

# Compendium of Policy Briefs

May 2022

INTRA-PARTY POLITICS, YOUTH  
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND  
CHALLENGES FOR COALITION  
GOVERNANCE IN GEORGIA



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

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Founded in early 2011, the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research, and analysis organization. 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 projects and democratic processes. The organization has quickly become a major center for scholarship and policy innovation, not only for Georgia, but for the wider Black sea region as well. To this end, GIP sets itself apart through relevant, incisive research; extensive public outreach; and a brazen spirit of innovation in policy discourse and political conversation. Since December 2013 GIP is a member of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions and the Network of Think Tanks on the EU's Eastern Partnership launched in September 2020 by the German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP) with the support of the European Commission.

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## FOREWORD

Georgia has been in a deep and protracted political crisis since the 2020 parliamentary election, which has damaging long-term consequences for Georgia's democratic development as well as its future European perspective. Amendments to the constitution, together with reforms proposed in the agreement brokered by the EU, were supposed to shift Georgia towards a coalition government. However, the current relationship between the political parties is anything but cooperative. Many perceive politics as a zero-sum game where the winner takes all and the losers face the constant threat of political persecution.

Against this backdrop we see the alarming developments in the broader region, with the Russian Federation launching yet another act of military aggression against Ukraine. The collective West has been united as never before in its opposition to the Kremlin's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and willingness to assist the Associated Trio on their European path. The ongoing major geopolitical shifts create a window of opportunity for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine to solidify their EU membership perspective. Yet, in order for this chance to materialize, commitment to democratization and depolarization is vital.

Political parties have an important role to play in building a sustainable political culture that will facilitate depolarization and enhance cooperation between the actors. Nevertheless, neither the ruling nor opposition parties are able to offer voters a positive

agenda. Instead of issue-based discussions and presentation of their visions for the country's development, pre-election campaigns are often focused on scandals and negative campaigning, affecting the development and sustainability of the political culture. Radical polarization in the political field also increases its unevenness and forces small political parties to "choose a side".

An important aspect that needs to be taken into account is that, despite polarization of the political field, year after a year opinion polls suggest that an absolute majority of the population supports the idea of coalition government and thinks this is vital for Georgian democracy<sup>1</sup>. These numbers suggest that there is a considerable mismatch between the ambitions of the political parties and the wishes of the electorate. Therefore, both the wider public and the political classes must start thinking about ways to overcome these challenges and restore the trust and linkages between the political parties and Georgian society. Policy briefs in this compendium suggest possible ways of addressing these shortcomings and how to move forward in order to strengthen Georgian political culture and enhance cooperation between the parties.

The Georgian Institute of Politics is delighted to present **Compendium 2022**, the latest of our annual collection of policy briefs dedicated to Georgia's political processes, challenges, and prospects. The collection is intended to serve as an introduction to the **seventh annual conference #GEODEM2022** and a

<sup>1</sup> For example, IRI 2021 opinion polls available at <http://tbl.ge/5n4x> or Edison Research poll from 2020 available at <https://formulanews.ge/News/37953>

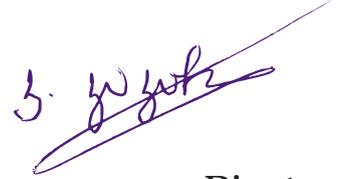
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keynote for discussion within the frame of our major event. We hope that the publication will lead to interesting discussions. These policy documents and papers may be used as a resource by representatives of political circles as well as civil society, political experts, members of the academic community and other stakeholders involved in the country's democratic transformation.

This Compendium, just like its predecessors, could not be published without the support of prominent institutes, including the **Embassy of the Swiss Confederation in Georgia**, and the **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Caucasus Office**. We are also indebt-

ed to the citizens of Georgia, representatives of civil society and media outlets for their continuous support for our work and their civic engagement in the development of civil society, as well as the strengthening of the organizational backbone of democratic institutions through their contribution to the development of democratic processes.

**Dr. KORNELY KAKACHIA**



**Director,  
Georgian Institute of Politics**

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**PROBLEM OF COOPERATION AMONG  
GEORGIAN POLITICAL PARTIES: WHAT  
DO VOTERS DEMAND?**

**NINO SAMKHARADZE**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, discussions about the need for coalition governance have become more prominent. This topic is particularly pressing in the context of the one-party governance experience and the prolonged political crisis that has brought the democratization process in the country to a dead end. However, talking about coalition governance would be unrealistic without the successful precedent of interparty cooperation. Signs of this are still not evident despite the fact that, according to public opinion surveys, voters support interparty cooperation in the country regardless of party affiliation.

This gap between parties' radical agendas and the public's attitudes is determined by several factors. It includes leader-oriented, personalized party strategies, the fear of small parties of being affiliated with the dominant powers and the zero-sum principle of party competition. The mismatch between voters' and parties' views on interparty cooperation creates additional problems for the Georgian political system: the political environment is becoming more

radical with no deradicalization prospects in sight. Additionally, parties that are involved in party battles cannot find the resources to provide competent responses to problems that are important for the voters within a specific ideological view. As a result, the public trust in political parties might decrease, which will further limit the legitimisation of a healthy political process by the population.

This policy brief analyses the major factors behind parties' inability or unwillingness to respond to the public demand for interparty cooperation. It also identifies problems caused by the mismatch between party agendas and voter needs. Lastly, the brief offers recommendations for political parties to bring their views on interparty cooperation closer to the preferences of the voters and as a result enable the creation of realistic prospects for coalition governance in Georgia.

**Key Words:** coalition governance, interparty cooperation, political parties, public opinion

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, talk about democratic backsliding in Georgia has become frequent, with one of the main reasons behind this being the problem of issue-based cooperation among political parties. The 2018, 2020 and 2021 elections were accompanied by radicalisation of the political environment, uncompromised confrontation among parties and a prolonged political crisis. Developments like these have been leading the country irreversibly towards deadlock, with competent discussion on nationally import-

ant issues becoming impossible. In the context of weakened democratic processes, the importance of consensus among parties on further development for Georgia as a democratic state has become obvious. Reaching consensus among parties on common national issues strengthens the prospects for strong coalition governance, which is important for the growth of the country into a mature democracy.

The ongoing long-term political crisis has

demonstrated contrasting views on the prospects of interparty cooperation among political parties and their supporters. Political consolidation and interparty cooperation based on consensus among political powers on various topics is a public demand (NDI 2022). However, the political class pays little attention to this and in some cases acts in conflict with voters' demands. Parties' inability or unwillingness to respond to public demand on cooperation based on the con-

sensus creates a confrontation deadlock not only among parties, but also between parties and their voters.

Therefore, on the path to building a stable democratic state, it is important to promote discussion of the reasons behind the mismatch between public opinion and party strategies, the problems that the parties' disregarding of their own voters' views create and the solution.

## WHY DO PARTIES DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM VOTERS' DEMAND ON INTERPARTY COOPERATION?

In consolidated or transitional democracies one of the key characteristics of a strong political system is the level to which the political parties are responsive to voters' demands and needs (Ibenskas & Polk 2021). Every party, considering their ideological platform, has its own voter pool. However, post-Soviet transitional democracies, such as Georgia, have some peculiar characteristics (Kitchelt 2007), which is the reason why in such countries' party strategies are distanced from public attitudes and fail to meet the voters' expectations. In the case of Georgia, particularly important is the level to which parties respond to their voters' attitudes to interparty cooperation.

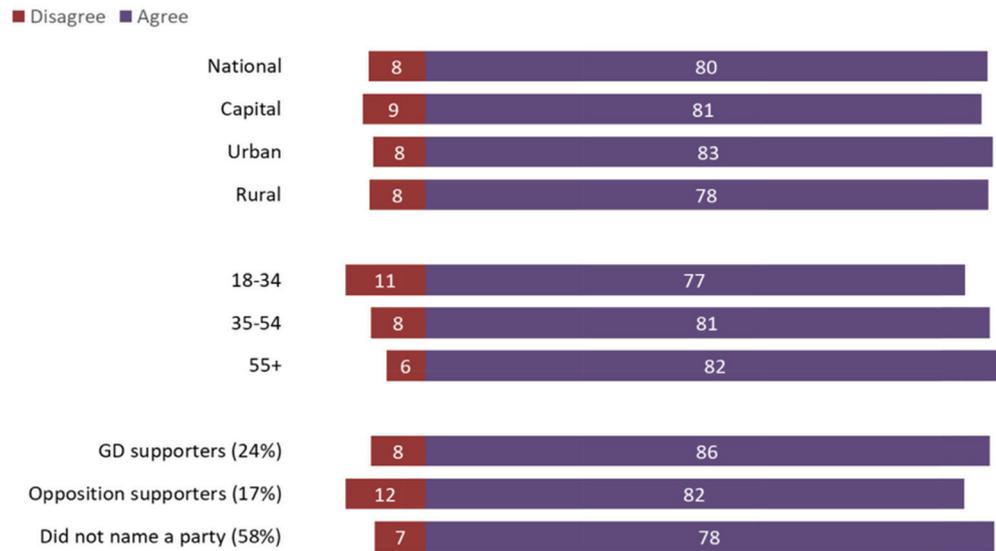
According to the public opinion poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute

in December 2021, link between the views of political parties and their voters on a consensus-oriented dialogue is weak (NDI 2022). Regardless of their political views, a significant majority of the population (80%) expects interparty cooperation even if the actions and opinions of other parties are unacceptable for the population (Graph 1). The political elite in Georgia pays scant attention to these attitudes and frequently politicizes the results of surveys (Gillam 2021; GIP 2020). Parties determine their political strategy with "red lines" that may be less important for the population (Samkharadze 2021b). Therefore, it is interesting to see what the reasons behind parties' avoidance of responding to their voters' demands are and of being more ready to agree on common national issues.

*Graph 1. Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2021*

## Support for cross-party collaboration is consistent across political affiliation

Imagine there is a political party which you like more than others. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that your favorite political party should cooperate with all other political parties in the parliament, even if the actions/views of some parties might be unacceptable to you? (q24 X Settlement, Age, Party closest to you)



Source: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20December%202021%20poll\\_Eng\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20December%202021%20poll_Eng_vf.pdf)

One of the first factors is that in Georgia the party system is determined by a zero-sum game mechanism. To illustrate this, when it loses ruling power, the party losing the elections also loses access to significant resources, which is vital for a party's existence. As Georgia's recent history demonstrates, similar parties either frequently vanish from the political field completely or are so weakened that they don't have enough strength to replace the ruling power (Bolkvadze 2021). This unstable political system pushes parties to focus on political survival or maintaining their ruling power at any cost. As a result, meeting actual public demand is beyond them.

The second inhibiting factor may be the character of Georgian politics, in that it is focused on personalities. Parties have a hard

time getting away from agendas based on a specific leader, as during elections leaders are focused on themselves (Bertoa 2021; Samkharadze 2021a). The Mikheil Saakashvili and Bidzina Ivanishvili's factors clearly demonstrate the two poles of the party spectrum: they are considered to be such powerful centres of gravity in Georgian politics that they "hijack parties", overruling voters' preferences in party agendas (Enyedi 2021; Sharashenidze 2021). Therefore, this character, based on specific individuals, particularly in dominant party strategies, obstructs other players from freely getting involved in a consensus-based political process at the cost of certain concessions (Minesashvili 2021; Samkharadze 2021a).

