Teka Komisji Prawniczej PAN Oddział w Lublinie
vol. XIX, 2026, no. 1, pp. 453-474
https://doi.org/10.32084/tkp.10724

CHURCH–STATE RELATIONS IN GEORGIA AND ARMENIA AND THE IMPACT OF THIS RELATIONSHIP ON THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION

Prof. Dr. Vaja Vardidze

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland
Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University, Georgia
e-mail: v.vardidze@sabauni.edu.ge; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6933-440X

Abstract. The aim of the present article is to compare church–state relations in Georgia and Armenia and to demonstrate the influence of this relationship upon the process of democratisation. To this end, the article identifies seven principal spheres of public life in which these relationships manifest themselves. These spheres are: 1) the legislative framework; 2) the political-cultural environment; 3) the educational policy of the churches; 4) the context of religious consciousness and cultural identity markers; 5) social and civic activism; 6) foreign policy orientation as a force of normative attraction; and 7) the influence of the diaspora as a determining factor of internal social pluralism. Beyond demonstrating the similarities and differences between the processes unfolding in the two countries, the article also specifies the positive and negative dimensions deriving from these relationships upon the process of democratisation – a process characterised by non-linearity and encountering constant resistance. However, notwithstanding the ambiguous and complex character of the democratisation process in both countries, it is not sterily demarcated from the other, and by virtue of their immediate geographical proximity and cultural-social affinity they exert mutual influence upon one another. It is for this reason that, on the basis of the present analysis, the article endeavours to demonstrate wherein the factor of mutual influence resides and where it may be discerned.

Keywords: Church–state Relation; democracy; Georgia; Armenia.

INTRODUCTION

In politological discourse concerning the diffusion of democracy or autocracy, frequent reference is made to the mutual influence of political processes at the regional and global scales. Notwithstanding the fact that every political and cultural unit develops according to its own internal logic, geographical proximity and cultural-social similarity exert considerable influence on the vector of political processes [Huntington 1991; Rogers 2003]. In this regard, the political processes unfolding in the Caucasus are of particular interest. The region finds itself, in many respects, in a transitional

ISSN 1899-7694
e-ISSN 2719-7379

period, and despite two centuries of shared history – encompassing the occupation of both countries by Russia and their struggle against Russification, the terror of Soviet atheism and the concomitant battle for the preservation of national and cultural identity, as well as the common Soviet economic and political space and the culture of institutional dependence it engendered – Georgia and Armenia have, following the attainment of independence, pursued divergent political dynamics, manifest both in their respective geopolitical orientations and in the differing amplitude of their domestic political processes. Whereas following the attainment of independence Armenian foreign policy exhibited a vertical (North–South) vector, and Georgia a horizontal (East–West) one, this picture has undergone a significant transformation over the past several years, in the aftermath of the Karabakh War. Armenia has reoriented its strategic emphasis toward the West, while Georgia, following the ascent of 'Georgian Dream' to power, has shifted its orientation northward. In such circumstances, if we nonetheless maintain that geography is not merely geography in the purely physical sense, but rather possesses a 'contagious' character, it becomes pertinent to examine in what precisely this contagion manifests itself, what the similarities and divergences between these processes are, and what bearing all of the foregoing has on the formation of democratic consciousness.

1. THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The fundamental legislative documents of both countries emphasise the principle of separation between church and state. Both states conceive of themselves as secular, and recognise freedom of belief and conscience. However, the constitutions of both countries foreground the special role of the church in the process of formation of national identity, culture, and statehood (cf. *Constitution of the Republic of Armenia*, Article 18; *Constitution of the Republic of Georgia*, Article 8). Whereas the Constitution of Armenia explicitly delineates the special and exclusive position of the church in Article 18, in Georgia it is by means of a Constitutional Agreement of 14 October 2002 – a Concordat – that the privileged status of the Georgian Orthodox Church is determined. Whereas in Armenia freedom of belief and confession is regulated by a dedicated law on religion (cf. Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations 1991), no such separate law on religion exists in Georgia. In 2002, a constitutional agreement was concluded between the state and the Orthodox Church, which was intended to govern all spheres of this relationship [Gegenava 2020]. The relationship with other religious organisations and denominations – including the matter of registration itself – is governed by the Law on Legal Entities of Public Law, under which religious groups may function either

as non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entities or as non-governmental organisations (cf. Law on Amendments to the Civil Code of Georgia 2011). On the one hand, this arrangement expands their operational space; however, on the other hand, such a solution divests religious groupings of the character of public good that distinguishes them from secular organisations. This, in turn, signifies the placement of other religious organisations within a different regulatory regime from that of the Orthodox Church, and the ceding of the religious space exclusively to the latter. Through this differential regulatory regime, the state de facto legitimises not only the rights and obligations assumed by the church vis-à-vis the state, but also the placement of the church in a position of privilege – as a consequence of which the observance of the principles of impartiality and neutrality on the part of the state becomes considerably more difficult. While direct discrimination may not always be at issue, the possibility of indirect discrimination is a matter of fact. This is most clearly manifest in the question of state subsidisation of religious groups, whereby not all congregations benefit equally from tax exemptions or financial concessions.

Neither Georgia's constitutional agreement (concordat)[1] nor Armenia's Law on Religion of 1991 is fully refined in legal terms or democratically resolved [Król-Mazur 2019], insofar as both foundational documents leave certain ambiguities and inconsistencies [Metreveli 2022, 254-312; Gegenava 2018b; Danielyan, Vardanyan, and Avtandilyan 2009, 40-41]. The issue concerns not only terminological clarity and clearly defined rights and obligations, but also the internal coherence and consistency of the legislative framework as a whole. In order to address this problem, a Concordat Implementation Commission was established in Georgia – a body that has not distinguished itself by its activity in resolving the range of outstanding issues enshrined in the concordat. Equally, in Armenian society a process is underway – with considerable difficulty – surrounding the reform of the law on religion, as it encounters resistance on the part of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Notwithstanding the fact that the 1991 law remains in force, recent reform proposals have sought to better regulate the status of minority religious communities. However, to date no comprehensive amendment has been adopted. Accordingly, in practice, the original text remains operative – with subsequent modifications – rather than being replaced by an entirely new legislative instrument [Król-Mazur 2021, 230-60; Zviadadze 2015]. Both apostolic churches endeavour to preserve the privileged position attained in the 1990s and to maintain the legal status quo.

In such circumstances, the implementation of legislation at the practical level gives rise to numerous contradictions (*2023 Report on International*

[1] To see how problematic this document is in terms of legal issues and political fairness, read Gegenava 2018b.

