



THE IMPACT OF MEDIA CONSUMPTION ON POLITICAL SENTIMENT AND VOTING INTENTIONS IN GEORGIA'S 2024 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

Levan Gurgenidzeⁱ

British University in Georgia,
Tbilisi, Georgia

Abstract:

Media outlets had a significant effect on voting intentions for the 2024 Georgian parliamentary election. By analyzing pre-election media consumption patterns and voting intentions, this article aims to assess how effectively pro-government and pro-opposition media encouraged voter turnout in Georgia. This article argues that media consumption influences a voter's political sentiment in Georgia, which in turn affects voting intentions. A voter's likelihood of voting is shaped by their outlook on the country's future.

Keywords: Georgian politics, political sentiment, media consumption, voting intentions

1. Introduction

Media outlets had a significant effect on voting intentions for the 2024 Georgian parliamentary election. By analyzing pre-election media consumption patterns and voting intentions, this article aims to assess how effectively pro-government and pro-opposition media encouraged voter turnout in Georgia. The findings can help media outlets enhance their influence on political participation.

In Georgia, media is a significant political force: nearly 86% of voters consume news from traditional media at least once a week, with 43.45% accessing it daily and just over 7% more than once a day. News consumption from online sources is even higher, with 88% of voters accessing it weekly, 52% daily, and 9% more than once a day. The impact of media on public sentiment is also substantial, as 75% of voters believe it strongly shapes society's political views.ⁱⁱ

This study conducted a phone survey between October 9 and 23, 2024, with 540 respondents. The survey gathered data on voter demographics - including age, gender, and region - along with media consumption frequency, media preferences, the role of

ⁱ Correspondence: email levan.gurgenidze@britishuni.edu.ge

ⁱⁱ The data presented in the article is from the survey, unless otherwise stated.

media in shaping societal, political sentiment, views on the country's direction and future, opinions on the Georgian Dream party, the Prime Minister and Cabinet, opposition parties, and voting intentions.

This article argues that media consumption influences a voter's political sentiment in Georgia, which in turn affects voting intentions. A voter's likelihood of voting is shaped by their outlook on the country's future. This analysis centers on two key variables:

- 1) **Political Sentiment** - is defined by a voter's view on the country's future. The survey question, "How do you view the future of the country?" offered respondents choices: "very pessimistically", "Pessimistically", "Optimistically" and "very optimistically." Respondents also stated that they did not have an answer, which was the mid-point option that the survey captured.
- 2) **Media Diet** - is defined by the media sources a voter relies on for political information. The survey question, "Which traditional media source do you rely on for political news and information?" offered respondents an opportunity to list three media sources of their choosing. Through this analysis, the article provides a nuanced look at the relationship between media consumption and political participation in Georgia.

2. Literature Review

Media plays a crucial role in democracy, serving as the primary means through which citizens gain knowledge of and participate in the democratic system (Boulianne, 2011; Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005; Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008; Livingstone & Markham, 2008; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003; Cook, 1998). Theoretical perspectives on this connection highlight the media's dual role. Firstly, it directly educates citizens about political processes. Secondly, it indirectly fosters attitudes and resources such as trust, feelings of effectiveness, and political knowledge, all of which encourage citizen involvement.

Dahl (1989) underscores the crucial role of media in democratic processes, suggesting that the credibility and legitimacy of democratic elections may come into question if voters lack essential information to make informed political decisions. Consequently, the quality of decision-making within a democratic framework is closely linked to the quality of information provided by the media to the electorate (Dahl, 1989). During elections, these media outlets serve as vital platforms for political parties to articulate their ideologies, providing voters with opportunities to access political information and assess the policies and manifestos advocated by various parties and candidates throughout campaigns (Yaser, *et al.*, 2011).

Scholars concur on the media's impact on public education and political engagement. However, there is a divergence of opinions within existing research on this matter. Some scholars underscore the media's role in disseminating information and

promoting participation (e.g., Breuer, 2016; Norris, 2000), whereas others accentuate its contribution to fostering political disillusionment, public skepticism, and disengagement (e.g., Schuck, 2017; Lin & Lim, 2002; Howard & Parks, 2012). Additionally, numerous studies examine various factors that influence political engagement.

