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GEORGIA: CAUSES OF THE ROSE REVOLUTION AND LESSONS FOR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

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CAUSES OF THE ROSE REVOLUTION

LESSONS FOR DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE



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Georgia: Causes of the Rose Revolution and Lessons for Democracy Assistance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By the books, regime change in Georgia was a foregone conclusion. The regime had accumulated years of popular discontent against it, aimed at corruption and the state's inability to deliver basic social services, such as steady supplies of electricity, to the population. In the past, a combination of public apathy and fear of upheaval, nimble political deal-making, and the regime's international popularity contributed to its survival. By 2003, however, the regime was unpopular internationally, fragmented, and faced opponents that could offer assurances to the population that stable political change was possible.

Nonetheless, the Rose Revolution was still a surprise, as was its particular outcome—the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze and the uncontested rise to power of Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement and Zurab Zhvania'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 a united, effective resistance movement.

Also, 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 set of opposition parties running in 2003 would enjoy a reasonable showing, and be satisfied even given fraud, may have led observers to fail to predict radical political change. If observers were to predict the moment that an opposition movement were to successfully resist electoral fraud and come to power, they would more likely have pointed to the anticipated 2005 presidential election.

In this paper, I propose a number of key elements that led to the Rose Revolution. These include a) the peculiar nature of the regime - unpopular with authoritarian leanings, but weak and tolerant of democratic procedure; b) the peculiar electoral scenario of democratic checks-and-balances matched by egregious examples of fraud; c) the opposition's ability to persuade followers that political change was possible; d) external democracy promotion efforts, particularly those of the United States via its assistance programs and diplomatic efforts, and other international pressures; and e) the passivity of the security forces.

First, however, I summarize my findings by way of presenting preliminary lessons of the Rose Revolution for external assistance providers.

LESSONS FOR FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

1. *Incrementalism helps.* Steady, patient democracy assistance probably contributed to the success of the Rose Revolution. Promoting democratic local elections, or establishing alliances with “pockets of reform” within government, can pay off at later times even when such activities do not promise rapid, substantial changes in governance. Such efforts can capitalize on regime weakness to promote evolutionary democracy and/or help build alternate power bases inside or outside of government.
2. *Attack in all directions.* Targeting multiple areas for electoral assistance can lead to synergistic effects. The reform of election commissions and voter lists, parallel vote counting, the cultivation of NGO promoters of electoral change, and the establishment of links with potential supporters of democratic change within the regime can build on each other to produce desired results.
3. *Match assistance with message.* Democracy promotion should not remain at the assistance level. So long as the target country is one in which at least a portion of the political elite and population cares about US support, persistent signals from the US administration that electoral assistance is a serious strategy for achieving specific, desirable outcomes in foreign policy (i.e., democratic change) may make a difference.
4. *Undermine fear.* Democracy promoters ought to think more strategically about promoting human rights. Transforming the will or ability of regimes to use force against peaceful demonstrators may lead to the evolution of regimes willing to voluntarily transfer power via democratic elections, or at least regimes that are ultimately unable to get away with fraud.
5. *Don't sweat the big stuff.* “Bastions of illiberalism” do not necessarily need fixing in order to promote democracy. Places that prove resistant to democracy promotion (like Adjara) may, in an overall more liberal context, provoke reactions that ultimately work in democracy's favor.

KEY CAUSAL FACTORS

1. **The Regime: Unpopular, Tolerant, and Visibly Weak**
2. **The Electoral Process: Transparent Fraud**
3. **Opposition Leaders: Credible, (Eventually) United, and Decisive**
4. **External Pressures**
5. **The Passivity of Security Forces**

1. THE REGIME: UNPOPULAR, TOLERANT, AND VISIBLY WEAK

Unpopular

Many regimes that hope to stay in power by fixing elections are unpopular. The fact that Georgia's ruling party, the Citizen's Union of Georgia (CUG), had the support of less than 15 percent of the population, according to public opinion polls conducted in the weeks before the November 2003 parliamentary elections, by itself did not make for a successful opposition movement.

This unpopularity, however, combined with an unusual tolerance for the "motions of democracy" and a visible lack of regime strength, assured that there was at least a *chance* opposition parties would be able to declare victory on election day.

