13: "These people do not have faith and respect for the Church, but they excel in false narratives and statements."

Propaganda of Patriarchate Regarding Protests

Representatives of various religious communities expressed their positions on peaceful protests and the violent actions of the Georgian Dream.

The Patriarchate and Its Public Relations Department Regarding Violence at Pro-European Protests:

The Patriarchate and Its Public Relations Department have not expressed any explicit support for the demonstrators beaten and tortured by law enforcement during this period. Instead, they limited themselves to issuing general statements condemning violence. Their narratives reinforce the propaganda of an illegitimate government as if there is an internal clash in the society or the violence “from both sides.”

- [In a statement on November 29](#), the Public Relations Department of the Georgian Patriarchate repeated the propaganda of the illegitimate government, claiming that the declarations that Georgia would not turn away from the European path were not “considered sufficient or convincing” for “a part of the Georgian society” and that peaceful protest “slowly escalated into a physical confrontation between representatives of law enforcement agencies and protest participants.” The statement drew an equivalence between the protesters who, it said, were “attacking police, trying to break into buildings and damaging infrastructure” and the brutal violence by the law enforcement officials.
- [On November 30](#), the Georgian Patriarchate again urged the victims (protestors) to respect the limits of expression while calling on law enforcement to be more patient.
- [On December 8](#), the Public Relations Department of the Georgian Patriarchate formally condemned the violence against journalists. Still, it repeated the Georgian Dream’s propagandist messages about “public polarization” and “violence from both sides.” The public was urged not to respond to “provocation.” In the same token, the Georgian Dream labeled the physical attack on a TV Pirveli journalist and a cameraman as “[provocation](#).”
- [On December 13](#), the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II, released a statement broadly condemning violence without identifying or mentioning the victims. The Patriarch stated that “everyone must distance themselves from violence,” reaffirmed that Georgia is an inseparable part of European civilization, and called for “constructive dialogue” between the sides. He emphasized that “it is our duty to contribute to strengthening and developing a European-style national state based on traditional values.”

Discrediting Pro-European Demonstrations in an Anti-Western Context:

Some anti-Western messages from the Patriarchate and Orthodox clergy involved false dilemmas, forcing people to choose between preserving their identity and Europe.

- The Choice Between Europe and God

[Iakob Iakobashvili, Metropolitan of Bodbe, December 15: "What is more important: Europe or God and Georgia? We hope the election of a new president will calm the situation in the country, and we wish the president to be for all people."](#)

- The West is a "Restless Friend" [with the connotation of an enemy], and Demonstrators are "Zombified by Hatred."

On December 20, the Facebook page of the [Kutaisi-Gaenati Diocese](#) published a letter by Metropolitan [Ioane Gamrekeli of Kutaisi-Gaenati](#). In the letter, he stated that the Church should not take sides in political processes. However, he simultaneously made statements supporting the illegitimate government (for instance, referencing the problems of previous governments and claiming that the country has been experiencing "revival since 2013"). He named pro-European protestors as "slandorous, aggressive individuals zombified by hatred." He ironically characterized Georgia's Western partner countries as "our restless 'friends' [with the connotation of an enemy]."

- The protests are anti-Christian uprisings, and the West is "forcing Sodom's propaganda upon Georgians"

Metropolitan [Stephane Kalajishvili of the Chkondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi Diocese](#) stated in his sermons on [December 1](#) and [7](#) that the ongoing demonstrations are a "clear example of an anti-Christian uprising," further accusing the West of "imposing Sodom's propaganda" on Georgia.

Similarly, [Bishop Spiridon Abuladze of the Skhalta Diocese](#) claimed in his December 4 sermon that the protests are provocations funded by foreign interests hostile to Georgia. According to him, these forces aim to overthrow the current government and replace it with one that would fulfill their goals, such as legalizing "same-sex marriage" and immorality. Spiridon Abuladze spread such propagandist narratives in his December 1, 3, and 10 sermons.

Portrayal of Demonstrators as Blasphemers:

During one of the protests, in a performance involving the burning of [Bidzina Ivanishvili's effigy and coffin](#), the Public Relations Department of the Georgian Patriarchate and other clergy members, by referring to religious symbols on the coffin, declared that this act was an extreme expression of [hatred, an occult ritual, blasphemy, and the worship of the devil](#). The Patriarchate's Public Relations Department did not mention the gist of the performance - burning of the coffin and Ivanishvili's effigy. Statements on this issue were made by [Orthodox clergy, including Archpriest Aleksandre Galdava, Priest Giorgi Putkaradze of the Church of the Transfiguration of Christ in Tbilisi \(Facebook post\), Priest Spiridon Tskipurishvili, and Archpriest Shalva Kekelia](#).

