

"Non-Politicians" in Politics: The Case of Georgia

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Abstract

There are two main types of leaders in political science: formal and informal. A formal leader is a person who has responsibility by virtue of their position. An informal leader is recognizable and respected figure in society, who does not have an official burdens. Social capital accumulated outside the political sphere can be successfully utilized for political purposes. It is significant that in the pre-election period electorate shows more trust in informal leaders. An informal leader has no political responsibility which puts them in a very advantageous position. The involvement of informal leaders in politics is particularly active in conditions of ineffectiveness of political parties. At such times, they try to compensate for parties ineffectiveness through leadership. In this way, politics becomes person-centered and free from ideological accountability. During the pre-election period, the compilation of party lists by well known figures for society is a proven strategy. This approach mobilizes an unstable electorate and their votes.

The purpose of our study was to determine the role of effectiveness of political parties in the involvement of informal leader in politics. In our research, we utilize Marshall's theory of celebrity influence. According to this theory, celebrities are individual members of society who, on the surface, promote (false) values and actively shape political, economic, and social life. Our hypothesis is as follows: political parties ineffectiveness leads to the involvement of informal leaders in politics. We are interested in exploring the role of so-called intelligentsia and celebrities in political process. In the research process we used a qualitative research method, specifically focus-group, and the respondents were selected non-probabilistically and supposedly. We identified two groups: the first group consisted of individuals aged twenty to thirty-nine, and the second group consisted of individuals aged forty to seventy.

Key Words: Intelligentsia, Celebrities, Political party, Election, Georgia

Introduction

The role of leader in public life has been particularly important since ancient times. Personal connections and respect for him are factors which largely determine trust in a person. A positive attitude toward a leader is a great asset in every field. Modern studies confirm that the formal legitimacy of a leader is often no longer politically beneficial. Personalization is a well-known advertising campaign strategy. At such a time, the rules on which the policy is based are of decisive importance. Personal connections and familiarity are very important in electoral decision-making, especially in a society, where the actual political process lacks ideological foundations.

The pre-election process in Georgia is distinguished by a number of peculiarities. The country's weak party institutionalization and small electoral field are especially noteworthy. The political process dependent on leaders and authorities is another characteristic of it. In the Soviet past, formation of public opinion was facilitated by the intelligentsia. The intelligentsia was divided into two groups: one part agreed with the regime, in the hope of benefiting from it while the other part opposed it and even had to go into exile. In a state with a population of 3 million, personal contacts have a significant influence on political processes. It is interesting, that even during the Soviet period, politicians tried to gain the favor of celebrities.

What do we mean by party system institutionalization, and why is it so important? The ideological foundation and programmatic differences between parties promote pluralism and strong party system institutionalization. A prominent feature of the modern party system is the personalization of politics and fragile ideological foundations. When politics becomes dependent on individuals, it becomes spectacle. Thus, under such conditions, created a favorable ground for pseudo-democratic process. The one party rule during the Soviet era, focused on maintaining of supportive intelligentsia, which was necessary for pseudo-legitimacy in society. Post-Soviet hybrid regimes also actively utilized the intelligentsia and celebrities for mobilizing the electorate. This unity of citizens serves as a form of support for the government, while for the average voter, it establishes a pattern of behavior.

Theoretical Foundations

The word „intelligentsia” is of Latin origin and means „benevolence.” In the definition existing in the Soviet Union, intelligentsia referred to individuals engaged in intellectual labor. The term was first used in its modern meaning in Poland during the 1840s. Pascal offers a much simpler explanation of the term „intelligentsia:” intellectuals who discuss and critique various aspects of public life (Pascal and Sirinelli, 2002). The term „intelligentsia”

was also used in a narrow, local sense. Billington referred to the segment of society that opposed the Russian Empire as the intelligentsia (Billington, 1999). Kritzwalter pointed out the differing attitudes toward intellectuals in Eastern and Western Europe (Kritzwalter, 2009). In Western Europe, intellectuals were respected individuals in society, whereas in Eastern European states, they were persecuted by the authorities. This explains that in the Soviet space, intellectuals who were not persecuted were regarded as unconditional supporters of the regime.

