
CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC SUSTAINABILITY OF MODERN GEORGIAN POLITICAL PARTIES: GOVERNANCE, HIERARCHY, IDEOLOGICAL FRAGMENTATION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL WEAKNESS

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Abstract

The article deals with the challenges of democratic sustainability of Georgian political parties in modern Georgia. It tries to reveal the main reasons why, according to some researchers, there is a crisis of intra-party democracy in the modern Georgian party system, why the state's drive towards democratic development has not been reflected in the organizational structure of parties. The article examines the challenges of leader hierarchy, ideological fragmentation, and organizational fragmentation in modern Georgian political parties using the conceptual framework of the theory of resource dependence and in-depth qualitative research methods.

Keywords: party system, party financing, state financing system, Georgia, elections, ideology.

INTRODUCTION

Political parties are one of the essential components of democratic governance [Sartori 2005]. As it is known, parliamentary governance is gradually being established in Georgia, and by 2024, there will be a fully proportional electoral system [Matsaberidze 2019]. Proponents of the mentioned changes support the idea of a multi-party parliament and forming a coalition government. Therefore, the importance of political parties in the political system of Georgia is growing even more. Naturally, the effective implementation of these changes requires institutionally and financially sustainable political parties, which enables the formation of coalitions and the implementation of coherent, substantive, and strategic policies. Accordingly, the unification of interests and the creation of policies by parties is one of the main challenges of the modern Georgian party spectrum [Kobalia 2020; Kakhishvili et al. 2021].

In Georgia, the issue of financing political parties from the state budget has always been a subject of discussion. Since 2008, the financing of parties has increased. The last changes were implemented in July 2020 (obtaining budgetary financing was simplified). The debates regarding the budgetary financing of parties became relevant again after the parliamentary elections of October 2020. According to the initiative of the ruling political team, a legislative initiative was presented, according to which political parties will have their budgetary funding suspended or terminated if they do not capture at least half of the parliamentary mandates [civil.ge 2020]. However, the state funding of political parties is still valid.

As it is known, parties have three primary income sources: membership fees, private donations, and direct and indirect ways of public funding [Nassmacher 2006]. It should be noted that in most post-communist countries, funding of parties from the state budget has been introduced. The share of state money in the party budget can be very high, approaching 70–80 %. Researchers argue that state funding jeopardizes the relationship between parties and civil society, creates distortions, and disadvantages smaller parties. The most frequently heard criticism is that state funding reduces the necessary motivation to establish party-society ties [van Biezen 2003]. According to the research conducted in Georgia, the primary source of financial income is state funding and donations from private businesses [Nodia and Scholtbach 2006]. As we can see, the state is trying to promote the development of political parties through budgetary financing.

Nevertheless, the question is: does financing parties from the state budget bring this result? Accordingly, the research aims to study the impact of the financing of parties from the state budget on the institutional sustainability of the modern

Georgian party spectrum and to determine the extent to which the mentioned law has fulfilled the set tasks. Therefore, the research question can be formulated as follows: To what extent does the increase in the specific share of state funding in the party's financial resources determine the institutional stability of the party and the democracy of internal party decision-making?

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The scientific debates around political parties often refer to the tendencies of organizational development of parties and the search for the ideal type of intra-party democracy. Samuel Huntington defines institutionalization as the process by which organizations acquire value and stability [Huntington 1968]. Unlike Huntington, Taylor-Robinson notes that institutionalized parties do not necessarily guarantee democracy because: "Institutionalization implies order and stability more than democracy" [Taylor-Robinson 2001:582]; according to the author, the high degree of organizational development of the party is not a guarantee that the party shares democratic values. However, we may disagree with Taylor-Robinson because if party institutionalism means, among other things, the existence of democratic mechanisms for making internal party decisions, then an institutionally stable party system will also create guarantees for establishing democratic governance in the state.

Panbianko developed a concept that includes two principles to study the democratization and institutionalization of parties. First, the degree of autonomy of the organization and the internal structural coherence of the organization, which includes the centralized control of organizational resources and the process of exchange with the environment. More specifically, five indicators of party institutionalization are proposed and discussed: 1. The degree of development of the central parliamentary organization; 2. Degree of homogeneity of organizational structures; 3. How the organization is financed; 4. Relations with other parties; 5. Validity of the party charter [Panbianco 1988]. Kenneth Janda defined party institutionalization as "the representation of public interests by a party when the party exists as a social organization, and this organization exhibits recurring patterns of behavior" [Janda 1980:19]. In addition, Janda identified six institutionalization variables: year of party origin, name change, organizational change (party dissolution or merger), leadership competition, legislative instability, and electoral instability [Janda 1980]. Thus, Janda's approach seems to recognize the internal organizational component of institutionalization and the 'external'

component. While leadership competition refers to internal leadership selection procedures, legislative and electoral instability is due to an external dimension: the electorate's perception of the party as an institution.

Although the presented authors were one of the first to measure the institutionalization of parties, it is worth noting that they do not focus on such vital issues of internal party politics as the ideological stability of parties or the existence of democratic candidate selection mechanisms.

