Exploring Reasons of Extreme Right-Wing Attitudes Development in Youth: Case of Georgia

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on researching reasons of extreme right-wing attitudes development in youth and analyses Georgian case of extreme right-wing groups' members and supporters. The emergences of extreme right sentiments is discussed in the framework of political socialization theory and the role of its agents is examined in formation of political views and behavior in adolescence. The study presents a qualitative research and the data is collected by semi-structured interviews conducted with the members and supporters of Georgian extreme right-wing group "Georgia's National Unity". Research proposes that living war memory and collective remembrance combined with parental influences are the most influential agents in the formative years of extreme right-wing youth, while social media networks tend to play a crucial role in young individuals' radicalization in later years of adolescence.

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Contents

Introduction

Far-right groups are increasing in sophistication and prominence across Eurasia as well, predominantly in those countries where significant liberalizing and democratic reforms have taken place.[1] These radical nationalist, anti-globalist, antiliberal groups strive to return what they call "traditional" values and the idea of a "pure" nation-state, and often support violence or the threat as an acceptable method for advancing this vision.[2]

Tbilisi-based experts often link the militant ethnic nationalist ideology which has been prominent among Georgian right wing groups with the country's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who is named as a radical right-wing populist by the historian Stephen Jones and led Georgia into a civil war in the early 1990s under the slogan: "Georgia for Georgians".[3] Even though after this right-wing sentiments remained present in society, there was no prominent extremist activism. Georgia's latest iteration of right-wing activity has grown of age in the context of the conflict against Russia. The five-day war in August 2008 resulted in the flight of tens of thousands of ethnic Georgians from their ancestral homes growing the feeling of insecurity in the society.[4] One of the most important proponents of right-wing discourse and activism in the country appears to be the Orthodox Church which is one of the most influential and powerful institutions. According to a public opinion survey conducted in July 2019, the Orthodox Church has the highest popularity

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[1] April Gordon. "Reflections on Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia". Special Report 2020: A New Eurasian Far Right Rising. (2020) https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/new-eurasian-far-right-rising
[2] Ibid
[3] Sasha Delemenchuk and Agit Mirzoev. "Opinion: Georgia's government is failing to take on right-wing extremism", *OC-Media* (August, 2019) https://oc-media.org/opinions/opinion-georgia-s-government-is-failing-to-take-on-right-wing-extremism/
[4] April Gordon. "Reflections on Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia."

rating (89%) among public institutions.[5] It was exactly the Orthodox Church and the clergy who led the attack on the participants of anti-homophobic rally on May 17, 2013, in Tbilisi.[6]

Apart from this, the demonstrations held by the right-wing groups acquired a systematic character in recent years leading to their increased visibility. In some occasions, they were aggressive as well: there were cases of counter rallies held against the protests carrying a "liberal" agenda and crimes (physical attacks) motivated by the racial discrimination.[7] Moreover, there has been a steady growth of the number of hate crimes occurred in past several years. As the report provided by the National Prosecutor's Office demonstrates, there were 44 criminal cases reported in 2017 for hate crimes. In contrast, this number increased to 95 in 2018, out of which 53 offenders were imprisoned.[8] However, as a report by Freedom House, an international organization working on human rights, reads, the response of the Georgian government to right-wing activities has been inadequate as the judicial law enforcement systems of the country have neither the will nor the operational capacity to counteract right-wing violence.[9]

Taking into consideration all these circumstances, it becomes particularly relevant to research how right-wing movements gain and mobilize supporters. Past studies in Western Europe have shown that young people are the most likely to join far-right parties on average.[10] Moreover, it should be also mentioned that most youth involved in the far right not through official voting but through

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[5] Center for Insights in Survey Research. "Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia", International Republican Institute (2019) https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/georgia_poll_2.pdf

[6] Andrew Roth. "Crowd Led by Priests Attacks Gay Rights Marchers in Georgia", *The New York Times*. (May 2013) https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/18/world/europe/gay-rights-rally-is-attacked-in-georgia.html

[7] Ministry of Internal Affair. "Shss-m Rasobrivi Diskriminatsiis Braldebit Ori Piri Daakava". (2015) https://police.ge/ge/shss-m-rasobrivi-diskriminatsiis-braldebit-ori-piri-daakava/8830

[8] Ministry of Internal Affairs. "Shinagan Sakmeta Saministrom 2018 Tsels Sidzulvilis MOtivit Chadenili Danashaulis Braldebit 53 Piri Daakava" (2018) https://police.ge/en/shinagan-saqmeta-saministrom-2018-tsels-sidzulvilis-motivit-chadenili-danashaulis-braldebit-53-piri-daakava/11660

[9] April Gordon. "Reflections on Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia"

[10] Inta Mierina and Ilze Koroleva. "Support for far-right ideology and anti-migrant attitudes among youth in Europe: A comparative analysis", *The Sociological Review* (63) S2 (2015), 184

engagements in subcultures of the extreme and radical right, which is where the far right youth violence is centered. Although not all far right youth engage in violence, young generations are more likely than adults to engage in far-right violence, and are disproportionately perpetrators of anti-immigrant, xenophobic, racist, and other far right attacks.[11]

The profile of Georgian right-wing groups in this regard is rather complex. Tbilisi-based analysts divide the Georgian right into two separate generations. They differ in the age of their members and supporters or the length of their presence within the Georgian society, as well as in their values. The older generation allies with conservative religious groups and ultra-Orthodox priests, while having a strong connection with the Russian-speaking world.[12] However, the new generation is much more secretive and does not have explicit connections with traditional institutions, such as the Orthodox Church. They have instead cultivated deep connections on Western-associated social networks such as Facebook and Instagram as well as white supremacist online forums like Stormfront. They use language and concepts strongly influenced by internet culture and campaign against (often chimeric) ideological opponents including "globalists", "social-justice warriors", and feminists. They use the current popularity and infamy of right-wing discourse to recruit adolescents seeking a status of "hipster" and "counter-culture". The members and supporters of young generation right-wing groups often organize and engage in combat training and collective sporting events. They are also involved in an activity that they call "migrant hunts", in which extreme-right youth go out at night with the aim to assault people of non-Georgian ethnicity (people from African and Middle Eastern origins).[13]

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[11] Cynthia Miller-Idrriss, "Youth and the Radical Right" in *The Oxford Handbook of Radical Right* ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 498.
[12] Sasha Delemenchuk and Agit Mirzoev. "Opinion: Georgia's government is failing to take on right-wing extremism".
[13] Ibid

The members and supporters of new generation right-wing groups, oftentimes, explicitly talk about their ideological affiliations with fascism. Moreover, one such organization, called "Georgia's National Unity" is registered at the National Agency of Public Registry as a "national-socialist organization" and tends to be the first such organization officially registered in Georgia. Therefore, the emergence of fascist right-wing attitudes is a new phenomenon for Georgian traditional ethno-nationalism and needs a further research. In this regard, my thesis aims to explore the reasons of extreme right-wing attitudes' development in Georgian youth.

The presented study is divided into four main chapters. The first summarizes relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, including political socialization theory. This explores how various agents (family, context, milieus, social media) influence the political socialization and attitude formation of young Georgian extreme right-wing activists. The second chapter explains the local Georgian context starting with a historical overview of Georgian ethno-nationalism's development and the current ground on which the modern right-wing movements emerged. The third chapter is dedicated to a detailed overview of the methodology employed in my interviews. The fourth chapter is based on the ten semi-structured interviews I conducted among members and active supporters of "Georgia's National Unity," a national-socialist organization. Here I provide the content analysis of the interviews, drawing special attention to the role of respondents' families, social-political contexts and social media networks influence on their attitudes' development.

This research shows that war memory, family and social media networks are the most influential agents in formation of extreme right-wing attitudes in Georgian youth.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

Research proposes that political values and attitudes are relatively stable from early childhood onwards, which suggests that right-wing extremism among young people today may have a lasting impact on their political values and behavior in the future.[14] This finding makes it all more surprising that, despite a long history of youths participating in far-right organizations such as the Hitler Youth and Mussolini's Gioventù Italiana del Littorio, there has been relatively little research on why youth get involved in the radical right.[15]

In order to explore this topic, it is essential first to define the terms this study employs. The term "far-right" is ambiguous and lacks clarity.[16] Regardless, in the present study this will be used to refer to movements, members, and that are characterized by an "antisystem" dimension, ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and anti-globalism. The far-right itself may be divided into two categories: radical and extreme right. Extreme right represents nativism, authoritarianism and antidemocracy, and stands closest to fascism. By contrast, the radical right may be defined as a notion which is not antidemocratic but opposes the principles of liberal democracy.[17] As for the term "youth", although it is often used in reference to younger children as well as adults in their early thirties, I use the definition proposed by Cynthia Miller-Idriss which applies to the lifespan

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[14] Thomas Siedler, "Parental unemployment and young people's extreme right-wing party affinity: evidence from panel data", *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*. (2011): 738

[15] Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Youth and the Radical Right" in *The Oxford Handbook of The Radical Right,* ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 498.

[16] Cas, Mudde. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

[17] Cas, Mudde. *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019)

from early adolescence through the mid-to late twenties as this is the first period when political attitudes emerge and develop.[18]

Researchers generally take one of two different paths while studying the development of far-right attitudes among adolescents. Examining the two together may provide a picture of the field of research as a whole. The first, which may be termed "political participation" is based on exploring voting behavior and finds that the young generation's support to right-wing parties is connected with the search for political community. Another best described as "subcultural socialization," focuses on youth far-right activism which does not involve political participation and emphasizes alienation from family and the desire to rebel against parents as a primary motivation.

An example of a "political participation" study is Daniel Rona's research, which focused on the rise of the extreme right-wing Hungarian Jobbik party among youth. He based his study on the research conducted by the Active Youth Research Group between 2011 and 2015 among university and college students. Rona found that two widely cited hypotheses in the field of far-right research: value preferences and economic crises, had only a limited effect on Hungarian youth. Instead, the research outcomes show that a typical young Jobbik-voter comes from a family where politics are rarely or never discussed, and schools taught by teachers who purposefully avoid discussing politics and democracy. Finally, the author concludes that a young, somewhat isolated, unemployed Jobbik supporter absolutely lacks the toolkit for critically absorbing political messages and, at the same time, searches for a political community and "world explanation." [19]

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[18] Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Youth and the Radical Right", 498.
[19] Rona, Dániel. "Far-Right Generation? Reasons behind the popularity of Jobbik among the Youth". *European Consortium for Political Research* https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/d599a34f-cAfD-4bfa-87ad-9ae9f1956ba4.pdf.

By contrast, an example of "subculture socialization" research is Michael Kimmel's in-depth interviews with ex-neo-Nazis in Scandinavia. This ethnographical study details adolescents from small towns or metropolitan suburbs, who come from a declining lower middle-class background and divorced families. His research shows that youths' motivations to become members of extreme right-wing groups are driven by detachment from family and are perceived as the first step towards manhood.[20]

These studies differ as to the backgrounds and motivations of their subjects, yet they both highlight the essential role of socialization agents in the development of adolescents' views and behavior. The development of right-wing extremist attitudes in individuals have tight connections with a range of agents in society, including family, context, milieu, media, church, and educational institutions. These form the basis of Political Socialization Theory and the approach employed in this work. The following sections will provide overviews of the research related to this theory, as well as a number of empirical studies, highlighting the correlations they found between the role of agents and attitudes development. The final section will discuss an additional and under recognized agent which became essential in this study's findings.

