



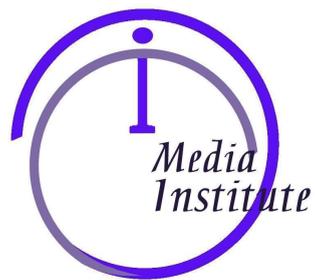
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Monitoring of the Pre and Post-Election Environment

Interim Report



Media Institute

2020



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Media Institute is a Georgia-based non-profit and non-governmental organization founded in 2012. The goals of the organization include but are not limited to promoting the development of independent and balanced media in Georgia, promoting media accountability and self-regulation, protecting and popularizing the principles of freedom of speech, promoting professional and institutional media development, and developing human rights journalism.

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Introduction

The media environment in Georgia is pluralist, yet deeply polarized, which has been established by international research organizations. According to *Reporters Without Borders*, “the reforms of recent years have brought improvements in media ownership transparency and satellite TV pluralism but owners still often call the shots on editorial content.”¹ In a similar vein, Freedom House’s country report on Georgia states that “Georgia’s media environment is pluralistic but frequently partisan.”²

Furthermore, according to the report of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the results of the media monitoring conducted by the Limited Election Observation Mission (LEOM) showed that all monitored private broadcasters were considerably biased.³ Furthermore, according to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), media polarization resulted in the political entities having “uneven access to news coverage on television”. At the same time, only “the largest and most established” political parties including the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement were regularly covered in the media.⁴

Polarization in both media and politics comes to the surface in the pre-election period. Observing the pre-election environment of 2020 Parliamentary elections, once again, revealed radical political polarization. Due to the epidemiological situation that emerged from the large-scale spread of Covid-19, political debates shifted mainly to the domains of media. The main goal of the ruling party, as well as the opposition, was to shape and manipulate public opinion through the media, for which they used various propaganda methods and techniques.

The fact that representatives of the ruling party did not partake in the TV programs of the pro-opposition televisions including, “The Main Channel”, “TV Pirveli” and “Formula”, whereas they were often visitors of pro-governmental televisions such as “Imedi TV” and “Post TV” also indicates the strong political and media polarization. In addition, within the course of the Media Institute monitoring, none of the representatives of opposition parties visited the programs of “Imedi TV” and “POSTV”. It should be noted that the main messages of the latter mentioned broadcasters predominantly reflected the messages of the Georgian Dream party leaders. Furthermore, the 2020 Parliamentary election discourse can be characterized by the lack of political debates among the representatives of political entities.

According to the NDI survey, the majority of the Georgian population receives news from television which has been shown to be biased.⁵ Representatives of the political parties claimed that they faced obstacles in accessing media outlets that were not politically

¹ See: Reporters Without Borders : Georgia: Pluralized but not Independent: <https://bit.ly/35LjMrJ>.

² Freedom in the World, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2XJqtpW>

³See: Georgia - Parliamentary Elections, 31 October 2020 Report on Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, OSCE / ODIHR; P. 24. <https://bit.ly/3oQTtYS>.

⁴ GEORGIA ELECTION WATCH Report on October 31, 2020 Parliamentary Elections NOVEMBER 2, 2020 p. 10 <https://bit.ly/3iPXpH9>

⁵ Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of December 2019 survey, NDI. <https://bit.ly/3igS2Ag>.

biased against them.⁶ It can be assumed that such obstacles prevented voters from making informed choices.

This report reflects the results of the monitoring from 15 October 2020 to 31 December 2021. During the reporting period, the Media Institute monitored both television media and online media. In particular, the following media outlets and programs were monitored: Imedi TV (programs - "Faceburg (ფეისბუქზე)" and "Arena"), Pirveli TV (talk show "Reaktsia"), Obieqtivi TV ("Night Studio program"), Formula TV (programs – "Formula of Politics"; "Who is elected by Georgia", Public Broadcaster (" Debates 2020 "); Main Channel (Mtavari Arkhi) (program "Main Accents"). Also, monitoring was carried out on online media: *Tabula*; *Publika*; *Georgia and the World*, and *Sakinform*.

In the report, qualitative research method - content analysis is deployed. The aim of the report is twofold. First, it reveals which propaganda techniques were most frequently applied in the Georgian media both in the pre-election and post-election periods. Second, it analyzes the rhetoric of politicians against the background of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties.

Methodology

Propaganda techniques and methods

One of the most popular definitions of propaganda designates a deliberate and systematic attempt to form the perceptions, manipulate cognitions and stimulate actions that serve the goals of the propagandist⁷. Most of the propaganda messages are classified as logical fallacies, as propaganda disseminators use seemingly convincing but invalid, illogical arguments. For the sake of identifying propaganda, the awareness of concrete propaganda techniques and methods, as well as logical fallacies is crucial.

This report analyzes the mainstream messages of media outlets and political entities through the lenses of propaganda techniques.

During the course of Media Institute monitoring, the use of following propaganda techniques was revealed:

- ❑ **Ad Hominem** - attacking concrete organizations or individuals, instead of criticizing their arguments and accounts.
- ❑ **Hasty Generalization** - Raising unfounded alarm, generalizing specific event/information for the sake of dramatizing them.
- ❑ **False Dilemma/False Dichotomy** - Conceiving two extreme positions and giving preference to one of them, while the conflict of the conceived alternatives is illusionary.

