

**Exploring Political Discourse Dynamics in the Hybrid Regime:  
Quantitative Text Analysis of the Prime Ministers' Speeches of Georgia  
(2016 - 2023)**

By  
Nino Gvilia

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Department of Political Science

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Supervisor: Professor Carsten Q. Schneider

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, Nino Gvilia, candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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## **Abstract**

The development of automatic tools for quantitative text analysis provides opportunities for incorporating speech analysis into an additional area of research exploring democratic backsliding and democratic erosion. The public rhetoric of political leaders might influence regime developments, bolstering or undermining democratic principles. While comparative studies reveal differences in language styles used by autocratic and democratic leaders, the public discourse used by leaders in hybrid regimes, illustrating commitments to consolidate democracy over reinforcing the transitional regime remains understudied. The paper utilizes insights from comparative studies on the linguistic styles of political leaders and presents an exploration of the quantitative analysis of the government leaders' speeches in a hybrid regime of Georgia, from 2016-2023. The paper focuses on a case study to analyze the dynamics of the public discourse over time reflecting the Prime Minister's public positioning regarding liberal versus illiberal values. By incorporating dictionary-term analysis of liberal/illiberal terms, the study enables the identification of potential linguistic shifts along the changes in the country's liberal democracy index, shedding light on leaders' proclaimed commitments to liberal democracy. The study also analyzes the main trends in language use and examines whether the language styles are tailored to local and international audiences. The paper reasserts that speech analysis can serve as an indicator of leadership's positions in hybrid regime contexts, illustrating their inclination towards the regime type and can unveil important insights for future research endeavors.

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## 1. Introduction

Studies on Hybrid Regimes and the terms ‘democratic backsliding’ or ‘illiberal democracies’ have become prevalent in political science with the third wave of democratization (Bogaards 2008). These types of regimes comply with minimal democratic procedures in Schumpeter’s (1942) minimalist terms, however, they occur with setbacks and are characterized by violating civil liberties (Ekman 2009). The recent democratic erosion is distinct by its gradual nature and is often initiated by the leaders who came to power through democratic processes (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Most studies on political regimes traditionally focus on institutional structures, however, considering that modern democratic backsliding is marked by verbal assaults from its leaders, there is an increasing trend toward integrating analysis of language and public discourse in regime studies (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 24, Maerz and Schneider 2021, 3). It has especially been popularized, with the advancement of technological tools and opportunities for big data analysis. The institutional characteristics and their roles in the regimes are evaluated using objective indicators. Investigating leadership's role in the absence of explicit actions or vocal decisions can present greater complexity. Political speeches provide an opportunity to analyze at the very least, public commitments of leaders, which can be accounted for the regime transformation. Therefore, public discourse and political leaders’ rhetoric regarding liberal democratic principles might fulfill the studies on political regimes (Maerz and Schneider 2019, p.518).

As politicians use language strategically, illustrating their political agenda (Edelman 1985), public communication can serve as the plain manifestation of leadership’s intentions or at least indicate their political strategies and publicly expressed commitments. A number of

comparative studies have explored the language of political leaders and underlined differences between democratic and authoritarian language styles (Windsor et al. 2017, Maerz 2019, Maerz and Schneider 2019, 2021). While providing a significant basis for understanding the language characteristics within various regimes, less focus has been placed on exploring language dynamics over time in transitional regime contexts. Public discourse, considered as a survival mechanism for authoritarian leaders (Windsor et al. 2017), may also serve as an instrument for leaders in hybrid regimes to reinforce the non-consolidated democratic status quo by verbally undermining democratic principles rather than promoting values vital to liberal democracies. An analysis of public positioning introduces an additional indicator that could shed light on whether leaders are advocating for the development of liberal democracy in their countries, or if they employ language that serves to undermine democratic principles. The speech analysis becomes even more relevant in fragile democratic contexts where regimes have been characterized by autocratic tendencies and democratic features for years, which could also be influenced by the narratives amplified by political leaders.

Analyzing changes in political discourse in the hybrid regime over an extended period allows for discussions on potential changes amongst the shifts in regime status, evaluated by the democratic indexes. The analysis of public speeches of political leaders in the context of regime change offers an additional avenue for evaluating their role in periods of regime transformation. The paper asserts that in case the leadership's public positioning towards illiberalism and decline in the liberal index is correlated, this can be accounted as the leadership's inclination towards reinforcing hybrid regime over consolidating democracy. The aim of the paper is twofold. Firstly, to identify the stated values in the public speeches of the leadership vital for consolidated democracies and to detect possible shifts in the positioning, evaluating whether the changes reflect the state of the regime. Secondly, it seeks to examine

whether (quantitative) speech analysis can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of hybrid regimes and leaders' roles within them and offer insights beyond institutional features.

In order to incorporate speech analysis for studying the leaders' alignment with the regime change and their public communication efforts towards democratic consolidation, this paper seeks to analyze speeches of leaders in regimes characterized as hybrid regimes or illiberal democracies—still going through regime changes over the years. To discuss how the positioning of the political leaders has been changing amongst or in contrast to the liberal democratic development of the regime, the choice of the case study has been set on Georgia for the following reasons. Georgia has a long history of the regime development process (since the 1990s), yet has not succeeded in consolidating democracy. At the same time, the country has been led by the same ruling party since 2012. This unequivocally holds one political power accountable for the public positioning made by leadership. Additionally, a longer timeframe overlooks questions on short-term political strategies and perhaps, undecided policy positioning. Therefore, it presents a suited case study to analyze possible shifts or static state of positioning throughout the regime transition that can be solely accounted for the specific political leadership.

The research focuses on the analysis of the official public discourse of the Prime Ministers (heads of the government) in Georgia throughout the 2016 - 2023 years. All the Prime Ministers serving throughout this period have been representatives of the ruling party Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia (hereafter referred to as Georgian Dream). Georgia, one of the hybrid regimes with a decreasing (liberal) democracy index (Freedom House, V-Dem), has been ruled by the same political party with the ruling majority since 2012. The research explores language



dynamics on a temporal scale to uncover peculiarities of leadership's communication and possible shifts in their commitments towards liberal democratic principles. Studying narratives of the heads of the government from the same party throughout the years provides an underexplored opportunity to analyze the communication strategies of the leaders in the context of the regime transition. The study addresses the following research: How does the public discourse of the Georgian government's leadership correlate with the country's democracy index and what tendencies emerge in the used language styles? The proposed research seeks to extend existing literature on the public discourse in hybrid regimes and potentially provide insights into the strategic use of language and its role in perpetuating transitional status.

The following sections present an overview of the use of language and its implications for democratic backsliding, literature review, and research methodology. Upon presenting the hypothesis, findings of the quantitative text analysis are illustrated to discuss the paper's results. Finally, the paper addresses its limitations and suggests avenues for further research.

## 2. Identifying Democratic Erosion through Language

Democracy has been in a global recession throughout the last decade (Diamond 2015), with many attributing responsibilities to leaders within governments. Up until a recent period, comparative regime studies have been less focused on the realm of public speech, regarding it as an undesirable type of empirical evidence (Schedler 2019, 451). However, the studies of speeches have gone beyond the realm of political communication into regime studies, since notorious cases of utilizing illiberal communicative strategies by populist leaders (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, Schedler 2019). Disruptive processes in democracies are often driven by fringe parties, however, it became increasingly evident that such processes can also be observed within the leadership of consolidated democracies (Bennet and Kneuer 2023). Indications that language can be used for spreading antidemocratic messages even in consolidated democracies highlight the need for greater scrutiny in regimes characterized as hybrid ones and detect whether the leadership's public discourse might be aligning with the prolonged transitional status.

Due to the gradual nature of autocratization, it has become harder to identify the deterioration and effects of the slow erosion (Diamond 2021). Language analysis can serve as one of the tools to resolve this challenge. Political language plays a dual role in political systems— it both influences and reflects them (Wodak 2007). The indications and signals given in public speeches can serve as an alarm in a blurry state of regime where actions and words might seem mismatched. Notably, contemporary examples of backsliding also reveal that leaders in such regimes often appeal to harsh rhetoric, while at the same time, propagating legitimization narratives emphasizing nationalistic values (Bartels 2023, Bennet and Kneuer 2023) which could also be starting indicators of backsliding. Rhetorical attacks, representing

an indicator of authoritarian behavior, often form into actions (Bennet and Kneuer 2023) and might end up deteriorating democratic institutions (Maerz and Schneider 2019).

Undoubtedly, regimes strongly rely on their institutional arrangements, however, the significance of institutions relies on the meaning the public gives to them (Habermas 1998 as cited in Schedler 2019). When it comes to public opinion, political leaders may exert significant influence. Public discourse influences the understanding of norms and their transformation. It might even lead to deviations from well-established norms, as demonstrated by Viktor Orbán's representation of a new form of democracy in its "illiberal" form (2014). Therefore, speeches might be perceived as “the most important category of political acts in democratic politics” (Schedler 2019, 451).

Public discourse analysis might further indicate whether or not leadership can be characterized as authoritarian, considering the litmus test provided by Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018). Moreover, as the styles of communication can serve as an indicator of the quality of democratic life (Bennet and Kneuer 2023) analysis of public speeches in the longer timeframe could provide a new perspective on the political processes and their gradual evolution. Considering these factors, it becomes evident that textual data can complement studies on regimes and the leader's role. Especially, given the accessibility of the material important for academic research (Monroe 2008).

