

Misuse of administrative resources in Georgian elections: Winning elections before the election day

Dolidze Nino

Ilia State University, Master of Public Administration Program, Tbilisi, Georgia

Abashidze Archil

Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

Nino Tsverava

Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia

Abstract: Developing democracies, affected by conflicts, are characterized by polarization and the desire of the government to maintain power. This includes politicization of the public sector and elections, serving one political force and establishing a "pseudo-democratic" regime. Power sharing is the only force to support democratic system, - including independent public institutions and constitutional protection of civil rights (Graham et al, 2017);

Use of administrative resources for party purposes, a form of corruption that contributes to the decay of local political culture and decreases citizens' trust in democracy, is often observed. For Georgia, as a young democracy with a history of violent elections, a civil war, revolutions, ethnic conflicts, and only one case of peaceful transfer of power, this is an existential issue. Georgia represents a "pseudo-democratic" regime, where "the existence of formally democratic institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, masks ... the reality of authoritarian domination" (Diamond, 2002). Despite efforts of optimization since 2004, the public sector still is one of the largest employers. State budget funds paid for the bureaucratic apparatus are largely socially targeted, which is often used for manipulations in statistics in order to achieve political goals and gain the desired number of votes. The vicious practice of using administrative resources goes beyond voting on election day (EC 2021, OSCE/ODIHR 2021, HRW 2021).

Not surprisingly, one of the recommendations of the EC states: "further improve the electoral framework, addressing all shortcomings identified by OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe/Venice Commission in these processes" (EC, 2022).

Way identifies three variables to explain how competitive authoritarian regimes function: a) incumbent capacity, b) opposition unity and strength, and c) international context (Way, 2015). Incumbent capacity includes three dimensions: elite cohesion, coercive capacity and electoral capacity. This latter is the government's ability to succeed in elections through a combination of voter mobilization and fraud.

Polarization of the political elites is typical for hybrid regimes and has played a role in hindering "the consolidation of presidential autocracy by creating ... an informal system of checks and balances" (Riabchuk, 2020).

The paper focuses on the misuse of administrative resources, as one of the levers for maintaining political power. The data are collected from sub-agencies in ten municipalities of Georgia.

The research reveals common trends, such as vague recruitment practices, unsubstantiated and excessive numbers of employees contracted as "assistants", "deputies" and "specialists", hired with violation of regulations on redistribution of civil servants and labor contractors, and of auxiliary employees. The research shows, that not only the jobs are artificially created, but also often the purpose and the functions of the agencies are not clear. Obviously, they are established to create jobs for the government supporters, and contribute to the further politicization of public sector.