

EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESIDENTIAL SOFT POWER IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS: CASE OF GEORGIA

By

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Department of International Relations

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Abstract

Do presidents possess soft power, and what role does the Presidential Soft Power (PSP) play in crisis mitigation? What are the conditions under which PSP can successfully contribute to crisis management? To answer these questions, this thesis, rooted in Nye's soft power theory, shifts the level of analysis from the state to the individual and focuses on the agency of presidents as the chief executives possessing soft power resources. This study specifically explores the conditions under which the Presidential Soft Power is effective in crisis mitigation, using Georgia as the case study. This thesis first develops a novel framework for measuring PSP, which is applied to three Georgian presidents. It is followed by a longitudinal study of five crises under their presidencies. Finally, it deploys the csQCA analysis as a technique to formalize the cross-case patterns. It finds that PSP can be effective in crisis management when two conditions are absent: namely, hard power and an external intervention. The csQCA analysis reveals that the configuration of $PSP^* \sim HP^* \sim EI$ (i.e., presence of Presidential Soft Power and absence of both Hard Power and External Intervention) is descriptively sufficient for effective crisis mitigation. The case study of the Georgian context as the plausibility probe lays the solid foundation for a future, broader examination of the Presidential Soft Power across various political contexts and contributes to the literature on leadership, soft power, and crisis management.

Keywords: Presidential Soft Power, president, soft power, crisis, Georgia

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Tamuna Manvelishvili**, candidate for the MA degree in International Relations declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Effectiveness of Presidential Soft Power in the Times of Crisis: Case of Georgia” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 22 May 2025

Tamuna Manvelishvili

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List of Abbreviations

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

csQCA – Crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

CSOs – Civil Society Organizations

EC – European Community (European Union)

EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EI – External Intervention (*condition in QCA*)

EU – European Union

GD – Georgian Dream Party

HP – Hard Power (*condition in QCA*)

IMF – International Monetary Fund

incl – Inclusion (*consistency in QCA*)

IOs – International Organizations

IR – International Relations

JPKF – Joint Peacekeeping Forces

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PRI – Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency (in QCA)

PS – Political Science

PSP – Presidential Soft Power

Saak_Rose – Saakashvili, Rose Revolution Crisis (*case name*)

Saak_War – Saakashvili, 2008 War Crisis (*case name*)

Shevi_CW – Shevardnadze, Civil War (*case name*)

Shevi_Recog – Shevardnadze, International Recognition Crisis (*case name*)

SP – soft power

SUC – Success of Crisis Mitigation (*outcome name*)

SUIN – Sufficient but Unnecessary part of an Insufficient but Necessary condition

TRACECA – Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNM – United National Movement Party

US – United States

USD – United States Dollar

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WB – World Bank

WOS – Web of Science

WTO – World Trade Organization

Zour_Crisis – Zourabichvili, Political Crisis (*case name*)

Introduction

"Even a serpent is lured out of its lair by the sweetness of the tongue." As a Georgian poet, Rustaveli suggests, one can even make the most cautious leave its lair through *attraction* or *persuasion* – the two focal points of soft power (SP). As Nye (2004) explains, soft power accomplishes desirable outcomes through attraction and persuasion, in contrast to hard power that relies on coercion and military power. After shaping others' preferences according to yours within the right context of a relationship, Nye notes, "You say 'Jump!' and they jump" (2004, 2).

State's chief executives hold the soft power to persuade or attract other actors, including the masses, through their actions, words, and policies. Presidents, in particular, due to their high visibility, formal authority, and symbolic role in the country, wield essential influence over the policies and public (Barber 2020). During the crisis, the importance of the person holding power becomes particularly vital, as their influence on the decision-making process can determine crisis outcomes (Allison 1971, Byman and Pollack 2001, Dyson 2006, Nye 2008). Individuals' experiences, personal traits, style, and relationships have the power to impact the political events (Hermann 1980, Dyson 2006, Gallagher and Allen 2014, Gherghina 2020). Given its non-coercive nature, the role of soft power ought to be developed by the leaders as a strategic tool to minimize costs in crisis management. Soft power, as Lee (2009, 207-209) argues, can be utilized to meet five policy goals: strengthening external security, rallying external support, manipulating other states' preferences, maintaining the community's unity, and increasing the domestic leader or government's ratings. Some of the notable examples of using soft power in crisis management are Mahatma Gandhi's use of soft power against British colonialism and oppression (Patel 2006), Martin Luther King Jr. efforts against the racial segregation (Fairclough 1986), China's decision to send humanitarian aid to Italy

during the Covid 19, positively changing the Italian public opinion about China (MacDonald 2020), or Nelson Mandela's non-coercive efforts in the South African anti-apartheid struggle (Brites and Padilha 2017).

This thesis, emphasizing the role of the president as the key political actor in numerous countries, aims to show how the president can deploy soft power to mitigate the crisis effectively. It addresses the main research question: under what conditions is the Presidential Soft Power (PSP) effective in times of crisis? The analysis draws on the case study of Georgian presidents and further investigates under what conditions Georgia's Presidential Soft Power has been effective during the crisis. Georgia provides a compelling case study due to the diverse variation on the main independent variable (PSP) and the dependent variable (the success of crisis management).

The thesis posits the following hypothesis: *the higher the level of Presidential Soft Power, the greater the likelihood that the crisis can be successfully managed with minimal costs*. In this study, I argue that presidents who have stronger PSP are more likely to solve the crisis effectively, in contrast to presidents with weaker PSP. However, PSP, being a necessary condition for successful crisis mitigation, is not sufficient alone. The crisis is successfully mitigated when the tensions are de-escalated and major conflicting issues are resolved. Whenever hard power and/or an external intervention are present in crisis mitigation besides soft power, it becomes very unlikely that the crisis can be managed effectively. Thus, when the strong PSP is combined with the absence of both hard power and an external intervention, it creates the conditions under which tensions can be diminished and key conflicting issues settled.

The methodological approach employed in this thesis is mixed methods. First, it develops the quantitative framework of PSP that is applied to three Georgian presidents, followed by a longitudinal analysis of five different crises under their presidencies. The Georgian case study

serves as a plausibility probe. Finally, crisp set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) is conducted to systematically assess the conditions under which PSP contributed to effective crisis management.

Building on the soft power theory as the theoretical framework, this study intends to shift the level of analysis to the individual, which has long been overlooked in academia and beyond. The state has remained the dominant unit of analysis, and the importance of non-traditional actors has been increasingly emphasized in emerging global politics. Despite the literature on leadership highlighting the importance of leaders' influence on politics (Greenstein 1987; Kaarbo and Hermann 1998; Walker, Schafer, and Young 1999), the debate on the significance of individuals, particularly their soft power capabilities, contributing to crisis mitigation has not been systematically studied. Therefore, this thesis aims to bridge this gap.

The first chapter begins with a review of the academic literature developed on the topics of leadership, soft power, and crisis mitigation, followed by a discussion on soft power and the theoretical framework in the second chapter. The third chapter defines key concepts, particularly develops the PSP framework, and relevance to crisis management. The chapter concludes by outlining the research methodology and the justification for selecting the Georgian context as the case study, based on its small size, diverse range of crises, and evolving presidential institution.

After laying out the solid academic foundation for this study, the empirical part of this thesis develops as follows: the fourth chapter delves into the case study. It starts with the in-depth analysis of Shevardnadze's administration, covering two major crises: the international isolation crisis in the early 1990s, and two civil wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Then it moves to the next president, Saakashvili's term, examining the post-Rose Revolution crisis and the 2008 Russia-Georgian war. Finally, it discusses the deep political crisis under Zourabichvili's rule. The fifth analytical chapter is devoted to the csQCA analysis. After

calibrating the data, the necessary and sufficient conditions are examined, and truth tables and solutions are reported, making final observations on the cross-case patterns.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

1.1 Leaders, Crisis, and Soft Power

Over the past few decades, there has been a lively academic debate on whether a leader's personality matters in international politics. Despite mainstream IR theories that argued that personal characteristics can only have a trivial or no impact on politics, there is body of work showing that leadership personality matters in international politics, especially in the decision-making process and in times of crisis (Allison 1971, Hermann 1980, Greenstein 1987, Byman and Pollack 2001, Dyson 2006, Gallagher and Allen 2014, Boin, Hart, Stern, and Sundelius, 2017). Kenneth Waltz (2001) contests this view, despite acknowledging individuals as the “first image,” that can explain international relations. He dismisses the idea that individuals can influence international politics due to human nature being constant. In contrast, Byman and Pollack (2001) argue that individuals can impact the second (domestic) and third (international) image of international relations, and their characteristics can shape important events such as war and alliances.

The relationship between the leader's personality, particular characteristics, and their impact on foreign policy behavior has been often studied (Hermann 1980, Dyson 2006, Gallarotti 2011, Gallagher and Allen 2014). Gallagher and Allen (2014) empirically examine four traits: excitement seeking, openness to action, deliberation, and altruism that assess the leader's risk-taker or risk-averse character and their (in)consistency in using force. Similarly, Dyson (2006) used Leadership Trait Analysis to demonstrate how Tony Blair's personality contributed to the decision-making process that led to the UK's involvement in the Iraq War. Thus, it can be argued that the impact of the individual in international politics is considerable, as they influence the development of political events.

The role of individuals in domestic politics has also been extensively examined. For instance, Gherghina (2020) highlights the emerging influence of individual politicians in party politics, a phenomenon that he calls the personalization process of party politics. Leaders' values, expectations, perceptions, and experiences greatly influence their behaviors. Gherghina reviews key leadership theories, including the Leaders Motive Profile Theory, the Charismatic Leadership Theory by House (1991), the Life Cycle Theory focusing on four leadership styles: telling, selling, participating, and delegating by Hersey and Blanchard (1982), and the Cognitive Resource Theory by Fiedler (1995). These theories illustrate the extensive development of leadership studies.

Various scholars have examined how leaders can use soft power in different kinds of crises. For example, Divkolaye et al. (2016) studied how health diplomacy as a tool of soft power has been used by the health ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia to avoid further escalation of political and military tensions between the two countries. Similarly, Bokova (2017) analyzed how UNESCO, as a soft power actor with an emphasis on education and heritage, has contributed to peacebuilding and resilience in 20 countries in the age of emerging extremism and conflict. Another prominent soft power actor, the EU, has frequently engaged in negotiations, mediation, diplomatic talks, or similar activities to solve the crisis. For instance, the EU successfully used mediation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2015 during the deep political crisis after the Gruevski wire-tapping scandal (Coibion 2017). These cases suggest that soft power has the capacity to address the crisis effectively, if employed by leaders under the right conditions. As also argued by Gallarotti (2011), it is up to decision-makers to exploit soft power and make it part of their foreign policy. He suggests that if the leaders want to benefit from soft power, they should assess their nation's international influence and then effectively integrate the soft power into their policy. Thus, leaders can

incorporate soft power into their policies to de-escalate the tensions and address the central conflicting issues.

The role of personality during a crisis is even more significant. As Dyson (2006, 290) argues, “foreign policy crises and wars involve conditions which favor the influence of personality, and that individuals’ distinctive policy preferences, decision-making styles, and relationships to advisers are crucial elements in accounting for outcomes”. Similarly, Nye (2008, 9) argues that leaders matter more during crises. The crisis that brings uncertainty, urgency, and threat to major values puts the government leaders in a position to make highly important decisions, sometimes even fatal ones (Boin, Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 2017, 6-9). The decision-making process is often tough, as decisions can include making choices that can harm others, lead to hardly predictable outcomes, and raise dilemmas that do not suggest an easy way out. Under such circumstances, various leaders act differently; some tend to be decisive and bolder while others require extensive deliberation, time, and delegation of responsibilities (Boin, Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 2017, 51-54). During the crisis, “the personalities, styles, and competencies of individual officeholders [are] in sharp focus” (Boin, Hart, and Esch 2016, 119) – leading to distinctive outcomes. Hence, personalities matter in international politics and even more during crises.

