



ATTEMPTING TO DISCOURAGE ELECTORAL MALFEASANCE IN GEORGIA

THE RESULTS OF A RANDOMIZED CONTROL TRIAL

TBILISI, GEORGIA

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22

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Malfeasance in Georgia:
The results of a randomized control trial**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2021, Georgia voted for city councils and mayors. During this period, CRRC Georgia implemented a field experiment attempting to discourage voters from exchanging their votes for goods or services. This report summarizes the findings of the field experiment as well as a pre-electoral survey conducted to inform the design of efforts aimed at measuring and discouraging vote buying in Tbilisi.

The study was motivated by the growing concerns in Georgia over electoral malfeasance, as exhibited by declining assessments of the quality of Georgian elections in a wide range of sources. From Freedom House's scores related to the quality of elections to international and local election observation mission reports, the preponderance of opinion is that Georgia's electoral quality has been declining, with vote buying being an increasingly common concern.

To measure and discourage vote buying in Tbilisi in the 2021 local elections, CRRC Georgia conducted a pre-electoral survey, a post-electoral survey, and a field experiment. The pre-electoral survey included an experiment which tested the effectiveness of different messages at discouraging vote buying behavior. The field experiment delivered the most effective message to a sample of voters in Tbilisi prior to the first round of elections. The post-electoral survey measured whether or not the messaging ultimately resulted in reduced vote buying behavior. Each survey also collected data on people's perceptions of election quality.

The study's results lead to a wide range of conclusions.

The data indicate that the public is split on the fairness of the elections. A third think the elections were well administered, a third that they were of moderate quality, and a fifth that the elections were poorly administered. The data show a strong partisan division in attitudes with GD supporters significantly more likely to feel that the elections were well administered. A similar pattern is present with regard to attitudes towards the electoral playing field.

The data from the pre-electoral survey suggested that up to a fifth of the population of Tbilisi was willing to exchange their vote for some personal benefit in the run up to the elections. Yet, several messages were effective in discouraging these attitudes. The most effective tended to suggest some form of international embarrassment, with these messages leading to in the realm of 30 percentage point declines in willingness to exchange one's vote for some material benefit.

The messages tested within the pre-electoral survey were also effective at changing attitudes towards the acceptance of vote buying. Negative international embarrassment, a reminder

of the dark 90s, and messages about the incompatibility of vote buying and Georgia's Euro-atlantic integration all lead to relatively large declines in people's acceptance of vote buying.

Data from the field experiment estimates that approximately 9% of Tbilisians exchanged their vote for some benefit during the election, yet this estimate is not statistically significant. As a result, this estimate can be considered imprecise and not clearly larger than 0 given the standard errors of the estimates. The effect of the message on the posters that were distributed as part of this study point towards a positive impact, but again remain inconclusive.

The results from the pre-electoral study taken together with the findings from the field experiment suggest a number of conclusions. Specifically, the effect of the poster is roughly half the effect of the message on the survey. Measurement of the effect of the posters took place as much as a month after they were placed at people's doors. By comparison, the impact of the messages on the pre-electoral survey was measured immediately after they were delivered. In this regard, the effect of the messages may have waned over time. In this vein, a poster is a relatively ineffective medium of message delivery. As a result, the medium of message delivery may have diluted the effect of the message. In this regard, organizations aiming to discourage voters from selling their votes should consider delivering messages:

- As close to elections as possible;
- Multiple times;
- Through multiple mediums (in this regard, face to face messaging is known to be most effective for most messages).

The above findings should be considered in light of the general survey findings. The survey data suggest that a large majority of Georgians disagree with vote buying practices in principle: 90% of Tbilisi residents fully or rather agree that it is wrong to accept a gift in exchange for a vote. However, approximately one in four (24%) disagree with the statement that people should report or disclose vote-buying attempts, and roughly one in five Tbilisi residents (22%) believe vote-buying is acceptable for poor people. While the analysis in the pre-electoral survey suggested that messaging was effective in changing attitudes when respondents immediately heard the messaging, the field experiment data shows essentially no effect of the posters on attitudes.

The field experiment led to no observed unintended effects. People who remember seeing the poster as well as people from the treatment clusters did not report significantly different attitudes on a wide range of attitudes related to the elections but not directly related to vote buying such as the fairness of elections.

INTRODUCTION

On October 2, 2021, Georgians went to the polls in the first round of municipal elections. In Tbilisi, Kakha Kaladze of the Georgian Dream received 45% of the vote, while Nika Melia came in second with 34% of the vote, forcing a second round run-off. In the second round of the local elections, Kakha Kaladze won with 56% of the vote compared to Nika Melia's 44%.

While election day itself was relatively peaceful, international election monitors highlighted numerous problems with the elections. The second sentence of OSCE ODIHR's preliminary findings report for the first round of the elections states, "Contestants were able to campaign freely in a competitive environment that was, however, marred by wide-spread and consistent allegations of intimidation, vote-buying, pressure on candidates and voters, and an unlevel playing field."¹

Vote-buying practices have been an increasing concern for Georgia's electoral conduct in recent years. According to the Varieties of Democracy project,² scores on vote-buying in Georgia have been deteriorating since 2007, nearly reaching the levels of the 1990s in the past 2-3 years.

Anticipating that this would remain an issue in the 2021 municipal elections, CRRC Georgia conducted a pre-electoral survey to understand what types of messaging might discourage people from selling their votes as well as a field experiment using those messages to attempt to actually hamper the practice in Tbilisi. In this report, vote buying and selling are conceived of broadly, including such practices as exchanging favors for a vote, directly buying/selling a vote for cash, or exchanging a vote for goods or services. This report provides the results of both the pre-electoral survey experiment as well as the field experiment.

Specifically, this research aims to address the following research questions:

- What were the Tbilisi public's attitudes towards vote buying?
- What share of the Tbilisi public were willing to sell their votes prior to the elections?
- What share of the Tbilisi public sold their votes during the first round of elections?
- What messages work to curtail people's intentions to sell their votes?
- Who do these messages work for?

¹ OSCE, 2021. Available at: https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/d/499468_3.pdf

² V-Dem [Georgia -1991/Georgia-2001] Dataset v11.1. Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/>

The report proceeds as follows. In the next section, the report provides background on previous studies which CRRC Georgia has conducted focused on what encourages people to sell their votes. In the following section of the report, the study lays out the methodology. In the subsequent section, data analysis is presented first for the pre-electoral survey, and then for the field experiment. The first subsection covers perceived views of the fairness of elections. The following section describes the results of a survey experiment which tested a number of messages aimed at decreasing vote buying intentions. The final sub-section looks at the results of a field experiment, which tested whether posters could change vote buying behavior. The report ends with conclusions and recommendations for actors working towards decreasing electoral malfeasance.

BACKGROUND ON ELECTORAL MALFEASANCE IN GEORGIA

Voters are expected to be prone to selling their votes where trust in and loyalty towards political parties is low. According to the Caucasus Barometer survey, parties have been among the least trusted institutions in the country during the past decade.³ Moreover, longitudinal surveys show that the level of partisanship has remained low and is on the decline.⁴ While normally at least half of the eligible voters vote in Georgia's elections, surveys show a modest level of party identification. In the last CRRC Georgia survey of winter 2021, only two in every five voters named a party closest to his or her views.⁵

Given that the political environment in Georgia could be expected to encourage vote buying and that there were allegations of it in past elections, CRRC Georgia conducted two survey experiments to explore:

- Whether the type of incentive offered matters to voters, and;
- Whether it matters who promises a material benefit.

For each issue, voters were asked about their expectations regarding other voters as well as about their own expected behavior.

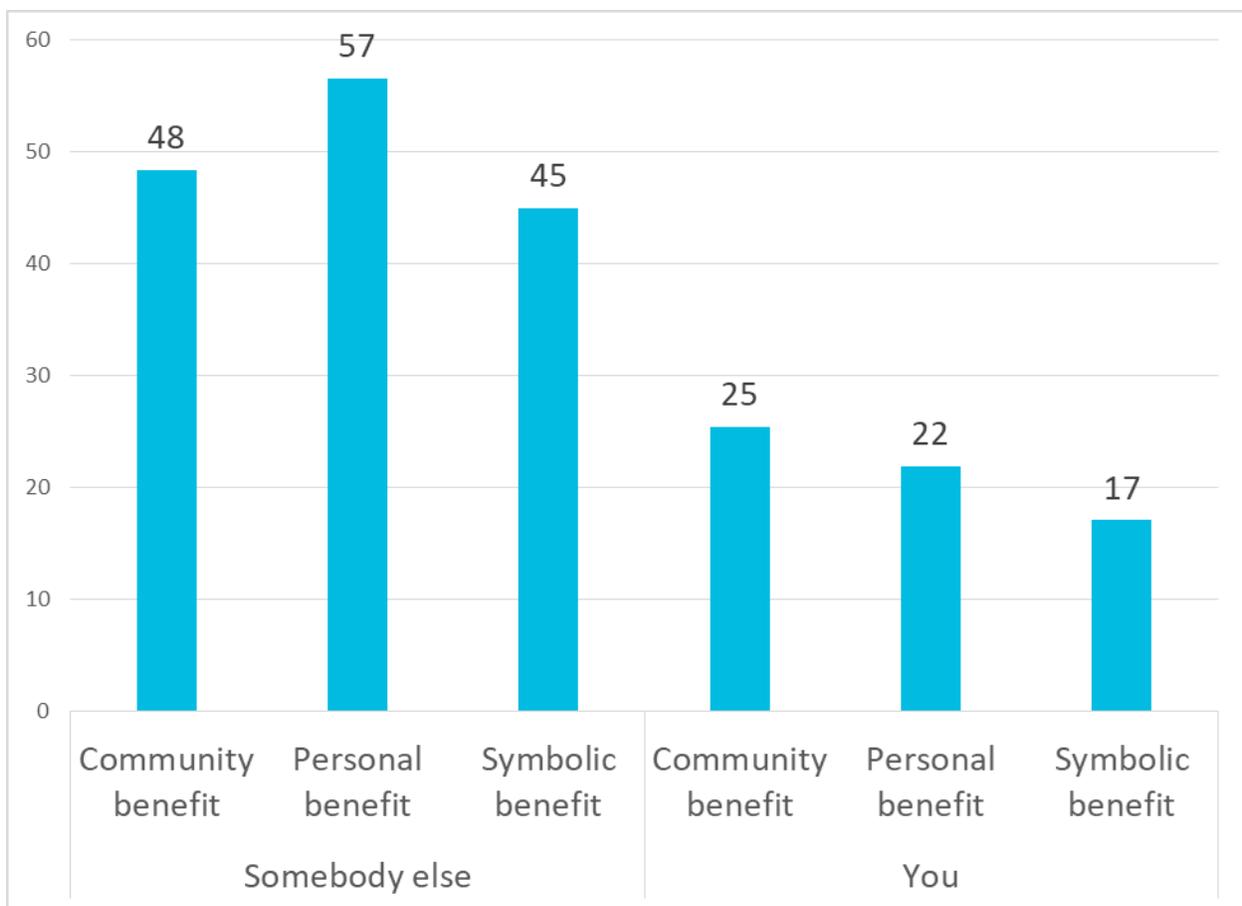
³ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2012-2019, Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/TRUPPS>

⁴ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2014-2019, Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/ndi-ge/PARTYSUPP1>

⁵ NDI, 2021. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/georgia-polls>

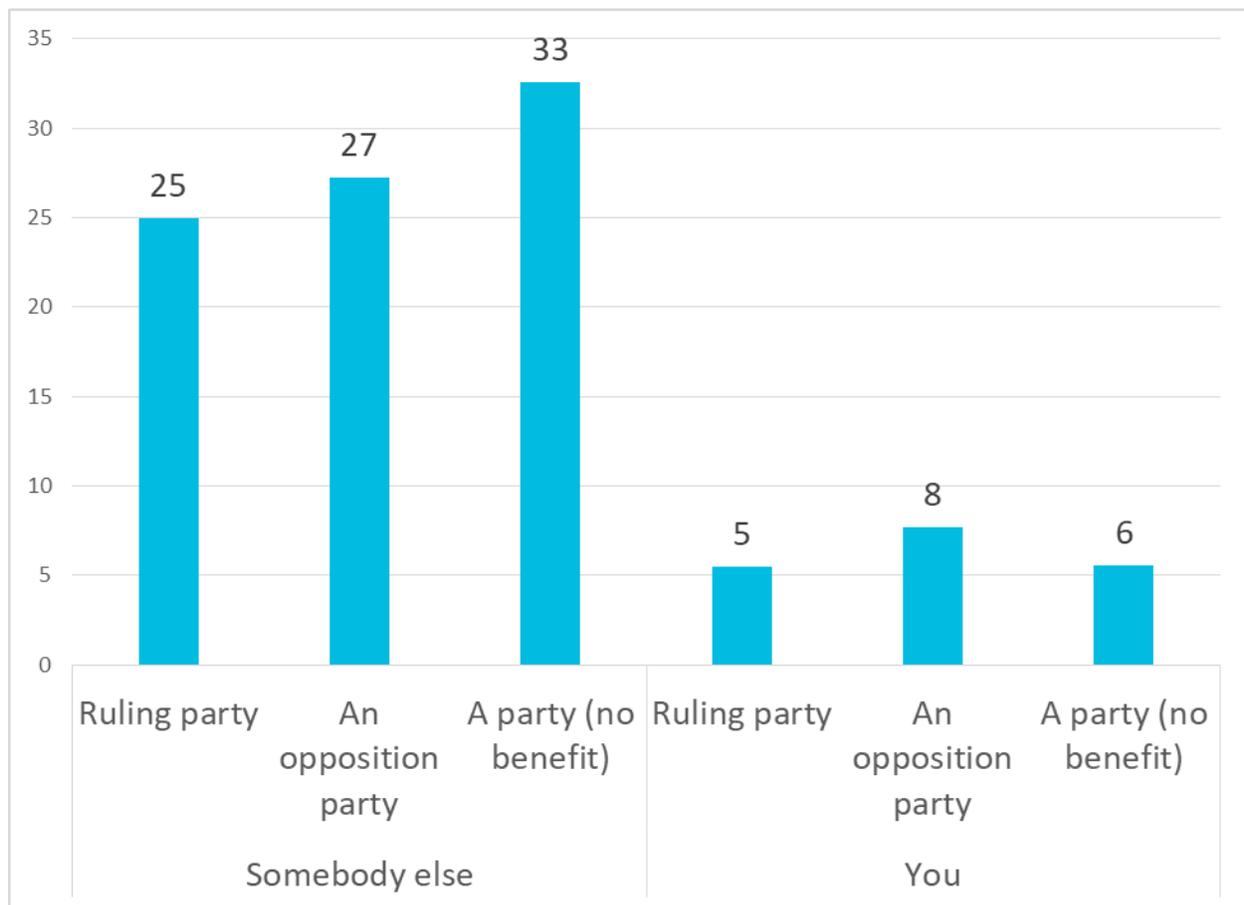
The first experiment about the type of benefits showed that trading votes for various benefits is acceptable for a significant share of voters. A quarter (25%) of voters are very likely or likely to vote for a party in exchange for a community benefit (roads and water in the neighborhood), followed by 22% for a personal benefit (a job), and 17% for a symbolic benefit (an unspecified favor). It is worth noting that voters expect their fellow voters to exchange their votes for benefits more often than themselves. A majority (57%) expect that a person who was promised a job will vote for the party that offered it, whereas close to half expect the same in case of a community benefit or a favor. While voters report that a community benefit is more important for them, they expect other voters to favor personal benefits.

