Shifting Narratives:
Analyzing Georgian Dream's Authoritarian Turn Through Political Discourse

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Abstract

This exploratory research examines the authoritarian trajectory of Georgia under the ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD), by analyzing the evolution of its political discourse from the party's founding in 2012 through 2024. While existing research on autocratization largely focuses on institutional malfunctions, this thesis argues and demonstrates through empirical findings that rhetorical shifts offer an equally critical and complementary lens for understanding regime change. Drawing on a single-case qualitative design, the study explores the ideational dimension of GD's rhetoric, with a focus on its three leaders: the party's founder, Bidzina Ivanishvili, former Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, and current Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze.

Using Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and coding of 192 speeches and statements, the research traces a clear shift from liberal-democratic to increasingly illiberal narratives. The empirical analysis combines thematic and actor-centric approaches to reveal how rhetorical strategies evolved over time, including the coexistence of liberal and illiberal elements and the rationale behind these contradictions. The findings show that shifts in political language not only reflect but often precede regime change. Overall, the study underscores the importance of discourse as an early indicator of authoritarian consolidation.

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1 Introduction

As the world witnesses a global wave of democratic subversion - also referred to as the third wave of autocratization (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019) - political scientists seek to capture this phenomenon by developing new conceptual frameworks and analyzing dysfunctional institutional performance that undermines liberal democratic norms and rules. However, scholarly interest remains largely focused on institutions, rarely placing discourse at the center of regime change analysis. Furthermore, existing democracy metrics exacerbate this gap by emphasizing formal institutions while overlooking the role of political rhetoric in regime transition (Dawson, 2018; Omelicheva, 2016; Schmidt, 2008).

To address the growing need to examine discourse in the study of autocratization, scholars have increasingly emphasized the significance of both how and what political actors communicate. Empirical findings suggest that the nature and function of public discourse differ structurally between democracies and autocracies: democracies exhibit more pluralism and debate, while autocracies tend to feature controlled and instrumental communication. Moreover, authoritarian leaders use discourse to redefine what constitutes legitimate governance and gradually erode democratic norms. Therefore, discursive practices do not merely reflect political reality but actively produce it (Finlayson & Martin, 2008; Martin, 2014; Schedler, 2023; Schmidt, 2008; Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2015).

The increasing volume of research argues that substantial shifts toward illiberal rhetoric can be early indicators of gradual regime transformations (Drinóczi, 2022; Maerz & Schneider, 2021, 2020; Martin, 2014, 2022; Omelicheva, 2016). Drawing on political leaders' speeches from several countries and positioning them along a [il]liberalness scale, Maerz and Schneider demonstrate that two discursive dimensions - infringing on autonomy and sabotaging accountability - are consistently present in cases of democratic decline. Public rhetoric, they

argue, serves as a "harbinger of change (soon) to come" (2020, p. 537). Accordingly, they advocate for analyzing the nature of political rhetoric - whether it is [il]liberal or authoritarian - and for more fully integrating discourse analysis into the study of political regimes.

Despite these valuable efforts, most research remains quantitative, raising context-specific questions when applied to emerging autocracies. To fill this theoretical and empirical gap, incorporating qualitative analysis is essential - not only to uncover the meanings and intentions embedded in political rhetoric but also to trace the evolution of ideational shifts that may precede institutional change.

To achieve the aforementioned qualitative goals, this research presents a single case study of Georgia and its authoritarian trajectory under the current ruling party (2012-present), Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia (GD). With its fourth consecutive victory in the parliamentary elections in October 2024, Georgian Dream has become the longest-ruling party in the history of independent Georgia (since 1991). This prolonged incumbency has allowed GD to gradually consolidate power, limit democratic oversight, and shift its rhetoric from defending liberal democracy and Western values to embracing increasingly illiberal narratives.

Unlike abrupt regime shifts, GD's rule illustrates a case of slow autocratization, where democratic backsliding occurs through incremental changes in law, media control, and institutional capture - all under the guise of electoral legitimacy. Notably, for the first time during GD's rule, Georgia was classified as an electoral autocracy in the 2025 report by the most comprehensive democracy measurement project, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (Nord et al., 2025).

Using a single case study primarily focused on political discourse, this exploratory study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ideological evolution of GD's rhetoric and its possible connection to regime change. Georgia represents a typical unit of analysis, as it exemplifies a broader trend among today's autocracies in which regime change

and subtle assaults on democracy are carried out through the gradual erosion of democratic norms and institutions by elected incumbents (Bermeo, 2016; Diamond, 2021; Guriev & Treisman, 2022; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Schedler, 2023). The strategic, often covert undermining of democratic principles by elected political elites highlights the need to revise the regime analysis toolkit - shifting attention to what incumbents say, do, and even learn from one another in comparative perspective.

Due to its exploratory nature, the study does not test formal hypotheses but advances one central proposition: that incorporating discourse analysis into the study of regime types and their transition may offer a complementary and more sophisticated analytical toolkit. This presumption is grounded in a preliminary observation that inspired the thesis - namely, that the political rhetoric of GD's leading figures began to shift noticeably prior to the party's attack on liberal democratic practices and norms. Yet without a careful examination of how their worldview has been reshaped and whether it aligns with political developments, this observation remains superficial.

By systematically analyzing political discourse across different phases of GD's rule, this research uncovers the calibration of shifting narratives in relation to regime change. Examining speeches by the party's founder, Bidzina Ivanishvili, former Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili (2013-15, 2021-2024), and current Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze (2024 - present) - spanning from GD's founding in 2012 to 2024 - this study analyzes how these rhetorical patterns evolved over time, rather than merely reacting to recent political crises. This longitudinal approach allows to assess whether illiberal rhetoric has remained consistent or escalated over time.

The research is important for several reasons. First, its methodological contribution lies in observing regime change through discourse analysis, a relatively novel approach. In doing so, it offers a flexible but rigorous analytical lens that can be applied across contexts and

compared to other cases, allowing scholars to move beyond static regime classifications toward more dynamic, discursive models of political transition. Second, on a theoretical level, this study contributes to ongoing debates on how we conceptualize and define illiberalism, autocratization, and their intersection (Enyedi, 2024a; Waller, 2024a, 2024b).

While a single-case study provides limited scope for generalization, it can still engage with two pressing questions: 1. Can we go against Laruelle's well-known proposition and allow illiberalism to "travel" to cases that never experienced liberalism? (Laruelle, 2022) 2. How can we conceptually understand subversion in countries like Georgia, which never achieved full-fledged democracy, and how can we avoid the conceptual confusion caused by labeling them as "backsliders"?

For the first question, like Enyedi, I find Laruelle's restriction unnecessarily limiting (2024a, p. 3). I argue that it is in the best interest of illiberalism studies to identify illiberal symptoms wherever they can be found. While it is true that this approach may further complicate efforts to conceptualize and demarcate the boundaries of illiberalism, omitting cases that demonstrably exhibit illiberal ideas and practices seems unjustified. Including cases like Georgia in the ongoing debate would ultimately enrich the theoretical corpus by helping us understand how illiberalism - a thin and context-sensitive ideology - is translated and practiced across different countries and regimes.

For the second question, I agree with the scholarly concern regarding the use of terms that imply a regression from liberal democracy in contexts where such democracy has never truly existed (Cassani & Tomini, 2020; Levitsky & Way, 2002; Tomini, 2024; Wilson et al., 2024). To address this issue, I propose using the term autocratization. It is more neutral than some recent alternatives and, at the same time, more comprehensive, as it "covers both sudden breakdowns of democracy and gradual processes within and outside of democratic regimes

where democratic traits decline, resulting in less democratic, or more autocratic, situations" (Wilson et al., 2024, p. 546).

Finally, by marrying theoretical reflection and empirical findings, this study expands the scope for examining the ideational dimensions of non-[liberal] democracies. It proposes a new route to illiberalism: communitarian illiberalism, a regime logic that emphasizes traditional communal values, moral homogeneity, and the preservation of national identity as justifications for undermining liberal norms.

The thesis is structured as follows. **Chapter 2** reviews the core literature on autocratization, illiberalism, and political discourse, and develops the theoretical framework. **Chapter 3** outlines the research design, detailing the single-case study approach, the use of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), the data collection and sampling process, and the coding strategy. It also introduces an experimental component involving AI-assisted scoring to complement manual qualitative analysis. **Chapter 4** presents the empirical findings in five parts: it begins with thematic analysis of key discursive frames, followed by an exploration of rhetorical contradictions, an actor-centric comparison of the party's leaders, a comparison with international democracy indices, and concludes with AI-assisted discourse scoring. **Chapter 5** discusses the implications of the findings within broader theoretical debates and concludes the study with final reflections.

2 Literature Review and Theory

This chapter reviews the core literature and develops the theoretical framework for analyzing regime change, with particular attention to its conceptual and ideational dimensions. It focuses on three interrelated elements: autocratization, illiberalism, and political discourse. First, it explores existing conceptualizations of democratic decline, emphasizing its incremental nature and the range of theoretical perspectives that capture its dynamics. Second, it examines scholarly debates surrounding illiberalism - an umbrella term that encompasses both ideological content and political practice - highlighting the need for definitional clarity. Finally, the chapter introduces political discourse analysis as the methodological and analytical lens through which this thesis examines the ideational foundations of autocratization, especially as they manifest in the Georgian context.

2.1 Democratic Decline and Autocratization

Over the past two decades, a growing body of research has documented the erosion of democratic norms and institutions across diverse political contexts. Rather than collapsing abruptly through coups or revolutions, many democracies have experienced a slower, more insidious process of decline (Diamond, 2021; Guriev & Treisman, 2022; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Schedler, 2024). Notably, some scholars contend that authoritarianism is intensifying even in countries that are already non-democratic - "the worst gets worse" (Walker, 2016, p. 52) - emphasizing that backsliding in such regimes warrants just as much attention as in democracies (Cassani & Tomini, 2020; Walker, 2016).

Scholars broadly agree that Francis Fukuyama's celebrated claim of the triumph of Western liberal democracy as the "end of history" has not withstood the test of time (Fukuyama, 1989). Liberal democracy - both as an ideology and a mode of governance - has faced significant setbacks and is no longer the predominant game in the 'European town.'

Nevertheless, some authors attempt to temper growing concerns, arguing that while

democratic backsliding is real, full regime breakdown remains rare, especially in affluent democracies (Brownlee & Miao, 2022; Levitsky & Way, 2024; Treisman, 2023). Others, however, adopt a more cautionary stance, contending that without a robust scholarly, political, and civil society response, even gradual erosions of democratic norms may accumulate into substantial regime change across the world (Diamond, 2015; Laebens & Lührmann, 2021; Nord et al., 2025).

One may indeed be hopeful and believe that democratic institutions - through checks and balances and strong foundations - could serve as the most resilient force against subversion and later recuperate. However - whether we belong to the camp of optimists or realists - numbers depicting regime change call out for our attention. According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) recent report, the level of democracy for the average world citizen is back to 1985, and for the first time in over 20 years, we have fewer democracies (N=88) than autocracies (N=91). The report further states that almost 40% of the world population (3.1 billion people) live in autocratizing countries, among which we can find Georgia (Nord et al., 2025).

These numbers are alarming, but another truth remains: the world has historically had far greater experience living under non-democratic regimes than democratic ones. Therefore, the post-Cold War agenda of establishing liberal democracy as the predominant form of governance and mode of living has always been, and still is, an experimental idea, one that now faces significant challenges.

The greatest scholarly and political uncertainty lies in the fact that today's agents of democratic subversion often gain power through legal means and then gradually - yet profoundly - erode democratic norms while preserving the formal architecture of democratic institutions. Rather than dismantling democracy outright, they hollow it out from within. Moreover, to justify these changes, incumbents frequently claim they are acting with the

people's permission (Diamond, 2021; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Kneuer, 2021; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019; Schedler, 2013).

Formal and strategic maintenance of relatively free and fair elections has given rise to two regime categorizations - electoral democracies and electoral autocracies. Schedler states that the borderline between those two categories is often blurred and controversial, but also suggests a fine line which focuses on elections as a marker, claiming that electoral democracies may fall short of liberal democratic standards - lacking robust checks and balances, bureaucratic independence, or an impartial judiciary - but they still uphold the core principle of conducting free and fair elections, which is absent in electoral autocracies (Schedler, 2013).

Another matter of discussion, beyond uncertainties regarding regime classifications and internal boundaries, lies in the attempt to conceptualize the process of democratic subversion. Cassani and Tomini compiled at least 17 terms used to describe transitions away from democracy, ranging from the widely cited democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016) to decay (Schedler, 1998), erosion (Plattner, 2014), and de-democratization (Tilly, 2003) (in Cassani & Tomini, 2020, p. 275).

Furthermore, the existence of regimes that belong neither strictly to liberal democracies nor to outright dictatorships has given rise to the concept of "democracy with adjectives" (Collier & Levitsky, 1997). In this vein, Madlovics and Magyar identified 11 such qualifiers - such as competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way, 2002), defective democracy (Merkel, 2004), delegative democracy (O'Donell, 1994) - to describe regimes that exhibit mixed or hybrid features (in Magyar & Madlovics, 2020, p. 6).

Simultaneously, Schedler outlined 18 terms for actors who undermine democracy, including "authoritarian politicians" (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), "autocrats" (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021), and "illiberal leaders" (García-Holgado & Pérez-Liñán, 2021) (in Schedler, 2024, pp. 23–24). While this rich conceptual landscape has advanced the understanding of

regime change, it also evokes a warning from Collier and Levitsky, who cautioned that "if research on democratization degenerates into a competition to see who can come up with the next famous concept, the comparative study of regimes will be in serious trouble" (1997, p. 451).

