



COST OF POLITICS IN KYRGYZSTAN

BACKGROUND PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

This primary research on the cost of parliamentary politics was conducted by sampling current and former MPs, unsuccessful candidates for these positions and political party officers. It examined the financial implications of running for office in parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan which were held in October 2015. From this information, WFD will create a data set that can deepen the donor community's understanding of electoral incentives and inform future programming aimed at improving democratic outcomes in the countries in which WFD works.

The Kyrgyz Republic (hereafter "Kyrgyzstan") is the sole democracy to emerge in the Central Asian post-Soviet states. While the country has experienced two revolutions in the past 10 years, it has developed into the only stable parliamentary system in the region. The country has seen a dramatic increase in the cost of politics within the last decade that threatens to undermine this fledgling democracy.

METHODOLOGY

In the framework for this study, two methods of analysis were mainly used: desk-based review and situational analysis.

The desk-based research focused on the drivers of the cost of politics in Kyrgyzstan. It included a legal analysis of current legislation governing election procedures. It also examined the core issues contributing to the rising cost of politics in Kyrgyzstan.

The situational analysis examined the current realities regarding the increased influence of money in politics by conducting semi-structured interviews (survey) of MPs, political parties' election campaign staff and leading local experts in the field.

The research examined these principal questions:

1. What is the historical experience of campaign financing and how has this shaped previous elections at the parliamentary level?
2. What are the key drivers of electoral costs for current parliamentary elections? What does it roughly cost to run for parliament? What are the principal sources of funding for parliamentary campaigns? Is the burden to fund campaigns principally on the candidate or the political party?
3. What are the costs incurred by MPs once in office? Are these demands principally public (official engagements) or private (constituent requests)?
4. What barriers do these costs create for particular groups (such as women)?
5. What are the prospects for future expansion or reduction of these costs based on either normative or legal constraints?

The survey covered current and former MPs of the Kyrgyz Parliament, as well as other participants in local council elections that were conducted in March 2016. The total number of surveyed participants was about 40 people.

The political system

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyzstan has attempted with mixed results to construct a functioning parliamentary system. The country's first elections in October 1991 returned Askar Akayev unopposed and it initially appeared as though he was committed to economic and political reform. However, allegations of corruption and vote-rigging soon bubbled to the surface and by 2005 Akayev was still in post in spite of a promise to stand down when his term expired.

This led to protests and Akayev's eventual downfall in what became known as the Tulip Revolution. He was replaced by Opposition Leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev after a landslide victory in which he too promised significant political reform. When this reform failed to be delivered, a second revolution followed in 2010 which led to ethnic violence, particularly between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south of the country.

That revolution, which broadly sets the tone for Kyrgyz politics today, resulted in a referendum which reduced presidential power and proposed a new constitution that made Kyrgyzstan a parliamentary democracy with a 120-seat parliament which no one party could dominate. Parties based on ethnicity or religion were banned.

Kyrgyzstan is a semi-parliamentary system with a directly elected president and a prime minister elected by parliament. In the last election, 14 parties submitted candidate lists and paid the required fee of KGS5 million (Kyrgyz soms) (about US\$74,000) in order to participate in the election. The fee was increased fivefold from previous elections and is criticized by some as being an obstacle to exclude smaller parties.

Parliamentary elections took place on 4 October 2015. Parties were required to have at least 30 per cent of the candidates on

their list from each gender and every fourth candidate on the list from a different gender. There was also as well a 15-per-cent quota on each list for ethnic minority candidates. Controversially, following claims of vote rigging at the previous election, biometrics were introduced. A number of parties combined their financial resources and sought to ensure their ability to exceed the seven-per-cent threshold to be allocated seats. These parties largely represented northern and southern constituencies respectively. Controversy also circulated around the formation of party lists with allegations that places were sold to the highest bidder – rumours suggest that high places on the lists cost between US\$500,000 and US\$1 million.

