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The Reasons for the Formation of Student Protest Movements in Contemporary Georgia: A Case Study of "Auditoria 115" and "May Student Movement"[3]

Abstract

In the 21st century, the formation of student protest movements is one of the current events in Georgia. The years 2016-2022 were characterised by large-scale manifestations of student protests, the scale of which often went beyond the university environment. The activation of student movements during this period is associated with the student associations "Auditoria115" and "May Student Movement", which emerged at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The reasons for the emergence of the student movements presented here are complex and are linked to both internal university and external state factors. These factors are often closely interrelated. This study, based on primary empirical sources (in-depth interviews), examines the reasons for the emergence of the above-mentioned student movements in modern Georgia, which arise from internal university and external state challenges, and analyses the role of these reasons in the formation of the theory of collective identity of the members of the movements. At the same time, in identifying the social, economic and political factors for the emergence of the student movement, the dominance of left-wing ideological views, which have proved to be the basis for the emergence of student movements both in Georgia and in other countries, became clear.

Keywords: Georgia, student movements, reasons for protests, collective identity, student protests, student activism.

Introduction

The emergence and activism of student protest movements in modern Georgia is one of the active events. The transition period after the post-Soviet period has led to various social and political crises in the country, which are still on the agenda today. The involvement of students in the transformation processes in Georgia is particularly striking. The formation of student protest movements in Georgia began in 2011 ("Laboratoria 1918" student movement), and this process continues to this day. In this context, the large student movement "Auditoria 115" emerged in 2016, and the "May Student Movement" in the following period should be mentioned. The emergence of the emerging movements was conditioned by various environmental factors, which in turn led to the formation of shared values among the members. It is worth

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mentioning that the emergence of the presented student movements is associated with Ivane Javakhishvili's Tbilisi State University, whose protests later spread to other universities.

This study examines the reasons for the emergence of student protest movements in Georgia in the modern era. Among the movements, "Auditoria 115" and "May Student Movement" were specifically selected due to their scale and modernity. The emergence of the presented student movements in the years 2016 to 2023 was linked to both internal university and external state factors. The subject of the study was selected factors that were actively identified in both cases. These are, in particular, social, economic, and political factors. At the same time, student associations formed around these issues often create common identities in Georgia. Therefore, a review of collective identity and related academic theories in the context of the present study is valuable in identifying the reasons for the formation of student movements in Georgia. In her research on protest behaviour in Georgia, Tamar Khoshtaria found that the majority of Georgians support protest actions (60%). In comparison, actual participation in protests is significantly lower (6%), while young people and adolescents (18-34 years old) are more likely to support and participate in protest actions than older generations (Khoshtaria, 2024, p. 24). Therefore, the study of student protest movements among young people is of great importance.

The existence of protest movements has played an important role in the process of state change, even in Western democracies. This argument is supported by a number of events in the 20th century. The worldwide wave of protests in 1968 represents one of the most important moments in the history of social movements, especially in the history of student activism. Particularly in countries such as France, the United States, Mexico, and Germany, it showed how student movements can challenge authoritarianism, inequality, and cultural conservatism. Immanuel Wallerstein links the protests to systemic shifts in global power dynamics. In his edited volume The Modern World System, he examines the cyclical crises of capitalism and their connection to social movements such as those of 1968, noting that such movements often arise in response to inequality (Wallerstein, 2004).

The existence of student protest movements occupies an important place in the process of change in the state. The reason for their protest often takes on a larger form that includes local intra-university factors as well as state processes. In the example of the two student movements we analysed in Georgia, the extent of protest speech is striking in both cases. According to the people interviewed in this study, such student movements bring energy and a kind of 'explosion' against the background of a pessimistic and nihilistic attitude towards social change. Moreover, the participation of students in protest movements is important for the process of strengthening civil activism in the state. The existence of such movements, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of civil activism, change, and the formation of a progressive, open society.

Georgia is a post-Soviet country with little tradition of democratic institutions. In these processes, it becomes difficult for citizens to make their voice heard to the state and overcome the challenges they face. According to the respondents, even members of parliament with a majority vote cannot adequately express the voice of the people, despite the existing system of government in the country. At the same time, in their view, there is a bureaucracy and a political class that is very autonomous. In a post-communist society, where

the system is still under construction, the degree of institutionalism is also low. The only way for people to express their interests is to participate in protest movements: *"For our society, the existence of such social movements is in fact the most important channel through which people collect their grievances and try to bring these grievances to the government in some form"* (In-depth interview №5, former member of "Auditoria 115", 27/11/2023). For the members of the Georgian student protest movement, this association represents a kind of unity that has a defined vector of action; at the same time, it is able to analyse the existing social conditions and reality, and has a methodological and discursive advantage. The most important factor for the existence of the movement is that it aims to impose progressive changes in the country, and the beginning of these processes from student age is important: *"[...], we start such social, political or cultural activities at student age, which should ultimately end, so to speak, with at least laying the foundation for a kind of new social reality"* (In-depth interview №1, member of "May Student Movement", 10/09/2023).

Taking Georgia as an example, the academic study of modern student movements is valuable in both theoretical and practical terms. The novelty of the topic stems from the short history of the emergence of student movements, on which there is little academic literature. Accordingly, this article is a significant academic paper based on primary data, the opinions of students directly involved in student movements. From a theoretical point of view, the article will help those interested in the topic to deepen the subject with different interpretations in the future. From a practical point of view, the study of student movements will help the various state institutions in facing specific challenges in this direction and in developing appropriate state policies.

Research Methodology

The aim of this article is to study, within a defined time frame, the reasons behind the formation of student protest movements in Georgia and the stimulating factors that contribute to them. Based on this aim, the following objectives were identified: To study academic literature and applied research related to student movements globally; To collect and analyse primary data on the subject in order to develop a conceptual framework adapted to the local context; To explore the factors that stimulate the formation of student protest movements in Georgia; To examine the specific factors—social, economic, or political—that drive the formation of student movements; To analyse both internal university-related and external state-related factors that contribute to student protests; To compare and contextualize the reasons behind the formation of contemporary student movements.