Tolerant of the Democratic Process

That pre-election public opinion polls were even conducted highlights a key factor that contributed to the rise of a successful opposition movement—the willingness of the regime to permit a pre-election democratic process at all. This willingness extended beyond setting up the kind of façade democratic process authoritarian governments routinely establish: allowing one or two small opposition parties to advance candidates for elections and permitting them a limited, tightly controlled election campaign. In Georgia, the regime was firmly committed to the basic structure of democracy—it allowed a number of political parties to function freely (together with a diverse media), campaign extensively, and openly criticize the government.

Georgia had even enjoyed one dress rehearsal for the 2003 parliamentary elections, thanks to the elections to local councils held in June 2002. In those elections, despite substantial disorganization and voting improprieties, the regime had already partially conceded to democracy. In the city council of Tbilisi, home to one-third of Georgia's population, Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement and a second leading opposition party, the Labor Party, each won approximately one-quarter of the vote, finishing in first and second place. Opposition parties did less well throughout Georgia. However, they still received at least 36% of the votes that were cast in favor of candidates running on a party platform (as opposed to independents).¹

In the days before the election, President Eduard Shevardnadze even acknowledged that the CUG electoral bloc, For A New Georgia (FNG), could very well lose the parliamentary race. In a message broadcast on state television four days before elections, Shevardnadze stated 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." Moreover, he informed the population that "every person has a free choice" and "every citizen [should] vote as their conscience dictates."

This was not the sort of message the president ought to have delivered if his intention (or that of others in his ruling circle) was to thwart the final vote.

¹ The ruling party and the parties it later allied with in the 2003 parliamentary elections received at least 45% of the votes for party-affiliated candidates (the data I possess tabulates the vote for 1,671 of these seats, out of a total of 2,056, leaving 385 unaccounted for). A majority of seats went to candidates who registered as independents (2,731 of 4,787, or 57%); most of these were affiliated with one or another party. I have yet to locate a list that identifies the party sympathies of all 4,787 successful candidates.

Visibly Weak

Without a consideration of state strength, this openness might appear to have been sufficient, together with the regime's unpopularity, to lead to a successful opposition victory in parliament (which, in turn, would have set the opposition up for the more important race for the presidency in 2005). If the regime had been stronger, however, it might have been capable of forestalling a democratic outcome even as it cynically promised a free race. In particular, if supporters of the opposition perceived that the government was capable (and willing) to impose brutal punishment if they insisted on claiming their democratic due, they may have consented to keeping the façade of democracy intact.

The regime's ability to engage in repression, however, was seriously up for question. Police brutality, official complicity in kidnapping crimes, and the unresolved killing of leading television anchor Giorgi Sanaia pointed to the regime's ability to engage in violence. At the same time, the regime did have a consistent record of allowing anti-government demonstrations to proceed without violence, arrests, or beatings, and no leading opposition figure had ever been arrested or seriously harassed. The security forces' involvement in a wide range of criminal activity and general unprofessionalism produced contempt among the population rather more than fear.

The regime's most visible sign of weakness was the ruling party's actual implosion in the years before the 2003 parliamentary election. A group of politicians from the business community were the first to defect, forming the opposition New Rights Party in 2000. Mikheil Saakashvili, who served as Minister of Justice in 2000-2001, began his break with the government from the inside, complaining of an inability to make a dent in the political culture of corruption. Saakashvili resigned from his post in September 2001 and left the ruling party in December, taking several supporters with him. Zurab Zhvania, the head of the Georgian parliament since 1995, departed from the government the month before, in part of a complex political deal in which the Security and Interior Ministers were forced to resign after a scandalous operation against Rustavi-2, an independent television channel. Zhvania's wing of the ruling party formally separated from the CUG in May 2002, one month before local elections. Nino Burjanadze, the deputy chair of parliament who became Zhvania's successor, made her final break from the regime in 2003, to unite with Zhvania on a ticket known as the Burjanadze-Democrats.

With each defection, the ruling party retreated into its shell. By the 2003 election, it had become a camp of senior apparatchiks, joined by a handful of younger powerbrokers, mainly based in the regions, who were accumulating illegal wealth through their government positions.²

Thrown into disarray by the series of defections, the CUG lacked the wherewithal or ability to engineer a convincing show of strength even in the 2002 local elections. While a large number of CUG supporters won seats as independents, candidates that ran specifically on the CUG platform won just 3 percent of all mandates received by party-affiliated candidates (60 out of 2,056). The CUG's share of the vote in Tbilisi, where the vote was entirely conducted on the basis of party lists, also stood at 3 percent: in the city council of Georgia's capital, therefore, the ruling party obtained not one seat.