⁶ GEORGIA ELECTION WATCH Report on October 31, 2020 Parliamentary Elections NOVEMBER 2, 2020 p. 25 25.
<https://bit.ly/3bJaXm6>

⁷ Garth Jowett, Victoria O'Donnell (2015), *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Sage Publications

- ❑ **Whataboutism** (also known as whataboutery) - making attempts to discredit an opponent's position by attacking them directly instead of criticizing their arguments. **Whataboutism** may also entail shifting attention on different topics or charging the opponents for allegations instead of providing answers to their inquiries.
- ❑ **Creating simulation evidence** – using authentic facts, which create an illusion of the existence of evidence but are irrelevant to the accusations for illustration of which this evidence had been used.
- ❑ **Changing the context of facts and quotes:** Deliberately misinterpreting facts, statements and sources for sowing doubts and creating misconceptions in the audience.
- ❑ **Card stacking** –emphasizing one side of the facts, while overlooking and ignoring the other on the grounds of manipulating the opinions of the audience.
- ❑ **Appeal to emotion- appeal to fear** - Instead of providing valid arguments, manipulating the emotions of the audience. In the pre-election period, **appeal to fear** is often used for the sake of persuading the audience that if certain political entities come into power, devastating outcomes will be inevitable.
- ❑ **Ad nauseum** – repetition of the same ideas for convincing the audience in them⁸

In addition to the propaganda techniques used by media outlets, the monitoring also focused on the facts and statements including hate speech, homophobia and sexism.

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties⁹, which was drafted with the support of the CEC of Georgia, the Switzerland, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the International Republican Institute (IRI), represents the set of norms of voluntary ethics aimed at both protecting the human rights and liberties and conducting a substantive, program-oriented, inclusive election campaign that provides equal opportunities for electoral stakeholders.¹⁰ The code was signed by 40 political parties active in Georgia.¹¹

According to the code, which is composed of four parts, the signatory parties recognized the rule of law, promised to: act in accordance with the Constitution of Georgia, the laws, the principles of democratic governance and the interests of society, respect and protect the rights of all political parties, candidates and voters, abstain from using hate speech,

⁸ For more information about propaganda techniques see Millab: propaganda: <https://bit.ly/3omVHOx> . See also: Purdue online writing lab: Logical Fallacies : <https://bit.ly/39ml7Yj>

⁹ See: Political Party Code of Conduct For the 2020 Parliamentary Elections : <https://bit.ly/3a8ztdZ>

¹⁰ See: Election Administration of Georgia. Statement on the Code of Conduct for Political Parties - Parliamentary Elections, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3cfHY9D>

¹¹ See: OSCE. International Election Observation Mission Georgia. <https://bit.ly/3inJ7x1>

xenophobic and/or intimidating expressions, and do everything possible to ensure a peaceful election environment.

The parties also took responsibility for not obstructing the campaign activities. They promised not to disseminate campaign materials of their opponents, and not to implement and condemn the mobilization and confrontation of their activists and supporters during the pre-election campaign events of rival political parties/candidates. The signatory parties additionally took responsibility for not using administrative resources to gain an advantage in the electoral process, except as permitted by law.¹²

Media Institute, within its monitoring, incorporated certain norms of the Code into its methodological framework. These articles directly address the rhetoric of politicians and entail conducting a constructive election campaign. The selected articles imply the following content:

- conducting activities without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender or other grounds;
- abstaining from using hate speech, xenophobic and/or intimidating expressions;
- promoting a peaceful election environment, not resorting to violence, and not calling for its use;
- running a subject-based, program-oriented and issue-oriented election campaign, respecting the dignity of our competitors, and refraining from personal insults;
- not using or intentionally spreading illegally obtained and / or false information about other candidates, not fabricating and falsifying information;
- refraining from making public statements, campaign materials (media, video, audio, social media, print) that contain allegations of slander, treason, terrorism, other criminal offenses, as well as incitement to hatred or conflict on the national, ethnic, religious or other ground;
- not providing the media with defamatory, unsubstantiated information about other political entities, their members, and publicly condemning the actions and statements of the media or individual media representatives that contain threats, slander, or insults to a voter or election contestant.

Discrediting campaigns

Directed against political entities

¹²See: Public Broadcaster: “The National Democratic Institute publishes a pre-election ballot”. <https://bit.ly/3r9fTGf>.

Discrediting campaigns against the opposition

In both the pre-election and post-election periods, several campaigns against the opposition emerged:

1. **The opposition is a destructive and radical force, and plans a rebellion;**
2. **Mikheil Saakashvili is the leader of the opposition; The entire opposition obeys the National Movement party;**
3. **Davit Gareji is Georgia while the opposition advocates for the opposite.**

Imedi TV was featured with its discrediting campaign against the opposition, with its two programs - *Arena* and *Faceburg* (ფეისბურგი), among others. *Ad hominem* technique which implies attacking and demonizing specific organizations or individuals was most frequently used, in this regard. It is noteworthy that this technique was used in particular reportages of these TV programs.

