Georgia
(GeorgiaRN1.3)

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This is one of a set of “random narratives” to complement our statistical findings in regard to civil war onsets. This is a draft of July 5, 2006; comments welcome.

Our model tracks well the post-Soviet period in Georgia of one bona fide insurgency (Abkhazia from 1992-1994 amounting to 6,833 deaths) and several bouts of civil violence that did not cross the 1,000-death threshold (in Tbilisi among various Georgian warlords; in South Ossetia; and in Ajaria). Georgia’s GDP per capita at the time of its independence was only $3,828; its relative poverty is in our model a good predictor of civil war. Georgia was a new state in 1991, making it especially vulnerable to an insurgency when the actual insurgency and near insurgencies erupted. With Polity IV scores of democracy at “5” and autocracy at “1”, we classify Georgia as an anocracy, an institutional situation making it more susceptible to civil war than if it had been a democracy or autocracy tout court. Finally, with 61 percent of the land area in Georgia being mountainous, our model predicts greater possibilities for insurgents in hiding from the armies of the state.

With these values on the key independent variables, our model reckons that Georgia at the time of its independence had a 6.3% chance of a civil war onset, as compared to the regional average (of the other 21 post-Soviet and Eastern European states for 1991) of 4.4%. Thus our model assesses that Georgia’s propensity for a civil war was almost half again as high as the other states in its region at the time of the collapse of communism.

Perhaps better as a comparison, neighboring Armenia achieved independence the same year as Georgia. The two countries had near identical GDP per capita (with Georgia a bit lower). Without putting ethnic heterogeneity into our equation -- the factor that most regional experts point to in differentiating Georgia and Armenia -- our model computes an
insurgency in Georgia as more than twice as likely to have crossed the 1,000 threshold in the period 1991-92 than in Armenia (with a 2.8% probability). That Georgia suffered from an insurgency while Armenia was able to avoid one gives us added confidence that our model has tapped into the causal mechanisms differentiating countries that have experienced a civil war from those that have not.

**Georgia’s History and Culture as Explanations**

Georgia’s history provides but few clues as to why the transition to independence would be so incendiary. One analyst sees the roots of the present violence in Georgia's unhappy past. Otyrba (1994: 281) explains: "In Georgia one can find examples of all the major causes of ethnic strife in the Caucasus: the legacy of the national-territorial division of the USSR, the problem of the right of nations to self-determination, the tension between federalism and unitarianism, and the frustrations of peoples subjected to repression.'"

These frustrations, some analysts suggest, nurtured in Georgia a "culture of violence." Indeed, Georgia has experienced in its recent history a few riveting episodes that could have served to establish a culture of violence. In 1956, for example, there was a quiet vigil at a monument to Stalin, one that symbolized disgust with Khrushchev's exposé of Stalin's crimes. The Soviet army came in quickly, killing dozens of young people and wounding hundreds (Suny, 1988:303). Perhaps more relevant, a peaceful prodemocratic demonstration in Tbilisi in April 1989 again brought in Soviet troops, and nineteen were killed, mostly elderly women and young girls. After that event, Soviet troops were routinely called the "army of occupation" in Georgian political discourse (RFE, 910215). The organization of the Knights of Georgia, a paramilitary underground society, grew out of these bloody events. The militarization of the conflicts in Tbilisi, in Ossetia and Abkhazia in the late 1980s and early 1990s might be seen as the full development of a culture of violence induced by iconic events played out in the contemporary era.

However, the standard national history of Georgia (Suny 1988) points in the opposite direction. Georgia is seen to have had a distinguished role as

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1. Some of the subsequent narrative has been lifted from Laitin (1995), though this narrative reflects learning over the past decade.
an historic passageway, one in which ethnic and religious minorities could pass through, could integrate socially and culturally, and could operate commercially, without threat to their personal security. And as a passageway between the Ottoman and Russian empires, Georgian elites learned the importance of accommodating to the realities of power rather than fighting for autonomy. The late 18th and early 19th century incorporation into the Russian empire was accomplished without resistance, as the Georgian aristocracy well understood the realities of Russian power. During the Russian revolution, the Mensheviks were the most powerful force in Georgia. But when the Bolsheviks closed in on Tbilisi in 1921, the Mensheviks fled the capital city without a fight. While it is tempting to find the roots of violence in the mists of Georgian history, or even the clearer signals from Soviet history, it would be equally easy to dig out the historical roots of peaceful accommodation in Georgia. History can explain either outcome!