Religious Freedom: Armenia and Georgia). Minorities frequently encounter discrimination, finding themselves confronted with inconsistent legal protection and restricted access to property and public space [Gavtadze 2024].[2] Both states confer special privileges upon their national churches in such domains as tax exemption, access to educational institutions and media, the restitution of property confiscated during the Soviet period, the functioning of penitentiary and chaplaincy institutions, the registration of religious marriages, and the administration of historical heritage and ecclesiastical buildings. Other religious organisations have restricted access to the same rights.[3]

With the aim of regulating relations with religious groups, the Georgian government established the *State Agency for Religious Issues* in 2014, whose activities are shaped under the shadow of the constitutional agreement. A comparable agency also existed within the structure of the Armenian government, which was subsequently dissolved. It is true that, as a result of considerable criticism and public pressure regarding the state's financing of the Orthodox Church alone under the rubric of restitution for religious communities damaged by the Soviet system, the government resolved to extend the Soviet-era restitution law and to provide funding to four traditional denominations as well – namely, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Catholic Church, the Jewish synagogue community, and the Muslim community. However, this measure nonetheless failed to establish the principle of universal justice, insofar as Protestant churches and other religious groups remain excluded from state support programmes.[4]

Beyond the fact that the legislative frameworks of both countries require further consolidation, the context that shapes the law merits attention, insofar as it is governed not only by certain ideational, logical, and systemic calculations, but equally encompasses the factor of moral consciousness, which gives effect to the spirit of the law. Given that in Armenia the Armenian Apostolic Church accounts for 94% of the population, and in the case of Georgia 84%, the dictate of the majority not only diminishes the possibility of resonance in instances of legal violation, but equally produces the devaluation of the 'unwritten rules' operative in every society – ultimately engendering an environment of societal polarisation and struggle for self-preservation. This factor is so determinative for the democratic order that the legislative framework alone cannot guarantee the principle

[2] See https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenian-religious-minorities-complain-discrimination [accessed: 08.04.2026].

[3] See https://iwpr.net/global-voices/armenian-church-tax-relief-controversy [accessed: 08.04.2026].

[4] An additional instrument of leverage over religious groups is constituted by the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, adopted in 2024, which has further deteriorated the situation of religious minorities, insofar as this law directly generates manifest risks of interference with freedom of religion [Metreveli 2024].

of justice. Legislative regulation must secure that juridical dimension which ought not to be assessed exclusively from the position of the dominant actor. In the mechanism of defence against the dictate of the majority, the church ought to be engaged not only on the basis of Christian moral and faith principles in favour of the marginalised, but also from the perspective of a creative vision of just legislation. It is therefore important that, beyond legislative regulation, the church presents itself in the democratic process as an informal authority that strengthens the moral immunity of society and confers legitimacy upon democratic values – as well as upon the rule of law – in the name of both the people and of God. The state cannot guarantee the moral order. A legal order devoid of moral orientation may, in turn, degenerate into tyranny. The church is capable of offering society those values that will expand the possibilities of its peaceful coexistence. Ultimately, a well-functioning legislative framework will afford religious communities greater inviolability and a more secure foundation for action. So long as the law remains internally inconsistent and fails to eliminate all space for ambiguity, the state will encounter difficulty in fulfilling its democratic objectives and integrating religious diversity – since there will always arise the temptation for institutional actors to seek the consolidation of their own position at the expense of legislative vagueness.

Conclusion 1: The existing legal order does not strengthen the practical realisation of democracy, which ought to guarantee justice and equality before the law. Accordingly, the churches exploit these lacunae. However, on the other hand, they nonetheless contribute indirectly and positively to the moral enforcement of the unwritten law – the quality of which is experiencing instability in a society marked by the tragedy of totalitarianism and war. Irrespective of political positioning, the proclamation of justice, forgiveness, love, and freedom within society constitutes a precondition for a healthy society, which finds its development through the sharing of experience and the process of competition among its constituent actors. The extent to which the churches remain faithful to their own proclamation and teaching is a matter of ecclesial identity, one that requires theological analysis and does not position itself within the legislative framework.

2. THE POLITICAL INSTRUMENTALISATION OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DOMINATION

From the 1990s onwards, both churches were afforded a broad operational space, facilitated not only by legislative freedom but also by the socio-political processes that defined both countries – processes characterised by the conduct of wars, economic crises, mass impoverishment, political confrontation, and the renewed search for national and cultural identity. The significance

of religion in both countries increased so substantially from this period onwards that every political force came to regard its relationship with the church as a source for the augmentation of its own political dividends. On the other hand, political rulers themselves contributed to this strengthening, insofar as they – confronted, on the one hand, by the permanent fear of war and, on the other, by the necessity of providing certain moral and ideological orientation within society – perceived the church as a mainstay of national unity and stability. At this time, political systems were so weak that they also invoked the church in order to consolidate their own legitimacy.

Against this backdrop, financial and material state support for the church increased, as a consequence of which, over the course of the past three decades, the property holdings, infrastructure, and number of clergy of both churches have grown considerably. With emphasis on historical cultural heritage, the construction of ecclesiastical and educational centres, the restoration of monasteries, and the development of infrastructure commenced. In both countries, heads of state demonstrably cultivated a conspicuous proximity to their respective patriarchs.[5] Local bishops, too, frequently presented themselves in the manner of protectors reminiscent of the medieval 'ecclesiastical-feudal order' [Gardman 2011].

Such valorisation of the churches did not go unanswered on the part of the patriarchates, and the accompaniment of religious officialdom at the inauguration ceremonies of heads of state – and its frequent protocolar ritualisation – came to be presented as a natural and self-evident given. In both countries, the church conceives of itself as, in effect, an additional source of legitimation for the state. Accordingly, the mutual influences of church and state exceed the boundaries of merely legal cooperation [Tchilingirian 2007], and their mutual assistance frequently encompasses the coercion of goodwill as well ("*Church Leaders*")[6]. The result has been the mutual exploitation of state and church [cf. Nazaretyan and Dermoyan 2025; Yegavian 2026; Chitanava 2015; Blauvelt and Berglund 2016].

Documented instances of corruption, and growing criticism directed at the church's narrow business interests and moral inconsistency, have rendered the church no longer an inviolable institution. In both countries, the church's pedestal as a moral and ideological authority – which was previously perceived more as an advance credit of public trust – has been destabilized. It is for this reason that Prime Minister Pashinyan's open confrontation with the Catholicos in Armenia finds considerably greater public

[5] President Shevardnadze was indeed baptised by the hand of the Patriarch and took the name Giorgi. Armenians president Ter-Petrosyan, for his part, directly extended patronage to both Catholicoi – Vazgen I and Garegin I. Cf. Petrosian 2017a.

