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BULLETIN



DEMOCRATIC HYPOCRISY IN TBILISI

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ABOUT CRRC GEORGIA

CRRC-Georgia is a non-profit research organization which provides good data for public good. The organization's mission is to promote evidence-based discussions on pressing societal issues by producing reliable, up-to-date, and accessible data and analysis.

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DISCLAIMER

Data collection was conducted within a National Endowment for Democracy project focused on improving election quality in Georgia. The results do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Endowment for Democracy, CRRC Georgia, or any related entity.

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ABSTRACT

A newly emerging set of scholarship looks at democratic hypocrisy - the idea that people only support democratic norms if their party retains power. What literature exists suggests that this problem subsists across liberal and conservative parties. However, the literature has primarily focused on attitudes in developed democracies. This policy brief presents data on democratic hypocrisy in a hybrid regime. The study employs a survey experiment and suggests that democratic hypocrisy is present in the capital of Georgia.

INTRODUCTION

In an ideal world, electorates would punish parties for democracy-eroding actions, regardless of their partisan affiliation. However, data increasingly shows that in established and aspiring democracies alike, voters' views of anti-democratic policies is conditional on whether their preferred party is in power or not. This phenomenon is known as democratic hypocrisy, a term coined by McCoy, Simonovits, and Littvay.¹ This policy brief employs a survey experiment to test for democratic hypocrisy in Georgia as well as to gauge the electorate's support for anti-democratic policies, finding moderate support for anti-democratic policies that is conditioned on which party is in power.

In recent years, not only Georgia's electoral conduct but its commitment to a democratic path in general, has come increasingly under question. The Freedom House scores for the country have been in decline since 2018.² Other democracy-tracking indices, such as those conducted by V-Dem and The Economist, point to a similar deterioration in Georgia's democracy. More recently, the European Parliament has adopted a highly critical resolution concerning Georgia's democracy, emphasizing worsening standards of press freedom in the country, one of the pillars of democracy.³

Typically, those who are concerned with Georgia's democratic backsliding point to political elites as a decisive driver of the process. As a result, the demand side of the democratization equation, i.e. the electorate, receives significantly less attention.

In this context, this policy brief asks: do Georgian voters exhibit support for anti-democratic policies and is support for anti-democratic policy conditioned on who is in power? To address these research questions, data from a survey experiment conducted in Tbilisi in 2021 is used. The data suggests that Georgian voters exhibit democratic hypocrisy. Notably, the problem of support for democracy-eroding policies appears to be worse among supporters of the ruling party, however, hypocrisy is similarly spread among supporters of the ruling Georgian Dream and opposition alike.

This brief proceeds as follows. The paper first discusses the data collected and methods of data analysis. Next, the findings are presented in two subsections: support for anti-democratic policies in the public and democratic hypocrisy. The paper ends with a brief discussion conclusions and implications.

¹ Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay, 2022.

² Freedom House, 2022.

³ European Parliament, 2022.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection

To understand democratic hypocrisy in Georgia, a survey experiment was conducted. The survey was conducted in Tbilisi in October, 2021 and the sample size was 1254 respondents with 16.3% response rate.⁴ The sampling design was multi-stage stratified cluster sampling method with election precincts as primary sampling units. The poll is representative of adult population of Tbilisi. The survey mode was computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). For more information on sample composition, please, see Table 1.

Table 1. Sample description

Variable	Category	Raw numbers	Proportion in the sample	Weighted proportion in the sample
Sex	Men	385	31%	43%
	Women	869	69%	57%
Age	18-34	328	26%	35%
	35-54	384	31%	35%
	55+	542	43%	30%
Education	Secondary or lower	521	42%	48%
	Higher than secondary	733	58%	52%

⁴ The data used in this article is available [here](#).

