

Media Polarization, Manipulative Practices and Democratic Vulnerability in Small States: The Case of Georgia

*By Diana Liparteliani**

This article examines how media polarization relates to manipulative communication practices and how this relationship may be understood as a contributing condition of democratic vulnerability in a small state, using Georgia as a case study. The analysis focuses on the period from April 3 to May 28, 2024, when the reintroduction of the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence” was followed by parliamentary debates, street protests, international reactions, the Venice Commission’s opinion, and the override of the presidential veto. The study adopts a qualitative comparative media-analytical design, combining structured qualitative content analysis with discourse analysis. The research corpus consists of 48 texts drawn from four Georgian online platforms: ImediNews.ge, TVPirveli.ge, 1TV.ge, and Netgazeti.ge. The analysis shows that polarization extends beyond the coexistence of different political positions. It operates as an active communicative process that constructs the same event through different labels, frames, emotional tones, and logics of legitimation. Particularly salient are selective agenda construction, interpretive bias, emotionalization, narrative fragmentation, the blending of fact and evaluation, and platform-specific transformations of the journalist’s role. In a small-state digital media environment, such practices weaken shared interpretation, reinforce camp-based perceptions, and erode the deliberative common ground of the democratic public sphere.

Keywords: media polarization; manipulative communication practices; democratic vulnerability; small states; Georgian online media

Introduction

Digital transformation has significantly altered the role of the media. In the contemporary online environment, media no longer functions only as an institutional channel for selecting, verifying, and disseminating information; it also operates as a space in which political meanings are produced, circulated, and contested. Journalism, political communication, platform visibility, algorithmic dissemination, and emotionally intensified public discourse are increasingly intertwined. As a result, media participates not merely in transmitting events, but also in interpreting political reality, naming problems, and structuring public perceptions.

*Assistant Professor, Georgian National University SEU, Georgia.

In this context, media polarization acquires particular significance. In digital media environments, polarization no longer denotes only the coexistence of different political positions. More often, it appears as an active communicative process through which the same event is presented across different platforms through different frames, moral logics, and emotional tones. This increases the likelihood that different audience segments will interpret the same political process as fundamentally different realities. Such fragmentation weakens the shared interpretive basis on which reasoned debate and democratic deliberation depend.

The deepening of media polarization is closely linked to manipulative communication practices. In this study, the concept refers to selective emphasis, interpretive bias, emotionalization, the blending of fact and evaluation, the delegitimation of opponents, and the reduction of complex political processes to simplified narratives. These practices do not necessarily depend on explicit falsehood. More often, they operate through the selective organization of meaning and the prior framing of events. In this sense, manipulation in contemporary media is better understood not as an isolated deviation, but as a recurring discursive logic.

These dynamics are further intensified by the conditions of digital communication. Online visibility, engagement, shareability, and speed of reaction shape headlines, source selection, thematic priorities, and textual tone. Competition for attention encourages the circulation of sharp, conflict-driven, and affectively charged narratives, while fragmented patterns of media consumption reinforce exposure to content that aligns with pre-existing views and group identifications. Under these conditions, polarized communication is reproduced not only through editorial choices, but also through broader platform and audience dynamics.

This problem is particularly visible in small states. In the present study, a small state is understood not only in demographic or territorial terms, but also as a communicative context marked by a limited media market, relatively scarce economic resources, concentrated political and institutional influence, and heightened sensitivity to external factors. In such environments, media outlets are often more vulnerable to both domestic political pressure and external discursive influence. At the same time, financial instability and a narrow audience base may intensify the formation of sharply differentiated editorial identities, thereby reinforcing the conditions under which polarization deepens.

The Georgian case is especially significant in this respect. For years, the Georgian media environment has been characterized by high political tension, sharply opposed editorial frames, personalized political communication, and intensified discursive fragmentation across digital platforms. At the same time, Georgia is a small state in which media plays a particularly important role in shaping political legitimation, institutional trust, and debates over sovereignty and Western aspirations. This makes Georgia a productive analytical setting for examining how media polarization, manipulative communication practices, and democratic vulnerability interact.

The so-called draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence” first appeared on Georgia’s political agenda in March 2023, but was soon withdrawn amid mass protest and strong international criticism. The issue returned to parliament in April 2024 and developed into a more prolonged and conflictual political process. Its reintroduction was followed by parliamentary hearings, intensified street protests,

international reactions, the opinion of the Venice Commission, and, ultimately, the override of the presidential veto. While the 2023 episode serves here as necessary prior context, the main analytical focus of this article is the period from April 3 to May 28, 2024, when polarized frames, discursive division, and manipulative communication practices became especially concentrated.

Against this background, this article examines how media polarization relates to manipulative communication practices in the digital media environment and how this relationship may be understood as a contributing condition of democratic vulnerability in a small state, using Georgia as a case study. More specifically, it asks how selected Georgian online media texts construct polarization through framing, emotionalization, selective emphasis, narrative simplification, and the blurring of information with interpretation. The article does not claim a direct causal relationship between media polarization and democratic crisis. Rather, it analyzes the communicative conditions through which polarized media practices may intensify distrust, binary perceptions, mutual delegitimation, and the fragility of the democratic public sphere.

Literature Review

Research on media polarization has developed along two closely related lines. One approaches it as a structural feature of the relationship between media and political systems, most clearly captured by Hallin and Mancini's (2004) concept of political parallelism, which links media to political actors, ideological blocs, and broader social cleavages. The other treats polarization as a communicative process through which political reality is selected, framed, and

relevant. Media do not simply reflect events; they privilege certain aspects of them, increase their salience, and shape the terms through which they are publicly understood (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele, 1999). In digital environments, these dynamics are further intensified by platform logics of circulation, visibility, and repetition, though their democratic effects remain contingent on wider political and institutional conditions (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023).

This communicative perspective also draws attention to the interpretive and discursive mechanisms through which polarization is produced. Goffman's (1974) frame analysis emphasizes that meaning is organized through interpretive structures rather than through facts alone.

More recent work similarly shows that polarization develops through interpretive divergence across platforms and through recurrent performances of antagonism in communication itself (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2020; Revers, 2023). Discourse-oriented scholarship deepens this view by showing how ideology operates through the construction of "us" and "them," the normalization of some actors, and the stigmatization of others (van Dijk, 2013; Wodak, 2011). In more affectively charged contexts, such processes may also involve threat construction, moral alarm, and intensified antagonistic vocabularies (Wodak, 2021). From this perspective, delegitimization, strategic naming, emotionalization, and the blending of fact with evaluation are not peripheral stylistic features, but central mechanisms of polarized communication.

Another key dimension of the literature concerns the audience side of polarization, especially selective exposure and trust. Garrett (2009) argues that audiences tend to prefer information that reinforces prior views, though not necessarily to the extent of avoiding all counter-attitudinal content. Comparative research suggests that such reinforcement is more pronounced in fragmented and polarized information environments, whereas strong public service media may broaden exposure to more heterogeneous viewpoints in some contexts (Bos et al., 2016; Steppat et al., 2022). Trust in journalism is also shaped not only by perceptions of factual reliability, but by perceived ideological proximity between audiences and media actors (Curini et al., 2024). Polarization therefore emerges through the interaction of media structures, communicative practices, and audience orientations, with important implications for the shared interpretive ground required by democratic contestation.

These issues become particularly acute in small states and transitional democracies. Small states are not only demographic units; they are structurally specific media environments marked by limited markets, scarce resources, small audiences, and heightened sensitivity to external influence (Puppis, 2009). Related research has linked media sustainability and professional autonomy in small European countries to the resilience of democratic public spheres (Köouts-Klemm et al., 2024). In politically fragile or post-socialist contexts, these vulnerabilities are compounded by institutional instability, political capture, and blurred boundaries between journalism and politics (Bajomi-Lázár, 2014; Voltmer, 2013). In such settings, media polarization cannot be understood solely as textual divergence; it is closely tied to broader forms of structural and democratic vulnerability.