The third issue in parties' failure to respond to voters' demand and create an effective

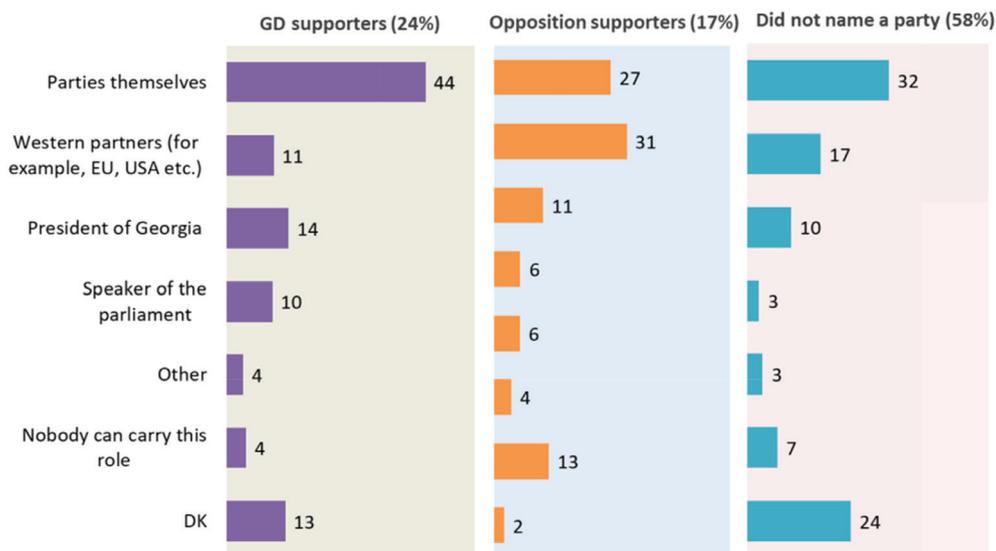
cooperative environment is the factor of an authoritative mediator. The problem is that even trustworthy mediators are not able to work successfully with Georgian political parties. During the political crisis that started in the beginning of 2021 this role was taken up by the President of European Council, Charles Michel. At a certain point he achieved some kind of success and political parties signed the so-called April 19 agreement; however, it was annulled in several

months. This means that it is hard to find the kind of authority that will succeed in achieving a stable agreement on cooperation among Georgian political parties. If we look at the opinions of Georgian voters in these regards, we will see how opposition and undecided voters view Western partners in the mediating position. For the supporters of the ruling Georgian Dream party, parties themselves should act as leading players (Graph 2).

*Graph 2. Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2021.*

### Majority look inside of the country for a source of facilitation between the opposition and the government

At the moment, opposition parties and the ruling party have difficulty having a dialogue and agreeing on numerous issues. In your opinion, who would make the best moderator and facilitator in this process? (q26 X Party closest to you)



Source: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20December%202021%20poll\\_Eng\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20December%202021%20poll_Eng_vf.pdf)

The fourth factor specifically concerns small parties, which may fear that after cooperation with any of the dominant powers they will be stigmatized by the voters, which is a pertinent risk in even developed democracies (Rossiter 2021; Zurabashvili 2021). Therefore, achieving agreement among parties on issues such as the parliamentary boycott by the opposition after the 2020 parliamentary elections is often complicated. According to

the then-leader of the “European Georgia” party – Gigi Ugulava – “entering parliament today means becoming part of the “Georgian Dream” party (Tskipurishvili 2020). Fearing to lose radical supporters, smaller parties struggle to take decisions that will potentially lead to their affiliation with any of the major powers. Therefore, the space for interparty cooperation becomes limited.

## PUBLIC DEMAND VIS-À-VIS POLITICAL AGENDA: WHAT KIND OF PROBLEMS DOES IT CREATE FOR THE STATE?

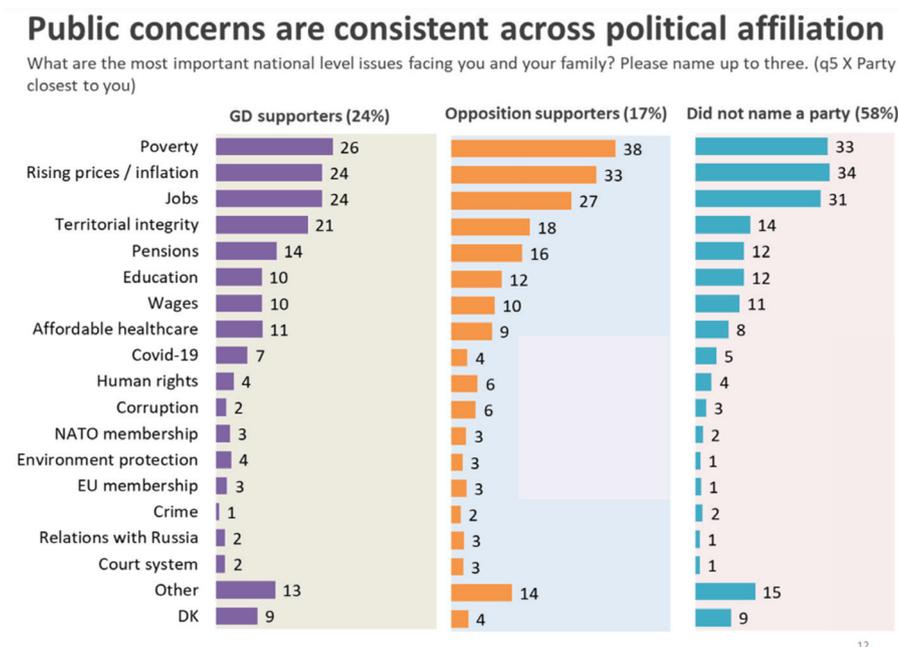
This summary points to the fact that the Georgian political system is not yet mature enough to increase the focus on interparty cooperation as demanded by its own voters. As a result, the country faces several critical challenges on its path towards the development of statehood.

One of the main problems caused by the gap between the vision of the parties and the voters is increasing radicalisation in the political field. Parties no longer express willingness to balance their uncompromising rhetoric by starting healthy political competition with other parties. Therefore, the political field always remains radicalized and polarized - this is also the view of international observers (OSCE 2018, 2020, 2021).

Parties find it quite comfortable to choose strategies based on revenge and annihilation of a competitor (Tsutskiridze 2021).

The more radicalized and toxic the political environment becomes, the more the political processes become distanced from the real needs of the public and over the years the dichotomy between the parties and voters has increased (Lebanidze 2021). As a result, broad problems, which are considered by the public to be the main challenges facing the country, remain outside the realm of political discussions (Graph 3). Hence, parties are not able to focus on the real national issues and deliver some kind of agreement from Georgia's political processes.

*Graph 3. Public Attitudes in Georgia. December 2021.*



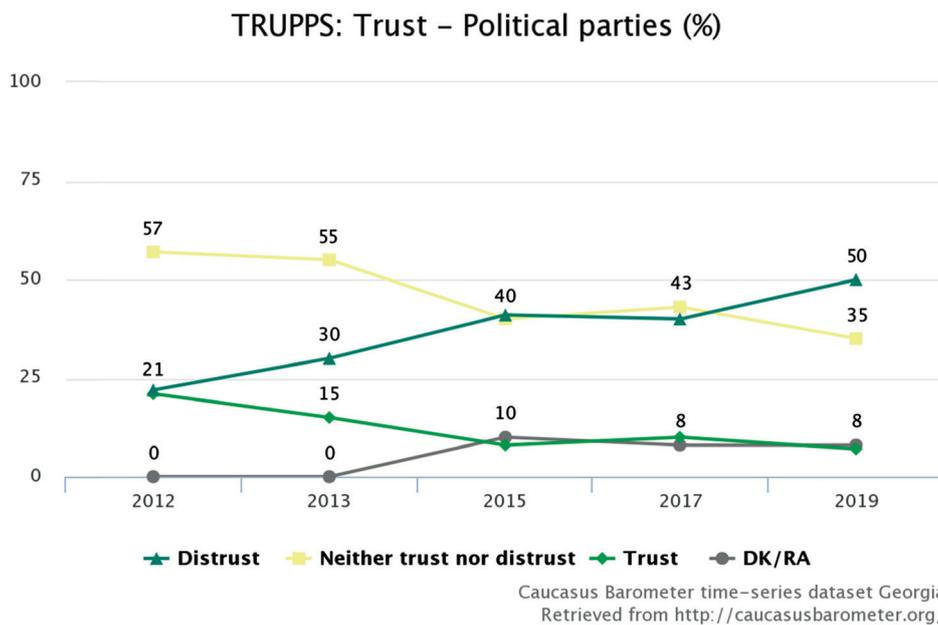
Source: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20December%202021%20poll\\_Eng\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20-%20December%202021%20poll_Eng_vf.pdf)

At the same time, in parallel with endless toxic and non-thematic political battles, parties do not have sufficient resources and goodwill to put more effort into building ideological identities. A number of research reports confirm that the ideological differences of the parties are slight, with rare exceptions. Parties do not frequently engage in thematic debates publicly (GPB 2021; Radiotavisupleba 2021) and therefore cannot draw clear distinctive lines among themselves in the eyes of the voters. The stated official ideological views of the parties may not match the needs of the voters (FES 2021). In Georgia, parties have little awareness that if their ideological view is in conflict with the voters' needs, they will lose supporters

and therefore the chance of electoral success (Tsutskiridze 2021).

It is also important that differences in views in political dialogue may deepen alienation between parties and voters will lead to some sort of polarization of trust, distancing voters from the political processes (Lebanidze 2021). In general, in recent years trust in political parties has decreased, while mistrust has increased (Graph 4). With disappointed voters, parties lose their trust to such an extent that even strong and stable parties are no longer able to change the government in a peaceful way, backed by the confidence of voters. This is a challenge for the building of a consolidated democracy.

**Graph 4: Timeline – trust towards political parties**



Source: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/TRUPPS/>

Therefore, the differing views on interparty relations create a number of problems for parties and their voters. Among these, of particular importance is the inability of politics to go beyond the boundaries of radicalisation. This is the reason why public needs are re-focused on other areas, which results

in a political system devoid of ideology. As a result, there is the risk that the already decreasing level of public trust in the parties is even further diminished and it becomes increasingly challenging to organise a healthy democratic political process.

## WHY IS RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN POLITICAL CLASS AND VOTERS IMPORTANT AND HOW THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED?

As this general picture demonstrates, there is a demand for interparty consensus among voters, however, contrary to the public's wishes, the parties cannot achieve productive and long-term consolidation. Occasionally discussions on interparty consolidation around particular issues and prospects of coalition government emerge. However, in the end, the parties' uncompromising, radical agendas, based on hatred, hinders any co-operation. To change this picture, and to ensure that parties get closer to their voters, it is important that they re-assess their strategies to reflect the views of the public and give much more attention to the demands of the voters.

In this process, it is important to correctly redefine the "red lines". Frequently, parties define their "red lines" at the negotiating table based on narrow party interests and pay less attention or completely ignore the most important national challenges (graph 2). In order for the parties to be able to break the deadlock of the political crisis as soon as possible, it is important that issues considered by the public to be the country's primary challenges become priorities in party agendas instead of narrow party objectives (Tsutskiridze & Kvashilava 2021). The fact that national problems, as perceived by the public, have remained the same for some years (Caucasusbarometer 2022), should indicate to the parties that the public demands that they give a stronger and more substantiated response.

According to the majority of the population, the prolonged disagreement between the parties should be resolved through the efforts of the parties themselves (34%) or with the mediation of any other internal actor (16%). Only 18% expect renewed engagement of Western actors (NDI 2022). This data should signal to the parties that the public demands more from them when it comes to the leading consensus-oriented political processes and less attention should be paid to party affiliations (Graph 4). For this to happen, parties need to acknowledge the existence of their opponents and the legitimacy of their opinions and refuse to take radical attitudes towards each other (Tsutskiridze & Kvashilava 2021) – this remains the demand of voters of every dominant party.