Experimental design

In the survey experiment, respondents were randomly split into two groups. One group was asked to imagine that in the next parliamentary elections the current ruling party (GD) won and retained power while the other group was asked to imagine that GD went into opposition and the current opposition won in the next parliamentary elections. Subsequently, both groups were asked the same set of questions, in particular, whether or not they would support the following actions of the winning party:

- The winning party announces that they will initiate investigations of the sources of the financial backing of the losing party;
- The winning party announces that they will initiate investigations of the financing of opposition media;
- The winning party announces restrictions on protesting election results;
- The winning party announces restrictions on the use of exit polls in forthcoming elections;
- The winning party announces they will initiate constitutional changes without consulting the opposition;
- The winning party announces they will initiate election reforms without consulting the opposition;
- The winning party announces all leadership positions in the parliament will be filled by the winning party.
- The winning party announces that they will remove supporters of the opposition from government jobs;
- The winning party announces that they will expand surveillance operations on political opponents;
- The winning party announces that they will investigate NGO funding;

Data analysis

The study relies on univariate and multivariate statistical analyses. The analysis below compares the results of the questions above between three groups. These include:

- Respondents with no discernable party preference;
- Respondents who have been asked to imagine the party they support coming to power;
- Respondents who have been asked to imagine the party they do not support has come to power;

In Georgia, relatively few people are willing to report which party they support. In this regard, approximately half of respondents named no party, refused to answer, or said they did not know which party they supported on the survey. Knowing this would likely take place, the authors used a cumulative approach to build a variable of party affiliation and employed 3 measures of partisanship, including a) the party which respondents feel closest to, b) the party which the respondent reported voting for, and c) which television station the respondents reported trusting most. With regard to the final variable, the authors believe that it is a reasonable assumption that if a respondent reports they support no party, but that they name Imedi TV, Rustavi 2, Pirveli Arkhi (Public Broadcaster), Maestro TV, Adjara TV, or POST TV as the most trusted source on politics and ongoing affairs, then it is reasonable to assume that they would lean towards GD. On the other hand, for respondents who do not name a particular party but report Mtavari Arkhi, Formula TV, Kavkasia, Obiektivi, or TV Pirveli as the most trusted source of information, then it is sensible to suppose that they would lean towards the opposition. All respondents that could not be grouped into a party using these measures of partisanship are labeled as unaffiliated voters throughout the text.

Aside from analyzing these groups, the analysis also looks at what other social and demographic variables predict whether or not people support or do not support anti-democratic actions. To do so, it looks at the association between the following variables and support for anti-democratic actions.

The regression analyses explicitly control for 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);
- Employment status (working, not working);
- Education level (Tertiary or not).

The data presented in this study were also collected as part of a field experiment. The treatment groups within the field experiment are also controlled for in this analysis.

The replication code for the above analysis is available [here](#).

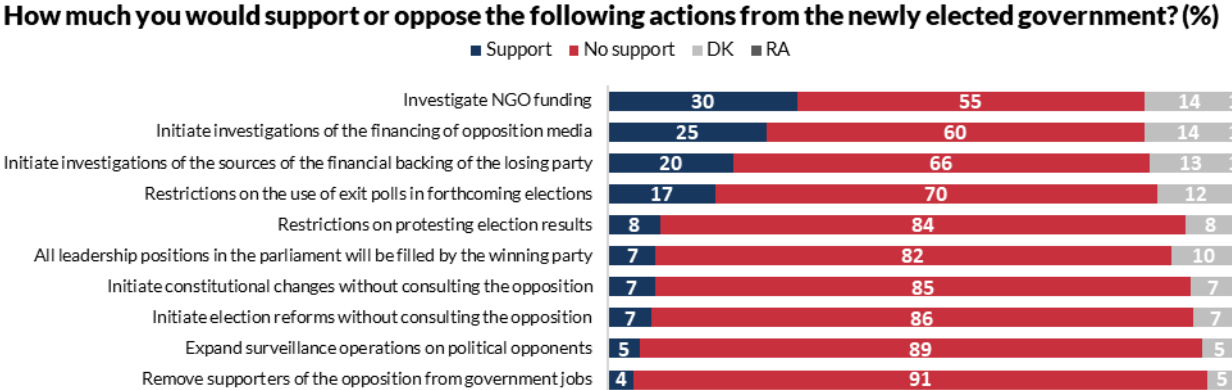
FINDINGS

Overall, the data indicate that there is relatively little support for the anti-democratic policies asked about on the survey. Yet, there is clear evidence of democratic hypocrisy in Tbilisi among political partisans.