The notion of an ethnic cauldron would not help us either. With the rapid outmigration of Armenians, Jews and Russians from 1959, Georgians make up nearly 70 percent of the population, with Armenians at 9 percent and Russians at 7.4 percent (Suny, 1988: 299). Most of the other minority populations live on the border with Turkey and in the mountainous regions of the Caucasus bordering on the Russian republic. The Ossetians cross the border between Georgia and Russia. The score for ethnic fractionalization in Georgia is .5, showing greater diversity than the world (.40) and the regional mean (.39) as well. However, as we note in our Armenia narrative, the country with the second lowest ethnic fractionalization score in the former Soviet Union is Azerbaijan, which suffered from a civil war; meanwhile the two countries with the greatest fractionalization in the FSU -- Kazakhstan at .69 and Kyrgyzstan at .66 -- did not have civil wars. It is therefore difficult to attribute any causal significance to Georgia’s ethnic fractionalization by itself, especially in light of the fact that our model made good predictions without reference to scores on ethnic fractionalization.

To be sure, in the post-Stalin period, Georgians were quite discriminatory toward minorities. In the late Soviet period, Georgians made up 67 percent of the republic's population. Yet in the 1969-70 school year, they accounted for 82.6 percent of the students in higher education. "National autonomy in Georgia had come to mean," concludes Suny

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(1988:304-05), "the exercise of local power against the unrepresented local minorities." It might be argued that Georgian discrimination against minorities was a powder keg ignited by the freedoms associated with glasnost. But it is doubtful that such discrimination was a significant factor in explaining levels of post-Soviet violence. For one, violence in Georgia had an intra-Georgian flavor (though not to civil war levels) as well as an inter-ethnic one. Second, titular discrimination against minorities was common in most republics, and Georgia hardly stands out as a particularly egregious transgressor against the Soviet principle of “brotherhood of peoples”.

Our narrative will therefore focus not on the grand historical sweep of Georgia or on ethnic grievances, but rather on the strategic issues that played an explanatory role in our theory and statistical results. We take this focus not to bias results in favor of our theory, but rather because we have a case in Georgia in regard to our theory of a “true positive”.

We now examine two periods in narrative detail. The first is from December 1991 (independence) through 1992, when the new Georgian government faced several insurgent threats, with one of them escalating in violence to be coded as a civil war. The second is the period from 1996 through 1999 when Georgia has had about a one percent probability higher than the world average for civil war, but no new one erupted. This is hardly a disconfirmation of the model, but since it is a case of greater susceptibility on average with no onset, it merits descriptive analysis.

Georgian Insurgencies in the Wake of Independence

In Georgia, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, peace has been elusive, both among nationality groups and among Georgian political factions. Electoral politics at the moment of transition were played out in an atmosphere of contending armed camps. In 1990, the radical nationalist candidate for the presidency Gia Chanturia was nearly killed in an assassination attempt, and at least two people were killed in armed clashes during that campaign. Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was then considered a moderate with impeccable nationalist credentials, won the election with his "Round Table/Free Georgia" coalition.

Gamsakhurdia quickly lost support among other leading Georgian figures. He had organized the election so that Jaba Ioseliani, an art history
professor who was leader of the Sakartvelos Mkhedrioni (Knights of Georgia), was not permitted to run. Ioseliani's band of 7,000 recruits, relying on weapons bought from demobilized Soviet soldiers who had fought in Afghanistan, established national credibility by fighting Soviet MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs) troops. But after being marginalized by Gamsakhurdia, Ioseliani mobilized the Knights to overthrow the Georgian president. Even Gamsakhurdia's former allies, disgusted by his erratic rule, soon joined the armed opposition, and a rump group of the National Guard joined as well. In early 1992 the cycle of armed combat led to a siege of Gamsakhurdia's official residence. He finally escaped, but the six-week battle cost of lives of 110 people, and Tbilisi became an armed camp with daily reports of explosions and armed attacks (FBIS, 920316).

With regard to nationality groups in Georgia, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was the scene of early bloodshed. Georgian titular authorities denied electoral standing to candidates who preached any form of secession, and this act alone took nationalist Ossetians outside of the democratic game. Ossetians appealed to Moscow, not only for the right to field candidates, but to protect them from threats that Georgian would be the sole official language of the republic. Ossetian nationalists began to terrorize Georgian villagers, and Georgians in Ossetia fought back by cutting off all electrical power, in the middle of Winter 1991, to South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, and by surrounding the city with 15,000 Georgian troops. Meanwhile, Georgians living in surrounding farming villages began to shoot missiles into Ossetian cities while Ossetians attacked Georgians travelling between farming villages. The Russian (now the CIS) army has played an arbitrating role, but the death toll was over 250 in 1991, and there were tens of thousands of refugees. This did not cross our threshold for a civil war.3

In Ajaria, a nationalist leader was assassinated in April 1991 during a demonstration in support of political autonomy. There was a spiral of

