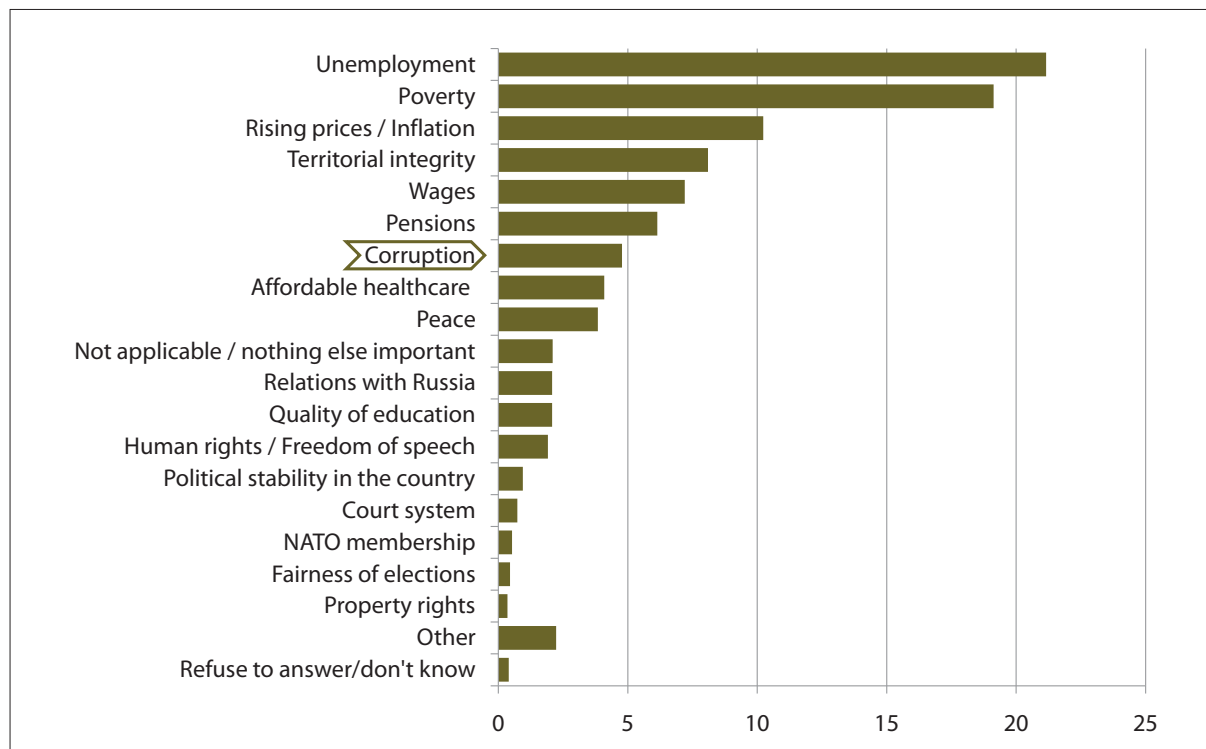


Figure 3: What do you think is the second most important issue facing Georgia at the moment? (%)



Source: representative opinion polls by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers. 2010 "Caucasus Barometer". Retrieved from <http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer/> on {13.04.2011}.

The State on the Streets: the Changing Landscape of Policing in Georgia

By Gavin Slade, Oxford

Abstract

After the Rose Revolution of 2003, public negativity towards the police, the revolutionary popularity of the government, and the lack of vested interests in a developed private security market gave Mikheil Saakashvili free rein to completely overhaul state policing. This article presents data showing that the Georgian reform has been successful in terms of public opinion. Perhaps it has even contributed to a call for the ongoing police reform in Russia. However, Georgia faces a future in which policing will become more fragmented and pluralized.

