

# Imperfect Democracy or Electoral Authoritarianism? Georgia's Decent into a Hegemonic-Party System

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## Introduction and Goals

- The Georgian electorate has a clear chosen political path: Western democracy.
- Whenever the Georgian Dream party has exhibited very clear signs of going against this choice, the public outrage has been vocal and clear.
- Nevertheless, when it comes to elections, the same voters cast their votes in favor of the Georgian Dream party again and again.
- In this paper, I will explore reasons behind continued success of the Georgian Dream party in remaining in power, despite their increasing authoritarian and anti-Western tendencies and frequent public outrage against them.

## Hypothesis and Design

- The phenomena of hegemonic-party survival may be the causes of the electoral survival of the Georgian Dream party in the Georgian political climate, despite its clear authoritarian and anti-Western tendencies and the increasing public dissatisfaction.
- To test this hypothesis, I have used Beatriz Magaloni's theory on authoritarian equilibria of hegemonic party systems and applied it to Georgia.
- While Magaloni's theory was centered around Mexico, it can be universally applied to hegemonic party systems as it defines their behavior under different circumstances.
- I will be analyzing the empirical state of Georgia under the Georgian Dream to test whether these conditions are being met to establish whether the Georgian political climate provides an opportunity for electoral authoritarianism to emerge.

## Theory

		Punishment Regime	
		No	Yes
Long-Term Economic Growth	High	<b>SELF-DESTRUCTIVE AUTHORITARIAN EQUILIBRIUM</b>	<b>SELF-REINFORCING AUTHORITARIAN EQUILIBRIUM</b>
	Low	<b>UNSTABLE AUTHORITARIAN EQUILIBRIUM</b>	<b>SELF-DESTRUCTIVE AUTHORITARIAN EQUILIBRIUM</b>

From: Beatriz Magaloni. *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic-Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico* (p. 21, Figure 1.1)

- Magaloni defines authoritarian equilibria based on the presence of a punishment regime and a degree of long-term economic growth.
- A punishment regime is characterized by the governing party (in this case a hegemonic party) withholding certain benefits from opposition voters and politicians and awarding these same benefits to its members and supporters.
- The punishment regime is usually the driving strategy behind the success of a hegemonic party, especially once it begins exhibiting authoritarian tendencies and needs to retain mass support.
- Depending on whether a punishment regime exists, and whether a country experiences a high or low degree of long-term economic growth, the hegemonic party system can result in three types of equilibria: self-destructive authoritarian equilibrium, unstable authoritarian equilibrium, self-reinforcing destructive equilibrium.

## Results and Discussions

- To examine which criteria Georgia fits, it is necessary to establish the conditions of economic growth and the presence of the punishment regime in the country.
- To demonstrate the existence of the punishment regime, I provide examples of party supporters benefiting from the government, while the opposition supporters face artificial obstacles in three fields: public movements, private sector, and arts and culture.
- The Georgian Dream government has created conditions in which citizens, with similar ideologies as the party, enjoy freedom of expression while those that oppose it are either ignored or persecuted. This is demonstrated with the example of the Shame Movement and Conservative Movement.
- The punishment regime can also be observed in the private sector, where businesses with ties to the Georgian government operate freely and receive benefits, while those with oppositional views or no open support to the Georgian Dream party face additional obstacles. This is demonstrated with the example of the Anaklia Deep-Sea Port construction issues.
- The punishment regime can also be observed in arts and cultural spaces, where the party has begun installing loyalists and removing employees that do not openly support the party and have opposing stances. This is demonstrated with the example of the series of reforms from Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection that served to replace employees of cultural institutions with loyalists.
- The conditions of economic growth can be more challenging to establish in the case of Georgia as its economy has only stabilized in the recent two decades and with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic does not paint the full picture.



From: World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2021&locations=GE&start=2003&view=chart>

- 2003 – 2013: GDP growth averaged 6%.
- 2014 – 2015: GDP growth slowed as a result of a slump in global oil prices
- Starting in 2016: growth resumed and outperformed most countries in the region
- 2020: the pandemic affected the economy
- Starting in 2021: economy bounced back with an estimated growth rate of 10.4%

## Conclusion

- As demonstrated, the Georgian Dream party has established a punishment regime in Georgia, effectively creating incentives for its support base to remain loyal and for the opposition supporters to defect to the party.
- Although the economic growth is not characterized as high long-term growth, when discussed in the context of Georgia's consolidation as a state, it produces the same result for the formation of the hegemonic-party autocracy.
- Additionally, hegemonic-party systems often rely on the initial reason of victory to retain support. In the Georgian Dream's case, the victory is painted as a symbolic defeat of the constrictive regime of the National Movement and Saakashvili.
- The party uses this image to create an illusion of themselves as saviors and with the looming threat of National Movement's return (and with it the Saakashvili regime) the Georgian Dream creates additional incentives for its electorate to remain loyal.
- In Magaloni's authoritarian equilibria theory, Georgia can then be characterized as an emerging self-sustaining authoritarian hegemonic system. Consequently, the Georgian Dream's consolidation as a hegemonic-party, would drastically harm Georgia's democratic future and its continued success as a free-liberal state in the region.
- With more than twenty percent of the country being occupied by the Russian Federation, a party with an increasingly loyal attitude towards the aggressor becoming a hegemonic autocrat puts under question Georgia's continued territorial integrity as well.
- However, even though the pre-conditions for the Georgian Dream to become a hegemonic party are present, they have not consolidated as one yet. In this way, there is still a possibility of avoiding such scenario.
- Whether the opposition will manage to mobilize against the party in time, however, remains to be determined but is not yet impossible.

## References

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