

# Chapter 10

## The Dilemma of Good Governance Versus Power Grab in Georgia



Shalva Dzebisashvili

### 10.1 Introduction

Since the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) in the early 1990s, the proponents of successful democratic transition have looked tirelessly for instances in which regime change has led to the establishment of more democratically functioning institutions, i.e., the use of democratic practices and thus to the tradition to *good governance* and a consolidated democracy (Huntington, 1991). Georgia has been titled the lighthouse of democracy as a part of this wave, following the 2003 “Rose Revolution”, has gradually regressed in its democratic credentials, and after the parliamentary elections and the change of political regime in 2012, ultimately plunged into the category of partly authoritarian (or hybrid) democracy (Freedom House, 2021). As the *Nations in Transit 2020* calmly states, the 29 countries which have experienced a democratic breakdown, leading to the maximum number of undemocratic regimes since 1995 in Europe and Central Asia, are characterized by:

...these politicians have stopped hiding behind a facade of nominal compliance. They are openly attacking democratic institutions and attempting to do away with any remaining checks on their power. In the region stretching from Central Europe to Central Asia, this shift has accelerated assaults on judicial independence, threats against civil society and the media, the manipulation of electoral frameworks, and the hollowing out of parliaments, which no longer fulfill their role as centers of political debate and oversight of the executive (Freedom House, 2020).

Despite the laudable attempt of the *National Movement* government to establish a tradition of peaceful transition of power (to the coalition of *Georgian Dream*) through parliamentary elections, the hopes of further democratic consolidation and the proliferation of good governance principles quickly died and were replaced by growing

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S. Dzebisashvili (✉)  
The University of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia  
e-mail: [sh.dzebisashvili@ug.edu.ge](mailto:sh.dzebisashvili@ug.edu.ge)

domestic and international concerns (Kakachia & Lebanidze, 2019). In fact, this negative tendency is typical not only for Georgia, but a series of countries in Europe and Central Asia, once again highlighting the problem of “democratic automatism”, in which democratically held elections do not automatically herald the advent of stable democratic institutions. This point is shared by Joseph Derdzinski and Thomas Carothers, who conclude that the movement away from a dictatorship or an authoritarian regime in no way guarantees the movement toward democracy (Derdzinski, 2009). The quest for the best formula of democratic development, especially for those countries that, similarly to Georgia, experienced an authoritarian past, remains unfinished, thus ultimately boiling down to the ability of the political system to force the government and of the government itself, to act in the spirit of good governance and the practices involved.

According to Fukuyama, the discussion of contemporary politics on how to constrain tyrannical governments has centered on the institutional mechanisms that constrain the government, that of the rule of law and democratic accountability (Fukuyama, 2014). Thus, it has become highly relevant from the political and policy analysis perspective, including the extensive menu of concepts on the general rationale and practical mechanisms authoritarian regimes use, to justify the retreat from democratic achievements and ensure the effective monopolization of power. In this context, Lust and Waldner (2015) distill the essence of the problem and frame it as changes made by authoritarian regimes in formal political institutions and informal political practices that significantly reduce citizens’ capacity to control the government and keep it accountable (Lust & Waldner, 2015). The backsliding of democracy has thus been accelerated over the past decade.

This implies that the institutional mechanisms of accountability and the means of internal political and societal control, such as the internal security services, will inevitably come to the center of analytical scrutiny and bear great potential for providing deeper insight into the processes of general political transformation. The literature on the role of internal intelligence and other state security services is still underdeveloped, resulting in a “lacunae of understanding” and significance of these agencies in general and their political decision-making, not less in obstructing the democratic consolidation of institutions, i.e., the application of good governance practices (Alymbaeva & Fluri, 2021). It should also be noted that literature still needs to hold the so-called security sector’s control and accountability at the core of its analysis. Such literature is known as the Security Sector Reform (SSR) literature. However, as David Lewis correctly points out, largely the product of OSCE, the SSR is too overly optimistic while remaining unable to deliver a coherent doctrine with isolated assistance programs of primarily prescriptive and technical nature, divorced mainly from other initiatives and disconnected from the complexities (challenges) of political transformation (Lewis, 2011).

## 10.2 Hypothetical Approach

One can argue and assume that the wide variety of theoretical explanations for the democratization processes offers little to distill a universal formula for a successful transition. But still, it remains a mere simplification (Geddes et al., 2018). Instead, an attempt must be made to construct a hypothetical proposition based mainly on the more narrow systemic factors of political change: the strength of external (international) demands, the lack of internal pressure from below, and the nature of bureaucratic tradition, typically dominated by internal security apparatus in the Soviet era. As the aspect of international involvement (pressure) is visible in Georgia before and after the regime change in 2012, our first hypothetical claim is pretty much in line with Haggard and Kaufman's (2016a, 2016b) statement that the absence of a powerful opposition turns a transition from authoritarian rule to a mode of more liberal, good governance which is elite-driven mainly with external, i.e., international, inducements and constraints playing a much higher role in the calculus of the existing regime (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a, 2016b).

