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Understanding the Georgian Democracy through the Voters' Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Why does the post-soviet Georgian democracy differ so much from the representative model of democracy which was typical for the developed western countries in the 20th century? We will try to find an answer to this question through the voters' screen. Through using the dimension - reduction techniques, we can analyze the basic, underlying axes that shape the electoral field in Georgia. The identical approach is employed to sketch a general portrait of a Georgian voter and explore his frame of reference while navigating the electoral field. The electoral behavior is also interpreted by employing the relevant theoretical perspectives. In addition, we will describe those aspects of the electoral process in Georgia that may evoke parallels with some of the post-soviet and developed democracies.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Voting Behavior, Georgia, Elections

INTRODUCTION

The recent trend of political developments in the countries with established democracies, and a large body of electoral studies, have demonstrated that the ideology- and party- driven western politics have been weakened (Dalton 2000). The bottom-up representation, determined by societal groups, have been gradually replaced with the representation of the state to the people by creating narratives of "people's" aspirations

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(Saward 2009). The long-established political maps, depicting the economic (state vs. market) and cultural (conservative vs. liberal values) divisions, have become a less efficient compass for the electoral behavior. Extensive research materials have indicated that the non-policy factors, such as personal characteristics of the candidates or the ownership of the issues, interfere with the voters' decision-making process and determine the outcome of elections considerably (Enelow and Hinich 1982; Schofield and Sened 2006). The widespread trend is to bring out the leaders' charisma and build an electoral support on the non-policy grounds by articulating the interests of the "whole nation" through a symbolic discourse. The social scientists often use the concept of populism to characterize this growing new trend. Populism discards the horizontal cleavages and promotes the vertical - People against Elite - dimension, which includes the elites at the top and the emigrants at the bottom (Meny and Surel 2002).

The above-depicted new characteristics of the western politics, which researchers consider to be idiosyncratic for the western representative democracy, have been the customary mode of the Georgian politics since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the recent history of the country may provide valuable material for comparing and understanding the ongoing processes in the western democracies. For the last three decades, Georgia has been practicing politics that incorporates two essential modes – (a) Teleological, "national interests" oriented discourse, and (b) the counter - mobilizing, retrospective democracy. Retrospective democracy implies that the prospective voting on the vision or ideology is replaced with the principle of accountability and voters retrospectively punish or reward politicians with their vote (Campbell 2010; Rosanvallon 2008). Apart from these two modes, the politics appears to be extremely personalized and "strong man" driven. Counter-mobilizing and tactical voting are indicative of an anti-systemic and anti-elitist electoral behavior. Factually, individuals vote for a candidate who is capable of throwing the rascals out of their offices, rather than for a candidate that they merely like.

The chronic malaise of Georgian Politics may be schematically described as a spiral, comprising of the following stages: Initial massive support to a regime, public disappointment and outrage, negative mobilization, and retrospective voting. At the beginning of the political cycle, the public displays less interest to engage in politics and control the newly elected regime. The population gradually finds itself frustrated by the misuse of the political power or its inefficiency. Under this condition, any highly publicized "injustice" serves as a trigger to shaking the public apathy and results in an outbreak of mass protests. The political actors capitalize on two factors: (a) The so-called strong leader who projects messianic promises and is perceived as capable of accomplishing the task, and (b) Channeling the public anger by means of the most clearly

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articulated negative position towards the existing regime. As a rule, the strongest political leader pulls together the small, ideologically incompatible parties and thereby, creates a political coalition. Such political coalitions project themselves as a national unifying entity rather than a political party that represents the interests of a distinct social group. A coalition articulates the unifying, non-divisive message and speaks on behalf of "the people", not on behalf of a particular social class or group. The coalition wins the election and obtains an almost unrestricted power - the constitutional majority in the Parliament and all of the commanding positions in the government bodies. As usual, the regimes try to combine the conflicting goals. Specifically, they strive to implement the necessary reforms that may be unpopular and, simultaneously, still remain popular enough to be re-elected. In order to accomplish this unrealistic task, the regimes slow down the pace of the reforms to serve the interests of the different groups and, as a result, degenerate into a corrupted, self-preserving entity that is incapable of producing any tangible results. Since Georgian politics lacks the historically established, strong institutions (rule of law, civil society, and strong opposition), which can inhibit a mistreatment of the power, the once democratically elected government mutates into an autocratic regime simulating the democracy by means of mishandling the incumbent's advantages. The next phase of the vicious circle begins: once again, a new political actor emerges and tries to capitalize on the "all minus the one" principle in order to mobilize the public anger.

There are theories of democratization that scrutinize the economic factors to explain the institutional weakness and the fragility of some of democracies and their susceptibility to an autocratic rule (Przeworski et al. 2003). Furthermore, the interest of social scientists is drawn to the factors, related to an electoral legislation that is regarded as being instrumental in the process of shaping the democratic institutions and the system of the political parties (Duverger 1972; Ishiyama 1999). In this paper, we do not aim at analyzing Georgian democracy from an institutional point of view; rather, we look at the electoral behavior in order to understand what kind of structures of the public mind contribute to the shaping of Georgian politics as it is. Through analyzing the two elections' data, we can investigate the underlying electoral cleavages that may be the factors to explain the characteristics of the democracy in Georgia, especially the two modes (teleology and retrospective voting) driven politics.

