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The Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia

**PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA:
PERCEPTION IN RUSSIAN MEDIA AND
SOCIAL NETWORKS**



Comprehensive AI-powered media analysis

RESEARCH RESUME

The election campaign in Georgia, which began on August 28, 2024, sparked lively discussions in Russian media focusing on the country's geopolitical course and the ruling party's "Georgian Dream" political agenda.

The Institute for Conflict Studies and Analysis of Russia conducted a detailed analysis of relevant messages on major Russian television channels and video platforms using the specialized AI-powered tool War of Words and examined social media using the Osavul AI platform.

The study revealed that discussions of the Georgian elections on Russian television frequently referenced the ruling party "Georgian Dream" and its associated Russian interests in the region. Moreover, Russian propaganda actively promoted the "Georgian Dream" on Telegram, where compromised sources accounted for 24% of all coverage on this topic.

There were indications of an aggressive information campaign against President Salome Zurbishvili, particularly following her refusal to sign the law banning "LGBT propaganda." This caused significant resonance among the Russian Telegram audience, with relevant publications receiving around 3 million views and negative reactions to messages mentioning the president exceeding 40%.

The issue of occupied Georgian territories – South Ossetia and Abkhazia – was also prominently featured in the course of election campaign. The main narrative suggested an inevitable escalation of conflict should the Georgian opposition win.

In general, the topic of the war in Ukraine became one of the key elements of the election campaign. One should highlight Bidzina Ivanishvili's statements regarding the inevitable confrontation between Georgia and the Russian Federation in case of victory of the opposition. This narrative was actively used on Russian television and the Telegram platform. The discussions reached their peak on September 26 when the "Georgian Dream" party used videos and photos of destroyed Ukrainian cities to compare the war in Ukraine and peaceful Georgian life.

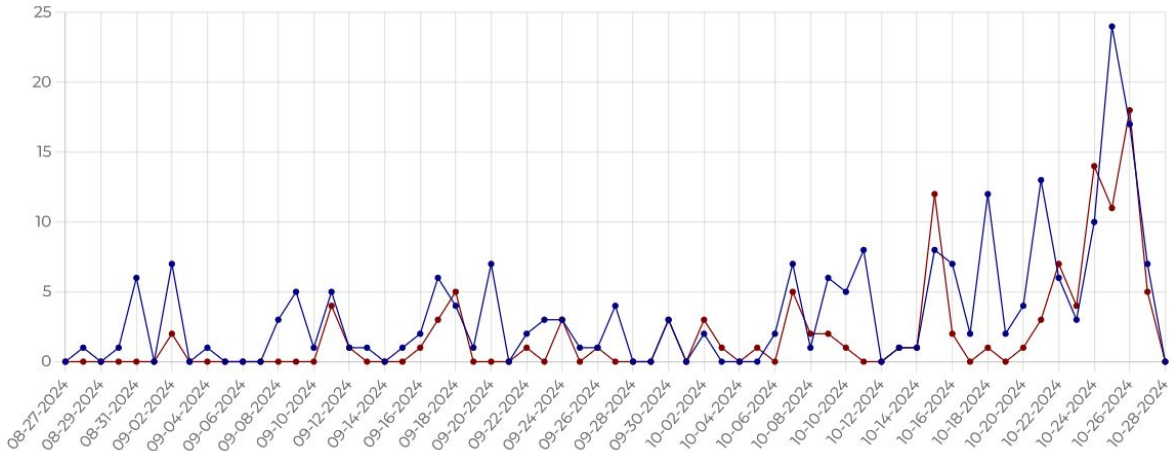
Furthermore, the governmental legislative initiatives, such as the Law on Foreign Agents, triggered numerous protests in Georgia and led to Western sanctions. On September 20, 2024 when the United States announced sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, views of relevant messages on Telegram exceeded 4 million. By October 9, the European Parliament passed a resolution urging sanctions against Georgia's ruling party, resulting in 1.7 million views of related messages.

On October 26 and 27, 2024 – the election day and votes counting – there were published over 3,000 messages in Russian Telegram dedicated to Georgian elections, with more than 14 million views. Rate of negative reactions towards these posts reached nearly 50%, while compromised sources covering the elections accounted for over 25% of all messages, with a combined audience of 46 million readers.

