# Ethnic Minorities, Russian Propaganda and Political Participation in Georgia

## Desk Study

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*Introduction*

The complex interplay between ethnic minority integration, national identity formation, and vulnerability to hostile foreign-sourced propaganda presents one of the most pressing challenges for post-Soviet states like Georgia. Studies have consistently demonstrated that ethnic minorities are particularly susceptible to propaganda efforts, creating a significant concern for Georgia's social cohesion and democratic development[1].

Previous efforts by Georgian civil society to counter propaganda targeting minorities have primarily relied on traditional fact-checking methods, myth deconstruction, and awareness campaigns. However, these approaches have often fallen short due to a lack of coordination with government entities and the inability to address deeper societal factors that contribute to minority vulnerabilities[2]. Moreover, the landscape for countering propaganda has shifted dramatically in recent years. With the adoption and implementation of restrictive Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence the possibility of meaningful cooperation between civil society and government in this sphere has become increasingly limited.

In light of these challenges, this paper proposes a new approach that focuses on building an inclusive civil community through enhanced cooperation between Georgian and ethnic minority civil society groups. Building upon the work of researchers like Adzinbaia and Devdariani[3], we argue for the development and spread of a robust civil community narrative that can serve as a bulwark against divisive propaganda. This approach recognizes that addressing the issue of Russian propaganda targeting Georgian minorities cannot be viewed in isolation from the country's broader nation-building project.

As a multiethnic country striving to build an inclusive democracy while facing ongoing geopolitical pressures, Georgia offers a compelling case study of these dynamics. This analysis examines the multifaceted issue of Russian propaganda targeting ethnic minority communities in Georgia, exploring both the immediate tactics of information manipulation campaigns and the deeper societal factors that create fertile ground for external influence.

This study adopts a desk research approach, drawing primarily from scientific and non-profit research publications to provide a comprehensive analysis of the issue. The investigation is structured in three main parts. First, we summarize key studies on the nature of modern Russian propaganda, examining its evolving tactics and strategies. Second, we focus on research specifically addressing Russian propaganda targeting ethnic minorities in Georgia, exploring its unique characteristics and impacts. Third, we review studies on the

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[1] Salome Minesashvili, "EU and Ethnic Minorities in Georgia: How to Counter Misinformation and Disruptive Communication," Policy Brief #29, Georgian Institute of Politics, July 2020, 2-3.

[2] Jaba Devdariani and Zviad Adzinbaia, "RESPONDING TO RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION: A CASE OF GEORGIA Overview of Non-state Sector's Activities May - August 2019," EWMI Activism, November 13, 2019, https://ewmi-activism.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Responding-to-Russian-Disinformation_A-Case-of-Georgia_FINAL_English_13.11.2019.pdf.

[3] Ibid.

political participation and political culture of ethnic minorities in Georgia, providing crucial context for understanding propaganda vulnerabilities. In selecting our sources, we prioritized studies published in peer-reviewed journals or on reputable university websites to ensure academic rigor. The aim of this approach is to situate the discourse on information manipulation within the broader context of minority political participation in Georgia, thereby identifying the weak points in societal structures that enable propaganda to spread effectively. By synthesizing these diverse areas of research, we seek to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges faced and potential pathways for building resilience against external influence.

Georgia's journey since independence has been marked by efforts to forge a cohesive national identity that can accommodate its diverse ethnic makeup. However, the legacy of Soviet nationalities policy, periods of ethno-nationalist rhetoric, and unresolved conflicts have complicated this process. Ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis, comprising over 10% of Georgia's population, often find themselves caught between competing visions of Georgian statehood and their own cultural preservation. It is within this context of incomplete integration and lingering mistrust that Russian propaganda finds opportunities to exploit existing divisions and anxieties.

Recent research reveals that the landscape of propaganda in Georgia is more nuanced than often assumed[4]. Rather than relying primarily on direct control of media outlets, Russian information manipulation efforts have adapted to the digital age, leveraging social media platforms like Facebook to reach target audiences. This shift in tactics necessitates a reevaluation of traditional counter-propaganda strategies. Furthermore, the observed similarities between Russian propaganda narratives and messaging from some local pro-government and foreign sources blur the lines between external influence and domestic political discourse, creating a complex information environment for minority communities to navigate.

The vulnerabilities of ethnic minorities to propaganda stem from two interconnected directions. First, there are challenges specific to the effectiveness of information manipulation tactics within these communities. Traditional fact-checking approaches often fall short when confronting propaganda that relies more on deeply resonant narratives than easily disprovable claims. The rapid, multi-channel nature of modern information warfare also requires swift, coordinated responses that can be difficult to mount without extensive local knowledge and cultural sensitivity.

The second, and perhaps more fundamental, direction of vulnerability relates to the broader issue of minority integration into Georgian state and society. Low levels of civic engagement, persistent language barriers, and a sense of alienation from national institutions create information vacuums that propaganda readily fills. Historical grievances, fears of cultural

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[4] International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), "RUSSIAN INFORMATION OPERATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: ACCOUNTS OPERATING IN SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THEIR MESSAGES," January 16, 2023, [https://isfed.ge/eng/sotsialuri-mediis-monitoringi/rusuli-sainformatsio-operatsia-samkhret-kavkasiashi-sotsialur-qselebshi-moqmedi-angarishebi-da-mati-gzavnilebi-].

loss, and orientations towards external kinstates further complicate efforts to build a shared civic identity that can withstand divisive messaging.

Addressing these intertwined challenges requires a holistic approach that goes beyond traditional counter-propaganda tactics. Any effective strategy must simultaneously work to combat information manipulation and foster genuine integration of minority communities into a more inclusive conception of Georgian civic identity. This dual imperative highlights the need for grassroots civil society initiatives, culturally sensitive communication strategies, and institutional reforms that can rebuild trust and promote meaningful participation across ethnic lines.

