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Politična polarizacija in njen vpliv na demokratizacijo Gruzije

Political polarization and its' influence on the democratization of Georgia

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2020
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Ključne besede: polarizacija, demokratizacija, strankarski sistemi, Gruzija

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The thesis examines the problems of democratization in line with the political polarization in Georgia. The thesis is concerned with a detailed analysis of political events from 1991 till today, portraying the constitutional, legal, and political dimensions of state-building. The goal of the thesis is to understand how much political polarization affects democratic consolidation/transition in Georgia. The finding of the thesis is that polarization in Georgia has always been part of politics. However, it took greater meaning since 2012. The confrontation between the Georgian Dream party and the United National Movement exceeded the politics into the "parliamentary blockages" and "street politics" The verbal and physical violence against UNM party leaders and their supporters became frequent in the run-up of elections. The hostile political environment strengthens the one-party rule and clientelistic relations among party leaders and greater society. Politics does affect the business and economic sectors that influence poverty and inequality. Simultaneously, polarization has a spillover effect on media and social environments. The latest political developments in Georgia indicate that Western Allies pressure can be the only force to decrease polarization by adopting a new electoral system that can foster the development of functional democracy in Georgia.

Key-words: Polarization, democratization, party-systems, Georgia.
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List of Abbreviations

Cesko Central Election Commission of Georgia
DRI Democracy Reporting International
EU European Union
GYLA Georgian Young Lawyers Association
IDFI Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
IDPs Internally displaced persons
IFIs International Financial Institutions
INGOs International Non-Governmental Organizations
MNCs Multinational companies
NATO North Atlantic Treaty Association
NGOs Non-Governmental Organizations
NLPG National Parliamentary Library of Georgia
ODIHR Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
TI Georgia Transparency International Georgia
UNM The United National Movement
WWII The Second World War
1. INTRODUCTION

The political polarization is one of the biggest democratic challenges in the modern era. According to Bétoa, Politics since WWII has never been so polarized all across Europe. He argues that electoral polarization in Europe has never been this high since the 1950s. He puts affected countries into two groups: those who were challenged by immigration (Austria, France, the Netherlands, Germany) and economic crisis (Spain, Greece, Cyprus) while post-Communist Europe followed the same path of rising polarization. (Bétoa, 2019) The polarization and democratic backsliding, or in other words, democratic downgrading, have its conflictive aspects for analysis.

According to Milan W. Svolik, democratic breakdowns come into two forms: executive takeovers or military coup. In most cases, executive takeovers are achieved through democratic norms, for instance, elections that is the case in Georgia. The most prominent examples are the victory of Hugo Chaves and Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, Vladimir Putin in Russia, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey. (Svolik, 2019) The Presidential elections won by the far-right populist candidate, Jair Bolsonaro, made Brazil possibly enter the polarized politics phase. Even if, elections are free and fair, it does not automatically imply the establishment of a functional democracy. In Egypt, in 2011, the defeat of President Hosni Mubarak in “free elections” led the country into violent attacks between Islamic forces and their opponents. (Carothers & O’Donohue, 2019)

According to scholars, the political split between the ruling and the opposition parties can lead to societal cleavages. For instance, the collapse and formation of traditional parties in Bolivia caused conflict on issues of identity and culture. Similarly to Bolivia, polarization influenced dispute over socio-political factors of identity between Hindu nationalism and pluralism. Arab Spring bringing more democracy into the Middle East perpetuated further spread of polarization. (ibid, p. 2-3)

Nevertheless, the political regime, be it democracy or authoritarian, severe polarization has gained its political meaning in Sub-Saharan Africa over the last decade. For instance, in Kenya, tribal groups try to pursue their political power into an extremely polarized environment, especially during election times. The political confrontation between Bashar Al-Assad and his opposition lead the country into a bloody civil war that changed not only regional but international politics over the last few years. (ibid, p. 3) The concentration of
power in Turkey, Brexit, and rising populism in Germany and France are examples of political polarization. The multiple case studies show that no matter the regime in a country, polarization diminishes existing institutions and is a threat to democracy in its nature. However, in post-communist Europe, countries notably differ in their political and historical legacy. Some of them, such as Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and the Czech Republic, had at least some sort of democratic history before entering the soviet bloc. Thus, other post-communist states of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine with much less democratic experience have a rising trend of polarization from 2000 till today. (Bértola, 2019)

It is crucial to notice, Georgia is facing polarization during the transition phase, whereas other electoral democracies in Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Poland, Turkey, and the United States have similar cleavages. However, more in-depth contextual analysis can give detailed information regarding the consequences of polarization, which is a severe risk to democracy in transitional countries like Georgia. Which aspects of political, social life can be damaged, and in the end, can somehow political polarization be avoided. (Bértola, 2019)

1.1 Research questions

Georgia is a developing country with a controversial historical experience and struggle since the collapse of the Soviet Union to become a functional democracy. Alongside numerous political cleavages, the polarization of the political sphere embedded into the democratization process of Georgia. From 2016 to 2018, Georgia was named as one of the most polarized countries by OSCE, European Union, the Council of Europe, and NATO. (GYLA & DRI, 2018) Personalized politics, negative campaigning, and demonizing of the opponents have reached its peak in Presidential elections in 2018. (Nai, 2019)

In the thesis, democratization is linked to institutional, legal, and constitutional development. Moreover, in literature, economic, social, and media environments are believed to the potential contributing factors as well as affected areas of polarization as these spheres are not mutually exclusive. To provide comprehensive analysis, polarization is outlined as a gradual process taking place in Georgia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this sense researching the historical background of Georgian democracy is believed to be a crucial part of the thesis. To answer the mentioned issues, the thesis will have main and one additional research questions.

Main question: how does political polarization affect the Georgian democratization process?
Research Question 2: Does political polarization in Georgia have ideological determinants or tends to manipulate social feelings, especially during/in-between elections?

1.2 Research methodology

The thesis uses the case study method with primary and secondary data analysis of legislative documents, interviews, speeches, statistical data, and literature review on polarization processes in the world, under the literature on democratization concerning liberalization and democratic consolidation in Georgia. To establish the legal framework of Georgia, an in-depth analysis of the Constitution of Georgia is provided with the historical outline.

The case study method portraits the Georgian democracy and mechanisms of state-building. The discussion is based on international organizations' reports such as Freedom House, and the Venice Commission. To describe the historical development of Georgian democratic status quo analysis of both local and international scholars will be presented. While trying to understand the level of political polarization in Georgia and its consequences, reports from most prominent NGOs will be overviewed. These organizations are a vital part of Georgian democratic development and act as watch-dogs in the country.

The descriptive method of analysis in line with the statistical information allows illustrating the social attitudes and emancipative values in Georgia that are far more important for the consolidation of democracy. To measure the societal and media polarization, public opinion polls conducted by various research centers are analyzed. (Caucasus Barometer-The Caucasus Research Resource Centers; National Democratic Institute Georgia – Public opinion polls; World Value Survey, International Republic Institute Georgia – Public opinion polls)

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of 10 chapters.

The first – introductory chapter overviews the main thoughts in academic literature and political examples of political polarization as a phenomenon. The primary and additional research questions are presented, as well as the methodology and the structure of the thesis.

The theoretical framework around political polarization and democratization is presented in the second chapter. In this part of the thesis, main academic theories regarding political and societal polarization are discussed, different scholarly articles concerned with Elite and Mass level polarization are examined. Additionally, the term of severe polarization is presented
with its possible adverse effects on the country level. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on democratization theories, particularly ones of political liberalization, institutionalization, and consolidation. The rationale between democratization and transition is established, pointing to the limitations and challenges of democratic change in different contexts.

The third chapter moves on to the main case study of Georgia, starting to analyze the Georgian political system in which Georgia's politics and statehood building is performed. First, the thesis looks at the Constitution of Georgia (its latest version) regarding relations between branches of the government. In this light, the constitutional revisions of 2017 are particularly crucial that changed the country from Presidential to Parliamentary republic. The thesis revises the reports of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (VENICE COMMISSION), Transparency International Georgia (TI), Institute of Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), and academic articles on the topic.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the logic of Georgian political landscape first alongside the historical analysis embedded in the discussion dating back to the creation of the independent republic of Georgia in 1918, the first Georgian Constitution of 1921, followed by Georgian Annexation by Soviet armies in 1921, and establishment of Georgian Soviet Social Republic. The political events taking place since the collapse of the Soviet Union regarding democratization is presented in a way to explain the logic of politics in Georgia, regime transition, and main challenges over the last few decades.

The next chapter looks at the current level of political polarization in Georgia. Its main determinants, actors involved, and methods used by them to achieve individual goals. The chapter looks at the latest political developments in Georgia regarding the confrontation between political parties speculating to foreseeable changes into the nearest future. The thesis also examines ongoing political debates on the proportional election system for the upcoming parliamentary elections in autumn 2020. As long as the thesis will be defended beforehand, it only aims to suggest the election's visible developments.

The sixth chapter considers the consequences of political polarization on more significant matters such as informal governance, corruption, use of administrative resources, and electoral campaigning. The final part of the chapter is devoted to reflecting on economics, such as the business sector in polarized politics, income inequality, and poverty. Additionally, social factors, attitudes towards the pillars of democracy are provided.
Then the thesis turned to other possible forms of polarization: Societal and Media polarization. The logic is developed in a way to understand the interdependence of those two issues with political polarization.

The eighth chapter gives the main remarks of the thesis, answers research questions, and concludes with the recommendations for the democratization of Georgia.

Slovenian Abstract is in the ninth chapter.

The last chapter shows the list of references used to write the academic piece.
2. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The conceptualization of polarization

The political polarization is a state in which political parties differ remarkably in their agendas, and political preferences are not able to find common ground for executive functioning. By analyzing global trends, political polarization illustrates radically negative consequences, diminishing the democratic values, and weakening political institutions. It influences further hatred and intolerance in society resulting in robust backsliding of the state on the democratic scale. (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019)

The classical works on political polarization suggest that polarization is an ideological distance between parties creating two extremes in the political arena, sometimes erasing the center from politics. Studies concerned with these concepts try to explain polarization on the elite level. Such scholars are far more interested in legislative procedures in polarized societies. (Sani & Sartori, 1983) According to this traditional school of thought, polarization is a result of electorally successful political parties (communists, fascists) that often bring high levels of instability and collapse of the state. (Bértoa, 2019)

However, in 21st-century, when polarization is one of the determinants of democratic backsliding, authors focus on the mass level of analysis concerned with questions such as: how do people articulate their preferences on ideological scale among extremely homogeneous political parties? (Abramowitz, 2010; Campbell, 2016) Here comes another question: is political polarization necessarily connected to the ideological aspects such as left-right or has it transformed in other forms of social life starting from “globalist/cosmopolitan versus nationalist; religious versus secular; urban versus rural; traditional versus modern cultural values; and participatory versus representative democratic models” (McCoy, Rahman & Somer, 2018, p. 20)

Compared to the 20th-century left-right confrontation, issues that divide people worldwide are more comprehensive and sophisticated. For understanding the concept of polarization, it is essential to move from the ideological definition of political polarization, emphasizing the political distance between the politicians and citizens. Political polarization has its “rational nature” and “political use” In other words, the average difference in values among society is
not perceived as a positive phenomenon; instead creates two antagonist groups “Us versus them.” Intergroup conflict dynamics tend to enlighten the major two opposition groups in society trying to change the fundamental standards and rules of polity that result in “modernized democracy” (McCoy, Rahman & Somer, 2018)

Though academic literature does not provide many arguments for positive outcomes of political polarization, in the democratic regimes, it can lead to further competition between strong parties, enhance them to achieve their political preferences and agendas established in society. Some polarization levels can be beneficial in new, emerging democracies to stabilize the political environment and build more robust party systems. (Lupu, 2015)

Hence, polarization rises when the formerly marginalized societal group gains political unity and mobilizes grassroots of social, cultural, and ideological cleavages. When do such developments become critical for democratic stability? Answers to this question are embedded into several factors that could also be determinants of polarization in a broad sense. For instance, studies suggest that most of the countries face similar patterns of political changes once they experience severe political polarization. It is still interesting to argue whether the context of a country matters and if polarization differs according to the historical experience or regime type.

**The severe political polarization**

The severe polarization occurs when trust in institutions decreases, opposing parties do not engage in communication, legislative procedures are failing, simultaneously involving citizens in violence. (McCoy, Rahman & Somer, 2018) The latter is called societal polarization. In Venezuela, societal polarization exceeded the general public entering schools, families, churches, and small communities. Furthermore, in the United States, people started choosing their new houses according to the political preferences of their inhabitants. In Turkey, supporters of different parties tend to isolate themselves, cutting all kinds of communication. (Corporate Social Responsibility Association of Turkey, 2016)

In the divided communities, identity issues gain more meaning letting populist leaders take advantage of the situation. Politicians usually prioritize the negative campaigning to attack the opponents. They create an enemy icon - God vs. Devil,” which in turn contributes to
dehumanization, demoralization, and distrust of everyone from the other group. It does not only portrait the distorted reality but excludes everyone who holds the middle ground in society. Everyone is forced to choose between camps and stick to it. (McCoy, Rahman & Somer, 2018)

Somer explains the group dynamics developed during ethnic polarization in former Yugoslavia. The cascade model describes how the figure of certain people creates an extreme version of reality while attracting those having similar views. By this logic, larger the number of people is in a particular group, and balance will be in favor of them. Their political and social believes will be translated into their actions against everyone out of their group. Such processes in ethnically diverse countries can lead to conflicts as it has happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Somer, 2001)

2.2 The conceptualization of democratization

Democratization is a historical process, gradually taking place in specific conditions that determine the type of democracy. The most contemporary wave of democratization started in Europe and Latin America in 1974. This process was characterized by socio-economic factors of transition. Study on 30 countries situated in southern and Eastern Europe, South and Central America, and the former Soviet Union indicate that under the term democratization, two significant concepts should be combined: liberalization and consolidation. (Schneider & Schmitter, 2004)

As defined by Schneider and Schmitter, political liberalization is “the process of making certain rights effective that protect both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties” (Schneider & Schmitter, 2004, p. 60) In other words, it includes individuals being able to form any connections freely respecting the rule of law.