Based on the research aims and objectives, the central research questions are as follows: 1. What external factors (state-related, economic, social) have influenced the formation of contemporary student movements in Georgia, specifically the "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement"? 2. What internal university-related factors contributed to the formation of student movements in contemporary Georgia? To conduct this study, a qualitative research method was applied. The first part of the paper involves the analysis of secondary sources, including a review and analysis of scientific literature and applied research related to the topic. This method allowed for the development of a theoretical framework tailored to the local context.

Moreover, the scientific literature assisted in interpreting empirical research findings and contributed to the theoretical development. Secondary sources also helped define the chronology of the development of the student protest movements studied within the research.

Another qualitative research method used in this study was the semi-structured interview. These were conducted both face-to-face and via the Zoom platform at the individual level. In total, 20 respondents were interviewed. Through this method, it was possible to study the positions of students who actively participated in the protests, served as key organizers, and played significant roles in planning and implementing various activities. Additionally, interviews were conducted with individuals who currently manage the social media platforms of these student movements. The first part of the interviews focused on the reasons for engaging in the protest movement and why respondents deemed it necessary to form or join such student initiatives. For the basic factor analyses, the study also uses a quantitative research method to categorise the internal university-related and external governmental causes of protest. The data was categorised and coded based on the qualitative input using two indicators - area and coverage (%) - using MAXQDA Coded Content Analysis.

The research is based on a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling. Given that among the recent student protest movements in Georgia, "Auditoria 115" spread beyond Tbilisi State University to other higher education institutions, its broad scale made it a key subject for this research. The second movement selected for the study is one of the most current and prominent protest movements, still ongoing at Tbilisi State University – the "May Student Movement". Accordingly, "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement" were selected as the main cases for this study.

Theoretical review

Student movement might have been generated due to a combination of perceived deprivation, effective resource mobilization, favorable political conditions, strong collective identity, strategic framing of issues, robust social networks, significant grievances, and cultural factors. Accordingly, it is important to explain, based on a specific international scientific theory, what specifically determines the formation of student movements in Georgia. One of the explanatory theories that we will use in the paper is the collective identity theory, the theory focuses on the shared identity and sense of solidarity among members of a social movement. It is also important that the collective identity promotes solidarity among group members and enables them to work towards common goals despite individual differences. Collective Identity Theory is an important framework in understanding social movements, including student movements. It focuses on how individuals come to see themselves as part of a larger group with shared interests, goals, and a common identity.

This issue has been studied in detail by Alberto Melucci. In his work "Challenging Codes Collective Action in the Information Age", Alberto Melucci defines in the chapter "The Process of Collective Identity" how shared experiences, grievances, and goals contribute to the development of a collective identity that connects group members. In the context of student movements, collective identity plays a crucial role in

mobilizing students around common concerns such as dissatisfaction with educational policies, political oppression, or social injustice. This shared identity is often strengthened by the following factors: Shared experiences, such as attending the same university, similar challenges (e.g., tuition fee increases, lack of representation), or participation in collective actions (e.g., protests), contribute to the development of a collective student identity. Student movements often arise from perceived injustices or unmet needs, which become focal points around which a collective identity is built. In addition, the formulation of common goals, such as political change, social justice or educational reform, strengthens the collective identity and gives the movement a clear direction (Melucci, 1996).

Alberto Melucci's definition can be applied to Georgian examples, such as "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement." In both cases, groups were formed around a common goal, with participants representing the same university and motivated by a perceived sense of injustice. In the case of "Auditoria 115," the initial protest targeted the student self-government system at Tbilisi State University (TSU). The dissatisfaction arose after 24,600 GEL was spent on training sessions organized by the self-government, which led to a wave of protests (Mandaria, 2017). Similarly, the "May Student Movement" emerged when students protested TSU's decision to end the distance learning regime following the pandemic (Tarkhnishvili, 2022). In both movements, the protests were driven by feelings of injustice within the internal university system. According to Melucci, collective identities often form around a shared cause, whether it be fighting against oppressive regimes, advocating for social justice, or seeking educational reform. In the case of Georgia, these student movements reflect openly left-wing values and have been actively involved in broader social protests, such as showing solidarity with miners, subway drivers, striking couriers, and other labor groups (tabula.ge, 2018). The mentioned theory is quite well suited to the subject of our research in relation to the forms of expression as well. Alberto Melucci explains, that movements shaped by collective identity engage in symbolic acts of solidarity, such as occupying university buildings, organizing mass gatherings, or wearing specific colors or symbols. These expressions help reinforce the group's shared identity and publicize their cause. In the case of both movements, occupying a separate building of the university or specific rooms of the administration was one of the main forms of protest.

William A. Gamson also addresses the issue of collective identity in his work "The Strategy of Social Protest". He emphasizes the importance of collective identity in the formation of social movements. According to him, the presence of a strong collective identity fosters participation in protest activities, as it gives individuals a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves. This sense of belonging encourages loyalty and sustained engagement within the movement. However, Gamson also highlights the challenges of forming a unified identity, as groups often face contentious issues such as leadership struggles or ideological differences. He argues that collective identity plays a crucial role in shaping the tactics a movement adopts. For instance, movements with a strong sense of identity may opt for more radical or direct forms of protest, confident that their internal cohesion will help them resist external pressure or repression (Gamson, 1975).

