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Trends in Post-Soviet Media Consumption:
Assessing Media Freedom and Russian Media Influence in Georgia and Ukraine

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Trends in Post-Soviet Media Consumption:

Assessing Media Freedom and Russian Media Influence in Georgia and

Ukraine

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to the two people who have supported me through this process more than anyone else – Ali and Lika. Ali, thank you for your patience, support, constant pep talks, and love. I could not have done any of this without you by my side. And Lika, thank you for being my cheerleader and closest friend all of these years, even from afar.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Trends in Post-Soviet Media Consumption:
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Media assessments produced by organizations such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) provide a useful benchmark for gauging levels of media freedom in the post-Soviet world. However, these evaluations do not necessarily provide a complete picture of the media landscapes they assess, neglecting to factor in the effects of media consumption on democratic outcomes. This point is particularly relevant in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, considering that both states have been the target of Russian aggression through both military and information warfare.

This analysis provides a clearer picture of the interaction between trends in media consumption, effects of Russian disinformation narratives, and democratic media in Georgia and Ukraine, ultimately arguing that Russian disinformation narratives succeed in Georgia because they are disguised by nationalist rhetoric, while these same efforts fail in Ukraine due to the enforcement of censorship policies targeting Russian media sources and

the implementation of nationwide media literacy campaigns. These findings have significant implications for short- and long-term understandings of democratic media and media freedom in the post-Soviet space.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On December 4, 2018, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg opened the plenary session with a warm welcome to the Georgian and Ukrainian foreign ministers in attendance. Smiling widely, Stoltenberg stated that "NATO fully supports the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of both countries."[1] In defending the territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine, Stoltenberg thereby voiced a diplomatic jab at Moscow, whose military forces continue to occupy the Georgian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the Ukrainian separatist regions of Crimea and Donbas. Russian incursions into Georgian and Ukrainian territory are not limited to physical landscapes, however. Rather, Russian efforts to flood Georgian and Ukrainian media spaces with pro-Moscow, anti-Western disinformation narratives constitute a deliberate violation of sovereign media spheres.

When evaluating the "health" of media environments, we often turn to media freedom assessments produced by organizations such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX). Initially created in the early 1960s, media freedom assessments consider the political, legal, and economic environments of a state, as well as the quality of journalism produced within that state.[2] Freedom House, RSF and IREX weigh each of these factors differently, resulting in slightly different media freedom ratings. However, none of these assessments take into consideration the fact that increased media freedom does not always result in greater democratic outcomes and certainly does not always yield a more democratic media

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[1] AP Archive. "Georgia, Ukraine welcomed at NATO session." December 4, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_UIlVifucs.

[2] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 17.

environment. Many post-Soviet states struggle to achieve greater democratic outcomes largely because of the presence of media freedom, which allows ultra-nationalist ideologies and Russia-originating disinformation narratives to warp public dialogue and ultimately undermine democratic governance and institutions. Georgia and Ukraine are no exception in this matter. For this reason, it is necessary to also consider trends in media consumption, public trust in media, and the influence of regional hegemonic powers on media environments in order to assess the level of democratic media present in a state. These considerations are particularly relevant in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, both of whom are strongly affected by the types of media their citizens consume due to the ongoing occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territory by Russian forces and the prevalence of pro-Russian disinformation narratives used to augment Russian territorial claims.

Russian disinformation efforts, often referred to as "active measures" during the Soviet era, take advantage of unique weaknesses in the media environments of post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine – in Georgia, by playing on the polarized nature of the Georgian media landscape and the rise of pro-Georgian nationalist sentiment and, in Ukraine, by exploiting the oligopolistic character of Ukrainian media holdings and the presence of a large minority of Russian speakers.[3] The intent of these efforts is to undermine trust in democratic institutions in Georgia and Ukraine while simultaneously promoting Russia's role as a regional hegemonic power. However, while Russian disinformation efforts are often successful in Georgia, where they are cloaked by ultra-nationalist rhetoric, these same efforts have failed in Ukraine in recent years due to the combined efforts of censorship

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[3] Active measures (активные мероприятия) can be defined as "attempts to deceive the target (foreign governmental and non-governmental elites or mass audiences), and to distort the target's perceptions of reality to affect decisions that serve Soviet interests" and consist of "disinformation (дезинформация), propaganda, controlled international front groups, agents of influence, forgeries, and reflexive control" (McCauley, Kevin N., *Russian Influence Campaigns against the West: From the Cold War to Putin*. North Charleston, South Carolina: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016: ix, 4, 6).

policies targeting Russian media and the nationwide implementation of media literacy programs. Combined, these two post-Soviet case studies present unique media environments that defy traditional conceptions of media freedom and demand a reassessment of how we define media freedom in the first place.

Chapter 2: Media Theory

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.[4]

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was created in 1948 in response to the savage assaults on humanity that took place in the years preceding and during World War II. These assaults were advanced in many states through media control and limits on freedom of expression, resulting in the emphasis on media freedom in Article 19. However, this conception of media freedom as a universal human right rests on the notion that a free press and a democratic press are one and the same. Contemporary media freedom assessments produced by organizations such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and International Research & Exchanges Board are also based on this equivalency. But how do we define a "democratic press?" Media ethicist Stephen Ward defines a democratic press as "a free press that, in principle and in fact, advocates for and substantially advances democracy."[5] However, most contemporary media scholars agree that the concept of a free press, centered on the "negative liberty" of the press not to be interfered with, is far too expansive for the simple reason that a free press does not always advocate for or advance democracy. In order to better understand the notion of the free press and its relationship to democratic governance in areas such as the post-Soviet space, it is necessary to consider our underlying assumptions about constitutional liberal democracies and their connection to mass media, as well as the theories guiding our understanding of mass media effects.

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[4] UN General Assembly. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* 10 December 1948, 217A (III). https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.

[5] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 15.

THEORY: MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

When we consider mass media's role in upholding democracy, we are confronted with a series of seemingly contradictory assumptions. On the one hand, academics and policymakers alike generally assume that free media systems yield democratic results, upholding fledgling and established democratic governments alike. Often called "the connective tissue of democracy," the presence of media freedom is considered to be, at the very least, a necessary condition for democracy, as is evidenced by the great deal of funding devoted to protecting and fostering media freedoms worldwide, as well as the inclusion of media freedom in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[6] While the link between media freedom and democratic governance may hold true in the long run, this link is more nuanced when considering short-term outcomes. Part of this complication results from the difficulty in establishing empirically *how* media freedom leads to superior democratic outcomes.[7] The other, more obvious, explanation for this struggle results from the fact that sometimes greater media freedoms do not result in greater democratic outcomes; in fact, greater media freedoms can result in civil unrest and authoritarian measures. In the following section, I present a brief overview of media's role in both upholding and undermining democracy by considering the mediated nature of public life, the arguably detrimental effects of media freedom on democracy, and what Romanian media scholar Tudor Vlad calls "the politics of media freedom rankings."

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[6] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 23, 18.

[7] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 18.

Mediated Public Life and Media Freedom

Global communications scholar Geoffrey Craig and economist David Stromberg argue that media freedom upholds the democratic process in three primary ways. First and foremost, Craig argues that the very creation of the public domain – and thus the democratic public – rests on mass media. In early 18th century England, the formation of the independent press helped shape public consciousness, thereby securing media's public orientation. This role was further cemented by the rise of mass media in the late 19th century and the parallel ascent of the "urban mass public."[8] Public life thus became a mediated life, defined not by its geography, but by its location in "discourse and representation."[9] This is not to say that the public cannot be defined by physical, geographic space, but rather that public life resides in media. The public domain is constructed and re-constructed continually through representations in mass media – a process which applies to policymaking and governance issues as well.

Building upon the cycle of meaning-making that defines the mediated nature of public life, a free and unencumbered media provides information relevant to policy decisions and outcomes to "predominantly rational voters." Stromberg calls this the "rational learning model of media effects."[10] This model predicts that, in providing necessary information to voters, the media ultimately makes "voters more responsive to the quality of policy outcomes," thereby strengthening and improving democratic institutions and public welfare.[11] According to this model, the media provide a full account of policy issues and political figures' stances on said issues, ultimately resulting in a higher level of political participation. Stromberg also notes that data supporting this model traces

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[8] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 6.

[9] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 5.

[10] Stromberg, David. "Media and Politics." Annual Review of Economics 7 (2015): 173-205. 10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101: 174.

[11] *Ibid.*

back to a 1954 study which found that "media exposure during [political] campaigns increased the amount of correct information that voters had about where the candidates stood on issues."[12] The study found that media exposure, regardless of variables controlled for, also increased "the interest in politics" and "voter turnout."[13]

The third way in which mass media upholds democratic governance lies in media's tendency to "problematize society," according to Craig.[14] In other words, media serves a "watchdog function," wherein mass media, in its efforts to produce a coherent and clear understanding of major issues and events, "enacts a process of questioning and critique" that ultimately improves the "democratic health of a society."[15] This process dates back to the French Revolution and the need for a new guarantor of truth following the diffusion of authority among the people. Popular sovereignty was created and ensured by the creation of a "collective political consciousness," which demanded a continuous accounting of policymakers and officials for their decision-making.[16] This cycle – consisting of an "unending process of questioning and critique" – was, and continues to be, carried out through journalism and mass media. Theorists such as Craig and Stromberg argue that this constant scrutiny increases political accountability, thereby supporting the functioning of democratic governance.

Detrimental Effects of Media Freedom on Democracy

While there is considerable evidence to support the aforementioned positive theories regarding the long-term relationship between media freedom and democracy, this

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[12] Stromberg, David. "Media and Politics." Annual Review of Economics 7 (2015): 173-205. 10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101: 175.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 19-20.
[15] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 19.
[16] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 19-20.

correlation is complicated by the arguably negative effects of media freedom on democratic governance. French philosopher Jacques Ellul points to the problematic tendency of media (particularly television) to oversimplify stories for the public so as to reduce uncertainty or ambiguity. Audiences, as Ellul notes, seek clarity rather than ambiguity in media.[17,18] However, while a ten-second soundbite curated to support a simplified, easily-digestible narrative may be more accessible to the average audience member, such a brief moment is perhaps incapable of conveying the "truth" regarding a policy, trend, or event. Moreover, rather than improving public welfare, media may actually create or reinforce the systematic biases of the public and, in doing so, encourage politicians to "pander to voters' incorrect beliefs" or to force policymakers to devote valuable time and energy to the "wrong" issues.[19] In such an environment, the potential for hate speech disguised as factual narrative is high.[20] This practice seems to undermine Stromberg and Craig's arguments that the information provided by mass media necessarily results in greater political accountability. Ellul emphasizes the danger of this practice, warning that such oversimplification can create a ready opening for propaganda wherein the "propagandee...turns out to be a willing collaborator in the propaganda process" due to constraints on time, knowledge, and resources that would otherwise allow them to reject a given media narrative.[21] Thus, rather

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[17] Marlin, Randal. "Jacques Ellul and the Nature of Propaganda in the Media." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 206.

[18] Ellul authored one of the most influential theoretical texts on propaganda in 1962, titled *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*.

[19] Stromberg, David. "Media and Politics." Annual Review of Economics 7 (2015): 173-205. 10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101: 174.

[20] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 33.

[21] Marlin, Randal. "Jacques Ellul and the Nature of Propaganda in the Media." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 204-205.

than empowering the public to engage in democratic processes as more knowledgeable citizens, mass media also has the power to undermine democratic governance.

Market imperfections make this threat all the more real, allowing room for divisive parties to warp public debate and take advantage of an unrestricted platform of public expression.[22] Without an "invisible hand" guiding public debate in mass media, other factors – such as corruption, journalists lacking professional or ethical standards, or ethnic and cultural divisions – pose a particular threat to democracy, regardless of how well entrenched democratic traditions are in a given society. In some states, media freedom can actually enhance authoritarian tendencies by exacerbating preexisting power struggles.[23] Negative media effects are particularly likely to arise in societies where there are serious conflicts of interest among different groups. As Ellul states, "[r]eality and truth are now functions of what is broadcast."[24] If what is broadcast largely consists of populist or nationalist rhetoric, the free and open nature of the media system may become a vehicle for the popular acceptance of such rhetoric. Both the Rwandan Genocide and the Holocaust were supported through the effective use of mass media, after all.[25] Thus, while media freedom may be tied to democratic outcomes, it seems that media freedom can also be manipulated to undermine those very same outcomes.

[22] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 33.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Marlin, Randal. "Jacques Ellul and the Nature of Propaganda in the Media." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 205.

[25] Stromberg, David. "Media and Politics." Annual Review of Economics 7 (2015): 173-205. 10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101: 201.

Media Freedom and Rankings

Mass media's malleability seems to beg the question of whether our understanding of media freedom is perhaps too broad. Within mass media scholarship, David H. Weaver's 1977 theory regarding press freedom remains influential. Weaver presents three major facets of press freedom: a "relative absence" of government restraints on media, a "relative absence" of nongovernmental restraints, and the inclusion of not only diverse ideas and opinions, but also the ability to disseminate a balance of such opinions.[26] Some theorists argue that the definition of media freedom should be expanded to include economic development or nation-building concepts, while still others throw their support firmly behind either the classic liberal perspective or the radical democratic perspective on media freedom. The classic liberal perspective stresses the media's freedom to publish or broadcast. The radical democratic perspective builds upon this concept by also emphasizing mass communication's responsibility to equitably mediate conflict and competition between social groups.[27] There is a lack of agreement on which conceptualization of media freedom is "most correct," but there is some consensus that any working definition of media freedom should include a lack of government and marketplace interference, as well as a focus on societal needs.

Media scholars Tudor Vlad, Lee Becker, and Jack Snyder (2009; 2018) explore this issue by delineating the landscape of press freedom assessments conducted by international organizations, paying particular attention to Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and International Research & Exchanges Board's (IREX) global press freedom

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[26] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 24.

[27] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 23.

assessments. Measures of press freedom were created in the early 1960s by researchers hoping to connect those same measures to consequences of media freedom.[28] Freedom House, RSF, and IREX each produce media freedom assessments with that same goal in mind. Broadly speaking, the assessments are based on the political, legal, and economic environments of a state, as well as the quality of journalism within those same environments. Between the three organizations, the country ratings differ slightly, but this variance can be attributed to the "conceptual differences in the weight assigned to different criteria, such as physical attacks on journalists, government controls over media, and public availability of information."[29] As Vlad et al. note, each organization weighs these considerations differently, with Freedom House placing emphasis on the legal and policy environments, RSF stressing the freedom and wellbeing of journalists, and IREX focusing on a balance of both considerations. Despite these conceptual differences, the researchers found that each media assessment institution provided consistent internal media ratings across time, with the average correlation year-to-year of Freedom House at .96 (Pearson r) and RSF at .94.

While Vlad et al. do not take issue with the media freedom assessments themselves, they question whether these assessments can actually be used as "guides to improving media freedom and stabilizing democracy in transitional countries."[30] As explained previously, although media freedom is often assumed to be linked to democratic governance, we know that this is not always the case. In their study, Vlad et al. compared Freedom House, RSF, and IREX media freedom assessments with a series of public

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[28] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 17.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 18.

opinion surveys concerning perceived media freedoms conducted by the BBC World Service Poll, the Gallup World Poll, and WorldPublicOpinion.org. The researchers used data from a 2007 BBC World Service Poll in which respondents in 14 countries were asked to "use a 5-point scale to indicate how free they thought the media in their country were to report the news accurately, truthfully, and without bias."[31] In comparing respondent data with Freedom House press freedom indexes, Vlad et al. found a correlation coefficient of "only .23 (Spearman rho)."[32] Likewise, in comparing the respondent data to RSF press freedom assessments, the researchers yielded a .25 correlation coefficient.

Interestingly, in comparing press freedom assessments to a Gallup survey undertaken between 2005-2009 in more than 100 countries, Vlad et al. also found that in countries in which repression of freedom of expression was low, "free media was associated with low levels of confidence in the media relative to confidence in other institutions in society" and in countries in which repression of freedom of expression was high, "press freedom was associated with high levels of confidence in the media."[33] The researchers attributed these findings to the "critical stance" of media "relative to other institutions in society" in free media environments, suggesting that the watchdog function of media does not always result in greater public trust of media.[34] Moreover, the researchers found that, according to the Gallup data, "the belief that the media have a lot of freedom was correlated only mildly with confidence in the media" at .21, indicating that public trust in media is not necessarily related to perceived levels of media freedom either. Both the

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[31] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 26-27.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 27-28.

[34] *Ibid.*

BBC and Gallup comparisons also shed light on the fact that media freedom assessments ignore an important element at work in these countries' media environments – that of the audience.[35]

The research findings from this study also suggest that, in assessing media freedom and its correlative relationship with democratic outcomes, we perhaps should be more cautious. While media freedom may be a necessary condition for democratic governance, it is certainly not a sufficient condition. However, without media freedom, the public would not (as Craig and Stromberg make clear) have access to the information necessary to make informed voting decisions or to evaluate policy issues adequately. While neither the theorists discussed here nor I mean to question the long-term relationship between increases in media freedom and greater democratization, we should be wary of assuming that short-term increases in media freedom will necessarily yield democratic outcomes. Moreover, we should be cognizant that media freedom rankings provide only a partial image of a country's media environment.[36] Different historical, geopolitical, and social circumstances determine whether the short-term effects of increased media freedom support or undermine democratic governance. As such, in order to adequately assess the impact of mass media on democratic outcomes in specific countries or regions, it is necessary to approach evaluations of mass media environments from a variety of additional angles.

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[35] Rollberg, Peter and Marlene Laruelle. "Introduction: Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 10.
[36] *Ibid.*

The majority of existing media theories are framed by one of the three following approaches: media production and content, media ecology, or media consumption.[37] Each framework contributes to a greater understanding of media freedom and its link to democratic outcomes. The following section provides an overview of each of these categories and how these approaches have contributed to the field of media studies.

Media Production and Media Content

In 1956, Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm published *Four Theories of the Press*, a text which remains foundational within media scholarship. Siebert, et al. argued that global media could be split into four models: libertarian, socially responsible, authoritarian, and Soviet.[38] The authoritarian model is considered to be the first theory or approach to the press and was embraced widely prior to the eighteenth century. This model positions the press as an entity poised to serve not the public, but to serve as an instrument of the state. Within this model, the press is controlled entirely by a central leader, government, or an oligopoly.[39] Arguably, this model overlaps with Siebert, et al.'s "Soviet" model, which required that "the press support the Marxist-Leninist view of reality."[40] Like the authoritarian model, the Soviet model positions the press as a subservient arm of the state.

The libertarian model, on the other hand, arose in the late nineteenth century as a reimagining of the press as the tool of an autonomous public. In contrast to the authoritarian or Soviet models, this theory rests on the "negative liberty" of the press, or "the right not

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[37] Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 4.

[38] Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 5.

[39] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 5.

[40] Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 5.

to be interfered with.[41] According to this model, the liberal press should be privately owned, self-regulated, and free of government interference."[42] In short, a libertarian press is "not just a relatively free press, but a *maximally* free press," according to media ethicist Stephen Ward. At the close of the nineteenth century, liberals hoped that, in making the press free, democracy would advance. This hope, according to Ward, was based on three assumptions. First, liberals hoped that a free press would also be a "serious, public-minded, and progressive press."[43] Second, this hope rested on the theory that a free press would yield a "healthy marketplace of ideas, where diverse ideas would be equally represented."[44] Third, proponents of the libertarian press hoped access to a free press would produce a knowledgeable, rational public and improve social welfare in the process. Moreover, supporters of the libertarian model argued that a market-driven media environment would be less susceptible to control by powerful elites or "inchoate masses," according to media scholar Sarah Oates.[45]

However, following World War I, growing disillusionment with these assumptions led Western journalists to focus on creating a set of modern professional ethics. This turn toward ethics produced what Siebert et al. termed the socially responsible model of the press. Rather than focusing solely on the freedom of the press, this model emphasized the responsibility of the press to deliberately advance the social welfare of all segments of

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[41] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 6.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 8.

