

Georgia

Period of democratic transition: 2003–2004

Pro-democracy civic movement: present

In 1922, Georgia entered the Soviet Union as a component of the Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Republic, becoming a separate Soviet republic in 1936. Following a national referendum in April 1991, Georgia declared its independence from the Soviet Union.

Former Georgian Communist Party head and Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze overthrew the previous president in 1992 and won two five-year terms in 1995 and 2000. However, the 2000 election was accused of being fraudulent and led to vocal opposition from other politicians. Massive demonstrations in the capital, Tbilisi, organized under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement, soon spread to most of Georgia's other major cities and towns. Another leading force in the nonviolent struggle was the Kmara student and youth movement. The civic movement employed rallies, marches, nonviolent takeovers of government buildings, and strikes. At their height, the rallies involved hundreds of thousands of participants in the capital and tens of thousands of demonstrators in other municipalities. After the flawed and fraudulent parliamentary elections in November 2003, frustration over corruption boiled over into what became known as the "Rose Revolution". The protests forced the resignation of President Shevardnadze and resulted in new, freely and fairly contested elections for the presidency in January 2004. Constitutional amendments in February 2004 strengthened the authority and powers of the presidency. Multiparty elections for Parliament in March 2004 consolidated the revolution and allowed democracy to take root.

It is still too early to determine how well democracy has been maintained in Georgia since the 2004 parliamentary elections. Reform in Georgia is hampered by economic conflict with Russia. Meanwhile, the governing National Movement Party continues to dominate the domestic political scene, as the opposition has so far proven incapable of providing meaningful competition.