Six parties won seats in parliament. The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), a party identified with President Almazbek Atambayev, led the pack. Other parties with seats were: the opposition Respublika-Ata Jurt; the pro-government Kyrgyzstan party; the southern-focused Onuguu-Progress; Bir Bol, a patchwork party formed by veteran officials from earlier presidential administrations; and the left-of-centre Ata Meken party, a long-time fixture on the Kyrgyz political scene. Three of the six (Onuguu Progress, Bir Bol and Kyrgyzstan) were formed less than one year before the 2015 elections. As parties are able to gain power with no clear policy platform and there is little public demand for this, there is little incentive to reform.

The political party system in the Kyrgyz Republic is fragmented, with the Ministry of Justice officially registering 203 political parties, which in Kyrgyzstan are formed around the personalities of their leaders and not by platforms, which largely coincide. However, the ministry of justice has no authority or capacity to control the implementation of financial transparency by political parties.

In Kyrgyzstan, political parties are based

around the personality of a leader rather than a long-term identity based on policies. During the survey, most respondents stated that parties lacked the skills and experience to debate policy positions and unite voters around their ideas.

The big-man syndrome

Currently, the most common motivations for the appearance of political parties and projects in the Kyrgyz Republic are continuity and lobbying. Most parties are headed by former or current high-ranking officials. Parties lobby and support the interests of certain social structures and groups at all levels. For example, each financial group or clan reaching a certain level of development considers it necessary to have a party that will lobby for its interests in the power structure.

Political parties are often no more than a temporary collection of interests, driven by individuals with generic platforms and little contact with their electorate. This is exacerbated by the closed list electoral system, which does not naturally lend itself to fostering strong links between MPs and constituencies. Parties remain focused around individuals, and many party leaders are successful businessmen seeking office to obtain immunity and government influence. MPs continue to buy their way on to party lists with widespread reports and evidence of this practice.

Political parties are often inactive between elections and poorly connected to the factions in parliament.

The fragmentation of politics

The eradication of a strong presidency and the monopoly of a single group over political power thus appear to have been achieved. However, given the twists in the political system of Kyrgyzstan over the past 20 years, one wonders how sustainable the current political system really is. While forecasting is risky, one can reach some tentative conclusions by analyzing the factors that support the current arrangement. Two in

particular seem to feed the division of power: social and political fragmentation and the interests of predatory political and business elites.

One kind of fragmentation is evident through the strong ties that exist between particular political leaders and their local constituencies. As political scientist Scott Radnitz argued to explain the 2005 Tulip Revolution, under conditions of weak state capacity, political and business elites maintain close client-type relationships with particular localities (often their hometowns as well as their electoral districts), eroding the authority of formal state institutions. While some specifics of that 2005 situation no longer apply, such as the majoritarian system of electing parliamentary deputies, political elite connections to particular localities remain salient. As the 2010 and 2015 elections demonstrate, Kyrgyz parties continue to rely on particular party members' work at the local level to mobilize votes. Another dimension of Kyrgyzstan's political fragmentation is regional. While generally considered highly sensitive and politicized, regional differences in voting behavior provide interesting data. Those parties led by politicians from the southern regions received fewer votes in the northern regions, and vice versa. This may indicate an urban-rural divide and/or a degree of ethnic homogeneity within populations.

The second factor that feeds the division of power into multiple centers is the nature of the current political elite. The post-Soviet political elite in Kyrgyzstan developed into a large predatory group that views the state primarily as a tool for private enrichment. The efforts of both former presidents Akaev and Bakiev to create single pro-presidential parties left important and powerful actors outside the "state" system, leading to the March 2005 and April 2010 events. The current multiparty parliament and coalition government, in this context, appear to be an optimal solution for providing the largest possible number of elites with some access to state resources. As observers have noted, members of the current

coalition government may agree on few policy issues, but this has not stopped them from agreeing on the distribution of positions, which so far has been sufficient to maintain balance. However, the new government system has been providing political competition among political parties.

Other influences

The most active parties have been quick to report their rivals' misdemeanours, whether they involve banners with derogatory slogans or the removal of local government posters during the last election campaigns. And there is no shortage of things to report. The various parties are, however, in no hurry to complain to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) about their opponents' dirty tricks. They have all signed up to a so-called "Code of Ethics", i.e. there is to be no complaining to the CEC or the police – unless it is a question of mudslinging or direct interference with their election campaigns.

