



# **Pre-Election Environment: Freedom of Religion or Belief, Equality and Secularism**

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**Monitoring results for the period between  
September 25 and October 25, 2024**

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The document is prepared by the Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)

[www.tdi.ge/en](http://www.tdi.ge/en)



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Cover photo by Tamuna Chkareuli (RFE/RL)

Parliamentary elections in Georgia will be held on October 26, 2024. The Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI) continues to monitor the pre-election environment in terms of freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularism. This includes the monitoring of statements and activities by public agencies, political parties, politicians, and public figures.

The present report covers the period from September 25 to October 25, 2024.

The report on monitoring the pre-election environment in terms of freedom of religion or belief, equality, and secularism for the period between August 25 and September 25 is available [here](#).

## Key Findings

In the pre-election period, the Georgian government and the ruling party, Georgian Dream, have been actively engaged in anti-human rights, anti-democratic, and anti-Western propaganda, with the central theme being the protection of the Orthodox Church, “values,” and “traditions.”

- Through election banners and videos, the ruling party manipulates religion and uses images of Ukraine bombed by Russian occupation troops to hint to voters that the election of opposition parties will lead to war and the destruction of churches.
- After the unsuccessful attempt to declare Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, the ruling party continues to speculate on topics of the Church and Orthodox Christianity, promising in its electoral platform to enshrine the “special role of Orthodox Christianity” in the Constitution.
- On the pretext of “defending the faith” and the Church, the ruling party portrays human rights defenders, non-governmental organizations, political opponents, and Western partners as part of a Western “spy ring,” using phrases such as “fighters against the Church,” “blasphemers of the Church,” “anti-national, anti-church, radical groups,” and others.
- During the pre-election campaign, the ruling party and government representatives actively visit churches and monasteries and publicly appear with Orthodox clergy.
- In September-October of this year alone, the government transferred 11,062 square meters of non-agricultural land and buildings to the Orthodox Church as property and granted 217,008 square meters of agricultural and non-agricultural land for a 99-year term under free usufruct rights.
- Statements from the Georgian Patriarchate's public relations department clearly support the ruling party and its propagandistic, anti-democratic initiatives. Along with supporting the government, some Orthodox Church hierarchs disseminate statements against civil society, human rights, and the West.

- To discredit political opponents in the pre-election period, government-affiliated media and groups have intensified xenophobia and Armenophobia. The Armenophobic campaign was directed against Mamuka Khazaradze, leader of the coalition Strong Georgia.

## Propaganda Election Banners by the Georgian Dream

On September 26, election banners by the ruling party Georgian Dream appeared in Tbilisi. On one side of the banners are black and white images of the war in Ukraine unleashed by Russia, with destroyed and devastated buildings and the inscription “No to War,” and on the other side are color images of Georgian cities and buildings with the inscription “Choose Peace.” One of the banners features, on the left side, a [church](#) destroyed by Russian bombing in the village of Bohorodychne in Ukraine’s Donetsk region, and on the right side, Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi. Against the backdrop of Ukraine’s destroyed buildings, the electoral numbers of major opposition political parties are crossed out.

The ruling party used images of Ukraine bombed by Russian occupation forces for electoral propaganda. In this case, too, the ruling party manipulates religion and hints to voters that choosing the crossed-out opposition parties will lead to war and the destruction of churches. In addition to the banners, the ruling party also released a [video](#) clip containing the images above with the caption, “No to war! Choose peace! Color 41.”



Photo: Radio Liberty

These banners received strong criticism both in Georgia and from friendly countries.

**[Salome Zourabichvili](#), President of Georgia, September 26:** “I have never seen anything as shameful, as insulting to our culture, traditions, history, and faith.”



[Pawel Herczyński](#), EU Ambassador to Georgia, October 4: “Let me tell you, these banners are outrageous, shameful, and disgusting.”

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine](#), September 26: “The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine condemns and considers unacceptable the use of images depicting the horrific consequences of Russia’s brutal war against Ukraine, the suffering and blood of thousands of innocent people, and the destruction of churches and cultural heritage in political advertisements. The people of Georgia can have no fear for a new war as long as Ukraine continues to resist Russian aggression. The terrible price of this resistance is also the price of peace in Georgia...”

