

GEORGIA'S ROSE REVOLUTION:
FROM REGIME WEAKNESS TO REGIME COLLAPSE

Cory Welt
Center for Strategic and International Studies

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INTRODUCTION

By the books, regime change in Georgia was a foregone conclusion. Years before external actors began to reevaluate the capacity of President Eduard Shevardnadze to bring democracy and development to Georgia, the country's population had already become disenchanted with the former Soviet foreign minister (1985-1990) and first secretary of the local Communist Party (1972-1985), who came to power in independent Georgia in 1992. Popular discontent was directed at increasing criminalization within the regime, massive corruption, and an inability to deliver basic social services, including gas and electricity, to the population. Previously, a combination of public apathy and fear of upheaval, nimble political dealmaking, and Shevardnadze's international popularity contributed to the regime's survival.

By 2003, however, the regime was highly vulnerable. A diverse set of indicators pointed to this vulnerability. These included: a severely fragmented political elite and the unpopular "replacement alliances" which the rump ruling party used to shore up its electoral strength; defeat in past local elections and pre-election opinion polls; a relatively free broadcast media with the capacity and interest to cover dissent; and, finally, a lack of will to engage in repression against citizens seeking to exercise their democratic rights. This "vacuum" of state vulnerability set the context for Georgia's electoral breakthrough.

Nonetheless, this breakthrough was still a surprise, as was its particular outcome – the resignation of Shevardnadze and the uncontested rise to power of Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement and Zurab Zhvania and Nino Burjanadze's Democrats. The opposition entered the 2003 parliamentary election disunited, promising the regime an opportunity to play parties off

each other and forestall the opposition from forming an effective resistance movement. In addition, the nature of the electoral contest – an election to parliament in a presidential system – did not offer much hope for radical change. The election was mainly about defining the process and actors for the 2005 presidential election, a race in which Shevardnadze was constitutionally barred from running. The assumption that the opposition parties running in 2003 would enjoy a respectable showing, even given fraud, and that their supporters would tolerate this, led observers to fail to predict Georgia's electoral breakthrough.

To explain the Rose Revolution, therefore, we need to not only address the regime's vulnerability prior to the elections but also the dynamics of the postelectoral process itself, when the interaction between social actors committed to exposing and protesting fraud and a weak state scrambling to maintain order dramatically magnified the regime's vulnerability, ultimately providing an opening for regime change. Often neglected after the Rose Revolution is the fact that protests were generally not that large – five thousand demonstrators or less and only on two separate occasions substantially greater. As this slow-moving mobilization suggests, it is a mistake to assume that regime weakness alone engenders a successful electoral breakthrough. A vulnerable regime still holds levers of power. Barring evidence to the contrary, citizens may still believe it capable of weathering protest and reconsolidating authority. A collective action problem thus needs to be overcome, if not regarding the fear of punishment then regarding the perception of probable success.¹ Citizens have to see not only that the regime is weak, but that this weakness can actually be translated into defeat.

¹ On problems of collective action applied to the electoral breakthroughs in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, see Joshua A. Tucker, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and the '2nd Wave' of Post-Communist Democratic Revolutions," working paper (version 1.1), November 2005, <http://www.wss.princeton.edu/jtucker/Tucker_EFCA_2005.pdf>.

In the course of twenty-one days, this collective action problem was overcome as the interaction of social actors and the state dramatically magnified the regime's vulnerability, paving the way for regime change. This process unfolded in a number of steps. First, NGOs and media produced postelectoral vote counts that confirmed the regime's defeat; even the official exit poll and election results suggested the same. Second, Shevardnadze insisted on making the ultimate replacement alliance with a widely reviled regional-based elite, demonstrating the hollowness of authority at the center. Third, the postelectoral protests shifted beyond the bounds of political partisanship, as two opposition parties united in protest, and were joined not only by NGOs but a broad spectrum of Georgia's professional and cultural elite, and even a number of regime elites. Fourth, after election day the broadcast media had both the capacity and interest to cover protest and regime defections. Finally, political elites and state security organs confirmed their lack of resolve to use force against peaceful protestors. Together, these factors turned a weak regime into a collapsing one.

Turning to the influence of external forces on Georgia's electoral breakthrough, I focus on two – activist learning from other cases of popular mobilization (i.e., the “diffusion” effect) and U.S. assistance and diplomacy. There is no doubt that the student movement Kmara and associated NGOs, as well as political leaders – Saakashvili in particular – sought to emulate the success of electoral breakthroughs elsewhere, especially the popular mobilization in Serbia against President Slobodan Milosevic. Adhering to an electoral model that had proved successful in Serbia and elsewhere in eastern Europe, these NGOs and political figures highlighted the regime's vulnerability before the election and afterwards. Their efforts, however, operated only in conjunction with other factors that cannot be ascribed to diffusion (i.e., the role of Adjara, the broadcast media, the broader nonpolitical elite, and the absence of force). Ultimately, even given

Saakashvili's own personal emulation of democratic contestation elsewhere, his own role – particularly his decision to have supporters rush parliament at a critical moment – is best considered outside a diffusion framework.

As for U.S. assistance and diplomacy, I argue that its importance in Georgia's case is not chiefly in the commonly understood sense of strengthening the democratic process through technical assistance for elections and support for political party and civil society development. Instead, U.S. assistance and diplomacy is more accurately viewed as an instrument that affected government vulnerability directly. Declining U.S. support for the Georgian government heightened perceptions of regime vulnerability before the election and, more importantly, afterwards.

I now turn to discuss indicators of regime vulnerability prior to Georgia's parliamentary election. I then analyze in greater detail the particular set of interactions between social actors and the state that magnified the regime's vulnerability after election day. Next, I assess the role of diffusion and U.S. assistance and diplomacy. I conclude with a brief comparison of the Rose Revolution to cases of failed electoral breakthroughs in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

THE VULNERABILITY OF THE REGIME

The Georgian government's vulnerability prior to election day can be measured by a diverse set of indicators. First, political elite fissures before the election were palpable, with the regime forced to rely on a hodgepodge of marginal political figures to shore up its power base. Second, the ruling party surrendered electoral superiority in local elections a year before parliamentary elections and, on the eve of the election, could not (or did not care to) prevent the publication of opinion polls that suggested this outcome could be repeated. Third, an independent and popular television station emerged victorious from a battle with the government

two years before the election and continued to criticize the regime up until election day. Finally, the government openly lacked the resolve to use force against peaceful protestors.

Grasping at Straws: Divided Elites and Replacement Alliances

The regime's most visible sign of vulnerability was the implosion of the ruling party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), in the three years before parliamentary elections. In 2000, a group of parliamentary deputies representing the business community were the first to defect from a government that had already begun to be viewed as impotent and captured by a handful of corrupt and criminal officials. These deputies formed the opposition New Rights Party (NRP) in 2000.² Shevardnadze himself resigned from his position as chairman of the CUG in September 2001. This resignation heralded the party's collapse. Complaining of an inability to make a dent in Georgia's political culture of corruption, Mikheil Saakashvili, who had served as Georgia's minister of justice for a year, resigned days after Shevardnadze left his party post. Leaving the CUG together with several of his supporters, Saakashvili formed the National Movement in November.³

Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the Georgian parliament since 1995, departed from the government in November 2001, after a student-led demonstration of several thousand, by far the largest in recent years, demanded the government's resignation after a scandalous operation against the independent television channel Rustavi-2 (see below). Though Zhvania was not implicated in the operation, he agreed to leave office as a result of a deal in which the ministers of security and internal affairs, the key offenders, also resigned. While Zhvania fought with

² For an account of the NRP's defection, see Irakly Areshidze, prepublication manuscript, *Democracy and Autocracy in Eurasia: Georgia in Transition* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming 2007), 51-54.

³ "Saakashvili Disassociates From Shevardnadze's Corrupted Government," *Civil.Ge United Nations Association of Georgia Magazine* (Tbilisi), September 20, 2001, <www.civil.ge>; "Former Georgian justice minister-led movement to hold congress in January," Prime News agency (Tbilisi), December 4, 2001, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

supporters of Shevardnadze to retain legal title to the CUG, the courts eventually ruled in the latter's favor, and Zhvania's wing formally seceded from the party weeks before the 2002 local elections.⁴ Nino Burjanadze, Zhvania's successor as parliamentary chairman, made her final break from the regime in 2003, uniting with Zhvania on a ticket known as the Burjanadze-Democrats (henceforth referred to as the Democrats).

With each defection, the ruling party retreated further into its shell. By the 2003 election, the CUG had become a camp of senior apparatchiks, joined by a handful of younger powerbrokers, mainly based in the regions, accumulating illegal wealth through their government positions. Additionally, the CUG retained support in Armenian- and Azerbaijani-populated regions of Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, through a combination of patronage networks tying local leaders to the CUG apparatus and local approval for the interethnic stability that reigned during CUG rule.

To make up for the vulnerability that resulted from these defections, the government tried to rebuild a power base to contest parliamentary elections by allying with a number of former opposition parties and figures whose popularity had long peaked and whose decision to join with the ruling party was widely met with derision. These included the previously staunch oppositionist Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia and her National Democratic Party; businessman Vakhtang Rcheulishvili's Socialist Party; and the extreme religio-nationalist Guram Sharadze. While CUG leaders may have calculated that the formation of a new progovernmental alliance, For A New Georgia (FNG), would enable it to pick up additional votes among these factions'

⁴ See "Government Was Forced to Leave," *Civil.Ge*, November 1, 2001; Jaba Devdariani, "Reformists Vie To Establish Power Base in Georgian Local Elections," Eurasia Insight, EurasiaNet.org, May 29, 2002, <www.eurasianet.org>; Mikhail Vignansky, "Georgian Reformer Faces Political Oblivion," Caucasus Reporting Service No. 129, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), May 17, 2002, <www.iwpr.net>.

core supporters, this was at the expense of increasing the perception that the CUG was unable to stand on its own feet.⁵

Precedents of Defeat: Local Elections and Opinion Polls

By the time of the parliamentary elections, not only had the ruling party collapsed, its vulnerability at the polls had already been demonstrated – both through past local elections and pre-election opinion polls. Thrown into disarray by its initial series of defections, the CUG lacked the wherewithal or ability to engineer a convincing show of strength already in 2002 local elections. Despite substantial disorganization and voting improprieties, the ruling party's incapacity to mobilize supporters or to engineer decisive electoral fraud was exposed in these elections. Out of a total of approximately 4,850 seats, candidates formally affiliated with the CUG won just 70 seats, barely one percent of total mandates.⁶ Coupled with the estimated 600 party supporters who ran as independents, the CUG total came to approximately 14 percent of the total seats available.⁷ In the city council of Tbilisi, Georgia's capital and home to more than one-third of the country's population, the CUG did not obtain a single seat.⁸

⁵ In referring to the CUG's coalition partners, Nino Burjanadze recounts how she told Shevardnadze he was "doing a really strange thing...going against everything [he had] done" when he "gathered around him people who were corrupt, people who had no authority among Georgians, people who were hated by Georgians. It was really unbelievable how President Shevardnadze could surround himself with such people, but it was his choice. I absolutely can't explain it." Similarly, in the words of parliamentary deputy and NGO representative Ivliane Khaindrava, the pro-government bloc "looked like a ghastly mutant even in the Georgian reality. The cocktail of failures, bankrupt politicians and dubious individuals who had nothing to do with politics was too much for the people to stomach." Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch, *"Enough!": The Rose Revolution in The Republic of Georgia, 2003* (New York: Nova Science, 2005), 45; and Ivlian Haindrava, "Georgia: Through Elections to the 'Rose Revolution'," in *Election Assessment in the South Caucasus (2003-2004)* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2004), 107, <http://www.idea.int/publications/ea_caucasus/upload/BookEng.pdf>.

