

**“The Radical Right and Youth in Georgia:
Networks, Mechanisms and Tendencies of Radicalization.”**



UGSPN

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Preface

In an era marked by the precarious balance between democracy and authoritarianism, the study of right-wing radicalization within nations like Georgia assumes paramount importance. Georgia, standing at the crossroads of political ideologies and future development, faces a pivotal moment where democratic values, especially upheld by its youth, are under threat. The emergence of radical-right movements, often resorting to violent means, jeopardizes the diverse and tolerant fabric of Georgian society, together with damaging the nation's democratic aspirations. Moreover, this phenomenon is not unique to Georgia; it is a global trend, with far-right ideologies on the ascent even in Western liberal democracies that serve as models for countries like Georgia.

This research offers a rare combination of first-hand data collection and diligent ethnographic observation. Through an in-depth analysis of individual experiences, motivations, and sentiments, the study provides not only an overview of the right-wing political and social landscape but also a thorough understanding of the factors driving right-wing radicalization among Georgian young adults. This report navigates through the multifaceted nature of radical-right politics, shedding light on the underlying complexities, including the mobilization and motivational factors on both political and societal sides. Such an understanding is crucial not only for accurately assessing the issue but also for devising tailored solutions aimed at safeguarding democratic values and promoting social cohesion. It is also timely that the report deconstructs the "pro-Russian" label ascribed to these movements. As Georgia grapples with the challenge of preserving its democratic ideals and international observers predict the rise of far-right on the European level, this research serves as a call to action, urging stakeholders to confront the issue with informed interventions grounded in empirical evidence.



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Executive Summary

This research analyzes contemporary trends of radicalization within Georgia, with a specific focus on the young adult demographic. Central to this study is the deconstruction of mobilization strategies employed by the radical right, understanding their appeal among young supporters, and illuminating the motivations behind their engagement with various radical-right discourses and groups. Additionally, the analysis unpacks the commonly attributed “pro-Russian” label associated with the Georgian far right and explain the nuances of this association.

To achieve its objectives, this study employs a triangulation approach in regard to data collection and analysis methods. The study reveals complex motivational factors driving right-wing radicalization among Georgian youth, including the search for alternative pathways, perceptions of global antagonism, and interest in/references from Western politics. Additionally, feeling of fear, perception of control deprivation, and relativism toward violence all play significant roles in shaping their ideologies. In this context, online platforms serve as crucial arenas for ideological exchange, fostering solidarity and amplifying radical narratives. The perception of global antagonism, fueled by events such as the full-scale war in Ukraine, contributes to alignment with right-wing. Furthermore, a simplified and binary framing that views Georgian politics as a struggle between two antagonistic groups adds to the moralization of political issues and justifies engagement with radical ideologies.

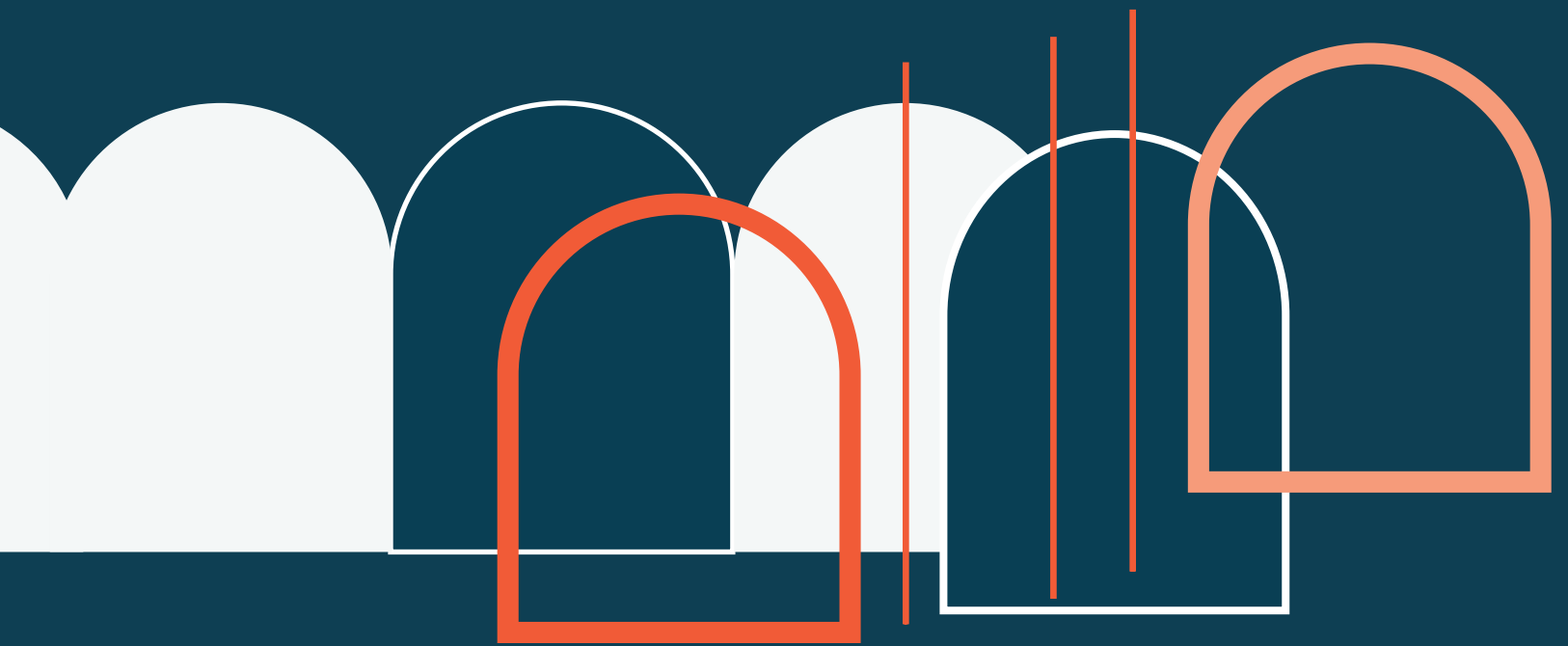
Fear, related to identity, security and culture, underpins youth engagement with radical ideologies. Despite denials of violence, situational relativism is observed, justifying actions against perceived threats to national identity and values. In their search for affiliation with a political ideology offering a sense of belonging and purpose, nationalism resonates among young adults.

The radical right in Georgia concentrates on identity, religion, migration, and media, opposing the non-governmental sector, emphasizing traditional values, and critiquing liberal ideals. They actively promote discriminatory stances against minority groups and challenge the legitimacy of the media and non-governmental organizations. While not explicitly stated, the radical right embodies pro-Russian discourse, emphasizing dialogue with Russia to address issues like the status of the occupied territories. However, it is essential to avoid oversimplification: pro-Russianness coexists with anti-LGBTQ agendas, illiberal influences, and at times, anti-democratic or violent expressions, presenting a complex ideological landscape.

In the end, the study overviews the concepts of deradicalization and disengagement, further outlining international practices from the Western democratic spheres in these regards. Subsequently, the following avenues of recommendations applicable to the Georgian context are offered in close dialogue with the research findings: Long-Term Prevention Strategies; Tailored Activities and Programs on Diverse Political Ideologies; Programs on Raising Awareness of Radical-Right Ideologies; Youth-Oriented Programs Encouraging Active Participation in Society, and Integration of Psychological Support.

CHAPTER I

Problem Statement



Problem Statement

The growth of radical sentiments and activities of radical-right forces have been trending throughout Europe, particularly affecting the state of democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Popularization of the far-right powers is driven by a variety of factors; however, the issue of migration has largely defined right-wing national-populist political discourses (Nourbakhsh et al. 2023). The outcome of European parliamentary elections in 2019, in which the far-right parties achieved greater success than ever before, serves as one proof of their growing popularity (Nourbakhsh et al. 2023). At the time of writing this report, the EU elections also forecasted an increased representation of right-wing ideologies in the European Parliament, predicting the highest increase in voting rates for groupings such as Identity and Democracy (ID) and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) (“Politico Poll of Polls” 2024). Following the rise and electoral success of broad far-right discourses and political actors across the European states, these rates only emphasize the core of the challenge that contemporary liberal democracy faces in the region. In parallel, anti-minority attitudes, especially targeting immigrants and the LGBTQ community, draw a worrying picture in the countries of Central Europe. Some public opinion surveys demonstrate that public attitudes are largely beneficial for the above-discussed political forces. For instance, more than half of respondents rejected having an immigrant neighbor according to the results of public opinion polls conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Bulgaria (Küpper and Váradi 2021).

In Georgia, Such groups are manifesting their influence through different anti-democratic, illiberal proposals (i.e., against NGOs and the media), and aggressive opposition to minority rights (including the freedoms of assembly and expression). Several examples underscore their presence and impact over the years:

- **Tbilisi Pride Fest Site Storming (2023):** This event was marked by the forceful cancellation of an LGBTQ festival as hundreds of opponents vandalized the stage, set fires, and looted the event’s private location. Far-right activists were central in mobilizing against the event and encouraging violence
- **2021 Attack on Tbilisi Pride:** In July 2021, far-right protesters engaged in a violent counterdemonstration against attempts to hold a pride parade by pro-LGBTQ organizers of the NGO Tbilisi Pride. At the event, dozens of journalists were physically attacked
- **Far-Right Demonstrations Against Youth Protesting Bassiani Events (2018):** The heavy-handed police raid on the club in May 2018 led to subsequent protests and prompted counterdemonstrations by far-right activists who aggressively opposed the alleged liberalization of drug laws and the cultural shifts associated with clubbing.

While these events only scratch the surface of the radical right’s increased activities, they are reflective of an increasing tendency to incorporate violence into their public manifestations, as well as of a sense of impunity from the state, as only a limited number of activists—not including from the organizers—faced criminal allegations. These events were dominated by young adult males (under 35), reflecting the increasing share of

the youth/young adults in the country's radical-right scene. However, at the same time, support for Georgia's Western aspirations and democratic development is consistently high, especially among the young ([CRRC 2013–2021](#); [CRRC 2011–2019](#)). Simultaneously, the exposure of far-right groups has increased notably in Georgia over the past five years, at all points along a spectrum from populist to extreme right movements ([Stephan 2018](#), [Gelashvili 2023](#)). Their role in these incidents underscores the complex landscape in Georgia, where societal and political dynamics are shaped by the exacerbating polarization between conservative and progressive segments in the country. Moreover, far-right ideas and policies are frequently linked with Russian politics, both as it is conducted locally and propagated abroad (see [Laruelle 2015](#)).

With the upcoming parliamentary elections in the fall of 2024, it is vital to be aware of the illiberal, undemocratic tendencies in the country, especially among the young electorate (18–35). This study aims to investigate trends of radicalization in present-day Georgia, specifically concentrating on the demographic of young adults who exhibit heightened susceptibility to the influences of radical-right mobilization. The study aims to comprehend the resonance of the mobilization efforts amongst young supporters, all the while seeking to understand the latter's motivations and drivers toward the spectrum of radical-right discourses and groups. Furthermore, it is the goal of the analysis to deconstruct the commonly ascribed pro-Russian label to the Georgian far right and outline the specificities of this association.

Anyone can be vulnerable to the threat of radicalization, regardless of their age, gender, religion, ethnicity, or background. However, the following factors are deemed to make some people more susceptible to radical-right ideas: failed societal integration; questioning one's place in society; feelings of alienation; mental health issues; a traumatic life event; family issues; feeling left behind; low self-esteem; experiencing racism, bullying or discrimination; and so on ([Bałowski 2022](#)). Young people who are entering a new phase of life often experience these types of challenges, making them vulnerable to the threat of increasing right-wing radicalization. Moreover, the research outlines that avoiding discussing politics at home or school might contribute to the radicalization of youth, as they seek to identify with a political community whilst still young ([Róna 2020](#), [Kvatadze 2020](#)).

It is particularly worrying when young people, whose views and actions shape the future of the country, become involved with groups that endanger democracy and contribute to social antagonism, at times fetishizing political violence and ethnic homogeneity.

Russian Influence and the Radical Right

Radical-right movements are usually not defined by a fixed set of principles and tend to adapt to changing circumstances. They seek effective modes of expression that resonate with the context and situation, rather than adhering to specific traditions. At the same time, nativist appeals, appeals to ethnic homogeneity, and the rejection of pluralism in society are typical goals for far-right groups. Far-right parties also share some features of the (“traditional”) far-left political forces, like being anti-establishment, anti-NATO, and Eurosceptic. However, despite the quite versatile nature of far-right politics, a commonly ascribed general feature of the contemporary radical right across Europe—among other associations—seems to be Russian influence ([Enriquez 2017](#)). The illiberal features of the far right contribute to aligning them with Russia's aim to weaken the state of liberal democracy in the West. Additionally, far-right groups' emphasis on

exclusionary nationalism and the alleged restoration of “traditional values” aligns with Russia’s ideological approach at local and transnational levels.

Beyond the post-Soviet sphere of influence, Russian interest in contributing to devaluing the Western models from within is frequently pursued by, through, or in direct partnership with the radical right in Europe. These parties tend to support Russia’s anti-EU agenda, emphasizing national sovereignty and conservative ideologies. In turn, Russia views them as platforms to influence EU foreign policy in its favor [\(De Maio 2018\)](#). This alignment with far-right groups aids Russia in weakening the EU and NATO, as well as exploiting divisions within Western democracies to further its influence and strategic objectives on the European continent. These groups, with their anti-EU and nationalist stances, offer opportunities for Russia to influence domestic and foreign policies in its favor. Importantly, the extent of Russian support for these parties is not entirely clear, but some financial support cases suggest involvement [\(Krekó, Győri, and Zgut 2017\)](#).

On the other hand, Russia aligns itself with radical-right groups across Europe for various strategic reasons. Russia has embraced these political actors in order to legitimize its policies, spread disinformation, and influence European domestic debates [\(Shekhovtsov 2018\)](#). These movements often share anti-Western and anti-establishment sentiments, making them appealing allies for Russia’s goal of undermining Western unity and influence. Russia considers far-right groups as valuable partners in challenging liberal democratic institutions, serving its broader geopolitical agenda [\(Dennison and Pardijs 2016\)](#). Far-right media outlets across Europe frequently promote narratives that coincide with Russian interests, providing a platform for the dissemination of disinformation and amplifying Russian influence. Furthermore, the Russian state leverages the polarization and divisiveness that these radical-right groups can generate within European politics, ultimately sowing discord and chaos. We can conclude that Russia strategically engages with far-right movements and populist parties in various countries to advance its interests, which can vary from party to party and nation to nation.

Russia’s influence is noticeable in radical-right youth movements in, for instance, Austria. The ideology of Russian far-right political philosopher Alexander Dugin has gained traction within the Identitarian Movement there, which opposes US influence in Europe. Russia has also supported various NGOs and think tanks in Austria and Germany which promote pro-Russian positions [\(Krekó, Weidinger, and Schmid 2017\)](#). The far-right media in Germany has close ties to both the AfD and the Kremlin, often promoting similar narratives while receiving support from Russian hackers and automated networks [\(Havlicek et al. 2017\)](#). In the Czech Republic, openly pro-Russian parties and organizations often represent nationalist or far-right positions. They aim to establish a pro-Russian geopolitical platform opposed to liberal democratic institutions, the European Union, and NATO. These organizations have ties to Russian embassies and cultural centers and promote pan-Slavic and Eurasianist geopolitical ideas [\(Vejvodová et al. 2017\)](#). Similarly, pro-Russian groups in the Czech Republic disseminate disinformation, delegitimize democratic institutions, and contribute to destabilization.

Furthermore, Russia’s playbook includes supporting territorial disintegration and secessionist movements in various Western countries. To achieve these goals, it often supports the spread of historical revisionism, particularly sensitive across the countries of Central Europe. Budapest has become a hub for pro-Russian

extreme right networks, hosting meetings and activities of extremist groups from other countries ([Krekó, Gyóri, and Zgut 2017](#)). Russia's influence operations are pragmatic and tailored to each country, focusing on strategic goals. In these terms, the instrumentalization of historical narratives have become prevalent, as seen prior to the authorization of armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine and promoting its version of historical truth since ([Koposov 2018](#), [Hrytsak et al. 2019](#), [Gozalishvili, Kartsivadze, and Kalandadze 2022](#)).

While the Georgian radical right has been narratively labeled as pro-Russian almost since its widespread resurgence in recent years, this designation is still in need of deconstruction. As seen above, association with Russia is a multidimensional process, varying from value association to practical links and financial networks. While all of it could be considered contributive to the destruction of liberal democracy, the nuanced understanding of “pro-Russianness” within Georgia's radical right is salient at least for the following reasons: it assists in identifying the core of the challenge and focusing solution-oriented discussion on the matter; moreover, it reflects on the indirect ways of influencing the youth's ideological inclinations and positions on democratic values; and finally, it contributes to tailoring policy suggestions to the nuances of the issue.

