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Polarization and Capture of the Country

Abstract

The wave of democratization that began at the end of the 20th century, thirty years later, was replaced by a wave of authoritarianism. The onset of dictatorship affects the vital interests of every citizen, making this problem extremely relevant in the modern era. The retreat from democratization and the return to dictatorship affect the vital interests of every citizen, leading to deep societal polarization and making this problem extremely pressing. The study analyzes the triad in the process of state capture: the capture of state power through free and fair elections, the capture of the state (or what is today called the "deep state"), and the attempts to capture civil society. The ban on opposition parties, exorbitant fines, bloody dispersals of rallies and demonstrations, poisoning of demonstrators with gas of unknown origin, and prison sentences for political opposition leaders and civic activists create the appearance of a strong dictatorship. However, these anti-democratic measures only deepen societal polarization and reduce the number of the ruling party's supporters in the long term. Ultimately, this could lead the country to dangerous civil strife, the collapse of authoritarianism, and severe persecution of the GD leaders. A way out of the deep political crisis would be inter-party dialogue and free and fair parliamentary elections with security guarantees for the GD

leadership. The study utilized secondary sources, an analysis of media reports, and legal and policy documents. The ideas presented in this article are based on the authors' long-term observations and field research conducted throughout the period of Georgia's independence. A conflict-transformation lens is employed to underscore how unresolved structural tensions accelerate polarization and enable authoritarian capture.

Keywords: Polarization, Capture, Country, Power, State, Civil Society, Authoritarianism, Georgia.

Introduction

We have witnessed not only a new wave of democratization but also a rollback of democracy and a rise in authoritarianism in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. The onset of dictatorship affects the vital interests of every citizen, making this problem extremely relevant in the modern era.

The study aims to analyze the process of capturing a country, and defines the following research question: How do certain groups capture power, the state, and civil society? The case of Georgia is relevant here, and the answer requires research in the following areas:

1. Polarization and capture of state power;
2. The use of the captured power to capture the state;
3. The use of power and the state to capture civil society;

The study used secondary sources, including analysis of media reports and government legal and policy documents. The ideas expressed in this article are based on the authors' extensive observations and fieldwork throughout Georgia's period of independence.

Classical Dictatorship and New Authoritarianism

The classic perception of dictatorship depicts a bloodthirsty dictator, or group of dictators, who, through punitive organs, mercilessly suppress the people, keeping them in extreme poverty, while enriching themselves fabulously at their expense. This form of dictatorship is nothing less than a mafia state, in which the dictator commits any crime for profit and personal security. But there are other classic forms of dictatorship, in which the dictators' motivation is not personal enrichment, but the implementation of certain political ideas. For example, these are forms of totalitarianism, such as Nazism and Bolshevism, in which the authorities exercise strict control over all aspects of society and commit crimes such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, mass repression, and executions for political and ideological reasons. Such forms of dictatorship are terrorist states.

In both cases, dictators commit serious crimes and are concerned about their personal safety, and therefore rely on numerous security and law enforcement agencies—police, state security services, prosecutors, courts, and prisons—to maintain their grip on power. Corruption, violence, and terror help them control the power.

Studies are being published on what the new authoritarianism represents and why democracy is retreating. Anne Applebaum calls on democracies to radically reorient their policies to combat this new threat, as in the 21st century, we only think we know what an autocratic state looks like, but in reality, this bears little resemblance to reality. She points out that today's autocracies rely not on a single dictator, but on complex networks consisting of kleptocratic financial structures, security services, surveillance technologies, propaganda, and disinformation. (Appelbaum, 2024). Corrupt businesses finance dictatorial regimes, and police, state security services, propagandists, and authoritarian leaders themselves cooperate and share resources in the fight against democracies both nationally and internationally. International sanctions and organizations are ineffective, and national opposition political forces and peaceful movements are unable to cope with well-armed, organized, and generously paid punitive agencies. Modern dictators have learned to exploit the weaknesses of democracy for their own ends. They skillfully manipulate presidential, parliamentary, and local elections, appealing to peace, stability, traditions, sovereignty, human rights, and other democratic values in public speeches, while behind the scenes they engage in bribery, disinformation, blackmail, surveillance, intimidation, and murder. But most importantly, they effectively use polarization as a tool to attract not only criminal groups but also those segments of the population that, due to poverty and insufficient civic education, are easily influenced by propaganda. It is these segments of the population that help the ruling clans garner a significant percentage of votes in elections, corrupt the results, and then appeal to the people with victory speeches. These segments of the population include not only voters, but also an entire army of members of numerous electoral commissions, false observers, combat units, or so-called "titushki," and the secret security services, police, local government officials, and civil servants who ensure their impunity. No

