



SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING 2018 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

FIRST INTERIM REPORT



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Social Media Monitoring

2018 Presidential Election

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of information technologies, social media has become a strong instrument for shaping political opinions and holding public debates. As the number of social media users and influence of social media platforms grows, political parties, candidates and activists rely more on social networks for disseminating their ideas, programs and opinions.

Out of many different social platforms that are available more and more people in Georgia turn to Facebook to receive and disseminate information. Facebook has also become one of the most large-scale platforms for election activity, greatly influencing the electoral environment and largely determining voter behavior.

Monitoring of the election campaign of the 2017 parliamentary elections illustrated that Facebook was used not only by political actors for dissemination of their election programs and ideas and for discussions, but also for discrediting individual candidates by spreading false and damaging information, in an organized and targeted manner. Throughout observation it also became evident that in addition to discrediting different electoral subjects, social media is also successfully used for bypassing legal restrictions on political financing and campaigning established by the electoral legislation.

In light of these, ISFED found it was important to monitor social media in the election context for the 2018 presidential election, because without observing and evaluating influences of social media, comprehensive evaluation of the electoral process is impossible.

Effects of social media on elections has drawn a lot of interest worldwide only recently, after evidence about possible outside meddling in Brexit referendum, in the U.S. presidential election in 2016, and in elections and referenda of European countries using social media was disclosed.

Up until now, international and domestic observer organizations essentially overlooked social media monitoring and evaluation of how social media affects elections. This is first of all related to the fact that there is no unified, time-tested methodology for social media monitoring, unlike in the case of monitoring traditional media using qualitative and quantitative components. Before the presidential election campaign was launched, ISFED developed a special methodology for systemic evaluation of different types of activities on Facebook related to elections.

In this way, ISFED is a pioneer of social media monitoring and its work helps introduce methodological approaches to systemic evaluation and monitoring of social media effects in the context of elections.

II. METHODOLOGY

ISFED began social media monitoring on August 29, when the election campaign officially commenced. At this stage, ISFED monitors only Facebook activity since Facebook is especially popular among different social media platforms in Georgia.

Generally, the scope of observation of social media monitoring by ISFED contains the following three layers:

- I. Monitoring of direct electoral activity and violation of electoral legislation on Facebook;
- II. Monitoring of attempts to discredit electoral subjects, political and electoral processes, possibly with the aim of influencing voter attitudes;
- III. Monitoring divisive value based narratives, which have become active in the election context.

This interim report covers only the first and the second layers of monitoring, including the following four areas studied by ISFED:

1. Activities of Facebook pages of presidential candidates, parties that nominated these candidates and official campaign pages, and their compliance with legislation;
2. Campaigning by local self-government civil servants on Facebook;
3. Monitoring of official Facebook pages of local self-government and Ajara A/R bodies.
4. Activity of Facebook pages set up primarily for discreditation purposes, their tactics and main messages;

Monitoring of official Facebook pages of presidential candidates, political parties and election campaigns aims to evaluate compliance of campaign conducted by parties and candidates using social media with requirements of the law, to identify instances of violation of campaigning rules, misuse of administrative resources, and to monitor spread of xenophobic, homophobic, anti-Western and anti-liberal, nationalistic messages in narratives of electoral subjects. To this end, ISFED studied 19 pages that are actively involved in the pre-election campaign, representing main candidates and political parties that nominated these candidates.

Monitoring of campaigning by local self-government civil servants entails analysis of their personal Facebook posts that are public and related to campaigning in favor of or against any electoral subject. In this regard, the organization is monitoring 664 civil servants of 65 municipalities, who are holding important or key positions. These individuals were selected by ISFED long-term observers (LTOs) that are monitoring pre-election processes in municipalities.

Monitoring of official Facebook pages of local self-government and Ajara A/R bodies aim to evaluate the extent of misuse of administrative resources by pages funded by the budget and the extent of their involvement in election campaign of electoral subjects.

Monitoring of pages operating for discreditation purposes aims to monitor anonymous Facebook pages that are working to discredit specific candidates and parties. ISFED was monitoring anonymous pages that aim to instill negative sentiments about presidential candidates, parties and political processes. A total of 54 discrediting pages were studied. They were grouped according to different strategies that target candidates and political processes. The report analyzes main messages spread by these Facebook pages and number of users reached by their activity.

For effective implementation of the project, based on the ISFED methodology a tool for monitoring and analyzing social media – Fact-a-lyzer was created. It allows collecting public posts on Facebook, grouping them under different categories, and analyzing the information. The software development stage was overseen by an international expert from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

The monitoring is conducted through specially trained observers.

This report summarizes first interim evaluation of trends identified by the social media monitoring for the 2018 presidential election. ISFED continues to monitor social media in election context and it will publish two more – interim and final reports based on the analysis of information collected through the monitoring.

III. KEY FINDINGS

Over the recent years Facebook has become one of the most important platforms of political activity in Georgia. During the election period, social media is rigorously used for election campaigning and influencing voters. As political parties and presidential candidates are becoming more active on social media, organized campaign-like attempts to discredit electoral process, electoral subjects, different actors and political processes in general are becoming more frequent. Amidst growing influence of social media on electoral process, ISFED is implementing a pilot project of social media monitoring for the 2018 presidential election.

The monitoring of 19 official pages of presidential candidates, political parties that represent/support them and official campaign pages on Facebook, within the period from August 29 to October 9, indicates that their activity entailed mainly advertising own election platforms, criticizing competitors and publishing election promises. Xenophobic statements and hate speech was detected on Facebook pages of a few candidates. Interestingly, candidates/parties tended not to use their official social media pages for discrediting opponents, with the only exception of Strength in Unity campaign page that often publishes photo manipulations discrediting Salome Zourabichvili and the party that endorsed her candidacy – the Georgian Dream. A post published on p/u Girchi's Facebook page about bookmaking regarding elections contained signs of violation of the election law. ISFED subsequently filed a complaint with the electoral administration.¹

ISFED did not find any instances of misuse of administrative resources on official Facebook pages of municipalities and Ajara A/R bodies during pre-election period, which is commendable. The only exception was Facebook pages of Ninotsminda Municipality and Tbilisi City Hall, which published Salome Zourabichvili's campaign materials. We also welcome the fact that number of posts published by these websites did not change during the electoral campaign period; instead, their activity was stable.

Local self-government civil servants were actively engaged in campaigning on their personal social media accounts in favor of the candidate endorsed by the ruling party. The monitoring from August 29 to September 4 found that 42 civil servants employed by 29 municipalities participated in campaigning during working hours, which amounts to violation of the law. 51 civil servants employed by 26 municipalities engaged in campaigning outside of working hours. Civil servants became active in election campaigning from September 9-10, after the Georgian Dream declared its support for Salome Zourabichvili. From this point on, civil servants started to frequently share campaign posts with the aim of expressing their support only for Salome Zourabichvili. Interestingly, from the very same period civil servants more frequently started sharing posts that discredited opposition parties and presidential candidates.

Activity of anonymous Facebook pages operating for the primary purpose of discrediting specific candidates, politically active individuals and ongoing political or legal processes is especially striking. These pages have a well-formulated organized strategy focusing on use of propaganda methods to influence public opinion. These pages are disseminating different contents and multimedia materials in an attempt to harm reputation of candidates/parties, political figures or civil society organizations that they target. The vast majority of these posts are sponsored in order to reach wide audience.

As the pre-election period began, activity and number of pages created to discredit candidates and parties that have nominated/endorsed them grew significantly. Most of their names contain negative and obscene phrases. In addition, posts that these pages publish contain obscene and cynical terms and hate speech. Almost all main presidential candidates are targeted by similar pages, however pages operating to discredit Salome Zourabichvili/Georgian Dream, Grigol Vashadze/UNM and Davit Bakradze/European Georgia are especially active. ISFED explicitly underlines that obscene names of the pages in this report are for the purpose of reporting and should not in any way be perceived as ISFED's endorsement of their messages or the content of these pages.

Many of discrediting pages that target Salome Zourabichvili have been created following the 2012 parliamentary elections, and up until now their primary targets included Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Georgian Dream and the government policies. After the ruling party announced its support for Salome Zourabichvili in the presidential election, she became the target of the discreditation attempts. Nearly half of Facebook pages operating for the sole purpose of discrediting Salome Zourabichvili were set up in the pre-election period of the 2018 presidential election.

¹ ISFED complaint and CEC decision: <https://sachivrebi.cec.gov.ge/info.php?id=7157>

Two-thirds of pages that operate for the purpose of discrediting Grigol Vashadze and the United National Movement were created right before the 2018 presidential election. Several pages were created earlier, in connection to the 2016 parliamentary elections and 2017 local self-government elections. Pages working to discredit Grigol Vashadze also target Mikheil Saakashvili, the UNM and Rustavi 2 TV.

Facebook pages targeting Grigol Vashadze and Salome Zourabichvili accuse both candidates of advancing Russia's interests.

Messages against Davit Bakradze are radically different. Some pages refer to him as the force controlled by Bidzina Ivanishvili, while others try to make him seem like part of the United National Movement.

Posts on pages operating to discredit Zurab Japaridze and Davit Usupashvili contain anti-liberal and xenophobic phrases and hate speech, directed against political ideology of these candidates.

In addition to electoral subjects, the vast majority of discrediting Facebook pages aim to discredit political processes, civil activists and opinion leaders as well. These pages discredit opposition party leaders and supporters on the one hand and on the other hand, they target individuals and organizations that criticize the government.

During the pre-election period, campaigns waged against NGOs through anonymous Facebook pages became an intensive trend. These campaigns became active following verbal attacks of high-level government officials on observer organizations and their leaders. Amidst government's aggressive rhetoric, the discrediting pages became active and started disseminating or sponsoring obscene, sarcastic and undermining posts against NGO leaders.