Liberalization does not automatically allow citizens to engage in political processes and hold a significant position. To experience this right effectively, there has to exist the political consolidation. In our case, consolidation of democracy means accounting citizens the power to elect their representatives in governmental positions in free and open elections. Moreover, it is strategically vital that consolidation involves the institutionalization of norms and
practices of governance both for the electorate and political parties. (Schneider & Schmitter, 2004) There is no formula for political consolidation that can work in one country or the other. The most frequently used analysis of democratization is the Freedom House index. The index constitutes categories such as the electoral process, civil society, independent media, and governance. In addition to this, the rule of law (constitutional, legislative, and judicial framework) corruption (money in politics) and economic liberalization are additional components of democratization. (Freedom House, 2003)

To formalize all the above mentioned: “Regime consolidation consists in transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms and contingent solutions that have emerged during the uncertain struggles of the transition into institutions, that is, into relationships that are reliably known, regularly practiced and normatively accepted by those persons or collectivities defined as the participants/citizens/subjects of such institutions; and in such a way that the ensuing channels of access, patterns of inclusion, resources for action, and norms about decision making conform to one overriding standard: that of citizenship” (Schneider & Schmitter, 2004, p. 62)

In practical terms, democratization is merely connected to the transition from one regime type to another. For instance, it was moving from autocracy to democracy. In Thailand, it was a process of transformation from absolute monarchism. Over 70 years since the 1932 political and social forces have changed dramatically. The monarch is no longer seen as a sacred persona. (Winichakul, 2008) Thus, the transition is a timely process that should include moving from the “rule of one person” to the “rule of people.” To achieve the positive effects of transition elites from the previous regime should be changed entirely.

However, in most countries where the transition occurs, representatives of former governments do not always wish to lose their political influence for the goodwill of democracy. (Schmitter, 2018) The political consolidation should include: “neutralization of anti-system movements, stabilization of electoral rules, party systems, economic and structural stability, and an independent judiciary.” (Dominioni, 2014, p.5)

To frame the political landscape in Georgia, now I move to discuss the constitutional and electoral framework in which political parties in Georgia work. I will try to answer the
question of whether the legal framework contributes to the total seize of power by each ruling party and, consequently, to the rise of political polarization in the country.
3. CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL FRAMEWORK OF GEORGIA

As a result of the constitutional amendments adopted in 2017, Georgia moved from a presidential republic to a parliamentary model. Reform of the parliamentary democracy was part of the ruling Georgian Dream party's electoral program in 2012. It should be outlined that the Georgian Constitution has been a tool to maintain power by ruling parties over the years.

For instance, in 2008, right before the Parliamentary elections United National Movement party unilaterally changed the electoral system increasing the number of majoritarian seats to 75 and decreased proportional seats to 75. These changes were in line with the fading popularity of the UNM Government. However, it made UNM win the majority of seats in the elections. Similarly, in 2012 during the run-up to the Parliamentary elections to eliminate the opposition from the new Government, the UNM pushed for a more increased number of majoritarian seats aiming to sustain the political power. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, pp. 795-799) Thus, these changes benefited the newly formed Coalition of Georgian Dream to win elections with the constitutional majority that continues to prevent the democratization process in Georgia.

According to the latest constitutional amendments, the powers of the President were primarily restricted, the rule of direct election of the President was changed, and the redistribution of powers between the presidential, executive, and legislative branches were established. At the same time, for the first time, a record has emerged regarding the transition to a fully proportional electoral system, which should aim to strengthen democratic principles in the country. In this chapter, I will discuss in detail the legislative framework in which the Georgian state operates. The analysis intends to illustrate the extent to which this Constitution contains risks of political polarization.

The majority of the members of the Constitutional Commission, which was created in 2016, were representatives of the ruling party - "Georgian Dream,” or their supporters from the government and the Constitutional branches. (TI Georgia, 2017) Local and international organizations working in Georgia were involved in the process, whereas significant importance was paid to the Venice Commission's reports.
The particular drawback of the discussions was the boycott of President Giorgi Margvelashvili, which was caused by disregarding his recommendations and his appointment as the Commission's Chairman. It should also be outlined that in the statements made by the ruling Georgian Dream party's public figures during the discussions, the polarization between the Parliament representatives and the President's office was exacerbated.

The opposition left the commission due to the lack of consideration of the proposals regarding critical issues such as parliamentary elections and the new role of President. At the same time, Transparency International Georgia concluded that the commission did not take into account the recommendations by NGOs, the public sector, and public defender. The new Constitution was adopted without the agreement of most of the members of the Constitutional Commission. (TI Georgia, 2017)

3.1 Parliamentary Electoral System
I will discuss the Constitution of Georgia with the Chapter on the Parliament because its functions and powers are critical for the transition to the parliamentary republic model.

For the first time in the history of Georgia in 2017, the Constitution introduced a regulation on the introduction of a fully proportional electoral system.\(^1\) The proportional system provides an opportunity to create a much higher standard of democracy, strengthens the participation of citizens into governance, and promotes fair representation of their electoral choice into politics. At the same time, it creates political stability and promotes multi-party representation in Parliament. This change has been supported for years by both local and international partners. Consequently, it was altogether positively assessed by all parties involved in the negotiations. (Venice Commission, 2017)

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\(^1\) In 2017 first draft of Constitutional amendments introduced a fully proportional electoral system for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2020. However, by the third parliamentary hearing, the entry of the constitutional change was postponed till 2024. The Parliamentary elections in 2020 will be held according to the old/mixed electoral system. Seventy-seven members will be elected by proportional and 73 by the majoritarian system. Additionally, the election threshold will be lowered to 3 %.
In parallel with the introduction of the proportional system, three problematic definitions were recorded in the First Draft of the Constitution:

1. It is forbidden to form blocs

2. Election threshold remains 5%

3. Unallocated mandates shall be given to the parties successively. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)²

**The ban on political blocs**

Each of these regulations creates an additional barrier to the effectiveness of the country's proportional electoral system. Considering the background of weak political parties and an unstable political system in Georgia, especially when there are two main opposing parties in the country, the ban on political blocs will prevent party diversity in Parliament. It should also be noted that the current ruling party itself came to power in the form of a coalition of various small parties. The rationale behind the regulation is that the possibility of political blocs has historically prevented the establishment of the country's stable party systems. At the same time, it allowed the parties to receive additional financial assistance from the state and other political benefits. The access to the blocs allowed parties to gain more votes that did not necessarily reflect public preferences.

The creation of blocs in itself indeed implies these circumstances, but in the context of Georgia, mainly when the formation of political parties has historically revolved around influential, charismatic, or wealthy people, like Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili, and Bidzina Ivanishvili.

This regulation holds other threats to general political stability, given the political influence of Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the "Georgian Dream" party. In 2012 his wealth was worth 6 billion $ half of Georgian GDP. (Ioffe, 2012) Hence, it means that a significant amount of financial resources for active electoral campaigning remain in the hands of the "Georgian Dream" party. Consequently, the ban on political blocs may hinder the effective

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participation of small parties in the elections and, conversely, promote the victory of the two main political forces in today's elections, mainly by the political party that will be holding a majority in Parliament and government during the elections.

5 % threshold
One of the main issues discussed during the constitutional amendments was the Venice Commission's conclusion, which clearly stated the problems of such regulative mechanisms, particularly the 5% electoral threshold. For instance, in 2012, parliamentary elections were the first peaceful change of government for Georgia, only two political entities that crossed the 5% threshold.

Bidzina Ivanishvili-"Georgian Dream" (54.97% of the vote)
The political party - the United National Movement – "more benefits for the people" (40.34% of the vote) (Cesko, 2012)

Out of 26 entities running for the 2016 parliamentary elections, only three managed to cross the 5% threshold:

"Georgian Dream" - Democratic Georgia - 48.68%
United National Movement - 27.11%
David Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, United Opposition 5.01% (Cesko, 2016; Zedelashvili, 2017)

As a result of the mixed electoral system into force at the time, the "Georgian Dream" government won a constitutional majority in Parliament. "Georgian Dream" received 115 out of 150 parliamentary seats (71 majoritarian and 44 from the proportional list) (Zedelashvili, 2017)

The Venice Commission, in its final report, noted that the 3% election threshold is an internationally accepted and well-established mechanism protecting the votes of citizens, it is an adequate means for the representative democracy and at the same time determines its maximum efficiency of the proportional electoral system in the democratic societies. The
commission also remarked that this threshold should not exceed 3% in democratic states, as in this case, the opportunities for successful participation in the elections of small political parties decreases. (Venice Commission, 2017)

What are the risks of a 5% threshold for Georgia? As mentioned above, many parties in Georgia do not meet the 5% threshold according to the results of the parliamentary elections held in recent years.

In this regard, the data from 2016 Parliamentary Elections is interesting, where the number of parties that would have received parliamentary mandates in the presence of a 3% threshold has increased compared to the results of 2012. These parties are:

**Nino Burjanadze - Democratic Movement - 3.53%**

**Paata Burchuladze - "State for the people" - 3.43%**

**Shalva Natelashvili - Georgian Labor Party - 3.14%** (Cesko, 2016) These data suggest that the Georgian Parliament would be much more diverse and multi-party than one under 5% threshold regulation.

**Distribution of the unallocated mandates**

The third critical issue concerns the topic of unallocated mandates. The Venice Commission's report found that the percentage of redistributed seats since 1999 to 2016 elections was 12.85% on average. Among them, the highest rate was 19.82% in 2016. (Venice Commission, 2017)

Transparency International Georgia predicts that such regulation of undistributed mandates, along with a 5% threshold and a ban on blocs, will lead to a large number of mandates falling into the hands of the party with the best results. In this case, likely, the undistributed mandates might even reach 20%, as it happened in 2016. Overall, the chances of a single party gaining a majority in Parliament are growing.
Two models were offered as an alternative to the Constitutional Commission:

1. Mechanism of a 3% threshold and giving the equal number of undistributed mandates to every party crossing the set threshold.

2. The 3% threshold and introducing the upper limit of mandates that can be awarded to the party receiving the majority of votes. (TI Georgia, 2017)

According to the Venice Commission, the regulation on the upper limit would have contributed to the political balance even in the case of the 5% threshold, although the Constitutional Commission shared none of the models. (Venice Commission, 2018)

3.2 President of Georgia
The second most important change that came into force concerned the President's institution and the difference in the rules of his/her direct election. As it is known, in the parliamentary republics, the indirect/parliamentary election of the President is a characteristic sign. Earlier in the chapter, it was initially mentioned that in 2017, as a result of a disagreement between the ruling party - "Georgian Dream" and the President Giorgi Margvelashvili, he boycotted the Constitutional Commission and the new Constitution came into force without the participation of the President and his administration.³

Changes in 2017 brought new far more reduced presidential powers. Under the new Constitution, the President is the head of state, the guarantor of its unity, sovereignty, and independence. Thus, he/she is the commander-in-chief of the country's defense forces, and

³ In 2013, Giorgi Margvelashvili was supported in the presidential election by Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the "Georgian Dream" party and the former Prime Minister. He nominated Margvelashvili as a presidential candidate. (info9.ge, 2013) After the victory in the presidential elections, a confrontation began to grow between the "Georgian Dream" government and the President. One of the most pressing issues was whether Giorgi Margvelashvili would work from the Presidential Palace built by his predecessor Mikheil Saakashvili. The "Georgian Dream" already during the elections in 2012 opposed maintaining the function of the palace, as well as the development of several other facilities built by previous Government. (Eurasianet, 2018) After Giorgi Margvelashvili moved to the presidential palace, Bidzina Ivanishvili made the following public comments: "I was mistaken for Margvelashvili; I don't remember a person changing like that in two months; President Margvelashvili's decision to return to the Presidential Palace merely is unprincipled; (Voice of America, 2014; Netgazeti, 2015; On.ge, 2016)
symbolically represents the country in foreign relations. Behind this general formulation, several contextual problems are discussed below. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)

3.2.1 Indirect elections of the President by the Electoral College

To some extent, the restricted powers of President to symbolic functions, characteristic of parliamentary republics. However, such a model requires a strong balance system between both legislative and executive branches of the governance. The functional separation of powers and checks and balances system was the historically unattainable desire of Georgian democracy. (IDFI, 2017)

Here are some critical issues:
First of all, the main problem is the indirect method of electing the President. The next President in 2024 will be elected indirectly by a specially formed electoral college, which will include members of the Georgian Parliament, members of the highest representative bodies of the Autonomous Republics of Abkhazia and Adjara. The Central Election Commission of Georgia selects other members of the Election Board.