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3. In an interview in Moscow with Andrei Koshikov, Laitin told him why South Ossetia was not in the Fearon/Laitin dataset as an instance of civil war. He smiled and offered to tell me why. At that moment of potential mass killing, he was acting Defense Minister in a cabinet meeting with Yegor Gaidar as acting Prime Minister (Yeltsin then was his own Prime Minister, but was not at the meeting). They heard a report of a Georgian militia (made up of many irregulars, and even criminals) who were in formation to overrun south Ossetia. Gaidar ordered the army to stop them. The military leaders said that they would not do it without proper firepower. Gaidar accepted. But time was short, and the army sent attack helicopters. They bombed the forward positions of the militias and scared them to disband and return to Tbilisi. Then the army sent in paratroopers to clean up the roadways. This, said Koshikov, is why south Ossetia did not make it into our dataset, as the “preventive peacemaking,” in his reckoning, saved at least a 1,000 lives. (Interview conducted by Laitin, Moscow, June 27, 2002).
violence in the making; the old Ajarian elite was bribing the officers in the army garrisons in order to procure weapons. But this conflict, as with Ossetia, never crossed the threshold of 1,000 deaths.

The greatest bloodshed for Georgia has been spilled over Abkhazia. In the Stalinist period, many Abkhazis were deported, and those that remained were subject to unwanted Georgianization measures. Their hopes were lifted during perestroika, and Abkhazian leaders appealed to Gorbachev to allow them a higher level of administrative autonomy. The Georgian government was opposed, and there were violent clashes in July 1989. By 1990, Georgian deputies walked out of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet, giving the Abkhazian delegates the opportunity to declare sovereignty. They were willing to remain as part of a federal Georgia, but wanted Georgia to remain part of the Soviet Union, which gave Abkhazians some level of protection against Georgian predation. But Georgia shortly thereafter received its own independence, and when its parliament reinstated the 1921 constitution, with no specific mention of Abkhazia, violent conflict resumed, but now as a region not in the Soviet Union but in Georgia. The Georgian State Council sent units of the National Guard (which was really a set of private armies, including Ioseliani’s Knights of Georgia) that engaged in gratuitous violence, irrespective of the orders coming from the Georgian government. The Abkhazian autonomist movement got military support from other Caucasian national groups, and its guerrillas were able to force a Georgian military retreat out of the capital, Sukhumi (Otyrba, 1994).

The return to Georgia of Eduard Shevardnadze in 1992 to serve as head of state gave many Georgians hopes for peace. In 1978, while serving as chief of the Georgian Communist Party, demonstrations took place on the streets of Tbilisi to protest restrictions on the Georgian language's official status. Shevardnadze diplomatically gave in to the demands and avoided a possible round of violence. His heroic return to war-torn Georgia from an illustrious career as Minister of Foreign Affairs and pro-democrat in the late Soviet period therefore sparked optimism. But Shevardnadze could not douse the flames of violence. To be sure, he quickly negotiated a truce in Ossetia. However, Abkhazia remained a nightmare, and only military victory by Russian-supported Abkhazian troops ended open warfare. Russia was able to keep Georgia under constant threat of losing permanently its sovereignty over Abkhazia, which was a powerful bargaining position. In 1994, Shevardnadze capitulated to Russia, joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and its troops began to monitor the
Georgian/Abkhazian border, no longer threatening secession. They were subsequently complemented with a 125-member UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). A political agreement has not been reached as of 2003. Most of the Georgian refugees from Abkhazia have not as yet been resettled. Sporadic violence along the border mars chances for a political settlement. Yet by our reckoning, the civil war was over in 1994.

What then explains post-Soviet violence in Georgia, with a special concern for Abkhazia, which crossed the threshold to civil war?

Leadership

Contemporary observers of the post-Soviet ethnic scene are more likely to explain the violence in Georgia by focussing on Gamsakhurdia's exclusionary rhetoric and megalomaniacal ambitions (Suny 1995). This cannot be denied as a source of state breakdown. Unstable leadership signals to potential insurgents a high probability of success. It runs into trouble, however, in explaining why Gamsakhurdia’s successor Shevardnadze – as sane and responsible leader as could have been asked for – could not put a halt to a disastrous military campaign into Abkhazia by Georgian militias that cost the country many lives and the possibility of keeping the violence under the civil war threshold.