[6] See https://asbarez.com/church-leaders-decry-government-role-in-catholicos-elections/ [accessed: 08.04.2026].

resonance than would have been conceivable even five or ten years ago [Nazaretyan and Dermoyan 2025]. This confrontation – as was equally the case during Saakashvili's presidency in Georgia – reveals a deeper structural problem in the mutual relationship between church and state, rather than constituting a matter of personal sympathies or antipathies at the individual level. What emerges here is that the greater the state's endeavour to reform and modernise society, the more the relationship between church and state becomes strained – insofar as the church is unwilling to relinquish its privileged status quo. A latent, though not overt, tension between church and state existed in Georgia during Saakashvili's presidency as well; however, both parties endeavoured to avoid allowing this tension to assume the character of a declared and open confrontation [cf. Górecki 2020]. Saakashvili attempted to overcome this problem through the bestowal of gifts upon bishops and by increasing state funding to the church – a strategy that ultimately failed to yield the desired results. The church's contribution to the outcome of the 2012 elections, in the defeat of Saakashvili's party, proved to be a factor of considerable significance [Chitanava 2016].

It must be noted here that the churches' distrust of reforms is not explained exclusively by the fear of losing their privileged status quo. Proceeding from a conservative understanding of faith, traditionalist and nationalist groups predominate within the church, whose natural inclination toward loyalty and tolerance of the state leads them to perceive external actors' involvement in the country's affairs within the democratic process as interference. In this they perceive their own vulnerability, and consequently regard any deviation from the existing status quo as a betrayal of the traditional order. Their reactive posture shifts into a defensive mode, one that can no longer accommodate the loss of the paternalistic relationship with the state, and experiences political pluralism as a dissolution of national unity.

A certain latent competition between church and state is also historically conditioned [cf. Corley 2025; Gurchiani 2022]. Whereas during the Soviet period we observe the complete subordination of the church to the state, following the attainment of independence the church sensed its own strength and demonstrably emancipated itself from dictation, acquiring the weight of a political subject. This facilitated a certain capacity for negotiation with the state, which ultimately evolved into a mutual politics of 'hand-washing'. However, public criticism impels both parties toward the taking of certain steps. Dialogues are frequently initiated or commissions established, mandated to regulate the outstanding issues between church and state. Yet, so long as the matter does not reach the point of genuine reform, a substantive breakthrough remains in neither party's interest – since in an informal and legally frequently opaque situation, the redemption of one's own interests is considerably more easily accomplished. A telling illustration of this is the

Commission for the Facilitation of Concordat Implementation in Georgia, which has de facto improved nothing in this regard.[7] This ambiguity brought the church to a condition in which power exercised by the state – particularly in Georgia – in an effective and frequently unlawful manner reduced the church's autonomy and partially subordinated it once again to the state apparatus. Through covert surveillance and legislative blackmail[8] [Targamadze 2021], the Georgian church reverted to a model of subordination to the state, approximating the model prevalent in the Russian Federation.[9]

Conclusion 2. So long as the deformed relationship of mutual dependence between church and state – conditioned by the historical legacy of the Soviet period and the Middle Ages – remains unchanged, and genuine independence is not guaranteed to both subjects, such a relationship will perpetually carry negative potential and weaken both institutions in the fulfilment of their respective missions. However, while this admittedly entails a violation of the autonomy of the subjects and the delineation of competences, even in conditions of weak political opposition the unilateral and unaccountable dictate of the state has been shaken.

3. THE EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF THE CHURCHES

Whereas during the Soviet period it was impossible to obtain theological and liberal education without communist indoctrination, from the 1990s onwards no radical changes have been implemented in the church's approach to education. It is true that the ideology of atheism was never, even in its own time, a persuasive or clarity-conferring orientation; nonetheless, it left behind the paradigms of Soviet education in the structure of thought. This was reflected in the contemporary state of ecclesiastical education in both countries – in the atheist interpretation of religion and in an eclectic practice laden with pagan elements of Christianity. This finds expression in the fact that the religious Marxist interpretation – formed over decades on the one hand as a cultural addendum – and on the other the secular fusion of Christian and national narratives, found their most effective

[7] In 2002, the so-called Concordat Commission was established – a mixed commission composed of representatives of the state and the Orthodox Church, mandated to oversee the implementation and interpretation of the Constitutional Agreement (Concordat) and to resolve current outstanding matters pertaining to its perfection. However, it has de facto never functioned at all, see https://kvira.ge/25445 [accessed: 08.04.2026]. Commissions of a similar character have been numerous.

[8] See https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/471670/ [accessed: 08.04.2026].

[9] It must be noted here, however, that unlike Russia, the church in Georgia enjoys considerably greater influence and a higher degree of autonomy – though its ideological and political service to the state nonetheless recalls the model of Byzantine caesaropapism.

manifestation from the 1990s onwards. This accounts for the synthesis of religiosity and secularism that defines the formation of nationalist ideology.

It is true that following the attainment of independence the number of clergy increased, ecclesiastical educational institutions were opened and expanded, and the churches became more extensively involved in educational processes; however, the problem of the significant outflow of the educated population into emigration – a consequence of the socio-political processes of both countries – affected the churches as well. This has determined that in neither country have adequate conditions been formed for changing the existing paradigm of Church–state relations. The primary attention of both churches is directed toward liturgical-ritual observance, and religiosity is cultivated more at an instinctive level than subjected to reflective cognitive discourse. It is true that the churches of both countries devote considerable attention to the study of national history and traditions;[10] however, their primary objective remains concentrated upon the monopolisation of national narratives and institutional consolidation.

Both churches have a well-developed awareness of their responsibility toward their respective countries and endeavour, through various non-governmental and educational institutions, to make their contribution to national development. Such a positive role on the part of the churches creates preconditions for diversity; however, the ambition to comprehensively encompass and control this diversity is conspicuous in both cases. They seek not only to be cultural dominants within society – to which end they effect the equation of ethnicity with ecclesial belonging – but also to hold a primary and decisive voice in the educational and academic space. Whereas in Georgia the church endeavours to exercise this voice through the establishment of its own schools and universities, the Armenian church from the outset sought to penetrate state institutions[11], so that its history and culture would be established as compulsory instruction in schools and that clergy would teach subjects mandatory for all – something that in Georgia has hitherto proved unachievable due to societal resistance. However, following the shift in political processes, the approach to the question of school instruction changed in both countries. Whereas the Pashinyan government – despite

[10] See https://hyetert.org/2020/09/11/catholicos-armenian-church-history-should-remain-compulsory-in-school/ [accessed: 08.04.2026].

