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Anatomy of Competitive Authoritarianism (2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia)

Abstract

There is discussed the results of Presidential elections of 2018 year in Georgia on the bases of Anatomy of Competitive Authoritarianism. In particular, there are shown two important aspects of the sense of competitive authoritarianism: Inequality of government and opposition in terms of attracting election finance and an unsuccessful attempt to develop a document reflecting the ethical principles of behavior of election subjects during the election campaign.

The article is prepared on the basis of electronic and printed media materials regarding the election campaign finances, as well as interviews with people involved in development of the ethical principles presidential candidates behavior.

Keywords: Georgia, Competitive Authoritarianism, Elections, Democratization.

1. Introduction

The Freedom House's reports of 2020 "Freedom in the World" Georgia is scored 61 out of maximum 100, which makes him to fall within the category of the "partially free" countries. Besides, during the last years the standing of Georgia in the list worsened continuously: in 2019 it got 63, in 2018 – 64 scores. In addition, in the international democracy indices of the Economist, Georgia is mostly listed among the list of countries which are termed as the hybrid-authoritarian group and its democracy score (on the range from 0 to 10) is gradually worsening as well: in 2019 – 5.42, in 2018 – 5.51 and in 2017 – 5.93.

Georgia is remaining as the country of the hybrid regime. The hybrid regime entangles characters of the democracy and authoritarianism and different significantly according to the correlation of these factors: some of them might be closer to democracy, while others could shift towards autocracy. The hybrid regime is not the phase of democracy, rather it is a separate form of a political regime, with its peculiar characteristic and mode of functioning. In this type of regime there might be the decrease of the elements of democracy or there might be shift to democracy.

The article analysis the presidential elections of 2018 in Georgia on the bases of the theory of competitive authoritarianism. These types of regime demonstrate their core aspects during the elections. The regime adheres to democratic standards until it is threatened by the lose of power. The presidential elections of 2018 in Georgia is a clear testimony to this statement. As the holding of the second round of elections became apparent, as different from the first round, illegal methods for ensuring the victory of the presidential nominee favored by the government were applied.

Through the reflection on the new empirical materials, the present article attests various aspects of the competitive authoritarian theories and carries out conclusion regarding obstacles of conducting not only competitive, but also fair elections.

2. Theory

Georgia, in terms of democratic transition, currently fits one of the types of hybrid regime profile countries, which is known as competitive authoritarianism. When reflecting on its concept, we rely on the works of Diamond, Morlino, Menocal, Fritz, Rakner, Kassan on the

essence, origin and development of competitive authoritarianism. Besides, we use the works of Jones, Lazarus and Karoter that specifically concern Georgia and its ruling regimes established after the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹

Although according to the theory of authoritarianism such regime is authoritarian indeed, it is trying to imitate democracy to the fullest extent. Opposition, which is tolerated, can access mass media, freedom of speech and real competition during elections do exist and many democratic standards are being met, but by and large, elections are conducted unfairly and the ruling political party is making strong efforts aiming at flawing elections as soon as it feels the danger of losing the power, abusing the use of state resources to the benefit of the political force in power.

The nature of competitive authoritarian governance in the country was clearly revealed during 2018 Presidential elections, when it became necessary to hold the second round. The first (October 28) and the second rounds (November 28) of elections differed considerably. The first round, despite some violations, was conducted more fairly with regard to meeting democratic standards but as soon as the real threat of defeat of the government -supported candidate, Salome Zourabishvili became evident, the government resorted to various forms of electoral fraud.

In our opinion, the essence of competitive authoritarianism during elections is clearly expressed in unequal financing of government and opposition candidates, as well as in abortive attempts of elaborating Code of Ethical Conduct and its enforcement.

Different methods of electoral fraud, such as bribing or intimidating voters, using fake ballots and so on can be disputed endlessly but the government denies the above facts and what is more, procrastinates the investigation into the above facts. As for raising legal funds for the electorate campaign, it is an open process and is carried out officially.

