

Grand Visions, Missing Maps: How Georgian Parties Navigate Between Promises and People

Abstract

The disconnect between political discourse and citizen concerns in Georgia has become increasingly apparent in recent years. This study analyzes the narrative strategies, policy frameworks, and ideological positioning of major political forces in the 2024 Georgian parliamentary election, examining how they frame key challenges and propose solutions. Through detailed analysis of party manifestos, public statements, and citizen responses, we identify several key findings. First, Georgian parties demonstrate sophisticated ideological differentiation, ranging from Georgian Dream's conservative populism to Girchi's radical libertarianism, with various positions between these poles. Second, while parties have developed more distinct policy frameworks, they often fail to bridge the gap between macro-level promises and citizens' everyday concerns. Third, party narratives reveal fundamentally different understandings of state-market relations and development strategies, from state-led development to radical market liberalization. Fourth, there exists a significant "representation gap" between political discourse and citizen priorities, with parties often prioritizing broad ideological positioning over concrete, implementable solutions to local problems. Finally, the research identifies missing narratives in Georgian political discourse, particularly regarding implementation mechanisms and citizen participation. These findings suggest that while Georgian political parties have developed more sophisticated programmatic approaches, they continue to struggle with effectively addressing and communicating solutions to citizens' immediate concerns.

Introduction

The disconnect between political discourse and citizen concerns in Georgia has become increasingly apparent in recent years. A 2023 study by the Chavchavadze Center revealed a striking pattern: focus group participants consistently expressed frustration with political parties' failure to address their pressing needs, though noting that some parties showed greater attention to tangible problems¹. As one participant pointedly observed, "They talk among themselves; they do not communicate with us, the voters, who should be the main focus of the state." This sentiment, echoed throughout the study, suggests a fundamental misalignment between political narratives and public concerns.

The evolution of Georgian parties' programmatic work presents an intriguing paradox. While parties have demonstrated increasing sophistication in policy development, research indicates persistent gaps between formal programs and citizen needs. A 2020 analysis by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation found that Georgian parties have developed more distinct ideological positions since 2016, particularly on economic and social issues.² However, this ideological differentiation has not necessarily translated into better citizen engagement. The Social Justice Center's 2024 study revealed that even as parties craft more detailed programs, they continue to struggle with addressing specific community needs, especially those of ethnic minorities and regions outside Tbilisi.³

This gap between sophistication and relevance is further illuminated by Geocase's 2024 analysis of economic programs, which found that while parties are producing more detailed economic proposals, they often lack realistic implementation mechanisms and fail to address citizens' immediate concerns.⁴ These findings align with the Georgian Institute of Politics' observation that larger parties, despite having more comprehensive programs, frequently prioritize broad ideological positioning over concrete, implementable solutions to local problems.⁵ Together, these studies suggest that Georgia's political landscape is characterized by increasing programmatic sophistication that paradoxically may be contributing to, rather than bridging, the distance between parties and citizens.

The focus group findings from our previous research highlighted a critical perception among Georgian voters: that political parties largely offer similar, vague promises rather than

¹ Nino Kalandadze, Zaza Bibilashvili, Giorgi Jokhadze, and Giorgi Kharebava, *The Time to Gather Stones - Overcoming Georgia's Two-party Divide* (Tbilisi: Ilia Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education, 2023).

² "Georgia's Political Landscape: Diversity, Convergence and Empty Spots" (Tbilisi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung South Caucasus Office, 2022).

