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საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization founded in early 2011. GIP strives to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia. It also encourages public participation in civil society-building and developing democratic processes. Since December 2013 GIP is member of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions.

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FOREWORD

As a prelude to the **5th GEODEM2020 Annual Conference**, Georgian Institute of Politics is delighted to present *Compendium 2020*, the annual collection of policy briefs about the current political situation in Georgia. Once again, the publication will serve as a conversation starter for our flagship event. The briefs are intended to create a foundation for discussion and serve as a resource for government officials, civil society representatives, field experts, academics, citizens and other stakeholders who are engaged in Georgia's democratic development.

With a **parliamentary election** expected in autumn, 2020 could be a critical year for Georgia's democratic development—as well as for the future of its European aspirations. Uncertainty about the exact nature of the electoral system and flux in the political spectrum in the months before the elections are clear indicators of intractable political instability. The fact that Georgia was the only country in the region in which a governing political party was changed via elections in 2012 does not guarantee an uninterrupted democratization process. Furthermore, many observers, both international and local, are concerned about signs of Georgia's democratic backsliding in recent years.¹

Electoral reform is the key to escaping the vicious circle of one-party politics and establishing a European-style multiparty and consensus-based democracy. If implemented,

it's a chance to consolidate Georgia's democracy. Georgia has often been hailed as a democratic frontrunner in the region, however in 28 years of independence, it has never managed to consolidate its democratic structures and at best remains a hybrid regime. Importantly, since 2012, the Georgian public has been increasingly concerned about the fairness of elections. In 2012, 56% of the population thought that the most recent national elections were completely fair and only 1% reported that the elections were not fair at all.² The picture was drastically different in 2019 when only 16% of the population believed that the most recent national elections were completely fair while 31% reported that the elections were not fair at all.³

There are other factors that further exacerbate fears regarding the upcoming parliamentary elections. More particularly several factors—dubious prison sentences and charges against a number of opposition leaders; increased political polarization between political parties; growing public distrust towards political parties; and a tradition of the party in power misusing administrative resources—add to concerns. These factors, coupled with the ruling party's failure to adopt a fully proportional electoral system—and a growing number of warnings from international actors about democratic backsliding—indicate that the 2020 parliamentary elections will be a critical test for Georgia's democratization process.

¹ Kakhishvili, L. 2019. "Democratic Backsliding in Georgia?". Institute for European Politics. Accessed on: 13 February, 2020. Available at: http://iep-berlin.de/en/op-ed-democratic-backsliding-in-georgia/?fbclid=IwAR1y_1kwurEjkbYfjoSex-wPerqpg3DBNoTAQYN4P1EiZStdJnQHTQnXYL0

Corboy, D., Courtney, W., and Yalowitz, K. 2019. "Damage Done: Georgia's Struggle to Sustain Democracy". *The National Interest*. Accessed on: 13 February, 2020. Available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/damage-done-georgias-struggle-sustain-democracy-102957>

² Caucasus Resource Research Center – Georgia. 2012. "Caucasus Barometer 2012 Georgia". Accessed on: 13 February, 2020. Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2012ge/ELCOND/>

³ Caucasus Resource Research Center – Georgia. 2019. "Caucasus Barometer 2019 Georgia". Accessed on: 13 February, 2020. Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/ELCOND/>

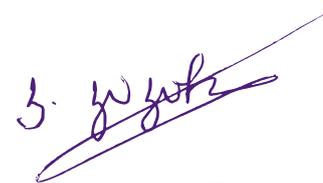
The **international community** has played an important role in Georgia's democratization process over the last two decades. Both positive and negative reinforcements have proven crucial during critical junctures of Georgia's recent political history. This year will not be different and Georgia will need the support of Western allies and non-state actors. Considering their positive reputation among the Georgian population, the EU and the US—together with Western organizations and non-state actors—could play an important role as mediators between the government and opposition and push Georgian politics in the right direction. They should ensure that the upcoming election is held in a democratic and transparent manner and that political competition between the government and opposition remains within constitutional boundaries.⁴ Considering the high level of trust they enjoy in Georgian society,⁵ Western institutions could become an honest broker to ensure Georgia's sustainable democratic development.

And finally, the **radicalization of voters in Georgia** in parallel with the growing polarization of political parties and the media is a serious issue Georgia watchers should not neglect. Demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, which sometimes turn violent, have witnessed attacks against political foes and an uptick in radical statements, adding to a downward spiral that has already had detrimental effects on the

country's democratization process. Polarization has become part of the game, not just a feature of election campaigns. Radicalization is being amplified through social media platforms, which are increasingly used to target opponents through sponsored and well-coordinated attacks.⁶ Smear campaigns, fake news, deceptive tactics, and propaganda messages on social media are aimed at disorienting society, amplifying divisions and influencing voter choices.⁷ As Georgia enters the upcoming election period, this alarming trend is expected to rise. Georgian society and the political class need to think about how to address this challenge.

The Compendium 2020, like its predecessors, would not have been possible without the generous support of numerous renowned institutions, including the National Endowment for Democracy. We would like also to thank the ordinary citizens, civil society representatives and media outlets that continue to support our work to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions by encouraging public participation in civil society-building and developing democratic processes in Georgia.

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⁴ Kakachia, K, and Lebanidze. B. 2019. "Georgia's Dangerous Slide Away From Democracy". Carnegie Europe. Accessed on: 20 February, 2020. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/80542>

⁵ Caucasus Resource Research Center – Georgia. 2019. "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, November-December 2019". Accessed on: 20 February, 2020. Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nn2019ge/JOINEU/>

⁶ Gleicher, N. 2019. "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior From Georgia, Vietnam and the US". Accessed on: 20 February, 2020. Available at: <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/12/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-georgia-vietnam-and-the-us/>

⁷ McCain Institute. 2019. "Tracking and Refuting Disinformation in Georgia Social Media Monitoring and Analysis Final Report". Accessed on: 20 February, 2020. Available at: https://www.mccaininstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/final-report_disinformationgeorgia.pdf

**LARGE PARTIES VERSUS SMALL
PARTIES IN GEORGIA: DO PARTY
MANIFESTOS VARY ACROSS PARTIES?**

LEVAN KAKHISHVILI¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The manifestos of Georgian political parties are often overlooked by researchers. The documents are important because they offer insights into how parties position themselves and to what extent these positions are consistent with their claimed ideologies, however. An analysis of party manifestos and the results of the 2016 election can provide a baseline for the upcoming 2020 elections – as well as insightful recommendations for the competing political parties. This paper analyzes only those parties that have gained

at least one mandate in the 2016 election and explores six dimensions of political competition: foreign policy orientation, democracy and human rights, distribution of power, economy, welfare state, and nationalism. The paper also provides recommendations for Georgian political parties, civil society organizations and donor organizations.

Keywords: political parties, party manifestos, party positions, political competition, elections.

INTRODUCTION

Political parties are vitally important for a functioning representative democracy. They play a fundamental role in translating voters' preferences into policy. Therefore, presenting an elaborate program focused on the promise of what each political party will deliver in terms of public goods is a key in this process. While in challenging contexts, such as Georgia, pre-election party manifestos are often considered to be unimportant, these are documents that describe a party's political promise to the public. Even if the average voter does not read the manifestos, they serve as a framework for parties to communicate their political vision for the country. Building on this premise, this paper explores the party manifestos of the Georgian political parties that won at least one seat in parliament following the 2016 election: Georgian Dream (GD), United National Movement (UNM), Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG), and Industry Will Save Georgia (IWSG). The manifestos are compared and contrasted

with each other to determine whether different parties present different policy offers or whether party positions converge in specific policy areas. The 2016 manifesto analysis offers some lessons to be learned by political parties. Furthermore, increasingly both Georgia media and Georgian think-tanks argue that right-wing populism is on the rise in the country. One such party that is often labeled as populist is the APG. Therefore, comparing APG's manifesto to mainstream party manifestos will help understand how the most important populist actor in Georgia positions itself. This will also promote understanding of Georgian populism as a political phenomenon.

The discussion below is based on a content analysis of party manifestos. Every sentence of each manifesto has been coded into one of the 66 coding categories that cover seven policy domains: external relations, freedom and democracy, political system, economy,

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welfare and quality of life, social fabric, and social groups.² Following the coding procedure, six main dimensions of political competition have been constructed by aggregating selected coding categories: foreign policy orientation, democracy and human rights, distribution of power, economic system, welfare state, and nationalism.³ The positions of each of the four political par-

ties have been estimated using a logarithmic method.⁴ The paper concludes that the positions of the mainstream parties, i.e. the GD and UNM, converge on all dimensions of competition. However, smaller parties, i.e. the APG and IWSG, register different positions from the mainstream parties in the areas of foreign policy, welfare state, and nationalism.

CONVERGENCE OF PARTY POSITIONS IN THE 2016 ELECTION

Out of the six policy areas listed above, parties offer the same promises across three. These include democracy and human rights, distribution of power, and economic system. Distribution of power, i.e. whether parties advocate for a more hierarchical structuring of political power or a more horizontal one, is the least interesting out of the three. However, the areas of democracy and economy offer insightful findings discussed below.

Direct democracy

All four parties register positions that favor democracy and human rights. However, although no party opposes these ideas, this policy domain is interesting for a different reason. The APG is the only party that includes negative references to freedom and human rights and the only party that strongly advocates for ideas related to direct democracy. Almost half of the references fall-

ing under the policy domain of freedom and democracy are positive references of direct democracy. One of the vivid illustrations of this is the following statement from the APG manifesto:

The people should be able to dismiss any government official, including the President, the Prime Minister, or the Cabinet Minister. The people should be able to recall deputies and to dismiss mayors and governors. The people should be able to cancel unacceptable laws and to change destructive decisions.⁵

Moreover, the manifesto describes a plan to organize the government in Georgia by creating micro-districts of, on average, 2,000 families, which would have an appointed state representative so that decisions are made at a grassroots level.⁶ This can be inter-

² On coding procedures that guides this analysis see: Werner, A., Lacewell, O. and Volkens, A. (2011). "Manifesto coding instructions." [online] Available at: https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/download/papers/handbook_v4.pdf Accessed: 28 February 2020. The framework offered by Werner, Lacewell and Volkens (2011) has been adapted for the purposes of this analysis.

³ See the Appendix for details on what coding categories constitute each dimension of competition.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the logarithmic method of estimating party positions on the basis of textual data and its superiority over other methods see: Lowe, W., Benoit, K., Mikhaylov, S. and Laver, M. (2011). "Scaling policy preferences from coded political texts." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 36(1), pp: 123-155.

⁵ Patriots.ge. (n.d.). "Our vision and program." [online] Available at: <http://patriots.ge/our-vision-program/> Accessed: 28 February 2020.

⁶ Patriots.ge. (n.d.). "Our vision and program." [online] Available at: <http://patriots.ge/our-vision-program/> Accessed: 28 February 2020.

puted as an idea related to the unchallenged rule of the people, which is characteristic for populism.⁷

Economic system

The economic system was always a subject of party competition in Georgia in parliamentary elections during 1992-2012. However, in 2016 for the first time, all party positions converged and favored position of free market instead of market regulation. Interestingly, even the GD, which self-identifies as social democratic, advocated for the free market. This is an important development because from 2012 to 2016 the positioning of the GD changed diametrically: the GD offered a manifesto that leaned toward market regulation in 2012 and leaned toward the free market in 2016. It has to be mentioned that slight changes in party positions from election to election should be expected. However, when the change happens to the extent that the party crosses the center of the dimension and adopts an opposite position,

which is what happened with the GD, this indicates ideological inconsistencies. The reasons for this unexpected shift require further research but it can be hypothesized that the GD did not want to lose the support of Georgian businesses. In 2012, the GD was a challenger of the incumbent UNM and Bidzina Ivanishvili, along with his financial resources, was personally invested in the campaign. In 2016, however, the GD was the incumbent and could have compromised on the ideological stance in exchange of the support of the businesses that would not favor a ruling party in favor of regulatory policies.

