

# A New Eurasian Far Right Rising:

Reflections on Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia

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# SPECIAL REPORT

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### ON THE COVER

Georgian police officers cordon off the area in central Tbilisi, on May 17, 2013, where Orthodox believers and anti-gay activists demonstrate to protest gay rights activists' plans to stage a rally marking the International Day against Homophobia. Homosexuality is still highly stigmatised in Georgia, a deeply socially conservative ex-Soviet state in the Caucasus where the Orthodox Church retains immense clout. (Photo Credit: Tony Karumba/AFP via Getty Images)

## Executive Summary

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- Far-right groups are growing in prominence and sophistication across Eurasia, particularly in countries where notable democratic and liberalizing reforms have taken place. These movements have emerged in similar contexts and share certain characteristics, and should be evaluated as a phenomenon in their own right.
- While the electoral power of far-right groups is limited, they are nevertheless influential within their respective societies, and shape social and political discourse according to their ideological framework. Moreover, far-right groups pose a direct physical threat to minority populations, undermining their ability to exercise basic freedoms of expression and assembly.
- Instrumental exploitation of far-right groups by political and commercial interests is a cause for serious concern. High demand for professional, far-right thuggery feeds a vicious cycle that encourages further radicalization and violence.
- While Ukraine's far right is already highly professionalized and visible in society, similar movements in Georgia and Armenia are gaining momentum, and face few barriers to their continued rapid development. Monitoring of far-right groups and violent incidents is necessary to better equip stakeholders with the information they need to grapple with this issue.

Recent years have witnessed an undeniable increase in the prominence and activity of ultraconservative and far-right groups in both Europe and the United States. Parties such as Alternative for Germany (AfD); Matteo Salvini's Northern League, in Italy; and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland have established firm footholds in the politics of their respective societies, reflecting a deep discontent with the values of liberal democracy and a growing desire among voters to embrace hard-line, nationalist narratives and policies.

In Eurasia, too, activity by far-right groups is increasingly visible. These antiliberal, antiglobalist, radical nationalist groups support a return to what they describe as "traditional" values and the ideal of a "pure" nation-state, and often support violence or the threat thereof as an acceptable tactic to advance this vision.

Eurasian far-right groups have emerged in contexts distinguished by common features, including the long-standing presence of ethnic-nationalist discourses; military conflicts that are open to exploitation by radical nationalist groups; and the instrumentalization of movements by domestic and international actors that see them as useful tools in their various political struggles. Far-right groups often have international linkages that in some cases point toward Russia, but in others toward the resurgent far right in Europe and the United States. And while these emergent groups currently do not hold much sway in formal politics, they have significant resonance and normative impact within their respective societies.

Worryingly, these movements are gaining a foothold in countries that are undergoing significant democratic reform and development. In Ukraine and Georgia, for instance, the rise in prominence and sophistication of radical groups in recent years has taken place in parallel with democratic achievements in other sectors. In Armenia, there has been a significant increase in the visibility and legitimization of far-right activism in public and political discourse since the Velvet Revolution in 2018.

The growing sophistication and prominence of Eurasian far-right movements has serious implications for democratic development in the region. Moreover, these movements threaten the fundamental human rights of members of minority groups, who increasingly face violence and intimidation at their hands. This brief describes the growth of far-right movements in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia, considering their impact on democratic development and the extent to which they may herald the emergence of a new far-right paradigm in Eurasia.

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## Far-Right Groups in Ukraine: Professionalized with Mainstream Visibility

Since the Revolution of Dignity of 2014, Ukraine has been widely viewed as an important leader and symbol of democratic values and reform across Eastern Europe and Eurasia.<sup>1</sup> However, in recent years the country's significant democratic gains have been paralleled by a dramatic increase in the activity of far-right groups. While radical far-right groups have existed in Ukraine since the 1920s, they now represent a sophisticated and politically influential element of society.<sup>2</sup>