Radical Right

While moving along the continuum of radicalization and extremism, contemporary radical-right movements usually participate in constitutional forms of democratic politics, such as elections, and adopt populist styles to avoid accusations of extremism ([Henderson 2020](#)). The online presence entangled with youth-dominated activities online and on-site characterizes a considerable part of contemporary radicalization tendencies, as evidenced below. The research proposes to examine radicalization tendencies in contemporary Georgia, with a particular focus on the youth, who are particularly susceptible to radical-right mobilization.

Radical-right politics is hereby understood as a political movement rooted in nativism, characterized by xenophobic, homophobic, anti-Islamist, and anti-immigration attitudes, and is aimed at advancing the “interests” of the major ethnic/national group in the country as opposed to the minorities there ([Mudde 1995](#), [Jupskås 2020](#), [Bötticher 2017](#)). “Radicalism as an ideological mindset tends to be very critical of the existing status quo, pursuing the objective of restructuring and/or overthrowing outdated political structures” ([Bötticher 2017](#), 75). The concept of the nation and tradition plays a central role in their ideologies, with nationalism being a common thread.

In sum, the radical right is hereby approached as a spectrum of diverse political actors, varying from groups that frame their “front-stage politics” in a populist manner, to movements that lean toward extremism and consider violence a means to an end ([Snow and Cross 2011](#)).

Outline and Research Questions

The research aims to comprehend and deconstruct the complex process of radicalization in Georgia, particularly focusing on the tendencies of youth radicalization there. It is, therefore, the goal of the research to provide an analysis of the far-right scene in the country, the issues with which they concern themselves, and their mobilizing strategies, as well as motivating factors on the part of the youth. One of the study's objectives is to examine the characterization of the Georgian radical right as pro-Russian, a narrative prevalent since its notable resurgence in recent years, with an emphasis on deconstructing this categorization. In accordance with the objectives of the study, it will:

1. Map the far-right scene in Georgia as it has evolved over recent years (especially considering the period since 2017–2018, the years of the radical right's public resurgence, as well as the years when anti-immigrant issues were most widely discussed in the media). This proves important for observing the general tendency and structural composition of the radical right in the country, together with their tendencies of organizational transformation and a timeline of their public activities.
2. Attempt to deconstruct the omnipresent pro-Russian labeling and scrutinize the contextual congruence with "Russian politics," while also scrutinizing this term.
3. Draw upon the motivational factors that contribute to the radicalization of youth in the Georgian context.
4. Provide an overview of international practices and contextually relevant deradicalization strategies.

Research Questions:

- Why are young people becoming involved in radical-right movements and activities?
- How can we operate the "pro-Russian" label in reference to the Georgian radical right?
- What effective deradicalization tools are applicable to the Georgian context?

Methodology

As the first step, it is important to identify radical groups, movements, or organizations that actively use social networks and channels to spread their ideas and recruit people. Subsequently, the study focuses on comprehending the relevant reasons and mechanisms behind the young people's incentive to join radical groups and subscribe to subsequent ideologies. The task remains problematic to study, as getting the people involved to talk about their experiences is an omnipresent challenge. Considering the inherent challenges of the study matter, the research applies triangulation of the data collection and analysis methods.

The study conducts qualitative semi-structured interviews with young members and supporters of radical groups. These interviews provide first-hand insights into the motivations, drivers, and barriers to radicalization, offering a deeper understanding of individual experiences. The research team carefully selected interview participants from key groups, using broad digital platforms and a snowball sampling

method to expand the participant pool. Conducted by trained students throughout February, a total of fourteen interviews were gathered and analyzed to enrich the overall findings.

Moreover, the study also conducts an ethnography in digital space of the far-right scene, focusing on uncovering the strategies used for recruitment. The goal is to thoroughly investigate the various pathways to radicalization, considering both overt and covert recruitment methods, as well as active and passive engagement. By tracking the evolution of content shared by political actors, the research examines the dynamics between these actors and the groups they target or attract. The technical approach involves a six-week period of monitoring key online platforms—Facebook, Telegram, and TikTok—chosen for their widespread use and relevance in Georgia. Two researchers spend 60–90 minutes each day analyzing content on these platforms to identify and categorize recruitment-related data. The data is organized into categories such as general recruitment, self-recruitment, explicit recruitment, and covert recruitment, with daily logging of the findings.

Technical plan: After identifying the main groups, the research team outlined the particular segment aiming to target supporters/members for each political grouping. Since it was expected that the positions of supporters within these groupings would not be static, the target group for the interviews was selected via the broad digital platforms and expanded via a snowball strategy. The interviews were conducted by trained students over the month of February. In total, fourteen interviews were collected and analyzed.

Qualitative interview data are first transcribed and categorized per the mixture of data-driven and concept-driven coding. Accordingly, the codebook is systematized and submitted to an interpretative analysis in dialogue with the research questions and conceptual framework of the study.

CHAPTER III

The Far-Right Scene in Georgia



The Far-Right Scene in Georgia

The global rise of the far right has been extensively discussed in both academic and media circles. Not only have far-right ideologies gained momentum in transitioning and hybrid regimes, they have become especially prominent in those countries where notable democratic and liberalizing reforms have taken place. The enduring political polarization and continual crises in these countries foster a widespread apathy among the populace, leading to a lack of motivation to engage in politics. Consequently, both the participatory process and trust in democratic institutions are adversely affected (Waal and Gegeshidze 2021).

During the past few years, Georgia has witnessed an increasing exposure to far-right discourse, with several demonstrations being organized by radical and extreme-right groups. Some of the events, as briefly mentioned above, exhibited violence. As stated by Tamta Gelashvili (2019), such events have naturally instilled fears of rising right-wing extremism in Georgia, especially considering the global trend of far-right mobilization impacting numerous other nations.

April Gordon, in "A New Eurasian Far Right Rising" (2020), argues that "while the electoral power of far-right groups is limited, they are nevertheless influential within their respective societies, and shape social and political discourse according to their ideological framework. Moreover, far-right groups pose a direct physical threat to minority populations, undermining their ability to exercise basic freedoms of expression and assembly." The considerable danger these groups cause in Georgia is not just instant damage, such as violent attacks or vandalism, but also the long-term consequences of their mobilization: their public appearances, however rare, carry the risk of proliferating extremist opinions (Gelashvili 2019). The latter is concerning insofar as many of these groups exhibit an electoral interest and plan subsequent campaigns.

Georgian right-wing radicals display diverse ideological viewpoints and communication styles. The rhetoric of far-right radical groups usually encompasses conspiracy theories, fake information, and distorted facts within their discursive arsenal. Utilizing homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-liberal narratives, these ideas are used to influence views and perceptions of society, shape social and political discourse, and create the desired political agenda in the country (Kvakhadze 2018). As April Gordon observes, the far-right in Georgia frequently advocate for "a return to what they describe as 'traditional' values and the ideal of a 'pure' nation-state." To protect a country's "national identity," therefore, hate speech or (online and on-site) violence is frequently justified (A New Eurasian Far Right Rising 2020). In the anti-liberal discourse, the radical right in Georgia targets the following communities: immigrants, religious minorities, the LGBT community, non-governmental organizations, and politicians, journalists, activists, businessmen, etc., who support liberal values (GFSIS, 2018). Since these radical right actors first appeared in public, their ideas have rarely remained within the realm of social movements, frequently transforming into party structures with an electoral agenda. Archil Gegeshidze and Thomas De Waal in "Divided Georgia: A Hostage to Polarization" state that "[p]arts of the Georgian Orthodox Church disseminate the message that the contemporary globalized world poses a threat to Georgian traditions.... [and] the fear that modern life is destroying precious Georgian moral values" (Gegeshidze and De Waal 2021).

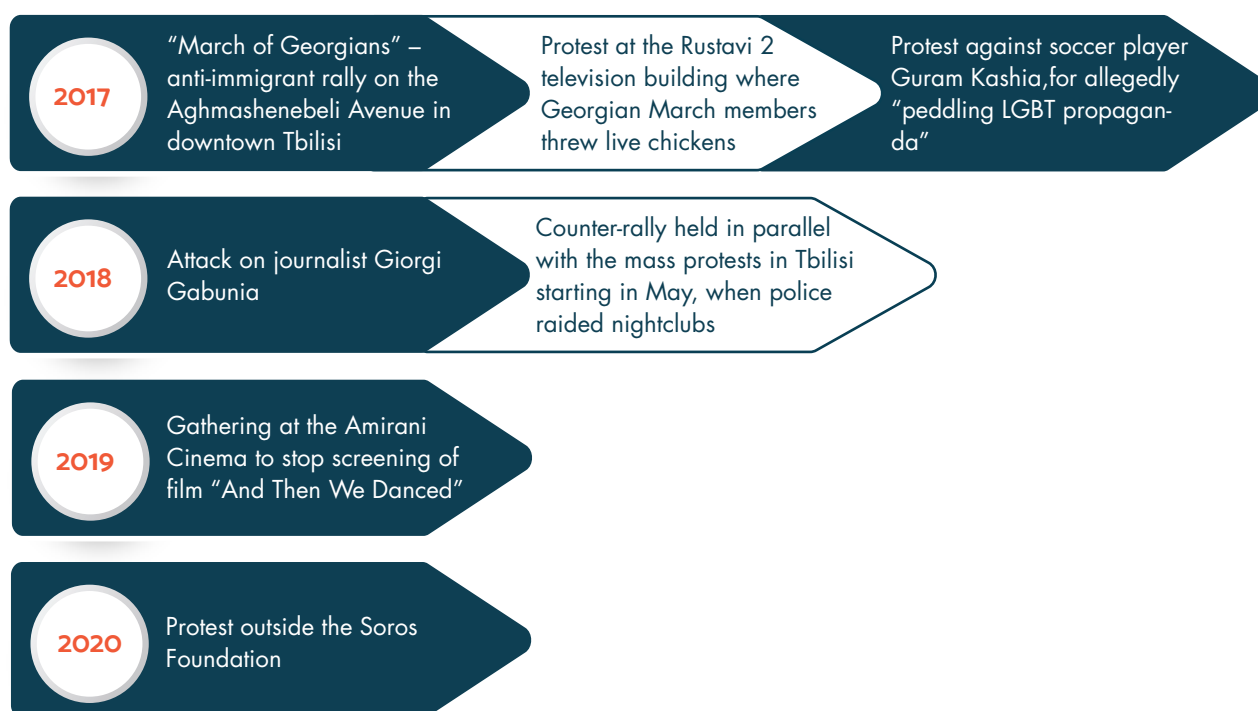
Georgia is a deeply religious country, and the Church and its Patriarch are more highly respected than most political figures and institutions (CRRG Georgia 2008–2019). As Gordon asserts, some far-right narratives have been able to gain mainstream legitimacy in Georgian society, due in large part to the tacit support of the

Georgian Orthodox Church (Gordon 2020). While this does not denote any official alignment between the Church and far-right groups, the latter often utilize religious narratives to legitimize exclusionary discourses, depicting clergy as well as religious symbols during its public appearances.

The discussion below reviews the main political actors that utilize radical-right ideas in the country to outline the main trends and structural composition of Georgia’s far right.

Georgian March

The Georgian March movement (GM) was established in 2017. It was later registered as a political party in July 2020, with the self-declared aim of restoring “traditional Georgian values.” The leader of GM served in the government as the Deputy Minister of Diaspora Issues from 2014–2016 (Nativist ‘Georgian March’ Movement Becomes Political Party, 2020). The movement appeared on the public scene with anti-immigrant narratives and has since advocated for anti-LGBT, nationalist, and anti-Western ideas. The timeline below depicts the main activities of the movement, reflecting on the policy issues advocated by GM over the years.



The “Nationals” Movement

The Georgian March leader, Sandro Bregadze, is the founder of another movement, “Nationals,” which was registered on February 8, 2016. According to its charter, one of the movement’s goals is to protect and strengthen the values of Orthodoxy. The movement’s cofounders are Kakhaber Migineishvili and Zurab Enukidze. Migineishvili was a member of the initiative group that addressed the Central Election Commission with a referendum question on defining the status of marriage (Gogiashvili et al 2018).

Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement

The Conservative Movement as a social movement was founded on November 20, 2021. Like GM, it was quickly transformed into a political party, on December 7 of the same year. The Conservative Movement's founders are members of Alt-Info,¹ a media platform and television company officially registered in 2019 and broadcasting since January 2021. Its stated aims are "to end the diktats of liberal ideology prevailing in Georgia, to establish a culturally organic and acceptable agenda for the majority of Georgia's population, and to preserve Georgian identity and statehood" (The Conservative Movement, About the Party). Their goals are reflected in the demand for the "prohibition of external interference" in Georgian media and education, along with attempts to exert total control of foreign-funded organizations at the legislative level (The Conservative Movement, About the Party). The Conservative Movement "started forming a regional network shortly after its creation. The party managed to open district offices in a short period.... At the moment, 65 offices of the party have been opened throughout Georgia. The offices of the Conservative Movement in the municipalities of Khulo and Shuakhevi were soon closed as a result of the opposition of the local population." (Activities of the Conservative Movement/Alt Info In The Regions of Georgia, ISFED 2022). According to local monitoring undertaken by the Democracy Research Institute, the total amount officially donated to the Conservative Movement has exceeded 500,000 GEL. In total, the party received 585 donations from 102 individuals; 25 of the 102 individual donors are heads of the group's regional office. Importantly, most of the donors have no real estate holdings recorded in the public register (Democracy Research Institute, 2023).

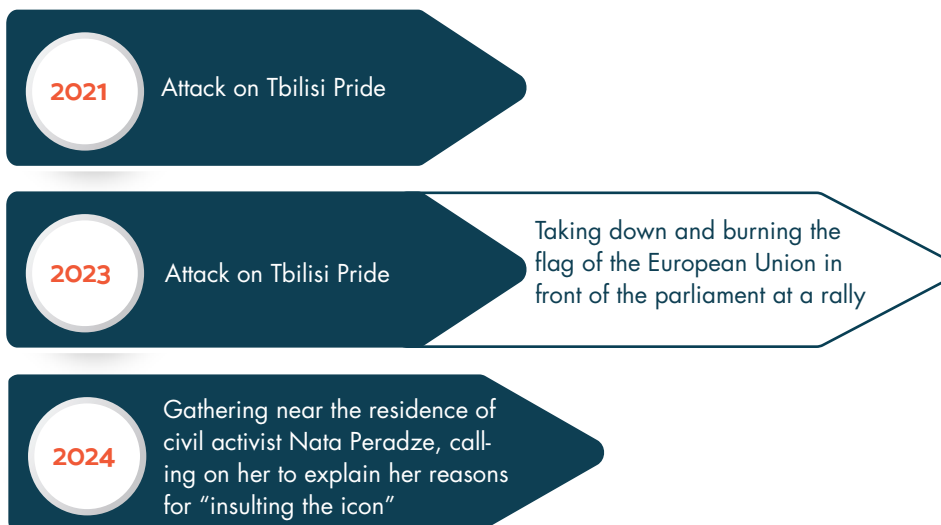
The members of the Conservative Movement depict anti-NATO narratives and, especially after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, support the normalization of relations with Russia. This aim is reflected in the ideological declaration published on their website, offered in Georgian and Russian: "We are not going to stand for decades at the entrance to the doorway of the mystical NATO. The interests of Georgia come first! Everything that strengthens the Christian, Georgian identity is good; all international contacts and connections that contribute to this are necessary."

From the start, Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement has instrumentalized social media in its communication strategy. It frequently uses Facebook pages and groups, as well as TikTok and Telegram channels, to devalue the ideas of liberal democracy and spread its own discourse. Their rhetoric is marked by the cultivation of fear toward, and the unacceptability of, the different and the new. While initially the movement did not depict explicit support toward Russia and focused on accentuating far-right narratives and personas from the West (see Gozalishvili 2021), after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 it has become more vocal in its sympathy toward Russia. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that on the social network, the founder of the Eurasian Movement and ideologist of Russia's expansionist policy, Aleksandr Dugin, expressed his approval of the political party established by representatives of Alt-Info (ISFED 2022).

Even during its early years, when the movement rejected any association with or favoritism toward Russia, Dugin was still referred to positively by them. For example, on July 10, 2020, Dugin was invited to be a guest on an Alt-Info program, where he explained that if Georgia opts for a neutral course and rejects pro-Western aspirations, Russia will welcome its territorial integrity (ISFED 2020).

Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement has depicted its readiness to use violence to achieve their goals. In 2021, several days before the anti-Pride rally, its leader Zurab Makharadze stated that "They call us violent people and yes, I am a violent person.... I can and plan to defend my values, including with force... I am ready to act with force against this [rally]" (Kinchka 2023).

¹ Founded by Shota Martinenko and Tsiala Morgoshia in January 2019.



In April 2024, the National Agency of Public Registry of Georgia (NAPR) cancelled party’s registration “following the request from the Anti-Corruption Bureau to review the legality of the party’s registration” (Civil. ge 2024). The cancellation of the party was primarily due to administrative and legal irregularities. Although the party promptly appealed the decision, the likelihood of its participation in the upcoming elections under the same party structure is exceedingly slim, if not entirely nonexistent. However, it has been announced that the party will collaborate and share an electoral platform with another political entity (Georgian Idea, discussed below) sharing the same ideological stance (Nikuradze and Kincha 2024).