These findings question the assumption that the radical character of Georgian political polarization is the result of public demand. While the focus of disagreement between parties is directed towards constant oppression of competitors and their political destruction, it is important to the voter that this situation eases and the resources of the parties are focused more on cooperation. Therefore, Georgian political parties must soften their radical, uncompromised rhetoric, which is sometimes based on personal hatred. Otherwise, the chances of interparty agreement and consolidation for the Georgian political elite will be further reduced. This will lead to a constant dead-

lock of polarization and further distancing of the political class from the real needs of their voters.

In conclusion, despite the obstacles Georgia's political elite should undertake a fundamental review of its ideological views and practical strategies as soon as possible,

so that these respond as much as possible to what the public wants (Tsutskiridze & Kvashilava 2021). Otherwise, getting the country out of the deadlock of political crisis will continue to drag on, which will further delay the transition from transitional hybrid regime to a consolidated democracy.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recent surveys of public attitudes conducted in Georgia indicate that for the voters it is important that a precedent for successful cooperation between parties should be created to help improve the prospects for coalition governance. However, there are several factors that block parties from responding to public demands. These include the zero-sum principle of Georgian politics, the personality driven party agenda, parties disregarding the authority of mediators and the risks regarding voter attitudes for small parties affiliating with big parties.

This environment creates additional risks for the country: the political sphere becomes more radicalized and therefore parties cannot focus on the actual needs of their voters, widening the gap between them. In the end, the trust and confidence of the voters in the parties diminishes. In order for Georgian political parties to avoid the damaging impact of this tendency and to be able to respond to the needs of their voters, it is important that:

- Political parties approach the results of public surveys with more responsibility and based on that **plan qualitative and quantitative research specifically focusing on the demands of their voters**;
- Use the voters' preferences identified by the internal surveys as the basis for strategies on cooperation with other parties, which will legitimize the inclusion of voters' demands in the political agenda;
- Political parties should **reduce attempts to discredit public opinion research organizations** as much as possible and think through the damage caused by such actions;
- Based on independent research, parties should identify important aspects that, **according to their voters, will have a major role to play in interparty cooperation**;
- Based on research and effective strategies, **redefine their own "red lines"** and bring them closer to those of voters'; identify the issues voters will accept to compromise on at the negotiating table with competitors;
- Based on the preferences of the voters, actively start **creating ideological identities** to promote thematic discussions, which will create favourable conditions for successful interparty cooperation;
- Carefully study and use the experi-

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- ences of established democracies** to create precedents for successful interparty cooperation in Georgia;
- After re-examining international experiences and internationalization, work on identifying **who, according to voters, is an intermediary with the authority to achieve interparty cooperation;**
  - **The Ruling Party** plans a possible cooperation strategy with other parties for two reasons: to respond to the demands of its own voters and to respond to the demands of the entire population; understand that it is accountable to the population, as one whole constitutive part of the state;
  - **Ruling party** boosts work with those Western parties that are in a coalition government in their own countries, and learn from these practical experiences;
  - In the framework of cooperation with the ruling party, **opposition** tries as much as possible to act in accordance with thematic problems and practical needs identified via communication with the voters, which will introduce more or less radicalized positions in the political agenda.
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**WHAT DETERMINES THE PROMOTION  
OF YOUTH WITHIN POLITICAL  
PARTIES AND THEIR ACCESS TO  
PARTY POLICY FORMULATION?**

**TEONA ZURABASHVILI**



## 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 elec-

tion, 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.

## 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<sup>1</sup> 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 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 Multi-party 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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

## ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL PARTIES: DOES THE PLURALITY OF YOUNG MEMBERS MEAN QUALITATIVE CHANGES WITHIN POLITICAL PARTIES?

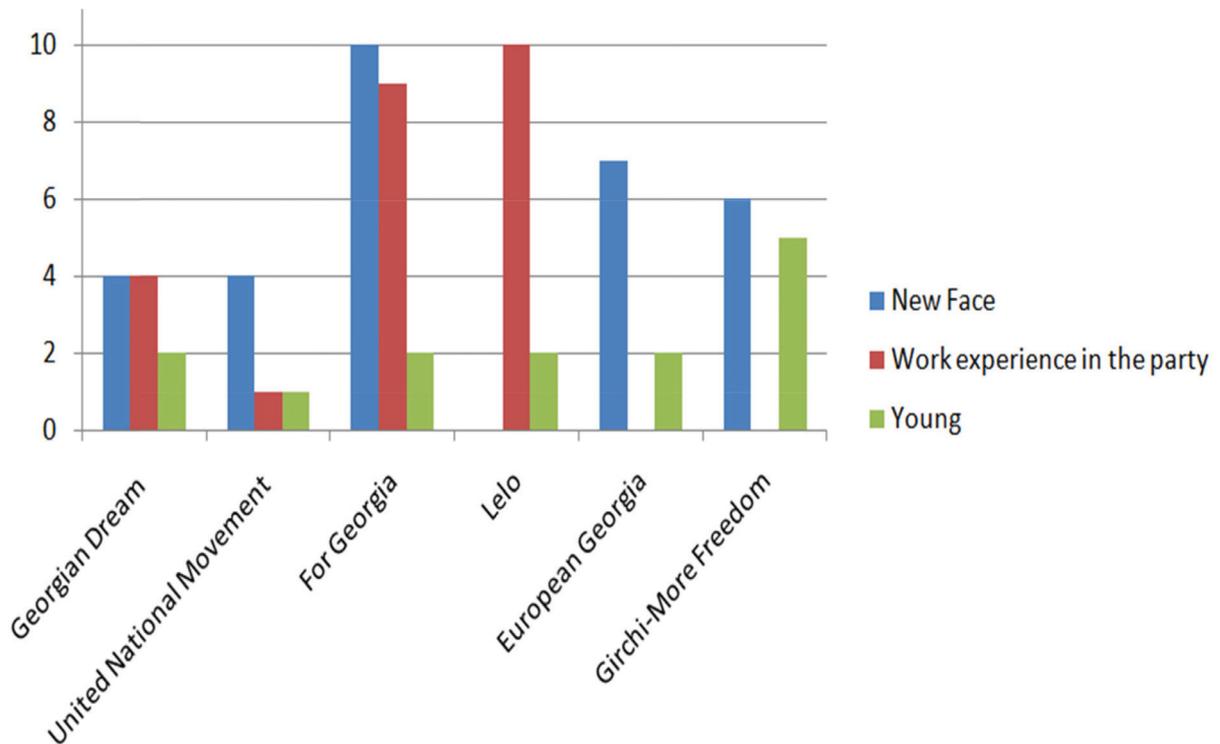
The analysis of the top ten candidates on proportional party lists submitted for the Tbilisi City Council outlined a few key trends concerning the extent to which political parties considered the demand of society for the renewal of parties for the 2 October 2021 municipal election. First, it shows that 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 peo-

ple 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)

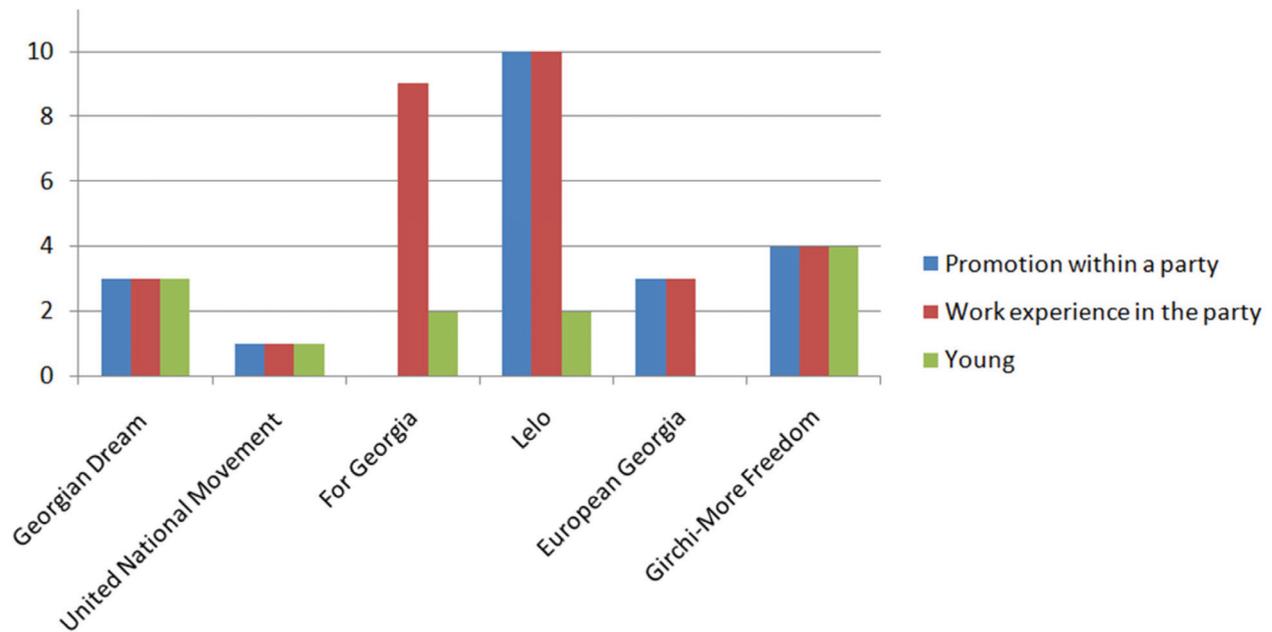


*Source: Author's analysis.*

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 anti-corruption 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, in-

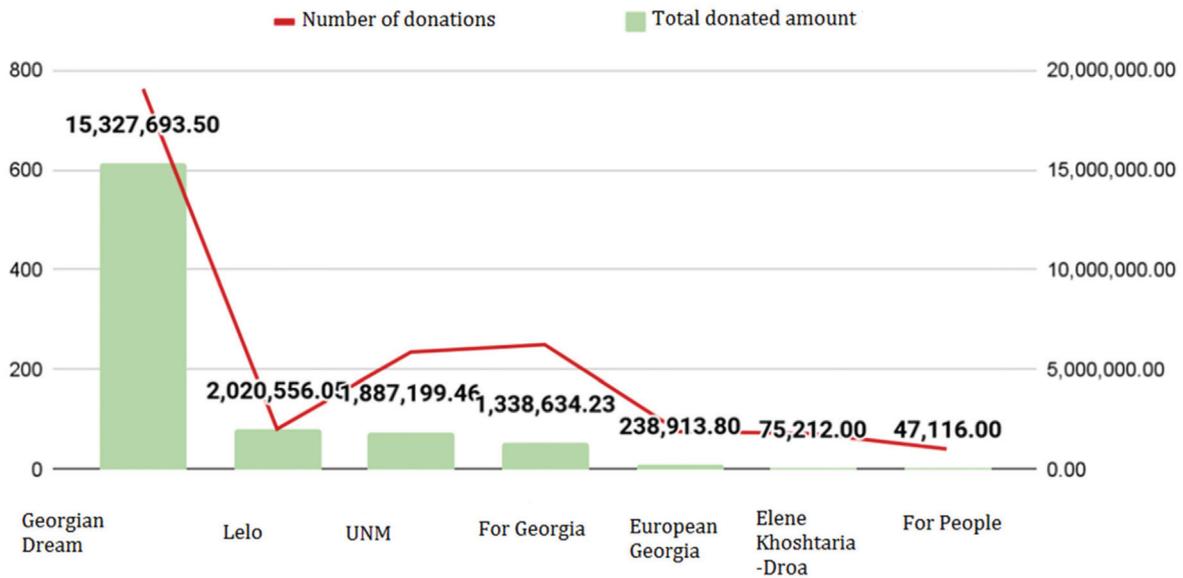
clusiveness and equal access to power within the political parties researched (Kvashilava, 2020) and highlight the differences between them.

