

Public Perceptions of Media Coverage of National Security Issues in Georgia

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Abstract

In contemporary societies, national security is increasingly mediated through the information environment, where mass media play a central role in shaping public perceptions of risks, threats, and state resilience. This article examines how the Georgian public evaluates media coverage of national security issues, the degree of trust placed in different media platforms, and public expectations regarding accuracy and reliability of information. Drawing on information security theory, media framing theory, and the literature on information disorder, the study employs a quantitative research design based on an online survey of 800 respondents conducted across Georgia between December 2024 and March 2025.

The findings indicate that social media and television dominate as primary sources of security-related information, while traditional media play a marginal role. Although respondents frequently encounter national security content, levels of trust in both domestic and international media remain predominantly partial rather than high. A substantial proportion of participants perceive the media's influence on security issues as neutral or negative and report frequent exposure to disinformation, particularly in domestic media. The results suggest that fragmented trust, limited media literacy, and uneven framing of security issues may reduce public understanding and increase susceptibility to polarization in a transitional democratic context. The article contributes to media and communication scholarship by providing empirical evidence on public perceptions of security-related media coverage in Georgia and highlights the importance of framing, trust, and media literacy in strengthening democratic resilience.

Keywords: Georgia; media trust; national security; framing; disinformation; public perception

1. Introduction

The relationship between mass media and national security has become increasingly significant in the context of digitalization, political polarization, and the global spread of disinformation. Media systems do not merely transmit information about security issues; they actively shape how threats are defined, prioritized, and interpreted by the public. In transitional democracies, where political institutions and media landscapes are still consolidating, public

perceptions of media credibility and framing can have direct implications for democratic stability and social cohesion. (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

Georgia represents a particularly relevant case for examining these dynamics. Since regaining independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country has experienced political upheaval, economic crises, armed conflicts, and ongoing geopolitical pressure. These developments have unfolded alongside a rapidly evolving media environment characterized by strong political polarization, the growing dominance of digital platforms, and persistent concerns about disinformation. Against this background, understanding how citizens perceive media coverage of national security issues is essential for assessing the broader role of communication processes in shaping public awareness and trust. (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Newman et al., 2024)

Existing scholarship emphasizes that the media influence public attitudes toward security not only through agenda-setting - deciding which issues receive attention, but also through framing, which shapes how those issues are interpreted (Zamith, n.d.; Entman, 1993). At the same time, research on information disorder and information warfare highlights how external and internal actors may exploit media ecosystems to undermine trust, amplify fear, or polarize societies (Bingle, 2023). While these processes have been widely studied in Western contexts, empirical research focusing on public perceptions in smaller, transitional democracies remains limited.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining how Georgian society evaluates the role of mass media in covering national security issues. Specifically, it explores three interrelated questions: (1) which media platforms citizens rely on for security-related information; (2) the extent to which they trust domestic and international media sources; and (3) how they assess the media's contribution to public understanding of national and global security issues. By focusing on public perceptions rather than media content alone, the article contributes to media and communication research on trust, framing, and security discourse in transitional political environments. (Bingle, 2023; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

2. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: information security theory, media framing theory, and the concept of information disorder and information warfare.

Information security theory emphasizes the role of the information environment as a critical domain in which contemporary security challenges emerge. In this perspective, information flows, communication channels, and public trust constitute key elements of societal resilience. Media systems influence which security-related topics become salient and how risks are communicated to the public, thereby shaping collective perceptions of vulnerability and stability. (Horne et al., 2016)

Media framing theory further explains how the presentation of information affects audience interpretation. Framing does not concern only what the media report, but how issues are contextualized, emphasized, or normalized. In the context of national security, framing can influence whether threats are perceived as immediate or distant, legitimate or exaggerated, and

political or technical in nature. Such frames play a central role in forming public attitudes toward state institutions, foreign actors, and policy responses.(Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999; Zamith, n.d.)

Finally, the literature on information warfare and information disorder conceptualizes the information space as an arena of strategic competition, where disinformation, misinformation, and persuasive narratives may be used to influence public opinion. From a media and communication perspective, the significance of this framework lies in its focus on audience perception and trust rather than operational or military dimensions. Disinformation becomes particularly effective in environments characterized by low media trust, fragmented audiences, and limited media literacy.(Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Bingle, 2023)

Together, these approaches provide an analytical lens for examining how Georgian citizens interpret media coverage of national security issues and how trust and framing interact within a transitional democratic media system.

3. Methodology

The study employs a quantitative research design based on an online survey. Data were collected between 3 December 2024 and 3 March 2025 using Google Forms. The survey period coincided with heightened political sensitivity in Georgia, which provides important contextual background for interpreting the findings.

A total of 800 respondents participated in the study. Participants were selected through voluntary participation using a random distribution of the online questionnaire. The sample includes respondents from different age groups, genders, and regions across Georgia, allowing for basic demographic differentiation. Women constituted 56.4% of respondents and men 43.6%. The largest age group was 18-24 years (51%), followed by 25-34 years (26.5%).