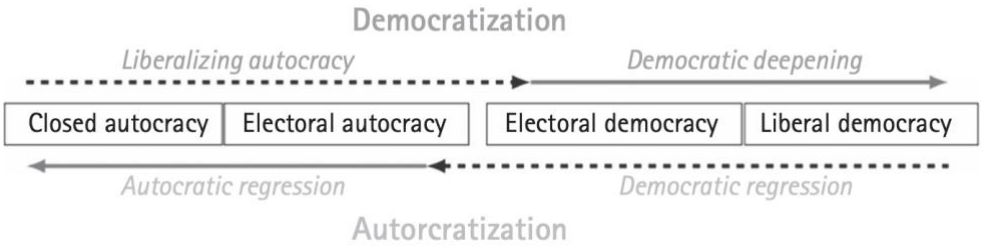
To avoid this conceptual overload and best capture the subversion occurring in our unit of analysis - Georgia under the current ruling party, Georgian Dream (GD) - it is necessary to scrutinize the country's regime classification. Georgia has never achieved the status of a liberal democracy. It was long categorized as an electoral democracy, but in V-Dem's most recent report, Georgia has been reclassified as an electoral autocracy (Nord et al., 2025). This raises a crucial question: how should we conceptualize regime-level transformations in countries that were never fully democratic and thus cannot logically be labeled as backsliders? This challenge, particularly relevant to post-Soviet states that experienced simultaneous waves of democratization and subsequent breakdowns, calls for a more inclusive concept.

For such cases, scholars consider autocratization the most appropriate term (Cassani & Tomini, 2020; Tomini, 2024; Wilson et al., 2024), a concept coined by Lindberg (2009). These authors argue that uncertainty can be resolved by adopting a spectrum-based approach: "any movement toward liberal democracy constitutes democratization, while any movement toward closed autocracy represents autocratization" (Wilson et al., 2024, p. 544). Moreover, the term is accurate because autocratization - like democratization - is a process, not a discrete event (Sato et al., 2022; Wunsch & Blanchard, 2023). In light of the tactics employed by today's democracy eroders, focusing on the processual nature of democratic decline rather than its endpoint proves far more analytically useful.

For illustrative purposes, Figure 1, adapted from Wilson et al. (2024, p. 547) and originally based on Maerz et al. (2021), visualizes the dual processes of democratization and autocratization along a spectrum of regime types. It highlights the critical threshold separating

democracies from autocracies. Movements toward full (liberal) democracy on the right side of the spectrum are classified as democratization - a broad concept encompassing episodes of sustained and significant enhancement of democratic institutions and practices. In contrast, transitions toward full (closed) autocracy on the left side represent autocratization, defined as periods marked by substantial and enduring deterioration in core democratic attributes.

Figure 1.Conceptual Spectrum of Regime Transformation



Autocratization typically unfolds through a set of identifiable and often incremental mechanisms. These include the manipulation of electoral laws, the curtailment of judicial independence, the concentration of executive power, control over the media and civil society, and the delegitimization or cooptation of political opponents (Bermeo, 2016; Gerschewski, 2013; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Sato et al., 2022; Scheppele, 2022) - all rooted in what Cassani and Tomini define as the "modification of the formal and informal institutions regulating political participation, public contestation, and executive limitation" (2020, p. 281).

Empirical findings by Nord et al. (2025) further reinforce these scholarly insights, identifying media censorship, followed by electoral manipulation and the undermining of civil society, as the most frequently used tools of autocratizers. These strategies are typically pursued under the guise of legality or reform, enabling incumbents - or, in Scheppele's terms, legalistic autocrats - to erode democracy without overt rupture (2018). This stealth character of modern autocratization complicates detection and underscores the need to analyze not only institutional manipulations and breakdowns but also the ideational dimension of regime change

(Enyedi, 2024b; Schedler, 2024) - most evidently expressed through political rhetoric (Martin, 2014).

2.2 Illiberalism and its Conceptualization

In the previous subchapter, I argued that the most accurate and least disruptive term chosen for Georgia from the regime change dictionary - provided by the so-called (de)democratization-with-adjectives literature - would be autocratization. Later, drawing on suggestions from the most recent studies, the subchapter concluded that for a more overarching understanding of regime transitions, it is equally necessary to go beyond institutional performance and consider their ideational dimension.

I agree with scholars who argue that the long-standing reluctance to engage with ideology-centered analyses is no longer justified (Enyedi, 2024b) and that the tendency to categorize political actors using predefined labels - without critically engaging with what they say and do - can hinder meaningful analysis of autocratization and the complex processes that precede and/or accompany it (Schedler, 2024). Therefore, one of the core assumptions of this thesis is that authoritarian leaders are not merely opportunists or driven solely by the allure of power; rather, they possess worldviews that may partially align with one another but are primarily shaped by context-specific and ideologically nuanced differences.

The briefest summary of the autocratization process, as previously discussed, would be to define it as any movement or inclination away from liberal democracy - marking closed autocracy as an extreme point, though not necessarily the final destination - along a spectrum of regime types. This process also entails a shift in the worldview and political orientation of the leaders driving these changes, who often adopt an alternative normative vision rooted in illiberal principles, rather than merely abandoning liberal ones. Illiberalism, in this sense, becomes not just the ideological consequence of institutional erosion, but a guiding framework that shapes how power is justified, exercised, and communicated.

Before moving on to conceptualizing illiberalism, three preparatory stances are necessary to clarify the discussion. First, this thesis adopts Enyedi's definition of ideology as "a set of interrelated ideas about socio-political structures and about the adequate human conduct toward these structures" (Enyedi, 2024b, p. 154). Second, ideologies are largely produced and reproduced through discourse; what discursively reveals ideologies are texts and/or spoken words, generated through the use of language (Van Dijk, 2006). Third, language is inherently intertwined with praxis: it is not merely descriptive but performative, often carrying the intention to enact or initiate change (Austin, 1975).

Following this chain of reasoning, we can conclude that treating illiberalism as an ideology necessarily encompasses a set of practices. In the landscape of political discourse-making, what is said tends to carry an inherent intention to be translated into practice. Whether or not this translation occurs depends on the socio-political context - some environments favor changes that are hinted at, ambiguously signaled, or explicitly promised through rhetoric, while others leave such words as unrealized statements, publicly uttered but never enacted.

Ongoing scholarly debates about how illiberalism should be treated and defined, bolstered by empirical observations of countries drifting away from liberal-democratic norms, suggest that illiberalism is indeed a mixture of ideology and practice (Kauth & King, 2020). To avoid overstretching the term, Kauth and King distinguish between *ideological illiberalism* - referring to coherent belief systems - and *disruptive illiberalism*, which denotes practices that challenge procedural democratic norms. Illiberal practices of incumbents fundamentally undermine democratic processes by stripping opponents of their liberties while maintaining the façade of respecting electoral procedures. In this sense, illiberalism fits within the broader pattern of the third wave of autocratization, but it is more than just an attack on opposition actors, their rights, and the maintenance of a democratic veneer.

The term illiberalism gained prominence following Fareed Zakaria's widely cited 1997

essay, *"The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,"* published in *Foreign Affairs*. Although Zakaria does not provide a precise definition, he focuses on "democratically elected regimes… [which] are routinely ignoring constitutional limits of their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms" (Zakaria, 1997, p. 22). He adopts a broad perspective, describing a variety of formerly autocratic, largely premodern regimes that transitioned to electoral politics but failed to establish modern liberal institutions. Pappas later referred to these pre-liberal, premodern, and often precapitalist regimes as **"**Zakarialands" (2024, p. 102).

In contrast to the illiberalism observed in these transitional regimes, today's illiberalism afflicts modern states that already possess established liberal institutions. The most prominent example is Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party. Notably, the term saw a resurgence in 2014 when Orbán openly declared his intention to build an "illiberal state," challenging the notion of liberal democracy as the default or a priori form of governance - especially within the EU (Juhász, 2014). Scholarly confusion stems less from the original Zakarialands than from this second group of regimes - so-called illiberal democracies like Hungary. To better understand this conceptual uncertainty, we must first finalize the definition of illiberalism.

Amid this ambiguity, Enyedi provides a more precise framework. He argues that illiberalism, as an umbrella concept, is defined by its opposition to three core liberal principles: limited power, a neutral state, and an open society. Reversely, "illiberalism is centered on power concentration, a partisan state, and a closed society" (Enyedi, 2024a, pp. 1–2). Due to its wide scope across different countries and regime types, illiberalism should be understood as a fluxional, context-dependent thin ideology. The latter, according to Laruelle, is a main mode of ideological production in the postmodern world - marked by fluidity and adaptability (2022). Despite this variability, different trajectories toward illiberalism share a common feature: "They all question some essential aspect of liberal democracy" (Enyedi, 2024a, p. 6).

To elevate the discussion to a higher level of ideological analysis, Laruelle argues that illiberalism is more than an intuitive label for ideologies and practices falling outside the liberal tradition. She suggests that this usage ignores the emergence of a post-liberal - or post-postmodern - era that follows the decline of postmodernism. While some scholars define illiberalism simply as the negation of liberalism (*ex negativo*), new critiques of liberal democracy propose a more affirmative interpretation. Authors in Laruelle's camp advocate for understanding illiberalism as a form of post-liberal ordering - not only opposed to liberalism but aiming to transcend it (Laruelle, 2022; Waller, 2024a, 2024b).

While this approach offers greater theoretical abstraction, it remains inherently limiting, as it confines illiberalism to countries that have experienced some form of liberalism. This thesis, however, argues that illiberalism should be permitted to travel analytically across cases, as "various features of liberal democracy can trigger a backlash in any corner of the world" (Enyedi, 2024a, p. 3). In doing so, it becomes a useful lens for understanding hybrid or authoritarian systems that, although not post-liberal in a temporal sense, still embody illiberal logic. Such an expanded view enables scholars to analyze the ideological content and performative strategies of regimes that never consolidated liberal democracy yet actively mobilize rhetoric in opposition to it.

Another matter of theoretical importance lies in clarifying the relationship between illiberalism and one of its closest conceptual counterparts - authoritarianism. Illiberalism can clearly serve as a legitimizing ideology or enabling condition for autocratization, as demonstrated by a wide range of authoritarian regimes - from highly restrictive, hegemonic-authoritarian Russia to more pluralist, electoral-authoritarian systems like Hungary (Waller, 2024b). Despite variations, authoritarian regimes fundamentally question and attack the core principles of liberal democracy. As such, they may be qualified as inherently illiberal (Enyedi, 2024a).

However, Waller argues that a more precise conceptual distinction is needed. He contends that illiberalism should be treated as a positive concept with its own substantive content, not merely defined by the absence of liberalism. Though context-dependent, illiberalism is conceptually distinct and comparable to other ideational frameworks. In contrast, authoritarianism is a negative or residual category defined by the absence of electoral democracy. To resolve the frequent conflation of the two, Waller proposes anchoring authoritarianism in regime type and illiberalism in ideational content (Waller, 2024a)**.** This thesis adopts that distinction as a core conceptual assumption to examine the ideational dimensions of autocratization in the Georgian case.

In light of the above, this thesis treats illiberalism as a traveling, ideational framework that intersects with but remains distinct from authoritarianism. This distinction guides the analysis, using discourse as an analytical lens, to examine how autocratization unfolds ideationally in the case of Georgia.

2.3 Discourse as an Analytical Lens

Having established the conceptual relevance of autocratization and illiberalism, this subchapter turns to the methodological approach used to capture the ideational dimension of regime change - discourse analysis. In what follows, this subchapter clarifies the relationship between discourse and rhetoric and situates the approach within interpretive and constructivist paradigms, and justifies its relevance for studying the regime change.

Before turning the discussion to the theoretical embeddedness of discourse, it is essential to conceptual clarify and ultimately distinguish discourse from rhetoric, as the reader frequently encounters both in this thesis. Some authors do not differentiate one from another. For example, Maerz and Schneider define public discourse "broadly as the entity of official communication put forward by a government and its agents" and use *public discourse*, *public communication*, and *public rhetoric* interchangeably (2021, p. 1). It may not necessarily pose

a significant misunderstanding, but delving into discourse and situating the role of rhetoric when utilizing discourse analysis as a primary methodological tool enriches the theoretical framework and benefits not only regime studies but also discourse analysis itself.

According to Martin, discourse refers to the broader ideational structures and narratives (such as illiberalism, sovereignty, national identity, etc.) that shape political communication. Rhetoric, by contrast, focuses on how these discourses are strategically performed in specific public texts and speeches to persuade, justify, and legitimize power. While discourse reveals the ideological underpinnings - in our case, of autocratization and illiberalism - rhetoric shows how political actors frame and advance those ideas in real time under situational constraints (Martin, 2022, pp. 170–171).

This thesis draws on rhetorical theory to understand how political actors strategically communicate, but the primary analytical lens is discourse. In this context, discourse refers not only to individual speeches but to the metasystem of language, meaning, and ideology through which political actors' shifting narratives construct and reconstruct legitimacy, frame opponents, and possibly reimagine democratic norms (Martin, 2014; Schmidt, 2008, 2011). The choice to use discourse in the thesis title reflects this broader scope, as the research examines not just rhetorical moments, but the gradual discursive shift toward illiberalism and authoritarianism in Georgia. Rhetorical performance is thus treated as a component of political discourse, not a standalone focus.

The longitudinal approach employed in this study is central to examining the Georgian Dream's authoritarian turn through political discourse. Tracing the narratological development of Georgia's ruling party from its founding year in 2012 to 2024 makes it possible to treat rhetoric as a specific mode of discursive action embedded within a broader system of meaning-making. Ultimately, rhetorical approaches are not opposed to discourse analysis but

complement it. On the other hand, discourse analysis does not substitute for existing approaches and efforts in the study of regime change but complements them.

