



Navigating the Georgian Civil Service: Is Georgian Dream Balancing Efficiency and Politicization?

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Executive Summary

This policy brief assesses the challenges facing Georgia's civil service system, focusing on inefficiency and pervasive politicization and their implications for Georgia's pursuit of EU candidacy. By analyzing the current Human Resource Management (HRM) system and the 2022-2023 reforms, the brief highlights the need for a more independent and accountable civil service in line with democratic principles.

The findings reveal two main issues: the HRM system's inefficiency and the civil service's politicization. The analysis uncovers an interconnected set of factors contributing to these problems, including a restrictive recruitment process, inexperienced managers, and centralized training. The brief acknowledges the importance of addressing inefficiency and politicization as separate but interrelated challenges, emphasizing the need for policy recommendations to consider both aspects simultaneously.

Addressing these challenges is critical for ensuring citizens' rights protection during the 2024 elections, promoting civil service independence, and enhancing public trust in the government's capacity to serve the public interest. Implementing comprehensive civil service reform focusing on improving efficiency and eliminating politicization will help Georgia meet the EU's expectations and foster a more democratic and accountable government.

Key Words: Human Resource Management, EU Candidacy, Hybrid Regimes, Politicization, Civil Service, Public Administration, Bureaucracy.

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Introduction

As Georgia pursues EU candidacy, an essential requirement remains an independent and accountable civil service (European Commission 2022). Human Resource Management (HRM)², necessary for the effective and efficient delivery of public services within the civil service, has been a challenge in Georgia's past, leading to both inefficiency (not achieving maximum productivity with the resources expended), as well as politicization (political authorities extending their control over the bureaucracy) (Pollitt & Bouckaert 2017). As Georgia pursues its aspiration for EU candidacy and aims to establish a civil service that is both autonomous and accountable, the reforms related to HRM implemented by the ruling Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia party have not yet been successful in fully eradicating political interference within the civil service. The persistent concern over the potential partisan exploitation of administrative resources during the upcoming parliamentary elections (TI Georgia 2020a) underscores the urgency of addressing this issue. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of current HRM practices is warranted to address the ongoing politicization in Georgia's public service and identify the underlying contributing factors.

Utilizing international organization reports, analyses of Georgian civil service reform laws, expert interviews, and an analytical framework, this policy brief critically evaluates politicization within the existing civil service HRM approach. The analysis assesses the civil service's current state, focusing on control over administrative resources and discretionary legal instruments. It's crucial to recognize that reducing political influence on civil servants is complex, with no simple solutions. However, if further reforms granting more autonomy for civil servants were to be applied in Georgia, it would create a more formidable obstacle for political actors seeking to exert control.

Understanding Dual Survival Logic in Georgia

Georgia has a hybrid regime characterized by a blend of democratic and autocratic elements, resulting from an incomplete democratization process (Freedom House 2022). As a result, Georgian Dream may tolerate or even desire a politicized civil service to continue utilizing administrative resources during election periods. Georgian scholar and government quality expert Professor Bolkvadze, has developed a two-dimensional or dual survival logic framework, which serves as a valuable lens to understand the process of bureaucratic reforms in competitive authoritarian regimes. Bolkvadze (2017) argues that hybrid regimes with dominant ruling parties stay in power by 1) tilting the political playing field to reduce fair election unpredictability and guarantee enduring control, and 2) maintaining legitimate

² Human resource management (HRM) in public administration refers to the organized function within public sector organizations that focuses on the effective management of its employees. This includes the processes and systems used to hire, train, evaluate, reward, and retain public sector employees.

elections and passing widespread reforms that improve government efficiency and boost public approval.

Evidence of this framework can be seen under the United National Movement's (UNM) tenure, where heightened bureaucratic efficiency was paired with retained political control. Minister of Economy Kakha Bendukidze's libertarian New Public Management approach dismantled Shevarnadze's corrupt public administration during the post-revolutionary period. However, despite achieving systemic corruption elimination and efficiency improvement, this method failed to ensure bureaucratic autonomy. Key institutional setups were neglected, leading to agencies being headed by vice ministers without independent director boards. Protections against partisan interference and arbitrary treatment were absent, while reward systems were manipulated to ensure political loyalty. The marginalization of third-party voices, such as civil society organizations and trade unions, further inhibited bureaucratic autonomy and representation (Engvall 2012; Bolkvadze 2017). Consequently, the president maintained control over the ministerial and agency levels, making the civil service prone to political influence. Thus, while efficiency and corruption elimination were achieved, a deeply politicized bureaucracy lacking genuine independence emerged.

