



The politics of culture and identity in post-communist states: A new political cleavage in Georgia?

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Abstract

The role of ideology in political competition in the former Soviet Union is under researched. This paper uses public opinion data to identify and investigate patterns of political competition in Georgia. I find voters’ preferences on a range of issues to be underpinned by a latent cultural dimension of political ideology that concerns how citizens view the relationship between the Georgian nation and the rest of the world. I go on to present evidence that this dimension is, at least to some extent, both embedded in social structure and reflected in voting patterns.

Introduction

The relationship between social structure, ideology and party affiliation in the former Soviet Union remains under-researched. Most of the literature on how political competition is structured and on the relevance of ideological dimensions in post-communist societies focusses on Central and Eastern Europe and rather neglects the post-Soviet space beyond the Baltic republics (Kitschelt 1995; Sitter 2002; Marks et al. 2006; Bertoa 2014). The impact of globalisation on domestic politics in post-Soviet countries and the political conflicts it generates is also under-studied despite the recent emergence of conflicts in this region over perceived Western cultural influence. These new conflicts have gained in salience over the past decade and have come to resemble the “culture wars” described by scholars and media in the United States and Western Europe (Hunter 1991 Furedi 2017; Koch 2017). This paper focusses on Georgia, where there appears to be a deepening conflict between ever more emboldened religious traditionalists and social conservatives and a small, but increasingly vocal group of mainly young socially progressive activists. On occasions this conflict has even spilled over into violence. The paper aims to investigate this phenomenon by exploring the relevance of ideology to political competition in Georgia. It does so by drawing from opinion data generated by a Voting Advice Application (VAA) deployed in Georgia in 2016. Specifically, it addresses the following questions. First, are citizens’ preferences structured in any way by ideology? If they are, what are the principal ideological dimensions and are they in any way similar to those observed in Western Europe? Second, do ideological preferences affect party choice? Finally, can we find any evidence that distinct interest groups in society express certain distinctive ideological preferences? And if so, do these preferences relate to the impact of globalisation on society?

The paper is structured as follows. The first section provides an overview of the literature on how political competition is structured in Western Europe, how it relates to social structure and how it appears to be ever more shaped by issues of

culture and identity. The next section explores contrasting theories about how political competition is structured in post-communist Europe. In doing so it identifies a gap in the literature by showing how scholars of post-communism have tended to neglect the ever-growing cleavage between “winners” and “losers” of globalisation that Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008) identify in Western Europe. Given the communist-era isolation of the region from global economic and cultural trends and the subsequent period of hyper-globalisation, this paper begins by arguing that this cleavage is even more relevant in post-communist Europe than it is in the West. It then turns to the case of Georgia. It explores the conflicts that have been generated in recent years between an increasingly assertive Georgian Orthodox Church and an incipient counter-culture, before elaborating a hypothesis and counter-hypothesis on the relationship between ideology, party support and social structure. The next part of the paper turns to the public opinion data to test these hypotheses. Having explained how the data it uses to test these hypotheses are generated, this section provides an overview of the methodology used to identify ideological dimensions and party supporters from the data and to investigate whether ideology is any way related to social structure. The penultimate part presents the results of the analysis. The final part consists of a discussion of the results in relation to the hypotheses and considers the possibility that a more ideology-based politics, based on rival conceptions of culture and identity, is emerging in Georgia.

Ideological dimensions and cleavages in Western Europe

The principle of modern democracy is that political power is held by citizens, through their representatives, and that to win power office-seekers must appeal to citizens for their votes. While part of this appeal may relate to the personal charisma of candidates and party leaders and another part to the capacity of leaders to woo voters with promises of material gain (clientelism), in stable democracies such as those in Western Europe contenders for office are also expected to offer voters a package of distinct policies that aim to improve the common good (Kitschelt 1995). These packages are often labelled by their ideology, and “left” and “right” have come to be their most often used ideological markers. “Left” versus “right” represents the principal ideological dimension along which scholars and citizens place themselves, their political parties and their candidates (Bartolini and Mair 1990).

However, “left” and “right” are vague and ambiguous concepts. First coined after the French Revolution to distinguish supporters of the King and Church from supporters of the Revolution, by the twentieth century they were primarily seen as economic ideologies, with the left representing labour and favouring redistribution of wealth and an enhanced role of the state in the economy and the right representing capital and advocating wealth creation and laissez faire, free market economic policies. While the struggle between capital and labour defined European politics throughout much of the twentieth century, in Western Europe during the late 1960s and 1970s a new set of cultural issues came to the fore.

These included the rights of ethnic and sexual minorities, environmentalism and a stack of issues relating to the morality of lifestyle choices. These sets of values, described by Inglehart (1984) as “post-material”, went beyond the economic categories of left and right. Some scholars, including Inglehart himself, argued that the Left-Right dimension was “an amorphous vessel whose meaning varies in systematic ways with the underlying political and economic conditions in a given society” (Huber and Inglehart 1995, p.90) and could be adapted to fit these new issues. Others, however, proposed that the ideological space in Europe could best be defined in terms of two dimensions with one economic dimension that reflected economic (left and right) issues and one cultural dimension that reflected the new issues. This second dimension has been labelled variously as libertarian versus authoritarian (Kitschelt 1994), libertarian-universalistic versus traditionalist-communitarian (Bornschier 2010) or Green-alternative-libertarian versus traditional-authoritarian-nationalist (Marks et al. 2006). The latter label, abbreviated to GAL-TAN, is a reflection of the fact that this cultural dimension “summarizes several non-economic issues – ecological, lifestyle, and communal – and is correspondingly more diverse than the Left/Right dimension” (Marks et al. 2006, p.157).

Some scholars argue that both ideological differences (such as that between left and right) and the evolution of political parties within the ideological space are underpinned by social structure. Social structure can be defined as the pattern of relationships between groups in society with diverging interests, and is made politically salient through *societal cleavages*. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) identify four such cleavages in Western European societies – centre versus periphery; church versus state; land versus industry; and labour versus capital – that were generated by the national and industrial revolutions in the nineteenth century. Not all of these cleavages were relevant in all societies, but their relative salience determined the patterns of competition between grassroots-based political parties in each respective society. By the twentieth century, most Western European party systems were dominated by a left-wing party representing labour and a right-wing party representing capital, plus an assortment of other parties that represented other sectors within society (such as established religions or peripheral interests).

Bartolini uses the broad term “cleavage” to refer to a “combination of orientations according to interests embedded in social structure, cultural/ideological orientations rooted in the normative system and patterns of behaviour expressed in belonging to [certain] organizations and identifiable in action” [translation mine] (Bartolini 2005, p.11). The notion of a cleavage as a compounded divide that incorporates social structures, norms, ideology and organisational (e.g. party) affiliation suggests that ideological divides are intrinsically linked both with the macro-historical processes that shape societies and with the evolution of political parties.

Not all scholars, however, concur that party competition and the ideological dimensions that define it are fully or partly determined by social structures. Lipset and Rokkan themselves argue that patterns of competition have remained more or less “frozen” since the second quarter of the twentieth century (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, p.50) and this would imply that social structure is no longer perhaps the driving force behind party formation and decay. To explain the “freezing” of party systems, Sitter argues that “the party system, once developed is not merely the result of other forces, but an independent factor contributing to its own stability” and is “the product of the interaction between parties” (Sitter 2002, p.429). This approach emphasises agency over structure and suggests that perhaps it is ideological dimensions that are the product of interactions between parties, not the other way round.

