



GÖTEBORGS
UNIVERSITET

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION UNDER AUTOCRATIZING STATE RESTRICTIONS

A Comparative Study of INGO Democracy
Promotion in Türkiye and Georgia

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Master's Thesis:	30 credits
Programme:	Master's Programme in Political Science
Date:	
Supervisor:	Frida Boräng
Words:	19180

Abstract

International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are central actors within international democracy promotion. By not being formally state-affiliated, these actors have many advantages in furthering democratic developments around the world. Meanwhile, following current autocratization trends are increasingly restrictive operating environments for democracy promoters. Previously open countries are now increasingly closing themselves off as part of a broader autocratization trend across many states targeted for democracy promotion. This poses several challenges to democracy promoting INGOs, not least in relation to how this may affect their programs to further democratization in increasingly restrictive target states. This thesis builds on previous literature in proposing a theoretical model that outlines how increasingly restrictive operating environments in autocratizing states lead to political compromises in the democracy promotion strategies of INGOs. In utilizing this model, this thesis compares two target states diverging on recent autocratization trends, Türkiye and Georgia, for their respective impacts on INGO-led democracy promotion programs. By interviewing INGO personnel active with democracy promotion in Türkiye and Georgia combined with a document analysis of INGO documents, this thesis investigates whether democracy promotion in Türkiye as a highly autocratizing state has led to more politically compromised democracy promotion strategies when compared to operations in a non-autocratizing state such as Georgia. It is found that INGO democracy promotion strategies indeed have been compromised to a certain degree in autocratizing target states. However, the analysis also shows that the specific ways in which this occurs depends on a number of other factors, such as organizational mandates, different impacts on INGOs and their partner organizations, varying state restrictions within target states etc. Such findings provide contributions for potential future research on international democracy promotion.

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1.0 Introduction

Democracy promotion refers to efforts by actors, whether international or national, to further democracy within countries lacking in democratic developments. Such projects may involve both state and non-state actors. Non-governmental democracy promotion grew during the 1980s and 1990s along the rise of major NGOs and quasi-governmental organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States. The overall focus on democratization during this era led to financial and political opportunities which favored the emergence of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) engaged in democracy promotion in other countries (Bush, 2017).

Meanwhile, a worrying trend is now emerging within international democracy promotion. This being an increasing trend of government repression against democracy promoting INGOs (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). This trend is further associated with another international trend, the spread of autocratization across countries targeted for democracy promotion (Lührmann et al, 2017; Glasius et al, 2020). Increased state restrictions against INGO democracy promotion within autocratizing countries lead to several challenges. Not only in that the lines between autocracy and democracy are becoming increasingly blurred (Gerschewski, 2018), but also in that it is becoming increasingly unclear what types of democracy promotion programs that actually have the possibility to further democratization (Leininger, 2022).

The research field surrounding state restrictions against international non-governmental democracy promotion in autocratizing states remains relatively unexplored. In particular, little research has yet been conducted on the impacts of autocratization on democracy promoting INGOs as organizations (Heiss, 2017). This leads to many questions, including how the current spread of autocratizing state restrictions might impact democracy promoting INGOs in their strategic choices to promote democracy. Like other similar organizations, democracy promoting INGOs

have organizational interests to maintain their access to funding and advocacy spaces within target states to continue their operations (Cooley & Ron, 2002; Risse, 2007). Because current state restrictions limit such organizational interests, it may be worthwhile to ask whether increasingly restrictive state environments might lead INGO democracy promoters to compromise on their strategies to promote democracy. Might increasingly restrictive target state environments lead democracy promoting INGOs to choose strategies that are less confrontational towards target state governments, or will democracy promoting INGOs remain steadfast despite attempts by governments to restrict their activities? And if democracy promotion strategies are compromised, then precisely how does this occur from within the INGOs themselves?

This thesis aims to answer such questions. The aim of this thesis is to study how target state autocratization might impact the strategic choices by INGO democracy promoters. The theoretical claim being that democracy promoting INGOs operating in countries undergoing autocratization will tend to adopt less politically confrontational strategies towards target states, when compared to democracy promoting INGOs operating in non-autocratizing countries. In regards to how this occurs, this thesis proposes a theoretical model which suggests that democracy promotion strategies become less politically confrontational following internal conflicts over strategic choices, in turn leading to compromises on INGO strategies to promote democracy in target states undergoing autocratization.

1.1. Research question

This thesis studies the impacts of target state autocratization on INGO democracy promotion programs. In particular, it poses two main research questions. The first question asks whether or not the presence of autocratizing state restrictions against democracy promotion leads INGO democracy promotion strategies to become less politically confrontational towards target state governments. The second question concerns the mechanism through which autocratizing state restrictions may make democracy promotion strategies less politically confrontational towards target state governments.

1. Do restrictions in autocratizing target states impact democracy promoting INGOs to choose strategies that are less politically confrontational?
2. In which ways do restrictions in autocratizing target states impact democracy promoting INGOs to choose strategies that are less politically confrontational?

1.2. Contribution

This thesis has three major contributions.

The first major contribution of this thesis is that it studies the impacts of autocratizing target state environments on strategies chosen by INGOs to promote democracy. In particular, the theoretical claim is that this leads to strategies becoming less politically confrontational. The general notion that target state restrictions may constrain democracy promotion strategies to become less politically confrontational is not new (Bush 2019; Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). However, rather than focusing on restrictive target states in general, this thesis focuses on the impacts on democracy promotion strategies in target states undergoing autocratization. Unlike target states that have long been autocratic, autocratizing target states are state environments where restrictions have recently been increasing,

leading to particular challenges for democracy promoters. Among which include that autocratizing target states lead to more strategic uncertainties to promote democracy, in part due to the rapidly changing nature of autocratization.

The second major contribution of this thesis is that it studies impacts of target state restrictions on INGOs themselves. How democracy promoting INGOs themselves are impacted as organizations by target state restrictions remains understudied (Heiss, 2019; Springman, Malesky et al, 2022). To approach this question, this thesis proposes a theoretical model suggesting that target state restrictions against the organizational interests of democracy promoters lead to internal strategic conflicts within democracy promoting INGOs. Autocratizing target state restrictions are expected to lead to internal conflicts over which strategies to pursue within such INGOs, in turn leading to compromises on their strategies to promote democracy. In particular, internal strategic conflicts emerging from pressures on their organizational interests are expected to force INGOs to adopt strategies of democracy promotion that are less politically confrontational towards target state regimes. Thus, the second main contribution of this thesis is the focus on how target state restrictions may impact democracy promotion strategies through internal organizational impacts on INGO democracy promoters.

The third major contribution is the utilization of a comparative method to study two target state cases: Türkiye and Georgia. These countries are divergent in their autocratization trends during the last 10 years (V-Dem, 2023). The contribution is the studying of the effect of autocratization on democracy promotion, through a comparison of the impacts of the operating environments in these divergent target states on democracy promotion INGOs, with Türkiye representing an autocratizing target state and Georgia representing a non-autocratizing target state. Thus, this thesis provides a contribution by utilizing a comparative approach on the impacts of diverging operating environments on INGO democracy promoters.

1.3. Thesis overview

This thesis is divided as follows:

Under *Theory*, previous relevant research and the theoretical model are presented. This section provides definitions of central concepts, their relation to previous literature and a description of the central relationship posited by the theoretical model. Under *Methodology*, the methodological approach is presented. This section provides details on the case selection, the methodological approach as well as descriptions of how the data is collected and coded. *Data and Material* provides further details on the main empirical material of this thesis, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. It also provides information on the INGOs under study as well as a justification for the comparison between Türkiye and Georgia as target state cases. Under *Results*, the main empirical material (interview data and INGO documents) are presented and analyzed in accordance with the theoretical model of this thesis. Under *Discussion*, results from the empirical material are presented and analytically discussed in relation to the two research questions.

2.0 Theory

This section presents previous research and the theoretical model of this thesis. The section begins by providing an overview of previous literature on INGO democracy promotion and its relationship to the topic of this thesis. The section then provides an outline of the theoretical model and its relationship to previous literature.

2.1. Defining democracy promotion

Democracy promotion has been defined in multiple ways. On a broader level, it refers to “aid programs specifically designed either to help nondemocratic countries become democratic or to help countries that have initiated democratic transitions consolidate their democratic systems.” (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000, p.5). More specifically, it refers to “intended-violent or non-violent- effort of international and transnational actors to proactively support the opening of authoritarian regimes, transitions to democratic order, and the deepening of democratic regimes” (Leininger, 2019).

Democracy promotion projects may be distinguished from other interventions, e.g. state building or peace building, in that they focus exclusively on political transformations in other countries. Meanwhile, some aspects of state building or peace building may be included within the broader goals of democracy promotion (Leininger, 2019). This thesis focuses specifically on non-violent forms of democracy promotion as promoted by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) aimed at foreign states. It utilizes the following definition by Leininger (2022):

Democracy promotion is an action taken by an actor (the democracy promoter) to support or protect democracy in a country outside its own territorial and legal boundaries (the target state). This involves an inter or transnational interplay between the democracy promoter and local actors in the target state, in which the democracy promoter furthers democracy by supporting local pro-democracy actors or by supporting institutional reforms in the target state (Leininger, 2022).

2.2. Previous research

This section provides an outline of previous literature. This covers topics such as autocratization, restrictions against non-governmental democracy promotion as well as the impacts of such restrictions on democracy promoting organizations.

2.2.1. Autocratization

The literature mentions an ongoing cross-national wave of autocratization. The current wave which started in the mid-1990s is characterized by affecting nominally democratic regimes. As noted by Lührmann & Lindberg (2019) regimes across the world are gradually autocratizing through means that differ from previous autocratization waves. Contemporary autocratizers are increasingly using more gradual and legal forms of autocratization, in contrast to the more blatant forms of power-grabs, e.g. military coups, which characterized prior autocratization waves (Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019).

The ongoing third wave of autocratization appears to be gaining momentum across multiple countries (Boese, Lundstedt et al, 2022). Common features of which includes increased polarization and government misinformation as reinforcers of autocratization (Boese, Lundstedt et al, 2022). As noted by Bermeo (2016), current autocratizers increasingly also tend to frame their own power-grabs as necessary defenses of democracy by utilizing gradual methods to expand their own executive powers (Bermeo, 2016). The consequences of which include a gradual diminishing on checks and balances on executive state powers as well as the establishment of new restrictive laws aimed at oppositional actors through seemingly legal channels (Bermeo, 2016).

2.2.2. Shrinking spaces for democracy promotion

Autocratization and INGO democracy promotion

The literature indicates that ongoing autocratization trends are related to the spread of state restrictions against international civil society actors, incl. INGO democracy promoters (Glasius et al, 2020; Lührmann et al, 2017; Rutzen, 2015). As Carothers (2006) notes, many of the newly democratizing states during the 1990s have now turned into semi-authoritarian states, keeping semblances of democratic institutions while retaining autocratic control over political powers (Carothers, 2006).

As Chaudhry (2022) notes, when autocratic regimes encounter INGO democracy promoters, they face options to either utilize open repression against such actors and risk losing international legitimacy, or they may adopt more subtle methods of repression, e.g. through anti-NGO laws (Chaudhry, 2022). By being more subtle, anti-NGO laws have now become one strategy of choice for autocratic regimes aiming to repress civil society activities (Chaudhry, 2022; Chaudhry & Heiss, 2022). Meanwhile, target state regimes are also increasingly willing to risk lost international legitimacy in adopting anti-NGO measures, particularly in areas considered as being politically sensitive for regime survival (Dupuy, Ron et al, 2016; Chaudhry, 2022; Toepler, Zimmer et al, 2020). Therefore, current restriction trends against civil society actors are becoming especially prevalent in activities deemed as being politically sensitive, such as human right advocacy and democracy promotion (Hossain, Khurana et al, 2018; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021). Such restrictions may take a variety of forms, including direct expulsions and harassments of INGO actors, but also includes repression against local NGOs in target states, thereby preventing such local actors from cooperating with and accepting funds from international supporters (Carothers, 2006).

What is notable about current regime pushbacks against democracy promotion is that they affect countries that had previously allowed international democracy

promoters within their borders. Thus, this trend does not mainly affect countries which never allowed democracy promotion in the first place, but rather countries which until recently were relatively open to democratization support from INGOs (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Gershman & Allen, 2006). This leads to restrictions taking on increasingly wider proportions, representing a threat to many previous democratic advancements in affected countries (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Leininger et al, 2016). This tends to affect the financing of INGOs and their local NGO partners, but also the ability of such actors to engage in election observations, the training of local personnel and the providing of strategic counseling (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Poppe & Wolff, 2018).

This limits the range of activities available to INGOs (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Poppe & Wolff, 2017) and may lead to specific reporting and tax regulations on INGOs which limit their usages of funds for specific government-approved purposes (Dupuy, Ron et al, 2016). Legal restrictions may target INGOs and their local NGO partners by imposing restrictions on the right to associate with each other or through restrictions on registering non-governmental organizations engaging in political activities. This makes such actors vulnerable to facing arbitrary external interference or even shutdowns, prosecutions and deportations (Chaudhry, 2022, Gershman & Allen, 2006). Restrictions may also obstruct INGOs by crowding out their activities through the establishment of host-regime-supported NGOs (GONGOs) (Gershman & Allen, 2006). Roggeband & Krizsán (2021) note three major impacts on INGOs from restrictions. That they restrict the access to target states and their political institutions, that they affect the access of INGOs to resources, incl. state funding, and that they restrict advocacy spaces of INGOs through limits to freedom of association, speech and information (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021).

Restrictions in autocratizing states leads to particular challenges to democracy promoters, since it becomes increasingly difficult to identify which interventions that are appropriate in scenarios where the lines between autocracy and democracy are becoming blurred and formally democratic institutions are utilized for autocratic ends (Glasius et al, 2020; Gerschewski, 2018). This constitutes major challenges to

democracy promoters, since it restricts their ability to coordinate and share information with local actors in target states, thereby leading to major limitations on the impacts of international democracy promotion (Leininger, 2016).

2.2.3. Impacts on democracy promotion

Interests of INGO democracy promoters

The literature notes how INGOs have organizational interests which can be affected by target state restrictions. As Heiss & Kelley (2017) note, NGOs possess characteristics of both the private and public sector. While they are similar to the private sector in having high demands for organizational efficiency, they are also similar to the public sphere in having to meet public demands for accountability and common interests (Heiss & Kelley, 2017). As a result, increasingly restrictive environments constitute a problem. If NGOs decide to focus only on their own organizational interests, then this may lead to risks of becoming diverged from their own normative ideals. However, if they decide to overlook their own material interests, e.g. needs for funding or access for operations, then this could lead to risks to their own organizational survival (Heiss & Kelley, 2017).

Risse (2007) notes the importance of material resources (e.g. public finances, donations) for INGOs. When such resources become limited, INGOs may adopt different marketing strategies to compete for resources. This may lead INGOs away from their primary goals by becoming too dependent on their donors, leading to a loss of contact with local constituencies (Risse, 2007). This poses harm to INGOs, since a major resource for advocacy INGOs is their claim to represent the common good as opposed to private interests. Losing contact with constituencies may lead to reputation losses, which in turn may pose a challenge to their organizational survival (Risse, 2007). Further, as noted by Cooley & Ron (2002), INGOs face various other organizational pressures in target states. These include competitions with other organizations working in the same policy areas as well as marketization trends of

NGO activities. These may result in non-profit NGOs behaving more and more like for-profit organizations (Cooley & Ron, 2002). After all, NGOs are no different from other organizations in that they too may be forced to compromise on their normative agendas for material organizational interests (Cooley & Ron, 2002).

