

Georgia: Remarkable Reforms and Shifting Norms

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Part I: Introduction

Georgia, a small mountainous country in the Caucuses with a coastline on the Black Sea, has experienced foreign occupation for centuries. Tucked in between the nearby borders of some of the region's greatest powers: Russia, Turkey, and Iran, Georgia has been subject to Soviet, Ottoman, Iranian, and even Mongolian rule. After breaking from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country finally achieved independence for a period that lasted beyond a few years.

Nevertheless, Georgia has undergone a rocky transition: after independence, the country was immersed in extreme poverty and lacked basic services such as running water and electricity. In the early 1990s, Georgia's economy contracted by 65% over three years, which represented an unprecedented collapse even among former Soviet Union states (World Bank 2018, xiii). The country was ranked by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Then, under the leadership of a charismatic and cunning young leader, Mikheil Saakashvili who executed a far-reaching and ambitious campaign of rigorous reforms, Georgia experienced an astonishing turnaround in its governance and a revitalization of its economy. Just a decade later, in 2010, it was ranked by Transparency International as number 1 in the world in relative reduction of corruption. In 2012, it was ranked 12th in the world for investments by the 'Doing Business' indicators (World Bank 2018 – "Fighting Corruption Report", 7). As recently as 2018, Georgia ranks 41 out of 180 nations in Transparency International's governance indicators (Transparency International, 6). How did Mikheil Saakashvili achieve such tremendous gains? How did Georgia experience such astonishing improvement, making it the darling of the governance reform world, and the subject of many reports and case studies seeking to understand its success? Recent studies in the social sciences, and publications by development agencies such as the World Bank, suggest that the answer may lie, in part, in Saakashvili's ability to design and implement reforms that shifted social norms in Georgia. In this paper, we will look at Saakashvili's sweeping reforms through a 'social norm' lens and seek to better understand how his reforms cultivated a 'new mindset' among Georgians, which eventually lead to Georgia's total transformation from an impoverished and conflict-ridden Soviet state, to the sole bastion of democratic governance in its region (World Bank 2015 – Fighting Corruption, 99).

Part II: When Corruption is a Social Norm

Recent scholarship over the past decade in the behavioral sciences has revealed how social norms are powerful motivators behind the way individuals act. Social norms are defined as “a set of mutual expectations about the right way to behave” (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 25). Put differently, social norms are a “belief about what others do, and about what others expect us to do” (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 25). The word “mutual” is crucial to this definition: in a social norm, the expectation must flow both ways: it is both how an individual anticipates that others will act, and how others anticipate any given individual to act. Social norms announce and declare that: ‘In our society, in our group, in our country, *this* is the way we act.’

Social norms hold tremendous sway over individual choices on how to behave in any given situation. In 2017, two professors at The Fletcher School at Tufts University: Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, a professor of aid practice and effectiveness, and Diana Chigas, a professor of international negotiation and conflict resolution, authored a paper “Social Norms, Corruption & Fragility” that sought to adapt the enormous amount of literature on social norm change to anti-corruption efforts in the fields of international development. Chigas and Scharbatke-Church’s paper synthesizes the recent research on social norms, describes the various dimensions and components of social norms, and explains how social norms can enable, drive and otherwise influence corruption.

Chigas and Scharbatke-Church write that social norms manifest themselves in collective patterns of behavior that are: 1) thought to be typical and commonly preferred; 2) deemed appropriate; and 3) maintained by social influence. As such, social norms are reinforcing phenomena, and hold the potential to entrench vicious cycles of behavior. But as this paper will examine: Social norms can also entrench virtuous cycles. In the Republic of Georgia, President Saakashvili shifted the social norm around corruption from a vicious cycle, to a virtuous one.

Social norms are affected by a range of factors: the size of the group to which they belong, the purpose for which they are practiced, and the strength of the influence they hold. Social norms can be held by a small and very particular sub-group within a population, or by an entire country (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 39). Social norms can be practiced for the purpose of guaranteeing vital protection during times of instability and vulnerability, or for lining pockets and fattening wallets during times of stability (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 50). Social norms vary in strength, dependent upon a number of conditions such as: the severity of the social sanction if the norm is violated; the ‘detectability’ or visibility of the behavior that the social norm encourages; and the level of cohesion within the group that holds the norm. All of these factors contribute to the potency of the norm’s influence over society – the overall ‘strength’ of the norm. The stronger the norm is, the harder it is to change (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 55). Yet, as the case of Georgia demonstrates – changing an entrenched social norm is possible, and can be done.

