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## Escaping the Kmara Box: Reframing the Role of Civil Society in Georgia's Rose Revolution

Robyn E. Angley\*

### Abstract

This article examines the role of civic groups in Georgia's Rose Revolution using Larry Diamond's framework of the democratic functions of civil society. The author argues that the contribution of civil society to the peaceful transfer of power in 2003 is best understood by expanding the analytical focus out from the Kmara youth movement to include a larger set of organisations. Rather than focusing on the Kmara youth movement as the primary civil society actor in 2003, the author contends that Kmara was, in fact, a product of the coordinated involvement of a cohort of NGOs. The article stresses the highly interconnected nature of Georgian civic leaders and organisations, particularly regarding networks with other NGOs, opposition politicians, and journalists from the Rustavi 2 television station.

**Keywords:** Civil society, Kmara, Georgia, Rose Revolution, Colour Revolutions.

### Introduction

The Rose Revolution of November 2003 was Georgia's first non-violent post-Communist transfer of power and, more importantly (at least in a regional sense), the first successful ouster of a post-Soviet leader using what Bunce and Wolchik (2006a) have dubbed the electoral revolution model. This model called for a united opposition front, access to pro-opposition media outlets, extensive election monitoring and get-out-the vote initiatives, and large-scale peaceful demonstrations. The same model would later also be used in Ukraine in 2004 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005. These three successful anti-regime efforts came to be known collectively as the Colour Revolutions. Though implementation of the electoral revolution model in Georgia was celebrated by some (particularly within the US government) as a democratic success, the extra-constitutional removal of a sitting president by means of street demonstrations has set a precedent that continues to impact Georgian opposition strategies today. Nonetheless, the 2003 parliamentary election did represent a potential democratic opening in Georgia, in which pro-reform groups fostered a public reaction that challenged the implementation of parliamentary election results that had been manipulated by the government.

This paper will examine civil society's contribution to the developments that culminated in Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation. Both within and outside Georgia, numerous claims have been made regarding the role of civic groups in the Rose Revolution. Mikheil Saakashvili, the victor in the elections that followed Shevardnadze's resignation and one of the three opposition politicians who led the protests, denied that civic groups made much of a contribution (Karumidze & Wertsch, 2005, p. 25). Shevardnadze, on the other hand, blamed George Soros, whose Open Society Institute funded many Georgian civic groups, for the events leading up to his removal (Karumidze & Wertsch, 2005, p. 30). The truth is somewhere in between.

Academic discussions on the role of civil society in the Rose Revolution usually tend to fall into one of two traps. Either they assert that civil society was a factor but fail to give sufficient evidence to substantiate assertions regarding civic groups' contribution, or they focus almost exclusively on

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either Kmara [Enough], the Georgian youth organisation, or the foreign funding that influential NGOs received. This article seeks to avoid those pitfalls by analysing, in detail, the role of various domestic civil society actors in the Rose Revolution. Simply put, the main research questions of this article are: Did civil society play a role in the Rose Revolution? If so, what role did it play?

It would be an exaggeration to argue that civil society, in the form of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), played the primary role in instigating the events that led to Shevardnadze's resignation. Other actors, including, first and foremost, Shevardnadze himself, had a much bigger impact on developments after the election on November 2 and on the underlying political and economic grievances that motivated Georgians to call for his resignation. Even among the reformist forces, civil society played a subordinate role; first, to opposition politicians and, second, to independent media.

However, civil society did provide an indispensable base for the Rose Revolution by performing a variety of functions. This article will argue that, though not sufficient to cause the Rose Revolution, civil society's contribution was necessary for that event's success. Using Larry Diamond's framework regarding the democratic functions of civil society, the article will examine the ways in which the civic groups under consideration helped to lay the groundwork for Shevardnadze's eventual ouster in November 2003. Specifically, the article seeks to advance understanding of civil society involvement in the Rose Revolution in two areas. First, the article will stress the highly interconnected nature of the Georgian activists in question, particularly regarding their networks with other NGOs, opposition politicians, and journalists from the Rustavi 2 television station. Second, rather than focusing on Kmara as the primary civil society actor in 2003, the article will argue that Georgian student movement was, in fact, a product of the coordinated involvement of a cohort of NGOs. Some analyses of Kmara, in particular, tend to treat the student movement as a Minerva-like creation, springing fully formed from the Jupiter's head of the Open Society Institute. This article seeks to give context to existing analyses of civil society in the Rose Revolution and to emphasise the ways in which the NGOs that brought Kmara into being were embedded in their domestic environment long before the youth movement emerged.

## Literature review

The Rose Revolution has been discussed perhaps most frequently as part of the series of post-Communist transfers of power known as the Colour Revolutions. They include the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, which removed Georgian President and former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze from power; the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, in which Viktor Yushchenko triumphed over Viktor Yanukovich in 2004; and the Tulip Revolution, which ousted Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev in 2005. The exact data set for the Colour Revolutions is a topic of some dispute, with some accounts of the Colour Revolutions including the events that culminated in the overthrow of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, known as the Bulldozer Revolution, and others seeking precedents still earlier in the 1990s. The Colour Revolutions form the subject of an extensive literature, which can be expected to grow as scholars explore continuities and disjunctures in the series of protests and transfers of power spanning from the velvet revolutions of 1989 to the 'Arab Spring' of recent years. As such, a full survey of the extant literature is beyond the scope of this article. However, a brief examination of the ways that the Colour Revolutions, in general, and the Rose Revolution, in particular, have been analysed will help inform this article's focus on the role of civil society in the events that took place in 2003.

