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Persistence of Authoritarian Governance in Georgia: An Analysis of Institutional and Societal Barriers to Democratization

Annotation: This article's objective consists in analyzing and articulating principal insights concerning why Georgia's authoritarian governing regime "Georgian Dream" resists collapse notwithstanding unprecedented demonstrations regarding both participant magnitude and temporal endurance. For this purpose, six main factors will be analyzed that present the structural problems of Georgian political processes and also those main supporting pillars upon which Georgian Dream stands. Such factors encompass democratic culture deficiency, economic instruments under Georgian Dream's control, their targeted persecution and legislative strictures intensification, fear and crisis normalization as perpetual regime consolidation endeavor, disinformation operations and ideological manipulation, along with international context presentation, which substantially conditions prevailing political circumstances. The article equally elucidates the political impasse, whereby on one side, owing to societal non-compliance and prevailing circumstances' considerable fragility, dictatorship cannot consolidate completely nor can governance secure either domestic or international legitimacy. Conversely, notwithstanding the ostensibly enfeebled adversary confronting the opposition, it proves unable to alter extant status quo, which ultimately redounds once more to governmental advantage and thereby occasions further national political, economic, and social degradation.

Keywords: Democracy, Dictatorship, Georgia, Nonviolent resistance,

Trwałość autorytarnego systemu rządzenia w Gruzji: analiza instytucjonalnych i społecznych barier demokratyzacji

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł stawia sobie za cel analizę i systematyzację kluczowych wniosków dotyczących przyczyn, dla których autorytarny reżim rządzący Gruzją – „Gruzińskie Marzenie” – wykazuje odporność na destabilizację

pomimo bezprecedensowych protestów społecznych, wyróżniających się zarówno skalą uczestnictwa, jak i wyjątkową trwałością w czasie. W tym celu analizie poddano sześć głównych czynników, które ukazują strukturalne uwarunkowania gruzińskich procesów politycznych oraz fundamentalne filary podtrzymujące pozycję „Gruzińskiego Marzenia”. Do czynników tych zaliczają się: deficyt kultury demokratycznej, instrumenty ekonomiczne pozostające pod kontrolą partii rządzącej, systematyczne prześladowania polityczne i zaostrzenie regulacji prawnych, normalizacja strachu i permanentnego kryzysu jako narzędzie konsolidacji władzy, operacje dezinformacyjne i manipulacja ideologiczna, a także kontekst międzynarodowy, który w istotny sposób kształtuje aktualne uwarunkowania polityczne. Artykuł charakteryzuje ponadto impas polityczny, w którym - z jednej strony - z uwagi na opór społeczny oraz znaczną kruchość istniejącego ładu dyktatura nie jest w stanie dokonać pełnej konsolidacji władzy ani zapewnić sobie legitymizacji zarówno wewnętrznej, jak i międzynarodowej. Z drugiej strony zaś, mimo pozornie osłabionej pozycji reżimu, opozycja pozostaje niezdolna do zmiany obowiązującego status quo, co w dalszej kolejności przynosi korzyści władzy i przyczynia się do postępującej degradacji politycznej, gospodarczej oraz społecznej państwa.

Słowa kluczowe: demokracja, dyktatura, Gruzja, opór bez przemocy

Introduction

In the aftermath of the passage of unconstitutional legislation¹, the rigging of the 2024 elections², and the government's departure from the European trajectory³, Georgia has experienced protests unprecedented in the nation's history, both in terms of participant numbers and the length of continuous protest activity⁴. Nevertheless, the ruling party "Georgian Dream", through mass repression⁵, persists in pursuing its selected trajectory and progressively

¹ Transparency International Georgia, *The Road to Dictatorship: Georgian Dream's Latest Repressive Legislative Changes*, 22.07.2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/road-dictatorship-georgian-dreams-latest-repressive-legislative-changes> [06.05.2026].

² European Parliament, *Parliament Calls for New Elections in Georgia*, 28.11.2024, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20241121IPR25549/parliament-calls-for-new-elections-in-georgia?ref=oc-media.org> [10.05.2026].

³ Civil Georgia, *GD Aborts EU Accession*, 28.11.2024, <https://civil.ge/archives/638801> [10.05.2026].

⁴ M. Nikuradze, *In Photos | 365 Days of Consecutive Protest in Georgia*, OC Media, 11.2025, <https://oc-media.org/in-photos-365-days-of-consecutive-protest-in-georgia/> [10.05.2026].

⁵ Civil Georgia, *2025 | Chronicle of Repression*, 13.05.2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/611538>; Civil Georgia, *Repression in Numbers*, 30.08.2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/697375> [10.05.2026].

consolidates its grip on power⁶. The aim of the present article is to analyze the ongoing processes and demonstrate why "Georgian Dream" cannot be defeated despite the prolonged and large-scale nature of the protests. We will attempt both to present systemic problems in political processes and to show wherein lie the opposition's weaknesses and mistakes that condition the existing political situation. The present article seeks to systematize and present comprehensively significant findings, which will enable us to reflect multifaceted and complex reality through a causal picture. This concerns not simply assessing events and showing the interconnections among them, but also articulating those insights that can explain crisis situations and present a starting point for overcoming them.

Research Design and Methodology

The primary analytical method is *process tracing*, as developed by Beach and Pedersen and George and Bennett⁷. Process tracing is suited to single-case studies that seek to reconstruct the causal mechanisms linking structural conditions to observed outcomes – in this instance, the mechanisms sustaining authoritarian resilience in Georgia despite large-scale societal resistance. Unlike statistical methods, which establish correlations across cases, process tracing traces the within-case sequence of events and identifies the *intervening mechanisms* through which macro-level factors (e.g., economic dependency, disinformation campaigns, legislative coercion) produce micro-level effects (e.g., political demobilization, normalization of fear, erosion of opposition unity).

⁶ *Georgian Dream Consolidates Power Following Municipal Elections*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2025, vol. 22, no. 132, 06.10.2025, Jamestown Foundation, <https://jamestown.org/program/georgian-dream-consolidates-power-following-municipal-elections/> [10.05.2026].

⁷ A. George, A. Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2005; D. Beach, R. B. Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2013.

Six such causal mechanisms are identified in this article. Each is analysed with respect to three dimensions: (a) its *structural preconditions* – the historical and institutional context in which it operates; (b) its *activation logic* – the specific strategies through which the Georgian Dream government deploys it; and (c) its *interaction effects* with the remaining five mechanisms. The cumulative, mutually reinforcing operation of these six mechanisms produces the political stalemate described in the conclusion, in which neither full autocratic consolidation nor democratic transition has been achieved.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis is grounded in four bodies of scholarship that together constitute the contemporary literature on competitive authoritarianism, democratic backsliding, and authoritarian resilience.

Democratic culture and political psychology. The analysis of the deficit of democratic culture (Section 1) draws on the works of Chantal Mouffe⁸ and Almond and Verba's⁹, who focus on the principles and cultural prerequisites that underpin democracy. The psychological dimensions of authoritarian normalization – including the cultivation of fear, conformity, and what the article terms the *homo sovieticus* syndrome – are theorized with reference to Linz¹⁰ on totalitarian and authoritarian regimes and Desmet¹¹ on the mass psychology of totalitarianism.

Competitive authoritarianism and hybrid regimes. Levitsky and Way's¹² framework of competitive authoritarianism – regimes that maintain formal

⁸ C. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London 2000.

⁹ G. A. Almond, V. Sidney, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1963.

¹⁰ J. J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder 2000.

¹¹ M. Desmet, *Die Psychologie des Totalitarismus*, Europa Verlag, Frankfurt 2023.

¹² S. Levitsky, L.A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.

democratic institutions while systematically violating their norms – provides the primary classificatory lens. Georgian Dream's governance strategy exhibits the key features identified by Levitsky and Way: electoral manipulation, selective repression of opponents, media control, and exploitation of incumbency advantages, without resort to outright abolition of electoral competition.

Patronal politics and economic coercion. Hale's theory of patronal politics¹³ – in which political stability is achieved through the concentration and redistribution of economic resources across patron-client networks – is applied to Georgia's economic control mechanisms. Hale's framework explains why large segments of the Georgian electorate outside Tbilisi remain dependent on, and therefore supportive of, the ruling party, even in the absence of ideological affinity.