POLITICS IN THE POST SOVIET GEORGIA

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Georgia passed four political cycles. A cycle constitutes the ruling period of the regimes that promote the different developmental projects.

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The government of the first democratically elected President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was overthrown by the swift military coup d'etat in December 1992. The coup was preceded by the intense political clashes and mass protests against the regime. Gamsakhurdia's presidency was marked by an outbreak of an inter-ethnic violence and confrontation with the elites, who regarded his regime as an ethnic-religious autocracy. The confrontation turned into a civil war that lasted for almost three years.

In 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze was elected as the chairman of the Parliament and the Head of the State. After three years of civil war, Shevardnadze's regime deactivated the paramilitary groups and established the conditions for a stable development. He faced two major problems: the destroyed post-Soviet economy and the strong Russian interference in the Georgian affairs. Shevardnadze managed to initiate Georgia as the essential transportation route for the energy resources and establish a clear-cut pro-western foreign policy. The initial years of Shevardnadze's presidency proved to be successful. Various transitional economic reforms were implemented that resulted in a macroeconomic stability and economic growth. In 1995, Georgia joined the Council of Europe and in 2002, declared an aspiration to become a member of the NATO. Besides, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were invited to support the economic transformation and ensure a macroeconomic stability. However, the system started operating as a mix of the rule of law and the law of personal relationships combined with the massive corruption and the shadow sector of the economy. Informal, clienteles' networks involving the state bureaucracy became the main source of obtaining wealth and privileges. The allegations of the vote fabrication in November 2003 triggered the protest rallies against the regime. Eventually, the rallies developed into the Rose Revolution and terminated the second political cycle. Shevardnadze's government was replaced by the government of President Mikheil Saakashvili and his ruling coalition - the National Movement.

The initial years of the third political cycle were marked by the swift and efficient reforms that aimed at establishing strong state institutions and a further liberation of the economy which produced remarkable results. Besides the acute social side effects of the reforms, Saakashvili had to cope with additional challenges. Specifically, he opted for snubbing the public involvement and pushed the technically right decisions. This caused deep resentment among the elites and their alienation from the processes. The exceedingly teleological discourse was employed to consolidate the general public. Furthermore, the government set the cultural agenda in order to modernize the attitudes of the traditionalist groups in Georgia, which brought about the issues of psychological security and cultural shocks among large groups of the Georgian population. Finally, the reforms aimed at establishing a legal universalism which should have been a

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mandatory precondition for the economic liberalism stumbled or even failed. The unsuccessful reforms of the legal system manifested themselves in the so-called *telephone law*, the frequent abuse of the property and human rights and caused massive anger and frustration among the population. In 2007, massive anti-Saakashvili protest rallies denouncing injustice began in Georgia. In 2011, the Georgian billionaire, Bidzina Ivanishvili, entered the political scene and assembled the broad anti-Saakashvili political coalition - the Georgian Dream - which consisted of this protest movement and small, ideologically incompatible parties. After one year of a cold civil war that more likely resembled an existential struggle to identify the good and the evil rather than a political campaign, the National Movement lost the 2012 Parliamentary elections and the fourth political cycle began in Georgia.

The dominant discourse of the Georgian Dream was directed towards the "restoration of Justice", a better democracy, and human rights.

In conclusion, all the post-Gamsakhurdia regimes took advantage of the pro-reforms and the pro-western transitional paradigm (Carothers 2002). The anti-elitist, anti-systemic, and anti-regime massive political rallies appeared to be a key instrument in the regime changing process.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The main question of the research may be formulated as follows: What type of relationship exists between the patterns of the electoral behavior and the present mode of democracy in Georgia?

We analyzed the survey data of the two elections that followed the 2012 Parliamentary elections - the Presidential election in 2013 and the Parliamentary election in 2016. In 2013, the Georgian dream won the presidential election. Despite the fact that the constitutional amendments radically reduced the executive power of the Institute of Presidency, this election had a significant symbolic meaning to ensure a sense of stability and a new balance of powers. From 2012 to 2016, the first term of the Georgian Dream was marked with an increased welfare spending, less efficiency, less determined state apparatus, and amorphous and eclectic politics in the different spheres. There was an impression that the Georgian Dream tried to create a balance among the political antagonists merely to avoid ground shattering consequences.

Once more, before the 2016 Parliamentary election, the National Movement and the Georgian Dream opted for each other's demonization and identifying "the Enemy" as the main pre-election strategy. The political slogans of the Georgian Dream reflected the free-floating populism along with the blurred policy

options ("Freedom, Rapid Development, and Prosperity"). The National Movement brought up the issue of the inefficiency of the ruling party and the "unfulfilled promises" as the focal points of its political campaign.

The article presents a comparative analysis of two pre-election surveys (Presidential in 2013 and Parliamentary in 2016), in order to reveal the continuing characteristics of the Georgian electoral field. Despite the fact that the two elections were supposed to elect different ruling bodies, we considered the data as comparable. It is reasonable to expect that the characteristics of an individual candidate matter more in a presidential election than in a parliamentary election; however, this assumption is less relevant to the Presidential election in Georgia in 2013. In 2013, the frontmen of two major political adversaries (the Georgian Dream and the National Movement) had to take the back seats and the less prominent politicians were nominated as the presidential candidates. Thus, a factor of their personal charisma played a negligible role in the electoral campaign. Factually, their ratings may be regarded as the mere extensions (or projections) of the parties' ratings.