less important is the understanding that the main reason for the persistence of dictatorships is the presence of a segment of the population that harbors an authoritarian mentality and serves as the social support for authoritarian regimes.

There are numerous publications on the subject of state capture, which investigate the existence and emergence of so-called mafia, criminal, or terrorist states in various parts of the world. Some of these arise from the fusion of mafia-criminal and political-ideological groups into criminal conglomerates that infiltrate not only state structures but also seek to establish strict control over all of civil society. It is therefore important to distinguish between the concepts of seizure of power, seizure of the state, and seizure of civil society.

Rule of Law and the Feudal Mentality

The nations of Western Europe have undergone centuries of democratic development, while the countries of the former Soviet Union have only experienced it in three decades. This is one of the main reasons why democracies in countries (primarily in Northern Europe) are stable, and why politicians who come to power do not seek to usurp power and rule for decades. The reasons lie in two factors: the stability and strength of democratic institutions and the civic mentality of society. An independent judiciary, along with a depoliticized police and prosecutorial office, is the main guarantor of the stability of democratic institutions. But their successful functioning depends on one fundamental factor: the level of civic education of society. In a mature democratic society, the idea of the rule of law is ingrained in the minds of the people. In other words, in a country where every person is their own policeman, there is no need for a large police force, the state is not mafia-like, there is no social polarization, and attempts by politicians to usurp power are thwarted through impeachment or free and fair elections. A mature democracy is not perfect, but the basic principles of the rule of law are strictly observed, and attempts to violate these principles are suppressed.

In a society that has just emerged from dictatorship, the generation of people from that era still bears a feudal or totalitarian mentality. As a result, modern democratic institutions built with support from the EU and the US are constantly under attack and eroded by those who hold this mentality. Therefore, the future of democracy in such societies depends on the continued support of mature democracies. Holding free and fair democratic elections is fraught with the risk of populists, corrupt officials, criminal groups, or agents of foreign dictatorships coming to power. If this occurs, the laboriously constructed democratic institutions disintegrate, as they quickly become filled with those with a feudal-criminal mentality, and people who, for various reasons, have not adapted to life in a democratic environment begin to cluster around them. These people prefer to be subjects of their masters rather than citizens of a free society. This segment of the population is the main social support for usurpers of power and the state.

However, in countries that have already undergone 30 years of democratization since the Soviet collapse, the situation is not hopeless. In these countries, some of the middle and older generations have already gained experience of life under the rule of law, and a new generation of young people has been born and raised. A significant portion of these people have lived part of their lives in Western countries, graduated from the best European and American universities, and have benefited from visa-free entry to EU countries. This significant segment of society has already developed the foundations of civic consciousness, and it is they who represent the force capable of resisting attempts to seize power, the state, and society. At its core, this part of civil society is made up of young people, primarily student movements.

Accordingly, the polarization divide in such a society is the confrontation between those who hold democratic values and those who adhere to a feudal-totalitarian mentality. The development of democratic institutions and civic education contributes to the stabilization of society and a reduction in polarization. However, if anti-democratic forces come to power, polarization increases, as dictatorships always rely on the search for internal and external enemies. These enemies include political opposition, non-governmental

organizations, independent media, student movements, civil society activists, and the mature democracies that support them.

From a peace and conflict studies perspective, this struggle between democratic institutions and a feudal-authoritarian mentality is not only a constitutional or institutional problem, but also a problem of everyday security and dignity for citizens. When access to justice, political participation, and socio-economic opportunities is systematically skewed in favor of a ruling group and its loyal networks, this creates what peace researchers call structural and cultural forms of violence: harm that is embedded in institutions, laws, and narratives, rather than only in open repression or armed conflict (Galtung, 1969, 1990). Over time, the unequal satisfaction of basic needs for security, recognition, and participation produces deep grievances and protracted social tensions that are not easily resolved by elections alone. In such settings, polarization becomes more than a political tactic; it is a way of governing through division, fear, and mutual de-legitimization, closing space for constructive dialogue and long-term conflict transformation.

