

# UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

Issue 3 (32), 2023

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## DEMOCRACY

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REVOLUTION  
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## DEMOCRACY

### Editors

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### Publisher:

Published by NGO "Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation" (Ukraine),  
Centre of International Studies (Ukraine), with the financial support of the  
Representation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Ukraine,  
International Renaissance Foundation

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ISSN 2518-7481

500 copies

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# THE ROLE OF VALUES AND MECHANISMS IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES

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*This article delves into the landscape of checks and balances within democratic societies, emphasising their pivotal role in maintaining democratic values and countering emerging challenges. As the foundations of democratic governance face pressures from polarisation and populist trends, the study investigates the weaknesses of the contemporary checks and balances, and explores the optimal strategies for enhancing their effectiveness.*

## **Introduction: The Essence of Checks and Balances**

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary politics, the bedrock of democracy relies on the resilience of checks and balances. This extensive research article traverses the nuanced terrain of Georgia, Ukraine, the US, and Russia, offering a meticulous exploration of the vulnerabilities of these mechanisms in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Through a comprehensive analysis, this piece of research examines the evolution of the system of checks and balances, and its intersection with the preservation of democratic principles such as accountability, the separation of powers, and protection of individual rights. The article probes the complexities surrounding the mechanisms designed to prevent the concentration of power and ensure government accountability.

In the realm of politics and governance, the concept of “checks and balances” holds a central role, in preserving the stability and integrity of democratic systems. This foundational principle is designed to

ensure that power is distributed and shared among different branches of government, preventing any single entity from accumulating excessive authority. Checks and balances serve as a critical safeguard against potential abuses of power, and as a means to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens. This examination delves into the intricate mechanisms through which checks and balances operate, including the separation of powers, the role of an independent judiciary, and the vigilance of civil society and the media.

In an ever-changing world where political dynamics and challenges continue to evolve, understanding the essence of checks and balances is not only a matter of academic interest but a necessity for the sustainability of democratic governance. This exploration invites readers to consider the core of democratic principles, as it sheds light on how checks and balances remain vital to our ongoing pursuit of accountable, transparent, and just societies.

This system, often found at the heart of modern democratic governments, ensures that power is distributed among different

branches and institutions, to prevent any one entity from becoming too powerful. This foundational principle was articulated as early as the 18th century, in the Federalist Papers by Hamilton, Jay and Madison.<sup>1</sup> The distribution of power among institutions was evolved to ensure the resilience of the democratic system, even in the face of adversity, a concept vital to the stability of democratic frameworks globally.

## Contemporary Challenges to Checks and Balances


In the contemporary political landscape, the challenges to checks and balances are multifaceted. Rapid technological advancements, and the rise of social media platforms, have introduced new avenues for misinformation, potentially undermining the accountability and transparency of government actions. Furthermore, the consolidation of power in the executive branch and partisan polarisation can weaken the independence of oversight institutions, making it more difficult for them to perform their intended functions. These and other modern challenges emphasise the need for ongoing innovation and adaptation, in the quest to preserve the essence of checks and balances within democratic societies.

Political polarisation, exemplified in both the United States and Russia, represents a significant challenge to the intricate underpinnings of democratic mechanisms, thereby jeopardising the very foundations upon which these systems are built. This polarisation goes beyond a mere difference of political opinion; it has evolved into a deep-seated and often intransigent divide that undermines the ability of institutions to effectively counterbalance the concentration of power.

Furthermore, the rise of executive overreach in contemporary democracies poses another formidable threat to the delicate equilibrium of power. Leaders in various nations, such as Russia and the United States, have increasingly pushed the boundaries of their authority, blurring the traditional lines that separate executive and legislative powers. This phenomenon not only challenges the principle of the separation of powers but also disrupts the system's ability to maintain a healthy balance, which is a cornerstone of democratic governance.

