



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Georgia's Rose Revolution of 2003, the first bloodless change of power in the Caucasus, occurred largely unpredicted by analysts and policymakers. Both Georgian and western observers feared and predicted yet another wave of bloodshed in this troubled former Soviet nation. Yet the enthusiasm, hard work, and nonviolent discipline of initially small groups sparked what many now call "Europe's fourth wave of liberation." "I did not think to pay serious attention to these young people running around with flags and drawing graffiti on the streets," deposed President Eduard Shevardnadze said shortly after the revolution. "I was wrong," he added.

Author Giorgi Kandelaki was elected in 2001 to Tbilisi State University's first student self-government, which pursued a high-profile campaign against corruption and for reform in higher education. In April 2003 he co-founded the youth movement, Kmara (Enough), which played an instrumental role in Georgia's November 2003 Rose Revolution. More recently he has trained young activists to organize for nonviolent change in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova, and, most recently, Belarus, where he and a colleague were detained for eleven days. Since June 2005 he has been an adviser in the administration of President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

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Giorgi Kandelaki

Georgia's Rose Revolution

A Participant's Perspective

Summary

- Efforts to resist calling the 2003 events in Georgia a "revolution" were misplaced. Although the turmoil was marked by a lack of violence, a critical mass of people did come out to move the country away from the rampant corruption of the Shevardnadze regimes of 1972 to 1985 (when he was Communist Party first secretary) and 1992 to 2003 (when he was president).
- As president, Shevardnadze supported independent civil society groups and media outlets such as the television station Rustavi-2. His support of these groups ended in 2001, when he tried to shut down Rustavi-2. This action prompted reform-minded members of his government to form opposition parties.
- Before the 2003 parliamentary elections, opposition groups hoped only to gain momentum for the 2005 presidential elections. However, blatant electoral fraud, Shevardnadze's refusal to compromise, and the discipline of nonviolent opposition groups precipitated his exit.
- The youth group Kmara (Enough) played an important role in combating widespread political apathy among the Georgian public and youth in particular. The successful mobilization of so many young people continues to reverberate as former Kmara members maintain their interest in politics.
- Saakashvili's National Movement party believed that its success depended on radicalizing the political sphere and thereby broadening political participation. It was particularly effective at increasing political participation among provincial populations.
- Georgia's independent media, particularly Rustavi-2, supported the Rose Revolution by providing a forum for opposition parties and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) critical of the government. The channel also co-funded and broadcast exit polls that contradicted the official election results.

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- Although a few civil society organizations did play significant roles in the revolution, most were constrained by foreign funding priorities and their own elitism. Similarly, foreign actors played a limited role because they lacked information or were overly cautious about fostering significant political change.
- There was no violence because the various security forces chose not to respond to public demonstrations with force. Three main factors drove their decision: 1) The security forces were accustomed to responding to democratic pressures and not defending autocratic rule; 2) a divided ruling party could not speak with one voice; 3) opposition groups, including Kmara, made strong efforts to build sympathy for their cause while downplaying the threat posed by political change.
- International actors can best support democratic transitions by targeting assistance to nationwide election watchdogs, such as the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), that can carry out parallel vote tabulations (PVT). Ideally, large numbers of observers from similar organizations outside Georgia should be deployed, since they can be more outspoken about electoral fraud.

Introduction

When asked why the Rose Revolution took place in Georgia, many westerners point out that Georgians were fed up with their gloomy economic prospects and the government's rampant corruption. It is true that corruption, sharp economic decline, and, of course, blatant election rigging all fed the popular frustration that fueled the revolution, but these and other injustices can be found in many other countries where no democratic revolutions have occurred. Why of all countries, including the states of the former Soviet Union, did such a breakthrough happen first in Georgia? What made this country special? What factors and actors were involved? Finally, to what extent did western assistance make the revolution possible?

This report examines the specifics of the political and social landscape in Georgia before the revolution, dynamics of the protests sparked by rigged elections, and the actors who contributed to laying the groundwork for change and supporting the revolution itself. A clear picture of the Rose Revolution helps explain the most intriguing aspect of the events: that neither protesters nor the government used force despite the orders given. As an active member of Kmara, I consider all these questions and issues from a participant's perspective, providing insights not readily available from most outside observers.

Terminology: Coup, "Revolution," or Revolution?

