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### *Regime Vulnerability and Popular Mobilization in Georgia's Rose Revolution*

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Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law  
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# REGIME VULNERABILITY AND POPULAR MOBILIZATION IN GEORGIA'S ROSE REVOLUTION

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IN GEORGIA'S ROSE REVOLUTION

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## INTRODUCTION

By the books, regime change in Georgia was a foregone conclusion. Years before external actors began reassessing 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 government corruption and the regime's inability to deliver basic social services, including steady supplies of gas and electricity, to the population. Previously, a combination of public apathy and fear of upheaval, nimble political dealmaking, and Shevardnadze's international popularity had contributed to the regime's survival. By 2003, however, the regime was fragmented, losing international popularity, and facing off against opponents that could offer assurances to the population that stable political change was possible.

Nonetheless, Georgia's electoral 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 a united and 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. If observers had predicted the moment for a breakthrough, they would more likely have pointed to the anticipated 2005 presidential election.

In this paper, I argue that Georgia's electoral breakthrough is best understood as a conjunction of two factors – one state-based and one society-based. The state-based factor was the regime's extreme vulnerability to electoral loss or pressure: an astonishingly diverse set of indicators suggested that the government was going to lose a fair vote and that it had limited capacity or will to fix a vote decisively in its favor. These indicators included: a severely fragmented political elite and unpopular "replacement alliances" which the rump ruling party used to shore up its electoral strength; past local elections and pre-election opinion polls which revealed a government in disarray; postelectoral vote counts that confirmed the ruling party's defeat (including not only an independent exit poll and parallel vote tabulation, but also an official exit poll and even the official election results); and, finally, lack of resolve among political elites and state security organs to use force against peaceful protestors.

This structural "vacuum" of state vulnerability explains much of the success of popular mobilization in Georgia. Often neglected after the Rose Revolution is the fact that protests were not very large – generally five thousand demonstrators or less and only on two separate occasions substantially greater. A more confident government, in particular one capable of brandishing a more credible threat of force, would have been able to deter or withstand these social forces (as, for instance, was the case in neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan).

At the same time, without substantial popular mobilization even a teetering regime might hang on and buttress itself anew. As Georgia's own slow-moving mobilization suggests, it would be a mistake to assume that regime vulnerability automatically engenders popular mobilization. A collective action problem must still be overcome – if not regarding the fear of punishment than

regarding the perceived benefits of participation.<sup>1</sup> Citizens have to be persuaded that their actions are meaningful – that the objective of resisting electoral fraud involves more than “just politics” alone and that mobilization really can succeed. Otherwise, the public might fail to mobilize, believing their actions will not change a thing.

To overcome this collective action problem, the actions of a number of social actors, including the government, appear to have been necessary. The alliance of two rival opposition parties after election day, the support of the leaders of Georgian civil society (in the broad sense of the term), and Shevardnadze’s misguided choice to ally with the regional dictator Aslan Abashidze all contributed to a popular sense that defending against electoral fraud involved more than just politics alone. As for public confidence that mobilization would succeed, credit can largely be given to the Georgian broadcast media – its relative strength, diversity, and interest in covering protest and dissent, as well as the opposition’s capacity to use it strategically to achieve a perception of impending success.

This framework suggests that to determine the influence of external forces we should assess their impact on government vulnerability or the encouraging of public mobilization. I focus here on U.S. assistance and diplomacy, as well as the “diffusion” effect of activist learning from other cases of popular mobilization (i.e., Serbia). On U.S. assistance and diplomacy, I conclude that at the level of intentionality it failed – the United States did *not* achieve its main objectives in Georgia of promoting free and fair elections or a negotiated electoral breakthrough. If U.S. intervention was critical, it was unintended, via the lack of U.S. support to the Georgian

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<sup>1</sup> 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 ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Wave’ of Post-Communist Democratic Revolutions,” working paper (version 1.1), November 2005, <[http://www.wws.princeton.edu/jtucker/Tucker\\_EFCA\\_2005.pdf](http://www.wws.princeton.edu/jtucker/Tucker_EFCA_2005.pdf)>.

government and the consequent contributions to government vulnerability and encouraging of popular mobilization.

As for diffusion, there is no question that the student movement Kmara and associated NGOs, as well as political leaders –Saakashvili in particular – sought to emulate the success of Serbian popular mobilization against President Slobodan Milosevic. The important question, however, is not whether Serbian mobilization served as inspiration to the opposition but whether the Serbian model was responsible for their success. On the one hand, the model does not appear to be responsible for mobilizing large numbers of protestors or for attracting to the streets the diverse set of social actors which made the protest movement more than a partisan phenomenon. On the other hand, considering that government vulnerability alone was unlikely to lead to spontaneous broad-based popular mobilization, we can suggest that the actors inspired by the Serbian model fulfilled a necessary role, by keeping the space for protest created by government vulnerability open, until other factors had time to independently prompt popular mobilization. Without the activities of the Serbian-inspired NGOs, that space may have closed as “normal” politics began to take over and popular mobilization lost its appeal to the broader public as a likely force for change. This remains a hypothesis; further research must be done in order to support or disprove this conclusion.

Finally, I have included an appendix to this paper, which seeks to contribute to refining our approach to explaining “electoral breakthroughs.” As I alluded to above, the Rose Revolution was only one of a number of potential electoral breakthroughs that could have occurred in Georgia. Three others were the holding of free and fair elections (such as in Slovakia or Romania), a post-election acknowledgement of fraud and revision of results (Serbia being the extreme variant of this possibility), and the holding of a repeat, more democratic, election (as in



Ukraine). From the standpoint of democracy building, any of these alternatives would have been preferable to the kind of extra-constitutional regime change that actually occurred. In explaining Georgia's electoral breakthrough, therefore, it is instructive to explain why other electoral breakthroughs did *not* occur. Georgia is thus a positive case, compared to the absence of electoral breakthroughs in countries like Armenia and Azerbaijan, and a negative case, against more institutionalized electoral breakthroughs elsewhere.

The paper first discusses the extent to which the vulnerability of the regime was exposed before and during the electoral process. I then examine the factors that contributed to popular mobilization, noting at first why mobilization was surprising even given government vulnerability. Third, I assess the role of U.S. intervention and Serbian-inspired NGOs and offer tentative conclusions regarding their effects. The appendix addresses the question of why alternative electoral breakthroughs did not occur.

## **THE VULNERABILITY OF THE REGIME**

The first factor that explains Georgia's electoral breakthrough is the regime's open vulnerability to electoral loss or pressure, measured by an astonishingly diverse set of indicators. Political elite fissures before and during the election were palpable, with the regime finding the need to shore up its power base by relying on a hodgepodge of marginal and unpopular political figures. The ruling party had surrendered electoral superiority in local elections a year before and could not (or did not care to) prevent the publication of opinion polls on the eve of the election which underlined that this outcome would be repeated. After the election, *all* tabulations of the vote, including a state television exit poll and even the official results (if one compares ruling party results with those of probable coalition allies), confirmed that the regime had lost the popular vote. Finally, the government openly lacked the resolve to use force against peaceful

protestors: it neither issued credible threats of force to deter protests, nor used force to seriously limit or disperse protests once they began to convene.

In sum, the government was going to lose a fair vote and it had limited capacity (or will) to decisively fix the vote in its favor. To win, the government was counting on popular inaction, in the face of an electoral fraud designed to allow it to scrape into first place, after which it would 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 wide open to competition and protest.

### **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 years before the 2003 parliamentary election. A group of politicians representing the business community were the first to defect, forming the opposition New Rights Party (NRP) 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 CUG in December, taking several supporters with him. Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the Georgian parliament since 1995, departed from the government in November 2001, as a result of a complex political deal in which the security and interior ministers also resigned after a scandalous operation against the independent television channel Rustavi-2 (see below). While Zhvania fought with supporters of Shevardnadze to retain legal title to the CUG, the courts eventually ruled in the latter's favor, and so Zhvania's wing formally seceded, weeks before local elections. 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 (below referred to as the Democrats).

With each defection, the ruling party retreated further 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, 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 leadership 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 formerly 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 this alliance would enable it to pick up additional voters among these factions' core supporters, this was at the expense of increasing the perception among the general population that the CUG was unable to stand on its own feet.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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." See 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](http://www.idea.int/publications/ea_caucasus/upload/BookEng.pdf)>.

In the days after the election, the regime exhibited further signs of fragmentation. Rather than close ranks and insist on victory, members of the government and its electoral bloc, For a New Georgia (FNG), were divided regarding how to deal with opposition protests. Some top officials were in favor of promoting a clean election entirely. Other politicians and officials expressed willingness to negotiate an alternative vote tabulation or a new election. 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.<sup>3</sup> Some government officials also took the unusual step of calling in the head of the local NGO that had conducted the PVT to discuss the mechanisms of it with them.<sup>4</sup>

Before Saakashvili and his supporters peacefully stormed the parliament building on November 22, the government had already lost numerous supporters from within its ranks. These included the chair of the state broadcasting company Zaza Shengelia (who resigned on November 19), presidential legal advisor Levan Aleksidze (on November 21), and, most importantly, National Security Council head and former Ambassador to the U.S. Tedo Japaridze (also on November 21). Japaridze explains that on November 20, before the central election commission (CEC) released its results, he already favored the holding of new elections.<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>3</sup> “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;

<sup>4</sup> “Georgian authorities ‘take interest’ in parallel vote count,” Rustavi-2 TV, November 12, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>5</sup> See Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 55-58.

election fraud and the damage it had done to Georgia's reputation. He warned authorities against using force and expressed support for a compromise solution in which the new parliament would temporarily convene and announce the holding of new elections. He was fired the next day.