After such a dismal showing, the CUG leadership revealed through its actions that it understood it had no chance of securing a democratic victory in parliamentary elections. In the months before elections, the CUG allied with a number of weakened opposition parties and figures willing to sell out for a share of power, including the formerly staunch oppositionist Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia's National Democratic

² The CUG also retained support in minority-populated regions, through a combination of patronage and local approval for the interethnic stability that reigned during CUG rule.

Party; businessman Vakhtang Rcheulishvili's Socialist Party; and the religio-nationalist Guram Sharadze. A regime that had fractured so much it needed support from this motley crew was not a regime worth fearing.

Unpopular, tolerant of the democratic process, and visibly weak, Georgia's ruling party set itself up for a contentious parliamentary election, regardless of the ultimate outcome.

2. THE ELECTORAL PROCESS: TRANSPARENT FRAUD

A leading consequence of the ruling party's tolerance of the democratic process was the establishment of a number of mechanisms that, while promoting a democratic election, also provided the opposition with the ability to persuasively brandish evidence of fraud if the regime insisted on fixing the election.

Opposition Representation in Electoral Commissions

Opposition parties made up more than one-fourth of the seats (four of fifteen) on election committees at all levels: central, district, and precinct.³ While opposition parties had sought more seats, this limited presence nonetheless created the expectation that a reasonably democratic election was at least plausible, via the close monitoring of the vote count along the election committee hierarchy. Besides this, their presence gave the opposition an institutional seat from which to protest irregularities on voting day and after.

The Parallel Vote Tabulation

The opposition's ability to demonstrate election fraud was reinforced by the regime's acceptance of an NGO-organized parallel vote tabulation (PVT) for parliamentary elections. While there may be several problems associated with relying on exit polls to demonstrate fraud, a properly administered PVT, which relies on a parallel count of the official vote in a statistically significant number of precincts, increases the certainty that late-stage fraud will be detected. It provided composite hard data with which to compare the official results later aggregated at the district and, ultimately, central levels.

According to the PVT, the results of which were released the day after the election, Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement received 27 percent of votes, making it the leading party to fill the 150 (out of 235) parliamentary seats reserved for party lists.⁴ The ruling party's bloc (FNG) came in second place with 19 percent. Three other opposition parties—Labor, the Burjanadze-Democrats, and the New Rights Party—together received another 35 percent total, respectively coming in third, fourth, and sixth place. Two parties allied to the regime but that ran on separate tickets—Revival and Industry will Save Georgia (ISG)—received 13 percent of the vote, coming in fifth and seventh place (see attached tables).⁵

To summarize the key data of this PVT estimate, the parties that came to power as a result of the Rose Revolution—the National Movement and the Democrats—reportedly won a total of 37% of the vote, while the regime and its allies received just 32%. Such data provided these parties with the ammunition

³ Technically, opposition parties held nine of the fifteen seats. Five, however, were awarded to two parties that were allies of the ruling party.

⁴ Another 75 seats were to be granted to successful candidates in the single-mandate districts. Ten seats were reserved for previously elected Georgian representatives from Abkhazia, now internally displaced.

⁵ Revival's alliance with the CUG constituted, in effect, an agreement to support CUG rule at the center in exchange for the government's tolerance of Abashidze's rule in Adjara. While Revival made some noise about being a national party, and in the 1999 elections allied with nationwide parties, in practice it had extremely localistic interests.

needed to reject an official declaration that the regime and its allies had been victorious on the party lists. With the PVT, they were able to make a convincing case that it was really their parties that had won.

Adjara: A Focal Point for Fraud

Fortunately for the opposition, the PVT was not the only tool at their disposal to establish the speciousness of the regime's claim to victory. They were provided with a symbolically even more powerful example in the form of the electoral returns from Adjara, an autonomous (i.e., self-governing) republic in southwestern Georgia. Run Soviet-style by its leader Aslan Abashidze, Adjara was consistently the least democratic region of Georgia, returning turnouts and winning tallies in the upper 90 percentiles for Abashidze's party, Revival, in every election. The 2003 parliamentary elections promised more of the same. Compared to the practically pathetic weakness of the CUG, Revival's regional strength was anachronistic, its ability to play kingmaker intolerable.

