Resilient Bonds
On Social Cohesion in Georgia

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Foreword

This book, written by a sociologist and a historian, is an enlightening read, a well written read, and above all else, a necessary read. It is necessary because it helps us understand the deep-rooted challenges that democracy has faced in Georgia since independence in 1991. The book is theoretically rich; it incorporates concepts and ideas developed by Western scholars since Emile Durkheim and Max Weber on social integration, social order and social cohesion. It places Georgia in both a historical and comparative context and drills down into the psychology and social structures that sustain community and collaboration among citizens living in democracies.

This book highlights the persistent patterns in Georgian society that despite repeated "democratic breakthroughs" in the post-Soviet period, have stymied the development of a cohesive and sustainable democracy. The authors, building on studies by Western and Georgian scholars such as Ghia Nodia, Barbara Christophe, Florian Mühlfried, and Gia Tarkhan Mouravi, examine the roots of the lasting political and social fragmentation that has characterized modern Georgian society, shaped by the longue durée of Soviet power and its capitalist neo-liberal successor. Since Georgia's independence, such social fragmentation has been exacerbated by unrelenting political polarization.

The central focus of the book is social cohesion, a complex concept that emphasizes the interconnections at the civic (or popular) level between identity, trust, culture, community, and the state's governing institutions. Throughout the book, the authors emphasize the vital relationship between social cohesion and democracy. Social cohesion, they argue, is based on the principles of "generalized social trust, reciprocity and solidarity," and forms the "'building block" of a democratic society." (p.6) Low social cohesion, it follows, undermines the prospects for democratic consolidation.

The authors examine the multiple and, in some cases, unique factors that shape Georgia's own experience with social cohesion. The book avoids abstract modelling; it contextualizes Georgian society socially, demographically, and geographically; it anchors its analysis in Georgia's own historical experience; it collects both qualitative and quantitative data on popular attitudes in the capital and regions (especially in Georgia's smaller provincial towns) and it provides a comparative analysis with neighboring states and societies in Central and Eastern Europe. The book presents an important multidisciplinary study for Western scholars on why democratic institutions, apparently functional, are yet so fragile. It tells us specifically about the social and economic conditions of post-Soviet states like Georgia and helps us understand patterns that determine why some democracies have thrived (Estonia) and others (Georgia) have not.

In many ways, Georgia is the ideal case study of emerging democracies in the post-Soviet space, one that illustrates the contradictions between the strategies of democracy building and the reality encountered and practiced by its citizens. The tension between formal democracy and informal practices has, in Georgia's case, been a decisive variable in the popular struggle to establish accountable governance. Whether it was state socialism or an economically polarizing capitalism, Georgian state and economic structures have never been able to overcome the sense of exclusion, inequality and absence of control felt by its citizens. The Georgian state has always been segregated from its own citizens and the popular ideals of social solidarity, reciprocity and trust which underpin the common democratic enterprise have, as the authors show, remained weak and fragmented.

One explanation for this, illustrated by the data in chapters 5 and 6 and convincingly argued by the authors, is the difference between primary and secondary networks of community in Georgian society. Social cohesion is ubiquitous in Georgian social communities, but it is fragmented, often focused on kin, geography, business clans or ethnic identity. It rarely extends to cooperation or bonding between and across social communities on a

national scale. In many ways this limited from of social cohesion is a natural reaction to state structures that cannot be trusted, but the authors underline the cost such narrowly focused personal, family or group loyalties can do to the common and inclusive values that are needed to hold democracies together. The authors argue that Georgia's "formally oriented" type of social cohesion in reality translates into passivity, limited political engagement, and low participation in civic activities. This is reflected in much of the data presented by the authors, though the mass demonstrations in Tbilisi in 2024-25 suggest attitudes toward the unaccountability of power are changing.

The book, of course, raises the question as to how Georgia's citizens can be encouraged to participate and engage with Georgian governments and political parties which maintain only limited accountability at election time. The authors do not have the answer – the book is an academic study rather than a platform – but it examines the issue, provides the data, and outlines the challenges for citizens who wish to live in a democratic state. This is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on democracy building.

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Introduction

Social cohesion is a core social scientific concept used since Tönnies, Durkheim, and Weber, which is based on "a bond between members of a society as well as between the members and society as a whole" (Dragolov and Boehnke 2024). The members of such an abstract reference group have positive attitudes towards each other and towards their overall context, participate in their community-related practices and engage in (institutional and non-institutional) processes of cooperation and integration, which they simultaneously address and evaluate. "Cohesion arises where these levels coincide sufficiently – in the attitudes, actions, relationships, institutions and discourses of a society. This concept of cohesion is [...] normatively dependent, which means that specific conceptions of cohesion that are normative in nature must borrow this normativity from other sources" (Forst 2020; FGZ-RISC). A conceptual approximation can be made by affirming that social cohesion exists above all when similarities between people not only exist formally but are also felt. This feeling is also summarized as a sense of community, the "sixth social sense" (Heibült 2009:19; Assmann 2024). What is meant here is a "sense of belonging" within a community (or we-group), grounded in trust as a key component (Delhey et al. 2018:427). In addition to trust, the experience of equality, positive expectations for the future and the availability of efficient public goods and sufficient services of general interest are seen as prerequisites for social cohesion. On the other hand, experiences of rejection or denial of participation or insecurities about one's own lifestyle jeopardize this social cohesion (Kersten et al. 2022:19). The question of where and how social connections and obligations arise becomes particularly virulent in times of profound social upheaval or crisis phenomena, such as after the financial crisis in 2008 or the wave of refugees in 2015-2016 (Middell 2024:8-9). The

extent and quality of social cohesion or "togetherness" in a community of people – personal, private or abstract, public – are therefore dependent both on individual characteristics of deployable social capital,[1] and on collective characteristics of group membership through formal and informal practices. Social cohesion can therefore become a powerful resource that appears indispensable for collective action oriented towards the common good and cannot be enforced in the mode of command and obedience. The members of the research network recommend "not taking a substantive understanding of social cohesion with normative implications as a basis, but rather to adopt a reflexive approach to this term and the spectrum of its uses." (Deitelhoff et al. 2020:11-19)

The Bertelsmann Stiftung also builds its research program on social cohesion in Germany and Asia on three core aspects: resilient social relationships, a positive emotional connection among its members and a strong orientation towards the common good (generalized reciprocity). In this way, individuals and groups form a horizontal network of social relationships within society. Vertically, these positive individual and primary group-related ties can also be extended to a country and its institutions. Ideally, orientation towards the common good is reflected in the actions and attitudes of all members of a given society, who demonstrate responsibility for others and the community (Vopel and Unzicker 2016; Anderson and Unzicker 2014). For Bahrdt (1996:189), therefore, "the development of human sociality and social relationships and the development of a self-capable of acting are to be seen as two parts of a coherent process that can only be separated analytically." Social cohesion therefore supplements the systemic integration of formal state institutions and the social identification with them. It refers to genuine social qualities that cannot be directly generated or manipulated politically.

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[1] Ostrom and Ahn 2009; Putnam 1995a; Putnam 2000, esp. chapter 6 on "Informal Social Connections" and the "silent withdrawal from social intercourse" in U.S. communities, pp. 93-115.

A study on social capital in Georgia carried out by Hans Gutbrod (2018) at the *Caucasus Research Resource Center Tbilisi* (CRRC) at the end of 2010 showed that there is strong solidarity within certain social groups in Georgia. These are almost exclusively personal, interest-related or political. Particularistic interest groups are less developed and formalized (e.g. civic or voluntary associations) within the state and social framework in Georgia. This means that although the country has a high level of *bonding* social capital, it lacks *bridging* social capital (Putman 1995; for Georgia see: Gutbrod 2018; Chitanava 2013). Personal groups or networks use informal practices such as the "banquet" (*supra*), including ritualized "toasts" (*sadghegrdzeloebi*), to compensate for the lack of higher-level regulatory mechanisms to establish personalized reciprocity or reciprocity among themselves (Mühlfried 2019). We will discuss the significance of such practices in this book.

Given the complexity of the contextual developments in Georgia, a country with a Soviet legacy facing serious contemporary transitional challenges, the issue of social cohesion is particularly significant. The diverse socio-cultural and political landscape provides new insights for understanding this phenomenon, which has primarily been studied within a Western framework concentrated predominantly on global trends and developments that often lead to significant societal challenges. To some extent, Western scholarship was influenced by the political agenda of the 1990s, which sought ways to counter growing threats to social cohesion in Western nations.

Social cohesion is shaped by the unique cultural and institutional characteristics of each society, making its contextualization and particularization crucial. Studying social cohesion in the post-Soviet context offers scholars fresh perspectives on the phenomenon and necessitates new frameworks for empirical research. The distinctive historical background of Georgia, coupled with its current socio-political developments, underscores the importance of examining social cohesiveness and its functional mechanism. The transitional context of Georgia – shifting from

70 years of Soviet rule to a democratic state – renders this process even more compelling. The rapid changes experienced by former Soviet societies, including the establishment of independent democratic institutions, legal systems, property rights, labor markets, and political parties, have rendered the adaptation to a system of democratic values increasingly important (Gel'man 2003; Huntington 1991; Fukuyama 2014). The large-scale political, economic, and cultural transformations have impacted various societal levels, including collectives, organizations, and individuals.

Considered as an essential basis and a "building block" of a democratic society, social cohesion and its examination become even more critical amidst the ongoing socio-political fragmentation. Recently growing political and social polarization in Georgia has been followed by rising fragmentation of society into highly antagonistic groups, essentially perceived as opponents on substantial existential questions over the past, present, and future developments of society. In the context of these macro-scale institutional changes, achieving a consensus on shared values and principles of a democratic system – which fosters generalized social trust, reciprocity, and solidarity – poses significant challenges for both politicians and scholars. The factors contributing to the relevance of studying social cohesion in Georgia are extensive and warrant greater scholarly attention. We will try to discuss some of the main factors in detail in the following chapters.

In response to the question, *"What divides or unites us as a society?"* featured in a nationwide public opinion survey conducted in July 2022 in Georgia (CRRC and NDI 2022), the results revealed that 87% of respondents identified politicians as the primary drivers of division within society. Similarly, 82% blamed the Georgian media, 83% believed that Russia played a significant role, and 80% pointed to the current economic system as contributing factors to societal division. In total, the survey addressed 11 issues, actors, and institutions that could either unite or divide Georgians. In the previous year's survey, citizens listed seven specific elements as sources of division (Gilbreath 2019). Interestingly, one in

twelve respondents (8%) stated that none of the issues mentioned divided society, while one in twenty (5%) claimed that all the issues did. The survey results indicated fewer perceived reasons for division in rural areas and among ethnic minorities compared to urban areas and ethnic Georgians.

As for sources of unity in Georgian society, religion (50%) and the educational system (41%) were considered the most unifying institutions, with a significant portion of citizens supporting these views (CRRC and NDI 2022), The European Union was also noted as an important unifier, receiving support from nearly 40% of respondents. The study further highlighted significant differences in attitudes based on settlement type, ethnicity, and age groups. For instance, 88% of respondents from ethnic Georgian settlements believed that Russia divides society, compared to only 42% of citizens from minority settlements. Differences were also observed among age groups; 88% of young individuals (ages 18-34) saw Russia as a source of division, while 83% of older respondents (35-54) and 80% of those 55 and over agreed.

A cross-national comparative study of 48 European countries, categorized into six regions – North, South, West, East Europe, the Former Soviet Union, and Turkey (Halman et al. 2005) – showed that Georgia, along with other East European countries, was characterized by low levels of formal (behavioral) and substantial (attitudinal/perceived) social cohesion (Dickes and Valentova 2013). More specifically, an analysis using data from the European Values Study (EVS) in 2008 indicated that former Soviet Union states geographically closer to Europe (e.g., Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus) exhibited a high level of social cohesion. In contrast, those countries closer to Asia (such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia) demonstrated similarities to Southern region countries, which appeared cohesive at the formal (attitudinal) level but less so at the substantial (behavioral) level.

When exploring regional developments related to social cohesion, it is important to mention a cross-national study by Janmaat (2011) that included post-communist countries. The author evaluated social cohesion

characteristics across more than 50 countries, drawing upon data from various sources, including the 1999-2004 Wave of the World Values Survey. The study revealed that post-communist states exhibited the lowest levels of civic participation, similar to trends observed in Latin American and African countries, while Western nations demonstrated higher levels of civic engagement. Interestingly, despite low civic participation, post-communist countries showed levels of solidarity comparable to those in many Western nations. Janmaat (2011) emphasized that variations in solidarity and civic participation could not be solely attributed to socio-economic factors, such as developmental levels. Instead, he underscored the importance of historical trajectories in shaping the distinctive character of each region and its current trends in social cohesion. In post-communist societies, the legacy of totalitarian rule has significantly weakened civil society and fostered a deep-seated distrust of state institutions. Janmaat (2011) referenced Rose et al. (1997:91), who described the emergence of "hourglass" societies, characterized by two extreme poles: citizens engaging in informal businesses at the bottom and political and economic elites at the top, accumulating wealth and power while eliminating a "missing middle." Given this historical context, Janmaat (2011) predicts that levels of civic participation in the region will remain low for decades, if not centuries, to come.

The mentioned nationwide and cross-national survey results underscore the complex and stratified nature of cohesion in Georgian society as well as in the region, highlighting the importance of rigorous examination at both micro, macro, and regional levels.

In the following sections of this book, we will undertake a comprehensive exploration of the current state and developments of social cohesion in Georgia. By employing an integrated research methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon based on rich and valuable empirical data. The survey results will allow us to examine the general profile of social cohesion at the national,

urban, and other settlement levels, as well as to identify how various socio-demographic factors influence the current state and development of social cohesion within Georgian society. The quantitative analysis will facilitate our exploration of social cohesion profiles concerning both formal (attitudinal) and substantial (behavioral) developments. The qualitative data will enhance and expand upon the quantitative findings, providing deeper insights and interpretations. We will address essential questions, such as: How do individuals perceive and experience interconnectedness in their daily lives within their communities? How do they comprehend the meanings of social connectedness and belonging across various facets of life? In what ways do they feel included and recognized at the community level? How do they establish boundaries between in-groups and out-groups in their daily interactions? To gain a richer understanding of the unique cultural meaning of social cohesion in Georgian society, we will also employ a historical case study. This method will shed light on the historical context and evolution of social cohesion, particularly from the 18th century, thereby enhancing our comprehension of its current state and distinctive characteristics.

We hope that this work will serve as a unique resource for understanding social cohesion in contemporary Georgia, a concept that has been insufficiently researched to date.

Structure and Objectives of the Book

This book is based on empirical data collected through an integrated research approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Its goal is to address various questions related to the complex phenomenon of social cohesion in Georgian society. The chapters in this volume aim to explore above-mentioned questions.

The first chapter clarifies the intricate and often vague concept of social cohesion. It examines its historical development in academic scholarship and its current application in policy-making. By identifying

the main waves of conceptual evolution and their implications for definitions of social cohesion, this chapter highlights the challenges that scholars should consider when studying the subject and developing empirical measurement tools. Thus, it lays the theoretical groundwork for our empirical research.

The second chapter provides a historical overview of social cohesion in Georgia. Through selected historical case studies, it identifies specific forms of social unity and connectedness among people, revealing related concepts that enhance our understanding of the contemporary forms of social cohesion in Georgian society.

The third chapter emphasizes the contextual relevance of studying social cohesion in Georgia. It outlines the unique socio-cultural and political factors that contribute to social cohesion in this context. Additionally, this chapter assists in selecting the relevant dimensions and variables of social cohesion for examination using our empirical research instrument.

The fourth chapter discusses the methodological foundations of the study. It clarifies the importance of an integrative methodological approach for the empirical investigation of social cohesion in Georgia. In detail, it describes how various theoretical frameworks have been utilized and synthesized to develop multidimensional empirical instruments for both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. This chapter provides a thorough overview of our multidimensional measurement instrument for social cohesion, highlighting its differences compared to other established measurement tools.

The fifth chapter delves into the hermeneutic depth of social cohesion, exploring how individuals and communities perceive, act, and interpret diverse meanings of social connectedness and belonging. This exploration is based on rich qualitative data.

Chapter six addresses questions regarding the current state and profile of social cohesion in Georgia. Using data from the recent wave of the European Values Survey (EVS), it demonstrates how various socio-demographic factors influence social cohesion at national, urban, and

other settlement levels. The survey results presented in this book offer fresh insights, showcasing how different dimensions of social cohesion manifest at both substantial and attitudinal levels.

Chapter seven provides a comparative analysis of social cohesion profiles in Georgia's neighboring countries and Eastern Europe. The selection of countries for this comparative analysis is based on their shared historical experiences as former Soviet states. This regional comparison creates a broader perspective on the development of social cohesion, unveiling local particularities and characteristic trends.

The book concludes with a final chapter that summarizes and synthesizes the main findings from the survey, qualitative research, and historical case studies. This synthesis seeks to answer the central questions of the study. The knowledge gathered through various methods contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex nature of social cohesion and its contextualization within the current transitional period of the country, particularly focusing on urban and regional peculiarities.

CHAPTER 1

From Theory to Definition: Challenges in the Conceptualization of Social Cohesion

However, social solidarity is a wholly moral phenomenon which by itself is not amenable to exact observation and especially not to measurement. To arrive at this classification, as well as this comparison, we must therefore substitute for this internal datum, which escapes us, and external one, which symbolizes it, and then study the former through the letter.

Durkheim 1893 [1984] p. 24

It is widely acknowledged that social cohesion is a highly complex theoretical concept that causes its susceptibility to various interpretations (Beck et al. 2001). Considered as a type of holistic phenomenon, it describes general conditions of society (Friedkin 2004; Chan et al. 2006). Despite its ubiquity in social science literature, it remains a highly abstract concept without a clear definition of its unique analytical content. Without a universally recognized definition, the concept lacks coherence, clarity and often appears contradictory, with a low capacity for its operationalization and empirical measurements (Rajulton et al. 2007). There are several reasons for this. One of them is related to the problem of the distinction between its constitutive elements and the conditional factors

(Chan et al. 2006; Dickes et al. 2010). Another is determined by the multidimensional and multilevel nature of the concept. The challenge for definitional clarity of social cohesion is also caused due to the existing conceptual overlaps as well as empirical interrelationships with other concepts and sub-concepts such as social capital, social inclusion, social integration, social solidarity, etc. With these conceptual overlaps, the notion of social cohesion becomes vague and multi-faced so that the distinction of social cohesion from similar concepts remains one of the essential tasks for scholars (Portes and Vickstrom 2011).

The Linguistic Equivalent of Social Cohesion in Georgian

The origins of the word "cohesion" can be traced back to Latin, with its usage dating back to the 17th century. Its initial meaning relates to the physical state of material objects, derived from the Latin terms "cohaerere" and "cohaes," which signify "cleaved together." A closer examination of various lexicographic definitions reveals that the core meaning of the term remains unchanged. For example, the Concise Oxford Dictionary (2011) defines "cohere" as "to hold firmly together as a whole." Similarly, the Oxford American Dictionary of Current English (1999) defines it as "to stick together (of parts or wholes) and remain united." The Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1987) states that "cohesion is the state or situation in which all parts or ideas fit together well, forming a united whole." Finally, the Oxford English Dictionary (2000) describes social cohesion as "[t]he action or condition of cohering; cleaving or sticking together."

The term's transition from the natural sciences to the social sciences can be traced to the nineteenth century, when scholars – especially sociologists – began to conceptualize modern society as a highly differentiated, heterogeneous, and complex whole with its own functional possibilities (Durkheim 1984 (1893); Simmel 1995). This way, the condition of a physical state of the material objects is ascribed to human beings in

society who "cohere" or "hold firmly together as a whole." In sociological terms, this latter will mean essentially people's state of mind that is firmly held together (Durkheim 1984 (1893)).

It is significant to note that in almost all research on this issue, most of which has been conducted in English-speaking countries or across Europe, the term is used universally regardless of regional and local contextual translations (Friedkin 2004). This illustrates how difficult a proper linguistic equivalent of social cohesion is to find. One of the definitive reasons for this development is the complexity and multidimensionality of the concept that until now has been distinctively utilized by scholars and policymakers. There have even been studies undertaken enquiring if there exists a corresponding linguistic match of social cohesion carried by the same local meanings of the term (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2017; Green et al. 2009; Desai 2015; Kamwangamalu 1999; Croissant and Walkenhorst 2020). This emphasized the importance of the latent conceptual equivalence approach (Boehnke et al. 2014) in the process of indicator selection relevant to the specific context.

It is obvious that the translocation of the English-language term of social cohesion, which has been conceptualized primarily within a Western theoretical framework, into other parts of the globe raises the question of Eurocentrism. This last is also considered a potential danger for dismissing the local specifications of the phenomenon. One of the examples of such criticism is an argument of Marquez who states that the social cohesion defined in European context by the indices such as civic participation or reduction of social disparities cannot be completely valid and operational in the Latin American context because of the peculiarity of its socio-cultural milieu preliminary united via strong primary ties and networks (Márquez 2010).

Though there are still attempts by researchers to find a relatively close counterpart to the concept of social cohesion in local contexts, one of the examples is the term *assabiyah* introduced by Ibn Khaldun already in the 14th century in the Arab world that conceptualizes the similar meanings

such as a solidarity among folks. Solidarity and interdependence among citizens are conceptualized under the South African term *Ubuntu* (Kamwangamalu 1999) which is also widely used as a Pan-African concept among scholars studying the social cohesion in the region (Desai 2015; Burns et al. 2018).

The direct translation of the original concept poses difficulties, since local terms often bear adjacent meanings or are intertwined with related notions such as "social integration" or "social inclusion" (Croissant and Kim 2020). Ultimately, however, these pre-existing expressions cannot fully capture the specific idea of social cohesion (Croissant and Walkenhorst 2020).

It would be legitimate to say that the term *social cohesion* is rarely utilized by the Georgian public, across policy, or within academic circles. During the last decades, it has been quite rare, though mainly used by NGO sectors as a part of their policy analysis area that is intertwined with the interethnic and intercultural integration thematic. It should also be emphasized that the term is used unchanged without Georgian translation, besides the fact that there exists its translation in Georgian – *"shech'iduloba'*- an equivalent word of *cohesion* which has lately become relatively resonated among a small circle of local scholars. The rarely utilized Georgian word *"shech'iduloba"* ("შეჭიდულობა" – "cohesion"), loaded with deep etymological meaning of strong closeness and interconnection together with its conceptual counterpart "*sotsialuri"* ("სოციალური" – social), articulates the very essence of the semantic meaning of the original term – *social cohesion*. There is a considerable amount of research conducted on the issue of social integration by social scientists as well as policy analysts (Broers 2008; Tevzadze 2009; Gugushvili et al. 2017; Kirvalidze 2021). Though, to our knowledge, the concept of social cohesion *per se* remains barely used and unexplored until now (Reisner 2025a; Kirvalidze 2025).

The focus-group discussions also reveal that even equivalent and semantically or culturally close term of social cohesion, such as "unity" – *er-*

toba (ერთობა), *ertianoba* (ერთიანობა), is used rarely in public as well as private discourses. In a certain sense, the concept appears overshadowed by the power of the most widely utilized terms locally, such as "We", "Georgians", "Georgianness", etc., that articulate a societal unity defined predominantly by national and cultural codes of identity. Though there are other terms widely observable in everyday speaking and public discourses that define the situation and conditions of cohesiveness and unity based on mutual values and understandings among people. With a close look at the most equivalent and interchangeable terms that resemble the semantic meaning of social cohesiveness by referring to a particular state of society constituted by closely interconnected individuals, we find *"urtiertgageba"* (ურთიერთგაგება) – mutual understanding, *"urtiertgat'ana"* (ურთიერთგატანა) – reciprocity, "*urtiertoba"* (ურთიერთობა) – interrelationship, most referential in this regard. These terms appear widely established in public discourse and describe a particular state of society or people in society who are closely interconnected with each other based on mutual understanding and respect, essentially because of shared mutual values. Some of them also appear to be utilized as an indicator of *the modus vivendi* of society, particularly by contrasting the present state of society with the past. One of the widely utilized phrases – *"tbilisi iq'o urtiertoba"* ("თბილისი იყო ურთიერთობა") – "*Tbilisi was a city that was all about interrelationships (warm and respectful) between people"* describes the condition of society (mainly in the past) where people were closely interconnected based on the mutual understandings and respect, essentially as a result of shared mutual values, that does not exist in the present any more.

Social cohesion is often described as a culturally specific, path-dependent phenomenon (Janmaat 2011), particularly by scholars who emphasize the role of culture in shaping human agency (e.g., Huntington 1996). Context specificity is a critical issue in the study of social cohesion. Each country, district, or region provides characteristics in terms of social cohesiveness of society that must be considered comprehensively by researchers. Moreover, the contextual differences can also gain rele-

vance inside a single country in terms of its rural and urban characteristics and differences. An interesting example of a cross-country specificity of social cohesion is that trust and civic participation appear critical in the study of cohesion in the Netherlands, while in the United States, the issue of social mobility plays a significant role (Schmeets and te Riele 2014; OECD 2011). Another issue that requires attention is the contextualization of the state of social cohesion in particular time periods, as the socio-political as well as cultural and economic events occurring in certain periods can be influential in terms of raised interethnic fractionalization as well as political polarization, which consequently can cause some modifications and changes in social cohesion profiles.

Historical Lineage and Development of Academic and Policy Debates on Social Cohesion

Two principal waves that are explicitly distinguishable in the conceptual development of social cohesion are closely linked to the large-scale societal transformations. These gradual transformations challenged questions related to the social integration and cohesiveness in societies (Jenson 1998). The first wave is ultimately related to the formation of modernity and modern forms of society (Durkheim 1984,1915; Weber 1930/1905; Tönnies 1957). The fundamental changes, such as secularization, individualization, changes in stratification models, migration, urbanization, etc., demolished the existing basis for social order and challenged the question of integration in newly emerged complex societies. The very first attempts at conceptualization of the phenomenon of social cohesion were initiated and undertaken by social scientists, particularly by sociologists, who defined the issue of social cohesion and integration of newly emerged complex societies as programmatic and its theorization as a disciplinary agenda. In comparison to this, the second wave of concept development was predominantly deepened and enhanced in the policy sphere.

One of the founding fathers of sociology, Émile Durkheim, utilizes the term *social cohesion* (*la cohésion sociale*) in his seminal work on *"The Division of the Social Labor"* (1893/1984) within the framework of social science and establishes a firm foundation for its theoretical conceptualization and further development. In general, he defines social cohesion predominantly as a socio-cultural concept, which is mainly related to the internalized normative as well as value system of society, assumed as an essential basis for stability, social order, and cohesiveness (see the discussion in greater detail below). The concept subsequently becomes fundamental in both classical and early modern social theory and, first and foremost, intertwined with the issues of social integration and social order. It is in the context of the theoretical elaboration of the functional mechanisms of social integration that social cohesion, conceptualized by Emile Durkheim, becomes a crucial basis for American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1937). From the paradigmatic turn of the 1960s in social sciences, the concept has been extended following a new understanding of social integration. Concepts such as conflict and differences are redefined and referred to as a new social resource for cohesion (Coser 1957; Dahrendorf 1959).

The second wave in the development of social cohesion research dates back to the 1980s-1990s and is related to the rapid social changes associated with globalization, increased population mobility, massive migration, diversity, rising fragmentation, etc. These developments are fostering and accelerating the main demands of democratic legitimation in complex societies, particularly the participation, inclusion, and recognition both on the individual and communal levels. During this second wave, the study of social cohesion goes beyond academic frames and becomes a subject of interest for policymakers and the social policy sphere in general. This trend can be explained by the intensity of the impact of emerging challenges in contemporary society. The immediate manifestation of this trend is the development of policy-oriented approaches

in the study of social cohesion supported by European, Canadian, and other international institutions since the 1990s (Maxwell 1996; Bernard 1999; Berger-Schmitt 2000; Jeannotte 2000). Determined by the agenda of social policy analysis, the study of social cohesion prioritizes practical research relevant to policy objectives and upgrades theoretical concepts with a measurable policy instrument (Jenson 1998; Bernard 1999; Dickes 2010). Though there are also some theoretically oriented developments in the social sciences for this period. One of them is from Gough and Olofsson, whose main interest became the interconnection of "social integration" and "social exclusion" (Gough and Olofsson 1999:1). How normative bases as well as institutional arrangements *per se* moderate conflicts and consensus in modern society appears a major theoretical concern for Berger (1998). One of the first unambiguous definitions of social cohesion is elaborated by Lockwood, for whom "social cohesion refers to a state of strong primary networks (like kinship and local voluntary organizations) at the communal level" (Lockwood 1992, quoted in Chan et al. 2006:276).

It is important to distinguish between two different conceptual visions of social cohesion based on their historical lineage that are circulating in academic and policy debates. One is traditional and one is contemporary. The traditional vision, particularly conceptualized by scholars studying a social order in societies, defined social cohesion as a relatively homogenizing concept that was based on the same values, culture, and identity as well as more traditional forms of social integration (Durkheim 1984; Simmel 1995; Tönnies 1957). The scientific history in French sociologist Émile Durkheim's writings begins with the conceptualization of social cohesion in cultural terms. The debate initiated in the social policy branch is defined with a strong focus on issues such as social inclusion and respect for social diversity. This debate carefully avoids the homogenizing property of the concept and defines it as an open concept for understanding a multicultural society (Council of Europe 2001:5).

Academic Development of the Concept

As mentioned above, the history of academic development of the term begins in Sociology when its French founding father Émile Durkheim, attempts to conceptualize the functional possibilities of newly emerged modern society (1984). To comprehend all the definitional challenges that are still pending, it is highly beneficial to recapture the conceptual basis that the author provides for the phenomenon of social cohesion.

He conceptualizes a strong correlation between the issue of social order and the state of social cohesion in society. It is important to note that Durkheim introduces the word *cohesion* (cohere) from natural science into a social science, precisely in sociology, to describe the state of social molecules. More specifically, by describing the state between social molecules in mechanical solidarity with the analogy of molecules in physical objects, he writes: *"The word does not mean that solidarity is produced by mechanical and artificial means. We only use this term for it by analogy with the cohesion that links together the elements of raw materials, in contrast to that which encompasses the unity of living organisms."* (Durkheim 1984:84)

Durkheim does not provide an explicit and clear definition of social cohesion; instead, it is often used interchangeably with other concepts such as social solidarity and collective consciousness. He also provides explanations for this conceptual confusion and definitional vagueness, stating: *"However, for the moment we need not concern ourselves with clarifying this question.*[2] *It is enough to state that these two orders of facts are linked, varying with each other simultaneously and directly"* (Durkheim 1984: 25). He also recognizes the challenges related to examination and empirical measurement of these terms due to their highly abstract characters:

[2] The author means the concepts of social cohesion and social solidarity and their intertwined characters.

"... social solidarity is completely a moral phenomenon which, taken by itself, does not lend itself to exact observation and indeed to measurement. To proceed to this classification and this comparison, we must substitute for this internal fact which escapes us an external index which symbolizes it and study the former in the light of the latter." (Durkheim 1893/1965: 64)

Defined as a state of collective consciousness in society, social cohesion is considered by Durkheim as a precondition of social solidarity, so that it appears to be a broader phenomenon than the solidarity *per se*. Social cohesion is conceptualized as a source for internalized normative systems that possess a moral power (mechanical solidarity) or institutional systems such as law and economic order based on the division of labor (organic solidarity).

The terms "social cohesion" and "social solidarity" are not only used interchangeably by the author but are also closely linked to the state of collective consciousness (*conscience collective*). Durkheim uses the notion of *cohésion sociale* as an equivalent of the term *conscience collective*. Solidarity is defined as a state of collective consciousness (*conscience collective*) that is commonly shared among members of society. According to Durkheim the social solidarity can exist *"because a certain number of states of consciousness are common to all members of the same society"* (Durkheim 1984:64). The collective consciousness itself is defined by Durkheim as *"the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. It can be termed the collective or common consciousness."* (Durkheim 1984: 38-9)

It becomes clear that the terms "social cohesion" and "social solidarity" both describe the state of collective consciousness in society as an abstract, intersubjective community. Though, as emphasized by the author, it is not easy to provide clarification and to distinguish these two orders of facts from each other, as they are linked and intertwined:

"… it is not easy to say whether it is social solidarity that produces these phenomena[3] *or, on the contrary, whether it is the result of them. Likewise, it is a moot point whether men draw closer to one another because of the strong effects of social solidarity, or whether it is strong because men have come closer together."* (Durkheim 1984:25)

Though it becomes also obvious that the concept of "*conscience collective"* has many other and fundamental meanings in Durkheim's work than social solidarity. Moreover, the *conscience collective* is explicitly defined as an essential precondition of solidarity:

"The (mechanical) solidarity that derives from similarities is at its maximum when the collective consciousness completely envelops our total consciousness, coinciding with it at every point." (Durkheim 1984:84)

The foundational base for the conceptualization of social cohesion and social solidarity is the intersubjective state of collective consciousness in society, more specifically, the relation between individual and collective personality. Based on the relation between the individual and collective consciousness and personality the author distinguishes two types of solidarity called as mechanical and organic: If mechanical solidarity *"is only possible in so far as the individual personality is absorbed into the collective personality",* the organic solidarity *"is only possible if each one of us has a sphere of action that is peculiarly our own, and consequently a personality."* (Durkheim 1984:85)

The form of solidarity characteristic of the pre-modern world – according to Durkheim – is defined as an analogy of molecules coherence in inorganic bodies, the cohesion that links together the elements of raw

[3] "(…) where it is strong it attracts men strongly to one other, ensures frequent contacts between them, and multiplies the opportunities available to them to enter into mutual relationships." (Durkheim 1984: 24-25.)

materials. That is regarded as artificial and mechanical. Compared to this pre-modern mechanical solidarity, modern solidarity is characterized by organic solidarity that unites living organisms and bonds individuals with their own movements to society:

"The social molecules that can only cohere in this one manner cannot therefore move as a unit save in so far as they lack any movements of their own, as do the molecules of inorganic bodies. This is why we suggest that this kind of solidarity should be called mechanical. The word does not mean that solidarity is produced by mechanical and artificial means. We only use this term for it by analogy with the cohesion that links together the elements of raw materials, in contrast to that which encompasses the unity of living organisms. What finally justifies the use of this term is the fact that the bond that unites the individual with society is completely analogous to that which links the thing to the person." (Durkheim 1984:84)

The organic solidarity characteristic of the modern era is defined by author as an opposing state of mind in society by stating that:

"Thus, the collective consciousness leaves uncovered a part of individual consciousness, so that there may be established in it those special functions that it cannot regulate. The more extensive this free area is, the stronger the cohesion that arises from this solidarity. Indeed, on the one hand each one of us depends more intimately upon society the more labor is divided up, and on the other, the activity of each one of us is correspondingly more specialized, the more personal it is. Doubtless, however circumscribed that activity may be, it is never completely original. Even in the exercise of our profession we conform to usages and practices that are common to us all within our corporation. Yet even in this case, the burden that we bear is in a different way less heavy than when the whole of society bears down upon us, and this leaves much more room for the free play of our initiative." (Durkheim 1984:85)

Second Generation of Theorizing: from Parsons to Lockwood

Within the discipline of sociology, social cohesion represents one of the most fundamental theoretical concepts. There is still an absence of clarity regarding the meaning of social cohesion and how it can be measured. It would be legitimate to note that many fundamental theoretical paradigms in sociology revolve around the concept of social cohesion (Mizruchi 1990). It is a fact that most sociologists have paid attention to the fundamental questions, such as social integration and stability, as well as their systemic analysis. Though the empirically grounded conceptualization of social cohesion has been always left on the secondary priority list (Chan et al. 2006).

If we overview the appearance of the concept of social cohesion in its earlier stages of development, we will observe that the notion is closely linked to the large-scale and rapid societal, political, and economic changes that questioned the existing forms as well as perceptions of social unity, social order, stability, and societal cohesiveness. As mentioned above, historically, we can identify two main waves in the development of the concept in general when scholars recognize the disquieting effects of complex social transformations. Though there can also be two different stages identified during the first wave of academic development of the concept within sociology. The first stage, as defined above, is related to the early period of modernization when Émile Durkheim, by borrowing the natural science term cohesion, tries to identify the functional mechanism of social unity in early modernity (Durkheim 1915, 1984). This is followed by another stage of changes dated in the interwar period (1918-1939) when Parsons (1937, 1951) attempts to find foundations for social unity and its equilibrium. By extending the structural functionalism to the system theory, the author emphasizes the dominant power of the cultural system (that is predominantly defined as a value system) over the personality system with an aim to find a solution to the problem of social

order. By doing so, the author ascribes an additional feature to the values that function as having moral power in a society. A more recent (third) wave of changes is related to the era of globalization (Jenson 1998), when the rising trend of migration and economic fragmentation fosters the debates around the issue of social cohesion most critically.

Parsons returns to the concept of social cohesion and social unity in the period of further fundamental shifts in the social and political sphere of the 1930s, which are followed by continued crisis in societies and rising questions related to the issues of social order, stability and cohesion (Parsons 1937). In comparison to Durkheim who refers to the social division of labor in the rising trends of modern differentiation and diversity as a fostering force for social cohesion in societies, Parsons recognizes the threats of existing trends and identifies the solution in the shared values. The internalized value system with a moral power is assumed by the author as essential to holding together the functionally differentiated systems and their subsystems. He elaborates the functionalist approach according to which society is considered a social system composed of various independent subsystems. Institutionalization and socialization processes are considered as main mechanisms for reproducing shared values in societies. In fact, Parsons begins his theorization from the individual actor as a unit of analysis, defined as a reflexive and creative individual who follows his own "*Voluntas*". The dilemma arises in his scheme relating to the foundational mechanism of unity among the individually determined actors' actions. This question is later solved by introducing the concept of "shared values". Through the socialization process, values become internalized from the cultural into the personal system and hold unity in the social system due to their moral power.

Some later-developed theoretical frameworks emphasize the importance of social cohesion in societal integration and define it as one of two levels of social integration. "Social cohesion", together with "civic

integration" (institutional order at the macro-societal level), represents two levels of social integration, which concern the "orderly or conflictual relationships between actors of society" (Lockwood 1992:377). Scholars also define the role and strength of primary networks in generating social cohesion. Lockwood itself defines social cohesion as "a state of strong primary networks (like kinship and local voluntary organizations at the communal level (Lockwood 1999, quoted in Chan et al. 2006:275). What is unique in Lockwood's definition is that social cohesion implies the one pole of the conditional duality of social life (cohesion/dissolution, integration/corruption).

Recent developments in sociological theory suggest that scholars primarily focus on issues of social integration and social stability, while giving less attention to the conceptualization of social cohesion in itself. Although valuable insights are offered in other social disciplines, such as social psychology, anthropology, etc., as well as in social theory in general, the theoretically grounded and operationally measurable definitions remain a significant challenge in academic literature to this day.

Policy Debates on Social Cohesion

The policy debates on the issue of social cohesion do not have the same long history as the academic debate, as they primarily began in the late 1980s and expanded significantly from the mid 1990s in response to the increased political agenda of overcoming rising societal fragmentation. This tradition shares similarities with the academic one, particularly in its essential conceptual foundations, macro-scale analytical instruments, and top-down theoretical frameworks. Although there are some nuances in conceptual redefinition corresponding to the policy agenda, per se. One of the definitive characteristics in policy debates is the problem-driven future of the concept of social cohesion (Chan et al. 2006).

What unites both academic and policy debates is a definition of the concept of social cohesion in macro-structural terms, such as society, the state, etc. (Durkheim 1984; Parsons 1937; Gough and Olafson 1999; Jenson 2010; Chan et al. 2006). The issue of how social cohesion is created and generated through specific processes, and which social factors contribute to its enhancement or decline at the local community level, remains insufficiently explored in both trends. It is worth noting that Lockwood (1999) was responsible for one of the most important studies on social cohesion at the micro level, which stressed the importance of social generativity in generating cohesion.

One of the characteristics of recent policy research is a top-down perspective while framing the concept of social cohesion. This is particularly evident in the official documents of both national governments and international organizations that address the issue of social cohesion. In the official definition of the Council of Europe, social cohesion is described "as society's ability to secure the long- term well-being of all its members, including equitable access to available resources, respect for human dignity with due regard for diversity, personal and collective autonomy and responsible participation." (Council of Europe 2005:23)

The essential role is attributed to the state in offering and producing the socio-economic and political conditions for citizens, in which they can prosper. This proposal fails to acknowledge the power of generative processes within the local realities, as well as the role of different actors and mechanisms in the creation and development of social cohesion.