Code of Ethical Conduct of electoral subjects defines the principles that guarantee fair elections but is problematic to follow them under the given competitive authoritarian regime.

¹Larry J. Diamond. 2002. "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes." *Journal of Democracy* 13:2(Spring): 21-35

Joel Lazarus. 2010. "Neo-liberal State Building and Western 'Democracy Promotion': the case of Georgia." Paper presented at the Seventh Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Stockholm, September 9-11, At <http://georgica.tsu.edu.ge/?p=712> , accessed 03.2019.

The article addressed the above two issues that emerged during 2018 Presidential elections.

The article is prepared on the basis of electronic and printed media materials regarding the election campaign finances, as well as interviews with people involved in development of the ethical principles presidential candidates behavior. The interviews were conducted with: Shalva Tskhakaia (Representative of the Embassy of Switzerland during the develop process of the document of ethical rules); Zurab Khrikadze(Representative of the Central Election Comission); Davit Usupashvili(Development Movement); Davit Bakradze(European Georgia); Levan Bejashvili(United National Movement); Irakli kiknavelidze(European Georgia).

3. Discussion

3.1. 2018 Presidential Elections in Georgia

According to the Constitution of Georgia amended in 2010, the country became the Parliamentary Republic. Under 2017 Constitution, the President is to be elected by the Parliament. Therefore, in 2018, National Presidential elections were held for the last time in Georgia (certainly, if the Constitution is not amended again). Despite the fact that the power of the President is significantly reduced by the Constitution, presidential race was rather tough. The victory of an opposition candidate in Presidential elections would mean weakening “Georgian Dream” positions before 2020 Parliamentary elections and presumably lead to unification of opposition forces, who would demand on calling early Parliamentary elections in 2019.

The ruling politicalparty, “Georgian Dream”, did not nominate their candidate for the Presidency but they supported an independent candidate, Salome Zourabishvili and employed all possible methods to achieve the victory. However, the opposition was traditionally fragmented and could not agree on a common candidate.

25 candidates were registered in 2018 Presidential elections (19 out of them were nominated by political parties, while 6 others by an initiative group).² Most candidates were almost unknown to the public and had no chances of winning. Table N1 below shows the results of candidates who received more than 1% of votes in the first round of elections.

Table N1

Candidate	Party	First Round	Second round November 28, 2018			
		October 28, 2018				
		Votes	%	Votes	%	
Salome Zourabishvili	Independent	615,572	38.64	1,147,625	59.52	
Grigol Vashadze	United National Movement	601,224	37.74	780,635	40.48	
Davit Bakradze	European Georgia	174,849	10.97			
Shalva Natelashvili	Labour Party of Georgia	59,651	3.74			
Davit Usupashvili	Development Movement	36,037	2.26			
Zurab Japaridze	Girchi	36,034	2.26			

² October 28, 2018 Presidential Election of Georgia Registered 25 candidates at <http://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/114936-2018-tslis-28-oqtombris-archevnebisvis-25-prezidentobis-kandidatia-registrirbuli>, accessed 30.01.2020

Kakha Kukava	Free Georgia	21,186	1.33	
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Competitive character of Presidential elections was expressed in the fact that it became necessary to hold the second round and two opposition candidates – Grigol Vashadze and Davit Bakradze severely competed against the government-supported candidate - Salome Zourabishvili. It must be noted that these opposition candidates represented the former political party “National Movement” and the political force which had seceded from it – “European Georgia”. Both candidates won more votes in total than the candidate supported by the government. According to the results of the first round, Salome Zourabishvili defeated Grigol Vashadze, the candidate of the “National Movement” by about 14 000 votes, which caused a great concern among the “Georgian Dream”. As a result, compared with the first round, the pre-election period of the second round of Presidential elections was characterized with even more polarization and quite obvious negative campaign.³Judging by the facts provided in the reports of election observers, the following violations took place:

