

# Political Science in Georgia: Epistemology and Determinants

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the epistemological approaches employed by Georgian researchers in the field of Political Science over the past five years. It is grounded in an initial, generalized study of a topic that has been largely overlooked by both local and international scholars. Through a review of the literature and an analysis of the research conducted by leading local scientists, the paper posits that there are no well-established or deeply rooted political schools of thought in Georgia, as traditionally understood, due to the country's Soviet past. As a result, universities and the entire field of Political Science are products of the democracy proliferation reforms. These reforms were implemented with strong support from Western strategic allies, particularly the United States and the European Union. Currently, the field is heavily influenced by dominant Western theories of Political Science and International Relations, such as liberalism, neoliberalism, and liberal institutionalism. Moreover, the discipline is inherently oriented toward Civic Education, with a primary focus on democracy promotion rather than critical studies. Georgian scholars tend to research topics and apply theories that align with mainstream Western narratives. This tendency is significantly influenced by financial and logistical dependence on Western grants and scholarships.

## KEYWORDS

*Georgia, education, epistemology, Political Science*

Politics and education are deeply interconnected, with political forces directly influencing the scientific and epistemological tools used to research and transmit knowledge about the world. Educational institutions – such as kindergartens, schools, and universities – play a central role in implementing mainstream reform packages aimed at building a new society through shaping the youth and re-educating older generations. This connection is particularly relevant in the modern era, where advancements in technology, especially in communications, have made states more vulnerable to external interference in domestic affairs. Representatives of other states, cultures, and civilizations can easily disseminate values and ideas through educational programs, which inherently carry assumptions aligned with specific political goals. For instance, U.S. educational projects are grounded in concepts that reflect American political, economic, and social agendas, often summarized under the term “values.” Consequently, states compete in the realm of both local and international education as part of their national interest protection strategies. This rivalry for influence, particularly in shaping the hearts and minds of people, becomes most apparent in the projection of political and cultural power onto developing and smaller nations.

Great nations and global superpowers invest significant financial and other resources into educational programs worldwide to secure the support of weaker, more dependent countries. Western nations, particularly the United States, have a substantial presence in the post-Soviet space, including multidimensional projects in science and education. Educating foreign citizens on Western soil is seen as part of the broader national interest protection agenda. In theory, a Western education promotes a Western mindset, along with Western approaches and techniques, which contributes to cultural expansion. The Republic of Georgia, which lacked a national educational system at the end of the Soviet era, serves as a success story in this regard. With significant support from Western institutions, the state built its higher education system through a Western lens, with its research focused on Civic Education, emphasizing citizenship, democracy, freedom, and human rights. These priorities inherently shape the main research directions and the general mindset within the country.

The article attempts to identify the general epistemological approaches employed in researching topics within the fields of political science and international relations over the last five years. What key assumptions underlie this research? What factors have shaped these approaches? The research methodology is divided into two parts: an initial general literature review and an in-depth content analysis of scholarly works published by researchers from leading Georgian universities from January 2019 to May 2024 (with the list provided below). The study considers articles, books, and other scholarly works based on the assumptions made, the theoretical frameworks applied, and the main topics researched. The first part of the article presents the quantitative and qualitative findings, while the remainder of the paper explores the general determinants of the prevailing research trends. It is important to note that this research serves as an initial step toward a better understanding of a largely under-researched topic, with the primary goal of laying the groundwork for future, more complex analyses.

Epistemological Approaches

Due to its Soviet past, Georgia never developed deeply rooted political schools of thought or narratives; instead, local scholars were compelled to adhere to Political Communism. As a result, current academic thought and research in Georgia are heavily influenced by external trends and ideas established during the state-building process in the 1990s<sup>1</sup> and the significant political and ideological shifts that followed the so-called Rose Revolution.<sup>2</sup> This influence is particularly evident given the relatively limited financial support from the Georgian government over the years and the significant involvement of Western institutions, which primarily focus on value-based research.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1.

UNIVERSITIES CONSIDERED IN THE ANALYSIS  
УНИВЕРСИТЕТЫ, УЧТЕННЫЕ В АНАЛИЗЕ

Universities	Status
AkakiTsereteli State University (Kutaisi)	Public
Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University	Public
Georgian Technical University (Tbilisi)	Public
Ilia State University	Public
Sokhumi State University	Public
Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University	Public
Caucasus International University (Tbilisi)	Private
Caucasus University (Tbilisi)	Private
David Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia (Tbilisi)	Private
East European University (Tbilisi)	Private
European University (Tbilisi)	Private
Free University of Tbilisi	Private
Georgian American University (Tbilisi)	Private
Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (Tbilisi)	Private
Georgian National University SEU (Tbilisi)	Private
Grigol Robakidze University (Tbilisi)	Private
International Black Sea University (Tbilisi)	Private
Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University (Tbilisi)	Private
New Vision University (Tbilisi)	Private

Source: Times Higher Education, "Study in Georgia," accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/where-to-study/study-in-georgia>.

Based on the literature review and scholarly works published by the academic staff of these institutions, we can confidently assert that there are several fundamental assumptions shared by the majority of researchers. Indeed, it can be argued that these shared assumptions constitute foundational pillars of their research.

Key Pillars

Georgian scholars have increasingly adopted Western epistemological approaches in their research, reflecting the nation’s aspirations to align more closely with Western

1 Chulitskaya et al. 2022.  
2 Lanahan 2023.  
3 Bochorishvili, Peranidze 2020; Natia Gamkrelidze, "A Case Study of the Higher Education System in Georgia" (Master's thesis, Department of Political Science, Lund University, 2018), accessed June 13, 2024, <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=8940337&fileId=8940341>.

political and economic paradigms.<sup>1</sup> This epistemological shift is particularly evident in studies related to democracy promotion, European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) integration,<sup>2</sup> and globalization through the lens of liberal institutionalism. These themes not only underscore Georgia's strategic priorities but also highlight the broader influence of Western thought in shaping academic and policy discourses within the country.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary Georgian academic research is primarily founded upon three fundamental pillars: democracy promotion, Western integration, and globalization.

