Foreign and domestic:
Information manipulation during elections in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan

Eto Buziashvili

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About the Digital Forensic Research Lab

The Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) at the Atlantic Council is a first of its kind organization with technical and policy expertise on disinformation, connective technologies, democracy, and the future of digital rights. Incubated at the Atlantic Council in 2016, the DFRLab is a field-builder, studying, defining, and informing approaches to the global information ecosystem and the technology that underpins it.

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Author

Eto Buziashvili, research fellow at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

Contributors

Sopo Gelava, associate director of research at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

Givi Gigitashvili, resident fellow at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

Victoria Olari, research associate, Moldova at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

Editors

Andy Carvin, non-resident fellow at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

Layla Mashkoor, deputy director of research at Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab

Table of contents

Introduction

Recent and upcoming elections in Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia demonstrate the multitude of stressors that test a state's ability to maintain democratic freedoms. In October 2024, Georgia held parliamentary elections that international observers characterized as "fundamentally flawed," with the V-Dem Institute in Sweden subsequently downgrading the country from an "electoral democracy" to an "electoral autocracy." That same month, Moldova conducted a presidential election and European Union (EU) accession referendum, both passing by razor-thin margins amid what Moldovan President Maia Sandu called an "unprecedented assault" on democracy. Subsequent parliamentary elections took place in September 2025. Azerbaijan, operating under a firmly authoritarian system, hosted municipal elections in January 2025 that served primarily to legitimize ongoing repression by the current regime. Armenia, meanwhile, will conduct parliamentary elections in June 2026 as it continues to navigate rapidly evolving changes in its security and diplomatic partnerships, testing the nation's democratic resilience after decades of tensions with Armenia that frequently spiraled into conflict.

These elections share more than proximity in time and geography. All four countries exist within overlapping zones of Russian influence and interference, Western engagement, and contested territorial sovereignty. Prolonged territorial conflicts—involving the Russian-occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria and Gagauzia in Moldova, and Armenia's defeat by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh—have created ongoing sources of instability that can be weaponized by malign actors during electoral periods. While foreign aid, Western political support, and EU integration pathways become opportunities for democratic stabilization, they also serve as potential targets for narrative warfare. These structural vulnerabilities create opportunities for both foreign and domestic actors to exploit information environments.

Foreign influence operations do not function in isolation. They exploit and rely on a web of domestic actor connections that blurs the line between foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and domestic information manipulation. This ecosystem relies on a range of actors, from direct proxies and ideological co-optees to opportunistic domestic actors who, while lacking formal ties to a foreign power, weaponize foreign narratives to serve localized political agendas. This creates a dynamic in which influence is effectively laundered: foreign entities provide an initial narrative spark that domestic actors then adopt and localize, granting the operation a level of cultural resonance and perceived legitimacy, as well as plausible deniability for malign actors. As a result, these campaigns often appear to be domestic in origin, ensuring that foreign strategic interests are embedded within legitimate political discourse, thereby complicating attribution and bypassing traditional democratic defenses.

This report examines three dimensions of this phenomenon. First, it analyzes the role of anti-Western narratives—priming distrust, delegitimizing opposition, and justifying legal restrictions framed as defenses against interference. Second, it documents how unresolved territorial conflicts were exploited as narrative leverage during electoral periods. Third, it maps the ecosystems of digital platforms that facilitated the reach of influence operations across distinct national contexts.

Social media platform dynamics varied across the four countries. In Georgia, Facebook remained dominant for domestic political discourse; local and foreign actors exploited this through coordinated advertising and inauthentic amplification, while Meta's 2025 policy shift on factchecking was exploited to undermine and delegitimize independent researchers. In Moldova, Russian influence operation extended into multiple platforms, such as TikTok, X, Facebook, and Telegram, achieving a large amount of exposure despite the attempts by local authorities to limit their reach. In Armenia, Telegram served as the primary vector for content targeting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, while inauthentic websites mimicking legitimate news outlets appeared across multiple operations. In Azerbaijan, X served as the primary platform for state-aligned

operations targeting international audiences, with domestic media establishing narratives which online networks then amplified abroad.

This report presents findings that represent one year of activity within these information environments but is informed by an extensive years-old monitoring effort. Given each country's distinct historical, linguistic, and political dynamics, the research acknowledges the challenges of making direct comparisons between one another. Nor is the analysis intended to be exhaustive; rather, it prioritizes narrative trends, actors, and tactics most relevant to the specified electoral cycles. The report's scope enables identification of structural similarities and localized divergences in how information environments are shaped around electoral contests.

A leaked document on influence strategy in this region prepared for the Office of President of Russia added further context to the developments described in this report. The document described the strategy for working with Russian diaspora in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, focusing on segmentation, developing cultural ties, as well as utilizing other means of engagement, including through religious institutions. Although the document does not specifically address elections, it once again confirms how building influence through various forms occurs over time and can be mobilized later for specific political contexts.

Chapter 1: Anti-West narratives

In all countries, various actors constantly presented the West as a risk. Domestic and foreign actors, including politicians and media outlets, as well as covert networks, promoted fears that growing ties with Europe or the United States would lead to a war, instability, or loss of sovereignty. The promotion of this message was happening through the concept of "Ukrainization," which suggested that any alignment with the West would end in similar fate as Ukraine. These messages were deployed for discreditation of the protests, providing rationale for limiting civil liberties, and justifying repressive measures taken as an act of defense.

Georgia: Anti-Western narratives as a governing tool

As Western nations implemented sanctions to isolate Moscow after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, deepened its relationship with the Kremlin. The party and several of its officials later faced Western sanctions for undermining democracy for Russia's benefit, undermining human rights, and acting as agents of Russian intelligence. These dynamics formed the backdrop to the October 26, 2024, parliamentary elections, which Georgian Dream framed as a referendum on war and peace, weaponizing the fear of Ukrainization throughout the election cycle.

By 2024, anti-Western rhetoric in Georgia had coalesced around four interrelated narrative themes: dragging Georgia towards war and becoming a "second front" for a battle between Russia and the West; Western interference and alleged coup threats; "deep state" conspiracy theories; and values-based mobilization around "family values."

During the 2024 electoral campaign, Georgian Dream's central message was that only it could preserve peace. In the weeks leading up to the vote, the ruling party attempted to pressure broadcasters to air anti-Ukraine ads, with messaging that framed Ukraine as a cautionary tale and suggested that alignment with Western partners would drag Georgia into war. This messaging simultaneously intersected with Kremlin rhetoric; Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov repeated claims that the West sought to open a "second front" in Georgia against Russia. Georgian officials publicly echoed versions of this logic, reinforcing the perception that Western engagement would precipitate military escalation and war in Georgia.