Figure 1. Would you/somebody else vote for a party in exchange for ... (Predicted probabilities)



The second experiment looked at the importance of a personal benefit, such as a job, promised by the ruling party or by an opposition party. As anticipated, voters expect significantly less integrity from other voters compared to themselves. While five to eight percent reported that they would support a party if a person close to them promised them a job on behalf of that party, they expect a quarter of other voters would do so. Interestingly, there is no difference if a promise is coming from the ruling party or from the opposition.

Figure 2. Vote for a party if asked by a relative (Predicted probabilities)



Overall, the two studies show that a significant share of voters are willing to receive some material or symbolic benefit in exchange for their votes, and they expect other voters to do so much more often than themselves.

METHODOLOGY

This study included a pre-electoral survey experiment as well as a survey as part of a field experiment. Each of these contained a list experiment to elicit willingness to exchange a vote for a specific benefit. This section of the report first describes the survey experiment, and then goes on to describe the conduct of the field experiment. This includes a description of how data analysis was conducted for each component.

PRE-ELECTION SURVEY EXPERIMENT

Data collection

The pre-electoral survey was conducted between August 10 and September 5. The survey included 2951 respondents. The margin of error does not exceed 1.8%. The minimum response rate was 14%. Following data collection, 10% of interviews were back checked. The survey was administered using the computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method. The sample was done using random digit dialing of cell phone numbers in Georgia. The interviews were conducted in Georgian. The data is weighted to be representative of Tbilisi.

SURVEY EXPERIMENT

The pre-electoral study contained a survey experiment. A survey experiment randomly assigns different messages to different people, and then asks a number of questions to determine whether the people who heard different messages respond in different ways to the subsequent survey questions. The messages tested in the survey experiment include the following:

1. International embarrassment positive

Now I would like to ask you a few questions about politics, but first I wanted to tell you about some recent international research on elections in the world. Recent international assessments have shown that elections were improving in countries such as Armenia, North Macedonia, and Bolivia, while they were becoming worse in Georgia. Freedom House even pointed to vote buying in Georgia in relation to the 2020 elections.

2. International embarrassment negative

Now I would like to ask you a few more questions about politics, but first I wanted to tell you about some recent research on elections internationally. In 2020 and 2021, countries with growing problems with vote buying and election malfeasance included Ethiopia, Venezuela, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia.

3. Western integration threat

Now I am going to ask you some more questions about politics, but first I wanted to remind you about the 2020 elections and their aftermath before asking. The 2020 parliamentary elections were criticized for many reasons, including a number of issues around voters trading their votes for benefits, which is not compatible with the country's aspirations to become an EU member.

4. The dark 90s

When it comes to politics in Georgia, many people remember the 90s poorly. While there were many problems, elections in particular had lots of falsifications and vote buying. Do you remember the 90s well?

5. Democracy

Now I would like to ask you a few more questions about politics, but first I wanted to tell you about countries that struggle with democratization. There are many countries around the globe that try to democratize but fail to do so. One of the major reasons for failure is that voters are willing to exchange their vote for some material benefit (such as gifts, employment, permits, licenses, etc.)

After respondents were read out the above scripts, they were asked a number of questions about their views of vote buying. A list experiment was conducted to test whether the above messages shifted respondents' willingness to exchange their votes for material benefit in the 2021 elections.

LIST EXPERIMENT

A list experiment is a tool that is used to estimate the prevalence of activities that people are likely to lie about during a survey, such as whether or not they would be willing to sell their vote. The list experiment works by assigning people to either treatment or control groups. In the control group, a person is asked about **how many** different activities they have engaged in or plan to engage in during a specific time period. In the treatment group, a person is asked about the same activities, plus a sensitive item. In the present case, the sensitive item was vote buying. The difference in averages between the two groups results in a percentage point estimate of how many people have or will engage in the sensitive activity. For the pre-electoral survey list experiment the question text was as follows:

I will now read out a list of (3 in control; 4 in treatment group) items. Please tell me how many of them are true for you about your plans for the next six months.

- You will go to a political rally;
- You will go outside without a mask;
- You will vote in elections;
- You will vote for a candidate in exchange for a gift or money (Only in the treatment group).

FIELD EXPERIMENT

Following the above survey, CRRC Georgia conducted a field experiment (i.e. a cluster randomized control trial). To do so, CRRC Georgia randomly selected a representative sample of election precincts, with probability proportional to the number of voters associated with an election precinct. In cases where multiple election precincts were located in the same location, the clusters were merged.

After sampling clusters with probability proportional to size, each cluster was randomly assigned to either receive posters or not receive posters with the most effective message from the pre-electoral study. To determine which message was most effective, when the pre-electoral survey was nearly complete, the data from the above described experiment was analyzed to understand which treatment had the largest effect size. The results suggested that the negative international embarrassment message was most effective. As a result, 18,000 copies of the following poster were distributed in treatment clusters:



Following elections, CRRC Georgia conducted a face to face survey with 1258 respondents, including 644 in the treatment group and 614 in the control group. The survey had a response rate of 16.3%. The results are representative of Tbilisi, and weighted for social and demographic characteristics. The survey was conducted between October 4 and 29, 2021.

The field experiment also contained a list experiment. The key difference between the list experiment described above and the one used within the field experiment is that it asked about behavior during the past six months and whether someone actually exchanged their vote or not.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data for the survey experiment is analyzed in the report below using a multivariate and a univariate regression model. The univariate regression model simply looks at the effect size of the treatment. The multivariate models look at the interaction of treatment status with the following variables:

- Age group (18-34, 35-54, 55+);
- Sex (Male or female);
- District (Left or right bank of Tbilisi);
- Wealth index (A simple additive index of durable good ownership);
- Party (Georgian Dream, Opposition, Don't know/No party, Refuse to answer which party);
- Likely voter (Whether or not the person intended on voting in elections);
- Ethnicity (Ethnic minority or not);
- Personality or policy voter (Thinks that a party's leadership, policies, or does not know which is most important for their vote);
- Knowledge of vote buying index (A set of four questions about whether or not they reported four different types of behavior where vote buying).

For the list experiment, the analysis makes use of item count regression.

The data analysis for the field experiment is analyzed in a largely similar manner, with several exceptions. First, the variable for personality or policy voter and the knowledge of the vote buying index are excluded. These variables are not analyzed in the post-election survey, because all of the respondents in the treatment group were treated prior to the survey. As a

result, these outcomes could be affected by the treatment status of an individual rather than there being a differential impact of treatment on these variables. Second, two estimates are calculated for the effect of receiving a poster. The first is a simple comparison of whether the voters were in a treatment or control cluster (also known as an intention to treat effect). The second is an estimate of the effect on those who remembered seeing the poster (also known as a treatment on the treated effect). The first estimate enables an understanding of the cost-effectiveness of the intervention, while the second estimate provides an estimate of the effect size of the treatment on individuals that actually see it.

FINDINGS

This section first presents views of the fairness of the elections in Tbilisi, with data collected after the first round of elections. The chapter then moves on to describe the findings of the survey experiment which were used to design the field experiment. It then moves on to show the results of the field experiment.

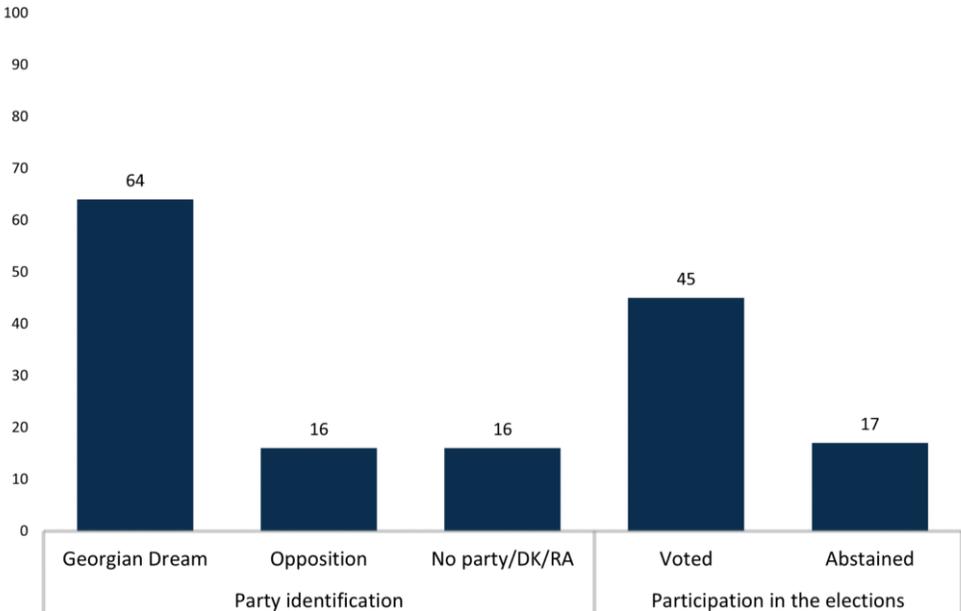
Fairness of the elections

Perceptions of fairness of elections are crucial to their legitimacy, and thus the functioning of democracy. In this regard, the data indicate that the public is split over the fairness of the elections along partisan lines.

Overall, 33% of Tbilisi residents think the first round of elections were well administered, 32% believe it was administered in neither a good nor bad manner, and 21% think the elections were administered poorly.

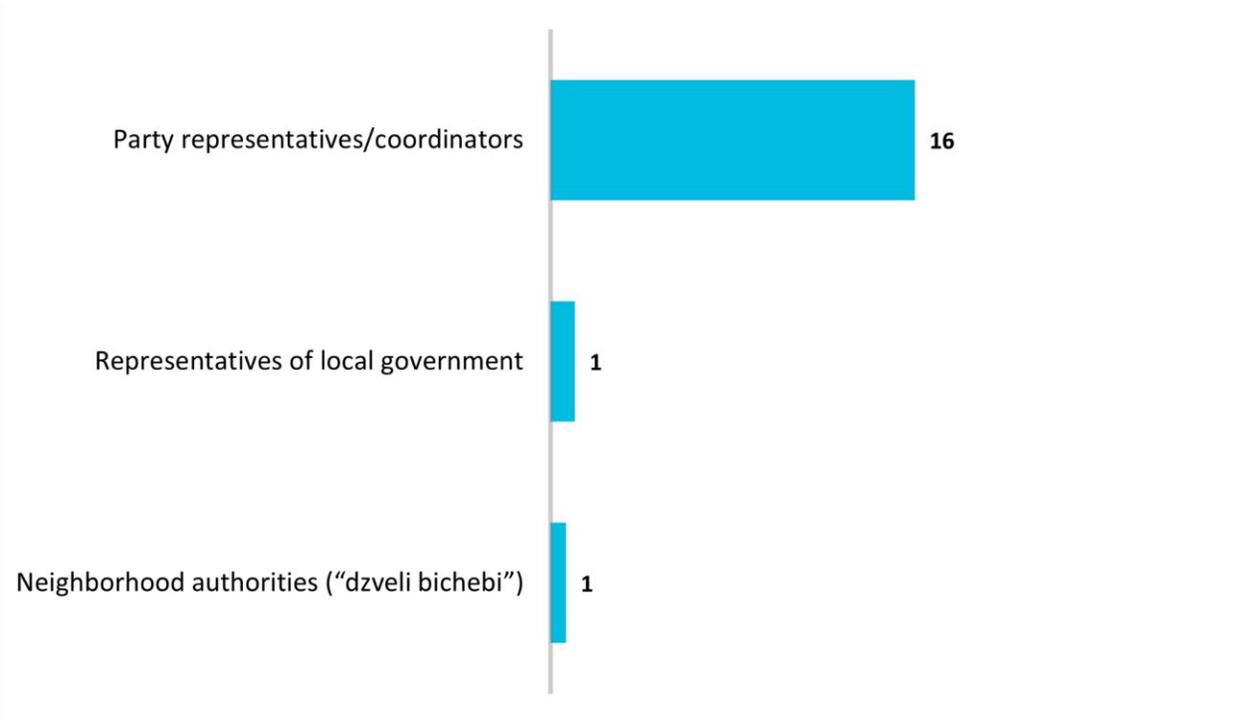
Some groups differ in their assessments of the elections. Supporters of the ruling party and people who voted in the first rounds of elections exhibit significantly more positive attitudes towards electoral conduct. Supporters of the ruling party were 48 percentage points more likely to say that the elections were well-administered compared to opposition supporters or those people who do not identify with any party. Moreover, people who voted in the first round were 28 percentage points more likely to positively assess the elections than people who abstained. No other differences were identified on this issue.

Figure 3. How the elections was held



Aside from the above, respondents were surveyed about different actors contacting them in the pre-election period. According to the data, 16% of the Tbilisi residents were contacted by a party representative or coordinator. Smaller portions of the public were contacted by a representative of local government (1%) or neighborhood hoodlums (“dzveli bichebi”) (1%).

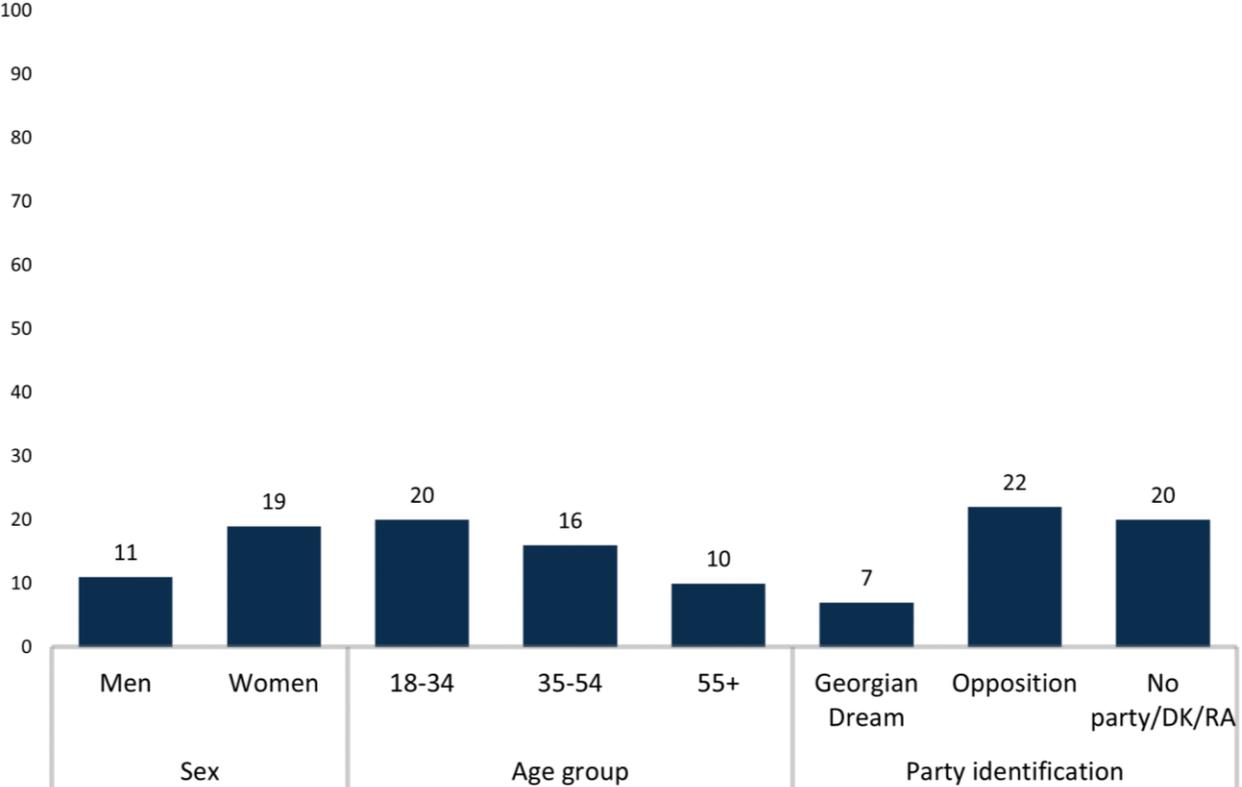
Figure 4. Who contacted Tbilisi residents in the pre-election period to discuss election-related matters



Respondents were asked whether they have heard of or have personally experienced a party representative/coordinator offering a gift or money in exchange for a vote. Most of the Tbilisi residents (77%) have not heard of such an instance. Still, one fifth of Tbilisi residents did report that they had heard of a party representative/coordinator offering a gift or money in exchange for a vote (21%). Only a tiny minority reported that they have personally experienced this (2%).