Georgian Idea

The sociopolitical movement Georgian Idea (GI) was established in 2014 and reorganized as a political party later that year. Like the groups characterized above, GI propagates anti-immigrant, anti-LGBT, and anti-Western rhetoric, all the while emphasizing the urgency “to protect the national identity of Georgia.” The leaders of GI strongly supported the participants of the violent protest on July 5, 2021, and referred to the people arrested during this protest as “prisoners of conscience.” Later, Georgian Idea also joined the protest actions organized by Alt-Info, the main demand of which was to release those arrested on July 5, 2021 (Online Discourse and Political Transformation of Far-Right Group in Georgia, DRI, 2023).

According to their charter published on their website, the goals of the Georgian Idea are the following: “building an independent, legal, and truly national Georgian state; promoting the role of the Church in building the Georgian state and restoring the territorial integrity of the country; initiating direct negotiations with Russia for the purpose of de-occupation of the country; defining a national economic policy and creating a healthy investment environment; rejecting the sale of land, water, forests, and other objects of strategic state importance, etc” (Georgian Idea [Qartuli Idea] 2019).

In 2016, GI participated in the parliamentary elections. At the top of the party list was leader Levan Chachua, who was arrested in 2010 for his extremist behavior at the Kavkasia television station. He, alongside other members of the “Orthodox Parents’ Union,” burst into the studio during a live television broadcast and engaged in a physical altercation. Chachua was sentenced to four and a half years in prison, but in 2012 he was released with the status of a political prisoner (Baranec, 2018).

The Georgian Idea got only 0.17% of the votes in the 2016 parliamentary elections, but despite this unsuccessful result, the GI did not disappear from the public space. According to the ISFED report "A Coordinated Network of the 'Georgian Idea' Party on Facebook," Georgian Idea once again appeared in the headlines before the local elections of 2021, when the network of Facebook pages affiliated to GI became particularly active, spreading sharply anti-Western, homophobic, xenophobic, and aggressive content aimed at provoking political polarization. Hence, despite not achieving an electoral success over the years, the right-wing political actors do not vanish from the public scene entirely, but move into the passive mode temporarily.

For the parliamentary elections of 2024, Levan Chachua called on the "conservative wing" for unity and proclaimed an initiative to create "national-Church unity." Membership in the latter would be based not on party affiliation, but on personal characteristics. At the final stage of writing this report, GI has offered his platform to Alt-Info Conservative Movement therefore enabling them to still partake in the upcoming elections, despite their party being formally deprived from the right due to the National Agency of Public Registry of Georgia (NAPR) retreating their registration (Civil.ge 2024).

According to Chachua, the Orthodox Church of Georgia should give its blessing and political legitimacy to this unity (DRI, 2023). Accordingly, affiliation with the Orthodox Church remains narratively significant and an important mobilizing strategy for the country's far right.



Georgia's National Unity

Georgia's National Unity (GNU) was founded in 2016, as a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity. GNU declares its aim to be "to carry out a peaceful and united policy, according to which the Georgian mental worldview is prioritized" (Tabula 2018). The leader of the movement openly stated that he follows fascist ideology: "We live with our roots. We push for fascism and national socialism; we are followers of this ideology." Hence, GNU constitutes a more unusual case, where the entity openly and publicly declares its fascist inclinations.

GNU tends to justify violence in its public activities. In May 2018, during the demonstrations in front of the parliament to protest police raids on the nightclub Bassiani, GNU leaders and supporters, together with other radical right groups discussed above, stood out with their aggressive and violent behavior against the participants of the rally (Pertaia 2018). At that time, GNU stated that they would create patrol squads, begin walking the streets, and deal with any violation of the law. The members and supporters of GNU also used threatening verbal attacks: "They demand blood? We will give them a sea of blood" (Pertaia 2018).

Unlike other movements, GNU is also outspoken about its use of weaponry and physical preparation. In August 2018, GNU's Facebook page published a video titled "Fascist Sunday," in which members of the organization engage in weapons training. The caption of the video states that "a Georgian male should devote at least one day a week to sports and combat training." Subsequently, the group writes that its members, known as "*blackshirts*," train regularly every week. Physical preparation for potential violence is an important aspect of the group's activities. As the group's leader, Giorgi Chelidze, put it in 2018: "I have a hunting rifle, a sawed-off Winchester which I bought in full compliance with the law. My fellow members have also purchased weapons in accordance with the law. If the events that happened in 1991, which I vaguely remember as a time when the government got out of control, there was a civil war and bloodshed that set our country back decades, we will use irons, forks, and anything else we can get our hands on" (Tabula 2018). That same year, Chelidze expressed his intention to create a "Civil Guard": "We are starting to form Civil Guard units to protect our homeland. Tens, hundreds, etc. will be created. The agenda should not be set by drug dealers and LGBT people. We should set the agenda" (Radio Liberty 2018).

In September 2018, Chelidze was arrested for possession of illegal weapons. After he was arrested on charges of illegal purchase, storage, and carrying of weapons, the GNU Facebook page was deleted. However, as of February 2024, the page has been reactivated, mainly resharing videos by the group that had been published on YouTube; its reach is severely limited (less than 200 followers).

GNU has never expressed any desire to participate in elections. Moreover, Giorgi Chelidze has said that he supported the ruling Georgian Dream, although the laws adopted by the party were so unacceptable for him that he even left his public position: "I was an active supporter of Georgian Dream and had some influence in my district. I worked in the Ministry of Finance; however, after Georgian Dream approved two laws that were unacceptable to me, I realized that the government's course since Shevardnadze's rule would not change." (Arabuli 2018).

The Civil Solidarity Movement

The Civil Solidarity Movement was registered in 2013. One of the founders is Giorgi (Gia) Korkotashvili, a prominent figure within the Georgian nationalist scene. The purpose of the movement was declared as "restoring justice," as well as "monitoring and exposing the fulfillment of the promises made" by the ruling party, Georgian Dream (Gogiashvili, 2018). By 2014, the Civil Solidarity Movement's Facebook page was no longer active; instead, its leaders began to appear within different organizational structures, such as Georgian March, Georgian Idea, and Georgian Mission (see e.g. Tabula 2018).

In July 2017, a march was organized on David Aghmashenebeli Avenue by the Civil Solidarity Movement and Georgian March. The organizers presented the ruling party with the following ultimatum: "All illegal foreigners (Iranians, Arabs, Africans, etc.) must leave the territory of Georgia!" Following this march, Korkotashvili threatened a female, former Georgian Youth Delegate at the UN online, with sexual violence and gang rape (OC Media 2017).

Georgian Mission

The sociopolitical movement Georgian Mission was founded in 2015; one of its founders is the aforementioned Giorgi (Gia) Korkotashvili. The goals of Georgian Mission were declared as "to study and assess the current socio-legal and economic situation in Georgia and search for a concrete solution, as well as to raise civic self-awareness and involve the citizens in the current public-political processes" (Georgian Mission Facebook Page). The movement has never expressed any desire to participate in elections although the movement has been affiliated with several other radical right fractions in the country on situational occurrences. After 2021, the Facebook page directly associated with Georgian Mission is no longer active.

Georgian Power

The social movement Georgian Power began its activity in 2015. The focus of the group's activity was the occupied territories of Georgia. Its leader consistently emphasized that they did not receive any support from Russia: "We are a truly right-wing nationalist force, and we don't take funding from anyone, and we don't protect anyone's interests." (Palitravideo.ge 2016)

Georgian Power made headlines with its violent appearance in May 2016, when its members and supporters attacked a vegan café, Kiwi, in Tbilisi (Eurasianet 2016). More than a dozen men stormed into the café, shouting and throwing meat at patrons. The attackers wore strings of sausages around their necks and threw chunks of meat onto customers' plates. The BBC reported that the café was "popular among young people sporting unconventional hairstyles, tattoos, and body piercings." Its workers stated that they endured some hostility due to "the way we look, music that we listen to, ideas we support, and the fact that we don't eat meat," as well as their support for LGBT people (BBC, 2016). Georgian Power also held a nationalist rally near Turkish restaurants on David Aghmashenebeli Avenue, during which several of their members were arrested.

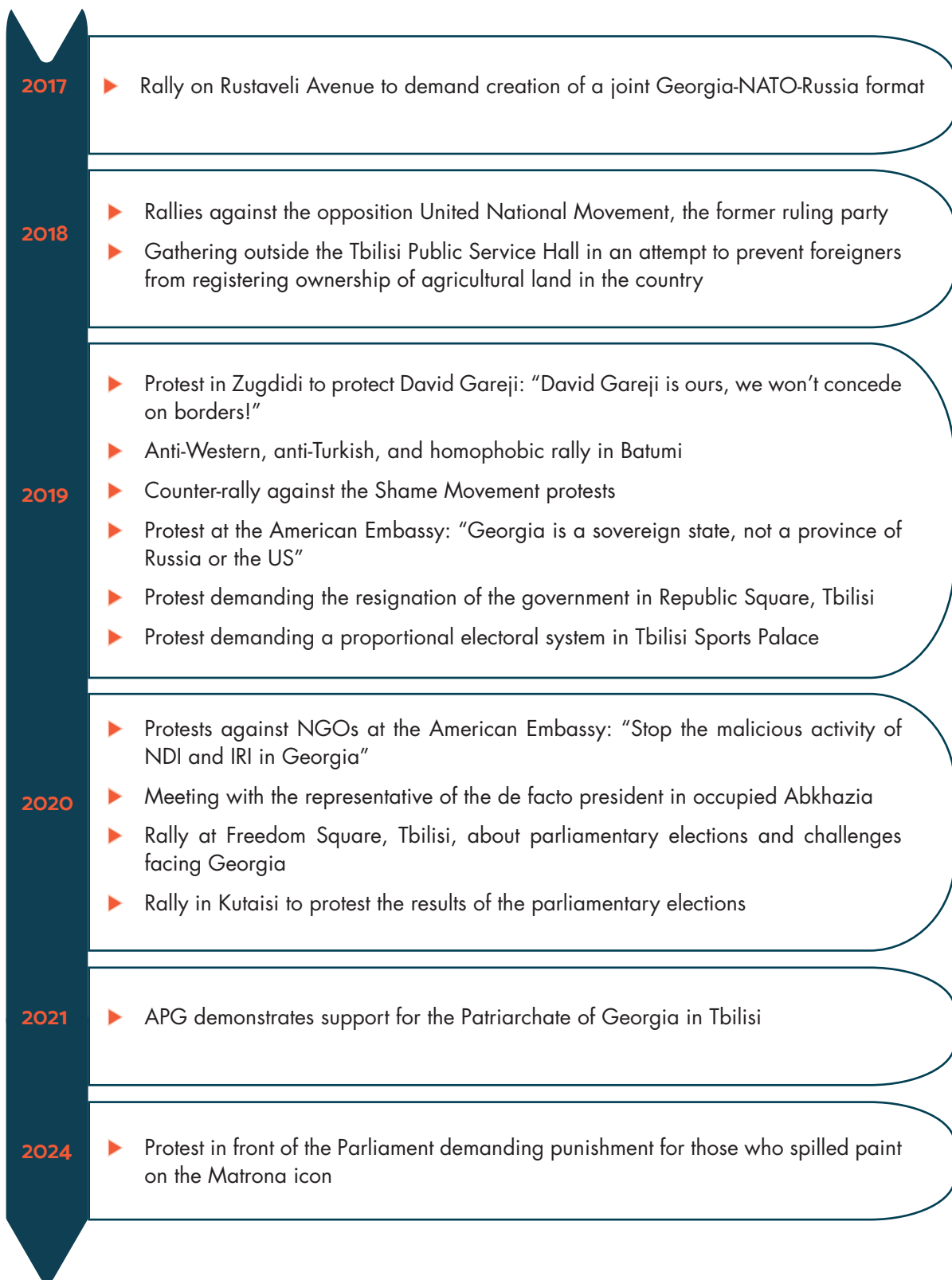
On September 27, 2017, Georgian Power organized a nationalist rally, declaring on Facebook: "We will remember the lost territories, display nationalist symbols and end the march with an eye-catching performance. Anyone with a right-wing ideology can join us." The demonstrators broke into Turkish restaurants on their way, shouting nationalist slogans, such as "Glory to the nation, death to the enemy!", and demolishing billboards (On.ge 2016). Since August 2023, the Georgian Power Facebook page is no longer active.

Alliance of Patriots of Georgia

The political party Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) was founded in 2012. In contrast with other groupings mentioned here, APG established itself from the start as a political party with electoral ambitions. Before the party was established, in 2003, Irma Inashvili and Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi—who would go on to be leaders of the party—founded the "Media Union Obieqtivi," a TV and radio broadcasting company, and later became vocal critics of the Mikheil Saakashvili government. Like other mentioned political actors (for instance, Georgian Idea, Civil Solidarity, and Georgian Mission), the APG also demands punishment for members of the former ruling party of Georgia, the United National Movement. Obieqtivi, which is active to this day, has provided a platform for nationalist right-wing ideologies and religious discussions.

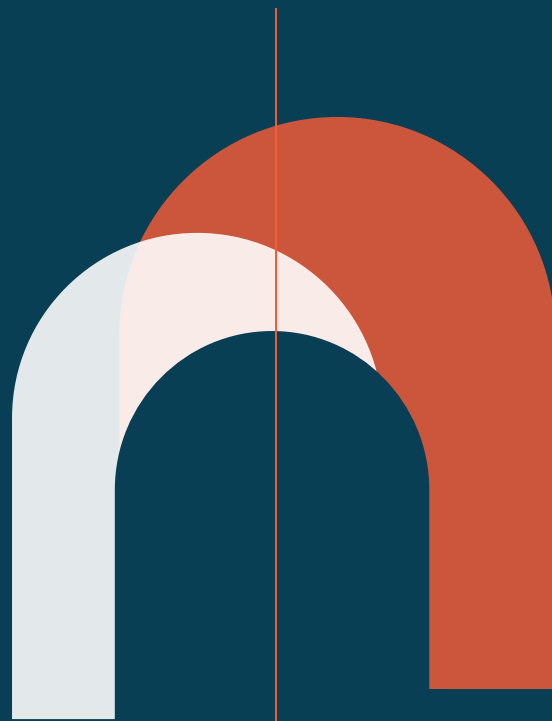
The APG took part in elections for the first time in 2014. In city council elections across the country, the party collected 4.72% of the vote and won council seats in several municipalities. Subsequently, in the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Alliance of Patriots won six parliamentary mandates, maintaining four of them in 2020. Accordingly, the party has been operating in the parliamentary realm, while backing conservative and nationalist proposals in the country.

The APG was one of the first parties with parliamentary representation that openly advocated for "normalising relations with Russia." The Russian Federation is presented not as an occupier, but as a mediator and facilitator by the Alliance of Patriots. This attitude is revealed in frequent visits by party members to the Russian Federation, which are justified as attempts at "doing a real job, instead on just pursuing the PR" (Civil.Ge 2017). In addition, it constantly instigates anti-Turkish sentiments and uses the border dispute surrounding the David Gareji monastery to mobilize supporters (iFact 2020). During the early years of its activity, the APG collected signatures in the coastal city of Batumi against the project of building a mosque there (Kucera 2016).



CHAPTER IV

Deconstruction of the “Pro-Russian” Labeling



Deconstruction of the “Pro-Russian” Labeling

Reflecting analogous movements gaining momentum globally during the “fourth wave” of far-right politics since World War II (Mudde 2019), the far-right movement in Georgia frequently mobilizes against the LGBTQ community, immigration, and Islam, as well as progressive or liberal politicians, activists, and journalists (Gelashvili, 2023). With even a brief glance, it is easy to notice that the Georgian far right has seldom, if ever, mobilized against Russia. Over the years, it is difficult to recall any event of such nature. On the other hand, the far right has orchestrated large-scale rallies advocating for direct dialogue with Moscow, endorsing military neutrality for Georgia, and expressing anti-NATO sentiments (GPB 2019, Gvadzabia 2019, Civil.ge 2022). In the aftermath of the 2008 war, when certain political figures and civil society organizations launched the “Russia Is An Occupier” campaign to bring international attention to Russia’s recognition of the independence of the Georgian breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the far right’s response involved depicting Turkey as an occupier and alleging its exertion of soft power in Western Georgia (Kucera, 2017). As such, anti-Turkish and anti-Western sentiments have also been utilized by the Georgian far right to narratively counterbalance Russia’s hostile presence in the region.

The articulation of Russia in both rhetoric and activities has incited enquiries among analysts, media representatives, and academics about potential connections between the Georgian far-right movement and Russia. In specific discourses, these groups are labeled as distinctly pro-Russian. This includes illustrative examples such as the characterization of Georgian March as the “Russian March of Georgians” in media reports, as well as the slogan of a coalition of opposition parties uniting against the far right, “No to Russian Fascism” (Gvarishvili 2017). At the same time, some factions in Georgia had in past distanced themselves from the groups labeled as pro-Russian (for instance, from Georgian March) (Nanuashvili 2020). This tendency in turn indicates on the public unpopularity of the association.