[11] The Faculty of Theology at Yerevan State University was established in 1995. Its establishment predated equivalent developments in Georgia, where theological education remained primarily confined to the Georgian Orthodox Church's own ecclesiastical institutions – the Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary – rather than being formally integrated into the state university system. The comparative timing and institutional modality of theological education's introduction into the two countries' higher education systems constitutes a concrete empirical indicator of the differing strategies of ecclesial educational penetration.

opposition – removed the teaching of church history from the school curriculum as a discrete subject and integrated it into Armenian history, social sciences, and world history [Nazaretyan and Dermoyan 2025], in Georgia, under the influence of the Georgian Orthodox Church, the government has decided to train clergy to be admitted to schools as teachers of religion. This would constitute, to a certain degree, yet another step backward in democratic backsliding, insofar as the idea of separation between church and state is violated and religious practice penetrates secular educational institutions as well.[12] In effect, through the cultivation of nationalist ideology and the invocation of the need for faith, the consolidation of a dominant position on the part of both state and church is intended. In such circumstances, schools would in effect become open spaces for the propagation of religious nationalism and governing ideologies. A problem of the political systems of both countries is that governing parties and the church identify themselves either with the state or conceive of themselves as standing above it,[13] thereby excluding other social and political actors from the process of governance to the greatest extent possible.[14]

Conclusion 3. The churches of both countries regard themselves as the sole supra-partisan guardian of truth and national values. However, if through education there is no such orientation of values and self-critical assessment and appreciation of both one's own and others' freedom, such an institution can never serve as a foundation for development and an intercessor of the horizon of salvation. It is true that the promotion of education and the sharing of knowledge opens an operational space for the churches; however, the privatisation of this possibility exclusively for themselves deprives the country of the experience of diversity and the formation of a culture of tolerance.

4. RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY MARKERS

Beyond the Christian heritage, the formation of the contemporary religious consciousness and cultural identity markers of both countries was substantially shaped by the paradigms imposed during the period of the Russian Empire and subsequently the Soviet Union – frameworks within which both nations were compelled to struggle for the preservation of their

[12] About the current situation in this regard Tabatadze 2018.

[13] The Armenian Church is often referred to as a "supra-national institution" guided by national and state interests. See https://armenpress.am/en/article/1041674 [accessed: 08.04.2026].

[14] With the one-party Soviet experience, the political culture, especially in Georgia, is dominated by an approach embodied in 'winner-takes-all' logic. See https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/46047/189_georgia_sliding_towards_authoritarianism.pdf [accessed: 08.04.2026].

distinctive selfhood. Following the complete expulsion of religion from the public sphere in the 1920s and 1930s, the institutionalisation of faith found its vital space within the individual and familial environment [cf. Dragadze 1993]. As a result, when faith found public expression, assumed a necessarily informal character, while the institutional framework of theological and religious formation was entirely dismantled. Following the Second World War, the policy toward the church softened across the entire Soviet space, and Stalin resolved to utilise ecclesiastical institutions in the international arena [cf. Lursmanashvili 2021a]. For this purpose, the Armenian Apostolic Church was particularly advantageous to him, since with the assistance of its extensive diaspora it was better positioned to present itself on the international stage as an exemplar of freedom of faith and religious tolerance. As a result of the Soviet national policy known as 'korenizatsiia' ('nativisation')[15] and the expansion of religious freedom, processes developed in both Georgia and Armenia that may be characterised as the secularisation/de-sacralisation of Christianity and the sacralisation of the nation [Zenderowski 2011, 93-94; Agadjanian 2015, 22-23; Reisner 2015; Kekelia et al. 2013]. This process was, of course, also substantially conditioned by the many centuries of medieval tradition – encompassing the messianic idea and the concept of the elect nation, and the sacralisation of language – which withstood the great cataclysms of the Islamic incursions and survived in transformed form under the Soviet period. This transformation ultimately found expression in the twentieth century in the mutual interpenetration of religious and national narratives and in their secularised form.[16] This determined that upon the very attainment of independence, both nations elevated Christianity – informally, yet almost to the level of a state ideology – a development that in the subsequent period, continuing to the present day, undergoes constant subliminal revision [Nodia and Schrapel 2021]. The formation of democratic consciousness also develops within this cultural and religious context – one that, from the outset, was characterised neither by a radically rejecting nor by an entirely healthy environment, yet which, in the process of the inner fermentation of society, gradually endeavours to find greater persuasiveness and clarity. The more free a society is and oriented toward reform and renewal, the more firmly democratic processes are consolidated. It is evident that, as noted in the introduction, democracy also constitutes a certain cultural phenomenon and requires cultural and religious incorporation. Democracy is the realisation of the communal and political coexistence of experience, which

[15] In each of the republics, the development of nationalism and forms of national culture served the creation of a 'supportive' emotional foundation for the supranational unity of the Soviet Union.

[16] This is religious ethno-nationalism, where Georgian means an Orthodox Christian, and Armenian means a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church. On this topic: Antonyan 2011; Zedania 2011; Jawad and Reisner 2013].

creates an order oriented toward the individual and the common good, establishes a framework of freedom and equality, and regulates the possibilities of coexistence. It must be noted, however, that in this regard divergent trajectories are developing in Georgia and Armenia. Whereas in Armenia reformist forces came to power and the question of Church–state relations gradually came to the foreground of public deliberation, in Georgia the reformist processes of the Saakashvili era were overtaken by an anti-reformist wave, which reduced the Church–state relationship once again to a regime of mutual exploitation and displaced it from public debate to the background. In this regard, the opposition political parties in Georgia remain in a passive mode with respect to this problematic and, in a survival mode, concentrate on extricating the country from its political crisis.

