

THE FAR RIGHT HONEYTRAP: GEORGIAN MEDIA

AND THE MEDIAGENIC FAR RIGHT

Tamta Gelashvili

P O L I C Y P A P E R | J U N E 2 0 2 0



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



OPEN
SOCIETY
GEORGIA
FOUNDATION



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS



Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the **Open Society Georgia Foundation**. The views, opinions and statements expressed by the authors and those providing comments are theirs only and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foundation. Therefore, the Open Society Georgia Foundation is not responsible for the content of the information material.

The Georgian Institute of Politics and its donors do not determine, nor do they necessarily endorse or advocate for, any of this report's conclusions.

HOW TO QUOTE THIS DOCUMENT:

Tamta Gelashvili, "The Far Right Honeytrap: Georgian Media and the Mediagenic Far Right", Policy Paper No. 14, Georgian Institute of Politics, June 2020.

© Georgian Institute of Politics, 2020
13 Aleksandr Pushkin St, 0107 Tbilisi, Georgia
Tel: +995 599 99 02 12
Email: info@gip.ge

For more information, please visit
www.gip.ge

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
INTRODUCTION	4
WHY DOES MEDIA COVERAGE MATTER ?.....	5
DEMAND FOR THE FAR RIGHT.....	6
SUPPLY OF THE FAR RIGHT	7
GEORGIAN MEDIA AND FAR-RIGHT MOBILIZATION	10
CONCLUDING REMARKS	13
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	14
<i>FOR MEDIA OUTLETS</i>	14
<i>FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS</i>	14

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent wave of far-right mobilization across the globe, including Georgia, naturally attracts wide media attention. Although the interrelation of the media and the far right, especially in the Georgian context, remains under-researched, evidence from other countries shows the potential impact of media coverage on both public opinion, i.e. the demand for the far right, and the consolidation of far-right actors, i.e. the supply of the far right. This policy paper examines the possible role the Georgian media can play in far-right mobilization and provides recommendations for both media and civil society organizations.

Keywords: Far right, media influence, protest events, media framing, agenda-setting, validation, momentum, legitimacy.

INTRODUCTION

In his recent book, *The Far Right Today*, Cas Mudde, one of the most prominent scholars of the far right, describes a typical example of a far-right demonstration in Europe:

[It] is held in a provincial town, gathering a few dozen activists, almost all (white) males between fifteen and forty years old, surrounded by at least as many (riot) police, even more (freelance) journalists, and at least twice as many “anti-fascist” counter-protesters. Radical right demonstrations can attract larger crowds, and fewer counter-protesters, but still tend to be remarkably rare and small, particularly given the media hype surrounding them.¹

Although Mudde focuses on far-right demonstrations in Western Europe, similar events in Georgia have followed this tendency, gathering relatively small crowds, groups of counter-protesters, and an army of journalists. Indeed, out of the 66 protest events organized by the Georgian extreme right during 2014-2018,² around half included less than 50 participants (mostly between 5-25), and only 9 were ignored by the mainstream media. The rest were covered by online media sources, major television stations, and newspapers.

A recent illustration of exaggerated media attention to far-right groups³ was the premiere of the movie *And then We Danced* in Tbilisi, which caused backlash from the Georgian far right due to the film’s portrayal of a love story between two men.⁴ The protagonist of the day’s news stories was Levan Vasadze, a conservative and eccentric Georgian millionaire, who marched in central Tbilisi with a few like-minded individuals and a swarm of journalists.⁵ This small demonstration was quickly transformed into a nationwide news story.

Many journalists went live with the demonstrators, asking them what their plans were. Caught off-guard with questions about their plans, the protesters over-compensated for their unpreparedness with ambitious statements. One of the

¹ Mudde, C. 2019. *The Far Right Today*. Polity Press. p.41

² Gelashvili, T. 2019a. “Georgian Pride World Wide:” Extreme Right Mobilization in Georgia, 2014-2018 (Master's thesis).