A crucial takeaway from this framework and case study is that reforms aimed at combating inefficiency do not always result in decreased politicization; incumbents can combine them to create an effective but still politicized civil service as a power retention strategy. Although the civil service under Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia (GD) today looks very different from Georgia during this period, the underlying framework appears the same. When formulating policy recommendations for bureaucratic reforms in Georgia, it's crucial to consider both inefficiency and politicization. It's essential to craft solutions that address these issues simultaneously to prevent an imbalanced outcome.

Systemic Public Administration Inefficiency Under Georgian Dream

Examining the inefficiencies in Georgia's civil service system reveals several interconnected factors, including an inefficient recruitment process, inexperienced managers, and centralized training. The recruitment process primarily draws candidates from within the civil service, and the system monopolizes certification training, which diminishes private and non-governmental voices (Dolidze 2018). These problems have contributed to the "isolation" of the public sector, which has led to both efficiency and politicization. Understanding the interdependencies between these factors can help identify the critical areas for reform and guide the development of policy recommendations that simultaneously address inefficiency and politicization concerns.

Recognizing the shortcomings of the previous approach, the Georgian Dream, which emerged victorious in the 2012 elections, sought to create a more transparent and accountable system. Accordingly, they enacted the "Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020" (PAR 2015), a five-year plan designed to establish a comprehensive civil service framework and introduce new tools for effective implementation. The PAR addressed and corrected the absence of legal

provisions prohibiting partisan interference, the dismissal of civil servants, and protecting public sector employees from arbitrary treatment and political interference (PAR 2015; Kvashilava 2019).

Under UNM, the recruitment process was characterized by high flexibility, leading to considerable drawbacks. Initially, ministers enjoyed excessive autonomy regarding hiring and firing, which led to arbitrary dismissals and appointments often influenced by political loyalty rather than merit. The ministries had wide discretionary powers over their personnel decisions. This resulted in a civil service vulnerable to political manipulation and patronage, severely affecting its professionalism and independence. Moreover, the flexible recruitment practices triggered frequent turnover of high-ranking bureaucrats (Hartvigsen & Mungiu-Pippidi 2013; Rieker 2016; Modebadze & Kozgambayeva 2020). However, the PAR has now established safeguards against the arbitrary dismissal of civil servants in an attempt to counteract the negative consequences of the earlier, more flexible recruitment process.

In today's Georgia, while ostensibly open, the recruitment system for civil servants is now, in practice, too restrictive. Agencies and Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPL) face disincentives to hire new civil servants externally, as the bureaucratic procedures are lengthy and cumbersome (Dolidze 2023). Conversely, there is an incentive to hire existing civil servants, ensuring opportunities for promotion within the organization (Beselia 2023). This approach was initially implemented to address the issue of civil servants needing to appease their managers due to a lack of job security before the PAR. However, the prioritization of internal hiring has become excessive, as the job qualifications for promoting civil servants to higher positions are relatively low (Dolidze 2023) – consequently, candidates who often do not possess the necessary qualifications still secure positions.

The over-prioritization of internal hiring has resulted in the ascension of inexperienced managers through the ranks. As a result, managers often lack the knowledge and competencies to implement contemporary management systems. Numerous managers are former field specialists appointed to managerial roles without previous management training or experience (Beselia 2023). As a result, they are often unaware of the importance of providing employee feedback, nurturing motivation, and emphasizing organizational efficiency following performance assessments (Dolidze 2023). Although these individuals are often highly accomplished professionals in their respective domains, they do not possess the necessary managerial acumen to manage teams, make decisions, take responsibility, and resist political pressure.

Georgian Dream has implemented a “centralized” system for civil servant training, conducted by a single provider, through specialized training centers and distinct modules for lower and higher civil servants (Beselia 2023). Implementing a centralized approach limits the range of training options, as only one type of training is available for each subject, often with insufficient time allocated. For example, high-ranking officials receive only eight hours to learn strategic management, while low-ranking officials are given just six hours to study administrative law, despite lacking a legal background (Dolidze 2023). Training modules' limited scope and duration stifle creativity and hinder the quality of civil servant development. Involving multiple providers would allow diverse competencies to offset potential knowledge gaps inherent in a single provider, such as the government (Dolidze 2018). The current rigid and