The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions measured media use, trust levels, perceptions of disinformation, and evaluations of media influence on security issues. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to express qualitative assessments of media objectivity and reliability.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, for closed-ended responses, as well as thematic analysis of open-ended responses to identify recurring patterns. As the study relies on an online, self-selected sample, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The results do not claim full representativeness of the Georgian population but provide valuable insights into dominant trends among digitally engaged audiences.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous, and no personal identifying data were collected.

4. Results

4.1 Media Sources and Trust Patterns

The results indicate a strong dominance of digital platforms in respondents' information consumption, including coverage of national security issues. Social media

emerged as the primary source of information for the vast majority of participants, followed by television and online news portals. In contrast, traditional media formats - such as radio and print newspapers - play a marginal role in shaping public information flows (see **Table 1**). Patterns of media trust largely correspond to these consumption trends. Respondents reported the highest levels of trust in social media and television, although this trust is predominantly partial rather than absolute. Full trust in any single media platform remains limited, suggesting a fragmented and cautious trust environment (see **Table 2**). This finding reflects a broader tendency among audiences to rely on multiple sources while simultaneously questioning their credibility.

The coexistence of high media consumption and moderate trust highlights a key characteristic of the Georgian information environment: audiences remain actively engaged with media content but demonstrate skepticism toward its reliability. From a media and communication perspective, this pattern indicates that exposure alone does not translate into confidence, particularly in the context of politically sensitive topics such as national security.

4.2 Exposure to National Security Content and Disinformation

The findings indicate that national security-related topics are highly visible in the Georgian media environment. A substantial proportion of respondents reported encountering information related to national security on a frequent basis, suggesting that such issues occupy a noticeable place in the media agenda (see **Table 3**).

At the same time, perceptions of disinformation are widespread, particularly in relation to domestic media coverage. Many respondents reported frequent exposure to misleading or distorted information within Georgian media, which points to a persistent credibility challenge in the national information space. This perception aligns with broader concerns about politicization and selective framing of security-related issues.

By contrast, assessments of disinformation in foreign media were more uncertain. A large share of respondents indicated difficulty in evaluating the reliability of international coverage of Georgia's security issues. This uncertainty may reflect lower exposure to foreign media, limited familiarity with external information sources, or challenges in assessing credibility beyond the domestic media context.

Overall, the results suggest that while security-related information is readily available, its perceived quality and reliability - especially in domestic media- remain contested. Frequent exposure to disinformation may contribute to audience skepticism and reduced trust in media narratives surrounding national security.

4.3 Perceived Media Influence on Security Issues

Respondents' evaluations of the media's influence on national security issues reveal a predominantly cautious and ambivalent public attitude. The largest share of participants characterized media influence as neutral, while negative assessments outnumbered positive ones. Positive evaluations constituted only a small proportion of responses, indicating limited confidence in the media's role in shaping public understanding of security-related matters (see Table 4).

4.4 Public Evaluations of Media Contribution and Regulation

Respondents expressed mixed views regarding the media's contribution to public understanding of national and global security issues. While a plurality acknowledged that the media plays some positive role in raising awareness, only a small minority perceived this contribution as highly effective. At the same time, a considerable share of respondents indicated that media coverage does not meaningfully enhance public understanding of security issues, while others were unable to form a clear assessment (Kebadze et al., 2025).

These findings suggest that although security-related topics are visible in the media agenda, their communicative effectiveness remains limited. Neutral and negative evaluations indicate gaps in clarity, depth, and credibility of media narratives, which may reduce the media's capacity to foster informed public engagement with complex security matters.

In contrast to skepticism toward media performance, respondents demonstrated strong support for corrective and preventive measures. A large majority endorsed media literacy initiatives as a means of improving public understanding of security issues, and similarly strong support was expressed for additional information campaigns focused on national security. Furthermore, more than half of respondents supported stronger regulation of media outlets, particularly television and social media platforms, in order to reduce manipulation and misinformation.

Overall, the results reveal a clear discrepancy between public demand for reliable security-related information and the perceived performance of the media in delivering it. While respondents recognize the importance of media in shaping security awareness, their evaluations point to a need for improved quality, transparency, and responsibility in media coverage.

Table 5 presents respondents' assessments of the media's contribution to public understanding of security issues, as well as levels of support for media literacy initiatives, information campaigns, and regulatory measures.

Table 1. Primary Sources of Information on National Security Issues

Media source	Percentage of respondents (%)
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Media source	Percentage of respondents (%)
Social media	94.0
Television	64.3
Online news portals	41.5
Radio	7.8
Print newspapers/magazines	3.4

Source: Author's survey, Georgia, 2024–2025 (n = 800). *(Multiple answers allowed)*

Table 2. Trust in Domestic Media Outlets

Media outlet type	Percentage of respondents (%)
Social media	67.3
Television	57.8
Internet portals / political websites	38.5
Radio	6.3
Print ewspapers/magazines	4.0

Source: Author's survey, Georgia, 2024–2025 (n = 800).