Such organization pressures may further impact the overall goals of democracy promoters. Grimm & Leininger (2012) note how conflicting objectives defined as a “clash of two competing goals, whereby the achievement of one goal is impaired by the achievement of the other goal” constitutes major challenges for democracy promotion (Grimm & Leininger, 2012). The authors differentiate ‘intrinsic conflicts’, i.e. conflicts between different dimensions or sub-goals of democracy promotion, from ‘extrinsic conflicts’, i.e. conflicts between democracy promotion and other development programs e.g. peace-building (Grimm & Leininger, 2012). The authors stress how these conflicts can emerge at different stages of democracy promotion. They can emerge at the general strategic level all the way down to the operative level where certain interventions must be prioritized over others (Grimm & Leininger, 2012).

Impacts on democracy promotion strategies

In regards to how restrictive target states may influence democracy promotion strategies, the literature seems undecided. Meanwhile, as noted by Ottaway & Carothers (2000), democracy promoters are forced to take into account local country contexts in all of their strategic priorities. For instance, democracy promoters receiving foreign support may come under suspicion from authorities, which could force democracy promoters to change their strategies accordingly in order to survive (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000, p.15).

Leininger (2022) suggests how democracy promoters should consider current autocratization trends in their strategic choices. In particular, the author suggests how gradual phases of democratization/autocratization (autocratic regression, autocratic regression, transition to democracy, democratic deepening, democratic

regression, transition to autocracy, autocratic deepening) might influence the appropriateness of different democracy promotion strategies (Leininger, 2022). Here, the furthering of democracy in already democratizing states is termed 'democracy support', whereas preventions against further autocratization in autocratizing states is termed 'democracy protection' (Leininger, 2022). This may involve strengthening local actors in target states (e.g. political parties, media, government actors) or the building of institutions (e.g. election cycles, rule of law and independent media) (Leininger, 2022).

Carothers & Brechenmacher (2014) note how human rights activists and democracy promoters alike have been forced to tone down the assertiveness of their activities in the face of increased target state restrictions. This results in various forms of self-censorship, less external training and reduced information sharing with foreign counterparts (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). Likewise, Hyde, Lamb & Samet (2023) note that in facing autocratic restrictions, INGOs may begin to choose tamer and more indirect strategies to promote democratization. Meanwhile, in doing so, this may lead to decreased public demands for democratization, which in turn may lead to citizens of autocratic target states to become complacent with ruling autocratic regimes (Hyde, Lamb & Samet, 2023).

Bush (2015) notes how NGO democracy promoters require two primary resources: donor government funding and access to target states. The author notes how democracy promoting NGOs may become stuck between demands of their donor governments and restrictions from target states (Bush, 2015, p.5). To gain donor funding, democracy promoting NGOs become incentivized towards projects that can be easily quantifiable, e.g., programs focusing on women's participation or good governance. This leads projects to become increasingly tied to easily quantifiable indicators of democracy, overlooking other indicators as part of a professionalization of democracy promotion (Bush, 2015, p.10-11). Further, facing target state restrictions, democracy promoting NGOs and their state funders are increasingly favoring less politically confrontational approaches to ensure their access to and survival within target state environments. The author notes this to be a trend towards

more regime-compatible democracy promotion, meaning projects that target states view as less likely to threaten their own survival via regime replacement, e.g. through regime-overthrow or regime collapse (Bush, 2015, p.14).

The end result of more measurable and regime-compatible programs is a 'taming' of democracy promotion, i.e. democracy promoters are increasingly incentivized to adopt less regime-confrontational approaches to democracy promotion so as to ensure their own organizational survival (Bush, 2015, p.10-11). This being visible in the decrease during recent decades in the proportion of grants given to projects that are regime-confrontational, relative to projects that are less regime-confrontational but more measurable and regime-compatible (Bush, 2015, p.60). The author notes target state restrictions to be a major reason for a growing trend among NGO democracy promoters to choose less confrontational activities. Less confrontational strategies favor organizational survival, since they are less likely to lead to anti-NGO backlashes from host governments (Bush, 2019). However, by being less confrontational, projects may also ultimately become less effective at promoting democratization (Bush, 2019).

Carothers (2009) notes two contrasting democracy promotion strategies as having emerged following recent trends of increased target state restrictions, in which target states are no longer following clear paths between autocracy and democracy (Carothers, 2009). These are the 'developmental' and the 'political' approaches for democracy promotion. The developmental approach emphasizes democratic promotion as a process tied to broader socioeconomic developments. Formal political institutions such as transparent elections, while important, are considered as one of many equally important rights, alongside social and economic rights (Carothers, 2009). In focusing on socioeconomics, the developmental approach tends to focus on broader socioeconomic developments as part of its democracy promotion strategies. This entails cooperation with host regimes, leading to the avoidance of projects that are too politically confrontational (Carothers, 2009).

By contrast, the political approach focuses on a limited conception of democracy, stressing the priority of political institutions (e.g. elections, political parties and

political civil society groups) over other concerns such as socioeconomics (Carothers, 2009). In emphasizing contestation through support to political institutions, this approach favors more confrontational projects. This includes supporting oppositional parties, local NGOs, and other actors seeking to gain the upper hand over host regimes (Carothers, 2009). Followers of the developmental approach tend to criticize the political approach for being too politically assertive towards host governments, leading to various counterreactions. By contrast, followers of the political approach criticize the developmental approach for being too vague and unassertive, to the point that their projects become ineffective at furthering democratization (Carothers, 2009).

2.2.4. Contributions to the literature

To summarize, ongoing autocratization trends lead to increased state restrictions against international non-governmental democracy promotion. This presents several challenges to democracy promoting INGOs, leading to restrictions on their funding, their ability to advocate etc. Like other organizations, democracy promotion INGOs have organizational interests to maintain their abilities to operate within target states. Thus, there lies the risk that increasingly restrictive environments may open the door for compromises on their democracy promotion strategies, so as to ensure their continued operations in autocratizing target states. This thesis provides the following contributions to the literature.

Firstly, this thesis builds on previous literature referring to an increasing trend of state repression against democracy promoting actors. While there is support in the literature that this trend is part of the broader third wave of autocratization, much of the literature on democracy promotion has still focused on autocratic restrictions more broadly as opposed to autocratizing states in particular. In contrast to previous literature, this thesis focuses on increased restrictions in target states undergoing autocratization as a specific type of challenge to democracy promoters.

Secondly, this thesis builds on previous literature mentioning organizational interests of democracy promoting INGOs as becoming increasingly restricted in target states.

However, how target state restrictions impact democracy promoting INGOs *internally* remains less studied. Likewise, this thesis also builds on previous literature mentioning how state restrictions may make democracy promotion less confrontational towards target state governments. However, the literature provides little insight into *how* this occurs on an organizational level. This thesis provides a contribution by offering a theoretical model for how increased restrictions in autocratizing target states lead to less confrontational democracy promotion, through internal organizational impacts on INGOs. This theoretical model suggests a mechanism in which democracy promotion strategies become less politically confrontational due to internal conflicts within INGOs over which strategies they should pursue in autocratizing states, in turn leading to political compromises on their chosen strategies to promote democracy in such target states.

Thirdly, this thesis builds on previous literature mentioning how the current trend of target state restrictions affects countries which previously had been open to democracy promotion. However, the literature contains little research in terms of comparative studies which contrast autocratizing target states with non-autocratizing target states for non-governmental democracy promotion. This thesis provides a contribution by comparing two target states for democracy promotion which are divergent on autocratization trends during the last 10 years: Türkiye and Georgia. Utilizing these two countries as most-similar target state cases which are divergent on autocratization, this thesis studies whether and how their differing operational environments might impact programs of INGO democracy promotion differently, in that these programs in autocratizing states may become less politically confrontational when compared to programs in non-autocratizing states.

2.3. Theoretical framework

This section describes the theoretical model of this thesis and provides the conceptualization of the following concepts: autocratizing state restrictions and politically confrontational strategies.

2.3.1. Theoretical model

The model of this thesis suggests that increasingly restrictive target state environments from autocratization (independent variable) leads democracy promoting INGOs to favor less politically confrontational strategies to promote democracy (dependent variable). This is expected to occur through internal strategic conflicts within democracy promoting INGOs, emerging from target state pressures on their organizational interests (mediating variable).

Figure 1: Theoretical model



This theoretical model expects autocratizing target states to lead to increased state restrictions against INGO democracy promoters, when compared to non-autocratizing target states. Target state restrictions are expected to impact INGO democracy promoters through pressures on their organizational interests, e.g. funding capacities, access to advocacy spaces. This is expected to lead to internal strategic conflicts within these INGOs, i.e. internal conflicts over which strategies to pursue due to target state restrictions on their organization interests.

Higher target state restrictions faced by INGOs operating in autocratizing target states are expected to lead to more severe internal strategic conflicts due to pressures on their organizational interests, forcing these INGOs to compromise on their democracy promotion strategies to remain operational in these states. Conversely, lower target state restrictions faced by INGOs in non-autocratizing target states are not expected to lead to internal strategic conflicts which are severe enough to lead to strategic compromises.

The expected result of internal strategic conflicts among INGOs operating in autocratizing target states is that their democracy promotion strategies as a whole become compromised, resulting in democracy promoting strategies that are *less* politically confrontational towards target state governments. Conversely, for INGOs operating in non-autocratizing target states, the same impact on their democracy promotion strategies becoming less politically confrontational is not expected.

Independent variable

The independent variable is the degree of target state restrictiveness against democracy promotion due to autocratization.

Mediating variable

The mediating variable are internal strategic conflicts within democracy promoting INGOs due to target state pressures on their organizational interests.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is the degree to which INGO democracy promotion strategies are confrontational towards target country regimes.

2.3.2. Theoretical conceptualization

Autocratizing state restrictions

In conceptualizing the impacts of autocratization on democracy promoting INGOs, this thesis recognizes that methods of government repression (restrictive laws, bureaucratic/administrative repression, informal harassments etc.) tend to be overlapping. In fact, autocratizing states tend to utilize a wide variety of methods to restrict non-governmental actors. This includes the usage of restrictive laws (Scheppelle, 2018), but also various forms of administrative and bureaucratic repression, misuses of executive powers, autocratic discretion in implementing laws, state harassments of democracy promotion activists etc. (Çalı, 2021; e Silva, 2023).

Conceptually, this thesis utilizes a broad definition of autocratic restrictions which includes a variety of different repression methods utilized by autocratizing states. Thus, when referring to target state restrictions, this refers not only to individual methods of repression, but to an array of related repression methods utilized to stymie democracy promoting activities. In utilizing a broad definition of target state repression, there lies the danger of ‘conceptual stretching’, i.e. a definitional broadness in which the “gains in extensional coverage tend to be matched by losses in connotative precision” (Sartori, 1970). However, this definition is justified in that, as noted, different methods of state repression against democracy promotion tend to overlap with each other.

Politically confrontational strategies

In analyzing whether the impacts of autocratizing state restrictions impact democracy promotion strategies to become less politically confrontational, it is necessary to define what politically confrontational strategies actually entails. In defining `politically confrontational strategies`, this thesis combines theoretical insights from Carothers (2009) and Bush (2015).

As noted in Previous Research, Carothers (2009) makes a distinction between two emerging approaches of democracy promotion: the `political`, focusing on interventions in political institutions, and the `developmental`, focusing on cooperative socioeconomic developments (Carothers, 2009). This thesis utilizes this distinction by defining political confrontational strategies as democracy promotion focusing explicitly on political institutions (e.g. elections, political parties) as opposed to broader socio-economic developments. Thus, if a strategy focuses on political institutions, then it is viewed as being confrontational.

Further, as noted in Previous Research, Bush (2015) speaks of a `taming` of democracy promotion, where target state restrictions and donor demands lead to less confrontational democracy promotion (Bush, 2015). More specifically, the author utilizes a distinction between `regime-compatible` and `non-regime compatible` democracy promotion. The author defines regime-compatible projects as “programs that target-country leaders view as unlikely to threaten their imminent survival by causing regime collapse or overthrow” (Bush, 2015, p.60). The more likely a democracy promotion project will lead to regime replacements, e.g. through competition or mobilization, the less regime-compatible it is (Bush, 2015, p.60-61). As Bush notes, this definition is justified for two reasons. Firstly, in that the ability to replace regimes is a central criterion for a system being considered as democratic. Secondly, in that regime-replacements constitute the type of scenarios which autocratic leaders are likely to fear the most and thus will try to prevent (Bush, 2015, p.60). This thesis utilizes this insight for its definition of politically confrontational strategies. If a democracy promoting strategy focuses on interventions which have the powers to lead to regime replacements, then it is viewed as being confrontational.

Combining the insights from Carothers (2009) and Bush (2015), politically confrontational democracy promotion is defined as follows:

A politically confrontational democracy promotion strategy is an approach which focuses on interventions in political institutions of the target country (e.g. elections, political parties etc.) and which at some level is designed to facilitate the power of democratic actors to replace the incumbent government through non-violent political processes, e.g. parties, local civic groups or similar means.

3.0 Methodology

This section details the methodological approach used in this thesis for comparing and analyzing Türkiye and Georgia as target states for INGO democracy promotion. It details the methodological approach, the case selection, as well as the coding scheme of this thesis. It also details the following aspects: reflexivity, validity/reliability and ethical aspects.

This thesis utilizes a most-similar comparative method to compare the impacts of differing autocratization trends in Türkiye and Georgia on INGO democracy promotion strategies. As an empirical approach, it utilizes semi-structured interviews with democracy promoting INGOs and document analysis of documents from these INGOs. Thus, the unit of analysis are INGOs engaged in international democracy promotion, which are compared based on whether they are active in Türkiye (an autocratizing state) or Georgia (a non-autocratizing state) respectively. The aim of this comparison is to study whether and how INGO strategies to promote democracy become less politically confrontational when operating in an autocratizing state (represented by Türkiye), when compared to operations in a non-autocratizing state (represented by Georgia).

3.1. Case selection

Divergent target state cases on autocratization are selected by utilizing the latest 2023 V-Dem Democracy Report. This shows the top 10 most autocratizing and democratizing countries during the last 10 years and 3 years respectively (see Figure 2). For autocratizing countries, the last-10 years period includes the following countries: Brazil, Poland, Mauritius, Hungary, India, Serbia, Tunisia, Thailand, El Salvador and Türkiye. For democratizing countries, the same period includes: Seychelles, Georgia, Nepal, Ecuador, The Gambia, Armenia, Sri Lanka, Honduras, Fiji and Madagascar. This thesis focuses on the longer 10 years period as opposed to the shorter 3 years period. The reason being that the thesis is interested in more long-term autocratization trends, as opposed to the shorter period which may be more sensitive to temporary effects within countries. Among the diverging states described in the V-Dem Report 2023, this thesis focuses on Türkiye and Georgia. Türkiye and Georgia are studied under a most-similar comparison as target states for INGO democracy promotion, having undergone diverging trends on autocratization vs. democratization during the last 10 years. Here, Türkiye and Georgia are assumed to be generalizable in being representative cases for the impacts of diverging trends of autocratization on INGO democracy promotion.

As noted by Lijphart (1971), the main limitation of the comparative method is “many variables, small number of cases” (Lijphart, 1971). Here, the comparative method is useful where the number of cases are “too small to permit systemic control”.

One way to overcome this limitation is to focus on comparable cases which are “similar in large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to treat as constant, but dissimilar as far as those variables are concerned which one want to relate to each other” (Lijphart, 1971). Here, it is assumed that all other differences between Türkiye and Georgia besides their differing autocratization trends are accounted for in their impacts on INGO democracy promotion. For a justification of Türkiye and Georgia as comparable cases, see *Comparing Türkiye and Georgia* in Data and Material.