'We're not going to bring the authorities into it. We'll see what happens on election day. It is the responsibility of the area electoral commissions to follow up on any irregularities we report – it is not our job,' said Makhabat Zhumagulova, the Butun Kyrgyzstan Emgek party's lawyer.

Toktakunova, her counterpart at Ata-Meken, agreed that it was not the job of her party's observers to draw up complaints against its rivals: "Our Code of Ethics means that we just assemble and analyse information about fraudulent practices, with the help of our experienced observers. But we know that we have our supporters who will vote for us, no matter who tries to influence them against us." Bir Bol also confirmed that the parties had agreed to turn a blind eye to one another's irregularities. In other words, none of them would ever encourage any attempt to outlaw bribery and the misuse of public resources. Instead, they use others' misdemeanours to justify their own.

Meanwhile the CEC, which is responsible

for handling any grievances, is at a loose end. Rashid Bekbasarov, who heads the commission's working group on complaints of election irregularities reported that there were few complaints, and none connected with bribery or administrative resources. So the parties were exonerated from any criticism or punishment, and the elections were declared free and fair.

With Kyrgyzstan's political parties agreeing to overlook each other's misdemeanours and the public afraid to speak out, bribery and corruption will continue to be endemic. Every time after elections, dozens of anonymous public sector workers – teachers, doctors and other professionals – report election campaign violations to voluntary sector organisations, journalists and even the political parties themselves. Non-governmental organisations complain, however, that people are afraid to report this officially to the police or the CEC, or to put their names to their complaints.

"Bribery of voters is not just a problem but a threat to national security," Ainura Usupbekova, a representative of Taza Shailoo (Clear Elections) Association, said at a roundtable discussion after elections in local councils in February and March 2016.¹ An analysis of the survey results from this current research showed that party election campaigns involved the distribution of financial resources among voters, increased agitation in the media, the use of foreign political consultants and entertainment events. Most respondents during the survey pointed out that "the election campaign of political parties is carried out based on distribution of funds among voters, enhanced campaigning in the media, conducting recreational activities in the districts".

The parliamentary elections in October 2015 became one of the most expensive parliamentary elections in the history of the country, although according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) they were quite fair, open and competitive. The case of the interception

of US\$700,000 in cash (in a country where a university professor receives on average the equivalent of about US\$100 per month) by the National Security Service illustrates the amount of resources invested in these election campaigns. Different parties used their resources differently. Some tried to simply buy voters en masse, and the Kyrgyz media regularly reported incidents in which candidates offered voters cash or various goods in exchange for votes. Others tried organizing quite professional Western-style election campaigns, often using Western-educated local election campaign organizers.²

Previous examples of research on this topic from earlier elections

In general, this type of formal study has previously been conducted either by government agencies or international organizations. However, in this study, many experts and members of political parties reported that almost all political parties conducted similar studies before the elections for a thorough analysis of the “market and its offer and demand”. However, such internal investigations were never distributed as they were used by political parties for their internal election strategy.

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE conducted a significant observation of the 2015 parliamentary elections in which they concluded that the hurried implementation of a biometric voter registration system, concerns over ballot secrecy and “significant procedural problems during the vote count” were the main issues on election day.

II. Current drivers of the cost of parliamentary politics

Barriers to entry into politics, both formal and hidden costs, and implications for the political system

After the break-up of the Soviet one-party system in 1991-1993, the basics of free elections and a multi-party system were provided in the constitution of Kyrgyzstan. The law on civil organizations was passed in 1991 and the law on political parties in 1999. This latter law was quite liberal and it allowed the creation of a political party by 10 persons. The cost of political party registration was very low. It was required to pay only for the certificate of registration.

A feature of parliamentary development in Kyrgyzstan is that the party system has developed on the basis of patronage networks including business interests and “regional identity”.

According to interviews with representatives of political parties, almost all parties participating in the survey noted that their charter documents allowed them to accept “membership fees”; but they weren’t able to specify the amount and regulations of this process.

