Consequences of Deficit of Intra-party Democracy in Georgia

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General overview

The Chavchavadze Center conducted two studies on intraparty democracy to assess the level of internal democracy within Georgian political parties. These studies revealed a significant deficit of intraparty democracy and identified the causes for it.

This paper is the Chavchavadze Center's third study on intraparty democracy. It seeks to identify the consequences of the deficit of democracy within Georgian political parties.

The study found that the deficit of intraparty democracy contributes to the erosion of public trust in political parties, political leaders and, in general, political processes as well as institutions associated with political parties. The political polarization in the country can, to a certain extent, be explained by voters' disappointment with political parties and increasing nihilism toward the political processes involving political parties, caused in turn by the deficit of intraparty democracy.

Political nihilism encourages brain drain and emigration from the country, and adversely affects the economy through its impact on domestic and foreign investments. However, these issues require more research and are not the subject of this particular study.

1. Literature review

For over a century, most researchers specializing in political parties and democracy have agreed that political parties are of vital importance for representative democracies. As Balcere notes, political parties play the most important roles in state governance, policy formulation, interest representation, and elite recruitment (Balcere, 2017; pg. 50). Researchers of the first generation of political parties, such as Duverger, Schattschneider and Wilson acknowledged that free and fair competition among political parties nourished democracy. While they believed that it was impossible to attain democracy within a political party, they thought its absence would not adversely affect the level of democracy in a country. Over the past 60 years, this position has been challenged and attention has shifted to the needs of intraparty democracy.

In their study, Hazan and Rahat highlight the importance of intraparty democracy. The authors argue that in countries with a proportional electoral system, candidates heading an electoral list have every chance to get a seat in parliament, regardless of election outcome. This is especially true in case of electoral lists from main political parties (Hazan & Rahat, 2010; pg. 11). Thus, one may say that the process of selecting candidates within parties, rather than elections, can determine whether particular politicians enter parliament.

Discussing the importance of intraparty democracy, Ignazi stresses that democracy within political parties is the result of free and fair competition; at the same time, he notes that parties' internal rules and practices are critical in the political system. Thus, intraparty democracy is vital for the working and legitimacy of the political system (Ignazi, 2018; pg. 5).

Reviewing the opinions of supporters of intraparty democracy, Scarrow notes that parties with a strong internal democracy are likely to select more capable and appealing leaders, offer more responsive policies, and enjoy greater electoral success (Scarrow, 2005; pg. 3).

Gauja believes that the involvement of citizens in the formulation of party policy not only adds to the legitimacy of a political party, but also helps ensure links between citizens and the state (Gauja, 2013; pg.16).

Mersel identifies several factors explaining why intraparty democracy is important and what problems may ensue from its absence. In Mersel's view: 1) Intraparty democracy affects representative and participatory functions; political parties constitute a component and major part of democracy and therefore, if citizens are free and equal in a democracy, they must have these rights within political parties too. Furthermore, intraparty democracy ensures a high representation of society in matters of ideology and politics; 2) Lack of internal democracy may encourage the neglect of general democratic principles (referred to as "external democracy" by the author) in a party's political activities; 3) Concentration of power within a party leadership and their control of party members may go beyond the party and be applied to wider society; 4) Issue of monitoring—it is vital that a political party has democratic mechanisms in place to monitor and control its leaders. Without intraparty democracy, party members cannot freely associate in factions, leading to a decrease in transparency (Mersel, 2006; pg. 96-97).

When discussing the benefits of intraparty democracy, Cross and Katz note that intraparty democracy may help political leaders better understand the desires of party supporters and society (Cross & Katz, 2013; pg. 171).

The renewal of political elites is driven in large part by the selection of a party's candidates and leaders. Field and Siavelis note that the selection of candidates is an integral part of the recruitment of politicians (Field & Siavelis, 2008; pg. 621). Leadership change in political parties can influence a particular party organization and have wider-scale consequences. Ensser-Jedenastik and Muller believe that a change of party leadership sends a strong signal to voters, other political parties, the economy, and party activists, which may

have significant results (Ennser-Jedenastik & Muller, 2015; pg. 930).

How a party selects candidates and leaders says a lot about it. According to Schattschneider, the nomination process determines the nature of a political party and those who control the process are, in fact, the "owners" of the party. This observation is the best illustration of how power is redistributed inside a party (Schattschneider, 1942).

Michels offers a more radical assessment, arguing that the selection of candidates can clearly show oligarchical tendencies in political parties because old elites may use the selection process to prevent the emergence of new leaders (Michels, 1949).

The selection of candidates and leaders in political parties in modern democracies is an inclusive process, which means that a party's ordinary members and supporters play an active part in the replacement of political elites. One method is through party primaries, which facilitate the development of intraparty democracy and the active involvement of rank-and-file members in party affairs. Cross and Pruysers stress that primaries offer political parties an opportunity to strengthen legitimacy and recruit new members (Cross & Pruysers, 2017; pg. 2).

Various studies have shown that inclusiveness in the selection of candidates and leaders, along with other features of intraparty democracy, helps reinforce links between parties and citizens, which could be critical for the democratization of countries like Georgia. As Van Biezen notes, in emerging democracies, formal organizational linkages between political parties and society are weak (Van Bizen, 2003; pg. 201).

This is true for Georgia: according to a public opinion poll published by the International Republican Institute in June 2021, more than half of respondents (55%) were unhappy with the work of political parties. Only 37% of respondents said they were happy. Further-

more, 61% of the people surveyed said they want new political parties (Public opinion survey, residents of Georgia, June 2021, Center for Insights in Survey Research).

Growing political polarization in Georgia is often discussed by international partners and foreign nongovernmental organizations operating in Georgia as well as local nongovernmental organizations, media, politicians, and political scholars. One of key subjects of this study is to explore the linkages between the reality in the country and the lack of democracy within political parties. Carotheres and O'Donohue explain that political life in a country is polarized when political forces have fundamental differences in their ideas and actions and lack common ground. The authors believe that when polarization reaches a certain degree of intensity, it can corrode democratic system (Ed: Carotheres & O'Donohue, 2019; pg. 4-5).

But the question is to what extent the Georgian reality fits that description of polarization. According to Gilbreath and Turmanidze, the divisions among political forces in Georgia are not about ideology or policy. The authors observe that citizens' opinion on many issues is not divided into two radical camps, which is a necessary feature of polarization. Instead, division in Georgia is determined by three main factors: 1) assessment of particular political events (for example, in contrast to Georgian Dream supporters, the United National Movement supporters think that Rose Revolution was a good thing); 2) individual politicians; and 3) the institutions they run (Gilbreath & Turmanidze, 2020). Consequently, one may conclude that in the case of Georgia, the main source of division is politicians and events or institutions associated with them.

As noted above, in the absence of intraparty democracy, political parties and leaders tend to lose linkages with, and the trust of, citizens. The reality in Georgia adds credibility to the findings of Gilbreath and Turmanidze because the main causes of polarization in the country in recent years are politicians and political parties that more citizens oppose than support (according to opinion polls). This

turns discreditation and negative PR into the key weapons to pit parties against each other, which is precisely what the most recent public opinion survey by the International Republican Institute shows. According to the survey, only two politicians—Kakha Kaladze and Giorgi Gakharia—have positive ratings while other political leaders have much higher negative ratings than positive ones (Public opinion survey, residents of Georgia, June 2021, Center for Insights in Survey Research). It must be noted here that the high personal ratings of leaders do not automatically translate into high ratings for the corresponding political parties. One example is the European Georgia and one of its leaders, Davit Bakradze. Citizens' trust in Bakradze has always been high whereas support for the European Georgia has been declining. The same holds true for Irakli Alasania and Davit Usupashvili, whose personal ratings were well above the ratings of their political parties.