The Economist succinctly summarized the shift from vicious cycles of corruption to virtuous cycles of transparency in a 2010 article aptly titled “Georgia’s Mental Revolution”:

When the [Soviet] empire collapsed, Georgia descended into a near-failed state: dysfunctional and disfigured by banditry and ethnic conflict...Today Georgia has re-invented itself as the star of the Caucasus. It is less corrupt than most former Soviet republics...Its police do not take bribes and electricity is no longer a luxury. Most important, people are no longer surprised by such success. The biggest transformation is in their minds....the mental shift which has occurred in Georgia will make it hard to turn the country backwards (*Economist*, 40).

As *The Economist* notes, Georgia’s “mental shift”, now entrenched via a self-fortifying virtuous cycle, will be equally hard to reverse. Now, exactly how does a so-called “mental revolution” in Georgia lead to such comprehensive societal reformation? What does a “mental revolution” have to do with a country’s politics and the challenging pursuit of good governance?

The answer lies within the power of perception, and its potent influence on individuals’ assumptions, expectations, mental models, and ultimately, on their behaviors. It turns out, how a person within a community *thinks* about corruption, is a critical key to understanding if a person will *act* in a corrupt way. In other words, as the World Bank writes: “Seeing things

differently may be a critical component of doing things differently" (World Bank 2015, World Development Report, 61). In order to better understand Georgia's extraordinary turn-around, let us now further explore the emerging understanding within the social sciences of the interplay between perception, assumption, expectation, and mental models.

Part II: The Power of Perception

Turning now to the theoretical literature: a number of influential studies have found that a variety of behaviors – which can eventually coalesce into broad social change – are all highly contingent upon cognitive processes (such as perception) and beliefs (such as trust). Scholarship in the behavioral sciences has put forward theories which assert that humans act based upon how they *perceive* others to act in the present, and how they *believe* others will act in the future. In other words, individuals: first observe the behaviors of others, then make mental calculations and predictions about how they expect others to behave, and ultimately decide how to act according to their calculations.

A. ‘Saints, Sinners, and the Regular Folks In-Between’

Behavioral science scholarship over the past decade or so has challenged the dominant theories in the field, such as public choice approach and behavioral game theory (Ostrom, 239). In her article “Challenges and growth: the development of the interdisciplinary field of institutional analysis”, economist Elinor Ostrom writes:

“Evidence from field and experimental research thus challenges the basic underlying model of individual behavior used in neoclassical economics, public choice theory, and game theory. In some settings, individuals do contribute to public goods, do restrict their use of a resources, and do trust one another contrary to theoretical predictions” (Ostrom, 255).

Here, Ostrom brings together the (at the time) emerging scholarship in the field that has radically re-thought traditional approaches to ‘individual rational behavior’ and challenged conventions about behavior in the social sciences. Surveying the contemporary literature on behavioral sciences to-date, Ostrom identifies a number of the assumptions that “are shared across these new theories of individual behavior” (Ostrom, 256). The assumption most relevant

to social norm-shifting, and therefore most relevant for our purposes here, is the assumption that: “preferences may change over time in light of interactions among participants” (Ostrom, 256). The interactions between individuals, and their ability to communicate with one another, learn from one another, and respond to one another, is critical to understanding behaviors.

Ostrom writes:

“Now one needs to ask how individuals provide reliable signals to each other about their preferences and intentions and how they gain information about the actions and outcomes of others. How individuals learn about these factors also strongly affects predicted and actual outcomes...Once successful ‘contingent cooperators’ are noticed by others, these successful strategies may be learned and adopted more widely in a population” (Ostrom, 257).

In her synthesis of the scholarship, Ostrom emphasizes the central role of communication and trust in individuals’ actions, and highlights that preferences change over time based upon these interactions. Ostrom also highlights a powerfully insightful quote from behavioral economist Colin Camerer, wherein he writes: “Institutional arrangements can be understood as responding to a world in which there are some sociopaths and some saints, but mostly regular folks who are capable of both kinds of behavior” (Ostrom, 257).