⁶ "Percentage Allotment of Sakrebulo Members Elected Among Election Subjects throughout Georgia (Results by June 24, 2002)," Central Election Commission of Georgia, <<http://www.archive.cec.gov.ge/Cfdocs/sabolooshedegebi/gasulebiENG.cfm?contact=0>>.

⁷ Areshidze, manuscript, 66.

⁸ For more on the local elections, see Irakly Areshidze and Paata Chakhnashvili, "Pre-Vote Analysis of the Georgian Local Elections Campaign," 2002, and "Technical Assessment of Election Day Administration 2002 Local Government Elections of Georgia," IFES, July 2002, <www.ifes.ge/files/assasments/techn_ass_eng.pdf>.

2002 Local Election Results

- Independent candidates – 2754 seats, 56.80 percent;
- NRP – 558 seats, 11.51;
- ISG – 485 seats, 10.00;
- Revival Party – 201 seats, 4.15;
- Socialist Party – 189 seats, 3.90;
- Labor Party – 167 seats, 3.44;
- National Democratic Party – 86 seats, 1.77;
- Citizens' Union of Georgia – 70 seats, 1.44
- National Movement – 29 seats, .60;
- Christian Conservative Party – 4 seats, 0.08;
- Other parties – 306 seats, 6.31;

The chief significance of the results was that the ruling party was vulnerable, not that an obvious competitor was rising to take its place. A full 57% of the seats (2,754) were filled by “independent” candidates (including the CUG supporters mentioned above). Throughout the country, the party that received the most votes on the basis of party affiliation was the opposition New Rights Party (NRP), which received 558 party-affiliated seats and approximately 309 additional independents (18 percent of total seats). Four parties that served formally or informally as CUG allies in the 2003 parliamentary elections – Industry Will Save Georgia (ISG), the Socialist Party, the National Democratic Party, and Revival, the party of Aslan Abashidze, head of the autonomous republic of Adjara – received 20 percent of the seats, not including informally-affiliated independent candidates.⁹ The opposition Labor Party, led by Shalva Natelashvili, received only three percent of seats, while Mikheil Saakashvili’s National Movement, which campaigned almost exclusively in Tbilisi, received less than one percent.¹⁰ In the Tbilisi city council, however, the Labor Party and the National Movement each won

⁹ ISG received 485 party-affiliated seats (10 percent plus independents), while the other three parties cumulatively received an additional 476 party-affiliated seats (another 10 percent plus independents).

¹⁰ The remaining 6 percent of seats were filled by 7 other parties, three of which received more party-affiliated seats than either the CUG or the National Movement. A complete analysis of the approximately 1,845 independent seats that were not affiliated with the CUG or NRP is required to more precisely determine relative party strength. See “Percentage Allotment of Sakrebulo Members,” Central Election Commission of Georgia.

approximately 25 percent of the vote, finishing in first and second place, respectively.¹¹ Zhvania and his parliamentary allies ran on the platform of the little-known Christian Conservative Party, which received 7 percent of the vote in the Tbilisi City Council.

Public opinion polls in the last two months of the election campaign also demonstrated the government's vulnerability. Polling, commissioned by Rustavi-2 and, for one final poll, the Soros-funded Open Society Georgia Foundation, was carried out regularly and the results publicized weekly on at least Rustavi-2. According to these polls, the progovernment bloc FNG had the support of just 6 to 9 percent of the population; on questions of trust, government leaders also ranked at the bottom.¹²

In the opinion polls, nearly all opposition parties ranked higher than the FNG. The Democrats led the polls for most of this time with gradually rising support of 16 to 20 percent, almost exclusively linked to Burjanadze's relatively high popularity (she consistently ranked at the top of lists of trusted politicians, while Zhvania ranked barely above government leaders). The National Movement rocketed from 8 percent to 23 percent over the eight-week period. Polls showed the Labor Party at 14 to 18 percent, and the New Rights at 5 to 10 percent. They showed the level of support for Revival gradually declining over this period from 13 to 8 percent.

The Victory of the Media

¹¹ While Saakashvili demanded a recount that ultimately did not change these results, the Labor Party agreed to support his bid to become head of the city council. According to Natelashvili, the Labor Party supported Saakashvili's candidacy to prove to the population that he lacked governing ability and also "so [that] afterwards people won't say that Saakashvili could have saved Tbilisi and Georgia and we did not give him a chance." See "Georgian Labour Party brands its ally in Tbilisi city council 'bogus opposition'," Prime News agency, June 25, 2002, trans. in BBC Monitoring; and Java Devdariani, "Opposition Leader Poised to Become Tbilisi Council Chairman," Eurasia Insight, EurasiaNet, June 19, 2002. Also see Areshidze, manuscript, 73.

¹² "Georgian parliament speaker's election bloc leads opinion polls," Rustavi-2 TV (Tbilisi), September 17, 2003; "Georgian opposition parties leading opinion polls," Rustavi-2 TV, October 4, 2003, "Georgian opposition parties maintain steady lead in opinion polls," Rustavi-2 TV, October 10, 2003; "Opposition parties lead opinion polls in Georgia," Caucasus Press, October 27, 2003, all trans. in BBC Monitoring.

Prior to elections, the opposition had a key media ally in the independent television channel Rustavi 2. In an overall climate of relative media freedom, the channel had been recognized as the most professional in Georgia and had gained widespread popularity “as a result of several years of open and fearless criticism of the Shevardnadze regime.”¹³ Rustavi-2 became associated most visibly with antigovernment sentiment in July 2001, when a popular 25-year-old television news anchor, Giorgi Sanaia, was shot to death in his apartment. A former interior ministry official was found guilty of his murder. The prosecution’s belabored justification of the crime on personal grounds was believed by many, however, to mask a directive to eliminate Sanaia in response to Rustavi-2’s reporting on corruption. Sanaia’s death caused an uproar and brought thousands onto the streets for his funeral.¹⁴ Three months later, tax police raided Rustavi-2’s offices, whether as an attempt to shut the station down, buy it out, or deter it from airing reports on corruption.¹⁵

Whatever its objective, the operation failed spectacularly, leading instead to the government’s resignation. The operation also did not rein in Rustavi-2. Prior to the November

¹³ David Usupashvili, “An Analysis of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia: A Case Study, November 2003-March 2004,” in *Election Assessment in the South Caucasus*, 94. The rise of Rustavi-2 need not be interpreted solely as a case of a plucky independent media defending the principle of free speech and public criticism. The station was developed not as an opposition channel, but with Shevardnadze’s full support and the active assistance of Zhvania in the mid-1990s as a platform for reform and an example of Georgian democracy. While it did benefit from startup grants from the Eurasia and Soros Foundations, as well as assistance and training from the U.S. government-funded NGO Internews, it was also a business venture that procured financial support from a variety of private domestic sources. See Areshidze, manuscript, 43-44, 95-96. In a prepublication version of his article on the Rose Revolution (see n. 20), Kandelaki discusses the development of Rustavi-2 in similar terms. Giorgi Kandelaki, “Rose Revolution: A Participant’s Story,” United States Institute of Peace, unpublished, July 2005, 16-17; also David Anable, “Role of Georgia’s media – and Western aid – in the Rose Revolution,” Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, 2005, 8, <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Papers/Working_Papers/2006_3.pdf>.

¹⁴ See “Giorgi Sanaia, A Famous Georgian Journalist, Was Found Murdered in His Own Flat,” *Civil.Ge*, July 27, 2001; “Murder of Giorgi Sanaia – What Was the Reason and What Will Happen Next,” *Civil.Ge*, July 28, 2001; “Georgia Mourns Murdered Journalist,” Caucasus Reporting Service No. 92, IWPR, July 31, 2001; and “Georgia: Sanaia Murder Inquiry Slated,” Caucasus Reporting Service No. 110, IWPR, December 18, 2001.

¹⁵ “Ministry of State Security Enters Rustavi-2,” *Civil.Ge*, October 30, 2001; “Free Speech, Democracy Is Being Ignored,” *Civil.Ge*, October 31, 2001; “Protests Widen As More Students Hit the Streets,” *Civil.Ge*, October 31, 2001.

2003 election, Rustavi-2 openly sided with the opposition and actively encouraged the public to take part in elections, as well as cosponsored regular pre-election opinion polls. In 2003, Rustavi-2 was joined by two more independently financed stations: Imedi, owned by oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili, and Mze, owned by Vano Chkhartishvili, a leading banker and former minister of economy, industry, and trade. While Imedi remained largely apolitical in the runup to the election, Mze was willing to broadcast criticism of the regime, if to a lesser extent than Rustavi-2.¹⁶

The Absence of Fear

Whatever its faults, the Georgian government was strongly conditioned against using force to prevent or disperse peaceful protests prior to election day. Police brutality, official complicity in kidnapping crimes, and the unresolved murder of Sanaia in 2001 did point to the regime's ability to engage or tolerate isolated instances of violence. As well, in the two years before parliamentary elections, the government had made some effort to pressure critics – lawsuits against the media, the tax raid against Rustavi-2, a hardening of the libel law, and proposed reviews of foreign-sponsored organizations.¹⁷ Overall, however, the Georgian political scene was not characterized by repression – criticism freely emanated from a number of sources, including political parties across the spectrum, NGOs such as the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the Liberty Institute, and print and broadcast media. Anti-government demonstrations had never been dispersed, and no leading opposition figure had ever been arrested or seriously harassed. In addition, among Georgians it was a given that the memory of April 9, 1989, when Soviet troops forcibly dispersed pro-independence demonstrators on

¹⁶ Areshidze, manuscript, 95-96, 109, 116, 122.

¹⁷ See Laurence Broers, "After the 'revolution': Civil society and the challenges of consolidating democracy in Georgia," *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 3 (September 2005): 333-350, at 339.

Tbilisi's central Rustaveli Avenue, was a powerful restraint against government officials and members of the security forces participating in efforts to prevent or suppress protest.