The survey before the Presidential election in September 2013 was conducted by the Center for Social Studies. The Caucasus Research Resource Center carried out the survey before the Parliamentary election in June 2016 at the request of the NDI. Both of the surveys provide a representative (random sampled) nationwide data obtained by the means of face-to-face interviews.

We utilized the dimension reduction techniques to analyze two elections data. Factor analysis is applied to construct the two-dimensional spatial models. Subsequently, the regression models were employed in order to reveal the variables that better explain the sensitivity of the respondents toward each dimension. Finally, we employed the three main theories of the electoral behavior in order to interpret the research results.

The two-dimensional spaces have been constructed based on the questions reflecting the public debate issues that were prevalent prior to the elections. Besides the current policy issues, the 2013 year's questionnaire contained questions to reveal the more enduring basic beliefs relevant to the western-styled right - wing – left - wing continuum. Questions, regarding market-state relations, relationships between the church and the state, and the rights of the minorities (sexual and religious) were included in the research instrument. Regrettably, in 2016, the questions related to the basic beliefs were not present. Nevertheless, assuming that beliefs are broad general dispositions that are quite stable and unlikely to be largely modified in such a short period of time, we can principally extrapolate the results to 2016.

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The two spatial maps, developed as a result of a factor analysis of the pre-election data, reveal that the first enduring dimension, segregating Georgian voters, is the West–anti-West axis. This axis has been formed by the questions relating to whether or not Georgia should intensify its partnership with the NATO and the EU. Moreover, an analysis of a survey conducted earlier, after the 2008 Presidential elections, indicated that, at that moment, the West–anti-West axis also was one of two main dimensions and the axis was shaped by the voters' position towards the NATO, The EU, and the USA (Schofield et al. 2012). Thus, a factor analysis of the three elections' data uncovers one unequivocal, long-lasting policy dimension that can be regarded as a principal cleavage in Georgia.

Since the issues related to the internal policy are not as permanent as the two foreign policy alternatives, the second axis of the spatial maps are formed by the different sets of questions in 2013 and 2016. Nevertheless, we still believe that the answers to these questions can be generalized as the attitude toward a regime. In 2013, the horizontal axis was shaped by the attitudes toward the previous, president Saakashvili's regime. Namely, the questions regarding the restriction of the Presidential power, the implementation of amnesty, and the retribution against the prominent figures of the Saakashvili's regime divided the electoral space and shaped the axis. In 2016, an evaluation of the current regime formed the horizontal dimension of the spatial model. The questions that show a respondent's evaluation of the regime performance in the different spheres formed the second axis. The highest factor loads are linked to the evaluation of the performance in the following spheres: dealing with corruption, functioning of courts, freedom of speech, poverty, criminal situation, jobs and an overall evaluation on whether the current government is making changes that matter to the respondent. Thus, we identify the horizontal dimensions of both the maps as a regime axis.[1]

Below, we present two maps, depicting the spatial distribution of Georgian voters in 2013 and 2016. The position of a party/candidate on the space is the mean of their supporters' political preferences and not the articulated position of the political actors. It is assumed that the parties' and the candidates' programs may be different from the interpretations of their devoted voters. The parties pursue the voters share maximizing strategies, which normally result in a struggle to attract the undecided voters.