More recent developments have suggested that societal cleavages remain important in terms of defining political competition. Focussing on Western Europe, Kriesi et al. (2006) argue that a new cleavage has opened up in many societies between “winners” and “losers” of globalisation. “Losers” they argue, tend to adopt a position of economic or cultural demarcation with respect to the outside world and very often it is *cultural* resistance to globalisation that has come to define party competition at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. This, they suggest, has manifested itself in the increasing prominence of new populist right parties as well as the repositioning of existing parties to fit the new cleavage (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008). Cultural resistance to globalisation seems to reinforce the cultural (GAL-TAN) dimension of political competition (Hooghe and Marks 2018).

During the last decade there has been considerable interest amongst scholars about the emergence of culturally exclusivist, “right-wing” populist parties and of the apparently increasing salience of the cultural dimension of political competition (Zaslove 2009; Bale 2012; Mudde 2013). This interest has only increased since the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States in 2016. While the term “culture wars” may have originated in the United States (Hunter 1991), some authors have begun using the term to refer to a conflict between liberal cosmopolitans and the adherents of more socially conservative, nativist views in Europe (Furedi 2017; Koch 2017). The notion of “culture wars” is primarily about a conflict over *identity*, specifically a clash over the relationship between the community (be that a national community, a regional community or any kind of self-defined community) and “outsiders” (however defined). It is the contention of this article that the term is also useful in the post-communist world, including countries of the former Soviet Union.

Ideological dimensions and cleavages in post-communist Europe

As I suggested in the previous section, studies on the dimensionality of the political space have most often focussed on the established democracies of Western Europe. Relatively little attention has so far been devoted to patterns of political

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2 competition in post-communist Europe. A number of scholars hold that societal cleavages in post-communist societies have
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4 been weak, at least in comparison with Western Europe. For Krustev, communism “abolish[ed] all social groups” leaving
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6 “a kind of amorphism” (Krustev 1991, p.32). For Bielasiak, “one party rule in the USSR and East Europe severed
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8 party-constituency linkages to a much larger extent than equivalent effects in southern European and Latin American
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10 authoritarian regimes or the brief occupation of western Europe by totalitarian forces”, making it “more problematic
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12 for the post-communist states to reconstruct the ties that bind citizens to specific political organizations” (Bielasiak
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14 2002, p.207). At first sight, the oft-cited high levels of electoral volatility in post-communist Europe (Sikk 2005) seem
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16 to confirm this hypothesis. If parties lack a programmatic or ideological basis and have no grassroots base in society,
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18 voter-party linkages are more likely to consist of clientelistic or charismatic ties than programmatic ones (Kitschelt
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20 1995). Party support will continue only as long as the flow of patronage remains unchecked or the party leader retains
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22 his or her appeal.
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25 Other scholars, however, hold that post-communist societies do indeed exhibit cleavage structures. For Whitefield
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27 (2002) these cleavages to be context-dependent, idiosyncratic and need to be understood *sui generis*. Others argue that,
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29 while ideological or programmatic cleavages play a role in post-communist politics, these are more often shaped by
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31 actors, i.e. political parties or elites, rather than by longstanding societal cleavages (Enyedi 2005; Sitter 2002). For
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33 Enyedi “the interpretative frameworks of the political elites decisively influence whether differences of interests are
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35 perceived as social conflicts” (Enyedi 2005, p.699). In this vein the role of charismatic leadership should not be
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37 underestimated; strong charismatic ties between (the leaders) of parties and voters are common in many post-
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39 communist countries (Kitschelt 1995; Gurov and Zankina 2013). The implication of this literature is that while
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41 cultural/ideological cleavages may exist in post-communist countries, generally speaking these do not reflect “interests
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43 embedded in social structure” (Bartolini 2005, p.11) and voting behaviour is significantly more likely to be determined by
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45 perceptions of leaders than by political programme.
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48 Kitschelt et al. (1999) offer a more systematic and nuanced approach to cleavage structures in post-communist societies
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50 that draws not only from the communist experience, but also from earlier legacies. They argue that in countries that had
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52 been agrarian and barely industrialised prior to the establishment of communism (a category that applies to most Soviet
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54 successor states), both the communist regime and its successor regimes were liable to exhibit a high degree of
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56 patrimonialism. As a result, party-citizen linkages were more likely to be based on clientelistic exchange rather than
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58 policy or ideology. At the same time, they acknowledge that even here certain social and ideological cleavages are
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60 relevant, especially during the post-communist period. Specifically, they suggest that in societies where “patrimonial
communism” had hitherto been dominant, cleavages between a) supporters of the old (communist) regime and

supporters of reform, b) winners and losers of market reforms, c) social-cultural libertarians and authoritarians, d) nationalists and cosmopolitans are mutually reinforcing and combine into a “super dimension of left-authoritarian versus right-libertarian politics” (Kitschelt et al. 1999, p.75).

These findings are confirmed in part by Marks et al. (2006), who use data on party positions from the well-known Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) to show that while in Western Europe economically right-wing parties tend to be associated with a socially conservative (or TAN) position and economically left-leaning parties tend to be more socially liberal (or GAL), in post-communist Europe a reverse tendency is observed whereby the economic left is associated with TAN and the economic right with GAL. As Kitschelt et al. (1999) formulate it, this ideological divide seems to reflect a divide between “winners” and “losers” of the post-communist transformation, with “winners” enjoying the opportunities that both the free market and cultural openness to Western democracies can bring, and “losers” hankering for a return of the social safety net of the communist state and feeling indifference or even hostility to Western cultural imports. This very much resembles the divide Kriesi et al. (2006) propose between “winners” and “losers” of globalisation; the post-communist transformation, after all, involved opening up to global markets and global culture. However, notwithstanding a brief observation by Hooghe and Marks (2018, p.124) on the rise in populist right parties in Eastern Europe against the backdrop of what they term a transnational cleavage, overall the literature does not explicitly apply the globalisation-based cleavage to post-communist societies. It is this gap that this paper seeks to fill.

The Case of Georgia

At first glance, ideological cleavages would appear to have played little or no role in the struggle for political power in Georgia since the country became independent in 1991. Voter-party linkages instead appear predicated on clientelistic ties (in the case of ruling parties) and the perceived charisma of leaders (for all parties).

Since independence Georgia has been governed by a series of “parties of power” that have been closely associated with a particular leader. In most cases these parties have held onto power until they have been forcibly removed. Thus, the first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his “Round Table” bloc was overthrown in an armed rebellion in January 1992; his successor, Eduard Shevardnadze, was forced out by peaceful protests in November 2003 that became known as the “Rose Revolution”, although his party, the Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG), had effectively disintegrated two years earlier after Shevardnadze had resigned as its chairman; finally, the third president Mikheil Saakashvili effectively lost power when his party, the United National Movement (UNM), lost the parliamentary elections of October 2012, although he saw out the remaining year of his presidential term. The UNM was replaced as a ruling party by Georgian Dream (GD), which remained closely associated with its founder, the businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili, who was briefly