The Georgian case is increasingly discussed in these broader terms. Research links polarization in Georgia to pressures on professionalism, safety, and editorial autonomy, while also situating it within a wider condition of entrenched political antagonism and democratic fragility (Gegeshidze & de Waal, 2021; Gersamia & Toradze, 2021; Nodia, 2021). The identity dimension is also significant, as political conflict in Georgia is shaped not only by policy disagreement but by symbolic struggles over legitimacy, belonging, and the country's political trajectory (Wheatley, 2021). This helps explain why Europeanization occupies such a prominent place in Georgian political and media discourse. It has been shown to function as a strategic resource of legitimation and delegitimation, while competing discourses of sovereignty, external influence, and democratic direction continue to structure public debate (Pérez-Escoda & Lokot, 2023; Schmidt & Radaelli, 2004; Tsuladze & Abzianidze, 2025; Tsuladze et al., 2016; Tsuladze et al., 2021). Institutional and survey-based materials reinforce this picture by describing Georgia's media environment as simultaneously pluralistic and sharply polarized, with persistent concerns about journalist safety, politically motivated pressure, segmented media consumption, and the stigmatization of critical outlets (Atchaidze & Fabos, 2024; Georgian Institute of Politics, 2024; Human Rights Center, 2024; ISET Policy Institute, 2024; Silagadze, 2023; United Nations Development Programme, 2021).

Taken together, the literature clarifies the structural logic of political parallelism, the interpretive force of framing and discourse, the importance of selective exposure and trust, and the specific vulnerabilities of small-state and Georgian media contexts. What remains less fully integrated is how these dimensions converge at the level of

digital media texts: how competing platforms organize divergent political realities through framing, selective emphasis, emotionalization, delegitimization, and the blurring of information with interpretation. It is this analytical gap that the present article addresses.

Methodology

Research Design and Corpus

This study is based on a qualitative, comparative media-analytical design and examines media polarization and manipulative communication practices in Georgian online media in the context of the political and public debates surrounding the 2024 so-called Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. It combines structured qualitative content analysis with discourse analysis in order to examine the thematic and formal organization of texts, their interpretive frames, and the mechanisms through which different platforms position actors as legitimate or delegitimized.

The unit of analysis is the individual online media text. The corpus was selected through purposive sampling and includes four Georgian online platforms: ImediNews.ge, TVPirveli.ge, 1TV.ge, and Netgazeti.ge. These outlets were chosen because they covered the same political process from different editorial, institutional, and discursive positions, making them analytically suitable for cross-platform comparison. The selection took into account media type, audience visibility, political significance, and discursive influence on the ongoing debates.

Table 1. Corpus Map of the Analyzed Media Test

Media	P1 (3-5 Apr)	P2 (16-17 Apr)	P3 (30 Apr – 1 May)	P4 (13 May – 14 May)	P4 (21 May)	P6 (27 May – 28 May)
ImediNews.ge	IM-01, IM-02	IM-03, IM-04	IM-05, IM-06	IM-07, IM-08	IM-09, IM-10	IM-11, IM-12
TVPirveli.ge	TVP-01, TVP-02	TVP-03, TVP-04	TVP-05, TVP-06	TVP-07, TVP-08	TVP-09, TVP-10	TVP-11, TVP-12
1TV.gr	1TV-01, 1TV-02	1TV-03, 1TV-04	1TV-05, 1TV-06	1TV-07, 1TV-08	1TV-09, 1TV-10	1TV-11, 1TV-12
Netgazeti.ge	NG-01, NG-02	NG-03, NG-04	NG-05, NG-06	NG-07, NG-08	NG-09, NG-10	NG-11, NG-12

Source: Author's coding of the media corpus

The study covers the period from April 3 to May 28, 2024, divided into six analytical phases: the reintroduction of the draft law (April 3–5), the first hearing (April 16–17), the intensive phase of protest (April 30–May 1), the third hearing (May 13–14), the publication of the Venice Commission's assessment (May 21), and the override of the presidential veto (May 27–28). This phase-based structure makes it possible to compare media responses across equivalent political moments.

From each phase, two texts were selected for each outlet, resulting in a final corpus of 48 media texts. The main selection criteria were direct thematic relevance

to the event under study, interpretive density, representational significance for the phase, and analytical relevance to the research questions. The aim was not to provide a quantitative representation of the entire media flow, but a comparative reading of analytically salient texts through which competing frames, discursive confrontation, and different modes of organizing political meaning could be examined.

Table 2. Phase Key of the Analyzed Political Process

Phase	Period	Description
P1	3-5 April	Reintroduction of the bill
P2	16-17 April	First hearing
P3	30 April – 1 May	Intensive protest phase
P4	13-14 May	Third hearing
P5	21 May	Venice Commission opinion
P6	27-28 May	Override of the presidential veto

Source: Author's phase-based corpus design

Analytical Framework and Coding Procedure

The first stage of analysis consisted of structured coding based on a unified analytical matrix. Each text was coded according to the following categories: main frame or central claim; whom the text privileges; whom it criticizes or weakens; degree of emotionality; balance between factual and evaluative components; and the presence of a camp-based “us” versus “them” division. These categories enabled systematic comparison across platforms in terms of thematic emphasis, legitimation and criticism, emotional tone, and factual-evaluative balance.

The second stage employed a discourse-analytical reading framework focused on communication mechanisms significant in a polarized media environment. Particular attention was paid to agenda emphasis and selective visibility, frames and interpretive bias, emotionalization, narrative fragmentation and simplification, the blurring of the boundary between informing and interpretation, and forms of performing the journalistic role. This framework made it possible to examine not only which themes dominated, but how they were organized, which actors were given voice, how symbolic advantage was distributed, and how cross-platform interpretive asymmetry was produced.

The combination of content analysis and discourse analysis was selected because the research problem requires both structural comparison and interpretive reading. A purely quantitative description would not capture the discursive mechanisms through which different media transform the same event into different political realities, while an exclusively open-ended interpretive approach would weaken the consistency of cross-platform comparison.

Reliability, Comparability, and Research Limitations

In this study, reliability is understood primarily as analytical consistency and cross-platform comparability. All texts were processed using the same coding matrix, reducing the risk of arbitrary reading and strengthening internal coherence. The phase-based selection logic further increased comparability by ensuring that

texts from different platforms were examined in relation to equivalent political moments. At the same time, the formal categories were interpreted within their specific political context through discourse-analytical reading rather than applied mechanically.

The study has several limitations. First, the corpus was selected purposively and does not represent the entire Georgian media system; accordingly, the findings do not claim quantitative generalizability. Second, the analysis focuses on textual production and does not separately examine visual material, platform algorithms, comment dynamics, or audience reception. Third, the selection of two texts per phase was intended to support comparative analysis of analytically salient material rather than comprehensive coverage of the full information flow. Fourth, the study does not measure direct audience effects; its purpose is to analyze the discursive construction of polarization and manipulative communication practices in media texts.

Despite these limitations, the methodological framework is adequate to the purpose of the study. It makes it possible to examine, through a relatively small but analytically focused corpus, how polarized political communication is formed across different types of Georgian online media and how this process relates to media framing, interpretive bias, and discursive confrontation.

Results

The selected corpus of Georgian online media shows that polarization in this material is expressed not simply through the coexistence of different political positions, but through editorial choices involving topic selection, the naming of actors, emotional tone, and the interpretive treatment of factual material. Across the four platforms, the same legislative process is organized through different meanings, so that readers encounter not only different evaluations, but different versions of the process itself. These differences are visible across phases, with shifts in both dominant themes and the actors granted interpretive centrality. The full map of the corpus and its phase structure are presented in Tables 1 and 2, while the coded platform profiles are presented in Appendix Tables A1-A4.