The word was established in Georgia in the 19th century, but its roots can be traced back to the 17th century when the connection with Western Europe strengthened. It is interesting to note that the Georgian intelligentsia, founded by the nobility, actually opposed it and represented the interests of society. The subjugation of the intelligentsia and its placement in the service of the government are a result of Soviet rule.

The term „Celebrity” appears in the English language context drawing from the Latin word *Celebritas* which means fame. Fame is a term which has been around since the Romans. The term *Celebrities* is for the trivial form of fame. The earliest known celebrities were performers and politicians. In classical and medieval times people wanted to be remembered after their deaths. Today, it is much easier to gain popularity through television and social media. Scandals, gossip, and self-promotion constitute the content of modern media. The celebrity culture in politics began in the early 2000s. This challenge has weakened the ideological foundations of the policy. Wright Mill's work (1956) is the first study in which term „celebrities” is discussed in a sociopolitical context. According to Milli, the elite is not composed of extraordinary individuals; rather, it is the positions that these individuals hold that grant them special influence. He suggests that ordinary citizen in modern society is a subject of manipulation. Archeri is one of those who believes that the involvement of celebrities harms the democratic political process (2020). He considers the influence of famous figures on public opinion to be the reason, especially when they lack the necessary competence. Meyer pointed out that, in politics, knowledge and experience in management are necessary, rather than artistic talent (2002).

Effectiveness of Political Parties

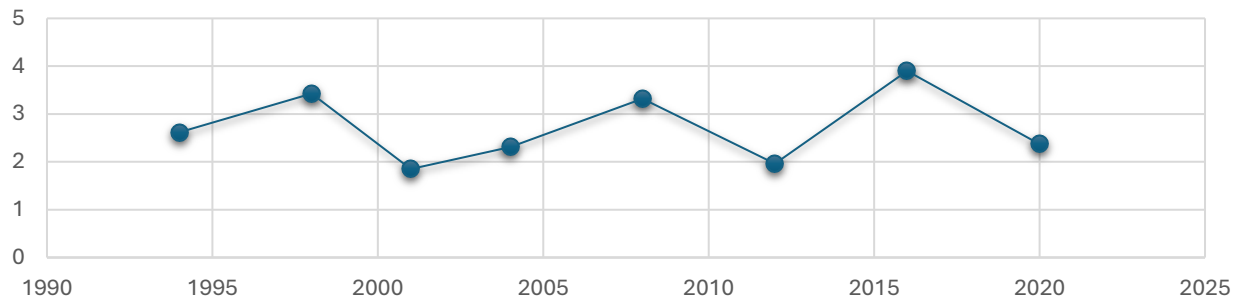
The effective number of parties (ENP)¹ is the indicator, which allows us to define the institutionalization of the party system (Laakso, Taguepera, 1979, 3- 27). By using the effective number of parties, which is determined through the obtained votes of the parties, we can determine their political weight. The high rate of effective parties means that party system is diffusive, but the low rate indicates on the existence of dominant parties. For orientation should be noticed that the highest rate of the effective parties is 6.30, but the lowest one is 3,14. In the early years of the independence according to the effective parties Georgia was at the advanced positions across the world; however this meant special fragmentation of the party system. In the second half of the 1990s, the effective number of parties had been relatively increased, but the fragmentation remained as a problem. The incompatibility of the parliamentary factions, political parties and dominant ruling parties against the disconnected opposition were much more exacerbating crisis of party system (Bader, 2008, 4).

After the “Rose Revolution,” the institutionalization problem of party system had been accelerated by artificial threat. Was formed several “satellite” parties, which blocked unwanted parties for the ruling group. Pseudo-opposition parties were oriented on the weakening of opposition. After a tense pre-election period, the “Georgian Dream” opposition coalition ousted “United National Movement” in 2012. In the 2016 parliamentary election ruling party, “Georgian Dream” gained the constitutional majority, In 2020, it received 90 mandates and had 23 deputies fewer than necessary for a constitutional majority in parliament. In 2024, the elections were held for the first time using a fully proportional system, and the ruling party was unable to gain a constitutional majority. It is noteworthy that none of the opposition parties have recognized the results of these elections and have not entered the parliament.

For the last period, the number of parties reached to 250, however, most of them don't participate in active political processes. Political parties are still personalized, with a strong focus on leaders. Due to the existence of small parties, the social votes having identical interests are scattering and the parties are weakened.

