



**WEDNESDAY,  
JANUARY 21,  
2026**

**4:00 PM**

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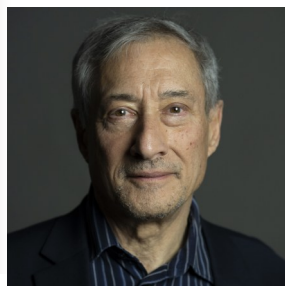


CEES Seminar Series

**ERIC FREEDMAN, J.D.**

**“FAITH AND FREEDOM: NEWS COVERAGE OF  
CONSTRAINTS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE  
POST-SOVIET CAUCASUS”**

Freedom of religion is considered a fundamental human right, enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the constitutions of post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. However, in the more than three decades since the USSR collapsed, these countries have failed to adopt any democratic governance and protection of human rights, including religious freedom and press freedom. That failure receives virtually no coverage in domestic media in the Caucasus, largely because of direct and quasi-official government control over media outlets or because of fear of government reprisals. Any coverage of religious repression in the region comes from international news agencies. This study examines how one specialized international news outlet, Forum 18, covers constraints on religious freedom and practice in the region. That lack of coverage also reflects broader barriers to reportage in the region and the inability of its new media to provide information, direct and indirect, about levels of religious repression. The study examines the types of news sources relied on by Forum 18 journalists. The findings underline the repressive nature of the regimes, exemplified by the use of anonymous news sources and refusals by officials to comment to Forum 18 journalists. The findings have implications for reportage about freedom of religion in Russia and other former Soviet republics in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Although Forum 18's coverage does not penetrate deeply in the Caucasus, it can contribute, at least symbolically, to hope for more accountability in media exposure of religious rights violations in the region. It also highlights a need for sustained international press scrutiny of the lack of religious freedom in authoritarian countries elsewhere.



**Eric Freedman** is a professor of Journalism and holds the Knight Chair in Environmental Journalism at MSU. He is a former Fulbright Scholar in the Republic of Georgia and his research interests include obstacles to press freedom and the practice of independent journalism internationally.