
Taking Partly Free Voters Seriously:

Autocratic Response to Voter
Preferences in Armenia and Georgia

CRRC-Georgia and CRRC-Armenia

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Executive Summary

The Taking Partly Free Voters Seriously Project set out to compare and contrast how the oscillation of institutions and policies in Armenia and Georgia with the goal of staying in power. We were primarily interested in a regime's policy responses to the electorate's preferences although, arguably, these responses are mediated by the regime's institutional environment. Thus, our aim was to identify and analyze (1) voters' preferences, and (2) the regime's policy responses to them. In order to achieve this goal, the team used a mixed methods approach. In total, we carried out over 30 elite interviews, analysis of secondary and primary sources, and conducted a survey experiment in Tbilisi and Yerevan. Our research has led to six articles which are currently undergoing internal peer review and will be submitted as a special issue which has been accepted for consideration at *Caucasus Survey*, a peer reviewed Taylor and Francis Journal. In this research report, we provide extended abstracts of the articles.

In the first article, "The public policies of competitive authoritarian regimes and their effects on regime stability and change" Dr. Matteo Fumagalli and Koba Turmanidze ask "Do voters matter in competitive authoritarian regimes? If so, how exactly? Do their preferences matter?" They argue that the subsequent contributions to the special issue support the fundamental contention of the project - that voters in partially free regimes matter and that incumbents take them seriously.

In the second article, "Elections and the political landscape in Georgia and Armenia", set to appear in the special issue, Dustin Gilbreath and Dr. Mikayel Zolyan provide a comparative case study of Georgian and Armenian elections. The article is the first comparative case study and thick description which provides an in depth look at the history of Georgian and Armenian elections from a comparative perspective. The article first provides a brief overview of the political landscape in each country including a discussion of major players, actors, and a general background on the factors which shape political competition in each country. Moving from the political landscape to a specific focus on elections, the article provides a narrative history of elections in Georgia and Armenia, describing how each country's electoral system has changed and how elites have attempted to use electoral legislation to their advantage. Next, the paper describes the changing forms of pre-electoral and election-day malfeasance in Georgia and Armenia. We trace how election fraud has moved from more direct and heavy-handed forms like vote buying and ballot box stuffing to more nuanced forms of fraud, using technical, but often legal means of affecting the vote. Finally, the article uses quantitative methods from electoral forensics to trace the quality of elections in each country in recent years.

In the third article in the special issue, “The self-defeating game: How state capacity and policy choice affect regime stability,” Dustin Gilbreath and Koba Turmanidze look at the inter-relations between state capacity, reform, and regime stability. While the political economy literature implicitly suggests that there should be a link between regime durability and state capacity, this article shows that radical reforms which lead to increased state capacity can also lead to instability. The article shows that state capacity is a necessary but insufficient condition for regime stability using a nested analysis. The article first tests whether state capacity is in fact linked to regime durability using the World Bank’s World Governance Indicators, NELDA, and Heritage Foundation data. However, the authors also show that radical policy reform, which is likely to increase state capacity, is also likely to lead to instability using data on the rate of change in assessments of property rights as a proxy for rate of reform. Moving from the global level to the local, the authors illustrate these findings with the cases of Armenia and Georgia, providing a thick description of the development of state capacity in each country, and breaking its development into three periods. While Georgian state capacity developed in fits, jumps, and starts, in Armenia state capacity developed at a slow and steady pace. As the aphorism goes, slow and steady wins the race with politicians being thrown out of office in Georgia and the incumbent in Armenia maintaining its power. Based on the above analyses, we suggest that a self-defeating game is at work for reformers. When they deliver on their promises of reform, they generate state capacity leading to greater capacity to reform, however, they also generate losers which challenge their rule. In order to retain office, they must either coerce or co-opt the challengers leading to more resources dedicated to private rather than public goods, which in turn generates fewer winners from the regime’s reforms. As the process continues, a critical mass of losers emerges leading to regime instability.

The fourth article in the special issue, “Policy Demand: What do voters want?” Giorgi Babunashvili, argues against the prevailing logic that in less than democratic regimes, authorities can manipulate, buy, or outright steal votes. The article shows that voters not only matter but sometimes engage in retrospective voting. The article uses the case of Georgia, a hybrid regime, between 2008 and 2016 to illustrate this point. The paper relies on nationally representative survey data, including panel survey data which had previously been unavailable, and expert interviews. The survey data shows that the most important issues for voters are related to the economic situation – unemployment, wages, poverty, and the affordability of healthcare. The author finds a positive relation between voter support for the incumbent party and a positive assessment of the government’s social and economic policies. This correlation goes in line with retrospective voting theory and provides evidence of the importance in voting decisions of government performance in spheres that are relevant to voters. Citizens who assess government economic and social policy negatively are more prone to vote for opposition candidates or not vote at all compared to those who are more satisfied with the

government's performance both in Armenia and Georgia. Besides issue-alignment, the paper shows that values and foreign policy preferences are important factors that affect voting behavior. Support for liberal values and a pro-Western foreign policy increases an individual's probability of voting, and citizens who hold conservative cultural values or are more skeptical about a pro-Western foreign policy are less likely to vote. Finally, the article looks at how these factors affect reported party identification. This paper provides evidence that voters monitor the incumbent party's performance and relate their party identification and future voting decision to the performance assessment. Hence, in line with the key argument of this publication, the paper shows that disregarding voters' preferences has negative consequences for regime legitimation and stability.