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2 prime minister after GD's election victory in 2012 and is party leader at the time of writing.
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6 The Georgian party system has remained highly unstructured since the founding elections in 1990. Electoral volatility
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8 between elections has been very high, with the Pedersen index of electoral volatility averaging at over 50% (see Table 1
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10 below).
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14 All four ruling parties, the Round Table, the CUG, the UNM and GD, seem to have attracted support both through the
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16 personal appeal of their leaders or founders (namely Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, Saakashvili and Ivanishvili) and
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18 through their status as parties of power with the associated capacity to build a loyal clientele that can be mobilised at
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20 election time (Jones 2015, p.156).
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24 Drawing from this evidence, it would seem that Georgia represents a case in which the party system is not in any way
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26 rooted in ideology, suggesting that the country's history of "patrimonial communism" (to use Kichelt's words) and the
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28 fact that large-scale industrialisation only took place after the establishment of a communist system has meant that voting
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30 has been determined far more by charismatic leadership and clientelism than by any kind of programmatic appeal to
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32 voters (Kitschelt 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999). If this is the case, this could either mean that cleavage structures in Georgian
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34 society are weak or non-existent or it may mean that they exist but are irrelevant to voting behaviour.
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38 However, ideology has not been entirely absent from Georgian political discourse, especially in recent years. The UNM
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40 developed a rudimentary ideological profile during its time in power, advocating a strong state, the return of the
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42 territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which had remained under the de facto control of separatists since the civil wars
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44 of the early 1990s), and integration into Western economic and security structures such as the European Union and NATO.
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46 Nevertheless, rather than being an expression of grassroots organisations within civil society, this ideology seemed to
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48 have been fostered and framed by Saakashvili and the UNM. At the same time, opposition parties emphasised
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50 their opposition to the UNM, rather than proposing any ideological alternative.
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54 The position of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) with respect to the outside world has been an object of
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56 contention since the late 1990s and disputes over its role in politics have since become ever more intense. The GOC,
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58 perceived by many Georgians as the saviour of the nation through centuries of conflict and occupation, broke from the
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60 World Council of Churches in 1997 in a move to disassociate itself from reformist tendencies in some Western

Churches.¹ In 1999, a planned exhibition of religious artefacts and relics in the United States was cancelled as a result of protests by nationalist groups and the Patriarchy itself (Serrano 2010). In 2002, under pressure from the GOC, a Constitutional Concordat was approved, recognizing the special role of the GOC in Georgia, granting the patriarch legal immunity and confirming the GOC's ownership of all churches and monasteries.

During the presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili, the relationship between state and Church became more complicated. The UNM leadership was not always sympathetic towards the GOC, and moves by the government to modernise and secularise state education were viewed with suspicion by the Church (Janelidze 2015; Kekelia 2015). Nevertheless after the GOC condemned the brief introduction of a state of emergency in November 2007 in response to large-scale anti-government protests², the government clearly felt it needed to appease the Church. Between 2007 and 2009 annual government spending on the GOC increased from 4.2m Lari to 25.7m (Janelidze 2015, p.71). However, in 2011 the relationship between the government and the GOC soured further when the Georgian parliament (led by the UNM) adopted a law allowing minority religions to be registered as public entities in law, provoking disapproval from the Patriarch Ilya II and street protests (ibid.). It is also widely rumoured that the GOC intervened in the 2012 parliamentary elections (that the UNM lost) by instructing its flock to vote for Georgian Dream (Sulkhanishvili 2012, p.148).

Within society, conservative movements that were often ideologically affiliated to the GOC and (later) secularist liberal groups began to emerge. In 2010, two newly-formed groups, the Orthodox Parents' Union and the People's Orthodox Christian Movement made headlines by protesting violently against a book by a young writer that it deemed as blasphemous (Kekelia 2015, p.127). When liberals and gay rights activists attempted to hold an anti-homophobic rally in Tbilisi in May 2013 to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, they were met by a violent reaction from counter-demonstrators, including a large number of priests. A number of activists were injured and hospitalised.³ The Orthodox Parents' Union continued to protest against liberal, Western "decadence"; in November 2017, the group protested against a leading Georgian footballer wearing a rainbow flag armband, accusing the Georgian Football Federation of "LGBT propaganda".⁴

The salience of LGBT rights as a political issue was underlined in March 2016, when the Georgian Dream coalition, under pressure from conservative groups and the GOC, proposed an amendment to the constitution to define marriage

1 Orthodox Christian Information Centre. "Georgian Orthodox to Leave WCC and CEC". Available at <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/georgia_wcc.aspx>, last accessed 10 December 2018.

2 Reuters, "Georgia Declares State of Emergency" (7 November 2007), available at <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-georgia/georgia-declares-state-of-emergency-idUKL0752768220071107>>, last accessed 20 December 2018.

3 Civil.ge, Daily News Online, 17 March 2013, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26066>.

4 'Orthodox Parents' Union, Clergy Accuse Football Federation in LGBT Propaganda', *Georgia Today*, 7 November 2017. Available at <<http://georgiatoday.ge/news/8097/Orthodox-Parents'-Union%-2C-Clergy-Accuse-Football-Federation-in-LGBT-Propaganda>>, last accessed 21 December 2018.

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2 as a union between a man and a woman. The move was countered by some civil society groups sympathetic to LGBT
3 rights (see below).⁵ The amendments was eventually passed by parliament, together with a raft of other amendments, in
4 September 2017.⁶
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9 This ideological divide also spilled over to issues that did not relate directly to the GOC or LGBT rights. Immigration,
10 never previously a salient issue in Georgian politics, became so in the summer 2013, when a group of Georgian farmers
11 united under the slogan “Georgian land for Georgians” and protested against the sale of land to Indians that had been
12 initiated by the UNM government in the Eastern province of Kakheti.⁷ Sporadic protests also broke out in the western
13 region of Adjara, which borders with Turkey, over perceived Turkish influence there, and in one instance in 2018 these
14 protests were led by a new ultranationalist group called “Georgian March”.⁸ In July 2017 this group had held a rally in
15 Tbilisi demanding the deportation of illegal immigrants⁹, and in September the same year had protested against a
16 legislative initiative that would allow the Government to sell agricultural land to foreigners or foreign companies in
17 special circumstances. They had also demanded that the Georgia branch of the Open Society Georgia Foundation
18 (OSGF), financed by George Soros, be shut on the grounds that it undermined the Georgian nation.¹⁰ In February 2018
19 the same group burned an effigy of Soros outside the OSGF office in Tbilisi.¹¹ Thus, the “conservative camp” includes
20 not only the GOC but an assortment of groups with a nationalist or even ultra-nationalist orientation. It also has the
21 support of much of the old Soviet-era intelligentsia and a number of Georgian entrepreneurs.¹²
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36 While the majority of Georgia's population are socially conservative, express strong support for the Patriarch¹³ and
37 frown on sexual minorities¹⁴, grassroots organizations led by young people with an alternative agenda began to emerge
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42 5 'GD Refloats Proposal on Setting Constitutional Bar to Same-Sex Marriage', *Civil Georgia* (8 March 2016), at
43 <<https://civil.ge/archives/125345>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.
44 6 *The Constitution of Georgia*. Available at <<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=35>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.
45 7 'Georgia's backlash against foreign landowners', *Al Jazeera*, 14 August 2013. Available at
46 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/08/2013811125720720256.html>>, last accessed 21 December 2018.
47 8 Giorgi Menabde, 'Events in Adjara May Provoke Tensions Between Georgia and Turkey', Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor 10:156 (5
48 September 2013), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/events-in-adjara-may-provoke-tensions-between-georgia-and-turkey>>; 'Far right
49 Georgian March holds rally in Batumi', *Georgia Today*, 13 August 2018, available at <[http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11801/Far-Right-Georgian-](http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11801/Far-Right-Georgian-March-Holds-Rally-in-Batumi)
50 [March-Holds-Rally-in-Batumi](http://georgiatoday.ge/news/11801/Far-Right-Georgian-March-Holds-Rally-in-Batumi)>. Both last accessed 21 December 2018.
51 9 'Ultrationalists March Against Immigration, Counter-Protesters Rally Against Occupation', *Civil Georgia*, 15 July 2017. Available at
52 <<https://civil.ge/archives/217865>>, last accessed 21 December 2018.
53 10 'Ultrationalists Rally Against Soros Foundation, Land Ownership Changes', *Civil Georgia*, 13 September 2017. Available at
54 <<https://civil.ge/archives/218294>>, last accessed 20 December 2018.
55 11 'Ultrationalist Georgian March Holds Anti-Soros Protest Rally', *Georgia Today*, 23 February 2018. Available at
56 <<http://georgiatoday.ge/news/9232/Ultrationalist-Georgian-March-Holds-Anti-Soros-Protest-Rally>>, last accessed 21 December 2018.
57 12 Most notable among these is the ultra-conservative millionaire businessman Levan Vasadze, who organised the 2016 World Congress of
58 Families in Tbilisi and claims that liberalism is “an immoral diabolical cult”. See Christina Pushaw, “Don’t underestimate the threat of Georgia’s
59 'knight in shining armour'”, *New Europe*, available at <[https://www.neweurope.eu/article/dont-underestimate-the-threat-of-georgias-knight-in-](https://www.neweurope.eu/article/dont-underestimate-the-threat-of-georgias-knight-in-shining-armour)
60 [shining-armour](https://www.neweurope.eu/article/dont-underestimate-the-threat-of-georgias-knight-in-shining-armour)>, last accessed 4 October 2019.
61 13 In June 2018, 84% of Georgians polled said that they approve of activities of Georgian Orthodox Church. However this figure was down from
62 the 94% approval rating registered in 2013. Source: '84% of Georgians approve of activities of Georgian Orthodox Church', Website of the
63 Serbian Orthodox Church, 8 June 2018. Available at <http://www.spc.rs/eng/84_georgians_approve_activities_georgian_orthodox_church>, last
64 accessed 21 December 2018.
65 14 In an opinion poll carried out for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) Georgia in June
66 2018, 44% of respondents expressed the view that protecting the rights of sexual minorities was 'not important', compared with only 23% who
67 held that it was 'important'. In an earlier poll carried out in April 2015 by the same organisation, the figures were 49% and 21% respectively. See
68 'Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of June 2018 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia', available at