Thus, the knowledge accumulated in the academic literature shows that the lack of intraparty democracy may adversely affect issues such as legitimacy of political parties and leaders; linkages between citizens and parties and trust in society; renewal of political elites; recruitment of new politicians; mobilization of new members and supporters by political parties; representation; internal party control and monitoring; and the overall degree of democracy in a country.

2. Methodology

The research studies into intraparty democracy conducted by the Chavchavadze Center revealed an acute deficit of internal democracy within political parties and identified its causes. This study aims to identify the consequences of the lack of intraparty democracy. Therefore, the question to be answered by the study is:

What are the consequences of the deficit of intraparty democracy in Georgia?

The study applied methods of qualitative research. It rests on qualitative and quantitative analyses of the results of public opinion polls conducted by independent organizations in Georgia between 2003 and 2021 as well as the results of the last four elections, published by the Central Election Commission. To fulfill the objective of the study, academic literature on the subject was also scrutinized.

The sample of the study includes political parties that have held at least two party congresses and received at least 1% of the votes in the 2021 local elections.

3. Impact of lack of intraparty democracy on erosion of trust in political parties

The lack of democracy within political parties of Georgia causes decline in and gradual loss of voters' trust in them. This trend can be seen in the results of sociological surveys and public opinion polls but does not, as a rule, affect elections. Due to the extreme polarization in Georgia, it is difficult for a divided society to find a real alternative and therefore voters have to choose between the two poles, the two largest political parties.

When there is a severe deficit and, often, a total absence of intraparty democracy, decisions within political parties are taken by an extremely narrow circle of leaders. Party elites decide all important issues, including compilation of electoral lists; nomination of candidates; selection of heads of party structural units; use and distribution of financial resources; and the formulation of election manifestos and action strategies. Rank-and-file members are sidelined. Furthermore, party elites exercise total control over the process of picking out new politicians within political parties as well as the general renewal of parties. New politicians rarely appear in parties and when they do, they are presented not as new politicians but as "new faces." It is ambiguous where they come from and how they are promoted within party structures. New faces are, as a rule, staunch supporters of the leaders that promoted them; therefore, their entry into politics is mainly superficial and is not based on meritocracy, ideological views, success in intraparty competition, etc.

The extremely low degree of inclusiveness and dependence on leaders in Georgian political parties, in addition to the absence of political will to undertake a real, free and competitive renewal, erodes voters' trust in political parties and results in nihilism about political processes. Party elites, who remain in place for decades, are one of the main causes of nihilism in society. They are unaccountable to voters and try to stifle criticism from political opponents or voters by accusing them of "sowing nihilism." As a result, voters increasingly lose trust in parties and extremely negatively evaluate their work.

Declining trust in political parties has become a growing trend in recent years. This can be seen from the results of various public opinion polls. One conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in June 2021 shows that political parties are ranked much lower than even other political institutions. Answering the question: "Would you like to see new political parties in future elections or are you satisfied with the current choices?" 61% of respondents said that they would like to see new political parties and only 31% were satisfied with the current parties (IRI, Public opinion survey, residents of Georgia, June 2021, pg. 42). Some 31% of respondents do not think that any political party in Georgia represents their interests (only 21% of respondents think that there is at least one such political party in Georgia). The assessment of political parties compared to other formal or informal institutions highlighted the extremely low level of trust in political parties. Only 27% of respondents evaluate the work of political parties as favorable compared to 62% of respondents who think the opposite. For comparison, the work of the two most trusted institutions, the army and the Patriarchate, was assessed as favorable by 85% and 80% of respondents, respectively. The institutions less trusted than political parties include the State Audit Office (23%), National Bank (22%), and Trade Unions (16%) (IRI, Public opinion survey, residents of Georgia, June 2021, pg. 55).

A similar trend is seen in the recent survey conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in July 2021. The survey covered 2,016 adults. Only 30% of the respondents named a political party closest to them. At the same time, 51% of respondents could not name a party that was closest to them (NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, July 2021, pg. 65).

Diagram 3.1 shows the change in respondents' assessments of the work of political parties between 2003 and 2021 (based on IRI's public opinion surveys).
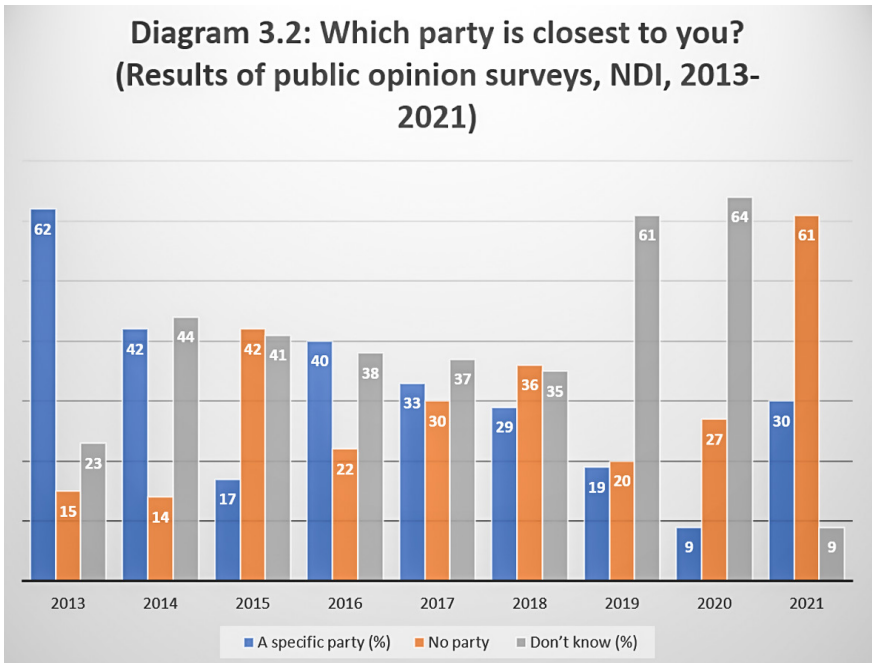
DIAGRAM 3.1: ASSESSMENT OF WORK OF POLITICAL PARTIES ACCORDING TO IRI PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS (2003-2021)

■ Positive assessment of work of political parties (%)   ■ Negative assessment of work of political parties (%)
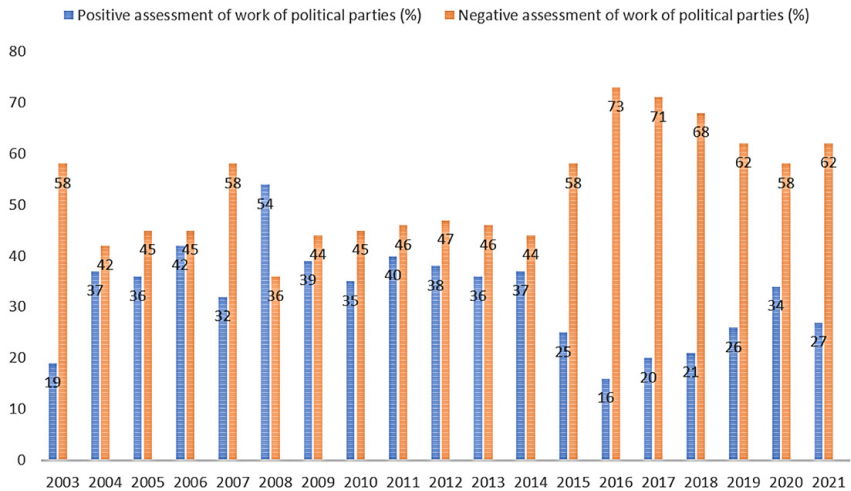
The diagram shows that voters' trust in political parties was rather low (19%) in 2003, but increased significantly and maintained an upward trend for some time. The trust in political parties peaked in 2008 when a larger number of respondents had a more favorable opinion of the work of parties than unfavorable for the first time in the past 19 years (favorable - 54%, unfavorable - 36%). That indicator has never been repeated; the trust in political parties started to decline from 2008.

