What Determines the Promotion of Youth Within Political Parties and Their Access to Party Policy Formulation?

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Executive Summary

Georgia has seen a recent escalation in discussion of a need to renew the political elite with new faces. This idea has become particularly mainstream after the political crises that arose following the 2020 election and led the country into a long political stalemate. An important factor in the renewal of internal structures of political parties could be the promotion of youth, based on the principles of inclusiveness and competition. Promotion of youth is of the utmost importance in the context of Georgia, where the key principle of recruitment of new party members has no precedent in party activities, selection being based on success in a professional sphere and financial resources. This practice further strengthens a policy of dependence on personalities within a party instead of ideological and programmatic development.

Referencing the top ten candidates on the proportional lists submitted for the Tbilisi City Council in the 2021 municipal election, this policy paper gives an overview of the efforts undertaken by *Georgian Dream, United National Movement (UNM), For Georgia, Lelo, European Georgia, and Girchi – More Freedom* to renew their parties with young leaders. The paper also discusses additional factors that are illustrative of the motivations of political parties with regard to young leaders: whether they are viewed as potential political leaders or if the engagement of youth in politics is aimed merely at sprucing up the façade of political parties. This policy paper also reviews the main circumstances that encourage or hinder the promotion of young members within political parties and their access to the formulation of party policies. In conclusion, the policy paper provides recommendations on how to increase the role of youth within political parties and recommendations for the development of intraparty democracy.

Key words: political parties, young leaders, intraparty democracy.

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Introduction

The protracted political crises in the country have triggered debates about the ability of political parties to offer result-oriented policies to their constituencies. Frustration in society with political parties is also seen in public opinion surveys, which show a significant erosion of public trust in political parties over the past few years. In particular, within the time-span of one year, from 2021 to 2022, the number of citizens who cannot name a political party closest to them has increased from 35% to 64% (NDI, 2022). These attitudes have translated into an increasingly mainstream opinion that the political elite needs renewal with new faces (IRI, 2022), which may result in innovative decision making and diversity within political parties.

To judge by the prevailing trend of recruiting new faces, it is apparent that political parties try to renew themselves through nominating well-known representatives of culture, sports or business as party candidates. This commonly-applied practice makes it clear that the key principle followed by political parties in recruiting new faces is the success these people have had in professional fields and their financial resources, rather than their prior experience in party activities; this principle, however, does not meet the demands of society for results-oriented party policies. The main reason the approach of political parties to structural renewal falls short of public expectations is that the above-mentioned selection criterion runs counter to a party development standard adopted in mature democracies, wherein party candidates are selected based on the principles of competition and inclusiveness (Wolkenstein 2015, Hazan and Rahat 2010), and, therefore, enhances the personalization of political parties instead of ideological and programmatic development.

In the light of this challenge, this paper discusses whether new faces in political parties are young people with prior experience in party activities, which is considered an important factor for an institutional renewal of political parties (Mkheidze and Gamtenadze, 2021; Jijelava, 2012), and what circumstances determine the promotion of youth within parties and their involvement in the formulation of strategies.

Methodology

Political parties selected for this study include pro-Western[2] parties that stood in the municipal election (2021) and are among the top six parties by votes mustered countrywide (Cesko 2021a). Based on the aforementioned criteria, the following six parties were selected for the study: Georgian Dream, UNM, For Georgia, Lelo, European Georgia, Girchi – More Freedom. After the crisis that arose in 2020, the opposition political parties framed the 2 October 2021 election

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[2] Pro-Western political party was defined as a party that, according to its statute, supports liberal values and the country's integration into NATO and the EU.

