

Georgia's Cognitive Battlefield: A Case Study in Authoritarian Propaganda

By effectively transforming state capture into a [pattern](#) of electoral manipulation—primarily via intimidation and vote buying—the Georgian Dream (GD) has the potential to mobilize roughly one-third of voters in its favor. Following recent waves of mass protests against the regime's openly pro-Russian policies, it has become clear that convincing the remaining strongly pro-Western electorate to support the regime is close to impossible.

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With unprecedented polarization defining the political landscape, the Georgian Dream's key objective for the pivotal 2024 elections is to maintain low voter turnout among those unaffected by their manipulation patterns. The regime's pre-election

strategy is characterized by aggressive [intimidation campaigns](#) on opponents through hate speech and calls for violence, [reinforced](#) by physical attacks while labeling any critical individuals or organizations as enemies of the state and [threatening](#) prosecution after elections.

Blatantly going against the facts and evidence, the Georgian Dream's pre-election rhetoric is an a blend of contradictory narratives grounded in conspiracy theories designed to create confusion, nihilism, and, ultimately, the political disengagement of undecided and inactive voters. Drawing from standard authoritarian propaganda tactics, as [noted](#) by Hannah Arendt, the aim is not to foster belief in a particular truth but to generate uncertainty and disorientation. When people are bombarded with outright lies and conflicting messages, they lose their sense of direction and, more importantly, their capacity for action. Similar dis-



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information and propaganda practices in Russia and its proxy authoritarian satellites have proven to be a powerful tool for controlling societies.

To outvote the regime in the 2024 elections, one crucial strategy lies in motivating significantly more pro-Western voters to mobilize despite the regime's election manipulation patterns to demobilize. This requires untangling the toxic web of propaganda narratives and bringing clarity to Georgia's information ecosystem. It is essential to demonstrate the destructive consequences of the Georgian Dream's declared and intended policies as well as its pre-election promises. By exposing these realities with facts and evidence, voters can be motivated to proactively make informed choices toward safeguarding Georgia's democratic and European trajectory.

Strategic Trinity

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The Georgian Dream's pre-election narrative has been built around a strategic trinity: peace, traditional values, and European integration, albeit in a dignified way. These three core messages form the foundation of their campaign, each having its depth yet intricately woven into interconnected narratives. Beneath this framework lies a complex web of sub-narratives and supporting messages that appeal to various voter segments. Often, these narratives are contradictory and mutually exclusive.

At the core of the Georgian Dream's propaganda is the claim of being the only government in Georgia's history that has maintained peace and avoided the loss of the territories. The ruling party as-

serts that, unlike previous administrations, it has neither led the country into war nor compromised Georgia's sovereignty by succumbing to Western pressure. This positioning is framed as a testament to their steadfast commitment to Georgia's national interests and values amidst geopolitical turbulence and external pressures. This campaign message has recently been stretched to the level of absurdity. The Georgian Dream erected billboards depicting the contrast between the Ukrainian sites destroyed by Russia (such as the Mariupol theater) and peaceful Georgian sites (such as schools and churches). Despite the outcry on social media, GD [responded](#) that showing the contrast between the consequences of war and peace was a legitimate political tactic.

The ruling party further emphasizes its policies of peace and the preservation of Georgian identity as central to its strategy for achieving "dignified" European integration. This messaging taps into nationalistic sentiment, portraying the Georgian Dream as balancing national pride with its goal of joining "real Europe" on its own terms—without compromising Georgia's sovereignty or cultural heritage.

However, the 14 September speech by Bidzina Ivanishvili, honorary chair and number one on the party list, marked a strategic turning point. In his address at a rally in Gori, Ivanishvili once again blamed Saakashvili and his government for starting the 2008 war but, this time explicitly accused the West of directing Saakashvili while omitting Russia's role in the conflict. He went further, apologizing on behalf of Georgia to the Ossetian people for initiating bloodshed between the "brotherly nations."

This narrative shift dramatically repositions the Georgian Dream's messaging, emphasizing "peace at all costs" and sidelining the other two components of the trinity—traditional values and European integration. Most notably, Ivanishvili announced

plans for a mass Nuremberg-style prosecution of the “collective United National Movement (UNM),” a term the Georgian Dream uses to denote all opposition parties, civil society organizations, and critical media outlets.