Thus, the existing literature demonstrates that individuals can influence international politics, exploit soft power for their country’s benefit, and play a crucial role during crises. This thesis illustrates the relationship between these three in the following manner: a person’s (president’s) soft power is likely to influence the success of crisis management. To the best of my knowledge, this relationship between leadership personality, soft power, and crisis management has not been systematically studied within academia. Therefore, by outlining the framework for understanding the relationship between the president’s soft power and crisis management, this thesis aims to bridge this research gap.

Chapter 2 – Soft Power

The term soft power, originating from the International Relations (IR) discipline, has been examined across various fields of study. To best illustrate the term's evolution, the Web of Science (WOS) database serves as a valuable tool, allowing analysis of academic works in English. As a result of the search, the IR and Political Science (PS) categories included 1,118 publications with the name “Soft Power” in the title from 1990 to 2025 (see Appendix 1 for search details). It is remarkable that after the IR and PS categories, it has become popular in area studies, economics, history, communication, and so on (see Figure 1). Moreover, the search showed that Joseph S Nye has been the most influential author, while most of the publications were published in 2020.

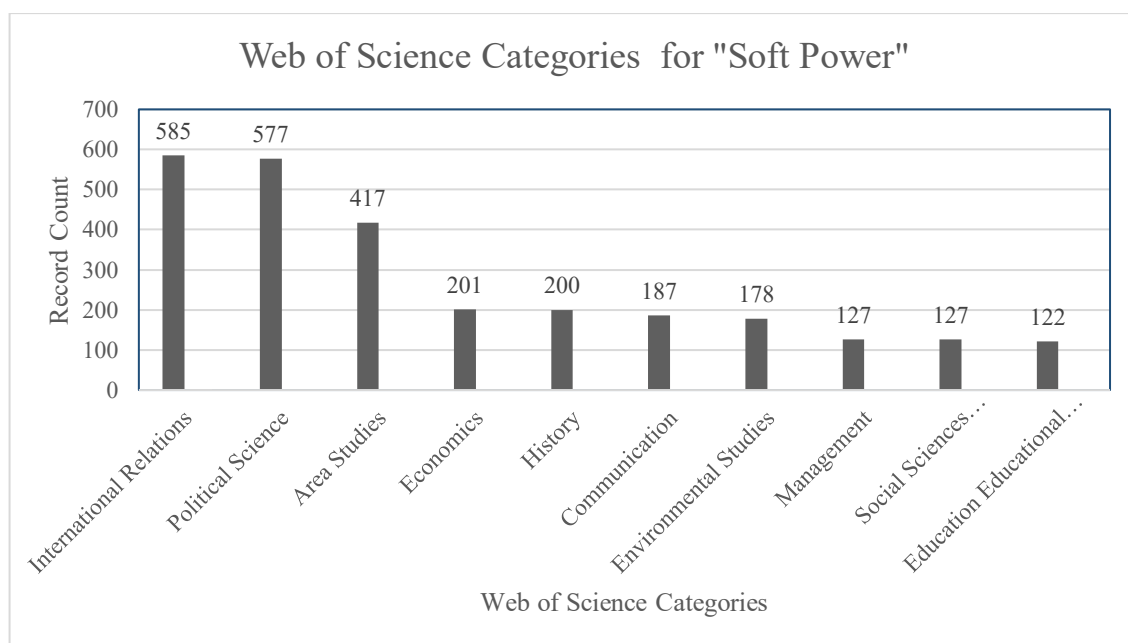


Figure 1: Web of Science Categories (Source: WOS)

Beyond the English written sources, Winkler (2020) examines Japanese and Chinese databases, finding the Chinese substantial interest and focus on soft power. For instance, only

in 2012, the number of publications reached 1,882. As Winkler finds, besides the academic interest, the concept of soft power holds significant relevance for the Chinese government, specifically in shaping its domestic and foreign policy objectives.

2.1 Soft Power Measurements

As the thesis aims to develop the Presidential Soft Power measurement, reviewing existing soft power measurements is worthwhile. Measuring SP has always been challenging. As Nye (2004, 1) mentions, “Power is also like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that.” Still, a group of scholars (Treverton and Jones 2005, Olivié, and Molina 2012, Olivié and Santos 2013, Trunkos 2013, McClory 2015) have tried to develop multidimensional scales to empirically examine SP resources. Some of them are: the Soft Power Index developed by the Institute for Government (IFG); McClory’s Soft Power 30; soft power index developed by Ernest& Young; Anholt Ipsos National Brand Index; Elcano Soft Power Presence Index; and IfG-Monocle Soft Power Survey. However, these rankings have been criticized for focusing overly on great powers, overlooking small states (Yavuzaslan and Çetin 2016, Seong-Hun 2018, Wang 2024).

While soft power measurements on small states are lacking, the debate on small states’ soft power is vital. In the modern multilateral international order, small states can strategically use SP to advance their position in the international arena, thereby compensating for the lack of hard resources (Timilsana 2024). If small states invest significantly, they can deploy SP more efficiently than big states (Kounalakis and Simonyi 2011, 37). Small countries like Norway, Switzerland, South Korea, and Singapore serve as success stories, finding a niche in the global world through distinctive culture, political values, policies, and institutions (Timilsana 2024).

Moreover, soft power rankings were created to grasp the soft power at the state or organizational levels, making them less applicable for the analysis at the individual level.

However, soft power assessment, yet hard to measure, can be transposed to the individual level, as chief executives possess significant soft power. Thus, to address this gap, this thesis aims to develop a framework relevant to the President's Institute suitable for both small and large countries.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The literature on soft power since the 1990s, when Joseph Nye first coined the term, has grown substantially. As the classical definition suggests, soft power is: “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (Nye 2004, X). Shaping the preferences of others is the pillar of soft power, which is achieved through attraction or persuasion. Nye (2004, 6) argues that intangible assets, namely, attractive personality, political values, culture, institutions, and legitimate and morally acceptable policies, tend to shape others' preferences, thus making it easier for others to follow a leader. Furthermore, Nye (2004, 8) claims that in international politics, the main resources that produce soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policy.

Despite Nye's powerful theory, it does not come without criticism. Hall (2010), disapproving of soft power as the analytical category, suggests disintegrating “the concept into separate ‘soft powers’, each with a discrete pathway of influence.” Instead of considering attraction as the main mechanism of soft power, he offers the alternative of soft power mechanisms, namely, the power of institutions, reputation, and representation. De Martino (2020) reviews group of authors, such as Watanabe, and McConnell 2008; Ying Fan 2008, Zahran, and Ramos 2010, and Shin-Wha Lee 2011, who criticize Nye for underestimating the role of non-state actors, and the relational character of soft power, oversimplification of the soft power resources, and US-centrism. Moreover, Watanabe and McConnell (2008, xxi) argue against his state-centricity, giving “the impression that governments are singular entities rather

than complex sites of competing interest groups.” Yet scholars agree that Nye’s academic works remain a strong theoretical foundation for further developing the soft power research program. This thesis, grounded in Nye’s theoretical framework, zooms in on the individual level to better understand the role of individual leaders’ exercise of soft power in crisis management.

Soft power, PSP in particular, positively contributes to successful crisis management. However, it should be deployed under specific conditions for an effective outcome. Two such conditions can be named: the absence of hard power and the absence of external intervention. Hard power, “the ability to get desired outcomes through coercion and payment (Nye 2011, 12), is expected to impede the effectiveness of crisis management, as it brings high human and material costs and leaves deep psychological traumas for the generations. As Nye (2004, 2011) notes, when coercion is used, the international image of the state (SP) also deteriorates. When such high costs are paid, effective crisis management should be hardly achievable. Moreover, it is important to distinguish external intervention from hard power as a separate condition for two reasons: first, hard power during the crisis can be used by domestic and/or external actors and second, external intervention can happen through various means – directly or indirectly – by providing military, financial, informational, and/or material support. External intervention from the hostile external actor can further destabilize the situation and escalate the tensions, especially when they intend to infringe the country’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. Thus, these two conditions impede effective crisis management efforts. This thesis, using the mini-case studies of Georgia, examines the role of Georgian PSP, together with hard power and external intervention, as contributing factors in the crisis management.

Chapter 3 – Research Design

3.1 Definition of Presidential Soft Power

Presidential Soft Power is defined as follows: *the president's ability to make others behave in a way that comes in conformity to his/her preferences and interests without coercion but rather through attraction and persuasion.*

What makes PSP different from soft power is the level of analysis; while the focus of the latter traditionally is the state, the former's focus is on the individual. In this regard, PSP is similar to personal diplomacy (Ohnesorge 2020), "celebrity diplomacy" (Cooper and Frechette 2008), or "celebrity politics" (Kellner 2010). It is personalities that facilitate and drive international developments, pursue and advocate national interests. In this, personal characteristics, such as charisma, rhetoric, leadership, and diplomatic skills, play an important role. This thesis does not claim that it is only presidents or single personalities that hold this power. However, their agency is bigger than usually recognized (Ohnesorge 2020). Presidents have high visibility and communication resources with the masses and elites at home and abroad to advance their interests, shape their preferences, and persuade audiences of the value of their goals. For that reason, it is essential to understand the unique resources that presidents hold.

For Nye (2004, 10), the state's soft power can be enhanced through institutions. However, I argue that institutions not only enhance soft power but also generate it. The presidential administration, as a key state institution, possesses the capacity to establish its own soft power. Indeed, I argue that all major state institutions contribute to the country's soft power, albeit to varying degrees. It is the president who embodies the presidential administration, thus holds

the soft power resources. While all institutions, together with non-governmental structures, produce the country's soft power (see Figure 3), their individual importance should not be overlooked by the broader state-level analysis.

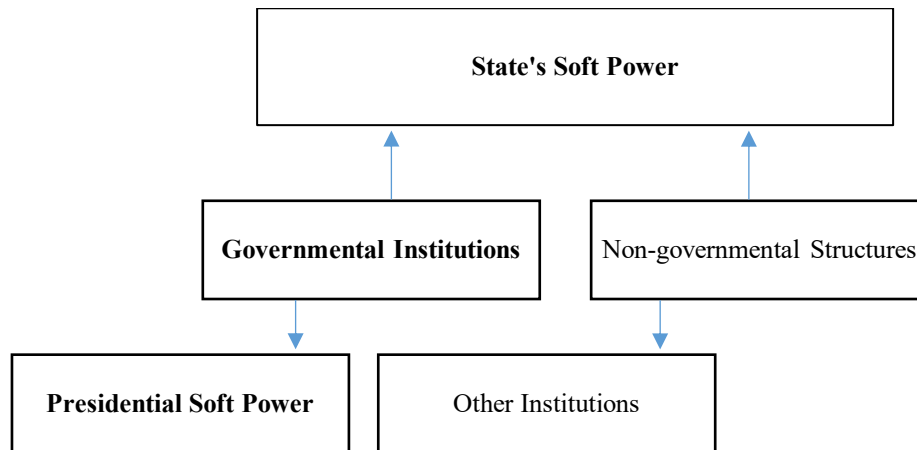


Figure 2: State's Soft Power (Source: prepared by the author)

To further refine the concept, it is important to distinguish it from diplomacy. First of all, soft power is an umbrella term that unites diplomacy under it. There are various forms of diplomacy: public diplomacy, personal diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, etc. Intuitively, public diplomacy stands closest to the PSP, as through it, the president tries to win the “hearts and minds” of people. As Edmund A Gullion defines it, public diplomacy is “the means by which governments, private groups and individuals influence the attitudes and opinions of other peoples and governments in such a way as to exercise influence on their foreign policy decisions” (quoted in Ohnesorge 2020, 137). However, soft power is best understood as the “mindset” (Kounalakis and Simonyi 2011, 36), whereas public diplomacy is its tool, the value of which should be neither undervalued nor exaggerated. Equating public diplomacy with soft power means oversimplifying the multifaceted nature of soft power (Kounalakis and Simonyi 2011). Meanwhile, PSP is similar to personal diplomacy, but

reducing the concept to personal diplomacy would only underestimate the complexity of soft power that the president can wield.