Similar to Collective Identity Theory, "Grievance Theory" asserts that social injustices and economic inequalities drive the formation of student movements. In his work "From Mobilization to Revolution", Charles Tilly examines the dynamics of mobilization and the various forms that social movements can take in response to these grievances. His analysis highlights the relationship between grievances and collective action, providing insights into the reasons behind the formation, evolution, and mobilization of individuals toward specific goals (Tilly, 1978). Like Alberto Melucci, Tilly emphasizes that grievances such as social injustices, economic disparities, and political repression serve as key motivators for collective action. He investigates how individuals come together to create social movements, asserting that mobilization is not merely spontaneous (Tilly, 1978). Furthermore, akin to Melucci, Tilly discusses the development of collective identity among movement participants, noting that a shared sense of identity helps unify individuals around common grievances and goals, enhancing solidarity within the movement. Another key figure in Grievance Theory, William Gamson, explores the dynamics of social movements in his work The Strategy of Social Protest. He examines how movements articulate their grievances and formulate strategies for mobilization. Gamson argues that access to organizational resources—such as leadership, funding, and networks—is crucial for the success of social movements. Notably, he emphasizes the strategic decisions that student movements must make regarding their engagement with university administrations, politicians, and the public (Gamson, 1990).

In his work "Why Men Rebel" Ted Robert Gurr argues that student protests often emerge when expectations do not align with reality. He suggests that when students feel deprived of opportunities, rights, or resources compared to others, they are more likely to engage in protest (Gurr, 1970). For example, in the context of Georgia, the "Relative Deprivation Theory" is particularly relevant, as both groups involved in the selected movements felt that they were lacking certain resources, while other groups (such as student self-governments) were perceived to be receiving these benefits. In the case of the "May Student Movement," student protests were linked to the issue of access to education. Following the pandemic, many students lacked the financial means to attend exams or continue their education fully. Therefore, the "Relative Deprivation Theory" is crucial for understanding the formation of student movements, as it emphasizes perceived educational inequality, where one group has more access to resources than another. As a result, according to the theory, students may feel excluded from decision-making processes or experience discrimination. Gurr emphasizes that the gap between expectations and reality is a key motivator of collective action. Building on psychological theories of frustration, Gurr explains that frustration caused by blocked goals can lead to aggression. In the political sphere, unmet social, economic, or political aspirations generate grievances, which, in turn, spur collective actions. Relative deprivation helps explain why certain groups, particularly marginalized communities or students, participate in protests, strikes, and demonstrations. Their sense of being denied opportunities or rights that are available to others intensifies their drive for change (Gurr, 1970).

Neil Smelser addressed the formation of student movements in his work "Theory of Collective Behavior". Smelser incorporated grievances into a comprehensive model of collective behavior, emphasizing

that a conducive social and political environment (structural conduciveness) and specific triggering events (precipitating factors) are crucial for a movement to emerge (Smelser, 1962). He discusses the importance of the environment or space where students can gather and express their protests. What is particularly noteworthy is his emphasis on the triggering factor, which can spark the formation of student movements. For instance, a high-profile case of discrimination at a university underscores the sensitivity of students to social protests, as students often act in solidarity with broader social issues, viewing their struggles as part of a larger effort for social justice. Smelser's approach outlines that for collective behavior to occur, six conditions must be met: structural conduciveness, structural strain, the growth and spread of a generalized belief, precipitating factors, mobilization for action, and the operation of social control (Smelser, 1962).

When discussing "Collective Action," it is essential to reference Alexander Astin's "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education". Astin emphasizes the connection between student involvement and collective action, noting that engaged students are more inclined to participate in protests, advocacy efforts, and various forms of activism. He posits that students who are actively involved in organizations are better positioned to mobilize around social issues and collaborate to effect change. This collective action can take numerous forms, such as protests, campaigns, and initiatives that address concerns within the campus community or the broader society (Astin, 1984).

Comprehensive analyses of student movements, including theories such as Doug McAdam's Political Process Model, explain how structural opportunities and mobilisation factors influence the success of movements. Such movements often arise in response to structural weaknesses in society that support justice and equality through collective behaviour (McAdam, 1999). In an article entitled "Perspectives on Student Political Activism", Philip Altbach argues that student movements often emerge as part of a continuum of historical events, with current activism being shaped by the legacy and narratives of past student struggles (Altbach, 1989). Philip Altbach's argument mirrors the examples of student protest movements we examined. The interviewees link the existence of the movement to already existing student movements and see it as a kind of continuation: *The protest movement ("Auditoria 115") was a kind of continuation of the already existing "Laboratoria 1918" (which was active in 2011-2013)"* (In-depth interview №3, former member of "Auditoria 115", 14/10/2023).

In his article, Philip Altbach emphasises that understanding student political configurations is crucial, as they have often played an important role in higher education reforms and broader societal changes. Accordingly, student protest movements are naturally responsive to the challenges facing the university and students in the country. However, it is also worth noting that student protests in Georgia often take on a more global dimension and involve solidarity with the challenges faced by different social groups. For example, the student movement "Auditoria 115" has not only addressed issues of university life but has also been actively involved in other protests in the country (Imerlishvili, 2023, p. 9).

In Georgia, the interviewees, who are themselves members of student protest movements, explained the role of student movements in Georgia and other democratic states in detailed interviews. For them, the existence of such movements is linked to a kind of balance in the country created by the relations between

society and the political systems: *"I think that not only student but also general protest marches, rallies, strikes, I don't know, are probably very important because there is a certain contradiction in the country that is created in the country to create a kind of balance in the country"* (In-depth interview №7, former member of "May Student Movement", 23/09/2023).

When discussing the importance of the existence of a movement, students often mention the material deficiencies that exist in various groups of society that exist in the state. In their view, the existence of student movements is aimed at eliminating these deficiencies. Accordingly, the elimination of existing problems in various strata of society, especially among students, is an important prerequisite for the existence of student movements, which was confirmed in the case of the two movements we studied in modern Georgia. Despite the diversity of the movements' members, these basic goals remain unchanged, and throughout their existence, the student movements have endeavoured to eliminate these social challenges: *"I think that there will always be student movements until these problems are completely solved"* (In-depth interview №3, member of "May Student Movement", 29/10/2023).

Agreement on the most important fundamental values is another important factor for the existence of a student movement. Among these values, the degree of independence and courage of the movement occupies an important place, maintaining all this under any pressure. The members of the modern student movement studied in Georgia mention the active support of the members in overcoming these difficulties: *"In reality, this movement is the space and the collective where we help each other to overcome these difficulties, and this is not an obstacle to say anything"* (In-depth interview №3, member of "May Student Movement", 29/10/2023).