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Figure 1. Spatial distribution of the voters in the 2013 Presidential elections: Margvelashvili was a candidate of the Georgian Dream, Bakradze represented the National Movement, and Burjanadze was regarded as a candidate, who was in favor of closer links with Russia.
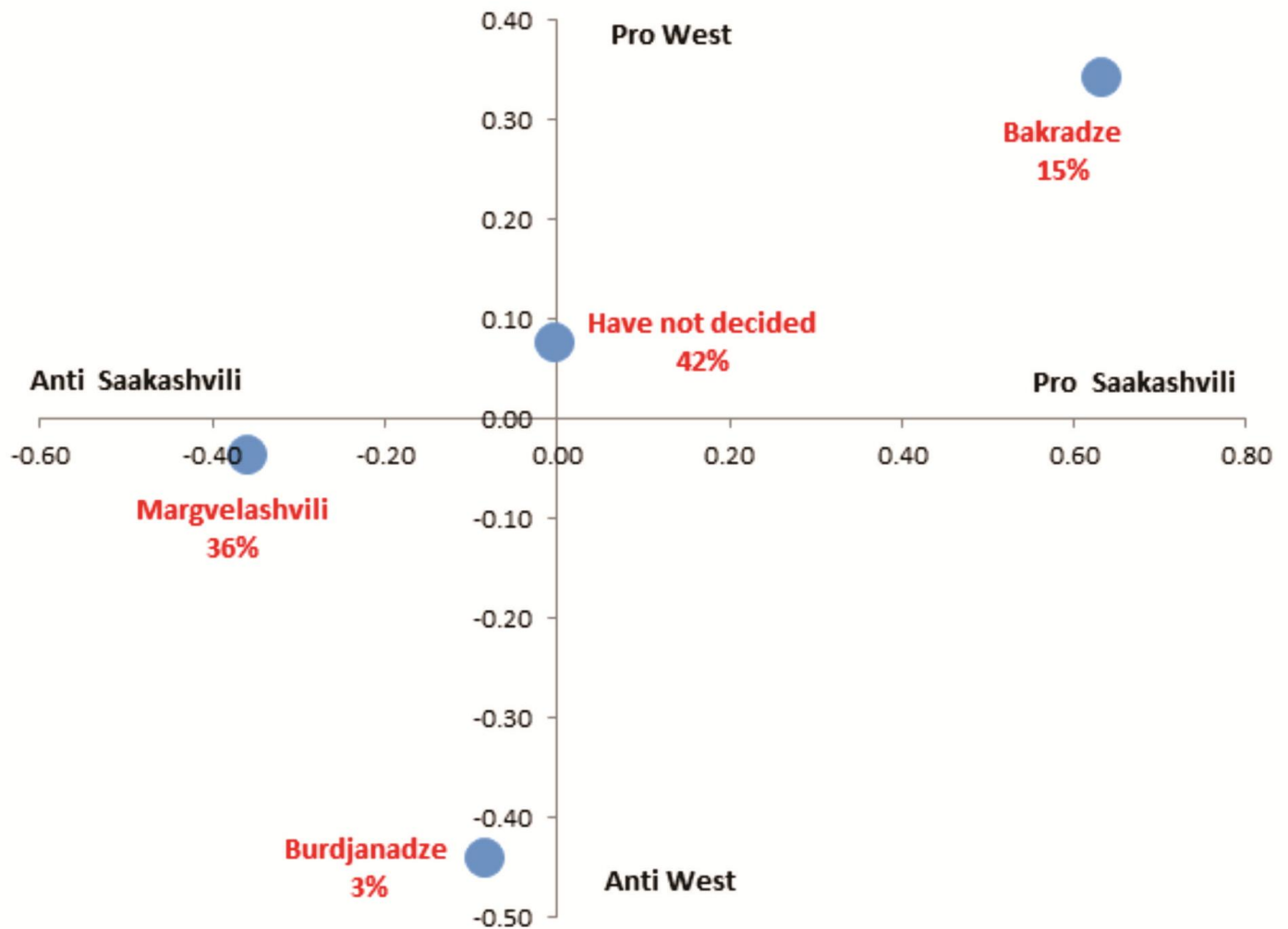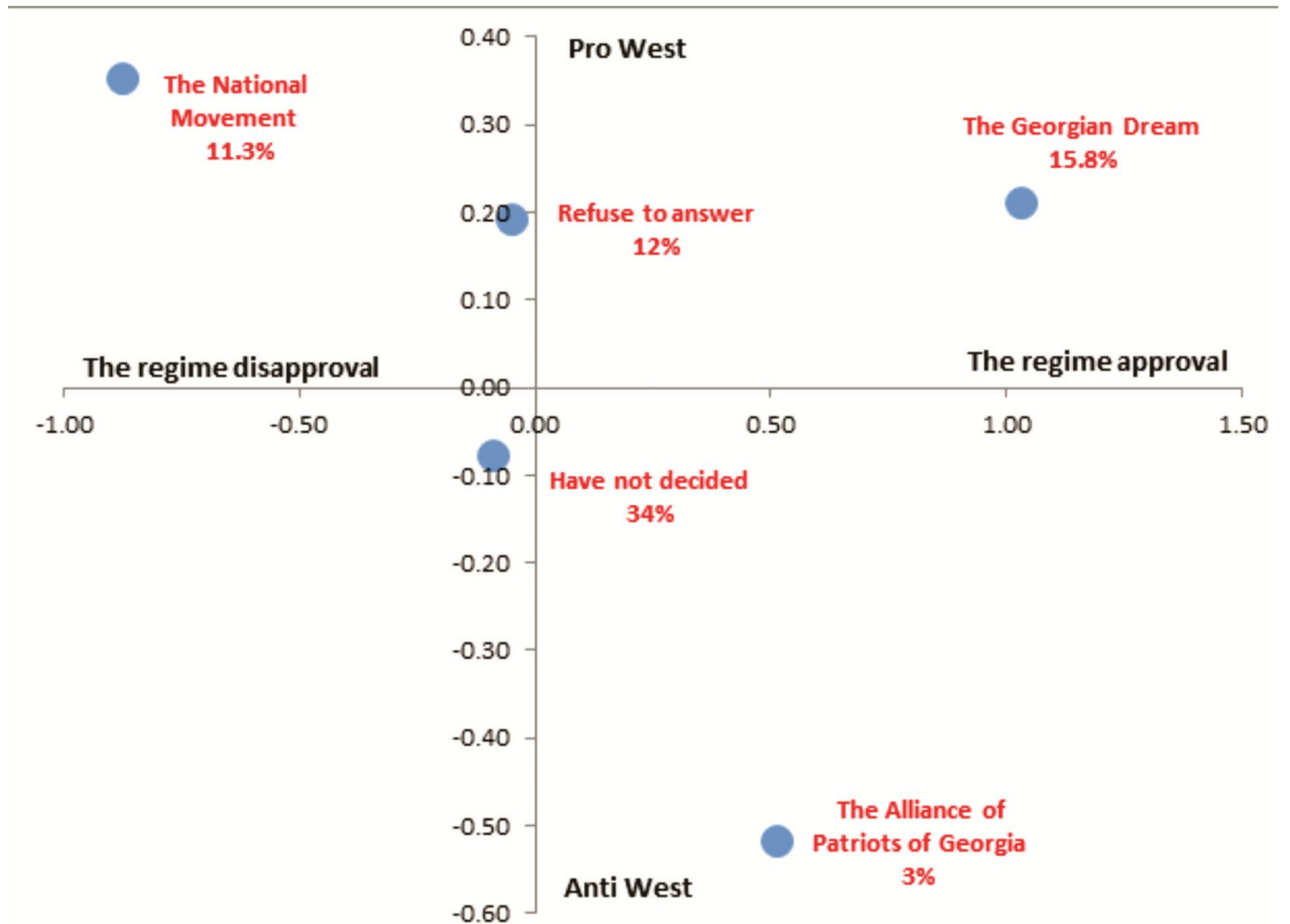
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Figure 2. Spatial distribution of voters in 2016: The horizontal axis represents the attitudes towards the current regime. We present only positions of those parties, which overcame a 5% threshold to enter the parliament.

