



Georgian Institute Of Politics | Policy Paper #5

ADRIANA STEPHAN

DEFINING THE FAR RIGHT  
IN GEORGIA:  
FROM NEO-FASCISTS TO  
POPULIST PARTIES

Tbilisi | October 2018



## Executive Summary

As countries throughout Europe fall prey to far-right dissent, Georgia is also witnessing gains in its own domestic, far-right movement. Though still a marginal phenomenon, the burgeoning success of these movements threatens Georgia's European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization ambitions, as well as the strength of its democratic institutions. Far-right groups cultivate anti-Western sentiment and employ xenophobic, racist, and nationalist rhetoric to present foreigners as fundamentally incompatible with Georgian Orthodoxy and Georgian identity. While the roots of this phenomenon are homegrown, Russian disinformation plays a crucial role in fueling far-right narratives. In an increasingly polarized media environment that produces imprecise coverage of this phenomenon, it is difficult for the public, as well as the government, to understand how best to counteract its growth. Furthermore, as many far-right groups operate exclusively on social media, it is difficult for the government to intervene. This policy paper explores the far-right problem by examining the three most prevalent far-right actors, analyzing their support base, and surveying their main messages, and proposes recommendations that have the potential to stem the rising tide of far-right momentum in Georgia.

## Placing Georgia in the larger framework

Once dismissed for antics like pelting meat at patrons of a vegan café, the far right in Georgia is increasingly making advances that threaten the country's most coveted foreign policy objectives and place an undue burden on a nascent democracy. Georgia's far-right woes are taking place in an environment where long-established democracies are witnessing unprecedented gains in far-right momentum.<sup>2</sup> Advances in far-right movements in Georgia have taken place in conjunction with the erosion of public support for democracy. Between 2012 and 2015, support for democracy decreased from 68% to 47%.<sup>3</sup> Popular distrust of government institutions, businesses, and religious institutions is on the rise,<sup>4</sup> while the public is generally less optimistic about domestic politics and more doubtful of Georgia's prospects for European Union (EU) integration.<sup>5</sup> Adding fuel to the fire, data from the Caucasus Research Resource Center and National Democratic Institute's December 2017 survey show that Georgians appear to place

---

<sup>1</sup> Adriana Stephan is a Research Fellow at the World Justice Project

<sup>2</sup> Countries with long-established democracies that are currently witnessing gains in far-right movements include: The United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands.

<sup>3</sup> "Trends in the Data: Public support for democracy is slowly waning in Georgia (Part 2)." *Social Science in the Caucasus* (blog). August 8, 2016. Available at- <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2016/08/trends-in-data-public-support-for.html>

<sup>4</sup> "Changes in public opinion between 2011 and 2017." *Social Science in the Caucasus* (blog). April 10, 2018. Available at- <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2018/04/changes-in-public-opinion-between-2011.html>

<sup>5</sup> In response to a survey question asking, "Please assess your level of trust toward the European Union," 54% of respondents said they trusted the EU in 2008 versus 33% in 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

more trust in media that aligns with their political beliefs.<sup>7</sup> In a polarized media environment<sup>8</sup> with decreasing public faith in Georgian democracy, and an escalating Russian disinformation campaign that supports far-right movements, the opportunities for far-right actors to capitalize on popular discontent, as they have in many other parts of the world, are plentiful.

The May 2018 Tbilisi demonstrations decisively thrust the far-right problem into the spotlight. In the aftermath of a government drug raid on two popular night clubs, massive protests erupted in Tbilisi in support of the club scene and progressive social movements, as well as a counter-rally organized by multiple far-right groups. The police managed to prevent right-wing groups from violently confronting the pro-club protestors. However, the demonstrations were such that the clashes made international headlines and attracted the attention of publications such as Radio Free Europe<sup>9</sup> and the BBC.<sup>10</sup>

While the potential for the far right to gain momentum exists, it is important to note that racial and ethnic extremism is not a mainstream phenomenon in Georgia and far-right groups do not enjoy widespread support. Georgia's current far-right discourse takes place, in part, as a result of Georgia's success in cultivating democratic norms, such as a pluralistic and free media and freedom of speech. It ultimately bodes well for Georgia to have open debate and a civil dialogue. However, the harsh reality remains that Georgia must successfully advertise itself as an inclusive and pluralistic country in order to realize its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Growing dissent and factions within Georgian politics distract from Georgia's reform efforts, particularly those focused on democracy promotion, good governance, and the rule of law. The successful implementation of the human rights and anti-discrimination laws, which were a mandatory part of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, are called into question when xenophobic and inherently undemocratic movements thrive. If Georgia continues to align its political and economic ambitions with the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the government cannot indulge far-right actors and must take preemptive action against these groups.

---

<sup>7</sup> "Polarisation in Georgia's media landscape." *Open Caucasus Media*. March 5, 2018. Available at- <http://oc-media.org/analysis-polarisation-in-georgias-media-landscape/>.

<sup>8</sup> According to two reports on media monitoring during the 2016 parliamentary and the 2017 municipal elections conducted by the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme, *Imedi TV* provided more airtime and positive coverage of the ruling Georgian Dream Party, and negative coverage of the opposition party, the United National Movement. In comparison, *Rustavi 2* provided more airtime and positive coverage for the United National Movement and negative coverage of Georgian Dream. Based on the survey results of the CRRC and NDI survey, those who named Georgian Dream as the party whose views aligned most closely to their own were more likely to trust *Imedi* for accurate information on politics and current affairs in Georgia, while those whose views aligned most closely with the United National Movements cited *Rustavi 2* as their most trusted news source.

<sup>9</sup> Available at- <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-far-right-against-club-goers/29224427.html>

<sup>10</sup> Available at- <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-44999599/georgia-s-rave-revolution>

## Which groups make up the far right in Georgia?

There are several far-right actors in Georgia, ranging from neo-fascist to institutionalized political players. Dozens exist as informal groups on Facebook, while others are formally registered as political parties or NGOs.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of brevity, this policy paper will focus only on the far-right groups that have established themselves as notable political actors in recent months, which include the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, the Georgian March, and Georgian National Unity. Borrowing from Roy C. Macridis' definition in *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, this paper defines the far right as an ideology that comprises racism, xenophobia, and nationalism.<sup>12</sup> Each of the abovementioned groups can be described as nationalist, which is to say, they all stress Georgian patriotism and commitment to traditional Georgian values through the lens of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), and employ xenophobic and racist rhetoric against migrants and foreigners. However, there are crucial distinctions among the groups that will be addressed below. While the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia is seeking political power through the use of populist rhetoric, both the Georgian March and Georgian National Unity are distinguished by their violent and aggressive behavior.