To counter such defections within the regime, the intransigent elements within the government further demonstrated weakness by relying 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, ended up as virtually the only "opposition" bloc in parliament – and proceeded for four years to raise hardly a peep against the government. This de facto alliance with the CUG constituted an informal agreement to support CUG governance at the center in exchange for Tbilisi's tolerance of Abashidze's rule in Adjara. While Revival made some noise about being a national party, and its allies in 1999 were represented nationwide, in practice it had extremely local interests.

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 an absurd 21 percent of the vote count, temporarily entering first place nationwide. In addition to Revival having officially received 95 percent of the vote in Adjara, Abashidze had grossly inflated the total number of voters in the region, reporting a 22 percent increase from already inflated voter rolls of 1999.<sup>6</sup> Rather than denounce the fraud, Shevardnadze traveled to Adjara and stood side-

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<sup>6</sup> See the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, "Post-Election Interim Report, 2-25 November 2003," 5, <[www1.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1593\\_en.pdf](http://www1.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1593_en.pdf)>OSCE. Irakly Areshidze estimates that the 284,000 votes allegedly cast in Adjara constitute at least a third more than the region's entire population. Irakly Areshidze, unpublished manuscript (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming), 137.

by-side with Abashidze, declaring “nothing will separate us, we will stand together.”<sup>7</sup> Relying on Revival’s excessive vote fraud dramatically underlined the regime’s inability to secure an undisputed victory on its own.

### **Local Elections and 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 had already been exposed in these elections. Local elections were for a total of 4,849 seats.<sup>8</sup> Candidates formally affiliated with the CUG won barely *one percent* of total mandates – 70 seats. Coupled with an estimated 600 party supporters who ran as independents, the CUG total came to approximately 14 percent of the total seats available.<sup>9</sup> In the city council of Tbilisi, Georgia’s capital and home to more than one-third of the country’s population, the ruling party obtained not one seat.<sup>10</sup>

The significance of the local elections 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 candidates on the basis of party affiliation was the opposition New Rights Party (NRP), which received 558 party-affiliated seats and approximately

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<sup>7</sup> “Shevardnadze, Abashidze Pledge Cooperation,” *Civil.Ge United Nations Association of Georgia Magazine* (Tbilisi), November 10, 2003, <[www.civil.ge/eng/article\\_elections.php?id=5467](http://www.civil.ge/eng/article_elections.php?id=5467)>. Also see Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 10.

<sup>8</sup> “Percentage Allotment of Sakrebulo Members Elected Among Election Subjects throughout Georgia (Results by June 24, 2002),” Central Electoral Commission of Georgia, <<http://www.archive.cec.gov.ge/Cfdocs/sabolooshedegebi/gasulebiENG.cfm?contact=0>>.

<sup>9</sup> Areshidze, unpublished, 66.

<sup>10</sup> 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](http://www.ifes.ge/files/assasments/techn_ass_eng.pdf)>.

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), Revival, the Socialist Party, and the National Democratic Party – received 961 seats (20 percent plus independents).<sup>11</sup> The opposition Labor Party, led by Shalva Natelashvili, received 167 seats, or just over three percent, while Mikheil Saakashvili’s National Movement, which campaigned almost exclusively in Tbilisi, received just 29 seats (less than 1 percent).<sup>12</sup> In the Tbilisi city council, however, the Labor Party and the National Movement each won approximately 25 percent of the vote, finishing in first and second place, respectively. 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.<sup>13</sup>

Public opinion polls in the last two months of the election campaign also demonstrated the ruling party’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, FNG had the support of just 6 to 9 percent of the population; on questions of trust, government leaders ranked at the bottom.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 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).

<sup>12</sup> The remaining 6 percent of seats were filled by 8 other parties, three of which received more party-affiliated seats than either the CUG or the National Movement (two of these were regional parties, the Svaneti-based Lemi organization and the Javakheti-based Party for the Protection of Constitutional Rights. The other was the People’s Party-Traditionalists Union, a merger of two longstanding Georgian parties. The data I possess accounts for approximately 909 seats filled by independents. A complete analysis of the remaining 1,845 independent seats is required to more precisely determine relative party strength, on the basis of both party-affiliated and independent seats. See “Percentage Allotment of Sakrebulo Members,” Central Electoral Commission of Georgia.

<sup>13</sup> According to Natelashvili, the Labor Party supported Saakashvili’s candidacy to demonstrate 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 news agency (Tbilisi), June 25, 2002, trans. in BBC Monitoring; and Java Devdariani, “Opposition leader poised to become Tbilisi council chairman,” EurasiaNet, June 19, 2002, <[www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav061902.shtml](http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav061902.shtml)>. Also see Areshidze, unpublished, 73.

<sup>14</sup> “Georgian Parliament Speaker’s Election Bloc Leads Opinion Polls,” Rustavi-2 TV, September 17, 2003; “Georgian Opposition Parties Leading Opinion Polls,” Rustavi-2 TV, October 4, 2003, “Georgian Opposition

By contrast, opinion polls showed opposition parties on top. 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 also showed the level of support for Revival gradually declining over this period from 13 to 8 percent (see attached tables).

### **Exit Polls, the PVT, and Official Results**

The vulnerability of the government demonstrated by local elections and opinion polls was reinforced on election day by exit polls and an NGO-organized parallel vote tabulation (PVT), a statistically significant parallel vote count at the precinct level.<sup>15</sup> The results of two exit polls, both of which established a victory for opposition parties, were released on election night (see attached tables). The first results to reach the airwaves were from a poll jointly funded by the Open Society Georgia Foundation, the Eurasia Foundation (with USAID support), 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, at 21 percent of the vote, making it the leading party to fill the 150 (out of 235<sup>16</sup>) parliamentary seats reserved for party lists, followed by FNG at 13 percent (later amended to 15 percent). According to the poll,

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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.

<sup>15</sup> Together with the exit polls, which if properly administered are able to counter election day fraud at its earliest stages (e.g., ballot box stuffing), a properly administered 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.



the Democrats came in fourth with 8 percent, behind the Labor Party's 13 (later amended to 14) percent.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> Despite this variation in rankings, the official exit poll revealed 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, with only 4 percent of the vote, would not make it into parliament, even this exit poll handed victory to the opposition.

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.<sup>19</sup> According to the PVT, the National Movement received 27 percent of the vote. FNG came in second place with 19 percent. Three other opposition parties, Labor, the Democrats, and the NRP, together received 35 percent total, respectively coming in third, fourth, and sixth place. Revival received 8 percent, coming in fifth, while ISG received five percent, not enough to enter parliament. In short, the regime and its de facto allies had received 32 percent of the vote, while opposition parties had won 62 percent

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<sup>17</sup> The NRP and Revival each had 6 percent (with results for Revival later amended to 7). U.S. organizers did acknowledge on television that the results should be interpreted with care, especially given that 22 percent of respondents did not answer. "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.

<sup>18</sup> This exit poll put the Labor Party in third place, with 14 percent, and the NRP in fifth place, with 11 percent. "Progovernment bloc wins parliamentary election in Georgia – state TV," Georgian State Television Channel 1, November 2, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>19</sup> "Official Georgian election results at odds with parallel vote count figures," Rustavi-2 TV, November 3, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

(the National Movement and Democrats alone, 37 percent). Such data again demonstrated the government's defeat.

Even final election results, announced 18 days after the election, conceded the government's vulnerability. 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. Together, FNG and Revival had 40 percent of the vote.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, even the official results gave the four leading opposition parties 47 percent of the vote, including 28 percent for the future ruling bloc of the National Movement and Democrats – again a combined total more than the FNG itself.

### **The Absence of Force**

Most importantly for the success of popular mobilization, Georgia's security forces never cracked down on protesters. Why they did not involves two separate questions. The first is why the government did not credibly seek to deter protesters with the threat of force, or limit or crack down on early protests. The second is why the government did not use force to restore order after the peaceful storming of parliament on November 22.

The answer to the first question is that whatever its faults, the Georgian government was strongly conditioned against the use of force to prevent or disperse peaceful protests. Police brutality, official complicity in kidnapping crimes, and the unresolved murder of Rustavi-2 television anchor Giorgi Sanaia in 2001 did point to the regime's ability to engage or tolerate isolated instances of violence. And in the two years before parliamentary elections, the

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<sup>20</sup> 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.

government had made some effort to pressure critics – lawsuits against the media, a tax raid on Rustavi-2, a hardening of the libel law, and proposed reviews of foreign-sponsored organizations.<sup>21</sup> But the Georgian political scene was not characterized overall 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 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. It was also taken for granted that the memory of April 9, 1989, when Soviet (Russian) troops forcibly dispersed pro-independence demonstrators on Tbilisi’s central Rustaveli Avenue, served as a powerful restraint against the participation of government officials and members of the security forces in efforts to prevent or suppress protest.