The initiation of a policy debate on the issue of social cohesion is primarily associated with the Canadian government and European Union institutions. These debates encouraged researchers to develop conceptual schemes and empirical instruments for understanding the phenomenon. More specifically, the development of social cohesion as a policy agenda started in Canada from 1990s as a federal government project for the

promotion of multiculturalism and citizen's inclusion and participation: "a cohesive and inclusive society depends on respect for all ethnic groups and the fullest possible participation of all citizens in civic life" (Department of Cultural Heritage of Canada 2001:7). It should also be emphasized that one of the renewed and most referenced attempts of conceptual and operational works of social cohesion is initiated by Canadian political scientists and sociologists (Maxwell 1996; Beauvais and Jenson 2002; Jenson 1998; Bernard 1999).

Social cohesion as a policy agenda has been further extended by the EU and covered issues such as economic and social development and growth. Furthermore, the Council of Europe defined social cohesion as an essential condition of democratic development of society. More specifically, in the 1990s, the question of social cohesion was placed high on the agenda in European institutions such as the European Commission and the European Council. Social cohesion, together with the economy, has been declared by the European Union (EU) as a major policy goal. In 2001, the Council of Europe provided a more detailed understanding of the concept with two significant preconditions (Jenson 2010); The first refers to the requirement of distance from a more traditional vision of social cohesion which emphasizes the "homogeneity" and consensus towards values that may be regarded as a cause for damage of respect for social diversity. The second precondition for understanding the concept is a rejection of the necessity for the provision of a real definition of the concept. This requirement is regarded as strategic for enhancing the possibility of growing policy initiatives: "it does not define social cohesion as such but seeks to identify some of the factors in social cohesion..." (Council of Europe 2001:15).

The definition itself follows this way:

"The Council of Europe does not see social cohesion as being a homogenizing concept that is only based on traditional forms of social integration, which

nonetheless are important, such as: identity, the sharing of the same culture, adhering to the same values. It is a concept for an open and multicultural society. The meaning of this concept can differ according to the socio-political environment in which it evolves. ... From an operational point of view, a strategy of social cohesion refers to any kind of action which ensures that every citizen, every individual, can have within their community the opportunity of access: to the means to secure their basic needs; to progress; to protection and legal rights; to dignity and social confidence. Any insufficiency of access to any of these fields operates against social cohesion." (Council of Europe 2001: 5)

According to the Directorate General of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe, social cohesion is defined not only in terms of shared values among citizens but also associated with fundamental social and economic rights. Social cohesion is a concept that

"…includes values and principles which aim to ensure that all citizens, without discrimination and on an equal footing, have access to fundamental social and economic rights. Social cohesion is a flagship concept which constantly reminds us of the need to be collectively attentive to, and aware of, any kind of discrimination, inequality, marginality or exclusion." (Council of Europe 2001)

The sense of belonging and connectedness among individuals was defined as a consequence of social cohesion in society by the French government in 1997. The social cohesion itself was regarded as a complexity of social processes: "social cohesion is a set of social processes that help instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognized as members of that community." (Plan 1997: 16, quoted in Jenson 1998: 4)

In his later revised Strategy for Cohesion (2004), the Council of Europe focused more on the diversity (ethnic, religious) and polarization as a potential threat to social stability, and linked social cohesion almost to democracy *per se*:

"As understood by the Council of Europe, social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means." (Council of Europe 2004:3-4)

Since 1960, there has been particular interest shown by various international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth Secretariat, in the developmental challenges of small states in the context of decolonization.

The international policy actors (among them OECD, the World Bank) recognized the fact of how entangled the sectors of economic development and socio-cultural conditions of societies were with each other (Ritzen et al. 2000). This added to the issue of social cohesion more relevance and policy currency. Moreover, the very idea of social cohesion encapsulates all those challenges and problems to which the current democratic governments and international organizations are faced. This could be one of the explanations for the problem-driven character of policy discourse on the issue of social cohesion in comparison to the academic one (Chan et al. 2006).

Besides various attempts made by policy analysts in conceptualizing the phenomenon, the authors emphasize the fact that the concept of social cohesion has been inadequately and inappropriately defined in the provided policy literature (Chan et al. 2001).

Confronted with a solution to policy problems, policymakers forced the process of re-conceptualization and operationalization of social cohesion for the purpose of elaborating an empirical measurement instrument. This contributed to extending the literature on the conceptualization and operationalization of the phenomenon characterized by diversity and complexity.

One of the first attempts of conceptualization in this line was introduced by Canadian policy theorist Judith Maxwell (1996), who built her version significantly on the definition provided by Rosell (Rosell et al. 1995). The author understands social cohesion not only in terms of its cultural but also social and economic conditions of communities: "Social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community"(Rosell 1995, quoted in Judith Maxwell 1996:13). The driving forces for generating social cohesion, which, for the author, appears also as an outcome of social capital, are the shared challenges, ethnic or religious ties, shared ideology, and social institutions, that provide bases for consensus around values in society.

To summarize, policy debate appears largely defined by its problem-driven features, following its political agenda, and is less engaged with overcoming the limitations of theoretical and conceptual bases for social cohesion. Instead, its vagueness and consequential flexibility, as well as adaptability to various situations, are regarded as suited to the necessities of political actions (Bernard 1999: 2). That is why Paul Bernard described social cohesion as a "quasi-concept" with "hybrid" and adaptable properties to political aims:

... "'*hybrid" because these constructions have two faces: they are, on the one hand, based, in part and selectively, on an analysis of the data of the situation, which allows them to be relatively realistic and to benefit from the aura of legitimacy conferred by the scientific method; and they maintain, on the other hand, a vagueness that makes them adaptable to various situations, flexible enough to follow the meanderings and necessities of political action from day to day.*" (Bernard 1999: 2)

The Definitional Challenges of Social Cohesion

Constituent and causal elements of social cohesion, intertwined concepts, multidimensionality and multilevel aspects of social cohesion

One of the main challenges in defining the term social cohesion is related to the confusion that exists among authors regarding the constituent and causal elements of the phenomenon. The first is referred to as integrative components that define social cohesion, and the second as its conditional effects that may operate as a promoter for cohesiveness in society (Chan et al. 2006; Dickes et al. 2010; Bottoni 2018). The concept is defined in terms of the condition by those authors who understand the phenomenon predominantly from the "means-end approach". They assume a cohesive society as an end goal and simultaneously as a significant means that ensures this end. One of the examples for this is the conceptual model provided by Berger-Schmitt (2000), who defines the phenomenon in terms of the conditions, such as social capital and social inclusion, that produces cohesiveness in society (Berger-Schmitt 2000:4). The confusion between the conditional and constitutive elements is characteristic of other definitions as well as their associated measurement instruments. One is provided by Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD 2000), in which a list of indicators can be considered as factors that potentially contribute to cohesiveness in society, rather than as constitutive elements that produce cohesion. In this approach, social cohesion can be equal to inclusion, participation, poverty reduction, etc. In the conceptual model of social cohesion provided by Jane Jenson (1998), dimensions such as *recognition/rejection* can also be regarded as conditional elements that can promote cohesiveness in society as long as they do not form a real constituent element of the phenomenon (Chan et al. 2006). Many authors try to elaborate a definition that will be composed only of essential constituent elements of social cohesion rather than its potential causes or effects. For this very reason, Chan et al. (2006) exclude indicators

such as “inclusion”, “equal opportunity”, “tolerance”, as well as “shared values” from his measurement scheme. The issue of which elements constitute and which ones promote social cohesion in societies has not been resolved yet, which again reveals a lack of theorization and a conceptual basis of the phenomenon.

Intertwined Concepts

A whole family of concepts is utilized when discussing social cohesion. Some of them are used almost interchangeably, not only in policy documents but also in scholarly literature. The considerable extent of conceptual overlap can result in their appearance as synonymous and inextricably entangled. The conceptual clarification would be helpful to prevent any misperceptions when conceptualizing and operationalizing it (Giardiello 2014). The most commonly used counterparts of social cohesion appear to be social integration, social solidarity, social capital, etc., which will be explored separately in the following sections.

Integration and Social Cohesion

Concepts of social cohesion and social integration are used almost interchangeably, not only in policy documents but also in scholarly literature. Though there are some essential conceptual divergences among them that should be carefully considered in their usage as synonymous peers. The academic literature on social cohesion indicates that it can operate as a fundamental prerequisite for fostering social integration. Additionally, social cohesion is considered to be the micro dimension of social integration associated essentially with primary and secondary relationships. It is defined by bonding and bridging ties that foster social integrity and enhance connections within communities.

Lockwood (1999) identifies social cohesion as a key component of social integration. He examines social integration by distinguishing between two independent levels: micro-level social cohesion and macro-level civic integration. According to this analytical distinction, social cohesion – considered at the micro level of social relations – is associated with primary social interrelationships. They are predominantly instated within a local community, such as families, relatives, neighborhoods, as well as secondary social relationships such as social associations, and civic integration. Such secondary social relationships refer to the universality of rules and rights, the institutional order that is extended to the whole national level. It is worth noting that these two levels that constitute the social integration are "analytically and empirically distinguishable" (Lockwood 1999:65). Though, despite their independent character, the author also describes the mutual interrelations developed between them.

Lockwood (1999:65) argues that "although social cohesion and civic integration are analytically and empirically distinguishable (as in the case of social versus system integration), it is also the case that civic corruption beyond a certain point will affect social cohesion, just as a widespread social dissolution will threaten civic integration". Therefore, he emphasizes the importance of mutual coordination between these levels of integration. Only when both levels of social integration coexist can the conditions for the development of a good society be established. Conversely, pathological asynchronies between these levels can arise, potentially harming social integration.

Social integration, which, according to Lockwood (1999), is constituted by social cohesion and civic integration, differs from systemic integration. In line with this differentiation, Lockwood considers social cohesion as a micro aspect of social integration, not able to affect society as a system, but rather all those actors who are involved in the primary and secondary relations inside the community.

One of the notable differences between social integration and social cohesion is the conceptual assumption regarding the nature of relationships among individuals. The concept of social integration is primarily defined by functions and dysfunctions, highlighting the relationships between individuals based on their roles in society. Thus, the main source of social integration is found in the functional roles that individuals or actors play within the social structure. Social cohesion, from its origin, has been defined as a cultural concept that emphasizes the feature of interconnections and interrelationships between individuals, not only from functional but rather socio-cultural perspectives (Durkheim 1984).

It is also noticeable that the social integration theories do not define relationships between actors as harmonious but emphasize the disharmony and conflict as their inseparable parameters. Additionally, the term social integration refers to a face-to-face interaction that occurs in co-presence (Lockwood 1999).

Some authors differentiate between the concepts of cohesion and social integration based on their sources. Social cohesion is primarily defined by interpersonal attraction, while social integration is characterized by instrumental interdependence, or functional integration. Both types of group structures can be identified within society and are generated by social bonds or strong interconnections among individuals. This classification resembles the classical distinction between pre-modern and modern forms of solidarity, as described by Emile Durkheim, which he characterized as mechanical and organic. According to Markovsky and Lawler (1988), this distinction is redefined as interpersonal attraction and integration (Shelly and Bassin 1999). More specifically, mechanical solidarity, which is based on affective choices, is identified as interpersonal connection, while organic solidarity, rooted in instrumental choices, is recognized as functional integration. They highlight how cohesion and

functional integration can differ independently of each other (Shelly and Bassin 1999:145).

Solidarity and Social Cohesion

Another synonymous term commonly used in both policy and academic literature to refer to social cohesion is solidarity. These terms are often used interchangeably, and their meanings have rarely been clearly specified. One possible reason for this is the classical conceptualizations of the concepts. Notably, both terms have been used interchangeably by their intellectual inventor, Emile Durkheim (Durkheim 1984). While the author does not provide the exact definitions, he highlights essential conceptual distinctions between terms.

Defined as a state of collective consciousness in society, social cohesion is considered by Durkheim (1984) as a precondition of social solidarity among people, so that it appears to be a broader phenomenon than solidarity *per se*. It appears that, based on the internalized normative systems with moral power (mechanical solidarity), on low and even on economic order related to the division of labor in society (organic solidarity), can foster solidarity in society.

One significant similarity between the concepts of social cohesion and social solidarity is that both describe the state of collective consciousness within a society. As the author notes, it is challenging to clearly differentiate between these two concepts because they are linked and intertwined. More precisely, Durkheim argues:

"… it is not easy to say whether it is social solidarity that produces these phenomena or, on the contrary, whether it is the result of them. Likewise, it is a moot point whether men draw closer to one another because of the strong effects of social solidarity, or whether it is strong because men have come closer together... It is enough to state that these two orders of facts are linked, varying with each other simultaneously and directly." (Durkheim 1984: 25).

Due to their highly abstract and complex nature, the concepts of solidarity and social cohesion have not been considered suitable for empirical analysis. More precisely, Durkheim notes,

"Social solidarity is a wholly moral phenomenon which by itself is not amenable to exact observation and especially not to measurement" (Durkheim 1984:24).

He further explains that social cohesion

"…can only be thoroughly known through its social effects" (Durkheim 1984:27).

As Durkheim defines solidarity as a social fact, he asserts that

"the study of solidarity lies within the domain of sociology" (Durkheim 1984:27).

In later literature on this topic, Markovsky and Lawler (1988, quoted in Mizruchi 1990) provide some clarifications. They distinguish social cohesion from solidarity, particularly in terms of the unity of group structure. Social cohesion is defined as follows: "A set of actors is cohesive to the degree that it has high reachability" (1988:11, quoted in Mizruchi 1990). This means that the social ties among the members of the group are very strong. They further explain that "a solidarity group is a set of actors with high reachability and unity of structure" (Markovsky and Lawler 1988:12, quoted in Mizruchi 1990). This indicates that the group's structure is so cohesive that there are no subgroups present. It is important to note that in sociological literature, unity does not necessarily equate to integration, and it is not entirely clear which of the

two concepts is more definitive. Parsons (1951) defines group solidarity and cohesion as essential for achieving and maintaining integrity. More specifically, he describes solidarity as the "commonness of the value-orientation patterns of the participants in a system of social integration" (Parsons 1951:96). According to Moore (1979), integration is regarded as a means of generating and fostering unity (Moore 1979:674-675). Simmel (1922) defines unity as the ultimate synthesis of a group. More specifically, he describes it as "the consensus and concord of interacting individuals, as against their discords, separations, and dis-harmonies. But we also call "unity" the total group-synthesis of persons, energies, and forms, that is, the ultimate wholeness of that group, a wholeness which covers both strictly speaking unitary relations and dualistic relations." (Simmel 1922:17)

Most definitions of solidarity emphasize the mobilization of individual recourses toward collective goals; However, this perspective alone does not fully capture the complexity of social cohesion. For example, Hechter (1987) defines group solidarity as "the average proportion of each member's private resources contributed to collective ends" (Hechter 1987:18). Additionally, for pluralist theorist Dahl (1961), solidarity as a resource of political system describes "the capacity of a member of one segment of society to evoke support from others who identify him as like themselves because of similarities in occupation, social standing, religion, ethnic origin, or racial stock." (Dahl 1961:226)

Social Capital and Social Cohesion

Social capital is another concept often used interchangeably with social cohesion. Authors emphasize the inconsistency in the conceptualization and operationalization of social capital and social cohesion, pointing out their unique and distinctive characteristics (Portes and Vickstrom 2011).

The concept of social capital gained significant attention following Robert Putnam's influential work, where he defined it as "features of social organization, such as networks, norm and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits" (Putnam 1993:36). From this widely accepted definition, it becomes clear that there are explicit differences between these two terms. One of the fundamental differences between social capital and social cohesion lies in the scale of reference for each term. The social capital refers to the networks and relationships maintained at the individual and group levels. In contrast, social cohesion describes the state of social organization on a broader scale, offering a more holistic view of overall societal conditions. This difference indicates that a high level of social capital accumulated in group networks does not necessarily lead to greater social cohesion in society. For instance, in highly segregated interreligious or interethnic contexts, the strongly developed networks among the members of the same group may not extend to the wider society, resulting in a lack of cohesiveness and interethnic or interreligious ties. In fact, in such intergroup settings, this dynamic can operate in the opposite direction.

The terms *social cohesion* and *social capital* are interrelated as far as their semantic connotations intersect each other closely. Social cohesion refers to the level of interconnectedness and solidarity among individuals and groups within a society, whereas social capital is a resource for individuals that enables collective action by fostering interpersonal trust, norms of reciprocity, and mutual support (Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993). As noted by Kawachi and Berkman, "a cohesive society is also one that is richly endowed with a stock of social capital" (2014:175). Therefore, it can be said that "social capital thus forms a subset of the notion of social cohesion." (Kawachi and Berkman 2014:175)

Long before political scientist Robert Putnam redefined and popularized the concept of social capital in 1993, the term had already been extensively explored in sociology. Notably, French sociologist Pierre Bour-

dieu (Bourdieu 1979, 1980; Wacquant 2000) contributed significantly to its conceptualization in the late 1970s and 1980s, while American sociologist James S. Coleman also provided important contributions in 1988. Pierre Bourdieu views social capital primarily as an individual and familial relational asset. In contrast, Robert Putnam's later elaborated version in political science (1993) defines social capital at the community and societal level as a public good. Putnam emphasizes that social capital is cultivated through participation of citizens in civic and political institutions at both the state and national levels, relying on trust among individuals. For him, "social capital … refers [to] features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 1993:167). Bourdieu argues that social capital arises from the networks of relationships surrounding individuals and families, so that it appears inherent to them. This social capital can then be transformed into other forms of capital, such as economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1979, 1980; Wacquant 2000).

James Coleman emphasizes the importance of the density of social ties, which contributes to the enforcement of norms within a community. His concept of "community closure" highlights how these ties can decline in the modern world, characterized by increasing individualism and erosion of relational connections (Coleman 1988, 1990). Community closure refers to the density of social ties and strong connections among members who share mutual knowledge.

According to Coleman (1990), "social capital is defined by its functions. It is not a single entity, but rather a variety of different entities that share two common characteristics: they all involve aspects of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions for individuals within that structure. Similar to other forms of capital, social capital is productive, enabling the achievement of certain goals that would be unattainable without it" (1990:302). In this context, the author refers to factors such as levels of trustworthiness, the

presence of obligations, a normative system with effective sanctions, social institutions, and channels of information. On the other hand, for Pierre Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition (Bourdieu 1986:248). More precisely, the "social capital is the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119)

It is evident that in sociological tradition, the conceptualization of the term social capital does not elicit much controversy (Bourdieu 1979; Coleman 1988), as it all stresses the networks of relationships among individuals and families that produce the consequential density of ties. Though it reveals a distinctive operational structure of social capital to social cohesion, with its community-level operational functions, it forms a base and produces resources for the cohesiveness of social organizations on a broader scale. While social capital is typically associated with specific communities or sub-state entities, social cohesion pertains to society as a whole. Any breakdown of social cohesion can be assessed on a macro level by examining both inter-community and intra-community conflicts (Green et al. 2006). In essence, social cohesion captures the dynamics of intergroup relations on a societal scale, in contrast to social capital, which is recognized as a local-level phenomenon.

Multidimensionality and Multilevel Aspects of Social Cohesion

One of the main reasons for the ambiguity surrounding the concept of social cohesion is its multidimensional nature. While social cohesion can be measured at both the individual and group levels (through empirical data),

it is ultimately seen as a societal phenomenon, meaning it reflects the characteristics of society as a whole. (Durkheim 1984; Parsons 1937; Jenson 1998; Chan et al. 2006; Dickes et al. 2013). Social cohesion can be measured at multiple levels, including cross-national, regional, national, community, and neighborhood levels. It can also be evaluated within different groups or communities, such as religious groups and cities. Whelan and Maître (2005) identify three levels of analysis for social cohesion: micro, meso, and macro. The micro level focuses on the interrelationships among individuals. The meso level refers to the relationships between individuals and groups, while the macro level examines the interrelationships among individuals and society as a whole (Whelan and Maître 2005).

Generally, the most common levels used to measure social cohesion are cross-national, national, and country levels (Acket et al. 2011; Dickes and Valentova 2013). Social cohesion as a societal characteristic can be attributed to the sovereign state. As a unit of analysis, the sovereign state represents society within a political and institutional community, along with its socio-cultural attributes. This framework allows for comparisons of social cohesion profiles across different countries (Dickes et al. 2010, 2013; Dickes and Valentova 2013; Acket et al. 2011). It is also useful for providing cross-country comparisons based on different timelines. While macro-scale analyses of social cohesion are well-developed, the profile and formation mechanisms of social cohesion at the micro level – such as within small local communities, neighborhoods, and intergroup settings – remain insufficiently explored. Some studies on community cohesion (Paxton 1999) have shown its role in reducing crime rates (Sampson and Groves 1989). Although small group cohesiveness has attracted significant interest, particularly among urban researchers and social psychologists, who have conducted extensive empirical studies at the community and group levels (Kearns and Forrest 2000; Botterman, Hooghe, and Reeskens 2012), the community or neighborhood as a unit

of analysis is still largely under-researched. This lack of investigation is linked to various challenges.

Although the category of space is regarded as a facilitator of geographic closeness among people, social constructs like community and neighborhood can be more fluid in their geographical and spatial configurations. This fluidity can make it challenging for researchers to define and identify these social constructs (community and neighborhood). It is common for individuals living in the same geographical area to be part of multiple communities as well as their own neighborhoods.

Scholars try to convert this highly complex phenomenon into a measurable and operational one by identifying specific dimensions that classify various group characteristics. Canadian political scientist Jane Jenson (1998) identified five dimensions of social cohesion, each represented through three domains: social, political, and economic. The five original dimensions are: belonging/isolation, inclusion/exclusion, participation/ non-involvement, recognition/ rejection, and legitimacy/illegitimacy. Later, Bernard (1999) expanded this framework by adding a sixth dimension: equality/inequality.

Kearns and Forrest (2000) provide a comprehensive overview of the literature and identify five key elements in the conceptualization of social cohesion. These elements are: 1) common values and a civic culture; 2) social order and social control; 3) social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities; 4) social networks and social capital; and 5) territorial belonging and identity. According to the authors, these dimensions are intersected and interlinked so that they have an impact upon one another. According to authors, "a social cohesive society is one in which the members share common values which enable them to identify common aims and objectives, and share a common set of moral principles and codes of behavior through which to conduct their relations with one another." (Kearns and Forrest 2000:997)

Judith Maxwell defines social cohesion through cultural, social, and economic dimensions, explicitly focusing on its analysis at the societal level (1996:13). Specifically, she states that "social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community." (Maxwell 1996: 13)

The debate surrounding the appropriate level of analysis for examining social cohesion is closely related to the question of whether the concept refers to subjective or objective phenomena. Is it a product of individual perceptions, or is it rooted in societal structures? Useem (1984) defines social cohesion in terms of both subjective components, such as mutual trust and obligation, as well as a common sense of identity and culture, and objective components, like dense networks of acquaintances and institutions that reinforce a shared identity. He states, "social cohesion implies that the inner circle is truly a circle: acquaintanceship networks are dense, mutual trust and obligation are widespread, and a common sense of identity and culture prevail. All these features are embodied and reinforced in a variety of social institutions, ranging from clubs to intermarriage. While social cohesion is not a necessary precondition for mobilization, it is a powerful facilitator." (Useem 1984:63)

In contrast to most objective frameworks of social cohesion, which often overlook the individual perceptions of group members regarding their cohesion with a specific group, sociologist Kenneth A. Bollen and psychologist Rick H. Hoyle (1990) emphasize the significance of subjective perceptions of cohesion. They define social cohesion not as a societal construct but instead as a group phenomenon. The authors offer a theoretical definition of perceived cohesion as "an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership in that group." (Bollen and Hoyle 1990:482)

They identify two key dimensions of cohesion: a sense of belonging and a feeling of morale. The sense of belonging is vital for fostering cohesion among group members, while the feeling of morale plays a crucial role in achieving organizational goals. Their measurement tool, the Perceived Cohesion Scale (PCS), consists of six items designed to assess these two dimensions of cohesion. Additionally, they provide a conceptual distinction between two perspectives of cohesion: objective and perceived (subjective). The objective perspective pertains to the overall characteristics of the group, including the reported closeness among its members. In contrast, the perceived perspective focuses on each individual's self-assessment of their standing within the group. Researchers subsequently interpret this distinction between the two perspectives as subjective and objective levels of social cohesion. The subjective perspective emphasizes attitudes and individuals' state of mind, whereas the objective perspective addresses behavioral manifestations. These are also described as attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (Moody and White 2003; Dickes et al. 2010; Bottoni 2018). Social psychologists primarily view social cohesion as an individual characteristic associated with a person's psychological feelings (Bollen and Hoyle 1990), as well as the connections between individuals within small and intermediate groups (McPherson et al. 2001).

If we briefly explore both classical and contemporary social science literature on social cohesion, we can identify a normative model of society where cohesion and solidarity are maintained through individual socialization and the acceptance of the group's normative system (Durkheim 1894). This model emphasizes that these norms are internalized within an individual's personal belief system (Parsons 1951:201-248). This indicates that individuals can maintain cohesion with the internalized normative systems of their groups and societies without relying on external social pressure (Parsons 1951; Hechter 1987). According to the normative paradigm, external pressure or sanction is often viewed as insufficient for maintaining social

order (Mizruchi 1990). According to Hechter, "to the degree that members identify with a group's norms – and carry these norms, as it were, within them – they can be expected to engage in the appropriate behaviors without sanctioning" (Hechter 1987:20). In such a normative model, where solidarity is regarded as "a function of normative internalization", social cohesion could be considered as a subjective experience (Hechter 1987:20).

In classical sociological traditions since Durkheim, solidarity, or social cohesion, is viewed "as a property of social structure rather than a property of aggregations of individuals" (Mizruchi 1992:41). Theorists associated with traditions of structural sociology tend to define social cohesion as an objective phenomenon that can be measured. For instance, Peter Blau (1977) defines social cohesion in terms of a group's social structure, placing particular emphasis on the density of relationships within the group. Here, density is defined as the number of actual relationships between group members divided by the number of possible relationships (Blau 1977).

In these definitions, social cohesion is explicitly understood as a social relationship rather than merely a shared sentiment or feeling between individuals. However, what specifically constitutes the relationships within a group remains an open question. While normative sentiments certainly play a role, similar economic interests can also contribute to these relationships.

The formation of social cohesiveness is a complex process that occurs across multiple dimensions and levels. It involves various institutions, networks, and both formal and informal organizations. Importantly, it is essential to recognize that "a specific social infrastructure is necessary to encourage individuals to engage as social beings. This infrastructure should promote the exploration of community capabilities and create opportunities for cooperation." (Maesen 2001:154)

An essential source of social cohesion at the micro, individual level are personal relationships. However, for these relationships to function effectively, a specific social infrastructure is required that encourages people to

act as social beings and to cooperate. A key aspect of social cohesion is the restoration of social ties, which enables individuals to become active citizens and fosters dialogue between them and various sectors – including political, economic, civil, and cultural. This dialogue is considered a prerequisite for a democratic society (Vobruba 1999:89). Furthermore, "the reciprocity between structures and processes, and it concerns the dialectic between interacting citizens as social beings and operations of institutions, organizations and multinational enterprises" (Beck et al. 2001). Though it is important to note that a sense of belonging and collective identity does not solely arise from institutional reforms. Instead, there must be reciprocity between structures and processes. These involve a "…dialectic between interacting citizens as social beings and operations of institutions." (Beck et al. 2001)

Empirical Operationalization and Measurement Instruments of Social Cohesion

The empirical measurement of social cohesion is closely related to a specific operational definition that dominates the policy agendas of international organizations. However, this definition remains rather ambiguous. The pluralistic approach to social cohesion has gained significant traction in policy discussions (Chan et al. 2006). This perspective acknowledges that defining the complex concept of social cohesion can yield multiple interpretations. The ontology associated with this approach suggests that a single, universally accepted definition of social cohesion may never be achievable. Embracing this theoretical ambiguity is justified by the critical importance of social cohesion in current development and the urgent need for effective policy analysis in this area (Chan et al. 2006).

One of the earliest examples of a pluralistic approach is Jenson's (1998) multidimensional conceptual framework for social cohesion. This framework is based on O'Connor's (1998) empirical work, as well as on

official documents regarding social cohesion from Canada, France, the OECD, and the Club of Rome (Bernard 1999; Jenson 1998). Jenson explicitly adopts a pluralistic perspective, stating that "there is no single way of even defining it. Meanings depend on the problem being addressed and who is speaking" (Jenson 1998:17). The multidimensional framework is illustrated through five dichotomous constructions, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *The multidimensional scheme by Jane Jenson*

1. **Belonging v. isolation –** The dichotomous constructs refer to the existence or absence of shared values and a sense of identity as well as a sense of being part of the same community (Jenson 1998:15).
2. **Inclusion v. exclusion –** This dichotomous pair refers to the equality of opportunity among citizens in the economic domain and labor market (Jenson 1998:15).
3. **Participation v. non-involvement –** This pair construct implies people's political participation at the local as well as the central levels of government (Jenson 1998:16).
4. **Recognition v. rejection –** This dimensional pair implies pluralism, acceptance, and recognition for difference or tolerance for diversity in society (Jenson 1998:16).
5. **Legitimacy v. illegitimacy –** This dichotomous construction refers to the maintenance of legitimacy of public (major political) and private (social institutions) that act as mediators among individuals of different interests in conflicts (Jenson 1998:16-17).

The key question regarding the various multidimensional conceptual models of social cohesion is whether the identified dimensions fully encompass the entire concept. This concern led Bernard (1999) to expand

Jenson's five dimensions into six, categorizing each dimension by its formal/attitudinal and substantial/behavioral aspects, as well as by the three relevant areas: economic, political, and sociocultural. By viewing social cohesion as a dynamic balance among values such as freedom, equality, and solidarity, Bernard (1999) introduces the dimension of equality/inequality to the multidimensional framework, addressing issues of social equity and justice within the economic domain (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Typology of the dimensions of social cohesion by Bernard (1999)*

Character of relation **Spheres of activity**	**Formal**	**Substantial**
Economic	Insertion/Exclusion	Equality/Inequality
Political	Legitimacy/Illegitimacy	Participation/Passivity
Sociocultural	Recognition/Rejection	Belonging/Isolation

In her later work, Jenson (2002), along with Beauvais, redefined the concept by introducing five possible modes. This expanded the scope of Jenson's earlier work (1998) by incorporating the ideas of social order and social control. These conceptual models can also be described as a pluralistic approach to social cohesion: 1. Social cohesion as common values and a civic culture; 2. Social cohesion as social order and social control; 3. Social cohesion as social solidarity and reduction in wealth disparities; 4. Social cohesion as social networks and social capital; and 5. Social cohesion as place attachment and identity.

In her writings, Regina Berger-Schmitt (2002:404–405) identifies two dimensions of the concept: The first one, referred to as the inequality dimension, focuses on promoting equal opportunities and reducing disparities and divisions within society. This dimension also addresses

issues related to social exclusion. The second one is known as the social capital dimension. It aims to strengthen social relations, interactions, and connections, encompassing all aspects that are generally regarded as the social capital of a society (Berger-Schmitt 2002:404–405).

Chan et al. (2006) propose a multidimensional operational model of social cohesion, based on a "minimalistic" definition of the concept. Social cohesion is described as "a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of a society, as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust, a sense of belonging, and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations" (Chan et al. 2006:290). In defining social cohesion, Chan et al. (2006) emphasize the importance of distinguishing between the "constituent" and "determinant" elements, ultimately excluding the latter from the definition. The author views the economic domain – specifically equality and social inclusion – as an important factor among many others, rather than as a fundamental component (constituent element) of social cohesion. As a result, the economic aspect is excluded from the definition of social cohesion. Additionally, the author distinguishes between two types of interactions: "vertical" and "horizontal." The "vertical" interactions refer to the relationships between the state and society, while the "horizontal" interactions pertain to relationships among various individuals and groups within society. Consequently, Chan's multidimensional measurement model includes two dimensions (horizontal vs. vertical) of social cohesion, along with two components (objective vs. subjective). This framework is therefore described as a two-by-two model for measurement (Chan et al. 2006).

The subjective component includes items such as trust, a sense of belonging, and the willingness to cooperate and help others. In contrast, the objective component focuses on measurable actions, including actual cooperation and participation among members of society. This

model differs from those proposed by Berger-Schmitt (2002), as well as Duhaime et al. (2004) and Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD 2000), by excluding economic dimensions typically linked to socio-economic factors that may promote social cohesion. Instead, these economic dimensions are considered external to the core elements of social cohesion. Additionally, values such as tolerance are also omitted from the model. The structure of this model is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. *Measuring model of social cohesion: a two-by-two framework by Chan*

	Subjective component (People's state of mind)	**Objective component** (Behavioral manifestations)
Horizontal dimension (Cohesion within civil society)	General trust in fellow citizens	Social participation and vibrancy of civil society
	Willingness to cooperate and help fellow citizens, including those from the "other" social groups.	Voluntarism and donations
	Sense of belonging or identity	Presence or absence of major inter-group alliances or cleavages
Vertical dimension (State-citizen cohesion)	Trust in public figures	Political participation (e.g. voting, political parties, etc.)
	Confidence in political and other major social institutions	

The conceptual models provided by Chan et al. (2006) and Bernard (1999) share similarities in some key dimensions and domains. In Chan's model, the horizontal dimension corresponds to the social-cultural domain in Bernard's model. Conversely, the vertical dimension, which represents state-citizen cohesion in Chan et al.'s (2006) model,

aligns with the political domain outlined in Bernard's model (Dickes et al. 2013).

Drawing on various theoretical frameworks (Chan et al. 2006; Whelan and Maître 2005; Bollen and Hoyle 1990), Bottoni (2018) developed a seven-dimensional measurement scheme for social cohesion. This scheme incorporates all three dimensions: micro, meso, and macro, while addressing both subjective and objective levels (see Table 4). The author excluded the economic domain from his analysis, viewing it as an effective factor that contributes to social cohesion rather than as a fundamental element of it. Additionally, he left out certain components of the cultural domain, such as belonging, shared values, and collective identity, considering these factors to be more relevant to traditional or archaic societies (Durkheim 1893).

Table 4. *Bottoni's seven-dimensional social cohesion scheme*

	Subjective component	**Objective**
Micro	Interpersonal trust Social support	Density of social relations
Meso	Openness	Participation
Macro	Institutional trust	Legitimacy of institutions

Another renewed multidimensional measurement instrument of social cohesion called the *Social Cohesion Radar* (SCR) was developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Over the past 30 years, it has provided empirical measurements and cross-national comparisons of social cohesion within the EU and worldwide. For example, it has been used to compare social cohesion among 22 Asian societies (Dragolov et al. 2018), in 79 regions of Germany (see Arant et al. 2017), and across neighborhoods in Bremen (see Arant et al. 2016). The theoretical framework for *Social Cohesion Radar* is primarily based on the definition provided by Schiefer and van der Noll, who describe social cohesion as a "descriptive attribute

of a collective, indicating the quality of collective togetherness" (Schiefer and Van der Noll 2017:592). Social cohesion is defined "as the quality of communal life within a specific community, for example, a nation, federal state, region, or urban district" (Follmer et al. 2020:7). It is characterized by supportive, trust-based, and inclusive relationships among citizens who feel a sense of belonging to the community. These individuals trust the institutions within their community, perceive fairness, and express solidarity with their vulnerable members. Additionally, they respect social rules and actively participate in civic life (Follmer et al. 2020).

Following their conceptual model, the multidimensional framework consists of nine dimensions that can be grouped into three broad domains: social relations, connectedness, and focus on the common good. Each of these dimensions comprises three measurable dimensions: social networks, trust in people, acceptance of diversity, identification, trust in institutions, perception of fairness, solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civil participation (see Table 5).

Table 5. *Theoretical framework of Social Cohesion Radar (SCR) by the Bertelsmann Stiftung*

Dimensions	**Domains**
Connectedness	1. Identification
	2. Trust in institutions
	3. Participation of fairness
Social relations	1. Social networks
	2. Trust in people
Focus on the common good	1. Solidarity and helpfulness
	2. Respect for social rules
	3. Civil participation

The five essential dimensions of social cohesion are identified and examined by another multidimensional measurement instrument called *The Scanlon-Monash Index*, used in Australia. These dimensions include: 1. Sense of belonging, 2. Sense of worth, inclusion, and justice; 3. Political participation; 4. Views on discrimination, immigration, and traditions; and 5. Optimism about the future (Markus 2013).

There have been numerous attempts to create multidimensional empirical instruments for measuring social cohesion. However, many of these efforts lack systematic and theoretically grounded frameworks for the operationalization and measurement of social cohesion. While there is a considerable variety and some ambiguity in the conceptual literature on social cohesion, scholars do agree on several key characteristics of the concept. Social cohesion is considered a multidimensional and multilevel concept that encompasses various aspects of social life. This means that no single indicator or area of life can fully define or measure it. Consequently, authors agree that social cohesion is a state of society rather than a process, indicating that there is no "preferred" or "ideal" level of social cohesion (Chan et al. 2006:291). Additionally, many authors differentiate between the objective and subjective nature of the connections among individuals.

Due to the highly complex and latent nature of social cohesion, which is significantly influenced by contextual particularities, it is challenging to establish a single definitional framework or cumulative measurement instrument. In this study, we define social cohesion as a multidimensional and multi-level phenomenon, emphasizing its fundamental socio-cultural and political components. We aim to investigate how social cohesion is generated through a sense of belonging, interpersonal as well as institutional trust, civic and political engagement, shared values, and solidarity, which will be assessed at formal and substantial levels.

CHAPTER 2

From Social Unity to Resilient Bonding in Georgia Historical Perspectives

Forms of Social Unity in Georgia's Past

The Caucasus is a relatively small geographic area between Asia and Europe, characterized by striking climatic, topographic, demographic, and cultural diversity. Situated between the Caspian and Black Seas, it formed part of the northeastern periphery of ancient Mediterranean, Near, and Middle Eastern civilizations and empires. Owing to its strategic and economic importance, the region was repeatedly subjected to devastating military campaigns and successive overlords. Yet the rivalry among external powers, combined with its difficult geographic accessibility, produced a shifting balance that enabled the survival of decentralized, segmented communities. Only between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries did a united Pan-Caucasian feudal empire exist under the Christian Bagratid monarchy. With the arrival of Tamerlane's Golden Horde, however, this unity disintegrated into separate kingdoms and principalities, some of which became integrated into the Ottoman Empire or subordinated to Persian rule.

As mentioned above, the modern term "social cohesion" (sotsialuri shech'iduloba) was introduced into Georgian social science only recently via Western scholarship. In contrast, community-forming concepts such as patriotism – *mamulishviloba* (Nadareishvili 1998:52–61; 2003), nation – *eri* (Reisner 2012), and unity – *ertoba* (Gogoladze 1992:20–26)

have been in use since the emergence of Georgian writing in the fifth century. These terms generally referred to abstract group formations beyond kinship. Individuals who were not personally related voluntarily associated under specific constitutive rules (statutes, contractual agreements), often solemnized through oaths or rituals. Above all, such associations served to overcome collective threats and ensure security. They can thus be regarded as forms of autochthonous resilience, akin to those identified more broadly in the Eurasian region by Korosteleva and Petrova (2022), each with its own historical trajectory.

Over the centuries, two principal forms of social cohesion developed in Georgia, both essentially person bound. In the lowlands, cohesion was predominantly vertical, organized around princely or royal dynasties through feudal or dynastic patronage networks. As Toumanoff (1963: 34–40; 1988: 21–30) emphasizes, dynasticism and feudalism in the Christian Caucasus were closely intertwined, producing hierarchically structured patronal networks led by the Bagratids and other noble families. With the notable exception of the pan-Caucasian "Golden Age" kingdom of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries (Metreveli 2016:269–447), such arrangements generally gave rise to relatively small-scale units. This vertical form of patronal organization remains a dominant pattern of cohesion to the present (Janashia 2021). In contrast, mountain communities developed more egalitarian, horizontal structures based on sworn alliances, resembling similar forms in the Islamic North Caucasus and Switzerland.

In one of the first English-language histories of Georgia, W. E. D. Allen described what he termed the phenomenon of "aesthetic irresponsibility" as a distinctive feature enabling the preservation of the Georgian nation. For Allen, the continued survival of Georgians "not only as a people but as an individual cultural and political whole" despite centuries of foreign interventions appeared remarkable (Allen 1932:71–73, esp. 72). Bordering contending imperial powers – Arab, Iranian, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Russian – and subjected to sporadic invasions by nomadic

groups such as the Khazars, Turks, and Mongols, Georgia nonetheless maintained its identity. Allen attributed this to a peculiar "irresponsible individuality of the nation as a unit," akin, in his view, to the ethos of Spain or Ireland.