In the immediate aftermath of the Rose Revolution, many analysts and political scientists preferred to call it a "coup." Thus they suggested that what happened on November 22–23, 2003, was no more than a group of people ousting the incumbent government. Many other authors did use the word "revolution" inside quotation marks, as if to distance themselves from such a dramatic idea. A consensus on terminology emerged only after events in Ukraine a year later, amid growing enthusiasm for the future of democracy in the former Soviet Union.

During the twentieth century, supporters of democracy came to distrust revolutions, not least because they invariably were linked to violence. Supporters of democratization preferred to describe transformation of a political regime as "transition." As a result, an entire academic discipline of "transitology" developed, inspired by democratic consolidations in Latin America and southern Europe. A new debate ensued over whether the paradigm of democratic transitions could be extended to the regime transformations taking place in Eastern Europe. In the end, the word *transition* prevailed, although in most

Eastern European countries the changes did include the definitive defeat of one side and the involvement of the masses.

If we do not consider violence a necessary attribute of a revolution, the November 2003 events in Georgia clearly qualify as a genuine revolution, since they involved both a sudden change of power and mass mobilization. One paradoxical feature of both the Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine is that they did not seek to challenge the existing political regime as defined by the national constitution. Instead, Georgian political scientist Ghia Nodia describes the Georgian revolution as a *revolt in defense of the constitution*.

In more general terms, the Rose Revolution was a revolt against corruption and kleptocratic government. Rampant corruption in all spheres of life had forced increasing numbers of Georgians to engage in corrupt practices. This was one of the main criticisms of Shevardnadze's opponents, and it drove people out into the square in November 2003.

Shevardnadze's Civil Society: From Benefactor to Albatross

Many writers and scholars had competing interpretations of the kind of regime we had in Georgia. Shevardnadze's regime most probably could be placed somewhere between authoritarian and "post-totalitarian." Economic pluralism in Georgia was certainly greater than in a classic autocratic regime, while the political leadership was oligarchic. In his 2005 book, Ghia Nodia defines Shevardnadze's regime as "liberal autocracy" or "liberal oligarchy." Nevertheless, the regime was also characterized by many freedoms (for the media, political parties, and some associations) that were barred in most post-Soviet states.

At first Shevardnadze had good reason to support and foster such freedoms. On returning to Georgia from exile in 1992, he needed support for his struggle with paramilitary "warlords." Independent media and other organizations were permitted to function to create political space and pressure the warlords. After this objective was fulfilled in 1995, Shevardnadze aspired to cultivate his democratic image abroad. Before 1998, Shevardnadze's regime consolidated an unjustified reputation among many western observers and governments as a success story of post-Soviet democratization.

Shevardnadze's regime governed according to the widely respected 1995 constitution. The government recognized the need for elections, and the opposition had some success in local elections, but real power remained within a small network of political elites. Shevardnadze believed he could always win elections or rig the outcome if necessary to ensure victory. International criticism would come but would be forgotten within a few months. After 2001, he increasingly entertained the idea of "managed democracy," which already had become one of the main features of Russian politics.

Allowing certain liberal freedoms was more of a political calculation than a commitment to an open society. Nevertheless, it led to the development of a civil society that did not accept the rules and practices of the ruling oligarchy at face value. But Shevardnadze and his allies thought he could constantly claim credit for allowing more political freedom (as opposed to many other post-Soviet states) while containing challengers from civil society.

In time not only did these assumptions prove wrong, but the system itself started to erode. Favoritism, nepotism (especially benefiting Shevardnadze's own family), and the spoils system became entrenched in virtually every sphere of Georgia's social and political life. Rampant corruption shrank the tax base, and budgetary shortfalls destroyed the state's ability to carry out some basic functions, such as paying pensions and salaries to civil servants. Since their salaries were no longer paid, public servants were expected to earn their living through bribery and had to share the illegal income with their superiors. Budget shortfalls also made it increasingly difficult to satisfy the various interest groups around the president. Eventually, escalating systemic corruption put elements of the

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so-called “blackmail state” into place. That is, the executive collects compromising information about individuals’ illegal activities to ensure the loyalty of elite groups, individuals, and businesses. When it no longer needs them, it files corruption charges against them.

It was becoming impossible for Shevardnadze to maintain his image as a democratic reformer, and in 2001 he decided to drop it altogether. When the government tried to shut down Rustavi-2 that year, many reformers left Shevardnadze’s Citizens Union of Georgia party and formed opposition parties. Furthermore, the government’s inability to confront corruption prompted suspension of International Monetary Fund programs in Georgia in 2003.