Photo and video materials published by the discrediting pages suggest use of similar multimedia technologies, indicating that a single organized group can be the source of their creation.

IV. FACEBOOK ACTIVITY OF CANDIDATES AND PARTIES

To observe social media activity of electoral subjects, ISFED monitored 19 official Facebook pages² of main presidential candidates, political parties that have nominated/endorsed them and campaign pages. As of October 25, these pages have been liked by a total of **1,157,905** Facebook users and as of October 25 they have published **5,542** posts.

The present report summarizes monitoring of campaigning by these pages **from August 29 to October 9**.

Majority of candidates and parties are disseminating their political views and programs on official Facebook pages and majority of this activity does not contain any illegal actions or promises, with the only exception of Girchi and Zurab Japaridze. The latter spread calls about bookmaking regarding elections, which was in violation of the law as betting about election results is prohibited by Georgian Election Code.

On official Facebook pages of candidates and parties, mostly there are no multimedia photo and video manipulations that discredit other parties and candidates, which is entirely different from tactics of pages that operate to discredit electoral subjects. The only exception is the campaign page of the association of opposition parties Strength in Unity, which often publishes posts that are intended to mock Salome Zourabichvili.

It should be noted that significant portion of the election campaign of the presidential candidates Shalva Natelashvili and Kakha Kukava on Facebook is focused on spreading xenophobic statements and hate speech.

Xenophobic messages of Shalva Natelashvili

- Right after he becomes president, [migration from Iran and Arab world](#) will stop.
- Visa-free regime with Iran will be [abolished](#).
- If he becomes president, he will introduce certain [protective measures](#) for Georgian products and place restrictions on importing agricultural products from abroad.
- He will abolish the [unfair competition](#) with products imported from Turkey and Iran, which according to him, puts Georgian Farmers at a disadvantage and “allows Ivanishvili to sell these products in Carrefour”.
- He criticizes the fact that “Clock in Batumi [airport](#) displays time in Turkey”. If he becomes president, he will end the Turkish colonial domination at Tbilisi Airport, he will break the contract and turn Tbilisi International Airport into an international hub.

Xenophobic and homophobic messages of Kakha Kukava’s campaign

- Georgia without [immigrants](#).
- He thinks that unless restrictions are placed on the [flow of migrants](#) from Turkey, Arab countries, Pakistan, etc. in the 21st century Georgia may simply disappear.
- He [criticizes](#) Guram Kashia for wearing a rainbow armband. According to him, saying that LGBT armband and rainbow signifies nothing but the idea of equality is an attempt to deceive people.

² Facebook pages of the Georgian Dream and Salome Zourabichvili: [Georgian Dream](#); [Salome Zourabichvili](#); [Salome Zourabichvili](#); Facebook pages of the European Georgia and Davit Bakradze: [European Georgia – Movement for Freedom](#); [David Bakradze](#) Facebook pages of the United National Movement, Grigol Vashadze, united opposition Strength in Unity and its members: [United National Movement](#); [Gregory Vashadze](#); [Strength in Unity](#); [New Georgia](#); [National Democratic Party of Georgia](#) Facebook pages of Girchi and Zurab Japaridze: [Zurab Japaridze](#); [Girchi](#) Facebook pages of Free Democrats, Movement for Building and Davit Usupashvili: [Free Democrats](#); [Development Movement](#); [David Usupashvili Official](#) Facebook pages of Free Georgia and Kakha Kukava: [Kakha Kukava](#); [Free Georgia](#); Facebook pages of the Labor Party and Shalva Natelashvili: [Labour Party](#); [Shalva Natelashvili](#)

V. ACTIVITY OF OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGES OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

ISFED monitored **98** Facebook pages of city halls and assemblies of all self-government municipalities and Ajara A/R bodies.

The reporting period is **June 1 – October 18**. The purpose of the duration of the monitoring period is to analyze activity of municipality Facebook pages before and after the election was called.

The monitoring revealed that activity of official Facebook pages of municipalities is not related to launch of the electoral processes. Their activity did not increase after the date of Election Day was set or as the election campaign officially began.

During the period from June 1 to October 18, municipality pages were especially active on September 17 and 27. Posts published on September 17 were related to the first day of school year, and on September 27 information about the day Sokhumi fell was published.

ISFED welcomes the fact that official Facebook pages of local self-governments were distributing information about municipality work and activities, with the aim of keeping public informed, and these pages were not used in support of or against any electoral subject.

It is also positive that municipality pages were not disseminating any information about political party activities or any information that political parties publish.

Official Facebook pages of Ninotsminda Municipality Assembly and Tbilisi City Hall are the only exception. Information about public meeting of the independent candidate endorsed by the ruling party, Salome Zurabichvili in Ninotsminda was published on the official page of Ninotsminda Municipality Assembly. Interestingly, this page operates in the form of a personal account, instead of official Facebook page. In addition, on September 27 photos of the event that took place by the Heroes Monument in Tbilisi to commemorate the fall of Sokhumi were posted on the official Facebook page of Tbilisi City Hall. The photos featured Salome Zourabichvili.

Misappropriation of public resources for personal interests

The monitoring found instances of misuse of Facebook pages of municipalities in Imereti region for personal interests. On September 16, thirteen pages of municipalities of Imereti region shared a [post](#) from the Facebook page of Kutaisi Mayor Giorgi Chighvaria. In this post, Chighvaria stated that a report aired by Rustavi 2 about the mayor's portrait painted at an exhibition in Italy was "inaccurate information" and "a targeted attempt of the opposition to mislead public." According to the report, Kutaisi budget funded a painter to participate in an exhibition in Milan, where portrait of the mayor was exhibited.

The said post of Giorgi Chighvaria has been shared by Facebook pages of the following municipalities:

1. Kutaisi Municipality Assembly
2. Kutaisi Municipality City Hall
3. Terjola Municipality City Hall
4. Sachkhere Municipality City Hall
5. Zestaponi Municipality City Hall
6. Kharagauli Municipality City Hall
7. Kharagauli Municipality Assembly
8. Samtredia Municipality City Hall
9. Samtredia Municipality Assembly
10. Tskaltubo Municipality City Hall
11. Chiatura Municipality City Hall
12. Zestaponi Municipality Assembly
13. Khoni Municipality City Hall

VI. MONITORING OF PERSONAL FACEBOOK PROFILES OF CIVIL SERVANTS

From August 29 to October 4, ISFED studied public campaign posts published on personal Facebook profiles of 664 civil servants employed by local self-government bodies. Civil servants engaged in such activity both within and outside of working hours.

Interestingly, civil servants became active after the Georgian Dream officially endorsed Salome Zourabichvili (September 9) and after presidential candidates were assigned electoral numbers (September 10). In the days that followed, civil servants started frequently sharing campaign posts that supported only one candidate – Salome Zourabichvili. After this period (September 10), civil servants also started publishing more discrediting posts targeting opposition parties and presidential candidates.

ISFED detected violation of the rule about prohibition of campaigning for civil servants during working hours in 29 municipalities. Campaign materials in favor of and against presidential candidates and parties that have nominated/endorsed them was published on Facebook accounts of 42 civil servants.

Para.⁸ of Article 2 of the Election Code of Georgia defines campaigning as “appeal to voters in favor of or against an electoral subject/candidate, as well as any public action facilitating or impeding its election and/or containing signs of election campaign, including the participation in organization/conduct of pre-electoral events, preservation or dissemination of election materials, work on the list of supporters, presence in the representations of political parties.” Under para.4 “h” of art.45 of the Election Code of Georgia, civil servants are prohibited from conducting and participating in election campaigning during working hours.

The restriction placed on civil servants in terms of conducting and participating in pre-election campaigning is based on the principles of the Law of Georgia on Civil Service, requiring civil servants to abide by the principle of impartiality and political neutrality. A civil servant is prohibited from using his/her official status for advancing party (political) goals and/or interests, to participate in election campaign during working hours and/or while performing his/her official duties. In addition, according to the OSCE Copenhagen Document, which underlines the need to draw a line between the state and a political party, party activities should not be mixed with activities of the state.

Municipalities where employees (civil servants) engage in campaigning during working hours

Municipality	Number of illegal campaigning cases	Civil servants that violated campaigning rule
Akhalkalaki	2	Manuchar Mikeladze – chief specialist of educational resource center Armen Marganozian – deputy mayor
Akhmeta	1	Badri Pilashvili – head of the primary structural unit
Baghdati	1	Kakhaber Enukidze – head of the city hall administration
Gardabani	1	Revaz Egadze – deputy mayor
Dmanisi	1	Badri Subari – first deputy mayor
Zugdidi	2	Maizer Nanava – acting mayor (when the post was published, he was holding the office of deputy mayor) Magdalena Todua – head of the secondary (second rank) structural unit at the public relations department of the city hall
Tetritskaro	1	Lasha Kurdiani – head of the property management division at the city hall
Telavi	2	Gia Gigiashvili – head of the internal audit of the city hall Vazha Leshkasheli – head of the department for coordination of mayor’s representatives
Kaspi	2	Thea Khorbaladze – head of the department of culture, monuments protection, education, sports and youth affairs of the city hall Dali Korkomashvili – head of the public relations department of the city hall