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 8.

society.[46] This model identified a societal risk in the unlimited flow of public information, unfiltered and perhaps lacking nuance or relevant context. The social responsibility model also held that, if media self-regulation "failed," government or outside parties had the responsibility to intervene.[47] Compared to the libertarian model, the socially responsible theory is certainly less "free," but proponents argued that it was both more ethical and equitable (see Figure 2.1 for a comparison of the two press models). Most contemporary European public broadcasters continue to be guided by the social responsibility model, while the libertarian model shapes much of the American mass media landscape.[48]

Figure 2.1: Comparing the Libertarian and Social Responsibility Models

	Libertarian model	Social responsibility model
Definition	Driven by the needs of the consumer and often called the 'commercial' model. Chief obligation of the news media in free societies is to provide the general public with information about significant current events and entertainment.Anything interesting or important for media audiences may become news. Reported quickly, accurately, and free from opinion. Left to the audience to decide what to believe and what to question.	News producers design news output to support a civil society and discourage anti-social behaviour. Media output should reflect social concerns. Media should foster political action and publicize social evils. Media should not broadcast undesirable viewpoints and questionable accusations, even if sensational. Media should hold government accountable when necessary.
Role of audience	Can absorb all messages and decide what is important	Given information to promote acting is responsibly.
Role of media	Provide all information deemed of interest.	Provide information in a responsible manner.
Primary perception of audience as …	Consumers	Citizens
Primary perception of journalists as …	Information providers	Gatekeepers
Mostly adhere to this model	US – although tends more towards social responsibility model in times of war or terrorist acts on US targets.	UK – although its tabloid newspaper adhere to the libertarian model as do some commercial television broadcasts.

Source: Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 6.

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[46] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 9-10; Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 5.

[47] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 11.

[48] *Ibid.*

Many modern communications scholars have reimagined or built upon Siebert et al.'s four models of the press, although others criticize the four models as insufficient due to their inability to capture some realities of modern media systems. The post-Soviet media landscape, in particular, poses a categorization challenge.[49] On a global level, issues surrounding the high concentration of media ownership also make grouping within Siebert et al.'s model difficult. The growing power of transnational media conglomerates sparked American researchers Dallas Smythe (1981) and Herbert Schiller (1996) to explore the political economy of media for this very reason.[50] The freedom of media markets, so emphasized by the libertarian model, has resulted in the massive growth of transnational media corporations, allowing for the purchase of multiple media outlets in a single market.[51] This practice ensures that the public – despite believing that they are reading, viewing, or listening to news from multiple sources – only gain access to one perspective.[52] Political economists analyzing the growth of transnational media corporations chart the spatial and political growth of these companies globally and evaluate their effects on democratic governance.[53]

Tied to the issue of media oligopolies is another challenge to media model categorization: media imperialism. Media imperialism is defined by sociologist Mel van Elteren as: "the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution of content of media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantially external pressures from

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[49] See Chapter 3: Overview of the Post-Soviet Media Landscape.

[50] Mosco, Vincent. "Political Economic Theory and Research: Conceptual Foundations and Current Trends." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 40.

[51] Cramer, Theresa. "Defining the Media in the 21st Century." *EContent* 42 (Spring 2019): 3.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] Mosco, Vincent. "Political Economic Theory and Research: Conceptual Foundations and Current Trends." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 40.

the media interests of any other country or countries without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected."[54] While much of the research on media imperialism dating to the 1970s has focused on the global reach of media imperialism, recent evidence suggests that audiences actually prefer "locally produced content" rooted in regional language and culture rather than media exported from the distant abroad. However, rather than eliminating media imperialism, this preference seems to have secured the rise of localized cultural and media imperialism, wherein regional hegemonic powers dominate their respective regional media space.[55] Both the high concentration of global media ownership and media imperialism – transnational or localized – have the power to affect democratic outcomes. This phenomenon, very much at work in the post-Soviet media space, is explored more fully in Chapters 3, 5, and 6.

Another equally fruitful approach to media theory is to analyze the content of media, although this approach is, of course, intertwined with the production of media. Many scholars who take this approach analyze the content of media output to determine how journalists frame media narratives designed for public consumption. Renowned media scholar Doris Graber divided media approaches into four categories: mirror, organizational, political, and professional (see Figure 2.2).[56] The mirror approach consists of media content that aims to directly reflect reality. The content of organizational media output is, instead, directly shaped by the "pressures inherent in the organizational processes and goals of media organizations."[57] The political media model consists of media content

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[54] van Elteren, Mel. "Reconceptualizing 'Cultural Imperialism' in the Current Era of Globalization." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 401.

[55] van Elteren, Mel. "Reconceptualizing 'Cultural Imperialism' in the Current Era of Globalization." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 408.

[56] Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 10.

[57] *Ibid.*

shaped by journalists' and media organizations' ideological convictions. Lastly, the professional model consists of media created by "highly skilled professionals seeking to create news that attracts consumers and citizens."[58] As denoted in Figure 2.2, each of these models has potential advantages and disadvantages in terms of democratic outcomes.

Figure 2.2: Models of News Content

Model	Definition	Benefits to model	Flaws in model
Mirror	News should be reflection of reality.	News is not distorted or biased by production.	Unrealistic, impossible to cover all events. News producers must make choices about focus, highlighting, filtering the news, or there will be information overload. Discounts political bias and pressures.
Organizational	News emerges from pressures inherent in the organizational processes and goals of a news organization.	Differing outputs from various media organizations provide evidence for this (particularly as compared cross-nationally). Observations of journalists suggest that they are constrained by organizational factors.	Does not consider the fact that actual events also will affect the news. Discounts political bias and pressures. Ignores the notion that journalists may have professional norms that can counter organizational behaviour.
Political	News reflects the ideological biases of individual journalists, as well as that of media outlet. Only high-status, approved people covered by news; those who do not support the system are ignored or vilified.	Provides strong support for a regime. Fits evidence from some media systems particularly well.	News becomes a powerful tool for oppression. Does not consider the fact that actual events will also affect the news (except in authoritarian regimes in which there is such widespread control that events can go uncovered).
Professional	News making viewed as an endeavour of highly skilled professionals. Events selected for importance, attractiveness to media audiences, and balance.	Consumer-driven and apolitical.	Skilled professionals may act as filter of unpleasant or unpopular, albeit important news. Leaves out element of civic responsibility, such as hearing about dull, yet critical economic policy or election campaigns. Could lead to dumbing-down and pandering to the audience.

Source: Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 10.

Aside from journalistic approaches to media content, many media theorists have expressed concern that the level of "hard news" stories and investigative journalism has sharply declined and been replaced by "infotainment." These same theorists also often posit

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[58] Oates, Sarah. *Introduction to Media and Politics.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008: 10.

that political reporting has taken on an overriding concern for "image" and "strategy," crowding out substantial political coverage on major policy issues or political races, and exacerbating the alienation of the public from the political sphere in the process.[59] Craig complicates this theory, arguing that, due to the rise of new, ubiquitous media forms, the line dividing serious media and entertainment media has blurred irrevocably, resulting in "quality media giving us more stories on celebrities and lifestyle and consumer issues…[and] popular media giving more emphasis to international events, particularly since the bombing of the World Trade Center towers and the resulting fears about terrorism and national security."[60] Craig's rejection of normative theorizing here does not, however, eliminate the utility of exploring the effects of this genre mixing on media environments.

Media Ecology

Communications scholar Casey Man Kong Lum defines media ecology as the: "study of media as environments and of the way in which and extent to which complex communication systems impact upon how people think, feel, and behave."[61] Media ecology considers the different forms that modern media takes while emphasizing that each form of communication technology "has its own set of physical, technical, symbolic, and environmental characteristics," as well as its own "set of intrinsic…features or biases."[62] For example, television provides brief, rapid-fire audiovisual news coverage, while print media often provides more in-depth, contemplative news coverage.[63] Media ecologists

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[59] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: ix.

[60] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 7.

[61] Lum, Casey Man Kong. "Media Ecology: Contexts, Concepts, and Currents." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 137.

[62] Lum, Casey Man Kong. "Media Ecology: Contexts, Concepts, and Currents." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 139, 140.

[63] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 9.

argue that viewers, listeners, and readers each experience media in a unique way depending on the form of media they choose to consume.

These singular consumption experiences provide equally specific opportunities and limitations in terms of media freedom and democratic outcomes. By way of illustration, access to the internet has fundamentally changed the behavior of media audiences, arguably providing greater access to information than ever before.[64] There is considerable scholarship devoted to examining the assumed democratic outcomes of this widespread access to information. However, internet media monopolies have arisen to reflect the traditional power structures of mainstream media conglomerates, limiting the diversity of media narratives that are easily accessible.[65] Moreover, access to a greater pool of information does not guarantee access to a greater pool of *correct* information. These drawbacks have reigned in the optimism of media scholars regarding the democratic possibilities of the internet.

Like the internet, television provides particular advantages and disadvantages within democratic societies. Despite the rise of social media and internet usage, television consumption remains exceptionally high. Media theorists Toby Miller and Justin Lewis confirm that, rather than declining in recent years, television viewership has risen.[66] As Craig notes, the "audiovisual nature of television provides it with a high degree of realism" which, in turn, engenders a sense of credibility among viewers.[67] Additionally, television media is generally designed to be accessible to viewers, consisting of language and

[64] Cummings, Kevin and Cynthia Gottshall. "Citizenship and Consumption: Media Theory in the Age of Twitter." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 616-617.

[65] Ward, Stephen J.A. "Classical Liberal Theory in a Digital World." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 18.

[66] Storey, John. *Theories of Consumption.* New York: Routledge, 2017: 63.

[67] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 15.

narratives that are easily understandable. However, these benefits can prove problematic for the very same reasons explained earlier in this chapter: the brevity of media clips can create misconstrued or false contextual narratives, divisive voices may flood television media with curated audiovisual "evidence" to support nationalist or discriminatory agendas, and media oligopolies may limit the variety of opinions available to the average viewer. While some scholars have termed television an "old media form" following the advent of the internet, media consumption data suggests that television continues to dominate global public consciousness.[68] In a world where television has become the most powerful communication medium, media scholars should continue to monitor the content and effects of television – both in isolation and as part of a greater media ecosystem – rather than dismissing television as an "old media."

Media Consumption

Mass media research focusing on media consumption effects began in the 1930s, following the rise of Hitler and Mussolini.[69] Both Hitler and Mussolini effectively utilized radio messaging to disseminate propaganda and garner public support. Early theorists assumed that media messages could be "injected" like a hypodermic needle or a "magic bullet" into public consciousness.[70] This theory seemed to explain the fascist and populist tides sweeping through the world at this time. However, much of the research supporting this theory was merely anecdotal, based on cultural assumptions rather than data. The first empirical studies on mass media effects disproved this theory, indicating instead that mass

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[68] Craig, Geoffrey. *Media, Politics and Public Life.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004: 8.

[69] Stromberg, David. "Media and Politics." *Annual Review of Economics* 7 (2015): 173-205. 10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101: 175.

[70] Fortner, Robert S. "The Origins of Media Theory: An Alternative View." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 33.

media had "minor direct effects on people's voting intentions," according to Stromberg.[71] Rather than relying on a hypodermic explanatory conceptualization for the success of propaganda, media theorists were forced to create new explanatory theories.

Discarding the "magic bullet theory" of media effects, media theorists instead focused their efforts on three primary media effects theories: agenda setting, framing, and priming.[72] Agenda setting theory posits that the mass media creates a "public agenda by focusing attention on certain issues while ignoring others."[73] Closely related to agenda setting theory, framing theory argues that "the way the media frame stories (what they highlight and what they leave out) leads people to interpret those stories in a certain way," according to media scholar James Potter.[74] Potter also notes that framing theory suggests that "the media's use of certain phrases, pictures, sources, and examples" create moral and political frames by which people shape decision-making and voting preference.[75] Priming theory, in turn, suggests that exposure to particular media narratives or messages produces "an immediate and short-term effect on subsequent judgments and behaviors."[76] While all three theories are supported by empirical evidence, agenda setting theory remains the most widely accepted of the three. A 2006 Swedish national election survey found that "attention to political news exerts a significant and rather strong influence on perceived issue salience and that attention to political news matters more than attention to various specific news

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[71] Stromberg, David. "Media and Politics." *Annual Review of Economics* 7 (2015): 173-205. 10.1146/annurev-economics-080213-041101: 175.

[72] Potter, W. James. "Patterns in the Use of Theory in Media Effects Research." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 99.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] Potter, W. James. "Patterns in the Use of Theory in Media Effects Research." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 100.

shows on television and in radio, or to different newspapers."[77] This study confirms what media scholar Max McCombs calls the "first level of agenda setting effects," consisting of mass media's power to shape public perceptions of issue salience. Considerable empirical evidence also supports what McCombs terms the "second level of agenda setting effects," meaning that the mass media can also focus public perception not only on particular issues, but also on attributes of those issues.[78]

However, while the media may be able to focus attention on certain issues, most empirical evidence suggests that a variety of other factors affect whether the media can shape *how* audiences think about those issues. In 1973, media theorist Stuart Hall published "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse," introducing Hall's theory on "the circulation of meaning in televisual discourse" (see Figure 2.3).[79] As Hall notes, "if no 'meaning' is taken, there can be no 'consumption.'"[80] The first step in this process takes place within the media production stage, with media professionals creating televisual narratives of a "raw" social event. This is the moment of encoding and the creation of the "program as 'meaningful' disclosure." The third moment consists of a process of decoding in which the audience is confronted with the mediated narration of the social event and forced to make meaning of that event.[81]

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[77] McCombs, Maxwell E. and Lei Guo. "Agenda-Setting Influence of the Media in the Public Sphere." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 253.

[78] McCombs, Maxwell E. and Lei Guo. "Agenda-Setting Influence of the Media in the Public Sphere." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 255.

[79] Storey, John. *Theories of Consumption.* New York: Routledge, 2017: 64.

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Ibid.*

Figure 2.3: Circulation of Meaning in Televisual Discourse
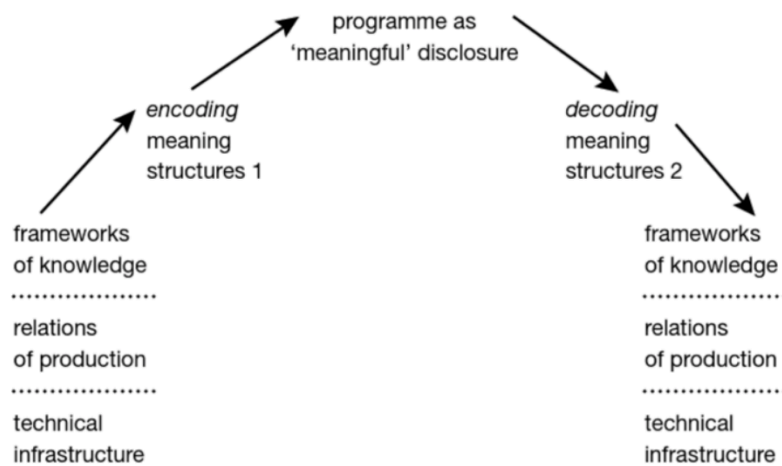
Source: Storey, John. *Theories of Consumption.* New York: Routledge, 2017: 65.

Through this process, the audience can fall into three positions. Hall calls the first position the "dominant-hegemonic position." Viewers in this position decode media messages as they are intended. The second position is called "the negotiated code." This position is occupied by viewers who decode and adopt some of the intended meaning, but not all. Hall notes that the majority of viewers can be categorized within this second position. The last position is called "the opposition code." This position consists of viewers who recognize the intended code, but following the decoding process, reject the intended meaning and choose "to decode within an alternative frame of reference."[82] Between 1976 and 1977, media scholar David Morley conducted a media consumption study based on Hall's theorizing which studied the televisual interpretation (or, media consumption) of 29 groups consisting of five to ten people watching BBC's evening news and current affairs programs daily. While not entirely causal, Morley found that one of the most significant factors in determining which position a viewer occupies is socioeconomic class. However,

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[82] Storey, John. *Theories of Consumption.* New York: Routledge, 2017: 66.

Morley noted that "it is always a question of how social position plus particular discourse positions produce specific readings."[83] A benchmark 1990 study conducted in Israel, Japan, and the US focusing on media consumption surrounding the television show *Dallas* built upon Morley's study, finding that "across the different cultural groups a variety of interpretive frames led to a multiplicity of readings, including ones that contradicted the allegedly dominant ideology of the series. They concluded that television viewers were likely to interpret cultural and ideological content by using local context and values." This finding indicates that, while audiences should be considered "active" rather than passive, meaning-making of mass media narratives is a complex process affected by socioeconomic and cultural factors.[84]

From each of these studies, we can determine that the effects of media consumption are not nearly as simple as the theorists behind the "magic bullet theory" once suggested. However, we know that the mass media has an agenda-setting power that determines which issues occupy public consciousness and which do not. Meaning-making, however, is much more complicated. As Ellul notes, "no direct propaganda can take place without a set of background myths, stereotypes, and shared attitudes," meaning that mass media effects are negotiated by historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors.[85] When considering the implications of media consumption on democratic outcomes, these factors should not be ignored.

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[83] *Ibid;* Morley, David and Charlotte Brunsdon. *The Nationwide Television Studies.* London: Routledge, 1999: 11.

[84] van Elteren, Mel. "Reconceptualizing 'Cultural Imperialism' in the Current Era of Globalization." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 407.

[85] Marlin, Randal. "Jacques Ellul and the Nature of Propaganda in the Media." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 199.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND DEMOCRACY

Although press freedom indicators produced by organizations such as Freedom House, RSF, and IREX provide a useful gauge for assessing media environments in particular countries, these indicators do not present a complete picture of the democratic nature of the press. After all, assuming that a free press is also a democratic press is a false equivalence. The democratic nature of mass media is determined by a wide range of factors, many of which are used to produce press freedom rankings. However, important factors such as audience and effects of regional hegemonic media imperialism are largely ignored. In order to accurately assess the media environments of post-Soviet countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, it is also necessary to consider trends in media consumption, as well as the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical conditions which affect audience decoding in these countries. As such, this study builds upon the important assessments provided by Freedom House, RSF, and IREX by considering trends in televisual media consumption in Georgia and Ukraine, paying particular attention to the consumption of Russian-based or Russian-influenced media sources as an indicator of regional media imperialism. In so doing, this study aims to contribute to understandings of media freedom and democratic outcomes in the post-Soviet space.

Chapter 3: Overview of the Post-Soviet Media Landscape

Disinformation specialist Peter Pomerantsev and journalist Michael Weiss argue that the Kremlin's media reach can "be thought of concentrically: in Ukraine it can create complete havoc; in the Baltic states it can destabilize; in Eastern Europe, co-opt power; in Western Europe, divide and rule; in the US, distract; in the Middle East and South America, fan flames."[86] Although the reach of pro-Moscow media outlets such as *RT* and *Sputnik* has expanded worldwide, their narratives are particularly potent in the post-Soviet space. As Weiss and Pomerantsev aptly describe, Moscow's media influence – or, its media imperialism – in the region which Russian officials often call the "near abroad" is particularly strong, taking advantage of the presence of Russian or Russian-speaking minorities, the Russian language's role as a regional lingua franca, and the influence of Soviet nostalgia to control or undermine its post-Soviet neighbors through mass media.[87,88] This regional hegemony allows the Kremlin to achieve a multitude of foreign policy objectives including, but not limited to, stalling or reversing democratization in post-Soviet states. While Chapters 5 and 6 provide an in-depth analysis of media consumption trends

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[86] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 9.

[87] I apply this term here not to endorse its usage, but in order to accurately capture Moscow's approach to post-Soviet states. The term "near abroad" is a politically loaded term which many post-Soviet countries reject due to its imperialist implications.

[88] Rollberg, Peter and Marlene Laruelle. "Introduction: Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 11.

and the impact of Russian media on media landscapes within Georgia and Ukraine, it is first necessary to consider the wider post-Soviet media environment and its evolution, paying particular attention to the development of post-Soviet media in the Russian Federation.

THE SOVIET MEDIA MODEL

Western scholars have long contended that the relationship between the Russian people and the media is a unique one, defined by the traditionally paternalistic media-state dynamic "in which the media still plays the role of an innocent and obedient child."[89] In this framing, the Russian people consider themselves to be "media subjects" sans rights, while the State hands down narratives that describe, define, and sometimes rewrite the world around them.[90] This media model traces its origin to the establishment of *Vedomosti* (Ведомости), the first Russian newspaper. *Vedomosti* was created in 1703 under Peter the Great as a "tool for elite communication" and "an essential means for social management."[91] In 1804, pre-publication censorship was established in Imperial Russia, although this establishment was merely a formality; Russian media was far from free in Imperial Russia.[92] This development firmly established the "top-down," or authoritarian (within Siebert et al.'s modeling system), structure of the Russian media model – a model

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[89] Vartanova, Elena. "The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics." In *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*, edited by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 66.

