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The Gap Between Support for Democracy and Liberal Values in Georgia

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Abstract

While democracy has been viewed by Georgians as the most preferable form of government for the last decade, support is on the decline, and a majority no longer reports a preference for democratic governance. CRRC’s Caucasus Barometer survey also shows that more and more Georgians view the country’s democracy as having major problems. This article addresses support for democracy at the individual level, specifically whether support for democracy is associated with liberal values. Using data from the Caucasus Barometer, it examines whether liberal values predict democratic support after demographic factors are taken into account. This research finds that in the Georgian context, support for democracy is not necessarily associated with traditional liberal democratic values, such as respect for minorities or progressive attitudes towards gender equality.

Introduction

This article aims to identify what factors are related with support for democracy in Georgia. Specifically, the paper uses survey data from CRRC’s Caucasus Barometer to examine whether support for democracy is associated with support for gender equality and tolerance towards minorities that are regarded by many as the core values of liberal democracy (Lægaard, 2007).

Public opinion polls suggest support for democracy as preferred form of government is in decline in Georgia. An increasing number of Georgians view their country as “a democracy with major problems”, with CRRC’s Caucasus Barometer survey showing the percentage reporting this belief to have increased from 27% in 2011 to 48% in 2019.¹ Parallel to this growing skepticism towards the country’s democratic situation, surveys also report a decline in the proportion of the population believing that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government, falling from 65% in 2011 to 49% in 2019.²

Existing scholarly literature on declining support for democracy in Georgia has sought to identify underlying causes. Some authors have linked this trend with the failure of political and civil society elites to “to overcome the resilience of clientelistic practices within state structures “ (Broers, 2005 p. 347; Chikhladze & Aliyev, 2019). Others tie disillusionment with the existing system to dissatisfaction with neo-liberal economic policies (Jones, 2013). Both domes-

1 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019) “Caucasus Barometer”. Retrieved through ODA: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/CNTRDEM/> and <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/CNTRDEM/> on March 12th, 2020

2 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019) “Caucasus Barometer”. Retrieved through ODA: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/ATTDEM/> and <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/ATTDEM/> on March 12th, 2020

tic and foreign observers suggest that the nature of the current political system, which has been referred to as “Illiberal Oligarchy”³ may have undermined the perception of Georgia as a democratic state.⁴

Whilst systemic, political and economic issues have been widely addressed, the relationship between support for democracy in Georgia and individual-level factors, such as values and demographics, is underrepresented in academic and policy discourse, with a notable lack of empirical work on the subject.

People in Georgia have a general understanding of key democratic principles. CRRC-Georgia’s survey conducted for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in November/December 2019 asks respondents to choose up to three sets of principles that they feel represents democracy. The majority of Georgians reported a belief that democracy relates to “freedom of speech/media/hearing different views” (54%)⁵. In addition, one third of respondents reported democracy to be “equality before the law / protection of justice”⁶ or “protection/defense of human rights”⁷. Whilst this demonstrates a link between liberal values and democracy in public understanding, the relationship between support for liberal values and support for democracy is less clear. Other studies have also argued that tolerance of other opinions is central for democracy, as freedom of speech and action and diversity of opinion necessarily requires tolerance for different groups and perspectives (Gibson, 1998). Using the Caucasus Barometer survey of 2019, we did not find evidence that support for democracy is related to democratic values, such as tolerance towards minority and other groups and support for equality in gender roles. In light of this evidence, this paper finds that motivations behind popular support for democracy in Georgia likely extend beyond individual values.

Methods

The data source for this paper is the Caucasus Barometer survey conducted by CRRC Georgia in 2019. The data is analyzed using multiple logistic regressions. The dependent variable is support for democracy, operationalized through respondents’ choice from three statements: (a) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government (49%); (b) In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable (20%); (c) For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have (14%). For analytical purposes, the question has been dichotomized as follows: “support for democracy” is coded if a respondent reported that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government (option a); answers (b), (c), “do not know” and “refuse to answer” (17%) were coded as “no explicit support for democracy”.

Covariates examine liberal values and are operationalized as follows: (a) level of tolerance towards ethnic minorities, measured by an additive index of approval of women of the respondents’ ethnicity marrying a number of ethnic and religious groups;⁸ (b) level of liberal attitudes towards women, measured through an additive index of acceptance of certain behaviors by women of a certain age⁹; (c) intolerance towards homosexuals, operationalized by a respondent naming a homosexual as their least desirable hypothetical neighbor;¹⁰ (d) attitude toward gender equality, measured by approval of men and women sharing equal breadwinning roles in families in Georgia¹¹ and (e) attitude toward

3 “Illiberal Oligarchy Lurks Behind Georgia’s Democratic Façade”, published by Civil.ge. Retrieved from <https://civil.ge/archives/328613> on March 18th, 2020

4 “A Flickering Beacon of Democracy in Russia’s Backyard” published by Foreign Policy. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/27/georgia-georgian-dream-ivanishvili-russia-democracy/> on March 18th, 2020.