From Collapse to Reform

The Georgian police currently enjoy public confidence and a great deal of government investment in salaries, stations, cars and equipment. However, it was not always like that. In the 1990s, the police were demoralised and weak. This weakness led directly from the legacy of 'unprecedented state collapse' (Zurcher 2006) and an economic decline incomparably worse than any other

former Soviet republic following independence. Security provision became fragmented as separatist wars with South Ossetia (1989–1992) and Abkhazia (1992–1993) created a proliferation of violent entrepreneurs. A mass prison breakout in 1991 after the return of some of the most dangerous Georgian recidivists from Russia on the political demand of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia contributed to the increase of criminals at large in soci-

ety. In the early 1990s, armed groups that took on features of paramilitaries, militias, and extortionist mafias operated throughout Georgia. Many of the newly armed groups were state-sponsored and obtained weapons from stashes belonging to the Soviet Army.

Most famously, Mkhedrioni and the National Guard were paramilitary groups that operated nationally. The former was headed by a renowned criminal, Djaba Ioseliani. Often groups operating across the country under the name Mkhedrioni did not take their command from any centralised structure and instead resembled roving bandits. The National Guard was also ill-disciplined and headed by a convicted criminal, Tengiz Kitovani. By 1993, and with the conflicts now 'frozen', these groups eventually found themselves merging with state structures. For example, President Eduard Shevardnadze promoted Mkhedrioni to the status of a security force in the Ministry of the Interior and appointed Temur Khachishvili, a member of this armed group, as Minister of the Interior, though Mkhedrioni itself was *de facto* abolished.

In the case of 1990s Georgia, security and policing, to the extent that these public goods were produced at all, came to be provided by demoralised law enforcement institutions reinforced by the bottom-up integration of violent formations, and collusion with overtly criminal groups that negotiated an untouchable autonomy in various regions of Georgia. In this regard, the prominence and influence of career criminals that formed something like a mafia network, so-called 'thieves-in-law', was particularly marked in Georgia compared to elsewhere. The corruption and demoralisation of policing structures brought about the debasement of recruitment and training processes and by 2003 the police to civilian ratio was 1:78 (Kupatadze et al. 2007: 94)—for comparison, in the later Soviet period this ratio stood at 1:450.

Policing in Georgia was ripe for reform by the time of the peaceful ouster of President Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003's Rose Revolution. Mikheil Saakashvili was swept to power with over 90% of the vote and the United National Movement landed a majority in parliament in relatively free and fair elections. With a strong mandate the new government had a window of opportunity to overcome entrenched interest groups and carry out far-reaching reforms and policing was top of the agenda.

Beginning immediately in 2004 Saakashvili carried out reform of the police with international assistance from Europe and America. Amongst others, the OSCE's Police Assistance Program, the EU's Rule of Law Mission, the Police and Human Rights Program of the Council of Europe and the embassies of the US, Germany and France supported the reform (Boda & Kakachia 2006). The main structural changes were within the Ministry of the Interior. Overall, the Min-

istry was reduced in size from 40,000 employees to approximately 17,000 (Hiscock 2006). Around 15,000 old police personnel were fired; this was over half the nation's police (Kukhianidze 2006). The infamously corrupt Soviet era institution of the Traffic Police, which numbered some 2,700 men, was disbanded. A new Patrol Police replaced them. This new force took on responsibilities for order on the streets as well as traffic control. They were given new German cars and Israeli guns and investment was made in police stations, equipment and information technology.

A competitive recruitment system brought in new people to replace the old police as reformers overhauled the police academy. A six week training program verses new recruits in criminal law and the criminal procedural code as well as administrative and physical training. Officers were given new uniforms and their salaries raised significantly. The police now number 14,500 with a police to civilian ratio of 1:324.

The 'shock therapy' in laying-off so many policemen, sometimes with no clear reason given, shifted a critical mass of those trained in violence from the state into society once again. Fears that ex-policemen would turn to crime, appears, with some exceptions, not to have materialised. Instead, the rapid changes created a ripple in the private security sector with many new private security firms registered and presumably employing ex-policemen (Hiscock 2006).

