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## Behind Closed Doors: How Remittance Flows Changed Repression Dynamics in Beneficiary States during COVID-19

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Behind Closed Doors: How Remittance Flows Changed Repression Dynamics in  
Beneficiary States during COVID-19

Senior Project Submitted to The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Ketevan Tsurtsunia

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, May 2023

**Bard College**



## **Dedication**

Dedicated

To  
my best parents  
and loving family  
thank you  
for constantly supporting me  
in all my educational  
&  
personal  
curiosities  
&  
growth  
მთელი გულით მიყვარხართ.

To  
all my fellow Georgians who never give up  
&  
all the persons of the world fighting for a better future.



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## **Introduction**

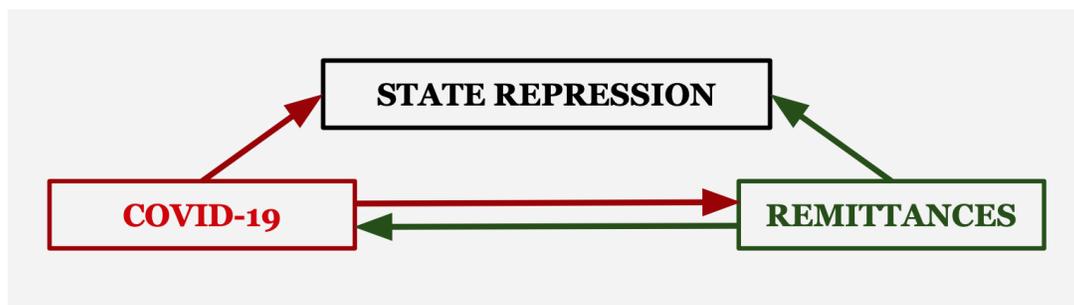
The paper is going to discuss a topic neglected in the research on pandemic studies in both Economics and Politics - How Remittance Flows Changed Repression Dynamics in Beneficiary States during COVID-19 - in respect of the separate relationships among three variables. Taking State Repression as an Dependent Variable, and COVID-19 and Remittance Flows as the Independent Variables, the paper builds a model of interrelation among these variables. Through breaking down this triangular model, the research attempts to analyze the separate effects of the variables on each other and then build their connection by fitting it into a bigger, more specific model. This model will present the results of the interrelationship of the effects by exploring how the three variables come into play with each other. The paper hypothesizes that Remittance Flows affected State Repression during COVID-19 and presents generalized cases that could be the result of variations in these different effects.

Structurally, the Conceptual Foundations of the research are presented and analyzed first, in order to demonstrate the inspiration of the research as well as the findings already explored in the relationships central to the paper. This chapter will set up and present a framework for the paper, through which the dynamics and relationships will be traced. To trace in detail the interconnectedness of the three main variables discussed - COVID-19, Remittance Flows and State Repression - the paper will proceed to apply its analysis in a case study of one Remittance-Dependent country during COVID-19 - Georgia. Human Rights developments in Georgia during the pandemic will be explored in the following chapter to fully analyze the dynamics that could lead to State Repression. The next chapter discusses changes in Remittance Flows in Georgia during the pandemic and analyzes what results these dynamics produced. By

bringing together the Human Rights and Remittance Dynamics in Georgia, the following section will trace the interrelationships of the three variables in the Georgia case study using the framework and models set up in the first chapter. The importance and implications of the paper are further discussed at the end, noting further contributions that could be made to the research.

## Conceptual Foundations

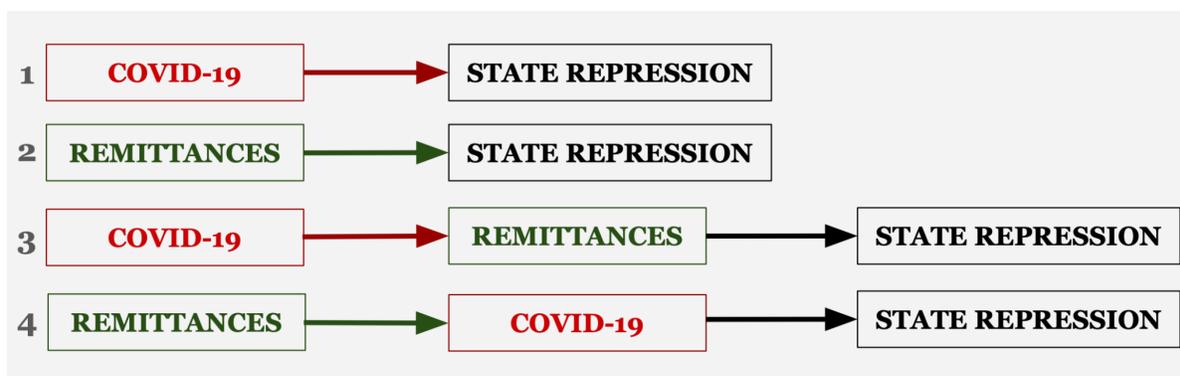
The COVID-19 pandemic affected the global world in a lot of ways. Extensive research has been done on its effect on the economic growth of states, the effectiveness of government responses, the efficacy of different vaccines, and vaccine diplomacy. However, changes in state repression have been a neglected topic in research focused on understanding and analyzing the processes that took place during the pandemic. This paper will take on the topic of state repression dynamics during COVID-19 and further develop this relationship using remittances as an additional variable that affects state repression, taking state repression as a dependent variable. Finally, the paper will build a theoretical framework on how state repression dynamics change during COVID-19 through different shifts in remittance flows in remittance-dependent countries.



**Figure 1.**

### **The Relationship Between State Repression, COVID-19 and Remittances**

Figure 1 introduces the relationship between state repression, COVID-19 and Remittances. The arrows represent that the variable in the box has an effect on the variable to which the arrow is pointing. The figure displays the complex relationship between the variables to be explored in the paper. There are 4 arrows expressing the effects of the 3 variables - State Repression, COVID-19, Remittances - on each other.



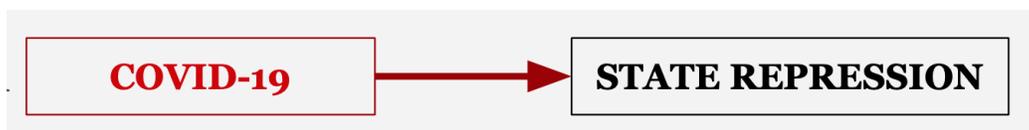
**Figure 2.**

### **Separating the Effects of the 3 Variables on Each Other**

First, it is necessary to break down the relationship that each arrow represents in order to explore the effect of the independent variables - COVID-19 and Remittances - on the dependent variable, which is State Repression. Figure 2 demonstrates this breakdown. During COVID-19, state repression dynamics changed due to the external shock of the pandemic, thus COVID-19 has its own effects on state repression. Remittances, the transfer of money from migrants to a person or household at home, have their own effect on citizens and their behavior thus leading to different dynamics in State Repression, depending on whether they fall or rise. These two independent variables, COVID-19 and Remittances, also have a relationship of their own. It is obvious to expect that the pandemic put a strain on the ability of emigrants living abroad to sustain their levels of remittances. Stores were closed, there were lockdowns, people were laid off. This would suggest that the flow of remittances would alter significantly during the pandemic, expressing the effect of COVID-19 on Remittances. The Remittance flows also have an effect on the Pandemic, since the slowdown of the economy due to the pandemic decreases the flow of income to households, making the consequences of the pandemic more severe. This increased severity leads to citizens

becoming dissatisfied with the government and its handling of COVID-19, leading in turn to changes in state repression dynamics.

With these separate effects and the importance of exploring them established, the paper will now further discuss and analyze each of these relationships case by case to build a framework for the complexities their interdependence entails.



**Figure 3. Relationship 1 - Effect of COVID-19 on State Repression**

In Figure 1, the first relationship to be discussed is the effect of COVID-19 on State Repression. In the light of recently-passed anti-abortion measures in the United States, it is clear that during COVID-19 a lot of minorities have been repressed, COVID-19 making it easier to hit a person when they are down. Significant research has been done by Wood & Wright on repression dynamics after a sudden natural disaster.<sup>1</sup> They argue that states escalate repression, because natural disasters cause grievances to increase, presenting a challenge to state authority. Natural disasters expose the relationship between the state and the society since both are vulnerable. They deduce that when natural disasters strike, the state loses power due to the “strain on the ability of the government to police potential threats and exert effective control over populations in affected areas”<sup>2</sup>. This increases opportunities for civic violence and as a result, increases regime repression. The authors also highlight the role of humanitarian aid and differentiate its effect in democratic and authoritarian states, stating that in the case of the latter, it leads to more political instability, since autocratic leaders abuse their power

<sup>1</sup> Reed M. Wood and Thorin M. Wright. Responding to Catastrophe. ( *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2016) 1446–72

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

in terms of aid distribution, further frustrating the population. Using humanitarian aid in a different way and targeting it correctly can help compensate for diminished state capacity during natural disasters, thus enabling the state to avoid escalating repression. This occurs in democratic states due to their pressure in terms of providing public goods, while autocratic states have different incentives, positing a contrasting approach to research into their repression of opposition. Authors note that “autocrats increasingly devote aid resources to private payoff of political challengers and the repression of dissident threats”<sup>3</sup>. Feeling weakened and less in control, and threatened by the instability caused by natural disasters, autocratic regimes resort to coercive violence to survive.

Considering COVID-19 as a type of natural disaster helps find the relationship between the pandemic and state repression based on the research referenced here. Multiple publications by Human Rights Watch, the United Nations, and Freedom House highlight the increasing abuse of freedom of speech and human rights during the pandemic. Human Rights Watch mentions that “at least 83 governments worldwide have used the COVID-19 pandemic to justify violating the exercise of free speech and peaceful assembly.”<sup>4</sup> They highlight that victims include journalists, activists, healthcare workers, political opposition groups and citizens who have criticized government responses to the pandemic. These violations show that opposition has been significantly targeted.

Political economists have looked further into this data and provided their hypothesis on using COVID-19 policies to target and oppress opposition. Grasse *et al* focus on civilian targeting by the state in response to COVID-19 in their research paper

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Covid-19 Triggers Wave of Free Speech Abuse. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2021)

titled “Opportunistic Repression”<sup>5</sup>. When there is an emergency such as the pandemic, it often leads to suspension of the rule of law. This permits states to take uncontested measures in order to protect their citizens. The authors argue that this gives the state opportunities to oppress political opposition; naming this type of oppression as ‘opportunistic’, they suggest it should be added to other types already identified. Testing their hypothesis by examining the relationship between emergency orders from governments and state violence against civilians across Africa, they find out that the lockdowns that followed COVID-19 were associated with increases in physical repression by the state. Barcelo *et al* also focus their research on using COVID-19 policies against political dissidents. They explore whether governments take into account repression of dissidents while enacting COVID-19 policies. Their findings suggest that “governments that have recently engaged in state violence against civilians or abused citizens’ human rights were about 10% more likely to enact lockdown and curfew policies”<sup>6</sup> and that in more repressive countries, such policies were enacted earlier and lasted longer. Badran and Turnbull contribute significantly to analysis of the relationship between public health policies and consolidating authoritarian power for regimes in this guise.<sup>7</sup> Confining their research to North Africa, they find that this was the case in Morocco and Egypt and that the international community has not condemned these rollbacks of freedom of expression and civil protection. This is vital to consider since it touches upon the issue of international legitimation of state of emergency and uncondemned abuse of this power. Since authoritarian regimes

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Grasse et al. Opportunistic Repression: Civilian Targeting by the State in Response to COVID-19. (*International Security* 46, 2021), 130–65

<sup>6</sup> Joan Barceló et al. Windows of Repression: Using COVID-19 Policies against Political Dissidents? (*Journal of Peace Research*, 2022), 73–89

<sup>7</sup> Sammy Badran and Brian Turnbull. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Authoritarian Consolidation in North Africa. (*Journal of Human Rights*, 2022), 263–82

“regularly seek out opportunities to upgrade and consolidate power”<sup>8</sup>, COVID-19 has been a vital tool for them. By looking at the emergency law structure and WHO guidelines, authors find that Morocco, while statistically doing well in terms of vaccination rates as well as death rates, has been repressing opposition and abusing power. Morocco was also one of the few countries that could still travel to the Schengen zone, which implies status and legitimation of their domestic status quo internationally. The case of Egypt also shows that states regressed in human rights to advance their power during the pandemic and authoritarian regimes used COVID-19 as a justification for this. It is important to note that none of the authors highlight the role of grievances in the case of COVID-19 and repression, which is significant to the research of repression as seen from the findings on repression dynamics after natural disasters. I will be focusing on the role of grievances and highlighting its importance as a trigger for state repression during COVID-19. Since the increase in grievances has a lot of implications for citizen’s rise in demands from the government, which in turn results in the government's repressive response.

To sum up the channels through which state oppression during COVID-19 occurred, I will group them into categories and analyze them through these categories. Grievances, Legitimacy and Disguised Policies are all categories under which these channels fall.

### Grievances

Since, “natural disasters exacerbate existing tensions between the state and society”<sup>9</sup>, during COVID-19, there was an increase in the grievances of citizens and their

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Reed M. Wood and Thorin M. Wright. Responding to Catastrophe. ( *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2016), 1446–72

willingness to speak up and mobilize. This challenges state authority, thus leading governments to oppress the citizenry in order to stay in power. When leaders feel threatened or if they expect to feel threatened, they are more likely to repress. Particularly in the case of autocratic regimes, humanitarian aid also increases grievances in citizens due to the regime practicing the politics of exclusion and favoritism while directing this aid.<sup>10</sup>

### Legitimacy

During COVID-19, there is a state of emergency, thus excess usage of state power is legitimized internationally.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, there are loosened international norms. During the pandemic lives are at stake, thus doing well statistically in terms of high vaccination rates, low death rates, and smart COVID-19 policies limiting the transmission of the disease are internationally applauded. In the case of autocratic regimes, this seems to have covered up a lot of domestic political problems during COVID-19. This is important to consider since it has implications on how the international community should respond to other states in times of crisis.

### Disguised Policies

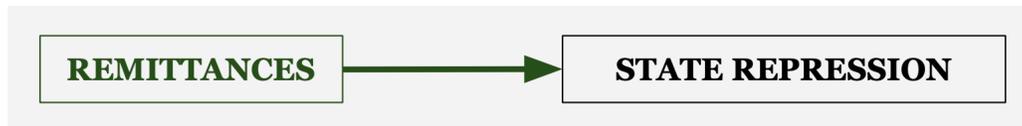
A lot of states started using COVID-19 policies as an excuse to repress opposition members. Especially in the case of autocratic states, COVID is a narrative that distracts from what the governments are really trying to do. States started acting through double standards by using COVID-19 policies when they benefit from it and violating/altering them when they do not. They also start to intervene in some communities more severely than they do in others.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Bull, Hedley. *The Anarchical Society : A Study of Order in World Politics (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977)*, Chapter 1-3

During COVID, state surveillance has to be increased in order to track citizens' health and movements. However, this can be abused by governments to constrain their citizens' movement. Due to lockdowns and restricted mobility during the pandemic, causing much of our daily activities to move online, online repression has also increased as well as repressing opposition under the name of “combating misinformation”.