In electoral politics, the Svoboda (Freedom) party is considered the most developed political arm of Ukraine's far right. The party's greatest political victory came in 2010, when it received 10 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections and several ministerial positions in the Ukrainian government. The Revolution of Dignity and outbreak of war with Russia in 2014 gave further momentum and mainstream legitimacy to nationalist political narratives, driving large numbers of patriotic Ukrainians to support more extreme measures to safeguard the country's independence and security.<sup>3</sup>

Electoral support for Svoboda and other openly nationalist political parties waned in the years that followed; Svoboda took only 4.5 percent of the vote in 2014, and a Svoboda-led coalition of right-wing parties failed to enter parliament in 2019 after taking only 2.15 percent of the vote. However, the narrow vision of pro-Ukrainian nationalist orthodoxy and vehement anti-Russian rhetoric championed by Svoboda and its allies became a dominant political narrative,

variants of which are increasingly common in mainstream political discourse. With his slogan "Army, language, faith!" former President Petro Poroshenko helped to popularize an exclusivist brand of patriotism that continues to draw significant support from both moderate and radical segments of society.<sup>4</sup> Poroshenko's political rhetoric ultimately culminated in a series of severe legal measures purporting to preserve Ukrainian identity, but which often infringe upon the rights of the country's minority groups.<sup>5</sup>

Far-right groups are also highly active outside the formal political arena. Emboldened by the struggle with Russia and greater societal acceptance of a radical and intolerant brand of patriotism, these groups target perceived internal threats and "impure" elements of society—including Roma, LGBT+ people, and religious and linguistic minorities—that do not align with their exclusive "traditional" vision of Ukrainian identity.<sup>6</sup> Their methods range from brutal violence, such as pogroms on Roma camps, to aggressive efforts to prevent the LGBT+ community from using public spaces and participating in public life.<sup>7</sup> According to recent data from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the number of hate-motivated incidents in Ukraine has grown steadily in recent years, with 178 incidents recorded by the police in 2018 alone.<sup>8</sup>

The war in the east has provided newfound social legitimacy to far-right groups, bringing with it unprecedented levels of sophistication, funding, recruitment, and organizational capacity. According to Vyacheslav Likhachev, a Kyiv-based expert on right-wing groups in Ukraine, the activity and visibility of these groups has increased significantly since the war's outbreak, drawing new members from a generation of youth who have come of age in a new era of war patriotism.<sup>9</sup> As the hot conflict against the external Russian threat has wound down, many young people have turned to far-right paramilitary groups in search of new ways to prove themselves, seeing membership as offering opportunities to defend the Ukrainian homeland against supposed internal enemies.

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Worryingly, Ukraine's far-right groups are not sustained on ideology alone: their activities are supported by various homegrown commercial and political operations, which regularly hire out the groups' services as paid thugs. The Ukrainian government itself is one of many stakeholders that draws on far right groups' violent skillset both formally and informally, even going so far as to integrate right-wing paramilitary groups into the Ukrainian armed forces.<sup>10</sup> Likhachev observes that the establishment of far-right violence as a lucrative industry in Ukraine has resulted in greater fragmentation and radicalization of these groups, as they compete amongst themselves for resources and prestige. Thus, the instrumentalization of far-right groups by various actors pursuing personal gain has actually made the far right more dangerous to their ideological opponents by reinforcing the violent character of their activities.<sup>11</sup>

Violence and intimidation by far-right groups has taken place with near-total impunity, as Ukrainian law enforcement has rarely taken meaningful action to hold perpetrators accountable in recent years.<sup>12</sup> This is primarily due to a lack of political will among policymakers and the Ukrainian public to take a stand on this issue in the context of the ongoing war. This failure of political will is complex and stems from many sources, ranging from genuine popular support for these groups as defenders of threatened Ukrainian identity, to powerful interest groups who stand to gain from the thriving industry of far-right thuggery. A weak legal framework to combat hate-motivated violence also aggravates the problem; existing articles in the criminal code do not provide investigators and prosecutors with the tools they need to hold perpetrators accountable for hate-motivated violence and are inconsistent with international standards.<sup>13</sup>