Examples:

❑ “Arena”, reportage: “(Nika Melia) gives an example of courage to his party members but when it comes to shaking fists, he hides... He creates turmoil at one place, then disappears and observes how others start fighting against each other.”¹³

❑ Ghia Abashidze, host of the program “Faceburg (ფეისბურგი)”: “With a high likelihood the National Movement will continue to try to create tension in several election districts. On November 1, we will inevitably witness noisy jogging with tents, whistles and padlocks. However, we will also see how futile their attempts will be since the Georgian society will win this important election, which will not allow the butchers, intriguers and the sect members fighting against Georgia to come back to power.”¹⁴

❑ Gia Abashidze, host of the program “Faceburg (ფეისბურგი)”: “Republicans represent a political entity with a 0% support. They target our fundamental values and the church. Their acts can only be explained by their imitation, the influence of the sect leader Saakashvili, as well as vulgarity and self-conviction that people forget everything very soon.”¹⁵

❑ “Arena”, reportage: “Gvaramia is a generalized image of destructive opposition. He explicitly states that he does not care about the facts and everything should be interpreted according to the needs of the party.”¹⁶

¹³ See: Imedi. *Arena*. 20 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/38QYon7>.

¹⁴ See: Imedi. *Faceburg*. 31 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39CXrO3>

¹⁵ See: Imedi. *Faceburg*. 27 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39yOxRY>

¹⁶ See: Imedi. *Arena*. 15 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2XPnxb7>.

Messages of such content were repeatedly disseminated in the mentioned programs. This indicates the usage of *Ad nauseum* technique, which implies the repetition of the same messages. Also, *Ad nauseum* technique was used in the “Gareji is Georgia” campaign. On Election Day, Imedi TV went on air with the slogan “Gareji is Georgia!” which was removed the next day. Yet the same message circulated on Imedi TV after the elections, as well.

Part of the opposition, in both Imedi TV programs, was repeatedly referred to by the presenters as the “radical opposition”, which, in turn, reflects the position of the Georgian Dream leaders.¹⁷ Furthermore, a split in the opposition into two factions – the “radical” and the “constructive” wing was noticeable.

It should be noted that the program “Faceburg (ფეისბურგი)” regularly discredited not only political parties but also pro-opposition media outlets. They were often referred to as “National Movement televisions” (“ნაცგელევიზიები”). Nika Gvaramia, the general director of the "Main Channel" was the main target of both the program host and the visitors.

❑ Ghia Abashidze, “Faceburg” program host: “The means for information dissemination of National Movement opposition, among which, televisions – Mtavari, Pirveli and Formula TV are outstanding with their radicalism and toxicity, try to discredit the image of the current government and constantly propagandize for the Saakashvili era. They are obsessed with the mania of returning to their own golden era.”¹⁸

Similar messages were spread on Post TV. On this broadcaster the use of hate speech was prevalent. The opposition was portrayed as a destructive force. Furthermore, TV hosts created an expectation that opposition’s provocations would be inevitable on the Election Day:

❑ Lisa Gegechkori, host, *Media X-ray*: “Natsmodzi (National Movement party) is a sect of cruel creatures, a group of cruel, unworthy people, disrespectful towards each other.”¹⁹

❑ Shalva Ramishvili, host, “three & Co.”: “tongue-tied Merabishvili... I say tongue-tied not due to his speech-defect but he himself is a tongue-tied person... He and his companions are, of course, planning some non-sense (on the election day)”²⁰

Hasty generalizations and the **creation of simulation evidence** techniques were furthermore used in the allegations regarding the pro-Russian orientation of the opposition, and/or in the ostensible coincidence of Russia’s and the opposition’s interests. Such comments were made based on specific events, which, in fact, can hardly be linked to these allegations:

¹⁷ See, for instance: <https://bit.ly/2M4gNUB> ; <https://bit.ly/3c85ROE>

¹⁸ See: Imedi. *Faceburg*. 20 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3o34DZ5>

¹⁹ See: Post TV. 2 December 2020. <https://bit.ly/3o2ngwg>

²⁰ See: Post TV, 20 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2~MaxaP6>

- ❑ Levan Nikolaishvili, "Arena": "The United States congratulated us (the victory of Georgian Dream in the parliamentary elections), Western European countries congratulated at all levels, the OSCE, the ODIHR... But the Russian Federation did not. It is doubtful that for some reason Russia and the opposition are not happy about it (conduct of successful elections)...”²¹

In campaigns against the opposition, instances of the use of *appeal to emotion* technique, especially *appeal to fear*, were heavily used. This was evident in the pre-election period. The focus was placed on the putative negative consequences the current opposition's return to power might bring about. Similar messages were found, among others, on *Sakinform*:

- ❑ “If the opposition wins in the Parliamentary elections, Georgia will have to forget about Abkhazia and Samachablo forever. If the opposition succeeds in the elections and Saakashvili returns to Georgia, as a Head of the Coalition Government, we will have to forget about getting Abkhazia and Samachablo back: today's transparent borders will completely vanish and the defense for the absolute borders will be doubled.”²²