Although Shevardnadze rightly claimed credit for the development of civil society in Georgia, parts of this sector deserve a large share of the credit for unseating him. From his own perspective, allowing such freedoms was a mistake, as he stated in numerous interviews after the revolution, when he regretted not having made sure that all appropriate mechanisms for “managing democracy” were put in place before the elections.

Driving Forces of the Revolution

The mass protests that eventually led to President Shevardnadze’s resignation continued for twenty days, from November 3 to November 23, 2003. Early reports on the official election results placed Shevardnadze’s For a New Georgia bloc first, followed by Saakashvili’s National Movement, the Labor Party, United Democrats, Revival Union, and the New Rights Party. These results sharply contradicted exit polls conducted by Rustavi-2 and a PVT by ISFED. Starting November 3, a relatively small number of demonstrators gathered at Freedom Square in central Tbilisi every evening. As long as the numbers of protesters remained small, the government chose to ignore their demands. Even after the National Movement and United Democrats merged, the government took no action.

In just two days, the picture changed dramatically when election results from the autonomous region of Adjara propelled the regional Revival Union party into second place. Both Saakashvili’s and Burjanadze’s parties demanded that the results be voided, citing the sharp differences between official and unofficial vote counts. Suspicions were particularly high about the Adjara results, because the long-acrimonious relations between Adjara’s pro-Russian strongman, Aslan Abashidze, and Shevardnadze had thawed in the months before the elections. This led some to speculate that the two had reached a deal to trade support for votes. These suspicions increased with the announcement of the impressive results of Abashidze’s Revival Union. Opposition parties claimed the Revival party had received more votes than the region’s population.

Believing that Shevardnadze would validate these results despite sharp criticism, his opponents radicalized their demands and began to use the word *revolution*. On November 9, when the election commission stopped counting votes because of ongoing court challenges, 2,616 out of 2,870 precincts were counted. For a New Georgia led with 20.9 percent, closely followed by Revival and National Movement, with Labor, Burjanadze-Democrats, and New Rights trailing.

The same day, opposition leaders Mikheil Saakashvili, Nino Burjanadze, and Zurab Zhvania met with Shevardnadze. Their brief talks produced no tangible results, and the president commented pointedly: “I do not intend to resign at the demand of individual politicians and a few dozen young people waving flags. If there were at least a million people, it would have been different.” Within just a few days, national petitions contained 1 million signatures demanding Shevardnadze’s resignation and calling for the election results to be overturned.

Protesters in front of the parliament building maintained their positions in shifts throughout the day and night. Promising to “paralyze Shevardnadze’s government,” Saakashvili soon called for civil disobedience. The process started slowly, but the

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opposition managed to gain public attention through a few successful incidents of civil disobedience in state institutions, such as schools, throughout the country. Groups of well-known artists, writers, and poets started campaigning in various public establishments—primarily universities—urging people to join the protest. These efforts bore fruit as disobedience committees began popping up in universities throughout the country, aided by Kmara activists who often were students themselves.

On November 17 more than 50,000 gathered at Freedom Square in central Tbilisi, and 3,000 held hands to form a human chain around the state chancellery. Many in the crowd wanted to push forward and try to go in, but the apparent readiness of special forces units to use force, as well as the absence of a “critical mass,” forced the leaders to call off the rally and go to the regions to mobilize more supporters. Rallies were suspended for the next two days, allowing Saakashvili and other opposition leaders to gather as many followers as possible throughout the country. Meanwhile government employees from Adjara took over the space in front of the parliament to express support for the fraudulent results. These protests were not taken very seriously, since many of the participants attended only because they had been threatened with job termination and other sanctions should they refuse to go.

On the evening of November 20, a convoy of cars stretching for kilometers and carrying thousands of people arrived from western Georgia. The next day more than 100,000 gathered in Freedom Square to pressure all the opposition parties with more than 7 percent of the votes not to enter parliament. This effort was not successful, and protesters had to consider other ways to disrupt the illegitimate parliament's first session. During the afternoon, protesters moved toward the chancellery, towing buses with heavy trucks to block the way and facing riot troops along the route. Overwhelmed by the number of people, troops stood by and took no action as the protesters passed them.