When observing the development of a country that has not yet fully consolidated into a democracy, such as Georgia, texts and speeches can serve as crucial indicators for tracking the leadership's attitudes toward the regime type and subtle changes within it. The trends of public discourse development can be especially discernible when the same leadership remains in power over an extended period. The public discourse and communication strategy of the political leaders certainly reflect values they are trying to amplify widely. At the same time,

the study does not presume that public speeches of the leaders are infallible indicators of their true positions. On the contrary, it recognizes the limitation that public speeches may not always align with political actions. Some may even disguise themselves with democratic rhetoric to mask authoritarian tendencies (Maerz 2019). Moreover, in the case of democratic backsliding starting from atop, there are numerous possibilities for covert methods to be employed, including propaganda techniques and political manipulations. However, what the paper asserts is that if public communication at the level of official leaders reflects any indications of emphasizing values deriving from democratic principles, this can serve as a clear illustration of the values leadership is promoting. Presumably, it provides insights into the direction the regime under this government is heading.

Analyzing public speeches throughout the years might provide a dynamic depiction of how official political stances have been changing. With Georgia's democracy index on the decline (Freedom House, V-Dem), it is worth examining whether the government leaders have been diverging from their proclaimed goals and positions supporting liberal democratic values. This gradual analysis may also unveil whether the change in rhetoric exhibits a directional trend (towards illiberal or liberal) and opens areas for future research. It would also underscore the importance of timely assessment of public stances as potentially alarming, particularly if they exhibit a deteriorating trend. Leaders, as prominent public figures, endorsing antidemocratic rules can have a significant impact, especially in non-democratic regimes. In a non-democratic setting, the leaders' influence is amplified due to control of information sources, reducing the likelihood for citizens to get information contradicting government propaganda (Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). The study underscores the advantage of integrating speech analysis to promptly identify periods of regime-type changes, at least shifts in the leadership's positioning, and potentially to forecast future trends before illiberal language is reflected in institutional-level changes (Maerz and Schneider 2019).

### 3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework:

The research centers on the exploration of language in a non-democratic regime. It adopts theoretical and methodological frameworks from the studies on regime studies, democratic backsliding, illiberal democracy, external influences, and political language analysis.

Illiberal democracies, hybrid regimes, electoral autocracies are defined as combining democratic and authoritarian features, failing to ensure the liberal rights of citizens while maintaining the institutional facade of representative democracy (Zakaria 1997, Diamond 2002, Levitsky and Way 2002, Schedler 2002). Although elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, incumbents routinely abuse state resources and, sometimes, manipulate electoral results. On the other hand, incumbents could lose power if they let democratic challenges run their course. The specific nature of such types of regimes has been more extensively examined since questioning the transitional phase of the diminished type of democracies prevalent in the post-Cold War period; In such regimes, incumbents are characterized by undermining democratic institutions, abuse of state resources, manipulation of electoral results or other attempts to obstruct genuine democratic processes in order to stay in power (Levitsky and Way, 2002).

Scholars have also been exploring the strategies applied by authoritarian incumbents to enhance their capacity to remain in power and sustain a Hybrid regime. Ekman (2009) emphasized the role of public opinion and support for democracy as a crucial dimension for analyzing the stability of hybrid regimes. In this regard, the public discourse and values promoted to citizens play an important role in gaining validity to the regime. Gerschewski (2013) identifies legitimization as one of the pillars of stability in autocratic regimes. Drawing on the distinction between "specific support," which is performance-oriented, and "diffuse support" (Easton 1975), which stems from people's acceptance of leaders' ideology or claims

to legitimacy based on religion, nationalism, or tradition, the scholar emphasizes the significance of both types of support for maintaining stability in autocratic regimes.

While examining regime changes, scholars also underscore the diverse array of external influences. Levitsky and Way (2006) investigate regime change through the lens of Western leverage, the extent to which governments are susceptible to external pressures for democratization, and their ties to the West, characterized by the density of connections. Pop-Eleches (2007) also points out the Western integration conditionality, along with political and economic incentives, as the most effective means of promoting democracy in post-communist rule. Given Georgia's strategic partnership and its aspirations to become a member of the EU as well as its largely pro-Western oriented population (CRRC 2023), it is presumed, that the regime is also subject to the conditionality of Western allies.

When it comes to analyzing public discourse specific to political regimes, a comparative approach reveals how leaders with authoritarian tendencies employ similar language strategies. Maerz (2019) reveals that leaders in hegemonic authoritarian regimes adopt a democratic style for simulating pluralism, however they avoid underlining liberal values. The scholar describes an autocratic style of language with emphasis on traditionalism, nationalism, and paternalism opposing liberal language, with emphasis on liberal values (2019, 4). The role of liberal public communication is further emphasized in the work of Maerz and Schneider (2019), who propose the index of (il)liberal public discourse, which is described as overemphasizing nationalistic and traditional values, while liberal language underscores inclusiveness and pluralism (2019, 522). Bennet and Kneuer (2023) examine how disruptive communication can contribute to democratic erosion, linking illiberal rhetoric to the strategy of exclusion of others. They highlight that leaders who propagate narratives of legitimation focus on claims of national

renewal, frequently spreading narratives containing politically divisive ideas concerning race, religion, immigration, gender, and traditional morality.

The presented research focuses on studying liberal and illiberal communication elements of leaders of the government and representatives of the ruling party in Georgia to indicate their public commitments towards the regime type. Building on the literature on hybrid (illiberal) regimes, transitions, and political discourse analysis, several trends are anticipated in the research.

Firstly, as the Georgian democratic index decreases, it is expected to observe a more prevalent mixed communication style among Prime Ministers, marked by a growing use of illiberal terms. Secondly, within the prolonged hybrid regimes, the liberal communication style is likely to prioritize the emphasis on democratic norms over liberal values, following the communication strategies of leaders in hegemonic authoritarian regimes. Finally, considering the international political context, it is expected that the Prime Ministers in Georgia will adopt different communication styles tailored to the national and international public. The government leaders are expected to avoid the use of illiberal language when speaking to the international public, relying more on liberal terms to underscore shared values with the EU and the West. In contrast, they are expected to use a mixture of terms incorporating illiberal language as well when addressing national audiences.

The paper intends to test the following hypotheses:

H1: The increasing use of illiberal rhetoric by Prime Ministers of Georgia positively correlates with a decline in the country's liberal democratic index.

H2: Government leaders are more likely to employ an illiberal language style when communicating with a local audience while avoiding the use of illiberal terms when addressing an international audience.

H3: When adopting a liberal language style, Prime Ministers predominantly underline democratic norms over liberal values

By exploring the tendencies in public discourse, the study aims to find indications of whether the government leaders' public positions align with liberal democratic values or diverge from them. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of language use in hybrid regimes, shedding light on leaders' intentions and commitments to either promote values significant for democracy's consolidation or maintain stability within hybrid regimes. The research serves as an addition to burgeoning literature on hybrid regimes as well as text analysis, examining whether valuable insights can be gained from political speech analysis in the context of regimes where democracy is not fully consolidated.



## **4. Research Design:**

### ***4.1 Methodology***

The study conducts quantitative text analysis of speeches delivered by Prime Ministers in Georgia from 2016 to 2023 to investigate patterns in public discourse language styles. In order to determine whether the language of Prime Ministers' positions leans towards liberalism or illiberalism, the research incorporates the supervised classification method. The study utilizes a dictionary search string relying on the validated dictionary of liberal and illiberal terms provided by Maerz and Schneider (2019). Following their method the study scales the positioning of political speeches, across the illiberal-liberal spectrum. As defined by scholars (Maerz and Schneider 2019), liberal language is defined in terms of political liberalism rather than economic one and illiberal language emphasizes nationalistic values and traditional structures (2019, 522).

Due to resource constraints, the paper focuses solely on the addresses of Prime Ministers due to their leadership positions as the heads of the government. Additionally, in the given case study, all of the serving Prime Ministers have been representatives of the same political party, the Georgian Dream. The research includes public speeches delivered between 2016 and 2023. The starting year for the study was selected as it aligns with the second parliamentary election period, resulting in the ruling majority of the Georgian Dream party. The study period offers available data, and the timeframe also allows for the temporal analysis of discourse dynamics up to 2023. Throughout the studied time, four Prime Ministers served in the position, all of them representing the ruling party, the Georgian Dream.

### ***4.2 Data Collection***

The speeches for the study were collected from the website of the Government of Georgia – [www.gov.ge](http://www.gov.ge), which provides English-translated speeches of the PMs. The webpage contains

all the news regarding the Prime Ministers' activities, including their meetings and public announcements. The site features a separate section - 'Prime Minister' which archives material covering all the years of interest. The speeches were collected from the sub-sections 'Prime Minister News' and 'Prime Minister's Visits & Meetings' (international meetings) from 2016 to 2023. Notably, the number of speeches delivered to the international public is considerably lower. Nevertheless, examining potential differences in outreach strategies to national and international audiences within the same time frame would reveal the main language styles tailored for the audiences.

Data collection was performed manually due to the absence of information on the website's terms of service, including permissions for web scraping. Additionally, the website does not provide the 'robots.txt' file, which typically specifies the type of information that is accessible for web crawling. Even though the data is public, without explicit information, it is not clear which specific actions can be illegal web scraping and which are not (Munzert et al. 2014, 280). To avoid any potential infringements, the relevant data has been collected manually and stored in document format.

Manual data collection further facilitated the initial stage of the data filtering process. All speeches were selected regardless of potentially relevant topics to avoid any bias. However, since the website also provides news on the Prime Minister's meetings and press releases alongside their public announcements, all the data not categorized as speeches was deemed irrelevant for text analysis and therefore omitted. These are the types of press releases that only describe activities without providing any citations or speeches. The omitted data included those with headlines indicating actions of the Prime Minister such as "visits", "meets", "greet", "participates", "attends" and those titled "Messages of Condolences".