³ For the purposes of this brief, the far right refers to a wide family of nativist, i.e. extreme nationalist actors, including their extreme- and radical-right manifestations. This includes a variety of actors, from political parties to subcultural groups that, taken together, form a wider social movement. For a detailed discussion of the concept, see Mudde, 2019.

⁴ Gray, C. 2019. “When a Film Shows Gay Romance in Georgia, Going to See It Is a Risk.” *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/06/>

⁵ Dato Parulava. 8 November 2019. Facebook post. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10221121835934993>

demonstrators claimed, for example, that he would enter the movie theater and simply “unplug” the movie.⁶ These videos went viral across social media, increasing the visibility of the protesters and, willingly or not, reproducing their messages. Even though some media outlets, like *Open Caucasus Media*, refrained from reporting live and only offered summarizing articles the next day,⁷ their responsible behavior was overshadowed by countless other outlets that incessantly livestreamed the demonstration. Thus, a potentially minor rally quickly transformed into one of the largest far-right events Georgia has witnessed in the last few years.

It would certainly be an overstatement to blame the violent demonstration directly on news media. Indeed, as with many other social phenomena, direct causal links are difficult to identify in the relationship between the media⁸ and the far right. However, evidence from a number of countries indicates that news outlets can influence both the demand and supply of far-right movements. In the context of the far right, “demand” refers to public support for far-right ideas and groups, while “supply” refers to the consolidation of far-right actors. The aim of this policy paper is thus not to diminish the importance of factors independent of the media realm, but to examine how these factors can be mediated through news reporting.

WHY DOES MEDIA COVERAGE MATTER?

As sociologist Ruud Koopmans points out, “what most people know about politics is what they know from the media.”⁹ Most people have never participated first-hand in political events or met the politicians that represent them,¹⁰ and they lack deep understanding of the intricacies of political processes. In this context, the media plays a crucial role in both informing the public and enabling political actors to communicate their ideas.

Events that receive no media attention can be referred to as “non-events.” Even if they take place publicly, “it is no longer the co-present public that counts most, but the

⁶ On.ge. 8 November 2019. Retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/news.on.ge/videos/1451058611727613/>

⁷ Open Caucasus Media. 2019. “Homophobic protesters attack filmgoers at Georgian film premiere.” Retrieved from: <https://oc-media.org/homophobic-protesters-attack-filmgoers-at-georgian-film-premiere/>

⁸ As Mudde (2019) points out, “The media *are* rather than *is*, in the sense that they entail a broad plethora of individuals and institutions, which share very different goals and ideologies.” But for the purposes of this brief, the media will be considered as a collective actor in social and political processes.

⁹ Koopmans, R., 2004. “Movements and media: Selection processes and evolutionary dynamics in the public sphere.” *Theory and society*, 33(3-4), p.14.

¹⁰ Boomgaarden, H.G. and Vliegenthart, R., 2007. “Explaining the rise of anti-immigrant parties: The role of news media content.” *Electoral studies*, 26(2), p. 4.

mass audience that sits at home and watches or reads the media coverage of the demonstration.”¹¹ The consequences of protest events thus depend less on how they occur, and more on whether they attract media attention and how they are depicted in the eyes of the public and the authorities.¹² In the case of the far right’s initial protests at the premiere of *And Then We Danced*, what proved less important was the initial low number of participants, than live footage from the demonstration. Media coverage created an air of urgency that culminated in the deployment of police forces between moviegoers and demonstrators, as well as several violent incidents,¹³ and live-broadcasted public prayers.¹⁴

The discussion on the media and the far right is linked to larger debates on the difficult balance between freedom of expression and radicalism or extremism. However, delving into these wider debates is not the aim of this brief. Rather, it discusses the role of the media in expanding both the demand for and supply of the far-right movement.

DEMAND FOR THE FAR RIGHT

As the media often stands between political actors and their potential supporters, it inevitably influences people’s perceptions of political actors.¹⁵ The media can affect the demand for the far right, or public support towards far-right actors, in two main ways: agenda-setting and framing.¹⁶

Agenda-setting refers to the media’s power to bring attention to certain issues. In general, immigration and crime often attract media attention; since these are also the issues that the far right instrumentalizes, media coverage of these issues often benefits the far right. This has been the case in many European countries, including Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Hungary.¹⁷ In the Netherlands, the

¹¹ Koopmans, 2004, p.3.