The Minority Commitment Problem

Independence meant for Georgia an opportunity for nation-building; but this opportunity, if grasped, had negative implications for minorities living in Georgia, and this created a commitment problem. Consider this issue from the language policy debate, in regard to the creation of an official language of state business. The Georgian language prospered in the Soviet period as a language of administration, education and culture. Nonetheless, the costs of accommodating to Georgian language -- one that has no value outside of the republic -- are somewhat higher for a variety of groups than would be costs for comparable groups accommodating to languages of international currency. Georgian is a Caucasian language, which is a separate family from Indo-European (of which Slavonic, Baltic, Romance,
Iranian and Armenian are members). Russians therefore have a harder time learning it. Ossetian and Armenian are both in the Indo-European family; their speakers have been adamantly opposed to Georgian language hegemony. Even Abkhazians, whose language is in the Caucasian family, have high costs adjusting to Georgian. Their language since the 1950s has relied upon a modified Cyrillic script, while the Georgian script is quite distinct. With Georgian being a non-Indo-European language with a non-Cyrillic and non-Latin alphabet, non-Georgians pay a high cost to assimilate. Indeed Russian-speaking Georgians had a difficult time in developing facility in Georgian (Hewitt, 1990). In reaction to the costs of learning Georgian, the Ossetian Popular Front appealed to Moscow rejecting the language measures reported in the Georgian press (in the 1988-1990 period) that would make Georgian the sole official language of the new republic. With only 14 percent of Ossetians knowing Georgian, the proposed Georgian language law presented a daunting challenge. Inasmuch as north Ossetians have done very well in securing higher education in Russia, south Ossetians felt highly discriminated against in Georgia (RFE, 910215).

Here then is the commitment problem. Minorities could calculate that the combination of low Georgian birth rates and low incentives for minorities to assimilate would give radical Georgian nationalists a sense that their hoped for “tip” toward Georgianization would not occur unless minority groups and Russian-speaking Georgians were intimidated and even terrorized. Knowing this, minorities could have calculated that it was better to fight for autonomy early, before a Georgian army would get sufficient training to quash early nationalist insurgents. Given the fact that both Georgian nationalists and non-titular minorities understood the difficulties of Georgian nation-building, could any Georgian leader have provided assurances to the minorities that their rights would be respected. To be sure, Gamsakhurdia had no such desire. Shevardnadze, however, very much wanted to provide assurances that minority mobility prospects would not be compromised by language decrees. But, given the extraordinary popularity of Georgianization in the public realm, and the popularity of nationalism among the militias (who were faster to mobilize against the Abkhazians than was the national army), government assurances would not be credible to the

\[\text{5}\] The country’s fertility rate decreased from 2.2 in 1990 to 1.1 in 2000, which is lower than the European Union average of 1.5 in 2000. The birth rate fell sharply from 17.1 (per 1000) in 1990 to 8.2 in 2001 (UN ECE 2003, p. 3).
minorities. Under such conditions, the best strategy for minorities was to mount an insurgency earlier rather than later.

*External Homeland*

Complementary to the issue of Georgian assurances to minority share of the national pie is the issue of credible threats by minority groups to the titular authorities (Brubaker, 1996, van Houten 1998, Posen 1993). To the extent that a minority has an external protector (e.g. the Russians in Ukraine, Latvia and Estonia), its security is assured. This puts a damper on any provocation by a titular nation-building government and it relieves the protected non-titular populations living there from the need to arm themselves. In Georgia, by contrast, the Ossetians (partially) and the Abkhazis (more fully) had no homeland to protect them, and by protecting themselves, they provoked the Georgians. Moreover, these minorities were used by Russia to weaken Georgian opposition to Russian dominance in the region. In a sense, without a homeland, these minorities became fools of an outside protector.

*Capacity for Insurgency*

Our model points to the importance of the geographic and security situation in regard to ethnic minorities that help drive civil violence. These factors help explain why any of these regions were potential candidates for civil war insurgencies.

First is the issue of institutional resources. The Soviet Union gave “titulars” different levels of institutional resources depending on their status in the union. At the top of the territorially based hierarchy were Union Republics such as Georgia. While all Union Republics achieved statehood in 1991, no other level was so rewarded. Below the Union Republics were the ASSR’s (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics), and in Georgia both the Abkhazis and the Ajaris were ASSRs. Below this level were Autonomous Oblasts, of which South Ossetia was one. All three regions (but less so for Ossetia, and not at all for Javakhetia, the region where Armenians live, but without any institutional resources) had sufficient institutional strength to make credible secessionist threats.

Second is the issue of geography and concentration. All three regions are situated in mountainous ranges of the Caucasus. Moreover, Georgia is
endowed with thousands of rivers (about 25,000, most of them less than 25 km long) either draining into the Black Sea to the west or through Azerbaijan to the Caspian Sea to the east (See UN ECE 2003). As the world well knows the travails of the Russian army in regard to the separatist movement in Chechnya, the Caucasus represent the ideal breeding ground for insurgencies.