The level of trust in political parties hit bottom in 2016 when a mere 16% of respondents had a favorable opinion of the work of political parties, compared to 73% who held the opposite opinion. Voters remain critical about the work of political parties to date; only 27% of respondents trust them (whereas more than twice, 62%, mistrust them).
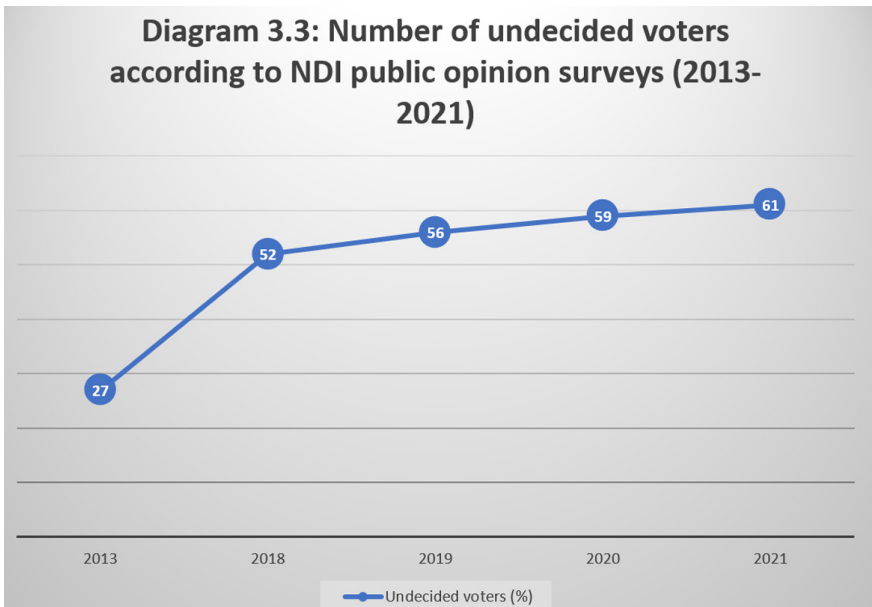
Diagram 3.2 shows how respondents' responses to the question have changed.

Diagram 3.2: Which party is closest to you? (Results of public opinion surveys, NDI, 2013-2021)

Year	A specific party (%)	No party	Don't know (%)
2013	62	15	23
2014	42	14	44
2015	17	42	41
2016	40	22	38
2017	33	30	37
2018	29	36	35
2019	19	20	61
2020	9	27	64
2021	30	61	9

Since 2013, the surveys conducted by the NDI have shown voters' growing nihilism about political processes. Voter loyalty toward any one party has notably decreased. Until 2017, the majority of respondents could name a party as closest to them, but thereafter, the trust of voters eroded and, since 2018, the answer of the majority of respondents to the question: "Which party is closest to you?" was "No party." In 2021, only 30% of respondents shared the opinions of a particular party whereas 51% of respondents disagreed with the ideological views of any given political party.

A continuous increase in the number of undecided voters is another indicator of voter alienation. For example, while in 2013 the share

of undecided voters was 27%, the indicator increased over time, reaching 56% in 2019. In 2020, the share of undecided respondents went up to 59% and increased to 61% (a record high indicator) in 2021. Diagram 3.3. shows the change in the number of undecided voters over the past few years.

Diagram 3.3: Number of undecided voters according to NDI public opinion surveys (2013-2021)

2013	2018	2019	2020	2021
27	52	56	59	61

Undecided voters (%)

In addition to eroding public trust in parties, the lack of intraparty democracy also nourishes voters' disappointment with political processes. Disappointment is caused in part by the lack of political will to change elites within political parties which means that democratic renewal rarely takes place. Various sociological surveys show voters' dissatisfaction with one and the same individuals engaged in political processes for years on end and the lack of real changes within parties, which adversely affects not only the degree of democracy within parties but also the overall level of democracy in the country.

Disappointment with politicians and political processes is also determined by the grave social and economic situation in the country. According to recent public opinion surveys conducted by the IRI, when asked whether the country is heading in the right or wrong direction, the majority of respondents said that the country is heading in the wrong direction. Since 2004 the number of respondents who think that the country is heading in the right direction more than halved. In 2004, as many as 65% of respondents had a positive view about the direction of the country. The indicator dropped to an all-time low (16%) in 2016, while today it stands at 30%. At the same time, the number of those who think that the country is heading in the wrong direction more than doubled: 24% in October 2004, compared to 59% in February 2021. Diagram 3.4 shows the change in answers of respondents to the aforementioned question between October 2004 and February 2021 (IRI, Public opinion survey: Residents of Georgia, February 2021, pg. 5).

A similar trend is seen in public opinion surveys conducted by the NDI. Between 2009 and 2021, the number of respondents who thought that the country was heading in the right direction decreased from 40% to 23%, while the number of those who thought that the country was heading in the wrong direction increased from 31% to 49% (NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, Results of July 2021 Telephone Survey, pg. 8).

Respondents' dissatisfaction with the social and economic situation in the country is also a manifestation of voters' growing disappointment. According to the IRI's February 2021 public opinion survey, only 6% of respondents thought that the economic situation improved a lot or somewhat over the last 12 months; 76% thought that it worsened (worsened a lot—39%, worsened somewhat—37%) while 19% thought that it stayed the same. The same survey shows that the biggest challenges for Georgia are unemployment (65%), infla-

tion (37%), poverty (27%), and the overall economic situation (7%) (IRI, Public opinion survey: Residents of Georgia, February 2021, pg. 7-10).