Applying this briefly to the case-study at hand: we cannot assume that all of Georgia’s street patrol police extorted bribes from citizens because they are categorically ‘sinners’, nor can we assume that everyday Georgians were willing to pay bribes because they also fell into the ‘sinner’ camp. Any given society will always have both the saintly outliers who refuse to give or take bribes out of stubbornly held principles of moral purity, and the sinner outliers who will demand excessive bribes regardless of the wider social norm.

As discussed above, for Georgians prior to the presidency of Saakashvili, paying the bribe to avoid police harassment was part of the wider social norm. Georgians assumed and expected that other people were paying the bribe, and the patrol police expected Georgian citizens to pay when demanded. Based on their mutual anticipation of what others were doing, average Georgians continue to pay bribes, and officials continued demanding bribes. To refuse to pay the bribe when all others were paying means that you will miss out on the benefits that paying

minor bribes will bring: temporary immunity from police harassment, guaranteed service delivery such as electricity, or an expedited permit service. To pay the bribe when no one else is, means you will be wasting your money because the bribe in fact will not bring you preferential treatment. The key to achieving successful anti-corruption reform in Georgia, was how to shift the social norm from ‘paying and taking bribes is the way of life in Georgia’ to ‘we do not pay or take bribes in Georgia.’

Ostrom synthesizes and summarizes various scholars’ conclusions to highlight that: people’s preferences are not stable; that people’s own preferences are constantly interacting with the preferences’ of others; that, given the opportunity to communicate and coordinate, people will often work together to find the most beneficial outcome for both – and lastly, that these practices, once observed to be beneficial, will be “adopted more widely” throughout a society. These conclusions hold sweeping implications not just for the field of institutional analysis, but also for the bureaucrats and technocrats who are designing and implementing interventions and reforms that seek to modify individual behaviors and catalyze wide-scale behavioral change.

B. A Government’s Legitimacy

In order for a government to catalyze wide-scale voluntary behavioral change, the government must be viewed by its citizens as legitimate. In their journal article “Conceptualizing Legitimacy, Measuring Legitimate Beliefs”, social science scholars Margaret Levi, Audrey Sacks and Tom Tyler open their piece with the statement: “Legitimacy derives from the beliefs citizens hold about the normative appropriateness of government structures, officials, and processes” (Levi, Sacks & Tyler, 354). In their piece, the authors argue that government legitimacy has two necessary prior conditions: the trustworthiness of the government, and the existence of procedural justice. Put differently: government will lose its legitimacy when it loses citizens’ trust, and/or when procedural justice is absent or corroded to the point of arbitrariness. When these two antecedents are in place, citizens will perceive their government as legitimate, and citizens will believe that the government “deserves deference” (Levi et al., 354).

The authors explicitly highlight that one of the central tasks of new political leaders is laying down the foundation of legitimacy. Levi, Sacks, and Tyler write: “When a new government comes into being, a key factor shaping its success is the degree to which it can establish legitimacy among its citizens” (Levi et al., 355). As we will see later in the paper, Saakashvili seemed to be intuitively aware of this. Saakashvili’s first acts as President struck at the heart these two principles: Saakashvili immediately went to work to both instill trust *and* restore procedural justice.

C. Tipping Points

How individuals perceive one another, and how they anticipate others will act, is a fundamental component of how individuals interact. In one seminal study, Nobel Laureate and professor emeritus of economics at Harvard University, Thomas Schelling, sought to better understand why there were so few stable racially integrated neighborhoods in the United States. Previously, University of Chicago sociologist Morton M. Grodzins pursued work on this phenomenon, researching why whites would leave neighborhoods once a certain number of black families moved in. Grodzins described this moment of en-masse ‘white flight’ as the “tipping point”, thereby coining the now popular term (Grodzins, 12). Schelling built and elaborated upon Grodzins’ work, seeking to understand how these “discriminatory individual choices” and behaviors interacted with one another (Schelling, 143). In his abstract, Schelling writes: “This is an abstract study of the interactive dynamics of discriminatory individual choices...The systemic effects are found to be overwhelming: there is no simple correspondence of individual incentive to collective results...A general theory of ‘tipping’ begins to emerge” (Schelling, 143).

Junfu Zhang, an economist at Clark University, describes the results of Schelling’s research as follows:

Schelling’s most striking finding is that moderate preferences for same-color neighbors at the individual level can be amplified into complete residential segregation at the macro level. For example, if every agent requires at least half of her neighbors to be of the same color – a preference far from extreme – the final outcome, after a series of moves, is almost always complete [neighborhood] segregation (Edsall 2015, paragraph 9).