The narrative did not stop after the vote and continued into 2025, when Georgian Dream doubled down on these themes in response to Western sanctions. Georgian Dream leaders framed sanctions as a punishment for not joining the war in Ukraine, in an attempt to divert attention from the real motive for the sanctions: democratic backsliding in Georgia. They increasingly used terms such as "deep state" or "global war party," to refer to a conspiracy theory pushed by Georgian Dream claiming that a hidden and powerful Western elite controls politics and starts wars around the world.

Parallel to the "war-dragging" theme, Georgian Dream advanced a sustained narrative that Western actors were preparing post-election unrest and attempting regime change. Ahead of the vote, officials argued that Russia lacked the capacity to interfere in Georgia's elections while claiming Western actors were to blame. This claim was amplified through paid social media advertising. The DFRLab identified 257 Facebook ads sponsored by Georgian Dream-linked actors employing keywords such as "coup," "revolution," "interference," "destabilization," and "agents." The volume of ads increased sharply in September 2024 as election day approached.

The narrative also claimed that protests, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and opposition figures were tools of foreign forces preparing a "Tbilisi Maidan," a reference to Ukraine's pro-democracy Euromaidan uprising in late 2013. Russian intelligence-linked narratives reinforced this line, with the Kremlin's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) publicly claiming that the United States was orchestrating a coup in Georgia. DFRLab reporting identified Telegram channels linked to Russian disinformation infrastructure,

including assets connected to NewsFront—a Russian disinformation platform tied to intelligence services—pushing similar claims ahead of the vote.

The "deep state" and "global war party" allegations functioned as connective tissue linking war, sanctions, and interference into a single narrative structure. When Western governments imposed visa restrictions and sanctions on Georgian officials in late 2024, Georgian Dream portrayed these measures as evidence of co-ordinated Western hostility, framing sanctions as attempts to punish Georgia for defending its sovereignty.

This framing intensified in 2025. Increasingly repressive legislative amendments tightened rules on assemblies and demonstrations, increased administrative and criminal penalties, and expanded detention powers. These measures were presented as necessary safeguards against foreign-backed destabilization rather than as constraints on civic engagement. Anti-Western narratives that justified vigilance during elections were later repurposed to legitimize political repression afterward.

Georgian Dream's anti-Western rhetoric became increasingly personalized, targeting individual diplomats by name. German Ambassador Peter Fischer faced a sustained campaign. He was verbally targeted by a Georgian Dream supporter who later boasted about the incident online; GD-affiliated broadcaster Imedi TV accused the ambassador of giving "instructions to radical opposition activists," while Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili accused him of pressuring the judiciary after attending a court hearing. The pattern extended across diplomatic missions. Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze stated he would expel EU Ambassador Paweł Herczyński if he could. Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua proposed expelling ambassadors from Germany and the United Kingdom, calling the latter's diplomatic approach "colonial." In September, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned both the German and United Kingdom ambassadors, accusing them of "grossly violating the Vienna Convention."

The United Kingdom became a particular focus of Georgian Dream's hostile narratives throughout 2025. Following UK sanctions on Georgian officials over human rights abuses that April, the ruling party launched coordinated Facebook campaigns, comparing UK sanctions to the Soviet Union's April 1989 massacre of Georgian protesters. Georgian Dream-affiliated media POSTV, meanwhile, ran sponsored Facebook content about UK child abuse cases in an attempt to discredit Britain's moral standing. In June, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued coordinated statements accusing the UK of leading a Western campaign to destabilize Georgia, which Georgian Dream officials echoed within days. Parliament Speaker Papuashvili accused the UK Embassy of funding "propagandists" and "extremists" after it announced election transparency grants to Georgian civil society groups. Russian propaganda outlet Rhythm of Eurasia published an article titled "Georgia: The British are preparing another revolution," in which the article presented legitimate trainings in a misleading way, suggesting that Georgian activists were trained in tactics of provocations and toughness against law enforcement agencies. This misleading framing was first spread by pro-Georgian Dream media.

By mid-2025, Georgian Dream revived anti-LGBTQ+ messaging in connection with ongoing EU policy debates, suggesting that European integration would require legalizing same-sex marriage and undermining "traditional values." The slogan "a woman is a woman, and a man is a man" became part of renewed pre-election propaganda cycles.

In addition to sustained anti-Western rhetoric, Georgian Dream also employed politically biased Western election observers to reinforce the perceived legitimacy of the October 2024 vote, while dismissing or marginalizing documented irregularities and credible allegations of fraud.

Moldova: Anti-Western narratives as Russian interference tool

In the case of Moldova, the most aggressive anti-West narratives were driven by pro-Kremlin networks, Russian officials, and aligned political actors, while state institutions and civil society demonstrated sustained

and strategic efforts to counter this activity.

Similarly to Georgia, one of the dominating themes during Moldovan 2024 election cycle was war-related narrative. President Maia Sandu and her government's political decisions were presented by pro-Russian actors as steps paving path towards Moldova's confrontation with Russia. They framed EU integration and cooperation with NATO as Moldova's militarization. Across Telegram, pro-Russian networks consistently repeated the same message: if pro-European forces win, Moldova will become "the next Ukraine."

This war-dragging framing intensified around the EU referendum, with narratives suggesting that enshrining EU membership in the constitution would inevitably lead to military escalation and NATO integration. The DFRLab observed unfounded allegations that Romania was preparing military intervention in Ukraine and that NATO exercises in neighboring countries signaled imminent deployment in Moldova. These claims relied on selective interpretations and misrepresentation of routine military cooperation.

Additionally, anti-West narratives were paired with financial incentives to widen the pro-Russia camp from those ideologically aligned to those financially motivated. Moldovan law enforcement exposed large-scale vote-buying schemes connected to networks associated with pro-Kremlin exiled Moldovan oligarch Ilan Shor. Russian funds were funneled to tens of thousands of Moldovan citizens, accompanied by instructions on how to vote in the referendum and presidential race.

After Sandu secured re-election, anti-West narratives shifted toward delegitimization. Pro-Russian political forces characterized her as the "president of the diaspora," implying that Moldovans abroad—many residing in EU countries—had distorted the will of domestic voters. This framing extended the anti-West logic: diaspora voters were implicitly portrayed as influenced by Western societies and therefore less authentic representatives of national interests.

The diaspora narrative served multiple purposes. It emphasized claims of domestic discontent, reinforced skepticism toward European integration, and kept the legitimacy question open without directly rejecting the electoral outcome.

Anti-West messaging continued through platform ecosystems, particularly Telegram and TikTok. Investigations by the DFRLab identified coordinated bot networks and channels amplifying claims of Western militarization, pending economic collapse under EU alignment, and foreign interference in Moldovan institutions.