On October 9, the Georgian Dream released another [video](#) with the caption **“No to war! No to anti-church propaganda! Choose 41 – the Georgian Dream.”** In the video, statements made by opposition party leaders and civil activists at different times, where they criticize the Georgian Patriarchate, the Patriarch, and clergy, are used out of context in a manipulative manner.

## Government's Election Promises to Reflect the Special Role of the Church in the Constitution

After the unsuccessful attempt to declare Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, the Georgian Dream continued to speculate on the topics of the Church and Orthodoxy. According to them, they need to win a constitutional majority in the October 26 elections to achieve four goals, one of which is to reflect in the constitution “Orthodox Christianity as the pillar of the Georgian state’s identity and its special role in the history and contemporary life of our country.” Despite the systemic [discrimination experienced by religious minorities](#) in Georgia, **the party’s chairman, Bidzina Ivanishvili**, [repeats](#) that *“the rights of no religious denomination will be restricted in the slightest, and a guarantor of this has been, is, and will be the government of Georgian Dream.”*

[Bidzina Ivanishvili, September 28, pre-election event in Telavi \(Kakheti\)](#): “Another important issue that we will certainly put on the agenda if we obtain a constitutional majority: we are ready to take concrete steps to protect and strengthen the Orthodox Church and to reflect the special role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia’s Constitution! However, let no one think that highlighting the role of the Orthodox Church in the Constitution could create any problems for any other religious denomination in Georgia; on the contrary, our country is unique because people of different faiths show the greatest respect for each other’s religions, and the state equally cares for every citizen, regardless of their nationality or religion. As always and in the future, the protection of and freedom for all religious denominations in Georgia will be guaranteed by the Georgian Dream government.”

[Bidzina Ivanishvili, October 10, pre-election event in Batumi \(Adjara\)](#): “If we obtain a constitutional majority, we will take concrete steps to protect and strengthen the Orthodox Church, which will be reflected at the constitutional level! But this will not cast even the slightest shadow on any religious denomination in Georgia! On the contrary, we are a country famous for its tolerance and diversity, and you, the people of Adjara, know this very well –

there is vast experience and many examples in Adjara of how Orthodox and Muslim Georgians, brothers and sisters manage to work together harmoniously and with mutual respect for the common good – for the strengthening and development of our country. For its part, our political team has been, is, and will be a guarantor that the state will equally care for each and every citizen, regardless of their nationality or religion.”

Bidzina Ivanishvili reiterated the promise to reflect the special role of the Orthodox Church in the Constitution in his [open letter](#) on October 1, and during pre-election events in [Zugdidi](#) on October 15 and [Kutaisi](#) on October 19.

**[Mamuka Mdinaradze](#), leader of the parliamentary majority, October 15:** “On October 26, the Georgian people will elect us with a constitutional majority in order to: [...] constitutionally ban LGBT propaganda and save the Georgian nation from degeneration, to constitutionally strengthen the role of the Church and faith.”

## Speculation on the topic of the Church in Anti-Western and Anti-Opposition Messages of the Government

During the pre-election period, the leaders of the Georgian Dream actively used Orthodox Christianity and the Church’s name for anti-Western propaganda messages. Under the pretext of “protecting the Church and faith,” they portray human rights defenders, non-governmental organizations, political opponents, and Western partners as Western “spy ring,” “fighters against the Church,” “blasphemers of the Church,” “anti-national, anti-Church, radical groups,” and “hostile forces.” In their narrative, the West is implied to be the “common master of the spies,” whose goal is to strip the Georgian people of their identity, Christian faith, and traditions.

**[Bidzina Ivanishvili](#), September 28, pre-election event in Telavi (Kakheti):** “Your voice, Kakhetians, is heard in the cosmos, and I am confident it will be heard loudly on October 26 in the parliamentary elections, where everyone will come and make the only possible choice: between war and peace, between pseudo-liberal values and those based on nationalism, family, faith, and independence, between a dignified European future for our country and the unacceptable reality that the radical opposition and foreign actors are trying to present as European.”