The second hypothetical explanation takes the influence of bureaucracy as a focal point of analysis, whether from the point of political (party) domination or the level of infiltration by loyal personnel or security service cadres. One could assume that, due to the heavy domination of the Soviet past, institutional/normative legacies, and bureaucratic ethics, the Russian pathway of "democratization" inevitably becomes a role model of failed democracy for Georgia. This is the crucial factor to be considered while studying post-Soviet regimes where, similarly to Russia, a large portion of senior bureaucrats (a quarter in Russia) can have a security services background (Treisman, 2018). This type of bureaucracy is intimately linked to the ability of the ruling regime to control and monitor at all levels of governance to ensure collaboration and prevent sabotage. However, as Barbara Geddes states, it also increases the power of the so-called inner circle of the regime and the clientele networks, as well as often requiring a concentration of power by chief executives and the replacement of the competent bureaucracy with regime supporters (Geddes et al., 2018).

## 10.3 Political Elites as Role-Model?

The role of political elites and leaders is a variable determining governance and regime type outcomes. No doubt, leaders exert immense influence on political processes and decision-making. However, as Ilie looked deeper into the identity of political leadership and the *prime-sites* of their emergence, he paraphrased that most research rests on the stereotypical approach of heroic individuals in hierarchical positions who mobilize supporters to achieve certain organizational goals. Whereas managers who know the rules, and how to break the rules, win (Ilie & Schnurr, 2017).

The significance of the arrangements between outgoing and incoming elites has been extensively discussed by Michael Albertus and Victor Menaldo (2018). In

essence, the negotiations are regarded as pacts and enterprises undertaken by political elites for other elites, and the institutional architecture of democracy is designed to shield the incumbent elites from the rule of law (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). Therefore, the ability of voters to translate their preferences into policies is blocked, leaving the very authoritarian DNA of almost every democracy untouched (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). Understandably, pacts between rival elites have tremendous consequences on the quality of democratic transformation and its institutional effectiveness. Conversely, as Luca Tomini concludes, the opposite process can happen in which opposing parties view each other as mortal enemies, and the narrow ruling elite perceives the political demands of the opposition as a threat. Thus, the choice is made to favor more authoritarian rule (entrenchment, repressions, and suspension of the rule of law) (Tomini, 2018). Viewing leadership as a systemic element, Ilie assigns the leader a significant role in shaping the human and institutional environment, where individual commitments, corporate, and cultural values (e.g., Nokia vs. Erikson) define the change processes (Ilie & Schnurr, 2017). This logic is further strengthened by Sarah Binder, who draws attention to the ability of party leaders to control resources and be exceptionally well informed and, therefore, to dominate the rank and file (Binder & Lee, 2015). In the end, the willingness to reach particular types of political arrangements for power-sharing is detrimental to political elites, according to Bell (2018). The elites themselves have to be distinguished by the degree of multilevel accountability, i.e., the multiplicity of stakeholders, as this indicates the interests and values upon which their power is constructed (Ade, 2019).

Hence, the role of leaders and elites in democratic transition reveals strong references to designing proper institutional mechanisms. Because the existing ones have contributed to the longevity of the previous regime and can be used by the new ruling party in the same way. Graeme considers the essence of democratic consolidation in the ability of all political groups to accept the established political institutions and the rules of the game, thus highlighting even more strongly the importance of institutional design typically carried out by political elites (Gill, 2000). Naturally, the definition of a consolidated democracy implies the existence of democratic institutions that fully comply with the principles of good governance, i.e., have the ability and mechanisms of (self)checks and balances. The elites in charge are very aware of this. However, to make good governance happen or, as Fukuyama puts it before governments can be constrained, they have to be able to govern—an apparent reference to governance practices and effective bureaucracy (Fukuyama, 2014).

Considering what has been discussed above, conceptually and context-wise, the critical political events during and after the Rose Revolution in 2003 in Georgia must taken under the analytical scrutiny. These can be broadly divided into two periods of differing political rule: The period of Saakashvili and United National Movement (UNM) domination and the authority of the Georgian Dream (GD) and the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili after their parliamentary victory in 2012. As for the case of Georgia, primary emphasis can be placed on the ability and willingness of transitional elites to bargain, strike a deal, and agree on (including institutional) arrangements that either secure the incumbent regime's interest or enable a more radical systemic (with or without personnel) purge.

