

6 Elections, Political Parties, and Social Change in Georgia, 2003–2018

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Introduction

Political parties in post-communist polities are often described as volatile,¹ a proposition which holds for Georgia.² Mogens Pedersen speaks of electoral volatility as “the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers,” or the flight of voters from one political party to another through subsequent rounds of electoral cycles.³ Stable party systems are important prerequisites of democratization⁴ since political parties help consolidate the interests of groups into institutionalized form.⁵ Unstable and fragile party systems are therefore more easily undermined by non-democratic institutions and actors such as the military, the church, populist political movements, and powerful oligarchs.⁶

The study of how party systems evolve over time, and what leads people to vote for particular parties, is central to understanding the development of democracies. Since independence in 1991, elections in Georgia have led to the disappearance of older political parties and the emergence of new ones. As a result of this volatility, both new and old political parties in Georgia were characterized as unstable and as failing to communicate their agendas to voters.⁷ Many came to be seen as representatives of elites and of the old *nomenklatura*,⁸ rather than as reflections of the country’s ideological divisions.

Recent public opinion data demonstrate, however, that policy issues are becoming more salient to Georgian voters.⁹ Surveys by the National Democratic Institute between 2012 and 2018 indicate that almost one-third of the country’s population would prefer that Georgia develop closer relations with Russia than with the European Union or NATO. According to the same source, Georgians with such opinions are inclined to support more conservative parties, such as the Alliance of Patriots of

Georgia, the Democratic Movement for United Georgia, and Industry Will Save Georgia (Industrialists), over more centrist and pro-Western parties.

In this chapter, I argue that there is a correlation between the attitudes of Georgian voters towards the country's pro-Western foreign policy and their sympathies towards particular political parties. This suggests the emergence of issue-based voting in Georgia, and following from this, a move towards greater stability in the country's party system. Party organizations can appeal to weak, yet evidently emerging, social divisions. I investigate how party systems stabilize over multiple election cycles, with specific reference to Georgia since independence. I explore the potential ramifications of ideological attitudes on party systems, and analyse how political parties have developed over the course of the past three decades. I argue that, alongside voting decisions based on cultural and regional characteristics, we see Georgian voters beginning to align with political parties based on the country's foreign policy orientation. Three decades after independence, Georgia's major political parties remain volatile, as was demonstrated in the 2016 parliamentary elections with the fragmentation of the United National Movement, the Republicans, and the Free Democrats. In the next election cycle, debates on the country's foreign policy could serve as mechanisms to promote greater party stabilization.

Party Structures and Voting in Post-communist Europe

The question of how political parties would emerge in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe was a topic of particular interest in the years immediately following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. The political landscape was deemed a *tabula rasa*¹⁰ – a clean slate on which observers could identify how new democratic institutions form and grow. It was initially assumed that the party landscape of Eastern Europe would be free from past cultural and institutional legacies.¹¹ At the same time, voters in the region lacked what Piotr Sztompka has called “civilizational competence”¹² – that is to say, they were not exposed to the rules and institutions key to the liberal democratic model. These assumptions, however, were quickly questioned.¹³ Geoffrey Evans, for example, has showed that variables such as life experience during the communist era, demographic patterns, and regional differences all had ramifications on party cleavages in post-communist societies.¹⁴ In addition, the design of political and electoral institutions during the transition was an important contributor to the stability of party systems, since the design ultimately determined the trajectory of multiparty systems.¹⁵

Although the effects are interactive, a directly elected president and the presidential system in general were associated with increased volatility.

The societal cleavages model of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan¹⁶ remains a useful analytical framework to explain the bases of party competition in Eastern Europe. As Russell Dalton and Kevin Deegan-Krause point out in their work, however, even in well-developed democracies, the traditional pillars of party formation, such as ideological and class issues, have been in decline since the 1980s.¹⁷ Ideological divisions are identifiable in post-communist societies, but they originate as much in pre-communist legacies and in the peculiarities of the transition from communist rule as they do in contemporary social experiences and identities.¹⁸ As a result, traditional expectations of ideological party cleavages in Eastern Europe were challenged by weak social structures and confusion between the meanings of “right” and “left.”