1.2. Political Socialization and Its Agents

Political socialization theory is an umbrella term for two research dimensions: first, to learn how political systems work and develop, and second, to gain a deeper understanding of how people develop a political identity. [21] The present study is based exactly on this micro level of analysis.

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[20] Michael Kimmel. "Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage: Ex-Nazis in Scandinavia", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (36)2 (April 2007): 202-218

[21] Henk Dekker, "Political Socialization Theory and Research" in *Politics and European Younger Generation: Political Socialization in Eastern, Central and Western Europe* ed. Henk Dekker and Rüdiger Meyenberg (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 1991) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234047064_Political_Socialization_Theory_and_Research

Various scholars define political socialization as the process through which individuals acquire relatively lasting orientations towards politics as it is viewed as the acquisition of the norms of political behavior that prevail.[22][23] Moreover, political socialization is believed to be the way in which different group memberships, socializing interactions and political-economic environment influence the visions people draw from their society.[24] Though few studies focus on radical right engagement, a remarkable characteristic of research on political socialization is that they frequently include preadult learning. Undeniably, one input of the socialization field is a compelling demonstration that political ideas start to develop early in childhood.[25]

As mentioned previously, several key agents of political socialization are identified that play principal roles in learning about the political world throughout childhood. Agents function simultaneously, influence each other, are related to one another, and operate within various political and socio-economic systems, cultures and processes.[26]

1.2.1. Family as Political Socialization Agent

Family is one of the most significant agents in the development of an individual's political behavior. This is supported by Dekker et al., who claim that family provides the primary motivation signals (along with national rituals) to produce national emotions and subsequently

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See also: Fred I. Greenstein, "Personality and Political Socialization: The Theories of Authoritarian and Democratic Character," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 361, no. 1 (September 1965): 81–95, https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626536100108 .

[22] Richard M. Melerman, "Revitalizing Political Socialization" in *Political Psychology* ed. Margaret Hermann (London: Jossey-Bass, 1986), 279.

[23] M. Kent Jennings and Richard M. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974)

[24] Hilde T. Himmelweit, "Political Socialization", *International Social Science Journal.* No. 35 (1983): 237-256

[25] Richard Niemi and Barbara I Sobieszek, "Political Socialization", *Annual Reviews Inc.* (1977): 209 https://www.jstor.org/stable/2945936

[26] Henk Dekker, "Political Socialization Theory and Research", 30-31.

national feelings in individuals.[27] This section will detail a number of studies on the role of family in developing extreme right attitudes, emphasizing the variety of possible outcomes and highlighting certain repeated themes.

One example is Adorno et al.'s research on the development of authoritarian personalities, which centers on family and parenting style to explain fascism, antisemitism and ethnocentrism.[28] The Berkeley Group which Adorno was a part of noted that authoritarian personality was a character common in the German middle classes: demanding strong leadership, regulation, and social order. They argue that children who grow up in a family regime overly concerned with "good behavior" and conformity to conventional moral codes are more prone towards developing authoritarian personalities; a simplistic way of thinking about the world in which people and their actions are firmly categorized into "right" and "wrong".[29] These theories theory received heavy criticism in the following years due to their claims that the threat of fascism comes solely from left-wing authoritarians, and their F-scale proposed to measures an individual's level of fascism.[30] Discussing these critiques stands beyond the scope of the present study's interest, yet the authors' emphasis on family remains valuable for future research. Adorno et al. confirms that the family is an important agent in the process of a child's political socialization, and that this can be confirmed empirically.

Another example is Thomas Gabriel's examination of the role of family as a "primary organizational structure" in the cultivation of racist attitudes and behavioral character. Gabriel

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[27] Henk Dekker, Darina Malova, and Sander Hoogendoorn, "Nationalism and Its Explanations," *Political Psychology* 24, no. 2 (June 2003): 345–76, https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00331.
[28] Theodor Adorno et al, *The Authoritarian Personality* (London and New York: Verso, 1950)
[29] Ibid
[30] Martin Roiser and Carla Willig, "The Strange Death of the Authoritarian Personality: 50 Years of Psychological and Political Debate", *History of the Human Sciences* (15)4 (2002): 71-96

studied right extremist adolescents' biographies to identify several possible paths of development.[31]

One of the paths is denoted by violence, disregard, and the search for recognition. Adolescents linked with this cluster are characterized by abusive family histories and violations of their social, psychic and physical integrity. Besides trauma, the central theme of their biographies appears to be failure to integrate socially.[32]

Another path is characterized by a lack of perception and a quest for experience, difference and visibility. The central feature of this cluster is a lack of subjectively significant and meaningful communication within the family circle, and specifically a strong "culture of non-attention."[33]

Apart from the two paths described above, the study findings demonstrate a third cluster of extreme right-wing adolescents identified by the radicalization of the values of their social environmental origin. This cluster is distinguished by the fact that political right-wing attitudes are already present in parents, grandparents or other close attachment figures of the adolescents. Rather than a path of abuse or disregard, in this group the adolescents see themselves as having executive power, and their political statements are acts that bring them approval and appreciation.[34] This cluster is especially relevant for the present study, and reminds of the role that family may play in ensuring ideological continuity.

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[31] Thomas Gabriel, "Parenting and Right-Wing Extremism – Analysis of the Biographical Genesis of Racism Among Young People" in NRP 4-+ Publication "Right-Wing Extremism in Switzerland - An International Comparison" (July, 2007): 1-9. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326016319
[32] Ibid
[33] Ibid
[34] Ibid

The topic of continuity is also central in the study on the origins of extreme right attitudes among youth conducted by Bert Klandermans. He tried to answer the question of how the youth becomes involved in the extreme right based on 157 life-history interviews conducted between 1995 and 1999 among activists of extreme right organizations in France, Germany, Netherlands, Italy and Flanders (Belgium). The author found that right-wing activism (RWA) originates from existing collective memory: in Germany and the Netherlands from the age of National Socialism, and in Italy, France, and Flanders from a "heroic" nationalist past. Klandermans encountered three kinds of life histories: continuity, conversion and compliance. Sharing similarities with the earlier studies mentioned, continuity denotes life stories in which involvement and engagement in a movement was a natural result of earlier political socialization. Conversion relates to those cases where movement participation is connected to a break with the past and is rooted in increasing disillusionment. In such life-stories, important events play the main role. The third trajectory revealed in the interviews is compliance. This refers to a situation in which people become extreme right activists due to external influences rather than original initiatives. These stories typically tell of friends and family members who convinced the subject to take an active part in the extreme right. Klandermans found that in almost all national contexts, socialization, especially by the family, contributes most to the recruitment of activists. The vast majority of those who were recruited, grew up in an extreme right milieu.[35]

Other empirical research demonstrates the transmission of political values and party identification from parents to their offspring. A study by Myron Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi analyzed data collected in 1965 by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, including 1669

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[35] Bert Klandermans, "Extreme right activists: Recruitment and experiences", in *The Populist Radical Right,* ed. Cas Mudde (New York: Routledge, 2017), 238-257.

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interviews held with senior students and their parents from 97 secondary level schools. This found a strong correlation between the parents' and children's political values, and although 38% of the interviewed students reported disagreement with their parents, fewer than 15% put these disagreements within a generally defined area of political and social phenomena.[36]

In addition, in a study of German and British households, Alan Zuckerman, Josip Dasovic and Jennifer Fitzgerald demonstrate that an individual's support of a certain political party is greatly influenced by other family members. Using data from a German Socio-Economic Panel Study and a British Household Panel Survey between 1985 and 2001, these authors show that the party support of the heads of the household responds to the party preferences of the rest of the family members, spouses influence each other's partisanship and from their side, parents influence their children's attitudes. As the authors note, family members are influenced by those with whom they trust and communicate most.[37]

Finally, these claims are supported by a study by Raphael Ventura of Israeli Jewish family cells, which demonstrate the correlation between the parents and their children's party choices. Surveying 272 such families, he found that more than one half of the children share their parents' party, and 80% voted for a party from the parents' political alignment. As a result, Ventura suggests a model of family political socialization in which children obtain political labels from their parents that guide them and crystallize their voting habits. Children learn to associate with specific political labels and use them as voting cues primarily by watching the parents use the label

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[36] M. Kent Jennings and Richard M. Niemi, "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child", *The American Political Science Review (62)1.* (March 1968) 169-184 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1953332
[37] Alan S Zuckerman, Josip Dasovic and Jennifer Fitzgerald, *Partisan Families: The Social Logic of Bounded Partisanship in Germany and Britain.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

while debating about politics or while listening to political news. Parents may also consciously pass the label to their children, using it to clarify what is wrong and what is right politically.[38]

To conclude, the literature analyzed above shows that family is a deeply impactful political socialization agent with a primary influence on the development of a child's political attitudes and behavior. This is especially clear in cases of families that lack communication, are abusive, or more characteristically authoritarian, as these may be risk factors in producing youths with radical views or who engage in extreme right activism. Another observation is that adolescents brought up in a family circle characterized by political right attitudes also tend to be more susceptible to extreme right radicalism. Apart from this, various empirical studies support the claim that political views and behavior are transmittable from parents to their children.

1.2.2. Role of the Context and Milieus in Political Socialization

Family is not the sole agent that influences the process of an individual's political socialization development. Social milieu, meaning one's overall social environment, friendships, peer groups, and educational institutions, is another important agent. As this includes a number of distinct categories of analysis, it has been divided into two sections: the first describing studies on milieu as a broad social environment, and the second focusing specifically on peer group relationships.

Annick Percheron is foundational in this analysis as having developed the idea of milieus as agents of political socialization. She argues that while milieus are connected with the place of residence, they should not be limited to the aspect of a single urbanization degree. Instead, space organization is characterized by social connections that can vary not only between urban and rural milieu, but

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[38] Raphael Ventura, "Family Political Socialization in Multiparty Systems," *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 6 (August 2001): 666–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414001034006004.

also between specific urban and rural environments. In the context of this study, the author proposes that milieu's have dual influences on the formation of a child's attitudes. While admitting the family to be one of the most important agents of socialization, Percheron distinguishes two different levels of context: the overall meaning in which the child, families, and schools are situated, and in which they all interact in different ways; and the context of the child himself, formed by his family, school and, in some way, the overall context itself. [39]

Percheron tested how the influence of context may intervene in the process of obtaining political attitudes by children based on French data. The analyzes showed the significance of subculture, and thus the impact of an individual's multiple "belonging" networks, in the world picture constructed by themselves. According to the findings, the author concludes that the adolescent's value system is the outcome of the interaction and mediation between all the "milieus" in which he is involved.[40]

This stresses a number of essential points. First, the overall understanding of reality, meaning the assessment of things one encounters in life, bears the imprint of all the milieus in which the adolescent is involved. Therefore reactions to experiences should "cut across" or in some way react in accordance with one's accepted milieus. Second, the fact of living in the same location tends to create more uniform or consistent views of different social groups. Third, the influence of context (or milieu) on developing an adolescent's value system is not uniform and depends on the intensity and nature of their ideological choice.[41]

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[39] Annick Percheron, "The Influence of the Socio-Political Context on Political Socialization," *European Journal of Political Research* 10, no. 1 (March 1982): 53–69, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1982.tb00004.x.
[40] Ibid
[41] Annick Percheron, "The Influence of the Socio-Political Context on Political Socialization", 67