The Colour Revolutions have been explored from a variety of theoretical and causal perspectives, with the debate between agent-centred and structural causes being particularly fierce (Bunce & Wolchik, 2006a; Way, 2008; Radnitz, 2010; Curry & Goëdl, 2012; Polese & Ó Beacháin, 2011). Yet another stream of influential literature focuses on the role of external democracy promotion organisations

in the Colour Revolutions (Bunce & Wolchik, 2011; Stewart, 2009a, 2009b; Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009). The Rose Revolution, specifically, has also been the subject of much study, particularly by scholars interested in the development of post-Soviet Georgian politics (for example, Nodia, 2005; Cheterian, 2008; Jones, 2012).

Youth activism has been a subject of particular interest in the Colour Revolutions literature; many scholars have focused on the impact of the Serbian group Otpor on the formation and tactics of similar student movements, including the Kmara movement in Georgia. Bunce and Wolchik (2006b) analyse Color Revolution youth movements as an example of diffusion theory, while Kuzio (2006) pays particular attention to the strategies employed by student groups. Nikolayenko (2007) and Lavery (2008) have both written about youth activism in the Colour Revolutions in the context of political opportunity structures; Ó Beacháin and Polese (2010) take these studies one step further by exploring how youth movements in countries that witnessed Colour Revolutions changed after the event.

Regarding the Rose Revolution, detailed analyses of the role of civil society—in the sense of groups or movements that are self-organised, autonomous from the state, and oriented to a particular set of issues or interests—are fairly rare apart from the focus on Kmara. In their analysis of youth movements in the Colour Revolutions, Bunce and Wolchik (2006b) acknowledge that Kmara worked with other Georgian organisations and assert that the youth movement's major emphasis was political mobilisation. Lavery includes “allied or even neutral nongovernmental organisations” under the category of mobilising structures (2008, p. 145). Similarly, in her comparative study of the youth movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, Nikolayenko credits Georgian NGOs with creating an enabling environment for the transnational diffusion of ideas about organising student movements (p. 182). A slightly more developed discussion of NGOs emerges in Ó Beacháin's (2009) overview of the major groups involved in the Rose Revolution, but this does not extend to a detailed analysis of their contribution. Likewise, Mushkhelishvili and Jorjoliani (2009) touch on the involvement of a broader civil society community than just Kmara, but only briefly.

This article will rely on analysis by Larry Diamond (1994) of the democratic functions of civil society as a basis for evaluating the role played by civic groups in Georgia's Rose Revolution. Briefly, Diamond argues that civil society serves the following ten democratic functions:

- (1) To advance the restraint of state power by society, implemented by imposing public scrutiny in democratic states and playing a democratising function in authoritarian ones
- (2) To encourage political participation by education and opportunities for active engagement in political issues
- (3) To provide a forum for the exercise and development of tolerance and engagement with alternative perspectives
- (4) To serve as a channel for groups to voice their interests
- (5) To bridge societal gaps through common interests
- (6) To develop new political leaders
- (7) To contribute to democracy building, through tasks such as vote monitoring
- (8) To serve as alternative sources of information
- (9) To disseminate new ideas and concepts
- (10) To enhance the legitimacy of good governance: “By enhancing the accountability, responsibility, inclusiveness, effectiveness and hence legitimacy of the political system, a vigorous civil society gives citizens respect for the state and positive engagement with it” (Diamond, p. 11).

Amalgamating Diamond's normative roles, ideally civil society organisations should provide feedback regarding the action or inaction of state authorities as well as promote alternative viewpoints from that of the government. They also provide opportunities for socialisation in the norms of political participation. In his emphasis on the socialisation aspects of civil society organisations, Diamond

presaged Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti's (1994) conceptualisation of civic associations as a place for developing interpersonal trust (i.e. bridging societal gaps) and democratic norms through participation.

Having briefly surveyed the literature and outlined the evaluative criteria to be used, the next section will provide a description of the methodology employed before turning to a detailed analysis of the roles played by civil society in the Rose Revolution.

## Methodology

The methodology consisted of a preliminary survey to identify the civic groups that were mentioned most frequently in news reports, published interviews, and the existing secondary literature. Based on this preliminary analysis, seven civic groups emerged as the focus for further research—six non-governmental organisations or NGOs (the Liberty Institute, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, the Open Society Georgia Foundation, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, and the Association for Legal and Public Education) and the Kmara student movement. Though NGOs by no means comprise the whole of civil society, the majority of the civic groups that were influential in the Rose Revolution adopted that particular organisational structure. The choice to focus primarily on NGOs in studying the role of civil society in the Rose Revolution is, therefore, a practical one, rather than a conceptual argument embracing NGOs as the primary expression of civic activity. (For more on the distinction between NGOs and broader civil society in Georgia, see Muskhelishvili & Jorjoliani, 2009.)

After identifying the major civic groups involved in the Rose Revolution, the author then conducted 16 in-depth interviews with activists, scholars, politicians, and analysts in 2008. This base of primary source material was supplemented by transcripts of interviews conducted by other scholars (most notably Karumidze & Wertsch, 2005) and with an additional 16 interviews conducted by the author in 2012. The author also conducted an extensive survey of over a thousand articles and news reports from the Georgian press from 2000 to 2004 and examined documents from democracy promotion organizations, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the Open Society Georgia Foundation, as well as US foreign aid data, in addition to incorporating secondary scholarly and journalistic sources and reviewing published accounts by civil society and election monitoring participants.

## Importing ideas: The Serbian model

Although civic activists were involved in the post-election protests, civil society's most significant contributions to the Rose Revolution took place before the parliamentary election was even held. One of civil society's major contributions to the Rose Revolution falls under Diamond's category regarding the adoption and promulgation of new ideas—the adoption of the ouster of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic in 2000 as a possible model for responding to anticipated attempts by the Shevardnadze government to manipulate the election results. The Serbian example had relied on opposition parties, independent media outlets, and civic groups—in particular, a youth movement named Otpor (Resistance)—to build pressure on the regime before the presidential election. Then, following a government attempt to claim an unearned victory for Milosevic, those groups held large-scale demonstrations demanding Milosevic's resignation until, finally, the Serbian dictator conceded.