Overall, even though party positions converge in these areas of competition, party manifestos can still provide useful insights on how Georgian politics work. The APG, often considered as populist, advocates for direct democracy, while the GD, a left-leaning social-democratic party, registered a position supporting free market economy instead of regulation.

DIVERGENCE OF PARTY POSITIONS IN THE 2016 ELECTION

The remaining three areas—foreign policy orientation, welfare state, and nationalism—are subjects of political competition but this competition is limited to large parties versus small parties.

Foreign policy orientation

Although foreign policy orientation in Georgian politics seems to be a topic on which

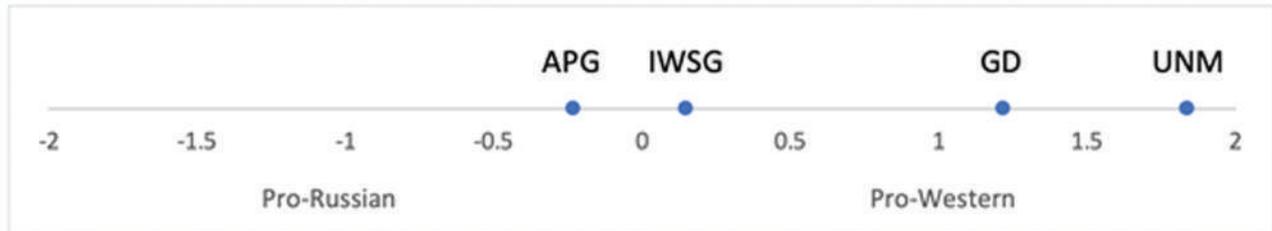
all actors agree, analysis of party manifestos reveals a different story (see Figure 1). Larger parties register strongly pro-Western positions. The UNM puts a relatively stronger emphasis on pro-Western foreign policy orientation than the GD and is the only party that does not include any positive references to Russia. On the other hand, smaller parties offer voters an alternative. Industry Will Save Georgia (IWSG) advocates for

⁷ For a discussion on populist actors and their narratives in Georgia, see: Silagadze, G. (2020). "Who is (not) populist in Georgia? Making sense of the buzzword." [online] *GIP Policy Memo*, 32. Available at: <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/policy-memo-32.pdf> Accessed: 28 February 2020. Samkharadze, N. (2020). "Deconstructing Modern Georgian Populism: Narratives from Political Parties to Social Movements." [online] *GIP Policy Memo*, 33. Available at: <http://gip.ge/deconstructing-modern-georgian-populism-narratives-from-political-parties-to-social-movements/> Accessed: 28 February 2020.

a pro-Western position but its emphasis is muted compared to its larger counterparts (the estimated position is close to zero on the chart below). On the other hand, the APG

registers a weakly pro-Russian position, again close to zero but leaning towards Russia, unlike the IWSG.

Figure 1. Party positions on the dimension of foreign policy orientation



Source: The author's own calculations based on the coded data from the manifestos.

It should be noted that the APG's manifesto includes positive references to the West as well. However, the aggregated data suggests that the overall preferred orientation is pro-Russian. Furthermore, the APG expresses skepticism about Georgia's chances of joining NATO and the EU. Additionally, the manifesto argues that in the unlikely scenario of Georgia gaining a membership prospect, the party fears that such developments would cause another devastating war with Russia. Such a manner of positioning pushes the aggregated position towards pro-Russian. As a result, the APG is the only party out of the four parliamentary parties that offers Georgian voters an alternative vision of Georgian foreign policy. It is, of course, another matter whether the Georgian voter is interested in such an alternative but completely excluding voters who would support a pro-Russian foreign policy is impossible. For example, according to the 2019 repre-

sentative opinion poll, 21 percent of respondents agreed with the statement "Georgia will benefit more if the country says no to the EU and NATO at the expense of improving relations with Russia."⁸ Therefore, the APG with this alternative offer likely represents this segment of Georgian society.

Welfare state

Welfare state is the second dimension in which only one small party registers a different position. The IWSG leans towards the position of welfare state limitation. This is not surprising considering that the IWSG is a right-leaning political actor. The GD, on the other hand, proposes focusing on expanding the welfare state more than any other party. Again, for a left-leaning political party, this is not surprising. However, the UNM and the APG are more interesting cases.

⁸ Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019). Caucasus Barometer. [online] Available at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org> Accessed: 17 February 2020.

Figure 2. Party positions on the dimension of welfare state



Source: The author's own calculations based on the coded data from the manifestos.

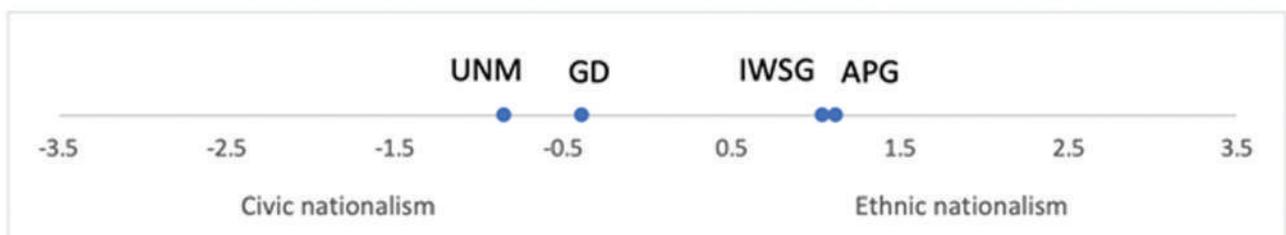
The UNM put significantly higher emphasis on a pro-market economy than any other party. Similarly, the APG self-identifies as “a center-right political party, which aims to promote in society [sic] moderate conservative ideology.”⁹ However, when it comes to the welfare state, they have offered left-leaning policies. This is ideologically inconsistent but can be explained. In a country such as Georgia, where social-economic problems are the top concerns of voters—a fact that has been demonstrated repeatedly by public opinion polls throughout the last few years—a party aiming at attracting more votes tends to compromise on ideology and

offer voters what they want. What they will deliver to the public if they come to power in another matter, but designing an appealing manifesto is a strategic move.

Nationalism

The final area where the parties offer different policies is nationalism. This dimension clearly delimits the positions of small parties and those of large parties. The GD and UNM offer clear preference for civic nationalism, while the IWSG and APG advocate for ethnic nationalism.

Figure 3. Party positions on the dimension of nationalism



Source: The author's own calculations based on the coded data from the manifestos.

⁹ Patriots.ge. (n.d.). “Our party.” [online] Available at: <http://patriots.ge/about-temp/> Accessed: 28 February 2020.

The share of ideas related to nationalism was high in the 2016 Georgian elections. Overall, considering all manifestos and all coded segments, 12 percent of sentences related to nationalism, which puts this policy area well above others, such as welfare state and economy, which represented 9.8 and 9 percent respectively. The 2016 elections were the first when nationalism was more important than other issues. This significant surge should be attributed to a single party, however. The

APG's manifesto dedicates 35 percent of the text to nationalism, pushing the issue up in terms of importance. Although the IWSG is close to the APG in terms of position estimations, these are logged proportions, which takes into account the length of a manifesto. The IWSG manifesto is more than six times shorter than that of the APG. The APG's overwhelming focus on nationalism further explains why the party may be labeled as populist.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, Georgian political parties in the 2016 election did offer alternative policies in some areas although their positions converged in others. Interestingly, in the 2012 election the GD and UNM registered different positions only in the area of economy. In 2016, however, parties differed in three areas—foreign policy orientation, welfare state, and nationalism. The fact that the vacuum was filled by smaller parties indicates that there are voters in Georgia adopting more extreme positions than mainstream parties can offer. The preferences of these voters have been satisfied by smaller parties.

It has to be mentioned, however, that this conclusion is only relevant for the APG because the IWSG managed to gain only one seat through the majoritarian vote, while the APG was able to overcome the electoral threshold of five percent and won seats through the proportional vote.

The inability of mainstream parties to attract extreme voters of any dimension of competition is not surprising as they tend to target the median voter. However, if increasing number of voters become disenchanted with the center, extreme positions may become

new points of attraction, which will further polarize the political environment in Georgia. Therefore, stakeholders interested in the stability and consolidation of Georgian democracy should consider the following recommendations.

For Georgian political parties

- **Ensure increased consistency between the policy offer of manifestos and self-identified ideological stance**—In the 2016 election, some party manifestos in some policy areas offered promises that were inconsistent with the overall ideological claim. Parties should make sure that such inconsistency does not dominate manifesto formation and policy offers are within the ideological limits of a given party as much as possible.
- **Make sure manifestos reflect public preferences**—Georgian voters are primarily concerned with the state of economic and social affairs. Party manifestos should reflect these concerns and offer voters solutions to the problems that concern them.

○ **Ensure that manifestos provide specific steps on how to solve bigger problems**—Georgian parties tend to provide overall general promise, e.g. economic growth, but it is even more important to also provide specific steps of ensuring delivery of the promise.

○ **Avoid extreme positions and polarization but do not ignore the concerns of voters**—Extremism and polarization are rising challenges for the Georgian democracy. Parties should avoid registering extreme positions that would nurture further extremism. However, voters who have extreme positions on any dimension of competition should not be left outside of the political process, their concerns should be addressed by the whole political spectrum. This does not mean shifting an overall position of a given party to the extreme, but rather constructive communication with such voters.

○ **Focus more on a policy offer rather than leaders, use leaders in terms of how they fit in the plan of implementing the policy offer of the manifesto**—Party leaders are often the way voters identify parties. This is a result of personalistic politics. In order to change such practice, parties should focus more on the policy offer of their manifesto instead of specific leaders. Leaders, however, should be utilized in terms of their experience and expertise and how this expertise fits in the plan of policy implementation.

For civil society organizations and think tanks in Georgia

○ **Continue monitoring and watchdog activities**—A number of Georgian civil society organizations conduct monitoring and watchdog activities. It would be beneficial if such activities include monitoring of pre-election promises, analyzing how consistent they are in terms of a given party's ideology, and how the victorious party follows its own promises in the post-election period.

○ **Offer voting assistance applications**—Civil society organizations have the capacity to not only provide explanations of manifestos in an accessible language but also offer voters voting assistance applications. Such applications are already present in Georgia, but their further promotion and/or proliferation is desirable.

For donor organizations

○ **Continue supporting political parties directly and/or through civil society organizations in designing manifestos and translating public preferences into policy offers**—Georgian political parties do not have sufficient resources financial or otherwise to fulfill their democratic function to the fullest. Therefore, it is vital for them, especially for opposition parties, to receive support in at least these areas prior to the elections.

APPENDIX. COMPOSITION OF DIMENSIONS OF COMPETITION.

1. Foreign policy orientation

- a. Pro-Western: a sum of favorable mentions of EU, NATO, USA and other western countries, mobilization of Western support for conflict resolution; and unfavorable mentions of Russia, USSR, FSU, Eurasian Economic Union, Russia's role in the territorial conflicts, imperialism.
- b. Pro-Russian: a sum of favorable mentions of Russia, USSR, FSU, Eurasian Economic Union, Russia's role in the territorial conflicts; and unfavorable mentions of EU, NATO, USA and other western countries, mobilization of Western support for conflict resolution.