Lagodekhi	2	Giorgi Mchedlishvili – head of the administration service of the city hall Mamuka Sulakvelidze – representative of the mayor in Ninigori community
Lanchkuhti	1	Maguli Kunchulia – head of the administrative and procurement office of the city hall, chair of the civil servants trade union
Ozurgeti	1	Germane Chanukvadze – head of the department of informational, analytical and technical support of the city hall
Samtredia	1	Levan Akhobadze – head of the city hall social services
Senaki	1	Zaza Murghulia – assistant of Assembly Chair
Sighnaghi	1	Boris Inashvili – inspector of architecture and construction
Tkibuli	1	Sophio Bochorishvili – deputy mayor
Kareli	2	Ilia Kelekhsashvili – assistant to the mayor Mary Arkhoshashvili – deputy mayor
Keda	2	Gurami Beridze – deputy mayor Davit Tedoradze – head of the office of social affairs and healthcare
Kvareli	3	Giorgi Lursmanashvili – office of infrastructure, spatial arrangement, monuments protection, construction and architecture Givi Chakhnashvili – department of coordination of mayor’s representatives Givi Zautashvili – deputy mayor
Shuakhevi	1	Omar Takidze – deputy mayor
Chokhatauri	1	Givi Antidze - specialist
Chkhorotsku	1	Zviad Grigolia – head of the administrative office of the city hall
Khobi	1	Varaz Gabedava – first deputy mayor
Khoni	1	Ilo Kuparadze – head of the city hall infrastructure office
Khulo	1	Lasha Bolkvadze – deputy mayor
Rustavi	1	Lasha Chopliani – head of the first structural unit of the internal audit office of the city hall
Poti	2	Daviti Jgerenaia – head of the architecture and supervision office of the city hall Levan Chochia – head of the city hall office of tourism development
Kutaisi	3	Giorgi Iobashvili – deputy mayor Zviad Javakhia – head of the city hall office of supervision Beka Kurashvili – head of the city hall office of infrastructure development, improvement and cleaning
Tbilisi	2	Irma Zavrashvili – Gamgebeli of Didube District Maia Badashvili – head of the department for development of associations of apartment owners in Nadzaladevi District Gamgeoba

Civil servants often publish political campaign posts on their personal accounts during non-working hours and on weekends as well. In some cases, campaign posts were shared minutes after working hours were over. Instances of publishing political campaign posts during non-working hours were found in **26 municipalities**. ISFED detected **51 civil servants** who published campaign materials of presidential candidates and parties that have nominated/endorsed them at least once outside of working hours, in the period from August 29 to October 4.

Posts published by civil servants employed by local self-governments are in support of or against a particular electoral subject. Civil servants engage in campaigning only in favor of the p/u Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia and the candidate that they endorse – Salome Zourabichvili, and mostly against Grigol Vashadze and the UNM. Some posts were targeting the European Georgia and their presidential candidate Davit Bakradze but such posts were less frequent.

VII. DISCREDITING PAGES ON FACEBOOK

There are anonymous pages on Facebook in Georgia that operate for discrediting candidates, political parties, leaders, politically active individuals and generally, current political process. During monitoring, ISFED detected 54 discrediting pages and it is monitoring their activity. The present chapter summarizes findings of the monitoring of the discrediting pages from **June 1 to October 18**.

Interestingly, sponsoring of posts is used to influence and control public attitudes towards ongoing political processes and to disseminate discrediting information targeting certain candidates. This warrants particular attention because financial resources are spent in order to distribute content targeting electoral subjects. Any calls against electoral subject amounts to campaigning, while use of financial resources for campaigning must be disclosed as prescribed by law. This is monitored by the State Audit Office (SAO). Since discrediting pages on Facebook are mostly operating anonymously, expenses for sponsoring their posts are not disclosed and therefore, these expenses are not subject to monitoring as prescribed by law. This means that financial expenses made for sponsoring the posts amount to illegal donation under the Georgian legislation.

From elections point of view, anonymous pages are clearly targeting main presidential candidates and parties that have nominated/endorsed them. Their activities are orderly and organized - specifically, they concurrently distribute and sponsor discrediting posts with similar content and format. Such pages target almost all main candidates, however pages operating to discredit Salome Zourabichvili/Georgian Dream; Grigol Vashadze/UNM and Davit Bakradze/European Georgia are especially active.

Mainly, pages that directly target presidential candidates were created in 2018, after presidential candidates were nominated, while pages targeting political parties existed before that; however their creation dates also mostly coincide with election years. Facebook pages created for discrediting the Georgian Dream were also discrediting Salome Zourabichvili during the current election period.

There are many pages that target not only specific candidates and parties but also aim to instill certain attitudes in public regarding ongoing political processes. For instance, a page titled [“Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s Team”](#) was created with the aim of discrediting Kvirikashvili when he resigned from the office of the Prime Minister and the ruling party started criticizing him publicly.

Similar tactics are employed by anonymous Facebook pages for waging campaigns against NGOs. For instance, after 13 NGOs issued a statement about secret audio recordings related to the scandal of Omega Ltd., indicating systemic corruption and informal rule, the ruling party started attacking NGOs. Following in the footsteps of the government’s aggressive rhetoric against NGOs and their leaders, anonymous pages became active and started disseminating and sponsoring obscene, humiliating and discrediting posts against NGO leaders.

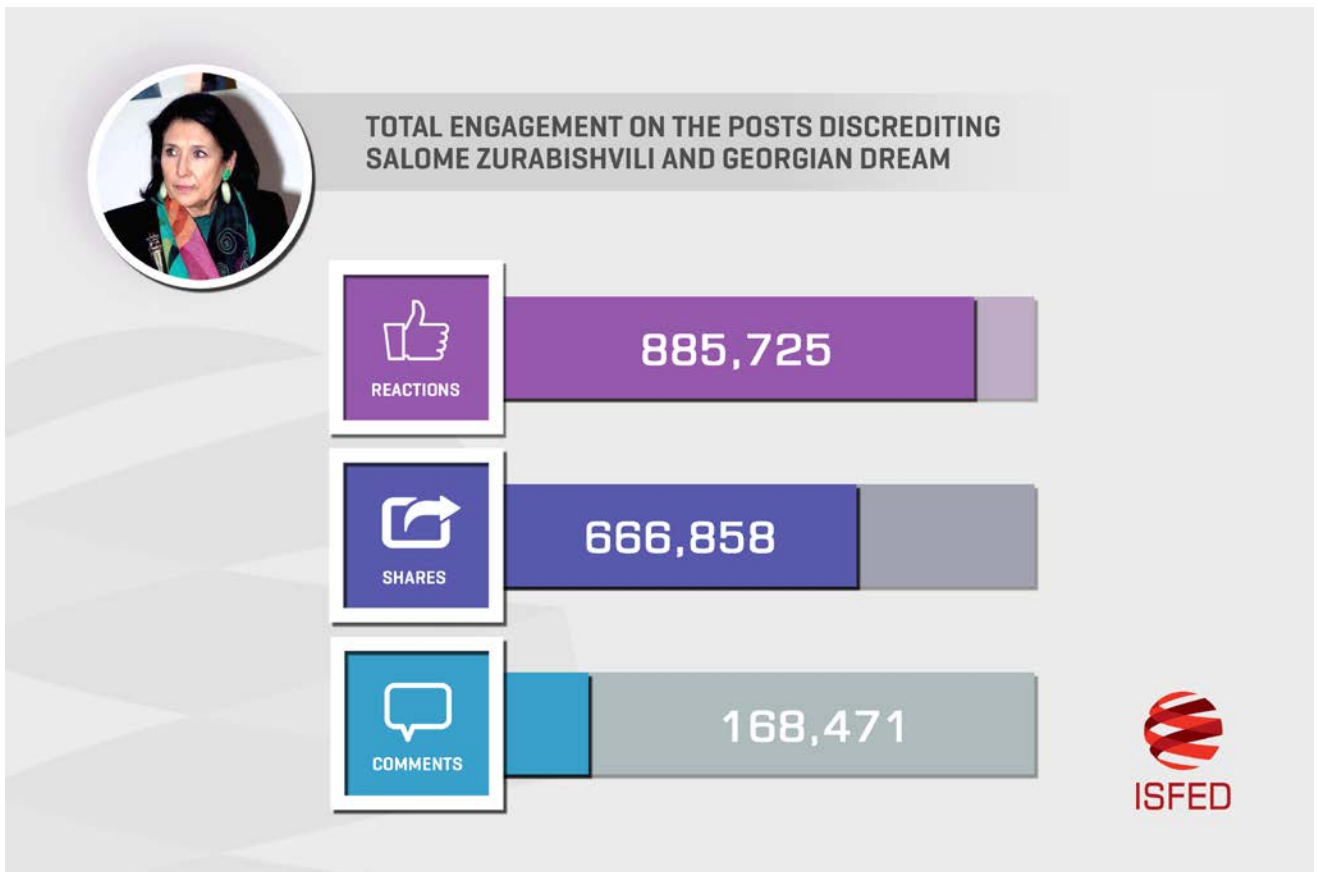
7.1. Pages targeting Salome Zourabichvili and the Georgian Dream

ISFED has found 26 Facebook pages that aim to discredit the independent presidential candidate endorsed by the Georgian Dream, Salome Zourabichvili.

Out of 26 pages, 14 were created soon after the October 1, 2012 parliamentary elections and their goal used to be to discredit the Georgian Dream. Remaining 12 pages were created as the 2018 presidential election cycle began.

These 26 pages are liked by a total of 452,572 people.

From June 1 to October 18, these pages shared a total of 10,538 posts.