The Serbian experience mandated a heavy emphasis on non-violence, an approach that particularly appealed to Georgian activists because of the country's conflict-ridden experiences dating from the

late Soviet period (G. Meladze, personal communication, March 28, 2008). This focus on peaceful activism was important in overcoming the legacy of the April 1989 Tbilisi massacre and Georgia's civil war (1991-1993), as a result of which Georgians associated street demonstrations with violent conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The Serbian model was promoted in Georgia by the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), an American democracy promotion NGO. OSGF was the Georgian branch of the New York-based Open Society Institute, established and funded by billionaire George Soros; it served as an important source of financial support for Georgian civil society groups. The Serbian model made its debut among Georgian actors when OSGF funded an NDI-led trip to Belgrade for opposition politicians Mikheil Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania, and David Gamkrelidze in January 2003. In NDI's estimation, the three opposition politicians seemed, at the time, to be Georgia's best hope for a reform-oriented coalition. According to NDI Georgia representative Lincoln Mitchell, "the need for the opposition to work together" was the "main message" of the Serbia trip. "We set it up so that they would hear that message over and over and over again" (personal communication, October 30, 2008). NDI's message cannot be said to have achieved its goal before the election; though rumours were plentiful during the campaign period regarding a potential opposition alliance, the major reformist parties did not unite prior to the poll, owing at least in part to rivalries among opposition leaders.

Though the opposition politicians resisted aspects of the Serbian model, civic activists saw it as a template for action. OSGF funded a trip to Serbia by Georgian civic activists in February 2003, in which the young people were exposed to techniques for peaceful activism intended to build societal pressure on undemocratic regimes. The trip included Giga Bokeria of the Liberty Institute, Tinatin Khidasheli of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, and Alexander Lomaia of OSGF. The trip was reciprocated that summer, when activists from Serbia's Otpor youth movement came to Georgia to instruct over 1,000 students in techniques of non-violent activism during a three-day series of workshops. NGOs also promoted the Serbian model on a broad scale by arranging, just days before the election, for the airing of multiple broadcasts of a documentary entitled 'Bringing Down a Dictator,' which featured the Otpor youth organisation, the model for Georgia's Kmara movement.

An important aspect of the Serbian model was its focus on the president as the target of protests, rather than the ruling party. By 2003, Eduard Shevardnadze made an appealing target for political action. Vicken Cheterian argues that by the time of the Rose Revolution, Shevardnadze had become what he calls "an enemy figure" for Georgians (2008, p. 694), aligning himself with corrupt officials and former Soviet apparatchiks and hindering progress toward the West. A poll conducted a mere two months before the parliamentary election indicated that although 66 per cent of respondents believed that democracy was the best form of governance, only 5 per cent believed the country to be developing in the right direction ("Georgians Nostalgic," 2003).

Targeting the president also seemed justified because of previous encounters with the regime. In October 2001, a state security service raid on Tbilisi's independent television station, Rustavi 2, sparked large demonstrations that, at their peak, massed up to 10,000 protesters in front of parliament and resulted in the dismissal of the entire government and the influential head of parliament, reformer Zurab Zhvania. NGOs played an active role in the 2001 protests, as did students from Tbilisi State University's self-government movement. Initially the moment was seen as a pro-reform victory. However, when it came time to name the new government, only 6 of the 19 proposed ministers were actually new to their posts, and only the Security Minister and Interior Minister were completely new to ministerial positions. For the students and activists who rallied in support of Rustavi 2, this moment

1 The 9 April 1989 massacre of peaceful Georgian protesters by Soviet troops served as a powerful reminder of the possible negative consequences of anti-regime activity. Georgia's civil war started in the winter of 1991-1992 as a series of protests by militia groups in the capital before turning violent and resulting in the ouster of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, as well as inciting an ongoing struggle with Gamsakhurdia's supporters, the Zviadists.

became symbolic of how Shevardnadze could turn even the people's victories into failures. Out of this eventually grew the idea that in order to truly succeed it was necessary to make future victories irrevocable by removing the politicians who might be tempted to revise them. This contributed to a sense of urgency regarding the 2003 parliamentary contest and the much anticipated 2005 presidential election.

Civic activists' long-term goals also contributed to concentrating their efforts on Shevardnadze. The 2003 parliamentary election was viewed as a dress rehearsal for the decisive 2005 presidential election, when Shevardnadze ostensibly would step down from power. Georgian groups were hoping to ensure Shevardnadze's replacement with a reformist candidate rather than one of the president's obstructionist associates, but anticipated electoral manipulation by ruling party. In 2003, according to Liberty Institute Director Levan Ramishvili, "we were going to have constant demonstrations for a while, but there was no real plan to overthrow the government because we were [...] preparing for 2005" (personal communication, April 11, 2008). Since the Liberty Institute was one of the major advocates for an eventual revolution, the fact that this organisation's leaders did not anticipate Shevardnadze's removal in 2003 may serve as an indication of the extent to which the timing and success of the eventual 'revolution' took even its instigators by surprise.