Types of Violations	Facts of violations
Incidents of abuse	Before the first round of elections almost no facts of physical confrontation and violence were reported. Although many such facts took place before the second round.
Pressure/threat	Before the second round, there were many incidents of placing pressure on the constituents, mostly on representatives of municipalities, public service, private sector, socially vulnerable groups and ex-convicts. They had been urged to vote for Salome Zourabishvili or threatened for supporting Grigol Vashadze. Employees of budgetary organizations were threatened that

³Evaluation of the pre-election environment of the 2018 presidential runoff, At <https://www.transparency.ge/ge/post/2018-clis-saprezidento-archevnebis-meore-turis-cinasaarchevno-garemos-shepaseba> accessed 20.02.2020.

	they would lose their jobs.
Bribing constituents	There were numerous facts of assumed bribing of constituent before the second round. The voters were offered money or food products in exchange for voting for Zourabishvili. To gain the constituents' favor, Georgian government decided to acquit the debts for 600 thousand citizens which amounted to 1,5 billion GEL.
The use of administrative resources	<p>After the first round, central and local governmental bodies initiated various social and infrastructural projects. They raised such issues as increase of salaries, social benefits, housing, improvement of infrastructure, the issues that had never been mentioned before the first round.</p> <p>A few days before the second round some alleged facts of ID forgery took place.</p>

3.2. Unequal financing of government and opposition Presidency candidates

Complying with the current electoral legislation, the candidates running for presidency may be financed by the following sources: 1. State funding (which implies the direct sums earmarked from the state budget, indirect funding and reimbursement of certain expenses); 2. Dues; 3. Donations (maximum 60 000 GEL from a physical person and 120 000 from a legal entity); 4. Annual income from campaign materials, lectures, exhibitions and other public events, publishing and other activities required by Charter; 5 Bank loan.

In Georgian reality, opposition candidates get the main sources of financing from the budget, whereas for government-supported candidate - from donations. (Table N 2.)

Table N2

Candidate	Budget	Donation
Salome Zourabishvili	6.395.983	5.395.983
Grigol Vashadze	1.471.939	718.767

Davit Bakradze	1.298.850	616.283
Davit Usupashvili	587.074	35.490
Shalva Natelashvili	544.738	3.000

During 2018 presidential elections Salome Zourabishvili, running with the support of the government, was granted a privileged position due to the raised amount of funds. The finances raised for her electoral campaign significantly exceeded the funding of other candidates. It is worth noting that Salome Zourabishvili did not get any state funding. But she got a loan in the amount of 1 million GEL.

Such privilege of the government candidate is ensured by abundant donations of private persons and especially businesses. Businesses normally finance government candidates. Opposition views it as a pressure on private sector; however, the government representatives deny this accusation. It is not only about pressure we can speak about, since in the period of elections the government gets other financial supports from businesses. Namely, the business people supporting the government regularly win the tenders in the country announced by the government.

The sum in the amount of 13 839 319 GEL in total was spent for election purposes in the period between August 1, 2018 and October 28, which was unevenly distributed between presidential candidates. (Table N 3)

Table N3

Candidate	Total amount of money, spent during the elections	Percentage in whole amount of money	Average price of one vote per voter
Salome Zourabishvili	6.351.949	45,89%	6.69GEL
Grigol Vashadze	1.133.536	8,19%	2.47GEL
Davit Bakradze	1.026.784	7,42%	5.04GEL
Davit Usupashvili	550.863	3,98%	5.22GEL

Shalva Natelashvili	200.731	1,45%	3.17GEL
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To be more specific, the financing in the second round of both candidates amounted to 7 047 160 GEL, out of which 5 513 493 GEL was spent on the campaign of Salome Zourabishvili and only 1 533 493 GEL on to Grigol Vashadze's. As we have mentioned above, Zourabishvili did not get any state funding and the whole sum came from donations, most of which she received in cash.

Between the rounds, 25 persons transferred more than 60 000 GEL to Zourabishvili. There were cases when the companies and their stakeholders transferred the sums separately. Before the second round, "Fund Cartu", founded by the "Georgian Dream" leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili and the high ranking authorities of the executive power announced debt cancellation program, according to which the state and "Fund Cartu" would relieve 600 000 Georgian citizens on the black list of their financial obligations, who owed the banks up to 2 000 GEL. The program was viewed by the most as bribing constituents.