The promotion of democracy constitutes a central theme in Georgian scholarly research, reflecting both the country's post-Soviet transformation and its efforts to consolidate democratic governance.<sup>4</sup> Georgian scholars employ Western epistemological frameworks to analyze the processes, challenges, and outcomes of democratization. This approach involves the adoption of methodologies that emphasize empirical analysis, comparative studies, and theoretical models developed within Western academic traditions.

A key aspect of this research is the evaluation of democratic institutions and practices. Scholars investigate the efficacy of electoral systems, the functioning of political parties, and the role of civil society in fostering democratic governance. The emphasis on transparency, accountability, and the rule of law aligns with Western democratic norms and is considered essential for ensuring the legitimacy and stability of democratic institutions in Georgia.

Furthermore, Georgian researchers explore the cultural and societal dimensions of democratization. This includes studies on political culture, civic education, and public attitudes towards democracy.<sup>5</sup> By employing Western theoretical frameworks, such as those developed by scholars like Robert Dahl<sup>6</sup> and Samuel Huntington,<sup>7</sup> Georgian researchers analyze the interplay between democratic values and societal norms. This approach facilitates the identification of both enablers and obstacles to democratization within the Georgian context.

The integration of Georgia into the EU and NATO is another prominent focus of scholarly research, driven by the country's strategic goal to enhance its security, economic development, and political stability. Georgian scholars employ Western epistemological approaches to examine the multifaceted processes and implications of integration with these Western institutions. In studying EU integration, researchers analyze the legal, political, and economic reforms required to meet the EU's accession criteria.<sup>8</sup> This involves a detailed examination of policy alignment, institutional

1 Mestvirishvili, Mestvirishvili 2014.

2 Election Administration of Georgia, "Central Election Commission of Georgia. January 5, 2008 Plebiscites Summary Protocol," accessed June 13, 2024, <https://cesko.ge/en/search-results/singleview/4001166-jauary-5-2008-plebiscites-summary-protocol-2817>.

3 Levan Kakhishvili et al., Georgia's Political Landscape: Diversity, Convergence and Empty Spots. Democracy and Human Rights, Research Report, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung South Caucasus Office, 2021, accessed June 13, 2024. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/georgien/18417-20220419.pdf>.

4 Natalie Sabanadze, "Who Is Afraid of Georgian Democracy?" Carnegie Europe, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/05/who-is-afraid-of-georgian-democracy>.

5 Makhashvili, Avdaliani 2023.

6 Britannica, "Robert A. Dahl," accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-A-Dahl>.

7 Davide Orsi, "The 'Clash of Civilizations' and Realism in International Political Thought," E-International Relations, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/04/15/the-clash-of-civilizations-and-realism-in-international-political-thought>.

8 Tinatin Akhvediani, "Georgia's European Dream Is Being Carried by the Highest Spirit of Democracy," Centre for European Policy Studies, 2023, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.ceps.eu/georgias-european-dream-is-being-carried-by-the-highest-spirit-of-democracy/>.

harmonization, and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* (the body of EU law).<sup>1</sup> Western methodological tools, such as policy analysis and impact assessment, are extensively used to evaluate Georgia's progress and identify areas needing improvement.<sup>2</sup>

NATO integration research similarly draws on Western security studies frameworks to assess Georgia's defense capabilities, military reforms, and strategic alliances. Scholars utilize concepts such as collective security, interoperability, and strategic deterrence to understand the implications of NATO membership for Georgia's national security. Comparative studies with other NATO member and candidate countries provide valuable insights into best practices and lessons learned. The adoption of Western epistemological approaches in this area also involves a critical examination of the geopolitical context.<sup>3</sup> Researchers analyze the geopolitical dynamics of the South Caucasus region, the strategic interests of major powers, and the impact of regional conflicts on Georgia's integration aspirations. This comprehensive approach helps in formulating informed policy recommendations that are grounded in a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical environment.<sup>4</sup>

Globalization is another key area where Georgian scholars employ Western epistemological approaches to analyze its impact on the country's socio-economic and political landscape. The study of globalization encompasses a wide range of issues, including economic integration, cultural exchange, and technological advancement.<sup>5</sup> Research on economic globalization primarily focuses on trade liberalization, foreign direct investment (FDI), and Georgia's integration into the global economy. Scholars utilize Western economic theories and models to examine both the benefits and challenges of globalization, such as increased market access, economic growth, and the risks of dependency and inequality. Common methodological tools in this research include quantitative analysis, econometrics, and case studies, which are used to assess globalization's impact on Georgia's economy.<sup>6</sup>

Cultural globalization research explores the diffusion of cultural practices, ideas, and values through global networks, including studies on media, communication technologies, and migration patterns. Scholars investigate how globalization influences national identity, cultural heritage, and social cohesion in Georgia, employing theories from cultural studies and sociology to analyze the interplay between global and local cultural dynamics. Technological globalization is another critical area of study, focusing on the adoption and impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Georgia. Researchers examine the role of technology in fostering innovation, improving governance, and enhancing connectivity. Western frameworks, such as the digital divide theory and the network society paradigm, are often employed to understand the opportunities and challenges associated with technological globalization.<sup>7</sup>

1 Democracy Research Institute, "The Next 10 Steps on the Road to EU Membership," accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.democracyresearch.org/eng/932/>.

2 Ana Mgaloblishvili, "Democracy in Peril: Rethinking EU Conditionality for Georgia's Path to EU Candidacy," Georgian Institute of Politics, 2023, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://gip.ge/publication-post/democracy-in-peril-rethinking-eu-conditionality-for-georgias-path-to-eu-candidacy/>.