Under the quotas established based on the law, the relevant political parties shall be appointed from among the representatives of the local self-government representative bodies. Quotas shall be determined following the principle of proportional geographical representation and in proportion to the results of local self-government elections. The number of board members is 300.

The winner is the candidate who receives at least 2/3 of the votes if the President is not elected in the first round, the candidate receiving the simple majority of votes in the second round will be considered elected. The first or second round of elections shall be deemed to have taken place if more than half of the full composition of the Electoral College participates. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)

What does this mean in practice? In 2016 and 2017 "Georgian Dream" Party won a majority of mandates in Parliament, in local self-government offices, and the Autonomous Republics of Abkhazia and Adjara, creating a one-party system in the whole country. (Cesko, 2016; Cesko, 2017) If we consider that the government representatives, including the judiciary and
public institutions, tend to be loyal to the ruling party, we might see that the constitutional framework will allow the winning party to gather the pro-government forces equal to 2/3 of the Electoral college.

In countries where governments are "Super-powerful" like Georgia, the indirect election of President follows the "winner takes it all" logic and might lead to further polarization between two leading candidates. (Bértoa, 2017) In the Georgian context, it means that the party holding power in Parliament will be able to select the "desired/favorable" candidate, which threatens the independence of the President's institution and increases the chances of weakening the idea of the balance of power. It also strengthens the opportunities for the ruling party to seize power over all government branches and create so-called one party-ruling. Consequently, the implemented constitutional model will be a façade and an illusion of a democratic state-building.

3.2.2 The President of Georgia and the Government

The functions provided for the President are strongly linked to the decisions of the Government. The President, on the recommendation and decisions of the Government:

1. Participates in the conduct of foreign relations; Appoints ambassadors and representatives to international organizations; Participates in negotiations and receives international delegations;

2. Approves the Commander of the Defense Forces of Georgia; Appoints one member of the High Council of Justice; Participates in the appointment of the Chairman and members of the Central Election Commission of Georgia in the cases and according to the rules established by the organic law; Nominates candidates for membership of national regulatory bodies to be elected by Parliament on the recommendation of the Government;

3. Is authorized to suspend or dissolve the activities of the representative body of the territorial unit with the proposal of the Government and the consent of the Parliament if its action endangers the sovereignty of the country, territorial integrity, the exercise of the constitutional powers of state authorities; (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)
Legal acts issued by the President require the Countersignature of the Prime Minister, except in the following cases:

1. Appointment of Parliamentary elections, dismissal of the Parliament, the convening of a session or sitting of the Parliament
2. Concluding a constitutional agreement;
3. Signing and publishing the law, returning it to the Parliament with remarks of the law;
4. Appointment of the Prime Minister; Appointment of a member of the High Council of Justice; Appointment to the Chairman and Member of the Central Election Commission; Member of the National Bank
5. Nomination, the appointment of the President of the National Bank; The appointment of a judge of the Constitutional Court;
6. Awarding state awards and prizes, honorary titles;
7. Resolution of citizenship issues; Pardon of convicts;
8. Appeal to the Constitutional Court or the Court;
9. Organizing the exercise of the powers of the President of Georgia. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)

Besides, I will mention other critical issues: Despite the title of Commander of the Defense Forces, the President cannot make decisions on the activities of the army and armaments. The symbolic function is assigned to the appointment of strategic officials, as defined in the paragraph. The need for the Parliament to consider and discuss the President's remarks on the draft constitutional amendments is not specified in the Constitution. At the same time, the veto function of the President has been completely abolished. This function of the President was indeed only symbolic in the conditions of the parliamentary majority of the "Georgian Dream" ruling party in 2017-2018. To some extent, it created a certain standard of participation of the President in the governance of the country.

3.3 The Government of Georgia
According to the Constitution, the Government of Georgia is the highest executive body that implements the country's domestic and foreign policy. A prime minister and ministers head
the government. The Prime Minister represents the country in foreign relations, concludes agreements on behalf of Georgia. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)

**Redistribution of powers between the Government and Parliament of Georgia**

The Parliament approves parliamentary candidates, ministers, and a government program nominated by the party with the best results in the parliamentary elections. The approval of the government requires the support of a majority of members of Parliament. If Parliament fails to approve the government within three weeks, a president is authorized to dissolve Parliament and call early parliamentary elections. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)

The current regulation of the constitution has increased the accountability of the government to the Parliament. Once a year, it becomes mandatory for the Prime Minister to deliver a speech in Parliament. Here, upon the request of the Parliament, it is obliged to submit a report on the implementation of the government program. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)

The procedure for declaring a vote of no-confidence in the government has been simplified. 1/3 of the members of Parliament have the opportunity to declare a vote of no-confidence. Under the former regulation, the President could declare a vote of no confidence, and only 3/5 was needed to approve the government. (IDFI, 2017)

If a majority in Parliament declares confidence to the new government, the President will appoint Prime-Minister and the Prime Minister - the ministers. If the President does not designate the Prime Minister within two days after the declaration of confidence, he will be considered approved. (Constitution of Georgia, 2017)
4. GEORGIAN DEMOCRATIC STATUS QUO/HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

4.1 1918-1921

In 1917 the Bolshevik revolution in the Russian Empire gave new opportunities for Georgians to gain independence. The majority of political leaders at a time were educated in St. Petersburg and further Europe. The international and domestic environments contributed to declaring Georgia's independence by Georgian National Council on May 26, 1918. (Georgian Association, 2018)

On December 5, 1917, the Georgian National Council, elected by the National Assembly of Georgia in November, declared that "the Georgian people shall hold sovereign power. Georgia shall be a fully-fledged independent State" The Georgian Democratic Republic ensured equal civil and political rights irrespective of race, ethnicity, faith, social station, and gender. (Civil.ge, 1918)

Since the 1918 Georgian government started the historically significant process of institutional building of the country. The coalition government created new ministries in a few weeks, constituted by 30-100 personnel. The standard of appointed people on positions was their respective qualifications. Only the minister and vice-minister were from the coalition parties. The government had successful reforms in local governance, education, civil and political rights, agriculture, and the judiciary. (Civil.ge & Jones, 2018) Thus in 1919-1921, regional and international politics have been continuously changing. The unstable environment was possessing a threat to the successful implementation of the reforms. However, it is believed that the consolidation of elites and citizens had to be the leading force for establishing the modern and functional institutions in Georgia. (Civil.ge, 2019) The first Georgian Constitution was adopted in February 1921. (Constitution of Georgia, 1995)

In 1921 the Red Army invaded Georgia. From 20-25 of February, battles between Georgian and Soviet armies took place on the outskirts of Tbilisi. Many Georgians were injured and captured. Major General Kvinitadze ordered Georgians to retreat. On February 25 Red army entered the Tbilisi proclaiming the establishment of Georgian Soviet republic on the same

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4 May 26 is a day of independence in Georgia.
Simultaneously VIII, IX, XIII red armies invaded different parts of Georgia, which continued till the end of March. Ottoman troops took advantage of the situation and occupied the Artvin and Batumi (the capital of the autonomous republic of Adjara). On March 20, General Mazniashvili managed to expel the Ottoman armies from Batumi. At night on 17-18 March, the Georgian government and political elites left the country from the Black sea to France without issuing the capitulation to Soviet authorities. This portrayed the soviet invasion as an occupation of a sovereign state. Particularly regarding the treaty signed by Georgia and Russian on May 7 in 1920, declaring the de jure recognition of Georgian independence.\(^5\) (NLPG, 2019; NLPG, 2019)

4.2 Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic

With the establishment of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and its' incorporation into the Soviet Union, the country got acquainted with all policy areas and principles of the Soviet Union. In the 1920s, Transcaucasus was more urbanized than any other parts of the Soviet Union, including Russia. Georgia has been dramatically exceeding the target economic plans with tea and grape production. In other words, Georgian economic growth brought a higher level of financial stability and modernization to most people, especially in the late 1970s. The promotion of national elites on governing positions (Nomenklatura) and Georgian culture's advancement aimed to unify the Georgian republic into the Soviet Union. (Parsons, 1982)

However, Georgia does not follow the path of indigenization (Korenizatsiya), such as in Latvia, Ukraine, or central Asian countries. Korenizatsiya officially launched in April 1923 on the XII Congress of RKP, aiming to integrate all nations into one union through promoting culture, language, and traditions. The industrialization in Latvia required the migration of skilled labor force, specifically Russians, into Riga's capital city. The same trend has developed in many other parts of the Soviet Union. Thus, in Georgia, there was no need for "russification" The labor force was already skilled enough to keep up the collective economic plan. (Parsons, 1982) For instance, from 1922 to 1933 the Georgian share of the population in Tbilisi (capital of Georgia) has increased from 34.6 % to 42.9 % Whereas, Armenian declined from 36.5 % to 33 %, Russian from 16.5 % to 14 % However, more intense russification was

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\(^5\) Under Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty, Russia has unequivocally recognized the independence of Georgia and its sovereignty. Russia refused to make any claims against the Georgian people and the territory of Georgia; Refused to interfere in Georgia's internal affairs.
introduced by Stalin in late 1940s and 1950s. The political elites in the Georgian Soviet republic, including the intelligentsia, were opposing the growing signs of russification of the state apparatus. (Jones, 1988)

What could be the reason for it? The Georgian language has always played a crucial role as a national marker for Georgians. The education in the whole country was held in the Georgian language, expect a few cases of Russian and Armenian schools. Plus, in 1921, Georgia had already developed rather strong institutions in the country. Both political elites and people consolidated to establish economic, social, and political reforms. There is an argument that Stalin and Beria tried to protect Georgia from russification. However, the massive deportation of the intelligentsia and highly educated Georgians (mostly everyone who believed in Georgian independence and held power to shape the Georgian public opinion have been sentenced a death) prove the contrary. (Parsons, 1982) On the other hand, Korenizatsiya had more influence over several Georgian territories. Abkhazia became an independent republic in May 1921. Adjara gained autonomy, and South Ossetia was awarded an autonomous region status. (Oblast) (Jones, 1988)

One of the Soviet Union's main historical legacies was strongly developed "Patron-Client Pyramids" and non-formal networks in both Nomenklatura, public officials, and society. Breaking transparent and formal procedures has become an embedded tradition in Soviet Georgia. The tolerance towards corruption both on high and low levels became part of everyday life. Figures of so-called big men, leaders around which communist political party was established particularly got translated into Georgian politics and still poses the main challenge for Georgian Democracy. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, pp. 779-783)

4.3 From independence till today
Even though the Georgian population did not oppose most of the soviet policies through the decades, it is obvious that the country somehow maintained the markers of nationhood. The massive anti-Russian sentiments started to grow into society in the late 1970s. (Parsons, 1982) In 1978 Soviet Government in Moscow decided to change the constitutional status of the Georgian language. The new amendment would acquire to protect the mother languages in all republics while Russian would become the official state language. The protest of
students broke out on Rustaveli Avenue in the capital of Georgia (Tbilisi) on April 14 in 1978, making soviet officials back-off in their decision. April 14 is marked as mother language day in Georgia. (Dedaenis dghe) (Tsamalashvili, 2008)

In 1989 on April 9, peaceful demonstration for Georgian independence was crushed by Russian soldiers killing 21 people and more than 2000 poisoned by unknown chemical substances. The majority of the protestors were women and students. (Tsamalashvili, 2009) The events of April 9 were a "moral death" of the Soviet Union in the eyes of Georgians. Since then, the Soviet government lost its legitimacy in the country. (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006) After two years in 1991 on April 9, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Georgia announced the restoration of Georgian independence based on the Act of independence dating back to 1918. (Act of Restoration of State Independence of Georgia, 1991)\(^6\)

4.3.1 1991-1993

On October 28, 1991, the first multiparty elections were held in Georgia. The nationalist, anti-communist coalition led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, won the elections with a 54 % vote. In May the same year, he won the presidential elections becoming the first president of Georgia.