Thus, Altynbek Sulaimanov, Leader of the Respublika faction, responded: “We do not raise membership fees as earlier. But some MPs and some members of factions contribute some amounts of money to our fund.” A member of the Ata-Meken party also noted financing is based on willing help.

According to the survey, budgets of political parties are confidential. According to Chynybai Tursunbekov, SDPK faction Leader, the cause is: “Firstly, if we inspect those who openly finance parties, questions might arise. Secondly, some sponsors are afraid to openly donate money. Our government does not finance parties as in other countries. That is why budgets of our parties are always hidden.”

Moreover, the presence of networks supported by local elite groups is one of the important factors in winning elections in Kyrgyzstan. These networks have to include representatives of various areas (business, media, culture, science, etc.) which will be involved to the election process.

An analysis of party lists in 2010 by representatives of all regions of Kyrgyzstan confirmed the use of this approach in compiling party lists. The most successful parties included candidates with successful businesses as well as former officials. Regionalism showed itself through regional and “fellow-countryman” signs. Social mobilization on this basis still plays a significant role in all levels.

Also, parties in Kyrgyzstan are created on personality cults or “cults of fuehrer”. They don’t protect the interests of their electorate because they exist separately from them, instead uniting around a Leader and aimed at serving only their own interests.

An analysis of the results of the survey showed that, in the formation of a list of candidates for a political party, the main criterion was the amount of money contributed to the party’s election fund.

To the question on how much money guaranteed a place in the “pass group” of candidates from a political party, 60 per cent of respondents answered more than US\$200,000.

The biggest controversy was caused in January 2016, however, when the CEC disqualified three MPs from the Kyrgyzstan party, — Elmira Dzhumaliev, Cholpon Ezenamanova and Urmat Ishenbekov. Election officials explained that the disqualifications were implemented at the request of party Leader Kanatbek Isaev, who stated in a letter on 21 December that the trio had declared their

intent to quit the Kyrgyzstan faction. Rules stipulate that MPs can lose their seats should they quit their party grouping. However, all candidates from political parties were forced to sign pre-election resignation letters before the vote.

“We signed a statement to say that we would give up our mandates if we don’t get enough votes. But there was no date on these letters, and since I was an MP in an earlier convocation, I stated that these letters had no legal effect”, said excluded MP Elmira Dzhumalievna.

Cholpon Sultanbekova, another female member of the Kyrgyzstan party, said that the pre-emptive resignations were part of the deal to be considered as a candidate. “Those who do not get enough votes cannot be a member of parliament if there are no voters behind them. The threshold was not met by these [three] MPs.”

This kind of arrangement makes a mockery of Kyrgyzstan’s proportional system. Requiring candidates to deliver a certain number of votes from their home regions — typically around 5,000 each, according to experts — threatens in effect to create a majoritarian voting system by stealth.

Less powerful and influential MPs, who tend more often to be women, are typically the most vulnerable. And the concern is that corruption can come into play as parties seek replacements for deposed MPs.

Some parties publicly admit they have used unusual ways to force their candidates to leave if they do not get enough votes. The Respublika-Ata Jurt party filmed clips of their candidates reading vows. “If I break my oath, let God punish me and may I not see the happiness of my children,” the Respublika-Ata Jurt vow reads in its conclusion³.

It is clearly established that the parties with greater financial assets campaigned longer and more extensively throughout the country.

Those parties with smaller funds were only able to intensify their campaigns during the end of the campaign period, resulting in marginally fewer votes.

Many of the parties themselves are not organized around platforms, but rather around personalities. This often leads to little in the way of party loyalty amongst MPs, who have been known to change parties just before an election in order to stand a better chance of retaining their seat.

The practice of “seat buying” is widely recognized within the parliament and often seen as a fund-raising method for the party. Campaign finance reports have shown that significant portions of some parties’ funds are raised from personal donations from candidates. While not explicitly illegal under current campaign finance law, the practice does raise significant questions about the place of private money and business in Kyrgyz politics.