In addition to these challenges, the erosion of democratic norms further weakens the foundations of these crucial mechanisms. As democratic norms are dismantled or disregarded, the once sacrosanct principles that have long underpinned democratic governance are compromised, leaving the checks and balances inherent to democratic systems susceptible to manipulation and erosion. Such erosion can lead to a situation where the very safeguards designed to prevent an abuse of power become fragile and susceptible to political exploitation.

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In summary, political polarisation, executive overreach, and the erosion of democratic norms represent critical threats to the effective functioning of democratic systems,

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1 Full Text of The Federalist Papers, Library of Congress, 1787-1788, <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>

both in the United States and Russia, and in democracies worldwide. Addressing these challenges is essential for preserving the integrity of democratic institutions and upholding the principles of accountability, representation, and the separation of powers.

## **A Comparative Analysis of Checks and Balances in Georgia and Ukraine**


A closer examination of Georgia and Ukraine, both navigating their unique paths in the post-Soviet era, reveals nuanced strengths and weaknesses in their systems of checks and balances. Both nations have adopted constitutions that establish the separation of powers; however questions remain over their implementation. Additionally, the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight, judicial independence, and the role of civil society and the media differ between the two countries. These disparities can be attributed to historical, cultural, and political factors that have shaped their respective political landscapes. While both Georgia and Ukraine have made strides in strengthening their democratic institutions, they continue to face unique challenges in maintaining a balance of power between their branches of government.

Georgia, with its rapid transformation post-independence, grapples with finding the delicate equilibrium necessary for effective checks and balances. In contrast, Ukraine, navigating the complexities of its post-Soviet identity, showcases successes and areas for improvement in the functioning of its democratic institutions<sup>2</sup>. The implementation of democratic principles has faced hurdles, yet the resilience of the

Georgian people and political leadership has allowed for the establishment of a functional system of checks and balances.

The constitution of Georgia, adopted in 1995, laid the groundwork for the country's democratic institutions. It delineated the separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president of Georgia, as the head of state, holds significant powers, but is counterbalanced by the parliament and the judiciary.<sup>3</sup>

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However, Georgia's political journey has not been without setbacks. The Rose Revolution in 2003 marked a turning point, leading to the ousting of President Eduard Shevardnadze, and the rise of Mikheil Saakashvili. This period witnessed efforts to strengthen the country's democratic institutions, including reforms to enhance judicial independence and parliamentary oversight. Despite progress, challenges persist. Political polarisation, a legacy of the post-Soviet era, continues to influence Georgian politics. The concentration of power in the executive branch, though tempered compared to the past, raises concerns about the effectiveness of the checks and balances. Additionally, issues such as corruption and media freedom impact the overall health of the democratic system.

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2 Giorgi Badridze, Georgia and Putin's Russia: The Practical Art of Sustaining Independence, GFSIS, *bout de papier* Vol. 28, No. 2, 2014, <https://gfsis.org.ge/files/library/pdf/English-2457.pdf>


3 The Constitution of Georgia, *Legislative Herald of Georgia*, 24.08.1995, <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=36>

Ukraine's constitution outlines a clear separation of powers. However, Ukraine has seen significant shifts in the balance of power, including due to the period of martial law. While parliamentary oversight and judicial independence have been topics of reform and debate, the country's complex political history have played a role in shaping its approach to checks and balances. The nation boasted a diverse civil society and media landscape, with influential oligarchic interests in the mix, before the Russian invasion of 2022. Ukraine's efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions are ongoing, reflecting the intricate challenges it faces in establishing a balanced system of governance.<sup>4</sup>

Ukraine's journey towards a robust system of checks and balances is shaped by its post-Soviet identity and geopolitical challenges. The Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014 reflect the Ukrainian people's aspirations for democratic governance, and for the establishment of effective checks and balances. The constitution of Ukraine<sup>5</sup>, adopted in 1996 and amended later, defines the country's political structure. It outlines the separation of powers between the president, parliament, and the judiciary. The president, as the head of state, is elected through popular vote, and is intended to work in tandem with the parliament and the cabinet of ministers. Ukraine's political landscape has been marked by a struggle for power between these institutions. The presidency, at times, has wielded considerable power, leading to concerns about the concentration of authority in one

person. The Orange Revolution, a series of protests in response to allegations of electoral fraud in the 2004 presidential election, underscored the Ukrainian people's commitment to democratic values.<sup>6</sup>