3 Kakachia et al. 2024.

4 CRRC Georgia, "Perception of Foreign Threats in Georgia," 2023, accessed June 13, 2024, [https://crrc.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/eng\\_perception-of-foreign-threats-in-georgia-2023.pdf](https://crrc.ge/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/eng_perception-of-foreign-threats-in-georgia-2023.pdf).

5 Veshapidze et al. 2023.

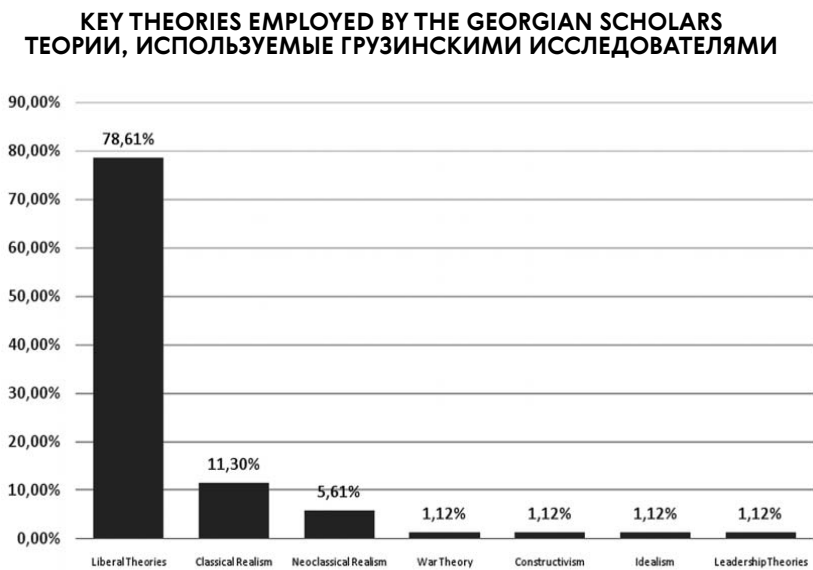
6 Vladimir Papava, "Georgia's European Way during the Period of Pandemic Deglobalization," Rondeli Foundation, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://gfsis.org/en/georgias-european-way-during-the-period-of-pandemic-deglobalization/>.

7 Mkalavishvili 2016.

Theories Applied

Georgian scholars have adopted a range of theoretical frameworks in their research to analyze and understand the complex socio-political and economic issues facing the country. The data indicates that the most dominant frameworks include liberal theories, classical realism, neoclassical realism, war theory, constructivism, idealism, and leadership theories.

Figure 1.



Source: compiled by the author

Liberal theories, including neoliberalism and institutional liberalism, dominate Georgian scholarly research, accounting for 78% of the theoretical frameworks applied. Liberalism, as a theoretical approach, emphasizes the importance of individual liberties, democratic governance, and economic freedom.<sup>1</sup> It is rooted in the belief that human progress is achieved through cooperation, free markets, and democratic institutions. Georgian scholars use liberal theories to advocate for the establishment and strengthening of democratic institutions.<sup>2</sup> This involves promoting the rule of law, transparency, and accountability in governance. Research often focuses on electoral systems, civil society participation, and human rights protection. Liberalism underpins much of the research on economic reforms in Georgia. Scholars analyze the benefits of free-market policies, trade liberalization, and foreign investment. The aim is to understand how these policies can drive economic growth and development. Liberal theories also emphasize the importance of international institutions and cooperation. Georgian research often explores the role of international organizations such as the EU and NATO in promoting peace, security, and economic development in Georgia.

1 Jeffrey Meiser, "Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory," E-International Relations, 2018, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/72781>.  
2 Teimuraz Khutsishvili et al., "Liberalism and Georgia," Tbilisi: Ilia Chavchavadze Center for European Studies and Civic Education, 2020, accessed June 13, 2024. <https://chavchavadzecenter.ge/public/uploads/other/2021-03-09/1199.pdf>.

In the wake of international cooperation and institutional integration, classical liberalism has been frequently replaced by neoliberal approaches and institutional liberalism.

Neoliberalism, although not explicitly listed in the provided data, is often intertwined with liberal theories due to its focus on economic liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of state intervention in the economy.<sup>1</sup> Georgian scholars who adopt neoliberal frameworks emphasize the role of market mechanisms in driving economic development and advocate for policies that enhance economic freedom and competitiveness. In the Georgian context, neoliberalism is particularly relevant in the study of post-Soviet economic reforms. Scholars apply neoliberal principles to evaluate the successes and limitations of Georgia's transition to a market economy. Research often highlights the role of neoliberal policies in attracting foreign investment, enhancing economic growth, and integrating Georgia into the global economy.

Institutional liberalism, widely appreciated by Georgian scholars due to the country's institutional integration with Western organizations, emphasizes the role of international institutions in promoting cooperation, peace, and stability among states.<sup>2</sup> Georgian scholars who adopt this framework focus on how international organizations and norms can influence and support Georgia's political and economic development. In the Georgian context, institutional liberalism is particularly relevant to the country's aspirations for EU and NATO membership. Scholars use this framework to analyze the processes, challenges, and benefits of integration with these institutions. Research often highlights how compliance with EU standards and participation in NATO exercises strengthen Georgia's political, economic, and security landscape. Moreover, institutional liberalism helps in understanding the transformative impact of international norms and practices on Georgia's domestic policies. Scholars examine how aligning with international standards in areas such as human rights, judicial reforms, and anti-corruption measures can enhance Georgia's governance and societal well-being.<sup>3</sup>

The second theoretical framework applied is realism, split into classical and neoclassical. Classical realism accounts for 11% of the theoretical frameworks used by Georgian scholars. Realism is a theory that focuses on the competitive and conflictual aspects of international relations. It posits that states act primarily in their own self-interest, seeking power and security in an anarchic international system. Scholars applying classical realism analyze Georgia's foreign policy and national security strategies. They explore the balance of power in the South Caucasus region and Georgia's efforts to enhance its security against external threats, particularly from Russia. Realism is used to understand the strategic calculations of states. Georgian research often examines the geopolitical dynamics involving major powers and their impact on Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>4</sup>

Neoclassical realism, an updated version of classical realism, integrates insights from both classical realism and liberalism, accounting for 5.6% of the theoretical

1 Jeffrey Meiser, "Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory," *E-International Relations*, 2018, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/72781>.