Recognizing the role of leaders and elites in designing political institutions, the logic, and structure of those institutions, including constitutional arrangements, will be given special attention, along with the assessment of institutional mechanisms that either support political consensus building or, in contrast, increase the chance of negotiation failure. Not least important is to recognize from the very beginning the risk of having an institutional design that is incredibly informal and leaves sufficient space for building and utilizing informal, shadowy centers of actual and effective decision-making. This is even more important when societies are politically divided and polarized. Here, we regard institutions based on consociationalism and, thus, the arrangements for power-sharing as the best model that is primarily elite-driven (Jakala, 2018).

Even in stable democracies, according to Mansbridge and Martin, institutions and political organizations have little incentive to further successful political outcomes, thus resulting in frequent policy reversals and government changes (Mansbridge & Martin, 2013). It should not be forgotten that, in the case of Georgia, the socialist past has to be elevated as a critical variable determining the institutional arrangements at all levels where the expectations of consensual power-sharing have to be minimal. This comes as no surprise due to the basic acknowledgement that socialism could be regarded as democratic as long as it allows for elite competition for power, and not the rigid domination of politics and industry by a single elite (Medearis, 2001). The basics for any change in political institutions appear to be the agreement on the very constitutional document that safeguards the vital rights and interests of elites, especially those about to “exit the dictatorship on their terms” (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). It is likely that if an agreement is not reached. The institutional arrangements lack legitimacy, as Justin Parkhurst argues. Their constraining effect is too weak, and the incumbent regime (as well as its opponents) starts to treat politics as a “winner-take-all” game and “abuse office to marginalize oppositions permanently” (Parkhurst, 2017; Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a, 2016b). Such abuse of office is typically understood as the monopolization of institutions and state agencies under which government departments “operate as ‘party fiefdoms’”, and are identified with individual ministers (Jakala et al., 2018).

Haggard and Kaufman argue that those regimes, along with the domination of state agencies, allow for limited political participation and reward those who cooperate conditionally (e.g., in semi-competitive elections), endure most, and are even capable of minimizing the impact of regime opponents who “choose to remain outside the controlled institutional space” (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a, 2016b).

It should also be noted that the term “controlled institution” does not exclude the existence of a hidden or informal center of decision-making. Kunicová points out this by dwelling on distributive politics and formal institutions in Russia (Shapiro et al., 2008). And this claim is further supported by Albertus and Menaldo, who include the political culture and patronage in this context. They conclude that informal institutions can work in tandem with formal ones or even bolster them (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). Contemporary research is still struggling to uncover the evidence of hidden power and the “shadowy world” and thus remains insufficient primarily to change government policy, as Duncan Green admits (Green, 2016).

As the solid administrative body of bureaucracy represents the essence of institutions and the machinery of governance, the bureaucratic arrangements and policies in critical areas of political decision-making will be examined, as well as the norms and procedures of formal accountability and transparency, as these represent the central pillars of the concept of good governance and democratic institutional development, even more so as the role of bureaucracy is being discussed. Since control by institutions and of institutions is the key to regime stability, the democratic system typically asks for mechanisms of *answerability* and punishment. The first is related to the availability of information (transparency), and the second is directly linked to the capacity to impose negative sanctions on office holders (National Research Council, 2008). While there are many interpretations of accountability (e.g., horizontal vs. vertical), we would rather look for the evidence of *within the system (or systemic) accountability* and *external accountability*. The former implies the mechanisms within the governance system, whereas the latter relates to the means of accountability before the public (society) and international actors. The external or *third dimension of accountability* is centered around the power of international actors (governments and organizations) to hold a state institution to account. It is particularly relevant since new democracies usually seek foreign support and legitimization. For example, David Lewis draws attention to the limited effects of the assistance provided by OSCE in police reform in post-soviet Central Asia, as it has been very narrow and technical in nature and needs more significant oversight from competent officials (Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, some sources point directly toward references to good governance and the rule of law that are largely absent or vaguely defined in EU demands to the partners to whom assistance programs are provided (Brockmann & Bosold, 2009). This aspect is particularly relevant to Georgia, as every ruling party since the declaration of independence in 1991 formally recognized the European perspective as the only way of state development. However, the permanent and traditional reference to a European future and the respective increase in bureaucratic and technical-normative linkages with the standard tool of the EU's conditionality does not always result in a high speed or quality of democratic transformation.