¹² Ibid., p.6

¹³ News.on.ge. 8 November 2019. Facebook post. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/news.on.ge/videos/701019260389208/>

¹⁴ News.on.ge. 8 November 2019. Facebook post. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/news.on.ge/videos/804150753321457/>

¹⁵ Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2011, p. 5

¹⁶ Ellinas, 2018; Kavtaradze, L. 2019. *Coverage of Issues Related to Violent Extremism*. Georgian Center for Strategy and Development, in partnership with the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics. Tbilisi.

¹⁷ Ellinas, 2018; Walgrave, S. and K. de Swert, 2004. “The Making of the (Issues of the) Vlaams Blok.” *Political Communication* 21(4); Karapin, R., 2002. *Far-right parties and the construction of immigration issues in Germany*. In *Shadows over Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

frequency of media coverage of immigration has been shown to increase the intention of voters to support anti-immigrant parties.¹⁸

Importantly, agenda-setting does not necessarily mean negative or positive coverage. The media need not share the stance of anti-immigrant parties. The frequency of coverage is what matters. Stories and people that make the news “can be retrieved from memory” easily,¹⁹ while politicians appearing rarely in the media will struggle to convince potential supporters that they and their opinions are important.²⁰ The mere frequency of reporting on immigration, for example, can lead potential voters to see immigration as a problem, and make anti-immigration actors seem as the “owners” of the issue who are better suited to resolve it than others.²¹

In addition, it is “not just *how much* but also *how* the media report on issues such as immigration.”²² Framing immigration in negative ways by presenting it as a problem or linking it with crime naturally plays into the narrative of anti-immigrant actors.²³ In addition to the framing of issues, media framing of far-right actors is also important. In many countries, media attention preceded significant mobilization of the far right, as well as electoral breakthroughs of far-right parties. One example is the Tea Party Movement in the US. The movement certainly did not appear overnight and had connections with other conservative groups, but media attention that created an impression of a fast-growing grassroots movement preceded its greater mobilization and even became “its most important predictor.”²⁴

SUPPLY OF THE FAR RIGHT

Along with framing and agenda-setting, media coverage can also contribute to the mobilization of far-right actors by giving them access to public space and granting them validation, legitimacy, and momentum.²⁵

¹⁸ Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2006, p.404

¹⁹ Bos, L., Van der Brug, W. and De Vreese, C., 2011. “How the media shape perceptions of right-wing populist leaders.” *Political Communication*, 28(2), p.6

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. p.407

²² Ellinas, 2018, p.3; Kavtaradze, 2019.

²³ Koopmans, R. and Olzak, S., 2004. “Discursive opportunities and the evolution of right-wing violence in Germany.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(1).

²⁴ Martin, G., 2015. *Understanding social movements*. Routledge. P.199

²⁵ Ellinas, 2018, p. 5

To influence public debates and policy, far-right actors need to get their message across, which is impossible without access to mass communication tools.²⁶ Events not covered by the media become non-events,²⁷ because public space is inevitably limited, even if expandable to a certain degree. As Koopmans and Olzak²⁸ argue, media outlets are regularly bombarded with hundreds of statements, demonstrations, press conferences and other events, most of which pass us by. The limited number of communication channels and the high competition among various actors to access them means that only a select few will attract media attention and reach a wider audience.²⁹

This selection process depends on a number of “news values,” including the potential for dramatization and personalization, novelty, degree of conflict, and level of proximity, among others.³⁰ Accordingly, those competing for media attention try to stage their public actions in a way that adapts to media priorities. Far-right actors dramatize and emotionalize their messages to become “mediagenic.”³¹ This includes the Georgian far right: conservative millionaire, Levan Vasadze, has given addresses while holding a handmade hybrid of a cross and a cudgel;³² the Alliance of Patriots have formed a human chain from Tbilisi to the Davit Gareja monastery near the border with Azerbaijan;³³ members of the anti-immigrant group Georgian March have burned George Soros’ stuffed figures;³⁴ and members of Georgian Power have used red-colored smoke and dark facemasks to attract more media attention.³⁵

