

Democratization and War

The Relation between Democratization and Conflicts in Georgia

For virtually all of Georgia's existence as an independent state, the country's peace and well-being have been under siege, undermined by violent separatist conflicts... Coppieters & Legvold (2005:2)

Abstract

This paper examines the relation between violent conflicts and democratization in Georgia. Since independence in 1991, Georgia has grown towards increased democratization but within the political transition, many obstacles, in form of violent conflicts and war have threatened the country. In the *Democratization and War theory*, Mansfield & Snyder argues that increased democracy increases the risk for violent conflicts. According to the theory, a country is more “war prone” and aggressive during political transition periods, primarily during democratization.

When applying the Democratization and War theory on the case of Georgia, since independence we learn that most of the conflicts since independence are caused by elite interests, when trying to use the relative instability of the political transition for their own agendas. The main arguments within the Democratization and War theory that increased democratization increases the aggression and violent conflicts, can however not be fully supported. Violent conflicts have occurred during non-transition periods as well as during decreased democratization.

Keywords: democratization, Georgia, Russia, conflict, Democratization and War theory

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States, an alliance among former Soviet Countries, including Russia
EU	European Union
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internal Displaced People (the common term for refugees fleeing within national borders)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

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1 Introduction

When I first visited Georgia in 2008, the country was at war with Russia and the earlier process towards westernization and NATO-membership was stalled. Three years later most people had returned to their everyday life but the tension and the threat against the increasing democratization and openness still bothered the country.

Georgia became independent from Soviet in 1991 and has since experienced an increase in democratization, with more openness and more freedom for the people. The democratic transition has however involved many obstacles in form of violent conflicts, revolution and war.

The “Democratization and War” theory by Mansfield & Snyder, argues that within the democratic transition, countries are more aggressive and more prone war. This paper analyzes this theory and tries it on the case of Georgia since independence. The paper examines what effect the violence has had on the democratization and whether the democratization process in itself has been a promoter of violence as Mansfield & Snyder argues.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The main purpose with this work is to examine Georgia’s development since its independence and the relation between the democratization process and violent conflicts in the country.

In order to examine the democratization process of Georgia in relation to violent conflicts, the research questions of this work are:

How has the democratization process of Georgia developed since 1991?

How has the conflicts emerged since the independence?

In what way do the conflicts and the democratization process interfere?

The work thus examines whether the violent conflicts are a result of the democratic transition, as claimed within the Democratization and War theory by Mansfield & Snyder (2005), but also in what way violent conflicts have affected the democratization of Georgia.

1.2 Disposition

This paper starts with a theoretical chapter, examining the theories and concepts used in the analysis of this work. This chapter includes a theoretical discussion on:

- the concept of *democratization*
- the concept of *violent conflicts*
- the *relation between violent conflicts and democratization*

The last part of the theory-chapter introduces the main theory used in this work, *the Democratization and War theory*, and brings up the main discussion among scholars considering the relation between democratization and increased violence.

The following chapter on methodology outlines the sources and the methods used in this paper when examining the relation between the previously mentioned concepts of violent conflicts and democratization. The chapter also brings up a theoretical analysis of the methods used for measuring democratization – the Freedom in the World Index, as well as the method used for identifying violent conflicts.

In the chapter following the methodology, Georgia's historical background since independence is outlined. In this chapter the main historical events in Georgia's democratization process, as has been presented by a large number of acknowledged institutions, are examined. This chapter emphasizes the historical events that have been directly or indirectly related to democratization and violent conflicts.

The last chapter of this work puts together the theories with the methodology to answer the research questions. The chapter analyses the causes and outcomes of the violent conflicts, within the democratic transition in Georgia and ends with a conclusion and discussion on this relation.

1.3 Delimitations

In order to limit this work to some extent, the conflicts referred to in this paper are the *Major Violent Conflicts*, as defined and discussed in the theory chapter. The availability of data from other conflicts (*minor* conflicts) is much limited and such information is thus often unreliable (more shootings and killings have appeared throughout Georgia's history but often with a much limited number of casualties, thus accidents would be hard to distinguish).

To limit this work further, this work focuses on the time period from 1991 to present. To include more years, prior to 1991 would perhaps bring further interesting results, but the information on violence prior to 1991 are much limited and expanding the timeframe would tremendously expand the size of this work.

The main focus on Georgia is another restriction which aims at both limiting the size of this work, but also to keep the focus on one particular country. A wider analysis on regional interference within democratization and violent events would result in a totally different work, and no longer be a case study of Georgia.

Another assignation is that this work refers to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as territories within Georgia. The reason to this is that they are *de jure* (according to international law) part of Georgia (Human Rights Watch 2009a:9).

Further on, the historical events in Georgia are in this work, analyzed from one main theory, the Democratization and War theory. The cause for this choice, as argued in *3.5 Finding the Relation*, lies in the suitability for this theory in answering the research questions. It must however be stressed that by emphasizing one particular theory this work mainly shows one perspective of the relation studied. Other perspectives are shortly discussed in the theory-chapter.

2 Theory

To examine the relation between democratization and violence, we must first understand what we mean when we talk about those concepts. This chapter examines the notions and discourse concerning democratization and violent conflicts. The final sections in this chapter further analyzes the relation between violence and democratization, and put forth a more thorough analysis on the main theory for this work, the Democratization and War theory.

2.1 Democracy and Democratization

Democratization is a process towards increased democracy or as Caroline Boussard (2003) puts it,

Democratization is the process wherein democratic institutions and procedures that embrace competitive elections, in which the winner gets control of the government, are established.” (Boussard 2003:38)

Professor Daron Acemoglu simplifies the democratization-definition by Boussard and states that “democratization is a move from non-democracy to democracy” (Acemoglu 2006:175). Thus, to understand this process we need to first understand the concept of democracy. Acemoglu (2006:48) argues that a democracy in practice is associated with “free and fair elections, the accountability of politicians to the electorate and free entry into politics”. Boussard (2003:27) refers to this view of democracy as a “minimalist” concept of democracy. Many scholars studying democracy favours a wider, “maximalist”-concept, where the concept of democracy not only emphasizes free elections but also the relevant institutions and social settings required to withhold and support the democratic framework (see for instance Larsson 2004 and Gastil 1991). This is true also in the process of democratization, where “free and fair elections” are usually not the only aim. Acemoglus claims that the democratization process is

strongly related to an increase of educational institutions and reforms (Acemoglu 2006:64f), and it is thus not only a matter of free elections.