### *Alliance of Patriots of Georgia*

Founded in 2012 by its current leaders Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi and Irma Inashvili, among others, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) is a mainstream political element of the far right and arguably the only one that embodies the populist threat that has taken long-established democracies by storm. The party's website frequently invokes the people, and is peppered with statements such as "The Georgian people should be able to rule Georgia!" Their ideology is socially conservative with a political platform advocating for conforming to the "Georgian spirit" through dedication to the homeland, faith in God, love for everything Georgian, and respect for the native language."<sup>13</sup> Despite promoting a political platform that does not explicitly target immigrants, the party is known for its xenophobic rhetoric and its particularly strong anti-Turkish sentiment. Members of the Alliance of Patriots were in attendance at the March of Georgians in the summer of 2017 and have acted as bail guarantors for Georgian March activists arrested in March 2018.

The party platform formally supports Georgia's European and NATO ambitions, but proposes a more 'realistic' evaluation of Georgia's prospects for joining NATO and a more pragmatic approach to relations with Russia. The party is frequently labeled as pro-Russian,<sup>14</sup> and received intense criticism for its third visit to Moscow in May of this year.<sup>15</sup> The parliamentary election of 2016 marked the first major victory for the party, earning them six seats in parliament. Running on a "Georgia First" campaign, the party accused the current government of handing the

---

<sup>11</sup> Lomsadze, Giorgi. "Georgian fascists step into the spotlight." *EurasiaNet*. May 25, 2018. Available at- <https://eurasianet.org/s/georgian-fascists-step-into-the-spotlight>

<sup>12</sup> Macridis, Roy C. *Contemporary Political Ideologies: Movements and Regimes*, 4th ed. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1989, pp. 231

<sup>13</sup> *Alliance of Patriots*, Available at- <http://patriots.ge/>

<sup>14</sup> *Kremlin Influence Index 2017: Joint Research Report*. Detector Media (Ukraine), pp. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Morrison, Thea. "Alliance of Patriots of Georgia Leave for Moscow." *Georgia Today*. May 17, 2018. Available at- <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/10307/Alliance-of-Patriots-of-Georgia-Leave-for-Moscow>

country over to Western states.<sup>16</sup> The Alliance of Patriots was the fourth most successful political party in the local elections of October 2017 with 6.56% of the vote, nearly 100,000 votes in total, making it a small but notable opposition force.<sup>17</sup>

The APG owns a television channel, Obieqtivi, which serves as a platform for disseminating the party's messages, ideas, and attracting new voters. The Media Development Foundation, which tracks the media environment in Georgia, labels Obieqtivi as both an ethno-nationalist and pro-Kremlin news source.<sup>18</sup> A political player that wields both a legislative and media platform could prove a particularly destabilizing opposition force. A recent study on pro-Russian media in Ukraine suggests that consumption of pro-Russian political news on TV not only mobilized voters with a pre-existing pro-Russian bias to vote for pro-Russian candidates in parliamentary and presidential elections, but further persuaded them to adopt more pro-Russian attitudes.<sup>19</sup> Similar to Ukraine, television is the primary source of political news in Georgia, with 72 percent of Georgians claiming to get their news via television in 2017.<sup>20</sup> Based on the analyses in the Appendix, compared with other political parties, APG supporters uniquely distrust US intentions and disapprove of NATO integration. This could make APG voters more susceptible to Russian-sponsored narratives that focus on deepening anti-US and anti-NATO sentiment. Aiming to promote stories of concern to APG supporters, Obieqtivi might in turn pick up and amplify such stories, incubating a distinctly polarized news environment. APG's potential to shift mainstream narratives further to the right, and to encourage the Georgian Dream party to cater to far-right voters in order to maintain political power threatens to further polarize the political sphere and to deepen divides amongst the electorate.

### *Georgian March*

The Georgian March, led by former Deputy Minister of Diaspora Affairs Sandro Bregadze, is the most prominent ultranationalist group in Georgia. The March qualifies as an ultranationalist group in that it positions the Georgian state and people as superior to others. It is a coalition uniting individuals and far-right organizations, including various neo-Nazi groups, known for their homophobic and racist statements.<sup>21</sup> Ideologically, the Georgian March shares characteristics of other European far-right groups in its radical anti-migrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric and advocacy for the protection of family values.<sup>22</sup> The Georgian March played a central role in the May demonstrations, and came to the attention of mainstream Georgian society for organizing the controversial "March of Georgians" demonstration on July 14, 2017. Over 2,000 ultranationalists demonstrated on Aghmashenebeli Avenue, a street known for its Arab, Iranian, and Turkish restaurants, demanding the deportation of illegal immigrants, the

---

<sup>16</sup> Kucera, Joshua. "Georgia: Disillusion with Establishment Fuels Rise of Populism." *EurasiaNet*. October 24, 2016. Available at- <https://eurasianet.org/s/georgia-disillusion-with-establishment-fuels-rise-of-populism>.

<sup>17</sup> *Election Administration of Georgia*. Available at- <https://results20171021.cec.gov.ge/eng/>

<sup>18</sup> Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Hate Speech*. Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2018, pp. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Peisakhin, Leonid, and Arturas Rozenas. "Electoral effects of biased media: Russian television in Ukraine." *American Journal of Political Science* 62.3 (2018), pp. 536.

<sup>20</sup> Mikashavidze, Maia. "Georgia Media Landscape." European Journalism Centre (EJC) 2018, pp. 6.

<sup>21</sup> "Anatomy of Georgian Neo-Nazism." *Transparency International Georgia*. May 18, 2018. <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/anatomy-georgian-neo-nazism>.

<sup>22</sup> "Georgian far-right group plans to form new political party." *Democracy & Freedom Watch*. February 15, 2018. Available at- <http://dfwatch.net/georgian-far-right-group-plans-form-new-political-party-49936>

tightening of the country's immigration laws, restrictions on granting residence permits to foreigners and a ban on the foreign funding of civil society organizations.<sup>23</sup>

Once a more informal network, the Georgian March is now seeking more legitimate political credibility. The leaders of the group confirmed to different media outlets in February 2018 that they are planning on establishing a new political party. Bregadze announced he will be a candidate in presidential elections this fall, running, in his own words, on a Marine Le Pen-style platform.<sup>24</sup> However, his candidacy has yet to be confirmed by the Central Election Commission of Georgia.

### *Georgian National Unity*

The Georgian National Unity was established in January 2017 under the leadership of Giorgi Chelidze, a former Ministry of Finance employee, and is officially registered under the non-profit National Socialist Movement.<sup>25</sup> In the past, its members demonstrated in support for Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán's visit to Georgia in April 2017 and the group was a prevalent face of the counter-rally last May.