As this analysis will demonstrate, the issue of Russian propaganda targeting Georgian minorities cannot be viewed in isolation from the country's broader nation-building project. By examining both the immediate tactics of information manipulation campaigns and the underlying societal factors that enable their spread, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing Georgia and similar multiethnic states. This holistic perspective is essential for crafting effective policies that can enhance societal resilience, promote inclusive democracy, and counter external attempts to exploit internal divisions.

### *Russian Propaganda: Main Characteristics*

The analysis of Russian propaganda, particularly the "firehose of falsehood" model articulated by Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, reveals a significant evolution from traditional methods used during the Soviet era. This model, characterized by high-volume, multi-channel dissemination of information, rapid and repetitive messaging, and a willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fabrications, effectively leverages modern technology such as the internet and social media to overwhelm audiences. Notably, this strategy diverges from conventional propaganda approaches that prioritize truth and consistency.

Research indicates that the psychological mechanisms underlying this model contribute to its effectiveness; overwhelming amounts of information can exploit cognitive biases like confirmation bias and the illusory truth effect, where repetition enhances perceived accuracy. The analysis suggests that the "firehose of falsehood" has played a crucial role in events such as the annexation of Crimea, demonstrating its capacity to shape narratives rapidly and gain a first-mover advantage in the information space.

Furthermore, character assassination, as explored by Samoilenko and Karnysheva, remains a powerful technique in contemporary Russian propaganda, linking modern tactics to the ideological foundations of Marxism-Leninism. Despite the reduced levels of repression compared to the Soviet era, the politics of fear and strategic discrediting persist, illustrating how historical methods of ideological warfare continue to inform current practices. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective counter strategies in the face of sophisticated information warfare.

**Paul, Christopher, and Miriam Matthews. "Defending against Russian Propaganda." In The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda, edited by Paul Baines, Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, and Nancy Snow, 286-300. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020.**

The "firehose of falsehood" propaganda model employed by Russia is characterized by four key features: high volume and multi-channel dissemination, rapid and continuous messaging, disregard for objective reality, and inconsistency. This approach, while seemingly counterintuitive to traditional propaganda methods, has proven effective due to various psychological factors.

Research in psychology and social psychology provides insights into why this model might work. Multiple sources presenting multiple arguments have been shown to be more persuasive than single-source or single-argument presentations. The rapid dissemination of information gives Russia a first-mover advantage, allowing them to frame narratives before other sources can respond.

The model's effectiveness is further enhanced by human cognitive limitations. People tend to accept information that aligns with their existing beliefs (confirmation bias) and struggle to differentiate between true and false information when exposed to high volumes of misinformation. Additionally, the repetition of false information can increase its perceived accuracy over time.

To counter this propaganda model, various strategies have been proposed, including media literacy education, inoculation against misinformation, fact-checking, and content regulation. However, each approach has its limitations, and a multi-pronged strategy is likely necessary to effectively combat the "firehose of falsehood."

Understanding the psychological mechanisms that make this propaganda model effective is crucial for developing counterstrategies. Further research and systematic evaluation of counter-propaganda efforts are needed to address this evolving challenge in the information age.

**Samoilenko, Sergei A., and Margarita Karnysheva. "Character Assassination as Modus Operandi of Soviet Propaganda." In The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda, edited by Paul Baines, Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, and Nancy Snow, 189-202. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2020.**

Samoilenko and Karnysheva provide a comprehensive analysis of character assassination in Soviet propaganda, offering crucial insights into this powerful tool of ideological warfare. The authors define character assassination as a deliberate effort to damage an individual's or group's reputation, often through allegations, misinformation, or manipulated truths.

The study reveals how character assassination was intrinsically linked to Marxism-Leninism, serving as a structural property of the ideology rather than merely a sanctioning mechanism. This connection stemmed from the Soviet worldview of continuous class struggle, where

propaganda aimed not only to promote official ideology but also to cultivate hostile attitudes toward ideological rivals.

The authors demonstrate how Soviet propaganda employed character assassination in both agitation and integration campaigns. Agitation targeted immediate political gains, while integration reinforced cultural norms and values. Character attacks were used to discredit opposition movements, competing ideologies, and even internal party dissent.

Notably, the research highlights the symbiotic relationship between propaganda and character assassination in Soviet society. State-controlled media served as channels for mass persuasion, while grassroots propagation spread damaging labels horizontally through social networks.

The study extends its analysis to contemporary Russia, suggesting that character assassination remains a powerful tool of informal governance. While repression levels are lower than in the Soviet era, the authors argue that politics of fear and strategic use of compromising materials (kompromat) persist in modern Russian propaganda.

This work provides valuable insights into the historical roots and ongoing relevance of character assassination in propaganda, making it essential reading for understanding both Soviet and contemporary Russian information warfare tactics.

### *Russian Information manipulation and Ethnic Minorities in Georgia*

Recent studies highlight the pervasive influence of Russian information manipulation among ethnic minorities in Georgia, particularly Armenians and Azerbaijanis. A policy brief by Salome Minesashvili and a project by CRRC-Georgia provide valuable insights into how this information manipulation operates and its impact on these communities.

Minesashvili's policy brief examines the low support for EU membership among ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities, attributing it to a lack of information and the prevalence of manipulated information. Language barriers and limited access to Georgian media isolate these communities, leading them to rely on Russian, Azerbaijani, and Turkish media sources. These sources often disseminate anti-Western propaganda, portraying the EU as incompatible with local values. The brief suggests targeted information campaigns in minority languages and greater integration of minorities into EU-related programs to counteract this information manipulation.