Troops also stood at the rear entrance of parliament, while the front was occupied by Revival Union supporters unaware of what was happening in back. Demonstrators began entering parliament from the rear in the middle of Shevardnadze's speech. His guards promptly removed him from the podium and evacuated him. After escaping to his Krtsanisi residence, Shevardnadze announced a state of emergency in Georgia and ordered the use of force to stop the protests. But the loyalty of the troops went increasingly to Nino Burjanadze, who had declared herself acting president. The order for violent repression was never carried out. Bereft of all other options, Eduard Shevardnadze resigned the evening of November 23.

Opposition groups, including Kmara, did not anticipate a 2003 election victory that would result in Shevardnadze stepping down. When they started their activities, they hoped only to influence the presidential elections of 2005, when Shevardnadze's term would legally expire. However, a number of factors accelerated Shevardnadze's exit: blatant electoral fraud, especially in the results from Adjara; the government's stubborn refusal to consider even minor compromises; and opposition groups' discipline and organization, which included their ability to project nonviolent power.

Three actors played a crucial role in making the Rose Revolution possible: the youth movement Kmara; the opposition parties, especially Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement; and Rustavi-2, the most prominent independent-media outlet. Each played a distinctive role in making the Rose Revolution successful and nonviolent.

Kmara: Breaking through Political Apathy

A new phenomenon in the post-Soviet world, Kmara succeeded in breaking through the public's political apathy, particularly among young people. It emerged as a nonpartisan force with a horizontal organizational structure. Nonviolence, discipline, coordination, promoting its brand, and making skillful use of humor all were key to Kmara's success.

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Kmara's origins go back to 2000, when a group of reform-minded students established student self-government at Tbilisi State University, Georgia's largest. The group campaigned primarily against corruption in higher education and called for radical reforms of the sector, which had experienced a dramatic decline in quality since Shevardnadze's return to Georgia. By the early 2000s, only 4 percent of state university graduates could find employment in Georgia's labor market. Universities remained one of the least-reformed institutions, where, unlike in the rest of the society, free speech was suppressed. The Georgian higher education system produced graduates who were unlikely to find professional employment and whose integrity was challenged even before they entered their alma mater: The vast majority of applicants were forced to pay bribes just to pass admission exams.

Nearly 2,000 students formed the first elected student body in the country in 2000. The group carried out a number of well-publicized and successful campaigns. Nevertheless, it became increasingly evident that no reform would be possible in the higher education system without a change of government. The reality was that faculty members were not only expected to be corrupt but actually rewarded by their superiors for corruption; in one notorious case, the person named in a survey as the most corrupt faculty member was publicly promoted and praised the next day. The fundamental principles of the education system had to be altered.

The second group that formed Kmara emerged at student protests following Shevardnadze's attempt to shut down Rustavi-2 in October 2001. This group called itself the Student Movement for Georgia. The two organizations remained in close contact following their successful defense of Rustavi-2 and formed Kmara in early 2003.

The leading Georgian civil rights NGO, the Liberty Institute, played a pivotal role during Kmara's foundation. It made technical and logistical resources available to Kmara activists throughout the campaign and assisted with regional outreach, training, and coordination of Kmara's actions with the political opposition. The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association provided legal services to Kmara activists in case of arrest.

From the outset Kmara avoided hierarchy, meaning it had no readily identifiable leaders; by default, all activists were considered equal. No single person or group could significantly impair the movement by being arrested. Although repression in Georgia never evolved into mass arrests, in Adjara this aspect of the horizontal structure proved highly effective. Many of the activists did not even know one another. Consequently, when arrests took place in Adjara, Kmara continued working. Kmara's Adjara branch played an important role in driving out the region's brutal strongman, Aslan Abashidze, whose regime resembled that of Milosevic or Lukashenko, the president of Belarus.

Second, the group's horizontal structure encouraged a greater feeling of ownership and participation among the activists than would have been possible within a hierarchy. This allowed more participants greater leeway for action. Each could find his or her right "fit" in the movement. Nevertheless, Kmara did possess a division of labor. Activists mainly chose what group to work in, but a number of functions were the responsibility of all the activists. Members of different groups also took specific, narrowly focused training.

Tactical planning occurred weekly, mainly during brainstorming sessions. Once the idea and details for an action were approved during a discussion, activists would compile a detailed budget for the action. Although discussions were heated and wide-ranging, once they made a decision, Kmara members tried to sustain consensus in its execution. "Democracy in planning, but dictatorship in execution," one of Kmara's main principles stated.