The theory of dependence on resources is attractive in terms of the sustainability of parties. According to this theory, because state funding is increasingly available to political parties in democracies, parties become more and more dependent on public finances [Silagadze 2020; Minesashvili 2022]. They become focused on maintaining funding, which creates new challenges in party politics [Gherghina and Volintiru 2023]. According to Nicole Beauliere, although parties are accountable to their voters and members due to receiving permanent state funding, parties are reluctant to change political courses, which distances them from the interests of voters [Bolleyer 2020]. Based on the above, the increase in the specific share of state funding reduces the amount of contributions, affecting the weakening of the party's structure [Bolleyer and Correa 2020].

Along with resource dependence theory, our research is based on the theoretical framework proposed by Susan Scarrow, Paul Webb, and Thomas Poughanck [Scharrow et.al. 2017]. The authors believe that the party's internal organization should be understood based on three dimensions: structural, resource, and representation. When studying the structural dimension, Scarrow et.al. first define the leader's autonomy within the party/the variable of the leader's limitation. In this regard, knowing the party leader's rights is essential. How does he make decisions? Is he an authoritarian sole ruler, or does he agree with other party members on his own decisions? The party's executive board or membership organization may limit a leader's autonomy. Conversely, leaders can be too autonomous and able to independently determine party policies and priorities, which weakens internal party democracy. Scarrow et al. also distinguish the criterion of coordination and entropy, which examines the extent of ideological or thematic consensus within the party and what is the consensus between the internal groups of the party.

As is known, modern parties consist of ideologically diverse members/factions, so if the party is fragmented and internal groups cannot agree on fundamental issues. We are dealing with disintegration/entropy, and if they can cooperate and maintain

the party's integrity, then there is coordination. According to research by Scarrow et.al. examining territorial concentration/dispersion is also essential in characterizing party structure. It means what is the distribution area of the party – is it concentrated in one city, or is it spread all over the country? According to the authors, the decentralization of parties often means their high democracy and structural stability [Scarrow et. al 2017].

Accordingly, to study the financial income of the parties, the secondary analysis of quantitative data is used in the research. To study the democratic challenges of the Georgian parties, the qualitative research method is used. In particular, content analysis of documents – to study the ideological foundation of political parties and party structure (including to determine the democracy/hierarchy of decision-making), party charters, and pre-election programs are analyzed. Also, a survey of experts was used in the research, within which targeted, non-probability sampling was used – in-depth interviews were conducted with researchers whose scientific interests included party politics. Within the research framework, ten experts were interviewed during 2021–2022, and respondents' ages vary between 45–70 years. The experts participating in the research have extensive experience researching Georgian party politics and intra-party processes, which became a prerequisite for obtaining valid information for this research. As for the selection, 2008–2020 was selected as the research period. Four parliamentary elections were held in this period [OSCE/ODIHR 2008, 2012, 2017, 2021], and therefore, the research includes those parties that received at least 1 % of the votes in the mentioned elections: 1. Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia; 2. United National Movement; 3. European Georgia – freedom movement; 4. Alliance of Georgian Patriots; 5. Labor Party of Georgia; 6. Republican Party of Georgia; 7. Girchi; 8. Citizens.

2. DEPENDENCE ON STATE RESOURCES IN GEORGIAN PARTY POLITICS

Based on the fact that the research aims to explain to what extent the budget financing was able to achieve the set goal and whether it contributed to the formation of financially sustainable democratic party organizations, it is essential to review the budget financing received by the parties participating in the research and determine the degree of their dependence on the state. Data analysis from 2008–2020 reveals that the Labor Party of Georgia (LPG) is the most dependent on state funding. According to the revenues received by the LPG in 2008–2020 [State Audit Service 2020], the share of state funding in the finances of the LPG in 2008, 2009, 2015, and 2019 was 100 %. The party was unable to find an alternative source of

funding. The LPG received the largest private donation in 2012 in the form of 114,240 GEL. During an in-depth interview, the expert noted that “the Labor Party is a classic example of the fact that budgetary funding cannot ensure the development of small political parties; on the contrary, they become more dependent on the state” [Interview with expert No.3, 2021]. According to the data, the party received private donations one year before the elections or directly in the election year, which is to some extent a confirmation of the opinion that the parties are not involved in active political activities in the period between the elections and are active only in the pre-election period. In total, between 2008 and 2020, the LPG received more than 7 million GEL from the state budget, which is 96.74 % of the party’s income [Election Administration of Georgia 2020], which is the highest indicator of dependence on the state among the studied parties (see Figure 1). Accordingly, it should be noted that the budget funding contributed to the so-called ‘physical survival’ of the LPG. However, it failed to ensure the party’s financial stability and became utterly dependent on state resources. Despite many years of experience in managing the party organization, the party failed to develop a mechanism for membership contributions and was unable to attract private donor supporters to finance the party’s activities.