5 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019) “Public attitudes in Georgia, November–December 2019”. Retrieved through ODA: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nn2019ge/DEMSPEECH/> on March 26th, 2020

6 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019) “Public attitudes in Georgia, November–December 2019”. Retrieved through ODA: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nn2019ge/DEMLAW/> on March 26th, 2020

7 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019) “Public attitudes in Georgia, November–December 2019”. Retrieved through ODA: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nn2019ge/DEMRIGHT/> on March 26th, 2020

8 The list of ethnic and religious groups is as follows: American, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Italian, Arab, Iranian, Jew, Kurd, Russian, Turk, Ukrainian, Indian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian living in Georgia, Azerbaijani living in Georgia, and Jehovah’s Witness. The additive index has a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 17. A score of 0 corresponds to disapproval of women of the respondents’ ethnicity marrying a man of any of the 17 groups. A score of 17 corresponds to approval of women of their ethnicity marrying representatives of all 17 groups.

9 Specifically drinking strong alcohol, smoking tobacco, living separately from parents before marriage, having sexual relations before marriage, and cohabiting with a man without marriage. The additive index has a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 5. A score of 0 suggests that the respondent named a specific age when it is acceptable for a woman to do the listed activities. A score of 5 suggests that for the respondent it is unacceptable for a woman to engage in any of those 5 activities at any age.

10 A code of 1 corresponds to respondents naming homosexuals as the group that they would least like to have as a neighbor. Code 0 corresponds to the naming of any other group of people, for example: people following a different religion, people having different political views, Europeans living in Georgia, Asians living in Georgia, drug addicts, criminals, and black people.

11 A code of 1 corresponds to the belief that men and women should equally be breadwinners in families in Georgia. Code 0 corresponds to the naming of a man or a woman as preferred breadwinner.

gender equality, measured by assigning equal distributions to male and female children in inheritance.¹² We tested the relationship between support for democracy and the five proxy measures for identification with liberal democratic values using five separate logistic regression models. In addition to the covariates described above, each model controls for the influence of the following demographic characteristics: settlement type (capital, urban and rural), gender (female/male), age, number of years spent in formal education, employment status (unemployed/employed), and ethnicity (Georgian/non-Georgian ethnicity).¹³

Findings are reported as predicted probabilities of a respondent with a given response for each covariate expressing support for democracy, alongside a comment on statistical significance of the given variable in the logistic regression model. Outcomes should be interpreted as the modelled probability of preference for democracy, adjusted for other demographic characteristics and covariates in the regression analysis¹⁴.

Findings

Model One examines the relationship between the tolerance towards ethnic minorities and support for democracy. Holding all other factors constant, different levels of tolerance toward ethnic minorities do not show statistically significant differences (see Table 1 for predicted probabilities).

Table 1: Predicted Probability of Choosing Democracy Over Any Other Kind of Government by Tolerance Index*

Tolerance index	0 (lowest)	48%
	2	48%
	5	49%
	8	50%
	11	51%
	14	51%
	17 (highest)	52%

* The index has a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 17. The table presents only probabilities using 3 point steps for convenience reasons.

Similarly, attitudes towards women's freedom of action, included in the second model, do not appear to have a statistically significant relationship with the outcome variable (see Table 5). Taking into consideration all other factors, the difference between people with liberal and conservative attitudes towards women's behavior did not appear to be significant in predicting support for democracy (see Table 2 for predicted probabilities).

Table 2: Predicted Probability of Choosing Democracy Over Any Other Kind of Government by Acceptance of Women's Activities

Acceptance of women's activities	0 (Specific age indicated for all activities)	56%
	1	54%
	2	53%
	3	52%
	4	50%
	5 (Unacceptable for a woman to engage in any of the activities at any age)	49%

The sexual minority attitude dummy, i.e. whether or not an individual's response suggests homophobia, also does not have a statistically significant association with support for democracy (see Table 5). Holding other factors constant, those who named and those who did not name homosexuals as a group that they would not wish to have as neighbors have almost the same levels of support for democracy (see Table 3 for predicted probabilities).

Table 3: Predicted Probability of Choosing Democracy Over Any Other Kind of Government by Sexual Minority Intolerance

Sexual minority intolerance	Named homosexuals as a group that they would not wish to have as neighbors	51%
	Did not name homosexuals as a group that they would not wish to have as neighbors	52%

12 In this variable code 1 stands for respondents who said that if a family has only one apartment, it should be equally distributed between a son and a daughter. Code 0 stands for people who named a son or a daughter as the child that should inherit an apartment.