The cleavage structure of society in post-communist polities is intertwined with institutional design and elite behaviour.¹⁹ Margit Tavits argues that societal cleavages play a role in developing stable party support only in the case of economic downturns, when “leftist” economic promises become attractive for voters.²⁰ Institutional design, according to other students of electoral systems,²¹ is the most vital impetus in the learning and sophistication of both voters and politicians in post-communist systems.²² Lise Herman argues that democratic consolidation is largely agent induced, where political parties, not institutions, are the drivers of the democratic process.²³ Treating parties as agents of greater voter sophistication challenges the dominant institutionalist approaches to democratic consolidation, which consider institutions chosen during the transition as crucial to party and voter strategies.²⁴

Recent “earthquake elections” in Eastern Europe²⁵ that diminished or even wiped out traditional political parties have added to the discussion on volatility and whether party systems are in fact stabilizing or destabilizing.²⁶ Tavits claims that elite behaviour, rather than voting, is the trigger of party splits, defections, and schisms.²⁷ The origins of volatile party politics also can be linked to economic instability, although this claim has been subject to serious critique.²⁸

What, then, drives voters to support particular political parties in post-communist societies? Can we detect a pattern? Can we treat Eastern Europe as a separate analytical category? Societal cleavages continue to be important: religion and social class are significant predictors of party affiliation,²⁹ as is the nature of voters’ exposure to the communist past.³⁰ Sociocultural, spatial, and historical dimensions of voting are vital variables, but they also might coincide with voters’ alignments based on traditional or newly emerging societal cleavages.³¹

In Georgia, very few of the ideological pillars that hypothetically allow parties to identify and seek support from their voters are apparent.³² Distinctive voting patterns of Georgia's ethnic minorities, such as Azerbaijanis, or sections of the urban population, are products of the relatively recent past, and are in line with the ideas formulated by Herbert Kitschelt, Geoffrey Evans, and Stephen Whitefield.³³ Specifically, the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s and the particularities of Georgia's urbanization during the Soviet period influenced the centre-periphery and urban-rural electoral cleavages, although the role of sociocultural and regional identities cannot be ignored as important contributory factors.³⁴ The political preferences of Georgian voters do not run deep, and are easily overturned by the populist mantra of political parties or by the pressures of local elites.³⁵ The emergence of powerful figures – such as ex-prime minister and billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili – can easily sway voting based on popular economic expectations of a “trickle down” effect.³⁶

Political Parties in Georgia: A Survey

The current arrangement of Georgia's political landscape is the result of the country's divisive and volatile political history. Eduard Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), a parliamentary majority from 1995 to 2001, was the cloth from which much of Georgia's political class emerged. Georgia's former president, Mikheil Saakashvili, served as both minister of justice (2000–1) and as the leader of the CUG's parliamentary faction,³⁷ while Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili (2015–18, Georgian Dream), was a member of parliament from 1999 to 2004 as part of the CUG's party list.³⁸ Shevardnadze, after his return to Georgia in 1992, sought legitimization through a sustainable party base. His newly established CUG was a multifarious coalition of former communist bureaucrats and apparatchiks, along with emerging young politicians, all with diverse backgrounds and ideological sentiments.³⁹ The CUG was a catch-all party of the old and new establishments, and the president's authority was the single unitary force that kept it together.⁴⁰

The CUG started crumbling in 2001 as internal tensions inside the party as well as public dissent intensified. The government and the CUG were accused of corruption, of mishandling the economy, and of trying to shape the constitution to their own needs.⁴¹ That year, a splinter group of the CUG formed the New Rights Party, and prominent figures such as Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania followed this example the following year, peeling off CUG members to form the United National Movement (UNM) and the United Democrats, respectively.

