Election Campaigning: The Case of Georgia

Giorgi Melikidze

Institute of Political Sciences,
Ilia State University
Kakutsa Cholokashvili Ave. 3/5
Tbilisi 0162, Georgia
Email: giorgimelikidze88@gmail.com

Abstract: Preparing for elections during election campaigning has been topical in every era. In the 19th century, new methods for carrying out election campaigns were developed in the United States. The Americanization of election campaigns is characterized by political personalization, the special role of the media in a pre-election period, brittle ideological grounds and particular specialization of the political campaign. A plethora of different concepts have been coined to explain this process, including 'Americanization' and 'professionalization'. As the US is identified as the origin of election campaigning trends, these assumed convergences came to be known in academic writing as 'Americanization'. Election campaigning was in need of professionals hired to navigate the campaign's strategy. With the emergence of campaign advisors, the term 'professionalization' was introduced.

In Georgia, the first steps on the way to statehood were made at the beginning of the 1990s, following the 70 years of Soviet rule. In post-Soviet Georgia, multiparty and competitive elections enabled political parties to use foreign experience in political campaigning. The goal of the present article is to define the existing election campaign model in Georgia, and especially, to examine the tendencies of Americanization in the election campaigns in Georgia in the period of 1990–2016. According to the research hypothesis, the weak institutionalization of the party system creates a favorable ground for the Americanization of political campaigning. In the 1990s, the weak representativeness of Georgian parties played an important role in political campaigning since the very beginning. In the research process, the characteristics of political campaigns in post-Soviet Georgia were analyzed.

This study makes use of qualitative research methods, including: (a) expert interviews with political consultants; (b) in-depth interviews with representatives of political parties; and (c) in-depth interviews with the selected electorate. Qualitative research methods were chosen for the work for the purpose of understanding the tendencies of the Americanization of election campaigning in Georgia from the respondents' perspective. Qualitative methods are more explicit and descriptive, and by gathering responses like these, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

Keywords: *Americanization, election campaigning, Georgia, post-Soviet countries*

1. Introduction

Already thirty years have passed since Georgia went through a democratic transition in a state of instability and cataclysms. In the first half of the 1990s, weak state institutions and a semi-authoritarian regime were the main abstract factors in the country's democratization process. Moreover, the country had to move from the Soviet past in the context of the heaviest socio-economical and armed conflicts. Georgia is now joining the ranks of the hybrid countries whose major challenges are the fair competition of a political government, an unconstitutional change of government and the weak institutionalization of the party system (Chochia & Popjanovski, 2016).

The majority of Western European parties are based on a solid ideological basis and representation of electoral interests. In post-Soviet democracies, political parties are characterized by weak organization and political personalization, whereas politicians have become the main anchor of interpretation and evaluation of the political process. Moreover, in these countries, the fragile ideological grounds of the political parties have shaped the unique nature of election campaigning. In post-Soviet Georgia, the weak institutionalization of the party system has played a determining role in the transformation of political campaigning. The overall realization in most studies (Farrel, 1996; Farrel, Kolody & Medvic, 2001; Mancini, 1999; Norris, 2004; Swanson & Mancini, 1996; Plasser & Plasser, 2002) is that recent decades have seen a process of change and convergence in contemporary styles of campaigning in the established and developing democracies.

Only a few studies have concentrated on political campaigning in Georgia. This study seeks to fill one of the gaps in the literature on political campaigning in Georgia, and especially, to define the existing election campaign model in the country. The article focuses on the process of Americanization of election campaigns in Georgia from 1990 to 2016 and poses the main research question: How does the institutionalization of party system influence the national election campaign model in Georgia?

In Georgia, as in other post-Soviet democracies, the Americanization process of election campaigning has been actively implemented. It is worth noting that the personalization of politics and the fragile ideological and structural basis of the Georgian party system were most characteristic of the first years of independence. At the initial stage in post-Soviet Georgia, the main task of the parties was to mobilize large masses for demonstration. However, the strengthening of mass media and media technologies played a decisive role in the transformation of political campaigning. Mediatization is a theory which argues that the media shapes the processes of political communication as well as the society in which this communication takes place. In Georgia, mediatization of politics was carried out gradually and reached its peak during the Rose Revolution (Kerikmäe *et al.*, 2014; Chochia & Kerikmäe, 2018).