The message of “traditional values” resonates strongly with Georgia’s conservative and Orthodox voters, its recent pro-Russian foreign policy shift reframes the West, rather than Russia, as the hostile force threatening Georgia’s security, identity, and values. This rhetoric justifies initiatives like the Russian-style law on foreign agents, which was intended to curb “malign Western influence” in Georgia. However, justifying the de facto freezing of Georgia’s European integration process, particularly after introducing such anti-democratic measures, has proven increasingly difficult—even for the regime, which relies on aggressive disinformation campaigns.

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The Georgian Dream’s disinformation strategy depends on attacking any individual or institution that criticizes the Georgian Dream, labeling them as part of the “collective UNM.” This creates a strategic loop of disinformation aimed at purging the country of so-called enemies of the state, all under the guise of making the necessary conditions for peace and “true democracy” which the ruling party claims will ultimately lead to European integration. This shift in the narrative not only highlights the Georgian Dream’s disturbing messaging but also raises significant concerns about the repressive course of action after the pivotal 2024 elections, turning the pre-election environment into a battle for survival.

Peace - Strategic Pillar of the Regime’s Propaganda

As is typical for Russia’s proxies around the globe, the Georgian Dream has translated the strategic narrative into the local context, adopting rhetoric that frames the West as the force behind a “global war party” trying to pull Georgia into a “second front” against Russia. The party also accuses the West of financing and facilitating a revolution in Georgia, which perfectly aligns with Russia’s propaganda narrative, blaming the United States and the West for initiating regime change in countries that do not obey their orders to initiate or involve themselves in the conflicts. The Georgian Dream has closely coordinated these narratives with those of Russia, directly amplifying anti-Western messages in Georgia’s information ecosystem. By doing so, they reinforce the Kremlin’s stance that the United States and its allies, not Russia, provoked wars in Georgia and Ukraine. This synchronization between the Georgian Dream’s messaging and Moscow’s broader geopolitical agenda highlights how Georgia’s ruling party has echoed and extended Russia’s disinformation campaign within the country, diminishing the country’s Western orientation.

The Georgian Dream, in parallel to accusing the West of “dragging Georgia into a war,” also accuses the United National Movement and its affiliates of wanting to engage Georgia in a conflict. The “second front” narrative is somewhat inconsistent, though, as the Georgian Dream fails to explain why the West would be interested in opening a second front in Georgia, especially considering the strategic and logistical challenges this would entail. In such a scenario, the West would have to assist both Ukraine and Georgia, and due to Georgia’s small geography, weak armed forces, and low preparedness, it would be difficult for the country to distract the Russian military from the Ukrainian war theater. Moreover, such a conflict would likely

result in Georgia's rapid and complete Anschluss and severing of its ties with the West. This outcome would deeply damage Western interests in the wider Black Sea region, making the narrative unconvincing and contradicting the Georgian Dream's interests by reminding society that Russia is the primary threat to Georgia's statehood and national interest.

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Recently, one of the most damaging narratives for Georgia's national interests—that Saakashvili and his government initiated the 2008 war at the West's behest—has gained momentum. This narrative strikes a severe blow to Georgia's national interests and undermines long-term hopes for the peaceful reintegration of the occupied territories. By framing Saakashvili as the instigator of the war, the Georgian government undermines the country's legal standing to claim territorial integrity. Such a statement from Georgia's political leadership suggests an acknowledgment that Russia's "peace enforcement" operation was legitimate, leading to the logical de facto recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

This messaging aligns directly with the narrative pushed by Sergey Lavrov during his visit to Sokhumi in October 2009 when he [stated](#) that Saakashvili's regime started the war and Russia responded in full compliance with the UN Charter. Ivanishvili's remarks mirror the Kremlin's long-standing claim that Russian forces entered Georgia to restrain aggressors under the pretext of a peace enforcement operation. Such an alignment of narratives not only damages Georgia's reputation but also undermines the legal and moral grounds for opposing Russian occupation. It is no surprise that

Russian propagandist Margarita Simonian and long-time Russian ex-negotiator with Georgia and now a senator, Grigori Karasin, openly [welcomed](#) Ivanishvili's statement.

Expected Consequences of the Strategic Shift

Ivanishvili's statements signal the effective end of the non-recognition policy, a stance that has been upheld mainly through solid support from Georgia's Western partners. The rise of anti-Western rhetoric and the increasing isolation of Georgia from the West will undoubtedly harm these efforts in the long term. Furthermore, even if Georgia's strategic partners continue to allocate diplomatic resources to maintain the burden of the non-recognition policy despite the blame directed at the West for allegedly provoking Saakashvili into starting the war (in line with Russia's claims), the Georgian Dream's position will still undermine the legal and moral foundations of this policy.