As an approach to examining political phenomena, discourse analysis is interpretive and constructivist. The former stresses the assumption that people act based on beliefs, values, or ideologies. Consequently, it aims to reveal the meanings that the political world has for agents who participate in it. The constructivist form of analysis, on the other hand, further accentuates that those meanings are socially and discursively constructed (Kułakowska, 2020). This decomposition leads the way to the most fundamental assumption of discourse analysis: that "language is a medium orientated towards action and function; that when we speak (or write), we do so, not only in order to say something, but also to do something" (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 366).

Through the analysis of speeches delivered by Tony Blair as UK Prime Minister, Finlayson and Martin further argue that speech and rhetoric as such are not just reactive - they are projective, meaning they not only respond to current constraints but prepare the public for future possibilities, threats, or transformations (2008). This observation echoes Maerz and Schneider's argument that shifts in public discourse can serve as early indicators of forthcoming transformations in political regimes (2021).

Windsor et al. take the importance of political rhetoric a step further, suggesting that the language used by authoritarian leaders serves as a critical yet understudied indicator of survival strategies (2018). They analyzed speeches of Middle Eastern and North African country leaders during the Arab Spring using computational linguistic tools. Major findings suggest that positive emotional tone and expressions of certainty are significantly associated with leaders who survived the crisis, whereas negative emotions, anxiety, and blame-oriented language were more common among leaders who lost power (Windsor et al., 2018).

Their findings refute the widespread association that illiberal leaders mostly pedal negative feelings. Whether leaders of the Arab countries were consciously aware that the use of positive messages is in positive correlation and aligns with a higher chance of survival is not clear in Windsor et al.'s article. However, Wagner and Enyedi challenge the widely held belief - particularly regarding right-wing authoritarian and populist leaders - that their rhetoric is predominantly driven by negativity. Analyzing speeches by Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Poland's Jarosław Kaczyński, they demonstrate that illiberal leaders actively invest in conveying positive messages, notably emphasizing themes such as "optimism, pride, and efficacy" in their discourse (Wagner & Enyedi, 2024, p. 1).

Drawing on these insights, rhetoric containing positive messaging was carefully considered during the coding phase of the Georgian case study to ensure its analytical significance is not overlooked. For example, one of the subcodes that emerged under the broader code "views on Georgian society" was the depiction of society as wise, which, according to the developed codebook, "portrays Georgian society as politically conscious, capable of critical evaluation, and resilient against manipulation" (see Appendix A). Paradoxically, however, the speeches of Georgian Dream leaders also at times present a contrasting image of society as politically immature - characterizing it as "lacking political experience, education, and critical capacity." The rationale behind this juxtaposition is further explored in the empirical analysis presented in Chapter 4.

These contrasting portrayals reflect more than just shifting attitudes toward the public. They offer insight into how political leaders frame societal roles in relation to their own authority. In this sense, rhetoric does not simply express what leaders believe about certain things; it reveals how they structure those beliefs and how they want others to understand and internalize them (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

Clearly, not all speeches or other textual material provided by political leaders reshape the political landscape - nor are they always intended to. Some gain significance only in hindsight, long after the events they address. Yet whether they evolve into defining, myth-making moments or remain routine contributions to ongoing debates, speeches play a vital role in the material reproduction and transformation of political life. Therefore, they merit analysis both on their own terms and in relation to broader political processes, including regime change (Finlayson & Martin, 2008).

3 Research Design

This chapter outlines the research design employed in this study, including the rationale for case selection and the suitability of a single-case study approach, the qualitative research strategy, the application of political discourse analysis (PDA), data collection procedures, and the analytical strategy used to examine the political rhetoric of the Georgian Dream government. In addition to manual qualitative coding, the study incorporates AI-assisted scoring to support the identification of ideological patterns. While exploratory in nature, this component is used for triangulation, offering an additional layer of analytical rigor and helping to validate the findings derived from qualitative interpretation.

3.1 Single Case Study Approach

The study employs a case study approach within qualitative research. The qualitative method was selected to enable a deeper understanding and examination of the authoritarian turn in Georgia under the ruling party, Georgian Dream. The scholarly attempt to treat political rhetoric and discourse as equally significant indicators of malfunctioning democratic institutions, particularly when studying authoritarian shifts, is central to this research.

Most comprehensive studies - primarily produced by Maerz and Schneider - have examined the role of language and rhetoric using quantitative methods (Maerz, 2019; Maerz & Schneider, 2021, 2020). In contrast, this research aims not only to integrate discourse analysis for understanding regime transformations but also to incorporate a qualitative approach, thereby contributing to studies that explore the intersection of rhetoric and regime change.

To achieve an in-depth, context-sensitive understanding of how political rhetoric intersects with autocratization, this study adopts a single-case study design. According to Creswell, case study research is a qualitative approach in which "the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over

time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Depending on the research focus, the unit of analysis may center on a single case or span multiple cases. Given this study's focus on the authoritarian shift under Georgian Dream, Georgia is selected as a single case for conducting a within-site or "single instrumental case study." Stake defines this approach as one in which the researcher identifies an issue or concern and selects one case to illustrate it (2010). In the context of the overarching theoretical framework of autocratization and illiberalism, Georgia serves as a typical illustrative case.

Authors specializing in qualitative methods identify three main variations of the case study approach: (1) descriptive, (2) explanatory, and (3) exploratory (Yin, 2018). The descriptive case study provides a detailed, factual, and systematic account of a phenomenon or case, answering questions about "what happened and how things are structured." The explanatory case study seeks to clarify causal relationships and underlying processes between variables or events, addressing the question of "why something happened." Lastly, the exploratory case study investigates new phenomena, identifies patterns, and generates hypotheses for future research. It leans toward open-ended inquiry without predefined hypotheses (Priya, 2021; Yin, 2018).

This research primarily adopts an exploratory case study design, aiming to uncover whether - and in what ways - the political discourse of Georgian Dream's core leadership aligns with broader authoritarian shifts. The objective is to identify emerging patterns and conceptual linkages without imposing predetermined causal models. Nonetheless, the study also incorporates elements of an explanatory case study, as it examines potential processes through which language and rhetorical strategies may contribute to regime change.

3.2 Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)

This study adopts Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) as its primary analytical approach to explore how elite language reflects and aligns with regime transformation. Rather than quantifying textual data, the analysis focuses on exploring, investigating, and interpreting meaning. It identifies patterns and recurring themes to understand - without a priori assumptions - the worldview of Georgian Dream's main political elites and the shifts in their rhetoric.

In studies examining politics through discourse, researchers commonly employ either Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). These closely related approaches differ in their primary focus and scope. PDA specifically addresses political communication, focusing on how political actors, institutions, and processes are constructed, maintained, and contested through language. It examines political speeches, interviews, debates, laws, campaigns, and other forms of political text and talk, emphasizing discourse's role in shaping political realities such as legitimacy, sovereignty, and opposition (Dunmire, 2012; Van Dijk, 2006).

In contrast, CDA adopts a broader perspective, analyzing how discourse across all areas of social life contributes to reproducing or challenging power relations, domination, and inequality. CDA is explicitly critical: it aims not only to describe discourse but also to expose and oppose abuses of power, discrimination, and social injustice embedded in language practices (Fairclough, 2013; Huckin et al., 2012; Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Given the study's focus on the discourse of Georgian Dream's leadership, political discourse analysis (PDA) is particularly suitable. As an exploratory approach, PDA seeks to understand the evolution and internal dynamics of Georgian Dream's narrative and its ideological underpinnings. It is crucial to emphasize that discourse is not synonymous with text; rather, discourses and rhetoric emerge from texts - what is said or written about a subject

(Van Leeuwen, 2008). Moreover, the term "discourse" primarily refers to socially constructed ways of understanding aspects of reality, or, in other words, context-specific frameworks for making sense of the world (Halperin & Heath, 2020; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

From a methodological standpoint, discourses are typically identified and examined through language used in spoken and written communication, subsequently transformed into texts and preserved as textual data (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1997). Textual data itself offers an unparalleled window into political actors' latent preferences and intentions, often revealing more than observable behavior alone (Benoit, 2020). In the context of authoritarian trajectories, analyzing public discourse can serve as a predictive tool. As Maerz and Schneider argue, supported by empirical findings, "by looking at public rhetoric, one can anticipate changes to formal political rules at a later point in time" (Maerz & Schneider, 2020, p. 529).

In political science, discourses render ideologies and general worldviews observable, as ideologies are primarily articulated explicitly through discourse. In contrast, other political practices often implicitly reflect ideologies - for example, acts of discrimination rooted in sexist, racist, or political belief systems (Van Dijk, 2006). It is within discourse that the explicit rationale behind discriminatory practices is articulated - for example, explicitly stating that sexism occurs "because she is a woman." The same methodological logic applies to studying regime type and change. By scrutinizing political leaders' language and noting shifts from liberal to illiberal rhetoric, one might identify early warning signs of impending threats to liberal democratic norms, possibly indicating authoritarian consolidation. Schmidt argues that public discourse is not merely noise surrounding regime changes; rather, it is an integral mechanism driving them. Studying discourse systematically can uncover signals that quantifiable measurements may overlook (Schmidt, 2008). Despite their sophistication, many quantitative measures remain institutionally focused and, consequently, fall short of addressing the fundamentally ideational challenges confronting both emerging and established

democracies (Dawson, 2018).

Building upon this critique, this research underscores the need to examine how political elites use language to construct, contest, and legitimize political orders. By analyzing the rhetoric of key Georgian Dream leaders over time, the study seeks to capture the ideational dynamics that often precede or accompany shifts in formal political structures. In doing so, it offers a complementary perspective to existing institution-centered approaches and contributes to a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms underpinning democratic backsliding and authoritarian shifts.

3.3 Georgia as a Typical Case

While the single-case study design offers the key advantage of enabling an in-depth, context-rich analysis of complex political processes, its primary limitation lies in its lack of generalizability. Findings derived from one case cannot be broadly applied without further comparative research. Nevertheless, since Georgia represents a typical case for studying this phenomenon, the insights generated can at least be theoretically informative for similar contexts (Yin, 2018), particularly other post-Soviet countries that share comparable political turbulence on their paths toward (de)democratization (Ekiert & Ziblatt, 2013), as well as other regional cases undergoing autocratization.

This study frames Georgia as a case of gradual democratic decline - more precisely, autocratization, as established in the theoretical framework chapter - driven primarily by elected elites. The case mirrors the global patterns of subversion in several important ways.

First and foremost, examining various democracy indices since the country's independence in 1991 - such as the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) index, Freedom House reports (available from 2005), and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI, available from 2003) - reveals a gradual, rather than abrupt, decline in democratic quality across multiple indicators (see Figures 2 and 3). These include weakening judicial independence, increasing

constraints on civil society, and deteriorating media pluralism. Although formal electoral processes remain intact, these indices highlight the erosion of liberal democratic standards, a hallmark of the electoral autocratic regimes.

Figure 2.Georgia's Normalized Democracy Indices, V-Dem (1991-2024) and BTI (2003-2024)

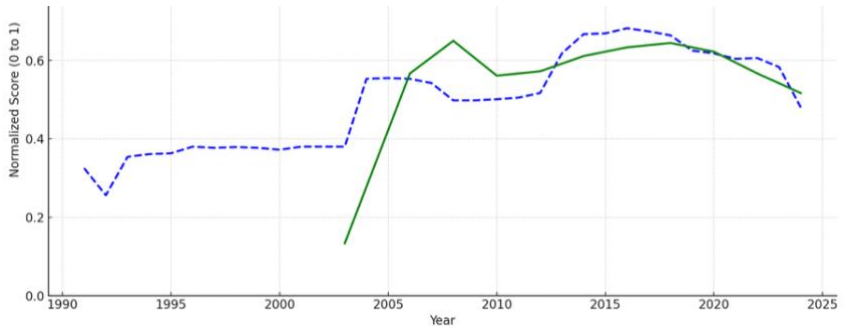
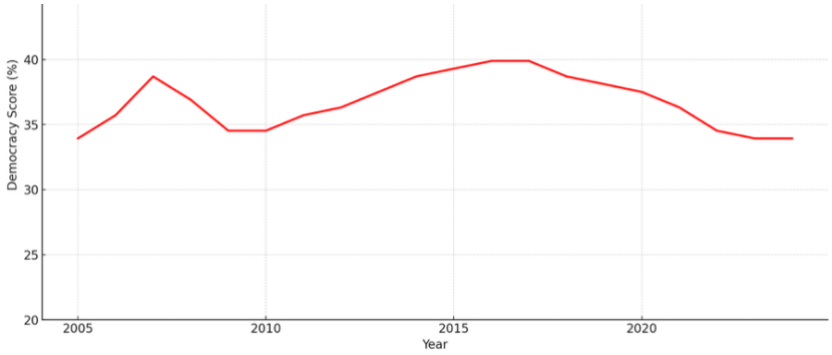


Figure 3.Freedom House (FH), Nations in Transit (NiT) Democracy Score for Georgia, 2005-2024



In terms of regime classification, according to the comprehensive Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) report from 2025, Georgia is classified as an electoral autocracy (Nord et al., 2025). The country joined this category in 2024, having declined from its previous classification as an electoral democracy (Nord et al., 2024). Georgia also appears on Freedom House's list of the largest one-year declines (-3 points) and is currently identified as "partly free," scoring 55 out of 100 (with political rights assessed at 21/40 and civil liberties at 34/60) (Gorokhovskaia & Grothe, 2025).

So far, this subchapter has emphasized that Georgia's typicality is situated within the broader context of post-Soviet countries and V-Dem's classification of electoral autocracies.

However, to be more precise, one can compare Georgia's Electoral Democracy Index with those of other autocratizing countries in Eastern Europe. According to V-Dem's latest report, a third of the region - eight countries - are undergoing autocratization: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine (Nord et al., 2025, p. 21). To illustrate this (de)democratizing trend, Figure 4 presents Georgia's Electoral Democracy Index alongside the mean of the aforementioned autocratizing cases from 1991 to 2024.