In conditions where entering the already narrow political field is based on access to administrative and financial capital, we find a high level of competition among the already established order of players. Unfortunately, entering a field such as this becomes closed to new forces, young politicians and grassroots movements. This was made clear by the example of the new Democrat party, which was founded by young professionals and entrepreneurs of a liberal orientation. Wanting to stay true to their democratic principles, the party refused to engage in vote-buying and, having gained about 4,000 votes in Osh in 2015, was unable to pass the electoral threshold. Observing their defeat, many young parties are asking themselves if it is worth staying true to democratic principles if the rest of the field is playing by different rules. In other words, five years after the constitutional reforms, to what extent do elections remain an instrument for open political competition and elite turnover?

The vote-buying in the 2015 parliamentary

elections and the 2016 local elections has overturned the processes that were set in motion by the democratic reforms after the events of 2010. It is difficult to say where these processes will lead. It is possible that vote-buying is a transitional phenomenon in those post-communist states, where hyper-competition between oligarchic elites is not yet completely regulated by common rules of the game. Much in Kyrgyzstan will depend on whether this dangerous precedent will be comprehended at the highest levels and whether the political elites will take responsibility. While this is not done, no one dares to predict with any confidence the potential and future of party development. The next presidential elections (2017) will only whip up the existing inter-elite competition and, consequently, the use of dirty tactics.

Factors influencing cost of election campaigns (mediatisation, political culture, corruption, legal frameworks etc.)

During the parliamentary elections in 2015, the media provided contestants with a platform to present their views. Contestants made extensive use of political advertisements, and direct debates between candidates enabled voters to familiarize themselves with the candidates. The limited coverage of the campaign by the majority of media outlets in their news and current affairs programmes, as well as a lack of investigative and analytical reporting significantly reduced the amount of impartial information available to voters. The lack of editorial coverage of contestants and the campaign contrasted sharply with the extensive positive coverage of the president and other state officials in all state-financed media. The CEC went beyond its mandate by establishing accreditation requirements for media outlets and websites and reserving the right to revoke such accreditation, which effectively prohibited some media from airing paid advertisements.

Observers of election coverage noted that state-affiliated media favored the ruling

political party, devoting the majority of news programming to activities of the president. However, these preferential tendencies did not hinder access to alternative programming from other mass media. This is likely due to the fact that all competing political party leaders have their own or affiliated media outlets, including Tushtuk, created by Kamchybek Tashiev, and NTS, affiliated with Omurbek Babanov, for example. Unlike previous election campaigns, the 2015 parliamentary elections were not as lucrative for regional newspapers. Instead, the majority of political advertisements were broadcast on television and online media outlets. Traditionally, the media see election periods as an opportunity to make a profit. In that manner, the Public Television-Radio Company (commonly known as OTRK, Obschestvennaya Tele-Radio Kompaniya) earned over KGS90 million (US\$1.25 million) from parties' campaign funds and was permitted by the state to keep the profit for the modernization of the television station.⁴

Parliamentary elections are primarily regulated by the 2010 Constitution, the 2011 Constitutional Law on Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (hereinafter Election Law), and the 2011 Law on Election Commissions to Conduct Elections and Referenda. Recent amendments were supported overall by the parliamentary parties and: introduced mandatory biometric voter registration and the use of ballot scanners, streamlined electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, increased electoral deposits for political parties, revised the electoral threshold, and raised campaign finance contribution and spending limits. Statements about the unconstitutionality of the biometric registration measures were rejected by the court. The legislative framework in the field of elections, in general, provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections. Recent changes in legislation take into account some of the previous OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Venice Commission recommendations, including: recommendations designed to improve the accuracy of voter lists, the

adoption of measures to prevent illegal ballot stuffing, the threshold change for the entry of a political party into parliament, as well as ordering and clarification dispute resolution proceedings related to the election.

Nevertheless, not enacted were the remaining recommendations, which include the opportunity for independent candidates to participate in parliamentary elections, ensuring compliance with gender quotas up to the stage of distribution of mandates, and increase the transparency of financing election campaign. Existing contradictions between the legislative acts negatively impact on legal certainty. The decisions and resolutions of the CEC did not always have a legal basis, and sometimes directly contradicted the legislation.