Spin dictatorship and informational autocracy. Guriev and Treisman's¹⁴ concept of the *spin dictator* – a ruler who maintains power primarily through information manipulation rather than mass violence – is central to the analysis of Georgian Dream's propaganda and disinformation strategies in Section 5. Unlike classical totalitarian regimes, spin dictatorships rely on manufactured confusion, media saturation, and the erosion of epistemic trust rather than explicit ideological indoctrination.

Data Sources and Justification

The analysis draws empirical material, combined in a triangulated manner to mitigate the limitations inherent in any single source type. Primary institutional documents, including legislative texts (e.g., the Foreign Agents

¹³ H. E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015.

¹⁴ S. Guriev, D. Treisman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2022; S. Guriev, D. Treisman. Informational Autocrats, "Journal of Economic Perspectives" 2019, vol. 33, no. 4, p. 100–127.

Registration Act 2025), European Union Council decisions, European Parliament resolutions, and official statements by international organizations. These documents provide verifiable evidence for the legislative and diplomatic dimensions of the analysis. Reports by established monitoring and research organizations (Transparency International Georgia, ISFED, CRRG Georgia, ZOiS Berlin, International Crisis Group) and analytical publications with documented editorial standards (*Civil Georgia*, *GEOpolitics*, Jamestown Foundation, Atlantic Council). Given that the political developments analysed extend into 2025–2026, and that peer-reviewed scholarship cannot yet cover these events, reliance on contemporaneous analytical and investigative sources is methodologically necessary and consistent with established practice in the study of ongoing political crises (see, e.g., Levitsky and Way¹⁵; Applebaum 2020¹⁶). All sources are critically assessed for potential advocacy bias, and findings are corroborated across multiple independent sources wherever possible.

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged explicitly.

This study does not claim that the causal mechanisms identified in the Georgian case are universally operative in all instances of authoritarian resilience. The article contributes to the understanding of a specific conjuncture – a post-Soviet state with a hybrid regime, significant Western linkage, and active civil society resistance – and its findings should be applied comparatively with appropriate caution.

The article does not provide quantitative estimates of the relative weight or causal priority of each of the six mechanisms. Such measurement would require survey data, elite interviews, and econometric analysis that lie beyond

¹⁵ S. Levitsky, L. A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.

¹⁶ A. Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Doubleday, New York 2020.

the scope of the present contribution. Future research could productively employ mixed methods to test and refine the causal claims advanced here.

The rapidly evolving political situation in Georgia means that some empirical claims may require updating as events develop beyond the article's analytical horizon (early 2026). The article's theoretical framework and causal logic are, however, intended to remain analytically valid beyond this specific conjuncture.

A systematic comparative analysis of Georgia alongside other post-Soviet hybrid regimes (Armenia, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine pre-2014) would allow more robust causal inference. Such comparison constitutes a logical extension of the present study and is recommended as a direction for future research.

1. Democratic Consciousness and the Deficit of Political Culture

First and foremost, the question arises as to what the process of society's democratization should rest upon and what must be done to create its solid foundation. Here the discussion concerns not only the idealistic-structural understanding of democracy, which consists in the recognition of the supremacy of popular will, the distribution of power among legislative, law-making, and executive branches, freedom of speech and expression, and the protection of the rule of law, but rather the mode of consciousness formed on the basis of these principles, which determines the givenness of democracy as a cultural phenomenon with its expression and the tension of decision-making. Without this, the understanding of democracy as a purely structural-technical political regime faces the danger that the balance among political forces can be easily disrupted, the legitimation of majority dictatorship can occur, and the weaknesses of democracy – which naturally accompany democracy as a free

and aporetically structured system Chantal Mouffe¹⁷ – can be exploited. In fact, we see this on the Georgian political scene, where the Georgian Dream is presented as competitive authoritarianism, which exhibits the key features identified by Levitsky and Way¹⁸: electoral manipulation, selective repression of opponents, media control, and exploitation of incumbency advantages, without resort to outright abolition of electoral competition.

The concept of democracy as a cultural phenomenon is far from trivial in evaluating the Georgian context, wherein political parties, in the aftermath of independence, notwithstanding the structural allocation of governmental authority, failed to coalesce fully as open associations organized around ideas and political concepts, but instead emerged as "fan clubs with aspirations to power" revolving around individual figures¹⁹. It is true that in any society the personal factor has decisive significance, and in a country undergoing a great epochal transformation, charismatic leaders are universally demanded. However, the transformation of political, economic, social, or Civic systems

¹⁷ C. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso, London 2000.

¹⁸ S. Levitsky, L. A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010.

¹⁹ Tina Khidasheli, (Head of Tbilisi-based think tank Civic Idea, former Minister of Defense of Georgia, 2015-2016.). See: N. Castillo, N. G. Calder, *Why Didn't Georgian Dream Fall?*, "Eastern Neighborhood Bulletin" 08.12.2025, <https://easternneighborhoodbulletin.substack.com/p/why-didnt-georgian-dream-fall>; [10.05.2026]. At issue here is not ideological or conceptual agreement between political subjects, but the organizational principle governing political actors, which forms itself through either open or closed relational models. This principle conditions democracy's destiny – whether democracy constitutes an unavoidable pragmatic equilibrium of powers that may readily collapse upon the slightest disruption of balance or represents rules of engagement founded upon fundamental principles. The tension between these two perspectives of democratic understanding reflects a defining feature, a demarcation of political culture that articulates democracy as an ongoing challenge. Citizens' political participation, trust in institutions, civic awareness, and political responsibility, all of which are signs of political culture (Almond and Verba's, 1963) are still insufficiently developed in the political arena to guarantee freedom, equality, and the rule of law and prevent the government from becoming the sole dominant force in political processes. The interaction of open societies creates a common living space for political culture, which is formed through the mutual sharing of experience and knowledge. In democracy, the determinant of the political process is not merely the seizure of power, but rather influencing the country's development trajectory beyond governance itself, so as to create the conditions under which the country is governed, and the ruling force conducts its policies.

represents a complex and long-term process that requires systematic action and ideological openness. At issue here are not prefabricated, fixed, and conclusively finalized programs of action or the structural reallocation of state and political party apparatuses, but consistent, axiologically informed organizational formations in politics that, alongside acknowledgment of systemic openness (to ideas and competition), guarantee meritocratic achievement. In Georgia, the political process is determined primarily by state power alone, and electoral activity is reduced to the reinforcement of economic and political levers of control²⁰. The absence of a systematic and coherent approach by the opposition, as well as the weakness of internal structural democracy, easily creates opportunities for discreditation and neutralization by the ruling force. Unprecedented instances of activism on the part of the opposition, while sustained by civic awareness and evidencing the democratic inclinations of society, prove inadequate; what is indispensable is the public implementation of strategic vision and systemic coordination capable of surmounting the government's fiscal superiority and the institutional support of the state apparatus²¹.

The imbalance of power among political parties is partially neutralized by the widespread use of social media and digital platforms, which in turn

²⁰ Stephen Jones (Professor of Modern Georgian History at Ilia State University; Founder and former Director of the Program on Georgian Studies at the Davis Center, Harvard University). „Georgia's dubious national elections are rooted in the institutions of state and in a longstanding culture of charismatic leaders controlling economic and political clients in the system“. S. Jones, *Perspectives: Mapping Georgian Dream's Path to 'Victory'*, Davis Center Insights, 4.11.2024, <https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/insights/perspectives-mapping-georgian-dreams-path-victory> [10.05.2026].

²¹ It is true that Georgian political parties speak about strategic visions for governing and developing the country, in order to demonstrate attractiveness and advantage over others in the eyes of the electorate. Nevertheless, no strategic conception or measures toward attaining governance and instituting the coherence guaranteeing uninterrupted politics pre- and post-electorally prove apparent. Their activities remain confined to brief electoral cycles and lack long-range strategic popularization. Democracy's every vulnerability readily surfaces within transitional societies.

transforms the structural character of society²². By ensuring universal accessibility, this is reflected both in the development of democracy and individual engagement, as well as in authoritarian tendencies that define regression through the possibility of increased manipulation, which can ultimately escalate into totalitarian order. Contemporary technologies, on the one hand, through broad individual engagement and, on the other hand, through the possibility of their universal control, increase the ambition for complete domination of political processes. This illusory sense of mastery, sustained by totalitarian soviet legacies, strengthens the prevailing Georgian approach embodied in "winner-takes-all" logic, whereby the triumphant party appropriates everything while the vanquished is removed from any accountability in governance. This approach generates an inexorable dynamic of reciprocal annihilation, which intensifies into a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes* within an informational deluge²³. It is true that within the opposition

²² It is true that Habermas sees the overcoming of political conflicts through the perspective of rational consensus, which in Georgian reality, due to the politics' profoundly affective nature, might seem an insuperable obstacle. Here Chantal Mouffe's position better reflects the democratic possibility of Georgian reality, insofar as the transformation of power confrontation from antagonism into agonistic competition resolves that necessary consensus which concerns the country's fundamental values in the form of freedom, equality, and the rule of law. C. Mouffe, *Das demokratische Paradox: Agonistischer Pluralismus statt rationalem Konsens*, "Politische Vierteljahresschrift" 2020, vol. 61, p. 671 –700. However, the Habermasian position is completely clear that these fundamental values, "even under the changed conditions of mass democracy, parliamentary legislation, party competition, and free political elections must be established in a vibrant political public sphere, an active civil society, and a liberal political culture. Without this societal context, the necessary preconditions for debates, which are decisive for democratic legitimation of government, cannot be realized in reality". It is precisely due to the loss of this condition that we see the Georgian ruling party's political crisis, which consists in the non-recognition of both internal and external legitimation. Comp. J. Habermas, *Der Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Suhrkamp Verlag AG, Berlin 2001, s. 72.