According to Allen, Georgians responded to "many forms of alien political and cultural coercion" with an attitude of "æsthetic irresponsibility": formally accepting domination without internalizing it, in order to "remain in character much the same as formerly." Resistance did occur, often fiercely, but not "for a principle" but "as a nation, as a living animal" (Allen 1932:72). Thus, throughout Georgian history, the nation itself was sacralized rather than abstract ideals. In an orientalist idiom characteristic of the 1930s, he concluded:

"*The Georgians are not a religious people, neither are they a political people, but they have a very strong and abiding sense of their community as a nation, and their individuality is very old-far older than the clamant sense of nationhood which is voiced by so many of the comparatively young European nations. The Georgian sense of themselves as a nation certainly dates from the time of the mediæval Georgian kingdom, and it is voiced by Rusthaweli and others of their mediæval poets.*" (Allen 1932:72)

Allen's interpretation highlights the Georgian "sense of nation" as an aesthetic preference for one's own kind, celebrated in terms of individualistic heroism rather than martyrdom. This "aesthetic irresponsibility," he contended, preserved Georgian integrity amid shifting political systems and religious creeds. Georgia's geographical remoteness, while isolating its people, simultaneously fostered a durable sense of communion. Its climate and viticulture, Allen suggested, nurtured reflection on grievances and principles while sustaining cultural vitality. In his view, Georgian unity was less a political construct than a cultural one: an enduring identity forged not through statehood, but through resilience and continuity in the face of foreign domination.

This chapter builds on this perspective by situating the endurance of Georgian cultural cohesion within a broader historical context.

Horizontal Social Cohesion: the Federal Sworn Union of "Free Svaneti" (13th - 19th cc.)

As an example of autochthonous resilience, we turn to the mountainous region of Svaneti. Nino Okinaschwili (2001) examined how an egalitarian, horizontally structured community of mountain villages developed in Upper or "Free" Svaneti from the 13th century onward – one that, unlike the lowlands, lacked vertical hierarchies with feudal lords. Among the sources she studied is a parchment preserved at the Korneli Kekelidze Manuscript Center in Tbilisi: a copied "Book of Souls" (*sulta mat'iane* or *liber memorialis*) from the 15th–16th centuries. This manuscript, used for the liturgical commemoration (*memoria*) of living and deceased members and donors, lists 2,500 names organized by village and valley. It represents the "assembly of the whole of Svaneti" (*q'ovelta svanetisa kreba*) as an "ertobili krebuli" grounded in an "assembly of assemblies" (*krebai krebisa*). At the conclusion, the anonymous copyist appeals to Mary to intercede with God.

In medieval society, alongside dynastic, monastic, and familial groups, voluntary communities (*coniurationes*) existed geographically in remote regions or professionally (e.g., guilds) in urban centers. These groups were formed through agreement among individuals, whether voluntarily or by co-optation. In Upper Svaneti, the oath among equal members served as the constitutive act of a "sworn brotherhood" (*dzmatnapitsoba*), codified in statutes (*pirobis tsignebi* as colophons in religious books, 13th–15th centuries). For the Svans, such oath-based unions enabled egalitarian peace, ensured mutual aid, provided shared legal norms, and constituted the political space of Upper "Free" Svaneti (*ertobili svanetis khevi*) from Lalveri to Ushguli. This order was sustained through symbol-

ic acts such as communal meals, memorial prayers, and annual assemblies at Lagurka, interceding for the salvation of souls. In this way, the Svans established an inclusive political community resilient against external enemies, natural calamities, epidemics, and disputes over law and order (Okinaschwili 2001).

Stéphane Voell (2013), studying Svan families resettled to Lower Kartli after the 1987 avalanche, shows how displaced communities sought to restore cohesion. The first step was establishing a prayer site (*salotsavi*) for the extended family (*gvari*), followed by the "oath on the icon." This ritual reinforced group unity in a new environment, transforming commemoration of the living and the dead into a practice of reintegration and confirmation of one's Svan origin:

"*The oath taking procedure is now in itself a memoria, a commemoration of ancient traditions. […] The recreating of reference points of the Svan culture in migrant communities, i.e. the institution of shrines as materialized relations to the home region and the social life "back home" is common after such resettlements. (…) The taking out of the icon in the process of oath taking is an enactment of Svan tradition. It creates a link to an imagined past and present in Svaneti.*" (Voell 2013:160-161, 167)

Similarly, Florian Mühlfried identifies "ritual sovereignty" in Tusheti, referring to the reciprocal relationship between highland communities and the lowland state, a sovereignty vested not in the Orthodox Church but in local elders (Mühlfried 2014:107). Yet post-Soviet transformations – including neoliberal reforms and growing alliances between state and Church – have eroded this autonomy:

"*The neoliberal turn in Georgian state politics has decreased their spatial mobility without increasing their social security, and the increasing Orthodoxisation of the Georgian state compromises their ritual sovereignty even in the highlands. In other words: the reserves that have been essential for the tempering of the Soviet state (see ch. 2) have dramatically deteriorated in the past decades, limiting the Tushetians' room for political manoeuvre.*

This should be taken as a reminder that relying on reserves may fail. // Ironically, the coalition of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state follows the example set in the 19th century by the Russian Orthodox Church. In the post-Soviet period, all of these reserves are endangered. Chapter 4 has illustrated that ritual sovereignty over the highland shrines is severely contested in a post-Soviet Georgia constituted on a coalition of the state and the Church." (Mühlfried 2014:159)

Such egalitarian, horizontal forms of cohesion continue to shape collective action today. The successful protest against the Namakhvani hydropower plant on the upper Rioni River exemplifies the enduring capacity of mountain communities to mobilize collectively. Similar grassroots protests against large-scale projects imposed without consultation underscore the resilience of these communal structures, even as lowland populations often dismiss the mountain regions as "backward" (Shikhashvili 2023; Baigent 2025).

Vertical Social Cohesion in the Caucasian Lowlands: Small Resilient Units?

Traditional structures and identities – feudalism and dynasticism at the borderlands between empires: the Georgian kingdoms and principalities up to the 18th century

Up to the 18th century, Georgian agrarian society was highly segmented: villages and regions functioned as small, viable "nuclear societies" capable of surviving raids in remote valleys (Grigolia 1939). These units, the Georgian *temi*, were led by princes (*tavadni*) who exercised sovereign authority, defining and enforcing local norms. Beneath them were noble knights, peasants, Armenian traders, and Orthodox clergy, all subordinated as serfs. Toumanoff (1963:34–40) describes this as "polygenetic dynasticism," a dispersed configuration of power rooted in multiple local dynastic lineages.

Attempts at centralization through monarchy, even with the Orthodox Church's support, largely failed to produce a stable, long-lasting Georgian state. Only between the 10th and 12th centuries, under the Bagratid dynasty, was Georgia successfully united, reaching its "Golden Age" under Queen Tamar. This unity collapsed with the Mongol invasions and subsequent raids under Tamerlane. Eastern Georgia fragmented into two kingdoms, increasingly subordinated to Persian influence, while Western Georgia disintegrated into one kingdom and several principalities, sometimes fighting as Ottoman vassals. Competing Bagratid branches also contested succession bitterly.

By the late 18th century, the Bagratid kings increasingly oriented toward Russia. The Treaty of Georgievsk (1783) between Catherine II and King Erekle II marked both a geopolitical realignment and a cultural shift from Near Eastern to European models, providing limited frameworks for state-building in Eastern Georgia.

Kings Vakhtang VI and later Erekle II achieved partial unification in East Georgia, but full modernization and consolidation remained elusive. Persistent internal rivals and external threats compelled Erekle II to seek Russian military support. Although Catherine II accepted his proposal, Russian troops did not intervene when needed. In 1795, Persian forces under Agha Mohammad Khan sacked and burned Tbilisi, devastating the kingdom (Suny 1994:55–59; Lang 1957:158–186).

Erekle's successor, Giorgi XII, proposed full incorporation into Russia in exchange for internal autonomy guarantees. Russia, however, imposed direct annexation instead. Eastern Georgia was annexed in 1801, followed by Western Georgia within a decade. The Georgian polygenetic tradition of dispersed rule proved incompatible with the Tsarist model, in which the monarch alone held legitimate power.

This incorporation reshaped Georgia's feudal order. The monarchy was abolished, and most Bagratids relocated to Moscow, compensated with aristocratic titles but stripped of sovereignty. For the first time, a

bureaucratic administration was introduced, staffed by Russian officials. Avalov (1910:482) described Georgia as "only an offspring of the original pre-reform Russia" transplanted into Georgian society.

Social Cohesion and Resilience in Abstract Communities: Georgian Social Democracy and the Cooperative Movement

From the 1860s onward, the *tergdaleulebi* – literally "those who have drunk the water of the Terek River" – emerged as impoverished aristocrats turned educated intellectuals, seeking to establish a new, abstract community: a Georgian cultural nation of the European type. Their project aimed to integrate the intelligentsia, nobility, and wealthier strata into a modern ethnocultural nation, compensating for the dissolution of traditional feudal and dynastic bonds following Georgia's incorporation into the Tsarist Empire after 1801 (Reisner 2004:29–38; Reisner 2018).

Within the intelligentsia, however, the Marxist "third group" (*mesame dasi*) pursued a different strategy, turning to peasants and the small urban working class as their primary audience. They interpreted peasant hardship through Marxist categories (Reisner 2005). Rural communities soon adapted protest practices pioneered by Batumi's workers – such as land boycotts and mutual aid systems – especially in western Georgia's Guria region. These practices revealed a remarkable capacity for local resilience. Georgian social democracy at the beginning of the 20th century thus represented a rare case of a mass party deeply embedded in society at the empire's periphery. Its leadership, largely drawn from the impoverished gentry of Guria, remained closely tied to equally destitute peasants. Solidarity within the so-called "Gurian Republic" (1902–1906) reinforced collective consciousness and belonging, although Soviet narratives later distorted these experiences (Nakhutsrishvili 2018).

After the failed revolution of 1905 and the brutal suppression of the Gurian Republic, a broad cooperative and civic movement emerged. In

the years preceding the First World War, this movement formed the social foundation of an abstract community under Menshevik leadership. With the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia on 26 May 1918 – amid the Bolshevik dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly – social self-organization reached its peak, facilitating the short-lived consolidation of a peasant nation. This trajectory was violently interrupted by the Red Army invasion of February 1921, and the final remnants of grassroots organization were eradicated in the failed uprising of August 1924 (Jones 2005:13–14, 243).

Nevertheless, increasing transregional mobility and communication did not fundamentally transform social ties. Face-to-face relationships remained central to individual and collective life. Seasonal laborers from Racha, for example, created cooperative associations in Tbilisi as *musha* or porters (Anchabadze and Volkova 1999:64–66). Migrants from the same village supported one another under local authority figures, pooling and redistributing wages equally among members. They circulated seasonally, returning home for sowing and harvesting. This "hybrid existence" of peasants as "workers between field and factory" (Bonwetsch 1991:71–79), common across the Russian Empire, did not weaken village attachments but reinforced them, thereby strengthening the foundations of Georgian social democracy.

Building on the autobiography of the Social Democrat Grigol Uratadze, Luka Nakhutsrishvili (2021) analyzes the oath sworn by protesting peasants in Guria in 1902 – an act that initiated mobilization under Tsarist rule and culminated in peasant self-government during the Gurian Republic until its brutal dissolution by the Tsarist Army in 1906. He interprets oath-taking as a constitutive ritual for collective unity, enabling political action and even armed struggle. This perspective highlights the asymmetries within the alliance between peasants and revolutionary intellectuals, as well as tensions between peasants and Tsarist authorities,

revealing the interplay of politics, religion, and customary law in shaping peasant agency.

The federalist Giorgi Laskhishvili, returning from exile in 1913, marveled at the dramatic expansion of Georgian associations: from a few hundred to several thousand members within just 15 years. He attributed this growth to both the rise of the intelligentsia and the increasing involvement of the "people" in cultural work (Laskhishvili 1992:247). After 1905, association life flourished not only in membership but also in diversity. By 1915, more than 30 Georgian cultural and educational societies existed, alongside consumer and credit cooperatives (Goderidze 2005; Gureshidze 1993; Metreveli 1982; Kiknadze 1981). According to Sophron Mikhelidze, the number of cooperatives grew from 32 with roughly 50,000 members in 1906 to 934 with 470,521 members by January 1921. Between 1910 and 1916 alone, cooperatives increased tenfold – from 35 with 6,143 members to 333 with around 120,000 – before tripling again during Georgia's brief independence (1918–1921) (Michelidse 1924; Mosidze 1994:32).

This functional differentiation of cultural and social tasks weakened the intelligentsia's previous monopoly on leadership, embodied by organizations such as the "Society for the Spread of Literacy among the Georgians." At the same time, it expanded opportunities for civic activism, diversifying forms of self-association and fostering social cohesion within more abstract, self-organized communities of solidarity and mutual aid (Reisner 2004:189–251).

State and Society in Soviet Georgia: Ambivalent Interactions of Formal and Informal Practices

The effects of Soviet rule on the development of statehood, society, and community consciousness in Georgia remain insufficiently researched.

Hanf and Nodia (2000:15) summarize Georgia's trajectory between 1917 and 1991 succinctly:

"Communism in Georgia, as in all communist states, led to economic modernization and politically to the opposite."

In the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, a "privatization of the social structure" occurred, giving rise to informal practices increasingly detached from large state mass organizations and cultural houses in every collective farm. From the mid-1980s, this state-directed model of public integration came to be perceived as forced participation, collapsing entirely after the brutal crackdown on demonstrators on Rustaveli Avenue on 9 April 1989. Under such conditions, cross-group self-organization and the emergence of a politically constituted civic nation were virtually impossible. What persisted instead was ethnocultural identity – rooted in pre-Soviet traditions and reinforced since the 1930s by Soviet nationality policy – as the decisive marker of distinction. Ethnicity, deployed as an instrument of symbolic politics, assumed shifting roles over time: during *korenizatsiia* (indigenization), state- and self-organization briefly overlapped; in the 1930s, Bolshevik repression – often genocidal – eradicated such continuity; and from the 1960s onward, increasingly delegitimized forms of official integration (e.g., staged folklore, the ethno-federal state structure) coexisted with a national self-organization that was first suppressed, then tolerated, and ultimately beyond state control.

Soviet nationality policy rested on the territorialization of ethno-culturally defined "nationalities," arranged hierarchically in administrative units within a formally federal system. This arrangement contradicted the universalist ideal of the "Soviet people" as a collective of equal citizens. Nationality, recorded in every internal passport, was in most cases legally immutable (Hanf and Nodia 2000:50; Reisner 2010; Shanin 1989). With Stalin's death, the personalized form of loyalty to the Soviet

state also began to erode. Privileged access to decision-making and gatekeeping positions, tied to such loyalty, could no longer guarantee cohesion across the multinational state (Kekelia and Reisner 2021).

A central obstacle to the development of bridging social capital in Georgia was the weakness of the Soviet state itself. Unlike a modern regulatory state grounded in the rule of law, the socialist production state dismantled autonomous mechanisms of regulation while simultaneously undermining society's capacity for self-organization. Despite its constant interventions, the USSR lacked the resources to exercise comprehensive control. To compensate, the CPSU *nomenklatura* relied on neo-patrimonial strategies, integrating or excluding local patronage networks through the appointment and dismissal of First Party Secretaries – from Vasil Mzhavanadze (1956–1972) to Eduard Shevardnadze (1972–1985) and Jumber Patiashvili (1985–1989) (Gerber 1997:44–51, 149–153; Jones 2013:3–50).

In public, local party elites invoked the "common good," while informally pursuing self-enrichment, undermining the legitimacy of state authority. These patterns of elite behavior survived the Soviet collapse and persisted in the post-Soviet period (Stefes 2006). The emergence of binding or "unifying" social capital in Putnam's sense was therefore blocked from the outset, replaced instead by a colonization of the state by particularistic groups – chiefly political elites. This dynamic produced recurring systemic crises (Christophe 2003:195-196, drawing on Staniszkis 1992; Nee and Stark 1989).

Furthermore, the ideologically rigid official discourse left no conceptual space for individuals to perceive themselves as members of distinct social groups (aside from the fictitious "working class"). The destruction of group awareness eroded the perception of structural differentiation within society. The only remaining abstract form of affiliation was ethnic identity – a legacy that persisted as part of the broader "Soviet heritage" (Reisner 2010:163–166).

Impact of Formal and Informal Values on Social Cohesion in Soviet Georgia

In their 1983 study on the "Cultural Basis of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy," Mars and Altman investigated the extent to which formal "Soviet" values shaped individual behavior. Drawing on a representative survey among Jews who had emigrated from Soviet Georgia to Israel, they found that informal factors were far more decisive than official Soviet norms. Work and private life were deeply intertwined, and resources circulated freely across both spheres. Nepotism was regarded as a moral obligation, while patronage networks constituted the principal mode of organization, with real authority vested in those (patrons) who controlled such networks. Occupational roles were only one facet of broader life roles, and decisions were typically made based on private commitments, as every role-holder was embedded in personal networks.

The formal Soviet model, by contrast, envisioned strict separation of private and professional life, advancement based on merit and expertise, hierarchical delegation of authority, upward reporting of information, individual accountability to superiors, clearly defined and interchangeable roles, and rule-bound decision-making. Mars and Altman demonstrated that in Georgia, the informal system consistently overrode this formal structure (Mars and Altman 1983:555; see also Altman 1983, chs. 4–5; Mars and Altman 2008:56–70).

These dynamics may be interpreted, in Putnam's terms, as manifestations of "bonding" rather than "bridging" social capital – reciprocity rooted in dense personal networks rather than generalized trust. Both Mars and Altman, and complementary findings by anthropologist Tamar Dragadze based on participant observation in a mountain village in Racha (Dragadze 1988), point to a process of re-traditionalization. This process represented a productive adaptation to the inefficiency of state control and economic management in the Soviet periphery. Informal networks became decisive not only for securing but also for defending

"gatekeeper" positions that enabled the diversion of public resources into patronage and clientelist structures.

The persistence of bonding over bridging social capital in Georgia is closely tied to the Soviet legacy. Scholars of post-socialist transitions agree that former Soviet states began with extremely low levels of bridging social capital. Under Soviet rule, trust was largely confined to family and close friends, while bridging forms of social capital were either absent or artificially imposed by the state. Membership in "mass organizations" such as the Young Pioneers – experienced as compulsory and inauthentic – fostered deep mistrust of formal institutions. This legacy endures: decades after the USSR's collapse, many Georgians, particularly farmers, remain reluctant to form cooperatives despite clear economic advantages. The Soviet experience of civic institutions subordinated to the Communist Party fostered a generalized distrust not only of specific organizations but of institutional life itself.

While similar patterns have been documented for Russia (Tikhomirov 2013), systematic historical studies for Georgia remain sparse. Available evidence suggests that reliance on dense, trust-based networks of kinship and friendship during the Soviet era – contrasted with the absence or manipulation of bridging capital – helps explain enduring skepticism toward collective public organization. It established "resilient bonds" for survival under conditions of permanent crisis (Koselleck 1982).

Social Unity in Modern Georgia – Spatial, Social and Political Relations in the Georgian "Transitional Society" Since 1991

The failure to establish an independent nation-state in 1991–1992 and the subsequent "dark 1990s" can be attributed largely to the absence of generalized social and civic cohesion linked to the state. This deficit also explains the lack of overarching social resilience beyond ethno-cultural

forms of communal organization. In the aftermath of independence, survival depended heavily on personal networks, maintained and celebrated through the traditional practice of the guest meal or feast (*supra*) (Mühlfried 2006, 2015; Babeck 2013).

With Eduard Shevardnadze's return to power in a Georgia fractured by separatism, civil war, and severe economic crisis, neo-patrimonialism became the de facto *raison d'état*. This dimension has received relatively little scholarly attention (Christophe 2003, 2004; especially 2005). In this context, Robert Putnam's concept of person-bound "bonding" social capital consistently outweighed "bridging" social capital, preventing the formation of generalized reciprocity and inhibiting the orientation of society toward the common good. Empirical verification of these dynamics remains limited (Chitanava 2013).

Barbara Christophe's seminal study of Baghdati and Vani in western Georgia's Imereti province demonstrates how political elites systematically instrumentalized the state apparatus for private interests. Even amid pervasive corruption and crisis, trust in state institutions was deliberately undermined, producing what Andrzej Kaluza (1998) termed a "semantic vacuum." Through the open embodiment of self-interest and the cultivation of a "fatalistic willingness to accept power," elites systematically eroded public confidence in state structures and thus encouraging the submission to patrons (Christophe 2005:160–187, esp. 167–168).

The "Rose Revolution" of November 2003 and the subsequent presidency of Mikheil Saakashvili did not fundamentally reverse these patterns. Saakashvili's reform program functioned less as an effort at democratization than as a neoliberal project that redefined citizens as customers of the state. His administration effectively reduced petty corruption through police and education reforms but increasingly alienated large segments of the population, who experienced social decline, economic insecurity, and inadequate access to healthcare (Bruckner 2009; Aydin

2011; Tarkhan-Mouravi 2012). His deteriorating human rights record, combined with the notorious conditions in Georgia's overcrowded prisons, left a deep imprint on public memory (Aliev 2014; Steenland and Gigitashvili 2018; Driscoll and Maliniak 2019; Frederiksen 2014).

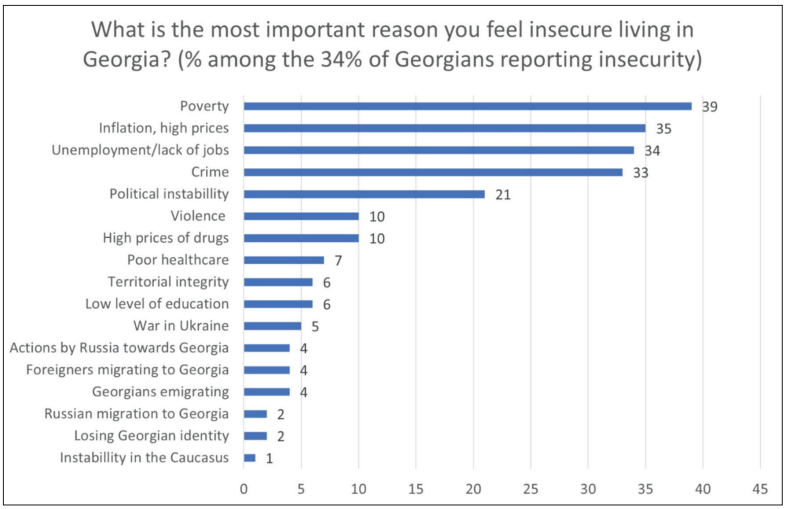
Security thus remained a scarce and often unattainable resource, undermining long-term planning in both politics and everyday life. No strategic lessons were learned from the August War of 2008, and no comprehensive or institutionalized concept of societal resilience has emerged (Kakachia and Cecire 2013; Kakachia et al. 2022). At the individual level, only about one-third of the working-age population is formally employed, of whom roughly 60 percent work in the public sector outside Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi. This group constitutes the reservoir of so-called "administrative resources," mobilized by ruling parties to consolidate power, most recently in the parliamentary elections of 26 October 2024. By contrast, the majority are classified as "self-employed," ranging from subsistence farmers to internationally active online service providers. A middle class has emerged only in a limited sense, comprising 15–20 percent of the population, and remains weak socially and economically (Kakulia and Kapanadze 2018). Consequently, Georgia lacks a strong, socially and economically independent societal base capable of defending democracy and the rule of law.

The role of social organization has increasingly been assumed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), developing since the 1990s under the umbrella of "civil society." Yet this trajectory has faced numerous challenges. Chief among them is the endemic "informalization of society," which has posed formidable obstacles to the emergence of an open civil sphere. In Georgia, the relationship between formal civil society and the informal realm remains particularly fraught. Patronage networks, radical movements, and extremist groups – whether formally registered or operating informally – often present themselves as civil society

organizations, embodying the "dark side" of NGOs in post-communist settings. This "uncivil society" flourishes partly due to persistently low levels of popular participation in formal civil society, undermining the potential benefits of a robust civic sector (Chikhladze and Aliyev 2019).

Costanza Curro has recently explored whether informal practices of hospitality (*supra*) during the Saakashvili era could foster civic values and interpersonal solidarity. Her analysis demonstrates that political leaders failed to account for the ambivalent impact of hospitality in everyday life. Rather than reinforcing legitimacy, these practices deepened societal divisions and further eroded trust in institutions (Curro 2017).

Figure 1. *What is the most important reason you feel insecure living in Georgia, NDI / CRRC Survey, December 2022* (Gilbreath 2023)



Barbara Christophe (2005) illustrates how Georgian political elites deliberately undermined interpersonal trust to heighten dependence on clientelist networks. She identifies a "strategy of negative legitimation," whereby

elites delegitimize potential challengers by instilling a fatalistic acceptance of power. The broader effect extends beyond neutralizing regime allies, systematically discrediting any opposition framed in terms of a thread to the public good. This strategy creates a "semantic vacuum" that erodes trust in norms and amplifies elite power (Christophe 2005:167–179; Kaluza 1998; Waldmann 1998, 2002).

Drawing on Georg Simmel and Lewis Coser, Christophe interprets conflict in Georgia as largely staged to generate "cognitive chaos," disrupt communication, and immobilize society rather than foster collective identity. Illusory conflicts consolidate "blockade power," maintaining order not through norms but through the strategic exploitation of egoistic motivations (Christophe 2005:171–173).

Cohesion, Resilience and Values? – Differentiation Along Cultural Path Dependencies and Problems of Political Participation

Our field research on social cohesion (2019–2023) confirms the continued dominance of personal social networks rooted in districts and neighborhoods. These networks, sustained by long-term relationships such as childhood friendships, extend through kinship, neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and informal groups. Their size and function vary by age, activity, and sociability. In small towns, immediate networks – "neighborhood," "colleagues," "classmates," and "community" – serve as the most salient reference points, while civic associations and NGOs are rarely mentioned. Among middle-aged and older respondents, neighborhoods remain decisive anchors of local identity, though perceived as increasingly fragile.

The logic of patronage politics reinforces these tendencies. The appropriation of the public sphere by ruling elites collapses the boundary between public and private domains, a dynamic described by Transparency International Georgia as "state capture" under both Saakashvili's United National Movement and Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream (Kevkhishvili 2021;

Transparency International Georgia 2020a, b. 2024). Political competition functions less as a contest of programs than as a struggle between rival patronal networks for monopolistic control over state resources (Magyar and Madlovics 2020, 2022; Hale 2015:24).

This fusion undermines generalized trust. Citizens who lack confidence in peers and institutions are more inclined to support policies that erode democratic rules (Lührmann 2023). Police reforms, officially transformative, primarily reproduced patronage ties and enabled violent repression of protests, including the manipulated parliamentary elections of October 26, 2024 (Meladze et al. 2024:57–72). Decentralization reforms similarly reproduce immobilization, as local civic infrastructure remains weak. Of more than 3,500 villages, only 160 officially registered community-based organizations exist, with over 250 depopulated (Margvelashvili 2021:4; Shamugia 2023). EU interventions, including ENPARD programs, attempt to stimulate cooperative organization, yet resistance persists. Farmers overwhelmingly reject joint credit schemes, citing distrust as a decisive reason (Pavliashvili 2009a, 2009b).

The result is a structural paradox. While Tbilisi-based NGOs retain visibility, civil society beyond the capital is weak, fragmented, and frequently co-opted by ruling elites (Reisner 2018; Salamadze 2021). The adoption of the "Transparency Law" in May 2024 and subsequent manipulated elections illustrate how civil society struggles to exercise institutional oversight, reproducing what Christophe (2005) terms "blockade power": a political order maintained by erosion of norms, egoistic calculation, and immobilization.

Cultural Aspects: Georgian Discourse on Social Cohesion

Social cohesion has long been central to Georgian public discourse, from Ilia Chavchavadze's 19th-century reflections on national unity to contemporary concerns about civic fragmentation. Since the emergence of

the Georgian intelligentsia – the *tergdaleulebi* ("those who have drunk the waters of the Terek River") – the question of defining the abstract community of the "Georgian nation" has been debated in newspapers and journals. The discussion on *kartveloba* during the second half of the 19th century reflected a localized variant of European nation-building discourses, adapted to Russian imperial rule and Georgia's position as a small nation, integrating cultural revival and socio-economic modernization (Suny 1994:87–112).

Chavchavadze's *Some Things* (1876) critiques the disintegration of social cohesion, emphasizing that parochial attachments undermined a unified Georgian identity, language, and collective purpose. Niko Nikoladze (*Love and Service for the Fatherland*, 1879) stressed constructive patriotism, civic responsibility, and education as foundations for national cohesion. Filipe Gogichaishvili (*Us and Life*, 1909) highlighted cultural and psychological barriers to modernization, framing Georgians as fragmented actors unable to translate cultural capital into economic power.

These debates informed early 20th-century social democracy (1918–1921) and were reframed under Soviet rule (1921–1991). After independence in 1991, the question of cohesion re-emerged, now framed as building a civic nation beyond ethno-cultural boundaries. Philosophers such as Merab Mamardashvili (1990; 2011) emphasized ethical transformation, responsibility, and active participation. Political theorists like Ghia Nodia (1992) stressed institutional frameworks, democratic pluralism, and national identity. David Usupashvili (2015) similarly highlighted the civic conception of statehood, warning against partisan, regional, or ethnic reductions of "our state."

In sociological terms, these debates focus on forming an abstract "we-group" that transcends particularistic solidarities, creating generalized reciprocity (Durkheim 1893/1984:85–93; Putnam 2000:22–25). Bridging social capital and collective orientations generate trust across boundaries, providing the normative foundation for the common good and public

spirit (Ishiyama et al. 2018:19–26; Elwert 1983, 1995, 1996,1998; Assmann 2024). The challenge of building a state grounded in the rule of law, democratic principles, and equal opportunities for participation in public affairs – so as to establish generalized reciprocity in pursuit of the common good – remains unresolved, leading to a profound crisis not only of politics but also of morals.

The following chapters turn to empirical data, findings, and discussion of the current state of social cohesion in Georgia.

CHAPTER 3

Local Context

For the Study of Social Cohesion in Georgia

There are many reasons why studying social cohesion is crucial in the Republic of Georgia. This transitional country, shaped by a complex Soviet legacy, offers a unique political and socio-cultural landscape for such research. The issue of social cohesion gained prominence on the political agenda in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in relation to global development trends and their diverse impacts in Western countries. Exploring social cohesion beyond this Western context undoubtedly provides new insights into the complexities and unique aspects of this concept. Georgia's societal and cultural composition, marked by its multiethnic and multicultural features as well as its rich historical background, adds another significant dimension to its scientific relevance.

Post-Transitive Society

After 70 years of Soviet rule, Georgia has undergone large-scale political and socio-economic transformations. The shift from the Soviet system to a democratic one has influenced all aspects of society, affecting the everyday life and practices of individuals. To understand social cohesion in Georgia, it is essential to contextualize it within the broader transitive processes that significantly shape it. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the transitions from a socialist to a free enterprise economy have led to sub-

stantial socio-cultural as well as political and economic transformations. These large-scale changes have reshaped Georgian society in various ways.

The topic of social cohesion is gaining renewed scientific interest, particularly in the light of growing polarization, socio-political fragmentation, and a decline in political legitimacy and consensus in societies across the globe. Given the complex transitional context, the case of the Republic of Georgia is of particular interest in this regard, considering its Soviet legacy, as it offers unique insights into the study of social cohesion. During their democratic transition, post-Soviet countries have encountered large-scale political, economic, and cultural changes that have influenced the structure and morphogenesis of their societies. These transformations have affected various elements of society, including individuals, social classes, collectives, and organizations (Gel'man 2003; Huntington 1991; Fukuyama 2014; O'Donnell and Schmitter 2013). The large-scale transformations involving fundamental changes have introduced new institutional facets of economic, political, and cultural systems. These include the establishment of independent and democratic state institutions, the development of a party system, the promotion of pluralism and freedom of expression, and the formation of a legal system, ownership structures, as well as financial and labor market institutions.

As a result, these developments have provided new insights and perspectives for studying social integration and cohesiveness within societies (Haerpfer and Kizilova 2014). During the process of institutional transition and building, contradictions between the inherent values of new systems and the local national value systems can lead to fragmentation and polarization within certain groups and levels of society. However, it is important to highlight that countries undergoing market transitions often show a positive correlation between indicators of social cohesion, health, and overall well-being. Specifically, this includes factors such as trust, confidence in public institutions, membership in organizations, and involvement in formal networks (Carlson 2004; D'Hombres et al.

2010; Ferlander and Mäkinen 2009; Kennedy et al. 1998; Rose 2000; Yamaoka 2008; Yip et al. 2007).

Multiethnic Dimension

The study of social cohesion in multiethnic and multicultural contexts has a long tradition in Western scholarship, primarily focusing on global migration (Putnam 2007; Holtug 2010; Portes and Vickstrom 2011; McCollum 2013; Hooghe 2007; Soroka 2007; Laurence 2011). However, examining the multicultural and multiethnic developments and dynamics in post-Soviet countries, particularly in Georgia, provides new insights into the complex nature of social cohesion.

The multiethnic composition of Georgian society, apart from the ethnic majority Georgians, is constituted by Jews, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Greeks, Kurds, Russians, Ukrainians, Chechens / Skits, Ossetians, Abkhaz, and other ethnic groups. Throughout different historical periods, the interethnic composition of the population has undergone changes. At the beginning of the 20th century, the 1926 census indicated that minorities constituted 33% of the total population. Among these, the largest group was Armenians, making up 11.51 %, followed by Azerbaijani Turks at 5.17 % and Russians at 3.60 %. The census shows that the growth in ethnic diversity began in the 1940s and continued until the 1980s, corresponding with significant historical developments in the country. However, after the 1990s, there was a notable decline in the number of ethnic minority groups. According to the most recent national census, minorities represent 15% of the total population. In this latest census, the largest minority group is Azerbaijanis at 6.72 %, followed by Armenians at 4. 53% and Russians at 0,71% (Kirvalidze 2021, Reisner 2025b).

Ethnicity has long served as a meaningful parameter of social organization in Georgia that has undergone significant modifications during its 70 years of existence within the multiethnic Soviet Union. In the con-

text of the post-Soviet transition, Georgia's multiethnic and multicultural society is a significant factor in helping to understand different layers and contexts of social cohesion. It should be noted that ethnic diversity served as a meaningful parameter of social organization for centuries prior to the changes that took place in the Soviet period.

During the Soviet period, the government sought to eliminate the primordial affinities by strictly enforcing social and political patterns of class identification in alignment with its ideological agenda of equality and rights. This approach allowed Soviet power to maintain a construct of ethnicity at the institutional level, characterized by essential constitutional elements like language. Identity was primarily defined in social terms, emphasizing the "*brotherhood of workers*", and also through secular supranational civic codes of identity that identified individuals as "*Soviet citizens*". This framework was supposed to function as a substitute for other, more primordial forms of identity (Kirvalidze 2021). The maintenance of distinct languages, along with cultural and religious traditions, has been facilitated by traditional agents of socialization and established social patterns. The cultural values and modes of behavior rooted in familiar environments have been supported by the concentration of ethnic minority populations mainly in compact ethnic settlements, which has helped sustain the cohesiveness of these groups (Silver 1974; Schanin 1989; Kolack 1987). Additionally, the concept of "nationality" has been dissociated from the construction of the state. It has been discharged from its primordial codes of identity, such as racial similarities, and viewed as "a specific characteristic (together with age and the color of one's eyes) at the top of the inventory for basic human characteristics" (Schanin 1989:410).

The identification and belonging to the state were defined by civic codes and denoted as citizenship (*grazhdanstvo*), which ultimately operated as a main parameter of social organization. With these secularized and ideologized patterns for identification a "set of overarching shared

values of the country as a whole was meant to substitute and replace the core values of the various ethnic groups" (Kolack 1987:38). In fact, the "nationality label and native language" alongside a lingua franca (Russian), remained as basic and most stable indicators of national and ethnic identity in the Soviet Union (Silver 1974; Kravetz 1980; Schanin 1989; Kolack 1987).

The dispersion of populations across territories and the urban-rural divide, along with the concentration of ethnic minority groups primarily in rural areas, has resulted in the formation of compact ethnic settlements. This situation has, on one hand, helped in preserving ethnic identity. However, it has also led to inequalities among different ethnic groups (Silver 1974). These "disparities between rural and urban" areas were particularly evident in education, especially among ethnic groups that displayed often negative attitudes toward schooling in general, and a specific bias favoring "less schooling for women." (Kravetz 1980: 22)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, national minorities encountered specific structural disadvantages that rendered them particularly vulnerable to poverty, isolation, and lack of education (NITG 2010:11). Despite the implementation of ongoing reforms, these challenges continue to persist. A primary concern is closely associated with the issue of social cohesion.

Urban Dimension

One important factor to consider when examining social cohesion in Georgia is its urban dimension. The country's post-Soviet transition has resulted in specific characteristics that affect social cohesiveness within society. There is limited literature in Urban Studies regarding post-Soviet and post-socialist cities in general (Ferenčuhová and Gentile 2016; Musil 2005; Brade and Neugebauer 2017). However, recent developments have aimed to critically conceptualize these post-socialist cities, focusing

on their socialist past and promoting a deeper understanding of their context (Frost 2018; Wiest 2012; Hirt and Stanilov 2009). At the same time, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the study of social cohesion in urban settings (Miciukiewicz et al. 2012; Novy et al. 2012). The legacy of the socialist past, along with the "multiple transformations" toward a capitalist economy, creates a unique hybrid character in post-socialist cities, distinguishing them from their Western counterparts. According to Mussil (1992), this distinctiveness gives Soviet cities significant importance in studying social cohesion comprehensively. It is crucial to investigate how these multiple transitions, particularly the changes in the political regime and mode of production (Brad and Neugebauer 2017), have influenced urban characteristics, structures, practices, and conditions for social cohesion among citizens.

Urban centers, as well as cities, underwent tremendous transformations during the recent period of large-scale transition. Soviet cities, which were centrally and supra-nationally planned, experienced essential changes both during this complex transformative period and because of the influential effects of globalization. As a result, the examination of modified urban structures with developed social cohesion profiles becomes an increasingly important issue. Since the onset of Soviet dominance, cities and their inner structural and spatial dimensions have been shaped by Soviet ideology, which aimed to eliminate class distinctions.

At the beginning of the Soviet urbanization process in 1926, the urbanization rate in Georgia was 22.2%. This rate significantly increased in the subsequent decades (Sjöberg 1999). The South Caucasus region, particularly Armenia, experienced remarkable achievements, with its urbanization rate rising from 15.6% in 1926 to 67.8% by 1989. The centralized planning system played a crucial role in this process, as it controlled city sizes and managed legal population flows to the capital (Sjöberg 1999) through specific regulations, such as "propiska" (registration). However, it is important to note that this process led to a decline

in urban populations in capitals like Tbilisi and Kyiv as a consequence of the extension of the city structure (Frost 2018). For example, in 1926, the urban population represented 49.5%, whereas in 1939, it accounted for 48.7%. In 1979, this figure was dropped to 41.0%, and in 1989, it grew to 41.5%. (Boldirev 1990, quoted in Frost 2018:8).

At the same time, it is important to recognize that patterns of Soviet urbanization are diverse and unique, influenced by both local and translocal contexts. The historical legacy of Soviet domination, along with recent large-scale transitional developments, has shaped the characteristics of modern urban units. In general, the transition to a new economic system in post-Soviet countries has coincided with a noticeable process of de-urbanization. This shift has been accompanied by significant changes in economic structures, leading to a deep socio-economic crisis, de-industrialization, increased migration flows, and drastic demographic changes (Frost 2018; Hirt et al. 2016).

In the former Soviet republics, the transition to capitalism was marked by a process of de-urbanization, leading to significant changes in the economic system. This shift resulted in a deep socio-economic crisis, de-industrialization, increased migration flows, and drastic demographic changes. Post-Soviet cities are characterized by a trend of spatial polarization, where major cities are contrasted with peripheral areas, leading to socio-spatial segregation. This segregation raises critical questions about social integration and the socio-cultural functions of urban centers, which have lost their compact forms and essential public infrastructure, such as cultural houses, cinemas, and public spaces (Sykora 1999; Grunskis and Mankus 2013).

Urban and rural disparities represent one of the most significant challenges facing the country. Economic activity is predominantly concentrated in Tbilisi and Batumi, with the urban population reaching nearly 60 percent in 2020. Meanwhile, many so-called “secondary cities” are experiencing persistent population declines due to inadequate infrastruc-

ture and a lack of appealing economic opportunities for residents. Additionally, certain remote mountainous areas and rural regions struggle with a shortage of essential services, including roads, water, gas, and educational facilities.