## Promoting political participation: The Kmara youth movement

Inspired by the Serbian example was the formation of Kmara, a youth movement that united student government associations developed by the Liberty Institute and NDI's Mark Mullen with another student group formed in response to the protests over the government raid on Rustavi 2 in 2001. Kmara (Enough!) was modelled on Serbia's Otpor, which worked to raise political awareness and to fend off voter apathy prior to the parliamentary elections. As highlighted in the literature review above, the Kmara youth movement has been analysed extensively from the perspective of the transnational diffusion of ideas from Serbia's Otpor movement, and in terms of the strategies and tactics employed by Kmara members in their attempts to mobilise Georgians to participate in the election.

However, these studies neglect the fact that behind the Kmara youth movement was a tight-knit set of NGOs, several of which had been active as human rights organisations or think tanks since the mid-nineties. Kmara was perhaps the best example of the extensive degree of cooperation and coordination among reformist actors that occurred in preparing for the parliamentary elections – among various NGOs, between NGOs and the Rustavi 2 television station, and between opposition political parties and civil society. Much of the previous literature on the role of civic groups in the Rose Revolution has focused on Kmara as the dominant civil society actor. Kmara was created to influence the election, but the actors behind Kmara were civic groups that had a much longer history than the short campaign period during which Kmara emerged on the scene. Rather than revisiting issues of Kmara's relationship with Otpor or its political tactics, this portion of the article will argue that Kmara was the product of the coordinated actions of a set of reformist actors, rather than the dominant civil society player.

The Liberty Institute was the driving force behind the Kmara youth movement and so closely involved in every aspect of its operations that one observer characterised the youth group as "essentially a Liberty Institute invention" (M. Mullen, personal communication, April 12, 2008). The founders of the Liberty Institute, Levan Ramishvili and Giga Bokeria, had been active in the student protests spawned by Georgia's drive for independence. The two men worked for Rustavi 2 before establishing the Liberty Institute in 1996, where their first efforts were dedicated to defending Rustavi 2 from government pressure. Rustavi 2 journalists continued to form an important part of the Liberty Institute's network in subsequent years. From media freedom, the Liberty Institute transitioned easily to human rights work and legislative activism. The Liberty Institute grew into a very influential NGO with close ties to

many reformist politicians, but an antagonistic relationship with the more conservative elements of the government. The Liberty Institute's tireless political activism, particularly in exposing corruption, prompted a number of investigations and contributed to the resignation of several ministers in the nineties, including the chiefs of the Communications, Finance, Energy and Agriculture Ministries (L. Ramishvili, personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Many Liberty Institute activists filled major roles in both Kmara and the Liberty Institute and provided support to the youth movement in terms of training, mentorship, and direction. The relationship between the youth groups that eventually constituted Kmara and the Liberty Institute was a longstanding one. Not only was the Liberty Institute, along with NDI's Mark Mullen and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, involved in the initial formation of the student self-government groups that evolved into the Kmara movement, but many founding members of the student youth associations joined the Liberty Institute after graduation (L. Sanikidze, personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Kmara was rumoured to have received funding from OSGF in amounts ranging up to \$500,000 (McKinnon, 2003). However, Kmara member Lika Sanikidze claimed that although Kmara had a computer bought with money provided by OSGF and OSGF, which eventually funded the purchase of food for post-election protesters, the actual amount received from OSGF was relatively small (L. Sanikidze, personal communication, April 11, 2008). OSGF's annual report for 2003 does not mention Kmara at all, and the Soros Foundation's senior policy adviser, Laura Silber, has stated that none of Open Society's 2003 budget for Georgia (\$4.6 million) went directly to Kmara (Corwin, 2005).

Kmara encouraged media coverage of its activities, viewing "the presence of media," in the words of Kmara activist Lika Sanikidze, as "one of the main guarantees" against violent state action. For the youth movement, "media was the only guarantee" that its members were safe (L. Sanikidze, personal communication, April 11, 2008). An informal partnership soon developed between Kmara and the Rustavi 2 television station. There were numerous instances when Rustavi 2 covered Kmara's activities. Rustavi 2 journalists appear to have gone to great lengths to document Kmara's efforts. At one point, a Rustavi 2 cameraman even was beaten up by FNG supporters for attempting to film footage of stickers that Kmara had pasted on an FNG candidate's posters. The youth movement's linkages with the independent television station considerably extended its notoriety.

Although technically unaffiliated with a particular political party, Kmara was seconded at some of its events by the youth wings of the reformist opposition parties. As Kmara founder Giorgi Kandelaki (2006) recounted:

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. (p. 7)

Even after that event, Kmara sometimes worked with the youth of the National Movement, which had activists in the local universities, and occasionally liaised with the Burjanadze Democrats' youth wing (L. Sanikidze, personal communication, April 11, 2008).

Kmara demonstrates the extensive coordination that took place between a variety of civic groups leading up to the parliamentary elections. The earliest incarnation of the student group was midwifed by NDI, the Liberty Institute, and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy. Kmara was influenced in strategy and tactics by the Liberty Institute and received funding from OSGF. The Soros branch sent Kmara activists to Serbia to meet with members of Otpor, and Otpor activists conducted trainings for students on techniques of non-violent protest at which NDI's Mark Mullen served as an instructor (McKinnon, 2007, p. 114). Lawyers from the Georgian Young Lawyers Association defended Kmara activists on occasions when they were detained during protests, as did lawyers from



the Association for Public and Legal Education under the leadership of Gigi Ugulava. Kmara ran a series of OSGF-sponsored commercials on Rustavi 2 that painted Shevardnadze's FNG bloc as a group of corrupt officials. Kmara also proved a point of coordination between youth branches of the opposition political parties, which sent their supporters to Kmara for some events, including the first big protest that introduced the movement to the Georgian political scene in April 2003.

