



PUBLIC OPINION IN GEORGIA: NEW CAUCASUS BAROMETER RESULTS

Special Editor: Koba Turmanidze (CRRC-Georgia)

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Introduction by the Special Editor

Good survey data is like vintage wine: its value only increases with age. Like aged wine, data often leaves a pleasing aftertaste when studying people's attitudes and opinions around transformative events. The Caucasus Barometer, the largest publicly available longitudinal survey in the South Caucasus, has already witnessed several transformative events of regional importance: the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, electoral change of political power in Georgia in 2012, the Four-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2016, and Armenia's Velvet Revolution of 2018. Next year the Barometer will help to analyze the impact of arguably the most important global event of the century, the Covid-19 pandemic.

The three articles in the current Caucasus Analytical Digest use the Caucasus Barometer 2019 data to look at people's attitudes towards conflict, democracy, and religion in Georgia. At the same time, the contributions describe baseline conditions of public opinion before it is affected by the economic, political, and social consequences of the pandemic. Hence, while the contributions are remarkable in terms of analytical depth and transparency, their findings are likely to acquire novel implications as post-Covid-19 waves of the Caucasus Barometer are released.

In the first paper, David Sichinava discusses the evolution of people's attitudes towards conflict resolution in Georgia. The author shows that overall positive attitudes to a compromise solution to the conflict (a confederation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia) have increased over time. Nevertheless, the 2008 war and subsequent borderization in South Ossetia have significantly shaped attitudes of the population most affected by the conflict: while geographic proximity to South Ossetia is related to a lower likelihood of compromise acceptance, living closer to Abkhazia has the opposite effect.

In the second paper, Rati Shubladze and Tamar Khoshtaria analyze trends and inconsistencies in popular support for democracy in Georgia. While a plurality of the population still believes that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government," this attitude has been on the decline since 2012. Moreover, the authors show that support for democracy is more fashionable than signaling deep-seated conviction: people who regard democracy as the superior mode of government are not necessarily more tolerant towards minorities or more respectful of gender equality than people who do not.

In the third paper Dustin Gilbreath tackles the trajectory of trust in the most trusted institution in the country, the Orthodox Church of Georgia. The article shows that while still very high, trust in the Orthodox church has declined over the last decade. Utilizing the lucky coincidence of a highly publicized scandal inside the church and the fieldwork of the 2019 Barometer, the author elegantly demonstrates that such scandals shake people's trust to this institution, especially among believers.

It is hardly possible to predict the effect or direction of the Covid-19 pandemic on public opinion regarding conflict, democracy, and religion. Still, some possible trends are already being discussed. For example, researchers forecast that the pandemic will likely become a double-edged sword for people most affected by conflicts: on the one hand, resources available for conflict mitigation are expected to shrink; on the other hand, scarcity of resources against the deadly virus may push conflicting sides to jointly solve economic, social, and health problems (ICG 2020a). Some new trends are already visible in Georgia's breakaway regions: scarce resources and weak institutions have pushed Abkhazia to cooperate with international organizations on Covid-19-related matters, while South Ossetia seems to favor even deeper isolation from the outside world (ICG 2020b).

Current surveys of public opinion show that in many countries people's assessment of government performance in handling Covid-19 is largely positive (GQR 2020). While good performers fully deserve public appreciation, including the Georgian authorities, (United Nations Georgia 2020) it remains to be seen whether Georgia's ruling party will resist the temptation of using the crisis to consolidate its power through restricting political competition. This is not an unlikely scenario, since the ruling Georgian Dream party has been trying to keep the electoral system advantageous for the incumbent longer than it had committed to (Civil.ge 2020, RFE/RL 2020).

The Church and the state have been of two minds regarding how to handle public affairs in the country (Minesashvili 2017). The pandemic exacerbated this rivalry to the point that the church refused to comply with the emergency rules introduced by the state. Despite facing the danger of spreading the deadly virus among its faithful and beyond, the church refused to close churches open for the populous Easter services at the height of the Covid-19 panic, and even continued the traditional practice of serving communion with a common spoon (Kandelaki 2020).

Future research should examine whether the expected trends regarding conflicts, democratic development and religious matters are reflected in public opinion. The Caucasus Barometer 2021, among many other research efforts in the country, will help to find answers to these and many other questions.

Koba Turmanidze, President of CRRC-Georgia

Please see overleaf for references.

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How Far is Too Far? Public Opinion on Conflict Resolution in Georgia

By David Sichinava (CRRC-Georgia)

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Abstract

This article looks at how public opinion regarding the peace processes between Georgia and its two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have changed over the past few decades. Research has shown that Georgian citizens overwhelmingly oppose the idea of these breakaway regions obtaining sovereignty or becoming a part of neighboring Russia, in any form. Still, decades of frozen conflict have also caused many to concede that there is a need for new approaches to how Georgia can co-exist with its breakaway regions into the future. If certain political conditions are met, Georgians seem supportive of a quasi-federal solutions, or are at least open to compromise.