Moreover, in the days before the election, Shevardnadze himself encouraged people to participate in the election without fear. In a message broadcast on state television four days before, he informed his audience that “every person has a free choice” and “every citizen [should] vote as their conscience dictates.” He added that “the possibility of opposition forces winning the majority of seats in parliament cannot be ruled out....If [the voters'] conscience tells them that the majority of seats should go to opposition forces, then I will be ready to cooperate with everyone who is guided by Georgia's interests.”¹⁸

In sum, prior to Georgia's 2003 parliamentary elections, several indicators pointed to the vulnerability of the regime. The regime was fragmented and dependent on discredited allies; it had lost local elections and ranked low on opinion polls; it had lost a showdown with an independent media that was beginning to expand; and it was unwilling to threaten or use force to discourage the population from exercising its democratic rights.

To win the election, the government was relying solely on popular inaction in the face of electoral fraud, after which it hoped to negotiate with members of other parties and majoritarian candidates to maintain and strengthen control over key levers of government prior to the 2005 presidential election. Under such conditions, the political arena was open to competition and protest.

¹⁸ “Georgian president interviewed on forthcoming parliamentary elections,” Georgian State Television Channel 1 (Tbilisi), October 29, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

FROM VULNERABILITY TO COLLAPSE

No Popular Mobilization: A Plausible Outcome

Even given the regime's vulnerability, mass mobilization, let alone successful mass mobilization, was not a foregone conclusion. Georgians have a history of popular mobilization, having protested against separatist movements and for independence in the last years of the Soviet Union and, immediately after, for and against the first Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. A decade later, however, Georgians appeared to have developed an antagonism toward popular mobilization, whether because the benefits of past mobilization proved so uncertain (including ethnic and civil war, and the corruption and lethargic development of the Shevardnadze years) or because the stability they had managed to achieve through past mobilization appeared so fragile. Perpetual power shortages finally led to mild street protests in 2000, and the tax raid against Rustavi-2 in the fall of 2001 prompted a significant demonstration of several thousand. In June 2003, another demonstration was mounted against government resistance to election commission reform.¹⁹ While these demonstrations signaled a renaissance of popular mobilization in Georgia, their limited size (probably no more than five thousand at their height) and duration also suggested that the appeal of popular mobilization had limits.

In the lead-up to parliamentary elections, then, it was a real question whether a sufficient number of Georgians would come out to the streets in the event of electoral fraud. According to Giorgi Kandelaki, a leading member of the youth organization Kmara, "breaking through the...political apathy" of a public which tended to believe that all elections were unfair was Kmara's central function. According to Kandelaki, Georgians' attitude toward both the political

¹⁹ On the June 2003 demonstration, see Irakly Areshidze, "Opposition Organizes Political Protests Across Georgia," Eurasia Insight, EurasiaNet, June 3, 2003; and Areshidze, manuscript, 97-99.

process and political parties was “nihilistic and distrustful.”²⁰ This meant that no matter how vulnerable the government was, and how obvious the fraud was to secure victory, the people could not be relied upon to defend their vote. Mikheil Saakashvili himself later estimated that up to 90 percent of the population would have said before the 2003 elections that they would not come out to the streets in the event of electoral fraud.²¹

Indeed, mostly forgotten after the Rose Revolution is the fact that street demonstrations were not that large or sustained. On ten of the twenty-one days between the election and Shevardnadze’s resignation (November 3, 6-7, and 15-21), there were no demonstrations to speak of. On eight days, November 4-5 and November 8-13, the number of demonstrators may not have exceeded 5,000.²² The first of three days of major demonstrations was November 14, when at least 20,000 demonstrators went to the streets. After this, street protest subsided for several days, although a civil disobedience campaign began throughout the country. A single, massive demonstration was convened on November 22 prior to the peaceful rushing of parliament by opposition supporters, which interrupted the new parliament’s opening session and sent Shevardnadze into retreat. This demonstration extended into the next day. Once Shevardnadze resigned, it transformed into an enormous street celebration, the image of which, after the parliamentary storming, is most symbolic of the Rose Revolution – occurring after it had already happened. Estimates for the size of the pre-celebration component of this demonstration vary wildly – between 20,000 and 100,000 people.²³

²⁰ Giorgi Kandelaki, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution: A Participant’s Perspective,” Special Report 167, United States Institute of Peace, July 2006, 5, 8.

²¹ Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 23.

²² Lincoln Mitchell, director of the National Democratic Institute office in Tbilisi from 2002 to 2004, says that for most of that time, there were far less. Lincoln Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” *Current History* 103 (October 2004): 342-348, at 345.

²³ One source that consistently overestimated the size of earlier protests reported that day a figure of 60,000. “Saakashvili Meets Shevardnadze, Saakashvili Says Shevardnadze Prepares for Resignation,” *Civil.Ge*, November 23, 2003.

To explain Georgia's electoral breakthrough, therefore, we must be careful not to directly link indicators of regime vulnerability prior to the election to a successful electoral breakthrough. Instead, we need to explain how the interaction between social actors and the state magnified the regime's vulnerability in the days after the election, ultimately paving the way for regime change. In Georgia, this occurred in several steps. First, NGOs and media quickly produced tabulations of the vote which demonstrated that the government had lost the election; these were reinforced by the results of a state television exit poll and, eventually, even the official election tally. Second, the regime chose to rely on regional despot Aslan Abashidze to stay in power, revealing its desperate position and provoking a strong counterreaction among the Tbilisi population. Third, two political parties were joined in postelectoral protest not only by NGOs but a broad spectrum of Georgia's professional and cultural elite and even a number of regime elites. Fourth, Rustavi-2 and, eventually, other broadcast media communicated and legitimized protest to as broad an audience as possible. Finally, the government demonstrated its lack of resolve to use force against peaceful protestors, neither issuing credible threats of force to deter protestors, nor contemplating seriously the use of force to limit or disperse protests. Through these interactions, the regime shifted from being vulnerable to the brink of collapse.

Evidence of Defeat: Exit Polls, the PVT, and Official Results

The vulnerability revealed by local elections and opinion polls was confirmed immediately after the parliamentary election by exit polls and an NGO-organized parallel vote tabulation (PVT), a statistically significant parallel vote count at the precinct level.²⁴ The results

²⁴ Together with the exit polls, which help to counter election day fraud at its earliest stages (e.g., ballot box stuffing), a properly administrated PVT increases the certainty that late-stage fraud (i.e., manipulation of the vote count above the precinct level) will be detected. For more on parallel vote tabulations, see Larry Garber and Glenn Cowan, "The Virtues of Parallel Vote Tabulations," *Journal of Democracy* 4, no. 2 (April 1993): 95-107.

of two exit polls, both of which established a victory for opposition parties, were released on election night. The first results to reach the airwaves were from a poll jointly funded by the Open Society Georgia Foundation, the USAID-supported Eurasia Foundation, the British Council, and Rustavi-2 and organized by a U.S. company in collaboration with Georgian pollsters.

Preliminary results of this poll placed the National Movement on top with 21 percent of the vote, making it the leading party to fill the 150 (out of 235) parliamentary seats reserved for party lists, followed by FNG at 13 percent (later amended to 15 percent).²⁵ According to the poll, the Democrats came in a disappointing fourth with 8 percent, behind the Labor Party's 13-14 percent.²⁶

More impressive, though rarely recognized as such, were the less publicized results from the state television's exit poll. While this poll predictably identified FNG as the leading electoral bloc with 22 percent of the vote, it gave the Democrats a second-place finish with 16 percent and put the National Movement in fourth with 13 percent.²⁷ Despite this variation in rankings, the poll thus acknowledged that the National Movement and Democrats had together received a greater share of the vote than the FNG. Given that the exit poll also suggested that Revival and ISG, with only 4 percent of the vote each, would not make it into parliament, even the official exit poll established a victory for the opposition.

²⁵ 85 seats were assigned to the winners of single-mandate districts, though in place of the 8 allotted to districts in breakaway Abkhazia were 10 that were filled by formerly elected Georgian representatives from Abkhazia, now internally displaced.

²⁶ "Georgian opposition bloc wins most votes in parliamentary election - exit poll," Rustavi-2 TV, November 2, 2003; "'Updated' exit poll results released in Georgia," Rustavi-2 TV, November 2, 2003; and "Official Georgian election results at odds with parallel vote count figures," Rustavi-2 TV, November 3, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

²⁷ "Progovernment bloc wins parliamentary election in Georgia - state TV," Georgian State Television Channel 1, November 2, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

Rustavi-2 Exit Poll

- National Movement – 20.8 percent;
- FNG – 15.0;
- Labor Party – 13.8;
- Democrats – 8.2;
- Revival Party – 7.1;
- (threshold)
- NRP – 5.6;
- ISG – <3;

Channel One Exit Poll

- FNG – 22.1 percent;
- Democrats – 16.4;
- Labor Party – 13.5;
- National Movement – 13.2;
- NRP – 558 seats, 11.3;
- (threshold)
- Revival Party – 4.2;
- ISG – 4.2;

The results of the PVT, run by the U.S.-funded NGO International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) in collaboration with the National Democratic Institute, were released the next day and reinforced the findings of the exit polls.²⁸ According to the PVT, the National Movement received 27 percent of the vote, while the FNG came in second place with 19 percent. The Democrats came in fourth place with 10 percent; two other opposition parties, Labor and the NRP, received 25 percent total, coming in third and sixth place respectively. Revival received 8 percent, in fifth, while ISG received five percent, not enough to enter parliament. In short, the regime and its de facto allies received 32 percent of the PVT count, while opposition parties won 62 percent (the National Movement and Democrats alone, 37 percent). Such data again established the government's defeat.

Even final election results, announced 18 days after the election, conceded the pro-government bloc's poor performance at the polls. The Central Election Commission (CEC) gave the FNG just 21 percent of the vote (a total statistically in agreement with the PVT results); Revival was granted the second-place slot, with an exaggerated 19 percent of the vote. At the same time, the four leading opposition parties received 47 percent of the vote, including 28 percent for the future ruling bloc of the National Movement and Democrats – again a combined

²⁸ “Official Georgian election results at odds with parallel vote count figures,” Rustavi-2 TV, November 3, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

total more than the FNG itself. For supporters and detractors of the opposition alike, the outcome of the election was clear – the government had lost the vote.²⁹

Parallel Vote Tabulation

- National Movement – 26.60 percent;
- FNG – 18.92;
- Labor Party – 17.36;
- Democrats – 10.15;
- Revival – 8.13;
- NRP – 7.99;
- (threshold)
- ISG – 5.20

Official Results

- FNG – 21.32 percent;
- Revival – 18.84;
- National Movement – 18.08;
- Labor Party – 12.04;
- Democrats – 8.79;
- NRP – 7.35;
- (threshold)
- ISG – 6.17;

Adjara: The Ultimate Replacement Alliance

Aware of this fact, Shevardnadze now relied on the blatantly falsified vote count in Adjara, an autonomous (i.e., self-governing) republic in southwestern Georgia, to maintain victory. Run Soviet-style by its leader Aslan Abashidze, Adjara was by far the most authoritarian region of Georgia, returning upper 90 percent turnouts and winning tallies for Abashidze’s party, Revival, in every election. In 1999 parliamentary elections, Revival, in alliance with other parties including the Socialists, was virtually the only “opposition” bloc voted into parliament – and proceeded for four years to raise hardly a peep against the government. This arrangement reflected an informal agreement to support CUG governance at the center in exchange for Tbilisi’s tolerance of Abashidze’s rule in Adjara.