Figure 4.Electoral Democracy Trajectories: Georgia vs. Regional Autocratizing Mean (1991–2024)

Figure 4 shows that while Georgia initially lagged behind the regional mean, it experienced a rapid rise following the 2003 Rose Revolution, temporarily exceeding regional levels. Since 2019, however, Georgia's Electoral Democracy Index has declined, drawing closer to the regional average. By 2024, Georgia's Electoral Democracy Index stands at 0.48, while the regional autocratizing mean is 0.46. Although Georgia remains slightly above the regional average, this convergence reflects a broader pattern of democratic subversion across the region, supporting Georgia's classification as a typical case of autocratization.

Notably, among the eight autocratizing countries in Eastern Europe, Georgia, Hungary, Serbia, and Ukraine are currently classified as electoral autocracies; Armenia, Moldova, and Romania as electoral democracies; while Belarus falls under the category of closed autocracy. Therefore, the discursive findings from this study - particularly regarding the pathways to illiberalism - may offer valuable insights not only for countries categorized within similar

regime types, but also for those undergoing comparable transitional challenges. These implications point to important avenues for further research.

In addition to institutional parallels, Georgia is particularly suitable for a discourse-centered study of autocratization. Like many contemporary electoral autocratic regimes, Georgian Dream leadership has relied on rhetorical strategies to justify consolidating power, delegitimizing opposition, and maintaining a façade of democratic legitimacy, as it is demonstrated in the empirical analysis.

The availability of extensive and publicly accessible materials provides a rich source for tracing ideational shifts underlying regime transformation. Furthermore, the sustained dominance of a single political force has facilitated discursive consistency and continuity, allowing this study to effectively track narrative changes over time - one of the key strengths of single-case discourse analysis (Gerring, 2007).

3.4 Data Collection and Sampling

Having established Georgia as a typical and analytically valuable case for studying the discursive dimension of autocratization, this section outlines the data sources and sampling strategy employed in this research. It explains how relevant materials were identified, selected, and filtered for analysis, and provides the rationale for focusing on the political discourse of Georgian Dream's leadership between 2012 and 2024.

As previously mentioned, this study employs qualitative text analysis grounded in the methodology of political discourse analysis (PDA) to examine the ideological evolution within the political rhetoric of Georgian Dream. The term *qualitative* is used here in its most basic sense - indicating that the analysis relies on non-statistical, non-numerical methods and is fundamentally driven by human judgment and interpretive decision-making rather than automated process (Benoit, 2020).

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the political discourse, a wide range of

materials was collected, including public speeches, interviews, press conferences, official statements, and public comments or remarks. The data corpus deliberately focuses on three central political figures within Georgian Dream - Bidzina Ivanishvili, Irakli Kobakhidze, and Irakli Gharibashvili (see Table 1) - who have played dominant roles in shaping the party's policy direction, ideological orientation, and regime trajectory.

Moreover, these three individuals produced the highest volume of relevant material, which is essential for capturing a longitudinal and overarching view of their worldviews and narrative shifts. By concentrating on these key agenda-setters, the analysis targets the principal narratives that guide and legitimize political developments under Georgian Dream's governance.

Another important aim of this thesis is to illustrate the full trajectory of Georgian Dream's discursive changes and their possible alignment with political developments. To achieve this, the timeframe covers the entire period of the party's rule, from 2012 through 2024. Conducting qualitative text analysis and hand coding - especially when focusing on three political figures over a 12-year period - is undoubtedly a challenging task. However, it is the approach best suited for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the single case and the issues within it.

For the collection of textual data, various media websites as well as official government websites and social media channels were utilized. The original materials were retrieved in Georgian. For the purposes of qualitative analysis, they were translated into English using Artificial Intelligence tools such as DeepL and ChatGPT. All translated texts were manually reviewed and edited, with particular attention paid to context-specific terms and phrases to ensure accuracy and consistency.

The final dataset consists of 192 speeches and statements (Ivanishvili, *N*=64; Gharibashvili, *N*=56; Kobakhidze, *N*=72) (see Table 1). This diverse set of sources was

deliberately chosen to capture both the formal and informal dimensions of political discourse. While official speeches and statements often reflect the strategic and institutional language used to legitimize policies and shape public perception, interviews, public comments, and informal remarks tend to reveal more spontaneous, emotional, or personalized rhetoric (Halperin & Heath, 2020; Omelicheva, 2016).

Table 1.Empirical Corpus Overview

Speaker	N of Speeches	Role During Period	Analytical Relevance
Bidzina Ivanishvili	64	Founder of Georgian Dream; PM (2012–2013); de facto leader	Establishes ideological baseline and strategic framing of GD's discourse.
Irakli Gharibashvili	56	PM (2013-2015, 2021-2024); Minister of Defence (2019-2021)	Reinforces moral-conservative themes; instrumental in normalizing illiberal rhetoric.
Irakli Kobakhidze	72	Chairman of GD (2021-2024); Chairman of Parliament (2016-2019); PM (2024-)	Primary driver of ideological escalation and opposition delegitimization.

A purposeful sampling strategy was employed. The strength of this approach lies in selecting information-rich cases that offer deep insights into issues central to the research purpose. As Patton explains, "by focusing on information-rich cases, researchers aim to achieve deep understanding and valuable insights rather than broad empirical generalizations. Purposeful sampling emphasizes the selection of cases that will best illuminate the research questions under investigation" (2002, p. 273).

Stratton further distinguishes between random sampling and subjective purposeful sampling. The former involves randomly selecting participants from a relevant population, allowing for greater generalizability of findings. This study adopts the latter - subjective purposeful sampling - because participants (in this case, political figures) are selected non-randomly based on their relevance to the research objectives. This approach supports a deeper exploration of specific issues (Stratton, 2024).

3.5 Data Analysis and Coding Strategy

Following an initial close reading of the entire corpus, the material was systematically curated to retain only those texts that engaged substantively with the ideological and political foundations of Georgian Dream's rule. This included speeches, interviews, and statements that articulated visions of statehood, democracy, sovereignty, national identity, the church-state relationship, views on Georgian society, foreign alignment, and the rhetorical framing of political opponents. This filtering ensured that the dataset captured substantive ideological expressions rather than ceremonial or administrative communications.

The collected and filtered materials were uploaded and manually coded using NVivo 15, a qualitative data analysis software. The use of NVivo enhances the transparency and rigor of the research by allowing for the systematic organization, coding, and retrieval of large volumes of textual data. The primary parent codes used were *Liberal Rhetoric* and *Illiberal Rhetoric*. In addition, other parent codes - those not explicitly fitting into either of these two categories - were created, including *Views on Russia-Georgia Relations* and *Views on Georgian Society*. Appendix A presents the thematic codebook used for the rhetorical and ideological analysis.

Existing literature on the intersection of discourse and regime change largely relies on dictionary-based computational methods (Maerz, 2019; Maerz & Schneider, 2021, 2020). In contrast, this study offers a valuable contribution by employing hand-coding, which allows for more nuanced interpretation than automated techniques. It represents one of the first attempts to capture authoritarian tendencies through qualitative discourse analysis.

A key step in the manual coding process was the development of a coherent coding strategy. Codes were constructed using both inductive and deductive approaches: some emerged organically from recurring themes in the textual materials, while others were informed by existing theories of authoritarianism and illiberalism.

Halperin and Heath distinguish these two broad approaches as *a priori coding* and *grounded coding*. A priori codes are developed in advance, typically based on existing theories, prior research, or key themes derived from research questions - this method is commonly referred to as *closed coding*. In contrast, grounded codes are derived directly from the data during the analytical process. In this approach - often called *open coding* - the researcher sets aside prior assumptions and focuses on identifying patterns and themes that emerge organically from the material (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

3.6 AI-Assisted Scoring

To strengthen the analytical robustness of this study, GPT-4 was employed as a secondary tool to assist in identifying patterns in political discourse. Its role was limited to scoring the liberal or illiberal orientation of the overall corpus of speeches and statements. Crucially, this AI-assisted analysis did not replace qualitative interpretation; rather, it served as a triangulation method to complement and verify patterns identified through manual coding and close reading. The AI's outputs were assessed independently and incorporated only when they aligned with the thematic and contextual evidence established through the primary analysis. This methodological layer adds rigor to the empirical chapter by offering a complementary perspective on ideological trends across time.

3.7 Ethical Considerations and Remarks on the Use of AI

From an ethical standpoint, this study relies exclusively on publicly available data. No human subjects were involved, and no sensitive or private information was accessed. Accordingly, no ethical approval was required, and the research posed no risk of harm or breach of confidentiality.

Regarding the use of artificial intelligence, it is acknowledged that GPT-4's internal scoring logic is not fully transparent. To ensure conceptual coherence, the model was provided

with the study's theoretical framework. This experimental method was applied with caution, and all AI-generated outputs were critically reviewed and contextualized by the author to maintain academic rigor and ensure alignment with the broader qualitative framework.

4 Empirical Analysis

While previous chapters laid the theoretical and methodological foundations for analyzing Georgia's autocratization through discourse, this chapter examines empirical materials to uncover how liberal and illiberal ideas are articulated, combined, and recalibrated over time. Rather than treating discourse as a neutral medium, language is understood here as reflective and constitutive of the country's shifting regime trajectory. The aim is not merely to track word frequency or thematic presence, but to interpret how rhetorical patterns express the worldviews of key Georgian Dream leaders, signal ideological commitments, justify authority, and shift positions along the liberal-illiberal spectrum - often with direct implications for foreign policy and strategic alignment.

The empirical analysis proceeds in five parts. The first and most substantial section (4.1) draws on manual thematic coding to identify and interpret the dominant rhetorical patterns in Georgian Dream's discourse between 2012 and 2024. This section is structured around four interrelated discursive frames: fear-based mobilization and saviour-leader logic, with an undertone of paternalist rhetoric; anti-Western narratives and NGOs and civil society delegitimization; opposition delegitimization - particularly targeting the United National Movement (UNM); and the fusion of religious and national identity, with an emphasis on family values and majoritarian will.

The second section (4.2) addresses discursive contradictions, highlighting rhetorical juxtapositions, for instance, in foreign policy and democratic norms. The third section (4.3) shifts from thematic to actor-centric analysis, comparing rhetorical trends across the party's three main leaders. The fourth section (4.4) compares the findings with international democracy indices, assessing whether shifts in discourse preceded, accompanied, or reflected

Georgia's autocratization under Georgian Dream rule. Finally, the fifth section (4.5) presents the results of AI-assisted discourse scoring.

4.1 Tracing Illiberal Discursive Shifts through Thematic Coding

This subchapter presents the results of manual thematic coding of speeches and statements made by Georgian Dream party leaders between 2012 and 2024. This analysis is based on close reading and systematic coding using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 15). The goal is to trace how rhetorical commitments to liberal and illiberal ideas evolved over time, to identify dominant themes, their interconnections, and temporal shifts in emphasis, and to uncover the coexistence of consistent narratives with contradictory or juxtaposed framings (further discussed in Section 4.2).

The analysis focuses on two overarching discursive clusters - liberal and illiberal narratives - which are also the two largest parent codes in the codebook (see Appendix A). As established in the theory chapter, while illiberalism and authoritarianism remain closely intertwined - both challenging the core principles of liberal democracy - illiberalism is understood here as the ideational dimension of autocratization, whereas authoritarianism is treated as a regime type.

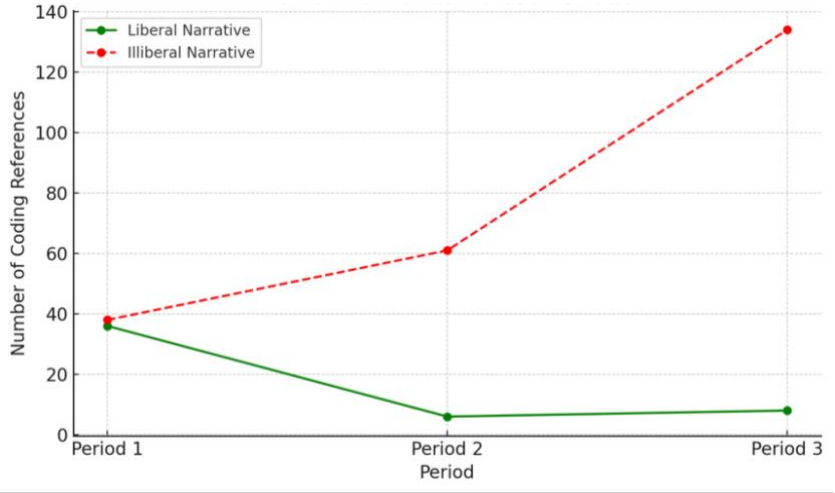
As outlined earlier, this chapter adopts a theme-centered approach and presents aggregated results across the three political figures under study, tracing the evolution of rhetorical patterns over time. Relevant domestic and international developments are also taken into account, particularly where they inform the intensification or transformation of specific discursive frames.

In addition to the liberal and illiberal parent codes, during coding, two inductively developed clusters emerged: (1) views on Georgian society and (2) Russia-Georgia relations. Though initially coded outside the liberal-illiberal binary, these clusters often align discursively

with illiberal rhetoric. For instance, the "spin over fear" subcode intersects with portrayals of Russia as both a threat and a strong geopolitical force, which makes it both a regional and generally useful actor - especially in terms of economic pragmatism, particularly through trade.