At the first sign of street protest, a few signs that the government might consider brandishing the threat of force against protesters did exist. 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.”<sup>22</sup> During the next significant demonstration of November 14, when protestors neared the heavily guarded state chancellery building where Shevardnadze’s offices were located, interior minister Koba Narchemashvili warned that in the event “armed opposition members” appeared in front of

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<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> “Georgian interior ministry: police may be forced to fire at protesters,” *Caucasus Press*, November 8, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

the building, the police would be compelled to respond and that this would “end very badly for the opposition.”<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, this armed presence and the interior minister’s warnings of force were diluted by other signals. The smaller demonstrations that continued around-the-clock between November 8 and 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 the prosecutor-general.<sup>24</sup> During the November 14 demonstration, the interior minister again announced that force would not be used. That day, security forces were even less of a presence than on November 8, and they concentrated their efforts on protecting government buildings and deploying on the outskirts of Tbilisi. Finally, any threat of force on November 14 was grossly undermined the day before when on state television 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,

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<sup>23</sup> “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.

<sup>24</sup> “Georgian interior minister says situation under control,” Caucasus Press, November 9, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring; “Georgia: internal troops deployed in Tbilisi,” Prime News, November 10, 2003, trans. in BBC Worldwide Monitoring.

since this possibility – that is the use of violence – was completely ruled out behind the scenes.”<sup>25</sup>

The second question is why security forces did not use force to restore order when it was most justified, after the November 22 storming of parliament. Shevardnadze ordered the government to enact a state of emergency at this time. This, however, was never enacted, and he retreated the following day. Why?

The most obvious answer is that the government could not rely on its security organs to implement the decree. National security advisor Tedo Japaridze reports that his initial reaction to Shevardnadze’s order to implement a state of emergency on November 22 was that this was “not only morally unacceptable” 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 Giorgi Kandelaki, a leading member of the youth organization Kmara, by that day the opposition already “knew that some [armed] units would not interfere.” Burjanadze notes that “[s]ome of our supporters were active inside the army and police.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, Japaridze reports secondhand 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 reflects, who exactly “was supposed to implement this decree of a state of emergency?” In his presence, Petre

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<sup>25</sup> Georgian State Television Channel One, November 13, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>26</sup> 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.” Giorgi Kandelaki, “Rose Revolution: A Participant’s Story,” United States Institute of Peace, forthcoming, 19; Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 27, 47, 54.

Mamradze, the chief of staff of the chancellery, phoned Shevardnadze and told him “there is no way to implement this state of emergency decree.”<sup>27</sup>

Some would argue that Shevardnadze still commanded enough security forces to be able to engage in a crackdown. 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.”<sup>28</sup> Kandelaki also notes that “the risk of violence was still clear with no news from a number of Special Forces units loyal to the president.”<sup>29</sup> Shevardnadze himself insists that while “[t]he opposition claimed that they were the ones who actually controlled the military and special police forces,” even if this were true it “would not mean that they were in control of 100% of them. Enough troops would still remain to implement the emergency decree.”<sup>30</sup>

So why then did Shevardnadze retreat? He insists he changed his mind after his wife and son urged him to reconsider, given the likelihood of casualties. Committed to avoiding bloodshed, Shevardnadze says, “I made up my mind to resign.” One must assume, however, that besides already lacking the resolve to use force against protestors, Shevardnadze had to realize that given his relatively small base of loyalists among the security forces, there was a high possibility that a special-forces crackdown could provoke a coup and the subsequent overthrow of the government anyhow, thus causing needless casualties and leaving Shevardnadze’s reputation in tatters and his family vulnerable to retribution.<sup>31</sup> As for the state of emergency,

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<sup>27</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 55.

<sup>28</sup> “Georgian interior minister ‘ready to act’ on President Shevardnadze's orders,” Caucasus Press, November 22, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>29</sup> 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 Story,” 20; Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 30.

<sup>31</sup> The former director of the National Democratic Institute’s Tbilisi office, Lincoln Mitchell, similarly argues that Shevardnadze’s claim “was not entirely accurate. In reality, Shevardnadze resigned because, finally realizing his

Shevardnadze just let his order lapse. The day before, he hastily denied to Mamradze that he had even ordered the decree, 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.”<sup>32</sup>

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 22<sup>nd</sup> (i.e., before Shevardnadze ordered the decree to impose a state of emergency) “the situation was very uncertain. There were no guarantees.” By the early afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, a cascade of army units rapidly declared loyalty to Burjanadze as interim president. They were followed by police units and, at last, the Tbilisi chief of police. The opposition had won. Shevardnadze resigned that night.

## **ENCOURAGING POPULAR MOBILIZATION**

### **No Popular Mobilization: A Plausible Outcome**

Facing an extremely vulnerable regime, which was seeking through fraud to achieve a minimal victory in parliamentary elections, the opposition leadership had to decide what to do: accept the fraud as inevitable, take their seats in parliament, and prepare for the next fight, or denounce the results and seek to persuade or pressure the government to revise them. Because of the government’s vulnerability, the possibility of persuasion or pressure was certainly available.

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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.” Lincoln Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” *Current History* 103 (October 2004): 342-348, at 348.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

Legal appeals were possible, but the very conduct of the elections suggested that these would have limited success, not enough to change the outcome of the elections. For the opposition to get the government to consider the opposition's appeals, it was going to have to bring people to the streets.

Even given the regime's extreme vulnerability, however, the mass mobilization that occurred 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 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 seemed so fragile. Perpetual power shortages finally led to mild street protest in 2000 and the tax raid against Rustavi-2 in the fall of 2001 prompted a student-led demonstration of several thousand. In June 2003, another significant demonstration was mounted against government resistance to reforming the CEC. While these demonstrations may have been interpreted as a renaissance of popular mobilization in Georgia, their limited size (probably no more than five thousand in 2001 and 2003) and duration also suggested that the appeal of popular mobilization had its limits.

In the lead-up to parliamentary elections, then, it was a real question whether a sufficient number of Georgians would care enough to come out to the streets in the event of fraudulent elections, even given government vulnerability. According to Giorgi Kandelaki of Kmara, "breaking the political apathy of the public" was the movement's central function. He elaborates



that Georgians generally viewed politics with “nihilism and distrust” and political parties and politicians of all stripes “with great distrust and suspicion.” This, together with a belief that “all elections were unfair,” suggested that no matter how weak the government was, and how obvious the fraud was to secure victory, the people could not be relied upon to defend their vote.<sup>33</sup> Saakashvili later estimated that up to 90 percent of the population would have said before the elections that they would not come out to the streets in the event of electoral fraud.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, even if the population were to accept that the political stakes were high – not so much for power in parliament, but to build momentum to achieve victory in the 2005 presidential election – there was still the opportunity to contest that second, more important battle for executive power. In the end, official election results granted more than half the party-list seats in parliament (plus an additional 23 single-mandate seats) to opposition parties, giving them 102 seats, or 43 percent of the total. With the possibility of some additional adjustments through recounts or revotes, the opposition would have had a substantial platform from which to propagate an anti-government message, and from which aspiring presidential candidates (including Saakashvili who as Tbilisi city council head had not run in parliamentary elections) could build support.

Opposition parties as a whole were not 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 New Rights Party – chose not to join street protests. The Labor Party had already set itself apart from the other opposition parties at the start of October, when it accused Rustavi-2 of carrying out a “dirty campaign” against it and of openly

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<sup>33</sup> Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Story,” 8, 11-12.

<sup>34</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 23.

supporting the Democrats.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, party leader Natelashvili denounced street protests as a destructive struggle for power of which he and his followers wanted no part. He publicly agreed with the pro-government Revival and ISG to boycott Rustavi-2, and called on Shevardnadze, Burjanadze, Zhvania, and Saakashvili to all stand down from politics.<sup>36</sup>

While more staid, the NRP also rejected street protests from the first day after the election and set for itself the narrow aim of “protecting the votes that [the party] had received,” according to Georgian political analyst, Irakly Areshidze, who also served as the NRP’s chief strategist for the election campaign.<sup>37</sup> The NRP pushed for a compromise to hold new elections within six to nine months, although it supported first convening the new parliament (since it was at least more representative than the old parliament and was the first parliament to which the NRP had been officially elected).<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, however, the NRP, unlike Labor, agreed to certify official election results. While its members were at first reluctant to join the opening session of parliament, which met two days after election results were announced, they agreed to join at the last minute, allowing the new parliament to legitimately convene (if it had abstained, the government, which together with Revival had fewer than 100 deputies, might not have been able to muster the 118 deputies needed to make a quorum, thereby prolonging the election standoff).<sup>39</sup>

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

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<sup>35</sup> “Georgian Labour Party accuses independent TV station of “dirty campaigning,” Caucasus Press, October 2, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>36</sup> “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.