²³ This approach particularly intensified during Saakashvili's government, when opposition parties were almost completely excluded from the state governance process, for which Saakashvili was accused of authoritarian tendencies. On Saakashvili's authoritarian tendencies, see: International Crisis Group, *Georgia: Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?*, Europe Report, no. 189, 19.12.2007, Brussels: International Crisis Group. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/46047/189_georgia_sliding_towards_authoritarianism.pdf [10.05.2026]. What Chantal Mouffe characterizes as the conversion of political opponent into foe, we effectively observe within Georgian political life: 1. Destruction of the common symbolic space: Recognition of the freedom and equality of others disappears; 2. Moralization and Fundamentalism: Antagonisms often manifest themselves through moral, religious, or ethnic identifications. The

spectrum, awareness of the harmful nature of such an approach is gradually strengthening, and there is increasing discussion of informational discipline in communication and pluralism in political governance. However, due to inexperience in political cooperation and a high degree of mutual distrust, Georgian political parties have still not managed to unite into a single open society in the face of existential threat to the country and to confront Georgian Dream as a unified action team. Every endeavour to mount a unified front against Georgian Dream has hitherto failed, notwithstanding that nearly all experts underscore the significance of opposition unity in overcoming authoritarian rule²⁴.

It is true that the ruling party, Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream, attempts by all means to disrupt this unity, resorting to blackmail, repression, bribery, disinformation, and targeted manipulation²⁵. However, transparency and intra-party democratic institutionalization of political parties reduce individual vulnerability, which significantly complicates the dictatorship's capacity to neutralize oppositional movements. Over the past year, Georgian Dream has been unable to suppress the diversified and horizontally dispersed protest, despite employing every legislative, economic, repressive, and informational lever at its disposal²⁶. Coordination on one side, and decentralization together

political opponent is then no longer seen as someone with different interests but is marked as a "traitor" or as an existential threat; 3. Endangerment of democratic stability: Ongoing political processes lose legitimacy and become unstable. Eruptions of violence and the collapse of public discourse loom; 4. End of democratic contestation: Power relations remain always provisional and contestable. Instead, there is an attempt to establish one's own position as absolute and to completely exclude the "Other". C. Mouffe, *Das demokratische Paradox...*, p. 671-700.

²⁴ N. Castillo, G. Calder, *Why Didn't Georgian Dream Fall?*, Eastern Neighborhood Bulletin, 08.12.2025, <https://easternneighborhoodbulletin.substack.com/p/why-didnt-georgian-dream-fall> [10.05.2026].

²⁵ Transparency International – Georgia, *How Georgian Dream Persecutes Critical Media: The Case of TV Pirveli*, 16.09.2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/how-georgian-dream-persecutes-critical-media-case-tv-pirveli> [10.05.2026].

²⁶ On repressive laws, see: Transparency International – Georgia, *The Road to Dictatorship: Georgian Dream's Latest Repressive Legislative Changes*, 22.07.2025,

with horizontal participation on the other, constitute a flexible modality of institutionalization that simultaneously articulates the dispersion of accountability and enhancement of solidarity while promoting mass mobilization – an approach that effectively represents the Georgian opposition's strategic orientation. Admittedly, this indicates a degree of political maturation that intensifies expectations upon political parties to maintain step with democratic advancement. However, due to the imprisonment of almost all leading political leaders and the maximum restriction of political activity, the strategic approach aimed at broad masses cannot be realized, and consequently, the protest fails to translate into political outcomes. In effect, the political process is weakening, and confrontation among parties has shifted to a mode of mutual rivalry.

One might argue that democratic awareness within society has increased in the recent period through critical examination of the errors committed by the former Saakashvili administration and efforts to surmount their repercussions, as demonstrated by the unprecedented willingness to fight for democracy. Nevertheless, society has failed to recover, on one side, extensive institutional confidence²⁷, with reliance upon individual leadership remaining elevated, while on the other side, the credibility of inter-party unity has not attained the requisite comprehensive consensus that would constitute a consolidated counterbalance to authoritarian rule. The realization of this, and even more so, its formation as

<https://transparency.ge/en/blog/road-dictatorship-georgian-dreams-latest-repressive-legislative-changes> [10.05.2026].

²⁷ If we do not take into account the last 30 years and the three-year experience of the First Republic (1918-21), Georgian society has not had its own self-governance for two hundred years that would be subject to historical development and the aspiration for ideological perfection. Distrust of institutions was conditioned not only by the fact of rule being imposed by occupiers and instances of governments abusing systems, but also by the experience of seeking freedom beyond systems. All attempts at self-preservation historically proceeded primarily along individual lines, which strengthened clan connections and developed personal creative force. In democratic society, anti-institutional consciousness creates fertile ground for political crisis. For information on the political crisis, see: S. Gvineria, *The Roots of Georgia's Political Crisis*, "Geopolitics", 2025, no. 15, <https://politicsgeo.com/the-roots-of-georgias-political-crisis/> [10.05.2026].

an acute need, requires the experience of freedom, since this, as the foundation of political culture, is the result of consciousness that accumulates in reflexive processes and complete clarity. Politics achieved through collective engagement is more effective in the long term and more productive from an epistemological perspective than politics fixated solely on individual power and closed systems, which in any case requires legitimation. Without this, no political force has a future. Gaining legitimation, however, requires strategy and action calculated over time, which is formed in the political process as an expression of political culture. Georgian Dream, however, attempts to suppress this process and to destroy all preconditions for change in order to maintain power. To this is added the circumstance that, against the background of frequent cataclysms (the collapse of the established economic-political system in the late 1980s, and the wars of the 1990s and 2008) and the radical changes experienced over recent decades, trust in long-term strategies remains low in society, as does awareness that the common good is far more beneficial than individual exemptions achieved *here and now*, and that just rules of life provide greater possibilities for well-being than privileges maintained through violence. Georgian politics lacks the experience of this. The concern of Georgian political society has always been in fire-extinguishing mode, which undermines the sense of stability. This complicates the winning over of Georgian Dream's wavering segment in favor of democratic processes, insofar as the sense of fatalism is strong among them, instability and the uncertainty of tomorrow are givens, while talk of strategies and a prosperous future represents an artificial or externally imposed construct disconnected from lived experience²⁸.

²⁸ The widespread prevalence of fatalism and the roots of nihilism lie not only in the existence of today's political crisis but also have cultural and historical roots. It was also strongly fed by the Soviet past, which was expressed in the insurmountability of colonial consciousness. On National Nihilism see: M. Jamagidze, *National Nihilism and Identity Crisis in Soviet and Post-Soviet Georgian Literature*. PhD diss., Iliani, Tbilisi 2020. Also: B. Tsipuria, *Kartuli Literatura: Kolonizatsia*,

From all that has been said, we can draw the first (1) conclusion: *the primary reason for the preservation of dictatorship is the complete destruction of political discourse, so that political culture as the art of governance and the provision of public interest no longer proves obstructive to satisfying the interests of a corrupt clan*²⁹.

2. Economics and the Money Factor

Given that the establishment of dictatorship in Georgia did not occur through sudden overthrow but rather through the gradual consolidation of power since 2012, the Georgian opposition can no longer engage in purposeful targeting and dismantling of the government's supporting pillars, which is why it has shifted its emphasis to the mobilization of large masses. However, it should be noted that a large portion of society is directly economically dependent on the ruling party. Since gaining independence, effective steps toward the decentralization of power have never been taken.