Zviad Gamsakhurdia's short period of rule does not allow a comprehensive analysis of political campaigning in Georgia. Significant prerequisites for the transformation of election campaigning emerged during Eduard Shevardnadze's presidency. For the purpose of this research, Shevardnadze's presidency could be divided into two stages in terms of professionalization of election campaigning: the first stage covers the first half of the 1990s and could be called the initial stage, and the second stage lasted from the second half of the 1990s up to 2003 and could be called the transitional period. The Americanization of political campaigning has been actively implemented after the Rose Revolution. In the last years, the role of media in political processes has significantly increased, and modern technologies have been actively used in political communication.

To complete the picture and to present it from the angle of this research, the Americanization tendencies of election campaigning in Georgia from 1990 to 2016 should be examined. The proposed hypothesis is that the weak institutionalization of the party system creates a favorable incentive for the Americanization of election campaigning. To verify this, the following questions should be answered: (1) How does the party system

institutionalization affect election campaigning in Georgia; (2) In what features is the evolution of election campaigning shown. To try to answer these questions, this research aims to explore them through the example of Georgia's 1990–2016 parliamentary elections. One of the ways to obtain this information was to carry out qualitative interviews.

The motivation for conducting this research came from learning that similar campaigning trends were occurring in countries around the world despite their specific histories and political landscape. In addition, since this topic is largely under-researched in Georgia, this study hopes to contribute to the academic understanding of advances in campaigning in such a context.

2. Literature review

Recently, there has been a surge of interest in the research of political campaigns in political sciences (Plasser & Plasser, 2002). According to the opinion of various authors, the Americanization of political campaigns reached its peak in the “colored revolutions” of the countries where the party system is characterized as having weak institutionalization (Anable, 2006, pp. 7–43; Dobbs, 2000; MacKinnon, 2007; Sussman, 2006, pp. 15–29; Sussman & Krader, 2008, pp. 91–112). In search of criteria for the relevant evaluation of the institutionalism of party system, I focused on the works of Mainwaring, Scully and Torcal (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Mainwaring, 1999; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2005).

Earlier authors, Schiller and Boyd-Barrett, have discussed Americanization as a result of American cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1968; Boyd-Barrett, 1977). Such a radical approach has later changed. It became clear that Americanization did not mean that this process has always and everywhere occurred with the same effects and intensity (Swanson & Mancini, 1996, p. 6). Negrine and Papathanassopoulos have argued that a transformation of a political campaign is mostly conditioned by the ongoing (political, media and social) processes in the country (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996, p. 59). The “import–export” model of election campaign presented by Norris indicates that the Americanization process “implies loans of those campaign technologies, which should be more useful” (Norris, 2004, p. 1).

The term Americanization has also been criticized. Holtz-Bacha argues that it should be replaced by modernization, which is more focused on

professionalism and endogenous changes (Holtz-Bacha, 2004, p. 15). Scammell replaces Americanization with globalization and considers that its driving factors are the mass media and the organizational structures of parties (Scammell, 1998, p. 15). Even though the authors criticize the term Americanization, both acknowledge the importance of the experience accumulated in the US during the transformation process of political campaigning. Thus, we can say that the term 'Americanization' implies the mass spread of American electoral technologies, also the modernization of political campaigns and professionalism.

We can outline two models of Americanization in terms of the transformation of political campaigns: diffusion, which discusses transformation as a result of imitation and external influence, and modernization, which considers Americanization a result of endogenous processes (Plasser & Plasser, 2002). There are different considerations which are contrary to the two radical approaches mentioned. Hallin and Mancini use the term modernization to express a deeper meaning (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 40), which is a result of ongoing changes in society and the media system (Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 16) and communication transition (Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 69). Changes in political communication must not be considered as changes inside society (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28), and it is important to take also external factors into consideration. In Plasser and Plasser (2002) we encounter the view by Blumler and Gurevitch that "local campaign practices may be filled by receiving, selection and adaptation of American campaign practices" (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001 in Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 20), but the mentioned process may be carried out through the standardization or hybridization of campaign practices (Plasser & Plasser, 2002, p. 19). This research studies the causal factors of Americanization/standardization.

3. Research methodology and theoretical framework

The goal of the article is to examine the tendencies of Americanization of election campaigns in Georgia from 1990 to 2016 and, specifically, to determine how the transformation of election campaigning takes place. This study draws on a dataset of semi-structured interviews with political parties, representatives of political parties and the selected electorate. A purposive sampling technique was employed in the selection of respondents. For the semi-structured discussions, the interviewer worked through a list of

discussion points, which provided a broader view for guiding the interview. The transcripts from the interviews were then analyzed. The strategy of the election campaign of qualified subjects elected from the acting political parties in Georgia was chosen as the object of research, which accurately reflects the transformation model of political campaigning.