Tobias-Mamina *et al.* (2021) assert that digital media exposure plays a significant role in shaping people's voting behavior. According to their theory, individuals who actively seek out, find, and consume news online demonstrate a motivation to become politically literate (Tobias Mamina *et al.*, 2021). This proactive engagement serves as a positive indicator of their voting intentions (Tobias-Mamina *et al.*, 2021).

Salzman (2015) asserts that consuming diverse types of news media typically mobilizes Latin Americans to participate in political activities, with the exception of Internet users, who show a lower likelihood of voting. However, engaging with Internet news correlates with heightened involvement in alternative forms of political participation (Salzman, 2015). These findings are statistically and substantively significant, as evidenced by the predicted probability results, which underscore considerable variations in political participation based on the frequency of news media consumption (Salzman, 2015).

The study conducted by Pfister *et al.* (2023) revealed that participants tended to rate candidates more favorably when they were exposed to them more frequently and subsequently voted for these candidates. Negative portrayals had minimal impact on voting behavior (Pfister *et al.*, 2023). Notably, the media exerted a significant influence on voting behavior, shaping the public's perception of political leaders (Pfister *et al.*, 2023). The frequency of media exposure impacted voting behavior, particularly when the content was neutral or positive; however, the same effect was not observed with negative content (Pfister *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, facial appearances and aesthetic cues were found to influence voting behavior (Pfister *et al.*, 2023).

Martijn van Zomeren *et al.* (2018) investigated the motivating factors of in-group identification, efficacy beliefs, and anger towards previous government policies or politics in a series of national elections held between 2012 and 2013 in the Netherlands, Israel, and Italy. Their research uncovered the significant role of anger in shaping voting behavior during these elections, highlighting its peculiar and context-dependent nature in comparison to in-group-directed party identification and efficacy beliefs (Martijn van Zomeren *et al.*, 2018). Interestingly, the study found that anger towards previous government policies did not reliably predict voting intentions (Martijn van Zomeren *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, general dissatisfaction with politics had differing effects across the samples: it suppressed voting intentions in the Israeli and Dutch contexts but stimulated them in the Italian sample (Martijn van Zomeren *et al.*, 2018). The authors attributed this variability to the presence of relevant out-groups, which often anger targets, in each context (Martijn van Zomeren *et al.*, 2018). Against the backdrop of emotionally charged election campaigns and surprising outcomes such as Brexit and the Trump presidency, the authors believe that these findings offer valuable insights and

emphasize the need for further research into the predictive power of anger in national elections (Martijn van Zomeren *et al.*, 2018).

The findings of Sarfaraz *et al.* (2012) highlighted various reasons for both political interest and apathy, along with their implications. Participants, unanimously recognizing flaws in the political system, exhibited diverse perspectives based on their level of interest (Sarfaraz *et al.*, 2012). Those interested in politics expressed optimism, believing in their ability to effect change through political engagement (Sarfaraz *et al.*, 2012). In contrast, apathetic individuals leaned towards pessimism, fostering feelings of learned helplessness and viewing their efforts as futile (Sarfaraz *et al.*, 2012). This research offers valuable insights for individuals aiming to deepen their understanding of politics and for those intrigued by political involvement but disillusioned by partisan divisions and rhetorical strategies prevalent in many political circles (Sarfaraz *et al.*, 2012). It also highlights the risk that detachment could exacerbate existing challenges (Sarfaraz *et al.*, 2012).

Chang *et al.* (2023) discovered that party affiliation is a significant predictor of voting inclinations. Utilizing Bert machine learning models to identify partisan tendencies in media outlets favored by voters, the authors determined an overall partisan bias in each voter's consumption of political information. Data obtained from a nationwide panel survey conducted in Taiwan confirms that the partisan "color" of media consumption in 2019 can effectively predict the voting choices of independent voters in 2020.