Nodia (2020) conducted a comprehensive quantitative investigation focused on far-right groups, examining attitudes toward the far-right groups held by experts that align with democratic principles. The findings reflect a shared inclination toward characterizing the Georgian far right as pro-Russian. A striking 97% of experts polled concurred that Russia’s backing constitutes a catalyst for the proliferation of far-right groups in Georgia, with 67% strongly affirming and 30% partially endorsing this proposition. Nevertheless, consensus waned when respondents were queried about classifying these groups as “pro-Russian forces.” A mere 33% unequivocally endorsed this classification, 14% dissented but acknowledged an alignment between their messages and Russian propaganda, and 48% presumed that, while some may harbor pro-Russian sentiments, they refrain from explicitly articulating them due to the unfavorable nature of such a stance in Georgia. Notably, only one expert among those surveyed contested any linkage to Russia, asserting that such affiliations were entirely erroneous (Nodia 2020). This study therefore clearly demonstrates that the label ascribed to the far right in Georgia is contested, being open to divergent interpretations across not only the media, but also expert perspectives.

Additionally, proponents of such labeling highlight the far-right narrative prioritizing (its version of) traditional values and Orthodox Christianity, mirroring Russia’s self-portrayal as the guardian of traditional values in con-

trast to the perceived “decadence of the West” (Wales, 2017). Furthermore, a prevailing argument asserts that the Georgian far-right represents yet another instance of Russia’s influence as realized on a global scale, via the promotion of illiberal powers (Shekhovtsov, 2017; Nodia 2020). It is worth noting that, unlike some European extreme-right parties that visibly praise Putin’s policies and portray him as a role model for their respective countries, the Georgian far right has been more reluctant in openly expressing support for Putin, at least until the full-scale war in Ukraine began. As Ghia Nodia (2020) concludes, these tactics might have stemmed from the unpopularity of publicly exploiting pro-Russian sentiments in Georgia, leading these groups to align indirectly with Russia’s interests by discrediting the West.

Despite the widespread perception that Georgian far-right groups are fundamentally pro-Russian, it is essential to acknowledge that this characterization is not universally undisputed. Moreover, considering that different types of discussions commonly apply the “pro-Russian” label, it is significant to deconstruct the categorization. Some researchers actively engaged in studying these groups express a degree of skepticism regarding the ubiquitous use of this “pro-Russian” label. One notable example is the comprehensive empirical analysis of media narratives conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) Georgia, which concluded that the majority of these groups cannot be simply or solely labeled as pro-Russian, cautioning against the oversimplification caused by such a categorization. Their findings indicate that the sentiment employed by these groups toward Russia was, at the time, predominantly negative. However, in their assessment of liberal norms and the role of the West in Georgia, the study outlines that there exists an obvious similarity between the opinions articulated by these groups and the messages disseminated by Russian propaganda (Sichinava 2019). Still, Gelashvili (2023) argues that such labeling reduces the dangers of far-right expression to a single, yet broad issue. Furthermore, such labeling might also bring a tendency to drive researchers and decision-makers away from considering the local roots of this radicalization.

Before discussing the issue of pro-Russianness in more detail, it is important to examine its meaning and connotations. While these political and non-governmental organizations may not explicitly label themselves as pro-Russian, it is necessary to address what makes them susceptible to such categorization. According to Silagadze (), an entity’s position on the spectrum (between pro-Western and pro-Russian) is determined by its scores in four interconnected sub-dimensions, eventually forming one dimension: (1) rhetoric; (2) geopolitics and security; (3) civilizational identity; and (4) military alignment.

The pro-Western ideal type is characterized by (1) harsh anti-Russian and strongly pro-Western rhetoric; (2) viewing Russia as the primary threat, with an unwavering pro-Western foreign policy response; (3) depicting the West as a civilizational choice for Georgia; and (4) robust support for military alignment with the West. In contrast, the pro-Russian ideal is typified by (1) harsh anti-Western and strongly pro-Russian rhetoric; (2) considering the West as the primary threat, advocating a rigid Russian foreign orientation in response; (3) aligning with Russia as a civilizational choice; and (4) offering strong support for military alignment with Russia. The Neutral category indicates: (1) neither harsh anti-Western nor anti-Russian rhetoric, and neither strong pro-Western nor pro-Russian rhetoric; (2) neither the West nor Russia being identified as a primary threat, with other countries potentially portrayed as threats, and advocating for Georgia to pursue a balanced foreign policy; (3) neither Russia nor the West as a civilizational home for Georgia, with these actors being self-proclaimed pro-Georgians; and (4) promoting military nonalignment (Silagadze 2021, 3).

In the Georgian context, Euroscepticism is often interpreted as pro-Russianness. Given the prevailing public discourse framing Georgia as a battleground between the West and Russia, Euroscepticism implies a departure from the “pro-Western ideal type” all the way toward the “pro-Russian ideal type.” Internal perceptions in Georgia aid this perception of a “zero-sum game” between the two foreign policy paths. While a significant portion of Georgia’s population maintains pro-Western foreign policy views, a notable segment, comprising approximately a fifth to a fourth of the public, expresses pro-Russian attitudes, as indicated by a March 2022

NDI/CRRC Survey. (National Democratic Institute 2022). Identified through criteria such as favorable views of the Russian government, a belief in increased Russian influence being positive, and advocating for economic and political cooperation with Russia, this pro-Russian demographic constitutes 23% of the electorate (Silagadze, 2022). Hence, despite most of the radical right groups not explicitly identifying themselves as pro-Russian, they actively promote narratives aligned with Russian interests, echoing Kremlin ideologies as discussed below.

Russia's state ideology is based on two key pillars. The first is a statism which manifests in presenting Russia as a unique and exceptional civilization, effectively a lone guardian of traditional values in the contemporary world. The second is anti-Westernism, portraying the West as a declining power which allegedly tries to bring instability and enforce liberal values on other nations in order to maintain its global dominance (Snegovaya, Kimmage, and McGlynn 2023). While the safeguarding of "traditional values" is a relatively new phenomenon in the Russian state ideology, the anti-Western discourse has a longer history in its discursive arsenal. In this vein, the narratives about the "decaying West" date back to the nineteenth century (Yeliseyev and Laputskaya 2023), as anti-Western sentiments were strengthened against the backdrop of Russia's defeat in the Crimean War. Also, at that time one of the most famous ideologues of the Russian Empire, Count Sergey Uvarov, formulated a theory that Russia constituted a unique, Orthodox civilization with a unique state and people, which was very different from all others, especially Europe (Sazonov et al. 2016).

The other discursive direction—asserting that the West tries to sow discord and spread instability globally, especially in the regions surrounding Russia—was one of the fundamental pillars of Soviet propaganda (Kolesnikov 2023). Especially intensified after the Second World War, this construction repeatedly juxtaposed the image of "an intrusive and conflictual West" to the peace-seeking Soviet bloc (Vacharadze et al. 2023). The latter narrative did not only provide a foundation for the subsequent anti-NATO narratives, but also to the contemporary Russian legitimizing narrative regarding its armed invasions in the region.

This Russian state ideology has been spreading via the ever-increasing propaganda tools in Russia's hybrid war arsenal since the Soviet era. The propaganda machine consists of various non-state national and international actors including media outlets, journalists, experts, thinktanks, and NGOs, as well as institutions such as the Russian Orthodox Church. However, the Russian state is the major actor formulating propaganda narratives and spreading them throughout various channels, using both state and non-state actors for this purpose. Russian top-level politicians, including President Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev consistently articulate the key messages of Russian propaganda in their statements, interviews, and newspaper articles. Similarly, those key messages are reflected in conceptual documents of the Russian Federation, such as its National Security Strategy and Foreign Policy Concept.

As asserted above, the pro-Russian propaganda campaign in Georgia takes different forms and frequently replicates the major narratives of Russian propaganda, adjusting them to the local context. The following key messages from Russian propaganda, advocated nationally as well as internationally across recent years, assist in depicting tendencies and parallels between the Georgian anti-Western and pro-Russian discourses, increasingly propagated by the far right in the country: By demonstrating the logic of Russian anti-Western discourse, this analysis showcases the contextual alignment of Georgian far right discourse with the Russian narratives, strategic aims and vision in the region.

- ▶ *Narrative 1:* Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and its allies have been trying to impose an order that reflects their own interests in disregard of the interests of other nations. In pursuit of this goal, they act unilaterally and—ignoring international law—use military force, which is manifested in the growing number of violent armed conflicts and increasing global instability;

Year	Actor & Statement
2014	Vladimir Putin: "Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun." ("Address by President of the Russian Federation," Kremlin.ru 2014)
2016	Foreign Policy Concept: "The containment policy adopted by the United States and its allies against Russia, and the political, economic, informational, and other pressure Russia is facing from them undermine regional and global stability, are detrimental to the long-term interests of all sides, and run counter to the growing need for cooperation and addressing transnational challenges and threats in today's world." ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," RF Government 2016)
2023	Sergey Lavrov: "We see the West making every effort to retain the remnants of its dominance, resorting to overtly neocolonial methods that are met by the global majority with rejection. The goal of the West is simple and at the same time cynical. It is to continue reaping the benefits of global politics, the economy, and trade and live off other nations' resources. Like the overwhelming majority of other countries, Russia will not accept these plans." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at the Primakov Readings International Forum, Moscow, November 27 2023," MFA 2023)
2023	Nikolai Patrushev: "With the collapse of the USSR, Washington and London imagined that they had a chance to create a unipolar world. The Anglo-Saxons do not abandon these ideas even today. The West considers the destruction of Russia or its weakening to a third-rate country under external control to be a radical way to change the world order." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.P. Patrushev with the 'Izvestia' newspaper," RF SC 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative II:* Against the current Western model of the international world order, which is based on rules shaped in accordance with the West's own interests, Russia continues to adhere to international law and rejects the policy of external intervention into sovereign states through the use of force or other rough methods;

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	National Security Strategy, 2015: "The Russian Federation builds its international relations on the principles of international law, the ensuring of states' reliable and equal security, peoples' mutual respect, and the preservation of the diversity of their cultures, traditions, and interests." (Unofficial Translation) (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2016	Nikolai Patrushev: "The Russian Federation is not interested in confrontation with the West. Moreover, the basis of Russia's foreign policy is the desire not only to defend its own interests, but also to take into account the interests of other partners. The initiator of the current conflict is the United States. Europe submits to their will. So, the decision to end the confrontation does not depend on Russia. We are always ready to resume equal cooperation." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of N.P. Patrushev with the 'Moskovsky Komsomolets' newspaper," RF SC 2016)
2022	Vladimir Putin: "The position of Russia and many other countries is that this democratic, more just world order should be built on the basis of mutual respect and trust, and, of course, on the generally accepted principles of international law and the UN Charter." ("Address to participants of 10th St Petersburg International Legal Forum," Kremlin.ru 2022)

Year	Actor & Statement
2023	Sergey Lavrov: "Our collective Western partner does not allow for equality in the belief that the world should abide by its 'rules' rather than the principles and norms of the UN Charter and international law." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with the Znaniye Society on the sidelines of the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, St Petersburg, June 17, 2023," MFA 2023)
2023	Foreign Policy Concept, 2023: "Russia is striving towards a system of international relations that would guarantee reliable security, preservation of its cultural and civilizational identity, and equal opportunities for the development for all states, regardless of their geographical location, size of territory, demographic, resource and military capacity, or political, economic and social structure. To meet these criteria, the system of international relations should be multipolar and based on the following principles: sovereign equality of states, respect for their right to choose models of development, and social, political and economic order." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative III:* In order to maintain its dominance, the West manipulates public perceptions by disseminating fake news and disinformation and imposing liberal values, which are unacceptable for the majority of the public;

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	National Security Strategy, 2015: "The intensifying confrontation in the global information arena caused by some countries' aspiration to utilize informational and communication technologies to achieve their geopolitical objectives, including by manipulating public awareness and falsifying history, is exerting an increasing influence on the nature of the international situation." (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2019	Vladimir Putin: "So, the liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population." ("Interview with The Financial Times," Kremlin.ru 2019)
2021	National Security Strategy, 2021: "Against the background of the crisis of the Western liberal model, a number of states are making attempts to deliberately erode traditional values, distort world history, revise views on the role and place of Russia in it, rehabilitate fascism, and incite interethnic and inter-confessional conflicts. Information campaigns are carried out to form a hostile image of Russia." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)
2022	Vladimir Putin: "It is notable that the West proclaims the universal value of its culture and worldview. Even if they do not say so openly, which they actually often do, they behave as if this is so, that it is a fact of life, and the policy they pursue is designed to show that these values must be unconditionally accepted by all other members of the international community." ("Valdai International Discussion Club meeting," Kremlin.ru 2022)

Year	Actor & Statement
2023	Sergey Lavrov: "The theme of our conference is especially essential because we see that in many Western countries, traditional values are being eroded and fundamental moral norms are being revised. They are aggressively encouraging all-permissiveness, tolerance taken to the point of absurdity and various destructive patterns of behaviour.... This policy is being conducted contrary to the aspirations of the majority of people, is doing irreparable damage to their moral health, is eroding their civilisational roots and leading to disengagement, depersonalisation and the self-destruction of society. The worst effect of this is the growth of radicalism, aggressive nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the opening of the forum Strengthening Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values to Guarantee Unity among Compatriots, Moscow, November 1, 2023," MFA 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative IV:* The collective West tries to expend institutions such as NATO and EU, dragging states like Ukraine and Georgia into them. This expansion policy brings instability and amplifies military threats against Russia;

Year	Actor & Statement
2016	Foreign Policy Concept, 2016: "The Russian Federation maintains its negative perspective toward NATO's expansion, the Alliance's military infrastructure approaching Russian borders, and its growing military activity in regions neighboring Russia, viewing them as a violation of the principle of equal and indivisible security and leading to the deepening of old dividing lines in Europe and the emergence of new ones." ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," RF Government 2016)
2021	National Security Strategy, 2021: "Military dangers and military threats to the Russian Federation are intensified by attempts to exert military pressure on Russia, its allies and partners, the buildup of the military infrastructure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization near Russian borders, the intensification of reconnaissance activities, and the development of large military formations and nuclear weapons against the Russian Federation." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)
2022	Vladimir Putin: "The choice of pathways towards ensuring security should not pose a threat to other states, whereas Ukraine joining NATO is a direct threat to Russia's security. Let me remind you that at the Bucharest NATO summit held in April 2008, the United States pushed through a decision to the effect that Ukraine and, by the way, Georgia would become NATO members. Many European allies of the United States were well aware of the risks associated with this prospect already then, but were forced to put up with the will of their senior partner. The Americans simply used them to carry out a clearly anti-Russian policy." ("Address by the President of the Russian Federation," Kremlin.ru 2022)
2023	Sergey Lavrov: "We have been warning publicly since 2008, even 2007, that NATO expansion, contrary to all the promises given to Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev not to expand their lines, was going too far, five waves of expansion. And then NATO, I mean at the last moment at the end of 2020, found itself just on the borders of the Russian Federation. Ukraine was pulled into North Atlantic Alliance. There were plans to build military bases on Ukrainian soil, including naval bases in the Sea of Azov, not to mention the Black Sea." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with CBS TV channel, New York, January 22, 2024," MFA 2024)

Year	Actor & Statement
2023	Nikolai Patrushev: "The anti-Russian Western global strategy has not changed for centuries. I remembered Mackinder due to the fact that he was one of the first to put a theory behind the numerous aggressive 'crusades' of the so-called Western civilization against Russia. Even NATO's expansion to the east follows the same directions along which Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Hitler moved." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.P. Patrushev with the 'Izvestia' newspaper," RF SC 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative V:* The West is fighting against traditional values, imposing liberalism, which generally manifests in the promotion of homosexuality and gender reassignment. In contrast to the West, Russia is promoting spiritual and moral values and guarding the traditional family, religion, and other values that are shared and respected by the majority of the world;

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	National Security Strategy, 2015: "Threats to national security in the cultural sphere are the erosion of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values and the weakening of the unity of the Russian Federation's multinational people by means of external cultural and information expansion (including the spread of poor-quality mass cultural products), propaganda of permissiveness and violence, and racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance, as well as the decline in the role of the Russian language in the world and in the quality of its teaching in Russia and abroad, attempts to falsify Russian and world history, and unlawful encroachments upon cultural objects." (Unofficial Translation) (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)
2021	National Security Strategy, 2021: "Basic moral and cultural norms, religious foundations, the institution of marriage, and family values are increasingly being undermined. Freedom of the individual is being absolutized, permissiveness, immorality, and selfishness are being actively promoted, the cult of violence, consumption, and pleasure is being inculcated, drug use is being legalized, and communities that deny the natural continuation of life are being formed." (Unofficial Translation) ("Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation," RF SC 2021)
2023	Vladimir Putin: "Look what they are doing to their own people. It is all about the destruction of the family, of cultural and national identity, perversion and abuse of children, including pedophilia, all of which are declared normal in their life. They are forcing the priests to bless same-sex marriages." ("Presidential Address to Federal Assembly," Kremlin.ru 2023)
2023	Sergey Lavrov: "This creative policy enjoys broad support in the international community. A growing number of people, including in Europe, not only have a liking for Russia but also regard it as the defender of enduring traditions and real values." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the opening of the forum Strengthening Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values to Guarantee Unity among Compatriots, Moscow, November 1, 2023," MFA 2023)
2023	Foreign Policy Concept, 2023: "A wide-spread form of interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states has become the imposition of destructive neoliberal ideological attitudes that run counter to traditional spiritual and moral values." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative VI:* Notwithstanding its hard effort to maintain its dominance, the West is in a state of decay, its power and influence is declining, and its political system is weakening. However, the Western states further enhance their destructive policy instead of seeking a reasonable compromise that would lead to global security and establishment of more equal and stable world order;