in the mid-2010s. One example of this was the NGO *Identoba*, which was created to defend the rights of sexual minorities.¹⁵ Spokespersons for the LGBT community began to appear on the media to defend their rights, often provoking opposition from their conservative opponents.¹⁶ Other new grassroots movements that can be positioned at the GAL or liberal end of the political spectrum include environmental pressure groups, such as Guerilla Gardening, a group that protests against atmospheric pollution, unregulated construction and tree-felling in Tbilisi¹⁷, as well as student activists protesting against Viktor Orban's campaign to close the Soros-funded Central European University in Budapest.¹⁸ From around 2011 informal, unregistered feminist movements also began to emerge, eclipsing the often ineffective women's NGOs that were set up by donor funding in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. These organisations, which included “Independent Group of Feminists (IGF)”, “Partisan Girls” and “Women’s Movement of Georgia”, mobilised mainly through social media.¹⁹ Another issue to gain political salience was that of the legalisation of soft drugs; both grassroots organisations, such as the pro-liberalisation campaign group White Noise, and some politicians began openly advocating the decriminalisation of cannabis. This mobilisation gained some success; following a petition from the small liberal party, GIRCHI, on 30 July 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that administrative penalties for the consumption of cannabis in private were unconstitutional, effectively decriminalising the personal use of the drug.²⁰ Even Georgian Dream appeared to take a softer approach towards soft drugs; in September 2018, the government proposed to allow cultivation and production of medical cannabis for export. However, the proposal was dropped after it met opposition from the GOC.²¹ Finally, an increasingly vibrant night club scene became politicised in May 2018 after a police raid on two of Tbilisi's best known clubs in search of drugs led to a round-the-clock protest rave by young people in the centre of Tbilisi. The rave was organised by White Noise. Police narrowly averted a major confrontation when ultra-conservative groups, led by Georgian March, led a counter-demonstration nearby.²²

These “culture wars” between liberals and conservatives are also related to Georgians' perceptions of the country's

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_June_2018_Presentation_Public_ENG_vf.pdf>, last accessed 5 January 2019.

15 Identoba's website (in Georgian) can be found at <http://identoba.ge>.

16 See, for example, Imedi TV, 2 May 2018. 'rat'om gadaipikra adamianis uplebata datsvis k'omit'et'ma 17 maisis aghnishvna: lgbt' akt'ivist'i tamaz sozashvili st'umrad imedis dilashi' (Why the Human Rights Committee Decided to Celebrate May 17: LGBT Activist Tamaz Sozashvili visited Imedi TV). See <<https://www.imedi.ge/ge/video/23792/ratom-gadaipikra-adamianis-uplebata-datsvis-komitetma-17-maisis-agnishvna--lgbt-temis-protesti-da-motkhovna>>, last accessed 5 January 2019.

17 Prathap Nair, 'Tbilisi Comes Up for Air' (1 June 2018). City Lab. At <<https://www.citylab.com/environment/2018/06/tbilisi-comes-up-for-air/561227>>, last accessed 5 January 2019.

18 'Hungarian PM Met with Protests During Tbilisi Visit', *Tabula* (21 April 2017). At <<http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/119514-hungarian-pm-met-with-protests-during-tbilisi-visit>>, last accessed 5 January 2019.

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former hegemon, Russia. Despite the ongoing conflict between Georgia and Russia over the Russian military occupation of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian influence is not limited to hard power alone. It is believed that many of the conservative civil society groups received Russian funding and some liberal commentators argue that the GOC as a whole is too close to Russia.²³ It is indeed likely that Russia has sought to promote the narrative within Georgia that the West represents a “moral decadence” that Orthodox Georgians should resist. However, while this narrative may have made some headway, most Georgians, despite being deeply socially conservative, still adhere to a pro-Western, rather than a pro-Russian foreign policy.²⁴

But does the fact that several moral-cultural issues have become politically salient mean that Georgian politics is any way shaped by these issues? In short, can we talk about the existence of political *cleavages* and if so are these cleavages in any way embedded by *social structure*?

One hypothesis is that Georgian politics is indeed structured by cleavages that encompass interests, norms and values and (to take the hypothesis a stage further) these are made manifest (in part at least) in support afforded to political parties. One way in which society and politics may be structured is through the kind of super-dimension that Kitschelt proposes. Kitschelt's notion of “winners” and “losers” of market reforms is perhaps just one aspect of the cleavage proposed by Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008) between “winners” and “losers” of globalisation. In recent years Georgia and other post-Soviet republics have experienced an extremely rapid period of globalisation after relative economic and cultural isolation during the Soviet period and this has transformed the structure of society and disrupted social norms and practices. On the one hand, these countries have seen the emergence of a mainly urban middle class that has benefitted from both economic and cultural globalisation. On the other hand, there are others for whom the end of communism and subsequent periods of globalisation have brought nothing good. The diverging interests of these two groups may well be reflected in their ideological preferences. Given that the former group tend to thrive in free market conditions and are increasingly exposed to cultural norms from the West either via travel or via social media, I suggest that they are both more economically pro free market and more socially libertarian in ideology. The latter group tend to be older, often having gained their skills during the communist period and find it difficult to adapt and thrive in the new circumstances. I suggest that this will mean that they feel nostalgic for those days when the state provided everything and reject the harsh realities of today's free market. In cultural terms, they are more likely to be conservative and nationalist, clinging to old certainties and feel threatened by the outside world.