**Figure 4. Relationship 2 - Effect of Remittances on State Repression**

The second relationship of Figure 1 that is going to be discussed is the effect of Remittances on State Repression. Remittance effects of migration have been neglected in the research literature in both politics and economics. Considering monetary effects remittances and its impact on state repression is even further neglected. Only a few authors, such as Bang, Mandal and Mitra, take up the subject when they discuss remittances and state protection of human rights<sup>12</sup>; and Escriba-Folch, Mesegues and Wright focus on how remittances undermine dictatorships in their newly published book, *Migration and Democracy*<sup>13</sup>. Both of these research directions highlight the actors to be considered: the political regime, the household receiving remittances, the migrant who remits and the government. Bang, Mandal and Mitra state that remittances decrease the need for state repression since they substitute for state welfare. This means that remittances reduce peoples' dependence on the state. From this we can deduce that when remittances are reduced, citizens are more likely to depend on the state for social

<sup>12</sup> James T. Bang, Arindam Mandal, and Aniruddha Mitra. Transnational Remittances and State Protection of Human Rights: A Case for Caution. (*Economic Notes*, 2019)

<sup>13</sup> Abel Escribà-Folch, Covadonga Meseguer Yebra, and Joseph Wright, *Migration and Democracy : How Remittances Undermine Dictatorship* (Princeton, New Jersey: *Princeton University Press*, 2021).

welfare needs so they are less critical of the state. Both sources focus on how remittances also affect mobilization. Remittances decrease the cost of mobilization, since they aid citizens to cut clientelist ties with the state thus incentivizing citizens to participate in mobilization. However, another effect could take place: households might attribute the material improvements brought about by remittances to the government, thus decreasing their will to oppose. Since Bang, Mandal and Mitra focus on autocracies as well as democracies, their empirical findings are more vague and posit for more research, due to the complications that arise from isolating the effects of scenarios.

Escribà-Folch, Mesegues and Wright focus mainly on autocracies and analyze how remittances undermine support for autocratic incumbents and advance democracy in some contexts. They highlight remittances as a special flow of income, especially in the case of autocracies, because they are private and go directly to citizens. If we consider foreign aid, autocratic regimes use it as a personal resource compared to democratic ones, making it so that remittances play a significant role in the case of autocracies. Their book focuses on two main arguments describing channels through which remittances fuel democratic ideals. First is that “remittances increase the resources available to political opponents for mobilizing dissent against the government”<sup>14</sup>, also mentioned by Bang et al. Second is that remittances undermine the “electoral strategies that autocratic governments employ to retain power”<sup>15</sup>, such as clientelist targeting of voters to win elections.

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<sup>14</sup> Abel Escribà-Folch, Covadonga Meseguer Yebra, and Joseph Wright, *Migration and Democracy : How Remittances Undermine Dictatorship* (Princeton, New Jersey: *Princeton University Press*, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

The authors propose their arguments by building on the framework developed by Hirschman, “exit, voice and loyalty”<sup>16</sup>, which is going to be significant in discussing the role of migrants sending remittances in opposition to the regime. The framework posits the proposition that if you exit your state, you forgo using your voice to change its status quo, so that exit and voice are considered mutually exclusive strategies. Escribà-Folch, Mesegues and Wright highlight the cost of using your voice, since it entails the risk of repression especially from an autocratic government.<sup>17</sup> Other than the exchange of ideas, norms and beliefs learned in the host country, the monetary side of emigration, remittances, “both weaken ruling parties’ abilities to mobilize electoral support and strengthen the organizational capacity of opposition groups”<sup>18</sup>. This outcome matters for the behavior of the recipients of remittances. Emigrants influence these decisions, however the authors observe that remittances are able to mobilize opposition in areas where resistance already exists, but not in regime-stronghold regions. Since autocratic regimes target their citizens’ loyalty carefully to maximize their electoral support, “exit from clientelist networks should be most evident among poorer individuals who live in areas where ruling parties are most likely to concentrate their turnout-buying resources: namely, swing districts.”<sup>19</sup> This is significant in the case of autocratic regimes because lower turnout for the incumbent erodes its power. They also mention the importance of technological changes<sup>20</sup> in facilitating the movement of people and information as well

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<sup>16</sup> Albert O Hirschman. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty : Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Mass.: *Harvard University Press*, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> Abel Escribà-Folch, Covadonga Meseguer Yebra, and Joseph Wright. *Migration and Democracy : How Remittances Undermine Dictatorship* (*Princeton University Press*, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

as the remittances itself, which was even more evident during COVID-19, since major parts of our lives moved online.



**Figure 5. Relationship 3 - Effect of COVID-19 on Remittances and the Relationship of The Effect to State Repression**

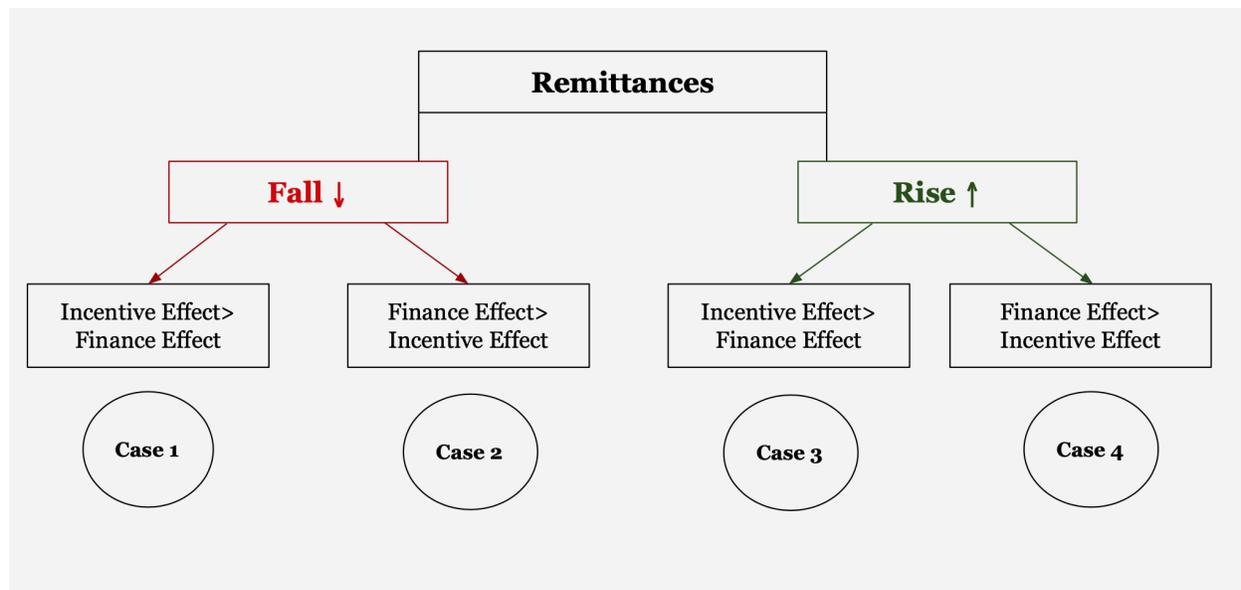
*Remittances, COVID-19 and State Repression*

The third relationship of Figure 1 that is going to be discussed is the effect of COVID-19 on Remittances and how that affects State Repression. Bridging the research on remittances & state repression and COVID-19 & repression, I consider that COVID-19 implies greater suffering due to the economic breakdown. If remittances alleviate these sufferings, then popular grievance against the regime is less than it might otherwise have been. In this case the regime should have less incentive to repress. If, on the other hand, COVID-19 reduces remittances, then there is both greater suffering due to the closure of the domestic economy and people having less insurance from remittances. In this case, popular discontent rises and the state has more incentive for repression. An important aspect of remittance increase to consider is that when this happens, citizens who already dislike the government might use those remittance resources to mobilize against it; the increase might also drive people to cut off clientelist ties with the government. However, this is complicated in the case of COVID-19, since people need the support of the government in terms of health concerns. Doyle<sup>21</sup> points out that remittances displace government expenditure, especially in social safety nets. If

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<sup>21</sup> Doyle, David. Remittances and Social Spending. (*American Political Science Review*, 2015) , 785–802

this “crowding out” leads to reduced government expenditure on health infrastructure, then that can magnify the burden of COVID-19 and raise the level of citizens’ grievances.



**Figure 6. Effects of Remittances on Citizen Behavior**

Considering remittances, there are 2 effects that could occur (as seen on Figure 1): First, expressing discontent is costly, mobilizing against the government is costly and remittances help finance this mobilization. This will be the Finance Effect. Second, mobilization capacity may increase with remittances but the incentive to mobilize may fall because the people are less likely to rebel against the government with remittances reducing dependence of people on the state. This will be the Incentive Effect. I will consider 4 cases. In 2 of them, I will assume that remittances have decreased during COVID-19 Pandemic and in the other 2, that remittances have increased during COVID-19 Pandemic. These cases have to be considered, since different countries, and their remittance inflows and outflows, were affected by COVID-19 in different ways. In both decreasing or increasing remittance cases, I will consider 2 alternatives of

Incentive Effect dominating the Finance Effect and the Finance Effect dominating the Incentive Effect. The results of these cases are hypothesized below.

### Remittances Fall

Case 1: Citizens feel like the government is not doing well and they require more support from them. Even though the FE (Finance Effect) will lead to mobilization being more costly, the IE (Incentive Effect) will drive citizens' grievances upwards, since they are more dependent on the government and frustrated. When IE dominates in this case, citizens are more likely to mobilize. This means that the governments will increase their oppression of citizens in order to stay in power. They can also utilize COVID-19 policies as leverage to target opposition.

Case 2: Citizens require extra support from the government and their grievances rise. If we consider the FE dominating IE in this case, then the effects of reduced remittances are greater. Since remittances fall and the citizens' dependence on the government rises, mobilization becomes more costly, making it harder for them to express their discontent. In this case, the government does not see the need for repression.

### Remittances Rise

Case 3: If we consider IE dominating the FE, then a rise in remittances decreases the dependence of citizens on the government. Even though it is less costly for them to mobilize against it, they choose not to, due to the decreased dependency on government support. This means that the government has no need to oppress opposition, since they are choosing not to mobilize.

Case 4: Mobilization is costly, however, this cost is reduced when remittances rise. If the cost is sufficiently reduced, i.e., if the FE dominates the IE, then citizens start

to mobilize against the government. Additionally, if we consider autocratic regimes, when remittances rise, citizens do not require much support from the government so they are even more likely to oppose. In this case, the government starts to lose power, thus they start to oppress citizens to stay in power and combat mobilization.

The effect of COVID-19 on Remittances provokes different cases that have different implications for state repression, thus this effect will be able to predict how the state acts in terms of oppression.



**Figure 5. Relationship 4 - Effect of Remittances on COVID-19 and the Relationship of The Effect to State Repression**

The fourth relationship of Figure 1 that is going to be discussed is the effect of Remittances on COVID-19 and how this affects State Repression. Recently, the importance of remittances has been highlighted by a number of organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations. Foreign Direct Investment(FDI) quickly exhausted its potential to support citizens during the pandemic. As an example, The World Bank finds that “remittance flows to LMICs (excluding China) surpassed the sum of FDI and overseas development assistance in 2020.”<sup>22</sup> Dilip Ratha, lead economist on Migration and Remittances for the World Bank, highlights the importance of remittances and their free transfer between states.<sup>23</sup> During the pandemic, remote modes of work became popular and people had to seek out digital solutions to problems.

<sup>22</sup> Remittance Flows Register Robust 7.3 Percent Growth in 2021. (*World Bank*, 2021)

<sup>23</sup> World Bank, What Role Are Remittances Playing in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery? - Expert Answers. (*YouTube*, 2021)

Since they could not go out and send money, sending money through mobile phones and cutting back on transaction fees have aided remittance flows.

In 2020, the World Bank predicted an expected fall of remittances by 20%. Interestingly enough, in the 3rd quarter of 2020, flow of remittances recovered significantly, amounting to \$540 billion<sup>24</sup>, meaning that it only fell by \$8 billion or 1.6% overall.<sup>25</sup> In some countries, it even increased. According to the data gathered by the World Bank, it rose by 6.4% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5.2% in South Asia, 2.3% in the Middle East and North Africa; and fell by 7.9% for East Asia and the Pacific, 9.7% for Europe and central Asia, 12.5% for Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that even without the pandemic, some countries are more dependent on remittances than others. Dilip Ratha highlights that low-middle income citizens in developing countries are more likely to use remittances as their lifeline. This unpredictable rise in remittances during COVID-19 could be attributed to: easing the transfer of remittances through digital channels; a shift from informal to formal channels of transfer; more remote jobs offered in the host countries; the vital necessity of remittances to households receiving it.

A decrease in Remittances would intensify the impact of COVID-19 on citizen behavior, while an increase of Remittances would lighten it. The intensified consequences would then lead to citizens being dissatisfied with the government and how they handle COVID-19, leading to increased opposition and in turn state repression. Lightened consequences would lead to citizens attributing their relatively

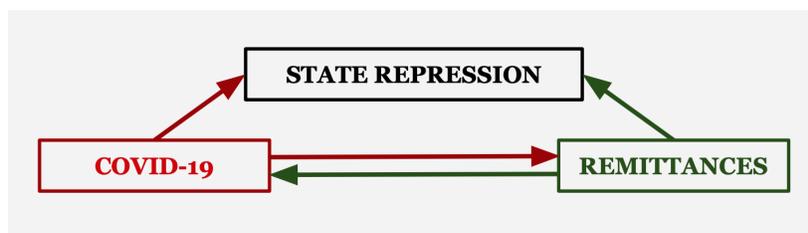
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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Defying Predictions, Remittance Flows Remain Strong during COVID-19 Crisis. (*World Bank*, 2021)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

greater security to the government, thus decreasing opposition and the need for the state to repress.



**Figure 1.**

**The Relationship Between State Repression, COVID-19 and Remittances**

Considering the triangular relationship of the three variables the paper focuses on - COVID-19, Remittances and State Repression - it is important to understand the implications of their interdependency. By understanding the separate effects of the variables on each other, we can see the significance of negligence of state repression internationally that is being affected by COVID-19 and Remittance flows. The paper highlights the role of international legitimation, condemnation and negligence of human rights abuses during COVID-19 caused by different channels. This reminds the international community that they should not divert their focus away from human rights during crises as it observes the behavior of individual states, since this is when states can use the opportunity to repress opposition due to the effects of the crisis on remittances, citizen's grievances, state behavior. The complexities of the relationship of the three variables can be further complicated by considering different state regimes, suggesting the importance of further research and understanding in this area. The paper is going to be focusing on remittance-dependent countries and explore how the relationship of the three variables plays out through different dynamics.

## **Human Rights Dynamics in Georgia: Pre and Post COVID-19 Case Study**

### *Introduction*

Georgia is a small country located at the border of Europe and Asia and at the eastern edge of the Black Sea. The Georgian people and their culture have a deeply rooted ancient history dating back to c. 1.8 million years ago.<sup>27</sup> The country has its own unique alphabet and language, and most people are followers of Greek Orthodoxy. The nature, geolocation, rich history and culture of Georgia have made it a target for acquisition by the much larger civilizations that surround it. Throughout the years, the country has fallen under the sway of different empires - the Ottoman, the Persian, and the Russian - from the Tsars through the Soviet Union. Georgia first declared its independence from Tsarist Russia as a Democratic Republic on 26 May 1918 but lost it after the entry of the Soviet Red Army in 1921. The Reestablishment of Independence happened through 1989-1991 during the collapse of the Soviet Union, and though an ancient civilization, Georgia's modern state is still new. Its lack of a robust economy and democratic institutions saw it plunge into a civil war in the years immediately after 1991. When that stabilized, Georgia entered a period of modernization, but to this day it deals with the effects of two centuries of Russian-Soviet rule, faces daily economic, social and political challenges and is struggling to become an established completely democratic state.

The Case Study is going to follow the Development of Human Rights Dynamics in Georgia from 2019 to 2021 based on reports published by Human Rights Watch, the United States State Department, and scholars researching Georgia, building a full

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<sup>27</sup> Georgian Archaeologists Find 1.8-Million-Year-Old Human Tooth. (*The Archaeologist*, n.d.)

picture and providing more evidence through the help of articles published in the native language or native sources.