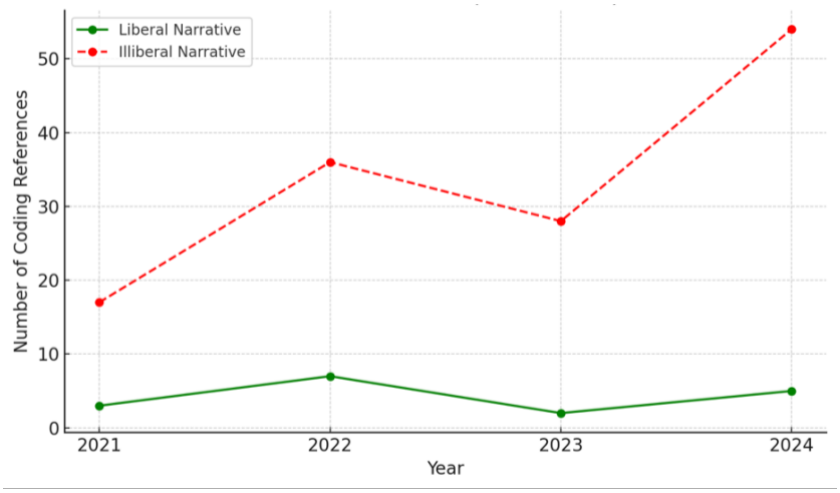
In line with the broader aim of identifying thematic connectivity and overarching patterns, the alignment across major code clusters is also explored. To illustrate the general shift from liberal to illiberal discourse, Figure 5 shows the frequency of liberal and illiberal references over the thirteen-year period and across three parliamentary terms. As shown, in the early years of GD's rule - specifically 2012 and 2013 - the number of liberal (N=36) and illiberal (N=38) references was nearly identical.

Figure 5.Liberal and Illiberal Narrative Trends Across Periods (2012–2024)



However, starting in 2014, liberal themes declined sharply, while illiberal discourse began to rise. This shift became especially pronounced in 2016 and intensified further during the third period (2021–2024), culminating in a dramatic peak of illiberal rhetoric in 2024 (see Figure 6). In contrast to earlier years - when liberal and illiberal ideas coexisted - recent discourse is marked by a more consistent and aggressive use of illiberal narratives, often portraying political opponents, civil society, and the West as threats to national sovereignty, values, and stability.

Figure 6.Liberal and Illiberal Narrative Trends (2021-2024)



While these trends underscore the increasing dominance of illiberal rhetoric in Georgian Dream's discourse, they provide only a macro-level perspective on a more complex discursive transformation. The subsequent sections offer a detailed examination of the core thematic patterns that constitute this shift, including fear-based mobilization, nationalist moral framing, and the systematic delegitimization of dissent. Through this thematic disaggregation, the analysis demonstrates that rhetorical strategies have not merely mirrored broader regime dynamics, but have actively contributed to the consolidation of authoritarian tendencies in Georgia's political landscape.

The understanding of illiberalism in this thesis follows Enyedi's conceptualization of three core dimensions: power concentration, a partisan state, and a closed society (2024a, pp. 1–2). To ensure analytical consistency - particularly around a contested concept such as illiberalism - this framework was explicitly provided to the AI-assisted model (as shown in Chapter 4.5). It also underpins the manual thematic analysis.

The table below (Table 2) summarizes the alignment between Enyedi's conceptual dimensions and the key discursive frames identified in the empirical material. This mapping not only supports the claim that Georgian Dream's discourse exhibits illiberal tendencies, but also reinforces the theoretical coherence of the empirical analysis.

Table 2.Alignment of Discursive Frames with Illiberalism's Core Dimensions

Empirical Theme	Illiberal Feature	Rationale
Fear-based mobilization & saviour-leader logic	Power concentration	Rhetoric justifies executive dominance; citizens are portrayed as needing protection.
Anti-Western narrative, NGO & CS demonization	Closed society	Western actors, NGOs, and civil society are framed as threats to national identity and order.
Opposition delegitimization	Partisan state & Power concentration	Political opposition is portrayed as an existential threat; the state is fused with the ruling party.
Church–state fusion & national identity	Closed society	The Georgian Orthodox Church, "traditional values," and the majoritarian will are positioned as core to legitimate statehood.

Taken together, the thematic coding reveals a clear shift in Georgian Dream's discourse from a pluralist, pro-Western orientation to an increasingly illiberal narrative structure. The following sections examine each of the dominant thematic blocks that emerged from the analysis, unpacking how they evolved over time and how they align with the broader ideational framework of illiberalism.

4.1.1 Fear-Based Rhetoric and Saviour Leader Logic

The first major thematic cluster emerging from the analysis of the illiberal narrative umbrella draws upon fear-based appeals and saviour-leader rhetoric. It functions by constructing an atmosphere of existential threat – framing the ruling party as the sole guarantor of national stability, while portraying the opposition, civil society actors, and international partners as sources of political chaos and moral decay.

Within this cluster, several interrelated rhetorical strategies are observable: the instrumentalization of fear through the spin over war logic, the depiction of political opponents as anti-Georgian or foreign-backed actors, the elevation of Georgian Dream as the only force

capable of preserving peace and sovereignty, the use of paternalist rhetoric, and the deployment of a "national interests first" narrative.

In most cases, fear-based discourse is directly connected to major geopolitical events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. After this point, the number of references to the deductive code "spin over fear" notably increased. Georgian Dream presents itself as the sole barrier between peace and war, while casting the biggest opoosition party, United National Movement (UNM), other opposition parties, NGOs, and even Western actors as existential threats seeking to "Ukrainize" Georgia:

> *"Let me tell you one thing: there are about five political parties along with several of the wealthiest NGOs and certain media outlets that are directly engaged in agent activities in Georgia. These are spies. Their only goal is to turn Georgia into another Ukraine. I call on everyone to distance themselves from these dangerous agendas. The "Ukrainization" of Georgia is something we must not allow under any circumstances"* (Kobakhidze, 2023, doc_151, see Appendix B[2]).

This rhetoric reflects an intentional strategy of conflating domestic dissent with foreign influence, reinforcing a narrative in which Georgian Dream is positioned as both protector and redeemer. This logic connects directly to another deductive code shaped by paternalist contours. Paternalism, in the context of illiberalism, is often discussed in conjunction with populist rhetoric. For example, Enyedi, in his analysis of Hungary under Viktor Orbán, introduces the concept of paternalist populism, which he defines as a subtype that rejects the liberal, pluralistic establishment while simultaneously asserting that the people are not mature enough for autonomous political participation (2016).

Unlike in Hungary, among Georgian Dream leaders the classical populist "people vs. corrupt elites" dichotomy is not a predominant narrative, and delegitimizing elites is not a central focus. However, clear signs of paternalist inclinations are evident. This subtheme is closely intertwined with another code that frames Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream as saviours.

[2] All document IDs (e.g., doc_151) refer to primary sources listed in Appendix B

The combination of these subthemes emphasizes a paternalistic discourse in which the public is portrayed as politically immature and in need of guidance. As Ivanishvili stated: "Our population struggles with evaluation, and that is precisely why I want to visit every region - to help those who believe in me analyze and understand things better" (Ivanishvili, 2016, doc_38).

In sum, the rhetorical construction of leadership within this framework depicts political figures as rational, unifying actors who guide society toward the "right" decisions, preserve national stability, and protect against collapse.

4.1.2 The Enemy Within and Without: Civil Society, Media, and the West as Threats

This paternalist framing and fear-based discourse set the stage for a broader discursive strategy rooted in the externalization of blame. As the government assumes the role of national protector, threats are increasingly defined not only as internal dissent but also as foreign influence and ideological contamination. This rhetorical logic intensifies in Georgian Dream's portrayal of Western institutions, civil society actors, and independent media as destabilizing forces that threaten Georgia's sovereignty, values, and cohesion.

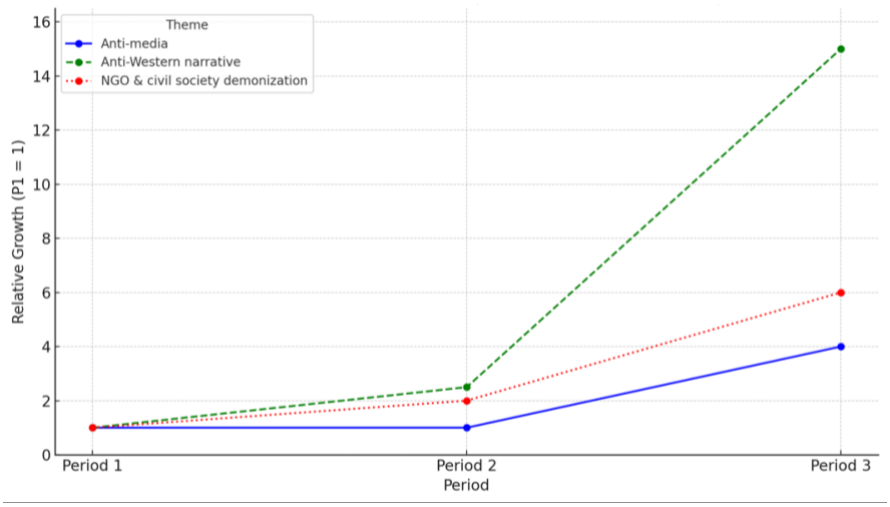
What begins as a discourse of protection quickly expands into a sustained campaign of delegitimization, in which critics are reframed as agents, provocateurs, or morally corrupt outsiders. The following paragraphs trace the thematic development of these narratives through the deductive codes of anti-Western discourse, NGO and civil society demonization, and anti-media rhetoric. The intensification of these themes not only reshaped political discourse but also laid the groundwork for concrete policy measures aimed at suppressing dissent. One notable example is the "foreign agent" law, which - after being withdrawn in March 2023 due to mass public protests - was reintroduced and ultimately passed in May 2024.

The effort to justify deeply anti-liberal democratic policies through rhetorical framing

is especially evident in numerous statements by Prime Minister Kobakhidze, who repeatedly claims that the so-called "transparency law" is intended to protect national sovereignty (see doc_164, doc_165, doc_166, doc_181, doc_184). Yet beneath this narrative, the law's repressive implications become clear. In practice, it mirrors authoritarian models in which dissent is systematically curtailed through ostensibly legal mechanisms, such as the adoption of foreign-agent-style regulations. This legislative strategy, which has already been implemented in countries like Russia and Hungary, represents a broader authoritarian playbook aimed at restricting civil society and silencing critical voices under the guise of transparency and national interest (Flikke, 2016; Scheppele, 2018, 2022).

This shift, which laid the groundwork for subsequent policy decisions, is further evidenced by the rise in references to anti-media rhetoric, anti-Western narratives, and the demonization of NGOs and civil society (Figure 7). Here, I employ a relative growth index in which each theme's frequency in Period 1 is set as the baseline value of 1. This approach enables standardized comparisons across periods without revealing absolute reference counts. A value greater than 1 in subsequent periods indicates how many times more frequently the theme appeared relative to its initial level. This method is particularly useful for identifying which rhetorical elements have intensified most significantly over time.

Figure 7.Relative Growth of Three Themes Across Periods (Baseline = Period 1)



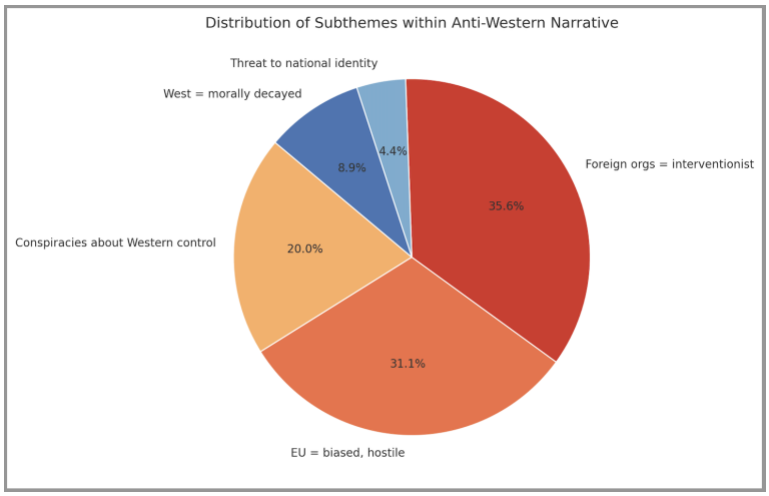
As shown, the deductive code "anti-Western narrative," which falls under the broader parent code "illiberal narrative," has experienced the most drastic increase - being used 15 times more compared to the initial period. Such sentiments are common among illiberal leaders and are not a unique invention of Georgian Dream political elites. For example, EU member states such as Hungary under Viktor Orbán and Slovakia under Robert Fico frequently blame Brussels for undermining national sovereignty, promoting liberal values, or interfering in domestic policymaking.

Taken together, the intensification of anti-Western, anti-NGO, and anti-media rhetoric reflects not only a broader illiberal turn but also lays the groundwork for the emergence of more radical discursive patterns. As the following section explores, these include conspiratorial narratives that portray foreign actors and domestic critics as part of a coordinated effort to destabilize the country.

4.1.2.1 Anti-Western Discourse and Conspiratorial Rhetoric

Figure 8 shows that the dominant anti-Western subthemes are the portrayal of foreign organizations as interventionist and the depiction of the EU as biased or hostile, together accounting for over 65% of references. Among these subthemes, "conspiracies about Western control" is the only inductively derived code - emerging directly from the data during the analytical process, independent of the theoretical framework. The remaining codes are largely self-explanatory. For detailed descriptions, see Appendix A.

Figure 8.Breakdown of Anti-Western Subthemes by Frequency of References



Predominant narratives within the conspiracies subtheme include "Global War Party" and a "Deep State" - shadowy forces allegedly controlling NATO, the EU, and even domestic actors like NGOs and opposition parties. These narratives suggest that Western institutions are not genuine partners but tools of hidden agendas aiming to destabilize Georgia. Such discourse positions GD as the defender against both foreign manipulation and internal betrayal, reinforcing paternalistic and, in general, illiberal messaging:

> *"The Global War Party holds significant influence over both the European Union and the United States... One could even say outright: both America and the EU are in need of de-oligarchization. We hope these troubling dynamics will eventually change for the better. Of course, we are not calling our partners part of the Global War Party. Our position is clear - we seek integration with the European Union and closer cooperation with the United States. Unfortunately, however, we are witnessing the opposite trend on their side, driven by the very forces exerting influence over both actors"* (Kobakhidze, 2024, doc_163).