The Problem of Polarization

Georgia, which regained its independence after 1991, has undergone a complex process of democratization over the past three decades and confidently advanced toward European and Euro-Atlantic integration. This process was accompanied by constant struggle between, on the one hand, the ruling political groups and their supporters, and, on the other hand, opposition parties, activists, and the majority of the population. Some groups positioned themselves as opponents of Bolshevism, yet they themselves embraced an authoritarian mentality, perceiving political processes in uncompromising black-and-white terms. This behavior by political participants and leaders inevitably led to persistent polarization in relations between social strata, which repeatedly erupted into physical confrontation: armed civil conflicts, murders, beatings of political opponents, kidnappings, arrests and torture in prisons, public insults, and discrediting campaigns against political opponents. Each time, groups that came to power attempted to usurp this power, and political opponents resorted

to a variety of methods to remove them from government and recapture power through the coup, the velvet revolution, or free and fair elections. This section briefly examines the problem of polarization of Georgian society as a prerequisite for capturing state power.

The National Liberation Movement (NLM) and the communist regime

The problem of polarization arose after the well-known tragedy of April 9, 1989, in Tbilisi, when Soviet troops brutally dispersed a rally demanding the restoration of Georgia's independence, killing twenty young people, mostly women. As a result of these events, the permanent rally on Rustaveli Avenue in front of the Supreme Soviet (now the Parliament of Georgia) escalated into a broad public protest against Soviet power and communist rule, and the Georgian national liberation movement became the main opposition force against the communist regime. Contrary to the mythology of the Russian Empire and Soviet propaganda, the history of Georgian-Russian relations began to be interpreted as the history of Russia's illegal annexation of Georgia in 1801 and its transformation into the Tiflisi and Kutaisi provinces, followed by a policy of forced russification and brutal suppression of any protests, as well as the Bolshevik invasion of independent and sovereign Georgia in 1921. The period from April 9, 1989, to the Supreme Soviet elections on October 28, 1990, marks the first example of multiparty elections to the Soviet parliament and the first example of polarization in Georgia's modern history. As a result of these elections, the coalition of opposition parties won, but the Communist Party of Georgia still received 29.58 percent of the votes. Under the proportional system, the seats were divided between the two main political forces – the Round Table – Free Georgia bloc received 81 seats and the Communist Party of Georgia 44 seats (Iremadze, 2020). An unpopular government always has a certain social base that it relies on and manipulates to justify and maintain the existing regime.

Split within the NLM and the return of the communist nomenklatura

No less dramatic during this period was the split within the Georgian national liberation movement itself. “The National Democratic Party (NDP) and other

relatively small groups boycotted the elections. They said that if the Soviet government was the occupier, then the elections were illegal – and participation in them indirectly meant recognizing the legitimacy of the occupying government” (Chubinidze, October 28, 1990).

Less than a year after the first democratic elections, the confrontation between the National Congress and the Round Table – Free Georgia bloc became extremely intense. A part of the parties left the ruling bloc. The culmination of the confrontation was the so-called Tbilisi War of December-January 1991-92. It ended with more than one hundred killed on Rustaveli Avenue and the overthrow of the legitimate government. A Military Council seized power, expelled President Zviad Gamsakhurdia from the country, suspended the operation of the Constitution on the territory of the republic, and dissolved the Supreme Council of Georgia. (Rekhviashvili, J., Nergadze, N.)