The fifth article in the special issue, "Promises, lies and the accountability trap. Evidence from a survey experiment in Armenia and Georgia," Koba Turmanidze explores the dilemma facing politicians in hybrid regimes when it comes to campaign promises: lie a little or promise a lot. To explore this dilemma, the paper examines whether voters support ambiguous pre-election promises in hybrid regimes using an experimental design and if so, what it tells us about accountability mechanisms and a potential accountability trap. The accountability trap emerges when voters cannot hold their elected officials accountable for their promises and become disillusioned with political participation. The trap deepens as politicians put forward ambiguous promises to impress disillusioned voters, yet politicians continue to fail on delivery. We understand ambiguity as a multiplicity of projected actions related to a particular electoral promise. The research looks at the impact of two types of ambiguous promises compared to clearly defined positions. One type of ambiguous promise only signals general solutions to pressing problems, while specificities remain unspoken so as to avoid alienating important segments of voters (type A ambiguity). In contrast, type B ambiguity is a promise combining components of state-driven and market-driven policy positions that are unlikely to be implemented together. The main finding is that Type A ambiguity does not decrease either turnout or party support. Moreover, if the party puts forward an abstract promise without being specific about its intended actions, it will do significantly better than the party promoting a state-driven policy solution. A weaker, but more optimistic finding is that voters do set a limit on politicians' fantasies: compared to the abstract promise, they punish the party, which gambles with inconsistent policy promises. The effect of ambiguity partially explains the ever-present problem with accountability in Armenia and Georgia and contributes to understandings of why parties have been poor at putting forward coherent electoral programs in both countries. More broadly, our findings contribute to understanding the problem of accountability in hybrid regimes, which creates fruitful ground for representation crises that open the doors for political outsiders to enter the political scene and significantly destabilize the political system.

The sixth article in the special issue, “Balancing the three pillars of stability in Armenia and Georgia”, by Dr. Tsisana Khundadze and Rati Shubladze exemplifies that voters matter and care about policy in hybrid regimes. To show why, their paper explains regime stability and change in Armenia and Georgia over the past 15 years through a review of policies employed by incumbents. The authors ground the paper in Gerschewski’s theoretical framework which views legitimation, repression, and co-optation as the three strategies or pillars of regime stability in less than democratic regimes. Incumbents in both countries lean on the pillars of stability to handle different actors and institutions. However, scope and intensity vary. Consequently, regime actions resulted in different outcomes. In Georgia, to modernize the country, the regime used severe law enforcement policies coupled with attempts at legitimation through inchoate social policies in the latter years of their power. Excessive use of repression and attempts at the rapid transformation of society left a majority of stakeholders disillusioned. On the other hand, the Armenian government’s policies were more concerned with maintaining the status quo, resulting in a majority of actors sustaining their social, economic and political positions. Based on the thick description, which makes use of over 20 interviews and official statistics, the authors conclude that if the policies benefit or at least do not hurt the majority of the population, it helps the incumbent to sustain power. In contrast, radical change which results in an excess of losers leads to instability. This contributes to the overarching argument of this issue that even in hybrid regimes voters do matter and selecting policies that disregard voters’ preferences is damaging for the incumbent in hybrid regimes just as it is in democracies.

In addition to the above six article, team members are preparing a paper on international and domestic constraints on state capacity and their role in regime stability. The paper will consist of a comparative case study of Georgia and Armenia which aims to parse out the specific international constraints faced by each country as well as their relative weight in regime stability. This paper will be added to the book which team members are preparing. The target publishing house for this publication will be Taylor and Francis.

In the remainder of this research report, we provide extended abstracts versions of the six articles that are being submitted for peer review for publication in *Caucasus Survey*. The full articles are not presented as they are still undergoing review and copyright related requirements for future publications. The report ends with a summary of conclusions and plans for future research.

Introduction

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Do voters matter in competitive authoritarian regimes? If so, how exactly? Do their preferences matter? The contributions in this report show that they do, and that the incumbents take them seriously. Crucially, the way the regime responds to policy demand determines their durability in office. While evidence provided in the extended abstracts here show that organizational power (in the form of state capacity and party strength and cohesion) as well as resource patronage (the pork and barrel during elections) matter, policy-making plays an important and understated role in determining whether a regime collapses or survives. This contributions herein are embedded in two strands of scholarly conversations. The first is the one on the South Caucasus, where a focus on nationalism, conflict and war has tended to overshadow anything else. Here we zoom in on electoral politics, the public policies of competitive authoritarian regimes and regime-voter interaction in two post-Soviet countries. The second is in the field of comparative authoritarianism, where we intervene by detailing the workings of democratic-looking authoritarian institutions. Here we show that authoritarian regimes do much more than survive or collapse. They do engage in collection of information on voter preferences, and devise policies in response to them. Policy-making does matter and is extremely consequential. Paradoxically, however, policy-making matters in somewhat counter-intuitive ways. As Armenia's case shows, a regime which refrains from making grand promises, or blatantly contradictory or unrealistic ones has greater chances of surviving than those that set out to transform society, like Saakashvili's Georgia. Ultimately, such policies backfire on those that launch them.

Elections and the political landscape in Georgia and Armenia

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Since independence, 18 elections have been held in Georgia and 20 in Armenia. The quality of these elections has varied from the broadly free and fair (e.g. Georgia's 2016 parliamentary elections) to the highly problematic (e.g. Georgia's 2000 presidential elections). While observer reports are many, relatively few academic accounts of the elections exist. This article begins to fill the gap, providing a short overview of the elections in a comparative perspective and offering a quantitative analysis of the quality of elections in Armenia and Georgia since 2007 using methods from the field of election forensics.

In Georgia, much literature has focused on the Rose Revolution and the 2003 and 2004 elections (e.g. Wertsch and Karumidze, 2005, Magaloni, 2010). Several high quality political histories that touch on a number of elections in Georgia (e.g. Wheatley, 2005, Jones, 2013), and the quality of Georgian democracy (Mitchel, 2009). Besides these, Jones (2000) writes on the lack of interest groups in early Georgian democracy, and George (2014) has explored minority electoral behavior. Van Peski (2013) covers the 2012 elections and provides extensive background on Saakashvili's tenure in office. Schofield et al. (2012) look at the importance of party leaders in the 2008 elections. However, the literature focused on the elections themselves is relatively small. Allison, Kukhianidze, and Matsaberidze (1993) provide an overview of the 1992 elections, and Allison (1996) describes the 1995 elections. Jones (2005) discusses the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections. Mueller (2014) provides an overview of the 2012 parliamentary elections and Fumagalli (2014) describes the 2013 presidential elections.

Significantly, less work has been done on the Armenian political landscape, let alone Armenian elections specifically. To the best of our knowledge, no political history of Armenia exists which covers independent Armenian political history in depth. Instead, work on Armenian politics has focused on nationalism and democracy (e.g. Rutland, 1994), the Nagorno Karabakh conflict (e.g. De Waal, 2013), and the repercussions of the Armenian Genocide (e.g. De Waal, 2015). When it comes to elections in particular, the literature is sparse, with only one set of academic electoral notes that focus on the 2007 Armenian Parliamentary elections (Ruiz-Rufino, 2008). Even the grey literature covers relatively few specific elections (e.g. Policy Forum Armenia, 2013).