[90] Khvostunova, Olga. "Corruption of the Fourth Estate." Accessed October 8, 2018. https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Olga_Khvostunova__Corruption_of_the_Fourth_Estate.pdf: 30.

[91] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 127.

[92] This censorship law would remain in effect until 1905, when it was abolished in response to the 1905 Revolution.

that persisted for centuries and arguably still retains its hold on the contemporary Russian media landscape.

MEDIA IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Following the Russian revolution, Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin established the role of print media in solidifying the infrastructure of the burgeoning communist state. As early as 1901, Lenin had designed the revolution around the role of the newspaper: "[T]he first step towards creating desired organization…should be the founding of an All-Russian political newspaper…Without a political organ, a political movement deserving this name is inconceivable in the Europe of today."[93] Lenin considered media to have three primary functions: propaganda, agitation, and organization. All three functions would serve the one-party system in a paternalistic fashion. Under Soviet media theory, journalism was defined as "a social activity of collection, transmission and periodical dissemination of information through mass communication channels aimed at propaganda and agitation."[94] This theory held throughout the majority of the Soviet era, with a strict censorship system in place under the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press, or Glavlit (Главное управление по делам литературы и издательств, or Главлит). Aside from censorship, much journalism dating from the Soviet era was overtly colored by

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[93] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 128.
[94] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 136.

"publistics," or political essays infused with moral reasoning. Publistics wove together journalism and ideology, deliberately blurring the lines between the two.[95]

While censorship and publistics worked in tandem to quell domestic discontent, the Kremlin also devoted considerable resources to disseminating propaganda externally. Interestingly, a controlled study was conducted at Florida State University in 1970 that tested the effects of Radio Moscow broadcasts on American listeners. Researchers found that the American listeners "developed more open attitudes about the USSR than those of average Americans" after tuning into the broadcasts.[96] However, Radio Moscow was only available on shortwave radio and, as such, reached less than 2 percent of the US population as of the late 1960s. This level of reach paled in comparison to that of its American counterpart – Voice of America – which was accessible by approximately 23 percent of the Soviet population by the 1970s.[97] Even so, the Soviet Union succeeded in stoking anti-Western sentiment in much of the developing world during the Cold War, as well as planting successful disinformation narratives such as Operation Infektion, which alleged that the HIV virus had been created in a US government lab.[98]

By the 1980s, however, the internal Soviet media climate began to shift with the adoption of perestroika and glasnost under Mikhail Gorbachev. Aside from the brief tenure of the 1917 Law on Freedom of Information, glasnost was the first definitive step toward

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[95] *Ibid.*

[96] Rutenberg, Jim. "RT, Sputnik and Russia's New Theory of War." *The New York Times*, September 13, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/magazine/rt-sputnik-and-russias-new-theory-of-war.html.

[97] *Ibid*.

[98] Ellick, Adam B., and Adam Westbrook. "Opinion | Operation Infektion: A Three-Part Video Series on Russian Disinformation." *The New York Times*, November 12, 2018, sec. Opinion. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/opinion/russia-meddling-disinformation-fake-news-elections.html.

an independent media model in Soviet or Russian history.[99,100] Under glasnost, censorship was dramatically reduced and print media outlets began to function more freely, a development that seemed to promise the future development of the Russian fourth estate.[101] In so doing, the media began to take on characteristics of the social responsibility model. However, it should be noted that, even under glasnost and perestroika, the operating media model still resembled Siebert et al.'s "Soviet" model more than any other model.[102]

1990-1995

 With the fall of the Soviet Union, the ideal of an independent Russian media seemed more achievable than ever before. On December 27, 1991, the Russian Law on Mass Media was adopted. The law seemed to mark a watershed moment in Russian media, wherein journalism itself could be redefined.[103] The Law disavowed censorship (article 3) and "guaranteed unlimited freedom to seek, obtain, produce, and disseminate information; to found media outlets; and to own, use, and manage them (article 1)….and allowed the establishment and operation of nonstate-owned (private) media."[104] In short, for the first

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[99] The 1917 Law on Freedom of Information was accepted by the Temporary Government in April 1917 but was cast aside following the outbreak of revolution in October 1917.

[100] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 136.

[101] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 154.

[102] Rollberg, Peter and Marlene Laruelle. "Introduction: Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 9.

[103] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 136-137; Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 164.

[104] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 123.

time in Russian history, the State relinquished its hold on the media, thereby transforming the Russian media landscape. Private companies and individuals created media outlets, while in other cases shares of previously existing publications were distributed to journalists working for those publications.[105] Thus, the Russian media sector took shape. The new Russian media seemed to model itself after its Western counterpart with the incorporation of freedom of press concepts, legislation protecting independent media, privatization of media, and an emphasis on objective reporting standards.[106]

Promising though these developments were, there were several issues that explain why Russia's media did not ultimately develop into a similarly independent and objective or socially responsible equivalent to that of many Western states. First, although the 1991 Russian Law on Mass Media was a considerable achievement, it is significant that this law does not apply to broadcast media. Additionally, and equally importantly, under this Law, much of Russian media is "governed not by federal law, but by presidential or governmental decrees."[107] Second, while Western media models may have been copied superficially, this change proved more rhetorical than substantial. Post-Soviet society was inherently different from many Western societies which, by this time, had long histories of independent media; the Western experience could not be easily duplicated in such a setting.[108] Moreover, while new political institutions and economic structures were

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[105] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 155.
[106] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 121.
[107] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 164.
[108] *Ibid.*

introduced to the Russian Federation, the scrambling for economic wealth among new and

old elites alike undermined attempts at institutional change, resulting in a "democratic civic

masquerade."[109] Third, in the early 1990s, economic conglomerates began to invest in

media empires. By 1995, Financial-Industrial Groups (FIGs) began to do so as well. Under

President Yeltsin, the media market was parceled off and became subject to Russian big

business interests.[110]

1995-2000

Throughout the 1990s, Yeltsin emphasized a "politically polycentric" future for the

Russian state. This political model depended on the power balance between various

political actors: FIGs, regional state administrations, Kremlin officials, and oligarchs.[111]

This equilibrium was often precarious during the 1990s, particularly given the considerable

economic turmoil experienced by the Russian state during this period. The financial crisis

of August 1998 exacerbated already poor social and economic conditions throughout the

Russian Federation, causing many Russians to lose all of their savings, devaluing the ruble,

and straining the advertising market.[112] This crisis also resulted in the closure of several

newspapers and other media holdings.

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[109] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*.
Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 122-123.
[110] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 157.
[111] Khvostunova, Olga. "Corruption of the Fourth Estate." Accessed October 8, 2018. https://
imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Olga_Khvostunova__Corruption_of_the_Fourth_Estate.pdf: 11.
[112] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 155.

The Russian media maintained its independence from the state under Yeltsin, but oligarchs continued to buy up media outlets, amassing vast media empires. The primary oligarchs involved in building up media empires were often dubbed the "seven bankers;" they were also the individuals who agreed in early 1996 to "pool their resources…in order to ensure a Yeltsin victory in the presidential election of that year, and then take their reward in the form of state assets at bargain prices."[113] These were the "winners" of the reform process and they intended to preserve their place through a strategy of political manipulation, "privatization of the Russian state," and cornering the Russian mass media market.[114] It should be noted that Russian media outlets were not earning considerable (if any) profits during this period and, as such, the oligarchs were purchasing media outlets for the sole purpose of "political profits." In the words of Boris Berezovsky, one of the "seven bankers" and former owners of ORT (Russian Public Television, now called Channel One): "[I] never got financial profits from ORT…Political profits were endless, economic – none."[115] Controlling media holdings also meant controlling coverage and thus the ability to "manage reputations" and guarantee "electoral campaign success."[116] Through the purchase of media holdings, these oligarchs wound the economic, political, and media spheres tightly together in Russia.

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[113] White, Stephen. *Understanding Russian Politics*. Croydon: CPI Group, 2012: 169.
[114] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 159-160.
[115] Khvostunova, Olga. "Corruption of the Fourth Estate." Accessed October 8, 2018. https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Olga_Khvostunova__Corruption_of_the_Fourth_Estate.pdf: 11.
[116] Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini, eds. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Communication, Society, and Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 129.

2000-2010

  The August 1998 financial crisis also had significant political implications, particularly when paired with the numerous international scandals that took place during this time and an armed Chechen invasion of a neighboring Russian region.[117] President Yeltsin was blamed for rising poverty, economic inequality, corruption, and the disintegration of democratic principles.[118] By the end of 1999, President Yeltsin had stepped down and Vladimir Putin became Acting President of the Russian Federation. As Yeltsin stepped down, he stated that he "[wanted] to apologize for our unfulfilled dreams…What we thought was easy has proved painfully difficult. I would like to apologize for having failed to justify the hopes of the people who believed that we would be able to make a leap from the gloomy and stagnant totalitarian past to a bright, prosperous and civilized future at just one go."[119] The newly appointed President Putin in turn promised that: "Freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press, the right to private property – all these basic principles of a civilized society will be reliably protected by the state."[120] On March 26, 2000, President Putin was officially elected President of the Russian Federation.

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[117] One of the international scandals included "reports that members of [Yeltsin's] family had taken kickbacks from a Swiss construction company."

[118] Bohlen, Celestine. "Yeltsin Resigns: The Overview." *The New York Times*, January 1, 2000. https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/01/world/yeltsin-resigns-overview-yeltsin-resigns-naming-putin-acting-president-run-march.html.

[119] *Ibid.*

[120] Bohlen, Celestine. "Yeltsin Resigns: The Overview." *The New York Times*, January 1, 2000. https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/01/world/yeltsin-resigns-overview-yeltsin-resigns-naming-putin-acting-president-run-march.html.

Despite President Putin's promises that the state would "reliably protect" the freedom of the press, the burgeoning independent media sector in Russia came to a standstill during the 2000s. Yeltsin's "polycentric" political model was cast aside, replaced by a monocentric vision of Russian politics. This shift was justified under President Putin's "power vertical" slogan, which emphasized "increased stability and security."[121] Rhetoric aside, this strategy resulted in the Russian state reasserting its power over mass media. In September 2000, the Security Council approved the adoption of the "Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation." This doctrine limited the rights of independent media and increased the reach of the state. Following 9/11, President Putin also ushered in a law to combat "Counter-Extremism," which in practice prohibited the "dissemination of extremist materials via the mass media and the conduct of extremist activities by the mass media."[122] Accordingly, the Russian Law on Mass Media was also altered to accommodate these new regulations – and to curtail media freedom in the Russian Federation. In July 2006, the "Counter-Extremism" regulations were expanded to create a "broader" definition of extremism, which would prohibit "public slander directed toward individuals fulfilling the state duties of the Russian Federation or state duties of a subject of the Russian Federation" on the grounds that this, too, was considered "extremism."[123]

Rather than protecting the freedom of the press, the Putin administration arguably did its best to eliminate any hope of establishing a free press in the Russian Federation.

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[121] Khvostunova, Olga. "Corruption of the Fourth Estate." Accessed October 8, 2018. https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Olga_Khvostunova__Corruption_of_the_Fourth_Estate.pdf: 11-12.
[122] Soldner, Markus. "Political Capitalism and the Russian Media." From *Media, Culture, and Society in Putin's Russia*, edited by Stephen White. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008: 169.
[123] *Ibid.*

Public political discourse was eliminated or replaced by mere imitative forms in popular media outlets, while the Kremlin worked to root out oligarchs that were deemed "uncooperative" or "resistant" to the Putin administration's policy agenda.[124] Two such oligarchs were Vladimir Gusinsky, who owned NTV, and the aforementioned Boris Berezovsky. Both figures were forced to sell their media holdings after allowing their television channels to feature anti-Putin themes.[125] Ultimately, Gusinsky and Berezovsky were both forced out of the Russian Federation. If any remaining oligarchs harbored doubts that they would share the same fate if they did not tow the Putin party line, Putin himself made sure to eradicate these doubts, stating that: "no clan, no oligarch should come close to regional or federal government – they should be kept equally distant from power."[126] The oligarchs took heed and under Putin a new relationship was formed between the ultra-rich, state authorities, and media holdings (see Figure 3.1).

New threats were also lodged against journalists during this time period, most notably in the case of Anna Politkovskaya. Politkovskaya was a leading critic of the Putin administration working for Novaya Gazeta (Новая Газета) and known for her sharp criticism of Kremlin officials, condemnation of corruption, and her coverage of Chechnya. She was assassinated in October 2006, decisively marking the beginning of a new era in Russian journalism – and the end of a more hopeful one. Six years later, a top criminal

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[124] Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018: 13.
[125] White, Stephen. *Understanding Russian Politics*. Croydon: CPI Group, 2012: 172-173; Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018: 13.
[126] White, Stephen. *Understanding Russian Politics*. Croydon: CPI Group, 2012: 172.

investigator reported that "the motive behind the 2006 murder of Anna Politkovskaya was to instill fear in the country's journalists."[127] Two of the five men convicted in Politkovskaya's murder were sentenced to life in prison in 2014, although questions still remain concerning who ordered her murder. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, between 1992 and 2014 53 journalists were murdered in Russia as a direct consequence of their work.[128]

Figure 3.1: Network of Russian Media Holdings
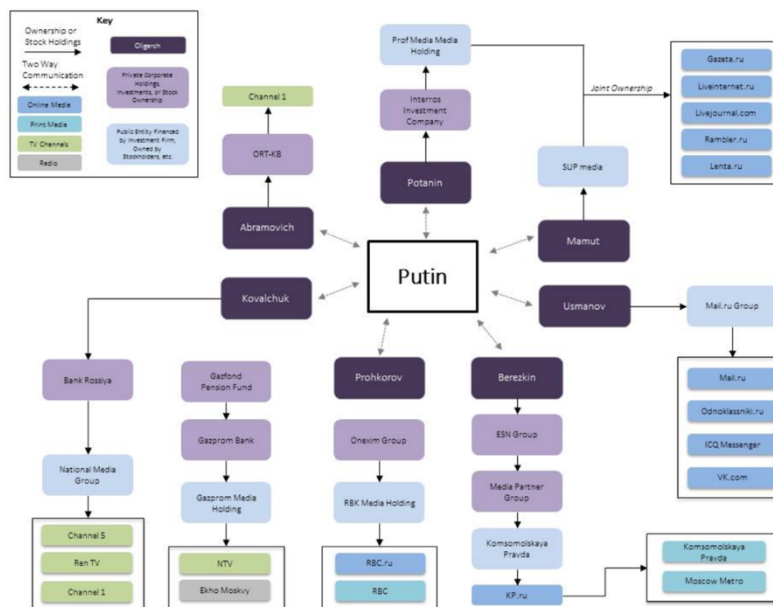
Source: Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018.

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[127] Kordunsky, Anna. "Russian Reporter's Murder Was Meant as a Message, Investigator Says." *The New York Times*, November 9, 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/10/world/europe/ Russian-investigator-speaks-about-anna-politkovskaya-killing.html.

[128] Klyukanov, Igor E. and Galina V. Sinekopova. "Theorizing about the Press in Post-Soviet Societies." Kumar, Shanti. "Media, Communication, and Postcolonial Theory." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 890.

2010-2020

President Putin concluded his second – and what was thought to be his final – term in 2008. Dmitri Medvedev was elected and under President Medvedev, the Russian media briefly experienced a comparable level of freedom. Nabi Abdullaev, a former *Moscow Times* deputy chief editor who oversaw RIA Novosti's foreign-language news service during this time, stated: "There was no talk about censorship. All they wanted from me was quality professional standards in reporting; that was it."[129] Even so, in 2010 both Freedom House and Reporters without Borders rated Russia as one of the least free countries in the world in terms of press freedom. Freedom House rated Russia at 175 out of 196 (above Saudi Arabia, but just below the Democratic Republic of Congo), while Reporters without Borders placed Russia at 140 out of 178 on its "Press Freedom Index" (below both Iraq and Ethiopia).[130]

Regardless, any semblance of media leniency was erased following the December 2011 mass demonstrations to protest the reelection of Vladimir Putin, which occurred after he successfully concluded his campaign to alter the Russian constitution to allow individuals to serve more than two presidential terms. Once he had taken office, Putin dissolved RIA Novosti and Voice of Russia (previously called Radio Moscow), creating a new entity called Rossiya Segodnya (Россия Сегодня, or Russia Today) from their component parts. Putin appointed Dmitriy Kiselsov, a popular state television host known for "homophobic rants and conspiracy theories," as the head of Rossiya Segodnya. The

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[129] Rutenberg, Jim. "RT, Sputnik and Russia's New Theory of War." *The New York Times*, September 13, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/magazine/rt-sputnik-and-russias-new-theory-of-war.html.

[130] White, Stephen. *Understanding Russian Politics*. Croydon: CPI Group, 2012: 343.

Kremlin's hold on media narratives tightened still further following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2016 ouster of top editors at the independent RBC media group.[131] A 2014 Levada Center poll in which 82 percent of Russians "believed that the Malaysia Airlines jet MH17 had been shot down by the Ukrainian military, even though the official investigation had not yet been concluded and preliminary information was pointing to Russia's involvement" demonstrates the effects of this selective media narrative on Russian audiences.[132, 133] In 2016, Freedom House scored the Russian Federation's media freedom as an 83 out of 100 (where 0 is most free and 100 is least free; see Figure 3.2). Responding to changing US and UK treatment of Russian broadcasters, the Kremlin also declared Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and several other Western news services "foreign agents" under new legislation in 2017. [134, 135]

Figure 3.2: Freedom House Profile, Russia
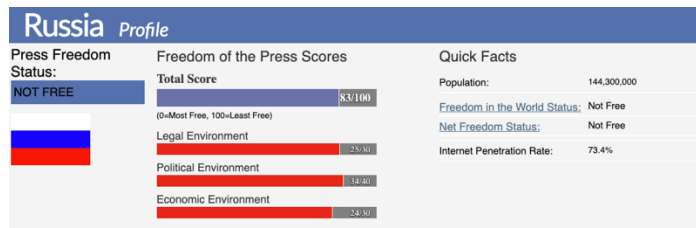
Source: Freedom House. "Russia." Accessed November 10, 2019. https://freedomhouse.org/report/ freedom-press/2017/russia.

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[131] Freedom House. "Russia." Accessed November 10, 2019. https://freedomhouse.org/report/ freedom-press/2017/russia.

[132] On July 17, 2014, Malaysia Airlines MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine while en route to Kuala Lampur from Amsterdam. While Russian media outlets continue to maintain that Ukrainians are to blame for the disaster, four pro-Moscow separatists have since been charged by a Dutch-led joint investigation team (JIT) with shooting down the plane.

[133] Rotaru, Vasile. "Force Attraction? How Russia is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the 'Near Abroad.'" *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, 1 (2018): 41.

[134] See section on RT.

[135] *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. "Russia Declares RFE/RL, VOA 'Foreign Agents.'" December 5, 2017. https://www.rferl.org/a/rferl-voa-foreign-agents-russia-justice-ministry-rt/28897401.html.

Nearly 30 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the outlook for the Russian media is bleaker than ever. In the words of award-winning Russian TV journalist Leonid Parfyonov:

> After the real and imaginary sins of the 90s, in [the] 2000s by two moves – first, for the sake of eliminating media oligarchs, and then for the sake of unity in the war on terrorism – *etatization* of the 'federal' televised information took place. Journalists' topics were broken down into those that could be broadcasted and those that couldn't. Later, the same breakage happened with life. Behind any politically important program, one can guess the state's goals and objective, its attitude, its friends and enemies. From the institutional point of view, it's not even information, it's the state's PR or anti-PR…For a correspondent of a federal TV channel high profile officials are not newsmakers, but bosses of his or her bosses. From the institutional point of view, a correspondent is not a journalist at all, but rather another official who follows the logic of serving and subordinating.[136]

President Putin, who had promised to protect the freedom of the press, oversaw the dismantling of that very same system, reducing it to nothing more than the "state's PR or anti-PR."

Popular Media Consumption in Contemporary Russia

A World Values Survey (WVS) conducted from 2010-2014 found that only 2.9% of Russians have "a great deal" of confidence in the press, while 30.6% have "quite a lot" of confidence in the press, 43.1% have "not very much" confidence in the press, and 21.1% have "none at all" (see Figure 3.3).[137] When broken down by age, respondents aged 50 or older had the highest levels of trust in the press, while respondents under the age of 29 had

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[136] Khvostunova, Olga. "Corruption of the Fourth Estate." Accessed October 8, 2018. https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Olga_Khvostunova__Corruption_of_the_Fourth_Estate.pdf: 29-30.