The horizontal structure and tactical planning methods caused decision making to be a bit more protracted and made tactical disagreements more likely. Still, labor distribution and increased motivation permitted by the horizontal structure and participatory decision making kept such disputes and delays to a minimum.

Kmara's first public action took place April 14, 2003, when more than 500 young people marched from Tbilisi State University to the state chancellery. They chose that

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day to coincide with the anniversary of 1978 student demonstrations, when then-Georgian Communist Party Secretary Shevardnadze had sided with courageous young people protesting the planned abolition of the Georgian language's favored status. In 2003 the student protesters carried flags from Georgia's days as a USSR republic. Bearing the faces of Shevardnadze and leaders of his newly formed For a New Georgia election bloc, they emphasized the current regime's connection with the country's Soviet past. The protesters condemned the government's alleged intention to rig the November 2 parliamentary elections.

From that day, Shevardnadze's government pursued three strategies against Kmara and other opposition groups: trying to discredit the movement, ignoring it, and repressing it, particularly in outlying regions. In an effort to discredit Kmara, at an April 21 press conference Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, the leader of the National Democratic Party and spokesperson for Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia bloc, announced, "Russian special services are planning a large-scale and well-tryed operation under the secret name Kmara." The government also accused Kmara of being the youth branch of Saakashvili's National Movement, or claimed each Kmara member was receiving \$500 per month in exchange for participation. The interior minister first made this claim, and Georgia's special services, skilled at disseminating rumors since Soviet times, also spread it. Even my mother, a nurse, was almost convinced by her colleagues that I was paid for my activism.

Outraged by Kmara graffiti on the front of the Palace of Youth, where the Socialist Party congress was to take place, the party chair and one of Shevardnadze's new allies accused Kmara of being part of an Armenian conspiracy. Reflecting the effort to ignore and downplay Kmara's significance, Shevardnadze told journalists he had seen Kmara graffiti on his way to work. Stopping his limousine to check whether anyone was paying attention to the graffiti, "I really saw that nobody was reading them," he said, thus showing that Kmara was effective. Except in Adjara, where the scale of repression was much greater, police preferred only to beat or scare activists. On only two occasions were activists (including me) arrested.

During its initial stage, Kmara resorted to bluffing or using activism methods and marketing techniques that created a "myth" of the organization and portrayed it as much more powerful than it actually was. One trivial but striking example was the graffiti campaign. Some twenty Kmara founders armed with brushes and paint split into subgroups of three to four and wrote "Kmara" tens of thousands of times on Tbilisi roads and streets. The next day the graffiti were the top news story, with journalists stressing that the biggest "Kmara" was in front of the National Democratic Party office in Tbilisi. Authorities rushed to mobilize firefighting vehicles to wash the graffiti off the streets but soon changed their minds when they realized the irony of the scene. During the following weeks, Kmara graffiti appeared in nine of Georgia's main cities, propelling the story to the top of the national news.

Because the number of Kmara activists was limited at first, cooperation with the opposition parties was very close. Helped by NGOs and other private contacts in the National Movement and United Democrats, the two parties' youth branches made hundreds of activists secretly available for a limited number of Kmara rallies, particularly the first one on April 14. Hundreds of students marching under slogans of a "mysterious" organization never seen before only added to the "myth" of Kmara as an unknown but very powerful force.

Another method to increase Kmara's perceived strength was to organize and coordinate simultaneous actions in different locations. The first nationwide action was held May 12, when Kmara activists passed out leaflets identifying constitutional prohibitions on torture and illegal detention and picketed police stations well known for abuse and misconduct. Rallying Kmara activists in Tbilisi and nine other cities were joined by human rights NGO representatives. Kmara quickly evolved into a legitimate and formidable presence in Georgian politics, achieving brand recognition at a very early stage.

Opinions vary on Kmara's importance in the revolution. To some, its exact role remains an unanswered question. Indeed, it was not a dominant actor, and its numbers reached

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only 3,000 at the movement's peak. Nevertheless, Kmara was vital during the Rose Revolution in combating political apathy and encouraging political activism and participation.

In terms of politics and political culture, Georgia was a typical post-Soviet society, where the public attitude toward any kind of political participation was likely to be nihilistic and distrustful. According to popular belief, since all elections were unfair, achieving a change of government peacefully through elections would be impossible. Such attitudes were particularly widespread among young people. The popular perception was that joining or working for a party during a campaign resulted from economic interest, with the expectation of specific material gains after a successful campaign. Such an attitude was not unrealistic: Many did join parties with such motivations and some achieved their goals. Under such conditions, political parties alone were incapable of overcoming apathy and mobilizing the public. Making matters worse, the youth branches of many parties were relatively weak, bureaucratic, and cliquish.