The coup d'état against the legitimately elected President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Supreme Council of Georgia led to a bloody civil war, complete economic devastation, rampant banditry and corruption, and the rise of separatism in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region of Georgia. The return of Eduard Shevardnadze, the last Soviet Foreign Minister, to Georgia in March 1992, failed to quickly stabilize the country due to deep societal polarization between supporters of Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze. The State Council was created to replace the Military Council, but the problem of polarization proved more serious than separatism, as it was national rather than regional, and therefore threatened Georgia's very existence as a country. The war in Abkhazia started in August 1992, and it relegated national polarization to a secondary issue. The parliamentary and presidential elections of 1992 and 1995 have legitimized the ruling group and led to a gradual easing of societal tensions, the opening of Western embassies and offices of international organizations, the establishment of the first non-governmental organizations, and the strengthening of independent media. During Eduard Shevardnadze's rule, a significant portion of the former communist and Soviet nomenklatura, experienced in public administration but highly corrupt, returned to the executive branch. On the one hand, this led to an intensified fight against major criminal groups and some political stabilization. On the other hand, it increased

the level of administrative and political corruption and smuggling, leading to further impoverishment of the population and ongoing economic devastation. The declining legitimacy of the ruling Citizens' Union of Georgia party forced its leadership to falsify parliamentary, presidential, and local elections, ultimately leading to the "Rose Revolution" in response to the fraudulent 2003 parliamentary elections, which led to the removal of President Eduard Shevardnadze from power.

The Rose Revolution and the Polarization of Society

The Rose Revolution brought the radical, large-scale reforms, a sharp increase in budget revenues, and the rapid restoration of the country's devastated infrastructure. Georgia achieved success in combating corruption and smuggling, collecting taxes, ensuring the timely payment of pensions and salaries, achieving positive macroeconomic changes, reintegrating the Autonomous Republic of Adjara into Georgia's economic, social, and administrative system, and restoring confidence in Georgia among foreign investors. The Rose Revolution also had a successful impact on the fight against transnational organized crime. Law enforcement reform affected all structures, was comprehensive, and included modernization of the legal framework and logistics, structural reorganization, and personnel policy. The United States and the European Union provided significant assistance in reforming the law enforcement system. However, the law enforcement structures remained under the control of the ruling political group and were not depoliticized (Berglund, 2014). As a result, the main challenge Georgia faced was the need to strengthen the rule of law, primarily the independence of the judiciary. The state of human rights and the fight against political corruption in the country depended directly on this, but this was not done. The country's revolutionary reforms did not extend to strengthening measures to protect freedoms and political rights, and Georgia remained among the semi-free countries. The ruling party continued to govern the country through revolutionary methods. It was unable to reach a compromise with the political opposition, leading to a political crisis and further polarization of society. This process was accompanied by a fierce struggle between supporters and opponents of the reform. There were other reasons for

the decline in the ratings of the ruling United National Movement (UNM) party, led by President Mikheil Saakashvili: the loss of illegal income not only for thousands of corrupt government officials and local business representatives, but also for a significant number of their relatives and friends who profited from corrupt practices. In a small country with traditionally close family ties and a tolerant attitude toward corruption and lawbreaking, this led to the formation of a segment of the population dissatisfied with the reforms. Following Russia's armed attack on Georgia in August 2008, relations between the two countries remained extremely hostile. The Russian leadership's negative attitude toward Georgia's "Rose Revolution," its hybrid war, and its interference in national elections, coupled with local groups dissatisfied with the ruling party, played a fatal role for the UNM in the 2012 parliamentary election (Kukhianidze, 2021).

Political Power Capture

In politics, the capture of power can involve the capture of party and state power. Moreover, the capture of party power can occur either before or after the capture of state power. Communist parties are good examples of totalitarian party power. The Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev sharply criticized the principle of democratic centralism in the Bolshevik Party, as a result of which all major party decisions were made by a small group of leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) and imposed from above for implementation in all grassroots organizations (Berdyaev, 1990).

As a rule, the creation of political parties is a process of forming a voluntary alliance of like-minded individuals with democratically elected leaders. However, the situation deteriorates when power in this party is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small group of people unaccountable to the rank-and-file party members. Such leaders view the party as a private enterprise from which they expel undesirable members and recruit new activists loyal to the leader. If, in the struggle for state power, this party unites a political coalition of weaker parties, then, upon coming to power through elections, its leaders continue the process of concentrating power in their hands by weeding out undesirable parties. In this case, a small group of people can seize not only party power but also state power. Small parties are used to attract votes, then expelled

from the process of governing the state, and in subsequent elections, finally excluded from the coalition altogether.