as a "referendum." Consequently, a possibility created within political parties to renew themselves with young leaders was assessed by the top ten candidates on the proportional party lists submitted to Tbilisi City Council in the 2021 municipal election. Although, due to the limits of the study, the party lists submitted to Tbilisi City Council alone are not sufficient to draw any obvious conclusions, the analysis of those lists can still give a general idea about the most recent trend in political parties. However, there is no universally agreed definition of the term "young" (for example, the UN defines it as people aged between 15 and 24 (UN, 2022), while the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development defines it as people aged between 15 and 29 (OECD, 2019)). For the purposes of this paper, the category of "youth "is defined according to the publication (Jijelava, 2012) of the country program of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD Georgia), in which the upper limit of "youth" is set at 35 years.
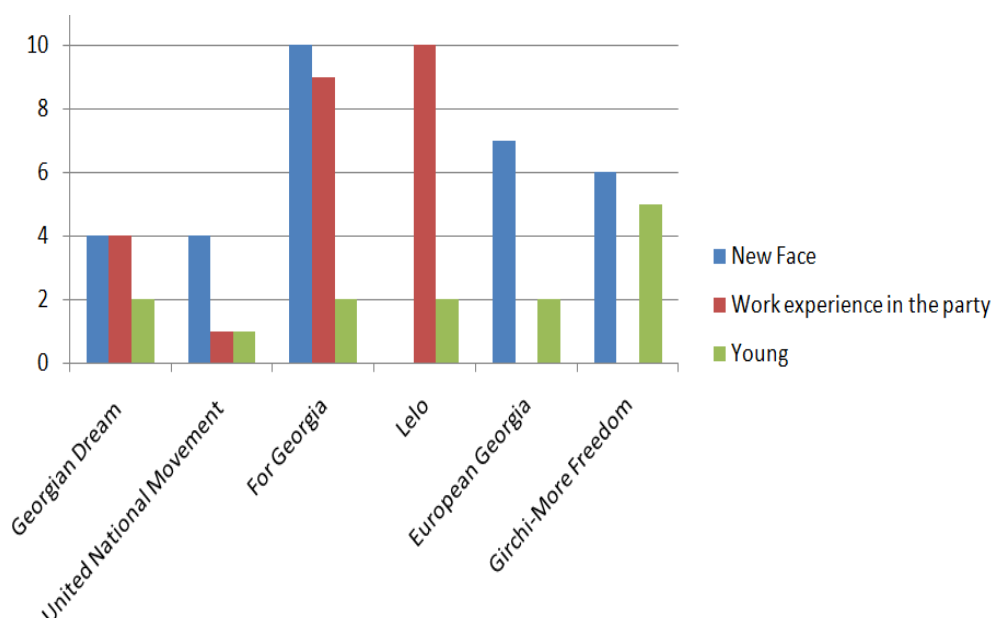
To analyze the extent to which the new faces in political parties have prior experience in party activities, the profiles of the top ten members on the party lists were scrutinized and coded according to a number of pre-selected variables: 1. **Newness of candidates** (whether until the nomination a candidate was a face of the nominating party or any other party), **experience of working with the nominating party,** and **age of candidates**; 2. **Instances of promotion of candidates within the party lists, experience of candidates in the nominating party, and age of candidates**.

Data on candidates was collected through open sources and from information published on the party webpages. To study the instances of promotion of candidates within party lists it was possible in ideal cases to compare the top ten candidates on researched political parties' proportional party lists for the 2021 election with the top ten candidates on proportional party lists in the previous municipal election. However, the establishment and development of the political parties researched did not allow application of a homogenous methodology because the history of the independent participation of all political parties in the elections does not span the same period. Therefore, in the case of Georgian Dream, UNM and European Georgia, the party lists submitted for the 2021 municipal election were compared with the 2017 party lists. As regards the political parties For Georgia and Girchi – More Freedom, the promotion and experience in party activities were studied by using the party lists of the preceding election in which these parties participated before they broke away from the parent party or after a split-up of the party. In case of the political party For Georgia we used the proportional list of Georgian Dream for the 2020 parliamentary election. In case of the political party Girchi – More Freedom we used the proportional list of Girchi for the 2020 parliamentary election. As regards the political party Lelo, whose first ever election was the 2020 parliamentary election, we used the proportional list for the 2020 parliamentary election.

