



## International Conference on Polling and Politics

### **POWER OF RESEARCH IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DISINFORMATION AND ITS IMPACT**

May 14, 2018  
Tbilisi, Georgia

In Georgia, as elsewhere, the integrity of information -- about politics, foreign policy, and government policies -- is under assault, compromising governance and reform efforts and creating opportunities for undemocratic forces to flourish. While not a new phenomenon, the confluence of “hybrid warfare,” big data, social media, artificial intelligence, computational propaganda, and political bots has made it far more dangerous and difficult to manage.

Authoritarian governments and undemocratic forces wield disinformation through offline and online channels to sow confusion and discontent. This aggressive campaign aims to pollute civil discourse, undermine faith in democratic processes and institutions, and potentially skew political outcomes. At a time when citizens are increasingly getting their information online and the political identities of youth are largely forged on social media, the challenge is only growing. “Information warfare” poses a particularly insidious threat to global democracies and security due to its asymmetries: values and limited resources constrain democracies from responding in kind.

Disinformation and propaganda campaigns sow distrust in democracy. Citizens need reliable, authentic information about their political environments in order for democracies to function. Lacking this critical resource, citizens are ill-equipped to voice their preferences and governments are, in turn, incapable of delivering responsive policies. Vital communication channels break down. Pluralism and accountability suffer. This creates a vacuum for nativist, populist, and illiberal groups to exploit. Disinformation is also the preferred tool of these groups, further perpetuating the decline in citizen faith in democratic governance.

Governments, civic groups, and researchers have been exploring different methods to track disinformation and identify patterns, measure impact of such campaigns, and identify those who are most vulnerable. Further, research is moving into testing solutions and strategies to counter malignant propaganda efforts, mitigate their impact, and bolster national resilience and adherence to democratic principles.

On May 14, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and CRRC-Georgia will host a one-day international conference on latest trends in research in this field. The conference aims to gather policy makers and analysts from Georgia and abroad to share their experiences and methods and discuss best practices and lessons learned.

The one-day event will be split into three thematic panels. Each panel will be opened by a keynote address, followed by three speakers. In the first panel, presenters will share their research on the roots, characteristics, and manifestations of disinformation efforts, as well as the prevalence and penetration of such campaigns. The second panel will focus on measuring the impact of disinformation on public trust in democratic institutions and on bolstering illiberal movements, as well as analysis on how different groups relate to false narratives. The third panel will address research on identifying approaches to build resistance, particularly of the most impressionable audiences, and to bolster support for democratic governance and practices.

Each thematic panel will be followed with discussion sessions led by a moderator. The formal event will be culminated with a dinner.

*The conference is jointly organized by NDI and CRRC-Georgia. NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. Since 1994, NDI has conducted programs in political party development, parliamentary strengthening, safeguarding elections, civil society development, women's political participation and local governance in Georgia. The Institute has provided extensive trainings to a broad range of political parties, fostering dialogue among political leaders and helping building more responsive state institutions.*

*CRRC-Georgia is a non-profit research organization, which collects, analyzes and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends in the country. CRRC-Georgia, together with CRRC-Armenia and CRRC-Azerbaijan, constitutes a network of research centers with the common goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus. The network has 15 years of experience providing researchers, the government, donors, NGOs, and the private sector with research methodology, data and analysis to assess critical trends and expectations in Georgia.*