In the case of the joint statements of Prime Ministers with international speakers, only statements from the Georgian Prime Ministers have been selected (copied). In the case of textual material from press briefings, journalist questions were omitted, retaining only Prime Ministers' responses. All the other data, regardless of its content, was collected. The collected speeches include those labeled with the following titles:

*“Prime Minister’s Statement”, “Prime Minister’s comment,” “Season’s Greetings,” “Performance Report”, “Wish-well messages”, Citation of the Prime Minister (“Prime Minister:” or “citation put in brackets”) “Written Address of the Prime-Minister”, “Briefing”, “Keynote speech”, “Speech at the plenary session”, “Interpellation session”, “Concluding remarks.”*

Given the study’s objective, the collected data has been divided based on international and national audiences and analyzed separately. The website categorizes data on international visits under the ‘Visits & Meeting’ section. In addition to the speeches collected from the mentioned section, speeches from local meetings with an international dimension, such as international conferences or those featuring guest speakers, were included in the dataset addressed for international audiences.

In total, 1492 speeches delivered by Prime Ministers from 2016 to 2023 were collected and analyzed using R, enabling a quantitative examination of keyword terms and shifts in language style over the specified time frame.

**Table 1 Overview of the collected data**

<b>Year</b>	<b>PM in Office</b>	<b>N of collected speeches for the local audience</b>	<b>N of collected speeches for the international audience</b>	<b>SUM of collected speeches</b>	<b>Total number of news available on the web</b>
<b>2016</b>	Giorgi Kvirikashvili	103	27	130	967
<b>2017</b>	Giorgi Kvirikashvili	69	33	102	564
<b>2018</b>	Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Mamuka Bakhtadze	165	41	206	632
<b>2019</b>	Mamuka Bakhtadze, Giorgi Gakharia	264	31	295	677
<b>2020</b>	Giorgi Gakharia	206	5	211	575
<b>2021</b>	Giorgi Gakharia, Irakli Garibashvili	183	14	197	669
<b>2022</b>	Irakli Garibashvili	158	20	178	687
<b>2023</b>	Irakli Garibashvili	134	39	173	635
<b>Total</b>		1282	210	<b><u>1492</u></b>	5406

### **4.3 Data Processing**

In order to analyze the liberal-illiberal style of languages of the collected speeches, text documents have been analyzed in R studio (Version 2023.06.2+561). The following packages for quantitative text analysis and data visualization have been applied: ‘readtext’, ‘quanteda’, ‘tm’, and ‘ggplot2’.

Before conducting keyword frequency analysis, texts underwent the initial preparatory process. Texts were converted to lowercase and the punctuations have been removed.

Subsequently, the textual material was tokenized and clean tokens were turned into the document-feature matrix (DFM) to facilitate the scrutinized analysis (Munzert et al.2014,296). The DFM is a more general form of the document-term matrix. This method has also been employed in the study by Maerz and Schneider (2019), which serves as the basis for replicating the methodology in this paper.

To avoid distortion of results and prevent the matching of terms provided in the library with similar terms in the text but in a misleading context, several collocations were identified and removed from the texts. Identified collocations include those that carry meanings irrelevant to the research, such as economic terms (also identified by Maerz and Schneider 2019), proper nouns, or greetings (e.g. 'it's a great honor to be here'). To detect specific collocations related to the terms provided in the dictionary, all the collected texts have been analyzed in the MAXQDA program using the 'Keyword-in-context' function. The function displays selected terms along with the other words that most frequently appear in combination with them. All the terms provided in the dictionary were tested to find the multi-word expressions. Following keywords have been found in the speeches with alternative contexts, unrelatable to the study: 'book fair'(Frankfurt Book Fair), 'visa free', 'free trade', 'for free', 'freedom house', 'economic freedom' (economic freedom of the world 2023, economic freedom index), 'visa liberalization', 'transparency international', 'great honor', 'my honor', 'honor to', 'an honor', 'an honour', 'great honour', 'justice project'(World Justice Project).

Excluding these terms may not entirely eliminate contextually irrelevant terms that could be classified as either liberal or illiberal. However, since these specific terms were found to be used most frequently in the speeches, their exclusion should help to minimize errors in term identification. Certain terms, like 'Book Fair,' were used frequently only in speeches from

specific years, but could result in misleading results in the analysis of those years. Therefore, such collocations were also included. Identifying all words used in different contexts was implausible and could introduce further biases. Therefore, word combinations that appeared less than five times in the speeches were not outlined as collocations in the data. Expressions frequently repeated in the documents were identified as multi-token sequences and processed in R to remove them from the texts. The functions ‘tokens\_compound’ and ‘tokens\_remove’ from the ‘quanteda’ package were used for this purpose.

The processing did not include stemming as it disrupted results. Some of the terms provided in the dictionary were in a mismatch in stemmed format as checked in R (for example the stemmed version of the term discrimination- ‘discriminat\*’ is ‘discrimin’ or stemmed version of the word ‘destabili\*’ from the dictionary is ‘destabil’). As the dictionary included terms with wildcard characters (\*), texts were analyzed to include all words with alternative endings but the same core word, using the count of wildcards. This was achieved through the ‘globbing’ function. In addition, the term ‘free\*’ with the wildcard character existing in the library was switched to the main form ‘free’ to avoid confusion with the term ‘freedom.’ Consequently, the term was included only in its original form and did not undergo an expanded search. This may exclude some results, but manual checks showed that the alternative forms (free\*) were not frequent enough to significantly affect the average positioning of the speeches.

The analysis of speeches was performed separately for the speeches according to each studied year. As the documents containing speeches have been collected separately in a doc format, the validity checks of the results have also been conducted manually finding and correcting any discrepancies calculated in R. Any corrections made were minor, possibly deriving from the inability to match the words after removing the punctuation, that sometimes

leads to stitching words together, or correctly incorporating function ‘globbing’. The final results presented in the study are manually corrected ones. Notably, the discrepancies found in terms of frequencies between the calculations in R and the manual checking via keywords did not significantly impact the positioning on the liberal-illiberal scale. Therefore, any possible further minor discrepancies in the frequencies of the terms that match with the liberal-illiberal dictionary are expected to have no effect on the overall language positioning.

Upon determining the frequencies of the matching words with the dictionary terms, the calculation of (il)liberal index has been conducted. The research replicated a method applied by Maerz and Schneider (2019) to find the positioning on the liberal/illiberal scale. The authors use Lowe’s (as cited in Maerz and Schneider 2019, 525) spatial model of logit scaling. This model scales the relative balance of liberal vs illiberal terms to compute the estimated positioning on a left-right scale (negative Illiberal, positive liberal) (2019, 524). The given study also follows the Lowe et al.’s spatial model of logit scaling and simple Bayesian approach of computing standard errors and confidence intervals for the estimates of 0 (Lowe 2011 as cited in Maerz and Schneider 2019,524). The following formula for identifying the positioning of the speeches on a liberal-illiberal scale has been applied:

$$\theta^{(L)} = \log \frac{R + .5}{L + .5}$$

$$\sigma^2 = (I+a)^{-1} + (L+a)^{-1}$$

Calculating confidence intervals:  $[\theta L - 1.96\sigma, \theta L + 1.96\sigma]$

Notably, results that are closer to 0 do not represent the centrist position, rather they indicate the balanced language, with insignificant differences between illiberal da liberal terms (Maerz and Schneider 2019, 526).

## **5. Case Study: Country Profile, Political Regime, and Party Profile**

### ***5.1 Country Profile***

The post-soviet country of Georgia, categorized as a transitional/hybrid regime or electoral democracy (Freedom House, V-dem) has been going through democratic development and a number of political upheavals since it regained independence in 1991. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the country has endured years of political instability, with an open intention to democratize and its outspokenly pro-Western course, especially since 2004. With the continuous state of Russian occupation, Georgia's policy has been actively oriented on advancing its relationship with the United States and the European Union. Since 2016, an association agreement between the EU and Georgia has come into force, and in 2022 the country has applied for membership. In 2023, Georgia was granted the EU candidate status, having submitted the application following Ukraine and Moldova since the Russian waged a full-scale war in Ukraine. The goal of the country's full integration into the EU and NATO is constitutionally enshrined. The majority of public support towards Western integration is confirmed in yearly public opinion polls (CRRC 2023, NDI Poll 2023).

Georgia's path to democratic state-building has gone through a mixed phase of development. Throughout these years, the country has experienced political turmoil and deep political polarization (European Commission 2023). V-dem describes the period from 1990 in Georgia with a high degree of variation in different components of democracy. The democracy index indicates a gradual increase over time, with the highest score reaching in the period of 2015-2018, which is followed by the downturn trend.



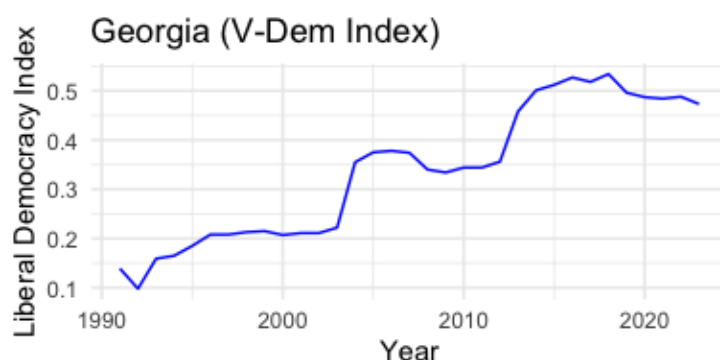


Figure 1 V-dem Liberal Democracy Index, Country Graph: Georgia

## 5.2 The Political Party Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia

The parliament of Georgia has been led by the same ruling majority comprised of the Georgian Dream party since 2012. Only in 2022, the ruling party lost its sole majority after five MPs left the party to join the new alliance. However, this division's formal nature has been reasserted continuously even by ruling party members. The chairperson of the ruling party has also noted that there was no significant difference between the party and the alliance, and it allowed them to remain together in the Parliamentary Majority<sup>1</sup>.

The Georgian Dream party identifies itself as a center-left union, with an emphasis on the social aspect, liberal rights, etc. The party's charter outlines goals that include safeguarding liberal political rights and promoting the civil and political engagement of Georgia's citizens, as well as supporting the development of civil society. However, there has been growing concern over government members' increasingly hostile rhetoric towards civil society organizations and media representatives, both domestically and internationally (European Parliament Resolution 2022).