¹ENP=1/Σ(Si)² - Si—number of votes obtained by each party

Effective Number of Parties in Georgia



Source: Based on the data published by the Central Election Commission (www.cesko.ge) the effective number of parties was determined using the formula developed by Laakso and Taguepera (1979).

The parties in Georgia in the conditions of weak representation of voters' interests were trying to compensate for the mentioned problem with political populism. They couldn't play the role of a mediator between society and state. The "pre-election program is only a cover to show that the party considers the public interests" (Wheatley, 2005,158). Traditionally the parties are reluctant to occupy drastic left-wing or right-wing position. In these circumstances, it is difficult for the electorate to perceive ideological differences and during vote, they still are focusing on leaders and the supporting elites of parties, which include both intellectuals and famous figures.

Georgian politics is characterized by the low popularity of parties, low party membership, fragile partisan loyalty and weak roots of parties in civil society. The absence of ideological watershed between the parties contributes to the instability of the electorate. The ephemeral political blocks formed in the pre-election period and the voter often can't see fundamental difference between the parties. This is the reason why voters seek persons and famous figures and rely on them when making electoral decisions.

The Soviet period is known for its one-party rule under the Communist Party. Under such conditions, the communists used the intelligentsia to create a pseudo-legitimacy for the party. In the transition period in post-Soviet society, the trust of political parties had been ruined. The pre-election promises are fixed on the attraction of the electorate and there is often observed the communication problem with the electorate. Political parties are trying to adress this shortcoming and attract voters by using famous figures and celebrities.

Soviet Era and Intelligentsia

In 1921, shortly after the Sovietization, an order was issued to support the cultural workers, which meant that the intelligentsia began to be recruited. The 1930s were particularly difficult for the unruly intelligentsia. The Soviet authorities carried out repressions against individuals who remained true to their ideals. Among them were director Sandro Akhmeteli, writer Mikhail Javakhishvili, musician Evgeny Mikeladze, and poet Titsian Tabidze. The year 1937 marked a pivotal moment in the struggle and assessment of the nation's intelligentsia. The rehabilitation process commenced in 1938; however, repressions persisted against members of the intelligentsia who exhibited notable activism. The censorship and self-censorship that operated during the Soviet era deserve special mention; however, the situation eased somewhat in the 1970s. In the so-called „warming era,“ the government changed its form of interaction with the intelligentsia. Through compromise and encouragement, the government sought to establish a solid support base among them. At first glance, it seems unbelievable, but three jazz festivals were held in Tbilisi in 1978, 1986, and 1989. During the Soviet period, the Shota Rustaveli jubilee Committee was established, and the 800th anniversary of birth was celebrated on a large scale. A multi-volume collection of Georgian literature was published, and research in to historical sources was conducted actively.

In Soviet Georgia, the intelligentsia was not homogeneous. At that time, it was represented by several members of the Communist Party, non-partisan elites supportive of the regime, a society that secretly fought against the system, and individuals who openly opposed it. A member of the Communist Party was historian, esteemed scholar, and academic Andria Apakidze, who represented the intelligentsia of that time. Another representative of the intelligentsia was the philosopher Niko Chavchavadze, who preserved the Georgian School of Philosophy without engaging in party activities. The Soviet Georgian intelligentsia was represented by director Tengiz Abuladze, who showcased the brutal and tragic aspect of the system in his film „Repetance“ (1984). The first president of Georgia, well-known dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was the son of the famous writer Konstantine Gamsakhurdia. He was a Doctor of Philology, a scientist, and a successful translator who openly opposed the Soviet system.

The proximity and occasional merging of the intelligentsia with the authorities is not a rare occurrence and can be a highly dramatic phenomenon. In this regard, 1970s and Shevardnadze's rule was outstanding. The philosopher Merab Mamardashvili's assessment

was interesting. He pointed out in the 1980s that the intelligentsia betrayed their professional clues. He considered the intelligentsia's conformist nature to be the reason for this.