GEORGIAN ELECTIONS IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA

The election campaign in Georgia, which began on August 28, 2024, sparked lively discussions in the Russian media. The main focus of these discussions centered on the country's geopolitical course and the political program of the ruling party, the "Georgian Dream." As illustrated in the graph, frequent mentions of the elections in Georgia (blue) during Russian television broadcasts were accompanied by discussions of the ruling party "Georgian Dream" (red), indicating an active information campaign aimed at advancing Russian interests.

Figure 1. Mentioning the elections in Georgia and the pro-ruling party on Russian TV.

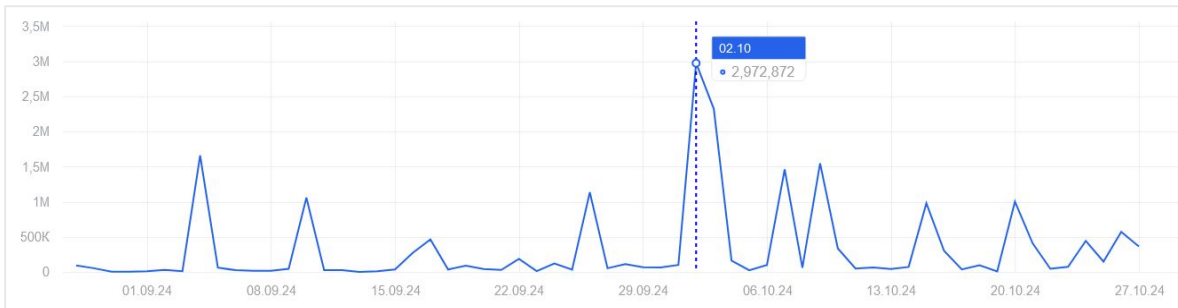


Additionally, Russian propaganda actively promoted the "Georgian Dream" among Russian-speaking Telegram users. Analysis revealed that the share of compromised sources spreading populist narratives about the ruling party reached 24%, significantly higher than the average of 15%.

At the same time, Russian propagandists intensified their campaign against President Salome Zourabichvili, particularly following her refusal to sign the "LGBT propaganda" ban on October 2, 2024. Relevant Telegram posts in Russia garnered nearly 3 million views.

A few days later, on October 6, the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, announced a new attempt to impeach Salome Zourabichvili. This news collected more than 1.5 million views in the Russian segment of Telegram.

Figure 2. Number of views of Telegram messages mentioning Salome Zurabishvili.



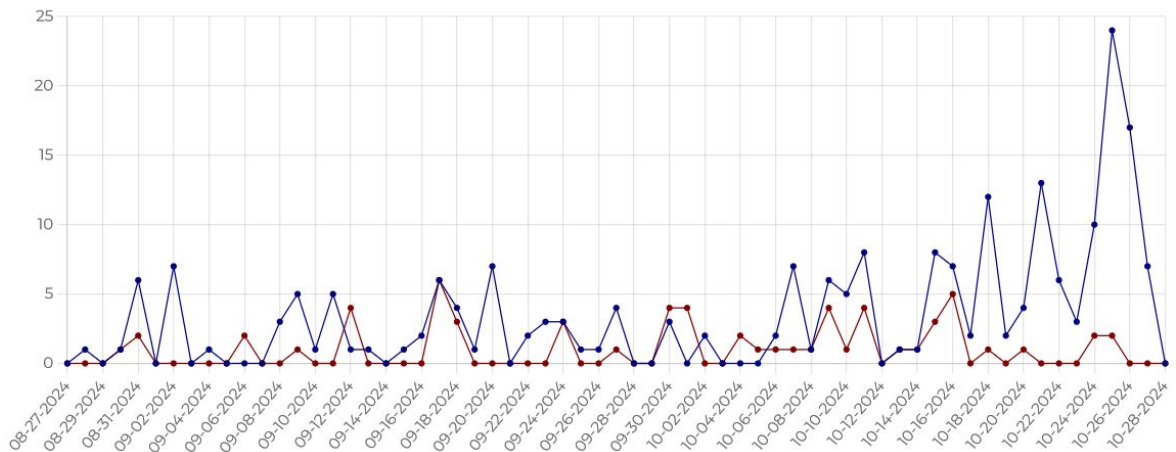
During the election campaign in Georgia, over 22% of Telegram messages mentioning Salome Zourabichvili were shared by compromised propaganda sources, with negative reactions exceeding 40%.