The results of surveys on religiosity conducted in the Caucasian countries demonstrate that in both Georgia and Armenia the indicators of religious practice are not as high as is expressed in the acknowledgement of religious belonging [Charles 2010]. From the 1990s onwards, religious freedom created a post-secular environment in which the formation of state and civic consciousness collided with religious and national narratives in such a way that a new appropriation of secularism commenced [Hovannisyan and Burchardt 2016]. This process is widely analysed in the scholarly literature under the concept of *cultural defence*, which encompasses cultural, religious, and social self-understanding. Notwithstanding the high indicators of religious belonging, systematic participation in sacred liturgical rituals, prayer, and fasting practice yields comparatively low results [Filetti 2014]. This points, on the one hand, to the phenomenon of the privatisation of faith, which was formed in the process of the persecution of religions and the negation of faith during the Soviet period, and which also acquired an informal and differentiated character of relationship [cf. Gurchiani 2017; Antonyan 2011]. On the other hand, that Christianity has become the central axis of cultural identity in both countries, and that the representatives of both nations – irrespective of their critical or loyal disposition toward the religion – conceive of themselves as children of the apostolic church. It follows from this that the church found itself not only at the centre of cultural and social processes, but also exerted influence upon the political landscape: The church became a subject of political processes without formal political affiliation. This is so problematic for democratisation that the political accountability of the church remains undefined. Political processes have in a certain sense become hostage to the church, the danger of which is the instrumentalisation of the democratic process – democracy conditioned solely upon ecclesial approbation. In effect, a structural framework has been created in which emancipation from ecclesial dictation becomes possible only at the cost of acting against one's own electorate – which is politically

self-annihilating. Accordingly, the aporetic nature of democracy manifests itself here as well, when responsible politics must overcome itself and elevate the political order to a higher plane. It is this problem that the Pashinyan's government in Armenia faces today, whereas Saakashvili failed to overcome this challenge during his period of governance.

Conclusion 4. To the extent that the democratic system consolidates itself, both churches will be required – in the battles of political processes – not merely to adapt to the democratic system but to achieve a certain internalisation of democratic culture (not in the doctrinal sense, but through administrative performance), since the church is not simply an addendum to the political system but, through the appropriation of national, cultural, political, and secular discourse, an inner motivating force. If the present ecclesial dictation prevails, the fate of democracy in both countries will be in doubt. It is therefore important that the spirit of democracy penetrate the church as well, and that the transformation of society occur together with the church. Otherwise, both the laity and the clergy will be drawn into an anti-democratic vortex.

5. SOCIAL AND CIVIC ACTIVISM AND ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIFE

Over the course of the past thirty years, both churches have been distinguished by a high level of social activism [Sarkissian 2008]. Schools and educational centres, youth organisations, their own television channels and publishing houses, the institution of military chaplaincy and access to penitentiary establishments, medical institutions – these constitute all those spaces in which both churches continue to carry out their activities in a nationalist spirit. The funding structure of both churches is similar, ranging from assistance from central and local budgets of state institutions[17] [Maisuradze 2017], through private donations, tax concessions, and various non-governmental organisations, to immovable property and private businesses operating under the patronage of the church [cf. Abrahamyan 2015]. Through this the churches make a significant contribution to national development; however, this does not ultimately benefit the broader society. The parallel existence of ecclesial wealth and the poverty of the wider population, alongside proximity to the political elite and oligarchic circles, renders the church's image questionable.[18] On the other hand, the cultivation by the church of vernacular religiosity as a means of proximity to the masses [cf. Siekierski 2013], and its appeal to moral teaching, compensates for the

[17] See https://transparency.ge/en/blog/overview-public-financing-provided-georgian-patriarchate [accessed: 08.04.2026].

[18] The construction of new churches is financed through proximity to political circles and oligarchic groups. Cf. Antonyan 2015, 97-111; Martirosyan 2011.

church's elitist image. At the same time, civic and social activism is further consolidated by the national narrative, which it reinforces through the romanticisation of a society of traditional, past glory. This does not promote the establishment of equality within society but rather presents a hierarchised image of a frequently heroicised medieval past as the force of the future.

Conclusion 5. It is true that both churches call the nation toward unity, Christian service, and spiritual values, and present themselves as being in the service of society; however, in practice their connections with political and business elites serve their own social consolidation and the growth of their authority. On the one hand, the manifestation of great wealth and influence in the upper echelons of the church, and on the other, the mass poverty of society, creates a greater risk of societal polarisation, which produces the destructive fragmentation of society. If broad social activism promotes the mutual sharing within society, narrow nationalist discourse and clannish consciousness places in question the idea of equality and universal service. In effect, to the degree that the churches' activities create favourable preconditions for democratic processes, to the same degree the actual facilitation of societal fragmentation damages the democratic environment. In place of solidarity and mutual strengthening, we receive a fragmented and disorientated society that can no longer exit the mode of self-preservation.

6. FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION AS A FORCE OF NORMATIVE ATTRACTION

One of the significant distinguishing features between the two churches is their disposition toward openness to the external world and toward inter-ecclesial relations. The Armenian church has actively utilised the possibilities of international contacts from the very period of the attainment of independence [Tchilingirian 2007, para. 29], whereas the Georgian church pursues a more isolationist policy. This is directly reflected both in international ecumenical relations and in the environment of the state's international policy, insofar as such a disposition of the churches becomes an instrument of public diplomacy. Whereas the Georgian church evaluates ecumenism negatively and perceives its effective relational space exclusively within the family of Orthodox churches – though even here it does not maintain equal receptivity toward all Orthodox churches [Tinikashvili 2019] – the Armenian Apostolic Church has in recent decades been distinguished by greater dialogue with other Christian denominations.

Notwithstanding these differing approaches, noteworthy is the relationship of these churches with the Russian church, which is reflected both in the style of church governance and in their geopolitical positioning. Following the restoration of independence, the Georgian church failed to achieve

emancipation from Russian influences, and its proximity to Russia equally determined the church's ecumenical position [Lursmanashvili 2021b]. This disposition of the church is also reflected in its relationship with the state. Against the backdrop of the calamities visited upon Georgia by Russia – the abolition of the church's autocephaly by tsarist Russia, Russification, the Soviet mass repressions, and the wars of the 1990s and 2008 – the Georgian church cannot openly declare its pro-Russian policy [cf. Vardidze 2022, 118-33] yet at the unofficial level its connection with Russia has been permanently maintained. While the Georgian state under Saakashvili's presidency was in open confrontation with Russia, the church demonstrated a cautious policy toward the state. From 2012 onwards, following the political revanche in Georgia and the accession to power of pro-Russian forces, the church's relationship with Russia became more intensive and open.

The Armenian church also maintains careful relations with the Russian church. All three Catholicoi – Vazgen I, Garegin I, and Garegin II – endeavoured to keep this relationship consistently constructive. Garegin I himself, who did not come from a Russian environment and actively sought to have a new generation of clergy educated in Western educational institutions, nonetheless endeavoured to maintain good relations with the Russian church on account of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, the large Armenian diaspora in Russia, and economic ties [Petrosian 2017a; Idem 2017b].