**[Shalva Papuashvili](#), Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia, September 28:** “[...] The opposition is on this very path – stripping the country of its national identity, stripping the nation of its faith, and stripping an individual of its identity. They want us to no longer know what it means to be Georgian, what Orthodoxy means, or what it means to be a man or a woman. That is why they have insulted King Erekle; that is why they have defiled our wine; and that is why they have insulted our Church. This is their European path. They want to turn us into a group of godless, history-less, identity-less individuals so they can later tell us where to pray and what to swear by.”

**Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, September 28:** “Today, the fate of the country hangs in the balance, and its future, the peace and stability of our families, and the inviolability of our faith and traditions depend on your choice...”

**Bidzina Ivanishvili, October 1:** “Not to pseudo-liberal values, but to values based on nationalism, family, faith, and independence; not to the categorically unacceptable reality that the radical opposition and foreign actors want to pass off as European, but to the dignified European future of our country!”

**Irakli Zarkua, member of the parliamentary majority, October 4:** “There are certain global groups that impose their order on everyone... A message comes, saying, ‘You must support LGBT propaganda.’ We will not do this. We are Georgians; we are primarily proud of our customs, our past, our Church, and our Patriarch, and we will continue this in the future.”

**Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, October 9:** “...Everything must be clear. Every citizen must know who is funding, for example, the insult to the Church, who is funding the defamation of the Patriarch, who is funding revolutionary scenarios, and so on.”

**Mamuka Mdinaradze, leader of the parliamentary majority, October 10:** “Apparently, they want us to abolish the transparency law so that we can never find out who is funding a spy ring, propaganda of war and LGBT, and campaigns against the Church, the state, and its institutions, as well as against national interests, in this country.”

**Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia, October 14:** “Unfortunately, there are forces that are fighting against Christianity, faith, and Christian moral dogmas in various countries. Unfortunately, these forces are also fighting against Christianity in Georgia, but when the nation and the clergy stand together, no one can defeat the Georgians, no one can defeat faith, Christianity, or Orthodoxy in our country, no one can defeat faith in our hearts, and no one can defeat Christian values in our consciousness. I would like to thank our Mother Church, the Catholicos-Patriarch, every bishop, and every clergyman for their efforts and work to spiritually strengthen our country.”

**Shalva Papuashvili, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, October 15:** “We built [it] because we brought back into political terminology - faith, tradition, homeland, sovereignty, national interest - the ideals that our parents’ generation aspired to. We brought back all those ideals that have been attempted to be replaced for years. They are trying to replace faith with pseudo-ideologies, tradition with trend, homeland with territory, sovereignty with submission, and national interest with flattery toward others.”

**Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi, October 17:** “[...] If this attitude changes and there is no funding for revolution and sowing division among people, there are no insults towards the Patriarchate, faith, our Patriarch, etc., of course, there will be no need for this [‘transparency’ law] to be on the agenda.”



**Mamuka Mdinaradze, October 18:** “[...] a spy ring with a common master can in no way be a force oriented towards national, traditional, and truly European values, or a guarantor of peace, dignity, and a better life.”

**Bidzina Ivanishvili, October 19, pre-election event in Kutaisi (Imereti):** “...Those people who are fighting against our traditions show particular aggression against one of the main pillars of our identity - the Orthodox Church... However, it was largely because Georgia is a Christian country that our country’s European identity was defined!”

**Mamuka Mdinaradze, Leader of the Parliamentary Majority, October 19:** “From now on, decisions regarding Georgia and the Georgian people will be made only here, in Georgia. Here, in this country, we can always vow that we will fulfill the words that have become a testament, the words of the great Ilia, that for us, the primary things we must take care of will be: homeland, language, faith.”

**Bidzina Ivanishvili, October 21:** “They have masters and make no decisions on their own; [...] they invented something, boycotted the parliament, and the opposition did not enter the parliament, because the society’s belief in Christianity, our traditions, and our identity is so strong that they became afraid of society and could not dare to go against it.”

**On October 23, three days before the parliamentary elections, the Georgian Dream held its final campaign event in Tbilisi, in Freedom Square.** The main messages from leaders of the Georgian Dream again included speculation on the Orthodox Church, opposition to human rights and democratic principles, and anti-Western statements.

