

GDI

Global
Disinformation
Index

Media Market Risk Ratings: Georgia

www.disinformationindex.org

Author: Tamar Kintsurashvili and Sophie Gelava - Media Development Foundation.

Researchers: Sophie Gelava and Nana Rapava - Media Development Foundation.

Design: www.designbythink.co.za

The Global Disinformation Index is a UK-based not-for-profit that operates on the three principles of neutrality, independence and transparency. Our vision is a world in which we can trust what we see in the media. Our mission is to restore trust in the media by providing real-time automated risk ratings of the world's media sites through a Global Disinformation Index (GDI). The GDI is non-political. Our Advisory Panel consists of international experts in disinformation, indices and technology. For more information, visit www.disinformationindex.org



September 2020. Published under a Creative Commons License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Table of contents

Preface	4
Introduction	5
The Georgian media market: Key features and scope	8
Disinformation risk ratings	9
Conclusion	17
Annex: Methodology	18
Endnotes	21

Preface

Since the invention of the web, how we live our lives online—and off—has changed in countless ways. This includes how news is funded, produced, consumed and shared.

With these shifts in the news industry have come risks. Disinformation is one of them. Disinformation has been used as a tool to weaponise mass influence and disseminate propaganda. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation has created an infodemic undermining public health, safety and government responses. No country or media market is immune from these threats.

To combat disinformation, we need to find ways to disrupt the system and its funding. This is where the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) has set its focus.

At the GDI, we believe that an independent, trusted and neutral risk rating of news sites' disinformation risks is needed. These risk ratings can be used by advertisers and ad tech companies to ensure that where they direct their online ad spends is aligned with their own brand safety and risk mitigation strategies for disinformation.

The GDI's research offers a trusted and neutral assessment about a news domain's risk of disinforming. By looking at structural, content, operational and context indicators, the GDI provides a domain-level rating about a news site's risk of disinforming an online user.

The following report presents the results of applying the GDI risk rating methodology to some of the most frequently visited media sites in Georgia. In total we assessed 24 sites that produce content in Georgian, and which are based both in Georgia and Russia (see Figure 1). The country has been chosen because of its diverse media environment shaped by market and political interests (internal/external)¹ and a media landscape that has been the sustained target of disinformation campaigns. While Kremlin-sponsored propaganda is the larger problem in Georgia, home-grown online disinformation campaigns² have been documented as well. These activities include the use of coordinated inauthentic behaviour (CIB) on Facebook,³ as well as the misuse of artificial intelligence.⁴

We consider the findings to be the start of a discussion among news sites, advertisers and ad tech companies on how the GDI risk ratings should be used to strengthen the funding of independent, diverse and trusted media in Georgia. Please join us in this journey.

Figure 1. Media sites assessed in Georgia (in alphabetical order)

1. alia.ge	9. info9.ge	17. pia.ge
2. ambebi.ge	10. interpressnews.ge	18. presa.ge
3. bm.ge	11. kvira.ge	19. primetime.ge
4. commersant.ge	12. kvirispalitra.ge	20. reportiori.ge
5. droni.ge	13. marshalpress.ge	21. resonancedaily.com
6. euronews.ge	14. netgazeti.ge	22. rustavi2.ge
7. formulanews.ge	15. newposts.ge	23. sputnik-georgia.com
8. imedinews.ge	16. on.ge	24. tabula.ge

Introduction

The harms of disinformation⁵ are proliferating around the globe—threatening our elections, our health, and our shared sense of accepted facts.

The infodemic laid bare by COVID-19 conspiracies clearly shows that disinformation costs peoples’ lives. Websites masquerading as news outlets are driving and profiting financially from the situation.

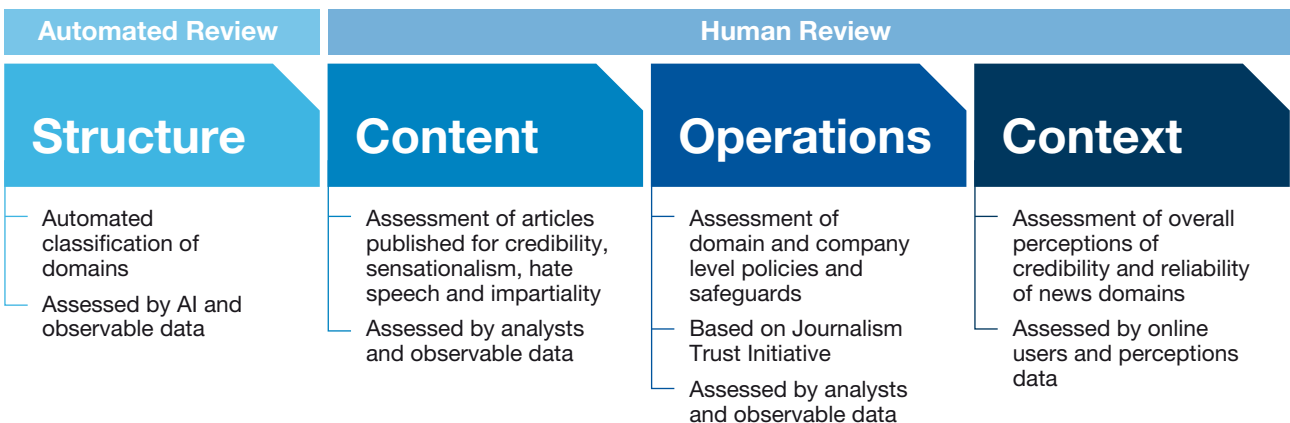
The goal of the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) is to cut off the revenue streams that incentivise and sustain the spread of disinformation. Using both artificial and human intelligence, the GDI has created an assessment framework to rate the disinformation risk of news domains.

The GDI risk rating provides advertisers, ad tech companies and platforms with greater information about a range of disinformation flags related to a site’s Structure (i.e. metadata and lexical features),⁶ Content (i.e. reliability of content), Operations (i.e. operational and editorial integrity) and Context (i.e. perceptions of brand trust; see Figure 2). The findings in this report are based on the three pillars that were manually reviewed: Content, Operations and Context.⁷

A site’s disinformation risk level is based on that site’s aggregated score across all of the reviewed pillars and indicators (see figure 2).⁸ A site’s overall score ranges from zero (maximum risk level) to 100 (minimum risk level). Each indicator that is included in the framework is scored from zero to 100. The output of the index is therefore the site’s overall disinformation risk level, rather than the truthfulness or journalistic quality of the site.

The following report presents findings pertaining to disinformation risks for the media market in Georgia, based on a study of 24 news domains.⁹

Figure 2. Overview of the GDI disinformation risk assessment



The data provide an initial snapshot of the overall strengths and challenges that these sites face to mitigate disinformation risks.¹⁰

All of these findings come from research conducted between February and June 2020. The market analysis is based on 15 disinformation flags from the human review of Georgian websites performed by MDF and by an independent perceptions survey.¹¹ This report presents the average scores for the market sample. Sites that are rated as having a minimum risk and/or score above 95 on any of the three pillars are named and profiled in the report.¹²

The GDI risk rating methodology is not an attempt to identify truth and

falsehoods. It does not label any site as a disinformation site—or, inversely, as a trusted news site. Rather, our approach is based on the idea that a range of signals, taken together, can indicate a site’s risk of carrying disinformation.