Professor Hans Albin Larsson (2004:12f) states that the function of a democracy is, among many other things, a political system *where power shifts can be maintained peacefully without the need of any violent actions* among the people. According to a dissertation by Daniel Silander (2005:32ff.), a full-fledged democracy, furthermore, requires a level of openness and transparency in the society and in the ruling authorities. This openness serves to give the citizens of the democracy an insight in the authorities so that they can build their own opinion and on equal grounds elect the ruling authority.

For the democratization process to be successful in establishing free elections (the core of the democracy concept), it naturally also needs the implementation of institutions as well as education, economic rights, freedom of speech etc (Silander 2005:30ff). Democratization and democracy is thus clearly related to other factors than just free elections although this may be the main aim. In the leading literature on democracy, we find a huge number of associating factors more or less relevant for the understanding of the democratic concept, its progress and its initiation¹, among those, are (in addition to the previously outlined factors) for instance, political crisis, economics and socioeconomic rights (Acemoglu 2006), violent conflicts and war (Mansfield & Snyder 2005), transnational power relations (Boussard 2003) and so on.

The “Freedom in the World”-research, originally published by Raymond Gastil (1991) and now published yearly through Freedom House (2012a), calculates the amount of democratic criteria’s fulfilled within the majority of the world’s countries and assembles it into a country-based democracy index. This index is often used when assessing on what level of democracy a particular country is, and is also (although to a limited extent) employed in this work (See **3.3 Measuring Democracy**).

¹ For a more exhaustive discussion on the initiation of democratization, see Acemoglu (2006)

² Mansfield & Snyder also bases their theory on the Polity Project. See Center for Systemic Peace (2012) for more information.

³ Author has lived and worked in Georgia, and have closely been following the Georgian politics since 2008. Author has also assisted in publishing a report for international expert groups and has been active within EU foreign policies, thus some prior knowledge does exist in the selection of sources and information as well as in the processing of reports.

2.2 Major Violent Conflicts

When discussing conflicts it is not hard to get lost in the definition and end up with a wide all-inclusive definition. To limit my work to the conflicts mostly discussed within the framework of Peace- and Conflict Studies the definition of conflict refers to *conflicts between human beings (including groups) that includes violent struggles*, here referring to violence as in killing. As per limit this work also focus on *the major violent conflicts in Georgia*, referring to “low”- and “high”-intensity conflicts. The “low”-intensity conflicts refers to conflicts with minimum one hundred deaths per year and “high”-intensity refers to conflicts with minimum one thousand deaths per year, as outlined by Miall and Ramsbotham (2004:23). This includes all violent conflicts that involve minimum one hundred deaths per year. In one exception this also includes a conflict with less than one hundred calculated deaths per year. This is in the case of the struggles for Abkhazian independence in 1998 where the number of Internal Displaced People (IDP) were approximately 35.000 and thus this conflict has a great relevance in the Georgian development and in the conflict analysis. The number of deaths in 1998 has however not been fully clarified by non-objective sources and may be higher than the available data suggests.

When analyzing the violent conflicts, the number of people who had to flee their homes, due to the conflicts (IDP) is also included. This number is to give the reader, a further understanding for the intensity and overall effects of the conflict on the society. Due to limited information available on casualties and IDP in some of the conflicts, the data is gathered from the most reliable and objective sources found (here referring primarily to international organizations such as UN and EU who in terms of objectivity and transparency has an aim to provide correct figures). In the cases where numbers varies, the mean value is calculated (see ***Table 1. Major Violent Conflicts in Georgia***).

2.3 Democratization & Violence

According to many scholars on political systems and world development, the world is becoming more democratic. The discussion of a relation between democratization and violence is thus, much relevant today, especially when the concept of democracy, although criticized, has become a symbol for freedom, stability and peace particularly within the western world (Silander 2005, Larsson 2004).

There is a wide range of theories considering the relation between conflicts and democratization, some scholars does not find any relation whatsoever between the transition and violent conflicts (see for instance Fearon & Laitin 2003 and Collier & Hoeffler 2000), while others find direct relations between them (for instance Mansfield & Snyder 2005, Acemoglu 2006 and Gurr 2000). A wide range of scholars also challenges the scientific attempts for conflict-generalization and argues that each conflict is a unique matter and that it thus, should not be compared to other conflicts (for instance Kriesberg 1989, Eurich 2010).

Among the scholars who argue for a linkage between conflicts and democratization, some finds that the democratization causes or increases the risks for conflicts (Mansfield & Snyder 2005). Other scholars with similar perspectives claim that conflicts are relevant for the initiation of democratic processes (Acemoglu 2006). The democracy in itself, when mature, is, particularly by western scholars, often considered to be the most peaceful and desired political system, a common argument for this is that “no democratic state has ever waged war with another democratic state” (Doyle 1986:1151f Mansfield & Snyder 2005:5,21).

Jensen & Young argues for instance, that a measure of democracy is relevant for the prediction of future violence in a country (Jensen & Young 2008:542). In their study, based on the Systemic Peace, Polity Project (from 2006)² Jensen & Young finds that when examining the risk for violence in a country, the matter of

² Mansfield & Snyder also bases their theory on the Polity Project. See Center for Systemic Peace (2012) for more information.

democracy is highly important, they argue that the so called “democratic strength” shows how able a country is to prevent and to control violence (Jensen & Young 2008:542). Jensen & Young (2008:533f) claims in similarity with Mansfield & Snyder (2005:5f) that the power in full democracies is more decentralized and shared than in non-democracies, which provides more “outlet” for frustration and thus makes the turn to violence less motivated.

According to Mansfield & Snyder (2005:5), countries become more “aggressive and war-prone” when they are within the transitional phase of democratization. Acemoglu (2006:68) instead suggests that the conflicts in themselves are the initiators of political transitions, in his discussion on European recent history, he states that “the driving force behind political liberalization and the introduction of democratic measures is the threat of social disorder and ultimately revolution” (Acemoglu 2006:68). In another discussion on the recent history of Latin America, Acemoglu finds similar results where the threat of revolution and social unrest has been important for the democratization processes (Acemoglu 2006:71f).

Further on Acemoglu (2006:334) argues that the main obstacle for democratization is the “fear of the elites that [a] democracy will be highly anti-elite”, Mansfield & Snyder (2005:20) on the other hand Argues that the elite may use the democratic transition for their own agenda and that the probability of war in the democratic transition is likely due to the interests of the elite groups.

It is, as this discussion illustrates, possible to look at the relation between democratization and violence from different perspectives and whether the democratization in itself causes violence or if the violence triggers the democratization is still debated.

In the following section, the “Democratization and War”-theory by Mansfield & Snyder (2005) will be further examined to illustrate the arguments and calculations that lies behind the perhaps most significant theory on the relation between democratization and violence.