The discrediting campaign against the opposition was active on Obiektivi TV's "Night Studio", which was also monitored by the Media Institute. The main tendency detected while observing the "Night Studio" was the demonization of the National Movement party and its members. Not only the guests of the program, but even the journalists themselves referred to the National Movement members with epithets such as: "Georgian-eaters", "those who smell of blood" etc.²³ The technique of *appeal to emotions*, in particular *appeal to fear*, was used when the speakers focused on the consequences of the National Movement's possible return to power:

- ❑ Davit Tarkhan Mouravi, Alliance of Patriots: "We will definitely overthrow this government, I assure you. But, those ones (National Movement) will be needed to be ripped up by us. I would like the Georgian people to understand - there is no one except us, you can trust. We will destroy them. They represent nothing. These are cowards - Saakashvili and Bokeria.”²⁴

- ❑ Zaza Simashvili, Alliance of Patriots: "If those (National Movement party) come back to the power, they will detain anyone they can.”²⁵

Furthermore, as a response to the allegations pertaining to their pro-Russian political direction, and xenophobia, the members of the Alliance of Georgian Patriots used

²¹ See: Imedi. *Arena*. 3 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3qDRur7>

²² See: Sakinform, 31 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2LLTNd0>

²³ See: obiektivi TV. "Night Studio" 29 October 2020. <https://bit.ly/38WCCy2>.

²⁴ See: Obiektivi TV "Night Studio", 29 October 2020. <https://bit.ly/38WCCy2>.

²⁵ See.: Obiektivi TV, "Night Studio", 9 November 2020. <https://bit.ly/365LG20>.

Whataboutism and *hasty generalization* techniques. For instance, Malkhaz Topuria stated:

□ “They offend me a lot when referring to me as a pro-Russian politician, whereas I repeatedly state that our opposition, which is a US partner holds the meetings at Natelashvili’s (leader of Labour party) office. Natelashvili is the one who claimed that the USA is an occupier of Georgia... Every party related to the United National Movement is an outgrowth of Putin's aggressive wing.”²⁶

Discrediting campaigns against the Government

Main tendencies:

1. There is oligarchic, one-person, authoritarian rule in Georgia;
2. If the Georgian Dream stays in power, Georgia will no longer exist or will become part of Russia;
3. The government of the Georgian Dream represents a form of criminal governance.

There were active discrediting campaigns against the government on the pro-opposition TV channels. Nika Gvaramia, host of “Main Accents” referred to Bidzina Ivanishvili as a “slaveholder” and the Georgian Dream party members as thieves. The technique of *ad hominem* was therefore intensively used.

Examples:

□ Nika Gvaramia, Host of “Main Accents”; Director of the Main Channel: “Georgian Dream, left alone in the second round of the parliamentary elections, continues rigging elections just like some people steal forks from a restaurant, not because they need to do it, but because they cannot refrain from doing it. This happens because they are sick and this disease is called kleptomania. The rule of kleptomaniacs is a kleptocracy. We have governance of thieves in Georgia - thieves in the direct and figurative sense.. they have electoral theft in their blood that even when they were alone in elections, they still stole votes.”²⁷

□ Nika Gvaramia, Host of “Main Accents”; Director of the Main Channel: “Mr. Bidzina, write down the indications of your end. If the CEC cannot do this, you might be able to arrive at the conclusion that you better depart from the country now rather than act

²⁶ See: Formula. 20 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2KBR5Gt>

²⁷ See: The Main Channel. 23November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3padeKO>

against the will of the Georgian nation while usurping the political power. If you do not do this now, you might be unable to do it this later”²⁸

By the visiting politicians of the pro-opposition TV channels *appeal to fear* and *false dilemma/false dichotomy* was often applied. The vast majority of them were leaders of the opposition parties. The focus in their speech was placed on disastrous consequences the Georgian Dream’s governance would lead to:

□ Mikheil Saakashvili, the ex-president: “the question here is not pertaining to someone’s private property issues. The question is if each of us will have a country, if our grandchildren will have a country. This is what will be decided tomorrow.”²⁹

□ Nika Gvaramia, host of “Main Accents”; director of the Main Channel: “Tomorrow, the fate of Georgia will be defined. It will be determined tomorrow whether Georgia keeps existing or becomes a Russian province; whether Georgia becomes a part of Krasnodar “Kraj” or will join the European Union and the Western world. It will be determined whether we will have the US like orderly judicial system or a bribed court of a Russian province”³⁰

Messages against the government were also heard on Formula TV. There were frequent cases when an opposition candidate, in order to criticize the Georgian Dream, tried to fully delegitimize the existing political system in Georgia by presenting it as an authoritarian regime. In addition, numerous instances of the use of *demonization* and *hasty generalization* techniques occurred:

□ Irma Nadiradze, European Georgia: “Georgia has suffered more because there is an authoritarian, one-man government The Georgian Dream has caused these problems.”³¹

□ Armaz Akhvlediani, European Georgia: “The SSG (State Security Service of Georgia) governs the country along with the not democratically elected God-king Ivanishvili. This means that he does not care about anyone’s religious feelings.”³²

Even though the Patriots Alliance's discrediting campaigns were predominantly directed at the opposition, party members or journalists of the Obiektivi TV also actively discredited the government and accused it of bargaining with the opposition.