The scores should be seen as offering initial insights into the Georgian media market and its overall levels of disinformation risk. The results are open to debate and refinement with stakeholders from news sites, advertisers and the ad tech industry. We look forward to this engagement. (The annex to this report outlines the assessment framework).¹³

Georgia’s media market, minority groups and Russian propaganda

While the media market is small, Georgia’s geopolitical importance has made the country the frequent target of information influence operations by Russian government-linked outlets.¹⁴ These operations are often directed from outside the country. A 2018 study suggests that one in two people surveyed in Georgia believe that Georgian online media often spread disinformation, while 40 percent think that a frequent source of disinformation are Russian social networks.¹⁵

Previous studies conducted on disinformation in Georgia indicate that direct Russian-language propaganda is more prevalent among minority groups in the country.¹⁶ The country’s Armenian and Azerbaijani minority populations are more dependent on non-Georgian news, due to language barriers and the non-inclusive nature of reporting by the national media: 40 percent of Armenians and 27 percent of Azerbaijanis watch coverage of news and current affairs on non-Georgian TV channels.¹⁷ Surveys also show that Russian channels are the most viewed non-Georgian sources for news.¹⁸

Since Georgians are more sceptical towards Russian-government sponsored media outlets, Russian-led disinformation efforts have tried to target them through Georgian-language rather than Russian-language sites.

These campaigns have been done via established or ad-hoc online platforms which often mimic Western news sites such as CNN (CNNNews.ru), BBC (BbcNews.website),¹⁹ and Fox News (Foxnews.ge),²⁰ among others.

Still, the channels used to spread Russian-sponsored disinformation are fragmented. New online platforms emerge continuously in Georgia²¹ and their reach is often limited. Therefore, the smaller media outlets directly or indirectly linked to these campaigns have largely been left outside the scope of this research. There is one exception, however: the Russian government-sponsored site <https://sputnik-georgia.com/>.²² This site has been included because it has a larger reach²³ than the other smaller pro-Kremlin sites found in the Georgian media landscape.

Trust in Sputnik Georgia, as an outlet directly sponsored by the Russian government, is low. This picture is reflected in the survey results conducted within this study (see Context pillar below). The majority of the respondents expressed their strongly negative opinion of Sputnik Georgia and assessed the outlet’s articles as extremely inaccurate, explaining that the domain is involved in disinformation campaigns and uses clickbait titles. In terms of content (see Content pillar in this report), Sputnik Georgia was among those domains that was assessed with a maximum risk level.

Key Findings: Georgia

In looking at the media landscape for Georgia, GDI and MDF’s assessment found that:

Some mainstream and local news sites in Georgia present a high degree of disinformation risk.

- No sites were assessed as having a minimum risk of disinformation. Only one of the 24 sites was seen as having a low risk level for disinformation: www.on.ge.
- Most of the domains in our sample fall into medium- or high-risk categories. More than two-thirds of the sample have one of these risk ratings.
- The six websites with the highest disinformation risk scores—a maximum risk level—also performed poorly in terms of perceived accuracy of their stories. One in four sites in the Georgian media sample had a maximum risk of disinformation.

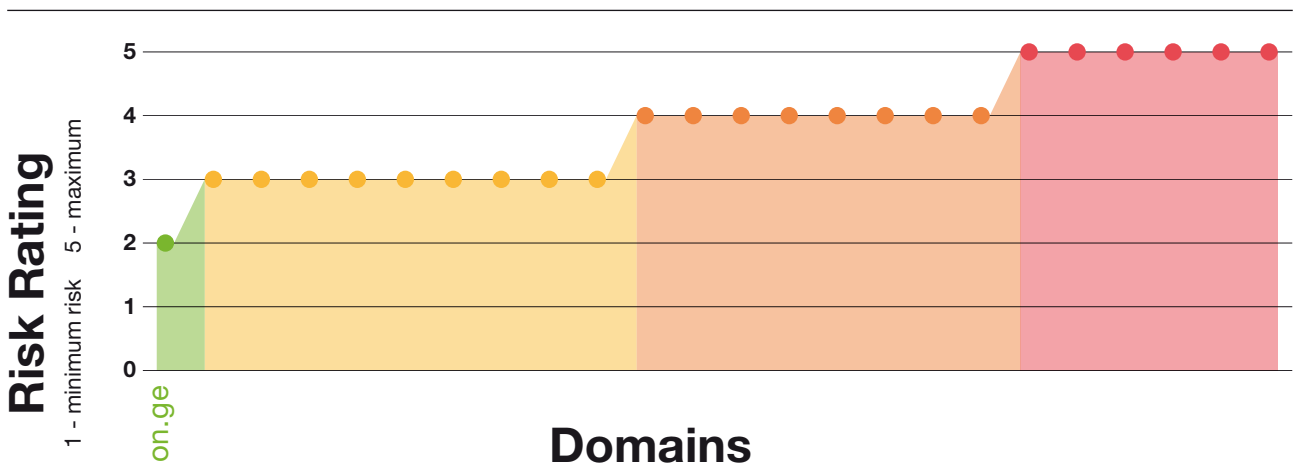
Most Georgian sites in the sample perform relatively well on content-related indicators, although all show some level of disinformation risk.

- For the articles sampled, most of the sites use headlines that reflect the main content of the stories relatively well and use unbiased reporting. Of the 24 sites assessed, three out of five score 80 or above on both of these indicators.
- However, the six maximum-risk sites in Georgia scored poorly on content and were noted to publish stories that negatively targeted individuals and/or groups. The main targets were the political opposition, other media sites, civil society organisations and the LGBTQ community.

The greatest area of disinformation risk for Georgian sites relates to their operational checks and balances, which are largely absent.

- Most of the domains fail to provide the public with information on their funding sources, editorial independence, and ownership.²⁴
- Most Georgian news sites also lack clearly defined codes of conduct regarding their comment sections. Only three sites have some of these policies.

Figure 3. Disinformation risk ratings by site



Online users in Georgia seem to have a relatively robust level of brand trust in some key media sites in the country, although this is not evident across the market.

- Five sites score passing grades (above 70) and are perceived to perform well when it comes to accurate information.
- More than 40 percent of the sites assessed by online users are seen as doing an average or above-average job at correcting errors and making this clear to readers.

- However, we see low levels of trust for a clear and important subset of sites in the sample. This includes sites that are perceived to provide inaccurate coverage and to use a high share of clickbait titles.

The scores in the Georgian market represent an opportunity for media sites that adopt best-in-class policies: they could significantly reduce their disinformation risks and increase their scores across many of the indicators.