Introduction

Starting in 1989 as sporadic armed clashes (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004a, 2004b) between Georgians and Abkhaz/South Ossetian irregulars, Georgia's ethnic conflicts turned into full scale military conflicts at the beginning of the 1990s. Violence would erupt periodically in the following decades, as happened, for instance, in the case of the Small War of 1998 in the Gali region (Анчабадзе, 2010), in Summer 2004 in South Ossetia, and most notably in August 2008. Since then, all sides have maintained a fragile peace. Yet, peace is often compromised due to ambiguous borders (Toal and Merabishvili, 2019) and occasional violent incidents (OC-Media, 2018).

In search of a way out, over the past three decades dozens of initiatives have been brought to the table (ცინისთავი-ხუციშვილი, 2014). The details of these proposals varied greatly and touched upon the humanitarian, political, and demographic aspects of the conflicts, although none has led to a break in the stalemate. Since the late 2000s, as talks on the future status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have become virtually impossible (De Waal, 2018), the process has been effectively frozen.

As political uncertainty on Georgia's conflict regions is virtually certain, it is important to explore how people perceive the paths out of the deadlock. To date, relatively little is known about Georgians' attitudes towards conflict resolution. This text tries to fill this void by evaluating how public opinion on Georgia's conflicts has changed over the last two decades. I will first analyze the changes in public opinion regarding the models of conflict resolution; I will then delve deeper into the results of the 2019 Caucasus Barometer results and analyze the factors predicting Georgians' readiness for a compromise.

Models of Conflict Resolution

How do Georgians feel about secessionist conflict in their country? Existing research reveals that, for many Georgians, territorial integrity is often inextricably linked with the resolution of conflict. In local public opinion polls, for exam-

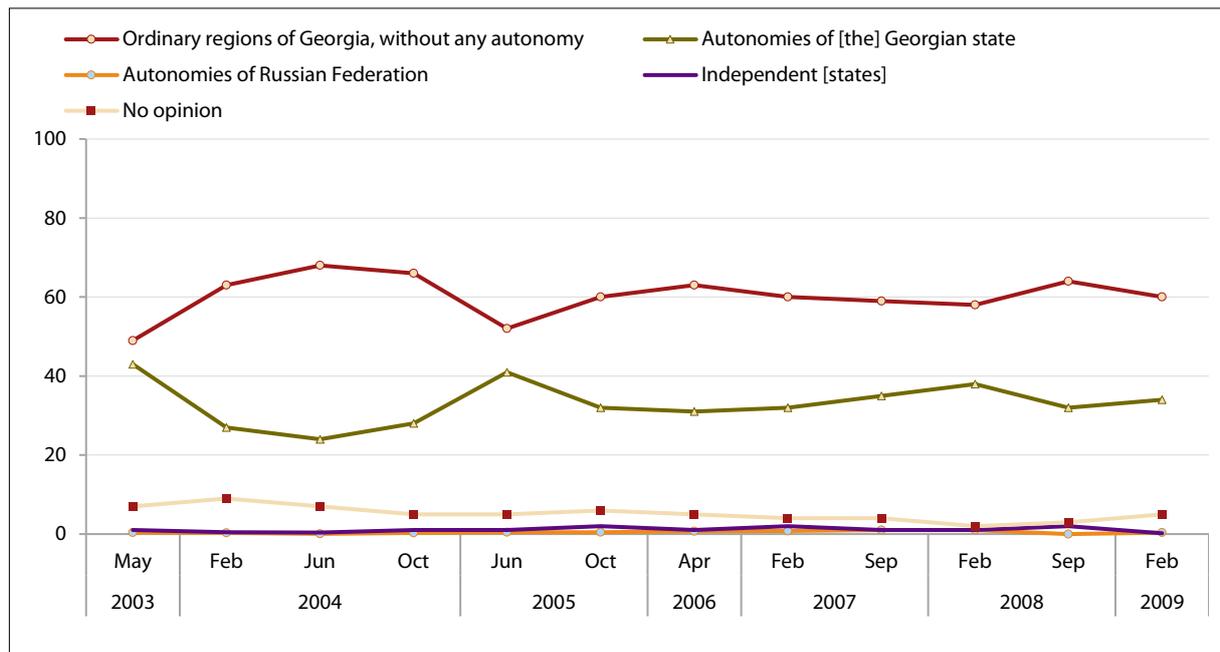
ple, the issue of territorial integrity has been consistently ranked among the most salient problems faced by Georgia (Thornton and Turmanidze, 2019). Along similar lines, it is the only non-economic issue highlighted as a top concern for Georgians in the Caucasus Resource Research Centre / National Democratic Institute's (CRRC/NDI) public opinion research conducted between 2009–2019.

While the issue of territorial integrity remains a top concern for Georgian citizens, the research also shows that over the years the salience of the issue has been declining. In 2009, for example, when CRRC and NDI first started measuring the Georgian public opinion, about 49% picked territorial integrity as the top national issue, next to employment. A decade after, in 2019, only 29% picked territorial integrity as an important problem, the issue having been overtaken in importance by rising prices, inflation, and poverty.