Even informal events, such as watching the evening news, served as points of connection between various groups. NDI's Mark Mullen reports that he regularly stopped by the Liberty Institute on his evening walk with his son to watch the beginning of Rustavi 2's evening news program before going home to tuck his children into bed, and Kmara member Lika Sanikidze described the Liberty Institute as a place where the students felt comfortable and welcomed. It was "like home" for Kmara members (L. Sanikidze, personal communication, April 11, 2008). Proximity, resources, and friendships each played major roles in building this student movement.

### **Democracy building and tools for accountability: Election monitoring, agenda setting, and reaching an international audience**

Georgian NGOs deployed a variety of tactics to prepare for the election, many of which fall under Diamond's category of contributing to democracy building. Both the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) organized major vote observation efforts. GYLA was one of Georgia's oldest NGOs. The group began as an informal student independence movement in 1988, with a second wave of students giving it added momentum after the Georgian civil war in 1992. One student who became involved around 1992 was Tinatin Khidasheli, GYLA's president during the Rose Revolution. Initially focused on promoting professional development, GYLA became involved in national politics in 1995, when members of the group began to work as assistants to members of the constitutional drafting commission. GYLA soon began to extend its reach beyond professional development and to provide legal representation for disadvantaged Georgians. The group also started to lobby parliament for democratic reforms. For its monitoring campaign for the November 2003 election, GYLA relied on its extensive regional network, which had grown to approximately 70 groups by 2001 (Black & Jay, 2001, p. 3).

ISFED's efforts were even more impressive. Originally known as the Fair Elections Society, ISFED was funded by the American National Democratic Institute (NDI) and routinely carried out a variety of activities, including election monitoring and lobbying for reforms to enhance the electoral process. As part of its monitoring efforts, ISFED cultivated relationships with volunteers and organisations throughout Georgia. By 2001, ISFED had a national network that consisted of approximately 40 chapters (Black & Jay, 2001, p. 3). For the 2003 election, ISFED planned to field over 3,000 election observers in 2,500 of Georgia's approximately 3,000 precincts ("ISFED to Conduct," 2003). This was Georgia's (and ISFED's) first such extensive domestic election monitoring campaign. ISFED even recruited election monitors from Russia and Ukraine to observe the elections in the pro-Russian region of Ajaria, reasoning that Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze presumably would be less willing to hassle observers from countries with which he cultivated friendly relations (Mitchell, 2008, p. 58).

ISFED also implemented the country's first parallel vote tabulation (PVT), an alternative vote count that would provide a means to verify or dispute the official vote tally. It is entirely possible that the 2003 elections were no more corrupt (and possibly less so) than previous Georgian elections. The significance of the PVT lay in its ability to confirm that fraud had taken place in this particular election. After the election, ISFED's PVT results provided opposition politicians with concrete statistical evidence that the government had manipulated the vote on a large scale. Youth activists even distributed leaflets announcing the PVT results in an attempt to draw more supporters to the protests (Wheatley, 2005, p. 183).

A second tactic adopted by NGO activists was to establish a political agenda for the election. During the campaign season, fourteen NGOs, including OSGF, the Liberty Institute and GYLA, put forth an agreement between civic groups and opposition parties entitled 'Ten Steps to Freedom.' Liberty Institute activist and Kmara youth movement member Giorgi Meladze described the document as a sort of contract with opposition groups, including a "certain agenda for those who will come to power" (personal communication, March 28, 2008). In the past, some politicians had aligned themselves first with one group and then with another in a spate of pre-election political manoeuvring; part of the reasoning behind 'Ten Steps to Freedom' was to force political actors to choose sides publicly in order to prevent people from shifting loyalties halfway through the campaign. Many of the NGOs initiating the 'Ten Steps to Freedom' document had good networks with opposition political leaders; however, the fact that civic leaders encouraged them to sign the contract implied that they were not willing to accept the reformist politicians' democratic commitment on the basis of rhetoric alone. The deliberate exclusion of Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia bloc from the signing process formalised the shift away from the government by civic groups that had been taking place for quite some time.

A third tactic was to call attention to Shevardnadze's tarnished democratic credentials. Civic groups were instrumental in undermining the government's portrayal of Georgia as a democracy, a depiction aimed primarily at Western governments. GYLA and other Georgian human rights organisations helped shape international perceptions about Georgia's democratic progress or lack thereof in the years before the election. From 2001 to 2003, GYLA president Tinatin Khidasheli and other activists wrote shadow reports for international organisations, which then drew on those reports as sources for their own publications. Reports written by Georgian activists for international organisations, particularly for UN agencies, commanded a wider audience than the NGOs would otherwise be able to reach on their own. From Khidasheli's perspective, this awareness-raising effort was one of the main contributions NGOs made to the eventual Rose Revolution: "The main success, I always say, [that] we as NGOs at that time achieved was that we managed to create a general, genuine understanding of all democracy-related problems in Georgia" (personal communication, May 1, 2008).

Ghia Nodia, a well-known Georgian academician and director of the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), also contributed to international evaluations of Georgia's democratic progress. CIPDD was an important source of research and analysis concerning Georgian domestic politics, as well as Georgia's role in the broader region; its publications helped shape international opinion about Georgia. Most significantly, Nodia authored the Georgia section of the *Nations in Transit* publication in the years leading up to the revolution.

These reports by Georgian NGOs provided a counterpoint to official accounts of the progress of Georgia's democratic transition and contributed to an increase in international scrutiny of the Georgian government, often prompting early reviews of Georgia's human rights performance. The UN Committee on Human Rights, for instance, issued a warning to Georgia in May 2002, in which it gave the government one year to improve its human rights' record. The committee had not been scheduled to review Georgia's record for another four years, but determined that the situation merited early consideration based on the dire reports it was receiving ("Georgia's Human Rights Record," 2002). Additionally, the US Commission on Cooperation in Europe, a committee in the US House of Representatives, held a democracy, human rights, and security hearing on Georgia in September 2002, its first such hearing since shortly after Shevardnadze's return to power.