The Georgian media market: Key features and scope

Georgia's media market is relatively dynamic and new for a country of 3.7 million people. The country is considered to have a highly pluralistic but very polarised media environment.²⁵

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the country's founding in 1991 and the beginning of a local language media market that has been maturing since the early 2000s. The Soviet legacy of state-controlled media, however, means that many Georgians still have issues of brand trust with sites. According to recent research by the Caucasus Barometer,²⁶ there has been a gradual decline (from 50% to 20%) in trust of the media over the last 11 years between 2008 and 2019. The same data suggest that one out of five Georgians distrusts the media.

This could be due to the fact that many operational and editorial checks and balances are missing on the part of online media sites. Georgia has adopted very liberal legislation for regulating the media, and accountability rules and self-regulation are relatively weak. These gaps reflect a general tendency among post-Soviet countries regarding how journalists view regulation. After decades

of being a part of the state machinery, 'journalists tend to reject "social responsibility" as merely a nice term for State control'.²⁷

In Georgia, resistance to state control can be connected to the fact that the county faces particular challenges when it comes to putting press freedoms into practice.²⁸ Recent government attempts to impose more control over freedom of expression have been noted, including by the EU Association Implementation Report on Georgia.²⁹ According to this report, some of the sources of this problem are a politically-polarised media landscape and changes in the ownership of some key media outlets.³⁰

Competing political interests have helped to shape a more pluralistic media environment in Georgia. Over the last twenty years, there has been a pattern of instrumentalising the media for political gains. For example, the late Russian tycoon Badri Patarkatsishvili founded one of the largest broadcasting companies, TV Channel Imedi,³¹ in Georgia in 2001. The billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, who made his fortune in metals and banking in Russia,³² launched TV Channel 9 in

Georgia ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2012 and defeated the incumbent ruling United National Movement (UNM) party – but then promptly closed the channel down. The popular and outspoken Rustavi 2 TV channel, which was closely affiliated with the opposition (UNM) party, changed its ownership and consequently editorial policy in favour of the government. Following this move, two new channels (Mtavari Arkhi and Formula) were formed soon after.

The focus on creating new television stations reflects the fact that Georgia's news consumption is dominated by this medium. According to one recent public opinion poll,³³ 85 percent of those surveyed use television as their primary or secondary source for news.

After television, nearly one in four people rely on the internet and/or Facebook for news.³⁴ After Facebook, some of the most visited online news portals³⁵ are www.amebebi.ge and www.ipn.ge (both owned by Palitra Media Holding), as well as www.on.ge (which is co-owned by the OMedia group and Formula Proesco Production)³⁶ In recent public opinion polls,³⁷ almost 50 percent of those surveyed that use the internet say that the internet (Facebook) is the source of news information they use most or second most.

The Georgian media market depends heavily on advertising and investments to maintain the sector. This is particularly true for television stations, since media outlets need more income than they can generate from commercials. The total advertising revenue for TV broadcasters amounted to 67.5 million GEL in 2019

(US\$22.5 million), which is nearly 11 percent lower than in 2018. At the same time, the total revenue of TV channels increased by nearly 14 percent due to an influx of new funding from the owners of two newly established, opposition-affiliated TV channels (Mtavari Arkhi and Formula).³⁸ Formula is included in our study.

Unfortunately, there is not much data on digital advertising in Georgia. This is partly due to the small size and unique linguistic composition of the local market. Moreover, online media outlets have neither legal requirements nor a tradition of disclosing information on their funding or its sources. The only publicly available data are on government-funded advertising on local media.³⁹ In 2018, contracts worth 6.6 million GEL (US\$2.15 million) were signed with media outlets for advertising and other services, of which roughly 23 percent was for online adverts.⁴⁰

For this study, we looked at a range of some of the most frequently used media sites in Georgia. We defined the Georgian media market based on an initial list of nearly 80 news sites, which included well-known national outlets, tabloids, and Russian government-sponsored media. We then worked with local media experts to refine the list according to each site's reach and relevance. We defined reach and relevance based on a site's Alexa rankings and Facebook and Twitter followers. We also consulted with local experts to identify domains with lower reach but high relevance among decision-makers and included those sites.

Disinformation risk ratings

The risk ratings for Georgian news domains are not very promising. Only one domain—www.on.ge—was assessed to present a low risk of disinformation.

Market overview

No site in our sample was seen as to have a minimum risk level and to perform strongly across all of the indicators and pillars.

Figure 4. Overall market scores by pillar

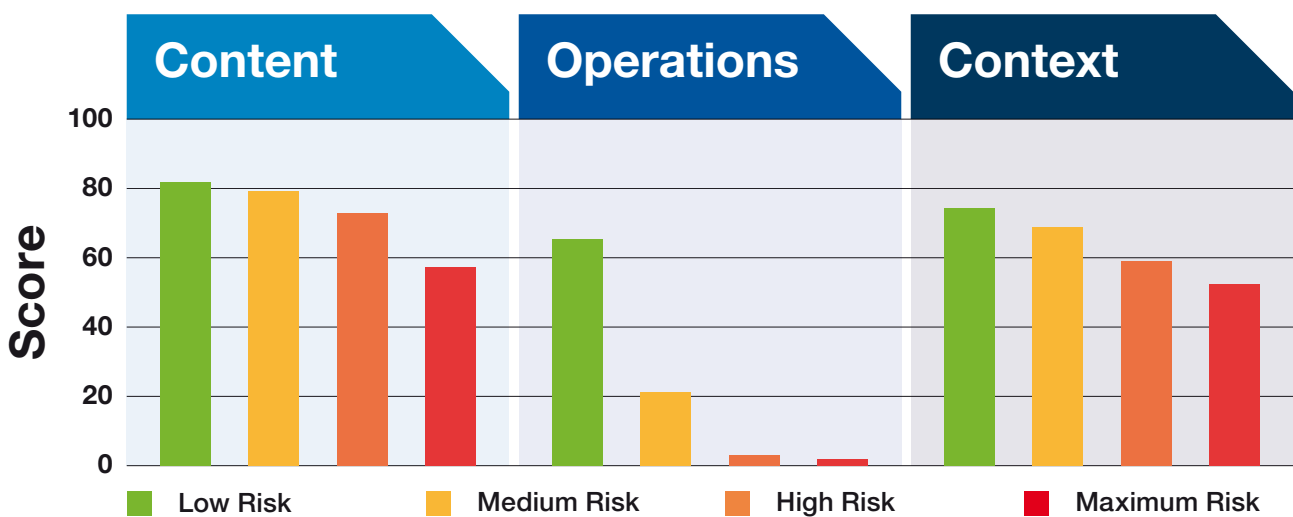


This distribution of risk ratings reveals that all of the domains in our sample have significant room for improvement. One in four Georgian sites falls into a maximum-risk category while one in three are classified as high risk. Both of these risk categories denote challenges in all of the pillars. In terms of content, many of these sites are seen to publish sensational stories without bylines and to use clickbait titles that do not match the content of the articles. They also record some of the lowest levels of brand trust when it comes to the accuracy of their news, based on the data collected on public perception.