Public engagement with posts published by pages targeting Salome Zurabishvili and the party that has endorsed her candidacy – the Georgian Dream, which includes number reactions, comments and shares (June 1 – October 18)



DISCREDITATION OF SALOME ZURABISHVILI AND GEORGIAN DREAM

DATE OF CREATION	NAME OF THE PAGE	PAGE LIKES	NUMBER OF POSTS
18.05.2013	God, Hit Us With A Stool	127,972	950
08.07.2014	Official Agency of Making Fun of Dreamers	111,682	1,829
11.11.2014	Society Society 2030-2032	42,668	378
08.12.2012	Free Zone	35,826	509
04.08.2015	Wise Dreamer	34,997	567
28.09.2013	I'm Meeting Mikheil Saakashvili In Georgia	17,297	730
02.09.2016	Stop Bidzina	11,220	742
09.11.2015	Dreamer Nazi	10,993	5
24.10.2012	Cool Guy's Abbey	7,955	146
05.02.2018	Department of Fighting Against Bullshit	6,388	317
DELETED IN OCTOBER	Support of Mikheil Saakashvili	5,974	42
16.05.2018	People vs. Ivanishvili	5,812	103
27.06.2018	Political Trash	4,765	212
21.08.2014	Political Vector	3,586	1,318
09.08.2018	Resident Salome	3,407	65
01.12.2012	Official Agency of Making Fun of Dreamers 2	2,992	1,283
31.07.2018	Resolution	2,725	48
04.04.2014	Generation Killed by Georgian Dream	2,696	188
16.07.2018	Power Is In People	2,603	142
09.03.2013	April 19 Official Agency of Making Fun of Dreamers	2,223	380
10.06.2011	New Government of Georgia	1,828	19
22.06.2018	Butt Worms	1,685	9
12.09.2018	Wise Salome	1,241	23
25.09.2018	Salome's DICKtionary	1,168	4
10.09.2018	Game of Sololaki	1,134	55
11.11.2015	Sonder Brigade of dreamers	140	3



Facebook pages discrediting Salome Zourabichvili and the Georgian Dream, their creation dates, number of page likes and number of posts (June 1 – October 18)

Messages used to discredit Salome Zourabichvili and the Georgian Dream

In the beginning of the election cycle, discrediting messages of Facebook pages studied by ISFED targeted the Georgian Dream and Bidzina Ivanishvili, and after the ruling party officially endorsed Salome Zourabichvili, messages were changed and transformed into the campaign against Salome Zourabichvili.

Main messages:

- In the beginning of the electoral period, the pages mostly used election promises made by the Georgian Dream leaders in 2012, and commented that these promises were not fulfilled. They mostly used statements like “Olygarch’s B.S.”. These posts contained various video and photo manipulations.
- As Zaza Saralidze and Malkhaz Machalikashvili continued to protest on Rustaveli Avenue, number of posts with the following main message started growing: “the state is laughing at and ridiculing parents whose children have been killed.”
- Following her speeches and television interviews within the election campaign, Zourabishvili is discredited for her poor command of Georgian language. The pages are focusing on her use of some words out of context, mispronouncing some words or speaking improper Georgian, which often are criticized through use of obscene forms or satirical cartoons.
- After declaring her support for the bill registered in Parliament about cultivation of marijuana, number of discrediting statements about Salome Zurabishvili increased. Photo manipulations are frequent.
- Often and in different contexts Zourabichvili is mocked for her run to Tbilisi Marathon after giving an interview.

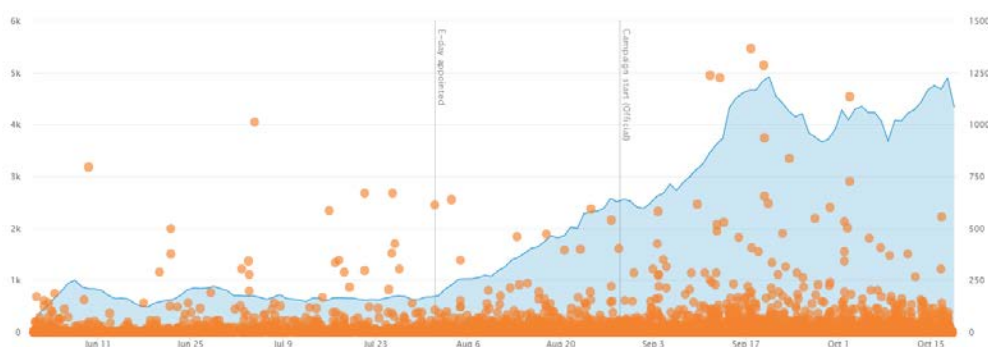
Ties with Russia

- After Salome Zourabichvili registered as a presidential candidate and the ruling party officially endorsed her and, also, after she gave interviews for the first time as a presidential candidate, speaking about the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, these pages started using messages aimed at making her look like a candidate that advances Russia’s interests. Messages of these posts include: “Putin instructed Ivanishvili to support Salome Zourabichvili”; “No to traitor Salome”; “do not vote for the traitor”, etc.

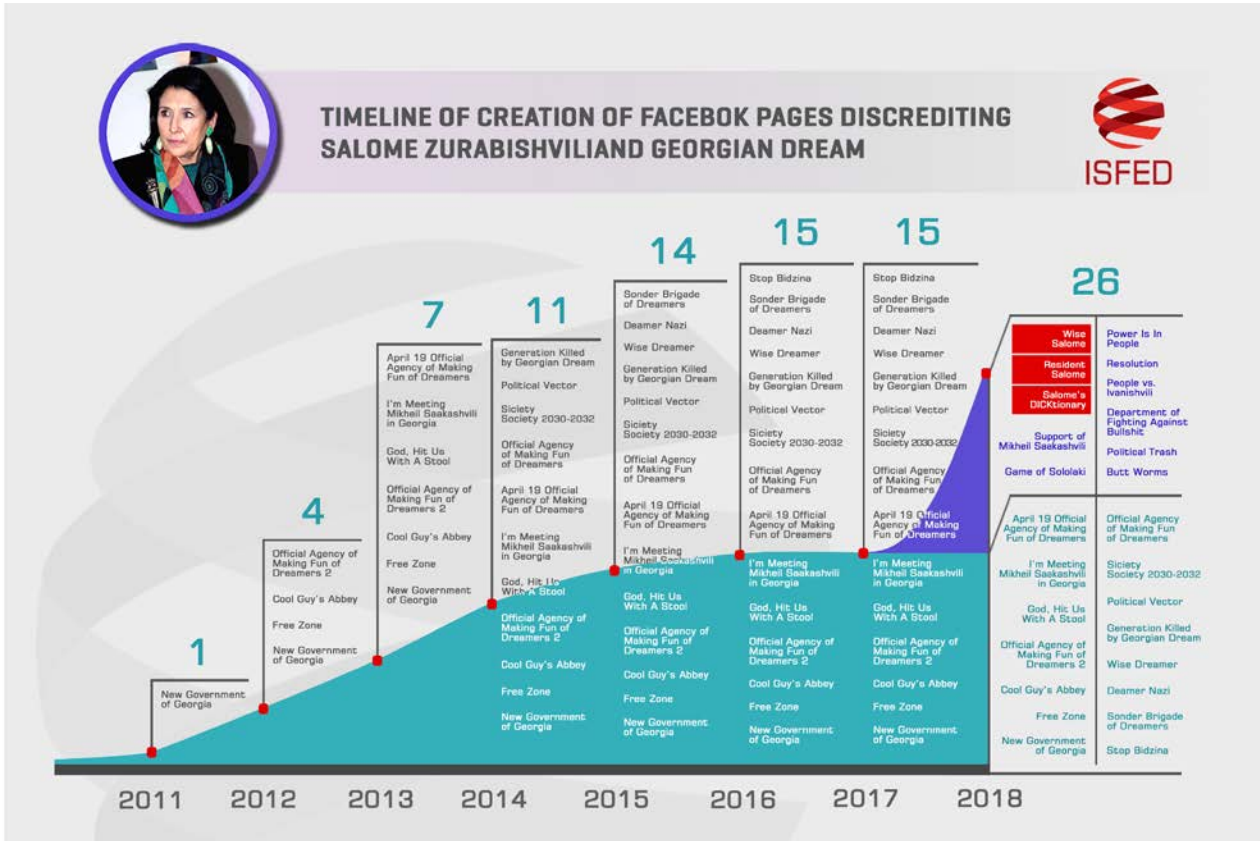
Speculation using personal life

- With the aim of discrediting Zourabichvili some pages mention her marriage to Janri Kashia and strained relationship with her brother.

Pages that discredit Salome Zourabichvili and the Georgian Dream often publish video and photo manipulations with the aim of insulting and mocking the candidate, leaders of the party and Bidzina Ivanishvili.



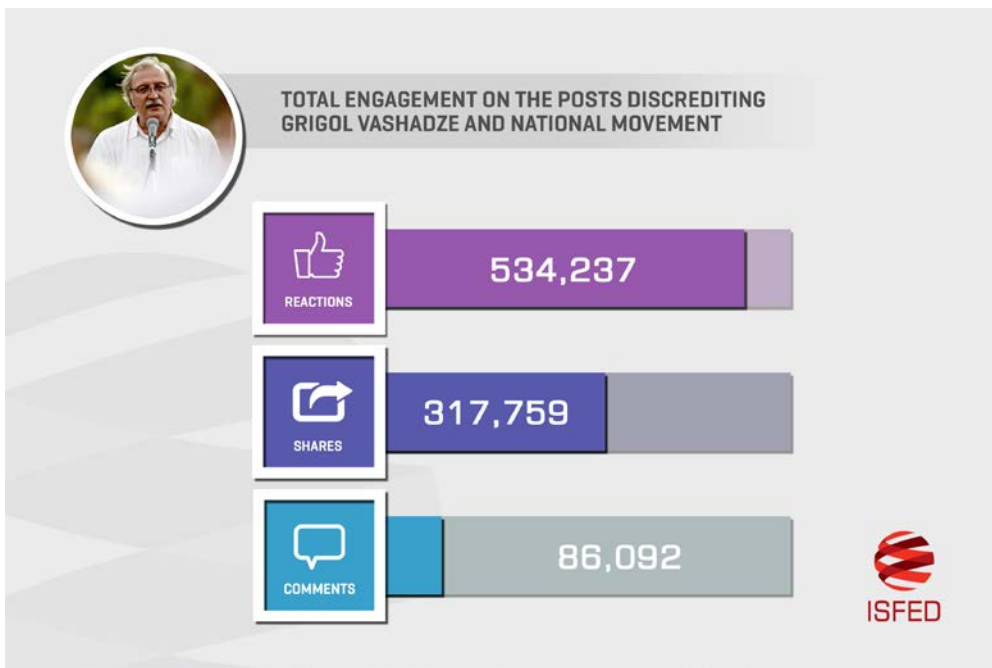
Activity of pages that discredit Salome Zourabichvili and the Georgian Dream: dynamics of the number of posts (in blue) and their ratings (in orange)