Notably, there has been no comparative history of elections in each country despite the fact that they are prime candidates for comparative work: both are ex-Soviet, hybrid regimes, with similar cultures, histories, population sizes, economic difficulties, among a great deal of other similar characteristics. At the same time, the quality of elections have developed to qualitatively different places over time, with Georgia's elections generally perceived to have become freer and fairer. This article begins to address this gap, providing the first comparative, quantitative assessment of Georgian and Armenian elections. It proceeds as follows. First, it provides a brief overview of the political landscapes in Armenia and Georgia and how they have developed. It then provides a brief historical overview of elections in both countries. Finally, the article uses measures from the field of election forensics to compare the quality of elections over time in Armenia and Georgia since 2007.

The political landscapes in Armenia and Georgia started from similar slates, but diverged over time. Both are competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2010), experienced conflicts over territory at the outset of independence (De Waal, 2010), and faced economic collapse and slow recovery in the 1990s. Armenia and Georgia have also both faced political instability, however, the nature of this instability is divergent. In Georgia there has been a regular turnover of the ruling elite. In 1991 Zviad Gamsakhurdia gained power, and lost it in 1992 to Eduard Shevardnadze. Shevardnadze was ousted in the 2003 Rose Revolution by Mikheil Saakashvili, who in his own turn lost power to Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream Coalition in 2012. In Armenia there has only been one transfer of power, with Robert Kocharyan taking office in the 1998 presidential elections, following Levon Ter-Petrosyan's resignation. Kocharyan's chosen successor, Serzh Sargsyan, took office in 2008.

The electoral systems in both Georgia and Armenia are mixed with proportional and first-past-the-post components. However, the electoral laws and systems in both countries have developed significantly over the course of independence. In independent Georgia, the first parliamentary elections were carried out under a compensatory list system in 1992 (Allison, Kukhianidze, and Matsaberidze, 1993). Through setting the electoral threshold at 2% and including a compensatory list, the system aimed at including every party with the exception of supporters of Zviad Gamsakhurdia (ibid). It succeeded in doing so, with 24 parties gaining seats in parliament. By comparison, in 1995 the elections were carried out under a mixed proportional and first-past-the-post system with a 5% electoral threshold. The increased threshold combined with political inexperience among political parties and voters alike led to the majority of votes in the proportional component being wasted. Compared with 1992's 24 parties, only three were able to gain representation through the proportional component. Presidential elections took place at the same time, with Eduard Shevardnadze winning by landslide against Jumber Patiashvili, a former leader of Soviet Georgia. In 1998,

the country held its first local elections since the ones which took place for *sakrebulo* in 1991 at the same time as the vote for independence. Shevardnadze's Citizens Union of Georgia took slightly under a majority of the seats, while at least 12 parties took seats in local councils. Notably however, local governance remained in the hands of centrally appointed governors at the time. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, the mixed electoral system was maintained, yet the electoral threshold was increased to 7% at the behest of an opposition party, which subsequently could not pass the threshold. The elections shifted in tone from the 1995 elections which focused on security issues to a discussion of the economy. Besides the Citizens Union of Georgia, Aslan Abashidze's Revival and Gogi Topadze's Industry Will Save Georgia gained representation. In 2000, the country held presidential elections, which saw Eduard Shevardnadze re-elected, but with significant election day irregularities. Jumber Patiashvili again was Shevardnadze's main competition, and Shevardnadze again won by an extremely large margin. In 2002 the second post-independence local elections took place. These elections marked the beginning of the end for the Citizens Union of Georgia, and in many respects foreshadowed the 2003 parliamentary electoral fraud and subsequent revolution. Notably, in Tbilisi, Shalva Natelashvili's Labor Party won the elections, though through horse trading, Mikheil Saakashvili was able to take the head of the *sakrebulo*. In 2003 parliamentary elections, the results of the elections were challenged, leading to the Rose Revolution. Immediately following the revolution, in January of 2004, presidential elections were held, resulting in a landslide victory for Mikheil Saakashvili. Following the Rose Revolution, the party list component of the 2003 elections was nullified, and repeat elections were held in March of 2004. They resulted in a resounding victory for the United National Movement. The majoritarian elections however were not nullified and majoritarian candidates took their seats. The 2006 local elections saw a near UNM sweep of local government, with almost 90% of seats. The snap 2008 presidential elections which came about as a result of the November 2007 crackdown on protests saw Mikheil Saakashvili slip by with slightly over 50% of the vote. Notably, in the 2008 parliamentary elections even though only 59% of the popular vote went to the United National Movement, they were able to take 79% of seats in parliament. Importantly, the electoral threshold was reduced to 5% in these elections. The 2010 local elections are most notable for the opposition's failure to unite and unseat the UNM in local government, particularly in Tbilisi where the popular Irakli Alasania ran as the main opposition candidate. The 2012 parliamentary elections unseated the United National Movement with the Georgian Dream Coalition coming to power. The Georgian Dream would subsequently sweep the 2013 presidential and 2014 local elections.

In Armenia, the 1991 presidential election was the first to be held in independent Armenia. The turnout was noticeably higher than the previous Supreme Council election and the public enthusiasm to participate was high (United States, 1992: 77). These elections, notably however, were the last ones held in Armenia to be

characterized by major international observers as free and fair. The parliament of 1995 was elected for the transition period and had 190 members (150 majority and 40 proportional votes). The years between the 1991 and 1996 presidential elections saw significant challenges to Armenia. Closed borders with neighboring Azerbaijan and Turkey and massive brain drain hurt the situation in the country.

Although the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) was banned from 1995, many opposition leaders consolidated around Vazgen Manukyan, an ARF leader, to form a strong opposition block presenting a formidable challenge to Ter-Petrosyan. In the 1996 presidential elections Ter-Petrosyan won the first round of the elections with a slight majority. The other three contenders in the elections accused Ter-Petrosyan of ballot box stuffing and vote-counting fraud. Violence broke out in mass demonstrations.