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***While both Georgia and Ukraine have made strides in strengthening their democratic institutions, they continue to face unique challenges in maintaining a balance of power between their branches of government***

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Subsequent constitutional reforms aimed to enhance the role of parliament and curtail the powers of the president. Despite these efforts, challenges persist. The geopolitical tug-of-war, economic struggles, and issues of corruption continue to impact the effectiveness of checks and balances in Ukraine.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening Checks and Balances**

Drawing from successful adaptations worldwide, some recommendations emerge as crucial pillars for fortifying checks and balances. Case studies from established democracies, notably in Scandinavia, illustrate innovative approaches. The Nordic countries, known for their robust democratic institutions, provide valuable insights into the adaptability and evolution of these mechanisms.<sup>7</sup>

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4 Eugene Rumer, Richard Sokolsky, Putin's War Against Ukraine and the Balance of Power in Europe, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11.04.2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/04/11/putin-s-war-against-ukraine-and-balance-of-power-in-europe-pub-86832>

5 The Constitution of Ukraine, 1996, UNHCR, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/44a280124.pdf>

6 Government and society. Ukraine, Britannica, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/Government-and-society>

7 Pippa Norris, Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited, Cambridge University Press, 2011, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/democratic-deficit/C1A2A5421BBD8F96899270619407405A>



The following proposed reforms for Georgia and Ukraine consider their unique contexts, echoing the importance of local adaptation. These recommendations encompass constitutional reforms, strengthening judicial independence, and enhancing legislative oversight. They draw from the experiences of countries that have successfully navigated challenges to their checks and balances systems.

The proposed reforms for Georgia include:

1. **Enhancing Judicial Independence:** Strengthening the independence of the judiciary is paramount. Establishing mechanisms to insulate judges from political influence ensures the judiciary's ability to act as a check on the executive and legislative branches.

2. **Media Freedom and Information Access:** A vibrant and independent media landscape is essential for fostering an informed citizenry. Measures to protect journalists, promote media diversity, and ensure access to information contribute to a healthy democracy.

3. **Anti-Corruption Measures:** Addressing corruption at all levels is crucial for building public trust and ensuring the effective functioning of democratic institutions. Implementing comprehensive anti-corruption measures, including transparent financial disclosure for public officials, is vital.

4. **Electoral Reform:** Reviewing and improving the electoral system can mitigate issues of political polarisation. Consideration of proportional representation and measures to empower minority voices contribute to a more inclusive political landscape.

The proposed reforms for Ukraine include:


1. **Strengthening Parliamentary Oversight:** Empowering the parliament as a robust check on executive power is essential.

Measures to enhance parliamentary oversight, including thorough scrutiny of executive actions and policies, contribute to a more balanced system.

2. **Constitutional Clarity:** Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each branch of government, especially in times of crisis, fosters stability. Ensuring that the constitution is a dynamic document capable of addressing contemporary challenges is crucial.

3. **Economic Reforms:** Addressing economic challenges is integral to political stability. Implementing reforms that promote economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction contributes to a stable environment for democratic institutions to thrive in.

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4. **Civil Society Engagement:** Fostering a vibrant civil society is instrumental in holding the government accountable. Supporting and protecting civil society organisations, including those focused on human rights, democracy, and good governance, strengthens the overall democratic fabric.

## **Conclusion: A Blueprint for Democratic Governance in the 21st Century**

In conclusion, as democracies strive for equilibrium, lessons from this research paper can illuminate possible pathways. Empowering citizens, strengthening

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ANALYTICA

Issue 3 (32), 2023

ISSN 2518-7481