Table 3. Exposure to National Security Content and Disinformation

A. Frequency of exposure to national security information

Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	46.3
Weekly	13.9
Rarely	34.0
Monthly	4.0
Never	0.9

B. Perceived disinformation in Georgian media

Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very often	17.1

Often	49.6
Rarely	24.2
Not observed	1.0
No answer	8.0

C. Perceived disinformation in foreign media

Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very often	4.8
Often	11.9
Rarely	28.1
Not observed	4.7
No answer	50.5

Source: Author's survey, Georgia, 2024–2025 (n = 800).

Table 4. Perceived Media Influence on National Security Issues

Assessment of media influence	Percentage (%)
Neutral	47.2
Negative	30.0
Positive	11.6
Don't know	11.1

Source: Author's survey, Georgia, 2024–2025 (n = 800).

Table 5. Media Contribution, Literacy, and Regulation

A. Media contribution to public understanding of security issues

Assessment	Percentage (%)
Contributes very effectively	5.9
Contributes to some extent	39.3
Does not contribute	32.5
Don't know	22.4

B. Support for media literacy initiatives

Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	87.4
No	2.7
Don't know	9.9

C. Support for additional information campaigns

Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	88.3
No	3.0
Don't know	8.8

D. Support for stronger media regulation

Response	Percentage (%)
Very necessary	15.0
Necessary	38.7
Not necessary	22.1
Don't know	24.1

Source: Author's survey, Georgia, 2024–2025 (n = 800).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into how Georgian society perceives media coverage of national security issues within a fragmented and highly digitalized information environment. Consistent with existing media and communication scholarship, the results demonstrate that high exposure to security-related information does not necessarily translate into high levels of trust or effective public understanding. (Newman et al., 2024)

First, the dominance of social media and television as primary information sources confirms a broader shift away from traditional media toward digital and broadcast platforms. This transformation aligns with global trends in media consumption but carries specific implications for national security communication in transitional democracies. While these platforms ensure rapid dissemination of information, they also increase the risk of fragmented narratives and uneven standards of verification.(Entman, 1993; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017) The moderate levels of trust observed across media platforms suggest that audiences remain cautious, relying on multiple sources while simultaneously questioning their credibility. This pattern reflects a low-trust media environment in which engagement is high but confidence is limited.

Second, widespread perceptions of disinformation, particularly in domestic media,highlight structural challenges in the Georgian information space. Frequent exposure to misleading or distorted content may contribute to audience skepticism and reinforce ambivalence toward media narratives on national security. The uncertainty expressed by respondents regarding foreign media coverage further suggests difficulties in assessing credibility beyond the domestic context. From a media framing perspective, inconsistent or politicized frames may reduce audiences' ability to evaluate security threats coherently, thereby weakening the media's role as a facilitator of informed public discourse.(Scheufele, 1999)

Third, the predominantly neutral and negative assessments of media influence on national security issues indicate limited perceived effectiveness of media coverage. Neutral evaluations may reflect disengagement or uncertainty rather than genuine balance, pointing to gaps in explanatory depth and contextualization. This finding is significant, as effective security communication requires not only visibility of issues but also interpretative clarity that enables citizens to understand complex risks and policy responses.(Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

Despite skepticism toward media performance, the strong public support for media literacy initiatives and additional information campaigns signals recognition of informational vulnerabilities (Chachanidze, 2026). High levels of endorsement for media literacy suggest that respondents perceive education and critical media skills as essential tools for navigating disinformation and polarized narratives. Similarly, support for stronger regulation of media outlets -particularly television and social media - indicates public concern about manipulation and accountability within the media system. Importantly, this support should be interpreted not as opposition to media freedom, but as a demand for higher professional standards and transparency in security-related reporting.(Entman, 1993; Newman et al., 2024)

Overall, the discussion underscores a clear mismatch between public expectations and perceived media performance. While Georgian citizens recognize the importance of media in

shaping national security awareness, fragmented trust, exposure to disinformation, and uneven framing limit the media's capacity to fulfill this role effectively. These findings contribute to media and communication research by illustrating how trust, framing, and media literacy interact in a transitional democratic context marked by political polarization and digital media dominance.

6. Conclusion

This study examined public perceptions of media coverage of national security issues in Georgia within a rapidly evolving and highly digitalized media environment. The findings demonstrate that while security-related topics are widely accessible through social media and television, public trust in media coverage remains fragmented and predominantly moderate rather than high.

The results highlight a clear discrepancy between the visibility of national security issues and their perceived communicative effectiveness. Neutral and negative assessments of media influence suggest limitations in explanatory depth, contextualization, and consistency of framing. As a result, high levels of exposure do not necessarily translate into enhanced public understanding or confidence in media narratives.

At the same time, strong public support for media literacy initiatives and additional information campaigns indicates an awareness of informational vulnerabilities and a demand for improved media performance. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening professional standards, transparency, and accountability in security-related reporting, particularly within digital and broadcast media platforms.

From a media and communication perspective, the study contributes empirical evidence on the interaction between trust, framing, and media consumption in a transitional democratic context. By focusing on audience perceptions, the article emphasizes that effective communication of national security issues requires not only access to information but also credible framing and sustained public trust. Future research could further explore how different framing strategies and media literacy interventions shape public engagement with security discourse over time.

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