

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

GEORGIA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

DIVERSITY, CONVERGENCE AND EMPTY SPOTS

Levan Kakhishvili, David Keshelava,
Giorgi Papava, David Sichinava
October 2021



On Georgia's Political Compass, most parties are either left-wing and culturally conservative or liberal and right-wing. This means that in the two-dimensional ideological field used in this study, two ideological vacuums exist: Liberal Left and Conservative Right. In other words: Voters that hold values that place them in these areas are under-represented in Georgian politics.



Data used in this report does not confirm the existence of extreme polarization in Georgia. If we consider the two largest political parties – GD and UNM – the data shows that out of 30 policy issues, these two parties have the same position on half of them.



A majority of the Georgian electorate is in favor of minimum wage regulation, prefers voluntary participation in the cumulative pension system, advocates higher taxes for businesses that pollute the environment, and have clear and strong pro-Western and pro-EU preferences.

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. BACKGROUND	6
3. METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS	8
4. A SNAPSHOT OF THE GEORGIAN ELECTORATE	10
4.1 Ideological orientation of voters: left-right vs conservative-liberal	10
4.2 Voter preferences by individual statements	13
4.3 Voters' ideological orientation towards different policy areas	15
5. POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN GEORGIA: PARTIES, IDEOLOGIES, AND POLICIES	18
5.1 Underrepresented ideological positions	20
5.2 Party groupings	20
5.3 What makes them different: georgian dream versus united national movement	22
5.4 Conclusions	23
6. VOTER-PARTY PROXIMITY	25
6.1 Voters' ideology and party preferences	25
6.2 Voters' ideological distance from party position	27
6.3 Unaffiliated voters	29
7. CONCLUDING REMARKS	30
7.1 Consistency and importance of political ideologies	30
7.2 Polarization	31
7.3 Party-voter linkages	32
APPENDICES	35

Executive Summary

The 2020 parliamentary election in Georgia was a highly contested political event not only during the pre-election campaign but also after the elections took place. Most opposition parties boycotted Parliament for a few months, and a return to parliamentary politics was only possible with mediation efforts of the European Union. To help voters inform themselves about various political parties and policy offers presented by the parties, the Voting Advice Application (VAA) – Election Compass of Georgia was created. The interactive tool was designed to help voters navigate a complex political landscape and at the same time collect unique data that allows for a comparison of the policy preferences of Georgian parties and voters. The Compass is composed of 30 questions covering five different policy areas and making up two dimensions on an ideological plane: a left-right nexus and a conservative-liberal nexus. Given that between September 23, 2020 and November 22, 2020, the Compass was used about 38,000 times, the resulting data has provided invaluable insights about voters' policy preferences, patterns of positioning on the political landscape, and party-voter proximity in Georgia.

Key findings: Voter preferences

- The average Georgian voter tends to be left-leaning when it comes to economic issues and liberal on the socio-cultural dimension of the ideological plane. However, voters are more dispersed along the left-right axis compared to the conservative-liberal axis. At the same time, voters who lean towards the right economically tend to be more liberal.
- The aforementioned patterns are not significantly influenced by geographic area or educational attainment. However, voter preferences vary across gender, age, and ethnicity. Women tend to have more leftist economic preferences, while ethnic minorities tend to be more liberal and people above age 50 are less liberal than their younger counterparts. At the same time, right-wing economic preferences are almost entirely professed by people younger than 50.
- The most polarizing policy issues are related to land policy, drug policy, and state employment policy, while voter positions tend to converge when it comes to taxing businesses that pollute the environment, making participa-

tion in the cumulative pension system voluntary, and pursuing a pro-Western foreign policy.

- In policy areas related to the economy, healthcare and education, the average voter is left of center. This means that the average voter believes, for example, that paying a monthly wage below the subsistence level should be prohibited by law; that the state should regulate the prices of medicines; and that healthcare should be universal and free. At the same time, women, those aged 35 and above, ethnic Georgians, those with lower educational attainment, and residents of rural areas lean towards the left.
- When it comes to judicial affairs, women, older generations, ethnic Georgians, people with higher educational attainment, and the rural electorate tend to be more conservative, implying their opposition to ideas such as the direct election of judges by the people or the legalization of light drugs.
- In terms of foreign and security policy, overall, liberal positions such as supporting Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy, even if it risks worsening relations with Russia, are prevalent and the trend strengthens among voters who are men, those aged below 35, ethnic Georgians, the urban population, and those who have higher educational attainment.
- Finally, when it comes to social and environmental issues, women, younger voters, the population of Tbilisi, and people with higher educational attainment tend to be more liberal. Some liberal positions include taxing businesses that pollute the environment; or excluding the financing of religious institutions, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, from the state budget.

Key findings: the Georgian Political landscape

- Georgian parties are mostly distributed along the two-dimensional ideological plane diagonally from the lower left to the upper right corner. This means that two ideological vacuums are created: Liberal Left and Conservative Right. These two quadrants are only occupied by two parties: Free Democrats and Free Georgia, respectively. This

means that voters who hold values that place them in these areas are under-represented in Georgian politics. According to the data, almost 44% of voters are located in the Liberal Left quadrant, while almost 3% are in the Conservative Right quadrant.

- Georgian parties, apart from the aforementioned two, can be divided into four ideological blocks: Left, Liberal Right, Conservative left, and Center. Of these four groupings, the Left, which is the most numerous, encompasses five parties including the Georgian Dream (GD), and seems to be struggling to form a consistent ideology. The Liberal Right, the second largest block of the four parties, includes the United National Movement (UNM), and has managed to consolidate its views relatively well.
- Of the 30 policy issues, none is a valence issue, i.e. an issue on which all parties have the same position. The closest to such an issue include some questions regarding foreign and security policy, yet the Conservative Left registers unique positions. The most polarizing issue among parties is the minimum wage, on which none of the party blocks has a clear position that all members of a group share.
- The GD and the UNM offer distinct policies to voters. On the left-right dimension, the GD supports welfare state expansion, while the UNM favors welfare retrenchment. On the conservative-liberal dimension, the GD tends to be on the conservative side, while the UNM tends to be liberal, but when it comes to the right of ethnic minorities to receive state services in their own language, the positions of the two parties are reversed (on this issue, the GD leans liberal, while the UNM adopts a conservative position). Finally, the GD supports environmental protection by supporting the introduction of new regulations, e.g. taxes; while the UNM prefers a rather libertarian approach.

Key findings: Party-voter proximity

- The ideological distance between parties and their supporters varies. Of the nine parties that managed to obtain at least one seat in parliament, the Left block – GD and LP – have the shortest average distance from their voters. The four parties from the Liberal Right – EG, Girchi, Citizens, and UNM – are the furthest from their supporters, respectively.
- The data reveals some characteristics of unaffiliated voters as well, suggesting that older voters are less likely to be affiliated with a party. At the same time, culturally liberal voters tend to be unaffiliated, while those who support limiting state intervention are more likely to be close to a certain political party.

1

INTRODUCTION

The importance of political parties is undeniable in a representative democracy. Georgia is not an exception, even though it has not yet consolidated its young democracy. However, analyzing party politics is challenging. On one hand, what political parties offer to voters before elections is often regarded as ideologically inconsistent (Barkaia and Kvashilava 2020¹). On the other hand, there are voters with perceptions of what parties have to offer. For example, a 2018 survey found that only 13 percent of Georgians think parties represent the interests of people like them (The Caucasus Research Resource Centers² 2018), while according to a 2020 survey, only 20 percent of Georgians think that electoral promises and platforms are more important than the personal evaluations of individual party leaders (The Caucasus Research Resource Centers³ 2020). These findings suggest that party ideological positions should not matter. However, the reality is that Georgian parties do produce pre-election manifestos and make their policy preferences public. This allows for calculating individual party positions in a specific policy area and comparing different parties with each other. At the same time, it is possible to ask voters some questions and calculate their ideological positions. Finally, the two strands of data can be compared to draw insights about the extent to which there are ideological linkages between Georgian parties and voters.

Based on these considerations, the goal of this report is three-fold. The report seeks to answer three main questions:

- How do voters place themselves regarding key policy issues?
- How are major political parties situated relative to key policy issues?
- How do parties and voters compare in terms of their ideological standings?

We are uniquely positioned to answer these questions as the analyses below are based on the data collected through the process of developing the Voting Advice Application (VAA) – Election Compass Georgia⁴. The Compass was developed by a team of Georgian researchers from the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) Georgia, the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) and the Policy Institute of the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET-Policy Institute). The project was supported by the United States Agency for International Development, the German political foundations and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the project is implemented by the Eastern European Center for Multiparty Democracy (EECMD), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the International Republican Institute (IRI). Methodological expertise and IT security is provided by Kieskompas, a company specializing in developing Voting Advice Applications based at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

The goal of Election Compass Georgia was two-fold: educational and academic. As an interactive tool, the Compass was designed to help Georgian voters learn more about political parties competing for their votes and to navigate the complex political landscape. The Compass did not advise voters on who to vote for but rather gave them the opportunity to see which party or parties stand closest to them in terms of values and ideological positions. Whether voters choose to use the new information in deciding how to cast their votes is entirely up to them. The Compass is also a gamified survey tool. With the use of the Compass, it is possible to gather data on both political parties and voters. The data can be analyzed, allowing researchers to draw insightful conclusions about Georgian party politics and party-voter interactions. Overall, between September 23, 2020 and November 22, 2020, the Compass was used about 38,000 times. Users answered 30 questions designed to position parties and voters on a two-dimensional ideological plane. The two dimensions included an economic left-right dimension and a cultural conservative-liberal dimension.

¹ https://eecmd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/საქართველოს-პოლიტიკური-ლანდშაფტი მეორე-გამოცემა_2020_EECMD.pdf

² <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2018ge/PPINTER/>

³ <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/na2020ge/PPROINLE/>

⁴ <https://kompasi.partiebi.ge/>

The following section of the report briefly describes the most important political dynamics throughout the year leading up to the October 2020 elections, which is followed by a detailed description of the methodology used for creating the Electoral Compass Georgia as well as the limitations of the voter data collected through the tool. The subsequent three sections provide an analysis of the data. The section on the snapshot of the Georgian electorate describes the trends and patterns that emerged in terms of how voters position themselves in key policy areas. This is followed by an analysis of the Georgian political landscape and the party positions along the left-right and conservative-liberal two-dimensional plane. The following section connects the two strands of data and analyses the ideological proximity of Georgian voters and parties. Finally, the key findings of the report are summarized in the concluding section.

2

BACKGROUND

The 2020 elections took place in an unusual context. Although highly contested as usual, two aspects made this election season special. First, new electoral rules for the first time made the prospect of a coalition government real. Second, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic disturbed the campaign process and even raised questions about possibly postponing the elections.

The new electoral rules that were introduced for the 2020 elections were interim rules. They were introduced as a result of a long battle for reforming the electoral system. Although the Georgian Dream (GD) government made constitutional amendments switching from a mixed electoral system to an entirely proportional representation system for the 2024 elections, a renewed push for the reform to apply to the 2020 election came in June 2019. A large-scale protest started on June 20, after the Russian MP from the Communist Party, Sergei Gavrilov, who was also the President of the General Assembly of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO), addressed the delegates of the IAO in Russian from the seat of the speaker of the Georgian Parliament.⁵ Even though public outrage was triggered by what was perceived as a symbolic violation of Georgian sovereignty by Russia, the demands of the protesters focused on domestic politics. One of the major demands was to reform the electoral system and abolish single-mandate districts. The GD conceded and agreed to make the necessary constitutional amendments so that the 2020 elections would be a fully-proportional vote.

A few months later, in November 2019, the bill on the promised constitutional amendments failed to pass. The GD tried to frame this unexpected development as an indication of the intra-party democracy, but even if this was true, it would not compensate for the frustration of voters. At the end of November 2019, GD and opposition parties started negotiations on how to proceed after failing to change the electoral system. The process was disrupted by the opposition parties in February 2020 after Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of European Georgia, was sentenced to over three years in prison. However, following the intervention of US and European diplomats at the end of the same month, negotiations were renewed. Even-

tually, the process resulted in an agreement on March 8.

The agreement put forward a few important points about how the 2020 elections would be conducted:

- The number of majoritarian MPs would be reduced from 73 to 30;
- The electoral threshold for proportional elections was set at 1%;
- A capping mechanism was introduced preventing a single party that receives less than 40% of the votes cast from receiving a majority of the seats in Parliament.⁶

The parliament adopted these proposed changes, and the elections took place according to the new rules. These new rules made a coalition government a real possibility for the first time in the history of Georgian parliamentarism. As a result, opposition parties started negotiations on the most optimal ways of competing against the GD. In this regard, two main avenues of cooperation can be identified. First, most opposition parties agreed that they would support each other's candidates in Tbilisi's eight single-mandate districts. Second, they achieved consensus on certain salient policy issues, such as reforming the judiciary.⁷

In contexts such as Georgia, which is not a consolidated democracy, opposition parties are usually disadvantaged, while ruling parties have administrative resources at their disposal and significantly greater financial resources. Therefore, pre-election campaigns are key in terms of appealing to unaffiliated voters, who in Georgia make up a very large part of society. For example, in August 2020, almost two-thirds of likely voters could not answer which party they would vote for if the elections were held the following day, while an additional nine percent did not name any party (see Figure 1.1).⁸ However, Georgian parties' attempts to attract votes through an electoral campaign were halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic influenced the playing field of political compe-

⁶ <https://ge.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/165/Memorandum-of-Understanding.pdf>

⁷ <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/641722-opozitsiuri-partiebi-sasamartlos-re-pormaze>

⁸ The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2020). „NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, August 2020“. Retrieved from: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/na2020ge/VOTPEL/>

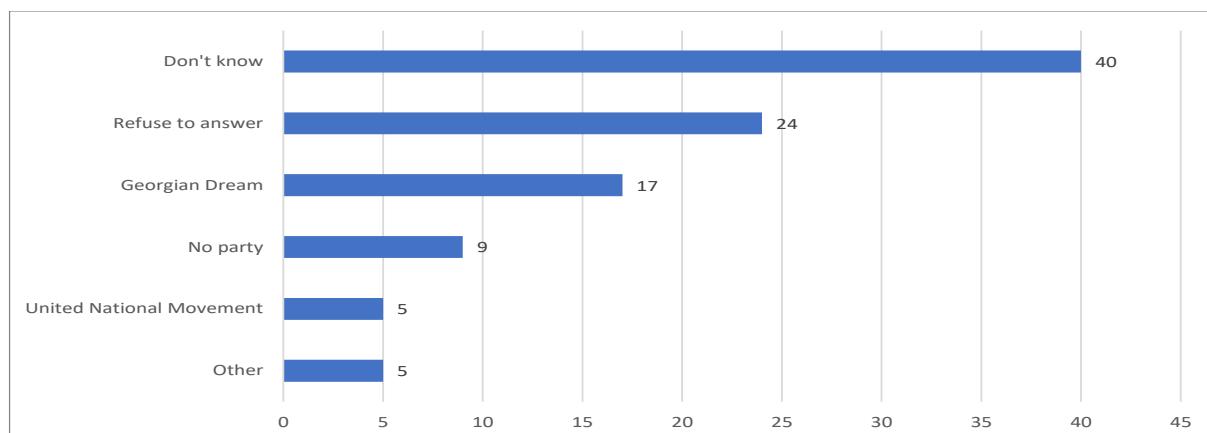
⁵ Civil Georgia. (2019). Opposition, Civic Activists Gather to Protest Russian Delegation's Visit to Tbilisi. [online]. Available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/309241>

tition in two main ways. First, the measures introduced by the government limited the traditional ways of political mobilization such as public demonstrations. Even when such demonstrations were organized, they would lead to controversial opinions from the public. Second, the pandemic and the initial effective response from the GD government to contain the spread of the virus led to increased public trust in government institutions.⁹ Trust in government translates into trust in the competence of the party that is in charge of forming the government. In the area of healthcare, the most competent party was the GD¹⁰, according to public perception, and effectiveness when dealing with the initial stage of the pandemic was most likely a boost for the party. Opposition parties did try to incite public discussions about the economic effects of the lockdown and the additional strict measures introduced by the government, however, it was not easy for these ideas to gain momentum when there was already a dichotomous understanding of saving lives versus saving the economy.