In 1998, a snap presidential election was called amidst the surprise resignation of Ter-Petrosyan. A clear red line was established in Armenian politics; ARF returned to the political arena and strongly supported Robert Kocharyan. In 1998, Karen Demirchyan lost elections to Robert Kocharian. Importantly, he did not dispute the results publicly. In 1999, a two party coalition emerged with Republican party led by Vazgen Sargssian and People's party led by Karen Demirchyan becoming the Unity bloc. The latter was the winner of 1999 elections. However that year was significant not because of elections, but because of the attack of the October 27 on National Assembly, when the leaders of Unity bloc, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament and six other parliamentarians were killed. In 2003 the government became markedly more authoritarian and exercised its coercive apparatus to shut down voices articulating change (Freedom House, 2003; Constitutional Court of the Republic of Armenia, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2003; OSCE, 2003a; 2003b). The main background of the 2003 presidential elections was formed by the relative homogeneity of Armenian politics, the lack of other candidates on the ballot and the presence of a dominant executive power in the country. Compared to 2003 parliamentary elections, voter turnout was higher in 2007, at 59.4%. An amendment to the Electoral Code was adopted in 2007 that related to out-of country voting. After prime Minister Andranik Margaryan, the leader of the Republican Party passed away, Kocharyan appointed Serzh Sargsyan as the new prime minister. If 2003's presidential election can be described as being emblematic of an authoritarian regime, then 2008 was more of the same and marked an even greater utilization of position in government to exploit resources to perpetuate rule and ensure regime survival. This time around, there were widespread reports of fraud (e.g. Jean-Christophe, 2008; Grigoryan, 2008; It's Your Choice, 2008, Eurasianet, 2008). In 2008, on the 24th of February, after strong competition between Serzh Sargsyan and the first president of Armenia Ter-Petrosian, the CEC declared Prime Minister Sargsyan the winner of the election with some 52.8% of all votes cast. During 2008 presidential elections, ten citizens were killed and the outgoing government coalition parties suggested a new Electoral

Code in order to improve the electoral process in Armenia. The 2012 parliamentary elections were held under a mixed electoral system and were the first national elections conducted under the new Electoral Code adopted in May 2011. The winner of this election was the Republican Party (OSCE 2012). However, the 2013 presidential election would demonstrate more covert, sophisticated and more difficult to detect fraud. Having in mind the international community's response on a record breaking electoral win and an increasingly anti-government electorate one could conclude that 2013 marked a point in the election process whereby methods of electoral fraud had evolved to be technologically advanced, sophisticated and difficult to detect. Sargsyan officially won with 58.64% of the vote in the first round (CEC 2013, Baumgartner, 2002: 30).

While election days were generally flawed in the early period of independence, later elections also exhibited significant issues despite some improvement in Georgia. In this section, we use methods from the field of election forensics to quantitatively describe Georgian and Armenian elections since 2008. The specific elections have been chosen due to the availability of data. Before providing a description of the elections themselves, this section provides a brief methodological overview.

Election forensics is a subfield within political science which has developed in recent decades. Its goal is to detect election fraud through the identification of statistical anomalies in election returns (Hicken and Mebane, 2015). In this paper, six election forensics tests are carried out on the proportional components of the parliamentary and presidential elections that took place in Armenia and Georgia since 2007. The six tests are of the mean of the second digit in voter turnout, skew of turnout, kurtosis of turnout, mean of the final digit in turnout, proportion of zeros and fives in the final digit in turnout, and a test of unimodality. For each of these tests, there are theoretically expected values, which are reported in the table below. For the first five tests, we use bootstrapping to generate 95% confidence intervals around the actually observed value. If the confidence intervals do not contain the theoretically expected value, then the test results suggest that there may have been election fraud. The final test, of unimodality, uses a dip-test to see if voter turnout has a single or multiple modes. If the test shows a value of $p < 0.05$ it is considered to be non-unimodal, which is considered suspicious.

The test results show similar results to what would be expected based on observer reports of the elections. While Georgian elections do exhibit problems, they are smaller than in Armenia. They show that in three of the four elections, two tests were set off in Georgia whereas in Armenia, in three of four elections four tests were set off. In one election in Armenia (2012 Parliamentary elections) three tests were set off. In the Georgian 2008 parliamentary elections, 4 tests were set off.

These results suggest that in Georgia, among these elections, the 2008 parliamentary elections were of the lowest quality of those tested, whereas the Armenian elections with the exception of 2012 have generally been of relatively poor quality. In the Armenian case, the lower number of test results likely reflects the Armenian authorities' changing strategies of election fraud in the 2012 elections, which included fewer strategies aimed at directly altering election results (Danielyan and Jenderejian, 2012).

This extended abstract of the forthcoming article *Elections and the political landscape in Georgia and Armenia* provides a brief overview of the findings that will be presented in greater detail. Specifically, the article has provided a brief overview of elections in Georgia and Armenia and shown that although elections in both countries started from a relatively rough place, they have also developed. In Georgia, elections have become largely free and fair, while in Armenia, they have stayed relatively problematic.

The self-defeating game: How state capacity and policy choice affect regime stability

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The political economy literature implicitly suggests there should be a link between regime stability and state capacity, although the relation has yet to be thoroughly explored. This article begins to fill this gap, showing that state capacity is a necessary but insufficient condition for regime stability in hybrid regimes. Although higher levels of state capacity contribute to regime stability, the rate of reform appears to moderate this relationship. Reforms, particularly large, structural ones, are likely to generate a host of instant losers followed by a gradual increase in the number of winners. If an incumbent is unable to generate more winners than losers through reform, they may still attempt to stay in office using co-optation or coercion to maintain a winning coalition, however, each of these options lead to increases in the number of losers vis winners. This causal mechanism traps incumbents in a self-defeating game, eventually leading to their unseating and the resultant instability.

We base this argument in selectorate theory. Selectorate theory suggests that every polity has three primary groups – residents, the selectorate, and the leadership (Mesquita, 2003). Residents are within the territory of a state, but are not members of the selectorate (ibid). The selectorate are those who can choose the leader, and the winning coalition “is defined as a subset of the selectorate of sufficient size such that the subset’s support endows the leadership with the political power over the remainder of the selectorate as well as over the disenfranchised members of society” (ibid, 51). To stay in power, the incumbent must maintain a winning coalition, and to unseat the incumbent, a challenger must generate a winning coalition equal to the size of the incumbent’s plus one (ibid).