The NDI surveys also indicate the grave economic and social situation. In the July 2021 telephone survey, the majority of respondents (41%) named lack of jobs as the most important problem in Georgia, followed by poverty (38%) and inflation (29%) (NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, Results of July 2021 Telephone Survey, pg. 23). Diagram 3.5 shows respondents' opinions about most important problems in the country (based on NDI's public opinion surveys).
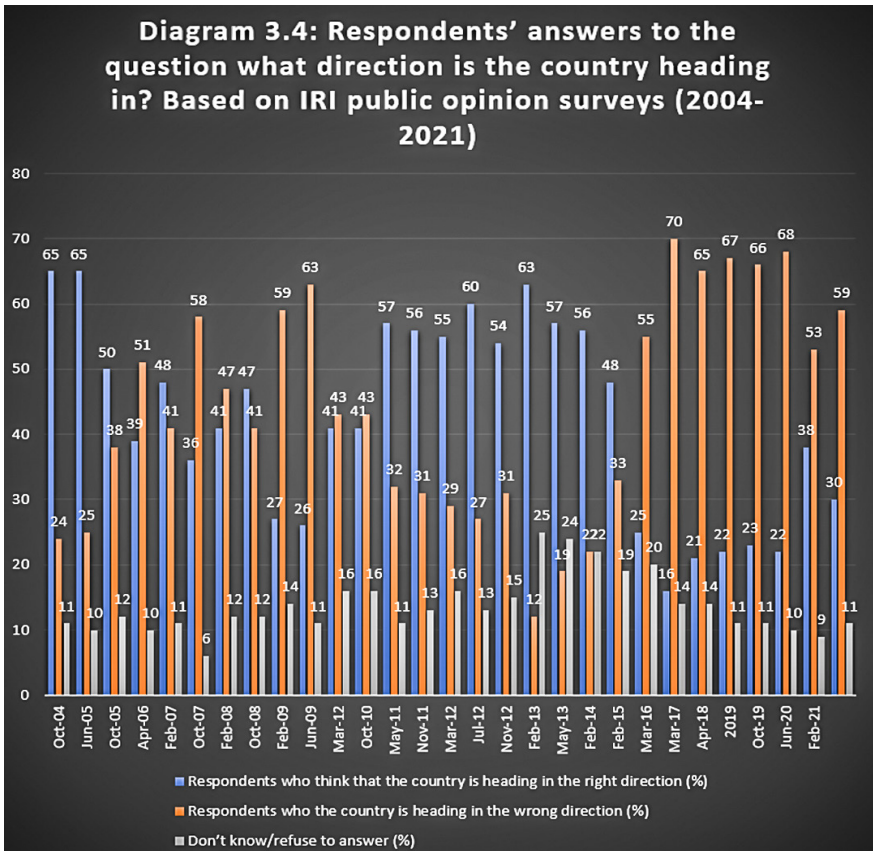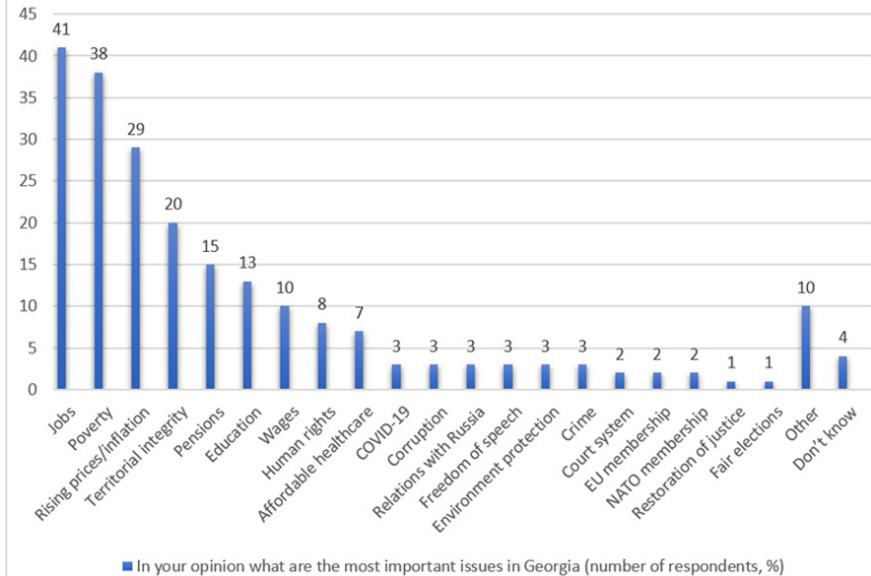

Diagram 3.4: Respondents' answers to the question what direction is the country heading in? Based on IRI public opinion surveys (2004-2021)

Diagram 3.5: What are the most important issues in the country? NDI public opinion survey (July 2021)

Jobs: 41
Poverty: 38
Rising prices/inflation: 29
Territorial integrity: 20
Pensions: 15
Education: 13
Wages: 10
Human rights: 8
Affordable healthcare: 7
COVID-19: 3
Corruption: 3
Relations with Russia: 3
Freedom of speech: 3
Environment protection: 3
Crime: 3
Court system: 2
EU membership: 2
NATO membership: 2
Restoration of justice: 1
Fair elections: 1
Other: 10
Don't know: 4

■ In your opinion what are the most important issues in Georgia (number of respondents, %)

Despite voters' growing disappointment with political processes and the acute problems identified in opinion polls by respondents, opposition political parties are failing to increase significantly their support base, which may at first seem paradoxical. This phenomenon is partly explained by the lack of democracy within political parties. It is difficult for undemocratic parties to implement changes—be it the entry of new independent politicians or the revision of party policy and adjustment to new circumstances, which, among others, causes disappointment of citizens in Georgia. Sociological surveys also prove that. That's why opposition political parties, including large ones, cannot broaden their electoral base to the extent needed to reach a critical mass. This can be interpreted as a shortage of political alternatives that ordinary voters consider trustworthy, which, in

addition to other issues (which are not covered by this study), gives the ruling political force a clear advantage over opposition political parties.

To sum up, the lack of democracy within Georgian political parties erodes voters' trust toward parties. The extreme exclusiveness of parties and dependence on individual leaders greatly harm the image of political parties, hinder the involvement of members and supporters in party activity and, hence, adversely affect voters' attitudes toward political parties.

The factor that causes the most severe erosion of trust toward political parties is the fact that the same unpopular and politically unaccountable politicians remain in power for many years. Voters see the lack of political will to allow periodic, natural renewal of parties and therefore, citizens become increasingly alienated from political parties. It has become a clear trend in recent times. This opinion is supported by annual public opinion polls.

If political parties in Georgia develop intraparty democracy; curb the unnaturally high and often, artificial influence of separate leaders in political parties; increase the level of involvement of voters in party activity; and display the will to allow periodic renewal, it is likely that voters' mistrust in political parties will decrease significantly and political parties will broaden their electoral base accordingly. To gain deeper insight into this issue, a quantitative survey is needed.

4. Impact of lack of intraparty democracy on political polarization in Georgia

The absence of intraparty democracy is one of several factors that are intensifying polarization in Georgia. The issues that cause the deficit of intraparty democracy, including dependence on leaders and the extreme exclusiveness and reluctance to renew parties, create a political environment where the fight for political power takes place between forces rallying around the two poles.

Every Georgian government has tried various methods to discredit political opponents, including physical violence, intimidation, blackmail, and the spread of disinformation, all of which has been repeatedly described in reports by various international organizations. According to the final reports of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on the 2008 and 2012 elections, there were instances of intimidation and pressure on candidates from opposition parties as well as the harassment of party activists (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Georgia Parliamentary Elections OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, 2008 and 2012, pg. 4). The incumbent government uses these methods more frequently than previous administrations. Opposition political parties also apply discreditation and disinformation, which further deepens the existing bitter division.

Polarization is a political process whereby growing differences between various groups lead to a society divided into "Us" and "Them" (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018, pg. 1). At such times, opposing groups base their legitimacy totally on the demonization of their adversary. Demonization implies the labelling of opponents and highlighting of their immoral deeds (Deluka & Buell, 2005, pg. 3). Consequently, demonization is an important tool in the hands of politicians to discredit opponents and strengthen their own legitimacy.

In countries with a high level of polarization, opposing political forces create an image of their opponents as the enemy and predict apocalyptic scenarios if they come/return to power. They deem any means, including violence, justified to remove such opponents from the political field. Before elections, political parties in such countries try to capitalize on the mistakes, immorality, and illegitimacy of opposing parties, instead of communicating their political manifestoes and

ideological views (Silagadze & Gozalishvili, 2019; pg. 1).