### *Present Political Governance*

Georgia's political governance is based on parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system, elections every 4 years, and a president with limited powers as head of state. The current ruling party, The Georgian Dream(GD), was founded by Georgia's richest man, Bidzina Ivanishvili. It took office in 2012 after beating the United National Movement (UNM), in elections and ending its 9-year long rule. At the presidential elections of 2013, the leader and founder of UNM, Mikheil Saakashvili, left office after two 5-year terms as President. Since then, Georgia's politics have been dominated by confrontations between the UNM and GD that have polarized the country. Two years ago, in an effort to suppress criticism that Georgia was being run by one man, Ivanishvili announced his withdrawal from politics but it is widely accepted that this was a bluff and that he continues to run the government from behind the scenes.<sup>28</sup> Georgians are strongly in favor of joining the European Union (the government is constitutionally mandated to do all it can to achieve this) but relations between Georgian Dream and the EU have gotten worse since 2020 as the country has backslid back towards authoritarianism.

### *Human Rights Dynamics in Different Areas*

This subchapter is going to look at different human rights areas identified according to reports: Media Freedom, Women's Rights, Minority and LGBTQ+ Rights, Labor Rights, Judicial System, Prisons. In each of the categories, the development of

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<sup>28</sup> Billionaire Georgia Party Leader Bidzina Ivanishvili Says Quitting Politics (*Euractiv*, 2021)

Human Rights dynamics from 2019 through 2021 will be discussed and changes analyzed.

### ***Prisons***

Problems faced in prisons were a major reason the United National Movement lost the elections in 2012. Under the Georgian Dream, conditions improved but challenges remain. Overcrowding remains a problem. There have been reports of increasing numbers of violence among inmates, and by inmates against prison staff,<sup>29</sup> yet these cases continue to be underreported and there are too few investigations. The government allowed monitoring of prisons by independent representatives and international organizations. However, video or audio surveillance of meetings between the public defender and inmates was prohibited - and yet, when the Justice Minister at the time, Tea Tsulukiani, “released a video recording of a Public Defender’s Office representative’s prison visit,”<sup>30</sup> the Prosecutor’s Office refused to investigate this breach, by a government minister, of its own law. According to General Inspector’s office, 509 cases of inmate injuries resulting from violence among prisoners occurred in 2021, compared to 465 in 2020,<sup>31</sup> displaying an increase and failure of changes in legislation to protect prisoner’s rights. The treatment of ex-President, Mikheil Saakashvili, in prison was also considered inhumane due to his health concerns. In March of 2022, Public Defender noted that “according to the standard set by European Court of Human Rights, the lack of timely, full and adequate treatment, accurate diagnosis, and proper medical care may equate to a violation of Article 3.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 9

<sup>30</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 9

<sup>31</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 7

<sup>32</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 4

COVID-19 changed the dynamic in the prison system. It pushed the Georgian parliament to address the issue of overcrowding in prisons due to additional health-care problems.<sup>33</sup> The government also increased the number of social workers and psychologists, and improved working conditions for prison staff.<sup>34</sup> However, “due to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 and continuing during the year, some penitentiary reform efforts were suspended”, which was a setback for prison reform overall.<sup>35</sup> Public Defender’s Office issued a report in 2022 claiming that there were 495 mistreatment allegations, including excessive use of force and physical and psychological violence by law enforcement officials, which were particularly problematic with administrative arrests.<sup>36</sup> The rise in numbers, especially in the case of administrative arrests, demonstrates the incumbent's increasing targeting of protestors and opposition groups.

Monitoring of prisons continued in 2020. Monitors were allowed to take photos during visits, but had limited access to video recordings of development in penitentiaries, to inmate medical files, and disciplinary proceedings for inmates.<sup>37</sup> “Ensuring confidentiality of medical records as well as the confidentiality of complaints remained problematic”.<sup>38</sup> Some inmates deliberately interfered with monitoring visits, which made it difficult and dangerous for representatives of the Public Defender’s Office to carry out their tasks in prisons. This was because “watchers” - influential prisoners - would try to solve problems instead of writing complaints, which caused an increase in

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 9

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 11

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 4

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 12

<sup>38</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 11

underreporting and the harassment of monitoring agents. The agents also found problems with reporting times and dates of arrests in police station logbooks.

The government also tried to introduce laws that would raise the stakes of protestors in Georgia. Georgian Dream rushed to amend the code of administrative violations by increasing the time allowed before first appearances in court from 12 hours to 24, and finally to 48 hours. These amendments were criticized by civil society and representatives of the international community since prolonging “the minimum administrative detention period and raising fines for petty hooliganism and disobedience to police order”<sup>39</sup>, seemed frequently to be directed against protestors and people involved in civil disobedience.<sup>40</sup> There were even efforts to incarcerate the director of Tbilisi Pride for allegedly swearing at a police officer over the telephone during violence against gay activists July 5.<sup>41</sup> Following these amendments, in 2022, Gtla reported “a significant increase in the use of administrative imprisonment compared to previous year and routine of the maximum 48-hour administrative detention period.”<sup>42</sup> This would have made citizens under detention not be able to go back and join the protests, decreasing the number of protestors and suppressing the protest overall. Additionally, they noted that civil society and legal assistance organizations were not notified when some protestors were detained, which led to some defendants receiving legal representation only when a civil society representative happened to be in court that day.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 17

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

2020 report of the “Public Defender’s Office stated that police continued to summon individuals as ‘witnesses’ and later arrested them,”<sup>44</sup> and continued to use involuntary interviews obtained with subjects in police cars or police stations. They also noted that officials continued to fail to maintain records of interviews or to advise subjects of their rights prior to initiation of the interviews.<sup>45</sup>

It is evident that most of the improvements made prior to COVID-19 were reversed by the government in 2020. Through their new policies, Georgian Dream tried to target protestors on the streets and rushed through legislative amendments that would target and repress the opposition, while failing to follow through with more serious reforms to ameliorate conditions in prisons.

### **Independence of the Judiciary**

In recent years, Georgia’s judiciary has consistently shown a serious lack of independence. There have been dozens of politically motivated prosecutions every year. In 2019, the State Inspector’s Office, created in 2018, received 1300 reports of alleged abuses by law enforcement officials.<sup>46</sup> “NGOs also reported several cases in which groups claimed the government improperly used tax liens to pressure organizations. For example, ... the then opposition-oriented Rustavi 2 television station claimed it was unfairly targeted for its failure to pay taxes, while pro government media did not experience similar scrutiny.”<sup>47</sup> In addition, the backlog of court hearings worsened during COVID-19. The processes were stretched out and civil cases failed to be disposed of within the fixed statutory terms, according to which “courts are required to hear civil

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<sup>44</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 15

<sup>45</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 15

<sup>46</sup> World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2019)

<sup>47</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 24

cases within 2 months after receiving an application”.<sup>48</sup> COVID-19 was used as an excuse for these backlogs for a while. Later, in 2020, Court Watch reported that the main cause of delays was an insufficient number of judges, which High Council of Judges(HCOJ) blamed on shortage of qualified applicants.<sup>49</sup> NGOs expressed their concern over this, saying that HCOJ was actually the one responsible for the shortage, to hinder entrance of new candidates into their corrupt system.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, GYLA found problems with devoting insufficient time to consider plea agreement hearings and the number of criminal cases resolved by them increased from 65.9% in 2021 to 70.9% in 2022.<sup>51</sup>

Public trust in the judiciary remains low. According to a public opinion poll conducted in 2019 by Transparency International Georgia, a local human rights watchdog, "53% of respondents believe that the judiciary remains under the influence of the ruling party; 35% of respondents think that the institution is corrupt; 50% suppose that it is not fair..."<sup>52</sup>Lack of transparency in the judiciary led to public distrust of the justice system in Georgia. "Access to court decisions remained restricted since courts ceased publishing decisions in 2020."<sup>53</sup> This is a strange development during COVID-19 since most institutions started publishing more documents online, instead of reversing these decisions due to restricted mobility.

To combat violations of the rule of law and human rights, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) monitored criminal cases between June 2020 and March 2021. This monitoring took place either physically or remotely. Some cases highlight

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 16

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> TI Georgia: Trust in Judiciary Low in Georgia – Civil Georgia. (*Civil Georgia*, 2019)

<sup>53</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 14

monitors not being provided with links to attend hearings, being disconnected from them for ‘technical reasons’, or being prevented from attending court. Using COVID-19 regulations, the government refused to allow GYLA to monitor further hearings. The Association called for virtual access but this was denied.<sup>54</sup>

Judges remained vulnerable to political pressures within and outside the judiciary, especially involving politically sensitive subjects or individuals.<sup>55</sup> During the year 2022, some former judges even stated that they faced pressure from senior judges to rule cases in a certain way.<sup>56</sup> Politically motivated prosecutions included the Lelo party founders Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, United National Movement Chair Nika Melia, and Mtavari Arkhi General Director Nika Gvaramia.<sup>57</sup> Arbitrary arrests of protestors also increased in 2020 with the Public Defender describing the contents of the violations and arrest reports as “mostly identical and... formulaic.”<sup>58</sup>

In 2020, there was an election for the High Council of Judges. Civil society, opposition parties, and the international community urged a pause in the elections until the rules for election were changed. However, the ruling party expedited parliamentary proceedings to push through legislative amendments concerning disciplinary hearings, the transfer of judges, including allowing election of the same person on the High Council of Judges to the same position two times in a row.<sup>59</sup> This meant that the judiciary system would experience further stagnation and corruption with no room for change. The Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary (CSO) urged parliament to suspend consideration of the draft to ensure more public participation.

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<sup>54</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26

<sup>55</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 12

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 14

<sup>57</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 18

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>59</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 23

However, the government pushed through the changes in just 3 days and adopted the legislation on December 30, just before the New Year. The Parliament has not begun working on comprehensive judicial reform, and NGOs are still reporting cases of hearings closed without explanation and inconsistent approaches of the Judiciary. In 2023, the European Commission on democracy Through Law drafted an opinion and follow-up on these laws with their recommendations, most of which have not been considered and followed through by the government as of now.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, despite these recommendations and a presidential veto, on September 26 of 2022, the Parliament passed controversial amendments that expanded the government's ability to conduct covert investigative measures. This included "extending the maximum surveillance period from 6 to 9 months and for an indefinite period for over 70s elected crimes, authorizing surveillance for an additional 27 crimes, and permitting surveillance of an individual without notification for years."<sup>61</sup> This additional amendment in the recent year is another demonstration of Georgia's move towards authoritarianism.

The Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary stated on 21 June 2020 that the "legislative changes of 2013-2021 can be characterized as an illusory and incomplete attempt at an institutional modernization of the judiciary, which ultimately created an imitation of a positive transformation instead of a real and systemic change."<sup>62</sup> GYLA reports that "The change of government in 2012 was a good precondition for fundamental reforms, but the lack of political will and fragmented legislative initiatives carried out in the last nine years have failed to meet the most

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<sup>60</sup>Atar, Yavuz, Holmøyvik, Erik and Sørensen, Jørgen Steen. GEORGIA Follow-up Opinion to Four Previous Opinions Concerning the Organic Law on Common Courts. (*Venice Commission & Council of Europe*, 2023)

<sup>61</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 19

<sup>62</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 18

important challenge pertinent to the Georgian context ... The result is a clan-based governance, where a small influential group of judges controls the judiciary, not in the interest of justice, but in its private interest.”<sup>63</sup>

It is easy to notice a lot of rushed amendments from the side of the ruling party without consultation with opposition parties, public opinion or statements from coalitions, NGOs. These new amendments enabled an increase in administrative arrests during COVID-19, and court hearings were prolonged, delayed, or postponed.<sup>64</sup> The given findings show that COVID-19 prompted further abuses in law enforcement and further erosion of judicial independence.

### **Labor Rights**

Georgia lacks a legal framework for regulating working hours and general oversight of labor conditions. 36 workers died and 107 were injured in work-related accidents in 2019 with health and safety concerns remaining an issue.<sup>65</sup> To ameliorate the situation, authorities drafted some legislative amendments, but changes have not been introduced during the year. According to Labor Inspectorate, in the first half of 2022, “35 workers died and 330 were injured in work-related accidents, compared with 37 deaths and 253 injuries during 2021,”<sup>66</sup> displaying a dramatic increase throughout the years and the incumbent’s failure to address them. Government struggled to combat anti-union rhetoric by employers but initiated unannounced inspections and penalties for health and safety violations. These inspectors were also responsible for checking workplace compliance with COVID-19 regulations.<sup>67</sup> COVID-19 negatively affected

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<sup>63</sup> A New Perspective on Judicial Reform. (*Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association*, n.d.)

<sup>64</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 27

<sup>65</sup> World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2019)

<sup>66</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 56

<sup>67</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 77

workers with jobs involving hazardous situations, since it became more costly for them to risk losing a job. “NGOs reported informal sector workers were vulnerable to exploitation...they tended to be the most affected by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.”<sup>68</sup>

According to reports<sup>69</sup>, year 2020 showed increasing concern over the working conditions and salaries of nurses due to their increased hours and workload during the pandemic. During the year, employers started to interfere with some unions and tried to initiate court cases declaring some strikes illegal, which were turned down by the court. Child labor remained a problem. “According to *Child Labor During the New Coronavirus Pandemic and Beyond*, a report published during [2020] by the Public Defender’s Office, approximately 8,800 children were involved in hazardous work, which equated to 64% of working children.”<sup>70</sup> COVID-19 also prompted the increased use of app-based food delivery services, which made it easier to combat hazardous working conditions due to the online nature of the job.<sup>71</sup>

Labor rights developments show that COVID-19 shed more light on work-related accidents and induced some response from the government, but the challenge of practically initiating new regulations persisted.

### **Minority and LGBTQ+ Rights**

During quarantine, discrimination against ethnic minorities, especially Azeris, Armenians and other ethnic minorities increased.<sup>72</sup> There were cases of ethnic Georgians being aggressive towards them, and the media reported multiple cases of hate speech targeting minority groups.<sup>73</sup> “When the government declared the

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

<sup>69</sup> World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2020)

<sup>70</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 81

<sup>71</sup> World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2020)

<sup>72</sup> US Report 2020, 66

<sup>73</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 66

Bolnisi-Marneuli region a quarantine zone, for example, one public official encouraged discrimination against ethnic Azeris on their personal Facebook Page.<sup>74</sup> The small number of ethnic minority representatives in government could be one reason for such discrimination, and the Public Defender's Office cites problems with the integration of different ethnicities.<sup>75</sup> Political parties also rarely engaged with minorities, and generally only when elections were coming up; and with a very few exceptions, their manifestos were not available in minority languages.<sup>76</sup>

The reports and recorded cases clearly show an increase of discrimination and hate crimes due to the policies that were introduced during COVID-19, the most dire one being quarantining zones where ethnic minorities are concentrated especially when their rights are not deemed important in the first place.