Regression analysis suggests some groups are more likely to report they have heard about vote-buying practices than others. Younger people, women, opposition supporters, and unaffiliated voters were significantly more likely to say that they had heard of party representatives/coordinators offering a gift or money in exchange for a vote than older people, men, and supporters of the Georgian Dream party.

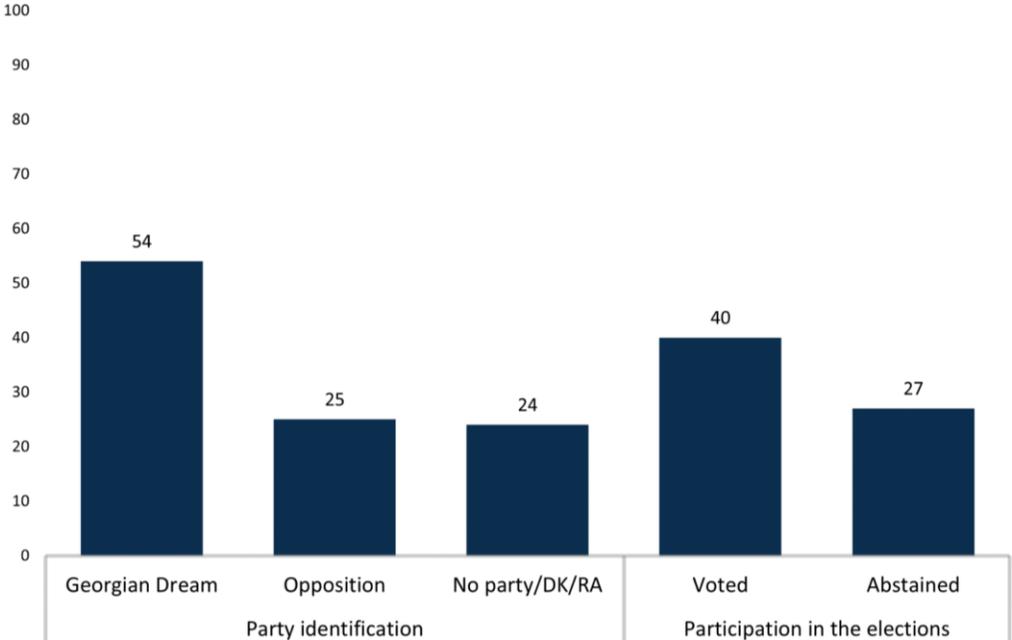
Figure 5. Who has heard of coordinators offering a gift or money in exchange for a vote by socio-demographic characteristics



Respondents were also asked about the equality of the electoral playing field for parties. The data indicate that roughly equal shares of people living in Tbilisi believe the parties did not have equal opportunities for campaigning (40%) or had more-or-less equal opportunities to compete in the elections. One fifth (21%) of Tbilisi residents reported that they did not know whether political parties had equal opportunities for political campaigning during the pre-election period.

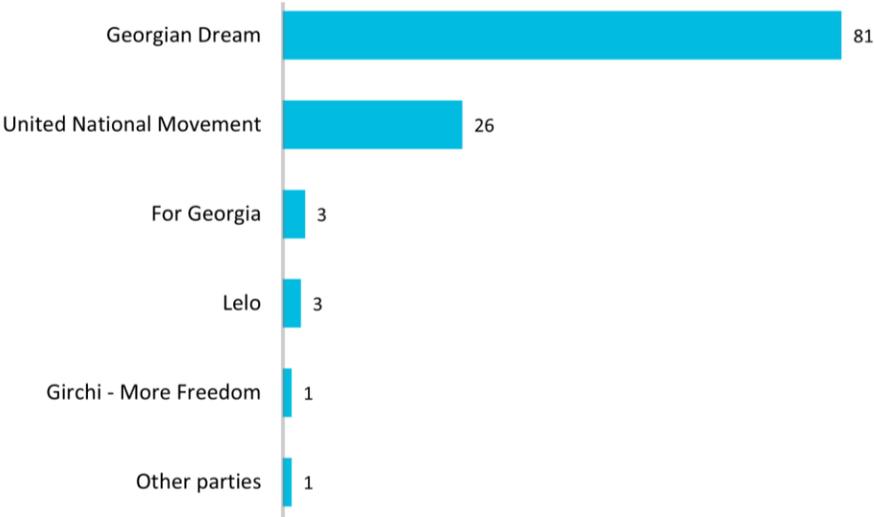
Supporters of the ruling party and people who voted in the first round of elections were more likely to believe that parties had equal opportunities than opposition supporters, people who did not name any particular political party close to them, and people who did not vote.

Figure 6. Did parties have equal opportunities for campaigning



Out of the respondents that think some parties had an advantage, the majority think the ruling party had an advantage (81%). Some also thought the United National Movement had an advantage (26%). Other parties were named by few respondents.

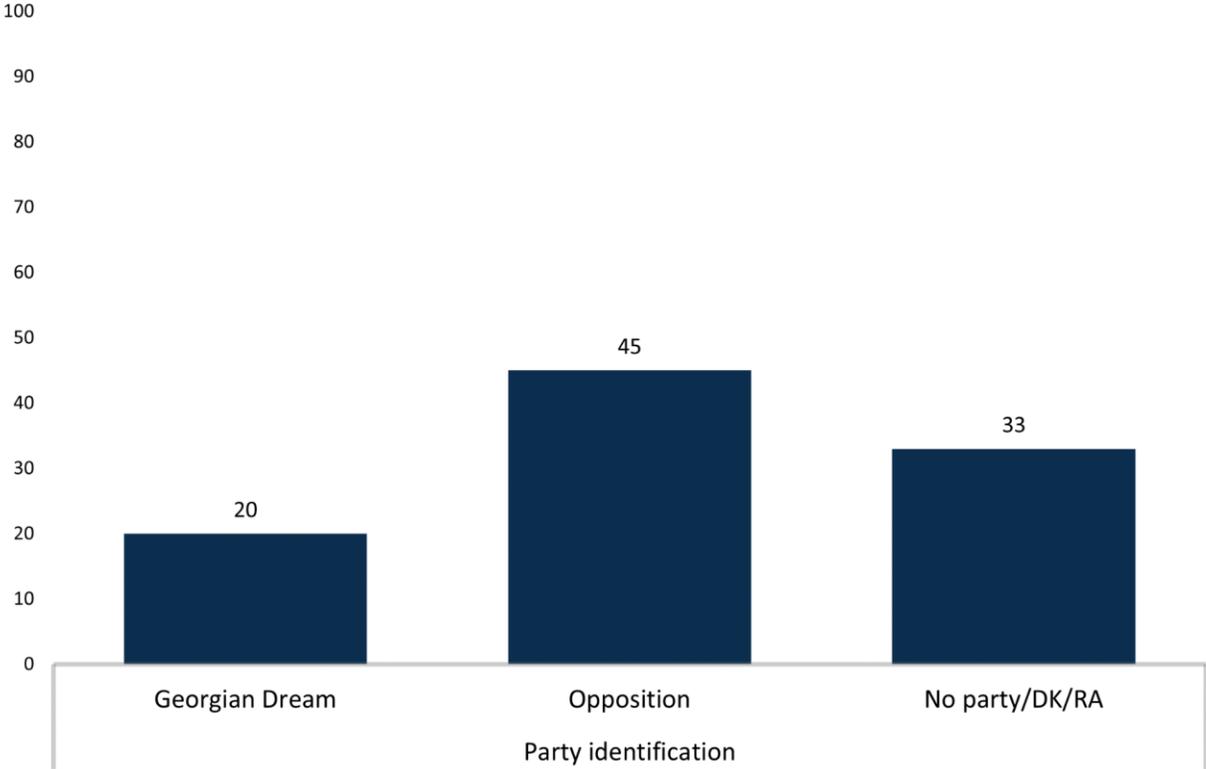
Figure 7. Which parties had an advantage? (out of 40% of Tbilisi respondents who said parties did not have equal opportunities)



Note: Respondents were allowed to name as many parties as having an advantage as they wanted.

The data suggests opposition supporters and unaffiliated voters were more likely to report the ruling party had an advantage than supporters of the ruling party. GD Supporters were 25 percentage points less likely than opposition supporters and 13 percentage points less likely than unaffiliated voters to report that the ruling party had an advantage in the pre-election period. No other significant differences were identified.

Figure 8. Georgian Dream had an advantage



With regard to election fairness, the data tend to show that views were split along partisan lines, across multiple measures of election fairness.

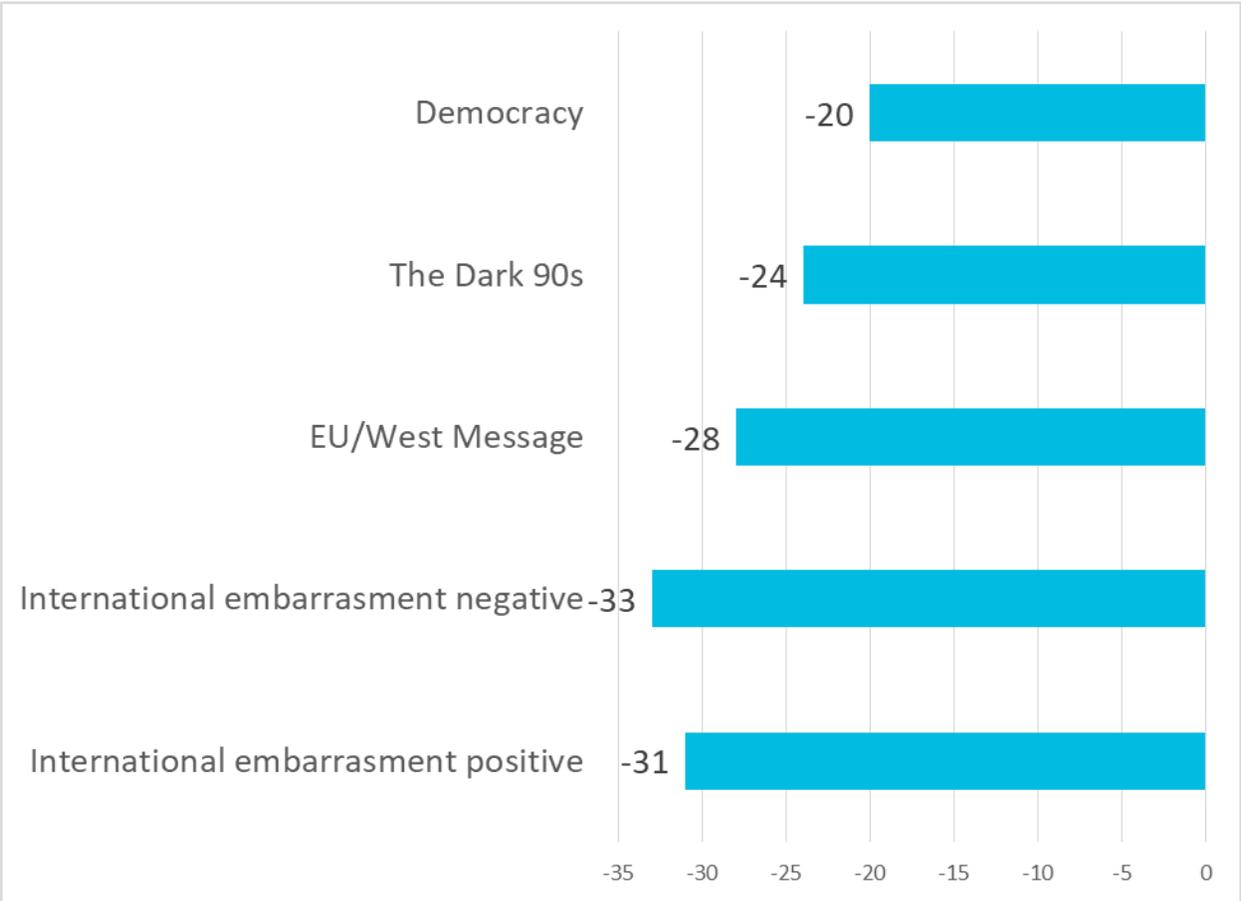
Vote Buying and Messages aimed at countering it

The pre-electoral survey contained a list experiment, measuring people’s intention to sell their votes. The results of the list experiment suggest that up to 20% of Tbilisi voters were willing to sell their vote for cash or another gift prior to the elections. This estimate was significant at the $p < 0.1$ level ($p = 0.0654$). This was estimated using an item count regression that adjusted for which treatment group participants were in.

What message is most effective at discouraging people from selling their votes?