<sup>1</sup> "Georgian Dream" Loses Parliamentary Majority, Civil.ge, 04/10/2022

In the election manifesto for the 2016 parliamentary elections, the party outlined human rights, dignity, freedom, and security and the development of institutional mechanisms ensuring it amongst the top priorities. The program further outlined developments in the problems regarding the penitentiary system, property rights, and restoring justice. Freedom of expression and media, freedom of assembly, gender equality, etc. have also been emphasized. The program further outlined democratic values, economic development, social development, and foreign relations (GD electoral program 2016). The 2020 manifesto for the following electoral cycle was quite similar. The party affirmed its commitment to liberal political and civic rights along with security and emphasized major problems to be Russian occupation and poverty (GD electoral program 2020). Both manifestos reassured Georgia's Western relations and aspirations, emphasizing that the party would appeal for the EU candidate status and ensure other steps for EU aspiration as well as strengthening US relations.

The manifestos for the two parliamentary years share similar sentiments and emphasis on both institutional democratic characteristics and liberal values, ensuring the political rights of citizens as in consolidated democracies, at the same time pointing out to citizens being the main pillar of the party. As the same political power has been in the leadership for the past 12 years, the analysis of political discourse provides the gradual timeline of whether the leadership started to shift its public stance and diverge from the liberal democratic values, also outlined in the charter and their programs.

### 5.3 The State of Democracy

Georgia's electoral democratic and liberal development has been evaluated over the years using various standards. This includes protections of individual and minority rights, civil liberties, the rule of law, judicial independence, checks and balances on executive power, and the level of electoral democracy. The Freedom House and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) reveal a declining trend during the studied period, measuring the institutional underpinnings of liberal democracy (both elected and unelected state institutions and non-state actors) and the extent to which liberal democracy is achieved.

Freedom House's Nations in Transit reports a gradual decrease in the liberal democracy score from 40 in 2016 to 34 in 2023, with a slight rise observed in 2020. V-Dem indicates the highest liberal democracy score in 2018, followed by a sharp decline and a slight increase in 2022. However, both indices show a general decreasing trend, with scores significantly lower in 2023 compared to the starting point in 2016

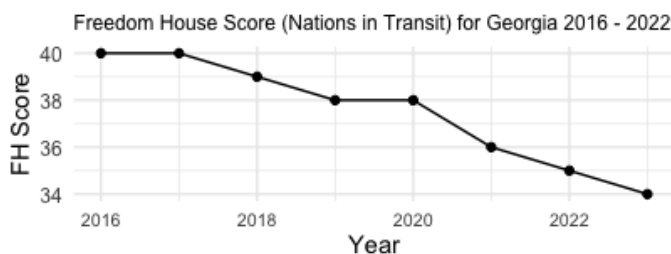


Figure 2 Freedom House, Nations in Transit, Georgia

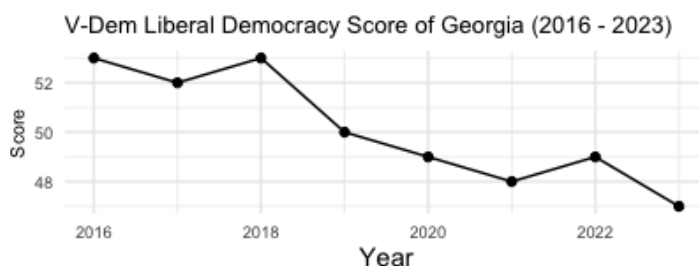


Figure 3 V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index, Country Graph: Georgia

The political landscape of Georgia and its regime development reflects a challenging path toward democratic consolidation. Despite its proclaimed aspirations for democratic consolidation and strengthening ties with the Western alliances the variations in democratic

index scores indicates that the country undergoes setbacks, possibly arising both from foreign and internal factors. The noticeable decreasing tendency of democratic development since 2016-2018 raises questions related to institutional arrangements as well as leadership's role. The paper examines the period of the ruling party of the Georgian Dream to reveal potential shifts in ideological stance in their speeches and their public commitments to the principles of liberal democracy, discussing findings in the context of the country's democracy index during the same period. The speech analysis provides an opportunity to assess whether the public commitments made by Prime Ministers and representatives of the ruling party align with shifts in regime transitions. The analysis examines whether the leaders publicly promote values that reinforce democratic consolidation or use other linguistic styles aligning with the hybrid nature of the regime, prolonging the mixed characteristics of the regime.

## 6. Results of the Speech Analysis

### 6.1 Positioning of Speeches Addressed to Both National and International Audiences

In order to determine whether the speeches reflect the decline in the liberal democracy index across the studied years, speeches addressed for national and international speeches have been analyzed collectively to illustrate how Prime Ministers position themselves and if they have been vocal regarding liberal democratic principles. In subsequent chapters, the data will also be analyzed separately for comparison between the different audiences.

Examining the used terms in public speeches reveals an increasing tendency towards the use of illiberal terms throughout the years.

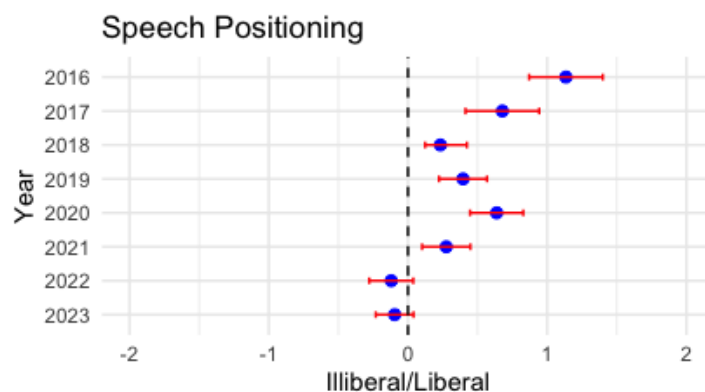


Figure 4 Speech Positioning (Addressed to National and International Audience)

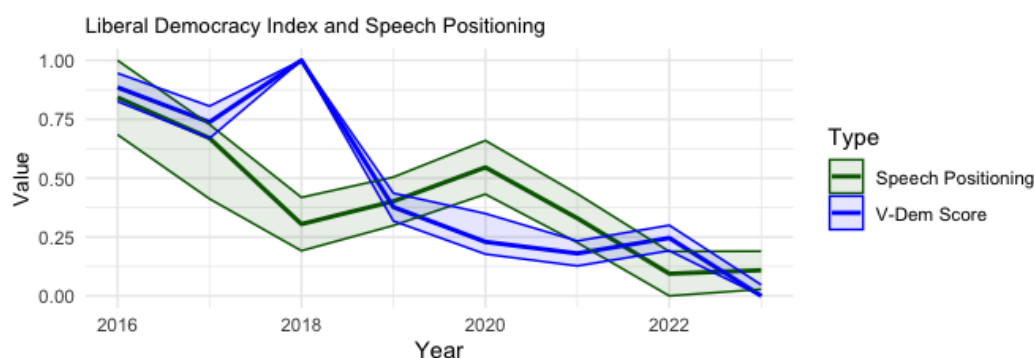
The starting year of the study - 2016, is characterized by a significant difference in the terms used, positioning speeches on the liberal side of the scale. Over time, the positioning shifts towards neutral or illiberal, suggesting that either the difference between liberal and illiberal terms has decreased or that illiberal terms have started to exceed liberal ones. An especially sharp shift is observed from 2020 onward, with illiberal terms being more frequently used by the head of government in public speeches addressed to both domestic and international audiences in 2022 and 2023 compared to any other years before that. The pattern of positioning on the scale getting closer to 0 indicates an increasing language style that either allows illiberal terms to exceed liberal ones or sends such mixed messages that the speeches cannot be identified as explicitly liberal or illiberal. Consequently, the positioning on the scale has shifted towards mixed messaging, and in 2022 and 2023, even leaned towards the illiberal scale. The public discourse throughout the years reflects the nature of a hybrid regime, increasingly incorporating elements of both liberalism and illiberalism.

The observed trends<sup>2</sup> in the changes of the liberal democracy index and the alignment of speeches on the illiberal/liberal scale do not mirror each other. They fluctuate throughout the years, indicating different trajectories in 2017 and 2020. There are different periods of peaks for both of the scores, indicating that the liberal positioning of the speeches did not align with the period of the highest liberal democracy index periods. However, an overall decreasing trend is apparent with some periods where the scores coincide. Overall, both liberal index score and speech positioning portray significantly decreasing trends (with fluctuations in between) resulting in a decline from 2016 to 2023. Regardless of the distinct peaks of the scores, an overall decreasing trend with similar patterns exhibited especially since 2020, suggests that the

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<sup>2</sup> The index score and illiberal/liberal positioning have been normalized in R for comparison on a similar scale

growing use of the illiberal discourse is aligned with the decrease in the liberal democracy index.



**Figure 5 Speech Positioning and Liberal Democracy Index Score over Time**

While some hegemonic regime leaders use liberal language to mask their true intentions under a democratic facade, and some autocrats deliver speeches that contrast with their regime type (Maerz 2019), in the case of a hybrid regime like Georgia, the linguistic patterns of the heads of government are not contradictory to the regime. Even considering that the PMs are expected to be implying official, structured language, they increasingly use more illiberal terms over time without a corresponding increase in liberal terms. The observed overall trend suggests that the correlation between the speech positioning and the liberal index score is not consistent in all years but the decreasing tendency supports hypothesis 1: The increasing use of illiberal rhetoric by Prime Ministers of Georgia positively correlates with a decline in the country's liberal democratic index.