²³ 'Why has the Georgian patriarchate not supported the idea of an independent Ukrainian church?' Jam News (10 October 2018), at <https://jam-news.net/why-has-the-georgian-patriarchate-not-supported-the-idea-of-an-independent-ukrainian-church/>, last accessed 5 January 2019.

²⁴ According to the above-cited opinion poll for NDI by CRRC Georgia, in December 2018 83% of survey respondents supported Georgia joining the EU, while 78% supported NATO membership. See 'Public attitudes in Georgia: Results of December 2018 Survey', available at www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_Issues%20Poll%20Presentation_December%202018_English_Final.pdf, accessed 4 March, 2019.

The counter hypothesis is that political cleavages are largely irrelevant in Georgia and are certainly not rooted in social structure. This does not exclude the possibility that certain issues may become salient from time to time, but it means that there is no *coherent* ideological divide in Georgian society. Georgians may feel strongly about a certain issue but this does not translate into a coherent orientation towards a certain set of values that represent a clear ideological position. Georgian politics instead remains shaped by clientelism and devotion to one or other strong leader that, it is hoped, will deliver Georgia from her woes.

Aims and Methods

The aim of this study is to identify latent ideological dimensions that undergird political opinion in Georgia (if they exist) with a view to shedding light on the hypothesis (and counter-hypothesis) outlined in the previous section. Specifically, the aim is to explore whether, and if so to what extent, political opinion amongst Georgian voters is structured according to certain latent ideological dimensions (whether this be left-right in the economic sense, GAL/TAN or something quite different). These dimensions will tend to bundle together groups of salient political issues in such a way that if a voter has a particular opinion about one such issue we would be able to predict his/her opinion about another issue in the group with some degree of confidence. A second aim is to investigate whether a voter's position along one or other ideological dimension can to any extent be explained by his/her position in society (e.g. in terms of education, age or gender). If these two conditions are satisfied then it is meaningful to talk of societal cleavages in Georgian society that are politically salient. A final aim is to examine whether or not a voter's position along any ideological dimension can, in part at least, explain his/her voting behaviour. If so, we can argue, like Lipset and Rokkan, that the party system in Georgia is embedded in the societal cleavages we identify.

The data used in this study were gathered during the run-up to parliamentary elections on 8 October 2016 and were drawn from the responses of Georgian voters to a set of issue statements within the format of a Voting Advice Application called *Xmamkvlevi*. Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) are online questionnaires that allow their users to express various degrees of agreement or disagreement on a set of policy statements before presenting them with one or more visual displays that match them to the political party (or election candidate) that best shares their preferences. Typically they are deployed shortly before elections in order to help their users decide how to vote. *Xmamkvlevi* used thirty policy statements, and users could respond to each statement with the following responses: “completely agree”, “agree”, “somewhere in the middle”, “disagree”, “completely disagree” and “no opinion”. The latter response was treated as a missing value for purposes of analysis. The policy items embraced a range of topics, including economic

policy, foreign affairs, defence, social issues, law and order, the role of the Church and the environment. The VAA also included a number of supplementary questions on age, gender, education, party identification (if any), vote intention (if any) and political interest. Although users were not required to answer these, a majority did so. In total the VAA generated 9,245 user response sets after cleaning.²⁵

The approach used in this paper differs from that of most investigations into political dimensionality in the following two ways. First, instead of identifying dimensions from the policy positions of party elites through expert surveys (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2012; Marks et al. 2006) or manifesto analyses (Stoll 2010), the aim is to use the orientations of ordinary voters. While such a bottom-up approach to identifying political dimensions has been used before, typically these approaches draw from opinion surveys such as the European Values Survey or the World Values Survey (Henjak 2010). The advantage of VAAs as a source of data is that a) they generate large datasets and b) they generate responses to a large battery policy items in the form of identical Likert-type scales.

The second way in which my approach differs from many others is that instead of defining ideological dimensions *a priori*, I derive them quasi-inductively from the data. Following Gemenis (2013), I use the term “quasi-inductive”, rather than “inductive” as the policy items used in the VAA are inevitably pre-selected to reflect the most salient political issues of the day (or, rather, what experts believe to be the most salient political issues). The inductive part refers to the way the dimensions are derived from the pre-chosen items.

To identify dimensions, I use Mokken Scale Analysis (MSA) to identify scales (or dimensions) from the thirty policy items. While factor analysis is most commonly used to identify latent dimensions, Van der Eijk and Rose (2015) caution against using factor analysis on ordered categorical survey items on the grounds that it may result in over-dimensionalisation. MSA, a psychometric method of data reduction named after its inventor Rob Mokken, hails from the toolkit of Item Response Theory. In order to constitute a Mokken Scale a group of items must a) conform to the monotone homogeneity model, meaning that as the value on the latent variable (as measured by the mean item score of the scale) changes, so the probability of a corresponding unidirectional change in each item of the scale changes accordingly and in the manner expected (Sijtsma and Molenaar 2002), b) register a positive normalised covariance H_{ij} with all other items and c) register a normalised covariance $H_j \geq c$ with the rest score where the value of c is at least 0.3.

25 For cleaning I remove: 1) all cases in which the time taken to complete the thirty issue statements of the VAA was less than 120 seconds; 2) all cases in which the time to respond to any one issue statement was one second or less; 3) all cases in which the time taken to respond to three or more issues statements was two seconds or less; 4) all cases in which the respondent answered ten successive issue statements in the same way; 5) all cases in which there are twenty or more no opinion responses to issue statements; 6) all cases for which it is not the first time the user has accessed the VAA on a particular machine (a cookie is installed from which it is possible to find this out). Finally I 7) remove all those who declared themselves ineligible to vote, and 8) all those that claimed an age of 95 or more (on the grounds that they were probably fictitious entries).

MSA also generates a value H (known as Loevinger's H) that measures the consistency of the scale as a whole. A scale (dimension) is considered weak if $H \geq 0.3$, medium if $H \geq 0.4$ and strong if $H \geq 0.5$ (Mokken 1971).

To explore the extent to which voting behaviour corresponds to a users' position along a particular dimension, I calculate the position of each user with respect to each of the Mokken scales (dimensions) that have been identified. I do this by summing his or her responses to the individual items that load onto each scale and reversing the polarity of items that load negatively onto the scale. I then normalize the scores in such a way that all scores vary between 0 and 1. Finally I identify party voters as those who say they intend to vote for a specific party list and map each group of party voters according to the dimensions identified. I only include the three parties that overcame the five percent threshold to enter parliament through the party list vote in 2016: Georgian Dream, the United National Movement and the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG).²⁶

In identifying latent dimensions and mapping party supporters, we have to be aware of the limitations of our data and to find ways to overcome these. The main issue here is the fact that the overall sample of VAA users is self-selected and is therefore unlikely to be representative of the population as a whole. Earlier studies show that VAA users are typically well-educated, young and male (Marschall 2014). While gender imbalance was not a major issue for *Xmamkvlevi* users (in fact only 48.6% of respondents were male), the education bias is strong with 83.4% of respondents declaring themselves to have higher education (amongst those who declared their education), compared with the approximately 30% of the overall population who have higher education according to census data (see below). VAA users are often also unrepresentative in terms of their political views and this was the case, at least to some extent, for *Xmamkvlevi* users. While the two main parties competing in the elections, GD and the UNM, garnered 48.7% and 28.1% of the vote respectively, amongst *Xmamkvlevi* users the respective figures for vote intention were 33.6% and 33.3% respectively, with smaller parties disproportionately winning the support of VAA users. Such skewed sampling may result in our sample drawing disproportionately from certain parts of the ideological map, leading to errors in identifying latent dimensions. In terms of party mapping it may also draw disproportionately from atypical party voters.