³ Social Justice Center. "Analysis of Pre-Election Programs of Parties from the Perspective of Ethnic Minority Needs." 2024. <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/partiebis-tsinasaarchevno-programebis-analizi-etnikuri-umtsiresobebis-sachiroebebis-perspektivan> ↵

⁴ Geocase. "Economic Analysis of Election Programs of Parties Participating in the 2024 Parliamentary Elections of Georgia." October 2024. <https://www.geocase.ge/ka/publications/1141/2024-tslis-saqartvelos-saparlamento-archevnebshi-monatsile-partiata-saarchevno-programebis-ekonomikuri-analizi-natsili>

⁵ Georgian Institute of Politics. "Large Parties versus Small Parties in Georgia: Do Party Manifestos Vary Across Parties?" 2022. <https://gip.ge/publication-post/large-parties-versus-small-parties-in-georgia-do-party-manifestos-vary-across-parties/> ↵

distinctive, implementable solutions. This perceived lack of differentiation and concrete solutions raises important questions about the actual content of party narratives and their approach to addressing Georgia's socio-economic challenges.

To systematically examine these voter perceptions, our research focused on two key dimensions: first, analyzing the distinctiveness of party narratives in terms of both content and structure, and second, evaluating the specificity and coherence of their proposed solutions to pressing socio-economic issues. This dual focus allows us to move beyond surface-level similarities and differences to understand how parties actually frame and approach key challenges facing Georgia. Our findings reveal a more complex picture than the initial voter perceptions might suggest, with significant variations in how parties construct their narratives and articulate solutions, though often still falling short of the concrete, implementable proposals that voters seek.

To analyze party narratives in Georgia's current political context might seem counterintuitive. The country faces what many observers describe as a pivotal moment in its democratic trajectory, with opposition forces united around basic liberal democratic principles and European integration, standing against the Georgian Dream government's increasing authoritarian tendencies and apparent pro-Russian shift⁶. The political landscape has been marked by intensifying protests since 2023, with demonstrators consistently rallying against what they perceive as the government's departure from Georgia's European path and democratic principles.

However, this very opposition movement - encompassing political parties, civil society organizations, and newly emerged public spaces both on streets and digital platforms - can be viewed as a prototype of Georgia's future pluralistic democracy. The diverse coalition that has emerged through protest action represents not just resistance to crippling authoritarianism, but a laboratory for democratic pluralism. Understanding the variations in how different opposition forces frame socio-economic challenges and propose solutions offers valuable insights into how Georgia's liberal democratic future might be structured once democratic governance is restored. Rather than undermining unity in the face of authoritarian tendencies, analyzing these internal differences can help articulate the contours of the pluralistic democracy that opposition forces aim to build.

Methodology: Narrative Analysis of Party Positions

This research employs narrative analysis as its primary methodological approach, a choice motivated by the method's unique ability to capture both the meaning and form of political discourse without reducing complex political positions to predetermined categories. As Czarniawska notes, narrative analysis allows researchers to "follow the actors" and understand how they construct meaning through their stories, rather than imposing rigid analytical frameworks that might miss important nuances.

Our analysis focused on official party documents, including manifestos, policy statements, relevant media archives and public communications from six major political parties chosen based

⁶ Sam Jones, "Georgia: An Existential Election," Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), October 21, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/2024/10/21/georgia-an-existential-election/>.

on their electoral potential as demonstrated through polling data and their representation of distinct ideological positions within Georgia's political spectrum. Each selected party either consistently polled above the electoral threshold or represented a significant ideological constituency in Georgian politics.

To complement the textual analysis, we conducted interviews with four representatives from party leadership to understand the internal processes of manifesto development and policy formulation. These discussions provided valuable context about how parties navigate between ideological positioning, practical policy-making, and voter communication. However, it's important to note a limitation of our study: due to the politically sensitive period during which this research was conducted, we were unable to secure interviews with representatives from all parties in our sample. This limitation reflects the broader challenges of conducting political research during periods of heightened tension.

Findings

How Parties Develop Their Manifestos: Internal Processes and Challenges

Georgian political parties are increasingly prioritizing ideological identity-building in their manifesto development processes. According to our interviews with party representatives, this emphasis is partly driven by their international partnerships, with parties actively seeking feedback from their international counterparts to refine their ideological positioning. Most parties rely heavily on internal policy specialists, typically organizing dedicated policy groups responsible for developing party positions. However, this approach has revealed significant internal communication challenges. Different policy working groups often develop positions independently, leading to inconsistencies across policy fields and occasional ideological contradictions within the same party platform. Only the United National Movement demonstrated a more inclusive approach, engaging in broad internal discussions that involved grassroots members in various policy areas.