Presented textual analysis aligns with the institutional erosions reflected in the country's declining liberal index score. Notably, the trends also indicate that the sharp shift in speeches towards illiberalism began prior to the decrease in the democracy index. Although there was a slight increase in positioning observed from 2018 to 2020, it remained significantly more

illiberal than the starting point in 2016. This raises the question of whether the initial noticeable shift in speeches towards illiberalism could have served as a signal, anticipating the declining tendency in the liberal democratic index as well.

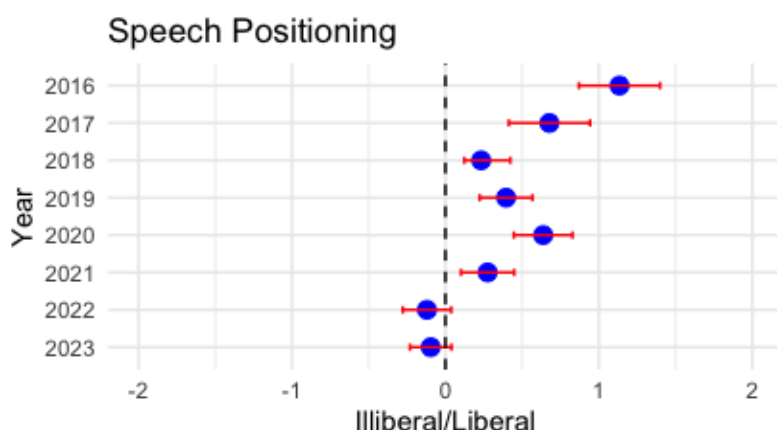
As the speech analysis reveals trends roughly aligning with the decrease in (liberal) democracy index scores, in the case of the prime ministers in Georgia and respectively as representatives of the ruling political party one must question whether the decrease in the liberal score and the persistence of a hybrid regime is solely due to institutional drawbacks, political instability, economic resources, political culture, etc. or if they also stem from the leadership itself. This analysis suggests that the leadership has been increasingly using mixed messaging and more illiberal terms in their speeches which might be at least an indication that since 2016 heads of government have altered their language style, relying more on illiberal terms along with liberal ones, possibly reflecting their commitments or the divergence from liberal democratic principles.

## ***6.2 Audience-Specific Positioning***

### **6.2.1 Speeches Delivered to National Audiences**

The presence of illiberal/liberal dictionary terms was explored separately in 1282 speeches that were addressed to the national audience from 2016 to 2023. The shifts in positioning in the speeches addressed to the national audience reflect a sharp shift towards illiberalism since 2020 with a tendency to lean more towards illiberalism. Analyzing speeches given to the national audience as discussed above, also follows the liberal democracy index changes within a country. The findings are very similar to those from the collectively analyzed speeches.





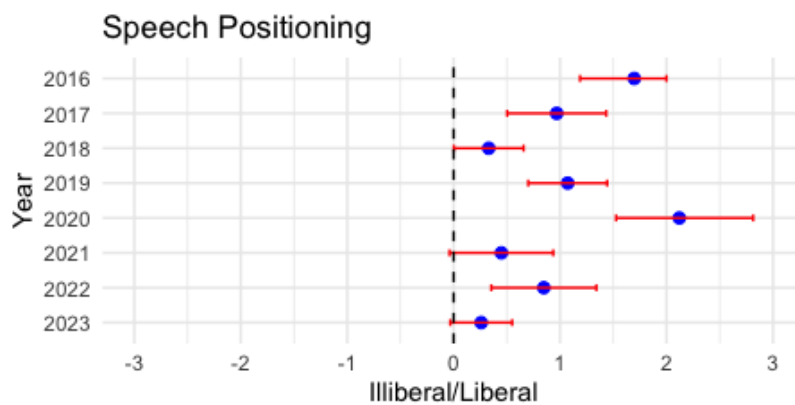
**Figure 6 Speech Positioning (Addressed to National Audience)**

The findings, based on the prevalence of liberal and illiberal terms, suggest that when addressing domestic audiences, Prime Ministers have employed mixed messaging strategies, incorporating both liberal and illiberal terms, in sum with the most emphasis on liberal terms. However, there is a growing tendency to use illiberal terms throughout these years. From 2016 until 2023 the discrepancy between liberal and illiberal term use decreased while the frequency of illiberal terms outnumbered liberal ones in speeches found in the years 2022 and 2023. This trend is not observed in speeches from previous years or from speeches addressed to international audiences. Even though in 2023 there is a slightly smaller difference between the illiberal and liberal terms, the positioning is still negative, and notably, the frequency of illiberal terms increased parallel to liberal ones. The analysis further reveals that PMs increasingly utilized both liberal and illiberal terms every year, with the usage of illiberal terms increasing sharply from 2021. The use of frequencies in liberal terms has been increasing more gradually and changing over time with slight variations. The use of illiberal terms, as mentioned, exceeded liberal ones in 2022 and 2023. This illustrates that the discrepancy that

has diminished in the past years with more illiberal terms was not accounted for a decrease in liberal language use, but rather for utilizing more illiberal terms along with the liberal ones. Overall, the analysis of the speeches addressed to the local public indicates that, since 2016, the speeches of Prime Ministers have consistently leaned towards the illiberal spectrum, with only one exception, the year 2020. Notably, both years 2016 and 2020 which can be characterized as relatively liberal-leaning languages are Parliamentary election years.

### **6.2.2 Speeches Addressed to International Audiences**

The analysis includes 210 speeches addressed to the international audience provided on the Governmental website. The results of frequency counts of terms matching liberal and illiberal categories from the dictionary reveal that from 2016 to 2023, liberal terms consistently surpassed illiberal terms. Notably, the different contexts of speeches given for the international audience should also be considered when discussing differences in language styles, along with the various audiences. The language attributed to international conferences, joint statements or speeches delivered during official international visits are more diplomatic in nature. They involve less discussion of internal politics and present a broad perspective from the heads of government on Georgian politics. Therefore, the language used might emphasize more democratic development of the country and outline a liberal style due to meeting the expectations of democratic partners of the country. The analysis on a temporal scale still reveals some trends in positioning and the main areas of their focus that the leaders have been emphasizing with the international audience.



**Figure 7 Speech Positioning (Addressed to International Audience)**

The analysis of the positioning of speeches addressed to the international audience indicates a different pattern than the speeches addressed to the national audience. The revealed trends fluctuate, showing no consistent tendency of shifting towards illiberalism since 2016. As illustrated by the results, PMs have been utilizing a mixed style of messaging with more emphasis on liberal terms. In general, speeches from all the years are leaning towards the liberal spectrum, however the language has become more mixed in nature since 2020. Nevertheless, none of the speeches are leaning towards the illiberal spectrum.

Throughout these years, the government heads mainly used a liberal language style. However, there is a variation across years in using both styles of terms in speeches. Speeches from years such as 2016 and 2020 show more differences between the used terms with dominating liberal language. Notably, 2023 is distinguished by the highest frequency of both liberal and illiberal terms used, with the former outnumbering the latter. This might possibly be indicating a shift towards more ideologically loaded speeches. Further scrutiny would be needed to determine whether these shifts align with shifts in the general ideological positioning and policies of the leaders.

Findings suggest that over the years, Prime Ministers' speeches tended to lean towards the liberal end of the scale. However, it is evident that leaders did not entirely eschew illiberal language, indicating a tendency towards mixed messaging with a notable emphasis on liberal terms. The results indicate a dynamic and evolving public discourse, however with no significant inclination towards illiberal side of spectrum. At the same time, speeches after 2020 years started to lean towards 0, incorporating more illiberal terms. However, the language still leaned towards liberal spectrum, outlining that when communicating with international audiences, leaders' language over the years can be characterized as predominantly liberal, despite the inclusion of some illiberal terms.

### **6.2.3 Comparison of the speeches addressed to National and International Audiences**

When analyzing the positioning of PMs on the liberal/illiberal scale based on their speeches during the studied period, different results can be observed depending on the target audience. Given the expectation that the country's leaders would be constrained by Western leverage (Levitsky and Way 2006) and considering Georgia's Western aspirations, it was anticipated that public speeches would align more with liberal democratic norms and principles than the local ones. To examine any differences, the paper intended to compare findings from the speeches based on the audience.

The speeches intended for the national audience over the years reveal a notable shift in language. In 2022 and 2023, illiberal terms exceeded liberal ones. Additionally, even in previous years, there was an increase in illiberal terms without a corresponding rise in liberal terms. Therefore, considering only the speeches given to the national audience, the positive correlation with the decline in the liberal index is more evident, strongly supporting H1.

The research also expected to find that government leaders are more likely to employ an illiberal language style when communicating with a local audience while avoiding the use of illiberal terms when addressing an international audience (H2). Comparing the results of speech positioning of the leaders for national and international audiences, mixed messaging can be found in both types of speeches. Even in speeches given to an international audience, one cannot state that leaders refrained solely from using illiberal language. However, the pattern of speech positioning addressed to the national audience certainly indicates that heads of the government were utilizing each year quite a mixed messaging with an increasing tendency to use illiberal terms. The overall trend exhibited in the speeches addressed to the local audience supports the H2. The analysis indicated that throughout the years PMs were integrating more illiberal terms however still used both terms and were not distinctly far from neutral (0) point since 2016.

While the speeches addressed to the international audience revealed that the language was predominantly liberal and compared to speeches delivered to the national audience, in none of the years it exhibited leaning towards the illiberal spectrum of the scale, the leaders still applied mixed messaging and did not entirely eschew from utilizing the illiberal language. Therefore, the H2 – the government leaders are more likely to employ an illiberal language style when communicating with a local audience while avoiding the use of illiberal terms when addressing an international audience – is partly supported.