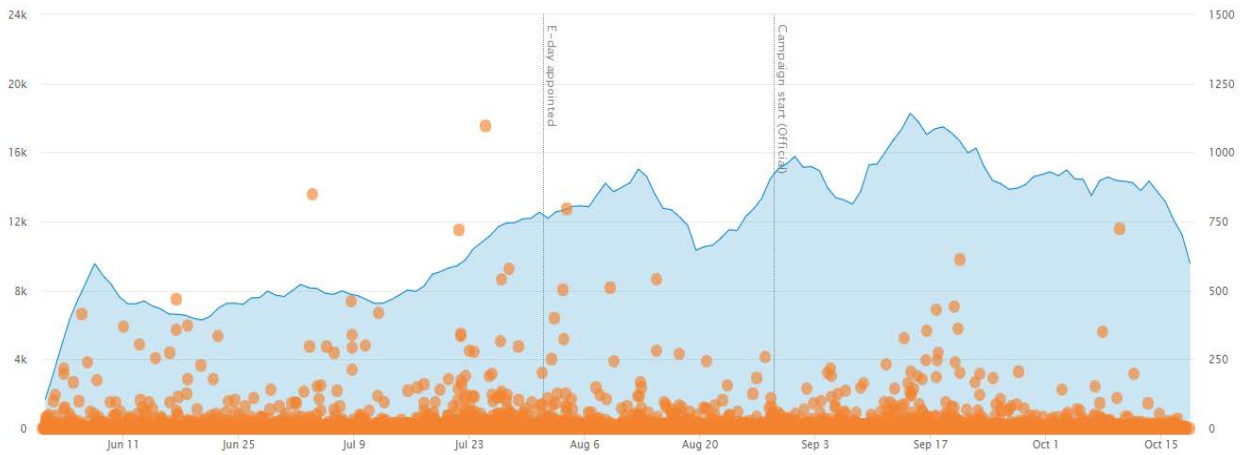
Dynamic of growth of the number of pages that discredit the Georgian Dream and Salome Zourabishvili, according to their creation dates (pages created in the current election period for discrediting Salome Zourabichvili are marked in navy blue)

7.2. Pages targeting Grigol Vashadze and the UNM

ISFED has found 27 pages on Facebook that operate to discredit Grigol Vashadze and the UNM. These pages are liked by a total of **403,417** people and they published **4,766** posts from **June 1 to October 18**.



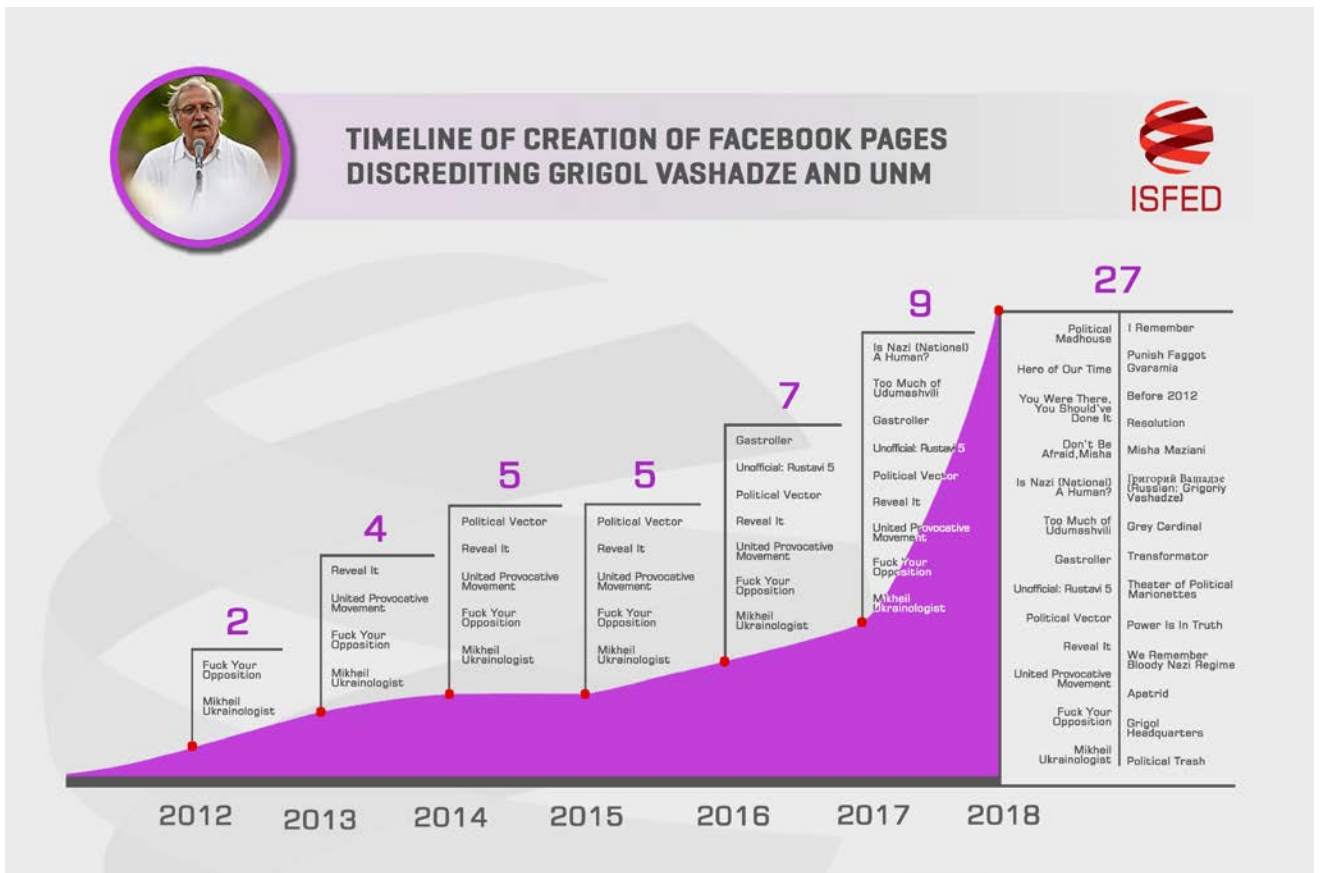
Public engagement with posts published by pages targeting Grigol Vashadze and the UNM, which includes number of reactions, comments and shares (June 1 – October 18)



Activity of pages that discredit Grigol Vashadze and the UNM – dynamics of the number of posts (in blue) and their ratings (in orange)

Vast majority of pages targeting Grigol Vashadze and the UNM were created in 2018, as the election processes began. Interestingly, pages registered earlier were created before the campaign period began for the 2016 parliamentary and the 2017 local self-government elections.

These pages mostly target Mikheil Saakashvili, the UNM and their presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze. Majority of these pages also discredit all organizations or public persons criticizing the government.



Dynamic of growth of the number of pages that discredit the UNM and Grigol Vashadze, according to their creation dates.



DISCREDITATION OF GRIGOL VASHADZE AND NATIONAL MOVEMENT

DATE OF CREATION	NAME OF THE PAGE	PAGE LIKES	NUMBER OF POSTS
15.08.2012	Mikheil Ukrainologist	131,252	682
05.10.2016	Gastroller	44,114	254
27.04.2013	United Provocative Movement	41,052	41
05.11.2012	Fuck Your Opposition	34,892	56
16.02.2016	Unofficial: Rustavi 5	26,972	33
27.06.2017	Too Much of Udumashvili	19,650	35
11.07.2017	Is Nazi (National) A Human?	18,004	319
12.09.2018	Don't Be Afraid, Misha	13,022	13
02.03.2018	You Were There, You Should've Done It	12,047	415
02.04.2018	Hero of Our Time	11,985	196
16.05.2013	Reveal It	7,977	34
22.04.2018	Political Madhouse	7,457	104
08.07.2018	I Remember	7,422	115
27.06.2018	Political Trash	4,765	212
20.07.2018	Grigol Headquarters	4,284	94
04.06.2018	Punish Faggot Gvaramia	3,942	201
21.06.2014	Political Vector	3,586	1,318
08.08.2018	Before 2012	2,728	69
31.07.2018	Resolution	2,725	48
02.07.2018	Misha Maziani	1,474	47
25.09.2018	Григорий Вашадзе (Russian: Grigoriy Vashadze)	760	35
22.09.2018	Grey Cardinal	613	9
17.06.2018	Apatrid	437	8
12.06.2018	Transformator	333	10
01.10.2018	Theater of Political Marionettes	240	10
28.08.2018	We Remember Bloody Nazi Regime	75	26
14.08.2018	Power Is In Truth	62	129



Facebook pages discrediting Grigol Vashadze and the UNM, their creation dates, number of page likes and number of posts (June 1 – October 18)

Main messages used to discredit Grigol Vashadze and the UNM

Main messages discrediting Grigol Vashadze and the UNM are mostly related to the propaganda against Mikheil Saakashvili, Grigol Vashadze, the UNM, Rustavi 2 TV and Nika Gvaramia.

Interestingly, these pages feature discrediting, insulting and obscene posts as well as homophobic and xenophobic content.