Thus, Parkhurst correctly confronts the problem of bureaucratic abuse and political monopolization with the challenge of growing dominance of technocratic expertise in political institutions as harboring the risk of moving away from democratic ideals (Parkhurst, 2017). Since we are far from recognizing the technocratic essence of bureaucracy as problematic in our research context, the primary focus is devoted to the qualities that make bureaucracy "well trained, of good standing and tradition... with a strong sense of duty and no less strong *esprit de corps*" (Schumpeter, 2003). Schumpeter doubles down on this matter, highlighting the critical importance of a strong, independent, and powerful bureaucracy (of the Weberian mold) to be able to guide and, if needed, instruct the politicians in various ministries (Schumpeter, 2003). This perfect picture is contrasted and presented by him as the main argument and answer to governments staffed by amateurs who typically don't understand that this "powerful engine"—a product of a centuries-long development—cannot be created in a hurry or hired with money (Schumpeter, 2003). This finding is illuminating as it helps in every respect to search for plausible answers in cases like Russia or Indonesia,

where in one instance, Russians remained wary of the democratic institutions. At the same time, Indonesians learned quickly to use their institutions for channeling their preferences (Lussier, 2016). Hence, the influence of bureaucracy becomes a focal point of analysis, whether from the point of political (party) domination or the level of infiltration by loyal personnel or security service cadres.

Consequently, we won't be able to avoid the comparison of Georgia with the Russian "model" and political reality because, often, new democracies experience common pathologies they have inherited from the former colonial occupiers, as Albertus and Menaldo aptly highlight (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). Do we have profound evidence of institutional roots still linked to Soviet-era KGB and *Siloviki* (power services), and does the communist past represent the defining factor that explains the more substantial grip and control over society, thus the difference to non-communist authoritarian regimes (Kelley, 2017)? These questions are, evidently, very relevant and must be responded to since many post-Soviet countries, in their transformation processes, expose political regimes that are characterized by the power of strong executives "buttressed by control over economic rents, the judiciary, the police", and institutions that work "...in concert with the court and legal systems which were under strong political influence in the Soviet period and have remained equally subordinate to political elites..." in the post-Soviet period (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a, 2016b).

Similarly, when the former secret intelligence service of East Germany, the Stasi, ruled the country, the communist party-dominated government jobs and public offices had to be additionally controlled and monitored by the Stasi. Hundreds of thousands of agents infiltrated and guided solely by their loyalty to the secret service Minister of State Security and his control (Geddes et al., 2018). In this context, the formality of checks and balances and respective institutions becomes an increasingly dominant marker for these regimes. Infiltration of the government by the "contemporary incarnation of the Cheka" can be seen down to the regional governmental offices that have been stripped of their authority (administrative or financial) space and "transformed" into presidential representations, staffed with envoys (*polpreds*) with a background in the security services (Kovalev, 2017; Zimmerman, 2014). Consequently, it is no surprise that absolute power corrupts absolutely and easily. Those who capture state institutions start to increasingly engage in economic and business activities by abusing their coercive power and control over the justice system to "re-assign state property to themselves as private owners while maintaining that they are, indeed the state" (Osipian, 2019). This is relevant and intriguing as it also refers to the monolithic self-understanding, reflection, and mentality of those individuals belonging to the "elite uncontrolled class" of *Siloviki*, characterized by the shared belief in a strong state, order, unity, primacy of the state over the individual, desire to bring others under control, and loyalty to one's team (Taylor, 2018). The power of shared mentality, norms, and corporate values cannot be ignored. In fact, this might become a powerful, if not central, obstacle to institutional change, as the carriers of this mentality denigrate the ability of ordinary citizens to understand the "realm of official politics" and regard themselves as uniquely competent to understand the existing challenges (Treisman, 2018). Thus, as Caparini argues, this phenomenon



has to be carefully and decisively dealt with by ensuring "...that the mentality of those working in the new service doesn't reflect that of the former service"(sic!) (Green 2016). This can be done by ensuring that the security apparatus remains "agnostic about the party in power," through lustration and prosecution practices to ensure justice, legitimacy, and consolidation and by political-administrative purging and vetting (Derdzinski, 2009; Fraihat, 2016; Harris & Reilly, 1998). In the end, if we borrow from Joseph Derdzinski, it is essentially whether we'll be able to prove the power of authoritarian legacies per se or the inherent choice of the new political elite to preserve them to secure their interests (Derdzinski, 2009).