Furthermore, all three autonomous regions had significant Georgian minorities living in the region, giving Georgians living in them a sense of threat were these movements to succeed in achieving independence. In the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic, the Abkhazis form only a small minority of 18 percent of the population (with Georgians comprising 48 percent). In the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, Ossetians constitute 66 percent of the population, while Georgians are at 29%. In the Ajar Autonomous Republic, Ajars are considered Georgian by ethnicity and language, and therefore there is no special census category for them. But Georgians make up 80 percent of the population of Ajaria, and more than half of them are Sunni Muslims, suggesting perhaps 45 percent of the population is made up of Ajars. Significant minority populations in institutionally distinct regions, with the dominant population having a large demographic presence, presents a commitment problem not only for the national state in regard to the autonomous minorities, but for the aspiring national states in regard to the dominant nationality of the status quo state.

**Rural Social Structure**

Georgia's rural social structure appears to have maintained the basis for terrorist organization. Georgia had a vibrant underground economy in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union. It is estimated to have reached 25 percent of the Georgian GNP, among the highest in the Union. A quasi-anthropological study (Mars and Altman, 1983) to explain the success of this economy, in the face of strict punishments by communist authorities, pointed to the importance of "network cores" that were constructed from family and business ties by those people who were most successful in this economy. These cores could be successfully and surreptitiously constructed because, in Mars and Altman's view (p. 548), Georgian village life is still based upon a culture of "honour" and "shame". This culture of honour pushes men to achieve personal economic successes that were not possible in the context of Soviet communism; but it also prevents members of the network from informing on illegal practices to central authorities. The tightness of village
networks, it is concluded, helps explain both the motivation and the security of the Georgian underground economy. It is this same village organization that allows for the construction of commando organizations to fight intra-Georgian as well as anti-minority battles in the course of a nationalist revival.

Summary

The separate factors addressed in the previous sections add up to an insurgency account of civil war onset. First, at independence in December 1991, the Georgian state was weak on several dimensions. Independence came so rapidly and without preparation, the new state structures were hardly able to maintain order. Russia, the metropole, was now itself a new state, and could not protect the leaders of the Soviet successor states. Moreover, old Soviet institutions in Russia were more sympathetic with the minorities who were pro-Soviet than they were with the titulars of the Union Republics who sought to undermine the Soviet Union. In Georgia, these issues were greater than elsewhere because the Georgian government refused to join the CIS; this gave added incentive for the Russians to compel Georgia to play by Russian rules through the military support provided to the Abkhazis. A weak state that over time is likely to strengthen gives minorities an incentive to bolt.

State weakness was exacerbated by the fact that the first president of independent Georgia turned out to be an apparent psychopath. Not only criminal militias but also well-educated moderate Georgians quickly came to the conclusion that Gamsakhurdia had to be deposed. While a variety of opposition groups were lining up at the Presidential palace to compel the president to stand down from power, ethnic entrepreneurs saw this moment as even more propitious to seek separate statehood for their republics.

A final aspect of state weakness is the enormous strength of local networks that were built on a social structure of honor, and thus not easily penetrated by state authority. In the Soviet period, the level and scope of criminal networking among Georgians was legendary. These networks were able to mobilize against Gamsakhurdia’s leadership, and to act provocatively against Abkhazia -- both of them signals of a weak state.

Combine state weakness with the commitment problem faced not only by Gamsakhurdia but also by Shevardnadze. The Ossetians and the Abkhaz
(but not the Ajaris), whose social mobility was based on skills in Russian, were to be marginalized with Georgian as the state language. Minority leaders feared that language was only the tip of the iceberg. No matter how much Shevardnadze appealed to his human rights record in the Soviet era, he could not commit future Georgian leaders to guarantee good mobility prospects for non-Georgians in Georgia.

Finally, the geography of Georgia and the demography of the autonomous regions gave insurgents a strategic advantage in defying the state. The Georgian armed forces were not able to crush the Russian-aided Abkhazian army that was able to terrorize some 200,000 Georgians from their homes in Abkhazia, turning them into refugees. Georgian troops have been stymied in trying to penetrate the deep gorges that would allow them to move into Sukumi from the Georgian border with Abkhazia.

In sum, state weakness (with an expectation of future strength), a commitment problem faced by the state, and geographical advantage for insurgency combine to account for Georgia’s civil war in 1992. Because Abkhazia had an institutional advantage over Ossetia, and more support from Russia (which did not want Ossetian autonomy in fear of activating North Ossetians living in an Autonomous Oblast in Russia), it was Abkhazia among the three mobilized autonomies that pushed its conflict to the level of civil war.