<sup>37</sup> Areshidze, unpublished, 135, 147 (n. 145).

<sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

parties, however, could not necessarily be relied upon to mount a successful protest movement. The National Movement was not extraordinarily popular – its top percentage on any measure (the PVT) was just 27 percent. As for the Democrats, with the Rustavi-2 exit poll and the PVT taking the wind out of their sails – handing them just half the vote public opinion polls suggested they would receive – one could imagine they and their followers dispiritedly accepting defeat.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, mostly forgotten after the Rose Revolution is the fact that street demonstrations in Georgia were, relatively speaking, not that large or sustained. Twenty-one days of crisis followed the November 2 parliamentary elections, culminating in Shevardnadze's resignation on November 23. On ten of those days (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.<sup>41</sup> 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 storming 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, and, once Shevardnadze resigned, transformed into an enormous street celebration, the image of which, after the parliamentary storming, is that which is most symbolic of the Rose Revolution – occurring after it had already been won. Estimates for the size of the pre-celebration component

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<sup>40</sup> 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% barrier and be in parliament.” See Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Former National Democratic Institute Tbilisi office director, Lincoln Mitchell, says that for most of that time, there were far less. Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 345. Other citations and explanations.

of this demonstration vary wildly – between 20 to 30,000 and 100,000. One source that consistently overestimated the size of earlier protests reported that day a figure of 60,000.<sup>42</sup>

These numbers, while impressive given the context of recent Georgian political culture, make us aware of the ease with which the mobilization effort could have failed. Given opposition fragmentation and a relatively small protest movement, it is possible to imagine a scenario in which even a regime as vulnerable as Shevardnadze's could have gotten away with fraud. This does not mean it would have survived the more important battle in the planned 2005 presidential race (although it might have), but it does remind us that regime vulnerability alone does not account for successful mobilization.

To explain the Rose Revolution, then, I offer two more explanations. First, though protest could have been interpreted as a purely political effort, the stakes rapidly came to be perceived as much higher than protecting one's vote or, for that matter, fighting against corruption and really came to represent a defense of the national interest. This transformation of the meaning of protest resulted from three factors: a) the postelectoral alliance of the National Movement and Democrats; b) widespread support for the movement among Georgia's nonpolitical elite; and c) the government's reliance on Adjara. Second, the broadcast media played a vital role in mobilizing protestors, communicating and legitimizing protest to as broad an audience as possible.

### **Depoliticizing Protest**

The first argument to explain popular mobilization is that the significance of protest was transformed from a vehicle for political aims into a defense of the national interest, successfully

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<sup>42</sup> "Saakashvili Meets Shevardnadze, Saakashvili Says Shevardnadze Prepares for Resignation," Civil.ge, November 23, 2003.

attracting a cross-spectrum of the population and not just partisan supporters. This, in turn, enabled protests to attract ever greater numbers of participants and to demonstrate to a divided ruling elite the fragility of the hardliners' position.

The first step in this process of transformation involved the street alliance 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 (even though it was likely they would subsequently form a parliamentary majority if they were able to). The parties were rivals for many of the same votes, and 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."<sup>43</sup> 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, in alignment with their political interests, 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.

Nonetheless, the two parties eventually agreed to support unified street protests. This unification, especially on the part of the Democrats, was critical. The Democrats could have just sat on the sidelines – with no desire to take their seats in a parliament that would have relegated

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<sup>43</sup> Areshidze, unpublished, 112. Areshidze says that these attacks were more successful than realized at the time, which if true helps to explain the contrast between the Democrats' standing in the opinion polls and in the later Rustavi-2 exit poll and the PVT.

them to an insignificant minority position, but also no incentive to push for a revised vote tally that would still have relegated them to at best fourth place.<sup>44</sup>

If the Democrats had not joined the National Movement, Saakashvili may not have been able to mobilize enough supporters on his own to overturn the results. It was not only numbers that were lacking, but the more important quality of being able to persuasively represent a popular movement, rather than just a partisan victory. While the Democrats themselves could reap significant political rewards by unifying with the National Movement – the latter’s victory was the only chance they had to share in parliamentary power – their unification was a case where the sum was greater than its parts. Rather than reinforce popular cynicism, the union was welcomed as a demonstration of the parties’ capacity to overcome petty political squabbles and to accomplish something for the greater good.

Second, the principle of protest rapidly found support from societal leaders outside of the political parties. I am speaking here not about the oft-discussed nongovernmental sector (on this, see below), but the leaders of civil society more broadly defined. Georgia’s intellectual and artistic elite, traditionally well regarded by the Georgian public, were highly visible in the protests. David Usupashvili, an NGO legal expert (and one of three OSCE-supported nominees as CEC chairman for the 2003 elections), argues that other “civil society activists” besides the student movement Kmara and allied NGOs were heavily critical of the government in television and news media before election day; he clarifies that this amorphous “group” included “the most popular writers, poets, singers, actors, sportsmen, lawyers, journalists, scientists, and others.” He says these individuals “put considerable pressure on the leaders of the political opposition and

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<sup>44</sup> Burjanadze herself explains that the Democrats “decided not to participate in parliament 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.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 45-46.

encouraged them to make braver and bolder moves against Shevardnadze's regime. They also played a crucial role in bringing people out on demonstrations."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, at the first rally called by the Democrats, the audience that came to the Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall 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."<sup>46</sup> 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 played a role), but a disobedience committee that came to be known as the Artcom (art committee), "comprised mostly of artists, movie directors, and writers."<sup>47</sup> Such broad support among Georgia's nonpolitical elite for protest provided an even more solid basis for mass participation.

Finally, the government's reliance on the vote from Adjara sparked an unanticipated defensive counterreaction among the population. Whatever negative attitudes the population had about Shevardnadze, most of Georgia's politically active population (at least in Tbilisi) reviled the pro-Russian Abashidze and his Soviet-style regional dictatorship in Adjara, 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.<sup>48</sup> The protests only began in force on November 8, two days after Adjara's official count was announced and a day after Revival's Tbilisi-based leadership organized their own demonstration in Tbilisi. These protests continued over the next days, as Shevardnadze traveled to Batumi and, in probably his single largest

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<sup>45</sup> 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*.

<sup>46</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 36.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 66. Kandelaki also comments that "groups of well known artists, writers and poets started campaigning in various public establishments, primarily universities urging people to join the protest." Kandelaki, "A Participant's Story," 7.

<sup>48</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 48, 63-64; Haindrava, "Through Elections to the 'Rose Revolution'," 109; Areshidze, unpublished, 145-146.

miscalculation, stood with Abashidze in front of a manufactured crowd. Beset by fear of Adjara's secession in light of Georgia's past losses in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Shevardnadze probably went to Adjara at least in part only to ascertain the risk of secession, in the event developments in Tbilisi went against Abashidze.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, the outcome was clear – Shevardnadze was going to rely on Abashidze for political support. This was underlined by Revival's parliamentary leader, Jemal Gogitidze, who insisted that "Revival will go to Tbilisi to help you."<sup>50</sup> To many Georgians, especially in Tbilisi, this was tantamount to threatening a coup against the nation. Even though Shevardnadze's visit to Adjara stemmed from his fear of fragmenting the country further, it stood as evidence that he was willing to betray Georgia to Abashidze to stay in power. After the large protest of November 14 subsided, protestors were given a new jolt by the appearance of Adjara's bussed into Tbilisi to demonstrate in support of the government. Opposition leaders did not immediately call for counter-protests, in part from fear of not inciting confrontation, but they did announce a nationwide civil disobedience campaign.

A final hint of the meaning of protest comes from Nino Burjanadze. Although we must be careful not to confuse elite justification for behavior for the motivations actually driving public mobilization, Burjanadze's discussion of Shevardnadze's convening of parliament offers a plausible insight into public thinking. After Shevardnadze entered parliament to convene the session, she says,

"We understood that he was ready to fight, that he was ready to defend a system that was really a disaster for Georgia. He defended the people in parliament, and we saw the kind of people he had there in the majority. So we understood that we had no chance,

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<sup>49</sup> For an analysis of Shevardnadze's possible motivations, see Areshidze, unpublished, 139-141.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 140, citing *24 Saati* (Tbilisi), November 11, 2005. Also see Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 10.



I mean Georgia had no chance if this regime would win. If President Shevardnadze and *these* people would win, then Georgia had no chance.”<sup>51</sup>

While the opposition had a strategic incentive to frame the crisis in this fashion, if Burjanadze’s comments accurately reflect the mood on the street, then fighting fraud was less about defending political preferences than it was about staking out a future for Georgia.