Nevertheless, context and milieus may be changeable throughout time. Stephan Fuchs and Charles E. Case argue that young people can be less prejudiced if they engage in a wider variety of social interactions. They build their claim on the notion of ritual density, which tends to be high when individuals continuously interact within the same community contexts and share homogeneous experiences. Thus, the stereotyped formulas start to be considered as the most sacred. As a result, prejudiced "lifeforms" create a world which is structured around simplistic distinctions between good and bad, black and white, in-group and out-group. These high ritual density lifeforms might produce fundamentalist religious sentiments, traditional sex role conceptions, political ethnocentrism, or institutionalize strict controls on the experiences and perceptions of its members. In most cases, at the stage of a child's moral development the nuclear family is the primary or even exclusive reference community, meaning ritual density is relatively high and conventional morality emerges to define good and bad in terms of concrete family expectations. However, as the child starts increasingly establishing social relationships outside of the family (friends, peers, school), ritual density decreases as social networks become more diversified. Therefore, Fuchs and Case argue that formal education is related to their central construct of ritual density. Education institutions reduce the level of ritual density by forming a hierarchy of increasingly cosmopolitan institutions which introduce more compound and diverse cultural exchange networks to individuals, providing an alternative social good. In comparison to elementary and high schools (which are embedded in more local community structures), the authors view universities as part of more diverse social relationships and that socialization through university decreases ritual density to a higher extent. Therefore, Fuchs and Case expect older people to be more prejudiced, as they usually have fewer opportunities to engage in a broader variety of social interactions than young

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people.[42] Notably, this theiry has been tested by Muranyi, Puuronen, and Zurev in an empirical study focused on Hungarian, Russian, and Finnish cases, where they proved the correlation between ritual density and prejudice.[43]

1.2.3. Peer Group as an Agent of Political Socialization

Compared with research on milieu as an agent of political socialization, the literature on the influence of peer groups in politics is extensive. The following studies especially focus on student communities, which are of primary relevance to the current study. Notably, these studies provide conflicting evidence about peer influence on one's political affiliations. Some demonstrate the evidence that individuals follow the political affiliations of their peers, while others discover no connection.[44] [45] [46] [47] Kenneth Langton conducted a study exploring the role of peer groups in the context of school-based on a national sample of 1287 students in government-aided secondary schools in Jamaica and the data of 1349 primary and secondary schools' students in Detroit, Michigan on the influence of the class climate of the school. The outcomes illustrated that the peer group's impact tend to be independent of the school's wider environment. Under the controlled homogeneity of the school, heterogenous class peer groups still play an important role in resocializing students of the working class towards higher-class political norms.[48] Even though later research showed that certain characteristics might be more likely to be influenced by peers

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[42] Stephan Fuchs and Charles E. Case, "Prejudice as Lifeform", *Sociological Inquiry (59)3*. (August 1989): 301-317
[43] Istvan Muranyi, Vesa Puuronen and Denis Zuev, "Lifeform: An Explanation of Prejudices of Young People", *Journal of Social Research & Policy*. No. 2 (December 2010): 63-78
[44] Christopher Kenny. "The Microenvironment of Attitude Change", *The Journal of Politics,* (56)3, (1994): 715-728
[45] Paul Beck. "Encouraging Political Defection: The Role of Personal Discussion Networks in Partisan Desertions to the Opposition Party and Perot Votes in 1992", *Political Behavior*. (24)4, (2002): 309-337
[46] Camila Campos, Shaun Patrick Hargreaves Heap and Fernanda Leite Lopez de Leon. "The Political Influence of peer groups: Experimental evidence in the classroom", *Oxford Economic Papers*. 69(4), (October 2017): 963-985 DOI: 10.1093/oep/gpw065
[47] Michael MacKuen and Courtney Brown. "Political Context and Attitude Change", *American Political Science Review,* (81)2, (1987): 471-490
[48] Kenneth P Langton. "Peer Group and School and the Political Socialization Process", *The American Political Science Review* (61)3 (September, 1967): 751-758 https://www.jstor.org/stable/1976093

than others, political attitudes were generally not of sufficient value to respondent's peers to conform to group pressures.[49]

It is commonly agreed that there are two crucial conditions for exercising political influence: the existence of communication about the political subject, and receptiveness which usually involves an emotional bond between individuals, for example, family or friends.[50] As Kent Tedin argues, a teenager is more likely to learn about a certain issue if it is important to a parent or peer than if it is not. Moreover, politics seem to be a rare basis for adolescent friendship.[51] The study conducted by Tedin among the newly graduate seniors of Iowa City's largest high school, which also included their parents and friends, demonstrates that when issues are important to parents or peers and accurately perceived by adolescents, attitude relationships are high. However, political issues transmission has a higher correlation with parents than with peers since the politics does not appear to be important for the peer groups.[52]

Therefore, we cannot unequivocally argue that peers can have a strong influence on adolescents' political behavior development, but it does not mean that this claim should be rejected. Instead, the peer group influence should be examined case by case, individually. Compared to the peer groups, politics appear to be more critical in the case of socialization through churches, which will be discussed in the following sub-chapter.

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[49] Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz and James G Gimpel. "Religion and Political Socialization" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics* ed. James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt (Oxford University Press, 2009) 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326529.003.0006

[50] Kent L Tedin. "Assessing Peer and Parent Influence on Adolescent Political Attitudes", *American Journal of Political Science*. (24)1 (February 1980): 137. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2110929

[51] Ibid

[52] Ibid

1.2.4 Role of Religion in Political Socialization

Social institutions such as unions and churches are major political actors, influencing both political elites and their wider membership.[53] Even though class and religious divisions started to decrease in influence, there is evidence to propose that the divide between religious voters and secular voters is still a moderately strong predictor of the vote.[54] Pippa Norris and Ronal Inglehart examined correlations between religious values and Right orientations in agrarian, industrial, and post-industrial countries worldwide based on the comparative study of these countries' electoral systems. Research demonstrates that religious involvement remains an important positive indicator for Right orientations in industrial and postindustrial societies, even after controlling for other socio-demographic factors. Norris and Inglehart conclude that religious participation emerges as the strongest indicator of Right ideology, exhibiting far greater impact than any of the predictors of social class. Moreover, study results show that those who consider religion to be important to their lives are more Right in almost all nations.[55]

Furthermore, in a study about priests' influence on parishioners' political attitudes (based on a questionnaire filled by nearly 1000 Catholic parishes), Gregory Smith concludes that the parishioners in liberal pastoral parishes are notably more liberal than their counterparts in parishes with moderate pastors in terms of a wide variety of political issues and political ideologies.[56] Therefore, one can argue that due to this context, churches play an important role in adolescents'

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[53] Russel J. Dalton. "Democracy and its Citizens: Patters of Political Change", Center for the Study of Democracy (1996) https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pn25985
[54] Kai Arzheimer and Elisabeth Carter. "Religiosity and Voting for the Radical Right". Keele European Parties Research Unit, Working Paper 28 (2009)
https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/group/kepru/KEPRU%20WP%2028.pdf
[55] Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide (Second edition)*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 201-207
[56] Gregory A. Smith. "The Influence of Priests on the Political Attitudes of Roman Catholics", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (44)3 (August 2005): 291-306

political behavior development. Churches are among the few places where young people interact with adults outside their family – that is, other citizens who can introduce them to information and ideas that may be absent, or poorly communicated, in their homes.[57] Moreover, the church-goer American adolescents in their interviews point out that the active involvement in religious communities leads to a dense network of relational ties as the religious organizations can provide cultural moral orders featured by "impressive scope, depth and authority, often surpassing other kinds of associations".[58]

Taking into consideration the dense network relation ties, moral orders and obedience towards authorities transmitted by churches, it can be hypothesized that church and faith plays a significant role in the development of adolescents' political views and attitudes. Within the field of far right studies, the argument that religiousness is an implicit part of nationalist identity has spread widely, which explains why it stimulates the anti-democratic political culture that emerged from it.[59]

Though, as already mentioned above, the influence of religion and churches saw a decline in recent years. Perhaps stepping into this gap, new informational technologies occupy space in adolescents' socialization processes.

1.2.5. Role of Media and Social Media Networks in Political Socialization

Apart from the literature overviewed above, while analyzing the development of extreme right-wing attitudes, we should not exclude other attributes that may be important in shaping a child's political orientation. As Raewyn Connell argues, children do not merely reproduce ideas from

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[57] Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz and James G Gimpel. "Religion and Political Socialization", 10.

[58] Christian Smith and Melinda Lunquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 242

[59] Dominikos, Sik. "The Imitated Public Sphere: The Case of Hungary's Far Right" in *Digital Media Strategies of the Far-Right in Europe and the United States*, ed. Patricia Anne Simpson and Helga Druxes (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 156.

adults, but they selectively appropriate the material supplied by mass media, schools, parents, and build their individual structures. Connell's study involved interviewing 119 children in Sydney from the ages of 5 to 16. As the findings demonstrate, the development of political beliefs is a historical process (which stretches across time and connects current events with the past ones), rather than a mechanical function. Therefore, children should be seen as members of various overlapping communities of different traditions. Thus, the author claims that the values of the children are connected with their communities' social and political past. However, the most significant influence among the children appeared to be the news reporting by the media.[60]

Media tends to be one of the aspects most frequently discussed in political socialization theory. For example, Dekker notes that deliberate direct political socialization is considered to happen by means of TV and radio programs, which provide political information and propaganda, political books, political sections of newspapers, politically-involved popular music, etc.[61]

In another study, Doris Graber and Johanna Dunaway tried to answer questions about the effect media has on the habits of thought and action, and whether the social and political views of the people are substantially influenced by what they read, hear and see. As the authors point out, most Americans are either directly or indirectly subjected to the combined impact of traditional and digital media by contact with individuals who tell them what they have learned, seen or read.[62] Due to this, it becomes particularly interesting to see what role the media plays in the process of children's political socialization. According to Graber and Dunaway, 80% of the content children

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[60] Raewyn Connell, *The Child's Construction of Politics.* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1971), 1-251
[61] Henk Dekker, "Political Socialization Theory and Research" in *Politics and European Younger Generation: Political Socialization in Eastern, Central and Western Europe* ed. Henk Dekker and Rüdiger Meyenberg (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 1991) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234047064_Political_Socialization_Theory_and_Research
[62] Doris A. Graber and Johanna Dunaway, *Mass Media and American Politics*, Tenth edition (Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, an imprint of SAGE, 2018).

see on TV is projected for adults, and presents events that significantly vary from the immediate environment of the child. If they are able to understand the message, the effect is potentially influential as the minds of children are trained for learning and are likely to take such demonstrations as face value.[63]

In current digital times, apart from the traditional media, online media and social network platforms have become particularly engaged in everyday politics. Social media is especially prominent in this sense as it offers a new platform to political actors to promote themselves and unmediated and inexpensive access to supporters. Moreover, it fits populist narratives as being non-hierarchical.[64]

In this context, it is especially important to explore the communication tactics the far-right uses online in order to draw the young generation's attention. The online far-right's success in reaching out to young digital natives have been particularly prominent. Their use of video game references, anti-establishment rhetoric and thrilling counter-culture behavior has allowed them to appeal to significant proportions of Generation Z and millennials. The far-right has increasingly polished its image among young generations by hiding racial slanders behind funny jokes and memes, and "by replacing traditional swastika-ridden attire with cool jeans and Ray Ban sunglasses".[65]

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[63] Ibid
[64] Nicole Ernst et al., "Extreme parties and populism: an analysis of Facebook and Twitter across six countries", *Information, Communication & Society, (20) 9.* (May 2017): 1347. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1329333
[65] Julia Ebner, "Counter-Creativity: Innovative Ways to Counter Far-Right Communication Tactics" in *Post-Digital Cultures of the Far-Right: Online Actions and Offline Consequences in Europe and the US* ed. Maik Fielitz and Nick Thurston (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2019), 177.