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The West–anti-West axis may be regarded as rather teleological, value-driven dimension of the public frame of mind. Based on the research data, the strict economic explanation of voter's preferences in this dimension is rather limited. Quite a small fraction of voters can sketch a link between their position on the labor market, on the one hand ,and their position on the West -anti-West policy axis - on the other. In a broad sense, the axis may be interpreted as a search for a Huntingtonian core of national identity in a system of the West–anti-West binary opposition (Huntington 1996). In a public space, this utterly abstract dimension is

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translated into the two opposite narratives about the West. The first narrative connects the West with the prosperous, geopolitically secure, and civilized future for Georgia. The second narrative presents the West as the main threat to the Georgian national identity and the world with much lower moral standards.

In respect of the second structural dimension of the Georgian electoral space – the Regime axis - we hoped that the research would reveal the underlying beliefs that serve as heuristics to shape the attitude towards a regime. Instead, the attitude towards a regime turns out to be the deepest dimension that may determine the attitudes towards the policy alternatives. This implies that the attitude towards a regime, itself, serves as a heuristic and replaces more universalistic values as a frame of reference for an evaluation of the policy alternatives. It is obvious that the regime axis differs from the market vs. state axis that was typical for the European and American politics during the 20th century. The political compass in Georgia doesn't line up with the ideological, left-wing–right-wing dimensions. The parties striving to align themselves with the traditional economic left-wing–right-wing continuum remain as an outcast in the Georgian political panorama. Despite the fact that problems pertaining to the economic and social policies are considered to be the most important in accordance with all of the polls conducted during last ten years, different approaches to solving these problems failed to generate cleavages. Moreover, the data analysis of the pre-election survey in 2013 revealed striking similarities between the economic outlooks of the supporters of the two main adversaries in the presidential elections. Given the clear-cut right-wing campaign of the National Movement's candidate, this similarity is more difficult to explain.

How to explain the fundamental importance of the Regime axis for the Georgian voters? Why has the market vs. state dimension not replaced the Regime axis so far? One apparent explanation derives from the teleological logic of the politics: As far as the democracy and market economy were set as the goals to be achieved, the characteristics of a regime became the number one priority, the measurement of development per se. The better regime is perceived as a sufficient condition to succeed, an end in itself. Since the project is top down, the society has to change the top (regime) in case the project stumbles. There is also another significant factor contributing to the salience of the regime axis. Specifically, as the post-soviet democratization was a top-down project, the macro-sociological theory of cleavages is less helpful to understand this process (Zielinski 2002). The macro-sociological model comprehends the shaping of the political parties and ideologies as a bottom-up process that translated the already existing social divisions and inequalities into the political system (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). In contrast, in Georgia, the regimes (and the political parties associated with the regimes) are perceived as the originators and the creators of new

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inequalities in society. The top-down political projects of capitalism and democracy apparently had groups of beneficiaries that were personally linked to the high ranked officials. Strategic informal alliances between the bureaucracy and the business groups were a widespread phenomenon during all the regimes. Due to the extremely centralized governance, the networks of political patronage are pervasive at the municipal level and provide an access to the local economic resources and jobs in the public sphere. Consequently, the post-soviet economic stratification is perceived as a function of the personal proximity to a particular regime. Thus, an involvement in the political patronage network of a regime may be a more decisive factor to calculate which outcome of the election is beneficial for a voter's social circle, rather than belonging to the certain socio-demographic group.

As mentioned above, in 2008, the pre-election study also revealed the West–anti-West axis as one of the most important dimensions. With respect to the horizontal axis, it was related to the respondents' satisfaction with the current state of democracy in Georgia (Schofield et al. 2012). In our opinion, it is very likely that the satisfaction with the current condition of democracy was a projection of a voter's general trust towards a regime at that moment. Based on this assumption, one can speculate that the Regime axis was that important in the 2008 year as well.