Second, while the diplomat's main duty is to engage in diplomatic relations with others, the president's authority, besides often being a chief diplomat, is more complex. In most countries, the president engages in foreign affairs, though the extent of this depends on the state's institutional design and the willingness to deploy soft power proactively. The president may opt for an isolationist foreign policy, thus minimizing the use of soft power, or the opposite.

Third, the level of interaction differs for presidents and diplomats. While diplomats usually engage with their counterparts, the president's diplomatic engagement is higher and broader, and extends to his/her counterparts, masses, and elites. Moreover, the president can enjoy the advantage of being a "first-mover" in the global arena compared to other governmental institutions and being exposed to critical information that is not available to others (Canes-Wrone, Howell, and Lewis 2008) – thus increasing her/his leverage.

3.2 PSP Resources and Measurement

Nye (2008) identified two main sources of a leader's soft power: inherent qualities (charisma) and communications (rhetoric, persuasion). However, he misses another important pillar – formal authority, which creates the institutional basis for exercising the soft power. In this spirit, this thesis identifies three key Presidential Soft Power resources: 1) *the president's personality*, which takes into account the leadership style, political values and popularity; 2) *institutional authority*, examining the president's constitutional power and cooperation with other political and non-political actors within the country, and 3) *international engagement*, where the president gets involved in the international arena (see Figure 4). It is important that

PSP resources effectively translate into soft power and the strategies that presidents deploy, as Lee (2009, 212) notes, are “goal-specific.”

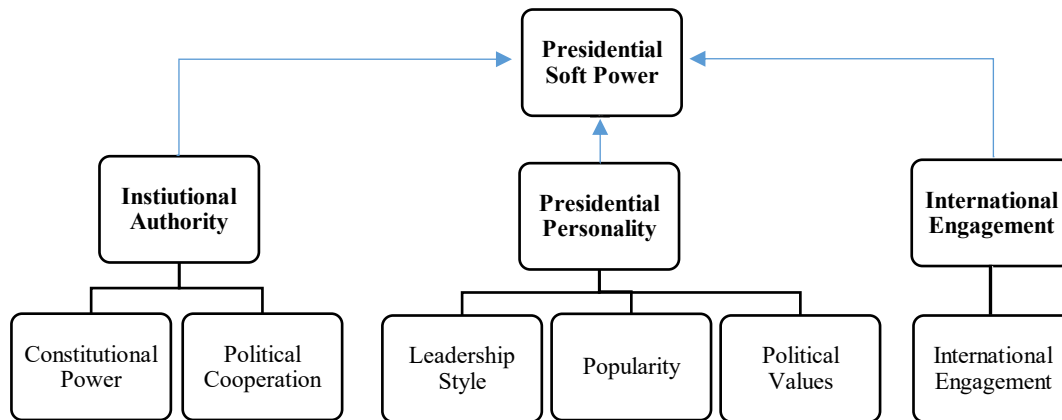


Figure 3: PSP Resources and Dimensions (Source: prepared by the author)

These three main PSP resources are evaluated based on six key dimensions: leadership style, popularity, political values, constitutional power, political cooperation, and international engagement. Each dimension incorporates measurable indicators (see Table 1) and is measured on a 0, 0.5, 1 point scale with a maximum of 6 points (the strongest Presidential Soft Power).

The PSP classification is the following:

5-6 points: Strong PSP

3-4 points: Moderate PSP

1-2 points: Weak PSP

0 point: No PSP

3.2.1 President's Personality

A leader's personality can impact the political developments within the country and beyond. The behavior of leaders varies, as their traits, values, experiences, motivations, and priorities differ. Moreover, the personality of the president has been seen as the prism through which people understand politics (Barber 2020, 17-18). The author (2020, 27) explains that the presidency goes beyond the institutional framework; it is "a focus of feelings" of people. As the presidents usually have the highest visibility and symbolic role in the public, they have more power over people with their words and actions. Their *leadership style*, *political values*, and *popularity* constitute the PSP resource.

For assessing leadership style, the emphasis is placed on the leader's cooperative/relationship-focused style. Countries tend to have higher SP when they promote international cooperation, peace, and stability compared to aggressive foreign policy (Amirbeka and Ydyrys 2014, Saaida 2023). Similarly, leaders with more focus on cooperation and relationships should have higher SP than leaders with a bellicose agenda.

The second dimension of the president's popularity is measured as the level of electoral support when they were elected, as well as popular support. The third dimension captures how strongly the president's political values are aligned with the international partner's values, norms, and laws – this is important for assessing how attractive the president's values are to others.

3.2.3 Institutional Authority

Greater institutional authority gives the president more leverage to form others' preferences, influence events, and, generally, deploy soft power. Institutional authority is composed of two key dimensions: *constitutional power* and *political cooperation*. Depending on the country's political setting, some presidents enjoy more constitutional power over

domestic and foreign affairs, while others might have only formal, symbolic roles. Here, I measure this in terms of whether the Constitution grants strong, moderate, or limited rights to the president.

On the other hand, the president's close alignment with the government, other political parties, and civil society forms a solid foundation for building SP. As Nye (2010, 220; 2011, 57) argues, soft power is a dynamic and relational concept: "soft power is a dance that requires partners." Therefore, PSP, as the constituent part of the country's soft power, needs to be analyzed in relation to other governmental or non-governmental actors.

3.2.4 International Engagement

International engagement is the means through which presidents establish and use PSP. International visits are the most common form of international engagement, where leaders represent national interests, express their positions, negotiate, etc. As Goldsmith, Horiuchi, and Matush (2021, 1345-1346) argue, a leader's activities during foreign visits translate into soft power over a foreign audience through raising their awareness about themselves and their country and shaping their views. The leader's engagement in international visits can have three different forms: "love" (ideational connection), "money" (material benefit), and "fame" (prestige and influence) (Balci and Pulat 2024). Presidents, aiming to use their soft power effectively, should focus on "love" and "fame" to create ideational linkages and be liked, accepted, and followed.

Furthermore, the "two presidencies thesis" suggests that presidents have more influence in foreign affairs than domestic affairs (Canes-Wrone, Howell, and Lewis 2008). This thesis would better capture the President's influence if considered as a two-level game (Putnam 1988). By engaging with both domestic and foreign audiences, the president is a connecting

thread between these two, which is essential for effective soft power. That's why examining the domestic and international positionality of the president is important.

The international engagement dimension mainly takes into account the president's international visits, the existence of elite networks, and symbolic acts as the measurement, since they hold valuable information for the researchers (Ohnesorge 2020, 162).

Table 1: Presidential Soft Power Framework

Presidential Personality		Institutional Authority		International Engagement	
Leadership Style	Relationship focus	Constitutional Power	Authority in domestic and foreign affairs	International Engagement	International visits
					Symbolic acts
					Elite networks
<i>Measurement:</i> 1 point: positive scholarly assessment 0.5 point: Neutral or mixed assessment (neither positive nor negative) 0 point: negative scholarly assessment		<i>Measurement:</i> 1 point: strong power 0.5 point: moderate power 0 point: weak/limited power		<i>Measurement:</i> 1 point: engages frequently 0.5 point: engages periodically 0 point: engages rarely	
Popularity	Public Opinion	Political Cooperation	With government		
			With opposition		
			With civil society		
<i>Measurement:</i> 1 point: Highly popular – above 60% 0.5 point: Moderate –40-60% 0 point: Low – below 40%		<i>Measurement:</i> 1 point: strong cooperation 0.5 point: moderate, and selective cooperation 0 points: weak or no cooperation			
Political Values	Alignment with international partners, norms and laws				
<i>Measurement:</i> 1 point: completely or mostly aligned 0.5 point: partial alignment 0 point: no or weak alignment					

3.3 Definition of Crisis

The unit of analysis in this thesis is the state crisis, defined by Sandbrook (1976, 172) as a “situation in which a system's basic institutional pattern is challenged by members of society and a routine response on the part of the governing élite is inadequate.” Similarly, Offe (1976, 31) describes crisis as a “process in which the structure of a system is called into question.” In this study, a crisis refers to *a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger that affects a community or a nation. Crises are characterized by a sense of urgency, uncertainty, and the potential for negative outcomes. They often disrupt normal operations, pose significant challenges, and require immediate attention and action to mitigate their impact.*

The success of crisis management in the thesis is measured qualitatively as follows: (1) *Minimally or No Successful Crisis Management*: The crisis persists with minor or no consensus/agreement on key issues; (2) *Partially Successful Crisis Management*: Some vital issues are solved, de-escalating the crisis. However, unresolved major conflicting issues prevent the crisis from being fully and effectively managed; (3) *Successful Crisis Management*: All major conflicting issues are resolved. Order and stability are restored, while tensions are de-escalated between the antagonistic parties. The crisis is mitigated with minimal costs.

3.4 Methodology

The thesis is grounded in mixed methods, using the Georgian context for the mini-case studies. First, it develops the quantitative PSP measurement, assessed on a 6-point scale, through which Georgian presidents' soft power is examined.

I test the value of PSP for crisis management through a longitudinal study. In the same spatial unit, I create mini-case studies of three Georgian presidents. Although case studies cannot be used for empirical generalization or testing hypothesis more generally, they are a

great heuristic case studies for the intense investigation of the subject (Lijphart 1975, 160). This thesis uses the case of Georgia as a plausibility probe to assess the validity of the suggested framework. Eckstein (1992, 141-142) says that, at a minimum, a plausibility probe “attempts to determine whether potential validity may reasonably be considered great enough to warrant the pains and costs of testing, which are almost always considerable”. The Georgian president’s study being an “intra-unit” comparison – within the same country – makes the ideal setting for controlled comparison, in Lijphart’s (1975, 168) words, that’s because “their degree of similarity is likely to be higher.”

Even though the longitudinal analysis reveals the conditions under which the PSP is effective, for a more systematic and formalized discussion, crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) is conducted using R software. QCA is a set-theoretic method, focusing on the causes-of-effects questions, and established in the principles of causal complexity, conjunctural causation, and equifinality (Oana, Schneider, Thomann 2021, 5-8). However, due to the small number of cases, csQCA in this study is primarily aimed at illustrating the potential of PSP as an explanatory model. The thesis relies on primary and secondary sources, such as books, articles, governmental documents, reports, presidents’ official websites, their speeches, interviews, and memoirs.

3.5 Case Selection

The country case of Georgia was chosen as it is a small state and exhibits an interesting transition from a presidential to a semi-presidential system, and later to a parliamentary republic since 1991 (Matsaberidze 2023). Such a transition over slightly more than three decades should allow us to examine how the PSP changes in terms of crisis management in response to different political systems. Throughout the transition, the power of the Georgian presidential administration has decreased remarkably. Presidents Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Eduard

Shevardnadze, and Mikheil Saakashvili all had significant constitutional powers, giving them wider room for political maneuvering. However, the 2010 amended Constitution limited Margvelashvili and Zourabichvili's presidential authority in domestic and foreign affairs to a formal role (Constitution of Georgia 1995a, as amended in 2010).