Figure 2: Autocratization and democratization trends

FIGURE 12. TOP 10 AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES (10-YEARS VS. 3-YEARS)

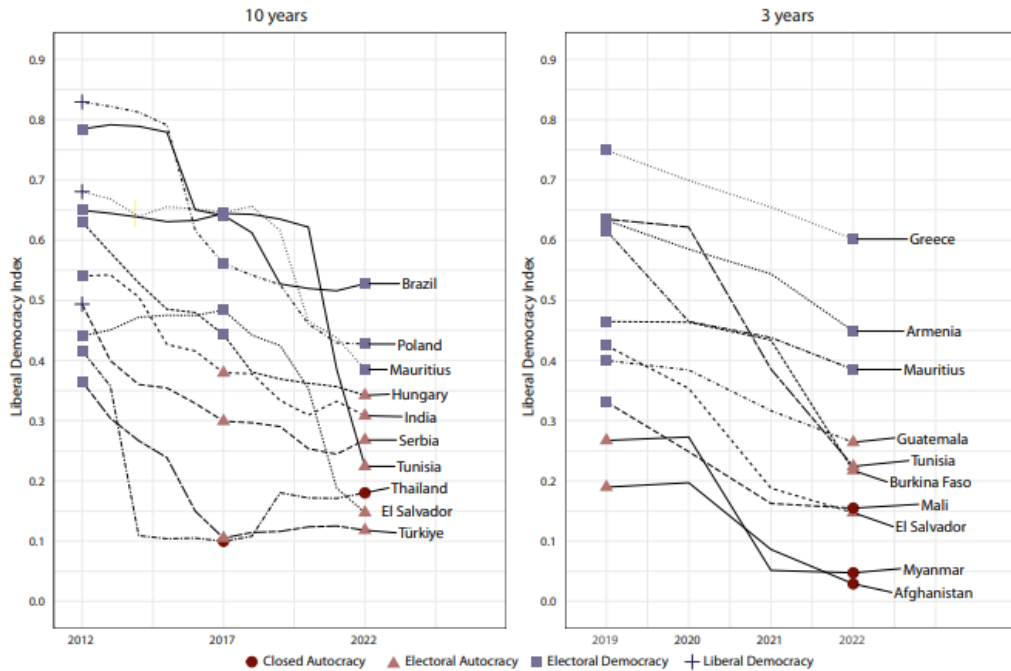


Figure 12 plots values of the LDI for the 10 countries with the greatest decreases in the last 10 years (left panel), and 3 years (right panel).

FIGURE 16. TOP 10 DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES (10-YEARS AND 3-YEARS)

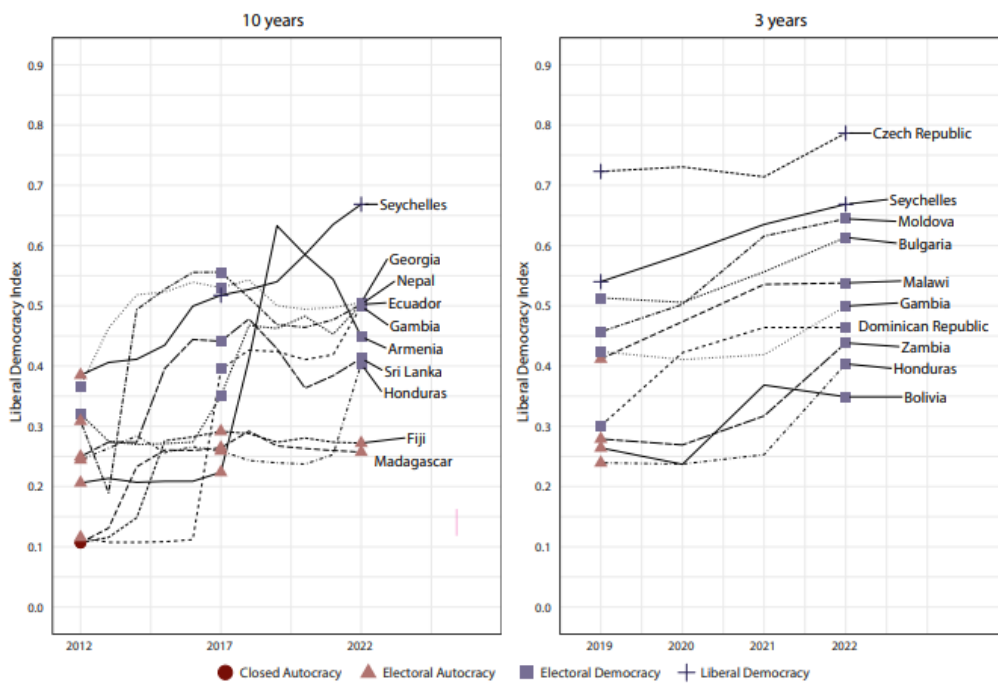


Figure 16 plots values of the LDI for the 10 countries with the highest LDI increase in the last 10 years (left panel), and in the last 3 years (right panel).

Source: *Democracy Report 2023*, V-Dem, 2023

3.2. Data collection

3.2.1. Semi-structured interviews

The main method for data collection consists of semi-structured interviews with INGO personnel active in Türkiye or Georgia. These semi-structured interviews are used for gaining insight into the processes of INGO democracy promotion in Türkiye and Georgia, allowing for a comparison between INGO operations in the two target states.

Each interview lasts approximately 30 minutes. Interviews are recorded using Zoom and stored safely on the computer. Since the thesis has a comparative focus, separate interviews are held with INGO personnel active in Türkiye and Georgia respectively. The interviews are conducted via Zoom. Interviewees are contacted via e-mail and phone. Some contact information was found on INGO websites, while other contact information was found using the e-mail finder RocketReach.

3.2.2. Document analysis

The second method for data collection consists of analysis of INGO documents derived from the democracy promoting INGOs under study (see Appendix). This will be based on informative quotes from these INGO documents, which are used to support the main findings in the interview material. One document has been translated into English from another language via the Word translation tool.

3.3. Data analysis

The method for data analysis of the semi-structured interviews is described below. The interview data are transcribed and categorized through codes using the software Nvivo.

3.3.1. Coding scheme

The coding scheme of the interview material follow the independent, mediating and dependent variables of the theoretical model (see Theory). The aim of this coding is to highlight crucial information within the interview answers on how INGOs are faced with autocratization in target countries (independent variable), whether this leads to internal strategic conflicts within INGOs (mediating variable) and whether this leads to less politically confrontational democracy promotion strategies (dependent variable).

Consequently, this thesis makes use of theory-generated codes, i.e. codes that derive from a theoretical model or literature, as opposed to being derived from the data itself (Marshall, Rossman & Blanco, 2022, p. 236).

Code 1 -2 describe the independent variable, Code 3 - 4 the mediating variable, Code 5 - 6 the dependent variable.

Code 1: Increased restrictions in target states as part of autocratization.

Code 2: Changes in available democracy promotion activities as a result of autocratization.

Code 3: Internal organizational impacts of restricted organizational interests

Code 4: Reprioritized goals due to conflicts over strategies

Code 5: Internal impacts on democracy promotion strategies.

Code 6: Impacts on political aspects of democracy promotion strategies.

Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4	Code 5	Code 6
Independent variable: Increasingly restrictive target state environments from autocratization		Mediating variable: Internal conflicts within INGOs over strategies, resulting from restrictions on organizational interests.		Dependent variable: Less politically confrontational democracy promotion strategies	

3.4. Validity and reliability

3.4.1. Validity

Validity for interview data in political science is “the extent to which one’s measuring instrument (in this case, the interview) actually gauges the properties the properties it is supposed to measure” (Mosley, 2013, p.20).

Firstly, this relates to asking the right questions (Mosley, 2013, p.21). In this thesis, this is ensured by making interview questions sufficiently open to allow for variations in answers while also being specific enough to capture relevant information.

Secondly, this relates to the accuracy of information provided by the interviewees (Mosley, 2013, p.21). This is ensured by the fact that interviewees have expertise with democracy promotion in their respective countries. Thirdly, this relates to the interpretation and synthesis of the interview material (Mosley, 2013, p.22). This is ensured by basing interpretations on well-supported arguments and careful as well as ethical considerations of interview answers.

3.4.2. Reliability

Reliability for interview data in political science is “the confidence we can place in a given instrument of measurement. To what extent is the information collected in an interview accurate, and how much confidence do we have that, were the interview to be repeated again, the same information would be generated” (Mosley, 2013, p.24).

Firstly, this relates to the accuracy in capturing the interview answer (Mosley, 2013, p.24). In this thesis, this is ensured by recording each interview via Zoom and then by transcribing interviews word-for-word on NVivo. Thus, no relevant information is left out at the data collection stage. Secondly, this relates to positionality and interviewer effects, i.e. that characteristics of the interviewer might influence responses (Mosley, 2013, p.25). This is avoided by remaining inquisitive, yet professional and ethical in the way that all interviews are approached and conducted.

3.5. Reflexivity

Qualitative research involves a degree of interpretation. This requires an awareness of theoretical assumptions, the role of language and the role of the researcher (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p.11). While several interpretations are possible, not every interpretation should be viewed as equally plausible (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p.331). Instead, certain interpretations may be favored because they match the empirical material and/or are viewed as more fertile for new theoretical insights (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 372).

This thesis utilizes a theoretical model. Thus, this involves a significant degree of interpretation in how the data is analyzed. A priority of this interpretation is to stay as close as possible to the empirical material. This interpretation also aims for theoretical sufficiency, i.e. that interpreted patterns in the data are sufficiently described to allow for a clear answer to the research questions (Marshall, Rossman et al, 2022, p.251). Thus, the interpretation will be informed by the theory-driven

approach of this thesis. However, the interpretation of this thesis still remains open to alternative explanations, so as to “demonstrate how the explanation being offered is the most plausible” (Marshall, Rossman et al, 2022, p. 252). This is necessary for discovering both nuances and potential unexpected finds in the empirical material.

In regards to the semi-structured interviews, these are conducted as a ‘miner’ as opposed to a ‘traveler’ (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 47-50). That is, interviews are based on the assumption that knowledge can be extracted from the interviewee (miner), as opposed to being co-created by the interviewer and interviewee (traveler).

3.6. Ethical aspects

This thesis follows appropriate ethical standards. The recording of interviews and the storing of recordings follows guidelines based on GDPR and complementary Swedish law.

Interviews comply with rules on informed consent, which apply whenever a researcher interacts with a subject for research (Brooks, 2013, p.52).

All interviews are based on informed consent by participants, which can be withdrawn at any time. Such consent can be both written and oral (Brooks, 2013, p.54). This thesis relies mainly on an oral form of consent, but allows for a written form if requested by interviewees. Expert interviewees may have concerns about their words being made public (Marshall, Rossman et al, 2022, p.176). This thesis takes caution in how interviews are recorded, stored and transcribed. All data are collected and processed for a specified purpose which is made explicitly clear to interviewees. All interview recordings and notes about recordings are safely stored on the computer during the writing of this thesis and are not stored longer than necessary. All such data will be deleted after this thesis has been handed in and received a grade.

It is made clear that complete anonymity cannot be ensured. However, information

beyond what is necessary is not recorded. Thus, information about specific personnel or their positions within the organizations is not recorded. If requested by interviewees, names of the INGOs under study are also not recorded. This being the case for the organization labeled as *USG Georgia*, whose actual name remains anonymous. No documents from this INGO will thus be utilized.

4.0 Data and Material

This section contains information on the democracy promoting INGOs under study and provides further details on the main empirical data derived from the semi-structured interviews and INGO documents. This section also provides a justification for the comparison between Türkiye and Georgia as target state cases for the impacts of autocratization on INGO democracy promotion.

4.1. Democracy promoting INGOs

The following democracy promoting INGOs have been selected for interviews. These INGOs have been chosen for their expertise with international democracy promotion in the specific countries under study: Türkiye and Georgia. This thesis includes four INGO interviews: two INGO experts with experience in Türkiye and two INGO experts with experience in Georgia.

National Democratic Institute (NDI)

US-based democracy promotion INGO. The NDI defines itself as non-political and non-partisan. The NDI aims to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values across across 156 countries, bringing together their expertise and knowledge for this end. Promotes openness and accountability in governments by building political and civic organizations, safeguarding elections, and

promoting citizen participation (NDI, 2023). This thesis has conducted one interview with this organization, an expert on Türkiye.

European Endowment for Democracy (EED)

An independent Europe-based grant-making organization, created by the EU and its member states as an independent organization aimed at promoting democracy in the European Neighborhood (Eastern Partnership - Middle East and North Africa), Western Balkans, Turkey and beyond. The EED supports civil society, civic and political activists, independent media etc. working towards pluralistic and democratic political systems (EED, 2023). This thesis has conducted two interviews with this organization, one with expertise on Türkiye and one with expertise on Georgia.

USG non-profit organization (USG)

A US-based 'United Scientific Group' (USG) non-profit INGO working with democracy promotion activities in several countries. Due to requests from the interviewee, the name of this organization will remain anonymous and will be referred to only as a USG non-profit organization (for short, USG Georgia). This thesis has conducted one interview with this organization, an expert on Georgia.

4.2. Interview data and INGO documents

In this thesis, the main data source consists of semi-structured expert interviews with INGO personnel active with democracy promotion in Türkiye and Georgia. INGO interviewees are selected on the basis of having high experience with democracy promotion in either Türkiye or Georgia. All interviewees are experts, i.e. individuals who are influential and well-informed within an organization (Marshall, Rossman et al, 2022, p.174). This fact allows for a high reliability of the interviewees as sources on INGO democracy promotion in the relevant target states.

By being semi-structured, interview questions are “carefully scripted” by “asking specific questions in a specific sequence” (Marshall, Rossman et al, 2022, p.163). Thus, while being consistent, interview questions are still open-ended enough to allow for a variety of answers from interviewees (Leech, Baumgartner et al, 2013, p.210). This fact allows for a high reliability of the interview questions. While they follow a sequence based on the theory-driven approach of this thesis, they are also open enough to capture different nuances in the interview data.

The second main data source consists of documents from the INGOs under study (see Appendix). These documents, consisting of reports and a policy document, are selected on the basis of providing a description of INGO democracy promotion activities in Türkiye and Georgia and the challenges/opportunities faced in these operating environments. These documents are limited to available documents derived from websites of these INGOs, since more detailed internal documents have not been available. All documents except one are derived from the websites of these INGOs. The exception being *Faces of Youth Policy Proposal IV* which was provided by one interviewee, which contains general policy proposals by NDI for Türkiye. In addition, documents from one INGO cannot be utilized due to anonymity concerns. All in all, this limits the available documents to three INGO documents. Further, the fact that the available documents drawn from these INGOs contain mostly information on target state contexts constitutes a limitation in the data.

4.3. Comparing Türkiye and Georgia

In utilizing Türkiye and Georgia as comparative cases, this requires a justification that both countries are comparable. Firstly, in that they constitute representative cases for states undergoing and not undergoing autocratization respectively. Secondly, in that they (due to the most-similar comparative approach) are similar in several aspects, except in how their differing autocratization trends affect INGO democracy promotion.

Firstly, as shown in figure 2 in *Methodology*, Türkiye and Georgia represent clearly contrastive cases in their trends of autocratization/democratization during the last 10

years. Additionally, as shown by V-Dem graphs (see Appendix), Türkiye and Georgia have diverged notably since the early 2010s on several indicators relevant to civil society freedoms. Here, we see a diverging trend since the early 2010s, where Türkiye has deteriorated and Georgia has improved considerably relative to Türkiye. This trends holds for all V-dem Democracy Indices, plus other civil society indicators, incl. Civil Society Participation Index, Civil Liberties Index, Core Civil Society Index, CSO Entry And Exit and CSO Repression.