2. Democracy and human rights

- a. For: a sum of favorable mentions of democracy (general), human rights, freedom.
- b. Against: a sum of unfavorable mentions of democracy (general), human rights, freedom.

3. Power distribution

- a. Horizontal: a sum of favorable mentions of decentralization; and unfavorable mentions of strong government; law and order; corruption, nepotism and abuse of power.
- b. Vertical: a sum of favorable mentions of strong government; law and order; and unfavorable mentions of

decentralization.

4. Organization of the economic system

- a. Free market economy: a sum of favorable mentions of free market economy; incentives; privatization; and unfavorable mentions of protectionism; taxes; controlled economy.
- b. Market regulation: a sum of favorable mentions of protectionism; taxes; controlled economy; and unfavorable mentions of free market economy; incentives; privatization.

5. Welfare state

- a. Expansion: a sum of favorable mentions of social policies expansion; and equality.
- b. Limitation: a sum of favorable mentions of private-public mix in welfare; social policies limitation; and unfavorable mentions of equality.

6. Nationalism

- a. Ethnic: a sum of favorable mentions of nationalism and national way of life; traditional morality; and unfavorable mentions of multiculturalism; civic mindedness.
- b. Civic: a sum of favorable mentions of mentions of multiculturalism; civic mindedness; and unfavorable mentions of nationalism and national way of life; traditional morality.

**RESILIENCE AND DEMOCRACY: CAN
A PRAGMATIC EU STILL PROMOTE
DEMOCRACY IN GEORGIA?**

BIDZINA LEBANIDZE¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strengthening resilience in EU neighborhood states is a cornerstone of Brussels' new ambitious global agenda. It aims to strengthen the states and societies that make up the EU neighborhood so they can better cope with challenges and crisis and adapt to fast changing political, social and economic environment. With regard to Georgia there are a few critical issues that should be addressed properly so resilience can live up to its full potential, however. One of them is a proper delimitation of the connection between supporting societal resilience and the regime's (autocratic) stability. The failure

of the EU to address this issue may turn its resilience-based approach into an autocracy-strengthening policy in Georgia and further undermine the democratization process in the country. Although this policy brief focuses solely on Georgia, its empirical and conceptual implications can also be relevant for the EU's relations with two other Associated Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, Ukraine and Moldova.

Keywords: Resilience, democratization, EU Global Strategy, Georgia, stability, democracy promotion

INTRODUCTION: THE MOVE TOWARD RESILIENCE IN EU'S FOREIGN POLICY

Over the last few years, resilience has become one of the key guiding principles of the EU's foreign and security policy.² The EU defines resilience as "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crisis."³ Resilience requires "a more modest and cooperative approach to EU intervention abroad."⁴ Instead of exporting or imposing European values on its neighbors, the EU "counts on local resources and operates with complex partnerships at national and regional levels to promote resilience, economic growth and war-peace transitions."⁵ David Chandler provides what is perhaps the most comprehensive definition of resilience as understood by the EU. According

to him, resilience is "the internal capacity of societies to cope with crises, with the emphasis on the development of self-organization and internal capacities and capabilities rather than the external provision of aid, resources or policy solutions."⁶ Hence, from a functionalist point of view, the EU's obsession with resilience is easy to understand as it speaks to the limited governance capacity of the EU outside its borders. As many critics argue, focusing on resilience can help the EU to somewhat lower its ambition in its neighborhood, shift responsibility to local actors under the guise of joint or local ownerships and limit its direct involvement in conflict and contestation areas within the neighborhood, where the EU leadership is

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² Wagner and Anholt (2016); Börzel and Risse (2018).

³ EEAS (2016: 23).

⁴ Bargués-Pedreny (2019: 2).

⁵ Bargués-Pedreny (2019: 2).

⁶ Chandler (2015).

clearly expected.⁷

Since the resilience turn is a relatively new development in EU's foreign policy, it is too early to judge its implications for EU's policies in Georgia. So far, however, its implementation in countries like Georgia raises more questions than answers. One of the key issues is how compatible the resilience principle is with supporting pro-democratic actors. Even though the EU claims that resilience should not be conflated with support for authoritarian stability,⁸ it can be observed that the resilience turn coincided with a period of EU's relative passivity towards Geor-

gia both in terms of democratic conditionality and new incentives. Moreover, despite various attempts by the international community, the democratization trend in Georgia has reversed recently and the country has been experiencing democratic stagnation or even autocratic backlash.⁹ Therefore, it will be interesting to watch how the resilience-focused EU will tackle the problems of Georgian democracy. The remainder of the policy brief addresses the challenges of the resilience-democracy nexus and offers the EU recommendations on how to deal with them.

RESILIENCE AND THE STABILITY IMPULSE

For many years, the EU and its member states have been the main supporters of Georgia's democratic reforms in terms of providing capacity building and long-term advisory support.¹⁰ However, the EU has often been reluctant to employ negative reinforcement of the democratization process¹¹ – or link its support and engagement with democratic progress in the country.¹² The recent developments in Georgia prove this trend. Whereas members of the US Congress have sent several critical statements to Georgia as well as open letters publicly denouncing the autocratic tendencies of Georgian authorities,¹³ the EU and its institutions (with exception of the EU parliament) remained largely silent. The criticism from the EU is more technical and lacks public visibility. It is often hidden in the long texts of EU documents that are

only read and scrutinized by a narrow audience. It is something of a paradox that although the EU outperforms the US in terms of institutional, societal, trade, financial and security linkages with Georgia, it is the US political establishment and US-based organizations that are the most visible actors when it comes to active democracy promotion in Georgia.

Unlike the US, the EU prefers to follow a developmental and more subtle approach of democracy promotion, which may generate better results in the long term but cannot prevent democratic backslidings in the short term. The focus on the long term could put unconsolidated democracies such as Georgia at risk of adopting bad policies that impede progress for years and damage the

⁷ Wagner and Anholt (2016).

⁸ EEAS (2016).

⁹ Freedom House (2018); The Economist Intelligence Unit (2019).

¹⁰ Börzel and Lebanidze (2015).

¹¹ Börzel (2016).

¹² Lebanidze (2019).

¹³ Civil Georgia (2020b, 2020a, 2019).

work done by European actors.¹⁴ EU actors are often slow and more modest in reacting to autocratic tendencies in Georgia—and most European NGOs, political foundations and other non-state actors lack flagship projects or any democracy-promoting initiatives that would have a direct impact on the current phase of Georgia’s democratic development.

From this perspective, more attention to resilience measures, which is more focused on capacity building and output legitimacy in non-normative sectoral areas (conflict management, environmental issues, disaster prevention, infrastructural development, etc.), may tempt the EU to further neglect democracy and human rights in its neighborhood. The recent reenergizing relations with autocratic countries such as Belarus and Egypt prove this trend.¹⁵ However, whereas it is politically tolerable for the EU to arrange pragmatic relations with countries with au-

toratic credentials that have no immediate prospect of democratization, it would be premature to do the same with Georgia or Ukraine, countries that became pluralist by default and have passed the threshold of authoritarian stability—the point when political stability and an autocratic form of governance are compatible and mutually reinforcing. On the contrary, attempts to establish authoritarian governance in Georgia would probably result in more instability and social discontent, undermining EU’s main objectives in the region: peace, security and political stability.¹⁶ Hence, if the EU wants to promote resilience in Georgia, it should not shy away from challenging autocratic tendencies of Georgian authorities. Unlike many authoritarian countries in the EU neighborhood, in Georgia, active democracy promotion should be viewed not as a spoiler but as a facilitator of country’s societal and state resilience.¹⁷

STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN A POLARIZED ENVIRONMENT

Observers of Georgian politics agree that the extreme political polarization characterized by the bipartisan dominance of the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) and the main opposition party United National Movement (UNM) and its splinter groups has become one of the main challenges for Georgia’s democratic consolidation.¹⁸ The polarization

is not only confined to party politics but transcends all areas of public life, including mainstream and social media.¹⁹ The government’s backtracking from its promise to implement electoral reform in November 2019 further undermined public trust in the political process; diminished the possibility of negotiated solutions between ruling party

¹⁴ On different approaches to democracy promotion see: Carothers, T. 2009. “Democracy Assistance: Political Vs. Developmental?” *Journal of Democracy*. 20 (1). 5–19. Magen, A., Risse-Kappen, T. and McFaul, M. eds. 2009. *Promoting Democracy and the Rule of Law: American and European Strategies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁵ European Commission (2020); Ioffe (2019); EEAS (2019a).

¹⁶ EUobserver (2019).

¹⁷ On negative aspects of democracy promotion, see: Grimm, S., and Leininger, J. 2012. “Not All Good Things Go Together: Conflicting Objectives in Democracy Promotion.” *Democratization*. 19 (3). 391–414. Jünemann, A. Ed. 2004. *Euro-Mediterranean Relations After September 11: International, Regional, and Domestic Dynamics*. London: Frank Cass. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10093984>.

¹⁸ Zurabashvili (2019); Robakidze (2019); DRI and GYLA (2018).

¹⁹ Kakachia and Lebanidze (2019).

and the opposition; and opened up a window for postelection political crisis.

Against this background, fighting the causes and symptoms behind extreme political polarization appear to be important preconditions for strengthening Georgia's state and societal resilience. In this context, there are three steps the EU can take. First, one of the reasons behind political polarization seems to be Georgia's current electoral code with its winner-takes-all nature.²⁰ Therefore, the EU needs to continue pushing the Georgian authorities to fulfill their political promise and change the election code. Second, although the government has benefited the most from demonizing the UNM for their past deeds, polarization has been a bipartisan process, driven both by the government

and the opposition. Some members of the UNM, including former President Mikhail Saakashvili, have been particularly notorious in fueling political radicalism.²¹ Therefore, next to the government, the EU needs to also work with the opposition and, if need be, apply negative conditionality or naming and shaming tactics towards opposition parties as well. Third, and most importantly, the EU seems to be the only actor, perhaps next to the Georgian Orthodox Church, that has the political reputation in Georgian society to play the role of neutral arbiter between the polarized parties. Therefore, the EU needs to coordinate the process of political dialogue and support negotiated solutions if the 2020 parliamentary election or any other future political event results in a legitimacy crisis.

SOCIETAL OR STATE RESILIENCE?

The EU claims its resilience approach to be society-, not (only) state-centered.²² Societal resilience would presuppose the involvement of civil society and the diversification of channels of communication from the state to non-state actors. In practice, however, the EU remains a state-centered actor. Indeed, the failure of the EU's external governance platforms designed to help its eastern neighbors consolidate their fragile democracies can be partly explained by their state-centered approach and overreliance on governmental channels of cooperation.²³ The EU recently tried to establish new cooperation frameworks with its neighboring states to strengthen the involvement of civil society organizations (CSO), yet those formats remain patchy and ad hoc. At best they ascribe

low-profile consultancy functions to local, non-state stakeholders. This is surprising considering the potential Georgia's vibrant civil society offers for Georgia's democratic consolidation.

A real empowerment of Georgian CSOs under the slogan of societal resilience could help the EU supplement its stability-oriented pragmatic approach by redistributing the decision-making authority on cooperation formats and reform dialogues between Georgian state agencies and local CSOs. Redistribution would mean the CSOs acquire the decision-making capacity regarding the intensity and depth of relations between EU and Georgia. This would not require the establishment of new institutions or reshuf-

²⁰ Zurabashvili (2019).

²¹ TI Georgia (2018).

²² EEAS (2016, 2019b).