2 Keohane 2012.

3 Phutkaradze et al. 2019; Lebanidze 2021.

4 Tsintsadze 2023.

frameworks used by Georgian scholars. This approach seeks to explain state behavior by considering both international pressures and domestic factors. Georgian researchers employ neoclassical realism to analyze how internal political dynamics, economic conditions, and societal pressures shape Georgia's foreign policy decisions. This includes examining the influence of political elites, public opinion, and economic resources. Neoclassical realism is particularly useful for studying how Georgia adjusts its foreign policy in response to both international and domestic constraints. This framework aids in understanding the complex interplay between external threats and internal political stability.<sup>1</sup>

War Theory, which accounts for 1.12% of the theoretical frameworks used, focuses on the causes, nature, and consequences of war. It includes various sub-theories that examine different aspects of conflict. Georgian scholars apply war theory to study the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, often analyzing the historical roots, political dynamics, and external influences that have contributed to these conflicts. Additionally, war theory is employed to explore strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, including the roles of international mediation, peacekeeping operations, and reconciliation efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Constructivism, which accounts for 1.12% of the theoretical frameworks, emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping international relations. Georgian scholars use constructivism to examine how national identity and historical narratives influence the country's domestic and foreign policies. This includes analyzing the construction of national myths and their impact on political discourse. Constructivism is also applied to study the influence of international norms and institutions on Georgia's policies. Researchers explore how global norms related to democracy, human rights, and international law shape Georgia's interactions with other states and international organizations.<sup>3</sup>

Idealism, also representing 1.12% of the frameworks, focuses on the potential for cooperation and the pursuit of ethical principles in international relations. Georgian scholars use idealism to advocate for foreign policies based on ethical considerations and international justice, including the promotion of human rights, environmental sustainability, and global cooperation. Idealism is also employed to analyze the role of visionary leadership in shaping a country's foreign policy, examining how leaders with strong ethical convictions can influence international relations and promote global peace.<sup>4</sup>

Leadership Theories, making up 1.12% of the frameworks, focus on the role of leaders in shaping political and organizational outcomes. Scholars apply leadership theories to analyze the influence of political leaders in Georgia's history and contemporary politics, including studies on leadership styles, decision-making processes, and the impact of individual leaders on policy outcomes. Leadership theories are also

1 Gvalia et al. 2019.

2 Nino Tsikhelashvili, "Cognitive Warfare Through Reflexive Control Strategy in Georgia," *The Defense Horizon Journal*, 2023, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://tdhj.org/blog/post/cognitive-warfare-reflexive-control-georgia/>; Grigalashvili 2020.

3 Kakachia, Minesashvili 2015; Kakachia et al. 2018.

4 Batashvili 2020; Vasil Kipiani, "(Stereotypical) Perceptions vs Changeable Conditions: From Idealism to Realism," *Geocase*, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.geocase.ge/en/publications/515/stereotipuli-tsarmodgenebi-cvalebadi-garemoebis-pirispiridealizmidan-realizmisaken>.



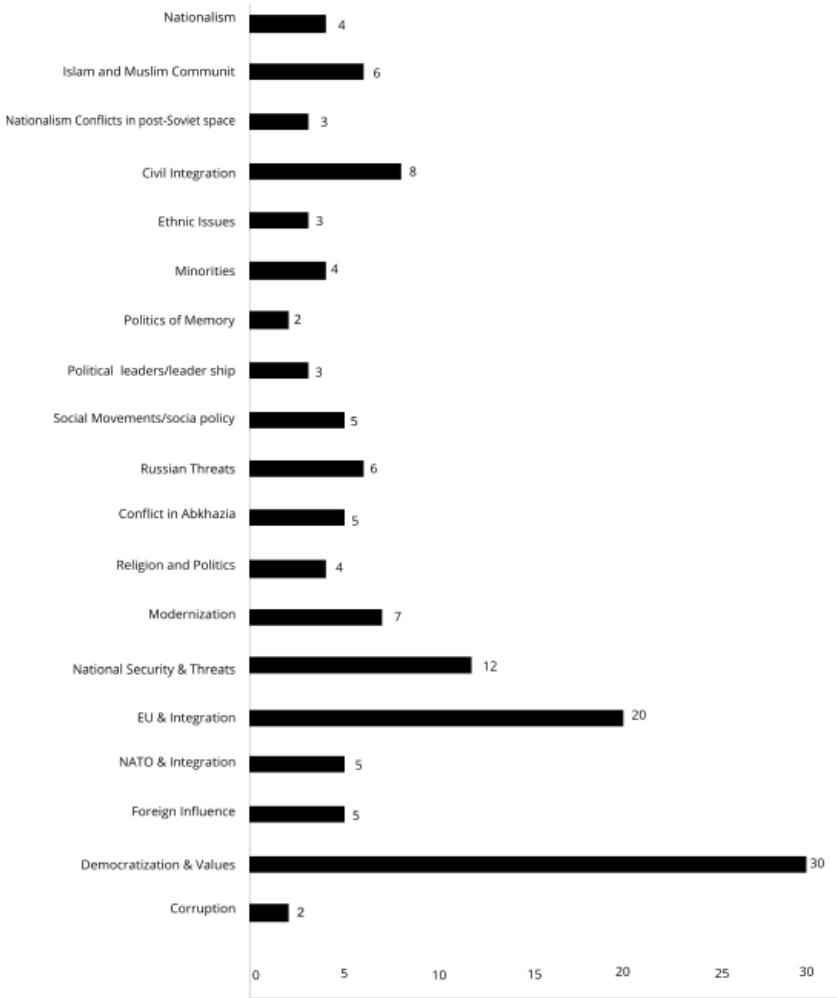
used to understand the dynamics within political parties, governmental institutions, and civil society organizations. Researchers examine how leadership practices affect organizational effectiveness and drive political change.<sup>1</sup>