**Bidzina Ivanishvili, honorary chairman of Georgian Dream:** “Georgia and the Georgian Dream government are walking a razor’s edge to maintain uninterrupted peace in the country, amidst constant attempts by both foreign and local ill-wishers and radicals to instigate revolutions and destabilize the nation. [...] This degree of legitimacy granted by the public will actually nip the plans in the bud of the collective United National Movement and their foreign masters, aiming to regain power through revolution and coup and then drag Georgia into war! [...] Once again, I will briefly remind you [why it is vitally important for the Georgian Dream to win a constitutional majority]: We will constitutionally strengthen the protection of minors’ interests and family values; we will take concrete steps to protect and strengthen the Orthodox Church, which will also be reflected at the constitutional level.”

**Irakli Kobakhidze, Prime Minister of Georgia:** “The injustice we so often hear from EU politicians and officials does not fit Europe; the rejection of Christian dogmas does not fit Europe; the LGBT propaganda does not fit Europe; the lack of transparency and disrespect for the sovereignty of other countries do not fit Europe. By 2030, we will become an EU member country only with dignity, respect for Christianity, the Church, and morality, independence, and sovereignty. To Europe only with dignity! [...] The October 26 election is a decisive referendum. The choice is between war and peace, immoral propaganda and traditional values. [...] On October 26, we must all stand together and loudly declare that Georgia chooses peace, traditional values, and a bright, European future for our beautiful country.”

**Kakha Kaladze, Mayor of Tbilisi:** “Countless people have gathered here today for one reason: to let the world hear that the people of Georgia will never give up their homeland, faith, or freedom. This city [Tbilisi] has never betrayed its loyalty to the homeland. It has always stood where the fate of the nation and the mother church was decided. Homeland and faith are inseparable for a Georgian man. [...] We want Europe; we want a European future, but not in the way as we are told from outside. [...] For us, Europe and being European are values based on Christian foundations.... This is the kind of European future we strive for - with our values, our uniqueness, our faith, and our identity. [...] [So-called friends of Georgia] are directly interfering in our elections and in the political life of the country. External forces cannot tolerate that Georgia did not share Ukraine’s path and that it did not join the sanctions. They are openly trying to convince us that white is black, that transparency is undemocratic, and that LGBT propaganda is an expression of humanism and liberalism. They tell us that radicals calling themselves non-governmental organizations have the right to receive funds and use these for sowing division among people, staging revolutions, and financing extremism, but we, the Georgian people, should not know anything about this. I want to address local radicals and their external instigators: This will not happen and cannot happen. These homelandless, treacherous people, let me say directly, will not be able to return to power.”

**Shalva Papuashvili, Speaker of Parliament:** “[...] In the name of liberalism, they have defiled our wine, insulted our icons, and declared our heroic kings to be traitors. A pseudo-religion is taking over the media and schools, threatening to destroy our identity and uniqueness. The declared battle is between religion and pseudo-religion, and this battle must be won with our victory. We are the Georgia of May 17, the Day of Family Sanctity, the Georgia of Ilia, where the homeland, language, and faith form the framework of Georgian consciousness. Therefore, we must win a constitutional majority so that the forces fighting against Georgian consciousness are finally defeated and disarmed.”

**Irakli Garibashvili, chairman of the Georgian Dream and former Prime Minister:** “On October 26, we must say no to the spy ring, say no to their masters, say no to pseudo-liberal fascism and LGBT propaganda, say no to foreign interference in our internal affairs, say no to the brazen interference of foreign politicians in Georgian politics and elections.”

**Mamuka Mdinaradze, leader of the parliamentary majority:** “We are fighting not for a one-legged stance but for a traditional, Georgian, national, Christian country and for a similarly Christian, traditional Europe, not for the kind of Europe that tells us we must act according to their instructions.”

**The issue of relations between the government and the Orthodox Church is also reflected in a statement by the State Security Service.** A [statement](#) made by the agency on October 16 says that groups connected to political circles are planning to spread falsified video and audio recordings ahead of the elections: “These fake recordings will use the voices and video images of representatives of the Georgian government. The purpose of spreading this false information is to provoke confrontation between branches of government, as well as to sow discord between the government and the Orthodox Church and to worsen relations between the government and Western partners.”