²⁹ The discrepancy between the official results and the PVT translated into a difference of 25 seats in favor of FNG and Revival. By the official results, FNG and Revival combined would have 71 party-list plus 25 majoritarian seats, or 96 seats in all (41 percent), while the National Movement and Democrats would have 47 party-list seats, plus 17 majoritarian seats (27 percent). The ten Abkhazian IDP seats would also go towards the ruling coalition, as would most if not all of 20 unaffiliated majoritarian seats and perhaps ISG’s 4 majoritarian seats, granting progovernment forces a slim parliamentary majority. By the PVT, by comparison, FNG and Revival would only have had 71 seats in all (30 percent), while the National Movement and the Democrats would have had 79 seats (34 percent). To make up a majority in parliament, these parties would still have had to secure a coalition with the NRP and unaffiliated deputies.

As became clear during the election, one reason for this alliance was Shevardnadze's fear of state collapse. Thanks to Russia's military presence in Adjara and other indicators of Russian backing for his state-within-a-state, Georgia's past secessionist losses in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Shevardnadze's own aversion to risk, Abashidze held sway over Shevardnadze as much as he did over Adjara. Shevardnadze was exceedingly wary of doing anything that could prompt Abashidze to try and move Adjara any further out of the central government's orbit (even though there were few signs of separatist sentiment among Adjara's bi-religious Georgian population).

When the tally from Adjara was reported four days after the election, Revival's total share of the vote rocketed from the less than 7 percent it had received so far to an absurdly high 21 percent of the vote count, temporarily entering first place nationwide. In addition to receiving an unrealistic 95 percent of the vote in Adjara, Revival benefited from inflation in the regional voter rolls, a 22 percent increase from the already inflated voter rolls of the 1999 parliamentary elections.³⁰

Whatever Shevardnadze believed about the need for caution in Adjara, most of Georgia's politically active population (mainly concentrated in Tbilisi) reviled the pro-Russian Abashidze and his Soviet-style regional dictatorship, anomalous even for less-than-democratic Georgia and associated with a return to Russian domination. Many observers note the outrage that developed among Tbilisi residents, once they realized the government was going to depend on Abashidze for protection.³¹ Protests began in force on November 8, two days after Adjara's official count

³⁰ See the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, "Post-Election Interim Report, 2-25 November 2003," 5, <www1.osce.org/documents/odihhr/2003/11/1593_en.pdf>OSCE. Areshidze estimates that the 284,000 votes allegedly cast in Adjara constitute at least a third more than the region's entire population. Areshidze, manuscript, 137.

³¹ Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 48, 63-64; Haindrava, "Through Elections to the 'Rose Revolution'," 109; Areshidze, manuscript, 145-146.

was announced and a day after Revival's Tbilisi-based leadership organized its own demonstration in Tbilisi. These protests continued over the next days, as Shevardnadze traveled to Batumi, standing with Abashidze in front of a manufactured crowd to declare that "nothing will separate us, we will stand together."³² After the large protest of November 14 subsided, protestors were given a new jolt by the appearance of Adjarans bussed into Tbilisi to demonstrate in support of the government.³³ Rather than confront the counter-protestors directly, opposition leaders now announced a nationwide civil disobedience campaign.

In addition to serving as a catalyst for popular mobilization, Shevardnadze's alliance with Adjara helped bring about the Rose Revolution in two other ways: by interfering beforehand with reforms that could have produced a democratic election and by restricting the government's ability to annul fraudulent results afterwards. Before the election, Abashidze was already a key spoiler of election commission reform. The reform, debated during the summer before the election, would have granted enough seats to opposition parties to shape commissions' pre-electoral preparations and to block certification of fraudulent results.³⁴ Shevardnadze had publicly expressed support for the reform, and the compromise passed a first reading in parliament. The proposal was, however, shot down in its second required reading, thanks to the influence of government officials who persuaded Shevardnadze to retreat from the proposal.³⁵

³² "Shevardnadze, Abashidze Pledge Cooperation," *Civil.Ge*, November 10, 2003. Also see Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 10. For an analysis of Shevardnadze's possible motivations in going to Adjara after election day, see Areshidze, manuscript, 139-141.

³³ Before this happened, Revival's parliamentary leader, Jemal Gogitidze, announced that "Revival [would] go to Tbilisi to help" the president withstand the demands of the protestors. Areshidze, manuscript, 140; also see Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 10.

³⁴ The reform was going to give the pro-government bloc just five seats in all election commissions, while nine opposition parties would receive one seat each. This reform was opposed by Revival and one other party, the ISG, who claimed that as the only two parties to have surpassed the seven-percent threshold to enter parliament in the 1999 elections, they should receive more seats than other opposition parties which either did not surpass the barrier in 1999 or, as was the case for the NRP, the National Movement, and the Democrats, had not yet existed.

³⁵ The reform passed, but in a modified form that prevented opposition representatives from blocking fraud-related decisions. Three seats were awarded to Revival, two to ISG, and the remaining four to opposition parties.

The main trump card of the reform's opponents was Abashidze's vocal objections to the reform. After parliament first approved the reform, Revival threatened to boycott the election. Abashidze then implied to a Rustavi-2 interviewer that the authorities, which were responsible for losing two Georgian territories already, were taking the country down the road to further fragmentation.³⁶ After the reform was shot down, Shevardnadze explained that though the decision might leave some political players unsatisfied, this was not as bad an outcome "as leaving a whole region outside the election process and virtually beyond the country's jurisdiction."³⁷ If Shevardnadze had been willing to stand up to Abashidze, Georgia's electoral breakthrough may have ended up resembling the smoother transitions of power that occurred in countries like Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria.

After the election, Adjara again became the key sticking point preventing Shevardnadze from pushing for a recognition of democratic results, via a combination of recounts and revotes in districts that had suffered from egregious fraud. Soon after the election, political parties, together with the election monitoring NGO ISFED and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, filed legal complaints in over 150 precincts and also lodged official protests against district commissions.³⁸ The courts even ruled for a recount in one of the most contested districts in Kvemo Kartli as well as of absentee ballots, setting a potential precedent. Conducting recounts and revotes was an option that would have received the acceptance of some government officials and the approval of, most importantly among opposition parties, Saakashvili's National Movement.

³⁶ "Ajarian leader's party threatens to boycott Georgian elections," Prime News agency, July 24, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring; "Leader of Ajaria challenges Georgia's central government," Rustavi-2 TV, July 25, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

³⁷ "Georgian president reaffirms loyalty to pro-Western course," Georgian Radio, August 11, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

³⁸ Broers, "After the 'revolution'," 5.

Even if the opposition were able to overcome resistance at the center, however, the problem of Adjara still loomed. While the vote for the FNG may have been sufficiently corrected to greater resemble the PVT results, the government could not easily order a democratic revote in Adjara. Shevardnadze had no guarantee that Abashidze would play by the rules, meaning that the FNG would end up in a leading alliance with Revival by default. If the government were to annul the results of the elections in Adjara, Shevardnadze risked the prospect of Abashidze refusing to recognize parliament's legitimacy, again raising the specter of Adjara's secession. Because Shevardnadze was not willing to challenge Abashidze to step in line, the postelectoral situation shifted further from the possibility of a negotiated outcome and closer toward the events that actually comprised the Rose Revolution – the rushing of parliament and Shevardnadze's resignation.

A Winning Coalition: Partial Opposition Unity and the Nonpolitical Elite

Additional mobilizing power came from the coalition building of two opposition parties together with Georgia's nonpolitical elite. This coalition building transformed protest from a vehicle for narrow political aims into a defense of the national interest, successfully attracting a cross-spectrum of the population, not just partisan supporters. This, in turn, enabled protests to attract ever greater numbers of participants. Critically, it also demonstrated the fragility of the hardliners' position to a divided ruling elite.

The most obvious coalition building involved the street coalition of the National Movement and the Democrats. While the two parties had made efforts to unite as a single electoral bloc before the elections, these efforts repeatedly failed and they were not unified

coming into the election.³⁹ When street protests began after election day, the National Movement and Democrats held almost comically separate demonstrations at different ends of Tbilisi's main Rustaveli Prospect. For several days, their demands were distinct, with the National Movement calling for revised results that would validate their first-place finish and the Democrats, disappointed in their fourth-place finish, calling for new elections entirely. However, the two parties eventually agreed to support unified street protests.

At the same time, the protests found broad support among societal leaders outside the political parties. Georgia's intellectual and artistic elite, traditionally well regarded by the Georgian public, were highly visible in the protests. Usupashvili argues that "the most popular writers, poets, singers, actors, sportsmen, lawyers, journalists, scientists, and others" were heavily critical of the government in television and news media before election day. He notes that this group encouraged "the leaders of the political opposition...to make braver and bolder moves against Shevardnadze's regime" and that they "played a crucial role in bringing people out on demonstrations." At an initial rally inside the Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall called by the Democrats, the audience was relatively small, only several thousand, but they arrived within two hours of being called and included, according to Zhvania, "the most famous intellectuals and scientists." Davit Zurabishvili, then-head of the opposition NGO Liberty Institute, adds that the creation of post-election university disobedience committees was spurred on not by Kmara or the Liberty Institute (both of whom did play a role), but a disobedience committee that came to be

³⁹ In the final weeks of the election, Saakashvili launched attacks against the Democrats, accusing members of corruption and Zhvania and Burjanadze, in particular, of "Shevardnadze-like tactics." Areshidze says that these attacks were more successful than realized at the time, which if true helps explain the contrast between the Democrats' standing in the opinion polls and in the later Rustavi-2 exit poll and the PVT. Areshidze, manuscript, 112.

known as the Artcom (art committee), “comprised mostly of artists, movie directors, and writers.”⁴⁰

This kind of coalition building was critical for the success of protest. Opposition political parties, separately and without broader social support, were not likely to succeed in bringing many people to the streets. Leading opposition parties as a whole were not even committed to mobilization. Two opposition parties representing by the PVT one-quarter of total votes and a full 40 percent of the opposition vote – the Labor Party and the NRP – opted out of the street protests altogether. The Labor Party set itself apart from the other opposition parties already at the start of October, when it accused Rustavi-2 of carrying out a “dirty campaign” against it and of openly supporting the Democrats.⁴¹ Subsequently, party leader Natelashvili denounced street protests as a destructive struggle for power of which he and his followers wanted no part. He even joined Revival and ISG in a boycott of Rustavi-2 and called on Shevardnadze, Burjanadze, Zhvania, and Saakashvili to all resign from politics.⁴²

The NRP, while more staid, also rejected street protests from the start, setting for itself the narrow aim of “protecting the votes that [the party] had received.”⁴³ The NRP pushed for a compromise to hold new elections within six to nine months, although it supported first convening the new parliament (which was at least more representative than the old parliament

⁴⁰ Kandelaki also comments that “groups of well-known...artists, poets, and musicians started campaigning throughout the country, mainly in different universities, calling on students to join the protest.” Usupashvili, “An Analysis of the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 93; Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 36, 66; Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 8.

