



De-radicalization and Integration Legal & Policy Framework in Georgia

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The summer of 2021 in Georgia was marked by violent attacks on the LGBTQI+ community and journalists. Massive attacks on representatives of media were led by far-right groups and several Orthodox clergymen, in response to the planned Tbilisi Pride March. This was not for the first time in the last decade that representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church together with alt-right groups were involved in violence against minorities.

The report on [*De-radicalization and Integration Legal & Policy Framework in Georgia*](#) engages with these incidents and aims to analyze legal and policy frameworks for de-radicalization and integration in Georgia. The latter remains a challenge as ethnic minorities in Georgia tend to live in communities and their civic integration remains a challenge. It provides a brief contextual and historical overview of radicalization and deradicalization policies and practices in Georgia, unpacks the existing laws and policies in the field of radicalization, identifies some major gaps and flaws in these frameworks, and provides policy-relevant recommendations on how to improve existing issues.

After examining existing laws, institutions, and policies on radicalization in Georgia and their effectiveness in addressing threats of extremism, the main findings of this report suggest that although by way of its constitution Georgia remains a secular state and the law guarantees equality and freedom of expression for everyone regardless of their faith and beliefs, in practice, the picture is a little bit more complicated.

The report also identified some worrying trends as Orthodox Christianity and the Georgian Orthodox Church's (GOC) being positioned as a defender of traditional values. The report notes the impact of their particular position on youth radicalization in Georgia. This influence of the Patriarchate is amplified by the special status of the GOC guaranteed by the constitutional agreement between the state and the Church. The agreement recognized the Church as a subject of public law, a status no other religious organization enjoyed. The state assumed responsibility for assisting with the establishment of priests in the army and prisons. It has provided immunity to the Patriarch, exempted clergymen from compulsory military service as well as recognizing the property rights of the GOC on all the lands, buildings and ruins of the Orthodox Christian monasteries and churches in Georgia. It has also declared all non-economic activities of the GOC non-taxable. Only in 2011 did other religious organizations manage to acquire the right to be registered as subjects of the public law as well – at the face of significant opposition and protests from the GOC and its followers, nonetheless.

What needs to be noted is that while the constitutional agreement between the GOC and the state gave the major privileges to the former, the existence of such an agreement might not per se imply discrimination of other religious communities. There exists a concept of a cooperative model of secularism where (in contrast to liberal secularism) state support of a particular religion is a common practice. However, in case of Georgia, the dominant position of the GOC leads to the forming of a vicious circle in which the political elite remains dependent on increasing support from the Church to perform well

in the election, while in exchange, the former compromises more on principles of secularity and equality.

Furthermore, the legislation regarding hate speech and freedom of expression is modelled on the USA and based on the “free marketplace of ideas”. Although our findings show that this implies greater visibility of extremist views and ideologies, all the respondents interviewed for this report opposed the introduction of any regulatory mechanisms. As they have argued, the government could abuse such systems to silence critical voices.

Another focus of this report was ethnic minorities in Georgia that usually live in their own regions as homogenous communities and their civic integration into Georgian society remains an important challenge. This is further aggravated by a low level of urbanization and a high level of economic inequality. Additional aspects of this report have identified potential sources and the history of radicalization the fact that the state security services of Georgia have continuously viewed Muslim minorities as potential threats and have even been involved in the selection of their religious leaders (mufti) to possibly have the community under control. Additionally, there is no Muslim clerical educational institution in Georgia where they can pursue their education. This makes local religious leaders of Muslim communities earn knowledge of Islam but devoid of its interpretations and practice in the Georgian cultural context. Moreover, they do not learn Georgian, and they have limited knowledge of the Georgian Constitution.

There is no well-developed institutional or policy framework that could be directed against potential sources of radicalization. In 2014 the government of Georgia established the State Agency on Religious Issues, as well as the Tolerance Center functioning at the Public Defender’s Office. Yet, there is no substantial, conceptual long-term strategy and vision aimed at facing challenges posed by radicalization. Most of the de-radicalization programs are sporadic, ad hoc, and short-term. Two case studies and other examples explored in this report indicate that Georgia’s policy framework for deradicalization seems to be both conceptually and practically underdeveloped. The state authorities often tend to securitize issues related to ethnic and religious minorities. This often leads to a less inclusive minority policy leaving space open for the radicalization of religious minorities in Pankisi Gorge and other regions.

What Georgia needs is a comprehensive deradicalization strategy to strengthen the country’s resilience against present and future threats of radicalization. Even though the country is not exposed to any major radicalization threat at the moment of writing, new risks may emerge in the foreseeable future. Short- and long-term measures need to be

taken to reduce negative impacts of the church. Furthermore, while an absence of regulations protects the media climate from intervention by the state authorities, it also opens a space for an increase in influence by religious or right-wing radicalization. To deal with this issue, specific regulatory mechanisms could be introduced. But these mechanisms, if introduced, should be the subject to a tight societal scrutiny and should not be turned into instruments in the hands of authorities to enable them silence critical voices.

For more insights, see the [REPORT >>](#), that provides a conceptual account on existing policies and laws addressing radicalisation, to pinpoint their most critical aspects and best practices, and to develop evidence-based policy and guidelines.

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