## 10.4 The Georgian Reality

On the eve of the *Rose Revolution* in 2003, President Eduard Shevardnadze's aging and weak administration was quite sure about the prospects of successful parliamentary elections. It did not regard the young generation of politicians such as Mikheil Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania, or Nino Burdjanadze as the mortal enemies of its political longevity. It had several reasons. They were all nurtured in the Shevardnadze government-led "Citizens' Union" party, occupied various mid-to high-level official (political) positions, and organizations created by them for the electoral purpose were not expected to do well, and, indeed, did not score a dangerously high number of votes (OSCE/ODIHR, 2003). The "white fox", prone to balancing his powerful ministers and regularly holding consultations with the minister of interior, initially Kakha Targamadze, and later his successor Koba Narchemashvili, could hardly believe that the situation following the rigged elections of 2003 got out of control that he was forced to negotiate with the "Troika" of Saakashvili, Zhvania, and Burjanadze, and managed only to secure his inviolability, but not that of his party nomenclature or the members of the corrupt economic oligarchy (Zamalashvili, 2004). Valentin argues that only limited space for goodwill and common ground was visible (Ade, 2019). We can see a rapid change and replacement of elites, both political and economic, following the deal reached between the revolutionary Troika and the ousted president Shevardnadze, which did not include guarantees of no prosecution, imprisonment, or exile, as Albertus and Menaldo would argue (2018). Interestingly, the incumbent regime's firm control of the security apparatus during the transition of power is the critical factor for such guarantees. Yet this was lacking from the beginning of the protest and even grew more problematic as the protests transitioned into a full-blown street revolution.<sup>1</sup> Unofficial channels, used intensively by several UNM and other leaders of the revolutionary alliance during the demonstrations, were not intended to create a certain level of trust but rather to implant disunity, intimidation, and chaos.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Koba Narchemashvili, the Former Minister of Interior in Georgia in 2003, personal communication, July 2, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Valeri Khaburdzania, the former Head of Intelligence Service, personal communication, February 21, 2021.



Since the source of support and legitimacy of the incoming political elite was utterly distinct from the incumbent regime, the primary way to signal loyalty to the president's base was through excessive extortion practices and prosecutions (Albertus & Menaldo 2018).

The personality and leadership qualities of former president Saakashvili who led the mass storming of the parliament as it was about to legitimize the falsified results of the elections, significantly increased his popularity and led the other members of the Troika to agree to his candidacy for the presidential elections in 2005.<sup>3</sup> The United National Movement stood firmly under the personal control of Saakashvili, with, essentially, no instances of internal severe disagreements to whatever decision was made, be it sudden relocation of the parliament unconvincingly justified by the need for decentralization or a hasty decision to build a deep sea port called Lasika (with no evidence of complex, serious evaluations done in advance) (Saakashvili, 2011). Even his very last decision, to return to Georgia, with no chance of any massive popular support, can only be explained hopes of his still existing personal popularity (vs. declining approval rates of the UNM) and the fear to lose his grip not only on the political situation in Georgia, but in the UNM party itself.

Personalities in party politics matter very much and aside from a few individuals such as Zurab Adeishvili, Giga Bokeria, and Vano Merabishvili in the UNM the role of ministers and deputy ministers was reduced to the technical function of executing decisions made in the inner circle.<sup>4</sup> This resulted in the frequent replacement of premier ministers and ministers, ironically called in public the government carousel, on which one individual could “practice” several ministerial positions within a short period of time.<sup>5</sup> Irakli Okruashvili, who, similar to other UNM ministers, occupied several key positions in the power ministries (from 2003 to 2006), and ended up at odds with Saakashvili due to his growing popularity, did not want to accept the Ministry of Economic Development as compensation for his political ambitions, and was eventually arrested and exiled to France in 2007 (Civil.ge, 2007).

The Georgian Dream (GD), led by the oligarch Ivanishvili, utilized similar patterns of leadership, consolidating a vast coalition of political parties, movements, and organizations supported by a mass base, a significant part of which was alienated by the strict and repressive policies of the Saakashvili regime (Transparency International Georgia, 2010). All of the critical political appointees in the new government following the parliamentary victory of the GD in 2012, and especially after 2016, were former members of the CARTU-foundation and Cartu Bank, institutions run by Bidzina Ivanishvili since the late 90s (Cartu Bank, 2022). During the political

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<sup>3</sup> Giorgi Baramidze, the member of the UNM, former minister of Interior in 2004, personal communication, October 3, 2021.

Nino Burjanadze, former Chairmain of the Parliament in 2001-2008, personal communication, August 5, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Burjanadze, personal communication, August 5, 2022. Khaburdzania, personal communication, February 21, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Note: Among many instances (incl. dozens of prime ministers) the career paths of Giorgi Baramidze and Irakli Okruashvili were extraordinary as they managed to occupy several key power-ministerial positions in a very short period of time.

developments and solidification of his power, he increasingly relied on his close circle of accomplices. Ultimately, he decisively distanced himself from several coalition parties that were domestically considered pro-western and democratic (Topuria 2014).