The theoretical framework of the research is the theory of Americanization/modernization. In accordance with the mentioned theory, the Americanization process is not progressing according to similar methods, results and intensity always and everywhere (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). The Americanization process is related to the political and communication transformations in the country. The starting point of the mentioned theory is that the structural changes on the macro level (mass media, technologies, party system, and social structures (public institutions and relationships)) cause appropriate action on the micro level (parties, candidates and journalists). The ongoing changes in the new democracies create a favorable basis and the “adaptation and introduction of experience of American election campaign” is successfully implemented (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001), which is known as Americanization/standardization. The theory for the evaluation of Americanization in political campaigning is represented in the following criteria: (a) mediatization; (b) focusing on the research of public opinion; (c) professionalization; in addition to the mentioned criteria, considering the specific case of Georgia, it is necessary to add another one—(d) the political instrumentalization of television.

Swanson and Mancini (1996) consider mediatization as a key element of Americanization. Plasser thinks that one of the important reasons of mediatization is the fact that television is the major transmitter of information (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). The focus of television on the personalities of political leaders and how it uses those personalities to frame political issues and events have several explanations. The most obvious is the way in which television presents information to its viewers. Because of the way in which it communicates information through visual images, it is easier for television to disseminate information through a familiar personality rather than through an abstract institution.

In the Americanization process of election campaigns, the research of public opinion is of crucial importance. When indicating its crucial importance, Swanson and Mancini imply a weakened ideological connection between parties and citizens (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). The situation in which everything is done in order to attract voters is often referred to

as a comprehensive policy (Swanson, 2005). The manufacturers of election campaign borrowed concentration strategy of voters' identification and campaign resources from marketing (Swanson, 2005).

Once it became clear that election campaigns implied mediatization and personalization instead of ideological confrontation, the issue of professionalization of election campaigning became urgent. Political campaigns have acquired a more "scientific" nature (Swanson & Mancini, 1996). For election campaigns, the assistance of specialists/consultants became necessary, which is yet another characteristic feature of Americanization.

The transformation of political campaigns is caused by the ongoing transformations inside the country as well as the ongoing processes in the situation of globalization. This acts as a kind of a "network" because the election campaign practices started to spread in the world from the US. Hence, the term Americanization. However, Americanization was not equally carried out everywhere. In countries where democratization and transition was completed successfully, the political transformation developed through hybridization, whereas in transitional democracies, where weak institutionalization of party systems is observed, Americanization/Standardization of the election campaign was implemented.

The purpose of the research is to explain how the transformation of political campaigning was carried out in Georgia following the Americanization/standardization model. For the in-depth analysis of the transformation of the election campaign, "expert" interviews with key informants—political consultants—were recorded.¹ The consultants were selected using targeted and snowball sampling. The transformation of political campaigning is reflected in the election strategies of the parties. Considering the abovementioned, in-depth interviews were conducted with those representatives of the political parties whose responsibility is to plan an election campaign or have relevant information. In the selection of parties, my task was the in-depth analysis of strategy development of a political campaign, which was applied to the targeted selection, and the qualified electoral subject status of the party during the monitoring period was applied as criteria.

One of the goals of the study was to research the electorates' perceptions of the election campaign model. At the initial stage of the research, it was pointed

¹ All the informants agreed to publicly display their names.

out that among the parties and experts the year 2003 had been discussed as the turning phase in election campaign transformation. Taking this into consideration, the research was guided according to the following criteria:

1. Should the age of the respondents be considered and persons who were watching the ongoing processes in 2003 as voters, and at the same time had already participated at least in one election before the 2004 parliamentary elections, be interviewed?
2. Should the interviewed respondents have been permanent residents of Georgia for the last 30 years, for their election campaign model perception not to be superficial? It was pointed out that the respondents should be interviewed considering gender and age proportion (45–54 and 55+) and have been Georgian citizens for 30 years. During the study, a total of 64 in-depth interviews with voters was conducted.