Year	Actor & Statement
2016	Foreign Policy Concept, 2016: “Systemic problems in the Euro-Atlantic region that have accumulated over the last quarter century are manifested in the geopolitical expansion pursued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), along with their refusal to begin implementation of political statements regarding the creation of a common European security and cooperation framework, have resulted in a serious crisis in relations between Russia and the Western states.” (“Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation,” RF Government 2016)
2021	National Security Strategy, 2021: “Under the conditions of stagnation and recession of the world’s leading economies, the declining stability of the global monetary and financial system, the intensified struggle for access to markets and resources, the use of unfair competition tools, protectionist measures, and sanctions, including in the financial and trade spheres, is becoming more widespread. In order to gain advantages, a number of states exert open political and economic pressure on Russia and its partners.” (Unofficial Translation) (“Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on approval of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation,” RF SC 2021)
2023	Foreign Policy Concept, 2023: “The changes which are now taking place and which are generally favourable are nonetheless not welcomed by a number of states being used to the logic of global dominance and neocolonialism. These countries refuse to recognize the realities of a multipolar world and to agree on the parameters and principles of the world order accordingly.” (“The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation,” MFA 2023)
2022	Vladimir Putin: “The smoothing out and erasure of all and any differences is essentially what the modern West is all about. What stands behind this? First of all, it is the decaying creative potential of the West and a desire to restrain and block the free development of other civilisations.” (“Valdai International Discussion Club meeting,” Kremlin.ru 2022)
2023	Sergey Lavrov: “The world remains stormy, and one of the reasons is that the Western policy-makers provoke crises thousands of kilometres away from their borders in order to solve their own problems at the expense of other peoples.” (“Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s interview with TASS news agency, December 28, 2023,” MFA 2023)

- ▶ *Narrative VII:* The war in Ukraine has been instigated by the West, which supported an illegal change of power back in 2014 and then reinforced the Nazi regime of Ukraine and its anti-Russian policy. Russia's aim has been to end the war (referring to it as a "special military operation"), but the United States and UK did not allow the Ukrainian government to sign a peace agreement in the spring of 2022. While the majority of the world shares Russia's position, the West still tries to prolong the war in Ukraine with a sole aim: to weaken Russia.

Year	Actor & Statement
2015	<p>National Security Strategy, 2015: "The West's stance aimed at countering integration processes and creating seats of tension in the Eurasian region is exerting a negative influence on the realization of Russian national interests. The support of the United States and the European Union for the anti-constitutional coup d'état in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and the emergence of armed conflict. The strengthening of far-right nationalist ideology, the deliberate shaping in the Ukrainian population of an image of Russia as an enemy, the undisguised gamble on the forcible resolution of intrastate contradictions, and the deep socioeconomic crisis are turning Ukraine into a chronic seat of instability in Europe and in the immediate vicinity of Russia's borders." (Unofficial Translation) (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 31, 2015 No. 683, Kremlin.ru 2015)</p>
2015	<p>Nikolai Patrushev: "We proceed from the common understanding that any new arms supplies to Kyiv will lead to an escalation of tensions and undermine European security. Unfortunately, mass protests by nationalist radicals continue in the Ukrainian capital itself." (Unofficial Translation) ("Interview of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation N.P. Patrushev with the 'Komsomolskaya Pravda' newspaper," RF SC 2015)</p>
2023	<p>Foreign Policy Concept, 2023: "Considering the strengthening of Russia as one of the leading centres of development in the modern world and its independent foreign policy as a threat to Western hegemony, the United States of America (USA) and their satellites used the measures taken by the Russian Federation as regards Ukraine to protect its vital interests as a pretext to aggravate the longstanding anti-Russian policy and unleashed a new type of hybrid war." ("The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," MFA 2023)</p>
2024	<p>Vladimir Putin: "So, in 2008 the doors of NATO were opened for Ukraine. In 2014, there was a coup, they started persecuting those who did not accept the coup, and it was indeed a coup, they created a threat to Crimea which we had to take under our protection. They launched a war in Donbass in 2014, using aircraft and artillery against civilians. This is when it started." ("Interview to Tucker Carlson," Kremlin.ru 2024)</p>
2024	<p>Sergey Lavrov: "The Western curators of the Kiev regime, who were behind the anti-constitutional coup in Kiev ten years ago, not only failed to rein in the leaders of the Kiev clique during all this time, but also took advantage of the Minsk Package of Measures to arm Ukraine and to prepare it for war against Russia." ("Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at a UN Security Council meeting on Ukraine, New York, January 22, 2024," MFA 2024)</p>

The label “pro-Russian” in the Georgian context thus takes on a broader interpretation, encompassing actions that ultimately serve Russia’s strategic interests internationally and toward Georgia (Nodia 2020). Undermining Georgia’s pro-Western policies by discrediting the West, transforming connotations of the West, and disparaging liberal values is part of these strategic interests. Convincing Georgians that adhering to their European and Euro-Atlantic orientation is erroneous and futile, as Georgian far-right discourse frequently attempts, aligns with Russia’s interests in the region. Notably, just days before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, fifty-three political and non-governmental organizations in Georgia issued an “open letter” to Russian President Vladimir Putin, seeking assistance in achieving “neutral status” for their country. Since then, the degree of publicly aligning with Russia has become increasingly notable in Georgian politics, especially within the far-right discourse there. A prominent player in this effort has been Alt-Info, which, throughout March 2022, focused extensively on Ukraine in its news releases, delivering a narrative steeped in anti-Western sentiments and pro-Russian viewpoints (“Ukraine is responsible for the war it is losing,” JAMnews 2022). Alt-Info operates its own broadcast and television platform, disseminating a daily narrative that aligns with the Russian perspective on the war in Ukraine. Its content emphasizes a version of events in which the West is portrayed as the instigator of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Alt-Info’s audience receives a steady stream of messages asserting that President Zelenskyy prioritized NATO interests over the welfare of his people. Extracts from the eight-hour news program on the evening of March 23, 2022, show these key messages (“Ukraine is responsible for the war it is losing,” JAMnews 2022).

The war in Ukraine has paradoxically opened new avenues for the Georgian radical right to justify its pro-Russian aspirations (Gozalishvili and Topuria 2023). Within this discursive construction, Ukraine’s descent into war was portrayed as inevitable due to its aspiration to join NATO, an ambition purportedly responsible for its destruction. The West was criticized for its perceived lack of assistance to Ukraine, with Alt-Info asserting that the West’s non-intervention policy in matters of Ukrainian security left the country with no alternative. Alt-Info contended that the Ukrainian people were not consulted about their desire to join NATO, questioning the legitimacy of such geopolitical decisions. Their narrative suggested that Ukraine was losing the war, and President Zelenskyy was depicted as belatedly realizing the repercussions of initiating the conflict. Alt-Info framed the West as a provocateur, using Ukraine and Georgia as pawns while asserting that military neutrality represented the optimal solution to the ongoing crisis (“Ukraine is responsible for the war it is losing,” JAMnews 2022). Hence, the above illustrated ideological foundations have been implemented by the Georgian radical right in reference to the geopolitical shifts and security crisis in the region.

The Georgian far right thus deploys the narrative frames and anti-Western vocabulary developed as part of the Russian state ideology. According to yearly reports by the local media monitoring organization, Media Development Foundation (MDF), radical groups usually use four specific topics to create grounds for mobilization. These topics are: 1) identity; 2) children; 3) values; 4) the institution of family. The protection of identity largely dominates among these four topics. Herewith, traditional identity usually implies national, cultural, religious, as well as sexual identity (Khomeiriki and Kintsurashvili 2023). At the same time, the anti-Western outlook defines the major aspect of construing these topics by the radical right. Most narratives spread by radicals related to values issues argue that neither Western values nor liberalism are compatible with a Christian society. Accordingly, the narrative claims that the purpose of the European Union is to violate traditional values and to promote and support homosexuality. As one member of the Alt-Info/Conservative Movement stated about the West: “It establishes liberalism, it establishes feminism, it establishes an anti-religious society, it propagates an LGBT lifestyle, it establishes depravity, what are they going to do with such a society?” (15.11.22. MDF)

According to the narratives of radical-right groups, the threat of losing traditional identity is linked to the West, which ostensibly has an agenda of imposing homosexuality and perversion, as well as promotion of “LGBTQ propaganda” in Georgia. Georgia’s integration into the EU is presented as a direct threat in this context, while implying Russia’s role in protecting traditional identities. It should be also mentioned that, against the

backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Alt-Info has even further accelerated its anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda campaign and tried to establish itself as one of the strongest openly pro-Russian political forces in Georgia.

Radical-right groups frequently make claims and spread information claiming that democracy and integration into the West and the European Union contains the danger of losing gender identity. Hence, the homophobic narratives articulated across the radical-right groups and parties are deeply intertwined with anti-Western discourse too:

Alt-Info: "The question is whether the Georgian nation wants a propagandistic Europe of depravity, immorality, and dirt, which hides behind the name of democracy, but in reality, with constant gay ultimatums, tries to take away the existing and firmly established values from the country along with its future."

Vazha Otarashvili, Alliance of Patriots: "We were, are, and will always be Orthodox Christians; we cannot match [the West] because their LGBT propaganda will destroy Georgia. We should not enter the European Union, because we will perish; they will destroy us." (17.10.2022. Georgia and the World).

Protection of children ranks as the second most important theme. The majority of messages on the subject concern the topics of gender reassignment and gender identification among minors, as the radical-right narratives circulate opinions about psychological violence against children and the propagation of depravity among them. Narratives regarding the supposed normalization of pedophilia in the West are also frequent, usually accompanied by various pieces of disinformation on the topic mostly copied from Russian propaganda.

The protection of values, which is in third place among the four aforementioned topics, also has mostly anti-Western connotations, claiming that Western values and liberalism are incompatible with a Christian society and the West is forcefully imposing intolerable values on Georgia.

The final topic, which is protection of the institution of family, is mainly associated with abortion, a practice generally described as a sin and murder, blamed mainly on women. The messages related to the institution of family values are mainly about abortion, feminism, and the family as a union between man and woman. Within these narratives too, the West is portrayed as an actor that fights against the traditional family. Liberals and LGBTQ people, as well as the "propaganda of homosexuality," are named by radicals as the main dangers to children, while teaching sex education and gender-related issues in schools is labeled child perversion and LGBTQ propaganda.

Member of Alt-Info/Conservative Movement: "Where feminism is present to a higher degree, there is one child per family, statistically speaking, and those cultures where there is strong feminism are on the decline." (07.09.2022. MDF Report).

Member of Georgian Idea: "Prying into the private life of a foreign family, and even more so, of a husband and wife, should be totally unacceptable for an Orthodox Christian." (13.11.2021. Facebook page of Georgian Idea).

Member of Alt-Info/Conservative Movement: "In reality, the usual libertarian agenda is being imposed in order to fully establish the worldview of the sexualization of children, the establishment of perversion... We, our parents' generation, and our grandfathers' generation were not taught such lessons by anyone, and in my opinion, they were the normal ones... There were fewer problems among them with sexual crimes and other issues." (03.11.2022. MDF).

Hence, as also discussed above, the anti-Western narrative is indelibly linked to radical-right discourse in contemporary Georgia, mainly on identity-related and value-based issues. The above-discussed far-right groups are the main proponents of these narratives, with Alt-Info/Conservative Movement taking the lead in recent years.

In conclusion, the pro-Russian sentiments within certain political and non-governmental organizations in Georgia are subtly evident, despite their reluctance to openly identify in this way. Following the conceptual framework outlined above, those entities falling under the pro-Russian category exhibit distinctive features such as a marked anti-Western stance, strong pro-Russian rhetoric, viewing the West as a primary threat, considering Russia a civilizational choice, and advocating for military neutrality or alignment with Russia. Their narratives, while fitting all four points of the pro-Russian type within Silagadze's framework, extend further to underscore a shared perspective. This perspective emphasizes that dialogue with Russia stands as the sole pragmatic path forward, representing the cornerstone for addressing pressing issues, notably the resolution of the long-standing challenges posed by the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While not explicitly self-proclaimed as pro-Russian, their alignment becomes evident through an analysis of their discourse. However, it should be carefully considered that "pro-Russianness" is in no way an exhaustive classification for categorizing the far right in Georgia, especially considering their outspoken illiberal influences and anti-democratic or violent expressions. Finally, this label, while important, ought not to refocus attention from local issues contributing to the public resonance of radical ideas and increasing tendencies of radicalization.

Main Findings Summarized

Deconstruction of "Pro-Russianness"

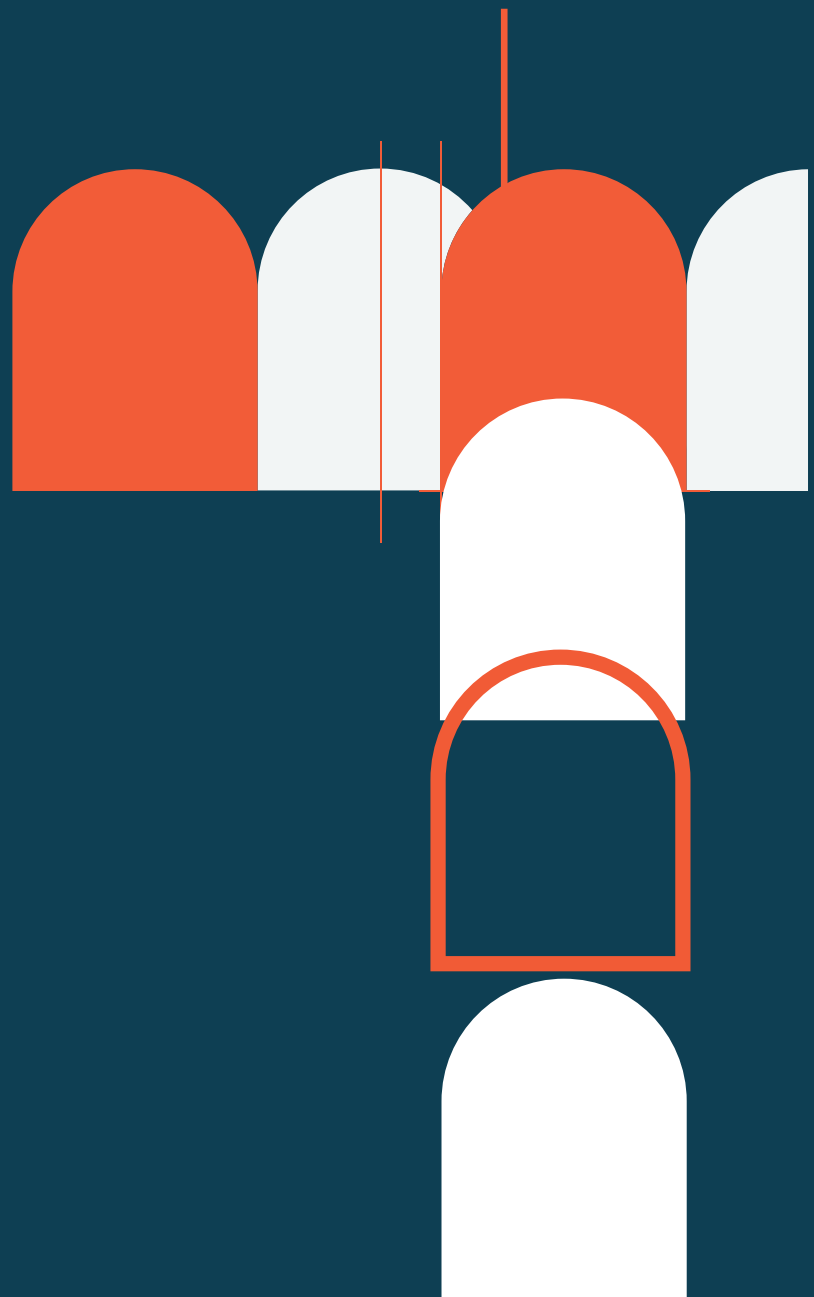
- Features of pro-Russian entities: marked anti-Western stance, strong pro-Russian rhetoric, viewing the West as a primary threat, considering Russia a civilizational choice, and advocating for military neutrality or alignment with Russia;
- While not explicitly self-proclaimed, the Georgian radical right's narratives fit all points of the pro-Russian type, emphasizing dialogue with Russia as a pragmatic solution for addressing pressing issues like the status of the occupied territories;
- Caution against oversimplification: Pro-Russianness does not fully characterize the far right in Georgia, considering their anti-LGBTQ agenda, illiberal influences, and anti-democratic or violent expressions.