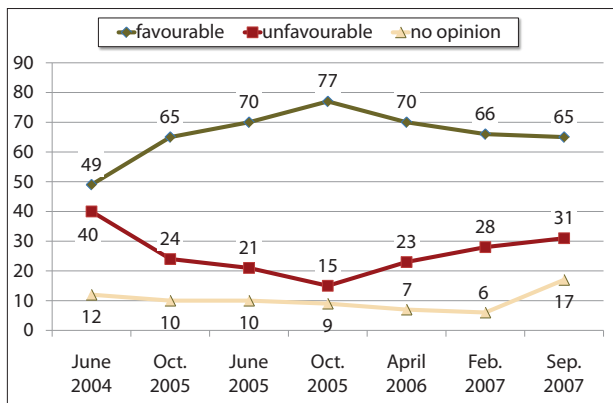
Though Georgia has still not seen the explosion in private security firms that was seen in the 1990s in places like Bulgaria, Ukraine or Russia, conditions now make this growth likely. Market liberalisation has brought stronger economic growth, as well as increasing inequality and insecurity, creating a demand for extra security provision and security products that the turnover of personnel from law enforcement bodies can meet. The lack of legislation means that the private security industry in Georgia is difficult to estimate and numbers vary, but it may include around 250–300 private security companies of which only 10 are particularly large (Hiscock 2006). Some state security structures perform market functions as well however, such as the Protection Police—a security force that protects important politicians and buildings.

The Georgian government needs to regulate and monitor these developments very carefully. Where Georgia's police reform may offer some lessons to other countries such as Russia, the Russian experience of privatising security functions in an unregulated and scandal-ridden grey area between the state and the market should provide clear lessons about the ways in which unregulated private security providers can undermine feelings of security and indirectly harm the reputation of state institutions.

Public Opinion Regarding the Police in Georgia

Public opinion towards the police can rarely have been so positive in Georgia. Figure 1 shows the jump in the Georgian police's favourability rating once the reforms began. Prior to the 2004 reforms, national voter survey results showed only 49% in favour of the police, while following the reforms this figure increases dramatically, peaking at 77% in October 2005. Police popularity declined somewhat in the following years as the novelty of the reforms wore off and the police became embroiled in a series of scandals, most notably the killing of the banker Sandro Girgyliani by members of the Interior Ministry in a fight following an argument.

Figure 1. Attitudes to the Georgian police over time.



Source: International Republican Institute (IRI 2004–2007) Georgian National Voter Surveys.

Today, a range of public opinion surveys from a variety of organisations show that the police maintain a good reputation in Georgian society. The Georgian crime survey conducted in concert with the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), independent Dutch criminologists and the Ministry of Justice, finds that in 2010 a combined 66% of Georgians were either 'very confident' or 'confident' in the police, higher than for courts (47%) or prosecutors (49%). These results are even more impressive for the Patrol Police taken on its own, which has a combined confidence rating of 81%. Importantly, perceived levels of corruption have been lowered: 80% thought the police corrupt in 2000 compared to just 24.6% in 2006. Moreover, levels of victimization have reduced radically since the 1990s. Indeed, comparing Gerber and Mendelson's (2008) study of police misconduct in Russia (see below) and ICVS findings in Georgia shows you are more likely to be victim of physical abuse specifically by the police in Russia than to suffer any physical abuse at all in Georgia.

However, the ICVS shows that this confidence does not translate fully into trust: compared to other coun-

tries in the study, Georgians significantly underreport all types of crime, preferring privacy and self-reliance. Furthermore, when surveys ask about trust rather than confidence or favourability, different results obtain. The Caucasus Research Resource Centers' independent Caucasus Barometer Survey for 2009 show that only around 42% of Georgians claim to either 'fully trust' or 'rather trust' the police with 27% neither trusting nor distrusting and a similar figure reporting distrustfulness. Furthermore, negative attitudes most likely increase when disaggregated to those who have actually used police services (see also the corresponding Caucasus Barometer figures for 2010 in this issue (Trust in Institutions, p. 10)).