Zhang's observation astutely summarizes Schelling's most startling finding: that big and quick social change can happen as a result of only a minor preference held by an individual. In other words: it is not whites' *desire* to live in fully white neighborhoods that results in neighborhood segregation and 'white flight', but in whites' perceptions of whether or not other whites will leave the neighborhood, that leads to 'white flight'.¹ Whites make the calculation, based upon their perceptions, that other whites will leave, and so they choose to move out of the neighborhood pre-emptively. Whites' choices compound and cascade through the neighborhood, until all whites have disappeared, effectively segregating neighborhoods.

In Schelling's original article, he seeks to describe the role of 'speculation' and 'anticipation' in peoples' actions. Schelling writes:

Speculation has been adduced as an aggravating factor. Whites may respond not to the number or percentage of blacks currently present, but to the anticipated increase in the number. They may, that is, anticipate the process. There will still be a cumulative process: those whites who evacuate in anticipation may enhance the belief of other whites in the inevitability of the process (Schelling, 185).

Schelling's work revealed the importance of individually-held perceptions in driving collective social phenomena. In Schelling's study, seemingly isolated individual choices – to move or not to move? – turned out to be far from 'individual': individuals were making their choices based upon how they *anticipated* and *speculated* others might act.

The term "tipping point" became commonly known in the United States after the publication of author Malcolm Gladwell's wildly popular book *The Tipping Point*. In *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell borrows the term from the medical field of epidemiology. While Gladwell invokes the term differently, some of the basic notions he conveys about how fads, trends, and behavioral changes 'spread' throughout society, share the same implication as Grodzins' and Schelling's

¹ This commentary is not meant to absolve the white population from any responsibility in this phenomenon, or to defend that their actions in moving out of the neighborhoods were not "racist". This example is discussed only because it is the seminal study on the topic of the effects of personal speculation, anticipation, and expectations about others' behavior. The potentially racist motivations of whites – which no doubt existed to some degree – in this scenario is no small matter, but the racist nature of the motivation was not the primary focus of the study, nor of my discussion of it here.

works: namely that a variety of social phenomena can reinforce and react to one another, quickly causing sweeping change through society. In other words: rapid, revolutionary, behavioral change in society can, and *does*, happen. According to Gladwell, the “tipping point” is a situation wherein: “the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is – contrary to our expectations – a certainty.” (Gladwell, 14). Therefore, the “tipping point” phenomenon, which has been observed by scholars in a variety of settings, demonstrates that fundamental change *is* possible.

What does all of this mean for our purposes here? How does all of this relate to our study? In Georgia, did the norm shift and spread in this epidemic-like way, like a fashion fad, or a virus? Not quite. But, as Gladwell, writes: “What must underlie a successful epidemic....is the bedrock belief that change is possible, that people can radically transform their behavior or beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus” (Gladwell, 258). In order to satisfy Gladwell’s key ingredient for a ‘successful epidemic’, the majority of the Georgian population would need to be captivated by the belief that change is possible. Lucky for Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili was audacious enough to believe that such change was possible, charismatic enough to convince people of this belief, and tenacious enough to doggedly pursue converting this belief into reality.

Part III: The Backdrop: A Brief History of Corruption in Georgia

When Mikail Saakashvili ousted the sitting president Eduard Shevardnadze during the Rose Revolution in 2003, he inherited a state weakened by decades – if not centuries – of foreign occupation, pandemic poverty, horrific ethnic conflict, and deeply-rooted corrupt practices. In order to better understand the extent of the intractability of Georgia’s corruption, Georgia’s political history, its tradition of favor-dealing to kinship networks, and its history of corrupt economic practices must be better understood.

Under the Soviet Union, Georgia held the notorious reputation of being the most corrupt republic within the USSR. (Stefes, 75). Eminent economist Gregory Grossman, a leading authority on the economy of the Soviet Union, coined the term ‘second economy’ to refer to

the shadow, informal economy that flourished underground within the communist system of the USSR. Grossman writes that Georgia's economy formed the backbone of the greater USSR's 'second economy' and that illicit black-market activity was carried out in Georgia with 'unrivaled scope and daring' (Grossman, 35).