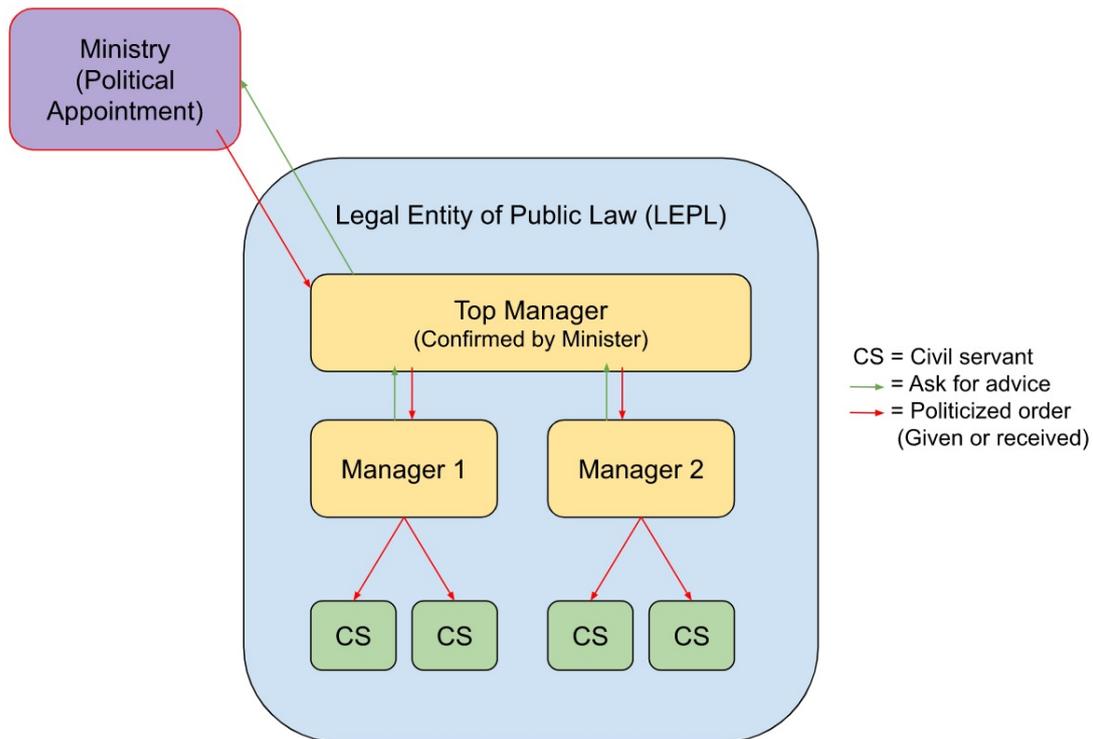
insufficient approach to professional development has led to an inefficient system that fails to adequately equip civil servants with the necessary skills and knowledge for their positions.

Systemic Politicization Under Georgian Dream

The factors contributing to civil service inefficiency enable the spread of politicized orders within agencies. While recognizing that inefficiency and politicization do not always go hand in hand, a closer look at the interplay between these factors reinforces the need to examine policy recommendations to address both simultaneously. The politicization of the civil service manifests in three distinct dynamics: systemic, “bottom-up”, and “top down”.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, two scholars of hybrid regimes posit, in *How Democracies Die* (2018) that a values-based education is crucial for the effective functioning of the civil service, as understanding the values, intentions, and the “spirit” of laws enables civil servants to safeguard institutions from politicized directives. The exact opposite is happening in Georgia. Rather than instilling values-based education for civil servants in LEPLs, the lack of creativity within training modules has fostered mechanical compliance with orders (Beselia 2023). Furthermore, outside employees with new opinions cannot enter the civil services effectively, as hiring external candidates is bureaucratically cumbersome and disincentivized. With a singular provider, CSOs and private voices are also unavailable to civil servants within the current modules. Allowing CSOs to participate would further provide a system of checks and balances, ensuring quality control within the government. Therefore centralized training has created a civil service that is increasingly isolated from outside voices, prone to groupthink, and inherently discouraging values-based ideas that protect the civil service. It is important to note that while some EU nations employ centralized systems, the context varies significantly, as they often have no historical ties to Soviet bureaucratic systems. However, in countries with a Soviet past, centralized systems can present substantial challenges, as deeply ingrained habits and lingering memories may resurface.

In addition to the aforementioned systemic issues, “bottom up” (indirectly receiving politicized directives) and “top down” (directly receiving politicized directives) issues occur due to the contemporary recruitment and remuneration systems. Top managers, previously susceptible to arbitrary dismissal under the New Public Management paradigm, now depend on ministers for guidance due to their insufficient managerial acumen. This reliance leads to managers seeking advice from politicized authorities and subsequently receiving politicized directives. Consequently, an environment has been created in which ministers can give direct politicized orders and the civil service will carry them out. Ministers in practice still have the ability to force politicized orders onto civil servants. Political control over the civil service is further solidified by ministers, who are political appointees, retaining the final say in top managerial appointments, with a consequence of someone not potentially compliant with politicized orders not getting the job (Beselia 2023). Collectively, these factors make it exceedingly challenging for the civil service to resist politicization.