After resigning from political activities as prime minister and handing over this position to his closest ally, Irakli Gharibashvili in 2013, he again returned as the chairman of the Georgian Dream party and, in 2021, distanced himself again from the political life by once again appointing Irakli Gharibashvili as a prime minister. As a result, Gharibashvili had “unexpectedly” resigned from the position of PM in 2015, supposedly due to heavy criticism from the oligarch (Gogua, 2015). Given all this, alongside other frequent instances of governmental carousels, where previously praised and credited political figures and colleagues (Kvirikashvili and Gakharia), became a “disgrace” to the GD, as well as the frequent changes of ministerial positions which continued to be a routine practice, the centrality of Bidzina Ivanishvili’s leadership in the GD cannot be denied (Radio Liberty, 2021). Furthermore, the frequent use of informal and shadowy mechanisms of decision-making and influence while deciding on political appointments or projects of economic and/or financial importance was frequently corroborated by Gia Khukhashvili, who happened to be at the very center of GD creation and the building of the team which led the oligarch to parliamentary victory in 2012.<sup>6</sup>

In a position of political domination and individual control of their party, such regimes exploit the absence, i.e., the weakness of the political opposition (caused by political nihilism and inability to mobilize additional supporters) and create or modify institutional designs to meet their preferences and interests. Such elite-driven transformation lacks pressure from below and can only exhibit some degree of external accountability (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016a, 2016b). Both parties (UNM and GD) immediately exploited their constitutional majorities in the parliament to proceed with constitutional changes that favored the political interests of the incoming regimes. In the case of the former, the constitution was amended to reduce the president’s power and turn the presidential republic into a German-modeled parliamentary republic with the prime minister on the top of the executive (Khidasheli, 2012). Arguably, this was done to allow President Saakashvili, who no longer could be elected in a presidential capacity, to transfer to the prime minister’s chair and continue ruling the country. Similarly, the Georgian Dream, having promised to introduce direct and proportional elections (with no majoritarian seats in parliament), broke its promise and postponed the introduction of the promised electoral model until 2024 (Radio Liberty, 2019).

The decision was relatively easy to explain since the promise of ‘better elections’ was forced by the political crisis and massive popular demands for government resignation during the *Gavrilov Night*. Additionally, the decision to abolish the seats in the parliament that are elected based on majoritarian victory could hardly be accomplished as those parliamentarians typically represent the local (regional) servants or

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<sup>6</sup> Gia Khukhashvili, former Counselor of Bidzina Ivanishvili, personal communication, July 27, 2021.

clientele of the ruling regime and are thus a potent tool of parliamentary domination. The political intentions manifested in institutional design can also be seen in other domains of political activity, such as the center-region relationship, i.e., the delegation of authorities from the center to the regions and municipalities, widely termed in Georgia as politico-administrative decentralization. We also see a similarity, which can be attributed to the typical pattern of authoritarian behavior, such as the maximization of control.

During UNM rule, for example, the position of regional governors, at that time unconstitutional entities, was strengthened and heavily subordinated to the president through the appointment of personally loyal individuals and party cadres (e.g., Petre Ziskarishvili, Akaki Bobokhidze, and Zaza Gorozia). These moves made it possible to minimize the space of political activism in the provinces and paralyzed local economic initiatives and activities, making them almost entirely dependent on endorsement from the political center in Tbilisi. However, the GD government promised to implement administrative decentralization before the parliamentary elections in 2012. It soon threw away these promises. It continued the tradition of staffing governors' positions with loyal cadres and even decreased the number of free municipalities from twelve to five (Civil.ge, 2017a, 2017b). In the end, the significant factor that constrains each regime and keeps it within the frames of democratic acceptability is the external (European/Western) influence, reflected in multiple conditions and demands of technical, institutional-procedural, or a pretty radical political nature (Association Agreement, or the EU-Commission Opinion on the Candidacy status), that despite their increasingly demanding nature cannot be entirely ignored by the ruling regime (European Commission, 2022).