After a disastrous performance in the 2002 municipal elections,⁴² the CUG tried to regroup for the 2003 parliamentary elections, forming a new electoral bloc with other parties, such as the National Democratic Party, and the Socialist Party. The elections, however, which led to the Rose Revolution and the resignation of President Shevardnadze on 23 November 2003, transformed Georgia's party landscape. Saakashvili's popularity as the leader of the youthful UNM, compared to the tired and corrupt faces of the CUG, led to the electoral annihilation of Georgia's former ruling political groups. This included Shevardnadze's important ally, Aslan Abashidze, and his Democratic Union for Revival Party, which was the dominant force in the Autonomous Republic of Achara. Other opposition parties were significantly diminished, such as the Labour Party and the National Democratic Party. The electoral bloc of the New Rights and the Industry Will Save Georgia parties narrowly managed to pass the high 7 per cent threshold in the repeat parliamentary elections of 28 March 2004 (Table 6.1).

The United National Movement was more effective as a party after the merger of Saakashvili's National Movement with Zhvania's electoral bloc of United Democrats, and a political group led by Nino Burjanadze. The new party, National Movement-Democrats, espoused staunch pro-Western (and anti-Russian) sentiments. This became the UNM's most consistent ideological stance. The UNM was in the centre-right of Georgia's political spectrum, but it advocated for more social spending as well as neoliberal economic policies.⁴³ From the electoral perspective, the bulk of the UNM's support came from rural settlements and Georgia's ethnic minority population.

The UNM government introduced vital reforms in the economy, public finances, defence, and the security and education sectors, and it eradicated petty corruption. The reforms were placed in a neoliberal framework,⁴⁴ and despite economic growth, failed to tackle rising income inequality.⁴⁵ The party quickly merged with the state, and incorporated large businesses into its policy-making circles. Several government employees were suspected of lobbying for important sectors of Georgia's economy,⁴⁶ while two prominent bankers, Vladimer Gurgendze and Nikoloz Gilauri, headed the UNM-led Georgian government for almost five years.

Dramatic events changed the UNM's fortunes in late 2007, which helped Georgian opposition forces consolidate and challenge the ruling United National Movement. Massive protest rallies in Tbilisi, which initially started in support of former defence minister Irakli Okruashvili,⁴⁷ were dispersed brutally by the police. In order to end the emerging political deadlock, Saakashvili called for snap presidential elections. In the

Table 6.1. Distribution of Seats in the Georgian Parliament Elected through Party Lists (PLs) and Single-Member Districts (SMDs), 2003–16

	2003 (annulled)		2004 (repeated)		2008		2012		2016	
	PL	SMDs	PL	SMDs*	PL	SMDs	PL	SMDs	PL	SMDs
For New Georgia	38	19		19						
Democratic Union for Revival	33	6		6						
Saakashvili-National Movement	32	10		10						
Burjanadze-Democrats	15	4		4						
National Movement-Democrats		1	135	1						
United National Movement					48	71	33	32		27
Labour Party	20	3		3	6					
New Rights	12	4		4						
Rightist Opposition-Industrialists			15							
Industrialists		4		4						1**
United Opposition (incl. New Rights)					17	2				
Giorgi Targamadze-Christian- Democrats					6					
Republican Party						2				
Georgian Dream Coalition							44	41	44	71
Alliance of Patriots of Georgia									6	
Independents		21		21						1***
Delegation of Abkhazia****		12								

* Majoritarian MPs elected in 2003 elections retained their seats, according to the decision of the Georgian Supreme Court.

** In the parliament of 2016, the Industrialist MP caucused with Georgian Dream.

*** Salome Zurabishvili, Georgia's future president, ran as an independent. Georgian Dream did not nominate a contestant in her district, informally supporting her nomination.

****The delegation of Abkhazian MPs was elected in the 1992 elections and automatically retained their seats in the 1995, 1999, and 2003 parliaments.