The Role of Internal University Factors in Student Mobilization

The emergence of student movements in Georgia is a complex issue, and besides state reasons, one of the most important factors for their activation is the internal situation at the university. In modern Georgia, in the case of the two student protest movements we analysed, "Auditoria 115" and "May Student Movement", several internal university factors were identified that contributed to the emergence of these student movements. Recent academic studies of student protest movements in different countries actively examine the role of internal university factors in the emergence of movements and the development of protests. The authors actively discuss socio-educational demands such as equal access to education, fair assessment systems, and better conditions at universities. These factors are often the drivers of these movements, while internal university policies can either inhibit or encourage activism (López & Loza, 2023). However, when explaining the reasons for the failure of the student movement 'Auditoria 115', the active members referred to the spontaneity of the movement's emergence: *"The protest movement emerged very spontaneously, unorganised, on an emotional basis, unexpectedly"* (In-depth interview №4, former member of "May Student Movement", 03/11/2023).

Since 2020, the global spread of the coronavirus has led to significant changes in almost all areas of public life, including the education system. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on higher

education and accelerated the formation of student movements. In particular, the transition to online learning, the closure of university buildings, and administrative decisions have led to increased student activism and highlighted systemic problems in higher education. A global study by UNESCO (2021) highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the global transition to online higher education, which in turn has revealed major challenges in terms of access to education, equality of opportunity, and quality of education. Many universities are struggling with the sudden transition to a distance learning format as students face challenges such as low engagement, limited interaction, and academic stress (UNESCO, 2021). The challenges posed by the pandemic have sparked student protests around the world. For example, in November 2020, students at the University of Manchester protested against the university's handling of COVID-19. The university erected barriers around student accommodation without notice, leading to student protests and their removal. Students also occupied Owens Park Tower, demanding a reduction in university fees and better support. As a result of the protests, semester fees were reduced by 30% (The Guardian, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a prerequisite for active protest and the founding of the movement by students in Georgia. The founding of the May Student Movement coincided with the time when the coronavirus was a hot topic and was seen as one of the biggest challenges facing society. Against this background, the members of the student movement actively demanded a change in the format of the final exams, which are usually held in the capital, at the Tbilisi State University Examination Centre. According to the interviewees, in addition to the problems with the COVID-19 virus, housing problems were also observed in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, in particular, an increase in housing prices. This challenge proved difficult to overcome for students living in the region, as they had to be in Tbilisi at the same time as taking exams. The founding of the "May Student Movement" was also related to this issue.

In addition, the interviewees who were members of the "May Student Movement" actively spoke in the in-depth interviews about internal reasons for founding the movement, such as university scholarships and their scarcity. Some of the interviewees talked about the number of certain scholarships. It is worth noting that this demand of the movement has been partially met, and the scholarship has been increased, although the amount of scholarship for students is still low in their opinion, considering the current housing problems and other challenges. As other internal reasons for the formation of the student movement, they mentioned the demands related to the change of the procedure for electing the rector and members of the Academic Council of Tbilisi State University. The students demanded a fundamental change in the challenge; in their opinion, the resignation of the rector was not a solution, and it was necessary to establish democratic standards for his election. At the same time, based on international experience, the members of the "May Student Movement" criticised the management model at universities, which one of the interviewees described as *"Academic Managerialism"* (In-depth interview №3, member of "May Student Movement", 29/10/2023).

The submitted demand was actively raised by the "May Student Movement" after the protest participants were ignored, and the rector of Tbilisi State University did not react during the protest. The

reason for the activation of the protest by the "May Student Movement" was the ignorance of both the rector himself and the representatives of the administration. To illustrate, they argued that the representatives of the administration did not pay attention to the petitions written by the protesting students on various challenges. Speaking of the rector of the university and the representatives of the administration ignoring the demands of the student movement, it is also worth mentioning that the members of the movement also addressed the silence of the academic staff of the university on the problems of the students: *"If the administration and the rectorate, the administration and the lecturers and the professorial staff in general do not speak out on the problems of the students, this is quite a big problem"* (In-depth interview №1, member of "May Student Movement", 10/09/2023). In addition, one of the most important original demands of the "May Student Movement" was the problem of financial transparency at the university. According to the interviewees, funds were spent inappropriately at the university: *"We noticed that no matter how many lari were used to finance the university, the university was charged with much less expenditure"* (In-depth interview №7, former member of "May Student Movement", 23/09/2023). According to their observations, this suspicion was well-founded, because 5-6 months after the claim, 3 employees of the university administration were taken to court for illegal use of funds.

Another current intra-university reason for the formation of student movements in modern Georgia is the challenges associated with student residenses (Gelkhauri, 2023). Students representing modern student movements frequently pointed out the problems of student residense in their interviews. According to the interviewees, the scarcity of accommodation and its condition are conspicuous. The deplorable state of the "Bagebi student residense" at Tbilisi State University was actively addressed in the interviews. The "May Student Movement" actively called on the university and the administration to take a public stance on the construction of student residenses: *"For us, the construction of student residenses was initially of the utmost importance due to the realities of the situation. Because time passes and does not wait, and how many students at the university lose their status every semester"* (In-depth interview №3, member of "May Student Movement", 29/10/2023).

Student councils play a crucial role in addressing student challenges at universities. Some authors have noted that while student representation was created as a form of student voice in formal decision-making processes, its effectiveness can often lead to frustration and force students to protest. In an academic article entitled "The Possible Political Effects of Student Activism", Seymour Martin Lipset (1969) examines the far-reaching political consequences of student activism in the 1960s, when student protests were on the rise, particularly in Western societies. The article emphasises how student governments cause frustration among students, which in turn causes them to continue protest movements. When student governments fail to meet the needs of their group (e.g., failing to represent students in administrative decision-making), this creates an environment ripe for protest. Lipset's work emphasises that protest is not simply a reactive, isolated event, but a potential consequence of institutional failure (Lipset, 1969).