In a polarized environment, opposing groups view politics as a ze-ro-sum game, whereby the victory of one group is perceived as the defeat of an adversary. Such an approach leaves no room for a constructive relationship or compromise between political subjects and instead, destructive rhetoric and actions are employed. Under extreme polarization, it is common for a newly elected government to start persecuting its political opponents if the former ruling party remains in politics. The attempt of the new ruling force to strengthen its own legitimacy through the political persecution of the previous government encourages revanchism. In such a system, the defeat of a ruling party means not only being forced to exit politics, but also being subjected to political persecution and therefore, in order to remain in power, the incumbent government employs all available resources, including intimidation, blackmail, electoral fraud, monopolization of state institutions, etc. (Thornton, 2021; pg.3).

The mass media also contribute to the creation of a polarized political environment by promoting the interests of a particular party or a group inside a party and, accordingly, they are perceived as the implementers of political orders. Various media outlets often spread disinformation to promote their favorite political force and discredit an adversary. They play an important role in shaping public opinion and, hence, politically biased media outlets further deepen destructive, un-compromising, and polarized political space (Yang et al, 2016, pg. 7).

The above-described situation can be observed in Georgia too. According to various intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, including OSCE ODIHR, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and independent experts, the Georgian political spectrum is extremely polarized. Every government in the history of independent Georgia has tried to strengthen its political legitimacy by demonizing opposing political subjects. The government of Gamsakhurdia often labelled its political opponents as KGB agents, while the government of Shevardnadze tried to discredit political adversaries by accusing them of "provincial fascism" and "terrorism." During the rule of the United National Movement (UNM), it was a common practice to accuse undesirable political forces of colluding with Russia. Although there were at times grounds for the accusation, it was levelled at opponents so frequently that it took the form of political discreditation.

Today, the incumbent Georgian Dream government calls virtually all its opponents the satellites of the UNM while portraying the UNM as a "destructive force." Polarization has reached the highest degree of intensity under the rule of the Georgian Dream, enabling it to maintain power by talking about the "crimes" of the previous government and demonizing the largest opposition party.

It has become a tradition for the political party that comes to power in Georgia to pursue a revanchist policy in order to monopolize its power and meet the demand of a particular segment of population. This turns the political process into something extremely destructive, so much so that it requires the involvement and mediation or facilitation of international partners to reach even an insignificant compromise. An example of such facilitation is the agreement made on 8 March 2020 between the ruling party and the opposition, whereby the parties to the agreement assumed obligations, including the obligations to conduct the parliamentary election in 2020 at a 120/30 ratio (120 members to be elected through the proportional party lists and 30 members to be elected through majoritarian system); establish a capping mechanism of 40% of votes in the 2020 election; and terminate the criminal prosecution of specific individuals, including Gigi Ugulava, Irakli Okruashvili, Besik Tamliani, and Giorgi Rurua. The government only partially fulfilled the obligations assumed under the 8 March agreement. Only Gigi Ugulava and Irakli Okruashvili were released; Rurua and Tamliani remained incarcerated. The government also did not fully fulfill the agreement brokered by President of the European Council Charles Michel on 19 April 2021. This agreement consisted of five key issues (addressing perceptions of politicized justice, implementing ambitious electoral reform, implementing judicial reform, sharing power in Parliament, and setting a 43% threshold for the local elections). None of these obligations were fulfilled by the ruling party in full. In late July 2021, the government unilaterally withdrew from the agreement, thereby refusing to fulfill its obligations.

Today, the Georgian political spectrum is polarized between two largest political parties, the Georgian Dream and the United National Movement (UNM); this divide is further encouraged by the rigid and aggressive rhetoric applied to their leaders, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili, respectively (Smolnik, Sarjveladze, Tadumadze, 2021, pg. 2). For the Georgian Dream, the UNM is a scapegoat that can be blamed for every political or economic crisis. The key promise

of the government ahead of every election is to banish the UNM from the political scene. Conversely, the source of all ills in the country for the UNM is the ruling party and its informal leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who controls all ongoing processes. Scrutinizing the content of these accusations and reasons behind them is not the aim of this study; this section of the study aims to explain the mechanisms of polarization.

A very high degree of polarization is one of the main factors that makes it difficult for smaller political parties to gain success in Georgian politics. Under extreme polarization, small parties fail to position themselves as an alternative to large parties. By opening up and introducing the standards of intraparty democracy, small parties may succeed in gaining voters' support by convincing them that democratic changes can be truly implemented within political parties. In countries where there is a bipolar system and political parties lack internal democracy, votes are mainly distributed between the two largest opposing parties.

Political polarization in Georgia is further intensified by parties' constant use of hate speech against their opponents. In its assessments of recent elections, the OSCE/ODIHR has underlined political parties' excessively aggressive rhetoric. It was especially critical in its summary conclusion about the 2021 local elections, which noted that the political environment was extremely polarized while discourse was aggressive and confrontational. The conclusion also stated that the campaign was marked by the escalation of offensive and negative rhetoric. The two largest parties repeatedly called for each other's demise, and negative campaigning took place shortly before elections through the media and videos posted on social networks (ODIHR International Election Observation Mission, Local Elections, Second Round, 30 October 2021, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions).

The negative attitudes built up over time in society toward political processes and specific politicians encourage the use of hate speech. Polarization in other countries mainly stems from differences in the ideologies of political parties; their views about domestic and foreign policy course. For example, the divide on a number of political issues in the United States rests on radical difference in the views held by the Democratic and Republican parties. The source of polarization in Turkey is the conflict between secular and Islamist parties, while in

many post-Soviet countries, it is a foreign policy course (opposition between the so-called pro-West and pro-Russian parties). In contrast, polarization in Georgia is largely personalized. Various sociological surveys prove that an absolute majority of voters support the pro-Western course and Euro-Atlantic integration. They also hold an unfavorable opinion about the work of political parties and individual politicians. The negative attitude toward individual politicians, which has built up in society, significantly exceeds the positive attitude. The main reason is the absence of renewal in parties, the process of periodic democratic renewal. For years, voters have had to watch one and the same leaders because political parties are closed to change and new leaders. Fearing the loss of power, unpopular leaders reject intraparty competition and do not allow a new generation of politicians to fully engage in party policy.

When voters feel negatively toward the majority of politicians, the discreditation and demonization of opponents seem rewarding in electoral terms because it is a means to create an enemy image, strengthen own legitimacy, and maintain political influence.

The media environment is also extremely polarized in Georgia. Reports by the European Union and the UNDP note that almost all the local media outlets manipulate facts about important issues. According to one report, media polarization is expressed by spreading unverified information, creating and releasing fake news, openly demonstrating political preferences, and discrediting the political forces they do not favor.

The results of the recent local election also indicate the intensity of the polarization. The ruling party and the largest opposition party received 77.5% of votes in total, while the remaining parties garnered a total of 22.5%. The results of the election totally contradict the results of various public opinion polls, which show much lower support for particular parties than the number of undecided voters. For example, according to the July 2021 NDI public opinion survey (conducted two months ahead of the local election), only 30% of respondents supported a particular party whereas 51% were undecided (NDI, Public attitudes in Georgia, July 2021, pg. 65). Diagrams 4.1 and 4.2 show that despite an extremely low level of trust toward political parties, the same parties dominate the political spectrum due to polarization in the country.