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's political interests were aimed to establish Georgian independence, which was a logically anti-communist movement. Despite his undoubtful political significance, the domestic policy towards Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region was highly conflictive. (Berekaashvili, 2018) Amid strong nationalist policies made it impossible to reconcile with them, especially given the fact that these regions had achieved some standard of autonomy during the Soviet era.\(^7\)


\(^7\) The situation in South Ossetia was particularly strained, where ethnic Georgians were in the minority, unlike Abkhazia. On December 9, 1990, the Supreme Council of South Ossetia announced the creation of a republic. In response, Georgia's Supreme Council revoked autonomy and tried to resolve the problem by force. The conflict lasted for years. After a failed case of the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia), the Georgian government was willing to reach a compromise. Abkhazia was granted the power-sharing opportunity, gaining some level of independence from the central government.
Along with the democratic path that the President was embroiled in, the political situation in the country has escalated as the opposition has been neglected since the presidential elections. (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006; Dominioni, 2014) On December 22, 1991, Tengiz Kitovani and Prime Minister Sigua, with the military guard (Georgian army at a time), attacked the parliament building. The President, along with his associates, had to flee Tbilisi. (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006) In 1992 Gamsakhurdia's government collapsed, in 1993 he died in suspicious circumstances in the west part of the country. (Berekashvili, 2018; Topuria, 2018)

4.3.2 1991-2003

In 1991 the leaders of a coup Jaba Ioseliani and Tengiz Kitovani, which were rivals to each other, backed Eduard Shevardnadze to lead the country, the former foreign minister of Soviet Union. Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG) was created to support Eduard Shevardnadze. Its members were both new, "reform-minded" politicians and former soviet politicians. (Nomenklatura) (Freedom House, 2003, pp. 263-264) Eduard Shevardnadze won the parliamentary elections in 1992 and was elected as a chairman of the fragmented Parliament. The election was reported to be fair, though it is arguable whether it was a peaceful replacement of Gamsakhurdia's government. (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006, Dominioni, 2014)

Concerning the conflict regions, Shevardnadze's approaches differed from those of his predecessor. Rhetoric towards ethnic groups have changed, but the problem has not been resolved, resulting in the conflict in Abkhazia in 1992.8 In 1995 Eduard Shevardnadze became the second president of Georgia. It was at this time in the wake of the frozen conflicts that a hybrid regime was established in Georgia that allowed the government to grant political parties and media organizations only some level of freedom that would not pose a threat to the ruling party. (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006)

The first Constitution of Georgia was adopted in 1995, establishing the principle of separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judiciary. Since then till now Georgian Parliaments were multiparty, allowing free and fair elections; however, Constitutionalism has never reached its practical meaning and followed purely Soviet understanding of party system

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8 Georgia was defeated in the war. The Abkhaz militia was backed by Northern Caucasus and Russian forces. In 1993 about 300 000 Georgians left the region. (IDFI, 2015)
– a one-party system established around persons or one leader. (IDEA & CIPDD, 2005, pp. 6-11)

The first steps were made towards the western integration of Georgia. Political ties have been established with European countries and the USA. One of the main problems of Shevardnadзе's government was corruption and the increased power of criminal groups, merely ones having significant power in the Soviet Union, all over the country. (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006) Shevardnadze became the leader of the country with the help of such groups. During his presidency, Jaba Ioseliani was elected in the Parliament, and Kitovani acted as minister of Defence and command of the National Guard. (Dominioni, 2014)

The CUG coalition held the majority in the Parliament from 1995 to 2001 and split up in 2001 into three new groups: National Movement (led by former minister of Justice Mikheil Saakashvili), the United Democrats (led by former Speaker of the Parliament, Zurab Zhvania), the New Rights Party (led by people with business backgrounds) (Freedom House, 2003, p. 264)

The failed democratic steps, corruption, lack of transparency, and electoral fraud in 2003 activated the opposition of the government. The students and representatives of the general public led by political parties and former minister of Justice, Mikheil Saakashvili, participated in mass demonstrations in November 2003. Eduard Shevardnadze had to leave the Parliament, where he was delivering a speech as protestors entered the building on November 23, 2003. These events are known as the Rose Revolution, the second coup d'état. Saakashvili won in Presidential elections in 2004 by 96 % of the vote while the UNM became new ruling party after Parliamentary elections (Berekashvili, 2018; Manning, 2007; Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, pp. 785-786)

4.3.3. 2003-2012

The reforms implemented during Mikheil Saakashvili’s first presidential term, especially in the fields of anti-corruption, police, education, and security, were seen as growing democratic

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9 Georgians represented only 2 % of Soviet Union population; however, 1/3 of Soviet criminals/thieves were Georgians. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, p. 780)
progress (sometimes in the literature referred to as modernization) over a short period. As a result of steps taken against the members of the criminal groups and local warlords brought the dramatically improved civil order and security for the wider population. Georgia's political significant and international image was one of the top priorities of the government at that time. Due to growing direct international investments, infrastructural projects have been implemented throughout the country, which has increased the tourism potential. (Burakova & Lawson, 2013; Waal, 2011)

Likewise, all previous governments, the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were still problematic for the country. After the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, which brought up to 263 598 more IDPs in the country plus the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, the anti-government movements began to emerge in society during the second presidential term. (IDFI, 2015)

Mikheil Saakashvili initiated the Constitutional changes after only 12 days of becoming President that brought increased leverage over legislative and executive branches. Despite the clear separation of powers, the President could solely nominate the judges, prime minister, Minister of Security, and Internal Affairs. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, pp. 785-786) During his second Presidential terms growing excessive power abuse cases by the police against demonstrators, the involvement of ruling party – United National Movement - members in high profile criminal cases, attempts to seize judicial power, high levels of poverty, unemployment, control over media outlets, and finally the so-called "prison videos" that aired on TV channels right before the elections, particularly decided the future of the government and led to the first peaceful transition of the power in the history of Georgia. (Waal, 2011)
5. LEVEL OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION IN GEORGIA TODAY

5.1 Politics since 2012

Although the confrontation between the political parties is a characteristic of the Georgian state-building, the political polarization has reached a much higher level since 2012, with the Georgian Dream party in Government and the United National Movement in opposition. After billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili announced his fight against Mikheil Saakashvili and the United National Movement, it became clear that the previous government would find it difficult to maintain political power. Bidzina Ivanishvili, who owns businesses in Russia, established a coalition that had no certain ideological and strategic basis rather than a mission to overthrow the United National Movement government and Saakashvili. (Voice of America, 2011)

As soon as Bidzina Ivanishvili launched the electoral campaign, the Georgian government suspended his Georgian citizenship, ostensibly because of his dual French citizenship. Right before the 2012 parliamentary elections, the election code changed introducing new mechanisms of party financing for the election campaigns, which created an additional barrier to the functioning of the coalition formed by Bidzina Ivanishvili, which mainly received money from his bank and the "Cartu" Foundation. (Aprasidze, 2015; Bolkvadze, 2013)

The victory of Bidzina Ivanishvili's coalition in 2012 was largely due to the events that took place in the run-up to the elections. On September 19, 2012, footage of the so-called prison videos aired on TV9, owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili, showing scenes of the possible torture, physical, and sexual abuse of prisoners. (Old.civil.ge, 2012) During Saakashvili presidential period after substantial anti-criminal reforms, from 2004-2011 number of prisoners increased from 7867-24114. (300 % increase) (FactCheck.ge, 2013; IDEA & Clingendael, 2016, p.34) According to the public defender of Georgia in 2012, Georgia had the highest number of prisoners' per-capita in Europe with the highest death rate of prisoners at the same time.

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10 It is noteworthy that Bidzina Ivanishvili has been financing various projects in Georgia for years. There are reports that during the first years of Mikheil Saakashvili’s rule, he also supported his government and helped financially. However, it is important to note that his philanthropy or support has always been widespread through rumors in the country. He never appeared in front of the cameras before the election campaign. (Tsuladze, 2011)
(FactCheck.ge, 2013) It is logical to speculate that the prison videos would have affected the emotions of large numbers of the Georgian population.  

In this regard, the data of public surveys conducted in 2012 are interesting. In March 2012, in the poll by NDI Georgia and CRRC Georgia, to question: "If the elections were held tomorrow, would you say you are decided/undecided? 43% of respondents answered they were undecided. After the events of September, the majority of the undecided votes received the Georgian Dream Coalition. (Tsuladze, 2016)

Hence, on the eve of Election Day, the newborn child died in a suspicious situation in Eastern Georgia / Kakheti. A few hours after the accident, the family of the kid and members of the Georgian Dream coalition blamed the United National Movement to be responsible for the "murder". Remarkably, the child's mother was a representative of the Georgian Dream coalition in the local election's commission. The Georgian Dream has blamed Kakheti Governor Giorgi Ghviniashvili for the crime, who was running in the upcoming parliamentary elections from the United National Movement party. (GHN.ge, 2013) This case has been the subject of controversy between the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement since 2012, but so far, the investigation has not ended, and the decision has not been announced by the court. (FactCheck.ge, 2017) These cases might be a good example of the interdependence of political polarization and its effects on society in Georgia.

On Election Day, the confrontation between the United National Movement and the New Political Coalition/ Georgian Dream was greatly increased. A common emotional/unstable background was created in the country, which, among many other reasons, brought a change of government. Georgian Dream received 54.97% of the electoral votes. That number of votes was not enough to get a constitutional majority. The United National Movement received 40% of the vote. Despite its decreasing public support and the growing polarization, "the United National Movement" managed to maintain unity and obtain parliamentary seats. In Georgia, traditionally, after the replacement of the government by another political party,  

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11 The prison-footages have not lost their relevance even after the elections. In 2015, parts of these videos were published on a Ukrainian web portal. Despite the investigation, the videos were shown to the public on the streets in Tbilisi and Zugdidi. The mayor of Zugdidi attending the event outlined the significance of videos to Georgians. It is noteworthy that considering the public space, the children also participated in the event. These events were organized after the results of the public opinion poll were published. According to the survey, in the given section of 2015, the rating of the National Movement was increased. (Tarkhnishvili, 2015)
the defeated party disintegrates and/or loses its influence in the political arena. (Aprasidze, 2015)

Georgian Dream won the 2013 presidential and 2014 local self-government elections in all major cities and municipalities. Both elections were reported as transparent and fair by international observer missions, but the fact that the Georgian Dream has established one-party rule in all branches of government has been seen as a threat to overall democratic development. The historical experience of "one-party rule" in Georgia has remained unchanged. (Aprasidze, 2015; Ubiria, 2018)

In 2016, the Georgian Dream turned out to be the most successful and won parliamentary elections with the majority. According to the report of the Central Election Commission of Georgia, out of 73 majoritarian mandates, the Georgian Dream candidates won 71. Candidates supported by the Georgian Dream won in the other two constituencies. Independent candidate Salome Zourabichvili won in Mtatsminda, in Tbilisi, and Simon Nozadze won in Khashuri. The Georgian Dream won 44 seats on the proportional list, giving the party a constitutional majority in parliament. (Cesko, 2016) In 2017 the United National Movement split up in two parties. Leading public figures of the UNM government left the party due to their political confrontation with Saakashvili. They established the "European Georgia" party, which is the main opposition in the parliament with UNM. It is still debatable if the creation of a new party would vanish the negative portrait of these politicians as they were faces of UNM from 2003-2012. (Old.civil.ge, 2017)

5.2 2018 Presidential Elections

The political polarization in Georgia reached its peak in 2018 Presidential Elections. Candidates from the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement parties were two main competitors in the elections. The election campaign was manifested with the great level of political polarization, involving negative campaigning, and populist rhetoric, verbal and physical violence against each other. In 2018 Georgia Dream announced that the party would not have a presidential candidate. Thus in the middle of September, they supported independent candidate Salome Zourabichvili (Tsuladze, 2018)

Salome Zourabichvili was Minister of foreign affairs in 2004-2005 (Saakashvili being President), soon became an opponent of UNM, formed a political party, and in 2016 with non-official support of Georgian Dream became an independent member of Parliament.
She is a granddaughter of Niko Nikoladze, the well-known public figure of the first Georgian democratic government of Georgia in 1918-1921 years. The government that fled to France due to the Soviet occupation in 1921. (Kevanishvili, 2018)

Her main opponent Mr. Grigol Vashadze was United National Movement candidate, ex-foreign Minister during Saakashvili's period, a former Russian citizen and soviet politician. (Machavariani, 2019)

**Election Campaign**

Alessandro Nai argues that populist leaders' communications strategies are rather emotional, often causing provocations among society. (Nai, 2018) Mrs. Zourabichvili’s statements followed the same path. She offered so-called «low politics» and "negative campaigning "against the United National Movement party and former President Mikheil Saakashvili. The historically driven trend of personalized politics implied itself during election campaigns. Due to Mrs. Zourabichvili's poor political performance and poor Georgian language skills leading members of the Georgian Dream Party got involved in the campaign. (Kiss, 2018)

Simultaneously, her campaign did not involve any official strategy. However, her accusations of the Georgian Government starting the 2008 Georgian-Russian war and bombing Georgian villages and Tskhinvali provoked personal attacks on her from other political parties, especially the United National Movement. (On.ge, 2018) It is important to notice that her statements are used as political evidence by Russian federation at European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in ongoing case «Georgia against Russia on gross and mass violations of human rights" (European Court of Human Rights, 2018)

Since then political party # 22 Zviad Baghdavadze - P / g "Civil Platform - New Georgia" that has been symbolically created to support United National Movement aired political ads built on negative campaigning against her with phrases: "She does not speak Georgian language," "Do not vote for the betrayer," "She should not represent Georgia in international politics." (News.on.ge, 2018; TI Georgia, 2018)

The political environment during the elections campaign exceeded the confrontation between the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement and endorsed historically driven grievances into the society. For instance, former President Saakashvili stated that the Georgian Dream party promoted laws allowing poor Iranians, Turks, and other nationals to gain economic benefits and jobs instead of Georgians. (Tabula.ge, 2018) Contrary, at the
meeting with ethnic Armenians living in the Southern part of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili, criticized former Government and President Saakashvili on granting citizenship to Turkish citizens without any obvious reason to do so while having different policy towards ethnic Armenians living in Georgia. (Rustavi 2, 2018) Her statements involved the risk of inciting historic confrontation and the mutual distrust among Armenians and Turkish people in the region.

Such approaches led to the polarization of society, creating two antagonist groups, and promoted hatred speech in public. (Nai, 2018) The elections turned into a competition between the Georgian Dream and United National Movement or between Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili.