Overall, the pandemic impacted the campaign environment as well as public attitudes towards the performance of the parties, both ruling and opposition, but the side-effects of the pandemic were likely politically beneficial for the GD. In the end, the election date was not postponed. Notwithstanding the pandemic and, in some cases, lines at polling stations, turnout reached over 56 percent, which is slightly higher than the turnout in the 2016 election.

Overall, the Central Electoral Commission of Georgia announced the results of the vote with Georgian Dream receiving a majority of the vote without the need for a coalition government. The opposition, however, contested these results, refusing to participate in the second round of the elections in 17 single-mandate districts, and started boycotting the new Parliament.

Figure 1.1
If parliamentary elections were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for? (% of likely voters as of August 2020)



Source: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2020). „NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, August 2020“. Retrieved from: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/na2020ge/VOTPPEL/>

Table 1.1
Results of the 2020 elections

Political party	% of votes received in the proportional vote	Number of mandates in the parliament
Georgian Dream	48.22	90 (60 with proportional vote and 30 with majoritarian vote)
United National Movement	27.18	36
European Georgia	3.79	5
Lelo	3.15	4
Strategy Aghmashenebeli	3.15	4
Alliance of Patriots	3.14	4
Girchi	2.89	4
Citizens	1.33	2
Labor Party	1.00	1

Source: Election Compass Georgia

⁹ <https://netgazeti.ge/news/469553/>

¹⁰ <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Policy-brief-17-Levan-Kakishvili.pdf>

3

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This report builds upon data obtained from the Election Compass Georgia project (<https://kompasi.partiebi.ge>). The Georgia Party Compass is a Voting Advice Application (VAA) based on the methodology developed by the Kieskompas team.^{11, 12} The tool allows users to assess their attitudes towards various policy issues and to estimate their proximity to a particular political group. Answers to these statements allow for placing the user on a two-dimensional plane of ideological dimensions.

The development of such an application requires several steps. First, the project's scientific team came up with a list of fifty-five statements that measured attitudes towards various policy issues relevant to the Georgian political debate. After deliberation, the list of items was reduced to thirty-one. These statements then were arranged thematically into five broader categories: healthcare and education, judiciary, foreign policy and security, social and environmental issues, and economic development. Afterward, these statements were classified along the economic left-right and the cultural liberal/conservative axes.

After finalizing the list of statements, the project team started coding party positions on each of these issues. Coding team members used official party documents, political leaders' statements, or the latter's media commentary to classify the political groups' positions.

Unlike other voting advice applications, the Kieskompas methodology allows for the further calibration of coding based on the feedback received from political parties.¹³ Such an approach proved to be especially fruitful in the Georgian case, as several political parties have not publicly disclosed their positions towards several policy statements included in the application.

¹¹ Kieskompas, 'Kieskompas Voting Aid Application', 2021, <https://www.kieskompas.nl/en/tools/>

¹² André Krouwel, Thomas Vitiello, and Matthew Wall, 'The Practicabilities of Issuing Vote Advice: A New Methodology for Profiling and Matching', *International Journal of Electronic Governance* 5, no. 3/4 (2012): 223, <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEG.2012.051308>

¹³ A. P. M. Krouwel, THOMAS Vitiello, and M. T. Wall, 'Voting Advice Applications as Campaign Actors: Mapping VAAs' Interactions with Parties, Media and Voters', in *Matching Voters with Parties and Candidates. Voting Advice Applications in a Comparative Perspective* (ECPR Press, 2014), 67–78.

The 2020 parliamentary elections were among the most diverse polls in Georgia's history,¹⁴ with sixty political parties and blocks running for seats.¹⁵ Considering such diversity, the project team decided to include only those political parties that held specific nationwide name recognition. To be included in the voting advice application, a political party should have complied with one of the following criteria: the party should either have polled greater than 1% in nationwide public opinion polls held after October 2019, received 1% or higher of the share of votes in the 2016 Parliamentary election, or have had parliamentary representation in the 2016–2020 convocation of the Georgian Parliament. As a result, sixteen political parties were selected (Table 5.1).

After its launch on September 23 until November 22, 2020, about 38 thousand internet users answered questions on the platform, yielding about 19 thousand complete observations in the database. Users provided their opinions to thirty-one policy statements on a five-point Likert scale (Completely Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Completely Disagree). Complimentary demographic information, as well as respondents' attitudes towards political parties, was also collected.

Unlike representative public opinion polls, where respondents are selected randomly, Election Compass Georgia used a convenience sample of self-selected internet users who saw an advertisement of the portal online and were willing to participate.

Thus, the external validity of results that would allow for an estimate of what Georgia's population thinks is low. Nonetheless, the richness and the uniqueness of the dataset, to some extent compensates for such drawbacks. To account for the shortcomings outlined above, and better reflect the structure of Georgia's population, the dataset was weighted using a proportional iterative fitting (raking) algorithm. Survey results were thus calibrated towards population counts derived from the 2014 national census of Georgia and the results of proportional voting in the 2016 parliamentary elections.

¹⁴ CEC of Georgia, 'History of Elections in Georgia, 1919–2017 (საქართველოს არჩევნების ისტორია, 1919–2017)', 2018, <https://history.cec.gov.ge/ENG/PDF/Elections.pdf>

¹⁵ CEC of Georgia, 'Party lists of registered parties (რეგისტრირებული პარტიების სიები)', cesko.ge, 2020, <https://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/120858-registirebuli-partiuli-siebi->

The analysis below makes use of several exploratory and confirmatory data analysis techniques. Binary logistic regression models were used to identify variables predicting whether a respondent is politically affiliated or not. Latent variables such as statism, cultural liberalism, support for limited government, and political impartiality are identified and calculated using exploratory factor analysis. To better visualize variables that are measured on intervals or ratio scales, the project team utilized kernel density plots.

4

A SNAPSHOT OF THE GEORGIAN ELECTORATE

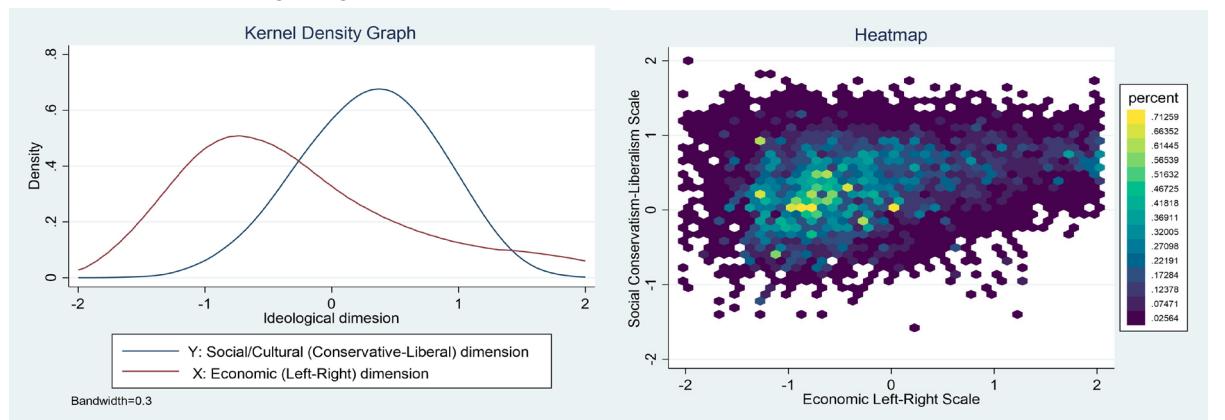
4.1 IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF VOTERS: LEFT-RIGHT VS CONSERVATIVE-LIBERAL

The Figures below summarize the distribution of voters' political preferences across two ideological dimensions (economically left-right and socio-culturally conservative-liberal) based on more than 19,000 responses from the Election Compass Georgia platform. As described in the methodology section, individual responses were weighted to obtain a generalized picture of the Georgian electorate.

As Figure 4.1 reveals, voters in Georgia tend to position themselves as more socio-culturally liberal and are, on average, economically leftist. Voter preferences are narrowly distribut-

ed across the socio-cultural dimension, while the economic dimension is more widespread, meaning that the economic views of Georgian voters are more diverse compared to their socio-cultural attitudes. Moreover, the right-skewed distribution of economic preferences demonstrates the existence of the respondent group with extreme right-wing economic views. Such a pattern was expected, considering the ideological profile of the Liberal Right block of political parties (e.g., Girchi and European Georgia). On the contrary, the distribution across the socio-cultural dimension does not indicate the existence of ideological extremes. The heatmap in Figure 4.1 shows the magnitude of the respondents' preferences across the two ideological dimensions, illustrating the intensity of liberal and leftist views among Georgian voters.

Figure 4.1
Distribution of voter preferences across two ideological dimensions (from economically left to right and from socio-culturally conservative to liberal) among Georgian voters*



* Kernel density is a measure of the probability distribution of a variable.

Source: Election Compass Georgia

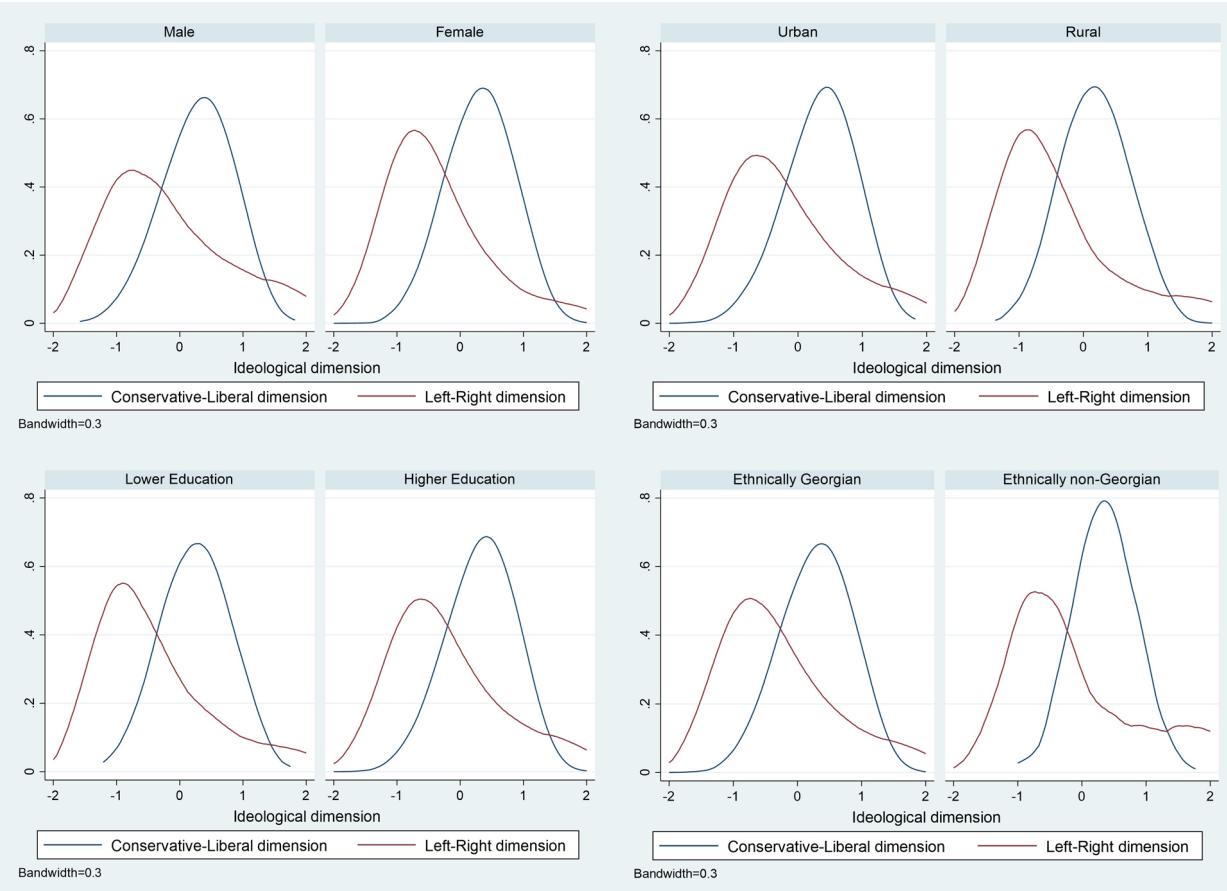
Additionally, the data reveals that the two ideological dimensions are significantly ($P\text{-value}=0.000$) and positively ($r=0.32$) correlated with each other. The correlation hints that for Georgian voters, being right-leaning is associated with possessing liberal socio-cultural views. This correlation is in line with the ideological profiles of the Georgian political parties: the political landscape produced by Election Compass Georgia shows that the majority of parties (Citizens, Girchi, European Georgia, United National Movement) with a very liberal agenda also have right-wing economic policy preferences.

The general pattern of the distribution across the two ideological dimensions is largely similar across various demographic groups: their economic preferences are more leftist, whereas their socio-cultural views are liberal. A separate description of respondents by settlement type and educational attainment shows that voters with higher education tend to be slightly more liberal and economically right-wing than voters with lower education, while urban voters are more liberal and economically right-wing than voters living in rural areas.

Certain contrasts between responses can be noticed in different gender and ethnicity groups. Specifically, women tend to have more leftist economic preferences than men, while non-ethnic Georgians turn out to be more liberal than ethnic Georgians (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2

Distribution of voter preferences across two ideological dimensions by gender, settlement type, level of educational attainment, and ethnicity



Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 4.1 complements the distributions above by presenting the differences between the average positioning of voters across ideological dimensions by gender, settlement type, level of educational attainment, and ethnicity. To summarize, female voters are, on average, more liberal and leftist; rural voters lean towards conservatism and leftism; higher education is correlated with more liberal and rightwing preferences; while non-ethnic Georgians are, on average, more liberal and prefer rightwing policies.

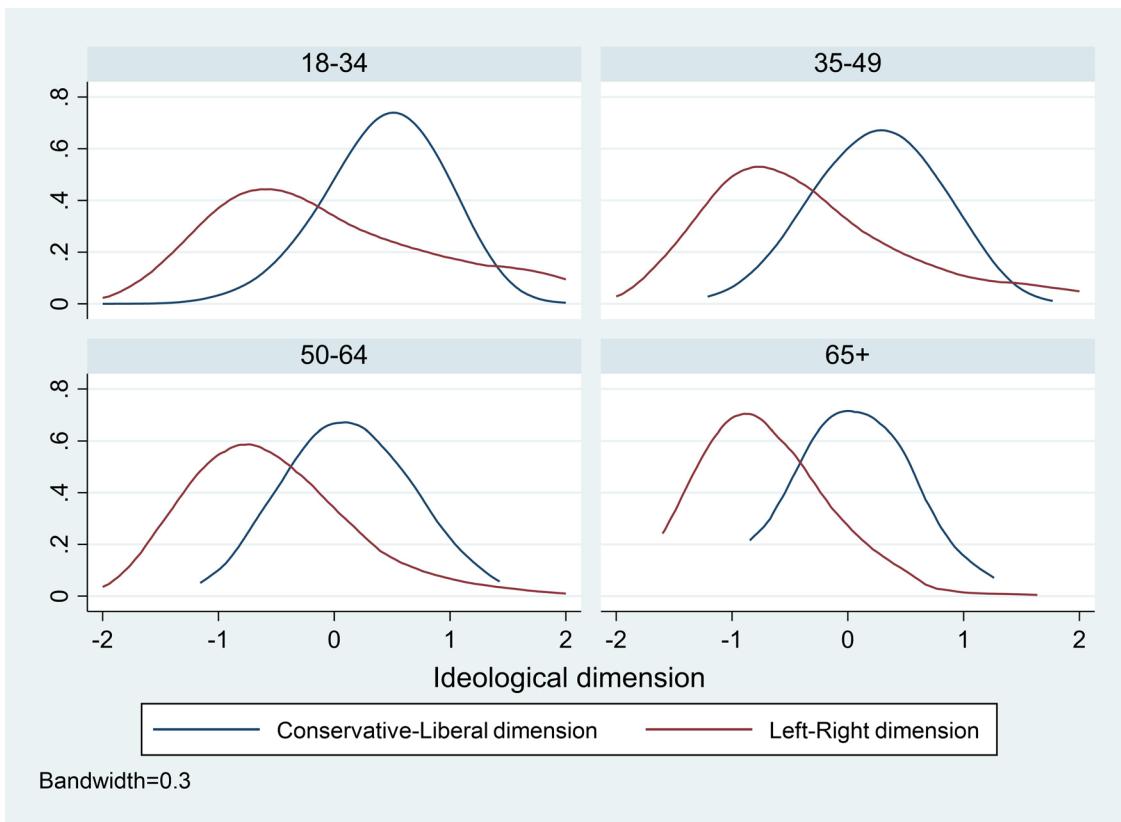
Table 4.1

Differences between means of ideological dimensions by respondents' gender, settlement type, level of educational attainment, and ethnicity

	Comparison Group	Culturally Liberal	Economically Right
Female	Male	0.02	-0.19
Rural	Urban	-0.18	-0.22
Higher Education	Lower Education	0.08	0.21
Ethnically non-Georgian	Georgian	0.05	0.14

Finally, Figure 4.3 presents the distribution of voter preferences across different age groups. We observe that the age of the respondents seems to matter for voter positioning across both ideological dimensions. As demonstrated in Figure 4.3, respondents representing older age groups (people above age 50) are less likely to be in favor of liberal policies and are positioned relatively more towards the center. In addition, despite the overall leftist economic profile of respondents, right-wing ideological preferences are almost entirely captured in the first two age categories (people below age 50).