The Georgian National Unity takes its emblem from a battalion of Georgian émigrés and prisoners of war who fought with Nazis against the Soviets during World War II. Like the Georgian March, it qualifies as ultranationalist and is frequently labeled as a prominent neo-Nazi group.<sup>26</sup> The group could be seen giving the Nazi salute in downtown Tbilisi during the May 12-13 counter-rallies to the initial protests against the government raids on the night clubs. Despite garnering significant media attention for displaying the gesture, the Georgian National Unity proudly self-identifies as neo-fascist rather than neo-Nazi, and frequently quotes Benito Mussolini. It uniquely stresses the ethnic purity of Georgia and promotes fascism as a solution to threats to Georgian identity and culture. Most concerning is the extent to which the Unity's World War II nostalgia has fed its ambitions to form a small-scale militia.<sup>27</sup> The group has stated it is well-armed and will create patrol squads to enforce the rule of law.<sup>28</sup> Despite having similarities to the Georgian March, Chelidze stresses that the groups are distinct from each other, with different ideologies, and have no formal ties.<sup>29</sup>

Though isolated from other far-right groups for its brand of extremism, both Chelidze and the Unity have still received a noteworthy amount of media attention in recent months. Encouraged

---

<sup>23</sup> "Anti-Immigration Protest Held in Tbilisi." *Radio Free Europe*. July 15, 2017. Available at- <https://www.rferl.org/a/anti-immigration-protest-held-in-tbilisi/28618289.html>

<sup>24</sup> Lomsadze, Giorgi. "Can a reclining Georgian nationalist fake his way to the top?" *EurasiaNet*. April 23, 2018. Available at- <https://eurasianet.org/s/can-a-reclining-georgian-nationalist-fake-his-way-to-the-top>

<sup>25</sup> "Anti-Orbán demonstrators face off with far-right in Tbilisi." *Open Caucasus Media*. April 21, 2017. Available at- <http://oc-media.org/anti-orban-demonstrators-face-off-with-far-right-in-tbilisi/>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Lomsadze

<sup>27</sup> Nizharadze, Tamuna. "როგორ იღებენ ქალებს ქართულ ფაშისტურ ორგანიზაციაში და სად ეკრძალებათ მათ სიყვარული." *Tbiliselebi*. April 27, 2018. Available at- <http://tbiliselebi.ge/index.php?newsid=268453070>

<sup>28</sup> "Anatomy of Georgian Neo-Nazism." *Transparency International Georgia*. May 18, 2018. Available at- <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/anatomy-georgian-neo-nazism>

<sup>29</sup> Kobakhidze, Otto. "Intolerance throws the Nazi salute in Georgia." *Civil.ge*. June 11, 2018. Available at- <https://civil.ge/archives/244077>.

by its newfound attention, Unity members may feel emboldened to show up to more demonstrations and escalate tensions among opposing protest groups. News stories focusing on Georgian neo-fascist groups receive significant attention both within Georgia and abroad due to the sensationalist nature of the content. Such publicity is particularly damaging to the reputation of the country as observers may falsely equate Georgia with its eastern European counterparts that have witnessed a striking rise in neo-Nazi movements and have taken concerning authoritarian turns.

## Where does far-right support come from?

Reliable data on support for informal groups like the Georgian National Unity and the Georgian March are unavailable because these groups operate outside political institutions and rely on online forums and social media to gain public support. As the Georgian March seeks more legitimate institutional credibility as a political party, better data may become available.

As the actor operating at the legislative level, the APG offers an easier case study. A preliminary analysis of the October 2017 local elections suggests that support for the Alliance of Patriots is tied to unemployment (Analysis I in the Appendix). In keeping with the larger literature, analyses examining far-right support in both Western and Eastern Europe would support the hypothesis that the far right in Georgia draws its support from citizens facing severe economic hardships. However, there is currently insufficient evidence available to draw definitive conclusions on the demographics of support. More notable is a statistical analysis using CRRC data from its December 2017 public attitudes in Georgia survey. While education level and unemployment were not notable indicators of support for the Alliance of Patriots, anti-US and anti-NATO sentiment proved stronger indicators of far-right support. Individuals who believe that US propaganda exists in Georgia and those who disapprove of Georgia joining NATO are three times more likely to support the Alliance of Patriots (Analysis II and III in the Appendix). This result takes on added significance once one examines the narratives disseminated by pro-Russian actors.

## The influence of Russian disinformation and propaganda

It is impossible to discuss the far right in Georgia without also mentioning Russia's interest in disrupting Georgia's democratic development. The 2012 election of Putin coincided with a Georgian administration, led by former President Mikheil Saakashvili, more predisposed to the West than ever before. In the aftermath of Putin's election, the Kremlin made a concerted effort to develop its conservative soft power in Georgia. In 2014, the Kremlin began establishing pro-Russian NGOs, as well as TV channels, which began broadcasting nationwide. In recent years, the Kremlin has focused on influencing Georgian cyberspace via internet media sources. Notably, Russian media sources are now broadcast in both Russian and Georgian to facilitate easy access to the Georgian public.<sup>30</sup> Saturating the media environment with stories about threats to Georgian identity, Russia plays on these emotional messages to present itself as a counterbalance to the Western liberalism that supposedly promotes homosexuality and influxes of foreigners. Through its propaganda campaigns, Russia casts itself as a country with a shared faith, identity, history, and culture, a protector of a Georgian identity under threat from the West.<sup>31</sup>

While it remains difficult to say to what extent Kremlin narratives are effective in garnering support for the far right in Georgia, the authors of the 2018 Disinformation Resilience Index describe ultranationalist movements as a pillar of Kremlin propaganda operating in Georgia.<sup>32</sup> All of the far-right actors discussed in this brief have been accused of having ties to the Russian Federation. However, it is difficult to prove whether there is direct support from the Russian Federation. A recently released Transparency International Georgia report linked members of the Georgian March and Alliance of Patriots to the Russian government or to local Russian-sponsored NGOs.<sup>33</sup> Despite their role in disrupting Georgian democracy, all of the far-right groups discussed in this report consider themselves to be adamantly pro-Georgian forces. Whatever the reality of Russian support may be, financial or otherwise, it is essential to note that the growing success of each of these movements serves Russia's interest in destabilizing Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Furthermore, the lack of awareness about the extent to which Russian disinformation supports the far right contributes to the vulnerability of the Georgian public to far-right messaging.

---

<sup>30</sup> Rukhadze, Vasili. "Russia's Soft Power in Georgia: How Does It Work?" February 19, 2016. Available at- <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-soft-power-in-georgia-how-does-it-work/>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. *Kremlin Influence Index 2017*, pp. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Ananishvili et al., pp. 155.

<sup>33</sup> "Anatomy of Georgian Neo-Nazism." *Transparency International Georgia*. May 18, 2018. Available at- <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/anatomy-georgian-neo-nazism>.



## Far right messages in Georgia

With limited data on the demographics of support for the far right, it is important to examine these groups' messages and rhetoric in order to counteract their recent gains. A distinguishing element of the Georgian far right is the extent to which it rallies around religion. In a country where 81% of the population considers itself to be members of the Georgian Orthodox Church, each far-right group profiled here invokes the Church, though to varying degrees. Many far-right nationalist groups in Georgia have portrayed Orthodox Christianity as “the fundamental pillar of Georgian identity, and one that requires protection from globalization.”<sup>34</sup> Drawing on this framework, far-right actors define the largest threats to Georgian Orthodoxy and values as an influx of foreigners (particularly Muslim), homosexuality, and increasingly, the West.