In this regard, *hasty generalization* technique was often used. The main message was that the National Movement, as well as the entire United Opposition, are evil. The Georgian Dream, on the other hand, tries to preserve this “evil” (Irakli Kobakhidze, Mamuka Mdinaradze and several other politicians were the main targets). Therefore,

²⁸ See: Main Channel. 7 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39PWemV>.

²⁹ See: Main Channel. 30 October 2020. <https://bit.ly/3o1O6EJ>

³⁰ See: Main Channel. 30 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3o1O6EJ>

³¹ See: Formula TV. 15 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3cdugvE>.

³² See: Formula TV. 19 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2Y3sOw4>

the only choice, according to the messages of "Obiektivi", is to elect the "Alliance of Patriots."

□ Ilia Chachibaia, TV host: "A lot of citizens voted for the Alliance of Patriots but these votes were stolen since they had to revive the National Movement and others."³³

□ Tamta Rogava, TV host " (The members of the Georgian Dream and National Movement) sing together whenever they find an opportunity to do so."³⁴

Anti-Western propaganda

Main tendencies:

1. It is necessary to cooperate with Russia and form a real "pro-Russian" force;
2. The West interferes in the internal affairs of Georgia, Georgia defines its foreign policy in accordance with the interests of Europe and the United States;
3. Liberalism is an aggressive force that causes perils to Georgian identity.

The monitoring revealed that the main target of the anti-Western press was liberalism, democracy, as well as specific Western actors. The *false dilemma/false dichotomy* technique was used in relation to Georgia's possible accession to the European Union.

□ "Unlike Khrushchev's communism, this time, if we join the European Union, we must give up our economy, our industry, our national institutions, or our army."³⁵

In the pro-Russian propaganda, *hasty generalization* technique was actively deployed. Namely, Russia was presented as a nation-state that follows traditions and shares a common faith with Georgia, whereas the West was presented as depraved and destructive.

□ "In short, (we have to choose) either LGBT-free, co-believer Russia, or Western Homo pederasticus - this is the eternal battle between good and evil, the God and the devil..."³⁶

Furthermore, democracy was presented as a negative phenomenon by using a *false generalization* technique:

□ "Democracy is sick. Democracy cannot protect us from the coronavirus - on the contrary, the more democracy there is in a country the more widespread is the

³³ See: Obiektivi TV. *Night Studio*. 8 November, 2020.

³⁴ See: Obiektivi TV. *Night Studio*. 30 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/396owu1>

³⁵ See: Georgia and the World. 22 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3oWvMOR>

³⁶ See: Georgia and the World, 22 December, 2020.. <https://bit.ly/3bSCRMK>

coronavirus, as the example of the United States has demonstrated. However, the recent presidential election and the black riot in the United States have shown that American democracy is sick too!”³⁷

In addition to the *false generalization*, *simulation evidence* was actively used in pro-Russian and anti-Western discourses:

- ❑ “Vladimir Putin from the presidential residence in Novo-Ogaryovo answered unfiltered questions of numerous journalists from countries which are friendly or hostile to Russia. Even this fact reveals that Russia is much more democratic than the United States and Europe.”³⁸

Ad Hominem was also used extensively in anti-Western messages. These messages were primarily targeting Western values, the European Union and NATO, as well as liberalism, non-governmental organizations and certain individuals, including George Soros.

- ❑ “George Soros’ sponsorship for the Georgian opposition and protest rallies has destabilized the country's socio-political life, which has a negative impact on Georgia’s trade and economic ties with Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey. This, in turn, led to the emergence of economic issues in Georgia ... Like an octopus, George Soros with his “tentacles” has hit all domains of public and political life in Georgia.”³⁹
- ❑ “For the sake of fulfilling its interests, the United States has been creating an entire network of non-governmental organizations in Georgia. The main goal is to form a more or less loyal government and implement the reforms which are unpopular in society. The number of operating structures today reaches more than ten thousand. The activities of these NGOs cover almost the entire country.”⁴⁰

Anti-Western sentiments were also noticed from a part of the opposition and the director of the Main Channel, Nika Gvaramia. In this regard, the use of *ad hominem* technique was revealed. Nika Gvaramia attacked Western ambassadors, accusing them of anti-Georgian behavior. This attack occurred repeatedly, therefore, the *ad nauseum* technique was used:

- ❑ Nika Gvaramia, the Main Channel: This is the Ambassador of the United States who refuses to grant a visa to Giorgi Gabunia, who is persecuted by a Russian killer. This is the face of the American Ambassador today. Are we obliged to hide this? Are we obliged not to

³⁷ See: Sakinform, December 31, 2020 <https://bit.ly/3qwJCHV>.

³⁸ See: Georgia and the World, December 22, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3nXjJ28>.

³⁹ See: Sakinform, 27 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3oVYEXu>.