**A Return to Danger (1996-1999)**

The Georgian world began to stabilize after 1994. A more-or-less stable armistice in Abkhazia was achieved in 1994. By the end of 1996, the governments of Georgia and South Ossetia renounced the use of force against one another, and Georgia further renounced the use of sanctions against South Ossetia. And there was in this period a noticeable economic recovery. Between 1990 and 1995 Georgia’s GDP declined more than that of any other former Soviet republic. In 1994, GDP was only 23.4% of its 1989 level. Georgia for a while was completely dependent on foreign aid. However, the increasing political stability in the mid-1990s yielded moderate economic recovery. GDP bottomed in 1995 when Georgia complied with a strict International Monetary Fund program, and the issuance of a new currency, the lari. Rapid growth in 1996 (11.2%) and 1997 (10.6%) was followed by slower but steady growth for the rest of the century, moving between 2 to 4.5% a year. Annual inflation as measured by
the consumer price index (CPI) was 22,470% in 1995, but fell to 39% in 1996 and again to 6.9% in 1997. In 2001, GDP grew for the seventh consecutive year, although it was still only 33.3% of its 1989 level (UN ECE 2003, pp. 5-6).

And the Abkhaz conflict has been basically cauterized. UNOMIG, authorized in August 1993 by Security Council resolution 858 (but revised following the signing, on 14 May 1994, of the Moscow Agreement), was mandated to establish a cease-fire and separation of forces. The CIS peacekeeping forces drew a Security Zone, where military units of both sides were forbidden to enter, of about twelve kilometers from both sides of the border. On both sides of the Security Zone, a broader Restricted Weapons Zone was established, prohibiting tanks, armored transport vehicles, and artillery and large mortars. UNOMIG monitors and verifies compliance with the Moscow Agreement, and observes the operations of a CIS peacekeeping force, which as of 2003 was composed of some 1,700 officers and soldiers from the Russian Federation, the only country that supplies military personnel. Its soldiers maintain checkpoints on both sides of the cease-fire line. UNOMIG is legally independent of the CIS force, but the two missions cooperate.  

For some time, the UN and the Russian Federation conducted their separate yet unsuccessful negotiations toward a political settlement. However, in November 1997, all existing peace process efforts were brought together under the umbrella of the United Nations. The UN assumed the chairmanship of the “Geneva peace process,” and the Russian Federation was to serve as a “facilitator.” The Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the OSCE, all have observer status. Since 1997 the UN Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, (HROAG), with the participation of the OSCE, has been functioning as an integral part of UNOMIG. The day-to-day work of the Office includes visiting inmates in prison and assessing their conditions; capacity-building among local NGOs; monitoring criminal trials; and conducting training seminars for the de facto law enforcement agencies, mass media and NGOs.

In reports to the Security Council by the Secretary General throughout this period, it was typically noted with distress that the political situation is

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6. This paragraph is based on material on the official website of UNOMIG: [http://www.unomig.org/](http://www.unomig.org/).
not yet resolved, as Abkhaz authorities refuse to accept the consensus among international officials that Abkhazia must remain within Georgia. But the operational situation on the Abkhaz-Georgian border solidified. The conditions there were criminalized but basically demilitarized. (UN Security Council 2003, paragraphs 4, 15-18, 21; see also Boden 2002). This was encouraging news that the Secretary General can report, as there was by the end of the century no active insurgency in Georgia. The culture of violence, however, continued to mark post-Soviet Georgia. The probability of civil war by our model remains well above the world and regional average. Yet there have been no outbreaks of new civil wars.

Nonetheless, as of 1999, there was no real peace. Around the capital, unofficial militias remained a threat to political stability. In February 1998, President Shevardnadze survived a second assassination attempt. Gamsakhurdia supporters, who remained in the military, revolted for a day in October 1998, fighting with government troops but quickly surrendering.

In Abkhazia, in May 1995 the White Legion, Forest Brotherhood and other Georgian groups renewed their attacks on the Abkhazian army, which finally lost control of the Gali region. But during the "six-day war" that followed, Abkhaz forces from the north soundly defeated the Georgian guerrillas. President Shevardnadze refused to send in Georgian army reinforcements, resulting in the displacement of 30,000 to 40,000 civilians from the Gali region. The Abkhazians set fire to some thousand houses, turning the refugees into long-term IDP’s (Cheterian 1998).

Meanwhile, the political status of Abkhazia was unresolved and outbreaks of violence continued to erupt. Peacekeepers from the Russian Federation, under CIS authority, along with United Nations observers, were for this period stationed in Abkhazia. The Georgian Government offered the region considerable autonomy in order to encourage a settlement, which would allow the displaced to return home. Fighting in neighboring Chechnya (within the Russian Federation) has generated fears that that conflict will spill over into Georgia. Several thousands of Chechen refugees moved into Georgia's Pankisi Gorge in late 1999, adding to the tensions between the Governments of Georgia and the Russian Federation (UN ECE 2003, p. 4).