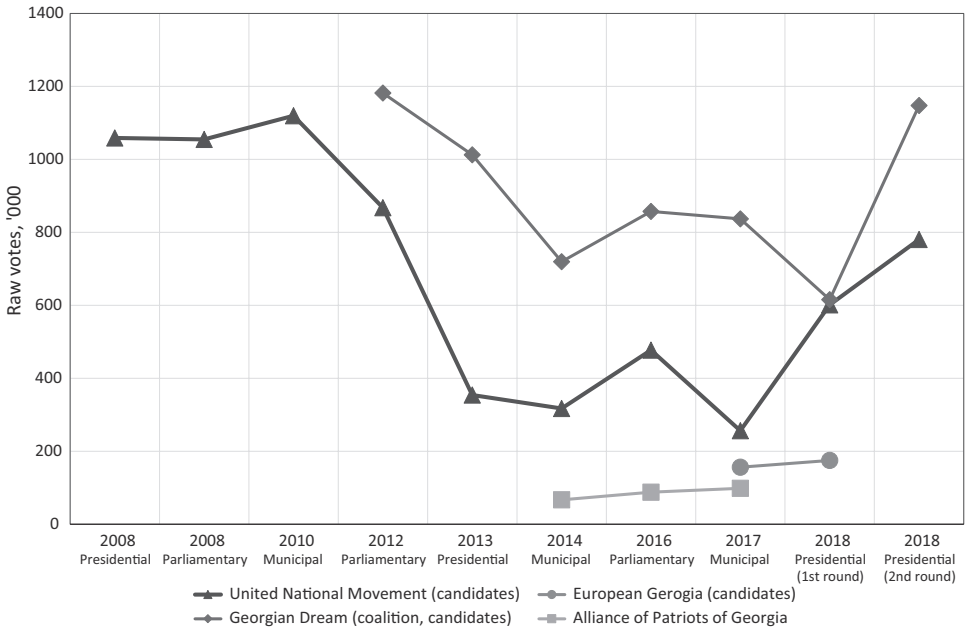
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, "IPU PARLINE Database: Georgia, Election Archives," 2012, online at http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2119_arc.htm, accessed 5 July 2017.

2008 presidential elections that followed, the opposition almost managed to force a runoff. In the first round, President Saakashvili squeaked through with 53.47 per cent⁴⁸ of the vote, compared with 25.69 per cent for his major rival, Levan Gachechiladze. However, the opposition failed to gain the same support in the parliamentary elections, and two major opposition groups, the United Opposition and the Labour Party, refused to participate in the parliamentary process altogether.

The August 2008 war with Russia was an important watershed in the political history of Georgia. Although it did not significantly affect the Georgian political landscape, the incompetence of the government during the war intensified public dissent over the conduct and policies of the ruling party. In early 2009, oppositional forces organized street protests in Tbilisi, and began polling at the same level as the UNM in public opinion surveys.⁴⁹ The opposition failed, however, to turn public support into political gains, and was unable to pressure the government into early parliamentary elections. The opposition polled poorly during the 2010 municipal elections and its public support diminished as it failed to display a common front.⁵⁰ Remaining fractured, the opposition was loosely coordinated by a national council that contained representatives of almost a dozen political parties. At various times, the council included established organizations such as the Republicans and Labour Party, as well as relative newcomers such as the National Forum and the Movement for United Georgia. But the council was ideologically amorphous, its members focused only on removing Mikheil Saakashvili from power. It never formed a stable alliance, and it finally disintegrated on the eve of the 2010 municipal elections.

When billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili emerged as the leader of a new opposition movement in 2011, it led to a crucial turnaround in Georgia's political landscape. He consolidated the opposition's fragmented political forces into a single coalition called Bidzina Ivanishvili–Georgian Dream, and used his financial resources to lead it to a remarkable and unexpected victory in the 2012 parliamentary elections. Ivanishvili's reputation as a successful businessman and philanthropist drew a certain portion of voters towards Georgian Dream in 2012.⁵¹ In addition, his radical rhetoric and posture as the only real alternative to the UNM consolidated the opposition vote. Video clips of prison torture under Saakashvili shown widely on television before the election, and the televised case of the killing of a minor, Barbare Rapaliants, as alleged retribution for her parent's political involvement, added to Ivanishvili's victory in 2012.⁵² Political parties such as the more ideologically liberal Free Democrats and Republicans, and the more right-wing and isolationist Industrialists, joined a Georgian Dream coalition in the parliament.

Figure 6.1. Raw Votes Received by Current Parliamentary Parties, Georgia, 2008–18



Note: In the 2018 presidential elections, Georgian Dream did not nominate its own candidate but supported that of Salome Zurbishvili.