1.2.6. War Memory as a Political Socialization Agent

The previous have provided overviews of a number of recognized political socialization agents, however, in the course of the research conducted for this study, a particular gap was discovered. This was an agent not typically discussed in either research nor theoretical scholarship on the process of attaining political attitudes and behavior in childhood or adolescence: the role of War Memory. Although it was not envisaged in the preliminary hypothesis, this appeared to be a carrier of particular importance while conducting field research of the present study, and I suggest this to be a crucial one in my subject's formative years. Therefore, in this section, I will overview the very limited existing academic literature dedicated to the role of war memory as an agent.

A relevant, yet extremely antiquated description of this concept is provided by Ernest Renan, a late nineteenth century philosopher and scholar. As he framed it in a speech from 1892, a heroic past with glory "is the social capital upon which the national idea rests. … One lives in proportion to the sacrifices that one has committed and the troubles that one has suffered."[66] Moreover, he argued that struggle unites more than joy. Times of mourning are worth more than triumphs to national memory as they impose duties and entail a common effort.[67]

This reasoning served as a ground for Diego Muro's research about the role of war memory in Basque's radical nationalism. As he argues, warfare not only causes the polarization of stereotypes but also feeds radical nationalism. The role of sacrifice is particularly crucial in this regard. Even though it may seem the end of national grandeur, the downfalls tend to be remembered as noble images of heroic resistance. It seems that uncompromising love for the country, expressed in

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[66] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne (March, 1882) (translated by Ethan Rundell) http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf
[67] Ibid

personal sacrifice, can occur only in defeat since war provides the perfect stage for an apotheotic end to the zealous nationalist.[68] In this regard, it becomes particularly interesting to research how young people adopt these historical narratives and develop their own political identity as a result.

This is particularly crucial for individuals who recently witnessed the war in their home countries. An essential study for the role of "living" war memory in the development of political attitudes (including in the South Caucasus) is provided by Anton Popov and Dusan Deak.[69] Their Georgian case study demonstrates that youth's living memories of armed conflicts (the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008) are connected with family memories of the 1990s and perceived as the most difficult period when their parents lived on the edge of starvation. This may produce tensions about the issues of national identity and also the role of ethnic Others in their country's past. Consequently, the living memories of "difficult past" feature in the narratives of young people as a reference point for rejecting or justifying growing xenophobia and nationalistic attitudes in society.

This is a largely unstudied topic, because even though there exists a field of memory politics, it is mostly oriented toward studying events of the distant past, not studied in relation to adolescent development or "living memory." The only exception I have found is the extremely useful Popov and Deak study. I suggest that scholars researching the role of family as a political socialization agent, should take note of how family may have a role in transmitting the memory of difficult times to children and shaping their offspring's views on national trauma.

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[68] Diego Muro "The Politics of War Memory in Radical Basque Nationalism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (32)4 (April, 2009): 659-678

[69] Anton Popov and Dusan Deak. "Making sense of the "difficult" past: transmission of political heritage and memory-work among young people across Europe. *The Sociological Review* (63)S2 (2015): 36-52

Summary

The theoretical literature and empirical studies present in this section mostly concentrates on exploring the impact of different agents in the process of a child's political socialization through their electoral choices. Though, as Cynthia Miller-Idriss stresses, political ideologies are not only held intellectually and are neither only expressed through voting, particularly for youth; they are inscribed on bodies in youth choices regarding musculature, different symbols, body image, etc.[70] Responding to this, the present study will research the development of national attitudes among young Georgian extreme right-wing activists while focusing on their views and life experiences. To do so, I will use the theoretical framework of political socialization theory and its agents (especially family, milieus (context), social media, and war memory) to evaluate their influence on the process of a child's political socialization.

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[70] Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Youth and the Radical Right" in *The Oxford Handbook of The Radical Right,* ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018): 514.

Chapter 2. Defining Georgian National Identity and Ethno-Nationalism in Georgia

This chapter focuses on the historical and ideological context for the rise of right-wing nationalist movements in Georgia. I argue that traditional Georgian nationalism serves as an foundation for these groups, and that in order to understand their emergence, we must first analyze the development of ethnonationalism in Georgia.

The presented chapter will overview the waves of Georgian nationalism's development and describe how it attained an ethno-nationalist character which fueled radical right-wing sentiments in the early 1990s, and still appears to be an ideological ground for modern right-wing movements. This can be connected with the failure of state attempts to build civic nationalism, as well as the political culture that developed during Soviet times which remains deeply seated in peoples' conciousness. This context directly informed modern right-wing groups' attitudes towards ethnic minorities and produced an ideology of "Georgianess" as morality. Emphasis is also placed on the religious character of Georgian ethno-nationalism as the Orthodox Christianity tends to be a marker of Georgian national identity actively promoted by the church. The issue of religious affiliation carries a special importance for the recently emerged right-wing, as religion is one of the main issues on which the radical and extreme right-wing movements differ. In the final section research questions and hypotheses will be presented.

2.1. Understanding Georgian Nationalism Before and During Soviet Times

Georgian nationalism first emerged in the 19th century in a form of civic nationalism when Georgia was a province of Russia. It had its origins among a group of educated young people educated in St. Petersburg who subsequently returned to Georgia, intending to unite the nation. They defined the nation according to one key sign: Georgian language, and asserted claims to any territory where

Georgian-speaking people were living. The above-mentioned group was led by Ilia Chavchavadze, who is perceived as "the father of the Georgian nation".[71] Chavchavadze was well aware of the challenges Georgia was facing during that time, especially the weakness of national unity. His concept of Georgianness was shaped by these needs to emphasize a shared history of values and memory. Chavchavadze's national identity was tailored to religious diversity, as according to his vision, a Georgian could be a member of any religious group.[72]

The concept of civic nationalism disappeared after Georgia's Sovietization, which may be characterized as another stage of the development of Georgian nationalism. Paradoxically, ethnic nationalism saw growth during this time. Field scholars attribute the nationalist discourse spread in Soviet Georgia as an outcome of the Soviet Union's nationalist policies. Natalie Sabanadze, in her book "Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and The Basque Country" calls the process of Georgian nationalism development during the Soviet times "folklorization." According to her, it was exactly the Soviet experience that formed Georgian nationalism's character, as it emerged during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. She views the folklorization of national identity as part of the Soviet nationalities policy.[73]

Like other union republics in the USSR, the Georgian nation was granted the status of a titular nationality and subordinated national minorities in different ways. [74] Teresa Rakowska-Harmostone calls the nationalism promoted by the Soviet Union in its titular republics "orthodox nationalism". This meant the deliberate pursuit of greater cultural, political, and economic

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[71] Tatia Kekelia et al. *Martlmadidebeli Eklesiis Roli Qartuili Natsionaluri Identobis Chamokalibebashi,* (Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2013), 22.

[72] Diana Bogishvili et al. *Qartuli Erovnuil Identoba: Konpliqti da Integratsia*, (Tbilisi: Nekeri, 2016), 155.

[73] Natalie Sabanadze. *Globalization and Nationalism: Cases of Georgia and The Basque Country.* (Central European University Press: Budapest, 2010), 81.

[74] Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia", *International Security (24) 3.* (Winter 1999/2000): 163

autonomy within the existing system.[75] Orthodox nationalism focused on cultural issues such as education, language, literature, the restoration of monuments, film, and sports.[76] Accordingly, there is evidence that even the rural masses of the most backward republics identified with national traditions.[77] Georgia, too, had an opportunity to establish its own national elite and national cultural intelligentsia in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR).[78]

As part of this, official Soviet historiography encouraged national republic historians to discover their ancient origins and explore their ethnogenesis. This led to unchallenged historical narratives stimulated by educational institutions, including ancient roots, unique folk cultures, tough past, and a dazzling present brought by the communist rule. As Sabanadze notes, in this context, the self-regulatory character of Georgia's Soviet nationalism carries special importance.[79] It appeared that the Soviet propaganda was largely based on praise and glorification of all Soviet achievements. Self-praise and lack of criticism were characteristics of Soviet Georgian intelligentsia as well, which enjoyed exalting local traditions, customs, wine, poetry and, music, stimulating a feeling of superiority among Georgians over other ethnic groups and nations.[80]

The nature of Georgian nationalism developed in the Soviet era can be seen by observing attitudes towards ethnic minorities. One of the strongly established myths of folk nationalism was Georgians' distinctively hospitable, open, and inclusive national character in relation to non-Georgian minorities residing in the republic. An official national discourse promoted the concept

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[75] Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of nationalism in the USSR", *Problems of Communism* (23)3 (May-June 1974):15.
[76] Stephen Jones. "The Myth of Georgian Nationalism" in his *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence* (New York: I. B. Yauris & Co. LTD, 2013), 221.
[77] Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, "The Dialectics of nationalism in the USSR", 15.
[78] Natalie Sabanadze. *Globalization and Nationalism: Cases of Georgia and The Basque Country,* 82
[79] Ibid
[80] Ibid

of multi-faith and multiethnic Georgia, placing it within the sense of Georgian openness and hospitality. Consequently, the idea of tolerance was confused with hospitality. This resulted in a profoundly intolerant culture where the majority assumed that outsiders were the perpetual guests and should, therefore, be treated according to the best Georgian traditions of hospitality. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this idea of "minorities are guests" was dangerously exploited by radical nationalists and did major harm to the newly independent Georgian state's social stability.[81]

We can conclude that even though Soviet policy was intended to be anti-nationalist, it actually had the effect of encouraging and producing greater ethnonationalism in the republics. As Brubaker points out, "the regime repressed nationalism, of course; but at the same time, it went further than any other state before or since in institutionalizing territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental social categories. In doing so, it inadvertently created a political field supremely conducive to nationalism."[82]

2.2. The Emergence of the National-Liberation Movement and The Role of Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Forming Georgian Ethnonationalism

The 1970s and 1980s were followed by a powerful wave of Georgian ethnic identity formation especially connected with Georgian dissident activity. Their concerns were less focused on human rights and civil liberties than on restoring Georgia's independence, language, religion, and traditions.[83] In addition, this period coincides with the election of the current Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II. His work is associated with a special strengthening of a religious character in Georgian national identity. Astonishingly, during a clerical ceremony in 1988, Ilia II used the notion of

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[81] Ibid

[82] Rogers Brubaker. "Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism" in *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* ed. John A. Hall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 286

[83] Oliver Reisner. "Georgia and its new national movement" in *Nationalism in Late and Post-Communist Europe* ed. Jahn Egbert. (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2009)

"heavenly Georgia", referring to a uniquely Georgian afterlife, where exclusively Orthodox Christian Georgians have acquired eternal empyrean, implicitly expelling non-Orthodox Georgians from this notion.[84]

This topic is also closely connected with the emergence of the national-liberation movement in the late 1980s, and its leaders, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (who became the first president of Georgia after gaining independence) and Merab Kostava. As historian Stephen Jones notes, a close look at Gamsakhurdia's writings and statements before and after his election demonstrates that his focus was not on human rights but exclusively Georgian rights.[85] Gamsakhurdia and Kostava tried to prove a theory in which Georgia and Georgians have a special mission to synthesize Western and Eastern civilizations, the realization of which requires Orthodox dogma to become a cornerstone for the Georgian nation.[86] Gamsakhurdia, later assessed as a right-wing populist, described the origins of Georgian civilization in messianic terms and portrayed Georgia as a powerful Christian state where culturally and spiritually superior Georgians should have privileged access to state power.[87] In the rhetoric of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Azerbaijani, Armenian, Abkhaz and Ossetian minorities within Georgia were depicted either as guests of the Georgians or as the agents of the Soviet government.[88]

Nevertheless, Zviad Gamsakhurdia was not characterized by anti-globalism. Moreover, he perceived the West to be the new protector of independent Georgia, and believed that Christian

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[84] Diana Bogishvili et al. *Qartuli Erovnuil Identoba: Konpliqti da Integratsia*, 155.
[85] Stephen Jones. *Georgia: A Political History since Independence,* 55.
[86] Zurab Davitashvili. *Natsionalizmi da Globalizatsia.* (Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 2003), 401.
[87] Stephen Jones. *Georgia: A Political History since Independence.* 59
[88] Ronald Grigor Suny, "Provisional Stabilities: The Politics of Identities in Post-Soviet Eurasia", 163.