### *On social media*

Facebook offers a unique window into the main arguments of the Georgian National Unity and the Georgian March as these actors lack mainstream platforms to disseminate their messages. The Georgian March page has nearly 16,000 followers,<sup>35</sup> while the Georgian National Unity page has over 3,000.<sup>36</sup> Often flagged for hate speech, the pages of both groups have been deleted or blocked by Facebook and group members have had to start new pages as a result. The current page of the Georgian National Unity, which has only been active since May 2018, suggests a group preoccupied with the ethnic purity of Georgia and a “dying homeland” that can only be saved through national socialism and fascism. It frequently states that fascism is not anti-Christian, and presents fascism as a solution for the defense of traditional Georgian values. The Unity targets Marxism and capitalism in equal measure and argues vehemently against democracy and liberalism, particularly sexual minority rights and gender equality. It borrows from American Alt-Right rhetoric, railing against political correctness, while accusing the mainstream media of disseminating propaganda.

As the Georgian March is now seeking greater political credibility, the views of the group are expressed with increasing frequency in mainstream media outlets. However, Facebook has also proved to be an important platform for organizing support for the Georgian March. The Facebook audience for pages supporting the group's “March of Georgians” exceeded 50,000 people. These pages made neo-fascist, racist, and xenophobic calls to encourage public participation in the demonstration.<sup>37</sup> The Georgian March directly invokes Georgian Orthodoxy as a central tenant on its Facebook page. It rallies aggressively against the LGBT community and warns of the threat of Arab, Iranian, and Turkish migrants. Like Georgian National Unity, it accuses the mainstream media, predominately Rustavi 2 TV channel, of spreading disinformation, and accuses Open Society Georgia Foundation of spreading propaganda and encouraging homosexuality.

---

<sup>34</sup> Sabanadze, Natalie. *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Country*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> ქართული მარში, Available at- <https://www.facebook.com/qartulimarshi/>

<sup>36</sup> ეროვნული სოციალისტური მოძრაობა- „საქართველოს ეროვნული ერთობა“, Available at- <https://www.facebook.com/pg/GeoNSM>.

<sup>37</sup> *Monitoring of the Activities of Ultra-Nationalist Groups on the Facebook*. Media Development Foundation: pp. 9.

While the far right in Georgia does borrow popular narratives of far-right groups elsewhere, like promoting anti-Soros sentiment, these groups have yet to fully leverage social media to reconfigure the information landscape to their advantage. None of the far-right Facebook pages have organized individuals to the extent of the American Alt-Right in terms of launching coordinated attacks online, such as in the comment section of news stories or YouTube videos. The Georgian far right still remains largely absent from popular forums for far-right actors like Twitter, YouTube, or Reddit. However, with Russia's interest in promoting the success of the far right in Georgia and the Kremlin's institutional knowledge of "trolling" tactics online, this is an important dimension to be aware of. Those concerned about the far right in Georgia should monitor attempts to game social media algorithms into promoting misinformation or conspiracy theories that serve the far-right agenda.

### *In the media*

A notable element of contemporary far right messaging in Georgia is the extent to which it coincides with pro-Kremlin narratives. While far-right groups distance themselves from blatantly pro-Russian policy, their messages align with Kremlin disinformation campaigns in that they cultivate Euroscepticism and anti-Western feelings.<sup>38</sup> Certain messages perpetuated by the far-right and pro-Kremlin sources remain virtually indistinguishable in the media environment. According to a Media Development Foundation (MDF) report, hate speech and anti-Western messages are spread primarily by the following media outlets: the ethno-nationalist newspapers Asaval-Dasavali and Alia Holding, Obieqtivi, and the pro-Kremlin internet sites Georgia and the World and Sakinformi.<sup>39</sup> Georgia and the World is the leading malefactor in the dissemination of anti-Western propaganda and hate speech.

### *Hate speech and xenophobic rhetoric*

Pro-Kremlin media sources are the primary circulators of hate speech in Georgia, with far-right elements comprising the second largest source. An increase was observed in almost all types of hate speech in 2017 compared to 2016. The MDF attributes this drastic increase in both xenophobic and homophobic comments to increased activity by ultra-nationalist groups.<sup>40</sup> Both the APG and the Georgian March top the list of the political actors who most frequently used hate speech in the last year.

Xenophobic discourse has been largely absent throughout Georgia's history.<sup>41</sup> Despite the fact that Georgia has been relatively immune to the consequences of the refugee crisis and immigration to Georgia is a small-scale phenomenon, the extreme right has been successful in linking EU-integration to a potential influx of migrants and to the belief that immigration will exacerbate unemployment for ethnic Georgians.<sup>42</sup> Generally speaking, xenophobic rhetoric

---

<sup>38</sup> Ananeishvili, Guram, Meskhi, Ana, and Tughushi, Lasha. *Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe: Georgia*. Kiev: Eurasian States in Transition Research Center, 2018: pp. 140.

<sup>39</sup> Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Hate Speech*. Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2018, pp. 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Jgharkava, Irakli. "Anti-migrant Rhetoric in Georgia: Do Far-right Groups Threaten Georgia's Pro-European Discourse?" *Georgian Institute of Politics* 16 (2017), pp. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6.

witnessed a sharp increase in recent years.<sup>43</sup> It was the most frequently employed form of hate speech, comprising nearly 50% of all hate speech in 2017. The majority of xenophobic comments in 2017 (29%) alleged that migrants were a threat to the country.<sup>44</sup>

### *Anti-Western propaganda*

2017 marked a significant shift in the content of anti-Western propaganda. According to the Media Development Foundation, in 2017 the dominant topic shifted away from identity and rights and moved towards foreign policy, with an emphasis on demonizing Georgia's strategic partners (the US, NATO, and the EU). Compared to the previous year, negative comments about the US tripled and messages against the EU doubled, whereas comments about the loss of identity and imposition of human rights in an anti-Western context almost halved. Comments against NGOs and the US philanthropist George Soros have tripled since 2016. The US accounted for the highest share of negative comments (25.9%), followed by NATO (18.4%).<sup>45</sup> Much like hate speech, pro-Kremlin media or political parties were the dominant sources of these narratives, followed by far-right media sources. This shift in the narrative of anti-Western propaganda is particularly alarming when combined with a data analysis that shows a strong correlation between support for far-right populism and suspicion towards US motives and anti-NATO sentiment (Appendix).

## Examining existing laws and policies:

The Georgian government has yet to implement sufficient programs to counteract Russian disinformation that supports the narratives of far-right groups, nor has it formed an overarching policy strategy to counteract far-right support. Laws against the most extreme cases of hate speech are, however, already in effect.

Georgian law criminalizes hate speech only when it “creates a threat of immediate, irreversible and apparent violence.”<sup>46</sup> The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) adopted a “Code of Conduct for Broadcasters,” which aims to ensure that all broadcasters have an equal responsibility to observe professional ethical norms and be accountable to society. It also establishes self-regulation mechanisms in accordance with the code.<sup>47</sup> While experts agree the law should not be changed, the state could do more to monitor the media through the regulation commission.<sup>48</sup> In 2017, MDF and member organizations of the civic platform “No To Phobia!” filed three complaints with various media commissions. Two of the three complaints were ruled in violation of ethical journalism codes. Similarly, the Georgian Charter of Journalist

---

<sup>43</sup>“The population of Georgia on immigrants.” *Social Science in the Caucasus* (blog). March 14, 2016. Available at <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2016/03/the-population-of-georgia-on-immigrants.html>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Kintsurashvili, pp. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda*. Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation (2018), pp. 7-10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Hate Speech*, pp. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Kintsurashvili pp. 9

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Ananeishvili, pp. 146-147.