More than one-third of the Georgian media site sample is seen as having a medium risk of disinformation. Most of the sites that are currently found in this middle range could move into a lower-risk group with improvements to their operational policies (see Figure 4). The disinformation flags tend to concern their operational and editorial integrity as well as perceptions of trust in their site. In contrast, these same sites show relatively lower disinformation risks in regards to how they present content in the stories which we reviewed.

Overall, the disinformation risk scores for Georgian news sites have significant room for improvement, particularly in terms of their operational checks and balances (see Figure 5). Many sites across the media spectrum lack policies that promote operational and editorial integrity. This results in an extremely low score of just ‘12’ across the market sample. Operational policies include information on the site’s owners and sources of funding, statements of editorial independence, how errors can be flagged and corrected, and policies addressing user-generated content. For example, nearly 90 percent of the sites in our sample have no policies regarding content generated by users or synthetically (i.e. by artificial intelligence). All of these operational policies are recommended as part of the journalism standards that have been set by the Journalism Trust Initiative.

Figure 5. Average pillar score by risk rating level

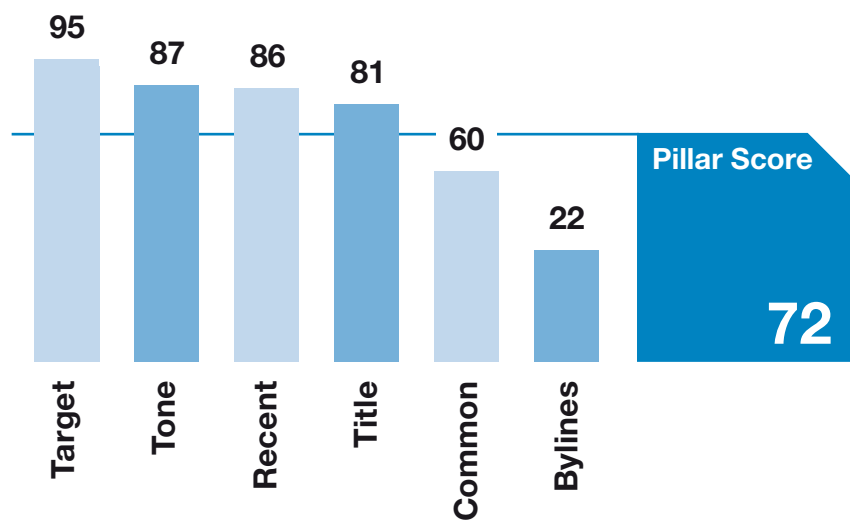


Pillar Overview

CONTENT PILLAR

This pillar focuses on the reliability of the content provided on the site. Our analysis for the Content pillar is based on an assessment of ten anonymised articles for each domain. These articles are drawn from among the most frequently shared pieces of content during the data collection period (see Figure 6). All article scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as assessed by the country reviewers.

Figure 6. Average Content pillar scores by indicator



Overall, our review found limited disinformation risk across the 24-site sample in terms of the reliability of content. Two thirds of the sites have a passing score of 70 or above in this category, indicating that the disinformation flags for a site’s content are relatively limited. The higher the score of a domain in the content pillar is, the lower the potential disinformation risk for each domain (and vice versa).

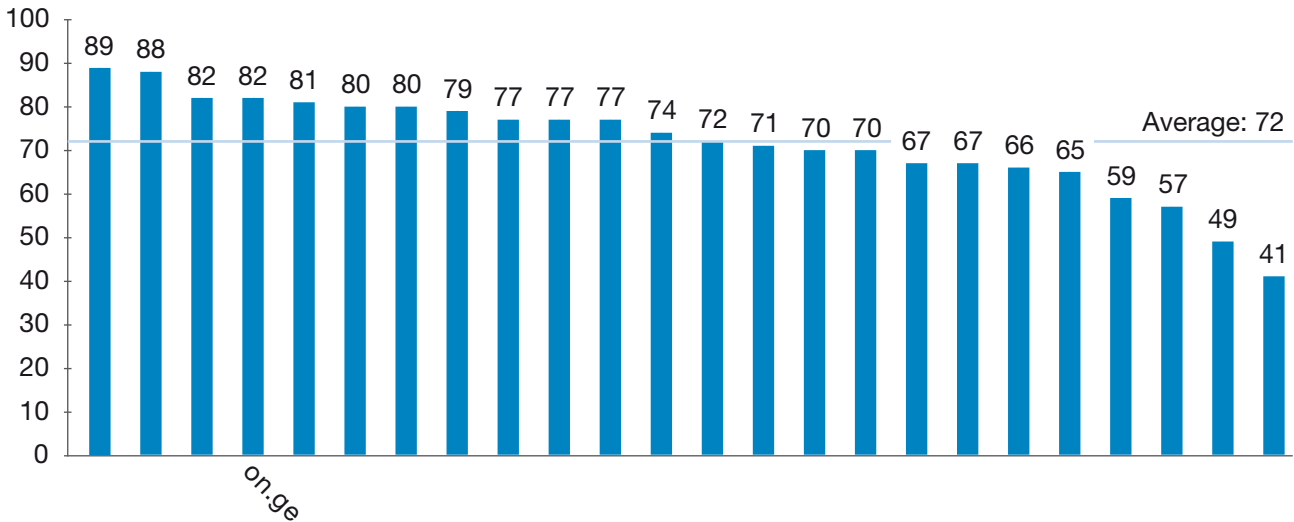
We also found that the title and the tone of the article strongly correlate with each other. The type of title, whether it was accurate or the site opted for a sensational one, determined whether or not the tone of the article was sensationalised.

Overall, Georgian news sites scored better on the content pillar by avoiding the negative targeting of groups and individuals. Even the domains with lower scores on title and tone had very few examples of negatively targeting specific groups and/or individuals. Among the sites analysed, only a small cohort of sites score poorly when it comes to using sensational titles as well as biased and targeted content. These are the same sites that were assessed with a maximum risk level (based on their performance across all three pillars).

Two latent risks, however, are the general lack of common coverage of stories and the absence of bylines. While sites do provide common coverage of domestic political developments, they also offer more bespoke content of interest to their online users. This tailored content could be manipulated in

cases where a site has weak operational and editorial checks and balances. The same concern applies to bylines. Across the sample of articles assessed, no site was seen to use author bylines as a rule. In fact, four sites did not use bylines on any of the articles — not even stating merely by which department, team or wire service the article was written.