²³ Falkenhain and Solonenko (2012); Gumeniuk (2010).

fling the funding mechanisms. The empowerment of CSOs can easily be accommodated under current institutional framework. So

far, however, the EU remains reluctant to empower Georgian civil society to that extent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The resilience turn is an interesting development in EU's foreign policy thinking. It could make the EU a more effective and efficient actor in its neighborhood, considering its limitations as a foreign policy actor. However, in order to live up to its full potential in democratizing countries such as Georgia, it should make sure that strengthening resilience does not interfere negatively with democracy promotion objectives. Below are a few recommendations for the EU on how to escape its low profile and passive image and become a more active player in the democratization process of Georgia.

Resilience and democratic conditionality. In urgent cases of swift democratic deterioration, next to capacity building and advisory support, the EU and its member states should also motivate political actors in Georgia by using negative reinforcement instruments. The EU's toolbox of negative conditionality may include:

- Use negative conditionality against non-compliant political actors in Georgia (threat of exclusion from the EU programs, the EU dialogue and cooperation formats);
- Use public pressure against non-compliant political actors (naming and shaming) and positive reinforcement towards the compliant actors;
- Introduce new flagship projects with a focus on active democracy promotion beyond advisory and capacity build-

ing functions;

- Actively use mainstream (Georgian TVs) and online media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter) to deliver critical messages directly to the Georgian public.

Resilience and polarization. Fighting extreme political polarization should be an integral part of EU's measures to support Georgia's societal resilience. They could include three important steps:

- Push the government and parliamentary majority to change the current electoral code, which fuels polarization by its winner takes it all nature.
- Push the government and opposition to abandon their polarization agendas by delegitimizing political parties' polarizing behavior (such as refusing to take part in dialogue, negative campaigning, demonizing opponents, and spreading hate speech).
- Act as a neutral arbiter between polarized parties by establishing structured formats of permanent cooperation.

Resilience and civil society. In order to escape the stability-promoting trap and live up to its objective of supporting societal resilience in Georgia, the EU should abandon its state-centered approach and focus more on non-state actors. The EU can accomplish this task by:

- Empowering CSOs to have a say in what the EU does in Georgia.

- Increase financial assistance and po-

litical support for non-state actors and grassroots movements working on democracy issues.

**CULTURAL VALUES OR ECONOMIC
INSECURITY:
WHAT PREDICTS MASS SUPPORT FOR
RIGHT-WING POPULISTS?**

SALOME MINESASHVILI¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nation-wide surveys show that around 7% of Georgians identify with right-wing populist political parties. Among these parties, the Alliance of Georgian Patriots is already represented in the legislative body. What predicts support for such parties among individuals residing in Georgia? There are two major theories for the rising right-wing populism in the Western countries: cultural backlash and economic insecurity. The economic perspective focuses on transforming societal structures in the post-industrial economy, which have created segments of society that feel left-behind, economically disadvantaged and insecure and, as a result, have become the primary supporters of populists. The cultural thesis sees such support as a response from the groups who were once predominant but now feel estranged

due to changing values in society. In order to test the two theories, this paper analyses nation-wide opinion polls via regression models. Results show that elements from both theses partially explain voters' preference for right-wing populist parties. Firstly, the findings show a generation gap as people over the age of 56 tend to support such parties more than younger people. Moreover, subjective feelings such as economic security, nostalgia for the Soviet Union and opposition to the EU and NATO membership are strong predictors for preference of nationalist populists.

Keywords: populist parties, extreme right, economic insecurity, cultural values, democracy, democratic backsliding.

INTRODUCTION

Populist and, specifically, nationalist populist parties have gained increasing visibility as well as rising public support in Western societies.² The increasing proliferation of extreme right groups and populist nationalist sentiments is widely noted in Georgia, as well, especially since 2015.³ These far-right groups – which include Georgian

Idea, Georgian March, Georgian National Unity and Georgian Power – primarily hold xenophobic, Islamophobic and anti-immigrant beliefs and criticize liberal democracy.⁴ These groups have also increased their public activities, in particular by holding counter-liberal protests and rallies against immigrants and minority rights.⁵

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² Inglehart, R.F. and Norris, P. (2017). Trump, Brexit and the rise of populism: economic have-nots and cultural backlash. *Perspectives on Politics*, 15(2); Staerke, C. and Green, E.G.T. (2018). Right-wing populism as a social representation: a comparison across four European countries. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 28(6).; Gidron, N. and Hall, P.A. (2018), Populism as a problem of social integration. Available at: <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hall/files/gidronhallapsa2017.pdf>

³ Lebanidze, B. (2019). Rise of nationalist populism in Georgia: implications for European integration. Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Policy-brief-18-Bidzina-Lebanidze-1.pdf>; Minesashvili, S. (2019). Social underpinnings of right-wing populism in Georgia. Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Policy-brief-16-Salome-Minesashvili.pdf>; Gelashvili, T. (2019). Political opportunities for the extreme right in Georgia. Georgian Institute of Politics. Available at: <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Policy-brief-20-Tamta-Gelashvili.pdf>

⁴ CRRC. (2018). Countering anti-Western discourse in social media. Available at: http://awdb.ge/files/PPAG_Anti%20western%20propaganda%20in%20social%20media.pdf

⁵ Gelashvili, 2019; Lebanidze, 2019.

But most importantly, public interest towards those groups is also on the rise. As the CRRC report noted, between 2015 and 2018 the audience of these groups' social media pages (measured by the number of likes and followers) increased nine fold. It is not surprising, then, that a party with openly defined populist nationalist agenda, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG)⁶, received enough votes to enter parliament in 2016. Despite the party's limited support (it received 5% of the votes, just enough to overcome the barrier) at this stage, its presence in parliament has served as a boost for far-right groups in general. Some of them even announced the intention to form a political party, for example, the National Front.⁷ Other than the AGP, there are several parties that can be defined as nationalists, including Democratic Movement – United Georgia, People's Council, Free Georgia and Imedi Political Party.⁸

While they are currently in the minority, increasing public interest and support suggests that populist nationalists have untapped potential to grow. The fact that a far-right party received enough votes to enter parliament indicates there is public demand for their political agenda. This paper looks at the issue of public demand and aims to understand who is more likely to support nationalist populists in Georgia. Two theories are usually used to explain the western

phenomenon, which will be tested for the Georgian case as well: the economic insecurity and the cultural backlash theses. The economic thesis suggests that post-industrial societies have produced economic inequality, isolating some segments of society from the market, leaving them economically insecure and prone to social deprivation. The economy theory maintains that this strata of society resents the political classes and is more susceptible to anti-establishment, nativist and xenophobic movements. The cultural thesis explains the phenomenon as a counter-revolution to post-materialist values such as cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, minority rights and gender equality. Populist nationalists attract those who resent the move away from familiar traditional norms and feel alienated from the values that are voiced in elite discourses.⁹ Both factors have been noted as drivers of populism in Georgian society. In a poll conducted by the Georgian Institute of Politics, experts identified several triggers for the increasing polarization and populism in the country, including anxiety related to identity issues (such as progressive values and minority rights) and immigration. Experts named socio-economic hardship as the biggest driver of populism.¹⁰

This paper examines the two above-mentioned theories in the context of Georgia to understand better which factors predict sup-

⁶ Kakachia, K. and Kakhishvili, L. (Forthcoming). Contextualizing populism in Georgian politics; Georgian Institute of Politics. (2019). Georgian Institute of Politics (2019). Government and opposition share blame for increasing trends of polarization and populism, experts say. Available at: <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Expert-Polls9.pdf>

⁷ Democracy & Freedom Watch. (2019). Georgian far-right groups reach agreement about forming new political party. Available at: https://dfwatch.net/georgian-far-right-groups-reach-agreement-about-forming-new-political-party-53106?fbclid=IwAR0qa2P0shwIpJ6SpX4K_ONtdV5PzLIK1Zz9MYmpHIsioAT9OZH-9_fVUng

⁸ Khorbaladze, T (2015). Homophobia and gender identity: media monitoring report. Media Development Foundation. Available at: [http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/Homophobia-ENG-web%20\(1\).pdf](http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/library/Homophobia-ENG-web%20(1).pdf)

⁹ Inglehart and Norris, (2017).

¹⁰ Georgian Institute of Politics, 2019.

port for nationalist populists. For this purpose, the paper analyses nation-wide public opinion surveys and examines evidence of

associations between economic and cultural factors and voting for the right-wing populist parties.

ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL THESES AS EXPLANATIONS OF RISING POPULISM

During the last two decades, populist – and particularly right-wing and authoritarian – leaders, have gained popularity in the US, Europe and Latin America.¹¹ Populism is not new; however, recent events are viewed as part of a substantial resurgence of this phenomenon. Populism ideology generally shares three characteristics: anti-establishment (against the political, business and intellectual elites), authoritarianism (favoring charismatic and powerful leader representing ordinary people) and nativism (excluding people from other cultures and countries as well as minority groups within the society; preference for national interest over international cooperation and traditionalism over liberal values).¹² In a similar vein, the APG holds an anti-elitist,¹³ xenophobic and nationalistic agenda with appeals to the “Georgian spirit” and “dedication to homeland”,¹⁴ while being anti-migrant (especially against Muslim migrants), out of a fear there will be a change to the ethnic balance in the country.¹⁵

Why is populism on the rise? Different theories and explanations have been applied to

explain increase in mass support for populists. Explanations usually underline either economic inequality stemming from structural changes in post-industrial economies or cultural backlash, a response to changing cultural values.

The former explains voters’ behavior by the changes that are transforming post-industrial societies. This approach pays attention to increasing income and wealth inequality¹⁶ due to the rise of knowledge-based economy, technological automation, the global flow of capital and labor—including migrants—and neo-liberal austerity politics that have left many either unemployed or in unskilled and insecure jobs.¹⁷ This rising economic insecurity is seen as a cause for increased resentment of the political classes by those with low-waged jobs, no jobs and living in the immigrant-concentrated areas. They are believed to be more susceptible to anti-establishment, xenophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric of the populist movements and parties. In terms of empirical evidence, this thesis would suggest that support for populism should be concentrated among economically

¹¹ Inglehart and Norris, 2017.

¹² Mols, F. and Jetten, J. (2016). Explaining the appeal of populist right-wing parties in times of economic prosperity. *Political Psychology*, 37, 275-292. Hameleers, M. (2018). A typology of populism: toward a revised theoretical framework on the sender side and receiver side of communication. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 2171-2190. Brubaker, R. (2017). Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40, 1191-1226.

¹³ Georgian Institute of Politics, 2019.

¹⁴ Kakachia and Kakhishvili, Forthcoming.

¹⁵ Anti-Western propaganda. (2018). Media Development Foundation. Available at: http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/eng/view_research/169

¹⁶ Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital*. Cambridge, MA: Bellnap Press.

¹⁷ Ibid.

marginalized groups, the “main losers from global markets, technological advances, and knowledge societies.”¹⁸ Therefore, the votes should be the strongest among unemployed, unskilled workers, those who report economic insecurity and difficulties in meeting their needs as well as those who lack a university degree and live in inner-city urban areas where more foreign-born residents are concentrated.¹⁹

The cultural backlash thesis explains the phenomenon as a reaction to cultural change. Accordingly, the shift to post-materialist values and the move to multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, which has started dominating elite discourses, have triggered a counter-revolutionary backlash, especially among the older generation, men and the less educated.²⁰ Those who do not agree with the new social order and feel left out resent the displacement of traditional norms and perceive the changes as an erosion of

their status in the society.²¹ Alienated from mainstream politics, they opt for supporting radical parties with a nationalist agenda. In terms of evidence, age, education and sex are strong predictors of value change. The populist vote is supposed to be strongest among the older generation; those who lack a university degree; traditionalists who oppose progressive cultural values toward sexual and religious minorities; gender equality; multiculturalism and foreigners.²² Populist supporters are also motivated by a xenophobic-authoritarian outlook against cosmopolitanism. These findings suggest that a mistrust in global governance and support for authoritarian values predict voting for populist movements.²³

Are these two theses, which are based on the trends in Western societies, helpful to understand the situation in Georgia? If yes, which of them predicts support for the right-wing populist parties in Georgian society?

