

Box 16.3 GEORGIA'S "ROSE REVOLUTION"

In early November 2003, less than a year before Ukraine's presidential election was scheduled to take place, Georgia, another former Soviet republic, held legislative elections. The elections were widely viewed as a key test of the strength of contending political factions prior to the Georgian presidential election slated for the spring of 2005, when the increasingly unpopular president Eduard Shevardnadze was due to leave office.

The election pitted government loyalists, who controlled Georgia's commerce and media, against self-proclaimed liberals attempting to exploit the public's growing unhappiness with perceived bureaucratic corruption. Official results indicated that Shevardnadze's ruling party triumphed, but opposition groups alleged massive fraud in the vote tabulation. Citing independent exit polls, Mikheil Saakashvili, a US-educated former Georgian official who had gone into political opposition after a falling out with Shevardnadze, claimed that his party had in fact won the elections, and he urged Georgians to undertake a campaign of public demonstrations and nonviolent civil disobedience against Shevardnadze's regime.