The government rarely enforced laws that gave limited protection against crimes directed at sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>77</sup> This lack of enforcement, combined with homophobic statements by politicians and public officials generated distrust of government among the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>78</sup> Tbilisi Pride has been a problematic demonstration every year, but especially in the past few years, when the government has failed to prevent violence by far-right protestors, which has increased year by year. In 2019, there were multiple attacks on the Tbilisi Pride office, where black paint and eggs were thrown at the office and at the flag, which was also eventually stolen. The court found 4 people guilty of vandalism; they received verbal warnings and one received a fine of 500 GEL (150\$ at the time).<sup>79</sup> This type of vandalism was repeated multiple times

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<sup>74</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 66

<sup>75</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 42

<sup>76</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 55

<sup>77</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 69

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 70

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*.

during the summer months. Death threats and physical attacks continued against members of the LGBTQ+ community, with a very few of the culprits being arrested or charged. The mobs also attacked over 50 journalists<sup>80</sup> and broke into the premises of several nongovernmental organizations that hid Pride organizers as they were being chased throughout the city.<sup>81</sup> Insufficient accountability for the violence by far-right counterdemonstrators was alarming for the citizens.<sup>82</sup> As of year's end, only 31 individuals were prosecuted and convicted<sup>83</sup>, while there were 3,000 of them in total.<sup>84</sup> The government representatives did not ensure the safety of the organizations and their members, but instead blamed them for being provocative. The prime minister continued to call this protest “unreasonable” and blamed the opposition, saying that “They (Saakashvili and the radical opposition) aim to spark tension and destabilization in the country.”<sup>85</sup>

“During [2020] there was a rise in attacks against LGBTQ+ persons and those perceived to be associated with the LGBTQ+ community, most notably transgender women”<sup>86</sup>; these attacks included homicides as well as physical and verbal assaults. Dozens of cases of tourists who were members of the LGBTQ+ community were also reported to be attacked with knives, beaten or killed on the bases of sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>87</sup> In May of 2022, 30 men attacked 5 transgender women at their home in Tbilisi.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in June 20 men attacked several transgender women on the

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<sup>80</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 27

<sup>81</sup> World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2020)

<sup>82</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26

<sup>85</sup> PM Garibashvili: Holding Tbilisi Pride March Unreasonable, May Lead to Civic Confrontation. (*Agenda*, 2021)

<sup>86</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 76

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26 2022 report, page 47

street in Tbilisi.<sup>89</sup> Some of the attackers got off on bail, while some cases remained pending as of year's end. The government fails to address the issues of violence and neglected this problem completely in their Human Rights Strategy 2022-2030.<sup>90</sup>

“Several dire cases highlighted how the economic fallout from COVID-19 exacerbated poor living arrangements for transgender people, many of whom work in the informal sector.”<sup>91</sup> Government assistance and social support remained nonexistent for them even though they were especially struggling due to family rejection and social isolation.<sup>92</sup> Their increased struggles during COVID-19 caused members of this community to demand more from the unresponsive government, which expectedly increased state repression as discussed in the previous chapter. Some Georgians even started to seek asylum in other countries during and after COVID-19 on the basis of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, because of the government's inability to support them and prevent oppression.

### **Women's Rights**

All over the world, COVID-19 put a strain on women, including but not limited to their jobs, domestic situations, and health. The pandemic notwithstanding, there have long been issues with abuse and sexual violence against Georgian women. “Strict requirements for convictions of sexual violence crimes were applied by judges,”<sup>93</sup> highlighting the unwillingness of the government to address women's safety. The criminal law also neglects addressing spousal rape and there are only limited punishments for sexual or domestic violence against women.<sup>94</sup> The shortage of measures

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26 2022 report, page 48

<sup>91</sup> World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2019)

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26 2020 report, page 53

<sup>94</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 26

to safeguard women was highlighted by the Public Defender's office, which stated that the government lacked measures to empower survivors of domestic violence and prevent more cases.<sup>95</sup> During 2019, the government approved some amendments to improve shortcomings in the detection of domestic violence against minors and shelter staff, as well as a prevention-oriented approach to correct abusive behaviors.<sup>96</sup> However, most problems with case handling and evidence collection remain and survivors are often told to focus on physical violence as a proof of sexual assault, with other coercive methods such as emotional, psychological force, manipulation being neglected.<sup>97</sup>

According to data, domestic violence statistics did not change significantly during COVID-19, which GYLA ascribes to underreporting by victims of domestic violence; worldwide there was a one-third increase in the number of cases over this period.<sup>98</sup> For example, in June of 2020 the Public Defender reported the case of a doctor sexually harassing a woman in quarantine. According to the amendments passed in 2019, if found guilty the persons will be fined only for 300 GEL (\$90 at the time), more for repeated crimes, and correctional service for up to one month.<sup>99</sup> The Defender also found evidence of instances of domestic abuse, including violence against women, involving influential persons and that had been approached selectively by the state.<sup>100</sup> This included delayed responses and less prompt action. The government took some steps to combat the problem of abuse, including a system of electronic surveillance that allowed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to monitor abusers 24 hours a day if there was a

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 55

<sup>97</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 60

<sup>98</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 55

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

high risk of a recurrence of the incident.<sup>101</sup> “The Public Defender’s Office highlighted a shortage of measures to prevent violence against women and to empower survivors of domestic violence. The office analyzed gender-based killings (femicides) and concluded that they demonstrated an absence of mechanisms to prevent violence against women in the country.”<sup>102</sup> In June 2021, Parliament approved legislation on the introduction of witness and survivor advocacy during investigative and legal proceedings.<sup>103</sup> The high rate of domestic violence shower reporting of incidents increased in the country and that police were responding after these changes.<sup>104</sup> Shortcoming remained, especially with some police officers asking women what they had done to prompt the violence directed at them.<sup>105</sup>

“Home-based learning due to COVID-19 made it more difficult for social workers to detect cases of child marriage and intervene promptly.”<sup>106</sup> During COVID-19, health service support to new mothers decreased due to fear of infections and movement restrictions.<sup>107</sup> This problem continued through 2020 with the “Public Defender’s Office reporting a lack of postpartum care needed for the prevention of maternal mortality.”<sup>108</sup>

In 2019, Parliament adopted a series of constitutional amendments and electoral reforms including a mandatory gender quota to increase the representation of women in parliament.<sup>109</sup> However, in June 2020, parliament voted to soften the gender quota,

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<sup>101</sup>Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 60

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 61

<sup>103</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 39 2022

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 39

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>106</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 69

<sup>107</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 58

<sup>108</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 64

<sup>109</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 45

which reduced the number of female candidates in lists for the municipal elections of October that year.<sup>110</sup>

COVID-19 worsened the condition of women in the country, including an increase of domestic violence, since people were quarantined and had to stay home together with their abusive partners – with little protection from the state. Amendments to promote women’s representation in elected office also experienced delays. Women’s health also suffered due to limited care facilities in terms of pregnancy and maternal health services. The pandemic exacerbated female issues country-wide and prompted repression of women’s rights.

### **Media Freedom**

Since independence, one of Georgia’s biggest challenges has been Media Freedom. Most mainstream media are aligned with political parties, causing feuds and tension among those politicians in power and their opponents.<sup>111</sup> Disputes over media stations, such as Rustavi 2, fueled politically motivated lawsuits by the ruling party, Georgian Dream. The ownership dispute over Rustavi 2 made it clear that the media was not free. The new Director General, Paata Salia, promised not to interfere with the station’s editorial policy, but he soon dismissed most of the hosts of political talk shows, which incited most of the workers of the newsroom to quit and completely change the stance of the station.<sup>112</sup> The politically motivated lawsuit against the former Director General of Rustavi 2, Nika Gvaramia, prompted him to start a new station called Mtavari Arkhi, a pro-opposition broadcaster. Authorities also brought charges against Avtandil Tsereteli, father of the founder of TV Pirveli, an independent broadcaster

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<sup>110</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 55

<sup>111</sup> World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2019)

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

critical of the government.<sup>113</sup> A large number of lawsuits from a total of 28 filed against critical TV channels such as Mtavari Arkhi, Formula, and TV Pirveli since late 2021, were filed by the ruling party or persons affiliated with them.<sup>114</sup> In July, the State Security Service started an investigation of Mtavari Arkhi, alleging that a story aired on the channel included falsified COVID-19 data; human right groups considered this to be politically motivated and a breach of freedom of expression. 42 domestic organizations noted that these developments were perceived as a warning and threat to other independent media outlets to stop critical coverage of the government's performance.<sup>115</sup>

Nor did the government protect the rights of journalists;<sup>116</sup> they were often disrespected, and treated violently during protests at which police were present, controlling protestors but failing to prevent violence against journalists and cameramen who were physically attacked and whose equipment was smashed. The PDO noted in 2021 that “the country lacked proper statistics on offenses committed against journalists, which impede awareness of the scale of the problem.”<sup>117</sup> As an example, during the Pride March, TV Pirveli (a channel not affiliated with the government) one of its cameramen sustained head injuries and concussion, was briefly treated in hospital but died of his injuries within days of being discharged. The government retrieved the body from his house in an inhumane manner, without his family’s consent; publicly asserted that he had died from a drug overdose, and launched an investigation into incitement to suicide.<sup>118</sup> Journalists were also sometimes summoned for questioning by law enforcement bodies and asked to disclose their sources, which the law prohibits

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<sup>113</sup> World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2019)

<sup>114</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 23

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 21

<sup>116</sup> World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2020)

<sup>117</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 20

<sup>118</sup> World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Georgia. (*Human Rights Watch*, 2020)

since they are allowed to preserve the anonymity of their sources.<sup>119</sup> A number of journalists also reported that during 2020, they were prevented from covering public events or did not receive key information when requested, while the law clearly provides the public with the right of access to information.<sup>120</sup>

Paul Bell, an independent strategic communications consultant now resident in Georgia, highlights government tightening of media control during COVID-19.<sup>121</sup> He mentions that an American non-profit International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) put it in a 2021 report: ‘Turbulence from the Covid-19 pandemic and parliamentary elections rocked the Georgian media and information system in 2020. Misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda swamped the information space, while the government tightened control over the media—leading to a deterioration of media freedom in the country’.<sup>122</sup> This highlights how the government used the pandemic as an excuse to monitor media even more, spread false information that benefited them, and used media control to suppress opposition. This spurred protests and anger in the capital which the government suppressed, while ignoring the protesters.

### **Corruption and Lack of Transparency**

The government continued to use the law to target opposition, which intensified during COVID-19. In 2019, the Anticorruption Agency of the State Security Ministry of Georgia detained 9 public servants for taking bribes.<sup>123</sup> This number increased in 2020 and as of December “the Anticorruption Agency of the State Security Service detained 21

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<sup>119</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 32

<sup>120</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 36

<sup>121</sup> Bell, Paul. *Strategic Communications and COVID-19: Exploring and Exploiting a Global Crisis*. (*NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*, 2023) , 50-62.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 49

public servants at the local and central levels for taking bribes”.<sup>124</sup> Some of the country's most influential judges were also reported to either failing to fully declare their assets or declared assets that significantly exceeded their income.<sup>125</sup> NGOs expressed concern over this and called for an independent anticorruption agency outside the state, since the state representatives were abusing its functions.<sup>126</sup> In January of 2021, Transparency International/Georgia noted that the country's anticorruption reforms did not progress.<sup>127</sup>

“On November 12, opposition-leaning Formula TC published a story alleging leaked documents from the State Security Service showing it was evaluating school principals for their loyalty to the ruling party.”<sup>128</sup> Formula reported that some principals who had received good evaluations were nonetheless removed from their posts or demoted simply because of a negative evaluation by the State Security Service. There have also been cases of more positive media coverage of the ruling party close to elections.<sup>129</sup> In report of 2021 notes that, “while the country's public broadcaster allotted equal airtime to the ruling party and the largest opposition party, the tone in covering the ruling party “became more positive closer to election day.””<sup>130</sup>

Elections reduced public confidence in the ruling party due to the blurring lines between the ruling party and the state by the incumbent.<sup>131</sup> 26 domestic NGOs issued a statement describing the conduct of the October 2020 elections as the worst held under

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<sup>124</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 57

<sup>125</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 14

<sup>126</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 33

<sup>127</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 57

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 41

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 37

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>131</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 34

the ruling party.<sup>132</sup> There were instances of misuse of administrative resources by the ruling party, voter intimidation, vote buying, violations of ballot secrecy, obstruction of journalists and domestic election observers, and missing ballots, which indicated widespread ‘carousel voting’.<sup>133</sup> This undermined the public trust in the electoral process, which the party had gained during their first years. Moreover, in July of 2022, there were “85 uninvestigated cases of alleged corruption involving high-ranking public officials or persons associated with the ruling party.”<sup>134</sup>

### **Respect for Civil Liberties**

Internet Freedom and Surveillance: Concerns remain regarding unauthorized surveillance, but there are no restrictions, disruption or censoring of internet access.<sup>135</sup> In 2022, “there were credible allegations the ruling party employed bots and trolls to manipulate social media discourse about democracy and NGOs advocating democratic reforms”<sup>136</sup>, much of which was Anti-Democratic and anti-Western.<sup>137</sup> Experts noted that this might have helped the campaign of the incumbent achieve some results in terms of public opinion.<sup>138</sup>

During the year, the then EU ambassador to Georgia called on authorities to inform the diplomatic community “of the results of the promised investigation into the reported massive wiretapping of Georgian and foreign citizens, as revealed in September 2021,”<sup>139</sup> demonstrating a loss of trust of the incumbent in the international community.

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 35

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>134</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 37

<sup>135</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 32

<sup>136</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 25

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 20

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly: The law generally permits freedom of peaceful assembly, though organizers are required to give 5 days notice to local authorities to assemble in a public area. This poses concerns and discourages spontaneous demonstrations.<sup>140</sup> Under the state of emergency proclaimed during COVID-19, restrictions were imposed on gatherings and on 22 May 2020 “parliament passed amendments to the Law on Public Health giving government power to restrict movement and gathering.” On 29 December, they extended these amendments for 6 months which allowed the government to restrict rights without declaring a state of emergency. During protests, GYLA called the use of force illegitimate, including the use of water cannons directed at peaceful protestors, causing injuries.<sup>141</sup> Nika Gvaramia also spoke out against the use of water cannons, calling it a violation of human rights in the context of COVID-19.<sup>142</sup> The Public Defender’s Office also stated that police failed to warn protestors before using force, such as rubber bullets, which is required by law.<sup>143</sup> As a result, hundreds of people were injured, 240 had to seek medical help and 3 of them even went blind, having to get their eyes removed surgically.<sup>144</sup> “Based on Monitorings of seven protests held between April and June (2022), The Human Rights Center reported that “law enforcement officers continued to use the mechanisms provided by the Code of Administrative Offenses against protestors, in violation of the right to assemblies and manifestations, mainly in order to discredit and intimidate them and inflict harm on the protest actions.”<sup>145</sup> Police failures to protect peaceful protestors

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<sup>140</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 34

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Tsotsonava, Tatia. გახარია ვირუსის გავრცელებას ოპოზიციას აბრალებს - ოპონენტების პასუხი პრემიერს. (*Mtavari TV*, 2020)

<sup>143</sup> Georgia 2020 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 35

<sup>144</sup> 18 წლის გოგო, რომელმაც აქციაზე თვალი დაკარგა, შემთხვევითი გამგულელი იყო. (*Imedi News*, 2019)

<sup>145</sup> Georgia 2022 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 11

during Tbilisi Pride, and the high mobilization of police during anti-government protests, shows a disproportionate use of force by the government.

### *Evaluation of the Dynamics*

Recent developments in the sphere of human rights in Georgia have underscored the country's shift towards illiberal democracy. In each of the domains of human rights discussed above, deficits and backlogs were experienced, causing popular frustration and prompting citizens to protest, and demand of the state that it change certain policies. The Prime Minister of Georgia during the time, Giorgi Gakharia, stated in November 2020 that the increased cases of COVID-19 were due to people gathering for protests.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, over Easter that year, the government allowed gatherings in churches and shortened the curfew time<sup>147</sup>, though at the same time banning use of motor vehicles over that weekend,<sup>148</sup> so as not to lose support from the Orthodox Church, to which most Georgians profess allegiance.<sup>149</sup> This selective application of COVID-19 regulations by the government demonstrates that the state used COVID-19 as an excuse to act for their own benefit rather than of the people.