### 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*



Source: The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). Accessible at: [https://idfi.ge/ge/political\\_donations\\_2021](https://idfi.ge/ge/political_donations_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.<sup>1,2</sup> 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<sup>7,8</sup>. 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<sup>11,12</sup>.

### Ideology

One of the key problems for Georgian political parties is considered to be the fact that the majority of them are created by business-

men, 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<sup>1,2</sup>. Young UNM party members spoke about a similar practice applying within their party, giving the examples of Ani Tsitlidze and Lavan Khabeishvili as proof<sup>3,4</sup>. 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<sup>7,8</sup>. Rep-

resentatives 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”) <sup>5,6</sup>.

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<sup>11,12</sup>. Likewise, according to representatives of European Georgia, those who make it into the party list are loyal to party ideology and principles<sup>9,10</sup>.

### 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<sup>1,2</sup>. 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”<sup>7,8</sup>. 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<sup>5,6</sup>.

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<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>. 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<sup>3,4</sup>.

## 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 di-

rection 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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**GEORGIA'S SWITCH TO A  
PROPORTIONAL ELECTORAL SYSTEM:  
HOW SHOULD POLITICAL PARTIES  
PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF  
COALITION GOVERNMENTS?**

**LEVAN KAKHISHVILI**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia's transition to a fully proportional electoral system creates a new set of dilemmas for Georgian political parties. In order to avoid the risk of instability, Georgian parties will have to engage in qualitatively different electoral campaigns, coalition negotiations, and show unity while maintaining their own policy profile. This policy brief urges Georgian political parties to start preparations immediately. Based on the analysis of the 2020 electoral campaign materials of the Georgian Dream and United National Movement parties uploaded onto their official YouTube channels, it can be seen that one in four campaign appeals

were negative and more than half of those contained character attacks. Parties will need to refrain from such virulent attacks in order to maintain the prospect of future collaborations. Drawing on empirical data and cutting-edge research on coalition governments, this policy brief elaborates a package of recommendations as an early warning for Georgian political parties and other stakeholders.

**Keywords:** proportional elections; party politics; coalition politics; electoral campaigns; negative campaigning

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2024 Georgia will hold its next parliamentary election. This election will be special in the history of the country because Georgian voters will elect their 150 representatives through a proportional vote. Electoral reform has been a persistent challenge in the process of democratization for Georgia. Differences of opinions have snowballed into protracted political crises, for which the best illustration is the protests that started in June 2019 and led to a full-blown crisis defined by the Georgian Dream's (GD) failure to fulfill its promise of electoral reform and the opposition's boycott of the 2020 parliament (see Kakhishvili 2021). This particular crisis was especially troubling considering that the political parties were unable to achieve a consensus, and when the European Union brokered an agreement this did not prove to be useful. The inability or unwillingness of Georgian parties to achieve a compromise-based consensus, when it is

necessary for the stability and advancement of the country, has received an increasing amount of attention from analysts in recent years (see Samkharadze 2022; Lebanidze 2021; Minesashvili 2021; Kakhishvili 2018). However, the implications of this challenge will be exacerbated following the electoral reform. Proportional voting leads to the inevitable possibility of coalitions in multi-party systems. In Georgia, although the largest two political parties – Georgian Dream (GD) and United National Movement (UNM) – represent the main powerhouses of Georgian politics, smaller parties have still managed to gather about 25 percent of the votes, which amounts to 24 mandates out of 120 proportionally allocated seats in the parliament (Civil Georgia 2020). Considering that it is only natural for dissatisfaction with the ruling party among voters to mount as their terms in office are continually renewed, the need for a parliamentary coalition to form

a government may arise even if the GD remains as the largest party. The possibility of coalitions requires the political parties to adjust their competition and campaign strategies to retain room for political maneuverability when it comes to finding coalition partners.

This policy brief builds on the premise that Georgian parties need to prepare themselves for the possibility of coalition government. Even though the elections are not coming up for a little over two years, the political parties

should urgently start preparations for a different style of electoral campaigning so that they do not find themselves trapped in their own rhetoric. The following section gives an overview of the reasons political parties should run qualitatively different electoral campaigns when they expect a possibility of coalition governments. This is followed by analysis of the 2020 electoral campaign to show how the current practice differs from what it ought to be. The concluding section elaborates final remarks and provides recommendations for the various stakeholders.

## WHY DOES THE POSSIBILITY OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT MATTER FOR GEORGIAN PARTIES NOW?

The tendency that proportional electoral systems favor multi-party systems emerged as conventional wisdom in the 1950s. This, in its turn, leads to a high likelihood of coalition governments. Because of coalition governments, opponents of proportional electoral systems including those in Georgia (see c'inc'aze 2020), often engage in fear-mongering about the potential for political instability, especially against the background of foreign threats. However, there is a mechanism that avoids such instabilities. Research on 420 cabinets in 23 countries across Europe between 1945 and 2015 has demonstrated that the risk of early cabinet termination in coalition governments is significantly lower if participating parties sign a coalition agreement prior to the formation of a government

(Krauss 2018). Furthermore, the longer and more comprehensive or detailed the coalition agreement is, the lower the risk of premature government termination becomes (Krauss 2018). These findings suggest that should there be a need for coalition formation in Georgia, parties should engage in a negotiation process to draft a coalition agreement allocating portfolios to participating parties. The resulting coalition agreement can constrain cabinet ministers and ensure that participating parties do not lose their agency over policy-making and that tight mechanisms are in place for monitoring and control (Moury 2010). This, however, creates new dilemmas for Georgian political parties which require urgent attention before the elections take place.

### *Competition and criticism versus the chance of future collaboration*

Firstly, on the one hand parties will need to continue competing against and criticizing each other but at the same time they

will need to ensure that they do not “burn bridges” and that there is still a chance of future collaboration even among the fier-

est competitors. “Burning bridges” will lead to instability and political crises. Therefore, Georgian political parties will need to act as mature and responsible European parties do. Research shows that in Austria, for example, coalition parties criticize each other with little restraint but they do refrain from burning bridges with potential partners by avoiding “virulent attacks” (Haselmayer and Jenny 2018). Political parties often have incentives to pursue negative campaigns to turn voters away from competitors. How-

### ***Electoral benefits versus policy motivations***

The second dilemma Georgian parties will face is the tradeoff between electoral benefits and policy motivations (Eichorst 2014). Essentially, this means that being in government, even if it is a coalition government, comes with returns in electoral terms but, on the other hand, coalitions require policy compromises to which political parties may not want to commit: such compromises have the potential to undermine a given party’s chances of gaining electoral support (Plescia, Ecker, and Mayer 2022). Until now, when such dilemmas have arisen in Georgia, Georgian parties have repeatedly chosen an uncompromising approach. Most recent illustration of this is the parliamentary boycott after the 2020 elections. This will need to change. It is easy to see political competition as a zero-sum game – an individual vote that parties target is indivisible and only one party can get it. However, coalition agreements and the process of crafting them are key in this context. Power can be shared and

ever, in proportional systems with a high likelihood of coalition governments, this strategy can be perilous for political stability (Haselmayer 2019). Therefore, one way for political parties to prepare for the transition to proportional voting is to pursue positive electoral campaigns. Georgian parties need to start this course of action immediately because their track record is not very promising – as shown below in section on the 2020 electoral campaign in Georgia.

portfolios within a cabinet can be allocated to more than one party. Research shows that parties do not tend to suffer electorally if during coalition design they do not compromise on the key policy issues important for their electorate (Plescia, Ecker, and Mayer 2022). Moreover, if a party establishes strong attachments with its core voter base, supporters will accept policy compromises (Plescia, Ecker, and Mayer 2022). The caveat is that Georgian parties, especially challengers, need to maintain a close ideological linkage with supporters. A recent research report has found that the GD is ideologically closest not only to its own voters compared to other parties, but also to the median voter (Kakhishvili et al 2021). Therefore, challenger parties, such as UNM, needs to get closer to their voters, but these linkages should go beyond personalized politics and clientelist networks and should take the form of programmatic or ideological connections.

### ***Showing unity to govern versus maintaining own policy profile***

Proportional electoral systems cause what has been labeled as “institutional friction” (Jones and Baumgartner 2005: 33) because

proportional systems lead to coalition governments which are constrained in their pursuit of policy changes. This happens because

the participating parties employ a range of control mechanisms to monitor their partners. Consequently, the coalition partners have to coordinate their activities with each other, make compromises, and show unity in order to be able to survive and function successfully (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). Showing unity, however, comes with caveats as the dividing line between the different ideological and policy profiles of partner parties is blurred. Therefore, it is equally necessary to maintain a distinct ideological identity. Research has shown that Georgian parties do offer voters differentiated policy options in their pre-election manifestos (Kakhishvili 2020) and that in the 2020 elections four distinct camps of political parties could be identified (Kakhishvili et al 2021). Georgian parties will need to sharpen these profiles so that they are able to maintain their individuality and not blend in with the co-

alition. Furthermore, this will be useful to make the transition from personal charismatic and clientelist linkages with voters, to programmatic ones. Programmatic linkage requires an alignment of parties and voters in terms of their policy preferences, which currently remains a challenge for Georgian parties to solve.

To sum up, the three dilemmas discussed here all arise from the need to form coalition governments, for which coalition agreements are an effective and well-tried instrument. However, to maintain integrity in the eye of the voter, Georgian parties need to avoid virulent attacks against each other. In the example of the 2020 electoral campaign the next section analyzes the extent to which the two largest parties in Georgia employ such attacks.

## HOW NEGATIVE ARE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS IN GEORGIA?

To evaluate the extent to which electoral campaigns in Georgia are negative, it is necessary to establish a basic methodological framework starting from the definition of the term. There are a number of competing definitions of negative campaigning but this brief adopts the most established definition: any criticism of an opponent is an act of negative campaigning (Geer 2006). Essentially, this definition puts the key emphasis on individual campaign appeals and sets them apart in terms of their direction: if an appeal is directed at an opponent, it is neg-

ative, whereas if an appeal is directed at the own candidate or party, it is positive. Consequently, not all negativity is harmful for democracy: electoral competition is unimaginable without criticism. This is why there is an important difference to be made: negative campaigning can be of varied grades (Haselmayer 2019). This brief differentiates two types of negative appeals: issue attacks or criticism and character assassination attacks, which are directed at the opponent personally and not at their policy performance (see Walter 2014).

## *Measuring negative campaigning in the 2020 elections in Georgia*

For empirical analysis, 57 videos were selected from the official YouTube channels of the GD and UNM, recorded and/or published during the two-month period of the official electoral campaign prior to the 2020 parliamentary elections. Of these videos, 47 were GD campaign material, while 10 videos were UNM material. This is a clear misbalance, but it is roughly in line with the campaign expenditures of the two parties. According to the Transparency International (2020) report, GD's campaign expenditure was about 3.26 times higher than that of the UNM, while advertising costs, which represented the largest category of costs for both parties, were 2.86 times higher for the GD

than for the UNM.

The videos analyzed included campaign ads and speeches at party rallies. In total, the material amounted to over three hours of video footage. In each video, every sentence or quasi-sentence was coded as either a positive or a negative appeal (see Walter 2014 on coding procedures). The latter, however, was further differentiated into either an issue attack or character assassination attack. Overall, these procedures yielded a total of 1439 coded units, of which 1159 or 76 percent were positive and 24 percent were negative (see Table 1). From the negative appeals, 53 percent were character attacks while 47 percent were issue attacks.