On the first round of elections held on October 28, 2018, she gained 38.64% of votes, qualifying for the second round with opposition candidate, Grigol Vashadze, with 37.74% of votes. (Cesko, 2018, p. 92) The unprecedented second round of Presidential elections was held on November 28. The run-up of the second round was characterized by increased personalization of politics, particularly from the Georgian Dream party. The shock of the first-round election results showed decreasing public trust of the Government. The opposition parties decided to support Grigol Vashadze in the second round, giving him nearly 50 percent of the electorate. (Civil.ge, 2018)

After the first round of elections, Salome Zourabichvili disappeared from her campaign. In her place, political banners with Bidzina Ivanishvili and Chairperson of Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze appeared on streets. The election slogan of Salome Zourabichvili has changed from "Together for Georgia "to "Moral Choice" – No to dictatorship, vote for Freedom referring to United National Movement Government times. (TV25.ge, 2018)

On November 28, in second round Salome Zourabichvili received 59.52 % of the votes while Grigol Vashadze - 40.48 % of the votes. Salome Zourabichvili became fifth president of Georgia. (Cesko, 2018, p.94) In the history of Georgia Presidential elections, firstly, ever President was not selected by the majority of votes, which can be an indication of decreasing popularity of the Georgian Dream and increased stability and independence of the Central Elections Commission of Georgia.
5.3 Physical violence against opponents

The traditional theories on political parties explain that in weak democracies political parties tend to form criminal ties to their benefit and manage the political environment, create obscured political and social structures, such as an "enemy icon" that can translate into "us versus them logic". Such connections become visible during the election campaign and especially in its' last period. (IDEA & Clingendael, 2016)

This analysis fits the increased cases of physical attacks by members of violent groups against members of the Opposition on the eve of the elections in Georgia and many other cases on Election Day. On the day of the 2016 parliamentary elections in the village of Kortskheli, Zugdidi, a group of athletes supporting the Government (according to some sources, the attack was organized by the Government) attacked members of the United National Movement party. (GDI, 2016)

To date, several similar cases have occurred in the country. In the run-up, the second round of Presidential elections representatives of the United National Movement party has been attacked by supporters of the ruling party and presidential candidate Salome Zourabichvili in several cities. (TI Georgia, 2018) In such cases, the police either do not or cannot take appropriate actions. Violent groups leave the court with small fines or verbal warnings. Simultaneously, high-ranking Georgian Dream officials justify physical violence, stressing out that the public has fair aggression against the United National Movement. They are trying to create public controversy on the one hand, and on the other hand, gain more trust among their supporters. This tactic is not a new characteristic of Georgian Politics. In 2002 local elections were held in chaos. Rallies in cities of Zugdidi and Poti turned into violence as a group of people attacked members of the Opposition - the United National Movement. The Government at a time did nothing to punish them. (Freedom House, 2003, p.266) According to Transparency International Georgia, governments still tend to deny the political aspect of physical violence, which leaves such groups without sufficient legal charges. (TI Georgia, 2018, p. 9-11)

5.4 Judiciary System

The Georgian State has been characterized by a malfunctioning judiciary and the usage of its power for political purposes. In the second term of the United National Movement's
Government, the non-transparent rules of the election of judges in courts increased. Among them were questions about judges' bias in high-profile criminal cases and their involvement in illegal activities. It was the lack of a fair trial that increased criticism and distrust of the United National Movement in society towards 2012. (Dominioni, 2014; Spirova, 2008; Jawad, 2005)

However, this issue remains relevant today. Under the current Government, loyal and corrupt judges who are considered to be in charge of UNM high-profile cases, are promoted in the courts today. For example, Levan Murusidze, a judge in Gvirma Melikashvili's case, has been appointed as a lifetime judge at the Supreme Court. (Netgazeti.ge, 2018) At the same time, thousands of various court employees have been released from relatively low positions as the UNM Government changed. International Organizations revealed that their dismissal was carried out by opaque mechanisms in suspicious circumstances, which reinforces the signs of the politicization of the judiciary. (IDEA & Clingendael, 2016)

Georgian Dream continues to appoint loyalists to high positions in the judiciary. An example of this was the appointment of Otar Partskhaladze, a supporter of the Georgian Dream and a supporter of Bidzina Ivanishvili, to the post of Chief Prosecutor in 2012. In 2017, the High Council of Justice (HCOJ) appointed lifetime judges. Coalition for independent and transparent judiciary noticed that the interviews were held in a biased manner with low ethical standards allowing the court to select favorable persons in the court. Most of the lifetime judges are known to be loyal to the previous Government, many of them often mentioned as members of the clan system in Georgian Judiciary. (Coalition, 2017; TI Georgia, 2018; IDFI, 2019) This fact became the subject of controversy in the Georgian Dream Party, causing several leaders to leave the party in protest. (On.ge, 2019)

Such approaches to the judiciary by the Georgian Dream government may be an indicator of two consequent things. The demand for the "restoration of justice" in 2012 was widely spread in the society. The dismissal of court employees before 2012 may have been a simulation of fulfilling a promise by the Georgian Dream to gain public confidence. While the promotion of influential judges of the previous Government gives guarantees of inviolability to the current Government for the foreseeable future. (IDEA & Clingendael, 2016)
**Investigations against former Government members**

After the Georgian Dream came to power, verbal and, in some cases, physical violence between the Opposition and government officials became part of the political agenda. During political debates, government officials often referred to the so-called bloody nine years. (9 years, the period when the Government of the United National Movement spent in the Government) and political crimes during their Government. The idea of «Restoration of justice" soon grew and/or took the form of legal persecution of opponents. (Aprasidze, 2015)

In 2013, the Secretary-General of United National Movement Party, the former Prime-Minister Vano Merabishvili, and Kakheti Governor, former Health Minister Zurab Chiaberashvili, was arrested for abuse of political responsibilities and voter bribery. (Radio Liberty, 2013) Bacho Akhalaia, a high-ranking official of the United National Movement, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia in 2012, was forced to resign after the release of prison footage and left the country after the parliamentary elections. He soon returned to Georgia, where he was arrested for abuse of political responsibilities and physical and verbal violence. (Old.civil.ge, 2012)

After the Presidential Elections in 2013, former President Mikheil Saakashvili moved to Ukraine to continue his political career. In Georgia, the legal prosecution started against him. After receiving Ukrainian citizenship, he was deprived of Georgian one. Then, in 2018, the former President was sentenced in absentia to 3 years in prison for abusing of him pardon powers within Sandro Gvigrvliani's case\(^\text{12}\) (Voice of America, 2018) President Giorgi Margvelashvili stated that the criminal prosecution of Saakashvili on his pardon powers illustrates the example of the Georgian Dream government's approach to weaken of the President's institution and its reputation. (Tabula.ge, 2018)

Whereas, there was the demand for fair investigation of crimes associated with former members of the UNM party, the politicization of judiciary and law enforcement bodies, as well as non-transparent mechanisms of selecting judges and empowerment of clan-based

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\(^{12}\) One of the most high-profile criminal cases of the UNM government. Family members of high-ranking party officials were involved in the case of Sandro Gvigrvliani's torture and death.
governance in courts, fosters the criticism. It raises questions of political motivations behind arrests, as mentioned earlier. (Joint Report of NGOs in Georgia, 2017; 2018; 2018)

Demoralization and exclusion of opponents became an integral part of the political confrontation. In contrast, the UNM, still the most powerful political opposition force, uses the same methods against the Government, which benefits the effects of polarization and engages the general population in the process. The lessened opportunities of cooperation often lead to boycott by opposition parties of parliamentary sessions in other words: "Street politics" and "Parliamentary blockades" (Falkowski, 2016; Ubiria, 2018; GYLA & DRI, 2018; Bétoa, 2017; Bétoa, 2019)

5.5 Recent events regarding political polarization

On June 20, 2019, the Parliament of Georgia was hosting the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO) organized by the Georgian Dream government. Sergei Gavrilov, a Russian MP, chaired the first session. The photos of him occupying the seat of the chairman of the Parliament of Georgia spread in media. The photos were followed by the outbreak of the demonstration in front of the Parliament Building. Protestors were mainly young Georgians. The opposition parties "United National Movement" and "European Georgia" entered the session to boycott the forum.¹³ The forum had to cancel the session, and Russian delegates had to leave the Parliament. The number of protesters grew in the evening, and politicians from different parties were involved among the representatives of international and local NGOs. (Gvarishvili, 2019)

On the evening of June 20, the Government withdrew a special task force to protect the parliament building. Their appearance was followed by a physical confrontation between activists and Special Forces. During the demonstration, member of the United National Movement party, MP Nikanor Melia, said: "We have to enter parliament peacefully and behold until they resign, then we will go out."

This phrase has been used by the Government to defend their actions stating that the demonstration was organized by the opposition/UNM to overthrow the Government. (On.ge, 2019; Gvarishvili, 2019)

¹³ Only "Georgian Dream" and "Alliance of Patriots" members were participating in the respective forum.
Without the notice for the protesters, the Special Forces used rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons to rally the demonstration. It is important to emphasize the fact that there was a direct targeting of rubber bullets, including against media representatives, journalists, and operators. Dozens of civilians were injured in the rally. Among them, three people (1 main channel operator) lost their eye, journalists and civil activists were injured. Police have detained hundreds on violation of police orders. According to a statement from the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, their trials proceeded with low legal standards, without clear evidence given against detained. (Gvarishvili, 2019)

After the events of June 20, the demonstrations continued for months. The political confrontation between the Georgian Dream and the opposition parties has deepened. Politics entered the streets. Protesters demanded the resignation of Parliament Speaker Irakli Kobakhidze and a fully proportional electoral system for the 2020 parliamentary elections. Irakli Kobakhidze resigned from his position. (Gvarishvili, 2019)

To alleviate the political situation, Georgian Dream Chairman Bidzina Ivanishvili, on June 24, proposed that the 2020 elections would be held in a fully proportional system with a 0% electoral threshold. (Netgazeti.ge, 2019) The protesters perceived this as a victory and a step towards democracy. Besides, this decision was positively assessed by the international partners of Georgia. In their view, this would help to decrease the political polarization in the country. Notably, this exact model used by Eduard Shevardnadze in 1992 in parliamentary elections was to blame for political fragmentation and general instability in the country. (Dominioni, 2014)

Voting for the constitutional amendments took place in November 2019. It was supported by all members of the United National Movement, European Georgia, and the Alliance of Patriots. Three majority Georgian Dream MPs voted against the change, while 37 abstained. As a result, the new constitutional amendment failed. This was followed by the protest of citizens and politicians. The leading political figures of the Georgian Dream left the party and their parliamentary positions. During the last few years, these people have been actively working on the EU and NATO integration of Georgia. They represented the country in various parliamentary groups, organizations, and assemblies. (Netgazeti.ge, 2020)

One of them, Tamar Chugoshvili, a former deputy speaker of Parliament, said that from June 2019 to November 2019, they worked closely with and persuaded Western partners that the promise of a transition to a proportional system would be fulfilled. Now, it would be difficult
for them to explain why the bill failed. To date, many Georgian Dream members have left the party. Therefore, the party no longer holds a constitutional majority. (TV Pirveli, 2019)

All opposition parties in the history of Georgian politics have united to fight against the Government. In this hostile environment, it was difficult for the Georgian parties to reach a substantial compromise through dialog. The EU mission in Georgia, the US Embassy and other diplomatic missions involved in the negotiations to resolve the political situation, particularly regarding the upcoming parliamentary election in autumn, 2020. As a result of long negotiations, under pressure from the Western partners, a memorandum was signed between the Georgian Dream and the United Opposition on March 8, 2020.

According to the memorandum, the 2020 elections will be held under a mixed model 120/30. 120 seats will be elected from the proportional list, while 30 will be elected from majoritarian districts. The election threshold will be 1%. A locking mechanism will be introduced according to which if one of the parties fails to get more than 40% of the vote, it will not be able to form a government. Undistributed mandates will be proportionally given to the parties with the best results, and the agreement has been reached to release all political prisoners by the Georgian Dream government. (Tabula.ge, 2020) It is noteworthy that since 2012 Georgian Dream never acknowledged the existence of political prisoners in Georgia.

Shortly after this agreement, a state of emergency was declared on March 21 at the initiative of Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia and President Salome Zourabichvili's decree to reduce the spread of coronavirus. (On.ge, 2020) Opposition parties partly stopped their boycott during the session on the declaration of State Emergency. Parliament of Georgia practically stopped functioning since then no committee meetings were held. According to the decree, the Government of Georgia was given an indefinite right to restrict the rights of citizens during a state of emergency. (Decree on declaring state emergency on whole territory of Georgia, 2020, March 21)

It should be noted that according to the Constitution of Georgia, the Parliament has to determine the limits, format, and the terms of State of emergency rules. The Parliament delegated its rights to the Government without its participation and actual parliamentary oversight. (Constitution of Georgia, 2018) According to today's data, several constitutional lawsuits are prepared to claim the declaration of a state of emergency to be unconstitutional. (Netgazeti.ge, 2020) This shows once again that in "one-party rule," it is easily possible to bypass the Constitution, whereas the principle of redistribution of powers loses its
significance. Several politicians, including ones who have recently left Georgian Dream, have called for strengthening the role of Parliamentary oversight, especially during the crisis. Government of Georgia deems that Parliament is represented in the anti-crisis group; however, in reality, three members of the Georgia dream party cooperate with Government over challenging issues for these times. This again illustrates how the Government does not include anyone outside of their party into the decision-making process, which simultaneously increases the gap between parties and affects general sustainability and longevity of policies.