Furthermore, a substantial part of this paper rests on interviews with young representatives of the political parties covered by the study. They represent an important source of additional information about the possibilities of youth promotion and involvement in decision making within political parties and of the relevant analysis.

The analysis of the top ten candidates on proportional party lists submitted for the Tbilisi City Council outlined a few key trends concerning the extent to which political parties considered the demand of society for the renewal of parties for the 2 October 2021 municipal election. First, it shows that the political party For Georgia has the best result by number of new leaders (Figure 1). The second by this indicator is European Georgia, followed by Girchi – More Freedom. UNM and Georgian Dream share the fourth place while Lelo, as compared to the party list in 2020, did not have any new faces for the 2021 municipal election. However, when it comes to the experience of prior party activity and the age of leaders, along with their number, the leader by this indicator is Georgian Dream. However, the number of candidates who meet all the three criteria is very small. As for the number of young people among new leaders, Girchi – More Freedom is far ahead of other political parties covered in this study.

Figure 1. Top ten candidates on the proportional list for the Tbilisi City Council (newness of candidates, work experience with the nominating party, age of candidates)
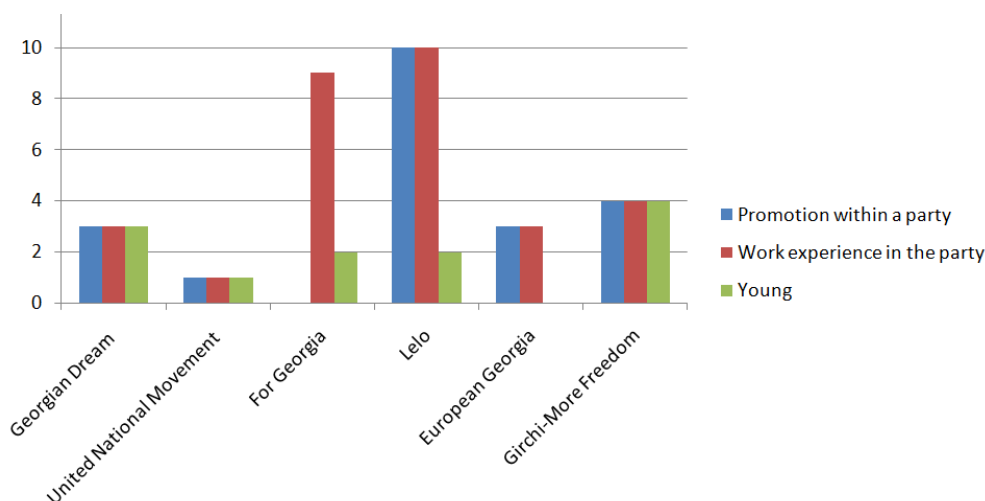

Source: *Author's analysis.*

According to the indicator of promotion of candidates within the lists of the top ten positions, as compared to previous proportional lists of political parties, the leader in the entire top ten group is Lelo, though among its candidates for the 2021 election only two were young. In this regard, Girchi – More Freedom is again a good example, moving up four candidates who at the same time fall under the category of "young" from lower list positions for the 2020

parliamentary election to higher positions for the 2021 municipal election. Georgian Dream promoted three young candidates while UNM promoted one young candidate. As regards European Georgia, two candidates were moved up the list but none of them were young (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Top ten candidates on proportional party lists for the Tbilisi City Council (promotion of candidates within party lists, work experience in the nominating party, age)

Source: Author's analysis.