A significant limitation in parties' manifesto development is their limited awareness of other parties' positions, hampering their ability to effectively differentiate themselves both ideologically and in policy terms. This challenge is compounded by parties' weak understanding of their electorate's social composition. When asked about their target audience, most parties describe their supporters in terms of political orientation rather than social characteristics. Only one party, Ahali, demonstrated a clear understanding of their demographic appeal, noting particular success with young voters and those over 60. This general lack of social profiling suggests that Georgian parties' sophisticated policy development processes may be disconnected from the actual social bases they aim to represent, potentially contributing to the gap between party promises and voter expectations.

I. Narrative Structures and Strategic Positioning

The Architecture of Political Storytelling

Each party constructs its narrative through distinct frames and rhetorical strategies, reflecting deeper ideological commitments and strategic calculations.

Georgian Dream: Pragmatic Conservatism

Georgian Dream's narrative embodies conservative populism. While their manifesto emphasizes concrete achievements and infrastructure projects, their primary campaign messaging centered on fears of war, loss of traditions, and threats to national identity. Economic achievements and infrastructure projects were mentioned secondarily, often overshadowed by emotional appeals to protect "traditional values" and "peace." This reflects a broader strategy of using populist messaging while maintaining a veneer of pragmatic governance.

GD's future projections maintain pragmatic tone: "Georgia's economy will grow to at least 130 billion lari by 2028." This careful calibration of promises reflects what their manifesto calls a "moderate and pragmatic" approach, emphasizing "stability and the feasibility of gradual progress."

The Opposition Spectrum: From Liberal Reform to Radical Change

The opposition parties present a spectrum of alternative visions, each with distinct ideological underpinnings:

National Movement Unity Coalition: Liberal Democratic Transformation

The UNM combines liberal democratic values with populist economic promises. Their manifesto declares that "freedom requires constant protection, caution, and expansion." They frame the election as a critical juncture, promising both democratic renewal and immediate economic relief through measures like "1,000 GEL pensions" and "debt forgiveness on retirement credits by 2024."

Strong Georgia Coalition: Social Market Economy

This coalition advocates what they term a "Marshall Plan" approach, explicitly linking their program to post-war European reconstruction: "In the last century, after the Second World War, the European reconstruction plan saved European countries from poverty, hunger, and brought unprecedented economic growth." Their vision combines market reforms with strong social protections.

For Georgia: Progressive Welfare State

For Georgia presents what their manifesto calls "a manifesto for a dignified life." They emphasize that "effective economic development is possible only with an optimal model of combining free market relations and state coordination of the economy." This positions them as advocates for a regulated market economy with strong social protections.

Girchi: Libertarian Vision

Girchi stands apart with its radical libertarian approach, advocating for "universal basic income funded by abolishing subsidies and social programs" and "distributing state-owned property equally among citizens." Their manifesto represents the most dramatic departure from Georgia's current political consensus.

Coalition for Change: Liberal Market Reform with Social Protection

The Coalition presents what they term "The Future is Yours," offering a distinctive combination of European integration, comprehensive welfare reforms, and economic modernization. Their manifesto promises to "increase social programs by 50 percent" and "eradicate absolute poverty," while simultaneously advocating for market liberalization. Their approach combines elements of economic liberalism with strong social protections, promising that "Within four years, the economy will double, and family incomes will increase by at least twofold."

II. Economic Visions: Competing Models of Development

Diverse Approaches to Economic Progress

The economic narratives reveal fundamental differences in how parties conceive of state-market relations and development strategies.

Georgian Dream's State-Led Development

Georgian Dream emphasizes infrastructure development and state-guided economic growth. Their platform details specific projects including "a new international airport in Vaziani" and "completion of a four-lane Tbilisi-Batumi highway by 2025." This approach reflects what their manifesto calls "pragmatic, incremental goals for 2028 and beyond."