The competition for media attention disadvantages newcomers to the political sphere and smaller actors who have limited resources and are more dependent on mass media.³⁶ Media access makes it possible to “communicate their messages to audiences much wider than their street activism can reach and their limited financial resources

²⁶ Della Porta, D. and Diani, M., 2020. *Social movements: An introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.

²⁷ Koopmans and Olzak, 2004, p.202

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Koopmans 2004, p.7

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2011, p. 4

³² Agenda.ge. 2019. “Police investigate calls to form anti-LGBT patrol in Tbilisi.” Retrieved from <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/1578>

³³ 1TV. 2019. Demonstration of the Alliance of Patriots near the Davit Gareja monastery complex. Retrieved from: <https://1tv.ge/video/patriotta-aliansis-aqcia-davit-garejis-samonastro-kompleqstan/>

³⁴ Netgazeti. 2017. “ქართული მარში” მმართველი გუნდის და ჯორჯ სოროსის წინააღმდეგ [Georgian March against the ruling party and George Soros]. Retrieved from: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/220070/>

³⁵ Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center. 2016. EMC 27 სექტემბერს ულტრანაციონალისტური ჯგუფების მიერ გამოვლენილი ძალადობის ფაქტს ეხმიანება [EMC responds to the fact of violence by ultranationalist groups on September 27]. Retrieved from: <https://emc.org.ge/ka/products/emc-27->

³⁶ Della Porta and Diani, 2020.

can buy.”³⁷ This could explain why Georgian March threw live chickens at journalists and why the National Socialist Movement marched in Tbilisi with Nazi salutes.³⁸ These actions attract the attention of passers-by and, more importantly, the media. Media visibility translates into relevance, as media attention is a sign of being taken seriously. Indeed, “the mere fact of recognition, of being singled out for attention, is evidently enough to bestow prestige and authority.”³⁹

On top of recognition, media attention can also give momentum and legitimacy to new and small far-right actors. Media coverage can create an air of importance around a movement, even before it becomes influential. As mentioned above, media attention contributed to transforming a small gathering in front of one of Tbilisi’s cinemas into a large-scale far-right demonstration-turned-prayer-vigil. Media coverage can normalize far-right actors⁴⁰ and remove the stigma associated with right-wing extremism, especially in connection with Nazism and fascism.⁴¹

A good illustration of the impact of the media on far-right movements is Jean-Marie Le Pen, one of the founders of the far-right National Front in France. In 1984, he got an hour of airtime on a French television program, after which he noted that it changed three decades of his career. According to Le Pen:

I had changed neither my look, nor my message, nor my language, nor my behaviour...
An hour is nothing, but it was enough for me to get rid of the monstrous and carnival-like mask that all my opponents have so generously applied to me.⁴²

Importantly, this interview preceded the unexpected electoral success of the National Front, which had been a marginal political party until then. Similarly, media attention preceded surprising electoral breakthroughs of previously marginal movements in Greece, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Austria.⁴³

³⁷ Ellinas, 2018, p.5

³⁸ Wayne, S. (2018). “Neo-Nazi Group Leader Facing Prison.” *Georgia Today*. Retrieved from: <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/12172/Neo-Nazi-Group-Leader-Facing-Prison>.

³⁹ Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2011, p. 6; Kinder 1998, 177, cited in Ellinas, 2018, p. 5

⁴⁰ Kavtaradze, 2019.