Despite this decline, territorial integrity continues to have salience for Georgians. More therefore needs to be known about exactly how Georgians perceive things like conflict, the country's relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the potential ways out of conflict—existing data for which remains relatively scant and fragmented.

One useful source for evaluating how Georgian attitudes towards conflict resolution have changed over time are nationwide polls conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI). Since this poll's launch in May 2003, at least twelve annual waves of IRI surveys have asked Georgians what they perceive to be a solution to the conflict— independence, incorporation, or autonomy (International Republican Institute, 2009). The result has been a valuable source of data on the topic.

Figure 1: Proportion of Georgians Preferring Various Models of Conflict Resolution, 2003–2009
Abkhazia and South Ossetia Should Be... (%)



	2003	2004				2005		2006	2007			2008		2009
	May	Feb.	Jun.	Oct.	Jun.	Oct.	Apr.	Feb.	Sept.	Feb.	Sept.	Feb.	Feb.	
Ordinary regions of Georgia, without any autonomy	49	63	68	66	52	60	63	60	59	58	64	60	60	
Autonomies of [the] Georgian state	43	27	24	28	41	32	31	32	35	38	32	34	34	
Autonomies of Russian Federation	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.8	1	1	0	0.4	0.4	
Independent [states]	1	0.5	0.4	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	0.2	0.2	
No opinion	7	9	7	5	5	6	5	4	4	2	3	5	5	

Source: IRI/Baltic Surveys, 2003–2009

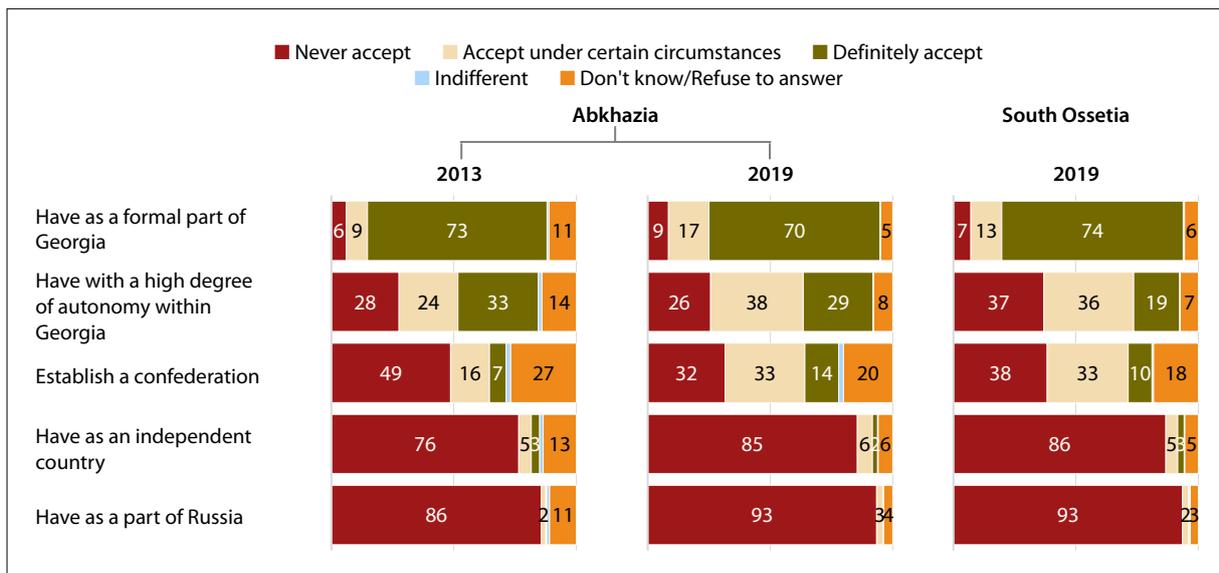
Specifically, between 2003 and 2009, IRI surveys probed Georgian attitudes towards the unresolved political status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Respondents had the option to choose between whether Abkhazia and South Ossetia should remain: non-autonomous regions of Georgia, autonomous entities inside Georgia, autonomies of the Russian Federation, or to become their own independent states.

At the beginning of the survey period in May 2003, about 49% of Georgians preferred there being no special status for the breakaway regions. By February 2009, however, the portion of those preferring no special status had increased to 60%, showing an increase in Georgian desires to see the country reunified. Over this six-year polling period, the share of respondents desiring direct incorporation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia without any autonomy grew by ten percentage points. During this same period, support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia becoming autonomous entities inside Georgia declined by nine percentage points. In the first wave of the IRI survey from 2003, 43% of respondents supported autonomous status for the breakaway regions, while only 34% demonstrated this support in 2009.

Interestingly, support for autonomous status decreased right after the 2003 Rose Revolution. Starting from 2004, support for the unitary solution to Georgia’s conflicts increased rapidly and peaked at 68% in June 2004. The share of those who supported the idea of granting autonomy to Abkhazia and South Ossetia declined to 24%.