Research Directions

The dominance of liberal theories among Georgian scholars at least partially shapes the main directions of academic research. Based on the provided data, the key topics of focus for Georgian scholars include democratization and values, EU integration, national security and threats, conflicts in the post-Soviet space, and peacebuilding efforts.

Figure 2.

TOPICS RESEARCHED BY THE GEORGIAN RESEARCHES  
ТЕМЫ, ИССЛЕДУЕМЫЕ ГРУЗИНСКИМИ УЧЕНЫМИ



Source: compiled by the author

1 Sartania 2021.

Undoubtedly, democratization and values are of significant concern to Georgians. In this context, democratization refers to the transition from a non-democratic regime to a democratic political system, which involves the establishment of institutions and practices that ensure free and fair elections, the protection of civil liberties, and the rule of law. The term “values” pertains to the cultural and social principles that support democratic governance, such as political tolerance, social justice, and respect for human rights. The emphasis on democratization and values underscores the importance Georgian scholars place on understanding and promoting democratic principles in their country, which has undergone significant political changes and challenges since the Soviet era.<sup>1</sup>

EU integration, another key focus, involves Georgia's efforts to align with the European Union in terms of political, economic, and social standards. This topic encompasses the study of EU policies, the benefits and challenges of integration, and the reforms required for Georgia to comply with EU regulations. Scholars interested in this area explore how integration with the EU can contribute to Georgia's development and stability, reflecting the country's broader aspirations to strengthen its ties with Western institutions.<sup>2</sup>

National security and threats are also central topics, covering the study of measures and policies designed to protect the country from various internal and external threats. This includes concerns about military threats, cyber threats, terrorism, and other forms of aggression. The focus on national security reflects the high level of concern among Georgian scholars regarding the country's vulnerability to regional conflicts, particularly given its geopolitical location and historical tensions with neighboring countries, such as Russia.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the national security discourse, conflicts in the post-Soviet space are heavily studied. This topic addresses the various conflicts that have arisen in the territories of the former Soviet Union, including ethnic conflicts, territorial disputes, and separatist movements. Scholars researching this area focus on understanding the causes, dynamics, and consequences of these conflicts, as well as exploring potential solutions for peace and stability. The emphasis on post-Soviet conflicts highlights the interconnectedness of regional issues and their impact on Georgia's security and development.<sup>4</sup>

Peacebuilding, a parallel process to conflict, involves efforts to establish lasting peace in regions affected by violence and instability. This includes initiatives aimed at reconciliation, institution building, and socio-economic development. Georgian scholars studying peacebuilding are focused on creating sustainable frameworks for peace in conflict-prone areas, addressing the root causes of conflicts, and promoting social cohesion. This emphasis reflects the ongoing challenges Georgia faces in dealing with unresolved conflicts, particularly in regions like Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>5</sup>

1 Kakhishvili 2018; Tamar Khoshtaria et al., “Youth Values and Political Activism in Georgia,” Tbilisi: Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, 2021, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/pdf/Youth-Values-and-Political-Activism-in-Georgia--3190.pdf>.

2 Maisuradze 2023.

3 Kornely Kakachia and Salome Minesashvili, “Russia's Intended Naval Base in Ochamchire: Implications for Georgian and Black Sea Security,” PONARS Eurasia, 2024, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/russias-intended-naval-base-in-ochamchire-implications-for-georgian-and-black-sea-security/>; JAM News, “CRRC: 69% of Respondents Consider Russia Georgia's Main Enemy,” 2024, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://jam-news.net/enemy-of-georgia/>.

4 Erkhvania 2021.

5 Middelashvili, Gakhokidze 2022.

The distribution of topics among Georgian scholars reveals several key insights into the priorities and concerns within Georgia's academic and policy-making communities:

The largest number of papers focus on democratization and values, indicating a strong commitment to understanding and promoting democratic governance in Georgia. This emphasis is likely driven by the country's ongoing efforts to consolidate its democratic institutions and address challenges related to political corruption, the rule of law, and civil liberties. With 20 pieces centered on EU integration, there is a clear interest in aligning Georgia's policies and standards with those of the European Union. This interest is motivated by the potential benefits of EU membership, including economic development, political stability, and enhanced security.

National security and threats are another major area of focus, reflecting the significant security challenges Georgia faces, particularly in relation to its tense relationship with Russia and the ongoing conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The emphasis on national security underscores the need for robust strategies to protect the country from various threats.

The study of conflicts in the post-Soviet space is also a priority, indicating an awareness of the broader regional dynamics that impact Georgia's security and stability. Understanding these conflicts is crucial for developing effective policies to mitigate their effects and promote regional peace. In conjunction with these conflicts, peacebuilding efforts are critical. The data reflects the importance of addressing the underlying causes of conflict and fostering long-term peace. This involves not only conflict resolution but also efforts to build resilient institutions and promote social cohesion.

The distribution of topics also highlights emerging areas of interest, such as foreign influence, NATO integration, and social movements. These areas are essential for understanding the broader geopolitical context in which Georgia operates and the social dynamics within the country.

Overall, the data indicates that Georgian scholars are deeply engaged in studying issues critical to the country's development, security, and integration into the international community. The focus on democratization, EU integration, and national security underscores the complex challenges Georgia faces as it navigates its post-Soviet transition and seeks to establish itself as a stable and prosperous democracy.

