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Joel Lazarus on Political Parties and Western Democracy Promotion in Georgia

Why, after almost two decades of independence, do Georgia's political parties and party system remain so weakly institutionalised? Joel Lazarus, a PhD student in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, attempted to answer this question in a public lecture on June 18th at the CRRC-Georgia entitled "Georgian Political Parties and Western Democracy Promotion".

While acknowledging Georgia's democratic potential from a theoretical perspective, in his doctoral research Lazarus seeks to identify the domestic and international explanations for **why political parties in Georgia and the party system within which they operate remain so weakly institutionalised.**

Joel explored the following major **domestic explanations:**

- No early experience of democratic politics;
- Lack of a tradition of rational bureaucratic governance;
- Remaining patron-client structures, fiefdoms;
- Privatisation of social sphere;
- Weak citizen-party linkages;
- Low levels of organisation; Very low levels of trust in parties and other political institutions;
- Absence of pro-democratic values, such as: tolerance, self-reliance, restraint.

Joel proffered these **international explanations:**

- Political democracy promotion usually expressed in backing "reformers" and excluding all others;
- The international community ignoring and sometimes even praising unfree and unfair elections and constitutional/electoral code manipulations;
- A shift in donor funding from civil society/media to direct government support after Rose Revolution.

To summarize, Joel argues in his thesis that **Western "democracy promotion" has actually served to exacerbate polarization and conflict in Georgian party politics**, thereby serving to undermine any potential process of party and party system institutionalisation.

You can see the PowerPoint presentation below!

Joel Lazarus is a PhD student in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. His doctoral research focuses on: "Promoting Democracy? Georgian Political Parties and Western Democracy Promotion."