Civic activists' efforts to influence international opinion about Georgia continued up to election day. Khidasheli, along with other NGO leaders, travelled internationally to discuss their concerns regarding the upcoming elections. In September 2003, for example, the Open Society Institute sponsored a trip by Khidasheli, CIPDD's Ghia Nodia, the Liberty Institute's Giga Bokeria, and OSGF chief Alexander Lomaia to New York and Washington D.C. Tellingly, their presentation was entitled 'Free and Fair? The Countdown to Georgia's Elections'.

## Exploiting the hybrid regime: The defence of formal liberties

In response to these attempts to subject the state to greater scrutiny, the Georgian government took steps to restrict the activities of pro-reform groups. Eduard Shevardnadze's Georgia, though purporting to be democratic, falls into the category of a regime classified as competitive authoritarianism by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2002). Competitive authoritarianism refers to a system of governance that, while relying on the mechanism of elections to select its leaders, is compromised by government interference to such an extent that the electoral process cannot rightly be classified as free and fair. However, in contrast to purely authoritarian states, competitive authoritarian regimes permit some areas of democratic contest, which can include—as in the Georgian case—elections, media, and civil society. In her comparative analysis of Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, Susan Stewart (2009b) observes that the presence of a somewhat pluralistic political sphere existed in all three countries prior to their electoral revolutions, despite attempts by the government to limit those spaces prior to the actual poll.

Civic activists acted as a restraint on state power by deftly defending and exploiting these potential openings. The common wisdom at the time held that Shevardnadze tolerated these areas of possible democratic contestation in order to demonstrate to Western audiences, particularly donor governments like the United States, the Georgian government's commitment to democracy building. Shevardnadze's lip service to democratic norms and his unwillingness to jeopardise his international reputation as a democratic politician had two effects: it empowered the president's opponents by providing fodder for criticism as Shevardnadze failed to implement reform and it prevented Shevardnadze from cracking down on his political adversaries effectively because it would have belied his democratic statements.

Under pressure from the regime, civic groups successfully defended the formal liberties allowed under Georgian law. One such case was the right to free assembly. Though this right was enshrined in the Georgian constitution, over the years other amendments had been added that could hinder possible protest efforts; for instance, a 1997 law on assembly required that state authorities receive notice of an event five days in advance and gave the government the right to choose the event's venue. No rallies could be held outside parliament, the State Chancellery, courts, or other government buildings. Another stipulation stated that local government bodies could prohibit a protest if they had evidence of a threat to the constitutional system, a caveat that could be manipulated by government officials to forestall pro-democracy protests. Prior to the elections, GYLA and the Liberty Institute, as well as some of the opposition parties, launched efforts to repeal the legal pretexts that could be used to prevent demonstrations as a response to the results from the parliamentary elections.

Civic groups also defended their right to receive financial assistance from abroad. In February 2003, Minister of State Security Valeri Khaburdzania introduced a draft law entitled 'Law on Suspending Activities of, Liquidating and Banning Extremist and Other Organizations Controlled from Abroad.' Though claiming to lay the legal foundation to address terrorist threats, the law actually provided pretexts to suppress NGOs that criticised the government (Baazov, 2003). Though a version of the controversial law did enter into force in April 2003, a group of seven NGOs, among them CIPDD and GYLA, took the Finance Ministry to court. In June, a Tbilisi judge suspended enforcement of the order.

The government also sought to restrict access to media outlets by opposition politicians. In August, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) proposed an amendment to the election code that would prohibit the broadcasting of any interviews or speeches by political party representatives that could be classified as election campaigning, as well as all entertainment or programs that involved political candidates. As proposed, the new regulations would ban interviews, speeches, or appeals associated with the campaign process or involving slogans, logos, or pictures, and would come into effect 50 days before the election. Although the amendment purportedly would prohibit all political

talk by candidates or party leaders on television for the 50 days prior to the election, it presumably would have been ignored by government representatives and the president, who could cloak their appeals to the electorate in the guise of ‘official’ business. Efforts by civic groups, including GYLA and ISFED, contributed to the proposed CEC amendment being overturned by a Tbilisi district court.

As is evident from these examples, one major contribution of civic groups to the 2003 parliamentary elections and the subsequent Rose Revolution was the defence of Georgia’s existing formal freedoms, particularly as those liberties came under threat in the lead-up to the elections. Had Shevardnadze and other officials been successful in these attempts to limit democratic expression, it would have seriously hampered opposition efforts to challenge Shevardnadze’s bloc in the electoral arena. After the elections, opposition politicians used the freedoms defended by NGOs to confront the government over its abuse of the democratic process.

### **Activism and personal networks: Interconnectivity and coordination in the Rose Revolution**

The networks that connected civic groups before the 2003 parliamentary election did not revolve around the Kmara youth movement. The NGOs that were the most active prior to the November 2003 parliamentary election were connected through both personal and professional, formal and informal networks. Levan Ramishvili, director of the influential Liberty Institute, illustrates this point well. He described his organisation’s relationship with Rustavi 2 quite casually: “They were interested to have interesting stories to put on the air and to attract viewers and we were interested in coverage” (personal communication, April 11, 2008). Yet, Ramishvili and fellow activist Giga Bokeria worked at Rustavi 2 before founding the Liberty Institute; indeed, defending Rustavi 2 was one of the new organization’s first acts. The Liberty Institute had close ties to Mikheil Saakashvili’s National Movement party. As Ramishvili said, “We had very strong /.../ cooperation with leaders of the National Movement because most of them were our friends from our circles, like Vano Merabishvili, who was Secretary General of National Movement, and some others as well” (personal communication, April 11, 2008). Ramishvili’s organisation also had strong linkages with the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), the NDI-funded group that was conducting the parallel vote tabulation and election monitoring efforts. ISFED director Zurab Tchiaberashvili was a former Liberty Institute activist; under his leadership, many Liberty Institute members found their way to new employment with ISFED (M. Mullen, personal communication, April 12, 2008).