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the campaign materials analyzed*

Party	Analyzed videos	Ads	Speeches	Total count of appeals	Count of positive appeals (%)	Count of negative appeals (%)
<b>GD</b>	47	36	11	1187	993 (84%)	194 (16%)
<b>UNM</b>	10	3	7	252	166 (66%)	86 (34%)

*Source: Author's own analysis.*

### *Patterns found in the data on negative campaigning*

The data shows three important patterns. First, the challenger party – UNM – was more prone to use negative campaigning than the incumbent GD. This is in line with research findings in other countries as incumbents can more easily rely on emphasizing their performance during the past electoral cycle (see Haselmayer 2019). However, what the numbers do not capture is that the GD repeatedly compared the conditions in 2020 to those prior to 2012. This is indirect criticism of the opponent as the voter knows

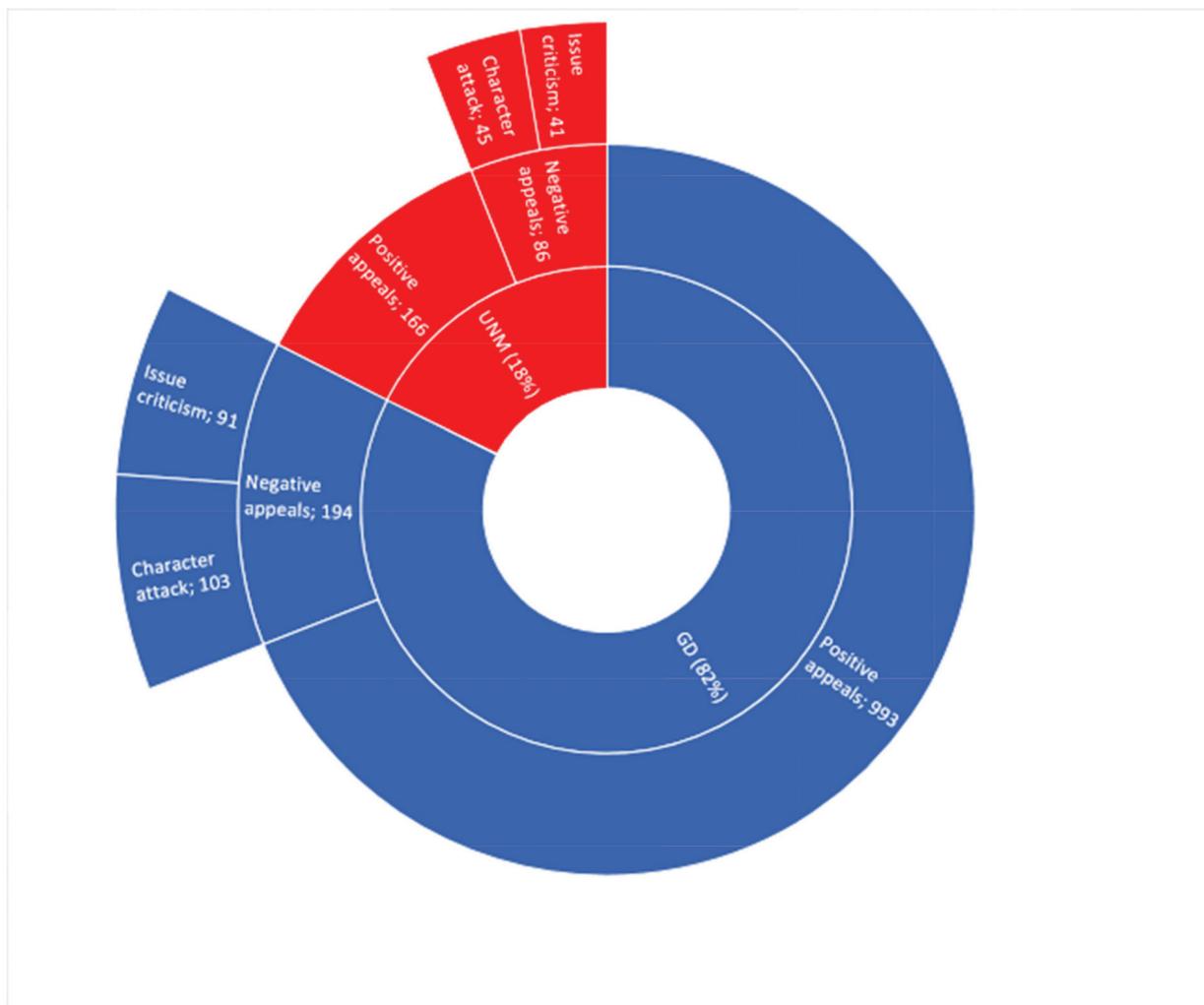
why the 2012 is used as a baseline. However, it is not a direct criticism and was not counted as negative campaigning.

The second pattern relates to the fact that both parties engaged in character assassination attacks more frequently than issue attacks. Throughout the data, the GD registered 103 counts of character assassination attacks and 91 issue attacks – all directed at the UNM. The respective numbers for the UNM are 45 and 41 – all directed at the GD (see

Figure 1). This trend is most harmful for the chances of collaboration between the parties because the voter will question the integrity of any party that decides to enter a coalition government with an opponent whose character traits they have targeted with negative campaigns. On the other hand, it is understandable why Georgian parties are doing this – such attacks drive voters away from the opponent. Moreover, opinion polls have shown that prior to the 2020 parliamentary elections Georgian voters reported that the following three factors were the most important when deciding who to vote for: trust towards specific members of political parties – 36 percent; electoral platforms and

promises – 25 percent; past performance of parties – 17 percent (The Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2019). These figures suggest that three out of four voters make their decisions based on these three factors. Conveniently, negative campaigning targets two of these three factors or 53 percent of voters: character attacks target voters' trust towards specific politicians, while issue attacks target opponent's past performance. It will present a dilemma in the future, however, as entering a coalition government with an opponent that a given party had actively tried to undermine is most likely to be seen as a lack of integrity in this party.

**Figure 1.** Structure of the GD and UNM appeals in the 2020 electoral campaign.

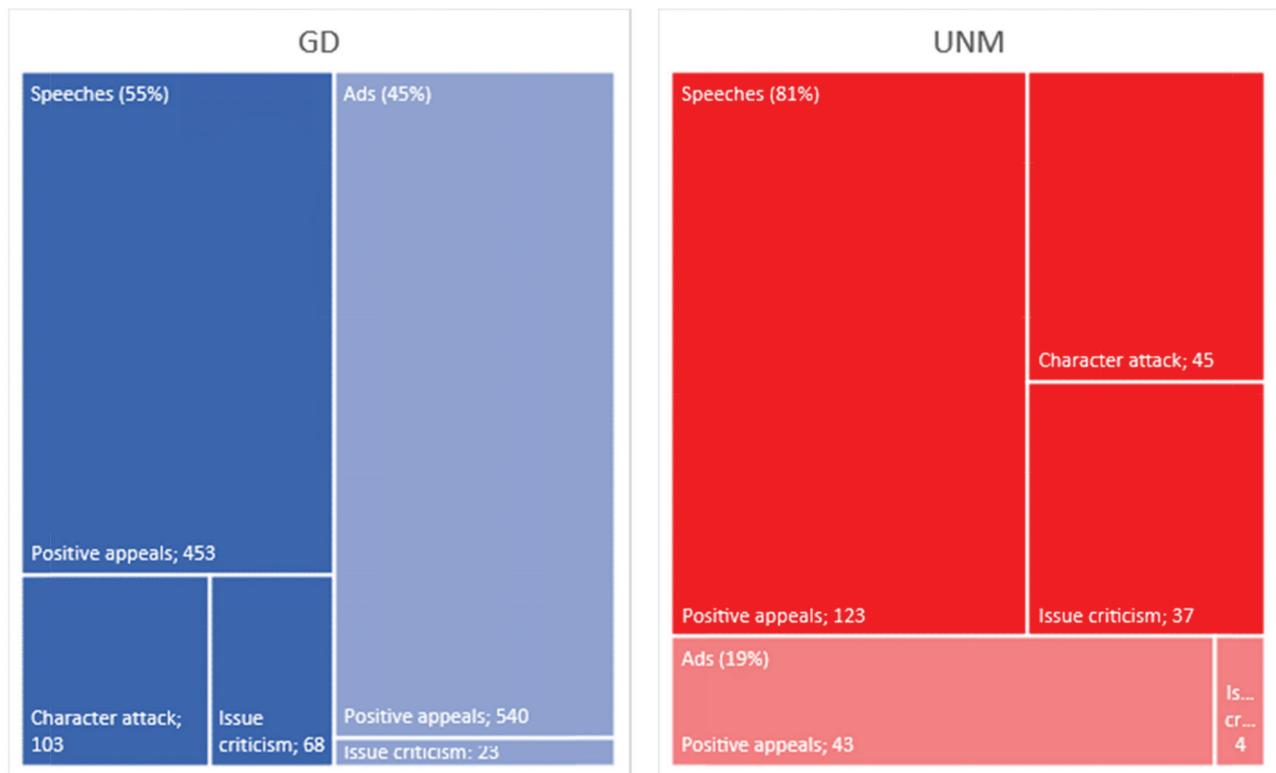


Source: Author's own analysis.

The final pattern in the data relates to the fact that the type of campaign materials influences the likelihood of employment of character attacks. All character attacks observed in the sampled data are found in speeches. Ads include only policy attacks and tend to be significantly more positive than speeches (see Figure 2). The GD ads include only 12 percent of all negative appeals found in

GD materials, which makes the GD ads 96 percent positive. Similarly, the UNM ads include only 5 percent of negative appeals and 91 percent of all appeals in the UNM ads are positive. This means that speeches are more problematic in Georgian election campaigns than political ads. Therefore, a clear area of improvement can be identified.

**Figure 2.** Structure of GD and UNM electoral appeals by campaign ads and speeches.



*Source: Author's own analysis.*

To sum up, it has to be emphasized that the campaign materials analyzed were created and distributed against a background in which 40 political parties signed a Code of Conduct for electoral competition aimed at ensuring they follow ethical norms and respect opponents and voters (Georgian Institute of Politics 2021). This means that in 2020 political parties should then have had

increased awareness of ethical principles compared to prior campaigns. However, the Code of Conduct did not prevent the GD and UNM from employing character assassination attacks as an instrument of negative campaigning. Continuing such practice is likely to jeopardize future possibilities of fruitful coalition talks.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Georgia's switch to a fully proportional electoral system from 2024 poses a challenge for the political parties as they are going to face dilemmas for which they have no experience. The Georgian parties will have to achieve a delicate balance between competition and criticism on the one hand, and the prospects of future collaboration on the other. They will find themselves on a seesaw between electoral benefits and policy motivations. Finally, once in a coalition government Georgian parties will have to walk a fine line between showing unity and main-

taining their own ideological identity. To achieve this, one of the most powerful mechanisms for parties will be coalition agreements made prior the formation of coalition governments. However, data shows that the level of negativity of the electoral campaigns pursued by Georgian parties is high, which means that should they enter coalition talks, voters are likely to lose respect for their integrity. Therefore, a set of recommendations are given below that could help Georgian parties better prepare for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2024.