Instead, we observe patronalist politics, in which political stability is achieved through the concentration and redistribution of economic resources in patron-client networks³⁰. Hale's model explains why a large part of Georgian voters living outside Tbilisi remain dependent on the ruling party and therefore support it, even without ideological alignment. Accordingly, local governance is also entirely subject to this form of relationship. However, the extent of dependency has never reached the magnitude observed at present. Central ministries, presently administered by Georgian Dream, exercise control over

Modernizatsia, Akhali Paradigmebi [Georgian Literature: Colonization, Modernization, and New Paradigms], "A Journal of the Humanities" 2010, no. 2, p. 183-195.

²⁹ Transparency International - Georgia issued an evaluation of the complaint regarding prohibition of principal oppositional parties within Georgia. The document manifestly demonstrates Georgian Dream's unconstitutional conduct, endeavouring to wholly subordinate the political arena. Transparency International - Georgia, *Ivanishvili's law against Georgia: How critical opinion will be punished*, 05.02.2026, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/ivanishvilis-law-against-georgia-how-critical-opinion-will-be-punished> [10.05.2026].

³⁰ H. E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015.

local self-government via resource allocation and the designation of officials. The opposition has no role whatsoever in this political structure. Rural voters are dependent on local patrons – Georgian Dream mayors, local officials who control property acquisition or administer taxes. Georgian Dream controls school directors, judges, and local entrepreneurs. Such reliance is reinforced at election time via transactions – pledges of land distribution, advancement opportunities, and rewards for adherents. Should these prove ineffective, intimidation tactics and rumour dissemination ensue³¹. The population sees financial stability and economic opportunities in the hands of the government. Therefore, the government controlled by Georgian Dream is the most influential "patron" of an impoverished society. The majority of the population living outside Tbilisi is dependent on the government's generosity, whether it be health insurance, social services, or employment. The majority of Georgian citizens fear losing their source of livelihood.

However, despite the fact that the economic situation for broad masses is not improving and the amount of state assistance is increasing, the opposition has failed to provide the public with a proper explanation of economic challenges, to concentrate on their problems, and to convince them that the existing system destroys the common good and appropriates the wealth they create. As a result of Soviet legacy, the sense of the common good remains low in society, and if money is not being directly taken from someone's pocket, the plundering of the state budget is not perceived by broad masses as an assault on their own well-being. The efforts of opposition parties to overcome such indifferent consciousness toward the common good are insufficient, insofar as this requires active engagement in society's political life and direct experience of this good.

³¹ S. Jones, *Perspectives: Mapping Georgian...*

Private business and local oligarchs cooperate entirely with Georgian Dream in order to preserve their own wealth. Otherwise, they will lose opportunities for success, whether through the creation of an unfair competitive environment or through direct legal prosecution. However, there exists a certain category of economically active population that, against the background of unclear changes or the negative experience of the previous government, supports maintaining the existing status quo, which again converts in favour of the ruling party. Economically powerful individuals maintain great influence over the population, especially beyond large cities, whether through financial levers or through the creation of their own authority³², which plays a particular role in politically non-emancipated society. The existence of local oligarchs with feudal tendencies³³ also testifies to the deficit of political culture, which does not yet reveal the emancipation of subjects to the degree that their standard of economic life would not be dependent on the mediation of authorities.

³² Noteworthy is the model of understanding authority, which not only plays a decisive role in democratic transition but also determines the legitimation of dictatorship. In this regard, the country is still dominated by the old understanding of authority based on the demonstration of individual power and the projection of influence, which in democratic orders and contemporary societies marked by the internet and digital interaction is gradually experiencing a certain inflation. The change in societal consciousness and the generational difference in Georgia is already clearly evident. However, this does not automatically signify the establishment of democratic culture, which either forms naturally through the cultivation of time and experience as a process of societal emancipation, or results from a direct, arduous process of learning oriented toward civic consciousness, which may bear an experimental character, and whose ultimate consolidation still expresses the level of cultural-political consciousness. Highlighting the difference between the old, power-oriented vertical paradigm of authority and the new, growing horizontal paradigm of consciousness reveals the spectrum of society's internal tension, which testifies to the differentiated development of society and the growing process of internal emancipation. On the difference between old and new paradigms of authority, see: F. Baumann-Habersack, *Mit neuer Autorität in Führung: Warum wir heute präserter, beharrlicher und vernetzter führen müssen*, Springer, Wiesbaden 2015.

³³ Despite the social influence of the Soviet system, local authorities in society have historically always had a consolidating function, to ensure societal stability and a certain axiological continuity. Social or economic success occurred through connection with authority. It was also the guarantor of well-being. Among authorities could be clergy or people from the criminal world, or from the ranks of state functionaries. Georgian Dream has enlisted almost all these representatives of the social stratum into its service – the criminal world, the church, and local businessmen, old soviet “intelligentsia”. They also played a major role in bringing “Dream” to power.

Moreover, the government attempts to suppress the protest of hundreds and thousands of people through financial penalties and cancellation of funding sources. By restricting access to grants for non-governmental organizations, dismissals from public service, and drying up sources of livelihood³⁴, the government seeks not only to weaken the force of resistance but also pushes people toward emigration in direct or indirect forms³⁵. Expelling the more insurgent segments of the electorate from the country advances governmental interests not merely regarding diminution of political opposition but equally concerning reinforcement of the regime's economic viability through funds transferred by emigrated individuals to their remaining families. The magnitude of foreign remittances within the national budget proves considerable³⁶.

The conflict initiated in Ukraine precipitated a substantial influx of Russian capital transfers, which facilitated economic amelioration advantageous to Georgian Dream³⁷. But this positive influence is not reflected in the improvement of the country's life. While in the first years of the war these remittances had a positive impact on the country's economy, this wave began to

³⁴ J. Kucera, *Why Georgia's Government Is Trying (Again) To Introduce An Unpopular 'Foreign Agents' Law*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 04.04.2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-foreign-agent-law-again/32891424.html> [10.05.2026]; D. Gegenava, T. Okropiridze, K. Bakhtadze, S. G. Sarukhanishvili, *The 'Russian Law' in Georgia: Human Rights, Legal Certainty, and the Passions of the Georgian Lawmakers*, "Review of European and Comparative Law" 2025, vol. 61, no.2, <https://doaj.org/article/d7842aab673c48b7a09ca178b872e526> [10.05.2026].

³⁵ About Ivanishvili's call to emigrate to work see: OC Media, *Bidzina Ivanishvili Suggests Georgians Seek Work Abroad to Tackle Unemployment*, 28.11.2019, <https://oc-media.org/bidzina-ivanishvili-suggests-georgians-seek-work-abroad-to-tackle-unemployment> [10.05.2026]; Tabula.ge, *ივანიშვილი: ხალხს მივავლებთ ევროპაში სამუშაოდ, 2 მლნ სამუშაო ადგილს 10-20 წელში ვერ შევქმნით*, [*Ivanishvili: We Will Send People to Work in Europe; Georgia Cannot Create 2 Million Jobs in 10–20 Years*], 28.11.2019, <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/635680-ivanishvili-khalkhs-mivavlent-evropashi-samushaod> [10.05.2026]. Also: A. Scrivener, *Why Georgia's Pro-Democracy Protests Failed*, Atlantic Council, 26.11.2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/why-georgias-pro-democracy-protests-failed/> [10.05.2026].

³⁶ The amount of money transferred to the country's revenues: National Bank of Georgia, *Money Transfers*, 31.01.2026, <https://nbg.gov.ge/en/page/money-transfers> [10.05.2026].

³⁷ Transparency International – Georgia, *Georgia's Economic Dependence on Russia Continues to Grow: January–June 2023*, 29.09.2023, <https://www.transparency.ge/en/post/georgias-economic-dependence-russia-continues-grow-january-june-2023> [10.05.2026].

decline, and signs of economic deterioration became more perceptible among the population. Nevertheless, for representatives of large business, this does not yet represent the threshold at which to begin distancing themselves from government policy.

The second (2) inference: *the second reason for the prolongation of dictatorship is complete control over financial flows and economic levers, in order to deprive socio-political activity of material energy and to leave existential survival as the primary concern for people irreconcilable with the regime*³⁸.