Similarly, the CRRC-Georgia project on the Samtskhe-Javakheti region reveals that ethnic Armenians predominantly consume Russian-language media due to language barriers. This media consumption contributes to a widespread distrust of information sources among both Armenians and ethnic Georgians. The study notes that while ethnic Georgians prefer national broadcasters and social media, both groups are skeptical of media reliability and often verify information through personal networks. Despite this skepticism, there is a general positive attitude towards the EU and the US, though caution remains regarding strained relations with Russia.

Together, these studies underscore the need for improved media literacy, targeted information dissemination, and greater integration of ethnic minorities into the national information space. Addressing these issues is crucial for building resilience against Russian information manipulation and fostering a more informed and cohesive society in Georgia.

**Minesashvili, Salome. "EU and Ethnic Minorities in Georgia: How to Counter Misinformation and Disruptive Communication." Policy Brief #29, Georgian Institute of Politics, July 2020.**

This policy brief examines the low support for EU membership among ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in Georgia, focusing on the role of information manipulation and lack of information. The author argues that while some minorities hold Eurosceptic views, most are simply indecisive or confused about EU membership due to insufficient knowledge.[1]

The brief highlights several key factors contributing to this information gap, including language barriers, limited Georgian media access, and isolation from mainstream Georgian society. As a result, many minorities rely on Russian, Azerbaijani or Turkish media sources, which often contain anti-Western propaganda.[2] Common manipulative narratives portray the EU as incompatible with local values and traditions.

To address these challenges, the author recommends a multi-pronged approach involving government, media, civil society and local actors. Key suggestions include developing targeted information campaigns in minority languages, supporting local media outlets, and increasing minority participation in EU-related programs.[3] The recommendations emphasize the need for two-way communication and feedback from minority communities.

**CRRC-Georgia. "Audience Research in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia." October 2023. Available at: [https://crrc.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/unmasking-vulnerability-report-eng_final.pdf](https://crrc.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/unmasking-vulnerability-report-eng_final.pdf)**

The project on audience research in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia offers valuable insights into the perceptions and informational needs of the local population, particularly the ethnic Armenian community. Conducted by CRRC-Georgia, the study's findings highlight several key issues related to information manipulation and propaganda.

One of the primary findings is the significant influence of Russian media on the ethnic Armenian population due to language barriers. Many Armenians in the region rely on Russian-language news sources like First Channel, RTR, and ORT, despite expressing skepticism about their reliability. In contrast, ethnic Georgians tend to trust national broadcasters such as Imedi and Rustavi 2, though they prefer accessing news through social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok.

The study also uncovers a widespread distrust of media among both ethnic groups, leading individuals to diversify their sources and verify information through personal networks. This skepticism is particularly relevant in the context of anti-Western sentiments, gender-

related narratives, perceived risks of conflict with Russia, and conspiracy theories about medical experiments, such as those involving the Lugar Lab.

Interestingly, despite varied media consumption habits, both ethnic Armenians and Georgians exhibit a generally positive attitude towards the European Union and the United States, recognizing the economic and political benefits of cooperation with these entities. However, there is caution about the potential negative implications of strained relations with Russia.

Overall, the project underscores the need for improved media literacy and greater integration of ethnic minorities into the national information space to build resilience against information manipulation.

### *Political culture and participation of ethnic minorities in Georgia*

Political culture and participation of ethnic minorities in Georgia can be viewed as result of complex historical legacies, state policies, and socio-political dynamics. This chapter synthesizes diverse scholarly perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ethnic minorities navigate and engage with Georgia's political landscape.

The fall of the Soviet Union and Georgia's subsequent independence in 1991 marked a critical juncture for the country's ethnic minorities. As explored by Matsaberidze and others, early post-Soviet ethnic nationalism gave way to more inclusive civic nationalism policies, aimed at integrating minorities into Georgian society. However, this transition has been far from smooth, with language policy, regional variations, and external influences playing pivotal roles in shaping minority political orientations.

Julie A. George's work illuminates the voting behavior of ethnic minorities, particularly Armenians and Azerbaijanis, revealing high voter turnout often surpassing the national average. Her research challenges simplistic narratives of electoral fraud, highlighting the complex interplay of socio-economic factors and political party strategies in minority regions.

Shavtvaladze's analysis underscores the importance of state accommodation in fostering political stability and democratic consolidation. His work reveals how inconsistent state policies have contributed to political instability and insufficient integration of minorities, emphasizing the need for more inclusive approaches.

Broers and Cotter delve into the ethnic politics and security dilemmas facing post-conflict Georgia. Their research highlights how cultural insecurities can exacerbate tensions in multi-ethnic states, particularly when institutional mechanisms to protect minorities are weak or absent.

Studies by Hin and Akerlund offer insights into the ethnic identity of Armenians in Georgia and the media landscape for minorities, respectively. These works reveal the heterogeneous

nature of minority identities and the challenges in accessing information, both crucial factors in shaping political participation.

Freni's application of the ethnic democracy model to Georgia under Saakashvili's presidency provides a framework for understanding how majority-minority relations remained relatively peaceful despite ethno-nationalist tendencies. Meanwhile, Guthrie's research on the social and economic consequences of non-integration offers a sobering look at the challenges facing minority communities.

Szakonyi's case study of the Yezidi-Kurdish minority serves as a poignant example of the struggles faced by smaller ethnic groups in mobilizing politically and maintaining their cultural identity.

Collectively, these studies paint a nuanced picture of the political culture of ethnic minorities in Georgia, revealing both progress and persistent challenges in the country's journey towards inclusive democracy and civic integration.