Further, V-Dem graphs also indicate that Türkiye and Georgia shared similar democracy scores (electoral, liberal, participatory, egalitarian and participatory) between 1990 until c.a. 2010, after which the countries began diverging. Thus, both countries shared a similar starting point (baseline) in democratic developments *before* their divergence relative to each other.

Secondly, besides V-Dem, the CIVICUS Monitor (a tool from CIVICUS, an international organization monitoring civic freedoms) also indicates Türkiye and Georgia as being contrasting cases on civil society freedoms. As of 2023, the CIVICUS Monitor ranks Türkiye as 29/100 giving the label “Repressed”. Georgia is ranked 68/100 giving the label “Narrowed” on civic freedoms (CIVICUS Monitor, 2023). As noted in the CIVICUS report *People Power Under Attack 2022* (2022) these countries have retained these labels (“Repressed” and “Narrowed”) since at least 2018 (CIVICUS, 2022, p.63-64). All in this, this shows that Türkiye and Georgia are contrastive cases for recent trends on civil society freedoms.

Thirdly, Türkiye and Georgia share commonalities by being neighboring West Asian states. Lijphart (1971) notes in regards to geographically neighboring states that “it is not true that areas merely reflect merely geo-graphic proximity; they tend to be similar in many other basic respects” (Lijphart, 1971). Indeed, Türkiye and Georgia share many characteristics in common. Both countries are republics and both have civil law systems (CIA World Factbook, 2023). Both countries have maintained close trade relations since Georgia’s independence in 1991, despite issues relating to their relations with Russia (Oskanian, 2011). Further, both countries share a similar

geopolitical situation and have expressed similar foreign policy goals towards Western institutions, such as NATO and the EU (Sayin & Dogan, 2017). This shows that, besides their differing autocratization trends, several other factors remain common to both countries. Here, this thesis assumes that all other factors besides their divergent autocratization trends are accounted for in their impacts on INGO democracy promotion.

4.3.1. Compared operating environments

To further justify a comparison between Türkiye and Georgia, the following section contains a comparison between recent trends in their operating environments for democracy promotion. The main sources for information are the International Center for Not-For-Profit Law (ICNL) and the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL), two organizations documenting the current and over-time development of the operating environments for civic freedoms in over 50 countries, including Türkiye and Georgia.

Türkiye

Sources indicate that the operating environment for INGO democracy promotion in Türkiye has significantly deteriorated during the last decade.

As noted by the *Civic Freedom Monitor* by ICNL, “the operating environment for civil society deteriorated after the Gezi Park protests of 2013 which challenged the government’s urban development plans. However, civil society has also been affected by many destabilizing pressures, including the renewed tensions over the Kurdish conflict, instability spilling over from neighboring Syria, the uncertain situation regarding refugees, political deadlocks, economic decline, and a failed coup attempt” (ICNL, 2023).

Officially, there are no limits to the aims or purposes of CSOs. In practice, INGOs and local NGOs engaging in political activities face far more government interferences than other types of organizations (ICNL, 2023). For instance, legal frameworks such as the Law on Associations and Law on Foundations contain vague formulations on “general morality” and “public order” which make CSOs vulnerable to arbitrary government discretion (ICNL, 2023).

Further, “on the whole the legal-political environment is not conducive for civil society in Türkiye. Restrictions limiting freedom of association, assembly, and speech/advocacy remain. An overarching legal and policy framework to govern the relationship between CSOs and public institutions is lacking. In addition, freedom of expression has been steadily eroding in Türkiye since 2013 through arbitrary and restrictive interpretations of legislation, pressure, dismissals, and frequent court cases against activists, journalists, academics, and social media users” (ICNL, 2023). CSOs can be inspected on grounds such as “political affiliations”, “advocacy on rights-based issues”, “proximity to government or opposition” and are vulnerable to “arbitrary implementation and interpretation of the law” (ICNL, 2023).

Georgia

Sources indicate the overall operating environment for INGO democracy promotion in Georgia to remain viable, even while facing several challenges.

The latest *CSO Meter 2022 Georgia Report*, coauthored by ECNL and Civil Society Institute, a local Georgian civil society organization, notes that “overall, in 2022, civil society in Georgia enjoyed a generally enabling environment. However, continuous verbal attacks on CSOs, the initiation of an undemocratic law and restrictions on the participation of critical CSOs in decision-making processes signal a potentially deteriorating CSO environment” (ECNL & Civil Society Institute, 2022, p.8).

That Georgia “has a generally enabling ecosystem for civil society, and the overall country score has remained the same as in 2021. Through promoting good

governance, respect for human rights, social inclusion, and public governance, CSOs actively influence Georgia's journey towards a more democratic society” (ECNL & Civil Society Institute, 2023, p.64). However, that “recent unsettling developments in the CSO-government relationship, however, raise the possibility that the CSO environment will be subject to restrictions and government intrusion if the attitude towards CSOs that are deemed critical of the authorities does not change, if there are no institutional guarantees that CSOs are involved in the creation of laws and legislative amendment processes from their beginning, and if there is no wider dialogue with the CSO sector”. (ECNL & Civil Society Institute, 2023, p.64)

The latest *2021 CSO Sustainability Index (2022)* report by ICNL and FHI 360, a US-based human rights NGO, notes that in Georgia, “although the operational context for CSOs worsened in 2021, overall CSO sustainability remained largely unchanged, with civil society continuing to play a key role in providing advocacy, services, and commentary on social and political developments” (ICNL & FHI 360, 2022, p.2). The legal environment, organizational capacity and advocacy space are described as viable for CSOs, but some challenges still remain, e.g. regarding the financial viability of local CSOs to gain a diverse and long-term funding beyond single donor sources (ICNL & FHI 360, 2022, p. 1-2, 5).

5.0 Results

This section provides results from the interviews with INGO personnel and the INGO documents. This includes interview answers from the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), plus an additional non-profit democracy promoting INGO working on Georgia which will remain anonymous and instead be referred to as *USG Georgia*. Interviewees will be referred to as *EED Türkiye*, *EED Georgia*, *NDI Türkiye* and *USG Georgia* respectively. Additionally, interviewees are also referred to as ‘respondents’.

5.1. Türkiye

Restrictive environments for democracy promotion

Both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye describe the target state environment for democracy promotion as having deteriorated during the last 10 years. EED Türkiye mentions increased polarization and a situation where local actors are becoming increasingly afraid and isolated from each other. EED Türkiye notes a “rolling back” of the relationships between Türkiye and the EU as well as an increased “vilification of civil society” where international donors are viewed as enemies. This trend involves a “curtailment of freedom of speech” with legal restrictions, diminished state engagement with civil society and infringements on “freedom of association” and “protest rights”. EED Türkiye also notes how “there are certain thematic areas that are more targeted than others” such as “women’s rights, minority rights and rights for sexual minorities” and that restrictions affect particularly “actors that work on democracy and human rights issues”. That the government is keeping a “very close track of all this documentation (...) what civil society actors do (...) what funding they are getting” (EED Türkiye).

Likewise, NDI Türkiye notes how ten years ago, Türkiye was “more West leaning and trying to be more liberal”. However, that political events during the last decade, such

as the 2016 coup attempt and the emergency laws that followed, have deteriorated the situation. Compared to events a decade ago, e.g. the 2013 Gezi Park protests, supporting protests is described as having become more difficult since this can “create accusations” and the government can “accuse them [pro-democracy organizations] of being terrorists or being traitors”. Further, executive powers have become more arbitrary. For instance, during a NDI project in the Eastern Kurdish-dominated city of Diyarbakir, authorities “thought there were a terrorist gathering or an opposition demonstration gathering”. Thus, the project was met with riot police, ID checks and demands to obtain information about participants.

NDI Türkiye further mentions increased restrictions on freedom of expression and “civil society’s ability to operate independently”. That “without the active participation of INGOs and CSOs, it becomes more difficult to promote transparency, accountability and the protection of human rights”. Further, increased executive powers are also described as creating challenges. For instance, NDI Türkiye notes how intrusive audits have increased since the early 2010s and that a widespread polarization is visible in the political party panels organized by NDI where “there are people from the pro-government side” who “attack the opposition like ‘you are a terrorist’”. NDI Türkiye also notes a major challenge to be the “balance between political parties” where the ruling AKP party can question CSOs about their activities. In these situations, “we [NDI] have to be neutral, one of the principles of ours is neutrality” (NDI Türkiye).

NDI Türkiye notes that “another important thing is the surveillance. That the government uses various methods and tactics to monitor and intimidate NGOs”. This includes the use of “audits” to create a “chilling effect” on NGO activities. That “formal democratic institutions are decreasing” and that “the executive branch holds all the powers”. Overall, the respondent describes two main challenges to democracy promotion in Türkiye. The first being the act of “keeping this political balance between parties” so as “to bring all party representatives on the same stage”. The other being restrictive laws in which “sometimes the government considers everyone as a terrorist” (NDI Türkiye).

Both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye describe one major challenge to be strategic uncertainties due to the deteriorating operating environment. EED Türkiye notes that “there have been many new legal regulations passed to make it more difficult for civil society actors to operate”. That while “it’s not difficult to register as a CSO”, still “administrative burdens are much higher and the burden to report regularly to relevant authorities”. Further, that “not everyone get put in prison or all of CSOs get the same treatment”. Rather, there is a “randomness and unpredictability that the laws and political environment create have a chilling effect on civil society and make both CSOs themselves and others more afraid of engaging in this sphere” (EED Türkiye).

NDI Türkiye relates a deteriorating legal environment to increased executive powers. That the president “can order, or some people from his government, can easily close or make any accusations about any NGO they want”. The government holds a “strong executive power” and can “enact any laws they want right now (...) if they want to abolish all NGOs, they can do it tomorrow”. This “will have a major impact on our work and civil society work in general” since there is “always the threat or danger that the government decides to close the NDI”. For instance, a recently passed law has imposed restrictions on “your area of focus” by making it “harder to open a new civil society organization”. To the NDI, this leads to strategic uncertainties in that everything depends on ones relation to the government. That “if you are close to the government, all the legal systems work fine” and that “applying those laws depends on how the government sees you” (NDI Türkiye).

Both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye also describe how state restrictions are utilized to repress democracy promotion with accusations of being tied to terrorist activities. For instance, NDI Türkiye notes a worsening situation for activities with minority rights since the early 2010s, e.g. Kurdish minority rights, leading to accusations of “being a terrorist” (NDI Türkiye). Likewise, EED Türkiye notes that laws are used to target CSOs with accusations of being linked to terror financing of Kurdish groups or the Gülen movement. Meanwhile, except for Kurdish groups, “there are very few [CSOs]

in recent years that have been shut down”. But even for NGOs and INGOs not tied to Kurdish issues, they still “receive a lot of administrative burdens and get audited all the time”. Thus, in the current environment, the “space to influence policy and so on is hardly existent” (EED Türkiye).

Another aspect mentioned by both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye is that local partner organizations of INGOs at times are more affected by state restrictions than INGOs themselves. For instance, EED Türkiye notes how restrictive laws tend to affect local partners in Türkiye more than the EED itself. To exemplify, a recent law is mentioned requiring INGOs to have representational offices in Türkiye. Meanwhile, “INGOs don’t really adhere to it [the law] and so far it hasn’t really been reinforced”. Rather, EED Türkiye notes how such restrictions “affects our partners than us directly” (EED Türkiye). Likewise, NDI Türkiye notes how the NDI is less affected by restrictive laws than their local partners. That the NDI is “operating under any other INGO law” and is “always work with lawyers who are familiar with international law and international organizations”. Further, NDI personnel “are not operating in a very difficult environment compared to local NGOs, as we work as an INGO with the US government“. Still, for the NDI, other state restrictions related to “targeting and auditing issues still apply” (NDI Türkiye). Thus, while some state restrictions do impose challenges on INGOs directly, other restrictions have less of a direct impact on INGOs, instead having a wider impact on local partner organizations.

Similar insights are also supported by INGO documents. The NDI policy document *Faces of Youth Policy Proposal IV* describes several challenges facing political participation in Türkiye. This includes include youth, women and LGBTI individuals being underrepresented, a polarizing societal climate as well as poor judicial independence and legal predictability (NDI, 2023, p.1-3). Likewise, the latest 2022 annual EED report *Supporting people striving for democracy (2022)* notes that in Türkiye, there is a “continuing authoritarianism of the government, human rights and civil society are in crisis. Rights-based CSOs are subjected to politically motivated and arduous audits and other attempts to impede and silence them” (EED, 2022, p.23). The 2021 version of this report similarly notes how widespread state

restrictions affect “the legal, political, and economic environment for civil society and independent media” (EED, 2021, p.24). That in Türkiye, “there is limited space for civic activism. Corruption in such contexts is widespread and the rule of law is weak. While there is typically some level of open pluralism in governance, elections are marked by irregularities, and opposition parties and candidates face significant pressure (...) there are often restrictions on democracy activists and donors who provide support” (EED, 2021, p.24).

Internal INGO conflicts over strategies

Both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye describe internal strategic conflicts as emerging from target country restrictions in Türkiye.

EED Türkiye notes how its main mandate is to provide platforms for local partners and that its donors (EU Commission and member states) tend to be more willing to provide funds when other organizations face operational difficulties. Still, EED Türkiye notes how several internal debates do emerge over the unpredictable operating environment and over the types of activities that are possible since “no one really knows where the limits are”. This leads to strategic uncertainties where “you're constantly debating what is actually the situation in the country”. That “the rules are not clear” which “has a strong effect on civil society (...) That you won't know what is legitimate to do and what isn't because it is still evolving and it changes and it hits actors randomly” (EED Türkiye).

EED Türkiye notes several internal debates relating to the viability of supporting specific projects. That internally there is “a continuous discussion and then we can identify that these spheres or themes need a bit more support because other donors are not supporting this or because this is a very key issue”. That in supporting local actors, “we [EED] have to adapt to what is going on in the country”. That this “doesn't mean that we are compromising with our ideas. It's just that, we want to have an impact to support the right people. So in this sense, you adapt”. To exemplify, if a LGBT organization comes to the EED with a project for more LGBT friendly

legislation, then “we [EED] would say, this is completely unrealistic. There is no space for this. This means the actor hasn’t made a sound analysis of what is possible. Our whole work is about analyzing what goes on in the country and what kind of pro-democracy activism can have any positive impact at this time” (EED Türkiye). Thus, while its mandates requires the EED to operate in restrictive environments, the organization still adapts itself according to the viability of supporting certain types of projects.

NDI Türkiye notes that due to increased target state restrictions, “a lot of different ideas have come up” leading to “a separation of opinion” within the organization. That internally “there is always a discussion between compromise and principles (...) whether we want to compromise on our principles for advocating our democracy, or we want to work with the government and still compromise on some things”. Further, the NDI “always want to work very closely with government, because if you have government support you can do almost anything you want. But we are trying to do this without compromising on our principles”. Nonetheless, NDI Türkiye does note how “external dynamics that the NDI face can impact our internal dynamics”. In particular, that impacts on internal discussions have shifted their strategies. As noted, “we face restrictions and limited resources and that is why we need to make some strategic choices. For instance, changing the country-wide perspective to the local perspective”. Further, NDI Türkiye notes that prior goals to work with the Parliament have been re-prioritized so that “now we are going to work with municipalities only”. In this regard, NDI Türkiye mentions compromises in that “we change our values and our main goals. We wanted to work with members of Parliament and we are now moving around the country in general” (NDI Türkiye).