[137] Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV.

the least. Similarly, the same WVS survey found that 4.8% of respondents had "a great deal" of confidence in Television, 36.3% had "quite a lot," 38.9% did "not have very much," and 18.3% had "none at all" (see Figure 3.4).[138] When we compare these numbers to the level of respondent's confidence in the Russian government (see Figure 3.5), a clearer picture forms, with 7% of respondents stating that they had "a great deal" of confidence in the government, 40.4% had "quite a lot," 30.6% had "not very much," and 16.6% had "none at all."[139] Interestingly, these numbers seem to remain more or less constant when we breakdown the survey responses by age and gender. It is only when the responses are broken down by income that we see significantly different responses, with the highest income bracket holding the greatest amount of trust in the government and the lowest income bracket holding the lowest level of trust in the government.

Figure 3.3: Confidence: The Russian Press
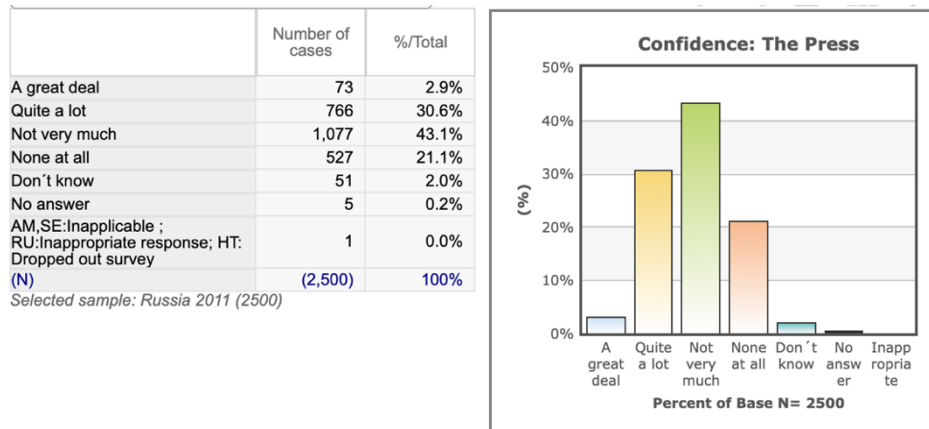
	Number of cases	%/Total
A great deal	73	2.9%
Quite a lot	766	30.6%
Not very much	1,077	43.1%
None at all	527	21.1%
Don´t know	51	2.0%
No answer	5	0.2%
AM,SE:Inapplicable ; RU:Inappropriate response; HT: Dropped out survey	1	0.0%
(N)	(2,500)	100%

Selected sample: Russia 2011 (2500)

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVS DocumentationWV.

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[138] *Ibid.*

[139] *Ibid.*

Figure 3.4: Confidence: Russian Television

	Number of cases	%/Total
A great deal	119	4.8%
Quite a lot	908	36.3%
Not very much	971	38.9%
None at all	457	18.3%
Don´t know	37	1.5%
No answer	5	0.2%
AM,DE,SE:Inapplicable ; RU:Inappropriate response; HT: Dropped out survey	2	0.1%
(N)	(2,500)	100%

Selected sample: Russia 2011 (2500)

Confidence: Television
Percent of Base N= 2500

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.
Version:http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV.

Figure 3.5: Confidence in the Russian Government

	Number of cases	%/Total
A great deal	175	7.0%
Quite a lot	1,010	40.4%
Not very much	766	30.6%
None at all	416	16.6%
Don´t know	112	4.5%
No answer	10	0.4%
HT: Dropped out survey; RU: Inappropriate response	12	0.5%
(N)	(2,500)	100%

Selected sample: Russia 2011 (2500)

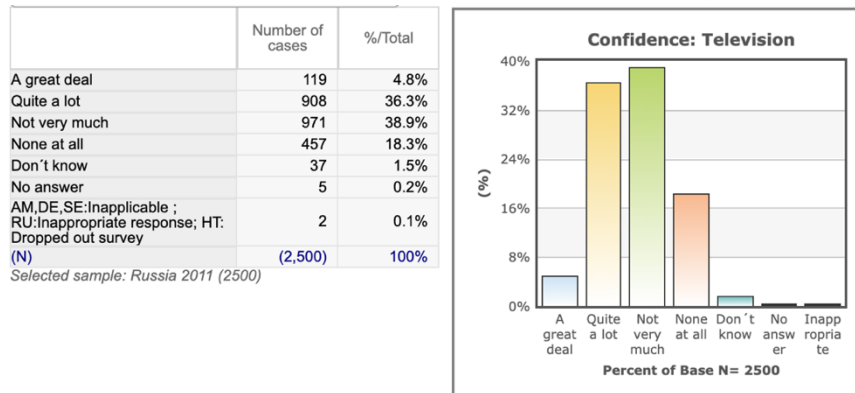Confidence: The Government
Percent of Base N= 2500

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.
Version:http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV.
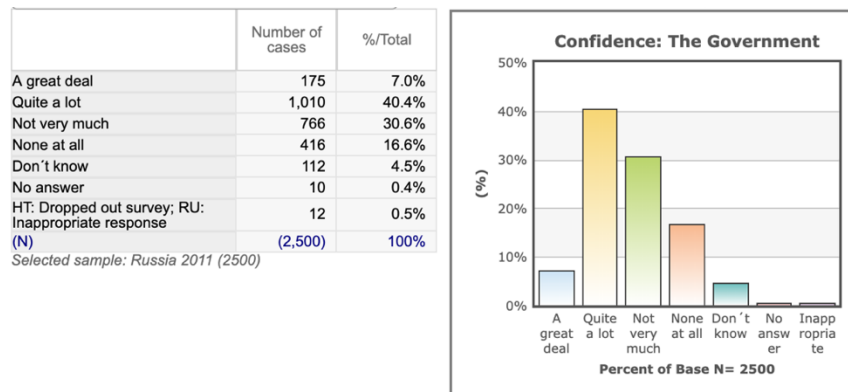
In terms of media consumption, most Russian citizens rate television as their preferred source of information, followed by internet, radio, and print media (see Figure

3.6, Figure 3.7, Figure 3.8, and Figure 3.9).[140] According to a study by the nonprofit research and analysis group CNA, "the average daily reach of television among urban dwellers[in Russia] is 71 percent. The second most popular media sources are online news and social media, which 33 percent and 27 percent of Russians turn to, respectively. Online news consumption is increasing and correlates with increasing internet penetration in Russia, which stood at 62 percent in 2015."[141] The study also noted that: "the numbers of Russians who receive news from radio and print media are declining; they stood at 22 percent and 19 percent, respectively, in 2016."[142] CNA also found that the two most watched television channels for news were Channel One and Rossiya 1 (see Figure 3.10 and Figure 3.11). Significantly, both of these television channels are highly state-controlled (for a visual overview of the most popular Russian media and their levels of independence, see Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.6: Daily Newspaper as Information Source

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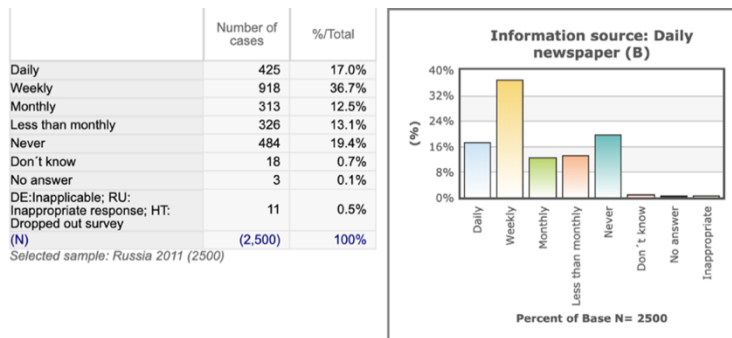
[140] Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018: iii.
[141] Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018: 3.
[142] *Ibid.*

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVS DocumentationWV.
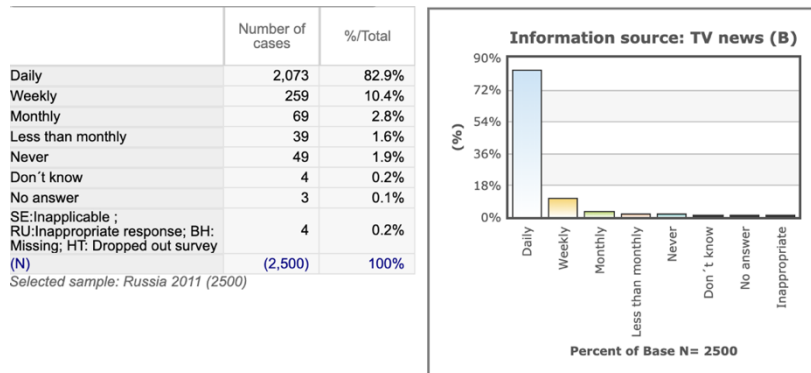
Figure 3.7: TV News as Information Source

	Number of cases	%/Total
Daily	2,073	82.9%
Weekly	259	10.4%
Monthly	69	2.8%
Less than monthly	39	1.6%
Never	49	1.9%
Don´t know	4	0.2%
No answer	3	0.1%
SE:Inapplicable ; RU:Inappropriate response; BH: Missing; HT: Dropped out survey	4	0.2%
(N)	(2,500)	100%

Selected sample: Russia 2011 (2500)

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version:http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV.

Figure 3.8: Radio News as Information Source

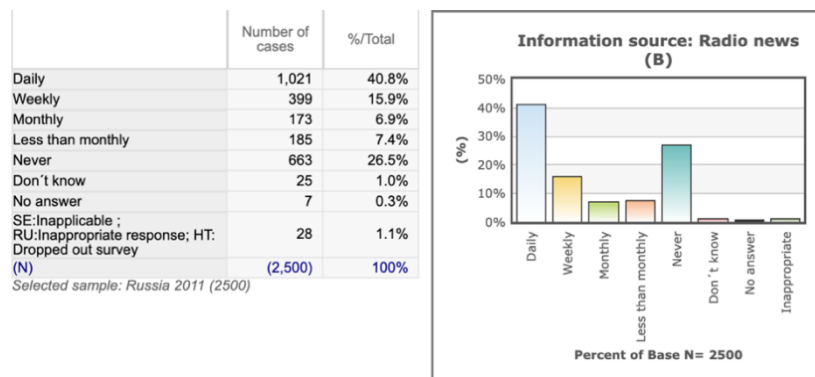|	Number of cases	%/Total
Daily	1,021	40.8%
Weekly	399	15.9%
Monthly	173	6.9%
Less than monthly	185	7.4%
Never	663	26.5%
Don´t know	25	1.0%
No answer	7	0.3%
SE:Inapplicable ; RU:Inappropriate response; HT: Dropped out survey	28	1.1%
(N)	(2,500)	100%

Selected sample: Russia 2011 (2500)

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version:http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVS DocumentationWV.

Figure 3.9: Structural Change of the Russian Media Market
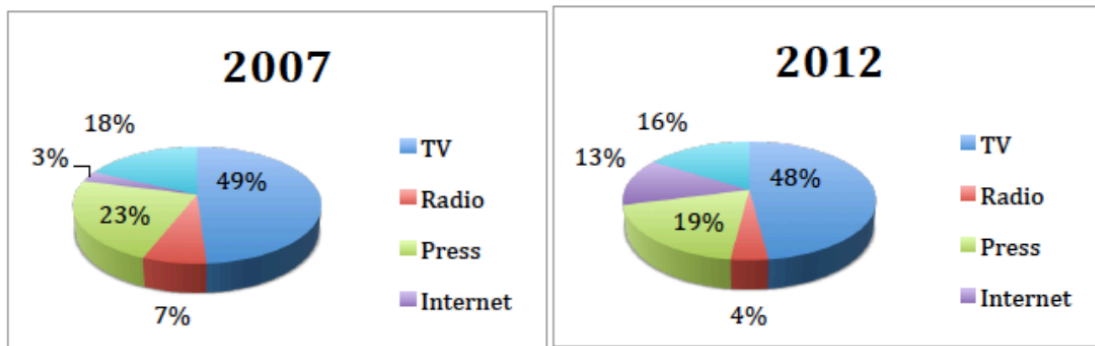
Source: Khvostunova, Olga. "Corruption of the Fourth Estate." Accessed October 8, 2018. https://imrussia.org/media/pdf/Research/Olga_Khvostunova__Corruption_of_the_Fourth_Estate.pdf.

Figure 3.10: Most Popular Russian TV Channels
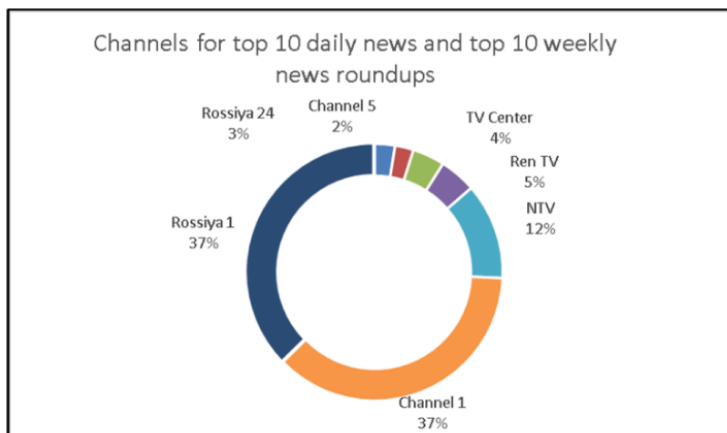
Source: Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018.

Figure 3.11: Top Television, Print, Internet, and Radio Media Sources

Source: Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018.

Figure 3.12: Most Popular Russian Media Sources, Level of Independence
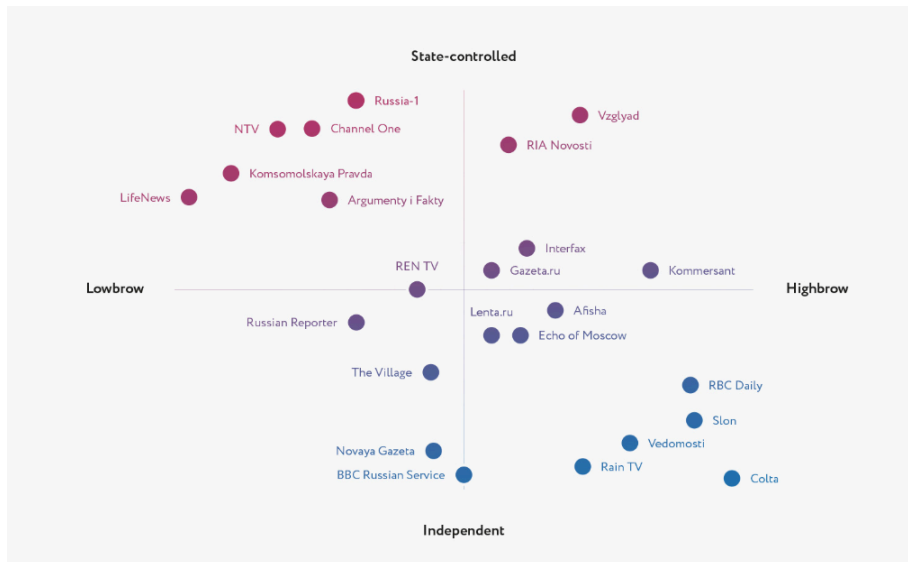
RUSSIAN MEDIA INFLUENCE IN THE "FAR ABROAD"

In 2016, the Kremlin released its foreign policy strategy document "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" and Putin's presidential decree titled "On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation." Both documents "emphasize Russia's aim to become a center of influence in today's world" and Moscow's push to create a "multipolar" world, as well as highlighting the "increasing threat posed by the United States and NATO due to their continued expansion eastward."[143] Given these stated concerns, the Kremlin has made a point of investing heavily in external messaging, which has taken various forms. However, much of this messaging is conveyed through Russian international media and broadcasting outlets that are state controlled – namely Sputnik and RT. Putin's Administration directly shapes Russian external media – and arguably internal – strategy in order to ensure that Russian international media accords with Russian foreign policy objectives. Putin himself "selectively exercises personal leadership, known as 'manual control' (or ручное управление), when Russia's political system, his personal legitimacy, or Russia's national security are at stake."[144] The Kremlin's oversight in Russian international media can most clearly be seen through Russia's most successful international media endeavor, RT.

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[143] Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018: 18.
[144] Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Kathleen. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making." CNA Analysis & Solutions, 2018: iv.

RT, originally called Russia Today, was established in 2005 as a subsidiary of RIA Novosti, one of the largest state-run news broadcasters operating in Russia.[145] When President Putin initially founded the media outlet, it had a budget of approximately $30 million and operated in English, Arabic, and Spanish. By 2010, this figure had swelled to $300 million.[146,147] Led by Margarita Simonyan, RT was started to not only "improve Russia's image abroad," but to also "break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon global information streams," in the words of Putin himself.[148] Simonyan has contested claims that RT is nothing more than "a platform for Kremlin messaging" and a "propaganda bullhorn for Putin," as many Westerners have alleged; rather, Simonyan argues that "No one shows an objective reality. The Western media are not objective, reality-based news sources."[149] Moreover, Simonyan has repeatedly pushed the narrative that RT is nothing more than a publicly funded media outlet, much like BBC, Deutsche Welle, or VOA. Russian officials maintain the same line, arguing that RT provides a much-needed alternative to the homogeneity of Western media. Disinformation specialist Peter Pomerantsev contests this claim, however, stating that the aim of RT is "to inundate the viewer with theories about Western plots, to keep them dazed and confused."[150] In 2017, RT was forced to register as

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[145] Pisnia, Natalka. "Why has RT registered as a foreign agent with the US?" *BBC News*, November 15, 2017. https:// www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41991683.

[146] Comparatively, BBC's International Service had a budget of approximately $376 million as of 2014.

[147] Pisnia, Natalka. "Why has RT registered as a foreign agent with the US?" *BBC News*, November 15, 2017. https:// www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41991683.

[148] Rutenberg, Jim. "RT, Sputnik and Russia's New Theory of War." *The New York Times*, September 13, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/magazine/rt-sputnik-and-russias-new-theory-of-war.html.

[149] Shuster, Simon. "Putin's On-Air Army." *Time Magazine*, March 16, 2015. http://web.b.ebsco host.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu:2050/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=603da415-08d3-4fcc-b4a4-01f4602386e6%40pdc-v-sessmgr05.

[150] *Ibid.*

a foreign agent with the US government due to RT executives' unwillingness to disclose finances, a list of board members, or show proof that RT operates independently of the Kremlin.[151] Similarly, RT was sanctioned in the UK by Ofcom following repeated breaches of impartiality rules in the broadcasting code.[152]

Assessing RT's reach is quite difficult considering its lack of transparency regarding operations. However, there is some existing data. In a 2015 Ipsos study, RT's weekly audience in the US was estimated to be eight million. A Nielsen report "commissioned in 2014 determined that almost three million people watch *RT* on a weekly basis across seven of the largest US metropolitan areas (Washington DC, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Diego) – more than watch *Deutsche Welle, France 24,* or *Euronews*."[153] Additionally, a 2016 comScore study estimated that the network's total monthly audience was approximately 49 million people worldwide. It should be noted that both the Ipsos study and the comScore study were commissioned and approved for release by RT, so these numbers are suspect. What we do know is that RT has had considerable success on platforms like YouTube, where clips from years ago can live on. RT began posting videos to YouTube in March 2007 and uploads

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[151] Pisnia, Natalka. "Why has RT registered as a foreign agent with the US?" *BBC News*, November 15, 2017. https:// www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41991683.

[152] Halliday, Josh. "BBC World Service Fears Losing Information War as Russia Today Ramps up Pressure."*The Guardian*, December 21, 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/dec/ 21/bbc-world-service-information-war-russia-today; Waterson, Jim. "RT Guilty of Breaching Broadcasting Code in Salisbury Aftermath." *The Guardian*, December 20, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/dec/20/rt-guilty-breaching-broadcasting-code-salisbury-novichok-aftermath.

[153] Richter, Monika. "What We Know About RT (Russia Today)." *European Values*, September 10, 2017: 32-33.

approximately 13 videos per day in English (see Figure 3.13).[154] Even so, RT's reach is contested, and it is highly unlikely that RT has the ability to sway worldwide public opinion on a mass scale. However, if RT is guilty of planting and disseminating disinformation, as US officials have claimed, then reaching everyone is not a priority; it is enough to plant the seeds of disinformation and institutional distrust and watch them grow.