As of 2009, IRI ceased to survey Georgian citizens regarding secessionist conflict and the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The CRRC’s Caucasus Barometer surveys from 2013 to the present thus remain the only publicly available source of information on Georgian public opinion regarding the issue. While the results of the Caucasus Barometer are not directly comparable to those of IRI, they still give a glimpse into the evolution of conflict-related public opinion in Georgia.

Figure 2: Proportion of Georgians Preferring Various Models of Conflict Resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 2013–2019



Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer, 2013–2019

The 2013 and 2019 Caucasus Barometer surveys asked respondents the extent to which they supported particular options for conflict resolution in Georgia. In a series of questions, respondents were probed whether they: definitely favored, would accept under certain circumstances, or would never accept conflict regions either: being a part of an unitary state with no special rights; having a high degree of autonomy; being part of a confederate state; having them as independent countries; or as a part of Russian Federation. In the 2013 installment of Caucasus Barometer, only questions about Abkhazia were included in the survey, while in the 2019 wave respondents were asked about both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Overall, the Barometer results show that Georgians are more inclined to support solutions which preserve the country’s territorial integrity, in a framework similar to Georgia’s current de-facto situation. In the 2019 Barometer results, 86% of Georgians would either definitely accept or accept under certain circumstances Abkhazia being a part of Georgia, with the region being granted no special status. A similar share of the Georgian population supported the same status for South Ossetia.

Fewer people supported an option for a confederate union between Georgia and its breakaway regions. In 2019, about 47% of respondents would either definitely favor or would accept in certain circumstances Abkhazia and Geor-

gia entering into a confederation. This is about fourteen percentage points more than the share of those who oppose the confederate option. By contrast, 43% of Georgians would support their country being a part of a confederation with South Ossetia to a certain extent, while 38% would oppose such an arrangement.

What this research reveals is that while Georgians appear to be open to the idea of an union state of some sort, they overwhelmingly oppose the country's breakaway regions becoming fully independent or being incorporated into the Russian Federation. Only 8% of respondents would accept the independence of these regions either unchallenged or under certain circumstances. A union between the breakaway regions and Russia was acceptable to only 3% of respondents.

Still, notable shifts are emerging with regard to the acceptance of quasi-federated solutions to the conflict in Abkhazia. Georgians are increasingly accepting of Abkhazia enjoying a high degree of autonomy inside Georgia. While in 2013 57% of respondents would have accepted Abkhazia being an autonomy or a part of a confederate state, support for such an arrangement had increased by ten percentage points by 2019.

When compared to the earlier IRI data, large and surprising changes occurred in opinions regarding the establishment of a confederacy between Georgia and Abkhazia. In IRI's 2013 data, only 23 percent of respondents favored the idea of Georgia and Abkhazia entering into a confederacy agreement. Six years later, however, the Caucasus Barometer data shows double this figure; almost half (46%) of the respondents were open to considering this solution.

Given the duration of frozen conflict, Georgian public opinion on models for internal conflict resolution have shifted in ways that one might have perhaps expected. While the idea of the breakaway regions becoming independent is still unpopular, support for quasi-federal models is on the rise. In the next section, I explore specific factors which predict the support of a particular option or model of conflict resolution.

Who Is Ready for a Compromise?

How do the representatives of different groups of Georgian society perceive various models of conflict resolution? In the following section I present two sets of analysis. First, I explore how various socio-demographic and geographic characteristics predict support for specific political arrangements between Georgia and its breakaway regions. The second analysis explores cumulative indicators measuring degrees of openness to conflict resolution.

The first set of models assess whether respondents would accept Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, part of a confederate state with Georgia, as territories enjoying a higher degree of autonomy within Georgia, or as directly incorporated into Georgia with no specific rights. Binary dependent variables are coded into ones if respondents perceive each of the given statements as "acceptable" or "acceptable under certain circumstances". Answer options "Unacceptable," "Indifferent," "Don't know," and refusals are coded into zeros. Regression models include standard demographic variables such as respondents' gender, age, index for material wealth, education, ethnic identity, and settlement type as predictors. In order to control for the effects of proximity of the conflict regions to the respondent, regression equations also include variables measuring distances of sampling points from Abkhazian and South Ossetian Administrative Boundary Lines.

Overall, Tbilisians are more likely to be open to any of the models of conflict resolution than people residing in other urban and rural settlements. Tbilisi residents have about a 10% chance of accepting Abkhazia's independence, while probabilities for urban and rural respondents are close to zero. Tbilisians have about a 50% chance of supporting confederation between Georgia and Abkhazia in comparison with other urban (30%) and rural (26%) residents. The idea of a confederacy between Georgia and South Ossetia is more acceptable to Tbilisians (37% chance) than to respondents coming from other urban (20% chance) and rural (15% chance) areas of Georgia. Similar patterns emerge when modeling support of autonomy and direct incorporation of breakaway regions into Georgia.

Ethnic minorities of Georgia are more likely to accept any model of conflict resolution than ethnic Georgians. They have about 10% probability of accepting the independence of Abkhazia. Minorities are more likely to accept Abkhazia and South Ossetia (65% chance each) as parts of a confederate state with Georgia.