Political scientist Ronald Suny writes that, in the central Caucasus, "the normal way of doing business has been through bribery, favoritism, [and] distribution of benefits to one nationality over another." (Stefes, 75). Georgian civil society leaders and activists Levan Ramishvili and Tamar Chergoleishvili describe how the Soviet Union's inability to provide basic services to its citizenry led to the need for Georgians to be creative and resourceful in securing a livelihood: "People remedied [this lack of public services] through the exploitation of personal support networks. These networks became a primary social asset and were crucial to obtaining and distributing goods and resources" (Ramishvili and Chergoleishvili, 186). Furthermore, for Georgians who had lived under Soviet hegemony for generations, the operation of illegal trade networks represented one of the few acts of national resistance to the "ways of doing business imposed by the Soviet polity" (Suny 1993, 120). In summary, the pervasiveness of corruption in Georgia was attributable to a culmination of favors: the cultural traits of the region; the thriving of the 'second economy' as the only way to viably sustain a livelihood under the failing communist enterprise of the USSR; and lastly, the maintenance of subversive networks of patronage in order to actively resist the economic structure forced upon Georgia by the Soviet Union (Stefes, 75).

Such widespread economic corruption rarely remains isolated to small-scale and cottage industries only. As historian Thomas De Waal writes, upon Georgia's independence these corrupt practices eventually "merged with the political system where political party posts were bought and sold" (De Waal, 95). According to political scientist Cristoph Stefes, corruption in Georgia was noteworthy not only due to its pervasiveness, but also due to the "high level of organization that maintained the corrupt structures....corruption reached all ranks of the state-party apparatus" (Stefes, 76). Corruption was not relegated solely to social networks and low-

level local officials extorting bribes, but existed within the upper echelons of state power as well.

Immediately following Georgia's independence from Russia in 1991, the nation's new leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was forced into hiding after a splinter group from his own faction took up arms against him. The country was plunged into violent chaos as roving militias and armed gangs roamed the streets, warring over control of various territories (De Waal, 189). Georgia's economy completely collapsed, and extreme poverty followed as previously cosmopolitan cities like Batumi and Tblisi no longer had even the most basic of services such as running water and electricity (World Bank 2018, xii). In one particularly harrowing anecdote, a Georgian nurse named Lamara recounts how she, and other hospital workers, had to fend off members of Georgia's most notorious criminal gang, the Mkhedrioni (translated as "the Horsemen") from entering the hospital. In an interview with the BBC she says:

"Every night we had attacks from these armed gangs. They were coming and asking for drugs because most of these armed gangs were drug abusers. Of course they threatened us, and we were afraid...We told the gangs, if they enter the hospital, we [will] ask our patients to cough and to transmit [their] infection to them, and they will be ill with the tuberculosis in just two or three months. And you know, they really were frightened" (BBC Witness, 2016).

As Lamara's dystopian personal story vividly illustrates, Georgia seemed fated to become a failed state ruled by militias and outside of any form of formal government control.

Against this horrific backdrop and within a total vacuum of state power, social networks were absolutely key in providing basic security. During such desperate times, social norms in fragile and conflict-affected countries become further entrenched as a means of "survival" and are used by communities to "reduce immediate vulnerability" (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 50-51). As a result, everyday Georgians' reliance on personal networks of support and patronage likely deepened, and citizens became increasingly accustomed to functioning totally autonomous from any state service.

Turning back to Georgia's history, Gamsakhordia, who was ineffective at wrangling the militias, was ultimately ousted. The grim situation was ameliorated when a military council was appointed in Gamsakhurdia's place, and the council members begrudgingly beckoned back the Georgian Soviet leader, Eduard Shevardnadze in order to stabilize the country (De Waal, 189). Shevardnadze was well-known: he had served as a Soviet party leader from 1972-1985, and also as the USSR's Foreign Minister (De Waal, 92). Shevardnadze managed to reign in the paramilitaries with the support of Russia's military, and his role was primarily one of the 'guarantor of stability' (Ramishvili and Chergoleishvili, 186). On the heels of the absolute chaos and total lawlessness which followed Georgia's independence, a seasoned leader under the Soviet regime who could call upon old Soviet era favors, was a welcome change for Georgians. But, as an old Soviet hand, Shevardnadze perhaps became trapped by Soviet dealings: he failed to implement comprehensive or effective reforms. The "listless stability" that Shevardnadze brought to Georgia ultimately "promoted corruption, the deepest scourge of Georgian society" (Ramishvili and Chergoleishvili, 188). In essence, Shevardnadze simply "restored the old institutions" (Ramishvili and Chergoleishvili, 188).