Table 3. Comparative Discursive Profile of the Four Media Outlets

Outlet	Dominant frame	Main beneficiaries	Main targets	Emotional tone	Fact/evaluation balance	“Us/Them” logic	Overall discursive profile
ImediNews.ge	Sovereignty, transparency, foreign interface, anti-state threat	Government, parliament, police, church	Opposition, NGOs, protesters, foreign actors, critics	High	Largely evaluative / mixed, with strong legitimizing interpretation	Strong	Pro-government legitimizing discourse centered on sovereignty, security, and delegitimization of protest
TVPirveli.ge	“Russian law,” democratic backsliding, repression, European future	Protesters, opposition, civic actors, European orientation	Government, “Georgian Dream,” police / special factors	High	Mixed, but strongly interpretive and oppositional	Strong	Anti-government mobilizing discourse centered on repression, democratic risk, and European choice
1TV.gr	Institutional conflict, transparency, security, international criticism	Mixed; often gives room to official institutional actors while also relaying external criticism	Varies by text; critics, protesters, or government opponents are more indirectly weakened	Medium	Mixed; more formal and institutional in tone	Partial / moderate	Semi-institutional discourse that appears more balanced stylistically, but still reproduces polarized interpretive asymmetries
Netgazeti.ge	Legal critique, democratic standards, human rights, European incompatibility	Critics of the law, civil society, international and legal-democratic frames	Government, the law, official justificatory discourse	Medium to high	Mixed, with stronger explanatory and legal framing	Partial	Critical watchdog / explanatory discourse centered on legal incompatibility, democratic regression, and European standards

Dominant Indicators of Media Polarization in the Selected Georgian Media Texts

On ImediNews.ge, the draft law is framed primarily as an instrument of transparency, sovereignty, and the protection of national interests, while its opponents are portrayed as radical, externally driven, or anti-state actors. TVPirveli.ge presents the reverse pattern: the draft law is framed almost entirely as a “Russian law” associated with democratic backsliding, repression, and obstruction of Georgia’s European future. 1TV.ge retains a comparatively more institutional tone, but still presents a clear tension between frames favorable to the government and those of its critics, often organizing the issue as a conflict between sovereign choice and external pressure. Netgazeti.ge most consistently develops a legal-critical and pro-European line, presenting the draft law as a mechanism of democratic regression, the restriction of media and civil society, and damage to the European perspective. As Appendix Tables A1-A4 show, these differences are reflected in distinct discursive profiles: security and sovereignty on ImediNews.ge, repression and European choice on TVPirveli.ge, institutional confrontation on 1TV.ge, and legal incompatibility and international criticism on Netgazeti.ge. The main indicators of polarization are therefore the competing naming of the draft law, different rules of legitimizing and delegitimizing actors, and the division of the same political process into alternative realities.

Manipulative Practices in Polarized Communication

The manipulative practices identified in the corpus are expressed less through explicit falsehood than through selective emphasis, interpretive distortion, the intensification of emotional tone, and the reduction of complex processes to simplified schemes. These practices are visible across all four platforms, though in different political directions.

Agenda Emphasis and Selective Visibility

On ImediNews.ge, the agenda centers on foreign influence, the role of NGOs, actions against the Church, destabilization, and external interference, while the legal content of the draft law remains relatively backgrounded. On TVPirveli.ge, the dominant lines are the legitimacy of protest, government violence, criticism from international partners, and the threat to European integration. On 1TV.ge, priority shifts toward international statements and official government responses, with the direct experience of civic protest receiving less attention. Netgazeti.ge concentrates on legal comparisons, human rights standards, the Venice Commission's opinion, international reactions, and the use of police force. As reflected in Appendix Tables A1-A4, agenda selection predefines the central question of the process on each platform.

Frames and Interpretive Bias

The clearest divergence appears in the naming of the draft law itself. In texts loyal or protective toward the government, the dominant formulation is "transparency law," whereas on critical platforms it is "Russian law." The same pattern applies to descriptions of the protest: on ImediNews.ge, it is often framed as violent, externally directed, or radical; on TVPirveli.ge and Netgazeti.ge, it is presented as a pro-European civic movement and often as a victim of repression. On 1TV.ge, both lines are present in a more institutionalized form. The same contrast extends to international actors, who appear either as sources of interference or as carriers of legitimate warning and European standards. Interpretive bias in the corpus therefore operates not only through evaluation, but through the distribution of actors' political roles.

Emotionalization and Affective Intensity

The highest emotional intensity is visible on ImediNews.ge and TVPirveli.ge, though in different directions. On ImediNews.ge, affect is tied to the lexicon of threat, betrayal, external interference, radicalism, and national defense. On TVPirveli.ge, it is generated through narratives of regime violence, pro-European struggle, and historical choice. 1TV.ge is formally more restrained, but its coded texts also contain moments of heightened emotionality, especially where blackmail, "Ukrainization," a "second front," or political threat become central. On Netgazeti.ge, emotional intensity is strongest in coverage of protest dispersal, the Venice Commission's opinion, and

the override of the veto, though it more often relies on legal and international framing than on directly mobilizational language. Emotionalization thus operates differently across platforms and serves different political functions.

Narrative Fragmentation and Simplification

The corpus frequently reduces complex political and legal processes to sharply oppositional schemes. On ImediNews.ge, the conflict is often condensed into formulations such as “state vs. radicals” or “sovereignty vs. external interference.” On TVPirveli.ge and Netgazeti.ge, the more common schemes are “people vs. regime” and “European future vs. Russian regression.” On 1TV.ge, a softer but still simplified model appears in the form of “sovereign choice vs. international criticism.” Individual events-hearings, street confrontations, the Venice Commission’s opinion, and the override of the veto-are rarely presented as interconnected elements of a longer process; more often, they are transformed into symbolic episodes that reinforce each platform’s central thesis. Narrative fragmentation therefore emerges as a recurring means of reducing political complexity. Taken together, these mechanisms suggest that manipulative effect in polarized communication is produced through the interaction of selective emphasis, framing, emotional tone, and simplified narrative schemes.

The Blurring of the Boundary between Information and Interpretation

A major finding of the corpus is the coexistence of factual reporting and prior interpretation within the news text. In headlines, opening paragraphs, and sometimes even in the selection of quotations, texts provide not only a description of events but an interpretive frame in advance. Formulations such as “Russian law,” “transparency law,” “attempted coup d’état,” “special forces brutality,” “blackmail through the EU theme,” and “repressive legislation” shape the political meaning of the event before factual detail is presented. This tendency is strongest on ImediNews.ge and TVPirveli.ge, though in opposite political directions. Netgazeti.ge maintains a more explanatory style, but its interpretive framing remains visible in naming and editorial qualification. In 1TV.ge, the same effect appears more through source selection and sequencing. The news text in this corpus therefore often performs two functions at once: it reports what happened and pre-structures how the event is to be understood.