The analysis of party lists (Cesko.ge 2021b, Cesko.ge 2020, Cesko.ge 2017) has revealed a trend of promotion of young leaders within political parties. However, this may be explained by peculiarities in the development of political parties. Motivation in European Georgia, a breakaway political party which was recently abandoned by many older members, could be a problem with human resources, as the breaking away from the parent party or the withdrawal of old members, could rationally be a reason for the promotion of new faces. The same holds true for Girchi – More Freedom and the political party For Georgia. As regards Lelo, which was created in 2019 on a political field where the change of political parties by politicians was a frequent occasion, it should have had higher motivation to promote young members.

Proceeding from these circumstances, it is interesting to study additional factors as to how much these political parties support young members to grow into true political leaders and whether the latter are able to influence the policies of political parties. It is worth noting that before and after the 2021 municipal election several smaller political parties displayed a higher degree of readiness for that. In this regard, an important precedent was set by Girchi – More Freedom - by nominating Tsotne Koberidze, the number one on the list for the 2021 municipal election, for a position of Vice-Mayor of Tbilisi (Radio Tavisupleba, 2021), and later, by electing four young members from the top ten candidates on the list to the political council of the party (Girchi, 2022). For its part, European Georgia nominated its Number One on the party list, Giorgi Noniashvili, for a position as the head of anticorruption network (Tabula, 2021), who, at the same time, is a member of the political council (European Georgia, 2022). It must also be noted that Saba Buadze and Tamaz Datunashvili from Lelo are members of the political council

of the party (Lelo, 2020, 2022). The political party For Georgia adopted a different approach and nominated the chairman of the party, Giorgi Gakharia, for the position of Tbilisi Mayor in the 2021 municipal election (Netgazeti, 2021) and did not nominate any of its young members from the list for any important position within the party (Civil.ge, 2021). A similar approach has been practiced in the large political parties. In the 2021 municipal election, UNM nominated its chairman, Nika Melia, for the position of Tbilisi Mayor again (Civil.ge, 2021) while later, despite the structural changes carried out in the light of challenges faced by UNM, did not nominate any young leaders from the top ten party list for Tbilisi City Council for any important position within the party (Radio Tavisupleba, 2022). Likewise, Georgian Dream nominated the old leader, Kakha Kaladze, for the position of Tbilisi Mayor (Imedinews, 2021). Nor did Georgian Dream renew its political council with new leaders.

This analysis suggests that in the case of the last three political parties, the promotion of new and young leaders might serve the aim of just sprucing up the facade of the parties and those new and young leaders, in reality, do not have access to the forming of political strategies. Conversely, the nomination of new members for decision-making positions, or the election to a political council in the majority of smaller parties, could indicate a qualitative change within these parties.
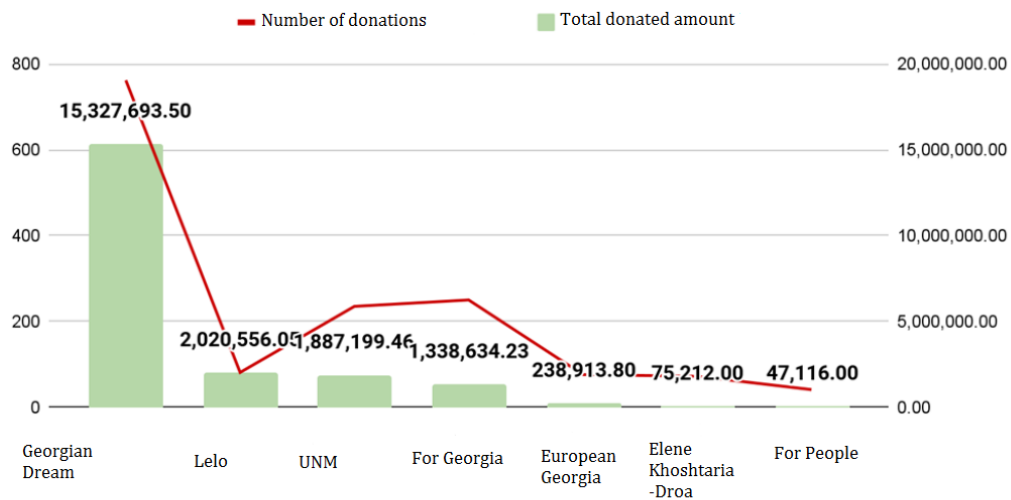
What Factors Determine Promotion of Young Members Within Parties and Their Access to Formulation of Political Strategies?