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The election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in April 2019 on an anticorruption and rule of law platform raised hopes that the government would take a firmer stance on this issue.<sup>14</sup> While it is too early to assess the full impact of the new government's policies, it is clear that some short-term progress has been achieved since Zelenskyy took office. According to Likhachev, the activity of the far right has become less prominent in recent months, with fewer violent incidents reported in 2019 than in 2018. Likhachev credits this change to a renewed commitment to maintaining law and order among law enforcement bodies—a key campaign promise of the Zelenskyy administration.<sup>15</sup>

However, it is doubtful if this dynamic can hold in the longer term, particularly as individuals with strong interests in sustaining far-right activity continue to hold positions of power in the new government,<sup>16</sup> and the weak legal framework for bringing perpetrators to justice remains unchanged. Rather than truly disappearing from the scene, it may be that Ukraine's far right is instead channeling their energies into sectors less visible to the public eye while they assess the changing political landscape under Zelenskyy.<sup>17</sup>

## Far-Right Groups in Georgia: Growing in Strength and Sophistication

Unlike in Ukraine, Georgia's far-right movement has yet to gain a meaningful foothold in the country's electoral politics.

Since its own celebrated democratic openings of the Rose Revolution in 2003 and the peaceful transition of power in 2012, Georgia has kept up a rapid pace of democratic, liberalizing reforms in line with its aspirations for membership in the European Union and in NATO.<sup>18</sup> However, as in Ukraine, these democratic achievements have been shadowed by the rise of a far-right movement growing in both strength and sophistication.

As in Ukraine, the far-right movement in Georgia can draw on a deep well of ethnic-nationalist sentiments. Analysts such as Tbilisi-based Oleksandra Delemenchuk link militant ethnic-nationalist ideology to the nation's first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who led the country into a protracted civil war in the early 1990s under the radical slogan of "Georgia for Georgians!"<sup>19</sup> Also like Ukraine, Georgia's most recent iteration of far-right activity has come of age in the context of conflict against Russia. Georgia was invaded by Russia in a five-day war in August 2008, which resulted in Russian occupation of northern territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the subsequent flight of tens of thousands of ethnic Georgians from their ancestral homes. Territorial losses and other sobering effects of the war loom large in Georgian society; Russia, meanwhile, continues to exert a potent mixture of soft and hard power in Georgia, including a militarized, creeping expansion of South Ossetia's administrative boundary lines deeper into



Georgian Orthodox believers and anti-gay activist demonstrate in the capital Tbilisi, on May 17, 2013, to protest gay rights activists' plans to stage a rally marking the International Day against Homophobia. Homosexuality is still highly stigmatized in Georgia, a deeply socially conservative ex-Soviet state in the Caucasus where the Orthodox Church retains immense clout. (Photo Credit: Vano Shlamov/AFP via Getty Images)

Georgian territory.

Unlike in Ukraine, Georgia's far-right movement has yet to gain a meaningful foothold in the country's electoral politics.<sup>20</sup> The pro-Russian Alliance for Patriots party is generally described as the most prominent manifestation of far-right politics in the country, and in 2016, it barely surpassed the 5 percent electoral threshold to enter Parliament. However, the Alliance is generally disliked by other Georgian far-right groups and often condemned as an artificial political creation to sweep up votes from ultraconservative segments of the population.<sup>21</sup> Georgian mainstream media is additionally critical of far right-wing groups, contributing to their generally negative public image.<sup>22</sup>

However, far-right narratives have nevertheless been able to gain mainstream legitimacy in Georgian society,<sup>23</sup> due in large part to the tacit support of one of Georgia's most powerful and influential institutions: the Georgian Orthodox Church.<sup>24</sup> Georgia is a deeply religious country, and the Church and its Patriarch, Ilia II, are more highly revered and respected than most political figures and institutions.<sup>25</sup> A number of ultraconservative and ultranationalist groups in Georgia (such as the Union of Orthodox Parents) are rooted in religious fanaticism, supporting radical interpretations of Orthodoxy and launching verbal and occasionally physical attacks against perceived heretical elements of society, including immigrants and LGBT+ people.<sup>26</sup>