Under Shevardnadze, the 'rules of the game' were still corrupt, and both low-level and high-level corruption remained as a social norm. While Shevardnadze did eventually initiate an overdue anti-corruption campaign – only after heavy international pressure to do so – most observers agree that the measures were "flawed, half-heartedly implemented, and most were reversed at a later point" (Stefes, 162). Shevardnadze's "pathetic" attempts at reform were "too little, too late" to effect any change (Stefes, 162). Meanwhile, Georgian society's tolerance for pervasive corruption was waning.

While Georgians were not pleased with the prevalence of corruption, this does not mean that a Georgian can simply easily elect to no longer participate within it. People will still engage in corruption, even if it is their personal preference *not* to. This seeming hypocrisy and inconsistency between speech and action is a tell-tale sign that corruption had become a social norm in Georgia. Diana Chigas and Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church write:

Empirical evidence suggests beliefs about ‘what others typically do’ and ‘what others disapprove of’ dictate different behaviors...If individuals consistently observe those they care about engaged in bribery (‘what others typically do’) while at the same time their group regularly laments the amount of bribery and harshly criticizes those who participate (‘what others approve or disapprove of’) individuals will be more influenced by the consistent acts of bribery than by the disapproval of the group (Chigas and Scharbatke-Church, 55).

We must remember that social norms are defined as the mutual *expectations* about the right way to behave. Social norms are not defined as the mutual *desires* or *ideals* about the right way to behave. While Georgians might bemoan the practice of corruption, they will still participate and engage in acts of corruption, such as bribery, because they both perceive and observe that other Georgians are continuing to bribe. If other Georgians are continuing to pay and demand bribes, then they must as well in order to ensure they do not lose out on the basic benefits that bribing brings.

Part IV: Saakashvili: A Norm-al Genius

A. Saakashvili’s Rise to Power

At this time, Mikheil Saakashvili emerged as a political protégé: a young, western-educated intellectual with liberal democratic ideals, he had served as justice minister within Shevardnadze’s government, but eventually left – due primarily to his disgust with widespread corruption and disappointment at reform efforts thwarted by greedy government officials (World Bank 2015 – “Fighting Corruption”, 5). Saakashvili was a passionate, charismatic and outrageously bold politician. In one anecdote, he interrupted a government meeting by “displaying pictures of the mansions belonging to prominent government officials, alleging corruption and misuse of public funds” (World Bank 2015 – ‘Fighting Corruption’, 5). Many other reformers had defected from the government and began organizing campaigns and public movements from the outside. This young progressive reformist group drew upon their time within government to give them strategic insight and an ‘insiders understanding’ of the dynamics of the systemic corruption.

Saakashvili founded the United National Movement (UNM) political party, whose chief motto was “A Georgia without Corruption” (World Bank 2015 – “Fighting Corruption”, 6). Alongside other reformist parties, the UNM galvanized the public’s growing discontent with the Shevardnadze regime after it was revealed that the 2003 parliamentary elections – which kept Shevardnadze in power – were corrupt and fraudulent (De Waal, 191-193). The reformists staged peaceful demonstrations demanding that Shevardnadze step down, and, remarkably, he did. Georgia’s peaceful transfer of power came to be known as the Rose Revolution, and publicly exhibited to the world that Georgians were sick and tired of corruption (World Bank 2015 – “Fighting Corruption”, 5).

Perhaps most critical to his success in leading the Rose Revolution was the fact that Saakashvili himself was never embroiled in corruption. As Christopher Stefes writes: “During the Shevardnadze era, Saakashvili and other reformers stayed outside of the corrupt structures. Their reputation as staunch opponents of corruption gained them widespread popular approval and support during the Rose Revolution” (Stefes, 166). Saakashvili abstained from corrupt behavior, and the public took note. In the subsequent parliamentary elections, Saakashvili and his UNM party emerged victorious by an overwhelming margin: in a landslide, Saakashvili won an astonishing 90% of the vote (World Bank 2015 – “Fighting Corruption”, 5).