⁴¹ “Georgian Labour Party accuses independent TV station of “dirty campaigning,” Caucasus Press, October 2, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁴² “Georgia: Opposition leader accuses president of masterminding protests,” Caucasus Press, November 8, 2003; “Three parties decide to ‘boycott’ independent Georgian TV station,” Caucasus Press, November 10, 2003; “Georgian Labour Party urges both government and opposition leaders to resign,” Imedi TV, November 12 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁴³ Areshidze, manuscript, 135, 147 (n. 145).

and the first to which the NRP had been elected).⁴⁴ Ultimately, however, the NRP went further than Labor in acting against the protest movement, agreeing to allow its CEC representative to certify official election results.⁴⁵ While the NRP was reluctant to join the opening session of parliament, which met two days after election results were announced, they agreed to do so at the last minute, allowing the new parliament to legitimately convene.⁴⁶

Left to lead the mobilization effort were the National Movement and the Democrats, representing (by the PVT) 37 percent of votes and 60 percent of the opposition vote. Even these parties, however, could not be relied upon to mount a successful protest movement. The National Movement itself was not extraordinarily popular; its top percentage on any measure (the PVT) was just 27 percent. Alone, Saakashvili may not have been able to mobilize enough supporters on his own, lacking not only numbers but the more important quality of being able to compellingly represent a popular rather than partisan movement.

As for the Democrats, they and their followers could have been expected to simply accept defeat, with the Rustavi-2 exit poll and the PVT handing them just half the vote public opinion polls suggested they would receive.⁴⁷ Their decision to join with the National Movement to lead protests helped put the already wobbly regime on the defensive.

⁴⁴ The NRP reportedly shared the idea with Saakashvili on November 17 and with visiting U.S. diplomat Lynn Pascoe and National Security Council official Matthew Bryza by e-mail two days later. *Ibid.*, 146, 149.

⁴⁵ Ironically, then, even in the absence of the original CEC reform, the changes that had been made to the CEC's composition almost produced the reform's intended effect. The two representatives of ISG, whose pro-government vote had been taken for granted, ultimately refused to certify the election results, presumably in protest for failing to surpass the election threshold, together with the single representatives of the National Movement, Democrats, and the Labor Party. It was the NRP that went along with the five presidential representatives, three Revival representatives, and the CEC chairwoman to certify the results. If the NRP had refused to certify, as was expected, the CEC would not have had the necessary two-thirds majority to certify the results.

⁴⁶ If the NRP had not joined the opening session, the government, which together with Revival had fewer than 100 deputies, may not have been able to muster the 118 deputies needed to make a quorum. Areshidze, manuscript, 154.

⁴⁷ When Burjanadze consulted with some party members regarding possible courses of action, she paraphrases the responses of some as "[y]ou know, we should just try to exceed the 7 percent barrier and be in parliament." At the same time, though some Democrats had little desire to take their seats in a parliament where they would be in an insignificant minority position, they also had no incentive to push for a revised vote tally that would still relegate them to at best fourth place. Burjanadze herself explains that the Democrats "decided not to participate in parliament

Within the halls of power, rather than close ranks and insist on victory, members of the government and the FNG were themselves divided regarding how to deal with opposition protests. While many politicians and officials insisted on pursuing a fraudulent victory, some were in favor of promoting a clean election from the start while others expressed willingness after election day to negotiate an alternative vote tabulation or a new election. Government officials even took the unusual step of calling in the head of the local NGO that had conducted the parallel vote tabulation (PVT) to discuss the mechanics of it with them.⁴⁸

In the end, the government publicly lost numerous supporters from within its ranks. These included the chair of the state broadcasting company Zaza Shengelia, presidential legal advisor Levan Aleksidze, and, most importantly, National Security Council head and former ambassador to the United States Tedo Japaridze. On November 20, before the CEC released its results, Japaridze says he already favored the holding of new elections. He drafted a speech for Shevardnadze to announce this decision, but the president refused to take the message. Rebuffed, Japaridze read a revised statement on television the next day, acknowledging election fraud and the damage it had done to Georgia's reputation.⁴⁹ He warned authorities against using force and expressed support for a form of the NRP's compromise solution, in which the new parliament would temporarily convene and announce the holding of new elections. He was the last official Shevardnadze ever fired.

because I knew quite well that it was not possible to do anything if you had only fifteen members there. It would mean that the president had given you the chance to be in parliament and you should be grateful to him for this, but I really didn't want to do that." See Karumidze and Wertsch, *"Enough!"*, 45-46.

⁴⁸ On November 6, three members of the FNG bloc (including Sarishvili-Chanturia and Rcheulishvili) accused authorities of "immorally" negotiating a manipulation of the vote count to satisfy the opposition. Six days later, even Rcheulishvili admitted that acknowledging the National Movement's victory was the only way out of the current political crisis. "Georgian pro-government bloc leaders warn against deal with opposition," Georgian State Television Channel 1, November 6, 2003; "Georgia: Pro-government official ready to 'cede first place' to opposition bloc," Imedi TV, November 12, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring; "Georgian authorities 'take interest' in parallel vote count," Rustavi-2 TV, November 12, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁴⁹ See Karumidze and Wertsch, *"Enough!"*, 55-58.

Broadcasting Vulnerability: The Television Media

Almost unanimously, Georgian observers emphasize the role of the broadcast media in mobilizing protest. Usupashvili characterizes Rustavi-2 as “the most active part of the opposition political coalition” and goes so far as to say that the channel “frequently determined the most important decisions of the political leaders.” Two other observers, Ivliane Khaindrava and Ghia Nodia, contend that the Rose Revolution could not have happened without the media’s participation.⁵⁰

Rustavi-2 openly sided with the opposition after election day and actively encouraged public involvement in protests. As Lincoln Mitchell, director of the National Democratic Institute’s Georgia office during the Rose Revolution puts it, “Rustavi 2’s coverage of the protests was almost nonstop, except to provide periodic interviews and roundtables with opposition leaders – who often used the opportunities to inform Georgians about upcoming demonstrations and actions.”⁵¹ Rustavi-2’s director-general, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, later admitted that “[w]e gave a one-sided coverage of the events in Tbilisi.”⁵² Rustavi-2 also cosponsored pre-election opinion polls and an exit poll, releasing preliminary results as soon as possible. It also provided rapid exposure of the PVT results.

⁵⁰ Others have also noted the importance of the media in comparison to NGOs. Zurabishvili notes that media played a larger role than NGOs. Saakashvili concurs, calling Rustavi-2 in particular “extremely important,” an opinion Burjanadze has echoed. U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles also remarked that Rustavi-2 was “in a little different category” than NGOs, the role of which he believed was exaggerated, since “many people in Georgia pay attention to Rustavi-2, and it did play what can almost be called an inflammatory role.” Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 95; Haindrava, “Through Elections to the ‘Rose Revolution’,” 108; Ghia Nodia, “The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Georgia, 2003-2004,” in *Election Assessment in the South Caucasus, (2003-2004)*, 120; Karumidze and Wertsch, “Enough!”, 25, 51, 65, 78.

⁵¹ Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 345.

⁵² “Rustavi-2 admits losing viewers’ confidence,” ITAR-TASS News Agency, December 2, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

In addition to Rustavi-2, other television channels, including surprisingly state television, were also important. Imedi and Mze, which had not sided with the National Movement and the Democrats, eventually came to provide regular coverage of the demonstrations and publicized the exit polls and PVT results. Most importantly, even state-controlled Channel One provided access to “anti-Shevardnadze political forces, NGOs and independent experts” and provided footage of the demonstrations.⁵³ Strikingly, and rarely discussed, the staff of Channel One revolted on November 19, a day before official election results were issued, when Shevardnadze criticized the channel for “[assuming] a neutral and not pro-government position in this difficult political situation.”⁵⁴ The head of the state broadcasting corporation resigned in protest, criticizing Shevardnadze for operating in a “vacuum.” Channel reporters followed his lead, openly criticizing the government on television and cutting the day’s news broadcast short. Popular television host Koka Qandiashvili addressed Shevardnadze directly on live television, accusing him of making a difficult situation “even more difficult today.”⁵⁵ This kind of coverage dramatically confirmed the vulnerability of the regime, and ensured that dissent was transmitted to as wide and politically diverse an audience as possible.⁵⁶

In addition to taking sides and communicating to the population at large what was happening, media coverage also served tactical functions, whether in collaboration with or used instrumentally by NGO activists and opposition parties. Usupashvili observes that the opposition

⁵³ Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 95.

⁵⁴ “Georgia: President appoints new chairman of state TV,” Interfax, November 20, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁵ In a move that heralded a decisive shift in the balance of power away from the government, Qandiashvili announced that Shevardnadze was calling into the show while it was being broadcast, but that he would only take his call once he went off the air. “Georgian state TV news staff go on strike,” Georgian State Television Channel One, November 19, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁵⁶ Usupashvili also notes that “[w]ith seven television stations covering election-related political events daily, this election was the most exhaustively covered election in Georgian history. This coverage eventually supported the mobilization of the citizens and focused their attention on political events.” At the same time, given the power shortages that plagued all of Georgia and, in particular, areas outside Tbilisi, the mechanisms of television media influence – its live broadcasts may not have even been viewed by all demonstrators – need to be further investigated. Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 95.

“had much more sophisticated and innovative methods of using the media than the government.”⁵⁷ Laurence Broers elaborates that media and activists employed a variety of techniques designed to make people believe protests were larger, more representative, and more successful at breaking down the regime than they were, and thereby get people out on the streets that would otherwise be hesitant. Such techniques included, according to Broers,

“judicious use of camera angles, the shifting of the same crowds around different locations, the attaching of other parties’ insignia to National Movement buses to give the impression of a wider support base, and the encouraging by protesters of security forces to remove their helmets, thereby giving the impression in television coverage of the ‘breaking’ of the police line and the implication that the police had ‘turned.’”⁵⁸

Most dramatically, on the night of November 21, before the large demonstration and the rushing of parliament the next day, Rustavi-2 (and probably other channels) displayed the most dramatic display of resistance so far, a nighttime convoy of cars and buses descending on Tbilisi from the countryside and led by Saakashvili, who had traveled to the western Georgian region of Mingrelia to mobilize supporters. It was, in Burjanadze’s words, “famous footage [that] was so exciting...you can’t watch it without feeling emotion.” Saakashvili himself downplayed the importance of the convoy, claiming that it was “more a symbolic thing” that “brought in something like 5,000 people to Tbilisi, not more.”⁵⁹ His admission that the event was more

⁵⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁸ Mitchell elaborates on Rustavi-2’s use of camera angles: “[T]he station always showed images of demonstrators tightly packed together, shying away from aerial shots that might have shown that the protestors were crowded in a relatively small space. Rustavi 2’s image of the vigil differed just enough from reality to give viewers the impression that there really was a mass movement actively supporting Saakashvili and the opposition.” Broers, “After the ‘revolution’,” 342; Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 345.