Table N4

	Amount of money, received before the second round	The average amount of money, spent on one voter
Salome Zourabishvili	5.513.493	90.86Gel
Grigol Vashadze	1.533.667	1Gel

Existence of such inequality in terms of financial resources cannot help but take a toll on the constituents' behavior and the elections held under the given circumstances do not reflect their real attitude. We need to also take into consideration that many methods for rigging the elections that have been mentioned by observers require significant financial resources, which cannot be mobilized in legal ways and they are not recorded in official pre-election expenses.

3.3. Working on the document defining ethical principles of presidential candidates

Central Election Commission initiated the development of the document defining ethical principles of conduct of presidential candidates before 2018 Presidential elections,⁴ which took place on October 28 in Georgia. CEC turned to the Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia to help prepare the document. Presidential candidates considered the Swiss Embassy the initiator of the document.⁵ Since the development of previous Codes of Ethics before the Parliamentary elections failed to succeed having little time left before the Presidential elections, the Embassy of Switzerland and the Central Election Commission agreed to offer the candidates the Code providing general principles, without specifying the details, as it would have been easier to reach a consensus.⁶

The attitudes of presidential candidates towards the document defining the principles of ethical conduct were being studied in August 2018, since in the case of negative feedback it would make no sense. The representative of the Swiss Embassy (Shalva Tskhakaia) and a member of the Central Election Commission conducted the survey. They met presidential candidates or their representatives separately.⁷ 11 meetings were held in all.

The registration was still going on at that period. Most of the registered candidates were actually unfamiliar to the public and therefore, had no chances to win the elections. Consequently, it was arguable whether the participation of these candidates in the process of preparation of ethical principles was reasonable or not, but since each candidate was registered legally and in compliance with the required procedure, it would have been discrimination to dismiss any of them.⁸

In early September, all candidates agreed to sign the document on Ethical Principles of Conduct and emphasized the necessity of creating such document. Agreement of candidates

⁴ Shalva Tskhakaia. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 18

⁵ Levan Bejashvili. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 15

Davit Bakradze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 12

Irakli Kiknavelidze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, December 13

Davit Usupashvili. 2019. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, February 18

⁶ Shalva Tskhakaia. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 18

Zurab Khrikadze. 2019. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, January 19

⁷ Levan Bejashvili. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 15

Davit Bakradze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 12

Irakli Kiknavelidze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, December 13

⁸ Levan Bejashvili. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 15

Davit Bakradze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 12

Irakli Kiknavelidze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, December 13

served the basis for its further development. The work on the wording of the document on ethical principles started with the involvement of representatives of all major parties.⁹ The document was of such general character that it was hard to imagine that any candidate would refuse to sign it. As Tamar Zhvania, the chairperson of the Central Election Commission stated, the document would facilitate the election process, serve the development of electoral culture and promote the respect to the country and constituents.

The document defining the basic principles of ethical conduct sets out the rules that should be followed in order to ensure peaceful environment during elections and enhancement of political culture. Signatories of the document agreed to:

- Respect and recognize the rule of law, abide by the Georgian Constitution, legislation, principles of democratic governance and the interests of the society.
- Conduct activities without any discrimination based on ethnic, religious, gender or other affiliations;
- Refuse to use any hate speech, or statements that involve xenophobia or intimidation;
- Encourage peaceful campaign environment, not act violently and call on violence;
- Abstain from obstruction of campaign events and dissemination of campaign materials of other contestants;
- Abstain from deliberate dissemination of false information about the candidates;
- Conduct inclusive election campaign to enable women, youth and the representatives of vulnerable groups to take equal part;
- Refrain from using the administrative resources, not make any attempts of bribing or intimidating voters;

⁹Shalva Tskhakaia. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 18

- Hold debates on the subject matter, programs and plans and refrain from personal abuse.¹⁰

Part of the above listed principles are also provided in the Electoral Code (Chapter 6 of the Electoral Code of Georgia, regulating pre-election campaigns) and their violation is prohibited by law,¹¹ but regarding the conduct of fair elections, Ethical Principles and voluntary adherence to them, may significantly improve the electoral environment.