Paul Bell also highlights the government's usage of the pandemic lows in the economy to talk highly of its current growth rates.<sup>150</sup> “What Covid has done is to allow

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<sup>146</sup> არაბუნებრივ ციფრებამდე დიდი რაოდენობით აღამიანების შეკრებამ მიგვიყვანა - გახარია აქციებზე. (*Mtavari TV*, 2020)

<sup>147</sup> New COVID Restrictions Rolled out for Easter – Civil Georgia. (*Civil Georgia*, 2021)

<sup>148</sup> Georgia Tightens State of Emergency with Ban on Driving Private Vehicles. (*Radio Liberty Georgia*, 2020)

<sup>149</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), Georgia - COVID-19 High Frequency Survey 2020-2022. (*World Bank*, 2021), 25

<sup>150</sup> Bell, Paul. Strategic Communications and COVID-19: Exploring and Exploiting a Global Crisis. (*NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*, 2023), 61.

the government to shift responsibility for its own prolonged failure to develop the economy to external factors caused by the pandemic,' says Iago Kachkachisvili, 'and talks about its current high growth rate using the bottom of the pandemic as a benchmark.'<sup>151</sup> Again, this demonstrates how the government used COVID-19 to manipulate economic data for public consumption, in order to enhance its image.

Overall, COVID-19 prolonged the reign of the current government and gave them extra leverage to exercise more power through different means. The government used COVID-19 to its electoral advantage in 2020. "To combat the COVID-19 pandemic, on June 23, parliament extended for the third time amendments to the law giving the government power to restrict movement and gatherings and to implement other measures without a state of emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19 until January 1, 2022."<sup>152</sup> Among other things, the strict rules that applied to public gatherings in the period prior to the 60-day official election period gave the incumbents a natural advantage by suppressing campaigning. This raised citizen's frustrations and prompted them to demand political reforms, culminating in protests, which were precluded by the government with their recently rushed passing of certain amendments and demonstration of power against citizens. As evident from this chapter, the state, in many instances used the pandemic to not push through reforms, which in turn pushed people to protest. As the previous chapter states, state repression increases when people demand something from the government and the government does not want to provide it. Human Right backlogs in Georgia in Labour Rights, Women's Rights, Media Freedom, LGBTQI+ and Minority Rights, have caused citizens to voice their frustrations, though with little or no response from the state. Georgia's example shows

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<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Georgia 2021 Human Rights Report (*US Department of State*, n.d), 41

that state repression in the country worsened over the pandemic years, especially through their use of COVID-19 policies.

**Remittance Dynamics in Georgia:  
Pre and Post COVID-19 Case Study**

*Migration Dynamics- Context*

In order to fully capture the remittance dynamics in Georgia, it is important first to consider the context in which citizens decide to migrate and send remittances. This section is going to discuss why Georgian citizens migrate and how that has influenced remittance transfers throughout the years. International migration and remittances have played vital roles in post Soviet countries. The collapse of the USSR created both economic instability and new opportunities for its citizens to leave in search of a better life, and migration levels rose across all of the former Soviet republics.<sup>153</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Georgia, as a newly independent Republic, lacked a base for stable political and economic development, and an armed rebellion against the new government of Zviad Gamsakhurdia drove the country into civil war in 1991-93. Between 1990 and 2002, between 100,000-150,000 Georgians left the country each year.<sup>154</sup> These numbers began to decrease around the time Mikheil Saakashvili and the United National Movement took power in the Rose Revolution of 2003, dropping to 30,000s after he became president in 2004.<sup>155</sup>

Various factors have influenced migration patterns over the past 20 years. Enthusiasm from a new government of United National Movement and then The

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<sup>153</sup> Weinar, Agnieszka. A Look at Migrations in the Post-Soviet Space - the Case of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Russian Federation. (*International Migration*, 2014), 47-51

<sup>154</sup> Total Net Migration Data Portal. (*United Nations*, 2022)

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*



For a country whose population ranges from 3.5 to 4.5 million, migration of its citizens is dramatically noticeable even by taking a stroll in the capital of Tbilisi. Research findings show that 2020 was the only year in which net migration was closer to positive numbers; this was due to COVID-19 restrictions, though those numbers quickly rebounded in 2021.<sup>159</sup> The EU has also reported a growing number of asylum seekers from Georgia. “In the first four months of 2022 there were 8 075 applications for asylum submitted by Georgian citizens in EU+ countries. This represents a 183 % increase on the number of applications received in the same period of 2021, when Georgians lodged a total of 2 855 applications in the EU+.”<sup>160</sup> This growing number of asylum applications indicates growing unease in Georgia over human rights, as discussed in the previous chapter; this increase indicates that repression and violations of human rights during the pandemic, when travel was restricted, contributed to the wave of departures that followed once restrictions were lifted.

Over the years, migration statistics show that stocks of emigrants to post-soviet countries decreased, while the number of Georgian emigrants to western countries, such as EU countries and UK increased(See the attached table below) .<sup>161</sup>The driving factor for this is the visa liberalization process introduced in Georgia in 2017, as well as citizen’s strong feelings of hostility against Russia and the Soviet Union.

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<sup>159</sup> Emigration and Effect of Remittances on Georgian Research - Economic Outlook and Indicators. (*PMC Research, 2022*)

<sup>160</sup> Migration Drivers Report on Georgia. (*European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022*)

<sup>161</sup> Emigration and Effect of Remittances on Georgian Research - Economic Outlook and Indicators. (*PMC Research, 2022*)

Emigrants from Georgia, by main countries of residence (Thousand persons)			
Country	2010	2015	2020
Russian Federation	442	450	450
Greece	88	83	85
Ukraine	64	64	65
Azerbaijan	54	51	49
USA	22	27	39
Armenia	26	38	38
Germany	18	19	25
Italy	10	13	16
Other	82	82	93
Total	806	829	861

Source: UN DESA

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### *Factors driving Emigration in Georgia*

In the 1990s, Georgia experienced an economic crisis and instability; this was one of the main reasons for citizens to migrate abroad. Even today, economic drivers are among the most important in Georgia's migration dynamics.<sup>163</sup> In its own reports, the EU analyzes the drivers of these trends, highlighting the political and security situation, human rights concerns and economic problems as the main push factors for Georgian emigrants or asylum-seekers.<sup>164</sup> Among the political and security issues they cite are events alluded to in the previous chapter, including popular demonstrations of support for the country's EU ambitions, and the government's failure to obtain EU candidate status following the EU's acceleration of that process after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Protestors called for the government's resignation, and Bidzina Ivanishvili to relinquish power despite Georgian Dream's *padrone* claiming to have retired from politics.<sup>165</sup> The European Parliament has also called upon the Council of Europe to impose personal sanctions on Bidzina Ivanishvili, considering his affiliations with the Kremlin and his

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Gerber, Theodore P., and Karine Torosyan. Remittances in the Republic of Georgia: Correlates, Economic Impact, and Social Capital Formation. (*Demography*, 2013), 1281

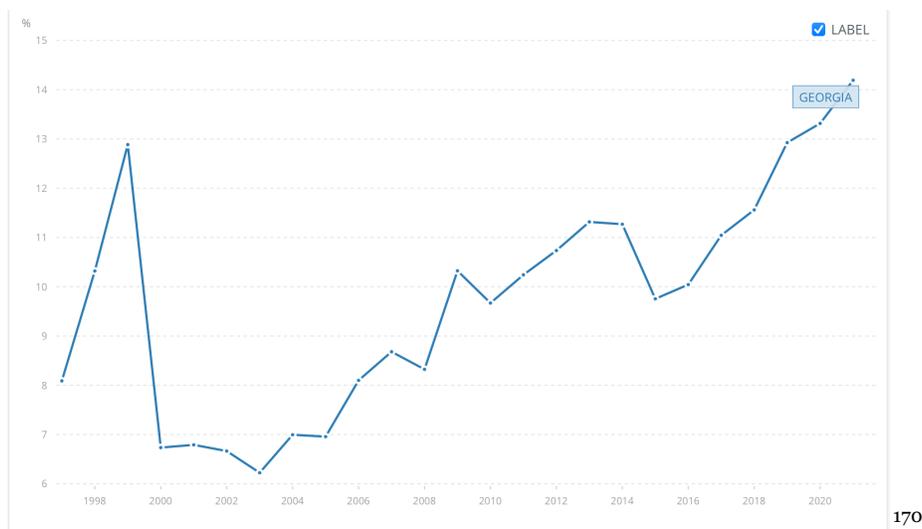
<sup>164</sup> Migration Drivers Report on Georgia. (*European Union Agency for Asylum*, 2022), 8

<sup>165</sup> RFE/RL's Georgian Service. Ivanishvili Says He's Leaving Georgian Politics for Good. His Critics Have Heard That One Before. (*Radio Liberty*, 2021)

businesses in Russia.<sup>166</sup> The EU has also highlighted human rights concerns as a driver for emigration, mentioning their own recommendations to the Georgian government in order to improve the situation in the country. Under economic reasons, the report highlights the rise of inflation and the increase of the subsistence minimum per month. Poor employment and career opportunities in Georgia are also drivers for citizens to leave and seek jobs and education in the EU.<sup>167</sup>

### *Remittance Dynamics- Context*

The drivers for emigration make it apparent - Georgia is a country heavily dependent on remittances. It stands 17th in the country rankings of remittances as a % of GDP with remittance inflows making up 14.19% of GDP in 2021<sup>168</sup>, up from 13.32% in 2020<sup>169</sup>, according to the World Bank. The graph below demonstrates how remittances to Georgia have grown over the years.



© *Remittances to Georgia throughout the Years (% of GDP)*, World Bank

<sup>166</sup> Migration Drivers Report on Georgia. (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2022), 8

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>168</sup> Remittances, Percent of GDP by Country, around the World, Ranking. (World Bank, 2021)

<sup>169</sup> Georgia - Remittance Inflows to GDP. (Trading Economics, 2023)

<sup>170</sup> Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP) - Georgia | Data. (World Bank, n.d)

Growth flattened somewhat post-COVID-19, but persisted nonetheless. In July 2022, money transfers to Georgia from abroad amounted to 306.0 million USD (871.2 million GEL) – 46.8% (97.6 million USD) more than in July 2021, according to National Bank of Georgia (NBG).<sup>171</sup>

The visa liberalization agreement affected not only migration levels but evidently the volume of remittances as well. Remittances from US, EU/Schengen States have increased, which could be due to the visa liberalization deal made with the EU and Georgia in 2017.<sup>172</sup> The graph above demonstrates this effect, since a slow but then rapid growth in remittances is noticeable after 2017. Meanwhile, remittances from Russia to Georgia have been falling. Between 2012-2021, remittances from Russia decreased by 45%.<sup>173</sup> Noting the growing numbers of emigrants to states other than Russia, clearly this would also affect the remittance amounts coming from those other countries.

Remittances transferred to Georgia by year and major countries (in thousands of USD)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	SUM
 Russia	\$ 394,603	\$ 455,439	\$ 457,184	\$ 428,887	\$ 363,915	\$ 2,100,028
 Italy	\$ 123,022	\$ 148,708	\$ 192,887	\$ 239,173	\$ 297,615	\$ 1,001,405
 Greece	\$ 124,565	\$ 141,967	\$ 170,886	\$ 192,545	\$ 219,141	\$ 849,104
 USA	\$ 127,662	\$ 142,079	\$ 159,558	\$ 178,412	\$ 218,360	\$ 826,071
 Israel	\$ 60,733	\$ 119,155	\$ 151,426	\$ 162,548	\$ 156,807	\$ 650,669
 Turkey	\$ 87,072	\$ 109,606	\$ 105,881	\$ 94,846	\$ 106,737	\$ 504,142
 Germany	\$ 29,853	\$ 34,061	\$ 41,461	\$ 49,806	\$ 74,154	\$ 229,335
 Ukraine	\$ 21,043	\$ 26,506	\$ 28,788	\$ 42,921	\$ 87,534	\$ 206,792
 Spain	\$ 30,876	\$ 36,348	\$ 41,579	\$ 47,303	\$ 47,923	\$ 204,029
 Azerbaijan	\$ 14,756	\$ 15,682	\$ 20,450	\$ 22,169	\$ 53,883	\$ 126,940
 France	\$ 11,946	\$ 14,562	\$ 19,438	\$ 26,371	\$ 28,146	\$ 100,463
 Kazakhstan	\$ 11,839	\$ 13,708	\$ 16,098	\$ 26,631	\$ 19,660	\$ 87,936
 United Kingdom	\$ 17,382	\$ 15,926	\$ 16,059	\$ 16,890	\$ 18,749	\$ 85,006
 Poland	\$ 1,390	\$ 3,282	\$ 18,468	\$ 31,491	\$ 27,633	\$ 82,264
 Canada	\$ 9,253	\$ 10,942	\$ 13,132	\$ 14,212	\$ 17,869	\$ 65,408
Other	\$ 87,389	\$ 99,282	\$ 126,368	\$ 159,111	\$ 147,859	\$ 620,009
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,153,384</b>	<b>1,387,253</b>	<b>1,579,663</b>	<b>1,733,316</b>	<b>1,885,985</b>	<b>7,739,601</b>

SOURCE: NBG

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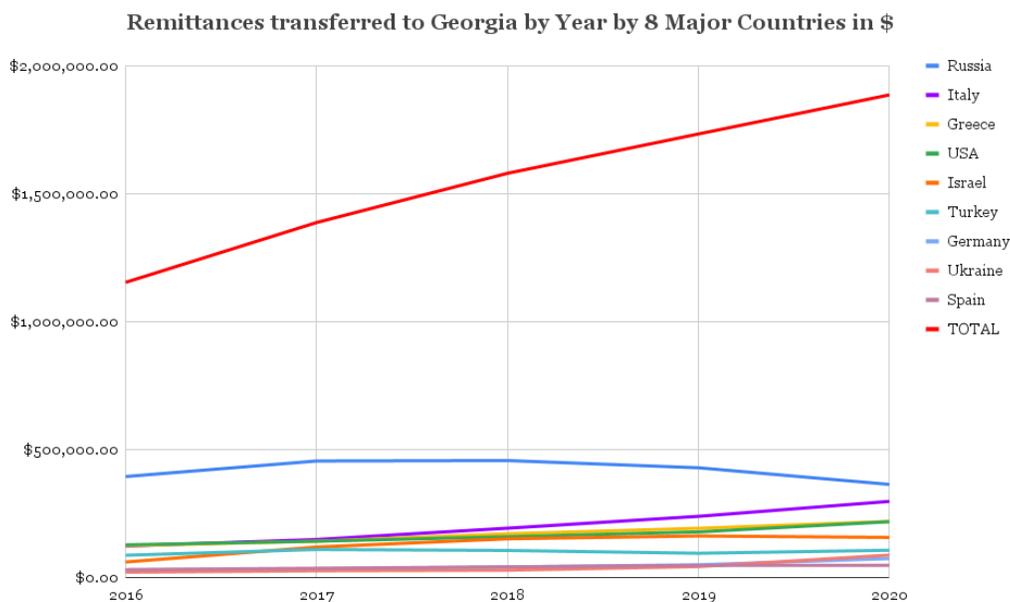
<sup>171</sup> Workbook: Money\_Transfers\_Press\_Release\_EN. (National Bank of Georgia, 2022)

<sup>172</sup> Emigration and Effect of Remittances on Georgian Research - Economic Outlook and Indicators. (PMC Research, 2022)

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Migration Profile of Georgia. Tbilisi. (Migration Commission, 2021), 47

NBG's Migration Profile on Georgia 2021 shows how remittance volumes have grown according to the country from which they have come. In 2020, Russia was still the leading source of remittances to Georgia though the amount has declined markedly since 2018. At the same time we see increased transfers from EU states, especially Italy and Greece, from both of which volumes increased by about \$100 million. The United States shows a similar trend.