The events of the previous months and the arrest of opposition leader Irakli Okruashvili14 during the State of emergency gave rise to reasonable suspicions that the Georgian Dream government was in no hurry to adopt new regulation of the memorandum. (Agenda.ge, 2020; 1tv.ge, 2020) There was no guarantee that the Government would not back down from this agreement, as it did in November 2019. Due to the decreasing numbers of Covid-19 cases, the country slowly started political life again. Local NGOs, as well as the EU and the USA, called for immediate memorandum implementation. (On.ge, 2020; Newposts.ge, 2020) Contrary, the Georgian Dream started speculating that there was no such decision to release politicians from prisons. They demanded facilitators of the agreement (USA embassy in Georgia, EU mission in Georgia) to acknowledge it. (On.ge, 2020) All the other signatories of the memorandum, including former Georgian Dream leaders, deemed that decision of political prisoners was achieved, and the Government was manipulating in their rhetoric. (On.ge, 2020)

Such an approach of the Georgian Dream was followed by unprecedented criticism from EU institutions and the US Congress.

Andrej Halicki – Member of European Parliament:

“We, Georgia's friends in the European Parliament, welcomed the March 8 Agreement between the Government and the Opposition. No release of political prisoners means breaking the agreement and no fair elections. Set the political prisoners free!” Source: https://twitter.com/AndrzejHalicki/status/1260824076953796608/photo/1

14 Irakli Okruashvili sentenced to 5 years in prison for participating and organizing violence in June 2019 (1TV.ge, 2020)
Senator Jim Risch – U.S Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

“I expect Georgia's political parties to fully implement their March agreement, including the release of political prisoners and progress towards a new electoral system” Source: https://twitter.com/SenateForeign/status/1260004543779217408

Joint Statement by the Facilitators of the Political Dialogue: (May 11)

“The resulting agreement is well-known to the public. It was welcomed by Georgians and the international community alike. We note that this agreement is composed of two parts — one focused on the election system and the other on addressing the appearance of political interference in the judicial system. We call upon all sides to uphold the letter and spirit of both parts of the agreement with a view to its successful implementation” (U.S Embassy in Georgia, 2020)

As a result of the Government's attempts to deepen the polarization and pressure of unprecedented international responses, President Zourabichvili pardoned two politicians Irakli Okruashvili and Gigi Ugulava. Giorgi Rurua, the founder of the Mtavari Arkhi (the main channel), is still in prison. EU is still urging Georgia to stop litigation against Giorgi Rurua. (On.ge, 2020; On.ge, 2020)

According to the Georgian Dream, the President's decision was inconsistent, and they do not agree with the pardon of politicians. However, President announced that her move was known to the Georgian Dream beforehand. (Interpressnews.ge, 2020) Such a position of the Government clearly shows that they are in severe political crisis. To prevent the weakening of their power, they aim to confront Opposition, simultaneously blaming them on polarization. However, such an attitude of the Georgian Government towards the country's main international partners is unprecedented.
6. CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL POLARIZATION

6.1 Informal governance

Shortly after taking office, Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that he was not going to stay in politics for a long time. He explained that he would create a strong governmental team working on democratic principles. On November 24, 2013, Bidzina Ivanishvili announced his resignation from politics. However, Georgian Dream leaders have made no secret of the fact that Bidzina Ivanishvili is still the real ruler of the country. The problem with informal governance is that the decision-maker does not have an actual political position and therefore, cannot be held accountable. The problem is much more profound. Here are some key factors.

First - From the day the Georgian Dream came to power, people on strategic positions were appointed from Bidzina Ivanishvili's bank, the Fund, and his businesses. For example, after Bidzina Ivanishvili, the Prime Ministers of Georgia were:

Irakli Gharibashvili - In 2005-2008 he was the Assistant to the President of the Company "Cartu Group". From 2006 to February 14, 2012, he was the Chairman of the Board of the International Charity Fund "Cartu".

Giorgi Kvirikashvili - In 2006-2011, he was the General Director of Cartu Bank. (TI Georgia, 2015; Gov.ge, 2014)

Mamuka Bakhtadze - Appointed President of the Georgian Railway as soon as he came to the Georgian Dream government. Among media, information has been spread that Mr. Bakhtadze is a close friend of Bidzina Ivanishvili's son, whose recommendation he has been appointed to the Prime Minister position. (Ubiria, 2018) The appointment of these individuals as prime ministers, as well as their resignation, is the result of Bidzina Ivanishvili's sole decisions. None of these people had previous political experience.

Second – In Georgia, informal governance emerged through democratic elections, unlike in other post-soviet countries. According to some scholars, it advances oligarchy; in other words, the "rule of few" Informal governance weakens the democratic rule and puts influential people above the law. Such practices lead to the promotion of narrow interest-based policies that do not serve to establish functional democracy in the country. (Safiyev, 2020) However, one can't argue that such a cabinet shuffle is new to Georgian politics. In 9 years of Presidency, Mikheil Saakashvili had "six Prime-Ministers, seven Defence ministers,
six foreign ministers, and six finance ministers. Rotations of ministers are believed to be done through the well-known patronage system. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, p.795)

6.2 Corruption
With the informal governance and the indefinite power of the Georgian Dream, significant risks arise for high-level corruption. The employment of Bidzina Ivanishvili's and the Georgian Dream's loyalists in all institutions of the country will further strengthen the so-called system of patronage widely spread during Soviet times in Georgia. A large amount of Bidzina Ivanishvili's property is outside Georgia. Most of it in offshore companies, as confirmed by the Panama Papers scandal, means that the state cannot control the financial transactions he has and will carry out. (Liklikadze, 2019)

At the same time, it increases the risk that political entities or civil society activists will be involved in clientelistic relationships. Such ties have become significant to Georgian politics during the Presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze. With his network established during his political activities in the Soviet Union, he managed further to combine a patron-client relationship with the official state apparatus. From 1995-2012 many government loyalist business people and politicians, including President Shevardnadze, were accused of enjoying unfair advantages over their competitors. (Dominioni, 2014, Freedom House, 2003; Democracy & Freedom Watch, 2015)

Likewise, Bidzina Ivanishvili, with his background, manages to hold influence over members of his party. The Georgian Dream was formed in 2012 to defeat the UNM, and its political groups had no ideological connection. Several former members of the coalition, such as Republican Party and former Majoritarian MP Gedevan Popkhadze, have declared that the only thing in common among Georgian Dream members is Bidzina Ivanishvili. The fact that the sudden resignation of the Prime Ministers has never raised a question among Georgian Dream members indicates that there is no internal party democracy in the Georgian Dream. The absence of democracy poses an even higher risk to the use of state resources by the influential leader and a Billionaire in various illegal ways. (Ubiria, 2018)

6.3 Use of administrative resources
The current government, likewise the UNM government, controls all branches of the state powers that continuously troubles the separation of powers between the party and a state.
After the Georgian Dream won the election by an overwhelming majority, the new government began to fire, the administrative workers of the previous government, and some of them joined the Georgian Dream party—the data on funding 2012 Parliamentary Elections and international transparency on those released on political grounds. Dozens of citizens have been released from the public sector on political grounds. Threats of employee dismissal in local and central institutions, especially in schools and kindergartens, have been on the rise in the run-up of the elections. It should be noted that this particular group of people was a strategically crucial administrative resource for both the previous and current governments. Both governments organized a collective attendance of employees of local self-governing institutions, teachers, and especially school principals' at large conventions during the election campaigns. In doing so, governments are trying to increase their popularity in the eyes of the general public and further spread their vast influence on society. The result of the appointment of loyal staff in all municipal bodies is a mechanism that allows the government to make unilateral decisions everywhere, without dialogue and compromise with the opposition. (TI Georgia, 2018; Ubiria, 2018)

6.4 Electoral Campaigning

The transparency of election campaign funding mechanisms is particularly important during the country's informal governance today. According to the Election Code of Georgia, the financing mechanisms, the powers of the state to finance political parties, and the function of the State Audit Office are well defined. However, political parties have no obligation to provide a detailed report on donations received. (TI Georgia, 2018)

The malfunction of current election code into practice was evidenced in the 2018 Presidential elections. Mrs. Zourabishvili registered as a candidate in early August while the ruling party supported her in late September. In this sense, the «Georgian Dream» party also applied to the modern trend of electoral campaigning, which is used explicitly to use time and financial resources effectively. Nevertheless, Salome Zourabichvili was registered as an independent candidate; she could not receive a direct donation from the Georgian Dream party. General Secretary of the «Georgian Dream» Mr. Kakha Kaladze was involved in addressing citizens to transfer donations. Salome Zourabichvili's campaign generated the highest of all revenue -- GEL 11 343 062, 79.3 percent of the total contributions received by the candidates. Zourabichvili is not eligible for state funding; still, her revenues were nine times greater than the amount raised by Grigol Vashadze – GEL 1 243 366.
Microfinancing has become an integral part of the election campaign. However, it is interesting that among her supporters were members of the Georgian Dream party and people employed in public service. Her PR-campaign included elected governors of regions and villages. The involvement of public sector employees in a PR campaign creates risks and raises questions on possible administrative resources pressure. Thus, Salome Zourabichvili was the only presidential candidate to have taken a bank loan. She borrowed GEL 1 million from Cartu Bank owned by the chairman of the «Georgian Dream» party. (TI Georgia, 2018)

Salome Zourabichvili received donations from 148 individuals, out of whom 92 are associated with 356 various legal entities as a shareholder or director. Out of these legal entities, only 18 were companies that received at least one government contract through the uncompetitive, simplified procurement as of 31 July 2018. The sum of funds deposited through such government contracts was GEL 243 875, while the individuals associated with these companies donated GEL 815 008 to Zourabichvili. At the beginning of October, over a dozen of doctors working at Chachava and Ghudushauri clinics, who contributed to the Zourabichvili campaign on 2 and 3 October, appeared in the public and media spotlight. It raised questions about a possible donation by a third-party donor -- a practice not allowed by Georgian legislation and subject to a fine twice the contribution amount. (TI Georgia, 2018)

Salome Zourabichvili's election exit poll was financed by the Georgian Dream. TI Georgia pointed out that: «since the ruling party does not have its presidential candidate, commissioning opinion polls, measuring the approval rating of independent candidate Salome Zourabichvili, is a donation made to her" The Georgian legislation prohibits party donations from other parties; the penalty for such actions is a fine in the double amount of the donation. (TI Georgia, 2018)

In addition to the direct funding of political parties/candidates, several critical issues were included in the reports of Election monitoring organizations. In 2018, according to the Transparency International Georgia data, legalization of the living facilities for 900 IDP families from the occupied territories of Georgia was included in the election expenses mobilized by the Government.\textsuperscript{15} In the run-up to the election, the Government has set up a fund to write off bank debts for 600,000 citizens owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili's Cartu

\textsuperscript{15} To this day, the issue of housing remains critical for IDPs. Most of them are still living illegally in abandoned buildings or living in unsuitable, faulty buildings.
Foundation. Mamuka Khazaradze, the founder of TBC Bank, one of the leading Georgian banks in 2019, said that the Government was forcing them to write off debts.  

(16) (TI Georgia, 2018; Radio Liberty, 2019)

The independence of the Central Elections Commission and the mechanisms of appointing members of the local electoral commissions have been long term problems in Georgia. In 2003 Freedom House remarked that the regulation on electoral commissions allowed "backroom deals" The risks of Electoral fraud have significantly decreased over time. Hence, in 2017 the Government passed a new law on regulating the appointment of the members of the electoral commissions. Parties can appoint their representatives according to the results of the last elections. This regulation put Georgian Dream into a superior position against other parties as they were able to select 4 members instead of 1 out of total 7. (TI Georgia, 2018, p.22)

6.5 Financial aspects

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia faced two essential challenges: building strong democratic institutions and a free market economy. The trend of "partial reforms" is typical in countries with experience of Soviet planned economies and ones with the hybrid regimes that have been established in the eastern part of Europe since 1991. (Papava, 2013; Frye, 2002)

The visible changes brought by Mikheil Saakashvili's reforms made the country's GDP growth, while the tax levels decreased. Simplification of Tax code and given opportunities to investments brought improvement in corruption. Thus, funds from International Donors (that hold lifetime importance for Georgian Economy) were flooding into state "Coffers," loyal businessmen of the Government, and Saakashvili's personal friends. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, pp. 786-790) Additionally, given that Georgia's leading political forces have been trying to maintain power through legal or illegal means since independence, it is clear that economic development has taken time.