The 2011 Election Law significantly increased the limits previously set on financial contributions to campaigns (raised fivefold to KGS5 million in the most recent election – about US\$74,000), and, following an amendment in 2015, additionally increased the limits on campaign expenditures. In general, campaign transactions are not to be made in cash, and the CEC issued warnings to three parties for ignoring this rule.

Furthermore, the Election Law bans contestants from conducting charitable activities from the moment elections are called. Even so, some parties actively advertised past charitable activities as part of their campaign. In doing so, many parties hired so-called party activists, many of whom were paid in cash despite the existing law against such dealings.

The president acknowledged the widespread accusations of vote-buying following the launch of several official investigations. Party representatives reported that voters, especially in rural areas, were sometimes promised money or personal political favours in return for their votes.

Notably, while the law requires parties to submit their final financial reports within

10 days after the election, there are no repercussions for parties which do not submit. Furthermore, the CEC is not obligated to publish these reports, further hindering transparency.

The study showed that most contributions to the election fund of a political party were carried out through a specific representative of a leader of a political party, or in person by the leader. It also revealed that the funds of each candidate of a political party are the main sources of financing for the election campaign of that party. Requirements could be introduced to show the legal origin of funds contributed to political parties.

The majority of respondents noted that the financing of the election campaign of a political party provided incentives for candidates by gender, age, ethnicity and individuals with disabilities. The public position of a political party and of the leader of a political party play an important role in determining the amount of funds contributed to the electoral fund of a political party.

Prior to the 2010 constitution there was a majority system where each parliamentary candidate based their campaign strategy on the needs of their particular district's voters. Under that system, voters had an idea how to evaluate the performance of a member of parliament in representing their interests in parliament. However, after the transition to a proportional system, factors such as a lack of a political culture and the practices of political parties demonstrate the challenges of implementing a multiparty proportional system at this stage of development. The political culture and a tradition of voting based on performance and programme evaluation of political parties are not present in current reality. Now, in addition to winning votes, the candidate must take care to enter the top ranks of the list of a political party, which entails additional costs. This situation does not allow common people who do not have large financial and administrative resources to stand successfully for elections.

An effective MP is the one who solves the current needs of the voters during elections. In society there are no stable indicators or criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of deputies as the representatives of the people in parliament. Therefore, “the current financial or other assistance” rendered by a prospective deputy to certain contingents of voters is perceived in society as the basic functions of a deputy.

Demands on MPs once in office, both formal and informal costs (constituents, political party, external demands)

Under Kyrgyz legislation, a member of parliament on taking office does not bear any formal costs nor does the party or the Parliament. However, during the survey, almost all the respondents noted that very often the wealthier MPs on an ongoing basis provide financial assistance or carry out charitable events for needy people mainly from their region and/or polling station. Scheduled meetings of deputies in the regions are often held as festive treats and events. At first glance, it is a normal process when the deputy voluntarily helps the needy people. However, as noted by the survey respondents, this phenomenon begins to have a permanent character so in the corridors of parliament every day there are people calling to each MP for help.

Respondents noted that many wealthy members are engaged in it during the entire period, which makes it possible to run for another term and to be a “people’s” MP for a long time. However, such a phenomenon shows that in Kyrgyzstan many MPs are engaged in improper functions. This discredits parliament as a whole and gives the wrong impression of the functions of the deputy and parliament. Moreover, this contributes to the prevention of youth and other potentially worthy candidates from serving as effective MPs if they cannot afford to provide continued financial support to constituents.

Moreover, during the survey respondents

mentioned about mandatory monthly costs to be paid to each MP by the government. According to the rules of procedure of parliament, each deputy has a fund to cover costs related to the implementation of their functions during trips to regions to meet with voters, to hire consultants and cover other services. Recently, however, the deputies voted not to report on the expenditure of their parliamentary funds. Such a resolution was adopted in parliament. This decision canceled statements on how the money spent from the deputies’ funds were spent. It was reported that their monthly fund is about KGS40,000 (about US\$600). The decision of deputies was received with criticism in the community because now the voters do not know how MPs are spending public funds.

III. Outlook

General trend in cost of politics (upward, downward, or static?)