Figure 4.3
Distribution of voter preferences across two ideological dimensions by respondent age.



Source: Election Compass Georgia

To conclude, when analyzing the average positioning of voters across different groups, we observe that voters in older age groups have consistently more conservative and leftist preferences.

4.2. VOTER PREFERENCES BY INDIVIDUAL STATEMENTS

In this section, we analyze voter responses to individual statements using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means "Strongly Disagree", and 5 means "Strongly Agree". Table 4.2 summarizes the top two most agreed-upon statements per each of the 4 ideological directions. The average scores of responses reaffirm that the majority of the Georgian electorate is in favor of minimum wage regulation, prefers voluntary participation in the cumulative pension system, advocates for higher taxes for businesses that pollute the environment, and has clear and strong pro-Western and pro-EU preferences.

Table 4.2
The two most supported statements per each ideological direction

Ideological Direction	Statement	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Economically Left	Paying a monthly wage below the subsistence level should be prohibited by law	3,94	1,30
	The state should regulate the prices of medicines	3,68	1,39
Economically Right	Participation in the cumulative pension system must be voluntary	4,16	1,05
	Privatization of state hospitals will reduce healthcare costs for consumers	3,04	1,25
Socio-culturally Conservative	Punishment should be tightened to reduce the level of crime	3,57	1,30
	The sale of land to foreigners should be banned	3,15	1,48
Socio-culturally Liberal	Businesses that pollute the environment must pay additional taxes to the state budget	4,24	1,03
	Georgia should have a pro-Western course even if it worsens relations with Russia	4,05	1,15

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Moreover, the data reveals interesting patterns regarding several important issues that have recently become part of the Georgian political discourse. For instance, voters are skeptical towards adopting binding gender quotas and, on average, disagree with an idea that foreign judges might guarantee the independence of the Georgian judicial system.

In addition to summarizing the level of agreement of respondents for different statements (measured by the average score), Table 4.3 below also presents the polarization level across statements using the standard deviation of received responses. Land policy, drug policy and state employment policy represent the most polarizing issues among respondents.

Table 4.3
The two most supported statements per each ideological direction

Ideological direction of the statement	Statement	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Socio-culturally Conservative	The sale of land to foreigners should be banned	3,15	1,48
Socio-culturally Liberal	Light drugs should be legalized	3,01	1,47
Economically Left	The state must ensure the employment of every citizen	3,14	1,45
Socio-culturally Conservative	Teaching Orthodox Christianity in school should be mandatory	2,38	1,43
Socio-culturally Liberal	Compulsory military service should be abolished	3,39	1,42
Economically Left	The rich must pay a larger share of their income to the state budget	3,39	1,41
Economically Left	The state should protect local production from foreign competition by imposing import restrictions	3,21	1,40
Economically Left	The state should regulate the prices of medicines	3,68	1,39
Economically Left	Healthcare should be universal and free	3,65	1,38
Socio-culturally Conservative	Georgia must declare military neutrality	2,65	1,38
Economically Left	Education in public schools should be free at all levels	3,32	1,37
Socio-culturally Liberal	Tbilisi should sign a non-use of force agreement with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali	2,82	1,35
Economically Left	Funding for health and education should be increased even if it leads to a tax increase	3,27	1,34
Socio-culturally Liberal	For the independence of the judiciary, local judges must be replaced by foreign judges	2,73	1,33
Economically Left	The amount allocated by the state for agriculture should be increased	3,66	1,32
Socio-culturally Conservative	Punishment should be tightened to reduce the level of crime	3,57	1,30
Economically Left	Paying a monthly wage below the subsistence level should be prohibited by law	3,94	1,30
Socio-culturally Liberal	The construction of large hydropower plants should be banned in order to protect the environment	3,25	1,30
Socio-culturally Liberal	Students must receive sex education at school	3,63	1,29
Socio-culturally Liberal	In areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, state services should be allowed in minority languages	2,63	1,29
Socio-culturally Liberal	Older cars should be banned to reduce emissions	3,46	1,28
Socio-culturally Liberal	Judges should be elected by the people	3,49	1,27
Socio-culturally Liberal	In every election, every second member of the party list must be a woman	2,53	1,27
Economically Right	Privatization of state hospitals will reduce healthcare costs for consumers	3,04	1,25
Socio-culturally Liberal	Religious institutions, including the Orthodox Church, should not be funded from the state budget	3,97	1,25





Ideological direction of the statement	Statement	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Socio-culturally Liberal	All criminal cases must be considered by a jury	3,06	1,21
Socio-culturally Liberal	Georgia should have a pro-Western course even if it worsens relations with Russia	4,05	1,15
Socio-culturally Conservative	Integration with the European Union threatens Georgian national identity	1,79	1,11
Economically Right	Participation in the cumulative pension system must be voluntary	4,16	1,05
Socio-culturally Liberal	Businesses that pollute the environment must pay additional taxes to the state budget	4,24	1,03

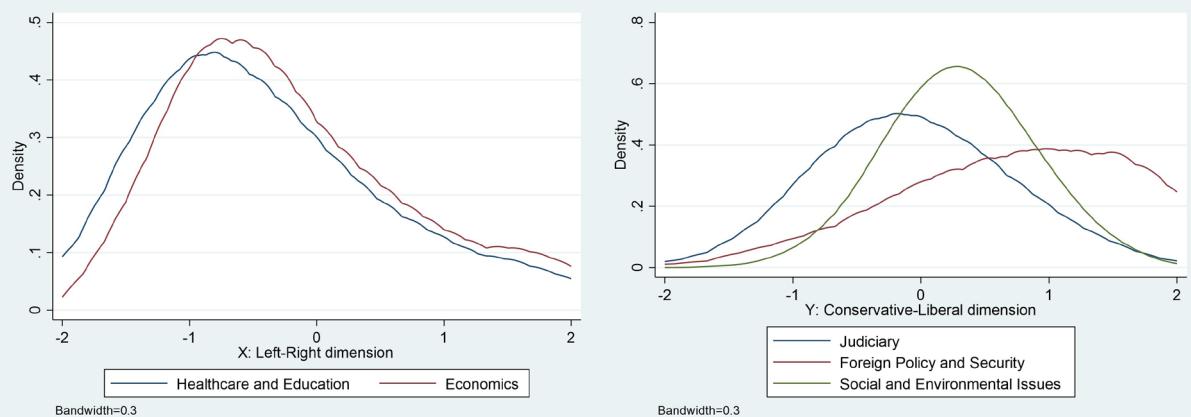
Source: Election Compass Georgia

4.3. VOTERS' IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION TOWARDS DIFFERENT POLICY AREAS

In order to better capture the ideological standpoints of the Georgian electorate, we analyzed received responses per the 5 thematic groups of statements identified by Election Compass Georgia: Healthcare and Education; Judiciary; Foreign Policy and Security; Social and Environmental Issues; and Economics. Significantly, the statements in each of the identified thematic groups measure voter preferences across specific dimensions. In particular, all the statements in the groups of Healthcare and Education and Economics contribute to voter placement along a horizontal axis (from left to right-wing), while the rest of the groups measure voter preferences along a vertical socio-cultural dimension (from conservative to liberal wing).

Figure 4.4 below summarizes voter responses across different policy dimensions. We can observe the clear left-leaning tendencies for economic, health and education policies. Views on judicial matters are mostly concentrated near the middle, while more liberal tendencies are observed for social and environmental, foreign policy and security issues. Appendix 2 provides the same distribution of each policy area segmented by various demographic characteristics of voters.

Figure 4.4
Kernel Density: Distribution of voter preferences across ideological dimensions for different policy areas



Source: Election Compass Georgia and Authors' calculations

We further positioned the voters on an ideological scale of 1-5 from economically left and socio-culturally conservative (1) to economically right and socio-culturally liberal (5), where a score of "3" represents centrist views. Tables 4.4-4.9 below present voter positions disaggregated by different demographic characteristics.

As shown in Table 4.4, electoral positions towards healthcare and education are slightly left-leaning (2.6). However, this thematic group, in comparison with the other identified groups, is characterized by the highest standard deviation (0.94).

Georgian women have somewhat more leftist policy preferences in terms of healthcare and education than men (Table 4.5). Support for leftist ideas towards education and healthcare increases dramatically among older age groups (above age 35) (Table 4.6) and, interestingly, is more prevalent in i. ethnic Georgian voters (Table 4.7), ii. respondents with lower education (Table 4.9), and iii. the rural electorate (Table 4.8).

As the results show, the overall standpoint (Table 4.4) on economic issues is left-leaning (mean=2.80; sd=0.91). Compared to their counterparts, support for left-wing positions increases among the female electorate, the older generation, the ethnically Georgian electorate, the rural population, and people with lower education. Significantly, young people (those between the ages of 18-35) are positioned on the right, but very close to the center (mean=3.03).

Electoral views regarding judicial issues are relatively less polarizing (sd=0.73), somewhat conservative (mean=2.94), and

very close to a neutral position (Table 4.4). This is especially informative considering the latest discussion around potential judicial reform; three integral points that have been integrated into Election Compass Georgia¹⁶. Regarding judicial policies, men tend to be slightly more liberal, while women profess somewhat conservative views. Similarly, to some extent, conservative standpoints towards judicial issues are more widespread among i. older people, ii. ethnic Georgians, iii. respondents with higher educational attainment, and iv. the rural electorate.

Significant preferences for liberal foreign policy and security are depicted among the electorate despite their different demographic characteristics. Still, liberal views are slightly stronger among men, younger people (ages 18-34), ethnic Georgians, people living in urban areas, and among people with higher education.

A similar picture is revealed for social and environmental issues. Overall, voters have liberal standpoints (mean=3.31) and they do not have strongly polarized views (sd=0.53) (Table 4.4). In this case, women tend to be more liberal than men. Slightly more liberal preferences are common among young citizens, people living in Tbilisi and other urban areas, and people with higher educational attainment.

¹⁶ Invitation of foreign judges, introduction of jury to consider all criminal cases, and election of judges were three frequently referred points by certain representatives of Georgian opposition parties during the pre-election phase across the country.

Table 4.4
Average score and standard deviation per statement theme

		Mean	SD
L-R	Healthcare and Education	2.60	0.94
C-L	Judiciary	2.94	0.73
C-L	Foreign Policy and Security	3.73	0.90
C-L	Social and Environmental Issues	3.31	0.53
L-R	Economics	2.80	0.91

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 4.5
Average score and standard deviation per statement theme by gender

Gender	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Healthcare and Education	2.69	1,00	2,52	0,87
Judiciary	3,06	0,73	2,82	0,70
Foreign Policy and Security	3,79	0,94	3,67	0,86
Social and Environmental Issues	3,20	0,54	3,41	0,51
Economics	2,89	0,99	2,71	0,83

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 4.6
Average score and standard deviation per statement theme by age

Age	18-34		35-49		50-64		65+	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Healthcare and Education	2,79	1,01	2,54	0,91	2,40	0,78	2,19	0,62
Judiciary	3,07	0,73	2,89	0,71	2,78	0,68	2,67	0,68
Foreign Policy and Security	3,96	0,82	3,68	0,89	3,33	0,93	3,35	0,94
Social and Environmental Issues	3,42	0,54	3,26	0,54	3,19	0,49	3,11	0,41
Economics	3,03	0,99	2,73	0,88	2,51	0,67	2,34	0,56

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 4.7
Average score and standard deviation per statement theme by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Georgian		Other	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Healthcare and Education	2,59	0,93	2,76	1,02
Judiciary	2,93	0,73	3,02	0,71
Foreign Policy and Security	3,74	0,89	3,60	0,96
Social and Environmental Issues	3,30	0,53	3,38	0,52
Economics	2,79	0,90	2,93	1,04

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 4.8
Average score and standard deviation per statement theme by settlement type

Settlement Type	Tbilisi		urban		Rural	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Healthcare and Education	2,70	0,94	2,58	0,92	2,48	0,94
Judiciary	3,02	0,74	2,91	0,74	2,85	0,69
Foreign Policy and Security	3,91	0,85	3,71	0,90	3,51	0,92
Social and Environmental Issues	3,40	0,51	3,30	0,55	3,19	0,52
Economics	2,95	0,91	2,74	0,88	2,65	0,91

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 4.9
Average score and standard deviation per statement theme by education attainment level

Education	High Ed		Low Ed	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Healthcare and Education	2,66	0,93	2,48	0,94
Judiciary	2,93	0,74	2,96	0,71
Foreign Policy and Security	3,84	0,85	3,51	0,95
Social and Environmental Issues	3,32	0,53	3,29	0,55
Economics	2,88	0,90	2,64	0,92

Source: Election Compass Georgia

5

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN GEORGIA: PARTIES, IDEOLOGIES, AND POLICIES

Election Compass Georgia has produced an interesting picture of the political landscape. The two-dimensional plane consists of a left-right dimension (horizontal axis) and a conservative-liberal dimension (vertical axis). Contrary to a stereotype persistent among voters and experts, Georgian political

parties have diverse positions on the 30 policy issues that were used to create the two dimensions. Overall, 16 political parties were included in the Compass (see Table 5.1 below).