Opposition Economic Models

National Movement's Transformative Economics

The UNM proposes rapid economic liberalization combined with social spending. Their manifesto promises "high-income, stable jobs with an average salary of 3,500 GEL" and "minimum salary of 1,500 GEL." These bold promises reflect what they term "a new policy with the old foundation."

Strong Georgia's Co-Investment Approach

The Strong Georgia Coalition emphasizes public-private partnership, stating that "rapid economic growth" requires "innovative projects" like the "Anaklia deep-water port and Kutaisi logistics hub." Their economic vision balances state coordination with market mechanisms.

For Georgia's Inclusive Growth Model

For Georgia advocates what they call "decent, sustainable, highly skilled, and productive jobs." Their manifesto emphasizes that "special attention will be paid to women's social protection and their empowerment, as well as the support of young people and other vulnerable groups."

Girchi's Market Fundamentalism

Girchi proposes the most radical economic reforms, including "abolishing the pension fund" and "introducing a multi-currency regime." Their libertarian vision represents the furthest departure from current economic policies.

Coalition for Change : Liberal Market that Works for Everyone

The Coalition emphasizes what they call an "economy of opportunities for all." Key proposals include:

- Lowering income tax to 15% and corporate tax to 10%
- €2 billion in EU subsidies for agricultural sector modernization
- Development of agri-hubs in rural areas
- Commitment to completing major infrastructure projects like the Anaklia deep-water port

III. Social Policy and Welfare: Competing Visions of State Role

Healthcare Reform: Different Paths to Universal Access

The approaches to healthcare reform reveal major differences in how parties view the role of government in ensuring social welfare.

Georgian Dream's Incremental Approach

Georgian Dream defends the current universal healthcare system while proposing gradual improvements. Their manifesto emphasizes building on existing achievements rather than systemic overhaul.

Opposition's Transformative Healthcare Visions

The Coalition for Change promises more dramatic reforms, stating they will "double the primary healthcare budget and improve infrastructure in rural clinics." Their manifesto commits to "expanding access to preventive medication and advanced treatments for chronic diseases."

Pension Reform and Social Protection

Pension reform emerges as a key battleground in the social policy debate. The National Movement Unity Coalition promises "1,000 GEL pensions," while Georgian Dream proposes more modest increases to "350/450 lari."

IV. Education: Shaping Future Generations

Competing Educational Philosophies

Education emerges as a critical domain where different visions of Georgia's future clash most visibly.

Traditional versus Progressive Approaches

Georgian Dream maintains a conservative stance on educational reform, opposing controversial changes like sex education while supporting "increased funding for public universities." In contrast, the Coalition for Change proposes comprehensive program of modernization of educational sector, encompassing what they call "knowledge deposits," promising that "each child will have a personalized education fund, starting from preschool" and "education for employment".

v. European Integration: Unity in Goal, Division in Approach

Different Paths to a Shared Destination

While all major parties support European integration, their narratives reveal significantly different approaches to achieving this goal.

Georgian Dream's Measured Approach

Georgian Dream presents what they term "pragmatic diplomacy," aiming to "reset relations with the U.S. and the EU" while maintaining regional balance. Their timeline extends to 2030 for full EU membership preparation.

Opposition's Urgent Integration Narrative

The National Movement Unity Coalition frames European integration as an immediate imperative, promising "€14 billion European support for the country's reconstruction." Their manifesto declares that "The Georgian people are fair and essentially European, and the Georgian culture and values are part of the culture of the big European family."

VI. Analysis: Understanding the Strategic Differences

Policy Implementation and Feasibility

The Georgian political landscape reveals significant variations in how parties approach policy implementation, with some offering detailed roadmaps while others present ambitious but less structured visions. Georgian Dream demonstrates particular strength in infrastructure planning, providing specific timelines and budgetary commitments for projects like the Tbilisi-Batumi highway and Anaklia port development. Their approach reflects a preference for concrete, measurable outcomes over transformative but less detailed promises.