Moldovan authorities sought to counter these networks. In August 2025, the General Inspectorate of Police reported that it had identified 443 TikTok channels suspected of spreading disinformation and formally requested their removal. The General Inspectorate said approximately 95 percent of these requests were rejected. The Moldovan government attempted to counter foreign-linked operations through legal and regulatory means, but enforcement limitations on major platforms allowed coordinated networks to persist during and after the election cycle.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, pro-Kremlin narratives in Moldova also invoked language questioning the country's sovereignty. The EU was portrayed as imposing conditions that would undermine domestic control over policy, energy markets, and cultural norms.

In Moldova's case, foreign narratives still managed to land in the domestic information space despite the state's attempts to counter said interference. Broader anti-Western narratives helped mobilize domestic pro-Russian opposition through fear of war, financial incentives, and questioning election results. It should be highlighted that Moldova's institutional responses against online and offline schemes and networks did limit these foreign influence efforts to some degree.

Armenia: Anti-Western narratives as sustained pre-election pressure

After Armenia lost Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, the country's information space saw increased anti-Western messaging. This has intensified in the lead up to 2026 Parliamentary elections in the country. Russian and Azerbaijani political actors and media outlets pushed a large share of the anti-Western messaging. Domestic political opposition repeated some of these narratives, applying additional pressure on an Armenian government that was navigating territorial losses.

As was the case in Georgia and Moldova, the dominant anti-Western narrative in Armenia centered on war. Russian officials and affiliated media repeatedly claimed that closer cooperation with the EU and US would "Ukrainize" Armenia or open a "second front" against Russia. Between January and mid-September 2025, the DFRLab identified more than 1,300 individual references to Armenia alongside the terms "Ukrainization" or "second front," generating millions of views across Russian-language Telegram channels. The language implied that Armenia was being manipulated into confrontation with Russia, its traditional security partner.

Anti-West narratives intensified in response to shifts in Armenian diplomacy and policymaking, particularly, in its attempts to expand its relationship with the West. When Armenia advanced negotiations on EU visa liberalization and formally signed a strategic partnership agreement with the US in early 2025, Russian officials warned that Western states were attempting to destabilize the South Caucasus. Statements from Moscow framed these moves as part of a broader Western strategy to expand NATO's footprint in the region. These claims resurfaced in April 2025, when Armenia initiated parliamentary discussion of an EU accession process following a 2024 public petition calling for a referendum on EU membership pursuit. Russian-aligned media predicted severe economic consequences, including rising energy costs and export collapse, attributing potential hardship to Western pressure rather than to Russia's own leverage over Armenian markets. In May 2025, Armenian Parliamentary Speaker Alen Simonyan publicly accused Russia of waging a hybrid campaign against Armenia ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections.

The March 2025 local elections in Gyumri showed a preview of these dynamics taking shape, as networks affiliated with the Russian-funded organization Evrazia supported an anti-Western and anti-EU campaign effort. The effort coordinated online activity with offline mobilization, including distributing anti-EU leaflets in the lead up to the vote.

The alignment in messaging became especially clear when Brussels announced a €15 million ($17.2 million USD) assistance package to support Armenia's democratic resilience and institutional reforms. Russian actors framed the funding as geopolitical intrusion. Azerbaijani actors echoed these claims, describing EU engagement as interference that risked undermining regional stability and complicating peace negotiations.

The DFRLab documented an escalation in disinformation tactics targeting Armenia over the course of 2025. The Russia-linked operation Matryoshka, which utilizes faux news websites, propagated AI-generated videos targeting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. At least ten videos used manipulated voiceovers and fabricated historical footage, including altered Holocaust survivor testimony, to accuse Pashinyan of authoritarian ambitions and violent repression.

As was the case in Moldova, certain domestic political actors participated in the laundering of Kremlin-aligned narratives. The independent Armenian news outlet EVN Report characterized Russia's disinformation approach as a domestically targeted, multi-layered information warfare campaign designed to destabilize Armenia in the wake of its Western pivot. According to EVN Report, Moscow's campaigns are aimed primarily at the Armenian public and rely on three principal mechanisms: Russian proxy groups operating within Armenia, diaspora factions aligned with those proxies, broader subversion efforts aimed at undermining trust in state institutions. They assessed that the information warfare surrounding the August 2025 Washington Accords exemplified this approach, with conspiracy theories, spurious analysis, speculative narratives, and coordinated talking points deployed in a synchronized manner. The campaign's am-

plification did not depend primarily on overt Kremlin bots or Russian social media personalities, but rather on Russia-aligned actors within Armenia and their counterparts in the diaspora, who functioned as the campaign's principal amplifiers.

Unlike Moldova, Armenia entered this period with fewer institutional mechanisms dedicated to countering disinformation. The Armenian government has made requests for EU assistance to strengthen cybersecurity, track illicit financial flows, and counter coordinated influence operations. The requests signaled a policy adjustment and recognition of the impacts of sustained external pressure.

Azerbaijan: Anti-Western narratives as regime defense

The key difference between Azerbaijan and the other three countries is that in Azerbaijan, anti-Western narratives are not reactive or deployed during uncertain periods, like elections. These messages are constant and state-driven, regardless of political development. Throughout 2024-2025, Azerbaijan used anti-Western narratives in three dimensions: to justify the repression against independent media and civil society, to camouflage Western engagement as interference, and to portray Western involvement in Armenia and Georgia as source of regional instability.

A November 2024 report on "hybrid attacks" surrounding Azerbaijan's hosting of COP29 accused Western governments and international organizations of attempting to destabilize Azerbaijan under the pretext of human rights advocacy. The report framed international scrutiny as coordinated intrusion into domestic affairs. With COP29 bringing increased international visibility, pro-government media characterized criticism from Western NGOs as politically motivated pressure designed to undermine the country's sovereignty during a high-profile global event.

Further, throughout 2024 and 2025, authorities detained independent journalists affiliated with outlets such as Meydan TV, charging them with financial crimes including smuggling and illegal entrepreneurship. Pro-government outlets framed these arrests as legitimate responses to foreign-backed destabilization efforts. They portrayed Western-funded organizations as conduits of interference, and independent journalists as participants in externally driven campaigns. Coverage by state-aligned outlets presented civil society engagement with Western actors as evidence of disloyalty. Azerbaijan's anti-Western narratives also intersected with regional electoral dynamics. During Georgia's October 2024 parliamentary elections, Azerbaijani state-linked media framed Georgian Dream's victory as a rejection of Western interference and a victory for regional stability. This framing aligned with Georgian Dream's own campaign messaging centered on "peace" versus "war." Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev was among the first leaders to congratulate Georgian Dream, reinforcing overlapping sovereignty narratives. Azerbaijani broadcasters highlighted support among ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia for Georgian Dream's position.