Equating Demonstrators with Bolsheviks - They Attack the Georgian Orthodox Church:

The Patriarchate and some Orthodox clergy members used an exaggerated or false campaign related to Archpriest Shalva Kakelia to speculate in the name of the Church and discredit peaceful demonstrators. This campaign aimed to associate the protesters with Bolsheviks, attackers of the Church (See the chapter *Manipulation in the Name of Religion and Dissemination of Deceit*).

Manipulation Concerning Students' Participation in Protests:

Some Orthodox clergy members have been reinforcing the illegitimate government's propaganda, claiming that the "organizers" or political groups of the protests are forcing school students to participate in demonstrations and attempting to instrumentalize them to incite tension.

[On December 3](#), the Georgian Patriarchate's Public Relations Department responded to Salome Zurabishvili's comment on the social media [platform X. Zurabishvili](#) had urged schools to express solidarity with the protests. The Patriarchate expressed concern over this call, placing the responsibility for the "escalation" of peaceful demonstrations on "both sides."

Comments regarding the participation of schools and students in the protests were made by the Patriarchate's Locum Tenens, [Metropolitan Shio Mujiri of Senaki and Chkhorotsku](#) (December 4), and the [Head of the Public Relations Department, Andria Jaghmaidze \(December 3 and 4, Facebook posts\)](#). They placed responsibility on "some people" who are trying to involve "school-age children" in the protests to create tension. [The Archbishop of Bodbe, Iakob Iakobashvili](#), directed a comment at President Zurabishvili: "When you call on schools to go outside [...] your motherhood and womanhood are over." [The Metropolitan of Khoni and Samtredia, Saba Gigiberia](#) in his sermon also repeated the propagandist narrative that "politicians want to achieve their goals by using the hands of young children."

Manipulation in the Name of Religion and Dissemination of Deceit

(Georgian Dream and the Parliamentary Majority, the Patriarchate, and Government Propagandist Media)

Below is an example of a coordinated propaganda campaign – through the dissemination of fragmented, exaggerated, and out-of-context information, certain Orthodox clergy, the Georgian Dream, and the media created a narrative suggesting that demonstrators are assaulting the Georgian Orthodox Church.

On December 13, in Tbilisi, a verbal argument occurred between Archpriest Shalva Kekelia and protesters during a protest march near the Church of the Transfiguration in Vake. Following this incident, Kekelia released a [video](#) statement in which he claimed that a “**group stormed the church, began shouting – ‘traitors, come out!’**, ‘**enemies of the church, come out!**’” He compared the event to incidents during the communist era when churches were raided, priests were expelled, and executions took place.

Georgian Dream leaders, affiliated politicians, government propagandist media ([Imedi](#), [Rustavi 2](#), [Post TV](#), [Public Broadcaster](#)), and some clergy members employed the strategy of [generalization and exaggeration](#), manipulating the incident and Kekelia's video statement. They spread information that the march participants had entered the church and vandalized it. After these claims, on December 17, Kekelia contradicted the previously disseminated information, stating to ["Publika"](#) that “**nobody physically stormed the church.**”

The dissemination of misleading information and deceit followed Kekelia's deliberate exaggeration of the incident, including phrases like “stormed us,” “began shouting,” and “expulsion of priests from churches, executions.” In reality, it was due to shouts and remarks heard from outside that Kekelia and a few others themselves stepped outside. By linking certain offensive remarks made by individuals to previous events, Kekelia used this to create a manipulative narrative of confrontation between the two sides. Thus, the selective, exaggerated, and out-of-context information circulated by some clergy members and government propaganda led to the creation of a manipulative propagandist narrative that protesters were attacking the church and vandalizing it.

Manipulative Messages of the Clergy and Dissemination of Falsehoods:

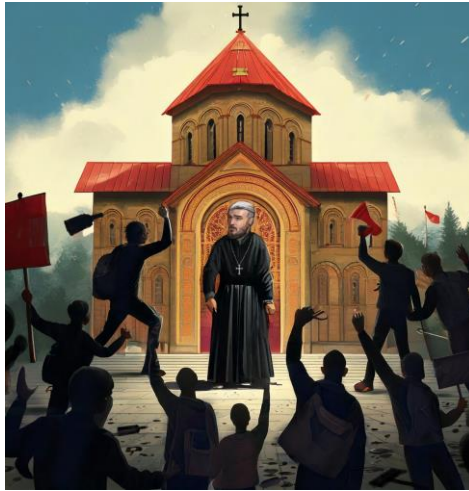
[Andria Jaghmaidze](#), the Head of the Public Relations Department of the Patriarchate, also made a statement: “*What happened today at the Church of the Transfiguration in Vake is equivalent in its gravity to historical events of church raids and persecution of Christians.*”

Propagandistic Media Disseminating Deceit and Discrediting Protesters²:

On December 13, the government propagandist [TV channel Imedi](#) disseminated information that protest march participants confronted clergy members. On December 15, a [special report](#) aired on the show “Imedi’s Week,” in which the host, Irakli Chikhradze, described the incident as a well-planned provocation against the priest, stating that the “participants of the march physically attacked the priest.” Journalist Varlam Tsiklauri noted:

“Radicals have been attacking the church for years, seeking to discredit it. What took centuries for none of the conquerors to accomplish, modern-day Bolsheviks have undertaken.”