**Matsaberidze, David. "The Role of Civic Nationalism in Transformation of the Internal Ethnic Politics of Post-Soviet Georgia." ECMI Working Paper #83, European Centre for Minority Issues, December 2014.**

The political culture of ethnic minorities in Georgia has been shaped by the country's transition from Soviet rule to independence and efforts at civic integration since the 1990s. Early post-Soviet ethnic nationalism under President Gamsakhurdia alienated minorities, leading to conflicts with Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Subsequent leaders like Shevardnadze and Saakashvili pursued more inclusive civic nationalism policies aimed at integrating minorities into Georgian society.

Key aspects of minority political culture include:

1. Language policy as a central issue, with state efforts to promote Georgian language learning among minorities while preserving minority languages.
2. Regional variations, with more successful integration of Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities compared to continued separation of Abkhazians and South Ossetians.
3. Influence of external actors, particularly Russia, on minority political orientations.
4. Interplay between civic and ethnic identities as Georgia attempts to build an inclusive civic nation.
5. Role of religion and the Orthodox Church in shaping state-minority relations.
6. Lingering effects of Soviet-era policies and institutions on minority political participation and representation.
7. Impact of Georgia's European/Western orientation on evolving minority rights frameworks.

While civic integration policies have made some progress, challenges remain in fully incorporating minorities into Georgia's political culture and institutions. Ongoing tensions

between civic and ethnic conceptions of nationhood continue to shape minority political participation and identities.

**George, Julie A. "Can Hybrid Regimes Foster Constituencies? Ethnic Minorities in Georgian Elections 1992–2012."** *Electoral Studies* **34 (2014): 292-302.** https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.02.007**.**

In her comprehensive study, Julie A. George delves into the intricate political behavior of ethnic minorities in Georgia during the period from 1992 to 2012. The focus lies squarely on the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities, examining their voting patterns, political inclusion, and the multifaceted impact of socio-economic factors and electoral fraud on their electoral choices.

Throughout Georgia's history, ethnic minorities—especially Azerbaijanis and Armenians—have consistently demonstrated high voter turnout, often exceeding the national average. Rather than attributing this solely to electoral fraud, George highlights the interplay of socio-economic conditions and strategic party maneuvers as key drivers behind their active participation.

While allegations of electoral fraud are prevalent, particularly in regions with ethnic minority populations, George argues that fraud alone cannot fully explain their political behavior. Employing statistical methods, the study reveals that poverty levels and urban density significantly shape electoral outcomes alongside fraud-related concerns.

Political parties in Georgia exhibit uneven attention toward ethnic minority constituencies, influencing their voting patterns. The ruling party strategically leverages targeted campaign efforts to secure support from ethnic minority voters.

Poverty and socio-economic status emerge as crucial factors in understanding ethnic minority voting behavior. George emphasizes their impact on electoral dynamics within minority regions.

The backdrop of ethnic secessionism and often tense relationship between the Georgian government and minority groups (such as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) significantly shapes the political landscape. Despite these tensions, ethnic minority districts consistently exhibit robust political engagement and high voter turnout.

The Georgian electoral experience underscores that hybrid regimes can indeed foster constituencies. However, vulnerabilities exist, including party manipulation and state disregard, which the study explores within the context of a hybrid regime.

**Shavtvaladze, Mikheil. "The State and Ethnic Minorities: The Case of Georgia."** *Region* **7, no. 1 (January 2018): 43-68. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26537991.**

The political attitudes and participation of ethnic minorities are shaped by their experiences with state policies and broader socio-political dynamics. The study highlights how minority

groups' political behavior is influenced by factors such as state-induced marginalization, socio-economic disparities, and the ongoing ethno-territorial conflicts with regions like Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These conflicts have led to significant casualties, displacement, and economic damage, further complicating the political integration of minorities.

Author points out that the Soviet legacy significantly influenced the political culture of ethnic minorities in Georgia. The centralized, totalitarian Soviet regime's ethnic policies, marked by coerced assimilation and relocation of minority groups, fostered a legacy of distrust and marginalization among minorities. This historical backdrop set the stage for the ethnic conflicts and tensions that characterized Georgia's transition to independence.

The study explores the varying approaches of different Georgian regimes towards minority integration and political accommodation. Under leaders like Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, Saakashvili, and the Georgian Dream Party, state policies ranged from ethnonationalistic and centralizing to more inclusive and accommodating. Shavtvaladze argues that the inconsistent and often arbitrary state policies contributed to political instability and insufficient integration of minorities.

**Broers, Laurence. "Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post-Conflict Georgia."** *Nationalities Papers* **36, no. 2 (2008): 275-304.** **https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990801934363.**

Laurence Broers' article "Filling the Void: Ethnic Politics and Nationalities Policy in Post-Conflict Georgia" provides an in-depth analysis of the ethnic politics and nationalities policy in post-conflict Georgia. The article highlights the complex and fragmented nature of ethnic issues in Georgia, especially in the aftermath of the secessions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s. Broers discusses how the management of ethnic diversity remains one of the most pressing challenges for the Georgian state. The article underscores the influence of historical narratives, economic factors, and external influences on the policies and attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

Broers notes the varied responses of different ethnic groups to political representation, language policies, and educational opportunities, indicating that these responses are often influenced by broader socio-economic conditions rather than ethnicity alone. This article provides valuable insights into the intersection of ethnic identity and political behavior in Georgia, showing how historical legacies and contemporary challenges shape the political landscape for minorities.