In Georgia, the country’s most influential NGOs gathered around their leaders, rather than a particular agenda or ideology, though they did all embrace a generally pro-reform consensus. Like Ramishvili, these individuals brought a personal asset that magnified the influence of their formal organisations – their extensive political networks, which included prominent reform-minded Georgian politicians, as well as international organisations and donors. Several of the chief civil society activists were in opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili’s inner circle and involved with him from street demonstrations to storming the parliament. NGO activists’ connections with a popular domestic politician gave them a platform and an advocate for their demands within the government, as well as allies on the street.

The most active civic groups also coordinated more formally. They coalesced in a small group of civic leaders who coordinated activities on three fronts: 1) Between NGOs, 2) with the pro-reform political parties of opposition politicians Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Zhvania, and 3) with the Rustavi 2 television station. The leaders involved included Gigi Ugulava, head of the Association for Legal and Public Education; Giga Bokeria, one of the founders of the Liberty Institute; Alexander Lomaia, the influential director of the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF), an organisation whose grants funded many other NGOs; Gigi Tevzadze, also from OSGF; Ghia Nodia, a prolific academic with Western

connections and director of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), a prominent think tank; Zurab Tchiaberashvili, head of ISFED, an election monitoring organisation that would conduct the parallel vote tabulation for the election; and Tinatin Khidasheli, president of the Georgian Young Lawyers Organisation, an organisation that worked on legal and human rights concerns. Erosi Kitsmarishvili, general director and co-owner of the Rustavi 2 television station and journalist Shalva Ramishvili also frequently participated (T. Khidasheli, personal communication, May 1, 2008).

Many of the civic groups in this coordinating council had worked together on reform issues in the past. Ties between various NGOs already were strong due to previous cooperation in lobbying parliament and the fact that some civic activists held posts in multiple organisations, an arrangement that facilitated networking. For instance, CIPDD leader Ghia Nodia chaired OSGF's board (Areshidze, 2007, p. 271). However, the coordinating council formalised collaboration between previously existing networks and focused the joint efforts of these pro-democracy groups on the parliamentary elections. A major focus for these coordination efforts was the attempt to lay the foundation for a clean election and to establish safeguards to demonstrate government complicity if, as anticipated, the government attempted to tamper with the electoral results in favour of Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia bloc.

### **Young blood: Gathering new leaders**

Like most spheres in Georgia, civil society was affected significantly by the Rose Revolution and the major changes that it produced. One of the most significant effects was the brain drain from civil society to government. After winning the presidential election in January 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili drew heavily on civil society cadres to staff his new administration, revealing the extent to which civic groups fulfilled one of the roles of civil society outlined by Larry Diamond – the development of new political leaders. Many of the NGO leaders involved in the Rose Revolution entered the new government within its first few months. Some assumed new posts in an even shorter time frame; Zurab Tchiaberashvili (International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy) became chief of the Central Electoral Commission within ten days of the Rose Revolution. The new administration included Alexander Lomaia (Open Society Georgia Foundation) as Saakashvili's Education Minister and adviser on many unrelated matters, Vano Merabishvili (a former member of parliament with close ties to the Liberty Institute) as Secretary of the National Security Council, Gigi Ugulava (Association for Legal and Public Education) as Deputy Security Minister, and Irakli Okruashvili (a member of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association) as General Prosecutor, while Giga Bokeria and Givi Targamadze (founders of the Liberty Institute) entered parliament as members of the new United National Movement party. Even Erosi Kitsmarishvili, founder and managing editor of the Rustavi 2 television station, assumed a role in the new state administration; he replaced a Shevardnadze stalwart as head of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Several of the leaders with ties to civil society who were part of the ruling United National Movement Party after the Rose Revolution have continued as close allies of Mikheil Saakashvili, including Giga Bokeria, Vano Merabishvili, and Givi Targamadze. For Saakashvili's government, civil society was fertile soil from which to harvest new political talent.

### **The power of ideas: The electoral revolution model's lingering influence**

Many of the effects of the Rose Revolution, including that on Georgian civil society, are discussed in the existing literature (for more on the impact of the Rose Revolution on Georgian civil society, see Muskhelishvili and Jorjoliani, 2009; Broers, 2005; and Laverty, 2008). Rather than belabouring

points that have been made elsewhere, this penultimate portion of the article will touch briefly on the prolonged impact of the electoral revolution model, imported by civil groups from Serbia, after Shevardnadze's removal from power.

Vicken Cheterian aptly describes the Rose Revolution as a political development aimed at modernisation, rather than democracy. The leaders that came to power in the Rose Revolution were committed to reforming the state, alleviating corruption, and repairing the economy; democracy, however, served as “an *external* attribute, a self-declared ideology that aligned Georgia with the West, rather than a certain political practice concerning the organisation of the political sphere through competitive elections, and other *internal* attributes of democratic performance” (Cheterian, 2008, p. 695, italics in original). Though coming to power under the guise of a democrat, Saakashvili failed to encourage broad political participation from the electorate and limited the ability of truly oppositional parties to participate in parliament.