Notwithstanding the traditionally good relations between Russia and Armenia, following the Armenian-Azerbaijani wars of 2020-2022, attitudes toward Russia within Armenian society have changed. The church, however, remains faithful to its original policy, insofar as this relationship is more frequently determined by personal factors than by geopolitical calculation. It is for this reason that accusations directed at the Catholicos of acting in the interests of Russia are frequent within Armenian society [cf. Petrosian 2017b, 169]. It is therefore no coincidence that he is even accused of a Russian-style mode of governance.[19]

Conclusion 6. Geopolitical orientation is not merely a pragmatically chosen path. It is equally concerned with the normative order, insofar as the latter also constitutes the foundation for the legitimation of pragmatism itself. To the degree that the international interests of the church and the state are in alignment, the churches cooperate positively with the state. This in turn strengthens democratic processes and promotes the country's positioning within the international order.

[19] "Catholicos Garegin II intentionally transformed the Armenian Church's 'bottom-up' organizational approach into a "top down" structure in order to control everything and everyone in the Armenian Church" [Petrosian 2017b, 175].

7. THE INFLUENCE OF THE DIASPORA AS A FACTOR CONDUCIVE TO INTERNAL SOCIAL PLURALISM

A further distinguishing feature between the churches of Georgia and Armenia concerns their relationship with diaspora experience.[20] The Georgian diaspora is comparatively young, numerically small, and does not constitute a significant financial and administrative force – in contrast to the Armenian diaspora, whose structure encompasses independent patriarchates and powerful cultural-educational centres. Over the course of the past two decades, the Georgian Patriarchate has established dioceses abroad, which serve primarily those fellow citizens who emigrated following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The mental difference arising from diverse socio-cultural environments is not yet sufficiently great to intensify internal tensions within the church, insofar as a significant proportion of Georgian emigration constitutes a new wave that remains mentally and culturally rooted in the homeland.

A different picture presents itself in the Armenian church, where – by virtue of its centuries-long history – the Armenian church constitutes a '*transnational organisation with a national interest*.' The Armenian diaspora is distinguished by a differentiated cultural-social order, which generates a certain tension between Etchmiadzin and the other patriarchates [Petrosian 2017b, 177-79]. This tension is frequently either administrative in character or alternatively mental – having been formed in entirely different political systems [Tchilingirian 2007, para. 34]. A telling personal illustration of this is the contrasting governance styles of Garegin I and Garegin II, the differences between which may also be explained by their respective origins. Whereas Garegin I was distinguished by a markedly horizontal style and correspondingly oriented his governance priorities toward a pneumatological and educational vision, Garegin II has recourse to a more centralised form and orients his mission toward the institutional consolidation of the church [Tchilingirian 2007, para. 65].[21]

At the present time, we observe that in both churches the diaspora is conceived of as an instrument for the consolidation of the church's internal hegemony. Instead of the relationship with the diaspora serving as an exemplar of the cultivation of an open society, the consolidation of the church's internal democratic and synodal practice, the manifestation of the church's

[20] Whereas approximately 3 million citizens reside within Armenia, the diaspora is estimated at 8-9 million. Of Georgia's population of nearly 4 million, emigration does not exceed 2 million. Whereas within the Armenian Apostolic Church there exist three patriarchates – the Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin, the Catholicosate of Cilicia, and the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Constantinople – each with their own dioceses, the Georgian Orthodox Church maintains dioceses of limited scope in Turkey, Western Europe and the Americas.

[21] Garegi II – "as a Soviet-style church administrator" [Petrosian 2017b, 175].

cultural and social diversity, and a valuable experience of Christianity's existence as a pilgrim community [Findikyan and Hollander 2020], it is perceived through the perspective of the augmentation of power and influence.

Conclusion 7. The diaspora has a particularly significant voice to contribute to the formation of democratic culture, insofar as the diaspora – as a spiritual-cultural component of the country – is not regarded as a factor alien to national consciousness, but rather makes its own contribution to the strengthening of society, the diversity of experience, and the creation of a culture of tolerance. The sharing and communion of knowledge and experience, and diversity, constitute the primary asset of the diasporas – one that imparts concrete additional content to Church–state relations and thereby improves the democratic environment.

CONCLUSION

By way of summary, it must be stated that Church–state relations in both countries are characterised by complexity and encompass virtually every sphere of public life. Accordingly, the similarities and differences between the two countries depend upon the specific sphere of the relationship and are reflected in equally varied ways upon the process of democratisation. All of the foregoing may be summarised in four propositions:

The Positive Influence of Church–State Relations upon Democratisation:

(1) The *similarities* between these countries in this regard reside in the following: 1) the churches contribute to the provision of the moral resilience and value base of society, which is of significance for a democratic, law-abiding society – particularly one marked by the tragedy of wars and economic-political crises; 2) both churches are engaged to the maximum degree in public life – whether in the economic, educational, cultural, or political dimension – which increases the possibilities of the mutual sharing of knowledge and experience and the necessity of the awareness of common responsibility; 3) even in conditions of an as yet unconsolidated democracy or a weak political opposition, the churches dismantle the unilateral monopoly of governing parties over socio-political life, which reduces the risk of dictatorship; 4) both churches endeavour to mobilise the emigrant communities in the processes of national development, which promotes the formation of diversity and a culture of tolerance.

(2) Within this positive role there also exists a *difference* between the two countries, which is delineated in the engagement of the diaspora. The Armenian diaspora is more effective than the Georgian. Accordingly, the church's relationship with external political actors also differs. Whereas the Georgian Orthodox Church is limited primarily to the Orthodox family alone, the

Armenian church is more open in all directions. It follows from this that the diaspora is capable of exerting greater influence upon the processes of democratisation in Armenia than in Georgia.

The Negative Influence of Church–State Relations upon Democratisation

(3) The *similarities* between these countries in this regard reside in the following: 1) both churches seek to preserve a defective legal status quo and to maintain legal opacity for the purpose of extracting greater benefit, rather than making their own contribution to the establishment of legislative clarity; 2) both churches are inclined toward the preservation of a regime of mutual exploitation with the state, rather than securing the consolidation of their own autonomy through the rule of law; 3) both churches are characterised by ethno-religious nationalism, which they regard as a privilege in the processes of determining the country's future, resulting in the de facto exclusion of minorities from various spheres of public life; 4) both churches are characterised by a cautious and frequently negative disposition toward reforms, which is a sign of distrust toward democratic processes; 5) the inclination of the governing echelons of both churches toward political and economic elitism and the unequal distribution of wealth promotes the de facto polarisation of society; 6) insufficient interest in civic education and an excessive emphasis on liturgical-ritual formalism, rather than a revaluation of educational values and the demonstration of greater readiness with respect to one's own and others' freedom and rights; 7) both churches exhibit a desire to maintain cultural dominance, rather than engaging in greater dialogue with the external world, with those who differ, and with minorities.