⁴¹ Ellinas, 2018, p.6; Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2011, p.17

⁴² Ellinas, 2018, p.6

⁴³ Ellinas, A.A., 2010. *The media and the far right in Western Europe: Playing the nationalist card*. Cambridge University Press, p.205

GEORGIAN MEDIA AND FAR-RIGHT MOBILIZATION

Given the relatively recent nature of far-right mobilization in Georgia, the impact of media coverage remains to be seen.⁴⁴ Evidence from other countries shows that media influence on far-right support and mobilization depends on a number of factors: the size and relevance of far-right actors, political opportunities, the type of media coverage, and the type of media.⁴⁵

Since media coverage is more important for political newcomers, the media can be decisive in facilitating electoral breakthroughs of small actors, but can have less influence on whether they maintain or increase their relevance.⁴⁶ Apart from the Alliance of Patriots, a far-right party that has its own television channel, Georgian far-right actors are small and lack organizational and financial resources.⁴⁷ This makes them even more dependent on media attention, without which they would be devoid of the necessary means of communication. Importantly, though, when new far-right movements rely largely on media coverage, they tend to pay less attention to solidifying their structures and communication channels. This means that if the media decides to pay less attention to them, they become “flash” phenomena.⁴⁸ This could partly explain why some of the smaller Georgian extreme-right groups (Georgian Power and National Socialist Movement, for example) have largely disappeared from public space recently.

Another important factor is the availability of political opportunities. Legal restrictions of far-right activity, the openness and availability of political space to far-right actors, and public support to far-right ideas are among the many aspects determining whether a given context enables the emergence and mobilization of far-right movements. In Georgia, legislation limits far-right activity to a large extent. Far-right actors are marginal and lack access to formal political institutions like the parliament. However, many influential actors, including members of the ruling party and the powerful Orthodox Church, remain hesitant at best about far-right actors and their ideas, and often even support them, implicitly or explicitly.⁴⁹ In this context, media coverage can have an even larger impact on far-right support and mobilization.

⁴⁴ A forthcoming study from the Georgian Institute of Politics investigates the coverage of the far right in the Georgian media. This policy paper, therefore, paves the way for the upcoming study, discussing the theoretical and empirical insights from other countries and far-right movements.

⁴⁵ Ellinas 2018, p.7

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Gelashvili, 2019a.

⁴⁸ Ellinas 2018, p.7

⁴⁹ Gelashvili, T., 2019b. “Political opportunities for the extreme right in Georgia.” Georgian Institute of Politics.

Implicit or explicit support unquestionably helps communicate the messages of the far right. But far-right messages tend to be controversial, so they often attract critique. Controversial messages are usually “better positioned for replication.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the relationship between a message’s likelihood to reach wide audiences and its legitimacy seems curvilinear: controversial messages attract more attention and are thus reproduced more than messages that seem absolutely legitimate or decidedly illegitimate.⁵¹ So even if the response is negative, e.g. if news media shows a powerful political actor reacting with indignation to a far-right actor’s statement, this reaction necessarily implies that the original message is reproduced and replicated, at least to some extent. Therefore, the chances of the message reaching its intended audience are much higher than they would be if they had remained ignored.⁵²

In addition, negative coverage in the media can strengthen the far-right narrative of liberal censorship. Studies have shown that far-right actors in European countries often argue that their negative portrayal in the media is due to the fact that they are the only true challengers of the liberal democratic system.⁵³ Likewise, in Georgia, far-right groups also often criticize the media for misrepresenting them. Georgian March, for instance, has argued that “the Soviet dictatorship has been replaced by sodomic-liberastic [sic] dictatorship,” while the National Socialist Movement has called Georgian news outlets “the factory of lies and pile of garbage.”⁵⁴ Yet, they seem to jump on every opportunity to attract the attention of the same journalists they claim to mistrust. Evidence from Sweden, Austria, Greece, and Germany also suggests that for smaller emergent far-right actors, any publicity is good publicity.⁵⁵

Finally, the extent to which the media can have an influence on far-right support and mobilization also depends on the type of media. Social media websites offer alternative and easy ways for mainstream outlets to reach their audiences. In addition, they offer a low-cost, low-threshold alternative to mainstream media sources, and for this reason, far-right groups have increasingly moved to online platforms and social media in recent years.⁵⁶ This has also been the case in Georgia. Yet, social media accounts can be reported by users and subsequently deleted, leading to a loss of past