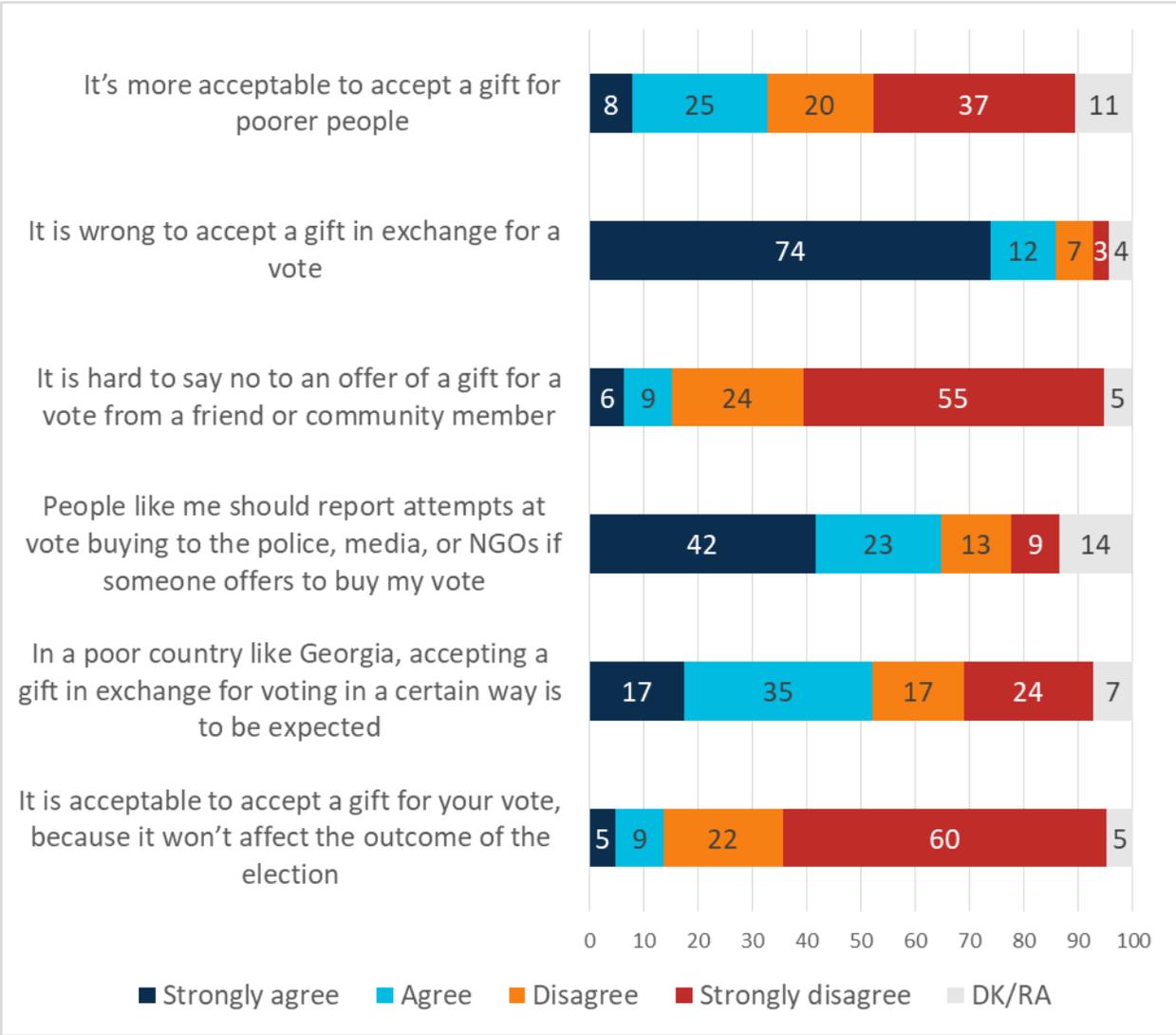
As noted above, five messages were tested to see which was most effective at discouraging voters from selling their votes. The key outcome variable for this analysis was whether or not someone was willing to sell their vote, as estimated using the above described list experiment. The results suggest that the treatment focused on negative international embarrassment led to a 33 percentage point decline in willingness to sell a vote. The positive international embarrassment treatment was next most effective, leading to a decline of 31 percentage points in willingness to sell a vote. The dark 90s treatment and EU/West focused message led to declines of 24 percentage points and 29 percentage points respectively. These effects though are only significant at the 10% level ($p=0.0621$ and $p=0.0941$). The democracy treatment did not have a statistically significant treatment effect.

Figure 9. Treatment effects on willingness to sell vote (percentage points)



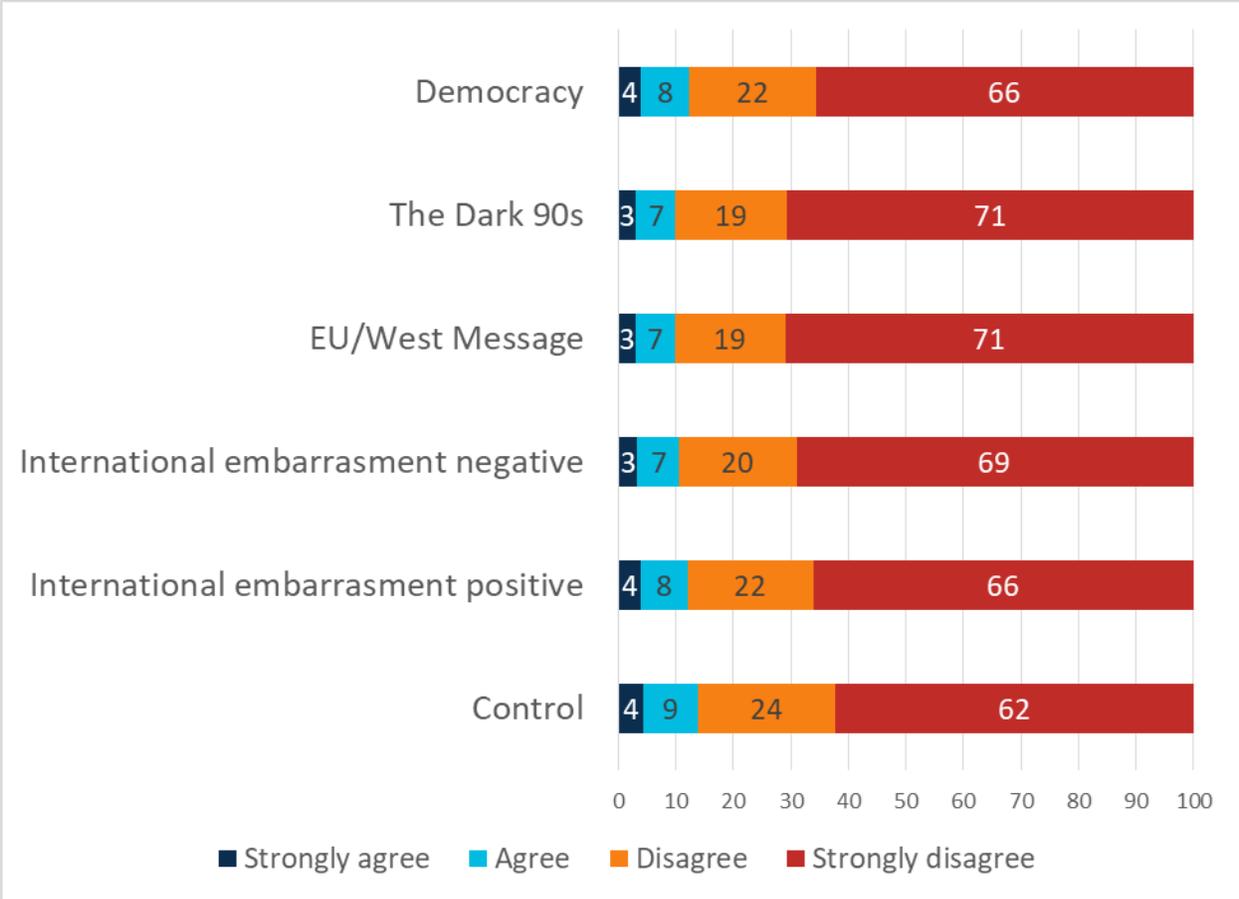
Aside from looking at willingness to sell votes through the list experiment, the study also looked at whether the messages changed people’s acceptance of vote buying. The data for these issues are presented on the chart below for the control group, which did not receive any message and thus represents the population of Tbilisi’s views. In general, the public exhibits attitudes that are against vote buying behavior. Perhaps the only statements which people were ambivalent about were whether it is more acceptable for a poorer person to accept a gift in exchange for their vote as well as whether or not it is more acceptable to accept a gift in a poor country like Georgia.

Figure 10. Acceptance of various forms of electoral malfeasance (% , control group only)



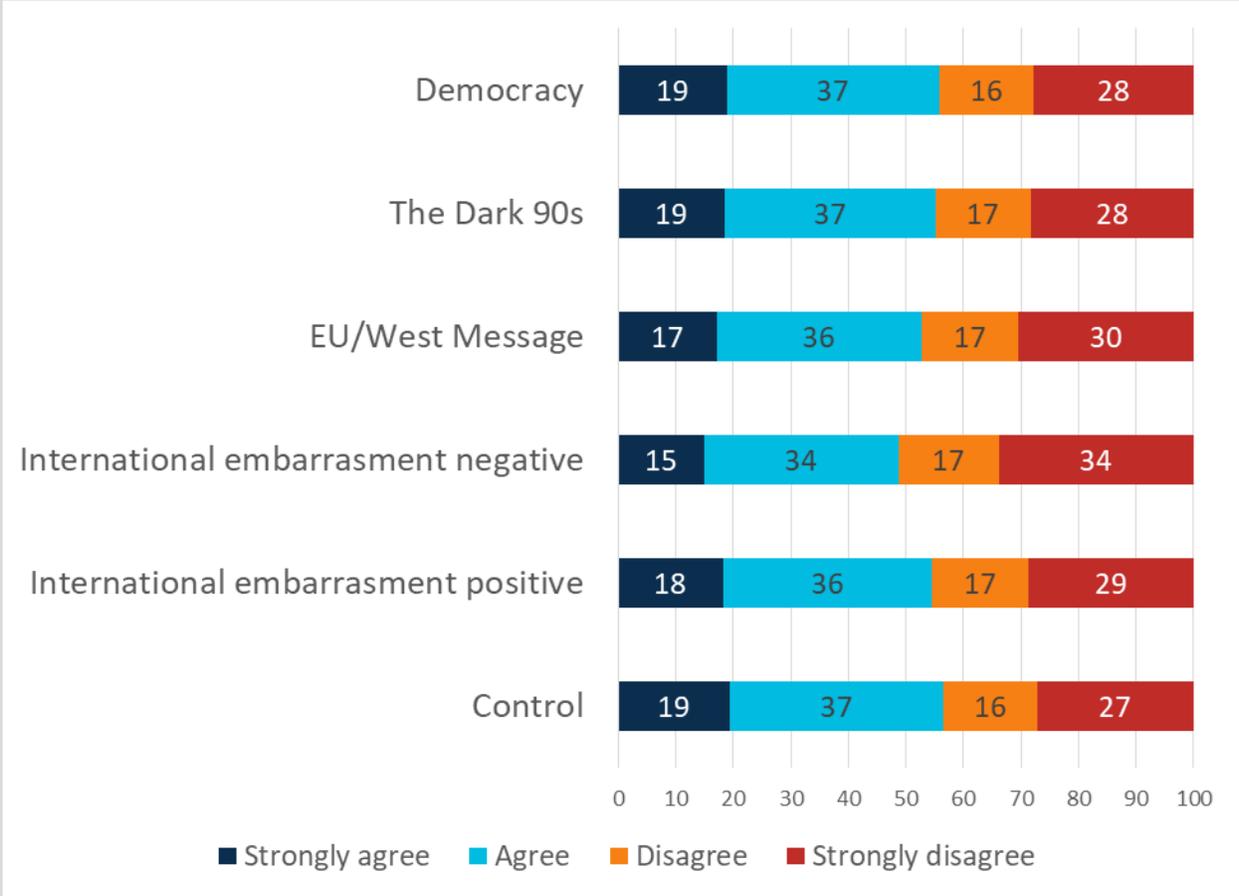
A regression looking at the effect of the different messages suggests a number of effects. For the first of the statements, "It is acceptable to accept a gift for your vote, because it won't affect the outcome of the election", the dark 90s and EU/West messages were most effective, resulting in nine percentage point increases in the share of the population reporting that they strongly disagree that it is acceptable to accept a gift for a vote, because it won't affect the outcome of the election. Aside from this, the negative international embarrassment message had a seven percentage point effect, significant at the 10% level.

Figure 11. Selling my vote won't affect the elections (predicted probabilities)



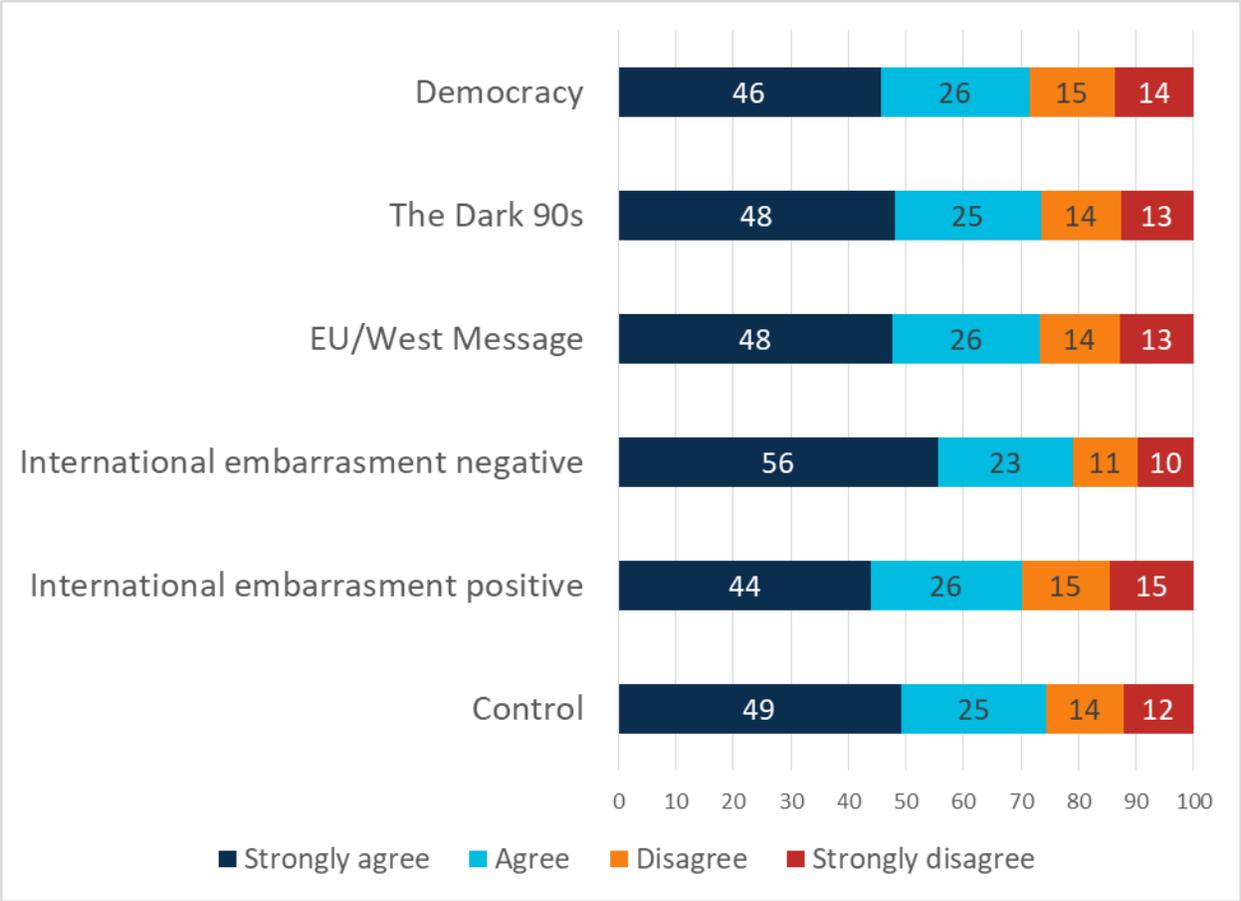
For the second statement, “In a poor country like Georgia, accepting a gift in exchange for voting in a certain way is to be expected”, the negative international embarrassment treatment was the only effective treatment. This message led to a seven percentage point increase in the share of people strongly disagreeing with the idea that accepting a gift in exchange for voting is to be expected.