⁴⁰ See: Sakinform, 6 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3o07Ybi>.

state this explicitly? No, gentlemen! Truth is truth, whether it concerns an American, French, or German person.”⁴¹

□ Nika Gvaramia, the Main Channel: “The ambassador of the United States has been blocked by the peasant oligarch (Bidzina Ivanishvili). Ms. Degnani came to Georgia and afterward, there was complete silence. We observe one of the most violent election campaigns in Georgia and we witness complete silence from both of the embassies (US embassy and the EU embassy). The actions of the Georgian Dream come with no surprise given this silence from the embassies. In my opinion, Ms. Degnan and Mr. Hartzell are responsible for such a violent election campaign and its consequences, as well. This is why they are fighting now. Their inaction is the condition for everything...”⁴²

In the same vein, Ana Dolidze, the leader of the Movement for the People, accused the ambassadors of interfering in Georgia's internal affairs:

□ "As for the role of ambassadors – this smells of colonialism. Neither you nor I like the statements of ambassadors that exceed their authority. This, in fact, indicates their interference in our internal affairs”⁴³

Covid-19 and Propaganda

Main tendencies:

1. The increase in coronavirus cases is a result of inefficient work of the government;
2. The increase in coronavirus cases is a consequence of the opposition campaign and numerous rallies organized by the opposition parties;
3. Coronavirus-related agitation serves low voter turnout;
4. Western vaccines against coronavirus are ineffective and dangerous.

Anti-Western channels have been actively spreading false information that vaccines produced by the Western countries against coronavirus are dangerous or ineffective unlike the Russian one:

□ “The use of Russian vaccines which are based on human genes (unless this is stated for business advertising) and are 95% effective, may be justified. However, so far no one can be certain – the second vaccine is given only two weeks after the first, or a month later. Minister Tikaradze and the prominent Georgian infectious disease

⁴¹ See: The Main Channel. 12 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/35YGF1c>.

⁴² See: The Main Channel. 8 December 2020. <https://bit.ly/36bmoPM>.

⁴³ See: <https://bit.ly/39U7uyy>.

specialists might want to be vaccinated with American or English vaccines, which are based on monkey genes and are only 50% efficient”⁴⁴

Additionally, pertaining to the coronavirus pandemic, *appeal to fear* technique was actively used:

- ❑ “You should by no means agree to be hospitalized or taken to the Covid-hotels unless you wish to die. Your condition will get worse during this pointless transportation and you will be killed on the way! At the hospital, you will be taken on reviving apparatus so that no one bothers much. But they will not take you out of the apparatus anymore – they will only cut you off once you finally pass away.”⁴⁵

In addition, coronavirus was used by politicians to manipulate public opinion. In this regard, the use of the *Whataboutism* technique should be noted. Namely, the government and the opposition blamed each other for the dramatic increase of the coronavirus cases. More specifically, the government has blamed the sharp rise in the virus cases on “irresponsible political campaigns and irresponsible actions.” According to the Minister of Infrastructure, and Vice-President Maia Tskitishvili, the increase of coronavirus cases could be explained by protest rallies. However, as she noted “the political process is our constitutional right, therefore, we could not stop the constitutionally established electoral and political process.”⁴⁶ In the same vein, Giorgi Gakharia stated that protest rallies caused the increase in the spread of the coronavirus.⁴⁷

In addition, Imedi TV actively spread messages implying that the opposition was in the service of the pandemic and the increase in coronavirus cases was its fault:

- ❑ Ghia Abashidze, TV host: “Excessive use of hate speech, personal harassment, discrediting state institutions deliberately, the spread of fake news, strong political bias and, most importantly, being in the service of the coronavirus – this is a small list of topics that the Georgian audience has witnessed on the TV channels, social media broadcasts or Facebook posts of the National Movement party.”⁴⁸

The opposition responded to such allegations with counter-accusations on the pro-opposition "Main Channel". In this regard, the use of the *Whataboutism* technique was revealed:

⁴⁴ See: Sakinform. 3 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3qC6FRx>.

⁴⁵ See: Saknifnrom. 2 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39KUCLd>.

⁴⁶ See: <https://bit.ly/3iu4oXk>.

⁴⁷ See: <https://bit.ly/3bYaV9V>

⁴⁸ See: Imedi TV. 6 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/393qw6p>

- ❑ Khatia Dekanoidze, National Movement, “People came out in the streets and protested against rigged elections while following safety instructions... You accuse them of spreading the virus ... we remember the events that took place around the dendrological park very well, we remember the border opened to uncertain tourists. This is immoral when the government blames the public for not doing something it had taken responsibility over.”⁴⁹
- ❑ Sergo Chikhladze, Strategy Aghmashenebeli: “I would like to remind you that not the opposition but the government allowed Russian tourists to enter Adjara, from where the explosion of coronavirus started. I remind Gakharia that it was their responsibility to prepare for the next wave of the virus, which they never did”⁵⁰.