The Strong Georgia Coalition shows similar attention to detail, particularly in their agricultural reform proposals. Their billion-lari agricultural co-investment program includes specific mechanisms for implementation, reflecting a balanced approach that combines ambitious goals with practical considerations. For Georgia likewise presents clear implementation pathways for their minimum wage proposals, including staged increases and sector-specific adaptations.

However, several key policy areas across party platforms lack detailed implementation strategies. Opposition parties' pension increase promises, while appealing to voters, often lack clear funding mechanisms or implementation timelines. This is particularly evident in the National Movement Unity Coalition's promise of 1,000 GEL pensions, which, while specific in its target, remains vague about the pathway to achievement.

Radical tax reform proposals, particularly from Girchi and elements of the Coalition for Change, face similar challenges. While ideologically coherent, these proposals often lack detailed transition plans from current systems to proposed alternatives. Educational transformation plans across opposition parties, while ambitious in scope, frequently lack specific details about implementation phases, resource allocation, and institutional restructuring.

This implementation gap reveals a broader pattern in Georgian politics: the tension between bold, transformative visions and the practical requirements of policy execution. While some parties excel in detailed planning for specific sectors, most struggle to maintain this level of detail across their entire policy spectrum. This variation in implementation specificity reflects not just different political strategies but also varying levels of institutional capacity and policy development expertise among Georgia's political forces.

VII. Ideological Spectrum Analysis

Mapping Georgia's Political Ideology

Conservative-Liberal Dimension:

- Georgian Dream: Conservative populism
- National Movement: Liberal democracy with populist elements
- Strong Georgia: Social market liberalism
- For Georgia: Progressive welfare capitalism
- Girchi: Radical libertarianism
- Coalition for Change: “Third Way”

The 2024 Georgian election reveals a sophisticated ideological landscape that transcends simple left-right divisions, with parties positioned along multiple ideological dimensions. This complex positioning reflects fundamental differences in how parties envision Georgia's development path and the role of government in achieving it.

The Conservative-Liberal dimension reveals a spectrum ranging from Georgian Dream's conservative populism, emphasizing stability and measured progress, to Girchi's radical libertarianism. The National Movement occupies a distinctive space combining liberal

democratic values with populist economic promises, while Strong Georgia advocates social market liberalism. For Georgia embraces progressive welfare capitalism, and the Coalition for Change positions itself as a transformative force advocating comprehensive welfare state reform.

On the State Role dimension, parties demonstrate markedly different visions of government's function. Georgian Dream favors strong but selective state intervention, particularly in infrastructure and strategic sectors. The National Movement sees the state as a democratic reformer, while Strong Georgia positions it as a market facilitator. For Georgia envisions the state as a both partner in liberal market-oriented governance and as a welfare guarantor, contrasting sharply with Girchi's minimal state approach. The Coalition for Change advocates for a strong welfare state with extensive social protections combined with equally strong market institutes.

The Reform Pace dimension further distinguishes party approaches. Georgian Dream advocates gradual, incremental change, while the National Movement pushes for rapid democratic transformation. Strong Georgia seeks a balanced reform approach, and For Georgia focuses on targeted social transformation. Girchi calls for radical system overhaul, while the Coalition for Change promotes rapid but structured transformation across multiple sectors.

Parties' positions on cultural issues reveal deeper ideological fault lines. Georgian Dream maintains what they call "traditional values," opposing sex education in schools while supporting optional religious studies. This conservative cultural stance aligns with their broader pragmatic populism. The Coalition for Change and National Movement advocate for more progressive social policies, supporting comprehensive sex education and taking a secular approach to religious education. Strong Georgia emphasizes cultural preservation, particularly regarding endangered Kartvelian languages like Mingrelian and Svan, while advocating modernization in other areas. For Georgia balances cultural traditions with progressive reform, while Girchi's libertarianism extends to cultural issues, advocating minimal state involvement in cultural and educational matters.