Regarding impacts on organizational interests, EED Türkiye notes that local NGOs face funding difficulties because “there is no local funding for democracy causes” but for INGOs, that “it depends because some step up and provide more when times are tough and some will more retreat”. That some INGOs have found it “too difficult and risky to work there” while others “have become better because of the crisis (...) they have to re-think and are listening more to civil society than they did before”. For the

EED, “there are different trends” but on the whole “funding has not decreased”. This is noted as being due to its mandates. Both in that the EED was “founded to work in these more difficult environments” and in that the EED “never work with government institutions (...) this is not part of our mandate”. Further, through its mandates, the EED receives funding from its donors (EU Commission and member states) when it is “more difficult for other donors because we are a bit more flexible and risk taking” (EED Türkiye). Likewise, NDI Türkiye notes its funding situation to be viable due to support from the US government. Still, that “if you can't do any activity [in Türkiye], then they are not going to provide any funds”. Thus, state restrictions “make it difficult for some organizations to receive financial support (...) the government is always sending audits and want to see how this money is spent” which “puts some strains and limitations on most of the organizational resources, and of course this limits the ability to carry our work effectively” (NDI Türkiye).

Thus, restrictions on advocacy spaces seem to affect INGOs more directly than restrictions on their funding. This seems to be because of organizational mandates to operate in restrictive environments and that INGOs receive funding from state sources. But even in cases where INGOs themselves do not face restrictions on their organizational interests, their activities can still be obstructed by restrictions put on their local partners.

Democracy promotion strategies

Both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye note that their strategies have been adapted due to increased target state restrictions. For instance, EED Türkiye notes how increased restrictions in Türkiye “makes you re-think how you should operate. It can be that they [INGOs] cannot work openly in this environment, you have to find other ways to work through third parties”. Further, that “it can be changing your thematic focus (...) working on this and this topic doesn't lead to anything. Lets work more on this topic. So it can shift the programmatic priorities”. Also described is a lack of consensus in supporting civil society and that state restrictions have led strategies towards less politically sensitive areas. However, EED Türkiye notes that its mandate is “supposed

to be supporting the more sensitive things”. That it “evolves what is considered politically sensitive”, thus that it is “difficult to generalize” (EED Türkiye).

NDI Türkiye notes how there have been strategic compromises in the sense that “we [NDI] need to make compromises on our principles or we need to tone down a little bit to advocate democracy. This may involve self-censorship for instance. Or avoiding criticism or reframing our messages, to avoid government backlash”. Further, that “we need to reassess our priorities and focus areas” and “try to shift government activities to less politically sensitive issues. Or we choose to adopt a more cautious approach to avoid direct confrontation with the authorities”. Further, NDI Türkiye notes how they been forced to strategically choose programs since “if you have a conflict with the state or the government, you cannot operate in Turkey, its very difficult. This doesn’t mean that you have to do anything they want” but “we always pick carefully the hills we want to die on” (NDI Türkiye).

Further noted are strategic adaptations in especially to sensitive issues. For instance, the NDI Türkiye notes how its priorities have shifted on gender-issues because “that’s not the hills we want to die on” and “we don’t want to pull all the accusations towards us”. Meanwhile, while strategic compromises do occur, these are also restrained by its organizational mandate. For instance, that “if they [the Turkish government] want us to promote cancellation of elections, we cannot do that because that conflicts with our main principles. So we just select our battles when we are operating” (NDI Türkiye). Thus, both EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye describe their strategies as having been adapted towards less confrontational and less politically sensitive areas due to increased target state restrictions. However, it also remains clear that the organizational mandates of both organizations still play a major role in determining the degree to which this occurs.

A further aspect is that certain strategic compromises seem to be limited to certain geographic regions *within* Türkiye. For instance, NDI Türkiye notes that “we are trying to choose our cities (...) where we want to work to more peaceful provinces”. Thus, the NDI is “not going to do something in Diyarbakir because its very difficult to

do something like that. For me, Diyarbakir or any other pro-Kurdish city in Turkey needs to be more democratized”. However, “because of the security force pressure, we cannot freely work in there” and that “we are focusing solely on local elections and local places”. As noted, “we planned to work in nearly 20 or 25 provinces, so it was a very huge operation. Right now, we reduced this number to 3 or 4, because we want to work with the governments that we can work with”. Likewise, that “we wanted to work with members of Parliament (...) Right now we are going to target municipalities and local branches, so that’s why we are going to be limited” (NDI Türkiye).

5.2. Georgia

Restrictive environments for democracy promotion

Both EED Georgia and USG Georgia note the operating environment in Georgia as remaining viable, yet precarious for democracy promotion activities.

EED Georgia notes that there have been some recent “backslidings” on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. For instance, the failed passing of the Foreign Agents Law in early 2023, “would have been really limiting for civil society”. EED Georgia notes how the organization has been accused of supporting extremist organizations and that local partners have been “called out and accused of receiving foreign funding”. Such challenges “are only going to get greater” because “Georgia is waiting for the decision from the EU about the integration process” which may lead to “very high level of frustration if the answer is no, because 80% of the population wants to join the EU (...) the government seems to be preparing the population for either way (...) whether it [answers from EU] is yes they did it, if it is no, then it is those evil civil society people who are disloyal and traitors”. Further, although “Georgia indeed was on track for a long time with many positive indicators”, EED Georgia notes a downturn in last 2 years along with fears that the government may try to resume attempted but failed anti-NGO legislations.

USG Georgia notes how the operating environment depends on the area of operations. Regarding existing CSOs in Georgia, “it fairly obvious that these organizations trajectories are toward Western values and towards EU”. However, that “some actions by the government are towards Russia” which creates a “disconnect which is obvious in the last few years”. Overall in Georgia, “there are some areas like service provision, agriculture or some other areas where there is significant improvement including election administration, how elections are administered” (USG Georgia). However, challenges remain in that “there is no trust towards government (...) there is this huge polarization between government and opposition and how the public is caught in between”. Further, there is “dissatisfaction with the current government” and there is nobody “who can represent them [the opposition]”. Further, USG Georgia notes a decreasing “platform [for CSOs] to communicate with the government” and that “you need access to minister, you need access to MP, you need access to parliamentary committee, and this is what is more complicated now”. That “political, legal and electoral reforms” require government cooperation. Thus, the need for INGOs to cooperate with governments to pursue political reforms is described as a challenge in Georgia.

Despite such challenges, both respondents note that the operating environment still remains relatively viable. EED Georgia notes that, when compared to Türkiye, “Turkey is a much worse case” in that “Georgia is not an autocratic country yet. There´re no restrictions for us to be working there, and everyone is functioning more or less freely. Its more about the pressure which people are under” (EED Georgia). Further, USG Georgia notes improvements over the last decade, including in issues regarding incarceration rates and healthcare reforms. But that there have been challenges during the last 3 or 4 years in regards to specific issues related to EU accession, since there is “big push from society towards EU accession”. That there is “public demands, however we aren´t seeing this action from the government. However, one thing to note is that while there are many actions by the Georgian government against the EU” (USG Georgia). Thus, both EED Georgia and USG Georgia describe the operating environment as having remained viable, despite challenges related to specific issues such as EU accession.

Likewise, both EED Georgia and USG Georgia describe the current legal environment for democracy promotion as viable, despite facing some challenges. USG Georgia notes that “no laws have changed that makes life for our organization or other organizations more difficult”. However, that given the attempted Foreign Agents Law in early 2023, it remains unclear “what's still to come” (USG Georgia). Likewise, EED Georgia notes that “it’s possible for us as a donor to fund freely in the country and for people to apply for us without any concerns” and that the “law itself has not changed which means EED is able to work as a donor in Georgia”. However, the respondent notes that it is “important to look at is the political will”. That while there are no legal restrictions in Georgia, “many NGO leaders are being called traitors” leading to “an atmosphere of self-censorship”. That “it’s not so much what exists in law, sometimes its about the application of the law and the political will behind it, to some extent (...) there are so many ways that you can narrow a civic space. It’s not just through legislation, intimidation of individuals also work extremely well” (EED Georgia).

Similar insights are also provided by the documents. The latest 2022 annual EED report *Supporting people striving for democracy* (2022) notes how there has been “a marked increase in protests, and civil society played a central role in mobilising society” in Georgia. Challenges include that “civil society and media operate in an increasingly fragile environment, and are subject to verbal attacks and harassment by the government, which is also tightening its grip on freedom of expression” (EED, 2022, p.22). However, in Georgia, there still remains a “continuing demand for democratic principles from wider society” (EED, 2022, p.6). That “despite this dramatic decline in democratic freedoms”, there remains in Georgia “strong popular demand for democracy from the general public and activists” (EED, 2022, p. 21).

Likewise, the 2021 version of this report notes that Georgia still “provides a generally non-restrictive environment in which EED grantees can work openly, without the threat of direct repression or limits on their activities. These are also countries where donors can operate and are broadly welcomed by governments”. (EED, 2021, p.24). Although there are “significant democratic challenges” in Georgia (EED, 2021, p.7),

democracy promoters “have found new ways to mobilise and circumvent obstacles — in some cases by moving actions online, in others by finding new forms of protest” with “an expansion in volunteerism in Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, and the Western Balkans, and a push-back against disinformation” (EED, 2021, p. 42). Thus, while democratic challenges remain, there still remain ways for INGOs to adapt themselves to the operating environment. Although state restrictions are present, they are not severe enough to hinder INGO democracy promotion in any major way.

Internal INGO conflicts over strategies

Both EED Georgia and USG Georgia describe internal strategic conflicts as emerging from target country restrictions.

Regarding internal discussions over strategies, EED Georgia points to its demand-driven approach in that the EED is driven by demands to work in restrictive environments. That in Georgia, “we don’t need to change our goals, because the goal is to support civil society where needed” but that there are some internal discussions involving “strategic questions with many of our partners”. These include internal discussions on how to prepare the EED and local partners for alternative plans “if things do get worse” and “if the EU provides a negative decision [for Georgian EU accession] and there is going to be a lot of social unrest”. That “we need to support our partners to prepare themselves for either way”. Regarding how this impacts their strategies, the respondent notes that “we have to do a lot more” by being “more engaged in Georgia” and that “there are a lot of initiatives to fund that are not getting funding”. That the EED “can help advice activists on how to position themselves (...) ensuring that peoples voices are heard here in Brussels” (EED Georgia).

Regarding internal strategic discussions, USG Georgia notes that “you cannot introduce new changes if there is no political will” and since there recently has been a lower “appetite for reforms”, USG is internally “just trying to maintain whatever is already there and not go backwards”. To exemplify, USG Georgia notes internal discussions over whether or not to postpone certain projects according to the

willingness of the government to cooperate on reforms. That “if there is no appetite for big reforms [from the Georgian state], then maybe we will try next year or we will try a year after. And if there is something that is needed, then we communicate that clearly with one another”. Then, there will be internal debates over whether “with the law, it is possible to implement” these reforms.

Regarding impacts on organizational interests, both EED Georgia and USG Georgia note the main challenge to be that funds may be diverted from their organizations, leading to lower spendings on countries like Georgia. As noted by EED Georgia, “I’m not going to claim that Georgia has been the worst hit, but I’m aware of some cases where funding has been negotiated with”. That “it is not just the amount of money, it’s about how people spend that money (...) a lot of donors will have big budgets and they’ll carve it up and so much of it ends up going into trainings and capacity building” without considering “paying the staff (...) paying the salaries of some of these organizations”. Likewise, USG Georgia notes that funding issues are not of major concern since “we are a very strong international organization” but that that funds may be diverted when “the government is weak to cooperate” on particular reforms.

Thus, EED Georgia and USG Georgia describe internal strategic conflicts in relation to preparing for potential developments in Georgia and in ensuring government cooperation on projects. There are no major state restrictions on their funding capacities, other than the risk that funds on the donor-side may be allocated to other organizations. Unlike in Türkiye, INGOs in Georgia do not face any internal discussions related to compromises on basic goals or organizational principles. Rather, in Georgia, internal discussions tend to concern issues related to the implementation of democracy projects within Georgian society.

Democracy promotion strategies

Neither EED Georgia nor USG Georgia describe their strategies as having been compromised due to target state restrictions. However, both respondents note the necessity to remain flexible towards potential developments in Georgia.

As noted by EED Georgia, “the struggle is not over yet (...) Georgia has a very strong civil society”. However, the situation in Georgia is “changing all the time and that’s why it’s necessary to be flexible”. Thus, for the EED, “you do have to think through about the perception of funding certain groups” even though the “goal as an organization is not to be politically confrontational to the Georgian state”. Rather, it is to “support civic activism so that there is a development of democracy (...) to be able to support people to develop their own structures, their way of having a dialogue between each other (...) way of developing different visions for the future” (EED Georgia).

USG Georgia notes that there remain strategic challenges in Georgia, especially in cooperating with the government. That “if you see that there is some important thing to be done, you don’t have government counterpart on that area, then you have two choices, you don’t pursue that reform or you pursue it when the government counterpart is against you, and then if they criticize you, then it won’t be done anyway. So that why its very hard to find this balance”. Meanwhile, despite such challenges, Georgia is still described as relatively open, since “at least it’s still possible to change the government”. That as a whole, “people in Georgia, they are very smart, they are very brave (...) we are not in a stage where there are no alternatives, that we will be shut down or that we wouldn't be able to campaign” (USG Georgia).

Thus, INGOs do need to adapt themselves to the situation in Georgia. However, this still does not include any major strategic compromises, nor widespread abandoning of democratization programs. Rather, strategic adaptations in Georgia relate to more practical challenges in organizing democracy promotion effectively and to further develop and maintain the progress that has already been made.

6.0 Discussion

This section provides an analytical discussion of the results from the semi-structured interviews and INGO documents. Both research questions will be answered separately. In the final part of this section, both questions will be answered together with a summary of the main findings.

To recall, this thesis has two research questions:

1. Do restrictions in autocratizing target states impact democracy promoting INGOs to choose strategies that are less politically confrontational?
2. In which ways do restrictions in autocratizing target states impact democracy promoting INGOs to choose strategies that are less politically confrontational?

6.1. Research question 1

Research question 1 deals with the question of whether target state restrictions due to autocratization leads democracy promoting INGOs to adopt less politically confrontational democracy promotion strategies. To begin, there is support that restrictive operating environments due to autocratization do constitute a major challenge to INGOs democracy promotion. For instance, EED Türkiye and NDI Türkiye describe a significantly declining operating environment during the last 10 years, whereas EED Georgia and USG Georgia describe more limited restrictions to their activities during that time period.

It should be noted that state restrictions against INGO democracy promotion are noted in both countries, despite Türkiye being an autocratizing state and Georgia being a non-autocratizing state. If target state autocratization leads INGOs to adopt less politically confrontational strategies, we expect Türkiye to have deteriorated to a far greater degree than Georgia in making INGO democracy promoters less politically confrontational. Indeed, this seems to be the case.

In Türkiye, INGOs describe state restrictions as having involved consistent curtailments of fundamental freedoms, as well as increasingly arbitrary executive powers and state surveillance over the past decade. By comparison, in Georgia, INGOs describe their challenges with state restrictions as being a more recent trend of the past 2 to 3 years, involving a polarizing society and state criticisms of their activities, but without constituting a major threat to their overall operations. In this sense, it can be stated that state restrictions against democracy promoters in Türkiye have been far more *severe* during the last decade, when compared to Georgia.