According to Shalva Natelashvili, it has been established that the coronavirus does not spread indoors and, moreover, at rallies. According to him, no case of transmission of the coronavirus had been reported during the rallies.⁵¹

In addition, some politicians, for the sake of attracting voters to the elections and reducing the power of the government, tried to downplay the threat of the coronavirus and present it as a minor problem. In this context, the representative of “Girchi”, Iago Khvichia, applied *card stacking*, stating that the Georgian Dream party is trying to use the pandemic to its advantage.⁵² Taniel Kalandadze, a member of the Labor Party, contended that coronavirus is “like influenza” and is neither disturbing nor dangerous. He stated:

- ❑ “This was not a pandemic. A pandemic is something else. Anyone who thinks the first wave was easier and now the second wave is heavier is mistaken. Due to the lack of the tests, not many cases were detected before. I call on everyone to participate in the elections.”⁵³

In order to fully impose severe consequences caused by the coronavirus on the government, the representative of the Citizens party, Genri Dolidze, also used the *card stacking* technique. He blamed the government for the current crisis and the lack of tourists in Batumi. He, however, failed to consider that in light of the coronavirus pandemic the number of tourists would greatly decrease, even in the absence of government regulations:

⁴⁹ See: The Main Channel. 26 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/392sDHH>.

⁵⁰ See: Pirveli TV. 28 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3a4LcKL>.

⁵¹ See: Pirveli TV. 28 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3a4LcKL>.

⁵² See: Formula TV. 19 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2MaamPN>.

⁵³ See: Formula TV. 19 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2MaamPN>.

- ❑ Genri Dolidze, Citizens party: “Due to the irrational government regulations, there are no tourists in the country. People find themselves in a horrible situation and can potentially become victims of banks”⁵⁴.

Instances of violation of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties

During the process of selecting non-partisan members in various district election commissions, as well as in the process of electing the leadership of precinct election commissions, numerous complaints were registered. Confrontations between representatives of the Georgian Dream and the opposition were furthermore observed several times. In this regard, the CEC has made several official statements in which the opposition has been criticized for attempting to discredit the election administration.⁵⁵ In the aftermath, the members of the European Georgia and the United National Movement in many municipalities refused to sign the Code of Conduct of the Election Administration.

In the end, the Code of Conduct for Political Parties was hardly respected by the signatory parties. Representatives of different political parties systematically violated the provisions of the Code of Conduct directing allegations and accusations against each other.

Pertaining to the ban on the use of administrative resources, it is noteworthy that a few days before the polling day - October 6, 2020, the Cartu Foundation, affiliated with the chairman of the Georgian Dream Bidzina Ivanishvili, announced the donation of a 36-hectare park to Tbilisi.⁵⁶ On October 21, 2020, the Chairman of the Georgian Dream opened a new campus of Kutaisi International University.⁵⁷ As part of its election campaign, the Georgian Dream promised to build a football academy in Kutaisi, irrigate 40,000 hectares of land, and allow private owners to register ownership of 1,200,000 hectares of state-controlled land.⁵⁸

In addition to the above-mentioned, the video clip of the “Georgian Alliance of Patriots” was problematic, which, as it turned out, violated the provision on the prohibition of incitement to hatred on the national, ethnic, religious or other grounds. The video footage

⁵⁴See: Formula TV. 19 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2MaamPN>.

⁵⁵ See: 1) The CEC Statement Regarding the False Accusations Towards the Election Administration. 21.09.2020. <https://bit.ly/2K8ROPf>; 2) Statement on Attempts to Discredit the Election Administration 29.09.2020. <https://bit.ly/3oZjNPY>; 3) Statement Regarding Attempt on Discrediting the Election Administration and Harming Electoral Environment. 27.10.2020. <https://bit.ly/2KHymM>.

⁵⁶ See: <https://bit.ly/2LLKZUI>.

⁵⁷ See: <https://bit.ly/3myvPhM>

⁵⁸ See: <https://bit.ly/3nz5yRM>.

had explicit anti-Turkish content. The party was fined 2000 GEL.⁵⁹ The Alliance of Georgian Patriots party was also criticized for placing a billboard with anti-Turkish messages.⁶⁰

During the course of the Media Institute monitoring, observations of politicians' rhetoric revealed that **the first part of Article 2** of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties was most intensively violated. This norm obliges signatory political parties to conduct a subject-based, program-oriented and issue-oriented election campaign, respect the dignity of their competitors, and refrain from personal insults. In the statements of politicians, statements of encouragement of violence were also frequently heard.

Consequently, violations of the following norms were identified:

➤ **Article 2.1 We shall run a subject-based, program-oriented and issue-oriented election campaign, respect the dignity of our competitors, and refrain from personal insults.**

Instances of norm violation:

❑ Tea Tsulukiani, Georgian Dream: “Political boycott is a part of political life, a gesture. However, in the Georgian reality, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between those who apply boycott and those who are merely street saboteurs. I would call them the latter.”⁶¹

❑ Sandro Bregadze, Georgian March: “These people are imprudent. Kobakhidze is the apogee of insolence.”⁶²

❑ Levan Gogichaishvili, Our Georgia - Solidarity Alliance: “What does Gia Volski control? This person has not done anything in the parliament but pressing his finger on the green button. Sometimes he agreed with the Marijuana bill to Bidzina Ivanishvili and sometimes he tried to justify Murusidze. What should these people control? Simply put, they are flatterers.”⁶³

➤ **Article 1.5. We shall promote a peaceful election environment, do not resort to violence, and do not call for its use.**

Instances of norm violation:

⁵⁹ See: <https://bit.ly/3ar0X0m>.