Figure 3.13: RT Viewers, Subscribers, and Followers

Note: Figures are for networks' primary YouTube channels and social-media accounts.
Sources: YouTube; Facebook; Twitter   THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
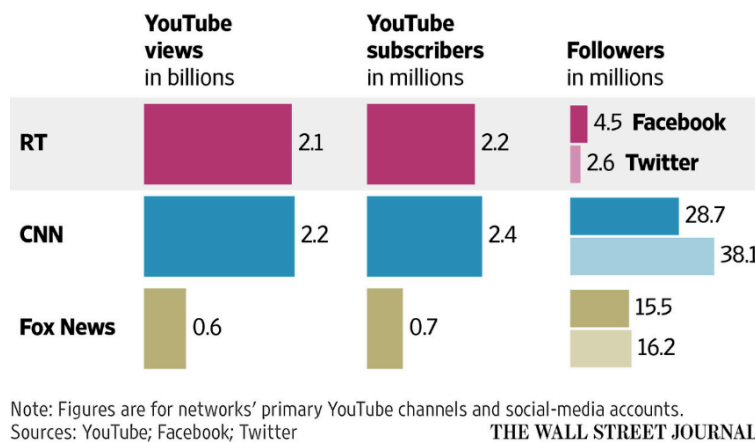
Source: Nicas, Jack. "Russia State News Outlet RT Thrives on Youtube, Facebook." *Wall Street Journal*, October 23, 2017. https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-state-news-outlet-rt-thrives-on-youtube-facebook-1508808937?mod=article_inline.

RUSSIAN MEDIA INFLUENCE IN THE "NEAR ABROAD"

Like the Russian Federation, many post-Soviet states experienced a period of "diversification in terms of media content and ownership" in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union.[155] However, also similar to that of the Russian Federation,

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154 Wells, Georgia. "Twitter Overstated Number of Users for Three Years: Social Media Company Says it Will Remove Advertising from its Site from Two Russian Media Outlets." *The Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2017. https://www.wsj.com/articles/twitter-overstated-number-of-users-for-three-years-1509015657.

155 Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 16.

media diversification in many of these countries soon gave way to an "unprecedent, dangerous level" of commercialization and monopolization, according historians Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle.[156] To varying degrees, dreams of media democratization in the post-Soviet space thus ceded to disillusionment and a "broad consensus that post-Soviet media – particularly the dominant media, television – have helped to reconsolidate elite power rather than empower citizens."[157] This situation has become particularly dire in authoritarian or "mild authoritarian" states such as Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.[158] Even in states deemed free by media monitoring organizations such as Freedom House (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) or partly free (Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine), Russian media influence remains extremely high. For example, even among EU-member Baltic states the Russophone First Baltic Channel remains extremely popular.[159]

In a survey conducted by the Rand Corporation, one Latvian respondent noted that non-Russia-based entertainment is "few and far between" and that many Latvians "are still watching Russian TV because it is well-funded. [Russia] gives you RT for nothing [and, with it,] you get your dollop of Russian propaganda."[160] This statement points to one of the key explanatory factors behind the continued consumption of Russian media in post-Soviet

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[156] Rollberg, Peter and Marlene Laruelle. "Introduction: Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 7-8.

[157] Rollberg, Peter and Marlene Laruelle. "Introduction: Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 8.

[158] Klyukanov, Igor E. and Galina V. Sinekopova. "Theorizing about the Press in Post-Soviet Societies." Kumar, Shanti. "Media, Communication, and Postcolonial Theory." In *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Robert S. Fortner and P. Mark Fackler. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014: 890.

[159] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 66-67.

[160] *Ibid.*

states: production quality. Due to both economies of scale and the Kremlin's commitment to providing government subsidies to pro-Moscow media outlets, the production value of Russian television is much higher than any local alternatives in the post-Soviet space.[161]

Paired with a high production value, Russian media also succeeds in post-Soviet states due to the continued dominance of the Russian language and its role as a regional lingua franca.[162] For example, a 2019 Caucasus Barometer poll found that only 13% of Georgians and 6% of Armenians did not have a basic command of Russian.[163] While most post-Soviet states have emphasized or even instituted policies regarding the use of regional or national languages, the Russian language continues to serve as a bond between post-Soviet states and Russian media consumption helps preserve this bond.[164] In this way, the Russian language serves as a causal factor in the continued consumption of Russian media in post-Soviet countries, while the continued consumption of Russian media ensures a basic level of Russian proficiency among post-Soviet audiences. This trend is particularly strong in countries boasting large Russian-identifying or Russian-speaking minority groups, as is the case in many post-Soviet states.[165] Russian media also succeeds among these populations by playing on or fabricating Soviet nostalgia, which in turn often translates to pro-Russian sentiment.[166]

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[161] Rollberg, Peter and Marlene Laruelle. "Introduction: Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 11.

[162] *Ibid.*

[163] Caucasus Research Resource Center. "Caucasus Barometer 2019 Armenia." https://Caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019am/codebook/; Caucasus Research Resource Center. "Caucasus Barometer 2019 Georgia." https://caucas usbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/codebook/.

[164] Rotaru, Vasile. "Force Attraction? How Russia is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the 'Near Abroad.'" *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, 1 (2018): 38.

[165] Vlad, Tudor, Lee B. Becker, and Jack Snyder. "Politics of International Media Rankings." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 16.

[166] Rotaru, Vasile. "Force Attraction? How Russia is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the 'Near Abroad.'" *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, 1 (2018): 39.

The effect of Russian media consumption on democratic outcomes varies by country and attendant cultural and geopolitical factors. In many post-Soviet states, Russian media narratives are boldest leading up to or during elections. One of the clearest examples of such instrumentalization took place in Belarus in 2010 with the broadcasting of the documentary *The Godfather*, produced by Gazprom-owned NTV, during a tense period between Putin and the Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The documentary depicted Lukashenka as "an unscrupulous dictator committed to staying in power at any cost," paying particular attention to human rights violations perpetrated by the Lukashenka-led Belarusian state.[167] The documentary was pulled from NTV following a reconciliation between Putin and Lukashenka, with NTV reversing its portrayal of Lukashenka entirely. Such reversals are common among Russian media narratives, which often frame events in an entirely different way than local or international media outlets or feature audio or video recordings – known as "deep fakes" – altered to make individuals appear to do or say things they never did or said.[168] These media manipulation efforts are usually propagated by Russian-affiliated media outlets such as NTV, RT, and Sputnik before being further disseminated by trolls and bots online, and ultimately being picked up by news aggregators that are not explicitly pro-Russia (for an example, see Figure 3.14).[169]

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[167] Rotaru, Vasile. "Force Attraction? How Russia is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the 'Near Abroad.'" *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, 1 (2018): 40.

[168] Bowyer, Anthony Clive. *Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia.* Arlington: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019: 3.

[169] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 12.

Figure 3.14: Russian Media Narrative Dissemination by News Aggregators
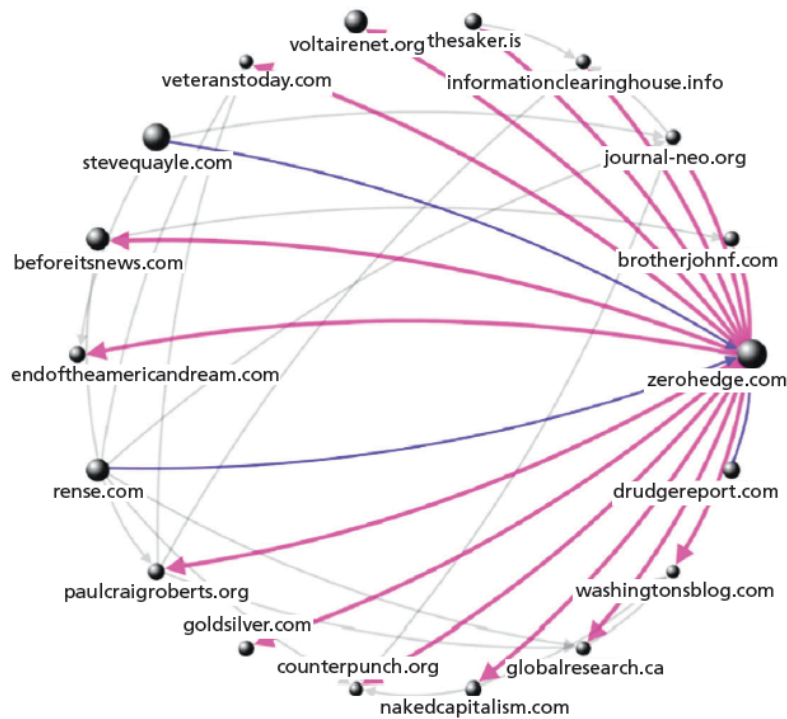
Source: Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe. Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 13.

CONCLUSION

While this chapter provides an overview of the post-Soviet media environment, it is by no means exhaustive. On its own, the Russian media climate is complex, neither entirely authoritarian nor partly free. Factoring in other post-Soviet states only complicates this landscape, particularly considering the wide range of governance models and cultural pressures at work in each of these states. However, all of these states have a shared Soviet history which has shaped their respective media systems – and, by extension, their levels of democratization. Moreover, all of these states have been affected by the internal and

external media developments of the Russian state. Such effects of Russian media on post-Soviet media environments are explored more fully in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 4: Methods

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3 by presenting an analysis of trends in media consumption in post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine. More specifically, this study builds upon the important work conducted by media-monitoring institutions such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, and IREX by providing a much-needed understanding of Russian media consumption in these states. This analysis provides a clearer picture of media freedom and democratization, as well as Russian media interference in Georgia and Ukraine. While this study only considers two post-Soviet states, both Georgia and Ukraine boast media environments that have been uniquely shaped by Russia's military actions in separatist regions, as well as Russia's continued occupation of these separatist regions. As such, the Georgian and Ukrainian media spaces provide insight into the vulnerabilities of post-Soviet media environments, even those that have been deemed "partly free" by media organizations such as Freedom House. Additionally, analyzing media consumption habits in countries whose sovereignty has been so openly violated by the Russian Federation provides a better understanding of Moscow's instrumentalization of media in regions of territorial or strategic interest to the Kremlin.

MATERIALS USED

This project utilizes preexisting data on media consumption from a variety of sources. In Georgia, the primary data I analyze was collected by Tri Media Intelligence (TMI), a Georgian TV audience measuring company based in Tbilisi. TMI collects data on "social and demographic characteristics of the population, a description of TV equipment,

and…on the TV environment."[170] My analysis supplements this data with surveys conducted by Georgian Opinion Research Business International (GORBI), the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), the European Union for Georgia, and the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC). In addition, this study builds upon media freedom assessments conducted by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), as well as other reports and articles created by academics and non-governmental organizations with regional expertise.

In Ukraine, the primary data I analyze was collected through a USAID-funded 2018 national survey on media consumption in Ukraine which was conducted by the Ukraine-based survey company InMind and overseen by Internews. I supplement this data with numerous media-monitoring surveys conducted by the Council of Europe, as well as data collected through the RSF and Institute of Mass Information-funded project "Media Ownership Monitor Ukraine." As with the Georgia chapter, this chapter builds upon media freedom assessments conducted by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders (RSF), as well as other reports and articles created by academics and non-governmental organizations with regional expertise.

SCOPE OF STUDY

As noted previously, the post-Soviet media environment is far from homogenous. Each post-Soviet state is unique in its cultural, socioeconomic, and geopolitical strengths and constraints. However, this study aims to advance understanding of media consumption and media democratization in this space by focusing on two post-Soviet states which have been targeted through military incursions and information warfare by the Russian

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[170] Tri Media Intelligence. "How We Measure." Accessed August 1, 2020. https://www.tmi. ge/en/pages/3.

Federation. Thus, though this study is limited to providing an overview of two unique post-Soviet states, the findings of this project contribute to the existing literature by providing insight into how Russia instrumentalizes media, how post-Soviet audiences interact with this media, and how the interaction between Russian media narratives and post-Soviet audiences affects our understandings of media democratization in the region.

Chapter 5: Media Consumption and Media Democratization in Georgia

The former Head of the European Union Delegation to Georgia once remarked that "being in Georgia is like dancing the tango – two steps forward, one step back."[171] Goran Eklund worked in Georgia throughout the first decade of the 21st century, during which time he watched the small Eurasian country transform from a "failed state" in which an EU Delegation staff member was murdered and an EU expert kidnapped, to a nation consumed by democratic fervor during the Rose Revolution of 2003.[172] A few years later, this same state would transform yet again, this time under the pressures of a war it could not win and the subsequent long-term occupation of 20% of its territory by Russian and separatist forces.[173] After witnessing such turbulence, it is not difficult to understand Goran Eklund's description of life in Georgia as a dance consisting of both leaps toward democratic outcomes and historical, socioeconomic, and geopolitical restraints that inevitably prevent democracy from continually advancing.

This statement is even more true when it comes to the Georgian media landscape, which has been described as one of the freest media spaces in the post-Soviet world, but remains highly partisan, biased, and rife with ultra-nationalist narratives which serve as a vehicle for pro-Moscow propaganda.[174] Adding to Freedom House and RSF's assessment

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[171] *Tabula*. "Per Goran Eklund: Being in Georgia is like dancing the Tango — two steps forward, one step backward, two steps forward, one step backward…" Published October 4, 2010. http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/69982-per-goran-eklund-being-in-georgia-is-like-dancing-the-tango-two-steps-forward-one-step.

[172] *Ibid.*

[173] Kandelaki, Giorgi. "Russia's Influence in Georgia has Grown Since the 2008 War." *New Europe.* Updated August 23, 2019. https://www.neweurope.eu/article/russias-influence-in-georgia-has-grown-since-the-2008-war/.

[174] BBC. "Georgia Profile – Media." Published December 11, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/ news/world-europe-17303294.

of the Georgian media landscape, the Georgian media is only "partly free."[175]

Understanding the Georgian nationalist bent of recent media consumption provides

valuable insight into understanding the stagnation of media democratization and the

continued success of pro-Kremlin rhetoric in a Russian-occupied country, thereby

providing a fuller picture of Georgian media freedom.

OVERVIEW OF THE GEORGIAN POLITICAL SECTOR

Currently, nearly all Georgian politicians voice support for continued

democratization and the holding of regular and competitive elections.[176] However, this pro-

democratic rhetoric is often at odds with the "lack of democratic political culture" within

this sphere, according to the Director of the Tbilisi-based Georgian Institute of Politics,

Kornely Kakachia.[177] The Georgian political scene is dominated by populism and party

politics defined not by policy stances, but by political personalities. Kakachia also notes

that the Georgian political scene is overflowing with political parties, overwhelming voters

and leaving them no choice but to base voting decisions on the basis of personalities.[178]

This trend is common in post-Communist states, many of which can be considered

"competitive authoritarian" entities simultaneously defined by authoritarian tendencies,

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[175] Freedom House. "Georgia." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Georgia/freedom-world/2020.

[176] Kakachia, Kornely, Tamara Pataraia, and Michael Cecire. "Networked Apathy: Georgian Party Politics and the Role of Social Media." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 171; Freedom House. "Georgia." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Georgia/freedom-world/2020.

[177] Kakachia, Kornely, Tamara Pataraia, and Michael Cecire. "Networked Apathy: Georgian Party Politics and the Role of Social Media." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 171.

[178] Kakachia, Kornely, Tamara Pataraia, and Michael Cecire. "Networked Apathy: Georgian Party Politics and the Role of Social Media." In *Mass Media in the Post-Soviet World*, edited by Peter Rollberg and Marlene Laruelle. Stuttgart: iBidem Press, 2018: 172.

political pluralism, and the presence of oligarchic actors who exercise considerable influence over policymaking decisions.[179]

RELATIONS BETWEEN GEORGIA AND RUSSIA

Even prior to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Georgian public political consensus was decidedly pro-Western – or, at the very least, not pro-Russian.[180] This characteristic of Georgian political life was solidified following the 2008 Russian incursion into Georgian territory that began the brief Russo-Georgian war. Led by former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the Kremlin defended its violation of Georgian sovereignty on "humanitarian grounds," alleging that the Georgian government had been committing genocide in South Ossetia.[181] This claim was later determined by the EU-led Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) to be unfounded.[182] Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy negotiated a ceasefire that remains in effect, although Moscow has yet to comply with the requirement to end its occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and, instead, has built or expanded Russian military bases in these regions.[183] Tensions between Georgia and Russia have remained frozen since 2008, with flare-ups such as the 2019 parliamentary protests occurring intermittently.[184] Relations between Georgia and

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[179] Freedom House. "Georgia." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Georgia/freedom-world/2020.

[180] Tsitsikashvili, Mariam. *Kremlin Watch: Comparing Lessons Learned From Countering Russian Disinformation in Georgia and the Czech Republic.* Published 2019: 3.

[181] Sergey Lavrov, "A Conversation with Sergey Lavrov," Interview by David Remnick. Council on Foreign Relations, September 24, 2008, Audio, 13:35, https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-sergey-lavrov.

[182] European Union, "Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia," (December 2, 2008): 6.

[183] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

[184] Thousands of protesters flooded the streets of Tbilisi to protest Russian interference following the June 20, 2019 attempt by a Russian parliamentarian to preside over a Georgian Parliamentary session on Orthodoxy.

Russia are further complicated by the fact that Russia remains Georgia's largest export destination. In 2017, 14.1% (274 million USD) of Georgian products were exported to Russia, a number that represented a significant increase from 2016.[185,186]

Currently, the only openly pro-Moscow political party in Georgia is the Alliance of Patriots. Established in 2012, the Alliance of Patriots is characterized by its populist and nationalist rhetoric, as well as its rejection of pro-Western values. Since 2017, Alliance of Patriots leaders have openly ignored the frozen nature of Russo-Georgian diplomatic relations and have frequented the Russian Duma, arguing that both Tbilisi and the West alone are to blame for the continued deadlock between Russia and Georgia.[187] Aside from the Alliance of Patriots, most Kremlin-sympathizing Georgian politicians hide behind an ultra-nationalist, pro-Georgian façade. These political parties often espouse ultra-nationalist, Eurosceptic approaches to foreign and domestic policy alike (see Figure 5.1).

The Democratic Movement-United Georgia was the first party to adopt a "neutral, block-free" approach to Georgia's potential integration into NATO, citing the potentiality for this shift to result in the definitive loss of Russian-occupied territories as the foundation for their anti-NATO stance.[188] Parties that adopt the "block-free" position also emphasize the need for Georgia to ally itself with Moscow in order to secure de-occupation. However, it should be noted that the anti-Western political position, although rapidly shifting towards the center, remains on the fringe of the Georgian political sector. As of 2019, approximately

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[185] In 2016, Russia was Georgia's third largest export destination at 132 million USD after Turkey and China.
[186] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

[187] Tsitsikashvili, Mariam. *Kremlin Watch: Comparing Lessons Learned From Countering Russian Disinformation in Georgia and the Czech Republic.* Published 2019: 16, 18.
[188] Tsitsikashvili, Mariam. *Kremlin Watch: Comparing Lessons Learned From Countering Russian Disinformation in Georgia and the Czech Republic.* Published 2019: 15.

70 percent of Georgians supported a potential EU or NATO membership bid while firmly rejecting pro-Russian stances, as well as the politicians that have adopted them.[189] Even so, political parties with platforms centered on Georgian, Eurasian, and Orthodox identity have gained traction within the Georgian political arena despite holding neutral or negative positions on NATO or the EU.[190]

Figure 5.1: Anti-Western Messages by Political Party
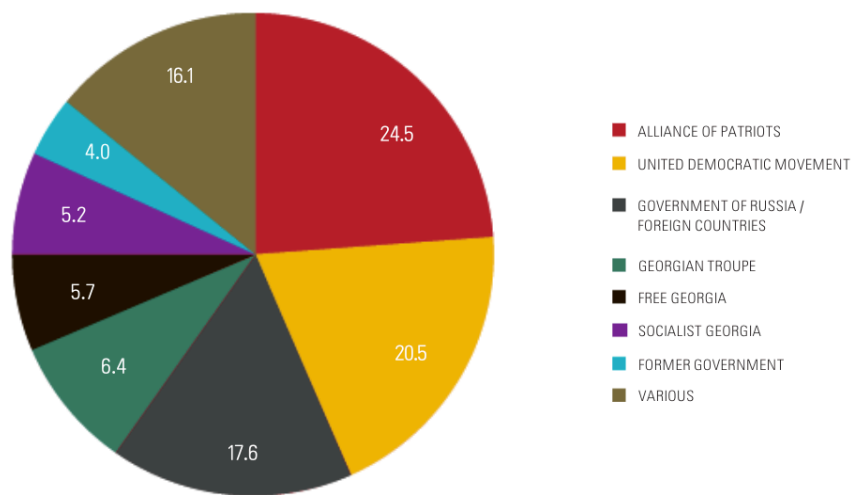
Source: Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda 2018.* Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2019 : 26.