Broers argues that post-conflict Georgia's approach to minority issues has been characterized by compromise and inaction, rather than by a coherent policy agenda. The state's weakness has forced it to retain Soviet-era institutions for managing diversity, leading to contradictions between formal "internationalist" institutions and informal mechanisms preserving ethnic Georgian dominance. This impasse has resulted in neither a discriminatory nor a liberal pluralist state, but rather one that struggles with crisis management and fails to establish a firm legal basis for minority rights. The author notes that while the post-revolutionary regime's focus on integration is encouraging, progress is

hindered by persistent informal codes of intolerance in Georgian society. Broers concludes that the main challenge in managing diversity in Georgia lies in creating an overarching frame of common values, which requires resolving the crisis of the state itself [1].

**Cotter, John M. "Cultural Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Conflict in Georgia."** *Journal of Conflict Studies* **19, no. 1 (1999): 106-131.**

In his article "Cultural Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Conflict in Georgia," John M. Cotter examines how the concept of the security dilemma can be applied to ethnic conflicts, particularly in the context of the post-Soviet states. The security dilemma arises when one group's efforts to ensure its security inadvertently threaten another group, leading to a cycle of mistrust and potential violence. Cotter critiques earlier applications of the security dilemma for focusing too much on structural factors—such as military capabilities and state weakness—while neglecting cultural dimensions like language, history, and identity. He argues that in multi-ethnic states like Georgia, where institutional mechanisms to protect minorities are weak or absent, cultural insecurities can exacerbate tensions, as groups vie to preserve their distinct identities. These cultural concerns often interact with structural insecurities, creating a volatile environment where ethnic conflict is more likely to occur. Cotter uses the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia during the early 1990s as case studies to illustrate how these dynamics played out in Georgia, leading to violent clashes between ethnic groups.

**Hin, Judith A. "Ethnic and Civic Identity: Incompatible Loyalties? The Case of Armenians in Post-Soviet Georgia." PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2003.**

The ethnic identity of Armenians in Georgia is strong but heterogeneous, with variations in language use, education preferences, and cultural practices. While almost all Armenians identify strongly as Armenian, those with weaker Armenian identity markers tend to adopt Russian rather than Georgian cultural elements. This reflects the historical influence of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union rather than integration with ethnic Russians.

The study finds a clear ethnic cleavage between Armenians and Georgians, with little adoption of Georgian identity markers among Armenians. Both groups exhibit particularistic attitudes, viewing their own ethnicity as superior. Interethnic relations are generally amicable in everyday settings but less so in more intimate or hierarchical contexts like work or marriage.

Regional variations in Armenian ethnic identity correlate with population density - areas with higher concentrations of Armenians show stronger Armenian identity. Rural regions with very small Armenian populations, like Sighnaghi, are exceptions where some Armenians have assimilated Georgian identity.

While Armenians in Georgia are not highly politically mobilized outside of Javakheti, their strong sense of ethnic identity and existing interest organizations suggest potential for national-level mobilization. This possibility, combined with Georgians' strong ethnic identity and often negative attitudes toward Armenians, could exacerbate ethnic tensions.

The findings highlight the complex nature of ethnic identity and intergroup relations in Georgia's multiethnic society, with implications for social cohesion and minority political participation.

**Akerlund, Tobias. "National Minorities and the Media Situation in Georgia." ECMI Working Paper #52. Flensburg: European Centre for Minority Issues, 2012.**

The media landscape for ethnic minorities in Georgia has seen positive developments in recent years, both in policy and practice. The Law on Broadcasting mandates the Georgian Public Broadcaster to address minority concerns and broadcast in minority languages. Additionally, the 2009 National Concept for Tolerance and Civil Integration aims to address media-related deficiencies for minorities.

Despite these advancements, access to information remains a significant barrier to integration for minority communities, particularly in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. Language barriers and limited Georgian media access lead many Armenians and Azeris, Georgia's largest minority groups, to rely on news from neighboring countries, resulting in a lack of awareness about national events.

The media also plays a crucial role in shaping majority attitudes towards minorities. However, issues such as lack of journalistic professionalism sometimes lead to discriminatory reporting. The absence of effective enforcement of existing anti-discrimination frameworks in media further compounds these problems.

Socio-economic and institutional factors hinder general media development that could potentially bridge the information gap. Additionally, technological deficiencies in some areas limit access to televised information.

These challenges collectively impede the full integration of minority communities into Georgian society, despite policy efforts to improve the situation.

**Freni, Salvatore. "Georgia as an Ethnic Democracy: A Study on the Azerbaijani and Armenian Minorities Under Mikheil Saakashvili." Master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011.**

Freni examines the complex relationship between Georgia's ethnic majority and its Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli provinces, respectively. Using Sammy Smooha's model of ethnic democracy, the study analyzes how majority-minority relations remained relatively peaceful despite Georgia's post-Soviet ethno-nationalist movement [1].

The research focuses on the period under President Mikheil Saakashvili, exploring how state policies affected minority participation and representation. Freni argues that Georgia's unique structure for majority-minority relations emerged from the legacy of Soviet

nationalities policy, experiences with ethno-political conflict, and the need to project a democratic image to the West.

The study addresses a gap in Western academia, which has largely ignored the status of Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia, despite local scholars viewing these minorities as potential sources of conflict. By applying the ethnic democracy model to Georgia, Freni seeks to understand societies with significant minority populations but without formal power-sharing agreements.

The research examines historical developments in Georgian state- and nation-building, the status of Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities, and how different presidencies affected the majority-minority dynamic. It also analyzes state policies and their impact on minority participation and representation, ultimately assessing the applicability of the ethnic democracy model to Georgia under Saakashvili's rule.

The author notes that Soviet-era policies and exclusive ethno-nationalism have hindered the development of a truly inclusive Georgian civic identity. Despite efforts by the Saakashvili administration to decentralize power and improve minority integration, challenges remain, including language barriers, centralization of power, and the perception of assimilation attempts by minorities. The passage concludes that while the status of Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia has improved over time, with some rights and freedoms granted, full integration remains elusive, reflecting the ongoing tension between democratic principles and ethnic considerations in the country.