This tactic allows authoritarian party leaders to appoint their own people to key state political and administrative positions, not necessarily from within their own parties. These people may include like-minded individuals - friends, employees, relatives, criminal figures, or foreign intelligence agents. After the capture of state power, corruption schemes begin to emerge, but foreign intelligence networks are established long before authoritarian leaders come to power. The capture of state power occurs under the cover of well-thought-out disinformation, something that broad sections of society are initially unaware of, which, in the wake of victorious euphoria, paves the way for the seizure of the state.

The capture of power in Georgia was accomplished through a coup d'état in December 1991 - January 1992 and the Rose Revolution in November 2003. In both cases, this capture of power was not a democratic change of power through free and fair elections. In the first case, it was accompanied by a bloody confrontation with numerous casualties; in the second case, it led to bloodless but revolutionary methods of governance; and in both cases, it was accompanied by polarization in Georgian society.

The third change of power in October 2012 is often presented as legitimate, thanks to a free and fair parliamentary election which resulted in the victory of the Georgian Dream (GD) political coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili. Mikheil Saakashvili, the leader of the ruling United National Movement (UNM) party, conceded defeat and announced that the party will move to the opposition. The BBC's Damien McGuinness in Tbilisi said it is a "day which strengthens the country's democratic credentials." Observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) concluded that "despite a very polarising campaign, the Georgian people have freely expressed their will," and the election process had "shown a healthy respect for fundamental freedoms... ". The Central Electoral Commission of Georgia (CEC) said there had been no grave violations during the voting. (See: BBC News, October 2, 2012). On the surface, this appears entirely democratic and fair; however, upon closer examination, two serious cases of disinformation arose related to the

manipulation of public opinion immediately before the 2012 parliamentary election in Georgia. A prison scandal involving the publication of video footage of torture and sexual abuse of male prisoners, which, as it later turned out, was staged to discredit the ruling UNM, and which led to an explosive protest of a conservative and quite homophobic Georgian society. As it later emerged, the organizer of the video recordings, prison warden Lado Bedukadze, had close contacts with the former Georgian Minister of State Security, Valeri Khaburdzania, who lives in Moscow and is known for his strong pro-Russian views, and Deputy Minister Temur Khachishvili (Kukhianidze, 2021). The second case of pre-election disinformation was the accusation that the UNM had murdered Barbare Rafalyants, a 10-month-old child. Years later, the GD admitted that blaming the UNM for the murder of Barbara Rafalants was nonsense; such situations cannot be manipulated, and the investigation did not confirm this fact (Radio Tavisupleba, October 18, 2022). But it was too late, and as a result, despite sociologists' forecasts (See: Navarro and Woodward, 2012), the GD coalition won the parliamentary elections of October 1, 2012. President Mikheil Saakashvili called the change of power in Georgia an operation by Russian special services aimed at helping Bidzina Ivanishvili's GD win the parliamentary election.

To weaken the UNM, Bidzina Ivanishvili promoted the creation of the Georgian Dream Coalition, which included opposition-minded parties and individual politicians, including former members of the ruling UNM. The Coalition was founded in 2011 by four political parties: Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (Bidzina Ivanishvili), Our Georgia – Free Democrats (Irakli Alasania), the Republican Party of Georgia (David Usupashvili), and the National Forum (Kakha Shartava). The Conservative Party (Zviad Dzidziguri) and Industrialists (Zurab Tkemaladze) later joined the coalition. The coalition defeated the ruling UNM party, receiving 55% of the proportional vote and 41 seats in single-member constituencies. With a total of 77 seats, the coalition secured a majority in the Georgian Parliament and formed the government of Georgia. In the 2013 presidential elections, the coalition nominated Education Minister Giorgi Margvelashvili as its presidential candidate, who won with 62% of the vote.

However, before the next parliamentary elections in 2016, almost all parties except Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia party were ousted from the coalition. This party independently participated in the 2016 parliamentary elections and, having won a constitutional majority, became the country's ruling party. State power was captured.