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

To examine national evidence, the research relies on data from two nation-wide surveys, NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia from December 2018 and July 2019. Support for rightist populism is measured by the expressed party preferences of respondents, specifically the question “Which party is

closest to you?”. Five percent identified right-wing populist parties in December 2018 and 7% in July 2019. For the purposes of this paper, “right-wing populist parties” include the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia with 4% vote²⁴ and other small parties that share a similar nationalistic and populist

¹⁸ Inglehart and Norris, 2017, p.12

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ For example, see: Karapin, R. (2002). ‘Far right parties and the construction of immigration issues in Germany.’ In *Shadows Over Europe: The Development and Impact of the Extreme Right in Western Europe*. Schain, M., Zolberg, A. and Hossay, P. (eds.). Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan; DeAngelis, R.A. (2003). ‘A rising tide for Jean-Marie, Jorg, and Pauline? Xenophobic populism in comparative perspective.’ *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49 (1): 75-92;

²¹ Gidron and Hall, 2017.

²² Inglehart and Norris, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ CRRRC. (2019). NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, July 2019.

ideology. The parties, which are not represented in the parliament but express nationalist populist tendencies and were named by the respondents, include: Democratic Movement-United Georgia, Freedom – Zviad Gamsakhurdia's way, New Rights, National Forum – Gubaz Sanikidze, Tamaz Mechiauri for United Georgia and Unity of Georgia Traditionalists.

Economic and cultural explanations for party preferences are examined using logistic regression models with right-wing populist party support as the independent variable. There are multiple questions that could account for the above listed economic and cultural explanations. Model A includes demographic and social controls such as age, sex, settlement type and education. Mod-

el B includes factors that are related to the economic thesis such as wealth, employment, subjective economic insecurity – such as reported difficulties making ends meet; feeling worse off economically than the previous generation; fear of losing one's job. Model C adds indicators associated with the cultural backlash thesis such as attitudes towards minorities, migrants and multiculturalism; mistrust in global governance and in national government; support for authoritarian values; and nostalgia. Model D is a combined model with both economic and cultural factors. For the dependent variable, respondents who picked right-wing populist parties as either their first or second choice were counted (variables and their coding are listed in the appendix).

FINDINGS

The regression models showed the following results.

Model A – Social and Demographic factors

Results in Model A show that two major standard social and demographic factors predict individual's preference for right-wing populist parties. Age is a significant predictor and remains so consistently over the models. Results show that younger respondents tend to be less likely to feel closer to right-wing parties than older ones, confirming the generation gap argument. The association is particularly strong for respondents who are 56 and older. Another significant factor proves to be the settlement type: populist support is more concentrated in rural villages than in urban areas and the capital (however, this factor becomes insignificant in Model D). The gender gap and the education hypothesis proved to be statisti-

cally insignificant, meaning that they cannot predict support for national populists. To recap the findings, right-wing populist support is the greatest among the older generation and among people who reside in rural areas. However, the exact reasons for these relationships can be interpreted in different ways. Further investigation is required. Age and settlement might account for different values or access to employment and, later, economic sufficiency, so there could be a link with either economic or cultural theses or both theories.

Model B – Economic Thesis

Model B looked at economic factors as predictors for favoring right-wing populist parties, with the above-discussed control variables. Data analysis provided mixed results. Objective measurements of wealth, such as lacking certain household items as well as

unemployment, did not prove statistically significant (it should be noted that 2/3 of Georgians report themselves as unemployed during interviews). However, out of the subjective economic insecurity variables, the indicator of feeling worse off economically than the previous generation proved to be statistically significant. Overall, adding Model B only slightly improved Model A. Economic factors only partly explain a preference for right-wing parties, with feeling pessimistic about the economic condition the clear indicator for such party support.

Model C - Cultural Thesis

Model C looked at cultural factors while controlling for the social and demographic indicators. None of the cultural factors – support of authoritarian values, negative attitudes towards gender equality, migrants, multiculturalism and minority rights – proved statistically significant. However, those who oppose membership in the European Union and NATO are more likely to be supporters of nationalist populists. Moreover, nostalgia for the Soviet Union is statistically sig-

nificant and remained consistently so in the combined D model, showing a positive association with populist support. Therefore, Model C also partly improved upon Model A, showing that people with such attributes as Soviet nostalgia and opposition to global governance prefer nationalist populist parties.

Model D - Combined factors

Model D examined the combined effect of economic and cultural indicators with controls. The analysis confirmed the previous findings that nostalgia for the Soviet Union with controlled social and demographic factors is a predictor of an individual's favor of right-wing populist parties. Moreover, the perception of being economically worse off than the previous generation also remains a predictor for feeling closer to such parties. Therefore, those who are over the age of 56; those with Soviet nostalgia; and people who are pessimistic about current economic conditions compared to what was available for the previous generation are more likely to be supporters of nationalist populists.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the data analysis led to the conclusion that neither of the two theses can completely account for voters' preference for right-wing populist parties. Elements of both ideas appear to predict individual support for right-wing populists. In the first place, the study appears to have confirmed that a generational gap exists and that, along other variables, suggests that older people tend to feel closer to such parties than younger people. This age gap seems to be related to their Soviet experience and nostalgia for that period as well as feeling worse

off economically than they were before. This finding confirms the theory that those who felt more advantaged in both cultural and economic terms in Soviet Georgia and likely feel more estranged in the modern society, are more likely to support extreme parties. While this combines both the cultural and economic explanations, opposition to EU and NATO membership also appear to predict support for far-right parties, which can be attributed to either cultural or economic reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Georgian government:

- Develop a state strategy against age discrimination in the Georgian economy, especially in terms of employment.
- Develop a state policy to better integrate the older generation into modern Georgian society.
- Increase the state pension.
- Support information campaigns on the EU and NATO among older people and those living in rural areas.

For civil society organizations in Georgia:

- Engage more with older generations of Georgian residents as well as rural communities so they feel less isolated from modern society.
- Offer projects on entrepreneurship and developing different skills that can help older people and those living in rural areas engage in the modern economy.

- Spread more information among older people and those living in rural areas about NATO, the EU and the tangible benefits that these relations could have for them.

For the international community in Georgia:

- Instead of a one-fits-all approach, develop an age and region-specific policy which specifically targets the older generation as well as those living in rural areas.
- Carry out information campaigns among older people on Georgia's relations with its Western partners, especially on the specific benefits that these relations could provide for them. For instance, provide more information in rural areas on specific support for farmers within the Association Agreement.
- Support and conduct vocational training for older Georgian citizens, equip them with the knowledge and skills to become more engaged in the modern economy.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Variables and coding

Variable	Question	Coding
Party preferences		
<i>Support for right - wing populists</i>	Feeling close to a right-wing populist party (I Choice + II Choice)	Close to a right -wing populist party (1) or not (0)
Demographic and social controls		
<i>Age group</i>	Age of respondent	18-34 (1), 35 -55 (2), 56+ (3)
<i>Sex</i>	Sex	Male (1), Female (0)
<i>Level of education</i>	Highest level of education	Higher education (0), Lower than higher education (1)
<i>Urbanization</i>	Settlement type	Capital (1), Urban (2), Rural (3)
Economic explanation		
<i>Economic condition</i>	Wealth index	Scale 0-10
	Employment	Yes (1), No (0)
<i>Subjective economic insecurity</i>	Self-placement on the economic ladder	Scale 1-5
	Not having enough money to pay for utilities in past six months	Yes (1), No (0)
	Fear of losing job in the next six months	Yes (1), No (0)
	Feeling economically worse off than the previous generation	Yes (1), No (0)
Cultural explanation		
<i>Mistrust in global governance</i>		
	Approve government`s goal to join the EU	Yes (1), No (0)
	Approve government`s goal to join NATO	Yes (1), No (0)
<i>Authoritarian values</i>	Most suitable political system for Georgia	Democracy (0), Any other (1)
<i>Anti-immigration</i>	Georgia should limit the number of immigrants	Yes (1), No (0)
<i>Gender equality</i>	Best proportion of men and women MPs	Pro-gender equality (0), anti-gender equality (1)
<i>Minority rights</i>		
	Important to protect sexual minorities	Agree (0), Disagree (1)
	Important to protect ethnic minorities	Agree (0), Disagree (1)
	Important to protect religious minorities	Agree (0), Disagree (1)

Table 2: Models of feeling close to right-wing populist parties

	A: Controls				B: Controls + Economic insecurity				C: Controls + Cultural values				D: Combined			
	Estimate	St. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Estimate	St. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Estimate	St. Error	t value	Pr(> t)	Estimate	St. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
Controls																
Age (56+)	1.318	0.317	4.156	<0.001**									1.091	0.371	2.941	0.004**
Sex	0.141	0.214	0.658	0.5114									-0.120	0.249	-0.482	0.631
Settlement type (rural)	-0.796	0.294	-2.708	0.007**									-0.330	0.321	-1.028	0.305
Education	-0.168	0.219	-0.763	0.4461									-0.105	0.252	-0.416	0.678
Economic Insecurity																
Wealth index					-0.059	0.069	-0.862	0.390					-0.034	0.071	-0.475	0.635
Unemployment					-0.119	0.267	-0.446	0.656					-0.298	0.360	-0.829	0.408
Economic self-placement					-0.088	0.067	-1.327	0.186					0.005	0.085	0.056	0.955
No money for utilities					-0.040	0.192	-0.207	0.836					0.002	0.258	0.008	0.993
Fear of losing job					-0.181	0.301	-0.602	0.548					0.118	0.402	0.293	0.770
Feeling economically worse off					0.537	0.230	2.560	0.011*					0.593	0.254	2.337	0.020*
Cultural values																
Anti- EU									-0.717	0.263	-2.730	0.007**	0.914	0.462	1.979	0.049*
Anti- NATO									-1.067	0.239	-4.460	<0.001**	-1.655	0.403	-4.105	<0.001**
Pro-authoritarian system									-0.309	0.215	-1.438	0.152				
Anti-immigration									0.419	0.219	1.909	0.058				
Anti-sexual minority rights									-0.040	0.263	-0.152	0.879	-0.078	0.312	-0.250	0.803
Anti-religious and ethnic minority rights									0.281	0.216	1.302	0.194	0.239	0.254	0.941	0.348
Anti-gender equality									0.050	0.207	0.241	0.810	-0.168	0.248	-0.676	0.500
Nostalgia for the Soviet Union									-0.567	0.219	-2.584	0.010*	-0.564	0.256	-2.200	0.030*

* = p<0.05 ** = p<0.01 *** = p<0.001

**PUBLIC TRUST TOWARDS
DEMOCRACY AND STATE
INSTITUTIONS: INFLUENCE OF
POPULIST NATIONALIST GROUPS**

GVANTSA DAVITASHVILI¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democratization of Georgia is challenged, inter alia, due to declining public trust to democracy and state institutions. In this discourse, increasing and intensive activities of populist nationalist groups introduce additional threat to development of democratic processes in the country. As state institutions are inefficient contrary to the increasing influence of nationalist populist groups, their financial resources, undeclared objectives, informal internal and external sup-

port, lacks the transparency. Even though, up to this date, populist nationalist groups have not had decisive influence over the political agenda of Georgia, declining public trust to democracy in general, increases the chances of strengthening populist nationalist attitudes in the country.