Table 5.1
Differences between means of ideological dimensions by respondents' gender, settlement type, level of educational attainment, and ethnicity

#	Political Party	Logo
1	Alliance of Patriots (AP)	
2	Citizens (CZ)	
3	Conservative Party (CP)	
4	European Georgia (EG)	
5	For Justice (FJ)	
6	Free Democrats (FD)	
7	Free Georgia (FG)	
8	Georgian Dream (GD)	
9	Girchi	
10	Labor Party (LP)	

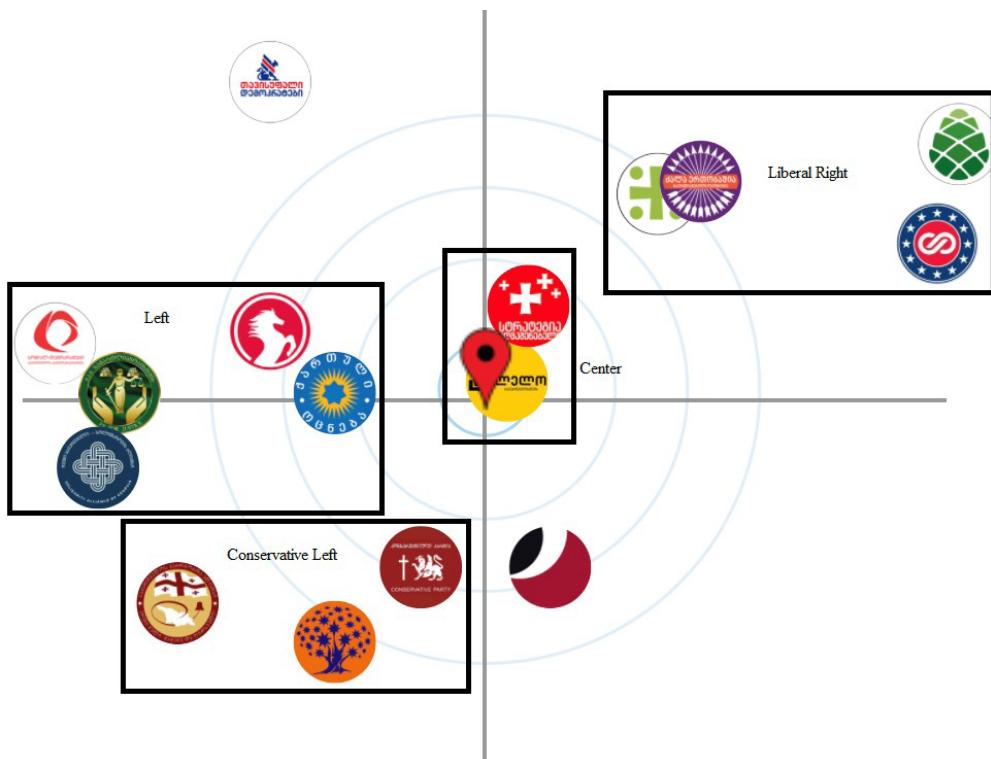


#	Political Party	Logo
11	Lelo	
12	Social Democrats (SD)	
13	Solidarity Alliance (SO)	
14	Strategy Aghmashenebeli (SA)	
15	United Georgia (UG)	
16	United National Movement (UNM)	

Conceptually, the question of why parties register different positions and do not converge towards the center is a kind of paradox. Given that in the Georgian context, ideologies are relatively less important, the issue of diverging party positions constitutes an unexpected phenomenon. In this regard, the Election Compass offers interesting insights into the Georgian political landscape. Three major patterns emerge. First, all four quadrants of the plane include at least one party, even though

the distribution of parties is skewed, with liberal left and conservative right positions underrepresented. Second, in terms of their ideological positioning, the sixteen parties selected for the compass can be divided into four main groups of parties and two more individual parties. Finally, when the two largest parties, GD and UNM, are compared with each other, only four economic issues set them apart, while many cultural issues cause disagreements between the two largest parties.

Figure 5.1
Political landscape in Georgia and party groupings in terms of ideological proximity



Source: Election Compass Georgia and Authors' calculations

5.1. UNDERREPRESENTED IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS

Figure 5.1 above illustrates that Georgian parties are positioned along a diagonal line running from the lower-left corner to the upper-right corner of the plane. This means that all four ideological views – leftist, rightist, conservative, and liberal – are represented in the landscape. However, the peculiar distribution means that liberal left and conservative right is underrepresented – or that there is an ideological vacuum in Georgian politics. Just under half of all voters fall into this vacuum: almost 44% of them in the Liberal Left quadrant and almost 3% in the Conservative Right quadrant.

The liberal left is only represented by the Free Democrats, which is a party that fell apart in 2016 when they did not manage to gain any parliamentary seats. Since then, they have failed to gain any significant momentum. Similarly, the only party in the lower-right quadrant is Free Georgia – another party unable to pass a 1 percent threshold in 2020. Consequently, those voters who hold values that fall under these two ideological umbrellas have three options when it comes to voting. First, they could vote for a weak party knowing their vote will be lost. Second, they could vote strategically for the party they believe will manage to gain seats and compromise on ideology and values. Finally, they can completely ignore ideology and vote with an entirely different motivation.

In any scenario, these segments of the society are naturally underrepresented not only in the parliament but also generally in Georgian politics.

5.2. PARTY GROUPINGS

The four ideological groups or blocks of Georgian parties include Left, Liberal Right, Conservative Left, and Center. Additionally, two above-mentioned individual parties do not seem to belong to any ideological group and stand alone. This section omits the latter two parties from analysis and focuses on the level of party groups to explore what issues lead to inter- and intra-group convergence and divergence.

The left is the largest group in terms of the number of parties. This group includes five political parties: Georgian Dream (GD), Labor Party (LP), Social Democrats (SD), Solidarity Alliance (SoA), and For Justice (FJ). This group of parties is the most diverse in terms of their positions. Out of 30 policy issues, left-wing parties have similar positions, i.e. parties are not positioned on the opposite sides of the center on 13 issues only (see table 5.2), which is less than half of all issues. In the field of foreign policy and security, however, left-wing parties express the same views, without any disagreement, while in the field of the judiciary, there is not a single issue on which all parties express the same position. Interestingly, foreign policy and security – the policy area in which the Left has convergence – does not belong to the left-right dimension; it is a rather cultural issue. This is a little paradoxical because on the horizontal axis all five parties are on the same side of the center, while on the vertical axis they are on opposite sides or right in the center. Therefore, it would have been more reasonable to expect that the Left would achieve convergence in areas such as the economy, healthcare and education. These trends suggest that there is more diversity among left-wing parties in Georgia, which may imply that leftist ideologies have not yet been consolidated and are still under formation.

Table 5.2
Issue convergence and issue divergence by policy area within ideological party groups

Policy Area	Party grouping in terms of ideological proximity							
	Left		Liberal Right		Conservative Left		Center	
	Number of issues on which party positions		Number of issues on which party positions		Number of issues on which party positions		Number of issues on which party positions	
	converge	diverge	converge	diverge	converge	diverge	converge	diverge
Healthcare and Education	4	3	5	2	4	3	5	2
Judiciary	0	5	5	0	2	3	1	4
Foreign Policy and Security	4	0	4	0	0	4	3	1
Social and Environmental issues	2	6	6	2	5	3	6	2
Economy	3	3	4	2	3	3	4	2
Total	13	17	24	6	14	16	19	11

Color codes: Complete convergence in a given policy area; tendency towards convergence; no tendency towards either direction; tendency towards divergence; complete divergence in a given policy area.

Source: Election Compass Georgia

The Liberal Right in Georgia includes parties such as United National Movement (UNM), European Georgia (EG), Girchi, and Citizens. This block of parties is the most consistent in terms of their positions. On 24 out of 30 policy issues, their positions converge. In two policy domains – the judiciary, foreign policy and security – the Liberal Right speaks with one voice. There is no policy area in which these four parties do not share positions on the majority of policy issues. This high degree of convergence may be a result of the fact that three of the four parties in this group – UNM, EG, and Girchi – used to be a single political entity. These trends suggest that the political market in Georgia is saturated with Liberal Right parties and that they are likely to be competing for the same votes. Indeed, even with the possible splitting of each other's votes, all four Liberal Right parties managed to gain parliamentary seats in October 2020.

The Conservative Left, which includes the Alliance of Patriots (AP), United Georgia (UG), and Conservative Party (CP), is another diverse group of parties. The positions of these three tend to diverge on the majority of policy issues – 16, as opposed to 14 issues on which they converge. Unlike the Left, however, there is no single policy area on which the three would entirely converge. Furthermore, in terms of foreign policy and security, the Conservative Left is unable to find any common ground among its members. This group of parties is electorally weak overall, as only one – AP – managed to gain seats in the 2020 elections.

Finally, the fourth block of parties is the Center – the smallest group in terms of the number of parties it includes. There are only two parties in the Center: Lelo and Strategy Aghmashenebeli (SA). Neither of these parties is exactly in the center of the plane and both lean towards the Liberal Right. Like the Liberal

Right, these two parties have similar positions on 19 of the 30 policy issues and tend to converge in all but one policy area – the judiciary.

Overall, if the four blocks of parties are compared, there is not a single issue of the 30 statements on which the positions of all four groups would converge. Four statements came quite close to consensus with only one group of parties diverging from the converging positions of the other three (see table 5.3). Interestingly, three of the four are from the area of foreign policy and security, which is a policy domain where the Conservative Left has differing stances. Therefore, their position as a group is unclear, (i.e. not all parties within the group share the same position), preventing these matters from becoming valence issues, or an issue on which all parties have the same position.

In general, it is hard to find issues on which all groups have a clear position shared by all members of a respective party group – only three issues belong to this category. However, it is even harder to find an issue on which no group has a clear position – there is only one such issue concerning minimum wage (see Table 5.4). From the table below, it can be concluded that since all parties have clear positions on issues related to the price of medicine, selling land to foreigners, and state funding for agriculture, Georgian parties probably believe that these topics are highly important to voters. These three topics respectively may be proxies of importance for the welfare state, cultural issues, and the economy. At the same time, the idea and the size of the minimum wage is causing disturbances in all party groupings, as none of them has been able to produce a common position. It is unclear, however, why the issue of minimum wage is such a polarizing one.

Table 5.3
Policy issues on which the positions of the four party groups are closest to convergence

Policy issue	Policy area	Party blocks and their positions			
		Left	Liberal Right	Conservative Left	Center
Georgia should declare military neutrality	Foreign Policy and Security	Disagree	Disagree	No clear position	Disagree
Georgia should maintain a pro-western direction, even if it deteriorates relations with Russia	Foreign Policy and Security	Agree	Agree	No clear position	Agree
Closer integration with the EU threatens Georgian national identity	Foreign Policy and Security	Disagree	Disagree	No clear position	Disagree
State funding for agriculture should be increased	Economy	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree

Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 5.4

Policy issues on which all or none of the party groups have a clear position shared by all members of the respective group

Policy issue	Policy area	Party blocks and their positions			
		Left	Liberal Right	Conservative Left	Center
The prices of medicine should be regulated by the state	Healthcare and Education	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree
Selling land to foreigners should be banned	Social and Environmental Issues	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
State funding for agriculture should be increased	Economy	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
It should be illegal to pay a wage below the subsistence level	Economy	No clear position	No clear position	No clear position	No clear position

Source: Election Compass Georgia

5.3. WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT: GEORGIAN DREAM VERSUS UNITED NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Georgian political space is often understood to be highly polarized with the poles being the GD and UNM (see Casal Bértoa 2019¹⁷; Georgian Institute of Politics 2019¹⁸). However, the question of how these two parties differ in terms of their positions on specific policy issues is rarely addressed. Given the Election Compass data, it is possible to compare GD and UNM side-by-side and identify which issues differentiate the two.

Election Compass Georgia tracks 30 policy issues, of which 11 adhere to the left-right dimension and 19 to the conservative-liberal dimension. On seven of the 11 left-right issues, GD and UNM agree with each other, while only four issues set them apart. These four issues and respective party positions

are reported in Table 5.5 below. Even though these four issues belong to different policy areas – healthcare, education, and economic policies, all of them can be combined in the domain of the welfare state. The positions of the two aforementioned parties suggest that the GD advocates for welfare state expansion in general, as a left-wing party typically would, while the UNM advocates for welfare state limitation, as a right-wing party would. It seems that welfare policies constitute a political cleavage in Georgia and that the positions of the GD and UNM are rather consistent with their declared ideologies.

When it comes to the cultural dimension, (i.e. the liberal-conservative nexus), the GD and UNM tend to have opposing stances more often. On 11 out of 19 such issues, the GD and UNM have opposing views. The GD tends to have conservative positions on 8 of the 11 issues and liberal positions on the remaining three, while the UNM's positions are reversed (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.5

Policy issues from the left-right dimension on which GD and UNM have opposing views

Policy issue	Policy area	Party positions	
		GD	UNM
Privatizing hospitals will reduce the costs of healthcare	Healthcare and Education	Disagree	Strongly agree
The prices of medicine should be regulated by the state	Healthcare and Education	Agree	Strongly disagree
At all three levels of the state educational institutions, education should be free of charge	Healthcare and Education	Agree	Disagree
Involvement in the accumulative pension system should be voluntary for everyone	Economy	Disagree	Strongly agree

Source: Election Compass Georgia

¹⁷ <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Policy-Memo-30.pdf>¹⁸ <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Expert-Polls9.pdf>

Table 5.6

Policy issues from the conservative-liberal dimension on which GD and UNM have opposing views

Policy issue	Policy area	Party positions	
		GD	UNM
All students in high school should receive sex education	Healthcare and Education	Disagree	Strongly agree
Education about Orthodox Christianity should be compulsory in all high schools	Healthcare and Education	Agree	Strongly disagree
To make the judicial system more independent, local judges should be replaced by foreign judges	Judiciary	Disagree	Strongly agree
Judges should be elected by the people	Judiciary	Disagree	Agree
Soft drugs should be legalized	Judiciary	Strongly disagree	Agree
Mandatory military service should be abolished	Foreign Policy and Security	Strongly disagree	Strongly agree
Selling land to foreigners should be banned	Social and Environmental Issues	Agree	Strongly disagree
Religious institutions, including the Orthodox Church, should not receive state funding	Social and Environmental Issues	Strongly disagree	Agree
In areas populated with ethnic minorities, it should be allowed to receive state services in their own languages	Social and Environmental Issues	Agree	Disagree
To reduce carbon emissions, old cars should be banned	Social and Environmental Issues	Agree	Strongly disagree
Companies responsible for environmental pollution should pay additional taxes	Social and Environmental Issues	Agree	Disagree

Source: Election Compass Georgia

From these 11 issues, at least three clear themes emerge. First, there is a theme of education and religion that is comprised of issues related to sex education, teaching Orthodox Christianity, and funding the Georgian Orthodox Church from the state budget. The GD is moderately conservative in this theme, while the UNM is strongly liberal. The second theme is the judiciary, in which the GD opposes two different proposals of making Georgian courts more independent: inviting foreign judges and making the judges' office elective. The UNM is in favor of both ideas. The third clear theme comprises green issues relating to banning old cars for their high levels of carbon emissions and introducing a corporate green tax for businesses that cause environmental pollution. In this area, the GD has rather progressive views and agrees with both ideas, while the UNM opposes them. These issues are often presented as a trade-off between environmental protection and economic development. If the GD focuses on the environment, the UNM chooses the economy. Finally, four remaining issues are stand-alone problems: the legalization of soft drugs; selling land to foreigners; abolishing mandatory military service; and allowing ethnic minorities in compact minority settlements to receive state services in their own language. Except for the latter, the UNM supports all of these ideas, while the GD holds opposite views.

Overall, the GD has rather conservative cultural values along with progressive green values. The UNM, however, does not support green ideas but has liberal values. The only issue that does not fit this pattern concerns the rights of ethnic minorities to receive state services in their own language. On this particular issue, the UNM holds a conservative position, while the GD holds a liberal position.

5.4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this analysis has shown that the Georgian political landscape can be described with the use of a two-dimensional framework of left-right and conservative-liberal axes. None of the four resulting quadrants is empty but at the same time, the distribution of parties is rather skewed along a diagonal line from the lower-left corner to the upper-right corner.

This skewed distribution means that there are ideological vacuums in the Georgian political landscape since parliamentary parties that would be characterized as Liberal Left or Conservative Right are absent. Consequently, voters who would end up in these ideological spaces are underrepresented in Georgian politics.

In addition, the two-dimensional plane suggests that in terms of ideological proximity, Georgian parties can be divided into four larger categories: Left, Liberal Right, Conservative left, and Center. However, these categories do not include two individual parties that are not ideologically close to other parties: the Free Democrats and Free Georgia.

Of the four party blocks, the Liberal Right is the most ideologically consistent and the Left is the least ideologically consistent, meaning that Liberal Right is well-consolidated in Georgian politics, while the Left is still struggling ideologically.

Out of the 30 policy issues, there are no valence issues across the four party blocks. However, the Conservative Left prevents some issues in the area of foreign policy and security from becoming valence issues. This means that if anyone is interested in alternative foreign policy ideas, they should explore what the three parties in the Conservative Left block have to offer.

The most polarizing policy issue, on which none of the four party blocks has a clear position, i.e. a shared position by all members of the block, is the idea and amount of a minimum wage. It is unclear, however, what about this specific issue causes a divergence in all party blocks.

In the left-right dimension, the GD and UNM can be differentiated by their views on the welfare state. The GD registers positions for welfare state expansion, while the UNM advocates for welfare state limitations. These views fit the two parties' ideological profiles.