⁵⁹ As other observers have put it, “[t]he television images were stunning: with headlights on, the cars moved like a huge blazing river.” Having watched these images, I can attest to their impact at the time; they heralded the end of the regime. Then-head of the opposition NGO Liberty Institute Davit Zurabishvili says that “[t]he idea for the now famous mass arrival of people from the provinces and rural regions of Georgia in Tbilisi belongs to Levan Ramishvili, one of the founders of the Liberty Institute. It was his idea to imitate the actions taken by the opposition

symbolic than substantive speaks profoundly to the importance of the media as a spur for mobilization.

The Absence of Force

Most importantly, Georgia's security forces never cracked down on protesters. The government did not seek to credibly deter protesters with the threat of force, limit or crack down on early protests, or use force to restore order during or after the rushing of parliament on November 22.

At the first sign of street protest, there were a few indications that the government might consider brandishing force against protesters. In anticipation of the first significant rally on November 8, the government deployed hundreds of police and interior forces to block roads into Tbilisi and to line Rustaveli Avenue. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Internal Affairs warned that the police were prepared to use force "[i]f the situation gets out of control."⁶⁰ During the next significant demonstration of November 14, when protestors neared the heavily guarded state chancellery building where Shevardnadze's offices were located, Minister of Internal Affairs Koba Narchemashvili warned that in the event "armed opposition members" appeared in front of the building, the police would be compelled to respond and that this would "end very badly for the opposition."⁶¹

At the same time, the official armed presence and warnings of force were diluted by other signals. The smaller demonstrations that continued around-the-clock between November 8 and

in Yugoslavia. After hearing this suggestion, Saakashvili went to the regions and started to summon people to come to Tbilisi." Karumidze and Wertsch, *Enough!*, 5, 13, 25, 30.

⁶⁰ "Georgian interior ministry: police may be forced to fire at protesters," Caucasus Press, November 8, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁶¹ "Georgian opposition leader urges crowd to march on president's office," Agence France Presse, November 14, 2003. Also see "Political confrontation in Georgia can break out into civil war"; "Georgian authorities to use force if State Office is stormed," ITAR-TASS, November 14, 2003; and "Georgian Interior Minister expects 'act of provocation' near president's office," Caucasus Press, November 14, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

14 encountered no opposition from security forces, and Narchemashvili specified at least twice that peaceful demonstrations would not be dispersed, a sentiment echoed by Shevardnadze and Georgia's prosecutor-general.⁶² During the November 14 demonstration, the interior minister again announced that force would not be used. That day, security forces were even less visible than during the last major rally, and they concentrated their efforts on protecting government buildings and deploying on the outskirts of Tbilisi. Finally, any threat of force during the November 14 demonstration was grossly undermined the day before when on state-run Channel One deputy national security council chairwoman Rusudan Beridze specified that force would never be used against peaceful protestors:

“The use of violence by the government...was always considered absolutely unacceptable at any stage of the process, unless there were instances of overt violence, such as the use of arms. Then, perhaps, the government would have had to resort to such steps. However, even then such steps would have been regarded as a last resort...Narchemashvili's statement that, if needed, force would be used, was just talk, since this possibility – that is the use of violence – was completely ruled out behind the scenes.”⁶³

Finally, security forces failed to use force to restore order when it would have been the most justified, during and after the November 22 rushing of parliament. Shevardnadze ordered the government to enact a state of emergency at this time. His order, however, was never implemented, and he retreated the following day. The most obvious explanation for this retreat is that Shevardnadze was unable to rely on his security organs to implement the decree. Japaridze

⁶² “Georgian interior minister says situation under control,” Caucasus Press, November 9, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring; “Georgia: internal troops deployed in Tbilisi,” Prime News agency, November 10, 2003, trans. in BBC Worldwide Monitoring.

⁶³ “Georgian official rules out violent end to street protests,” Georgian State Television Channel One, November 13, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

reports that his initial reaction to the state of emergency was that it was “not only morally unacceptable” to implement but “physically impossible.” Police forces were, by then, “neutral” and “different units in [the] army were staying out of the whole process from [the start.]” According to Kandelaki, by that day the opposition already “knew that some security units would not intervene.”⁶⁴ Finally, Japaridze reports that at a meeting with Shevardnadze that included the defense, security, and interior ministers, in response to the urgings of some to impose a state of emergency, the chief of presidential security, Sul Khan Papashvili, started “almost shouting”: “Why are you lying to the president? Tell him that it’s impossible!” Given such responses, Japaridze said, who exactly “was supposed to implement this decree of a state of emergency?” Petre Mamradze, Shevardnadze’s chief of staff, phoned the president in front of Japaridze and told him “there is no way to implement this state of emergency decree.”⁶⁵

There is some speculation that Shevardnadze still commanded enough security forces to be able to engage in a crackdown if he so desired. On November 22, Narchemashvili said that “the internal troops and police were ready to act on the president's orders and would undertake all necessary measures envisaged by [a] state of emergency.”⁶⁶ Kandelaki also notes that “the risk of violence was still great with no word from a number of special forces units loyal to the president.”⁶⁷ Shevardnadze himself insisted that while the opposition claimed “they were the ones who actually controlled the military and special police forces,” even if this were true it did

⁶⁴ Burjanadze also noted that the opposition had “supporters...active inside the army and police.” Saakashvili adds that after Burjanadze declared herself interim president, she called the heads of army regiments, who did not openly acknowledge her authority but hinted at their neutrality: “Don’t worry. We are not going to take any radical steps. We will look into it.” Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 11; Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 27, 47, 54.

⁶⁵ Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 55.

⁶⁶ “Georgian interior minister ‘ready to act’ on President Shevardnadze's orders,” Caucasus Press, November 22, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁶⁷ Burjanadze adds that she thought Shevardnadze would “never give an order to use violence” but that she “was not sure about those surrounding him.” Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 11; Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 48.

“not mean that they were in control of one hundred percent of them. Enough troops would still remain to implement the emergency decree.”⁶⁸

So why then did Shevardnadze retreat? He insists he changed his mind after his wife and son urged him to reconsider, given that there would probably be casualties. Committed to avoiding bloodshed, Shevardnadze says he made up his mind to resign. In addition, Shevardnadze probably realized that given the relatively small base of loyalists among his security forces, there was a high possibility that a special-forces crackdown would be of limited effectiveness, ultimately risking failure and leaving Shevardnadze’s reputation in tatters and his family vulnerable to retribution.⁶⁹ Whatever the reason, Shevardnadze let his decree on the state of emergency lapse. The day before, he hastily denied to Mamradze that he had even ordered it, fearing (correctly) that Mamradze and Japaridze were already in discussions with opposition representatives. The next morning, Japaridze paints a picture of a frightened and desperate Shevardnadze, scolding one of his inner circle: “What was this talk about plans for a decree of a state of emergency? There was no reason for us to implement this.”⁷⁰

With this final absence of an order to suppress the demonstrations, the security organs at last defected en masse to the opposition. Zhvania explains that while “a couple [of] army units had started to join [the opposition] on the 22nd (i.e., before Shevardnadze ordered the decree to impose a state of emergency) “the situation was very uncertain. There were no guarantees.”⁷¹ By the early afternoon of the 23rd, a cascade of army units declared loyalty to Burjanadze as interim

⁶⁸ Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 30.

⁶⁹ Mitchell similarly argues that Shevardnadze’s claim “was not entirely accurate. In reality, Shevardnadze resigned because, finally realizing his own weakness, he became aware that he no longer controlled the military and security forces. Bloodshed was avoided largely because the president was too politically weak to command it.” Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 348.

⁷⁰ Shevardnadze says that the next morning he “even avoided meeting some of my colleagues who were very bellicose and demanded the use of force.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

president. They were followed by police units and, at last, the Tbilisi chief of police. The opposition had won. Shevardnadze resigned that night.

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS

I now turn to the role of external factors, in particular the diffusion effect of electoral models elsewhere, in particular Serbia, and U.S. government assistance and diplomacy.

Diffusion: Assessing the “Serbia” Factor

A diffusion effect on the Rose Revolution was eminently apparent. A handful of prominent, Western-funded nongovernmental organizations (Liberty Institute, Kmara, ISFED and the Fair Elections Foundation, and the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association), that received support and training from pro-democracy NGOs in the United States and Europe were active at all levels – promoting democratic institutions and participation and the message of regime vulnerability; pressing for legal redress; and encouraging people to come to the streets. To the extent that open and frequent criticism of the regime, exit polls and the PVT, and NGO tactics and organization led to a public perception of vulnerability, the organizations involved were instrumental in this success.⁷²

Evidence of a specifically Serbian diffusion effect comes from the fact that activists and, among politicians, Saakashvili in particular directly sought to reproduce the Serbian popular movement in Georgia. The Kmara student movement was formed after Georgian NGO representatives went to Belgrade on an Open Society Foundation-funded study tour at the start of 2003. Subsequently, the Serbian youth group Otpor “served as [an] inspiration and model for

⁷² Kandelaki makes the useful point that the quality of election monitoring allowed Kmara and other opposition groups “to concentrate all their resources in promoting political participation.” Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 10.

Kmara,” and Otpor activists, as well as some from civic movements in Slovakia, visited Tbilisi for consultation and training.⁷³ In a January 2003 television interview, Saakashvili referred to Serbia while expressing an opinion that the opposition should unite to achieve victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections, “[j]ust as it happened in Yugoslavia where they first defeated Milosevic.” At a public meeting in Washington, DC in April 2003, Saakashvili referred “several times” to the Serbian comparison and called himself a “successful version of [assassinated Serbian Prime Minister and former Belgrade mayor Zoran] Djindjic.” The next month, he warned Shevardnadze against trying to play the ethnic card in Georgia, noting that this had already “been tried by Milosevic” and warning that the latter had been defeated by Otpor.⁷⁴

To more specifically assess the effect, rather than simply the presence, of externally-inspired activism, let us examine more closely the role of the youth movement Kmara, the focus of diffusion arguments. Kandelaki has argued that Kmara was one of three actors that “played a crucial role in making the Rose Revolution possible” (the other two being the National Movement and Rustavi-2) and that it “succeeded in breaking through the public’s political apathy.”⁷⁵ The group emerged in the spring of 2003 on the basis of two preexisting student groups, an elected student-body organization that fought corruption in Tbilisi State University beginning in 2000, with the assistance of the National Democratic Institute, and the Student Movement for Georgia, formed from students that participated in protests to defend Rustavi-2 in autumn 2001.⁷⁶ Kmara’s role in the Rose Revolution sparked considerable interest after

⁷³ Kandelaki, unpublished, 9-10.