Interviews with young party members revealed additional factors that show certain trends in terms of selection of candidates, inclusiveness and equal access to power within the political parties researched (Kvashilava, 2020) and highlight the differences between them.

- *Differences between financial resources of political parties*

Internal democracy within a political party is largely determined by the manner of party financing and ways of raising financial resources (Magolowondo et al 2013). In the case of Georgia, the financing of political parties depends on results obtained in elections (TI 2020). However, the key problem lies in the disproportionality of donations among political parties. For example, according to 2020 data, the dependence of political parties on state financing was nominal (TI Georgia 2020). According to the 2021 data, Georgian Dream and Lelo were the leaders by the amount of private donations (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Donations to political parties in 2021

Judging by existing practices, a large segment of donors to Georgian political parties have always given more than an average annual Georgian salary; this indicates the dependence of political parties on large donors (TI Georgia, 2020). Consequently, interviews with young party members make it clear that the ability to guarantee financial resources affects the promotion of youth within political parties and the engagement of young members in the formulation of party policy. Interviews with representatives of Georgian Dream have revealed that, on the one hand financial motivation plays an important role for the engagement of youth in the party, while on the other hand the financing received from the party by the youth wing strengthens the hierarchical system within the party, which might affect the prospects of promotion of young members.[1,2]. The same holds true for Lelo where, as mentioned above, one of motivations of engaging youth in the party is financial resources and young people join the party only if they can offer a certain amount[7,8]. In contrast to the aforementioned political parties is Girchi – More Freedom, whose financial state fully depends on fundraising, which has a serious impact on intraparty democracy. This enables young party members to present themselves as politicians through their ideological position or political activity and attracts supporters who will finance the party[11,12].

- *Ideology*

One of the key problems for Georgian political parties is considered to be the fact that the majority of them are created by businessmen, which makes the parties more dependent on leaders than oriented on ideological and programmatic development (Bertoa, 2021). This has been seen from interviews with young party members, too. In case of Georgian Dream

importance is attached to the capacity of a future candidate to excel as a party activist. The respondents named candidates who were distinguished for their activism and after a party decision were put on the list of candidates for various municipal councils in the 2021 local election[1,2]. Young UNM party members spoke about a similar practice applying within their party, giving the examples of Ani Tsitlidze and Levan Khabeishvili as proof[3,4]. Party activism was also mentioned by members of Lelo, though they noted that the prospects of promotion within the party heavily depends on both the activity of the party member and his/her professional experience. They gave the case of Ana Bibiliashvili as an example - she was a majoritarian candidate from Zestaponi for the 2020 election, and owing to her activity and professional experience was nominated as a candidate for Tbilisi Mayorship in the 2021 municipal election[7,8]. Representatives of For Georgia underlined the importance of activism, loyalty to the party ("it's important that a candidate cannot be recruited by another party") and reputation ("whether a candidate can become a face of the political party)[5,6].

The interviews with the members of Girchi – More Freedom and European Georgia revealed a different trend. To a question as to what determines the likelihood of a party member being put on a party list, they named ideological compliance of a member with the party. According to a representative of Girchi – More Freedom it is the only political party that is firmly based on party ideology, and a member who deviates from this will not be supported by those who participate in the primaries to select candidates for the party list[11,12]. Likewise, according to representatives of European Georgia, those who make it into the party list are loyal to party ideology and principles[9,10].