⁵⁰ Koopmans and Olzak, 2004, p.205

⁵¹ Koopmans, 2004, p.10

⁵² Koopmans and Olzak, 2004, p.204

⁵³ Hellström and Hervik 2014, cited in Ellinas, 2018, p.7

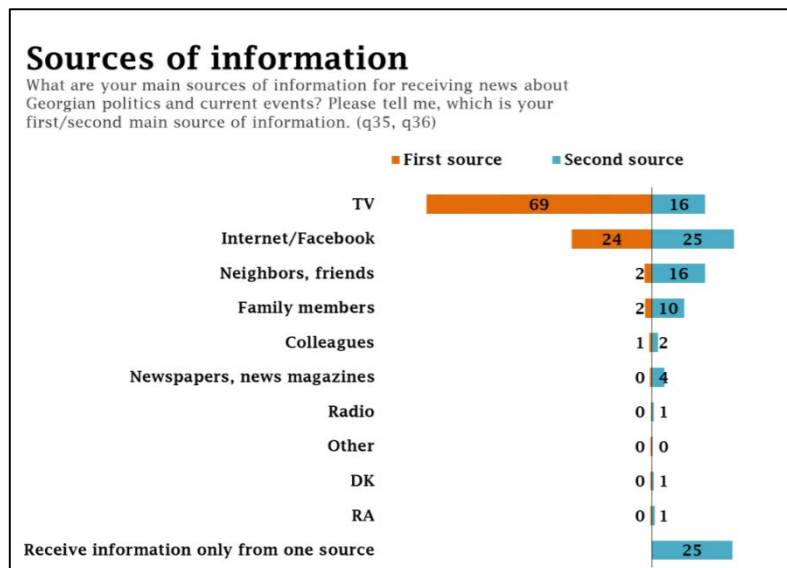
⁵⁴ Gelashvili, 2019a, p.87

⁵⁵ Ellinas, 2010, p.206-7; Ellinas, A.A. 2013. “The Rise of Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far Right in Greece.” *South European Society and Politics*, 18(4).

⁵⁶ Staggenborg, S. 2011. *Social Movements*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.47; Horsti, K. 2015. “Techno-cultural opportunities: the anti-immigration movement in the Finnish mediascape.” *Patterns of Prejudice*, 49(4);

activities, engagements, and followers. Even if far-right actors create new accounts and gather new followers, the impact of their social media use cannot match the potential influence of television news stories that reach millions of viewers. In Georgia, 69% of the population reports that television is the main source of information on current events in the country. In contrast, 24% note that they receive news from the Internet (see Figure 1).⁵⁷ In comparison to older and more established media outlets, social and online media lack reputation and reliability. For this reason, online and social media platforms might grant visibility to far-right actors to a certain extent, but their influence on validation, momentum, and legitimacy remains limited.⁵⁸

Figure 1: Sources of information in Georgia, 2019, NDI



⁵⁷ National Democratic Institute. 2019. *Public Attitudes in Georgia: Results of December 2019 Survey*. Retrieved from: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202019

⁵⁸ Ellinas, 2018, p.9

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The interrelation of the media and the far right in the Georgian context remains under-researched, however existing evidence from other countries shows the potential impact of media coverage on both public opinion and the consolidation of far-right actors. Understanding how the media can play into far-right movement mobilization is a necessary step towards challenging its potential impact on public debates and policies.

Certainly, the social and political environment of modern-day democracies seems conducive to the symbiosis between the media and the far right. Mediagenic politics are easy to sell, and an increasingly competitive marketplace makes far-right leaders, and their ideas, simplified and entertaining, fit for media attention.⁵⁹ In Georgia, as in other countries, far-right rhetoric instrumentalizes fear and reduces complex social and economic processes to a simplistic blame game, which makes for an attention-grabbing news story.⁶⁰ In Georgia, as is the case in many other countries,⁶¹ media outlets are affiliated with different political actors, so their behavior also depends on political processes. The extreme polarization of Georgian politics also translates into media polarization, where certain outlets may pay significant attention to not-so-significant far-right parties and groups, either to support their cause or to demonstrate their opposition to it.