State Capture

The capture of sovereign state power leads to the gradual penetration of corrupt, mafia, and spy networks deep into the state by appointing increasing numbers of the ruling party's people to important administrative positions, particularly in law enforcement agencies—the police, the prosecutor's office, the state security service, the courts, and the state's financial and economic structures. To oust undesirable bureaucrats, various restructurings, reforms, or simply discrediting them are carried out to remove them from their positions. In a democratic society, a professional bureaucracy continues its work regardless of which political party wins the elections. In a society where a group usurps state power, the process of ousting the professional bureaucracy and replacing it with a loyal bureaucracy begins. To this end, the usurpers of power begin a struggle against the so-called "deep state." Suppressing free thought can affect not only government structures but also scientific and academic circles in public universities and research institutions. This leads to the third stage of state capture—the capture of civil society.

In a democratic society, only politicians elected by the people (members of parliament and the president) have the right to shape the Cabinet of Ministers. However, when key government decisions are made by individuals who do not hold relevant political positions and bear no legal or political responsibility for the consequences of these decisions, this style of government begins to take on characteristics reminiscent of the mafia-style management of a criminal organization. In this style of governance, a private individual nominates appointments to key executive positions. The key question here is the purpose of appointing state leaders: to make them personally loyal and serve the interests of their boss instead of upholding national interests and serving the law and the people. This creates a kleptocratic system of government in which the dominant

criteria are loyalty, personal gain, or family and friendly ties, rather than professionalism and strict adherence to the principles of the rule of law. A group of people who seize state power through various electoral manipulations inevitably proceeds to the second stage after the elections: the creation of a mafia-style governance, that is, the capture of the state and its subordination to the personal interests of the informal leader.

The appointment of executive and judicial leaders is then accompanied by a gradual purge of the entire state apparatus, from the highest to the lowest government officials. In fact, the concept of fighting the deep state aims to capture the state by replacing the depoliticized professional bureaucracy with a loyal bureaucracy in the governmental institutions.

The capture of state power in Georgia in 2012 paved the way for state capture. In turn, the falsification of the parliamentary election on October 26, 2024, was possible because it was rooted in the captured "...institutions of state and in a longstanding culture of charismatic leaders controlling economic and political clients in the system. Western governments are deluded if they think elections have stimulated democracy in Georgia. The opposite has been the case: They have endorsed non-democratic practices. The Georgian Dream...captured all the regions and rural areas..." and it "...controls almost all rural municipalities and urban centers in the regions." (Jones, November 4, 2024). This means that by 2024, the Georgian Dream has completely captured the state, and this was made possible in part by the lack of internal democracy within Georgian Dream itself, whose success depends entirely on one man – the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Civil Society Capture

State capture manipulations typically begin to attract increasing attention from civil society—the political opposition, independent media, social media, non-governmental organizations, and university students and professors. As a result, criticism of the government grows, and discontent spreads across broad sections of society. Opposition and civil movements, including youth and student movements, emerge, increasingly irritating the usurpers of power. As time goes

on, their hold on power becomes more difficult, forcing them to resort to the most sophisticated methods of falsifying parliamentary, presidential, and local elections. Public protest leads to escalating conflict with the government. To prevent the political opposition from winning free and fair elections, the ruling party is attempting to suppress not only the political opposition but also civil society and independent media, and to establish strict control over the university and school education systems to eradicate dissent and student protest movements. This policy leads to the establishment of complete control of ruling groups over non-state structures and threatens the autonomy of universities, and it is an attempt to capture civil society.

Dictatorships in Russia and Belarus have already captured civil societies. As a result, even the slightest sign of protest in these countries is suppressed with anti-democratic laws and punitive law enforcement actions. Some political opponents of the current regimes were killed or imprisoned, others were forced into exile, and the remaining populations were transformed into silent and obedient subjects. Independent media and non-governmental organizations that carried out the civic control functions were banned, and the government-controlled propaganda media, NGOs, and youth movements have replaced them. Loyalty and silence replaced free thought and civic consciousness. Dictators who captured power, states, and civil societies have successfully captured entire countries.

It cannot be said that in Georgia, the ruling GD has completed the process of seizing control of the country, but its actions indicate that it is seeking to establish a dictatorship similar to that in Russia or Belarus. Since 2012, GD has successfully captured state power and the deep state, and since 2023, it has begun an accelerated capture of civil society.