### **The Broadcast Media**

The role of the broadcast media was also instrumental in mobilizing protest on a number of levels. Almost unanimously, Georgian elites emphasize the role of the media in Georgia’s electoral breakthrough. Usupashvili characterizes Rustavi-2 as “the most active part of the opposition political coalition” and goes so far as to say (without elaboration) that the channel “frequently determined the most important decisions of the political leaders.”<sup>52</sup> Two other observers sympathetic to the opposition, Ivliane Khaindrava and Ghia Nodia, contend that the Rose Revolution could not have happened without the media’s participation, while Zurabishvili notes that media played a larger role in events than the NGOs.<sup>53</sup> Saakashvili concurs, calling Rustavi-2 in particular “extremely important,” an opinion Burjanadze echoes.<sup>54</sup>

The opposition certainly had a key media ally in Rustavi 2. This channel was 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.”<sup>55</sup> Rustavi-2 was the focus of a scandal in the fall of 2001, when tax police raided its offices in what was interpreted not so much

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<sup>51</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 47.

<sup>52</sup> Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 95.

<sup>53</sup> Haindrava, “Through Elections to the ‘Rose Revolution’,” 108, and Ghia Nodia, “The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Georgia, 2003-2004,” in *Election Assessment in the South Caucasus, (2003-2004)*, 120.

<sup>54</sup> 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.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 25, 51, 65, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 94.

as an act of intimidation to deter the station from airing investigative reports on state corruption than the opening act of an effort to shut the station down or buy it out. The scandal did not rein in Rustavi-2, and during the November 2003 election, the channel openly sided with the opposition 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."<sup>56</sup> Rustavi-2's director-general, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, later admitted that "[w]e gave a one-sided coverage of the events in Tbilisi."<sup>57</sup> He attributed popular mobilization in no small part to Rustavi-2's coverage. 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.

In addition to Rustavi-2, other television channels were also important, including even state television. Channels that had not sided with the opposition, namely Imedi, sponsored by oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili, and Mze, associated with regime backers but which had some links to the NRP, eventually came around, providing regular coverage of the demonstrations and

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<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 345.

<sup>57</sup> "Rustavi-2 admits losing viewers' confidence," ITAR-TASS News Agency, December 2, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring. This does not need to be interpreted solely as a case of free media defending itself for the sake of democratic principles. With vastly different attitudes toward the Rose Revolution, Areshidze and Kandelaki both discuss Rustavi-2's origins and ownership in impressively identical terms. It was developed 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 a small startup grant from the Eurasia Foundation, as well as assistance and training from the U.S. government-funded NGO Internews, it was also a business and came to seek financial backing from a variety of sources – and as Kandelaki puts it "engaged in games with different players and even Aslan Abashidze himself, prior to 1999 parliamentary elections." In 2003, after Patarkatsishvili opened Imedi, Rustavi was now threatened not only by government opposition but also market competition. In this context, supporting the opposition may have appeared a logical business choice as well. See Kandelaki, "A Participant's Story," 16-17, and Areshidze, unpublished, 43-44, 95-96. Also see 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](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/Research_Publications/Papers/Working_Papers/2006_3.pdf)>.

publicizing the exit polls and PVT results. More surprisingly, state television was not monolithically in favor of the regime; Usupashvili notes that the state-controlled Channel One provided access to “anti-Shevardnadze political forces, NGOs and independent experts” and provided footage of the demonstrations.<sup>58</sup> 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.”<sup>59</sup> 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.”<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> On balance, therefore, the broadcast media cumulatively tilted against the regime. Such broad coverage ensured that dissent was transmitted to as wide and politically diverse an audience as possible.<sup>62</sup>

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

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<sup>58</sup> Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 95.

<sup>59</sup> “Georgia: President appoints new chairman of state TV,” Interfax, November 20, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>60</sup> “Georgian state TV news staff go on strike,” Georgian State Television Channel One, November 19, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> 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.” Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 95. 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 may not have even been viewed by all demonstrators – needs to be further investigated.

instrumentally by NGO activists and opposition parties. Usupashvili obliquely hints that the opposition “had much more sophisticated and innovative methods of using the media than the government.”<sup>63</sup> 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.’”<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, the night before the large demonstration and the nonviolent storming of parliament on November 22, 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.”<sup>65</sup> Saakashvili himself downplayed the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>64</sup> Broers, “After the ‘revolution’,” 342. Lincoln Mitchell, director of the National Democratic Institute office in Tbilisi from 2002 to 2004, 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.” Mitchell, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 345.

<sup>65</sup> As other observers have put it, “[t]he television images were stunning: with headlights on, the cars moved like a huge blazing river.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 13, 51. Having watched these images, I can attest to their impact at the time; they indeed appeared to herald the end of the regime. Intriguingly, this event may have been inspired by the events in Serbia. 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

actual importance of the convoy, claiming that it was “more a symbolic thing” that “brought in something like 5,000 people to Tbilisi, not more.”<sup>66</sup>

To a Tbilisi audience, Saakashvili may have had reason to diminish the role of “outsiders” in street protests (many have negative memories of the time when Gamsakhurdia mobilized supporters from Mingrelia to come to Tbilisi, escalating civil war). At the same time, the reverse is also true – the opposition’s appearance of power was most persuasive if it could demonstrate that it had support throughout the country. Mingrelia, being the base of Gamsakhurdia supporters, was a particularly powerful representation of opposition force. Creating the appearance of a mobilized Mingrelian population, coming to Tbilisi to unite with other Georgians in league against a common opponent, rather than to divide it through civil war, offered a powerful contrast to the divisiveness that Shevardnadze’s alliance with Abashidze had generated. Saakashvili’s admission that this event was more symbolic than substantive speaks profoundly to the importance of the media as a spur for mobilization.

## **ASSESSING THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL FACTORS**

In this section, I focus on two external factors: U.S. government influence and the diffusion effect of NGO and youth mobilization, namely in light of the successful electoral breakthrough in Serbia. Given the arguments above, we can assess the role of these external factors in Georgia’s electoral breakthrough on the basis of their contribution to a) promoting government vulnerability and b) encouraging popular mobilization.

### **Foreign Intervention: Assessing U.S. Influence**

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by the opposition in Yugoslavia. After hearing this suggestion, Saakashvili went to the regions and started to summon people to come to Tbilisi.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 30. For more on diffusion effects, see below.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 25.

The level of U.S. attention to Georgia's parliamentary election was certainly high, giving us the possibility to at least hypothesize that U.S. intervention was a decisive factor in Georgia's electoral breakthrough. At the same time, the U.S. effort was geared not toward extra-constitutional regime change but the promotion of free and fair elections and a negotiated solution to the electoral crisis. At this level, we can say that U.S. efforts did not achieve their desired effect. The only way to argue that U.S. influence was decisive is to point to its unintended effects.

My conclusions in this regard are preliminary: U.S. intervention may have played a role by both contributing to government vulnerability and encouraging public mobilization, but it was probably more important in the former sphere. It possibly contributed to the absence of force, and it certainly promoted vote monitoring mechanisms and, thanks to a steady decline of support for the government, government vulnerability more generally. If the U.S. government had demonstrated greater support for the Georgian government, perceptions of government vulnerability might have been limited sufficiently to restrain both defections from the ruling elite and popular mobilization. On the other hand, U.S. intervention played little direct role in transforming the meaning of protest or in promoting media support for the opposition. These, however, remain tentative findings. Further research should be done to determine whether U.S. intervention – or, rather, lack of intervention in favor of the government – was really decisive.

U.S. democracy promoters pursued a number of policies with the hopes of improving the chances that a democratic election would take place in Georgia. U.S. election assistance was substantial (check figures), and included funding for voter list reform, PVT training and implementation, and the cultivation of local election monitoring NGOs. This assistance, together

with the more infamous nongovernmental Soros Foundation funding for NGOs, study trips, and training, is 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 presidential letters 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 electoral commissions as well as allowing a PVT; and congressional letters by John McCain (and others?), urging the Georgian government to implement a free and fair vote.

How can we measure the effect of U.S. assistance and diplomacy? At one level, we must argue that these efforts did not, in fact, achieve their main objectives. In one of the two biggest political 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.<sup>67</sup> 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 who had genuinely been disenfranchised by the

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<sup>67</sup> For the best discussion of the voter lists, see Usupashvili, “Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Georgia,” 82-84. Also see Areshidze, unpublished, 126-129.

confusion, but it also opened the door to election day fraud. In general, despite all U.S. urgings, the Georgian government ultimately carried out, and validated, a fraudulent election.

Did U.S. assistance and diplomacy at least promote *more* democratic elections than there would have been if these efforts had been absent? If we hold that electoral breakthroughs can be promoted through partial democratic openings, then it is not important that U.S. intervention failed to achieve its main objectives, for it may still have been instrumental in establishing conditions that contributed to Georgia's electoral breakthrough.