## The Orthodox Church and Clergy in the Ruling Party's Pre-Election Campaign

During the pre-election campaign, alongside populist speculations about church-related topics, representatives of the ruling party and government actively visited Orthodox churches and monasteries and appeared alongside Orthodox clergy.

[On September 27](#), the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, attended the festive liturgy dedicated to the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross at the Sioni Cathedral. The liturgy was led by the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II, Patriarchal Locum Tenens, Metropolitan Shio of Senaki and Chkhorotsku, and other clergy.



*Photo: Government of Georgia*

[On October 1](#), Shalva Papuashvili, Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, attended the commemoration day of the Holy Martyrs Bidzina Cholakashvili, Shalva, and Elizbar, the princes of Ksani, in the Akhmeta Municipality. Members of the Georgian Dream party and the Metropolitan of Alaverdi, David Makharadze, also attended the event.



Photo: Facebook page [შალვა პაპუაშვილი • Shalva Papuashvili](#)

[On October 5](#), the Chairman of the Government of Adjara, Tornike Rizhvadze, and a member of the Georgian Dream party, Anzor Bolkvadze, attended the folk festival “Shuakhevoba” in the Shuakhevi Municipality. The Archbishop of Skhalta, Spiridon Abuladze, was also present at the event.



Photo: Facebook page [თორნიკე რიჟვაძე • Tornike Rijvadze](#)

[On October 7](#), the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, together with MPs Irakli Kadagishvili and Guram Macharashvili, attended the traditional folk festival “Heretoba-2024” in the Lagodekhi Municipality. Senior clergymen, including the Metropolitan of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti, Theodore Chuadze, were also present at the event.





*Photo: Parliament of Georgia*

[On October 9](#), Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze was at the Patriarchate, where Metropolitan Shio, the Patriarchal Locum Tenens, along with other bishops, led a prayer service in connection with the arrival of Ioane-Zosime's manuscript in Georgia. The Prime Minister attended the prayer service together with members of the Cabinet of Ministers. Ioane-Zosime's manuscript, which had been put up for auction at Christie's, was purchased by Bidzina Ivanishvili in June 2024, a few months before the election. According to the government, the manuscript will be transferred to the Georgian National Museum.



*Photo: Government of Georgia*

[On October 14](#), Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze attended the festive liturgy in Svetitskhoveli Cathedral for the Feast of Svetitskhovloba and **addressed** the gathered public **from the ambo**. Alongside the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Parliament, the Mayor of Tbilisi, and members



of both the executive and legislative branches were present at the event. Opposition politicians also attended the festive liturgy.



*Photo: Government of Georgia*

On October 15, the Prime Minister published a [video](#) showing the celebration of Svetitskhovloba on his official Facebook page.

[On October 17](#), the Georgian Dream held an event dedicated to Veterans' Day. At the event, Archbishop of Bolnisi Diocese Ephrem read a congratulatory letter from Patriarch Ilia II.



*Photo: Government Administration*

[On October 22](#), a presentation event for the Khulevi oil refinery project took place. Representatives of the executive, legislative, and local governments attended the event, which was also attended by Father Andria Jagmaidze, Head of the Patriarchate's public relations department.



*Photo: Government of Georgia*

## Property Transferred to the Patriarchate by the State During the Pre-Election Period

During the pre-election period, alongside the populist-propagandist use of the topic of the Orthodox Church, the scale of property transfers to the Patriarchate by the government increased. The analysis of the government's ordinances shows that the state's transfer of real estate and other financial resources to the Patriarchate on a greater scale is related to the upcoming elections and current political processes. Through this method, the Georgian Dream seeks to gain the favor of the Orthodox Church Patriarchate, clergy, and congregation.

In September-October of this year alone, the government transferred 11,062 square meters of non-agricultural land and buildings to the Orthodox Church as property and 217,008 square meters of agricultural and non-agricultural lands with the right of free usufruct for 99 years.

- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia of October 18, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, under the right of free superficies for 99 years, a state-owned 1,619 square meter non-agricultural land plot and the building located on it in the city of Lanchkhuti, at Jordania Street, to the Patriarchate.
- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia of October 17, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, for GEL 1 through direct sale, state-owned 3,610 square meter and 160 square meter non-agricultural land plots in the village of Shuasurebi, Chokhatauri municipality, to the Patriarchate.

- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia on October 17, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, for GEL 1 through direct sale, a 300 square meter non-agricultural land plot located at the address: Khelvachauri Municipality, village Salibauri, N2 public school, to the Patriarchate.
- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia on September 20, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, for GEL 1 through direct sale, a 318 square meter non-agricultural land plot and the building located on it in the village of Kodalo, Gurjaani municipality, to the Patriarchate.
- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia on September 13, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, under the right of free usufruct for 99 years, a 215,389 square meter agricultural (arable) land plot located in the village of Kelktseuli, Gori municipality, to the Patriarchate.
- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia on September 13, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, for GEL 1 through direct sale, a state-owned 1,004 square meter non-agricultural land plot and the buildings located on it, N1, N2, N3, located at 41a Leo and Nodar Gabunia Street, Tbilisi, to the Patriarchate.
- By the [ordinance](#) of the Government of Georgia on September 13, the LEPL National Agency of State Property will transfer, for GEL 1 through direct sale, a state-owned 5,670 square meter non-agricultural land plot located in the village of Kevliani, Mtskheta municipality, to the Patriarchate.

## Propagandist, Anti-Western Statements by Representatives of the Orthodox Church

During the pre-election period, some Orthodox Church clergy members made statements in public speeches and sermons in support of the government and against civil society, human rights, and the West.

On October 3, 2024, Shalva Papuashvili, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, signed a package of bills "[On the Protection of Family Values and Minors](#)" after Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili refused to sign it into law. Along with the signature, Papuashvili issued a [statement](#) in which he again criticized President Zourabichvili and the opposition, noting that the Orthodox Church and other religious denominations support the so-called homophobic law.

*"It is symbolic that the nominal leader of the homelandless and value-lost opposition, into which the president with very little left [in office] has turned, refuses to sign a law that protects the most valuable things for humans - family and children. [...] I fully understand that signing this law will attract criticism from some foreign partners, but Georgians have never been afraid of others' assessments when our faith, common sense, and loyalty to the country demanded it and when we saw that civilizational currents were flowing in the wrong direction. [...] In the process of*

*passing the law, we also held discussions with representatives of religious denominations, where both the Georgian Orthodox Church and other religious confessions expressed full support for the spirit of this law.”*

**On October 4, the [Public Relations Service of the Georgian Patriarchate](#) responded to the adoption of this discriminatory and homophobic bill by issuing a statement supporting the passage of the law:** “[...] Moreover, the spread of LGBTQI propaganda has repeatedly created significant social division in society and even became a tool of tension in the hands of those who strive to deepen polarization. Given these tendencies, the law adopted by the current government of Georgia on the Protection of Family Values and of Minors is a positive step forward. We hope this law will bring fruitful results for the well-being of our society, as it is a crucial and decisive step in protecting the traditional values that define the uniqueness of the Georgian nation.”

**[In a statement from the Public Relations Service of the Georgian Patriarchate of October 22, support for both the ruling party and its propagandist, anti-democratic initiatives is obvious.](#)** The statement mentions the “protection of national and religious values,” “long-term peace,” and the “strengthening of Christian and family traditions,” which fully align with the election slogans of the Georgian Dream: “Today, our country is on a crucial path. On the one hand, the protection of national and religious values, and on the other, the unification of the country, the preservation of sovereignty and peace, is the primary goal of both state institutions and society. We have repeatedly stated that the Georgian Orthodox Church, as the greatest unifier and protector of our nation and country, cannot appear as a political actor, but it will clearly support such a choice that will bring long-term peace to Georgia and strengthen those values in society that promote Christian and family traditions. Therefore, amidst the heightened emotions and tensions of the election period, we ask the clergy in their statements and appeals to consider their special role in maintaining social unity and peace.”

**[Shio Mujiri, the Catholicos-Patriarchal Locum Tenens and Metropolitan of Senaki and Chkhorotsku, October 9:](#)** “Today we mark a wonderful event, the return of this magnificent manuscript, a palimpsest, to Georgia, and that we care about our cultural heritage, historical antiquities, and their significance. It is of great importance to care for and protect our historical relics. I would like to extend special thanks to Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili, who enriched our cultural heritage with this magnificent acquisition.”