## Determinants

Georgia's geopolitical shift toward the West has been a strategic and transformative process since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. This shift is driven by Georgia's aspirations for European integration, stronger ties with NATO, and closer relations with Western democracies. A significant milestone in Georgia's Western orientation was the Rose Revolution in 2003, which brought a pro-Western leadership to power under the political trio of Zurab Zhvania, Mikheil Saakashvili, and Nino Burjanadze.<sup>1</sup>

1 "How the Rose Revolution Happened," BBC News, 2005, accessed June 13, 2024, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4532539.stm>.

The new government pursued reforms aimed at aligning Georgia's political, economic, and security interests with those of the West. These reforms included the implementation of democratic governance, market-oriented economic policies, and efforts to join NATO. The comprehensive departure from the Soviet legacy – encompassing political, economic, social, military, and civil distancing from previous practices – led to the development of new epistemological approaches within local academic life.<sup>1</sup>

We can argue that three main determinants shape the current epistemological approaches in Georgia: the higher education system reform conducted in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, Civic Education as the foundation of the higher education system, and, finally, the overwhelming influence of Western financial assistance.

### Higher Education System Reform

Following the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia underwent significant transformations across various sectors, including higher education. Led by Mikheil Saakashvili, the revolution aimed to eradicate corruption, strengthen democratic institutions, and modernize the country's infrastructure and governance. One of the early initiatives in higher education was the establishment of the European University, reflecting a shift toward European standards and values. This move was part of a broader strategy to align Georgia's education system with international norms and practices, aiming to improve educational quality and global competitiveness.<sup>2</sup>

To implement this shift toward European practices, the newly elected government addressed challenges related to corruption, governance, quality assurance, curriculum reforms, infrastructure and resources, and internationalization.

Before the revolution, corruption was pervasive in Georgian universities, affecting admissions, examinations, and academic appointments. The new government sought to eliminate corruption through stringent anti-corruption measures, transparency reforms, and the introduction of merit-based systems for academic and administrative appointments. These efforts helped restore public trust in the integrity of higher education institutions.

In terms of quality assurance, significant efforts were made to strengthen mechanisms ensuring academic standards. The Accreditation and Authorization Council of Georgia (now the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement) was established to ensure that universities met rigorous standards in faculty qualifications, infrastructure, curriculum, and research. This initiative aimed to enhance the credibility of Georgian degrees and qualifications both domestically and internationally.

Curriculum reforms were introduced to align with the needs of a modern economy, promoting interdisciplinary studies, practical skills development, and entrepreneurship.<sup>3</sup>

1 Council of Europe Office in Georgia, "Welcome to the Council of Europe in Georgia," 2024, accessed June 14, 2024, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tbilisi/field-office/overview>.

2 Gamkrelidze 2018.

3 World Bank Group, "Fighting Corruption in Public Services: Chronicling Georgia's Reforms," Europe and Central Asia, 2012, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/518301468256183463/fighting-corruption-in-public-services-chronicling-georgias-reforms>.

This shift aimed to equip graduates with the skills and knowledge required by the job market, thereby improving employability and fostering economic growth.

Investments were also made in improving infrastructure and educational resources, particularly in urban areas. These efforts included upgrading facilities, expanding library resources, and enhancing access to modern technologies. These improvements were designed to create a conducive learning environment that supported academic excellence and research.

Recognizing the importance of global perspectives and collaboration, efforts were made to internationalize Georgian higher education. This included promoting student and faculty exchanges, forging partnerships with international universities, and participating in joint research initiatives. Internationalization aimed to enhance the quality of education, broaden students' horizons, and facilitate knowledge transfer.<sup>1</sup>

### Values-Based Civic Education

The Georgian government aimed not just to build a Western-oriented education system but to establish one rooted in the concept of Civic Education.<sup>2</sup>

Within the higher education system, Civic Education serves as a cornerstone for fostering informed, engaged, and responsible citizens capable of navigating the complexities of modern society. It goes beyond merely transmitting knowledge about governmental structures and legal frameworks, encompassing critical analysis of civic issues, ethical considerations, and active participation in democratic processes. This essay explores the importance of Civic Education in higher education, its components, impact, and the challenges and opportunities it presents.<sup>3</sup>

At its core, Civic Education in higher education aims to cultivate civic literacy and promote democratic values among students. It equips them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to understand their rights and responsibilities as active participants in civic life. Key elements of the Civic Education concept include critical thinking and analysis, ethical citizenship, civic participation and engagement, and global citizenship.

Higher education encourages students to develop critical thinking skills essential for analyzing complex civic issues, evaluating policy proposals, and understanding the implications of governmental decisions. Through rigorous academic study and intellectual inquiry, students learn to assess information critically, recognize biases, and make informed judgments. Universities emphasize the ethical dimensions of civic engagement, encouraging students to consider principles of justice, human rights, and social responsibility in their actions and decision-making processes. This ethical foundation guides students in advocating for equity, inclusivity, and sustainable development within their communities.

Civic Education fosters active citizenship by promoting opportunities for students to engage in community service, volunteerism, and political activism. Through internships,

1 The Brookings Institute, "From Popular Revolutions to Effective Reforms: The Georgian Experience," Panel, Washington DC, 2011, accessed June 13, 2024, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/20110317\\_saakashvili\\_transcript.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/20110317_saakashvili_transcript.pdf).