When discussing both results in comparison several additional distinctions should further be made. Firstly, on average, the liberal terms used exceeded when communicating with the international public more than that of the national one. Without any exception, speeches given for international audiences were more filled with liberal terms rhetoric rather than ones for

national audiences. The frequencies in the use of illiberal terms on average varied. Some years showed similar patterns of applying illiberal terms, especially in the beginning period of the study from 2016 to 2020. The difference in illiberal terms is quite noticeable from 2022 and 2023, when in speeches for the national audience illiberal terms were exceeding the liberal ones. However, speeches for foreign audiences did not reveal such patterns and stayed relatively similar to other years. In that regard, the hypothesis is partly proved, as speeches for international audience exhibit a relatively balanced nature. Public speeches from none of the years addressed to national audiences are positioned more liberal than those found in speeches addressed to the international audience. At the same time, higher utilization of illiberal terms was observed.

The findings suggest that while communicating with different audience government leaders applied various language terms. Part of these differences can be attributed to the nature of speeches specific to national and international audiences, with possibly more focus on national issues, including civic rights for local audiences. However, it still raises the question of whether these discrepancies are influenced by Western conditionality or if other factors are at play, prompting potential avenues for future research.

## 7. Term Frequency Analysis

The top three most mentioned liberal terms in the speeches, found in collective analysis of the speeches for both national and international public, were: ‘rights’, ‘free’, and ‘freedom’. Notably, terms associated with liberal language that relate to civil rights have been found to be used the least among other terms. For instance, terms like ‘inclusion’, ‘liberal’, ‘women’, ‘minorities’ ‘diversity’, ‘gender’, etc. were mentioned less than 25 times a year. The difference is quite high with terms as ‘rights’, ‘free’, ‘freedom’, ‘injustice’, ‘transparency’ etc. which were mentioned more than 100 - 300 times. Moreover, when leaders referred to ‘rights’, they mostly applied the term to human rights in a broad sense, without explicitly mentioning the rights of specific groups that were also part of the dictionary but did not happen to fall amongst the most frequently used terms. The term

frequencies in speeches can also serve as a clear indication of the priorities that the Prime Minister, at the very least, aims

**Figure 8 Frequently Used Liberal Terms**



### Figure 8 Frequently Used Liberal Terms

to promote, focusing more broadly on democratic norms rather than liberal values. These findings align with the previously identified pattern by Maerz (2019) that characterizes leaders in hegemonic authoritarian regimes, who employ language emphasizing democratic norms but refrain from outlining liberal values. As analysis indicates, the heads of Government in the Georgian case also shared similar characteristics in their language use. The words that come up as the most frequently used ones every year are similar to each other. The exceptions are such as election years (2016 and 2020) where the terms ‘vote’, voting, and ‘choice’ have been used more frequently, which was out of the ordinary pattern. Throughout all the other years the

terms used were quite consistent, prompting further inquiry into potential patterns of public political campaign strategies employed by the leaders.

When analyzing the most frequently terms expressed in speeches according to different audiences, the terms revealed similar patterns. In both types of speeches, the terms ‘free’, ‘rights’, ‘freedom’, and ‘choice’ were among the most frequently used ones. The least frequent liberal terms were those associated with keywords indicating values of equality and diversity, even when analyzed separately in speeches addressed to international and local audiences.

In sum, liberal terms used had a repeatable nature throughout the years both in national and international audience-oriented speeches. Most of them were of broad character indicating democratic norms. This supports the H3: When applying liberal style language, Prime Ministers in Georgia underline more democratic norms rather than liberal values.

The study also explored the most frequently used illiberal terms. Terms ‘police’, ‘homeland’, and ‘honor’ in speeches addressed to the national audience and ‘proud’, ‘honor’, and ‘pride’ for the international audience were found to be repeated most frequently across the years. All other terms varied in their use in total counting each of them as less than 16 times. This infrequent usage indicates that they are less influential for any meaningful trend analysis based on their occurrence. Both observations suggest that the



Figure 9 Frequently Used Illiberal Terms



leaders were emphasizing a sense of authority, national pride, and dignity. Such discourse style is categorized as illiberal and is commonly associated with leaders exhibiting autocratic tendencies (Maerz and Schneider, 2019) and used for regime legitimization while undermining democratic development (Bennet and Kneuer 2023).

When analyzing the most frequently used terms from the dictionaries combining liberal and illiberal terms, the study finds that throughout the years the language of Prime Ministers has been utilizing both types of terms. Once again, it should be mentioned that among the top 20 most frequently used words, none are explicitly associated with civil liberties.

**Table 2 Top 20 Used Terms and Their Frequencies (Liberal and Illiberal)**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
rights	361
police	337
freedom	328
homeland	238
free	227
tradition*	212
injustice	179
choice	178
proud	154
honor	128
transparen*	126
vote*	111
pride	98
fair	95
soldier*	86
corrupt*	59
patriot*	18
ancestors	54
equal	50
sisters	39

Certainly, making definitive conclusions regarding the preferences of Prime Ministers in those years calls for qualitative discourse analysis of the texts but relying on frequency analysis

along with identifying words with which most of the terms have been attributed, one can state that most of the liberal terms were mentioned in general regarding democratic standards, rather than values intrinsic to liberal democracies, those that are promoting inclusiveness and pluralism. The absence of frequently used keywords associated with individual liberty rights in every studied year suggests that the incorporated liberal discourse may deliberately lack a substantive character. Moreover, when analyzing text per year some intriguing findings may emerge – the domination of certain terms in the discourse – illustrating the official agenda of the political party and probably indicating that these issues will be of paramount importance during their tenure. For instance, there was a sharp rise in the keyword use of ‘police’ starting in 2019 when communicating with a national audience. Notably, the keyword ‘patriot’, which was one of the most frequently used in speeches during 2022 and 2023, was not once mentioned before the years previous to that. Such intricacies could potentially reveal other noteworthy insights; however, exploring the nuances exceeds the scope of the current research.

Further analysis of the shifts in language style discussed within specific political contexts unveils additional findings, shedding light on the evolving nature of language use over the years and its variation among different Prime Ministers. These findings will be explored in detail in the subsequent chapter.

## 8. Potential Ideological Shifts According to the Authors of the Speeches

Observing the liberal and illiberal terms used by the Prime Ministers in Georgia during the studied period reveals certain trends in shifts in the positioning according to years. Given that the study focuses on not just one leader but four different ones, considering the changes in leadership during this period, specific language attributions may also have been influenced by these transitions. This calls for more close observation. Even though all the Prime Ministers whose speeches were analyzed represent the same political party, it might be relevant to distinguish between the language used by specific speakers to identify one of the possible reasonings to the shifts. Naturally, alongside the official stance and positioning of the political party, individual personas might play a role in determining their stances. Alternatively, it could indicate that during a specific Prime Minister's leadership period, the party had different policy preferences or public communication strategies. This inquiry also derives upon the V-dem's score of the ideology of the governments, assessing to what extent the government promotes specific ideology for regime justification (V-dem Institute 2019). In the studied period it seems like the ideological component for Georgia has increased since 2016 and reached the highest during 2023. In total, it increased from 0.69 to 0.99 and was the lowest during 2021. The measure of the ideology is generally applied to promoting a specific ideology to enhance their

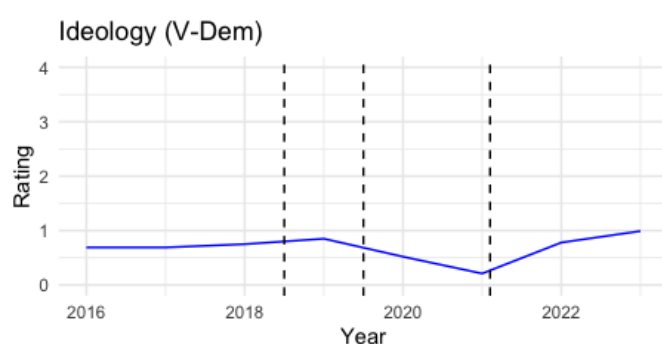


Figure 10 V-Dem Ideology Score, Georgia

legitimacy such as nationalist, socialist or communist, conservative restorative separatist or autonomist; religious – answers are not mutually exclusive (V-dem Institute 2019).



**Figure 11 Positioning of the Speeches According to the PMs**

The trends and shifts in V-dem's ideological score roughly align with changes in the Prime Ministers. During the period relevant to the study, Prime Ministers changed from 2018 to 2019, from 2019 to 2021, and again from 2021 until the end of the study period in 2023. As V-dem emphasizes the role of government appeals to ideology and as it closely follows changes in the government leadership, it calls for the analysis of the public discourse terms also according to leaders. Using liberal/illiberal terms does not necessarily translate into ideological preferences, however, the terms used do offer some insights into potentially ideologized speeches.

The results of the speeches (both national and international) positioning revealed that during the 2018-2019 years while in the office was the PM Mamuka Bakhtadze in Georgia, the terms applied in public speeches were mixed, with the larger discrepancy between the two types of terms in 2018 with more emphasis on liberal discourse. During the next year, there was an increase in usage of both liberal and illiberal terms. Hence, the positioning of speeches from 2018-2019 was relatively similar. This tendency aligns with the ideological pattern found on the V-dem ideological score.

From 2019 until 2021, there was serving a new PM, Giorgi Gakharia. During this period there is a gradual increase in the use of more illiberal discourse and the difference between liberal and illiberal terms decreases and the language style is close to being balanced. In this

case, the ideological component illustrates a slight decrease in the use of specific ideology, so the trends do not completely align in this timeframe. However, the use of illiberal language was at its highest frequency in 2022, with only a slight decrease in 2023. Hence, the years since 2021 are characterized by a greater shift towards illiberal language than ever before. These were the years of the again new prime minister – Irakli Garibashvili. The same pattern is visible on the ideological scale, with the rise and notably, the ideology score being the highest from 2022 onward, the period when the illiberal terms were most frequently found in speeches since 2016.