Key words: Democratization, populist groups, Georgia, state institutions, public trust.

INTRODUCTION

Researching Georgia's democratization process, integral part of which is the assessment of state institutions' effectiveness and efficiency, is closely linked to establishing public trust and ensuring public involvement in the process of democratic consolidation. Public trust towards state institutions should be the signal for political elites to formulate and later implement strategic policies. This discussion includes influential factors of public trust towards democracy and democratic institutions. Considering the context, activities and influence of nationalist populist groups over state's internal and external policies, which has lately become more

intensive, is one of the threats. This paper analyses the extent to which nationalist populist groups influence public trust towards democracy and state institutions. Responsible state institutions do not immediately and effectively react to the propaganda of anti-Western narrative of populist political parties or initiative groups. This might challenge Georgian political agenda in the long-term perspective, yet up till now, their intensive activities have not had tangible negative implications on internal or external political discourse. Below presented paper also comprises recommendations for state institutions and political parties.

PUBLIC TRUST TOWARDS DEMOCRACY AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

Forming public political trust towards democracy and state institutions is a complex process, which on its turn is reflected on the quality of democracy in the country.

In Georgia, strengthening democratic gover-

nance, as the responsibility of political elite in power, is directly related to Georgia's agenda of European integration. The process of political association and economic integration with the European Union, which implies guarantees to improve the quality of

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democracy due to the conditionality², does not enhance irreversibly in the absence of enlargement policy. Besides, if we analyze strengthening of democracy in the discourse of functional cooperation, it becomes obvious that the reforms implemented in particular sectors do not contribute to general improvement of the quality of democracy in the country³. Despite individual measures taken to strengthen democratic governance⁴, likewise other Eastern European countries, Georgia also faces the challenge of rule application.⁵ Resilient, coherent, continuous and proactive efforts of the Government are decisive in ensuring democratic consolidation and therefore, tangible results for the society.

Compared to previous years, deteriorating quality of democracy in Georgia is proved by the data of Democratic Index 2019, based on indicators such as national democratic governance, election process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, justice system and independence, corruption.⁶ The research conducted by the Georgian Institute of Politics on democratization

and political dynamics based on international and Georgian expert polls demonstrates declining quality of democracy in Georgia. 78% of experts consider that the quality of democracy has worsened in Georgia, 22% think that the quality of democracy has not changed, while none of the 23 experts surveyed agree that the quality of democracy has improved.⁷ Informal governance, low level of social-economic development and social inequality are named to be the leading problems in the opinion of the experts surveyed.⁸

The lack of trust towards the democratic institutions in Georgia is substantiated by recent surveys, as well as the studies from past years.⁹ The results of the polls conducted by National Democratic Institute (NDI) in November 2019 illustrate that the public trust towards democracy and state institutions is mostly declining.

Asked if there is a democracy in Georgia, 33% agree, while 59% disagree with the statement. Moreover, compared to 2017-2018, negative responses to this question have increased significantly.¹⁰

² Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part, 200/42, Legislative Herald of Georgia, Published on 11.09.2014.

³ Tina Freyburg, Sandra Lavenex, Frank Schimmelfennig, Tatiana Skripka, Anne Wetzel (2009) EU promotion of democratic governance in the neighbourhood, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16:6, 916-934, DOI: 10.1080/13501760903088405.

⁴ European Commission Joint Staff Working Document (2019) "Association Implementation Report on Georgia", Brussels, 30.1.2019. SWD(2019)16Final.

⁵ Tina Freyburg, Sandra Lavenex, Frank Schimmelfennig, Tatiana Skripka, Anne Wetzel (2009) EU promotion of democratic governance in the neighbourhood, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16:6, 916-934, DOI: 10.1080/13501760903088405.

⁶ According to the 2018 data, Democratic Index of Georgia has increased from 4.61 to 4.68. For more information, see: Freedom House (2018) Georgia. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NiT2018_Georgia_final.pdf Accessed on: 22.01.2020. Also see: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/georgia> Accessed on 01.02.2020.

⁷ For more information on international and Georgian experts' opinion on the quality of democracy in Georgia, see: Expert Poll (2019) "Observers Warn Georgia's Democracy is Deteriorating", Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N10.

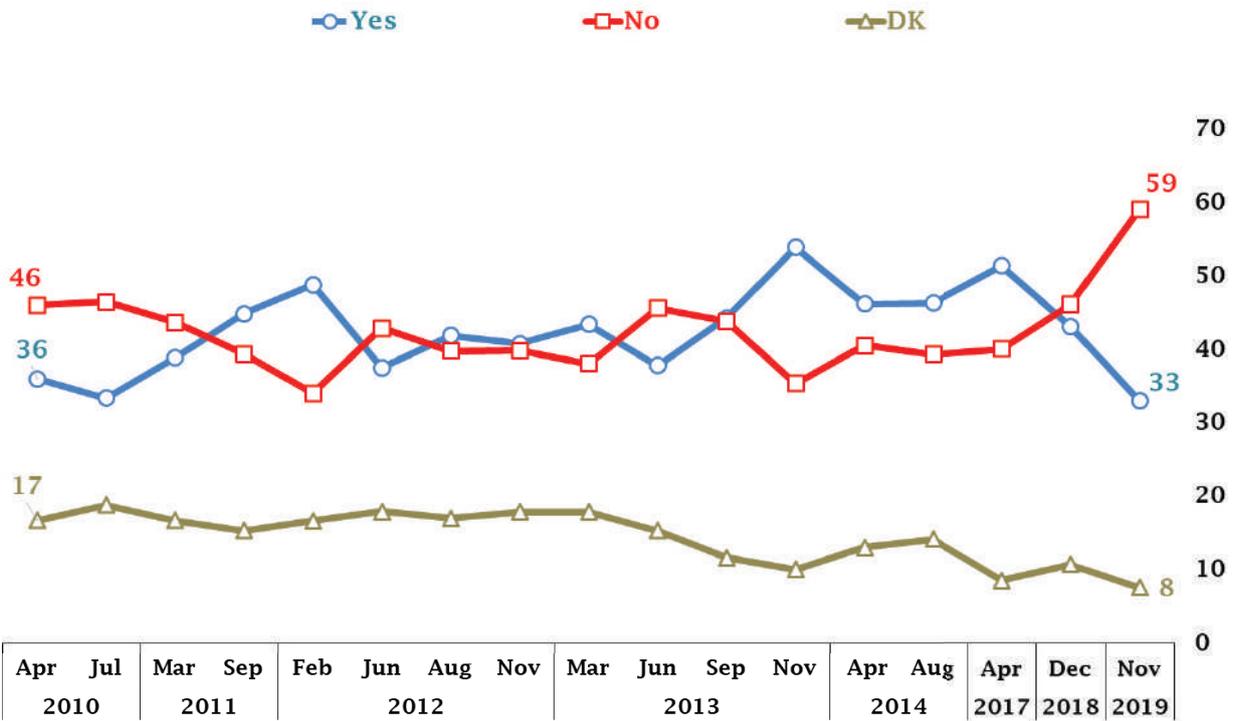
⁸ For more information on the international and Georgian experts' opinion on the quality of democracy in Georgia, see: Expert Poll (2019) "Observers Warn Georgia's Democracy is Deteriorating", Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N10.

⁹ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019) "NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, Results of December 2019 Survey", carried out for NDI by CRRG Georgia.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Democracy

In your opinion, is Georgia a democracy now? (q3)



Source: Results of 2019 Survey of NDI “Public Attitudes in Georgia”

In this context, it is important to assess the performance of the President of Georgia and the Parliament of Georgia as directly elected institutions having high level of legitimacy. Expectations of the public towards them as well as their responsibilities in leading political processes are particularly high. According to the result of the survey conducted by NDI, 93% of those surveyed has never had a communication with the member of the Parliament (MP) or his/her representative.¹¹ Moreover, according to 47%, public

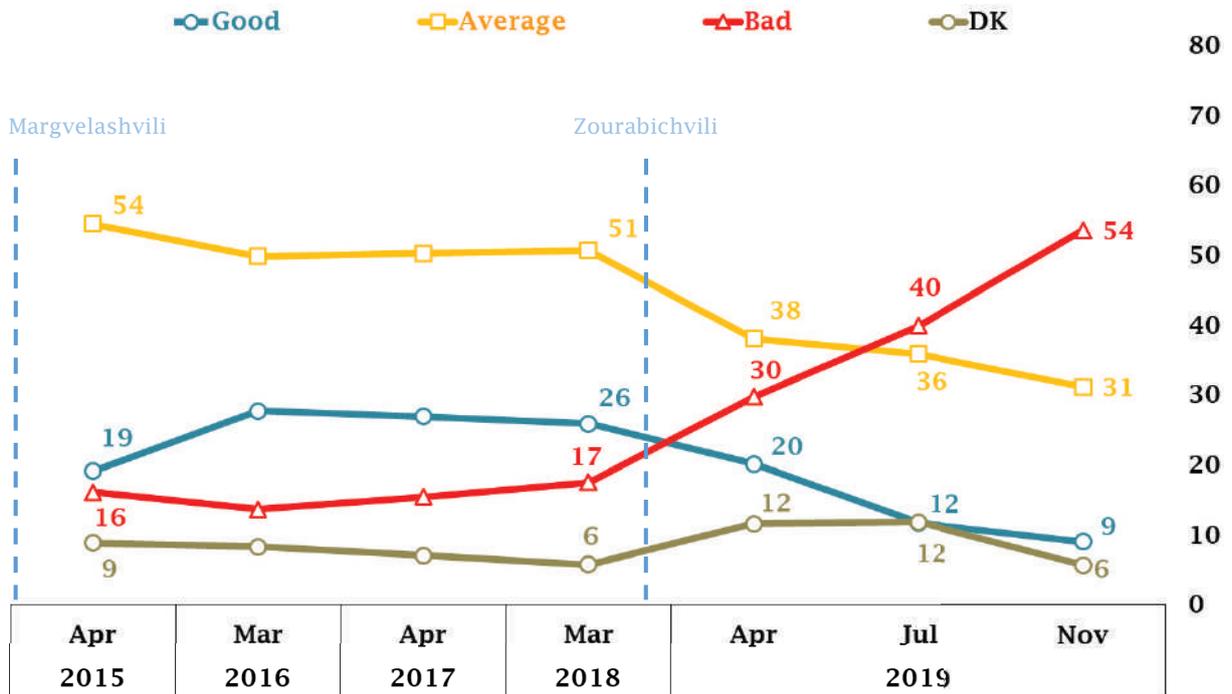
meetings are the best way to communicate with MP; 55% thinks that if they wanted to, it would not be easy to arrange a meeting with MP; according to 64%, MPs do not take into account the opinions of the public during the decision-making process; 73% thinks that the members of the Parliament will do what the party tells him/her to do, while 26% believes that MPs will represent their interests.¹² If in 2018 the performance of the president was assessed negatively by 17%, in 2019 this number increased to 54%.

¹¹ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019) “NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, Results of December 2019 Survey”, carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia.