3. Targeted repression and the establishment of violent legislation

Although regional representations and differentiated professional or social groups emerged at the early stage of the protest and in subsequent marches, their coordination and translation into one major political outcome could not be achieved. Georgian Dream accomplished, on the one hand, through general contamination of the political field – as if all politicians are corrupt and politics itself is an unjust and value-devoid dirty business – the complete discreditation of political opposition parties, which is why the political channelling of the protest could not be accomplished. On the other hand, parallel to the complete subordination of state institutions, it bought off representatives of almost every social stratum – whether the sports community, cultural figures, the educational sphere, certain portions of non-governmental organizations, and media outlets – thereby creating its own support groups, which are provided with financial and social privileges. Through their assistance, the administration

Beyond extensive penalization of demonstration participants, Transparency International Georgia's investigation equally established that protest participants include business figures who openly confronted Ivanishvili's regime and endorsed pro-Western rallies. Consult the register of persecuted individuals. See: Transparency International - Georgia, *Georgian Dream's Corruption Schemes - How Public Funds Are Stolen*, 30.10.2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/post/georgian-dreams-corruption-schemes-how-public-funds-are-stolen> [12/05.2026]. This organization equally furnishes investigation concerning Georgia's increasing economic reliance upon Russia, undermining national pro-Western trajectory.

endeavours to cultivate intra-societal antagonism and diminish oppositional momentum. Governmental institutions have been redirected toward advancing their interests, thereby further fortifying corrupted frameworks³⁹. At the legislative level, new laws have been adopted, and the legislative framework has been expanded so as to freely conduct targeted repression, dismissal from service, and persecution of people⁴⁰.

Following the subordination of state institutions and economic flows, the final declared action of Georgian Dream's targeted repression is the so-called education reform, which through control of the number of professors-teachers and students, restriction of their academic freedom, and regional fragmentation (one city - one faculty)⁴¹, also attempts to establish ideological control. The entire reform ultimately serves three main objectives: 1. To achieve complete control over those working in the education sector, 2. To create ideological legitimation for its own policy, and 3. To arrange new corrupt schemes for the system's financial sources, as well as to seize control of university infrastructure, which they now also plan to privatize⁴². All three of these target objectives point to Georgian Dream's long-term strategy, which the opposition is effectively unable to counter. This creates, together with other autocratic laws, the systemic condition for natural compatibility with dictatorial states, which would

³⁹ J. Devdariani, *Readied to Serve: From Civil Service to Political Servants under Georgian Dream*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no 19, <https://politicsgeo.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Readied-to-Serve-From-Civil-Service-to-Political-Servants-under-Georgian-Dream-Jaba-Devadriani.pdf> [10.05.2026].

⁴⁰ Repressive changes in legislation see: Transparency International – Georgia, გზა დიქტატურისკენ: 'ქართული ოცნების' მორიგი რეპრესიული ცვლილებები კანონმდებლობაში [The Road to Dictatorship: Georgian Dream's Latest Repressive Legislative Changes], 22.07.2025, <https://transparency.ge/ge/blog/gza-diktaturisken-kartuli-ocnebis-morigi-represiuli-cvlibebekanonmdeblobashi> [10.05.2026].

⁴¹ On education reform, see: H. Gutbrod, *The Assault on Higher Education and the Nihilistic Totalitarianism of the Georgian Dream*, "GEOpolitics", 2025, no. 25, <https://politicsgeo.com/the-assault-on-higher-education-and-the-nihilistic-totalitarianism-of-the-georgian-dream/> [10.05.2026].

⁴² Comp. S. Kapanadze, *De-Europeanizing the Mind: How Georgian Dream's "University Reform" Rebuilds the Soviet Model*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 24, <https://politicsgeo.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/GEOpolitics-Issue-N24.pdf> [10.05.2026].

automatically ensure in the future the deepening of relations with totalitarian countries.

Consequently, *the third inference (3) regarding the causes of Georgian Dream's prolongation in power consists in its systematic campaign against all actors and wellsprings of civic and political activism, in order to create only an environment that will fulfill only the dictatorship's directives*⁴³.

4. Normalizing Fear and Crisis Conditions

In Georgian Dream's approach to society, it is possible to recognize Russia's hybrid and ideological warfare manual approaches⁴⁴, which consist in demoralization, destabilization, creation of institutional crisis, and then normalization of this crisis condition. Such a condition ultimately creates the best circumstances for subordinating society, because its mechanisms of orientation and decision-making are disrupted and subjected to chaotic management. It is true that it is not in the government's interest to provoke disorder and uncontrollable processes in the country, yet it attempts to establish such a sense and fear that will be completely subject to control. Achieving such a condition does not represent the activity of some single structure on the government's side, but rather involves entire state institutions, beginning with security structures and the legislative sphere, and ending with cultural-educational policy and the

⁴³ Parliament passed at initial reading on 3 February 2026 legislative proposals that substantively penalize citizens possessing critical perspectives, activists, along with business, civic society, media, and political party representatives. Consult findings concerning these statutes' anti-democratic and unconstitutional nature. See: Transparency International Georgia, *Ivanishvili's law against Georgia: How critical opinion will be punished*, 5.02.2026, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/ivanishvilis-law-against-georgia-how-critical-opinion-will-be-punished> [10.05.2026].

⁴⁴ See: M. Galeotti, *Active Measures: Russia's Covert Geopolitical Operations*, Marshall Center Security Insight, 2019, no. 031, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/active-measures-russias-covert-geopolitical-operations-0> [10.05.2026].

subordination of religious organizations⁴⁵. Demoralization and destabilization are first caused by disrupting unity among social groups and facilitating opposition fragmentation, confusing the axiological order and ideological disorientation, eliminating consciousness of freedom through repression and expanding nihilistic sentiments, creating false discourses and obscuring real problems, as well as posing pseudo-challenges, preaching false patriotism and creating the image of an external enemy⁴⁶. Then, ostensibly to overcome existing problems, against the backdrop of intensifying economic leverage, Georgian Dream conducts its policy, which not only leaves a contradictory and vague impression (it was cloaked in a pro-Western facade until the last elections), but is also destructive from a state-building perspective. This might even be characterized as civil conflict, were it not impossible to overlook the Russian external power standing behind the government⁴⁷. In the case of Georgian

⁴⁵ Regarding the secret recordings of church representatives and celebrities, which are being blamed on security services controlled by the Georgian Dream see: Radio Tavisupleba, *მედიის ვრცელდება, თითქოს, სუს-ის მიერ სასულიერო პირებზე ფარული მიკროაღების შემცველი ჩანაწერები* [Media Reports Claim Covert Surveillance Recordings of Clergy by the State Security Service], Radio Tavisupleba, 13.10.2021, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31457650.html> [10.05.2026].

⁴⁶ Civil.ge, *Georgian Dream's Conspiratorist Brainwashing Works - Research*, 18.03.2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/669807> [10.05.2026]; T. Khidasheli, *Georgian Dream Shifting from Western Partner to Provocateur*, Jamestown Perspectives, The Jamestown Foundation, 14.12.2025, <https://jamestown.org/georgian-dream-shifting-from-western-partner-to-provocateur/> [10.05.2026]; S. Gvineria, *The Georgian Dream's Goebbelsian Propaganda*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 21, <https://politicsgeo.com/issue/geopolitics-issue-%e2%84%9621/> [10.05.2026]; D. Bogishvili, *Propaganda and Fear: How Georgia's Ruling Party Mobilises Voters*, ZOIS Spotlight, Centre for East European and International Studies, <https://www.zois-berlin.de/en/publications/zois-spotlight/propaganda-and-fear-how-georgias-ruling-party-mobilises-voters> [10.05.2026]; Social Justice Center, *Georgian Dream Seriously Undermines the Rights of Foreign Nationals*, Social Justice Center, 13.05.2025, <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/kartuli-otsneba-agrdzelebs-samokalako-sazogadoebis-organizatsiebis-devnas-sotsialuri-samartlianobis-tsentri-antikoruftsul-biurosshi-gagzavnili-tserilobiti-ganmartebis-teksts-akveqnebs> [10.05.2026]; L. Chkhetiani, K. Turmanidze, *Conspiracy Theories and Anti-Western Attitudes in Georgia*, CRRC-Georgia Research Report, November 2025, <https://crrc.ge/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/ned-report-25.02-final.pdf> [10.05.2026].