The Transformation of the Journalist’s Professional Role in a Polarized Media Environment

The analysis also shows that the classical role of the journalist as neutral intermediary, interpreter, and verifier does not operate uniformly across platforms. On ImediNews.ge, journalistic practice often approaches political-institutional legitimation, reinforcing the government’s frame and weakening its opponents. On TVPirveli.ge, it appears more as a mobilizational-oppositional intermediary that heightens the emotional and moral sharpness of the conflict. On 1TV.ge, the role leans toward institutional curation, presenting opposing positions in parallel but less

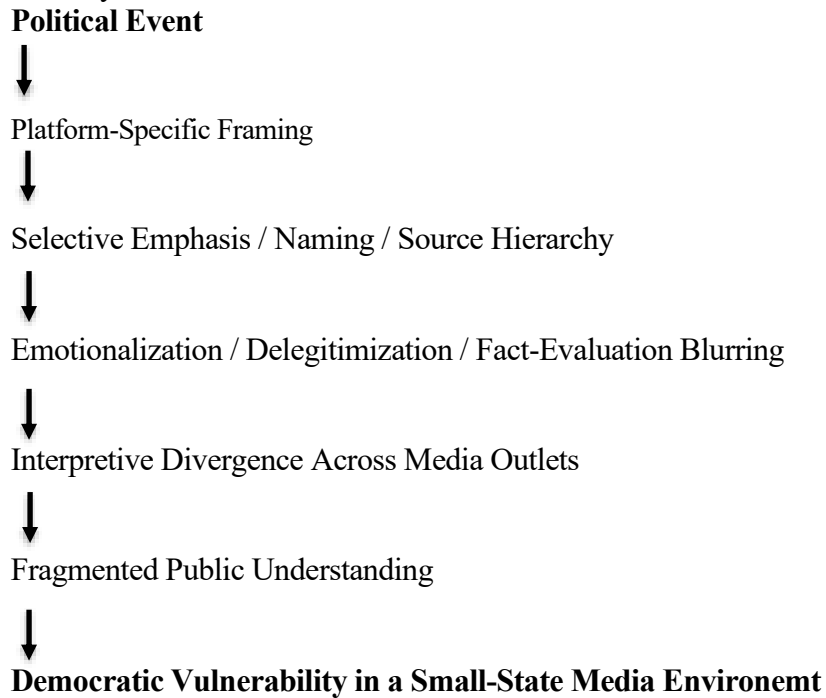
often synthesizing them analytically. On Netgazeti.ge, the role comes closest to a watchdog and critical-explanatory model, with clear editorial positioning supported by legal, rights-based, and international sources. The journalist's professional role in the corpus is thus not uniform, but changes together with the editorial position of the platform.

Recurring Discursive Strategies across Different Media Platforms

The comparative analysis reveals several recurring strategies across all four platforms: the politics of naming, the delegitimation of the opponent, the targeted use of authoritative sources, the existentialization of conflict, the transformation of procedural events into symbolic battles, and the reinforcement of “us” and “them” divisions. These strategies vary in intensity and form, but together they show that, during the period under review, Georgian online media functioned less as a unified informational arena than as a space in which several competing narratives operated simultaneously. In this sense, media polarization appears as one of the principal mechanisms through which political division is expressed and symbolically reinforced.

Discussion

The material examined in this study suggests that, in the selected Georgian online media between April 3 and May 28, 2024, polarization functioned not simply as a reflection of pre-existing political divisions, but as an active communicative process through which the same political event was organized across platforms through different symbolic, moral, and institutional meanings. In this sense, the findings support approaches that link media polarization to framing, agenda-setting, selective exposure, and trust erosion (Garrett, 2009; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Scheufele, 1999; Steppat et al., 2022). The Georgian case adds an important small-state dimension to this discussion: in a digitally intensified, resource-constrained, and politically high-temperature environment, polarization may become not only a feature of political competition but a property of the communicative infrastructure itself.

Figure 1. Analytical Model of Polarized Communicative Production

Media Polarization as a Communicative Process Rather than Only a Political Outcome

The findings indicate that cross-platform divergence operates not only at the level of political sympathies and antipathies, but through naming, thematic prioritization, the legitimization of actors, and the distribution of emotional tone. This observation is consistent with Hallin and Mancini's (2004) concept of political parallelism, while also suggesting that, in the digital environment, such parallelism is enacted in a particularly textual and dynamic form. The significance of this result lies less in the mere existence of competing viewpoints than in the weakening of a shared interpretive basis: audiences are not simply evaluating the same events differently, but increasingly encountering differently constructed media realities. From this perspective, media polarization should be understood not only as an expression of political confrontation, but also as one of the mechanisms through which it is reproduced.

The Relationship between Manipulative Practices and Democratic Vulnerability

The manipulative practices identified in the findings-selective emphasis, interpretive bias, emotionalization, the blending of fact and evaluation, and narrative simplification-should not be understood as isolated stylistic deviations. Their repeated presence suggests that they shape the conditions under which the democratic public sphere operates. When interpretation precedes description, audiences receive less information for independent assessment and are more readily drawn into

already framed narratives. This weakens one of the foundations of the deliberative public sphere: a shared factual basis on which competing positions can be compared.

The same logic applies to legitimization and delegitimation. When opponents are systematically constructed as “radical,” “externally directed,” or “anti-state,” or when governments are consistently framed as “regimes,” “repressive forces,” or blockers of the European future, political competition shifts from the contestation of arguments toward the moral and institutional exclusion of adversaries. Emotionalization and narrative simplification further intensify binary perceptions by reducing the space in which intermediate, compromise-based, or nuanced positions might emerge. This is consistent with research showing that crises of trust and political interpretation intensify when information is delivered through high affective intensity and sharp moral division (Curini et al., 2024). The findings do not establish a direct causal relationship between such practices and democratic crisis; rather, they indicate that these practices can create communicative conditions conducive to democratic vulnerability by increasing the likelihood of distrust, camp-based self-identification, and mutual delegitimation.

Digital Platforms, Visibility Pressures, and the Transformation of the Journalist’s Role

The variation in journalistic roles across platforms suggests that the transformation of the journalist cannot be explained solely by editorial preference. In online media, visibility, engagement, shareability, and speed of reaction shape headlines, emphases, and emotional tone, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the position of a purely neutral intermediary. The agenda-setting tradition has long shown that media participate in selecting salient topics (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), but in digital environments this function is intensified by competition for visibility, which favors sharp headlines, conflict-driven pairings, personalized confrontation, and emotional intensification.

Within this setting, the journalist’s role appears to shift in different ways across platforms: toward legitimizing institutional positions, mobilizing civic resistance, or curating competing statements without fully synthesizing their broader context. This helps explain why classical journalistic professionalism, understood as balanced verification and explanation, may be partially displaced by more positional or narrative-reinforcing functions. The Georgian case also aligns with research suggesting that trust in journalism is shaped by perceived ideological proximity between media actors and audiences (Curini et al., 2024). Under conditions of digital competition, the political recognizability of a journalistic brand may therefore become a mechanism of audience retention as well as a marker of editorial identity. In this sense, the journalist’s changing role is best understood at the intersection of political polarization, platform visibility pressures, and fragmented audience expectations.

Conclusions

This study shows that, in the selected Georgian online media between April 3 and May 28, 2024, media polarization functioned not merely as a reflection of pre-existing political divisions, but as an active communicative process through which the same political event was constructed across platforms through different labels, frames, emotional intensities, and logics of legitimation. In this sense, the study argues that media polarization is best understood not simply as an indicator of political conflict, but as a communicative condition that can contribute to democratic vulnerability. This is particularly evident where selective agenda construction, interpretive bias, emotionalization, narrative fragmentation, the blending of fact and evaluation, and platform-specific transformations of the journalist's role work together to organize divergent political realities.

The article's theoretical contribution lies in bringing together analytical strands that are often treated separately: media systems and political parallelism, framing and agenda-setting, selective exposure, the transformation of the journalist's role, and the vulnerabilities of media in small states. The Georgian case is analytically significant because it shows how, in a resource-constrained and politically intensified digital environment, polarization may become not only a feature of political communication but a property of the communicative infrastructure itself. More broadly, the study suggests that the relationship between media polarization and manipulative communication practices becomes especially pronounced where external factors, internal political conflict, and platform visibility pressures are closely intertwined.

The study also has practical relevance. For journalism and media ethics, it indicates that the erosion of professional neutrality often occurs not only through overt distortion, but through naming, headline construction, source distribution, emotional tone, and the fusion of information with interpretation. From the perspective of democratic resilience, the findings suggest that polarized media environments weaken the significance of a shared factual space, reinforce camp-based perceptions, and intensify asymmetrical patterns of legitimation and delegitimation. These patterns point to the importance of strengthening contextual explanation, balanced sourcing, interpretive transparency, and forms of professional self-regulation capable of reducing affective escalation.