Support for anti-democratic policies

For six out of ten questions asked about, less than 10% of the public reported they would support a given policy (Figure 1). However, approximately every third Tbilisi voter was relatively supportive of the newly formed government investigating the funding of NGOs. Every fourth Tbilisi voter was supportive of the newly formed government investigating the funding of the losing side’s media outlets. Every fifth Tbilisi voter supported the proposition that sources of financial support for the losing party to be investigated, and every sixth Tbilisi voter was supportive of the newly formed government restricting exit polls in forthcoming elections.

Figure 1. Support for anti-democratic policies



The above questions were merged into a simple additive index in order to better understand who supports and does not support anti-democratic actions, before taking into account the experimental treatment described within the study. The index ranged from 0, indicating no support for any of the listed non-democratic policies to 10, suggesting support for all the non-democratic policies. The mean score on the index was 1.4, suggesting that on average, Tbilisi voters are accepting of 1.4 of the above noted actions. People living on the left bank of Tbilisi, a relatively less affluent part of the city, support 0.9 more of these actions than people living on the right bank, all else equal. The data do not suggest any other significant differences in terms of support for the above, controlling for other social and demographic characteristics.

Democratic hypocrisy

As a result of the experimental treatment, 43% of Tbilisi voters ended up in the group where they were asked to imagine that their preferred party lost in upcoming parliamentary elections, 34% their favored party won, and the remaining 23% did not name a party, and therefore, ended up in the unaffiliated group.⁵

The data show clear evidence of democratic hypocrisy among the Tbilisi public. For seven out of ten listed actions, people with their co-partisans in power were significantly more supportive of anti-democratic policies than people with their favored party out of power.

People whose party was in power as a result of the hypothetical elections were 12 percentage points more likely to be in favor of initiating investigations of the financing of opposition media than people whose party was out of power as a result of hypothetical forthcoming elections.

Similarly, they were 10 percentage points more likely to report support for all leadership positions in parliament to be filled by the winning party and for the electoral code to be changed without consulting the new opposition.

People with co-partisans in power were nine percentage points more likely to report support for the ruling party to initiate constitutional changes without consulting the opposition.

⁵ The party support variable had three categories (supporters of the ruling party, supporters of the opposition, and voters without clear political preferences). This variable was created using three measures of partisanship, including a) the party which respondents feel closest to, b) the party which the respondent reported voting for, and c) which television station the respondents reported trusting most. If the respondent did not have any clear partisan preference on the basis of these, then the respondent is considered unaffiliated within this analysis. In the survey experiment, respondents were randomly split into two groups. One group was asked to imagine that in the next parliamentary elections the current ruling party (GD) won and retained power while the other group was asked to imagine that GD went into opposition and the current opposition won in the next parliamentary elections. These two variables were then used to create the treatment variable, which included three categories: a person's preferred party won, a person's preferred party lost elections, and the respondent did not have a party preference.

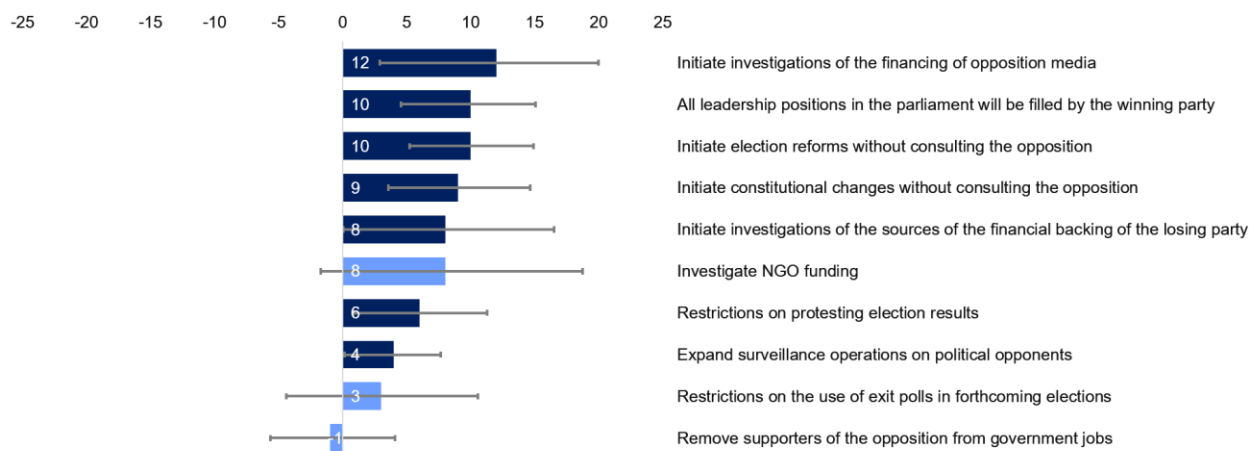
They were eight percentage points more likely to support the initiation of investigations of the sources of the financial backing of the losing party.