Yakubu (2012) contends that a population tends to become apolitical when, rather than reaping the rewards of democracy, they suffer from underdevelopment and inadequate governance under the leadership they have collectively chosen. He emphasizes that individuals abstain from voting as a result of decreasing confidence in the government, which arises from its inability to meet its responsibilities, ultimately resulting in decreased interest in political matters (Yakubu, 2012). This argument is substantiated by a survey conducted in the UK in 2013, which attributed the decline in voter turnout to a lack of trust in politicians, identified as the primary concern: 64% of respondents stated that politicians fail to keep their promises, while 34% indicated that politicians do not express their genuine beliefs (The Guardian, 2013). These findings suggest a loss of confidence in the possibility of positive change.

Fagunwa (2015) argues that the lack of democracy within political parties, particularly concerning leadership selection and candidate nomination processes, leads many members to feel disconnected from the party's decision-making processes for general elections. Folu (2020) discovered that secondary school teachers consider bad governance/leadership and various forms of electoral malpractice to be significant factors contributing to political apathy. This finding aligns with the perspectives of Yakubu (2012) and Utomi (2019). The perception of bad governance/leadership as a fundamental cause may stem from individuals' experiences under previous administrations that failed to fulfill their electoral promises (Folu, 2020). For example, the deterioration of infrastructure such as roads, which have become hazardous and contribute to numerous

accidents daily, insufficient funding for education, poorly equipped healthcare facilities, and an increasing unemployment rate are all indicators of ineffective governance (Folu, 2020). The study indicated that respondents view good governance/ leadership as a potential solution to political apathy (Folu, 2020).

This literature suggests that media plays a dynamic role in influencing voter behavior by shaping political sentiment, which can either motivate or dissuade electoral participation. In Georgia's context, where media is politically polarized, understanding how pro-government and pro-opposition outlets impact voter turnout is essential. This study explores these influences, focusing on how media consumption patterns relate to political sentiment and voting intentions in the 2024 parliamentary elections.

3. Theory

The relationship between media consumption, political sentiment, and voting behavior is crucial for understanding how individuals engage with democratic processes. The theory that a voter's political sentiment is influenced by their media diet extends beyond the simple cause-and-effect relationship between what one consumes in terms of news and the political opinions they form. This theory suggests that the media plays a central role in shaping the emotional and cognitive lens through which voters perceive their country's political landscape, and it affects their decisions when it comes to elections.

Media is not just a passive transmitter of facts but an active constructor of narratives. What we consume—whether through traditional outlets like newspapers and television or through digital channels like social media and online news platforms—can significantly shape our political attitudes and sentiments. In the digital age, people are exposed to an overwhelming amount of information, but the type of content consumed and the framing of issues play a critical role in determining how individuals feel about their country's political environment.

Regular exposure to negative or critical portrayals of the government, societal issues, or national crises can create a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction or disillusionment. If individuals constantly encounter stories of corruption, economic decline, political gridlock, or human rights abuses, their view of the government's ability to bring about change becomes increasingly bleak. This negative sentiment may foster political apathy or even distrust toward elected officials, political institutions, and the very idea of democracy. As a result, such individuals might feel that their vote would have no impact, leading to voter disengagement and low turnout rates. On the other hand, media that highlights achievements, progress, or success stories - whether in the economy, social welfare programs, or international diplomacy - can create an optimistic and hopeful political sentiment. Positive media coverage tends to reinforce a belief that the government is working effectively, instilling a sense of pride and satisfaction in citizens. When voters feel that their country is on the right track, they are more likely to support the status quo and vote for the incumbents, as their positive sentiment aligns with the political message being conveyed by the media.

In some cases, individuals might consume media in a way that leads to a neutral or indifferent political sentiment. This can occur when voters are exposed to a mixture of both positive and negative news or when they avoid media altogether. A neutral political sentiment may indicate a lack of deep emotional investment in the political system, often stemming from a perception that the system is either beyond one's control or not worth engaging with. This can also reflect a deliberate apolitical stance, where individuals choose not to become emotionally involved in political debates and decisions, either due to fatigue or a sense of powerlessness. This is connected to the power of media to frame issues in specific ways that influence how voters perceive political events. The framing effect involves the presentation of an issue from a particular angle, which can guide individuals' opinions and emotions toward that issue. For example, a media outlet that frames a government policy as "progressive" and "forward-thinking" will lead its audience to view it more positively than if it were framed as "overly ambitious" or "unrealistic."