Public discourse and political language reflect the reality of the political system and ideology (Edelman, 1985, 10-19), discussing the results of the terms identified within the ideological component of the government adds value to the analysis. It also explores whether, alongside the liberal index score as observed previously, public language also indicates the extent to which the studied actor or government is ideological. The analysis revealed parallels between periods characterized by a strong inclination towards illiberal language and the highest levels of ideological alignment within the government. Expanding this result into a more detailed analysis might further reveal new findings. At the same time, one needs to note that it has to be contextualized in a broader political context, researching the existing governmental stance during the specific periods, the influence of PMs, reasons for changes of the PMs, etc. At the very least, the text analysis identified consistent patterns during the same PM rulership which also apparently corresponds with the perceived level of ideological reliance by the government to justify their rule. Exploring the potential existence of ideological differences in public speeches as well can serve as a starting point for future inquiries, in case of interest.

## 9. Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While dictionary-based quantitative text analysis provides an opportunity to analyze the frequency of terms and provides a broad picture, it does not fully capture the nuances of political discourse. There are a number of drawbacks why the method presented in the research might not completely answer the research question posed in the paper, regarding the correlation between the leaders' positioning and changes in the democracy index and the styles used.

Utilizing an already existing dictionary might miss out on insights specific to the country. While it helps to identify broad trends a more scrutinized analysis may require a country-specific dictionary. Moreover, dictionary-based quantitative text analysis relies solely on the terms found in speeches and frequency counts. However, some terms that may indicate significant ideological shifts or alarming policies might not appear frequently enough to influence the overall trends. Therefore, term frequency alone is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding and should be combined with other methods. For instance, in the research given, although rare, the appearance of radically different terms like 'anarchy' or 'evil' could be significant. Their infrequent use means they might not impact overall term frequencies but could still indicate alarming trends that call for closer examination. Future research could develop methods to identify and analyze such alarm indicators more effectively. Furthermore, terms can have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used, and they might be redefined to serve contrary purposes. Such redefinitions can distort the analysis if not carefully considered. Therefore, complementing quantitative analysis with qualitative one would strongly enhance the search.

The provided study focuses exclusively on speeches by Prime Ministers available on the government website. This selection avoids potential bias from media sources but may miss

additional nuances provided in shorter comments or speeches covered by media outlets. Furthermore, Prime Ministers often employ more diplomatic language, which might not fully represent the government's broader public campaign strategies or the rhetoric used by other influential politicians. Therefore, to comprehensively capture shifts in the party's political discourse, it would be beneficial to study the speeches of additional prominent party representatives.

Provided results of the study are country-specific and may not align with other tendencies in other hybrid regimes, even if they share similar patterns of using increasingly mixed messaging with liberal and illiberal terms. At the same time, they may still offer valuable insights into broader patterns of leadership behavior and potential strategies in public discourse within hybrid regimes.

Future research could benefit from incorporating critical discourse analysis to delve deeper into the context and implications of the terms used. This would also provide a more nuanced understanding of how language shapes and reflects certain political positions and preferences. At the same time, beyond dictionary-based methods, future studies could explore the ideological dimensions of language (Dinas and Gemenis 2014, Diaz and Hall 2020). This approach would help to identify the underlying ideologies expressed through public speeches and other forms of communication.

An interesting addition for future research would also be to analyze how public positioning of terms in speeches aligns with political manifestos and proclaimed goals or policy decisions. This could involve identifying the ideologies of politicians based on their public speeches and comparing them with their stated objectives. Another intriguing research question is whether shifts in public discourse reflect changes in public opinion and concerns or whether leaders are attempting to set new narratives to influence public opinion (Maerz and Schneider 2019). This could be explored by comparing public discourse with public opinion data over time.

Moreover, studying shifts in public positioning along with the use of propaganda techniques and information campaigns could provide a comprehensive picture of whether the narratives circumventing in other sources are being reflected in public speeches and if so, at what point this alignment begins to occur. In the cases when certain alarming terms identified in other influence operations begin to appear in public speeches, it could suggest that the groundwork has been laid for officials to present these narratives publicly. Therefore, analyzing public speeches along with mass information campaigns could reveal additional insights into how language is used to shape public opinion and advance political agendas. This would entail examining the methods and strategies employed to influence public perception and behavior.

It would be particularly relevant to examine whether governments, especially newly-formed democracies that are often dependent on other democracies, are following certain trends arising worldwide and if the terms used in their speeches are being diffused from their democratic or autocratic-prone counterparts. Conducting comparative studies with other hybrid regimes in a particular timeframe could provide insights into how international political contexts influence the use of political language.

By incorporating speech analysis into identifying regime types along with pursuing potential areas of future research, scholars can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the use of language in transitional regimes and its implications for democratic consolidation.



## 10. Conclusion

The study derived from the shared notion that political discourse does not exist in isolation from politics. Public statements, even if they are façade, portray the political strategies of the officials. Therefore, language can be seen as a significant tool for bolstering democratic principles or undermining them. The paper aimed to explore the language dynamic in the hybrid regime context in Georgia, specifically focusing on detecting leaders' public commitments to promoting liberal values versus overemphasizing narratives associated with autocratic language styles – nationalistic and paternalistic.

The study collected and analyzed 1492 speeches delivered by the Prime Ministers of Georgia between 2016 and 2023. Exploring language shifts timeline amongst the changes in the democracy index, the study finds that generally, speeches and index exhibited similar decreasing tendency, shifting towards illiberalism. At the same time, the trends were not always consistent with each other. Notably, the changes in speech positioning began earlier with a sharper decline towards illiberalism than the liberal democracy index score, as evaluated by the V-Dem. This reinstates the potential of timely detecting alarming trends via speech analysis. Despite some irregularities in certain years, the overall trend suggests that in the case of Georgia, leaders' speeches reflect the values that are also mirrored in the regime's transformation. Hence, the public positioning of the government leaders could be used as an indication of their commitments and possibly, attempts to shape the particular state of the regime.

The use of liberal/illiberal terms in the speeches varied depending on the target audience. Considering Georgia's strategic aspirations, it was expected that the leaders would be

contained by Western expectations and would use different language when communicating with the international or local public. The analysis revealed a discrepancy: speeches directed at international audiences leaned more towards the use of liberal terms, whereas national speeches showed a tendency to shift towards the illiberal spectrum, with an increased use of illiberal terms from 2021 onwards. Although speeches addressed to international audiences were not entirely free of illiberal terms, the language was more balanced compared to that used in speeches addressed to local audiences.

The exploration of the main keywords used associated with the liberal and illiberal terms revealed, that throughout the studied years all the Prime Ministers predominantly have been outlining general democratic principles rather than liberal democratic ideals. The finding supported the hypothesis and aligned with the characteristics of leaders in hegemonic authoritarian states, which refrain from emphasizing explicit liberal values while mentioning democratic norms (Maerz 2019). Additionally, the analysis of illiberal terms illustrated that these were mostly used to advocate for national pride. Refraining from outlining values intrinsic to liberal democracies, the speeches of the government leaders demonstrated a lack of promotion of these principles and perhaps, a departure from them.

As an example of the party that has been in the government for an extended period of time, while the country maintained its hybrid regime status with no significant improvement and even a decline in the liberal democracy index score, speech analyses served as an important additional indicator to evaluate the leaders' role and their public commitments towards toward consolidating democracy and strengthening liberal democratic values. The results reveal the leaders' public positioning and the terms used aligned with the decrease in the liberal democracy index, indicating that even in their public statements, leaders chose terms consistent

with a hybrid regime rather than a liberal democratic one. Moreover, speech analysis demonstrated its effectiveness in detecting language shifts varying by authors and suggested, it could prompt additional findings for future studies. The study findings underscore the advantage of integrating speech analysis to promptly identify periods of regime type changes, particularly shifts in leadership positioning, and potentially forecast future trends before illiberal language is reflected in institutional-level changes. While the case of Georgia cannot be fully generalized to other hybrid states, it represents an addition to the study of the type of languages leaders in various regimes utilize.

Overall, the study identified significant shifts in used language style since 2016 and demonstrated that integrating speech analysis can reveal worthwhile findings in a timely manner. However, it also calls for more scrutinized analysis, including the customization of dictionary terms according to context and incorporation of qualitative discourse analysis. Political language analysis on a temporal scale illustrates nuanced shifts in public positioning and opens areas for future research. In cases, it might lead to inquiries not considered before, such as identifying regime legitimization strategies or examining the emergence of new terms and the reason for their prevalence in certain periods of time, local and international contexts, and other influencing factors.

As researchers examine how leaders' language can significantly impact non-democratic settings and contribute to democratic erosion (Bennet and Kneuer 2023), the paper's findings reinforce the importance of studying public discourse for a comprehensive regime analysis. The findings revealed insights into leadership's diverging public commitments from liberal democratic values and offered new areas of research. Even if officials attempt to obscure their true intentions and rely on other covert techniques, their official positioning remains crucial for the public and electors. Therefore, if leaders' public positioning indicates certain shifts or

a lack of emphasis on values significant for liberal democracies, it should serve as an indication of deliberate reasoning behind it. Supplementing the analysis of public speeches with other conventional methods can enhance understanding of the regime's state, trajectory, and the role and potential intentions of its leadership.