Kmara took direct action to overcome this apathy. In the midst of the protests, a group of well-known and mostly young artists, poets, and musicians started campaigning throughout the country, mainly in different universities, calling on students to join the protests. With approval from Artcom, an artistic committee, civil disobedience groups started popping up at various universities. Kmara activists played important roles in most of these, since they already possessed valuable experience in organizational structure and discipline. The committees were important for mobilizing apolitical youth. Through focused work in the disobedience groups, more than 10,000 previously inactive university students were mobilized.

As Kmara sought to overcome apathy among the young, the movement sought to fight political apathy among all Georgian voters. Essential to accomplishing this objective was the use of humor in various actions and activities. In any repressed society, apathy can be broken when people are caught unaware by appeals for their participation. For many this meant viewing Kmara's humorous messages making fun of the regime or learning about and benefiting from Kmara's "positive" actions, such as rock concerts, book collections for schools, and rubbish collection. These kinds of activities produced some tiny feeling of *participation* among ordinary citizens who might never have voted before.

For example, Kmara activists put large banners on display in streets where passersby could take pictures of themselves flushing Shevardnadze and his government down a toilet. At another event, Kmara staged a mock funeral complete with flowers to disrupt For a New Georgia's presentation of its economic program in the state chancellery garden. During this action seven young Kmara members were arrested and charged with hooliganism simply for trying to inject some humor into political protest.

In the end, all these mechanisms and incentives produced a group of young people with extremely high motivation, courage, and knowledge of "quality activism," capable of carrying their pleas for more political involvement to all parts of Georgian society.

Opposition Groups: Increased Visibility through Bold Confrontation

Mikheil Saakashvili first became popular for his anticorruption rhetoric as a parliament member in Shevardnadze's government. After leaving to form the National Movement party, he began effectively reaching out to regional segments previously blocked from national politics. Also, by stepping into previously politically "safe" areas, he succeeded in radicalizing political discourse and positioning himself as the most radical fighter against the regime, uncompromising in the face of its corruption.

Saakashvili's main strategy could be summarized as radicalizing the political situation and expanding the political space. He realized that even with fair elections—a development no one expected—several rounds would be needed for the National Movement and other opposition parties to build their electoral and organizational strength. It would be difficult to sustain a disciplined political force throughout this long period, so he would

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have to show concrete results to his supporters with an electoral breakthrough. At the same time, it was clear that in the existing political space, any breakthrough was impossible. New and more motivated elements had to get involved in the struggle. The 2001 rallies showed that the urban masses alone were insufficient for such a breakthrough, and a search for supporters beyond those groups was necessary. Mobilization targets included members of the lower middle class, provincial populations, and middle-aged Georgians.

One of the National Movement's most important achievements was effectively reaching out to provincial populations. In contemporary Georgian history, the provinces had played a significant political role when they supported nationalist president Zviad Gamsakhurdia before and during the civil war of 1991–93. Any participation in post-Gamsakhurdia politics for this group had been blocked, and Saakashvili made a significant effort to bring this highly frustrated segment of the public back into the political arena.

As Saakashvili radicalized the political space and opened it to more alienated groups, he also bolstered his reputation as a brave fighter against the regime. He suggested that the reason for his split from Shevardnadze was that his strong anticorruption rhetoric was unacceptable to the government he had left.

The courage of his National Movement in the “politically protected areas” was instrumental in its swift rise in approval ratings and eventual victory in the elections. The rallies brought out people who had been too overcome by fear and apathy to participate in politics. In Batumi, for example, more than 1,000 locals (a good number for that city), who never before would have dared express their views openly, joined 500 people from other cities at the rally. Kmara made available more than 100 activists for this demonstration.

These rallies showed the opposition's, and especially the National Movement's, success at broadening political participation by energetically and courageously confronting the Shevardnadze regime. As a result, more Georgians took an active role in voting and then defending their vote as the electoral fraud became apparent.

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The Media: From Shevardnadze Ally to Electoral Whistleblower

Independent media outlets were essential in exposing the electoral fraud, and of these outlets Rustavi-2 was the most prominent. When Shevardnadze tried to shut down Rustavi-2 in 2001, the move triggered mass protests, mainly by students. Despite this setback, imposition of direct control over Rustavi-2, either by shutting it down or buying it out, remained in Shevardnadze's plans. A rival station, Imedi TV, allied with him.