One could suggest, for example, that U.S. intervention, through funding and diplomacy, was critical to the implementation of vote monitoring mechanisms like the exit polls and PVT, which I have argued were themselves critical elements in exposing the government's vulnerability. To make this determination, however, we need to determine the extent to which: a) U.S. diplomacy was critical in getting the government to agree to the exit poll and the PVT; and b) U.S. funding was critical in running the exit poll and PVT. On the one hand, the PVT was backed by both U.S. diplomacy (the Baker mission) and funding (via institutional support and training to the Georgian NGO that implemented the PVT). U.S. intervention may, therefore, have been critical to the holding of the PVT; at this point in time, it was unlikely that other backers could have been found to promote this lesser-known mechanism of vote monitoring. At the same time, the independent exit poll had more diverse sources of funding, including from domestic sources (Rustavi-2), and the government may very well have permitted the exit poll to be conducted in the absence of U.S. support.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Whether the U.S. government or other foreign backers of vote monitoring mechanisms are the most likely and effective sponsors is another matter. It might also prove important to measure the separate effect of foreign *collaboration*, regardless of funding and diplomacy, on citizen confidence of results, that is to say, whether the involvement of foreign governments or NGOs, as opposed to purely domestic sponsorship, positively or negatively affects citizen perception of exit polls and PVTs. As for U.S. (and, at least as importantly, Soros Foundation) funding for democracy promotion NGOs more generally, the section below discusses how to ascertain their effect.



What about the effects of *diplomacy* on producing partial openings? We could hypothesize that diplomatic pressure compelled the government, or at least Shevardnadze, to accept a more democratic election than it otherwise would have, in part by accepting the principle of reform in election commissions and voter lists even if these reforms were subsequently sabotaged. Dependent on Western and especially U.S. aid and support, and having evinced a desire to cultivate the image of an enlightened leader, Shevardnadze may have accepted more democratic advances than he otherwise would have given U.S. pressure, even if he ultimately bowed to internal forces less receptive to Western pressure. This may have generated more optimistic expectations among the population that their vote would count, leading to a higher level of discontent that propelled mobilization after the election.<sup>69</sup>

Evidence, however, suggests that U.S. diplomatic pressures really made only quite limited inroads, if any, in convincing Shevardnadze to hold a freer election than he otherwise would have. Shevardnadze expressed considerable irritation and skepticism at U.S. diplomatic maneuvers, starting with a 200X visit by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who already at that time commented on the importance of a democratic transition of power and Shevardnadze's resignation at the end of his term. [ALSO Shevardnadze's response to Baker's visit] Also, according to Saakashvili, Shevardnadze actually did not take Western criticism that seriously; he responded to a colleague's concern regarding OSCE reports of fraud by saying "[d]on't you know how these Westerners are? They will make a fuss for a few days, and then they will calm down and life will go on as usual."<sup>70</sup> Finally, as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared it was suspending assistance to Georgia, the U.S. government also announced a reduction in

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<sup>69</sup> See, on this point, Charles H. Fairbanks Jr., "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no.2 (2004): 110-124, at 115.

<sup>70</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, "*Enough!*", 24.

foreign aid to Georgia. Such pressures appeared to have little effect on the government's willingness to produce a more democratic election than it otherwise would have held.

The effect of U.S. diplomacy in promoting Georgia's electoral breakthrough after the election requires separate discussion. The level of U.S. attention to the election results and the aftermath was extensive. Whatever its effect, the actual result – Shevardnadze's resignation – was surely unintended. Diplomatic pressure in the wake of a fraudulent election, however, may have been intended to achieve some kind of electoral breakthrough, if not the one that resulted, most likely through a revised tally via recounts and revotes.

In addition to the stream of remarks coming out of the State Department's daily press briefing during the crisis, U.S. officials were in constant communication with both government and opposition representatives following the election. U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles has characterized his role as one not of direct mediation, but of encouraging communication between the two sides in the hopes that they would work out a compromise solution (though it is not clear whether for the ambassador "compromise" meant a recognition of the opposition's victory).<sup>71</sup> Some government officials in Washington, DC were also following events closely and, by one's admission, in regular communication with less hardline government representatives and the opposition, Saakashvili in particular (the official explains that Saakashvili kept calling, both to appraise Washington of what was happening on the street and, more importantly, to attempt to demonstrate to followers that they had White House support).<sup>72</sup> This communication, like the Ambassador's, can be interpreted in the context of seeking to help achieve compromise (although in this case more likely meaning electoral breakthrough). (OTHERS like Lynn

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>72</sup> Personal communication, February 13, 2004.

Pascoe's visit?) As in U.S. efforts to promote a fair election, however, these efforts to produce compromise also did not achieve their objective.

The U.S. government was, however, possibly successful in producing the electoral breakthrough that did occur, even via an unintended mechanism, by weakening the government's resolve to use force against protestors. More than his role as facilitator, Miles appears to place value on his role as restrainer – urging the government (and opposition representatives too) to resolve the crisis peacefully. Miles says he talked 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.”<sup>73</sup> 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 out of the picture.<sup>74</sup>

Did U.S. urgings restrain government officials, particularly those in the security organs, from using force?<sup>75</sup> Miles modestly states that he “would like to hope that [his involvement] helped keep the whole exercise nonviolent.”<sup>76</sup> Above, however, I argued that the Georgian government and security forces were already disinclined to use force against protestors. It would

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<sup>73</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 72.

<sup>74</sup> See Fairbanks, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 117, 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.

<sup>75</sup> 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 violence against protestors would be more detrimental to Georgian stability than a thwarted vote, and that the important thing was simply that the security organs stayed out of the conflict, regardless of its outcome. I am inclined to believe the latter, although the argument should be further developed.

<sup>76</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 72.

seem likely, all other things equal, that the government would not have used force, even in the absence of these diplomatic communications. Still, the allusions by some Georgian participants to army units that could be counted on not to get involved (mentioned above) may be in reference to forces that were undergoing U.S. training at the time. Thus, even if diplomacy was not a critical factor, this does not mean that security linkages to the United States and other western countries were entirely irrelevant to the government's inclination to pursue restraint when faced with this kind of situation. This is a subject that needs to be explored in greater depth.

Besides security linkages, a more general question regarding U.S. diplomacy regards the extent to which declining U.S. support for Georgia's government reinforced regime vulnerability, contributing to the electoral breakthrough by increasing the confidence of opposition supporters that mobilization would succeed and increasing the incentive of government officials receptive to political change to defect. While such an effect may have been ongoing – for months the specter of losing U.S. support was evident – the most powerful effect may have been at the very end, when U.S. support for the government reached its lowest point. 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 a “formal statement” would be released shortly and that the government was “deeply disappointed in the conduct of Georgia's November 2 parliamentary election” and that the results “revealed an effort by the Central Election Commission and the Georgian government to ignore the will of the people.” 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.”<sup>77</sup>

These statements were significant for two reasons. First, they not only reflected disapproval of the election but, in uncharacteristically non-diplomatic speech, indicated direct disapproval of the government. By mentioning “next steps,” they 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 Aliiev, the victor of a heavily manipulated presidential election in neighboring Azerbaijan just the month before, or even the more commonplace criticism of the 2003 presidential and parliamentary elections in Armenia.

Second, the State Department statement was circulated throughout Georgia. It was repeated by newscasters on several television news channels and printed in full on the screen. The following day, 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. Opposition success may have seemed possible before these statements were issued. With the United States’ unusually explicit shift of support to the opposition, it must now have seemed almost certain.

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

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<sup>77</sup> 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](http://www.rferl.org/reports/caucasus-report/2003/11/41-241103.asp)>.

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 – if given definitive U.S. support for the government, the Rose Revolution would have been averted.

Interestingly, some observers contend that U.S. diplomacy not only did not significantly contribute to the Rose Revolution but was even a hindrance to achieving Georgia's electoral breakthrough. Areshidze argues that U.S. government officials were both too cautious prior to the election to have an appreciable effect and too eager to embrace the paradigm of "people power" after the election to seriously engage in mediating a negotiated outcome that could have helped produce a pacted, rule-of-law electoral breakthrough. Arguing from the other side, Kandelaki says that the U.S. embassy in particular preferred to promote stability rather than invest in real democratic change.<sup>78</sup> Implicit in these criticisms is that U.S. intervention in principle could be a decisive factor, but because of limitations to that diplomacy, it was not. To put it another way, the United States did not do enough to promote electoral breakthrough; the Rose Revolution happened despite U.S. efforts, not because of them.

In sum, the main achievement of external, in particular U.S., intervention was not free and fair elections or pressuring the Georgian government to allow an electoral breakthrough to occur. In this, it did not succeed. If anything, the role of U.S. intervention was to contribute to regime vulnerability, heightening the perception among officials and the population alike that the government could not win.

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<sup>78</sup> Kandelaki, "A Participant's Story," 18. Even former NDI Tbilisi director Lincoln Mitchell concedes that "had the Rose Revolution failed, the opposition would likely have accused the United States of not supporting it strongly enough." Mitchell, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 346.

## **Diffusion: Assessing the “Serbia” Factor**

The second external factor I assess is the “diffusion” effect of organized mobilization, especially “lessons learned” from the street mobilization in Serbia, particularly through the activities of NGOs and the Kmara student movement.

It is true that a handful of prominent, Western-funded nongovernmental organizations (Liberty Institute, Kmara, ISFED and the Fair Elections Foundation, and the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association) 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 led to a public perception of vulnerability, the organizations that publicized the faults of the regime may have contributed. To the extent that exit polls and the PVT contributed to a confirmation of regime vulnerability, those organizations involved contributed.<sup>79</sup> To the extent that NGO tactics and organization got people out to the streets, or contributed to the government’s own sense of vulnerability, the organizations involved contributed.