People whose favored party remained in power were six percentage points more likely to support restrictions on protesting the election results and they were four percentage points more likely to support the expansion of surveillance operations against political opponents.

Three policies asked about which did not show statistically significant differences were the introduction of restrictions on the use of exit polls in future elections, the investigation of NGO funding, and the removal of opposition supporters from government jobs.

Notably, throughout the analysis, respondents that did not support any party report similar attitudes to those whose favored party lost elections. This in turn suggests lower levels of support for anti-democratic policies among those who do not have partisan preferences in Georgia.

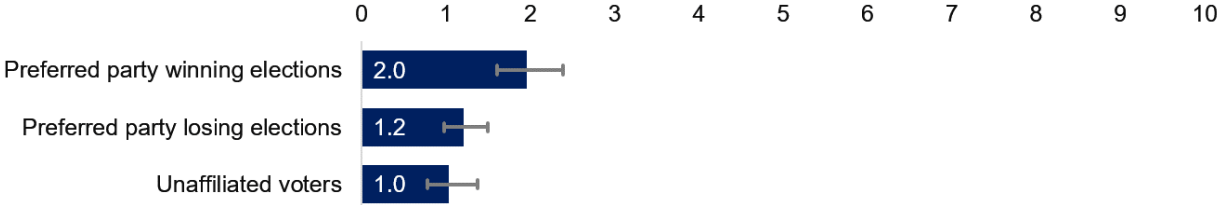
Figure 2. Marginal effect of preferred party winning elections as opposed to preferred party losing elections (percentage points)



NOTE: Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals

To further explore the above data, the above-mentioned additive index (0-10) was used. The data was then explored based on whether their preferred party had won or lost the elections. The results suggest that on average, Tbilisi voters with their preferred party in power would support 0.8 additional action from the above list in comparison to Tbilisi voters with their co-partisans out of power and one additional action in comparison to people without any favored party (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Predicted scores on the index



NOTE: Error bars denote 95% confidence intervals. The index ranges from 0, indicating no support for any of the listed non-democratic policies to 10, suggesting support for all the non-democratic policies.

The effect demonstrated in the above index does not vary significantly by education level, employment status, household wealth, IDP status, ethnicity, sex, geographic area of Tbilisi, or age group. Nor does the effect vary significantly by the party which respondents support.

The above results in turn suggest that democratic hypocrisy is widespread among partisans in Tbilisi, no matter their different social, economic, or political statuses.

CONCLUSIONS

Amid the deteriorating quality of Georgia's already fragile democracy, this policy brief examined the presence of democratic hypocrisy among Georgian voters, i.e. whether or not there is greater public support for democracy-eroding policies when a favored party is in power. Although the public in general tends to disapprove of non-democratic policies, the findings indicate a considerable degree of democratic hypocrisy among Georgian public: voters residing in the capital of Georgia heavily condition their support for non-democratic policies on party affiliation.

The problem of support for democracy-eroding policies appears to be worse among supporters of the ruling party, but the problem of holding hypocritical attitudes around democracy holds true for opposition supporters as well as supporters of the ruling party. Supporters of both parties are statistically indistinguishable in terms of the rates at which they harbor democratic hypocrisy.

The findings have a number of implications; first and foremost, political parties which ideally should be one of the main drivers of the political socialization of the electorate, seem to have failed in terms of equipping (at least) their supporters with democratic values and principles which would not be conditioned on a party in power.

Moreover, the findings once again underline that the protracted democratization process in Georgia is not only due to the supply side of the equation. The fact that a large part of the public in the capital, where most resources are concentrated, exhibits hypocritical attitudes toward democracy suggests that there is a fertile ground in Georgia for anti-democratic forces to flourish.

Finally, this study complements previous research in demonstrating that democratic hypocrisy is present not only in developed democracies with a highly polarized public-policy environment, but in hybrid regimes as well in which polarization is not manifested through diverging policy alternatives.

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