During the 2003 electoral campaign Rustavi-2 provided an important forum for NGOs critical of the government. With the British Council, the Open Society-Georgia Foundation, and the Eurasia Foundation, the channel sponsored an exit poll by the Global Strategy Group. Coupled with PVT, this poll proved highly important in challenging the fraudulent election results. Another advantage of the exit poll was that it was released and televised immediately after the polling stations closed. Preliminary official results started coming in a day later but were finalized only on November 23. Well aware of the “threat,” the government launched a campaign to discredit the exit poll. A Russian pollster (identified as Austrian) was invited to carry out an “alternative” exit poll that, as expected, confirmed the official results; but the popularity of Rustavi-2 drowned out these numbers and caused the rival exit poll to be ignored.

Thus, during the Rose Revolution Rustavi-2 emerged as a key supporter of the protesters. Symbolically, the station reminded everyone of the value and importance of opening discussion space to all members of society.

Civil Society and International Actors

Many observers have overestimated the contribution of civil society and foreign actors to the Rose Revolution. A number of NGOs, such as ISFED or the Liberty Institute, were very important; however, most groups remained fundamentally elitist, never winning the support and participation of the masses. Most of the international actors involved were too willing to compromise and make deals with Shevardnadze despite the demands of the Georgian people.

Activities by two NGOs—the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and ISFED—proved important in challenging the rigged election results. ISFED managed to deploy more than 3,000 trained volunteer observers throughout Georgia. The group also conducted PVT, which was one of the opposition's major weapons. After release of the PVT results, Kmara and the Liberty Institute printed and distributed tens of thousands of leaflets contrasting these numbers with the official results. Also, the high quality of local election-observer teams allowed Kmara and opposition groups to concentrate all their resources in promoting political participation.

Civil society's main accomplishment lay in its success at delegitimizing and demythologizing the Shevardnadze regime and creating an atmosphere that made the revolution possible. Although they were weak and fragmented, by questioning the government, NGOs helped reveal that the government was even weaker in intellectual terms.

Nevertheless, NGOs were constrained by elitism, their participation limited in many instances to English-speakers capable of writing projects and reports for foreign donors. Consequently, the agenda of most NGOs was foreign, too. On many occasions NGOs could not achieve the local legitimacy necessary to gain public support. Only a few NGOs with the capacity and will to come up with their own agendas became successful.

Western governments, particularly the United States, have been vilified and lauded for supporting the Rose Revolution. Observers' reactions have ranged from enthusiasm about the future of democracy in this part of the world to far-reaching conspiracy theories crediting the U.S. ambassador in Tbilisi, Richard Miles, with being the *eminence grise* of the revolution. The fact that Miles was also U.S. ambassador in Belgrade during the revolution to overthrow Milosevic fits this line of thinking.

Western assistance came in two forms: helping lay the groundwork for the elections by spreading democratic values and educating the public, and providing support during the revolution. Western funding for NGOs was important for civic education, informing the public on human rights, and so forth. But since the funding was foreign, the agenda was designed in western capitals and frequently focused on the entire region while neglecting problems specific to Georgia.

During the revolution, not only were western actors unhelpful, but at times they were actually detrimental. For example, Georgian civil society members had to work hard to convince some Council of Europe officials that the Revival and Industrialist parties could not be considered opposition parties. Ambassador Miles not only did not “mastermind” the revolution; on occasion his actions and statements were quite destructive. Favoring protracted negotiations, he strongly discouraged decisive action by the opposition and considered Mikheil Saakashvili dangerously radical. In short, even in the critical preliminary report by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), western leaders showed little desire to support decisive action.

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Should the Security Forces Defend the Regime or the People?

The Georgian revolutionaries were not pacifists, despite the fact that both Kmara and National Movement activists underwent intense training in nonviolent techniques. Police and security forces might have been expected to use force when protesters occupied the parliament and other government buildings, but they chose to do nothing. The crowd was

perfectly aware that the risk of violence was real throughout, but many believed that if bloodshed was inevitable, so be it.

These possibilities were all the more real considering the violence and civil war of the early 1990s. Nevertheless, Georgia had changed significantly since those years. The semi-liberal nature of Shevardnadze's regime allowed for the emergence and strengthening of democratic institutions and democratically minded actors. From the mid-1990s on, government officials, including the police and armed forces, became accustomed to criticism and democratic pressures, despite challenging working conditions and, most important, their lack of legitimacy, particularly after 1999.