The term „Red Intelligentsia“ appeared in Soviet Georgia. The Georgian intelligentsia was distinguished by one quality it was easily approached by the government if necessary. It should be noted that the term was coined for the first time by Zviad Gamsakhurdia. This term referred to the cultural and educational elite who benefitted from the Soviet Union. A kind of elite gathered around Gamsakhurdia, although they acted in the name of anti-Soviet elite. The fact is that, they had political influences and ambitions, which were clearly visible in their speeches. „The word „intelligentsia“ is even associated with the Soviet era and obedience to the government.” [Levan, 60 years old].

There is no middle class in Georgia, this affects the economic attitudes of the intelligentsia and undermines their impartiality. The use of personal contacts to finance cultural events was a characteristic of the Soviet period and the 1990s. For example, during the communist regime, friendship with Shevardnadze was a good way to obtain permission and funding to shoot a film. In post-Soviet Georgia the term „Intelligentsia“ is rarely used and has been replaced by „Intellectuals“ and „Celebrities.“ Intellectualism refers to a way of thinking, while intelligent denotes a rank or social status. It should be noted that the term „Intelligentsia“ was actively established in the 1930s of the twentieth century. „Society needs authorities; this is not a bad thing, even in politics. On the contrary, it helps voters make better decisions.“ [Nana, 58 years old].

The social status of the intelligentsia was a kind of a privilege and the support of the government was also considered. They avoid association with the intelligentsia due to its identification with the Soviet Union and Red Intelligentsia. A notable characteristic of Georgian intelligentsia is unity in both supportive and protest activities. It was characterised by personal connections with governmental officials, which implies material and financial prosperities. For example during the Soviet period, the Union of Writers was created, to mobilize the intelligentsia, as the influence of writers was significant.

There were numerous examples of special attitudes towards the representatives of the intelligentsia in Soviet Georgia. The intelligentsia displayed remarkable engagement in 1974 during the demonstrations organized for the preservation of the state language. „There were frequent instances in which famous actors helped citizens solve various problems. In 1983, the intelligentsia appealed to the authorities for assistance regarding the participants in the airplane hijacking incident.“ [Davit, 65]

Intelligentsia in Post-Soviet Georgia

The confrontation between elite groups began, significantly influencing the electoral behavior of ordinary citizens. This process took a dangerous turn and reached its peak during the Tbilisi war. Shevardnadze sought to gather supporters among well-known celebrities. He used this social capital well even in the 1990s, after his return to independent Georgia. The intelligentsia that backed Shevardnadze did not accept Gamsakhurdia. He was particularly opposed by the group that had enjoyed more privileges during the Soviet era. Zviad Gamsakhurdia's banning of the Communist Party turned the intelligentsia against him. It is worth noting, that in 1991 Gamsakhurdia himself established the hell of Intelligentsia, among whose members were many from the Soviet nomenclature. The well-known events of 1991 and the overthrow of President Gamsakhurdia were, in certain respects, a form of revenge by the Soviet intelligentsia.

Georgia was governed by informal influences during the military council. After returning to Tbilisi, Shevardnadze thanked the intelligentsia for taking up arms to fight the dictatorship. He included his pro-intellectuals in the State Council and this signified valuing his loyalty. In 1992, an unprecedented event in world history occurred in Georgia. Voters elected Shevardnadze to the post of head of state, a position that was completely unusual. At that time he had neither real, nor legal power, this position was created specifically for Shevardnadze and demonstrated confidence in him.

In 1993, based on the elite, Shevardnadze created the political party „Union of Georgian Citizens.” The famous phrase attributed to Eduard Shevardnadze: „Save the culture and we will survive.” It should be noted Shevardnadze's support always was from intelligentsia and he hoped for their support in the 2003 elections as well. It is also noteworthy that following the engagement in government, the intelligentsia that had been in the shadows during the previous administration emerged into the spotlight, and conversely.

The year 2003 and the period before the Rose Revolution was very interesting. The country's cultural and scientific elite avoided openly expressing political view. After the Rose Revolution the intelligentsia was no longer on the government side, but Saakashvili had an elite close to him. During Saakashvili's rule a new type of the intelligentsia – celebrities was formed, which distinguished itself from Shevardnadze's era and gave legitimacy to the new government. It should be noted that this people actively created the public opinion and supported the political agenda. Celebrities were often seen on TV and built pro-governmental

politics. However, there were, for example, the representatives of the field of art, who said, that they were blocked because of oppositional opinion. The United National Movement used the negative mood of the people, which was associated with the promoted elite during Shevardnadze period. In 2006, Saakashvili stated during a meeting with students that a qualitatively new elite should be created in the country – one that would be extremely – and that this elite should specifically consist of the new generation.