By banning opposition political parties and imprisoning opposition party leaders, the GD violated Article 3.4 of the Constitution of Georgia, which states that "political parties shall participate in the formation and exercise of the political will of the people. The activities of political parties shall be based on the principles of freedom, equality, transparency, and intra-party democracy." GD could not effectively rig elections abroad; this is why it imposed a ban on voting outside the country, thereby depriving hundreds of thousands of

Georgian immigrants of their constitutional right to vote. Articles 27 and 5.8 of the Constitution of Georgia guarantee the right to participate in elections and “the State shall take care of maintaining and developing connections with the homeland for Georgian compatriots residing abroad.” (Constitution of Georgia).

Anti-democratic laws were passed aimed at suppressing political opposition and protest among the Georgian population, especially youth movements. As Edward Levi, former president of the University of Chicago and US Attorney General, declared, “nothing can more weaken the quality of life or more imperil the realization of the goals we all hold dear than our failure to make clear by word and deed that our law is not an instrument of partisan purpose.” (Wolf, November 9, 2025). To protect its narrow partisan interests, the Georgian Dream adopted the Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence on May 28, 2024. The Law is aimed at limiting the activities of Georgian independent media and NGOs. In March, 2025, the Georgian Dream-led Parliament approved the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). This is an update of the Foreign Agents Act, passed by parliament despite public protests. FARA strengthens and expands the provisions of the previous law and affects both non-governmental organizations and independent media, as well as individuals. According to Georgian legal analysts, “...the scope of FARA is so narrowed in the US, ...that it does not apply to institutionally independent media and NGOs, although the Georgian draft law does not include or provide for such restrictions, making it more repressive in nature” (Brachveli, March 5, 2025).

The Georgian Law on Amendments to the Law of Georgia “On Grants” effectively imposes control over civil society. Article 5 of the amendments provides for the procedure and conditions for the foreign grant donor to agree on the grant with the Government of Georgia or an authorized person/body designated by it. These conditions are set by the Government of Georgia (saqartvelos kanoni “grantebis shesakheb” saqartvelos kanonshi tsvlilebis shetanis taobaze. June 12, 2025). The amendments to the Georgian Law “On Grants” are repressive and represent a mechanism for state control over civil society. They undermine the autonomy and independence of Georgian civil

society, Georgia's status as a candidate country for the European Union, the fundamental democratic principles, and deprive the Georgian people of a democratic future. (Tsqipurishvili. April 7, 2025).

In response to ongoing demonstrations and meetings that demand free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and Georgia's return to the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, the Georgian Dream adopted a series of additional restrictive regulations, including a ban on wearing medical masks during demonstrations and rallies and harsher penalties for blocking roads during protests. As a result, police, prosecutors, and courts are arresting, fining, and imprisoning an increasing number of activists daily. By the end of 2025, the standoff between the increasingly authoritarian government and civil society continued, and it cannot be said that the Georgian Dream has completed capturing civil society and, therefore, the country.

Conclusion

The values and mentalities of various segments of Georgian society, as well as the three-stage strategy for seizing the country, correspond to the theoretical approaches analyzed in the first part of this article. The specific nature of these processes is linked to the high probability of a hybrid war unleashed by foreign intelligence services against Georgia, but this is the subject of a separate study. The problem of polarization has plagued Georgia's modern history since the tragedy in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989; however, only under the rule of the GD was polarization openly used as a means of political manipulation and the retention of state power. Polarization enabled the GD to capture state power under the guise of the 2012 parliamentary elections and subsequently capture all state structures. The consolidation of state power and complete control over all government bodies paved the way for the GD to aggressively attack civil society and, finally, try to take over the entire country. The ban on opposition parties, exorbitant fines, bloody dispersals of rallies and demonstrations, poisoning of demonstrators with gas of unknown origin, and prison sentences for political opposition leaders and civic activists create the appearance of a strong dictatorship. However, anti-democratic measures can only deepen polarization in Georgian society and reduce the number of GD supporters. Ultimately, this

could lead the country to dangerous civil strife, the collapse of authoritarianism, and severe punishment for the leaders of the GD. A peaceful way out of the deep political crisis would be inter-party dialogue and free and fair parliamentary elections, with security guarantees for the GD leadership.

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