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 already received to a full 21 percent, dashing opposition hopes for a victory. Having officially received 95% of the vote in Adjara, Revival now temporarily entered first place nationwide.⁶ When final results were announced on November 20 (18 days after the election), Revival settled into the second-place slot, with 18.84 percent of the vote (the National Movement received just under that total, at 18.08 percent). Together, Revival and the FNG, which had officially come in first, had 40 percent of the vote, which translated into 71 of 235 mandates. This was almost sure to be enough, once the results from the majoritarian races came in, to command a majority in parliament (see tables).⁷

The electoral contribution from Adjara provided the opposition a focus for channeling popular resentment. Relying on the vote count from Adjara to defeat the opposition inherently underlined the regime's own weakness and also constituted a subversion of the surprisingly democratic process the regime had generally tolerated. FNG itself had officially received only 21.3 percent of the vote. Judging by the PVT results, which had FNG at 19 percent, this figure was statistically plausible—incorporating only a few percentage points of vote counting fraud at best. Whatever administrative resources the ruling party might have used to acquire more votes than it otherwise would have, it did not—or could not—manipulate the final vote count very much in its favor. Without the flagrantly fraudulent results from Adjara, democracy might otherwise have succeeded.

Additionally, relying on the vote count from Adjara meant the difference between a clear, and clearly fraudulent, victory for the regime and a process of political horsetrading that would have been perceived as reasonably democratic and, hence, tolerable. Imagine if Revival had received a vote count close to their PVT total (10 percent, for example, instead of 19 percent). If Revival had only received 10 percent of the vote, it would have been difficult for the National Movement and the Democrats to mount a compelling case that the elections had been “stolen.” The Democrats, for one, had an official result (8.8

⁶ In addition to inflated votes for Revival, a major problem with the vote count in Adjara was an inflated number of voters, which further increased Revival's overall share of the official vote count.

⁷ The ten seats of the Abkhazian IDPs would also go towards the ruling coalition, granting them 81 of 235 seats. In the end, FNG had 19 majoritarian seats, Revival had 6, and another allied party, the Industrialists, had 4 (their party did not receive enough votes for their party-list candidates to enter parliament). This means that even before considering whether any of the 20 independent deputies were to officially join them, the ruling coalition would have had 110 seats, eight shy of a majority. See attached tables.

percent) statistically in alignment with their PVT result (10.2 percent). The case of a stolen election would have focused mainly on the 8½-point discrepancy between what the National Movement officially received (18.1 percent) and what the PVT said it received (26.6 percent).

In this hypothetical scenario (in which the other parties retained their same vote percentages), FNG and Revival would have enjoyed a slim victory of just 31.3 percent, compared to the combined official vote for the National Movement and the Democrats of 27.6 percent.⁸ Under these circumstances, it would not have been immediately clear whether FNG and Revival would be able to block the opposition from establishing a majority coalition in parliament. Without an inflated percentage for Revival, a National Movement that officially came in second place to FNG was likely to still cobble together a parliamentary majority with the Democrats and the New Rights Party. Fraud outside of Adjara robbed the National Movement of its highly symbolic first-place victory, but it did not decisively determine whether or not the National Movement could form a parliamentary majority.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine that the opposition would have been able to mount a successful campaign to overturn the vote. Even if they were not able to automatically form a majority coalition, they could have simply lodged complaints (as they did) to get the electoral race re-run in a limited number of districts marked by high levels of fraud, in so doing hopefully procuring enough seats to form a majority. Given this option, street protests leading to the overthrow of the regime would have been a much later measure of last resort. Such protests, convened at a later time in the aftermath of drawn-out court battles or, worse, if the National Movement and Democrats did not actually win repeat elections, are unlikely to have had the impact they did.

The fraud in Adjara, by comparison, not only ensured that the National Movement would finish in third place, it meant the opposition would *definitely* not be able to form a parliamentary majority. The opposition was thus robbed of both its symbolic first-place victory (or at least a close second place to FNG) and its practical victory of fashioning a parliamentary majority.