Georgia had been part of the European civilization since ancient times, which gave place to Georgia in the European family.[89]

In October of 1990, Gamsakhurdia was elected as the Supreme Soviet chairman and formed the first non-communist government with an explicit intent to lead Georgia towards full independence. In March of the following year, he organized a referendum on restoring the independence of Georgia, in which more than 90% of participants voted in favor of it, and the newly elected Georgian government released a formal declaration of independence on April 9, 1991. A vast majority of Georgia's voters, almost 87%, chose Gamsakhurdia as their country's first popularly elected president on May 26 of the same year. [90] Almost immediately his rhetoric and policy escalated relations with ethnic minorities and the autonomous republics of Georgia, resulting in a growing number of individuals who were not satisfied with his policies. This led to a coup in August 1991, after which the country found itself in a state of civil war.

2.3 Disappearance and Later Reemergence of Ethnonationalism: The Modern Georgian Context

Gamsakhurdia's decision to flee the country resulted in the invitation by a military council of former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze to become Georgia's new leader. Shevardnadze was a Soviet bureaucrat with no romantic nationalist aspirations, only concerned with the establishment of the state and his control within it.[91] Unlike Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze put an emphasis on the importance of ethnic reconciliation, cultural differences, and inclusive citizenship. He managed to get the recognition of the international community and to incorporate

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[89] Stephen Jones. "Chapter 3: Populism in Georgia: The Gamsakhurdia Phenomenon" in his *Georgia: A Political History since Independence.* (New York: I. B. Yauris & Co LTD, 2013), 68
[90] Ghia Nodia. "Political Turmoil in Georgia and the Ethnic Policies of Zviad Gamsakhurdia" in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus* ed. Bruno Coppieters (Brussels: VUB University Press, 1996)
[91] Natalie Sabanadze. *Globalization and Nationalism: Cases of Georgia and The Basque Country*

Georgia into international organizations.[92] Despite the fact that ethnic nationalism disappeared from the country's political scene, during the last years of Shevardnadze's presidency, ethnonationalist discourse reemerged in public through the particular emphasis of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The understanding of nationalism shaped by Gamsakhurdia was later replaced by a version in which the Georgian Orthodox Church was the supreme authority. As a result, national discourse gained more and more religious tone. [93] As the epistle of the Patriarch of 1991 reads:

> "Georgian people have been Christians since the first century and have to remain so. Sects or foreign religions should not influence our nation. Orthodox Christianity will save Georgia. Anyone who betrays Orthodoxy and our church, will be a traitor of the nation. That's why anyone, who promotes various religions in Georgia, is declared as the enemy of the Georgian nation." [94]

Therefore, Orthodox Christianity was illustrated as the fundamental pillar of Georgian identity that needed special protection and attention in the context of globalization. Global conspiracy theories began to gain attention, with sinister globalist powers supposedly undermining national identities, faith, and church.[95]

The high level of corruption and poverty which reigned during Shevardnadze's presidency led to the Rose Revolution of 2003, after which Mikheil Saakashvili came to power. Saakashvili worked

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[92] Stephen Jones. "Chapter 8: The Myth of Georgian Nationalism" in his *Georgia: A Political History Since Independence*. (New York: I. B Yauris & Co LTD, 2013), 216
[93] Sopo Zviadadze. "Religiis Transpormatsia da Religiuri Identobis Ramdenime Taviseburebа Acharashi" in *Religia, Sazogadoeba da Politika Saqartveloshi* ed. Nino Ghambashidze. (Tbilisi, The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, 2016), 15.
[94] 1991 year epistle of Ilia II. *Epistoleni, Sitkvani, Qadagebani.* Book II. (Tbilisi, 1997)
[95] Natalie Sabanadze. *Globalization and Nationalism: Cases of Georgia and The Basque Country*

hard to turn Georgia's ideology of ethnocentric nationalism into a patriotism that is more modern, multiethnic, and democratic. This resulted in the recognition and acknowledgement of minority rights, at least on the government level, and the development of official rhetoric promoting common citizenship as the basis for the Georgian state. However, at the societal level, the results have been more mixed.[96] Currently, official representatives of the Georgian government still use Christian religion to define and underline the Georgian nation's historical belonging to a European identity.[97]

As the historical events demonstrated above show, while governments have changed throughout this time, and nationalist discourse was supposed to shift to civic one, there has been a steady increase of Church funding by the state. This has led to the latter gaining immeasurable authority in Georgian society. Tbilisi-based experts of the field argue that the question of "Georgianness" has become particularly alarming during last years: "we confront the problem of identifying nationality with a certain ethnic group (ethnic Georgians) and on the other hand, equating Georgians with a particular religious group (Orthodox Christians) by both politicians and representatives of the Georgian Church.[98]

2.4 Right-Wing Movements in Modern Georgia

Despite attempts to build civic nationalism in the country, far-right rhetoric and ethnonational sentiments have grown stronger in recent years. As the study published by the "Caucasus Research Resource Center – Georgia" shows, the representation and audience of far-right groups

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[96] Ibid
[97] Official Web Site of the President of Georgia, "Salome Zurabishvili: Saqartvelos Evropuli MIstsrapeba Siakhle Ar Aris", Interview of the President of Georgia with "France 24" (September, 2019)
https://www.president.gov.ge/geo/pressamsakhuri/interviuebi/salome-zurabishvili-saqartvelos-evropuli-miscrafeb.aspx
[98] Diana Bogishvili et al. *Qartuli Erovnuil Identoba: Konpliqti da Integratsia*

significantly increased between 2015 and 2018. The analysis demonstrates that far-right group activities peak during "liberal" events, such as the decriminalization of drug use, or the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia. According to the study, the number of followers of far-right social media pages increased from 89 325 to 758 850 in the time period between 2015 – 2018.[99]

Far-right groups in Georgia are not homogenous and can be divided into two different categories. I propose to classify them according to Cas Mudde's categorization as it best fits the characteristics and agenda of local Georgian movements: (1) radical rights who acknowledge the essence of democracy but reject principles of liberal democracy such as the rule of law and minority rights. In the Georgian context, "Georgian March" and "The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia" can be perceived as such. And, (2) extreme rights who discard the essence of democracy and while doing so, stand close to fascism. By nature, the extreme right is more revolutionary. In the Georgian context "Georgia's National Unity" is one national-socialist movement.[100]

Members of Georgian radical right groups equate religion and nationality with each other. The importance of religion is also illustrated in their loyalty toward Russia, as the leaders of the radical right groups often emphasize the cruciality of the friendship between "two same faith believer nations." [101] Opposite to this, representatives of the extreme right groups emphasize their anti-

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[99] Caucasus Resource Research Center – Georgia. "Antidasavluri Diskursis Tsinaaghmdeg Brdzola Sotsialur Mediashi". (2018)
http://awdb.ge/files/PPAG_Anti%20western%20propaganda%20in%20social%20media_geo.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2jK5CG4jsAavERHZJVYCr1cfnH8EaDq-AdZbO1HA9xvFIBtWo2l42xxZQ
[100]Cas Mudde. *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

[101]Tabula News, "Bregadze: Vetsdebi, rom ruseti gavkhado saqartvelos megobari", (2018)
http://www.tabula.ge/ge/verbatim/131835-bregadze-vecdebi-rom-ruseti-gavxado-saqartvelos-megobari

Russian attitudes and protest the Russian occupation of Georgian territories.[102] Despite their loyal attitude towards the Church, their rhetoric does not imply a genuine connection between Georgian nationalism and Orthodox Christianity. The radicals march with icons and other religious symbols, while the members of the extreme groups (who are predominantly younger than the generation of radical right activists) [103] wear an emblem worn by members of the Georgian battalion fighting on the Nazi side during World War II.[104] This indicates that the extreme right-wing groups do not follow the mainstream path of Georgian ethnonationalism fueled by the Georgian Orthodox Church, and instead strive to establish new trends.

One of the first demonstrations held by the extreme right-wing activists in Georgia took place in 2013 and aimed to protest mass immigration in Georgia, though this event was not widely reported by news agencies and did not receive public attention. Right-wing movements often emphasize the issue of the demographic situation in Georgia, and problematize the aging of the ethnic Georgian population and increasing number of immigrants. According to the latest general population census conducted in 2014, ethnic Georgians make up 86.8% of Georgia's population, as well as 6.3% Azerbaijanis and 4.5% Armenians.[105] The census demonstrates an intensive aging of Georgia's population, including an increase in the ratio of total dependency of old-age from 49% in 2014 to 57% in 2030 and 69.6% in 2050.[106] As for the immigration rate, the latest data of

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[102] Caucasus Resource Research Center – Georgia. "Antidasavluri Diskursis Tsinaaghmdeg Brdzola Sotsialur Mediashi"
[103] Center for Participation and Development, "Monitoring activities of neo-Nazi groups in Georgia".(2019) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1crcPgTyXnhIv4r5KafIXljd1Rgf74iQu/view?fbclid=IwAR2BsvOUc2wVybB_C4oG kDBkBj31VCIslSphoJqYkg2V30BIBzwaEmdKaCw
[104] Ibid
[105] National Statistics Office of Georgia. "Mosakhleobis 2014 Tslis Sakoveltao Aghtseris Shedegebi". (April, 2016) http://census.ge/files/results/Census%20Release_GEO.pdf
[106] Bart de Bruijn and Maka Chitanava. "Aging and Older Persons in Georgia: An Overview Based on the 2014 General Population Census Data", National Statistics Office of Georgia (2017) https://www.geostat.ge/media/20626/2.-Ageing-Engl_Print_F.pdf

2019 shows that citizens of Russian Federation holds the biggest share of immigrants' numbers (almost 6000) followed by citizens of Turkey, Azerbaijan, and India, the number of which consists around 5600 immigrants in total.[107] The issue of demographic aging is most often addressed and perceived as a disparagement of the nation by members of the extreme right-wing organization "Georgia's National Unity".