2.4 The Democratization and War Theory

In [the] transitional phase of democratization, countries become more aggressive and war-prone, not less... democratizing states are more likely to fight wars than are mature democracies... (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:5f).

In their theory which has been much debated (see for instance the discussions by Narang & Nelson 2009 and Enterline 1996:183ff), Mansfield & Snyder (2005:6, 19f, 25) claims that during democratic transitions, states are more aggressive and more likely to involve in violence than during times of no transition and relative stability. Mansfield & Snyder (2005:19f, 25) argues that the main cause for this is that the elites of the particular country, feel threatened by the transition as they may lose their previous privileges, including resources and control. The threat makes the elites and “other social groups” compelled to use violence to regain control and *status quo* (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:24f). The same groups may also use the political instability that occurs within the transition – before democratic institutions and full democracy has been established – for their own agenda (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:25).

The basis for Mansfield & Snyder’s theory (2005) is a calculation on historical appearances of war during years of *democratic transitions*. To find the years for democratic transitions they use the “Polity II”-index (Center for Systemic Peace 2012) which identifies the annual political setting for a large amount of countries. By identifying the years of changes in the political settings for a particular country they define the transition period – the years between changes of political settings (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:11).

The Democratization and War-theory has been criticized for its lacking of a clear separation between inter-state war and external wars (Birch 2001 14f; Enterline 1996:183f, Wolf 1996:181). The Polity II index used by Mansfield & Snyder for measuring the relation between democratic states and the appearance of war has different data on interstate wars and external wars (see Center for Systemic Peace 2012); Mansfield & Snyder (2005) did not make any clear difference between those.

This paper mainly focuses on the *Democratization and War-theory* as outlined by Mansfield & Snyder (2005) and tries it on my particular case, Georgia since independence.

3 Method

To examine the relation between democratization and violence the method for this work is mainly a qualitative textual analysis. It is also a case study, where the case is *Georgia since independence 1991*. This chapter will further describe the methods applied within this work.

3.1 Qualitative Textual Analysis

A qualitative study is relevant since no previous data on the relation between democratization and violence is to be found in the literature on Georgia since independence. Nor can any previous assembled and reliable data on all the violent conflicts in Georgia's history since 1991, be found.

The qualitative method includes analysis of a large number of historical texts and reports, where relevant stages in the democratization process as well as violent conflicts during the democratization are distinguished.

When performing textual analysis of a large amount of texts and interpreting the meaning of the texts, it is important to be aware of the context in which the texts are written and to what audience they are intended (Bergström & Boréus 2000:26ff).

It is also relevant to be aware of that the interpretation when reading a large amount of texts are often influenced by the readers previous knowledge of the discourse and context in which the texts are found (Bergström & Boréus 2000:34). In this case, the author is fairly familiar with Georgian politics and history, as well as the standards for the reports of United Nations and other

international organizations³. Previous experience can be seen as an asset, when choosing and analyzing information – the information is written in a language that the reader can easily understand and the reader can relatively easy find sources of information.

On the other hand pre-experience (“förförståelse”) can naturally also be a disadvantage, where prejudices and expectations from the reader on the textual analysis can make the reader interpret texts in ways not intended., further on a non-critical student with previous experience in the topic he or she studies, often tends to write in a biased and one-sided form (Bergström & Boréus 2000:36).

When carrying out textual analysis it is thus important to critically analyze the text, its source and the intention with the text (Bergström & Boréus 2000:38). From this perspective all textual analysis in this work, have been critically examined and the majority of sources have been compared to others, in order to get as close to objectivity as has been possible.

It is however also important to be notice Bergström & Boréus’s (2000:38) statement that any textual analysis can be criticized as they usually are subject to interpretation by the reader/author, and thus even the notion of objectivity may be a subjective matter.

3.2 Material and Sources

Once research questions and methodology have been defined it is, as (Bergström & Boréus 2000:38) argues, important to select relevant material and reliable information for the particular work to be done.

The main texts examined in the empirical parts of this work are public reports from organizations within the United Nations (UNOMIG, UNPO, and UNSC etc.) and EU (IIFMCG). Also reports from known expert groups often consulted by international organizations are analyzed, such as reports from Amnesty

³ Author has lived and worked in Georgia, and have closely been following the Georgian politics since 2008. Author has also assisted in publishing a report for international expert groups and has been active within EU foreign policies, thus some prior knowledge does exist in the selection of sources and information as well as in the processing of reports.

International, Human Rights Watch, Utrikespolitiska Institutet, International Crisis Group etc. In a few cases due to limited information available, also known newspapers such as BBC are consulted. The choices of texts analyzed are directly linked to the availability and the reliability of relevant information for the purpose of this work (See *1.1*).

The annual “Freedom in the World”-index, developed by Freedom House (2012a) is also used to further illustrate the democratization process in Georgia. The index has been recommended by teachers in Lund University, as well as by many scholars in the topic of measuring democratization (for instance Silander 2005 and Acemoglu 2006).

The theoretical framework in this paper is, in line with the research questions; theories that considers the relation between democratization and violent conflicts. The perhaps most emphasized theory is the Democratization and War theory, originally developed by Mansfield & Snyder (2005). The reason for emphasizing this theory is that it is the perhaps most distinctive theory within the democratization and conflicts discourse. It is also one of the more holistic theories within the discourse, making it perfect as a tool for trying this relation. Also scholars like Daron Acemoglu (2006), who developed theories on violence, democracy and economics and Daniel Silander (2005) who mainly discusses the concept and understanding of democratization, are studied.

Among other sources are for instance the researchers behind Freedom House (Inkles 1991 and Gastil 1991), various critics of Mansfield & Snyder’s theory and general critics of the relation between democratization and war (some of which are cited in the previous mentioned texts and some recommended by researchers at Lund University).

3.3 Measuring Democracy

When discussing democracy it is clear that one can perceive a variation in levels of democracy or as Duncan Ivison in the *Encyclopaedia of Political Theory* puts it; “it can be said that one society (whether now or in the past) is more (or less) democratic than another” (Ivison 2010:358).

When it comes to the issue of measuring democracy and the level of democratization in a country, the most common methods available in scientific literature, involves first defining different criteria’s of democracy and then calculating the existence or non-existence of those criteria’s at a specified time for a particular country or region⁴. The calculation of the criteria’s then equals to how much democracy a given country/region has at a given time.

One organization that monitors the different criteria’s of democracy is Freedom House. By calculating the relevant factors for free and fair democracy, the Freedom House assembles the annual “Freedom in the World”-index (Inkeles 1991, Gastil 1991). Freedom House measures the levels of civil liberties and political rights at a specific time, in a specific country, the mean value of the two equals to the overall *freedom rating*, widely used and recognized by scholars to define the level of democracy for a particular country (Acemoglu 2006:48f)⁵.