Ethics (GCJE) monitors disinformation in the media sphere. The GCJE reviews reported cases of violations of professional standards by request and allows citizens to appeal cases of ethical violations by journalists. Since 2010, the GCJE has reviewed 163 cases by different media outlets.<sup>49</sup> Where there is a lack in state programming or state resources, NGOs already working on issues of media monitoring can supplement and aid the government's work in tracking disinformation. Both the Media Development Foundation and the Georgian Charter of Journalist Ethics are working on the frontlines of Russia's disinformation warfare in Georgia. The government would do well to work closely with these organizations to track the main targets of Russian disinformation so as to formulate a better strategy to combat it.

The Liberty Charter, adopted in 2011, bans the public display of Soviet and Nazi symbols and designates a 1,000 GEL fine in case of violations. Georgian Vice Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, who also serves as Minister of Internal Affairs, acknowledged that the law is not perfect with respect to extremist groups, stating that it is "not very effective [at] fighting against aggressive and fascist-leaning groups."<sup>50</sup> Gakharia still maintained that the state had the capacity to prevent any fascist expressions in the country and the government made strong statements condemning the existence of fascist groups as unacceptable. The Ministry of Internal Affairs launched investigations into several cases when neo-fascist groups called for violence during the May 12-13 rallies. Georgia's State Security Service warned groups, including the National Unity, not to use fascist symbols in the future.<sup>51</sup> The government did well in acknowledging the incompatibility of Georgian fascism with Georgian ideals. However, the government should be wary of enforcing bans on symbols too widely. Far-right groups could easily accuse the government of suppressing freedom of speech. Furthermore, outlawing the display of fascist symbols does little to counteract the underlying issues of far-right support in any meaningful way.

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Ananeishvili, pp. 143.

<sup>50</sup>"Georgian State Security Service issue warning to neo-Nazis." *Open Caucasus Media*. May 18, 2018. Available at- <http://oc-media.org/georgian-state-security-service-issue-warning-to-neo-nazis/>.

<sup>51</sup>Morrison, Thea. "Interior Minister: We Will Act against Fascist Groups." *Georgia Today*. May 21, 2018. Available at- <http://georgiatoday.ge/news/10348/Interior-Minister%3A-We-Will-Act-against-Fascist-Groups>

## Conclusion and recommendations:

The government is in a difficult position and must strike a delicate balance in its approach to the far-right problem. With respect to future demonstrations, a too forceful dispersal of far-right demonstrators, though legal, could “play into their hands and increase public empathy for their cause.”<sup>52</sup> Any perception of censorship will evoke memories of Saakashvili-era policies and invite accusations of perpetuating a pro-Western narrative by any means necessary. In an environment where just as many Georgians think Western powers spread propaganda as do Russian powers, the government must be wary of being perceived as a puppet of pro-Western forces in its dealings with far-right groups.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to providing a measured response, it is important the government not go too far in writing off far-right actors as merely pro-Russian forces. The role Russian disinformation is playing in this phenomenon undoubtedly merits serious action. However, whether the Russian government is funding far-right politics in Georgia or not, it is certainly not paying individual Georgians to support far-right movements. Regardless of support coming from the Kremlin, the arguments of far-right actors are still attracting enough public support to cause concern. Ultimately, the government must recognize that the roots of intolerance are homegrown and the underlying grievances of individuals who support far-right groups, such as concerns over unemployment or government corruption, need to be addressed.<sup>54</sup>

### *Developing a state strategy*

The government cannot ignore the evidence that Russian disinformation in Georgia is having an effect. According to the authors of the 2018 Disinformation Resilience Index, the state lacks a clear vision to counter disinformation, as there is no national strategy to fight pro-Kremlin narratives.<sup>55</sup> It was not until 2017, as a result of lobbying on the part of civil society, that the administration approved a document naming Russian propaganda as a threat to Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic Integration.<sup>56</sup> The Communications Strategy of the Government of Georgia on EU and NATO Membership 2017-2020 deems the Kremlin’s information war a significant threat, but not enough has been done to streamline the institutional fight against disinformation.<sup>57</sup> With respect to the far right, no official document links Russian disinformation to growing support for far-right movements. The government first needs to acknowledge that Russian disinformation serves the interests of far-right groups in Georgia (and vice versa), and must coordinate across states bodies to address the problem.<sup>58</sup>

The Georgian government has also been notably slow in developing a broad strategy to counter violent extremism. Groups like Georgian National Unity and the Georgian March have already

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Lomsadze, Giorgi. “Georgian fascists step into the spotlight.”

<sup>53</sup> “As many Georgians think the West spreads propaganda as Russia.” *Social Science in the Caucasus* (blog). February 19, 2018. Available at- <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2018/02/as-many-georgians-think-west-spreads.html>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Kobakhidze

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Ananeishvili, pp. 156.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. *Kremlin Influence Index 2017*, pp. 21.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. Ananeishvili, pp. 149.

<sup>58</sup> *Threats of Russia’s Soft and Hard Power Policy in Georgia*. European Initiative, pp.10.

demonstrated their propensity for violence during the May 2018 counter-protests. While their ire was directed at a mostly ethnic Georgian crowd, these groups have the potential to radicalize Georgia's considerable Muslim minority if their Islamophobic rhetoric escalates and anti-migrant demonstrations continue.<sup>59</sup> To counteract far-right extremism among younger demographics, introducing media literacy courses in school could be an important protection for young Georgians against Russian disinformation and far-right radicalization.<sup>60</sup>

### *Working with the Georgian Orthodox Church*

Each of the far-right discussed attempts to derive legitimacy as a protector of Georgian values by invoking Georgian Orthodoxy. Though the Church has both pro-Western and pro-Russian forces, it is worth noting that certain members of the clergy have demonstrated with far-right groups in the past, and the Church has a mixed record in promoting liberal norms, such as equal rights for religious and sexual minorities and gender equality.<sup>61</sup> Still, as the Church is an entity with a remarkable degree of authority, the ability to shape public opinion, dictate moral standards, and mobilize collective action, working with the GOC in an open forum to counteract far-right rhetoric could do more to immediately slow the momentum of the far right than any other policy. Georgian Patriarch Ilia II intervened prior to March of Georgians demonstrations, calling for the demonstrations to be cancelled in anticipation of violence between opposing groups.<sup>62</sup> There is no reason to assume the Church's staunch protection of Orthodox Christianity and family values extends to supporting violent and hateful rhetoric.

An ongoing project financed by the British and Dutch embassies, which is organized by the Tbilisi-based Center for Development and Democracy and the Patriarchate's Education Center, educates priests about the EU so that they can educate their parishioners in turn.<sup>63</sup> A similar program could be implemented with open-minded members of the clergy regarding the far right. This program should educate priests on the dangers of far-right radicalization in corrupting Christian values, and encourage members of the clergy to pass on those messages to their followers.