THE ISSUE OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

In addition to promoting populist narratives in favor of the ruling party and supporting Georgia's current geopolitical course, Russian propaganda actively circulated topics related to the occupied Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These self-proclaimed republics, controlled by puppet governments, remain crucial for the Kremlin to influence Georgia's political and social landscape.

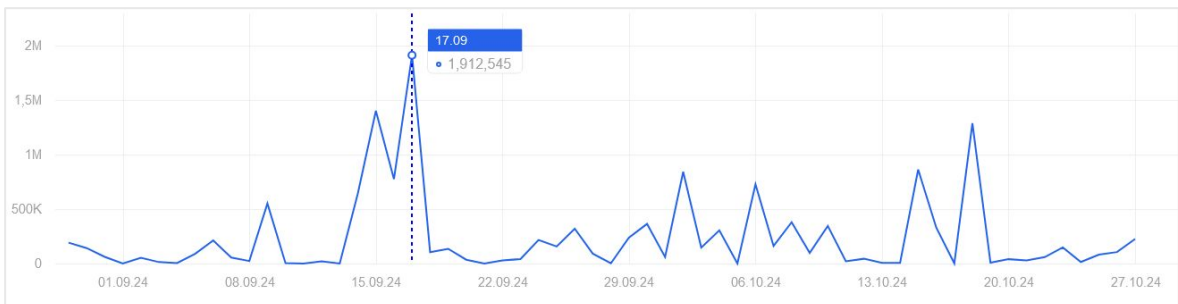
The graph below illustrates that the occupied Georgian territories were frequently mentioned in the election campaign. The main narrative concerning these quasi-republics revolved around the Kremlin's aggressive rhetoric regarding the inevitable escalation of conflict should opposition succeed in the Georgian elections.

Figure 3. References to the occupied territories and elections on Russian television.



At the same time, Russian Telegram channels actively discussed the issue of the Georgia's occupied territories. Notably, on September 17, 2024 nearly 2 million users viewed messages regarding Bidzina Ivanishvili's statement that Georgia was prepared to apologize for the war of 2008.

Figure 4. Number of views of Telegram messages about elections and occupied territories.

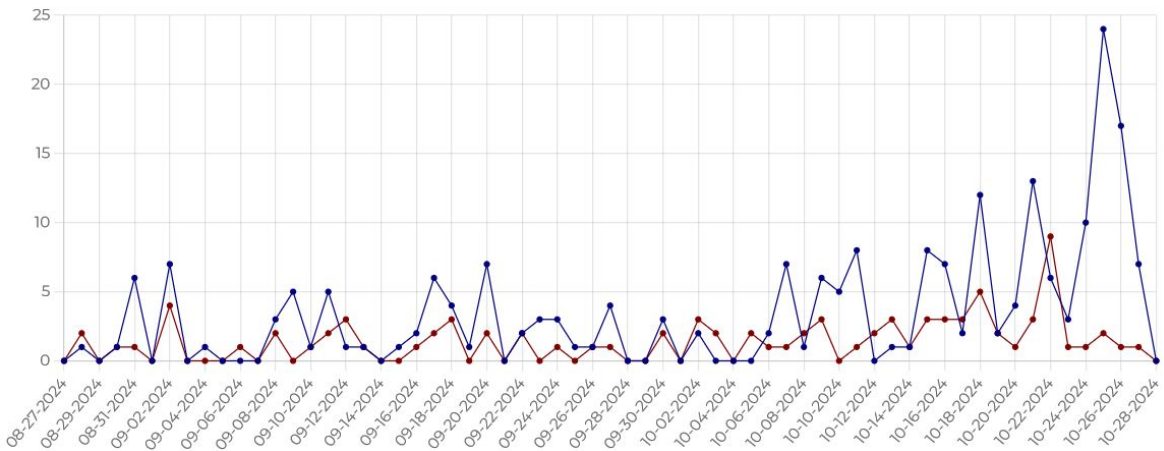


THE ROLE OF UKRAINE IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

"Georgian Dream" has remained in power for 12 consecutive years, with Bidzina Ivanishvili as its founder and primary beneficiary. In his rally speeches, he repeatedly warned that if his party loses, Georgia might face a fate similar to that of Ukraine, forcing the Georgian people to fight against the Russian Federation.