The challenges between student self-governments and student protest movements are also on the agenda in modern Georgia. In our study, among the internal university reasons for the formation of student

movements, in the case of the "May Student Movement", the appointment of a former member of the self-government to the administration of Tbilisi State University was highlighted, which, according to a member of the movement, pointed to the privileges of the members of the self-government at the university and the close relations with the university administration. In the student movements we analysed, the unacceptance of the activities of members of the university self-government also became the subject of student protest. The quality of teaching and the associated challenges are one of the most important internal university factors for the emergence of student movements and the rise of protests. One of the former members of the "May Student Movement" spoke in an in-depth interview about the challenges related to enrollment in degree programmes. Among the reasons related to the quality of teaching, the scarcity of the university's material and technical resources, its accessibility, and its incompatibility with teaching were also emphasised. This issue was relevant to both student movements we analysed. In extensive interviews, the members of the "May Student Movement" spoke about the condition of one of the buildings of Tbilisi State University and its incompatibility with the educational process.

When mentioning the internal university reasons for the emergence of the protest movement, one of the members of the "May Student Movement" mentioned the presence of numerous students with suspended status at Tbilisi State University. It should also be noted that, according to the interviewees, this can also be considered an external factor, as the suspension of a student's status is often related to financial, housing, or other personal problems that cannot be considered internal university factors.

Similar to the "May Student Movement", the reasons for the formation of the student movement "Auditoria 115" among the general internal university factors were the lack of democratisation, the lack and weakness of democratic structures within the university (In-depth interview №5, member of "Auditoria 115", 23/10/2023). In addition, members of the movement mentioned the distribution of resources within the university as another general internal factor. This referred to the management of the university budget, i.e., how fairly the university budget is distributed between students and faculty. Among the other internal university factors for the formation of the "Auditoria 115" and the start of the protest are the quality of education, the efficiency of university administration, and the challenges associated with it.

In both student protest movements analysed, internal university factors proved to be an important initial prerequisite in the process of movement formation. In-depth interviews were conducted to identify both university-internal factors that were common to the "Audience 115" and "May Student Movement" movements and those that differed from them. The table N1 provides a comparative analysis of the internal factors that have driven student movements in Georgia, focusing on "Auditoria 115" and the "May student movement". These internal factors were categorised and coded based on qualitative data, using two indicators - area and coverage (%) - to measure the extent and intensity of reference to each theme. Area represents the cumulative coded text length, while coverage reflects the proportion of the total dataset devoted to each topic. The data show that "Auditoria 115" addresses each of the internal issues listed, reflecting a broad critique of university administration, governance, and student conditions. In contrast, the student movement in May appears to be more selective, addressing certain key issues rather than a broad

spectrum. This distinction may indicate differences in the strategy, scope or ideological orientation of the two movements.

Several topics stand out both in terms of their length and their relative importance. "Problems with student accommodation and lack of student residences" recorded the largest range (1939), suggesting that it was one of the most extensively discussed concerns. However, the range (0.84%) is moderate, suggesting that although this topic formed a significant part of the discourse, it was part of a broader argument or narrative. Similarly, the "scheduling of examinations at the examination centre during the pandemic" (1637) and the "misappropriation of administrative funds through illegal means" (1403) also received considerable attention. Interestingly, "influence/privileges of self-government" stands out with the highest coverage rate (1.74%) despite being a relatively modest area (464). This indicates that although the topic is not very extensive, it was discussed intensively and probably appears in several sources. In contrast, other themes such as "Lack of responsibility/silence on the part of the administration and the Rector" and "The issue of election and resignation of the Rector and Academic Council" had high area scores but lower coverage, suggesting descriptive or contextual treatment rather than frequent, repeated emphasis. The themes with the least weight were "suspended students" and "lack of scholarships", which had the lowest area (34 and 282) and coverage (0.14% and 0.47%) scores. These themes may reflect narrower concerns or individual cases within the broader student experience. Their low presence may indicate that they were not core demands of the movements or that they were secondary consequences of broader structural issues.

Table №1. Internal Factors Addressed in Georgian Student Movements: Comparative Analysis of "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement" (MAXQDA Coded Content Analysis):

Student Movements / Internal Factors	"Auditoria 115"	"May Student Movement"	Area (The number of characters in the coded segment)	Coverage (%) relative size of the coded segments within the full text
Lack of responsibility/silence on the part of the administration and the rector		+	829	0.43
Influence/privileges of the self-government	+	+	464	1.74
Misappropriation of administrative funds through illegal means	+	+	1403	0.6
Scheduling of examinations at the examination centre - during the pandemic		+	1637	1.01

Dissatisfaction with the quality of education	+		956	0.97
The issue of the election and resignation of the Rector and Academic Council/Lack of internal democracy	+	+	839	0.38
Problems with student accommodation and lack of student residences	+	+	1939	0.84
Lack of scholarships		+	282	0.47
Suspended students		+	34	0.14

In both of the student protest movements we analysed, students were confronted with complex challenges within the university, which proved to be an important prerequisite for the emergence of student protests. Furthermore, when analysing the internal reasons for the emergence of these movements, it became apparent that the aforementioned demands of the student movements were often closely linked: *"All of this (the demands of the movement) was part of each other and without the other it would have had no effect"* (In-depth interview №2, member of "May Student Movement", 05/11/2023). At the same time, however, internal university factors are also closely linked to external, state-related challenges, which became clear in the fundamental study of the Georgian student protest movements.

The Role of External State Factors in Shaping Student Movements

The formation of student movements, along with internal university factors, is also related to the existence of state-important, or external, factors. In this study, some of the interviewees in in-depth interviews consider the internal university factors as the only reason for the formation of a movement that is linked to many external factors: *"The internal university factor was not the only goal in the formation of the student movement, it was just a kind of "explosive instrument" that came to the fore at a certain"* (In-depth interview №5, former member of "Auditoria 115", 26/12/2023). Social and economic problems in Georgia are one of the problematic issues for the society that acutely affect all age groups, including student youth. According to the latest youth survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2023), economic problems are the most important issue for Georgian youth, as they are for the Georgian population. A large proportion of them see unemployment (42%) as the biggest challenge, followed by the problem of rising prices (30%) (FES, 2023, pp. 38-39).