### *Combating disinformation in the media*

The media's lack of nuance in its coverage of the far right obscures the issues at hand and makes it more difficult to counteract far-right support. State-funded media outlets could be doing much more to promote the main foreign policy goals of the country, including its European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The public broadcaster's management should reconsider the closure of its bureau in Europe. More coverage on Europe and the alliance, as well as foreigners in Georgia, would do much to counteract xenophobia and distrust of the

---

<sup>59</sup> Krikorian, Onnik James. "Georgia Tackles the Thorny Problem of Radicalization." *Stratfor*. September 10, 2017. Available at- <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/georgia-tackles-thorny-problem-radicalization>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Ananeishvili, pp. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Minesashvili, Salome. "Can the Georgian Orthodox Church Contribute to the Democratization Process?" *Georgian Institute of Politics* (January 2016), pp. 3.

<sup>62</sup> "Anti-Russian fascist' rally met by far-right in Tbilisi." *Open Caucasus Media*. July 24, 2017. Available at- <http://oc-media.org/anti-russian-fascist-rally-met-by-far-right-in-tbilisi/>

<sup>63</sup> "Georgia: How Closely Should the State Embrace the Church?" *EurasiaNet*. May 26, 2016. Available at- <https://eurasianet.org/s/georgia-how-closely-should-the-state-embrace-the-church>.

West.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, opening up Georgian media to include more channels with European and even American programming could counteract the negative stereotypes about Western cultures that are currently taking hold.

Finally, reviewing the media coverage of the far right reveals that many articles mislabel or misunderstand these groups. For example, the labelling of Georgian National Unity as a neo-Nazi group without exploring the meaning of the term is overly-simplistic. The main aim of its Facebook page is to present fascism and national socialism as a viable alternative to democracy, while fixating on the ethnic purity of Georgia. The Georgian March has also been labeled as neo-Nazi, when in reality it unites several different ultranationalist elements. It more frequently demonizes Arab, Muslim, and Turkish migrants than any other group. The Alliance of Patriots is frequently portrayed as pro-Russian. However, the party platform itself is Russia-neutral and more NATO-skeptic than expressly anti-NATO. Its main interest is positioning itself as an opposition party to the current administration using populist rhetoric to portray itself as a defender of “the people.” Without a more nuanced discussion of these groups going forward, it is difficult to understand their main objectives and their support base, and thus, harder to combat their advances. The state should invest in training journalists to better identify differences between groups and produce better coverage of their messages, as well as capacity training with respect to the spread of Russian disinformation.

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. Ananeishvili, pp. 144.

## V. Appendix

The analyses in this appendix serve as a cursory evaluation of far-right party support in Georgia. More sophisticated statistical analyses are needed to provide a fuller and more robust picture of the determinants of far-right voting behavior.

### Analysis I

#### Methodology

This analysis looks at the number of votes for the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) in the second round of voting in Georgia's October 2017 local elections by region. The independent variables include the total number of immigrants, unemployed people, individuals with a primary education or below, the total number of individuals receiving state pensions (as of October 2017), and the percentage of the population living in urban areas within each region. All independent variable data were obtained from the latest Georgian census (2014), with the exception of statistics on pensioners, which were provided by the Social Service Agency of Georgia. Data for the dependent variable come from the Central Election Commission of Georgia.

VARIABLES	(1) APG
Low Education	0.050 (0.062)
Total Immigrants	<b>-0.306*</b> (0.173)
Unemployed	<b>0.207**</b> (0.095)
Pensioners	0.063 (0.053)
% in Urban Areas	-325.378 (561.478)
Constant	612.528* (312.591)
Observations	62
R-squared	0.908

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

### Results

Low education, immigrant presence, and high unemployment are all indicators that the literature has demonstrated to be correlated with support for far-right, populist parties.<sup>65</sup> The number of individuals receiving state pension is included as a measure of those living in poverty, as state pensioners might be more easily persuaded by a

<sup>65</sup> Arzheimer, Kai. "15 Electoral Sociology—who Votes for the Extreme Right and Why—and When?." *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader* 277 (2016).



political party that places emphasis on providing state support to ethnic Georgians first. In addition, as those living in rural areas tend to be poorer, it is likely that the voting behavior in urban and rural areas is fundamentally different due to cultural and economic divides. The percentage of voters living in urban areas is included in this model to control for the distinctions between urban and rural voters.

The results of this analysis suggest that support for the APG increases as the number of unemployed people increases in a region. Contrary to expectations, the analysis suggests that increases in the number of immigrants decrease support for the APG. The number of pensioners in a municipality, as well as the percentage of the population living in urban areas, did not prove to be statistically significant measures.

## Analysis II Methodology

Analysis II uses data from Caucasus Research Resource Center's December 2017 NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia survey. The analysis runs multinomial logistic regressions using dichotomous dependent and independent variables with survey settings. The dependent variable represents individuals who responded that the APG is the closest party to them.

(Table I)

VARIABLES	(1) APG	(2) APG	(3) APG	(4) APG	(5) APG	(6) APG
JOINNATOGOOD	<b>-1.338**</b> (0.647)	<b>-1.295**</b> (0.639)	<b>-1.301**</b> (0.643)	<b>-1.073*</b> (0.562)	<b>-1.604***</b> (0.396)	<b>-1.430***</b> (0.378)
USPROPAGREE	0.190 (0.709)	0.200 (0.703)	0.186 (0.702)	0.559 (0.673)	-0.010 (0.385)	0.034 (0.374)
RUPROPAGREE	1.074 (0.712)	1.094 (0.710)	1.096 (0.708)	0.976 (0.615)	0.600 (0.387)	<b>0.728*</b> (0.385)
JOINEURASIANGOOD	0.507 (0.649)	0.555 (0.643)	0.523 (0.645)	0.743 (0.569)	<b>0.693*</b> (0.380)	<b>0.705*</b> (0.368)
DISINFO_GEOTV	0.325 (0.822)	0.341 (0.818)	0.344 (0.813)	0.077 (0.684)	0.040 (0.438)	0.101 (0.422)
WRONGDIRECTION	0.643 (0.591)	0.489 (0.573)	0.528 (0.568)	0.197 (0.511)	0.482 (0.349)	0.523 (0.337)
CULTRLHERITAGE	-0.937 (1.097)	-1.005 (1.097)	-0.957 (1.090)	-1.251 (1.074)	-0.454 (0.515)	-0.242 (0.470)
URBANDUMMY	0.076 (0.598)	0.105 (0.594)	0.159 (0.588)	0.193 (0.525)	0.414 (0.401)	
PROTESTVOTE	0.222 (0.706)	0.210 (0.696)	0.238 (0.694)	<b>0.899*</b> (0.542)		
SPENDMNTNTH	-0.314 (0.621)	-0.271 (0.618)	-0.161 (0.602)			
UNEMPL	0.479 (0.632)	0.468 (0.632)				
JOBS_IMP	0.650					