Diagram 4.1: Voters' support for political parties according to NDI surveys (July 2021)
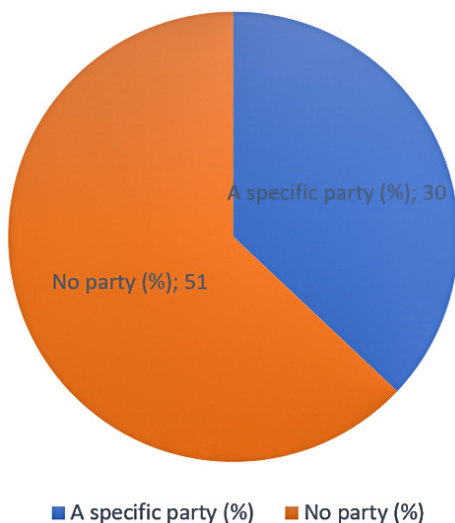
A specific party (%); 30

No party (%); 51

■ A specific party (%)   ■ No party (%)

Diagram 4.2: Results of 2021 local election (%)

46.74

30.78

7.79   2.21   1.66   1.46   1.44   1.38   1.34   0.95   0.85   0.61

GEORGIAN DREAM · UNM · GAKHARIA FOR GEORGIA · LELO FOR GEORGIA · EUROPEAN GEORGIA · ALLIANCE OF PATRIOTS · GIRCHI - MORE FREEDOM · LABOUR PARTY · THIRD FORCE - STRATEGY... · GIRCHI · ANA DOLIDZE - FOR PEOPLE · ELENE KHOSHTARIA - DROA
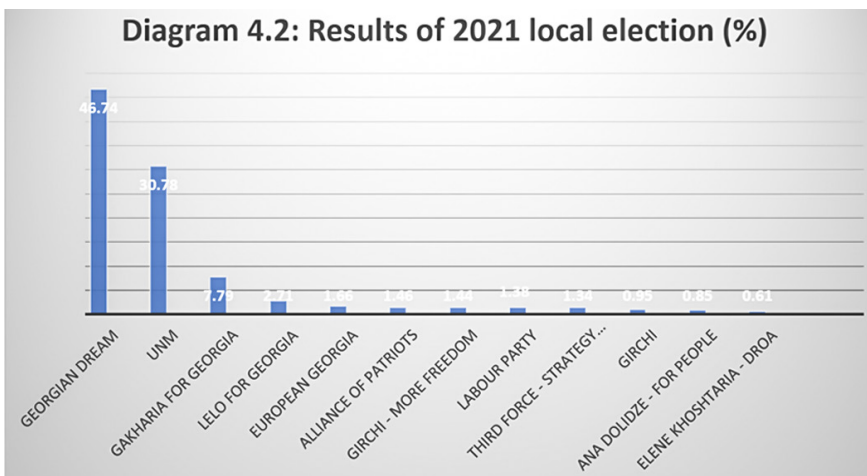
Diagram 4.3 shows the public's views on the polarization in the country. To the question: "Would you say that our country's politics are moving toward more consensus or more polarization?" as many as 61% said that

the country's politics was moving toward more polarization. Only 27% of respondents thought that polarization was decreasing while 17% refused to answer (IRI, Public Opinion Survey, June 2021).

Diagram 4.3: Public attitudes toward polarization in Georgia (%). IRI survey, June 2021

■ Country's politics are moving toward more consensus
■ Country's politics are or more polarization
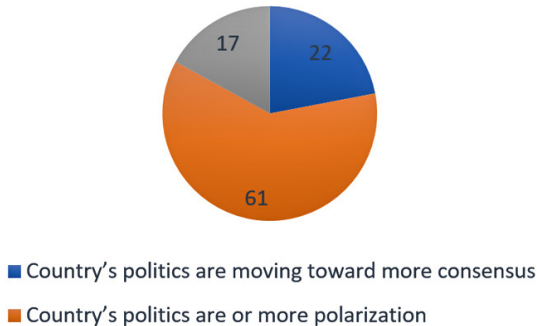
How does the absence of intraparty democracy correlate with polarization? Which of the causes for the lack of intraparty democracy intensify polarization in the country? To establish such a correlation, we have to introduce two important variables—the dependence on a leader and the lack of political will for periodic party renewal.

1. Dependence on leaders

Dependence on leaders largely explains the lack of intraparty democracy in Georgia. Ordinary voters do not participate in managing parties, staffing structural bodies and the decision-making process in Georgian political parties. Party leaders (or a narrow circle of party elites) have the final say on every important issue and they compile party electoral lists, select candidates for positions within parties, distribute party finances, and exercise control over all processes in political parties.

As the influence of leaders is unlimited in such parties, election manifestos and action strategies are often developed by leaders too (Scarrow, 2005; pg. 15). Those manifestos and strategies mainly reflect the personal attitudes, opinions, approaches, and motivations of party leaders rather than the vision and ideology of parties. The polarization of the political spectrum is electorally advantageous for charismatic leaders.

Creating enemy images of political opponents, labelling them, and blaming them for every problem is the best way for leaders to mobilize their loyal supporters. Therefore, party leaders often artificially exacerbate the situation and, to strengthen own legitimacy, demonize opponents. The existence of intraparty democracy in the country would weaken the role of the leader in political processes. A higher level of intraparty democracy would increase the accountability of party leaders and enhance the involvement of ordinary members in the party's activities, which, in turn, would notably lower the degree of polarization.

2. Lack of political will for periodic party renewal

Due to the lack of intraparty democracy, the process of renewal within Georgian political parties is virtually stalled. In Western democracies, the renewal of political parties takes place naturally, at the end of each electoral cycle, and a defeat or poor showing in elections accelerates the emergence or promotion of new politicians within parties. A defeated candidate loses voters' support and is replaced by a new candidate who is more appealing for voters; this is a routine and fundamental procedure for democracy. In contrast, the power in Georgian political parties lies with old elites who, presumably due to their fear of losing their positions, refrain from bringing new politicians into parties through free competition (Gherasimov, 2019, pg. 12-13). Consequently, voters do not have an alternative but to choose again from among existing parties as well as candidates subjectively selected by the leaders of those parties, whose

agendas largely rest on the polarization and demonization of opponents.

The existence of such parties in the country creates a reality where political processes are polarized between two confronting political parties and their leaders. If there were a high standard of intraparty democracy, the party renewal process would sharply reduce the influence of unpopular leaders and open the opportunity for new politicians with an agenda less oriented on the discreditation of opponents. The renewal of political elites according to the principles of intraparty democracy is not a panacea. However, it can play a positive role in diffusing polarization. The democratic process of renewal makes it difficult for leaders with negative personal ratings to maintain power and encourages the entry of new politicians with fresh ideas, plans, and, more importantly, positive ratings.

In summary, it may be said that both external (monopolization of power by one political party, fight for extremely scarce economic resources, and personalization of politics) and internal (absence of democratic standards within political parties) factors facilitate the growth of polarization in the country. Consequently, the lack of intraparty democracy affects the polarization of the political spectrum in the country too, as it does not leave enough room for the periodic renewal of parties and, as a result, the two largest opposing parties continue to dominate the political field. If smaller parties observe democratic standards, the opportunity of party elite renewal will appear and that, considering the Georgian reality, may be a key to their success. The extremely high degree of polarization in Georgia may be diffused by the development of intraparty democracy. Decreased dependence on leaders, active involvement of ordinary members in party activity, and the periodic renewal of parties would alleviate the destructive influence of traditional politics oriented on the persecution and demonization of opponents and diffuse polarization to some extent.