Additionally, Azerbaijani media repeatedly characterized EU engagement with Yerevan as destabilizing—a framing that aligned with Russian messaging. DFRLab research found that nearly every positive development in EU-Armenia relations prompted negative responses from both Moscow and Baku, with state-controlled media in Russia and Azerbaijan frequently amplifying each other's anti-Armenian and anti-EU rhetoric.

Chapter 2: Occupied and disputed territories

Historical events such as Russia's 2008 war in Georgia, separatist activity in Moldova's Transnistria region and autonomous Gagauzia, and Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 have ongoing impacts today, especially in shaping political narratives during elections. Territorial integrity and foreign occupation are significant issues that both domestic and international actors repeatedly exploit to sway public sentiment at critical times.

Georgia: Territorial reintegration as electoral leverage

Georgian Dream made the topic of Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia one of the central themes to its 2024 electoral narrative. In the months before the October parliamentary elections, the ruling party positioned itself as the only political force capable of restoring territorial integrity through pragmatic engagement with Moscow. The advancement of the narrative continued into 2025 as well. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze told government-affiliated Imedi TV in April 2025 that restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity could be achieved through "consistent policy and patience."

This narrative included reframing responsibility for Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia. Georgian Dream officials increasingly suggested that Georgia's previous government under then-President Mikheil Saakashvili, backed by Western actors, had initiated the August 2008 war. In September 2024, party founder and oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili went as far as suggesting that Georgians should apologize for starting the war. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, in an April 2025 interview with Izvestia, endorsed this framing, stating that diplomatic ties were cut after "Mikheil Saakashvili's government attacked South Ossetia, Russian peacekeepers, and Russia itself." Galuzin noted "positive signs" from Georgia's leadership, specifically citing Ivanishvili's apology speech.

Georgian Dream intertwined this narrative with broader anti-Western messaging. The party portrayed Western partners as having encouraged war in 2008 and as continuing to push Georgia toward escalation through sanctions pressure and security alignment. In contrast, the ruling party presented itself as a stabilizing force best positioned to negotiate pragmatically with Moscow. Georgian Dream promised gradual progress if voters delivered the party an overwhelming mandate.

Russia did not support Georgian Dream's reintegration narrative and, in practice, undercut it, even as both sides remained aligned on broader anti-Western messaging. Throughout the 2024 election cycle, Moscow reiterated its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, meeting with his de-facto South Ossetian counterpart in October 2024, "reaffirmed Russia's support for the region's independence" and praised the partnership as having "stood the test of time." In 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin met separately with the de-facto leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He promised continued cooperation across economic, humanitarian, and security sectors. Kremlin officials highlighted growing Russian tourism in Abkhazia and the reopening of Sukhumi airport, which had been closed for more than three decades.

The reopening of Abkhazia's main airport evidenced that Russia would not reconsider its approach towards the two occupied region. Despite Georgia's prior appeals to the International Civil Aviation Organization to keep the airport closed on security grounds, Russia proceeded with plans to resume flights. A test flight from Moscow to Sukhumi took place in February 2025, with regular connections announced soon afterwards. Former Georgian opposition MP Giorgi Kandelaki publicly argued that the airport could not have been re-opened without at least tacit acceptance from Tbilisi, pinning blame on Georgian Dream.

At the same time, Russia deepened its legal and administrative integration with the occupied territories. In May 2025, Putin signed a decree simplifying the acquisition of Russian citizenship for residents of Abkhazia

and South Ossetia, removing requirements such as permanent residence in Russia or Russian language proficiency. This reinforced a strategy of pursing long-term integration with Russia rather than reintegration with Georgia.

In Georgia's 2024-2025 electoral environment, the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia functioned as a strategic narrative bridge connecting anti-Western rhetoric, war-dragging narratives, and claims of Georgian Dream's unique negotiating capacity. While Georgian Dream positioned itself as the party that could restore territorial integrity through dialogue, Russia continued to consolidate infrastructure, citizenship, and diplomatic engagement with the occupation authorities, demonstrating that negotiations proceeded solely on Moscow's terms.

Moldova: Transnistria and Gagauzia as electoral pressure points

Moldova's separatist Transnistria and autonomous Gagauzia regions serve different electoral and rhetorical functions than Georgia's occupied regions. Russian actors and pro-Kremlin Moldovan politicians weaponized Transnistria and Gagauzia to amplify security fears and delegitimize President Maia Sandu's pro-European leadership during the October 2024 presidential election and EU referendum, as well as the September 2025 parliamentary election.

Transnistria, which has operated outside Chișinău's control since the early 1990s and currently hosts approximately 1,500 Russian troops, exploited war-dragging narratives throughout both electoral contests. Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued statements in the months before the October 2024 presidential election and referendum claiming that Western governments were conspiring to occupy Moldova and provoke conflict with Russia in Transnistria. Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels amplified these claims, warning that NATO was using military exercises as cover for initiating war and that Sandu was complicit in plans to forcibly resolve the Transnistrian conflict.

The Kremlin-aligned Telegram channels proved instrumental in spreading these narratives. They circulated posts claiming Romanian military exercises represented preparations for invasion, that NATO planned to use Transnistria as a pretext for occupation, and that Sandu had privately agreed to Western military deployment. This messaging followed a consistent pattern of identifying legitimate diplomatic or military activities—Romanian troop movements, NATO training exercises, and EU-Moldova security consultations—and recontextualizing them as evidence of initiating an eventual war with Russia.

The intensity of these claims increased heading into Moldova's September 2025 parliamentary elections. Coordinated messaging across multiple pro-Kremlin Telegram channels falsely claimed Romania was preparing a "lightning military operation" in Moldova. These channels alleged that Sandu had requested Romanian military support to suppress domestic protests and that Western powers would use post-election unrest as justification for military intervention. The language emphasized both speed and inevitability—a "lightning operation" that would leave Moldovans no time to respond—transforming Romania, a neighboring country with close linguistic and cultural ties to Moldova, into an imminent military threat.

Russian coercion regarding energy supplies provided additional narrative fodder. Moscow's reduction of gas supplies, particularly affecting Transnistria, created genuine economic hardship. Fugitive oligarch Ilan Shor and Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova exploited this crisis, framing it as a consequence of Moldova's European orientation rather than Moscow's coercive leverage. In February 2024, Transnistrian authorities issued an appeal to Moscow for "protection," claiming "increasing pressure from Moldova," which Chișinău dismissed as "propaganda." Russian media exploited this response to suggest Transnistria required Moscow's backing against a hostile central government.