4. Weak party system institutionalization

The interest in research of party system institutionalization surged especially in the 1990s, however, we should look for its origins in Huntington's research in the 1960s (Huntington, 1968). Weak party system institutionalization is a problem highlighted in new democracies. Ever since Georgia gained independence, the political parties in the country lacked a sense of stability. The party system suffered a crisis in terms of the articulation-aggregation of public interests and programs/ideological ties between the electorate and parties. The personalization of the policy and special dependence on the leader was characteristic of political parties. The mentioned reasons were undermining their development and caused weak party system institutionalization. After the Rose Revolution, the ruling party enjoyed special support of the general public, whereas the tendency to focus on leaders had become even stronger. As Gilbreath and Turmanidze (2017) argue, the state's capacity to implement policy affects the incumbent's chances of remaining in office. Babunashvili (2017) argues that the public engages in retrospective voting in Georgia, which means that they evaluate the government's performance and base their choice on it.

The effective number of parties (ENP)² is the indicator which allows us to define the institutionalization of the party system (Laakso & Taagepera,

² $ENP = 1 / \sum (S_i)^2$. S_i —the number of votes obtained by each party.

1979, pp. 3–27). By using an effective number of parties, which is determined through the obtained votes of the parties, we can determine their political weight. The high rate of effective parties means that the party system is diffusive, but the low rate indicates the existence of dominant parties. For orientation, it should be noted that according to the researcher's assessment, the highest rate of effective parties is 6.3, whereas the lowest one is 3.14. In the early years of independence, according to the effective parties, Georgia occupied an advanced position in the world. However, this meant a special fragmentation of the party system. In the second half of the 1990s, the effective number of parties was increasing, but the fragmentation remained a problem. The incompatibility of parliamentary factions, political parties and dominant ruling parties against the disconnected opposition exacerbated the crisis of the party system even further (Bader, 2008, p. 4).

Figure 1. The effective number of parties in Georgia

Source: Author's calculations from the electoral results provided by the Central Election Commission of Georgia.

After the Rose Revolution, the problem of party system institutionalization intensified and several “satellite” parties were formed. Pseudo-opposition parties were focused on weakening the opposition. After a tense pre-election period, the opposition coalition Georgian Dream ousted the United National Movement in 2012. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the ruling party Georgian Dream gained a constitutional majority. By the most recent period, the number of parties reached 240, however, most of them do not participate in active political processes. Political parties are still personalized, with a strong focus on leaders. Georgian parties lack ideological affinity and have not grown out of social cleavages.

The parties in Georgia in the conditions of weak representation of voters' interests were trying to compensate for the said problem with political populism. They could not play the role of a mediator between society and the state. The "pre-election program is only a cover to show that the party considers the public interests" (Wheatley, 2005, p. 158). Traditionally, the parties are reluctant to adopt drastic left-wing or right-wing positions. In these circumstances, it is difficult for the electorate to perceive ideological differences, and during voting, they still focus on the leader.

According to the research, the personalization of the politics indicates parties as well as the electorate:

The leader's charisma, manner of speaking, height, gender, biography and other aspects have a severe impact on the outcome of the election. Ideology seriously loses against the leader. (Interview with Levan Berdzenishvili, leader of the Republican Party)

In the study of the electorate mood, an interesting tendency was observed. The respondents indicate that ideology is important for parties; however, they say that the leader's factor during voting in elections is crucial:

The leader has always played a great role in Georgia. If we look at the history of parties, the ideological difference has retreated and strong personalities come forward. It could have been Gia Chanturia, Shevardnadze or someone else. (Interview with Davit Darchiashvili, leader of European Georgia)

There is an urgent need for political parties to take action to build political trust in Georgia:

In our country, people trust the personality factor and this determines the success of a party in the elections. (Romani, 60 years old, car mechanic, Mukhiani)

The leaders of political parties and their personalities are the key factors that influence electoral behavior:

In Georgia, a party has no perspective without an influential leader. (Tamari, 45 years old, philologist, Rustavi)

The interviewed voters did not consider themselves as stable voters of a certain party, and they tell that the reason for that is the growing frustration over the years. Interestingly, even the voters who see themselves as stable

voters of one party or another believe that this is caused by faithfulness to the party leader:

I am a stable voter of one of the parties. The leader as well as the party ideology is important to me, but I think that the leader is the defining factor. (Ilona, 45 years old, Svanetisubani)

The instability of the development of political parties in Georgia threatens the institutionalization of the party system. According to the Pedersen Index³ (Pedersen, 1983), which studies electoral volatility, Georgia belongs among those countries whose electoral volatility of the parties reaches the high indicator. However, electoral volatility has decreased over the last few years.