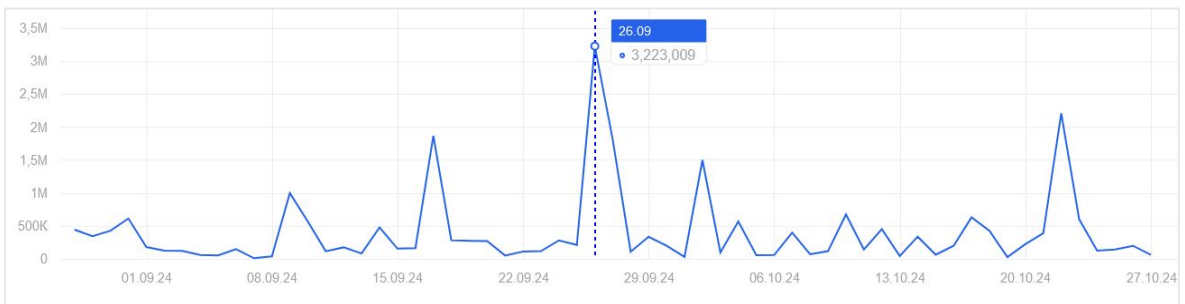
The war in Ukraine has emerged as a pivotal element in Bidzina Ivanishvili's election campaign, actively used to incite anti-European sentiments. Media monitoring indicates that discussions of the war in Ukraine frequently appeared in the context of the elections in Georgia on Russian television and RuTube video platform (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Mentions of the war in Ukraine in connection with elections on Russian TV.



On September 26, 2024 Russian Telegram messages related to the elections and the war in Ukraine garnered 3.2 million views. On this day, the ruling party used comparative videos and images contrasting war-torn Ukrainian cities with Georgia's "peaceful" life.

Figure 6. Number of views of Telegram messages about the elections and war in Ukraine.

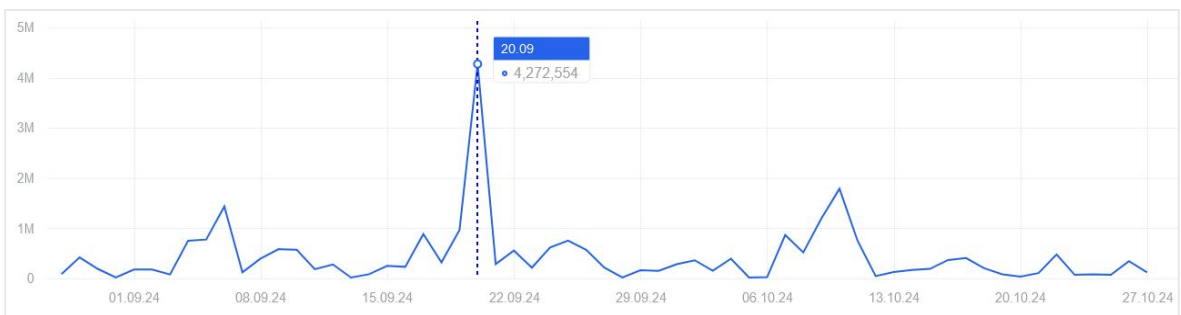


WESTERN SANCTIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE "LAW ON FOREIGN AGENTS"

The law banning "LGBT propaganda" was not the only political tool the ruling coalition employed ahead of the parliamentary elections in Georgia. On May 28, 2024, the Georgian government successfully passed the Law on Foreign Agents after a second attempt, which sparked numerous protests and prompted Western sanctions.

As the data illustrates, on September 20, 2024 when the U.S. announced sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of "Georgian Dream," and other high-ranking officials in Georgia, relevant messages on Russian Telegram exceeded 4 million views. In response, Russian propaganda accused the U.S. of interfering in the elections. On the same day, discussions about potential sanctions from the European Union also started, including the possibility of revoking the visa-free regime.

Figure 7. Number of Telegram messages views regarding sanctions against B. Ivanishvili.



As a result, on October 9, the European Parliament voted in favor of a resolution addressing the "rollback of democracy and threats to political pluralism in Georgia," calling on EU member states to impose sanctions against the ruling party. Telegram messages related to these news reached over 1.7 million users in the Russian segment of Telegram.