In this thesis, the following crises will be considered as the unit of analysis: the international recognition crisis and Georgian civil wars under President Shevardnadze; the post-Rose Revolution crisis and the 2008 war during the presidency of Saakashvili; and the deep political crisis during Zourabichvili's presidency.

As Nye (2004, 12) states, the context defines the effectiveness of any kind of power resources. That's why choosing the different kinds of crises – political crisis, domestic conflict, crises involving external power and/or hard power – can be helpful to observe in which context the PSP has been most effective. Despite the variation in the dependent and independent variables, mini-case studies, through in-depth analysis, reveal recurring cross-case patterns. These patterns are more formally illustrated through csQCA analysis. “Intra-unit” comparison within the same country guarantees that some variables remain similar, such as culture, the geostrategic importance, regional position, and role. By applying the PSP framework to crises under Georgian presidents, I hope to contribute both to the Georgian literature and the broader scholarship on soft power, crisis management, and leadership analysis.

The presidencies of Gamsakhurdia and Margvelashvili are not covered in this thesis. Gamsakhurdia's case is irrelevant for at least two reasons: first, he served as the president for less than 9 months, and second, Georgia was not *de jure* recognized by any Western countries (Kavadze 2020, 38). Hence, this is not a good case for analysis. In the case of President Margvelashvili, his term did not include any significant crisis and therefore, does not meet the scope conditions of my theory.

Last but not least, I have chosen this country case because I, as a Georgian, have a deep knowledge of the political, historical, and social context, as well as the advantage of accessing the broad range of Georgian literature, which may not be accessible to non-Georgian researchers.

Chapter 4 – Mini-Case Studies

This chapter examines five crisis cases under the presidencies of Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili, and Salome Zourabichvili. First, each president's PSP score is assessed based on the PSP framework, followed by a discussion of how their PSP contributed to the crisis management.

4.1 Eduard Shevardnadze

Eduard Shevardnadze, the second President of the newly independent post-Soviet state of Georgia (head of state of Georgia 1992-1995, president 1995-2003), inherited a fragile state marked by internal hostilities, profound instability, and continuous crises. Shevardnadze, as an experienced diplomat and politician, was more successful in dealing with some crises than others. Despite having a strong PSP, Shevardnadze's crisis management approach was more effective in resolving the country's international isolation than in the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where the involvement of hard power and external intervention played a detrimental role.

4.1.1 PSP of Eduard Shevardnadze

Presidential Personality

Shevardnadze, perceived as an innovative and open-minded leader globally, is described as “one of ‘the’ leaders, politically but also morally, and surely developmentally, of the world” (Geyer 2000, 58). His intellectual capacity to look for the defining principles in the chaos and then deploy them, combined with his charm, “innate moral nature,” and assertiveness, should have contributed to crisis navigation (Geyer 2000, 59-60). Many Georgians considered him to be a wise leader, capable of establishing order and guided by rationality (Sumbadze et al. 2016,

208-214). Various great leaders have praised his skills, namely, Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton acknowledged his talent in public speaking and rhetoric, a good sense of humor, and other essential traits needed for playing a significant role in international politics (Shevardnadze 2018, 141-142). Given domestic and international recognition of Shevardnadze's leadership qualities, assigning a score of 1 is reasonable.

Moreover, Shevardnadze enjoyed popularity among the domestic population, especially during his initial years in Georgia, being "welcomed home as a hero" (Cohen 2004). Shevardnadze received the mass support of the people in the 1992 parliamentary elections; he was elected as the chairman of the Parliament with 96,01% of the vote (Chubinidze 2024). Similarly, in the 1995 presidential elections, he received 74.32% of the vote (OSCE Parliamentary Assembly 1995), and 79.8% in the 2000 presidential elections (OSCE 2000). Despite his popularity waning after the 2000s, a score of 1 is justified as the PSP is more concerned with the early stages of his rule.

Shevardnadze's efforts to align the country with international norms and laws by joining the International Organizations (IOs) and declaring the country's Western aspirations mean that it is reasonable to assign a score of 1. It is noticeable that besides strengthening ties with the West, he tried to reinforce the relations with neighbors, yet with limited success when it came to Russia.

Institutional Authority

Shevardnadze, as the head of the country, holding the roles of Chairman of the State Council of Georgia and Chairman of the Georgian Parliament till his presidency in 1995, enjoyed significant authority to make decisions without the consent of Parliament (Shevardnadze 2018, 287). Furthermore, the 1995 Constitution granted him extensive rights

and responsibilities in domestic and foreign affairs (Constitution of Georgia 1995b). The high concentration of power from the initial days justifies a score of 1.

Shevardnadze's relations with the government, parliament, and civil society could be characterized as rather positive at the beginning of his political career in Georgia. However, his relations with Presidium members were not as smooth. Jaba Ioseliani and Temur Kitovani, holding substantial military power, were constantly challenging Shevardnadze's authority. Moreover, his relations became more strained with the opposition and civil society after the 2000s, leading to the 2003 Rose Revolution and his resignation. Thus, his selective and inconsistent political cooperation with different domestic stakeholders provides sufficient grounds for a score of 0,5.

International Engagement

The starting point for assessing Shevardnadze's international engagement should be his role as the USSR Foreign Minister, where he established strong elite connections worldwide, which played a positive role during his presidency. His visits included the Americas, Scandinavia, Asia, Africa, and Australia (Shevardnadze 2018). Meetings with key politicians of his time, including James Baker, Reagan, Nixon, Clinton, Suleyman Demirel, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein, and many others, laid the foundations for the soft power he later used in crisis mitigation. In 1988 alone, Shevardnadze visited 16 countries and hosted around 25 foreign ministers and 40 ambassadors in Moscow (Shevardnadze 2018, 160). His extensive diplomacy brought him international prestige, which justifies a score of 1.

To sum up, based on the above-examined indicators, Eduard Shevardnadze, with 5,5 points, had strong Presidential Soft Power.

4.1.2 International Isolation

One of the urgent issues that Georgia faced upon Shevardnadze's arrival in Tbilisi was international isolation. Georgia was not recognized by the international community, nor part of IOs - therefore, it had no access to international financial or other support, necessary for the failed state (Kavadze 2020, 48). Shevardnadze has realized the need to put the country back "on the global map". As Kavadze notes, during his first five months, Shevardnadze was actively engaged in ensuring that the international community recognized the country, for which he was actively reaching out to his old friends.

Given his positive international image and contacts during his role as USSR Foreign Minister, he was welcomed by many international political leaders (Gachechiladze 2014, 27). His relations and friendship with German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher has played a positive role for Georgia in establishing the constitution, parliament, courts, military, and financial institutions and implementing reforms (Shevardnadze 2018, 187). Hans-Dietrich Genscher and US Secretary of State James Baker, another close partner and friend of Shevardnadze, visited Georgia briefly in 1992, showing solidarity and support (Kavadze 2020, 49). The cascade of opening of foreign embassies in Tbilisi by the US, Turkey, the Holy See, Russia, Germany, and the EC soon followed. Georgia opened diplomatic missions in nearly 60 countries and IOs, which was a big success for the failed state (Gachechiladze 2014, 26). Moreover, Georgia started receiving humanitarian aid, mostly from Germany, the US, and Turkey.

Shevardnadze's political values: being loyal to democracy and Western values were well aligned with the international norms (Sumbadze et al. 2016, 212). He believed Georgia's position in the international arena could be strengthened by joining IOs. Under Shevardnadze, Georgia joined the UN, the Council of Europe, OSCE, WTO, IMF, WB, EBRD, and CIS. Joining CIS, a Russian project, was more of an insisted and forced request by Russia in return

for Yeltsin's help to end the conflict in Abkhazia (Gachechiladze 2014, 26; Kavadze 2020, 53). It was also a demonstration that Shevardnadze tried to maintain good relations with Russia, but not very effectively. He was the first president who openly declared integration aspirations within NATO and the EC, as he saw that being part of these organizations would guarantee Georgia's security and prosperity through democratization and economic growth. It was under Shevardnadze's administration that bilateral relations between NATO and Georgia started within the framework of the Partnership for Peace (NATO 2025). Similarly, Georgia and the EU signed the "Partnership and Cooperation Agreement" in 1996, preparing the foundation for Georgia's future Western integration path. Shevardnadze also tried to establish friendly neighborly relations with Russia. However, he had a hard time doing so, blaming Russia as the reason (Shevardnadze 2018, 291).

Another achievement to break the isolation was successful "pipeline diplomacy" that Shevardnadze achieved through his strong personal relations with neighbors, particularly with Heydar Aliyev, the President of Azerbaijan, and Suleyman Demirel, the President of Turkey (Kavadze 2020, 60-61). He viewed the potential of Georgia's geostrategic location as a tool to increase Georgia's importance on the regional and international levels. Constructing mega energy and transit projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Supsa pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the TRACECA project, as Kavadze continues, convinced US President Clinton to support the projects. However, it left Russia unpleasant, as these routes bypassing the Russian territories diminished its transit and energy monopoly in the region.

One of Shevardnadze's most notable visits was with Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran in 1989 – the first meeting Khomeini had held with foreigners after the revolution. After years, it defined the Georgia-Iran cordial relations under Shevardnadze's administration (Shevardnadze 2018, 142-147). Shortly after Shevardnadze assumed leadership, Iranian officials traveled to Tbilisi

to discuss Georgia's strategic role as a trade bridge between Asia and Europe (Shevardnadze 2018, 294).

After the dissolution of the USSR, Shevardnadze's PSP made it possible to break the international isolation, join the IOs, and establish diplomatic and economic relations worldwide. What the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, did not manage to do, Shevardnadze, with his strong PSP, accomplished within several months by breaking international isolation and actively seeking to integrate with the international community.

4.1.3 Ethnic Conflicts in the Early 1990s

In the early 1990s, tensions in Georgia spread across its two historical regions: South Ossetia and Abkhazia. After the fall of the USSR, these regions, populated by ethnic Ossetians and Abkhazians alongside Georgians, sought separation from Georgia proper, triggering acute ethnic conflicts. President Shevardnadze, having inherited these crises from his predecessor, President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, found himself at the center of two simultaneous crises. Shevardnadze, despite his strong PSP, only managed to partially mitigate the crisis as external interference from Russia and involvement of hard power exacerbated the conflict and limited his abilities for effective conflict resolution.

4.1.3.1 Conflict in South Ossetia

Upon Shevardnadze's arrival in Georgia in March 1992, he was confronted with an ongoing conflict in South Ossetia, which had escalated in 1991. Shevardnadze, as the head of the country, had to navigate the extremely complicated domestic environment as the open confrontation between the South Ossetian separatists backed by the paramilitaries and Russian forces and Georgia proper was acute. Early on, Shevardnadze realized that negotiations were essential to end the hostilities, and he moved forward with the help of his PSP. On May 14, 1992, Shevardnadze reached a ceasefire agreement with the South Ossetians. However, his

efforts were undermined by some Georgian paramilitary groups' continuous bombing without his order (Shevardnadze 2018, 298). Shevardnadze did not have complete control over the military. Two warlords, Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani, dominating the military, often acted independently and obscured Shevardnadze's attempts to stabilize the situation (Kavadze 2020, 54). Moreover, independent, self-equipped gangs continued the subversive actions. It was challenging for Shevardnadze to rely on the fragmented state and non-state structures, impeding his conflict resolution efforts.