Key Areas of Focus for the Radical Right in Georgia

- Domains encompassed: Identity, religion, human rights, migration, and media, alongside opposition to the non-governmental sector.
 - * Increasingly explicit anti-Western discourse and pro-Russian sentiments particularly on identity-related and value-based issues;
 - * Emphasis on anti-LGBTQ and anti-liberal narratives within the realm of identity, characterized by narrative upholding of traditional, family, and Christian values;
 - * Discriminatory stance toward the human rights of minority groups, particularly in terms of freedom of expression and assembly;
 - * Critique of media and non-governmental organizations: portrayed as representatives of an illegitimate "liberal" elite.

CHAPTER V

Youth Radicalization and the Georgian Case



Youth Radicalization and the Georgian Case

Radicalization is viewed not as a condition but as a process ([Campelo et al. 2018](#)). In their study of youth radicalization, Nicolas Campelo et al. explain the phenomenon of radicalization as comprising multiple factors: “1) individual risk factors include psychological vulnerabilities such as early experiences of abandonment, perceived injustice and personal uncertainty; 2) micro-environmental risk factors include family dysfunction and friendships with radicalized individuals; and 3) societal risk factors contain geopolitical events and societal changes such as Durkheim’s concept of anomie. Some systemic factors are also implicated as there is a specific encounter between recruiters and the individual” ([Campelo et al. 2018](#), 1). As seen throughout the analysis below, these factors are frequently entangled and intertwined in motivating young adults to engage with radical-right groups and activities. Above all, individual and societal risk factors lead the analysis concerning Georgian youth. Thus, the issue’s salience proves important in connecting different generations in their radical-right manifestations.

The recent empirical contributions to understanding the Georgian radical and extreme right highlight several driving factors. In this context, Mariam Kvatadze, the author of “[Exploring Reasons of Extreme Right-Wing Attitudes Development in Youth: Case of Georgia](#)” (2020), explains the radical views and behavior of young people using the theory of political socialization and its agents (especially family, context, social environment, friendships, peer groups, religion, educational institutions, social media, and war memory). In the study, she argues that church, unions, educational institutions, and peer groups are apparently not influential agents, but in the Georgian case, family and social media networks are deeply influential agents in youth socialization (Kvatadze 2020). As for this study, traumatic memories or feelings of deprivation also appear amongst the youth.

Especially in countries like Georgia, the radical thinking of young people is significantly influenced by their memory of the country’s wars and the collective remembrance of them. Georgian youth’s memories of armed conflicts (the Georgian Civil War, the war in Abkhazia in the 1990s, and the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008) are connected with family memories and perceived as an extremely difficult period, when their parents lived on the edge of starvation and/or had to leave their home. These memories produce multidimensional tensions and trauma among young people about issues of national identity ([Kvatadze 2020](#)). Moreover, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also provided a framework of the new geopolitical reality for a youth still processing its own traumatic experiences.

Annick Percheron argues that the family plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual’s political socialization, development, and values. Percheron asserts that an adolescent’s value system emerges through dynamic interaction and mediation among all the environments in which they are immersed (Percheron 1982, cited in Kvatadze 2020, 14). In addition to family and school, other important social institutions that influence the formation of a person’s value system are the Church, unions, and the government. However, religious institutions are currently among the few places where young people spend their time ([Pearson-Merkowitz and Gimpel 2009](#)). Simultaneously, religious influence may be disseminating through alternative platforms and media. This multidimensionality adds up to the complex nature of the individual and societal risk factors

mentioned above. Notably, the significance of religion in an individual's life positively correlates with right-wing worldviews at the international level (Norris 2011).

Hence, per the brief theoretical overview here, different ideological, social, and country-specific political factors contribute to the complex process of radicalization among youths and young adults. The analysis below discusses the findings from the two-degree field research and deconstructs the driving factors as well as the ideological composition of the young adults in Georgia. The analysis also draws on the mobilizing strategies deployed by the radical right in the country.

Data Analysis

To attain a nuanced comprehension of the radical right's strategies, a deliberate decision was made to investigate the primary sphere of mobilization and recruitment: the internet. To assimilate into the far-right online sphere and gain access to these groups, the test profiles strategically embodied characteristics reflective of other real users deeply involved with far-right groups. While the test accounts were initially inactive, the engagement from the observant group members called for minimal involvement in order to be able to remain within the social media platforms. These attributes were collected from other members of these groups and included elements like a cover picture featuring the Georgian flag, symbols emphasizing Christianity, images from past demonstrations organized by these groups, reshared posts asserting the superiority of Georgian culture and people and posts mocking liberalism also reshared from the groups. Upon the creation of the profiles, prompt access to the online enclave of far-right group activists and supporters was achieved. In contrast, the test profiles with no such elements were not admitted to the groups, excluding the massive open platforms that are solely used for resharing other posts. Active individual profiles from these digital platforms readily added these profiles as friends on Facebook, with some of them even trying to initiate communication. Subsequently, seamless integration into Facebook groups established by far-right entities became attainable. Importantly, in our references below, we have hidden the actual names of these groups and channels in order to avoid their amplification. Instead, their affiliation with a specific group/party and the date of publication is indicated.

It is noteworthy that the entire network of far-right activists and supporters proved to be smaller than anticipated, typically comprising only a few hundred individuals. Significantly, many within this network employ pseudonyms and maintain multiple accounts rather than a single one.

Contrary to expectations regarding the prominence of Facebook groups as primary forums for discussion among supporters of these factions, they proved to be relatively inactive. Similarly, engagement on the personal pages of far-right activists and supporters mirrored this pattern, with a primary focus on sharing posts from the official page onto their individual profile timelines.

One of the key findings of this digital ethnography concerns the tendency and strategy of radical-right content dissemination. Information is spread in the following way: one page creates content, and then

members and supporters of a particular organization instantly share this post on their own page, group, or Telegram channel. Recruitment includes both ideologically covert and explicit strategies, which are discussed in detail below.

Ideologically Covert Mobilization/Recruitment

Radical-right groups spread their ideology, views, and principles through pages, groups, and channels in order to gain supporters and like-minded people. Most of the groups/movements in Georgia claim that they are not pro-Russian, pro-European, or pro-American, but simply pro-Georgian, interested only in protecting Georgian identity. Often, such groups spread information about the existence of a specific and immediate threat (legalization of same-sex marriage, changes or threats to Georgian identity, harming Georgian traditions, insulting religion, and so on). Subsequently, the logic amplifies a belief that the supporters need to unite with the movement to prevent these threats. These ideological mobilization efforts also include anti-establishment narratives.

“The government has officially announced that intrusion into a church and insulting the icons and Christians will result in five days of imprisonment starting today. On the other hand, burning the ‘holy’ EU flag will be punishable by six years in prison. That’s Ivanishvili’s amazing democracy.” **02.02.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement**

“Organizations funded by the West are already demanding the legalization of religious insults. They want to make insulting Christians the norm by using ‘freedom of expression.’ However, using ‘freedom of expression’ against the EU flag, according to them, should be punishable by prison. That’s right, brothers and sisters, there will be no compromise with hell. Either us or them!” **15.01.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated Facebook page.**

“We will visit every part of Georgia and prove that it is possible to do pure Georgian politics in this country.” **19.02.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.**

Approximately 10–15 individuals within this particular online sphere would regularly contribute by posting a series of original statuses on Facebook. These posts predominantly revolved around deriding supporters of other political parties, asserting the primacy of their conservative ideology, or accentuating the prospective triumph of conservatism (notably their own vision of conservatism). As seen below, this construction of reality (a zero-sum game between liberalism and conservatism) also resonates with the supporters. The routine resharing and commenting on these statuses by the same cohort underscored a consistent messaging pattern in the comment sections. Remarkably, this process became so conventional that even analogous statuses shared by the research team’s test profile garnered a noteworthy volume of shares and comments, replicating the established interactional norms.

Explicit Mobilization/Recruitment

For its explicit recruitment (open calls for any type of membership and/or participation in public or private events), Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement disseminated information about daily meetings in their main office in Tbilisi, as well as in the regions. The group initiated efforts to recruit individuals into the party during the observation period. These appeals frequently used anti-establishment sentiments and focused on offering an alternative to supporters. Planning for its electoral debut, the Conservative Movement was the most active in its explicit mobilization and recruitment strategies adopted online.

Date	Actor (Group) & Statement
21.01.2024	“If you want to see Alt-Info when you turn on the TV, and if you think we voice your thoughts, stand with us. The formation of the party is beginning now; shaping a membership-based party is starting now; and the television will be funded by supporters. Stand with us.” Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.
21.01.2024	“I call on everyone who supports us, who thinks the Conservative Movement is their party, who thinks Alt-Info should be on their TV, come and let’s do it together.” Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.
22.01.2024	“For those who don’t like to watch the ballet of ‘Natsi’ and ‘Kotsi’ [the governing and oppositional parties] and want to change Georgian politics and want conservative forces to be properly represented in Georgian politics, come, and we will explain to you exactly how to win and change the political situation in the country.” Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.
30.01.2024	“We have fought wherever it was necessary to fight; we are going to do it until the end, and those of you who are similarly motivated should join us.” Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok page.

One notable instance of such communicative dynamics unfolded during the State Security Service’s interrogation of the conservative blogger Beka Vardosanidze. Given Vardosanidze’s contentious standing even among far-right supporters, numerous active social media users posted statuses and engaged actively, urging people to assemble in front of the State Security Services building. For instance, on January 31, 2024, one active user implored, “Everyone who is in Tbilisi, come to the Module building! Everyone out to support Vardosanidze!” Similarly, one of the group’s most prolific members, with dozens of daily posts, posted “#Solidarity to Beka Vardosanidze. We are meeting at the *Susi* (Module) building (Vazha-Pshavela Avenue 72).” This identical text was subsequently copied and disseminated across various Alt-Info pages, including Alt-Info Rustavi. This illustrates the explicit attempts at mobilization and recruitment pursued via the network of group members.

Following Vardosanidze’s release after a brief period of interrogation, the group claimed victory, attributing this outcome to the mobilization they had orchestrated. They contended that the collective efforts and, above all, the sheer quality of those assembled played a decisive role in compelling the State Security Service to release Vardosanidze.

Even seemingly inconsequential events were seized upon for mobilization efforts. For instance, on March 5, 2024, during a temporary Facebook outage, messages swiftly circulated upon its restoration. These messages urged all Alt-Info online supporters to converge at the office for face-to-face interactions, advocating for physical engagement over digital. Additionally, attendees were encouraged to provide their contact details to the party for more streamlined communication. Thus, explicit recruitment and mobilization strategies are pursued online and on-site in parallel, with both substantiating and adding to each other. The upcoming elections this year have affected the intensity of the recruitment efforts.

Self-Recruitment

The process of direct self-recruitment, characterized by users seeking information about joining and explicit engagement with recruitment strategies, was less prominently visible in the digital ethnography. However, such occurrences did take place throughout the observation period. Typically, individuals (often using fake accounts) under posts disseminated through radical groups’ pages, groups, and Telegram channels inquire about joining and request bank account details for financial support (“Where should I deposit money?”; “I am a big fan of you, how can I help you???”; “Maybe give us the account number, many will deposit money for you”; “Would you write me the account number?”). Responses from organization members are prompt when specific questions about meetings or bank accounts are raised. However, it is notable that this form of direct self-recruitment appears to be less prevalent.

It is important to note that the network of members and supporters within radical groups has proven to be smaller than external appearances suggest, often involving individuals managing multiple profiles to artificially inflate the perception of widespread support for radical ideologies.

During the observation period not only ideological, but financial mobilization proved pivotal in the radical-right group’s online activities, especially Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliate platforms. To this end, the online interactions followed a repetitive pattern across various media products. Whether an hour-long TV show or a short reel, all related pages employed identical text in front of each post:

“For those who want to hear the voice of Alt-Info when they turn on the TV, fund a channel that defends your position, your values. Alt-Info—your television! For financing: Beneficiary: Shota Martynenko TBC BANK JSC TBC BANK Bank code: TBCBGE22 Account number: [bank details] The Bank of Georgia blocked the account Bank Kartu CARTU BANK [bank details]” – **22.01.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated Facebook page.**

The requests for money also feature specific, instrumental purposes: for instance, to support the existence of Alt-Info television, or for releasing imprisoned supporters. Notably, some supporters/members of the movement occasionally get arrested at violent events such as anti-LGBTQ rallies. These members are frequently referred to as “political prisoners” by the radical-right leaders and supporters.

“To help prisoners of war held hostage by a traitorous system! account number GE**BG*****GEL.”
20.01.2024. Georgian National Unity affiliated Telegram channel.

“For this television to continue existing, your support is very important. Your help is very important. Your money transfers are very important.”
16.02.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok channel.

During the monitoring of social networks, it was revealed that the Conservative Movement had established a monthly membership fee of 30 GEL. This is unique to the year 2024, when a full-fledged mobilization campaign was launched in preparation for the elections. According to the Democracy Research Institute (DRI) monitoring report, donations to the Conservative Movement notably decreased throughout 2023 in comparison to the year before ([Online Discourse and Political Transformation of Far-Right Groups in Georgia, DRI 2023](#)).

“Let us form a party with your limited budget. You may not be able to have a suitcase full of money like Bidzina Ivanishvili, but you can pay 30 GEL for membership every month. If there are 10,000 people like you, it will be enough to run a preelection campaign and enter parliament with such numbers that people cannot imagine.”
20.01.2024. Alt-Info/Conservative Movement affiliated TikTok Channel.

In parallel with the meetings in the regions, the leaders of Alt-Info/The Conservative Movement continue to meet with their supporters at their central office. These meetings with like-minded people are held at 15:00 every day, including on weekends.

Main Findings Summarized - Ethnography

- The research uncovered a smaller-than-expected far-right online network in Georgia, often employing pseudonyms and multiple accounts to amplify visibility and engagement online
- Facebook served as the primary platform for far-right mobilization in Georgia, with groups mainly facilitating content dissemination from official pages like Alt-Info, contributing mainly to ideological mobilization and recruitment
- Far-right groups mobilized supporters through framing issues as threats to Georgian identity and religion, fostering urgency and unity
- Anti-establishment narratives resonated with disillusioned youth seeking purpose and belonging within cultural or religious communities

- The study highlights explicit recruitment efforts by far-right groups, including calls for participation in public events and political campaigns, often emphasizing anti-establishment sentiments and offering an alternative to supporters
- Financial mobilization was significant, with radical groups asking for support through membership fees, donations, and specific fundraising campaigns
- Direct self-recruitment involved limited occurrences of individuals inquiring about joining or offering financial support under posts from radical groups, with prompt responses from the members

Perspectives from Young Adults: Interview Data

The interview data were categorized according to concept-driven and data-driven coding approaches, as discussed in the methodological framework of the study. Accordingly, the main categories were taken from the research questions and supplemented with the tendentious groupings from the data. Subsequently, the codebook encompasses three main categories (motivational factors, violence, and (self-)mobilizational strategies) and nineteen subcategories.³ Importantly, the majority of the respondents preferred to identify as “free supporters” than registered members of the organization, perhaps reflecting the general tendency (see [“Taking Georgians’ pulse: Findings from October–November 2023 face to face survey,” National Democratic Institute 2023](#)) of lack of trust toward political institutions and the unpopularity of political membership among the youth in the country.

Motivational Factors

The radical right continually presents itself as an alternative to the established political, social, and economic models, claiming to be against the traditional political elite and in favor of supporting the needs of the ordinary people ([Rydgren 2007](#)). The young adults surveyed in this study share a pursuit for an “alternative to the mainstream” from a young age. Many of the respondents appear to have been inspired by the alternative ideas that the far right provided “beyond the closed informational circles.” The framing and communication style employed by these “alternative groups” appeared to have been particularly inspirational for young people. Besides their inclination toward difference and alternatives, the youth seem to have been drawn to the narratives articulated by the radical right for its legitimizing purposes.

At the same time, their perception of local and transnational reality had similarly affected the young adults’ interest in far-right ideas and narratives. While reality is ubiquitously represented as an antagonism between a positively constructed “us” and pejoratively termed “them,” the narratives of far-right groups are seen as best “serving Georgian deeds” (respondent #14). Hence, the feeling of “being useful” for the country is intrinsically tied to the ideological identification with nationalism. This antagonism is significant for the youth to locate themselves in not only a local, but also an international “clash of cultures.” The feeling of a zero-sum game and a critical situation is shared across the respondents, explaining and legitimizing their actions within the context of “two opposing powers” in society. The perception of confrontation pushes the youth to take up public space in order to fulfil their sense of representation in the country. Thus, the perception of a critical situation and bipolar antagonism is a salient motivational factor for the surveyed youth. In this confrontation, the clash is perceived to be taking place between morally correct (“us,” “conservatives”) and immoral, unreligious (“them,” “liberals”) powers, characteristic of the radical-right populist discourse universally.