This outcome—in which a weak regime relied on the egregious fraud of a regional despot to declare victory—sparked heavy protests. Opposition demonstrations only began in force once the results from Adjara were announced. While a few thousand demonstrators protested in downtown Tbilisi on November 4 and 5, more than twenty thousand demonstrators came out to protest on November 8, two days after Adjara's official count was announced. These protests were sustained over the next days, dramatically increasing in intensity only on November 21, after the official election results were announced.

Bargaining over Fraud

The regime itself, through an impressive display of weakness, further contributed to the transparency of fraud in the days after the election. Rather than close ranks and insist on victory, the regime and its FNG allies were divided regarding how to deal with opposition protests. Later, reports circulated that a number of top officials were in favor of promoting a clean election entirely. Other politicians and officials expressed willingness early to negotiate an alternative vote tabulation; on November 6, three

⁸ I recognize that the overall percentages would shift for the remaining parties, but the purpose of this hypothetical is to demonstrate what would have happened if fraud centered only on the rough difference between the totals for FNG and the National Movement. If Revival had received only 10 percent, and the rest of the votes officially counted for Revival were thrown out entirely, then FNG and Revival would have received 33.4 percent to the National Movement and Democrats' 29.5 percent (author's calculations).

members of the FNG bloc accused authorities in no uncertain terms of “immorally” negotiating a manipulation of the official vote count to satisfy the opposition. Six days later, however, one of these, Socialist Party leader Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, publicly stated that acknowledging the National Movement’s victory was “the only way out of the current political crisis” (this, of course, would not have meant that the National Movement would necessarily be able to form a parliamentary majority). Government officials even took the remarkable step of discussing the mechanisms of the PVT with the head of the local NGO that conducted it.

With such admissions of fraud by the regime, it was really up to the people to decide what to do: remain indifferent to casual hypocrisy and manipulation, or take to the streets in support of opposition figures that refused to accept the status quo.

3. OPPOSITION LEADERS: CREDIBLE, (EVENTUALLY) UNITED, AND DECISIVE

How did the National Movement and Democrats convince followers to take to the streets? A key element for channeling popular indignation into action is to persuade followers that political change is possible. The opposition’s ability to persuade followers of this stemmed in part, as described above, from the actions of the regime, which was doing a thorough job demonstrating weakness on its own.

Credibility

At the same time, opposition leaders projected their own strength. The opposition leadership did not consist of untested politicians, known for perennial defeat in electoral politics rather than their professional experience. Saakashvili, Zhvania, and Burjanadze were experienced administrators, who had already established a track record of governing the country. For Zhvania and Burjanadze, this ultimately may have limited their electoral potential, as they were implicated far more in the bad governance of the CUG. For the renegade Saakashvili, however, who had left the CUG relatively unscathed, this likely moderated concerns voters may have had about commonly-cited personal characteristics—erratic, excitable, emotional—that might otherwise have prevented them from lending the National Movement their support on the streets if he lacked experience.

Eventual Unity

The unity of the National Movement and Democrats is another factor often credited with bringing about their mobilizing success. This argument, however, must be carefully assessed. These two parties were not united coming into the election. They were, in fact, rivals for many of the same votes.

Already two days after the election, however, the National Movement and the Democrats were openly pledging unity to resist fraudulent electoral results. Whether in negotiations with the regime they were always unified is a subject for further research. Publicly, however—and this is what matters for the purposes of explaining mass support—they presented a unified front. The Democrats did not have to support the National Movement; they could have accepted their seats in the new parliament just as the New Rights Party and the Labor Party were prepared to do. If they had not joined the National Movement, it is hard to imagine how that party—which even according to the PVT received only 26.6 percent of the vote (compared to a cumulative 35.4 percent for the other three opposition parties)—could have wrested away enough supporters from the “accommodationist” opposition to overturn the results.