Shevardnadze's second major negotiation attempt was more effective, ending direct hostilities in South Ossetia through a ceasefire with Russian President Boris Yeltsin on July 14, 1992. The ceasefire deployed the Joint Control Commission, joint CIS-Georgian-South Ossetian military patrols, and the Joint Peacekeeping Forces (JPKF) involving Russia, North Ossetia, and OSCE beyond Georgia, and South Ossetia (Sammut and Cvetkovski 1996, 14; International Crisis Group 2004, 4-5). Although the agreement ended direct military confrontations and restored order, Tbilisi retained only parts of the region. Russia, formally recognizing Georgia's territorial integrity, did not fulfill its promise to withdraw Russian forces from the region and retained power over the region both informally and formally as the mediator party (Shevardnadze 2018, 308).

Shevardnadze, thanks to his strong international prestige and connections, secured international support. This is evidenced by James Baker's visit to Georgia on May 25-26, 1992, "to give a boost to an embattled old friend, Eduard A. Shevardnadze" (Crossette 1992). Baker's public show of solidarity, calling Shevardnadze a "brother" (Retromedia 2018), illustrates the President's international prestige and credibility in the US. Shevardnadze's personality, networks, and commitment to building a democratic state secured humanitarian assistance to Georgia. Right after Baker's return to the US, Georgia received 100,000 tons of wheat, which was vital for Georgians' survival. The US supported Georgia economically, politically,

socially, financially, and through defense programs. Shevardnadze later reflected that the US had become the “shield” against Russia (Shevardnadze 2018, 303).

In sum, Shevardnadze’s Presidential Soft Power, rooted in elite networks, diplomatic acumen, international prestige, and alignment with democratic values, enabled him to reach the ceasefire and end the civil war. However, the presence of Russian hard power and external actors prevented complete resolution of the conflict, resulting in a “frozen conflict”. The international community, particularly the US, strongly supported Georgia’s territorial integrity and provided critical humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the South Ossetian crisis demonstrated the importance of effective political cooperation with other key domestic institutions during a crisis – cooperation that was lacking in this case.

4.1.3.2 Conflict in Abkhazia

Shevardnadze inherited another crisis, which escalated into a war in 1992. This was the conflict between the Abkhaz separatists backed by the Russian and North Caucasian militaries and Georgia. As Shevardnadze recalls, his role in the Abkhazian conflict was to step-by-step end the civil war and restore order. Abkhazia was in complete chaos, harboring terrorists, slaughters, and banditry. The strategic infrastructure, particularly the major railway, was under regular attacks, causing enormous economic damage. Armenian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Russian goods were continuously stolen, with 1,142 attacks and explosions recorded in the first half of 1992 alone (Shevardnadze 2018, 359-363).

Even though events were rapidly escalating, and Abkhazian separatists self-declared an autonomous republic of Abkhazia, Shevardnadze tried using negotiations, evidenced by his regular phone communication with an Abkhazian separatist leader, Vladislav Ardzinba, and other representatives to avoid bloodshed (Shevardnadze 2018, 366). However, these efforts failed, and the war broke out on August 14, with Georgian troops entering Abkhazia. He tried to persuade the Georgian public, Abkhazian people, and international community that his

military actions were not targeted against Abkhazians, but rather protecting the strategically and economically important railway, and restoring Georgia's territorial integrity (Chitadze, pers. comm., March 13, 2025).

The crisis further intensified in October 1993, when former President Gamsakhurdia took over some strategic towns in western Georgia (Kavadze 2020, 51). Shevardnadze's leadership was decisive in mobilizing regional support, notably from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine, to restore control over Western Georgia. Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Heydar Aliyev lobbied Moscow to support Shevardnadze against Gamsakhurdia to avoid the region's further destabilization (Kavadze 2020). Furthermore, upon Shevardnadze's request for Ukrainian military aid, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk sent a 2500-strong marine expedition to assist Shevardnadze in bringing West Georgia under his control, which was a successful operation to defeat Gamsakhurdia's forces.

With the military help of Russia and North Caucasus soldiers, on September 27, 1993, Sokhumi fell to Abkhaz separatists. Shevardnadze addressed the IOs and partner countries for help, however, this did not yield results (Kavtaradze 2022). The bloodshed between the sides took the lives of from 10,000 to 15,000 and led to the displacement of more than 250,000 ethnic Georgians, and was deemed ethnic cleansing by the UN and OSCE. Shevardnadze's politics during the conflict have been criticized for portraying it as an ethnic conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, while some consider it to be a Russia-Georgian conflict (Kavtaradze 2022). Shevardnadze was willing to maintain stable relations with Russia and signed the agreements that led to the fall of Sokhumi. Shevardnadze had sought to avoid calling Russia an occupier and failed to distinguish between the perpetrator and the organizer of ethnic cleansing (Kavtaradze 2022). Moreover, he is criticized for letting the Russians influence Georgian domestic affairs by making compromises (joining CIS, signing the Dagomisi Ceasefire) and appointing people with pro-Russian sentiments to major offices (Gachechiladze 2014, 31).

Although Shevardnadze's PSP was conducive to having "friends" internationally and advocating in favor of Georgia, the crisis was only partially resolved due to the presence of hard power and the involvement of Russia. To conclude, Shevardnadze's crisis mitigation approach in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was only partially successful despite his strong PSP. The factors that hindered his success were the presence of hostile hard power, leading to casualties, IDPs, and damage, and the intervention of an external actor, namely Russia, which had sought to "divide and rule."

4.2. Mikheil Saakashvili

Mikheil Saakashvili (2004-2013), the third president of Georgia, assumed the office following the Rose Revolution. Inheriting a fragile and corrupt country, this Western-oriented, youngest head of state in Europe had strong PSP, much like Shevardnadze. Saakashvili proved to be effective in certain contexts, such as the post-revolution crisis, while being partially successful in mitigating the 2008 conflict with Russia. This was due to detrimental conditions: hard power and external intervention.

4.2.1 PSP of Mikheil Saakashvili

Presidential Personality

Saakashvili's personality is complex. According to Silagadze (2020, 138), Saakashvili "has proven to be a decisive and confident person who is not afraid of new challenges, has no problem moving around the globe, and knows how to stage himself in the media." His charm and rhetorical skills, often carrying dramatic and populist elements, made him capable of mobilizing masses and resources domestically and internationally (Silagadze 2020). As a "PR strategist", he is described as the "ideas man and chief salesman for his reforms", warmly

welcomed within Western circles, especially in the early years – Bush telling him to be “proud to call you friend” (De Waal 2013, 3). Simultaneously, his impulsive, abrasive character and tendency toward totalitarian governance brought him lots of criticism during his last presidential years. In general, his charisma and proactive leadership character were conducive to PSP, justifying a score of 1.

Saakashvili’s popularity in the 2004 snap presidential elections, receiving 96% of the vote, was unprecedented (OSCE 2004). Although he secured a second term in the 2008 elections, his support declined to 53% (Antadze 2009). Public trust fluctuated throughout his presidency, significantly declining after 2011 (The Caucasus Research Resource Center n.d.). His international popularity was notable, particularly during his first term: “the new-born national leader was propelled to the headlines in the international media for his new reform-minded approaches and thinking” (Kavadze 2020, 68). Given the decline in domestic support, assigning a score of 0.5 appears justified.

In terms of political values, he was strongly aligned with international partners and adhered to international norms. Saakashvili strove to position Georgia within the democratic and liberal world order. He pursued tight alignment with the EU and NATO, presenting Georgia as a committed partner to the West. Saakashvili, perceived as a Western-educated, reform-oriented, and liberal-minded figure, enjoyed reciprocal acknowledgment from international partners (Radnitz 2014, 3). He was also cordially accepted in Russia at the beginning of his first term. However, “the honeymoon” between Saakashvili and Putin was short-lived (Kavadze 2020). Despite increasing criticism, Saakashvili remained aligned with Western values, earning him a score of 1.

Institutional Authority

After the 2004 constitutional changes, the power of Saakashvili increased significantly, granting exclusive authority in domestic and foreign affairs as the Head of State, the Higher

Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and the highest representative in foreign relations (The Administration of the President of Georgia n.d.a). Consequently, his strong constitutional power warrants a score of 1.

In terms of political cooperation, his willingness to cooperate with the opposition, the parliament, and civil society organizations (CSOs) was stronger in rhetoric, as shown in his inauguration speech (Civil Georgia 2008a), than in practice. Saakashvili closely collaborated with CSOs, which greatly contributed to the successful organization of the Rose Revolution. However, relations grew strained during the post-war era (Nodia 2005). Saakashvili's relations with the opposition were also not smooth (Muskhelishvili 2005), making cooperation with Saakashvili hard or unacceptable for the opposition (Civil Georgia 2008b). In the mass protests of 2007, the opposition required the resignation of Saakashvili, demonstrating the tense relations between them (Civil Georgia 2007). Due to the selective cooperation of Saakashvili with different political or non-political entities, 0.5 points would be justified.

International Engagement

Saakashvili, during his presidency, has been proactively engaged in the international arena, as showcased by his frequent visits abroad and reception of international partners in Georgia. Based on his presidential administration website, one can count more than 160 international bilateral or multilateral meetings (The Administration of the President of Georgia n.d.b). Saakashvili's top destination was the US, followed by the EU, Poland, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan. His aspirations to have a tight alignment with the West explain his selection of the destinations. These countries represented Georgia's most strategic political and economic partners. That said, Saakashvili did not avoid traveling to Asia, Central and South America, and Africa, in states such as Nigeria, Honduras, Jordan, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, to name a few (The Administration of the President of Georgia n.d.b). Based on his active

international engagement score of 1 is assigned. Altogether, Saakashvili scores a strong PSP with 5 points.

4.2.2 Post-Rose Revolution Crisis in Georgia

In the early 2000s, the system under Shevardnadze's presidency was eroding, mired in economic hardships and corrupted institutions. Shevardnadze's regime of "liberal autocracy" or "liberal oligarchy" (Nodia 2005) failed to address massive public dissatisfaction, leading to the Rose Revolution. Saakashvili, as the revolution's key leader, took over the government after Shevardnadze's resignation and inherited a country that was in a deep economic, political, social, and institutional crisis. The institutions were fragile and corrupt, served the interests of elites, with an undeveloped economy, high unemployment, and crumbling financial and economic institutions (Nodia 2005). Saakashvili's leadership proved critical to addressing these issues. His reform agenda and strong orientation toward the West positively contributed to the institution and state-building of Georgia (Aliyev 2014), attracting allies and partners worldwide.

To turn Georgia into an emerging economic hub and attract international investment, Saakashvili initiated economic liberalization, privatization, tax reform, removed or radically eased restrictions, and aligned the country with international standards (Papava 2013). Saakashvili built modern-style cities and reformed the police, creating a secure and attractive place for tourists and businesses (Gigitashvili and Steenland 2018). By modernizing the military in cooperation with Western partners, especially participating in NATO missions, Saakashvili signaled Georgia's alignment with Western common democratic and security values. Notably, Georgia was the first per capita contributor to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force mission after the US (NATO 2013). Human rights and the free-market economy were well-aligned with the EU principles, paving the way for closer

cooperation. As a good orator, Saakashvili proactively lobbied internationally, successfully persuading states to invest in Georgia.

Many other reforms in the energy and pharmaceutical sectors, visa liberalization for EU countries, led Georgia to soar in international rankings, reaching 8th place between 189 economies on ease of doing business, 37th place in the World Bank's Doing Business index (2007), and 51th in Corruption Perceptions Index (2012), surpassing some EU states (Saakashvili and Bendukidze 2014). Saakashvili, as the reform-oriented and pro-Western leader, implemented the extensive reforms, as Saakashvili and Bendukidze note sometimes radically, with "dirty waves". His efforts led to the modernization of the Georgian social, economic, and political landscape. Through his strong PSP, active lobbying, and substantial reforms, Saakashvili persuaded international partners to invest. This positively changed the country's international image, making it a role model in the region.