To control for this selection bias I perform the Mokken Scale Analysis and party mapping on a sub-sample of the data that is more or less representative of the population in terms of a) education, b) age and c) vote intention. To derive estimates for the age and education levels of our target population of Georgian voters I rely on the 2014 Population Census of Georgia. These data indicate that 30% of Georgian voters have higher education and the median age of

²⁶ In Georgia 77 seats out of 150 are elected by a nationwide party list with a 5% minimum threshold. The remaining 73 seats are elected in single-mandate constituencies.

1 Georgian voters is 46.²⁷ I therefore dichotomise both variables: (1) for age, below versus above the median age (46) and
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3 (2) for education, degree versus no degree. For voting intention I use the share of the vote that each significant party
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5 obtained in the 2016 parliamentary elections to the European parliament (I define a significant party as one that
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7 garnered at least 5% of the vote). Since the VAA is a pre-election survey I also include an “undecided” category, which
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9 I estimate at 20%. These parameters are supplied to a calibration algorithm in Python and R, which works iteratively on
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11 the original dataset to return a resampled dataset that best approximates the target population parameters in such a way
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13 that the mean absolute error between the calibrated dataset and the original is less than 0.015. The new, smaller and
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15 (more or less) representative dataset includes 804 observations.

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19 The final step is to see whether or not certain characteristics (such as education, age and gender) predispose users
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21 towards taking a position near one or other end of the scales identified. To this end I use a multivariate regression
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23 analysis on all (clean) data to determine the differential impacts of each of these variables on users’ “scores” on the
24
25 principal dimension or dimensions.

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28
29 *Results*

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31 Analysis of the *Xmamkvlevi* dataset identifies two ideological dimensions (Mokken Scales): one that aggregates a
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33 relatively large number of items (eleven) and a second smaller scale that aggregates just three items. The first scale
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35 draws on users' attitudes to matters of culture, (national and religious) identity and the relationship of the nation-state
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37 with Russia, while the second mini-scale aggregates economic items. Table 2 shows the thirty issue statements used in
38
39 *Xmamkvlevi*, as well as the values of H_j for all items that belong to each scale. Plus and minus (+/-) signs after certain
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41 statements indicate whether agreement with the statement would move the user in a positive or negative direction with
42
43 respect to the dimension. The larger (cultural) scale incorporates issues of economic nationalism (Item 17), the role of
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45 the Georgian Orthodox Church and other religious groups (Items 24 and 28), the rights of homosexuals (Items 21 and
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47 22), Georgian participation in international peacekeeping (Item 2) as well as the relationship with Russia and the West
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49 (Items 3, 4, 5 and 30) and attitudes towards Stalin (Item 29). At one pole of this dimension are those that want to protect
50
51 the Georgian economy from foreign ownership, believe that the GOC should play a major role in politics, are intolerant
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53 of gay rights, have a relatively positive view of Russia – and Stalin – and a correspondingly negative view of the West.
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55 At the other pole are those who are more liberal in matters of gay rights, are more critical of the GOC, are pro-Western

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58 27 Data obtained from two sources that draw from the 2014 General Population Census Data: 1) Ralph Hakkert, “Population Dynamics in Georgia:
59 An Overview Based on the 2014 General Population Census Data”, *National Statistics Office of Georgia/United Nations Population Fund*
60 *(UNFPA) Office in Georgia* (Tbilisi: 2017), available at < https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/3.%20Population%20Dynamics_ENGL%20_print_F.pdf >, 2) Geostat statistics Database at < http://pc-axis.geostat.ge/PXWeb/pxweb/en/Database/Database_Population%20Census%202014_Education/12_Population%2010%20years%20of%20age%20and%20over%20by%20regions%20and%20educational%20attainment.px/table/tableViewLayout2/?rxid=763bf70b-f795-4497-966c-d40d984dafcf >. Both last accessed 15 January 2019.

and generally more tolerant of influences from abroad. The scale is at the bottom of the “medium” category in terms of strength as Mokken defines it, with an H value of 0.40. The second scale is effectively an economic left-right scale incorporating as it does issues such as workers' rights (Item 16), import duties (Item 19) and the minimum wage (Item 20). The relative insignificance of this scale is reflected not only in the paucity of items (it fails to incorporate items that one would expect to form a part of an economic left-right scale such as Items 12, 13 and 15), but also in its rather low value of H (0.35, “weak” in Mokken's terminology).

It is worth pointing out that the economic and cultural dimensions are highly correlated with one another. An economically left-wing position (in favour of workers' rights and a minimum wage) is correlated with a nationalist, socially conservative position and an economically right-wing (laissez faire) position with a cosmopolitan, socially liberal position. The Pearson's correlation coefficient between the two dimensions is 0.35. Given the limited capacity of the economic dimension to aggregate a wide range of issues, I will only consider the cultural dimension in the subsequent analysis.

To get an idea of whether each party's group of voters has a distinctive ideological profile, I first consider the mean scores of each group along the cultural dimension. As mentioned previously, these scores are normalised in such a way as to range from a value of 0 (nationalist-conservative) to 1 (cosmopolitan-liberal). The mean GD voter scored 0.37, while the corresponding figure for the UNM was 0.65. The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, which campaigned on a staunchly patriotic and traditionalist ticket, scored 0.29. This would appear to suggest that GD and APG voters drew from one side of the ideological spectrum and UNM supporters from the other, but for more evidence we should explore whether or not each party's voters are concentrated around a particular point in the spectrum or whether they are spread out almost evenly from one end of the spectrum to another, meaning that each party is able to draw on voters of very different ideological persuasions. Figure 1 shows the density map of each party's supporters with respect to each dimension. It shows that while each party does have quite a wide spread in terms of voters, each tends to draw disproportionately from one part of the spectrum, i.e. GD and the APG from the nationalist-conservative side and the UNM mainly from the cosmopolitan-liberal side. The density profile of UNM voters does seem to exhibit two peaks, one near to the liberal end and one near the middle but slightly towards the conservative end, suggesting that this party may draw from more than one distinct ideological profile.