Figure 7. Content pillar scores by site

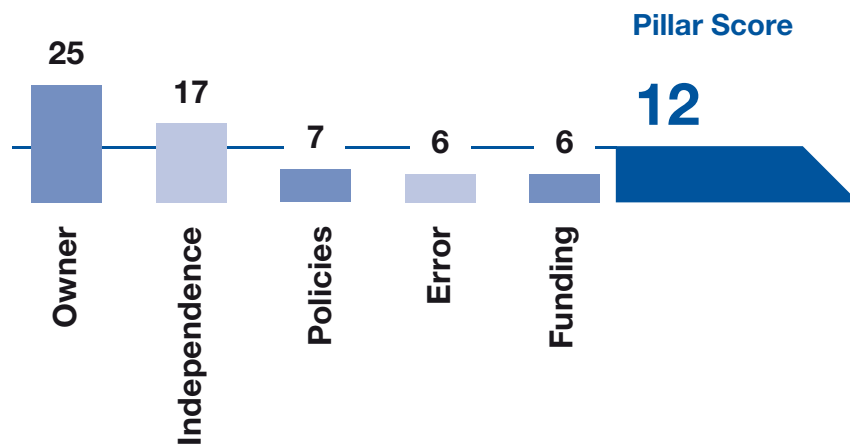


OPERATIONS PILLAR

This pillar assesses the operational and editorial integrity of a news site. All scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as scored by the country reviewers according to the information available on the site. The operations indicators are the quickest wins to reduce disinformation risk, as they represent policies that domains can immediately establish and make public.⁴¹ However, most domains in our market assessment did not make public their operational integrity policies (see Figure 6).

For example, none of the 24 sites included in the sample provides full information on their sources of funding. In certain cases even broadcasters, legally bound to report this data, omit this information, which is part of their regulatory transparency requirements. Such information is critical to ensuring full transparency about a country’s media.

Figure 8. Average Operations pillar scores by indicator

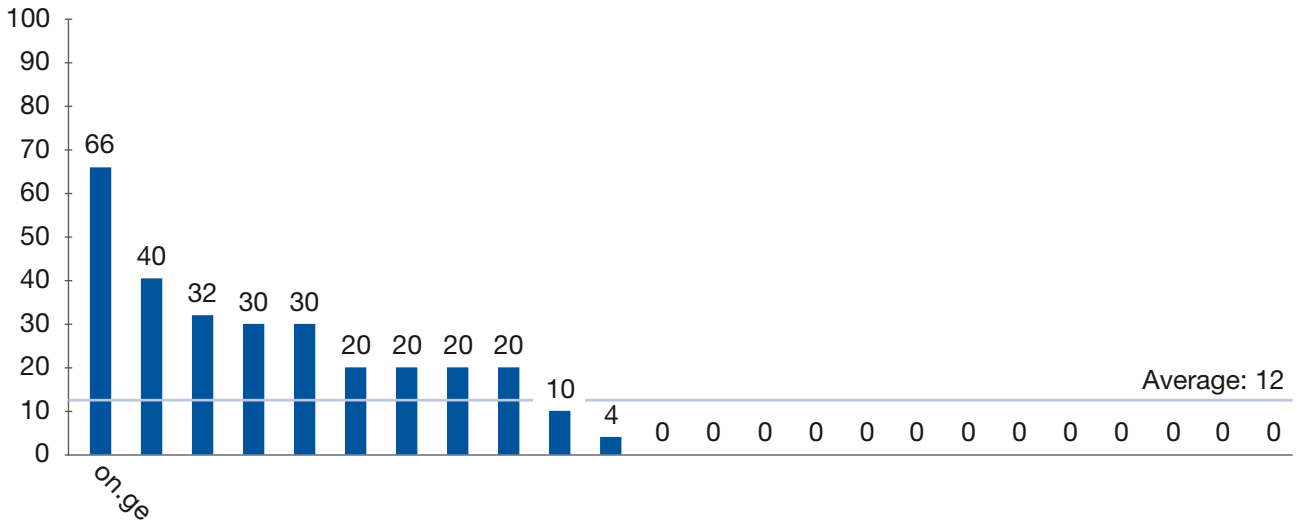


Moreover, only three sites had at least one key policy in place regarding the oversight of user-generated and synthetically generated content. And only one domain (www.on.ge) scored more than 60 on this indicator. In addition, only four sites have some form of information regarding how they correct errors on their sites. Out of these four domains, two are the websites of broadcast media who are obliged to report on their self-regulation mechanisms by law. No site provides users with both the policy and process for correcting errors. The use of these policies ensures that news sites have clear processes for reviewing and correcting erroneously published content as well as keeping the comments section civil and free of harassment.

Such findings indicate that many of the JTI's operational frameworks which help to promote the trustworthiness of a domain are absent from the Georgian online media market. These low scores reveal that there are latent risks for disinformation that could be caused by integrity breakdowns, which could eventually trigger higher content-related risks for the stories covered on these sites. For example, if a news site does not disclose its funding, ownership and editorial independence, an undisclosed change in ownership could potentially and greatly impact the reliability and trustworthiness of its content.

Sites performing poorly on this pillar include blogs and news aggregators as well as a number of more professional news outlets. This suggests that in order to minimise risk in the Georgian media market, all publishers should rethink their standards for public disclosure of the JTI's key policies (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Operations pillar scores by site

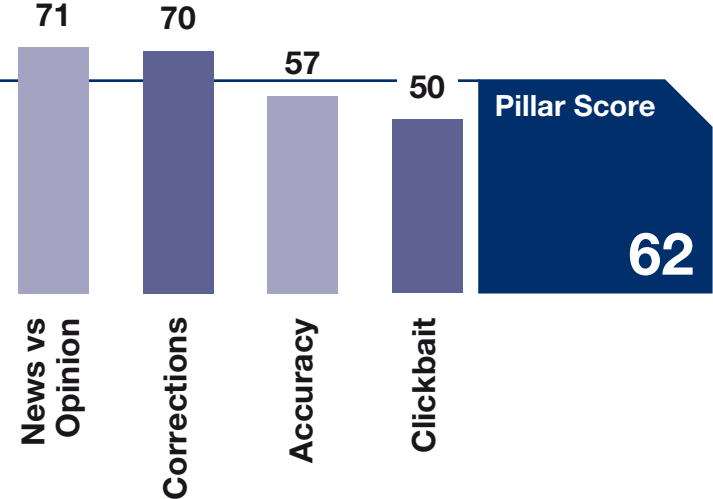


CONTEXT PILLAR

A site’s performance on this pillar is a good measure of perceptions of brand trust in a given media site. All scores are based on a scale of zero (worst) to 100 (best), as rated by online users.

Context pillar scores have significant room for improvement for many domains, although expert perceptions can be shifted only over the medium to long term (see Figure 10). This is partly due to the fact that perceptions can be ‘sticky’ and take time to realign with a site’s current realities. That said, our statistical analysis indicates that respondents’ perceptions do reflect several of the Content and Operations indicators, so adopting the content and operations standards measured in those pillars may have the additional effect of improving perceptions in the eyes of the country’s readers.