The first national-socialist movement, "Georgia's National Unity", which describes itself as a fascist organization, was officially founded in 2016 as a non-governmental organization and unites under slogan: "Nation, Race, State." As the statute of the organization reads, its purpose is "to carry out peaceful and united policy, according to which Georgian mental worldview is prioritized. Moreover, the traditions, mental, religious, and political worldviews of ethnic minorities who are citizens of Georgia will be respected, as long as they do not insult the Georgian worldview."[108] Members of the organization in interviews conducted in the framework of the presented research underline the fact that the movement itself is not political, but has political aims. For instance, together with the radical right-wing organization "Georgian March", they actively advocated for banning the sale of agricultural lands to foreign citizens on the parliamentary level. Even though the movement is officially registered at the National Agency of Public Registry, the official number of the movement members is not public. Members of the organization in private conversations tell that even though the organization is based on "patriarchal values", they also have female members, but do not speak about their number. In September of 2018 the leader of

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[107] National Statistics Office of Georgia. "Immigrants and Emigrants by Citizenship, 2019" https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/322/migration

[108] Mariam Gogiashvili and Salome Tsetskhladze. "Anatomy of Georgian Neo-Nazism", Transparency International Georgia (May, 2018) https://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/anatomy-georgian-neo-nazism

the organization was arrested on charges of illegal purchase and possession of firearms and ammunition, and sentenced to 3 years and 6 months in prison.[109]

The first mass demonstration of far-rights that gained public attention was organized by "Georgian March", in 2017 in Tbilisi, on Aghmashenebeli Avenue, which was joined by members of extreme right-wing groups as well. [110] The leaders of the far-right groups demanded the deportation of foreign, irregular migrants from Georgia and that the country's immigration policy be tightened.[111] As a result of events like this, society in Georgia has become more ideologically polarized. This became particularly apparent when in May 2018, police raided two techno clubs in Tbilisi, sparking a massive demonstration of Georgian youths (led by the so-called liberal activists) protesting the state's repressive policy. This provoked a counter-rally of extreme radical right-wing groups, the first such counter rally ever held in Georgia. This was also one of the first cases in which a rally of the extreme right-wing was actively covered by media, and the point when a majority of the population saw their faces for the first time. By observing the counter-rally and the demonstrators, Georgian society learned that the extreme groups are mostly joined by youth.[112]
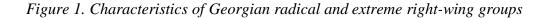
As the analysis of movements' social media pages carried out by the local Georgian non-governmental organization "Media Development Foundation" demonstrates, the extreme right-wing pages mainly circulate posts containing xenophobic rhetoric. They emphasize Georgia's

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[109] Tabula "Pashisturi Modzraobis Liders, Giorgi Chelidzes 3 Tslita da 6 Tvis Vadit Patimroba Sheeparda", *Tabula.* (May, 2019) https://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/149335-fashisturi-modzraobis-liders-giorgi-chelidzes-3-tslita-da-6-tvit-patimroba-sheefarda
[110] This is the place, where most of the Turkish and Iranian restaurants, as well as hostels, are located that host travelers coming in Georgia. Meanwhile, the avenue is named after a great Georgian king "David the Builder" who won a battle over Turk-Seljuks and liberated Tbilisi from Arab rule.
[111] Ibid
[112] RFE/RL's Georgian Service, "Tbilisi Rally Continues After Police Dismantle Protest Camps". *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, (2018) https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-tbilisi-rally-after-police-dismantle-protest-camp/29224058.html

(white) racial superiority over Iranians, Turks, Africans, etc. By comparison, social media pages affiliated with radical far-rights predominantly circulate posts containing homophobic rhetoric. Moreover, the extreme right-wings identify themselves as Georgian nationalists, who do not put up with the waving of Russia's and Soviet Union's flags on Georgian territory. This is in stark contrast with representatives of the radical far-rights, who seem to be loyal towards Russia despite ongoing conflicts.[113] In the diagram presented below, I illustrate the characteristics that are shared by Georgian radical (Georgian March) and extreme (Georgia's National Unity) right-wing movements (as well as by their supporters) as well as their differences.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Georgian radical and extreme right-wing groups

It is crucial to point out that despite the strong ethnonational character of Georgian nationalism, in the past, individuals with nationalist attitudes would never associate themselves with fascism. Moreover, Georgia does not have a historical precedent of having movements connecting

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[113] Media Development Foundation, "Facebook-shi ultranatsionalisturi jgupebis aqtiuri monitoring "qartvelta marhis" tsin" (2017): 11-16 http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/71/file/ultra_nacionalisturi_eqstrmizmi_fb.pdf

themselves with the fascist or Nazi ideology locally. In this context, it becomes particularly interesting to explore the roots of Georgian extreme right-wing individuals' ideological aspirations and learn how their political behavior develops.

2.5. Summary

As we see from the literature and historical events overviewed above, the status of titular nationality granted to ethnic Georgians during the Soviet era strengthened their feeling of privilege. Due to this, ethnic Georgians viewed other ethnic minorities residing in the republic as guests rather than equal citizens. Apart from ethnicity, religion was another factor which later became a marker of Georgian identity. The culture of self-praise and lack of criticism cultivated during the Soviet period, together with discriminatory attitudes towards representatives of other ethnicities, are common characteristics for modern right-wing movements, even though the latter divide in ideological aspirations.

The radical right movements and its supporters link the concepts of "Georgianness" and Orthodox Christianity with each other and tend to be defenders of conservative values. On the other hand, extreme right-wing groups and their supporters are more violent in their attitudes, praise the "Georgian (white) race" and explicitly state about their affiliations with fascist ideology.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The presented project aims to answer the following research questions:

How and why did extreme right-wing sentiments emerge in a country which does not have a history of groups with explicit fascist ideologies?

Also, Why is this young generation seemingly more prone towards extreme right-wing ideology?

My preliminary hypothesis, based on the theory of political socialization presented in the first chapter, finds the origins of extreme right-wing nationalist beliefs and attitudes in the agents of political socialization, especially the family, milieus, and social media. Early evidence suggested that young supporters of extreme right-wing groups are raised in families where right-wing views are strong and political issues often discussed. It was also my hypothesis that right-wing attitudes get more acute and extreme due to the social media networks' consumption. Generation Z and Millennials are social media natives and main targets of far-right propaganda, suggesting that social media would be an important socialization agent.

Chapter 3. Methodology

In order to learn the reasons for extreme right-wing groups emergence during the last few years in Georgia, it is essential to research those factors that influence the development of individuals' beliefs and attitudes. As the literature reviewed in the previous chapters illustrate, the influence of political socialization agents varies on the individual level. Due to this, I propose exploring the cases individually based on original data. In order to answer the study's research questions, I conducted qualitative empirical research; namely, semi-structured interviews as they give an interviewee more flexibility to express her/himself and an opportunity for the researcher to gain more insights from the respondent.[114] I identified interview topics based on the theory of political socialization and existing empirical research in the field, as well as by operationalizing my own research questions. The interview guide was built based upon these topics.

The study employs purposive sampling by interviewing people who are relevant to the research questions. Namely, I used a theoretical sampling approach and selected interviewees based on the study's theoretical focus (political socialization).[115] Specifically, this involved interviews of members and active supporters of the extreme right-wing organization "Georgia's National Unity." Even though my project aims to explore those factors that influence the development of extreme right-wing attitudes among Georgian youth in general, I decided to choose a sample of members and active supporters of the aforementioned organization, as they are easier identifiable and accessible on social networks. Due to the fact that I did not have a gatekeeper in the community, I identified my respondents through their activity on extreme right-wing Facebook pages (comments, tagged photos, etc.) and contacted them through the "messenger" application. I

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[114] Alan Bryman. *Social Research Methods.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 434
[115] Ibid

messaged twenty-eight potential interviewees. Thirteen out of them saw my messages and responded; ten agreed on an interview and three did not wish to participate. All ten of my respondents are in the age group of 18 to 25. I decided not to contact the extreme right-wing activists under 18 on purpose, as officially, it is forbidden to become a member of the organization before turning 18.

In the table presented below, the general background of respondents is illustrated: sex, age, which region of Georgia they come from, and their level of education. In order to preserve anonymity, they are given random Georgian names.

Figure 2. List of the Respondents

Name	Sex	Age	Region	Education	Field of Study	Length of the Interview
Sandro	Male	24	Tbilisi	University Degree	Computer Science	39:04 minutes
Rezi	Male	24	Imereti	University Degree	Psychology	1:48:10 minutes
Temo	Male	25	Kakheti	University Degree	History	35:50 minutes
Vano	Male	25	Shida Kartli	University Student	Journalism	1:33:40 minutes
Nino	Female	20	Tbilisi	University Student	History	52:26 minutes
Gigi	Male	18	Tbilisi	University Student	Philology	58:10 minutes
Rati	Male	21	Tbilisi	University Student	IT (military)	1:31:23 minutes
Luka	Male	21	Tbilisi	University Student	Business Administration	41:17 minutes
Tato	Male	19	Samegrelo	University Student	Political Science	38:56 minutes
Ilia	Male	23	Shida Kartli	University Degree	Business Administration	1:03:15 minutes

As the table illustrates, the majority of the interviewees come from the capital, Tbilisi. Others, who are from different regions, come from the semi-urban areas. It is also important to underline that the respondents are the students of high educational institutions or already hold a university degree which is not quite typical for whole population as generally about 30-35% of young people in the

appropriate age group attend higher education institutions. [116] The official number of organization's members is not public, and interviewees refused to speak about it, stating that they do not have approval from the leader of the organization (who is imprisoned currently). My initial aim was to interview both male and female members or supporters of the organization. Even though the interviewees mention girls in the organization, they do not go further and do not concretize their number either. However, I managed to identify and reached out to four girl members of the organization through Facebook, but only one of them agreed to an interview. Girls are not present in photos uploaded by group-members on social media, which gives an impression that they do not want to be identified. Therefore, even though the female interviewee's responses did not differ significantly in context from the male counterparts' responses, the data collected and analyzed in the framework of this study should be considered a representation of the male perspective and is limited concerning gender.

The original research design planned to conduct a field trip in Georgia and hold personal meetings with the interviewees. However, plans changed due to the covid-19 emergency, and instead the research was conducted online via Facebook messenger calls. This circumstance, together with the fact that I did not have a gatekeeper of the community and was an outgroup member, created natural barriers between my respondents and I. For this reason, they may have not completely open or honest in their responses. Despite this fact, the general atmosphere was friendly and my respondents were willing to share valuable thoughts and experiences. The general "ordinariness" of the sample was quite surprising to me as they did not look like the "skinheads" we usually see in media, which is telling in its own way about the subcultural identity. The reason for this disparity

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[116] Lela Chakhaia "Vin Ighebs da Vin Apinansebs Umaghles Ganatlebas Sakaertveloshi", *Netgazeti.ge* (February, 2016) https://netgazeti.ge/opinion/96629/

may be linked with media choices in coverage on issues connected with extreme right-wing activists. A full discussion of this topic stands beyond the scope of this study.

Interviews were conducted in Georgian and tape-recorded according to the respondents' permission, after which they were transcribed. I used the method of qualitative content analysis - coded transcribed interviews in order to identify types and patterns of the qualitative data. I grouped the codes and conceptualized the data by creating the following categories: family, milieus and context, peers, religion, thoughts about Georgianness, media and social media.