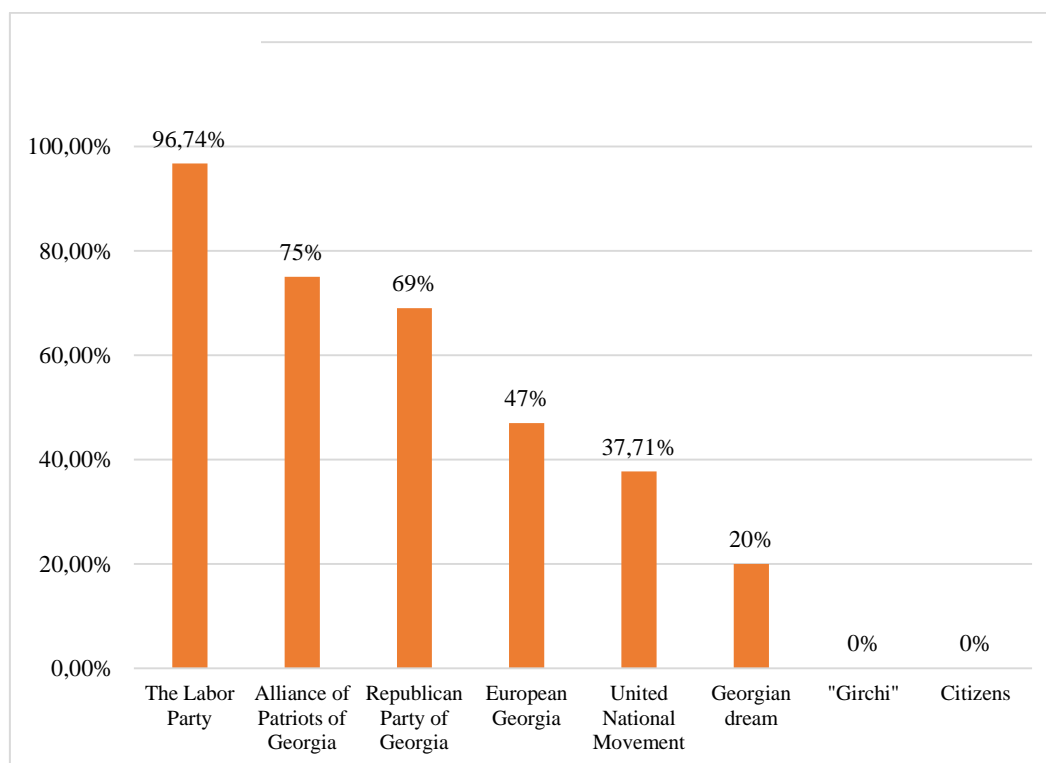


Figure 1. The share of budget funding in party revenues in 2008-2020 in %

Alliance of Patriots of Georgia (APG) also has a high dependence rate on state funding; according to the Figure 2, the specific share of state funding in the party's financial resources in the research period was 75 %. In 2016–2020, APG received 10,952,800 GEL income, of which 8,190,000 GEL was state funding. According to the trend, the private donations of the party increased in the election year, which is also confirmed in the case of the APG precisely in 2016 and 2020, when the party received the most significant number of private donations when the parliamentary elections were held. In connection with this, a researcher of party politics, an expert, during an in-depth interview, noted that the idea of state funding, along with other factors, aims to protect Georgian politics from foreign and mainly Russian money:

‘In some cases, the Georgian state should finance the parties rather than to seek alternative funding from Russia, but despite this, there are still big questions about the Alliance of Patriots because there is an assumption that they had much more income than they have presented in the declaration, and it is possible that it was Russian money [Interview with expert No.4, 2021].

The Republican Party of Georgia (RPG) has a higher-than-average dependence rate on the state. In 2008–2020, it received 6,369,084 GEL in the form of state and private donations, as well as membership fees. At the same time, 69 % of this income, 4,405,846 GEL, was government funding (see Figure 1). It should be noted that in 2008–2010, the party was almost entirely dependent on the state, and in these years, private donations did not exceed 1000 GEL. However, it should be noted that, unlike other parties, the RPG has established a voluntary system of membership fees, which, although not a large amount, is an attempt to establish the institution of intra-party membership. Despite the high rate of dependence on the state, in 2011–2013, this dependence decreased, and the share of private donations in the party's income increased, which is associated with the creation of a coalition between the GRP and Georgian Dream [Interview with expert No. 5, 2022]. It explains, for example, that in 2011, 86 % of the party's income came from private financing, and in 2012–2013, the RPG received a substantial private donation. Accordingly, during the mentioned period, the reduction of the party's dependence on the state did not cause the fact that the RPG was able to create a sustainable party structure and establish a close relationship with the voters, who started financing the party's political activities.

The political party European Georgia (EG) has a slightly lower-than-average dependence rate on the state. In 2016–2020, received a total of 8,329,060 GEL, 47 % of which 3,917,200 GEL is government funding (see Figure 1). In addition, at

the time of the party's creation, its dependence on the state was 100 %, and in 2018 and 2020, the dependence on the state was gradually decreasing, which is also explained by the election years. Accordingly, the case of EG proves that in non-election years, parties are entirely dependent on state resources, and they have no motivation to attract private donations or create a sustainable party structure and mechanism of membership contributions.

According to the research results, the United National Movement (UNM) ranks fifth among the eight political parties in dependence on state resources. The share of state funding in the total income of 2008–2020 is 37.71 %. The party has received 69,620,274 GEL, of which 26,255,910 GEL is government funding (see Figure 2).