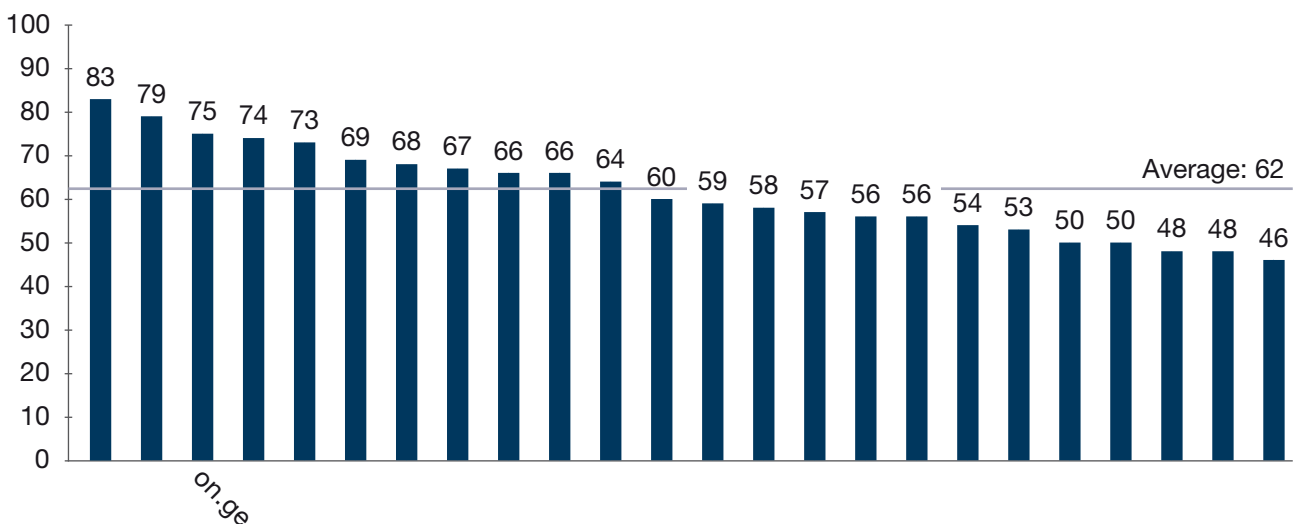
Figure 10. Average Context pillar scores by indicator



The Context pillar findings are based on an independent survey⁴² conducted to measure online user perceptions of brand trust in the Georgian media sites included in our sample. Interestingly, online users' perceptions of the accuracy of information on the sites assessed coincide with key disinformation indicators related to whether a site carries biased and targeted content.⁴³ Georgian domains are viewed by respondents as doing relatively well at labelling opinions and news. This indicator also is positively and significantly correlated with online users' perceptions of whether sites carry accurate information, and how well sites did on the indicators related to the reliability of their content (i.e. the Content pillar).⁴⁴

However, the assessed sites do relatively poorly when it comes to using clickbait titles and issuing corrections to their stories. Still, despite this critical assessment, 15 domains out of 24 receive a score of 70 or higher out of 100 points for clearly labelling news and opinion.

Figure 11. Context pillar scores by site



Moreover, the survey results revealed that for four sites, none of the respondents felt that they had enough information to know whether the domain issued corrections when a story was inaccurate. They also were not able to recall the last time they saw corrections on the website. This perception coincides with the finding that most Georgian domains do not make public their correction policies to their readers. Additionally, 'don't know' answers indicate that online users are less informed about self-regulation mechanisms and how to request a correction. On average, about 15 percent of respondents did not know how often a certain domain issued corrections when the story was inaccurate, while nearly 1 in 10 was not able to identify the last time they noticed a correction.

Conclusion

Our assessment of the disinformation risk of some of the top news sites in Georgia finds that the country's media market still presents various disinformation risks that should be addressed.

The analysis shows that most of the domains fall into either medium-risk or high-risk categories, while one in four can be classified as having a maximum risk of disinformation.

Domains typically perform better on our framework when it comes to indicators that assess the reliability of content. Still, these domains' overall ratings are brought down by their operational shortcomings and/or low levels of brand trust in them.

News sites could address these shortcomings by taking actions that:

- Focus on adopting journalistic and operational standards like those set by the Journalism Trust Initiative. This should be done across the board for all media sites in Georgia.

- Ensure that sites publish a statement of editorial independence, guidelines for issuing corrections, and policies for user- and AI-generated content.
- Ensure sites publish the names of their beneficial owners and not the general names of media holding companies, which can be used to obscure ownership. Otherwise, finding out the persons behind the companies requires expert skills and is not easily navigated by online users.
- Improve and make more visible a site's correction practices. It is important that such site corrections be clearly seen and understood, rather than being hidden on a web page 'below the fold'.
- Focus on ensuring proper labelling of news and opinion, as this is perceived to be one of the core indicators that is linked to levels of accuracy for media consumers.

The need for a trustworthy, independent rating of disinformation risk is pressing. The launch of this risk-rating framework will provide crucial information to policy-makers, news websites, and the ad tech industry, enabling key decision-makers to stem the tide of money that incentivises and sustains disinformation.

Annex: Methodology

Pillar scoring

The Structure, Content and Operations pillars of the GDI risk ratings are all designed to capture discrete, observable features of a domain by analysing a snapshot of a particular moment in time. This approach is effective at mitigating bias and standardising our analysis across domains and countries, but it is limited in scope. Historical information about a domain's content and practices is not captured by these pillars—nor are less observable disinformation flags (such as regularly disinforming readers by saying nothing about a story or topic). Both of these limitations are addressed by the fourth pillar, Context, which assesses long-term trends and indicators that are harder to measure. In this report, two-thirds of a domain's score is based on a snapshot of observable features (through the Content and Operations pillars), while the final third comes via a public perceptions survey that contextualizes our findings.

The Content pillar produces a score based on six indicators reviewed by two dedicated country analysts across ten articles published by a domain. These ten articles were randomly selected from among that domain's most frequently shared articles within a two-week period and then stripped of any information that could identify the publisher. The indicators included in the final risk rating are: title representativeness, author attribution, article tone, topicality and common coverage of the story by other domains.

The Operations pillar is scored at the domain level by the same country analysts. We selected five indicators from the Journalism Trust Initiative's list of trustworthiness

signals in order to capture the risk associated with a domain's potential financial conflicts of interest, vulnerability to disinformation in its comments sections, and editorial standards. This is not meant to capture the actual quality of journalism, as this pillar rates a domain based on its public disclosure of operations, which may differ from actual operations. The indicators included are: disclosure of true beneficial owners, transparency in funding sources, published policies for comments sections and the flagging of algorithmically-generated content, a clear process for error reporting, and a public statement affirming editorial independence.

The Context pillar score is based on results from a survey of online users' perceptions of a domain's content and operations. Incorporating survey data in calculating the risk rating is essential because it captures a wider range of opinions, and because online users' perceptions are based on a site's long-term behaviour and performance. This pillar offers a good complement to our Content pillar, which goes into greater depth but analyses only ten articles. The survey captures four indicators: accuracy, clear differentiation of news and opinion articles, use of clickbait titles and error reporting.