Within Abkhazia, there was yet another potential violent conflict brewing. Gali is the home base of the Mingrelians, the ethnic minority of former President Gamsakhurdia, who have organized their own ethnic
militias. In several respects, the Mingrelians have been the great losers in the history of the South Caucasus. They supported Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and subsequently paid a heavy cost for the war in Abkhazia. They continued under Shevardnadze’s presidency to be manipulated, and there were suggestions that they would turn their militias on to state authority.

Nor was South Ossetia free from potential violence. Because of the near insurgency of the late 1980s and early 1990s, regional concentration of ethnic groups has been vastly increased. Probably fifty percent of the Ossetians who lived in Georgia proper or in South Ossetia migrated to North Ossetia (in the Russian Federation), while a less significant number have gone to South Ossetia. Meanwhile, many Georgians living in South Ossetia have moved to Georgia proper. Very few Georgians – save for some elderly -- remain in Tskhinvali, the Ossetian capital, as most left when the conflict started. Some 5,000 Georgians, by official estimates, returned to Tskhinvali, but unofficial Ossetian sources estimate a far lower figure (Cvetkovski, n.d., chap. 4). Higher degrees of regional concentration, while reducing the commitment problem, make insurgency easier to carry out, and thus Ossetia was perhaps more dangerous to Georgia in the late Shevardnadze period than it was in 1991.

Moreover, a constructed memory of genocide incites Ossetians to expect yet another war. Memories of the massacre of 1920, when Ossetia declared itself independent from Georgia are often recalled. According to Ossetian sources, some 5,000 Ossetians were killed, and 13,000 subsequently died from hunger and epidemics in that struggle. As the Chairman of the Supreme Council of South Ossetia (later president), Ludwig Chibirov, put it in regard to 1991: “this is the second time in one generation that we have been the victims of genocide by the Georgians; in that way our demand for independence should be seen not as idealism but as pragmatism” (Chetkovski, n.d., chap. 4, quoted from a conversation with between author and Chibirov, in July 1995).

However, breaking a deadlock, in May 1996 the two sides signed a “Memorandum on measures for providing security and joint confidence” in which the two sides renounced the use of force. Several meetings between Shevardnadze and president of South Ossetia Ludwig Chibirov and their respective heads of governments followed (Cvetkovski, n.d.).
Nonetheless, danger is ever present. In early 2003, an apparently innocuous statement of Shevardnadze about the possible conducting of an anti-criminal operation in Kvemo Kartli region set off a firestorm. In response, the authorities of South Ossetia stated that if the operation were to take place, a new armed conflict between Georgians and Ossetians could recur. Georgia, in its state-building efforts, seemed not able to root out criminal operations in its regions without being threatened with insurgency (Internnews/Georgia, January 2003).

Relations with Ajaria, the most peaceful of the three autonomies, took a downturn after 1995, when Georgia’s new constitution described Georgia as a unitary, indivisible state. The Ajaria-based All-Georgian Revival Union (UGR), which Aslan Abashidze (chairman of Ajaria's Supreme Council) leads, and came third in the November 1995 parliamentary elections, sought a free economic zone in Batumi. But when this proposal was defeated, Abashidze was livid, and accused the central government of deceit. He accused Tbilisi of seeking to destabilize Ajaria, and hinted at secession. For a while at least, his threat was credible. The Russian military group based in Batumi was providing Abashidze with armed support, supplying weapons and military advice to the quasi-legal militia created by Abashidze to guard Ajaria's border from "terrorists". Suspicions were therefore running high. For example, a motorcade of Russian soldiers was stopped on the road from Tbilisi to Batumi in January 2003. For nearly twenty-four hours, more than forty Russian officers, who refused to be escorted back to Tbilisi, awaited approval from Georgian authorities (Internnews/Georgia, January 2003). In the end, the Russian contingent was permitted to pass. In return for Russian military support, Abashidze accepted a Russian military presence as his only reliable guarantee of his regional political base. To be sure, many of Abashidze’s Ajar opponents believe he has overplayed his Moscow hand, but factionalization within Ajaria nearly forced Abashidze to provoke an insurgency to recreate regional unity (Anjaparidze, 1997).