The graph above illustrates the data in the table. We see an overall increase in remittances between 2016-2020, especially in the last year. The graph also shows the change in the dynamic of Georgia's remittances and how the decrease in transfers from Russia is counterbalanced and surpassed by increased transfers from the EU and US. The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies has noted in its research that after the first wave of the pandemic, remittances to Georgia by 42.3%, but completely recovered through the second wave and surpassed pre-pandemic levels in

the following months.<sup>175</sup> The growth of remittances evident in the graph shows the overall upward trend continuing despite the dramatic dip experienced in the first wave, showing that remittances were a lifeline during the pandemic for many Georgian households. This growth can also be attributed to effective government responses to COVID-19 in emigrants' host countries, including assistance packages and remote working options, which would have enabled emigrants to send more support back home to families who were worse off during the pandemic.

Recognizing that until the pandemic happened and until most of the people remitting started using virtual, thus official channels (such as Western Union, Intel express<sup>176</sup>) of sending remittances, the data lacked accounting of some portion of remittances. Until COVID-19 due to them being exchanged through unofficial and unmonitored channels. It should also be noted that visa liberalization did not confer work rights on Georgian citizens, so that those who do work are doing so illegally<sup>177</sup>, and their transfers do not go through official, recorded channels.

A research report published in 2010, *Development on the Move*<sup>178</sup> worked on *Measuring and Optimizing Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia*. This included analysis of the remittance-sending and receiving households and while dynamics may have changed since 2010, a lack of more recent data prompts us to utilize this research in order to better understand more recent dynamics. The authors gathered information from certain source countries, which is presented in the table below.

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<sup>175</sup> Kakulia, Merab, and Kapanadze, Nodar. ანგიპანდემიური შეზღუდვების და მთავრობის ანგიკრიზისული ღონისძიებების გავლენა დასაქმებაზე, შემოსავლებსა და სიღარიბის ღონეზე საქართველოში. (*Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, 2020), 10

<sup>176</sup> Elizbarashvili, Giorgi. ფულად გზავნილებზე დამოკიდებულება იზრდება. (*Commersant*, 2020)

<sup>177</sup> Emigration and Effect of Remittances on Georgian Research - Economic Outlook and Indicators. (*PMC Research*, 2022)

<sup>178</sup> Tchaidze (IMF), Robert, and Karine Torosyan (ISET). *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia*. (*ISET*, 2010)

**Table 15: Methods of remitting by source countries**

Source	Percentage of Migrant Groups using:			Total, Migrant Groups
	Banks and money transfer agencies	With friends and other	By post and unlicensed agents	
Russia	88.0	8.0	4.0	100
Western Europe	93.8	3.1	3.1	65
Greece	78.3	5.0	16.7	60
Other FSU	93.5	6.5	0.0	31
Turkey	62.1	31.0	6.9	29
Other non-FSU	100.0	0.0	0.0	22
North America	90.0	10.0	0.0	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>86.4</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>317</b>

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The table shows that people remitting from more developed countries, such as Western Europe, North America, rely mostly on banks for transfers. In countries such as Turkey and Greece, there are higher volumes from unrecorded channels. Applying these findings to current remittance transfers, it can be argued that since more people are currently remitting from USA and EU countries, most money transfers go through banks and are recorded. It should be noted however, that COVID-19 pushed online transfer platforms to ease the passage of remittances,<sup>180</sup> enabling more amounts and instances to be recorded. Moreover, the decrease in Russian remittances might also be related to the Russian-Ukraine War and the new financial restrictions on Russia, which prompted many Russians and foreign residents in Russia to switch their transfers to cryptocurrencies, which are therefore not formally accounted for.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Tchaidze (IMF), Robert, and Karine Torosyan (ISET). Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia. (ISET, 2010), 28

<sup>180</sup> World Bank, What Role Are Remittances Playing in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery? - Expert Answers, (YouTube, 2021)

<sup>181</sup> Miminoshvili, Luka. 'გადარიცხვების ეკონომიკა' - საქართველო და ქვეყნები ყველაზე მეტი ფულადი გზავნილებით. (Business Media Georgia, 2020)

### *Remittance Effects on Georgia during COVID-19*

Georgia defied World Bank predictions that remittances would decrease as a result of the economic slowdown;<sup>182</sup> in fact, remittances to Georgia increased during and after the pandemic.<sup>183</sup> Recent research highlights how “Georgia’s economic dependence on remittances became obvious in 2020, during the COVID-19 crisis, when revenues from international travel and FDI declined by 88% and 53%, respectively, representing 1 billion USD. In contrast, remittances increased by 8.8% and reached 1.9 billion USD in the same year to become the second-biggest source of foreign currency inflows after exports.”<sup>184</sup>

FDI in Georgia declined due to political turbulence, which means that there was more pressure on the Remittances that were being transferred during and after the pandemic. Paul Bell, an independent strategic communications consultant who now resides in Georgia writes, “by early 2021, sixty-seven per cent of Georgians surveyed by IRI were reporting that their ‘household situation’ had worsened. Only remittances back to Georgia from family members who have gone abroad to work seemed to stand between many households and outright poverty.”<sup>185</sup> These remittances grew as the spendings of Georgians living abroad declined, and the World Bank estimates that they contributed to more than 13 % of Georgia’s GDP.

### **Household Behavior**

Firstly, it is important to remember that remittances bypass governments; they are allocated directly to households which decide for themselves how to spend the

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<sup>182</sup> World Bank Predicts Decline in Remittances in Georgia due to Coronavirus Crisis. (*Agenda*, 2020)

<sup>183</sup> Issue 127: Remittance Inflows in Georgia during Covid-19 Crisis. (*PMCG*, 2021)

<sup>184</sup> Emigration and Effect of Remittances on Georgian Research - Economic Outlook and Indicators. (*PMC Research*, 2022)

<sup>185</sup> Bell, Paul. Strategic Communications and COVID-19: Exploring and Exploiting a Global Crisis. (*NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence*, 2023) , 50-62.

money.<sup>186</sup> Moreover, these transfers are not ‘extra income’ to the household, they are considered a basic source of income that is taken into account by households in the way they make decision on consumption/investment/saving decisions.<sup>187</sup>

A lack of statistical data and surveys of households makes it difficult to obtain specific information and numbers on remittances and their influence on household behavior, though some research attempts to do so. Georgia’s economic precariousness makes it obvious that remittance incomes in most households are largely spent on consumer goods.<sup>188</sup> Remittances are often criticized for being used simply for consumption and not productive investment; and indeed, this is usually what happens in countries with underdeveloped investment and economic policies<sup>189</sup> such as Georgia. However, remittances do help keep households out of poverty, and enable them to withstand the worst impacts of economic shocks such as the pandemic.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ricciardulli, Julia. Do Remittances Encourage Poor Governance Practices? (*UGA Journal of Economics* 1, 2019), 3

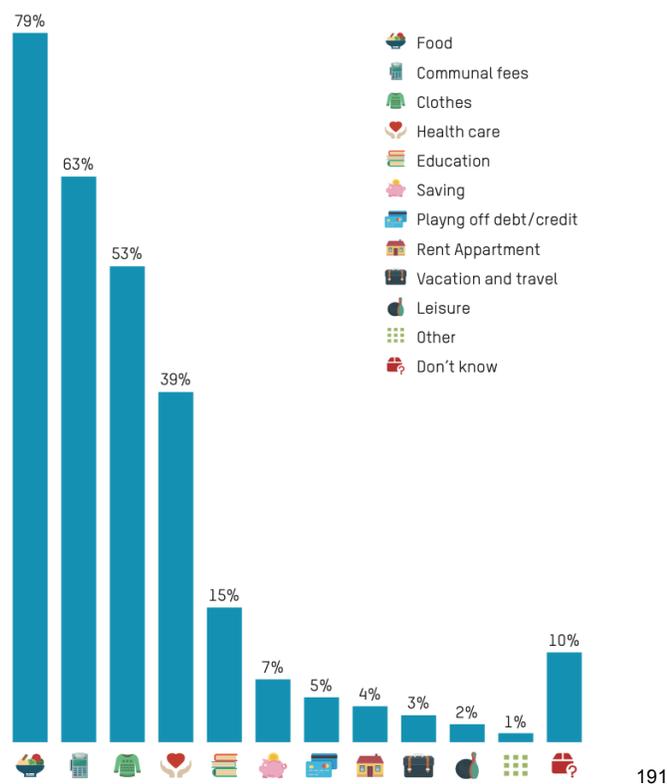
<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>188</sup> Brief Migration Profile: Remittances. (*State Commission on Migration Issues*, 2016), 14

<sup>189</sup> Ricciardulli, Julia. Do Remittances Encourage Poor Governance Practices? (*UGA Journal of Economics* 1, 2019), 5

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 6

Illustration 8. Spending of remittances of remittance-receiving households (% of HH)

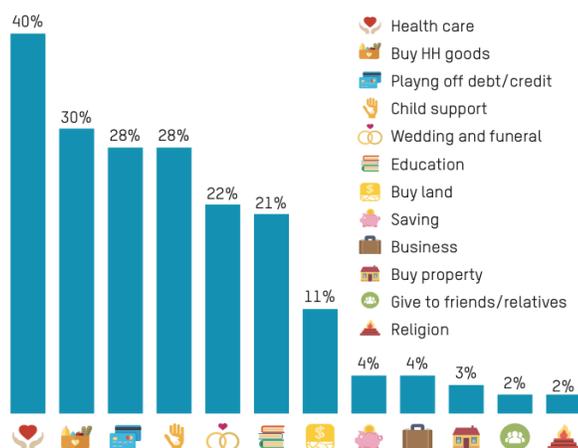


© *Brief Migration Profile - Remittances, 2017*

Migration Profile on Remittances published in 2017 included surveys conducted throughout households in Georgia receiving remittances. Though the survey has not been updated, this argument will assume that the spending patterns of these households have not changed drastically since that survey was done. The results demonstrated in the figure above display the large sum of remittances spent on consumer goods, such as food and clothes. The figure also draws our attention to spending at the next level down, on healthcare and education, and a lack of saving patterns in these households.

<sup>191</sup> Brief Migration Profile: Remittances. (*State Commision on Migration Issues, 2016*), 14

Illustration 9. Share of households that spend remittances differently than other household income (Development on the Move, 2008)



Note: This question was asked only to 141 respondents, who reported that they spend remittances differently than other household income

<sup>7</sup> Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia, 2009. Accessed: November, 14, 2016. [http://www.ippr.org/files/uploadedFiles/\\_research\\_teams\\_2009/Projects/Global\\_Change/Georgia%20FINAL%20%28April%202010%29.pdf?noredirect=1](http://www.ippr.org/files/uploadedFiles/_research_teams_2009/Projects/Global_Change/Georgia%20FINAL%20%28April%202010%29.pdf?noredirect=1)

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© *Brief Migration Profile - Remittances, 2017*

Households with different spending patterns than others are separately reported. In these households, the highest spending of remittances is on healthcare, followed by household goods, then paying off debt, which partly explains the low saving rates. In this figure, we see that a very few households do utilize remittances for investment purposes and starting businesses, something that is not present in most of the households' spending patterns. This highlights the evaluation of The Commission Report of 2016 concluding that the “financial potential of remittances is underutilized” in Georgia<sup>193</sup>. This is why most reports highlight that remittances in Georgia are invested in human capital, such as healthcare and education.<sup>194</sup> The underutilization of the financial potential of remittances can also be explained by the fact that remittances are considered to be an income source (as mentioned above), thus the household’s decision

<sup>192</sup> Brief Migration Profile: Remittances. (State Commission on Migration Issues, 2016), 15

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 16

to invest will be based on the financial opportunities available to them in their country of residence. Considering that Georgia lacks in strong financial institutions<sup>195</sup> and most citizens lack trust and confidence in banks and financial institutions<sup>196</sup>, the shortfall of spending patterns on business and investment makes sense.

“The Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development research conducted in 2014 by OECD in partnership with the SCMI Secretariat and CRRC-Georgia showed that the share of remittance-receiving families is larger in rural areas than in urban areas. According to the research, families who receive remittances spend more on agricultural development and education compared to families who do not receive remittances.”<sup>197</sup> This means that more people are emigrating from rural areas abroad for the purpose of sending remittances back to Georgia,<sup>198</sup> since their economic situation is worse than those in urban areas, to spend money on agricultural production as well as sending their children to the capital city for a better education.

Remittances not only affect household spending patterns, they also influence household behavior in the labor market. According to Amuendo-Dorantes and Pozo<sup>199</sup> remittances can lower the incentive of recipients to enter the labor market. In accordance with their own and other scholars’ predictions, the research finds that in Georgia, “from 2012 to 2021, the share of remittance-receiving households taking income from hired employment was significantly lower than households accepting no

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<sup>195</sup> Economy and Banking Sector of Georgia. (*The Banks EU*, n.d.)

<sup>196</sup> თსუ ეკონომიკის საერთაშორისო სკოლის პოლიტიკის კვლევის ინსტიტუტი. ფინანსური ცნობიერების კვლევა საქართველოში. (*ISSET*, 2016), 6

<sup>197</sup> 2017 MIGRATION PROFILE of GEORGIA. (*State Migration Commission of Migration Issues*, 2017), 29

<sup>198</sup> Tchaidze (IMF), Robert, and Karine Torosyan (ISSET). Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration’s Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia. (*ISSET*, 2010), 26

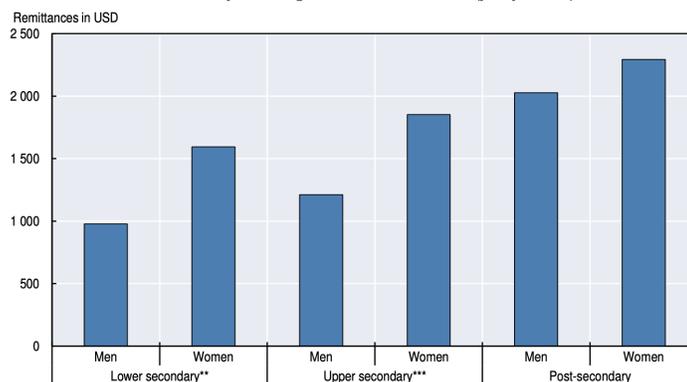
<sup>199</sup> Gerber, Theodore P., and Karine Torosyan. Remittances in the Republic of Georgia: Correlates, Economic Impact, and Social Capital Formation. (*Demography*, 2013), 1281

remittances<sup>200</sup>, by 14%. This could be because some salaries are so low in Georgia, and might be significantly lower than the value of remittances received, especially those in dollars or euros, further decreasing the incentive to find a job.

### **Citizens transferring Remittances**

The probit regression analysis done by Theodore Gerber and Karine Torosyan shows that as of 2013, “there was some tendency for absent-migrant (at least one member of household currently living abroad) groups to be male-headed (61.5%).”<sup>201</sup> Since then, this has changed. According to the OECD’s Development Pathways report on Georgia in 2017, women remit more than men on average (see graph below).<sup>202</sup> It also shows that the value of remittances increases significantly according to the educational qualifications of those remitting, both men and women – though women lead in all categories.