In the conservative-liberal dimension, the GD and UNM are different in terms of their views on education and religion, the judiciary, and environmental issues. The GD, overall, tends to express conservative values but supports environmental protection even if it negatively impacts the economy and individual members of society. The UNM, on the other hand, is rather liberal in its values but prefers a libertarian approach towards environmental protection.

The only issue that does not fit these patterns is the right of ethnic minorities to receive state services in their own language. On this issue, the GD has a liberal position, while the UNM adopts a conservative position.

6

VOTER-PARTY PROXIMITY

This section analyzes voters' proximity to political parties in the context of their preferences across two ideological dimensions (economically left-right and socio-culturally conservative-liberal) and their ideological distance from political parties. This section also identifies factors associated with party support and describes the characteristics of unaffiliated voters. Note that this analysis is based on a smaller subset of respondents (up to 1500 – 2000 participants) that were willing to complete an additional questionnaire where they could report their vote intention for the upcoming parliamentary elections and/or their vote recall in the previous (2016) parliamentary elections. Hence, this sub-sample is characterized by a self-selection problem and is based on the respondents' interest in taking part in an extended version of the survey.

6.1. VOTERS' IDEOLOGY AND PARTY PREFERENCES

The Kernel density graphs below show the distribution of voter preferences across the two ideological dimensions (left-right and conservative-liberal) by their party preferences.

Based on information about the propensity to vote, we recoded the vote propensity variable into a binary form, which would mean either "not likely to vote for a party", or "likely to vote for a party". It is assumed that a person is "likely to vote for a political party" if his/her vote propensity for this party is the highest among all of the political parties and exceeds 5 (otherwise, the person is presumably not voting for a party). In the following graphs (Figure 6.1), we present a distribution across the two policy dimensions among likely voters of select political parties (those who prefer certain parties)¹⁹. Table 6.1 reports the percentage of voters having more left-wing views than the respective political parties. Appendix 3 contains similar analyses using heatmaps.

While voters of all political parties hold relatively similar liberal socio-cultural views (except voters of the Alliance of Patriots), their preferences for economic policies tend to differ. As the graphs show, Georgian Dream voters tend to have somewhat centrist views on social-cultural issues, leaning slightly to-

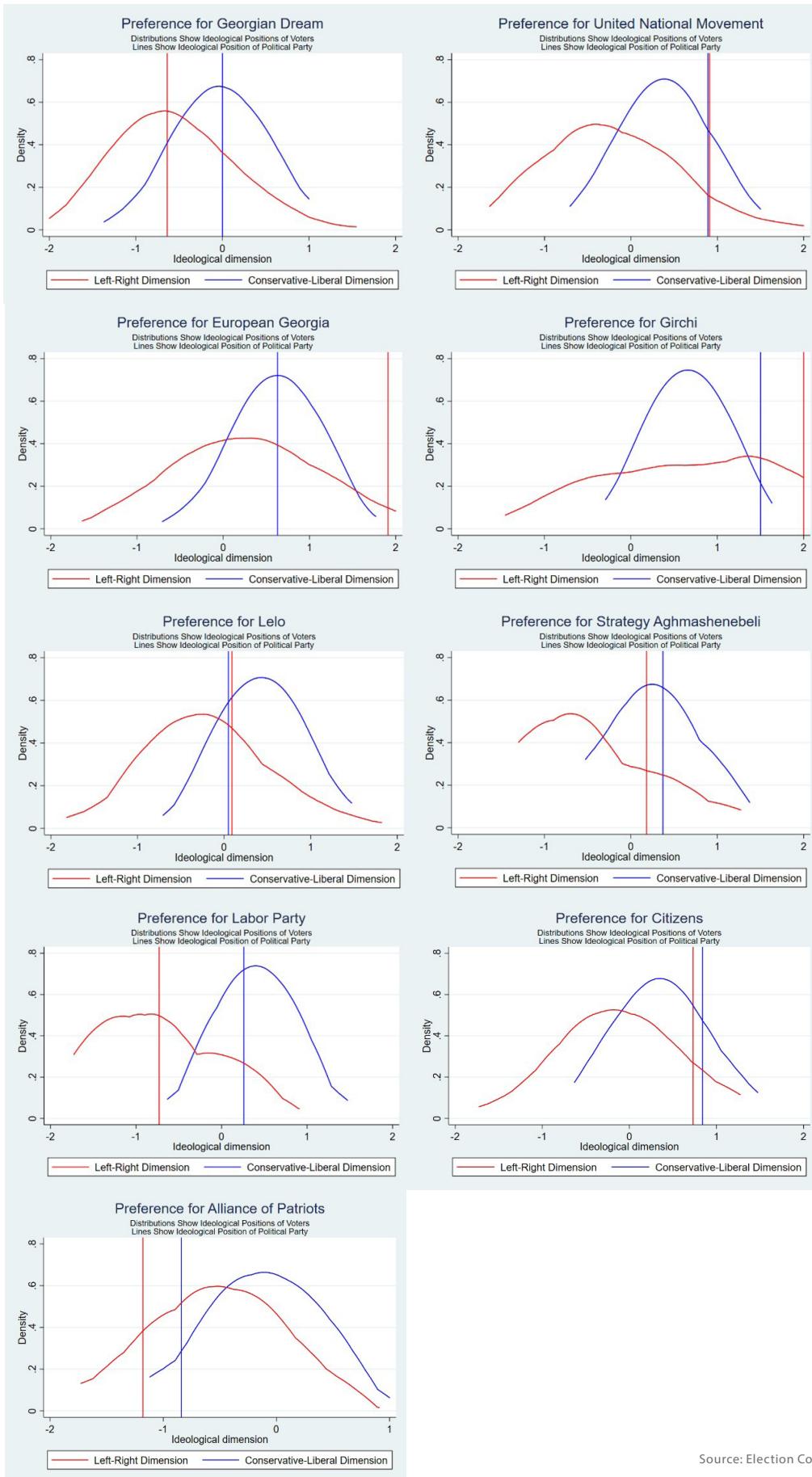
wards the liberal wing while being economically leftist. Notably, Georgian Dream, out of all parties, is located closest to the median positioning of its electorate.

The potential voters of the United National Movement seem to be more liberal and economically leftist, while the party itself favors right-wing economic policies (94.2% of UNM voters have more left-wing views than the UNM itself, and 91.5% of UNM voters have a more conservative ideology than the party). This could potentially be explained by the possibility of voters placing more emphasis on the personal characteristics of party leadership. The other two political parties displaying a significant ideological mismatch in terms of economic matters between party and voters are Strategy Aghmashenebeli and Citizens. These political parties identify themselves as economically centrist (Citizens has more right-wing views, but are still close to the center), while their voters display clear preferences for left-wing policies (Citizens displays a significant mismatch in terms of cultural issues as well). Furthermore, Lelo, the Labor Party and the Alliance of Patriots are more culturally conservative than their voters.

Among the analyzed electorate, only voters of Girchi and European Georgia have right-wing economic views. Importantly, the latter is strongly in line with their party's positions. Voters of all other parties support leftist economic policies.

¹⁹ The analysis is presented for parties that received more than 1 percent of votes in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Figure 6.1
Distribution of voters' preferences across two ideological dimensions by party preference



Source: Election Compass Georgia

Table 6.1
Voter and party preferences across two ideological dimensions

	Economically Left-Right Dimension	Culturally Conservative-Liberal Dimension		
	Percentage of party voters whose ideology is located to the left of the party ideology	Average position of the political party	Percentage of party voters whose ideology is located to the left of the party ideology	Average position of the political party
Alliance of Patriots	16.2%	-1.18	11.1%	-0.84
Labor Party	58.2%	-0.73	25.6%	0.26
Georgian Dream	47.2%	-0.64	56.9%	0.00
Lelo	67.9%	0.09	7.9%	0.05
Strategy Aghmashenebeli	83.5%	0.18	55.3%	0.37
Citizens	87.7%	0.73	83.7%	0.84
United National Movement	94.2%	0.91	91.5%	0.89
European Georgia	98.0%	1.91	42.0%	0.63
Girchi	100%	2	99.9%	1.5

Source: Election Compass Georgia

6.2. VOTERS' IDEOLOGICAL DISTANCE FROM PARTY POSITION

To observe how meaningful the voting choices of the Georgian electorate are, we look at the ideological distance of voters from their preferred party positions. The 'Distance' variables of the Election Compass Georgia data represent the Euclidean distance between the positions of the respondents and the party, taking into account two ideological dimensions. Considering all political parties, this variable takes a value between 0 (lowest) and 4.52 (highest).

The histograms in Figure 6.2 below present the distribution of likely voters of selected political parties²⁰ by their ideological distance from these parties in a two-dimensional ideological space. Notably, the ideological distance from Georgian Dream is the smallest (average distance=0.69) among different party voters. The greatest distance is depicted for voters of European Georgia (average distance =1.6). Table 6.2 presents the average distance of voters from their preferred party positions.

Table 6.2
Voter and party preferences across two ideological dimensions

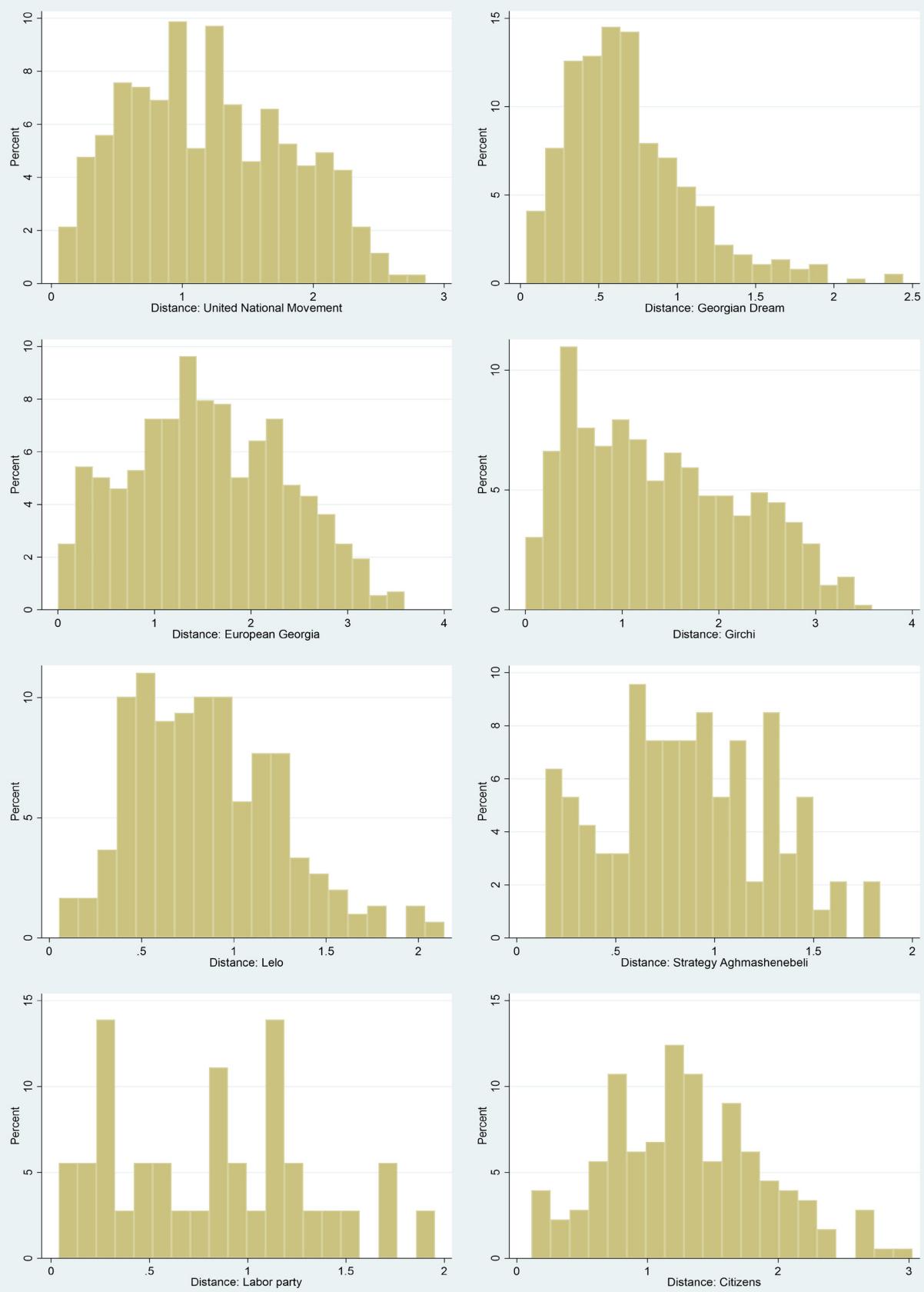
Parties qualified for the Parliament	Average distance
Georgian Dream	0.69
Labor Party	0.83
Lelo	0.86
Strategy Aghmashenebeli	0.87
Alliance of Patriots	1.06
UNM	1.21
Citizens	1.30
Girchi	1.39
European Georgia	1.55
Parties not qualified for the Parliament	Average distance
Social Democrats	0.73
For Justice	0.89
Solidarity Alliance	1.06
Free Democrats	1.07
Free Georgia	1.15
United Georgia	1.74

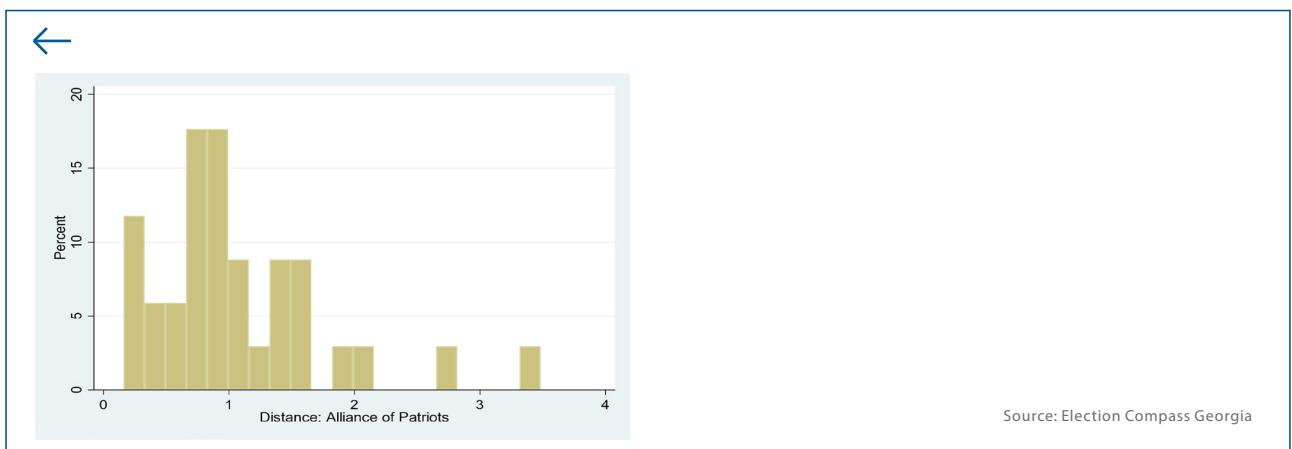
Source: Election Compass Georgia

²⁰ It is assumed that a person "votes for a political party" if his/her voting propensity to this party is the highest among all of the political parties and exceeds 5. Please see section 6.1 for more details.

Figure 6.2

Distribution of voters of political parties by their distance from the selected party's position





6.3. UNAFFILIATED VOTERS

This section provides a regression analysis to examine the association of respondents' ideological profiles and demographic characteristics for unaffiliated voters. The latter term refers to voters who did not report voting for any particular party in the previous parliamentary elections.

To this end, we first conducted a factor analysis to identify leading factors that explain the variability of voter preferences across different policy statements and acquire specific meanings when tracing their correlation with these statements. We identified four distinct factors and included them in the regression along with various demographic characteristics. The first factor, étatism, or supporting the great role of the state, is mostly associated with economically left-wing ideas (e.g. support for a universal healthcare system, progressive taxation, etc.). The second factor, cultural liberalism, reflects the culturally liberal values of respondents (e.g. introducing sex education in schools, liberalizing the existing drug policy, etc.). The third factor shows support for a limited state. The fourth factor, external political impartiality, reflects firmly anti-western and militarily impartial preferences among the electorate.