It is also true 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 [and, at that time, Saakashvili?] 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 Kmara,” according to Giorgi Kandelaki of Kmara, and Otpor activists visited Tbilisi for consultation and training.<sup>80</sup> In a January 2003 television interview, Saakashvili referred to Serbia while expressing an opinion

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<sup>79</sup> Kandelaki makes the useful point that the quality of election monitoring allowed Kmara and other opposition groups “to concentrate all their resources on promoting political participation.” Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

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.<sup>81</sup>

To more specifically assess the role of externally-inspired activism, then, let us examine more closely the role of the youth movement Kmara, which emerged in the spring of 2003 on the basis of two preexisting student groups, an elected university student-body organization that fought corruption in the university beginning in 2000 and the Student Movement for Georgia, formed from students that participated in protests to defend Rustavi-2 in autumn 2001.<sup>82</sup> Kmara’s role in the Rose Revolution sparked considerable interest after observers became aware of the (open) role of the Open Society Foundation in facilitating the NGO trip to Belgrade and the Otpor visit to Tbilisi.<sup>83</sup> These visits conjured up images of a well-organized Western-backed, global design to effect regime change via youth-led protest. One leading Kmara member, Giorgi Kandelaki, has further 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-

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<sup>81</sup> 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](http://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.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Hugh Pope, “Pro-West Leaders in Georgia push Shevardnadze Out,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 24, 2003; Peter Baker, “Tbilisi’s ‘Revolution of Roses’ Mentored by Serbian Activists,” *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2003; and Natalia Antelava, “How to Stage a Revolution,” BBC News, December 4, 2003, <[news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3288547.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3288547.stm)>.



2) and that it “succeeded in breaking the political apathy of the public.”<sup>84</sup> How can this determination be made, however?

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 does four things. First, he indicates that at its height Kmara was relatively small, no more than three thousand strong. Second, he notes that Kmara, together with other opposition groups, did not seek the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze in November 2003 but rather in “[t]he best-case scenario” hoped to achieve “enough success” to prepare for “the main battle” of 2005 presidential elections. Although Kandelaki does not make it entirely apparent, 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.<sup>85</sup> According to Kandelaki, only after it became clear the government was determined to validate the fraudulent elections did the opposition “radicalize their demands and mention the word ‘revolution.’”<sup>86</sup> Third, Kandelaki describes Kmara’s methods to achieve their goals at all stages: “non-violence, discipline, coordination, mythologization and efficient marketing of its brand.”<sup>87</sup> Fourth, he describes Kmara’s activities, including marches, anti-government theatrical

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<sup>84</sup> Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Story,” 8.

<sup>85</sup> David Zurabashvili, former head of the Liberty Institute, notes that the “second point” Kmara made in its pre-electoral activities was that “in the case that the 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.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 65.

<sup>86</sup> Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Story,” 7. David Zurabashvili, former head of the Liberty Institute, 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” without holding a new election entirely, 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.” Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Story,” 8.

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.

The question that concerns us, however, is not how active Kmara was but how much its efforts actually contributed to Georgia's electoral breakthrough. Kandelaki asserts, for instance, that Kmara's success was chiefly in mobilizing Georgian youth. Kandelaki estimates that they managed to mobilize more than ten thousand "previously inactive young people" through their work in the disobedience committees. This would be an accomplishment, if true, but we still need to find a way to determine how significant Kmara members really were in this endeavor, as opposed to other actors.

Even assuming the critical importance of advance organizers like Kmara, the next question we need to consider is how significant was the activity of even ten thousand young people from around the country (in addition to the three thousand Kmara members) 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."<sup>88</sup> 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, anecdotal evidence suggests that the "Serbian" model could have influenced the population at large. Rustavi-2 twice aired a documentary on the fall of Milosevic during the election crisis, and National Movement activist (and later interior minister) Ivane Merabishvili said at the time that "[a]ll the demonstrators knew

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 14.

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.”<sup>89</sup>

On the other hand, a survey taken among Tbilisi residents immediately after the Rose Revolution polled attitudes toward Kmara. In this poll, when exuberance appeared to lead 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.<sup>90</sup> Does this mean that on the days of mass protest most demonstrators who went to the streets did so regardless of Kmara’s activities? Or that the streets were filled chiefly from representatives of the 26 percent which backed Kmara completely? Could some demonstrators have rejected Kmara but independently embraced the lessons from the Serbian documentary? More research needs to be done on this topic to be certain.

Even if Kmara was not chiefly responsible for popular mobilization, however, we can hypothesize that the significance of Kmara and other NGO-led protest was not in mobilizing the masses but in keeping open a space for popular mobilization that would have closed if Kmara and others had not been active. The protest movement may very well have needed a vanguard, which Kmara and the other activists provided.

In this sense, it is possible to argue that the core demonstrators of Kmara and other Serbian-inspired NGOs were instrumental – but only in conjunction with the extreme vulnerability of the government and other independent factors that encouraged broader segments of the population to come to the streets. Demonstrations several thousand strong, under more

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<sup>89</sup> Baker, “Tbilisi’s ‘Revolution of Roses’ Mentored by Serbian Activists.”

<sup>90</sup> 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.

typical circumstances, are unlikely to have had the same impact. Indeed, Kandelaki himself emphasizes more generally that NGOs did not help to reveal government weakness through their extraordinary capacities 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 still could not manage to respond to its accusations in a persuasive and authoritative manner.<sup>91</sup>

Georgian political actors themselves deliver mixed verdicts about the impact of Kmara and associated NGOs. Mikheil Saakashvili, who does not have the most objective position but might still have argued otherwise if he believed it were true, holds that NGOs were “not that important,” especially compared to the role of the media, in bringing most students out to the streets. Kandelaki himself modestly notes that the role of NGOs “was much smaller than is commonly thought” and was, overall, “insignificant.” He says that the NGOs were an “elitist phenomenon” with foreign funding sources, keeping both their agenda foreign and “prevent[ing] them from achieving the local legitimacy necessary to reach the masses.”<sup>92</sup>

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 activism of the general public subsided temporarily, Kmara revived popular enthusiasm for its un-self-seeking activity.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Kandelaki, “A Participant’s Story,” 18.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Haindrava, “Through Elections to the ‘Rose Revolution,’” 109. Zurabishvili and Nodia also contend that NGOs were important but do not privilege them as they do the media. Karumidze and Wertsch, “*Enough!*”, 65; Nodia, “The Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Georgia, 2003-2004,” 120.

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."<sup>94</sup>

Thus, the jury is still out. Serbia was certainly on the minds of activists, as well as those of political actors, most importantly Saakashvili. But whether this example, or movements like Kmara, were necessary to produce the Rose Revolution are another matter. Certainly, it is only in conjunction with the vulnerability of the regime and the other factors involved in encouraging public mobilization that we can say they had a critical role.

#### **APPENDIX: EXPLAINING THE ROSE REVOLUTION AND NOT ALTERNATIVE ELECTORAL BREAKTHROUGHS**

In explaining Georgia's electoral breakthrough, we must be careful not to make the mistake of assuming that Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation was the only form of electoral breakthrough that might have occurred. Three potential breakthroughs that did not succeed were the successful holding of a passably free and fair election, a postelectoral adjustment of the vote count that would have accurately reflected the actual ranking of political parties on election day, and the holding of a repeat parliamentary election. In any of these three cases, Shevardnadze would have remained in power until the presidential election, and observers would still have concluded that Georgia had achieved an electoral breakthrough. To explain the success of an "electoral breakthrough" in Georgia, then, we must specify that what we are explaining is the particular electoral breakthrough that Georgia experienced and, concomitantly, the absence of alternative breakthroughs. In this regard, the factors I have discussed may be sufficient to explain

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<sup>94</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, "Enough!", 51.

*an* electoral breakthrough in Georgia, but they are not necessarily sufficient to explain the *particular* outcome that resulted. To make this determination, we need to examine more closely the reasons why alternative electoral breakthroughs did not occur.

### **Option 1: Passably free and fair elections**

Impressively, Georgia came rather close to holding passably free and fair elections on November 3. If it had been up to Shevardnadze alone, it might even have happened. In the days before the election, Shevardnadze acknowledged that the pro-government bloc might lose the parliamentary race. In a message broadcast on state television four days before elections, he said 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 his audience that “every person has a free choice” and “every citizen [should] vote as their conscience dictates.”<sup>95</sup>

Several months before the election, Shevardnadze was prepared to accept a compromise on the composition of the CEC and its subordinates that would have granted enough seats to opposition parties to shape electoral commissions’ pre-electoral preparations and block certification of fraudulent election day results. Shevardnadze publicly expressed support for the reform, and the compromise passed the parliament’s first reading. The proposal was, however, shot down in its second required reading, presumably via the machinations of other government officials who persuaded Shevardnadze to back away from the proposal. It eventually passed in a modified form that included opposition representatives on the commissions but not enough to be

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<sup>95</sup> “Georgian president interviewed on forthcoming parliamentary elections,” Georgian State Television Channel 1, October 29, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

able to block fraud-related decisions (opposition parties had four representatives on the 15-member committees, but decisions were to be made with a two-thirds majority).<sup>96</sup>

The second possibility for achieving passably free and fair elections lay in the development of reasonably accurate voter lists. (*Elaborate.* Had been approved, but did not happen, a combination of neglect and calculated interference by security organs.) The confusion in the voter lists was the single most important theme on election day, leading to disenfranchisement and facilitating fraud. Still, there is little to suggest that Shevardnadze himself would have opposed this effort.