While the church does not explicitly endorse such activities, its actions and those of its clergy have provided ample unofficial support, particularly for far-right groups' efforts to persecute the LGBT+ community. For example, radical priests have regularly joined far-right groups at anti-LGBT+ gatherings and demonstrations.<sup>27</sup> Ahead of Georgia's first Pride March this past June, the Patriarchate issued a statement denouncing the event and calling on the government to prohibit it.<sup>28</sup> The march ultimately took place,<sup>29</sup> but its organizers received death threats, and ultranationalist figurehead Levan Vasadze openly called for vigilante patrols to attack the gathering.<sup>30</sup>

As in Ukraine, the Georgian government's response to far-right activities has been woefully inadequate. According to Delemenchuk, the country's judicial and law enforcement systems have neither the will nor the operational capacity to counteract far-right violence.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, there is a widespread perception that powerful political actors

employ the services of far-right groups to further their own interests. According to Delemenchuk, there is substantial evidence that the ruling Georgian Dream party employs right-wing thugs for staged provocations and other political purposes; opposition parties and other political actors are suspected of similar schemes.<sup>32</sup> And, while the commercial aspect of "service-oriented" far-right groups is still less developed than in Ukraine, it is not far behind.<sup>33</sup>

The geopolitical profile of the Georgian far right is complex. While the groups typically espouse Orthodox and traditional values that align closely with Russian soft-power narratives, Russia's ongoing occupation of the northern territories continues to evoke a visceral anti-Russian sentiment among the ultranationalist and far-right community. According to Zurab Makhradze, cofounder of the ultraconservative group Alternative for Georgia, the younger generation of far-right activists are choosing to style themselves after like-minded groups in the United States and Europe.<sup>34</sup> Makhradze, who named his group after the far-right Alternative for Germany,<sup>35</sup> says he established it after observing the success of far-right movements in the West, many of which were able to gain prominence via the use of social media.<sup>36</sup> He remains in direct contact with several far-right groups in Europe, which he says support one another and feel solidarity around antiliberal and antiglobalist views despite widely divergent visions on how to restructure their respective societies.<sup>37</sup>

At 31 years old, Makhradze is emblematic of a younger generation of Georgians who came of age in the war context, and who rely heavily on the internet both to plug into a global network of far-right groups, and to recruit at home. Makhradze views the far-right movement in Georgia as a natural and justified backlash against the country's socially progressive reforms, which he sees as incompatible with core Georgian and Orthodox Christian values. In this context, he describes himself as a pragmatic, relatively moderate actor, working to open a legitimate space for conservative and nationalist discourse in mainstream

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Georgian society.<sup>38</sup> Despite these moderate claims, however, Makhradze openly admits to co-organizing several far-right demonstrations that utilized violent tactics.<sup>39</sup>

According to Delemenchuk, the scale and seriousness of far-right violence in Georgia, while formidable, is not as severe as in Ukraine.<sup>40</sup> While abuses occur with some frequency, the majority are verbal threats, and groups lack the capacity for large-scale coordination and organizational efficiency that has become the norm in Ukraine. However, there are

few barriers to the further development of the movement. Quite the contrary, conditions for a dramatic increase in the activities of far-right groups are in place—notably a lack of political will among the government, influential institutions like the church, and much of the Georgian public to confront far-right extremism, as well as a widespread conflict mentality against Russia that can encourage radicalization. These conditions only await a catalyst to propel the movement into full maturity and mainstream societal legitimization.



## Far-Right Groups in Armenia: A New Frontier?

Far-right ideology is a much newer phenomenon in Armenia than in Ukraine or Georgia. According to Yerevan-based expert Nina Karapetyants, far-right activity since independence has been characterized by groups' poor organizational coherence and marginalization in Armenian society.<sup>41</sup> However, the democratic political opening that accompanied the 2018 Velvet Revolution allowed a counterrevolutionary far-right movement to assert itself and grow in prominence.