Figure 12. More acceptable to sell your vote in a poor country like Georgia (predicted probabilities)



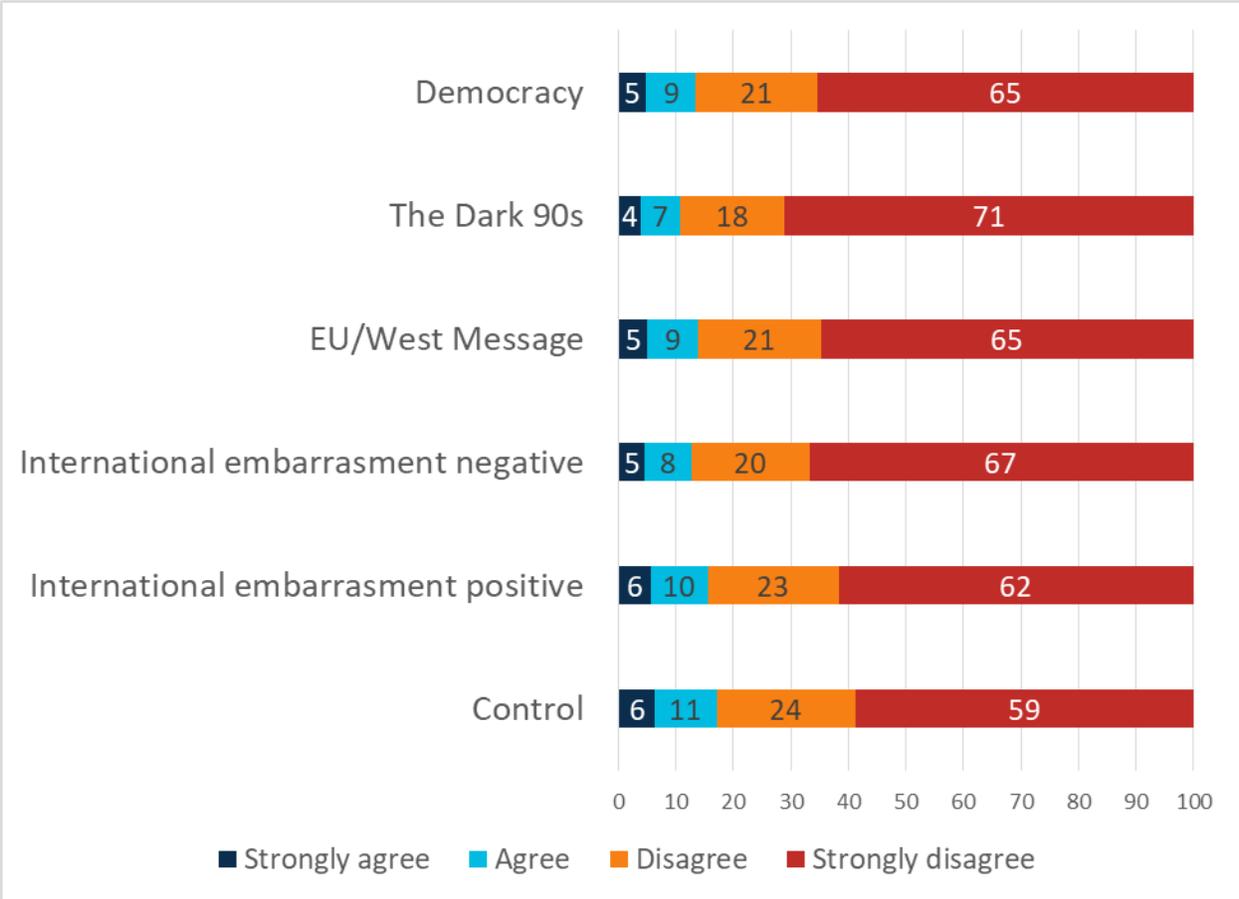
For the third statement, “People like me should report attempts at vote buying to the police, media, or NGOs if someone offers to buy my vote”, the only treatment that was effective was the negative international embarrassment message. This message was only significant at the 10% level ($p=0.072$). The treatment is associated with a seven percentage point increase in the share reporting that they strongly agree with this statement.

Figure 13. People like me should report vote buying (predicted probabilities)



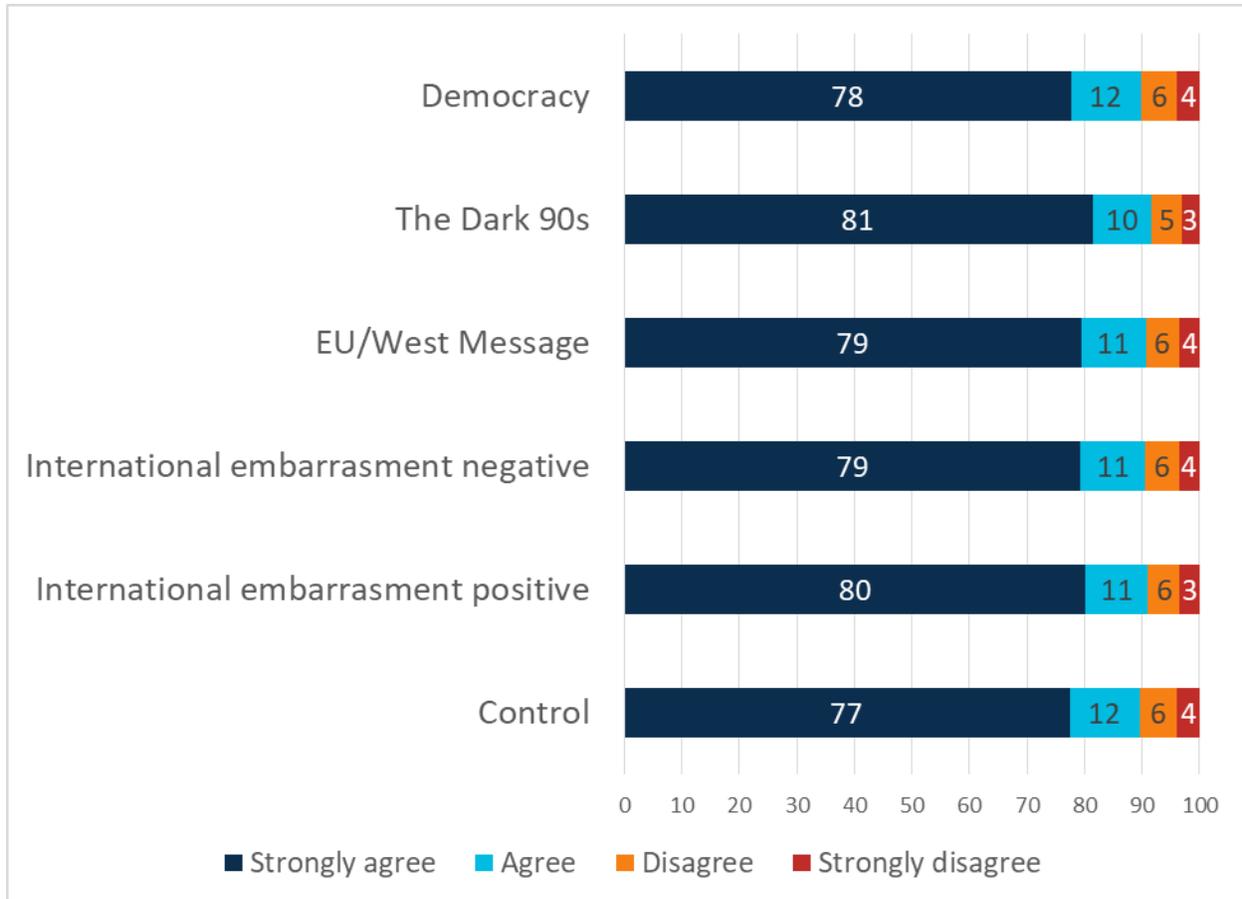
For the fourth statement, “It is hard to say no to an offer of a gift for a vote from a friend or community member”, the negative international embarrassment and dark 90s treatment were effective. The democracy treatment was also effective at the 10% significance level. The dark 90s treatment led to a 12 percentage point increase in the share of people strongly disagreeing with this statement. The negative international embarrassment statement led to an eight percentage point increase in the share strongly disagreeing with this statement. The democracy message is associated with a six percentage point increase in strongly disagreeing with the statement.

Figure 14. Hard to say no (predicted probabilities)



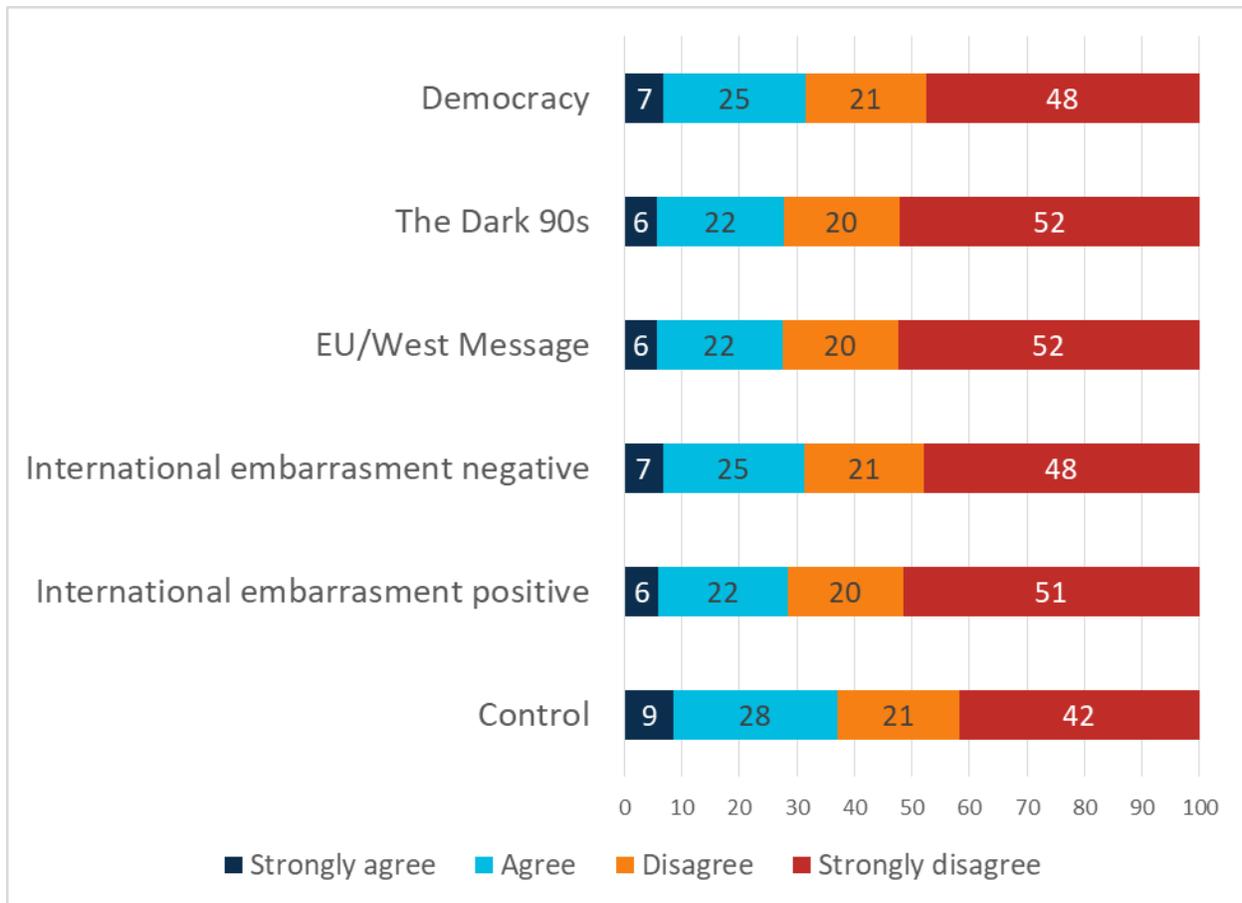
For the fifth statement, “It is wrong to accept a gift in exchange for a vote”, none of the treatments have a statistically significant effect on attitudes.

Figure 15. Wrong to accept a gift (predicted probabilities)



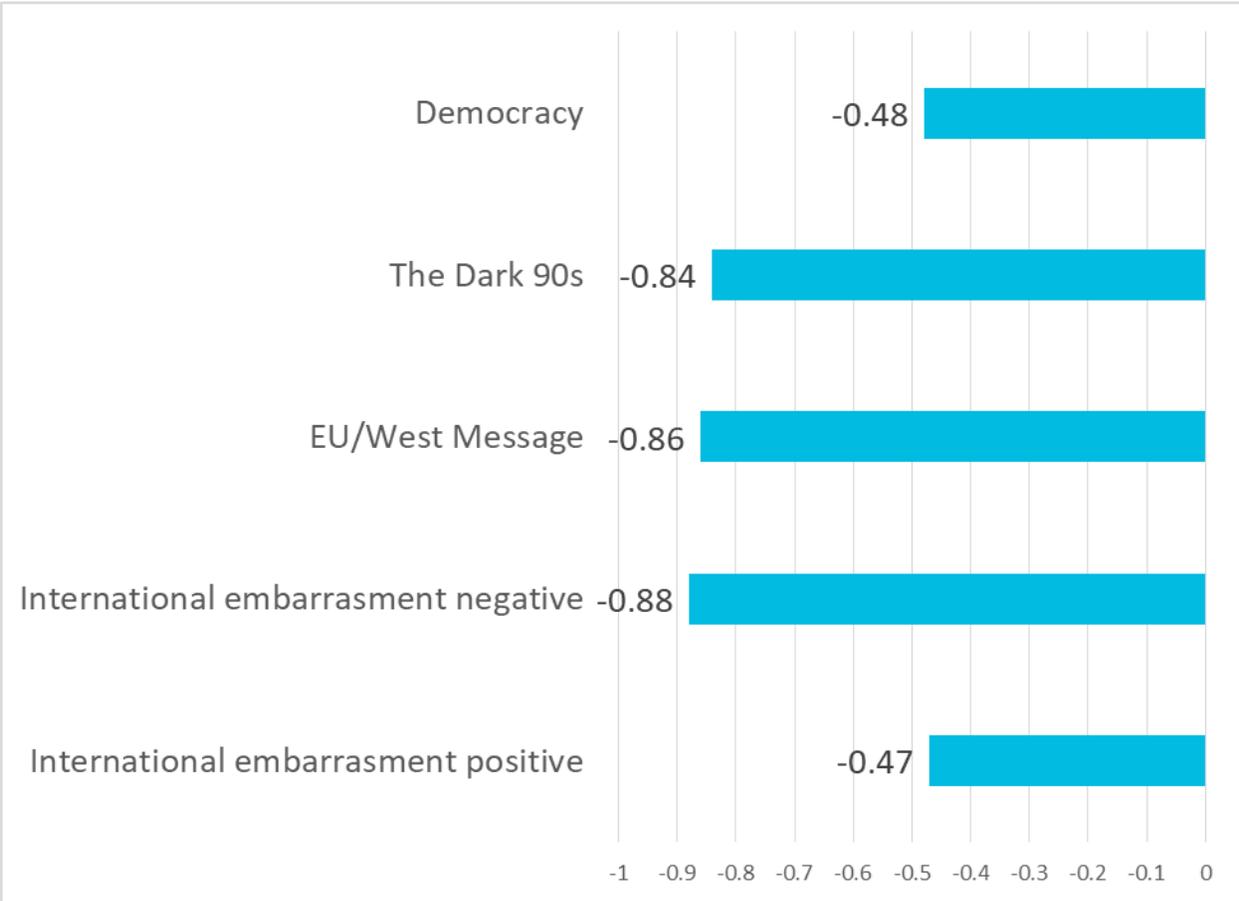
For the sixth statement, “It’s more acceptable to accept a gift for poorer people”, the dark 90s, EU/west message, and international embarrassment positive messages all had significant effects. The dark 90s and EU/West message are associated with a 10 percentage point increase in strong disagreement with the statement, while the positive international embarrassment message had a nine percentage point effect.