4.2.3 2008 Russia-Georgia War

Saakashvili's leadership was pivotal in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. This section examines how Saakashvili's PSP contributed to crisis mitigation, proving partially effective. Saakashvili had more success in mitigating the post-conflict crisis than in preventing or handling the active military confrontations. The presence of the external hard power – Russian military involvement – limited PSP's effectiveness during the conflict. However, in the post-conflict period, in the absence of Russian forces, Saakashvili was better able to employ PSP to handle the post-war recovery phase.

Before the war, Saakashvili actively sought international support for peaceful conflict resolution – publicly and in private. He effectively lobbied the EU, increasing Brussels' sympathy toward Tbilisi and persuading them to engage in the conflict resolution (Bardakçı 2010, Kavadze 2020). By surrounding himself with a "group of friends" who consistently affirmed their support for Georgia's territorial integrity (Kavadze 2020), it seemed Saakashvili

was succeeding. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt's conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov is the exemplary of such at least partial success: "The *main goal* of Georgia's friends is to support this country in terms of the full restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders" (Kavadze 2020, 74-75). Amidst increased tensions between Georgia and the breakaway regions of Georgia, Saakashvili tried to offer peace plans and make some concessions, for instance, by proposing to appoint a vice-president of Georgia with Abkhazian nationality and grant veto power on key laws related to Abkhazia. Despite Saakashvili's diplomatic attempts, some bearing potential, they were rejected by the separatist regimes (Kavtaradze 2022).

Although Western partners showed interest in assisting Georgia in conflict resolution, this support was insufficient to deter Russia (Kavtaradze 2022). When it became clear that Russia had prepared everything for the war, Western partners, including the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, warned Saakashvili not to fight with Russia, as "no one will come to your aid, and you will lose" (Rice 2011, 686). Still, Saakashvili hoped that the West would wake up and come to save the Georgians in the war. Through framing Russia as the "21st-century barbarians," the common threat to Georgia and the whole civilized world, he tried to mobilize the West for collective actions (Harding, Traynor, and Womack 2008). However, the West's response during the war was very weak.

Saakashvili has been accused of being confrontational and provocative toward the Kremlin (De Waal and Antelava 2013; Rice 2011, 692; Edinger 2024). Some in Western capitals saw "impulsive and hot-headed" Saakashvili's step to go to war as a "mistake", even though he had been previously "feted in Washington like a rock star and enjoy[ed] powerful friendships" (Asmus 2010, 37, 58). His decision to go to war with Russia indeed brought Georgia, once a "beacon of democracy", to a new reality of defeat. However, as Asmus notes, the overall picture was more complex. While Western leaders criticized Saakashvili's war politics, they

failed to understand the broader picture of Russian neo-imperialist intentions in its “Near Abroad.” As Vaclav Havel and others (2009) stressed, “the critical question is to determine which country invaded the other, rather than which soldier shot the first bullet”. One view is that neo-imperialist Russia was punishing a pro-Western Georgia in order to halt the spreading of pro-Western democratic “epidemics” in its periphery (Rondeli 2016, 35-45). Saakashvili was the main driver of these developments by stubbornly rejecting Moscow’s demands and making mistakes in succumbing to Russian provocations (Gachechiladze 2014, 30). In this view, Georgia was the “weapon of punishment” against the West for recognizing Kosovo’s independence (Zeinalov 2010) and making NATO integration promises with Georgia and Ukraine. In Saakashvili’s words, avoiding war would have been possible through Georgia becoming a Russian puppet state –criminal and corrupt (Interpressnews 2023). If Russia had managed to pressure Shevardnadze, a strongly pro-Western leader, Saakashvili resisted Moscow, and Georgia paid the price (Rondeli 2016, 40).

Yet one can find some rationality in Saakashvili’s decision to go to war. There was intelligence reporting that Russian forces were moving into Georgian territory. Hence, it was clear to Saakashvili that the war was inevitable (De Waal and Antelava 2013). Putin had kept Saakashvili guessing about their motivations, whether they would go only for South Ossetia or also for Tbilisi. Besides protecting his citizens, Saakashvili also needed to survive this crisis. He has repeated this point many times with Western partners: these two regions were existential issues for Georgia, but this was not understood by the West (Asmus 2010, 30).

Despite the war being a warfare failure for Georgia, losing de facto control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Cheterian 2009), Saakashvili’s PSP proved more effective in the post-conflict period. His crisis management strategy emphasized cultivating international support, framing the story, and guaranteeing the non-recognition policy of the breakaway regions after Russia recognized them as independent states on August 26, 2008. Within a short period, he

managed to secure significant international aid (4.5 billion USD) for post-war rehabilitation (Kavadze 2020). Additionally, he succeeded in promoting non-recognition of the breakaway regions by expanding Georgia's diplomatic presence abroad. New embassies were opened in Latin America, Africa, and South and East Asia. Georgia's diplomatic missions covered almost all EU, NATO, and CIS countries (Asmus 2010, 78). Saakashvili deployed proactive, even "aggressive diplomacy," and received significant support from the US and the EU – ensuring that only Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, and Syria recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Asmus 2010, 78). Beyond this, Saakashvili kept Georgia aligned with the West, paving the way for deeper ties in the years to come.

In sum, hard power and external actors undermined his PSP, so it was insufficient to solve the crisis. After direct confrontations were halted, Saakashvili's use of PSP was more effective in mitigating the post-conflict crisis by persuading the international community to adopt a non-recognition policy toward the occupied territories and attracting significant foreign aid.

4.3 Salome Zourabichvili

Salome Zourabichvili (2018-2024¹), the fifth president of Georgia, had moderate PSP, mostly due to constitutional restrictions on the president's power. It follows a slightly different pattern from other presidents. Despite decreased authority in domestic and international affairs, Zourabichvili emerged as a leading political figure during the deep political crisis in Georgia. However, the crisis persisted beyond the end of her term.

4.3.1 PSP of Salome Zourabichvili

Presidential Personality

¹ The end of her term is disputed, due to the contested 2024 parliamentary and presidential elections.

Leadership Trait Analysis reveals that Salome Zourabichvili respected challenges, was open to information, and motivated to both focus on the problems and relationships depending on the context (see Appendix 2). According to Hermann's (2002) "Assessing Leadership Style: A Trait Analysis" framework, Zourabichvili's mixture of accommodative and reactive leadership style reveals that she concentrated on existing issues and tried to find solutions within constraints, while seeking consensus and reconciliation. Finally, she focused on the representability of people. Zourabichvili's foreign policy orientation towards international cooperation and relationship-building should be conducive to the PSP, justifying a score of 1.

Salome Zourabichvili's popularity among the public increased more by the end of her presidential term compared to her initial years in office (The Caucasus Research Resource Centers n.d.). Notably, Zourabichvili was unable to secure a majority in the first round of the 2018 presidential elections, receiving nearly 60% of the votes in the second round (OSCE 2019). Public trust in Zourabichvili increased from 17% in 2019 to 26% in 2024 (The Caucasus Research Resource Centers n.d.). Despite this increase, Zourabichvili has not enjoyed support and trust from a large share of the public. Therefore, a score of 0.5 is a reasonable reflection of her overall popularity.

Zourabichvili strongly advocated for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration from the very first day of her presidency (Zourabichvili 2018). Her strong ideological foundation in democracy, liberal values, and representativeness became especially evident during Georgia's foreign policy crises (The Administration of the President of Georgia n.d.c). In these times, she maintained a strong pro-Western position despite confrontations with the government. Therefore, a score of 1 reflects her tight political alignment with international partners and norms.

Institutional Authority

Georgia's recent constitution grants limited and symbolic authority to the president in foreign and domestic domains (Constitution of Georgia 1995a). Consequently, a score of 0 captures Zourabichvili's constrained presidential power in the decision-making and policy-making process. Nevertheless, despite institutional constraints, Zourabichvili was able to exert influence on some key crisis events.

President Zourabichvili's political cooperation with other government actors, civil society, and the opposition during her term fluctuated. Initially, she cooperated closely with the ruling party while engaging minimally with the opposition and civil society. However, this pattern reversed later in her term, as she increased her cooperation with opposition parties and civil society and took a more confrontational stance toward the government (Stognei 2024). Due to the fluctuating and selective political cooperation across the domestic actors, a score of 0.5 was assigned.

International Engagement

Zourabichvili was actively engaged on the international stage, especially during the last years of the term. This was despite confrontational relations with the government, whose consent she required. In some instances, she paid unofficial visits to international partners, which upset the government and led to the initiation of impeachment against her (Lomsadze 2023). Her visits abroad during the political crisis were intended to receive international support and represent Georgians. Her strong engagement with international partners justifies a score of 1.

In Sum, Salome Zourabichvili scores moderately on the Presidential Soft Power scale with 4 points.

4.3.2 Political Crisis

The domestic political crisis in Georgia during Salome Zourabichvili's presidency evolved gradually, marked by critical events, such as the 2019 "Gavrilov Night" protests, contested 2020 parliamentary elections, failed EU mediation, the introduction of the "Foreign Agent" law, and the disputed 2024 parliamentary elections.

Zourabichvili emerged as a proactive key political figure as Georgia's democratic backsliding became inevitable under the ruling Georgian Dream Party (GD) after 2022. Although her limited constitutional authority constrained her actions to influence events to a great extent, Zourabichvili's moderate PSP allowed her to represent public sentiment abroad, lobby for international support, and secure West's refusal to legitimize the government.

At the beginning of her term, Zourabichvili aligned with the government, even condoning the government's decision to disperse the peaceful protesters on June 20-21, 2019, as adequate and necessary despite the use of disproportionate forces against peaceful protesters (Kunchulia 2020). Her position started to shift after the contested 2020 parliamentary elections. After the opposition boycotted the parliament, Zourabichvili actively supported EU mediation in Georgia to end the political deadlock, efforts that were praised by the European Council President Charles Michel (2021). Although the mediation de-escalated the tensions and some political parties signed the 19 April mediation agreement, the two biggest parties, GD and UNM, undermined the agreement's effectiveness. The former unilaterally annulled the agreement (Civil Georgia 2021), while the latter signed the agreement only after void by GD (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia 2021).

Zourabichvili's attitude toward the government shifted from loyalty to criticism of the government due to diverging views on foreign policy. Following the EU's decision not to grant candidacy status to Georgia on 17 June 2022, Zourabichvili maintained a strong pro-European course, initiating a series of foreign visits with Western partners to advocate for Georgia's

candidacy status. Without government consent, she resorted to unofficial, self-funded visits, leading to the government's attempt to impeach her (Kunchulia 2023). Her attempts successfully contributed to the EU's decision to grant the candidate status to Georgia on December 14, 2023.

The next critical point came with the introduction of the "Foreign Agent" law by the government in March 2023, which posed a threat to Georgia's democratic path. After passing the law in May 2024, the President vetoed the law, however, it was easily overridden by the parliamentary majority (Sauer 2024). This showed the lack of institutional authority. Nevertheless, it brought her increased public support and strengthened her role as the symbolic democratic counter-balance to the ruling party.

By 2024, Salome Zourabichvili had become a key pro-democratic political leader, gathering key domestic and international actors around her. She emerged as the last legitimate and democratic leader recognized by civil society and international partners. Before the 2024 elections, her initiative, "Georgian Charter", aimed at creating a strong pro-European platform for political parties to pursue Georgia's European integration and democracy. The idea was to establish a technical, non-partisan government, which would implement the democratic reforms, conduct early elections, and be led by the President (Civil Georgia 2024a). Despite significant support for her proposal, contested elections impeded its execution.

