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Publisher: Routledge

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European Security

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/feus20>

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Published online: 12 Mar 2012.

To cite this article: Gavin Slade (2012) Georgia's war on crime: creating security in a post-revolutionary context, *European Security*, 21:1, 37-56, DOI: [10.1080/09662839.2012.656600](https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2012.656600)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2012.656600>

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Georgia's war on crime: creating security in a post-revolutionary context

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(Received 31 May 2011; final version received 9 January 2012)

Since the Rose Revolution of 2003, the Georgian Government has made criminal justice reform a cornerstone of its political agenda. A big part of this was the fight against organised crime. This article looks at the use of anti-mafia policies and police reform to create domestic security in the post-revolutionary period. This article provides an account of collusion between the state and organised crime actors known as thieves-in-law prior to the revolution and levels of victimisation and insecurity amongst ordinary Georgians in this context. This article then details the anti-mafia policy and the criminological situation in Georgia since the Rose Revolution. It argues that Georgia has witnessed a huge crime decline and increases in security. In conclusion, this article suggests that the Georgian Government now 'governs through crime' and that this model might emerge in other countries of the post-Soviet region.

Keywords: Georgia; organised crime; revolution; security

Introduction

One of the most significant social consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union was the surge in criminality. The threat from outside to national security was replaced by growing personal insecurity within society in the Soviet successor states (Los 2002). In the early 1990s, there were marked jumps in crime across Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in violent crime and homicide (Karstedt 2003, Caprini and Marenin 2005, Pridemore 2006). Moreover, organised crime came to be seen as a particularly serious threat to security both within societies in the region and internationally (Sterling 1994, Shelley 1996, Williams 1997, Oleinik 2003).

However, in many countries in this region, crime and the criminal have remained undeveloped as objects of political interventions and discourse. In large part this is due to the fact that post-Soviet politicians are often accused of criminal practices in maintaining power. There is then little interest in endangering the status quo by drawing attention to crime and corruption. Moreover, unstable economies, territorial conflicts and poverty mean that there are often many more pressing problems for politics to address than crime. Yet, the dissonance between persistent high crime rates and unreformed or partially reformed police forces, prisons and courts means that many post-Soviet countries still face serious current and future policy decisions on crime and criminal justice.

In the republic of Georgia, the peaceful ouster of Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003 and the coming to power of Mikheil Saakashvili, known as the Rose Revolution, was

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one of the so-called 'colour' revolutions of the early 2000s. Since that time, Georgia has become a case study in the politicisation of crime – where this means when crime becomes a central object of government discourse, an electoral issue and a constant area of state intervention.

This article focuses on the Georgian Government's anti-organised crime policy and frames this in the wider context of the Saakashvili administration's war on crime. This article will give an analysis of the collusion between state structures and organised crime in the 1990s based on expert interviews, police files and court case data. It will then discuss data showing general levels of criminal victimisation, security and fear of crime in Georgian society in this period. This article then moves on to look at how the Georgian Government has dealt with organised crime after the Rose Revolution. In particular, this article looks at what might be seen as the first fully worked out anti-mafia policy in the post-Soviet space, learning from best practice from abroad, in particular Italy and the USA. Finally, this article offers data on levels of victimisation and crime rates post-2003 showing that since the Rose Revolution Georgia has experienced a drop in crime unprecedented since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Organised crime and the state in the 1990s

In the 1990s, Georgia experienced a near fatal weakening of state authority, unprecedented economic decline and an explosion of violence resulting from two secessionist conflicts and civil war. Organised crime groups, which essentially substituted for the state in extracting resources and selling protection to the population, flourished. In this period, a mafia network – where this means connected groups of professional criminals selling illicit protection and dispute resolution – known as thieves-in-law, or *kanonieri qurdebi* in Georgian, had become particularly prominent. The title of thief-in-law is an elite criminal status protected by ritualised boundaries. These actors still exist across the post-Soviet space having emerged in the Gulag in the 1930s. For historical and cultural reasons, Georgia was the foremost producer of these criminals. As many as 350 or around 33 per cent of the total number of thieves-in-law thought to be operating in the post-Soviet space were of Georgian origin by the end of the 1990s (AOCU-T 2004, Glonti and Lobjanidze 2004).¹

In Georgia, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, thieves-in-law had become one of the competing elements in society for the assets of the state. At this time they were able to bargain more directly for political patronage. A new government, led once again by Shevardnadze who had been invited back to Georgia in 1992 by a thief-in-law, Djaba Ioseliani, had to grant special privileges to power groups inside and outside of the state (Christophe 2004). Kukhianidze (2009, p. 220) reports that 'between 1991-2003, criminalisation of the government was a very serious problem ... 'Thieves-in-law' who controlled shadow businesses through their nexus with corrupt government officials, used the widespread practice of penetration into the parliament of Georgia. This protected their illegal businesses through the adoption of corrupt laws and by 'capturing' the state'. Similarly, Darchiashvili (2006) found that 'there are cases when so-called [thieves-in-law] review the results of certain elections. Some political leaders during their election campaigns visit them in their various corners of Georgia for support'.