A comparison of two pre-election data and two spatial maps reveals the following general tendencies: Two axes explain approximately 25 percent of the variability in the voters' behavior in 2013 and 34 percent of the variability in 2016. The supporters of the Georgian Dream (current regime) demonstrate less sensitivity towards the West–anti-West axis. Their voting behavior is mostly defined by an evaluation of the domestic performance of the regimes. Both of the axes determine the electoral behavior of the National Movement's supporters, although their sensitivity towards the regime axis is slightly stronger than their sensitivity towards the West–anti-West axis. In general, the regime axis is a much stronger determinant of the electoral behavior of the supporters of the two major political adversaries, rather than the West–anti-West dimension. In 2016, both of the groups were basically pro-western. If we assume that both of the axes explain 100 percent of the voting choice, it will appear that in 2016, the regime dimension explains 95 percent of the variance in the voting choice of the Georgian Dream's supporters, and 86 percent of the variance in the National Movement's supporters. The supporters of the Alliance of the Patriots of Georgia (2016) and Burjanadze as a presidential candidate (2013) are the least sensitive to the Regime axis. The anti-western attitudes principally characterize them as voters. The largest group of the Georgian electorate that is undecided about the future voting choice appears to be less engaged in the existing political discourse. Factually, this group is located at the center of

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the two-dimensional maps. Only 10 percent of their voting behavior can be explained by both of the axes of the spatial distribution in 2016. One may speculate that the existing political agenda is irrelevant for this group and their interests are not represented. On the other hand, there may be another explanation too. The citizens who form the traditional core constituency are the less politically attentive citizens. The data shows that this group is slightly lower in terms of their level of education, which might mean that the level of its political sophistication is lower too in comparison to the other groups of electorates.

In order to explain a voter's position in the two-dimensional spaces, we constructed the regression model considering the two sets of factors, which we believed might carry significant weight and explanatory power. The first set of the variables represent the socio-demographic profile of the voter. In particular, we considered the age, gender, level of education, family income. The second variable, placed into the regression model, was the most trusted TV station chosen by the respondent.

Table 1. reports the coefficients of determination by years in order to compare the importance of different variables.

	The West - Anti-West Axis		The Regime axis	
Variable	Coefficient of determination (r)		Coefficient of determination(r)	
	2013 year	2016 year	2013 year	2016 year
Trusted TV	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.6
Income Gender Age Education	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1

As the regression analysis reveals, all of the chosen variables, collectively, better elucidate the variability of a voter's position towards the Regime axis. The explanatory potential of the same variables is

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lower to explain a voter's sensitivity toward the West–anti-West axis. Besides this, the most important result of the regression analysis is that the four socio-demographic variables combined explain less in terms of the voters' preferences than the TV station which is regarded as trustworthy by a respondent.

INTERPRETING THE VOTERS' BEHAVIOR

In this part of the article, we look at the presented results through the lenses of the three main theories of voting behavior: the sociological model, the psychosocial model and the rational choice theory. As the questionnaires were not designed to accomplish this specific task, we have to apply a broad-brush approach. We suggest that the different clusters of voters profoundly differ in terms of their motivation for their voting behavior. Consequently, different paradigms may be employed to understand the behavior of the different groups of voters. Therefore, some approaches are considered to be complementary, rather than mutually exclusive.

In the beginning, we explore the potential of the sociological model of the electoral behavior to understand the Georgian case (Lazarsfeld et al.1944). In brief, the sociological model implies that belonging to a certain socio-demographic group has a decisive influence on the ideological outlook and the electoral behavior of a voter. Due to the fact that there is no significant linkage between the political preferences and the socio-demographic profile of the voter in Georgia (see table 1), the sociological model appears to be of little use to explain the data.

In the second place, we employ the psychosocial model to explain the data (Campbell et al. 1967; Lewis-Back et al. 2008). As claimed by the theory of bounded rationality, the individuals make a decision based on heuristic reasoning rather than the neutral processing of the available information. In a nutshell, the psychosocial model puts forward the partisanship and psychological affinity with the political actor as the main heuristics that serve as a cognitive screen between the parties' positions and the voter's perception of those positions. According to this approach, the partisanship is a genuine form of social identity. The voters have a definite sense of what sort of people belong to the various parties. In order to elucidate the process of shaping the partisanship, the psychosocial model employs the Funnel of Causality metaphor that puts together the distal factors (historical factors, values, membership groups, family voting tradition, etc) and the proximal factors (political actors, the government actions, and influence of associates) to explain a final voting decision.

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Based on the data analysis, it seems plausible that the psychosocial model is more relevant to explore supporters of the Georgian Dream and the National Movement rather than the other groups of Georgian electorate. In the Georgian case, the notion of partisanship can easily be replaced with one's loyalty towards a regime; considering the razor-sharp emotional animosity between the supporters of the two latest regimes, a notion as profound as a social identity may effectively explain the situation. Unlike the countries with the long-term tradition of democracy, it is more difficult to distinguish between the distal and the proximal factors in Georgia. The whirlwind, a lifespan of violent social events, and the hard-hitting economic reforms dramatically changed the biographies and made the external political events particularly personal. Therefore, one's loyalty or hostility towards a regime may be based on one's painful personal experiences rather than on the distal factors. A voter's biography can be seen as a baseline that provides the long-term political predispositions (heuristics) towards the different regimes. Each side possesses certain feelings that operate as heuristics to assess what kind of people like the antagonist political actor. Observing the public discourse in Georgia makes it clear that the supporters of the Georgian Dream and the supporters of the National Movement defined themselves through a confrontation with each other to a great extent. They invented utterly offensive nicknames to portray each other. The frenzy TV debates and violent pre-election confrontations between them were rather the rule than an exception. As described above, the attitudes towards a regime have more explanatory power for the behavior of these two groups as compared to any ideological or socio-demographic factors.