Former and current members of the student movements interviewed in this study highlighted social, economic and political challenges. Among the external issues of state importance, the social and economic challenges of the state were emphasised in the case of both the "May Student Movement" and the "Auditoria 115". The interviewees actively spoke about the problem of students paying tuition fees, the cause of which

they attributed to the lack of jobs and wages in the state. At the same time, among the problems mentioned were students' housing problems when residences are not sufficient for students and they have to pay additional amounts for housing rent. According to the interviewees, these problems also affect the quality of education: *"[...] There is no residense, no housing policy, and in the end it turns out that the student has no more time to study, he works, painstakingly saves money, pays, let's say, tuition fees, pays for housing. [...] This is the student's social life and social marginalisation, abandonment"* (In-depth interview №10, former member of "Auditoria 115", 14/02/2024).

Judging by the forms of expression and the scale of the "Auditoria 115" movement, it can be considered one of the largest student movements in modern Georgia. This fact is confirmed by the fact that in addition to the students of Tbilisi State University, students from other universities also joined the movement. Some of the former members of the student movement "Auditoria 115" consider the movement in their own way as a kind of continuation of the already existing student movement "Laboratoria 1918". In our study, we interviewed the active students who actively participated in the founding of "Auditoria 115" and in other types of planned protest actions. In their opinion, the general reasons for the failure of the movement include the demand for a student-centred educational reform, which, according to one of the interviewees, turns the existing problem into a state problem: *"[...] The protest became nationwide and the main demand was the abolition of the existing vicious education system and a fundamental reform of the student-centred education system, including the drafting of a new education law"* (In-depth interview №8, former member of "Auditoria 115", 18/12/2023).

Originally, before the establishment of the "May Student Movement" association at Tbilisi State University, the gathering of students was related to the challenges existing in the country, and only afterwards was the student group transformed into an organisation. For example, the members of the "May Student Movement" cite circumstances such as housing problems, the Covid pandemic and others as more concrete reasons for founding the movement. Since the housing problem in the country exists due to various environmental factors, the students believe that it is not an individual problem and must be solved by both the state and the university. In their opinion, the cause of this problem is more global and was conditioned by another factor, namely the Russian war in Ukraine, which started in 2021: *"All this [the creation of the movement] started with the fact that there were very big housing problems in Georgia, these housing problems were caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war and when Russian and Ukrainian citizens came to Georgia"*(In-depth interview №4, former member of "May Student Movement", 03/11/2023).

One of the main reasons for the emergence of the protests of the modern student movement was the construction and/or refurbishment of student residences. The members of the "May Student Movement" and 'Auditoria 115' actively spoke about the state's obligation to solve the above-mentioned problem of students. It is worth noting that, according to the majority of students, the construction of student residenses is a state issue and significantly affects the quality of education: *"At first glance, student residenses seem to be a material demand, but in reality it is a systemic demand, because its consequences are systemic. For*

example, if there is a student residense on a larger scale, i.e. for all state universities, this will automatically increase the quality of access to education" (In-depth interview №9, member of "May Student Movement", 13/03/2024).

The housing problems of students in this country are often linked to the problems of university halls of residence. For the people we interviewed, students' housing problems are complex and some of them consider it both an internal problem of the university and an external factor, i.e. a problem of the state: "It is not my problem, it is a problem that needs to be solved by both the state and the university, i.e. the university has a duty to ensure that education is accessible to students" (In-depth interview №7, member of "May Student Movement", 28/01/2024). Some of the current and former members of the movement who spoke about the social challenges noted that the social challenges and material inadequacies faced by students make them an oppressed class, which they believe is the fault of both the university and the policies of the state itself: *"How can a student be oppressed by the university in such a way that their moral and physical rights are violated, but in reality, if we look at students' lives, they have to pay a lot of taxes besides studying and, to cope with everything, they have to work in a job that actually provides minimum wage in exchange for maximum work"* (In-depth interview №1, member of "May Student Movement", 10/09/2023).

In the scientific literature, students' political orientations are frequently associated with left-wing ideologies. In The Question of Class Struggle, Craig Calhoun analyses how student movements often act as catalysts within broader leftist coalitions by introducing radical ideas (Calhoun, 1982). In recent years, scholars such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (e.g. Multitude, 2004) have discussed the role of youth and students in "networked resistance" to neoliberal globalisation (Hardt & Negri, 2005). In the case of Georgia, representatives of student movements criticise the issue of privatisation when discussing housing problems. In their opinion, the elimination of social obligations by the state is unjustified and creates many problems for students, which they consider to be one of the external factors for the emergence of student movements: "External factors are related from beginning to end to the economic, capitalist order that prevails in the country today, i.e. the rules of production, private interests, commercial goals, etc. that make a student what? From beginning to end, a student is a labourer for the state, the corporate sector, etc" (In-depth interview №9, member of "May Student Movement", 13/03/2024).

As far as ideological approaches are concerned, some of the interviewees also criticised the liberal approach to education policy in Georgia: *"Unfortunately, education policy in Georgia has been very liberal from the day of independence until today. The state bases its education policy, let's say, entirely on market economy principles"* (In-depth interview №8, former member of "Auditoria 115", 18/12/2023). In addition, it was noted that there is a problem with the irrelevance of state funding for the university. According to the interviewees, the amount allocated to the university by the state is meagre and is only enough for survival, while the development of science and research is not a priority. In addition, one of the respondents cites the education policy factor as one of the main reasons that have long attracted public attention. And it is precisely for this reason that the members of the "Auditoria 115" movement have demonstrated a radical form of protest - they have twice occupied Building 6 of Tbilisi State University.