How does political polarization effect the economy? First, it promotes unsustainable economic reforms in the face of opaque mechanisms, much of which aim to marginalize the opposition. A strong desire to maintain power prevents long-term projects and reforms, as an

16 TBC had to annul debts worth of 120 Million for 3 Million. The bank raised concerns regarding their foreseeable economic instability in the long run. (Tabula, 2019)
efficient economy implies that today's opposition may benefit from a stable economy. (Azzimonti, 2011)

Unstable economic changes are hampering the development of an independent business sector in the country. The polarized environment creates unfavorable conditions for businessmen to implement large local projects and find the international partners needed for these projects. Observations on the economy in polarized countries show that governments are mostly making inefficient decisions, raising taxes for investments, which in turn reduces the rate of investments and promotes slower economic development. (Frye, 2002; Kasradze, 2016)

This logic explains the dynamics of the relationship between the business sector and governments in Georgia. This logic becomes particularly acute and visible in the run-up to the elections. The political parties formed around charismatic and often wealthy leaders and not necessarily around political ideology need the business sector's support to win the elections. (IDEA & Clingendael, 2016; Bolkvadze, 2013) Transparency International Georgia reported that after the UNM joined the opposition, in 2013-2014, their political funding was reduced by 40% or more. The organization believes this may indicate that the party was not funded voluntarily in previous years. (TI Georgia, 2014) This view is reinforced by the fact that the so-called business racket was frequent during the UNM period when businessmen were forced to give up their shares, or politically motivated legal action was instituted against them. (IDEA & Clingendael, 2016)

In this sense, the Georgian Dream is not much different from the previous government. For instance, out of 160 individual donators supporting Salome Zourabichvili in 2018 have previously donated money to the Georgian Dream party. Sixteen of them were supporters of the United National Movement in 2012. (TI Georgia, 2018) Indeed, the control of the business sector is not significant to the previous level, but the government and specifically Bidzina Ivanishvili are still trying to influence it. Bidzina Ivanishvili enters into business sector relations only when his personal business or political interests are at stake. For example, this happened during the case of the port of Anaklia, which was carried out by the founders of one of the most potent Georgian banks, TBC Bank, together with American investors. If the port of Anaklia were to be built, it would be the deepest port on the Black Sea, which would also be able to receive submarines. Beyond the obvious economic benefits, its strategic location on the east-west transit road increased its international significance.
This port, by its very nature, is against Russia's interests. The governmental forces, including the Ministry of the Economics and Sustainable Development, were involved against the project.

According to the founder of TBS Bank, Bidzina Ivanishvili invited him to his residence to talk about the project. The Chief Prosecutor of Georgia Irakli Shotadze also attended the meeting. Subsequently, the latter confirmed the meeting. It should be noted that Bidzina Ivanishvili did not hold any position at that time. Soon after, the legal investigation against Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, the founders of TBC Bank, began. Judicial hearings are still ongoing. (Forbes, 2019)

**Economic inequality and poverty**

Slow development of the economy over time, which is liable to political changes, cannot withstand the dynamics of the international market economy, which is why the economic benefits for each person are gradually diminishing, which reduces the GDP per worker. (Azzimonti, 2011) In 2017, the GDP per capita was $4078, and in 2018 it increased to $4,717.1. (World Bank, 2020) Theoretically, GDP is linked to the stability of political institutions in the country. According to Adam Przevoski, in countries where the GDP is less than $6000, there is a good chance that they will become authoritarian. (Ubiria, 2018)

Thus, poverty remained one of the biggest challenges for Georgia. One of the latest findings published by UNICEF states that at the national level, 4.3% of households, 5.0% of the population, 6.8% of children and 3.7% of retirees live below the extreme poverty line ($1.25 per day is considered the extreme poverty line per adult). It corresponds to 82.8 GEL per month. In Georgia, the level of poverty has increased. If in 2015 this figure was 16.4% of the total number of households, in 2017 it increased to 19.6%; (UNICEF, 2017)

Today 23% of the population lives below the poverty line. The recent rise in inflation and national currency instability is another factor in increasing poverty in the country. Consequently, it is not surprising that unemployment, poverty have always been at the forefront of opinion polls in Georgia. (NDI Georgia, public opinion polls)

The high level of political polarization in the country contributes to the deepening of economic inequality. In 1996-1997 Georgia had one of the highest GINI coefficients of 0.6 comparable to the results of Latin America. (Yemtsov, 2001) Since 2000 income inequality has been slightly decreasing. (See figure 6.1)
Figure 6.1 GINI Index World Bank estimate Georgia (2000; 2010-2018)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GINI Index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>40.5</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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<td>2013</td>
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<td>2015</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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Such level of income inequality indicates that few wealthy people benefit from economic policies, whereas the middle class remains weak and marginal. Interestingly, Georgia has the highest GINI index among other post-soviet countries except for Russia. (Evgenidze, 2017; Ubiria, 2018)

According to economic theories, poverty in polarized countries empower people to replace one government with another. Hence, the only goal is to defeat the government that failed to deliver on its promise of economic prosperity. This analysis explains well the change in political forces in Georgia when a “bad guy” is replaced by a “good guy” through revolutions or elections. Typically, this enthusiasm will resonate with the public within a few years after the election and will resume for the next election. In a polarized environment, both society and the business sector live from election to election. (Papava, 2013; Mestvirishvili & Mestvirishvili, 2014)

6.6 Social factors

There is no democratic consolidation without social emancipation. Illustrating how does society perceives democracy as a concept can provide information on how does the political polarization and continuity of regimes work in Georgia. The absence of strong societal demand for functional democracy in Georgia is a result of its latest history being part of the Tsarist Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. As was noted earlier before in the thesis, Soviet policies of Korenizatsiya and Indigenization were not particularly effective in Georgia. Though, if we take into account that middle class and well-educated citizens were emigrated into Cyberia or died during mass killings, we can deem that support and meaning of democratic values have vanished in Soviet Georgian society.
Georgians have become an essential part of clientelistic exchanges, especially during the last years of the Soviet Union. Corruption and usage of informal networks to gain wealth or promotion at work was perfectly acceptable for people. (Freedom House, 2003, p. 283) In the late 1990s, instead of bonding with state institutions, Georgian society turned into non-formal governance through personal connections. (Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, p. 781) Such experience shaped Georgian public attitudes towards the structures and functioning of independent institutions. In 2002 80% of polled by GORBI Research center said that bribing a public servant was a solution to problems. (Freedom House, 2003, p. 283) hence, the strong anti-corruption and education reform attitudes have slightly changed over time. The majority of respondents surveyed by CRRC in Georgia in 3 rounds 2009, 2012, 2019 believe that connections are necessary to find a good job, while the importance of education, hard work, and professional abilities are among 4 top answers. There is an increase in the importance of connections from 2012 to 2019. Society is still fluctuating in their attitudes that might be easily affected by political struggles. (See figure 6.2)

Question text: Which of the following factors do you consider most important for getting a good job in Georgia?

**Figure 6.2** Caucasus barometer Georgia time series data set. GETJOB: The most important factor for getting a good job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-series (%)</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Connections</th>
<th>Doing favors for the right</th>
<th>Professional abilities &amp; Work experience</th>
<th>Hard work</th>
<th>Luck</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>DK/RA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Options Age, Talent, and Appearance were grouped to other

According to figure 6.3, the important features of democracy, such as the judiciary, human rights, fair elections, corruption, crime, freedom of speech, and media independence as important national issues have only been selected from 1-11% of the respondents. Corruption, as an important national issue, has only been mentioned by 1-3% of the ones interviewed.

**Figure 6.3** NDI Public Opinion Polls. What are the most important national issues facing you and your family?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-series (%)</th>
<th>Judiciary</th>
<th>Human Rights</th>
<th>Fair Elections</th>
<th>Corruption</th>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Freedom of Speech</th>
<th>Independent media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The theories on mass actions and emancipative values prove that societies in which people will participate in politics over defending their security have bigger chances of achieving consolidation and democracy. To measure the correlation between participation and autonomy/security I chose two variables (see figure 6.4; figure 6.5) from several rounds of Caucasus Barometer polls (2008-2019, excluding 2014, 2016, and 2018 rounds)
Variable 1: Government as a parent VS Government as employee (2008-2013; 2015 and 2017) Figure 6.4 Caucasus Barometer. Time-series data set Georgia. Cross-tabulation

Source: Caucasus Barometer. Time-series data set Georgia.

The chart shows that with a few exceptions, people tend to perceive the government as a parent. In 2008 and 2012, the only perception of a government as an employee has increased. These two data can be related to the Georgian-Russian war and political crisis in 2008 in Georgia and the first year of the Georgian Dream government in 2013.

Variable 2: Did you vote in the last national elections? (%)

Figure 6.5 Caucasus Barometer. Time-series data set Georgia. VOTLELE: Did you vote in the last national elections? (2008-2013; 2015; 2017)

Source: Caucasus Barometer. Time-series data set Georgia.
Significantly, the highest number of votes turnout has been in 2008, 2012, 2013 elections. The cross-tabulation of these two variables shows that during crises or elections, people will participate in politics and perceive the Government as an employee. However, this does not mean that Georgians feel the same way at other non-election years. For instance, if we look at the numbers of variable 1 in 2011 and 2017, we will see that after elections are over in neutral time's political activism decreases which again indicated to the severity of elections in Georgia while general attitudes regarding political governance do not change making social attitudes easily manipulated.

**Public Sector**

The only functional checks and balances system in Georgia is the NGO sector. (Waal, 2019) Since the independence of Georgia, every Government cooperated on some level with local and international organizations. Organizations such as transparency International Georgia, National Democratic Institute, and IRI with donations from the US State Department (USAID) and the UK have established numerous projects in both central and local-self governmental bodies. Many other organizations, working on issues related to human rights, justice, equality, and media environment, act as watchdogs to foster further transparency and accountability of state institutions.

Thus, trust in NGOs can be easily altered. Radical movements in Georgia, which deem to be defenders of Georgian values and Christianity, portrait international NGOs as servants of western politics and call for prohibition of International Non-Governmental organizations work in Georgia. (TI Georgia, 2018) Moreover, numerous members of the Georgian Dream party and Government have accused local NGOs of being supportive of the United National Movement party. Such accusations traditionally increase during elections campaigns and elections in general. In 2018 Presidential Elections Georgian Young Lawyers Association, International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED) and have been accused of subjectiveness and incompetence by chairmen of Elections Commission of Georgia, National Communications Regulatory Commission, and chair of Inter-agency commission for free and fair elections which is Minister of Justice at the same time. The discretization of the organizations led to their boycott of Inter-agency commission. (TI Georgia, 2018) On 8 October, Speaker of Parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze, said: Anyone who supports this fascism is himself an accomplice to fascism. In his words, "Unfortunately, such people are among the leaders of non-governmental organizations." (1TV.ge, 2018)
The positioning of the Georgian Dream to be critical of international and local NGOs can provoke nationalism and nihilism against Georgia's most prominent allies as Georgian civil society heavily depends on international assistance.
7. OTHER FORMS OF POLARIZATION

7.1 Media polarization

The existence of an independent and pluralistic media is an important feature of democracy. After the restoration of independence in Georgia, the Soviet censorship of the Soviet outlets changed. In the first years of independence, the media's political influence decreased, and the number of critical media grew significantly. However, the media environment in Georgia has been and continues to be heavily affected by a political shift in government, which is closely linked to political polarization and economic instability. Since Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency, leading Georgian media outlets and most of the TV channels have often had problems with economic independence. Subjective tax regulations by the government further reduced the financial viability of TV channels and forced them to engage in non-transparent relations with influential clans of the political or business sector. (Dominioni, 2014) This chapter is largely devoted to the problems of TV channels' independence, as recent studies show that 69 percent of the population in Georgia receives information from TV channels. (NDI Public Opinion Poll, 2019)

Against the background of such politicization of the media environment in Georgia, two important trends are visible. First, during the election campaign, new TV channels and agencies are set up, such as TV9, which aimed only to bring the Georgian Dream to power in 2012 and shut down as soon as the mission was completed. (Topuridze, 2020) Second, critical media outlets have a high probability that the economic dispute against them will start in court, and their revenues, equipment, and property will be seized. A similar thing happened in 2016 against Rustavi 2. On March 20, 2020, the Ministry of Finance levied the accounts of TV Pirveli and Mtavari Arkhi (Main Channel). Such cases occur mostly during election years. The legal investigation over the economic activity and debts against Rustavi 2 was not the first time in the channel's history. In 2001, the Ministry of Defense invaded Rustavi 2 due to tax violations, preceded by the aggressive rhetoric of Eduard Shevardnadze and his colleagues against Rustavi 2. (Kokashvili, 2005)

The investigation against Ivane Tsereteli, the owner of TV Pirveli, is underway with the founders of TBS Bank on money laundering allegations. According to Ivane Tsereteli, the

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18 The main channel and Formula TV were created by journalists who left Rustavi 2 in 2019 after changing its owner. Pirveli. (Civil.ge, 2019)
dispute against him has no legal basis and is initiated to create financial problems for TV Pirveli.

Amid the lack of independence of the judiciary in the country, it is likely that the disputes against the critical media have political motives and aim to bring the functioning of critical media into the question. The vulnerability of TV channels to the change of political parties in the government created sufficient circumstances for political parties to use TV programs to seize political power and maintain it. TV channels take turns into pro and anti-government rhetoric. (Kavtaradze, 2019) For example, if Imedi TV was their foremost critic during the rule of the National Movement, it still pursues a loyal policy towards the Georgian Dream policy. After the transfer of one of the most influential TV channels, Rustavi 2, to its former owner, Kibar Khalvashi, the government's criticism on the channel decreased. At the same time, the slam of the channel's journalists by Georgian Dream representatives mainly stopped while the degree of participation in TV programs by Georgian Dream leaders increased.