⁷⁴ “Georgia’s two leading opposition parties call for broad antigovernment alliance,” Rustavi-2 TV, January 22, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring; “Stability in Georgia: After the War in Iraq, Prior to Elections,” The Nixon Center, Washington, DC, April 14, 2003, <www.nixoncenter.org/publications/Program%20Briefs/PBrief%202003/041403saakashvili.htm>; “Opposition accuses Georgian authorities of fanning ethnic strife,” Rustavi-2 TV, May 4, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring. Also see Areshidze, manuscript, 89-90.

⁷⁵ Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 5.

⁷⁶ Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 6.

observers became aware of the role of the Open Society Foundation in facilitating the NGO trip to Belgrade and the Otpor visit to Tbilisi.⁷⁷ These visits conjured up images of a well-organized, Western-backed design to effect regime change via youth-led protest.

How can a determination of Kmara's impact be made? That Kmara pressed for democratization, resistance to fraud, and eventually revolution is not in dispute, nor is its level of activity. In an extremely useful analysis of Kmara, Kandelaki notes that the three-thousand strong Kmara organization, together with other opposition groups, did not seek the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze in November 2003 but instead hoped to achieve enough success to influence 2005 presidential elections. Although Kandelaki does not emphasize it, Kmara, again together with other opposition groups, planned to try and mobilize sufficient support after election day to pressure the government into conceding defeat or to at least nullify fraudulent results.⁷⁸ According to Kandelaki, after it became clear the government was determined to validate the fraudulent elections, the opposition "radicalized their demands and began to use the word *revolution*."⁷⁹ Kandelaki describes Kmara's methods to achieve their goals at all stages: "non-violence, discipline, coordination, promoting its brand [as well as the myth of a powerful

⁷⁷ See Hugh Pope, "Pro-West Leaders in Georgia push Shevardnadze Out," *Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2003; Peter Baker, "Tbilisi's 'Revolution of Roses' Mentored by Serbian Activists," *Washington Post*, November 25, 2003; Mark MacKinnon, "Georgia Revolt Carried Mark of Soros," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), November 26, 2003; and Natalia Antelava, "How to Stage a Revolution," BBC News, December 4, 2003, <news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3288547.stm>.

⁷⁸ David Zurabashvili, former head of the Liberty Institute, notes that the "second point" Kmara made in its pre-electoral activities was that in case "elections were rigged people should speak up, and we [the Liberty Institute] carried out a lot of activities in this regard, both in the capital and in the provinces." *Ibid.*, 5; Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 65.

⁷⁹ Zurabashvili elaborates that "revolution" at that point meant regime change; after it became clear that the government "was not going to give up" (i.e., intended to validate the fraudulent results), "we had no other option. Either we would move ahead and make them resign and make Shevardnadze step down, or the nucleus of Shevardnadze's bloc... would grab all power, and democracy would be finished completely." Even then, however, opposition groups, including Kmara, recognized that government concessions, even in the form of nullifying only the results where fraud was "absolutely obvious", would have limited their capacity to effect a revolution (and, for most, would still have been an acceptable outcome). Zurabashvili admits that some of the opposition were "worried about what would happen if Shevardnadze [conceded since they] really wanted to go the way of the revolution." Kandelaki, "A Participant's Perspective," 4; Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 62.

organization], and making skillful use of humor.” Kmara’s activities included marches, anti-government theatrical or humorous displays, graffiti campaigns, rock concerts, and social services (including book donation campaigns and trash collections) prior to the election, leaflet distributions and television commercials before and after election day, and involvement in university disobedience committees (representing the universities, not Kmara) during post-electoral protests.⁸⁰

How much did Kmara’s efforts contribute to Georgia’s electoral breakthrough? Kandelaki asserts that Kmara’s success was chiefly in mobilizing Georgian youth. He estimates that they managed to mobilize more than ten thousand “previously inactive university students” through their work in the disobedience committees. Even assuming the importance of advance organizers in the universities like Kmara, however, we need to consider how significant the activity of even ten thousand students (in addition to three thousand Kmara members themselves) was in overthrowing the regime. With regard to promoting broader public mobilization, Kandelaki is agnostic: he says that Kmara “sought to fight political apathy among all Georgian voters” and that its members proved “capable of carrying their pleas for more political involvement to all parts of Georgian society.”⁸¹ He stops short, however, of insisting that Kmara was critical to mobilizing protestors more broadly.

There is good reason for this hesitance. On the one hand, some anecdotal evidence suggests that the diffusion effect did spread to the population at large. Rustavi-2 twice aired a documentary on the fall of Milosevic during the election crisis, and National Movement member (and later interior minister) Ivane Merabishvili said at the time that “[a]ll the demonstrators knew

⁸⁰ Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 5, 6-8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

the tactics of the revolution in Belgrade by heart because they showed . . . the film on their revolution. Everyone knew what to do. This was a copy of that revolution, only louder.”⁸²

On the other hand, a survey taken among Tbilisi residents immediately after the Rose Revolution polled attitudes toward Kmara specifically. In this poll, where exuberance appears to have led to self-reporting extremes on many questions, just 26 percent of those polled expressed approval for Kmara’s goals and methods. Another 33 percent of respondents voiced approval for Kmara’s goals *but not their methods*, while 15 percent expressed “a negative attitude” toward Kmara.⁸³ Does this mean a diffusion effect was taking place, though not through the vehicle of Kmara? Or could it be that the streets were filled chiefly from that 26 percent of the population that backed Kmara completely?

Georgian political actors deliver mixed verdicts about the impact of Kmara and associated NGOs. Saakashvili said that NGOs were “not that important,” especially compared to the role of the media, in bringing most students out to the streets. Even Kandelaki notes that generally the role of NGOs has been overestimated. He says that Georgian NGOs were “constrained by elitism” and their foreign funding sources, keeping both their agenda foreign and preventing them from achieving “the local legitimacy necessary to gain public support.”⁸⁴

Others, however, are more willing to emphasize NGO achievements. Khaindrava highlights the ambiguity of Kmara’s role:

“Noisy and annoying, [Kmara’s] activists sometimes irritated the ordinary citizen, but they managed to build up their campaign. When during the post-election protests the

⁸² Baker, “Tbilisi’s ‘Revolution of Roses’ Mentored by Serbian Activists.”

⁸³ 12 percent claimed neutrality, and 14 percent did not answer the question. Nana Sumbadze and George Tarkhan-Mouravi, “Public Opinion in Tbilisi: In the Aftermath of the Parliamentary Elections of November 2, 2003,” in *NISPAcee News* (Bratislava), 11, no.1 (Winter 2004): 1-14, at 7.

⁸⁴ Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 10.

activism of the general public subsided temporarily, Kmara revived popular enthusiasm for its un-self-seeking activity.”⁸⁵

Similarly, when speaking of Kmara’s role, Burjanadze reveals that she “didn’t always support them,” and that their “reactions and...methods were not acceptable” to her. At the same time, she argues that “what they did, their activities and emotional feelings and emotional preaching...they did a lot with the people and somehow to mobilize the people. I think it would be unfair not to speak about their very important role.”⁸⁶

Kandelaki himself emphasizes that it was not through their extraordinary capacities that NGOs helped to reveal government vulnerability but precisely because of their limitations: though the NGO community was “weak and fragmented,” the government demonstrated its incompetence on a wider scale because it could not manage to respond to its accusations in a persuasive and authoritative manner.⁸⁷

Ironically, in the end it may be that diffusion had its greatest impact on the Rose Revolution by making actors aware of the *differences* between Georgia and sites of previous electoral breakthroughs. Saakashvili’s decision to rush parliament, the proximate cause of the Rose Revolution, was decidedly outside a diffusion framework.⁸⁸ While Saakashvili drew

⁸⁵ Zurabishvili and Nodia also contend that NGOs were important but do not privilege them as they do the media. Haindrava, “Through Elections to the ‘Rose Revolution’,” 109; Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*,” 65; Nodia, “The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Georgia, 2003-2004,” 120.

⁸⁶ Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*,” 51.

⁸⁷ Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Perspective,” 10.

⁸⁸ There is some debate as to whether the rushing of parliament, the proximate cause of the Rose Revolution, foreclosed the possibility of alternative electoral breakthroughs. Leading opposition figures all agree that if Shevardnadze had agreed to rerun the election, he would never have had to resign. The only realistic possibility to this effect appears to be that proposed by the NRP and backed by Japaridze – to convene the new parliament but schedule an early election for the coming months. Even the head of the FNG, Vazha Lortkipanidze, went on record in support of the New Rights proposal. Areshidze says that Shevardnadze initially refused to consider this option but, desperate for a quorum at the parliament’s first session, at the last minute agreed to back a proposal to hold new elections, after which the newly elected NEP deputies agreed to join the parliamentary session. Saakashvili and his followers rushed into the parliament building, however, before anyone had a chance to discuss the issue. It is impossible to know whether Shevardnadze was going to go ahead with the alleged agreement and announce new elections, and if so whether new elections would have been more democratic. On the opportunity for Shevardnadze

inspiration from the overthrow of Milosevic in Serbia, he probably also recognized that Shevardnadze's convening of parliament risked shifting the balance of power back toward the authorities and reducing the momentum of the protest movement. Rather than allow the resistance – and the emulation of Serbia – to fail, Saakashvili made the unexpected and unwritten move to rush parliament, radically exposing the government's vulnerability and forcing Shevardnadze to concede defeat. Thus, by the “counter-diffusion” act of rushing parliament, Saakashvili both made the Rose Revolution occur and established it as something decidedly different than the electoral breakthroughs that had come before.

Foreign Intervention: Assessing U.S. Influence

The level of U.S. attention toward, and assistance efforts for, Georgia's parliamentary election was high. It was geared toward the promotion of free and fair elections and, once that failed, a negotiated solution to the electoral crisis. The effort did not seek Shevardnadze's resignation.

U.S. democracy promoters pursued a number of policies with the hopes of improving the chances a democratic election would occur in Georgia. The U.S. Agency for International Development budgeted more democracy-related assistance to Georgia in 2002 and 2003 than to any post-Soviet state except the considerably more populous Russia and Ukraine. This assistance included funding for voter list reform, PVT training and implementation, the cultivation of local election monitoring NGOs, and civil society advocacy training. Together with the nongovernmental Soros Foundation funding for NGOs, study trips, and training, U.S. aid is

to stay in power, see Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 35, 44, 59, 62. The NRP's perspective is in Areshidze, manuscript, 143, 148-149, 153-55. On Lortkipanidze, see “Georgian pro-government bloc leader supports early parliamentary elections,” Caucasus Press, November 21, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

commonly cited as a factor increasing pressure on the government to hold a democratic election, while increasing the likelihood of voter participation and post-electoral detection of fraud.