VIII. Narrative Structures: Forms and Techniques

- **Achievements-Based Narratives (Georgian Dream)**
GD adopts a retrospective-prospective structure, highlighting past achievements before presenting future goals. Its manifesto is organized sectorally, offering specific promises with clear timelines (e.g., GDP growth targets by 2028). The cautious tone aligns with its preference for continuity and incremental reforms.
- **Crisis-Framing Narratives (National Movement Unity Coalition)**
The UNM uses emotionally charged, transformative rhetoric to portray the election as critical for reversing GD's perceived failures. Its structure combines broad ideological commitments with populist promises, such as debt forgiveness and substantial pension increases, to resonate with public dissatisfaction.
- **Pragmatic Narratives (Strong Georgia Coalition, For Georgia)**
These parties present balanced, aspirational narratives. Their structures integrate thematic goals, such as inclusivity and modernization, with actionable sectoral proposals like

agricultural co-investment and education reforms. For Georgia's focus on welfare programs offers a distinct emphasis on inclusivity.

- **Visionary and Ideological Narratives (Girchi, Coalition for Change)**

Girchi and the Coalition for Change adopt ideological approaches, prioritizing free-market principles and minimal state intervention. Girchi's libertarian manifesto highlights radical proposals, such as "*abolishing the pension fund*" and "*introducing a multi-currency regime.*" The Coalition for Change emphasizes privatization and decentralization, offering less sectoral granularity.

IX. Narrative Alignment with Citizen Concerns: The Representation Gap

Our analysis reveals a significant disconnect between political parties' narrative framing and citizens' expressed concerns, highlighting what we might term a "representation gap" in Georgian politics.

Focus group research indicated that citizens prioritize concrete socio-economic issues, particularly unemployment and outward migration, viewing these as Georgia's most pressing challenges. While parties across the spectrum acknowledge these issues, their narrative framing often diverges from citizens' practical concerns. As one focus group participant noted, "They don't care about this issue at all. None of them has any interest in it. Once they reach power, they all become the same as those before them."

Georgian Dream's emphasis on infrastructure development and gradual progress, while specific in targets, fails to address the immediate economic concerns expressed by citizens. The opposition parties' focus on transformative change and European integration, while important, often overshadows the day-to-day issues that citizens prioritize.

A particularly striking misalignment appears in communication style. Focus groups revealed strong citizen preference for direct, regular engagement beyond election periods, with one participant stating, "Let them come out to the people, talk to us. Let them find out what our real problems are and take care of us." However, party narratives remain largely top-down and media-focused.

The Coalition for Change and Strong Georgia Coalition come closest to aligning with citizen concerns through their emphasis on welfare policies and economic development. However, even their narratives often fail to bridge what focus group participants described as a fundamental "disconnect between political parties and the populace."

Girchi's distinctive libertarian positioning, while ideologically clear, appears particularly misaligned with citizen priorities. As one focus group participant noted, "No issue suggested by a political party that promotes marijuana to attract young people can be important to me."

This misalignment suggests that while parties have developed sophisticated narrative frameworks, they have largely failed to root these narratives in citizens' lived experiences and immediate concerns. The result is what citizens perceive as a political discourse that, regardless of ideological positioning, remains detached from their daily challenges and aspirations.

Conclusion: Beyond Simple Dichotomies

The analysis of Georgia's 2024 election narratives reveals a political system in transition, marked by sophisticated ideological differentiation yet challenged by a persistent disconnect between political discourse and citizen concerns. While parties have developed distinct ideological positions and policy frameworks - from Georgian Dream's emphasis on stability to the diverse reform visions of opposition parties - our research identifies a significant representation gap between these narratives and the everyday concerns of Georgian citizens.

This gap manifests not just in policy content but in communication style and engagement approaches. While citizens express strong preferences for direct engagement and practical solutions to immediate challenges, party narratives often remain abstracted from these concrete concerns, focusing instead on broader ideological positioning and transformative visions.