At the head of this new movement is Adekvad, a Facebook group that registered as a political party in May 2019.<sup>42</sup> The movement reflects typical antiliberal, antiglobalist ideology, calling for a return to “traditional” values and supporting aggression against minorities, such as LGBT+ people.<sup>43</sup> Like Makhradze in Georgia, Adekvad's young cofounder Artur Danielyan describes his movement as a means of legitimizing ultraconservative and antiglobalist discourse in the country, and considers European movements such as Alternative for Germany to be allies.<sup>44</sup> Despite these professed European influences, however, Adekvad is also widely rumored to receive significant support from the Kremlin.<sup>45</sup>

Taking into account the current conditions in Armenia, the rise of reactionary, far-right ideology does not come as a surprise. Armenian society has many of the characteristics that have proven to be fertile ground for budding far-right movements. As in Ukraine and Georgia, Armenia's far-right movement developed in a primarily conservative, Orthodox Christian society after a regime change that brought a relatively progressive, liberalizing government to power. Furthermore, Armenian national identity is deeply rooted in historical grievances relating to persecution by external enemies, offering a rich material for militant radicalization.<sup>46</sup> And while conflict-driven animosity in Armenia is primarily directed towards historical foes Azerbaijan and Turkey, the country also struggles to maintain its integrity against a constant deluge of Russian soft-power influences.<sup>47</sup>

In an interesting departure from the established pattern in Ukraine and Georgia, Armenia's government adopted a severe stance against Adekvad's far-right activities early on. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has vehemently criticized

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the group, publically accusing it of being secretly affiliated with the former government and with Russia.<sup>48</sup> Several days after Adekvad announced its intention to form a political party, Pashinyan characterized the movement as “men in black” who were “preparing to solve political issues through violence,” and called on law enforcement to “give a very strong counterblow.” Danielyan and several other members of Adekvad were subsequently detained for several hours by police, and Danielyan was arrested a second time two days later.

These arbitrary detentions—perceived as having been ordered by Pashinyan—backfired. Instead of turning public opinion against Adekvad, the group received sympathy over what were widely regarded as unjustified arrests. This in turn raised the group's public profile, and lent their movement what journalist Armen Dulyan called “the halo of the persecuted.”<sup>49</sup>

While analysts generally acknowledge that Adekvad has no ability to claim political power in the near future, the movement is an increasingly influential presence within Armenia's political discourse, particularly among youth and social media users.<sup>50</sup> According to Karapetyants, the movement appears to be both well financed and adept at mobilizing its growing number of followers.<sup>51</sup> As with Georgia, the conditions are in place for Adekvad and similar groups to undergo a rapid expansion in terms of their levels of influence and sophistication.

## Why These Movements Matter

Until governments in the US and Europe take responsibility for their own countries' contributions to legitimizing far-right discourse internationally, it is likely that these hateful narratives will continue to flourish.

The rise of far-right groups in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia has serious consequences for the continued political development of these societies. Eurasia's far-right groups have an impact that carries well beyond the formal political arena, as they are both adept at shaping social and political discourse in their respective societies and pose a direct physical threat to vulnerable minority populations. Moreover, such groups can be and often are exploited by malicious actors seeking to serve their own ends. Unless serious action is taken, far-right influences will continue to flourish in these societies, marring their potential for further democratic development.

### Power Beyond the Ballot Box

Particularly in Georgia and Armenia, the potential for far-right groups to win significant political power through elections in the near future is negligible. Even in Ukraine, the electoral power of far-right political parties is on the wane, and analysts such as Vyacheslav Likhachev predict that this trend will continue under the Zelensky administration.<sup>52</sup>

The weak electoral potential of such movements in Eurasia is notable at a time when elements of far-right ideology in Europe and the United States are becoming mainstream, and parties representing nationalist, antiliberal politics have made gains in several elections. This may reflect a reluctance by Eurasian movements, as yet, to play by the rules of more moderate and restrained electoral politicking, and instead to

embrace vigilante and (often) thuggish mobilization methods on the street and online. Nevertheless, in light of the growing popular acceptance of far right-narratives, the potential for such groups to develop a significant political following in the medium- or long-term must not be discounted.