5. Eroding trust toward politicians and issue of elite renewal in Georgia.

As noted above, one of the purposes of intraparty democracy is the selection of leaders and electoral candidates within political parties. The democratic conduct of the aforementioned process in a competitive environment allows the renewal of political parties, which is a good opportunity for ordinary and less prominent but competent, skillful and talented members to engage in party activity. It also helps political parties regularly rejuvenate and strengthen representation. Under intraparty democracy, politicians have to constantly prove to their supporters that they can benefit the political party. Otherwise, old politicians are easily replaced by new leaders who enjoy stronger support. In political parties that lack intraparty democracy, or use intraparty democracy as a mere façade, a narrow circle of leaders controls the process of renewal and the politicians who are periodically promoted within party structures are accountable not to ordinary party members and supporters but to the small circle of leaders who promoted them.

Given the severe deficit of democracy within Georgian political parties, the process of renewal is ineffective as changes are superficial and lack any substance. Hence, Georgian politicians have come to face serious problems of confidence in the past few years. As a result of insufficient and top-down renewals, the positive ratings of politicians have plummeted whereas negative ratings have soared. This is clearly seen in public opinion surveys, which show a severe erosion of trust toward political leaders.

Public opinion polls conducted by the IRI show that favorable attitudes toward politicians have been declining whereas unfavorable attitudes have been increasing in the country every year.

Diagram 5.1: Favorable attitudes toward politicians
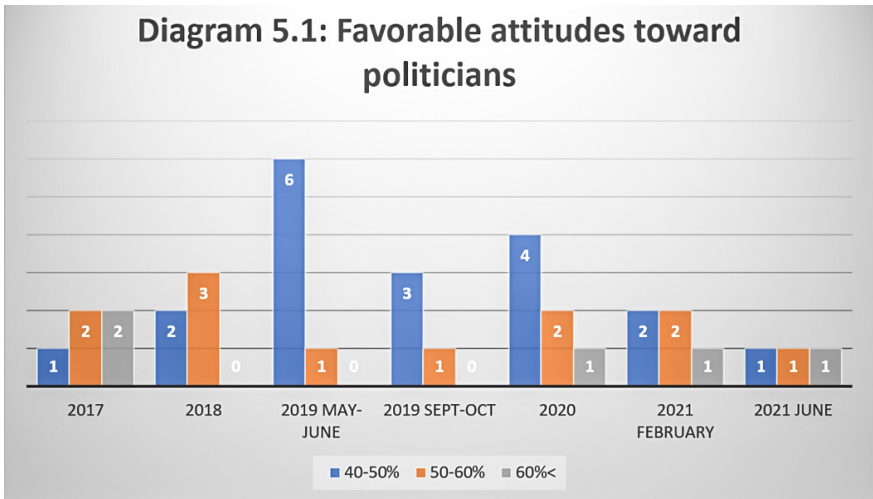
Data from IRI surveys.

Diagram 5.1 reflects the results of seven sociological surveys conducted by the IRI since 2017. To rank politicians, respondents were offered a list of 19 - 22 leaders of ruling and opposition political parties. Only a few of them were favored by more than 40% of respondents, which means that citizens of Georgia have an unfavorable opinion about the absolute majority of those political leaders. It may be asserted that modern Georgian politics has a shortage of political leaders who appeal to a broad circle of citizens. This trend becomes even more apparent when the negative ratings of politicians are taken into consideration.

Diagram 5.2 reflects the magnitude of citizens' dissatisfaction with current politicians. The politicians that are unpopular among broad circles of the population determine the agenda in their political parties. The parties comprising of unpopular politicians, however, face a serious crisis of confidence. According to the recent IRI public opinion survey, of the 22 political leaders, 11 have negative ratings higher than 60%, including the Georgian Dream chairman, Irakli Kobakhidze, as well as leaders of the Labor Party, Strategy Aghmashenebeli/Third Force, Girchi – More Freedom, Girchi, European Georgia, Citizens, Lelo, and United Georgia. As many as 54% of respondents have an unfavorable opinion of Prime Minister Irakli Garib-

ashvili. Their opinion of the chairman of the largest opposition party, Nikanor Melia, is similarly unfavorable.
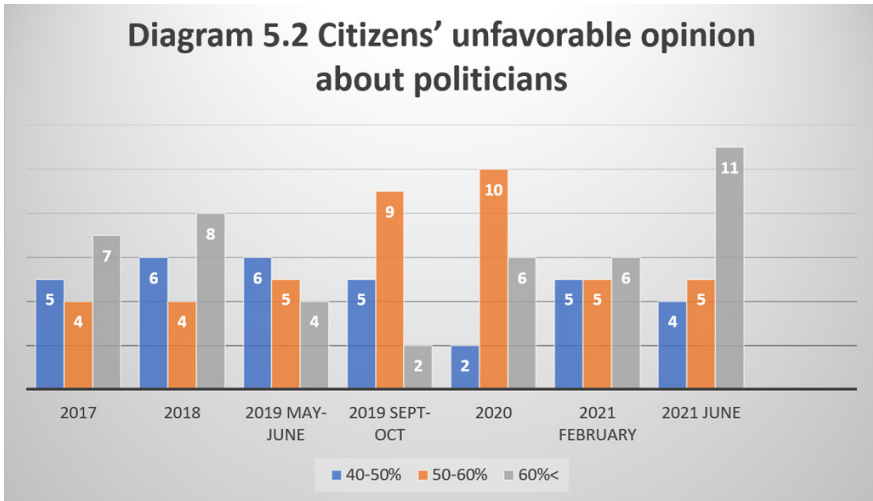
Data from IRI surveys.

The analysis of available data shows that the population holds an unfavorable opinion about the absolute majority of opposition and government politicians as well as political parties. The reason why these individuals remain in the political arena is the lack of democracy within political parties.
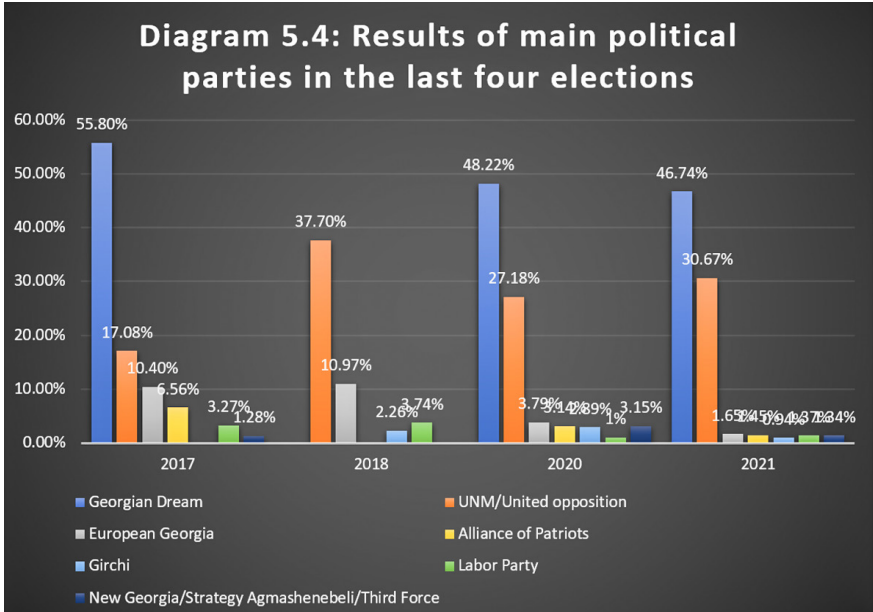
There are political parties in Georgia that have seen a sharp decline in voters' trust and have political leaders whose negative ratings significantly exceed positive ratings. Diagram 5.3 reflects personal ratings of leaders of various parties as of June 2021. According to the data, only two leaders, Kakha Kaladze and Giorgi Gakharia, enjoy positive personal ratings. All the remaining politicians, both from ruling and opposition parties, are not favored by the population at large.
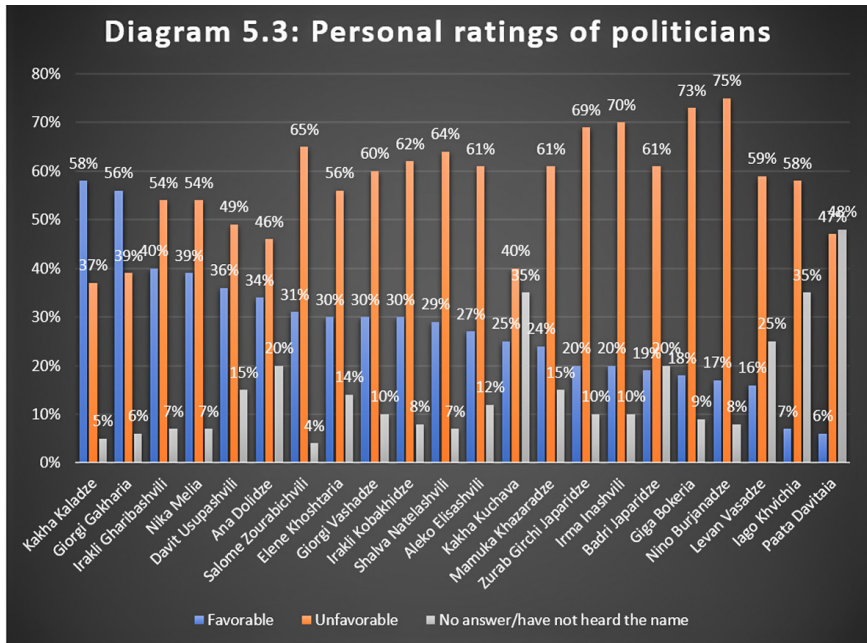
Source: International Republican Institute. Public opinion survey residents of Georgia, June 2021, Center for Insights in Survey Research, a project of the International Republican Institute.