2 Karaia 2016.

3 Rebell 2018.

service-learning projects, and campus organizations, students develop practical skills in leadership, communication, and collaboration while addressing pressing societal issues. In an increasingly interconnected world, higher education promotes global citizenship by exposing students to diverse perspectives, cultures, and global challenges such as climate change, migration, and human rights abuses. By understanding global interdependencies and participating in international exchange programs, students learn to engage responsibly in global affairs.<sup>1</sup>

Civic Education in higher education encompasses a range of components designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of civic life and democratic governance, including academic curriculum, experiential learning, dialogue and debate, and research and scholarship. Universities offer courses in political science, law, public policy, international relations, and ethics that explore foundational concepts of democracy, constitutional principles, human rights, and social justice. These courses equip students with the theoretical knowledge and analytical skills necessary for effective civic engagement.

Hands-on experiences such as internships, community-based research projects, and public service initiatives allow students to apply classroom learning to real-world contexts. These experiences enable students to develop practical skills in community organizing, policy analysis, and advocacy while making meaningful contributions to local and global communities. Higher education institutions promote civil discourse and respectful debate on contentious civic issues through student organizations, debate societies, and campus forums. These platforms encourage students to exchange ideas, challenge assumptions, and engage in constructive dialogue to broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of diverse viewpoints.

Civic Education encourages research and scholarly inquiry into critical civic issues, enabling students and faculty to generate knowledge, propose policy solutions, and contribute to public discourse. Research projects often involve collaboration with community stakeholders, policymakers, and advocacy organizations to address complex societal challenges effectively.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of Civic Education directly impacts the higher education system by empowering citizenship, promoting leadership skills, increasing community engagement, and reinforcing democratic values. Civic Education empowers students to become informed and active citizens who contribute positively to democratic governance and social change. By understanding their rights, responsibilities, and the mechanisms of political participation, graduates are better equipped to advocate for justice, equality, and accountability within their communities and beyond.

Higher education cultivates leadership skills among students, preparing them to assume roles as ethical leaders, policymakers, and advocates for social justice. Alumni of Civic Education programs often pursue careers in government, nonprofit organizations, law, academia, and international diplomacy, where they leverage their skills and knowledge to effect meaningful change. Universities serve as catalysts for

1 Surbhi et al. 2012.

2 Maia Bibileishvili and Shorena Chargeishvili, "Citizenship Education in Georgia", Country Profiles: Citizenship Education Around the World, Federal Agency for Civic Education, Germany, 2021, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://www.bpb.de/die-bpb/partner/nece/338430/citizenship-education-in-georgia/>.

community engagement and civic participation, fostering partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and grassroots organizations. Through collaborative initiatives, students contribute expertise, resources, and volunteer efforts to address community priorities and promote social cohesion.

Civic Education reinforces democratic values such as tolerance, respect for diversity, and commitment to the rule of law. By nurturing a culture of civic responsibility and civic virtue, higher education institutions uphold the foundations of civil society and prepare students to maintain democratic principles throughout their lives.

In conclusion, Civic Education in the higher education system plays a crucial role in preparing students to become informed, engaged, and ethical citizens capable of addressing complex challenges and contributing to the advancement of democratic values. By integrating academic rigor with experiential learning, fostering critical thinking and ethical reasoning, and promoting active civic participation, universities empower students to make meaningful contributions to society and promote positive social change both locally and globally. In the case of Georgia, this means embracing Western-oriented mainstream ideas and approaches<sup>1</sup>.

## Funding

There is no science without funding, and the flow of money into Georgia's education system, particularly in the sciences, largely comes from international donors, predominantly from the West, which focuses on its mainstream external goals of promoting democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Western democracy promotion funding in Georgia has been a significant aspect of international relations and foreign policy since the country gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Located in the Caucasus region, Georgia has been a focal point for Western efforts to support democratic reforms, strengthen institutions, and promote stability in the strategically important South Caucasus region.<sup>3</sup>

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia embarked on a path toward democratic governance and market-oriented reforms. Western countries, particularly the United States and European Union member states, provided substantial political, financial, and technical assistance to support Georgia's transition to democracy.

Western funding has been directed towards building and strengthening democratic institutions such as electoral systems, legislative bodies, and the judiciary. This includes support for legal reforms, capacity-building for public administration, and enhancing the rule of law. Funding has also been allocated to support civil society organizations (CSOs) that play a crucial role in promoting human rights, transparency,

1 Nino Gugunishvili, "Enhancing Civic Education in Georgia with the Future Generation Program," *Georgia Today*, 2017, accessed June 13, 2024, <http://gtarchive.georgiatoday.ge/news/6634/Enhancing-Civic-Education-in-Georgiawith-the-Future-Generation-Program>.

2 Giorgi Minashvili, "What Financial Assistance Did the European Union Provide to Georgia for Business and Other Areas?" *Myth Detector Georgia*, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://mythdetector.ge/en/what-financial-assistance-did-the-european-union-provide-to-georgia-for-business-and-other-areas/>; Giorgi Menabde, "Georgia Becomes a Priority Recipient of Western Financial Assistance," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, The Jamestown Foundation, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://jamestown.org/program/georgia-becomes-a-priority-recipient-of-western-financial-assistance/>.

3 Tamar Khuntsaria, "External Democracy Promotion in Georgia: The Role of the European Union" (PhD diss., Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, 2014), accessed June 13, 2024, [https://press.tsu.edu.ge/data/image\\_db\\_innova/socialur\\_politikuri/tamar\\_xunwaria.pdf](https://press.tsu.edu.ge/data/image_db_innova/socialur_politikuri/tamar_xunwaria.pdf).

accountability, and civic engagement. CSOs receive grants for advocacy, monitoring government actions, and fostering public participation in democratic processes.<sup>1</sup>

Western donors have supported independent media outlets and journalism training programs to ensure diverse and unbiased reporting, which is critical for fostering a free press, transparency, and access to information. International organizations and NGOs funded by Western donors have also monitored elections in Georgia to ensure they are free, fair, and transparent. This includes technical support for electoral reforms and promoting public confidence in electoral processes.