Figure 16. More acceptable for poorer people to accept a gift (predicted probabilities)



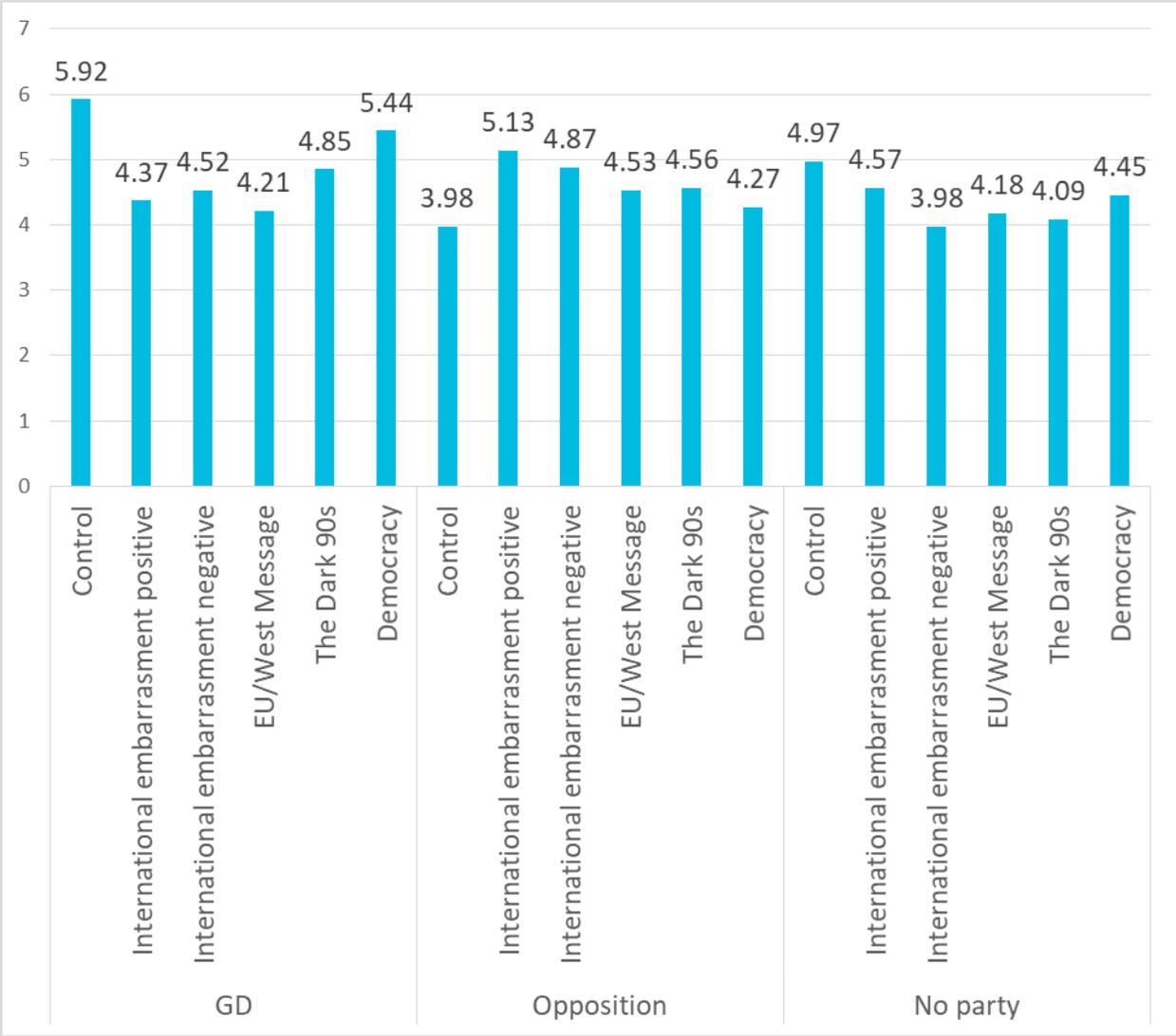
The above questions were combined into a simple additive index of vote buying acceptance, with items reverse coded as needed. The index varies from 0 to 18, with 0 meaning no acceptance of vote buying behavior and 18 meaning full acceptance of vote buying behavior. The mean and median scores on the index were 4. The data indicate that the dark 90s, EU/West, and negative international embarrassment messages had effects of close to 1 index point. The democracy and international embarrassment messages had half point effects that were significant at the 10% level.

Figure 17. Acceptance of vote buying index by treatment group (scale points)



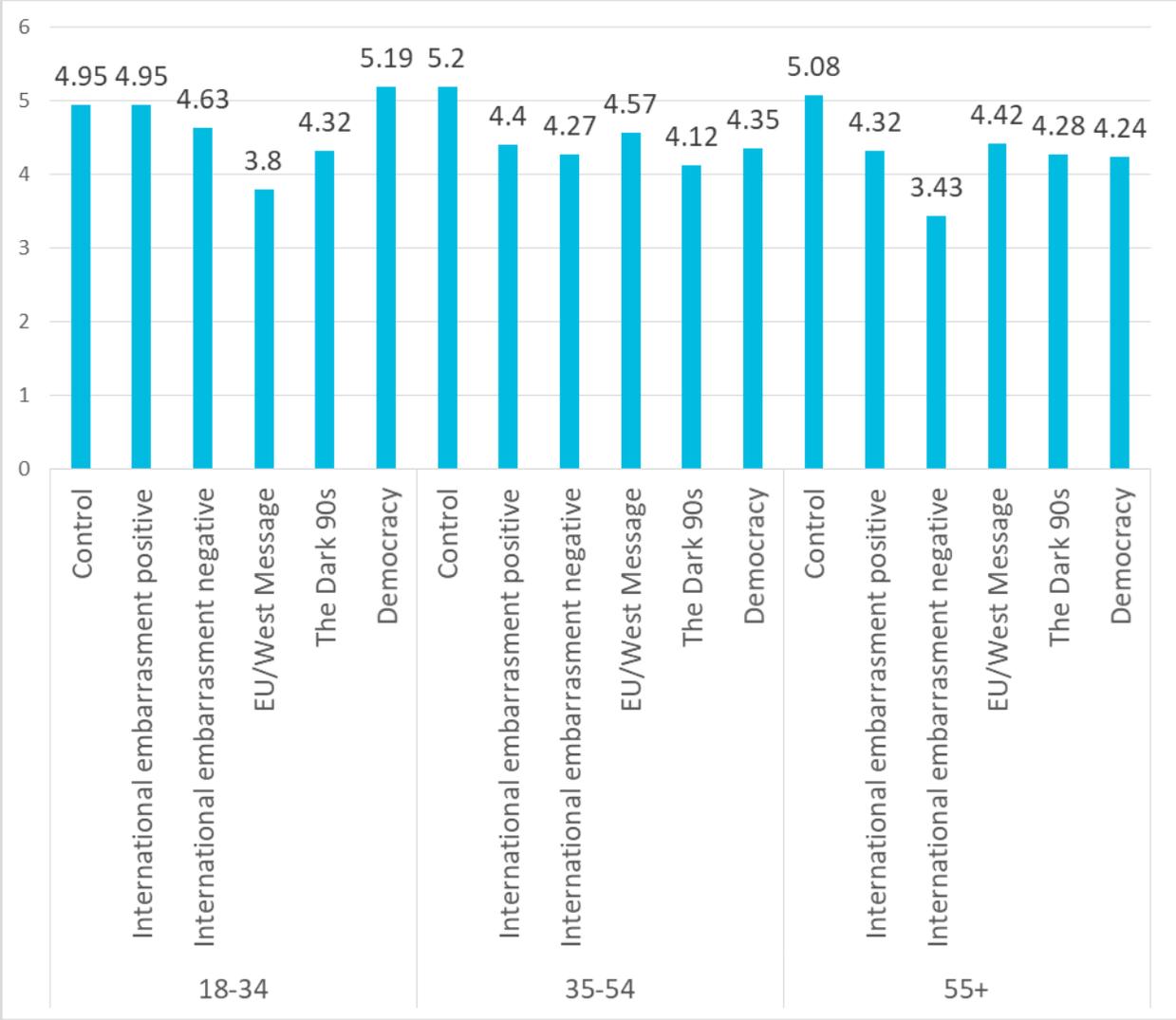
The effectiveness varied significantly for a number of groups. When the data is broken down by political party, the data suggest that opposition supporters have different reactions than supporters of GD and supporters of no party. They are significantly less likely to support vote buying generally. However, the international embarrassment messages makes them more accepting of vote buying.

Figure 18. Acceptance of vote buying index by social and demographic variables (predicted scores)



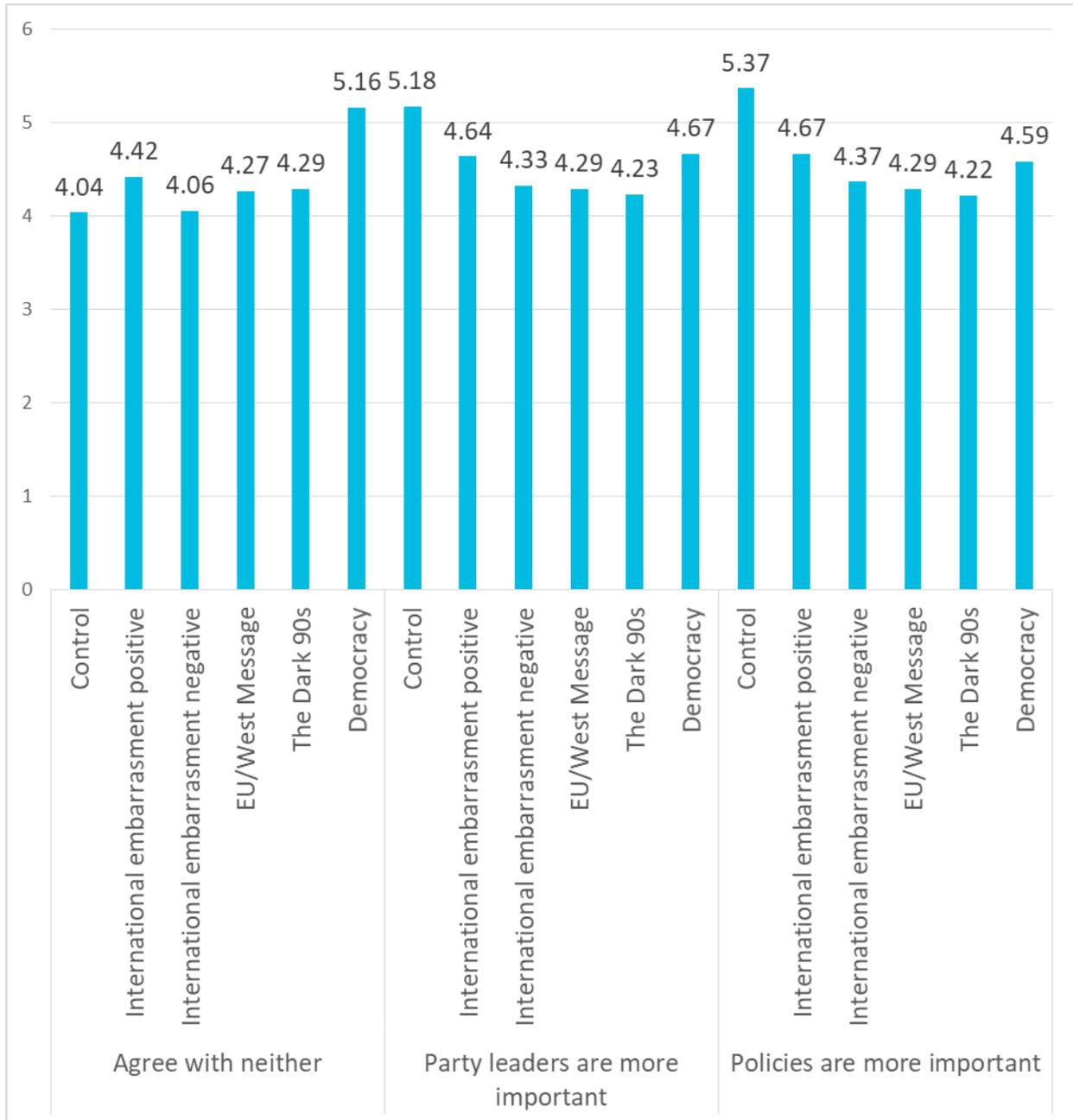
Older people are particularly affected by the negative international embarrassment treatment. Young people are particularly affected by the message about the West/EU. Otherwise, the treatment effects do not vary substantially between different age groups.

Figure 19. Vote buying acceptance index by age and treatment group (predicted scores)



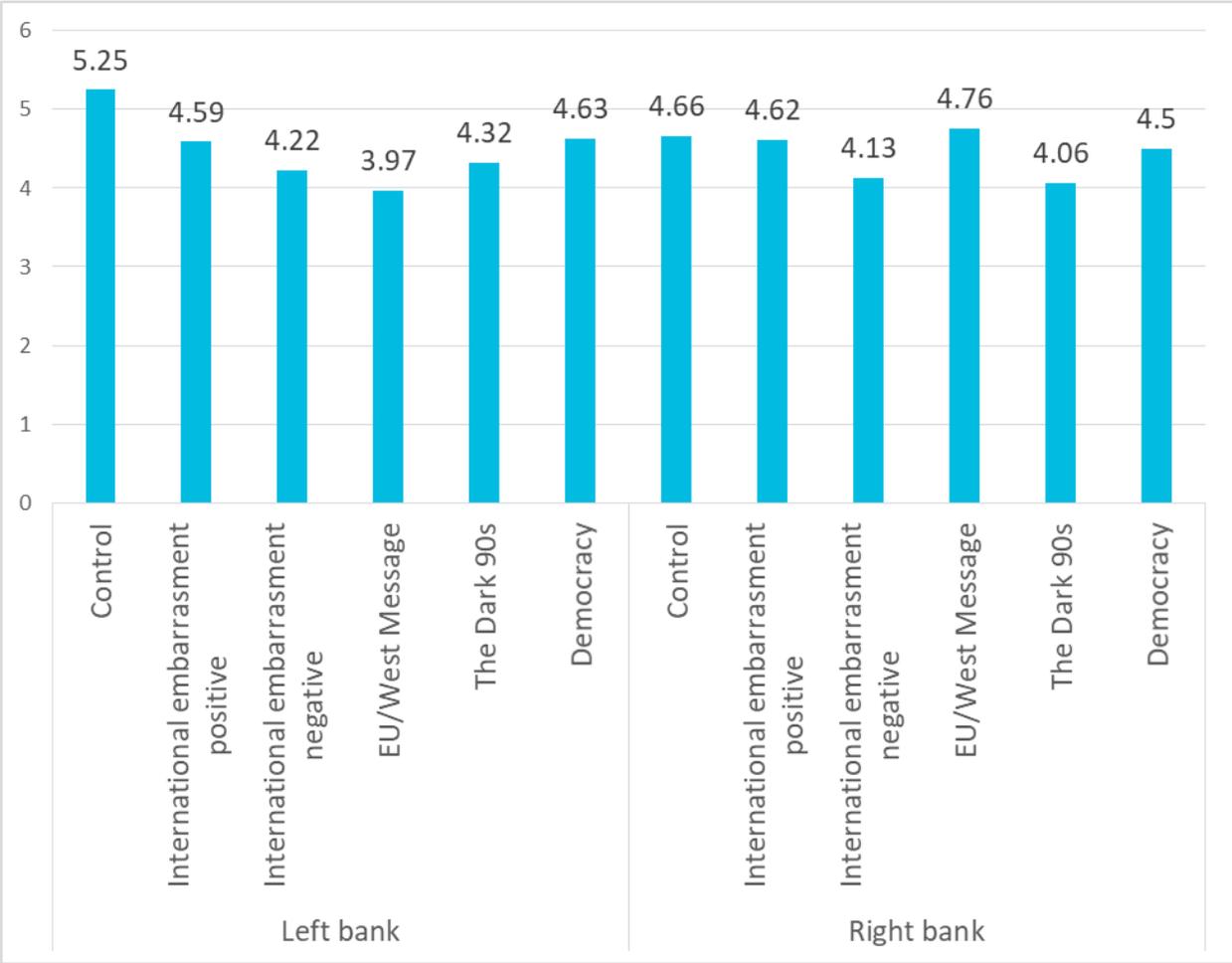
An analysis of how the treatments impacted people who felt that party policies were most important, personalities were most important, or neither suggests that people who agree with neither view were unaffected by the treatments. In contrast, people who felt that policies or personalities were important in deciding who to vote for had similar patterns as the general public in terms of being affected by the treatment.