As the regression output (1) in Table 6.3 shows, cultural liberalism is significantly positively correlated with being an unaffiliated voter. Support for a limited state is significantly and negatively associated with unaffiliated voters. The remaining two factors, external-political impartiality and supporting the great role of the state, did not turn out to be significant determinants of a voter's lack of affiliation. Gender and ethnicity also turned out to be insignificant variables. Interestingly, as a potential voter's age increases, the less likely they are to be politically affiliated.

The regression analysis results are largely robust in different specifications of the model. When controlling for two ideological dimensions (left-right and conservative-liberal views), instead of four distinct factors in the regression model (2), it is evident that supporting culturally liberal views increases the likelihood of voters being unaffiliated, while the correlation is insignificant for the economic left-right dimension.

Table 6.3
Factors associated with unaffiliated voters

Logit Regression	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	Unaffiliated voters	Unaffiliated voters
Factor 1 - Supporting the great role of the state	-0.0595 (0.0583)	
Factor 2 - Cultural liberalism	0.297*** (0.0729)	
Factor 3 – Limited state	-0.172** (0.0736)	
Factor 4 – External-political impartiality	-0.00541 (0.0887)	
Rural	-0.230 (0.229)	-0.465*** (0.180)
East	-0.693*** (0.223)	-0.598*** (0.187)
Tbilisi	-0.218 (0.152)	-0.171 (0.122)
Rural # East	0.712** (0.342)	0.887*** (0.287)
Rural # Tbilisi	-0.142 (0.522)	-0.0408 (0.458)
Gender	0.183 (0.125)	0.255*** (0.0975)
Ethnicity	-0.109 (0.122)	-0.171 (0.108)
35-49	-0.958*** (0.116)	-0.938*** (0.0966)
50-64	-1.176*** (0.190)	-1.204*** (0.150)
65+	-1.770*** (0.300)	-2.132*** (0.241)
Economically Left-Right		0.0257 (0.0594)
Culturally Conservative-Liberal		0.411*** (0.107)
Constant	1.159*** (0.144)	1.121*** (0.122)
Observations	9,746	14,617
Pseudo R-squared	0.0936	0.0957
Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1		

Source: Election Compass Georgia

7

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Election Compass Georgia has produced unparalleled high-quality data. The tool was created in consultation with political parties and enabled the collection of comparative data for the first time, allowing us to analyze party and voter positions on a two-dimensional ideological plane composed of left-right and conservative-liberal nexuses. The data analyses reveal several patterns characterizing the political landscape and the electorate. At the same time, the data has made it possible to juxtapose party positions and voter positions and explore party-voter proximity. In the concluding section, we identify three aspects of Georgian party politics that are thought-provoking and require further research. These include the consistency and importance of political ideologies, polarization, and party-voter linkages. Our data provides valuable insights that may be counterintuitive at points and are a matter of interpretation.

7.1 CONSISTENCY AND IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

It has been argued that Georgian parties are not ideologically consistent, which implies that ideology is unimportant in Georgian politics (Barkaia and Kvashilava 2020). This is a rather general statement and can vary from party to party. Girchi, for example, is one of the most ideologically consistent parties, but they never presented a consolidated pre-election program prior to the October 2020 election. The Labor Party, on the other hand, is ideologically closest to the GD as demonstrated by our data, but has managed to achieve an agreement with the parties of the Liberal Right. Does our data strengthen the claim about inconsistency and the insignificance of ideologies in Georgian politics? This is an important question to which there is no straightforward answer.

One way to look at this question is to take power status as the primary marker that divides Georgian parties. This would give us three types of parties. First, the party (and potentially parties in case a coalition government is formed in the future) that holds the majority in Parliament and forms the government. Second, the opposition parties in Parliament. Finally, the opposition parties outside Parliament. Perhaps the reason why the Labor Party has managed to find common ground with the Liberal Right and centrist parties is that they have the same power status. This would indeed reinforce the idea that ideologies are not of great importance in Georgian politics.

Another argument that can be used to argue that ideologies are not important is that there are pairs of parties that are very close to each other on the two-dimensional ideological plane, which would mean that there is no real need for their (separate) existence. What this means is that EG and Girchi; UNM and Citizens; Lelo and SA are six parties. The ideological proximity of each pair could suggest that if ideology mattered, there should have been three parties instead of six. Lelo and SA take up the center; UNM and Citizens take up the center-right, and Girchi and EG take up the right. This line of thinking is reinforced by the fact that none of the six parties is a marginal political entity – all of them managed to gain parliamentary seats.

The third important aspect to consider when thinking about the importance of ideologies is the high degree of internal inconsistency of the Left block parties. At a glance, this may seem to be a negative fact of Leftist ideologies. However, at the same time, there are aggregated positions across 30 policy issues from a range of different domains. We should remember that two parties can end up positioned very close to each other on the final landscape, but have very different positions on individual issues. This would be an ideological equifinality of sorts (i.e. achieving the same outcome by following different paths). This would be in line with the argument that the left-right nexus does not work in post-communist countries the way it works in western democracies (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012). This brings us to a very important question: should we expect Georgian political parties to have very clear ideological profiles?

Although the idea that party platforms are shaped according to consistent ideological profiles that are most useful for transparent policy-making and the functioning of democracy is widely accepted, Georgia is not in a part of the world where this idea developed. What observers and commentators of Georgian politics often forget is that crystallization of sets of values and policies into consistent political ideologies has taken decades if not centuries in established western democracies. Expecting Georgian politics to function similarly to western liberal democracies is rather unfair, as the country has only had three decades to build a stable political system. Obviously, this is not to argue that flaws of Georgian politics should

be tolerated. Instead, the point here is that perhaps in the foreseeable future, Georgian political parties are not going to form the “consistent” ideological profiles that have emerged in western democracies. The basis for this claim is the well-established argument that in former communist countries, political ideologies do not function in exactly the same way as in western democracies. There is a range of reasons for this, including, but not limited to the difficulty of forming lasting linkages between parties and voters (Toka 1998); the weak organizational capacity of post-communist parties (Kreuzer and Pettai 2003); the low levels of party identification (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000); and the need to re-invent interest structures following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which tried to eradicate all sorts of societal differences over the course of 70 years (Bunce 2001).

As a result, the question is whether we should expect Georgian parties to have consistent ideological profiles similar to those we know exist in western democracies. Of course, having a clearly identifiable policy platform is important for any political party in any context, but at the same time, it might be more useful to think about party platforms as they are, as opposed to comparing them to the pre-existing templates that have emerged in the west. This approach would lead to a completely new set of questions and challenges. The first question arising would be whether parties offer differentiable policies to their voters in their pre-election programs. This is called electoral decidability (Bartolini 2001). Without such differentiable platforms, the programmatic competition that Georgian party politics should strive for cannot exist. If voters are not supplied with different policy options, they will never be able to vote based on programs and will continue to be influenced by charismatic leaders or clientelistic networks (see Kitschelt 1995). The second question arising would be whether these differentiable programs have internal consistency. Provided a party has a pre-election manifesto that offers unique solutions to policy problems, what we need to focus on is whether individual politicians communicate the content of this program to voters; or whether the respective political party is using its communication channels to bring its offer to voters. This is an important challenge for Georgian parties in terms of their organizational development. The third and final question arising would be whether political parties remain consistent as institutions. The issue here is whether an individual party diametrically changes its positions from one election to another. This is called leapfrogging in the spatial understanding of party competition (Robertson 1976). This is an important challenge for Georgian parties and it has been observed in Georgia in the area of foreign policy (Kakhishvili 2020). Leapfrogging is a problem because when it happens it completely dissipates the benefits of programmatic competition since predictability and certainty are diminished as a consequence. Voters no longer know whether a given party is going to support a certain policy that they used to support or not.

These three questions represent fundamental issues preventing Georgian parties from developing western-style consistent ideologies. More importantly, as long as electoral decidability is present in Georgian party politics, the content of pre-election programs is consistently and clearly commu-

nicated with voters, and leapfrogging does not happen, there may not be a need to have clearly identifiable ideologies on the left and right. In other words, political ideologies in Georgia do not have to express the exact same set of policy positions as Western democracies. The ideological spectrum is always context-dependent and can vary not only from country to country but sometimes even within the same country from region to region. The fact that Georgian political parties do offer voters policy options to choose from is already a good start and should not be underestimated. What parties need to do next is two-fold. First, parties need to increase the quality of their offers, invest more time and resources to make their offers feasible and predictable from a long-term perspective, and make their offers appealing to voters. Second, parties need to ensure that their offers play an important role in their campaigning and communication with voters. For the time being, we can observe electoral decidability, but the internal consistency of programs and the stability and organizational capacity of parties do not inspire full confidence and need more research.

7.2. POLARIZATION

In recent years, polarization has become a buzzword, perhaps along with populism, that is often used to argue that Georgian politics does not function as it should. Consequently, polarization has become an “alarming challenge” for Georgia’s young democracy. However, against the proliferation of analyses of societal, media, and political polarization in Georgia, few authors have defined what the term actually refers to in the Georgian context and even fewer have measured it. More often than not, it is simply assumed that Georgia is polarized. Therefore, analyses focus on how to minimize its effects on the process of democratization in Georgia.

One report has claimed that the 2018 presidential election in Georgia was “a textbook example of the pernicious nature of polarization.”²¹ Another argued that Georgia “has become one of the most polarized democracies in Europe”²². Experts have identified “public antagonism and hostility, worsening of the economic situation [and] destabilization of political processes” as some results of “acute polarization and radicalization”²³ and warned against “Georgia becoming a failed state again”²⁴. These arguments are based on the idea that Georgian politicians use emotional rhetoric and negative campaigning against their opponents. Some experts have emphasized that politics and elections are often seen as a zero-sum game, in which the winner takes all.²⁵ Although these ideas are not

²¹ <https://medium.com/strengthening-political-pluralism-in-georgia/tearing-apart-what-drives-political-polarisation-in-georgia-f40088e5a5a2#.ftn6>

²² https://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/DRI-GE-The-high-price-of-extreme-political-polarisation-in-Georgia-and-what-to-do-about-it_Fact-Finding-Report.pdf

²³ <https://nsf.com.ge/en/news/97/political-polarization-in-georgia>

²⁴ <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GIP-Expert-comment-16-1.pdf>

²⁵ <http://gip.ge/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GIP-Expert-comment-16-1.pdf>

groundless, the language used in these reports is often too alarming. In scholarly literature, such a phenomenon would be called radicalization rather than polarization.²⁶

Polarization can be defined as the ideological distance between two groups within a society.²⁷ However, it is the crystallization of mutually exclusive identities of these groups that poses a threat to a political system.²⁸ One common polarizing rhetoric in today's world is employed by populists who juxtapose the "good" people and the "evil" political elite against each other.²⁹ Taking this framework into account, our data does not confirm the existence of extreme polarization in Georgia. If we consider the two largest political parties – GD and UNM – the data shows that out of 30 policy issues, these two parties have the same position on half of them. This cannot be considered to be a sign of extreme political polarization. Additionally, voter preferences do not suggest the existence of two clearly identifiable societal groups that would have mutually exclusive preferences.

These findings reassert the results of the report by CRRC, which finds no evidence of the division of Georgian society into two political groups with mutually exclusive policy preferences.³⁰ Furthermore, if we explore the Who Governs data, which measures polarization as a percentage of votes received by anti-elitist parties in a given election, we will see that Georgia is not a polarized society. In the five elections that the dataset provides figures for, the measure of polarization has ranged from as low as 1.3 percent in 2012 to 15.4 percent in 2016 (see Figure 7.1). For comparison, in Germany, for example, the same measure has been steadily rising throughout the last five elections, and this figure has increased from 6.5 percent in

2002 to 25.7 percent in 2017.³¹

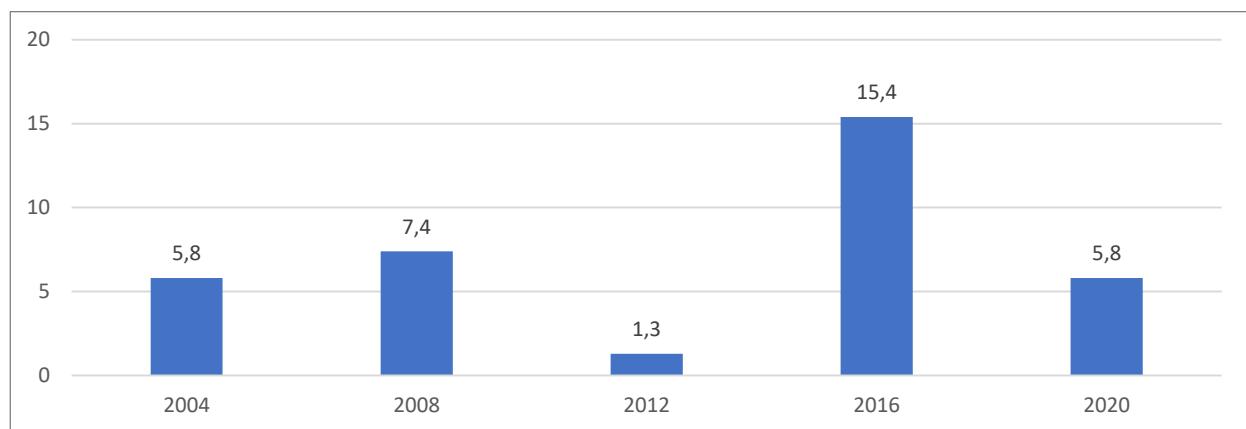
As a result, the data suggests that the talk of political polarization in Georgia is largely exaggerated. Instead, experts and commentators should perhaps focus on radical political rhetoric that involves negative electoral campaigning from both the ruling party and the opposition, as well as presenting elections as a zero-sum game.

7.3 PARTY-VOTER LINKAGES

The final and perhaps most important issue in Georgian party politics is the way parties try to connect with voters. The link between parties and voters can be influenced by the communication strategies parties adopt. If parties clearly communicate their policies to voters and only sparingly use radicalizing rhetoric and negative campaigning, they will be able to establish a positive link with voters. Additionally, if parties remain faithful to their policies across and between elections and do not engage in leapfrogging, voters will have a clear idea about what a particular party seeks to achieve. However, these are supply-side actions. The other side of the coin is what voters demand from parties. In other words, we can explore whether there is a connection between the ideological links of voters and parties on one hand, and which parties voters reward and which parties they punish, on the other hand.

It has been argued that in post-communist societies, the party-voter linkage can be of three types: charismatic, clientelistic, and programmatic (Kitschelt 1995). A charismatic linkage is related to the situation in which a given party has a following

Figure 7.1
Measure of polarization in Georgia according to Who Governs data



due to the popularity of its leader. Consequently, the performance of the leader determines the performance of his or her party. A clientelist linkage is about direct and tangible individual benefits that voters receive from a given party in exchange for their votes. Clientelism can be financed by the state or private resources and can have either positive or negative incen-

²⁶ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764218759576>

²⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764218759576>

²⁸ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=101098&download=yes

²⁹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764218759576>

³⁰ <https://crc.ge/uploads/tinymce/documents/PolicyBriefs/Polarization%20brief%20Oct2020.pdf>

³¹ Casal Bértoa, F. (2021): Database on WHO GOVERN in Europe and beyond, PSGo. Available at: whogoverns.eu.

tives (Mares and Young 2019). A programmatic linkage forms when voters vote for a party because of the policies the party presents. In such a case, voters receive indirect benefits in the form of public goods after the winning party assumes power. By definition, a programmatic linkage can only happen if a party offers voters a range of policies that voters want. Of course, the reality is never unidimensional and voting behavior is influenced by a myriad of factors including the leader's charisma and an expectation of positive or negative clientelist incentives. However, our data lets us explore whether there are any signs of programmatic party-voter linkages in Georgia.