Finally, there was substantial foreign, in particular U.S., attention to this election. This might not have mattered, except that Georgia viewed the United States as a patron, both financially and for security reasons. Though the U.S. might have paid less attention to the conduct of Georgian elections, it identified its interest in Georgia with a smooth transition of power and not only emphasized the importance of a democratic election but supported, and at a high level (most notably, through the Baker mission), electoral reform.

Surprisingly, then, Georgia had many of the makings of a passably free and fair election. That it failed to achieve this breakthrough can be attributed in the main to the objection of government officials other than Shevardnadze, coupled with Shevardnadze's own lack of will to resist their objections. Even at this early stage, this reluctance was due at least in part to the fear of Adjara secession; after the initial passage of the election commission reform, Revival threatened to boycott the elections, which would have meant that, barring popular revolt in Adjara, the region would not have participated, leading to a crisis of legitimacy. This is not to say that Shevardnadze was a committed democrat. But the evidence suggests that, whatever his

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<sup>96</sup> Technically, opposition parties held nine of the fifteen seats. Five, however, were awarded to two parties that were allies of the ruling party.

intentions were for the presidential election, for the parliamentary election he was prepared to at least acquiesce to a reasonably democratic vote in the face of external pressure, a fragmented elite, and the end of his political career – if, that is, it weren't for the emphatic resistance of influential officials and the implicit threat of Adjara secession.

### **Option 2: Sufficient nullification of fraud**

Two other breakthroughs are imaginable following elections. The first is a concession of fraud in a sufficient number of districts. Via a combination of annulments, revotes, and repeat elections in districts that had obviously suffered from fraud, the elected parliament could have come to more closely reflect voter preferences. These cases would have affected Adjara and Kvemo Kartli most significantly, and other districts as well.

This was a strategy that, at least in the early stages of the election, was likely to find acceptance among many government officials and would have received the approval of, most importantly among the opposition parties, the National Movement. Soon after the election, political parties, together with the election monitoring NGO ISFED and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, filed legal complaints against the results in over 150 precincts and also lodged official protests against district commissions, paving the way for such a resolution given government will.<sup>97</sup> The courts, in fact, ruled for a recount in one of the most contested districts in Kvemo Kartli as well as of absentee ballots, setting a potential precedent. Successfully annulling elections in Adjara, or rerunning them under greater supervision, would have been the most obvious route to an electoral breakthrough and, combined with similar processes in Kvemo Kartli, would have undoubtedly resulted in a victory for opposition parties.

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<sup>97</sup> Broers, "After the 'revolution'," 5.



However, even if the opposition was able to overcome resistance within the government to this solution in principle, the problem of Adjara still loomed. The government could not just order a revote in Adjara and assume that it would be democratic; without Abashidze's consent, the election would still be under the full control of local authorities and Revival would still be expected to achieve an unreasonably high vote count. Even if the vote for the FNG were adjusted through revotes sufficiently to grant the National Movement a first-place finish, Shevardnadze had no guarantee that Abashidze would play by the rules, and the FNG would thus end up in a leading alliance with Revival by default. Moreover, Shevardnadze was not willing to press the issue. The crisis of legitimacy would just continue. Alternatively, if the government were to annul elections in Adjara in conjunction with a revote in other districts, the National Movement would most probably have come in first place and, if it wanted, form a parliamentary majority with other opposition parties. In that case, however, Shevardnadze would have faced the risk of having Abashidze refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the Georgian parliament, raising the specter of secession even more seriously. In short, such an electoral breakthrough could succeed only if Shevardnadze was strong enough to successfully challenge Abashidze to step in line. At that moment in time, he was not even willing to try.

### **Option 3: A new election**

Perhaps surprisingly, the most probable of the three alternative outcomes was the most radical, the holding of new elections. This was something that, among opposition parties, the Democrats and the NRP embraced. While Saakashvili strongly preferred that the National Movement's first-place finish simply be accepted, he would have been hard-pressed to reject this compromise if all other parties agreed to it. Leading opposition figures all agree that if

Shevardnadze had consented to holding new elections, he could have stayed in power through presidential elections.<sup>98</sup>

While the government had ample opportunities to order a rerun of the elections and refused, a tantalizing possibility of the alternative electoral breakthrough emerged near the end of the crisis. As discussed above, a day before the storming of parliament Japaridze voiced support for a proposal, developed on the NRP's initiative, to convene the new parliament and then order new elections to be held.<sup>99</sup> "Maybe we were naïve," he said, "but we were absolutely sure, knowing [Shevardnadze] and his political instincts, that he would use the message in this statement and that he would react in some positive way."<sup>100</sup> The head of the FNG, Vazha Lortkipanidze, asserted shortly afterwards that even he supported the New Rights proposal.<sup>101</sup> Japaridze inadvertently suggests one possible reason for this: after Japaridze made his statement, government officials were unable to consult Shevardnadze until late in the afternoon and before they did,

"[e]verybody from the chancellery was absolutely sure, one hundred percent, that Shevardnadze was trying to find a way out of the situation, and my message was really Shevardnadze's way of trying to do this. His inner circle thought that it was everyone thought it was all over...They thought the game was up."<sup>102</sup>

In meeting with Shevardnadze, however, they discovered that Japaridze had acted alone. This suggests how close Georgia was to achieving this alternative electoral breakthrough.

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<sup>98</sup> See, for example, the interviews with Zhvania, Burjanadze, and Zurabishvili in Karumidze and Wertsch, *"Enough!"*, 35, 44, 62. Also Areshidze, unpublished, 153.

<sup>99</sup> A developed account of this is in Areshidze, unpublished, 143, 148-149, 154-55.

<sup>100</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, *"Enough!"*, 59.

<sup>101</sup> "Georgian pro-government bloc leader supports early parliamentary elections," Caucasus Press, November 21, 2003, trans. in BBC Monitoring.

<sup>102</sup> Karumidze and Wertsch, *"Enough!"*, 57-58.

Although the NRP readily certified the election results on November 20<sup>th</sup>, it made acceptance of its proposal a precondition for attending the opening session of parliament two days later.<sup>103</sup> Areshidze says that Shevardnadze first refused but, desperate for a quorum, at last agreed to back a proposal to hold new elections, after which the newly elected NRP deputies promptly went to the parliament building. Saakashvili and his followers stormed parliament, though, before anyone had a chance to raise the issue.

Our assessment of the likelihood of this alternative breakthrough, then, rests on three considerations. First, Shevardnadze would have had to follow through on his alleged commitment to hold new elections. Second, he would have had to ensure the immediate loyalty of a sufficient number of pro-government deputies to pass a resolution. Third, a new election would have then had to have been run in a far more democratic fashion than before, which would require mechanisms to ensure that the government did not backtrack from its commitment.

Assuming these conditions could hold, then we are left with the intriguing conclusion that the decisive explanation for the Rose Revolution – and not for a rule-of-law, pacted transition – is Saakashvili himself. His successful storming of parliament was a critical juncture that shaped the events that followed: his 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.

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<sup>103</sup> NRP's participation in the certification of the results raises another interesting question – what would have happened if the results had not been certified by two-thirds of the commission (*must investigate whether this was a requirement for certification*)? Ironically, the adjustments to the CEC almost did work the way they were supposed to. The two representatives of Industry Will Save Georgia, whose pro-government vote was taken for granted, refused to certify the election results, 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 chairperson to certify the results. If the NRP had refused to certify, as might have been expected, the CEC would not have had its two-third majority. Unable to certify the results (*true?*), it would seem that the crisis would only be resolvable through either a revised vote count or a new election. In this regard, we could say that Saakashvili is less responsible for the Rose Revolution in his storming of parliament than the NRP for certifying the results in the first place and compelling Saakashvili to take more radical measures to effect a breakthrough (see below).

At the same time, too many uncertainties exist to be able to say confidently that some form of electoral breakthrough would have occurred in the absence of the storming of parliament. What if Shevardnadze had changed his mind? What if the pro-government alliance resisted? Would the opposition have had the ability or conviction to continue to push for regime change? Would it have been able to successfully affect vote totals through recounts and revotes? Would protests have increased or would they have lost their momentum, allowing the government to regain its balance?

In this regard, determining the importance of the storming of parliament in Georgia's electoral breakthrough rests on our assessment of the likelihood that Shevardnadze would have successfully called for new elections. If it is high, then the storming of parliament was not that important; an alternative breakthrough was in the cards. If it was low, then the storming of parliament was far more critical. Without it, we would simply not know what would have happened next.