Although the code was inductively derived, research by Castanho Silva et al. explores the link between populist attitudes - which are often intertwined with illiberalism - and belief in conspiracy theories through survey analysis. Their findings suggest that individuals with strong populist orientations are more likely to believe in malevolent global conspiracies and the idea of elite control over information (Castanho Silva et al., 2017). When political elites begin employing conspiratorial narratives, it signals a broader way of understanding politics: one that relies on emotionally compelling and simplified stories rather than careful analysis of

domestic and geopolitical developments (Oliver & Wood, 2014).

Notably, the term "Deep State" is a longstanding, largely metaphorical concept that refers to a theoretical network of unelected power holders operating behind the scenes. In contrast, the notion of the "Global War Party" is a uniquely Georgian invention. As outlined in GD's discourse, this imagined group is accused of prolonging the Russo-Ukrainian war, spreading it to other countries, assassinating sovereigntist leaders, orchestrating global revolutions, and plotting to remove Georgian Dream from power ("Global War Party," 2025). The main architect of this term, current Prime Minister Kobakhidze, has never provided a clear explanation of who specifically is being referenced.

Despite the rise of anti-Western and conspiratorial rhetoric in Georgian Dream's discourse, Georgia's broader trajectory cannot be understood apart from its long-standing orientation toward the European Union. Since the Rose Revolution, Georgia has invested substantial political capital in aligning its legal and institutional structures with EU norms. Like many post-Soviet and Balkan countries, it was considered part of a wider regional movement toward Euro-Atlantic integration (Jones, 2015). Over time, however, this broader trend began to fragment. While some countries consolidated democratic reforms, others - such as Georgia and neighboring Armenia - entered a more ambiguous phase, characterized by formal alignment alongside rhetorical and institutional divergence.

Drawing on Levitsky and Way's seminal book *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (2010), Gel'man highlights the importance of distinguishing between international linkages and leverage (2017). In much of post-Soviet Eurasia, strong linkages with the West exist - through trade, communication, and civil society - but leverage is weak, providing limited incentives for genuine democratization or governance reform. International actors like the EU can only promote change if their efforts are complemented by domestic political will. Without such commitment, external support is often co-opted by ruling

elites, leading to superficial reforms or even reinforcing hybrid regimes.

Amid the rise of anti-Western narratives, the European aspirations of Georgian society remain consistent. Multiple surveys indicate that over 80% of the population continues to support EU integration ("More Georgians than Ever Trust the EU," 2024). Thus, the notion that Georgian society is divided between a Western and a Russian orientation is misleading. For the majority of the population, EU membership is seen as Georgia's natural path. At the same time, however, Georgian Dream's foreign policy priorities have visibly shifted. Despite a public that remains firmly pro-European, the ruling party has maintained power through a combination of electoral manipulation, fear-based rhetoric, and saviour-leader narratives.

4.1.3 UNM Delegitimization as a Core Pillar of GD's Illiberal Discourse

In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the main political rivals were the United National Movement (UNM) - the ruling party at the time - and the newly founded Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia. The latter won the election as part of a broader coalition also named Georgian Dream. One year later, Georgia held its presidential elections, in which Mikheil Saakashvili lost power to Giorgi Margvelashvili, who had been nominated by the Georgian Dream coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili. Since then, Georgia has largely functioned as a two-party system, with most of the electorate aligned with either GD or UNM.

However, this polarization has gradually weakened. UNM has slowly lost popularity, and its central figure, Saakashvili, has been imprisoned since 2021. Notably, for the first time since 2012, UNM failed to secure second place in the 2024 parliamentary elections, narrowly surpassed (by 1%) by the newly formed Coalition for Change.

Despite the emergence of new political competitors, the United National Movement (UNM) remains central to Georgian Dream's illiberal discursive strategy. "Opposition delegitimization" is the largest subcode under the illiberal narrative parent code, with 151 coded references - far exceeding other illiberal subthemes. From the early years of GD's rule,

UNM has been framed not merely as a political rival but as an existential threat to Georgia's sovereignty, morality, and future. This narrative has become a foundational pillar of GD's broader illiberal logic, reinforcing the idea of a partisan state and justifying the concentration of power.

Increasingly, GD leaders have adopted the phrase "collective United National Movement" to collapse the entire opposition spectrum into a single, dangerous entity, regardless of ideological or organizational differences. As Gharibashvili stated: "I want to address those who still support Saakashvili, the collective United National Movement, its allied satellite parties, and coalitions: Instead of European integration, you will once again get a bloody dictatorship" (Gharibashvili, 2024, doc_179).

The subcode "UNM/Saakashvili = to be marginalized" appears consistently across all three periods (14 -> 14 ->13 references), indicating a stable rhetorical strategy aimed at excluding UNM from legitimate political competition. Another recurring theme is the narrative that Saakashvili is responsible for the 2008 war with Russia, with this frame intensifying particularly in the second and third periods (8 references in each).

In contrast, some subcodes show sharp increases in the third parliamentary term, which is generally characterized by a broader surge in illiberal rhetoric. These include: "call to ban opposition," "opposition = anti-Georgian," and "opposition = foreign-backed." During the 2024 election pre-campaign, Ivanishvili promised to punish the "collective UNM," declaring: *"I give you my word that after the elections, we will certainly prosecute the collective United National Movement for their treasonous actions"* (Ivanishvili, 2024, doc_172).

This framing positions the UNM as a threat that cannot be engaged with through normal democratic competition, but must be neutralized - a logic that severely undermines pluralism. Ultimately, this subtheme of opposition delegitimization not only erodes the norms of fair competition but also enables the ruling party to insulate itself from criticism by labeling all

dissent as UNM-affiliated. As such, it aligns with both the partisan state and partisan concentration elements and forms a key mechanism through which GD justifies authoritarian tendencies within a formally electoral framework.

4.1.4 Church-State Fusion and National Identity

Another consistent pillar of Georgian Dream's illiberal rhetoric is the symbolic and political fusion of the Georgian Orthodox Church with national identity. In this discourse, the Church is cast not merely as a religious institution but as the foundational source of the country's morality, unity, and legitimacy. Clergy are frequently framed as authorities at both the societal and political levels, and GD's rhetoric explicitly adopts an anti-secular stance:

> *"There is a very strong unity between the Church and the government, and this is something that some see and are not happy about… The government and the Church share a firm and unbreakable bond, and no provocation can undermine this unity"* (Gharibashvili, 2021, doc_106).

Within this narrative, Georgian nationhood is inseparable from Christian identity, and deviation from religious tradition is framed as a threat to both cultural integrity and political stability. Orthodoxy is positioned not as a private belief system but as a foundational pillar of the state, essential to preserving national cohesion. The discursive continuation of this logic is reflected in GD's broader vision of societal ordering - one rooted in the majoritarian will, anchored in traditional family structures, and oriented toward the preservation of moral values.

The praise of family values, in itself, is not necessarily illiberal. However, when such values are prioritized at the expense of minority rights and used to justify discriminatory policies under the banner of majoritarianism, they align closely with the illiberal feature of a closed society.

In GD's rhetoric, liberal pluralism and secularism are portrayed as corrosive forces - imported ideologies that seek to undermine the historical and spiritual essence of Georgian identity. The rejection of secular norms and defense of the Georgian Orthodox Church are thus

not merely cultural stances, but political acts that legitimize the ruling party's authority as the true guardian of national authenticity.

In the broader context of illiberalism, the fusion of church and state echoes patterns seen in other regimes where religion is instrumentalized to sustain authoritarian legitimacy. Religion is frequently invoked to construct a moral boundary between "the people like us" and "outsiders" who do not share "our way of life" and are portrayed as threats to it (Brubaker, 2017). However, a context-dependent difference exists between Georgia and European cases of illiberalism.

In Europe, "outsiders" in illiberal discourse are predominantly associated with Muslim immigrants. In Georgia, where society is relatively ethnically and religiously homogeneous, the perceived "outsiders" take a different form. They are more often civil actors such as NGOs, independent media, liberal activists, LGBTQ+ groups, and the so-called "collective UNM" (i.e., opposition parties), including former President Mikheil Saakashvili. In both settings, adherence to a Christian way of life becomes less a matter of personal belief and more a marker of group identity - what Brubaker describes as a shift from "believing" to "belonging" (2017).

This case demonstrates why allowing illiberalism to "travel" across contexts - regardless of a country's experience with liberal democracy - can enrich both its empirical application and its theoretical refinement. While Georgia does not face large-scale immigration or religious pluralism, it still exhibits classic illiberal exclusionary mechanisms. This challenges the notion that illiberalism always or necessarily centers on Islamophobia and illustrates that even in culturally homogenous states, "enemies" of the nation can be constructed to fit the logic of moral-political exclusion.

4.2 Contradictions in Discourse – Liberal vs Illiberal Juxtapositions

Today's non-liberal democratic leaders often maintain not only the institutional façade of democracy but also a rhetorical one. For example, a study by Maerz, based on the analysis

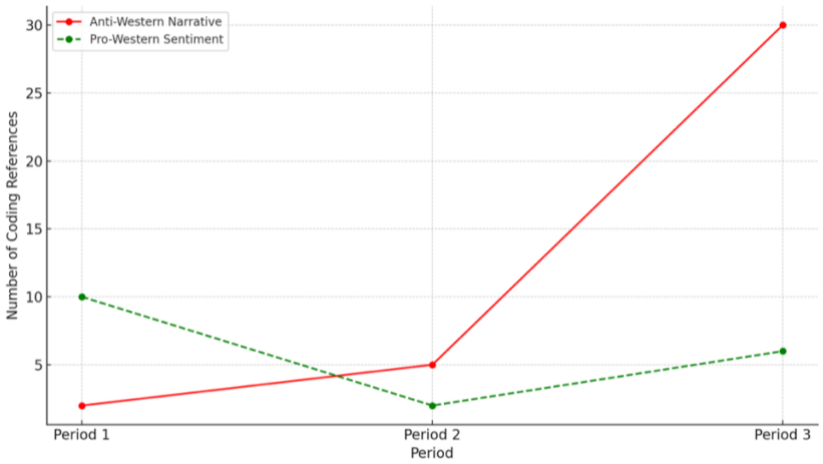
of political speeches, shows that leaders in hegemonic regimes tend to overemphasize democratic language and procedures to simulate pluralism and gain both domestic and international legitimacy (2019).

Given the exploratory nature of this research, the codebook was developed to include not only illiberal features but also liberal language. This dual lens enabled the analysis to trace how narratives evolved over time while also exposing the strategic and often contradictory use of political language, where remnants of liberal tone are maintained - albeit increasingly rarely.

4.2.1 Pro- vs Anti-Western Rhetoric

One of the most significant rhetorical contradictions lies in Georgian Dream's simultaneous use of pro- and anti-Western language. While the overall number of references to pro-Western narratives declined by over 40% in Period 3 compared to Period 1 (see Figure 9), the framing of the West as a strategic partner, and Europe as Georgia's natural destination rooted in shared values, still persists. This pro-European narrative, however, now coexists with increasingly explicit anti-Western rhetoric, creating a space for strategic ambiguity that can be manipulated depending on context.

Figure 9.Anti- and Pro-Western References Across Periods



Despite still using pro-European language, Georgian Dream filters the meaning of "Europeanness" through its own illiberal lens - particularly in connection with themes such as church-state fusion and national identity. As Prime Minister Kobakhidze stated in 2024, "*Europe represents transparency, traditional values, and Christian principles. For centuries, Georgians have aspired toward Europe because we share common traditions and a Christian cultural heritage*" (doc_181).

In the first parliamentary term, this framing was part of a broader pro-European and pro-liberal narrative, which included human rights language and positive references to NGOs, media, and pluralism. However, many of these liberal codes began to disappear by the end of the first term, giving way to the rise of more consistent illiberal narratives.

4.2.2 Pro- vs Anti-Minority Rights

Another contradiction is found in GD's simultaneous invocation of liberal tolerance and its overtly hostile stance toward LGBTQ+ rights. In its early years, the party adopted a liberal framing aligned with constitutional guarantees of equality. For instance, in 2013, Bidzina Ivanishvili condemned violence against LGBT demonstrators and emphasized that *"the Constitution of Georgia guarantees the right to assembly and expression to all citizens - without exception"* (doc_06).

However, since 2020, this discourse has shifted toward moral panic. GD leaders increasingly depict LGBTQ+ expression as a foreign imposition that threatens Georgia's traditional values and Christian identity. Prime Minister Gharibashvili, for instance, stated: "*When 95% of our population opposes holding a demonstrative, propagandistic march or parade, we must all respect that... Things will no longer be the way they were before when a minority always decided the fate of the majority*" (doc_102).

Similarly, Kobakhidze has framed LGBTQ+ visibility as the result of "propaganda" (doc_159) and pledged to ban same-sex adoption and partnerships (doc_170). These narratives

recast LGBTQ+ individuals not only as outsiders but as agents of pseudo-liberalism and moral decay.

4.2.3 Wise People vs Politically Immature Society

A further rhetorical contradiction stems from GD's depiction of the public as both politically wise and immature. Citizens are praised for their political discernment, especially after elections. References to the electorate's ability to "distinguish and analyze political realities" (Ivanishvili, 2020, doc_96) are common in such contexts:

> "*It is rare in the world for the same party to achieve such success in such difficult circumstances. This is a clear testament to the talent and capability of the Georgian people. I assure you - and we assure our society, our voters - that yes, there are richer countries than ours, countries with a longer history of democracy, but I firmly believe that our society is in no way inferior to any wealthy nation. What matters most is conscious decision-making - knowing whom to vote for and where to lead the country. That is what truly makes the difference*" (Ivanishvili, 2024, doc_185).