(4) In identifying the *differences*, the external factor also plays a particularly significant role here: notwithstanding their immediate geographical proximity and regional interconnectedness, both countries perceive the external foreign threat from different perspectives. Whereas Georgia identifies the primary threat to democracy and sovereignty in Russia, in Armenia the relationship with Azerbaijan and Turkey has not yet been sufficiently resolved for the external pressure to be reduced and for society to be afforded the possibility of self-determination and internal emancipation. The internal emancipation of political processes is fundamental for both countries. Furthermore, a different dynamic is also observable with respect to the Russian factor: whereas at the governmental level Armenia is becoming considerably more cautious, in Georgia we observe the governing party Georgian Dream's attempt at rapprochement – in contrast to the socio-political level, where a pro-Russian disposition predominates more strongly in Armenia than in Georgia [Kolarz 2025].

Notwithstanding the existing parallels, the political processes of both countries develop independently. As is apparent from the foregoing, the similarities between them are greater than the differences, while the role of the

churches in democratisation is externally more negative than positive. However, the unequivocal assessment of this role is so difficult that the weighing of positive and negative arguments is of differing weight and dimension, and a formal, frequently one-sided assessment may therefore readily become a subject of contestation. One fact is certain: the mutual influence between the countries resides above all in the consideration of experiences and of those models that bring about the correction of the behaviour of the various parties. Changed behaviour and dispositions create a changed environment, and this perpetually generates new possibilities. It is precisely these possibilities and the new experience of freedom that constitute the primary factor which, in the form of innovations and achievements, becomes the animating force of influence. Such innovation and the experience of achievement is not a purely informational flow, but rather an experience that is culturally and mentally assimilable, authoritatively and interpersonally attested, and matured in time – the result of which is a new consciousness, a new horizon of self-possession, and the promise of freedom.

Finally, it must be stated that both the process of democratisation and the future fate of these countries are substantially intertwined with one another – an observation well expressed by the words pronounced by Garegin I during Ilia II's visit to Etchmiadzin in 1997: "Our deep conviction is that it is not possible to have a strong Armenia without a strong Georgia, as well as that it is not possible to have a potent Georgian Church without a potent Armenian Church" [Petrosyan 2017a].

REFERENCES

Abrahamyan, Gayane. 2015. "Armenia: Mixing Faith and Philanthropy." https://eurasianet.org/armenia-mixing-faith-and-philanthropy

Agadjanian, Alexander. 2015. "Ethnicity, Nation and Religion: Current Debates and the South Caucasian Reality." In *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*, edited by Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke, and Evert van der Zweerde, 22-37. London and New York: Routledge.

Antonyan, Yulia. 2011. "Religiosity and Religious Identity in Armenia: Some Current Models and Developments." *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 56(2):315-32.

Antonyan, Yulia. 2015. "Political Power and Church Construction in Armenia." In *Religion, Nation and Democracy in the South Caucasus*, edited by Alexander Agadjanian, Ansgar Jödicke, and Evert van der Zweerde, 97-111. London and New York: Routledge.

Baghirov, Siyavush. 2024. "The Analysis of the Status of Religion in the Constitutions of the South Caucasus: Differences among Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia." Thesis. *Res Constitutionis*, no. 5 (September 29, 2024). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384442068

Blauvelt, Timothy K., and Christofer Berglund. 2016. "Redefining the Nation: From Ethnic Fragmentation to Civic Integration?" In *25 Years of Independent Georgia:*

Achievements and Unfinished Projects, edited by Ghia Nodia, 11-55. Tbilisi: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and Ilia State University Press.

Charles, Robia. 2010. "Religiosity and Trust in Religious Institutions: Tales from the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia)." *Politics and Religion* 3:228-61.

Chitanava, Eka. 2015. "The Georgian Orthodox Church: National Identity and Political Influence." In *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova*, edited by Adam Hug, 40-57. London: Foreign Policy Centre. http://www.tdi.ge/sites/default/files/fpc_eka_chitanavas_article_2015_0.pdf

Chitanava, Eka. 2016. "Georgia's Politics of Piety." *Open Democracy*, September 30, 2016.

Corley, Felix. 2025. *Catholicos and Commissar: The Armenian Church Under the Soviet Regime*. 2 vols. London: Gomidas Institute.

Danielyan, Stepan, Vladimir Vardanyan, and Artur Avtandilyan. 2009. *Religious Tolerance in Armenia*. Yerevan: Sage Publication. https://cdn.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/4/7/67674.pdf

Dragadze, Tamara. 1993. "The Domestication of Religion under Soviet Communism." In *Socialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Local Practice*, edited by C. M. Hann, 141-50. London and New York: Routledge.

Filetti, Andrea. 2014. "Religiosity in the South Caucasus: Searching for an Underlying Logic of Religion's Impact on Political Attitudes." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 14(2):219-38. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2014.904543

Findikyan, Bishop Daniel, and Aaron Hollander. 2020. "Exile and Hospitality: The Armenian Apostolic Church and the Wisdom of Marginality." *Ecumenical Trends*, March/April 2020.

Gardman, Pharissos. 2011. "Pharisos Gardman Letter to the Clergy, or Armenia's Journey to the Clergy-Feudal Order." https://hetq.am/hy/article/5704

Gavtadze, Mariam (ed.). 2024. *Freedom of Religion in Georgia*. Tbilisi: Institute for Tolerance and Diversity. https://tdi.ge/sites/default/files/religiis_tavisupleba_sakartveloshi_2023_tdi.pdf

Gegenava, Dimitri. 2018a. "Church-State Relations in Georgia: Legal Frames and General Overview." *Teka Komisji Prawniczej PAN Oddział w Lublinie* 11(2):121-30.

Gegenava, Dimitry. 2018b. *Legal Models of Church-State Relations and Georgian Constitutional Agreement*. Tbilisi: Prince David Institute for Law Publishing.

Gegenava, Dimitry. 2020. "Legal and Social Status of the Georgian Orthodox Church: Challenges and Perspective." *Teka Komisji Prawniczej PAN Oddział w Lublinie* 13(2):169-76.

Górecki, Wojciech. 2020. *The Autumn of the (Georgian) Patriarch: The Role of the Orthodox Church in Georgia and in Georgian Politics*. OSW Commentary, No. 332. Warsaw: Center for Eastern Studies.

Gurchiani, Ketevan. 2017. "How Soviet is the Religious Revival in Georgia: Tactics in Everyday Religiosity." *Europe-Asia Studies*.