**[Daniel Datuashvili, Metropolitan of Chiatura and Sachkhere, October 14:](#)** “The Church supports the advancement and development of the country based on its traditional values.”

**[Spiridon Abuladze, Bishop of Skhalta Diocese, October 1:](#)** “[...] When a nation is facing such a terrible trial, for which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, and a flood occurred, and this is clearly coming upon our nation. We see this horror in the ideology and propaganda of those 15 parties and their media, as well as the great danger of being drawn into a war that would engulf Georgia in flames, and at such a time someone is telling you to vote for this or vote for that [...] Let me say once again with full responsibility, as a clergyman, as instructed by the Holy Scriptures and my Mother Church, that those



who vote for those parties that have expressed solidarity with gay propaganda, expressed solidarity with transgenderism, and involvement of Georgia in war, will be subject to their sin and will be punished with them in eternal judgment.”

**Spiridon Abuladze, Bishop of Skhalta Diocese, October 9:** “Every moment we are threatened with sanctions, but the Mother of God protects us, and the God and the Mother of God have given Georgia a government that stands against this. You see this, and this government is threatened with terror attacks, sanctions, and misfortunes, and it is as if they are asking, How dare you ban sodomy and LGBT propaganda in Georgia? [...] God has provided us with a government that defends this purity and morality, and we must all stand by it. Every man must go and vote in the elections for Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili because he dared to do what others do not. Who doesn't dare? The government of France, the government of England, the government of America, and the governments of Europe. They have become enslaved by the Antichrist, as you can see. [...] Let me reiterate, those who do not vote in these elections for the government that has legally banned and destroyed this will play into their hands, the hands of those parties and forces of darkness, the hands of the West, who wish to bring debauchery, corruption, and the religion of the Antichrist to Georgia.”

**Spiridon Abuladze, Bishop of Skhalta Diocese, October 20:** “Today they are trying to completely destroy the institution of the family; today they are trying to destroy morality, decency, and order. Today they are actively promoting LGBT, sodomy, homosexuality, and lesbianism. Today there is aggressive propaganda for transgenderism. [...] As you know, transgenderism is the gravest sin, sodomy is the gravest sin, and the gravest sin within sodomy is transgenderism, and today they are promoting this through mass media, through social networks, and through those parties that are funded, so to speak, by these anti-Christian countries. From the countries of the Antichrist.”

**Archpriest Shalva Kekelia, October 20:** “Imagine, the country has adopted a law against LGBT propaganda; the country has passed this law, and it tells you that if you adopt this law, you will not be able to join me; I will not accept you; I will cut off funding for you; I will act against you in this way. Exactly the same policy is today. [...] Look how the issue is presented: when I talk about this and when I don't like this European policy, this kind of interference, and this kind of attitude, they view us as an inferior country, they compare us to an African country, imagine that, and they interfere like this and tell us what to do. We never wanted to be treated like this. I did not want to receive instructions from Moscow, and that's why I freed myself from Moscow, so it would not instruct me how to live. Today, they are doing the same from Brussels, the same from Washington, the same from America, and we want freedom; our people want freedom; that's what Saint Ambrose Khelaidze fought for. [...] A nation moves forward by God's grace. I strongly believe that this country will become an exemplary country. This country will adopt the laws that please God, and this process has already begun in our country. God started it, not this government. God caused this government to start this process; He left the government no other choice and caused it to choose this path; and the path of God became the choice, and the government has already embarked on this path and is adopting the laws that are necessary for the country.”



[Archpriest Shalva Kekelia](#), October 24: “I’m speaking directly to those who see themselves as members of the church...How can you give your vote to parties whose leaders insult your patriarch, criticize the church, and disregard the sanctity of the family? For believers, the choice should be clear. [...] The decisions must be based on consideration of ongoing processes, including attitudes toward religion, with each citizen bearing personal responsibility for their choice”.