Chapter 5. Analysis of the Interviews Conducted with Extreme Right-Wing Organization "Georgia's National Unity" Members and Active Supporters

As already mentioned in the previous methodology chapter, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews with members and active supporters of the extreme right-wing organization "Georgia's National Unity" in order to answer my formulated research questions. The interviewees come from both urban and semi-urban areas, hold a degree from universities, or are currently enrolled in higher education institutions specializing in different subjects varying from computer sciences to history and humanities. This chapter reports information which was taken from the interviews and demonstrates those key factors that influenced interviewees' political attitudes and behavior.

The presented chapter is divided into four main parts. In the first and second sections I draw attention to the formative years when the interviewees mindsets started to form. Firstly, social-political context is analyzed in which the respondents were brought up. Namely, the impact of war and the influence of war memory on their political attitudes' development. The second part is dedicated to the role of family, whereas the third section discusses the role of social milieu in shaping respondents' views and behavior. The third section, in turn, is divided into three subchapters: university, peers and social media. The fourth section questions the role of church and religion in the formation of political attitudes and behavior. These topics have been ordered with agents active in the respondents' formative years listed first, and agents active later in adolescence listed later.

4.1. Social-Political Context and War Memory

As the analysis of the interviews show, the overall context in which the respondents were born and brought up had a significant impact on their views' formation. Interviewees of this study are representatives of the generation born in the mid-1990s (during two ethnic and civil wars in

Georgia) or shortly after it, and were in their early years of adolescence when the August war in 2008 occurred. Thus, they have a living memory of "difficult times" which helps to fuel a feeling of insecurity as a member of a "victim nation" and an urgency to defend it. The practice of war memory is organized around acts of remembrance and patriotic rites, in particular the cult of the dead. In Georgia this especially marks defeats, such as the War in Abkhazia and the ongoing occupation of Georgian territory. As Diego Muro argues, traumatic loss and mass death are significant part of what war is about for soldiers, families and national communities.[117] They are embedded in "collective remembering" as images of heroic resistance.

Regarding this, respondent "Luka" tells that he has always been interested not only in the stories of prominent historical heroes, but also in the personal stories of ordinary soldiers (who fought in Abkhazia or in the 2008 war). He also added that learning all such stories further strengthened his ideological views. It also affected his professional choice: to pursue a military career (currently he is a student of the State Military Academy).

Another respondent, "Gigi" remembers a story from his childhood which is related to the August war:

> *"The August War broke out on my birthday, 8th of August. A Georgian helicopter flew to my village on that day. At first, people assumed they were Russians, and everyone got scared, but it turned out that they were our boys. I even remember, my father invited them to our house for dinner. They were tired and hungry, of course. And then, one of them gave me a bullet as a present. I started thinking about my homeland from that day. That the country needs nationalist thinkers and not liberalism, feminism, etc. coming from the West."*

Thus, it can be argued that the feeling of insecurity and the need to secure Georgian identity arose on the basis of the living memory of wars the country suffered over the past three decades. This

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[117] Diego Muro. "The politics of war memory in radical Basque nationalism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (32)4. (April, 2009): 660-664

may be a pattern in explaining respondents' anti-globalist attitudes as well: in the interviews they assert that the allies do not exist, and that everyone betrayed Georgia in its hard times. That is why the country should be self-sufficient and robust, which can only be achieved under the governance of a radical and strict national government.

4.2. The Role of Family

Apart from the overall context analyzed above, family is another factor which played a crucial role in view formation at a formative level. As has already mentioned in the literature review, the original motivation from parents tends to be the ground upon which a child grows positive beliefs about a certain country or nation.[118] Empirical studies show that parents often influence their offspring's partisanship and ideological affiliations as well (children tend to be supporters of the same party as their parents or another party which is in the same ideological camp).[119]

This is borne out in my interviews, which show that the family played a crucial role in developing respondents' national beliefs and attitudes. According to "Vano's" story, his father took an active part in the protests organized by the national-liberation movement in the late 1980s, and while a child, he used to hear stories of Georgian dissidents like Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia (the first president of independent Georgia whose right-wing politics and rhetoric is described in the second chapter of this study). "Nino" also recalls her childhood memories and connects the formation of her ideological preferences to discourse and views spread in her family:

"I used to listen to the conversations about Zviad Gamsakhurdia in my family since my early childhood. We used to watch and listen to his speeches. This had a great influence on me and my choice, becoming a nationalist, was a natural outcome."

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[118] Henk Dekker, Darina Malova, and Sander Hoogendoorn, "Nationalism and Its Explanations", 345-376.
[119] M. Kent Jennings and Richard M. Niemi, "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child", 169-184
See also: Alan S Zuckerman, Josip Dasovic and Jennifer Fitzgerald, *Partisan Families: The Social Logic of Bounded Partisanship in Germany and Britain*
See also: Raphael Ventura, "Family Political Socialization in Multiparty Systems", 666-691

Therefore, by taking these life stories into consideration, we can assume that familial propinquity to certain historical events or figures allows the interviewees to position themselves with a certain political context in a line of historical continuity. Thus, it can be argued that the respondents link their families' real life-stories and devotion with the story of the motherland, which strengthens their motivation not to break this "dynastic thread".[120]

With this in mind, it becomes apparent that the roles of the father must be analyzed separately. Opposed to the theory (backed by Kimmel's study on Scandinavian ex-neo-Nazis) which views young people's membership of extreme right-wing groups as a result of alienation from family and especially the desire to rebel against their fathers, in the presented study, fathers appear to be role models for respondents.[121]

> *"My father is a well-educated man. He graduated from high school with distinction and is a big patriot of his country. He is a role model to me, and after him, comes Zviad Gamsakhurdia"* – "Gigi"

Fathers' views and opinions also tend to be important for the interviewees when it comes to their behavior and attitudes:

> *"When I became a student and started making independent decisions, I still had questions to my dad, I would ask him if it would be right to do a certain thing"* – "Nino"

Even though the role of the father had a significant influence on the development of my respondents' political views and behavior, arguing whether their family life was based on authoritative parent-child relations lies beyond the scope and expertise of the present research. Yet, based on the interviews, we can assume that in this case, the popular hypothesis that those children

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[120] Stephanie Dechezelles. "The Cultural Basis of Youth Involvement in Italian Extreme Right-wing Organizations", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (16)3 (2008): 366
[121] Michael Kimmel. "Racism as Adolescent Male Rite of Passage: Ex-Nazi in Scandinavia", 202-2018

who lack family interactions are susceptible to radicalism, is not supported.[122] While speaking, respondents mostly focus on the fact that they often discuss the issues Georgia faces with their family members and are grateful for their parents (especially fathers) for bringing them up with "correct" values. It should be also mentioned that mothers were not influential, as no interviewees ever mentioned them in this role or any other.

In general, respondents believe that the family plays a significant role in the development of an individual's political behavior and attitudes. "Rezi" said that it is essential to teach a child love of his/her land and motherland. There is nothing bad in remembering ancestors' heroic stories as this is heroism, love, and devotion towards your people. It does not necessarily mean that you hate others. Moreover, "Nino" said that if there was no influence from her father, she could have developed different attitudes and chosen a different path. Moreover, my respondents often use simple labels, such as "right" and "wrong" or "white" and black" in order to describe or assess various issues and behaviors which can also be connected with the parenting style. They place a great emphasis on the role of the family in a child's development, as in early childhood kids are not able to assess things adequately and need someone to tell that something is wrong, and something is right.

4.3. Social milieus

The analysis of the interviews illustrates that apart from the overall socio-political context in which war memory and the influence of family are embedded, social milieus also play a significant role in the process of a child's political socialization. Milieu is an agent in the framework of which individuals develop their social identity, attain various life experiences, and make friends. As "Temo" points it out,

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[122] Rona Dániel. "Far-Right Generation? Reasons behind the popularity of Jobbik among the Youth"

"You cannot become a nationalist by reading some books and literature only. You have to have some life experiences, childhood experiences, fights, quarrels… and this awareness comes to you naturally".

Respondents point out their individual experiences connected with their peers who used drugs or were engaged in "immoral" activities, and foreigners being treated with "privilege," embedded a feeling of insecurity and injustice in them. "Temo" recalls a story from his early childhood when he would spend his summer holidays in his family's country house in the South-Eastern region of Georgia, bordering Azerbaijan. There was a field near his house where he used to play football with his friends, but later, "Tatars" (referring to ethnic Azerbaijani people) bought this land at a low price, and the children were not able to play there anymore. This was when he started growing angry towards foreigners in Georgia, as he, as a Georgian, was discriminated against in his homeland (he feels his rights have been violated). "Tato" tells a story of his neighbor, who was fired from his workplace and replaced by a cheap Chinese labor force, to argue that when Georgians are facing financial issues, their employment should be prioritized. He stresses that Georgians are oppressed in their own country. Based on examples like these, interviewees state that the Georgian identity is under attack and needs to be protected.

4.3.1. Role of University in Shaping Political View and Attitudes

The feeling of insecurity became more acute while studying at higher educational institutions. In this regard, interviewees emphasize their disappointment and dissatisfaction towards university teaching and describe it as spreading of "liberal propaganda." They call the current educational system "liberal dominated" that aspires to establish "liberal censorship". Respondents feel particularly worried that the majority of students do not question the information received from professors, who they describe as "distributors of liberal agenda." "Ilia," who studies at a "liberal"

state university, notes that in a course he took on nationalism last year, nationalism was completely

discriminated against and presented only in a negative light:

> *"If I had not been aware of this ideology and firmly rooted in it, I probably would have lost all my values. The same applies to other classes as well. The notion of nationality is being degraded. Universities brainwash students with some abominations, multiculturalism, and tolerance"*- Ilia.

At the same time, "Nino" tells her experience of studying at a private "liberal" university for a

year, where she did not feel comfortable because of her ideological preferences and decided to

drop out. Currently, she continues her studies at Tbilisi State University.

In this regard, Fuchs and Case's theory that ritual density decreases in young individuals if they

engage in a wider variety of social interactions, is not fully supported by the data of the present

study.[123] While the relationship between ritual density and prejudices in respondents can be found,

the interviews conducted did not find that universities actually guarantee more diverse social

relations. Although all respondents are either university students or hold a university degree, the

level of their ritual density has not declined throughout this time, seemingly because they refuse

to engage with students who hold other viewpoints.

Two further points bear mentioning. As the interviewees point out, they were already members of

dense communities and did not have a desire for further socialization. Moreover, respondents are

skeptical towards the professors and do not find the information they have been taught reliable. It

should be noted here the influence that various online platforms spreading "alternative theories"

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[123] Stephan Fuchs and Charles E. Case, "Prejudice as Lifeform", 306-317

may be having in strengthening dubious attitudes. This leads towards discussion about two other

crucial agents: peers and social media networks.

4.3.2. Role of Peer Groups in Shaping Political Views and Attitudes

In the context of engaging in a wide variety of social interactions, it is essential to draw attention

to the role of peer groups. Existing studies show that adolescents develop their political views and

behavior through discussion and interaction with peers. This leads to enhanced political

involvement partly because these discussions function as a recruitment mechanism. [124] In the

present study, interviewees point out that even though they share more or less similar views on

various social or political issues with their childhood friends, the latter are not interested in these

topics, and thus, they do not discuss any political or social affairs. Instead, interviewees report that

they developed their ideological aspirations and opinions independently from their peer groups.