The regime axis may be interpreted as the axis of a negative, retrospective democracy as well. However, since the already shaped loyalty to a regime may serve as a moderating variable (heuristic) to evaluate the current performance of a regime, such an interpretation doesn't contradict the psychosocial approach.

The third model of the electoral behavior, which is generally regarded as the rational choice theory, argues that voters behave rationally and seeks to enhance their utility by voting for the party that can serve their interests best (Downs 1957). In order to interpret the Georgian case, we consider two concepts that the rational choice theorists work on – voter's utility and valence. Mathematically, the voter's utility is measured by the proximity of the policy positions. The main difficulty in applying the concept of utility to the Georgian case is related to the teleological logic of the Georgian political discourse. The political actors mostly articulate the ends rather than the means, which is manifested by the free-floating populism and unclearly cut, ambiguous policy alternatives. Under these conditions, it is quite demanding for the voters to grasp where (on

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the policy map) is the location of a candidate or a party that may bring a utilitarian benefit. Besides, a strong clientele component of politics implies that the voter's utility may be related to his involvement in the political patronage networks rather than to the policy alternatives. Regrettably, the data at our disposal do not track down this factor.

The research on the valence factor in the electoral behavior was originated by Stokes (Stokes 1963, 1992). The valence factor may be referred to as an issue or a political actor. Stoke differentiates between the "position" issues and the "valence" issues. The policy alternatives are categorized as the position issues and, consequently, the interests of the different social groups are involved (for example, tax reduction issue). As an alternative, a valence issue is the whole electorate's common preference that unifies the society (for example, prosperity, peace, etc). As for the valence of the political actor, it is a public belief on which of the candidates (political parties or regimes) is the most capable of delivering the results. The determinants of the perception of *ability* can vary by the society and refers to the proficiency, integrity, morals or charisma. The valence model implies that the voters are biased towards the political actor with a higher valence. The higher the valence advantage of the political actor, the greater the likelihood that he takes a position closer to the electoral center to attract a central segment of the electorate, while it is more rational for the actors with the valence disadvantage to take a more radical position and articulate their position at the full volume (Schofield 1985; Schofield and Sened 2006). Since the largest group (undecided voters) of the Georgian electorate is located at the center of the two-dimensional spaces and lacks the definite political preferences, we are left to count on the valence of the candidates (parties) in order to understand their behavior. If we look at the two pre-election maps, the first map (see Figure 1) is fully consistent with the valence advantage hypothesis. One year before the 2013 Presidential election, the Georgian Dream defeated the National Movement in the Parliamentary election. Therefore, the group of supporters of Margvelashvili who held obvious valence dominance at that moment was located closer to the center of the spatial distribution. Margvelashvili articulated the most sweeping slogans and won the election by attracting a free-floating group of the voters. By 2016 the valence superiority of the Georgian Dream wore off and none of the two major adversaries had a definite valence advantage (see Figure 2). Four months before the election, by the time of the survey, the National Movement supporters were closer to the median voter on the horizontal axis, while the Georgian Dream supporters – on the vertical one. Despite the fact that the data didn't look unfavorable for the National Movement, the Georgian Dream won 49 percent of the proportional votes, whereas, the National Movement managed to secure 27 percent of the votes in the 2016 Parliamentary election. How do we explain this

incongruence? The observations of the latest Georgian elections show that the mood of the median (undecided) group swings reflecting the events that happen close to elections date. We believe that in 2016, the electoral campaigns of the main rivals modified their corresponding valence preferences just before the elections. Consequently, the valence model can still provide a reasonable explanation for the election results. Specifically, the Georgian Dream presented itself as a centrist and a stability providing actor (attractive to a median voter) while the National Movement called for a radicalization and moved away from the center. Several weeks before the Election Day, the exiled former president, Saakashvili, took an extreme position on the Regime axis. He promised to return to Georgia to fight against the regime and called for not accepting the election results. Meanwhile, the Georgian Dream Prime Minister, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, communicated the public grievance concerning the inefficiency of the government and presented a new team of younger technocrats as a promise of better performance. One may speculate that just before the elections, the Georgian Dream regained valence superiority by moving to the center of the regime axis, whereas, in accordance with the valence model, Saakashvili made a substantial mistake. By taking the farthest position from the center he caused a repelling effect, fueled the fear of "destabilization" among the central group of voters and counter-mobilized them in favor of the Georgian Dream. It is very likely that this group of voters voted tactically. They played veto on the National Movement by voting for the Georgian Dream rather than supporting the Georgian Dream. The tactical voting might also contribute to the failure of the smaller parties.

Finally, there is one more principal factor revealed by the data analysis that needs to be taken into consideration. This factor is noticeably high and, at the same time, the growing figures indicating the TV stations impact on the voters' position in the two-dimensional political spaces (see table 1). In fact, the data cannot clearly show which comes first in the causality chain – the political preference or the trusted TV station. There are two main approaches to be considered with regards to this topic – the minimal effect hypothesis and the agenda-setting theory. The minimal effect hypothesis claims that a voter's political preference comes first and, subsequently, the information bubble is built on this foundation (Bennett and Lyengar 2008). If we take this stance, the enormous power of the TV variable may be easily incorporated into the psychosocial model of the electoral behavior. This means that the political predisposition operates as a heuristic and a voter chose TV station consistent with his political views. The agenda-setting theory operates within the rational choice paradigm and argues that the media holds strong leverages to manipulate the political opinions by means of presenting the information selectively (McCombs 2014; Riker 1986). Some scientists consider this approach to be particularly accurate for Georgia. The partisan TV stations have been

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creating totally contrasting narratives and enormous information bubbles in order to promote further polarizations of the views. It is worth mentioning that all the three parties that crossed over the parliament entrance threshold in 2016 had influential TV stations under their control. In our opinion, the contradiction between these two approaches is exaggerated and both of the approaches may be employed in order to understand a different aspect of the process of media influence. Factually, they target different aspects of the information bubble formation. The minimal effect hypothesis explains the origination of a voter's media preference, whereas, the agenda-setting theory profoundly describes the process of the further polarization of the narratives.