In rural areas, the population has limited educational attainment, leading to a workforce that is largely informal and characterized by very low productivity levels. On a national scale, over 43 percent of employed workers earn a wage, yet less than 20 percent of the rural populace possess a higher education degree. In certain rural regions, there are concerns regarding an aging and declining population, as many individuals migrate to more urban and expensive areas. Furthermore, rural communities experience underdeveloped infrastructure and basic services, coupled with few economic opportunities, all of which contribute to the ongoing trend of migration toward urban centers.

There exists a high urban/rural as well as formal/informal productivity divide in the country. Overall, the level of urbanization is low, with limited spatial and structural changes. Economically, Georgia is highly polarized, with most growth concentrated in its capital, Tbilisi, and the second-largest city, Batumi. Approximately one-third of the national population resides in the capital, which generates half of the country's GDP. The higher living standards and improved access to opportunities have contributed to positive urban population and economic growth in these two regions, particularly in their urban centers, Tbilisi and Batumi.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, many non-ethnic Georgian citizens emigrated from the country, along with a significant number of ethnic Georgians. This also impacted on the dynamics of urban centers and their socio-cultural fabric. Cities described as "privileged places where various dynamics of the inherently contradictory *problématique* of social cohesion manifest" (Miciukiewicz et al. 2012), showcasing "both increased internal socio-cultural cohesion and rising tensions between different social groups." (Novy et al. 2012:1877)

Various socialist legacies should be considered when examining the phenomenon of social cohesion. Furthermore, the transition to a capitalist economic model has a unique dynamic in post-socialist societies. It is especially important to analyze the development of cities and urban areas in relation to their social cohesion profiles and characteristics, in comparison to Eastern post-socialist and Western capitalist ones.

Polarization and Fragmentation

In recent decades, Georgian society has experienced increasing polarization, socio-political fragmentation, a decline in political legitimacy, and a diminished willingness to engage in consensus-building. The polarization, which is considered a significant threat to social cohesion in societies, becomes a critical area of study for scholars in Georgia. Numerous theoretical and empirical studies indicate that polarization can make democracy vulnerable and lead it to deterioration. In particular, the type of affective polarization is recognized as a key factor contributing to democratic backsliding (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). The democratic doctrine that recognizes plurality as a fundamental for the ontological safety of society acknowledges that differing and conflicting viewpoints and potential political divergence are inherent to society. However, political polarization can pose a challenge to social cohesion, particularly when rising inter-group conflictual dynamic eliminates the space for political debate and reduces individuals' willingness to compromise on fundamental issues (Alesina et al. 2020; McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; McCoy and Somer 2019).

Over the past few decades, the political landscape in Georgia has shown that the differences among various groups regarding their political and ideological views have become increasingly homogeneous. These groups, often displaying overt antagonism, are generally perceived as opponents of fundamental and existential issues concerning the past, pres-

ent, and future of a society. Their differing attitudes and perspectives are crucial for social cohesion, as these differences often influence individuals' feelings towards those who represent or support specific political beliefs.

In recent years, political polarization has significantly reduced the scope for constructive political debate, impacting interpersonal relationships as well. Individuals often express strong feelings both for and against specific political views, extending these sentiments to those who present or support them. This trend has become increasingly dramatic, as growing animosity frequently intertwines with elements of intense affection and even violence. While the precondition for polarization appears inherently political – referring to political views and opinions – the impacts of its affective side materialize and emerge in social contexts. There is a growing social distance and fragmentation observable not only between in-group and out-group members but also within the most fundamental social units, such as families, relatives, and friends.

Polarization is defined as a dynamic process in which differences among groups accumulate into a considerably homogeneous dimension. Authors differentiate between two levels of political polarization: human and ideologically. The human level refers to both elite or political leaders as well as citizens in general, while ideological level arises from ideologies related to political issues that do not necessarily reflect the views and sentiments of citizens towards members of their own group ("in-group") or opposing groups ("out-group") (Owen et al. 2019). The difference between these two types of polarization lies in their focus. Affective polarization refers to negative emotional attitudes toward elites, political parties, and their supporters, based primarily on belonging to opposing groups. This means disliking individuals because of their viewpoints. In contrast, ideological polarization pertains to differing attitudes and opinions on specific political issues, which do not entail personal feelings about the individuals who support or present these views. In this case,

it's a matter of disliking the political opinions themselves rather than the people who advocate for them. The affective form of polarization creates a divide among individuals who experience empathy toward members of their own group, while simultaneously feeling antipathy toward those in other groups (Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2021). Such dynamics pose a significant threat to social cohesion, as they erode social interaction and communication between diverse groups within society (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Simas, Clifford, and Kirkland 2020). Affective polarization, defined as the social distance between in-group and out-group members, contrasts with ideological polarization, which relates to political views, opinions, or affiliations. The primary difference between these two forms of polarization lies in their nature: ideological polarization is marked by sharp divisions on specific issues, whereas affective polarization captures the emotional attitudes in which members of opposing groups harbor distrust and animosity toward one another (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). This type of attitude implies the future of *ad hominem*, whereas the ideological polarization does not involve it. Besides mutual intersections between them, ideological polarization does not inevitably lead to emotionally charged divisions among people.

Authors also identify another type of polarization called interactional polarization (Yarchi, Baden, and Kligler-Vilenchik 2021), which means also antagonism within groups that come from ideological and partisan divisions. One of the defining factors here is the individuals' tendency to align themselves with networks that share similar ideological beliefs (McPherson et al. 2001).

Understanding what accelerates and causes political polarization is a significant focus for many authors. Political factors, particularly the roles of political elites and leaders, are regarded as crucial in this process. However, economic, social, and cultural factors play an important role. The dissatisfaction and marginalization of certain groups in society are

considered essential contributors to political polarization. Additionally, socioeconomic exclusion and the lack of opportunities for social mobility are viewed as key determinants in this phenomenon (Grechyna 2016; Alesina et al. 2020). Authors also examine global issues such as immigration and international trade (Alesina et al. 2020; Rodrik 2020). Trust, which is a fundamental building block for social cohesion in societies, plays a crucial role in the process of polarization. Especially, citizens' trust in institutions is considered a significant source of legitimacy and essential for their effective functioning. Research indicates a correlation between low levels of trust and the differing viewpoints held by citizens (Edelman 2022). This observation is especially pertinent in the context of Georgia. Survey findings (refer to Chapter 6) reveal that citizens demonstrate a low level of institutional trust, which appears to be a significant factor contributing to the growing polarization within society.

By the late 1990s, sociologists observed a notable deficiency in systematic research on polarization, coining it a "neglected topic" (DiMaggio et al. 1996:691). This raised crucial questions: What is the primary source of polarization? Is it linked to domestic social issues marked by significant dissent in public opinion, or is it more closely associated with political ideology, cultural dynamics, or normative viewpoints? In the field of sociology, the distributional property of individual attitudes and their potential social impact on society and social cohesion has been a fundamental topic since the classics (Simmel 1908). Specifically, the dynamics of consensus and conflict are crucial for understanding how society operates as a cohesive unit.

Polarization is essentially conceptualized in the framework of group dynamics and social identity theories. These theories suggest that group membership and a sense of group identity involve having positive feelings toward members of one's own group (the in-group) and negative attitudes toward members of other groups (the out-group) (Tajfel et al. 1971; Billig and Tajfel 1973).

In contemporary sociology, definitions often highlight the disagreement between groups rather than how it is expressed by individuals or groups. According to DiMaggio, "polarization refers to the extent of disagreement, not to the ways in which disagreement is expressed. It is in the extremity of and distance between responses, not in their substantive content, that polarization inheres" (DiMaggio et al. 1996:691). He differentiates between two types of polarization characteristics: the state and the process. Polarization as a state refers to the level of opposing opinions on a particular issue, while polarization as a process relates to how polarization evolves over time. According to DiMaggio, polarization in society is closely linked to issues of social and political stability as he argues: "attitude polarization militates against social and political stability by reducing the probability of group formation at the center of the opinion distribution and by increasing the like hood of the formation of groups with distinctive, irreconcilable policy preferences" (DiMaggio 1996:693). He emphasizes "its potential impact on intergroup conflict and opportunities for political mobilization." (DiMaggio 1996:696-67)

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the causes of pernicious polarization, which can originate from structural, institutional, and elite factors, in contrast to mass-based influences (Bermeo 2003; Abramowitz 2010; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Campbell 2016). Structural factors, such as latent social cleavages and grievances, may serve as sources for political elites to strategically politicize these issues. The common social cleavages, such as class, religion, and ethnicity etc., do not necessarily predict polarization, as the political elite can manipulate the political context based on value-driven issues. This is particularly evident in the Georgian context, where opposing groups often clash primarily over differences in their value systems rather than over concrete political issues.

Despite the widespread nature of the phenomenon (DiMaggio et al. 1996), the lack of systematic study on polarization – particularly ideolog-

ical polarization, which sociologists have noted since the late 1920s – can be attributed, in part, to the complexity of this multidimensional concept. Polarization, like other complex concepts such as social cohesion, is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be measured using a specific set of variables and indicators, depending on the focus of the study.

In their research, Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer (2018) identify ten distinct features of pernicious polarization that diverge from a healthy state of pluralism in democratically developed societies. The key aspects involve the transformation of social identities into political identities for opposing groups, primarily based on exclusive moral positions. This transformation leads to psychological separation between groups, enhances in-group cohesion, and reduces the possibility of direct communication with out-groups, as well as the potential for generating shared intergroup interests.

In Georgia, opposing groups tend to have a clearly defined political identity that they perceive as morally exclusive. This antagonism stems from their differing views on the past, present, and future of Georgian society. A key aspect of this antagonist's views is the political orientation of the country, which locals believe is essential for its future development. Furthermore, issues surrounding the culture and identity of Georgia play a significant role in shaping these contentious perspectives. The political past and landscape from 2003 to 2012, along with the actions of key political figures, are often analyzed and assessed through a moral lens. The polarization in the country also has consequences at the institutional level, where certain institutions, as well as the media, may become dominated and controlled by one extreme or the other. As a result, the middle ground for public discourse in society is increasingly disappearing (McCoy and Somer 2018). It is evident that the prevalence of moralistic discourse is a common feature of polarizing dynamics in the country. Scholars highlight how political conversations have recently become dominated by Manichean and moralizing rhetoric. This Manichean discourse is

considered significant by populism researchers, as it incorporates both pro-people and anti-elite themes (Hawkins et al. 2018; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). In Georgia, the moralizing nature of discourse is effectively employed by both leaders and their supporters against opposing groups. This practice further deepens the divide between them and diminishes the possibility for constructive debate.

Polarization, first instigated by political forces and subsequently having affective implications on a broad societal scale, is considered a defining feature of Georgia's recent political history (Gegeshidze and de Waal 2021; Meister 2021). The phenomenon exhibits a mutable nature, predominantly shaped by the contextual elements of specific historical periods, the evolving dynamics of its principal actors, and the tactics employed for its instrumentalization (Kavtaradze 2021; Gelashvili 2021). It fundamentally pertains to a significant socio-political transformation or a profound political crisis inside society. One of the most pronounced forms of political division originated during the early formative years of independence from the Soviet Union (Jones 2013; Gegeshidze and de Waal 2021). Aside from a nearly universal cultural, ideological, and national project of an independent sovereign state, the political sphere has been divided into radicalized "pro-independent" and "pro-Russian" groups leading society into a small civil war (Jones 2013). This process of polarization is essentially seen as politically driven, aside from the fact that the "pro-Russian" group, specifically designated as "Red intelligentsia," could be readily related to a cultural and ideological dimension of polarization. It is believed that the current polarization, which appears to be driven essentially by political forces (Gilbreath and Turmanidze 2020; Kakhishvili et al. 2021), has reached "a very risky threshold" (Zurabashvili 2019; DRI and GYLA 2018). More significantly, it also developed social and cultural characteristics, as current events demonstrate. In the Georgian context, experts stressed the political basis of existing polarization, which was not based on ideological disagreements, such as the

country's social and economic development or foreign policy orientation (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006; Casal Bertoa 2021). Though recent political events have shown that the division between "us" and "them" has been translated into cultural terms, which refer to two radically contradictory worldviews with corresponding value systems: Pro-European versus Euro-sceptics, progressives versus conservatives, democratic vs authoritarian, etc. Political actors use polarization to mobilize their supporters. For example, major parties use it not only to motivate and mobilize their supporters, but also to eliminate potential room for newcomers or other competitors (Meister 2021). The media plays a vital part in this process. Experts underline the clear affiliation of mainstream media firms with political parties, which blurs the lines between them (Robakidze 2019). Media organizations are viewed as direct extensions of political players, accelerating and radicalizing a divided political climate (Kavtaradze 2021; Tsuladze and Abzianidze 2025). There have been reports of deviations from professional norms and journalism rules, which experts have noted (Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics 2018). As a result, political and media polarization has become a regular feature of Georgian daily life (Freedom House 2020), peaking around political elections (Zurabashvili 2019).

On the other hand, some national-scale survey analyses have been conducted by researchers to determine whether polarization, which they discovered to exist on the basis of the two largest political parties (GD and UNM), has ideological and cultural dimensions (Gilbreath and Turmanidze 2020; Kakhishvili et al. 2021). According to research conducted in 2020, "the divisions are not about either policy or ideology" (Gilbreath and Turmanidze 2020:5-16), but rather more about personalities. The study shows that Georgians are typically aligned on the bulk of important subjects, such as the country's foreign policy (pro-Western), economy, etc. Another study using survey data shows that there is no ideological party-voter linkage in the country (Kakhishvili et al. 2021). By studying

voters' sentiments about 30 policy problems, researchers discovered that these parties had similar viewpoints on half of them, and that survey results do not indicate mutually exclusive voter preferences. Though none of these studies deny the existence of radicalizing rhetoric in political and public discourse with extremely emotional implications on a societal level, based on the evidence analyzed, they find its current form classified as "extreme polarization" to be incorrect.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology and the Construction a Multidimensional Measurement Instrument of Social Cohesion in Georgia

Integrative Research Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-method approach to thoroughly analyzes the current state and nature of social cohesion within Georgian society. By combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, we aim to generate a more comprehensive dataset than would be possible with a single approach (Elliott 2005). Our objective is to measure social cohesion through nationwide survey data drawn from the recent wave of the European Value Study (EVS). This not only allows us to identify existing levels of social cohesiveness across various aspects of life but also enables us to delve into the deeper hermeneutic foundations of this phenomenon and its local interpretations through in-depth qualitative research. In summary, this study employs three primary methods: surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

Using an empirical dataset, we will identify and analyze key variables measuring social cohesion, including belonging versus isolation, inclusion versus exclusion, participation versus non-involvement, recognition versus rejection, and legitimacy versus illegitimacy. These variables will be examined across three spheres of human activity: economic, political,

and socio-cultural, following the widely validated measurement instruments referenced above (Dickes et al. 2010).

Although there is a growing interest in the topic, a complex, in-depth study of social cohesion, both at the national and community levels, is rarely identified. Given the multidimensionality of the concept, in-depth individual and focus group discussions become essential as tools for providing a complex understanding of this phenomenon. Qualitative methodology helped us uncover the hermeneutic depth of the concept, both on an individual and communal level. How people feel, act, and make sense of divergent meanings of social connectedness and belongings in their communities, as well as in the whole society, have been explored by using in-depth qualitative methodology (Pratt 2002).

The analysis presented here draws on qualitative data collected through 14 focus-group discussions and 46 in-depth interviews conducted with participants from various urban areas across Georgia. In sum, seven fieldwork sites have been selected in our study: Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Telavi, Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Marneuli, and Zugdidi. Following the main focus of our research we selected five small urban areas (SUAs) as a field sites, "cities with a population between 5,000 and 50, 000 inhabitants" (EUKN 2022) or "towns and semi-dense areas, which have a population of at least 5,000 inhabitants" (Dijkstra 2020), three of them characterized with interethnic mixtures that enabled us to extend the lens for capturing the possible particularities of small urban units, explore its in-depth contextual futures and its functional roles in it. For richer data and comprehensive comparative analysis between cases, we also selected capital Tbilisi and Kutaisi (as the fourth largest city in the country) as additional field work sites (see Table 1).

The selection of these locations served different goals as it represented both the Eastern and Western part of Georgia, as well as ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous populated urban (particularly small urban areas – SUAs) sites that were of crucial interest in the following study. The

field work was conducted mainly during the years 2020-2022. Three generational cohorts have been selected: youth (18-30 years), adults (31-50 years), and seniors (51+ years). The highly rich body of empirical data has been synthesized and analyzed with the assistance of the NVivo software.

Table 1. *Population by municipalities, urban and rural settlements in Georgia (National Statistics Office of Georgia)*[4]

Inhabitants / Municipality	**Total ('000)**	**Urban ('000)**	**Rural ('000)**
Tbilisi	1, 330.2	1, 285.3	45.0
Telavi	56.7	16.8	39.9
Kutaisi	-	161.2	-
Zugdidi	108.6	58.0	50.6
Akhalkalaki	43.7	8.4	35.3
Akhaltsikhe	37.9	18.0	19.8
Marneuli	114.0	22.7	91.4
Total country level	3,914.0	2,423.2	1,490.9

While qualitative data derived through the above-mentioned methods are extremely helpful to shed light on the individual sense of belonging and connectedness at the community level, particularly in small urban units, this type of empirical data does not allow for making generalized conclusions about population-level sentiments and attitudes. Nationwide representative survey data are required to explore the existing profile of social cohesion, the state, and the development of its multiple dimensions at different levels of society. To understand what the individ-

[4] Preliminary Results of the 2024 Population and Agricultural Census - National Statistics Office of Georgia.

uals think about their social interconnectedness, belonging, and social cohesion at the country level. The data from qualitative and quantitative methods will be used in concert with each other, further strengthening the analysis and overcoming the limitations of any one method.

Small Urban Areas of Georgia (SUAs) as a Unit of Analysis

One of the main focuses of our research is directed to the exploration of the specific nature and state of social cohesion in small urban areas (SUAs) of Georgia. In comparison to the European experience, where this term is broadly mentioned by policies even though it is not addressed directly and examined practically, in the Georgian case, it is rarely in focus of both policies as well as scholars. As the term SUAs appears as a simple statistical term for describing small and medium-sized cities ("towns"), scholars as well as policymakers try to consider its highly variable, fluid, and context-dependent features. By using this term, we follow two well-established definitions and methods of classification provided by the Degree of Urbanization and EUKN. The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN 2022) defines the term *"Small Urban Areas"* for describing small and medium-sized cities. More specifically, Small Urban Areas (SUAs) are defined as cities with a population between 5,000 and 50,000 inhabitants. It is important to note that this definition is characterized by a high level of variability and context-dependency, so that it is essential to consider its specific functional role and specificity in its surrounding areas. So that the context-related functions and roles are essential when using the term SUAs.

In our research, we identify small urban areas following the classification that is utilized by the Degree of Urbanization (Dijkstra et al. 2020). Using a simple and transparent method of categorization, this standardized classification approach enables international statistical comparisons and its application at the global level. The Degree of Urbanization was

recommended as a method for international comparison by the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC 2020) on March 5, 2020, in collaboration with six international organizations: the European Union, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labor Office (ILO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat), and the World Bank. These organizations have collaborated to develop a harmonized methodology that facilitates international statistical comparisons, resulting in a standardized definition of cities, towns, semi-dense areas, and rural areas. More specifically, the Degree of Urbanization identifies three types of settlements:

1. *Cities,* which have a population of at least 50,000 inhabitants in contiguous dense grid cells (>1,500 inhabitants per km^2);
2. *Towns and semi-dense areas*, which have a population of at least 5,000 inhabitants in contiguous grid cells with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per km^2; and
3. *Rural areas,* which consist mostly of low-density grid cells (<300 inhabitants per km^2).

It is important to note that this method tries to complement and not replace the definitions used by national statistical institutes and ministries, and at the same time, to be simple and applicable on the global scale.

From the Theoretical Framework to the Empirical Operationalization of Social Cohesion

Although authors have not yet agreed on a single definition (Friedkin 2004), in the first decade of the 2000s, several empirical research tools emerged based on different theoretical frameworks (Jenson 1998, 2011;

Bernard 1999; Berger-Schmitt 2002; Chan et al. 2006; Dickes et al. 2010, 2013; Green and Janmaat 2011; Bottoni 2018; Delhey et al. 2018). One of the first conceptualization of social cohesion, which belongs to the Canadian sociologist and political researcher Jane Jenson (1998), emphasizes the processual nature of the phenomenon, and defines it primarily as "shared values and commitment to a community" (Jenson 1998:13). By identifying five constituent dimensions of social cohesion such as *belonging vs isolation, inclusion vs exclusion, participation vs non-involvement, recognition vs rejection,* and *legitimacy vs illegitimacy,* Jenson's theoretical approach have been established as a foundational base for the later elaborated multidimensional measurement instruments for social cohesion. By adding another constituent dimension of *equality vs inequality*, Bernard (1999) not only further extended Jenson's model, but also established an integrative model for multidimensional empirical investigation of social cohesion. The author differentiated domains of activity (economic, political, socio-cultural) on the one hand and their formal/attitudinal and substantial /behavioral nature on the other hand. This ascribed a multilevel and multidimensional character to the measurement instrument. This theoretical model later fostered discussions regarding the issue of the legitimacy of constitutive elements of social cohesion. The further operationalization of the concept provided by Chan et al. (2006) excluded the economic dimension, which was regarded by Bernard (1999) as an "essential constituent" of social cohesion. In his conceptual model, Chan et al. (2006) assumed it as one of the determining and not constitutive factors for social cohesion. Unlike Jenson's theoretical model, Chan et al. (2006) defined social cohesion as "a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal integrations among members of a society, as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust, a sense of belonging, and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations" (Chan et al. 2006:290). After synthesizing the

conceptual frameworks of both Bernard (1999) and Chan et al. (2006), Dickes elaborated a multidimensional measurement instrument of social cohesion that has been tested and validated (Dickes et al. 2010; Acket et al. 2010). By constructing a set of intermediate indicators using the European Value Survey Data (EVS), the authors provided a series of comparable measurements and a multidimensional analysis of social cohesion across all European countries and beyond (Dickes et al. 2010, 2013; Acket et al. 2010). Their operational model measured social connectedness in three dimensions of life: social, political, and cultural, by covering two types of relations: formal (attitudinal) and substantial (behavioral). Following Chans et al. (2006) consideration, who regarded the economic domain as a precondition that does not legitimately constitute social cohesion, pairs of variables such as equality/inequality and inclusion/exclusion have been excluded from the multidimensional measurement instrument. It should also be emphasized that there exists a challenge for researchers in terms of the selection of indicators and variables for the social cohesion measurement instrument. The empirical databases of the European Value Study (EVS), following its initial aim, cover the set of variables measuring primarily the moral and social values and not directly social cohesion per se (Dickes et al. 2010).

The Elaboration of a Multidimensional Measurement Instrument

As mentioned above, in our research, specifically, in its quantitative part, we utilize a multidimensional measurement instrument of social cohesion, tested and validated by the empirical study of Dickes et al (2010, 2013), as well as by Acket et al. (2011), based on the synthesized theoretical framework of the various authors (Bernard 1999; Jenson 1998; Chan. et al. 2006). In general, we are utilizing the same set of intermediate

indicators in our measurement instrument that was selected originally by these authors (Dickes et al. 2010; Acket et al. 2011). However, in our work, Dickes's multidimensional measurement instrument will be further enriched with some additional intermediate indicators, which we found crucial for studying social cohesion in Georgia, considering its contextual particularities. The dimension of *acceptance / rejection* within formal relations in the socio-cultural sphere has been extended to include intermediate variables such as acceptance of diversity and interpersonal trust. The dimension of *belonging / isolation* within the socio-cultural sphere has been broadened to include formal relations and has addressed intermediate variables, such as the sense of belonging associated with geographical identity.

It should be noted that the elaboration of the empirical measurement instrument of social cohesion appears to be one of the challenging tasks for scholars who try to produce the cross-national as well as national comparative analysis of social cohesion. The authors are struggling with the operationalization of the highly abstract concept in terms of indicator selection of social cohesion based on the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks. As mentioned above, the empirical database of the European Value Study (EVS) with its international questionnaire appears limited in terms of alternative associative items of social cohesion (Dickes et al. 2010; Acket et al. 2010). Following the foundational theoretical framework, the socio-cultural and political dimensions of social cohesion with its formal and substantive characteristics are measured through concepts such as institutional trust, solidarity, political participation, and socio-cultural participation. We must note that these concepts have been largely measured by researchers through a set of indicators selected from the EVS database. For instance, based on this EVS empirical base, researchers examined institutional trust (Halman and Vloet 1994; Listhaug 1995), solidarity (Oorchot 2000; Oorchot et al. 2005; Galland

2002), political participation (Fahey et al. 2006), as well as sociocultural participation (Petterson 2008).

In comparison to Dickes et al. (2010) multidimensional measurement instrument, we extend the set of indicators by operationalizing social cohesion based on those concepts and items that have been excluded by some authors from their empirical work (see Annex 1, Table 1). For instance, Dickes et al. (2010) excluded items such as *trust in fellow citizens*, regarded *as interpersonal trust*, from their study, even though it is assumed to be one of the essential indicators of social cohesion in its original definitions (Jenson 1998; Chan et al. 2006). For example, in Chan's et al. (2006) multidimensional conceptual model ("a two-by-two framework" for social cohesion measurement) of social cohesion, *general trust*, which refers to *mutual trust among citizens*, comprises one of the two dimensions of social cohesion called "horizontal-subjective" (Chan et al. 2006:295). However, Dickes et al. (2010) provided argumentations for such a decision by referring to the framework of Bernard (1999), in which the formal/attitudinal domain of social cohesion is constituted by two dimensions, such as *legitimacy/illegitimacy* and *acceptance/rejection*. Dickes et al. (2010) find that legitimacy refers to different social institutions and not individuals per se. On the other hand, the dimension of acceptance (recognition) is defined by Bernard (1999) as acceptance of differences rather than interpersonal trust itself. So, based on these arguments, Dickes et al. (2010) disregard and exclude *interpersonal trust* from the multidimensional measurement instrument of social cohesion. At the same time, Dickes et al. (2010) emphasize the possibility of future verification of links between interpersonal trust and selected indicators of social cohesion. The concept of *acceptance,* with its associative indicators and items from the EVS international questionnaire, such as distance and tolerance (which asks respondents which groups they would like as their neighbor), has also been disregarded in

Dickes et al.'s work (2010), with the argumentation that there was no guarantee of functional invariance among the analyzed countries.

In the multidimensional measurement model provided by Dickes et al. (2010, 2013), the dimension of *acceptance/rejection*, which measures the formal relations in the socio-cultural sphere, is presented by intermediate indicators associated with Solidarity (proximal and distal). We extended the list of intermediate indicators in the dimension of *acceptance/rejection* in our operational model, and included *acceptance of diversity* as well as *interpersonal trust*, which measures the formal relations in the socio-cultural sphere. We also followed Jenson's (1998) argument who defined the dimension of *acceptance vs rejection* as an individual's feelings towards respect for difference and diversity in society (Jenson 1998:16). The same position is shared by Bernard (1999) who argues that the dimension of *recognition/rejection* (acceptance/rejection), that "is associated with the values of social cohesion, considers pluralism not just a fact, but a virtue, that is, the tolerance of differences." (Bernard 1999:18)[5]

We also extended another dimension of social cohesion, such as *belonging/isolation*, which in Dickes et al. (2010) multidimensional measurement model measures substantial relations in the socio-cultural sphere. The original model consists of intermediate indicators associated with belonging to and participation in the social, cultural, and political associations. As the unit of analysis in our research is the county, as well as its urban settlements, we found the issue of citizens' belonging to these units crucially significant. Moreover, the place attachment forms a solid foundation for an individual's sense of belonging within a community (Basso 1996) and is associated with a rich meanings and emotional connections of individuals, groups, and cultures towards it (Tuan 1977).

[5] More detailed analysis of conceptual link between intermediate variable of acceptance of diversity and shared values see in the separate section bellow.

For these reasons, we included formal relations, such as the citizens' sense of belonging towards the country, region, and district in the variables parcel (notably, *belonging vs isolation* relates to the socio-cultural sphere in Dickes et al. (2010) original approach and focuses on substantial relations). Additionally, we draw on Jenson (1998), who in her earlier work defines the dimension of *belonging vs isolation* in terms of shared values and a sense of identity (Jenson 1998:15) that can be produced at different geographical levels. By extending the socio-cultural sphere with formal relations, such as a citizens' sense of belonging towards the country, region, and district, the variable parcel – *belonging / isolation* – has been enriched with a *sense of geographical identity* (country, region, urban district). Here, we must note that grouping items within each parcel constructs an intermediate variable that aligns with the theoretical framework mentioned above. The number of items in each parcel satisfies the requirements for significant correlation and saturation as indicated by Dickes et al. (2010:458)[6]. It was also helpful that the European Value Study (EVS) database offered the possibility for operationalization of all additional indices in our measurement instrument, such as acceptance of diversity, interpersonal trust, and sense of geographical belonging/identity, along with relevant associative variables.

It is important to note that the multidimensional measurement instrument developed by Dickes et al. (2010) and Acket et al. (2011) has primarily been applied at the international or cross-national level, using sovereign states or large regions as units of analysis. In the present study, this instrument is employed at the national scale, where regions, urban and rural settlements, the capital, cities, and districts constitute the units

[6] "…where only two items constitute a parcel, the correlation between the two items must be significant in each of the countries; if more than two items form a parcel, they must have high enough saturations on the first principal component (equal or greater than 0.10)" (Dickes et al. 2010:458).

of analysis. To our knowledge, this represents the first application of this multidimensional model at both national and subnational urban levels, thereby adding methodological value to the study.

Conceptualized as a societal attribute (Durkheim 1984; Parsons 1951), social cohesion has traditionally been examined at the group or community level (Kearns and Forrest 2000). Research on cohesion within specific neighborhoods, urban and rural districts, and religious communities has attracted considerable attention among social psychologists (Bollen and Hoyle 1990) and urban studies scholars (Kearns and Forrest 2000), most often through qualitative approaches. Applying a multidimensional measurement instrument – one predominantly used in cross-national research – to regional, urban, and local contexts within a single country will enable the identification of distinct social-cohesion profiles across societal levels and provide a robust basis for comparative analysis. This approach offers a unique opportunity to generate new insights into the study of cohesion at the micro level.

The Concept of "Shared Values"

The concept of *shared value*s, one of the foundational and constitutive elements of social cohesion following its classical definitions (Durkheim 1984,1915; Weber 1930/1905; Parsons 1951; Tönnies 1957), involves some controversial reflections among authors. Durkheim viewed shared consciousness and values as foundational for a stable and cohesive society. Max Weber described collective ideas and values as essential for social development (1930/1905). These ideas have been extended by the second generation of classical sociologists, particularly by Talcott Parsons, whose theory of structural-functionalism defined "conformity with a shared system of value-orientation standards" (1951:24) as the foundational basis for equilibrium and cohesion in society. The list of authors defining social

cohesion through shared values in policy-related discourse is extensive. It has been conceptualized by Judith Maxwell as an essential component of social cohesion (Maxwell 1996:13). Ralf Dahrendorf (1995) defines a socially cohesive society as one that provides chances to all of its members within the framework of acceptable norms and institutions (Dahrendorf 1995). Other authors also emphasize that "social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community." (Rosell et al. 1995, quoted by Stanley 2003). It is important to note that the definitions of social cohesion that are based on the concept of "shared values" are broadly adopted by governments and international organizations. According to the social cohesion network, "social cohesion is the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunities based on a sense of hope, trust and reciprocity." (Social Cohesion Network, cited by Stanley 2001)

Shared values, understood as a core component of social cohesion, have been incorporated as indicators in the measurement instrument developed by Janmaat (2011). Janmaat argues that while certain values are assumed to carry particular importance for fostering societal consensus, there is no clear agreement on which values are most essential. His reasoning parallels the arguments of Almond and Verba (1963) and Dahl (1967), who emphasize the significance of values linked to democratic institutions. According to these authors, citizens' collective endorsement of democratic procedures and their active engagement in political life form a critical basis for social cohesion.

In this context, Janmaat (2011) identifies four indicators of shared values. Two of these are drawn from Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) cultural value dimensions – traditional versus secular values and survival versus

self-expression values. The remaining two pertain to political and civic orientations, specifically support for democracy as a form of governance and commitment to principles such as gender equality.

At the same time, definitions of social cohesion that rely heavily on the notion of "shared values" have been widely questioned for insufficiently accounting for the "fact of pluralism" in modern societies (Rawls 1996) and for underestimating the individualistic and autonomous characteristics of contemporary social actors. Scholars have noted that an overemphasis on societal unity risks overshadowing the significance of the process of reaching agreement among members of society – a process that enables the peaceful coexistence of diverse worldviews in pluralistic contexts. The concept of shared values has also been criticized as potentially conservative or even regressive, having been associated with forms of "social backwardness" (Banfield 1958). Stanley (2003: 9) further argues that the term is inherently ambivalent, as it can be interpreted as implying "social sameness" or the expectation that individuals conform to identical values, beliefs, or lifestyles – an interpretation that raises concerns about the reproduction of authoritarian tendencies. To mitigate these problematic connotations, Stanley proposes a reformulation of the concept, defining shared values as "the sum over a population of individuals' willingness to cooperate with each other without coercion in the complex set of social relations needed by individuals to complete their life courses." (2003: 9)

On the one hand, these concerns encourage researchers to remain critical and careful by defining and selecting the constitutive elements of the highly complex and multidimensional phenomenon of social cohesion. Though these critical concerns can also lead to a reductionist interpretation of the shared values, this has a substantial meaning for understanding the concept of social cohesion. They can also oversimplify the meaning of shared values by reducing it to the dimensions of everyday

routines, emphasizing that it can lead to standardization of individuals' choices of "lifestyle" as well as their praxis patterns.

The concept of social cohesion refers to a willingness of individuals to agree on those universalistic values that make their existence as members of society possible (Maxwell 1996; Jameson 1998). Values such as tolerance, respect for human rights, freedom, etc., have ascribed a universal character as they are shared by members of society for the sake of their existence in it. Such shared values are regarded as responsible for the creation of a foundational basis for socially cohesive societies. Most essential, the sharing and recognition of such values from individual members create fundamental conditions for plurality and heterogeneity in society that excludes a risk of sameness, as well as those forms of social homogeneity associated with totalitarian regimes. Jenson (1998) differentiates between the values that can be shared and those that can exist as different in society. For her, there are values (for example, universal or political that guarantee the coexistence of individuals in society) which "must be shared and which can differ without threatening the capacity to engage in developing a community." (Jenson 1998:31)

In most of the surveys utilizing the multidimensional measurement instruments of social cohesion, the segment of the shared values has been dismissed (Dickes et al. 2010, 2013). We can assume that the above-mentioned assumptions have also impacted the debate around the operationalization and measurement of social cohesion. It should be emphasized that the aim of elaborating a multidimensional measurement instrument is to cover and measure all essential intermediate variables and indicators of social cohesion. The exclusion of the shared value concept from the set of indicators of any type of measurement instrument of social cohesion, to some extent, can also lead to a limitation of the complex character of the phenomenon. We must note that there exists suitable empirical data in the EVS bases associated with the *shared value*s

concept, among them are *acceptance and tolerance of diversity*, which we included in our measurement instrument as stated above. The exclusion of the shared value concept from any type of measurement instrument limits the multidimensional character of the phenomenon. Moreover, to consider the unique fact that there exists suitable empirical data in the EVS bases related to these variables.

Another critical point observable towards the measurement instrument of social cohesion is its consequential normativity. It should be clarified that the multidimensional measurement instrument of social cohesion is designed to identify and compare the existing level of cohesiveness in different groups, societies, nation-states, regions, etc., as well as to compare the profiles of its various dimensions. As a scientific instrument, it does not have a normative inception, as it does not even pretend to elaborate a particular index of a "favorable" level of cohesiveness in any given society.

CHAPTER 5

The Qualitative Profile of Social Cohesion

Qualitative Data and Analysis

The qualitative component of this research aimed to explore the complex nature of social cohesiveness within communities. By employing in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions, the study seeks to understand how locals perceive social unity at the community level and within the broader context of Georgian society. It examines their sense of belonging and interconnectedness on both micro and macro levels, as well as their views on the key challenges to social unity and civic cooperation.

A crucial aspect to explore is how individuals perceive the essential elements of social cohesion in their daily actions and how they internalize, objectify, and express these elements in their lives. A significant gap is revealed in the quantitative analysis between attitudes (attitudinal) and behaviors (behavioral) related to social cohesion. The following section will thematically discuss and reflect on these main questions.

The multidimensional theoretical model used in the quantitative part of the study also guided the identification of key thematic directions for the qualitative interview guidelines, which utilized an unstructured interview format. This instrument was developed with a set of indicators that reflect the political and socio-cultural dimensions of social cohesion. It is important to note that the term "social cohesion," translated into Georgian as "sotsialuri shech'iduloba," carries almost the same semantic

meaning as the original term, directly referring to the state of interconnectedness among people. Although this term is rarely used, it may not resonate with the general public and appears to be relatively new in everyday public discourse, as well as in local academic circles.

We operationalized "social cohesion" by disaggregating it into a set of indicators that capture its multiple dimensions. This multidimensional approach strengthened the structure and effectiveness of the interview guidelines. In line with the theoretical framework adopted in this study, the qualitative instruments were organized around several core thematic areas: citizens' sense of connectedness and belonging, and their political, social, and cultural participation, including broader forms of civic engagement. The analysis therefore concentrates on the functional and operational characteristics of these elements of social cohesion, with particular attention to the substantive and attitudinal dimensions outlined above.

Civic Participation

The in-depth narratives indicate that civic involvement poses a significant challenge for citizens, irrespective of generational or gender differences. Respondents consistently pointed to low levels of public participation in local government processes, and instances of individual civic initiative were mentioned only infrequently.

One key finding emerging from both the individual and group discussions is the very low level of public awareness regarding civic rights and responsibilities. This lack of awareness discourages citizens from initiating actions to address local problems independently.

It is also noteworthy that many respondents primarily associate civic participation and activism with election periods. Such engagement – often expressed through the promotion of party programs and ideologies

– is widely perceived as being financially motivated rather than driven by genuine political or civic commitment. As an older man from Kutaisi explained:

> When the election period arrives, some people become active. If you ask someone in our town who the mayor is, about 90% would not be able to answer because he does not communicate with locals or engage with local issues. (Lado, 70, Kutaisi)

Indifference emerged as a key factor contributing to citizens' passivity in the public sphere. Respondents described civic engagement in their towns as minimal and largely attributed this to the apathetic attitudes of local residents. A lack of youth participation in civic initiatives was highlighted in particular. Overall, this indifference toward local and public issues appears to cut across generational lines. As a young woman from Kutaisi remarked:

> I would change many things here, starting with the attitudes of the locals towards our town, especially among the youth. Instead of changing something here, working to improve or develop our town, they're waiting for others to take action. I believe this current state reflects their indifference. Even with a university in town, the environment feels lifeless. (Lana, 26, Kutaisi)

A young man participating in a focus group discussion in Kutaisi described the passive behavior of young people in an urban area with a large student population:

> Nothing happens here. When I finished my studies, there were no youth groups for me to engage with. (Levan, 30, Kutaisi)

One reason cited for the existing passiveness in civic activities among residents is a lack of civic consciousness and responsibility.

> It is important to mention that when locals do have a civic initiative – like restoring something in their neighborhood – local government often interprets it as interference in their affairs, especially if there are distinct political party preferences involved. They think they are here now, and they must control the situation. They do not have enough understanding that we citizens have the right and responsibility to change something here. (Tamuna, 28, Telavi)

Some respondents from older age groups pointed to the daily struggle for survival as a reason for civic passivity, as it occupies most of their lives:

> There were better times in the past, but now everyone is under pressure due to financial issues; they experience poverty and a sense of need. (Gela, 68, Zugdidi)

The fundamental defining factor for the low levels of citizen involvement in the civic sphere appears to be not just a lack of civic consciousness and sense of generalized responsibility, but also other context-specific factors. One of them is also locally shaped attitudes.

In some contexts, those actively engaged in civic activities are labeled "activists," often associated with political agitation or party engagement.

This perspective has shaped local attitudes towards civic activities. Generally, civic initiatives are linked to pragmatic financial interests rather than seen as genuine acts of civic engagement rooted in internalized civic values and identity. In-depth narratives and focus group discussions reveal that citizens often define civic activities through idealized categories that exclude any practical interests. As such, some respondents express their deliberate distance from these activities, choosing not to partake because they view them as materialistic, pragmatic, self-serving, and disconnected from their true meaning. This creates a transactional approach to politics.