THE GEORGIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Within the region of Eurasia, Georgia features comparably liberal media laws and policies. Direct state censorship is absent, and the media market is relatively diverse in terms of political opinion.[191] In fact, Georgian media freedom and pluralism has increased in recent years. In 2005, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili decriminalized

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[189] *Ibid.*

[190] Tsitsikashvili, Mariam. *Kremlin Watch: Comparing Lessons Learned From Countering Russian Disinformation in Georgia and the Czech Republic.* Published 2019: 3.

[191] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

libel and enacted the Law on Freedom of Speech. Following continued calls for expanded media freedoms, the Georgian Dream party later amended the 2005 law to include "must-carry and must-offer rules, which protect television channels from possible pressures coming from cable operators" and, in 2015, Georgia converted completely to digital broadcasting. [192,193] Additionally, the Georgian media scene has welcomed the creation of several new TV stations such as TV Pirveli in recent years. Currently, the Georgian media sphere includes 92 television channels, 51 radio stations, and approximately 300 print publications.[194] In 2018 and 2019, the top four television channels were: Imedi TV (privately owned, pro-government), Rustavi-2 (privately owned, previously pro-opposition but, following a change in ownership, now pro-government), Georgian Dream Studio (GDS, privately owned, affiliated with the Saakashvili-opposed Georgian Dream Party), and TV Pirveli (privately owned entertainment channel).[195] Although several Russia-based television stations feature in the top 30 most popular television channels in Georgia, the majority of viewers choose to watch Georgia-based television channels (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). Regardless, Georgian viewers have a relatively high level of choice in terms of media for this region and for post-Soviet states more broadly.

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[192] Shah, Sanjana. "Silencing the Georgian People: Freedom of Expression, Government Interference, and Structural Constraints on Georgia's Media Environment." In *Georgia in Transition: State-Building and Democratization in the Caucasus*, edited by Robert C. Austin. Toronto: University of Toronto International Course Module, 2019: 112.

[193] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

[194] Shah, Sanjana. "Silencing the Georgian People: Freedom of Expression, Government Interference, and Structural Constraints on Georgia's Media Environment." In *Georgia in Transition: State-Building and Democratization in the Caucasus*, edited by Robert C. Austin. Toronto: University of Toronto International Course Module, 2019: 112.

[195] Tri Media Intelligence. "Russian TV Channel Viewership in Georgia." July 2019 (Unpublished); BBC. "Georgia Profile – Media." Published December 11, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/ news/world-europe-17303294.

However, as with many post-Soviet media environments, the Georgian media landscape features a high degree of politicization and polarization.[196] Georgian media outlets are extremely partisan. Objective, fact-based journalism is the exception rather than the rule.[197] Media polarization has grown particularly intense during election periods, according to a media monitoring project undertaken by the EU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) during the 2018 presidential election. The report stated that:

> In 2018 this polarisation reached its peak, especially during the 2nd round. In 2016 and 2017, the partisan approach was expressed in the positive coverage of a candidate, while in 2018 the bias was revealed in the negative coverage of unwanted candidates that was accompanied with cases of violation of professional ethics and manipulation with facts. On one side, there was *Rustavi 2* involved in the negative coverage of Salome Zurabishvili, the candidate supported by the ruling party; whereas on the other side there were Imedi, Public Broadcaster and Obiektivi, involved in negative coverage of Grigol Vashadze.[198]

Although many global media environments – including the US – feature heavily polarized media landscapes, the Georgian media environment is more limited than the American mediascape and, in contrast to the US, Georgian media outlets are often largely funded by politicians or political parties rather than supported by their own revenues. [199]

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[196] Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media. "Georgia." Accessed July 15, 2020. https://medialandscapes.org/country/Georgia.
[197] Eurasia Partnership Foundation. *The Georgian Media: Popular Assessments and Development Perspectives.* Tbilisi: Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2012: 4.
[198] Kavtaradze, Lasha. "Media and Polarization in Georgia." Democracy Reporting International, June 3, 2019. https://democracy-reporting.org/media-and-polarisation/.
[199] *Ibid.*

Table 5.1: Top 30 Channels, 2018

#	Channels	Rtg(000)	Rtg%	Share	AvDRch%	AvMRch%
	Period >>			2018 Year		
1	IMEDI	66.956	4.282	24.520	38.501	88.005
2	RUSTAVI 2	55.865	3.573	20.461	39.216	88.382
3	GDS	9.584	0.613	3.510	17.964	75.228
4	TV PIRVELI	8.513	0.544	3.118	18.482	74.586
5	MESAME	7.812	0.499	2.860	17.231	71.611
6	CHANNEL 1	7.797	0.499	2.856	18.631	77.337
7	MARAO	3.738	0.239	1.369	13.063	65.515
8	RTR PLANETA	2.761	0.177	1.011	5.626	33.265
9	MAESTRO	2.564	0.164	0.939	10.831	61.210
10	PALITRA NEWS	2.406	0.154	0.881	10.522	60.884
11	OBIEKTIVI	2.348	0.150	0.860	9.154	56.865
12	SILK UNIVERSAL	2.336	0.149	0.856	7.377	50.010
13	IBERIA	2.115	0.135	0.775	8.567	55.174
14	ERTSULOVNEBA	1.747	0.112	0.640	8.470	56.272
15	CHANNEL 1 RUSSIA	1.704	0.109	0.624	4.595	29.247
16	AJARA	1.417	0.091	0.519	9.016	60.388
17	KARTULI ARKHI	1.342	0.086	0.492	6.849	48.518
18	1 GASARTOBI	1.305	0.083	0.478	3.649	26.386
19	KAVKASIA	1.273	0.081	0.466	8.074	54.180
20	TNT COMEDY	0.970	0.062	0.355	2.352	23.222
21	TV 1000 ACTION	0.904	0.058	0.331	3.198	23.579
22	KINOSEMIA	0.876	0.056	0.321	3.059	25.066
23	MULT	0.870	0.056	0.319	2.206	25.284
24	ENKI-BENKI	0.680	0.043	0.249	2.901	32.683
25	STARVISION	0.472	0.030	0.173	4.212	37.606
26	BASTI-BUBU	0.450	0.029	0.165	1.794	23.003
27	TV 1000	0.430	0.027	0.157	3.414	28.550
28	MUSIC BOX	0.378	0.024	0.139	2.993	36.211
29	STEREO+	0.364	0.023	0.133	3.650	38.642
30	NICKELODEON	0.353	0.023	0.129	2.036	25.734

NOTE: Russian channels in blue
Source: Tri Media Intelligence. "Russian TV Channel Viewership in Georgia." July 2019 (Unpublished).

Table 5.2: Top 30 Television Channels, 2019

#	Channels	Rtg(000)	Rtg%	Share	AvDRch%	AvMRch%
	Period >>			Jan-Jun. 2019 Year		
1	IMEDI	66.203	4.331	23.543	40.928	88.731
2	RUSTAVI 2	54.454	3.563	19.365	38.863	88.981
3	GDS	12.038	0.788	4.281	20.054	76.903
4	TV PIRVELI	9.869	0.645	3.508	20.977	77.216
5	CHANNEL 1	6.438	0.421	2.291	19.271	76.308
6	MARAO	4.419	0.289	1.571	14.638	67.901
7	MESAME	3.358	0.220	1.193	12.735	64.539
8	SILK UNIVERSAL	3.344	0.219	1.192	10.144	59.404
9	PALITRA NEWS	3.014	0.197	1.072	12.290	62.912
10	MAESTRO	2.783	0.182	0.990	11.872	63.884
11	RTR PLANETA	2.674	0.175	0.951	5.896	34.309
12	OBIEKTIVI	2.525	0.165	0.897	9.795	59.379
13	ERTSULOVNEBA	2.235	0.146	0.795	9.092	57.217
14	CHANNEL 1 RUSSIA	1.886	0.123	0.670	4.493	29.670
15	1 GASARTOBI	1.811	0.119	0.644	4.323	32.056
16	AJARA	1.452	0.095	0.517	9.544	61.881
17	KAVKASIA	1.335	0.087	0.475	8.479	54.551
18	TV 1000 ACTION	0.994	0.065	0.352	3.287	23.293
19	KARTULI ARKHI	0.975	0.064	0.347	5.273	40.975
20	TNT COMEDY	0.780	0.051	0.277	2.187	23.081
21	KINOSEMIA	0.675	0.044	0.240	2.668	24.573
22	ENKI-BENKI	0.530	0.035	0.188	3.084	33.880
23	TV 1000	0.525	0.034	0.187	3.695	27.218
24	CARTOON NETWORK	0.461	0.030	0.165	1.644	21.533
25	NICKELODEON	0.437	0.029	0.155	2.163	26.850
26	MULT	0.404	0.026	0.143	2.065	25.714
27	TV 1000 RUSKOE KINO	0.380	0.025	0.135	2.752	25.592
28	CHANNEL 2	0.374	0.025	0.134	3.461	43.753
29	BASTI-BUBU	0.354	0.023	0.126	1.975	25.804
30	STEREO+	0.324	0.021	0.115	3.623	38.837

NOTE: Russian channels in blue
Source: Tri Media Intelligence. "Russian TV Channel Viewership in Georgia." July 2019 (Unpublished).

MEDIA FREEDOM ASSESSMENTS OF GEORGIA

According to BBC, the Georgian "media environment is among the freest in the former Soviet sphere. The constitution provides for freedom of speech and journalists often criticize officials."[200] Even so, Freedom House downgraded Georgia's independent media score in 2018.[201] As of 2020, Freedom House has ranked Georgia at 61/100 and considers Georgian media to be "partly free," with freedom and independence of the media rated a 2.0 out of 4.0.[202] The Freedom House report also notes that "Georgia's media environment is pluralistic but frequently partisan. The public broadcaster has been accused of favoring the government in its coverage."[203] Likewise, MSF noted that the Georgian media landscape was "pluralist but not yet independent" due to the high level of polarization and pro-government content.[204]

Both Freedom House and MSF explained Georgia's demoted press freedom assessment by pointing to the change in ownership of the popular channel *Rustavi 2*. Previously considered a pro-opposition media source, *Rustavi 2* was subject to a long-running dispute regarding ownership of the station. Georgian courts ruled that ownership should be transferred to the government-aligned former owner, Kibar Khalvashi. In July 2019, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upheld the Georgian court's

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[200] BBC. "Georgia Profile – Media." Published December 11, 2018. https://www.bbc.com/ news/world-europe-17303294.

[201] Shah, Sanjana. "Silencing the Georgian People: Freedom of Expression, Government Interference, and Structural Constraints on Georgia's Media Environment." In *Georgia in Transition: State-Building and Democratization in the Caucasus*, edited by Robert C. Austin. Toronto: University of Toronto International Course Module, 2019: 112.

[202] Freedom House. "Georgia." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Georgia/freedom-world/2020.

[203] *Ibid.*

[204] RSF: Reporters Without Borders. "Georgia." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://rsf.org/en/ Georgia.

decision.[205] Khalvashi, in turn, hired a new pro-government director, causing the majority of the staff to quit *Rustavi 2* and found their own station, Mtavari Arkhi (Main Channel). In both of their media freedom assessments, Freedom House and MSF lamented the loss of the opposition-aligned channel.

TRENDS IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN GEORGIA

A 2018 nationwide survey conducted by Tbilisi-based media-monitoring company Tri Media Intelligence (TMI) found that television remains the most popular medium for receiving news in Georgia, "with 89% of those over the age of 18 receiving their news from television," according to TMI and Georgian Opinion Research Business International (GORBI) founder Merab Pachulia (see Figure 5.2).[206] As Figure 5.3 illustrates, the medium audiences prefer varies by age, with 18-44 year olds consuming news via the internet at near equal rates as news via television. Today, 67% of the Georgian population has internet access, with 79% of urban populations and 53% having access.[207]

Figure 5.2: Which of the following sources do you use at least several times a week to get news and information about what is happening in Georgia? (%)

[205] Freedom House. "Georgia." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/Georgia/freedom-world/2020.

[206] Tri Media Intelligence. "TV or Internet?" Published May 4, 2020. https://www.tmi.ge/en/news/21; Pachulia, Merab. "Who will win next elections: Television or Internet?" *The Financial,* June 11, 2018. https://www.finchannel.com/opinion/73883-who-will-win-next-elections-television-or-internet.

[207] Pachulia, Merab. "Who will win next elections: Television or Internet?" *The Financial,* June 11, 2018. https://www.finchannel.com/opinion/73883-who-will-win-next-elections-television-or-internet.

Figure 5.3: Which of the following sources do you use at least several times a week to get news and information about what is happening in Georgia? (by age, %)
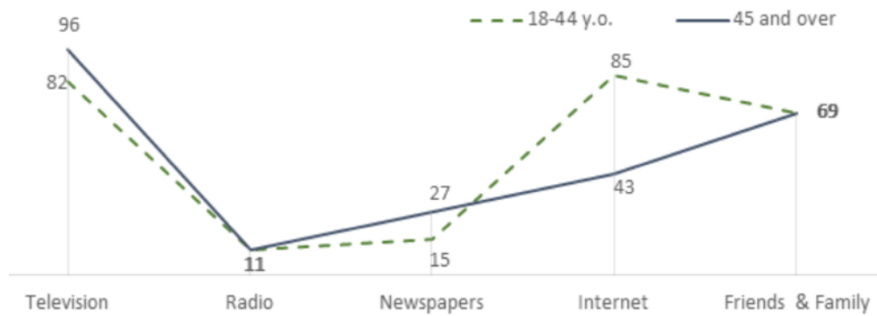
While internet consumption is increasing in Georgia, Pachulia predicts that elections will continue to depend on television consumption due to the fact that people over the age of 70, who largely depend on television for information, are most likely to vote in elections while the younger, internet-consuming generations are less likely to vote.[208] Moreover, a 2014 media literacy survey conducted by GORBI found that only 4.7% of the Georgian population reported "never" watching TV while 94.7% of Georgians reported watching at least one hour of television every day (see Table 5.3).[209]

Table 5.3: Hours Spent Watching Television Daily

1-3 hours	47
4-6 hours	34.4
6-8 hours	8.9
9 or more	4.4
I don't watch TV	4.7
Don't Know	0.6

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[208] *Ibid.*
[209]

Even so, trust in television is diminishing, with only 15% of those surveyed by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in 2019 reporting that television did a good or very good job of informing the Georgian public (see Figure 5.4), a number which has decreased from 19% in 2017.[210] This figure was only slightly higher when respondents were asked to consider their level of trust in media more broadly. Only 20% of Georgians responded that they "rather trusted" or "fully trusted" the media (see Figure 5.5).[211] Moreover, 42% of the Georgian population believes that "there is limited freedom of speech" and that the media is "biased" and "represents interests either of the government or the opposition."[212] Despite these expressed low levels of trust in media institutions, media consumption has not decreased and Georgian audiences continue to depend on Georgian media.

Figure 5.4: How Well Does Television Inform the Georgian Public?
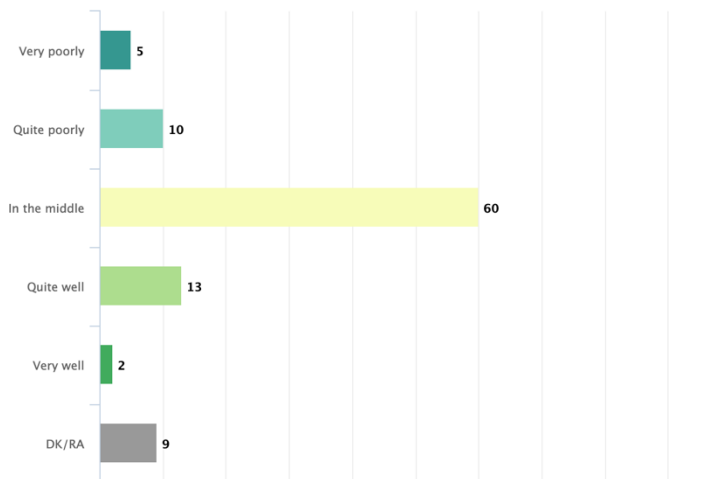
[210] Caucasus Research Resource Center. "Caucasus Barometer 2019 Georgia." https://caucas usbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/codebook/; Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media. "Georgia." Accessed July 15, 2020. https://medialandscapes.org/country/Georgia.

[211] *Ibid.*

[212] Eurasia Partnership Foundation. *The Georgian Media: Popular Assessments and Development Perspectives.* Tbilisi: Eurasia Partnership Foundation, 2012: 27.

Figure 5.5: Trust in Media
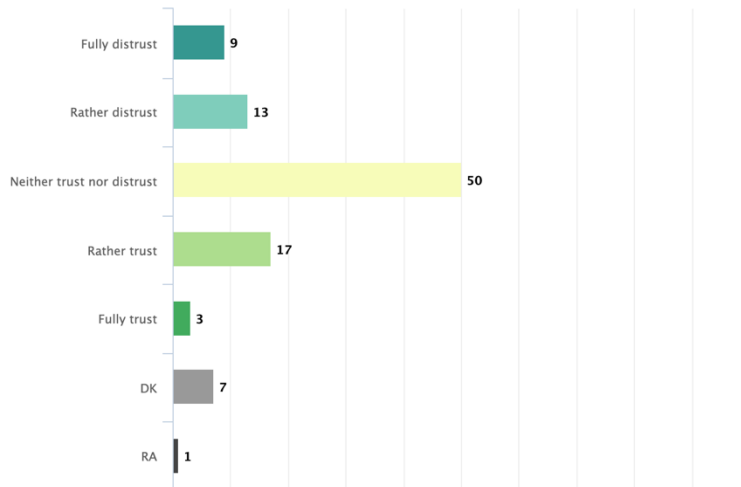
Russian Media Narratives and Georgian Audiences

Following the 2008 war, Georgian cable providers were ordered to stop broadcasting Russian channels. This directive lasted for nearly four years, with the Georgia Dream party formally removing this barrier in 2012.[213] Currently, over 50 Russian-language channels are available through the 119-channel package available through Global TV, while 90 Russian-language channels are available through the 222-channel package offered by Silknet.[214] Of these channels, consumption of RTR Planeta (Russian state-owned broadcaster) and Channel 1 Russia (Russian state-owned broadcaster) remains the

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[213] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.
[214] *Ibid.*

highest (see Figure 5.6). However, as Tables 5.1 and 5.2 demonstrated, Russia-based channel consumption lags behind the consumption of Georgia-based channels.

Figure 5.6: Russian-Language Channel Consumption
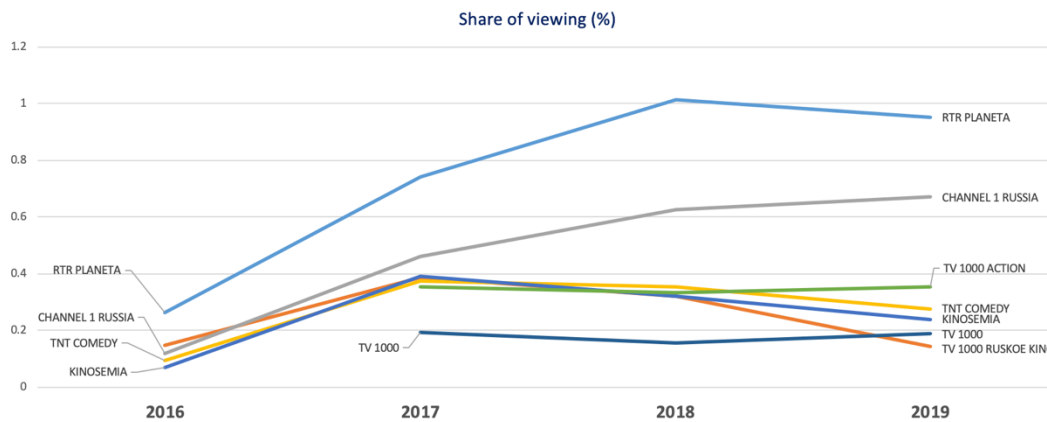
Source: Tri Media Intelligence. "Russian TV Channel Viewership in Georgia." July 2019 (Unpublished).