The incumbent’s ability to maintain a winning coalition is a function of state capacity. We define state capacity as the state’s ability to implement policy, with a broad understanding of policy as any state activity aimed at coercing, co-opting, and cooperating with the population within its territory. Hence, the state’s capacity also reflects the incumbent’s ability to use coercion, co-optation, and cooperation to maintain their office. Therefore, with greater capacity, the state is able to create more winners or decrease the size of the selectorate through coercion. Yet, state capacity is also generally dependent on reform with more reform

generating more state capacity and more state capacity enabling more reform. This relationship leads to a self-defeating game for reformers.

Reformers face a dilemma. They come to office promising reform, and if they follow through on these promises, their winning coalition is based on their ability to create more winners than losers through reform. Yet, structural reforms in particular very often generate a host of instant losers followed by the generation of winners over time. At the same time, reformers have a short time horizon, because they face elections in four or at most six years. Moreover, this time horizon is constantly declining as elections approach. Thus, if reforms cannot generate enough winners in the short term to maintain their winning coalition, they must either coerce or co-opt to stay in office or face being booted from office at the voting booths. Given the constantly declining time horizon, the incentive to coerce or co-opt also continually increases. Hence, the reformer must decide to stay in office through less than savory means or to leave. However, since coercion and cooptation generate losers, the reformer enters a self-defeating game. While the number of winners can increase over time through reform and increased state capacity, the incumbent instantly generates more and more losers through coercion and cooptation, thus eroding their winning coalition.

In order to empirically validate the above argument, the article uses a nested analysis research design - that is, we first empirically demonstrate the overarching pattern using a global dataset created for the project. The database includes data from the World Bank Governance Indicators dataset, the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy dataset, and the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom. With this dataset, we present a fixed effects model which demonstrates the relationship between increased state capacity and regime durability. Adding reform into the mix, we show the interaction between rate of reform and state capacity and its effect on regime stability.

Moving from hybrid regimes in general to specific cases, we illustrate these findings with case studies of Armenia and Georgia, providing a thick description of the development of state capacity in each country. State capacity in each state can be divided into roughly three periods. In Georgia 1989-1994 was a period of crisis and state collapse, the Georgian state entered a period of stable stagnation between 1995 and 2003. From 2003 to 2012, the state no longer experienced a lack of state capacity, however, it also became a problematic state. Overall, while Georgia increased its state capacity from radical reforms carried out following the Rose Revolution, the government's use of co-optation and coercion generated a critical mass of losers, ultimately leading to the erosion of its winning coalition. In the forthcoming paper, these periods are described in depth using a number of quantitative indicators as well as data from elite interviews.

While Georgian state capacity developed in fits, jumps, and starts, in Armenia state capacity developed at a slow and steady pace. Between 1990 and 1999 it focused on withstanding the challenges of transition, between 2000 and 2007 Armenia entered a period of stability. From 2008 to 2012, the government focused on withstanding the global financial crisis. As the aphorism goes, slow and steady wins the race with politicians being thrown out of office in Georgia and the incumbent in Armenia maintaining its power. Notably, the comparison of the two regimes thus illustrates the causal mechanism at play described in this paper.

Overall, the paper makes a number of contributions to the broader literature as well as to the overarching argument of this special issue. First, it contributes to the conceptual clarity of the state capacity concept through defining it in non-normative terms. Second, the paper demonstrates that state capacity is a necessary but insufficient condition for regime stability. This speaks directly to the literature on good governance, showing that under certain circumstances, attempts to develop state capacity will also lead to instability. When it comes to the overarching argument of the research project itself, this paper shows that the capacity to implement policy does increase regime stability overall. However, dramatic increases in state capacity trigger and are triggered by radical policy changes leading not only to increased capacity but also a self-defeating game for the regime.

Demand: What do citizens want?

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Do voter's policy preferences matter in hybrid regimes? I examine whether voters in Georgia engaged in retrospective voting as well as what policy preferences influence voters' decisions to support the ruling party, finding that assessments of the government's behavior affect voting decisions - that is to say voters in hybrid regimes do engage in retrospective voting, and thus policy and performance do matter. To do so, I use the National Democratic Institute and CRRC-Georgia data sets on attitudes towards politics in 2008. The article first describes issue preferences, and then goes on to report the results of a logistic regression model to see if voters with positive assessments of incumbent performance are more likely to vote for the incumbent.

Retrospective voting is defined as "how citizens evaluate and act on their perceptions of government performance" (Healy and Malhotra, 2013: 285). Theoretically, retrospective voting is the mechanism by which voters can hold politicians accountable at the ballot box (ibid). But the question remains, can and do voters in hybrid regimes hold politicians to account through the vote and reflecting on government performance? To date, relatively few studies look at retrospective voting in hybrid regimes. Work that does exist on retrospective voting theory in hybrid regimes argues that like in liberal democracies, in hybrid regimes ratings of political candidates are closely linked to public perceptions of economic performance, which, in turn, reflect objective economic indicators (Treisman 2010). In Mexico, De La O (2013) finds that conditional cash transfers resulted in retrospective voting, but not in shorter term support for the incumbent. Seligson and Tucker (2005) find significant results in Russia and Bolivia, two hybrid regimes, for proxies of some indicators of retrospective voting.

Before moving onto whether issue preferences and assessments of government performance did in fact influence voters, a round-up of issue preferences is needed. Socio-economic issues were more important for the citizens of Georgia between 2008 and 2012, compared to security and democracy. Even immediately after the 2008 August war unemployment was more important issue than territorial integrity. Citizens of Georgia were concerned about inflation, poverty and affordable health care as much as about territorial integrity. On the other hand, citizens assigned somewhat less importance to issues related to democracy such as fair elections, freedom of speech and fairness of the court system. Security issues mattered most in period of escalating Georgia-Russian tensions but as tensions gradually decreased after the August 2008

War, Georgians shifted their focus primarily to socio-economic topics. The relevance of security related issues such as relations with Russia and NATO membership gradually declined. Throughout the period under discussion, democracy-related issues have been the least important. Georgians cared about them most in 2008 and 2011-2012 when political competition was becoming more intense with the appearance of strong opposition to the regime. After the 2012 elections, the importance of democracy-related issues started to decline again.