¹² *Ibid.*

Performance of the president

How would you rate the performance of the president? (q5_2)



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Source: Results of 2019 Survey of NDI "Public Attitudes in Georgia"

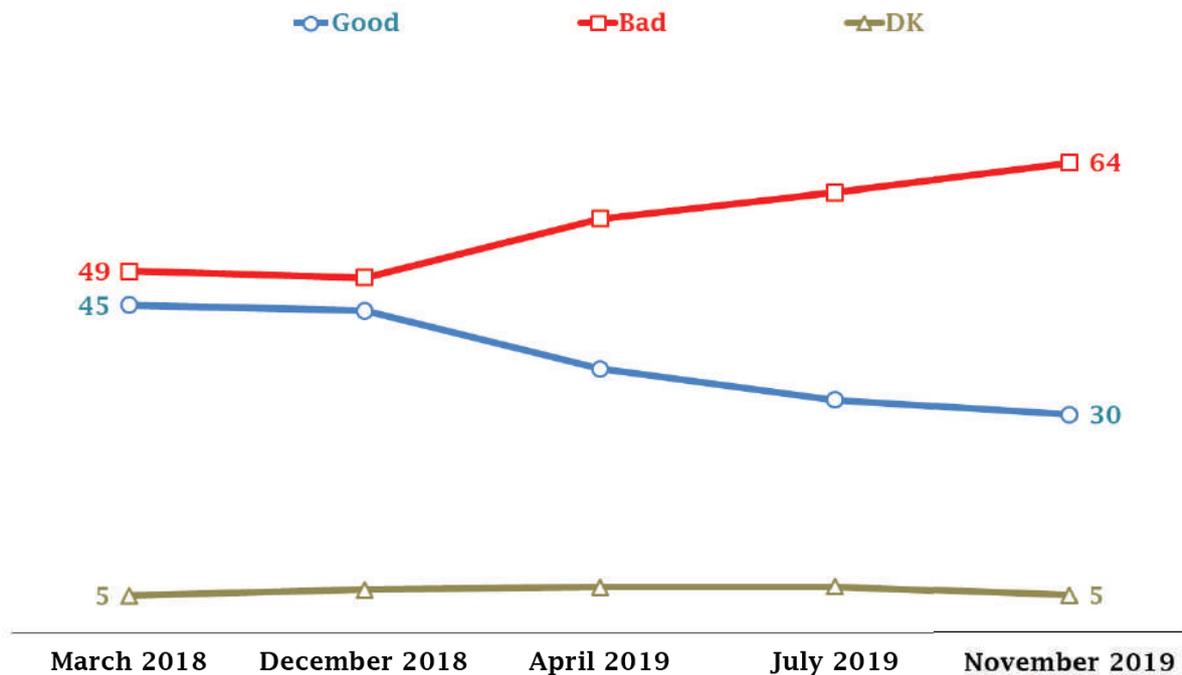
64% negatively assesses the performance of the government, while 30% assesses it positively¹³. Compared to 2018, the indicator of

negative assessment has increased in this case as well.

¹³ Ibid.

Government performance

Using this card, please tell me, how would you rate the performance of the current government? (q4)



11

Source: Results of 2019 Survey of NDI "Public Attitudes in Georgia"

Low level of trust of society towards democratic institutions negatively reflects on the democratization process in the country. Considering the approaching parliamentary elections, public involvement in democratic processes has detrimental importance. Against this background, if the decisions of state institutions have low legitimization and declining public support, it significantly threatens the process of democratization. It may be assumed that due to the lack of trust, citizens will avoid participation in the elections as voters, volunteers and political sup-

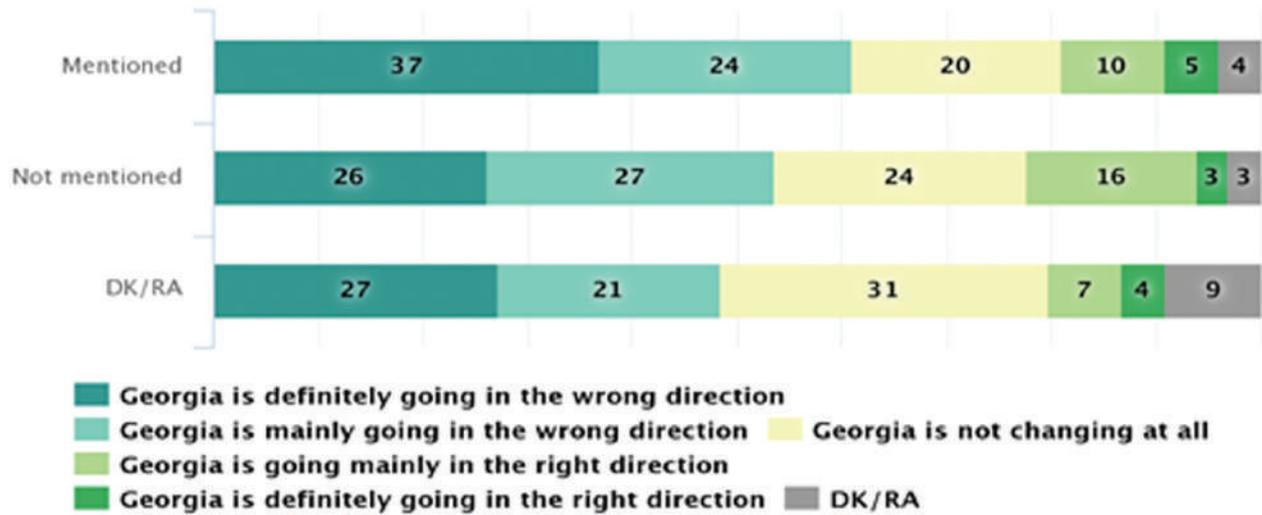
porters.¹⁴ Declining level of trust towards state institutions may have various reasons, including social-economic condition, legitimate questions towards the protection of human rights, absence of state strategy to manage political crisis.

Public has an increasing demand to be involved in political processes, however possible barriers to cooperate with state institutions, as well as the lack of information about their affairs, affects the level of trust towards them.¹⁵

¹⁴ Kakhishvili, L (2019) Decreasing level of trust in Georgian political parties: What does it mean for democracy and how to avoid negative consequences?" Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N17. Also, Ceka, B. (2012). "Do Perils of Political Competition and Trust in Political Parties in Eastern Europe". *Comperative Political Studies*, 46(12), 1610-1635.

¹⁵ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019). Based on the online data analysis website <https://caucasusbarometer.org/> Accessed on 30.01.2020.

**POLDIRN: Which direction is Georgia going in?
by DEMGOV: Democracy means – Government responding to
my concerns (%)**



NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, November–December 2019
Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

With the approaching parliamentary elections, the resources for dialogue between the parties is becoming narrow, while the risk of confrontation and polarization is increasing,

which will become one of the main challenges for Georgian political agenda in 2020. The prospect of more active populist nationalist parties to be represented in the parliament is also increased.

POPULIST NATIONALIST GROUPS IN GEORGIA

The influence of populist groups over the political processes in Georgia is becoming more visible and intensive. Voicing nationalist populist narrative from the Parliamentary tribune was an important signal for the public, attributing legitimacy to anti-Western discussions in Georgia.¹⁶ Activities of populist groups and parties include the organization of protest, as well as voicing and supporting anti-liberal and anti-Western ideas through social networks and media.¹⁷

The idea that their influence over political processes is increasing, is proved by the latest studies.¹⁸ With open declarations, public statements and through gatherings and manifestations, as well as covertly using social networks, populist groups are positioning in political processes.

Populist nationalist activists might be grouped in the following way:

- Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary

¹⁶ Party "Alliance of Patriots" in the Parliament of Georgia, which crossed 5% threshold.

¹⁷ Lebanidze, B. (2019). "Rise of Nationalist Populism in Georgia: Implications for European Integration", Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N18; As an example, also see Facebook pages: „Welcome to Georgia“, „სატი-პარადოქსი“, „ანტი-ლიბერალური გვერდი“, Accessed on 23. 01.2020.

¹⁸ Lebanidze, B. (2019). "Rise of Nationalist Populism in Georgia: Implications for European Integration", Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N18.

- ry parties having political platform;
- Groups formed by and around individual leaders;
- Religious interest groups;
- Financed and covert groups created in media and social networks.

Populist political parties and active interest groups succeed in being represented in political agenda, inter alia, with the help of media. Activities with incitement to violence organized and supported by these groups are increasingly attracting the attention of public and therefore also analyzed by scholarship in the context of Georgia's European integration.¹⁹

Georgian accounts in social networks that were positioning as news agencies, public officials and media outlets, mostly disseminate information having political nature, including elections, government policies, local activists and opposition.²⁰ Facebook connected the support of the pages saturated with anti-Western and anti-democratic propaganda with the Government of Georgia.²¹ Considering the context, in which international partners, including the US and the EU, have an expectation of strengthening the democratic governance in Georgia, the

possible connection of the Government of Georgia with anti-liberal groups questions the values and Western political choice of the ruling elite, and therefore, undermines Georgia's international support and democratic processes.

Homophobic groups also use violent means of expression, violate public order, yet the state considers them as groups exercising the freedom of expression and inefficiently examine individual cases of violence.²² In the context of the protection of human rights, state will is insufficient to ensure freedom of assembly and expression. In this regard, protests of June 20-21 is worthy of attention as it questioned the proportionality of the use of force and possible cases of abuse of power on part of the law enforcement personnel.²³

From the latest events, the assessment of NDI's recent survey on public attitudes by the leader of the Alliance of Patriots is particularly worthy of attention, as she stated that since the 90's similar studies are based on lies, are politically impartial, fake and at the same time "these so-called studies directly threaten our state and has already become an issue of state security."²⁴ The leaders of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Tabula, "Facebook deactivated hundreds of pages and groups connected with the Government of Georgia" (2019) Available at: <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/161994-facebook-ma-saqartvelos-xelisuflebastan-dakavshirebuli-asobit-gverdi-da-jgufi-gaaugma> Accessed on: 01.02.2020; Also see: Facebook, "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from Georgia, Vietnam and the USA", (2019) Available at: <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/12/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-georgia-vietnam-and-the-us/> Accessed on: 01.02.2020.

²¹ Facebook deactivated 418 Georgian accounts (39 profiles, 344 pages, 13 groups and 22 Instagram accounts). For more details, see: Tabula, "Facebook deactivated hundreds of pages and groups connected with the Government of Georgia" (2019) Available at: <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/161994-facebook-ma-saqartvelos-xelisuflebastan-dakavshirebuli-asobit-gverdi-da-jgufi-gaaugma> Accessed on: 01.02.2020;

²² Tabula (2019) "The Government is dispersing peaceful protest and reacts differently on violent groups" Available at: <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/161279-lomjaria-saxelmtsifo-mshvidobian-aqciebs-shlis-da-gansxvavebulad-reagirebs-modzalade> Accessed on: 01.02.2020.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "Inashvili requests investigation against Laura Thornton", Tabula, January 20, 2020, Available at: http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/163473-inashvili-lora-torntonis-tsinaaghddeg-gamodziebis-datskebas-itxovs?fbclid=IwAR3jBQFHW1TvmMTTPcoZs9EYuluKchGYrb1MHy1RJ1pMuDwDsNG_9YlvKaw Accessed on 25.01.2020.

the Alliance of Patriots call state institutions to look into this issue and start an investigation.²⁵ In this regard, the fact that this party is represented in the parliament needs to be highlighted. Moreover, according to the latest surveys, the party would get 3% support in the next elections.²⁶ After making the statement, the Alliance of Patriots organized a protest in front of the Embassy of the United States in Georgia calling to ban IRI and NDI in Georgia.²⁷ In this context, the contrasting nature of the positions of these groups that include the activities and initia-

tives in support, as well as against the government is particularly thought-provoking. For instance, after voting down the initiative on switching to proportional electoral system, the leader of the Alliance of Patriots was announcing protest and was calling for the government to take a decision in favor of proportional system.²⁸ Opinions on their impartiality and independence are derived from similar positioning that on its part strengthens the arguments on “Georgian national values”.