### *For all political parties in Georgia*

- Submit to the ethical principles elaborated in the Code of Conduct for the 2020 parliamentary elections and use these principles as a guideline during electoral campaigns. This will establish a respectful but competitive environment before elections.
- Refrain from using character assassination attacks against opponents because such practices threaten the possibility of collaboration and coalition governments. Avoiding character attacks would reduce the level of radical political rhetoric and increase the possibility of smooth coalition talks more likely. Entering a coalition with an opponent does not have to compromise integrity of any political party.
- Intensify efforts to create a programmatic linkage with voters – such a bond will be lasting and make voting behavior more predictable. In other words, political parties would be able to create permanent support bases, which would not be connected to individual political leaders. This could happen by repeatedly prioritizing policy problems and offering voters solutions.
- Provide voters with positive appeals, which offer solutions to problems that are important to them. Such practices will ensure that during the electoral campaign political agendas are positive. This will also help identify the salient issues that any given party would not want to compromise during potential coalition negotiations.
- Cease clientelistic practices such as creating an elaborate network of local coordinators to ensure voter mo-

bilization and/or suppression. Such practices are extremely costly and a cheaper and more stable alternative

is a programmatic linkage based on a policy offer by the party responding to the preferences of the voter.

*For think-tanks, media, and other civil society organizations*

- Monitor the implementation of the Code of Conduct by individual parties to ensure that violations are uncovered and condemned.
- Monitor the rhetoric of political parties and candidates to identify the use of character assassination attacks and hold the respective political actors accountable for employing this as an instrument of electoral competition.
- Analyze and publicize programmes political parties are advocating in order to help voters identify their preferred policy and respective political party choices prior to the elections.

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**LOW ELECTION THRESHOLD: THE  
END OF BIPOLARITY OR A NEW  
CHALLENGE?**

**SALOME KANDELAKI**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The majority of Georgian parliamentary parties support a 2% threshold for the 2024 parliamentary elections, which will take place for the first time per a fully proportional electoral system. It is hoped that this will encourage more political pluralism and less bipolarity. Decreasing the threshold is also a part of the so-called Charles Michel agreement, the fulfillment of which is important for the country's democratization and European integration. Low election threshold is not essential for the ruling and the biggest opposition parties. However, it is detrimental for parliamentary representation of small parties, particularly in the environment, where it will be impossible to create party blocs for the future elections.

This paper discusses the prospects of various parties with regards to the election threshold and analyses the importance of the threshold in the development of a multi-party parliamentary democracy. The paper also discusses the potential positive and negative impacts of the 2% election threshold in the context of Georgia, and offers recommendations to reduce bipolarity and political polarization. Facts and arguments presented in the paper are based on a literature review, official statements of politicians and an analysis of interviews conducted with party leaders.

**Key Words:** 2% threshold, bipolarity, polarization, parliamentary elections, parties

## INTRODUCTION

Two-party governance has become the norm of Georgian politics over the last two decades, while the political landscape has narrowed for new or already existing smaller parties. Dominant political parties try to accomplish their objectives by using polarization strategies such as mobilizing voters through the demonization of the opponent and its exploitation discourse (Mccoy and Somer, 2019). Such an approach and discourse intensified polarization and created a political crisis. Political polarization has a negative impact on liberal democracy and divided the population into two rival camps (Arbatli and Rosenberg 2020). This became particularly evident after the 2020 parliamentary elections when small parties had to partner with the leading opposition party during the boycott of parliament, which threatened the individuality and political identity of these parties.

In order to solve the standoff, according to the Charles Michel agreement, signed on April 19, 2021, the next two elections should be held in a fully-proportional manner with 2% electoral threshold for supporting multi-party parliamentary governance. In July 2021, despite the ruling party annulling the agreement, Georgian Dream (GD) stipulated that they would have a firm position on the implementation of electoral changes and that these changes ensure not only a lower electoral threshold but also better control mechanisms and more accountability (ლაცაბიძე 2021). The Parliament of Georgia approved the constitutional changes to electoral procedures in the first hearing, with one of the provisions setting the threshold for the next parliamentary elections to 2% and proportionally distributing the mandates (რადიო თავისუფლება 2021).

However, in total three hearings are needed for final approval of the 2% electoral threshold for the next two parliamentary elections, which agreement has not been achieved yet.

This policy brief analyses what are the challenges of polarization in Georgia and how important it is to decrease the electoral threshold to 2% to decrease polarization, es-

tablish multiparty parliamentary democracy and to make sure that the electoral votes will be adequately reflected in the parliament. This paper also compares the perspectives of large and small parties on this matter. The work reviews the extent to which the lowered election threshold is related to reducing polarization and encouraging pluralism.

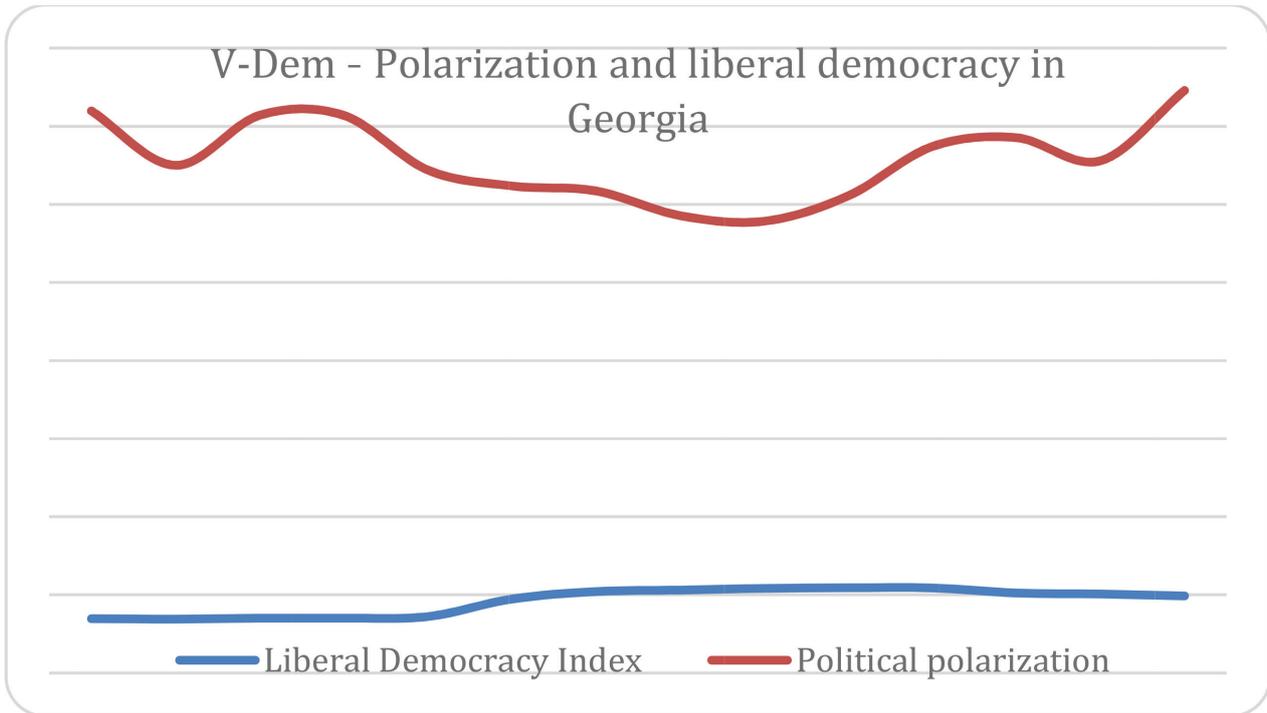
## MAIN FEATURES OF POLARIZATION IN GEORGIA?

Polarization has long been a problem in Georgia, and hampers the democratic development of the country. The political landscape is more an arena of rivalry instead of a space for constructive dialogue among parties. Endless political crises and extreme polarization limit the possibility of establishing multiparty democracy even more and hinders the development of a consolidated democracy in the country.

If we discuss the political polarization originating from the confrontation between the two dominant parties, it is important to note what the quality of democratic development in the country is and how ruling and opposition parties use polarization for constructive or destructive objectives (Somer and McCoy 2018). For most of the already established consolidated democracies like Georgia, the two-party system has

become a part of the political culture, where it is used by parties for constructive objectives. Using polarization to mobilize voters is characteristic for transitional, semi-consolidated democracies such as Georgia, frequently accompanied by autocratic tendencies (McCoy and Murat, 2019). In the case of Georgia, polarization is used as a tool to destroy the opponent (Nodia 2022). Based on the data of the Variety of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), in semi-consolidated democracies polarization demonstrates a negative correlation between the level of political polarization and liberal democracy rankings (Somer, McCoy and Luke, 2021). This is relevant for the Georgian case too, where we see the slight tendency that with the growing polarization, it is harder to improve the quality of liberal democracy. Diagram 1 shows that which in fact is decreasing more (Diagram 1).

**Diagram 1:** The 2008-2021 dynamics of the quality of polarization and liberal democracy in Georgia

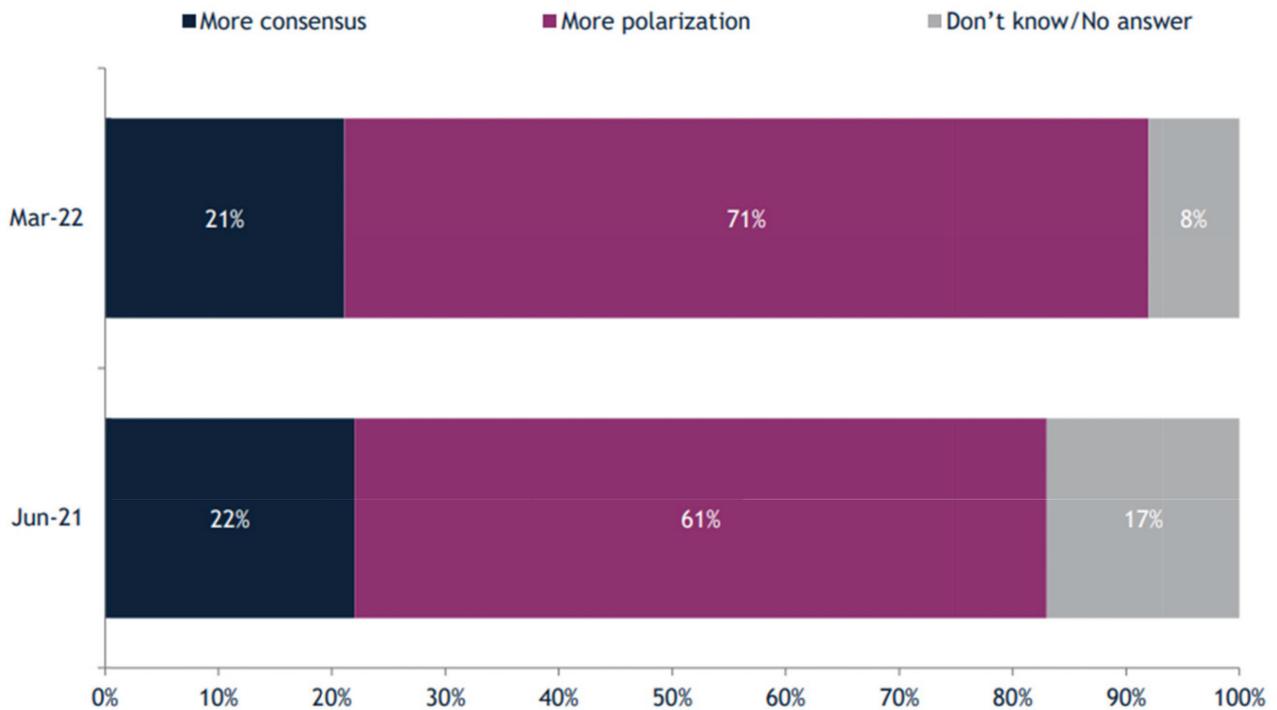


Source: Variety of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) 2008-2021, political polarization and liberal democracy indicator, Georgia. Available at: [https://www.v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/CountryGraph/](https://www.v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/)

The same dynamic can be seen in the data of Freedom House report 2022, with Georgia's overall indicator reducing from 3.18 to 3.07 compared to last year, which happened in parallel with political polarization (Freedom

House 2022). IRI public attitude survey also shows that 71% of the population (Diagram 2) thinks that politics in Georgia are directed more towards polarization than consensus (IRI 2021).