Our analysis reveals distinct narrative patterns in how Georgian parties frame their political offerings, while also highlighting significant gaps in the types of stories being told about Georgia's development and challenges. These narratives range from grand visions of state-building to emotionally charged salvation stories, yet they often fail to connect with citizens' immediate concerns and lived experiences. This disconnect undermines the ability of political parties to engage the electorate as active participants in shaping Georgia's future.

The research also highlights a significant credibility gap affecting Georgian political parties' ability to connect with voters. Multiple studies, including our own focus group research, indicate a fundamental lack of trust in political institutions, which undermines parties' ability to effectively communicate their narratives regardless of ideological positioning. This credibility deficit compounds the challenge of bridging the representation gap between political discourse and citizen concerns.

Present Narratives

The Epic of State Building

Georgian Dream (GD) positions itself as the architect of Georgia's physical and economic transformation. Its narrative highlights monumental achievements, such as “*constructing 63 hydropower plants*” and “*launching the Anaklia deep-water port.*” Promises of future projects, like “*a new international airport in Vaziani*” and expanded highways connecting Tbilisi to Batumi, form the backbone of its story of state-building.

This epic narrative emphasizes progress and stability, appealing to voters who value continuity and tangible development. However, it often fails to address the immediate, everyday needs of citizens. For instance, while GD boasts of GDP growth projections and infrastructure megaprojects, these promises seem abstract to rural families struggling to access healthcare or urban residents burdened by rising rents. A farmer in Kakheti, for example, might wonder how a highway connecting major cities will help them access better irrigation or higher crop prices.

By focusing primarily on dramatic transformations, GD risks alienating voters who feel disconnected from these large-scale initiatives. Its narrative of state-building tells the story of a nation being shaped but neglects the individual lives of those within it.

The Salvation Story

Opposition parties, particularly the National Movement Unity Coalition (NM) and the Strong Georgia Coalition (SGC), craft narratives centered on national salvation. These stories portray Georgia as a nation in crisis, plagued by oligarchic rule, corruption, and economic stagnation. Framing themselves as heroic saviors, these parties promise dramatic interventions to rescue Georgia.

For example, NM frequently highlights proposals like “canceling pension loans by December 2024” and “doubling the economy within four years.” Similarly, SGC’s invocation of a “Marshall Plan” promises rapid recovery and modernization, echoing historical narratives of post-war Europe. These emotionally charged narratives resonate with voters frustrated by the perceived failings of Georgian Dream, offering hope and a vision of transformative change.

However, these salvation stories often lack detailed explanations of *how* such transformations will be achieved. Promises of doubling incomes or halving unemployment rates may inspire, but without clear implementation plans, they risk being dismissed as populist rhetoric. For instance, while a pensioner might welcome the promise of loan forgiveness, they may remain skeptical without understanding how the government intends to fund such measures sustainably.

The Technocratic Tale

For Georgia adopts a technocratic narrative, focusing on balanced and evidence-based solutions to socio-economic challenges. It promises an “optimal model of combining free market relations and state coordination,” positioning itself as a rational alternative to the grandiose narratives of GD and NM.

This approach appeals to voters seeking competence and pragmatism, particularly middle-class urban professionals. However, its reliance on technical language often struggles to create emotional resonance. A small business owner in Rustavi might appreciate For Georgia’s commitment to reducing bureaucracy but find its lack of compelling storytelling about how these changes will impact daily operations less engaging.

By emphasizing competence over connection, the technocratic tale risks being overshadowed by the more emotionally evocative narratives of GD and NM.

Missing Narratives

The Everyday Story

One of the most glaring omissions in Georgian party narratives is the absence of stories centered on citizens' daily lives. While parties discuss macro-level transformations, such as GDP growth or EU alignment, they rarely illustrate how these changes will manifest in households or communities.