Future research would benefit from extending this analysis across longer time periods, broadening comparison to other small states, and integrating audience research in order to assess more directly the relationship between polarized media environments, trust, and selective information consumption. Further work is also needed on the relationship between editorial choice and the algorithmic visibility of digital platforms. In this respect, the Georgian case offers a productive basis for linking textual and discursive analysis more closely to institutional, audience-related, and platform-based dimensions of media polarization and democratic vulnerability.

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- reaction in March 2023, is once again being considered. <https://1tv.ge/news/piter-stano-evrokavshiri-wukhils-gamotqvams-rom-uckhouri-gavlenis-gamchvirvalobis-kanonproeqti-kvlav-ganikhileba-2023-wlis-martshi-sazogadoebis-da-saertashoriso-mdzafri-reaqciis-m/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, April 5). Shalva Papuashvili - international reactions regarding the transparency bill have been very mild; we had timely communication, including regarding the idea behind the draft. <https://1tv.ge/news/shalva-papuashvili-gamchvirvalobis-kanonproeqti-dakavshirebit-saertashoriso-gamokhmaurebebshi-dzalian-rbili-tonia-drouli-komunikacia-gvqonda-mat-shoris-proeqtis-ideastan-dakavshirebit/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, April 16). Charles Michel - the draft law “On Transparency of Foreign Influence” is inconsistent with Georgia’s European aspirations and accession trajectory. <https://1tv.ge/news/sharl-misheli-uckhouri-gavlenis-gamchvirvalobis-kanonproeqti-ar-sheesabameba-saqartvelos-evropul-miswrafebas-da-gawevrianebis-traeqtorias/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, April 16). Shalva Papuashvili to the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights - the main goal of the draft law is to improve transparency, which is one of the pillars of both the Council of Europe and Georgian democracy. <https://1tv.ge/news/shalva-papuashvili-evrosabchos-adamianis-uflebata-komisars-kanonproeqtis-m-tavari-mizania-gamchvirvalobis-gaumjobeseba-rac-evrosabchosa-da-qartuli-demokratiis-ert-erti-sayrdenia/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, April 30). Ministry of Internal Affairs - the rally fully exceeded the bounds of a demonstration and became violent; in order to restore public order, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is initiating the measures provided for by law. <https://1tv.ge/news/shss-aqcia-srulad-gascda-manifestaciis-farglebs-gakhda-dzaladobrivi-sazogadoebrivi-wesrigis-aghdenis-miznit-shss-iwyebis-kanonmdeblobit-gatvaliswinebul-ghonisdziebebs/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, May 1). Givi Targamadze - we are identifying every police officer; very bad days await you. <https://1tv.ge/news/givi-targamadze-yvela-policielis-vinaobas-vadgent-dzalze-cudi-dgheebi-gelit/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, May 13). Annalena Baerbock - tens of thousands of Georgians are showing that Europe’s heart beats not only between Warsaw and Lisbon; this vibrant democratic civil society has brought it onto the streets of Tbilisi as well. <https://1tv.ge/news/annalena-berboki-ati-atasobit-qartveli-achvenebs-rom-evropis-guli-mkholod-varshavasa-da-lisabons-shoris-ar-scems-am-demokratiulma-cockhalma-samoqalago-sazogadoebam-is-tbilisis-quchebshic-gamoitana/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, May 14). Vedant Patel - the final decision must be made by the Georgian government, but we are saying that such a law not only fails to correspond to their aspirations, but also corresponds to repressive legislation. <https://1tv.ge/news/vedant-pateli-saboloo-gadawyvetileba-saqartvelos-mtavrobam-unda-miighos-magram-chven-vambobt-rom-aseti-kanoni-aramkholod-ar-sheesabameba-mat-miswrafebebs-aramed-sheesabameba-represiul-kanonmdeblo/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, May 21). Marija Pejčinović Burić - I call on the Georgian authorities to implement the Venice Commission’s recommendations in order to bring the transparency law into line with European standards. <https://1tv.ge/news/maria-peichinovich-burichi-movuwodeb-saqartvelos-khelisuflebas-ganakhorcielos-veneciis-komisiis-rekomendaciebi-gamchvirvalobis-kanonis-evropul-standartebtan-shesabamisobashi-moyvanis-miznit/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, May 21). Salome Qurasbediani - the opinion of the Venice Commission once again confirmed that there is no legal or other kind of argument against the Georgian transparency law. <https://1tv.ge/news/salome-qurasbediani-veneciis-komisiis-daskvni-t-kidev-ertkhel-dadasturda-rom-gamchvirvalobis-qartuli-kanonis-sawinaaghmdego-samartlebrivi-an-skhva-sakhis-argumenti-ar-arsebobs/>
- 1TV.ge. (2024, May 27). Irakli Kobakhidze - no one should be given the opportunity to use the issue of the European Union for blackmail and speculation aimed at the “Ukrainization” of

Georgia and opening a second front here. <https://1tv.ge/news/irakli-kobakhidze-aravis-unda-mivcet-shesadzlebloba-rom-evrokavshiris-temit-shantadji-da-spekulireba-gamoiye-nos-saqartvelos-ukrainizaciisa-da-aq-meore-frontis-gakhsnistvis/>

1TV.ge. (2024, May 28). Davit Kirkitadze - the ruling team took into account neither the Georgian people's request nor the requests of any partner, thereby breaking the hearts of our many partners and delighting the sworn enemy. <https://1tv.ge/news/davit-kirkitadze-martvelma-gundma-arc-qartveli-khalkhis-arc-arcerti-partnioris-tkhovna-ar-gaitvaliswinar-itac-guls-uklaven-chvens-uamrav-partniors-da-guls-ukhareben-daudzinebel-mters/>

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ImediNews.ge. (2024, April 3). Parliamentary majority: "NGOs" are actively involved in spreading pseudo-liberal ideology and so-called "LGBT" propaganda, the aim of which is to undermine public trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/331512/saparlamento-umravlesoba-enjeoebi-aqtiurad-arian-chartuli-psevdo-liberaluri-ideologiis-gavrtselebasa-da-ets-lgbt-propagandashi-romelta-mizani-saqartve-los-martlmadidebeli-eklesiis-mimart-sazogadoebis-ndobis-sherkevaa>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, April 5). Representatives of the radical opposition and the "NGO" sector launched a disinformation campaign regarding the "transparency law." What the radicals are saying and what the draft actually says, in detail. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/331864/radikaluri-opozitsiisa-da-enjeo-seqtoris-tsarmomadgenlebma-gamchvirvalobis-kanonis-shesakheb-dezinpormatsiuli-kampania-daitskes-ras-amboben-radikalebi-da-sinamdvileshi-ra-tseria-proeqtshi-detalurad>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, April 17). Father David Rukhadze: What is happening now outside the Government Administration is an attempted coup d'état - I once again ask and urge young people to distance yourselves from these treacherous politicians. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/333815/mama-davit-rukhadze-rats-akhla-mtavrobis-administratsiastan-khdeba-es-aris-sakhelmtsipo-gadatrialebis-mtsdeloba-akhalgazrdobas-kidev-ertkhel-vtkhov-da-movutsodeb-gaemijnet-am-gamkidvel-politikosebs>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, April 17). Irakli Kobakhidze: "NGOs" are trying to attack the Church and damage its reputation - if a transparency law had existed over these years, "NGOs" would have had greater accountability to their donors. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/333711/irakli-kobakhidze-enjeoebi-tdiloben-tavs-daeskan-eklesias-da-misi-reputatsia-shelakhon-am-tslebis-ganmavlobashi-rom-kopiliko-kanoni-gamchvirvalobis-shesakheb-enjeoebs-sakutari-donorebis-tsinashe-meti-pasukhismgebloba-eqnebodat>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 1). Irakli Kobakhidze: At 23:20, radical youth groups receive instructions to hurl heavy objects at police officers, subject them to gross verbal abuse, and physically push them; this made the use of gas and water cannons necessary. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/335986/irakli-kobakhidze-2320-saatze-radikaluri-akhalgazrduli-dajgupebebi-igeben-davalebas-daushinon-mdzime-sagnebi-politsielebs-miakenon-ukheshi-sheuratskhkopa-da-khelit-gaitsion-aman-gakhada-autsilebeli-airis-da-tsklis-chavlis-gamokeneba>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 1). Mikheil Kavelashvili at the protest rally: All of this has been planned in advance by external forces - these actions committed by the protesters are set out in their instructions. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/336055/mikheil-kavelashvili-saprotesto-aqtsiaze-es-kvelaperi-tsinastsar-dagegmilia-gare-dzalebis-mier-mat-instruqt-siebshi-tseria-es-qmedebeli-rasats-momitingeebi-schadian>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 13). Nino Tsilosani: The rally is unequivocally violent in nature. There is, in effect, a scripted scenario in which the demonstrations are meant to be very peaceful one day, while violent actions continue the next day. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/>