Meanwhile, Gagauzia, an autonomous region with pro-Russian sentiments, provided a second pressure point for Kremlin interests. Local leaders, including former Governor Evghenia Gutul—sentenced in August

2025 for illegal campaign financing linked to Russian sources—played a central role in channeling anti-EU narratives and mobilizing protests against the central government in Chișinău. During the October 2024 presidential election, pro-Russian candidate Alexandr Stoianoglo secured more than 90 percent of the vote in Gagauzia, a result that pro-Russian media cited as evidence of deep regional opposition to President Sandu. Pro-Kremlin narratives capitalized on such results, portraying Gagauzia as oppressed by the Moldovan government and framing Russia as the champion of the region against a hostile central state, which it blamed for Gagauzia's economic and social hardships.

Armenia: Sovereignty, survival, and the 2026 elections

For Armenia, territorial integrity dominates political discourse in ways more immediate than in Georgia or Moldova. The loss of Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, after decades of conflict, two wars, and the displacement of more than 100,000 ethnic Armenians, created a political vulnerability that critics of Prime Minister Pashinyan exploit relentlessly.

At the December 2024 Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) summit, Putin dismissed Armenia's prior requests for collective defense. He argued that because Armenia had never recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of its territory, the alliance had no obligation to intervene, since there was no external aggression against Armenia itself. Pashinyan pushed back, clarifying that Armenia's request had not been about Nagorno-Karabakh but to defend against Azerbaijani incursions into Armenia's sovereign territory between May 2021 and September 2022. He pointed to Putin's remarks as evidence of the broader dysfunction within the CSTO. Russia's failure to deliver weapons purchased by Armenia for $400 million, a figure Armenia's Deputy Defense Minister Hrachya Sargsyan confirmed in December 2024, demonstrated for many in Yerevan that security guarantees from Moscow were unreliable.

Throughout 2025, Pashinyan continuously attempted to reframe the loss of Karabakh from defeat to liberation. In February, he introduced the notion of "Real Armenia," defining the country strictly within its internationally recognized borders and urging a shift from historical territorial claims to internal development. In June, addressing the National Assembly, he declared, "We have not lost Nagorno-Karabakh, we found the Republic of Armenia." He described the 2022 Prague Declaration—in which Armenia recognized Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan—as a historic turning point, arguing the Karabakh question had long served as "a noose" that prevented Armenia from achieving genuine sovereignty.

Russian state media portrayed Pashinyan's national reframing as capitulation. Izvestia claimed his willingness to amend Armenia's constitution and "abandon the Karabakh movement" represented a rupture with Armenian identity that could provoke revolution. RIA Novosti amplified warnings that unnamed promises from the US to Pashinyan would only "deceive" him, leaving Armenia destabilized. In August 2025, Topwar.ru called an Armenian Independence Day speech by Pashinyan an "absurd attempt by the Armenian leader to shift the blame for his foreign policy failures onto others." Meanwhile, Gazeta.ru ran the headline "Pashinyan tried to excuse himself for the refusal of Karabakh."

Notably, an ongoing conflict between Pashinyan and the Armenian Apostolic Church has become a primary domestic vector for these narratives. The rift has deep roots: since 2018, Pashinyan has clashed with the church, accusing it of corruption and obstructing political reforms. In 2024, church leader Catholicos Karekin II endorsed anti-government protests and called for Pashinyan's resignation, representing one of the most direct church interventions in Armenian politics since independence from the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Archbishop Bagrat Galstanyan led "Sacred Struggle" mass protests demanding Pashinyan's ouster. In June 2025, authorities arrested Galstanyan on charges of plotting a violent coup, alleging plans for bombings, shootings, and sabotaging infrastructure. Days earlier, security services detained Russian citizen and billionaire Samvel Karapetyan after publicly calling for the seizure of power. Authorities also arrested Archbishop Mikael Ajapahyan on similar charges after security forces clashed with crowds at the church's

headquarters in Etchmiadzin.

Russian state media immediately framed the arrests as religious persecution. On Rossiya 1, Kremlin propagandist Vladimir Solovyov defended Samvel Karapetyan as "a man of impeccable reputation," adding, "Armenians, remember who you are—a great Christian nation—they're taking away the last pillar of your existence, your church." Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of the Kremlin-owned platform RT, called Karapetyan "a true champion of all Armenians." The outlet Vzglyad warned Pashinyan "risks following the path of Mikheil Saakashvili," the former Georgian president that Russia blames for its 2008 invasion of Georgia. The sanctioned outlet News Front also weighed in, publishing the headline "Pashinyan establishes a dictatorship, starting with repressions against the church and opposition." Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated publicly that Russia "would not want to see the church come under attack."

The amplification of these narratives extended beyond Russian state media. American commentator Tucker Carlson repeated accusations that Pashinyan is waging a "war on Christianity." The sanctioned Russian military Telegram channel Rybar alleged that local elections in Echmiadzin were "part of an ongoing government campaign against the Armenian Apostolic Church." The Russian information operation Storm-1516, previously linked to the late Yevgeny Prigozhin, launched fabricated smear campaigns against Armenian officials including Parliament Speaker Alen Simonyan and the ex-wife of Prime Minister Pashinyan, Anna Hakobyan.

The peace process with Azerbaijan provided additional narrative fodder. Following the August 2025 signing of a US-brokered peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russian and pro-Russian actors intensified their attacks. Russian MP Alexei Zhuravlyov stated that "Pashinyan prioritizes his own comfort over Armenia's fate" and predicted he would "readily trade away Armenian national interests for a villa somewhere in Florida." Similarly, Margarita Simonyan claimed Pashinyan would "trade Armenia for a villa in California," calling him a "puppet sultan." Pro-Russian commentator Vladimir Bruter argued that "Pashinyan has already surrendered almost all of Armenia's interests and may surrender the remaining ones."

The June 2026 elections will test whether Pashinyan can survive these attacks. Armenia's two parliamentary opposition blocs—I Have Honour and Armenia (Hayastan)—attempted to trigger impeachment proceedings but lacked the numbers to initiate them. Meanwhile, Armenia has requested EU assistance to address what officials described as growing multimodal threats to democracy. In December 2025, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas stated that Armenian officials sought support similar to that provided to Moldova, focusing on cybersecurity, countering disinformation, and tracking illicit financial flows. Kallas identified Russia and affiliated actors as the primary sources of information manipulation targeting Armenia. Pro-Kremlin outlets immediately distorted her comments, presenting them as ultimatums for Armenia to impose sanctions against Russia.

Azerbaijan: Peace narratives as mechanisms of consolidation

Having militarily reclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, Azerbaijan used its victory to justify an expanding information campaign against Western institutions, independent media, and Armenia's European integration, framing each as threats to the country's sovereignty and territorial consolidation.

The EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia (EUMA) became one of the primary targets. In March 2023, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova alleged that EUMA was spying on Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan from Armenian territory, contributing to regional "tensions." Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev echoed this framing, accusing EUMA of engaging in "binocular diplomacy." In March 2024, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the mission of becoming a "NATO mission" due to personnel from Norway, Canada, and the United States. Six months later, Aliyev repeated the claim almost verbatim, stating that Canadian representatives had transformed EUMA into a NATO operation.

DFRLab analysis revealed that Russian and Azerbaijani media published similar numbers of articles about EUMA on specific days, peaking at the time of Zakharova's remarks. This pattern reflects aligned messaging interests between Moscow and Baku regarding Armenia's Western partnerships.

Azerbaijani pro-government outlets amplified and localized these narratives. In March 2025, Caliber.az—part of Global Media Group, which also operates Oxu.az and Baku TV—published an article titled "European observers caught spying in Azerbaijan's Zangilan and Lachin directions." Baku TV, Oxu.az, and Azad Azerbaijan TV republished the report, labeling EU mission members as "spies." In April 2025, Azerbaijan's parliamentary commission against foreign interference held a hearing titled "Hybrid attack called 'peace mission' in the South Caucasus."

Allegations of spying extended to domestic targets. In February 2025, Baku TV—a pro-government internet channel that has more YouTube views than any other local channel—published a video labeling Toplum TV journalists as intelligence agents, citing their use of Signal and aliases as evidence. This narrative aligned with broader government messaging framing Azerbaijan's civil society and independent media as a foreign backed "spy network." The government subsequently suspended BBC Azerbaijan, revoked Voice of America's accreditation, and detained journalists from Meydan TV and Abzas Media on espionage-related charges.

Baku even turned espionage narratives against Russia when convenient. In January 2025, Baku TV broadcast an episode titled "Russian house, or Russian intelligence house?" labeling Russia's Rossotrudnichestvo cultural center in Azerbaijan as a "spy house." In response, Rossotrudnichestvo head Yevgeny Primakov threatened to sue. Both countries summoned each other's ambassadors in a public rupture demonstrating Azerbaijan's willingness to weaponize espionage narratives against any actor.

Ultimately, Azerbaijan's territorial victory in Nagorno-Karabakh was used by Baku in multiple dimensions to shape county's information environment, including legitimizing domestic repression and pressuring Armenia's Western partnerships.

Chapter 3: Online vectors

Each country has a different digital landscape, and these differences shaped how foreign and domestic actors exploited platform-specific vulnerabilities, often reinforcing each other's narratives across borders.

Georgia: Facebook dominance

Facebook remains Georgia's dominant platform for domestic political discourse. Georgian Dream and its affiliated media exploited this dominance through coordinated advertising campaigns, inauthentic amplification networks, and AI-generated content.

DFRLab analysis of Facebook ads published between June 1 and October 20, 2024 identified 257 ads promoting Western interference narratives across five Georgian Dream-affiliated pages. These pages ranked among the top spenders in Georgia in Meta's Ad Library during the campaign period. The ads consistently used keywords like "external," "agents," "revolution," "coup," and "destabilization" to reinforce claims that Western governments planned post-election unrest. Ad frequency spiked on July 25 and September 15—dates following US Congressional hearings critical of Georgian Dream's trajectory away from democracy.

Meta has repeatedly removed networks linked to Georgian Dream. In 2019 and in 2020, Meta took down an inauthentic networks linked to Georgian Dream and affiliated personnel. In early 2023, Meta removed hundreds of Facebook assets linked to the Georgian Dream-led government's Strategic Communications Department. In August 2024, Meta removed a Russia-originating network targeting Georgia that posted about protests against the foreign agents law while expressing support for Georgian Dream.

In addition to exploiting online ads, government-affiliated media attempted to discredit pro-democracy protests by sharing an AI-generated image depicting a gay couple kissing at a protest, an effort to reinforce the traditional family values narrative. Other discreditation attempts included an apparent AI-generated photo claiming a detained pro-democracy protesters threw Molotov cocktails, and an image falsely claiming to depict an armed protester, when it in fact showed an individual holding a camera tripod.

Various actors also utilized Facebook groups. A Facebook group called "Anti-Maidan," created early October 2024 and later removed, included administrators from Georgian Dream, POSTV, and Georgian Dream-linked public servants. The name referenced Ukraine's 2013-14 Euromaidan revolution, framing Georgia's pro-European protests as a Western-orchestrated repeat of Ukraine that would lead to war and national destruction. The branding migrated across platforms: a Telegram channel originally named "we should know our censors," created during the 2023 foreign agents law protests to disseminate activists' private data, rebranded to itself "Anti maidan!" but continued targeting protesters.

Russian actors operated parallel infrastructure exploiting the same topic. NewsFront, a Russian disinformation platform linked to Russian intelligence services, ran a Georgian Telegram channel promoting narratives of a Western-organized "coup" during elections. The "Pravda" network, formerly known as "Portal Kombat," launched two Georgian-targeting websites during the 2024 pre-election period, publishing more than one thousand articles.

Meta's January 2025 decision to replace third-party fact-checking with Community Notes created additional vulnerability in Georgia. Georgian Dream immediately exploited Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg's statement that "fact-checkers have just been too politically biased." Imedi TV shared a visualization featuring the quote alongside logos of Georgian fact-checkers MDF and GRASS. Parliament Speaker Papuashvili cited Zuckerberg's remarks to justify the foreign agents law, alleging the organizations "received millions from foreign governments." Meta's policy shift, intended to address domestic US political dynamics, provided authoritarian actors in Georgia with justifications to delegitimize factchecking and research communities.

X, formerly known as Twitter, also serves as a platform for Georgian officials seeking to influence foreign audiences. Parliament Speaker Shalva Papuashvili used the platform to attack visiting EU delegations, accuse Baltic states of ingratitude, and justify crackdowns on civil society. Russian operations also targeted foreign audiences to shape international perceptions of Georgian politics on X. The DFRLab identified a Doppelganger network—a Russia-linked operation specializing in fake websites—on X in June 2024 that targeted US users with content discrediting protests against the foreign agents law. The operation amplified interviews with representatives of Russia-linked Georgian parties, pushing the narrative that the US covertly organizes protests—the same claim deployed by Georgian Dream officials domestically.

Moldova: Multi-platform saturation

In addition to pro-Russian and Russia-linked domestic actors, Moldova's 2025 parliamentary elections faced at least four documented Russia-linked operations, including Storm-1516, Operation Overload, REST Media, and InfoLeaders. Collectively, these campaigns generated at least 136.1 million views, 3.79 million interactions, and leveraged accounts with 17.7 million followers—numbers that dwarf Moldova's domestic population 2.4 million people.