Figure 2. Pedersen Index: the case of Georgia

Source: Author's calculations from the electoral results provided by the Central Election Commission of Georgia.

In Georgia, the electoral volatility of opposition parties is extremely high. After Georgia gained independence, the Communist Party disappeared from the political arena, and the bloc Round Table – Independent Georgia suffered the same fate during the rule of Shevardnadze, even though it had been a dominant political party. The Union of Citizens and the Revival Party, which had enjoyed significant influence and support in the 1990s, had disappeared after the Rose Revolution. In this regard, the only exception is the United National Movement, which after the 2012 parliamentary elections went into opposition and continues its political activity.

In Georgia, there is a trend to create parties of power that are always inspired by their leaders' personalities. The first of such parties, the Citizens' Union of Georgia, was built around the personality of Eduard Shevardnadze. The same is true for Georgia's Revival Union, built around Aslan Abashidze, the

³ $V = \sum (C_{i,t} - C_{i,t-1})^2 / 2$. V is volatility, $C_{i,t}$ is the vote share for a party i at a given election (t) and $C_{i,t-1}$ is the vote share of the same party i at the previous election ($t-1$).

leader of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Mikheil Saakashvili's United National Movement and Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream.

The absence of an ideological watershed between the parties contributes to the instability of the electorate. The ephemeral political blocs, formed in the pre-election period to win in the elections, weaken the representativeness of political parties (Bader, 2007, p. 8). The voter is often unable to see the fundamental difference between the parties; this is the reason for the frequent changes of parties:

The acting parties in Georgia are very similar to each other, they become active during the election period and are giving factually neglected promises. (Temuri 70 years old, physicist, Phanaskerteli Str.)

Sociologists indicate the instability of the electorate and find an interesting explanation for it:

According to the research there is a great chance that the person supports a party which doesn't promise anything concrete or promises something that can't be kept. (Interview with Koba Turmanidze, president of CRRC Georgia)

The connection between the parties and voters is weak, and the general public does not understand the inner workings of political parties.

In the transition period, in the post-Soviet society, trust in political parties was ruined, which could be explained as weakness of the representativeness of voters' interest by the elected political force (Sapsford Abbott, 2006, pp. 59–71; Stzompka, 1999). The pre-election promises in Georgia are mainly fixed on the attraction of the electorate and the communication problem with the electorate is often observed:

Relations with the electorate are a complicated art that requires nearly 20 times more reserve than this or that party has. (Interview with Levan Berdzenishvili, leader of the Republican Party)

Georgian politics is characterized by the low popularity of parties, low party membership, fragile partisan loyalty and weak roots of parties in the civil society. Moreover, political parties are often characterized by top-down hierarchical structures (Kakachia & Pataraia, 2013). For Georgian voters, the pre-election period plays a consistently important role when they decide for whom to vote.

The election year is most active when the voter and certain parties communicate with each other; the remaining period is a passive mode. (Interview with Shorena Khorbaladze, representative of the National Forum)

As the results of the analysis revealed, the Georgian party system suffers an institutionalization crisis. On the one hand, the weakness of the program/ideological connection between the parties and the electorate and articulation-aggregation of public interests remain an unsolved problem in the party system. The political parties do not have a sense of stability and are focused on short-term success. On the other hand, the personalization of politics and particular dependence on the leader escalates the crisis in the party system institutionalization even further. Georgia is in dire need of an end to the personalized politics that Saakashvili and Ivanishvili both epitomize.

5. Mediatization

During the last decades, many election campaigns in the democratic world have become similar to the US election campaign. Due to the special similarities of the characteristics, the current process in different countries has been given a common name and came to be called the Americanization of election campaigning. Georgia is among those countries where the Americanization of election campaigning started in the 1990s and became especially active during the Rose Revolution. The reason for that were the important ongoing political, social and cultural changes in the country. The institutionalization crisis of the party system and the formation of powerful commercial media outlets were related namely to these changes.