After the 2024 elections, which were declared rigged by the President, she took the lead in creating a special council to prepare for the new elections. Her attempt to mediate the crisis through dialogue with the government, including Oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, failed (Civil Georgia 2024b). In contrast, her cooperation with the opposition and civil society remained effective. Zourabichvili maintained close communication with civil society, frequently addressing them through speeches, social media, and participating in the protests. This increased her public support. Amidst a highly fragmented opposition, she became the focal

point for interparty consolidation as she attempted to consolidate the parties around the common objective of Georgia's European future (Samkharadze 2024).

Beyond her domestic legitimacy, she remained the only legitimate point of contact for the international partners. Her diplomatic efforts led European leaders to refrain from openly endorsing the legitimacy of the GD government, and resulted in the suspension of international aid and sanctioning the major government representatives. Zourabichvili framed Georgia's crisis as a matter of high geostrategic importance, influencing Black Sea region security, regional connectivity, and broader European interests. She called for the EU to be more strategic and react with greater urgency (Civil Georgia 2024c).

The Georgian Governance Index 2024 assessed the president's office as the most effective on the issues related to Georgia's democratic governance, scoring more than 80 points on a 100-point scale (Georgian Institute of Politics 2025, 22). The report notes that Zourabichvili maintained the independence of the Presidential Administration despite constrained circumstances. Thus, although her moderate PSP could not mitigate the crisis completely, her leadership was crucial to countering the undemocratic dynamics at home, persuading Western partners not to legitimize the ruling party, and supporting the Georgians' European aspirations. Her dedicated commitment to democracy, European values, and tight alignment with the Western partners brought her domestic and international recognition.

4.4 Key Observations

Before moving to csQCA analysis, Table 2 summarizes the above-discussed cases and conditions that contributed to the effective or partially effective crisis management. As displayed in two cases – Georgia's international recognition under Shevardnadze and the Post-Revolution crisis under Saakashvili – strong PSP contributed to effective crisis management when two other conditions, hard power and external intervention, were absent. Furthermore, in

the case of political crisis under Zourabichvili (Zour_Crisis), both strong PSP and hard power were absent, while the external intervention, although indirect from Russia, was present. Such a configuration of the conditions did not lead to a successful outcome. Similarly, the rest of the crises resulted in partial success due to the simultaneous involvement of external intervention and hard power. For a formal examination of these patterns, the following chapter uses the csQCA technique to find necessary and/or sufficient conditions.

	Presidential Soft Power	External Intervention	Hard Power	Crisis Management
Shevi_CW	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially effective
Shevi_Recog	Yes	No	No	Effective
Saak_Rose	Yes	No	No	Effective
Saak_War	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially effective
Zour_Crisis	No	Yes	No	Partially effective

Table 2: Key Observations

Chapter 5: csQCA Analysis

QCA is considered a methodological bridge between the case study and quantitative statistical method, combining the best of both approaches (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 10). This chapter uses crisp-set QCA (csQCA) as a technique (Rihoux and Ragin 2009) to formalize the cross-case patterns examined in the previous chapter. QCA, rooted in Boolean algebra, conducted in R, serves to showcase sufficient and necessary conditions contributing to the outcome of effective crisis mitigation.

The analysis calibrated the following three conditions: 1) Presidential Soft Power (PSP) – presence of PSP positively contributes to the crisis mitigation process; 2) Hard power (HP) – when the crisis involve the hard power, the high costs that it brings along inevitably reduces the effectiveness of crisis management; 3) External intervention (EI) – hostile external actor intervention, that infringes country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, leading further destabilization and escalation, diminishes the successful crisis management. The outcome analyzed is the success of crisis mitigation (SUC). Point 1 is assigned when the condition/outcome is present and 0 when absent². The analysis includes five cases of acute crises under the Georgian Presidents.

The analysis showed that $PSP* \sim HP* \sim EI$ (presence of PSP, absence of HP, and absence of EI) is both SUIN³ and a sufficient condition for the outcome. As a SUIN condition, in $PSP* \sim HP* \sim EI$, each condition individually is not sufficient for the outcome; however, they are jointly sufficient for the outcome. Meanwhile, necessity analysis found that $\sim EI$ is a necessary condition for the outcome.

² Strong PSP was calibrated as 1, while Moderate PSP as 0.

³ SUIN condition is “sufficient, but unnecessary part of a factor that is insufficient, but necessary for the result” (Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu 2009, 126)

The sufficiency analysis of the presence of the outcome illustrated that a sufficient conjunction $PSP^* \sim HP^* \sim EI$ is fully descriptively sufficient for effective crisis mitigation, displayed in the Truth Table (see Table 3). It means that based on the empirical data, when this sufficient conjunction is present, the outcome follows. It has an inclusion (incl) and Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency (PRI) score of 1.0 – indicating full consistency of $PSP^* \sim HP^* \sim EI$ with the outcome, and absence of contradictory cases⁴. This conjunction, also shown in the case study, covers two crises: the international isolation crisis under Shevardnadze and the post-Rose Revolution crisis under Saakashvili.

In contrast, the second and eighth rows do not lead the success. Particularly, $\sim PSP^* \sim HP^* EI$ (Row 2), covering the case of political crisis under Zourabichvili, lacking strong PSP capacity, with Russian indirect influence, leads to ineffective crisis mitigation. Additionally, the presence of all three conditions, $PSP^* HP^* EI$ (Row 8), covering two cases of Civil wars under Shevardnadze and the 2008 war under Saakashvili, demonstrates that in the presence of HP and EI, strong PSP does not produce successful crisis management. The remaining rows represent the logical remainders: rows without cases cannot be determined whether they are sufficient for the outcome due to a lack of empirical data (Oana, Schneider, Thomann 2021, 122).

⁴ Contradictory cases are when the same condition(s) leads to both the outcome and the negated outcome.

Row	PSP	HP	EI	OUT	n	incl	PRI	cases
5	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	2,3
2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	5
8	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	1,4
1	0	0	0	?	0	—	—	
3	0	1	0	?	0	—	—	
4	0	1	1	?	0	—	—	
6	1	0	1	?	0	—	—	
7	1	1	0	?	0	—	—	

Table 3: Truth Table for the Outcome

Cases: 1 Shevi_CW; 2 Shevi_Recog, 3 Saak_Rose; 4 Saak_War; 5 Zour_Crisis

A separate sufficiency analysis has been conducted for the negated outcome \sim SUC, i.e., failed crisis management (see Table 4). Truth Table (Row 8) reveals that the presence of all three conditions leads to the failure of crisis management, while the presence of PSP in the absence of HP and EI leads to the absence of the negated outcome, thus to the success of crisis mitigation (Row 5) – providing key support for my argument.

Row	PSP	HP	EI	OUT	n	incl	PRI	cases
5	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	2,3
8	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	1,4
2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	5
1	0	0	0	?	0	—	—	
3	0	1	0	?	0	—	—	
4	0	1	1	?	0	—	—	
6	1	0	1	?	0	—	—	
7	1	1	0	?	0	—	—	

Table 4: Truth Table for the Negated Outcome

QCA's other central function, logical minimization, reduces the complex empirical data to simplified expressions in a logical manner. It is "a process by which the empirical information is expressed in a more parsimonious yet logically equivalent manner by looking for commonalities and differences among cases that share the same outcome" (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 9). Three types of solutions exist: parsimonious, conservative, and intermediate. This thesis uses a conservative solution, being the most robust in detail and prioritizing the data (others are reported in Appendix 3). The conservative solution finds a single pathway to the outcome: $PSP* \sim HP* \sim EI \leftrightarrow SUC$, meaning that strong Presidential Soft Power, absence of both hard power and external actor intervention, leads to effective crisis management (see Table 5).

M1: $PSP* \sim HP* \sim EI \leftrightarrow SUC$

Configuration	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases
$PSP* \sim HP* \sim EI$	1	1	1	—	2,3
Solution	1	1	1	—	

Table 5: Conservative Solution

The graphical representation of the conservative solution (see Table 6) also confirms the sufficiency of this conjunction: two cases (cases 2 and 3) clustered in the upper right quadrant indicate that when $PSP* \sim HP* \sim EI$ is present, the outcome of successful crisis management follows. The other three cases (cases 1, 4, and 5) in the lower left quadrant hint at the absence of the sufficiency conjunction and outcome.

Sufficiency Plot

Cons.Suf: 1.000; Cov.Suf: 1.000; PRI: 1.000

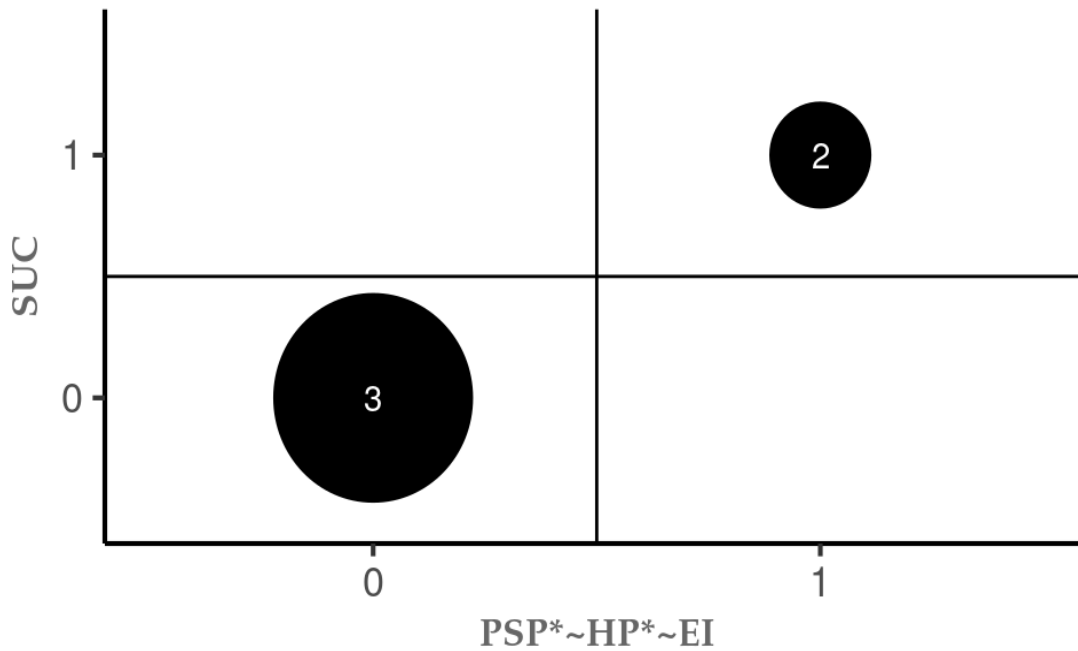


Table 6: Two-by-two Table for Crisp Sets

Thus, the csQCA confirms the findings from the case study, providing a more systematic analysis of conditions. It reveals that the high PSP is associated with effective crisis management in the absence of hard power and external actor intervention. However, it should be noted that csQCA, in contrast to an in-depth case study, due to its binary calibration, cannot grasp contextual nuances, such as the partial effectiveness of crisis management or moderate PSP, which are better addressed through the case study. Therefore, the case study and the csQCA complement each other, providing a richer and balanced understanding of the role of the PSP in crisis mitigation in Georgia.

Conclusion

As Karl Marx once noted “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please...but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” (Nye 2008, 5). This thesis begins with the premise that individuals matter in international politics. Using a mixed method, I show that presidents can positively influence the outcomes of a crisis.