Ivanishvili's narrative on the 2008 war shifts the focus by downplaying Russia's role and framing the conflict as primarily between Georgians and Ossetians. While criticizing Saakashvili's government for falling into Russia's trap isn't new, apologizing for the war without mentioning Russia as a key player marks a significant departure. This change may be aimed at restoring ties with Russia or even recognizing sovereignty for Abkhazia and Tskhinvali in one form or another.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, still adhering to the long-held non-recognition policy, will have a problem adjusting to this new narrative. Their recent [statement](#), perhaps by inertia, still condemns Russia's continued occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali. However, as political leadership moves toward the new stance, Georgian diplomats will be forced to contradict national interests on the global stage.

A Positive Scenario

The Georgian Dream has been promoting the need to gain a constitutional majority, arguing that its pre-election trinity - protecting family values, restoring territorial integrity, and abolishing the “collective UNM - will be impossible without it. With this, the Georgian Dream is working to impose a new social contract aimed at legitimizing the destruction of democracy and furthering its anti-Western agenda. If the regime succeeds in maintaining power after the 2024 elections, Russia’s objective of re-establishing its sphere of influence in Georgia will be complete.

The only way to prevent Georgia from crossing the point of no return, avoid irreparable damage to its national interests, and avert catastrophic consequences for its statehood is to consolidate a synchronized strategy between Georgia’s pro-democracy stakeholders and the country’s strategic partners.

The Georgian Dream’s narratives reveal weaknesses by ignoring key facts on the ground, such as the ongoing “[borderization](#)” process, where Russian forces continue moving occupation boundaries deeper into Georgian-controlled territories. In addition to silently losing control over these areas, Georgian citizens are regularly [kidnapped](#) and often [killed](#), further undermining the government’s claims of maintaining peace and sovereignty. Moreover, the Georgian Dream refuses to take responsibility for meeting the transparent [requirements](#) necessary for advancing European integration, framing its inaction as resistance to Western pressure. Instead, the regime has facilitated the expansion of Russian interests in Georgia, advancing Russia’s hybrid warfare strategy. By increasing [dependency](#) on Russia, [undermining](#) the defense sector, and [consolidating](#) autocratic rule, the Georgian Dream has isolated Georgia from its strategic partners, blocked its EU integration pro-

cess, and failed to protect the country from Russia’s growing influence.

Given the blurred and contaminated information ecosystem, these interconnections are not always evident to the general public. Therefore, it is crucial for pro-democracy stakeholders to coordinate nationwide, evidence-based awareness campaigns to take advantage of the regime’s weaknesses and expose these realities.

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At the same time, the United States and key European partners should engage strategically to ensure free and fair elections in Georgia. Every aggressive action against the democratic process must be promptly condemned, not just through statements but through widening and deepening the reach of sanctions. Impunity for anti-democratic actions emboldens the regime and encourages further malpractice while also undermining the narrative of pro-democracy forces and eroding voter confidence.

Beyond solid political engagement, it is essential to establish effective operational mechanisms to prevent election rigging. Observer missions should have a clear mandate and practical tools to address well-known election manipulation patterns. Evidence of electoral malpractice must be systematically collected, documented, and reflected in monitoring reports—noting the cumulative effects of isolated incidents on the overall election outcome.

Need for Clarity and Action

In the current phase of escalation orchestrated by the Georgian Dream, sanctions have become the West’s last remaining tool to counter the regime’s

anti-democratic trajectory. The European Union's [statement](#) about the potential revocation of visa-free travel is a crucial narrative that must be reinforced. It is essential to clarify to the confused segments of Georgian society that a country ruled by a regime under international sanctions cannot advance on the European path. Moreover, it should become more evident in the pre-election discourse that as democracy will inevitably continue to erode under the Georgian Dream's leadership, the rollback of progress in EU integration—such as visa-free travel and candidate status—cannot be sustained if the regime remains in power.

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Therefore, the West must expand targeted sanctions on the political leadership and civil servants responsible for violence and corruption. Such actions, particularly the ones targeted against Ivanishvili and his close circle, will weaken the Georgian Dream's repressive tactics, limit the power of those complicit in the regime's misconduct, and reassure the Georgian people that they will not be left to face Russia and its violent proxies alone. The United States has already made steps in this direction, unlike the EU and its member states.

Only through coordinated political and practical measures can fact-based counter-disinformation campaigns effectively challenge the regime's propaganda, creating the potential to disrupt well-prepared government narratives and re-establish trust in Georgia's democratic process. With only a few weeks to go, the winner of this information war will carry the elections, notwithstanding real public support ■