During Gamsakhurdia's short-term rule, television was under strict control with only two independent channels operating (Nodia & Scoltback, 2006, p. 9). During the presidential elections, Gamsakhurdia controlled the media, which was one of the main reasons for his victory in the elections. According to the political consultants' inquiry, many key stages of independence were revealed during the first ten years of media playing a crucial role:

It was due to the TV and printed media that Gamsakhurdia came into power, the mentioned media sources had many more readers at that time. After this, *Channel One* made everything to have him overthrown. (Interview with a political consultant Valerian Gorgiladze)

During Gamsakhurdia's rule, media was not the only dominant communication source because, during that period, other influential communication channels emerged. The media expressed a comparatively wide range of political opinions during the first years of Shevardnadze's ruling because the state was too weak to have any influence on the media (Broers, 2005, pp. 333–350). The free media constructed the image of Shevardnadze as an experienced and democratic politician. Since 1995, Shevardnadze managed to form a semi-functioned state (Wheatley, 2005, pp. 84–85) and most media outlets began to carry out a strict governmental course. During this period, the influential media source *Rustavi 2* emerged, which determined its own political agenda. The anti-government stance of the media outlet became apparent in 2001 when a popular TV journalist was killed in July (Welt, 2006), and in October the same year, the company was raided by the security service. These events were followed by a demonstration and led to the government's resignation.

In 2003, *Rustavi 2* became a catalyst for demonstrations once again. During the 2003 parliamentary elections, when the exit poll results it published did not match the official results, people went out on the streets and, in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, Shevardnadze resigned. Sociologists have interesting interpretations regarding these developments:

Television played an important role before the Rose Revolution. In Georgia, people don't have an immediate reaction to one or two frustrations; they gather the frustrations and respond later. The same happened during the Rose Revolution. (Interview with Koba Turmanidze, president of CRRC Georgia)

With its professional use of aggressive tone, sign systems and adventurism, which is so necessary in journalism, *Rustavi 2* gradually reached the status of an unrivalled creator of public opinion. It should be mentioned that, according to the ratings, in situations when the said media outlet did not cover entire Georgia, it occasionally ranked second after the national television *Channel One*. This fact played a crucial role in the development of further revolutionary processes.

Rustavi 2 live broadcasted the demonstrations, without interruptions, and determined the course of events, which was repeated by other media sources.

The Rose Revolution was mostly constructed through visual effects. We, Georgians, are very fond of figurative thinking. (Interview with the political consultant Zurab Bigvava)

During this period, the TV channel *Imedi* maintained a neutral position, while the channel *Mze* echoed the government's critical rhetoric.

During the days of the revolution, one of the important incidents was the resignation of the chairman of the national television and the protest of the staff. Political consultants note about special mediatization during the revolution:

In fact, television played a crucial role in 2003. The society and political leaders were not ready for what happened. Namely, television played an important role in the mobilization of society and in terms of pressure on political leaders. (Interview with the political consultant Soso Galimashvili)

After the revolution, *Rustavi 2* slowed down its usual activity and turned the focus on public entertainment. During Saakashvili's ruling, the activation of media in politics was observed in the events of November 2007. However, in the politically critical period, the government considered that the opposition's TV company *Imedi* was broadcasting dangerous information for the society and suspended its activities based on this charge. During the governance of the United National Movement, the country's top-rated television channel *Rustavi 2* tried to create a successful image of the ruling party in the permanent election campaign regime. In Georgia, during the pre-election period in 2012, shocking videos were broadcast on television channels, showing the torture and rape of prisoners. The prison scandal is widely believed to have resulted in Saakashvili's party losing power.

Mass media played a central role in the collapse of the Communist regime, and for post-Soviet leaders of the following period, it became clear that the media and especially television were political tools of significant influence. Like other post-Soviet countries, the professionalization of political communication in Georgia does not have a long history and was developed half a century later. The mentioned circumstance has left its mark because communication technologies have now been adopted in a very short period. However, the media, which subjected censorship during these decades obtained increasing confidence and influence in the society and the mediatization of politics has taken place. This process was accompanied by the personification, personal attacks on political opponents, and radicalism.

6. The political instrumentalization of television

In the Americanization process of election campaigning, the media is indicated as having a 'carnivalization' function, when a concrete media source has special power and influence on politics (Caspi, 1996, p. 182). The study suggests that in this key stage, the media, and especially television, had a drastic influence on political processes.

The majority of people interviewed in this case drew parallels between the 2003 Rose Revolution and the 2012 parliamentary pre-election period:

Everyone who remembers that period agrees that it was the previous period of the Rose Revolution, when in fact TV made half the revolution. We remember those TV footages, broadcasted by *Rustavi 2*, when cars were coming from the West, with headlights switched on. The media never had such an impact on the political process. (Temuri, 70 years old, physicist, Panaskerteli Str.)