The thesis first develops the Presidential Soft Power (PSP) scale, which I apply to mini-case studies of three Georgian presidents: Eduard Shevardnadze, Mikheil Saakashvili, and Salome Zourabichvili. In all, I examine five crises under their administration. I found that strong PSP can positively influence crisis management, as exhibited by the cases of international recognition crisis under Shevardnadze and post-Rose Revolution crisis under Saakashvili. Both presidents scored highly on PSP. Shevardnadze broke the country's international isolation and put Georgia on the global map again, while Saakashvili, after the Rose Revolution, secured significant assistance from the West and implemented profound reforms, leading to a robust economy, while strengthening state institutions and democracy. Interestingly, the same presidents in other crises, despite their strong PSP, only resolved the crises partially. In-depth analysis and csQCA confirm that the presence of two conditions, hard power and external intervention, particularly by Russia, impeded mediation success. Specifically, Shevardnadze in the ethnic conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Saakashvili in the 2008 Russia-Georgian war, used hard power. This led to the loss of lives and territories, diminishing the chances of effective crisis management. Furthermore, the involvement of Russia further escalated the tensions and destabilized the situation. Analysis of the political crisis under President Zourabichvili showed different patterns, in the absence of hard power and Russia's indirect influence in Georgian politics. With moderate PSP, she achieved the Western non-recognition of the GD's contested victory in 2024 elections and

played a consolidating role for the opposition. However, the crisis persisted beyond the end of her term, therefore only partially mitigating the crisis. In sum, the presence of PSP and the absence of both hard power and external intervention remain the key to successful crisis mitigation. In other words, the presence of hard power, especially military force by the external hostile actor, can spoil the effects of PSP on effective crisis mitigation.

The thesis, grounded in the soft power theoretical framework, has shifted the level of analysis from the state to the individual, expanding the scope of soft power analysis. It has addressed the gap between debates on leadership, crisis management, and soft power by illustrating how and under what conditions PSP contributes to crisis management. This framework can be applied to presidents or other chief executives of other smaller or larger countries. As a plausibility probe, using a case study and csQCA analysis, I successfully demonstrate PSP's positive influence on crisis mitigation. However, due to the limited number of examined cases, future research should study a greater number of units of analysis to further test the validity of the framework. Future research may consider adding other non-context-specific conditions to reflect broader contextual patterns and make the framework generalizable to crises more broadly. This thesis focuses importantly how presidents can use soft power and deploy soft power resources to address crises facing their country.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Web of Science Search Details

The term “soft power” was indicated in the WOS search bar. The information was filtered based on the Web of Science Index, particularly, the following Indexes were chosen: Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), Social Science & Humanities (CPCI-SSHI), and Book Citation Index – Social Sciences and Humanities (BKCI-SSH) for the period of 1990-2025. These indexes filter quality and prominent journals in contrast to Google Scholar (Winkler 2020, 86). Furthermore, in the Web of Science Categories, International Relations and Political Science categories were filtered, which made the search results parsimonious.

Joseph S Nye, since 1990, ranks as the most influential author, followed by Falk Hartig, whose research is primarily on public diplomacy in the Chinese context, and Yusaku Horiuchi, who specializes in foreign public opinion, Japanese politics, and elections. Additionally, observing the publication years demonstrates that 2020 accounts for most of the publications, with 84 records; however, with a declining tendency (see Figure 1).

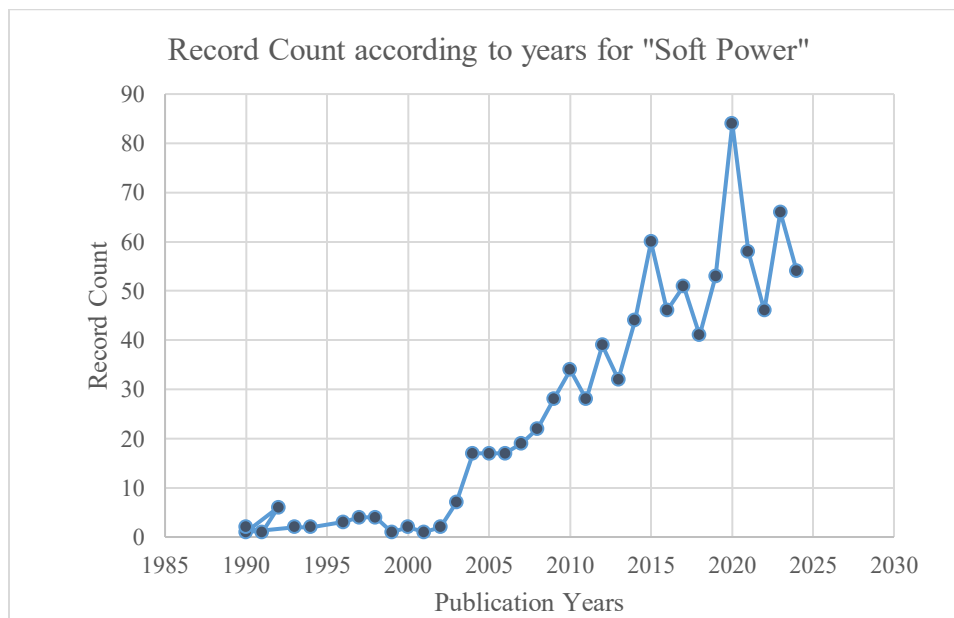


Figure 1: Publication years (Based on WOS search)

Appendix 2 - Leadership Trait Analysis of Salome Zourabichvili

Leadership style is studied based on Hermann's (2002) Leadership Trait Analysis LTA framework, which assesses leadership based on *responsiveness to constraints*, *openness to information*, and *motivation* through seven traits: belief to control/influence the events, need for power, conceptual complexity (distinguishing people and things from each other), self-confidence, focus on problems or relationships, distrust of others, and ingroup bias.

LTA is done through computer-automated software ProfilerPlus, which conducts the content analysis of the vast speeches. It scores each trait separately, which can be compared to the average scores of 122 politicians worldwide (Hermann 2002). LTA has been used by numerous scholars for leadership analysis, including Kesgin's (2019) analysis of hawkish and dovish leadership qualities and behaviors.

51 interviews and addresses by President Salome Zourabichvili were chosen during her Presidential term (2018-2024) to learn about her leadership style. The scores that she had on different traits are shown in Table 1. Based on Hermann's (2002, 9) typology (Table 2), these scores reflect that Zourabichvili's leadership style is between reactive and accommodative styles.

	HP (Count of high need for power observations)	LP (Count of low need for power)	<i>PWR (Need for Power score)</i>	IC (Count of internal control observations)	EC (Count of low distrust observations)	<i>BACE (Belief in Ability to Control Events score)</i>
2018-2024 (all 51 speeches)	9.24	27.58	0.26	10.79	26.77	0.31
122 Political leaders (Hermann 2002)			Mean = 0.50 Low < 0.38 High > 0.62			Mean = 0.45 Low < 0.33 High > 0.57
Salome Zourabichvili			Low			Low

	HD (Count of high distrust observations)	LD (Count of low distrust observations)	<i>DIS (Distrust score)</i>	HT (Count of high task observations)	LT (Count of low task observations)	<i>TASK (Task score)</i>
2018-2024 (51 speeches)	4.43	38.47	0.10	24.75	16.57	0.61
122 Political leaders (Hermann 2002)			Mean = 0.38 Low < 0.20 High > 0.56			Mean = 0.62 Low < 0.48 High > 0.76
Salome Zourabichvili			Low			Moderate

	HS (Count of high self-confidence observations)	LS (Count of low self-confidence observations)	<i>SC (Self-Confidence score)</i>	HC (Count of high complexity observations)	LC (Count of low complexity observations)	<i>CC (Conceptual Complexity score)</i>
2018-2024 (all 51 speeches)	7.39	14.1	0.35	92.60	64.37	0.56
122 Political leaders (Hermann 2002)			Mean = 0.57 Low < 0.34 High > 0.80			Mean = 0.45 Low < 0.32 High > 0.58
Salome Zourabichvili			Moderate			Moderate

	HB (Count of high ingroup bias observations)	LB (Count of low ingroup bias observations)	<i>IGB (Ingroup Bias score)</i>
2018-2024 (all 51 speeches)	4.78	23.82	0.18
122 Political leaders (Hermann 2002)			Mean = 0.43 Low < 0.34 High > 0.53
Salome Zourabichvili			Low

Table 1: ProfilerPlus Findings for Salome Zourabichvili

**Leadership Style as a Function of Responsiveness to Constraints,
Openness to Information, and Motivation**

Responsiveness to Constraints	Openness to Information	Motivation	
		Problem Focus	Relationship Focus
Challenges Constraints	Closed to Information	<i>Expansionistic</i> (Focus is on expanding one's power and influence)	<i>Evangelistic</i> (Focus is on persuading others to accept one's message and join one's cause)
Challenges Constraints	Open to Information	<i>Incremental</i> (Focus is on maintaining one's maneuverability and flexibility while avoiding the obstacles that continually try to limit both)	<i>Charismatic</i> (Focus is on achieving one's agenda by engaging others in the process and persuading them to act)
Respects Constraints	Closed to Information	<i>Directive</i> (Focus is on personally guiding policy along paths consistent with one's own views while still working within the norms and rules of one's position)	<i>Consultative</i> (Focus is on monitoring that important others will support, or not actively oppose, what one wants to do in a particular situation)
Respects Constraints	Open to Information	<i>Reactive</i> (Focus is on assessing what is possible in the current situation given the nature of the problem and considering what important constituencies will allow)	<i>Accommodative</i> (Focus is on reconciling differences and building consensus , empowering others and sharing accountability in the process)

Table 2: Leadership Style (Hermann 2022, 9)

Appendix 3 - csQCA Solutions

QCA Solutions for the Outcome

Conservative Solution

M1: $PSP^{*}\sim HP^{*}\sim EI \leftrightarrow SUC$

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1	$PSP^{*}\sim HP^{*}\sim EI$	1.000	1.000	1.000	- 2,3
M1	1.000	1.000	1.000		

Parsimonious solution

M1: $\sim EI \leftrightarrow SUC$

M2: $PSP^{*}\sim HP \leftrightarrow SUC$

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	(M1)	(M2)	cases
1	$\sim EI$	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000	-	2,3
2	$PSP^{*}\sim HP$	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.000	-	2,3
M1	1.000	1.000	1.000				
M2	1.000	1.000	1.000				

Intermediate Solution

From C1P1, C1P2:

M1: $PSP^{*}\sim HP^{*}\sim EI \leftrightarrow SUC$

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1	$PSP^{*}\sim HP^{*}\sim EI$	1.000	1.000	1.000	- 2,3
M1	1.000	1.000	1.000		

Solutions for Negated Outcome

Parsimonious solution

M1: HP -> ~SUC

M2: EI <-> ~SUC

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	(M1)	(M2)
1 HP	1.000	1.000	0.667	0.000	-	
2 EI	1.000	1.000	1.000	0.333		-
M1	1.000	1.000	0.667			
M2	1.000	1.000	1.000			

Intermediate Solution

From C1P1:

M1: PSP*HP -> ~SUC

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU
1 PSP*HP	1.000	1.000	0.667	-
M1	1.000	1.000	0.667	

From C1P2:

M1: PSP*EI -> ~SUC

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU
1 PSP*EI	1.000	1.000	0.667	-
M1	1.000	1.000	0.667	

Conservative Solution

M1: PSP*HP*EI -> ~SUC

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU
1 PSP*HP*EI	1.000	1.000	0.667	-
M1	1.000	1.000	0.667	