Stefes (2006, p. 20) grounds the possibility for such state capture in the systemic and decentralised corruption that emerged in Georgia through the collapse of the previously centralised system of corruption under communism. The fragmentation of state authority meant that ‘coalitions of local and regional officials and crime groups successfully captured key economic sectors and undermined the formation of formal state and market institutions’ (Stefes 2006, p. 35). Organised criminals in Georgia, as elsewhere in post-Soviet countries, offered a specialisation in violence to suppress market competition, enforce cartel agreements and protect well-connected entrepreneurs and former nomenklatura. In return for such services criminals acquired shares in businesses and infiltrated the state and economy (Stefes 2006, p. 83).

The 1990s and up to the Rose Revolution then was a period when organised crime in the form of thieves-in-law integrated with the remnants of the Georgian state. At this time, legislation existed to deal with organised criminal activities such as extortion and the creation of armed groups but conviction and incarceration rates were low and there was no coherent anti-mafia policy as such. This was also a time when the number of thieves-in-law also likely increased but not all of them necessarily made high-level contacts in the Georgian state and economy. Police records show that many had already left the country in the 1990s having found themselves in competition with other force wielding groups (AOCU-T 2004). In Georgia, the thieves-in-law network had still to compete with the dysfunctional, localised remnants of a once burgeoning governmental security apparatus now unfettered by central authority and ideological constraint. With the collapse of state capacity and continuing lack of legitimacy for state structures, different departments of the police, such as the transport police, became corrupt, organised criminal networks in the their own right competing with criminal groups headed by the thieves-in-law in extracting rents from the population. Furthermore, there were increased pressures from other groups like paramilitary formations such as *Mkhedrioni*.² Many thieves-in-law were still buying off local police chiefs then to protect themselves in case of conflict and to be left alone otherwise. In this sense, the police could be the ultimate protection racket for the thieves-in-law.

A pre-Rose Revolution report (Darchiashvili and Nodia 2003) on the ‘power structures’ in Georgia stated that with Kakha Targamadze in charge of the Ministry of the Interior from 1995 to 2000 the ‘ministry was associated with the cigarette business and the control of retail and wholesale markets; its powers even extended to the oil business and other fields of commerce . . . during the first half of 2001, only 27.3 per cent of the petrol consumed was taxed’ (2003, p. 12). According to police data (AOCU-T 2004), thieves-in-law were also involved in areas such as wholesale markets and petrol stations suggesting that they either worked with the police or came to an arrangement in maintaining competing business interests including funnelling up a cut of illicit business proceeds to the police. Indeed, one local analyst (Darchiashvili 2006, p. 109) reported that in the year 2002, ‘evidence indicates that the police, subordinated to the Ministry of Interior, has been continuing to tolerate the thieves-in-law and even cooperated with its representatives upon reception of regularly paid “taxes”’.

Respondents from the security sector concurred with this statement suggesting that the police had been patrons for criminals in the 1990s. ‘*Obshchak* [the thieves’ communal fund] money went to the police – a tax was paid to the local police chief in order to act freely without fear of prosecution’ (I-3). In Zugdidi, in Western Georgia,

‘the thieves-in-law paid them [the police] tax, it was \$5000 if a thief wanted to come here from Moscow for example and not be touched. There was a *makarubeli* [overseer of thieves’ interests] who collected money [in Zugdidi], so they used the money for this purpose’ (I-7). The relationship was mainly with the higher echelons of the local police departments however. ‘As simple officers you couldn’t touch them [the thieves-in-law]. I had that experience in Tbilisi, it didn’t matter if you had something on one of them, they always had someone protecting them further up the police hierarchy . . . I was an officer from 1997 to 2004 and it was the higher rungs who were taking the payments’ (I-9).

A similar process of payment to administrators of prisons also took place in the 1990s up to the Rose Revolution. According to one prison governor, ‘money was collected in the prison and outside of the prison as well, for the *obshchak* . . . Once money was collected and delivered to the prison . . . 50 per cent would go to the administration and the other half was taken by the *makarubeli* on the inside’ (I-8). The thieves-in-law used the contact with the prison administration to receive luxuries. In January 2003, Ortachala Prison no. 5 in Tbilisi was raided including the cells of thieves-in-law. Knives, Kalashnikovs, hand-grenades, mobile phones and drugs were confiscated (Novikov 2003). The thieves-in-law were able to live in much greater comfort on the inside:

Concerning those facilities, colonies as they are called, it wasn’t a jail but an open-type facility with living quarters for prisoners, with big rooms where they keep 120 people, when thieves-in-law where in such facilities they never turned up in the big dormitories they had their own separate cell that they themselves did up, and what they had, you can say, was like an office much better than that of the governor (I-12).