A misinformation [poster](#) titled “Red Terror on the Georgian Church” was also created by the government propagandist channel POSTV, dedicated to the so-called “storming and vandalizing” of the Church of the Transfiguration in Vake.



Speculation in the Name of the Georgian Orthodox Church and Dissemination of False Information by Georgian Dream and Its Satellites:

The Georgian Dream leaders and politicians affiliated with them used this campaign to speculate in the name of the Church and discredit peaceful demonstrators.

² This is not the only instance where the illegitimate government’s anti-Western narratives and manipulation of religious themes are amplified by its controlled propagandist media. These outlets employ various tactics to discredit peaceful protests, including exploiting religion and the name of the Church. For example, in a manner similar to the religious discreditation surrounding the burning of the coffin and the effigy of Bidzina Ivanishvili, on December 6, Imedi and Post TV circulated a video with captions such as: “Unidentified groups chanting ‘Allahu Akbar’ are at the ‘peaceful’ protest” and “Radical religious groups are present at the protest”.

[Shalva Papuashvili](#), the illegitimate Speaker of Parliament, on December 13: (He shared a video of the Archpriest on his personal Facebook page with his note): "...Exactly one hundred years ago, saint Patriarch Ambrosi [Khelaia] was tortured in Metekhi Prison because of such radicalism and aggression."

[Mamuka Mdinaradze](#), Chair of the faction Georgian Dream of the illegitimate parliamentary majority, December 13 (shared the priest's video on his personal Facebook page with the note): "Those who fight against the nation also accept fighting against the clergy... That's why they will never win! Never again! The truth, faith, and Georgia will always prevail! My deepest respect to Father Shalva!"

[Nino Tsilosani](#), Member of the illegitimate parliamentary majority, December 13 (Facebook post): "People without a homeland fight against the homeland, the godless storm into the Church..."

[Kakha Kaladze](#), Mayor of Tbilisi, December 13: "[...] Hatred is profoundly disturbing, especially hatred toward the Church and clergy. We know the destructive consequences of this from the Soviet past."

[Sozar Subari](#), December 13: "Foreign-funded agents have finally taken off their masks and declared war on the Church. This is a fight where the agents' fate is predetermined. [...] My solidarity with Father Shalva Kekelia."

Similar statements were made on this topic by representatives of Georgian Dream and People's Power: [Guram Macharashvili](#), [Archil Gorduladze](#), [Tornike Cheishvili](#), [Dimitri Khundadze](#), and [Geno Petriashvili](#).

Statements from Orthodox Clergy Condemning Violence and Supporting Protesters

Some members of the Orthodox Church clergy issued critical statements against the Georgian Dream's anti-European path, condemned violence and repression against peaceful demonstrators, and expressed their support for them.

Condemning Violence and Showing Support for the Pro-European Path:

[Melkisedek Khachidze](#), *Bishop of Margveti and Ubisi*, November 30 (Facebook post): *"Today, these free, bright, open-hearted, and happy young people, together with Georgian society, fearlessly declare their desire for Georgia, with its glorious past, culture, and heritage, to become a full member of Christian Europe. We have no right to harm these extraordinary people and their free choice. We have no right to alter the constitutionally defined political trajectory. I feel the pain of the hand raised against Georgian youth, the sting of eyes shut by tear gas, the cold of frozen bodies on the frosty November night, and the fear of losing the future..."*

[Diocese of Belgium and the Netherlands](#), *Communique*, December 2: *"What we have witnessed in recent days—violent actions, the hatred with which members of the security forces who have lost control, assault young people, the rabid way they strike fallen demonstrators in the face and literally 'break their bones'—compels us not only to perform ecclesiastical rites and pray for our State and society but also, in loyalty to sacred Christian and human ethics, to publicly share our pain about the ongoing events in Georgia. [...] The ruling party appears to tailor constitutional norms to itself, and its proclaimed allegiance to declared values remains mere words."*

