

# **The Cultural Language of Protest: Understanding the Semiotics of Resistance and Affective Expression in Contemporary Georgia**

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## **Abstract**

On 28 November, 2024, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced the suspension of the country's EU accession talks, directly contradicting Article 78 of the Georgian constitution, which obliges the state to pursue European integration. The ruling party's decision was widely perceived as a pro-Russian shift, provoking months of sustained protest, intense clashes with police, and an eruption of symbolic and creative resistance — emerging amid growing concerns over democratic backsliding and deepening tensions between the government and civil society. Despite the growing international interest in Georgia's political trajectory, the use of culture as a political language and the emotional dimension of symbolic resistance have remained understudied. While much of the existing literature focuses on institutional dynamics and geopolitical orientation, less attention has been paid to how citizens give meaning to protest through cultural expression. This research aims to explore how Georgian protesters utilize cultural acts — such as dance, music, humor, and symbols of national identity — to communicate political messages. It further examines how protesters interpret and reflect on their own acts of resistance. Guided by this objective, the study will apply a qualitative methodology, drawing on 15 semi-structured interviews with Georgian protesters, as well as media analysis of protest-related cultural content. By centering the voices of Georgian protesters, this study highlights the cultural expression and emotional resonance of a movement too often overlooked in international discourse.

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