Posts that contain different types of messages outlined below are usually sponsored.

Main messages

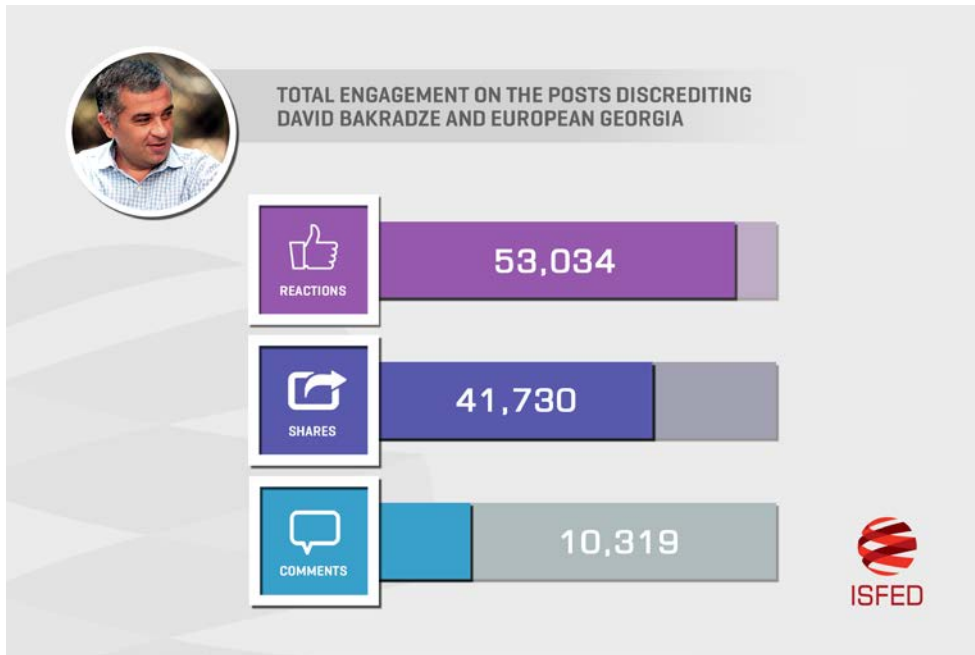
- Videos [discussing](#) torture of prisoners during the UNM government. Videos and photos showing torture of prisoners, and messages linking these facts to Mikheil Saakashvili, the UNM and their high-level officials.
- Mocking and making caricatures of Mikheil Saakashvili, posting videos of [Saakashvili's meetings](#) with captions that suggest he was under the influence of drugs, using photo and video manipulations about “running away from the war” and “chewing a tie”.
- Disseminating [photos](#) about crackdown of rallies when the UNM was in power, and linking them to Grigol Vashadze using the following messages: “I’ve missed the crackdowns, I’ve missed blood in the streets of Tbilisi, and if you’ve missed it too and if you want to be assaulted like this, then you should absolutely vote for Grigol Vashadze.”
- [Mocking](#) Grigol Vashadze for his pre-election promises, according to which he plans to [pardon](#) Saakashvili, Merabishvili and other political prisoners.
- Alleging that [Koba Khabazi](#) and [Petre Tsiskarishvili](#) are urging people to get weapons and fight if Salome Zourabichvili wins, without indicating source of this information.
- [Alleging](#) that Merabishvili released a statement from prison in which he [threatens](#) to make Salome Zourabichvili’s supporters “pay with their own blood.”

Ties with Russia

- After Grigol Vashadze was registered as a presidential candidate, number of posts that aim to make the UNM and Grigol Vashadze look pro-Russian increased. [Videos](#) made with footage from 2008 are used to indicate that then-members of the UNM were allegedly [well-disposed](#) towards Russia.
- [A message](#) that the UNM members signed a Council of Europe resolution about the Russo-Georgian war. According to the posts, the resolution says that bombing of Tskhinvali by the Georgian militaries on August 7 led to the conflict escalation.
- Posts about [participation](#) of Grigol Vashadze’s spouse Nino Ananiashvili and Georgian National Opera Theater in an event in Kremlin on January 25.
- Focusing on the fact that Vashadze studied and worked in Russia, his ties with the KGB, etc. Posting photos alleging that Vashadze has a certificate of a KGB officer.
- Focusing on the fact that Vashadze used to hold Russian citizenship, indicating that during eight months following the war he kept his Russian citizenship while also serving as a minister of foreign affairs of Georgia.
- Vashadze’s [interviews](#) in Russian, where a journalist asked him about the time Saakashvili [carried] held Nino Ananiashvili in his arms.
- Old [interviews](#) of Vashadze where he says that he is part of the Russian culture. His professional life is cited to underline that he has ties with Russia.

7.3. Pages targeting Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia

ISFED found 7 pages that target Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia. These pages have been liked by a total of **25,538** people, and they published **630** posts from **June 1 to October 18**.

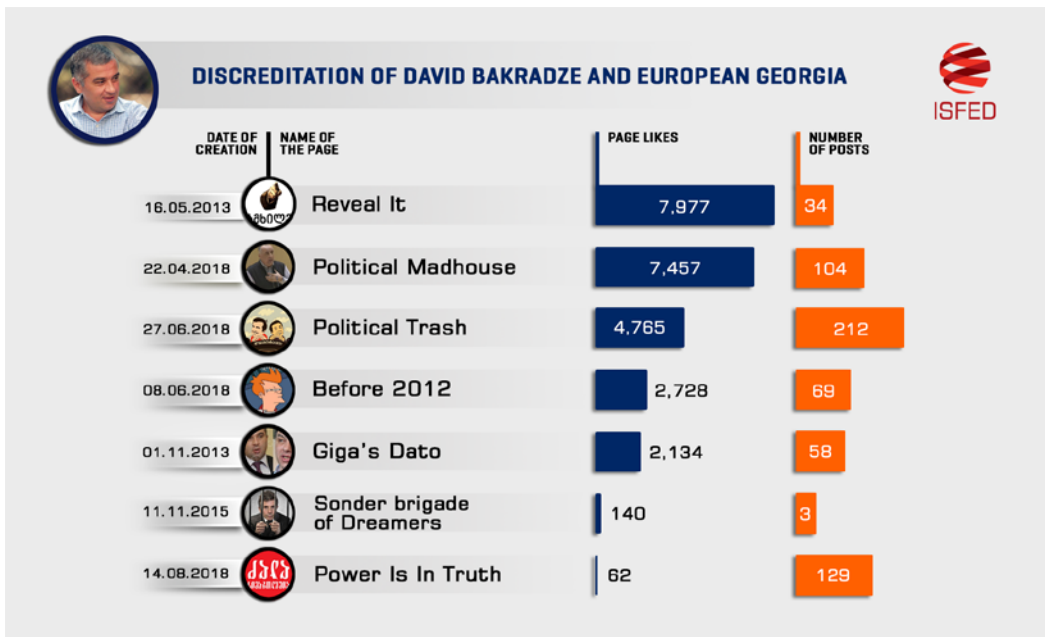


Public engagement with posts published by pages targeting Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia, which includes reactions, comments and shares (June 1 – October 18)

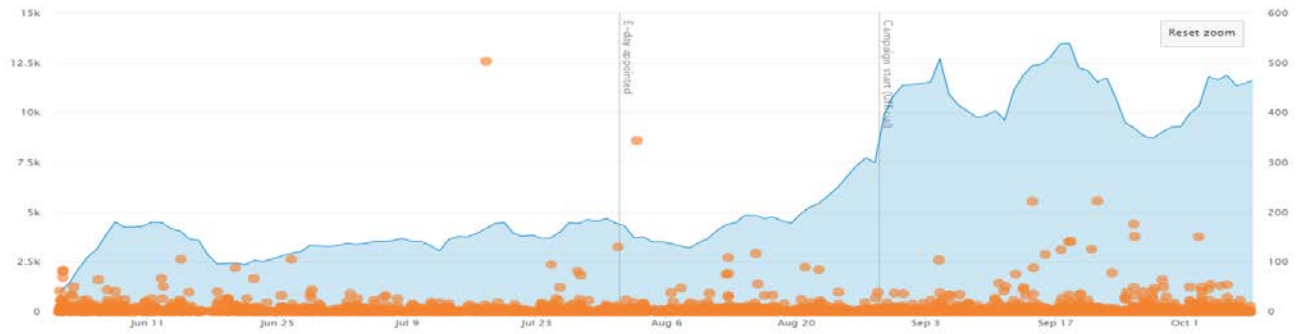
Strategy of groups operating to discredit Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia is different. Some pages engage in propaganda to make Bakradze and the European Georgia seem like a satellite of the Georgian Dream, while others aim to identify them with Saakashvili and the UNM.

Certain pages that target Grigol Vashadze also attack Bakradze and the European Georgia.

Vast majority of discrediting posts are sponsored.