Yet elsewhere, the same citizens are portrayed as politically naive - unable to understand complex issues without guidance from the leadership: *"I will help society make the right decisions, conduct analysis, and act rationally rather than emotionally. Together with the public, we will develop a mechanism to assess situations correctly"* (Ivanishvili, 2013, doc_12).

This contradiction supports a paternalist logic, where the people's moral authority is acknowledged but their autonomy is denied. Taken together, these narratives reflect a discursive model in which legitimacy is based not on pluralist deliberation but on presumed moral unity between the people and their leader.

4.2.4 Russia's Dual Image in Georgian Dream Discourse

The final juxtaposition in Georgian Dream's rhetoric is the simultaneous framing of Russia as both an occupier and a pragmatic geopolitical actor. On one hand, the party affirms that 20% of Georgia's territory remains occupied by Russia. On the other hand, GD adopts a

restrained and pragmatic tone toward Russia in international affairs. This dual narrative enables the party to mobilize nationalist sentiment while simultaneously legitimizing a cautious foreign policy that avoids provoking Moscow. However, this balancing act has been criticized for downplaying the extent and implications of Russian influence in Georgia, raising concerns about the long-term costs of strategic ambiguity.

GD leaders have further repeatedly criticized the idea of imposing sanctions on Russia, citing the need to avoid opening a "second front" during the war in Ukraine - an argument closely linked to the fear-based rhetoric discussed earlier. In this narrative, Russia becomes a dangerous yet calculable neighbor: an aggressor that must not be provoked. This rthetorical startegy enables GD to present itself as a responsible guardian of national peace, balancing patriotic sentiment with geopolitical realism, and justifying its refusal to take a firmer pro-Western stance.

4.3 Actor-Centric Evolution

Whereas the previous sections focused on dominant thematic patterns across the overall discourse, this section adopts an actor-centric lens to examine how key Georgian Dream leaders - Bidzina Ivanishvili, Irakli Gharibashvili, and Irakli Kobakhidze - have individually contributed to the articulation and evolution of illiberal rhetoric between 2012 and 2024.

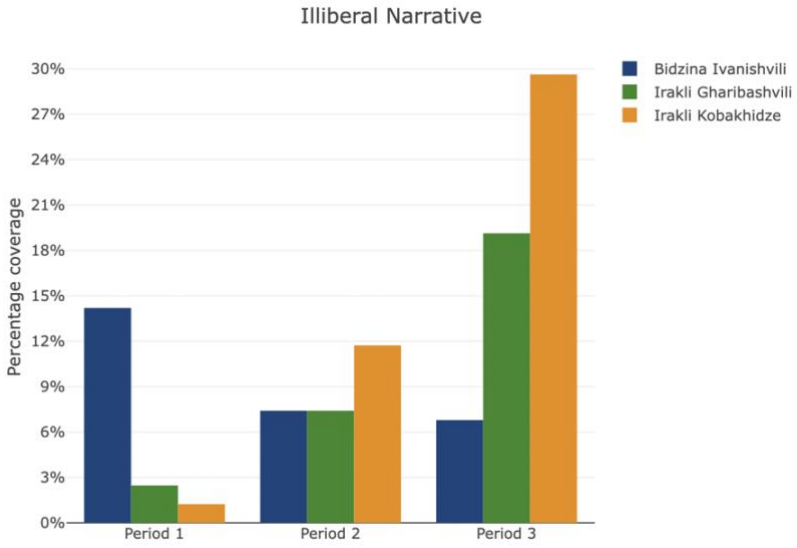
The aggregate number of coding references under the parent code "illiberal narrative" reveals notable shifts in the roles of key actors over time. In the first period, these shifts can be partly attributed to the changing political positions held by Georgian Dream leaders, which influenced the volume of discourse available under each name.

For instance, Irakli Kobakhidze assumed his first significant political role as Chairman of the Parliament in 2016. Accordingly, most of the collected materials featuring him date from that year onward. Irakli Gharibashvili, although he resigned as Prime Minister in 2015, continued to serve as an active political commentator prior to his appointment as Minister of

Defence in 2019, and later returned as Prime Minister from 2021 to 2024. Meanwhile, GD's founder Bidzina Ivanishvili has maintained a relatively consistent presence in the discourse throughout the entire period.

The bar chart (Figure 10) illustrates a temporal and leadership shift in the proportional use of illiberal rhetoric. While Ivanishvili laid the discursive foundations during Period 1 - with the highest percentage of illiberal content among leaders at that time - Kobakhidze and Gharibashvili emerged as the primary drivers of illiberal discourse in subsequent periods. Notably, Kobakhidze's rhetoric in Period 3 shows the highest concentration of illiberal content, accounting for nearly 30% of his overall discourse.

Figure 10.Illiberal Narrative Coverage (%) by Leader and Period



At the outset of Georgian Dream's rule, Ivanishvili was not only the primary driver of the illiberal narrative but also recorded the highest number of coding references under the liberal narrative parent code (N=32), even slightly surpassing his illiberal references during Period 1 (N=31). As both the founder of Georgian Dream and its initial Prime Minister, Ivanishvili occupied a central role in shaping the party's ideological direction.

The near-equal distribution of liberal and illiberal rhetoric in Ivanishvili's early discourse suggests a strategic attempt to balance Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations with conservative values that resonated with the domestic audience. This dual messaging likely reflected an effort to maintain broad-based support during Georgian Dream's formative years by appealing simultaneously to pro-Western constituencies and more traditional segments of society.

However, this equilibrium proved unsustainable. In Period 2, as Ivanishvili retreated from formal political roles and Kobakhidze gained increasing prominence, a clear discursive shift became evident. Kobakhidze's rhetoric adopted a more explicitly ideological tone, with illiberal themes gaining prominence. His ascent coincided with a broader intensification of Georgian Dream's nationalist and anti-pluralist messaging. In contrast, Ivanishvili's rhetoric during this period became more reserved and less ideologically pronounced, while Kobakhidze increasingly assumed the role of the party's chief ideologue in its illiberal turn.

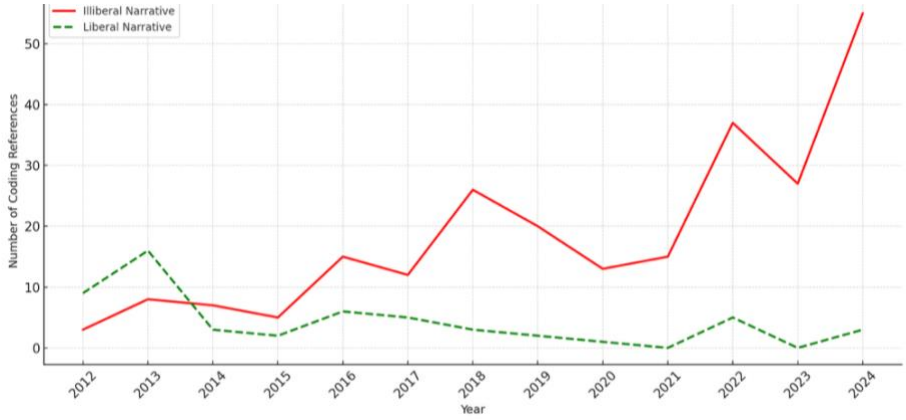
Irakli Gharibashvili, in contrast, performs a mediating role across periods. While less prolific in the early years, his re-emergence in high office is marked by a blend of conservative social values, overt support for the Church, and securitized narratives. Notably, Gharibashvili's discourse often amplifies the cultural dimension of illiberalism - particularly on family, tradition, and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, while also reinforcing anti-UNM narratives.

This leadership transition also signals an institutionalization of illiberal discourse within the party. Whereas early illiberal narratives were reactive and sporadic, later periods see their standardization across multiple actors. Therefore, the actor-centric view strenghtens the idea that Georgian Dream's ideological trajectory is not merely a product of individual leadership styles, but rather a broader structural realignment increasingly oriented toward illiberal governance.

4.4 Discourse and Democratic Decline: A Comparison with the V-Dem Index

Graph 11 illustrates the yearly trend of liberal and illiberal narratives in Georgian Dream's discourse from 2012 to 2024. The last year in which the liberal narrative predominated was 2013. Since then - particularly from 2015 onward - illiberal discourse has gradually emerged, reaching its first significant peak in 2018, followed by another in 2022, and rising notably by 2024.

Figure 11. Yearly Trajectory of Liberal and Illiberal Narratives in GD's Discourse (2012-2024)



Meanwhile, V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for Georgia between 2012 and 2024 shows that the country reached its highest score in 2016 (0.68), with the index remaining relatively stable in the following two years - 0.67 in 2017 and 0.66 in 2018. The first significant decline occurred in 2019, when Georgia's EDI dropped to 0.62 (see Figure 2 in Chapter 3.3).

The alignment between this institutional trajectory and the shift in political discourse is noteworthy. As illustrated in Figure 11, illiberal narratives began to surpass liberal rhetoric in Georgian Dream's discourse shortly after 2013. This transformation in language both anticipated and paralleled the institutional trends captured by the EDI. Notably, the rhetorical pivot preceded the 2016 peak in the EDI, suggesting that shifts in discourse served not only as reflections of democratic backsliding but also as early indicators and legitimizing tools for emerging autocratizing practices.

This sequence reinforces the theoretical proposition that discourse can function both as a precursor and an enabler of regime change. The strategic use of illiberal rhetoric - portraying dissent as foreign, amplifying perceived threats to sovereignty, and fusing national identity with moral order - gradually redefined the boundaries of legitimate political participation. In doing so, Georgian Dream laid the discursive groundwork for subsequent restrictions on civil society, independent media, and political opposition that were later codified through policy.

4.5 Evaluating Illiberal-Liberal Discourse via AI-Assisted Analysis

This thesis implements an innovative experimental method involving artificial intelligence to systematically assess the illiberalness versus liberalness of political discourse employed by Georgian political leaders. Specifically, OpenAI's GPT-4 model was used as an analytical tool to score political statements according to their liberal or illiberal characteristics.

A corpus of 192 political speeches and statements delivered by three political figures - Bidzina Ivanishvili, Irakli Gharibashvili, and Irakli Kobakhidze - between 2012 and 2024 was compiled. These speeches formed the empirical foundation of the analysis. One comprehensive document containing all materials, including information about the speaker, date, type of source, full text, and document ID, was provided to GPT-4 with the following explicit instructions:

> *"Imagine you are a political scientist. Score the illiberalness–liberalness of these speeches on a scale from 0 to 100, where: 0 represents completely illiberal rhetoric characterized by power concentration, a partisan state, and a closed society; and 100 represents fully liberal rhetoric characterized by strong commitments to limited government power, a neutral state, and an open society."*[3]

GPT-4 was further instructed to base scoring on clear liberal-democratic criteria: High liberalness (scores closer to 100): respect for political pluralism; protection and promotion of

[3] The scoring instruction provided to ChatGPT is based on Enyedi's framework (Enyedi, 2024a), which is overviewed in the literature review and theory chapter. For further discussion, see Subchapter 2.2: Illiberalism and its Conceptualization.

minority rights; support for civil liberties and human rights; commitment to democratic institutions and processes; pro-liberal democratic orientation and rhetoric; High illiberalness (scores closer to 0): strong authoritarian tendencies; Intolerance toward political opposition and civil society (e.g., NGOs); restriction of media freedoms and freedom of expression; anti-minority sentiment (e.g., LGBT rights opposition); anti-Western or isolationist narratives.

4.5.1 Illustrative Examples of Speech Evaluation

On the illiberal-liberal scale (0–100), GPT-4 scored Bidzina Ivanishvili's 2012 open letter to U.S. President Obama with a high liberal rating of 90. The excerpt demonstrates a clear commitment to democratic norms and pro-Western integration:

> *"If we succeed in the parliamentary elections, my political partners and I take full responsibility for implementing Georgia's declared foreign policy course and for establishing a multi-party political system. Therefore, we urge the leaders of the United States and the entire democratic community to support and encourage the country's path toward Euro-Atlantic integration, and at the same time, to use every possible resource to ensure free and fair elections for our citizens in the 2012 parliamentary elections"* (Ivanishvili, 2012, doc_01).

On the other hand, Ivanishvili's official statement from 2016 received a moderately illiberal score of 45, reflecting a critical stance on media freedom and pluralism:

> *"A political force [UNM] that not long ago ruled through terror, trampled on human rights, and persecuted free speech is now fully enjoying the freedoms of the very system it once suppressed... Citizens are deliberately and constantly fed a distorted picture of the country's situation, which fuels disillusionment and despair. This is all being done in pursuit of revenge, so that Saakashvili's clan can drag the country back into the swamp of oppression that we barely escaped. The media should criticize the government, and of course, I fully support that - but not from the position or in the interest of a political group that has inflicted so much suffering on its own people and is now seeking revenge"* (Ivanishvili, 2016, doc_34).

A significant shift toward illiberal rhetoric is evidenced in a 2019 interview by former PM Irakli Gharibashvili, scored 10 for its highly illiberal, anti-LGBT, and anti-minority content:

> *"The absolute majority of our society is traditional and conservative. Therefore, it is entirely understandable that the vast majority of people are outraged by such [LGBTQ+] marches and parades. I call on the representatives of this minority - do not provoke and do not deliberately irritate the rest of society. In reality, they face no issues in Georgia. We are a tolerant people"* (Gharibashvili, 2019, doc_76).

In a recent 2024 public statement, PM Irakli Kobakhidze's deeply illiberal, anti-Western, and hostile rhetoric against democratic institutions was assessed as thoroughly illiberal:

> *"Responsibility for the violent rally lies primarily with certain European politicians and bureaucrats, as well as with the local agent network the so-called fifth column - represented by four political parties. It is clear that everyone is fully aware of what is happening; the radicals and their foreign patrons simply continue to invent pretexts for attempts to destabilize the country and "Ukrainize" Georgia. They still fail to understand that, unlike Ukraine in 2013, Georgia is an independent state with strong institutions and, most importantly, a wise and experienced people. The Maidan scenario cannot and will not be repeated in Georgia - Georgia is a sovereign state and will not allow this to happen"* (Kobakhidze, 2024, doc_187).