**Guthrie, Samantha. "The Social and Economic Consequences of Non-Integration of Ethnic Minorities in Georgia."** *East European Multicultural Space***: 108-121, 2018.**

Georgia's largest ethnic minority groups, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, comprise over 10% of the population but often face systematic disadvantages. This study examines the social and economic consequences of minority marginalization on both minority communities and Georgian society as a whole. Through nine months of field research using surveys and interviews in Tbilisi and minority-majority regions, the author evaluated levels of inter-ethnic integration, quality of life measures, language skills, and attitudes toward integration among Armenian-Georgians and Azeri-Georgians.

The research identified barriers to full social participation for minorities and used quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate potential benefits of greater minority integration for Georgia. Key findings include low Georgian language proficiency among minorities (51% of Armenians and 74% of Azerbaijanis not fluent), limited political representation, and mutual distrust between ethnic groups in business relationships. The author argues that current lack of integration creates suboptimal conditions across Georgian society economically, socially, and politically.

The study proposes a vision of a multiethnic Georgia that distinguishes between Georgian ethnicity and nationality, celebrating diversity as part of national identity while promoting Georgian as a common language. Policy recommendations are provided to address barriers

and promote integration. The author suggests future research comparing minority populations in regions vs. Tbilisi and examining perspectives of ethnic Georgians in minority-majority areas.

**Szakonyi, David. "Ethnic Mobilization in Post-Soviet Georgia: The Case of the Yezidi-Kurds."** *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2007): 1-19.

David Szakonyi's article examines the failure of the Yezidi-Kurdish minority in Georgia to achieve significant ethnic mobilization following the collapse of the USSR and Georgia's independence in 1991. The author argues that this failure has intensified the risk of complete cultural, religious, and linguistic assimilation of the Yezidi-Kurds into broader Georgian society, rather than allowing for healthy integration while preserving their ethnic identity.

Szakonyi identifies three key factors contributing to this situation:

- Structural changes: Post-1991 economic and political shifts in Georgia led to significant out-migration of Yezidi-Kurds, reducing the human and financial resources available for community mobilization.
- Internal conflicts: Disagreements over self-identification, conflicting ambitions among community leaders, and a lack of unity weakened the group's organizational capacity and ethnic solidarity.
- State and societal pressures: Georgian state-building processes and societal trends promoted a national identity that did not sufficiently encourage diversity, subtly contributing to the erosion of Yezidi-Kurdish ethnic identity.

The article provides background on the Yezidi-Kurdish community in Georgia, including their religion, societal structure, and historical presence in the country. Szakonyi notes that the community reached its peak size of over 33,000 members in 1989 but has since struggled to maintain its cultural traditions and unity.

The author uses the case study of the failed construction of a Yezidi-Kurdish Cultural Centre to illustrate how these factors converged to hinder the community's ability to achieve its objectives.

Szakonyi concludes by discussing the future prospects of the Yezidi-Kurdish community in Georgia. He argues that only efforts to reunite the minority and cooperate with existing minority civil society structures can prevent the effective disappearance of the group in Georgia.

*Conclusion*

The comprehensive analysis of Russian propaganda targeting ethnic minorities in Georgia reveals a complex interplay of information manipulation tactics, societal vulnerabilities, and historical legacies. This multifaceted challenge requires a nuanced approach that addresses both immediate propaganda threats and underlying issues of minority integration and civic

identity formation. The research findings underscore the need for a holistic strategy that combines targeted counter-propaganda efforts with broader initiatives to foster genuine integration and civic engagement.

Russian information manipulation in Georgia has evolved significantly beyond the direct control of media outlets, leveraging social media platforms, particularly Facebook. This shift in tactics presents new challenges for counter-propaganda efforts, requiring a reevaluation of existing strategies and the development of innovative approaches tailored to the digital landscape. The observed similarities between Russian propaganda narratives and those promoted by local pro-government channels and some foreign sources further complicate the information environment, blurring the lines between external influence and domestic political messaging. This overlap makes it increasingly difficult for minority communities to discern reliable information sources and necessitates more sophisticated counter-strategies.

Traditional counter-propaganda methods, such as fact-checking, have proven insufficient in addressing this sophisticated form of information warfare. Russian propaganda often relies less on easily disprovable factual claims and more on deeper narratives that resonate with accepted social group beliefs. This shift in tactics highlights the limitations of conventional approaches and underscores the need for anti-propaganda strategies that address underlying cultural contexts and historical narratives rather than focusing solely on debunking individual claims.

The research highlights that the susceptibility of minority communities to propaganda stems not only from effective manipulation techniques but also from deeper societal disconnections. Low levels of integration into Georgian state and society provide fertile ground for the spread of manipulated information, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of alienation and vulnerability to external influence. Persistent language barriers, orientations towards external kin-states, and a lack of knowledge about national affairs contribute to information vacuums that propaganda readily fills. This underscores the need for any long-term anti-propaganda strategy to be inextricably linked to broader efforts of building an inclusive democratic community in Georgia.

The tension between ethno-nationalism and civic nationalism in Georgia's state-building efforts has contributed significantly to the challenges faced by minority communities. While progress has been made towards creating a more tolerant state, full integration of minorities into the state apparatus remains elusive. The perception among some minority groups that the state's intention is assimilation rather than integration highlights the delicate balance required in promoting a shared civic identity while respecting and preserving diverse cultural traditions. Resolving this tension is crucial for the development of a truly inclusive Georgian identity that can resist external propaganda efforts.