B. Making the Invisible Visible

This inarguable victory gave Saakashvili the mandate he needed to proceed with rigorous and expansive corruption reforms. Drawing upon his astute political instincts Saakashvili intuited that – most importantly of all – the government must make these planned reforms highly visible (World Bank 2015 – Fighting Corruption, 99). Seeing is believing, and unless Georgians could clearly see with their own eyes the radical changes underway, they would never believe it. Corruption had become such a way of life, that to convince the public that corruption was truly being addressed was a monumental task. As the World Development Report of the World Bank notes: “The persistent nature of long-held mental models may make it challenging to convince the public that governance reforms are real. Thus, anticorruption campaigns [are

likely to] be more successful when their enforcement is highly conspicuous" (World Bank 2015 – World Development Report, 61). The overarching logic of Saakashvili's strategh was to ensure that the reforms were highly publicized. Saakashvili and members of his administration were 'on-message' at all times, chanting the constant refrain that corruption would no longer be tolerated. Saakashvili's administration collaborated closely with media outlets to guarantee constant news coverage of the reforms. As the World Bank writes: "Early on, government leaders used the media effectively to share images of high-profile arrests of corrupt officials. Even tax evaders were arrested with cameras rolling." According to Gigi Ugalava, the former mayor of Tbilisi: "Attacking the symbols of corruption and showing results was key to changing the mindset of the population. Institutional change by itself may not have been enough. This change in mindset is the Georgian transformation" (World Bank 2015 – Fighting Corruption, 99).

Saakashvili understood that he had to live up to the enormous expectation – that he himself had set – to eradicate corruption. Turning again to Margaret Levi's work on government legitimacy, Saakashvili was shrewdly aware that he needed to be viewed as legitimate in order to garner buy-in and compliance from skeptical Georgian citizens, who were accustomed to being swindled and exploited by state and government officials. Saakashvili knew that he could not be viewed by the public as yet another power monger dishonestly exploiting the age-old campaign platform of anti-corruption. If he was perceived this way, he would never succeed at shifting the norm from "In Georgia we must pay and demand bribes", to "In Georgia we do not tolerate bribery."

C. Establishing Government Legitimacy

As asserted by Levi, Sacks, and Tyler, the two pre-conditions for establishing government legitimacy are: 1) trustworthiness, and 2) the establishment of procedural justice. Saakashvili seemed to intuitively understand these insights and executed reforms accordingly. Firstly, Saakashvili's political instincts (or perhaps his inner circle of advisors), told him that he must be viewed as trustworthy, and he immediately went about building trust by ensuring he swiftly made good on his lofty campaign promises. Secondly, Saakashvili knew he must restore

procedural justice to Georgia. In Georgia, the law did not apply equally to all; instead, the law applied only to the political enemies of those in power, and to the dispossessed. Saakashvili made it his top priority to prove that, under his presidency, the justice process would be fair, transparent, and equally applied to all.

The government understood that it had a narrow window of opportunity to demonstrate to the public that it had the genuine commitment and the ability to make major reforms. The government had to prove that it could change the corrupt ways of the prior regime and begin to deliver basic services and benefits. If the government failed to do this, it would lose the public's trust. Saakashvili's reforms were designed to gain the trust of Georgians: it aimed to deliver tangible improvement to the biggest number of people, in the quickest possible way (World Bank 2015 – "Fighting Corruption", 92). One way to make concrete improvements was to immediately deliver electricity, a service that had long been held captive to corruption and left many Georgians without consistent electricity. This tactic ensured that the public would see the government's gains directly themselves: every time they came home and could turn the lights on, they would think of Saakashvili's success.

Another tactic was to completely renew the country's police force. Georgia's traffic and patrol police were notoriously corrupt, and as such, were "the most visible and hated manifestation of the pervasive corruption" in Georgia (World Bank 2015 – "Fighting Corruption", 1). Police would stop any motorist or pedestrian, and would shamelessly extort bribes. In this way, police officers maintained the social norm of corruption, ensuring that the practice would remain alive and well. Georgians would pay bribes to these police because they anticipated their fellow citizens would, and vice versa. Saakashvili launched a total assault on corruption within the police forces. Overnight, the entire 16,000 person-strong police force of Georgia was fired, and new police were brought on board. The new police were told there would be a zero-tolerance policy on corruption, and when the new force failed to adhere to this new, non-corrupt norm, they were fired again. After two rounds of firing and re-hiring, as well as drastically reducing the bloated rank numbers, police officers eventually began to get the message, and fall into line.