**Diagram 2:** *Would you say that our country's politics are moving toward consensus or more polarization?*

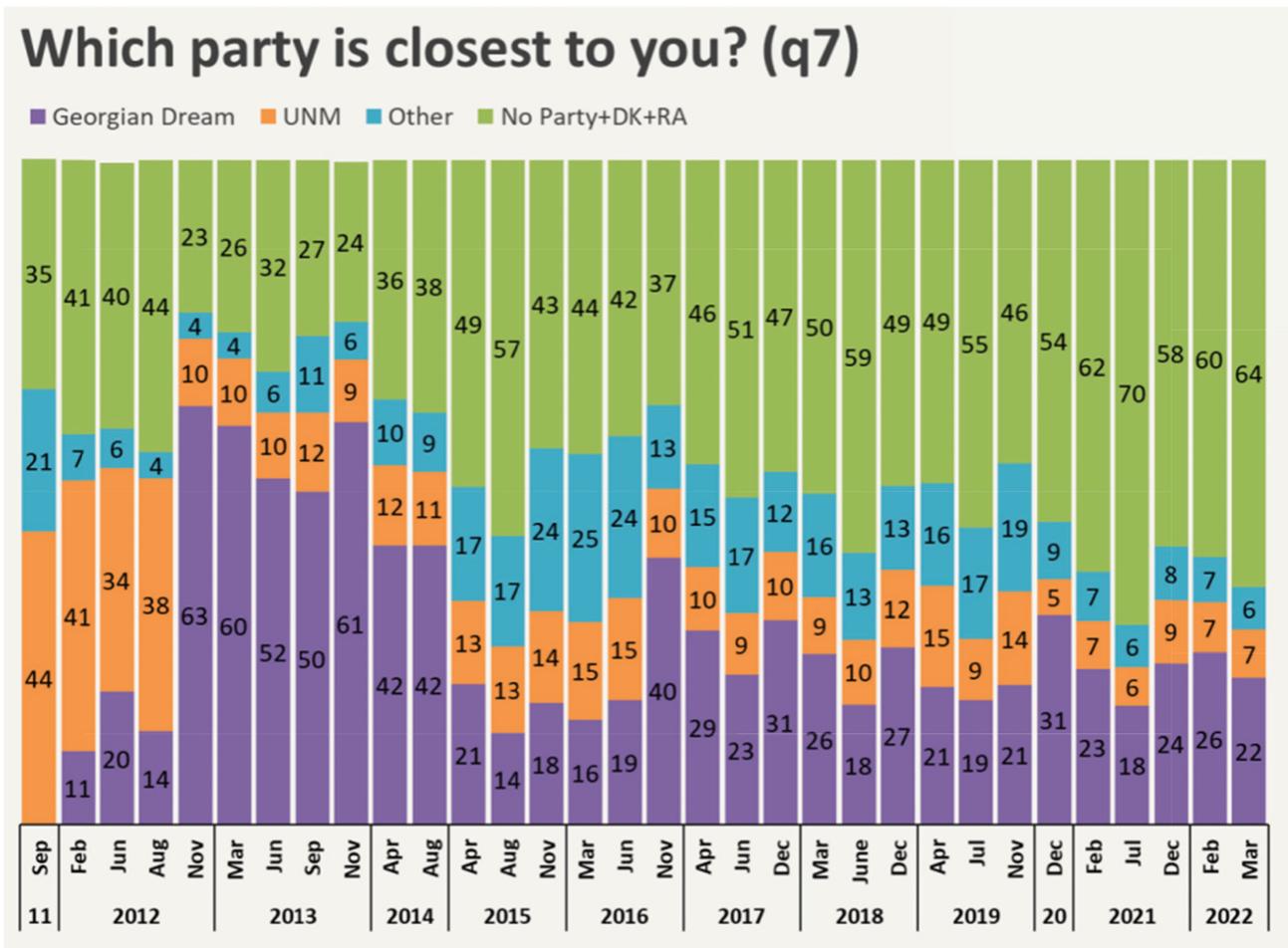


Source: IRI March, 2022. Public Opinion Survey, Residents of Georgia. Available at: [https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/IRI-Poll-Presentation-Georgia-March2022\\_Final.pdf](https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/IRI-Poll-Presentation-Georgia-March2022_Final.pdf)

Georgia, like other transitional democracies, is stuck between democracy and autocracy, at the initial stage of democratization and consolidation, which political scientists refer to as the gray zone (Carothers 2002). Georgia may be among the countries that are characterized by imaginary pluralism and dominant, closed politics and its trajectory on the path to democratization is still fragile

(Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2021). The latest NDI survey shows that political polarization and two-party dichotomy, had a negatively impact on the attitudes of the voters. Moreover, the number of undecided voters has increased up to 64% (Diagram 3). This outcome may be used by smaller parties as an opportunity to establish a 'third force.'

Diagram 3: Public attitudes towards parties in Georgia



Source: NDI, April 2022. Public Attitudes in Georgia. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_March%202022%20poll\\_public%20version\\_GEO\\_VF.pdf?fbclid=IwAR00JH7vuKrr0\\_HAARwa57lcYncDI4fO--b8UsAp1IK1r2SDcpYM5UBzcY0](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_March%202022%20poll_public%20version_GEO_VF.pdf?fbclid=IwAR00JH7vuKrr0_HAARwa57lcYncDI4fO--b8UsAp1IK1r2SDcpYM5UBzcY0)

## 2% VS 5% ELECTION THRESHOLD: OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE COALITION

In case of the failure of West’s mediation regarding lowering the election threshold from 5% to 2% for the next election, the opposition will have little opportunity to strengthen its position in the parliament without a coalition, especially considering that in the 2020 parliamentary elections, only the United National Movement was able to pass the 5% threshold (saqarTvelos centraluri saarCevno komisia 2020), while in the 2021 municipal elections, only the United National Move-

ment and former PM Gakharia’s party, For Georgia, were able to get more than 5% of the votes (Elections TV1 2021).

According to the interviews conducted by GIP with the constitutionalists, the election threshold is particularly important for the proportional election system. The general standard, as well as the recommendation of the Venice Commission, is a 3% threshold, however, a lot depends on the specific

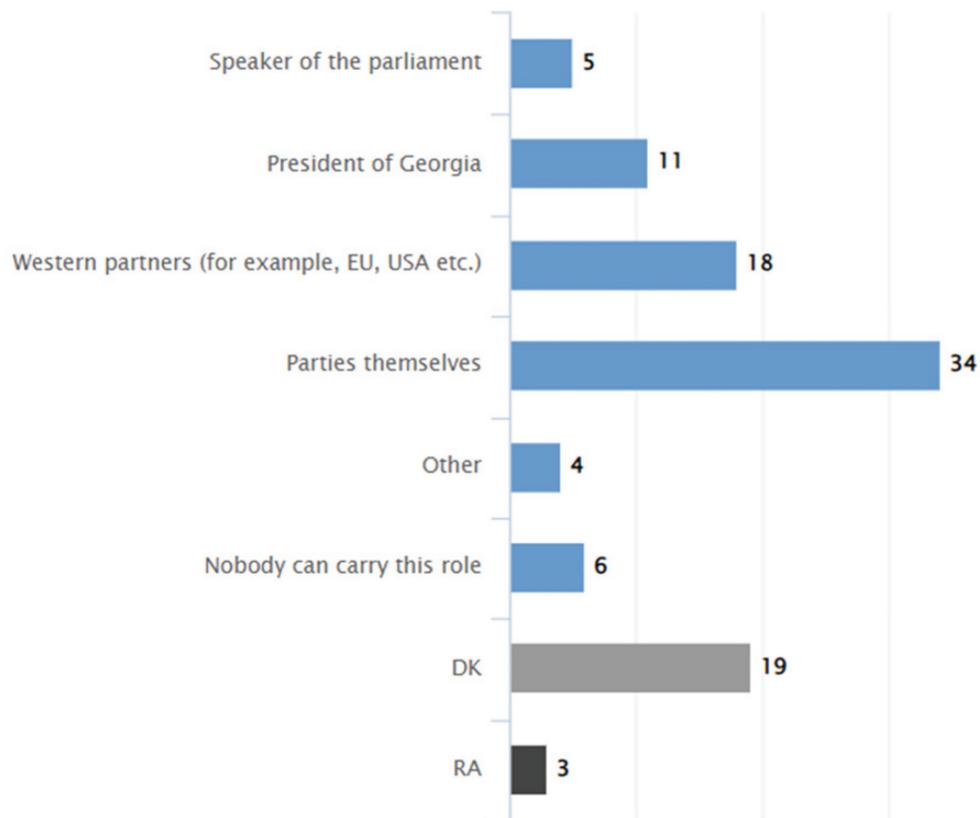
country and its political realities. According to the interviewed constitutionalists the 2% threshold minimizes the existence of one-party or two-party rule and is advantageous for small parties. In this case, it is not only important to support a multi-party system, but also to ensure the quality of their political influence, which would be more realistic by introducing a 2% threshold. Respondent claimed that “the lower the threshold is, the less disfigured is the political mosaic in the public.”<sup>i</sup> In a fully proportional system with a low threshold, getting 50% of the vote will be difficult for one party. In this case, the vote of every single member of the parliament will be decisive and will require forming a coalition. Therefore, in the view of a number of constitutionalists, “political life might be directed towards political consensus, not polarization.”<sup>ii</sup>

If the 2% threshold is not approved by the time of the next parliamentary elections, this will negatively impact the probability of the Charles Michel agreement being imple-

mented, and result in the further deterioration of the international image of Georgia on its path to European integration. Moreover, it will strengthen the opinion that support provided by the West to turn political parties in Georgia into stable democratic political subjects is ineffective due to the political class’ lack of readiness (Bader 2010).

The US Ambassador to Georgia also reminded the ruling party about the importance of the 2% threshold to encourage political pluralism and warned that one-party rule may create the risk of “tyranny by the majority”. Despite this, the fate of a lower electoral threshold is still ambiguous. According to a December 2021 survey conducted by NDI, 34% of the population thinks the best mediator between the opposition and ruling parties should be these parties themselves, while only 18% name Western partners for this role (Diagram 4). This may mean that the public clearly understands the political landscape and that negotiation between the two parties is impossible without the readiness of the political parties themselves.

**Diagram 4:** *Who would make the best moderator and facilitator in the dialogue between opposition parties and the ruling party? (%)*



Source: NDI, December 2021. *Public Attitudes in Georgia*. Available at: <https://caucasus-barometer.org/ge/nd2021ge/BFACBOPRP/>

On the one hand, the 2% threshold provides realistic opportunities for small parties to encourage genuine pluralist parliamentary governance; on the other hand, if Georgian Dream rejects the initiative on lowering the election threshold, opposition parties will have more motivation to establish a coalition. The question is who will they decide to form a coalition with, whether or not they will be able to unite on their own or try to defeat the ruling party with the largest opposition party, the United National Movement. The second option may seem more beneficial to achieve a common objective, however, there is a risk that in such a coal-

tion, the United National Movement will remain a dominant power; this will not put an end to bipolarity. However, in case 3% and 2% political parties unite, they may be able to pass the 5% threshold and support pluralism in the Parliament. Small parties lost similar opportunities during the 2021 elections (Zurabashvili 2021).