However, there were several cases when respondents saw the role of TV in political processes outside the Rose Revolution and the 2012 parliamentary elections:

The role of TV was especially great during the confrontation on 9 April and the TV raid in 7 November. (Lamzira, 57 years old, teacher, Gldani)

The party representatives whom I interviewed noted that the media has a crucial role in election campaigns in Georgia:

Media doesn't simply reflect reality, it creates reality and the technologies of this are quite advanced. Who manages the media, who stands behind the media, is politics and it forms a certain linked circle. (Interview with Davit Darchiashvili, representative of European Georgia)

The media also has a significant role in communicating with voters:

Any politician who tries to come to power is trying to influence the mass media. (Zurab Gongadze, representative of the National Democracy Party)

Sociologists and consultants talk about the special influence of mass media on election campaigns:

It is shown by surveys, and it is obvious that TV has a great influence in Georgia. TV hasn't any competition so far. Often the society starts

thinking in a similar manner as the events are shown by television channels, and that is very important in elections. (Interview with Koba Turmanidze, president of CRRC Georgia)

In Georgia, policymaking is performed mainly through the media:

Television should be mentioned in this regard. All crucial stages in Georgia have been connected with television, the *Winners TV*, *Rustavi 2* and *Channel 9*, which emerged after the Rose Revolution, who based on famous footages could transform the public opinion. (Interview with the political consultant Vaka Gorgiladze)

Georgian political parties do not make efficient use of the potential of social media. When social media is utilized by political parties, it is largely passive. Politicians understand the level of influence that television retains in the formation of public perceptions. This influence is especially relevant if television remains the primary source of news.

7. Public opinion survey

Democracy in transition shapes the results of surveys of impartial public opinion by adding credibility and making voters trust the parties. In the developed democracy, it is a strategic instrument of elections monitoring, the formation of the party platform and image. In post-Soviet Georgia, many years of the negative experience of one-party rule created a significant obstacle to public opinion research:

At the beginning of the 1990s, there were occasions in which those who worked in this tried to conduct research themselves using certain methods. However, often they did not have relevant knowledge. (Interview with the political consultant Zurab Bigvava)

During the Rose Revolution, public opinion research had a great influence on the processes. Moreover, “manipulation” with the results of public opinion research was considered as contributing to Shevardnadze’s resignation. The influential Western press wrote about the Rose Revolution that exit poll results conducted in accordance with the orders of the US and non-governmental organizations were broadcasted by *Rustavi 2* to show that pro-Shevardnadze forces tried to falsify the elections (Sussman & Krader, 2008, pp. 91–112).

The positive results of a public opinion survey enhance the support of party's supporters or may be directed towards the politicians, media, their supporters or opponents, in order to demoralize (Nancarrow & Evans, 2004, pp. 639–655).

The attitude towards public opinion research varies between the parties. There are very skeptical parties, there are those who do not understand anything and look at research as a means of propaganda. There are parties which are watching it very seriously. For example, the National Movement always treated surveys very seriously. (Interview with Koba Turmanidze, president of CRRC Georgia)

The research revealed that, in terms of public opinion researches, the international donor organizations (National Democratic Institute, or NDI, and International Republican Institute, IRI) intensively cooperate with the parties:

We began active cooperation with these organizations since their foundation. When we were in parliament, we were actively involved in training programs organized by the mentioned organizations, we still have contacts with them. However, we aren't a parliamentary party and have lost touch with NDI. (Interview with Zurab Gongadze, representative of the National-Democratic Movement)

Public opinion research in Georgia has evolved into two directions; the real result, which is intended only for internal party use and is reportedly used for advertising its own political power. In Georgia, the campaign against pollsters began at the end of March 2012, and the results were leaked. The discrepancy between the polls and the final election results would henceforth become the basis of Georgian Dream's claim that the polls used an untrustworthy methodology. Since Georgian Dream's rise to power, the attacks against pollsters have continued.

Unfortunately, in our country, public opinion research is often part of PR, and its objectivity is questionable. (Interview with Zurab Tkemaladze, leader of Mretsvelebi (Industrialists' Party))

8. Professionalization

The Americanization of political campaigning, in its turn, implies professionalization. Moreover, in some cases, the professionalization of the election campaign is discussed as a synonym of Americanization (Negrine & Papathanassopoulos, 1996, pp. 45–62).