Additionally, Western democracy promotion efforts in Georgia aim to strengthen democratic values such as pluralism, tolerance, human rights, and political pluralism. These values are seen as essential for fostering stable and inclusive democratic institutions. Finally, Georgia's aspirations for closer integration with the European Union, exemplified by the signing of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement in 2014, have been supported through financial assistance aimed at implementing reforms in line with EU standards and values.<sup>2</sup>

Western investment in Georgia's higher education system and research has been substantial over the years, aiming to enhance educational quality, institutional autonomy, and research capacity. This investment includes contributions from various international organizations, including the European Union (EU), the World Bank, and other bilateral and multilateral donors.

The EU has been a significant contributor to higher education in Georgia through various programs and initiatives. One prominent initiative is the Erasmus+ program, which has provided numerous scholarships and mobility opportunities for Georgian students and faculty members. This program has facilitated academic exchanges, joint research projects, and curriculum development, significantly enhancing the quality of education and research in Georgia. The EU's support also extends to capacity-building projects aimed at modernizing Georgian universities and aligning them with European standards and practices.<sup>3</sup>

The World Bank has also played a critical role in supporting higher education and research in Georgia. It has provided technical assistance and funding to support the development of education sector strategies and reforms. The World Bank's investments have focused on improving educational access, quality, and governance, including modernizing educational infrastructure, enhancing teacher training, and supporting the development of research institutions.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the EU and the World Bank, several other countries and international organizations have contributed to Georgia's higher education system. For example, the United States, through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), invested in the Georgia Compact, which included substantial funding for educational infrastructure

1 Asian Development Bank, "Civil Society Brief: Georgia," Tbilisi, 2020, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/678381/civil-society-brief-georgia.pdf>.

2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, "Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia, 2017-2020," accessed June 14, 2024, [https://mfa.gov.ge/pfiles/files/EU-Georgia\\_association\\_agenda\\_-2017-2020.pdf](https://mfa.gov.ge/pfiles/files/EU-Georgia_association_agenda_-2017-2020.pdf).

3 Yana Mitaishvili-Rayyis, "Educational Reforms in Georgia: Past Progress and Future Directions," Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, 2023, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/pdf/Eng-3530.pdf>.

4 World Bank Group, "Technical Assistance to Support Reforms to the Higher Education Financing System in Georgia (P164779)," 2018, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/895021551184190719/pdf/Report-on-Georgia-Higher-Education-Funding-Reform.pdf>.



projects. This investment aimed to improve STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education and create opportunities for Georgian students to pursue higher education in these fields. Similarly, other bilateral donors, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, have provided scholarships, research grants, and technical assistance to Georgian universities.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of these investments is evident in the significant progress Georgia has made in the higher education sector. The increased funding has led to improved educational facilities, more robust academic programs, and enhanced research capacities. Georgian universities have established partnerships with international institutions, enabling collaborative research projects and academic exchanges. These developments have contributed to the internationalization of Georgian higher education, making it more competitive on a global scale.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

Georgia's geopolitical shift in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution not only reshaped the state's foreign policy but also influenced the way local scholars approach the study of political science and international relations. Epistemological approaches have been revised, with a focus on democracy promotion, EU integration, and national security. Georgian scholars base their research on three main pillars: democracy and values as key priorities, Western integration as the grand goal, and globalization as an inevitability. Through these foundational assumptions, they emphasize the necessity of democratic transformation, the building of a value-based society, EU integration, and the assurance of national security.

Driven by prevailing Western ideas, Georgian scholars logically apply mainstream theories such as liberalism, neoliberalism, and institutional liberalism, which underscore the importance of promoting democracy and values to ensure institutional integration with the Western world and to secure the state's position in a globalized environment. This scholarly disposition is shaped by general approaches to the education system, particularly the transformative reforms in higher education that occurred following the Rose Revolution. A key concept of these reforms was the implementation of the Western model of Civic Education, rooted in democracy, human rights, institutionalism, and the Western mindset.

Naturally, these developments have been strongly supported by financial backing from external sources, making Georgian scholars significantly dependent on external logistical and financial support, including grants, scholarships, and paid courses and programs.

1 Norberto Pignatti, "Higher Education Reform in Georgia: Challenges and Opportunities," ISET Report, 2019, accessed June 13, 2024, <https://iset-pi.ge/storage/media/other/2021-10-06/f801cce0-2673-11ec-bd97-25fa0095a319.pdf>.

2 Mariam Chitashvili, "Doctoral Studies in Georgia," CSS Georgia, accessed June 13, 2024, [http://css.ge/?page\\_id=22](http://css.ge/?page_id=22).

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# Политическая наука в Грузии: к вопросу об эпистемологических основах

## АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье рассматриваются эпистемологические подходы, использованные грузинскими исследователями в области политической науки за последние пять лет. Она основана на первоначальном обобщенном исследовании темы, которая в значительной степени упускалась из виду как местными, так и международными учеными. На основе обзора литературы и анализа исследований, проведенных ведущими местными учеными, в статье утверждается, что в Грузии нет устоявшихся или глубоко укоренившихся политических школ в традиционном понимании из-за советского прошлого страны. В результате университеты и вся область политологии являются продуктом реформ, направленных на распространение демократии. Эти реформы были реализованы при сильной поддержке западных стратегических союзников, в особенности США и Европейского Союза. В настоящее время эта область находится под сильным влиянием доминирующих западных теорий политической науки и международных отношений, таких как либерализм, неолиберализм и либеральный институционализм. Более того, эта дисциплина по своей сути ориентирована на гражданское образование, уделяя основное внимание продвижению демократии, а не критическим исследованиям. Грузинские ученые склонны исследовать темы и применять теории, которые соответствуют господствующим западным нарративам. На эту тенденцию существенно влияет финансовая и логистическая зависимость от западных грантов и стипендий.

## КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА

*Грузия, образование, эпистемология, политическая наука*

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