Within Georgia, the only directly Kremlin-funded media outlet in operation is the online platform Sputnik.[215] Most pro-Kremlin or Kremlin-originating disinformation narratives are actually channeled through Georgian "fringe" media outlets and through Facebook.[216] The Alliance of Patriots aligned channel TV Obiektivi (or Objective TV, the 11th and 12th most popular channel in Georgia in 2018 and 2019, respectively) often features anti-Western or pro-Kremlin disinformation narratives, such as the January 27, 2018 broadcast in which Obiektivi program host Valeri Kvaratskhelia introduced a Channel 1-prepared news report depicting the "downing of an American 'invisible' aircraft by Soviet weapons to emphasize US military weakness" as a factual news story.[217] Besides Obiektivi, Tbilisi-based NGO Media Development Fund (MDF) found that disinformation

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[215] *Ibid.*

[216] Tsitsikashvili, Mariam. *Kremlin Watch: Comparing Lessons Learned From Countering Russian Disinformation in Georgia and the Czech Republic.* Published 2019: 3.

[217] Tri Media Intelligence. "Russian TV Channel Viewership in Georgia." July 2019 (Unpublished); Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

or misinformation was published most frequently by Georgia and World, by the Facebook page Politicano, and by the Alliance of Patriots political party[218] Interestingly, pro-Kremlin disinformation narratives are often disseminated under the guise of ultra-nationalist, pro-Georgian, or anti-Western narratives. In some cases, these narratives were merely translated into Georgian before being broadcast or published, completely unaltered (see Figure 5.7).[219]

Figure 5.7: Georgian Outlets Broadcasting/Publishing Identical Russian Sources of Disinformation
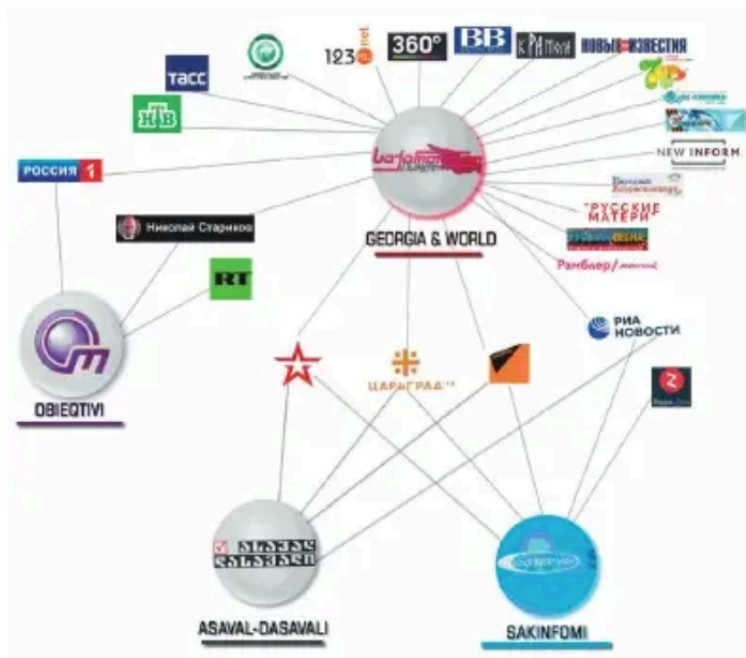
Source: Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda 2018.* Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2019 : 46.

MDF sorts this information by type (see Figure 5.8) and by content (see Figure 5.9). Examples of common misinformation narratives circulated include: the belief that

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[218] Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda 2018.* Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2019 : 47.
[219] *Ibid.*

Americans were testing Hepatitis C medications on Georgians (conspiracy); the belief that Stalin "brought back the national treasure taken by the government of the First Republic to the homeland" (fabrication of history); the idea that "70% of apartments in Tbilisi are bought by Iranians," thereby promoting suspicion surrounding visa-free travel (fabrication of statistics); the supposed occurrence of children being "taken away from homophobic parents in the Netherlands" and that a man who "raped crocodiles" had been arrested in the US (presenting satirical publication material as fact).[220]

Despite widespread efforts by USAID and EU-funded organizations and NGOs such as MDF to promote media literacy and Kremlin-based disinformation awareness, consumption of these "pro-Georgia," nationalist narratives remains high. Thus, there is a high degree of overlap between nationalist Georgian rhetoric and pro-Moscow rhetoric – ensuring the success of Russia-based disinformation narratives in Georgia.

Figure 5.8: Typology of Misinformation

TYPOLOGY OF MISINFORMATION	QUANTITY
Fake news / manipulation	82
Conspiracy theory	24
Fabrication of history	16
Fabrication of statistics	16
Fabrication of interview	12
Video manipulation	10
Photo manipulation	10
Presenting literary work / satirical publication as a real fact	7

Source: Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda 2018.* Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2019 : 39.

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[220] Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda 2018.* Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2019 : 41, 42, 43.

Figure 5.9: Anti-Western Messages by Media Outlets and Target
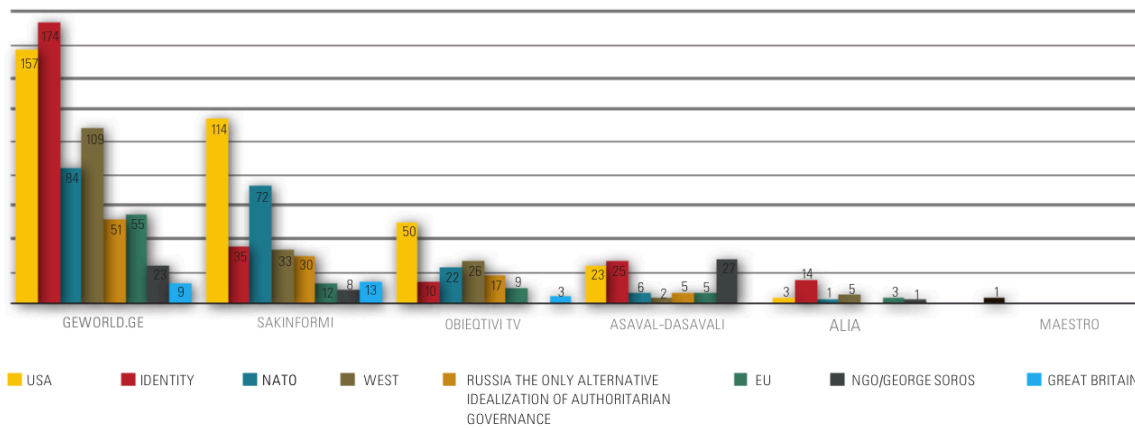
| | USA | IDENTITY | NATO | WEST | RUSSIA THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE IDEALIZATION OF AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNANCE | EU | NGO/GEORGE SOROS | GREAT BRITAIN |

Source: Kintsurashvili, Tamar. *Anti-Western Propaganda 2018.* Tbilisi: Media Development Foundation, 2019 : 19.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND MEDIA DEMOCRATIZATION IN GEORGIA

Russia-linked disinformation narratives succeed in post-Soviet Georgia not because Russian sympathies are high – quite the contrary, in fact. Few political parties are openly pro-Kremlin, knowing that to do so in a post-Soviet, Russian-occupied country would be political suicide. Moreover, consumption of Russia-based television is low, with Georgian viewers preferring to consume homegrown media. Instead, these disinformation narratives succeed because they are cloaked by ultra-nationalist, pro-Georgian rhetoric, thus explaining the continued consumption and dissemination of pro-Moscow propaganda under a different name – that of anti-Western rhetoric – in the Republic of Georgia.

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Chapter 6: Media Consumption and Media Democratization in Ukraine

A July 12, 2014 Channel One broadcast opened with the image of a young woman seated in a refugee camp tent facing a Channel One interviewer. The woman began to speak and the interviewer nodded sympathetically as the woman described the hellish scene she had witnessed, in which a young boy was crucified by the Ukrainian National Guard.[221] According to the woman, this horrible scene had unfolded in Slovyansk, located in Eastern Ukraine, following the Ukrainian National Guard's discovery that the boy's father was involved with a separatist militia. Following the boy's crucifixion, the woman stated that the National Guard troops had "strapped" the boy's mother "to a tank and dragged her three times around the central square."[222] Later, Channel One officials claimed that this woman's story was yet another "link in the endless chain of evidence" regarding the "fate of dozens of children torn by shells, shot while trying to escape" in the Eastern Ukraine conflict.[223] While the Russian state-sponsored media outlet had no images to support this story, the narrative sparked outrage in Russia and Ukraine alike. There was only one problem: the story was false.[224]

The woman, who had described in great detail the atrocity and the square in which this event had supposedly taken place, had never been to Slovyansk and had certainly never

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[221] First Channel. "Bezhenka iz Slavianska vspominaet, kak pri nei kaznili malen'kogo syna i zhenu opolchentsa" (Refugee from Slavyansk Recalls How She Witnessed the Execution of the Young Son and Wife of a Volunteer). Published July 12, 2014. http://www.1tv.ru /news/world/262978.

[222] First Channel. ""Zhurnalisty Pervogo otvechaiut na obvineniia vo lzhi v sviazi s siuzhetom pro ubiistvo rebenka v Slavianske" (Journalists of Channel One Answer Charges of Lying in Connection with the Report about the Murder of a Child in Slavyansk). Published December 21, 2014. http://www.1tv.ru/news/about /274369.

[223] *Ibid.*

[224] Rotaru, Vasile. "Force Attraction? How Russia is Instrumentalizing Its Soft Power Sources in the 'Near Abroad.'" *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, 1 (2018): 40.

witnessed a young boy's crucifixion at the hands of the Ukrainian National Guard.[225] When asked about the incident, Putin deferred to Channel One officials, who in turn defended the broadcast, stating that "just because they did not have evidence" of this incident did not mean that it did not happen, or that similar incidents of brutality against children were not being carried out by Ukrainian forces.[226] The Channel One officials emphasized the tragedies being perpetrated by the Ukrainian state, offhandedly expressing disgust for Ukrainian media by stating: "Why these shots and these tragedies do not interest those who call themselves opposition media is not for us to explain."[227]

In the years following Euromaidan and the eruption of conflict in Crimea and Donbas, such unsubstantiated media narratives became common and, for many people, these narratives initially seemed credible due to the concurrent outpouring of Ukrainian nationalism. The newfound ubiquity of extreme nationalist sentiment paved the way for the preliminary success of Russian disinformation in the Ukrainian media space and the consumption and acceptance of such pro-Moscow narratives. However, in more recent years, such blatant disinformation narratives propagated by the Russian state have bred widespread distrust of Russian media among Ukrainian audiences.[228] This trend, paired with the Ukrainian government's censorship of Russia-based media sources and nationwide media literacy initiatives, has reversed the hold of pro-Moscow propagandistic

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[225] First Channel. "Bezhenka iz Slavianska vspominaet, kak pri nei kaznili malen'kogo syna i zhenu opolchentsa" (Refugee from Slavyansk Recalls How She Witnessed the Execution of the Young Son and Wife of a Volunteer). Published July 12, 2014. http://www.1tv.ru /news/world/262978.
[226] First Channel. ""Zhurnalisty Pervogo otvechaiut na obvineniia vo lzhi v sviazi s siuzhetom pro ubiistvo rebenka v Slavianske" (Journalists of Channel One Answer Charges of Lying in Connection with the Report about the Murder of a Child in Slavyansk). Published December 21, 2014. http://www.1tv.ru/news/about /274369.
[227] *Ibid.*
[228] Cain, Geoffrey. "Ukraine's War on Russian Disinformation is a Lesson for America." *The New Republic.* Published March 29, 2019. https://newrepublic.com/article/153415 /ukraines-war-russian-disinformation-lesson-america.

narratives in the Ukrainian media space and thus secured the possibility of a more democratic media landscape in the future.

OVERVIEW OF THE UKRAINIAN POLITICAL SECTOR

Ukraine has experienced significant political upheaval since the eruption of the Euromaidan protests and the ouster of pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovych.[229] Sparked by the Ukrainian government's decision to halt an agreement with the EU, pro-Western Ukrainians flooded Kiev's independence square in November 2013 to protest ubiquitous government corruption, nondemocratic policies, and power politics.[230] Yanukovych's government was replaced with a pro-Western coalition of revolutionary forces, while previously powerful elites fled Ukraine.[231] The Russian Federation seized on this moment of turmoil to annex the Crimean peninsula and initiate unrest in Donbas (eastern Ukraine). Since 2014, Crimea has remained in Russian hands, while violent outbreaks of conflict are a common occurrence in Donbas.

Freedom House notes that a series of positive, democratic reforms have been instituted since Euromaidan, although "corruption remains endemic and initiatives to combat it are only partially implemented."[232] The major political parties consist of: Fatherland (conservative, pro-Western, "all-Ukrainian") led by Yuliya Tymoshenko; European Solidarity or BPP-Solidarity (liberal, pro-Western) led by former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko; Holos or Voice (liberal, pro-Western) led by Sviatoslav

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[229] Kofman, Michael, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer. "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2017: 1.

[230] *Ibid.*

[231] *Ibid.*

[232] Freedom House. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Ukraine/freedom-world/2020.

Vakarchuk; Opposition Bloc or OB (pro-Russian) led by Evgeny Murayev; Opposition Platform-For Life (pro-Russian); Radical (left-wing populist/nationalist) led by Oleh Lyashko; Self Reliance (Christian, democratic, pro-European) led by Andriy Sadovy; Servant of the People (libertarian, "Ukrainian centrist") led by Oleksandr Kornienko; and Freedom (right-wing, nationalist) led by Oleh Tyahnybok.[233] Many of these parties feature "weak ideologies," guided by political personalities and heavily influenced by financial industrial groups (FIGs) rather than ideological leanings.[234] In April 2019, Servant of the People candidate Volodymyr Zelensky was elected president with 73.2 percent of the vote.[235] Following Zelensky's election, the Servant of the People party secured an absolute majority of parliamentary seats.[236]

RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

Perhaps more so than any other post-Soviet state, the identity of Ukraine is tightly wound with that of Russia.[237] Many Ukrainians are bilingual, speaking both Ukrainian and Russian fluently. Moreover, a large minority of Russian speakers are present in Ukraine, with 49.8% of Ukrainians speaking Russian at home, as opposed to 48.4% of Ukrainians who speak Ukrainian at home (see Table 6.1).[238] However, it should be noted that polling

[233] CIA Factbook. "Ukraine." Accessed August 1, 2020. https://www.cia.gov/library/ publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html; Whitmore, Sarah. "Political Party Development in Ukraine." GSDRC, September 24, 2014. http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq1146.pdf: 2.

[234] Whitmore, Sarah. "Political Party Development in Ukraine." GSDRC, September 24, 2014. http://gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq1146.pdf: 2.

[235] Freedom House. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Ukraine/freedom-world/2020.

[236] *Ibid.*

[237] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 64.

[238] Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV.

data from 2017 found that self-identifying Russians made up only 6.3% of the Ukrainian population. Moreover, a 2014 Chatham House study found that "only 11% of Russian-speaking Ukrainians ally themselves with [the] Russian cultural tradition."[239] This figure arguably challenges assumptions concerning the correlation between language and political or cultural attitudes.

Table 6.1: Language at Home (WVS, 2011)

	Number of cases	%/Total
Armenian	1	0.1%
Bulgarian	2	0.1%
Hungarian	4	0.3%
Moldavian	10	0.7%
Old Church Slavonic, Church Slavic, Church Slavonic, Old Bulgarian, Old Slavonic, Ruthenian	4	0.3%
Russian	748	49.8%
Tatar	5	0.3%
Ukrainian	726	48.4%
(N)	(1,500)	100%

Selected sample: Ukraine 2011 (1500)

Source: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six - Country-Pooled Datafile 2010-2014. Madrid: JD Systems Institute. Version: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVS DocumentationWV.

Due to the continued occupation of Crimea and support of separatists in Donbas, tensions between Ukraine and Russia remain high, although Zelensky has made clear his intent to achieve piece in Donbas.[240] Russia has a vested interest in fomenting political turmoil in Ukraine, as is evidenced by the Russian state's repeated efforts to interfere in

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[239] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 14.

[240] Freedom House. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Ukraine/freedom-world/2020; Dixon, Robyn. "Ukraine's Zelensky wants to end a war in the east. His problem: No one agress how to do it." *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2020. https://www.washingtonpost .com/world/europe/ukraines-zelensky-wants-to-end-a-war-in-the-east-his-problem-no-one-agrees-how-to-do-it/2020/03/19/ae653cbc-6399-11ea-8a8e-5c5336b32760_story.html.

Ukrainian elections.[241] According to international electoral expert Anthony Bowyer, such election interference is meant to "weaken trust in the democratic process and institutions and cast doubt on their legitimacy," as well as "[exacerbating] political and social divisions…in a way that advances Russian interests, either through influencing the election of a pro-Russian candidate or sowing chaos and spreading distrust among Russian adversaries."[242] As such, electoral interference operations yield geopolitical gains regardless of whether they fully succeed. In this way, Russia maintains considerable geopolitical influence over its Western neighbor.

THE UKRAINIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Like the Ukrainian political sector, the Ukrainian media landscape is diverse and pluralistic, but opaque.[243] After the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian media was privatized through a process rife with corruption, resulting in the purchase of mainstream media outlets by a handful of oligarchs.[244] Despite international and domestic efforts to foster independent media in Ukraine, this process has been hindered by the oligopolist nature of media holdings in the country. For example, the most popular national channel 1+1 (see Figure 6.1) is owned by Ukrainian billionaire Igor Kolomoisky, who actively worked to ensure the election of Zelensky in 2019.[245] After 1+1, the second largest media holding Inter Media is owned by Serhiy Lyovochkin, a former Gazprom intermediary

[241] Bowyer, Anthony Clive. *Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia.* Arlington: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019: 4.

[242] *Ibid.*

[243] Szostek, Joanna. "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of 'Soft Power'?" *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 28, no. 3 (August 2014): 467.

[244] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

[245] Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media. "Ukraine." Accessed July 15, 2020. https://medialandscapes.org/country/Ukraine.

turned Opposition Bloc leader and parliamentarian.[246] These media holdings often feature biased, subjective content manipulated to achieve the aims of oligarch owners.[247] In contrast to the popularity of these two media holdings, the publicly funded network UA: First is poorly produced and does not even rank in the top 16 most popular television networks (see Figure 6.1). Lacking a popular state broadcaster, oligarch-owned media holdings thus dominate the Ukrainian media landscape. [248]

Despite this concentration of ownership, media is "diverse in terms of political stance," according to BBC, although most national media holdings have "adopted a united patriotic agenda following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in the east."[249] Regardless of ideological persuasion, most Ukrainians still consider Russia's annexation of Crimea to be illegal and media holdings reflect this widespread stance. Pro-Russian media outlets, on the other hand, have had considerable difficulties in gaining and maintaining audiences, with only 6% of Ukrainians preferring Russian channels for news (see Figure 6.2).[250]

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[246] Szostek, Joanna. "Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of 'Soft Power'?" *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 28, no. 3 (August 2014): 467.

[247] Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media. "Ukraine." Accessed July 15, 2020. https://medialandscapes.org/country/Ukraine.

[248] Pörzgen, Gemma. *Facing Reality After the Euromaidan: The Situation of Journalists and Media in Ukraine.* RSF: Reporters Without Borders. Published June 2016. https://rsf.org/en/reports/facing-reality-after-euromaidan-rsf-presents-new-report-ukraine: 5.

[249] BBC. "Ukraine Profile – Media." Published January 14, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/ world-europe-18006248.

[250] Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media. "Ukraine." Accessed July 15, 2020. https://medialandscapes.org/country/Ukraine.

Figure 6.1: What are the three national TV channels whose news you see most often?
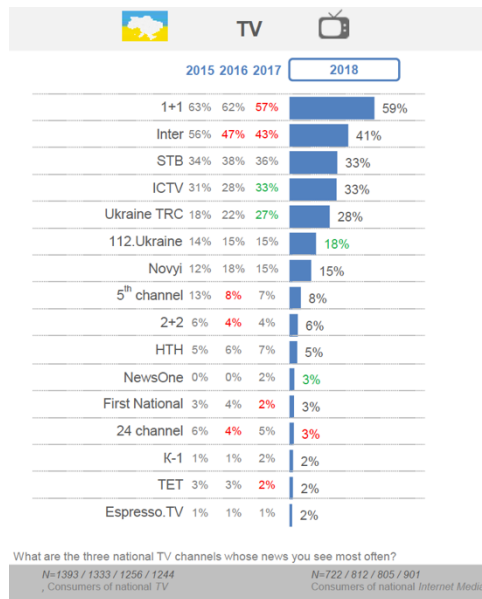
Source: Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.