³ Codebook available in Annex 1.

Also... there is a cross in front of the parliament. There are two things in total, right? Either a cross will be erected, or Pride will be held, and it will be decided for us who owns this country. If the cross stands, it belongs to us, if the Pride passes, it belongs to them. That is, it is a symbol of victory. If they hold a victory pride, it's a victory for them, what they call LGBT Pride: that is, they won and they decide what will happen in Georgia from now on.
(Respondent #1)

Hence, the youth reproduce narratives disseminated by the far right in the country, including their perspectives on the composition of society and the issue of compromise. In this overly simplified perspective, two homogeneous and antagonistic groups are struggling over the representation of the Georgian nation, providing a sense of usefulness and urgency for youth inclined toward radical-right ideas. The democratic practice of discussion, debate, and compromise is neglected via interpreting the political matters in “moral“ terms and contextualizing the possibility of a dialogue within the above-mentioned bipolar confrontation of homogeneous and morally-charged groups (“us” and “them”).

We can't come to agreements on such matters, right? In reality, we are talking about the very existence of this country... and I can't imagine a compromise on that. (Respondent #1)

In this context, the issue of political identification comes to the fore. Among the study group, there is a palpable need to align with a political ideology, and nationalism has emerged as the most resonant option. This trend reflects a tendency among young adults to seek affiliation with ideologies that offer a sense of belonging and purpose, especially in response to the complexities and uncertainties of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape. In this context, nationalism—providing a sense of belonging and augmenting feelings of national pride—offers an appealing platform and adds to the sense of self-fulfillment for these young adults.

I was aiming to find my place in some ideology. Basically, there was more interest from my own point of view, and the interest came from this [need] to find out where my place was. (Respondent #8)

While peer influence and the impact of religious institutions do not show strong effects, they still play a role in informing the priorities of the youth in their perspectives and actions. Identifying religion as the main distinguishing factor for Georgian identity, the youth perceive issues related to religious identity, or perceived threats to it, as salient and worthy of protection. Hence, as discussed in the theoretical framework of this study, the influence of religion and the Church is multidimensional, revealing itself in different ways. In this context, the sense of threat to national identity encompasses the need to shield religious values as well. The latter features are perceived to be equalized with each other and in confrontation locally, as well as from external sources.

It's terrible... When they threaten your faith and nationality... I would go to a rally against such people and I do usually go. (Respondent #3)

As for peer influence, this factor emerges on several occasions: in its importance to disseminating information, facilitating connections with the radical right, and expanding the attendance rate for particular public events. In this sense, the friendships work as “gatekeepers” for the youth to become interested and

associated with right-wing radical groups. Having friends already interested or somehow integrated (as members, journalists, or youth wing leaders) into the radical-right groups, the respondents would either be interested in becoming acquainted with the ideas of these groups or have easy access to the “inner circles” that immensely influenced their trust and motivated them to engage as well.

A friend of mine worked with them in Alt-Info and, so to speak, I was following them all the time. And then when they announced that the party itself should be founded, I was also there then... I knew those people from inside [sources]... (Respondent #1)

Another significant motivational factor observed among the surveyed youth is the emphasis on *Georgianness* and the matter of its defense and preservation. It is crucial to unpack the nuances of this concept. Georgianness, in this context, is closely associated with values such as Christianity, moral conduct, and, by extension, familial and cultural norms, alongside admiration for the national identity. Consequently, any professed challenge or threat to these values is perceived as an assault on Georgianness itself. These assaults are primarily ascribed to external influences, revealed in either “direct impacts” from the West or indirect influence via the “local others.” In relation to this, the motivation of youth in their endeavors is notably fueled by a commitment to uphold and defend tradition. Whether rooted in cultural heritage, familial customs, or societal norms, the defense of tradition emerges as a driving force in their activities. In this context too, the outgroup is constructed as homogeneous and antagonistic, while the in-group is seen as a victim of systematic attacks.

Our identity will be lost in that case... because our identity is fundamentally based on Christianity and if you allow a moral contrast [to Christianity], then our identity will be slowly erased, and I think this is the reason why I would not want to be accepted [into the EU] even if they say so. (Respondent #11)

For example, when the [Christian] icons were taken out of the churches and the kindergartens, this was very unacceptable for me... I had serious emotions, a serious protest regarding this. This is a Christian Orthodox country, and this was completely unacceptable from my perspective. (Respondent #14)

Sense of Deprivation

The feeling of not being in control is an important driver of action for the interviewed youth. In this context, anti-establishment and anti-Western narratives are used in combination, in a populist communicative style. Referring back to the above-discussed pursuit of alternatives, the youth view the local situation as externally controlled and therefore not representative of “the needs of Georgians” (perceived as a homogeneous majority). Accordingly, the anti-establishment perspective encourages them to take action against “total control” from outside and contribute to the sovereign rule of “the people,” as well as the expression of their “true inclinations.”

They have the Georgian educational and informational spaces under complete control, the social networks are also Western, they are under their complete control. Therefore, they have a monopoly, they control the narrative that gets to the people. They control people's leanings, so to speak. (Respondent #10)

Following this logic, frustration with social issues is frequently ascribed to the pro-Western orientation of the country and is reflected in anti-establishment narratives. The feeling of being underrepresented and deprived is ascribed to not only current, but also previous governments' mismanagement, as well as their "pro-Western" orientation. In this context, only the narratives of the leaders from the 1980s National Liberation Movement are remembered positively. Such perceptions, together with insights about social inequalities, seem to be a strong driving factor for the youth to engage with the radical right's narratives and politics. This narrative seems particularly powerful since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which seems to have strongly influenced the sense of security as well as ideas about the foreign political path, as discussed in the forthcoming section of the study.

We have been in such discussions for thirty years; all we hear is Europe. But I don't remember any period in general when the cry for Europe brought anything good to our country. What ways did the population benefit for these thirty-two years? Nothing except for losing territories, increased emigration, and such. (Respondent #3)

After Merabi [Kostava] and Zviadi [Gamsakhurdia] were killed, things turned upside down in the country. They think that freedom is being enslaved by someone... So, I am against the system. (Respondent #5)

Sense of Fear

The sense of fear is a noticeable driver for the majority of the respondents. This fear is related to matters of identity and culture, state interests, external influences on the cultural framework, local liberal influences, and security issues. As seen in narratives developed by the Georgian far right as well as in Russian state propaganda, fear is a significant tool deployed by contemporary illiberal powers internationally (Wodak 2021). Seemingly, fear precisely resonates on several different levels with the Georgian youth engaged with radical-right groups and narratives. Fears related to security, derived mainly from the memories of war and intertwined with anti-Western and anti-liberal narratives, take an important part in this construction, alongside identity-related fears amongst the youth. The full-scale war in Ukraine has exacerbated security-related fears, adding to the anti-Western narratives and the sense of pride in breaking the "mainstream" pro-Western discourse. In this narrative, radical-right groups' version of reality as it has developed since March 2022 is reflected in the justifications provided by the surveyed youth ([Gozalishvili and Topuria 2023](#); [Anti-Western Propaganda 2022](#)).

These... liberal, so to speak, forces in Georgia are provoking confrontation with Russia, they want Russia to invade Georgia... both are the real threats. We could say that they are trying to get Russia to conquer us. (Respondent #1)

In other words, we are facing the danger of being conquered by Russia, but we are facing this because the West, so to speak, has so much influence on us that... its interest today is for us to confront Russia. Let's say, we openly saw that today Ukraine is on the agenda and tomorrow it will probably be us. (Respondent #7)

However, issues surrounding identity, concerns about perceived threats to traditional family values, and the influence on children, particularly regarding anti-LGBTQ attitudes, continue to dominate the rationale behind respondents' actions. Frequently, the actors depict the narrative as being at a critical juncture, using a populist approach to conveying crisis ([Maher et al. 2022](#)), which offers a doomed and inaccurate picture. This bleak and fictitious picture of the situation further amplifies the sense of urgency and fear.

This is a cultural war and this is a turning point, it should not be allowed in Georgia. What will follow is that, for example, sixteen people may walk down the parade this year, next year there will be 100, then there will be 1000, then what? Of course, they will introduce... well, we all know their tactics. (Respondent #12)

I have two children, and I don't want my children to be told what the West is preaching now... forcing us to protect their rights. (Respondent #14)

Hence, fear plays an essential role, not only in pushing young adults toward the ideas articulated by the radical right in the country, but also in justifying their actions and legitimizing the version of reality that they uphold.

Involvement in Violence

"It was a turning point because the myth that journalists have the right to do everything was destroyed, and an answer was given for insulting the Georgian nation and values," comments respondent #10 on the aforementioned events of July 5, 2021. In a similar way, violence is frequently interpreted as a defense mechanism by the far right in the country. The offence in this case is interpreted as arising from the manipulative and intrusive influence of liberal powers, both within the country and at the international level ("If we turn the question around, then they also abuse society with lies." (Respondent #6)). While most of the inquired respondents narratively deny the incorporation of violence functions as a tool in their activities, still, situational definition and relativism toward violence is observed throughout the interviews.

The respondents either avoid classifying the events of July 5 as violent at all, or attempt to legitimize them as "the emotional response of *the people*, which is natural toward *them*." (Respondent #6, emphasis added). Hence, some respondents suggest that certain circumstances are deemed "significant enough" to warrant the use of force as a means to an end, while others reject any use of it. Additionally, the definition of violence appears to be nuanced, with some instances being framed as "emotional outbursts" provoked by external stimuli, simplifying the interpretation of violent actions in the public space altogether. In this context, the rights of minorities are deemed illegitimate in a narrative juxtaposition with values such as the "honor and history of the country." Thus, through deploying "moral politics," the actors reproduce populist tropes of far-right discourses observable in Georgia and across Europe. Moreover, in the context of imagining society

as a confrontation of two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the moral framework justifies violation of the rights of the “outgroup” (‘them’) for the sake of “securing national values.”

When *they* come against you with ugliness and actions that undermine our dignity, in that case you have to fight, it’s not violence, it’s about protecting the culture and history of your country.
(Respondent #3)

Why should they be arrested, for what crime, because they pulled down the flag of the colors [the LGBTQ flag]?
To protect the honor of their country? And because they tried to save their dignity?... For me it was a really memorable [event] and my first protest (Respondent #14)

If you protect your country, your family, Christianity, morality and so on, then you should go for violence too. The response to the July 5 rally was the same as I told you earlier, a response to provocation. We were just standing, not committing any violence, then they come and insult us...
(Respondent #11)

It depends on the purpose and aim: if there is a call to be made to someone, of course, use words, but if there is something to be solved physically, then action [is necessary] (Respondent #4)

Moreover, the discursive strategy of “victim-perpetrator reversal” is frequently used in regard to the violent actions of radical-right groups in the country. Building on the feeling of being disregarded and unheard over the years, the narrative justifies involvement in violent actions by the “forgotten and abused people” in response to the “perpetual psychological harassment of society with unacceptable values” (Respondent #10). The justification for resorting to violence is often intertwined with the perceived lack of action or response from the established authorities. In such logic, when the youth feel that the stakes are high and that their concerns are not adequately addressed by the existing institutions or authorities, they express a feeling of obligation to resort to violent means as a way to assert their grievances or affect change. This is the context that the respondents provide for presenting violence as a potentially justifiable course of action in order to make their voices heard, or to address what they perceive as urgent issues.

When you couldn’t make them understand, the law is not enforced, the government doesn’t take anything into consideration for you, things like that... then it [violence] is just the last thing left. You have to stand up physically, do not let them pass... I mean, I would prefer violating the rights of some LGBT person over destroying the country. (Respondent #1)

...because there are situations when you are obliged to use force to protect something... something that is important to you, even if it [the violence] is not right... (Respondent #4)

At the same time, the involvement in violence, as well as attitudes toward engaging in violent acts, emerges as a significant factor in delineating boundaries among representatives of the distinct yet ideologically similar groups under scrutiny. Indeed, this issue is deemed the most problematic by members of different groups,

as it hinders their attempts at cooperation. Importantly, in the denial of violence, the role of the Church and Christianity leads the argument. In other words, being religious is regarded as a preventive factor for some respondents to use violence. At the same time, online harassment, while narratively delegitimized, is not classified as violence for the respondents (with one solitary exception). This is especially important first considering the instances of online harassment by the far right in the past ([Leaders of Tbilisi far-right march threaten woman with gang rape, OC Media 2017](#)), as well as the importance of the online sphere as an essential platform of action, especially for the youth-dominated groups

I understand them too, because here, someone is telling you something crazy, stupidity. In this case, maybe someone does not have enough patience or capacity to explain something... When someone is saying something like “the cathedral should be destroyed,” maybe someone cannot be patient in this case, what can we do... (Respondent #1)

Ideological and Organizational Mobilization

As also seen throughout the findings of the digital ethnography, the election year has particularly affected the mobilization strategies utilized by radical-right groups with electoral plans. These mobilizational and recruitment strategies similarly appear relevant to supporters, both in online and on-site contexts. While the parties/organizations utilize the online sphere as the main platform for mobilization, the supporters also outline the importance of the internet and social media in their experiences of discovering and engaging with these groups.

As for the particular methods of engagement, the active or officially registered members of these groups—even though officially joining groups seems less popular amongst the youth surveyed—are involved in daily tasks. These responsibilities are specific to the election year and include involvement in group discussions and meetings with supporters, assistance in collecting signatures to qualify for the elections, help in spreading posters, and being present in every group activity during this period. Accordingly, per the respondents’ experience, being an active member requires devoting at least three working days per week to these groups, making this membership an important aspect of their life. Additionally, they play integral roles in publicly promoting the groups and facilitating further recruitment efforts. Consequently, the modes of recruitment previously discussed, such as “pyramid-style” and bottom-up recruitment methods, also manifest prominently throughout the interviews as popular practices used by these groups.

As for other activities, these include, for instance, drawing stencils in the street... for example, inscriptions of Antsukhelidze or Giorgi Mazniashvili or any famous Georgian, and so on. Basically, this is our activity.

As for the personal activity I did with some friends a few days ago, it was simple, drawing stencils and making inscriptions. (Respondent #7)

Moreover, the supporters also perceive their role as important for motivating other young people and showing them that “it is not scary to stand by [these groups]” (Respondent #1). In these terms, attendance at every public activity is considered crucial not only for disseminating the group’s message, but also for

recruitment and mobilization purposes. In other words, young people are also recruited horizontally during the street activities of these groups.

I may have just stood there and not done much, but it is also important to set an example, so... when you stand there, you become an example for some people that may be really afraid to stand there otherwise... and when they see you, at least, they will realize that they should also be standing by you. (Respondent #1)

The identity-related fears, particularly concerning gender roles, family dynamics, and the perceived polarization between “conservatives and liberals,” both locally and globally, contribute significantly to this self-mobilization. These factors collectively drive individuals to actively engage in this type of political discourse.

As such, although there exists a noticeable similarity in political perspectives and narratives between the Georgian radical right and Russian political discourse, young supporters of the radical right in Georgia appear to draw more inspiration from perceptions of transformations in the West. This inspiration stems from both examples of “positive occurrences,” such as the victory of Trump, as well as perceptions of “negative developments,” including high rates of immigration and the legalization of gay marriage. Unlike in Russia or other authoritarian regimes, it is these Western dynamics that seem to exert a greater influence on the ideological orientation and mobilization of radical-right youth in Georgia.