This is further supported by INGO documents. Documents describe how the operating environment in Türkiye remains severely restricted by rising authoritarianism, politically motivated CSO repression, poor rule of law and undemocratic election procedures (EED, 2022, p.23; EED, 2021, p.24). Overall political participation remains severely restricted, in part due to societal polarization

and poor legal protection (NDI, 2023, p.1-3). By contrast, the operational environment in Georgia is described as fragile, yet still sufficiently open for democracy promoters to operate without major restrictions on their activities (EED, 2022, p.6, 21; EED, 2021, p.7, 24). Georgia is described as having a high democratic demand, where democracy promoters despite challenges have opportunities to further democracy (EED, 2022, p.21). Democracy promoters are also described as having enough space to adapt themselves to the environment without major hurdles, leading to expanded forms of activism (EED, 2021, p.42)

Thus, when comparing Türkiye and Georgia, it can be confirmed from the INGO respondents and documents that Türkiye as an autocratizing state has been far worse in its restrictions against INGO democracy promotion during the last decade. Further, while INGOs in Türkiye have faced major obstacles to their operations, INGOs in Georgia have faced obstacles which are minor in comparison. While it can be confirmed that the operating environment for INGO democracy promotion has remained more restrictive in Türkiye as an autocratizing state, it remains to be answered whether this by itself has led to the adoption of less politically confrontational strategies to promote democracy. Recall the definition of *politically confrontational strategies* (see Theory) that a democracy promotion strategy is politically confrontational when it is directed at political institutions having the power to lead to regime-replacements of incumbent regimes. Here, INGOs in both Türkiye and Georgia describe instances in which they have adapted their strategies to promote democracy. Crucially however, this has occurred to different degrees.

In Türkiye, INGOs are described as facing major challenges to their freedom of association, leading to strategic compromises in the political content of their democracy promotion and an avoidance of programs considered as too politically sensitive to the Turkish government. INGOs respondents note how they have been forced to tone down their programs politically and to re-think their operations. Strategic compromises are described as having been particularly evident within political aspects of their programs, e.g. regarding activities in local elections and

organized political party panels. This has led to strategic changes in their thematic focus and programmatic priorities, as well as leading to various forms of self-censorship, avoidance of criticism and a re-framing of their messages.

Also described are cases where their operations for political reasons have been canceled within specific regions of Türkiye and how projects aimed at direct engagements with the Parliament have been canceled in favor of projects aimed at local governments. Further, strategic adaptation are explicitly noted as having led to compromises in their basic values and goals as democracy promoting organizations.

In Georgia, INGOs have faced more minor threats to their operations. When strategic adaptations have occurred, these have involved more general concerns to their activities. For instance, INGO respondents mention needs to think through perceptions of supporting certain groups and to postpone projects at times when there is a low willingness from the local government to cooperate on certain reforms. Also noted is a need to manage a strategic balancing act in order to maintain cooperative relations with the Georgian government. While state restrictions do occur, few restrictions are aimed at the political content of democracy promotion as such. Rather, Georgian state restrictions seem to impact INGOs more in terms of practical goals to maintain favorable relations with the Georgian government and in ensuring effective implementations of their democracy promotion programs. Further, unlike in Türkiye, Georgian state restrictions do not appear to have resulted in any compromises in their overall goals and values as democracy promoting organizations. Thus, while democracy promoting INGOs in both Türkiye and Georgia have adapted their strategies to target state restrictions, there remains a crucial difference in the degree to which this has occurred.

Utilizing the definition of politically confrontational strategies, it can be confirmed that INGOs in Türkiye have adopted less politically confrontational democracy promotion strategies due to increased target state restrictions. This is especially evident in the fact that INGOs have avoided projects deemed as being too politically sensitive and that compromises have been made in relations to political institutions such as local elections and political party panels. Likewise, this is evident in that

interventions in political institutions have been abandoned within particular regions of Türkiye. Thus, we see an abandonment of democracy promotion programs with the potential to replace the incumbent government of Türkiye. Utilizing the same definition of politically confrontational strategies, it is clear that strategic adaptations that do occur in Georgia are relatively minor in comparison. Rather than leading to any major political compromises as such, INGOs operating in Georgia are faced with less severe forms of strategic adaptations concerning practical issues, such as ensuring effectiveness in the promotion of democracy and the maintaining of cooperative relations with the state.

Consequently, it can be confirmed that INGOs operating in Türkiye have politically compromised on their strategies due to increased Turkish state restrictions. Meanwhile in Georgia, the same impact on INGO strategies has not occurred. Thus, it can be confirmed that autocratization has had a major impact in making INGO democracy promoters less politically confrontational. This becomes clear when comparing INGOs operating in an autocratizing country (Türkiye) to INGOs operating in a non-autocratizing country (Georgia). This leads to an affirmative answer to Research Question 1.

6.2. Research question 2

Having established that state restrictions in autocratizing states lead INGO democracy promoters to adopt less politically confrontational strategies, the question remains *how* this occurs. To approach this question, this thesis utilizes a theoretical model (see Theory), which expects this to occur from internal conflicts within INGOs over their democracy promotion strategies, following target state restrictions on the organizational interests (e.g. funding and advocacy spaces).

To begin, in both Türkiye and Georgia, there is support to the notion that internal strategic conflicts do emerge within democracy promoting INGOs from target state restrictions on their organizational interests. In Türkiye, INGO respondents describe several internal conflicts emerging out of increased Turkish state restrictions. These

include internal discussions over supporting and advocating for democracy in a highly restrictive operating environment. Likewise, in Georgia, INGO respondents describe internal discussions over how to effectively promote democracy given societal developments. Notably, neither INGOs in Türkiye nor INGOs in Georgia seem to be affected to any major degree in their funding capacities. Rather, for INGOs both countries, state restrictions on their ability to advocate seem to have a higher impact on their overall internal conflicts over strategies.

Thus, it can be confirmed that internal strategic conflicts do emerge within INGOs in both Türkiye and Georgia due to target state restrictions. However, it remains to be answered whether there is any difference in internal strategic conflicts between the two target states and whether this might explain the way that democracy promotion strategies become less confrontational in Türkiye when compared to Georgia. Here, internal strategic conflicts do seem to differ between INGOs in Türkiye and INGOs in Georgia.

In Türkiye, INGOs describe internal strategic conflicts over whether it is realistic to support certain types of projects given an increasingly restrictive state environment. Internal strategic conflicts also concern differing views on the situation in Türkiye as well as whether certain democracy projects should be implemented at all given a high degree of strategic uncertainty. Further, internal conflicts concern strategic questions on whether to compromise on their fundamental principles of democracy promotion so as to keep operating in Türkiye.

By comparison, in Georgia, INGOs face internal strategic conflicts over far less severe strategic issues. Here, internal discussions concern issues on how to prepare for future developments in Georgia and whether and how to postpone certain projects to more effectively promote democracy. Further, internal conflicts concern the utilization of resources to finance projects and salaries, in that donor funds risk being allocated elsewhere. Meanwhile, internal strategic conflicts do not concern any internal compromising on their fundamental principles or goals as democracy promoters. Rather, the internal conflicts which do emerge seem to concern more

practical issues on how to prepare for potential developments and how to implement democracy promotion in the most effective way possible.

Consequently, as expected from the theoretical model, we see that internal strategic conflicts are more severe among INGOs operating in Türkiye than in Georgia. Particularly in the sense that for INGOs in Türkiye, internal strategic conflicts concern more fundamental strategic issues, which lead to compromises in their basic principles and strategic goals. By comparison, INGOs in Georgia face less severe internal strategic conflicts, involving internal debates over issues that are preparatory and practical, but which do not lead to any compromises on their overall goals of democracy promotion. Thus, it can be confirmed that for INGOs operating in autocratizing target states, increasingly restrictive environments do lead to severe internal strategic conflicts which necessitate certain strategic compromises. The same does not hold true for INGOs operating in non-autocratizing target states.

Meanwhile, it remains to be answered whether more severe internal strategic conflicts among INGOs in Türkiye *as such* will lead to democracy promotion strategies becoming less politically confrontational, when compared to INGOs in Georgia. Here, the answer remains uncertain. While it can be confirmed that democracy promotion strategies do become less politically confrontational in Türkiye than in Georgia (see Research Question 1), it remains less clear that this occurs through internal strategic impacts on INGOs alone.

There is *some* support to this theory. For instance, INGOs in Türkiye do indeed mention how compromises on strategic decisions are made following impacts on internal discussions from target state restrictions. However, results from INGO respondents also show that there still remain instances in which INGOs are able to adapt themselves to restrictive state environments without having to resort to strategic compromises. In other words, there are many other factors which play a crucial role in determining the degree to which INGO democracy promotion strategies become less politically confrontational from target state restrictions.

A major factor determining the degree to which INGOs adopt democracy promotion strategies that are less politically confrontational seems to be organizational mandates. For instance, both EED Türkiye and EED Georgia emphasize their mandates to operate in restrictive environments and to not cooperate with target state governments. That their mandated approach leads them to support democracy programs despite facing target state restrictions. Likewise, even for INGOs that do cooperate with target state governments, their mandates still play a major role. For instance, NDI Türkiye describes its strategic compromises as only affecting issues that are considered as less prioritized. Whereas for issues closer to its own mandates, e.g. competitive elections, the same compromises do not occur despite government restrictions.

Furthermore, organizational mandates seem to play a role in how INGOs internally are impacted by target state restrictions and how this in turn affects their democracy promotion strategies. For instance, EED Türkiye notes instances in which target state restrictions have resulted in finding new ways to operate in Türkiye. That through its mandate, the organization is able to adapt itself to restrictive operating environments. Likewise, EED Georgia notes that while state restrictions do lead to internal discussions, these may lead to increased support to democracy projects rather than less.

Thus, organizational mandates seem to be crucial in whether state restrictions are considered as reasons by INGOs to increase or decrease their democracy promotion activities in a given target state. This shows that democracy promoting INGOs are highly driven by their organizational mandates, both in how they are impacted by target state restrictions *and* in how this influences their democracy promotion strategies.

Another factor is that INGOs themselves at times are less impacted by target state restrictions than their local NGO partners. For instance, both NDI Türkiye and EED Türkiye note how certain restrictive laws impact their local partners more than INGOs themselves. Since certain state restrictions affect INGOs and their local partner organizations differently, this might influence the degree to which INGOs

compromise on their democracy promotion. For instance, the degree to which strategic compromises occur may depend on whether specific types of state restrictions affect INGOs directly, or only indirectly through restrictions on their local partner organizations. Likewise, the degree to which INGOs compromise on their strategies may depend on the degree to which their programs are dependent on cooperation with local NGO actors within target states.

A further factor is that state restrictions against democracy promoters seem to vary not only between target states, but also *within* target states. For instance, NDI Türkiye notes there to be major regional differences in state restrictions against their activities. This has led to the abandonment of democracy promotion programs within certain cities and provinces which are associated with politically sensitive issues, limiting their programs to less restrictive regions of Türkiye. This shows how there might be sub-national variation in the degree to which INGOs adopt democracy promotion strategies that are less politically confrontational. Thus, leading to compromised democracy promotion within only certain regions of a target state. This might also indicate how impacts of state restrictions on democracy promoters are dependent on factors related to sub-national variation, e.g. the degree to which sub-national governments are able to choose their restrictive measures independently of the central government.

Finally, a factor which may influence whether or not democracy promotion strategies are politically confrontational may be that many democracy promoting INGOs require cooperation with target state governments to succeed in political reforms. For instance, NDI Türkiye and USG Georgia note their work as being dependent on cooperation with target state authorities. Here, strategic compromises may be inevitable due to the fact that INGOs themselves lack formal political powers to actualize political reforms without target state approval. Further, even when INGOs do not cooperate with target state government, they still rely on local authorities being willing to implement their proposed reforms. As are their local partners with whom INGOs are cooperating, who may be especially vulnerable to certain forms of state restrictions. All in all, this may indicate that strategic compromises on INGO

democracy promotion are inevitable to some degree due to the inherent political limitations of non-governmental actors as such.

Consequently, while there is some support to the theoretical model of this thesis, there are also a number of factors other than internal strategic conflicts as such which determine the degree to which democracy promotion strategies become less politically confrontational following increased target state restrictions. All in all, this leads to an inconclusive answer to Research Question 2.

6.3. Conclusion

In answering Research Question 1, it can be confirmed that state restrictions following autocratization trends have been a major reason for INGOs to adopt less politically confrontational democracy promotion strategies. This becomes clear when comparing democracy promotion activities in Türkiye, a highly autocratizing state, to Georgia, which despite challenges remains non-autocratic. In particular, we see that democracy promoting INGOs operating in Türkiye have been forced to compromise on major goals within their programs, adopting strategies that are less likely to threaten the incumbent Turkish government. Meanwhile, in Georgia, INGOs have faced only minor state restrictions, which have not been severe enough to lead to political compromises on their strategies. This leads to an affirmative answer to Research Question 1.

Research Question 2 is based on a theoretical model stating that INGOs operating in autocratizing states will face more severe internal strategic conflicts when compared to INGOs operating in non-autocratizing states due to increased pressures on their organizational interests, leading to strategic compromises in the former. In answering Research Question 2, the following can be concluded.

Firstly, it can be confirmed that in both Türkiye and Georgia, target state restrictions on the organizational interests of democracy promoting INGOs do lead to internal conflicts within these organizations over which strategies they should pursue. Secondly, such internal conflicts can be confirmed be more severe in Türkiye in that

they concern far more fundamental strategic issues. This leads INGOs in Türkiye to adopt certain compromises on their strategic goals as a result.

Meanwhile, as to whether such internal dynamics within INGOs lead to democracy promotion strategies becoming less politically confrontational, this remains more uncertain. In particular, there seem to be a number of other factors influencing whether democracy promotion strategies become less politically confrontational. These include the role of organizational mandates, variations of state restrictions within target states, varying impacts of state repression on INGOs and their local NGO partners, as well as inherent limitations in the political power of non-governmental actors. In utilizing the theoretical model of this thesis, this leads to an inconclusive answer to Research Question 2.

6.3.1. Main findings

This thesis has found that democracy promoting INGOs operating in autocratizing target states do tend to become strategically compromised in their democracy promotion due to increased target state restrictions. This is indicated by the tendency to adopt democracy promotion strategies that are less politically confrontational towards target state governments.

This thesis has also found that autocratization processes in target states do lead to internal conflicts within democracy promoting INGOs over their strategies to promote democracy. In particular, INGOs operating in autocratizing target states tend to become more concerned with fundamental strategic questions, such as whether or not to compromise on their principles of democracy promotion. This leads to certain compromises in their strategic goals to promote democracy. Meanwhile, INGOs operating in non-autocratizing target states tend to face internal conflicts over less severe organizational issues, in turn not leading to any such compromises.

This thesis has also found there to be a wide range of factors determining the extent to which INGOs become less politically confrontational in autocratizing target states. In particular, important factors include the role of organizational mandates, varying state repression within target states, different impacts on INGOs and their local NGO partners, as well as inherent limitations of non-governmental actors.

6.3.2. Future research

This thesis provides several openings for future research.

Firstly, there is potential for future research on other impacts of autocratization on democracy promoting organizations than the degree to which their strategies become politically compromised. For instance, future research might consider how autocratization processes impact organizational cultures of democracy promoting INGOs and how this in turn impacts their programs. Alternatively, future research might study other types of democracy promoting organizations. For instance, whether autocratization processes might lead to compromised strategies among state actors engaged in democracy assistance, e.g. agencies such as Swedish SIDA, or inter-governmental actors such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).