This can be explained by the fact that there is an absence of one of the crucial conditions for the

exercise of political influence in my interviewees and their peer relationships, which is

communication about the political subject. [125] When it comes to peers from the university,

respondents tend to choose their friends who stand closer to their views. Consequently, they

interact in a closed circle with like-minded people.

"My friends share my ideas more or less, but there is only me who knows more about ideologies. All my friends love our homeland and hate anti-national forces. At the university, of course, there are people with different opinions, but I have a close relationship only with those who have a nationalist mindset" – "Tato"

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[124] Casey A. Klofstad, *Civic Talk: Peers, Politics and the Future of Democracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 29-50

[125] Kent L. Tedin. "Assessing Peer and Parent Influence on Adolescent Political Attitudes", *American Journal of Political Science,* (24)1. (February, 1980): 137

Generally, all respondents state that they do not find it difficult to communicate with different kinds of people, but also underline the fact that they would not have any desire to build friendships or close relations with someone who does not share their values and ideas. All this demonstrates that despite the interviewees' involvement in higher education institutions, they do not tend to use it as a tool for socialization with diverse communities and, therefore, the level of their ritual density remains high.

In sum, the data demonstrates that peer groups did not have a significant effect on interviewees' political attitudes' development in their formative years, as political issues did not represent a topic of common interests and thus, was not discussed. Apart from this, when it comes to the late years of adolescence, respondents tend to choose new friends who share a similar mindset. This indicates that peer group discussions do not include diverse perspectives, and that as respondents grew older, their ritual density actually increased.

4.3.3. Role of Media and Social Media Networks in Shaping Political Views and Attitudes

Another agent of political socialization that was examined in this study is the role of media. As the literature demonstrates, media can have a significant influence on voters' behavior, as it sets the political agenda. Issues actively covered by the media (such as immigration and crime) are linked to radical right-wing voting at an individual level.[126] Taking into account the fact that the news broadcasted on TV for adults is also watched by children, we can assume that it all has a great impact on the development of youth mindsets. Based on the interviews, we may argue that the media has a significant role in the development of the interviewees' anti-globalist views. As they point out, they read and watch various media channels where they learn about developments taking

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[126] Antonis A. Ellinas. "Media and the Radical Right" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 391.

place in Europe ("increased crime rate due to the migration, sexual assault of local women by immigrants, etc.") and do not want the same to happen in their home-country.

In this context, social media platforms appear to be particularly crucial, and the information age has seemingly only aided the growth of far-right groups. Information spread through the various social media platforms tends to be an entirely novel form of social integration. It does not depend on a mutual understanding; rather, it works much more like a stimulus. The stream of information flows continuously and hence, coordinates action in real time.[127] The interviewees of the present study also highlight the influence of social media platforms (Facebook) on the development of their views and ideological aspirations. All of them state that they learned more about far-right nationalism through Facebook pages that promoted nationalistic discourse:

> *"I don't even know when and why I "liked" that specific page on Facebook, but at a certain point, I started seeing their posts in my news feed and got interested"* - "Luka"

The interviewees learned about the organization "Georgia's National Unity" via Facebook as well:

> *"They used to upload some videos, where they would talk about their views regarding various topics and I started liking them, I agreed with their opinions because I had the same ideas"* – "Vano"

The high level of social media influence on the interviewees can be explained based on the fact that this generation is a native of the information society, meaning its members are the primary target group for the virtual sphere of the far-right.[128] In this regard, it is particularly important to mention the role of Facebook's algorithm. The order and presentation of posts on an individual's news feed is controlled by an algorithm which prioritizes content based upon an individual's

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[127] Dominikos Sik. "The Imitated Public Sphere: The Case of Hungary's Far Right", 147
[128] Dominikos Sik. "The Imitated Public Sphere: The Case of Hungary's Far Right", 153

personal interests.[129] When a Facebook user interacts by sharing messages, posting "likes" and comments, or even visits websites which share data with Facebook, the algorithm detects these preferences and uses them to order content. Therefore, it can be argued that the Facebook algorithm contributes to the formation of "social bubbles" where like-minded people are grouped and the probability of these users receiving perspectives other than their own is decreased.

Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews illustrates that social media plays a significant role as an agent of political socialization in finding like-minded peers. It contributes to building closed communities where the young people socialize, leading to the increased level of ritual density. "Gigi" tells the story of socialization through Facebook in more details:

> *"I became friends with my peers on Facebook. We would meet and talk about various issues. We have a chat on Facebook, where we discuss different topics. On the whole, the social network has helped me in all of this. There is one page on Facebook called "Epochal Minimalism"* [Epokaluri Minimalizmi] *where more humorous memes are posted and mostly that is the place where we get to know each other. If a person comments on something, you will immediately know whether he is a nationalist or not, and you will get close to each other. I got to know around 200 people like this, who are driven by the same ideas as me."*

This suggests that far-rights' attempts to reach out to social media natives (Generation Z and Millennials) by promoting extreme right views with memes and humor have been successful and that social media networks are becoming more and more crucial as agents of political socialization. It is clear that this requires further research.

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[129] Brent Barnhart. "How the Facebook Algorithm Works and Ways to Outsmart It", Sproutsocial (May, 2019) https://sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-algorithm/

4.4. Role of Church and Religion in Shaping Political Views and Attitudes

A widespread argument in the field of far-right research exists, claiming that a degree of religiosity is implicitly a component of nationalist identity. This might support claims that religion opens the way for anti-democratic political cultures.[130] Church and religion are also considered crucial agents of political socialization by the scholars of the political socialization theory. As already discussed in the second chapter of the present study, the Georgian Orthodox Church has been one of the most prominent actors in the formation of Georgian ethno-nationalism, and as a result, Orthodox Christianity became a marker for defining Georgian identity. Perhaps because of this, religion is an ideological cornerstone for the members and supporters of Georgian radical right-wing groups, and a necessary consideration for study of the extreme-right.

However, the data collected through interviews demonstrates that the respondents do not view religion as a determinant of "Georgianness," and nor do they affiliate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church or the parish. Even more, some of them even speak critically about church/religion related issues. "Sandro" reports that he was brought up as an Orthodox Christian and that as a child he would go to religious services, but did not follow the path of the parish as he realized that religion has nothing to do with patriotism. The interviewees place emphasis on the fact that nationality and religion are two completely different notions from each other and cannot be conflated.

> *"Of course, there are some links between Georgia and Orthodox Christianity to some extent, as it is a Christian civilization. Albeit, we had our traditions before Christianity and rather advanced political system by the way. In my opinion, national identity is trans-religious and cannot be attributed to any religion. National identity implies a common cultural memory, a common collective unconscious about which Jung was speaking. Georgianness is much more than any particular religion"* – "Rezi"

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[130] Dominikos, Sik. "The Imitated Public Sphere: The Case of Hungary's Far Right" in *Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and United States* ed. Patricia Anne Simpson and Helga Druxes (London: Lexington Books, 2015): 156

"Sandro" views the confusion of these two concepts as discrimination against other ethnic Georgians who are representatives of other religions.

"These are two quite incompatible notions, in my opinion. In general, historically, our ancestors sacrificed themselves for the sake of Christianity for real. Still, the context in which Georgianness and Orthodoxy are being used nowadays, means denial of our tens of thousands and millions of compatriots living outside of Georgia, who were forcefully evicted from their motherland by enemies centuries ago"

Therefore, outcomes of the study show that extreme right-wing youth in Georgia do not follow the traditional path of Georgian ethno-nationalism fueled by the Church. In quite the contrast, their perception of Georgian identity as "trans-religious" suggests a new understanding of the notion.

4.5. Summary
To conclude, the outcomes of the research show that war memory and collective remembrance combined with parental influences tend to be the most influential agents in the formative years of extreme right-wing activists. Moreover, respondents' involvement in far-right activism can be perceived as a continuation of the "dynastic thread". In contrast to other studies analyzed in the literature review, university socialization and peer groups were apparently not influential agents, but social media networks are vastly more influential. The church and religion is apparently the least influential agent in their socialization. The agent of Social Media is worth emphasizing as it is the major platform of socialization for the interviewees and creates a closed community of like-minded individuals.

This group of young extreme-right minded individuals is located at a nexus of the influences cited, being young enough to have experienced war at a formative age, as well as being representatives of a generation of digital natives whose socialization is conducted on Facebook and influenced by

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an algorithm. This combination of feelings of insecurity, family influences, and social media closed-grouping make them a particularly vulnerable towards right-wing extremism.

Conclusion

Studying reasons for extreme right-wing sentiments' emergence among youth in Georgia reveals the essential role of political socialization agents in adolescents' attitudes and behavior formation. Namely, research finds that the underappreciated agent of war memory plays a crucial part in the formative years of extreme right-wing youth along with family and social media.

It is particularly important to underline that the Georgian context of civil and ethnic wars, lost territories, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, and the trauma associated with this has been fueling nationalist sentiments in society. In this regard, generation Z and Millennials are particularly susceptible. It is also important to recognize that generations born shortly after the wars in the early 1990s have transmitted collective memories of "difficult times" from their parents. The feeling of being a victim and of needing to defend one's nation was strengthened by the August war in 2008, which represents a "living memory" of the young generations. The memory of "difficult times" transmitted from parents combined with the "living memory" of the recent war shape nationalist discourse and narratives in youth.

This is particularly the case in adolescents whose parents are also inclined towards right-wing attitudes. The study identified a somewhat surprising shared feature among interviewees, in that parents were typically right-wing and supporters of the first president of independent Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia. This responds to the path of extreme right adolescents' views' development identified by Thomas Gabriel in which political right-wing attitudes are already present in families allowing young individuals to see themselves in certain political context and view their "mission" as continuing this "dynastic thread" of devotion towards motherland.

The two agents discussed above serve as important influencers in the development of extreme right attitudes among adolescents in their formative years. This study also finds that social media is a political socialization agent which plays a crucial role in young individuals' radicalization in late adolescents. This work discusses the influence of social media on development of extreme right attitudes in two dimensions. First, as they are digital natives, the young generation is the main target of far-right propaganda through social media. Spreading ideological propaganda among adolescents is particularly easy through these networks as target groups may be reached directly according to their age, subjects of interest, or place of residence. Therefore, adolescents are more vulnerable to become targets of biased or unverified information spread on social networks strengthening prejudices and thus the level of their ritual density. Secondly, this study found that social media networks play a critical role in finding like-minded peers. This leads to formation of dense communities where adolescents socialize in closed network of relations leading to a further extremization of young individuals' political attitudes and behavior.

Implications

This study suggests that groups who experience a combination of radicalizing political socialization agents such as war related trauma in formative years and right-wing family backgrounds are more likely to become extreme right activists due to the permanent role of social media in their lives. This suggests that the research of right-wing extremism in adolescents should concentrate more on the role of memory politics connected with subjects' personal experiences. Also, despite analyzing how does the consumption of social media fuels extreme right-wing attitudes, more robust research is needed in this dimension which will cover a bigger sample size and analyze the issue in depth. Finally, as the social media networks are expected to remain pervasive influence, increasing capacity for radicalization of youth should be expected.

In addition, I believe that the present research must inform local Georgian policymakers. Considering the fact that there is a limited academic research focusing on extreme right-wing attitudes and behavior formation in Georgian youth, the outcomes provide a ground for Georgian policymakers to see the actual reasons for the development of extreme right ideologies in young generation.

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