⁴⁷ Comp. S. Gvineria, *Explaining the Self-Harming Policies of the Georgian Dream through the Russian Prism*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 25, <https://politicsgeo.com/explaining-the-self-harming-policies-of-the-georgian-dream-through-the-russian-prism/> [10.05.2026]; K. Kakachia, S. Kakabadze, *Georgian-Russian Relations: A Shift from Influence to Ideological Convergence*, "Caucasus Analytical Digest" 2025, no. 141, p. 12-16,

Dream, its resources in all directions – whether macro-economic, intellectual, social, or ideological – are so weak that without external assistance it would struggle to manage such a large-scale protest. The discussion here concerns not only instructional assistance from Russia and ensuring financial backing⁴⁸, which is strengthened through new economic ties, but also creating support at the international and diplomatic level⁴⁹, which is primarily opaque in nature and presents itself to us as a new alliance with dictatorial countries. On the one hand, permanent repression parallel to organizing entertainment spectacles, institutionalization of the suppression of possibilities and freedom, and on the other hand, alliance with dictatorial states⁵⁰ and simulation of forging economic relations with them, gives fear-marked everyday life a semblance of normalization and a sense of pseudo-peace. Managerial systems crystallize wherein all individuals have transitioned into survival and keeping up mode. This milieu, upon permitting ethical concession, renders everyone complicit in

https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/104081/ssoar-caucasusad-2025-141-kakachia_et_al-Georgian-Russian_Relations_A_Shift_from.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y [10.05.2026].

⁴⁸ N. Sabanadze, *Is Russia Behind Georgia's Geopolitical Realignment?*, "GEOpolitics", 2025, no. 14, <https://politicsgeo.com/is-russia-behind-georgias-geopolitical-realignment/> [10.05.2026].

⁴⁹ Since the leading countries of America and Europe did not recognize the results of the last parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream attempts to cover up open ties with Russia while simultaneously demonstrating its international recognition through cooperation with Serbia, Hungary, or Eastern dictatorial countries. In reality, its policy is completely isolationist. Comp. T. Yakobashvili, *UN-Enchanted – Georgian Version of Neo-Isolationism*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 23, <https://politicsgeo.com/un-enchanted/> [10.05.2026]; S. Kapanadze, *The Georgian Dream's Isolationist, Damaging, and Minimalist Foreign Policy*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 15, <https://politicsgeo.com/the-georgian-dreams-isolationist-damaging-and-minimalist-foreign-policy/> [10.05.2026].

⁵⁰ Growing estrangement from Europe and America, declaring China as a strategic partner, intensifying relations with Central Asian countries—under the pretext of economic interests, Georgian Dream attempts to create an alibi of normal international relations and the usual flow of life. In fact, following the destruction of old strategic relationships, new strategic relationships are not being established so effectively as to provide a sense of stability and development.

illicit, corrupted transactions⁵¹. The social arrangement of totalitarian⁵² governance, saturated throughout with falsehood and simulation, constitutes the singular realm of subsistence offering no autonomous alternatives save internal or external exile, or else direct collision with the apparatus and acceptance of physical annihilation. Even within Georgian Dream's constituency, fear represents not merely a mechanism of subjugation but transforms into a universally normalized state wherein existence proves tolerable solely beneath the veneer of conformity, opportunism, and shallowness⁵³. Fabricating novel

⁵¹ It proves no accident that nearly all former senior functionaries face allegations of corruption or criminal conduct. See: *Dream vs. Dream: 10 Major Cases Against Former Officials in 2025*, Batumelebi & Netgazeti, 31.12.2025, <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/articles-in-english/600825/> [10.05.2026]; Beyond incarceration of opposition leadership, Georgian Dream's upper-echelon representatives likewise constitute targets of prosecution. See: E. Barbakadze, *Ex-Prime Minister Garibashvili to Serve Five Years in Prison After Prosecutor General's Office Announces Plea*, Civil.ge, 12.01.2026, <https://civil.ge/archives/717027> [10.05.2026]; Civil.ge, *MIA Says Ex-Prosecutor General Partskhaladze Organized High-Profile Contract Killing*, 29.12.2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/716172> [10.05.2026]; E. Barbakadze, *Ex-State Security Chief Grigol Liluashvili Arrested on Bribery Charges*, Civil.ge, 23.12.2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/715625> [10.05.2026], vice-ministers etc., anyone lacking protection within the prevailing ruling clan becomes the oligarch's objective, not however from anti-corruption imperatives, but to cultivate intra-factional antagonisms and pervasive apprehension of precarity, thereby augmenting compliant behaviours and fortifying hierarchical party discipline. Regarding corruption magnitude. See: Transparency International – Georgia, *Georgian Dream's Corruption Schemes – How Public Funds are Stolen*, 30.10.2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/post/georgian-dreams-corruption-schemes-how-public-funds-are-stolen> [10.05.2026].

⁵² Despite the fact that Ivanishvili's regime does not yet have a universal totalitarian character, today's Georgian authoritarianism bears signs of totalitarianism due to the revival of Soviet experience, which is expressed in society's high degree of self-censorship, the political passivity of a large portion, and universal nihilistic sentiments. The result of this is, among other things, massive emigration particularly of the younger generation. Those behavioural signs that can be considered manifestations of totalitarianism are encouraged, on the one hand, by Georgian Dream's attempt to rehabilitate the Soviet past, where in all spheres (economy, education, culture, etc.) the country is being converted to a one-party dictatorship regime. On the other hand, through the universal expansion of *homo sovieticus* J. J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder 2000, who after the collapse of the Soviet Union either found himself in marginal space or was sheltered in the ecclesiastical sphere. After Georgian Dream came to power, *homo sovieticus* again begins to occupy a dominant position not only in the country's governing apparatus, but in all leading spheres of the country. Accordingly, the analysis below employs signs of totalitarianism, which help us explain political behaviour. However, it must also be said that the aim of this article at present is not a complete psychological-sociological analysis of society and the thematization of the relationship between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, but rather the explanation of political processes with consideration of these givens.

⁵³ Anxiety and precarity, social fragmentation, conformity and systematic rationalization, internal exile/dissociation, cognitive dissonance/accommodation—these simultaneously nourish

reality constituted beneath fear and compelling its acceptance represents the modality of authoritarian rule⁵⁴. In Georgia, this does not dismantle the two-hundred-year colonial consciousness and authoritarian way of life; on the contrary, it again seeks ways for its survival and normalization⁵⁵.

The fourth cause (4) preventing dictatorial dissolution consists in the resuscitation of homo sovieticus⁵⁶, the endeavor to cultivate an individual devoid of aspirations toward personal liberty, possessing attenuated accountability consciousness, and guided by conformist and materialist priorities within their axiological framework.

5. Disinformation and False Ideology

Georgian Dream demonstrates a comprehensive approach in the information-propaganda sphere as well, which the opposition cannot fully neutralize due to limited financial and intellectual resources. The dominant

totalitarianism while rendering totalitarianism's weight enduring. Concerning psychological equilibrium mechanisms within totalitarianism, consult: M. Desmet, *Die Psychologie des Totalitarismus*, Europa-Verlag, Frankfurt: 2023. Mattias Desmet locates totalitarianism's origins in the mechanistic conception of humanity, whose intolerable heaviness generates demand for ideological tyranny. Authoritarianism subsists upon falsified modes of existence, engendering a closed malignant cycle wherein individuals constitute simultaneously architects and casualties of their own totalitarian arrangement. Democratic culture's deficit and incapacity to construct liberal society manifests in dictatorial, subsequently totalitarian, order's crystallization. Georgia's malignant cycle intensified following society's subjection to artificially imposed governance, as a populace initiating self-emancipatory trajectory confronted violent reality (via electoral falsification) and physically proved unable to arrest processes conducting toward degradation and auto-destruction. Consequently, within such circumstances, external dynamics assume critical import. Owing to recent decades' conflicts and destabilizing interventions, self-preservation resilience has eroded such that the question attains existential survival dimensions.

⁵⁴ On the introduction of universal fear in Russia see: T. Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*. Tim Duggan Books, New York 2018; A. Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*, Doubleday, New York 2020; M. Galeotti, *We Need to Talk About Putin: How the West Gets Him Wrong*, Profile Books, London 2019.

⁵⁵ From this perspective, it is interesting to observe, after the country's 30 years of independence, the return of *homo sovieticus* consciousness and its strengthening in religiously non-emancipated consciousness, whose continuity was primarily ensured by the policy of the Orthodox Church. See: V. Vardidze, *Church Sovietization and Its Outcome*, [in:] *The Trauma of Communism*, ed. Clemens Sedmak, A. James McAdams, Ukrainian Catholic University Press, Lviv 2020, p. 118–133.