	(0.580)					
Constant	4.968***	-4.667***	-4.432***	-4.572***	-3.386***	-3.399***
	(1.254)	(1.198)	(1.152)	(1.024)	(0.625)	(0.528)
Observations	528	528	528	602	917	980

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**(Table II)**

VARIABLES	(7) APG	(8) APG	(9) APG	(10) APG	(11) APG	(12) APG
JOINNATOGOOD	<b>1.483***</b>	<b>-1.468***</b>	<b>-1.489***</b>	<b>-1.666***</b>	<b>-1.381***</b>	<b>-0.994***</b>
	(0.364)	(0.359)	(0.347)	(0.310)	(0.289)	(0.249)
USPROPAGREE	0.011	-0.067	0.123	0.172	0.449	
	(0.357)	(0.350)	(0.329)	(0.328)	(0.314)	
RUPROPAGREE	<b>0.797**</b>	<b>0.854**</b>	<b>0.780**</b>	<b>0.640*</b>		
	(0.376)	(0.374)	(0.346)	(0.335)		
JOINEURASIANGOOD	0.556	0.542	0.390			
	(0.353)	(0.349)	(0.338)			
DISINFO_GEOTV	0.234	0.203				
	(0.413)	(0.398)				
WRONGDIRECTION	0.432					
	(0.316)					
CULTRLHERITAGE						
URBANDUMMY						
PROTESTVOTE						
SPENDMNTH						
UNEMPL						
JOBS_IMP						
Constant	3.446***	-3.191***	-3.066***	-2.751***	-2.630***	-2.588***
	(0.517)	(0.485)	(0.420)	(0.331)	(0.293)	(0.170)
Observations	1,057	1,077	1,176	1,187	1,247	1,674

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**(Table III)**

VARIABLES	(1) APG	(2) APG	(3) APG	(4) APG	(5) APG	(126) APG
JOINEUGOOD	0.060 (0.683)	0.106 (0.678)	0.087 (0.678)	-0.130 (0.580)	<b>-0.985**</b> (0.384)	<b>-0.901**</b> (0.362)
EUPROPAGREE	-0.094 (0.606)	-0.103 (0.598)	-0.112 (0.598)	0.246 (0.564)	-0.097 (0.365)	-0.135 (0.351)
RUPROPAGREE	0.414 (0.619)	0.395 (0.613)	0.401 (0.611)	0.402 (0.543)	0.342 (0.374)	0.514 (0.367)
JOINEURASIANGOOD	0.860 (0.598)	0.891 (0.591)	0.880 (0.591)	<b>0.940*</b> (0.539)	<b>0.762**</b> (0.386)	<b>0.812**</b> (0.363)
DISINFO_GEOTV	0.299 (0.698)	0.319 (0.695)	0.308 (0.695)	0.106 (0.607)	0.014 (0.413)	0.179 (0.398)
WRONGDIRECTION	0.844 (0.540)	0.765 (0.535)	0.799 (0.531)	0.486 (0.476)	0.488 (0.337)	0.452 (0.322)
CULTRLHERITAGE	-1.186 (1.071)	-1.167 (1.067)	-1.154 (1.065)	-1.441 (1.058)	-0.482 (0.503)	-0.557 (0.495)
URBANDUMMY	-0.126 (0.537)	-0.138 (0.535)	-0.106 (0.532)	-0.008 (0.475)	0.176 (0.359)	
PROTESTVOTE	0.102 (0.673)	0.079 (0.667)	0.100 (0.666)	0.773 (0.516)		
SPENDMNTNTH	-0.414 (0.582)	-0.394 (0.584)	-0.326 (0.577)			
UNEMPL	0.354 (0.566)	0.356 (0.567)				
JOBS_IMP	0.622 (0.522)					
Constant	4.913*** (1.163)	4.609*** (1.122)	-4.410*** (1.074)	-4.402*** (0.940)	3.137*** (0.616)	3.295*** (0.524)
Observations	547	547	547	625	942	1,014

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**(Table IV)**

VARIABLES	(7) APG	(8) APG	(9) APG	(10) APG	(11) APG	(12) APG
JOINEUGOOD	<b>-0.995***</b> (0.353)	<b>1.051***</b> (0.347)	<b>-1.006***</b> (0.330)	<b>-1.287***</b> (0.289)	<b>-1.124***</b> (0.273)	<b>-0.887***</b> (0.244)
EUPROPAGREE	0.013 (0.340)	-0.039 (0.335)	-0.037 (0.306)	0.021 (0.304)	0.139 (0.281)	
RUPROPAGREE	0.533 (0.358)	<b>0.607*</b> (0.357)	<b>0.678**</b> (0.331)	0.504 (0.319)		
JOINEURASIANGOOD	<b>0.600*</b> (0.356)	<b>0.581*</b> (0.350)	<b>0.586*</b> (0.330)			

DISINFO_GEOTV	0.199 (0.390)	0.148 (0.377)				
WRONGDIRECTION	0.379 (0.308)					
CULTRLHERITAGE						
URBANDUMMY						
PROTESTVOTE						
SPENDMNTH						
UNEMPL						
JOBS_IMP						
Constant	-3.347*** (0.516)	3.093*** (0.488)	-3.057*** (0.419)	-2.569*** (0.315)	-2.394*** (0.274)	-2.519*** (0.187)
Observations	1,100	1,124	1,229	1,243	1,310	1,724

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## Results

While this analysis cannot tell us what indicators are predictors of support for the Alliance of Patriots, it can point to indicators that are correlated with support for the party. Of note is the extent to which variables around Georgia's strategic partners matter in this analysis. Indicators that address NATO and EU-integration are statistically significant, while economic variables are not.

Both variables representing approval for joining NATO and the EU are negatively correlated with support for the far-right party APG, while support for joining the Eurasian Union is positively correlated. A belief that Russia propaganda exists is positively correlated with support for the APG. This suggests that while the APG's base may support joining the Eurasian Union, they are also aware of the presence of Russian propaganda. Generally, 54% of survey respondents agree that Russian propaganda exists in Georgia, while 46% agree that US propaganda exists in the country. This result should cause some alarm given the emphasis pro-Kremlin narratives place on the circulation of US propaganda in Georgia.

Unlike Analysis I, economic variables were not relevant in this analysis. Unemployment; citing employment concerns as the most important issue; low monthly spending (0-300 GEL per month); and low education levels (less than a high school education) were not statistically significant variables.

Considering the extent to which the APG claims the government does not do enough to protect Georgian identity, one might expect this indicator to be correlated with far-right

support. However, even independent variables dealing with cultural preservation were not statistically significant. One might also expect individuals who live in more urban areas to be less likely to support the APG, as evidence suggests that individuals who have more contact with foreigners are less likely to support far-right parties. Nonetheless, like Analysis I, living in an urban area does not prove to be a statistically significant indicator of APG support.

Finally, support for far-right parties is often explained away as “protest voting,” a phenomenon where voters only support a political party to send a message to the parties in power. However, protest voting (measured as voting more against someone than for anyone else) was largely not correlated with APG support.