Secondly, there is potential for future research on other forms of internal dynamics among democracy promoting organizations. For instance, research might focus on how target state restrictions lead to internal conflicts over organizational resources, or how strategic uncertainties emerging out of unpredictable operating environments might shape policy formulation processes among democracy promoting organizations.

Thirdly, there is potential for future research on how differing mandates among non-governmental organizations might shape their behaviors to promote democracy. For instance, democracy promoting organizations might be comparatively studied based on different organizational mandates. Alternatively, studies might focus on how

target state restrictions vary on a sub-national level and how different regions and/or levels of government might impact democracy promotion programs in different ways.

All in all, such studies would provide further insights into the impacts of target state restrictions on democracy promotion. Indeed, further studies into such impacts would have policy implications not only for non-governmental democracy promoters themselves, but also for their broader support structures, e.g. state donors or local partner organizations. Providing more insights into how pro-democracy organizations function in restrictive state environments is crucial not only for the organizations involved, but also for the broader project to defend and further democratization in an increasingly restrictive world.

Appendix

Interviews

EED Expert on Türkiye

Date: 17/5 2023

NDI Expert on Türkiye

Date 2/6 2023

EED Expert on Georgia

Date: 12/6 2023

USG non-profit organization Expert on Georgia

Date: 20/6 2023

INGO documents

Annual Report 2022 Supporting people striving for democracy. European Endowment for Democracy, 2022

Annual Report 2021 Supporting people striving for democracy. European Endowment for Democracy, 2021

Faces of Youth Policy Proposal IV. Participation of Young People in Political Decision-Making Processes. National Democratic Institute, 2023

Interview questions

Describe the main activities of your organization in...

Have the democracy promotion activities of your organization changed during the last 10 years or so...

Do you see any challenges to democracy promotion in...? If so, what are the main challenges?

Are challenges to democracy promotion different today when compared to 10 years ago or so? If so, what are these changes?

How would you describe the current legal environment towards civil society actors in.... How does this impact your democracy promotion activities?

Has the legal environment towards civil society actors in... changed during the last 10 years or so? If so, how has this impacted your democracy promotion activities?

Could you give examples of *specific laws* that have impacted your activities in...?
How do you solve these problems?

Could you give examples of *specific laws* that have impacted your activities of your local partners in...? How do you solve these problems?

To what extent would you consider developments in... during the last 10 years or so to have impacted the interests of your organization (e.g. your advocacy space, funding and access to the target country)?

Have challenges to your organizational interests (e.g. funding, advocacy space etc.) in... led to any need to reprioritize your overall goals? If so, please provide examples.

Have challenges to your organizational interests in... led to any conflicts or discussions within your organization over your activities? If so, how has this impacted your democracy promotion activities?

What are the main impacts that autocratization/democratization trends in.... might have on your democracy promotion activities? Please, provide examples.

Have certain types of activities to promote democratization become more difficult as a result of autocratization/democratization? What have been the ways to deal with this?

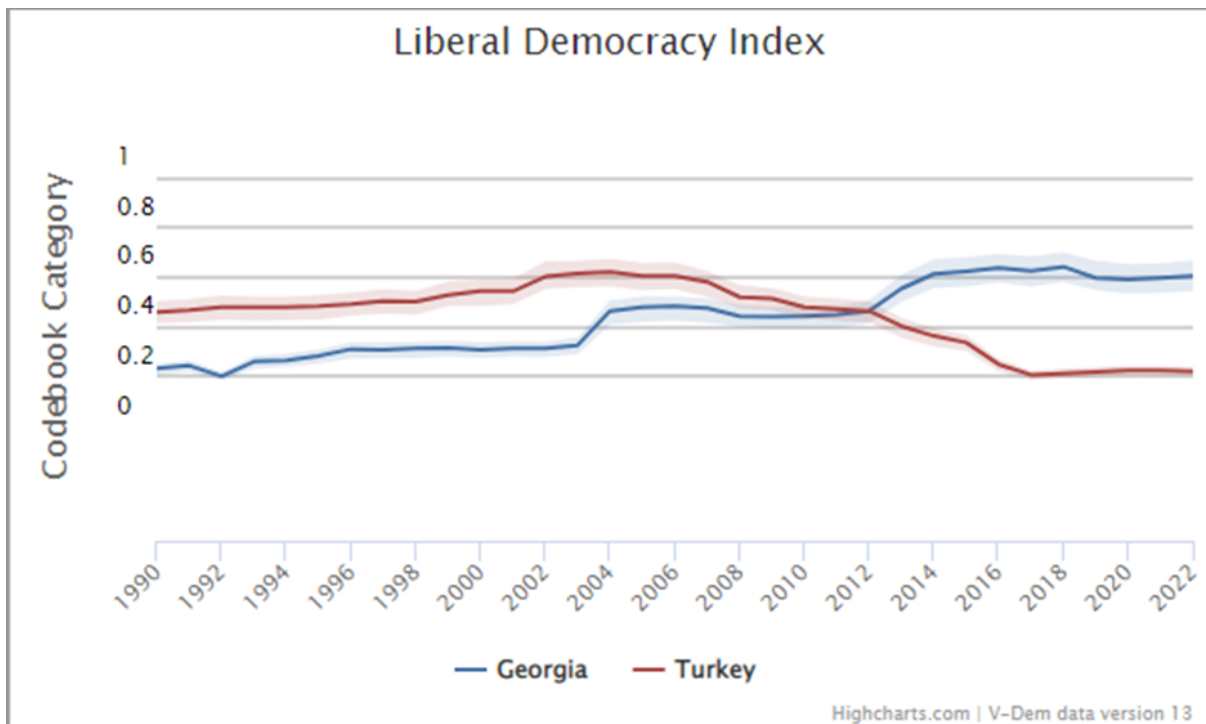
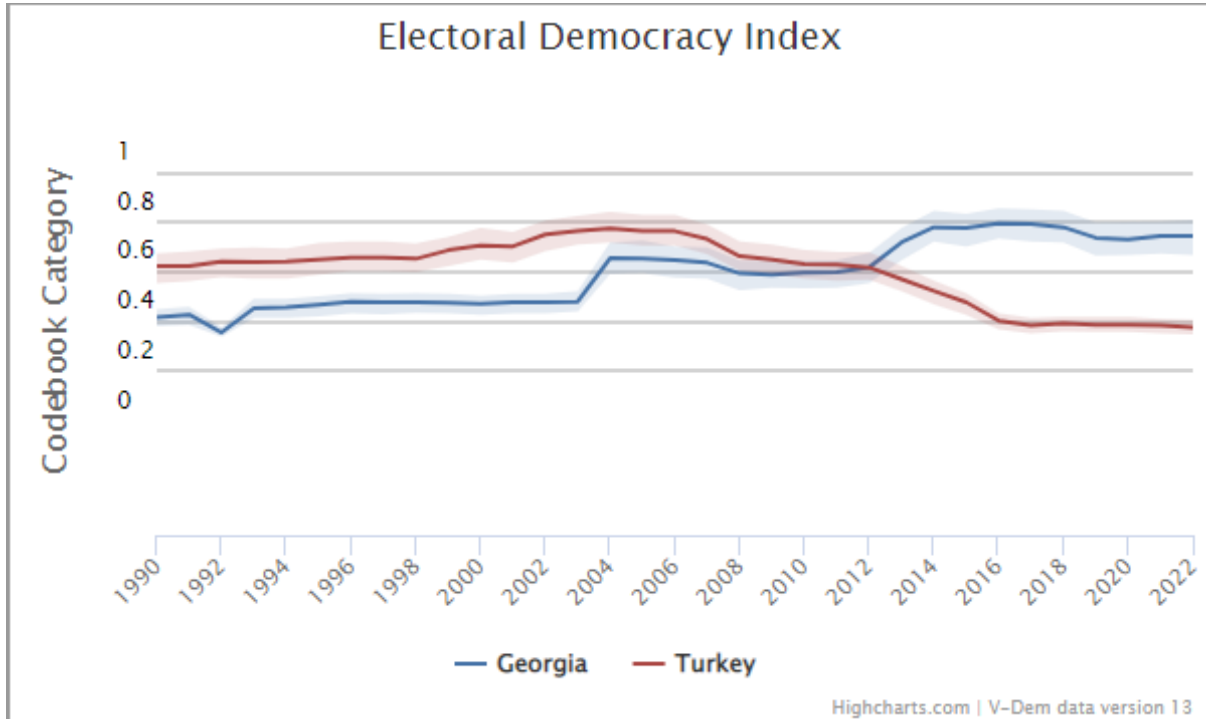
To what extent are legal aspects of autocratization/democratization a crucial part of the overall impacts on your activities?

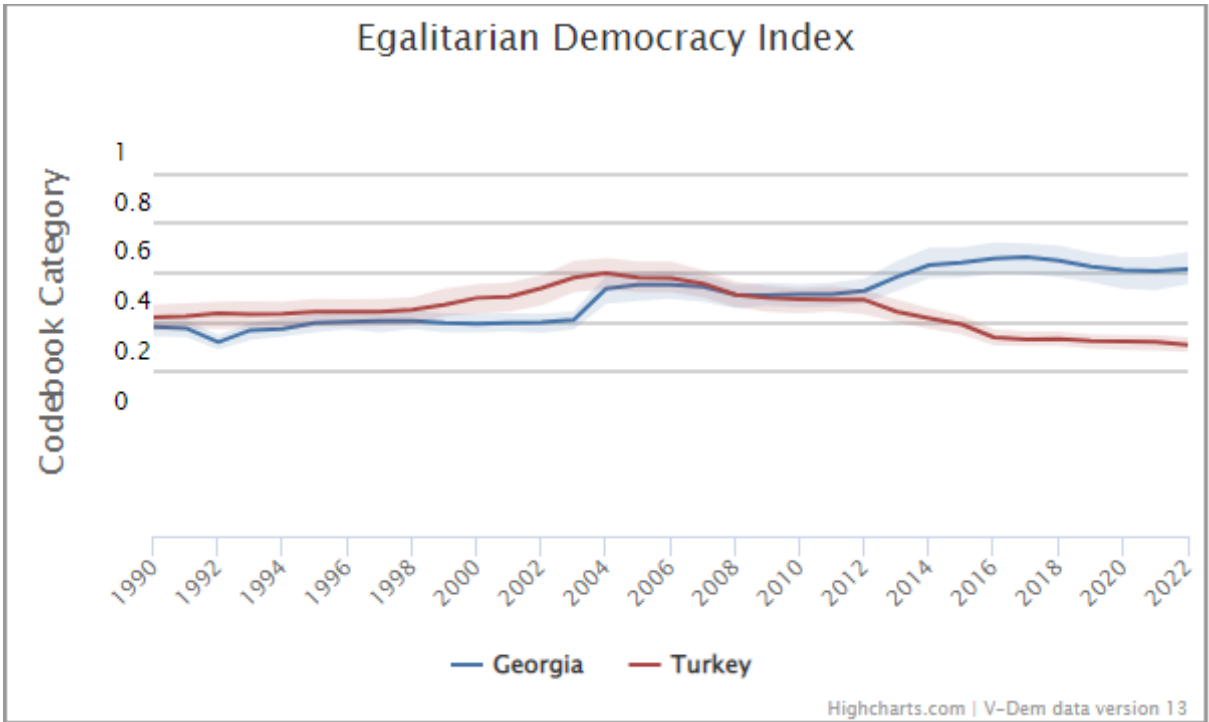
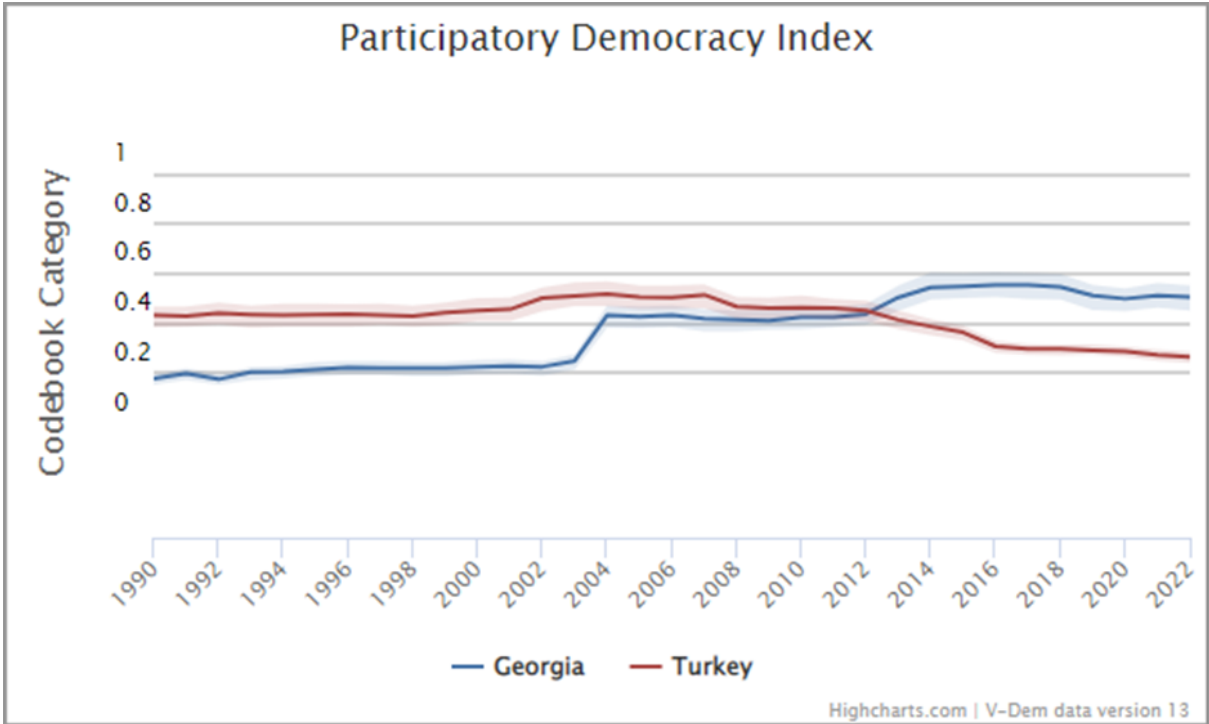
Have autocratization/democratization trends in... made it more difficult for your organization to choose politically sensitive activities? If so, to what extent? Please provide examples.