⁶⁰ See: <https://bit.ly/2KzIDbs>.

⁶¹ See: Tabula. 23 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/35V2EzQ>.

⁶² See: Pirveli TV. 24 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/2LOauVc>.

⁶³ See: Pirveli TV. 17 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3sGhoxU>.

❑ Aleko Elisashvili, Citizens: “I will join forces with my supporters. I will go and fight. I am not threatening anyone, it is just really irresponsible to prolong the crisis like this, on a much more important crisis background.”⁶⁴

➤ **Article 2.4. We will not use or intentionally spread illegally obtained and / or false information about other candidates, we will not fabricate and falsify information.**

➤ **Article 2.7. During the election campaign, we refrain from making public statements, campaign materials (media, video, audio, social media, print) that contain allegations of slander, treason, terrorism, other criminal offenses, as well as incitement to hatred or conflict on the national, ethnic, religious or other ground.**

Instances of norm violation:

❑ Irakli Kobakhidze, Georgian Dream: “I do not rule this out (Gavrilov, Russia, European Georgia, the National Movement to have acted together) because they had banners printed 10 days ago. We have information from the printing house.”⁶⁵

❑ Shalva Natelashvili, Labor Party: “Ivanishvili brought a vaccine (against the coronavirus) from Germany through a private flight and got vaccinated.”⁶⁶

➤ **Article 1.3. We shall carry out activities without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender or other grounds.**

➤ **Article 1.4. We shall not use hate speech, xenophobic and/or intimidating expressions.**

Instances of norm violation:

❑ Malkhaz Topuria, Alliance of Georgian Patriots: “I am not in favor of the establishment of who is gay and who is not. They are pathetic. A man arrives at home, hides it (the gender orientation), and tells his children and wife “I am a man”. In fact, he is sometimes a woman.”⁶⁷

❑ Otar Shaorshadze, Alliance of Patriots: “People of neutral gender will never manage to defeat Georgian culture.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ See: Rustavi 2. 23 November, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39oyjSx> .

⁶⁵ See: Palitraneews. 20 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3peoZAh>.

⁶⁶ See: Pirveli TV. 22 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/396Ai7C> .

⁶⁷ See: Objektivi TV. 26 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/39WQkQG>

⁶⁸ See: Objektivi TV. 24 October, 2020.

- ❑ Soso Shatberashvili, Alliance of Leftists: “Some of our inhabitants who are supposed to feel here like guests, make us feel like guests. This is the problem.”⁶⁹
- ❑ Tea Tsulukiani, Georgian Dream: “What do you say, it turns out that it is difficult for Gvaramia’s family to be spied on? Does he have beauty at home or what? Why is he so upset?!”⁷⁰
- ❑ Irakli Okruashvili, Victorious Georgia: “One would enter a parliament for the sake of some hotties from the Georgian Dream... Such a post is acceptable from me...”⁷¹
- ❑ Tako Charkviani, Strategy Agmashenebeli: “Irakli Kobakhidze, you constitutio-analyst! You will have to leave the politics with the fast test and then you will realize that you should not talk to us in such a way that you do. Georgian Dream sunk in Russian corruption did not manage to get rid of Kobakhidze from the politics.”⁷²

Conclusion

The report reflects the outcomes of the monitoring conducted by the Media Institute. It furthermore reveals the facts of violation of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties. At the same time, the document identifies the propaganda techniques used in the pre- and post-electoral periods by media outlets and political entities.

During the course of the monitoring, it has been revealed that **Article 2.1** of the Code of Conduct for Political Parties was most frequently violated. This provision implies running subject-based, program-oriented and issue-oriented election campaigns, respecting the dignity of the competitors of all political entities, and refraining from personal insults. In contrast, pre-election campaigns were predominantly based on personal insults and personal attacks rather than on program-oriented discussions and debates. In addition, Article 1.3 and Article 1.4 were quite often violated. These provisions entail, accordingly, conducting activities without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender or other grounds, and abstaining from using hate speech, xenophobic and/or intimidating expressions

Apart from this, the Media Institute came up with the working methodological framework, which entails identifying the propaganda techniques within the course of media monitoring. The Monitoring has shown that *ad hominem*, as well as *Whataboutism*, *Hasty Generalization*, *Card Stacking*, *Simulation evidence* were intensively applied. Moreover, the same messages were repeated on a regular basis. Hence, the *ad nauseam* technique was used.

⁶⁹ See: Formula TV, 20 October, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3o2gMO9>

⁷⁰ See: Tabula, 14 December, 2020. <https://bit.ly/3bZ7Vu2>

⁷¹ See: <https://bit.ly/3o2x4q0>

⁷² See: <https://bit.ly/3p1Q9dq>

Given the extreme media and political polarization in the country, political debates are very largely absent in both – pre-election and post-election periods. Voters had little access to information about the views and programs of political parties. At the same time, there was a tendency for the media to demonize not only political entities but also media outlets of sharply different editorial policies.