In sync with Saakashvili's approach to clear and consistent messaging, he also launched a public relations campaign to cast police officers in a more favorable light. This campaign included outfitting police in new uniforms, placing police in new patrol cars, running public service ads depicting police as good people and good citizens, and even the remodeling of police offices to include glass walls and glass, street-facing windows to signify the institution's new purity and transparency. All of these measures worked to visually signal a shift from old to new. The police reforms were "quick wins" of "easily observable reductions in corruption", and as we learned from Elinor Ostrom, the observability of behavior is crucial to shifting norms (World Bank 2015, World Development Report, 61). If citizens are able to observe that their fellow community members' behaviors are changing, they will begin to shift their expectations about their fellow citizens' behavior, and their own behavior, accordingly. Through these achievements, Saakashvili was beginning to gain Georgians' trust, and shift the norm around corruption.

The second element of legitimacy, procedural justice was another one of Saakashvili's primary targets. In Georgia, political elites and high-powered criminals were able to flagrantly operate above the law, and it was common knowledge that the justice system was blind to their misdeeds, rigged in favor of the powerful. To restore faith in the law, Saakashvili had to begin to implement procedural justice – and his administration did this in a spectacularly zealous way. The government televised "truckloads of armed police in ski masks rounding up high-profile crime bosses" (World Bank 2015 – "Fighting Corruption", 15). Notoriously corrupt government officials were jailed, including the heads of railways systems, former high-profile government ministers, and even Shevardnadze's son-in-law (Stefes, 166). Through a clever changing of the procedures needed to bring a case forward, Saakashvili was able to force parliament to publicly hear cases of former officials. The procedure previously required parliamentary approval first, thereby ensuring that powerful Members of Parliament (MPs) could quash any cases involving old friends or people to whom they owed political favors. Now, parliament was forced to take up the cases, and would not dare, in the face of the public, to discount blatant evidence of corruption (World Bank 2015 – "Fighting Corruption", 93). Saakashvili effectively forced

parliamentarians' hands, and the public began to perceive that procedural justice for all individuals – no matter how powerful – was being observed.

Georgian activists and scholars Levan Ramishvili and Tamar Chergoleishvili connected Georgia's situation to the scholarship of economists Douglass North and Barry Weingast, noting that liberal authoritarianism in the long-term can "cause economic stagnation". Writing that the "stability of the legal environment is closely related to the reputation of the state", the two scholars highlight that Georgia needed "predictable game rules" in order to stimulate economic growth (Ramishvili and Chergoleishvili, 189). By vigorously applying – and admittedly in some cases, manipulating – the rules of law, Saakashvili was able to create a public spectacle of his 'zero-tolerance' approach to corruption, and was able to recoup funds from criminals who had extorted millions from the state (Stefes, 166). The World Bank succinctly summarized Saakashvili's approach to restoring justice: "As a result of these actions, money started pouring into government coffers, and every Georgian understood that corruption that affected them daily would no longer be tolerated" (World Bank 2015 – Fighting Corruption, 6).

Part V: Conclusion: Radical Change *is Possible*

Saakashvili implemented an aggressive, full-front assault on corruption, and ensured every single reform was highly publicized and broadcast to the public. This high-level of visibility helped to shift everyday Georgians' perceptions of the government itself, and perceptions of the acceptability and viability of engaging in corruption. By signaling in a loud, clear, and unified voice that corruption would have no home in Georgia, the government sent a consistent message that began to shift the domestic social norms around corruption.

Unfortunately, Georgia's unbelievable success in rooting out corruption in such a short amount of time may in fact not be replicable. Saakashvili's approach to corruption worked within a particular historical moment, in a very small country with a population of 3 million people, and, as with any political success, was reliant on outside contextual factors. And of course, there is the element of personality: Saakashvili was a bold and audacious maverick leader who was

willing to take such risks, and had cut-throat, shrewd, political acumen. While Saakashvili was unable to fully dismantle Georgia's entrenched corruption, and perhaps himself ultimately succumbed to it, he was nevertheless able to monumentally shift a norm.

Through his reforms, Saakashvili brilliantly shifted a social norm, and then he let the cascading effects take care of themselves as the norm-shift spread, in tipping point fashion, throughout society. Georgia under Mikheil Saakashvili represents a fascinating case study in how the deeply-rooted problem of corruption, often thought of as culturally determined or unavoidable, is in fact not inevitable at all. Georgia gives us a case for hope that radical societal change *is* possible after all.

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