[politika/337562/nino-tsilosani-aqtsias-aqvs-ertmnishvnelovnad-dzaladobrivi-khasiati-paqtoibrivad-gatserili-stsenaria-rom-erti-dge-aqtsiebi-unda-ikos-dzalian-mshvidobiani-kholo-meore-dges-grdzeldeba-dzaladobrivi-qmedebebi](https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/337562/nino-tsilosani-aqtsias-aqvs-ertmnishvnelovnad-dzaladobrivi-khasiati-paqtoibrivad-gatserili-stsenaria-rom-erti-dge-aqtsiebi-unda-ikos-dzalian-mshvidobiani-kholo-meore-dges-grdzeldeba-dzaladobrivi-qmedebebi)

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 14). Archil Gorduladze: Yes, the Church stands guard over the Georgian people, just as the national government will stand guard over the Georgian people's sovereignty and independence. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/337760/archil-gorduladze-diakh-eklesia-aris-qartveli-khalkhis-sadarajoze-iseve-rogoris-erovnuli-khelisupleba-iqneba-qartveli-khalkhis-suverenitetis-da-damoukideblobis-sadarajoze>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 21). Gia Abashidze on the Venice Commission's opinion: This structure, composed of independent experts in constitutional law, is not a political party that should disseminate political, and indeed distorted, messages. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/338768/gia-abashidze-venetsiis-komisiis-daskvnaze-konstitutsiuri-samartlis-dargis-damoukidebeli-eqspertebisgan-dakompleqtebuli-es-struktura-araa-politikuri-partia-rom-atirajiros-politikuri-tanats-damakhinjebuli-gzavnilebi>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 21). The opinion of the Venice Commission once again confirmed that there is no legal or other kind of argument against the Georgian transparency law - Georgian Dream responded to the Venice Commission's opinion. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/338757/venetsiis-komisiis-daskvnit-kidev-ertkhel-dadasturda-rom-gamchvivalobis-qartuli-kanonis-satsinaagmdgo-samartlebrivi-an-skhva-sakhis-artserti-argum-enti-ar-arsebobs-qartuli-otsneba-venetsiis-komisiis-daskvnas-gamoekhmaura>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 27). Mikheil Kavelashvili: As soon as the European Union and the United States stop interfering in Georgia's domestic affairs and the political community concentrates on local issues, this artificially created "Georgian Charter" will collapse instantly. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/339644/mikheil-kavelashvili-rogoris-ki-evro-kavshiri-da-ashsh-shetskvets-saqartvelos-sashinao-saqmeebshi-charevas-da-politikuri-sazogadoeba-kontsentrirdeba-adgilobrivi-temebze-es-dzalit-sheqmnili-qartuli-qartia-im-tsutshi-daishleba>

ImediNews.ge. (2024, May 28). Irakli Kobakhidze: I would like to thank every member of parliament who supported the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence and thereby remained loyal to Georgia's national interests, its independence, and its sovereignty. <https://imedinews.ge/ge/politika/339789/irakli-kobakhidze-minda-madloba-gadavukha-do-parlamentis-titoeul-tsevr-romelmats-mkhari-dauchira-kanons-utskhouris-gavlenis-gamchvirvalobis-shesakheb-da-amit-uertgula-saqartvelos-erovnul-interesebs-mis-damoukideblobas-da-suverenitetis>

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Netgazeti.ge. (2024, April 4). Why the "Russian law" does not resemble the American and Australian ones - OSCE/ODIHR explanation. <https://netgazeti.ge/opinion/716481/>

Netgazeti.ge. (2024, April 5). Members of the European Parliament do not rule out the possibility that the European Commission may revert to its pre-candidate-status position. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/716730/>

Netgazeti.ge. (2024, April 16). The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights urges parliament not to adopt the Russian law. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/718243/>

Netgazeti.ge. (2024, April 17). We urge the Georgian government to heed the warnings - the U.S. <https://netgazeti.ge/opinion/718555/>

Netgazeti.ge. (2024, April 30). The Ministry of Internal Affairs began dispersing the rally on Rustaveli Avenue - tear gas and water cannons were used <https://netgazeti.ge/life/720545/>

- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 1). Parliament adopted the Russian law in its second reading. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/720746/>
- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 13). Kobakhidze assigns responsibility to the president if she does not use the veto to align positions. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/722616/>
- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 14). If the law is not changed, there will be restrictions on specific individuals and their families - O'Brien. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/722388/>
- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 21). The Venice Commission negatively assesses the Russian law and urges "Dream" to withdraw it. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/723535/>
- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 21). "Dream" criticizes the Venice Commission's professional reasoning and accuses it of bias. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/723551/>
- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 27). We have begun discussing appropriate EU responses in the event the law enters into force - Borrell. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/724387/>
- Netgazeti.ge. (2024, May 28). "A shameful day for Georgia" - international reactions to the adoption of the Russian law. <https://netgazeti.ge/life/724511/>

TVPirveli.ge

- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, April 3). Khazaradze to Ivanishvili: We will not let you drag Georgia into Russia. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/64835-khazaradze-ivanishvils-ar-gagatant-saqartvelos-rusetshi>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, April 3). "Georgian Dream" is bringing back the Russian law. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/64794-qartuli-otsneba-rusuli-kanons-abrunes>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, April 16). You should listen to the Georgian people, who are firmly telling you "No to the Russian law!" - Tina Bokuchava to "Dream." <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/66158-unda-usmendet-qartvel-khalkhs-romelits-urkevad-geubn-ebad-ara-rusul-kanons-tina>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, April 17). EU reaction to the Russian law - "Dream's" decision may be discussed in Brussels. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/66339-evrokavshiris-reaqtsia-rusul-kanonze-otsnebis-gadatskvileba-shesadzloa-briuselshi>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, April 30). The special forces have begun hunting activists. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/67992-spetsrazmma-aqtivistebze-nadiroba-daitsko>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 1). "Georgia is at a crossroads; it must remain on the European path" - Ursula von der Leyen. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/68226-saqartvelo-gzajvaredinzea-is-unda-darches-evropul-gzaze-ursula-pon-der-leie>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 13). New evidence of the brutality of Ivanishvili's special forces (video). <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/69627-ivanishvilis-spetsrazmis-sisast-ikis-akhali-mtkitsebulebi-video>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 14). The Georgian government is moving away from the Euro-Atlantic path - John Bass. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/69691-saqartvelos-mtavroba-gadadis-evroatlantikuri-gzidan-jon-basi>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 21). According to the Venice Commission, "Dream's" law resembles the Russian law, not the U.S. one. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/70536-venetsiis-komisiis-tanakhmad-otsnebis-kanoni-rusuli-kanonis-msgavsia-da-ara>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 21). If the Russian law enters into force, accession negotiations with Georgia for EU membership will not be opened - the final warning to "Dream." <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/politika/70523-tu-rusuli-kanoni-amqmeddeba-eu-shi-gasatsevraneblad-saqartvelostan-molaparakebebi>
- TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 27). What will the EU's response to "Dream's" actions be? - foreign ministers are discussing Georgia in Brussels. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebe/>

politika/71001-rogori-igneba-eu-s-pasukhi-otsnebis-qmedebenze-briuselshi-sagareo-saqmeta-ministrebi