[Stepane Kalaijishvili, Metropolitan of Chkondidi, Tsageri, and Lentekhi](#), **October 6:** “Now let us weigh ourselves on the scales - foreigners tell us to follow them and wag their fingers at the government that passed the law protecting the family and opposing the sin of Sodom. They wag their fingers and say that for adopting this law, you will be punished, you will not be allowed to join us, and all sorts of nonsense. This is a choice, and it is very clear – for opening negotiations, they want us to sign a 'gay memorandum' and allow the propaganda of this Sodom sin in Georgia. Therefore, this is not a difficult choice. There is one force that, thanks God, is in power today and protects us, safeguards our values, and puts Christian values first. We have long wished to have a government that would raise its voice and defend our values. Now we must see what these foreign-controlled forces are doing and what the next stage is. It may happen that we are fooled or intimidated, and they try to stage a coup. They are not active today, but they will be when these elections pass or during the elections, and if Western-controlled forces come to power, they will tell us that the sin of Sodom must take root in Georgia, and if you do not revoke that law, which protects our children and our future, then we will fight you, and they will declare such a fight against us as we have never seen.”

A contrasting statement supporting European integration was made by [Zenon Iarajuli, Archbishop of Dmanisi and Agarak-Tashir](#) (**October 20**): “Our ancestors, devoted to Georgia, once fought for Europe’s security alongside Georgia, and now Europe fights for us, for the descendants of our ancestors. Yes, together with us, Europe now fights for Georgia, for its prosperity, peace, security, and the protection of its borders. Today’s struggle is aimed at ensuring that Georgian citizens living in Europe and the West are not alienated from their homeland, and the homeland is not alienated from its children. [...] Young people, you are the generation that needs no reminder that no one has ever been glorified by humiliating others. You respect the existence and life of every human being! So, with love and respect for one another, lead the tired older generations forward to a peaceful home on this earth. [...] Europe’s door is open, and from Georgia, the creator of the ancient Caucasian-European civilization, it awaits the dawn of a Georgian union with it. We go to the elections for Georgia’s European peace, for the declaration that Georgia is a bridge to Europe for Asia itself.”

## Armenophobia

In the pre-election period, government-affiliated propaganda media and representatives of the People's Power party [launched a series of Armenophobic attacks](#). They tried to discredit political opponents by assigning them to a different ethnic background.

The government propaganda media outlet POSTV initiated the Armenophobic campaign against the leader of the coalition Strong Georgia, Mamuka Khazaradze, on September 30, when they used an audio deepfake (an AI-created fake video) to publish a video clip titled [“Khazaradze's Armenian Shalakho.”](#) On October 11, [POSTV](#) aired another video in which a journalist asked Khazaradze why he was hiding his Armenian origin: ***“We know that you have Armenian origin, and are you ashamed to admit it?”***

On October 13, POSTV spread a [card](#) and TV report claiming that a relative of Khazaradze from Yerevan spoke negatively about him.

On October 13, an Armenophobic comment was made by [Zurab Kadagidze](#), a majority MP from the People's Power party: “I cannot imagine a person hiding their own origin. This speaks to a personal complex and a problem. Any individual who denies their past, roots, history, and genetics, of course, insults that particular nation.”

[On his Facebook page, Levan Ioseliani](#), Georgia's Public Defender, commented on the statements but did not say anything about the [Armenophobic context](#) or its severity. “Although the main function of the media is to ask questions, it should not be discriminatory. It does not matter which ethnic group a Georgian citizen belongs to. According to the constitution and the law, we are all equal.”

On October 15, [Mamuka Khazaradze](#) responded to the Armenophobic statements himself: “Russian, ‘KGB-like’ propaganda by Ivanishvili and his subordinates that has been waged against me for years now has crossed all boundaries. The latest defamatory campaign not only targets me but also our brotherly people, the Armenians. I apologize to them for the shameless and unethical xenophobic attacks by the Georgian Dream. Had one of my ancestors been Armenian or from any other brotherly nation, I would openly and proudly say so. Those who are troubled or embarrassed by their own origins are xenophobes!”

[Representatives of the Tolerance Center and the Ethnic Minorities Council under the Public Defender's office released a joint statement on the issue](#): “The Tolerance Center and the signatory organizations of the Ethnic Minorities Council under the Public Defender categorically condemn and consider it unacceptable to renew this harmful and nationally damaging ‘tradition’ that has been established for years in Georgia - the use of ethnic identity for political discreditation, discrimination, and manipulation with stereotypical ideas.”