Length of education, that is, years spent at school is positively associated with the acceptance of a confederation model. Georgians with ten years of schooling have about 10% less chance of supporting a confederation between Georgia and Abkhazia or South Ossetia than those with twenty years of schooling.

Political partisanship does not divide Georgians much when it comes to the acceptance of various models of conflict resolution. Those who say that they do not know which party they feel most affiliated to or refuse to answer are less likely to accept any model of conflict resolution. Supporters of the United National Movement have about a 60% chance of accepting confederacy between Abkhazia and Georgia; supporters of conservative opposition parties are more likely than others (78%) to accept the autonomy of Abkhazia. Supporters of other parties have the highest probability (62%) of accepting the autonomy of South Ossetia.

The distance of a community from Administrative Boundary Lines has a perhaps rather unexpected effect compared to what one might expect in an area heavily affected by the conflict. Respondents residing in close vicinity to Abkhazia are more likely to support its independence than the residents of communities deeper in the Georgian heartland. Distance from the Administrative Boundary Line with South Ossetia is not a significant predictor of support of any presented conflict resolution models.

The second strand of analysis explores which groups are the most open to various degrees of concessions in order to resolve the problems. Dependent variables in this analysis represent scales constructed in the following manner: respondents who accept the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are given scores of four, those who would accept confederacy three, those who would only agree to regional autonomy two, and those who would only accept breakaway regions being directly incorporated into Georgia are given a score of one.

Overall, results are rather similar to previous analyses. Tbilisi residents are more open to compromise than people outside the capital city both with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Distance from the conflict regions have opposite effects. Respondents living close to Abkhazia are more likely to be open for concessions in case of both conflicts than those living in the proximity of South Ossetia. Younger Georgians are also more likely to be open to the compromise, although effects are significant in the case of a conflict in South Ossetia.

To summarize, many Georgians have become more open to the models of quasi-federalism or granting a certain level of sovereignty to the country's breakaway regions. Tbilisi residents are more open to conflict resolution and to higher concessions to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While we cannot directly infer how Georgia's internally-displaced population feels about the models, proxy measures such as distance from the conflict regions show certain context-dependency. Proximity to Abkhazia predicts more readiness to compromise, while closeness to South Ossetia has the opposite effect.

So What: Key Takeaways

In short, Georgian public opinion towards the country's conflict regions has shifted. While territorial integrity has lost some of its salience as an important national issue, Georgians increasingly consider alternative methods of conflict resolution. Indeed, there are red lines: the idea of the breakaway regions becoming independent is very unpopular. However, as the analysis shows, there is a steady increase for a model which grants certain sovereignty to the breakaway regions.

Another emergent pattern is a significant divergence in opinions between Tbilisi residents and others. The former are more open to different models of conflict resolution and are generally more in favor of compromise. Residents in the close vicinity of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have conflicting opinions. While those closer to the Abkhazian Administrative Boundary Line are more likely to support compromise, respondents residing in communities in the proximity of South Ossetia feel the opposite, likely an outcome of fresh memories of violence and ongoing borderization.

The Georgian public is seemingly ready for change, but this alone does not ensure that the peace process will necessarily kick-start as desired. Analysts suggest that the current emergency of the global COVID-19 pandemic (De Waal, 2020) has created opportunities for cooperation and confidence building. However, as until recently the public opinion across Administrative Boundary Lines did not lean towards compromise (O'Loughlin et al., 2014), the chances of a breakthrough still seem rather negligible.

Methodological Note

The first part of this analysis is based on binary logistic regression models predicting support for different models of conflict resolution. Models assessing readiness for a compromise are based on ordered logistic regressions. Predicted probabilities are reported. Regression tables as well as the complete replication script are available via [Github](#).

About the Author

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The Gap Between Support for Democracy and Liberal Values in Georgia

By Rati Shubladze and Tamar Khoshtaria (both CRRC-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.

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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

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

The Slow and Quick Declines in Trust in the Georgian Orthodox Church

By Dustin Gilbreath (CRRC Georgia)

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Abstract

The Georgian Orthodox Church is among the most powerful institutions in Georgia. The majority of the country identifies as Orthodox Christian. The Church's Patriarch, Ilia II, has consistently been named the most trusted person in the country in surveys. Yet, Caucasus Barometer data suggests a slow but steady decline in trust in the church over the last ten years. While the data clearly show a slow and steady decline, recent scandals also appear to be taking their toll, particularly among the religious. This article first looks at the slow and steady decline, and proceeds to describe the impact of one of the most recent scandals—accusations that the Church's Patriarch was a pedophile.

Scandals

The Georgian Orthodox Church has experienced numerous scandals in recent years. In 2017, a priest was charged and convicted of attempting to murder Patriarch Ilia II's secretary (Lomsadze, 2017). The incident, known as the Cyanide Scandal, resulted in a prominent priest being imprisoned. He claimed that the Patriarch's Secretary had been misleading him, and the incident was widely discussed in the Georgian media.

Aside from the Cyanide Scandal, the homophobic riots that erupted on the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia in Georgia that included Orthodox priests in 2013 (Antelava, 2013) were another salient event which likely hurt the church's credibility in the eyes of many in the public. With a priest notoriously chasing pro-LGBT rights activists down the street with a stool, many were appalled given that priests were clearly engaged in violence.