> Everyone involved in such activities expects to gain something, like money or other benefits. They often don't care much about the content of what they're discussing or doing. (Nino, 45, Telavi)

A middle-aged man from Western Georgia highlighted the different categories of people regarding civic activities and public involvement:

> The same few people are typically involved in these activities. There are many who are not active at all. The few who are involved participate in everything. (Vano, 52, Zugdidi)

Respondents highlight a concerning trend of demonization surrounding specific civic activities that are linked to certain organizations, largely due to the differing views on fundamental issues these organizations are locally associated with. As articulated by some respondents, these organizations and their initiatives represent an "ideology" that does not completely fit with the traditional values and lifestyles of locals. One respondent noted,

> There are organizations in our city that have various local projects, and people from here are engaged in them. I do not have any interest in being a part of it. I believe these organizations try to undermine our traditions and establish a new way of living. (Manana, 45, Telavi)

It is also significant to emphasize that in certain cases, citizens engage with specific social and political issues to a lesser extent regarding their overall political views, frequently aligning their perspectives based more on party or group identification. The strictly defined boundaries between "us" and "them" often stem from group membership rather than established political beliefs. Moreover, the country's foreign orientation is categorized as either pro-Western or pro-Russian, or Europe versus Russian, which leads to opposing groups identifying their opponents accordingly. This division fosters a greater potential for conflict and separation rather than encouraging discussion and cooperation among groups with different party identifications.

In general, discussions reveal that respondents often articulate the political sphere predominantly with negative connotations. It is described as corrupt, unjust, and monopolized by corrupt actors, leading many to deliberately distance themselves from it. Respondents often express strong views on this matter. One individual shared,

> I try not to be involved in politics. (Giorgi, 37, Zugdidi)

An older man from Eastern Georgia elaborated on this sentiment:

> Politics is a big business here. Those who want to make a lot of money enter politics today. They do not even care about their illegal actions. They are ready to spend years in jail just to maintain their illegally collected billions.

> Perhaps there are a few who genuinely care for their values and country, but they are definitely in the minority. (Tamazi, 70, Telavi)

Some respondents explain their own civic passivity, as well as that of their fellow citizens, as a consequence of the pressure they face in their local environment. They recount negative experiences related to their freedom of expression. In some instances, respondents express concern that voicing certain issues within the community could lead to potential repercussions. One focus group participant described a moment of hesitation:

> We have freedom of thought expressed only verbally, as we are still constrained in many ways. Imagine if I get arrested – God save me – who will care for my family? Because of this, at times, I try to stay under the radar. On the surface, it seems like we are not under pressure, but in reality, we all feel it; we are not free. (Erekle, 30, Kutaisi)

Additional quotes from interviews illustrate this condition:

> People here are trying to control what to say out loud and what to keep quiet about. (Vaja, 27, Telavi)

> I should not be scared to express my thoughts. I should not fear others' disapproval; only then can we achieve something. (Manana, 55, Kutaisi)

Overall, the low level of civic participation, which was confirmed at the national level in the quantitative part of this study, can be attributed to several subjective and objective factors. The most significant among these appear to be the low civic consciousness of citizens, as well

as a lack of awareness regarding their civic rights and responsibilities. Additionally, a seemingly subjective factor contributing to passivity is a "blasé"[7] attitude (Simmel 1995:116–131) that was observed across all age groups involved in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. This attitude seems to encapsulate various objectively existing conditions that respondents are concerned with. Most mentioned are the personal experiences of injustice, corruption, and monopolized public spaces.

Furthermore, there is a locally generated image of the "active citizen," which is perceived as motivated primarily by self-interest and materialistic desires, with an apparent absence of genuine civic intentions. Conversely, respondents also attribute civic passivity to the prevailing vulnerable social and economic conditions, asserting that impoverished individuals, focused on their daily struggles, are unable to consider their civic responsibilities or engage actively in social life.

In contexts where civic initiatives among local community members are largely absent, civic and social activities appear to be confined mainly to the work of local NGOs or to parliamentary and municipal election cycles. Respondents frequently associated these forms of engagement with financial or material incentives, viewing them as inconsistent with their understanding of genuine civic participation grounded in authentic concern for local issues.

Although respondents frequently characterized civic consciousness and engagement as insufficient, they also highlighted the "power of solidarity," which becomes particularly visible and mobilized during moments of crisis (see page 128). Recent developments in Georgia underscore this dynamic, revealing pronounced civic solidarity and collective

[7] "blasé", *"Die Blasiertheit" – the indifferent attitude of an individual towards the outside world as he/she "sees all things as being of an equally dull and grey hue, as not worth getting excited about"* (Simmel 276:2011). Georg Simmel: The Philosophy of Money, London: Routledge.

action, especially among younger generations. This cohort has demonstrated elevated civic awareness and a strong commitment to public engagement – at times even risking their lives and personal freedom in defense of core civic values.

Social Connectedness

When discussing their current social relationships, nearly all respondents explicitly contrasted their past experiences with the present, underscoring what they perceive as substantial changes in interpersonal connectedness over time. The past is generally viewed through a nostalgic lens – most prominently by older respondents, but also by some younger participants who have no direct experience of the Soviet period. This indicates a degree of generational transmission of attitudes and perceptions. As one resident of Kutaisi remarked:

> There used to be more love and respect among people. Now people have become colder and more aggressive toward one another. (Erekle, 30, Kutaisi)

Several respondents attempted to explain the dramatic changes in contemporary interpersonal relationships, often offering similar reasons. Their explanations focused primarily on shifts in socio-economic conditions and broader societal transformations within the country. Many respondents described the daily struggle for survival as a defining feature of their current lives. As a young man from Kutaisi stated:

> The main reason for the disconnection people experience is the financial hardship they face. (Nikoloz, 26, Kutaisi)

In another account, a young man from Kutaisi describes the everyday challenges faced by local residents:

> People are preoccupied with how to provide for their families – how to pay bills, what to do the next day, and how to earn enough just to get by. This is the main issue everyone struggles with daily, and it's why people become aggressive. Imagine working all day, coming home in the evening, and still not having enough money for food. (Erekle, 30, Kutaisi)

Furthermore, some respondents attributed these changes to broader political and economic transformations, contrasting their nostalgia for past forms of human connection and solidarity with the socio-economic realities of the Soviet period. As one respondent reflected:

> People may say I was socialized in the communist system, but I can tell you that I had a normal life back then. I didn't face the problems I face now; I didn't know what hatred was, nor was I aware of the kinds of negative experiences we are living through today. Then came the 1990s – the war and all the horrors we went through – and even now we continue to experience difficulties. (Revazi, 57, Kutaisi)

It is important to note that the intensity of interpersonal relationships is strongly influenced by age as well as by social and economic factors.

Despite the changes in interpersonal connectedness, many interview participants noted that solidarity still emerges during difficult moments or when individuals must rely on one another for support. A woman

from eastern Georgia shared an example of feeling a sense of community even in unexpected situations:

> Thank God we haven't completely lost our humanity. I regularly bring produce from my garden to sell at the street market, and that's where I see real solidarity. Everyone who sells there encourages and helps one another. Some might think we're competitors, but if someone arrives late or doesn't have a place, we all try to make room for them. In those moments, we truly form a community, helping each other regardless of our backgrounds – some of us are peasants, some teachers, and so on – and we all care for one another. (Nino, 61, Telavi)

According to respondents, care and connectedness are not consistently experienced or expressed as core elements of citizenship in everyday life. Nevertheless, even under challenging circumstances, citizens possess notable reserves of solidarity and mutual support that can be mobilized in specific situations, as illustrated in the accounts discussed above.

This observation is particularly salient in situations where the perceived threat involves existential issues affecting the entire society and nation. Recent history shows a marked rise in solidarity and collective unity among Georgians – especially among younger generations – who have defended the country's future at great personal cost, including risking their lives and freedom. Numerous examples attest to their commitment to fundamental human values through acts of self-sacrifice.

The transformations in social connectedness and interpersonal relationships are especially striking when described at the neighborhood level. One woman recalled how neighbors once shared their everyday lives:

> In my childhood, we shared a kitchen with our neighbors, living alongside seven families. Today, it's common for people to go an entire week without even seeing their neighbors. (Meri, 69, Kutaisi)

A young woman from Zugdidi shares a similar perspective, highlighting the prevalent financial difficulties in her local milieu:

> Today, there is much more distress and hardship; everyone is struggling financially. (Tamar, 36, Zugdidi)

Additional interviews illustrate these shared experiences:

> People have so many financial problems that they lack the motivation for anything. They prefer to isolate themselves. (Artur, 71, Akhaltsikhe)

Some respondents also express concerns about the social divide that is developing between the wealthy and the economically vulnerable, affecting their interconnectedness. A young lady states:

> In general, there is no middle class left in town or in the country. There are only rich and poor people. The wealthy have built massive houses, surrounded by high walls, and they are closed off from the rest. (Tata, 31, Zugdidi)

The narrative suggests that a key resource for sustaining mutual respect and kindness – the value placed on interpersonal relationships

– appears to be diminished in everyday life. At the same time, respondents attributed this growing indifference at least in part to vulnerable socio-economic conditions and the daily struggle for survival.

Social Networks

One thematic component of the qualitative research examined social networks within society, with the aim of understanding their nature and specific characteristics in small urban areas. The findings highlight several noteworthy developments:

Individuals' social networks are closely tied to the urban areas or districts in which they live. The size and composition of these networks are strongly shaped by factors such as age, social status, and the level of individual activity. In smaller urban settlements, the core components of social networks typically include neighborhoods, colleagues and coworkers, classmates, and religious communities (parishes).

A significant portion of these networks is rooted in primary group memberships – such as family, relatives, kinship ties, and close circles of friends (often referred to as dzmakatsi – literally "brother-man" – and dakali – "sister-woman," designating close same-gender friends). These relationships tend to foster private-oriented social practices rather than public or civic forms of engagement. Secondary group structures, which typically facilitate socialization into civic participation, appear to be largely underdeveloped in these urban settings. As described by respondents, social networks are predominantly organized around personal ties with close relatives and acquaintances, and are rarely – if ever – formed through civic associations, organizations, or other voluntary collective groupings.

Social networks are primarily stratified and shaped by age, social status, geography, and other socio-demographic characteristics. For in-

stance, neighborhoods remain an important component of social networks among middle-aged and older citizens. However, respondents noted a marked difference between urban and rural areas in terms of the social function that neighborhoods play.

While a neighborhood is understood as a geographical unit, it does not necessarily operate as a socio-cultural category or inherently foster a sense of interconnectedness among residents. These dynamics are shaped by both subjective and objective factors, with respondents placing particular emphasis on subjective elements such as personal characteristics, attitudes, and mutual understanding. Consequently, respondents did not associate the strength of neighborhood-based social networks with geographical proximity; instead, they highlighted the primacy of shared worldviews, interpersonal compatibility, and mutual trust.

Networking within neighborhoods also exhibits distinctly gendered forms and practices. One traditional socio-cultural space for interaction is the "birzha" (see Curro 2017), which is fundamentally gendered in nature and remains a common feature of urban social life.

One of the most robust social networks observed in both urban and rural areas is formed through the systematic, ritualized practices of small "coffee societies." These groups consist of female residents from the same neighborhood who gather daily in one another's homes to drink coffee and converse. The size of these networks typically ranges from three to eight women living in close proximity – usually within the same neighborhood or district – and their members generally share similar socio-cultural backgrounds and common interests. These networks function as important sources of local information and shared activities. They are also strongly shaped by age dynamics, tending to consist predominantly of middle-aged and older women.

Respondents emphasized the importance of mutual support among neighbors, noting that it plays a crucial role in sustaining interpersonal

interconnectedness. However, they also observed that traditional forms of mutual assistance are increasingly being replaced by newly established local companies and service providers that cater to community needs. According to respondents, the emergence of these service organizations has altered – and in some cases diminished – existing patterns of interdependence and mutual connectedness among neighbors. As one middle-aged woman explained:

> We are experiencing a significant decline in connections among neighbors. In my childhood, if a family had a wedding or needed help with harvesting, all the neighbors would come and help. It was a responsibility everyone took for granted, knowing that when they needed help, their neighbors would do the same. Now companies and organizations provide these services, and people mostly rely on them instead. (Manana, 55, Kutaisi)

Changes in the dynamics of social networking – particularly within neighborhood settings – are closely tied to emerging moral values shaped by the contemporary division of labor. Traditional informal practices of mutual assistance and interdependence appear increasingly replaced by more formalized arrangements that have, to some extent, become commodified.

Another respondent, a 69-year-old man from Telavi, expressed his disappointment with the changing nature of personal relationships, attributing these shifts to the logic of the contemporary social division of labor:

> I never imagined that one day I would pay my close relatives or neighbors to help me with the harvest.

> But I understand that they might miss a day of work to assist me, so I feel obliged to compensate them. I would never charge my relatives for helping them, and I know there are still others who feel the same. (Giorgi, 69, Telavi)

Another important component of social networks consists of strong ties among relatives. In urban settings, close workplace relationships also play a significant role in shaping social networks. Overall, stable networks tend to be defined by long-term relationships and shared experiences, with childhood friendships being especially valued. Nonetheless, many respondents noted that their neighborhoods are considerably less friendly and cohesive than they once were.

Regarding interethnic and intercultural dynamics, respondents expressed a noticeable ambivalence toward ethnic minority groups. This ambivalence appears to stem from perceived cultural boundaries shaped by primordial and religious codes of collective identity. Discussions reveal that, on one hand, residents generally tolerate the presence and cultural distinctiveness of ethnic minorities in public life, provided that such differences do not extend into their private sphere. In certain cases, crossing these private cultural boundaries is perceived as a potential threat to the collective identity considered fundamental to the community's cohesion (Kirvalidze 2021). For example, while locals may feel comfortable conducting business with members of ethnic minorities in public contexts, they often express uncertainty – or even hostility – toward interethnic marriages that enter the realm of private life.

Respondents narratives suggest that the size of the society – specifically, the country's population – plays an important role in shaping the idea of Georgia, often articulated through the notion of a "small country." This sentiment frequently appears in statements such as

> We are a small country with a small population (Davit, 52, Telavi).

Population size thus emerges as a significant parameter in Georgian self-identification. As a result, any perceived increase in the number of "out-groups" (e.g., ethnic minorities, immigrants) or the erosion of interethnic boundaries within private spheres of life is sometimes viewed by members of the dominant ethnic group as a potential threat to the society's continued existence. As one resident from Kutaisi explained:

> There are Arabs, Chinese, and Indians in our town, but I have no aggression toward them because they keep to themselves. But I don't know what will happen in six years, when they receive Georgian citizenship, build their own districts and communities in our towns, and possibly push us out. (Giorgi, 53, Kutaisi)

There are also instances of strong antagonism toward ethnic groups associated with different religious identities. As one interviewee explained:

> I don't really know what attitude I should have toward others. The truth is, I know only the Orthodox Christian world. I have no interest in anything else. Others should remain within their own cultural boundaries, and I will remain within mine. (Rezi, 53, Kutaisi)

Attitudes toward interethnic marriage are particularly sensitive. As a young woman from Kutaisi noted:

> I simply don't like it when a Christian marries a Muslim. It's unacceptable to me. I think that anyone who marries a Muslim loses their Christian identity. (Tamar, 39, Kutaisi)

In-depth discussions reveal a substantial lack of communication and exchange of experiences between the dominant and minority ethnic groups in the country. The limited frequency of interactions and shared practices with out-groups emerges as a key factor shaping the nature of interethnic relationships in Georgia.

Another major contributor to this lack of communicative engagement is the territorial separation between settlements of ethnic minorities and those of the majority population. Because ethnic minority communities traditionally reside in compact and geographically distinct areas, opportunities for interaction, cooperation, and connection among citizens are significantly reduced.

Citizens' attitudes toward these conditions are noteworthy. Both members of the dominant ethnic group and representatives of minority groups generally view the existing spatial and cultural distances – understood as traditional ways of living – as "normal." This perception helps explain several aspects of interethnic relations in the country that citizens tend to take for granted. One such issue is the limited proficiency in the Georgian language among ethnic minority citizens, which can be traced, in part, to this entrenched mindset. Some minority groups perceive learning and using the state language as a potential threat to their own linguistic and cultural traditions.

At the same time, both minority and majority groups exhibit a notable degree of tolerance and openness toward cultural distinctiveness, although this attitude is sometimes marked by ambivalence, particularly in the distinction between public and private spheres.

A more open and tolerant attitude toward minority groups appears among younger respondents who have had opportunities to engage in interethnic interactions and shared practices. The quotations from the discussions below illustrate this form of intercultural competence more clearly:

> I have lived with people from different ethnic backgrounds, though not in Georgia. I found the exchange of culturally distinct experiences very interesting. It offers a different form of personal development, which is not yet common there. (Sandro, 25, Zugdidi)

Some respondents attempt to elaborate on this notion. A young woman from Marneuli highlights socio-cultural factors, such as education and experiences, as key influences in shaping one's worldview, rather than demographic categories like age. She states:

> I believe that age alone does not determine a person's attitudes and worldviews. I can name many young individuals who think quite differently, even in a communist style. It is more about education and experience than age itself. (Ida, 27, Marneuli)

In urban areas with ethnic minority settlements, respondents point out a lack of opportunities for contact and relationships with ethnically Georgian citizens. They attribute this partly to the absence of intersection sites and spaces that foster potential social interactions and shared practices. One resident notes:

> To be honest, people become friends and good neighbors when they work and study together. Because we lack such

> practices, Armenians communicate with Armenians, and Georgians with Georgians. (Rifsime, 38, Akhaltsikhe)

In ethnically diverse settlements and urban areas with a long history of shared experiences, we observe distinct attitudes towards interethnic relationships. Respondents mention external factors that negatively affect the relationships among different local ethnic groups. A resident remarks:

> People here talk not about integration, but reintegration. They believe that they had wonderful relationships in the past, and now they simply need to restore them. (David, 26, Telavi)

In interethnic urban areas and settlements, some respondents reflect on the differences between present and past interethnic relationships and experiences. They emphasize the harmonic dynamics of these relationships in the past, particularly during Soviet times, which they believe have been undermined by external factors. Among such factors, respondents name the intensive religious indoctrination in the county. As another explanatory factor, they specify a latent process of positive discrimination of the majority ethnic group. Young men from Akhmeta explain:

> I think we must change our approach when working with ethnic and interethnic teams. For example, when NGOs implement projects in Pankisi and use phrases like "Pankisi is so beautiful, their religion is so distinct, and the people from Pankisi are a unique ethnic group," the local Georgian residents begin to wonder, "Where do I fit in?" They start feeling like "invisible team members." The Georgian team, in

> this context, becomes a "minority among minorities." This causes negative feelings that can lead to conflict between these two historically friendly ethnic groups. We need to find a sensitive way to engage with such interethnic communities. (Vaja, 27, Telavi/Akhmeta)

Polarization and Fragmentation

Most respondents explicitly highlight the divisions within their local communities and society, largely driven by political controversy. They describe the dramatic consequences of this polarized environment.

> Society is divided. Neighbors, relatives, and friends are in conflict because of politics. Over time, people have become more self-focused, caring only about their families and withdrawing from one another. (Marine, 28, Zugdidi)

It is important to note that during the group discussions, citizens described polarization primarily in terms of political party affiliation – specifically between the oppositional United National Movement (UNM) and the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) – rather than in relation to specific political beliefs or ideological convictions. Respondents emphasized the negative consequences of this polarization, which manifest in both public and private spheres and affect not only secondary but also primary group relationships. As a young man from Kutaisi explained:

> There was a time when all neighbors gathered for celebrations like birthdays and New Year's Eve.

> Now, we are divided into two groups, "Nationals" and "Dreamers." People who grew up together are now separated because of their political preferences. (Erekle, 30, Kutaisi)

The extent of polarization within the community appears to be broader than just the relationships among individuals. Many respondents highlight how this polarization affects local infrastructural policies. One respondent shares a specific instance of how a political orientation has influenced local policy, stating:

> Because of their political affiliation, one district in our village has not been able to restore a damaged road to this day. They support a particular political party, and because of that, they do not deserve a newly repaired road. (Barbare, 32, Telavi)

During group discussions and in-depth interviews, respondents sought to explain the prevailing situation. Many accuse political elites of driving wedges between people. They offer various explanations for societal fragmentation, delving deeper into subjectively defined causes. These include a spiritual malaise among the population, a lack of belief in God, and an inability to love and care for each other. Nino from Kutaisi articulates a related sentiment:

> We are missing something essential: belief in God and love for one another. No government can assist us if we lack love for each other. Regardless of who holds power, we will continue to fight among ourselves. (Nino, 21, Kutaisi)

Politics is prominently identified as a key factor contributing to the rising polarization within Georgian society. However, respondents also point to existing social and economic conditions as impactful on social cohesion. Citizens in urban areas frequently cite their social and economic circumstances as defining factors for societal fragmentation. Their main concerns revolve around a lack of job opportunities and low wages. The rising trend of out-migration among both youth and adults is regarded as a significant consequence of the economic climate. A woman from Telavi states:

> Anyone progressive in this town leaves. Why should they stay? Everyone deserves to live according to the value of their work. (Manana, 47, Telavi)

A young woman from Kutaisi describes the alarming outflow of locals seeking better opportunities abroad, explaining:

> It is very sad that there is no future in our town. We work all day, but the salaries are so low that they can not support a family. That's why our youth are considering moving away, even abroad, for work. Sadly, there are fewer Georgians left in the country. Anyone who has the chance goes abroad. If my children choose to leave, I would not try to stop them, even though every mother wants her children close. Our hopes for the future here are dwindling; it is heartbreaking, but we see no prospects ahead. (Manana, 30, Kutaisi)

Respondents attribute the growing fragmentation among locals to various factors, most of which are objectively determined. On one hand, they link this trend to the widespread socio-economic vulnerabilities of

recent history in the country. On the other hand, they attribute it to the effects of these developments, notably the emergence of individualistic (private) values over collective (public) values. Additionally, they identify the increasing trend of migration as a significant contributor to societal fragmentation, with implications at both the micro and macro levels.

At the micro level, the consequences are most evident within families, which are undergoing significant structural and functional changes. At the macro-societal level, one effect of migration is the loss of the most productive members of society, which can potentially undermine both economic and socio-cultural functions.

Compared to earlier qualitative studies conducted in urban settings (Kirvalidze 2014), there is a noticeable shift in respondents' attitudes regarding blame for the current societal conditions. In earlier interviews and focus group discussions, participants primarily attributed all negative circumstances in Georgia to the government. Today, most respondents acknowledge the role of citizens in the current situation, expressing a more critical perspective toward society as a whole, rather than blaming the government alone.

> … No government will be able to help us until we have love and unity among each other. Regardless of who comes into power, we will still fight together; they will do the same, and we will persist as well. (Giorgi, 24, Kutaisi)

The main focus of their criticism seems to be the indifference and passivity of society toward the current situation in the country, as well as the low levels of civic consciousness and participation. They attribute this attitude not only to objective reasons but also to subjective ones. A young woman from Kutaisi remarks:

> Maybe this situation is also our fault because we do nothing and just watch each other silently. It's a mentality in Georgia; we believe others will do our work for us. This is how we view elections, thinking that "my voice doesn't matter at all, as the others will win anyway." We Georgians tend to watch others take action instead of stepping up ourselves. (Nana, 30, Kutaisi)

Some Feelings and Attitudes Toward Trust

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the various dimensions of social cohesion – such as legitimacy versus illegitimacy, acceptance versus rejection, participation versus passivity, and belonging versus isolation – are closely interrelated. The in-depth narratives and group discussions suggest that the low level of civic participation among citizens is shaped by both subjective factors, such as limited knowledge or low awareness of civic rights and responsibilities, and objective factors. Among the latter, the fragile socio-political context plays a particularly significant role, fostering widespread nihilism and civic indifference. This interpretation is reinforced by the low levels of institutional trust observed at the national level, as evidenced in the quantitative portion of the study.

In-depth discussions reveal a pronounced lack of legitimacy attributed to many state institutions that are generally regarded as essential for democratic development. As a middle-aged man from eastern Georgia explained:

> Whom can we trust? Everyone and everything has lost moral authority. There is no one left to rely

> on – they all seem the same. Even the individuals and institutions I once considered sacrosanct now appear untrustworthy. I don't understand what is happening to us. How can everyone sell their soul? How are we supposed to build a future like this? (Alex, 57, Telavi)

Many respondents pointed to a perceived moral deficit across various institutions and societal actors, which further contributes to their low levels of trust in these entities. The following quotations illustrate this sentiment clearly:

> In a country where most schoolteachers fail their subject exams, where politicians enter politics only to get rich, where judges cannot uphold justice, where big businesses crush small initiatives, and where even monks are involved in commerce… I could go on, and you would not find a single field we can trust. (Barbare, 45, Telavi)

> I don't understand how it is that we encounter injustice everywhere. Yet there are many people in our society – even in my own town – who can be trusted and who serve the community fairly. (Lika, 67, Telavi)

CHAPTER 6

Quantitative Profile of Social Cohesion

Quantitative Data and Analysis

The primary objective of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive nationwide analysis of the state and development of social cohesion in contemporary Georgia. Drawing on the most recent empirical data from the European Values Study (EVS), we examine the quantitative profile of social cohesion across socio-cultural and political domains, paying particular attention to both formal/attitudinal and substantial/behavioral dimensions. Our analysis seeks to identify the key factors that shape current levels of social cohesion across different spheres of social life. To further assess the influence of socio-economic and demographic characteristics, we conduct additional regression analyses to explore how these factors contribute to variation within each dimension (index).

We begin by outlining the development of the multidimensional measurement instrument applied to assess social cohesion at the national level. The unit of analysis includes the country as a whole and its various types of settlements, allowing us to measure and compare indicators of social cohesion across diverse community contexts.

The Scale Construction

This study initially sought to replicate the methodologies used by Dickes et al. (2010) and Acket et al. (2011) by employing data from

the 2017 wave of the European Values Study (EVS) conducted in Georgia. However, given the recency of the dataset, several variables used in earlier studies were unavailable and were therefore replaced with the closest possible alternatives (a full list of the original variables is provided in Annex 1, Table 1). Following the general scaling approach outlined by Dickes et al. (2010, 2013) and Acket et al. (2011), we conducted reliability tests and scale analyses. When applying the original scaling method to the 2017 Georgia-only dataset – defined as "summing up the standardized raw intermediate individual variables, divided by the number of variables belonging to the construct" (Acket et al. 2011:8) – several of the suggested scales did not reach acceptable reliability thresholds (see Annex 1, Table 1 for details).

Moreover, while Acket et al. (2011) relied on country-level observations and controlled for country-level social indicators, our study adopted a different analytical focus. Here, the units of observation were individuals and local contexts (settlements/urban areas) rather than entire countries. To measure the various dimensions of social cohesion, we employed an alternative index-building strategy that logically grouped variables in accordance with the conceptual structure of the VALCOS index. Reliability tests and distributional analyses confirmed that this set of variables was suitable for index construction (see Annex 2, Table 1).

An important component of scale construction using survey data involves addressing item non-response, particularly responses coded as "Don't know" or "Refuse to answer." To avoid losing cases during the scale formation process, we replicated the procedure employed by Dickes and Valentova (2013) in the construction of social cohesion indices. Specifically, we applied multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to determine the most appropriate category to which missing responses should be assigned. All non-responses ("Don't know" and "Refuse to answer") were first combined into a single category; MCA then identified the cat-

egory located closest to the missing-data cluster in the two-dimensional space, and the values of this nearest category were subsequently imputed. This approach was selected both to maintain methodological consistency with Dickes and Valentova (2013) and because the structure and non-random pattern of missingness in the data limited the suitability of alternative approaches, such as multiple imputations.

It is important to note that the overall proportion of item non-response never exceeded 5–6 percent (with only two exceptions) and therefore had minimal influence on the final scale construction (see Annex 5, Table 1 for details on the recoding procedure and variable list). The same method was applied consistently across all indices used in this study.

Following the recoding of missing values, a simple additive index was constructed using the variables listed in Annex 2, Table 1. For ease of interpretation, the response categories were inverted so that higher values corresponded to more affirmative responses. Finally, the index was standardized, producing a scale ranging from 0 (indicating the lowest level of confidence, agreement, support, or trust) to 1 (representing the highest level).

Multiple Regression Models

The primary aim of this study was to develop a measurement instrument for social cohesion and to apply it at the national level. Specifically, we sought to measure key indicators of social cohesion and compare their levels across different types of settlements. To account for the potential influence of major socio-demographic and economic factors, we employed multiple regression models. Depending on the characteristics of the measurement scales and model specifications, we used robust standard errors as well as both ordinary least squares and quantile regression models at various points in the distribution.

In our standard base model, we included the following control variables: type of settlement, respondent's sex, educational attainment, employment status, household income, and religious affiliation. This approach was informed by the methodology used by Dickes et al. (2010, 2013) and Acket et al. (2011), who controlled for variation in social cohesion indicators using country-level socio-economic variables. In line with this logic, we incorporated all relevant socio-demographic variables available in our dataset. It is important to note, however, that the original studies drew on a substantially broader set of control variables derived from multiple secondary data sources. By contrast, our analysis was constrained by the more limited range of variables included in the 2017 Georgian wave of the European Values Study (EVS). To enhance analytical feasibility and ensure comparability across subgroups, we transformed and recoded several variables in the dataset. Details regarding these control variables and their transformations are presented in Annex 3, Table 1.

Results

This section begins with a brief description of the constructed indices, including their descriptive statistical parameters, and then compares these indices across different types of settlements. Subsequently, selected indices are examined using the regression models described above.

Index Comparison

A total of eight indices were constructed for this study (see Table 1). The legitimacy/illegitimacy dimension, which captures formal relations in the political sphere, is represented by the General Confidence Index. This index integrates questions measuring respondents' confidence in various social institutions in the country.

The acceptance/rejection dimension of social cohesion – focused on formal (attitudinal) relations in the socio-cultural sphere – is measured using three indices: Support for Diversity, General Solidarity, and Interpersonal Trust. This approach expands on the original measurement models proposed by Dickes et al. (2010) and Acket et al. (2011), in which this dimension was represented primarily through general solidarity indices (proximal/distal). (For a detailed description of the construction of our empirical model, see page 105)

The Political Participation Index and the Political Concern Index capture the participation/passivity dimension of social cohesion, emphasizing substantial (behavioral) relations in the political sphere.

The belonging/isolation dimension in the socio-cultural sphere is measured through two indices that differentiate between formal and substantial relations: the Sense of Institutional Belongingness Index and the Sense of Geographical Belongingness Index. By extending the notion of belonging from institutional to geographical contexts, we are able to assess belonging/isolation through substantial relations within the socio-cultural domain (see page 105).

From a reliability perspective, all constructed indices demonstrate acceptable to good levels of internal consistency, with the exception of the Political Concern Index, which has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.45 and is therefore considered unreliable.

Table 1. *The dimensions and indices of social cohesion*

Dimension	Index Name	a	M ***SD***	Skew. ***Kurt.***
Political sphere – formal relations Dimension: Legitimacy/ illegitimacy	General confidence index	**0.86**	**.49** *.18*	**.26** *3.10*

Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimension: Acceptance/rejection	Support for diversity	**0.81**	**.69** *.27*	**-.61** *2.00*
	General solidarity	**0.82**	**.78** *.15*	**-.90** *4.70*
	Interpersonal trust	**0.64**	**.53** *.14*	**-.28** *3.77*
Political sphere – substantial relation Dimension: Participation/ passivity	Political participation	**0.72**	**.39** *.26*	**.74** *2.50*
	Political concern	**0.45**	**.32** *.17*	**.61** *3.33*
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimensions: Belonging/Isolation	Sense of organizational belongingness	**0.95**	**.12** *.14*	**5.36** *32.04*
Socio-cultural sphere – substantial relations Dimension: belonging/isolation	Sense of geographical belongingness	**0.67**	**.77** *.16*	**-.45** *2.89*

A comparison of the indices across different types of settlements reveals several noteworthy patterns (see Table 2). Significant differences emerge between settlement types for the General Confidence Index, Support for Diversity, General Solidarity, Political Participation, Political Concern, and the Sense of Institutional Belongingness Index. For the remaining indices, no statistically significant differences were observed.

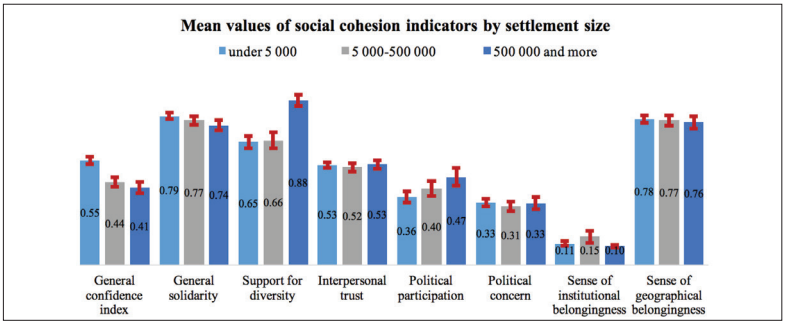
Table 2. *Analysis of variance (ANOVA – index by settlement size variable)*

Index Name	Groups	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	p
General confidence index	Between groups	8.60	2	4.30	150.39	**0.00*****
	Within groups	62.67	2191	0.03		
	Total	71.28	2193	0.03		
General solidarity	Between groups	0.70	2	0.35	15.33	**0.00*****
	Within groups	50.14	2191	0.02		
	Total	50.84	2193	0.02		
Support for diversity	Between groups	13.33	2	6.67	100.40	**0.00*****
	Within groups	145.46	2191	.066		
	Total	158.79	2193	.072		
Interpersonal trust	Between groups	0.08	2	0.03	2.08	0.13
	Within groups	40.80	2191	0.02		
	Total	40.87	2193	0. 02		
Political participation	Between groups	3.22	2	1.61	24.84	**0.00*****
	Within groups	141.80	2191	0.06		
	Total	145.02	2193	0.07		

Political concern	Between groups	0.23	2	0.11	3.91	**0.02****
	Within groups	63.48	2191	0.03		
	Total	63.71	2193	0.03		
Sense of institutional belongingness	Between groups	0.80	2	0.40	20.02	**0.00*****
	Within groups	43.82	2191	0.02		
	Total	44.62	2193	0.02		
Sense of geographical belongingness	Between groups	0.09	2	0.04	1.57	0.21
	Within groups	58.96	2175	0.02		
	Total	59.04	2177	0.02		

As shown in Table 2, comparing the mean values of the indices across settlement types reveals no statistically significant differences in the Sense of Geographical Belongingness or Interpersonal Trust. For the remaining indicators, however, settlements with populations of 500,000 or more – represented here by the capital city, Tbilisi – exhibit higher levels of political activity, as reflected in the Political Participation Index, as well as stronger support for diversity. At the same time, respondents in the capital report lower confidence in public institutions and slightly reduced levels of general solidarity. They also demonstrate a lower sense of institutional belongingness compared to residents of medium-sized settlements (SUA). Nonetheless, the absolute differences in institutional belongingness across settlement types remain small, with all categories showing generally low levels (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Mean values of social cohesion indicators by settlement size*



In summary, the Georgian public demonstrates relatively high levels of general solidarity and geographical belongingness across all settlement types. At the same time, both interpersonal trust and the General Confidence Index reflect more moderate levels of support and trust. While interpersonal trust does not vary significantly across settlements, confidence in public institutions is notably higher in smaller settlements compared to the rest of the country.

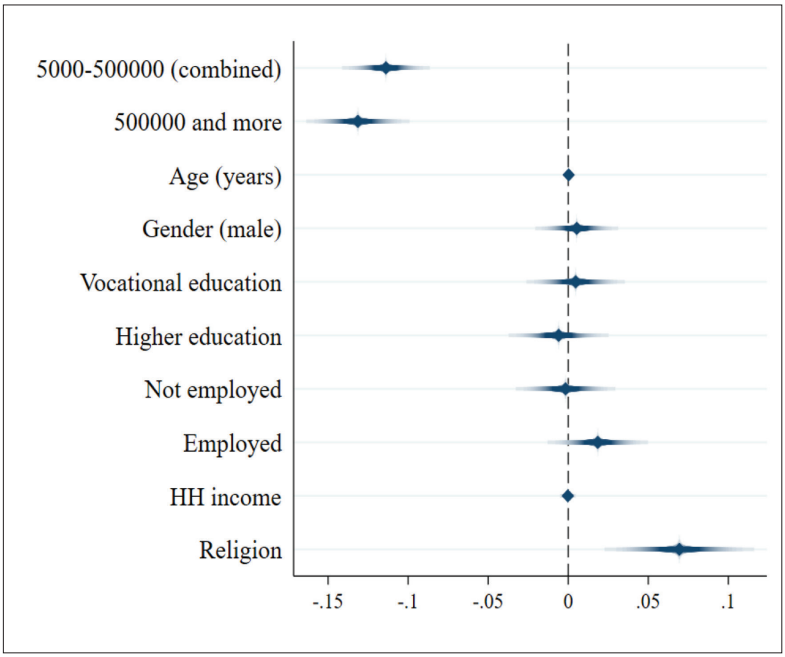
The Support for Diversity Index displays the most pronounced variation across settlement types: residents of Tbilisi score approximately 0.2 points higher in receptiveness toward distinct social groups than residents of other areas. A similar pattern emerges for the Political Participation Index, where both settlement size and levels of participation increase in tandem. Conversely, the Political Concern Index and the Sense of Institutional Belongingness register the lowest overall levels – particularly the latter, which stands out as the weakest indicator of social cohesion.

Regression Analysis Outputs

In the previous section, we compared the general levels of social cohesion indicators across different types of settlements; however, these com-

parisons were made without accounting for other potentially important predictors. To evaluate the extent to which socio-economic and demographic factors contribute to variation in each index, additional regression analyses are required. For this purpose, we constructed a standard demographic model that includes the following control variables: settlement type, respondent's sex, educational attainment, employment status, household income, and religious affiliation.

Figure 2. *General confidence index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation, regression coefficients plot*



The first variable examined is the "General Confidence Index." After conducting regression diagnostic tests as well as goodness-of-fit checks, the most appropriate method for investigating this model was a robust

regression model using MM estimation. The regression model outputs confirm the findings from the ANOVA analysis: settlement size is negatively associated with higher levels of general confidence. In other words, smaller settlements are more likely to have higher levels of the general confidence index (see Figure 2; detailed regression tables are provided in Annex 4, Figure 1). Regarding the other predictors, holding all other factors constant, being non-Orthodox increases the likelihood of achieving high scores on the general confidence index. However, the differences between statistically significant variables and effect sizes on the dependent variable are only moderately distinct (see Annex 6, Figure 3).

The second index analyzed focused on solidarity, operationalized by the extent to which respondents expressed concern for various societal groups. Descriptive analysis revealed that solidarity, as measured by this index, was notably high (0.78), with slight variations among settlements of different sizes. Given the type and distribution of the index, robust regression and quintile regressions at different levels (0.25, 0.50, and 0.75) were employed to control the relationship between dependent and independent variables at various levels of the solidarity index. The application of quintile regressions allowed for a deeper understanding of the index's nature and its associations with other variables, beyond mean values or applicability to non-normally distributed indices.