Media Support

Another important factor is that the opposition had a key ally in the mass media—the independent television channel Rustavi 2. An open critic of the regime for years, Rustavi-2 was the focus of a scandal in the fall of 2001, when tax police raided its offices in what was interpreted as an act of intimidation to deter the station from airing investigative reports on state corruption. This event led to the resignation of the Interior and State Security Ministers, as well as (in an unusual tit-for-tat) parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania (who was not himself implicated in the scandal). It also marked the first political appearance of *Kmara!*, the student group that modeled itself after the Serbian *Otpor* movement that contributed to the fall of Slobodan Milosevic. The scandal did not rein in Rustavi-2, and during the November 2003 election crisis, the channel embraced an activist platform, openly siding with the opposition and encouraging public involvement in protests. In a subsequent interview with the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS, Rustavi-2's director-general, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, admitted that “[w]e gave a one-sided coverage of the events in Tbilisi.” He attributed the mobilization of the masses in no small part to Rustavi-2's coverage. Moreover, other media channels, including the independent Imedi and Mze, also provided regular coverage of the demonstrations, ensuring that images of the protests were transmitted to as broad an audience as possible. Even state television provided footage of the demonstrations.⁹

Decisiveness: Closing the Door to an Alternative Rose Revolution?

Finally, we must consider the importance of persuading followers that all that was needed in the end was “a final push,” i.e. the peaceful storming of the elected parliament prior to its formal convocation. Without Saakashvili's determination, the parliament would presumably have opened. In this case, it is almost impossible to know whether the opposition would have had the ability or conviction to subsequently change power via street demonstrations. Without the “final push,” we are left in the realm of the unpredictable.

There is one interesting twist to this, however. The opposition New Rights Party, which agreed to the parliament's convocation, insists it was prepared to immediately call for a new parliamentary election, and that Shevardnadze would have agreed to this. While it may be appropriate to respond to this assertion with skepticism, there is at least one other sign that such a proposal was seriously countenanced prior to the storming of the parliament; National Security Council head (and former Ambassador to the U.S.) Tedo Japaridze publicly lent his support to such a proposal on November 19, three days before the opposition's “final push.”

Opponents of this proposal suggest that the proposal was not credible. It was not apparent why the regime could not simply let the judiciary annul the elections rather than legitimize a new parliament which, once convened, could go back on its word.

However, if there was a good reason to schedule new elections in this way, and such a proposal was sincere, then a mechanism may well have been devised that would have made it difficult for the regime to retract its commitment afterwards.

It is worthwhile considering what would have happened if such a proposal had been carried out. Democracy might still have won in Georgia, and in a more institutionalized fashion. A new parliamentary

⁹ 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 broadcasts might not even have been viewed by many demonstrators—needs to be further investigated.

election would have been held under heavy scrutiny; Georgians could have elected a parliament led by the opposition but with a more diverse party representation; and a subsequent presidential election would have been held in 2005, which would have served as a second test for Georgia's democratic transition. In other words, the "Rose Revolution" might have occurred nonetheless, but in a different fashion.

Regardless of whether the parliament's convocation would have led to continued protests, the regime's victory, or a more institutionalized democratic transition, the storming of parliament prior to its convocation was undoubtedly a critical moment that shaped the events which followed: Saakashvili's decisive emergence as the leader of the opposition, Shevardnadze's resignation, and the holding of new parliamentary and presidential elections that established political hegemony for a now institutionally united National Movement and Democrats.

4. EXTERNAL PRESSURES

Democracy Promotion: Assistance and Diplomacy

Democracy promoters, official and otherwise, pursued a number of policies that improved the chances a democratic election would occur and which, in the end, contributed to regime change. High-level U.S. diplomacy in support of a clean election (including a pre-election visit of former Secretary of State James Baker, who urged the regime to accept the PVT and reform of electoral commissions); USAID funding for voter list reform, PVT training and implementation, and the cultivation of local election monitoring NGOs; and Soros Foundation-funded training for the youth organization *Kmara* are all credibly cited as factors that increased pressure on the government to hold a reasonably democratic election, while increasing the likelihood that fraud would be detected.

International Pressures

In addition, prior to elections, the regime found itself facing a number of international pressures that may have increased perceptions among Georgian citizens (and, more importantly, a segment of the regime itself) that the regime was exceedingly fragile, devoid of foreign (in particular, U.S.) support. In the summer, the regime was unable to find a way to purchase a controlling share of a central power company that a financially strapped American owner was trying to sell. This led to its purchase by the Russian United Energy Systems.¹⁰ Shevardnadze's consent to signing a secret 25-year agreement with the Russian company Gazprom to surrender control of Georgia's gas distribution network in exchange for subsidized imports further suggested the regime's emergent need to rely on Russia for support rather than the West. A month before elections, the global NGO Transparency International ranked Georgia as one of the three most corrupt countries in the CIS, listing only five out of 133 countries in a worse position internationally. Unable to get the Georgians to implement their recommendations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared it was suspending assistance to Georgia. The United States also announced a reduction in foreign aid.