Source: Freedom of information request from the Central Elections Commission of Georgia.

Ivanishvili was a polarizing figure, temperamentally uncomfortable with governing, and after one year as prime minister announced his retirement from politics. But Ivanishvili is still a powerful political figure in Georgian politics, and his informal influence over government policy is one of Georgian democracy’s weakest points.⁵³ Although Georgian Dream put significant effort into creating a party structure separate from Ivanishvili, the party is still strongly associated with its former leader, who currently chairs it.

The Georgian Dream coalition held together until the eve of the 2016 parliamentary elections, when it rapidly disintegrated. Old coalition members such as the Industrialists, Republicans, Free Democrats, and the National Forum were dismissed from the coalition. Other constituents, such as the Conservatives and left-leaning Social-Democrats, were directly incorporated in the parliamentary party lists and among the ranks of Georgian Dream’s majoritarian caucus. Georgian Dream also gained a

comfortable majority in the legislature, which ensured the passage of widely debated and controversial constitutional amendments, including the abolition of direct presidential elections.⁵⁴

The UNM's relatively poor results led to a split among its parliamentary members that trickled down to the mass membership. The party managed to sustain a steady voter base even after moving into opposition, and retained a strong regional structure. Internal divisions among party factions became visible, however, almost right after the polls were closed in October 2016. UNM members loyal to Saakashvili supported a boycott of the parliamentary process,⁵⁵ a move resisted by the party's dominant figures and leaders. The former president's controversial comments accusing his old teammates of playing "Ivanishvili's game"⁵⁶ added fuel to the fire, and had a negative impact on the party's electoral performance. Division among the ranks of the UNM led to the defection of almost its entire parliamentary delegation to a splinter political party, the Movement for Liberty–European Georgia (MLEG).

Uncertainty about the future of both the UNM and the MLEG might have prevented potential voters from supporting either party in the October 2017 municipal elections. Nationwide, the UNM received only 256,000 votes, while 156,000 voters supported the MLEG. In total, this was about a 65,000 decline from the previous parliamentary elections. In contrast, Georgian Dream lost only 20,000 votes in the same period.

The UNM ran a successful campaign in the 2018 presidential elections. Its candidate, Grigol Vashadze, received 601,000 votes (37.74 per cent of the total), more than double the number the party had been able to mobilize in the previous municipal elections. Davit Bakradze, the MLEG's presidential candidate, finished third after Salome Zurbishvili, the candidate supported by Georgian Dream, and Vashadze by garnering 175,000 votes (10.97 per cent of the total). In the runoff, the MLEG endorsed Vashadze.

In 2016, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) was a new addition to Georgia's party constellation. The group emerged after the 2012 parliamentary elections, presenting itself as a patriotic centre-right party.⁵⁷ The APG has declared its support for Georgia's integration into EU structures, but public opinion surveys show that its electorate shares more pro-Russian sentiments than do the supporters of other parties.⁵⁸ The increase in the party's popularity – although it only squeaked into the parliament by reaching the 5 per cent barrier – could be attributed to a successful and active campaign in the media, accompanied by strong anti-Turkish, and conservative-populist views on social issues. The party had a decent result in the 2017 municipal elections, supported by 98,000 voters, compared with 88,000 who did

so in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The Alliance did not nominate its own presidential candidate for the 2018 presidential poll, but announced that it would support Salome Zurbashvili, the Georgian Dream candidate, in the runoff.⁵⁹

Georgian politics is still dominated by a single ruling party, although oppositional voices are present in the legislature and in the political arena outside the parliament. Political events in 2018 revealed internal divisions within Georgian Dream. Its largely technocratic government failed to address political crises quickly, such as protest rallies organized by the supporters of aggrieved fathers Zaza Saralidze and Malkhaz (Vakha) Machalikhvili, who had lost their children in clashes with the government.⁶⁰ This crisis was followed by a reshuffle in the cabinet: the sitting prime minister, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, was replaced by the lesser-known former finance minister, Mamuka Bakhtadze. Although the prime minister's office is still the highest political office in the country, Kvirikashvili's dismissal was attributed to the influence of Bidzina Ivanishvili. There was minimal consultation and discussion with the public.⁶¹