Telegram, which lacks robust moderation or transparency mechanisms, functioned as a command-and-control hub. Between July and September 2025, OpenMinds identified 462 bot-like accounts that posted more than 62,000 comments across 253 channels—roughly 12.8 percent of all comments on those channels. Approximately 95 percent of bot comments were unique posts, indicating AI-assisted generation rather than simple copy-paste activity. Some accounts produced thousands of comments under individual posts; one account published 2,815 comments under a Sandu-related post. Language analysis showed 75 percent of these accounts were simultaneously active in Ukrainian and Russian Telegram spaces, strongly suggesting external coordination.

TikTok also emerged as an important influence vector. Operation Overload migrated to TikTok in May 2025, using thirteen newly created accounts to seed videos that garnered 30,000 shares and nearly 3 million views, suggesting artificial boosting by distributing videos via a network of coordinated accounts, likely using engagement farming to exploit the platform's algorithm. REST Media, linked to the sanctioned Rybar Telegram network, generated 3.11 million views from just eleven original posts and eight articles, with TikTok accounting for almost all visibility. Moldovan authorities requested blocking of 443 TikTok channels totaling 1.2 million followers and 4.5 million views, however, approximately 95 of the flagged content remained online after TikTok rejected most of their requests.

The paid-influence network InfoLeaders recruited Moldovan citizens to distribute anti-government messaging for financial rewards via Promsvyazbank, a sanctioned Russian defense-linked bank. The network utilized at least 253 accounts coordinated across TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, generating more than fifty-five million views across 28,000 pieces of content. It targeted multiple demographics, including younger TikTok users, older Facebook audiences, and diaspora communities on Instagram.

Storm-1516 and Operation Overload utilized multiple platforms for amplification purposes. Storm-1516 disseminated at least seventeen fabricated articles via thirteen fake websites and thirty-nine accounts across X, TikTok, and Telegram, generating an estimated 59 million views—though engagement patterns suggest significant inauthentic activity to influence platform algorithms. At least seventy-five inauthentic Overload accounts spread Moldova-related content on Bluesky between April and June 2025 before platform suspension.

Narratives across these operations converged on anti-EU framing that portrayed European integration as domestic loss of sovereignty, security fear-mongering about NATO expansion and war, and personal attacks against President Sandu, who faced the most aggressive gender-based smear campaigns among all

Overload targets in 2024-2025, including deepfakes and incitement to violence.

Religious networks served as an additional influence vector. The DFRLab-documented Matushka network operated through Orthodox parishes, church-affiliated youth groups, and coordinated social media channels on Facebook, TikTok, and Telegram, blending religious content with political messaging.

Armenia: Coordinated cross-platform operations

Armenia's information environment faced documented operations from Russia-linked actors, with Russian and Azerbaijani state media frequently amplifying aligned narratives. DFRLab investigations identified multiple coordinated campaigns employing media impersonation, multilingual dissemination, and cross-platform amplification ahead of the June 2026 parliamentary elections.

Telegram serves as one of the primary distribution vectors for anti-Pashinyan content. As reported by the DFRLab, the Storm-1516-linked Russian Foundation to Battle Injustice (R-FBI) published fabricated claims about US biolabs testing "toxic military grade steroids on Armenian women, children and the disabled." The story directly accused Prime Minister Pashinyan of approving these experiments on Armenian citizens for financial profit and to curry favor with European states, framing his Western pivot as a betrayal of his own people. The content spread rapidly across Telegram. Within ten minutes of initial posting, content was reshared across multiple channels; some channels amplified the same claim twice from different sources. The Pravda network subsequently published the biolab story on Telegram in seven languages, including Russian, English, German, Spanish, Polish, Armenian, and French.

X served as an amplification vector for a disinformation campaign targeting France-Armenia relations. In June 2025, a fabricated story accused France's state-owned nuclear company Orano of secretly shipping depleted uranium waste to Armenia for storage in Dilijan National Park, a protected biosphere reserve. The narrative originated from CourrierFrance24.fr—a fake website impersonating France 24 that used AI-generated content and falsely listed a legitimate journalist as author. The inauthentic story also alleged that the foundation of Pashinyan's ex-wife, Anna Hakobyan, received a suspicious €1.6 million ($1.8 million USD) donation from a French shell company following the supposed deal—linking the prime minister's pro-Western orientation to personal corruption. The DFRLab identified coordinated inauthentic behavior through replies targeting French politicians that appeared in batches within minutes of each other, with volumes strongly suggesting automation. Azerbaijani state news agency Azertac subsequently cited Courrier-France24 as a legitimate source, publishing the nuclear waste story in three languages, while the Azerbaijani NGO coalition Environmental Protection First framed the fabricated waste dumping as "ecological warfare against Azerbaijan."

The Russia-linked operation Matryoshka expanded its efforts to target Armenia in June 2025, flooding X and TikTok with AI-generated videos accusing Pashinyan of downplaying the 1915 Armenian Genocide. Content spliced unrelated footage to fabricate condemnations of Pashinyan, then falsely presented it as coming from Euronews, France 24, and Turkish outlet Yeni Şafak. The tactic of media impersonation took place across multiple operations targeting Armenia.

Azerbaijan: State-aligned operations targeting foreign audiences

Azerbaijan operates the most controlled information environment among the four countries, with documented operations targeting both domestic and international audiences. DFRLab investigations revealed coordinated campaigns linked to supporters of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), employing copy-paste tactics, hashtag manipulation, and cross-platform coordination.

X served as the primary platform for operations targeting international audiences. During Azerbaijan's January 2024 suspension from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the DFRLab

identified a coordinated copy-paste operation: 146 unique posts were shared 16,834 times by 1,619 accounts between January 24 and January 26. One text featuring photos of PACE delegation members with accusations of lobbying for Armenia was shared 9,145 times. Seventy-five accounts mentioned YAP in their bios. Analysis revealed posts containing phone numbers and timestamps suggesting instructions were distributed to users—text starting with an Azerbaijani phone number and "ÖS" (Turkish for "P.M.") appeared across sixty-six identical posts featuring President Aliyev's photo and YAP logos.

An operation in May 2024 demonstrated similar tactics at scale. When protests erupted over French voting reforms in the territory of New Caledonia, Azerbaijani accounts launched a campaign targeting French authorities. France's counter-disinformation agency VIGINUM attributed the activities to supporters of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), noting that one account was tied directly to a YAP consultant with a party email address. DFRLab analysis of relevant hashtags including #BoycottParis2024, #RecognizeNewCaledonia, and #EndFrenchColonialism found more than seven thousand mentions, with traffic manipulation analysis indicating suspicious coordination levels. The operation employed synchronized posting (identical content posted simultaneously by different accounts), hashtag hijacking using unrelated tags to increase visibility, and infrastructure linked to Doppelganger domains previously flagged by VIGINUM. Notably, the DFRLab found 951 accounts participated in both the anti-PACE and New Caledonia campaigns—demonstrating persistent infrastructure reused across operations. Most accounts that mentioned YAP in their bios have since been suspended.