The Power of Statements?

The argument for the importance of external support—or, rather, the withdrawal of support—for bringing events to their successful conclusion can invoke a dramatic piece of evidence. On November

¹⁰ This deal was, admittedly, a challenging one for the Georgians to avoid, given the US company's own determination to sell, but both Georgian politicians and U.S. officials have suggested the government could have received the foreign aid and assistance needed to retain control of the power company if it had only tried.

20, after official election results were issued, State Department Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli informed journalists at his daily press briefing 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 a “formal statement” would be released shortly and that the United States would “be assessing next steps.”

Ereli’s statement was significant for two reasons. First, it not only reflected disapproval of the election but, in uncharacteristically non-diplomatic speech, reflected disapproval of Georgia’s “leadership.” By mentioning “next steps,” it also suggested the United States was not willing to simply let the fraud stand. Such statements were in stark contrast to, say, the initial congratulations issued by the State Department to Ilham Aliev, the victor of a heavily manipulated presidential election in neighboring Azerbaijan just one month before.

Second, Ereli’s statement was circulated in Georgia. The quotation was repeated by newscasters on several television news channels and even printed in full on the screen. The following day, when convoys of cars and buses descended on Tbilisi from the countryside to protest the election results in the most dramatic display of resistance so far, it was difficult not to consider the potential impact of this message: that the United States, which Georgia looked to as a patron, did not, and would not, support the regime.¹¹

Indeed, in the formal statement issued by the State Department that day, the United States not only expressed its deep disappointment, but explicitly called on the Georgian government to “respect freedom of the media, peaceful expression and assembly, and on all parties to react to the results peacefully”—a set of demands that at the moment sounded very much like stage directions for a peaceful, law-based regime change. In a rather astonishing display of interest in Georgia’s internal affairs, the statement further noted that the United States “urges the Government of Georgia to conduct an independent and transparent investigation immediately and hold accountable those who violated the law.”

Opposition success may have seemed possible to Georgia’s citizens before these statements were issued. With the United States’ unusually explicit shift of support to the opposition, it must now have seemed virtually certain.

Measuring the Effect of Democracy Promotion

Ultimately, measuring the effect of democracy promotion is a multi-leveled task. At a minimum, two complementary assessments need to be taken.¹² First, we must assess *how significant* externally funded or motivated processes, actors, and organizations were in bringing about a successful opposition movement, as opposed to factors that were not targets of democracy promotion efforts. How important were the reformed election commissions, reformed voter lists, and PVT? How significant was Kmara’s role in mobilizing individuals outside the urban student population? Did Shevardnadze’s “falling out” with the West really affect public calculations of regime weakness?

Second, if we do identify externally-induced factors that were significant (such as, most obviously, the PVT), we should determine *whether these factors would have emerged in the absence* of external democracy promotion efforts. Would the PVT have been accepted or electoral commissions have

¹¹ However, see note 9.

¹² In addition, we should still assess the relative importance of pure financing and technical assistance versus actual training, civic education, and other hands-on efforts to transform local political culture.

looked the same without U.S. intervention?¹³ Would voter lists have been reformed?¹⁴ Would the final mass protests have occurred if the State Department had issued more neutral statements?

At this point, we are only able to ask these necessary questions and suggest that such external factors were important. Further research, both within-case and comparative, is required to assess with confidence the significance of external factors in bringing about the Rose Revolution.

5. THE PASSIVITY OF SECURITY FORCES

This leaves the final component of the explanation: the behavior of the security forces. There are generally two explanations for the willingness of the security forces to allow a regime change to occur. Either the political leadership is not powerful enough to command its loyalty (in which case the leadership may either futilely test its obedience or resign), or the leadership itself refuses to use violence.

A Defection of Security Forces, or...