Finally, the impacts of key demographic and attitudinal variables—gender, age and education—on users' “scores” on the cultural dimension are provided in the outputs of the multivariate linear regression analysis shown in Table 3. For education I perform the regression on two binary variables: 1) whether the respondents have higher (university)

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2 education and 2) whether they have a professional education. The rationale for this choice links in with the notion of a
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4 cleavage between “winners” and “losers” of globalisation proposed by Kriesi et al. (2008); one would expect those with
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6 a university education to benefit from globalisation, while a technical education, popular during the Soviet period for
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8 those choosing to work in heavy industry, would bring no advantages in today’s global economy.
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11 The regression shows that having a technical education, being older and being female will pull you towards a
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13 nationalist-conservative position, while having a university education, being younger and being male will pull you
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15 towards the cosmopolitan-liberal pole. Table 3 suggests that a technical education is likely to move you 9.2% of the
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17 entire spectrum towards the nationalist-conservative pole, while university education will pull you by 8.1% of the
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19 spectrum towards the cosmopolitan-liberal pole. 50 years more in terms of age will move you 10% towards the
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21 nationalist-conservative pole, while being female will move you 4.6% of the way towards that pole, all other things
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23 being equal. All trends are significant at the $p<0.001$ level.
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25

26
27 **Discussion**
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29
30 The results of this analysis seem to refute the counter hypothesis that political cleavages are largely irrelevant in
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32 Georgia and are not rooted in social structure. First, the Georgian political space seems to have quite a coherent
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34 structure, defined as it is by two latent ideological dimensions, including one that aggregates eleven rather disparate
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36 issues. Although we do not quite observe Kitschelt's “super-dimension” that aggregates both economic and cultural
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38 issues, as economic issues do not quite aggregate onto the main (primarily cultural) dimension, the economic “mini-
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40 dimension” correlates strongly with this dimension. As Marks et al. (2006) propose, economically left wing positions
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42 seem to be strongly associated with socially conservative or TAN values, while economically right wing (pro free
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44 market) positions are more often associated with socially progressive or GAL leanings. This is the reverse of the pattern
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46 observed in Western Europe. As proposed earlier, in Georgia and other former Soviet republics, globalisation's “losers”
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48 tend to look back with nostalgia to a communist past in which economic equality and traditional authority
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50 were prioritised, while “winners” seek to escape the fetters of both state economic control and traditional moral
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52 proscriptions. In much of Western Europe, however, where capitalism is historically embedded and often
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54 closely linked with established churches, the choice has more often been between capitalist traditionalism and socialist
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56 or social democratic secularism.
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59 Second, the regression analysis also shows that the main dimension of political competition is rooted in social structure.
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Those best equipped to thrive in an increasingly globalised world (young graduates) would appear to adopt a position of

“cultural integration”, while those that are less well-equipped (older voters and those with a technical education whose skills are no longer valued) tend to adopt a position of “cultural demarcation”, rejecting the cultural influences that contact with the rest of the world has brought (Kriesi et al. 2006, p.924). The former group also seem keen to intensify links with Europe and the West, while the latter seeks to preserve old ties with the former Soviet hegemon. In terms of gender, the explanation for its significance in the regression analysis may be that older women in particular may find it difficult to adapt to the new global world both culturally and economically, due to deeply ingrained Georgian cultural norms that make engagement in business and the development of extensive friendship networks (including perhaps global networks) a male preserve (Mars and Altman 1983). This may explain why being female predisposes users towards a more economically leftist and culturally conservative perspective. Overall, the finding suggest that there is an ideological cleavage in Georgian society that is based on “interests embedded in social structure” and this cleavage is very similar to the one that Kriesi et al. (2006) identify in Western Europe between “winners” and “losers” of globalisation.

Turning to now to the orientations of different party groupings, groups of party supporters do indeed occupy distinct niches in terms of policy preferences, suggesting that the main ideological divides that split the Georgian population are, in part at least, reflected in vote choice. Georgian Dream and, more particularly, the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia – which, as its name suggests, was set up as a patriotic conservative party – seem to attract more socially conservative, nostalgic and anti-Western voters. There is also a tendency for UNM supporters to be rather more pro-Western and socially liberal, although there also seems to be a group of more conservative UNM supporters. The fact that ideology not only seems to be embedded in social structure but is also a (weak) predictor of party choice despite the apparent lack of strong ideological cues from the parties themselves mitigates against the argument of Sitter (2002) and Enyedi (2005) that ideological differences are purely the result of interactions between parties and political elites.

Despite the tendency of voters from different parties to adopt rather different ideological positions, they still remain rather more ideologically heterogeneous than their Western European counterparts (for comparison, see **author’s earlier work**). In terms of the political narratives of party elites, these contrasting orientations are not always expressed, particularly on the liberal end of the spectrum, where party spokespersons fear that to come out with a pro-LGBT or anti-Church position is likely to alienate much of the rather conservative Georgian population. On the conservative side of the spectrum there is less trepidation, and the APG, which was founded in 2012, is openly nationalistic and opposes multiculturalism and Turkish influence in the country.²⁸ Even on the liberal-cosmopolitan side,

28 Joshua Kucera, 'Georgia: Disillusion with Establishment Fuels Rise of Populism', *Eurasianet* (24 October 2016), at <<https://eurasianet.org/georgia-disillusion-establishment-fuels-rise-populism>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.

a few smaller parties have laid their claims to territory. The New Political Centre (GIRCHI), which split from the UNM in 2015, professes itself to be liberal both economically and socially. It defends the right of citizens “not be the victim of violence because of their religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or because they represent any minority group”²⁹, supports the legalisation of cannabis (see above) and even planted cannabis at their party offices on New Year's Eve 2016.³⁰ Moreover, in September 2017, the Republican Party proposed the introduction of civil partnerships for LGBT couples.³¹ However, these two parties are very small: the Republican Party garnered just 1.55% in the 2016 parliamentary election, while GIRCHI's candidate in the 2018 presidential elections managed to secure just 2.26% of the vote.

Perhaps more significant was the split that occurred in the UNM in January 2017 in the wake of its defeat in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The liberal wing of the party left to form a new party called European Georgia, which pledged to step up integration with the EU and NATO, to “maximize the involvement of more women in the country's political life” and to “protect the rights of national, religious and sexual minorities”.³² The rump UNM remains far more focussed on the party's founder, Mikheil Saakashvili, to whom it is unswervingly loyal. The split seems to represent a divide between one group that has a (relatively) liberal and pro-European ideology and another that is more of a charismatic party centred around a particular individual with the overriding aim of removing the government, if necessary by extra-constitutional means. The divide between these two groups may be reflected in the rather diverse ideological positions of the UNM's 2016 supporters shown in Figure 1. European Georgia is more successful electorally than GIRCHI and the Republican Party; 20 of the 27 MPs elected on the UNM ticket in 2016 are affiliated to this party and its candidate, Davit Bakradze, garnered 10.97% of the vote in the 2018 presidential elections. Its performance, however, was still eclipsed by the more strident and charisma-based UNM, whose candidate, Grigol Vashadze, won 37.74% in the first round of the elections, forcing a run-off with the GD-backed candidate Salome Zurubashvili.

Despite the trend for Georgian parties to pay greater heed to ideology and political programmes than previously, the development of truly programmatic parties remains at an embryonic stage and charismatic leadership remains a strong driver of voting intention. Nevertheless, the so-called “culture wars” that have engulfed Georgia over the past decade have led to the emergence of a political divide within society and have made issues such as LGBT rights, the role of the Orthodox Church, immigration and the overall cultural orientation of the country politically salient. It seems likely that the Georgian party system will increasingly reflect this divide in future years as globalisation continues to create

29 See the party's website at <<https://girchi.ge/english-welcome>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.

30 Democracy and Freedom Watch, 'Georgian opposition party will not face charges for planting pot' (25 February 2017), available at <<https://dfwatch.net/georgian-opposition-party-will-not-face-charges-for-planting-pot-47726>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.

31 'Republican Party to Lobby Civil Partnership for Same Sex Couples', *Civil Georgia* (21 September 2017), at <<https://civil.ge/archives/218316>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.

32 See the party's website at <<http://europeangeorgia.ge/campaigns/2018-clis-saprezidento-archevnebia>>, last accessed 16 January 2019.

“winners” and “losers”.