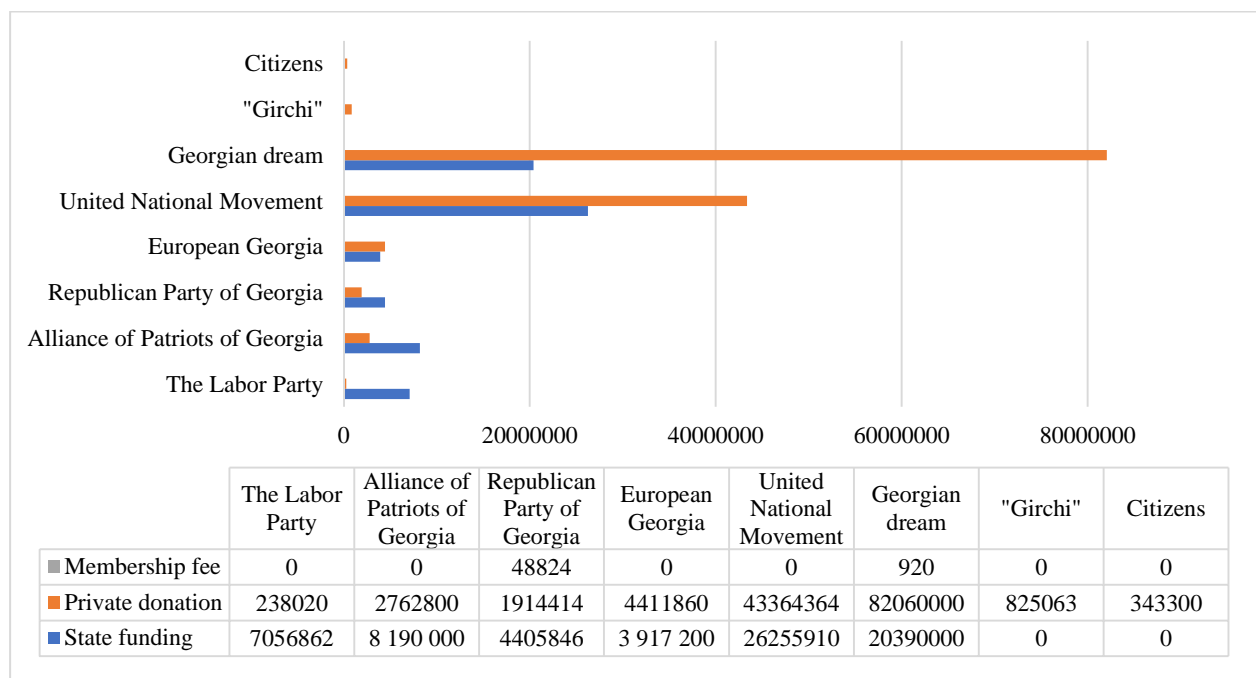


Figure 2. Total financial income of political parties in 2008–2020 in GEL

In addition, several general trends can be seen in the revenues of the UNM. Firstly, the party receives much more private donations during election years than during non-election periods. According to the second trend, the party received more private donations while in power and was less dependent on public funding than after it was in opposition. In 2008, when UNM was the ruling party, the specific share of the budget funding in the financial resources of the party was only 12.93 %; however, on the contrary, 14 333 017 GEL (87.07 % of the total income) was received by the party in the form of private donations. In this case, the imbalance between financial sources is evident.

Resource dependence theory focuses on the balance between alternative sources of income. During an in-depth interview, the expert noted that “like state funding, the party’s financial dependence on private donations may lead to the dependence of the party’s activities on not public but private interests, a clear example of which is Georgian political parties, which usually represent the interests of a certain business group” [Interview with expert No. 5, 2022]. In addition, it is worth noting that the UNM, like other parties, failed to establish a membership contribution mechanism and ultimately failed to diversify resources between state funding, private donations, and membership contributions, which indicates the low degree of financial independence of the party according to the theory of resource dependence. As a result of the research, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party, has one of the lowest rates of dependence on state resources. In 2012–2020, the party received a total of 102,450,920 GEL in the form of donations and funding, of which 20,390,000 GEL was state funding, which is equal to 20 % of the party’s financial resources (see Figure 2).

GD, as a government party, is characterized by an increase in the specific share of private donations in financial resources, especially in the years of parliamentary elections, for example, in 2012, the specific share of private donations in the party’s income was 84 %, in 2016 it was 91 %, and in 2020 the mentioned indicator It was 85 % [State Audit Service 2020].

As for the lowest rate of dependence on state funding, among the political parties that are the object of the research, there are only two political parties that, despite having the appropriate opportunity, did not receive state funding; these parties are Girchi and Citizens. In this case, Girchi has not established a system of membership contributions, hence, according to the theory of dependence on resources, although Girchi is not a political party dependent on the state, it is still unable to diversify its income and depends only on private donors. It at least creates challenges in terms of financial stability. As for the political party Citizens, it was created in the pre-election period in 2020 and received 343,300 GEL through private donations. The courage of minor parties to refuse state funding and conduct party politics independently is welcome. It should be noted that Girchi succeeded more or less and won more mandates in the 2020 parliamentary elections than the LPG, which exists with state funding.