Historical experiences and collective memories play a crucial role in shaping current attitudes among minority communities. Events from different periods of Georgia's recent history, including the Gamsakhurdia era and Saakashvili's attempts at promoting civic nationalism, have left lasting impacts on minority perceptions of the state and their place within it. Addressing these historical narratives and conducting a sober analysis of past

attempts to build an inclusive civic nation in Georgia is essential for building a more cohesive national identity. This process requires acknowledging past shortcomings while emphasizing shared experiences and common aspirations for the future.

The concept of cultural security emerges as a significant theme in the research, with important implications for both propaganda and counter-propaganda efforts. Fears related to the loss of language, culture, and traditions are often exploited by propaganda campaigns. Effective counter-strategies should address these concerns by emphasizing the preservation and celebration of cultural heritage within the context of a broader, inclusive national identity. This approach can help alleviate anxieties about cultural loss while promoting a sense of belonging to the larger Georgian society.

A persistent theme in the research is the widespread mistrust in Georgia, particularly among minorities, towards social institutions and media. This lack of trust creates a fertile environment for misinformation and propaganda to flourish. Addressing this issue requires a two-pronged approach: improving the quality and reliability of information provided by institutions and media outlets, and actively working to rebuild trust through transparent, inclusive practices. The importance of media self-regulation mechanisms in preventing discriminatory reporting is highlighted, as each instance of biased or discriminatory reporting contributes to further alienation of minority communities.

To effectively counter Russian propaganda and foster genuine integration, a multifaceted approach is necessary. This includes developing targeted, culturally sensitive counter-propaganda strategies that can quickly identify and respond to information manipulation in minority languages. Creating rapid response teams composed of members from minority communities, equipped with the necessary digital tools and training, can enhance the effectiveness of these efforts.

Addressing information vacuums is crucial for combating the spread of misinformation. Supporting the development of high-quality, minority-language media outlets that can provide reliable information on Georgian political, economic, and social issues is essential. Establishing community information centers in minority-populated regions can serve as hubs for accessing reliable news sources, government services, and educational resources in multiple languages.

Fostering grassroots civil society initiatives emerges as a key strategy for building resilience against propaganda and promoting integration. Empowering local civil society organizations within minority communities through funding and capacity-building support can create a network of trusted information sources and community leaders. Encouraging the development of youth-led organizations that can bridge ethnic divides and promote a shared vision for Georgia's future is particularly important for long-term resilience.

Improving language policy and education is crucial for both countering propaganda and fostering integration. Strengthening bilingual education programs, providing incentives and support for Georgian language learning among adults in minority communities, and

encouraging the use of minority languages in public spaces alongside Georgian can help bridge linguistic divides while promoting integration.

Promoting an inclusive civic identity is essential for long-term resilience against divisive propaganda. This involves revising national curricula and history textbooks to better reflect Georgia's multiethnic heritage, supporting cultural initiatives that celebrate diversity while emphasizing shared civic values, and framing Georgia's nation-building efforts within the context of European integration.

Crucially, the construction of an inclusive Georgian civic identity should be framed within the context of European democratic principles. This approach can distinguish Georgia's nation-building efforts from ethnic hierarchies reminiscent of Russian and Soviet imperial structures, potentially increasing their appeal to minority communities while reinforcing the country's Western orientation. By positioning Georgia's inclusive vision as aligned with European values, there is potential to increase its appeal to minority communities and strengthen the country's resilience against external influences.

Addressing collective memory issues through thoughtful memorialization projects and historical analysis can help heal past wounds and create a shared narrative that acknowledges the experiences of all communities. This process should involve analyzing minority experiences at the eve of independence, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of past civic nationalism projects, and developing initiatives that honor the complex history of all communities within Georgia.

Enhancing media self-regulation and ethical standards is essential for rebuilding trust and countering information manipulation. Strengthening existing media self-regulation mechanisms, providing training for journalists on ethical reporting of minority issues, and establishing recognition programs for exemplary journalism can contribute to a more responsible and inclusive media landscape.

Given the transnational nature of propaganda efforts, international cooperation is crucial. Collaborating with EU institutions and member states to share best practices, engaging with international organizations specializing in media literacy and counter-propaganda efforts, and working with neighboring countries to address shared challenges can enhance the effectiveness of Georgia's efforts.

Ultimately, building resilience against Russian propaganda among Georgia's ethnic minorities requires a holistic effort that goes beyond traditional counter-propaganda tactics. It necessitates addressing fundamental issues of civic engagement, institutional trust, and national identity formation. By recognizing the interconnected nature of these challenges and implementing a comprehensive strategy that combines targeted counter-propaganda efforts with broader initiatives for societal integration, Georgian civil society can work towards a more resilient and cohesive society. This approach not only enhances the country's ability to withstand external influences but also contributes to its development as a diverse, democratic nation firmly anchored in European values.

*Recommendations*

Addressing the complex challenges of Russian propaganda targeting ethnic minorities in Georgia requires a multifaceted approach that combines targeted counter-information manipulation efforts with broader initiatives to foster genuine integration and civic engagement. The following recommendations are designed to address both the immediate tactics of propaganda campaigns and the underlying societal factors that create vulnerabilities to external influence.

1. Develop Targeted, Culturally Sensitive Counter-Propaganda Strategies

Given the limitations of traditional fact-checking methods in countering Russian propaganda, it is essential to develop more nuanced approaches that address underlying narratives and cultural contexts:

a) Create rapid response teams composed of members from minority communities who can quickly identify and counter information manipulation in their native languages. These teams should be equipped with the necessary digital tools and training to operate effectively across various social media platforms.

b) Develop counter-narratives that resonate with the specific cultural values and historical experiences of different minority groups. These narratives should aim to bridge ethnic and civic conceptions of Georgian identity while addressing concerns about cultural preservation.

c) Invest in media literacy programs tailored to minority communities, focusing on critical thinking skills and the ability to identify propaganda techniques. These programs should be delivered in minority languages and adapted to local cultural contexts.