- ***Differences between decentralized and hierarchical systems***

Youth wings of political parties are often seen as providers of lifeblood for political parties (Mycock and Tonge, 2012) inasmuch as youth wings, on the one hand, represent the key means of recruitment for political parties and, on the other hand, provide an important platform for political socialization from the point of view of organization and ideology (Hooghe and Stole, 2005; Mycock and Tonge, 2012). However, as it transpires, a youth wing in Georgia is an additional factor that impedes youth from direct involvement in the implementation of party policy. The interviews showed that the more decentralized Georgian political parties are, the higher the indicator of meaningful participation of youth in politics. For example, in case of Georgian Dream, which has a youth wing, representatives of youth are mainly engaged in activism. In particular, direction for the party's political strategy are communicated top-down and representatives of the youth wing carry out various activities within a given strategic direction[1,2]. Lelo also has a youth wing, and young members, by types of their activity, are divided into activists and politicians. The decision-making mechanism in Lelo, in terms of relationship with youth, is also hierarchical and representatives of the youth wing receive information on "what is being done and what must be done"[7,8]. The political party, For Georgia, does not have a youth wing, however, there is a youth organization within the party whose representatives said that during the pre-election period, instructions came top-down on how to work with voters[5,6].

In contrast, European Georgia and Girchi – More Freedom operate without youth wings and their members consider themselves party members who can independently plan and implement certain types of events[9,10,11,12]. It must be noted, however, that the feeling of direct involvement in politics was stronger among representatives of Girchi – More Freedom, who emphasized that they did not require consent from the center on the conduct of political activities in the regions and independently managed political processes. UNM does not now have a youth wing, but its structure is more hierarchical than that of Girchi – More Freedom and European Georgia. Young members, who have not already been promoted, have little chance of influencing party strategy even on a local level. Furthermore, problems of informal leadership have also been identified, where the political council of the party has often to consider directives received from outside and accommodate them in their strategy. Because of the given the unequal environment for the promotion of young individuals within the party, UNM is making an attempt to set up a youth wing through that the members of the youth wing intend to influence the policy of the party by means of a memorandum, according to which the youth must comprise 20% of electoral lists[3,4].

Conclusion and Recommendations

As society's trust in political parties has been eroding, it is important for parties to renew their internal structures. One of main directions in this regard could be the promotion of young members within parties based on the principles of competition and inclusiveness. This would contribute to a long-term program of development in political parties. The analysis provided in this paper shows that certain positive moves in this direction were observed before and after the 2021 municipal election. However, differences shown between the political parties by this indicator make it clear that financial resources, a degree of ideological development and internal systems of institutional management largely determine the extent to which new young leaders, albeit promoted by political parties, are able to influence the forming of party policies.

Recommendations to political parties:

- *End the monopoly of political parties' key governing bodies in the process of forming electoral lists and increase the role and influence of rank-and-file members.*
- *When forming electoral lists, pay greater attention to ideological compliance with the party than to experience in party activism as this will enable longer-term programmatic party development.*
- *Increase the involvement of young party members in the formulation of political strategies and give greater consideration to their opinions with a view to reflecting these in strategies.*

To international community:

- *Broaden the monitoring of private party financing and develop relevant recommendations on enforcement mechanisms.*

- *Plan consultations with Georgian political parties to share the experience of youth promotion within political parties in Western democracies.*
- *Enhance international programs ensuring intensive interaction between young representatives of political parties from mature democracies and representatives of Georgian political parties.*

To media:

- *Increase pressure on political parties to introduce structural and programmatic renewal.*
- *Plan programs about party politics and cover adequately the dynamics of Georgian political parties in this regard.*
- *Support the promotion of new leaders in political parties and the communication of their visions to society.*
- *Plan programs facilitating meaningful debates between young leaders of political parties on various issues, including outside of election periods.*

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9. *A young representative of European Georgia, a written interview, 16 April 2022;*
10. *A young representative of European Georgia, a written interview, 16 April 2022;*
11. *A young representative of Girchi – More Freedom, a written interview, 16 April 2022;*
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