Domestic and international narrative symmetry is characteristic of these campaigns. Pro-government outlets such as APA.az, Trend.az, Report.az, and Oxu.az published narratives that X accounts subsequently amplified internationally. During the PACE suspension, domestic media framed the assembly as "Islamophobic," a "puppet of Germany and France," and being under the influence of the "Armenian lobby." X accounts spread identical messaging to international audiences, creating coordinated domestic-foreign amplification cycles.

The documented operations reveal a consistent pattern of pro-government domestic media outlets establishing narratives that a coordinated network of X accounts then amplifies to international audiences. This dual-track approach enables Azerbaijan to conduct offensive information operations abroad—targeting European institutions like PACE or exploiting crises like New Caledonia—while its domestic information ecosystem maligns independent journalists and civil society as foreign agents who threaten national security. The overlap of nearly one thousand accounts across both operations points to a shared infrastructure designed for reuse across campaigns.

Patterns and implications

The four countries examined in this report reveal common patterns as well as significant divergences in how information environments were shaped around electoral contests and how they absorb and deflect foreign influence and domestic amplification.

Convergent patterns

Across all four countries, the "Ukrainization" frame acted as a geographically flexible threat. Russian officials, state media, and aligned domestic actors deployed warnings that Western alignment would replicate Ukraine's fate: war, territorial loss, and national destruction. This frame proved adaptable; in Georgia, it justified Georgian Dream's rejection of EU integration; in Moldova, it anchored vote-buying messaging and post-election delegitimization; in Armenia, it framed Pashinyan's Western pivot as a betrayal of national security interests. The narrative's power lies in its flexibility; it can be activated regardless of a country's actual proximity to the war.

A second pattern concerns the instrumentalization of territorial disputes. In each case, unresolved or recently resolved territorial questions could be exploited for narrative leverage. Georgian Dream promised reintegration through dialogue with Moscow while Russia deepened administrative control over occupied regions. Pro-Kremlin actors in Moldova weaponized Transnistria and Gagauzia to amplify security fears. Russian and Azerbaijani media exploited Armenia's loss of Nagorno-Karabakh to portray the prime minister as a capitulator. Azerbaijan leveraged its territorial victory to justify repression of journalists and pressure on Armenia's Western partnerships. These territorial questions remain active instruments that can be mobilized during future elections, when political stakes are highest.

Third, consistent platform exploitation facilitates the aforementioned behaviors. Telegram functioned as command-and-control infrastructure across operations targeting Moldova and Armenia, enabling rapid coordination with minimal accountability. TikTok's algorithmic vulnerabilities and content policies were exploited for reach, with the platform rejecting the majority of removal requests from national authorities. Facebook remained dominant in Georgia, where domestic actors exploited advertising systems and inauthentic amplification. X served dual purposes: Georgian and Azerbaijani officials used it to reach foreign audiences, while Russian operations used it to shape international perceptions of domestic politics in each of the four countries.

Divergent configurations

The key variable across the four case studies was the relationship between state actors and anti-Western narratives. This relationship determined whether information manipulation was a governing tool or an interference instrument.

In Georgia, the ruling party adopted and operationalized frames traditionally associated with Russian state media. Georgian Dream's anti-Western rhetoric became indistinguishable from Kremlin messaging on key subjects, such as the "global war party" or Western-orchestrated coups, or threats from European integration. This exemplifies how foreign interference and domestic manipulation reinforce each other.

Moldova presented the inverse configuration. The government actively resisted pro-Russian and Russia-linked operations while Russian and aligned domestic political actors drove the messaging. Institutional resistance—through government agencies, international partnerships, and direct engagement with platforms – attempted to respond to and prevent interference efforts.

Anti-Western narratives in Armenia developed from sustained external pressure from Russia and Azerbaijan in the period between the 2023 loss of Nagorno-Karabakh and the approach of 2026 parliamentary

elections. Domestic opposition figures selectively amplified similar frames, but the government itself pursued Western partnerships while requesting EU assistance to counter information manipulation.

In Azerbaijan, anti-Western narratives served as regime defense. Unlike the other three cases, these narratives were not primarily activated in response to electoral uncertainty. They were permanent instruments for legitimizing domestic repression, depicting Western engagement as hybrid attack, and signaling regional positioning.

Global dynamics, local refraction

Each country's elections intersected with global dynamics that were refracted through local narratives. Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine provided the meta-frame: warnings of "Ukrainization," "war-dragging" and "second fronts" drew their power from an ongoing war visible to all audiences. Platform governance decisions made in the United States shaped the information environment in Georgia as Meta's January 2025 policy shift on factchecking was immediately weaponized by the government to delegitimize Georgian researchers.

The US-brokered Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement in August 2025 demonstrated how diplomatic developments generate new narrative cycles. Russian and pro-Russian actors intensified attacks on Prime Minister Pashinyan within hours, framing the agreement as a surrender of Armenian interests. Global events are immediately processed through existing narrative structures and actor networks.

Strategic implications

The foreign-domestic information manipulation continuum complicates traditional frameworks for identifying and attributing interference. When domestic ruling parties adopt foreign narratives, when domestic opposition figures amplify external pressure, and when coordinated operations blur the line between foreign and local actors, responses calibrated for purely external threats are insufficient.

Platform accountability remains inadequate. The asymmetry between national oversight capacity and platform responsiveness was made evident after Moldovan authorities flagged hundreds of TikTok channels, yet they remained accessible with no action taken against them. Influence operations generating over 136 million views—in a country of 2.4 million people—proceeded with little friction. The documented operations exploited platform-specific vulnerabilities: Telegram's opacity, TikTok's algorithmic amplification, Facebook's advertising systems, and X's diminished transparency mechanisms. Until platforms are subject to meaningful accountability in these markets, the operations will remain difficult to detect and easy to sustain.

The 2026 Armenian elections will test whether the patterns documented in this report persist or evolve. Armenia has requested EU assistance similar to what Moldova received; whether that support arrives in time and at sufficient scale will help shape the information environment around the vote. The lessons of Moldovan elections will be relevant as tactics previously seen in Moldova have been documented in Armenia as well.

Amid geopolitical pressure, unresolved territorial issues, and platform ecosystems that reward manipulation, these countries remain vulnerable to information manipulation, though in some cases as targets and in other cases as drivers.

Atlantic Council