In this work I have used the “Freedom in the World”-index, mainly to illustrate the democratization process in Georgia. The core analysis of the democratization process derives from the qualitative analysis of the reports and the material defined in previous section. The textual analysis along with the “Freedom in the World”- index answers my first research question, “How has the democratization process of Georgia developed since 1991?”.

⁴ See for instance the “Polity-index” by the Center for Systemic Peace (2012) and the Economist Intelligence Unit’s democracy-index (EIU 2012).

⁵ For a more detailed description on the Freedom House indexes, see Inkeles (1991:26-33) and Silander (2005:235f).

3.4 Identifying Major Violent Conflicts

To identify the major violent conflicts in Georgia since its independence, the definition outlined in the theory-chapter (See *2.2 Major Violent Conflicts*) is used. The Major Violent Conflicts are further on illustrated in a table of relevant data for each conflict, with clear comments on casualties (and IDPs) and sources for the information, to make sure the reader can directly verify the correctness of the data.

Through qualitative textual analysis, the conflicts are then examined and the outcomes as well as the context in which the conflicts have occurred (within the democratization process) are distinguished.

A large amount of sources are examined and, in order to identify the Major Violent Conflicts the amounts of deaths and internal displaced people from each conflict are distinguished. By calculating the mean value of deaths as well as IDPs from all relevant sources, a relatively reliable number of violence-intensity for each conflict is acquired and from that the major violent conflicts are identified.

The examining of the major violent conflicts of Georgia answers my second key question, “How has the conflict dynamics emerged since the independence?”.

3.5 Finding the relation

This work aims at examining the relation between democratization and conflicts in the case of Georgia since independence. The analysis is mainly based upon the “Democratization and War”-theory by Mansfield & Snyder (2005). To a much limited extent, the relation between Democratization and Violence is also considered in terms of Acemoglu theory on social disorder as a trigger for democratization (Acemoglu 2006). There are two main reasons for these choices: First the “Democratization and War”-theory is well fitted within the field of study and aims at answering the question whether the democratization in fact triggered the violence, occurring in Georgia. Second, Acemoglu theory argues instead that the violence may have been the trigger for the democratization. By referring to

Acemoglus theory, we also get a counterpart to the “Democratization and War “-theory, enabling us to emphasize Mansfield & Snyder’s theory even more.

4 Historical Background

After the independence in 1991, Georgia has grown more and more towards democratization and westernization, but on the path, the country has passed many difficulties and obstacles. This chapter will shortly describe the history of Georgia and bring up relevant events within the democratization process, since its independence from the Soviet Union, until present.

4.1 The Post-Soviet Era 1991-2003

Georgia gained independence in April 1991 and Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a key figure in the initiation of the independence, was elected as president (Höglund 2009:12). Soon after the election, the opposition and the National Guard started a violent campaign against Gamsakhurdia and in 1992 Gamsakhurdia had to flee. The leader of the National Guard and his allies took over the power and a struggle between Gamsakhurdia's forces and the new power in the capital, Tbilisi began (Höglund 2009:13). Meanwhile, Georgian forces also struggled with the South Ossetians in the north, over their ambitions for sovereignty and independence from Georgia.

In late 1992, Moscow decided to announce a new election and Eduard Shevardnadze, previously foreign minister for the Soviet Union, was elected as president over Georgia (Höglund 2009:11,13). The new government managed to reach a ceasefire agreement with South Ossetians and peacekeeping forces was placed in the region, but in the meantime, another old conflict considering the Abkhazian independence in the north-western Georgia, became imminent (Höglund 2009:14). President Shevardnadze's response, to overtake the capital of Abkhazia, resulted in increased bloodshed and over 250,000 refugees (IDPs). In 1993, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was deployed

to monitor the situation between Abkhazia and Georgia (UNSC 1993). One year later, a ceasefire between the Abkhazia and Georgia was announced and peacekeeping forces (CIS) were assigned to control the Abkhazian territory along with the UN observers (Höglund 2009:14).

In the president election 1995, Shevardnadze gained a clear majority of the votes but, despite the alliance with CIS, Gamsakhurdia's former supporters kept threatening the president – in 1998 Shevardnadze was nearly killed in an assassination attempt. During 1998 “guerrilla groups” attacked and kidnapped Abkhazian forces and international peace forces (MacFarlane 1999:39). UNOMIG and CIS were forced to withdraw from the security zone in Abkhazia (MacFarlane 1999:39). Shevardnadze's government tried to further increase the approach to the west and in 1999 Georgia joined the Council of Europe and left their alliance with Russia (Coppieters & Legvold 2005:4, IIFFMCG 2009b)⁶.

Despite lower living conditions, rumours of corruption, and decreased trust in Shevardnadze, he remained at power but after another winning in the election in 2000, the violence from the opposition increased further. After a violent struggle in Tbilisi, in late 2001, between police and the opposition (including some of Shevardnadze's previously allies) President Shevardnadze decided in desperation, to fire the whole government.

4.2 Rose Revolution and Modernization 2003-2012

When in 2003, Shevardnadze's party won a majority of the votes in the parliament new struggles immediately erupted. In a slightly rapid but effective and peaceful revolution, that has become famous as the Rose Revolution, the new opposition-leader Mikheil Saakashvili and his allies, stormed into the parliament-building in Tbilisi and removed Shevardnadze from power (EIU 2012). He voluntarily resigned and fled from Tbilisi (Coppieters & Legvold 2005:2f, Höglund 2009).

⁶ Georgia left the Collective Security Treaty, a security alliance with Russia in 1999.

A new presidential election was announced in January 2004 and Saakashvili won with a remarkable majority of the votes (96%). In the following parliamentary elections, Saakashvili's party, "The National Movement" won a majority of the seats (Höglund 2009).

Under the new political leadership, a thorough modernization process began throughout Georgia. New reforms, better control over taxes and cooperation with neighbouring Azerbaijan over their oil-pipeline to Europe, increased the income for the state, and salaries and pensions became more stable and paid out on time (Coppieters & Legvold 2005, Höglund 2009). The relation to Russia also improved and further security and energy agreements were settled between the two (IIFFMCG 2009b:10f). With some support from Moscow, the Saakashvili government also managed to regain Georgian control over the south western breakaway region, Ajara in 2004 (Höglund 2009:18, Coppieters & Legvold 2005:3, IIFFMCG 2009b:11f). The stabilization, in relation to Russia, as well as the new reforms, raised the state economy. The economy was, however unequally distributed and this eventually resulted in increased corruption among the elite (Höglund 2009:17, EIU 2012).