Gamsakhurdia and Saakashvili actively used the method of discrediting of the opposition minded elite. Saakashvili tried to use Gamsakhurdia's narrative regarding the Red Intelligentsia and thus confronted the pro-Shevardnadze elite. A number of famous signers and actors said that this kind of attitude led to their choice in the 2012 elections. It is worth noting, that before coming to power, Bidzina Ivanishvili financed the representatives of culture and sports. In 2012, the intelligentsia started mobilizing again, but it was mostly the intelligentsia who were upset with Saakashvili. Georgian intelligentsia was often involved in personal conflicts and because of it was discredited. Post-soviet political elite tried to use the resource of famous faces individually, the stage of professional associations was over. Celebrities were often affiliated with governmental political parties, although the National Movement was an exception in this regard.

Discussion

Intellectuals are researchers, representatives of non-governmental organizations and members of the media sector who consider themselves to be part of the western intellectuals community. The term „celebrities” is very comprehensive, although it was actively established under the influence of the West. The best example of the successful involvement of celebrities in politics is the fortieth president of USA, Ronald Reagan. Actor and athlete Arnold Schwarzenegger was the governor of California from 2003 to 2011. The term mentioned implies famous people, although it is more often used for representatives of the cultural sphere. The Intelligentsia was associated with the soviet government, celebrities were often accused of political conformity, but intellectuals avoided political party affiliation.

In post-Soviet Georgia celebrities were at the forefront of the supporting of government and political forces. For example, the song performed by famous singers have a special influence on social thought. As a result, popular songs were performed: in 1989, „Let's Give Each Other Tulips!” in 1999 „Be Happy!” in 2007 „Hello, Abkhazia, Yours!” During the

soviet period the first jazz festival was held in Tbilisi and filming began the anti-Soviet film „Repentance.“

In hybrid regimes, the involvement of an informal leader in political process is an accepted form of activism. „This kind of marketing method is successful, when an electorate is not familiar with a political party's program at all.“ [Davit, 67 years old]. Celebrity endorsement gives the political parties an extra opportunity to distribute their messages to the electorate. It is no coincidence that the name of the political party includes the name of a famous person. For example, „Bidzina Ivanishvili - Georgian Dream,” „Burdjanadze – Democrats,” and „Paata Burchuladze – Movement for the State People.” When party politics is not limited by an ideological framework, a political party becomes like a marketing product. In order to sell a marketing product, it needs to be packaged attractively. „If an appearance of the famous person on the political party list makes the electorate of this party feel positive, it causes negative emotion in others.“ [Nika, 32 years old].

Famous figures can effectively attract voters and promote products. Celebrities have an indirect influence on politics when they appear solely as supporters of a political party. In such a case, they have no political responsibility, even though they enjoy high public trust. „If celebrities have finished their careers in their profession, politics becomes an attractive business at such a time.” [Tamar, 36 years old]. It should be noted that the use of celebrities in pre-election campaign is more effective in small electoral countries.

A person outside the political process is free from political niches and accumulates social capital. „For example, the football players were included in the pre-election advertisement after they won the football game.” [Giorgi, 25 years old]. There were many famous Georgians on the lists of political parties. For example, directors Eldar Shengelaia and Gogi Kavtaradze, academic Roin Metreveli and historian Andria Aphakidze were members of the „Communist Party” in the Supreme Council. In the early years of post-soviet Georgia, the political party „The Round Table – Independent Georgia” included poet Mukhran Machavariani, sculptor Gogi Ochiauri, writers Guram petriashvili and Nodar Tsuleiskiri, vocalist Maya Tomadze, artist Tengiz Kitovani, actor Nodar Rtskhiladze and director Zurab Kandelaki. Directors: Lana Ghoghoberidze Eldar Shengelaia, Giga Lortkiphanidze, and Tengiz Abuladze, Writers: Chabua Amirejibi, Davit Maghradze, Jansugh Charkviani, Artists: Zurab Tsereteli and Tengiz Kitovani. Boxer Giorgi Kandelaki, scientists Nodar Natadze, Tamaz Gamkrelidze and Kote Gabashvili were represented in parliament by the list of the political party „Georgians Citizens Party.” Writers Mukhran Machavariani and Rezo Mishveladze,

actor Zurab Kaphianidze, Philologist Elizbar Javelidze, infectious disease specialist Vakhtang Bochorishvili were members of the political party „Revival.“