These examples are provided for illustrative purposes to demonstrate the internal logic and consistency of GPT-4's scoring pattern. They reflect how different rhetorical elements correspond to varying levels of (il)liberalness as interpreted by the model.

4.5.2 Summary of AI-Assisted Analysis Results

The AI-generated results reveal a clear temporal shift in the rhetoric of Georgian Dream leaders. Initially, in the period of 2012–2013, Georgian Dream leaders exhibited predominantly liberal-democratic rhetoric emphasizing pluralism, civil liberties, minority rights, and strong pro-Western (EU/NATO) integration. This phase was followed by an intermediate phase (2014–2019) where the discourse became increasingly mixed, blending liberal elements with growing criticism of media, civil society (NGOs), and political pluralism.

Most notably, during the late phase (2020-2024), a significant shift occurred toward strongly illiberal, authoritarian, and anti-Western rhetoric. Leaders explicitly displayed hostility toward pluralism, opposition, civil society organizations, media freedom, LGBTQ+ rights, and Western institutions (U.S., EU).

In quantitative terms, GPT-4 scoring vividly illustrates this trajectory: early speeches (2012–2013) averaged between 70 and 90, reflecting liberal rhetoric. During the middle period

(2014–2019), scores ranged between 40 and 60, indicating a shift toward moderately illiberal discourse. In the later period (2020–2024), scores frequently dropped below 20, with some reaching 0, representing deeply authoritarian and anti-liberal positions.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This research set out to examine how the political discourse of Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, has evolved since its founding in 2012, including 2024. The main goal of this exploratory research was to understand and answer the puzzling question of how shifting narratives and ideational changes align with regime transformation. The findings show that GD's rhetoric, examined through its three dominant leaders, did not merely shift in focus but underwent a fundamental ideological transformation. These shifts were mostly manifested in the framing of the West, NGOs, civil society, and political opponents. An intensification of discourse is also visible in worldviews concerning control, exclusion, and traditionalism.

The study contributes to broader debates on regime change by demonstrating that authoritarianism can be ideologically driven and discursively legitimized before institutional breakdowns become visible. The empirical evidence challenges the institution-focused approach of regime change studies by showing that Georgia's illiberal turn was not a sudden deviation but a gradually normalized outcome of discursive strategies employed by the ruling party. In this sense, the Georgian case supports calls in the literature to treat discourse not as peripheral, but as equally important as observations of political institutions.

Conceptually, the thesis engages in discussions about regime classifications and their ideational dimensions. To describe gradual regime change in a case that never achieved full-fledged democracy, the thesis adopts the notion of autocratization, as it captures both the incremental nature of democratic erosion and the spectrum-based logic that allows for analyzing democratic subversion in cases like Georgia.

The research further strictly distinguishes between authoritarianism and illiberalism: the former is treated as a regime type, while the latter is understood as its ideational dimension - an ideological framework that informs, justifies, and sustains authoritarian practices without

necessarily replacing democratic institutions outright. The analysis also showed that illiberalism, beyond reflecting worldviews, strategically legitimizes the concentration of power, discredits opposition actors, and constructs a moral framework through which policy decisions appear necessary and patriotic, even when they erode democratic norms.

In observing the Georgian version of illiberalism, an additional distinct route may be identified, which can be termed *communitarian illiberalism*. Unlike populist illiberalism, which emphasizes the absolute authority of the ordinary people's will against corrupt elites, or authoritarian illiberalism, which centers on top-down control (Enyedi, 2024a, p. 11), communitarian illiberalism legitimizes restrictions on pluralism and civil liberties by appealing to collective morality, cultural authenticity, and social cohesion. It often leverages religious narratives, state-society paternalism, and anti-individualist rhetoric to frame liberal rights as threats to national unity. As such, this subtype is particularly relevant for post-Soviet contexts like Georgia, where state-led modernization and moral traditionalism coexist in uneasy tension.

By theorizing and identifying the subtype of communitarian illiberalism, the thesis adds a conceptual tool to the study of ideological change in regimes undergoing autocratization, especially in post-Soviet countries and among regional autocratizers. It also helps move the literature beyond Western-centric models and opens space for comparative studies of ideational transformation across diverse political settings.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. As a single-case, discourse-focused analysis, its findings are context-specific and may not be directly generalizable. Additionally, the exclusive reliance on elite political speech - while methodologically justified - limits insight into how illiberal discourse is interpreted, resisted, or reproduced by the wider public. Therefore, future studies may benefit from triangulating these findings with public opinion data, interviews, or media analysis to expand the understanding of how these discourses are received and contested.

In conclusion, Georgia's authoritarian turn under Georgian Dream transcends institutional weaknesses and is observable through language. Political discourse made autocratization imaginable and eventually governable. Recognizing the power of language is therefore essential - not only for understanding Georgia's trajectory but also for anticipating and resisting democratic erosion elsewhere.

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Appendix A. Thematic Codebook

Code	Subcode	Sub-Subcode	Definition
Illiberal narrative	Anti-LGBT narrative		Frames LGBT identities, rights, and visibility as threats to national values, children, religion, and public morality, often labeled as dangerous propaganda pushed by external or anti-Christian forces.
	Anti-media		Portrays critical or opposition-aligned media as deceptive, radical, or aligned with foreign interests.
	Anti-western narrative	EU = biased/hostile	Undermines the credibility, neutrality, and moral authority of EU institutions and politicians - framing them as biased, corrupt, or manipulative.
		Foreign organizations = biased/interventionist	Discredits Western organizations, embassies, and NGOs by portraying them as biased, manipulative, or part of a broader anti-Georgian agenda.
		Threat to national identity	Portrays liberal ideas, foreign influence, and Western-backed institutions as threats to Georgia's cultural, religious, and moral identity.
		Conspiracies about Western control	Promotes the idea that powerful, hidden forces - such as the "Global War Party" or a "Deep State" - control Western institutions and aim to destabilize Georgia through foreign influence, domestic agents, and anti-national agendas.
		West = morally decayed	Frames Western societies as suffering from moral decay.
	Church-state fusion	Rejection of secularism	Portrays the Orthodox Church as inseparable from the state and elevating its authority in political decision-making.
		Patriarch-clergy as an authorty	Elevates the Patriarch as a central moral and political figure whose guidance is treated as authoritative in both religious and state affairs.
		Religion = national identity	Frames Orthodox Christianity as inseparable from Georgian national identity - depicting it as the foundation of statehood, tradition, morality, and resistance to cultural erosion.
	Ivanishvili/GD = saviour		Portrays Ivanishvili and Georgian Dream as heroic figures who rescued Georgia from authoritarianism, collapse, and war - framing them as the sole guarantors of peace, sovereignty, and national survival.
	Liberalism as threat and chaos		Depicts liberalism as disorderly, foreign, and morally harmful.
	Morality & family = national foundation		Frames traditional morality and the family unit as the core of Georgia's national strength and cultural survival, often contrasted with liberal or foreign attempts to undermine them.
	National interests first		Frames Georgia's sovereignty and national interests as the supreme guiding principles - prioritizing self-determination over foreign advice, pressure, or global norms.
	NGO & civil society demonization	NGOs & CS = foreign agents	Portrays NGOs and civil society actors as tools of foreign powers - accused of espionage, regime change, and undermining Georgia's sovereignty and political order.

		NGOs & CS = opposition agents	Frames NGOs as covert extensions of the political opposition, accusing them of masquerading as neutral actors while advancing partisan agendas and staging political provocations.
	Opposition delegitimization	Call to ban opposition	Frames the opposition - especially the UNM - as criminal, treasonous, and inherently destabilizing, justifying their permanent removal from politics through legal or constitutional means.
		Call to weaken opposition	Frames the opposition - especially the UNM - as a destructive force that must be systematically weakened and politically sidelined.
		UNM = authoritarian regime	Frames UNM's time in power as a one-party authoritarian regime characterized by media control, repression, elite corruption, and self-serving leadership.
		Opposition = anti-Georgian	Frames UNM leaders and affiliates as betraying Georgian values, traditions, and identity - portraying them as foreign-aligned, culturally detached, and fundamentally hostile to the nation.
		Opposition = foreign-backed	Portrays the opposition - especially UNM - as loyal to foreign interests rather than the Georgian people, accusing them of surrendering national sovereignty and following external directives.
		UNM/Saakashvili = existential threat	Frames the United National Movement as a radical, anti-state force posing an existential threat to Georgia's sovereignty, stability, and national identity.
		UNM/Saakashvili = to be marginalized	Frames UNM Saakashvili as dangerous, criminal, and morally corrupt actors who should be ultimately excluded from politics.
		UNM/Saakashvili = responsible for 2008 war	Portrays UNM and Saakashvili as the main initiators of the 2008 war, accusing them of provoking Russia, betraying national interests, and enabling occupation through reckless or criminal actions.
	Orban=friend and role model		Portrays Viktor Orbán as a model leader and ideological ally - admired for his nationalism, defense of traditional values, and prioritization of national interests - positioning him as an example for Georgia's own leadership.
	Paternalist rhetoric		Frames the leader - especially Bidzina Ivanishvili - as a wise, unifying, and morally superior figure who guides a politically immature public, providing knowledge, stability, and protection, like a paternal figure overseeing the nation.
	Spin over fear		Uses fear-based rhetoric - especially of war, revolution, or foreign plots - to frame opposition actors and civil society as destabilizing threats, portraying the ruling party as the sole guarantor of peace and national survival.
	Labeling liberal ideas (e.g. pseudo-liberal, neoliberal, liberal-fascist)		Rebrands liberal ideology using labels like pseudo-liberalism, neoliberalism, or liberal fascism to discredit its values, depict it as a foreign threat, and associate it with moral decay, societal harm, or anti-national agendas.

Liberal narrative	Human rights language		Uses liberal-democratic language - such as individual rights, minority protection, and freedom of expression.
	Pluralism language		Affirms political pluralism, opposition rights, and media diversity as core elements of democracy.
	NGOs & CS = partner		Frames civil society as essential to democratic development and international legitimacy - presented as a valued and supported partner of the government.
	Pro-media		Frames media freedom and lack of state control as a key achievement of the ruling party.
	Pro-western sentiment	Europe = natural destiny	Frames European integration as Georgia's natural, historic, and value-driven path.
		Shared values framing	Frames Georgia as historically, culturally, and spiritually part of Europe.
		West = strategic partner	Frames the EU, NATO, and the U.S. as Georgia's key strategic allies.
	Respect for democratic principles		Emphasizes adherence to rule of law, institutional accountability, electoral fairness, and public service.
	Respect for tolerance		Affirms tolerance as a core component of Georgia's identity - framed as rooted in national and Christian tradition, and necessary for democracy, social cohesion, and European integration.
Russia–Georgia relations	Russia = threat, but avoid provocation		Frames Russia as an aggressor and occupier, but emphasizes the need to avoid provocation - advocating strategic patience, internal strengthening, and diplomatic restraint.
	Russian alignment = denied		Rejects allegations that the government, its policies, or institutions are aligned with or influenced by Russia.
	Russia = pragmatic engagement		Portrays Russia as a potential future partner - advocating dialogue, economic ties, and pragmatic diplomacy.
	Russia = useful actor		Frames Russia as a powerful neighbor and global actor whose cooperation is seen as necessary for regional stability, economic development, and pragmatic diplomacy - despite ongoing occupation.
	Russia = occupier		Frames Russia as the main aggressor and occupying power responsible for the loss of Georgian territories.
Views on Georgian society	Society = divided/misled		Portrays the public as fragmented, manipulated, or lacking clear understanding.
	Society = politically immature		Frames the Georgian public as lacking political experience, education, and critical capacity.
	Society = wise		Portrays Georgian society as politically conscious, capable of critical evaluation, and resilient against manipulation.
	Society = manipulated		Frames society as susceptible to misinformation, emotional reactions, or external manipulation

Appendix B. Empirical Corpus

Document ID	Speaker	Date (Y)	Source	Type of Source
doc_01	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2012	Link	Official Statement
doc_02	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2012	Link	Official Statement
doc_03	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2012	Link	Interview
doc_04	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_05	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Press Conference
doc_06	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Official Statement
doc_07	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_08	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_09	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_10	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_11	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Official Statement
doc_12	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_13	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Interview
doc_14	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2013	Link	Public Speech
doc_15	Irakli Gharibashvili	2013	Link	Official Statement
doc_16	Irakli Gharibashvili	2013	Link	Official Statement
doc_17	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2014	Link	Interview
doc_18	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2014	Link	Interview
doc_19	Irakli Gharibashvili	2014	Link	Public Speech
doc_20	Irakli Gharibashvili	2014	Link	Interview
doc_21	Irakli Gharibashvili	2014	Link	Public Comment/Remark
doc_22	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2014	Link	Interview
doc_23	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2014	Link	Interview
doc_24	Irakli Gharibashvili	2014	Link	Public Speech
doc_25	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2014	Link	Interview
doc_26	Irakli Gharibashvili	2015	Link	Official Statement
doc_27	Irakli Gharibashvili	2015	Link	Public Speech
doc_28	Irakli Gharibashvili	2015	Link	Public Speech
doc_29	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2015	Link	Official Statement
doc_30	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2015	Link	Public Comment/Remark
doc_31	Irakli Gharibashvili	2015	Link	Interview
doc_32	Irakli Kobakhidze	2016	Link	Interview
doc_33	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2016	Link	Official Statement

doc_34	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2016	Link	Official Statement
doc_35	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2016	Link	Official Statement
doc_36	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2016	Link	Interview
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doc_38	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2016	Link	Interview
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doc_48	Bidzina Ivanishvili	2016	Link	Press Conference
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