As for Citizens, it is difficult to predict how much it will be able to ‘survive’ without state funding in the future. However, it is a fact that it will have more incentives to attract supporters [Interview with expert No.1, 2021]. Accordingly, as the research showed, during the years 2008–2020, state funding was the main and often the

only source of income for political parties. Even though since 2012, the financially solid GD appeared in the political arena as a competitor of the UNM, the primary source of funding for the parties remained the budgetary funding. LPG, RPG, APG, and EG still strongly depend on state resources.

3. DEMOCRACY/HIERARCHY OF INTERNAL PARTY DECISION-MAKING

One of the essential characteristics of the institutional stability of a political party in modern democratic political systems is the democratization of internal party decision-making. In this context, it is crucial that in the party organization, decisions are not taken alone or by a narrow party group, but party members also participate in this process using democratic mechanisms. One of the main challenges of the modern Georgian party system is the high degree of dependence on the leader. As a rule, political parties in Georgia were formed not around ideological values, but around personalities. Various studies confirm that voters tend to support one or another party not because of the program but because of the personality of the party leader [Gvindadze 2023; Kobalia 2020; Kakhishvili et al. 2021]. In this regard, the LPG, which received budgetary funding yearly during the research period and is one of the stable political parties in the Georgian party spectrum, is very attached to the leader. According to the party charter, democratic mechanisms for making and executing internal party decisions have been created, including the party having a congress composed of members, which elects the party's chairman by a majority of votes. The party has a national policy committee and a general council. The party also has a party control committee to avoid the balance of power in internal party governance [Labor Party of Georgia 2018]. Despite the declared existence of a balanced mechanism for making intra-party decisions, the party has not developed, for example, any mechanism for compiling the parliamentary list. In addition, the party charter does not specify the role of party members in the work process of the Congress, and the LPG has not developed a mechanism for developing a pre-election party program. The LPG is one of the good examples of parties created around the leader because there is no real democratic decision-making mechanism in the party.

As a rule, voters vote for the chairman of the party, Shalva Natelashvili [Interview with expert No. 2, 2021]. The fact that the party does not have an actual mechanism for the involvement of supporters and members in the decision-making process is also reflected in the party's election results. In most cases, it is difficult for the party to obtain parliamentary mandates. In addition, when we consider the autonomy

and limitations of the leader within the party, we should mention that Shalva Natelashvili was the first number on the party's parliamentary list in all four parliamentary elections from 2008 to 2020. Also, Natelashvili was the party's presidential candidate in all the presidential elections held during this period. Thus, despite the idea that budget funding has facilitated the development of institutional sustainability of political parties, it has failed to do so in the case of the LPG. Indeed, the party did not disappear from the Georgian political landscape, but it could not create a democratic mechanism for making intra-party decisions.

As for the APG, which also has a high rate of financial dependence on the state, 75 % of total income (see Fuguer 1), it is also characterized by a high dependence rate on charismatic leaders. However, unlike the LPG, the party has two prominent leaders, Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi and Irma Inashvili. In addition, an exciting manifestation of attachment to party leaders is the election ballots, where along with the name of the party, the names of its leader(s) are indicated [Interview with expert No. 4, 2021]. Although the APG has a party structure defined by its charter, which consists of a party congress and a political council [Alliance of Patriots of Georgia 2016], even in this case, the party does not have a detailed electoral list formation mechanism or the practice of considering the opinions of voters and supporters in the development of the party program. The APG is a party that likes large gatherings. However, not because they want to consider the opinion of voters and citizens in this process, but it is a kind of ritual of demonstration of strength, which Georgian parties inherited from the Communist Party [interview with expert No. 1, 2021]. Therefore, even in the case of the APG, state funding could not become the basis for the democratization of the governing structure of the party.

UNM and EG are exciting examples of the democratization of intra-party decision-making and the leader's autonomy. According to the UNMt charter, the party congress elects the political council of the party's executive body, which is authorized to present and approve the majority candidates and the electoral list [United National Movement 2013]. Accordingly, officially, the statute of the UNM does not provide for adopting party decisions. However, from 2008 to 2020, the UNM had some attempts to form intra-party democracy. For example, in 2013, the party held primaries across Georgia to select a presidential candidate, in which members of district organizations of the party could participate. In the last round of primaries, each polling station across Georgia could cast one vote (send one delegate to the Congress). In order to register as a delegate, the candidate needed to submit a list of 30 supporters [United National Movement 2013], according to the

principle of primaries, the National Movement led the local self-government elections in 2014.

Although this can be considered a positive fact, it should be noted that the UNM is also a party strongly dependent on the leader - Mikheil Saakashvili and the push to introduce primaries and other intra-party democracy mechanisms is also related to the forced departure of Saakashvili from active politics, because otherwise Saakashvili would probably have decided on the names of the candidates together with a narrow group of the party. However, "If we evaluate the primaries conducted by the party with strictly democratic criteria, it turns out that delegates often voted for candidates supported by party leaders, although the introduction of primaries is still a welcome practice, and in order to transform it into an effective mechanism, it needs to be used to select candidates for every election" [Interview with expert No. 2, 2021].