In addition to the numerous state problems of the student protest movements in Georgia, another one has been added in recent years since 2020, which has caused damage to many people and areas, including educational institutions. The Covid-19 pandemic has proven to be a major challenge for students, bringing further problems such as access to education. During the critical phase of the pandemic, higher education was shifted to distance learning and students had to be taught online. One of the external factors for the postponement of the "May Student Movement" was the return of students to the regions as a result of the pandemic. Despite distance learning at Tbilisi State University, final exams were to be held in person. As a result, some students were repeatedly unable to travel from the regions to the university to take the exams.

One of the temporary external factors that aggravated the protests of the student movement was the presence of security structures at the university, i.e. the presence of groups at the university that were directly controlled by the State Security Service. Former members of "Auditoria 115" cited the existence of so-called "odeers" in the university's leadership circles as one of the reasons for the emergence of the movement. This challenge was also counted among the external state factors, as in this case they actively spoke about the issue of autonomy at the university. It is worth noting that this issue also became a factor in the escalation of the protest for the members of "Auditoria 115". The members of the movement organised a rally "No to the police regime!" near the building of the State Security Service and protested against the pressure exerted on them and the presence of the so-called odeurs at the university (Imerlishvili, 2023, p.7).

The MAXQDA coded content analysis of the external factors (table №2) addressed by the "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement" shows that socio-economic problems and state education policies are the main concerns of both movements. The socio-economic problems occupy the largest part of the coded area with 3417 characters, accounting for 6.64% of the total text, which emphasises the students' strong awareness of economic inequalities and their impact on youth prospects. More remarkably, government education policy occupies the highest proportion at 7.41%, reflecting students' strong commitment to national education reform, governance and the broader political context that shapes higher education. In contrast, factors such as the presence of odeurs at universities (1.48%), problems with student accommodation (0.83%) and the availability of education (0.71%) are less strongly emphasised. These lower coverage rates suggest that while institutional and infrastructural challenges are recognised, they are secondary to broader structural criticisms. The limited attention given to access-related concerns in particular could be a sign of a shift in student activism - away from traditional demands for access to education and towards politically and socially charged issues. Overall, these findings highlight a shift in focus in Georgian student movements, where activism is increasingly characterised by complex intersections of economic, political and institutional pressures.

Table №2. External Factors Addressed in Georgian Student Movements: Comparative Analysis of "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement" (MAXQDA Coded Content Analysis):

External Factors \ Student Movements	"Auditoria 115"	"May Student Movement"	Area (The number of characters in the coded segment)	Coverage (%) relative size of the coded segments within the full text
Socio-economic problems	+	+	3417	6.64
State education policy	+	+	1436	7.41
The presence of Odeers at universities	+		841	1.48
Availability of education		+	424	0.71
Challenges of student residences	+	+	833	0.83

Factor Analysis of Internal University and External State Influences on the Formation of Student Protest Movements in Georgia

Georgian student protests are not solely reactive but rooted in a nuanced critique of both university-level governance and national policy. This intersection of internal and external factors demonstrates that student mobilizations in Georgia are shaped by multi-level grievances, reflecting both institutional shortcomings and broader systemic challenges. SPM = IUF + ESF + CF (formula №1), where: IUF - Internal University Factors, ESF = External State Factors, Common Factors. The reasons for the emergence of student protest movements in Georgia can be analysed using a set-theoretical framework. Based on empirical qualitative data, we define the universe of factors (F) as a comprehensive set of structural, political and socio-economic conditions cited by student activists. These include internal university factors (IUF) such as poor teaching quality, administrative mismanagement and lack of democratic decision-making, external state factors (ESF) such as high tuition fees, lack of social protection and market-orientated education policies, and overlapping or common factors (CF) such as the housing crisis and educational disruption associated with COVID-19. The student protest movement (SPM) is conceptualised as the result of the unification of these subsets: SPM = {x ∈ F | x ∈ IUF ∪ ESF ∪ CF}[4].

In this case, all of the protest-triggering issues identified in the interviews fall into at least one of these categories, suggesting that the protest is not the result of isolated grievances, but rather the result of cumulative pressures emanating from both the university and the state system in general. The model provides a holistic understanding of student mobilisation and shows how overlapping and interacting factors - such as infrastructure decay combined with unaffordable housing - act as catalysts for collective action. This approach underpins the argument that student protests in Georgia are structurally embedded and triggered by both institutional failure and systemic neglect.

Table №3 presents a comparative framework that systematically categorizes the internal university factors, external state factors, and commonalities between the two that contributed to the emergence of student protest movements in Georgia. The data reveals a significant overlap between institutional and national-level grievances, highlighting the complex and interdependent nature of student discontent. Factors such as student self-government privileges, residence-related issues, and COVID-19-related disruptions appear across all three columns, underscoring their foundational role in mobilizing student activism. These shared concerns illustrate how systemic problems within universities often mirror broader socio-political dysfunctions.

Internal university factors focus predominantly on governance issues, resource mismanagement, and academic policy failures. Complaints regarding the quality of teaching, non-targeted financial spending, and bias in academic staff conduct suggest a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with how institutions are run and how students are treated. Meanwhile, external state factors such as state education policy inequality, tuition fee policies, and the influence of so-called "Odeers" (unofficial security actors) reflect the broader political and

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[4] **Formula №2.** Set-Theoretical Representation of Protest Factors, from MAXQDA-coded data:

$SPM = \{x \in F \mid x \in IUF \cup ESF \cup CF\}$, where:

- SPM = Student Protest Movement;
- $F = IUF \cup ESF \cup CF$, define a universe of factors, based on all the possible reasons for protest;
  F = {poor teaching quality, high tuition fees, housing shortage, covid-era exams, corruption in student government, misuse of university funds, low stipends, Russia–Ukraine war impact, poor infrastructure, non-transparent rector elections, weak student rights, lack of social protection, privatization of education, state neglect in housing policy, interference by security services, exam registration issues}
- IUF, ESF, CF - Subset of factors;
  IUF {internal university factors} = {poor teaching quality, misuse of university funds, corruption in student government, non-transparent rector elections, exam registration issues, low stipends, poor infrastructure};
  ESF {external state factors} = {high tuition fees, Russia–Ukraine war impact, lack of social protection, privatization of education, interference by security services, state neglect in housing policy};
  CF {factors shared across institutional and state responsibility} = {housing shortage, covid-era exams, weak student rights}.
- SPM = F, because all factors belong to at least one subset (IUF, ESF, CF)

economic pressures shaping student life. The presence of geopolitical references, such as the Russia-Ukraine War, within the external category highlights the responsiveness of student movements to global events and their local consequences.