Moreover, the agenda-setting function of the media determines which issues are highlighted and which are ignored. If the media emphasizes topics like unemployment, poverty, or government corruption, these issues will become top-of-mind for voters and shape their political attitudes. If, however, media outlets focus on economic growth, successful policy implementations, or international accomplishments, voters may form a more positive view of the government's performance and future prospects.

Political sentiment—whether positive, negative, or neutral - directly affects how individuals approach voting decisions. The level of emotional investment that voters have in political matters often determines whether they choose to participate in the electoral process at all.

When political sentiment is negative or indifferent, individuals may believe that their vote will not result in meaningful change. This perception of political helplessness or cynicism leads to disengagement from the voting process. This is particularly evident in scenarios where individuals feel that politicians are untrustworthy or that systemic issues like corruption or inefficiency will persist regardless of who holds office. When voters do not perceive the electoral process as a viable path for enacting change, they may choose not to vote at all. This can contribute to voter apathy and lower turnout, especially in regions or periods of political instability.

Conversely, when voters feel positive about their country's political trajectory and believe that voting is a means to further progress, they are more likely to participate in elections. Positive sentiment often stems from a belief that one's vote can contribute to societal improvements or confirm the legitimacy of a government. Those who are optimistic about the future may see voting as an opportunity to reinforce the status quo or push for continued reforms. When voters are hopeful about the potential for change, they are more likely to believe that their participation matters and will make a difference in the political outcome.

In a more polarized media environment, where different media outlets consistently present divergent views of the same events (e.g., one side presenting a

government policy as a failure while the other presents it as a success), political sentiment may become more extreme. Those who consume media with a particular ideological bent may develop more rigid, polarized views, making it harder for them to entertain moderate or opposing perspectives. This polarization can fuel voter turnout among highly partisan groups, with those strongly aligned with one political camp more likely to vote based on their heightened emotional engagement.

4. Methodology

This article uses a quantitative method to understand the relationship between media diet, political sentiment and voting intentions in Georgia before the 2024 Parliamentary election. The survey was conducted just before the election in October, providing valuable insights into the dynamics between these variables. The number of respondents was 540.

Respondent's political sentiment was captured by the question: "How do you view the future of the country?" Respondents could choose from the following options: "Very Pessimistically," "Pessimistically," "Optimistically," and "Very Optimistically." Respondent's media diet was captured by the question: "Which traditional media source do you rely on for political news and information?" Respondents could highlight up to three sources from which they consumed news. The third variable, Voting Intention, was captured by the question: "Do you intend to vote in the upcoming election?" with the options: "Yes," "Maybe," and "No."

Hypothesis 1: A voter's media diet influences their political sentiment, with those consuming pro-government media sources tending to hold more optimistic views on Georgia's future, while those consuming opposition media sources are more likely to hold pessimistic views.

Hypothesis 2: A voter's political sentiment influences their likelihood of voting; voters with an optimistic outlook on Georgia's future are more likely to intend to vote, while those with a pessimistic outlook are less likely to intend to vote.

A dataset was created where the Political Sentiment variable was labeled as "Future," capturing optimistic sentiment, and as "Pessimist.Future", capturing pessimistic sentiment. Media Diet was labeled as "Dummy.Imedi.1," capturing voters watching TV Imedi for news, and "Dummy.Opposition.1", capturing voters watching opposition media (Mtavari, Formula and TV Pirveli) for news. Voting Intention was labeled as "Vote."

The "Future" variable has five options:

- 0: No Answer,
- 1: Very Pessimistic,
- 2: Pessimistic,
- 3: Neutral,
- 4: Optimistic,
- 5: Very Optimistic.

The “Pessimist.Future” also has five options, but the responses are reversed:

- 0: Very Optimistic,
- 1: Optimistic,
- 2: Neutral,
- 3: Pessimistic,
- 4: Very Pessimistic,
- 5: No Answer.

“Dummy.Imedi.1” is a dummy variable, with a value of 1 indicating that a respondent watches Imedi TV, and 0 indicating they watch any other TV station. “Dummy.Opposition.1” is also a dummy variable, with a value of 1 indicating that a respondent watches an opposition media outlet (Mtavari, Formula or TV Pirveli), and 0 indicating they watch any other TV station.