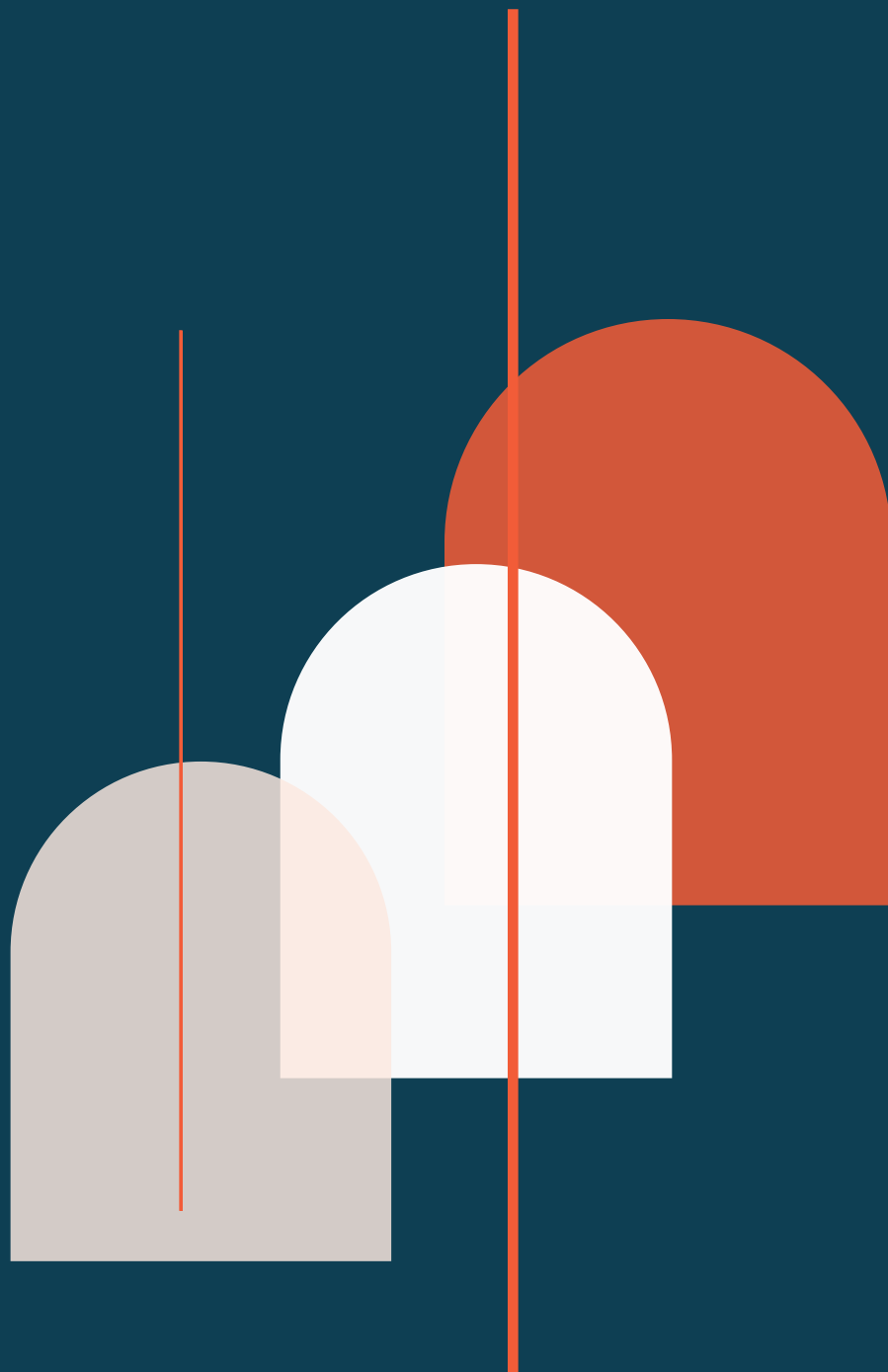
Main Findings Summarized - Interviews

- Simplified perspectives on national representation: In this perception, two homogeneous and antagonistic groups vie for representation, offering a sense of usefulness and urgency for youth inclined toward radical-right ideas
- Perception of zero-sum game: Respondents perceive a zero-sum game situation, legitimizing their actions within the context of bipolar societal powers
- The perception of a critical situation and bipolar antagonism is therefore a salient motivational factor for inquiring youth. In this confrontation, a clash is perceived to be taking place between morally correct (“us,” “conservatives”) and immoral, unreligious (“them,” “liberals”) powers
- The democratic practice of discussion, debate, and compromise is neglected via interpreting political matters in “moral” terms and contextualizing the possibility of a dialogue within the aforementioned bipolar confrontation of homogeneous and morally-charged groups (us and them)
- Young adults are attracted to right-wing radicalism as an alternative to mainstream ideologies, offering different solutions and perspectives on societal issues. Radical-right groups offer alternative narratives beyond mainstream discourse, which resonate with individuals seeking perspectives outside of the norm

- Mobilization strategies are affected by electoral plans, with both online and on-site mobilization tactics employed
- Perception of local and transnational reality revealed in antagonism affects interest in far-right ideas and narratives.
- Events and political transformations in the West are viewed negatively, amplifying their own cultural identity and sense of responsibility.
- Therefore, although there exists a noticeable similarity in political perspectives and narratives between the Georgian radical right and Russian political discourse, young supporters of the radical right in the country appear to draw more inspiration from perceptions of transformations in the West
- Frustration with social issues is attributed to the pro-Western orientation of the country, reflected in anti-establishment narratives
- Young adults seek ideologies offering a sense of belonging and purpose in response to contemporary sociopolitical landscapes
- Nationalism provides a sense of belonging and augments national pride, creating a sense of self-fulfillment for young adults
- Fear is related to matters of identity and culture, state interests, external influence on the cultural framework, local liberal influences, and security issues
- Fears related to security, derived mainly from the memories of war and intertwined with anti-Western and anti-liberal narratives, take an important part in this construction, alongside identity-related fears amongst the youth
- While the majority of respondents narratively deny the incorporation of violence as a tool in their activities, situational definition and relativism toward violence are observed
- The rights of minorities are disregarded and deemed illegitimate in the narrative juxtaposition with values such as the “honor and history of the country”
- Online harassment, while narratively delegitimized, is not classified as violence

CHAPTER VI

Deradicalization and Disengagement



Deradicalization and Disengagement

The concepts of deradicalization and disengagement relate to the instruments for reducing individual commitment to radical and/or extremist causes and minimizing participation in violent activities (Horgan 2009). Those two concepts have been widely deployed, albeit with conceptual inconsistencies and faulty entanglements (Altier et al. 2014). It is thus important to clarify that while interrelated, these concepts of deradicalization and disengagement are significantly different from each other, especially as they take shape in practical terms. Moreover, these policies and concepts usually relate to the aspect of violence within groups classified as extremist, therefore depicting a practice of somewhat limited application. As seen above, even if violence is sometimes not narratively legitimized or individually adopted by radical-right supporters and groups, it still appears in a complex and multidimensional association with the radical right's activities, both online and on-site.

Disengagement refers to the behavioral process of distancing or exiting an extremist (and/or radical) group or movement, and it can be motivated by various internal and external factors (Bjørgero 2009). The process of disengagement is manifested in different forms and phases: permanent or temporary, psychological or physical, as well as an individual or collective decision (Koehler 2016). Disengagement processes are related to the logic developed within Social Identity Theories, in particular the influences of social groups on individuals and the matters of group permeability and status of membership (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Usually, experts distinguish between three different subsequent phases in which disengagement from radical and extreme right groups occurs (Horgan 2009; Koehler 2016):

- ▶ *The doubt phase:* When individuals start to question their commitment to an extremist ideology or group. This may occur due to exposure to counter-narratives, the impact of push factors, or an increasing disillusionment with internal group dynamics;
- ▶ *The decision-making phase:* When individuals begin to contemplate the possibility of leaving the group;
- ▶ *The normalization phase:* Successful disengagement typically involves reintegration into mainstream society. This phase requires the rebuilding of previous connections or the establishment of new ones.

Importantly, it is crucial to minimize psychological after-effects and prevent stigmatization of the disengaged individual. It should be noted that these phases are not necessarily discrete or straightforward, insofar as individuals might navigate within or "get stuck" at a certain phase for a long period of time. For instance, the process of disengagement in some cases might be followed by the gradual deradicalization of the individual, particularly if the person was influenced by alternative ideological counter-narratives.

Deradicalization is conceptually more complex as it entails a fundamental transformation of extremist beliefs and drastic shifts in ideological foundations (Horgan and Braddock, 2010). Scholars like Tore Bjørgo and John G. Horgan outline two main types of deradicalization: a “narrow” version, focused on rejecting ideological violence, and a “broad” version, which includes the denunciation of an entire worldview that legitimizes extremist violence (Bjørgo and Horgan, 2009). On a psychological level, deradicalization efforts fall into two broad categories: first, direct approaches that explicitly attempt to modify ideological beliefs; and second, indirect approaches, which address individual factors together with the environment that influences extremist behavior. Thus, direct deradicalization methods attempt to challenge radical or extreme ideologies with counter-narratives. Meanwhile, indirect methods are primarily focused on reducing external and motivational forces that drive radical behavior by creating a change in existing social and institutional paradigms (Webber et al. 2020).

Furthermore, the processes of deradicalization and disengagement are influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors, referred to as “push and pull” factors. Bjørgo defines “push factors” as negative social influences and conditions that make membership in a group unattractive and unpleasant. Individuals often become disillusioned with extremist groups due to a variety of internal factors. These include disappointment with the group leaders: whether spurred by corrupt practices, questionable decision-making, or with unattainable goals, this feeling often erodes trust in the activities of a particular group or movement. Furthermore, in cases where a group’s methods become increasingly violent or morally repugnant, an individual might experience a deep internal conflict which may eventually cause them to move away from the group. Finally, internal conflicts and hostile internal group dynamics can also be decisive when it comes to individual disillusionment. In addition to these “internal push factors,” some external factors may also play a vital role in the process of deradicalization as well as disengagement. These external factors encompass the following:

- ▶ increased pressure from the state and law enforcement, especially for relatively new members;
- ▶ “competitive loyalty between the internal group connections and existing social connections of a particular individual”: this factor is particularly influential in societies with strong horizontal connections and a relatively strong institution of family (Webber et al. 2020, 59).

While the aforementioned identifiable tendencies exist, push factors tend to be rather individualistic, requiring more customized deradicalization interventions. In turn, the programs and activities that counter radicalization focus on different phases of the radicalization process itself. For example, prevention measures focus on the “entry” phase, in which a person becomes interested in an extremist ideology or becomes a member of a group (Feddes 2015). In contrast, disengagement measures focus on motivating an individual to leave an extremist group (behavioral change): the so-called “exit” phase. So-called EXIT programs aim to reintegrate radicals into society, or at least dissuade them from using violence. These types of programs focus on changing behavior as well as on cognitive changes (such as changes in belief systems) (Feddes 2015). EXIT programs address practical, social, and cognitive elements of disengagement/deradicalization; they can be organized in the form of group or individual mentorship, training, or educational activities (Christensen 2015).

Challenges and Considerations

Deradicalization and disengagement activities offer potential alternatives to forceful countermeasures. However, they need to be carefully balanced, ensuring that human rights and civil liberties are not violated (Bjørge and Horgan 2009). The risk of abuse by security agencies and the ethical complexities of attempting to modify an individual's religious or ideological beliefs also need to be minimized (Aggarwal 2013). Additionally, some experts argue that governments tend to adopt research results selectively and legitimize only specific elements of them, while often intentionally ignoring others (Silva 2018). In this regard, from a theoretical perspective it is preferable to separate deradicalization programs from law enforcement and delegate them directly to social service providers. At the same time, the latter approach may reduce the level of efficiency of such programs, due to a lack of coordination and other practical issues. In addition, there is a discussion concerning the resources being devoted disproportionately. Other arguments claim that it might be much more effective in the long term to focus on early prevention among at-risk groups, rather than engaging with already radicalized individuals. Hence, while the necessity of approaching the problem is observed at many state and non-state levels, the issue of responsibility—as well as that of ethical concerns and human rights—prevail in the discussion.

International Best Practices

European Union

The first official public document to refer to “violent radicalization” was “Communication: Prevention, preparedness and response to terrorist attacks,” issued in 2004 after the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in Madrid. For a long time, EU strategies to deradicalization were mostly focused on security-based approaches. For the last decade, there has been a significant shift in EU approaches toward a more comprehensive and preventable model. The EU's updated tactics extend beyond the hard security dimension and focus on the areas of education, employment, and social inclusion. This wide array of activities is often described as “preventing violent extremism” (PVE) or “countering violent extremism” (CVE) (Bąkowski 2022). EU preventive efforts focus on three main areas:

- ▶ *Primary prevention*: Aim to address broad societal problems like discrimination and poverty, which contribute to radicalization;
- ▶ *Secondary prevention*: Specifically targeting people who are at risk of becoming radicalized;
- ▶ *Tertiary prevention*: Preventing those already radicalized from committing further acts of violence. This includes programs promoting both disengagement and deradicalization.

It must be noted that relevant EU policy documents outline the secondary and supportive role of the European Union and highlight the responsibility of the member states to prevent and detect radicalization. At the same time, through initiatives like the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), the EU liaises directly with frontline practitioners (social workers, local authority representatives, and prison officers). In general, the EU tends to focus on coordinating and facilitating cooperation among the member states, with tangible financial assistance including research and program-based activities (Bąkowski 2022).

Similar multi-agency initiatives are also seen in the EU at the member-state level. One example from a former EU member state is the UK's Prevent strategy and its Channel program, which involve collaboration between educators, healthcare professionals, and law enforcement to identify individuals vulnerable to radicalization and offer tailored support plans (HM Government 2023). Another good example of a well-established state-initiated program within the EU is EXIT-Deutschland, founded in 2000. Specifically targeting individuals seeking to leave right-wing extremist movements, the program offers a unique blend of practical support, psychological counseling, and ideological disengagement strategies. EXIT-Deutschland's assistance ranges from helping individuals relocate for their own safety, providing legal or employment support, to facilitating access to therapy for addressing the trauma often associated with extremist involvement (Firstlinepractitioners.com 2024).

Application to Georgia and Recommendations

Considering existing best practices and the multifaceted nature of the threat posed by the spread of radical right ideologies amongst vulnerable groups, especially young people, a comprehensive multidimensional approach is required in order to address the problem at state, societal, and group dimensions. Moreover, international practices show the need to adjust policies to local settings and tailor them to research-based findings, as well as the sensitivity of sociopolitical contexts. Observing the findings from the Georgian case analyzed above, it must be noted that collaboration between governmental agencies, civil society organizations, and academic institutions is essential for developing holistic and sustainable solutions to radicalization. Moreover, based on the research findings and observations of the activities, experience of engaging in violence shall not be a single denominator for utilizing deradicalization approaches and policies insofar as the application of violence is flexible and situational for the radical right groups and supporters in the country.

In these terms, deep social, informational, and political polarization must be contextualized for developing tailored approaches to the issue of deradicalization of youth and young adults in Georgia. Moreover, sensitive matters such as religious associations and group belonging should be prudently evaluated in developing these policies. While these require intersectoral collaboration and research-grounded policy discussion, listed below are several suggested recommendations applicable to the Georgian case and contributive to developing a general approach to the issue.

Long-Term Prevention Strategies

While disengagement and deradicalization efforts are crucial, long-term prevention strategies focusing on early intervention are equally important. Investing in education, building community resilience, and addressing underlying socioeconomic grievances can help prevent individuals from being initially drawn to radical ideologies. As seen throughout the research findings, feelings of alienation and a need to belong appear at the juncture of radical-right association across the surveyed youth.

Tailored Activities and Programs on Diverse Political Ideologies

Tailored activities and programs aimed at raising awareness of diverse political ideologies are essential for the case-tailored policies. These types of programs/activities should be implemented with a precise scope and aim to open the discussion on political ideologies on different scales. As seen throughout the study, an absence of discussion of political issues at home and at school, as well as the feeling of limited access to the spectrum of ideologies, contribute to increased interest in "hidden" or "unpopular" ideological inclinations amongst youth. A balanced discussion of the spectrum of ideologies and their historical contextualization

could be a platform of scrutiny available to youth to test their interests and answer questions otherwise addressed by biased actors (in this case, radical-right groups). Programs should be focused on educational activities in order to increase participants' critical thinking skills regarding political ideologies.

Programs on Raising Awareness of Radical-Right Ideologies

Related to the recommendations above, the educational programs implemented via extra-curricular education could provide a space for raising youth awareness about radicalization and extremism as these relate to their daily lives. Such an approach would entail not only a historical discussion on the influence of radicalization tendencies in the region, but also on the immediate effects of radical and extremist groups for countries like Georgia. In this way, the feeling of being neglected in society, as well as the sense of usefulness via practicing radical-right ideas (as identified throughout the research), would be critically scrutinized and addressed.

Youth-Oriented Programs Encouraging Active Participation in Society

Based on the findings, a sense of social inclusion and group acceptability is an essential need among young adults vulnerable to radicalization. As such, it is essential to promote a sense of inclusion and space for self-expression in order to foster a feeling of belonging and purpose outside of radical-right circles. These could be materialized via supporting small- and large-scale community initiatives that offer young adults a space of belonging and association, all the while contributing to their feeling of contribution to the wider society.

Integration of Psychological Support

Given the psychological complexity involved in disengagement and deradicalization, it is crucial to incorporate mental health support into programs. This can include counseling or therapy sessions to address the emotional challenges individuals may face during their transition away from radical and extremist ideologies.

While these recommendations are education-dominated, the research findings are applicable for claiming responsibility by the state, media, and non-governmental sector.

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Annex

Table 1 – Analytical Codebook of the Study

Codebook
Age
Education
Occupation
Affiliation/ Additional comment
Motivational Factors: Why are the youth becoming involved in the radical, frequently violent, movements and activities?
Motivation - search for an alternative
Motivation - Ideological Inclination
Influence of the religious institutions
Peer influence
Sense of deprivation
Sense of Fear
International Aspect/Perspective
Defending "Georgianness"
Involvement in Violence
Definition of Violence
Online Harassment
Justification of violence
Sense of impunity
What are the main mobilization strategies utilized by the radical right in the elections' year?
"Pyramid" recruitment
Online ideological
Online organizational
On-site organizational
On-site ideological
Main self-mobilization factors
Online information
Decision to get involved