In conclusion, we looked at the data through the prism of the three competing theories that advocate different visions of the electoral behavior. Since the data clearly showed that the sociological model of the electoral behavior is the least functional, we concentrated on two approaches in order to bring in a more unified picture of the field: the psychosocial model and the rational choice theory. There are significant missing points in the available data to fully explore the potential of combining these two models for understanding the Georgian case. We don't have possession of the data that would allow a concurrent, scrutinized analysis of the variables related to the personal biographies, the involvement in the political patronage networks, and the perceptions of the political actors' valences. However, as long as the data in this field accumulates, a meta-analysis of the different studies will prove to be a promising method to achieve this goal and as a result, to study the interplay of the policy, the contextual, and biographical factors.

Probably, the supporters of the different paradigms would balk on the concurrent employing of the models and consider such an approach as utterly eclectic and leading to chaos. Nevertheless, believing that the contradictions among these three paradigms are overstated, we consider them to be complementary to target different groups of the electorate in Georgia. This means that the construction of a broader, more holistic framework is possible, into which all of the conflicting approaches may be placed in order to understand the different groups of the same electorate. As long as a more holistic paradigm emerges, the already existing paradigms will operate as the special cases as it happened in other disciplines.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of two pre-election data revealed tendencies of the voters' behavior that may be considered as congruent with the way in which democracy functions in Georgia. Since the research does not disclose in which direction the causality flows, we describe the relationship between these two factors as

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bidirectional causality. Based on the analysis, it is obvious that the socio-economic policy preferences play a much smaller role in the voting behavior than the non-policy factors, such as a generalized trust towards a regime and a perception of the valence of a political actor. The teleological and counter-mobilizing components of politics are also fully reflected in the spatial distribution of voters' preferences. The West–anti-West axis represents a prospective, teleological dimension and the Regime axis is a dimension of a retrospective, counter-mobilizing democracy. Despite the high level of polarization between the regime supporters and their opponents, the swings of the largest and, at the same time, the most indifferent group towards both the policy dimensions appear to be the most significant determinant of the elections results. A valence advantageous political actor who is able to put together as many interest groups as possible and at the same time, maneuver between the extreme policy positions by articulating the valence issues is more attractive to them. As a result, the ideologically blurred, "catch-all" coalitions may be perceived as the guarantors of stability in Georgia. However, there are important questions about the largest group of the electorate that needs to be answered by a further research. Namely, in the absence of policy preferences, what drives them to vote? What is *Political* for them? What generates the perception of superiority of a political actor for them? Reflecting on the recent historical experience, we can hypothesize that the factors explaining behavior of this group may be considerably contextual. In some cases, the drive for voting may be a desire to keep the politics and life in a "normal" mold. In other cases, the drive can be accumulated anger and frustration. The contextual factors can also define the valence superiority of a candidate. For example, international credit and recognition served as a valence enhancing factor for Shevardnadze; Wealth and image of the benefactor promoted Ivanishvili as a valence advantageous candidate. It is worth mentioning that the scope and vigor of the public protests may play an important role for the less engaged citizens to define whether a political actor associated with the protests is a strong man or the "lame duck".

Additionally, parallels may be drawn between the current situation in Western democracies and Georgia. Namely, the new populism proceeds hand-in-hand with the decreased parties' affiliation in the Western countries. According to the Gallup 2016 report, the percentage of the U.S. adults that do not associate themselves with the political parties has recently reached levels never seen before (Jones 2016). As the mainstream political discourse is less relevant to them, it seems plausible that this stratum of the electorate is more susceptible to the populist appeal. Factually, the Presidential election in 2016 showed that Donald Trump attracted the unaffiliated electorate by discarding the dominant policy axes and galvanizing a new agenda, which may be identified as the Global–Local axis. Interestingly, the Global-Local axis may echo the

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Georgian West–anti-West dimension. The accentuation of this new dimension has recently modified the course of history in the U.K. and influenced the elections results in the other European countries as well.

NOTES

1. More detailed information concerning the questionnaire and the results of 2013 year research: http://cssge.ge/%e1%83%a1%e1%83%90%e1%83%96%e1%83%9d%e1%83%92%e1%83%90%e1%83%93%e1%83%9d%e1%83%94%e1%83%91%e1%83%98%e1%83%a1-%e1%83%99%e1%83%95%e1%83%9a%e1%83%94%e1%83%95%e1%83%98%e1%83%a1-%e1%83%aa%e1%83%94-2/ Pp. 164-192.

2. More detailed information regarding the results of 2016 year research: https://www.ndi.org/georgia-polls

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