Turning to the broader picture, the kind of political divisions relating to culture and identity that we observe in Georgia are visible right across the post-Soviet space. The Pussy Riot affair in Russia is perhaps the most well-known example of so-called culture wars in the former Soviet Union, accentuating as it did the creation of an ideological divide between Western liberalism and Orthodox traditionalism. This was further reflected in Vladimir Putin's 2013 claim at the Valdai International Discussion Club that Western countries are not only “implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan” but “are aggressively trying to export this model all over the world”. Putin's stated mission was to lead a resistance by Christian Orthodox Russia against this “standardised model of a unipolar world.”³³ It is no coincidence perhaps that Putin appeared to be championing the forces of resistance to (Western-led) globalisation, both in the post-communist space and even in parts of western Europe through Russian support of the populist right (Shekhovtsov 2018). In Moldova, as in Georgia, divisions between pro-Russian social conservatives and Western-oriented liberals intensified during the second decade of the twenty-first century with the pro-Russian Moldovan Socialist Party (PSRM) and the Moldovan Orthodox Church fighting laws banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.³⁴ In Armenia too, the issue of gay rights became a major issue in the 2018 parliamentary elections with two opposition parties, Prosperous Armenia and the Republican Party, campaigning to ban gay marriage and outlaw so-called “gay propaganda”.³⁵ The emerging culture wars observed in Georgia are therefore the rule, rather than the exception.

That these divides are emerging across the post-Soviet space is unsurprising. The pace of the economic and cultural transformations that all post-Soviet societies have been experiencing, marked as they are by their opening up to both economic and cultural globalisation, are much more far-reaching than anything that has been experienced in the West. It is inevitable that the disruption and dislocation that these changes have engendered will provoke a counteraction amongst a large part of the populace. Far from becoming attenuated, these conflicts appear to be intensifying. Whether they can be managed within the framework of democratic constitutional politics remains to be seen.

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Table 1. Electoral Volatility in Georgia

Electoral Cycle	Pedersen’s Index of Electoral Volatility (%)
1990-92	77.0
1992-95	62.1
1995-99	41.9
1999-2004	79.3
2004-08	24.6
2008-12	54.0
2012-16	22.8
Average	51.7

Source: Election Administration of Georgia

Table 2: Results of Mokken Scale Analysis

Item	Issue Statement	Scale 1	Scale 2	Direction
1	The Georgian government should start negotiations with de facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.			
2	Georgian soldiers should not fight outside the country.	0.40		+
3	Georgia would benefit more from abandoning Euro-Atlantic integration in favour of better ties with Russia.	0.48		+
4	Georgia should become a member of NATO.	0.42		-
5	Georgia should buy gas from the Russian energy giant Gazprom to guarantee energy security.	0.38		+
6	Georgia should have a presidential model of governance with a stronger president.			
7	A larger part of tax revenues should go directly to the municipalities.			
8	Quotas should be introduced to increase the number of women in parliament.			
9	Jury trials should be fully implemented in Georgia.			
10	Social spending programs should be targeted at the most vulnerable part of society rather than be universal.			
11	Woods and pastures should be in private ownership.			
12	The state should subsidize agriculture.			
13	Wealthy citizens should pay a greater share of tax.			
14	Fostering economic growth is more important than protecting the environment.			
15	The State should regulate the free market more.			
16	The Labor Code in Georgia should be changed in order to better protect the rights of employees.		0.36	+
17	Ownership of land by foreigners should be illegal.	0.40		+
18	Georgia should go ahead with the construction of major hydro power plants.			
19	There should be higher import duties in order to protect local industries.		0.33	+
20	There should be a legally enforceable minimum wage.		0.35	+
21	There should be a constitutional ban on same sex marriage.	0.45		+
22	Homosexuals should be allowed to defend their lifestyle in public.	0.39		-
23	The government, not the Church, should make the final decisions regarding cultural policy.			
24	All religious groups should have the same rights and liberties.	0.37		-
25	People should continue to get arrested for smoking of cannabis.			
26	The state should set limits to freedom of expression to protect believers against insults to their religious feelings.			
27	Non-Orthodox/minority religions should be given tax exemptions just like the Georgian Orthodox Church.			
28	The Patriarch should be given the right to pardon prisoners.	0.39		+
29	Monuments to Stalin should be removed from all public places.	0.36		-
30	Broadcasting of Russian TV channels in Georgia should be stopped.	0.35		-
H		0.40	0.35	

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2 Table 3: Regression Results
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Dependent variable:		

Cultural dimension		
	(1)	(2)

University Education	0.081*** (0.065, 0.098)	
Professional Education		-0.092*** (-0.119, -0.064)
Age	-0.002*** (-0.003, -0.002)	-0.002*** (-0.002, -0.002)
Gender	-0.046*** (-0.056, -0.035)	-0.047*** (-0.058, -0.036)
Constant	0.576*** (0.560, 0.592)	0.655*** (0.644, 0.666)

Observations	6,677	6,127
R2	0.040	0.036
Adjusted R2	0.039	0.036
=====		

20 Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
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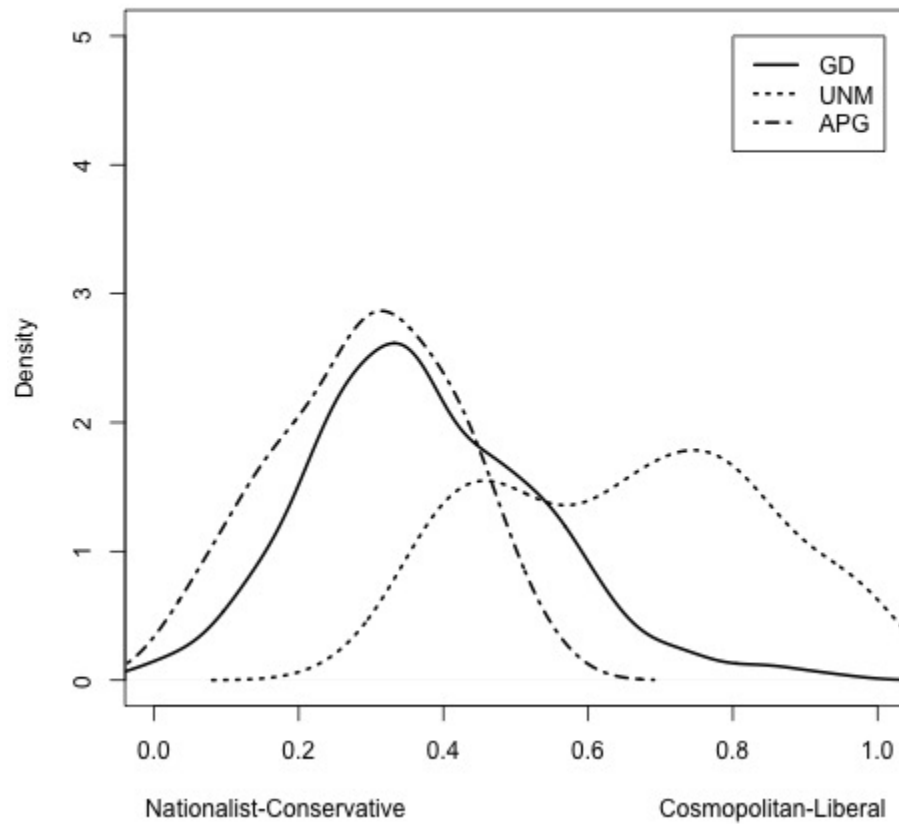


Figure 1: Density Plot of Party Supporters With Respect to the Cultural Dimension

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