In 2006, rumours of coup attempts against president Saakashvili caused the authorities to arrest around 30 people and when one of the president's primary opponents was arrested in 2007, protests erupted in Tbilisi. The government then decided to close all anti-government TV-channels and during correlated police raids in Tbilisi, as a response to the protests, many people were wounded (Höglund 2009:17ff). After heavy negotiations in 2007, Moscow agreed on withdrawal from their military bases in the Georgian cities of Batumi and Akhalkalaki (Coppieters & Legvold 2005:4, IIFFMCG 2009b:6f). A Russian military base did however remain in Abkhazia (IIFFMCG 2009b:6).⁷

In January 2008, President Saakashvili announced re-election, as a response to the Tbilisi protests; Saakashvili won with 53, 4% of the votes (Höglund 2009:17, IIFFMCG 2009b:29). While President Saakashvili "declared the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity to be his political priority", Russia increased their

⁷ During the NATO summit in 1999, Russia was required to withdraw from Abkhazia as well, but Moscow ignored this demand (Coppieters & Legvold 2005:4, IIFFMCG 2009b).

support to the breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The tension towards Russia re-emerged.

When Kosovo declared its independence in February 2008, the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, decided to do the same, with full support from Russia⁸ (Höglund 2009:19, IIFFMCG 2009b:25f). Armed conflicts between Georgian and South Ossetian troops erupted and in August, Russian troops invaded Georgia in a short war that lasted for five days (Höglund 2009:20f, Göransson 2012, IIFFMCG 2009b).

The war did not only result in a large number of IDPs (Internal Displaced People), but also in Georgia losing control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian people were disappointed and in massive demonstrations in November, they proclaimed a new election (Höglund 2009:21). Saakashvili responded by transforming the government and dismissing key figures in the military and defence ministries (Höglund 2009:21f).

Another result from the war was the drawback from a NATO-membership. One of Saakashvili's main aims, in order to stabilize the country was to make Georgia a member of the NATO alliance but the war in 2008, made some NATO-members questioning Georgia as an appropriate member-state and thus stalling the process (Göransson 2012, IIFFMCG 2009a:14ff)⁹.

Saakashvili remained at power although the opposition had increased. Another demonstration, led by the opposition leader Nino Burjanadze, erupted in front of the parliament, in May 2011 and resulted in massive police interventions (McGuinness 2011b). Minimum two civilians died and some people from the opposition disappeared in the struggles (Russia Today 2011)¹⁰. President

⁸ Russia never agreed with the Kosovo declaration of independence as they allied with Serbia, it is thus possible to understand the support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 as a Russian revenge towards the Western support for Kosovo independence and Western interests.

⁹ The NATO membership includes per definition, *the right to be protected* by other NATO members in the event of a foreign invasion. A Georgian membership would thus, as highlighted by the war, mean that NATO might have to act against Russia, an act most likely undesired by both NATO and Russia as that would increase the tensions between the two (NATO and Russia) and in a worst case scenario outline the foundation for a much larger war than that of 2008.

¹⁰ Authors comment: "Russia Today", due to its origin, may not be objective in this case and the amount of people lost or injured remains unclear, although death cases can be confirmed by the author.

Saakashvili responded by establishing a law to forbid any future demonstrations in front of the parliament.

Saakashvili has announced next presidential election to be hold in October 2012 (Govtrack 2012) and since, in accordance with the Georgian constitution, “the same person may be elected the President only for two consecutive terms” (10 years in total), Saakashvili will leave the office within a year unless the laws are changed or violated (Saakashvili 2012).

Major Violent Conflicts in Georgia 1991-2012			
Year	Main parties involved	Dispute(s)	Outcome
1991-92	South Ossetia, Georgia, Russia, Opposition	South Ossetia independence and Opposition struggles	1500 deaths 30.500 IDP ¹¹
1992-93	Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia, Opposition	Abkhazian independence and Opposition struggles	11.500 deaths 250.000 IDP ¹²
1998	Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia, unverified guerrilla groups.	Disputed, various struggles	20 deaths 35.000 IDP ¹³
2008	Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia etc.	Independence of breakout regions etc.	850 deaths 134.000 IDP ¹⁴

Table 1. The Major Violent Conflicts in Georgia since independence. The numbers in Outcome are mean-values, see comment for each value.

¹¹ Höglund (2009:13) suggests 1500 deaths totally for both conflicts Höglund (ibid.) also suggests “some thousands” IDP. HRW (2009a:17) and ICG (2009) proposes 1000 deaths and “thousands” IDP only in the South Ossetian struggles. Amnesty International (2010:10) states ~ 60.000 IDP. The total for 1991-1992 is thus approximately 1500 deaths and mean value of IDP 30.500 ((1000+60.000)/2).

¹² HRW (2009a:17) suggests “some 8000 deaths” and “over 200.000” IDP, Parsons (2001), UNPO (2009:5) and Amnesty International (2010:9) states “250.000” IDP, while IIFFMCG (2009b:79) states approximately 300.000 IDP and “thousands of casualties on both sides”. UNPO (2009:5) and Amnesty International (2010:9) claim 10.000 deaths. Greenberg (1999:2) claim 10.000-15.000 deaths and more than 200.000 IDP. The mean value of deaths is thus 11.500 ((8000+15.000)/2) and for IDP, 250.000 ((200.000+300.000)/2).

¹³ The number of deaths is an estimation and exact number is much unclear. Cheterian (2012) claims 17 “enemy soldiers” killed while IIFFMCG(2009b:86) claims “dozens of deaths”. According to both IIFFMCG (2009b:86) and Cheterian (2012), the number of IDP was 30-40.000 (mean value 35.000). The struggles which started in the Gali-region (Abkhazia) are still not fully investigated. See for instance MacFarlane (1999) for further details on these events.

¹⁴ According to HRW(2009b:3) and IIFFMCG(2009a:5) approximately 850 deaths. USAID (2011) states “more than 130.000” IDP and Amnesty International (2010:10, 13) claims 192.000 IDP (as estimated by UNHCR). IIFFMCG(2009a:5) claims 135.000 IDP. IIFFMCG(2009b:224) gives a total of 138.000 IDP. In a UNHCR report, Tarkan-Mouravi (2009:15) gives 133.000 IDP. ((130.000+138.000)/2)=134.000.