TVPirveli.ge. (2024, May 28). State Department spokesperson: “Dream” has moved the country even further away from the path of European integration - we will take this into account. <https://tvpirveli.ge/ka/siaxleebi/politika/71244-sakhdepis-presspikeri-otsnebam-kidev-upro-daashora-qvekana-evrointegratsiis>

Appendix Table A1. ImediNews.ge Coding Matrix

Code	Phase	Date	Title	Dominant Frame / Main Claims	Privileges / Favours	Criticisms / Weakness	Emotional Tone	Fact / Evaluation Balance	Fa / Them
IM-01	P1	03.04.2024	Parliamentary majority: NGOs are actively involved in spreading pseudo-liberal ideology and so-called LGBT propaganda, the aim of which is to undermine public trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church	Foreign influence / anti-state campaigns / moral / institutional threat	Government	NGOs / civil society / thought actors / critics	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
IM-02	P1	03.04.2024	Representatives of the radical opposition and the NGO sector launched a disinformation campaign about the transparency law. What the radicals say and what the law actually says, is denied	Transparency / countering disinformation / legitimization of the bill	Government	Opposition / NGOs / critics	Medium	Mixed	Yes
IM-03	P2	07.04.2024	Ivaki Kobakhidze: NGOs are trying to attack the Church and damage its reputation... if there had been a transparency law even the years, NGOs would have had greater accountability in their donors	Foreign influence / campaigns against the Church / accuracy of transparency	Government	Opposition / NGOs / critics	High	Mixed	Yes
IM-04	P2	07.04.2024	Father David Rakochidze: What is happening now? The Government Administration is an attempted coup d'état... I once again ask and urge young people to distance themselves from these violent politicians	Attempted coup of state / delegitimation of power / threat of destabilization	Government	Opposition / NGOs / critics	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
IM-05	P3	01.05.2024	Ivaki Kobakhidze: At 23:30 radical youth groups were instructed to throw heavy objects at police officers, verbally abuse them, and physically push them, which made the use of tear gas and water cannons necessary	Violent protest / legitimization of police action / protection of security	Government / police	Protest participants / radical groups	High	Mixed	Yes
IM-06	P3	01.05.2024	Mikhail Kovalevich: On the protest rally: All of this was planned in advance by external actors... these actions committed by the protesters are written in their instructions	External interference / pre-planned destabilization / delegitimation of protest	Government	Protest participants / external actors / critics	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
IM-07	P4	03.05.2024	Saba Tsiklauri: The protest has no unprovokedly violent character. There is effectively a staged scenario whereby one day the rallies are meant to appear very peaceful, while on the next day violent actions continue	Violent protest / pre-scripted scenarios / legitimization of police and institutional order	Government / police	Protest participants / opposition	High	Mixed	Yes
IM-08	P4	04.05.2024	Anatoli Gotselidze: Yes, the Church stands guard over the Georgian people, just as the national government will stand guard over the sovereignty and independence of the Georgian people	The Church and the national government as defenders of sovereignty / delegitimation of external actors	Government / Church	External actors / critics	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
IM-09	P5	21.05.2024	The Venice Commission's opinion once again confirmed that there is not a single legal or any other kind of argument against the Georgian transparency law... Georgian Dream responded to the Venice Commission's opinion	Delegitimation of the Venice Commission / legitimization of the law / justification of the demand for transparency	Government	Venice Commission / NGOs / critics	High	High	Yes
IM-10	P5	21.05.2024	Gia Abuladze on the Venice Commission's opinion: This structure, composed of independent experts in constitutional law, is not a political party that should disseminate political and non-neutral distorted messages	Delegitimation of the Venice Commission / legitimization of the law / justification of the demand for transparency	Government	Venice Commission / NGOs / critics	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
IM-11	P6	27.05.2024	Mikhail Kovalevich: As soon as the European Union and the United States stop interfering in Georgia's internal affairs and the political community concentrates on local issues, this artificially created "Georgian Charter" will collapse	External interference / external control of the opposition / delegitimation of national politics	Government / Parliament	Opposition / President / Western actors	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
IM-12	P6	28.05.2024	Ivaki Kobakhidze: I want to thank every member of Parliament who supported the law on the transparency of foreign influence and thereby remained loyal to Georgia's national interests, its independence and to sovereignty	Defense of national interests / sovereignty / final legitimization of the law	Government	Critics / Experts supporting "revolutionary" and a "second front"	High	Mixed	Yes

Appendix Table A2. TVPirveli.ge Coding Matrix

Code	Phase	Date	Title	Dominant Frame / Main Claims	Privileges / Favours	Criticisms / Weakness	Emotional Tone	Fact / Evaluation Balance	Fa / Them
TVP-01	P1	03.04.2024	Georgian Dream is bringing back the Russian law	Russian law / threat to democracy and the European course	Kovalevich directs / sabotage of the European future / policies	Government / Georgian Dream	High	Mixed	Yes
TVP-02	P1	03.04.2024	Rakochidze to Ivanushvili: We will not let you drag Georgia into Russia	Russian law / threat to democracy and the European course	Opposition / European choice	Government / Georgian Dream	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
TVP-03	P2	16.04.2024	You should listen to the Georgian people, who finally tell you "No to the Russian law!"... Tam Bokeriaev in Dream	You should listen to the Georgian people, who finally tell you "No to the Russian law?"... Tam Bokeriaev in Dream	Russian law / defense of the European future / the people's choice	Opposition / the Georgian people / European choice	High	Predominantly evaluative	Yes
TVP-04	P2	17.04.2024	EU reaction to the Russian law... Dream's decision may be discussed in Brussels	EU reaction to the Russian law... Dream's decision may be discussed in Brussels	International reactions / European future / the European policy next of the law	Critics / the European future	Medium	Mixed	Yes
TVP-05	P3	30.04.2024	Special forces have begun hunting activities	Georgia is at a crossroads, it must remain on the European path... Vladimir von der Leyen	European future / international condemnation of violence / Georgia at a crossroads	Activists / protest participants	High	Mixed	Yes
TVP-06	P3	01.05.2024	Georgia is at a crossroads, it must remain on the European path... Ursula von der Leyen	European future / international condemnation of violence / Georgia at a crossroads	Protest / European choice	Government / violent crackdown	High	Mixed	Partially
TVP-07	P4	13.05.2024	New evidence of Ivanushvili's special forces' brutality (video)	Police brutality / vague evidence / portrayal of protesters as violent	Protest participants / democracy	Government / special forces	High	Mixed	Yes
TVP-08	P4	14.05.2024	The Georgian government is moving away from the Euro-Atlantic path... John Rane	Departure from the Euro-Atlantic path / government responsibility / demand to investigate violence	Critics / protest / Western future	Government / Georgian Dream	Medium	Mixed	Partially
TVP-09	P5	21.05.2024	According to the Venice Commission, Dream's law resembles the Russian law, not the EU one	Legal delegitimation / similarity to the Russian law / threat to human rights	Critics / European legal future	Government / Georgian Dream	Medium	Mixed	Partially
TVP-10	P5	21.05.2024	If the Russian law enters into force, EU assistance tells that Georgia will not be opened... final warning to Dream	Threat to the European future / foreign policy consequences / final warning	Critics / European choice	Government / Georgian Dream	High	Mixed	Yes
TVP-11	P6	27.05.2024	What will the EU's response to Dream's actions be? Foreign ministers in Brussels discuss Georgia	Threat to the European future / possible international response measures / the foreign policy next of the government's decision	Critics / European choice	Government / Georgian Dream	Medium	Mixed	Partially
TVP-12	P6	28.05.2024	State Department spokesperson: Dream has moved the country even further away from the path of European integration - we will take this into account	Moving away from the path of European integration / international condemnation / possible response measures	The Georgian people / critics / Western future	Government / Georgian Dream	High	Mixed	Yes