INFLUENCE OF POPULIST GROUPS

The influence of populist groups over the formation of public trust towards state institutions is spontaneous and also related to burning issues of political agenda at hand. The examples include inflaming the issue of David Gareji against the background of unresolved territorial integrity of Georgia,²⁹ discriminatory statements towards LGBT+ community in the discourse of European integration,³⁰ organizing protests against issuing ID cards in the context of visa liberalization.³¹

Low public trust towards state institutions creates fertile grounds for strengthening populist nationalist groups’ influence. For

instance, if 49% of public has negative attitudes towards the President of Georgia, according to the same study, 35% assess the leader of the Alliance of Patriots negatively. 30-35% of population assesses the performance of political leaders neither positively nor negatively, which, along with other factors, may be the result of the absence of transparency of the affairs of politicians.

Violent activities and statements of populist nationalist groups should be considered as threat and should trigger state institutions to neutralize these threats using legal means. However, in contrast to this, the government does not distance itself, does not condemn

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019) “NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, Results of December 2019 Survey”, carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia.

²⁷ Netgazeti, “IRI and NDI should be banned in Georgia - Inashvili”, Available at: https://netgazeti.ge/news/422276/?fbclid=IwAR1shBZbm0fGF7yurqe_4cH0ieuCHA-tRNNiwXYBeux5hJwrMr5cfGhmaFU Accessed on: 27.01.2020. Also, Civil Georgia, “Alliance of Patriots Rallies, Wants NDI, IRI Banned in Georgia”, 2020, Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/336057> Accessed on: 28.01.2020.

²⁸ Netgazeti, “If you vote down proportional [election system] I will call supporters of every party to take into the streets” 2019, Available at: <https://netgazeti.ge/news/404998/> Accessed on: 28.01.2020.

²⁹ Minesashvili, S. (2019) “Social Underpinnings of Right-Wing Populism in Georgia”, Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N16.

³⁰ For instance, homophobic protest on November 8, 2019 while screening the movie “And Then We Danced” in Georgian cinemas.

³¹ Liberal (2013) “ID Cards: Threat to Personal Liberties”, available at: <http://liberali.ge/articles/view/3150/ID-baratebi--safrtkhe-piradi-tavisuflebistvis> Accessed on: 20.01.2019.

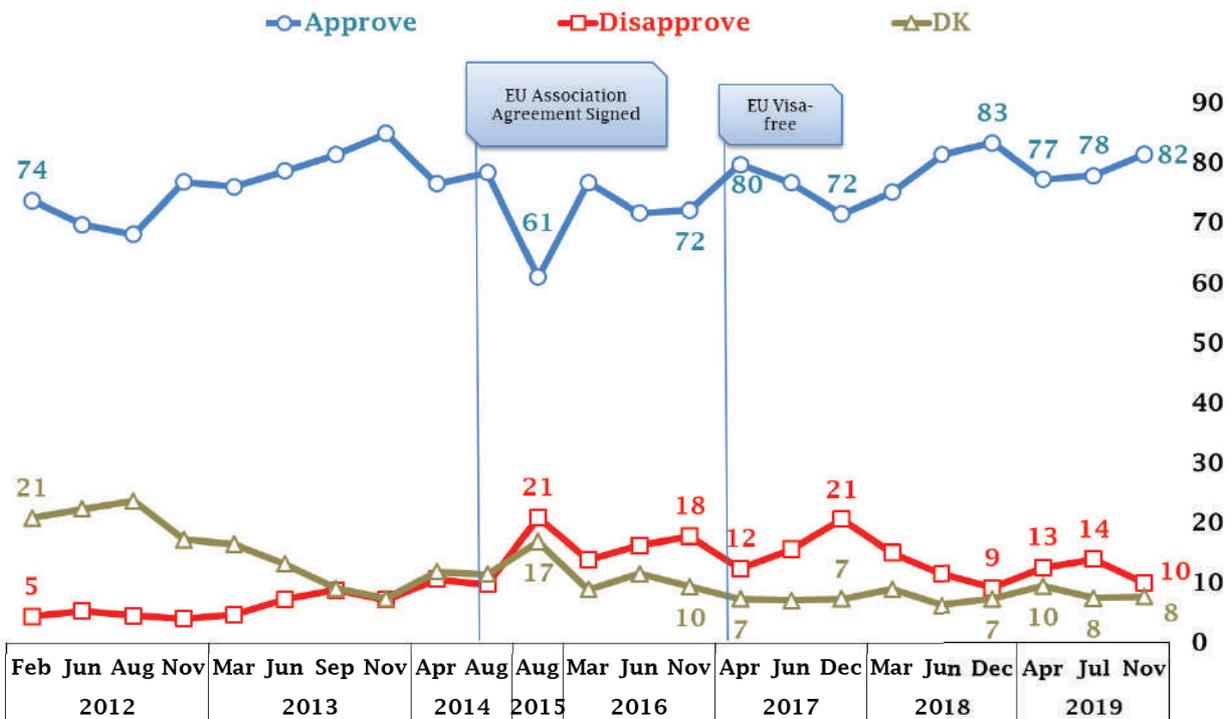
explicitly and ineffectively investigates illegal activities of populist groups in public space, including the use of hate speech and violent statements.

Questions around undeclared objectives, source of funding, informal connections and influence of populist nationalist parties and groups, as well as the declining public trust towards democratic institutions increase the risk of strengthening influence of popu-

list groups over political processes in long-term perspective. However, it needs to be noted that up to this date, these groups do not have significant and decisive influence over public attitudes towards European integration and cannot threaten the process of functional and institutional approximation of Georgia with the European Union.³² The latest studies also illustrate increasing public support towards the membership in the EU³³.

EU membership support

Do you approve or disapprove of Georgian government's stated goal to join the EU? (q33)



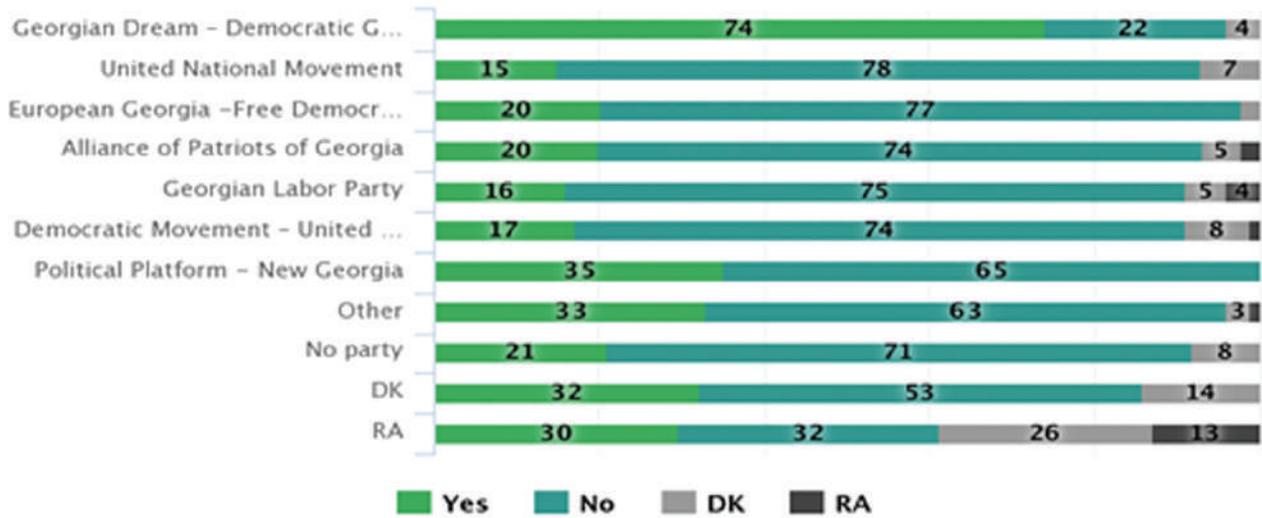
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Source: Results of 2019 Survey of NDI "Public Attitudes in Georgia"

³² Lebanidze, B. (2019). "Rise of Nationalist Populism in Georgia: Implications for European Integration", Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N18.

³³ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019). Based on the online data analysis website <https://caucasusbarometer.org/> Accessed on 30.01.2020.

DEMNOW: Is Georgia a democracy now?
by PHANDFP: Which party will do the best job handling
foreign policy? (%)



NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, November–December 2019
Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

According to the opinion polls, asked whether or not there is a democracy in Georgia and which party would handle the foreign policy issues the best, parliamentary nationalist populist party ranks third among all other opposition parties.³⁴ However, with the comparative analysis of the challenges to political processes, international and local experts consider populism to be a less influential issue for the democratic development of Georgia.³⁵

Obviously, the establishment of public trust towards democratic institutions is a time-consuming and complex process. It is particularly true considering the fact that in recent years Patriarch of Georgia had enjoyed the highest public trust.³⁶ Fragile positioning of political parties and social beliefs among the public further contributed to this setting.³⁷

³⁴ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019). Based on the online data analysis website <https://caucasusbarometer.org/> Accessed on 30.01.2020.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Caucasus Research Resource Center (2019) “NDI: Public Attitudes in Georgia, Results of December 2019 Survey”, carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia.

³⁷ Kakhishvili, L (2019) Decreasing level of trust in Georgian political parties: What does it mean for democracy and how to avoid negative consequences?” Georgian Institute of Politics, Issue N17.

CONCLUSION

Forming public political trust towards democracy and state institutions is a complex process, which on its turn is reflected on the quality of democracy in the country. The existence of the lack of trust towards democratic institutions in Georgia is demonstrated by recent and past researches. Declining public trust towards the process of democratization and state institutions in Georgia may be the consequence of various factors. Considering this context, the influence of populist groups over political processes is particularly important - the fact that has become more visible and intensive recently. Questions around undeclared objectives, sources of funding, informal connections and influence of populist nationalist parties and groups, as well as the declining public trust towards democratic institutions increase the risk of strengthening influence of populist groups over political processes in long-term perspective.

Clearly, Georgia's democratization does not have a national context only and is directly related to the country's foreign political agenda, including political association and economic integration with the European

Union. Therefore, support of anti-Western and anti-liberal values on part of populist nationalist groups has a negative impact on pro-Western course of the country. It is particularly true in cases, when the government does not efficiently examine violent activities and statements of these groups within its legal constraints. Moreover, the possible concealed support of anti-liberal values on part of the ruling political elite has already come to the attention of international community.

As a conclusion, it has to be noted that against the background of general political, economic and social challenges, the influence of populist nationalist parties and groups over public trust towards democracy and state institutions is spontaneous and not decisive. Despite intensive positioning in support of anti-liberal approaches, populist nationalist political parties and groups do not have undermining impact over public trust towards democracy and state institutions. This does not exclude the possibility of strengthening their future influence in the context of fragile democratization process.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

For state institutions:

- **Unequivocally and unconditionally distance itself from the violent and anti-Western statements of populist nationalist parties and groups** to ensure the objective of preventing violent statements, promoting democracy and safeguarding the irreversible process of European integration.
- **Actively and effectively support the efforts to raise awareness about Western values among the society**, which creates effective barriers for anti-Western propaganda in the long-term perspective.
- **To improve the quality of democracy in the country, ensure wider public involvement in planning and implementing state policy** based on the

principles of openness and transparency.

For political parties:

- **Do not encourage populist narrative in political agenda, particularly during the pre-election period;**
- Ensure sufficiently high political resources for **intensive dialogue;**
- **With appropriate diligence, direct efforts towards avoiding populist nationalist narratives** in declared political agenda and election programs, as well as in the process of communicating with public.
- **Establish strong political platforms to attract young leaders** in support of European values.

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