Figure 3.7. **Women remit more than men on average**  
Remittances by sender’s gender and education level (yearly, in USD)



Note: The number of emigrants with either primary education only or no formal education at all was too low to be included in this figure. Remittance amounts were provided by respondents in Georgian lari (GEL), the exchange rate at 1 July 2014 was used to calculate the amount in USD. Lower secondary education includes basic education (grade 7 to 9), and upper secondary education includes general secondary education (grade 10-12) in the Georgian education system. Significance tests are indicated as follows: \*\*\*: 99%, \*\*: 95%, \*: 90%.  
Source: Authors' own work based on IPPMD data.

StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933457803>

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<sup>200</sup> Emigration and Effect of Remittances on Georgian Research - Economic Outlook and Indicators. (*PMC Research*, 2022)

<sup>201</sup> Gerber, Theodore P., and Karine Torosyan. Remittances in the Republic of Georgia: Correlates, Economic Impact, and Social Capital Formation. (*Demography*, 2013), 1291

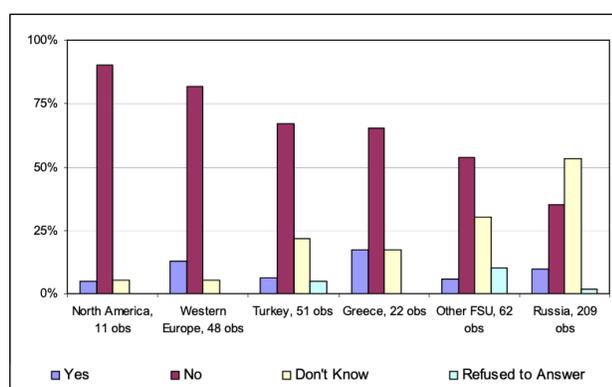
<sup>202</sup> OECD/CRRC - Georgia. Interrelations between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Georgia. (*OECD Development Pathways*, 2017)

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

This is unlikely to have changed in the past 7-8 years, considering the fact that a lot of remittances to poor families come from women working in domestic service or as carers. This type of labor is often undocumented and so hard to find, but every person in Georgia knows of at least one woman who is performing this kind of labor abroad. This demonstrates how the burden of COVID-19 even in the case of remittance-sending and receiving households fell largely on women.

In accordance with the research done by Escribà-Folch, Meseguer and Wright,<sup>204</sup> there is limited but nonetheless notable evidence that the political views of citizens are affected in Georgia through migration. The report of 2010, *Development on the Move*<sup>205</sup>, surveyed migrants returned from different countries (North America, Western Europe, Turkey, Greece, post-Soviet countries, Russia) about their opinion on Georgian democracy. Asked “In your opinion, is Georgia a democracy now?”, most responded no. More detailed information is presented in the table below.

Figure 8: Views on democracy by destination



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© *Development on the Move* - Figure 8, 2010

<sup>204</sup> Abel Escribà-Folch, Covadonga Meseguer Yebra, and Joseph Wright, *Migration and Democracy : How Remittances Undermine Dictatorship* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>205</sup> Tchaidze (IMF), Robert , and Karine Torosyan (ISET). *Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration’s Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia.* (ISET, 2010)

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*, 40

Though this survey has not been updated and includes only returned migrants, it is important to consider since it shows how migration affects the opinion of Georgian households of democracy. The first chapter highlights how living abroad and remittance transfers can affect political views. Citizens who had migrated to more democratic countries such as North America and Western Europe were more critical of Georgia's Democracy than those who had returned from less democratic states such as Russia and former Soviet states. Considering how migration patterns have changed in recent years, it is safe to assume that more migrants are critical of Georgia's democracy now. Today, more people are migrating to countries where democracy is stronger, such as EU states and the US. This finding has critical implications for the political views of citizens in Georgia, since experiencing life in countries where democracy is stronger prompts them to notice more flaws in their own country and demand more changes from the incumbent government, which could lead to more repressive dynamics.

### **Exchange Rate**

One of the vital economic factors that remittances affect in Georgia and other countries is the exchange rate.<sup>207</sup> The State Commission on Migration Issues in 2017 highlighted how the decline in remittances from 2014-2016 along with other factors might have affected the depreciation of the national currency.<sup>208</sup> This relationship can be better represented by the table below, where, as remittances to Georgia decrease, the currency tends to depreciate.

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<sup>207</sup> 2017 MIGRATION PROFILE of GEORGIA. (*State Migration Commission of Migration Issues, 2017*),

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table N18.** Average annual USD-GEL exchange rates and total value of remittances (2012-2016)

Year	USD/GEL exchange rate (year average)	Remittances to Georgia from abroad (in thousands of USD)
2012	1.6513	1,334,173.9
2013	1.6634	1,477,019.5
2014	1.7659	1,440,754.2
2015	2.2702	1,079,952.1
2016	2.3667	1,151,236.1

Source: NBG

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© *Migration Profile on Georgia, 2017*

In recent years, remittances from post-soviet countries have decreased and more remittances are coming from the EU and the US; this helps the exchange rate between GEL and USD maintain at a lower level, appreciating the Georgian Currency. Though the strengthening of the GEL after the pandemic cannot be attributed only to remittance transfers, since the National Bank of Georgia also purchased dollars multiple times during the period of the pandemic,<sup>210</sup> their role cannot be neglected.

To understand the effect of strengthening of exchange rates on changing public opinion, we need to consider why this is significant for Georgia in the first place. Tertychnaya *et al* state that government's economic outcomes are more important in developing countries and that citizens tend to base their voting decisions on these outcomes to a greater extent - which is the case in Georgia.<sup>211</sup> Considering this, if the economic situation, especially in developing countries matters in terms of increasing votes for the incumbent, then the strengthening of the exchange rate, and the role of remittances in that during and after the pandemic, should not contribute any decrease in support for the incumbent. Rather, this might help the incumbent gain more support

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*<sup>210</sup> Miminoshvili, Luka. 'გაღარიცხვების ეკონომიკა' - საქართველო და ქვეყნები ყველაზე მეტი ფულადი გზავნილებით. (*Business Media Georgia*, 2020)<sup>211</sup> Tertychnaya, Katerina, Catherine E. De Vries, Hector Solaz, and David Doyle. When the Money Stops: Fluctuations in Financial Remittances and Incumbent Approval in Central Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. (*American Political Science*, 2018), 759

because the appreciation of the Georgian Lari boosts perceptions of the government's economic outcomes. Considering the recent rapid inflation in prices of goods and services in Georgia<sup>212</sup>, appreciation of Lari should work to the government's advantage at elections.

### ***Remittance Effects on Repression Dynamics in Georgia during COVID-19***

Going back to the conceptual foundations of the research and the multilayered effect of COVID-19 and Remittances on Human Rights Dynamics and Repression, the subchapter will connect the information and the analysis gathered and build inferences to demonstrate the complicated relationship of these three variables, with Georgia as a specific example.

Tertychnaya *et al* point out that it might be expected that if remittances decline, there would be less support for the incumbent, since citizens would punish the incumbent for the decrease;<sup>213</sup> while if remittances increase, support for the incumbent might increase. The authors highlight that developments in countries that are the source of remittances affect remittance transfers and dynamics. In turn, the government where remittances are received does not have control over the amount received and can be punished for outcomes which they are not primarily responsible for.<sup>214</sup> This can be a political manifestation of economic dependency. Considering the fact that the paper is doing research through the pandemic, the shock of COVID-19 worldwide needs to be considered, which complicates looking at economic dependency and its outcomes; further complicating household behavior and its effect on Human Rights developments.

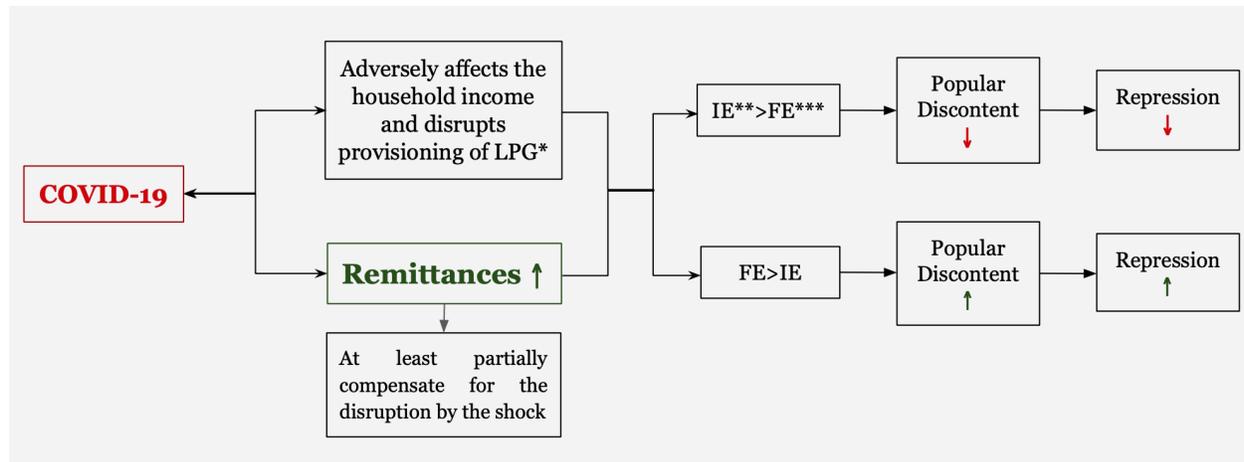
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<sup>212</sup> Georgia Economic Forecast. (*FocusEconomics*, 2023)

<sup>213</sup> Tertychnaya, Katerina, Catherine E. De Vries, Hector Solaz, and David Doyle. When the Money Stops: Fluctuations in Financial Remittances and Incumbent Approval in Central Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. (*American Political Science*, 2018), 758

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 759

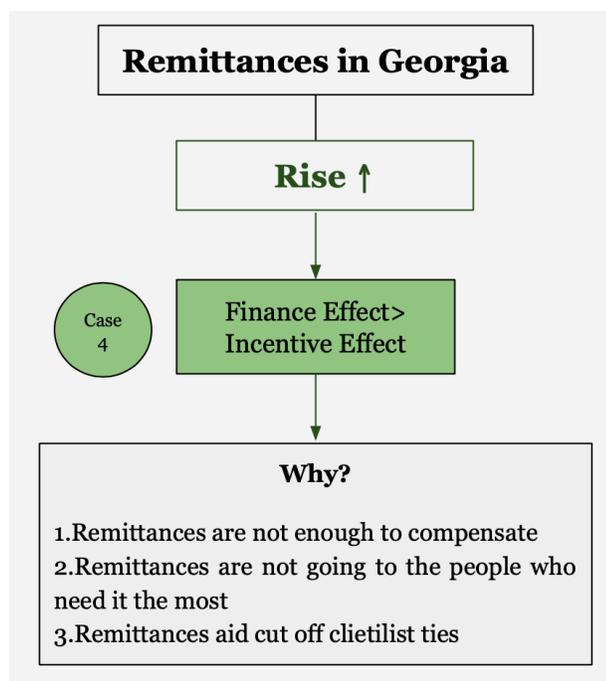
The figure below considers the pandemic as another factor affecting Remittances and Human Rights and displays their complex relationship.



\*LPG- Local Public Goods; \*\*IE- Incentive Effect; \*\*\*FE-Finance Effect.

**Figure 7. State Repression Dynamic Possibilities during COVID-19 if Remittances Increase**

As previously discussed, remittance transfers tend to increase people's faith in the government. As seen in Figure 7, the provision of local goods is disrupted during the pandemic, but if remittance transfers are present, then these partly ameliorate grievances caused by the disruption. Compared to a situation in which there were no remittances, popular discontent against the regime would be less. Recalling Figure 6 from the first chapter, in Georgia, it is clear that the Finance Effect dominates the Incentive Effect (Case 4). In other words, remittances mean less dependency on the state, which therefore aids citizens to mobilize, rather than decreasing their incentive to mobilize. Popular discontent rises, which in turn prompts the government to resort to repressive behavior, using COVID-19 policies as the means to do this. There are multiple reasons why the Finance Effect may have overpowered the Incentive Effect in the case of Georgia.



**Figure 8. Why did Popular Discontent in Georgia Rise with Remittance Increase?**

Firstly, remittances might not be enough to compensate the repressed household for COVID-19-induced distress. Though alleviating some economic strains, since the economic situation in Georgia was already unstable and COVID-19 made it worse, remittances did not have enough leverage to combat the economic shrinkage caused by the pandemic. The Swedish Development Cooperation Agency, The World Bank and Caucasus Research Resource Centers decided to partner in conducting a series of high frequency surveys on households in order to assess the impact of COVID-19 and inflation on them. Their report concluded that “the public tends towards thinking that the economic costs of the virus are worse than the virus itself, and is in favor of opening the economy rather than waiting for the virus to subside.”<sup>215</sup> This explains that economic

<sup>215</sup> Understanding Public Opinion on the Coronavirus in Georgia. (*Caucasus Research Resource Center*, 2020), 59

concerns were at the top of Georgians' list of grievances and why those grievances could not be combated by increased remittances.

Another reason why popular discontent might have increased though remittance transfers were high, could have been due to the fact that the remittances coming in were not going to the people who needed them the most, prompting them to protest. As an example, the LGBTQ+ community would not have received any remittances, since they are ostracized by their families and have no means of relief - either from their families or government - from the pressures caused by COVID-19. This prompted them to express their grievances towards the government and instead of receiving help, they were repressed. In addition, if we remember that in Georgia, people who receive remittances are less likely to enter labor markets, they would not have been laid off during COVID-19 - so their losses would be significantly less than those people in jobs and who are less likely to receive remittance transfers. This could be another reason why people who need remittances the most are not receiving them, thus their grievances and frustrations towards the government rise.

Another factor indicating that remittances were not going to those who needed them the most can be seen through COVID-19 policies implemented by the government. During the pandemic, agricultural workers received a special assistance package of 200 GEL per month for 6 months.<sup>216</sup> Taking into account that most people emigrating and sending remittances are from rural areas where households work in agriculture, meaning that remittances alleviated some economic strains for these families. Such

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<sup>216</sup> Kakulia, Merab, and Kapanadze, Nodar. ანტიპანდემიური შეზღუდვების და მთავრობის ანტიკრიზისული ღონისძიებების გავლენა დასაქმებაზე, შემოსავლებსა და სიღარიბის დონეზე საქართველოში. (*Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, 2020), 15

assistance could have been directed to people who needed it more, such as minority groups, including the LGBTQ+ members.

As discussed in the first chapter, the role of remittances in enabling households to reduce clientelistic ties with the state and mitigate corruption is central to Georgia. People are less dependent on the state for certain benefits, which dilutes their need to support the state.<sup>217</sup> Remittances reduce the government's ability to 'bribe' the electorate. In 2020, months before the October elections, the government announced additional anti-crisis measures of US\$132 million, including a further social assistance package.<sup>218</sup> This led opposition and civil society groups to accuse the government of manipulating voters.

Although the Georgian government was doing well in terms of COVID-19 policies to target cases at the beginning and this was positively met by the citizens,<sup>219</sup> their incompetent failures in carrying out these policies were noticed by the citizens and met negatively. For example, allowing mass for Easter, as well as use of communal spoons, while restricting other gatherings and movements seemed hypocritical of the government. This was met negatively by the citizens.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ricciardulli, Julia. Do Remittances Encourage Poor Governance Practices? (*UGA Journal of Economics* 1, 2019), 7

<sup>218</sup> World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Georgia. (Human Rights Watch, 2020)

<sup>219</sup> Understanding Public Opinion on the Coronavirus in Georgia. (*Caucasus Research Resource Center*, 2020), 10

<sup>220</sup> Understanding Public Opinion on the Coronavirus in Georgia. (*Caucasus Research Resource Center*, 2020), 10

## ***Relationship between Human Rights Dynamics and Remittance Transfer Dynamics***

It is important to consider the Human Rights Dynamics discussed in the previous chapter to understand why popular discontent rose during and after the pandemic – at a time when remittances to citizens were increasing. The evidence shows that most of the Human Rights domains were set back by the pandemic, even though the position of some of them had been improving prior to the pandemic, e.g. prisons and the judicial system. In the case of LGBTQ+ Rights, as discussed, the effect of the pandemic was more severe because they were ostracized by families and society. That being said, if no remittances would have been sent to this group, their frustrations and grievances would have risen during the pandemic, and they would have become more demanding of the government. That is why the government started using different ways to squash Pride protests and repress LGBTQ+ community members.