Figure 3. *Solidarity index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation and quintile regression models at different cut points, regression coefficients plot*

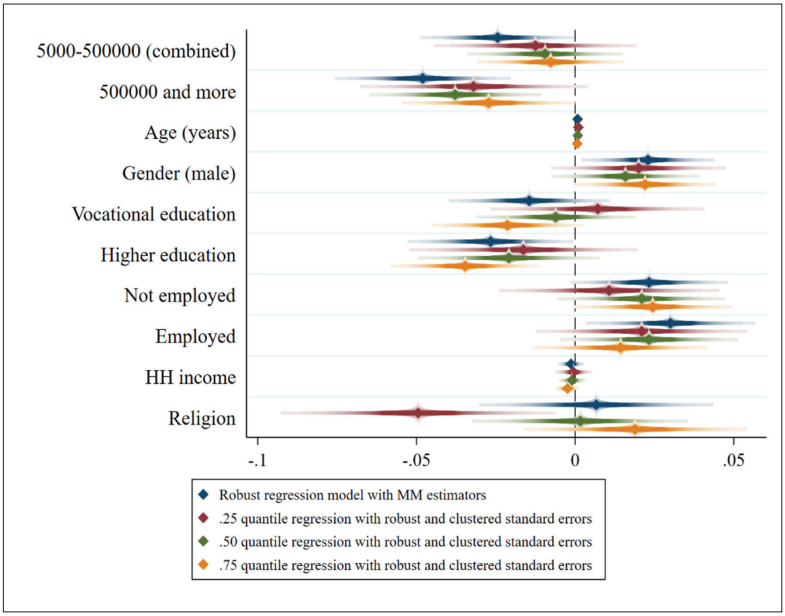
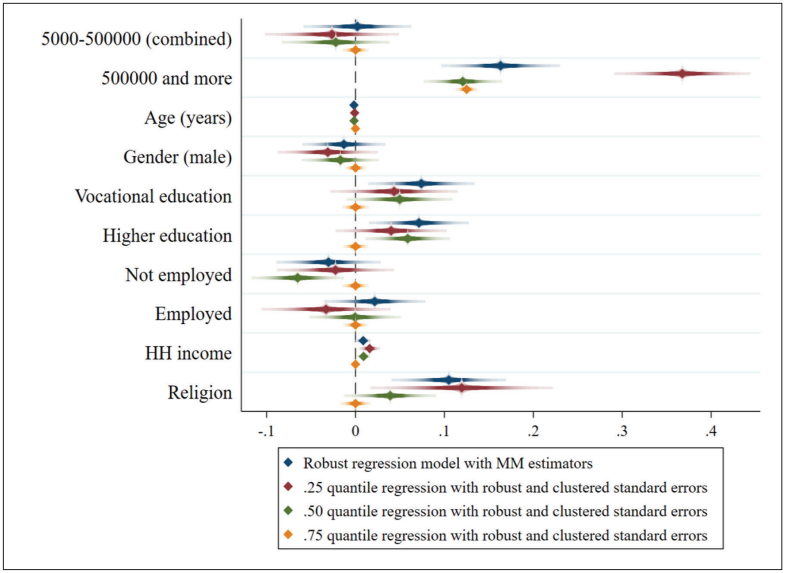


Figure 3 illustrates the key findings from all four regressions used to test potential predictors of the solidarity index. In the context of a robust regression model with MM estimation, levels of solidarity significantly differ based on settlement size, being higher in smaller, typically rural settlements and decreasing as settlement size – and hence urbanization – increases (see Figure 3 and Annex 4, Figure 2). For quintile regressions, statistically significant differences are found only when comparing settlements with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (mostly rural) with those having 500,000 or more residents (in the case of Georgia, this refers to the capital). Regarding age, regardless of the regression approach employed, there is a positive relationship with the solidarity index: older respondents tend to have a higher probability of scoring well on the soli-

darity index. In other words, elderly individuals are generally more likely to exhibit solidarity and empathy towards others compared to younger individuals in society. Nonetheless, the solidarity index remains higher across all age groups, indicating a limited effect size of age on the solidarity index (see Figure 3 and Annex 6, Figure 5).

The analysis of the impact of various control variables on the solidarity index produced mixed results. Robust regression findings indicated that individuals with higher education levels tend to score higher on the solidarity index, but this observation is valid only when focusing on the upper (0.75) quintile of the index. This suggests that the influence of educational attainment is only notable at the higher levels of the solidarity index, while its impact diminishes at the middle and lower levels. An irregular relationship was also noted between religious affiliation and the solidarity index. A statistically significant negative association was found in the lowest (0.25) quintile, while in other quintiles or in the overall analysis, no significant relationship was observed. Regardless of the regression model applied, the general impact and variability of the solidarity index among different groups showed limited variation. For example, predicted scores from all regression models revealed differences within a single-digit range. In robust regression, the predicted score for settlements with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants was 0.81, compared to 0.76 for those with 500,000 or more residents (see Annex 6, Figure 5). This trend was also seen among different age groups.

Figure 4. *Support for diversity index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation and quintile regression models at different cut points, regression coefficients plot*



Support for the diversity index was another aspect of social cohesion that was analyzed. A simple comparison of means indicated significant differences between the capital city (settlements with a population of 500,000 or more) and other settlements. The results from regression models confirmed this observation (see Figure 4 and Annex 4, Figure 3). Despite statistical significance, the effect size remained modest, showing considerable discrepancies among settlements when both robust and quintile regression models were applied. The relationship between the age and religious affiliation variable is also consistent across all regression models (Figure 4 and Annex 4, Figure 3).

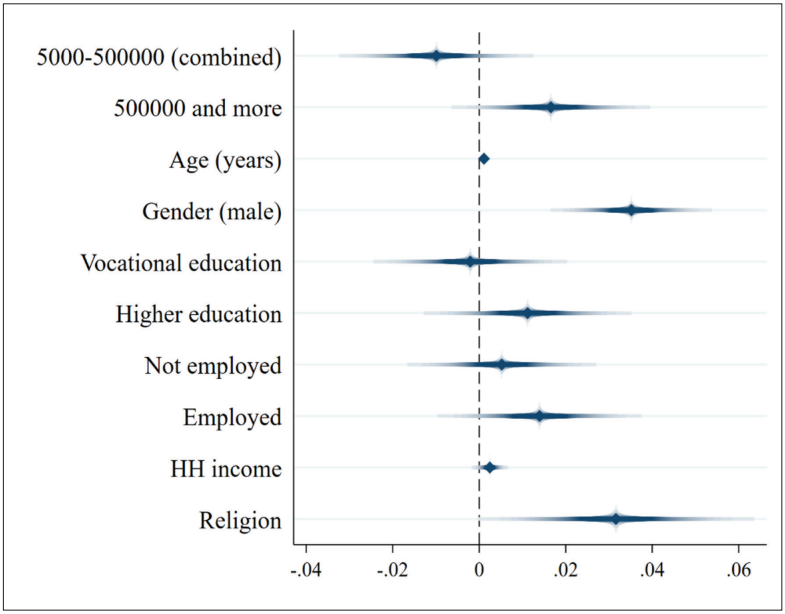
Moreover, as settlement size increases, the diversity index also tends to increase. Residents in smaller settlements are less likely to score high on the diversity support index compared to those in larger settlements.

For instance, holding all other factors constant, the support for diversity in settlements with a population of fewer than 5,000 is 0.72, while for those living in settlements with 500,000 or more residents (i.e., the capital city), the score is 0.88 (robust regression numbers, see Annex 6, Figure 7).

When examining the relationship between age and solidarity, it was found that older individuals are more likely to exhibit higher levels of solidarity. Conversely, younger people tend to show greater support for diversity – with a predicted index score of 0.79 at age 18, decreasing to 0.69 at age 75 (robust regression numbers, see Annex 6, Figure 7). Additionally, having a higher education level is positively associated with support for diversity; holding all other factors constant, those with secondary education or lower show relatively low support for diversity (0.70) compared to those with higher education (0.77) (robust regression numbers, see Annex 6, Figure 7). Furthermore, it was revealed that non-Orthodox Georgians report higher levels of support for diversity on average compared to those who identify as Orthodox.

The fourth index analyzed was interpersonal trust. In this case, most of the control variables applied were not significant predictors (see Figure 5). Unlike the previously discussed indicators, settlement size did not show significant variation in interpersonal trust levels. The education variable also did not demonstrate significant effects. The only factors found to be statistically significant were age, gender, and religious affiliation, although their overall impact was quite modest (see Figure 5 and Annex 4, Figure 4).

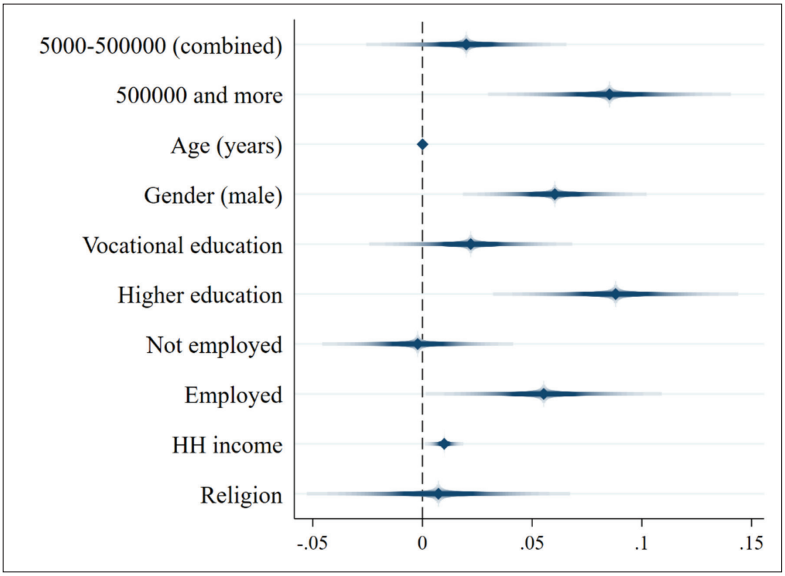
Figure 5. *Interpersonal trust index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation, regression coefficients plot*



Taking all other factors into account, non-Orthodox Georgians tend to have a slightly higher score (0.56) on the interpersonal trust index compared to those who identify as Orthodox (0.53) (see Annex 6, Figure 9). The data analysis also indicates that males (0.56) are slightly more prone to show higher levels of interpersonal trust compared to females (0.52). The variance is more pronounced when considering age: older Georgians (0.57 at 75 years) are more likely to achieve higher scores on the interpersonal trust index than younger individuals (0.50 at 18 years) (see Annex 4, Figure 4 and Annex 6, Figure 9). However, it is important to note that the absolute differences across the groups analyzed are not significant. Overall, the data reflects average levels of interpersonal trust among the Georgian public.

The fifth index investigated was political participation. Settlement size emerged as a crucial predictor of varying levels of social cohesion. Other significant predictors for rates of political participation included educational attainment, employment status, and gender (see Figure 6 and Annex 4, Figure 5).

Figure 6. *Political participation index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation, regression coefficients plot*

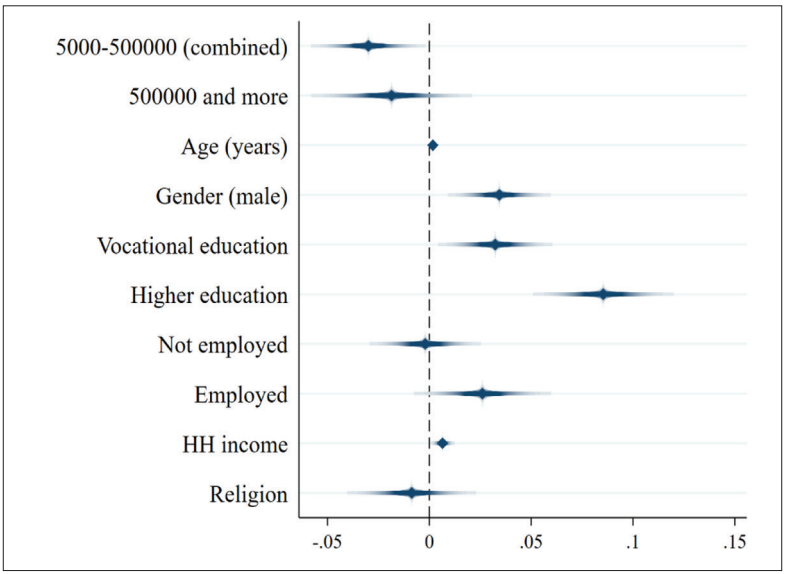


Holding all other factors constant, males (0.38) report a higher rate of political participation than females (0.32). Residents of the capital city (with a population of 500,000 or more) also tend to be more active in political matters compared to those living in other urban or rural areas (see Annex 6, Figure 11). In terms of education, individuals with higher education levels tend to be more politically active, with predicted scores of 0.41 for those with higher education versus 0.32 for those with secondary or lower education and 0.34 for vocational education. The analysis also

reveals that employment is a significant factor in political participation; employed individuals are somewhat more likely to report higher levels of political engagement (see Annex 6, Figure 11).

The political concerns index measured the interest and intensity of engagement in political affairs. Gender and educational attainment emerged as the most important predictors in the general demographic model used in this study (see Figure 7 and Annex 4, Figure 6).

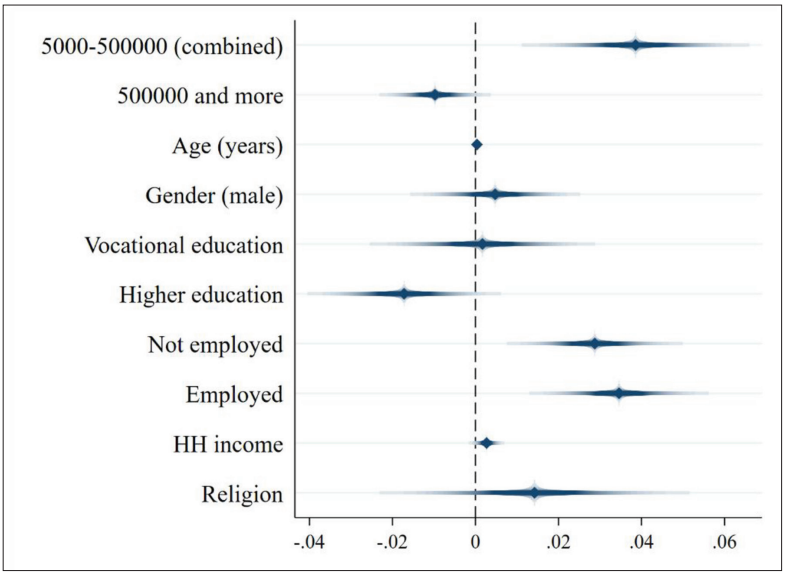
Figure 7. *Political concern index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation, regression coefficients plot*



In controlling for other factors, individuals with higher education (0.36) are more likely to report higher scores on the political concern index compared to those with secondary or lower education (0.27) or vocational education (0.31). Males (0.33) also tend to show slightly more interest in political affairs than females (0.29). However, the differences between genders are not substantial in terms of absolute measures (see Annex 6, Figure 13).

The final two indicators of social cohesion examined in this study are institutional and geographical belongingness. While both concepts relate to a sense of belonging, the rates and significance of these indices differ greatly. Overall, the Institutional Belongingness Index is reported at exceptionally low levels, while the Geographical Belongingness Index shows high figures (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. *Institutional belongingness index model – Linear regression model with robust standard errors, regression coefficients plot*

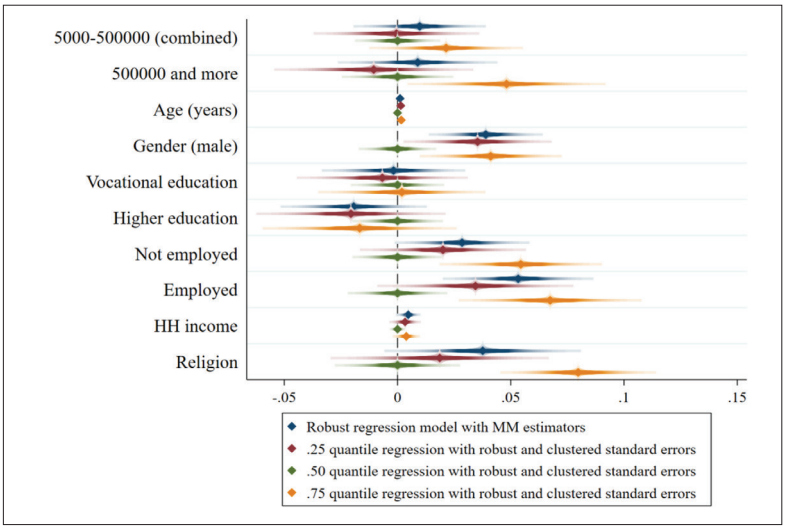


Due to the nature and composition of the data, we were unable to use a robust regression model for the Institutional Belongingness Index. Instead, a linear regression model with robust standard errors was employed (see Figure 8). The impact and effect sizes of the statistically significant variables are modest; although employment status and settlement size show statistically significant results, the differences between groups remain minor

(see Annex 4, Figure 7). Individuals living in settlements with populations between 5,000 and 500,000 report slightly higher levels of institutional belongingness compared to those in smaller or larger settlements (see Annex 6, Figure 15). Regarding employment, both employed (0.13) and unemployed individuals (0.13) are slightly more likely to report institutional belongingness than those not in the labor force (0.10) (see Annex 6, Figure 15). However, the differences among these groups are minimal.

In contrast to most indicators, the Geographical Belongingness Index allowed for robust regression as well as quintile regression at different cutoff points. Most notably, the Geographical Belongingness Index demonstrated no statistically significant differences between index figures and settlement types, except for quintile regression at the 0.75 threshold. Statistically significant predictors identified in this case included gender, employment, and religion (see Figure 9 and Annex 4, Figure 8).

Figure 9. *Geographical belongingness index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation and quintile regression models at different cut points, regression coefficients plot*



Males (0.81) tend to report slightly higher scores in geographical belongingness compared to females (0.77) (see Annex 6, robust regression, Figure 17). In terms of employment, those who are employed (0.81) also have a higher likelihood of scoring well on the geographical belongingness index than those who are not in the labor force or unemployed (see robust regression, Annex 6, Figure 17). Although the differences are small, they are statistically significant between Orthodox (0.78) and non-Orthodox (0.82) Georgians as well (see robust regression, Annex 6, Figure 17). However, these differences remain marginal.

Major Findings

The key findings from the data analysis suggest that different dimensions of social cohesion exhibit varying levels of intensity in Georgian society. Among the indicators of social cohesion, the general solidarity index (0.78), sense of geographical belongingness index (0.77), and support for diversity index (0.69) demonstrate prominent scores (on a scale from 0 to 1). In contrast, the sense of institutional belongingness index (0.14), political participation index (0.26), and political concern index (0.32) have the lowest scores on the same scale.

The survey results reveal that the settlement type appears to be a significant factor for generating differences in the dimensions of social cohesion. The general confidence index, general solidarity index, support for diversity index, political participation index, and sense of institutional belongingness index all display statistically significant differences across settlement types. More specifically, Georgians living in smaller settlements tend to show higher levels of general confidence (0.55) and general solidarity (0.79) compared to those living in the capital (0.41 for general confidence and 0.74 for general solidarity). However, capital dwellers tend to be more supportive of diversity (0.88) and politically

active (0.47) compared to the rest of the country. A separate analysis of each index further revealed that, concerning the general confidence index, religious affiliation plays a significant role in addition to geographical differences, with non-Orthodox Christians showing slightly higher confidence levels compared to Orthodox individuals.

While general solidarity is higher in smaller settlements, older age groups report higher levels of solidarity compared to younger individuals. As noted, residents of the capital are generally more supportive of diversity, a trend that is also observed among younger segments of the population, those with higher education, and non-Orthodox Georgians. The interpersonal trust index showed no statistically significant differences across different settlement types. However, marginal yet statistically significant differences were observed based on religion, gender, and age. Individuals living in settlements with 500,000 or more inhabitants (i.e., the capital) exhibit higher rates of political participation. Males, along with those with higher education and employment, tend to be more politically active. While settlements do not differ significantly in terms of political concerns, individuals with higher education (0.36) and males (0.33) tend to show greater political engagement and concern compared to those with secondary or lower education (0.27) and females (0.29). Nevertheless, the differences are not substantial.

Overall, Georgians demonstrate a stronger sense of geographical belongingness (0.77) than institutional attachment (0.14). Institutional attachment is exceedingly low across all socio-demographic groups, while geographical belongingness is relatively high. Particularly high rates of geographical belongingness are noted among males, employed individuals, and non-Orthodox Georgians.

CHAPTER 7

The Regional Comparisons

Comparative Analysis

Selecting the country as the unit of analysis in large cross-national comparative studies is particularly valuable for identifying broad trends, characteristics, and challenges associated with country-specific social cohesion profiles. However, to uncover regional particularities and distinctive patterns in the development of social cohesion within a single country, it is equally important to situate the case within a broader comparative framework that includes other South Caucasus and Eastern European countries.

Only a limited number of studies have compared Georgia's social cohesion profile with those of other Eastern European and post-Soviet countries (Dickes et al. 2013). As noted earlier, a cross-national comparative study of 48 European countries – grouped by the authors into six regions (Northern, Southern, Western, and Eastern Europe, the Former Soviet Union, and Turkey) (Halman et al. 2005) – found that Georgia, along with several Eastern European countries, displayed relatively low levels of both formal (behavioral) and substantial (attitudinal/perceived) social cohesion (Dickes et al. 2013).

More specifically, analysis of data from the 2008 European Values Study (EVS) revealed that former Soviet countries geographically closer to Europe – such as Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus – exhibited higher overall levels of social cohesion. In contrast, countries

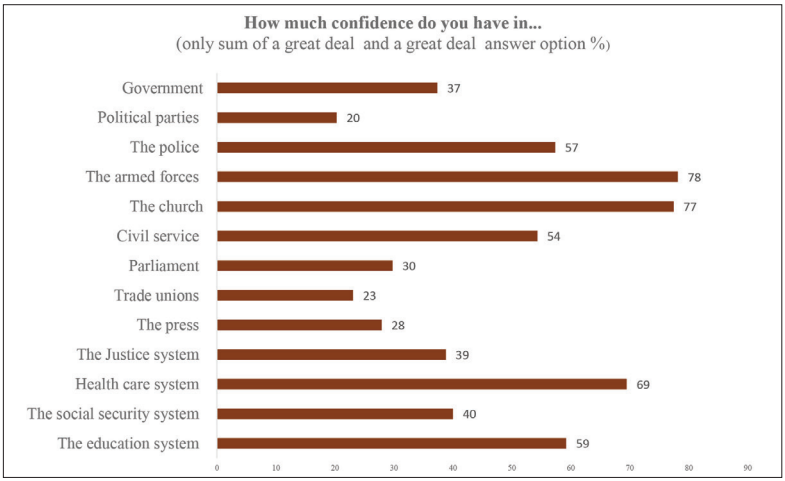
situated closer to Asia, including Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, demonstrated patterns more akin to those observed in Southern European countries: relatively higher cohesion at the formal (attitudinal) level, but weaker cohesion at the substantial (behavioral) level.

In this chapter, we aim to provide a comparative overview of social cohesion profiles across South Caucasus and Eastern European countries. All of the countries included in this analysis are post-Soviet states and fall within two regional categories – Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union – according to the geographical classification proposed by Halman et al. (2005). We begin by examining the overall statistical profile of social cohesion in Georgia, drawing on all indices constructed through our measurement instrument.

Confidence and Legitimacy

Survey data show that the Armed Forces and the Church enjoy relatively high levels of public confidence, whereas political parties receive the lowest confidence rating at only 20%. This figure is considerably lower than the 37% confidence expressed in the Government. The press also records low levels of trust, with just 23% of respondents reporting confidence in this institution (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Confidence*



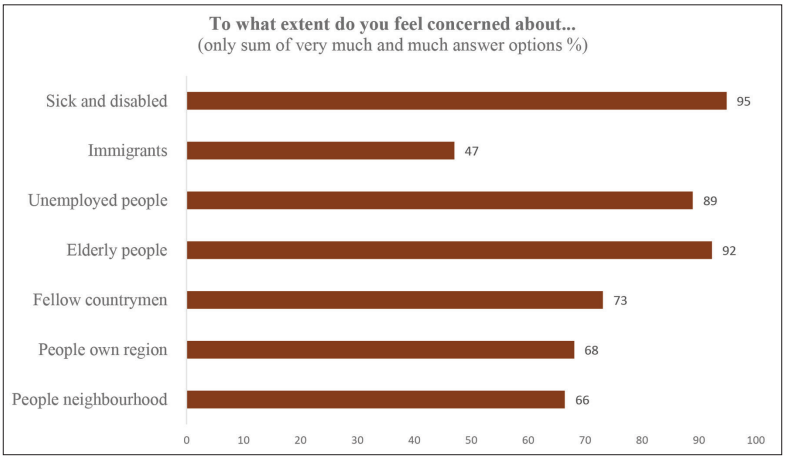
Solidarity

The survey results indicate a strong sense of solidarity among Georgians. Notably, levels of distal solidarity – concern for individuals outside one's immediate social circle – are higher than levels of proximal solidarity, or concern for members of one's close community. Respondents express particularly high levels of concern for vulnerable groups: nearly all report being worried about the sick (95%), people with disabilities (95%), and older adults (92%) (see Table 2). Unemployed individuals also receive substantial sympathy, reflecting the long-standing and persistent unemployment challenges facing the country. Importantly, unemployment is generally perceived as the result of broader socio-economic conditions rather than individual failings, which further reinforces the high levels of solidarity extended toward the unemployed.

In some cases, Solidarity levels are consistently higher toward in-group members than toward out-group members. Approximately 73% of respondents express concern for "fellow countrymen," whereas only

about 47% report solidarity with emigrants. Interestingly, geographical proximity – such as being neighbors – does not appear to significantly influence solidarity levels: concern for neighbors remains lower than the more generalized solidarity expressed toward "fellow countrymen," which is supported by nearly three-quarters of the population.

Table 2. *Solidarity*



Acceptance of diversity

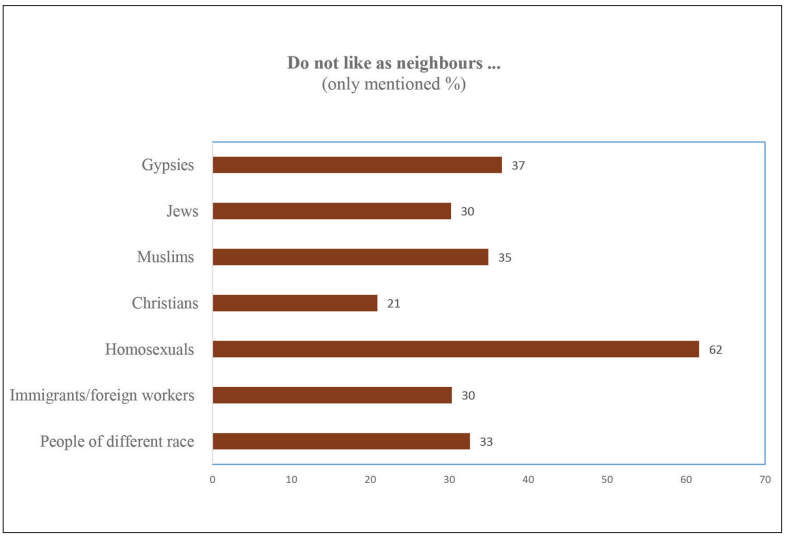
Neighborhoods are perceived as important sites of socialization and are often regarded as familiar and protective environments for many Georgians. For this reason, attitudes toward diversity are examined within the context of neighborhood life. The findings suggest that Georgian society demonstrates greater tolerance for religious, ethnic, and racial diversity than for diversity related to sexual identity, particularly in relation to sexual minorities.

However, acceptance of ethnic diversity is not uniform but stratified: Georgians tend to be more tolerant toward Jews than toward Muslims.

Overall, approximately one-third of respondents report discomfort with living in proximity to individuals of different races, ethnicities, or religions. Notably, around 60% of Georgians express discomfort with having neighbors who identify as non-traditional in terms of gender identity (homosexuals) (see Table 3).

Interestingly, Georgians exhibit somewhat greater tolerance toward certain out-group members – such as immigrants and foreign workers (33%) – than toward in-group members who challenge traditional gender norms, such as homosexuals (62%). The pronounced resistance to non-traditional gender identities underscores a tension between prevailing worldviews and actual patterns of social acceptance. These findings regarding attitudes toward homosexuals align with broader regional trends and are consistent with patterns observed across Eastern European countries (see the regional comparative analysis of social cohesion in Chapter 7).

Table 3. *Acceptance of diversity*

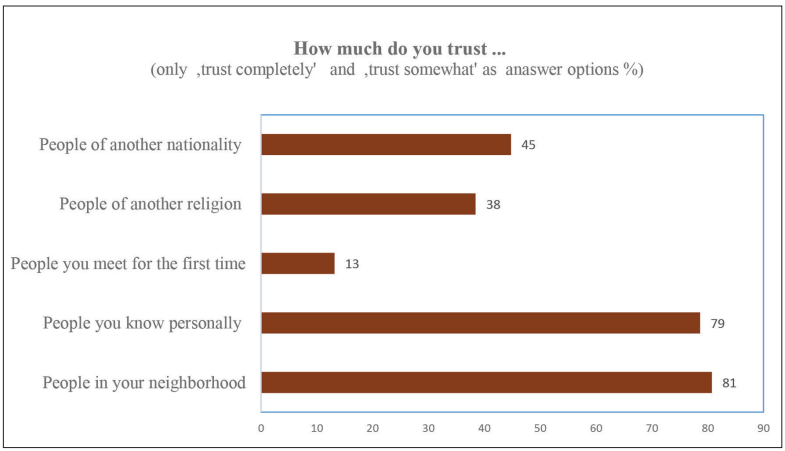


Interpersonal trust

Georgians exhibit high levels of trust toward members of their close personal and familiar circles. Survey data indicate that interpersonal trust is strongly associated with the closeness and quality of relationships between individuals. Citizens report higher levels of trust toward people they know personally, especially those within their neighborhoods. A substantial majority express strong trust in their neighbors (81%) and in individuals they know personally (79%). By contrast, trust in strangers is markedly low, with only 13% of respondents indicating trust in people they meet for the first time (see Table 4).

Interestingly, interpersonal trust toward foreigners is also relatively high: nearly half of respondents' express trust in individuals of different nationalities. However, the data show that Georgians tend to exhibit greater trust across national differences than across religious ones. While 45% of citizens' express trust toward people of another nationality, fewer – 38% – report the same level of trust toward individuals of a different religion.

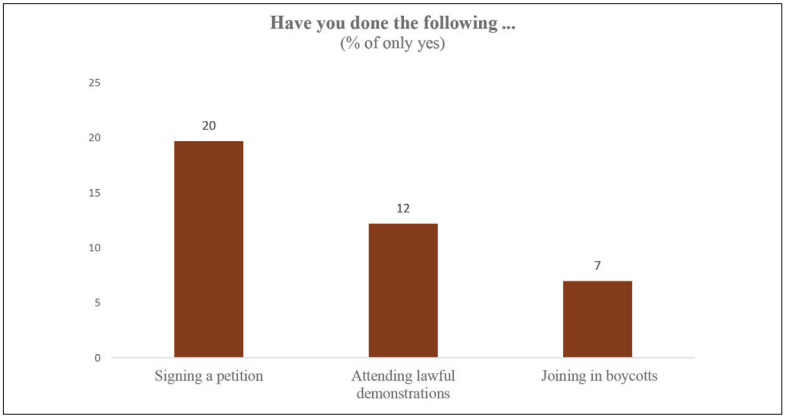
Table 4. *Interpersonal trust*



Participation in Legal and Political Activities

Empirical data indicate consistently low levels of civic participation in legal and political activities. Only 12% of citizens report having attended a lawful demonstration, and just 7% have ever participated in a boycott. Signing a petition is somewhat more common: one in five Georgians (20%) report having done so at least once in their lives (see Table 5).

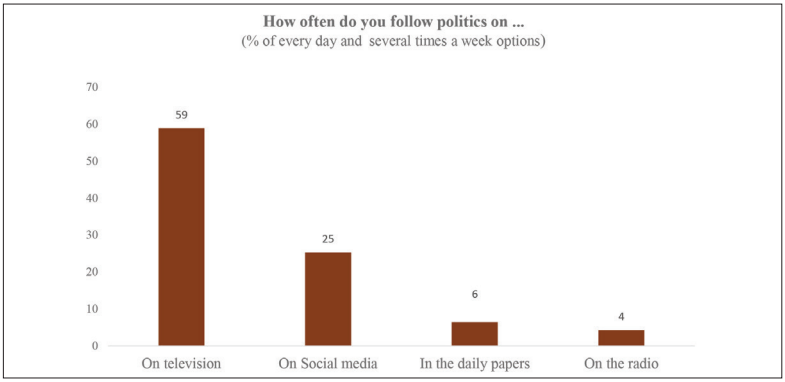
Table 5. *Participation in legal political activities*



Political Concern

Survey data show that television remains the most widely used medium for following political affairs, with more than half of Georgians (60%) identifying it as their primary source of political information. Social media is the second most frequently used source, cited by one-quarter of respondents (25%). By contrast, radio and daily newspapers attract relatively few followers as sources of information about political events (see Table 6).

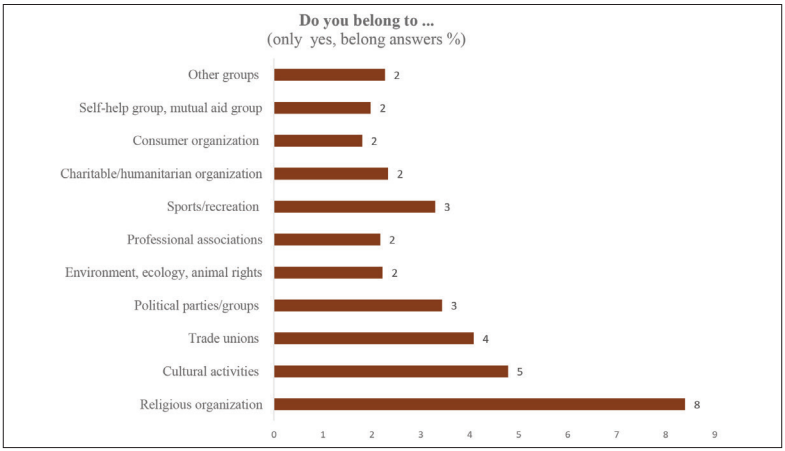
Table 6. *Political concern*



Institutional Belonging

The data indicate that levels of institutional belonging among Georgians are notably low (see Table 7). Only 8% of respondents report membership in religious institutions, and participation in cultural organizations is even lower, at just 5%.

Table 7. *Institutional belonging*

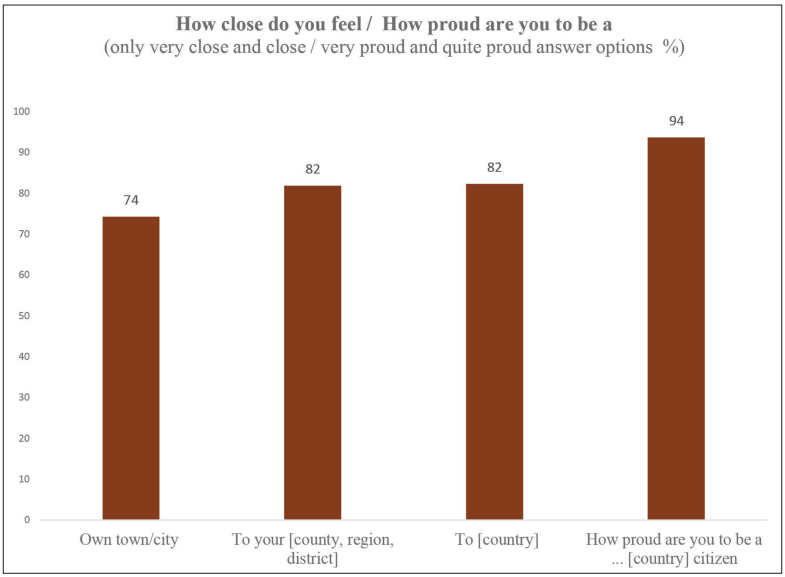


Geographical Belonging

Georgians demonstrate a strong sense of geographical attachment (see Table 8). Nearly all respondents express deep pride in their country, with 94% reporting a strong attachment to Georgia as a whole. Regional identity also carries substantial meaning, as more than four-fifths of citizens (82%) feel a strong connection to their region. Attachment to one's town or city is similarly pronounced, with approximately three-quarters (74%) of respondents affirming this sense of local belonging.

Overall, the data suggest that, in addition to strong attachments to their town or city and region, Georgians exhibit their strongest sense of identification with the country as a whole.

Table 8. *Geographical belonging*



Comparative Analysis of Social Cohesion Profiles in the Regional Context

This comparative analysis examines Georgia's social cohesion profile within the broader context of other former Soviet countries, with a particular focus on the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. The aim is to identify key trends and characteristics that define the state of social cohesion in Georgia and to assess how these patterns have developed within the recent regional landscape. Using the measurement instrument developed in this study, we compare a range of social cohesion indices across Georgia's immediate neighbors as well as countries in the wider Eastern European region. All countries included in the analysis share a common historical background like former Soviet states, making them especially suitable for comparison. This regional perspective provides a comprehensive overview of social cohesion dynamics in Georgia and highlights the country's distinctive features relative to its regional counterparts.

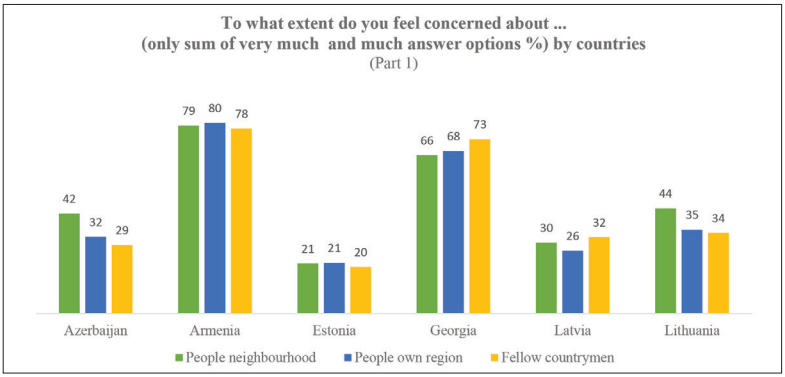
Proximal Solidarity

Survey results indicate that individuals in South Caucasus countries – Armenia and Georgia – display significantly higher levels of proximal solidarity toward their fellow citizens than those in Eastern European countries such as Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. In Armenia, more than three-quarters of respondents report concern for their neighbors (79%), residents of their region (80%), and their fellow countrymen (78%) (see Table 1). In Georgia, approximately three-quarters express deep concern for fellow citizens (73%), while about two-thirds report solidarity toward people from their own region (68%) and neighborhood (66%).

In contrast, levels of proximal solidarity are markedly lower in Estonia: fewer than one-quarter of respondents express concern for their fellow countrymen (20%), residents of their region (21%), or neighbors

(21%). The profiles of Azerbaijan and Lithuania fall between these two extremes. In both countries, around half of respondents express concern for their neighbors (42% and 44%, respectively), whereas lower proportions express solidarity toward people from their region (32% and 35%) or their fellow countrymen (29% and 34%).

Table 1. *Solidarity (proximal)*



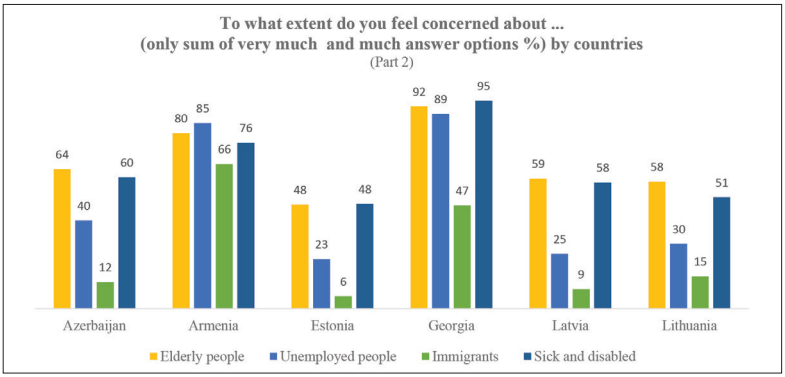
Distal Solidarity

While citizens across both regions express forms of solidarity, notable differences emerge in their levels of distal solidarity. Georgia and Armenia display the highest levels of concern for vulnerable groups compared with the other countries in the sample. For example, nearly all Georgians report sympathy for elderly people (92%) and for sick or disabled individuals (95%). By contrast, Estonia shows the lowest levels of distal solidarity, with only about half of the population expressing concern for the elderly (48%) or for sick and disabled individuals (48%).

Differences also appear in attitudes toward immigrants. Approximately two-thirds of Armenians (66%) express concern for immigrants – substantially higher than the proportions observed in the other countries.

In Georgia, nearly half of respondents (47%) report such concern, while immigrants receive markedly less sympathy in the other regional cases (e.g., Estonia 6%, Latvia 9%). The solidarity profiles of Latvia and Lithuania show broadly similar patterns, whereas Azerbaijan displays slight variations.

Table 2. *Solidarity (distal)*



Acceptance of Diversity

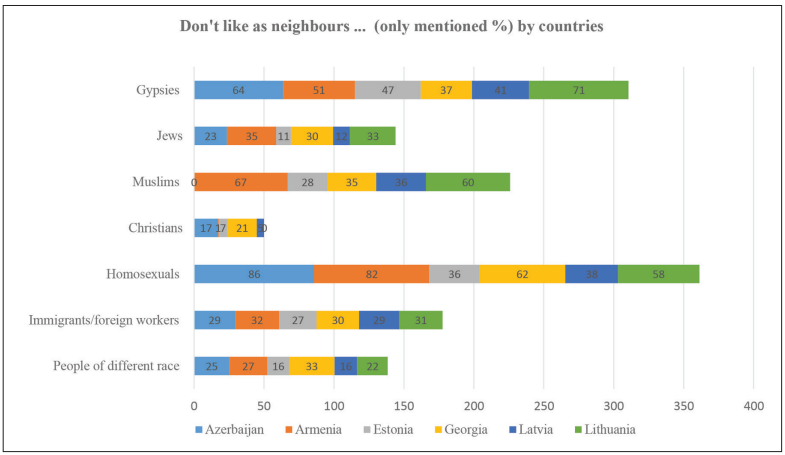
Georgians appear to be comparatively more tolerant toward sexual minorities within the South Caucasus region (see Table 3). Approximately two-thirds of Georgian citizens (62%) report discomfort with individuals who identify with non-traditional gender identities, whereas the levels of intolerance are even higher in Azerbaijan (86%) and Armenia (82%). In a broader regional perspective, Georgian attitudes resemble those found in Lithuania, where 58% of respondents express similar reservations.