In this constrained political sphere, after 2007 the ‘revolutionary’ model gained increasing salience as one of the few legitimate options for effecting change in contemporary Georgia. Part of the reason for this perception was that post-Soviet Georgia, until 2012, had never experienced a peaceful, constitutional transfer of power (for more on post-Soviet power transfers in Georgia, see Angley, 2012). The diffusion of the electoral revolution model, as implemented in the Rose Revolution, within the Georgian domestic context contributed to a phenomenon of belligerent imitation, in which the tactics Saakashvili and his allies implemented to evict his predecessor were used in attempts to remove the post-Rose Revolution regime. The electoral revolution model imported by Georgian NGO leaders from Serbian activists in 2003 was adopted by Saakashvili's domestic political opponents, an idea transmitted across both international and domestic boundaries.

In 2008, a many-partied opposition coalition failed to secure either the presidency or significant representation in parliament. Unable to play a role in formal politics through legal bodies, these extra-parliamentary groups adopted street demonstrations—the most visible portion of the Rose Revolution—as their major political tactic. These large-scale demonstrations (and the political coalitions behind them) relied on demands for Saakashvili's resignation as their major platform. Tinatin Khidasheli, the former president of GYLA who subsequently became one of the leaders of the Republican Party, was active in the 2008 demonstrations. She described her party's tactics at the time as “very negative.” The Republicans' main strategy was to discredit Saakashvili. “We played on the government's nerves,” said Khidasheli. “They set the agenda and we tried to attack” (personal communication, July 16, 2012).

Opposition groups also sought to imitate other elements of Saakashvili's rise to power—their own interpretation of the electoral revolution model—by, for instance, attempting to gain influence over media outlets and contesting elections for significant local posts, such as the mayoralty of Tbilisi in 2010. These steps, though they represented a misinterpretation of the opposition's successes in 2003, were an attempt to duplicate the influence of Rustavi 2 and the significance of the 2002 local elections to Tbilisi's city council in challenging Saakashvili for power (for more on the 2008 opposition's interpretation of the Rose Revolution, see Angley, 2010.<sup>2</sup>

This reliance on mass demonstrations as the primary strategy for challenging the sitting regime continued until 2011 as a street presence and persisted through at least the 2012 parliamentary elections as a potential option of last resort if the government attempted to carry out electoral fraud. The Georgian Dream coalition, which staged a major upset of the ruling United National Movement party in the October 2012 election, adopted a much less radical approach to opposition politics

2 In the Georgian context, the success of the electoral revolution model was aided by earlier changes in the political configuration. A split among Georgian elites in 2001 disenfranchised a group of young, pro-Western Georgian politicians. One of these politicians, Mikheil Saakashvili, successfully won the most senior position in the capital city of Tbilisi in 2002; from this post, he established a power base that greatly aided his subsequent parliamentary campaign. Consequently, in the Georgian case, gaining the highest-ranking post in the Tbilisi government has been adopted as a component of the ‘revolutionary’ model.

than other major groups since the Rose Revolution. Nevertheless, even coalition leader Bidzina Ivanishvili, who had entered the Georgian political scene declaring that he “[didn’t] want to even hear the word ‘revolution’ or to mention the word ‘street’” (“Ivanishvili: ‘Don’t Even,’” 2011), began referencing potential protests as a fallback in case of “grave violations” (“Georgia Opposition Leader,” 2012). Perhaps Tinatin Khidasheli expressed the impact of the Georgian interpretation of the electoral revolution model best: “Protests are always an option,” she said. “If there is a need, we will call people on the streets” (personal communication, July 16, 2012).

## Conclusion

On November 23, 2003, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze resigned from office in the middle of large-scale peaceful demonstrations over flawed parliamentary elections. The Rose Revolution, as this event came to be known, established a precedent that has had a continuing impact on Georgian politics. The Kmara youth movement was by no means the only or even the most significant civil society player in the events that culminated in Shevardnadze’s ouster. Taking Kmara as the primary representative of civil society involvement in the Rose Revolution disregards the valuable democratic functions being carried out by other Georgian civic groups and obscures the fact that Kmara was, in fact, the joint effort of several domestic NGOs that were already well established by 2003. Broadening the focus to include other groups yields a much fuller picture of the web of interconnected individuals and organisations that played an important role in the first of the post-Soviet Colour Revolutions.

The civil society organisations examined in this article made a valuable contribution to Georgia’s Rose Revolution by performing a variety of democratic functions. Perhaps most importantly, they imported and publicised new ideas in the form of the Serbian model and advocated it as a prototype for potential action, with lingering results for Georgian politics. As part of that model, a densely interconnected group of NGO activists fostered the Kmara student movement, in an attempt to imitate the Serbian youth movement Otpor.

Civic groups also prepared tools for accountability, in the form of election monitoring efforts, agenda-setting, and awareness-raising activities implemented on the international level. In publishing the results of the parallel vote tabulation and implementing their election monitoring campaign, NGOs participated in democracy building in its most technical, election-oriented sense. Distributing the results of the parallel vote tabulation also served the function of providing alternative information to that produced by the state. By calling attention to attempts to restrict the exercise of rights permitted under the Georgian constitution, activists contributed to subjecting the behaviour of the state to close public scrutiny. Civil society leaders successfully exploited the formal liberties established by Shevardnadze’s hybrid regime, laying the foundation for post-electoral protest efforts.

Civic groups also fulfilled various other democratic roles. Through the formation of Kmara and by offering volunteer opportunities such as election monitoring, the civic groups considered in this article encouraged active involvement with political topics. Additionally, civil society helped to develop new leaders, many of whom went into politics following Shevardnadze’s resignation.

Though they did not fulfil all of the democratic functions outlined by Larry Diamond (they did not, for instance, provide a forum for the inculcation of norms of civility and tolerance or bridge societal gaps), the civil society organisations analysed in this article, through the activities summarised above, did contribute significantly to the creation of a potential democratic opening in the Republic of Georgia.

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