Source: Authors Graph

The Georgian civil service laws emphasize a unified professional development and career growth system for civil servants, predicated on merit and regular performance evaluations. It underscored key factors: 1) a formal certification process managed by the Civil Service Bureau prior to recruitment, 2) lifelong employment for civil servants to ensure stability and protection from unfair dismissal, including politically motivated reasons, and 3) (Dolidze 2018). In practice, however, the law appears to adhere to Bolkvadze's "dual survival logic" balance. The Georgian Dream party implemented popular reforms under the illusion of eliminating politicization while maintaining substantial political influence and control over civil service.

Implementing popular/pro-EU Civil Service Reform		Tilting the Playing Field
Formal certification process managed by Civil Service Bureau prior to recruitment	<i>but</i>	In practice, restrictive recruitment promotes weak managers that cannot resist politicization
Internal promotion for upper ranks for career development	<i>but</i>	Restricting external candidates' access to public sector positions so managers depend on ministers for guidance
Lifelong employment for civil servants to ensure stability and protection from unfair dismissal	<i>but</i>	Centralized training approach limits creativity, has no value based education, and encourages mechanical compliance
Unified professional development and career growth system for civil servants	<i>but</i>	Centralized approach limits external perspectives and fosters groupthink and insularity

Source: Authors Graph (based off of Bolkvadze's graph)

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the context of civil service reform, the discussion addresses two primary issues: the current system's inefficiency and pervasive politicization. It is essential to acknowledge that the government may not concede to intentionally creating a politicized system, instead attributing the problem to poor management. While centralized training systems exist in various Western countries, such as France (Serve 1999), whereas Georgia faces the challenges of developing institutions and transitioning from Soviet-era structures. This is important to remember when the Georgian government claims adherence to Western standards. Suppose the problems within the civil service result from innocent incompetence rather than intentional manipulation. In that case, it becomes even more critical to implement policy recommendations that can effectively address these challenges. Addressing these issues is critical to promote civil service independence and enhance public trust in the government's capacity to serve the public interest. As Georgia pursues EU candidacy, it is vital to demonstrate a genuine commitment to upholding democratic values and principles. By undertaking comprehensive civil service reform that focuses on improving efficiency and eliminating politicization, Georgia can make significant strides toward meeting the EU's expectations and fostering a more democratic and accountable government that serves the best interests of its citizens.

Recommendations for Georgian CSOs:

- Evaluate the balance between efficiency and politicization using dual survival logic: As Georgia implements reforms to increase efficiency, CSOs should carefully assess whether these changes also advertently or inadvertently maintain political control.
- Enhance Values-Based Education: Implement a comprehensive values-based education program for civil servants, emphasizing the understanding of the values, intentions, and "spirit" of laws. This will help safeguard the civil service from politicized directives and promote professionalism and integrity.
- Encourage CSO Engagement and Diversify Training Modules: Promote the involvement of CSOs and other private entities in the training process, enabling them to provide expertise and act as a system of checks and balances to ensure quality control within the civil service. This could help revise training modules to encourage creativity and critical thinking among civil servants. Introduce modules that allow for the participation of external candidates, including representatives from CSOs, to bring fresh perspectives and foster a culture of openness and dialogue.

Policy Recommendations for Georgian Policymakers:

- Consider adopting a "Semi-Centralized" civil service training system: Encourage multiple training providers, including private institutions and NGOs, to offer diverse professional development programs for civil servants. This approach will foster a range of competencies, reduce groupthink, and introduce alternative perspectives.
- Revise and enhance the recruitment process: Bureaucratic procedures for internal hiring are too stringent. Streamline the bureaucratic procedures for external hiring, and ensure the qualifications for promotion within the civil service are commensurate with the responsibilities of higher positions. This will create a more competitive environment, attract more qualified candidates, and ultimately improve the overall quality of the civil service.
- Reforming Managerial Appointments: Establish a transparent and merit-based system for managerial appointments, reducing political influence and ensuring that managers possess the necessary managerial acumen. This will help prevent the reliance on politicized authorities for guidance and mitigate the spread of politicized directives.

Recommendations for International Community:

- Encourage transparency and accountability: Support Georgian civil society organizations and independent media to hold policymakers accountable for their actions, promote transparency in decision-making processes, and expose instances of politicization within the civil service.
- Support capacity-building initiatives: Provide technical assistance, financial support, and expertise to help Georgian policymakers implement these recommendations and

improve the overall performance of the civil service while actively discouraging any measures that could enhance politicization.

- Maintain pressure on adherence to EU governance standards: Continue to monitor and evaluate Georgia's progress towards EU candidacy, emphasizing the importance of an impartial and accountable civil service in the accession process. Keep a watchful eye on any attempts to manipulate the political landscape in a manner that compromises adherence to EU governance standards.

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