Appendix Table A3. ITV.ge Coding Matrix

Code	Phase	Date	Title	Dominant Frame / Main Claims	Privileges / Favours	Criticisms / Weakness	Emotional Tone	Fair / Evaluation Balance	Do / Theme
ITV-41	F1	04.04.2024	Peter Stano: The European Union expresses concern that the bill on the transparency of foreign influence is again being considered, despite the strong public and international	International concerns / risk to EU integration / freedom of civil society	Critics / European frame	Government / the bill	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-42	F1	05.04.2024	Shalva Papunashvili: The issue of international treaties regarding the transparency bill is very small, we had timely communication, we had regarding the sides of the bill	National security / legitimization of transparency / the sovereignty of the Georgian people	Government	NGOs / critics / foreign communication	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-43	F2	16.04.2024	Charles Michel: The bill on the transparency of foreign influence does not correspond to Georgia's European aspirations and accession trajectory	Threat to European aspirations / incompatibility with the accession trajectory	Critics / European frame	Government / the bill	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-44	F2	16.04.2024	Shalva Papunashvili on the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights: The main aim of the bill is to improve transparency, which is one of the pillars of both the Council of Europe and Georgian democracy	Legitimation of transparency / argument of compatibility with European standards / proportionality	Government	Critics / international actors expressing concern	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-45	F5	30.04.2024	Ministry of Internal Affairs: The rally fully exceeded the limits of demonstrations, became violent, and the Ministry is instituting measures provided by law to ensure public order	Violent rally / restoration of public order / crime legitimization	Government / police	Protest participants / opponents	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-46	F5	01.05.2024	Otar Targemidze: We are searching every police officer; every bad days are at you	Radicalization / threat against police officers / intensification of confrontation	Government / police	Radical opposition figures / officers of the law	High	Predominantly exclusive	Yes
ITV-47	F4	13.05.2024	Antonieta Barbeck: Tens of thousands of Georgians are showing that Europe's best does not just only belong to Warsaw and Lisbon, this democratic civil society has brought it into the streets of Berlin as well	European frame / legitimization of civil society / accountability of the government's choice	Protest / civil society / European choice	Government / the bill	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-48	F4	14.05.2024	Verdant Pali: The final decision must be made by the Georgian government, but we say that such a law not only does not correspond to their aspirations, but also constitutes repressive legislation	Critics / risk European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations / future of repressive legislation / government responsibility	Critics / the Georgian people's European choice / Western frame	Government / the bill	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-49	F5	21.05.2024	Maria Pogorilac Horac: I call on the Georgian authorities to implement the Venice Commission's recommendations in order to bring the transparency law into conformity with European standards	European standards / implementation of the Venice Commission's recommendations / international law / national pressure	European institutional framework	The law is in its current form	Medium	Mixed	Partial
ITV-50	F5	21.05.2024	Silviana Gheorgheladze: The Venice Commission's opinion once again confirmed that there is no legal or any other kind of argument against the Georgian transparency law	Delegitimation of the Venice Commission / legal legitimization of the law / frame of defending transparency	Government	Venice Commission / critics / NGOs	High	Mixed	Yes
ITV-51	F6	27.05.2024	Irakli Kobakhidze: No one should be allowed to put the topic of the European Union on the blackboard and speculate on it, instead of the Unionization of Georgia and opening a second front here	Blackmail through the topic of the European Union / threat of Unionization / avoidance of a second front	Government	Critics / "corrupt actors" / the "global war party"	High	Mixed	Yes
ITV-52	F6	28.05.2024	Davit Kobakhidze: The ruling team ignored under the Georgian people's request not that of any parties, thereby violating the laws of our nation's protest and placing our country's energy	Threat to national interests / ignoring protesters / defense of the European frame	Hypocrites / Georgian people / international pressure	Government / ruling team	High	Predominantly exclusive	Yes

Appendix Table A4. Netgazeti.ge Coding Matrix

Code	Phase	Date	Title	Dominant Frame / Main Claims	Privileges / Favours	Criticisms / Weakness	Emotional Tone	Fair / Evaluation Balance	Do / Theme
NG-51	F1	04.04.2024	Why the "Russian law" is not similar to the American and Australian versions — OSC UODDBR explanation	Russian law / comparative-legal delegitimation / difference from Western analogues	Critics / legal-critical frame	Government / the ruling party's argument	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-52	F1	05.04.2024	Members of the European Parliament do not rule out the possibility that the European Commission may even to the pro-conflict-euras position	Threat to the European frame / risk to candidate status / incompatibility with EU values	Critics / European frame	Government / the bill	High	Mixed	Partial
NG-53	F2	16.04.2024	Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights urges Parliament not to adopt the Russian law	Incompatibility with human rights standards / protection of media and civil society / European institutional critique	Critics / civil society / European legal frame	Government / the bill	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-54	F2	17.04.2024	We urge the Government of Georgia to heed the warnings — United States	International warning / risk of legitimizing civil society and the media / negative impact on the EU path	Critics / Western frame	Government / the bill	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-55	F3	30.04.2024	The Ministry of Internal Affairs began dispersing the protest on Rikashvili — law gas and water cannons were used	Use of police force / dispersal of the protest / exclusion in the streets	Protest participants / critical frame	Police / government	High	Mixed	Partial
NG-56	F5	01.05.2024	Parliament passed the Russian law on second reading	Institutional advance / adoption of the law despite protest / democratic backsliding frame	Critics / the protest side	Government / the ruling team	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-57	F4	13.05.2024	Kobakhidze places responsibility on the President of the law as well as the vote to secure position	Shifting responsibility onto the President / politicization of the vote procedure / legitimization of the government's position	Government	President / critical side	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-58	F4	14.05.2024	If the law is not changed, there will be restrictions on specific individuals and their family members — O'Flaherty	International pressure / threat of potential sanctions / incompatibility of the law with European standards	Critics / Western frame	Government / the bill	High	Mixed	Partial
NG-59	F5	21.05.2024	The Venice Commission criticizes the Russian law negatively and urges Georgian President to withdraw it	Legal and institutional delegitimation / call for repeal of the law / incompatibility with democratic standards	Critics / European legal frame	Government / the Russian law	High	Mixed	Partial
NG-60	F5	21.05.2024	Georgian Director criticizes the Venice Commission's professional reasoning and accuses it of bias	Delegitimation of the Venice Commission / government counter frame / rejection of criticism	Government	Venice Commission / critical accusations	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-61	F6	27.05.2024	We have begun discussing an appropriate EU response in the event the law enters into force — Horac	Possible EU response measures / risk to the European path / Georgia policy cost of the law	Critics / European frame	Government / the ruling team's decision	Medium	Mixed	Partial
NG-62	F6	28.05.2024	"A shameful day for Georgia" — international reactions to the adoption of the Russian law	International condemnation / violation of European integration / political cost of extending the vote	Critics / the Georgian people's European choice / international frame	Government / the Russian law	High	Mixed	Partial