During the protests after the elections, it became increasingly clear that President Shevardnadze's reactions were inadequate. In addition, numerous factions around him had strained relations, contributing to the possibility of deals with the opposition. The fact that Shevardnadze did not have a clearly identified successor increased fragmentation of pro-Shevardnadze groups. Just so, when an army does not have a consolidated and efficient chain of command, it has difficulties in winning.

As for the police and military, the fact that their leaders agreed to negotiate showed their realization that with virtually the entire country involved in the protest movement, any use of force would result sooner or later in self-destruction. By November 22, opposition leaders knew that some security units would not intervene, although the risk of violence was still great with no word from a number of special forces units loyal to the president. The significant factor for the police was that "critical mass" had been achieved. This was the number of protestors (120,000) necessary to give the revolution legitimacy and overwhelm the police at key moments, such as the takeover of government buildings.

This collection of factors explains why force was not used. But one important aspect of the whole process was Kmara's explicitly nonviolent rhetoric and discipline. This was particularly evident when Kmara female activists gave flowers to troops deployed around the city days before the revolution and when Kmara activists distributed sandwiches and went to great lengths to treat the troops the same as their fellow demonstrators. At no point did any civilian groups promote or resort to violent actions in the name of the resistance.

The impact of this discipline was most apparent during the takeover of parliament, when only one window was broken because the doors were too narrow to accommodate the demonstrators. Kmara peacekeepers quickly broke up a few fistfights between citizens and members of parliament. Groups of volunteers stayed in the parliament and chancellery to ensure nothing was lost, stolen, or destroyed, and the head of the chancellery voluntarily handed over the building.

Conclusion

A variety of factors made the Rose Revolution possible: the incumbent regime's systemic weakness, its history of liberal policies, the National Movement party's success in radicalizing politics and broadening political participation, civic education efforts by civil society members during recent years, free media, and the radical, nonpartisan, nonviolent Kmara.

The legacy of the Rose Revolution is great. As the first bloodless change of power in the region's history, it rekindled hopes for democracy, which many believed intrinsically foreign to this part of the world. Many observers refer to the Rose Revolution as an inspiration for what some, including Georgia's new president, Mikheil Saakashvili, have called a "new wave of democratization."

In addition to profoundly altering the development of Georgia and the Caucasus for years to come, the revolution inspired supporters of democracy throughout the former Soviet Union. Neither before nor during the 2003 mass protests in Georgia could oppo-

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sition activists in Tbilisi have dreamt of the level of support the Ukrainian opposition would receive a year later from western countries and institutions.

In Georgia expectations of western support were based on western behavior following the presidential elections in Azerbaijan in October 2003. Although the Azeri presidential elections were characterized as “falling short of democratic standards,” all the western diplomats in Baku except the Norwegian ambassador rushed to congratulate the incumbent president’s son, Ilham Aliiev, who suppressed public protests that erupted after he grabbed power. Ukraine’s political weight is far greater than Georgia’s, but the Georgian experience convinced many western policymakers that nonviolent regime change is indeed possible in the former Soviet Union and will not necessarily lead to civil war.

Open international support and solidarity increased the chances of success for democratic forces in Ukraine, and this could happen elsewhere in similar situations. At the same time, problems in Ukraine also confirmed the necessity to fund and train election observers capable of carrying out PVT and exit polling. Ideally, similar organizations from other former Soviet countries should assist such groups. Politically active youth groups such as Kmara must be included as well.

At the same time, in more repressive and authoritarian systems like Belarus, where it is impossible to carry out comprehensive monitoring, the danger is that the regime will control election monitoring projects and groups and approach international actors for funding.

Finally, international actors such as the European Union and the United States should abandon the illusion that rigged elections might “not be so bad” or could be “an improvement over the last elections” in most post-Soviet countries. Softening wording of election monitoring results might undermine the reputation of authoritative election monitoring organizations such as the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, while putting democratic activists and forces in danger. Pressures on nondemocratic regimes should include measures responding to the country’s internal situation—for example, pressure on governments to release political prisoners and stop arresting people for distributing posters. Western or EU ambassadors could make good use of their diplomatic status by publicly supporting demonstrations asserting that freedom is a right, not a luxury.

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Recent Institute Reports

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