Table №3. Reasons for the Formation of Student Protest Movement in Georgia

Internal University Factors	External State Factors	Common to both
Student self-government and their privileges and connections Construction/renovation of residenses	Student self-government and their privileges and connections Construction/renovation of residenses	Student self-government and their privileges and connections Construction/renovation of residenses
Quality of teaching: problems with textbooks and teaching approaches	State education policy, inequality	
Covid pandemic and the classroom format of final exams during the pandemic	Various challenges in the country (including the Covid pandemic)	Covid pandemic and the classroom format of final exams
Housing problems and shortage of student residenses	Housing challenges (especially in light of the Russia-Ukraine war)	The Russia-Ukraine War and Housing Challenges
The problem of student residenses	The problem of student residenses	Residenses construction/renovation
Non-targeted spending of university financial resources	Payment of tuition fees and suspension of the student status	
The attitude of the rector and academics towards students and the procedure for their selection	The existence of so-called "Odeers" in universities	
Competence and attitude of academic and administrative staf towards students		

Conclusion

The formation of student protest movements in Georgia in the period 2016-2023 represents an active process of youth protest. In this study, based on the analysis of primary sources - data from in-depth interviews - it was found that the reasons for the formation of both student movements – "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement" - are different. This is closely related to both university-internal and broader, state-related factors. The study of modern student movements in Georgia has shown that the conditions for the emergence of student movements are diverse. Internal reasons are related to university problems that have accumulated at universities over the years. These include, above all, the quality, efficiency and accessibility of teaching and staff, the lack of scholarships for students, the procedure for electing the rector and the academic council, as well as the lack and condition of student residences. At the same time, the inappropriate use of financial resources proved to be an important intra-university factor for the emergence and escalation of the protests in both student movements analysed.

The policies pursued by the state in different directions have an impact on students' problems. This is confirmed by the fact that active students who are members of the studied student movements talked to us about the inequality existing in the state, which is determined by the policies pursued by the state in social, economic or political directions. In the case of the two student movements analysed, equality emerged as the most important value actively shared by the majority of the movement members. In the interviews, the students spoke about the serious social and economic external factors that exist around them and in their families. According to them, the challenges existing in the country are one of the main factors for the emergence of student protests, as they affect students' daily lives or the quality of education. Socio-economic factors in particular are closely linked to the payment of tuition fees and the suspension of student status. In the context of the same challenges in Georgia, housing problems proved to be an important external factor for students. In the case of the "May Student Movement", this was closely related to the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war, which pushed up housing prices, and among the external state factors for the emergence of this movement, the Covid pandemic proved to be one of the current issues. Among the external political factors, especially in the case of "Auditoria 115", the presence of security structures in the university's ruling circles was emphasised.

The analysis of internal and external factors shows that the student movements in Georgia, in particular the "Auditoria 115" and the "May Student Movement", emerged as a reaction to a complex interplay of institutional and socio-political pressures. Internally, grievances related to university management, administrative misconduct and student welfare issues - such as accommodation, examination scheduling and perceived abuse of power - served as key catalysts for mobilisation, with "Auditoria 115" addressing a broader spectrum of institutional criticism than its counterpart. Externally dominant issues such as socio-economic conditions and state education policy emphasise how far-reaching structural problems beyond the university environment significantly influenced the movements' agendas. Taken together, these findings suggest that student activism in Georgia is both deeply embedded in the everyday

realities of academic life and strongly influenced by national political and economic contexts, emphasising the dual nature of student dissent as both locally rooted and politically engaged.

The categorisation of these factors into internal and external factors in our study was based on the opinions of the students themselves, so some factors were mentioned by the students in both cases. For example, the problem of building/renovating student residences was found to be related to both an internal university problem and an external government problem. According to the students, the construction of halls of residence is a responsibility of the university and the state. Also, the format of final exams, within the framework of which the "May Student Movement" protested, was the transition from the method of distance learning to face-to-face classes in the middle of the semester during the pandemic, precisely against the background of the fact that housing prices in Tbilisi had risen and students had difficulty renting flats, therefore the said issue was closely related to the internal problem and the external state challenge. In addition, issues related to student residences and self-governments were the subject of complex discussions, which were among the reasons for the student protests. Against this background, the privileges of student self-governments and their cooperation with the university administration were emphasised, although fundamental studies on this topic are the subject of future research.

In the context of the emergence of Georgian student movements, the article analyses scientific sources and examines the known theoretical foundations of the emergence and development of student movements. When analysing the conceptual foundations, the theory of collective action and identity is closely related to the reasons for the emergence of the student movements mentioned in the article. In the case of Georgia, the specific internal and external factors of organisational formation generally determine the formation of a common collective identity and values of movement members in both movements studied, which in turn affects the transformation, intensification and forms of expression of the protest goals of student movements.

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In-depth interviews

1. In-depth interview №1, member of "May Student Movement", 10/09/2023;
2. In-depth interview №2, member of "May Student Movement", 05/11/2023;
3. In-depth interview №3, former member of "Auditoria 115", 14/10/2023;
4. In-depth interview №4, former member of "May Student Movement", 03/11/2023.
5. In-depth interview №5, former member of "Auditoria 115", 27/11/2023;
6. In-depth interview №6, member of "May Student Movement", 18/10/2023;
7. In-depth interview №7, former member of "May Student Movement", 23/09/2023;
8. In-depth interview №8, former member of "Auditoria 115", 18/12/2023;
9. In-depth interview №9, member of "May Student Movement", 13/03/2024;
10. In-depth interview №10, former member of "Auditoria 115", 14/02/2024.