In May 2008, citizens rated the government's performance most positively in pensions (71% thinking the situation got better in this issues), corruption and NATO membership (42% and 39% respectively). At the same time corruption was not a very important issue for voters (only 8% named it among the three most important issues), while NATO membership and pensions mattered more to voters (18% and 27% respectively). NATO membership was the only issue that more respondents thought politicians talked more about than they should. In the three the most important issues (jobs, territorial integrity and poverty) the situation overall was rated either as the same or worse by a majority of respondents. The situation was rated the worst with regards to inflation, as 77% of Georgians thought the situation got worse, compared to 16% who thought the situation improved or remained the same. At the same time inflation was rated first among the issues that deserved more attention from politicians with 59% of Georgians thinking that politicians talk too little about this issue. With regards to democracy, a majority of Georgians associated democracy with freedom of speech/media and liberty in general and reported that situation became slightly worse, however freedom of speech and fairness of elections was important for only 12% of Georgians. After two months as the escalation between Russia and Georgia grew, the only significant change in prioritization of issues affected fairness of elections (importance declined from 23 to 9%), while other changes were not so significant. At the same time even more people were thinking that the government talks too much about NATO membership (23% compared to 18% two months ago). Shortly after the 2008 war the importance of territorial integrity grew from 38% in July to 64% in October, forging better military relations with the West became the second most important issue (52%), and the importance of re-establishing good economic and political relations with Russia declined from 32% to 19% .

While voters in Georgia were mostly concerned with socio-economic issues, their voting behavior did not always reflect their issue preferences. Support towards the ruling party has depended more on its performance in security and democracy related issues than social ones. Nonetheless, their declared support for a given party is also clearly related to how they thought that party was performing.

To test the retrospective voting theory, I used a model with a binary variable for voting for the incumbent party if the elections were held the next day, as an outcome variable and a scale variable for agreement with the statement that the government was making changes that were relevant for the respondent, as a predictor variable. The logistic model shows a statistically significant impact of the government's performance assessment over votes for the incumbent party: the more people agree that the government is making changes that are relevant for them, the more likely they are to vote for the incumbent party.

The model remained stable with the addition of socio-demographic control variables such as age, gender, employment and education. Testing the model with other predictors, such as assessment of the regime's performance in economic (using a composite variable consisting of the president's performance in relation to the economy, rising prices / inflation, jobs, healthcare, pensions, agriculture spheres), security (national security, foreign policy, territorial integrity, relations with Russia) and democracy (Democracy development) related variables does not affect the significance of the predictors. According to the model, assessments of president's performance in the fields of economy, security and democracy are all statistically significant predictors for voting for the incumbent party.

Clearly, voters in Georgia engaged in retrospective voting. The finding is robust with multiple proxies for government assessment and with numerous control variables included in the model. This strongly suggests that voters in Georgia, and potentially hybrid regimes more generally, engage in retrospective voting.

Policy Supply: Promises, lies and the accountability trap. Evidence from a survey experiment in Armenia and Georgia

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Pre-election campaigns in advanced and developing democracies show one significant similarity: in both contexts politicians tend to make vague promises to voters. In fact, research in advanced democracies demonstrate that ambiguity is the norm rather than the exception in political competition. A key driver of ambiguity is the mismatch between voter preferences and politicians. When such a mismatch happens, politicians benefit from ambiguity in several ways. First, they attract voters with diverse preferences by avoiding clear positions on divisive policy issues (Rovny 2012; Somer-Topcu 2015, 850). Second, they signal flexibility in future actions, which some voters, especially those, who have relatively weakly defined policy preferences or do not mind taking risky decisions (Tomz and Van Houweling 2009, 96), appreciate (Aragonès and Neeman 2000). However, trading votes for promising a little or nothing becomes problematic for democratic accountability, especially if parties continuously apply strategic ambiguity and then fail to deliver the promised policies once in office (Somer-Topcu 2015, 852).

Although there is scarce empirical research on strategic ambiguity beyond advanced democracies, theoretically parties in developing democracies also have incentives to disguise positions on important policy matters. According to Keefer (2007), the imperfections of political competition condition poor economic performance: on the one hand, there is no credible linkages between politicians and voters; on the other hand, voters have less than perfect information about politicians and policies (Keefer, 2007: 900). Facing economic hardships and imperfect information on potential solutions and/or remedies, voters demand policies that will have tangible impacts on their lives. However, such policies are hard to implement without producing a substantial portion of losers before anybody appears as a winner. Hence, politicians will be cautious in making promises and when they do, they will emphasize the benefits and disguise the costs. This will push parties to make general appeals without specifying the course of their future actions. Importantly, electoral competition over ambiguous positions will only be repeated over time if ambiguity brings actual benefits to the party.

Poor economic conditions perhaps set the most significant context for ambiguity. Many developing democracies inherited poor economies and struggle with poor performance. Like many developing democracies, Armenia and Georgia have faced economic hardship since independence. Unemployment has remained at the forefront of the public's mind at the national level: approximately 45% in Armenia and

50% in Georgia have considered the economy the number one problem in the country for the last five years (CRRC, Caucasus Barometer). About six out of ten people surveyed in each country consider him/herself unemployed, also a stable trend for at least the last five years. Although the official unemployment rate is much lower, because the government employs a different methodology to calculate it (Gutbrod, 2013), the scale of overall poverty is well illustrated by the database of Georgia's Social Service Agency:¹ about 40% of the population applied for subsistence aid as of 2015 and only ¼ of the applicants actually received assistance. Although the maximum subsistence aid is only GEL 60 (~USD 28) per person per month, a substantial share of the population is eager to go through the lengthy process of obtaining assistance, including the application and scoring of the household's social-economic conditions by a social agent, even though it is a rather meager amount of assistance.

Such conditions establish solid ground for specific voter-party linkages: facing economic problems and uncertain economic perspectives in the future, voters seek to elect a political force which maximizes their utility by producing tangible results very quickly. But, would voters really support ambiguous promises in developing democracies? If they do, what does this tell us about accountability and more generally, about democratic development?