We can calculate the position of a median voter on a two-dimensional ideological plane and explore how the political landscape changes when we center party positions not around the ideological center but around the median voter. The median voter is the position on a given dimension with the preferences of exactly half of all voters on one side and the preferences of the other half of voters on the other side. Given that Election Compass Georgia has two dimensions, the median voter is a position composed of two coordinates: [-0.45; 0.32]. If we treat the median voter as the center of the political landscape, we have a slightly different picture. Figure 7.2 below does exactly this. The size of the logo of each party is proportionate to the share of votes received in the elections.

Furthermore, the GD approaches the median voter from the left, while its main competition is quite far on the right side of the left-right dimension (the horizontal X-axis). Provided that policy preferences matter to voters, the GD has a significant amount of space for maneuvering and can in fact move to the right side of the horizontal axis. As long as the GD stays on the left side of the UNM, it will remain closer to the Median voter. This sort of behavior is expected according to the spatial model of party competition pioneered by Downs (1957), and would in theory bring more votes to the GD.

The fact that the UNM is not nearly as close to the median voter as the GD is partly responsible for the greater average distance between the UNM and its supporters when compared to the GD. In fact, the GD is the closest to its voters, while the UNM is the sixth closest of all parliamentary parties. If we apply the spatial model of party competition to what we observe in Georgia, the current state of affairs provides significant incentives for the UNM to move towards the left, closer to the median voter and its own supporters. This would not be unheard of, as the UNM started out ideologically closer to the center and was characterized as "center-left" by some observers (see European Stability Initiative 2010³²).

Figure 7.2
Parliamentary parties and their distance from the median voter



Source: Election Compass Georgia

This figure shows that we have two centers of political power in Georgia – GD and UNM. However, the GD is much closer to the median voter, i.e. the center of the plane – [0; 0]. This result does not allow us to exclude the possibility that policy preferences or ideologies actually matter to Georgian voters. If we had a situation in which one of the two main contenders for political power was further from the median voter and received more votes, then we would be able to exclude the importance of ideology in voting behavior in Georgia (or question the instrument we have used to measure party positions and voter preferences).

Being ideologically far from one's own voters and yet receiving the second-largest share of votes implies that voters do not necessarily care much about policy preferences and ideological positions when they choose a party to vote for. However, this argument should be made cautiously. It is one thing to place parties and voters on ideological dimensions and another thing to determine how the same parties decide to mobilize

³² https://www.esiweb.org/sites/default/files/reports/pdf/esi_-georgia_liberarian_revolution_-part_three_-jacobs_in_tbilisi_-25_april_2010.pdf

their voters during an electoral campaign. We argued in the previous section that Georgian politics is full of radicalizing rhetoric that is often mistaken for extreme polarization. This radicalizing rhetoric can lead to emotional and protest voting. Such voting behavior is common in established democracies, too, and is a part of an explanation for the electoral success of right-wing populist parties in the West. At the same time, Georgian voters are used to charismatic leaders, which parties still use to connect with their voters. All these aspects of voting behavior and party-voter linkages in general co-exist. Therefore, it is not reasonable to either entirely dismiss the importance of ideologies in Georgian elections or to expect that Georgian voters should only pay attention to policy offerings. The reality is more complex.

With these concluding remarks, we have shed a little more light on those aspects of Georgian party politics that are often either misjudged or essentially inaccessible for analysis. We believe all these aspects would benefit from further research. Given the unique data collected through Election Compass Georgia, we have uncovered patterns that were previously inaccessible for analysts. Using the Compass, which included 30 questions across five different policy areas, we were able to provide insights into the policy preferences of Georgian voters, as well as the policy stances of 16 Georgian political parties. Considering that these preferences were collected using the same questions, we were able to explore the ideological party-voter linkage in Georgia. These insights are of great importance not only for students of Georgian politics and political parties but also for individual political parties and those who plan and implement electoral strategies to engage with the electorate.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The list of 30 statements across five policy areas and the respective positions of the parties that received at least one mandate in the Parliament.

Policy Area		Party grouping in terms of ideological proximity								
		Left		Liberal Right				Center		Con. Left
		GD	LP	UNM	EG	Girchi	Citizens	Lelo	SA	AP
Healthcare and Education	Privatizing hospitals will reduce the costs of healthcare	-1	-2	2	2	2	1	1	1	-1
	The prices of medicine should be regulated by the state	1	2	-2	-2	-2	-1	1	2	-2
	Universal Healthcare should be free for everyone	2	-1	1	-2	-2	-1	1	2	2
	Healthcare and education funding should be increased even if it results in higher taxes	2	1	1	-2	-2	-1	-2	2	2
	At all three levels of the state educational institutions, education should be free of charge	1	1	-1	-1	-2	-1	1	-1	2
	All students in highschool should receive sex education	-1	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1
	Education about Orthodox religion should be compulsory in all high schools	1	-2	-2	-2	-2	-1	-2	0	1
Judiciary	To make the judicial system more independent, local judges should be replaced by foreign judges	-1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	-2
	All criminal court cases should be discussed by the jury	1	1	2	2	2	2	-1	2	0
	Judges should be elected by people	-1	2	1	1	2	2	-2	1	-1
	Soft drugs should be legalized	-2	-1	1	1	2	1	1	-2	1
	To reduce crime, punishments should become more severe	-2	0	-2	-1	-2	-1	1	-1	1





Foreign Policy and Security	Georgia should declare military neutrality	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	2
	Georgia should maintain a pro-western direction, even if it deteriorates relations with Russia	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	-2
	Mandatory military service should be abolished	-2	-2	2	2	2	2	-1	1	-1
	Closer integration with the EU threatens Georgian national identity	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	-2	1
Social and Environmental Issues	In every election, every second person on the party list should be a woman	1	-2	1	-2	-2	0	-1	-1	-2
	Selling land to foreigners should be banned	1	2	-2	-2	-2	-1	-1	-1	2
	Religious institutions, including the Orthodox Church, should not receive state funding	-2	1	1	2	2	1	-1	-2	-2
	Tbilisi should sign the agreement on the non-use of force with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali	-1	-2	-2	-2	-1	-2	-2	-2	1
	In areas populated by ethnic minorities, it should be allowed to receive state services in their own languages	1	-2	-1	-2	2	1	-1	-1	-1
	To protect the environment, the construction of large hydropower plants should be banned	-1	2	-1	-2	-1	-1	-1	2	-1
	To reduce carbon emissions, old cars should be banned	1	-2	-2	-2	-2	-1	1	-2	-1
	Companies responsible for environmental pollution should pay additional taxes	1	2	-1	-1	-2	-1	-2	0	1
Economy	To protect local production from foreign competition, the government should introduce import restrictions	-2	1	-2	-2	-2	-1	-2	-2	2
	Rich people should pay more share of their income in taxes to the state	-1	-1	-2	-2	-2	0	-2	-2	1
	Involvement in the accumulative pension system should be voluntary for everyone	-1	0	2	2	2	2	-2	2	0
	State funding for agriculture should be increased	2	2	0	-2	-2	0	1	2	2
	It should be illegal to pay a wage below the subsistence level	-1	2	-2	-2	-2	2	1	-2	2
	The state should guarantee a job for each citizen	1	1	1	-2	-2	-2	-1	0	1

Note on color codes:

2 – Strongly agree;

1 Agree;

0 – Neither agree nor disagree or no opinion;

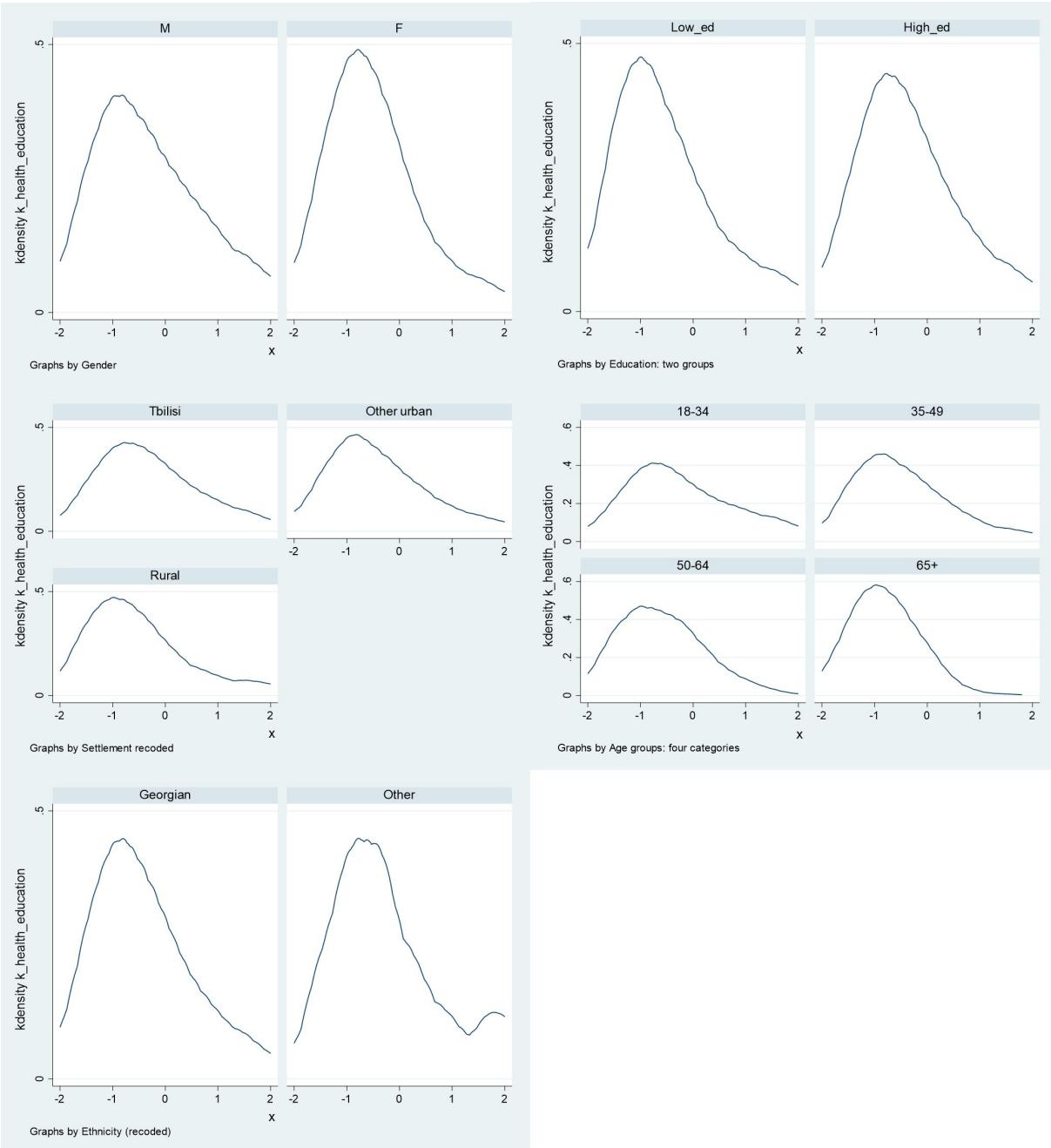
-1 – Disagree;

-2 – Strongly disagree

Appendix 2

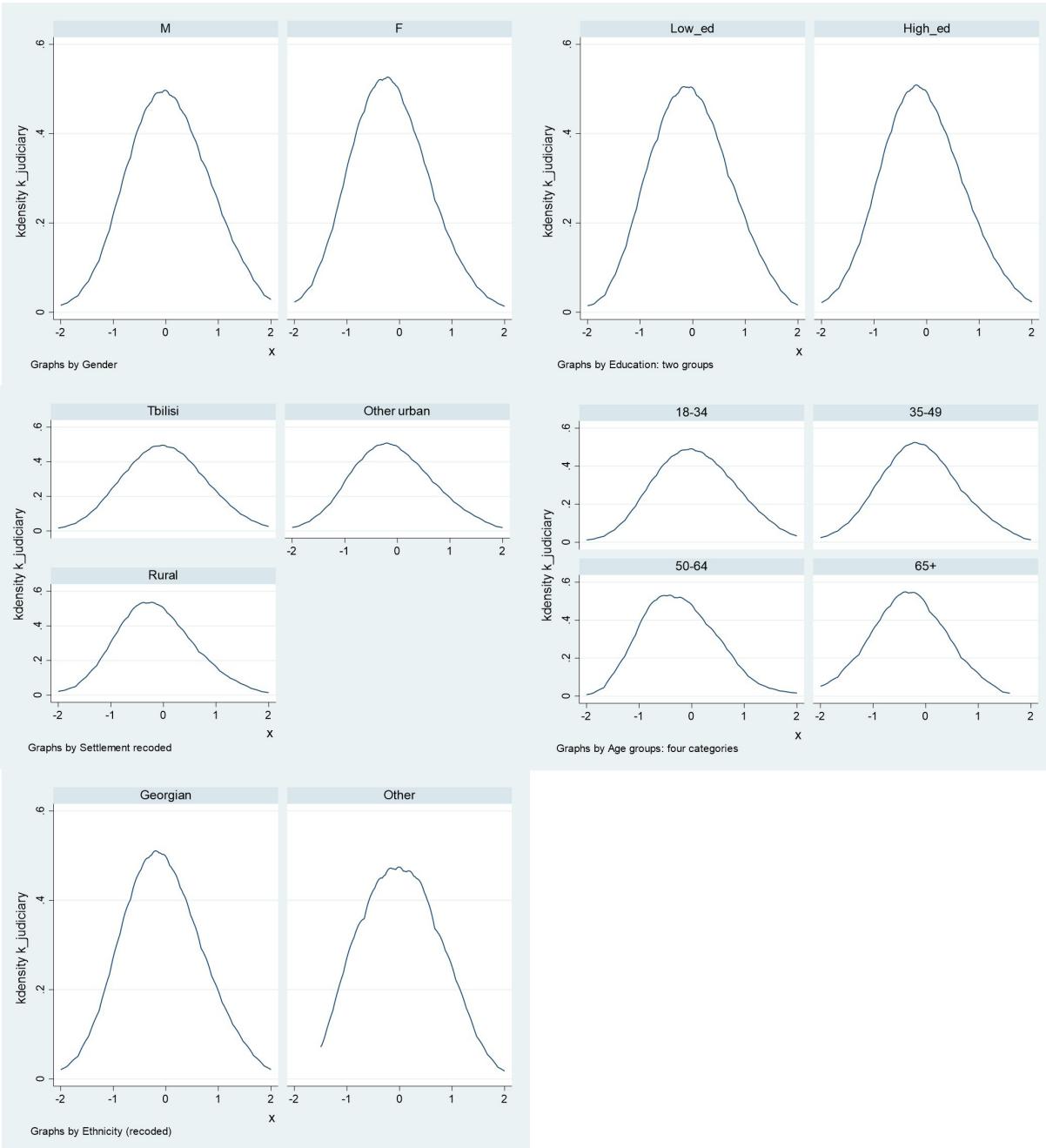
Appendix 2.1

Health and Education - distribution of ideological dimensions for different policy areas by demographic characteristics (gender, education, settlement, age and ethnicity)