### Analysis III

This analysis uses data from Caucasus Research Resource Center’s December 2017 NDI survey: Public attitudes in Georgia. The analysis runs multinomial logistic regressions using dichotomous dependent and independent variables with survey settings. The dependent variables represent individuals who identified the APG, Georgian Dream, the Democratic Movement-United Georgia, or the United National Movement as the closest party to them.

VARIABLES	(2) APG	(4) Georgian Dream	(6) Democratic Movement- United Georgia	(8) United National Movement
USPROPAGREE	<b>1.157**</b> (0.554)	<b>0.453***</b> (0.147)	0.600 (0.681)	<b>-0.719***</b> (0.248)
WRONGDIRECT ION	0.259 (0.425)	<b>-0.911***</b> (0.156)	<b>1.719**</b> (0.683)	<b>1.462***</b> (0.261)
UNEMPL	0.430 (0.459)	-0.139 (0.147)	-0.381 (0.608)	<b>0.590**</b> (0.277)
CULTRLHERITA GE	-0.708 (0.762)	<b>-1.193***</b> (0.249)	-0.871 (1.064)	<b>1.309***</b> (0.265)
PROTESTVOTE	0.503 (0.491)	<b>-0.683***</b> (0.211)	0.425 (0.694)	<b>0.584**</b> (0.295)
JOINNATOGOO D	<b>-1.031**</b> (0.413)	-0.028 (0.161)	<b>-1.668***</b> (0.624)	<b>1.417***</b> (0.376)
Constant	-3.999*** (0.676)	0.144 (0.196)	-4.512*** (0.876)	-4.548*** (0.466)
Observations	749	886	886	886

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

VARIABLES	(1) APG	(2) Georgian Dream	(3) Democratic Movement- Georgia	(4) United National Movement
USPROPAGREE	<b>1.090*</b> (0.558)	<b>0.460***</b> (0.148)	0.551 (0.691)	<b>-0.698***</b> (0.250)
WRONGDIRECTION	0.308 (0.433)	<b>-0.930***</b> (0.157)	<b>1.695**</b> (0.692)	<b>1.494***</b> (0.262)
UNEMPL	0.384 (0.464)	-0.133 (0.148)	-0.454 (0.620)	<b>0.644**</b> (0.279)
CULTRLHERITAGE	-0.729 (0.765)	<b>-1.195***</b> (0.249)	-1.047 (1.077)	<b>1.374***</b> (0.268)
PROTESTVOTE	0.545 (0.495)	<b>-0.654***</b> (0.212)	0.462 (0.704)	<b>0.599**</b> (0.295)
JOINNATOGOOD	<b>-0.818*</b> (0.478)	0.042 (0.182)	-0.944 (0.696)	<b>0.992**</b> (0.401)
JOINEURASIANGOOD	0.321 (0.484)	0.139 (0.181)	<b>1.602**</b> (0.754)	<b>-0.945**</b> (0.372)
Constant	-4.208*** (0.744)	0.049 (0.221)	-5.618*** (1.070)	-4.084*** (0.483)
Observations	740	874	874	874

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## Results

Analysis III compares the effect of several of the independent variables discussed in Analysis II with support for different political parties. Notably, only the belief that US propaganda is distributed in Georgia and opinions about NATO-integration were statistically significant indicators of APG support. The belief that Georgia is definitely going in the wrong direction, citing employment status as unemployed, the belief that the local government will not preserve cultural heritage, and protest voting were not statistically significant. Independent variables related to skepticism around Georgia's strategic partners were the only relevant indicators of APG support.

For comparative purposes, Analysis III includes dependent variables where respondents stated that either Georgian Dream, Democratic Movement-United Georgia, or the United National Movement was the closest party to them. The results of this analysis are largely as expected. It is unsurprising that a belief that the country is headed in the wrong direction, protest voting and the belief that the local government will perform badly in preserving local cultural heritage are negatively correlated with support for Georgian Dream. One would not expect protest voting or dissatisfaction with the government to be correlated with support for the party in power. However, a belief that US propaganda exists in Georgia is positively correlated with support for Georgian Dream, while approval of joining NATO is not a statistically significant indicator of Georgian Dream support despite the pro-Western stance of the party.

As expected, support for the United National Movement is positively correlated with: a belief that the country is headed in the wrong direction, claiming to be unemployed, a belief that the local government will perform badly in preserving cultural heritage, protest voting, and support for Georgia's ambitions to join NATO. It is largely unsurprising that dissatisfaction with the government, the direction of the country, and protest voting are correlated with support for the main opposition party. The United National Movement remains stridently pro-Western, and supporters of the party would be expected to support Georgian integration into NATO.

Though its support base remains very small, Democratic Movement-United Georgia is the most notable pro-Kremlin political party acting in Georgia and the most active in making anti-Western statements. As APG is often cited as a pro-Kremlin party, it is important to contrast indicators of APG support to those of other openly anti-Western political parties. Like the APG, approval for joining NATO is negatively correlated with Democratic Movement support, while, unlike the APG, a belief that the country is moving in the wrong direction is positively correlated with party support.

```

Logistic regression                Number of obs   =       749
                                   LR chi2(6)      =       15.93
                                   Prob > chi2     =       0.0142
Log likelihood = -101.61211        Pseudo R2      =       0.0727

```

DEPVARPATSALLIANCE	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
USPROPAGREE	<b>3.180005</b>	<b>1.762615</b>	<b>2.09</b>	<b>0.037</b>	<b>1.073058</b>	<b>9.423936</b>
WRONGDIRECTION	<b>1.296102</b>	<b>.5509881</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.542</b>	<b>.5633567</b>	<b>2.981912</b>
UNEMPL	<b>1.537191</b>	<b>.7061342</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.349</b>	<b>.6247618</b>	<b>3.782173</b>
CULTRLHERITAGE	<b>.4928006</b>	<b>.3753957</b>	<b>-0.93</b>	<b>0.353</b>	<b>.1107287</b>	<b>2.19322</b>
PROTESTVOTE	<b>1.653954</b>	<b>.8125931</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>0.306</b>	<b>.6314301</b>	<b>4.332331</b>
JOINNATOBAD	<b>2.805088</b>	<b>1.159049</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>0.013</b>	<b>1.248056</b>	<b>6.304622</b>
_cons	<b>.0065392</b>	<b>.0043336</b>	<b>-7.59</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>.0017841</b>	<b>.0239675</b>

A look at the odds ratios of Model (2) of Analysis III indicate that only independent variables related to opinions on US propaganda in Georgia and joining NATO are statistically significant. This analysis suggests that voters who believe that US propaganda exists in the country, as well as those who disapprove of Georgia joining NATO, are three times more likely to support the APG.

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 support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Georgian Institute of Politics and the National Endowment for Democracy.

**How to quote this document:** Adriana Stephan. “Defining the far right in Georgia: From neo-fascists to populist parties”, Policy Paper No. 5, Georgian Institute Politics, October 2018.

© Georgian Institute of Politics, 2018

Tel: +995 599 99 02 12

Email: [info@gip.ge](mailto:info@gip.ge)

[www.gip.ge](http://www.gip.ge)