Considering economic and institutional uncertainties, rational politicians will be better off if they supply ambiguous, if not contradictory promises. Following the findings from advanced democracies, we expect that clear electoral promises will appeal to voters with specific ideological orientations only, whereas ambiguity will attract voters from potentially competing electoral camps. Hence, we test two hypotheses:

***Hypothesis I:** Type A ambiguity (an abstract promise) will not be disadvantageous for the party in either turnout or expected support.*

***Hypothesis II:** Type B ambiguity (promising inconsistent policy positions) will be advantageous to the party in both turnout and expected support.*

This paper investigates these hypotheses based on a survey experiment carried out in Tbilisi, Georgia and Yerevan, Armenia. We examined the impact of two types of ambiguous promises compared to clearly defined positions – a state-driven policy and a market-driven policy. One type of ambiguous promise only signals general solutions to pressing problems, while specificities remain unspoken so as to avoid alienating important segments of voters. I refer to this as type A ambiguity. In contrast, type B ambiguity is a promise

¹ http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=35&lang_id=ENG

based on combining components of state-driven and market-driven policy positions that are unlikely to be implemented together.

The Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) administered the survey on representative samples in each city in February, 2016 using face-to-face Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing. The survey design combined stratification and clustering, where strata were the administrative districts of each city and clusters (primary sampling units) were electoral precincts. In the original sample, we randomly selected 63 electoral precincts in Tbilisi and 61 precincts in Yerevan. Following a fieldwork back check and follow up analysis we cancelled the results of 7 and 2 precincts in Tbilisi and Yerevan respectively. Thus, the final dataset has 906 responses from 56 Tbilisi precincts and 954 responses from 59 Yerevan precincts. Overall response rate was 39 percent (36 percent in Tbilisi and 42 percent in Yerevan).

To address the issue of low partisanship and distrust in political parties, we intentionally avoided mentioning any particular party name in the survey instrument. Moreover, to discourage the respondents' negative experience with party promises we applied anchoring vignettes. Our decision was motivated by the anchoring vignette literature, which shows that such vignettes improve respondent's self-assessments and reduces measurement error (King & Wald, 2007; Hopkins & King, 2010). Following this approach, we constructed anchoring vignettes around a typical Georgian household, where the household head had an unstable, poorly paid job: "[Name] lives in a town in [country]. He does irregular jobs from time to time to support his family. Before the parliamentary elections a new party organizes a political campaign in [Name's] town aiming at job creation." We kept this constant across the vignette versions and only varied information about the electoral promise of the hypothetical party campaigning in the district where this household lived. As suggested by Hopkins and King (2010), we placed vignettes before the self-assessment questions. This way we believe we decreased the respondent's' immediate negative attitude to political parties. Significantly, we also intentionally primed the respondent to project his or her political behavior using the story of the vignette character.

We addressed the challenge of respondents' attention by keeping unemployment, the most salient national issues in both countries, at the core of the information treatments. Thus, the treatment scenarios emphasized different hypothetical policy options for job creation. The first group received a vignette, where the party promised to improve the economic situation in the country with no specific details provided, a type A ambiguous promise. Since this type of promise has been universal in both countries and also the least that parties have traditionally promised, we treat the type A ambiguous promise as a reference category. Hence, we assess the impact of other treatment conditions in comparison to the type A ambiguous promise.

Another group was created by the random assignment of a state-driven solution to job creation: the party would increase taxes and invest the additional revenues to create more jobs. The next group received a market-driven policy solution, according to which the party promised to decrease taxes and enable/encourage private companies to expand businesses and create more jobs. The final treatment provided a combination of the state-driven and market-driven solutions: decrease taxes and increase government investment in the economy to promote job creation. Due to random assignment, we expected roughly equal numbers of respondents receiving each type of information treatment. Indeed, the number of completed interviews were distributed approximately equally in the three treatment groups and in the control group.

After the treatment vignettes, each respondent was asked their opinion about the (1) probability that the person in the vignette would participate in elections, (2) probability that the person in the vignette would support the political party described in the vignette, (3) probability that the respondent herself would participate in elections, (4) probability that the respondent herself would support the party described in the vignette, (5) percent of vote the party like the one described in the vignette would receive in the country. We consider questions regarding the vignette character's voting behavior as a logical continuation of vignettes, serving only priming functions. Thus, we only use responses about the respondent's reported voting and party support as outcome variables.

Parametric and nonparametric tests show that a type A ambiguous promise gives an advantage to the party in terms of both turnout and support. Specifically, type A ambiguity gives better results for the party compared to state-driven and type B ambiguous promises, whereas it is no worse than the market driven promise. As for expected party vote if it participated in real elections, a Mann-Whitney test shows that type A ambiguity is not statistically different from either market-driven or type B ambiguous promise. However, it is expected to produce significantly more votes for the party than the state-driven promise. Reliability checks confirm the findings.

Our survey experiment provides four important conclusions: (1) an ambiguous electoral promise is not worse than promises containing concrete policy options; (2) an inconsistent promise is not advantageous for the party; (3) increased state intervention aimed at solving the most pressing issues will not be supported if this requires increased taxes; (4) the promise about decreasing taxes and promoting market-driven mechanisms of job creation yields no more support than an ambiguous promise. These findings are relevant for developing democracies in at least three respects. First, we observe a source of the accountability trap:

since voters do not mind ambiguous promises supplied by political parties, the end result is the failure of the party in power to deliver on its promises and the subsequent disillusionment of the electorate to the inchoate democratic process. Second, not surprisingly, voters are more concerned with their immediate losses (increased taxes) than potential long-term benefits (creation of new jobs). Such conditions may force parties to emphasize long-term benefits in programs and disguise the fact that there is no free lunch. Third, despite the observed advantages of ambiguity, voters are likely to punish a party which turns ambiguity into inconsistency and promises something unrealistic. This last finding does provide a potential way out from the accountability trap: if voters repeatedly punish parties due to their inconsistent, unrealistic promises, politicians will be cautious in moving from ambiguous positions to inconsistent ones. Meanwhile, it looks like the winning strategy for political parties is, if you have to lie about promises, at least promise just a little.

Balancing the three pillars of stability in Armenia and Georgia

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When analyzing hybrid regimes, researchers tend to pay little attention to voters that play an important role in the outcome of elections in democratic states. Grounded in the cases of Armenia and Georgia, this paper focuses on hybrid regime stability and examines the ways in which governments manage to sustain power, or fail to do so, in hybrid states. Studying two countries with similar historical and political backgrounds, but different outcomes in terms of regime sustainability, gives an opportunity to better understand the political processes underlying regime survival.