However, Georgians exhibit comparatively lower levels of tolerance toward individuals of different races within their private spheres than citizens of other countries in the region. This pattern aligns with qualitative findings that highlight a distinct ambivalence in how Georgians negotiate in-group

boundaries in both public and private domains. Specifically, Georgians appear particularly sensitive to perceived boundary "deconstructions" by out-group members in private settings. More than one-third (33%) of Georgians report unwillingness to accept a neighbor of a different race, compared with roughly one-quarter of Armenians (27%) and Azerbaijanis (25%). In contrast, fewer than one in five Estonians (16%) and Latvians (16%) reject neighbors based on racial identity. Overall, Estonia and Latvia demonstrate comparatively higher acceptance of non-traditional gender identities than the other countries included in this study.

Conversely, Georgians demonstrate relatively higher levels of tolerance toward religiously different Muslims in their private environments compared to Armenians and Lithuanians. Approximately two-thirds of Armenians (67%) and Lithuanians (60%) report unwillingness to accept religious diversity within their neighborhoods, whereas only about one-third (35%) of Georgians express similar reservations toward Muslims as potential neighbors. Estonians appear even more accepting, with just 28% indicating resistance to religious diversity.

Table 3. *Acceptance of Diversity*



Interpersonal Trust

The statistics indicate that levels of trust toward in-group and out-group members are relatively consistent across the selected countries, though notable differences emerge within specific domains of trust (see Table 4). In Georgia and Armenia, trust in individuals from one's personal circle closely mirrors trust in neighbors. More than three-quarters of Georgians (79% and 81%) and approximately three-quarters of Armenians (71% and 74%) report trusting both people they know personally and those from their neighborhoods. This pattern underscores the central role of personal experience and direct familiarity in shaping trust, while also highlighting the neighborhood as a key socio-cultural space where meaningful interactions and shared experiences are formed in these two countries.

By contrast, in the other countries examined, trust in one's personal circle does not necessarily align with trust in neighbors, suggesting that personal interactions do not consistently take place within neighborhood settings. The gap between trust in personal networks and trust in neighbors varies considerably – around 9% in Lithuania, 15% in Azerbaijan and Estonia, and 21% in Latvia.

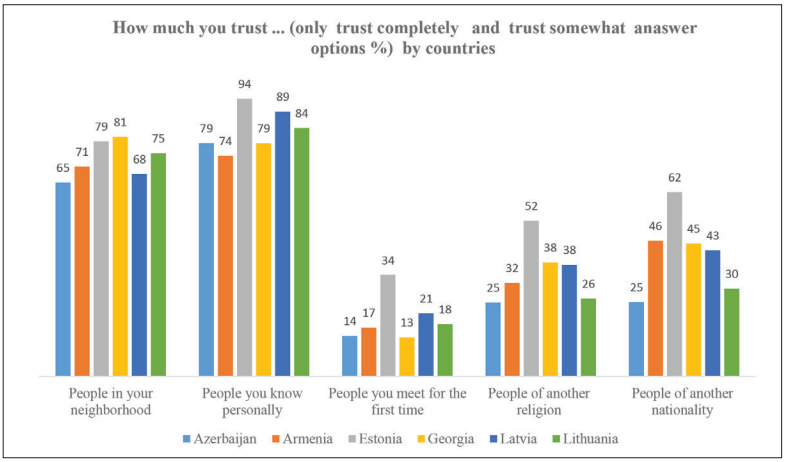
Compared to citizens of other countries, Georgians appear significantly less trusting of strangers. Only about one in ten Georgians (13%) expresses trust in people they meet for the first time, a pattern similar to Azerbaijanis (14%) and Armenians (17%). In contrast, the Baltic states demonstrate relatively higher levels of trust toward strangers. The highest level is reported in Estonia, where roughly one-third of respondents (34%) express trust in unfamiliar individuals, followed by Latvians (21%) and Lithuanians (18%).

Across all selected countries, individuals tend to express greater trust toward people of different nationalities than toward those of different religious identities, with Azerbaijan standing as the only exception to this pattern. The magnitude of the trust gap between these two collective

identity markers varies: Armenia shows the largest difference at 14 percentage points, followed by Estonia (10%), Georgia (7%), Latvia (5%), and Lithuania (4%).

Georgians and Latvians display nearly identical levels of trust toward individuals of different national and religious backgrounds. Around half of Georgians (45%) and Latvians (43%) report trusting people of another nationality, while just over one-third (38% in both countries) express trust toward individuals of a different religion. Armenians, meanwhile, exhibit comparatively lower trust toward religious out-groups, yet they show a slightly higher level of trust (46%) toward those of other nationalities than both Georgians and Latvians.

Table 4. *Interpersonal trust*



Political Participation

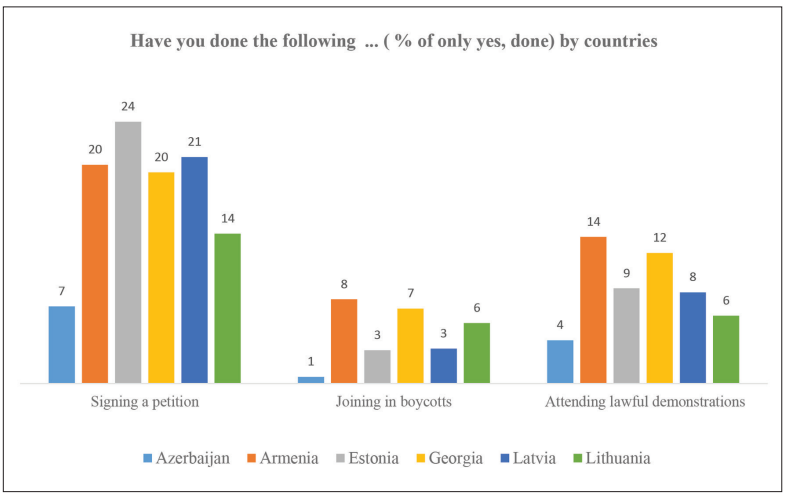
Overall, citizens in the Baltic states and the South Caucasus exhibit comparable levels of engagement in political activities such as attending lawful demonstrations, signing petitions, and participating in boycotts. Azerbai-

jan, however, represents a notable exception: fewer than one in ten Azerbaijanis (7%) report involvement in these types of political actions. While the general pattern suggests similar engagement across most countries in the comparison, some noteworthy differences do emerge (see Table 5).

Among the various political activities, signing petitions emerges as the most common form of engagement across all selected countries. One in five Georgians (20%) and Armenians (20%), as well as 21% of Latvians, report having signed a petition. Participation is comparatively lower in Lithuania (14%) and is lowest in Azerbaijan, where only 7% of citizens report engaging in this activity.

Georgians (14%) and Armenians (12%) are more likely to take part in lawful demonstrations than citizens in the Baltic states, where fewer than one in ten Estonians (9%) and Latvians (8%) report similar participation. In terms of boycotts, Armenians, Georgians, and Lithuanians demonstrate comparatively higher levels of involvement than their Estonian and Latvian counterparts.

Table 5. *Political participation*



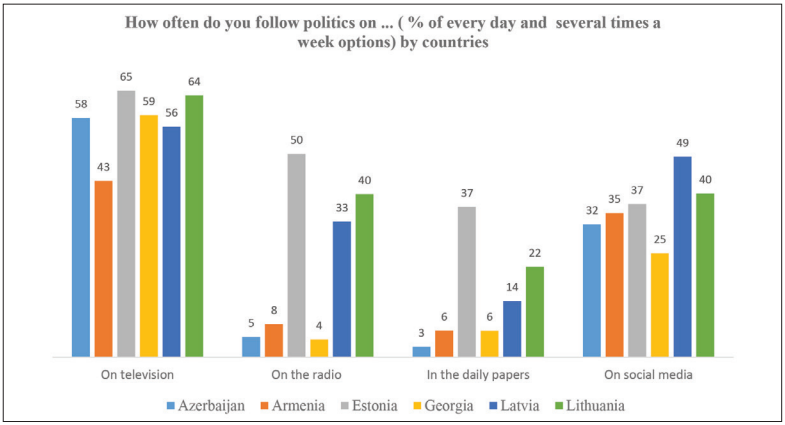
Political Concern

The overall level of political concern is largely similar across all selected countries. However, regional and country-specific differences emerge in the sources people rely on to follow political developments. Television remains the most widely used medium for political information in every country included in the comparison. Nearly two-thirds of Estonians (65%) and Lithuanians (65%) report following politics on television almost every day or several times a week, followed closely by 59% of Georgians and Azerbaijanis and 56% of Latvians (see Table 6).

Social media is the second most commonly used source of political information in the South Caucasus, though its use varies across countries. Armenians (35%) and Azerbaijanis (32%) rely on social media for political updates almost daily or several times a week, whereas Georgians use it less frequently, with only one-quarter (25%) doing so. In contrast, social media plays a more prominent role in the Baltic states: nearly half of Latvians (59%) and 40% of Lithuanians report engaging with political content on social media on a regular basis.

Compared to the South Caucasus countries, traditional media formats such as radio and newspapers remain more significant sources of political information in the Baltic states. Approximately half of Estonians rely on radio for political updates, followed by 40% of Lithuanians and one-third of Latvians (33%).

Table 6. *Political concern*



Institutional Belonging

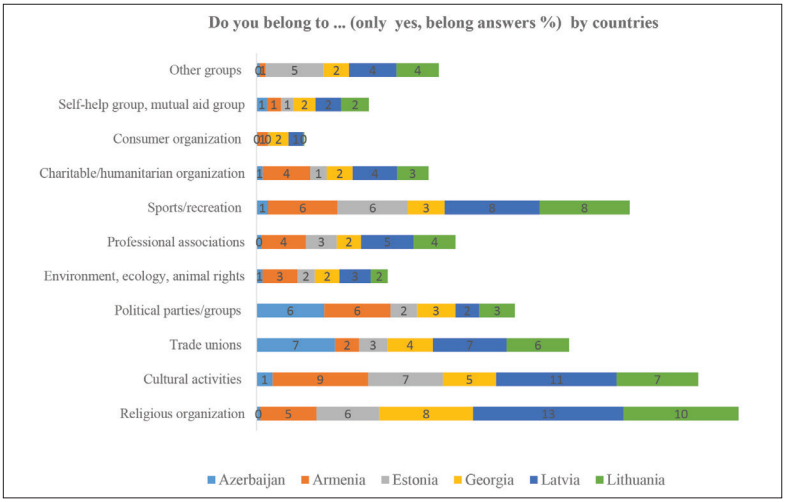
Statistics indicate consistently low levels of institutional and organizational belonging across all selected countries. Citizens are most likely to report affiliation with religious, cultural, or sports organizations. Approximately one in ten Latvians and Lithuanians belong to religious organizations, followed closely by Georgians. In contrast, levels of involvement are even lower among Estonians and Armenians, with only 6% of Estonians and 5% of Armenians reporting membership in such institutions (see Table 7).

Individuals in Latvia, Lithuania, and Azerbaijan appear to be relatively more engaged in trade unions than those in Georgia, Estonia, or Armenia. Participation in political parties and political groups is low across all countries. Armenians (6%) and Azerbaijanis (6%) report slightly higher levels of involvement in such organizations compared to Georgians, Estonians, and Latvians (2% each) and Lithuanians (3%).

Membership in charitable and humanitarian organizations is relatively low compared to participation in cultural and religious organizations.

Likewise, levels of involvement in environmental, ecological, and animal rights organizations are also lower than those observed for cultural and religious groups.

Table 7. *Institutional belonging*



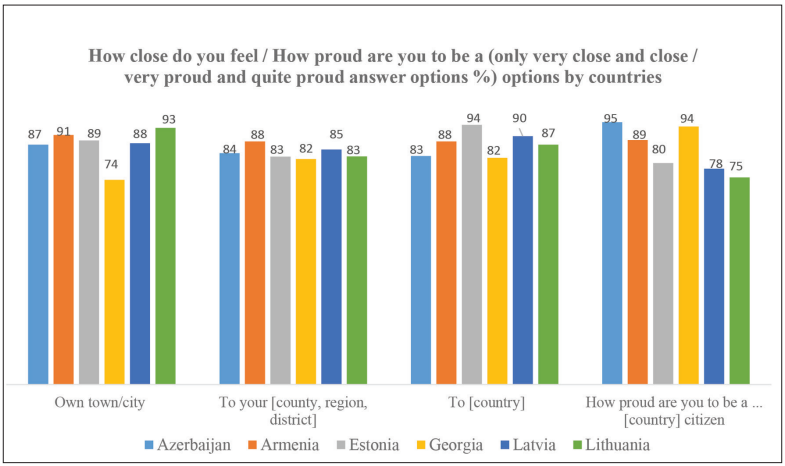
Geographical Belonging

Citizens of the South Caucasus countries express significantly higher levels of pride in their national citizenship compared to those in the Baltic states. An overwhelming majority of Azerbaijanis (95%) and Georgians (94%) report being proud of their national citizenship. This is followed by citizens of the Baltic states, where more than three-quarters of Latvians (78%), Estonians (80%), and Lithuanians express similar levels of pride (see Table 8).

Georgians, in particular, show a stronger attachment to their country and region than to their local towns or cities. Their attachment to their immediate locality is comparatively lower (74%) than that of citizens

in the other countries examined. In contrast, citizens of the Baltic states demonstrate higher levels of geographical belonging to their country. Almost all Estonians (94%) and Latvians (90%), as well as 87% of Lithuanians, report feeling more connected to their country than to their regions or cities. Notably, Lithuanians exhibit an especially strong attachment to their cities, with 93% expressing this sentiment.

Table 8. *Geographical belonging*



Discussion

The objective of our study was to analyze integrated empirical data in order to develop a comprehensive macro-level profile of social cohesion in Georgia. In parallel, we sought to identify its key micro-level characteristics and operational dynamics. By situating the phenomenon within a broader historical context, the historical case study offered important insights into the major patterns and underlying factors that have shaped the development of social cohesion and contributed to its present configuration.

Our multidimensional scaling analysis indicates that Georgians demonstrate relatively high levels of cohesion at the formal (attitudinal) level, but considerably lower levels at the substantial (behavioral) level. This suggests that attitudes toward the core dimensions of social cohesion are more favorable than the behaviors that would otherwise reflect these attitudes. In other words, although Georgians generally express positive evaluations of key aspects of social cohesion, these do not consistently translate into everyday practices. This pattern aligns with findings from previous research (e.g., Dickes et al. 2010), which similarly observed that Georgia – alongside several former Soviet states located closer to Asia, as well as some Southern European countries – exhibits a predominantly "formally oriented" profile of social cohesion. The qualitative component of our study reinforces this trend: respondents who underscore the importance of socio-cultural engagement and political participation frequently acknowledge that they themselves rarely engage in such activities or possess only limited experience with them.

The indices for institutional belongingness (0.14), political participation (0.26), and political concern (0.32) are among the lowest of all

measured components of social cohesion, based on a scale ranging from 0 to 1. In a broader perspective, this declining pattern of civic engagement corresponds with findings reported in studies from Western contexts (Putnam 1995a). However, these results should be interpreted with particular attention to the historical and structural conditions characteristic of transitional societies – especially those shaped by the Soviet legacy, persistent socio-economic vulnerabilities, and ongoing processes of democratic state-building. Within this context, survey data underscore several factors that contribute to low levels of citizen engagement and institutional belonging: the limited development of democratic institutions, a lack of sustained civic and political socialization, and the weak or inconsistently articulated nature of civic and political identities.

In addition, political elites often discourage broader societal participation by co-opting or discrediting potential challengers. In doing so, they deliberately undermine the development of generalized reciprocity and policy-based political competition in Georgia.

When situated within a broader regional context, empirical evidence appears to support Janmaat's (2011) prediction. His analysis suggests that the prevailing configuration of social cohesion in post-communist countries may endure over time, largely due to the distinct historical trajectories that have shaped social relations in the region. In his cross-national study, Janmaat (2011) found that post-communist societies are characterized by comparatively high levels of solidarity coupled with persistently low levels of civic and political participation.

The notably low level of institutional belongingness (0.14) identified in this study can be interpreted through the lens of institutional theory, which underscores the importance of procedural fairness and impartial governance for cultivating trust within society (Rothstein and Stolle 2003:192). Experiences of systemic discrimination and perceptions that institutions fail to adequately address individuals' concerns further erode

confidence in institutional structures (Rothstein and Stolle 2003:200). These challenges are characteristic of transitional contexts, including Georgia, where institutional development remains uneven and often contested. Moreover, prior research suggests that trust in institutions is a key driver of institutionalized forms of political participation, whereas trust embedded in personal networks is more likely to stimulate non-institutional modes of engagement (Suh 2013:20; Almond and Verba 1963).

One of the central aims of this study was to examine the state and character of social cohesion in small urban areas. To address this question, the quantitative component analyzed various types of settlements to identify and compare their social cohesion profiles, as well as the socio-demographic factors that most strongly shape these outcomes. The survey results indicate that settlement type plays a significant role in producing differing levels of cohesion across multiple dimensions. More specifically, the indices measuring general confidence, general solidarity, support for diversity, political participation, and sense of institutional belonging exhibit statistically significant variation across settlement categories. The analysis highlights a strong association between community size and the nature of social interactions: Georgians living in smaller settlements and urban areas demonstrate higher levels of general confidence (0.55) and general solidarity (0.79) than residents of the capital city, whose scores are noticeably lower (0.41 and 0.74, respectively).

These findings are consistent with classical and contemporary scholarship, which has long associated small communities and rural areas with the production of stronger social ties, higher levels of social capital, and more cohesive social relations (Tönnies 1957; Durkheim 1984; Park 1952; Stein 1960). Smaller settlements typically offer conditions conducive to close interpersonal relationships and dense social networks, whereas larger urban environments often generate more fragmented and impersonal forms of interaction (Simmel 1995; Hofferth and Iceland

1998; Ziersch et al. 2009; Sørensen 2016). Moreover, social cohesion in smaller communities appears to extend beyond kinship-based or familiar networks, which themselves are characterized by high levels of cohesion, reinforcing broader communal integration (Carreras 2019).

However, residents of the capital city tend to exhibit higher levels of support for diversity (0.88) and greater political activity (0.47) than those living in other parts of the country. Research on large urban centers consistently demonstrates that cities often host more educated and economically secure populations, where cosmopolitan attitudes and more liberal value orientations are comparatively widespread (Carreras and Bowler 2019). From the perspective of social disorganization theory, however, the heterogeneity of urban populations and the high rates of residential mobility typically associated with large cities may inhibit the formation of strong interpersonal relationships (Wirth 1938).

With respect to attitudes toward diversity, younger individuals and those with higher levels of education tend to be more accepting. Education, in particular, exerts "a very powerful effect on trust and associational membership, as well as many other forms of social and political participation" (Putnam 1995:667), underscoring its central role in shaping dispositions toward inclusion and engagement.

The Interpersonal Trust Index indicates no statistically significant differences across settlement types. However, marginal yet statistically significant variations emerge along religious, gender, and age lines. Individuals who are male, possess higher levels of education, or are employed tend to demonstrate greater political engagement. Gender, conceptualized as a critical sub-dimension of social cohesion (Walby 2000; McDaniel 2003), functions as an important parameter that reflects unequal and differentiated social experiences, thereby shaping opportunities for integration and participation in the public sphere (Yuval-Davis 1991:66; Geldenhuys 2011).

Although settlement type does not influence political concern, those with higher education (0.36) and men (0.33) report higher levels of political interest compared to individuals with secondary or lower education (0.27) and women (0.29). Previous studies similarly show that individuals with higher educational attainment are more likely to join voluntary associations, display greater political interest, and engage in a broader spectrum of political activities (Green and Preston 2001). They also tend to exhibit higher levels of interpersonal (social) trust and trust in institutions (institutional trust), as well as a stronger commitment to civic cooperation.

Georgians display a markedly stronger attachment to their geographical roots (0.77) than to institutional structures (0.14). While institutional attachment remains consistently low across socio-demographic categories, feelings of geographical belonging are notably high. Such geographical attachment is widely recognized as a core component of personal and collective identity (Low and Altman 1992:7; Hernández et al. 2007; Stedman 2002). It encompasses the symbolic and emotional meanings that individuals, groups, and cultures associate with specific places (Tuan 1977), forming a multidimensional construct shaped by personal, familial, ancestral, cultural, economic, and sociopolitical factors (Low and Altman 1992; Manzo 2003; Relph 1976, 2009; Shamai 1991). This place-based attachment serves as an essential foundation for developing a sense of community belonging (Basso 1996).

From the perspective of social identity theory, identities are organized within a hierarchy of inclusiveness – superordinate, intermediate, and subordinate (Turner 1987). Research, especially in organizational studies (Riley 2014:8), demonstrates that the salience and centrality of identities vary: some are more fluid and peripheral, while others are more stable and foundational (Gioia, Schultz, and Corley 2000). In the Georgian context, the pronounced strength of geographical identity relative to in-

stitutional identity suggests that primary group networks (e.g., family, kinship, neighborhood) are more resilient and influential than secondary, institution-based affiliations. Consequently, social identities tend to be anchored more strongly at personal and communal levels than at broader institutional or civic levels.

To deepen the interpretation of the macro-level findings, the qualitative component of the study provides an essential analytical foundation. These qualitative results indicate that connectedness and belonging among Georgian citizens are shaped predominantly by primordial and cultural – rather than civic – codes of collective identity (Eisenstadt 1998). Social networks are largely constituted through primary social groups such as family, relatives, kinship networks, peers, and close personal relationships. These networks predominantly support private or personal-oriented practices, rather than forms of public or civic engagement.

Although secondary group structures capable of fostering civic participation do exist, they appear to be considerably underdeveloped. In urban settings, social networks are rarely formed through civic associations, voluntary organizations, or other forms of collective civic engagement. Instead, the dominant networks rely on personal connections among relatives and close acquaintances, reinforcing the primacy of private over public life.

The core of these primary-group networks is rooted in intimate interpersonal relationships, where levels of trust are highest. Consequently, the strength of primary-group ties often eclipses – and in many cases substitutes for – the secondary-group ties that typically emerge in the public sphere. This imbalance has significant implications for the nature and dynamics of interpersonal and intergroup relationships at the civic level, limiting the development of broader, more institutionally oriented forms of social cohesion.

Society appears to be structured largely around self-interested and family-centric practices, which in some cases may prioritize familial well-being – even nepotistically – at the expense of the broader public good. The notable scarcity of collective practices at the local community level – such as cooperation, joint problem-solving, or coordinated action for shared benefits – illustrates a broader deficiency in shared values and in the willingness to address common challenges collectively. These challenges include initiating community-oriented projects, improving local infrastructure, and responding to shared economic concerns.

At the micro level, there is little evidence of internalized civic values that would motivate individuals to engage in collaborative action within the public sphere. At the macro level, this tendency is compounded by the limited presence of community-building institutions and the absence of robust institutionalized practices that typically support collective engagement and civic participation. Together, these factors contribute to a weakened foundation for developing and sustaining broader forms of social cohesion.

On the other hand, the quantitative data reveals that, nationwide, levels of distal solidarity – concern for individuals outside one's immediate social circle – surpass those of proximal solidarity, which reflects concern for people within one's close community. This pattern is most evident in respondents' attitudes toward vulnerable groups: nearly all Georgians report concern for the sick (95%), individuals with disabilities (95%), and the elderly (92%). In contrast, concern for immigrants is noticeably lower, with only 47% expressing worry for this group. Yet, when examined within a broader regional context, Georgia's solidarity toward immigrants is comparatively high, especially in comparison to Eastern European countries such as Estonia (6%), Latvia (9%), and Lithuania (15%).

Overall, both proximal and distal solidarity levels among Georgians (73%) are substantially higher than those observed in Eastern European states (Estonia 20%, Latvia 32%, Lithuania 34%) and are closely aligned

with levels recorded in Armenia (78%). This suggests that, despite certain internal variations across specific groups, Georgians maintain a consistently strong sense of concern for others, placing the country among the most solidaristic cases within the region.

The importance of neighborhood relationships as a sociocultural phenomenon is also particularly pronounced in Georgia. Survey findings demonstrate that interpersonal trust among Georgians is strongest toward neighbors (81%) – a level higher than in any other surveyed country. Georgians additionally show comparatively elevated trust toward individuals of different nationalities (45%), exceeding the levels observed in Lithuania (30%) and Latvia (43%), and exhibit more trust toward individuals of different religions than their South Caucasus counterparts. Nevertheless, Georgians remain notably cautious toward strangers, with only 13% expressing trust in people they meet for the first time.

As previously noted, a clear ambivalence characterizes the attitudes of local populations toward ethnic minority groups and "others" more broadly. Identity in Georgia – largely shaped by primordial and religious codes – cultivates a heightened sensitivity to cultural boundaries that manifests ambiguously across daily interactions. On the one hand, individuals may accept the presence and cultural distinctiveness of ethnic minorities in formal or public settings, so long as these do not intrude upon private, cultural, or material spheres. The demographic composition of the country plays a crucial role in shaping Georgians' self-understanding and contributes to the construction of a broader conceptualization of Georgian society – what Rondeli (2003) describes as the idea of a "small country" with a "small population." Within this framework, any perceived increase in the size of out-groups or the blurring of boundaries between public and private domains by members of these groups may be interpreted by representatives of the dominant culture as a potential threat to social cohesion.

This dynamic aligns with theoretical models that link out-group size to heightened perceptions of ethnic threat (Meer and Tolsma 2014). Empirical research demonstrates that increases in out-group size – and corresponding decreases in in-group size – are positively associated with perceived cultural, economic, or security threats (Scheepers et al. 2002). These perceptions are often reinforced by perceived gaps in shared language, values, or identities between in-group and out-group members. However, the interethnic contact paradigm offers a contrasting perspective: larger out-group populations can also expand opportunities for intergroup interaction, thereby fostering more positive attitudes and enhancing trust (Allport 1954). Increased contact has been shown to diminish perceived threats and strengthen interethnic cohesion (Wagner et al. 2006).

While interpersonal trust serves as an important foundation for citizens' political behavior, public policy also plays a critical role in cultivating a shared civic identity. Such identity-building must be grounded not in assimilationist approaches, but in a broader and more inclusive sense of "we" (Putnam 2007:161–164). Educational policy is especially influential in promoting civic trust in ethnically diverse contexts (Macedo 2003), and ensuring equitable access to socio-economic resources for both majority and minority groups is essential for mitigating inequalities that can otherwise fuel interethnic tensions (Alesina and Ferrara 2002).

One of the most significant challenges to social cohesion in Georgia is the growing political polarization, which has become increasingly emotionally charged and, at times, even violent. This polarization has narrowed – if not altogether eliminated – the space for constructive political dialogue and has had detrimental effects on interpersonal relationships across society. It has deepened social distance and fragmentation not only between opposing groups, often characterized by mutual antagonism, but also within core social units such as families, kinship networks, and circles of close friends.

Findings from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions indicate that the issues fueling this polarization are largely disconnected from local social or economic concerns. Rather than emerging from everyday material conditions, the dividing lines center on questions perceived as existential by the respective groups. These include debates about the country's foreign policy orientation, cultural and identity-related matters, and visions for Georgia's long-term trajectory. A further source of contention concerns deeply divergent understandings of moral authority, legitimacy, and preferred modes of governance.

It is also important to highlight that the intensifying polarization within local communities and Georgian society at large – though fundamentally political in nature – often manifests more strongly through partisan loyalties and party-based identities (most notably between supporters of the *United National Movement* and *Georgian Dream*) than through substantive ideological differences. This dynamic creates a significant barrier to fostering constructive, cooperative dialogue between opposing groups.

Recent political developments further illustrate how this polarization has evolved beyond partisan divisions: the boundary between "us" and "them" has increasingly been reframed in cultural and civilizational terms, reflecting two sharply contrasting worldviews and corresponding value systems. These competing orientations are frequently articulated as pro-European versus Eurosceptic, or democratic versus authoritarian.

Respondents also point to a growing trend of fragmentation among local communities, which they attribute to the large-scale socio-economic vulnerabilities Georgia has faced in recent years. This fragmentation has contributed to shifts in value structures, particularly the increasing prioritization of private, family-centered values over those oriented towards the public sphere. Moreover, rising migration emerges as a critical factor

intensifying societal fragmentation. It affects both the micro-institutional level – where families undergo profound structural and functional transformations – and the macro-societal level, where the departure of the most productive segments of the population weakens the country's economic capacity and its broader socio-cultural functions.

In addition to the transformations in social relations described earlier, all participants in this study emphasized the enduring significance of the "power of solidarity" that emerges during difficult moments, whether personal or collective. They described relying on the support of others in such circumstances. In summary, the insights gathered suggest a nuanced picture of Georgians' civic awareness and solidarity. On the one hand, respondents note that caring for others and fostering connections are not consistently perceived or enacted as core elements of citizenship in everyday life. Yet, at the same time, substantial sources of solidarity persist and can be rapidly mobilized in critical situations, as illustrated in the narratives of respondents – particularly when challenges are framed as existential for society or the nation as a whole.

Recent experiences have demonstrated considerable growth in both solidarity and civic consciousness, especially among younger generations, who have shown a willingness to defend the country even at great personal cost. Several examples highlight individuals who have sacrificed their safety, freedom, or lives to uphold fundamental human principles and protect the future of their country.

The comparative historical analysis demonstrates that the strong personalization of Georgian politics, the weakness of political parties, the absence of traditions of coalition-building beyond personal networks, and the lack of experience in managing both the loss and the re-acquisition of political power constitute core elements of Georgia's historically evolved political culture. These features have profound implications for social cohesion. The personalization of public trust in state institutions – mediated largely through patronage and clientelist networks – tends

to foster bonding social capital in Putnam's terms, while simultaneously inhibiting the development of bridging social capital. This imbalance constrains Georgia's long-term developmental potential and contributes to cyclical patterns of political crisis.

These dynamics may be driven less by ideological considerations and more by pragmatic or material interests, which are perceived as more effective in responding to the challenges posed by globalization – such as complexity, diversity, hybridity, and ambiguity. Because the mechanisms for addressing these challenges are located primarily in the informal sphere among competing elite factions, opportunities for political learning and the development of robust policy responses geared toward overcoming authoritarian modes of governance are limited. As a result, value-driven and evidence-based policymaking remains weak, frequently replaced by patrimonial practices of distributing benefits – such as pension increases, public sector hiring campaigns, or the use of administrative resources during elections – as a means of securing public trust. Such strategies reinforce confidence in individual state actors rather than in the institutions they represent, thereby obstructing the formation of meaningful linkages between political values and political action.

External actors (e.g., the EU, GIZ) have also struggled to address these structural challenges, largely because their interventions focus primarily on formal "readiness to fit" rather than on the informal mechanisms – such as patronage and political clientelism – that shape actual governance outcomes. It is therefore unsurprising that several leading figures within the ruling Georgian Dream party previously participated in various EU or US-supported programs without this leading to substantive institutional transformation. Instead of advancing structural inclusivity or empowering diverse social actors – whether "materialist" or "post-materialist" – across local, regional, national, and international levels to jointly address core societal issues such as poverty or decent

employment, contemporary developments reflect a contrary trajectory: growing exclusion, polarization, and defamation rooted in ethno-cultural narratives and purported "national values." (Gozalishvili 2024)

The central question that emerges is whether these Georgia-specific characteristics of social cohesion and resilience constitute a path-dependent pattern that will shape the country's future development, particularly now that it has been granted candidate status for EU membership. The European Union has increasingly recognized that the forms of patronal politics described above pose a substantial barrier to Georgia's accession prospects. This understanding is reflected in the EU's list of ten recommendations issued as prerequisites for opening accession negotiations – one of the most prominent being the requirement of "*de-oligarchization*." As the EU Ambassador to Georgia, Pawel Herczynski, emphasized:

> "From our point of view, de-oligarchization is not about any particular person. De-oligarchization is about creating a system that would allow Georgia to be a fully democratic, rule-of-law-abiding country where the influence of rich businessmen on political life is very limited. So, it's about creating a system of transparency, a system that would not allow high-level corruption. It is a system of checks and balances." (Civil Georgia 2024)

In contrast, Hans Gutbrod argues that the current situation is better described as a "re-feudalization" of political relations (Gutbrod 2022). This perspective resonates with the lament frequently expressed by taxi drivers, who often conclude their criticism of the political landscape with the resigned remark: "The country has no patron!" Yet as long as indi-

viduals continue to appeal for a patron to resolve their problems on their behalf, the transition from subject to citizen remains impossible. And it is precisely this transformation that constitutes a fundamental precondition for statehood – an idea emphasized by David Usupashvili at the outset of his 2015 lecture.

The current mass protests, with their demands for new elections and the release of detained demonstrators, may carry the potential to serve as an initial catalyst for the formation of a civic nation. Whether this potential will be realized, however, remains a matter for the future. What is clear is that without an open and self-critical assessment of the state of social cohesion and generalized reciprocity across society – as examined throughout this book – Georgia will continue to face recurring and systemic challenges.

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All links have been assessed on November 3, 2025.

Annex 1

Table 1. *Scale formation and reliability analysis of the original approach (Dickes et al. 2010; Acket et al. 2011)*

Sphere/ dimension	**Intermediate variables**	**Items**	**Reliability (a)**	**Scale range**	**The overall shape of the distribution**	**Missing cases (%)**
Political sphere – *formal relations* ***Dimension: Legitimacy/ illegitimacy***	VAI01 Confidence in national distributive systems	v117 How much confidence in education system (Q38C)	0.7068 (Good)	0-1 (standardized)	slightly negatively skewed	0
		v123 How much confidence in social security system (Q38I)				
		v126 How much confidence in health care system (Q38L)				
		v127 How much confidence in justice system (Q38M)				
	VAI02 Confidence in national organizations	v118 How much confidence in the press (Q38D)	0.6625 (Acceptable)	0-1 (standardized)	slightly positively skewed	0
		v119 How much confidence in trade unions (Q38E)				
		v121 How much confidence in parliament (Q38G)				
		v122 How much confidence in civil service (Q38H)				

	VAI03 Confidence in authority institutions	v115 How much confidence in church (Q38A)	0.4717 (Poor)	0-1 (standardized)	negatively skewed	0
		v116 How much confidence in armed forces (Q38B)				
		v120 How much confidence in the police (Q38F)				
	VAI04 Satisfaction and approval of democracy and government	v130 How much confidence in political parties (Q38P)	0.728 (Good)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v131 How much confidence in government (Q38Q)				
		v143 Democracy in own country (Q41)				
		v144 The system for governing this country (Q42)				
Socio-cultural sphere – *formal relations* ***Dimension: Acceptance/ rejection***	VAI05 Proximal solidarity	v212 Are you concerned with people neighborhood (Q60A)	0.8695 (Very good)	0-1 (standardized)	negatively skewed	0
		v213 Are you concerned with: people own region (Q60B)				
		v214 Are you concerned with fellow countrymen (Q60C)				
	VAI06 Distal solidarity	v217 Are you concerned with elderly people (Q61A)	0.3772 (Very poor)	0-1 (standardized)	negatively skewed	0
		v218 Are you concerned with unemployed people (Q61B)				

		v219 Are you concerned with immigrants (Q61C)				
		v220 Are you concerned with sick and disabled (Q61D)				
	VAI07 Acceptance of diversity	v22 Do not like as neighbors: people of different race (Q6A)	0.7858 (Good)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v24 Do not like as neighbors: immigrants/foreign workers (Q6C)				
		v27 Do not like as neighbors: Christians (Q6F)				
		v28 Do not like as neighbors: Muslims (Q6G)				
	VAI08 Interpersonal trust	v33 How much you trust: people in your neighborhood (Q8B)	0.4785 (Poor)	0-1 (standardized)	slightly negatively skewed	0
		v34 How much you trust: people you know personally (Q8C)				
		v35 How much you trust: people you meet for the first time (Q8D)				
	VAI09 Intergroup trust	v36 How much you trust: people of another religion (Q8E)	0.7899 (Good)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v37 How much you trust: people of another nationality (Q8F)				

Socio-cultural sphere – *formal relations* ***Dimensions: Belonging/ Isolation***	VAI010 Sense of belonging	v164 How close do you feel: to own town/city (Q45A)	0.6704 (Acceptable)	0-1 (standardized)	negatively skewed	0.73
		v165 How close do you feel: to your [county, region, district] (Q45B)				
		v166 How close do you feel: to [country] (Q45C)				
		v170 How proud are you to be a ... (country) citizen (Q47)				
Political sphere – *substantial relation* ***Dimension: Participation/ passivity***	VAI011 Participation in legal political activities	v98 Political action: signing a petition (Q30A)	0.7217 (Good)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v99 Political action: joining in boycotts (Q30B)				
		v100 Political action: attending lawful demonstrations (Q30C)				
	VAI012 Political concern	v97 How interested are you in politics (Q29)	0.5393 (Poor)	0-1 (standardized)	slightly positively skewed	0
		v208 How often do you follow politics: on television (Q59A)				
		v209 How often do you follow politics: on the radio (Q59B)				
		v210 How often do you follow politics: in the daily papers (Q59C)				

		v211 How often do you follow politics: on social media (Q59D)				
Socio-cultural sphere – ***substantial relation*** ***Dimension: belonging/ isolation***	VAI13– Participation in social organization	v16 Do you belong to charitable/humanitarian organization (Q4H)	0.5686 (Poor)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v18 Do you belong to self-help group, mutual aid group (Q4J)				
		v21 Did you do voluntary work in the last 6 months (Q5)				
	VAI14– Participation in political organization	v11 Do you belong to trade unions (Q4C)	0.7914 (Good)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v12 Do you belong to political parties/groups (Q4D)				
		v14 Do you belong to professional associations (Q4F)				
	VAI15– Participation in cultural associations	v9 Do you belong to religious organization (Q4A)	0.5204 (Poor)	0-1 (standardized)	positively skewed	0
		v10 Do you belong to cultural activities (Q4B)				

Annex 2

Table 1. *Scale formation and reliability analysis used in the paper*

Sphere/ dimension	**Index Name**	**Items**	**Reliability (a)**	**Scale range**	**The overall shape of the distribution**	**Missing cases (%)**
Political sphere – formal relations Dimension: *Legitimacy/ illegitimacy*	**General confidence index**	v117 How much confidence in education system (Q38C)	**0.8599 (Very good)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Almost Normal**	**0**
		v123 How much confidence in social security system (Q38I)				
		v126 How much confidence in health care system (Q38L)				
		v127 How much confidence in justice system (Q38M)				
		v118 How much confidence in the press (Q38D)				
		v119 How much confidence in trade unions (Q38E)				
		v121 How much confidence in parliament (Q38G)				
		v122 How much confidence in civil service (Q38H)				
		v115 How much confidence in church (Q38A)				
		v116 How much confidence in armed forces (Q38B)				
		v120 How much confidence in the police (Q38F)				
		v130 How much confidence in political parties (Q38P)				
		v131 How much confidence in government (Q38Q)				

Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimension: *Acceptance/ rejection*	**Support for diversity**	v22 Do not like as neighbors: people of different race (Q6A)	**0.8096 (Very good)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Positively skewed**	**0**
		v24 Do not like as neighbors: immigrants/foreign workers (Q6C)				
		v26 Do not like as neighbors': homosexuals (Q6E)				
		v27 Do not like as neighbors: Christians (Q6F)				
		v28 Do not like as neighbors: Muslims (Q6G)				
		v29 Do not like as neighbors': Jews (optional) (Q6H)				
		v30 Do not like as neighbors': Gypsies (optional) (Q6I)				
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimension: *Acceptance/ rejection*	**General solidarity**	v212 Are you concerned with people neighborhood (Q60A)	**0.8150 (Very good)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Negatively skewed**	**0**
		v213 Are you concerned with: people own region (Q60B)				
		v214 Are you concerned with fellow countrymen (Q60C)				
		v217 Are you concerned with elderly people (Q61A)				
		v218 Are you concerned with unemployed people (Q61B)				
		v219 Are you concerned with immigrants (Q61C)				
		v220 Are you concerned with sick and disabled (Q61D)				
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations	**Interpersonal trust**	v33 How much you trust: people in your neighborhood (Q8B)	**0.6350 (Acceptable)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Almost Normal**	**0**
		v34 How much you trust: people you know personally (Q8C)				
		v35 How much you trust: people you meet for the first time (Q8D)				