Figure 20. Vote buying acceptance index by personality or policy voter and treatment group (predicted scores)



The data show some variation by whether people live on the left or right bank of Tbilisi. Specifically, people on the left bank responded most strongly to the EU/West message, while people on the right bank responded most strongly to the dark 90s message.

Figure 21. Vote buying acceptance index by location and treatment group (predicted scores)



The data showed no significant differences in terms of the treatment effects of the above messages between men and women, working and non working people, ethnic minorities and ethnic Georgians, wealthier and poorer households, and likely and unlikely voters.

Overall, the data indicate that prior to the elections, 20% of the public was willing to sell their vote. At the same time, expressed attitudes towards vote buying tended to be quite negative. The data show that the negative international embarrassment treatment tended to be most effective at decreasing vote buying intentions as well as moving attitudes towards vote buying.

FIELD EXPERIMENT FINDINGS

In line with the above analysis suggesting that there was a significant effect of negative international embarrassment, posters were delivered to 18,000 doorsteps to attempt to discourage voters from selling their votes. Following elections, voters were interviewed in both treatment and control groups.

How many people sold their votes?

As with the pre-electoral survey, the post-electoral survey included a list experiment which estimated the number of people who traded their votes for some concrete benefit. The list experiment does not have an estimate which is statistically different from 0. The point estimate is 9%, however, with a large confidence interval meaning that it cannot be conclusively estimated how many people exchanged their vote for a benefit during the elections.

Did the poster decrease the sale of votes?

The data suggest that the people in the treatment group were no more or less likely to sell their votes, though the data suggest a point estimate in the hypothesized direction. The point estimate is negative 15%. However, this estimate is not statistically significantly different from 0 (95% confidence interval is between -45% and +15.7%, with 74% of possible values suggesting declines in vote selling).

This data is hopeful, but by no means conclusive. It suggests that the poster may have had a positive effect on decreasing vote buying, but did not meet standard statistical criteria for doing so. This in turn calls for further research with a larger sample size to confirm or deny what the data indicates.

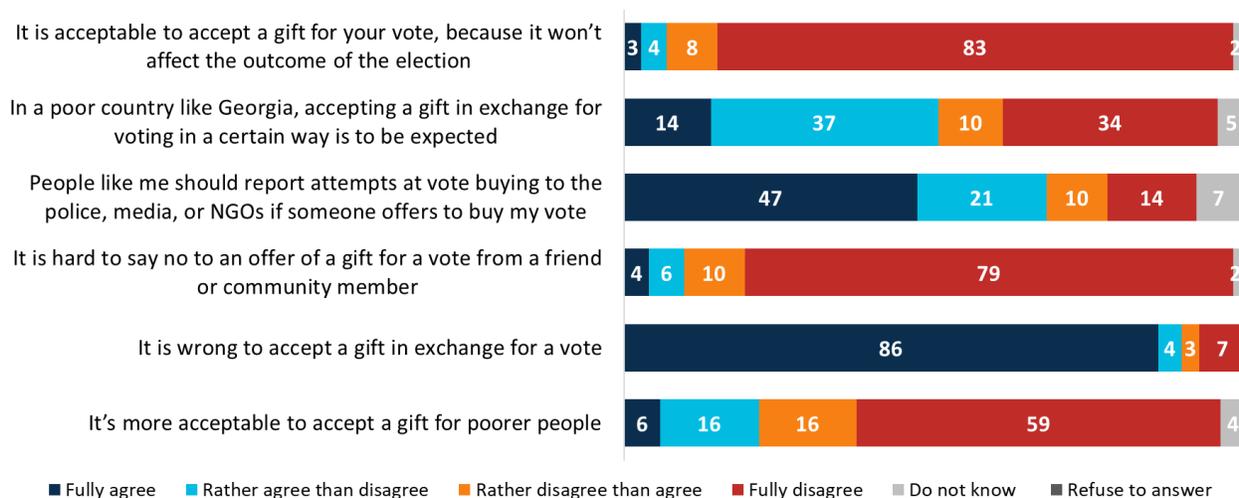
How did the posters affect attitudes towards electoral malfeasance?

Aside from testing whether the posters directly decreased vote selling behavior, the data also enable an understanding of whether the data changed attitudes about the issue significantly. There are two ways of estimating whether the posters successfully discouraged people from selling their votes. Specifically, the effect of the poster can be calculated for a) people who remember seeing the poster, which provides an estimate for the people who are most likely to have seen the poster (known as the treatment on the treated effect, TOT), and b) for all people within the treatment group (known as the intention to treat effect, ITT).

The former provides a measure of the efficacy of the poster at changing views, while the latter provides an estimate of the overall effect of the activity. Therefore, this section presents both estimates, first presenting the ITT estimates and second the TOT estimates.

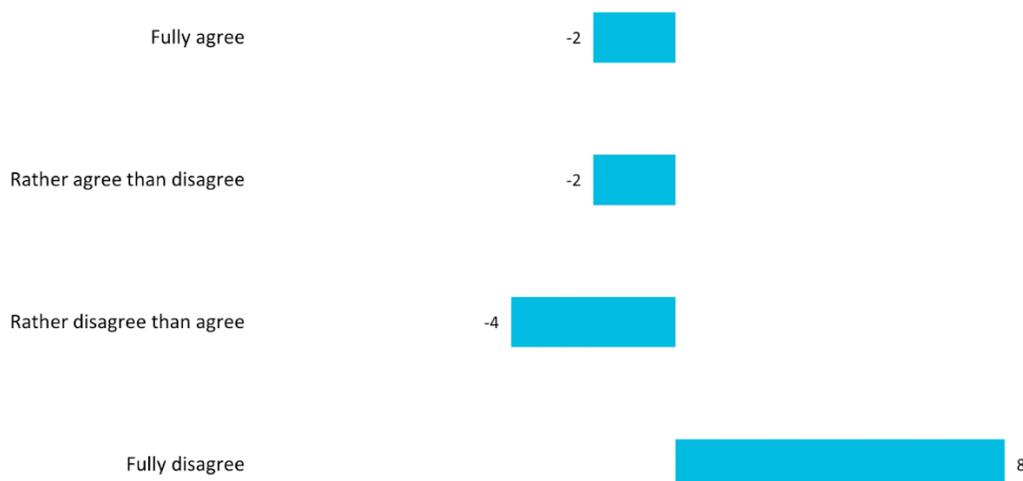
To measure attitude change the same questions were used as on the pre-electoral survey. The data for these issues are presented on the chart below for the control group, which did not receive any message and thus represent the population of Tbilisi’s views, without treatment.

Figure 22. Acceptance of various forms of electoral malfeasance (%)



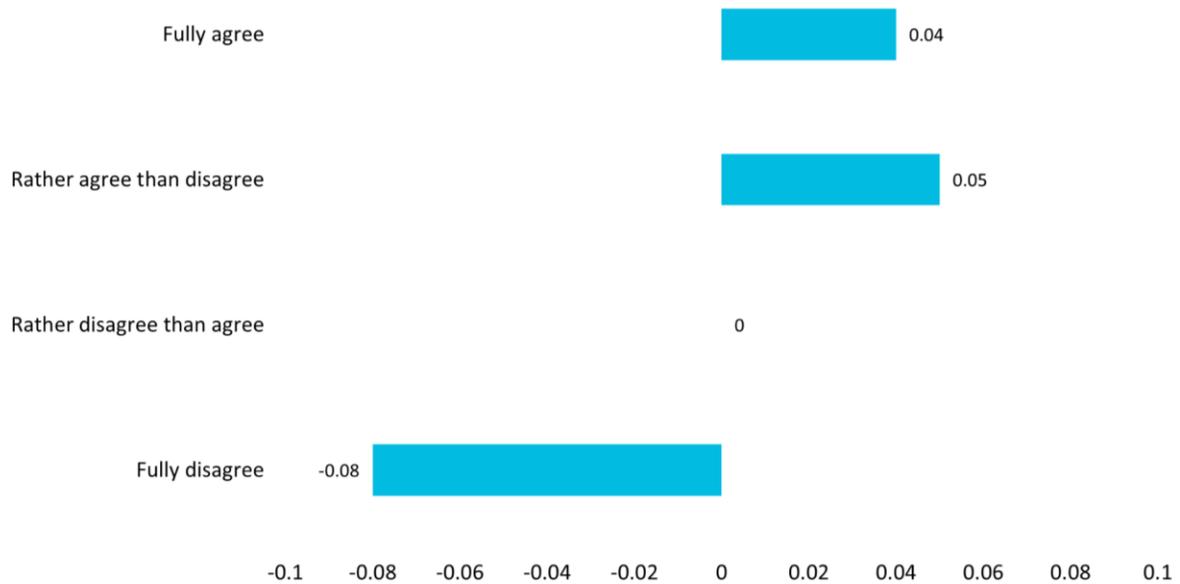
For the first statement, “It is acceptable to accept a gift for your vote, because it won’t affect the outcome of the election”, the ITT estimate suggests that there was no statistically significant effect.

Figure 23 Acceptable to accept a gift for vote because it won't affect the outcome of the election



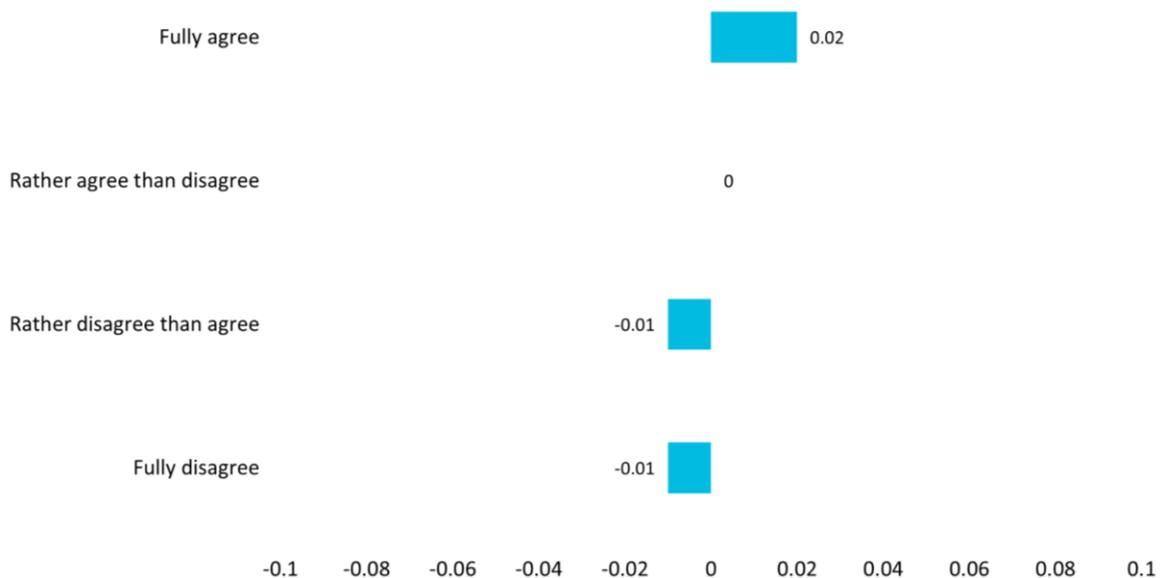
For the second statement, “In a poor country like Georgia, accepting a gift in exchange for voting in a certain way is to be expected”, the treatment was ineffective according to the ITT estimates.

Figure 24. More acceptable to sell your vote in a poor country like Georgia (marginal effects)



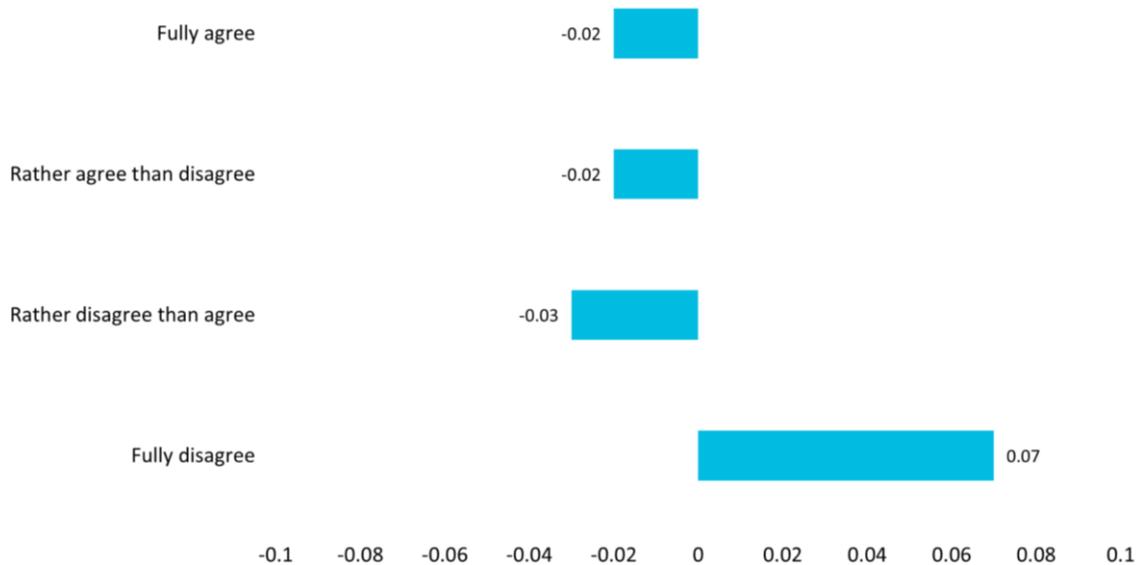
For the third statement, “People like me should report attempts at vote buying to the police, media, or NGOs if someone offers to buy my vote”, the ITT estimates suggest no significant effect. Similarly, there was no effect on any specific sub-group in the population.

