

Landscape Assessment of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence as an Attack on Women's Public Participation in Georgia: Incidence, Opportunities, and Recommendations

Transform Digital Spaces (Transform) Activity

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is a global threat to the health, safety, and political and economic wellbeing - not just of those who experience it, but of society as a whole. Transform is a three-year global initiative, which supports the piloting of practical approaches to prevent, mitigate, and respond to TFGBV, with a focus on addressing violence experienced by women in politics and public life. In 2023, Transform worked on a foundational assessment of the state of TFGBV in the Republic of Georgia.

This country-based assessment focused on six domains:

1. TFGBV against women in politics and public life, including incidence, trends, perpetrators, and common characteristics
2. Women's political and civic participation
3. Violence against women in politics
4. Women's digital participation and civic tech
5. Opportunities and barriers to accountability
6. Broader contextual factors, including international and conflict factors and LGBTQI+ status in country

TFGBV in Georgia is part of a pattern of democratic backsliding, frequently driven by foreign narratives seeking to influence Georgian politics. Political parties deploy TFGBV against women political opponents and candidates to shore up parties' own political status. The current governing party has also heavily deployed anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and encouraged bigotry against members of that community. TFGBV is frequently deployed as part of an overall narrative against female political participation in favor of traditional Georgian gender norms.

Key Findings:

1. **There is a lack of recognition of TFGBV and Violence Against Women in Politics and Public Life (VAWPP) in Georgia and minimal data collected on the problem.** In Georgia, there are no statistics on prevalence of TFGBV overall, nor on VAWPP more generally, and no legal or social recognition or awareness of the issue. Therefore, despite TFGBV against Georgian women appearing to be commonplace, there is minimal understanding and measurement of TFGBV in Georgia.
2. **Georgian women who are also LGBTQI+ community members, ethnic minorities, displaced persons, and women human rights defenders are highly targeted.** Disinformation targets minorities, women human rights defenders, gender-based violence survivors, women politicians, and women activists coming from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.
3. **Georgia has no laws specifically addressing VAWPP, and enforcement of existing laws or other mechanisms that could apply to TFGBV is weak.** Laws on hate speech and related topics are wielded as political tools against political opponents. Prosecution of hate speech against women in politics and public life is highly infrequent: Research could not identify any cases where hate speech against women human rights defenders was prosecuted.
4. **Digital engagement is high in Georgia and facilitates TFGBV against women in politics and public life.** Over 80 percent of Georgians use the internet, with the gender digital divide largely eliminated. The multitude of platforms allows perpetrators to evade regulation, and several recent government actions have been perceived as attempts to curb press freedom rather than prevent online abuse.
5. **Common narratives deployed through TFGBV target gender identities and norms.** Perpetrators accuse Georgian women in politics and public life of deviation from traditional gender roles, disloyalty, sexual deviance, and other misogynistic tropes. Perpetrators also threaten to and in fact do release intimate images and details of women leaders and contact their families.
6. **TFGBV and gendered disinformation in Georgia are part of a malign influence agenda.** Russia maintains an interest in influencing Georgian politics. Gendered disinformation is deployed by Russian and pro-Russian narratives, and bots and trolls have been used to spread anti-Western and anti-democratic narratives and attack civil society.

This landscape analysis was conducted using **Transform’s Digital Threats and Public Participation Landscape Assessment Methodology**, accessible [HERE](#)



Based on these findings, Transform identified several implications for the design and implementation of initiatives and programs working to address TFGBV in Georgia. Throughout all these next steps, **trauma-informed approaches and psychosocial support** should be incorporated in all activities related to TFGBV.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Women parliamentarians have a tool that could be used to combat gender-based violence known as the Gender Equality Council, created by the parliament of Georgia to ensure systematic and coordinated work on the issues of gender equality. Key informants indicated that political parties lack regulations governing TFGBV policy, rules, and procedures, but when such issues arise, even general knowledge on TFGBV and digital security can have a significant impact.

Recommendations:

- 1. Build capacity and awareness:** by working with government agencies, training survivors on bringing concerns to digital platforms, governmental bodies, and gender councils, and organizing trainings in tech events.
- 2. Support local civil society:** by extending activities to rural areas and ethnic minorities, working with higher education to include TFGBV in curricula, and supporting media to build capacity around reporting on TFGBV.
- 3. Engage in tech solutions:** by supporting and building on existing locally directed activities, such as the “Safe You” app, and tools to monitor TFGBV perpetrated in the Georgian language.
- 4. Strengthen pro-democratic institutions and norms:** by working with election observers to monitor TFGBV and on mitigation tactics in advance of the 2024 election as well as collaborating with organizations and interested officials to develop an online space for women Members of Parliament and activists.
- 5. Leverage existing synergies and partnerships:** by working with existing programs such as the USAID-funded Civil Society Engagement Program in Georgia and Georgia Rule of Law program, as well as the Democracy Schools organized by the EU-funded Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy.

To request the full assessment, please reach out to info.transform@irex.org

Transform is an Associate Award (AA) carried out under the Civil Society and Media-Strengthened Together and Advancing in New Directions (CSM-STAND) Leader with Associates Award (LWA). It is implemented by the CSM-STAND consortium, with Pact as the holder of the leader award and recipient of the AA, and IREX as implementing lead. CSM-STAND is a five-year, USAID funded award that aims to foster independent civic forces; enhance civic engagement; and build vibrant, resilient, and self-reliant civil society and media sectors that cultivate more pluralistic, democratic societies.