The COVID-19 lockdown put more strain on Georgian women, both in the country and, because migrant women remit more than men, on those living abroad. Deficits in women's rights vis a vis healthcare and domestic violence show a rise in women's discontent against the government, which could have prompted them to take repressive action to soften the gender quota, thus reducing the number of female candidates in the municipal elections. The examples of women's increased protests and demonstrations include march on women's rights, femicides and against abuse on International Women's Day in 2020;<sup>221</sup> march on violence against women in November of 2022<sup>222</sup>, which repeated recently, in March of 2023;<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Protest March on Violence against Women Held in Tbilisi. (*Agenda*, 2022)

<sup>222</sup> Georgia Marks International Women's Day with Protests. (*OC Media*, 2020)

<sup>223</sup> Chkareuli, Tamuna. Georgian Women Take to the Streets to Demand Change. (*Radio Liberty*, 2023)

In terms of media freedom during COVID-19, the government was unwilling to tolerate criticism from the media and wanted to control the narrative. With remittance transfers increasing, we might have expected that people would be more willing to believe the biased information due to alleviated frustrations,<sup>224</sup> though this was not the case in Georgia. This might have been due to the presence of pro-opposition media outlets as well as frustrations of the people who were noticing the government's excuse to control the media during COVID-19 even more. People were also especially concerned and spoke up about pro-opposition media channels being targeted together with their members, with some of them even being put in jail.

Corruption, which is evidently present in Georgia with a stagnated Corruption Perception Index,<sup>225</sup> is one of the factors that can be affected by remittance transfers. Scholars such as Tyburski, Meyer, and Shera argue that if the government's primary goal is to remain in power, then they might use the income households get in remittances to fund corrupt behavior and limit public spending by the state,<sup>226</sup> often mentioned as Substitution Effect. This is very much dependent on the regime type. I argue that this is not the case in Georgia, especially considering that there was a pandemic at the time, which increased public spending and the fact that even remittances were not enough to compensate for the economic shock of the pandemic. Since clientelism, also prominent in Georgia, feeds into corruption<sup>227</sup>, understanding its

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<sup>224</sup> Bless, H. et al. Mood and the use of scripts: Does a happy mood really lead to mindlessness? (*Journal of personality and social psychology*), 665-679

<sup>225</sup> Nikoladze, Tatia. Transparency International: Corruption in Georgia Still a Problem. (*English Jam-News*, 2023)

<sup>226</sup> Ricciardulli, Julia. Do Remittances Encourage Poor Governance Practices? (*UGA Journal of Economics* 1, 2019), 8

<sup>227</sup> Lo Bue, Maria, Kunal Sen, and Staffan I. Lindberg. Clientelism, Public Goods Provision, and Governance Working Paper. (*Varieties of Democracy Institute*, 2021)

change under the influence of remittance increase is important in fueling citizens' expression of grievances during the pandemic.

The research focuses on financial remittances, though it should be mentioned that migration and remittances drive change that is not only economic, between households, but also cultural, social and ideological.<sup>228</sup> The effects of social remittances are important in a political and social context, since they help cultivate democratic ideals and the sharing of these ideals with those back home. "By transferring funds to other households, Georgians cultivate and sustain broad norms of solidarity that entail reciprocal obligations and expectations of future rewards. In turn, the social ties and solidarities that are fostered by such exchanges may serve as resources for collective economic, political and social action."<sup>229</sup> These types of remittances are often transferred not only by migrants who leave in search of labor opportunities abroad, but also by students who seek better educational opportunities abroad, which is very prominent in Georgia. Students and citizens abroad often exchange with their families the ideas and values they have acquired abroad. Further research is necessary into social remittances to Georgia in order to fully grasp their effect on spreading democratic values and fighting for these values.

The pandemic clearly eroded citizens' human rights and remittances they received were not able to fully compensate for the economic strain imposed by the pandemic. Instead, the increase of economic support from abroad enabled Georgian citizens to speak up and demand change from the government. This prompted a

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<sup>228</sup> Ricciardulli, Julia. Do Remittances Encourage Poor Governance Practices? (*UGA Journal of Economics* 1, 2019), 8

<sup>229</sup> Gerber, Theodore P., and Karine Torosyan. Remittances in the Republic of Georgia: Correlates, Economic Impact, and Social Capital Formation. (*Demography*, 2013)

repressive response by the government, which further eroded civil liberties and media freedom and led to targeting of the opposition.

### *Evaluation of the Dynamics*

Remittances to Georgia show an increasing trend, with more transfers coming from economically and democratically developed countries such as the USA and EU. For some families, the grievances caused by the disrupting effect of the pandemic's on the provision of Local Public Goods, are alleviated by these transfers, which are spent largely on consumer goods. Georgia, being remittance-dependent, presents case 4 from Figure 6 in Chapter 1, with a rise in remittances during the pandemic, and the Finance Effect dominating the Incentive Effect. This means that citizens, frustrated and strained by the the economic effects of the pandemic, mobilized against the government. Though remittances alleviated the strain for some groups of people, others were left without much government support.

The research showed that remittances did not reach people who were most in need of them, and were neglected by the government, which exacerbated their grievances. It is clear that the government did not give enough support to minorities, which meant that the latter had nothing to lose if they spoke up against the government. The increased flow of remittances did not favor the government because the pandemic imposed further strain on the rights of minorities, some of whom were not dependent on remittances at all, and others, especially women, were those sending the remittances.

One might argue that human rights in Georgia were not good even before the pandemic. However, most of the domains of human rights discussed in the previous chapter experienced setbacks and even a reversal of improvements that began before the pandemic. It is clear that the government used COVID-19 in its favor to further its

agenda and consolidate its power, at the expense of the human rights of many groups, especially minorities. David Shiolashvili, an economist in Georgia, “feared the continuing erosion of the middle class, and the extent to which government largesse during the pandemic had expanded that class of voters—those on welfare, and civil servants—who now depended on government for an income, at the cost of a growing deficit in government spending. ‘[The government] are just consolidating their power’ he said. Meanwhile, state institutions were ‘being brought into line’, ordinary people were ‘exhausted’, and were ‘voting with their feet’. It is a grievance expressed by many young Georgians who, unless born into relative privilege, struggle to see an economic or professional future in their home country and look for any opportunity to study and work abroad— exacerbating an already heavy brain-drain in Georgia that has been in progress since Georgia reclaimed its fragile sovereignty from Russia in 1991.”<sup>230</sup> Some of these dependencies on the government that this economist feared were combated by remittance transfer increases, which help reduce clientelist ties by requiring less support from the government. This is evident in increased protests during the pandemic years, which caused the government to crack down further on opposition and minority groups.

One concern related to the interdependence of the three variables central to the research is that it is hard to isolate the causal relationship between deteriorations in human rights, people’s outright demands, and government repression. The regression of human rights in different fields could have been the result of COVID-19 itself as well as the government’s way of repressing opposition by utilizing COVID-19 policies for its benefit. This means that it could be hard to isolate in what case the grievances of citizens were caused by COVID-19 itself, in what case government just used COVID-19 as an

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<sup>230</sup> Bell, Paul. *Strategic Communications and COVID-19: Exploring and Exploiting a Global Crisis*. (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2023) , 50-62.

excuse to further its agenda and in what case the grievances themselves caused the government to use repressive measures, thus exacerbating the frustrations already present due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, it is clear that the pandemic, in one way or another, caused deteriorations in Human Rights in Georgia, though remittances helped certain families to overcome its economic impact to some extent. The increase in grievances through different channels caused citizens to speak up and demand more of the government, which in turn caused the government to crack down and repress. The repressions did not stop people from speaking up, which can be partly attributed to remittance transfers – whether received or not – during the pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

The research attempts to hypothesize the effect of Remittances on State Repression and presents different cases that could develop through change in Remittance Transfers. It further attempts to put these cases into a bigger picture of the times of crises, particularly the period of the pandemic, hypothesizing the interaction between 3 main variables - COVID-19(Independent variable), Changes in Remittance Transfers(Independent Variable) and State Repression Dynamics(Dependent Variable). Considering COVID-19 as a natural disaster and remittances as alleviating the shocks of this disaster lays as the central conceptual foundation of the project, further relating this to changes in Human Rights Dynamics in states, leading to repressive responses from the incumbent.

The research contributes the exploration of effects of 2 independent variables on State Repression to the studies, since until now only separate findings have been published on effects of COVID-19 on State Repression and effects of Remittances on State Repression. Through the exploration of the interdependence of these variables, the findings have a lot of important implications for politics as well as economies of states, unveiling/demonstrating the interconnectedness of both of these fields.

The case study of Georgia aids the research in exploring, analyzing and tracing the relationship of the variables in action. The case study also demonstrates the individuality of cases according to countries, since the reasons why the hypothesized 4 concluded cases might occur is very much dependent on and might be different from country to country.

## *Future Implications of the Research*

### *Future Implications for Governments*

Generalizing the analysis of Georgia's Case Study, the research provides a lot of future implications for remittance-dependent countries. The findings unravel that the pandemic truly gave a hand to repression and remittance transfers affected this in some ways, by making it possible for citizens to express their grievances.

COVID-19 can on its own deteriorate Human Rights without governments taking advantage of its policies and using it to their benefit. For example, transportation with taxis gets more expensive and, in Georgia, social workers had to use taxis to visit abused victims, which made it harder for them to do so, causing a setback in the Human Rights of the country.<sup>231</sup> Though, additionally, the government can further intensify these setbacks, instead of addressing them. From Georgia's example, we learn that patriarchs, for example, were exempted from vehicle bans;<sup>232</sup> the same could have been done for social workers, but the government decided not to. If the government had evaluated the impact of remittances on households better, their spending patterns and aid packages during the pandemic could have combated the grievances of a lot of citizens. For example, if the government assisted minorities in the case of Georgia, this could have alleviated the extra strain pandemic put on these people, which would have improved their rights, decreasing grievances and prompting a non-repressive response from the incumbent. Moreover, the incumbent could have used this opportunity to gain support of minorities, instead of further hitting them when they were already down.

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<sup>231</sup> Patriarchate Claims 'Clergy Exempted from Transportation Ban on Easter. (*OC Media*, 2020)

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

As mentioned in the First Chapter, Doyle<sup>233</sup> points out that remittances displace government expenditure, especially in social safety nets. If this “crowding out” leads to reduced government expenditure on health infrastructure, then that can magnify the burden of COVID-19 and raise the level of citizens’ grievances. The case of Georgia does not demonstrate this, however, further research on different countries is necessary to understand if this can happen during the times of crises and what implications that will have on repression dynamics.

The investment potential of remittances should be realized by the governments of remittance-dependent countries, which should prompt them to strengthen their financial institutions or to address the problem of distrust in financial institutions. This will create more favorable conditions for citizens and help them invest more into their own country, rather than foreign nationals investing in developing countries most of the time. Improved economic conditions in the country will alleviate citizens’ grievances, thus reducing protests and in turn, repression.

Going back to the conceptual foundations of the research, government expectations are an important factor in their decision to utilize repressive measures. If they expect grievances to grow, they might repress opposition even before any protests occur; though protests themselves could prompt repressive measures. The research might prompt governments to expect opposition when remittances rise thus by repressing in advance, they might cause further mobilization or the opposite, decrease in mobilization. This makes it important for governments to learn about the behavior of the households in their country.

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<sup>233</sup> Doyle, David. Remittances and Social Spending. (*American Political Science Review*, 2015) 785–802

Costs of mobilization for opposition groups are decreased with remittance flows and past research shows that especially where resistance already exists,<sup>234</sup> remittances are able to mobilize citizens against the government. By improving economic conditions in places where remittances are able to mobilize, incumbents might decrease grievances of people and drive less people to emigrate and send remit, causing less grievances and opposition, thus no need for repression.

This means that the research could be negatively used by the governments and their expectancy of opposition and expectancy of increased grievances might change, increasing the probability of them using repression as a preventative measure to silence the voices of those oppressed. From the case study, it is unclear whether the leaders feeling threatened or their expectancy to feel threatened caused the aggregate level of human rights violations to increase during the pandemic. Isolation of these effects may further strengthen the findings and contribute to the research.

#### *Future Implications for Households*

This research has a lot of implications for the households in remittance receiving countries as well as the government. From the example of Georgia, it is clear that the potential of remittances in transfer-dependent countries has to be realized and implemented by the households receiving them. Due to the poor economic nature of the some countries, citizens are mostly spending the remittances on consumption goods.

The fact that remittances have serious implications on Human Rights of citizens, especially in the time of crises, should be realized by households, since with their collaboration and cooperation, mobilization costs will be much lower than otherwise. The importance of economic frustrations and grievances in developing countries can be

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<sup>234</sup> Abel Escribà-Folch, Covadonga Meseguer Yebra, and Joseph Wright. Migration and Democracy : How Remittances Undermine Dictatorship (Princeton, New Jersey: *Princeton University Press*, 2021).

combated by remittance transfers, which, if utilized for investments, can further ameliorate the economic situation in households of host countries. This will decrease economic grievances of citizens and prompt less demands from the government, thus less repressive measures will be used against citizens.

Further research and surveys are necessary to fully comprehend the effect of remittance on household behavior, not only considering spending patterns, but also ideological changes, voting behavior, political behavior and so on. The paper invites for further econometric research and gathering of statistical data. Whether remittances promote democracy or not, push people to speak up or not, depends on the preferences of remittance recipients. More extensive research is necessary on remittance-recipients to understand in what case the transfers can promote democracy in different remittance-dependent countries. More extensive research is necessary on changes in household behavior through rise/fall of remittance transfers, not only in the case of Georgia, but every other remittance-dependent country. Household surveys would unravel if any shifts in their political opinions occur, further contributing to the research through building regression models from the statistical information gathered.

#### *Future Implications for The International Community*

Acknowledging the fact that COVID-19 [and other crises] creates a state of emergency in the world and health is the primary concern of all states, Human Rights concerns that are not related to health seem to be neglected. International community had not condemned these rollbacks of freedom of expression and civil protection, which further highlighted the role of international legitimation of use of power and its utilization for repression.

Even though the countries might be doing well in terms of COVID-19 and responding to shocks well, the cost at which this is happening should not be neglected internationally. The example of Georgia as well as Morocco (discussed in the first chapter) demonstrate the stakes of loosened international norms and legitimization of state of emergency. This is important since after states come out of the pandemic, the citizens might find themselves in the gutter in terms of Human Rights setbacks. International condemnation of Human Rights violations during COVID-19 might hold countries accountable and aid citizens to protect their rights.

The paper has serious implications on the importance of remittances not only for alleviating poverty and economic shocks, but also for mobilizing citizens to stand up for their rights. During the pandemic, states were under pressure to provide public goods and assistance. Some aid resources were wasted on clientelist ties and private benefits, while remittances fuelled some households to demand more from the governments. This gave a hand to the targeting of opposition through pandemic policies. Further contributions to this field of research are necessary for isolating the relationships between the 3 variables and correctly tracing the interconnectedness of these variables, even with other crises (other than the pandemic). Adding social remittances to the research could also show interesting results and explain more of remittance effects on households and mobilization.

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