However, in the 2024 parliamentary elections, parties won't be able to unite in one bloc and will have to participate in the election under the umbrella of one party or establish and unite under a new party with values shared by all. The government justi-

fied the abolishment of election blocs with the argument that this will strengthen political parties. However, a number of lawyers have criticized this decision and think that abolishing election blocs will further complicate the cooperation among parties, which in the current political context when parties already have a hard time reaching a consensus on issues of national importance, will make it harder for them to cooperate during

the campaign period (Taliuri 2017). Taking into account the last election results, cooperating with Gakharia's party may look more beneficial for small opposition parties in order to establish a third force. However, the moral dilemmas these parties have against one another with regard to past experiences and incompatibility of values are important to consider. Particularly when talks will not relate to uniting under one election bloc.

## IS DECREASING THE ELECTORAL THRESHOLD THE ONLY WAY OUT OF BIPOLARITY?

Decreasing the election threshold and changes already applied to the election code is one among many mechanisms that may improve the pre-election and election process, ensure transparency, accountability, and competition among parties (საერთაშორისო გამჭვირვალობა). However, establishing electoral support for political parties also starts prior to the pre-election period. Prior to voting day, voters most likely support those parties they have more affinity with prior to the election campaign, while during the campaign period parties are merely mobilizing their voters, rather than gaining new supporters (Hansen and Kosira-Pedersen 2015). Therefore, leading political parties have to gain the support of new voters or retain them using minor incremental measures. This is a lot easier for the ruling party than for the main opposition party since the Georgian Dream has control over administrative resources. Moreover, it is easier for the ruling party to create an enemy out of the United National Movement, completely ignore other opposition parties, and retain polarization this way, which has

been advantageous for the Georgian Dream for years.

To overcome polarization, decreasing the threshold is not enough. Opposition parties, particularly small opposition parties, which in reality may gain significant electoral support in case of unity, must work on gaining electoral support in between the elections and try to bring their views closer to the public to gain their support. This is particularly important for newly established parties. Experience shows that even these small parties become the victims of discourse on polarization and do not have time or space to strengthen their party identities. This is why the number of undecided voters increases and public nihilism is best seen during the public attitudes survey between the elections. In order to end the polarization and establish a multi-party democracy, small parties can work on undecided voters and not on those with already determined political preferences. If the small parties use the same discourse of one of the two dominant parties deliberately or undeliberately, they

will even lose the votes they had gained before and will only further deepen the polarization in the light of which decreasing the

election threshold to 2% won't be enough to have any tangible effect.

## THE VIEW OF BIG AND SMALL PARTIES ON 2% ELECTION THRESHOLD

The majority of the political subjects that passed the lowered 1% threshold for the 2020 parliamentary elections support the 2% threshold for the parliamentary elections in 2024 (Table 1). Out of the nine such parties listed below, seven agree that the election threshold should be decreased to 2%. One considers that 3% threshold is enough, while for the ruling party the topic is still up for discussion.

In addition to these nine parties, leaders from Droa and Girchi – More Freedom as well as Gakharia – For Georgia were also interviewed. Representatives of these parties gained parliamentary mandates in 2021

elections, which some of them rejected. The founder of Droa was the former member of the party European Georgia, the founder of Girchi – More Freedom was the former leader of the party Girchi; While the founder of Gakharia – For Georgia was the former Prime Minister of Georgia from the ruling party - GD. One of the leaders of Droa views the decreased threshold with skepticism, unlike the Girchi – More Freedom leader says that the threshold should be lowered as much as possible. However, one of the leaders of Gakharia's party states that lowering the election threshold will support more pluralism but this will not be principally important for their party.

**Table 1: Parties' view of 2% threshold on 2024 Parliamentary Elections**

Political Party	Supporting 2% threshold	Against 2% threshold	Undecided	2020 Parliamentary Elections results
Georgian Dream Democratic Georgia			Party position is that 5% threshold ensures stability, while 2% threshold enables more pluralism. There is still time to discuss it. Party does not yet have a clear position. <sup>iii</sup>	48.22% (928 004 vote) – 60 mandates.
Bloc United National Movement - United Opposition Strength is in Unity	Not essential for the party, but will support it. <sup>iv</sup>			27.18% (523 127 votes) – 36 mandates
Bakradze, Ugulava, Bokeria - European	Party supports lowering the threshold, however considers the discus-			3.79% (72 986 votes) – 5 mandates

Georgia - Movement for Freedom	sions on threshold before holding snap elections as an “attempt to legitimize an illegitimate parliament”. However, specifically for this party, lowering the threshold is not among the most important issues. <sup>v</sup>			
Lelo - Mamuka Khazaradze	There is a risk that no other parties, except for the two parties, will be able to pass the 5% threshold. A lower threshold creates opportunities for new alternatives. <sup>vi</sup>			3.15% (60 712 votes) – 4 mandates
Bloc Giorgi Vashadze - Strategy Aghmashenebeli	It is important that people with all kinds of political views have their representative in the Parliament. <sup>vii</sup>			3.15% (60 671 votes) – 4 mandates
Droa		In Georgia, where parties are not generally stable and there is big money involved, 2% is very low. Therefore, the party backs the 3-4% threshold and increasing party support before the elections. <sup>viii</sup>		-
Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia		Party must be able to pass 3% threshold. (დემოკრატიული 2020).		3.14% (60 480 votes) – 4 mandates
Girchi	Party supports fully proportional and natural threshold (0.67%). Party must be allowed to have at least one member of the parliament. However, they agree on a 2% threshold per Charles Michel Agreement. <sup>ix</sup>			2.89% (55 598 votes) – 4 mandates
Girchi - More Freedom	In general, threshold must be natural. However, considering the current political realities, when it is practically impossible to agree on a natural threshold, the party supports lowering the threshold as much as possible. Smaller parties in the Parliament will help to end polarization. <sup>x</sup>			-
Aleko Elisashvili - Citizens	Lowering the threshold to 2% as opposed to having it at 5%, as it currently is according to law, is of utmost importance for the parties. (რადიო თავისუფლება 2021).			1.33% (25 508 votes) – 2 mandates
Shalva Natelashvili - Labour Party of Georgia	In the given situation, this is a mechanism enabling multi-party [system] and pluralism. Lower			1.00% (19 314 vote) – 1 mandate

	threshold weakens the high level of polarization in the country. <sup>xi</sup>			
Gakharia - For Georgia	This will promote political pluralism and democracy in Georgia. However, it will not be essential for the party, as they hope to cross the 5% threshold. <sup>xii</sup>			

*Source: Data is gathered from written interviews with party leaders and based on the public statements of the party.*

**Supporters.** The arguments of those supporting a lower threshold can be divided into two groups. One group sees a lower electoral threshold as a way to decrease polarization and an enabler of a multi-party system, while also encouraging the representation of diverse voters in the parliament. The second group supports the 2% threshold out of collegiality, however, does not see it as a principally important topic for their party or for improving general political environment.

**Opponents.** The arguments against the 2% threshold may also be divided into two groups. The first argument concerns obscure sources of funding and general instability of parties; the second argument states that if a party has the ambition of representing a portion of the public, it should be able to pass at least 3% threshold.

On the one hand, it is clear that by lowering the electoral threshold, more political subjects can enter the parliament and smaller parties will have to unite with other larger parties, especially when parties won't be

able to form blocs and they will have to unite with other parties at the expense of giving up their identities. While previously voters decided in favor of one party because they did not like the other, by introducing the 2% threshold, voters will make a decision not only based on their dislike of one of the two parties, but because another alternative party better reflects their values and views. However, lowering the threshold to 2% has its downsides too. With a lower threshold, the number of parties wanting to participate in the elections may increase significantly, which may allow destructive forces to participate in the process at the expense of obscure funding. Therefore, lowering the threshold will not be enough. It will also be important to closely control the sources of funding and the extent to which their activities and discourses are compliant with the constitution and whether or not it threatens the sovereignty of the country. As an example, these parties may be Alt Info and a number of ultra-right parties that have close ties with Russia.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the next two parliamentary elections, lowering the electoral threshold is clearly important for small parties, particularly given it will be impossible to create election blocs. While for the larger parties that do not have a problem passing the threshold, this decision will not be detrimental. However, considering the fact that deepening polarization is accompanied by endless political crises, diverse parliamentary governance should likewise be important for the bigger parties. At this stage of democratization, Georgia is stuck between democracy and autocracy, which is normally characteristic of transitional, semi-consolidated democracies. However, the longer the polarization drags on, the country will experience more

backsliding in terms of democratic development. If we consider the perspectives of the majority of political parties and constitutionalists, lowering the threshold during the next two parliamentary elections will bring more benefits than negative impacts. Yet it comes with challenges that may be balanced by comprehensive improvement of electoral legislation and a transparent election process. Lowering the threshold alone will not change the situation to enable multi-party parliamentary governance. For this to happen, it is crucial that parties start proactively communicating with voters, negotiating with other political parties and maintaining close ties with Georgia's western partners.

### *Recommendations for the ruling party:*

- Approach the provision in the Charles Michel document with responsibility, including through the **approval of the 2% threshold** in the next two parliamentary elections, **reducing political polarization and maintaining a positive international image**.
- Take **responsibility to start a constructive dialogue with opponents and reduce negative discourse** used for gaining electoral support, which deepens polarization and decreases the quality of the country's democracy.
- **Monitor the effective implementation of the changes applied to the election code** with Western partners and civil society and ensure a legal or political response for every transgression, which will reduce the criticism of opposition parties, public mistrust and enable the **build-up of a consensus-based democracy** while creating space among parties for **thematic discussions**.

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***Recommendations for the largest opposition party, the United National Movement:***

- Support renewal of parliamentary **discussions for the introduction of the 2% threshold** in order to **improve the political field and establish a competitive political environment.**
- For the next election, start a radical **renewal** of the party, reduce **negative discourse** towards the opponent and establish a **positive agenda** between the elections to create the **opportunity to unite the opposition.**

***Recommendations for smaller opposition parties:***

- In order to gain electoral support, smaller opposition parties should distance themselves from the **space of confrontation created by the two opposing poles**, highlight **party identity and values**, determine **party priorities** by close communication with voters and **formulate long-term action plans** that will help the population of Georgia make informed and comprehensive choices in the future.
  - Closely **cooperate with opposition parties with the closest value base** and in case joint [opposition] efforts become inevitable in the 2024 elections, determine in advance who it would be **more profitable to cooperate with**, considering the attitudes of the voters.
  - Focus on the **growing indicator/tendency of undecided voters** and identify the **reason behind this dynamic**; put special effort in **attaining the support of these voters** and mobilizing them between elections.
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### Information about respondents:

- i Constitutionalists, written interview, April 11 2022.
  - ii Constitutionalists, written interview, April 10 2022.
  - iii Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia, one of the leaders of the party, written interview, April 29, 2022.
  - iv United National Movement, one of the leaders of the party, April 22 2022.
  - v European Georgia, one of the leaders of the party, written interview, April 22 2022.
  - vi Lelo for Georgia, one of the leaders of the party, April 12 2022.
  - vii Strategy Aghmashenebeli, one of the leaders of the party, April 18 2022.
  - viii Droa, one of the leaders of the party, April 17 2022.
  - ix Girchi, one of the leaders of the party, April 22 2022.
  - x Girchi – More Freedom, one of the leaders of the party, April 18 2022.
  - xi Georgian Labour Party, one of the leaders of the party, April 21 2022.
  - xii Gakharia – For Georgia, one of the leaders of the party, written interview, May 9 2022.
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