2. Address Information Vacuums and Improve Access to Reliable Information

To combat the spread of misinformation, it is crucial to fill existing information gaps and ensure that minority communities have access to accurate, relevant information about both local and national affairs:

a) Support the development of high-quality, minority-language media outlets that can provide reliable information on Georgian political, economic, and social issues. These outlets should strive for editorial independence and adhere to professional journalistic standards.

b) Further develop existing partnerships and create new ones between national media organizations and local minority-run outlets to improve the flow of information between communities and promote more inclusive coverage of national issues.

c) Establish community information centers in minority-populated regions that can serve as hubs for accessing reliable news sources, government services, and educational resources in multiple languages.

3. Foster Grassroots Civil Society Initiatives

Empowering local civil society organizations within minority communities is essential for building resilience against propaganda and promoting integration:

a) Provide funding and capacity-building support for grassroots organizations that focus on inter-ethnic dialogue, civic education, and community development. Prioritize initiatives led by members of minority communities themselves.

b) Encourage the development of youth-led organizations that can bridge ethnic divides and promote a shared vision for Georgia's future. Support exchange programs and collaborative projects between young people from different ethnic backgrounds.

c) Facilitate partnerships between minority-led civil society organizations and national-level NGOs working on issues of democratization, human rights, and European integration.

4. Strengthen Institutional Trust and Legitimacy

Addressing the widespread mistrust in social institutions is crucial for reducing vulnerability to propaganda:

a) Implement transparency measures across government agencies, with a particular focus on making information accessible in minority languages. This could include regular public meetings, easily navigable websites, and dedicated outreach programs.

b) Enhance representation of minorities in public institutions at all levels. This should go beyond tokenism to ensure meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

c) Establish robust accountability mechanisms for cases of discrimination or rights violations against minority communities. Ensure that these mechanisms are easily accessible and widely publicized.

5. Promote an Inclusive Civic Identity

Developing a truly inclusive conception of Georgian civic identity is essential for long-term resilience against divisive propaganda:

a) Revise national curricula and history textbooks to better reflect Georgia's multiethnic heritage and the contributions of various communities to the country's development. Ensure that these materials are available in minority languages.

b) Support cultural initiatives that celebrate Georgia's diversity while emphasizing shared civic values. This could include festivals, exhibitions, and media projects that showcase the country's multicultural heritage.

c) Frame Georgia's nation-building efforts within the context of European integration, emphasizing how an inclusive civic identity aligns with European democratic principles. This framing can help distinguish Georgia's path from Russian and Soviet models of ethnic hierarchy.

6. Improve Language Policy and Education

Addressing language barriers is crucial for both countering propaganda and fostering integration:

a) Strengthen bilingual education programs that allow minority students to maintain their native language while achieving fluency in Georgian. Ensure that these programs are adequately resourced and staffed with qualified teachers.

b) Provide incentives and support for Georgian language learning among adults in minority communities, including flexible courses that accommodate work schedules and family responsibilities.

c) Encourage the use of minority languages in public spaces and official communications alongside Georgian, demonstrating respect for linguistic diversity while promoting integration.

7. Address Collective Memory Issues

a) Analyzing Minority Experiences at the Eve of Independence:

- Explore the historical experiences of ethnic minorities in Georgia during the transition to independence. Consider their perspectives, challenges, and contributions during this critical period.
- Present a new narrative that emphasizes shared values, cultural richness, and the resilience of minority communities as integral parts of Georgia's identity.

b) Assessing Saakashvili-Era Civic Nationalism Project: Strengths and Weaknesses:

- Evaluate the implementation of the civic nationalism project led by Mikheil Saakashvili. Highlight its successes, such as fostering a sense of unity and pride, promoting civic engagement, and emphasizing common citizenship.
- Also, critically examine any weaknesses or unintended consequences, such as potential exclusion of minority voices or oversimplification of complex identities.

c) Commemorating Georgia's Complex History: Memorialization Projects:

- Develop memorial initiatives that honor the experiences of all communities within Georgia's intricate historical context.

These projects should celebrate diversity, acknowledge past struggles, and promote understanding, fostering a collective memory that unites rather than divides.

8. Enhance Media Self-Regulation and Ethical Standards

Improving the quality and reliability of media coverage is essential for rebuilding trust and countering information manipulation:

a) Strengthen existing media self-regulation mechanisms, with a particular focus on preventing discriminatory or biased reporting about minority communities.

b) Provide training for journalists on ethical reporting of minority issues and the responsible coverage of potentially divisive topics.

c) Establish awards and recognition programs for exemplary journalism that promote inter-ethnic understanding and challenges stereotypes.

9. Coordinate International Cooperation and Support

Given the transnational nature of propaganda efforts, international cooperation is crucial:

a) Collaborate with EU institutions and member states to share best practices in countering information manipulation and promoting minority integration.

b) Engage with international organizations specializing in media literacy and counter-propaganda efforts to access expertise and resources.

c) Work with neighboring countries civil society to address shared challenges related to cross-border propaganda and minority issues.

Implementation of these recommendations will require sustained commitment, adequate resources, and coordination across government agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners. Regular evaluation and adaptation of strategies will be necessary to respond to evolving propaganda tactics and changing societal dynamics. By addressing both the immediate challenges of information manipulation and the broader issues of minority integration, Georgia can build a more resilient, cohesive society better equipped to withstand external attempts to exploit internal divisions.

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