The dwindling trust toward politicians is in direct correlation with the support of political parties. Those political parties that have been operating for several years now and have already held at least two party congresses, have failed to broaden their support base. Diagram 5.4 shows the results of the main political parties in the four elections held in the past four years. The 2017 local election was the first election in which the European Georgia participated and managed to garner 10.4% of votes against the backdrop of decreasing support for the UNM. In the following years, however, support for the European Georgia went down whereas it increased for the UNM; this allows us to suggest that the UNM succeeded in "regaining" a large segment of its supporters which resulted in the worsening of election results for the European Georgia. In total, the election results for the main parties show a downward trend in support for the abovementioned parties or, on certain occasions, an insignificant increase, which is not suffice to change the general trend. It should be noted that Diagram 5.4 does not

incorporate the results of the political parties formed in the past three years as there is no sufficient data available to evaluate the election results of those parties.

Diagram 5.4: Results of main political parties in the last four elections

Legend:
- Georgian Dream
- UNM/United opposition
- European Georgia
- Alliance of Patriots
- Girchi
- Labor Party
- New Georgia/Strategy Agmashenebeli/Third Force

Data from the webpage of the Central Election Commission.

Note 1: The Georgian Dream did not formally run in the presidential election in 2018; instead, the ruling party supported Salome Zourabichvili who received 38.6% of the votes. Diagram 5.4 does not reflect that data.

Note 2: After the 2020 parliamentary election, the leader of the Girchi political party, Zurab Girchi Japaridze, left the party to established a new party, "Girchi – More Freedom." Diagram 5.4 reflects Girchi's results received in the 2021 local elections.

All the above data indicates the erosion of citizens' trust in political leaders and parties; nevertheless, none of the main parties have undergone renewal in the past few years. Old and often unpopular leaders continue to run parties without earning a renewed mandate

and trust. The Georgian media mirrors this state of affairs by regularly giving airtime to politicians who maintain their status owing to the lack of intraparty democracy. The frequent media appearance of politicians and leaders who are unacceptable for a large segment of society is one of manifestations of the lack of intraparty democracy. It should also be noted that media outlets have some levers to promote new politicians and stimulate the development of intraparty democracy. Unfortunately, Georgian media outlets rarely undertake such efforts.

According to the established practice in the majority of Georgian political parties, the nomination of candidates for public positions is under the control of a small group of leaders, often the party's political council. Reportedly, this issue is decided within an even narrower circle (for more information about this issue, see the Chavchavadze Center's study "Reasons of deficit of intraparty democracy in Georgia"). Regarding the staffing of party leadership, which involves the election of a chairman and political council members, the rule of nomination is often ambiguous. A party congress, which is supposed to be the highest and most democratic body in a party, has no other option but to approve the proposed candidates in an open ballot. Georgian political parties lack mechanisms that would enable rank-and-file members to influence the process of recruiting or replace party elites through a truly democratic process. The replacement of party elites is fully monopolized by a small group of leaders.

Such an uncompetitive and unfree environment within political parties nips any possibility of fundamental renewal in the bud. Consequently, the influence of old and unpopular leaders remains strong. New politicians who appear in such parties, as a rule, lose their rating quickly.

The negative ratings of politicians largely result from the lack of intraparty democracy and difficulties renewing Georgian political elites. The absence of a free and competitive environment within the party is a persistent problem for the majority of Georgian political parties. Old/incumbent leaders block the emergence of new figures, thereby minimizing the opportunity/likelihood of politicians with real support stepping onto the political stage.

Conclusion

The study "Consequences of Deficit of Intraparty Democracy in Georgia" has established that the lack of intraparty democracy adversely affects many interrelated factors. Undeveloped intraparty democracy leads to problems such as eroding trust toward political parties, growing political polarization, increasing distrust in political leaders, and absence of natural renewal through free competition within a political class.

The lack of intraparty democracy in Georgian politics is one of the causes of the erosion of trust toward political parties. Sociological surveys show that trust in political parties is dwindling in the country, the number of undecided voters is increasing, and dissatisfaction with the social and economic situation is growing. Voters' increased dissatisfaction would normally create a fertile ground for broadening the support base of opposition parties, but the analysis of election results gives a different picture. Therefore, one may conclude that voters' alienation from political parties is growing, which is a result of the lack of intraparty democracy. The exclusiveness of the decision-making process inside political parties erects barriers to bringing ordinary voters closer to parties, which causes voters to distrust political parties and translates into poor election results for opposition parties. Despite this distrust, however, the ruling party manages to achieve favorable results by employing the numerous levers available to it.

 Ordinary party members' and supporters' virtual absence of influence, the exclusiveness of decision making, lack of transparency, and the uncompetitive and unfree environment make it possible for political leaders with extremely low public support to keep on running political parties. It is precisely owing to the lack of intraparty democracy that unpopular leaders maintain their positions, because leaders with higher negative ratings than positive ones are incompatible with democratic political parties. This factor also has an adverse effect on parties' election results and voters' general attitude toward parties. Leaders with negative ratings inflict harm on their own political parties.

This problem also contributes to political polarization in the country. In the case of Georgia, polarization is driven by negative attitudes

toward individual politicians and parties, which are used by opponents to conduct aggressive and negative campaign against each other. Under intraparty democracy, leaders who are unpopular and unacceptable for a large segment of population will, as a rule, be sidelined from politics (unless they earn a renewed mandate through an open and transparent internal political process), thereby easing the task of political parties to regain lost trust and improve ratings. Such a scenario in Georgia would significantly weaken campaigns oriented on discrediting opponents and help diffuse polarization.

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