In addition, it should be noted that in the primaries conducted by the UNM, the candidates were the party's leaders, and there was no pre-preparation period where an ordinary party member could put himself as a candidate in the primaries. Although the UNM is perceived as a party dependent on the leader (Saakashvili), experts distinguish it from other parties by the existence of intra-party leadership groups. In particular: "There are various influential groups in the National Movement that try to influence party decisions, which is not a fully democratic practice, but it differs from, for example, the Labor Party, where party decisions depend only on one leader" [Interview with expert No. 3, 2021]. It is also worth noting that in 2020, after the chairman Grigol Vashadze, left the party, the UNM used a poll conducted on social networks to elect a new chair, in which both party members and ordinary supporters could participate, which is a step forward in terms of intra-party democracy. Despite the efforts of the UNM, the fact that a democratic decision-making system could not be established in the party is evidenced by the dissolution of the party in 2017, when European Georgia was separated from the UNM. In Western political parties, when there is disagreement, they do not dissolve because they have democratic mechanisms for eliminating disagreements [Interview with expert No. 3, 2021].

As for the internal party structure of EG itself and the procedures for receiving transfers, like other parties, the charter of EG establishes the elements of indirect (representative) democracy in the Congress and the United Political Council. In addition, their statutes emphasize the mechanisms to include representatives of regional organizations in the parliamentary list (European Georgia – Movement for Freedom 2017). It is worth noting that the party presented a proportional list

without numbering for the 2020 parliamentary elections in order to redistribute mandates based on the results of the elections. Based on the above, the UNM and EG are characterized by situational manifestations of institutional sustainability. It does not allow us to determine how the parties will select candidates or elect the party's chairman in the next election year. Therefore, institutional stability and intra-party decision-making challenges still exist in the UNM and EG, like other parties.

The RP, which ranks third among the research parties regarding financial dependence on the state (see Figure 2), is one of the oldest political parties in Georgia. According to the charter, like other parties, the highest body is the Congress. It elects the National Executive Committee, which manages the party's daily activities, prepares the pre-election program, and approves election candidates [Republican Party of Georgia 2015].

Despite this entry in the charter, the RP, like the LPG and the APG, cannot ensure the involvement of voters in the process of making internal party decisions, according to the expert. However, today, the party is no longer concentrated around one specific leader; this does not mean it is more democratic [Interview with expert No.4, 2022]. Therefore, despite the idea that budgetary funding would contribute to the development of institutional sustainability of political parties in the case of the RPG, it is true that the party did not disappear from the Georgian political landscape. However, it could not create a democratic mechanism for making internal party decisions and a sustainable party organization.

The GD has the lowest rate of dependence on state finances at 20 % among the research parties (see Figure 1). However, it still experiences a crisis in the direction of intra-party democracy. According to the party charter, the Congress of party members elects the party's political council and the party's chairman, who is the highest executive official [Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia 2020]. According to the expert, despite the abovementioned, the party still needs an actual mechanism for involving party members or supporters in making intra-party decisions [Interview with expert No. 1, 2021]. Like other Georgian political parties, GD is a political party built around a leader, within which the hierarchy of decision-making is the main principle of this party's work [Ubiria 2018]; therefore, considering the authority of the party leader, it is explained why GD failed to democratize internal party processes. The situation is similar in the case of the political party Citizens, which does not even have a website on the Internet; therefore, its rules are not publicly available.

The party does not have any official intra-party democratic mechanism. As the experts point out, the party is wholly built around the charisma of its leader – Aleko Elisashvili [interview with expert No. 5, 2022]. The explanation may be that the party was created just before the last elections and does not have relevant experience in conducting party politics. The analysis of the intra-party processes of the seven political parties presented reveals that although the weak parties survived under state funding conditions, they could not develop the party structure. Despite the budgetary funding, the LPG failed to gain broad electoral support. On the contrary, the political party Girchi created intra-party democracy without budgetary funding, managed to attract alternative funding sources, and offered voters a sharply defined ideological program.

It should be noted that Girchi is the only one among the research parties that has a democratic mechanism for making internal party decisions. The party has created an electronic portal through which ordinary members can vote for the desired candidate and participate in forming the parliamentary list. However, it can also put themselves forward as a candidate [Girchi 2020]. In addition, the mentioned procedures are related to the accumulation of electronic currency introduced by Girchi, which gives the party members additional motivation to engage in party activities and make donations, which is the first precedent in the Georgian political space. Accordingly, the resource dependence theory explains the main challenges of the institutional sustainability of the modern Georgian party spectrum. Parties constantly receiving budget funding have become dependent on these resources and have lost the motivation to develop the party organization. The political party Girchi, which does not receive state funding, found more motivation to develop the party organization and involve members in the governance process to ensure the institutional and financial sustainability of the party.

4. IDEOLOGICAL STABILITY/AMBIGUITY OF GEORGIAN PARTIES

One of the visible challenges of the institutional sustainability of the modern Georgian party spectrum is the implementation of coherent, substantive policies. The research revealed that despite the declaration of ideological values by the parties, it is common to change economic or social views from year to year, and often, a party with the same ideological value promises voters radically different issues.