Gurchiani, Nino. 2022. "The Orthodox Apostolic Church of Georgia and Soviet Religious Policy (50s of the XX Century)." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/398642003_The_Orthodox_Apostolic_Church_of_Georgia_and_Soviet_Religious_Policy_50s_of_XX_century

Hovannisyan, Hovhannes, and Marian Burchardt. 2016. "Religious vs Secular Nationhood: 'Multiple Secularities' in Post-Soviet Armenia." *Social Compass* 63(4):427-43.

Huntington, Samuel P. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Jawad, Pamela, and Oliver Reisner. 2013. "Die Nationalisierung der Religion in der Orthodoxen Apostolischen Kirche Georgiens – Begünstigung oder Hindernis im Demokratisierungsprozess?" In *Religiöse Akteure in Demokratisierungsprozessen*, edited by Julia Leininger, 149-90. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Kekelia, Tatia, et al. 2013. *The Role of Orthodox Church in Formation of Georgian National Identity (End of XX Century–Beginning of XXI Century)*. Tbilisi: Ilia State University.

Kolarz, Stefania. 2025. *Under Russian Influence: Challenges and Future Directions for Armenia, Georgia and Moldova*. Warsaw: The Opportunity Institute for Foreign Affairs. https://theopportunity.pl/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Under-Russian-Influence-Armenia-Georgia-Moldova_Kolarz_The-Opportunity.pdf

Król-Mazur, Renata. 2019. "Prawo do wolności religijnej w Republice Armenii – analiza obowiązującego ustawodawstwa." In *Prawa człowieka wobec wyzwań współczesnego świata*, edited by E. Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka, A. Czubik, and D. Dziwisz, 459-75. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.

Król-Mazur, Renata. 2021. "Controversy over the Armenian Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations." *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* 74(4):230-60.

Lursmanashvili, Guram. 2021a. "Stalin's Church Policy." *Journal of Theology and Religious Studies 'Dialogue'* 2(11):88-100. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University. In Georgian.

Lursmanashvili, Guram. 2021b. "Mixed Marriage, Council of Crete and Georgian Orthodox Church." *Journal of Theology and Religious Studies 'Dialogue'* 2(11):70-88. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University. In Georgian.

Maisuradze, Anna. 2017. "Capital of the Patriarchate: Property of the Most Influential Institution in Georgia."https://jam-news.net/capital-of-the-patriarchate-property-of-the-most-influential-institution-in-georgia/

Martirosyan, Marine. 2011. "My Dear, I Am Not a Service Worker." https://archive.168.am/articles/26732

Metreveli, Archil. 2022. *Freedom of Religion and Belief: Collective and Institutional Aspects*. Tbilisi.

Metreveli, Archil. 2024. "Law of Georgia on Transparency of Foreign Influence – Domestic Influence on Religious Minorities and Freedom of Religion." Institute for Tolerance and Diversity. In Georgian. https://tdi.ge/ge/page/sakartvelos-kanoni-ucxouri-gavlenis-gamchvirvalobis-shesaxeb-shinauri-gavlena-religiur

Nazaretyan, Hovhannes, and Hranoush Dermoyan. 2025. "Church–State Relations in Independent Armenia." https://evnreport.com/politics/church-state-relations-in-independent-armenia/

Nieczuja-Ostrowski, P. 2013. "Religia w polityce w państwach Kaukazu Południowego." In *Religia i polityka na obszarze Europy Wschodniej, Kaukazu i Azji Centralnej*, edited by T. Stępniewski. Lublin–Warszawa: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, KUL.

Nodia, Gia, and Thomas Schrapel (eds.). 2021. *From Independence to Freedom: How State and Society Are Changing in the New Georgia*. Tbilisi. In Georgian.

Petrosian, Levon. 2017a. "The Armenian Apostolic Church in Contemporary Times (1991-2011): Political Changes in Armenia and Social Challenges of the Last Three

Catholicoi of Etchmiadzin. Part I: Vazgen I and Garegin I." 81-111. https://www.academia.edu/32973279

Petrosian, Levon. 2017b. "The Armenian Apostolic Church in Contemporary Times (1991-2011) … Part II: Catholicos Garegin II (1999) and the Reinstitutionalization of the Church." 156-84. https://www.academia.edu/32973290

Reisner, Oliver. 2015. "Sacral-national: Staat, Religion und Nation in Georgien." *Osteuropa* 65 (7–10). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295703596_Sakral-national_Staat_Religion_und_Nation_in_Georgien

Rogers, M. Everett. 2003. *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press.

Sarkissian, Ani. 2008. "Religion in Post-Soviet Armenia: Pluralism and Identity Formation in Transition." *Religion, State and Society* 36(2):163-80.

Siekierski, Konrad. 2013. "The Armenian Apostolic Church and Vernacular Christianity in Soviet Armenia." https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264195362_The_Armenian_Apostolic_Church_and_Vernacular_Christianity_in_Soviet_Armenia

Tabatadze, Shalva. 2018. "Religious Education in Public Schools." Institute for Tolerance and Diversity. In Georgian. https://tdi.ge/ge/page/religiis-scavleba-sajaro-skolebshi

Targamadze, Giorgi. 2021. "Interview with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew." https://formulanews.ge/News/49809

Tchilingirian, Hratch. 2007. "In Search of Relevance: Church and Religion in Armenia since Independence." In *Religion et politique dans le Caucase post-soviétique*, edited by Bayram Balcı and Raoul Motika, 277-311. Istanbul: Institut français d'études anatoliennes. https://books.openedition.org/ifeagd/1563?lang=en

Tinikashvili, David. 2019. "The Orthodox Church of Georgia and the Ecumenical Movement (Before and After 1997)." *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 71(1-2):127-59.

Vardidze, Vaja. 2022. "Church Sovietization and Its Outcomes." In *The Trauma of Communism*, edited by Clemens Sedmak and A. James McAdams, 118-33. Lviv: Ukrainian Catholic University Press.

Yegavian, Tigran. 2026. "Church and State in Armenia: A Crisis Decades in the Making." https://evnreport.com/opinion/church-and-state-in-armenia-a-crisis-decades-in-the-making/

Zedania, Giga. 2011. "The Rise of Religious Nationalism in Georgia." *Identity Studies* 3:120-28.

Zenderowski, Radosław. 2011. *Religia a tożsamość narodowa i nacjonalizm w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej. Między etnicyzacją religii a sakralizacją etnosu (narodu)*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Zviadadze, Sophie. 2015. "Georgian Orthodox Church and Human Rights: Challenges to Georgian Society." In *Religion and Human Rights: International Perspective*, edited by Hans-Georg Ziebertz and Gordan Crpic, 45-60. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.