Dimension: *Acceptance/ rejection*		v36 How much you trust: people of another religion (Q8E)				
		v37 How much you trust: people of another nationality (Q8F)				
Political sphere – substantial relation Dimension: *Participation/ passivity*	**Political participation**	v98 Political action: signing a petition (Q30A)	**0.7217 (Good)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Positively skewed**	**0**
		v99 Political action: joining in boycotts (Q30B)				
		v100 Political action: attending lawful demonstrations (Q30C)				
Political sphere – substantial relation Dimension: *Participation/ passivity*	**Political concern**	v208 How often do you follow politics: on television (Q59A)	**0.4493 (Poor)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Positively skewed**	**0**
		v209 How often do you follow politics: on the radio (Q59B)				
		v210 How often do you follow politics: in the daily papers (Q59C)				
		v211 How often do you follow politics: on social media (Q59D)				
Socio-cultural sphere – substantial relation	**Sense of institutional belonging-ness**	v9 Do you belong to religious organization (Q4A)	**0.9476 (Very Good)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Positively skewed**	**0**
		v10 Do you belong to cultural activities (Q4B)				
		v11 Do you belong to trade unions (Q4C)				
		v12 Do you belong to political parties/groups (Q4D)				
		v13 Do you belong to environment, ecology, animal rights (Q4E)				

Dimension: *Belonging/ isolation*		v14 Do you belong to professional associations (Q4F)				
		v15 Do you belong to sports/recreation (Q4G)				
		v16 Do you belong to charitable/humanitarian organization (Q4H)				
		v17 Do you belong to consumer organization (Q4I)				
		v18 Do you belong to self-help group, mutual aid group (Q4J)				
		v19 Do you belong to other groups (Q4K)				
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimensions: *Belonging/ Isolation*	**Sense of geographical belongingness**	v164 How close do you feel: to own town/city (Q45A)	**0.6704 (Acceptable)**	**0-1 (standardized)**	**Negatively skewed**	**0.73**
		v165 How close do you feel: to your [county, region, district] (Q45B)				
		v166 How close do you feel: to [country] (Q45C)				
		v170 How proud are you to be a ... (country) citizen (Q47)				

Annex 3

Table 1. *Control variable transformation*

Variable name	Original answer options	Recoding pattern	Recoded answer options	Scale
Settlement size	1. under 5000 2. 5000-20000 3. 20000-100000 4. 100000-500000 5. 500000 and more	Code 1 = Code 1 Codes 2, 3, 4 = Code 2 Code 5 = Code 3	1. Under 5000 2. 5000-500000 3. 500000 and more	Nominal
Sex of respondent	1. Male 2. Female	Code 1 = Code 1 Code 2 = Code 0	0. Female 1. Male	Nominal (binary)
Educational attainment	-2. no answer 0. Less than primary 11. Primary: general education 21. Lower secondary: general education 31. Upper secondary: general education 32. Upper secondary: vocational programs 42. post-secondary non tertiary: vocational programs	Code -2 = missing Codes from 0 to 31 (including) = Code 1 Codes from 32 to 42 (inlcuding0 = Code 2 Codes from 51 to 80 (including) = Code 3	1. Secondary or lower 2. Vocational education 3. Higher education	Ordinal*

	51. Short-cycle tertiary: general education 62. Bachelor or equivalent: vocational programs 72. Master or equivalent: vocational programs 80. Doctoral or equivalent			
Employment status	-2. no answer -1. don't know 1. 30h a week or more 2. less than 30h a week 3. self employed 4. military service 5. retired/pensioned 6. homemaker not otherwise employed 7. student 8. unemployed 9. disabled	Codes 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 = Code 1 Code 8 = Code 2 Codes 1, 2, 3 = Code 3 Codes -2, -1 = missing	1. Outside the labor force & other 2. Not employed 3. Employed	Nominal
Household income (Households total net income [standardized])	-2 no answer -1 don't know 1. A - 1st decile 2. B - 2nd decile 3. C - 3rd decile 4. D - 4th decile 5. E - 5th decile	Codes -2, -1 = missing All other observation remained the same	1. A - 1st decile 2. B - 2nd decile 3. C - 3rd decile 4. D - 4th decile 5. E - 5th decile 6. F - 6th decile 7. G - 7th decile	Ordinal

	6. F - 6th decile 7. G - 7th decile 8. H - 8th decile 9. I - 9th decile 10. J - 10th decile		8. H - 8th decile 9. I - 9th decile 10. J - 10th decile	
Religious affiliation	-3. not applicable -2. no answer -1. Don't know 26801 GE: Orthodox 26802 GE: Catholic 26803 GE: Gregorian/Armenian Apostolic 26804 GE: Protestant 26806 GE: Muslim 26807 GE: Jehovah's Witnesses 26808 GE: Sun Cult 26809 GE: Baptist 26816 GE: Other	Codes -3, -2, -1 = missing Code 26801 = Code 0 Codes from 26802 to 26816 (including) = 1	0. Orthodox 1. non-Orthodox	Nominal (binary)

Annex 4

Figure 1. *General confidence index model – Robust regression model with MM estimation*

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)			
5000-500000 (combined)	-0.114***	-0.122***	
	(0.0106)	(0.0156)	
500000 and more	-0.131***	-0.125***	
	(0.0125)	(0.0197)	
Age	0.000280	0.000531	
	(0.000299)	(0.000429)	
Sex (Base category – female)	0.00532	0.00194	
Education (base category - secondary or lower)	(0.0101)	(0.0146)	
Vocational education	0.00463	0.00814	
	(0.0119)	(0.0192)	
Higher education	-0.00599	-0.00486	
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)	(0.0121)	(0.0191)	
Not employed	-0.00166	-0.00747	
	(0.0121)	(0.0186)	
Employed	0.0184	0.0186	
	(0.0122)	(0.0169)	

HH income		-0.000239	0.00208	
		(0.00193)	(0.00260)	
Religion (base category – Orthodox)		0.0694***	0.122***	
		(0.0181)	(0.0270)	
Constant		0.521***	0.501***	0.155***
		(0.0197)	(0.0259)	(0.00452)
Observations		1,901	1,901	1,901
MM regression (85% efficiency)				
Wald (chi2(10)	175.07			
Prob > chi2	0.0000			
Pseudo R2	0.1126			
Breakdown point	50			
M-estimate: k	3.4436898			
S-estimate: k	1.547645			
Scale				.15527418

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 2. *Solidarity index model - Robust regression model with MM estimation and quintile regression models at different cut points*

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale	(4) Quintile 0.25	(5) Quintile 0.50	(6) Quintile 0.75
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)						
5000-500000 (combined)	-0.0244***	-0.0233		-0.0125	-0.00947	-0.00770
	(0.00942)	(0.0146)		(0.0124)	(0.00952)	(0.00895)
500000 and more	-0.0480***	-0.0527***		-0.0320**	-0.0378***	-0.0273**
	(0.0107)	(0.0136)		(0.0139)	(0.0105)	(0.0106)
Age	0.000781***	0.000925***		0.00102***	0.000840***	0.000680***
	(0.000232)	(0.000316)		(0.000324)	(0.000261)	(0.000237)
Sex (Base category – female)	0.0229***	0.0159		0.0200*	0.0159*	0.0220**
	(0.00816)	(0.0118)		(0.0107)	(0.00903)	(0.00865)
Education (base category - secondary or lower)						
Vocational education	-0.0145	-0.0247*		0.00712	-0.00613	-0.0213**
	(0.00982)	(0.0142)		(0.0130)	(0.00974)	(0.00926)
Higher education	-0.0266***	-0.0282*		-0.0163	-0.0209*	-0.0346***
	(0.0101)	(0.0163)		(0.0140)	(0.0111)	(0.00905)
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)						
Not employed	0.0233**	0.0425***		0.0107	0.0210**	0.0244**
	(0.00962)	(0.0134)		(0.0134)	(0.0102)	(0.00975)
Employed	0.0300***	0.0326**		0.0210	0.0233**	0.0143
	(0.0103)	(0.0152)		(0.0129)	(0.0109)	(0.0107)

HH income	-0.00128	-0.00298		-0.000482	-0.000983	-0.00237
	(0.00158)	(0.00230)		(0.00222)	(0.00159)	(0.00144)
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	0.00664	0.0547**		-0.0495***	0.00164	0.0189
	(0.0143)	(0.0217)		(0.0168)	(0.0132)	(0.0136)
Constant	0.761***	0.769***	0.132***	0.636***	0.742***	0.845***
	(0.0169)	(0.0212)	(0.00374)	(0.0222)	(0.0193)	(0.0169)
Observations	1,901	1,901	1,901	1,901	1,901	1,901
R-squared				0.021	0.023	0.015
MM regression (85% efficiency)						
Wald (chi2(10)	67.33					
Prob > chi2	0.0000					
Pseudo R2	0.0393					
Breakdown point	50					
M-estimate: k	3.4436898					
S-estimate: k		1.547645				
Scale			.13207732			

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 3. *Support for diversity index model - Robust regression model with MM estimation and quintile regression models at different cut points*

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale	(4) Quintile 0.25	(5) Quintile 0.50	(6) Quintile 0.75
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)						
5000-500000 (combined)	0.00213	-0.00855		-0.0265	-0.0222	-0
	(0.0235)	(0.0106)		(0.0292)	(0.0235)	(0.00563)
500000 and more	0.163***	0.0491***		0.368***	0.121***	0.125***
	(0.0259)	(0.0103)		(0.0297)	(0.0171)	(0.00479)
Age	-0.00171***	-0.000933***		-0.000974	-0.00159***	0
	(0.000617)	(0.000349)		(0.000603)	(0.000465)	(0.000160)
Sex (Base category – female)	-0.0131	-0.0129		-0.0312	-0.0170	-0
	(0.0182)	(0.00867)		(0.0219)	(0.0168)	(0.00459)
Education (base category - secondary or lower)						
Vocational education	0.0741***	0.00170		0.0434	0.0497**	0
	(0.0232)	(0.0123)		(0.0277)	(0.0230)	(0.00580)
Higher education	0.0713***	0.00456		0.0400*	0.0588***	-0
	(0.0217)	(0.0112)		(0.0242)	(0.0185)	(0.00539)
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)						
Not employed	-0.0304	-0.00826		-0.0226	-0.0651***	0
	(0.0228)	(0.0128)		(0.0255)	(0.0202)	(0.00573)
Employed	0.0216	0.0210*		-0.0331	-0.000454	0
	(0.0221)	(0.0110)		(0.0282)	(0.0199)	(0.00524)

HH income	0.00866***	0.00180		0.0159***	0.00907***	0
	(0.00335)	(0.00158)		(0.00458)	(0.00287)	(0.000811)
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	0.105***	0.00847		0.119***	0.0390*	0
	(0.0250)	(0.0137)		(0.0398)	(0.0201)	(0.00654)
Constant	0.719***	0.899***	0.208***	0.407***	0.800***	0.875***
	(0.0555)	(0.0271)	(0.0105)	(0.0559)	(0.0377)	(0.0112)
Observations	1,901	1,901	1,901	1,901	1,901	1,901
R-squared				0.123	0.114	0.100
MM regression (85% efficiency)						
Wald (chi2(10)	109.47					
Prob > chi2	0.0000					
Pseudo R2	0.0911					
Breakdown point	50					
M-estimate: k	3.4436898					
S-estimate: k		1.547645				
Scale			.20849744			

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 4. *Support for interpersonal tust index model - Robust regression model with MM estimation*

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)			
5000-500000 (combined)	-0.00991	-0.00639	
	(0.00871)	(0.0231)	
500000 and more	0.0166*	0.0224*	
	(0.00891)	(0.0115)	
Age	0.00111***	0.00105***	
	(0.000200)	(0.000345)	
Sex (Base category – female)	0.0352***	0.0203	
	(0.00722)	(0.0196)	
Education (base category - secondary or lower)			
Vocational education	-0.00208	-0.00818	
	(0.00868)	(0.0174)	
Higher education	0.0112	0.0158	
	(0.00933)	(0.0217)	
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)			
Not employed	0.00520	0.00836	
	(0.00847)	(0.0133)	
Employed	0.0140	0.0147	
	(0.00915)	(0.0142)	

HH income	0.00245	0.00443	
	(0.00164)	(0.00297)	
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	0.0316**	0.0317*	
	(0.0124)	(0.0180)	
Constant	0.446***	0.457***	0.119***
	(0.0136)	(0.0176)	(0.00327)
Observations	1,901	1,901	1,901
MM regression (85% efficiency)			
Wald (chi2(10)	75.34		
Prob > chi2	0.0000		
Pseudo R2	0.0441		
Breakdown point	50		
M-estimate: k	3.4436898		
S-estimate: k	1.547645		
Scale			.11927312

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 5. *Political participation index model - Robust regression model with MM estimation*

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)			
5000-500000 (combined)	0.0200	0.0155	
	(0.0177)	(0.0147)	
500000 and more	0.0853***	0.274***	
	(0.0215)	(0.0488)	
Age	6.02e-05	-6.66e-05	
	(0.000417)	(0.000357)	
Sex (Base category – female)	0.0603***	0.0118	
	(0.0162)	(0.0148)	
Education (base category - secondary or lower)			
Vocational education	0.0220	0.00993	
	(0.0179)	(0.0122)	
Higher education	0.0880***	0.0308	
	(0.0217)	(0.0238)	
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)			
Not employed	-0.00216	-0.00988	
	(0.0169)	(0.0135)	
Employed	0.0553***	0.0204	
	(0.0209)	(0.0210)	

HH income	0.00993***	0.00443	
	(0.00339)	(0.00411)	
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	0.00727	-0.00758	
	(0.0233)	(0.0169)	
Constant	0.214***	0.176***	0.228***
	(0.0306)	(0.0265)	(0.00932)
Observations	1,901	1,901	1,901
MM regression (85% efficiency)			
Wald (chi2(10)	60.27		
Prob > chi2	0.0000		
Pseudo R2	0.0706		
Breakdown point	50		
M-estimate: k	3.4436898		
S-estimate: k	1.547645		
Scale			.22837147

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 6. *Political concern index model - Robust regression model with MM estimation*

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)			
5000-500000 (combined)	-0.0300***	-0.0244	
	(0.0109)	(0.0185)	
500000 and more	-0.0186	0.000554	
	(0.0153)	(0.0313)	
Age	0.00172***	0.00222***	
	(0.000259)	(0.000429)	
Sex (Base category – female)	0.0343***	0.00886	
	(0.00981)	(0.0146)	
Education (base category - secondary or lower)			
Vocational education	0.0323***	0.0267	
	(0.0109)	(0.0167)	
Higher education	0.0854***	0.0855***	
	(0.0134)	(0.0287)	
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)			
Not employed	-0.00203	0.000187	
	(0.0106)	(0.0161)	
Employed	0.0260**	0.0498**	
	(0.0131)	(0.0223)	

HH income	0.00646***	0.00238	
	(0.00235)	(0.00368)	
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	-0.00864	-0.0115	
	(0.0123)	(0.0154)	
Constant	0.160***	0.128***	0.153***
	(0.0186)	(0.0297)	(0.00447)
Observations	1,901	1,901	1,901
MM regression (85% efficiency)			
Wald (chi2(10)	117.80		
Prob > chi2	0.0000		
Pseudo R2	0.0846		
Breakdown point	50		
M-estimate: k	3.4436898		
S-estimate: k	1.547645		
Scale			.15295957

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 7. *Institutional belongingness index model - Linear regression model with robust standard errors*

VARIABLES	(1) Institutional belongingness index
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)	
5000-500000 (combined)	0.0386***
	(0.0106)
500000 and more	-0.00975*
	(0.00522)
Age	0.000359
	(0.000227)
Sex (Base category – female)	0.00473
	(0.00795)
Education (base category - secondary or lower)	
Vocational education	0.00168
	(0.0105)
Higher education	-0.0172*
	(0.00904)
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)	
Not employed	0.0287***
	(0.00823)
Employed	0.0346***
	(0.00839)

HH income	0.00268
	(0.00166)
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	0.0142
	(0.0145)
Constant	0.0615***
	(0.0177)
Observations	1,901
R-squared	0.037

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 8. *Geographical belongingness index model -*
Robust regression model with MM estimation and quintile regression models at different cut points

VARIABLES	(1) MM estimation	(2) S estimation	(3) scale	(4) Quintile 0.25	(5) Quintile 0.50	(6) Quintile 0.75
Settlement size (base category - under 5000)						
5000-500000 (combined)	0.00980	0.0423**		-0.000478	0	0.0215
	(0.0113)	(0.0186)		(0.0142)	(0.00729)	(0.0132)
500000 and more	0.00891	0.00277		-0.0105	0	0.0482***
	(0.0137)	(0.0358)		(0.0171)	(0.00954)	(0.0170)
Age	0.00112***	0.000765*		0.00143***	-0	0.00164***
	(0.000287)	(0.000421)		(0.000331)	(0.000190)	(0.000362)
Sex (Base category – female)	0.0390***	0.0371**		0.0354***	0	0.0411***
	(0.00976)	(0.0162)		(0.0127)	(0.00663)	(0.0122)
Education (base category - secondary or lower)						
Vocational education	-0.00177	-0.0121		-0.00669	0	0.00194
	(0.0123)	(0.0229)		(0.0146)	(0.00799)	(0.0143)
Higher education	-0.0193	-0.0268		-0.0205	0	-0.0167
	(0.0125)	(0.0198)		(0.0162)	(0.00778)	(0.0166)
Employment (base category - Outside the labor force & other)						
Not employed	0.0285**	0.0305		0.0201	0	0.0544***
	(0.0115)	(0.0203)		(0.0142)	(0.00771)	(0.0139)

Employed	0.0533***	0.0931***		0.0344**	0	0.0674***
	(0.0129)	(0.0226)		(0.0168)	(0.00852)	(0.0157)
HH income	0.00473**	0.00586		0.00334	-0	0.00388*
	(0.00212)	(0.00358)		(0.00268)	(0.00132)	(0.00235)
Religion (base category – Orthodox)	0.0376**	0.0611		0.0186	0	0.0798***
	(0.0168)	(0.0687)		(0.0187)	(0.0107)	(0.0133)
Constant	0.665***	0.660***	0.161***	0.562***	0.769***	0.719***
	(0.0189)	(0.0271)	(0.00447)	(0.0241)	(0.0132)	(0.0200)
Observations	1,892	1,892	1,892	1,892	1,892	1,892
R-squared				0.030	0.000	0.028
MM regression (85% efficiency)						
Wald (chi2(10)	42.27					
Prob > chi2	0.0000					
Pseudo R2	0.0428					
Breakdown point	50					
M-estimate: k	3.4436898					
S-estimate: k		1.547645				
Scale			.16059644			

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Annex 5

Table 1. *Item's missing values and recoding pattern*

Sphere/ dimension	Intermediate variables	Items	% of Missing data M (unweighted)	Transformation (MCA) pattern
Political sphere – formal relations Dimension: *Legitimacy/ illegitimacy*	**General confidence**	v117 How much confidence in education system (Q38C)	**1.55**	M = quite a lot
		v123 How much confidence in social security system (Q38I)	**4.19**	M = none at all
		v126 How much confidence in health care system (Q38L)	**1.32**	M = not very much
		v127 How much confidence in justice system (Q38M)	**6.38**	M = quite a lot
		v118 How much confidence in the press (Q38D)	**3.60**	M = none at all
		v119 How much confidence in trade unions (Q38E)	**16.77**	M = not very much
		v121 How much confidence in parliament (Q38G)	**3.60**	M = none at all
		v122 How much confidence in civil service (Q38H)	**4.88**	M = none at all
		v115 How much confidence in church (Q38A)	**1.78**	M = quite a lot
		v116 How much confidence in armed forces (Q38B)	**1.32**	M = not very much
		v120 How much confidence in the police (Q38F)	**1.55**	M = quite a lot
		v130 How much confidence in political parties (Q38P)	**5.47**	M = none at all
		v131 How much confidence in government (Q38Q)	**2.01**	M = quite a lot

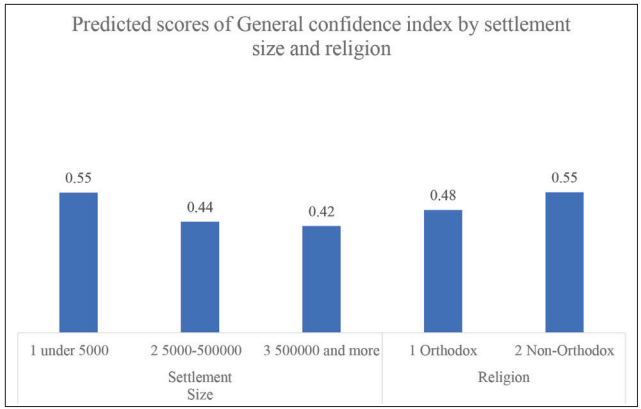
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimension: *Acceptance/ rejection*	**Support for diversity**	v22 Do not like as neighbors: people of different race (Q6A)	**1.14**	m = not mentioned
		v24 Do not like as neighbors: immigrants/foreign workers (Q6C)	**1.50**	m = not mentioned
		v26 Do not like as neighbors': homosexuals (Q6E)	**0.73**	m = not mentioned
		v27 Do not like as neighbors: Christians (Q6F)	**0.32**	m = mentioned
		v28 Do not like as neighbors: Muslims (Q6G)	**0.77**	m = not mentioned
		v29 Do not like as neighbors': Jews (optional) (Q6H)	**1.19**	m = not mentioned
		v30 Do not like as neighbors': Gypsies (optional) (Q6I)	**1.96**	m = not mentioned
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimension: *Acceptance/ rejection*	**General solidarity**	v212 Are you concerned with people neighborhood (Q60A)	**0.50**	m = very much
		v213 Are you concerned with: people own region (Q60B)	**0.68**	m = not at all
		v214 Are you concerned with fellow countrymen (Q60C)	**0.87**	m = very much
		v217 Are you concerned with elderly people (Q61A)	**0.36**	m = not at all
		v218 Are you concerned with unemployed people (Q61B)	**0.50**	m = not at all
		v219 Are you concerned with immigrants (Q61C)	**1.78**	m = very much
		v220 Are you concerned with sick and disabled (Q61D)	**0.64**	m = much
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations	**Interpersonal trust**	v33 How much you trust: people in your neighborhood (Q8B)	**0.96**	m = trust somewhat
		v34 How much you trust: people you know personally (Q8C)	**0.50**	m = trust somewhat

Dimension: *Acceptance/ rejection*		v35 How much you trust: people you meet for the first time (Q8D)	**1.50**	m = do not trust very much
		v36 How much you trust: people of another religion (Q8E)	**3.97**	m = do not trust very much
		v37 How much you trust: people of another nationality (Q8F)	**3.60**	m = trust somewhat
Political sphere – substantial relation Dimension: *Participation/ passivity*	**Political participation**	v98 Political action: signing a petition (Q30A)	**5.83**	m = have done
		v99 Political action: joining in boycotts (Q30B)	**4.06**	m = have done
		v100 Political action: attending lawful demonstrations (Q30C)	**2.74**	m = have done
Political sphere – substantial relation Dimension: *Participation/ passivity*	**Political concern**	v208 How often do you follow politics: on television (Q59A)	**0.23**	m = less often
		v209 How often do you follow politics: on the radio (Q59B)	**0.27**	m = less often
		v210 How often do you follow politics: in the daily papers (Q59C)	**0.32**	m = less often
		v211 How often do you follow politics: on social media (Q59D)	**1.09**	m = less often
Socio-cultural sphere – substantial relation	**Sense of institutional belongingness**	v9 Do you belong to religious organization (Q4A)	**0.41**	m = mentioned
		v10 Do you belong to cultural activities (Q4B)	**0.55**	m = mentioned
		v11 Do you belong to trade unions (Q4C)	**0.64**	m = mentioned
		v12 Do you belong to political parties/groups (Q4D)	**0.73**	m = mentioned

Dimension: *Belonging/ isolation*		v13 Do you belong to environment, ecology, animal rights (Q4E)	**0.73**	m = mentioned
		v14 Do you belong to professional associations (Q4F)	**0.68**	m = mentioned
		v15 Do you belong to sports/recreation (Q4G)	**0.64**	m = mentioned
		v16 Do you belong to charitable/humanitarian organization (Q4H)	**0.77**	m = mentioned
		v17 Do you belong to consumer organization (Q4I)	**0.91**	m = mentioned
		v18 Do you belong to self-help group, mutual aid group (Q4J)	**0.64**	m = mentioned
		v19 Do you belong to other groups (Q4K)	**0.82**	m = mentioned
Socio-cultural sphere – formal relations Dimensions: *Belonging/ Isolation*	**Sense of geographical belongingness**	v164 How close do you feel: to own town/city (Q45A)	**1.32**	m = not close at all
		v165 How close do you feel: to your [county, region, district] (Q45B)	**1.14**	m = very close
		v166 How close do you feel: to [country] (Q45C)	**1.05**	m = very close
		v170 How proud are you to be a ... (country) citizen (Q47)	**0.05**	m = not close at all

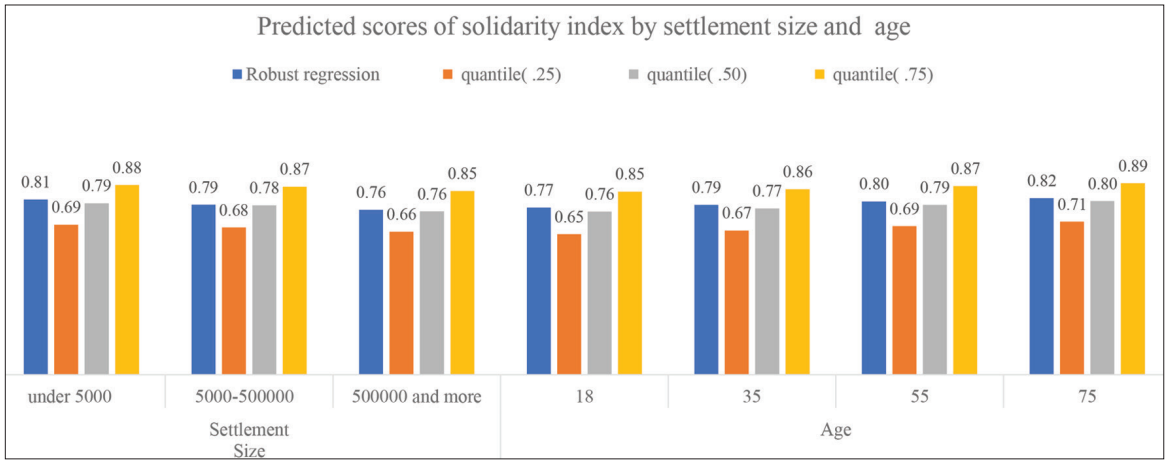
Annex 6

Figure 3. *Predicted scores of General confidence index*



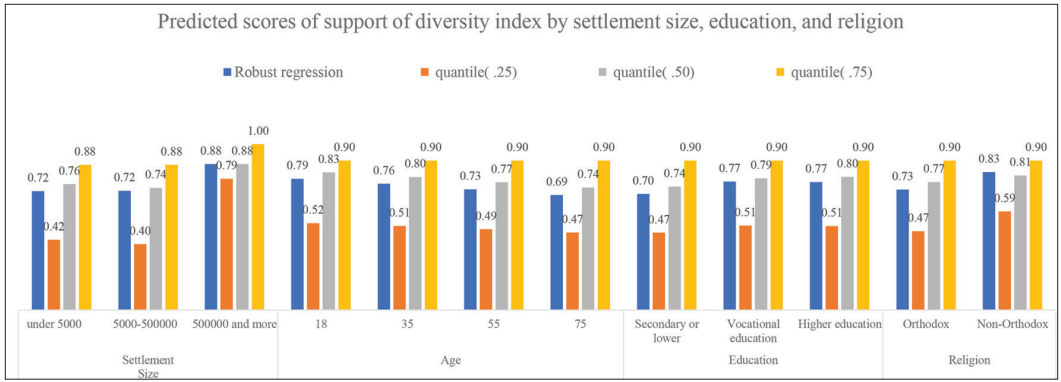
		Predicted scores	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Settlement Size	under 5 000	0.55	0.54	0.56
	5 000-500 000	0.44	0.42	0.45
	500000 and more	0.42	0.40	0.44
Religion	Orthodox	0.48	0.47	0.49
	Non-Orthodox	0.55	0.52	0.59

Figure 5. *Predicted scores of solidarity index*



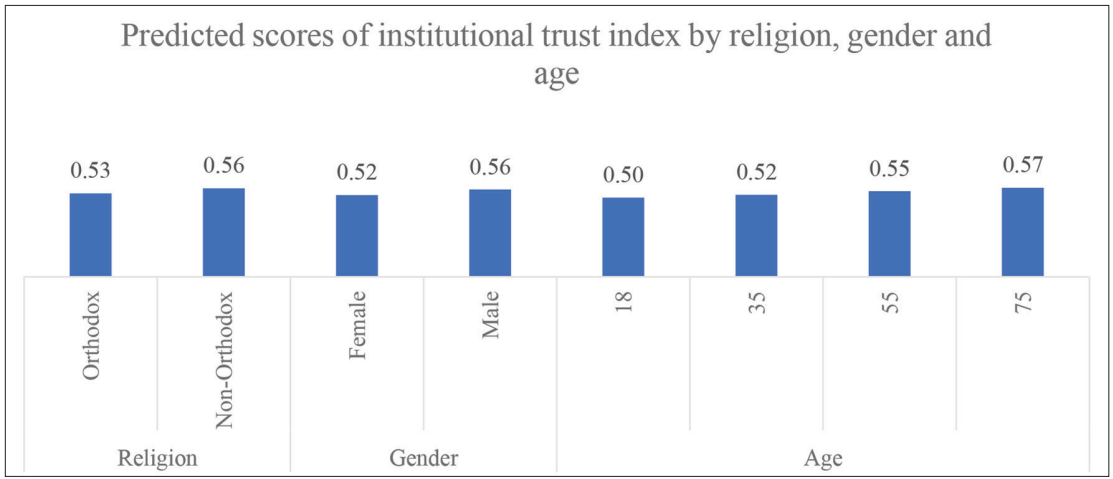
		Robust regression	[95% Conf. Interval]		quantile (.25)	[95% Conf. Interval]		quantile (.50)	[95% Conf. Interval]		Quantile (.75)	[95% Conf.	
Settlement Size	under 5000	0.81	0.80	0.82	0.69	0.68	0.71	0.79	0.78	0.81	0.88	0.87	0.89
	5000-500000	0.79	0.77	0.80	0.68	0.66	0.70	0.78	0.77	0.80	0.87	0.86	0.88
	500000 and more	0.76	0.75	0.78	0.66	0.64	0.68	0.76	0.74	0.77	0.85	0.83	0.87
Age	18	0.77	0.76	0.79	0.65	0.63	0.67	0.76	0.74	0.77	0.85	0.83	0.87
	35	0.79	0.78	0.80	0.67	0.65	0.68	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.86	0.85	0.87
	55	0.80	0.79	0.81	0.69	0.68	0.70	0.79	0.78	0.80	0.87	0.87	0.88
	75	0.82	0.80	0.83	0.71	0.69	0.73	0.80	0.79	0.82	0.89	0.87	0.90

Figure 7. *Predicted scores of support for diversity index*



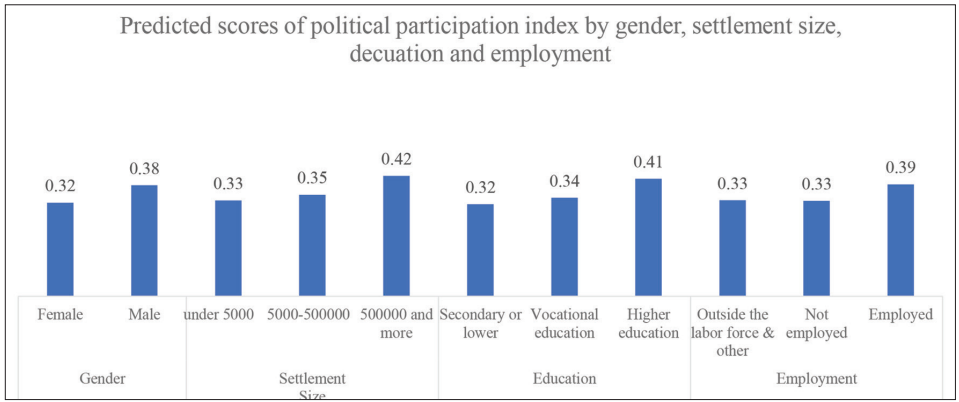
		Robust regression	[95% Conf. Interval]		quantile (.25)	[95% Conf. Interval]		quantile (.50)	[95% Conf. Interval]		Quantile (.75)	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Settlement Size	under 5000	0.72	0.67	0.76	0.42	0.38	0.47	0.76	0.73	0.79	0.88	0.87	0.88
	5000-500000	0.72	0.67	0.77	0.40	0.35	0.44	0.74	0.70	0.77	0.88	0.87	0.88
	500000 and more	0.88	0.86	0.90	0.79	0.76	0.82	0.88	0.86	0.90	1.00	0.99	1.01
Age	18	0.79	0.73	0.85	0.52	0.47	0.57	0.83	0.80	0.86	0.90	0.89	0.91
	35	0.76	0.72	0.81	0.51	0.47	0.54	0.80	0.78	0.82	0.90	0.89	0.91
	55	0.73	0.69	0.76	0.49	0.46	0.51	0.77	0.75	0.79	0.90	0.90	0.91
	75	0.69	0.66	0.73	0.47	0.43	0.50	0.74	0.71	0.77	0.90	0.89	0.91
Education	Secondary or lower	0.70	0.65	0.75	0.47	0.43	0.50	0.74	0.71	0.78	0.90	0.89	0.91
	Vocational education	0.77	0.73	0.82	0.51	0.46	0.56	0.79	0.76	0.83	0.90	0.89	0.91
	Higher education	0.77	0.73	0.81	0.51	0.47	0.55	0.80	0.78	0.83	0.90	0.89	0.91
Religion	Orthodox	0.73	0.68	0.77	0.47	0.45	0.50	0.77	0.75	0.79	0.90	0.90	0.91
	Non-Orthodox	0.83	0.80	0.87	0.59	0.52	0.67	0.81	0.78	0.84	0.90	0.89	0.91

Figure 9. *Predicted scores of interpersonal trust index*



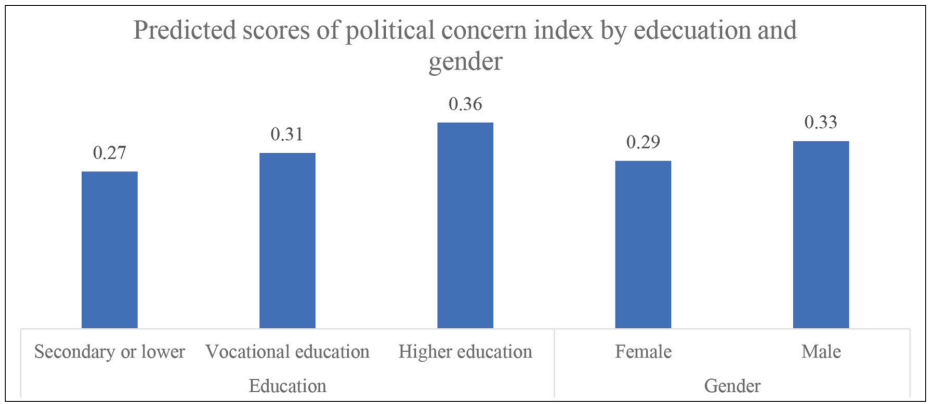
		Predicted scores	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Religion	Orthodox	0.53	0.52	0.54
	Non-Orthodox	0.56	0.54	0.59
Gender	Female	0.52	0.51	0.53
	Male	0.56	0.54	0.57
Age	18	0.50	0.49	0.52
	35	0.52	0.51	0.53
	55	0.55	0.54	0.55
	75	0.57	0.56	0.58

Figure 11. *Predicted scores of political participation index*



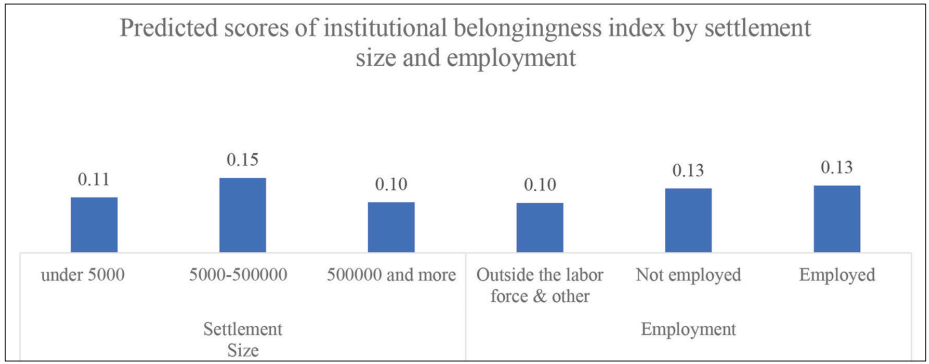
		Predicted scores	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Gender	Female	0.32	0.30	0.35
	Male	0.38	0.35	0.42
Settlement Size	under 5000	0.33	0.30	0.36
	5000-500000	0.35	0.32	0.39
	500000 and more	0.42	0.38	0.45
Education	Secondary or lower	0.32	0.29	0.34
	Vocational education	0.34	0.31	0.37
	Higher education	0.41	0.37	0.45
Employment	Outside the labor force & other	0.33	0.30	0.36
	Not employed	0.33	0.30	0.36
	Employed	0.39	0.35	0.42

Figure 13. *Predicted scores of political concern index*



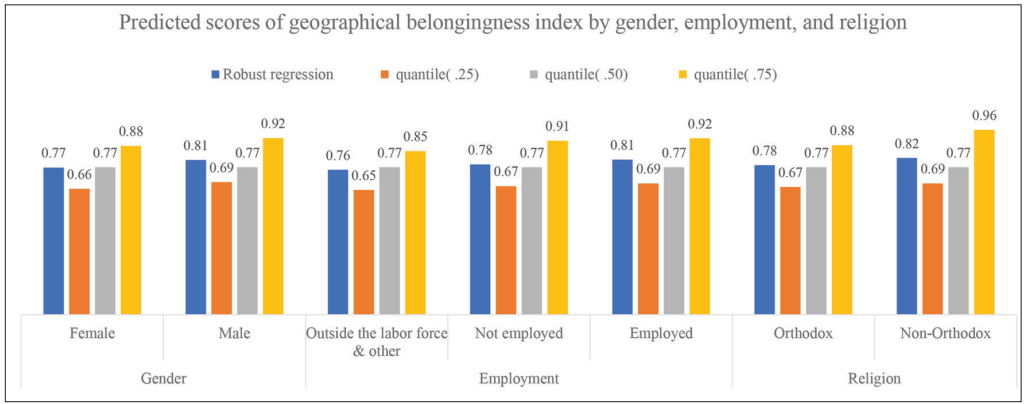
		Predicted scores	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Education	Secondary or lower	0.27	0.26	0.29
	Vocational education	0.31	0.29	0.32
	Higher education	0.36	0.34	0.38
Gender	Female	0.29	0.28	0.31
	Male	0.33	0.31	0.34

Figure 15. *Predicted scores of institutional belongingness index*



		Predicted scores	**[95% Conf. Interval]**	
Settlement Size	under 5000	0.11	0.10	0.12
	5000-500000	0.15	0.13	0.17
	500000 and more	0.10	0.09	0.11
Employment	Outside the labor force & other	0.10	0.09	0.11
	Not employed	0.13	0.11	0.14
	Employed	0.13	0.12	0.15

Figure 17. *Predicted scores of geographical belongingness index*



		Robust regression	[95% Conf. Interval]		quantile (.25)	[95% Conf. Interval]		quantile (.50)	[95% Conf. Interval]		Quantile (.75)	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Gender	Female	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.66	0.64	0.67	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.88	0.87	0.89
	Male	0.81	0.79	0.82	0.69	0.67	0.71	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.92	0.90	0.94
Employment	Outside the labor force & other	0.76	0.74	0.77	0.65	0.63	0.67	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.85	0.83	0.87
	Not employed	0.78	0.77	0.80	0.67	0.65	0.69	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.91	0.89	0.93
	Employed	0.81	0.79	0.83	0.69	0.66	0.71	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.92	0.90	0.94
Religion	Orthodox	0.78	0.77	0.79	0.67	0.65	0.68	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.88	0.87	0.90
	Non-Orthodox	0.82	0.79	0.85	0.69	0.65	0.72	0.77	0.75	0.79	0.96	0.94	0.99