Turmoil among the ranks of Georgian Dream almost cost the party its victory in the presidential campaign in 2018. The decision to support the candidacy of Salome Zurbashvili, an independent member of the parliament, was announced only weeks ahead of presidential polls, which added to the confusion. Zurbashvili failed to secure victory in the first round, and faced a UNM-endorsed candidate, Grigol Vashadze, in the runoff. Negative campaigning⁶² and a controversial promise by the government to write off the debts of more than half a million Georgians led to Zurbashvili's eventually gaining a commanding 59.52 per cent of the votes.⁶³

In 2019, Georgian Dream still holds a comfortable parliamentary majority, although it needed a mighty effort to mobilize voters for the presidential runoff. Indeed, its supporters might not necessarily identify themselves with Georgian Dream, but simply resent the United National Movement. Almost half of the Georgian public remains politically unaffiliated.⁶⁴ This also hints at the failure of mainstream Georgian political parties to reach the wider population.

A New Cleavage in Georgian Party Politics?

There is a broad consensus inside Georgia regarding the country's aspirations to join European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Political resistance to this consensus has increased of late, however, from the opposition, including Nino Burjanadze's Democratic Movement and the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, and even among members of the Georgian Dream

coalition, such as Gogi Topadze, leader of the Industrialists. My analysis of the data suggests that issues connected to Georgia's foreign policy orientation are correlated with Georgian voters' party affiliation. Thus, regardless of the sociodemographic traits of the respondent, variables such as the respondent's attitude towards closer integration with the European Union are significantly correlated with broader political sympathies.

My analysis is based on a publicly available repeat survey of Georgians' attitudes towards the EU commissioned by the Europe Foundation,⁶⁵ and conducted by the Caucasian Research Resources Center–Georgia.⁶⁶ Face-to-face interviews were done in 2011, 2013, and 2015.⁶⁷ The datasets contain different attitudinal variables measuring respondents' positions towards the EU, as well as measures of their sociodemographic characteristics. The model presented here evaluates, in addition, respondents' attitudes towards various political parties, and how respondents would vote in a hypothetical referendum on Georgia's membership of the EU. The question is somewhat speculative, but it echoes the mantra among the country's political elites⁶⁸ on Georgia's pro-European foreign policy goal.⁶⁹ The dependent variable is coded as a binary outcome, where 1 corresponds to the respondent's declared willingness to vote for EU membership, while other outcomes (refusal, negative, and neutral attitudes) are grouped towards 0.

The analysis reveals that the major predictors in the model are respondents' attitudes towards political parties. In each survey year, participants were asked to assess their feelings on a five-point (2011) or a three-point (2013, 2015) scale towards political parties. Apart from political feelings, I controlled for the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, such as gender, age, educational attainment, and type of residence, and evaluated the hypothesis using a logistic regression model. Appendix 6.1 summarizes the main outcome of the analysis.

Overall, the analysis suggests a link between how respondents felt about political parties and their preference for EU membership. The trend is clearly pronounced in 2015, where eight out of eleven party variables predict attitudes towards the EU. Supporters of the UNM form the most consistent group: respondents who expressed a positive attitude towards the UNM were twice as likely to vote for Georgia's EU membership in a hypothetical referendum than those who had negative feelings about the party.

Respondents with a positive attitude towards the Republicans showed even higher comfort with the country's foreign policy goal of EU membership. Although the coefficient in 2013 is not statistically significant, the overall trend indicates the consistency of this pattern. Supporters of

Our Georgia–Free Democrats, led by former minister of defence Irakli Alasania, were also staunch pro-Westerners. In 2015, respondents with positive attitudes towards the Free Democrats were twice as likely to back Georgia’s EU membership as those who looked on the party negatively. Those with neutral attitudes towards the party were also more likely to be supporters of Georgia’s integration with the West.