Social and political conditions notwithstanding, it is important for the media to consider its potential role in strengthening the demand for or the supply of the far right. This is not to say that the media can or should avoid covering far-right events, rather that journalists and editors should consider the benefits of informing the public about ongoing events against the risks of inflating the importance of far-right actors or reproducing far-right messages. In short, media outlets should refrain from transforming non-events into actual events.⁶²

Finally, what matters is not only *if* the media covers the far-right, but also, and perhaps more importantly, *how* it covers it. For example, in Germany, journalists consider it a “civic duty” to avoid giving unnecessary voice to the far right, whereas in the UK, the norm is to grant coverage to all sides of a given story “with the same level of sceptical

⁵⁹ Martin, 2015, p. 192

⁶⁰ Wodak, R., 2015. *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. Sage.; Bos, van den Brug, de Vreese, 2011, p.18; Gelashvili, 2019a.

⁶¹ Ellinas 2010, p.212-3

⁶² A recent photograph of a mini-demonstration in the Netherlands illustrates this point: @CasMudde. “This picture perfectly summarizes majority of far right “demonstrations” in western democracies.” Twitter. 13 November 2019. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/CasMudde/status/1194712183990435841?s=20>

inquiry and respect.”⁶³ The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics and *MediaChecker* have continuously been critical of the pursuit of objectivity and balance by the Georgian mainstream media outlets.⁶⁴ Instead of glorifying simplified understandings of objectivity and balance and granting equal coverage to all sides of any given story, the media should consider avoiding alarmist or exaggerated coverage of far-right events and opinions.⁶⁵ To this end, they should refer to the existing guidelines specifically published for Georgian journalists to cover the issues related to terrorism and violent extremism.⁶⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

For media outlets:

- Refrain from sensationalized coverage of right-wing extremist mobilization and superficial or simplified conclusions when spreading information on far-right groups.
- Consider the benefits of informing the public about ongoing events against the costs of inflating the importance of far-right actors or reproducing far-right messages.
- Follow the guidelines of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics. To cover the far right specifically in a way that avoids both normalization and sensationalization, follow the guidelines for the Coverage of Issues Related to Violent Extremism.

For civil society organizations:

- Monitor and report on the development of far-right rhetoric and mobilization in Georgia and communicate evidence-based findings to the wider society and the government.
- Monitor the coverage of far-right issues in the media and identify news stories or other material that could influence either the demand for or the supply of the far right.
- Counter the spread of far-right narratives and organize campaigns to raise public awareness on far-right hate speech and hate crime.

⁶³ Ellinas, 2010, p.215.

⁶⁴ Metskhvarishvili, M. 2019. რადიკალური ჯგუფების გამუქების ეთიკური დილემები [Ethical Dilemmas of Covering Radical Groups]. *Mediachecker*. Retrieved from: <https://www.mediachecker.ge/ka/analizi/article/77369-radikaluri-jgufebis-gashugebis-ethikuri-dilemebi>

⁶⁵ Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics. 2019. *Coverage of Terrorism-Related Topics*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gartia.ge/sakhelmdzghvanelo-tsesebi1/article/29310-terorizmtan-dakavshirebuli-temebis-gashugeba>.

⁶⁶ Kavtaradze, 2019; Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics. 2019.

Author Bio

Tamta Gelashvili is a PhD candidate at the University of Oslo and a Junior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). She holds a MPhil degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Oslo and a MSc degree in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Amsterdam. She has previously worked at the Embassy of Georgia to the Kingdom of Norway, Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center, Georgian-American University, University of Georgia and Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Her research interests include nationalism, extreme and radical right, and social movements.



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

© Georgian Institute of Politics, 2020
13 Aleksandr Pushkin St, 0107 Tbilisi, Georgia
Tel: +995 599 99 02 12
Email: info@gip.ge

For more information, please visit
www.gip.ge