5 Democratization and the danger of war

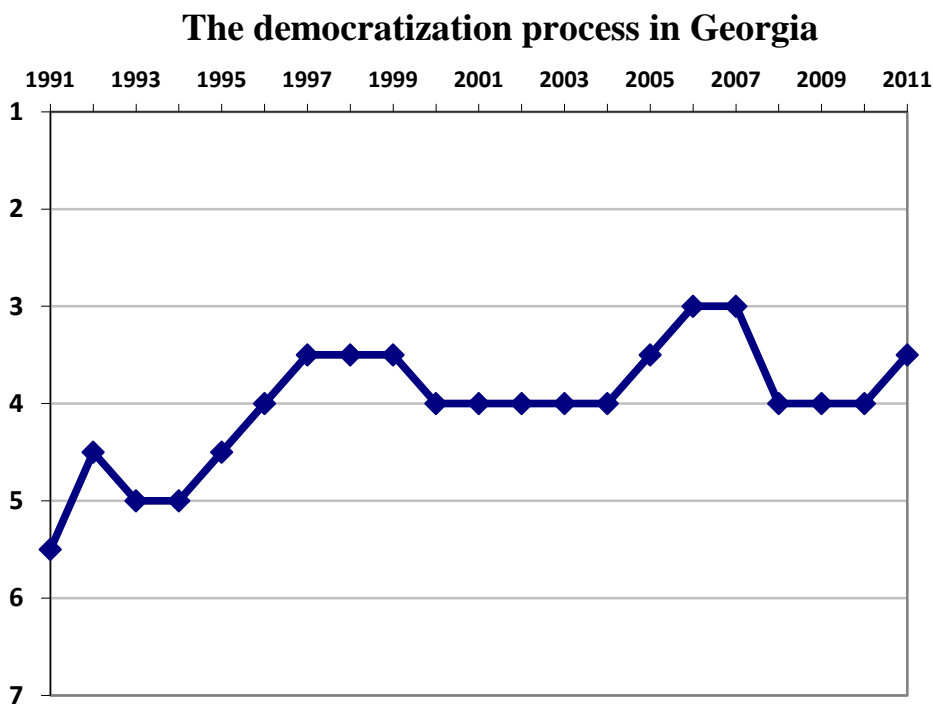


Figure 1. Freedomrating in Georgia since independence, where 1=highest level of political rights and civil liberties, 7=lowest level of freedom (Data assembled from <http://freedomhouse.org>).

In accordance with the Freedom in the World-index (Freedom House 2012a), Georgia has become more democratic since its independence in 1991 (see *Figure 1*). The country has however not yet become a mature democracy as per definition by Freedom House (2012a), Coppieters & Legvold (2005), Mansfield & Snyder (2005) etc. According to Mansfield & Snyder (2005), the path to democracy is often much turbulent and full of obstacles and as we can see from the history of Georgia's democratization process, Georgia is not an exception in this case.

The Democratization and Violence Nexus Georgia since independence

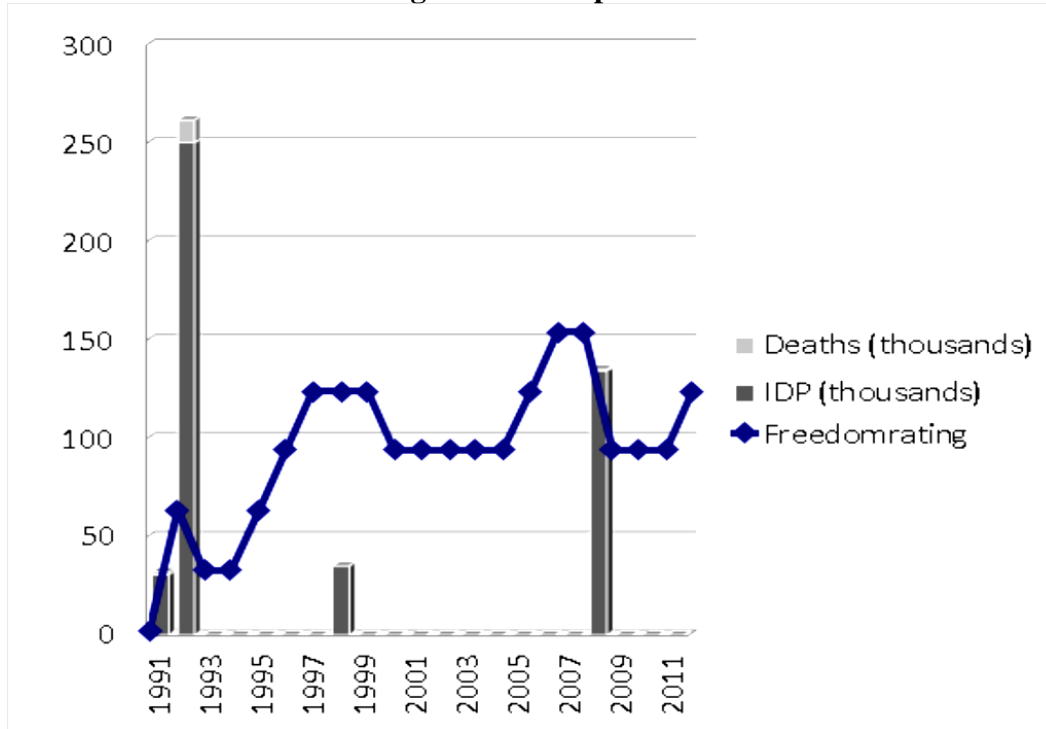


Figure 2. Conflicts and conflict intensity versus freedomrating (yearly). (Freedomrating data from <http://freedomrating.com>, conflict data from various sources, see Table 1. in the end of chapter 4. *Historical Background*)

When considering Major Violent Conflicts in Georgia since 1991, we find four main episodes, 1991-1992, 1992-1993, 1998 and 2008 (See *Figure 2.*). Along with these main conflicts are also a large number of “minor” conflicts, opposition forces fighting against governmental forces and separatist movements fighting for independence. Among those groups of violent elements are former political elite groups and threatened social groups. This chapter will identify those groups and examine the main causes of the violent episodes within the Democratization and War theory and thus within the democratization process.

5.1 Early Democratization 1991-1997

Some months after Georgia's independence in 1991, violent conflict erupted between, on one side President Gamsakhurdia and his supporters, the zviadists and on the other side, opposition forces (led by the former Soviet elite) in the meantime, conflicts also erupted between the zviadists and the South Ossetian and Russian forces (Höglund 2009:13, HRW 2009a:17f). The conflicts eventually resulted in a change of president and with the new president, President Shevardnadze, a political process towards democratization, started in Georgia (Höglund 2009:13, HRW 2009:17).

Although there were many different reasons behind the conflicts in 1991 and 1992 they fits what Acemoglu (2006:68, 71) claim; that the violence and social disorder can function as a “driving force behind political liberalization and the introduction of democratic measures”. A question that arises from this discussion is whether a transition towards democratization would be possible or even desired without violence?