At the zenith of its popularity in the years 2008–11, the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM), which later merged with Nino Burjanadze’s Democratic Movement, boasted about its pro-Western supporters. In the 2011 dataset, respondents with a positive attitude towards the CDM were twice as likely to support the EU as those with negative attitudes towards the party. Georgian Dream supporters showed only moderate support for the EU in the hypothetical referendum compared with those who had negative attitudes towards that party. This does not necessarily mean that Georgian Dream supporters were more pro-Russian. Considering the polarized nature of Georgian politics, respondents with positive feelings towards the UNM were more likely to be stalwart opponents of Georgian Dream (and supporters of the European cause), which might explain the observed pattern.

Party attitudes stayed firm over the period of analysis; none switched from negative to positive or vice versa regarding the EU. Negative attitudes towards the country’s EU membership emerged only in the last year of the study. Respondents who expressed positive or neutral attitudes towards Nino Burjanadze’s Democratic Movement had the largest odds (0.436 and 0.593) of rejecting EU membership, and the significance of the value suggests that the chances that this trend was a randomly occurring one are low. Respondents with positive attitudes towards the Industrialists were also less likely to vote for Georgia’s EU membership. Finally, respondents who had neutral feelings towards the Alliance of Patriots were less likely to vote for the EU than those who possessed negative attitudes towards the party.

Demographic variables also have a consistent and statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. Younger respondents were more likely to support EU membership in a hypothetical referendum, while those with only secondary or lower education were much less likely to be supporters of Georgia’s EU membership than peers with higher education. Finally, geography matters: although the related coefficients become significant starting from 2013, respondents from Tbilisi were more likely to have positive attitudes towards the EU than those in the rest of the country. Georgia’s ethnic minorities were least likely to be pro-EU compared with Tbilisi residents.

Conclusion

Despite correlations between party support and pro-EU attitudes, voting preferences based on ideological cleavages are still comparatively tenuous among the Georgian public. Geoffrey Evans reminds us that, in many other young post-communist democracies, societal cleavages only weakly determine voting patterns.⁷⁰ Other recent studies – for example, by Christopher Raymond and his colleagues – show that institutional and cleavage effects “are learned through experience with elections.”⁷¹ New ideological cleavages emerging in Georgian politics might have something to do with this “learning” process.

Stephen Whitefield suggests that foreign policy orientation – more specifically, pro- or anti-Western stances – serve as ideological bases for party formation in a number of ex-communist countries.⁷² Although the proposition was made nearly a decade and a half ago, it has only recently become relevant to understanding Georgian politics. The newest data in Georgia show that sympathy towards certain political parties mirrors respondents’ attitudes towards Georgia’s declared foreign policy goals. Economic issues and well-being are extremely salient, but they are not reflected in the voting public’s alliance with particular parties or in the formation of political coalitions, although the economy might have a moderating effect on ideological partisanship, as Tavits attests.⁷³ During economic downturns, cultural cleavages can contribute to the stabilization of party systems. Gabor Toka and Gergely Karacsony⁷⁴ find that that voter alignments are often based on cultural issues more than on economic ones. The evidence from Hungary suggests that debates on foreign policy orientation are “cultural” issues, similar to those that influence party affiliation in Georgia.

In a deeper sense, narratives regarding foreign orientation, in this case pro- or anti-Western ones, are linked to attitudes towards “traditional”⁷⁵ values, which are widely promoted in the former Soviet space by Russia’s conservative elites.⁷⁶ Such “traditional” or “spiritual-moral” values represent a specific reading of traditionalism, one that in the Russian and Georgian Orthodox Churches includes an anti-LGBTQ stance and a defence of Eastern Christianity’s exceptionalism.⁷⁷ The “West” is characterized as the “main propagator” of immorality.⁷⁸ Not only are these ideas employed by the Russian state for internal consumption; they increasingly find their way into the country’s foreign policy agenda as part of its “soft power.”⁷⁹ The Georgian public is, on the whole, socially and culturally conservative.⁸⁰ Conservative ideas intertwined with anti-Western stances have found fertile ground in Georgia, and might contribute to the emergence of a new, purely ideological pole in Georgia’s party system.