In return the thieves-in-law helped keep control of the prison. ‘Imagine in the prison there is a riot, the governor will ask the thief, what’s going on there? The thief will say, right you whores, get back in your cells, you are upsetting my position here . . . if he can’t calm the situation down, his position is lost’ (I-5). In the 1990s, prison governors felt it was in their interests to use the thieves-in-law not least because of their small wages: ‘[Turning to the thieves-in-law for help] happened. There was such a case, even a few times. What could we do? People weren’t even getting a wage some of the time, the prisoners if they start rioting who’s going to risk anything when they don’t even get a wage? And it took a lot to bring in special forces’ (I-6).

In this period then there was toleration and facilitation of the professional criminal actors who ran criminal enterprises and mafia groups by key state actors based on apparent commitment to each other. Integration between the state and the thieves-in-law was clearly on display as late as 2003 when the Georgian Government’s plenipotentiary in the Kodori Gorge utilised its connections with the thieves-in-law to rescue UN workers being held hostage, these connections were unashamedly reported by government representatives (Devdariani 2003). By this point, the Shevardnadze Government had started to become uneasy about the level of influence these criminal actors possessed. Shevardnadze had begun to take small steps towards tackling the problem, however, it was not until his ouster that a robust anti-mafia policy, breaking the relationship between organised crime groups and the police, fully began.

Insecurity and fear of crime in pre-Rose Revolution Georgia

As we have seen, pre-Rose Revolution Georgia was afflicted by blurred boundaries where state actors cooperated more than competed with professional mafia actors in Georgian society in the market for extortion, protection and black marketeering. In 1990s Georgia, policing was carried out by often under-trained, sometimes ex-militiamen who populated a bloated, demoralised, largely unreformed institutional structure that often acted as a predator on society (Wheatley 2005, Kukhianidze 2009). Against this backdrop, it is worth investigating general levels of crime in Georgia relative to elsewhere in this region and insecurity amongst the population at this time.

Crime statistics from post-Soviet countries are very unreliable. Using official rates does not take into account the level of under-reporting in societies with low trust in the justice system, alternative institutional practices of investigating and recording crime and the utter demoralisation of law enforcement structures and the lack of incentives to report crime statistics properly. Crime rates then, where available, can tell us little about the actual security situation in Georgia during the 1990s.

However, the International Crime and Victimisation Surveys (ICVSs), representative studies of levels of victimisation across countries, help to get a picture of levels of crime in Georgia relative to elsewhere in the 'transition' region. There are some limitations to these surveys however. Firstly, these are only for crimes that by their nature have actual victims. Secondly, crimes of a sensitive nature, such as sexual crimes or domestic violence are unlikely to be reported, even in a survey carried out by a neutral body. Nevertheless, the ICVS can help give some idea of what was happening in Georgia in the 1990s. The results in Table 1, below, are from 1996. Respondents were asked about victimisation for the preceding five years and the last year. The data presented here are on last year victimisation – 1995. As can be seen Georgians were victimised more in 1995 than the average for 19 countries in the post-communist 'transition' region across most crimes except 'assault with force' and 'other crime' which refers to petty stealing, bicycle theft and car vandalism amongst others.

The ICVS statistics showed that not only were Georgian victimisation levels higher relative to other countries in the region by 1995 but that these levels had jumped significantly since 1991. Burglary had gone up 1.8 times from 1991 levels, personal theft 5.3 times, robbery had doubled and assault was up 3.2 times. In line with these statistics, most commentators on Georgia agree that crime in the 1990s had become a serious problem (Coppeters and Legvold 2005, Darchiashvili 2006,

Table 1. Victimisation rates in Georgia in 1995 compared with averages for 19 transition countries in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

| | Burglary | Attempted burglary | Robbery | Assault with force | Sexual assault | Other crime |
|-------------|----------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Georgia (%) | 4.3 | 4.8 | 3.8 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 19.4 |
| Average (%) | 3.7 | 3.4 | 2 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 21.6 |