Both Armenia and Georgia became independent states after the dissolution of Soviet Union and went through economic and political hardships during their first years of independence. The following analysis focuses on the years 2004-2013 in both countries. The selected timeframe was chosen taking into consideration the fact that both countries reached a certain degree of regime stability around 2004 and we can clearly discuss the policy trends as intentional rather than accidental or random actions (Worldwide Governance Indicators 2013). The United National Movement (UNM) government in Georgia gained power after the Rose Revolution in 2003 and managed to stay in power for nine years. It fell out of power in 2012 when it lost the parliamentary election to an opposition party. In Armenia, the government successfully sustained the status quo, never losing power. By comparing these two cases of regime survival and failure, the article argues that governments use public policy to convince voters of their ability to fulfill their functions and to gain support using both soft and coercive policies.

Gerschewski's (2013) three pillars of stability unite most of the approaches towards the regime stability into one complex model where legitimation, repression, and co-optation represent a set of instruments in the hands of governments to sustain their power. According to Gerschewski's model regimes build these three pillars over time. The actions which are successful in sustaining power become systematic over time and institutionalize. This leads to formation of a structure rather than just a sum of specific occurrences. The parts of this system further complement, reinforce and strengthen each other (Gerschewski 2013).

The wide range of data sources and methods employed in this study were predetermined by the application of Gerschewski's three pillar theory: in order to grasp every manifestation of each pillar, Gerschewski

suggests to use a mixture of secondary data, survey results and qualitative interviews (Gerschewski 2013). Secondary data includes various indicators from different international organizations and national statistics offices data. Nationally representative public opinion polls used in this article also cover citizens' social and political attitudes throughout the last decade. This empirical data is enriched with qualitative interviews, reports from non-governmental organizations and news articles.

The aim of the article is to examine the dynamics of the regime stability and failure: Georgia's ruling party lost power, while their Armenian counterparts sustained it. In order to guarantee regime stability, governments should maintain equilibrium between legitimization, repression and co-optation pillars. The initial nudge for legitimization for the Georgian government was the legacy of the Rose Revolution and the rhetoric around modernizing the country. In the following years, the Georgian government complemented legitimization strategies with repression as dissatisfaction with both harsh law enforcement policies and the economic situation in the country was growing. However, limited by its democratic image and dependence on Western aid, Georgian ruling elites had to find other means of coping with challenges to their power. During the second half of the UNM's rule, the application of specific legitimization and co-optation strategies prevailed. Though the effect of social policies was not significant, as these programs mostly occurred before elections and were considered as vote obtaining strategies. The UNM also failed to enjoy all the benefits of co-optation strategies due to their ideological differences and unwillingness to share power. These circumstances reflect the malfunctioning in the stabilization process of three pillars: failed legitimization increased the cost of co-optation and the need for repression; failure to co-opt rivals increased the need for legitimization (public support); restriction on using the repression tactics increased pressure on co-optation and legitimization strategies that were not functioning properly anyway. As a result, "reciprocal reinforcement" between the pillars failed. The political opposition in Georgia had the possibility to transform the accumulated dissatisfaction with the government into political capital, gathered around influential and rich political figure and successfully challenged the ruling party.

How the Armenian regime secured its power becomes more interesting as these two countries started with similar preconditions and ended up with different outcomes. Like in the Georgian case, the initial base for regime stability was diffuse legitimization strategies related to victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh war and the claim of guaranteeing national security. After initial support, people's dissatisfaction started to increase mostly because of economic hardships, unlike Georgia, where ideological differences were also significant. Having several critical moments, like in the 2008 presidential election protests, in 2012 Parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections, the government was able to neutralize all possible threats. The government's success in the 2013 presidential elections was the result of a sophisticated strategy employed by the

government, which included both co-optation of opponents, as well as repression and threat of repression, combined with exercising control over a large part of the media. All this led to a situation where opposition parties were deprived of all political, financial and media resources and were not able to compete with the government in the elections.

Thus, the example of Armenia's regime survival shows the successful stabilization of three pillars. Even though legitimation strategies were weakened after initial years, the incumbent managed to effectively employ repression and co-optation policies. There were fewer external constraints, like Western countries and international organizations that would denounce the government's coercive measures. Additionally, the Armenian government had less radical policies that ensured the majority of actors would sustain their social, economic and political positions. Last, but not the least, Armenians were more flexible with the application of their co-optation policies, as there was not a large ideological or programmatic gap between the government and other political parties. This also made it possible to incorporate and incapacitate possible challengers to the ruling elite with minimal costs. To conclude, the Armenian ruling elite successfully managed the process of the stabilization of pillars: when legitimation did not reach the desired goals, the incumbents actively and without restrictions employed repression and co-optation strategies that ensured regime sustainability.

This article contributes to this special issue by showing that regime stability in hybrid states is related to various factors and requires balance in the usage of legitimation, repression and co-optation pillars. In Georgia, a breakneck modernization program and policies aimed at changing the existing organization of society led to the weakening of the regime's legitimacy and a subsequent electoral change of power. In contrast, making incremental changes to key policies contributed to regime stability in Armenia since these policies were less harmful to the majority of the population. This contributes to the overarching argument that in hybrid regimes voters do matter and selecting policies that disregard voters' preferences is damaging for the incumbent in hybrid regimes just as it is in democracies. This article also contributes to the overall discussion on regime stability in the region and shows that in addition to external factors internal processes are of no less importance.

Conclusion

In the above six extended abstracts, we presented the basic findings of our research in abridged form. While each article addresses the issue of why voters matter from a different standpoint, each article shows that voters do in fact matter in hybrid regimes. That is to say scholars of authoritarianism should take partly free voters seriously. In order to further develop the points presented above, the project team will continue developing its work on the subject. At present, the six papers above are undergoing internal peer review. Following internal peer review, each paper will be submitted for double blind, external peer review with *Caucasus Survey*. After updating papers, they are expected to appear in a special issue of *Caucasus Survey* in Spring of 2017. In addition to the special issue of *Caucasus Survey*, the team is also in the process of developing a book manuscript for submission to Taylor and Francis. On top of the topics discussed above, the book will provide an extended history of Georgian and Armenian elections and analysis of international constraints and their role in regime stability in Georgia and Armenia.

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