Appendix 6.1. Attitudes towards Political Parties, Georgia, 2011, 2013, and 2015, Regression Analysis

Variables (base categories reported in brackets)	Categories	2011		2013		2015	
Attitudes towards the Free Democrats (negative)	Neutral	0.628	-1.9	1.005	-0.02	1.533	(2.65)**
	Positive	0.622	-1.42	1.176	-0.41	2.661	(5.28)**
Attitudes towards the Republicans (negative)	Neutral	1.311	-0.98	1.642	-1.45	1.281	-1.39
	Positive	2.744	(2.59)**	1.286	-0.7	2.311	(3.44)**
Attitudes towards the Alliance of Patriots (negative)	Neutral					0.677	(2.31)*
	Positive					0.78	-1.17
Attitudes towards Democratic Movement–United Georgia (negative)	Neutral	0.787	-1.14			0.593	(3.49)**
	Positive	2.154	-1.63			0.436	(3.77)**
Attitudes towards the United National Movement (negative)	Neutral	2.248	(3.35)**	1.34	-1.89	1.018	-0.11
	Positive	2.643	(4.19)**	2.701	(4.89)**	1.746	(3.09)**
Attitudes towards Georgian Dream (negative)	Neutral			0.645	-1.89	0.959	-0.24
	Positive			0.922	-0.31	1.697	(2.30)*
Attitudes towards the National Forum (negative)	Neutral	0.666	-1.55	0.71	-1.1	1.041	-0.19
	Positive	1.045	-0.11	0.836	-0.52	0.957	-0.1
Attitudes towards the Conservatives (negative)	Neutral	0.742	-1.42	1.124	-0.48	0.919	-0.39
	Positive	0.846	-0.53	1.27	-0.73	0.91	-0.27

Variables (base categories reported in brackets)	Categories	2011	2013	2015
Attitudes towards Labour (negative)	Neutral	1.121 -0.49	0.794 -1.44	1.099 -0.64
	Positive	0.781 -1.02	0.92 -0.37	1.357 -1.62
Attitudes towards the Industrialists (negative)	Neutral	0.653 -1.87	0.952 -0.19	0.864 -0.67
	Positive	0.917 -0.19	0.796 -0.73	0.501 (2.18)*
Attitudes towards the Christian Democratic Movement (negative)	Neutral	1.572 (2.30)*	1.289 -1.29	
	Positive	2.234 (3.52)**	1.107 -0.47	
Attitudes towards New Rights (negative)	Neutral	1.169 -0.57		
	Positive	0.458 -1.61		
Attitudes towards the National Democratic Party (negative)	Neutral	1.119 -0.59		
	Positive	1.728 -1.04		
Attitudes towards the People's Party (negative)	Neutral	1.301 -0.98		
	Positive	0.847 -0.43		
Attitudes towards the Freedom Party (negative)	Neutral	0.727 -1.22		
	Positive	1.734 -1.12		
Attitudes towards the Georgian Party (negative)	Neutral	0.774 -0.95		
	Positive	1.531 -0.82		
Attitudes towards the Democratic Party of Georgia (negative)	Neutral	1.009 -0.03		

Variables (base categories reported in brackets)	Categories	2011	2013	2015
Attitudes towards the Georgian Group (negative)	Positive	1.22	-0.41	
	Neutral	0.973	-0.09	
Attitudes towards We Ourselves (negative)	Positive	0.538	-1.2	
	Neutral	1.216	-0.75	
Respondent's sex (male)	Positive	3.003	-1.59	
	Female	0.681	(2.87)**	0.631 (4.60)** 0.851 -1.54
Respondent's age		0.987	(3.45)**	0.993 (2.71)** 0.985 (5.51)**
Attained education (higher)	Secondary or lower	0.436	(6.46)**	0.72 (2.72)** 0.445 (5.80)**
	Secondary vocational	2.69	-1.25	0.875 -0.5 0.933 -0.31
Settlement type (capital)	Urban	0.776	-0.77	0.457 (3.14)** 0.543 (2.57)*
	Capital	0.718	-1.14	0.553 (2.12)* 0.511 (3.09)**
	Ethnic minorities			0.066 (9.18)** 0.205 (6.09)**
N		1,665	2,435	2,317
Hosmer–Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test	Prob>Chi2	0.989	0.2684	0.4256

Note: Significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; odds ratios are reported.

NOTES

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