It should be noted that, according to Kibar Khalvashi, he was illegally deprived of the channel by the National Movement government. Bidzina Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream did not hide their wish to return Rustavi 2 to Kibar Khalvashi. (Netgazeti.ge, 2015)

It was these two channels that were most polarized during the 2018 presidential elections. As I have discussed before, the 2018 elections turned out to be engaging in many ways for observing Georgian democracy. The negative campaign produced by the parties and the language of hatred were communicated through TV channels. Much of Rustavi 2's advertising time was spent on videos created by the United National Movement and other pro-UNM political parties opposing Salome Zurabichvili, both as a politician and her personality. Instead, a large part of the TV "Imedi"s programs portrayed a picture of the end of Georgian democracy in the face of opposition criticism and the possible return of the National Movement to power. (UNDP, 2018; TI Georgia, 2018)

The typical style of populists using "bad manners" describes Salome Zurabichvili's attitude to critical media and journalists during each presidential campaign, often insulting them and trying to avoid questions that have arisen during each campaign. Bidzina Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream party members have used this particular approach towards the media many times. (On.ge, 2018) The boycott of critical TV channels by the Georgian government leaders and the representatives of the Georgian Dream is quite a frequent event. Only one-sided opinions are heard in the programs on issues of strategic importance. (UNDP, 2018) During
this period, the Georgian Dream leaders often referred to journalists as members of the National Movement. An example of this is that in response to a question about Gavrilov's nightly details on TV Pirveli in 2019, the former speaker of parliament called TV Pirveli the UNM party. (On.ge, 2019) It was preceded by a similar assessment of the Adjara TV regional branch of Public Broadcaster in Georgia. (On.ge, 2019) According to the media reports of International Organizations, Adjara TV was one of Georgia's most independent TV channels. (Danelia, 2020) Recently the director of Adjara TV and several Journalists changed. NGOs believe that such drastic changes into management are determined to slander the criticism towards the government on TV Channel.

Such statements by government officials encourage the public to appear in two camps and increase polarization. It should be noted that the politicization of the media is also reflected in its ownership. Today, for example, Nika Gvaramia, one of the owners of Mtavari Arkhi (Main channel) and the host of one of the programs, and previously General Director of Rustavi 2 is a former Minister of Justice and Education of Georgia during the National Movement governance period. The second new television "Formula TV" is created with the financial support of Davit Kezerashvili, former leader of UNM, head of the Financial Police that enjoyed preferential treatment from the state in his business endeavors. Whereas, Irakli Rukhadze manages TV Imedi owned by Patarkatsishvili family with close ties to the Georgian Dream party. (Tsiklauri, 2018; Topuridze, 2020; Berglund, Ekman, Deegan-Krause & Knutsen, 2013, p.791)

The trust of the media has decreased in recent years. At the same time, there is a tendency for citizens to trust loyal TV channels to the party closest to them. For example, supporters of the Georgian Dream trust TV Imedi, but do not trust Rustavi 2 and believe that it is spreading disinformation. (NDI, Public Opinion Poll, 2018)

While the primary goal of the Georgian Dream is to fight and destroy the power of the United National Movement, the media ownership details encourage them to put a political label on media representatives. Often such controversy goes beyond political boundaries. There has been an increase in the usage of physical and verbal violence against civilian and media representatives, especially in opposition to the government. Demonstrations in front of their homes often involved public sector employees from various regions of Georgia. The latter raises suspicions that the government is trying to use administrative resources to its advantage. (Radio Liberty, 2019; On.ge, 2019)
Recently, there has been a positive trend of increased participation of former Georgian Dream members on TV Pirveli, Formula TV, and the Mtavari Arkhi. (Main Channel) They did not cooperate with these TV channels during their party membership. Although there is still a problem of multi-party dialogue in specific programs, the participation of these politicians in Talk-shows provides more information regarding the governance of the Georgian Dream and their inter-party politics. (Mtavari Arkhi, 2020; Formula News, 2020)

The 2017-2018 Media Monitoring showed that TV channels operating for political parties influence the general awareness of the public, which is very important for the development of civil society, as well as for the formation of the media as an independent and fact-oriented field. The importance of in-depth criticism and analysis in the media aimed at propagating political parties comes to the fore. Adherence to the norms of impartiality and media ethics is no longer critical for journalists. The results of media monitoring also indicate that TV talk-shows are an area of unjustified mutual accusations and partisan controversy, especially during the election period. Over time, the media has developed a yellow press style whose primary goal is to create a shock effect and provoke strong reactions in society. In such a space, the level of misleading information by the media is higher, which at the same time increases the risks of misinformation and emotional impact on public sentiment on citizens by political parties. (Media Monitoring Report, 2018)

The negative coverage of political entities and the hate speech might be deemed part of the editorial policy of TV channels. The Georgian National Communications Commission demanded Rustavi 2 to remove the negative video footage against Salome Zourabichvili. Civil organizations working on media regulations observed that there was no legal basis for such a demand. The request of the commission was perceived as support of Salome Zourabichvili and interference in the independence of the media. (TI Georgia, 2018) With the establishment of a new media regulation network, maintaining the low level of ethics and standards allows TV channels to remain supporters of political parties and, in fact, to represent them in the elections. Its significance is continuously increasing in the modern information era. (Ronfeldt, 1991, pp. 5-18)

7.2 Societal polarization

In 2019, the question of public polarization first appeared in NDI Public Opinion Pools. From the listed options, respondents had to name whether different factors unite or divide society.
Question text: Please, tell me, do the following push us apart/divide or bring us together/unite us as a society

**Figure 7.1** NDI Public Opinion Poll. UNDEPOL: The following divides or unites us as a society?


However, the methods of research of the societal polarization are very sophisticated. The lack of analysis in academic literature complicates the ability to draw generalizable conclusions, especially in Georgia, where the discussion on polarization has just begun. Nevertheless, the first results of the NDI Public Opinion Poll clearly show that the main reasons for the societal polarization are believed to be the politicians, Russia, the economic system, the media, and political leaders.

To identify several consequent trends, I took two questions as variables in the same study, one being factors of polarization and the second primary source of information. According to figure 7, most of the people who get information from the Internet (Facebook) and magazines/newspapers consider politicians as the reason for the division of society. (See figure 7.1) Recently, the number of groups on social media in Georgia, which have negative coverage of the multiple political parties and individuals, has increased. Their significance was indicated by the removal of these pages by the official Facebook administration in the last six months. In the official report on coordinated inauthentic behavior, we read that the pages and Facebook groups were linked to both the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement parties. (Gleicher, 2019; Facebook, 2020, Civil.ge, 2020)
V1: INFSOUF1: Main source of Information – the first source %
V2: UNDEPOL: The following divides or unites us as society: Politicians %

Figure 7.2 NDI Public attitudes in Georgia (2019, April) Cross-tabulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross tabulation (%) V1*V2</th>
<th>Unites</th>
<th>Divides</th>
<th>DK/RA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/Facebook</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors, friends</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers, news magazines</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK/RA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CRRC Georgia. NDI Public attitudes in Georgia (2019, April)

As for magazines and newspapers, most of them are the yellow press, where the basic, often subjective information is frequently occurring. However, in the same year, only 1 percent of respondents named the magazine as a source of information that can indicate to the lesser significance of newspapers into forming the public attitudes towards polarization. (Media Monitoring Report, 2018)

The vulnerability of society to Russia may be related not only to territorial integrity but also to Russia's information policy in Georgia. Russia's information policy is anti-Western in its content, which finds a foothold in groups that see Georgia's integration with the West as an anti-state project. (EPDE, 2020)

V1: Question text: Please, tell me, do the following push us apart/divide or bring us together/unite us as a society: Russia

V2: Question text: If Disapprove, Why do you disapprove joining EU? - It allows Western interference in Georgia’s internal politics

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19 Note: The question was asked only to respondents who disapprove of the Georgian Government's stated goal to join the EU.
Cross tabulation V1xV2 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unites</th>
<th>Divides</th>
<th>DK</th>
<th>RA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CRRC Georgia. NDI Public Opinion Poll (2019, April)

Finally, one of the indicators of the division of the society is the questions asked for the examination of interpersonal trust. From 2010 to 2017, there is a significant decrease in respondents who state that most people can be trusted. On the other hand, the importance of being careful peaked in 2019 with 54% (Caucasus Barometer, 2019). At the same time, the number of neutral people has decreased. Here, the leap forward took place in 2013, at a time when political polarization had become a hallmark of the Georgian state. See Figure 7.4


Note: You can’t be too careful includes two extreme negative attitudes; Most people can be trusted – two extreme positive attitudes

In academic literature, societal polarization is closely related to the perceived economic condition that simultaneously articulates people’s ideas about politics. (Chakravarty, 2009, pp. 113-122) As I mentioned during the economic situation discussion, poverty is still one of
the main challenges in Georgia. If we look at data on trust according to the economic classes in Georgia, we will see that people in low and middle classes vary from 6 to 21 percent. While 41% of people under the poverty line believe that “you cannot be too careful,” whereas that number is only 24% in the middle class. (Caucasus Barometer, 2017) These data show that the growth and strengthening of the middle class in Georgia are critically important and may have a positive impact on both political and social relations in the long run.
8. CONCLUSION

The political polarization and its influence over the democratization is a timely process taking place in Georgia since 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union did bring independence and first steps to build democracy; however, the Soviet-style ruling mechanisms still affect Georgian endeavors to become functional democracy. It is particularly visible in the constitutional and electoral framework, which has been a tool of political dominance of every government till today.

The Georgian state is characterized by one-party rule both in executive, legislative and judicial branches. The latest amendment of the Georgian Constitution does imply positive steps towards democratic practices of the electoral system; however, neither previous nor current government manages to overcome single party ambitions to establish a proportional electoral system in upcoming parliamentary elections.

The thesis aimed to shed light on the problem of political polarization in Georgia with the historical experience of state-building. The analysis shows that political confrontation and exclusion of opposition from the political arena is not a new phenomenon in the country. The political parties created around charismatic, frequently wealthy former Soviet politicians and businessmen give rise to opaque mechanisms of policymaking and fosters widespread of client-patron relations. The most successful and influential political parties in Georgia are formed around individuals, the lack of ideological background within such parties makes them politically weak. Parties formed for short-term purposes either disintegrate or lose influence if they lose the elections.

Hence, in 2012 the United National Movement party maintained its most substantial opposition influence, and political polarization reached a whole new level. The Georgian Dream Government's declared primary mission became the disappearance and marginalization of the UNM from Georgian politics. The undemocratic style of governance of the United National Movement and their possible involvement in various criminal cases contributed to the marginalization of the party.

Polarization in Georgia has historically followed policy personalization of politics and informal governance. The influence of non-formal connections creates additional risks of corruption, which has a wide range of effects on the electoral environment, from financing to campaigning. Corruption prevents the formation of a genuinely independent business
environment. Economic reforms linked to political change create an unstable environment for international investment and lead to an increase in poverty and economic inequality, directly proportional to public polarization.

In parallel with the strengthening of political polarization, media polarization has increased in the country. However, the thesis shows that the politicization of TV broadcasters, especially TV channels, is not a new phenomenon in Georgia. Leading TV stations have always been set up to support the government or to wage a political struggle against them. It is also well seen in the details of the ownership of TV channels when the founders of TV channels are influential businessmen in close ties to any particular ruling party. Such an invasion of politics in the media environment often affects the editorial policy of television, as well as the content and rhetoric of specific TV programs and Talk shows. In such circumstances, the creation of an impartial, fact-oriented Media content is less of a priority than ever before, leading journalists to repeatedly violate media standards.

At the same time, the critical media, which has political affiliation with the current or previous governments, is giving additional leverage to divide society into two hostile camps. The boycott of the Georgian Dream leaders' participation in critical TV programs and sticking political label to all relatively critical TV channels, deepens the problems of media freedom and pluralism. There is a positive trend in the number of MPs showing up on various media outlets, which may increase the format of the dialogue on relevant topics for the country.

TV Channels are the primary source of information in Georgia. Consequently, it is not surprising that the media has a significant influence on the formation of public opinion. According to the data of 2019, the Georgians considered the society polarized. Possible factors of polarization were also identified: politics/politicians, Russia, the media, and the economic system. At the same time, public polarization is high in the population that receives information through Facebook. The reason for this may be the increased number of pages that have been created in recent years for the negative coverage of opposition parties, especially the National Movement. In contrast, anti-government pages have launched, indicating that both opposing sides are using the same methods in a polarized environment. At the same time, social distrust is growing in society, which is one of the indicators of social division.

In recent months, political events in Georgia have shown that Western pressure and their mediation in negotiations can be a means of tackling the political confrontation. For the Georgian Dream maintaining the political power has acquired far more significance, for
which even a change in rhetoric and confrontation with western allies is acceptable. If the constitutional amendments take effect before the elections, the proportional system may ease the situation. With the formation of a coalition government, compromise and dialogue between the parties may increase. Still, the fact that no one is focusing on the importance of political dialogue may indicate that even in a multi-party parliament, compromise will be difficult to achieve.
9. SLOVENIAN ABSTRACT


V zadnjem delu se opravi analiza medijske in družbene polarizacije. Kot literatura o ustreznih temah namiguje, ta dva vidika nista nujno medsebojno izključujoča. Tako lahko oba prispevata in sta posledici ekstreme polarizacije v državi. (Chakravarty, 2009; Ubiria, 2018; Nuriyev, 2015; Pokleba, 2016; Robakidze, 2019)

Demokratizacija je v nalogi povezana z institucionalnim, pravnim in ustavnim razvojem. Poleg tega delo pokaže, da je politična polarizacija vpeta v gruzijski ustavni in volilni okvir,
kar še bolj preprečuje razvoj stabilnih političnih sistemov v državi, in posledične delne reforme demokracije. Takšne okoliščine še naprej vplivajo na socialno emancipacijo in izboljšanje gruzijskega prebivalstva.
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