[Archpriest Zaza Tevzadze](#), December 6 (at the protest): *"The only thing we have is our future... Our destruction has practically begun, and everyone understands this well; that's why so many people are standing out here in the cold."*

[Grigol Berbichashvili](#), *Metropolitan of Poti and Khobi*, December 9 (Sunday sermon): *"Today, when we see brutally beaten citizens, we must acknowledge that, in essence, all of Georgia has been beaten, regardless of where one stands. The violence of this scale against free citizens and its continued manifestations take us back to a dark past, signaling that if this does not stop, difficult times lie ahead for both the country and society as a whole."*

[Zenon Iarajuli](#), *the Archbishop of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashiri*, on December 12 (Facebook): *"Freedom and solidarity to the wounded and repressed fellow citizens, for the loyalty to Georgia, for the love of Georgia, for the right to life and happiness, for the search for freedom and justice."*

[Dorothe Kurashvili](#), Archimandrite, December 15 (sermon): "Today, it cannot be said that both sides are our children. Those who kill, beat, and bear false witness are not children of the Church. The child of the Church is the one who fights for the truth, even at the cost of their health."

Statements supporting peaceful protesters and condemning violence were also issued by Zenon Iarajuli, Archbishop of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir, and Great Britain and Ireland ([November 29, December 5](#)), [Svimeon Tsakashvili](#), Bishop of Surami and Khashuri (December 1), Saba Intskirveli, Bishop of North America ([November 29, December 16](#)), [Priest Leon Gelovani](#) (December 1), [Priest Ieronime Katamadze](#) (December 6), [Kirion Ugrekheldze](#), Priest of the Cathedral in Poti (December 9).

Statements Against Religious Manipulation: Some members of the Orthodox clergy have critically assessed propaganda and manipulation in the name of religion, including instances involving the Orthodox clergy themselves.

[Archpriest Zaza Tevzadze](#), December 14, guest on First Channel's special broadcast: "I've heard phrases that a clergyman should never utter. If anyone has the obligation to endure, it is the clergy, as they should be guided by the examples of their shepherd, Jesus Christ. Christ represents sacrifice, devotion, peace, and love."

[Ilia Jinjolava](#), Archimandrite, December 15 (Facebook post): "When people use the Church as a mask for their own immorality, it is not only a sin but an insult to God's name. The Church is not a place for hiding personal agendas; it is a space for truth and repentance. Those who turn religion into a tool of manipulation are not following Christ's call but are opposing His will."

[Shio Kvaratskhelia](#), Archimandrite of Tbilisi Sameba Cathedral, December 15 (sermon): "Some people care more about their private zoos and trees than the needs of the hungry, others, or the youth. God does not favor a deceitful priest who changes and retracts their words faster than a rooster's crow. A priest's hand should bless and pray, not curse or label young people as antichrists. It is shameful to remain silent when truth demands your voice."

Statements from Non-Dominant Religious and Ethnic Communities and Clergy Regarding the Protests

On December 1, members of the [Council of Religions under the auspices of the Public Defender of Georgia](#) issued a statement condemning violence against demonstrators and emphasizing the importance of Georgia's constitutionally guaranteed path toward European integration.

On [December 7](#), clergy from various religious denominations organized a march to protest violence against demonstrators and to show support for those who had been beaten and tortured.



December 7, March of different religious community leaders and members
Photo: Khatia-Juda Psuturi

[Malkhaz Songhulashvili](#), Metropolitan of the Evangelical-Baptist Church of Georgia: "We express solidarity with the children who were beaten and tortured in our city—this is a shame for all of us: your shame, our shame, and the shame of our homeland."

[Rusudan Gotsiridze](#), Bishop of the Evangelical-Baptist Church of Georgia, December 7: "Do not be ruthless; do not be dangerous to future generations. Together, we must rebuild this semi-collapsed country. Let us take care of each other and the future of this country."

[Zaal Tkeshelashvili](#), Pastor of the Evangelical Church, December 7: "We have many differences in views, theology, philosophy, and faith, but today we decided to stand together because the most important thing is at stake—our country's future. Without liberty, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion or belief, our leadership and religious mission lose meaning."

[Mamuka Nakiaidze](#), Imam of the Batumi "Freedom Mosque," December 7: "We are all children of this country, all Georgians, and we all want our country to be developed and

united. So, I urge you to refrain from violence against those young people who are sacrificing themselves, protecting the future, and standing as guardians of Georgia."

On December 25, a "[March of Unity](#)" took place in Tbilisi, involving religious leaders, ethnic Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Jews, Kists, Kurds, and representatives of various other ethnic groups. At the end of the march, the participants, together with the Jewish community, celebrated the Hanukkah holiday near the Parliament.



*25 December, March of Unity
Photo: Guram Muradov*