⁵⁶ For the content of *Homo Sovieticus*, see: T. Dobko, *The Trauma of 'Homo sovieticus'*, [in:] *The Trauma of Communism*, ed. Clemens Sedmak, A. James McAdams, Ukrainian Catholic University Press, Lviv 2020, p. 255–256.

information agenda of the day is in the hands of Georgian Dream, which it often maintains through the assistance of false information and the activities of trolls and bots. Guriev and Treisman's⁵⁷ show that the emerging autocratic power relies primarily on information manipulation rather than the direct use of violence. The Georgian Dream, unlike classical totalitarian regimes, also resorts to creating confusion, saturating the media with false information, and attempting to cause the erosion of epistemological trust, rather than overt ideological indoctrination. At the strategic level, Georgian Dream follows the false, pseudo-conservative positioning proposed by Russia, which presents itself as a counterweight to liberalism and a defender of traditional values. In this confrontation, the opposition's weakness lies not only in its failure to present its correct position convincingly, but also in its inability to dismantle Georgian Dream's narratives, to demonstrate that Georgian Dream possesses neither a sustainable ideology nor a distinct value base, apart from an unquenchable thirst for retaining power and money⁵⁸. In the discourse of national identity as well, Georgian Dream does not possess a narrative that would oppose the European civilizational approach. Even the justification of rapprochement with Russia and religious-cultural proximity, which the government attempts to promote, finds its legitimacy in belonging to the European family. However, it undermines the foundation of this legitimacy with the falsehood that Europe itself has betrayed its own principles and that only Russia remains the guardian of Christian and family values⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ S. Guriev, D. Treisman, *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2022; S. Guriev, D. Treisman, *Informational Autocrats*, "Journal of Economic Perspectives" 2019, vol. 33, no. 4, p. 100-127.

⁵⁸ On the lack of an ideological basis for Georgian Dreams see: J. Devdariani, T. Zurabashvili, *Rewiring the National Idea: GD Attempts Radical Ideological Reengineering*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 25, <https://politicsgeo.com/rewiring-the-national-idea-gd-attempts-radical-ideological-reengineering/> [10.05.2026].

⁵⁹ For the Georgian Dream's propaganda see: International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, *"Georgian Dream's" Propaganda to Suppress Protests*, Social Media Monitoring, 12.12. 2024, <https://isfed.ge/geo/sotsialuri-mediis-monitoringi/qartuli-otsnebis-propaganda-protestis-chasakhshobad-> [10.05.2026]; *Anti-Western Sentiments and 'Georgian Dream' in the MDF, Report*,

Particularly against the backdrop of Russia's two-century-long crimes and the wars waged in Georgia in recent periods (the 1990s and 2008), this narrative nevertheless fails to find solid ground in society. However, to compensate for this, Georgian Dream invokes the argument of pragmatism and economic well-being in order to justify its capitulatory policy toward Russia⁶⁰. The negative experience that followed the catastrophes of the 1990s and 2008⁶¹, as well as the brutality of the ongoing wars in Syria and Ukraine, became the basis for Georgian Dream's intensification of fear and manipulation of the peace theme. Through the motif of being abandoned by the West in a war with Russia, and by cultivating the so-called "second front" and the "global war party," the government presents itself as a defender of sovereignty, a national protector, a guarantor of peace, and a victim of foreign interference. With the control of information and the support of the Georgian Orthodox Church, it has successfully constructed a dominant narrative: "Georgian Dream" stands for traditional values, maintains peace, and protects Georgia from the threat of war with Russia. In reality, however, it pursues an entirely capitulatory policy⁶², which may ultimately cost the country the loss of its sovereignty.

Georgian Dream's propaganda signature is entirely situated within the stylistics of non-liberal countries and employs entirely foreign political-technological instruments⁶³. The method of attributing one's own crimes to others

Publika.ge, 22.07.2020, <https://publika.ge/antidasavluri-ganwyobebi-da-qartuli-ocneba-mdf-is-angarishshi/> [10.05.2026].

⁶⁰ B. Chedia, *Georgia's Ruling Elite Prepares for Complete Capitulation to Russia*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2024, vol. 21, no. 134, The Jamestown Foundation, <https://jamestown.org/georgias-ruling-elite-prepares-for-complete-capitulation-to-russia/> [10.05.2026].

⁶¹ At what cost could this war have been avoided, see: R. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2010.

⁶² Comp. S. Gvineria, *Explaining the Self-Harming...*; See in this regard too: Transparency International - Georgia, 41 Steps towards Russia...

⁶³ Tabula.ge, *მოშე კლუგჰაფტი ოცნების სტრატეგიული მრჩეველი გახდა - პარტიამ კონტრაქტი უკვე გააფორმა* [Moshe Klughaft Became Georgian Dream's Strategic Advisor - Party Has Signed the Contract], 13.12.2023, <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/711808-moshe-klughapti-otsnebis-strategiuli-mrcheveli> [10.05.2026]. This article reports that the ruling Georgian Dream party signed a

is characterized by shameless lying, whose power lies solely in audacity and the distortion of reality⁶⁴. In contrast, opposition media are often immersed in equally aggressive rhetoric in order to overcome government media through the intensification of sharp emotional charge. All of this strengthens the spiral of mutual accusations, kills the possibility of rational discourse, and further facilitates society's fragmentation. In the media space, we receive a presentation of two radically different worlds from each other, between which connection almost does not exist. Such a situation does not facilitate changing the status quo, which is in the government's interest, insofar as it, already being in power, is concentrated on its preservation.

Hence the fifth (5th) inference: *Dictatorship seeks to create a false narrative that justifies not a free way of life imbued with civic responsibility, but rather a way of life cultivated in servitude and submission*⁶⁵.

6. External Context and International Pressure

contract with *Moshe Klughaft* – an international political strategist – and *Miri Michael* as strategic advisors during an election period, noting Klughaft's international experience managing campaigns and advising political leaders. Their messaging corresponds precisely with Russian anti-liberal propaganda.

⁶⁴ International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, *Shifting the Blame onto the Citizens – 'Georgian Dream's' Propaganda Tactic*, 06.08.2025, <https://isfed.ge/eng/blogi/isrebis-gadatana-moqalaqeebze-qartuli-otsnebis-propagandistuli-taqtika> [10.05.2026]; Also S. Kapanadze, *Anti-Western Propaganda – The Georgian Dream's All-Purpose Fix*, "GEOpolitics" 2023, no. 1, https://politicsgeo.com/anti-western-propaganda-the-georgian-dreams-all-purpose-fix/?utm_source=chatgpt.com [10.05.2026]; N. Sabanadze, *Georgia's Imitation Game: Hungary, Russia and the Rise of the Anti-Liberal International*, South Caucasus Regional Office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Tbilisi 2024, https://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/06.11_geo-hu-final.pdf [10.05.2026].

⁶⁵ Investigation of the 2024-2025 television marketplace exposes governing party media strategy. Owing to manufactured fiscal difficulties, seventeen provincial broadcasters proved unable to resume transmission throughout 2025. Financial crisis imperils closure of the nation's principal critical outlets – Formula and TV Company First. The primary oppositional television entity Mtavari discontinued broadcasting operations commencing 2024. Transparency International – Georgia, *Key findings of the advertising market for 2024–2025*, 30.12.2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/blog/key-findings-advertising-market-2024-2025> [10.05.2026].

Prior to Russia's launch of the war in Ukraine, Georgian Dream maintained the image of a pro-Western government in its relations with the West. However, the war in Ukraine made it impossible to conceal the policy of sitting on two chairs. With the outbreak of war, Georgian Dream openly revealed its support for Russia, which encountered even greater resistance from the population. Along with the increase in internal confrontation within the country, criticism from the West also intensified. Although the European Union and the United States have recently adopted stricter positions after years of non-intervention: the European Union cancelled high-level meetings and suspended certain funding, while the United States reduced its strategic partnership with Georgian Dream. For a party that had relied on a pro-Western facade for a long time, these steps were critical. However, for Ivanishvili's regime, the removal of its pro-Western appearance did not eliminate the enormous financial and administrative resources it employs to maintain power. The suspension of Western funding primarily affected non-governmental organizations and weakened the momentum of civic activities. The adoption of the so-called Russian law on "foreign agents"⁶⁶ drastically reduced the capabilities of human rights defenders to a minimum.