13 For nominal and ordinal scales the first listed answer options are the base categories.

14 Replication code for the data analysis is available at CRRC's GitHub repository here: https://github.com/crrcgeorgia/cad_cb19_democracy

Finally, proxy variables for attitudes towards gender equality were tested. When examined separately in different models, neither appeared to be statistically significant predictors of support for democracy (see Table 5). Neither egalitarian nor conservative views towards gender roles appear to suggest a particular preference for democracy over any other type of government (see Table 4 for predicted probabilities).

Table 4: Predicted Probability of Choosing Democracy Over Any Other Kind of Government by Preferred Sex of Breadwinner and Inheritance Equality

Breadwinner equality	Naming either man or women	48%
	Equally	51%
Inheritance equality	Naming either man or women	49%
	Equally	50%

In all five models demographic variables, like settlement type, gender, age, years of education, employment, and ethnicity were included. The analysis finds that of these demographic variables only education and ethnicity have a significant association with the outcome variable. In all models, ethnic Georgians are significantly more likely to support democracy over other forms of government in comparison to non-ethnic Georgians. Moreover, the more years of education a person has, the more likely it is that this person will support democracy (see Table 5 in the appendix).

Conclusion

Regression analysis demonstrates that none of the proxies for liberal values within the models have significant association with support for democracy. Interestingly, support for democracy in Georgia does not appear to be related to tolerance towards ethnic or sexual minorities. Furthermore, those supporting women's rights or gender equality are not more likely to view democracy as the best form of government for Georgia. The only significant predictors in the models were years of education and ethnic minority status. More specifically, the more years of education a person has, the more likely it is that they express support for democracy, and ethnic Georgians are more likely to name democracy as the best form of government than those from other ethnic groups. These findings suggest a need for further investigation into the determinants of support for democracy. A study of the subject in the post-socialist countries has shown that support for democracy may be conditioned by "instrumental"¹⁵ factors, and that preference can be identified for political structures that "act in their own or their own group's best interest" (Pavlovic, 2014, page 38). Advocates for this approach assert that support for democracy is merely an instrument to reach the goal of attaining the economic prosperity of economically developed democratic societies (Pavlovic, 2014). In the context of Georgia, our paper presents evidence that liberal democratic values are not associated with support for democracy. Examination of factors which address the issue of instrumental approach may shed further light on the determinants of support for democracy in Georgia.

About the Authors

Rati Shubladze is a policy analyst at CRRC-Georgia. He holds a Master's degree in Social Sciences from Tbilisi State University (TSU) and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. from the Department of Sociology and Social Work at TSU. Rati's doctoral research investigates electoral behavior in Georgia. He also holds an academic assistant position and teaches quantitative research methods at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs.

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¹⁵ Instrumental factors relate to economic calculations, economic well-being, governmental achievements and general confidence in political system (Bratton & Mattes, 2001; Chu et al, 2008; Huhe & Tang, 2016).

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Appendix

Table 5:

VARIABLES	(1) Model 1 Logit coefficients	(2) Model 2 Logit coefficients	(3) Model 3 Logit coefficients	(4) Model 4 Logit coefficients	(5) Model 5 Logit coefficients
Settlement type					
<i>Urban</i>	-0.520** -0.208	-0.354 -0.229	-0.527** -0.218	-0.499** -0.208	-0.492** -0.209
<i>Rural</i>	-0.232 -0.175	-0.00584 -0.195	-0.196 -0.192	-0.208 -0.177	-0.175 -0.176
Gender	-0.0732 -0.128	-0.00503 -0.136	-0.181 -0.141	-0.0748 -0.129	-0.0538 -0.131
Age	-0.0000743 -0.00318	-0.000689 -0.00373	0.0012 -0.00344	0.000308 -0.0032	-0.000881 -0.00321
Years of education	0.135*** -0.0222	0.132*** -0.0243	0.146*** -0.0245	0.136*** -0.0222	0.140*** -0.0227
Employment	0.0449 -0.128	-0.0126 -0.146	0.0224 -0.137	0.047 -0.128	0.0345 -0.131
Ethnicity	-0.863*** -0.277	-0.895*** -0.292	-0.803*** -0.282	-0.835*** -0.268	-0.835*** -0.276
Tolerance index	0.0116 -0.00995				
Acceptance of women activities		-0.0582 -0.0478			
Sexual minority intolerance			0.0406 -0.163		
Breadwinner equality				0.107 -0.129	
Inheritance equality					0.0514 -0.131
Constant	-1.438*** -0.378	-1.206*** -0.44	-1.473*** -0.408	-1.456*** -0.378	-1.462*** -0.385
Observations	2,271	1,818	1,880	2,269	2,228

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$