According to the results of the survey, the main factors that increase the financial expenses of the election campaign of political parties are increases in the number of ongoing cultural and recreational activities in the districts and increases in funding amounts to bribe voters.

In addition, there were examples of increased bribing of voters outside of polling stations on voting day carried out under such schemes as:

- The use of mobile phones with a camera or video camera for photographing or taking videos of ballots with a marked tick in front of the right political party in order to provide evidence of a cast ballot (the cost of one of the votes was assessed to be KGS2,000 to KGS6,000 (about US\$80 depending on the region);
- The solving of pressing, everyday problems of some voters (construction of the necessary social facilities or their repair, employment opportunities, etc.) in exchange for votes;
- The distribution of humanitarian aid (food - flour, rice, vegetable oil, meat, etc.; coal, furniture and others) during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, which coincided with the campaign period.

During the interviews, independent observers of the recent elections stated the following: Drawing up the list of voters and voter identification based on new biometric technologies together with the use of automatic reading of ballot boxes to count votes minimized the possibility of falsification of voting results by members of election commission teams. However, if dishonest candidates used to bribe electoral commission teams, now, according to civil society activists, they started to bribe the voters massively. Bribery of voters, which in the past was only one of the election issues, is now becoming

the main and most dangerous threat.

Additionally, the study period coincided with the election of deputies of local councils in some regions of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In this connection, it is necessary to note that these elections for local councils were also accompanied by the use of administrative resources and the increase in distribution of money as it reported by local non-governmental organizations engaged in election observation:

In addition, the preliminary results of the elections in some city councils showed the strengthening of existing mechanisms used for vote-buying in the parliamentary election – i.e. the regional elections also used the previously mentioned schemes, mostly on the day of the vote. This fact may ultimately raise the question of the legitimacy of both the regional parliaments, and the parliament.

What options are currently available to restrain the role of money in politics and to what extent are these likely to make an impact?

In order to address the issues raised, it is recommended to use the experience of developed democratic countries, as well as to improve the regulatory framework in terms of auditing and the transparency of the collection and expenditure of the election fund of a political party. This would help to clearly define the “cost of politics” in the Kyrgyz Republic and further the development of democratic institutions.

Furthermore, because voters tend to support individuals within party lists as opposed to party platforms, most MPs from the previous parliament sought to satisfy the interests of a specific constituency as opposed to addressing national issues. This trend is likely to continue with the current cohort but might improve somewhat. The prospect of even more intense political competition might potentially focus MPs’ attention on larger issues to secure top positions within their parties.

This research shows that current political culture and legislation need further development.

definitely needs further amendments.

Limits and prohibitions on rising political costs can work only if there are adequate rules for disclosure. Therefore, public disclosure is at the foundation of controlling money in politics and, without it, most other approaches will fail. Without a party or candidate disclosing expenditures, spending limits can not be monitored or enforced, and without the names of the vendors who were paid by the campaign funds, spending can not be audited and verified. Effective public disclosure requires that candidates and parties report in detail on receipts and expenditures, and that campaign and party funding reports are provided to the public in a timely manner. Two benefits result from effective disclosure. First, more educated and informed voters are better prepared to exercise their rights in a democracy. Second, the media and civil society are empowered to “follow the money” thereby keeping a check on politicians. The logic is that openness is the antidote to the influence of big money, and to the secrecy that enables illicit funding or unsavory donations. It is clear that international organizations and the donor community need to pay more focused attention to civic education in emerging countries.

This background research revealed that there are no adequate disclosure laws and regulations. The Westminster foundation for Democracy (WFD) can provide expertise in reviewing the country’s disclosure laws and other relevant legal and regulatory provisions, resulting in detailed recommendations for improvements. The WFD can also assist various constituencies (such as reform-minded legislators, election commissioners, other relevant government agencies, and NGOs) to consider options for new and/or revised laws and regulations, and facilitate a group effort to draft them. A draft law on political parties could be considered as a good example to regulate disclosure principles. The existing law on political parties was adopted in 1999 and

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.eng.24.kg/election2011/180060-news24.html>
- 2 <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5424>
- 3 <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/77936>
- 4 https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/u105/EE_MSI_2016_Kyrgyzstan.pdf