In Georgia's case, evidence exists for both points of view. By the time the moment of decision neared, the government had lost numerous noted supporters from within its ranks (including the head of state television and radio Zaza Shengelia, presidential legal advisor Levan Aleksidze, and—at least somewhat—National Security Council head Tedo Japaridze). Such defections may have increased the likelihood that security forces would not defend the remnants of the regime and instead remain on the sidelines. US officials also reportedly used their own channels of communication to encourage security forces to abstain from using force. In particular, the loyalty of the Ministries of State Security and Defense, led by Valeri Khaburdzania and Davit Tevzadze, in the event of an order to suppress opposition demonstrations, was up for question. Since 2001, both ministries had established close connections to the United States.

...the Absence of a Dictator?

At the same time, other evidence suggests that Shevardnadze did command the loyalty of at least some segment of the security forces until the end. The day before Shevardnadze resigned, the Caucasus Press news agency reported that Minister of Internal Security Koba 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.” Shevardnadze himself insisted it was his choice alone not to order the internal troops to suppress the opposition's rush on parliament.

A preliminary assessment would suggest that the security forces were divided regarding their determination to obey orders to suppress the population, and that particular relations with US departments and agencies may have attenuated this division. While this division might not have

¹³ Indeed, the final composition of the electoral commissions did not actually reflect the level of opposition representation Baker had suggested. Was the final composition, then, a compromise that could only have come about through the pressure of an external mediator, or could the opposition have wrung such a compromise out of the regime even in the absence of such a mediator?

¹⁴ Again, like the electoral commissions, the final voter lists did not represent the clean and thorough product external supporters had envisioned. Still, were they significantly better than they would have been if external assistance had not been offered, or would the opposition have managed to pressure the CEC into developing such lists in its absence?

prevented *internal troops* from using force in the event of a presidential order, it would have at least inhibited the extent of such a crackdown by keeping the military and special forces out of the picture. Under these circumstances, what would have happened next is not easily predictable.

Georgia: Causes of the Rose Revolution and Lessons for Democracy Assistance
Cory Welt

November 2003 Parliamentary Elections

Official and PVT Election Results (Percentages and Party-List Seats)

	Official Results	PVT	Official Seats	PVT Seats
For A New Georgia	21%	19%	38	32
Revival	19%	8%	33	14
National Movement	18%	27%	32	45
Democrats	9%	10%	15	17
New Rights Party	7%	8%	12	13
Labor Party	12%	17%	20	29
Industry will Save Georgia	6%	5%	0	0
Other Parties/Initiative Groups	7%	6%	0	0
Abkhazian Parliament	n/a	n/a	0	0
Total	100%	100%	150	150

The Effect of Majoritarian Elections on Official and PVT Seat Results

	Majoritarian Seats	Total Official Seats	Total PVT Seats
For A New Georgia	19	57	51
Revival	6	39	20
National Movement	10	42	55
Democrats	7	22	24
New Rights Party	4	16	17
Labor Party	2	22	31
Industry will Save Georgia	4	4	4
Other Parties/Initiative Groups	20	20	20
Abkhazian Parliament	10	10	10
Unfilled	3	3	3
Total Seats	85	235	235

Party-List Seats by Bloc (Official and PVT)

	Official Party Seats	PVT Party Seats	% of Official Party Seats	% of PVT Party Seats	% of Total Official Seats	% of Total PVT Seats
Regime Bloc (FNG/Revival)	71	46	47%	31%	30%	20%
Opposition Bloc (NM/Dem)	47	62	31%	41%	20%	26%
Full Opposition Bloc (NM/Dem/NRP)	59	75	39%	50%	25%	32%
Labor Party	20	29	13%	19%	9%	12%
Total	150	150	100%	100%	64%	64%

Total Seats by Bloc (Official and PVT)

	Total Official Seats	Total PVT Seats	% of Total Official Seats	% of Total PVT Seats
Regime Bloc (FNG/Revival/ISG/Abkha)	110	85	47%	36%
Opposition Bloc (NM/Dem)	64	79	27%	34%
Full Opposition Bloc (NM/Dem/NRP)	80	96	34%	41%
Labor Party	22	31	9%	13%
Initiative Groups	20	20	9%	9%
Unfilled	3	3	1%	1%
Total	235	235	1	1

Number of Majoritarian Seats/Defections Needed for a Parliamentary Majority (Official and PVT)

	Official	PVT
Regime Bloc (FNG/Revival/ISG/Abkha)	8	33
Opposition Bloc (NM/Dem)	54	39
Full Opposition Bloc (NM/Dem/NRP)	38	22