It is explained by the fact that Georgian parties were not created around values but were united around leaders. Also, voters do not have an order regarding ideological

values [interview with expert No. 6, 2021]. For example, the UNM, EG, the RPG, and the APG call themselves right-center political unions.

Against this background, often, the promises of the RPG are based on the ideas of a free-market economy and a secular state [Republican Party of Georgia 2008]. In contrast, the APG often promises voters an increased state role in the economy, protectionism, free health care, education, and the restoration of close ties between the church and the state [Alliance of Patriots of Georgia 2020]. Despite the similar ideological foundation, the UNM and EG broke up, which once again confirms the secondary nature of ideology for parties. In addition, for example, the UNM is characterized by frequent changes in ideological principles from year to year. When it was in power, it promised voters increased social programs and state-friendly economic policies [United National Movement 2008]. After switching to the opposition, the party promised the voters a minimalist government, implementing neoliberal economic and targeted social policies [United National Movement 2020]. Accordingly, it is clear how vague the perception of right-centrism is in the modern Georgian party spectrum. Also, parties' ideological affiliation does not determine their field of action. For example, in 2012, the RPG was in a coalition with the left-centrist GD and opposed the UNM, while in 2020, it united with the UNM against the GD.

As for the declared left-centrist political parties GD and LPG, first of all, it should be noted that despite the ideological proximity of these two parties, there is extreme polarization between them, which indicates the absence of a coherent and substantive policy in the modern Georgian party spectrum [interview with an expert No.4, 2021].

In general, labor parties in the world are unions of workers and trade unions, and therefore, have a relatively solid social base; however, in the case of Georgia, the Labor Party has not been able to establish a similar niche, and instead of ideological values, it is united around the personal characteristics of the party leader. In addition, despite the left-centrist ideology, the party, in its pre-election programs, often focuses on protecting right-wing national values, Georgian traditions, and national culture [Labor Party of Georgia 2012].

The ideological instability of the LPG is also manifested by changing economic visions from year to year. The party sometimes promises voters increased taxes for business and correspondingly increased social programs (in 2008), and sometimes supports reduced profit taxes and targeted social policies [Labor Party of Georgia 2020].

As for the GD, which is also a left-centrist political party united around its leader, in 2012, it promised voters the creation of a social state with universal welfare. However, in 2016, the party changed its economic views and emphasized a free-market economy and monetarism [Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia 2016], which went beyond its declared ideological foundation. In addition, the party often uses right-wing populism when discussing protecting and saving the national identity, Georgian language, and culture.

As for the so-called ‘new’ political parties, such as Citizens and Girchi, it should be noted that there is a sharp ideological difference between them. According to the 2020 pre-election program, the ideological visions of ‘citizens’ are pretty vague. On the one hand, the party promises voters a free market economy, minimal taxes, and, on the other hand, increased social spending and universal education and health care [Aleko Elisashvili – Citizens 2020]. Like other parties, “Citizens” are less focused on adherence to ideological values because the mentioned party also united around the leader [interview with expert No. 5 and No. 2]. As for the political party Girchi, unlike other parties, it identifies itself as a libertarian ideologist and supports the idea of a minimalist government, according to which the government should only care about the protection of citizens’ safety, property, and freedom and the state should not interfere in the economy. In addition, the state should not plan health, education, sports, or culture policies because, according to the party’s view, the free market will regulate all of these [Girchi 2020].

Accordingly, in this situation, in the modern Georgian party spectrum, only the political party that can be called an ideologically stable party whose pre-election visions coincide with its declared ideological values is ‘recommended.’

However, in the case of Girchi, like other parties, the characteristics of personification were highlighted because, due to the personal alienation between the internal groups of the party, the party split into two parts. Despite the ideological stability, it was not possible to maintain unity.

According to Susan Scarrow, modern parties consist of ideologically diverse members/factions, so internal groups cannot agree on fundamental issues if the party is fragmented. We are dealing with disintegration/entropy, and if they can cooperate and maintain the integrity of the party, then there is coordination [Scharrow et.al 2017]. When a high rate of disintegration characterizes a party, its disintegration is expected, which happened in the case of the UNM, EPG, and Girchi.

Thus, even though the state spent a total of 69,935,818 million GEL in financing researched parties in 2008–2020 [Election Administration of Georgia 2020], it

seems that the parties did not use the mentioned financial resources to create sustainable party platforms, which is why leftist or rightist populist promises and inconsistent, irrelevant pre-election programs are often offered to voters, which makes political parties even more dependent on the influence of the party leader.

5. TERRITORIAL CONCENTRATION/DISPERSION OF GEORGIAN PARTIES AND BUREAUCRATIC STRENGTH/WEAKNESS

Research on the financial and institutional sustainability of political parties also includes an examination of the party's territorial concentration/dispersion [Rose and Mackie 1988]. Which means, what is the distribution area of the party? Is it concentrated in one city or spread across the country? Parties may serve voters who live primarily in rural areas, or they may focus on urban populations. It should be noted that territorial distribution affects the homogeneity of political competition within the country and serves the development of political involvement at the local level [Caramani 2004].