For example, a narrative about how a rural schoolteacher's salary will improve under specific education reforms or how pensioners in Kutaisi will access subsidized medicines under a proposed healthcare policy could bridge the gap between political promises and personal realities. Parties miss the opportunity to humanize their platforms by connecting them to relatable, tangible outcomes.

The Implementation Chronicle

Another missing narrative is the story of *how* change happens. Most parties make sweeping promises without detailing the processes, challenges, or incremental steps involved. This lack of transparency reduces trust and makes ambitious proposals appear unrealistic.

For instance, NM's promise to "*establish universal free school meals*" could be accompanied by a detailed narrative about working with local municipalities to improve kitchen facilities, train staff, and source local ingredients. This would transform a bold promise into a credible plan while engaging citizens as stakeholders in the process.

The Citizen's Journey

Perhaps the most significant omission is the absence of narratives that position citizens as active participants in shaping policy. Current narratives primarily cast citizens as passive beneficiaries of government initiatives, rather than as co-creators of solutions.

For instance, a narrative about communities in Samegrelo collaborating with local officials to decide how EU subsidies should be invested in agricultural development could empower voters and foster a sense of agency. Similarly, framing policy discussions around citizen-led forums or participatory budgeting would demonstrate a commitment to democratic engagement.

Gaps in the Narrative Landscape

Despite their increasing sophistication, Georgian political parties fail to fully bridge the gap between macro-level promises and the micro-level realities of citizens' lives. The dominance of grand narratives—whether epic, salvational, or technocratic—overshadows the everyday stories and participatory frameworks that could make political discourse more relatable and impactful.

By incorporating narratives about daily experiences, implementation processes, and citizen agency, parties could transform their platforms from abstract visions into compelling stories of shared progress. Addressing these narrative gaps is crucial for rebuilding trust and fostering meaningful connections between Georgian citizens and their political representatives.

Recommendations: Toward More Inclusive Political Storytelling

Based on our analysis of existing and missing narratives in Georgian party politics, we propose the following recommendations for developing more effective political communication:

1. Humanize Grand Narratives

Parties need to ground their transformative visions in human-scale stories:

- Connect infrastructure projects to community-level impacts (e.g., how the Anaklia port will affect local businesses and employment)
- Illustrate macro-economic promises through household-level examples
- Translate technical policies into stories about everyday experiences
- Balance national achievements with local success stories

2. Develop Implementation Narratives

Transform abstract promises into credible stories of change:

- Create narratives that explain the step-by-step process of achieving goals
- Include stories about overcoming potential obstacles
- Show how funding mechanisms work through concrete examples
- Highlight incremental achievements rather than just end goals

3. Create Participatory Narratives

Shift from top-down pronouncements to stories of shared achievement:

- Showcase examples of successful community-government collaboration
- Tell stories about citizen involvement in policy development
- Include diverse voices and experiences in party communications
- Develop narratives about ongoing citizen engagement beyond elections

4. Bridge Time Frames

Connect past, present, and future through coherent storytelling:

- Show how current actions contribute to long-term goals
- Illustrate immediate benefits of long-term projects
- Develop narratives about continuous progress rather than dramatic transformation
- Include stories about present-day problem-solving

5. Build Local Storytelling Capacity

Invest in organizational ability to gather and tell community stories:

- Train party representatives in connecting policy to local experiences
- Develop mechanisms for collecting citizen stories
- Create platforms for sharing community-level successes
- Establish regular forums for citizen-party dialogue

These recommendations aim to help parties move beyond the current narrative landscape dominated by epic state-building tales, salvation stories, and technocratic accounts. By incorporating everyday experiences, implementation details, and citizen participation into their storytelling, parties can build more meaningful connections with voters and foster greater trust in political institutions.

Success in this transformation requires sustained commitment to new forms of political communication that prioritize citizen engagement over grand proclamations, and concrete achievements over abstract promises. This shift in narrative approach could help address the current disconnect between political discourse and citizen concerns that our research has identified.

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