Figure 6.2: Which TV channels have you preferred for news in the last month?

	2015	2016	2017	2018
TV Consumption				
National	99%	99%	99%	99%
Regional	43%	44%	39%	45%
Russian	12%	7%	5%	6%

Source: Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.

MEDIA FREEDOM ASSESSMENTS OF UKRAINE

In 2019, Freedom House assessed the Ukrainian media space to be "partly free," while RSF noted that Ukrainian media was currently "at the crossroads."[251] Attacks on journalists remain high and, as Freedom House notes, "Ukraine's courts and law

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[251] Freedom House. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Ukraine/freedom-world/2020; RSF: Reporters Without Borders. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://rsf.org/en/ Ukraine.

enforcement agents often fail to protect their rights."[252] A key example of this failing took place in May 2019, when Ukrainian journalist Vadym Komarov was fatally attacked "with a hammer in broad daylight in the center of the city."[253] The Kyiv-based, independent Institute of Mass Information logged 226 media-freedom violations in 2019, including Komarov's attack and murder. The other violations included "20 beatings, 16 cyberattacks, 93 incidents of interference, 34 incidents of threats, and 21 cases of restricting access to public information."[254] Moreover, separatist-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine and Crimea are largely "no-go areas" for journalists.[255] Even so, the 2020 World Press Freedom Index ranked Ukraine at 96, six spots higher than in 2019.[256]

Aside from direct intimidation and attacks on journalists, a key constraint in Ukraine's media freedom is the instrumentalization of media by oligarchs and politicians alike. A high degree of corruption exists within the Ukrainian media sphere, yielding a media plagued by "jeansa," or paid PR content parading as media coverage. [257] As Figure 6.3 shows, in 2018 approximately 15% of regional television, 20% of national television, and 10% of Russian television featured "jeansa."[258] It should be noted, however, that jeansa does not necessarily consist of political messaging.[259]

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[252] Freedom House. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://freedomhouse.org/country/ Ukraine/freedom-world/2020.
[253] *Ibid.*
[254] *Ibid.*
[255] BBC. "Ukraine Profile – Media." Published January 14, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/ world-europe-18006248.
[256] RSF: Reporters Without Borders. "Ukraine." Accessed July 18, 2020. https://rsf.org/en/ Ukraine.
[257] Pörzgen, Gemma. *Facing Reality After the Euromaidan: The Situation of Journalists and Media in Ukraine.* RSF: Reporters Without Borders. Published June 2016. https://rsf.org/en/reports/facing-reality-after-euromaidan-rsf-presents-new-report-ukraine: 34.
[258] Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.
[259] Makarenko, Olena. "Jeansa: Vehicle of Oligarchs, Ukraine's Largest Threat to Media Freedom." *Euromaidan Press.* Published June 4, 2018. http://euromaidanpress.com /2018/04/06/the-kings-of-jeansa-who-buys-influence-in-ukrainian-media-and-how-they-do-it/.

Figure 6.3: Estimation of Jeansa Frequency, 2015-2018
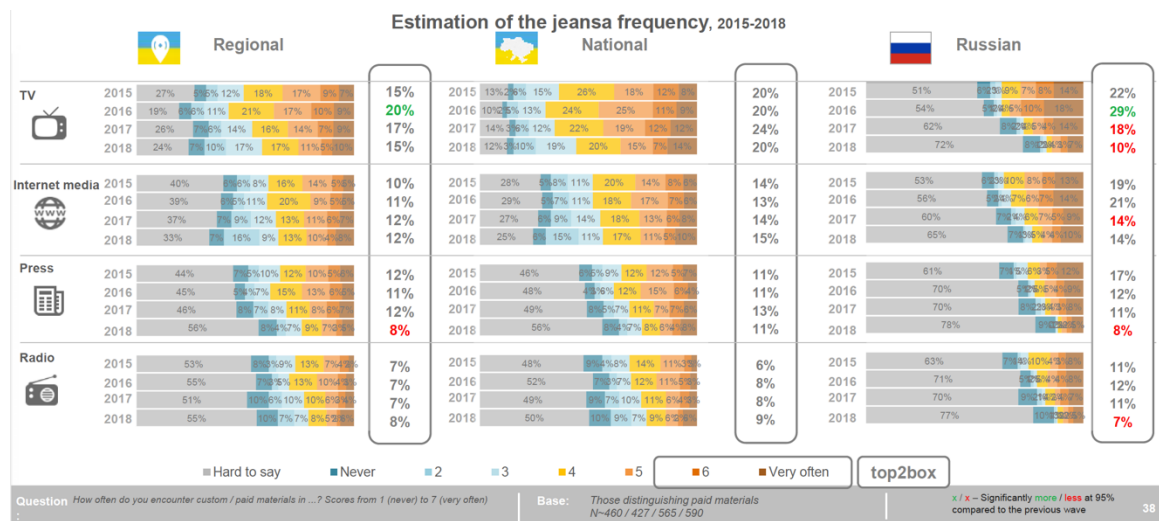
Source: Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.
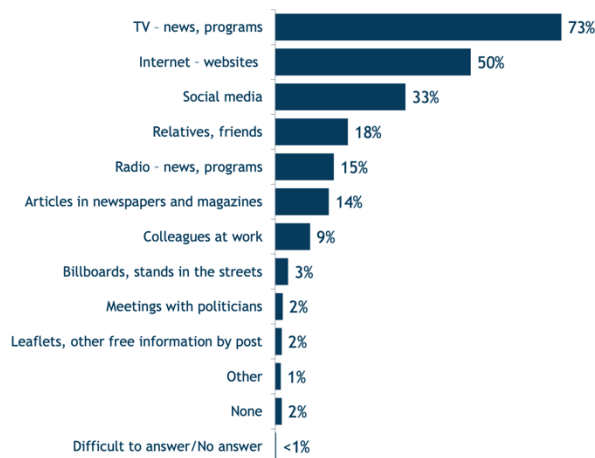
TRENDS IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN UKRAINE

According to a multiple-response 2019 survey conducted by the Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR), 73% of Ukrainians obtained political information from television, while 50% obtained this information from the internet and 33% obtained this information from social media (see Figure 6.4). As with Georgia, television remains the most influential and most consumed medium in Ukraine.[260] Following global media consumption trends, radio and print media were the least consumed formal mediums.[261] As noted previously, consumption levels of Russia-based media outlets are very low throughout Ukraine, although viewers who did regularly consume Russian media were

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[260] Pörzgen, Gemma. *Facing Reality After the Euromaidan: The Situation of Journalists and Media in Ukraine.* RSF: Reporters Without Borders. Published June 2016. https://rsf.org/en/reports/facing-reality-after-euromaidan-rsf-presents-new-report-ukraine: 5.

[261] Media Landscapes: Expert Analyses of the State of Media. "Ukraine." Accessed July 15, 2020. https://medialandscapes.org/country/Ukraine.
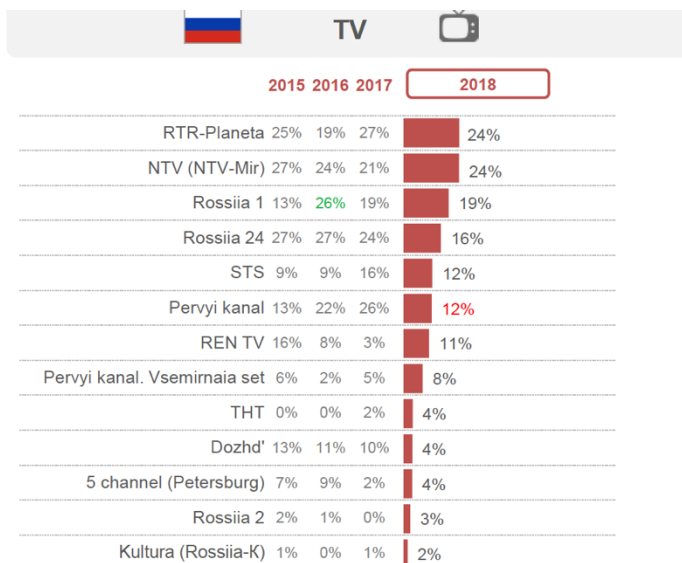
most likely to watch RTR-Planeta (state-owned), NTV (owned by Gazprom Media, so state-owned), and Rossiia 1 (state-owned). These figures are listed in detail in Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.4: Which of these sources of information do you use to obtain political
      information?

Source	Percentage
TV – news, programs	73%
Internet – websites	50%
Social media	33%
Relatives, friends	18%
Radio – news, programs	15%
Articles in newspapers and magazines	14%
Colleagues at work	9%
Billboards, stands in the streets	3%
Meetings with politicians	2%
Leaflets, other free information by post	2%
Other	1%
None	2%
Difficult to answer/No answer	<1%

Source: Center for Insights in Survey Research. "Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Ukraine, June 13-23, 2019." Accessed June 3, 2020. https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/july_ 2019_ukraine_poll.pdf.

Figure 6.5: Russian Media Ratings

| 🇷🇺 TV 📺	2015	2016	2017	2018
RTR-Planeta	25%	19%	27%	24%
NTV (NTV-Mir)	27%	24%	21%	24%
Rossiia 1	13%	26%	19%	19%
Rossiia 24	27%	27%	24%	16%
STS	9%	9%	16%	12%
Pervyi kanal	13%	22%	26%	12%
REN TV	16%	8%	3%	11%
Pervyi kanal. Vsemirnaia set	6%	2%	5%	8%
THT	0%	0%	2%	4%
Dozhd'	13%	11%	10%	4%
5 channel (Petersburg)	7%	9%	2%	4%
Rossiia 2	2%	1%	0%	3%
Kultura (Rossiia-K)	1%	0%	1%	2%

Source: Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.

A 2018 Internews nationwide survey found that levels of trust in Ukraine-based media grew from 2017, with 61% of Ukrainians stating that they trusted national television media in 2018, as opposed to only 54% in 2017 (see Figure 6.6).[262] Conversely, between 2017 and 2018, trust in Russian television media fell from an already low 6% to 4%.[263] The majority of Ukrainians attributed their lack of trust in media sources to a sense that "the information provided [seemed] unreliable" (see Figure 6.7).[264]
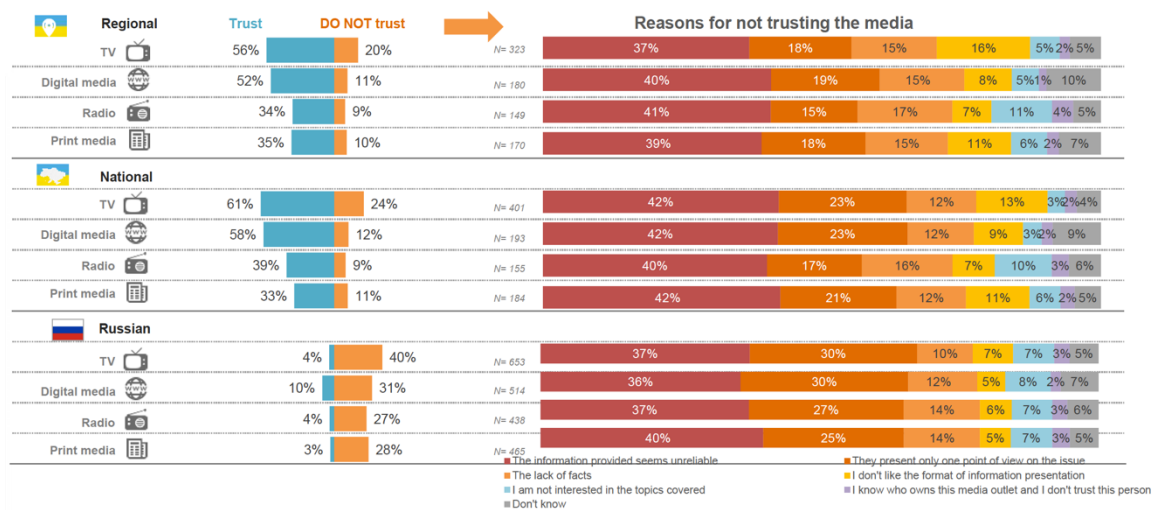
Figure 6.6: Trust in Media, 2015-2018
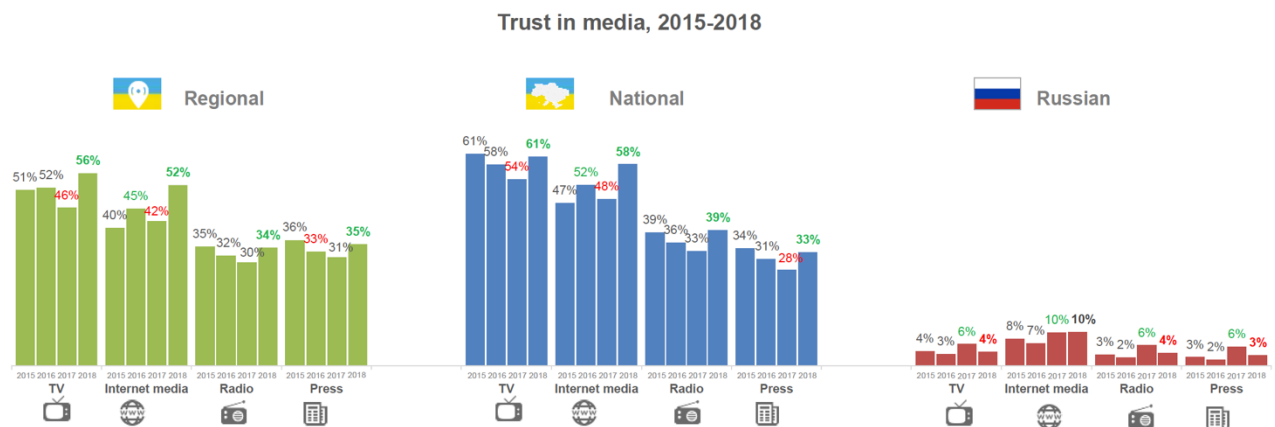
Source: Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.

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[262] Internews. "Media Monitoring: Online Analysis." Accessed June 3, 2020. http://mediamonitor. ge/index.php?m=6&year=2018&tab=media_resources.
[263] *Ibid.*
[264] *Ibid.*

Figure 6.7: Reasons for Not Trusting the Media

Russian Media Narratives and Ukrainian Audiences

In 2014, Ukrainian officials found their newly revolutionary country under attack
from both military and information-based means. A 2017 Rand Corporation study found
that Russia's annexation of Crimea could not have succeeded without the utilization of
information warfare, which primed Crimean audiences and polluted the Ukrainian
information environment with disinformation, which in turn translated to distrust of the
barely-established revolutionary government.[265] Russian media coverage at this time
consisted of "one-sided coverage of events, distortion of facts, [and] outright lies."[266] Prior
to Crimea's annexation, Russian media dominated Ukrainian cable networks and public
surveys indicated high levels of distrust in Ukrainian media due to the influence of

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[265] Kofman, Michael, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny
Oberholtzer. "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." Santa Monica: Rand
Corporation, 2017: 20.

[266] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe."
Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

oligarchs on media narratives, as well as the high degree of censorship enforced by the Yanukovych regime.[267] Even after Yanukovych's ouster by pro-Western revolutionaries, many Ukrainians knowingly or unknowingly accepted Russia-originating disinformation narratives on account of the chaos which engulfed Ukraine during this time, a lack of basic media literacy skills, and, primarily, in reaction to the extreme nationalist, pro-Ukrainian rhetoric which some revolutionaries were voicing at this time.[268] The nationalist leanings of the new government created a space for Russian disinformation narratives to thrive.

However, in 2014 Ukrainian officials devised a plan to reduce the popularity of Russian broadcast television and, consequently, to reduce the presence of pro-Moscow disinformation in the Ukrainian media space. The Ukrainian interim government created a Ministry of Information Policy tasked with "protecting Ukraine's information sovereignty."[269] In 2014, the Ukrainian Ministry of Information Policy instituted a nationwide ban on Moscow-based television channels. By 2016, the ban covered 73 channels. Although these channels are still accessible via satellite or the internet, this censorship policy significantly reduced Ukrainian consumption of Russian media from 27% in 2014 to just 6% in 2016. [270] In doing so, Ukrainian officials succeeded in limiting the dissemination of Russian disinformation in the Ukrainian media space. In response, state-sponsored Russian media outlets began to reshape their approach to disinformation, creating imitative, fake objective journalism (such as the false crucifixion story included

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[267] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

[268] Kofman, Michael, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer. "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2017: 20.

[269] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 69.

[270] *Ibid.*

at the beginning of this chapter) as opposed to relying on more straightforward disinformation methods.[271] This new challenge was met with nationwide media literacy campaigns such as the IREX-created Learn to Discern project, which was launched in 50 schools in four cities across Ukraine in 2018.[272] The Learn to Discern project report noted that "those receiving Learn to Discern training were twice as likely to detect hate speech, 18 percent better at identifying fake news stories, 16 percent better at sorting out fact from opinion, and 14 percent more knowledgeable about the role of the news media industry."[273] Although it would be impossible to completely eradicate Russian media influence in Ukraine, the combined efforts of censorship and media literacy campaigns have limited the influence of Russian disinformation campaigns.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND MEDIA DEMOCRATIZATION IN UKRAINE

This case study presents an interesting challenge to accepted assumptions regarding media freedom. On the one hand, censorship seems to represent a step away from democratic media. Censorship is often associated with authoritarian tendencies such as state propaganda.[274] However, in the case of Ukraine, this factor must be weighed against the arguably beneficial effects of censoring media outlets that the Kremlin actively instrumentalizes to spread disinformation and distrust in democratic institutions.

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[271] Foreign Policy Council: Ukrainian Prism. "Disinformation Resilience in Central and Eastern Europe." Accessed July 21, 2020. http://prismua.org/en/dri-cee/.

[272] Cain, Geoffrey. "Ukraine's War on Russian Disinformation is a Lesson for America." *The New Republic.* Published March 29, 2019. https://newrepublic.com/article/153415 /ukraines-war-russian-disinformation-lesson-america.

[273] *Ibid.*

[274] Helmus, Todd C., Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, and Zev Winkelman. *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.* Santa Monica: Rand, 2018: 69-70.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

When we think of the concept of media freedom, we generally do not consider the negative effects of such freedom. For example, we do not consider the lack of journalistic objectivity or social responsibility that allows for the proliferation of hate speech, fake news, and disinformation in free media environments. We do not consider the potential public health crises that can result from the free dissemination of false or harmful information, as has occurred during the current Coronavirus pandemic.[275] And we do not consider the lives that are lost due to conflict sparked by such widely accessible hate speech or fake news.

In the case of Georgia, media freedom has produced a widespread disinformation problem in which pro-Moscow narratives are published and disseminated by Georgian media outlets under the guise of "patriotic," pro-Georgian, or nationalist political stances, while NGOs and regional media monitoring institutions scramble to fact-check these narratives and increase media literacy. This battle taking place in Georgia features the constant backpedaling – or tango, as Goran Eklund once stated – of key figures and institutions devoted to defeating disinformation in the Georgian media space due to the overwhelming onslaught of fake news, unprofessional journalism, and Russian disinformation that threatens the future democracy of the Georgian state.

Conversely, while Ukraine faced a similar media threat in the years immediately following Euromaidan, the Ukrainian state has succeeded in diminishing the media consumption of pro-Moscow disinformation narratives by adopting censorship policies targeting Russia-based media outlets – a move which free speech proponents have publicly

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[275] Frankel, Sheera, Davey Alba, and Raymond Zhong. "Surge of Virus Misinformation Stumps Facebook and Twitter." *The New York Times*. Published March 8, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/08/technology/coronavirus-misinformation-social-media.html.

denounced. However, this case begs the question of whether our understanding of media freedom, which is so heavily focused on the negative liberty of the press, is perhaps insufficient in such a case. Although I do not mean to reject the important work of Freedom House, RSF, and IREX or the long-term, proven correlation between media freedom and democratic outcomes, Ukraine's adoption of censorship policies as a self-protection mechanism against Russian information warfare and its subsequent ability to decrease levels of disinformation consumption and protect its democratic institutions seems to suggest that media freedom assessments should consider factors such as media consumption, public trust of media, and the effects of regional hegemonic powers on media environments when producing their assessments. Moreover, the cases of Georgia and Ukraine demand the reassessment of our understandings of free speech, taking into account the social responsibility of media to improve the welfare and democratic governance of its audiences, rather than threatening future democratic outcomes.

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