Accordingly, it is essential to analyze the challenges of Georgian political parties regarding territorial concentration/dispersion. It should be noted that among the political parties participating in the study, Girchi was the only party whose structure did not formally include the party's regional organizations. However, the party has developed an electronic portal through which it is possible to participate in the party's activities throughout Georgia. In addition, the party supports strengthening local self-government rights [Girchi 2020], although it does not outline a specific action plan in this direction. In addition, even though Girchi has efforts to be a party with intra-party democracy, it still finds it challenging to increase regional representation, and the primary human resources are still concentrated in the capital [interview with expert No. 2, 2021].

Issues related to decentralization and the development of local self-government cannot be seen in the pre-election programs of the UNM (2008–2020). However, despite this, the party has a regional representation and a network of party coordinators throughout Georgia, which is an essential force in the pre-election process, and the party has about 80 regional organizations, each of which has a chairman and members [United National Movement 2020]. In addition, according to the party charter, the goal of the city and district organization is to spread the party's main visions and tasks at the local level [United National Movement 2013]. Therefore, it is clear that we are dealing with something other than a territorial and decentralized political party, but a strictly central political party that has specific mechanisms of spreading influence at the local level.

Local party organizations are not involved in the internal party decision-making process of the National Movement, which is one of the main challenges in bringing local problems to the central level. It should also be noted that even though the party has a vast network of coordinators and offices, the mentioned resource is often used only in the pre-election period and not in the party's daily activities (interview with expert No. 1, 2021). Therefore, the party is not based on the system of governance from the periphery to the center, and often, initiatives and decisions are made only at the central level.

As for the GD, like the UNM, it also has a network of party offices and coordinators throughout Georgia. It can be explained by the fact that both parties have the appropriate financial resources to ensure the mobilization of human resources at the regional level before the elections because they have representation in local self-government bodies. Often, the parties' district organizations and city council members are the same persons [interview with expert No. 2, 2021]. Even in the case of the GD, despite its broad regional representation, the party does not have an actual decentralization mechanism through which local-level party organizations would significantly contribute to party politics. However, the party actively supported the development of local self-government in the pre-election programs of 2012–2020. Such governance practices were not introduced within the party, as evidenced by the party charter, which does not assign essential functions to local-level organizations in developing local or national policies and party activities [interview with expert No. 4, 2021].

In pre-election programs, the ideas of self-government and decentralization were actively supported by the RPG, although the involvement of local-level district organizations in the process of the party's activities is less noticeable [interview with expert No. 4, 2021]. It is also worth noting that "Citizens" do not have local-level organizations, which is explained by the fact that the party was created only in the run-up to the 2020 elections. According to the expert, the fact that parties are created around the leader also reduces their motivation to create a truly decentralized party organization [interview with expert No. 3, 2021].

As for the APG, the party, in its pre-election programs, does not emphasize the importance of decentralization, and in the charter, there is no fundamental record of the role of local organizations in the party's structure. In general, the APG often holds protest rallies in different cities of Georgia, and the party has coordinators in different regions. However, the duty of these persons is not to bring local problems to the central office but to implement the decisions made at the center on the spot.

EG also has a similar system, which formally asserts the role of local organizations in managing the party's activities at the charter level. However, at the actual level, it is rarely implemented in practice. Accordingly, despite some efforts, the modern Georgian party spectrum is characterized by geographical concentration, which makes the party organization dependent on the central ring.

Thus, the geographical distribution and decentralization of political parties in 2008–2020 is one of the main challenges of institutional sustainability. Political parties have failed to decentralize their internal party structure, and power is often in the hands of a central party leader or a small privileged group.

CONCLUSION

Thus, as a result of the research, it was revealed that despite the increase in financing of political parties from the state budget from year to year, the absence of an ideological profile and consistent policy is one of the essential characteristics of modern Georgian parties. In the context of the Resource Dependence Theory, in the example of Georgian political parties, it was revealed that the more the specific share of state financing in the party's financial resources increases, the less the party's institutional stability and democratic development.

Data analysis revealed that parties with a high degree of financial dependence on the state (Labour Party, Republican Party, Patriot Alliance) face more challenges in terms of institutional sustainability. The analysis of the intra-party processes of the eight political parties included in the study shows that in the conditions of state funding, small parties 'physically survived,' but in the conditions of receiving guaranteed funding, they lost the motivation to form a powerful party organization. It is not worth the risk for parties to offer different visions or policies to their voters for fear of losing the minimum stable electorate through which they constantly receive state funding.

In contrast to this, the political party Girchi, in the absence of budgetary funding, created mechanisms of intra-party democracy, managed to attract alternative funding sources, and actively lobbied for the issues desired by the party's supporters in the period between elections. Thus, discussing the financial instability in the modern Georgian party spectrum leads to the problem of institutional stability of parties.

Despite increasing state funding, parties lack established democratic decision-making mechanisms, exhibit a high degree of dependence on the leader, lack consistent and consistent ideological values, and fail to provide voters with coherent,

substantive policy proposals. They do not have alternative sources of financial income, which is related to the bureaucratic weakness of the parties. In the conditions of dependence on state resources, the parties do not have the proper motivation to form a strong party organizational structure, which is one of the main challenges of the modern Georgian party spectrum regarding institutional sustainability.

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