Schumpeter paraphrased that an effective bureaucracy cannot be created promptly and hired with money. It must be sufficiently independent and powerful to avoid becoming a government of amateurs (Schumpeter, 2003). Unfortunately, the Georgian reality in all cases reveals substantial evidence of an administrative apparatus that is heavily politicized and thus prone to frequent reshuffling across the entire bureaucratic pyramid based on political but also increasingly individual (ministerial), loyalty (Mariamidze, 2018; Urushadze, 2018). Retaining the pattern of behavior from the UNM and initially committing to the political purge of governmental offices as the UNM did in 2003, the GD even expanded the number of employees in public offices, hitting a record, albeit somewhat reducing the number of public employees fired bluntly at ministerial demand and with no solid legal protection (Lomidze & Dzidziguri, 2020; Urushadze, 2018). Admittedly, such bureaucracy can hardly meet the high demand for efficacy, which is especially important at managerial and administrative levels (Harris & Reilly, 1998). The degree of bureaucratic accountability can hardly be assessed as optimal due to the formal nature of control mechanisms, the politicization of justice, and the low availability of relevant information. For instance, the parliamentary committees rarely question or call intensive hearings on matters of great urgency for the ruling party, and even those that functionally deal with issues of state security, in fact, serve the interests of the agencies to be held accountable (Dzebisashvili, 2014). Furthermore, the deputy chairman of the Defence and Security Committee in the Georgian parliament Ms. Teona Akubardia was forced to write

a letter to the Speaker of Parliament (GD), listing all the activities of the committee related to security services, where she and other opposition members of the committee were stripped the constitutional right to participate by the current committee chair Irakli Beraia (a blatant abuse of power). In essence, this powerful mechanism of parliamentary control, questioning, and investigation became an extended hand of the executive during the Saakashvili era. They were successfully “imported” and utilized by the Georgian Dream.

The absence of practical tools of checks and balances and the formality or informality of the accountability mechanisms of government agencies has become even more problematic as it allows the incumbent regime to increasingly resort to undemocratic and violent means of political control and domination that typically can only be executed by heavy reliance on security services or the *Dzalovnebi*, a Georgian term widely used in political language and a direct translation of the Russian *Siloviki*. The initial popularity after the revolution in 2003 was wasted due to the heavy and clumsy activities of power agencies, such as the Ministry of the Interior (with the intelligence department integrated) and a prosecutors’ office that has essentially eliminated the freedom of the judiciary and increasingly expanded intimidation practices toward the businesses and large segments of the population.

In line with Caparini’s findings, the parliamentary oversight of security and intelligence services in Georgia has become a pure formality and, similar to the Russian case, has been captured by party members and has thus lost its independence and value (Caparini, 2007). Significant challenges related to ineffective oversight, a lack of political neutrality, and undemocratic practices in internal security services continue to mark security governance in Georgia. This is similar to the Russian model exemplified by the limited ability of national legislatures to control security services, where the State *Duma* often even increases their discretion by delegating legislative initiatives to the concerned security agencies themselves (Treisman, 2018). The phenomenon of the rapidly growing influence of security services in the political system down to the very critical moment of forming a new elite—a mix between *nomenklatura* and *siloviki*—to destroy competitors and secure economic and political instruments of power, including the means of coercion, has been brilliantly covered by Andrei Kovalev (Kovalev, 2017). The members of these agencies, in extreme cases as in Russia, can gradually take over key positions across the country, and “United by a common identity, a shared worldview, and a deep personal loyalty”, the *siloviki* constitute a cohesive corporation, accountable to no one but the president himself, being the driving force behind authoritarian policies (Treisman, 2018).

Under Ivanishvili’s leadership, the intimidation practices toward businesses and the population decreased significantly. Nevertheless, the intensity and extent of political espionage toward the opposition, journalists, social activists, clergy, and foreign diplomats, and election fraud were made possible through massive intimidation of “vulnerable” segments of voters by security agents. The infiltration of security apparatus-related individuals in central or regional administration offices reached a point of concern (Civil.ge, 2022). This tradition was not GD-novum and was first effectively instrumentalized during the UNM rule. But the scale of merging and diffusion between the *Dzalovani*(*siloviki*) agencies and other public offices such as

ministries, municipalities, parliamentarians, or even businesses and, most importantly, the ruling GD party is alarming.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that similar to their Russian counterparts, the members of the Georgian security agencies have developed a common mindset, shared understanding, and set of principles that unites them, whether active in duty or outside of the institutional framework. This is expressed in the word—*Tanamshromeli*—meaning ‘colleague’ but far better matches the Russian version—*Sotrudnik*. This code word, which testifies to your professional background and corporate values, makes it much easier to transfer from one power (*Dzalovani*) agency to another and remain indefinitely in any public office if needed.

