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]

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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.

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.

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.

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[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.

[3] Ibid.

[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.

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 loss, and orientations towards external kin states 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"

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 counter strategies. Further research and systematic evaluation of counter-propaganda efforts are needed to address this evolving challenge in the information age.

Samoilenko and Karnysheva Analysis

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.

Analysis of Key Studies

Minesashvili Study (2020)

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.

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. 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. The recommendations emphasize the need for two-way communication and feedback from minority communities.

CRRC-Georgia Study (2023)

CRRC-Georgia. "Audience Research in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region of Georgia." October 2023.

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 a 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.

Analysis of Individual Studies

Matsaberidze Study

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 Study

George, Julie A. "Can Hybrid Regimes Foster Constituencies? Ethnic Minorities in Georgian Elections 1992-2012." Electoral Studies 34 (2014): 292-302.

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.

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.

Shavtvaladze Study

Shavtvaladze, Mikheil. "The State and Ethnic Minorities: The Case of Georgia." Region 7, no. 1 (January 2018): 43-68.

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.

The 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.

Broers Study

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

Laurence Broers' article 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.

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.

Cotter Analysis

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

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. 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.

Hin Research

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.

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.

Akerlund Study

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.

Freni Analysis

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.

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.

Guthrie Study

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.

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.

Szakonyi Analysis

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.

Szakonyi identifies three key factors contributing to the failure of Yezidi-Kurdish mobilization:

1. Structural changes: Post-1991 economic and political shifts led to significant out-migration
2. Internal conflicts: Disagreements over self-identification and leadership
3. State and societal pressures: Georgian state-building processes that didn't sufficiently encourage diversity

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

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.