Domains are placed into one of five risk categories based on their final risk score. The cut-offs for the categories are determined by combining the risk ratings for domains in all countries in the current version of the index, and calculating this global sample's mean and standard deviation. Domains are placed into a category based on the number of standard deviations that separate their rating from the global mean score. The following table shows each category and its cut-offs.

Table 1: Overview of risk bands

TOTAL DOMAIN SCORE	DISINFORMATION RISK LEVEL	DISINFORMATION RISK CATEGORY
< -1.5 SD from mean	5	Maximum risk
≥ -1.5 and ≤ -0.5 SD from mean	4	High risk
> -0.5 and ≤ 0.5 SD from mean	3	Medium risk
> 0.5 and ≤ 1.5 SD from mean	2	Low risk
> 1.5 SD from mean	1	Minimum risk

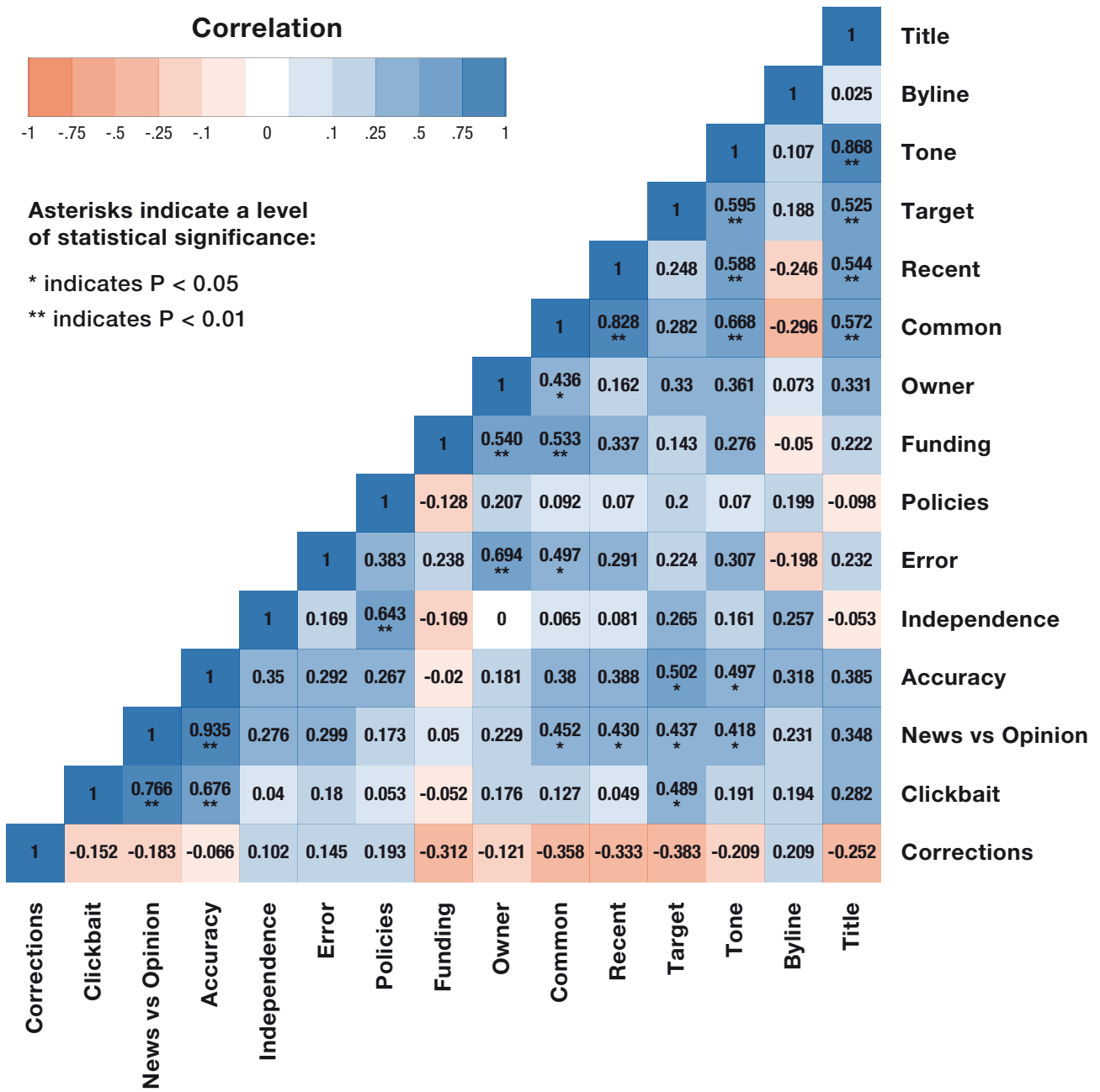
Data collection

The Georgian domains were split between two MDF analysts who were trained by GDI staff on our framework according to a codebook that provides detailed instructions for assessing each indicator.

The survey was conducted by an independent research body – the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRCC) – using a snowball sampling method, and includes over 200 experts from academia, civil society, and industry.⁴⁵ Each respondent was asked a series of questions

about domains that they indicated they were familiar with but do not actively contribute to. Seven domains were reviewed by fewer than ten respondents and were dropped from the study. The maximum number of respondents was 130 for www.interpressnews.ge and the lowest number of respondents was 10 for www.resonancedaily.com. Across all sites the average number of responses per site was 42.

Table 2. Correlations matrix



Endnotes

- 1 IREX Media Sustainability Index, Georgia 2019: <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2019-georgia.pdf>.
- 2 Transparency International Georgia, 2019. Fighting Disinformation in Georgia. page 7. <https://www.transparency.ge/en/post/fighting-disinformation-georgia>.
- 3 In December 2019, Facebook imposed sanctions on pages linked to the Georgian government for 'coordinated inauthentic behavior' and removed hundreds of them; then in 2020 Facebook removed not only government-affiliated accounts, pages and groups due to CIB, but sites affiliated with the opposition party UNM. Facebook, 20 December, 2019. Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior From Georgia, Vietnam and the US; <https://bit.ly/2xLptZ9> Facebook, 5 May, 2020. April 2020 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/05/april-cib-report/>.
- 4 This was done to create a fake social media profile to then spread disinformation on the part of domestic actors. The result was that an AI-generated pro-government blogger was quoted by online media as a real source. See: Myth Detector, 22 November, 2019. 'A Pro-Governmental "Blogger" Giorgi Aghapishvili is Actually an AI-Generated Photo'. <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/pro-governmental-blogger-giorgi-aghapishvili-actually-ai-generated-photo>.
- 5 We define disinformation in terms of the verb 'to disinform': 'to deliberately mislead; opposite of inform.'
- 6 The Structure pillar is assessed by a machine-learning algorithm prototype that is trained on metadata from thousands of websites known for regularly disinforming readers. It identifies these domains according to technical features. For example, use of ads.txt, security protocols, and site-specific email aliases. For more on our methodology, see the appendix.
- 7 For more on our methodology, see the appendix and methodology at: <https://disinformationindex.org/research/>.
- 8 The Structure pillar is assessed by a machine-learning algorithm prototype that is trained on metadata from thousands of websites known for regularly disinforming readers. It identifies these domains according to technical features of the website itself, and currently produces a binary assessment: it either is or is not a high-risk disinformation site. For this study, the structural indicators were used only as a filter to cross-check the domains which were selected for the human review. Their scores on this pillar were not used to calculate the final risk rating. As the sample is composed of some of the most popular sites in the Georgian media market, they would not be expected to share structural features with high-risk sites.
- 9 In this round of reports for 2020, media market assessments will be produced for the following countries: Argentina, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Latvia, India, South Africa, UK and the U.S. Additional countries may also be added.
- 10 All sites included in the report were informed of their individual scores and risk ratings, as well as the overall market averages.
- 11 The survey was commissioned and conducted by a local independent survey company, the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRCC) (<http://www.crrccenters.org/2>). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were replaced by a phone survey and text. 202 respondents were interviewed. Two analysts from MDF were tasked with undertaking the other areas of the media market assessment.
- 12 Minimal risk is the best risk rating, followed by a low-risk rating. Both ratings suggest a news site that has scored well across all of the indicators. For all countries, individual site scores were shared confidentially with the site operators to allow for engagement, feedback and any necessary changes. All sites were contacted in advance to provide them with information on the methodology and rating process. In all countries covered by the risk ratings, the composite scores are shared only for the sites assessed to have a low or minimal disinformation risk. As a result, the number of sites disclosed in the report will vary by country.