## 10.5 Conclusion

The problem of the diffusion of bad practices in transitional democracies is not new. Similar to other international cases, an initial push for a more democratic rule in Georgia did not necessarily result in a consolidated democracy in which institutions play significant and independent roles in keeping democratic principles such as transparency and accountability, i.e., the mechanism of good governance, viable. The reality is sobering. Instead, the new political elites (UNM or GD) had opted to take advantage of authoritarian tools and formal accountability (reform masking) and do little to prevent the total monopolization of power and state capture. Whether under UNM led by Mikheil Saakashvili or the GD led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, the common feature is that the monopolization of politics by both regimes started with the individual monopolization of the party. The party structures of UNM and GD, although different in design, constituency, and commitment to a cohesive political ideology, reveal a striking similarity in the behavior of their political leaders and appointment policies and principles based mainly on political and individual loyalty. Leaders are instrumental at every level of political decision-making, utilizing formal or informal frameworks (formats) of policymaking. They lead negotiations and are the best informed to make decisive moves, whether by designing new institutional frameworks or defining the acceptable level of institutional accountability.

In his policy of centralization of power by eliminating the possibility of local self-governance and appointing personal trustees as governors accountable solely to him personally, President Saakashvili provided only lip service to the democratic prospects of the country and allowed Bidzina Ivanishvili to benefit from this mistake. Similarly, the bureaucracy, the backbone of the effective administrative functioning of any country, was reduced to the function of a politically (and individually) trusted pool of public offices and technical implementers, stripped of any ability and responsibility of independent or neutral thinking and initiative. With the degradation of existing

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<sup>7</sup> Note: the story of the former deputy minister of State Security Service is exemplary, as it reflects a rapid ascendance of “nobody” with the condition of social dependency to the position of deputy minister and the status of multimillionaire. The involvement of the Russia based businessman David Khidasheli in the David Gareji affair and his consequent reward by the Georgian Government (thousands of hectares of forest in the natural resort area Racha) is pretty much telling.

accountability mechanisms of state institutions and agencies to the level of formal and embarrassing mimicry of Western practices, the process of creating the so-called *power vertical* (or *Vertikalj Vlasti* as it is called in Russia) in Georgia was complete. State capture, evident by the end of UNM rule, became even more articulated during the GD government with an ever-growing and all-embracing bureaucratic apparatus.

All this, with a great dose of insights into the difficulties of parliamentary oversight over security and intelligence services when institutions are captured by party members and thus lose their independence and ethical value, is extensively reviewed by Caparini (2007). Pretty in Russian style the national legislature in Georgia plays little if any role in executing serious control over Dzalovnebi/Siloviki. This is even more dangerous, as due to the growing tendency of merging between the political nomenklatura and formally former representatives of power agencies the risk of a complete takeover of the entire fabric of political governance becomes looming, effectively turning it to truly unaccountable and closed system. It is no secret that even in the most democratic countries the democratic oversight of security and intelligence services is challenging. In authoritarian countries or even transitional democracies, these services represent a key means of maintaining power and neutralizing domestic opposition. Therefore, we agree with Joseph Derdzinski that studying the “powerful and shadowy security apparatus” and the degree they were exposed to systemic changes and liberalization could have powerful policy implications toward “nudging the holdouts” (Derdzinski, 2009).

With all markers in place, the current political system and the way of governance in Georgia strongly resembles the system created by Vladimir Putin in Russia, with the strong central pillar of power exerting influence and control both in the administrative structures of the country and party echelons using the security apparatus (infiltration and proliferation). If continued unchecked, this practice will inevitably result in a more totalitarian system, except when this damaging prospect is balanced by the increased involvement of external actors (the EU and/or USA) and their respective accountability demands and other tools of good governance. Unfortunately, the external pressure, i.e., whether the EU-12 point recommendations on the prospects of Georgia’s EU candidacy or the promise of NATO membership have increasingly failed to create positive resonance in the current government in Georgia. This has been demonstrated by canceling the so-called EU-brokered *Charles Michel Agreement* on the side of this ruling GD party, the stunning lack of practice and implementation of the EU-Commission 12-point recommendations, and the increasingly confrontational rhetoric toward the EU and the US by the GD representatives in the context of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. This fact points toward the need for greater importance to the mandatory nexus between the external pressure factors and internal demands represented by a powerful democratic opposition. Without this strong linkage, where external and internal democratic pressures can be mutually reinforcing when needed, reliance solely on the positive effects of international demands can be futile and misleading.

Not least, domestic political competition must be characterized by the permanent presence of a robust democratic opposition, which can not only increase the impact of external (democratic) pressure but also enormously benefit from it, forcing the

incumbent regime to comply with its demands. If these changes remain on paper, Georgia will risk becoming a champion of isomorphic mimicry only.

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