Regardless of their electoral power, it is undeniable that radical, ultraconservative, and ultranationalist groups have had an impact far beyond the formal political arena of elections. By employing effective mobilization strategies in favorable contexts, these groups have demonstrated a strong ability to shape social and political discourse according to their ideological framework, stretching the boundaries of society's tolerance to accept ever-more radical interpretations of key topics surrounding national identity, patriotism, and security. By shifting societal discourse on these core topics, far-right ideology has the potential to have an outsized effect on the formal political arena, and to attract politicians and voters across the ideological spectrum toward intolerant, antiliberal ideologies.

In an immediate sense, far-right groups pose a direct physical threat to minority populations, undermining their ability to exercise basic freedoms of expression and assembly. LGBT+ people, immigrants, and other minority groups face a constant barrage of threats and intimidation, which is too often met by a lackluster response from law enforcement. Wielding vigilante justice with near-impunity, these far-right groups undermine the fundamental rule of law that is the bedrock of any democratic society.

### Manipulation by Internal and External Interests

The manipulation of far-right groups by political and commercial interests is a cause for serious concern. As we have seen, the manipulation and financing of these groups at the local level can cause them to mature into a professionalized shadow industry, from which various actors, including those in power, may contract violent "services" at their whim. Demand for professional far-right thuggery feeds a vicious cycle of further radicalization and violence.

Moreover, the “service” orientation of these groups leaves the door open for unsavory external actors—particularly Russia—to hijack the political development of their societies. Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia have long fought on the front lines of Russia’s hybrid warfare, facing constant and unrelenting pressure from a mixture of soft and hard power influences. It would clearly play to the interests of the Russian government to support extremist, antidemocratic elements in these countries as part and parcel of ongoing destabilizing efforts.

Allegations of Russian involvement and support for these movements throughout the region are widespread, although pinpointing explicit funding streams or other forms of support is often difficult.<sup>53</sup> Adekvad in particular is widely rumored to have close links with and support from the Kremlin.<sup>54</sup> For their part, far-right movements in Ukraine and Georgia seem largely sincere in their anti-Russian sentiments. Nevertheless, the ultraconservative values and criticisms of the liberal, globalist order they promote dovetail with Russian soft-power narratives. Whether through direct support or soft-power propaganda, there are many opportunities for the Kremlin to manipulate these groups to its advantage. Unless

counter steps are taken, far-right groups will continue to serve as a vulnerable entry point in their societies for Russia and other malicious external actors to exploit.

It should also be acknowledged that Russia is not the only influential international actor with a stake in this game. Far right-groups in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia speak openly about the inspiration and other forms of support that they draw from movements in the United States and Europe. In some cases, this support is quite public. For example, in 2016 the US-based Christian evangelical organization the World Congress of Families held its annual international conference in Tbilisi, uniting ultraconservative, anti-LGBT+ activists from around the world and featuring local speakers including Patriarch Ilia II and the infamous Levan Vasadze.<sup>55</sup> Former US president George W. Bush expressed his support for the gathering in a public letter that was read onstage.<sup>56</sup>

Until governments in the US and Europe take responsibility for their own countries’ contributions to legitimizing far-right discourse internationally, it is likely that these hateful narratives will continue to flourish.

## The Path Forward

The growth of far-right movements in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia is evidence that a new Eurasian paradigm for the far-right movement is taking shape. While the growth of these movements is linked to the popularization and legitimization of far-right ideologies in Europe and the United States, Eurasian groups develop and operate in a distinct sociopolitical context, and should be evaluated as a phenomenon in their own right.