On the other hand, Mansfield & Snyder (2005) suggests that the violence is instead caused by the democratization and not the other way around. Within the instability, caused by the political transition of democratization, Mansfield & Snyder (2005:20) argues that elite-groups may exploit the process for their own agendas. The exploitation may in terms cause increased violence and ultimately – war (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:5f).

One of the reasons to why violence appear within democratization processes, is according to Mansfield & Snyder (2005:24f) that “many social groups, including many powerful ones, are likely to be losers” in the democratization process. They argue (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:27) that to maintain the power of the social group, violence may be the only solution, to stop (or gain control over) the political process.

In the case of Georgia most violent conflicts have been fought regarding independence. It is possible that the strive for independence became increasingly relevant as means for the Abkhazian and South Ossetian elites, to maintain or take control over the political processes, not at least since the independence had

support from Russia (Höglund 2009, ICG 2009). Independence becomes in this case a uniting force with a clear goal, and everyone opposed to the independence (in this case mainly Georgia) becomes the enemy. If we look at this aim for independence as an opportunity for the elites and social groups in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to regain control, perhaps Mansfield & Snyder (2005:29) are right when claiming that the “[n]ew participants in the political process may be uncertain of where their political interests lie, because they lack established habits and good informations, and are thus fertile grounds for ideological appeals”. The previous political setting of the territories, within the Soviet Union, had not been supportive of such strive for independence and thus the elites by then may have had other means of controlling their privileges.

The strive for Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence was not a new phenomenon in the 1990s, but the fall of Soviet, the independence of Georgia and the initiation of a political transition, might have opened the political sphere and possibilities for a further strive for independence. Whether this ambition for independence is a way for the Russian elite to retain control, and/or for the South Ossetian and Abkhazian elites to establish stability, remains relatively unclear. Mansfield & Snyder’s argument does however fit very well to this case:

Elites try out all sorts of ideological appeals, depending on the social position that they need to defend, the nature of the mass group they want to recruit, and the type of appeals that seem plausible in the given political setting. A nearly universal element in these ideological appeals is nationalism, which has the advantage of positioning a community of interest that unites elites and masses... (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:29)

Mansfield & Snyder (2005:28) claims that while the threatened elite groups have strong reasons to *mobilize allies among the mass of people*, they may use whatever “special resources they still retain”.

In the first conflicts in Georgia since independence, the “weaker” elites within Abkhazia and South Ossetia were threatened to lose control over the political power, by on one hand the “more powerful” Russia and on the other hand the “less powerful” Georgia. The main *resource* for Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been the ability to ally with one of the two conflicting parties, where an alliance

with Russia (the more powerful) involved further ambitions for independence, as Russia supported this. Considering the Russian support for Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence, this can in terms be seen as a way for the elite (the previous Russian elite) to regain control in the area. Mansfield & Snyder (2005:25) argues that even the potentially beneficial elites have an interest in maintaining the control of the democratic transition. This is also what happened; after the struggles 1992-1993 four Russian military bases were deployed in Georgia and Russia increased their military presence (in form of CIS peacekeeping forces) along the Abkhazian border (Höglund 2009:14). This may in terms explain the period of relative stability 1993-1997, the elites (in this case Russia) had managed to regain control, and as Acemoglu (2006) claims, “if the elites have sufficient power they do not need to undertake coups”.

The perhaps most significant outcome of those initial conflicts, in terms of political transition, where the raise in democratization (See *Figure 1*), a process, which continued to increase until 1997 due to relative stability and local support for President Shevardnadze who now, in terms had support from the Russian elite (Höglund 2009:14f, Freedom House 2012b).

5.2 Increased Democratization 1997-2010

When we look at the two later major violent conflicts in Georgia, 1998 and 2008, they did not occur during increase of democratization as Mansfield & Snyder (2005) argues, but rather in times of relative transitional stability or in a downturn of democratization. The conflict in Abkhazia in 1998 which was characterized by hostile activities, killings and widespread destructions rather than an organized struggle for independence (IIFMCG 2009b:86, MacFarlane 1999:38ff), seems to have been boosted due to aggression rather than a common political ideology, although the ambition for independence, and thus equality, settled the foundation for violence. What started the aggressions in 1998 was thus not necessarily the transition towards democratization, although the years of increased freedom from 1994 to 1997 may have created the space, which Mansfield & Snyder (2005:28)

argue for, so that the Abkhazian elite could use the situation to take control over the masses of people:

In a periods of democratization, threatened elite groups have an overwhelming incentive to mobilize allies among the mass of people, but only on their own terms, using whatever special resources they still retain (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:28)

More likely is thus that the aggressions in 1998 was supported by other elites than the Abkhazian independence movement, *elites which gained something on keeping the conflict alive* (see Mansfield & Snyder 2005:19f), for instance various Russian elites.¹⁵ Failure to pay wages and to tackle corruption resulted in Shevardnadze losing in popularity (Freedom House 2012b). In 1998, two of Shevardnadze's body guards were killed in an assassination attempt aimed at the president (Höglund 2009:15). When Shevardnadze rigged the election in 2000, the freedomrating dropped (Freedom House 2012d).

The ongoing democratic transition stopped between 2000 and 2004 and the revolution in 2003, did remarkably enough not cause much violence compared to previous conflicts (Höglund 2009:16). Mansfield & Snyder (2005:5) argues that within the democratic transition, countries become more aggressive. The calm of the revolution may illustrate this relation. While on the other hand, the "Silver revolution" in 2011 that occurred during a period of increased democratization, did cause violence and casualties. However, the raise in freedomrating, 2004-2005, did not result in any particular violent conflict.

The war in 2008 did not change the overall freedom rating for Georgia, other than possibly stalling the downturn since 2007. The downturn was mainly seen due to the absence of any political opposition in Georgia (Freedom House 2012c). President Saakashvili's decision to arrest his main opponent, Okruasjvili (Höglund 2009:17) temporarily removed the democratic criteria of competition

¹⁵ Authors comment: what is however interesting to observe here is the increase of the Georgian-EU relation between 1996-1999, with the aim to make Georgia economically stronger and more independent (a possible obstacle for the Russia-Georgia relation). See for instance <http://www.europolitics.info/eu-georgia-boosting-reform-via-the-eu-s-tacis-assistance-programme-artr159465-44.html>.

from the political sphere and thus the freedom rating dropped (Freedom House 2012c).