Figure 25. People like me should report attempts at vote buying to the police, media, or NGOs if someone offers to buy my vote (marginal effects)



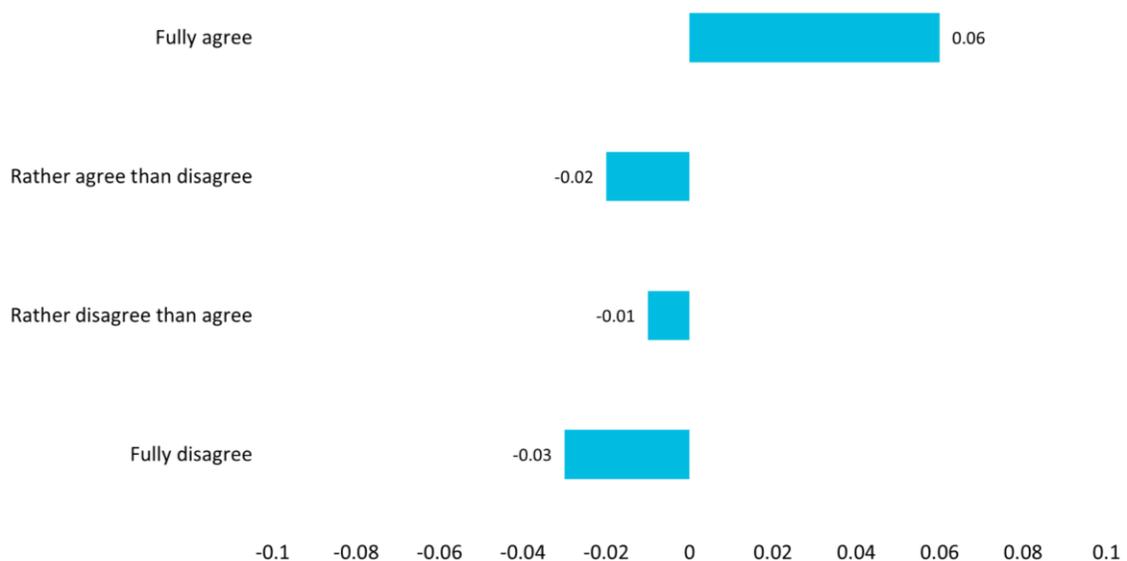
For the fourth statement, “It is hard to say no to an offer of a gift for a vote from a friend or community member”, the ITT estimate suggests that there was no effect of treatment. Similarly, there were no significant effects on sub-groups.

Figure 26. *It is hard to say no to an offer or a gift for a vote from a friend or community member (marginal effects)*



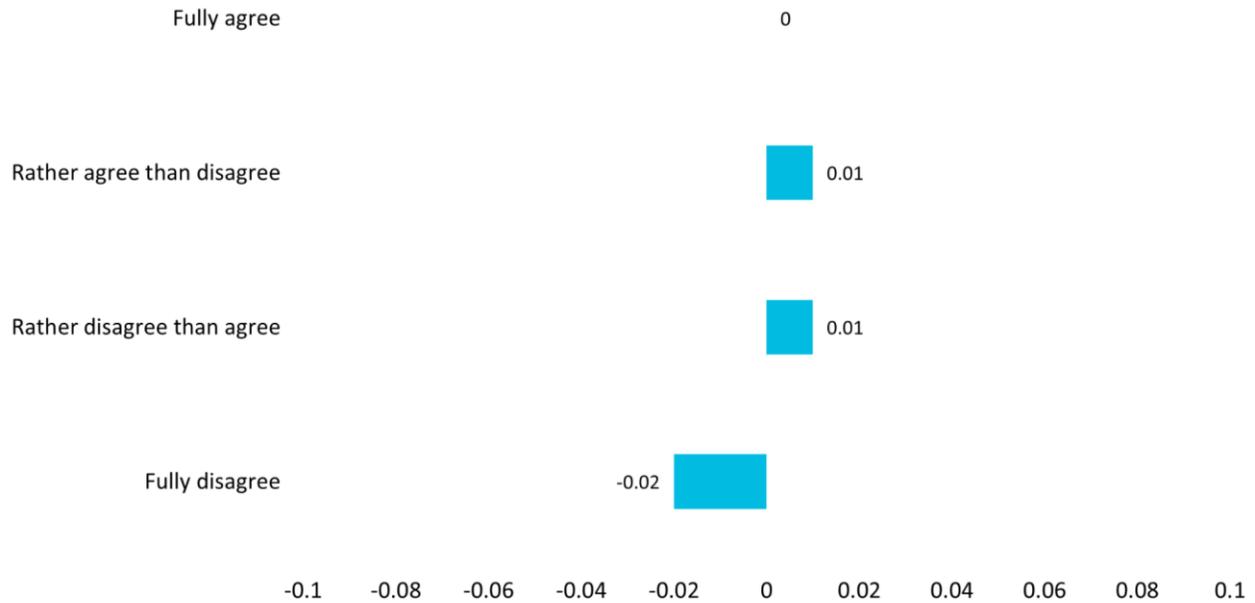
For the fifth statement, “It is wrong to accept a gift in exchange for a vote”, an ordered logistic regression looking at the effect of the poster on the entire treatment group suggests no statistically significant effect on the statement, despite the fact that the direction of the impact seems to be what it was expected.

Figure 27. *It is wrong to accept a gift in exchange for a vote (marginal effects)*



For the sixth statement, “It’s more acceptable to accept a gift for poorer people”, the treatment was ineffective according to the ITT estimates.

Figure 28. *It is more acceptable to accept a gift for poorer people (marginal effects)*



As for the respondents who remember seeing the poster, the poster had a statistically significant impact for the following statement only: "It is acceptable to accept a gift for your vote because it won't affect the outcome of the election". The TOT estimate suggests the effect of treatment stood at 0.48 points less likely to agree with the statement on a 4-point scale.

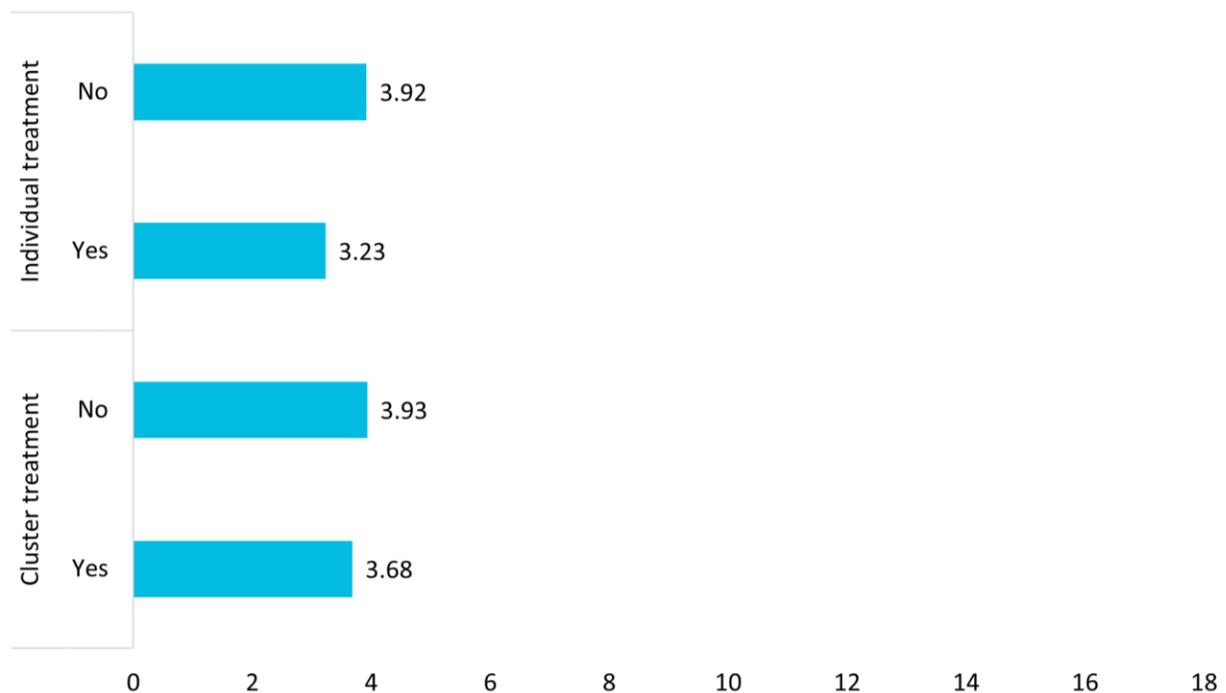
When it comes to the other five statements, the treatment was ineffective as suggested by the TOT estimates. However, the direction of the impact generally seems to be in line with the prior expectations.

Figure 29. Acceptance of vote buying, TOT effects (marginal effects)



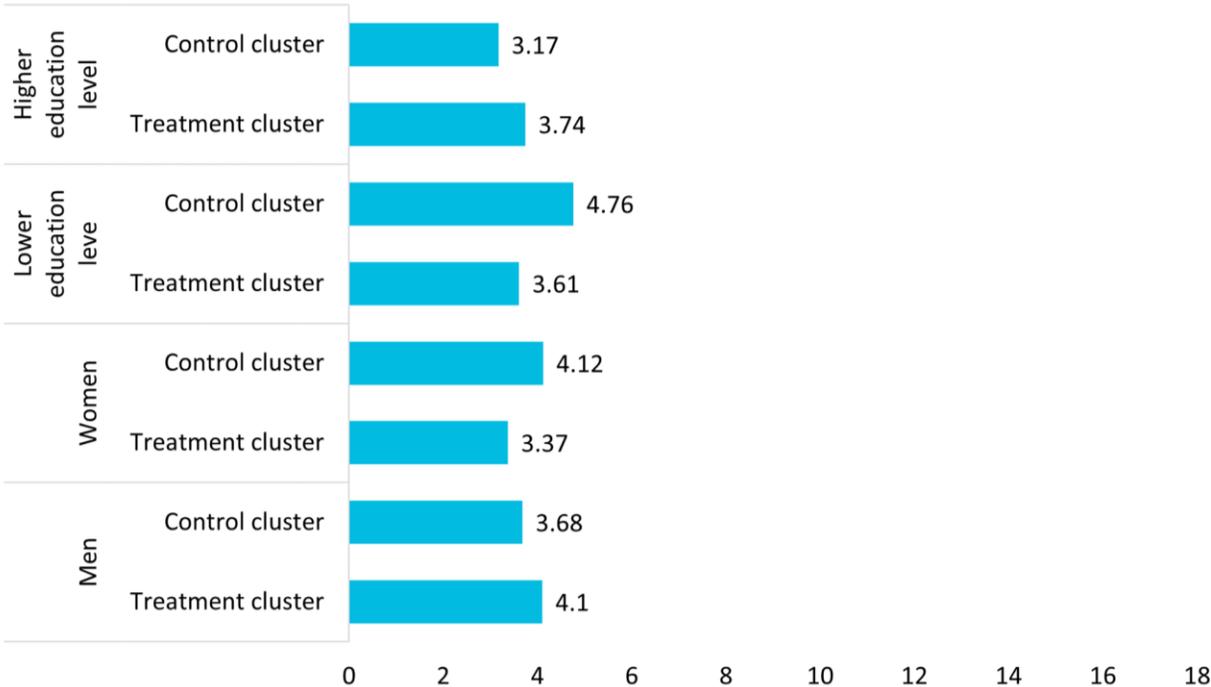
The above questions were combined into a simple additive index of vote buying acceptance, with items reverse coded as needed. The index varied from 0 to 18, with 0 implying no acceptance of vote buying practices at all and 18 indicating full acceptance of vote buying. The results suggest no treatment effect. Similarly, there was no effect of treatment when the treatment on the treated effect was calculated.

Figure 30. Acceptance of vote buying index by treatment group (predicted scores)



Despite the lack of overall effects, the treatment was effective for some groups. Specifically, the treatment worked for people with lower levels of education and women while having minimal impacts on people with higher education and men.

Figure 31. Acceptance of vote buying index by social and demographic variables (predicted scores)



The above data and analysis provides inconclusive results with regard to the poster’s effects. The data point towards decreased vote buying behavior, but do not meet conventional standards for statistical significance. At the same time, the data point towards limited changes in attitudes.

Did the posters have any side effects?

Unintended consequences are a well-known possibility with any kind of intervention, be they positive or negative. The data in the present study indicate that there were no side effects of the intervention on attitudes. People in the treatment group were not different from the control group in perceiving the elections as well-administered. Similarly, the treatment had no effect when it comes to assessments regarding the pre-election period. People in the treatment group did not hold different views than people in the control group in perceiving the pre-election period as fair for all the parties. The data suggest that there was no statistically significant effect of the posters on who people voted for. People in the treatment group or people who remember seeing the poster did not report whether they had heard of vote-buying at different rates.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The above data and analysis leads to a range of conclusions and recommendations about the electoral environment and for future efforts aimed at preventing vote buying in Georgia.

The study found that the public is divided over whether the elections were well administered. In this regard, there is a strong partisan division, with GD supporters tending to report that the elections were well administered, while others had less positive views. A similar pattern is present with regard to attitudes towards the electoral playing field.

The data from the pre-electoral survey suggested that up to a fifth of the population of Tbilisi was willing to exchange their vote for some personal benefit in the run up to the elections. Yet, several messages were effective in discouraging these attitudes. The most effective tended to suggest some form of international embarrassment, with these messages leading to in the realm of 30 percentage point declines in willingness to exchange one's vote for some material benefit.

The messages tested within the pre-electoral survey were also effective at changing attitudes towards the acceptance of vote buying. Negative international embarrassment, a reminder of the dark 90s, and messages about the incompatibility of vote buying and Georgia's Euro-atlantic integration all lead to relatively large declines in people's acceptance of vote buying.

Data from the field experiment estimates that approximately 9% of Tbilisians exchanged their vote for some benefit during the election, yet this estimate is not statistically significant. As a result, this estimate can be considered imprecise and not clearly larger than 0. The effect of the messages on the posters that were distributed as part of this study point towards a positive effect, but again remains inconclusive.

The results from the pre-electoral study taken together with the findings from the field experiment suggest a number of conclusions. Specifically, the point estimate of the effect of the poster is roughly half the effect of the estimate of the message on the survey. Respondents may have initially been discouraged by the message, but this effect could have lasted for a relatively short period. Furthermore, a poster is a relatively ineffective medium of message delivery. As a result, the medium of message delivery may have diluted the effect of the message. In this regard, organizations aiming to discourage voters from selling their votes should consider delivering messages:

- As close to elections as possible;
- Multiple times;
- Through multiple mediums (in this regard, face to face messaging is known to be most effective for most messages).

The above findings should be considered in light of the general survey findings. The survey data suggest that a large majority of Georgians disagree with vote buying practices in principle: 90% of Tbilisi residents fully or rather agree that it is wrong to accept a gift in exchange for a vote. However, approximately one in four (24%) disagree with the statement that people should report or disclose vote-buying attempts, and roughly one in five Tbilisi residents (22%) believe vote-buying is acceptable for poor people. While the analysis in the pre-electoral survey suggested that messaging was effective when respondents immediately heard the messaging, the field experiment data shows essentially no effect of the posters on attitudes.

The field experiment led to no observed unintended effects. People who remember seeing the poster, as well as people from the treatment clusters did not report significantly different attitudes on a wide range of attitudes related to the elections such as the fairness of elections, or the playing field during the pre-election period.