In addition to assistance, the high level of U.S. diplomacy in support of a clean election was striking. This included a number of letters from President George W. Bush to Shevardnadze encouraging clean elections; a June 2003 visit of former Secretary of State James Baker, serving as a special presidential envoy, who urged the regime to adopt a ten-point plan for clean elections, including the main task of reforming election commissions as well as allowing a PVT; and delegations to Georgia a month before the election led by Senator John McCain and, via the National Democratic Institute, former deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbott and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikashvili.

In addition to these efforts at persuasion, U.S. officials also used diplomatic pressure. In mid-August, U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles told a Rustavi-2 interviewer that if parliamentary elections were “not conducted in an open and honest and transparent manner,” this would not only “be very bad for Georgia,” it would “also be bad for the American-Georgian relationship.”⁸⁹ In late September, Thomas Adams, then deputy coordinator of U.S. assistance to Europe and Eurasia, announced from Tbilisi that the United States would be scaling down its foreign aid to Georgia, citing dissatisfaction with corruption and abuse of power. Several days later, U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles told a Georgian television interviewer that the United States would “probably further reduce the assistance” to Georgia in the next six months “if progress is not achieved” in areas the United States was helping finance.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ “US ambassador to Georgia hails ties, urges fair elections,” Rustavi-2 TV, August 15, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁹⁰ Prior to Adam’s announcement, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared that it was also suspending assistance to Georgia. “USA set to cut aid to Georgia,” Rustavi-2 TV, September 24, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring; Natalia Antelava, “United States Cuts Development Aid to Georgia,” Eurasia Insight, September 29,

On the one hand, these efforts did not achieve their main objective of assuring a free and fair election. In one of the two biggest controversies prior to the elections, the Georgian government backtracked on its agreement with Baker to provide a blocking minority of seats to opposition parties on the election commissions. In addition, despite tremendous organizational effort on the part of USAID contractor International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the process of revising, updating, and computerizing voter lists was riddled with difficulties, including repeated delays by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in providing necessary data.⁹¹ Despite all U.S. urgings, the Georgian government ultimately carried out, and validated, a fraudulent election.

On the other hand, U.S. assistance and diplomacy may have promoted at least *more* democratic elections than there would have been if its efforts had been absent. U.S. intervention, through funding and diplomacy, may have been critical, for instance, in implementing vote monitoring mechanisms like the exit polls and PVT. For a more definitive answer, we would have to determine whether civil society groups could have found domestic sponsors and trainers, and whether the Georgian government would have agreed to these mechanisms in the absence of external pressure. For the PVT at least, U.S. intervention was probably decisive, as other possible sponsors and trainers were not immediately apparent. The independent exit poll, on the other hand, had more diverse sources of funding, including from domestic sources (Rustavi-2), and the government may very well have permitted it to be conducted in the absence of U.S. support.

2003, <eurasianet.org>; “Georgian election to determine ‘quality of relations’ with USA,” Rustavi-2 TV, October 5, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

⁹¹ In the final days before the election, when it became apparent that the computerized lists still contained obvious inaccuracies, the CEC ruled to use original handwritten lists and to amend them as necessary on election day. This last condition – allowing individuals to vote even if they were not on the registered lists – accommodated voters that had been disenfranchised by the confusion, but it also opened the door to election day fraud. For a discussion of the voter lists, see Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 82-84. Also see Areshidze, manuscript, 126-129.

After election day, U.S. officials unsuccessfully sought to produce a compromise resolution to the crisis. In addition to a stream of remarks in the State Department's daily press briefing, U.S. officials were in regular communication with both government and opposition representatives. U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles characterized his role less as one of direct mediation, than of encouraging communication between the two sides in the hopes that they would work out a compromise solution.⁹² Government officials in Washington, D.C. were also following events closely, with at least one in regular contact both with reform-minded government representatives and the opposition, Saakashvili in particular.⁹³

While not successful at brokering compromise, U.S. diplomacy could conceivably have been successful in weakening the government's resolve to use force against protestors, thereby (intentionally or not) creating the opening for a peaceful change of power. More than his role as facilitator, Miles placed value on his role as restrainer – urging the government (and opposition representatives) to resolve the crisis peacefully. Miles says he spoke with authorities at length about “the need to avoid the use of force and in particular the use of lethal force.” He also specifies that he spent “[h]ours in repeated conversations with the power ministers [i.e., security, internal affairs, and defense], as did other people in the embassy who had working relationships with the people in those ministries.”⁹⁴ In addition, Pentagon officials, who had been working in close collaboration with the Georgian defense ministry since 2002 with the initiation of the Georgian Train-and-Equip Program, are said to have appealed to defense officials to keep the army neutral.⁹⁵

⁹² Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 72.

⁹³ Personal communication, February 13, 2004.

⁹⁴ Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 72.

⁹⁵ See Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 100-124, at 117 and 123. The U.S. was also closely engaged with the Georgian ministry of security, though I have no information regarding the nature of communication to the ministry during this period.

Did U.S. urgings restrain government officials, particularly those in the security organs, from using force?⁹⁶ Miles said that he “would like to hope that [his involvement] helped keep the whole exercise nonviolent.”⁹⁷ At the same time, the Georgian government and security forces were already disinclined to use force against protestors. Still, the above references by some Georgian participants to army units that could be counted on not to get involved were likely in reference to forces undergoing U.S. training at the time. Thus, even if diplomacy was not the critical factor, security linkages to the United States may still have been relevant to the government’s inclination to pursue restraint.

Beside security linkages, we should also consider whether declining U.S. support for Georgia’s government reinforced regime vulnerability more generally, by increasing both the confidence of opposition supporters that mobilization would succeed and the incentive of government officials receptive to political change to defect. For months, the specter of losing U.S. support was evident, including most prominently the announcement of a reduction in foreign aid. The most powerful effect, however, was probably at the very end of the crisis. On November 20, after official election results were issued, State Department deputy spokesman Adam Ereli informed journalists that “we have seen the results released today...[and] are deeply disappointed in these results, and in Georgia’s leadership. The results...reflect massive vote fraud in Ajara and other Georgian regions.” He noted that the results “revealed an effort by the Central Election Commission and the Georgian government to ignore the will of the people.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ A second question is whether those urgings had the strategic intent of shifting the balance of power in favor of the opposition, precisely in order to achieve an electoral breakthrough (even if U.S. officials were hoping for a breakthrough of a more moderate sort), or were motivated by the straightforward belief that the important thing was that the security organs stayed out of the conflict, regardless of its outcome.

⁹⁷ Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 72.

⁹⁸ Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, November 20, 2003, <www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2003/26502.htm>. For the formal White House reaction to the election, see “Presidential Election in Georgia,” Press Statement, U. example, S. Department of State, November 21, 2003, <www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/26539.htm>.

This was, one analyst has asserted, the “first time ever that the U.S. has openly accused the leadership of a former Soviet republic of rigging an election.”⁹⁹

The State Department statement was circulated throughout Georgia, repeated by newscasters on several television news channels and printed in full on the screen. The following day, the implication of this message was clear: that the United States, which Georgia looked to as a patron, did not, and would not, support the regime.

It is instructive to ask what would have happened if the United States had backed the Georgian government. What if officials had quickly congratulated the ruling party in its victory, while offering mild condemnation of fraud; had not openly persuaded the government to negotiate; and did not have the kinds of linkages that made it plausible for them to urge security organs to refrain from the use of force? Would the government have felt itself stronger, the opposition weaker? Would officials that were on the fence have been encouraged to stick with the government and not, as it happened, jump off the evidently sinking ship? It is at this level that we would need to determine whether the role of U.S. diplomacy was decisive – whether, given definitive U.S. support for the government, the Rose Revolution would not have succeeded.

In sum, the main achievement of external, in particular U.S., intervention was not in promoting free and fair elections or a negotiated outcome to the crisis. In these, it did not succeed. However, U.S. intervention did contribute to regime vulnerability, heightening the perception among officials and the population alike that the government could not win.

⁹⁹ Liz Fuller, “Shevardnadze’s Resignation Resolves Constitutional Deadlock,” RFE/RL Caucasus Report, November 24, 2003, <www.rferl.org/reports/caucasus-report/2003/11/41-241103.asp>.

CONCLUSION

Georgia's Rose Revolution stemmed from Georgians' discontent with an ineffective, criminalized, and corrupt ruling regime. As this chapter has shown, however, Georgia's ruling party was not only unpopular before the 2003 election, it was also weak. The ruling party had fragmented and was forced to rely on marginal and discredited political forces; it had performed poorly in past local elections and opinion polls; it faced criticism from a popular broadcast media; and it lacked the will to use force against protestors and political opponents.

That said, before election day it was clear only that the government was vulnerable, not that it could be defeated. The Rose Revolution was really the product of a set of interactions between social forces and the state that magnified the government's vulnerability after election day and ultimately led it to the brink of collapse. Exit polls and a parallel vote tabulation made it impossible for the ruling regime to insist decisively on success; the government depended on a flagrantly fraudulent vote count in one region, provoking widespread indignation among the Tbilisi population; two political parties joined with civil society activists and Georgia's intellectual and cultural elite to set a nonpartisan tone for protest; the broadcast media broadly covered the protests, with the most popular station publicly backing the opposition; and political elites refused to support the use of force to restore order. Together these developments created the context for opposition leader Saakashvili and his supporters to successfully rush Georgia's parliamentary building and break up the new parliament's opening session, forcing Shevardnadze to concede defeat.

External influences promoted this outcome, even if they were not decisive. Saakashvili and a number of civil society activists sought to replicate past electoral breakthroughs in eastern Europe, and planned to use popular mobilization to pressure the government to accept defeat if it

refused to acknowledge its loss voluntarily. This diffusion effect operated in conjunction with factors that were not exported across borders (i.e., the Adjara factor, the media, the support of the nonpolitical elite, and the absence of force) to help produce the Rose Revolution. At the same time, the most obvious effect of U.S. assistance and diplomacy was not in promoting a democratic outcome – in this, the United States did not succeed – but in heightening perceptions of government vulnerability both before and after the election.

Georgia's Rose Revolution highlights a central paradox of electoral breakthroughs. They happen in countries that have moved further down a democratic pathway than those that have not. In neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan, for example, opposition forces sought to resist fraud in various electoral races in 2003 and 2005, and were even able to mount substantial protests. In all these cases, however, they were defeated by strong regimes. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, ruling regimes were neither fragmented nor reliant on discredited political forces; they had not previously lost local elections or (with one exception) received poor ratings in preelectoral opinion polls; they did not allow a free broadcast media; and they maintained a credible threat of force. Unsurprisingly, after election day, the interaction between social actors and the state in Armenia and Azerbaijan reinforced regime strength rather than magnify their vulnerabilities, with the state, in particular, able and willing to use force to deter and to break up protests. The lesson for electoral breakthroughs is clear – as in other revolutions, democratic revolutions require the emergence of proper conditions within the state, as much as they require dedicated revolutionaries.