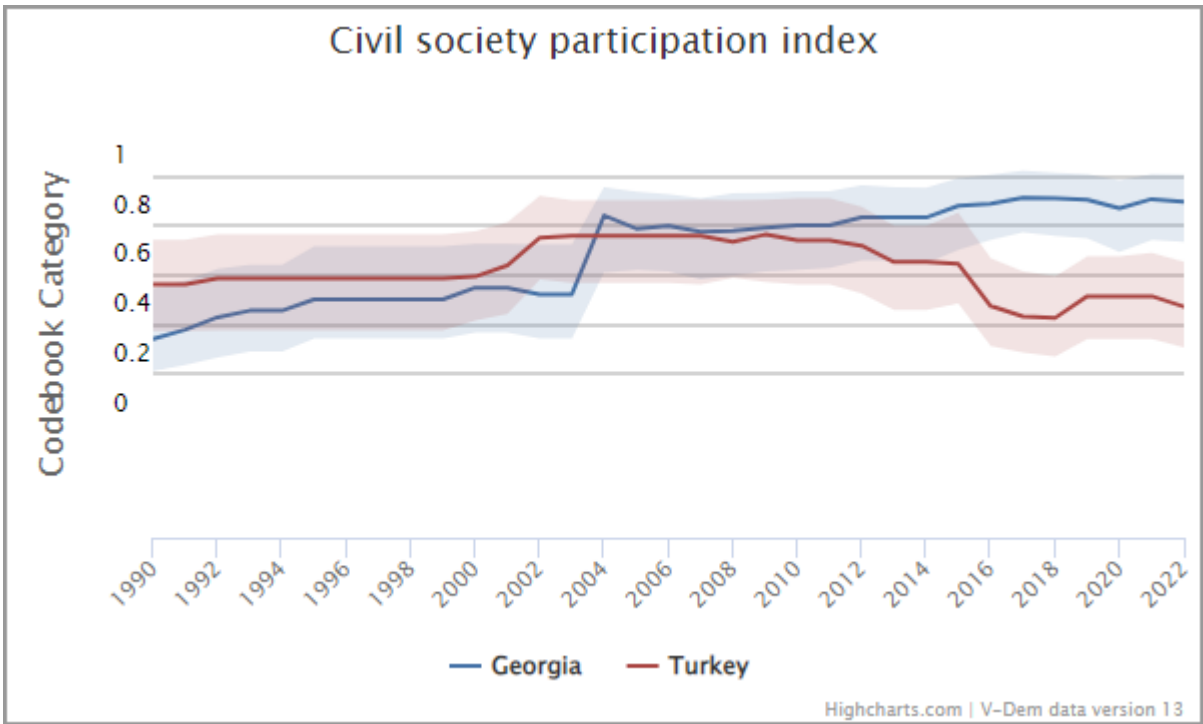
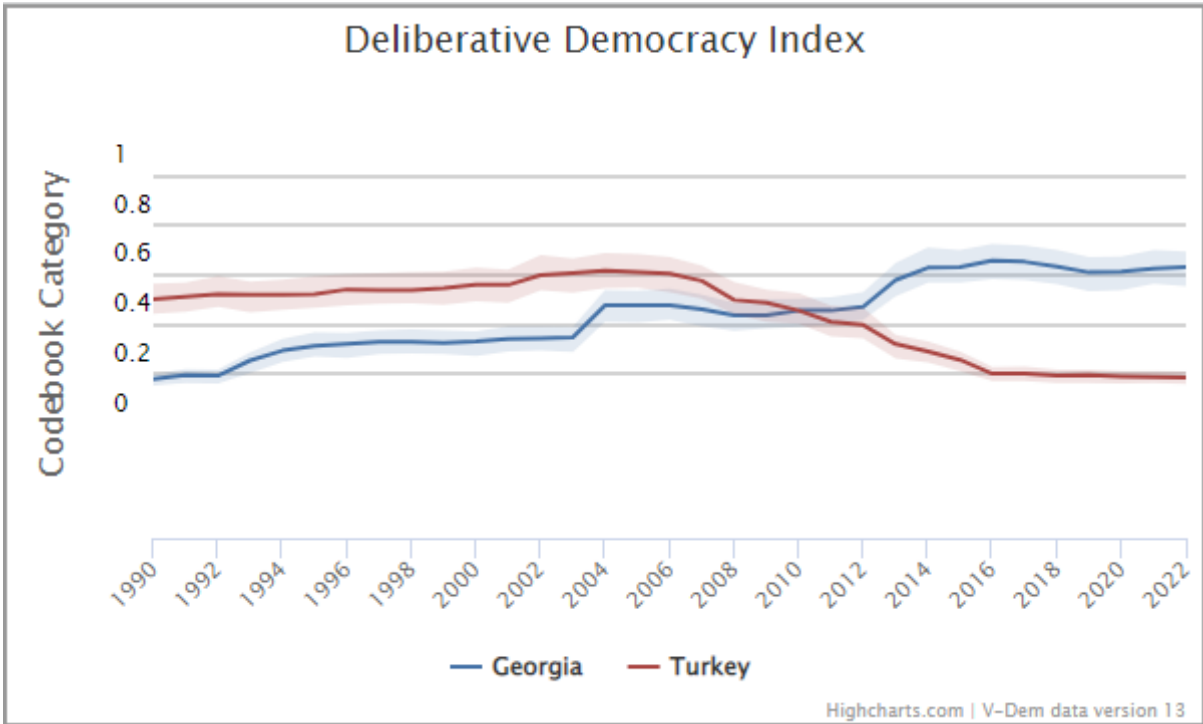
Would you say that autocratization/democratization trends in... have made it more difficult to support projects that are politically confrontational towards the state? If so, in what ways?

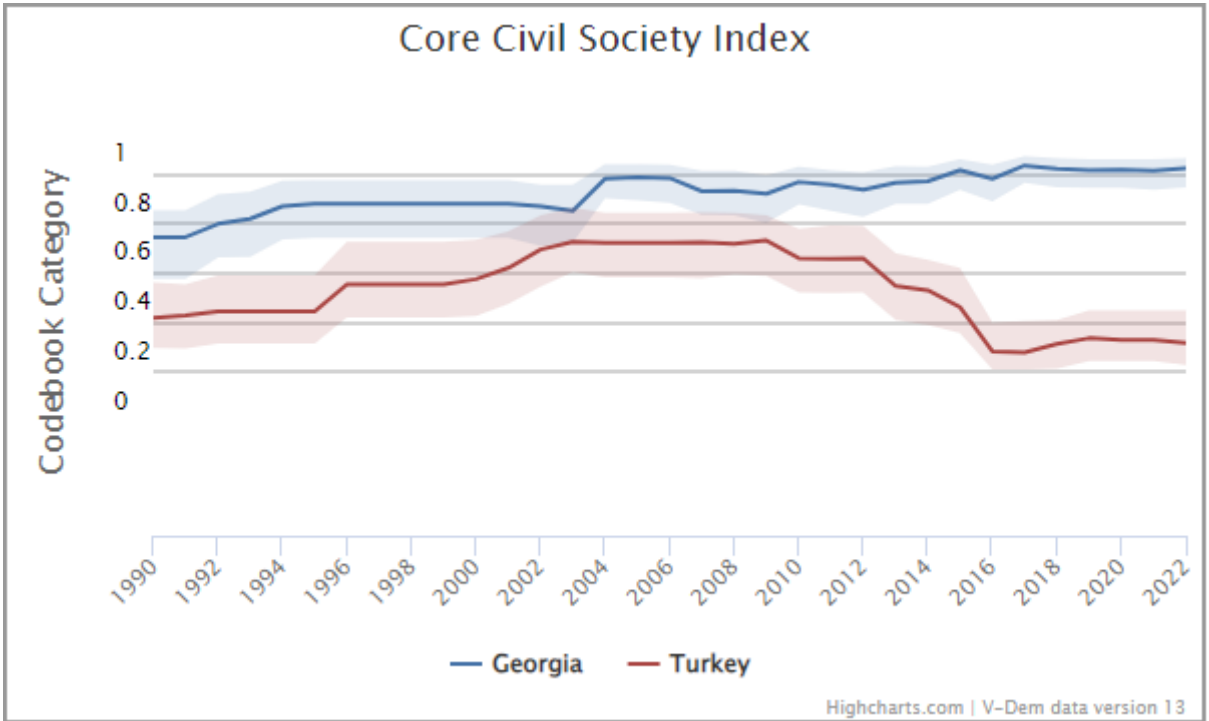
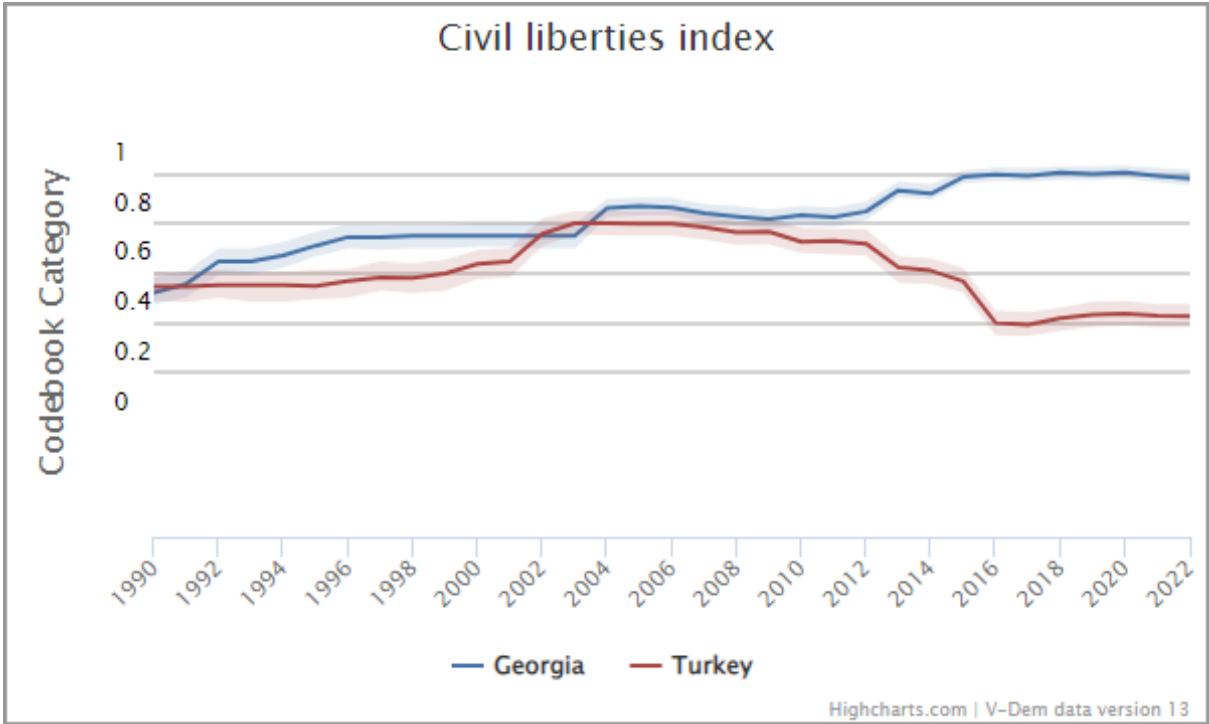
Do you have any other inputs on this overall topic?

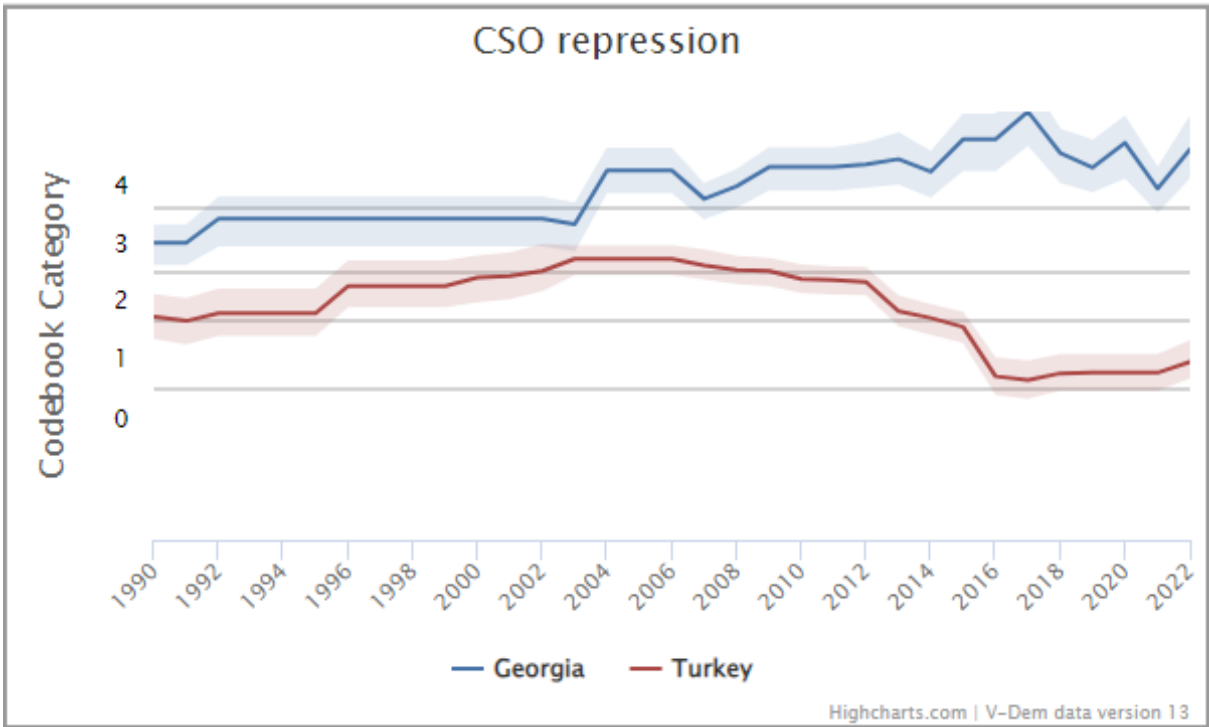
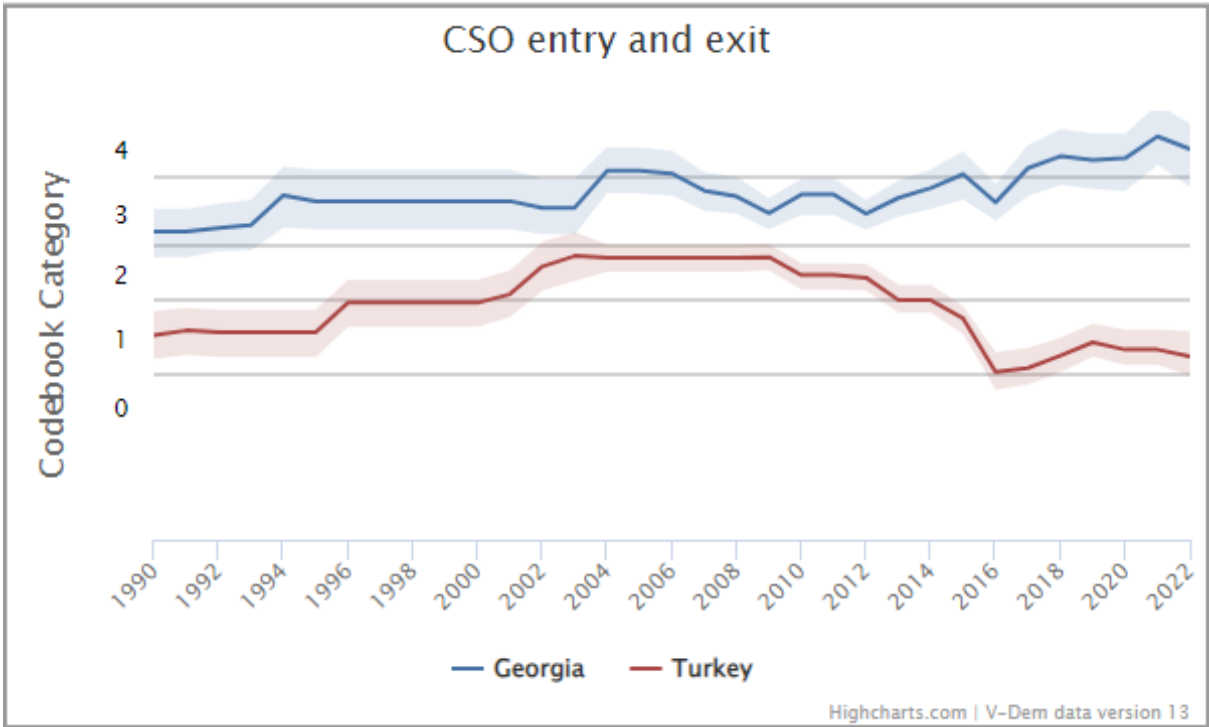
V-Dem Graphs











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