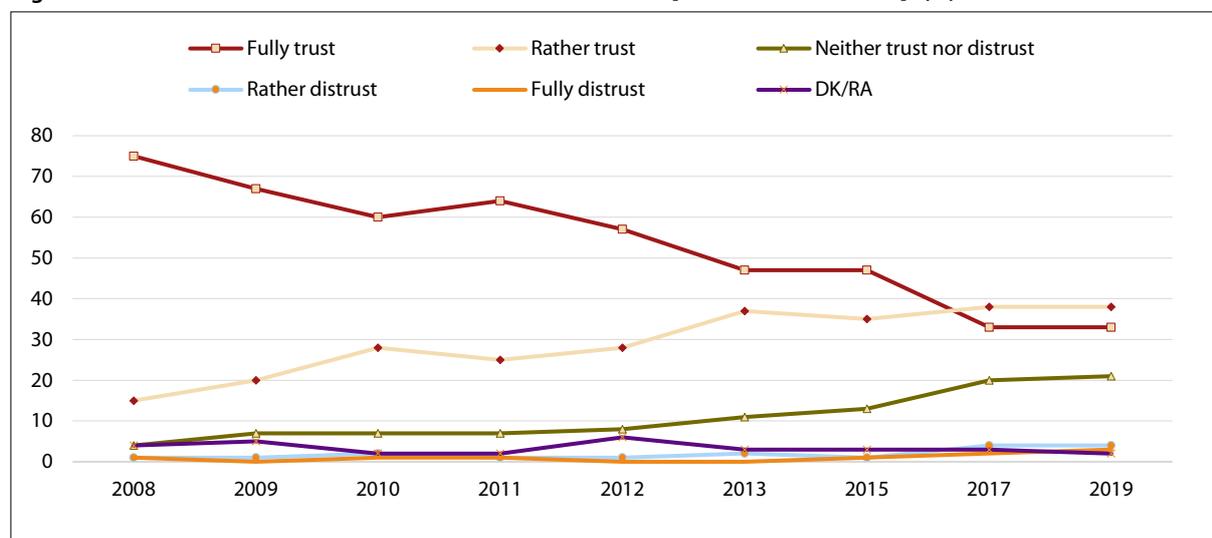
Aside from the above, on numerous occasions, scandal has emerged as a result of the government giving the church land for symbolic prices (OC-Media, 2017). Similarly, the church's moneymaking activities, including numerous shops and the water company Sno, which are not taxed, have generated further controversy. Many also question why, in a poor country like Georgia and where the Church is considered a wealthy institution, the state budget should be used to fund it.

More recently, sexual abuse scandals have emerged. On October 31, 2019 a synod meeting was held (OC-Media, 2019). Following the meeting, the Archbishop Petre Tsaava accused Ilia II as well as other high-ranking church officials of being pedophiles and homosexuals (Civil Georgia, 2019). The Archbishop was removed following the accusations (Civil Georgia, 2019). Still, the allegations were shocking for Georgian society. Ilia II is generally accepted to be the most trusted individual in Georgian society (Civil Georgia, 2019). At the same time, large parts of Georgia are homophobic: for example, 87% of the public would not approve of someone like them doing business with a homosexual (CRRC, 2020).

All of these issues have likely contributed to the slow and steady decline in trust in the Church that has taken place according to the Caucasus Barometer Survey. While 75% of Orthodox Christians fully trusted the church in 2008, only 33% did in 2019. Over this same period, the share reporting that they "rather trust" the church has increased from 15% to 38%. Ambivalence has also been on the rise: while only 4% of the public reported that they neither trusted nor distrusted the church in 2008, 21% did in 2019. Although there has been a decline in full trust and rise in ambivalence, there has not yet been a meaningful uptick in outright distrust in the church (see Figure 1 overleaf).

This has occurred in a context where almost everyone in Georgia identifies with a particular religious group (98%), and the vast majority of the public (87%) states that religion is important in their everyday lives. Notably, regarding the latter statistic, Georgian Orthodox Christians are more likely to report that religion is important or very important in their everyday lives (92%) compared with religious minorities (72%).

Most recently of all, the church has received negative attention during the Covid-19 outbreak (Gogokhia, 2020). The church decided that parishioners should take communion from a communal spoon rather than from disposable plastic spoons, creating a clear public health risk. Many observers suggest this led to the government to declare a state of emergency in the country, despite official denials.

Figure 1: Please Tell Me How Much Do You Trust Or Distrust [the Orthodox Church]? (%)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2015	2017	2019
Fully trust	75	67	60	64	57	47	47	33	33
Rather trust	15	20	28	25	28	37	35	38	38
Neither trust nor distrust	4	7	7	7	8	11	13	20	21
Rather distrust	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	4	4
Fully distrust	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	3
DK/RA	4	5	2	2	6	3	3	3	2

Source: (CRRC Caucasus Barometer, Georgia)

Methodology

Although the apparent decline described above is likely linked to the scandals, making a causal connection is difficult. Numerous factors could have led to declines in trust in the church, from changing values to less interest in religion. Indeed, trust in institutions is generally on the decline in the country.