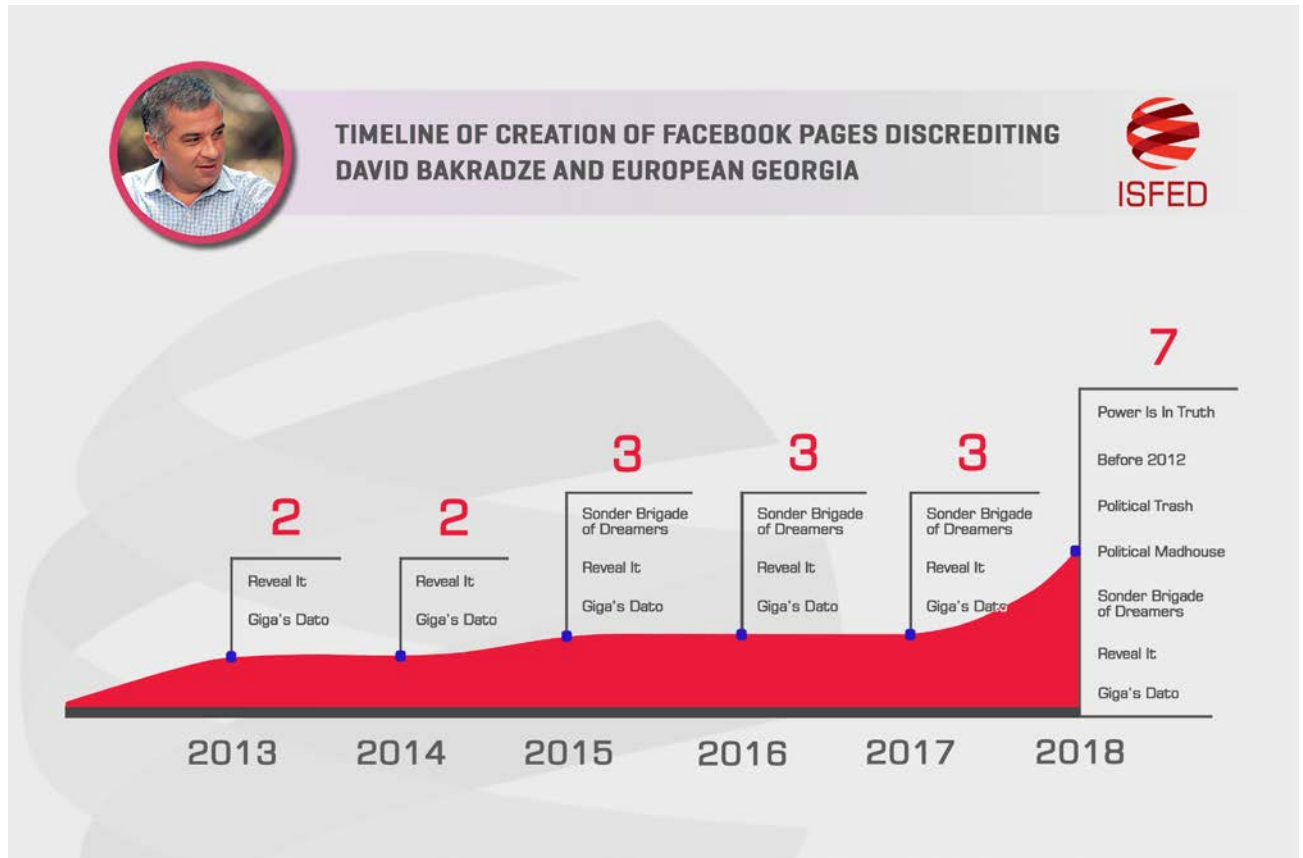
Facebook pages discrediting Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia, their creation dates, number of page likes and number of posts (June 1 – October 18)



Activity of pages that discredit Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia from June 1 to October 28 – dynamics of the number of posts (in blue) and their ratings (in orange)

Main messages used to discredit Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia

- Posting caricatures of Davit Bakradze and referring to him as a “[traitor](#)”.
- Reporting that during the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Davit Bakradze urged population to protect themselves using “knives and forks.”
- Compilation of videos of Davit Bakradze and Giga Bokeria, referring to them as creators of the “regime”.
- [Video](#) and [photo](#) manipulations about Khatuna Gogorishvili
- Underlining that the European Georgia is funded jointly by Bidzina Ivanishvili and Davit Kezerashvili.
- Linking Bakradze and the party that nominated him to the United National Movement and Mikheil Saakashvili.

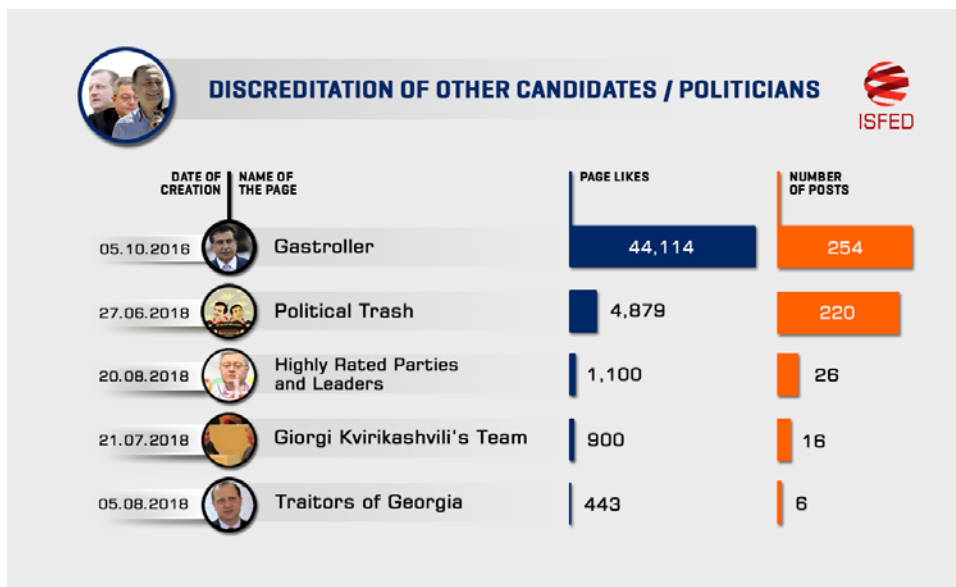


Dynamic of growth of the number of pages discrediting Davit Bakradze and the European Georgia, according to their creation date.

7.4. Pages targeting other candidates, parties and politicians

ISFED found 5 pages that target other candidates, parties and politicians. These pages have been liked by a total of **51,457** people and they published **524** posts from **June 1 to October 18**.

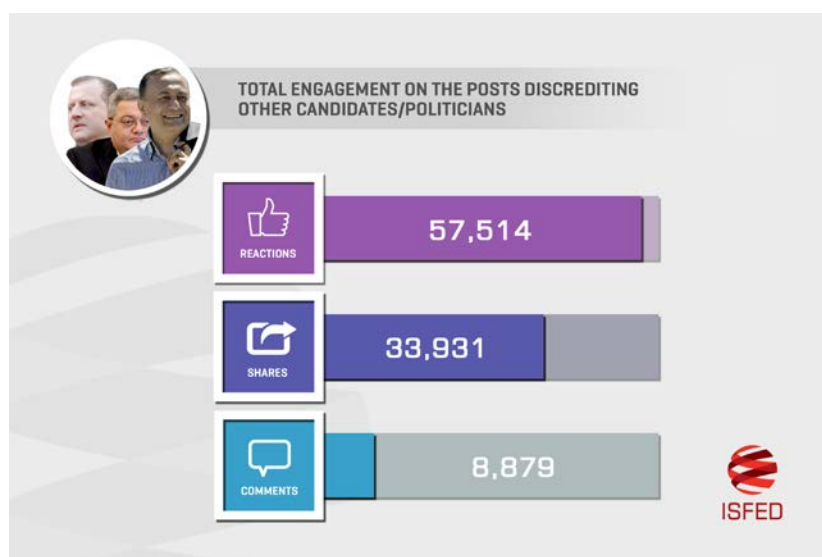
The following pages are discrediting other presidential candidates: “Very popular parties and leaders” is targeting Davit Usupashvili and Shalva Natelashvili. “Gastroller” [a Russian term for an actor or a musician on a tour], which is discrediting the UNM and Grigol Vashadze, is also targeting Shalva Natelashvili. “Political Dumpster” is targeting Shalva Natelashvili, Dvit Usupashvili and Zurab Japaridze (as well as Salome Zurabishvili, Grigol Vashadze and Davit Bakradze), “Traitors of Georgia” is targeting Zurab Japaridze only.



Facebook pages discrediting other candidates and politicians, their creation dates, number of page likes and number of posts (June 1 – October 18)

In addition to discrediting presidential candidates and parties that have nominated them, these pages also publish posts that target current president Girogi Margvelashvili and former Tbilisi mayoral candidate Aleksandre Elisashvili.

Page named “Giorgi Kvirikashvili’s Team”, created after PM Kvirikashvili resigned, is discrediting Kvirikashvili and former Deputy PM Dimitri Kumsishvili. The page becomes active as interest of media about Kvirikashvili grows and its main message is accusing former leaders of the government of corruption.



Public engagement with posts published by pages targeting Davit Usupashvili, Zurab Japaridze, Shalva Natelashvili and other politicians, which includes reactions, comments and shares (June 1 – October 18)

Messages used to discredit Davit Usupashvili

Pages that discredit Davit Usupashvili were created in 2018, including the most recent one (Very Popular Parties and Leaders) created on August 20.

There are two different types of messages against Usupashvili, according to two different pages that discredit the candidate. In the first case, messages spread by the page named “Very Popular Parties and Leaders” are identical. Different comic drawings and photo manipulations are published with the aim of making Usupashvili [seem like](#) the least popular presidential candidate with 1% support. In the second case, the page named “Political Dumpster” is mainly [confronting](#) liberal views of Usupashvili.

Messages used to discredit Shalva Natelashvili

Shalva Natelashvili is most often discredited by the following three pages: “Political Dumpster”, “Very Popular Parties and Leaders”, “Gastroller”. The first page was created 1 month before the election was called, the second was created during the official election campaign and the third was created in 2016, during pre-election period.

Below are posts that contain different messages, some of which were sponsored at the time of monitoring:

- Natelashvili’s caricature drawing attention to his [lack of success](#) in elections.
- Linking Natelashvili to [Saakashvili](#).
- Comic drawings and photo manipulations, referring to Natelashvili by obscene [phrases](#).
- A satire [video](#) discrediting Shalva Natelashvili.