The “Vote” variable has three options:

- 1: No,
- 2: Maybe,
- 3: Yes.

The dependent variable is “Vote”. This article measures how the “Future,” “Pessimist.Future”, “Dummy.Imedi.1,” and “Dummy.Opposition.1” variables affect it. Since “Vote” is a categorical variable, an ordered probit model is used in R for analysis.

5. Results

Hypothesis 1: Media Diet is the independent variable, and Political Sentiment is the dependent variable. In technical terms, **Dummy.Imedi.1** and **Dummy.Opposition.1** are independent variables, and **Future** is the dependent variable. The coefficient for **Dummy.Imedi.1** is 0.57, which is statistically significant at the 99% level, indicating a positive relationship. The coefficient for **Dummy.Opposition.1** is -0.56, also statistically significant at the 99% level, indicating a negative relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Political Sentiment is the independent variable, and Voting Intention is the dependent variable. In technical terms, **Future** and **Pessimist.Future** are independent variables, and **Vote** is the dependent variable. The coefficient for **Future** is 0.36, which is statistically significant at the 99% level, suggesting a positive effect. The coefficient for **Pessimist.Future** is -0.35, also statistically significant at the 99% level, suggesting a negative effect.

5.1 Interpretation

The coefficient of **Dummy.Imedi.1** (0.57) indicates that if a voter relies on Imedi TV for news (i.e., the **Dummy.Imedi.1** variable increases by 1 unit), they are more likely to have an optimistic outlook toward Georgia’s future (i.e., the **Future** variable increases by 0.57 points).

The coefficient of **Dummy.Opposition.1** (-0.56) suggests that if a voter relies on opposition media for news (i.e., the **Dummy.Opposition.1** variable increases by 1 unit),

they are more likely to have a pessimistic outlook toward Georgia's future (i.e., the **Future** variable decreases by 0.56 points).

The coefficient of **Future** (0.36) means that if a voter has a more optimistic outlook toward the future of Georgia (i.e., the **Future** variable increases by 1 unit), they are more likely to intend to vote (i.e., the **Vote** variable increases by 0.36 points).

The coefficient of **Pessimist.Future** (-0.35) indicates that if a voter has a pessimistic outlook on Georgia's future (i.e., the **Pessimist.Future** variable increases by 1 unit), they are less likely to intend to vote (i.e., the **Vote** variable decreases by 0.35 points).

6. Conclusion

This article examines the significant impact of media consumption on political sentiment and voting intentions in Georgia's 2024 Parliamentary election. The findings indicate that voters' media preferences - whether favoring pro-government or pro-opposition outlets - strongly influence their perspectives on the country's future and their motivation to participate in elections. Pro-government media generally fosters optimism that aligns with support for incumbents, while pro-opposition media often generates critical sentiment that can fuel a desire for change. This article aimed to assess how effectively opposition media cultivates a critical view of the government while sustaining hope for positive change, motivating voters to participate rather than disengage. Conversely, it also explored how pro-government media seeks to inspire confidence in a positive future, potentially increasing support for the current leadership. The analysis rests on the key assumption that political sentiment directly influences voting intentions. Results show that voters with an optimistic view of Georgia's future are more likely to vote, while those with a pessimistic outlook are less likely to engage. This insight suggests that media organizations seeking to boost voter participation should consider the balance between fostering critical awareness and preserving optimism. Although opposition media may aim to challenge the government, it is crucial to maintain a level of hope that motivates voters to act. If voters lose faith in the possibility of change, they will lose the motivation to participate in the democratic process.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Levan Gurgenidze, is an associate professor at the British University in Georgia. He was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences in August 2024, bringing with him extensive experience in both academia and political management. He studied History and Politics at the University of Exeter, where he graduated in 2013, followed by a Master of Research in Politics from the same institution in 2015. He later earned a second Master's degree from George Washington University in International Affairs in 2023. Levan played a key role in establishing the British University in Georgia and has an

extensive background in political management, having led political campaigns across four continents: North America (United States and Canada), Europe (including two campaigns in Moldova), Africa (South Sudan), and Asia (Pakistan). He is also an active member of the European Association of Political Consultants and the International Association of Political Consultants.

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