The National Movement has reached the special professionalization of election campaigning. Its election campaigns revealed how they planned the campaign, what symbols they used, and how this largely relied on the Western experience. Later, in 2012, when the National Movement was in opposition, it carried out many actions in the same style and manner. The Georgian Dream used the so-called Russian technologies, i.e. discrediting tactics in the election campaign. (Interview with Davit Darchiashvili, representative of European Georgia)

In 1990–2018, 26 elections were carried out in Georgia. Of these, 6 were presidential elections (1991, 1995, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2013), 9 parliamentary elections (1990, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2012) and 4 local government elections (1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2017). In the same period, 2 referendums (1991, 2003) and 2 plebiscites (2008, 2008) were held. In the initial stage of the professionalization of election campaigning, the parties apply specialists (consultants) to help only in exceptional cases. According to the professionalization of election campaigning and Americanization of political technologies, the mentioned elections could be categorized into three stages:

1. The initial stage: 1990–1994. The country took its first steps on the path to statehood. The euphoria of independence had been replaced by internal confrontation and wars. However, in post-Soviet Georgia, competitive multiparty elections gave the political parties an opportunity to use the experience of foreign countries and apply the assistance of professionals. On the political arena, the ruling party Union of Citizens of Georgia, and in subsequent years the strong regional political bloc Revival Party emerged. During the same period, the first local consulting centre was established, and international donor organizations with a political marketing profile entered the country. During the initial stage, the role of political consultants in election campaigns was insignificant.
2. Development stage: 1995–2003. During this stage, the Constitution was adopted, the building of state institutions was commenced and the

national currency was put into circulation. *Rustavi 2* was founded, which had a major influence on public opinion. In this period, many consulting centers were established and the alliance was strengthened with foreign professionals. The pre-election political campaign moved to the next stage of professionalization and entered the active phase.

3. Permanent election campaign stage: 2004–2019. After the Rose Revolution, the government in Georgia changed. During the revolution and in post-revolution Georgia, the role of media (especially television) increased significantly in political processes. In 2012, the most significant events occurring late in the campaign were the release of videos by Georgian Dream, purporting to show shocking prison abuse by guards. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, Georgian Dream and the United National Movement built their campaigns on fierce opposition to each other. Inequality of resources played a significant role in the results of the election. The success of the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia can be partly attributed to the operation of the TV channel *Obiektivi*. From this, leaders of the Patriots' Alliance of Georgia have been addressing Georgian electorate for years. During the last years, modern technologies were actively used in political communication. In this period, the needs for modernization of election campaign were well understood and used, which means the impact of commercialization, globalization and visual effects (in which mass media, especially television, has an important role).

9. Conclusion

My interest in the research of election campaigning in post-Soviet democracies was inspired by the realization that election campaigns across different countries shared identical features, which had its roots in the US political campaigning practices. I was more interested in the issue because it became evident that there were no fundamental researches about the Georgian experience from this point of view. My goal was to determine if the ongoing modernized transformation of technologies and the mass media have laid the foundation for the Americanization of election campaign within the weak institutionalization conditions of the party system in Georgia.

The research showed that features characteristic of Americanization indeed emerged in the election campaign processes in Georgia. The special personal trust on the voter's side in a politician, the ideological weakness of parties

and indecisive electorate indicates the weak institutionalization of the party system, however, it creates a conducive climate for the Americanization of election campaigns. In these conditions, an election campaign is not separated by an ideological watershed, and the indecisive electorate easily falls prey to the visual-technological effects. During the election campaign, the sharp mediatization of politics, focusing on the public opinion and active cooperation with consultants, are the distinct signs of Americanization. Thus, we can say that modernization factors causing Americanization in Georgia were identified.

According to the research results, the Americanization of election campaigns started by ongoing transformations on the macro level (Party System, Mass Media and Technologies) and continued to changes on the micro-level (Party, Television) of the society. In Georgia, the best example of this is the commercial media outlet (*Rustavi 2*), which had a tipping role in the Americanization of election campaign within the weak institutionalization of the party system. As a result of summarizing the theoretical basis and empirical data in Georgia, the process of Americanization shifted towards the direction of standardization rather than hybridization. Namely, a party system (one element of the macro level) is distinguished by weak institutionalization, which caused intensive import of election technologies (the second element on the macro level) and adaptation on the micro level (party, media sources).

Giorgi Melikidze has a PhD in political science and is associate researcher at the Institute of Political Sciences of Ilia State University, as well as a visiting lecturer at Tbilisi State University. His research interests are political consulting, party politics, political communication, public policy, research design and methodology.

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