



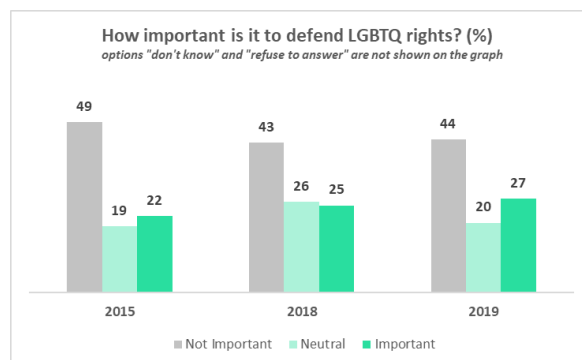
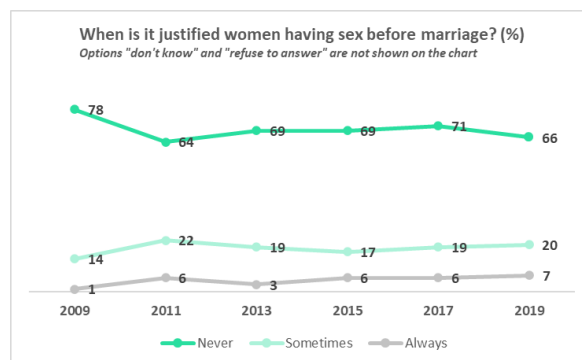
Shrinking Space for Queer and Women Activists

Country Context

Far-right groups and the **Georgian Orthodox Church** create a hostile environment for women's rights and queer activism. They violate the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression for queer and women activists through physical and symbolic expulsion from public space, creating disruptions at work and limiting safe personal spaces. These groups are directly or indirectly supported by the *state*.

Discourse Incompatibility

The discourse that the Georgian Orthodox Church and far right groups spread is conservative, anti-western, and anti-liberal. They use family values to confront women's rights and queer narratives. Georgian Orthodox Church significantly influences public opinion on a variety of issues, accordingly the narratives the women's rights and queer activists spread usually receive negative responses. **The most dissonant narratives disseminated are those which challenge the idea of a traditional family, including changing the traditional roles of a husband and a wife/woman and any issue related to women's sexuality.**



Women's rights and queer activists receive threats in their everyday life that threaten their physical and digital security. **These threats are mostly framed in terms of the gender identity of activists, as well as their work or activism that is focused on gender issues and are strictly defined by hetero-patriarchal values and its harmful practices.**

A variety of external and internal factors such as lack of trust in state institutions, unethical media coverage, lack of coordination and solidarity among activists, and low capacity to assess the risks increase activists' vulnerability.

Threats:

Bullying and hate speech

Libel against the professional capacities

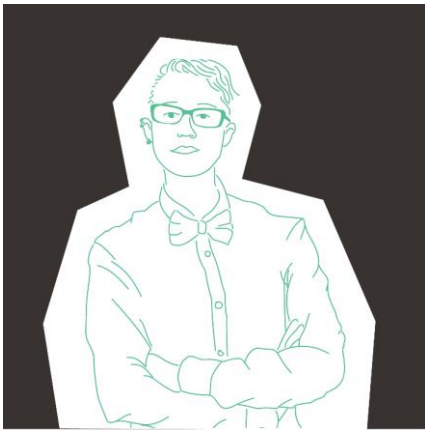
Physical attacks and intimidation

Attacks on office

Sexual harassment and sexual violence

Digital threats

Threats against family and children



“Those women’s rights [activists], who try to break taboos on sexuality, who are not interested in men and are queers, who write on these topics, they are under the biggest threat, because they are not those women anymore, who are respected by society and by men. Actually, they are not women at all in their eyes and the [social rule] ‘not to hit a woman’ is not relevant anymore, and I know that if they need, they will hit me.”

“I was writing [blog] during that tough period of my life and they took a photo of me for this [blog]. If you look at that photo, I look ten years older there. All that stress, sleeplessness, anxiety, and everything is on my face. And that photo was shared and discussed everywhere, shaming like ‘she even does not know skincare and her hair is dirty...’ [.....] The epithets that were used towards me and the content of the bullying is very much linked to my gender identity. They directly called me a slut, saying ‘she is not even a woman’, ‘she can’t even grow a child’. I was disparaged as a mother, and I became devalued, because a mother should not be like me.”



The shrinking democratic space, together with the accompanying threats, puts the wellbeing and lives of individual activists at risk. It hinders activism. This ultimately prevents the establishment of a more egalitarian and inclusive discourse in society.

Sources:

Figure 1: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019) "Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia". Retrieved through ODA - <http://caucasusbarometer.org> on May 3, 2020.

Figure 2: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2017, 2019) "Caucasus Barometer". Retrieved through ODA - <http://caucasusbarometer.org> on May 3, 2020.

This research was conducted within the framework of the Women's Fund in Georgia's project "Grassroots Women Mobilize for Democracy" by the organization We Research, with the financial support of the German women's fund filia.die frauenstiftung.

The research utilized qualitative approach. In particular, desk research was carried out to analyze far-right group narratives, epistles of the Georgian Orthodox Church's Patriarch and secondary data on public attitudes. In addition, fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with queer and women activists.

The research was carried out during January-July 2020.