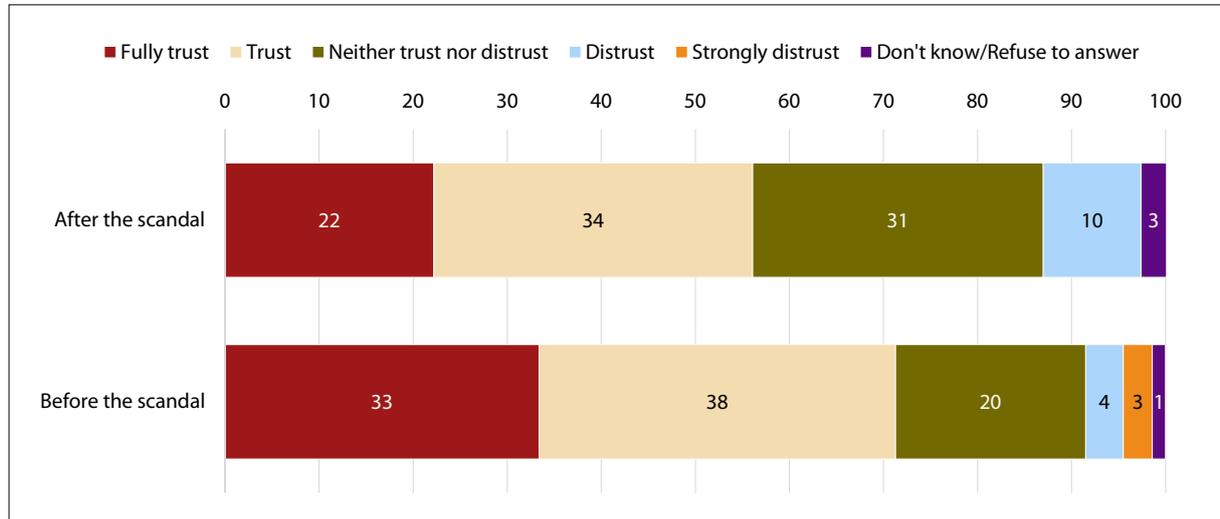
However, a natural experiment which occurred during the fieldwork for CRRC's Caucasus Barometer survey in 2019 enables a better understanding of the impact of church scandals on people's trust in the church. At the same time as the above-described pedophilia scandal was taking place, the Caucasus Barometer survey was ongoing and asked respondents about trust in the religious institution which they belong to, and religious practices, among a wide variety of other issues.

To test whether this scandal had a significant impact on trust in the church and for whom, this article makes use of two analysis strategies. The first uses the natural experiment and multiple regression testing for a significant change before and after the scandal while controlling for the following variables: age, settlement type (Tbilisi, other urban, and rural), years of education, sex, respondent employment status, and household wealth. Second, the study uses multivariate matching with genetic weighting to test for an impact of the scandal. Matching is a quasi-experimental method. It tries to achieve as-if randomization through identifying people who are statistically similar to those exposed to a treatment (in this case, the pedophilia scandal) to those who have not (people who were interviewed in the same survey, but before the scandal took place). The impact of the event is then estimated using ordinary least squares regression. The same variables used in the multiple regression analysis described above were used to generate the matched control group. For both analyses, the analysis is only run on individuals reporting they are Orthodox Christians. Replication code for the analysis is available at CRRC Georgia's Github page: <http://github.com/crcgeorgia/>.

Results

Descriptive statistics suggest that the scandal led to a significant decline in Georgians' trust in the church, with a 15 percentage point decline in those reporting they either fully or partially trust the Georgian Orthodox Church following the scandal. Although there are relatively few respondents in the survey following the scandal (126 Orthodox Christians), this difference is still statistically significant.

Figure 2: Please Tell Much How Much You Trust or Distrust the [Georgian Orthodox Church]? Before and After October 31 (% of Orthodox Christians)



Source: (CRRC Caucasus Barometer, Georgia)