## Appendix

*R Code: Dictionary-Based Quantitative Text Analysis (Maerz and Schneider, 2019,  
Benoit et al. 2024, Reference Manual 2024)*

Nino Gvilia

2024-06-06

```
# load packages

library(quanteda)
library(ggplot2)
library(readtext)
library(tm)

#read the doc

twenty_three_int <- readtext("/Users/ninigvilia/Desktop/2023 Foreign Statement
s.docx")

#to lower case

twenty_three_int <- tolower(twenty_three_int)
head(twenty_three_int)

#remove punctuations

twenty_three_int <- removePunctuation(twenty_three_int)
head(twenty_three_int)

#Now the text is in lower case without punctuations

#create tokens and remove collocations

tokens_twenty_three_int <- tokens(twenty_three_int)

# Identify multi-word expressions to remove

multi_word_expressions <- c('book fair','visa free', 'free trade','for free',
'freedom house', 'economic freedom', 'visa liberalization', 'transparency inte
rnational', 'great honor', 'my honor', 'honor to', 'an honor', 'an honour',
'great honour', 'justice project')

#use tokens compound to remove

toks_comp <- tokens_compound(toks, pattern = phrase(multi_word_expressions))

#clean tokens from identified expressions

cleaned_twenty_three_int <- tokens_remove(twenty_three_int, compound_tokens)
```

```

head(cleaned_twenty_three_int)

#load dictionaries
#in my case I had them in a .txt format

liberal_dictionary <- readLines("/Users/ninigvilia/Desktop/Liberal.txt")
illiberal_dictionary <- readLines("/Users/ninigvilia/Desktop/illiberal.txt")

#adding wildcards to identify from dictionary

liberal_with_wildcards <- tokens_select(cleaned_twenty_three_int, pattern = liberal_dictionary, valuetype = "glob", case_insensitive = TRUE)

illiberal_with_wildcards <- tokens_select(cleaned_twenty_three_int, pattern = illiberal_dictionary, valuetype = "glob", case_insensitive = TRUE)

#Creating DFMs

dfm_liberal <- dfm(liberal_with_wildcards)
dfm_illiberal <- dfm(illiberal_with_wildcards)

word_counts_dfm_liberal <- colSums(dfm_liberal)
word_counts_dfm_illiberal <- colSums(dfm_illiberal)

Sumword_counts_dfm_liberal <- sum(word_counts_dfm_liberal)
Sumword_counts_dfm_illiberal <- sum(word_counts_dfm_illiberal)

#find positioning of the speeches

positioning_twentythree_int <- log(Sumword_counts_dfm_liberal + 0.5) / (Sumword_counts_dfm_illiberal + 0.5)

#calculate confidence intervals (95%)

# Calculate 95% confidence intervals
lower_bound <- positioning_twentythree_int - 1.96 * sigma
upper_bound <- positioning_twentythree_int + 1.96 * sigma

```

*Dictionary Terms (Maerz and Schneider 2019)*

<b>Illiberalism</b>	<b>Liberalism</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allah</li> <li>• almighty</li> <li>• anarch*</li> <li>• chaos</li> <li>• christ</li> <li>• christianity</li> <li>• christians</li> <li>• church</li> <li>• danger*</li> <li>• destabili*</li> <li>• evil</li> <li>• father*</li> <li>• god</li> <li>• hero*</li> <li>• homeland</li> <li>• illegal*</li> <li>• immigra*</li> <li>• invincible</li> <li>• islam</li> <li>• jesus</li> <li>• migrant*</li> <li>• migration*</li> <li>• militar*</li> <li>• minaret</li> <li>• motherland</li> <li>• muslim*</li> <li>• negative</li> <li>• patriot*</li> <li>• police</li> <li>• pride</li> <li>• prison*</li> <li>• proud</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• authoritarian*</li> <li>• autocra*</li> <li>• choice</li> <li>• corrupt*</li> <li>• cruel*</li> <li>• demilitarization</li> <li>• dictator*</li> <li>• disarmament</li> <li>• discriminat*</li> <li>• diverse</li> <li>• diversity</li> <li>• equal</li> <li>• fair*</li> <li>• fascism</li> <li>• free</li> <li>• freedom</li> <li>• harassment</li> <li>• holistic</li> <li>• inclusion</li> <li>• inclusiv*</li> <li>• innocent</li> <li>• interfaith</li> <li>• interreligious</li> <li>• liberal*</li> <li>• mediat*</li> <li>• multicult*</li> <li>• negotiation*</li> <li>• oppression</li> <li>• pluralis*</li> <li>• referendum</li> <li>• repressi</li> <li>• sex*</li> </ul>

- |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| • rebell*     | • suppression |
| • religi*     | • transparen* |
| • riot        | • violat*     |
| • separatist  | • voluntary   |
| • soldier*    | • vote*       |
| • spiritual   | • voting      |
| • stabil*     | • dialect*    |
| • subversive  | • ethni*      |
| • territory   | • gay*        |
| • uniqueness  | • gender      |
| • unity       | • genocide    |
| • unlawful    | • girls       |
| • ancestors   | • handicapped |
| • brothers    | • harmon*     |
| • discipline  | • indigenous  |
| • family*     | • injustice*  |
| • forefather  | • intolerance |
| • glories     | • justice     |
| • glorious    | • lesbian*    |
| • heritage    | • lgbt        |
| • honor       | • marginalize |
| • honour      | • minorities  |
| • inherit*    | • multiethnic |
| • jubilee*    | • queer*      |
| • loyalty     | • racist*     |
| • majesty     | • rights      |
| • monarch*    | • sisters     |
| • moral       | • solidarity  |
| • obscen*     | • transgender |
| • pervert*    | • unfair*     |
| • pornograph* | • voice*      |
| • principle   | • woman       |
| • recapture*  | • women       |
| • reliab*     |               |
| • shameful    |               |
| • tradition*  |               |



## Term Frequencies

### Liberal Terms found in Speeches addressed to National Audience

	SUM local	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
rights	277	41	41	57	60	26	21	24	7
freedom	226	31	41	39	17	62	15	10	11
justice	171	24	17	22	47	29	11	3	18
free	162	28	11	31	27	16	13	14	22
transparen*	126	19	18	15	15	20	11	8	20
vote*	110		3	11	52		22	8	14
choice*	106	2	11	9	12	37	28	1	6
fair	95	10	12	21	33	9	4	2	4
solidarity	67	4	22	5	6	9	16	3	2
corrupt*	54	34	16					4	
equal	39	4	4	8	8	9	3	2	1
sisters	33	7	12	8		2		2	2
fascism	19	6	5	4	4				
voting	19	1		1	3	5	1	2	6
unfair*	16	5	6			2	2		1
diverse	16		2	2	3	7		2	

									10
negotiation	16					6			
women	15	8	5	2					
voice*	15	2		5		7		1	
diversity	13	1	1	4	1	6			
referendum	12	4		1				7	
liberal*	9	3	2	1		3			
injustice	7	1	1				3	2	
minorities	7	1		3	3				
indigenous	6	4	1					1	
innocent	6	1				1			4
multiethnic	6	1	2	1			1	1	
authoritarian*	5	2	3						
gender	5			2		1	2		
inclusion	4			1		1		1	1
voluntary	4					4			
oppression	2	1		1	0				
intolerance	2		1		0				1
harassment	2					2			
woman	2						2		

### Liberal Terms found in Speeches addressed to International Audience

	<b>SUM</b>								
	<b>International</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2016</b>
rights	134	22	4	6	2	35	25	19	21
freedom	102	41	4	7	2	20	10	9	11
choice	72	16	10	9	1	18	10	1	7
free	65	10	4	4	4	7	6	8	22
fair	38	11	4	8		8	2	5	7
justice	29	4	5		2	4	8	4	2
solidarity	20	4	9	1			2	4	
negotiation*	18	5	5				8		
voice *	13	1	2	2		2	3	2	2
equal	11	2			1	2		1	5
liberal*	10	2						3	5
minorities	10	3	1	2		2		1	2
diverse	10	3	1				6		
unfair*	9	8	1						
inclusion	9	3				2	2	1	1
women	8	3		1		2	1	1	
sisters	6	2	1	1			1		1

corrupt*	5			5		
woman	4	4				
inclusion	4	2	1			1
gender	3				3	1
voluntary	3	1		2		
fascism	2	2				
referendum	2				1	1
voting	2	1				1
injustice	2	1		1		
holistic	2					2
indigenous	1	1				
vote*	1					2
lgbt	1	1				
suppression	1				1	
diversity						1

### Illiberal Terms found in Speeches addressed to National Audience

ILLIBERAL	SUM local	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
police	324	78	72	41	75	39	13	3	3
homeland	222	43	45	50	10	29	18	18	9
tradition*	127	18	23	11	4	44	18	5	4
honor	92	27	7	9	14	11	11	7	6
proud	86	18	9	11	7	19	12	6	4
soldier	85		34		13	10	14		14
brothers	81	19	17	19	8	5	3	6	4
pride	77	20	14	4	2	16	16	3	2
ancestors	42	6	8	8		10	8	1	1
patriot*	39	17	22						
prison*	38	20		7	10			1	
glorious	32	4	5	11	1	6	3	1	1
spiritual	29	13	6	4			3		3
loyalty	23	5	3	8		4	1	1	1
discipline	18		3		7	7	1		
evil	17	7	2	1	4	2		1	

shameful	16	6	8	2					
chaos	14	4	3	4	1	1		1	
motherland	14	3	3	2	1	1	1		3
unlawful	13	1	2	2			5	3	
christ	12	2	4	1	2	3			
uniqueness	9		3			5		1	
invincible	8	5	3						
christianity	5		4				1		
christians	5	1		3		1			
almighty	2	1	1						
jesus	2	1	1						
riot	2	1				1			
majesty	2		2						
honour	1						1		

### Illiberal Terms found in Speeches addressed to International Audience

ILLIBERAL		2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
tradition*	85	54	4	2		10	12	3	0
proud	68	14	9	9	1	12	8	5	10
honor	36	11	1	1		4	15	3	1
pride	21	5	1	1		3	7	3	1

homeland	16	6	1	1	4	4		
police	13		1	9			2	1
ancestors	12	5	2		3	2		
brothers	8	2	1	2	1	1		1
christianity	8	8						
uniqueness	7	3				1	3	
patriot	5					5		
loyalty	4	1				3		
unlawful	4			1		1	2	
majesty	4	3				1		
christ	2	2						
separatist	2		2					
honour	1							1
spiritual	1					1		
shameful	1						1	
invincible	1	1						
glorious	1	1						
chaos	1						1	
almighty	1	1						
jesus	1	1						
soldier	1						1	
inherit	1							1

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