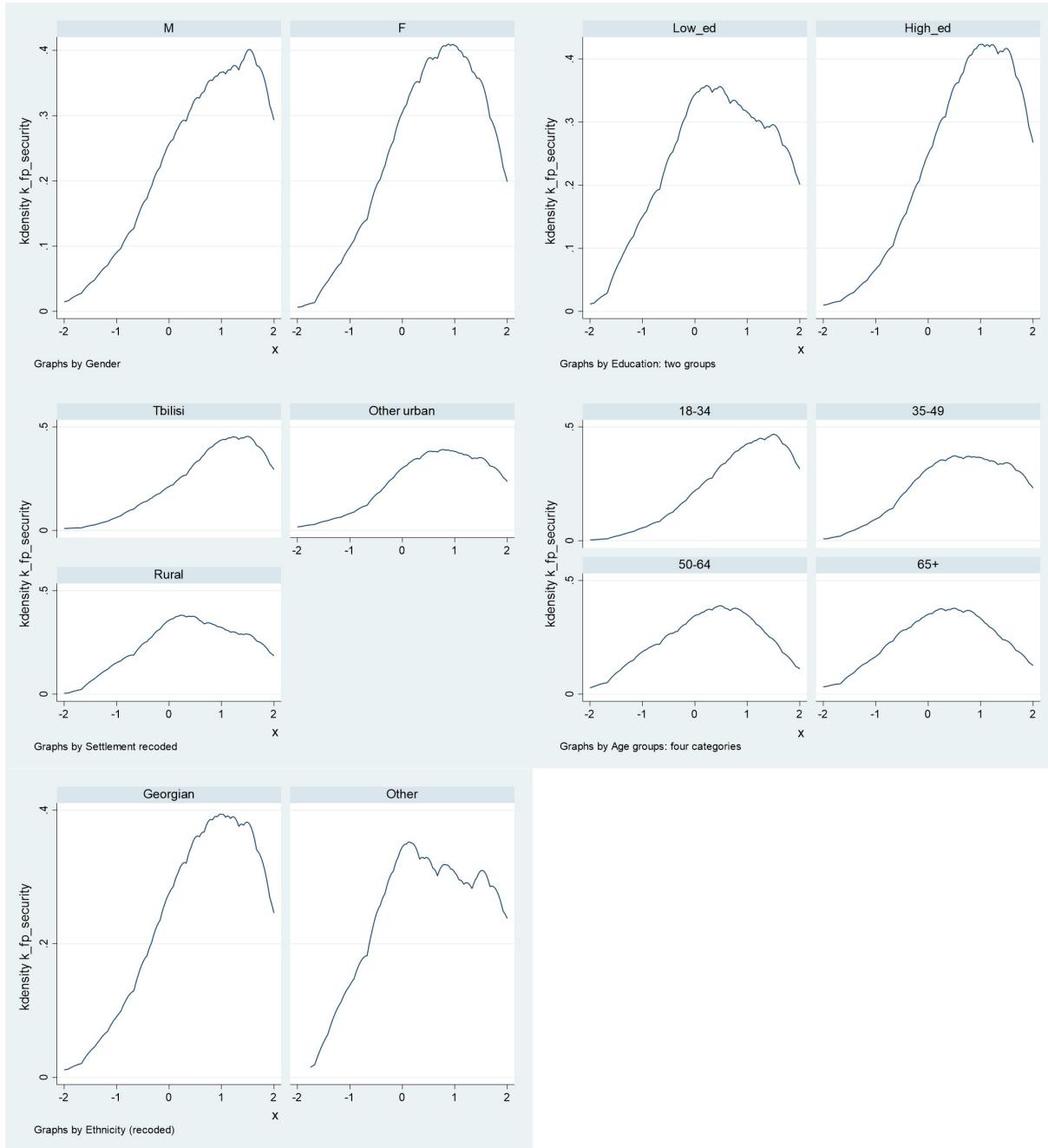
Appendix 2.2

Judiciary - distribution of ideological dimensions for different policy areas by demographic characteristics (gender, education, settlement, age and ethnicity)



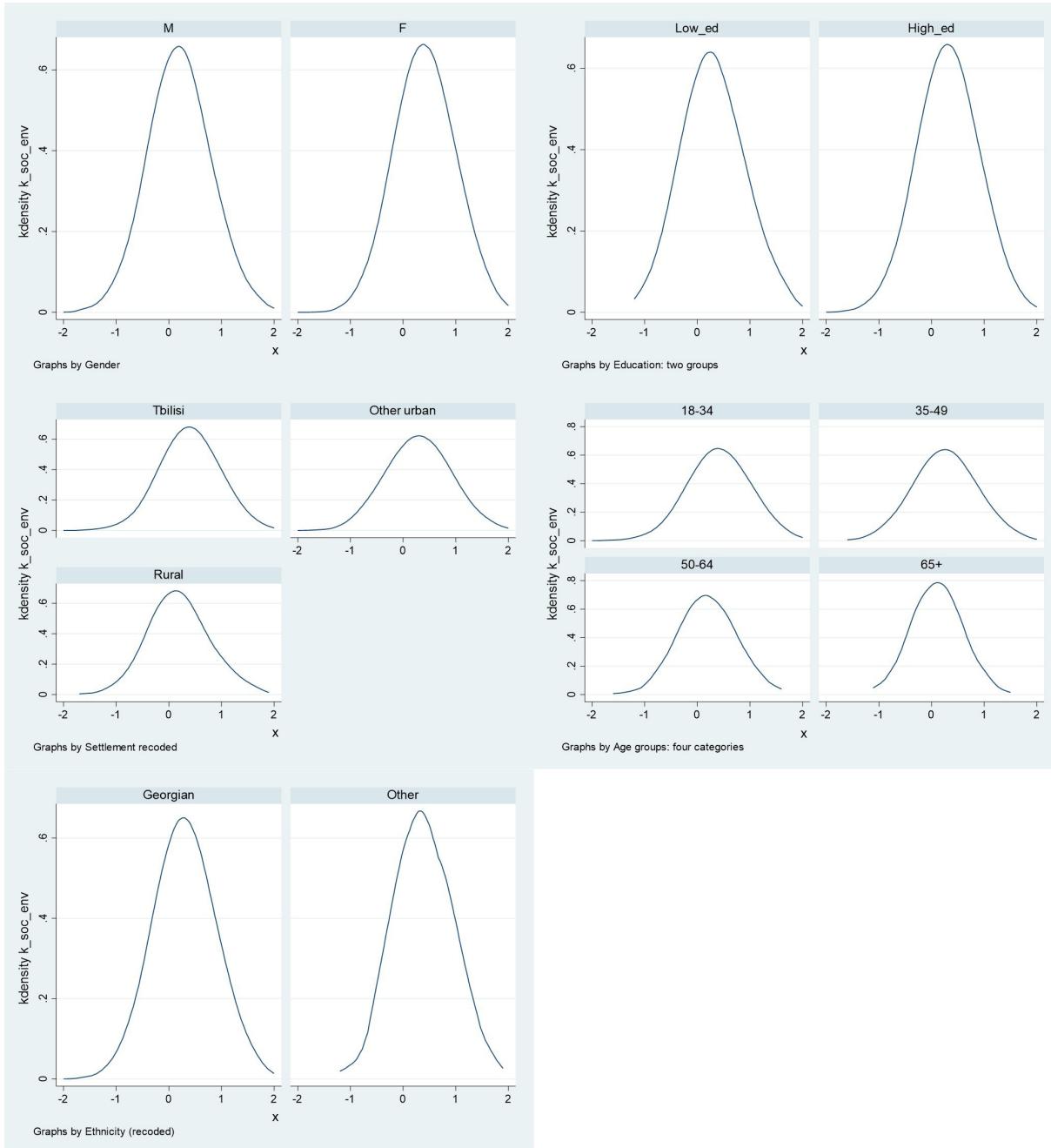
Appendix 2.3

Foreign Policy and Security - distribution of ideological dimensions for different policy areas by demographic characteristics (gender, education, settlement, age and ethnicity)



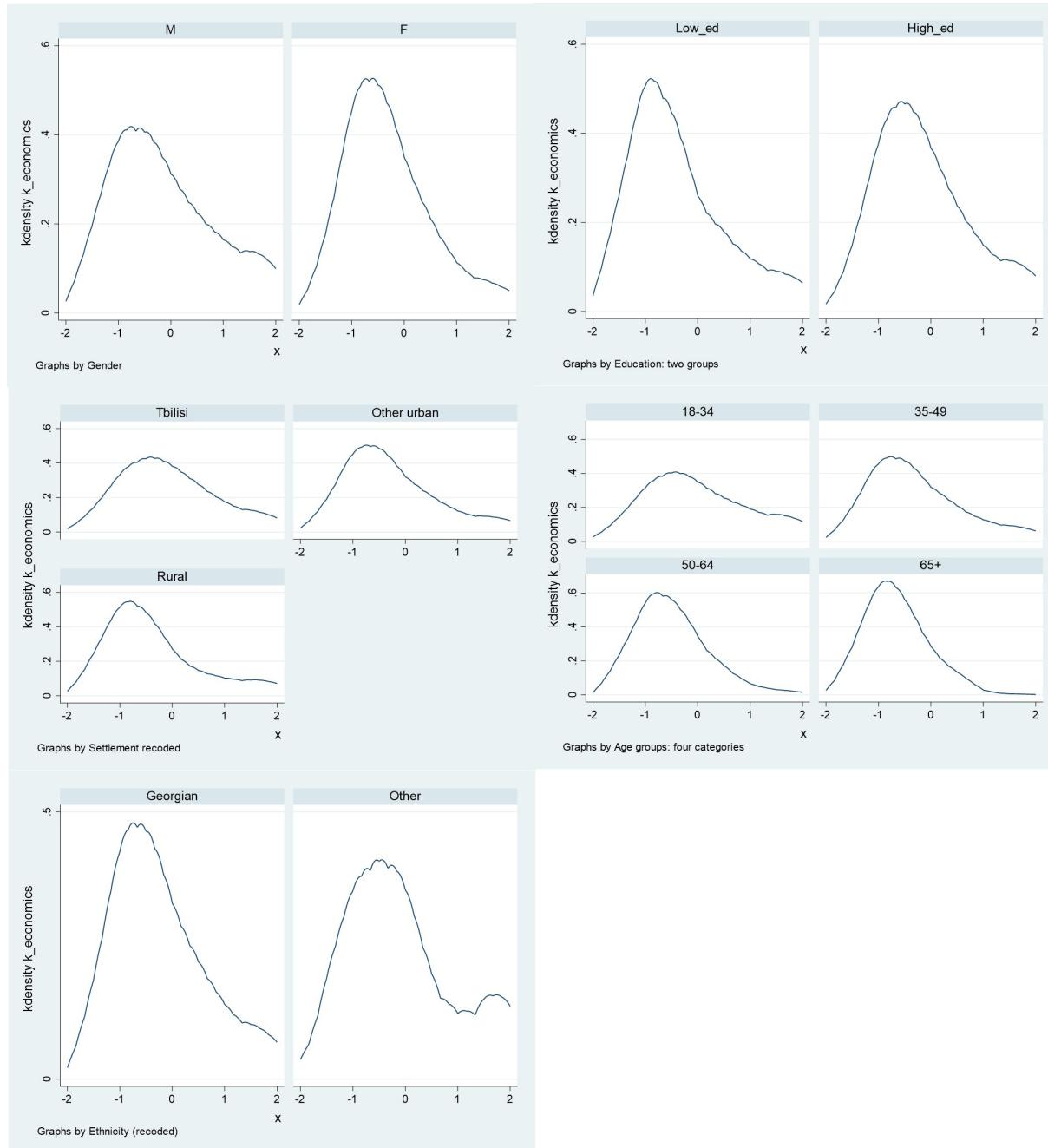
Appendix 2.4

Social and Environmental Issues - distribution of ideological dimensions for different policy areas by demographic characteristics (gender, education, settlement, age and ethnicity)



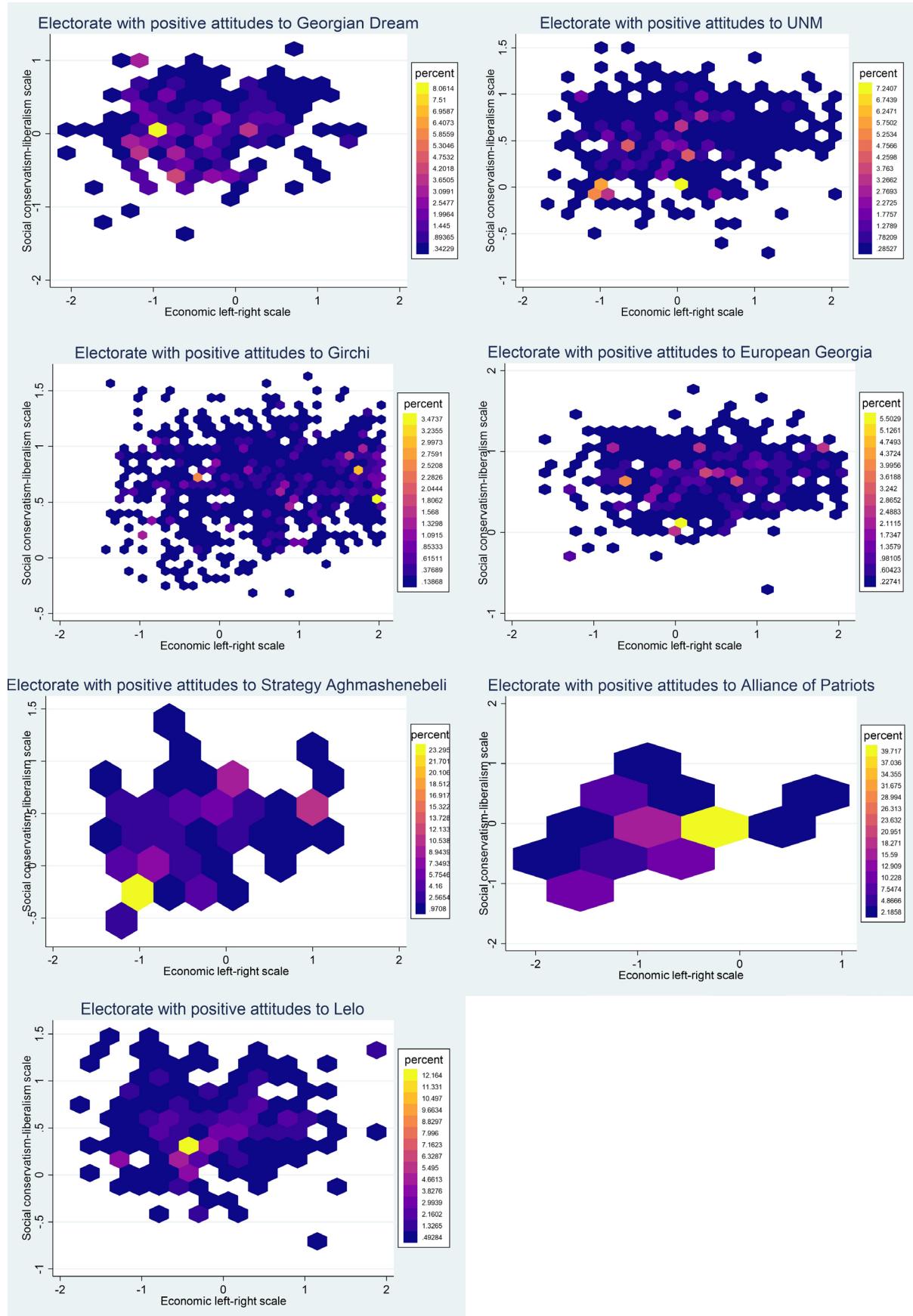
Appendix 2.5

Economics - distribution of ideological dimensions for different policy areas by demographic characteristics (gender, education, settlement, age and ethnicity)



Appendix 3

Ideological distribution of respondents with positive attitudes towards political parties



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Giorgi Papava Lead Economist at the Policy Institute of the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET-Policy Institute)

Davit Keshelava Researcher at the Policy Institute of the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University (ISET-Policy Institute)

Levan Kakhishvili Policy Analyst at Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)

Davit Sichinava Research Director, Party Program Specialist at the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC)

IMPRINT

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Tbilisi Office
N. Ramishvili str. I Dead End, Bldg. 1, Ap. 7
0179 Tbilisi | Georgia

Responsible:
Felix Hett | Director
FES Regional Office South Caucasus
Tel.: +995 32 225 07 28
<http://southcaucasus.fes.de/>

To order publications:
stiftung@fesgeo.ge

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

GEORGIA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Diversity, Convergence and Empty Spots



The potential voters of the United National Movement seem to be more liberal and economically leftist, while the party itself favors right-wing economic policies: 94.2% of UNM voters have more left-wing views than the UNM itself, and 91.5% of UNM voters have a more conservative ideology than the party.



The winning party in the 2020 elections, the Georgian Dream, is also the party that is closest to the “average”, or the median voter.



Data used in this report does not confirm the existence of extreme polarization in Georgia. Additionally, voter preferences do not suggest the existence of two clearly identifiable societal groups that would have mutually exclusive preferences.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
www.southcaucasus.fes.de