After the war in 2008, Russia (and Nicaragua) acknowledged independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Höglund 2009:21). The outcome except for the casualties and abuses, was that Georgia lost control over the territories and instead Russia took over the control by increased military and security forces (Höglund 2009:24). Mansfield & Snyder (2005:29) argues that the elites who might benefit from wars and violent conflicts often use nationalist appeals, to regain control and privileges. They argue that the “nationalist appeals have often succeeded even though the average voter was not consistently pro-war” (Mansfield & Snyder 2005:29).¹⁶ Thus, the cause of the war in 2008 can be understood within Mansfield & Snyder’s argumentation that more violent conflicts occurs in democratizing states, due to some elites aim for control or privileges (Mansfield & Snyder 2005). The relation between democratization and violent conflicts is however not as clear as Mansfield & Snyder argues, at least not in the case of Georgia and within the time span chosen. Although we can relatively clearly see how the elites have and can use the transition for their own agendas.

5.3 Present 2011-2012

Although tensions from Russia, still exists, the current situation in Georgia remains relatively stable. According to Freedom House, the upturn in freedomrating 2010-2011, was the result of a more *relaxed security environment*, as well as *increased diversity in media* (Puddington 2012). The so called “Silver Revolution” in 2011, where according to BBC (McGuinness 2011b), approximately 10.000 people protested against President Saakashvili and demanded him to resign (See *Appendix 7.3* and *Appendix 7.4*) ended in two deaths and around 40 people injured (McGuinness D. 2011b). The following day

¹⁶ Authors comment: From this discussion, the war in 2008 suddenly makes some sense. A more thorough focus would however be needed on the elites and the benefits they may gain, in order to clearly outline this relation.

all traces of a revolution attempts was gone and the independence day of Georgia was celebrated peacefully in Tbilisi (See *Appendix 7.5*).

President Saakashvili has announced that presidential election will be held in October 2012 (Govtrack 2012). The Georgian constitution (Saakashvili 2012) does not allow the same person to be elected for more than two consecutive terms (10 years in total), thus we will most likely see a new leader after the election. Saakashvili did however recently remove the Georgian citizenship for his most popular opponent Ivanishvili (Lomsadze 2012)¹⁷ so the future democratization process of Georgia remains unclear.

Saakashvili did however, recently remove the Georgian citizenship from one of his main opposition leaders, Ivanishvili (Lomsadze 2012) so the future democratization process of Georgia remains unclear.

¹⁷ Authors comment: Ivanishvili is Georgia's richest man, and has been known for being humble in supporting poor villages while gaining nothing in return. Local newspapers and rumors in Georgia claims that Ivanishvili's main riches lie in Russian stocks and that he thus may be supported by Russia. Suddenly one day in late 2011 he announced to candidate for president. The official claim for removal of Ivanishvili's citizenship is that Georgian constitution only allows two citizenships (Ivanishvili had a Russian and a French citizenship as well).

6 Conclusion and Closing

The path for Georgia's democratization has been full of obstacles, revolutions and violent conflicts. The democratic transition has however continued although occasionally it has been stalled.

When it comes to the "Democratization and War"-theory, there are a few examples in Georgia's history, where the democratic transition has involved violent conflicts. During the initial phase of the democratization, in the early 1990's, Georgia went through the most devastating conflicts in its history since the independence from Soviet. The struggles over South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence 1991-1993, aligns with Mansfield & Snyder's theory on increased aggression during the initial phases of democratic transition.

An overall pattern following Mansfield & Snyder's theory can however not be found in the case of Georgia since 1991. An increase of democratization did not necessarily result in an increase of aggression and violent conflicts. The claim by Mansfield & Snyder that the elites may use the political transition for their own agenda, does however match with the case of Georgia in most cases, although this does not necessarily bring more violence aligned with more democracy, the elites may in terms be the cause of much of the violence during the political transition.

The main problem with Mansfield & Snyder's theory, as I have found, is the relation they make between increased violence, elite-aims and democratization. This relation is not as clear as Mansfield & Snyder wants to argue, at least not in the case analyzed in this paper. The casual connection that Mansfield & Snyder argues for seems much more non-casual in this particular case and I would argue that Mansfield & Snyder's generalization of democratizing countries is far too narrow and that each democratization process may diverse from others. The same applies for conflicts, where conflicts such as; conflicts for independence, conflicts waged by foreign forces, conflicts within and conflicts outside of one's territory etc. all are subject to different causes and different outcomes. Thus generalizing

widely, as Mansfield & Snyder apparently do, both when it comes to the type of conflicts mentioned and perhaps more essential – the type of democratic transition that applies – does not bring a reliable model for measuring individual cases nor for establishing any reliable prognoses for future violence within the political transition. It is possible that the transition theory may be used for a wider and more universal view of democratization, but within the particular case of this study, it has not proved to be accurate in understanding the relation between violent conflicts and democratization.

Although the Democratization and War theory does not completely match with the case of Georgia since independence, it has been a useful tool when identifying the possible causes and outcomes of the democratization process.

Georgia has gone through a turbulent democratization process since Soviet-times, a process which has both shaped and defined the political space in which the country is positioned today. Good relations to neighbours and to the international community are crucial for a peaceful and constructive democratic transition in Georgia. The decrease of violence and increase of democracy recent years, shows a positive trend, that can only be better.

To close this paper I wish to share a paradox considering this case; if the Democratization and War theory is right in assuming that *increased democracy increases the risks for instability and turbulence*, what if Coppieters & Legvold (2005:9f) also are right:

[Georgia] accepts the democratic model, because it wants to be Western, and it wants to be Western to affirm its independence from Russia. In this chain, however, a commitment to the liberal Western model is for security's sake, not because of a strong attachment to the model's intrinsic worth [democratic values]. Add to this the Georgian public's instinctive mistrust of the state—any state, democratic or otherwise—because of what the state came to represent in Soviet times, and the prospect of overcoming state weakness by promising democracy dims, particularly when for many Georgians, democratic values compete with other values embedded in Georgian society...(Coppieters & Legvold 2005:9f)

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APPENDIX

A. Map of Georgia



The map of Georgia (CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>, retrieved 18 May 2012).

B. Nato Integration Sign in Tbilisi



Georgia aiming for NATO integration – a suggested cause for the war 2008 (Photo by author, Tbilisi 2011).

C. Demonstrations in Tbilisi 2011



Demonstrations against President Sakhashvili outside of the Parliament, prior to the violent Silver Revolution (Photo by author, Tbilisi 2011).

D. Silver Revolution 2011



The Silver Revolution that caused at least two civilian deaths, Tbilisi streets crowded with Georgian special forces (Photo by author, Tbilisi 2011).

E. Independence Day 2011



Military Parade on a peaceful Independence day May 26, 2011, the day after “Silver Revolution” (Photo by author, Tbilisi 2011).