Against this backdrop, targeted Western sanctions⁶⁷ are particularly significant, because Ivanishvili's inner circle, which occupies important positions and maintains his power, holds substantial financial interests in the West. Many Georgian Dream officials send their children to Western universities, despite the

⁶⁶ *Foreign Agents Registration Act*, 01.04.2025; Georgian Legislative Herald, <https://www.matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/6461578?publication=0> [13.05.2026]; R. Fabbro, *Resignations Hit Georgian Government as Protests Rock Country for Third Night*, OC Media, 01.12.2024, <https://oc-media.org/resignations-hit-georgian-government-as-protests-rock-country-for-third-night/> [13.05.2026].

⁶⁷ Council of the European Union, *Georgia: Council Suspends Visa-Free Travel for Diplomats and Officials*, 27.01.2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/01/27/georgia-council-suspends-visa-free-travel-for-diplomats-and-officials/> [13.05.2026].

fact that they promote anti-Western propaganda within the country. Although individual sanctions have been imposed by the United States, Great Britain, and some European Union member states⁶⁸, they are limited in scope and largely symbolic in nature. Meanwhile, stricter measures, such as the Megobari Act⁶⁹, have become stalled in the U.S. Congress⁷⁰, while the European Union's proposal on personal sanctions was blocked by Hungary and Slovakia. Internal disagreements made the European response non-credible and meek. This restrained reaction gave Ivanishvili the opportunity to maintain the resources that constitute the foundation of his hegemonic, coercive governance. However, the recent persecution of regime loyalists indicates that even the existing measures are causing internal confrontation and fractures within his circle. Despite resisting the Western pressure, cracking down on the protesters, and appearing strong in its domestic propaganda, the Georgian Dream might not be as potent as it wants to portray itself⁷¹.

Georgian Dream's leadership, which is under pressure on the one hand from democratic countries and on the other from Russia, miscalculated the resilience of Georgian society, as it assumed that post-2024 election fatigue and the international community's focus on other crises would suppress internal mobilization. It inadequately assessed the endurance of society's commitment to the European trajectory, which is supported by more than 80 percent of the

⁶⁸ Transparency International – Georgia, *Sanctioned Georgian Dream Representatives*, 20.11.2025, <https://transparency.ge/en/post/sanctioned-georgian-dream-representatives> [13.05.2026].

⁶⁹ United States Congress, *H.R. 36 – Mobilizing and Enhancing Georgia's Options for Building Accountability, Resilience, and Independence Act (Megobari Act)*. 119th Cong., 1st sess, 03.01.2025, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/36/text> [13.05.2026].

⁷⁰ A. Kalandadze, *U.S. Annual Defense Bill Passes without Megobari Act: What's Next?*, Civil.ge, 20.12.2025, <https://civil.ge/archives/715329> [13.05.2026].

⁷¹ V. Chkhikvadze, *Time to Fix the Broken Phone: How the Western Response to GD's Authoritarianism Failed to Achieve Results*, "GEOpolitics" 2025, no. 24, <https://politicsgeo.com/time-to-fix-the-broken-phone-how-the-western-response-to-gds-authoritarianism-failed-to-achieve-results/> [13.05.2026].

population⁷². This steadfast defiance has thus far prevented the ruling party from completing the consolidation of autocratic power. However, opposition parties do not possess unlimited resources either. Emigration from the country continues, society is becoming increasingly impoverished, and the number of political prisoners remains consistently high. It can be said that at this stage the country is in a political stalemate, the breaking of which may occur as a result of significant weakening of one of the sides. In such a situation, any perception of Western indifference strengthens the regime and further reduces the country's democratic space. The European Union and the United States can still respond to the ongoing political crisis through a consistent and coordinated policy of pressure. Financial conditionality must be implemented through international financial institutions and European Union budgetary mechanisms. Only a unified and credible punitive framework can achieve further suspension of authoritarian consolidation and preserve the remaining levers of the European Union. This chasm subsisting between coercive domination and public legitimacy constitutes the principal arena for democratic regeneration.

Finally, a sixth (6th) inference *can be drawn, according to which Georgia has dropped from the list of international interest priorities, fallen under Russian influence, and through self-isolation has been transformed into the private domain of a criminal gang.*

Conclusion

⁷² Despite aggressive anti-European propaganda and strained relations with the West, a large part of the population still wants the country's future in the Euro-Atlantic space. EU Neighbours East, *Most Georgians Support EU Membership, According to Latest Opinion Poll*, EU Neighbours East, 02.09.2025, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/opinion-polls/most-georgians-support-eu-membership-according-to-latest-opinion-poll/> [13.05.2026]. According to the Institute for International Studies IRI 89% of respondents in 2023 support the country's membership in the European Union, and 80% in NATO; Radio Tavisupleba, IRI: *მოსახლეობის 89 % EU-ში, 80 % კი NATO-ში გაწევრიანების მომხრეა* [IRI: 89 % of the Population Favor EU Membership, 80 % Favor NATO Membership], Radio Tavisupleba, 25.04.2023, <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32378567.html> [13.05.2026].

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Despite the fact that, prior to the publication of this article, Georgian Dream manages to retain power and pursues its repressive policy, a certain stalemate situation is observed from the perspective of political struggle. Georgian Dream's dictatorship is not fully established, because the protest remains alive and a large part of society does not accept the existing status quo, while the ruling party cannot exercise absolute dictate. On the other hand, the opposition does not unite around a common front either and, due to inconsistency in political communication and internal fragmentation, fails to shake Georgian Dream's positions. However, despite this political stalemate, the balance of power in the form of financial or institutional support is so greatly in favour of Georgian Dream that it creates the political climate and the country's real trajectory. When the country is under de facto occupation by a capitulatory government, even a democratically minded society, in an environment of low political culture, cannot effectively constrain the dictatorship – a dictatorship whose foundation is also reinforced by external Russian factors. In the event of a direct confrontation of forces, the probability of a revolutionary scenario diminishes due to the awareness of the catastrophic consequences that might follow this process and which a country already on the brink of statehood would be unable to overcome. The Russian military base located in so-called South Ossetia, approximately 50 kilometers from Tbilisi, intensifies the sense of imminent danger, the brutality of which Georgian society has experienced on numerous occasions over recent decades. The scale of war and internal confrontation is evident. If in the 1990s the catastrophe brought about by Russia's facilitation and instrumentalization of internal political confrontation was followed by the violation of the country's territorial integrity (loss of control over Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region), now a possible political chaos or new war could result in the final loss of sovereignty. The opposition in particular has this danger internalized, which significantly reduces the force of its intransigence.

What can be opposed to internal problems in the face of such imminent external danger is, on the one hand, unity of idea and consolidation of the broad public, which in a democratic society, against the backdrop of diversity of views and differences among social or political groups, as well as due to the scale of external bribery and manipulation, is so difficult to achieve that the comprehension of unity at the level of the individual and the axiological experience of this appears as an almost insurmountable challenge. Georgia is not a politically and economically self-contained and self-sufficient country in which internal political processes develop independently of external factors; rather, both its economic and geopolitical stability depends on processes occurring in the immediate neighbourhood.

Given the current existing situation, awareness of external and internal factors makes it clear that neither the internal nor the external geopolitical context speaks to the possibility of radical changes in the country. However, this status quo is not a stable given either and is so fragile that a reversal of the situation is possible at any moment. Convergence between internal and external factors has not yet or cannot yet occur in order for radical changes to take place. However, both of these factors are under constant pressure, and this creates the possibility for the situation in the country to develop according to any scenario. This unpredictability of tomorrow makes it even clearer that drastic actions may prove fatal. Therefore, the arrival of a desirable outcome of the political process requires the synchronous formation of processes.

The reason for the insurmountability of the existing status quo ultimately lies both in the lack of political culture in society, which is manifested in the general acceptability of false political discourse and the high susceptibility of society to manipulation, as well as in the incompatibility of external geopolitical factors with those internal political processes that reflect society's natural aspirations. Despite the reduction of Russia's international influence, unfortunately in

Georgia the external balance is disrupted in favour of Russian power. The counterweight to this balance is created by Russia's behind-the-scenes activity, which is infiltrated and penetrated state structures to such a degree that it effectively controls the political balance of power within the country and the strategic perspective of the political process.

All six factors formulated in the text illuminate the complex situation and their mutually conditioning circumstances, whose overcoming mechanism cannot be limited to sporadic activities and requires internationally coordinated action. The problem of dictatorship is not an isolated problem of only one particular country and internal redistribution of forces, but rather testifies to civilizational development's decline, whose manifestation, though it may occur along state territorial borders, in its substantive complexity testifies to a universal human challenge in any society's internal development.

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