Lukas Beglinger, Ambassador of Switzerland to Georgia, stated that the document on Ethical Principles is an important step forward on the way of democratic development, since it allows to change political culture, which in its turn, will contribute to conducting election campaign oriented at holding debates and discussions instead of confronting opponents.¹²

Despite the fact that all presidential candidates had given their consent in advance and agreed to sign the document on Ethical Principles, only 22 signed it eventually. Three candidates, Salome Zourabishvili, Shalva Natelashvili and Otar Meunargia did not sign the above document.

The representative of the Swiss Embassy, Shava Tskhakaia noted that they had preliminary meetings with election teams of Salome Zourabishvili and Shalva Natelashvili. There were no remarks or any adverse opinions regarding the wording of the document. Consequently, they expressed their wish to sign the document, but ultimately refused to join the initiative.¹³ Opposition candidates who refused to sign the document did it out of protest as in their opinion, the government would violate these principles anyway. However, that the candidate, supported by the government, did not sign the document was quite an extraordinary fact, which, for some reason, had been ignored during pre-election period.

¹⁰Presentation of the “Ethical Principles” for the Candidates Participating in October, 2018 Presidential Election At, <http://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/115188-2018-tslis-28-oqtombris-saprezidento-archevnebshi-monatsile-kandidatebis-etikis-printsipebis-prezentatsia> accessed 9.02.2020

¹¹According to the article 47 of election code of Georgia in case of bribery of voters the registration of election subject will be cancelled by the court decision. The usage of Budgetary funds, official positions for election purposes is forbidden by the article 49. Propaganda of violence and violent acts, provoke of religion and ethnic hatred is forbidden by the article 45.

¹²Presentation of the “Ethical Principles” for the Candidates Participating in October, 2018 Presidential Election At <http://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/115188-2018-tslis-28-oqtombris-saprezidento-archevnebshi-monatsile-kandidatebis-etikis-printsipebis-prezentatsia> accessed 9.02.2020

¹³Shalva Tskhakaia. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 18

Along with signing the document on Ethical Principles of Conduct, presidential candidates expressed skeptical attitude to the implementation and compliance with the principles offered and specified in the document in their private conversations. They considered that real electoral process would be far different from the declared principles. After the elections were over, they mentioned that conducting ethical election campaign did fail again.

They listed the reasons for the failure as well. The most important among them was voiced by one of the candidates: “Under the existing political culture, Ethical Codes are being ignored by politicians, as well as society and journalists. The society is less demanding towards the facts of violations of ethical conduct so far and given the circumstances, politicians do not care about following ethical principles.”¹⁴

4. Conclusion

Competitive authoritarianism in pre-election periods is clearly revealed in unequal financing of electoral subjects, which is an important factor for retaining governmental positions of the existing ruling group.

One of the conditions for transition from competitive authoritarianism to electoral democracy should be creating more or less equal opportunities. In this regard, it is important to maintain and improve the regulations on state financing of electoral subjects. Without it, the opposition in fact will stay without financing. Likewise, it is necessary to regulate the rules on donations by reducing their limit established by the current law to the maximum possible extent.

Under competitive authoritarianism the unfairness of elections is largely conditioned by the character of elections, which are conducted with numerous attempts of violations, intimidation, violence, bribing and discrediting. Consequently it leads not only to the violation of electoral law but in the first place to the failure to conform with principles of ethical conduct.

As for the document of pre-election Code of Ethics, it is necessary to start working on it well in advance rather than directly before the elections, as it usually happened in the past, in

¹⁴ Davit Bakradze. 2018. Interviewed by Natia Zedginidze, Tbilisi, Georgia, November 12

order to agree on the standards of ethical principles and attract the attention of public and media to the process.

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