Actors Gia Roinishvili and Merab Botsvadze, signers Anzor Erkonaishvili and Goga Khachidze, mountaineer Gia Tortladze, director Eldar Shengelaia, footballer Giorgi Nemsadze, weightfighter Giorgi Asanidze, and signer and actor Buba Kikabidze were members of „The National Movement.“ „The Georgian Dream“ list included musicians Zaza Khutsishvili and Tamaz Chkuaseli, Director Nukri Kantaria, Actors Soso Jachviani, Zaza Papuashvili and Gogi Kavtaradze, football player Kakhi Kaladze, Gocha Jamarauli, Levan Kobiashvili and Mikheil Kavelashvili, basketball player Victor Sanikidze, wrestler Eldar Kurtanidze and Geno Petriashvili, Judoka Zurab Zviadauri, wrightfighter Lasha Talakhadze.

Signer Nugzar Kvashali was in the „Labor Party“ and director Goga Khaindrava in the – „National Council.“ Signer Tsisana Sephiashvili was in the top ten of the parliamentary list of the „Patriot Alliance.“ TV host Nanuka Jorjoliani was the parliamentary majority candidate on the list of the „United Forces.“ Signer Nugzar Kvashali was nominated as the majoritarian candidate of the political union „Georgian Roots.“ The world famous opera signer and the founder of the charity fund (that helps orphaned needy children) Paata Burchuladze, founded the party „Paata Burchuladze Movement for the State People.“

Using social capital is an effective method for gaining electoral support. This tactic makes it relatively easy to gain trust of people, but also has limitations. First of all, association with a political party reduces this resource and it is quickly spent. Any celebrity scandal poses a significant challenge for the political party. If there is no strong political affiliation or other interests celebrities avoid such connection. Celebrities especially avoid political affiliation with opposition and newly created parties. As a rule successful people found political parties themselves or tried to avoid politics. Celebrities are also characterized by frequent change of parties and political volatility. In this regard, Georgian politics is truly outstanding.

In addition to the trust in celebrities, the interest of electorate is significant. At the same time, we observe the cases of imitation and conformity. Using celebrities to promote of conformity and obedience is a common practice. The public needs to see the behavior of the leader. „Celebrities may seem quite independent at first glance, but they are also used for political purposes“ [Barbare, 30 years old]. The human desire for social affiliation motivates political conformity. Political conformity is especially strong there where is a high concentration of power. In such cases, celebrities are used by the electorate as a kind of prototype. How does conformity work? It is necessary to select topics relevant for society. A

patern of socially desirable behavior and leaders of public opinion should be identified. Conformity is particularly prevalent in countries with low political culture.

Conclusion

The research revealed that voters attribute the involvement of famous figures in politics to several reasons. One reason is personal trust, along with success achieved outside of politics and an impressive image. The contribution of the media, especially television and social networks, is significant in the issue of the celebritization of modern politics.

The research found that public figures are perceived as a kind of lifeline for politics, and this is particularly effective when citizens trust the authorities. The search for authority and reliance on it during decision-making were particularly pronounced among those respondents who lived during the Soviet era. Representatives of the new generation noted that politics is solely the business of politicians and that it is unacceptable for people from other field to interfere in it, whether directly or indirectly.

It turned out that the respondents themselves consider ideological diversity to be an important prerequisite for democratic elections; however, they believe that such pluralism is only used superficially. The famous phrase „bread and circuses,” attributed to the ancient Roman Emperor Augustus, is still considered authentic by respondents. The reasons cited include both the simplification of issues for politicians and the immature nature of the electorate. Despite the qualitatively different stages in the effectiveness of political parties during the 35 years of post-Soviet Georgia, not to mention the Soviet period, the use of resources from famous figures remained a consistent feature in Georgian politics.

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