Messages used to discredit Zurab Japaridze

Zurab Japaridze is mostly discredited by the following two pages: “Traitors of Georgia” and “Political Dumpster”. Both pages were created in 2018, including “Traitors of Georgia” created during the official pre-election campaign. Below are main messages discrediting Japaridze from posts published by these websites:

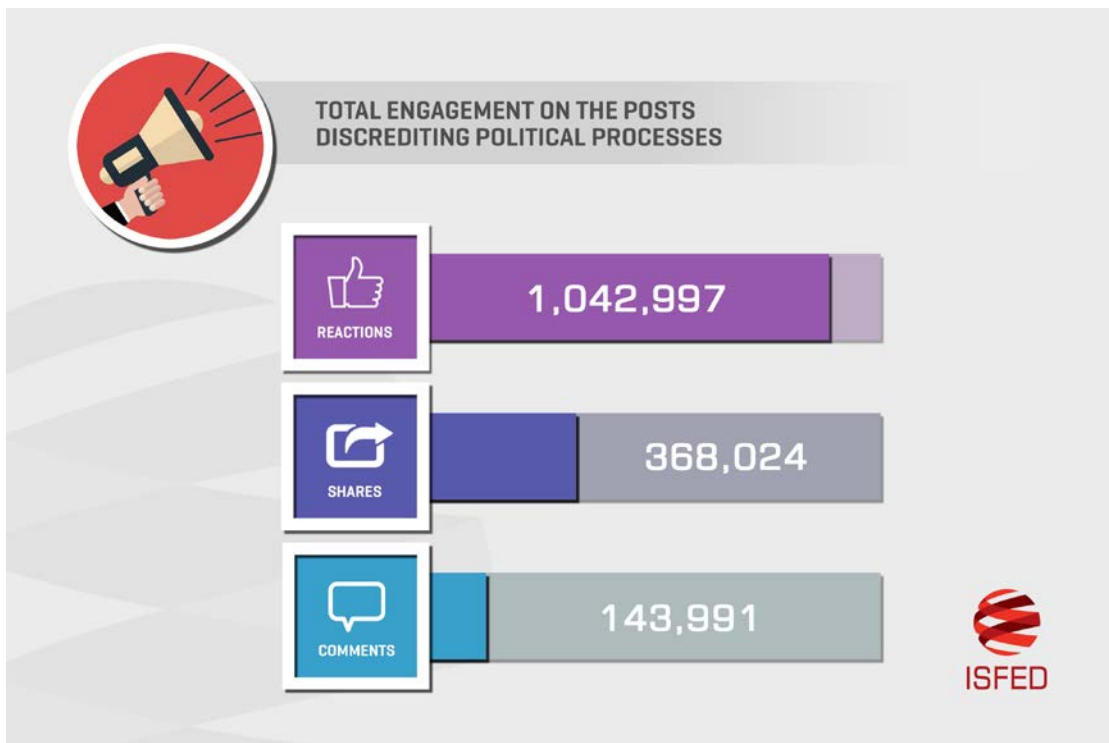
- One of the main messages contained by posts that target Zurab Japaridze [are related to](#) his activities for decriminalization and legalization of marijuana.
- Japaridze’s “fight for more liberty” is tied to his material [success](#).
- Japaridze’s statements against the church are evaluated as [betrayal](#).

7.5. Pages operating to discredit political processes

ISFED found that some Facebook pages in Georgia aim to discredit not only electoral subjects but also current political processes, civil sector, civic activists and opinion leaders. These pages discredit opposition party leaders and supporters on the one hand and on the other hand, they target individuals and organizations that criticize the government.

These pages post similar content at the same time and disseminate photo and video materials in a coordinated manner in parallel with political processes that take place in the country in a specific period of time, with the possible aim to instill certain attitudes in the audience towards those processes. Photo and video materials published by these pages indicate use of similar multimedia technologies including: editing, subtitles, graphics, etc. This leads us to believe that a single organized group is the source of their creation.

ISFED studied **21** pages that follow such strategy. These pages have been liked by a total of **719,995** people and they published **5,081** posts from **June 1 to October 18**.

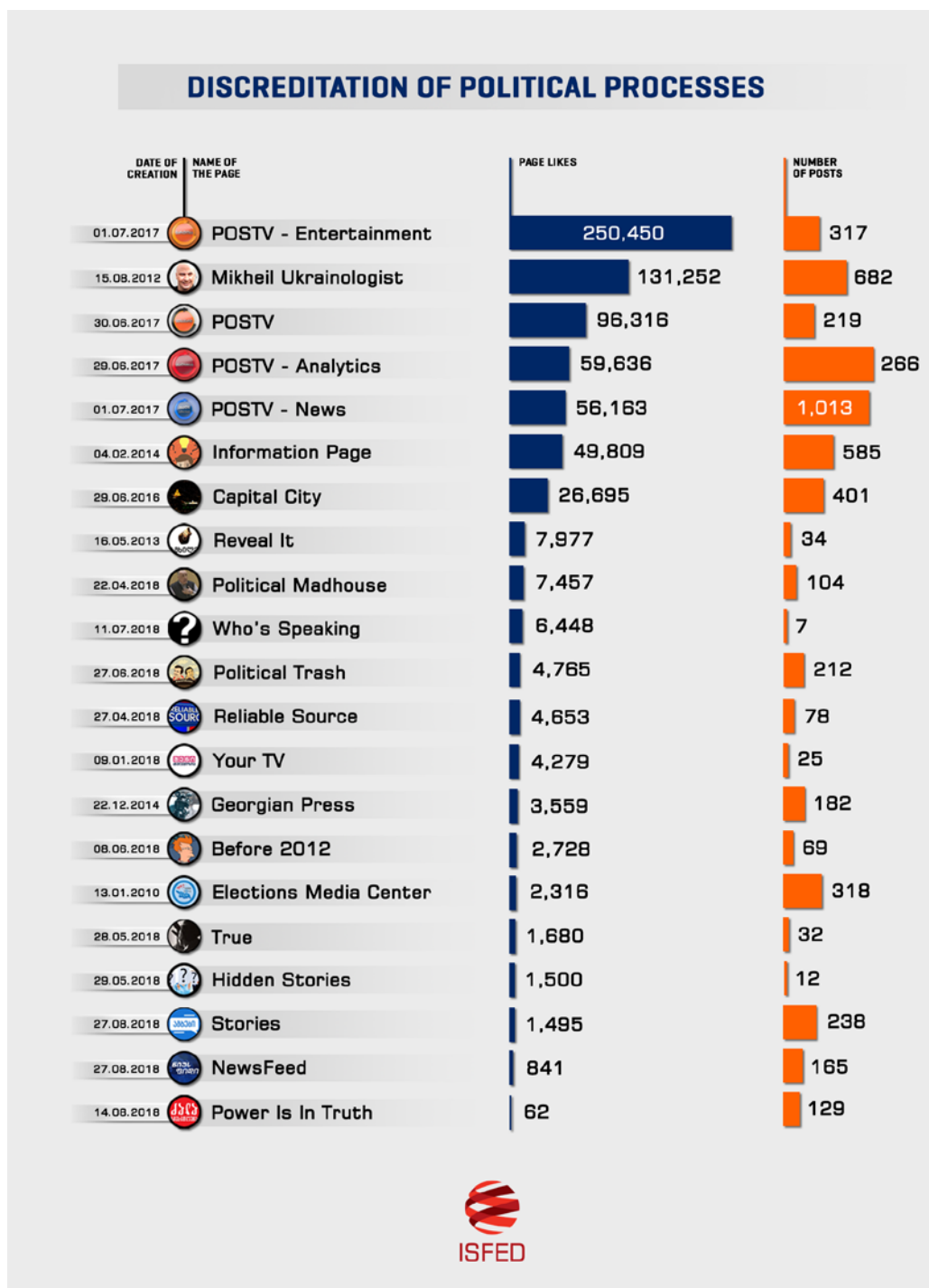


Public engagement with posts published by pages discrediting political processes, which includes reactions, comments and shares (June 1 – October 18)

Main messages of pages that operate to discredit political processes and create certain public attitudes

- Linking Zaza Saralidze and Malkhaz Machalikashvili to the United National Movement. Posts that the UNM is spreading its political messages through Zaza Saralidze. Also, a statement made by Malkhaz [Machalikashvili](#) during a protest rally that he was going to explode himself inside the State Security Service building. Later [posts](#) about official involvement of Zaza Saralidze and Malkhaz Machalikashvili in Grigol Vashadze’s pre-election campaign become active.
- [Discreditation](#) of NGOs, which becomes active following the attacks of the Speaker of Parliament on the organizations. In photo and [video](#) manipulations, directors of different organizations are portrayed in obscene forms with Mikheil Saakashvili and Nika Gvaramia as false evidence that these organizations are advancing interests of the United National Movement.
- Making Zaza Okuashvili seem like a supporter of Mikheil Saakashvili and the UNM, who staged “spectacles” and uses doctored recordings to avoid paying what he owes in taxes.

- Speculating with the topic of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008; focusing on “mistakes” made by then-government and Mikheil Saakashvili, which led to the war. The main message is that Mikheil Saakashvili “ignored warning of Americans and involved the country in the war [where Georgia] was doomed from the very beginning.”
- [Posts](#) that contain positive messages about cultivation of marijuana, underlining that the Constitutional Court made the decision about legalization of marijuana and the society was not prepared for this decision, which is why the State should impose regulations on use and cultivation of marijuana, while exporting marijuana will be economically beneficial for Georgia.
- [Posts](#) saying that reports about Vladimir Putin’s use of Salome Zurbashvili’s quotes are false.
- Posts saying that Salome Zurbashvili’s comments about Abkhazia are misinterpreted.



Facebook pages discrediting political processes, their creation dates, number of page likes and number of posts (June 1 – October 18)