In order to stem the influence of these movements and their impact on democratic development, policymakers and other stakeholders must take measures to improve their understanding of far-right groups' functioning and strategic aims. This analysis has taken a first step in identifying the common conditions that foster environments in which far-right movements can take root in the Eurasian context, as well as lessons learned:

**Systematic monitoring of far-right groups and violent incidents is necessary to better equip stakeholders with the information they need to grapple with this issue.**

- Far-right movements in Eurasia are **developing in states where notable democratic reforms** have taken place, often forming as a backlash to socially progressive government policies. These movements are growing adept at utilizing the tools and rhetoric of civil society and mainstream political parties to legitimize their activities, framing themselves as legitimate representatives of traditional and conservative elements of society that feel left behind by relatively progressive governments.
- All of these movements **draw on international connections for support**, although Russia's relationship to the far-right movement in this region is particularly

complex. Whereas far-right groups in Europe and the United States have at times benefited from Russia's overt support and may even revere the country as a model of illiberalism,<sup>57</sup> in Ukraine and Georgia's case, Russia is considered the aggressor in an ongoing conflict. Even in Armenia, where attitudes toward Russia are more positive,<sup>58</sup> the nascent far-right movement is styling itself after model groups operating in established democracies.

- **Ethnic nationalism in Eurasia can be co-opted and manipulated by the far right.** In Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia, ongoing conflicts have played a crucial role in pushing society toward more radical interpretations of ethnic nationalism, which may legitimize far-right ideology in public and political discourse and offer opportunities for radicalization.
- **The attitudes and actions of governments are key in determining the role of far-right groups in society.** A lack of political will to stand up to radical activities results in impunity for violence, undermining the rule of law and contributing to instability and insecurity. State complicity and support of far-right violence for political and commercial purposes is also an established pattern in the region that is both a flagrant contradiction of the rule of law, and leaves the door open for malicious co-optation of far-right groups by external influencers.
- At the same time, **it is detrimental for the state to crack down on far-right groups without clear legal justification**, forcing them underground without any means of legitimate representation or expression. This causes further radicalization of far-right elements, pushing them further toward violent methods to achieve their aims. As demonstrated in Armenia, it may also cause large segments of society to view the radical groups more sympathetically than they might otherwise. Governments in Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia must treat far-right groups fairly under the letter of the law, adopting attitudes that are neither too lax nor too strict. Subjecting far-right groups to thorough and timely investigations with impartial judges would ensure that perpetrators are held accountable in a nonpoliticized manner. Where necessary, the legal framework for hate crimes and related acts should be bolstered and clarified according to international standards.

Moving forward, systematic monitoring of far-right groups and violent incidents is necessary to better equip stakeholders with the information they need to grapple with this issue. Critical questions for further investigation include: What are the factors that drive radicalization of members? How do far-right groups and movements form and gain influence in a society? And what are their strategic aims?

In Ukraine, Freedom House is taking the first steps in this endeavor with local partners Truth Hounds, ZMINA, Ukrainian Legal Aid Foundation, Expert Center for Human Rights, LGBT Human Rights Center Nash Mir, Roma Human Rights Protection Center, and the Congress of Ethnic Communities of Ukraine. Together, Freedom House and its partners are developing a comprehensive system that will monitor, document, and analyze hate-motivated violent incidents and dynamics in the country.

The Center for Participation and Development and the Helsinki Association for Human Rights are also taking the first steps to monitor far-right activity in Georgia and Armenia, respectively. However, these initial efforts are only the beginning—a concerted effort must be made to monitor and analyze far-right groups across the Eurasian region and beyond.



## Endnotes

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- 1 According to Freedom House's 2018 Nations in Transit report on Ukraine, the country has achieved important democratic gains since 2014, including in corruption and local democratic governance. See "Ukraine Country Profile," Freedom House, Nations in Transit, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/ukraine>; Alexander Motyl and Dennis Soltys, "Ukraine's Democracy is (Almost) All Grown Up," Foreign Policy, August 28, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/28/ukraines-democracy-is-almost-all-grown-up/>.
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  - 3 A 2018 study by UNDP Ukraine revealed that, even though Ukrainians favor and support equality in society, a significant percentage of them approve restricting the rights of vulnerable communities. See "Ukraine," OSCE ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting, <http://hatecrime.osce.org/ukraine>.
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