Georgia faced in 1998 yet another incipient insurgency in the south. Ninety percent of the population in Samtskhe-Javaketi region is Armenian and it has few contacts with Georgia proper due to poor transport and communication infrastructure. Assuring its de facto (but without institutional autonomy, almost no de jure) independent status is the presence of the Russian 62nd Military Base at Akhalkalaki. Some 7-8,000 local people depend on the Russian military presence for jobs. This emboldens Armenian gangs. Georgian army units on their way to maneuvers in Akhalkalaki in
August 1998 were stopped by armed Armenians, who were demanding autonomy. Ervan Sherinian, one of the leaders of the Armenian people's movement Javakh in the Akhalkalaki region, insisted that his was not an irredentist movement. Rather he opposed the administrative proposal attaching of their homeland Javakhetia to other regions so as to water down its Armenian flavor. Although these grievances seem relatively easy to address, the possibilities for insurgency are enhanced by that fact that over half the 3,000 troops stationed at the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki are Armenians. The Russian government could therefore threaten an Armenian uprising if Georgia did not comply with CIS policies (Cheterian 1998; Robinson 2002).

Georgian relations with Russia remained unstable, giving Russia an incentive to activate opposition in Georgia. After the failed assassination attempt against him in 1998, Shevardnadze accused forces that "cannot forgive us for Afghanistan, the Berlin Wall, the liberation of Europe, the oil pipelines and the Euro-Asian corridor." Taking its cue from the president, the Georgian parliament ordered a blockade of Russian military bases in Georgia, to prevent the attackers from leaving the country. But the question Georgia that remained unresolved is whether Russia is ever going to give up its military ambitions in the Caucasus, and if it does, what will happen in the regions of Abkhazia, Ajaria and Javakhetia, where the Russian bases are located? At first the regional unrest worked to Moscow's advantage, enabling it to force Georgia to join the CIS. But the Russians understand their longer-term risks, especially as Georgia works more closely with the US in anti-terrorism maneuvers. They have the lever to incite local populations (who were once loyal to them) in arms against an only minimally more stable Georgian state (Cheterian, December 1998).

In sum, our model assesses that civil war probability from 1996 through 1999 was low, but above the world mean. Given the potential for insurgency or its recrudescence in this period around the capital, in Abkhazia, in Mingrelia, in Ossetia, in Ajaria, and now in Samtskhe-Javakheti, we can say that the model was correct in pointing to an above-average but not a high probability susceptibility to a civil war onset. Still poverty, a weak state, mountains, and anocracy make Georgia vulnerable to new insurgencies. An added factor is the interest of the Russian Federation in keeping the Georgian state unstable and in giving aid to potential insurgents. This outside intervention (no matter what role Russia or the CIS play in
seeking solutions) emboldens minorities and oppositions within Georgia to keep insurgent hopes alive.

In 2003, after a peaceful revolution (locally called the “Rose Revolution”), Shevardnadze was forced out of office. Mikhail Saakashvili came to power on a crest of popular support and as leader of the opposition National Movement, and in January 2004 was elected president of the republic garnering some 96 percent of the vote. He quickly resolved the Ajaria secession through the coercive forcing of former regional strongman Aslan Abashidze from power. He got military support from the U.S. as part of its anti-terrorist campaign through the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), a program that enabled him to strengthen state control over paramilitaries operating semi-autonomously in the state. Russian president Putin, in the face of growing American power to his southern flank, held back from aggressively pushing for Abkhazian independence or incorporation into Russia. But in regard to both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Saakashvili has up till now accepted armistice rather than pushed for peace.

The peaceful revolution in Georgia (and later in Ukraine) in which massive demonstrations led to the abdication of power by elected but authoritarian presidents is troublesome for our theory – with the Polity IV score at the anocratic level in 2003 at +5, it will likely go up in regard to the fair election of 2004 such that Georgia will be experiencing political instability, a factor that should keep up a relatively high probability of a civil war onset. The massive demonstrations in the capital city further revealed the weakness of state power, which should have, in our model, induced rebels in the countryside and in the separatist regions into further insurgent activity. But no such thing happened. The UN-sponsored peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia, and the external oversight of events in Georgia both by the U.S. and by Russia may well have served as the deterrent against insurgent revitalization in Georgia.
References

Anjaparidze, Zaal (1997) “Georgia: A conflict may be brewing between Tbilisi and Ajaria, seen until now as Georgia's most peaceful region” The Jamestown Foundation, Prism, Volume 3, Issue 19 (November 21)  
http://www.jamestown.org/pubs/view/pri_003_019_002.htm


Foreign Broadcast Information Services (various dates), Washington D.C. In the text, the particular date of broadcast is indicated by FBIS followed by the last two digits of the year, then the month, and then the day, as six continuous numbers.


Internews/Georgia (various dates)  
http://www.internews.org.ge/eng/new.asp?i=43


Radio Free Europe, daily reports. In the text, the particular date of broadcast is indicated by RFE followed by the last two digits of the year, then the month, and then the day, as six continuous numbers.


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