- 13 The GDI looks forward to working with the entire industry in this effort. There is strong demand for such a risk assessment of sites, and a notable concern that less trusted, less independent actors may seek to fill this gap.
- 14 MDF, 2020. Anti-Western Propaganda 2019. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/173/file/eng/AntiWest-Booklet-ENG.pdf>.
- 15 National Democratic Institute (NDI), Caucasus Research Center Georgia (CRRC), Public Attitudes in Georgia (March 2018). https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf.
- 16 MDF, 2019. Anti-Western Propaganda 2018. page 8. http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/119/file/eng/Anti_West-2018-ENG.pdf.
- 17 National Democratic Institute (NDI), Caucasus Research Center Georgia (CRRC) Public Attitudes in Georgia (April 2019), page 60. DK - Don't know. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_April_2019_Public_Issues%20Poll_ENG_Final.pdf.
- 18 This is based on the findings for the share of respondents that consume non-Georgian information: NTV (26%), Channel One Russia - ORT (24%), Russia 1 (22%), RTR (18%). These are followed by English-language media outlets: CNN (12%), Euronews (10%), BBC World News (8%). See: National Democratic Institute (NDI), Caucasus Research Center Georgia (CRRC), Public Attitudes in Georgia (April 2019), page 61. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_April_2019_Public_Issues%20Poll_ENG_Final.pdf.
- 19 Myth Detector, 15 April 2020. "“Russian Cluster” of disinformation and its “internal spread” in Georgia’ <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/russian-cluster-disinformation-and-its-internal-spread-georgia>.
- 20 Myth Detector, 16 May 2017. 18+: a photo-manipulation by foxnews.ge on alleged trade in children’s organs actually uses photos from events in Damascus, Indonesia and Abkhazia <http://mythdetector.ge/en/myth/18-photo-manipulation-foxnewsge-alleged-children-organ-trade-actually-uses-photos-damascus-0>.
- 21 MDF (2018), Anti-Western Propaganda. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/89/file/eng/AntiWest-2017-ENG.pdf>.
- 22 Media Meter: <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/sputnik-georgia>.
- 23 #102. Alexa [accessed 24 August 2020].
- 24 While in certain cases information on a site’s ownership is publicly available, online users are not able to access this data directly on the news site.
- 25 Reporters Without Borders (2020). 2020 World Press Freedom Index. [online] Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/georgia>.
- 26 Caucasus Barometer time-series dataset Georgia <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/TRUMEDI/>.
- 27 Claude-Jean Bertrand (2003). A report on Media Accountability in Georgia by Claude-Jean Bertrand, ATCM (2003), Council of Europe.
- 28 Freedom house (2018). Freedom of the press. [online] Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2019> [accessed 13 July 2020].
- 29 European Commission, Brussels, 6-2-2020. Joint Staff Working Document. Association Implementation Report on Georgia. <https://bit.ly/2VLSNGP>.
- 30 ‘The media landscape changed considerably after a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling on the Rustavi 2 TV channel case in July. New media channels were set up and the Prosecutor’s Office launched investigations into cases involving the owners/managers of some media outlets.’ See page 2: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/1_en_document_travail_service_conjoint_part1_v4.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0H6yDF_OYXlgS6eJm6EOJ_xO3pSuLCwyjlpseAdMZJL5cO75HWbCJASvA.
- 31 Media Meter, Imedi TV. <http://mediameter.ge/en/media-profiles/tv-imeri>.
- 32 Forbes, #456 Bidzina Ivanishvili. <https://www.forbes.com/profile/bidzina-ivanishvili/#2bd6089c4598>.
- 33 National Democratic Institute (NDI), December 2019. Public Opinion Polls in Georgia, page 74. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202019_Public%20Presentation_ENG_VF.pdf.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Alexa [Accessed: 23 August 23, 2020]. <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/GE>.
- 36 Georgian National Communication Commission (GNCC), Annual Report 2019. page 46. <https://comcom.ge/uploads/other/5/5875.pdf>.
- 37 National Democratic Institute (NDI), December 2019. Public Opinion Polls in Georgia, page 74. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_December%202019_Public%20Presentation_ENG_VF.pdf.
- 38 Transparency International, 10 July 2020. Overview of 2019 advertising market. <https://www.transparency.ge/ge/post/2019-clis-samaucqeblo-sareklamo-bazris-mimoxilva?fbclid=IwAR3LXVNCgHSdv4tVn0KhJTXQfwb0YfjKX6GqyCa3dozqC2Oe8rWWjgqVqa0>.
- 39 This is accessible through open data on public procurement processes, but even these data present challenges, as the criteria for the funding decisions of adverts to certain outlets are unclear.
- 40 MDF, 2018. Financial Transparency of Media, page 12. http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/127/file/eng/Eng_financial_transparency.pdf.

41 The Operations pillar looks at whether relevant policies are in place. It does not assess the level of robustness of the policy based on good practice, and does not look at how the policies are being implemented. However, other indicators in the framework do capture some of the relevant practices, such as by measuring expert perceptions on how often sites correct errors or are viewed as presenting accurate content.

42 The survey was commissioned and conducted by a local independent survey company, the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRRC) (<http://www.crrcenters.org/2>). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, face-to-face interviews were replaced by a phone survey and 202 respondents were interviewed.

43 See statistical correlations in the Annex.

44 See statistical correlations in the Annex.

45 CRRRC provides research, analysis and training using tested methodologies which allow accurate comparisons between sectors, populations and countries.



www.disinformationindex.org