Still, these figures for Georgia are more in line with Western Europe and higher than the Central and Eastern Europe area which has a median 32% satisfaction level with the police (Caparini & Marenin 2005). The effects then of the Georgian reforms are evident and suggest a model for other countries to follow in which policing is professionalized, civilianised and, most importantly, re-conceptualised. Certainly, such reforms can bolster political capital: data from the IRI surveys in 2005 show that with the exception of providing electricity and smoother roads, police reforms were the aspect Georgians were most pleased with in the performance of the government.

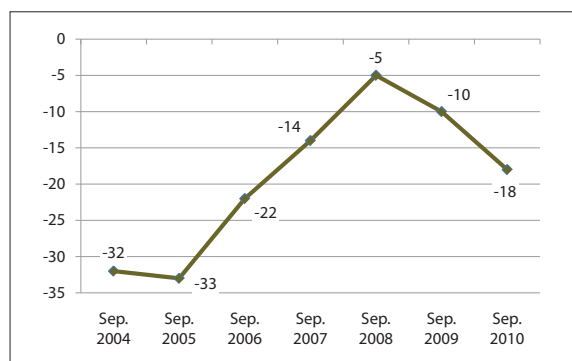
It could well be possible then that Georgia's northern neighbour, Russia, has been paying attention to the Georgian reforms. As of December 2009, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev demanded reform of the country's scandal-plagued and costly police. As well as firing 17 top police commissioners, Medvedev called for a reduction in the police force by 20% by 2012, greater independence for internal investigations carried out by the Ministry of the Interior, the renaming of the *militia* to *politsia*, the raising of wages to combat corruption and a new Law on the Police which has already passed through parliament.

These reforms have yet to impact public opinion in Russia: data from April 2011 from the Russian Levada Centre shows that 59.9% of Russians still do not trust the police. Data from the state-controlled polling firm VTsIOM¹ paint a similarly negative picture over the last decade. Figure 2 shows that the negative ratings of law enforcement have consistently outweighed positive ones proportionately (0 = no difference between positive and negative responses, i.e. 50% approval vs. 50% disapproval) (see Figure 2 overleaf).

¹ The Russian state used its ownership of VTsIOM to take over the firm in 2003. All the key researchers at VTsIOM then went to work for the newly created Levada Center, which is now considered the main independent polling firm in Russia.

These results are unsurprising when we consider that three waves of representative surveys on police misconduct from 2002 to 2004 across Russia found that in that period '5.2 percent of Russian adults [were] victimized by police violence in any two- to three-year period, 6.3 percent by corruption, and 13.8 percent by some form of misconduct directly or via family.' "[This] translate[s] into roughly 6.2, 7.6, and 16.4 million acts of police misconduct. These numbers are staggering' (Gerber & Mendelson 2008: 17). Russia's police desperately need Georgian-style reform. Yet, while Medvedev's reforms are welcome, they are hasty, and compromised by the

Figure 2. (Dis)approval Rating for Russian Law Enforcement



Source: Vserossiiskii tsentr izucheniya obshchestvennogo mneniya (VTsIOM) Available at: <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=173>

About the Author

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weight of embedded interests in a security sector that by some estimates employs in total 10 million people—many in private security companies, who have no interest in seeing a strong state competitor in the shape of a reformed police.

Conclusion

The data show that Georgia's police reforms have been successful in terms of gaining public confidence. Possibly, the reforms have even indirectly influenced calls for reform in other countries in the region such as Russia. However, unlike in Russia, conditions in Georgia were favourable to making real headway with police reform. After the Rose Revolution, public negativity towards the police, the revolutionary popularity of the government, its willingness to take on international assistance, and the lack of vested interests in a developed private security market gave Mikheil Saakashvili the grounds to completely overhaul state policing. However, the situation is already changing. It is likely that Georgia will see a deepening of Russia-esque processes of privatisation of policing—which the government should aim to tightly regulate. These processes are especially likely as the economy slows, aid dries up, national debt increases and the government finds it harder to maintain the costs of providing security in an increasingly unequal society.