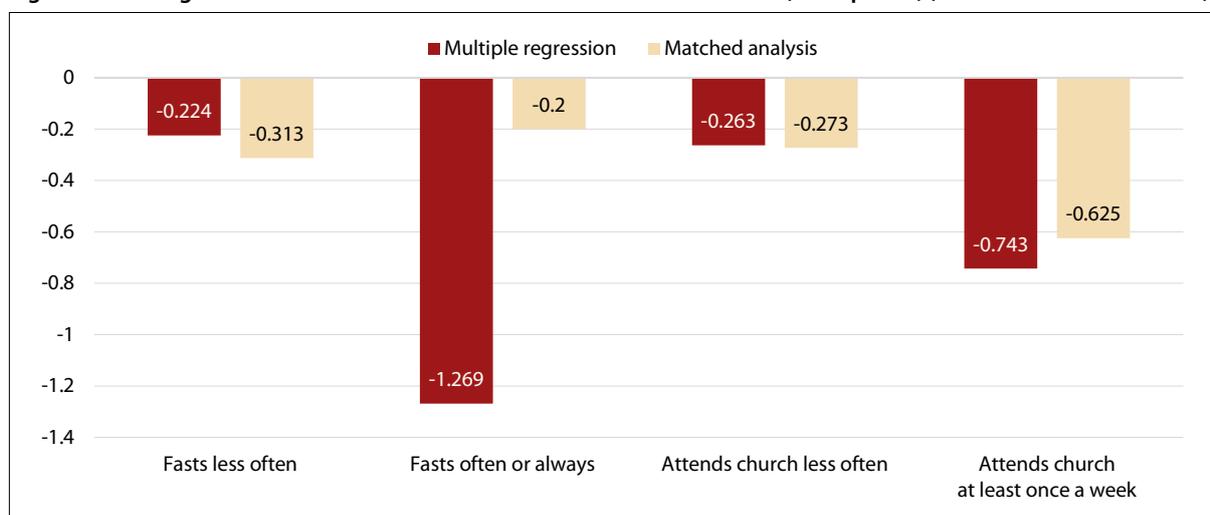
Further data analysis was conducted to test whether the apparent decline resulted from different kinds of respondents being interviewed before and after the scandal rather than the scandal itself. After controlling for the factors described in the methodology section, the lower level of trust in the church remains statistically significant. Responses to the question were recorded on a five point scale with 1 equivalent to fully distrust, 2 distrust, 3 neither trust nor distrust, 4 trust, and 5 fully trust. The difference in trust before and after the scandal is 0.26 points on the five point scale, while it is 0.32 after controlling for other factors in the multiple regression analyses. A second analysis that compares whether people trusted (responses 4 and 5) the church to other responses (1, 2, 3) shows a similar pattern. Without controlling for other factors, the decline in trust (fully trust and rather trust) following the scandal is 15 percentage points. When controlling for other factors, the effect of the scandal is 18 percentage points. This suggests that the respondents who were interviewed after the scandal were if anything more predisposed to trusting the church than those who were interviewed before. The same analyses using the matched data suggests that there was a 17 percentage point (0.31 scale point) decline in trust in the church as a result of the scandal.

Further analysis was conducted to look at who the scandal affected most. The results suggest that people in urban areas outside Tbilisi and those with higher levels of education had larger declines in their trust in the church as a result of the scandal. In contrast, men and women, those who are working and not, and older and younger people were no more or less affected by the scandal, controlling for other factors.

To understand whether the scandal had differential impacts on those that are more or less intensive practitioners of Orthodox Christianity, multiple regression and matched analyses were conducted. The multiple regression analysis suggests that the scandal primarily affected people who were more engaged in Orthodox practice, while the matched analysis is more ambivalent on this point.

The survey asked respondents about religious attendance and fasting. Taking into account other factors in the multiple regression analysis, those who attended church at least once a week were significantly more likely to report lower levels of trust following the scandal compared to those who reported attending church at least once a week prior to the scandal. Similarly, those who reported that they fasted often or always when religion dictates were significantly less likely to trust the church after the scandal than those who reported the same prior to the scandal in the multiple regression analysis. In contrast to the multiple regression analysis, the matched analysis does not suggest statistically significant effects on people who are more engaged in religious practice. However, the pattern in terms of effect size generally remains similar. The one exception is that in the matched analysis, the effect on those that fast often or always is much smaller than in the multiple regression analysis.

Taken together, the evidence leans towards suggesting that the religiously engaged were more affected by the scandal than those Orthodox Christians who do not regularly fast or attend church. Still, further evidence is needed to confirm this. The chart below provides the effect of the scandal in terms of the average point change in attitudes among those who are more religiously engaged versus those who are not in terms of scale points.

Figure 3: Marginal Effect of the Scandal on Attitudes Trust in the Church (Scale points) (Caucasus Barometer 2019)

Source: (CRRC Caucasus Barometer, Georgia)

Outlook

While the above data analysis strongly suggests that the events of late October shook the public's trust in the church, this could be a short-term effect. The data used for this analysis were collected in the weeks before and days after the scandal. Whether the decline in trust associated with the church scandals is a lasting one is an open question as far as the data is concerned. However, the long term decline in trust in the church that has taken place concomitantly with numerous scandals suggest that the Church's woes are having a lasting impact on Georgians' trust in their religious institutions. The recent scandals surrounding Covid-19 have likely only exacerbated matters for the church.

This trend is important. While some in Tbilisi's more secular circles might celebrate the decline in trust in the church to a certain extent, people should not forget the many benefits of a unifying institution in society. As Robert Putnam has pointed out in his tome *Bowling Alone*, church going is one form of social capital, and social capital matters a great deal. It is associated with numerous positive outcomes, from economic development to social well-being. In turn, this decline calls for investment in institutions that can unite Georgians—be they religious or secular.

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Dustin Gilbreath is the deputy research director at CRRC Georgia. The views presented in this article do not represent the views of CRRC Georgia or any related entity.

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