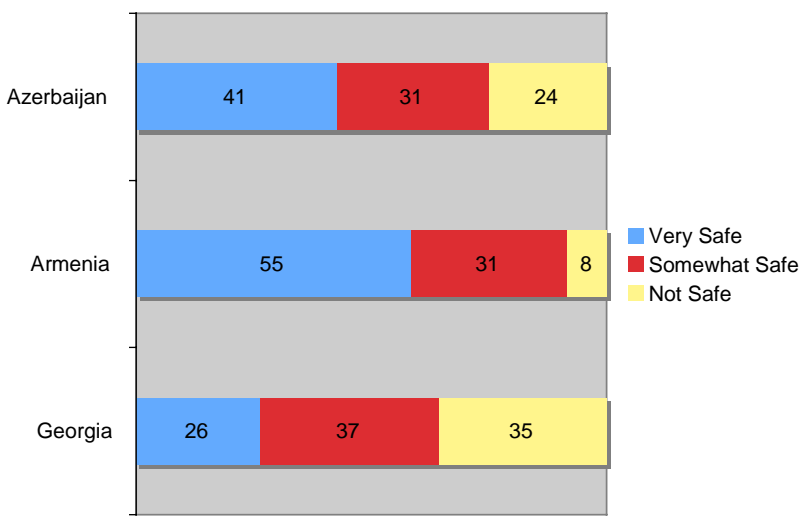
Source: ICVS (1998).

Shelley 2007, Kukhianidze 2009). As Legvold (2005, p. 6) says about the pre-2003 situation: ‘Institutions, including those expressly designed to provide security, have so weakened, have been so corrupted, and have so become the preserve of families, clans, and special interests that they no longer have the strength to defend either the individual or the country from harm’. In a situation of weak statehood, crime in Georgia was, as elsewhere in the post-Soviet space, a problem to be dealt with informally through private networks and extra-legal protection providers.

On top of these findings regarding victimisation, a study of health and fear of crime in Eastern Europe from 2003 (in Roberts *et al.* 2010) shows that Georgians also reported high levels of fear of crime relative to other places in the post-Soviet region with only Kyrgyzstan and Moldova higher. This is consistent with representative household survey data for the next year, 2004, directly after the Rose Revolution, which shows that Georgians had significantly greater feelings of insecurity than Azerbaijanis and Armenians. When questioned about whether they felt safe on the street at night significantly more Georgians reported not feeling safe than in the neighbouring south Caucasus countries as Graph 1 below shows.

Georgians were then clearly worried about crime, victimised more than other countries in the region and felt more insecure than their neighbours. This insecurity was a symptom of the weakness of the state and the ineffectiveness of its law enforcement bodies. These negative phenomena were also driven by the embedded presence of organised crime groups and the proliferation of violent actors in the 1990s. Addressing the state-organised crime nexus was a big part of reducing crime and anxiety over crime, increasing feelings of security and creating a stable

Feelings of Safety on the Street at Night in 2004 (%)



Graph 1. Showing responses to the question ‘during the night do you feel safe when alone on the street?’ in Georgia (N = 1472), Armenia (N = 1500) and Azerbaijan (N = 1489) in 2004. Responses ‘don’t know’ and ‘refuse to answer’ are excluded.
Source: Caucasus Research Resource Centers (2004), Caucasus Barometer.

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environment for economic activity and investment into Georgia. These were areas that Mikheil Saakashvili and his United National Movement party, on coming to power in 2004 with overwhelming popular support, worked on straight away.

Anti-mafia and the Rose Revolution

According to key respondents (I-12; I-3), the anti-mafia policies implemented in Georgia in December 2005 were outright 'cut and paste' copies of legislation from other countries. In particular, the US's 1970 Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organisations Act (RICO) was influential in the drawing up of legislation in Georgia. There are also clear replications of measures brought in by the Italian Anti-Mafia Commission, particularly Emergency Decree Law 306/8 of June 1992 that built on existing anti-mafia law 416bis, that were intended to seriously hinder mafia activities after the assassinations of the Judges Falcone and Borsellino at the hands of the Cosa Nostra (Jamieson 2000). Lesson drawing from other jurisdictions was carried out through key advisors including a general prosecutor from the USA, and major figures in the anti-mafia Sicilian Renaissance movement, most primarily former Palermo mayor Leoluca Orlando and Roy Godson of the National Strategy Information Center (NSIC), a think tank that had thought out a 'culture of lawfulness' programme based on the Sicilian experience of fighting the mafia.

Orlando was especially receptive to Georgians having twinned Tbilisi with Palermo and spent a period in Soviet Georgia in the 1980s when he had fled Sicily due to a threat to his life.³ During his time there he noted cultural and historical similarities between Sicily and Georgia and wrote about his affection for the people in his autobiography (Orlando 2001, p. 136): 'also a cocktail of different races and cultures, Georgia was in many ways similar to Sicily'. From 2001, Orlando and other prominent anti-mafia leaders from Sicily conducted exchange visits between Palermo and Tbilisi. The transfer from Italy was a process of lesson-drawing and emulation (Rose 1993, Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). The main message taken on by the Georgian administration was that reforms had to be implemented in unison. Orlando's often repeated metaphor of the two-wheeled cart, one wheel representing social, political and cultural reform, the other police and judicial reform, that must move together, got an enthusiastic reception in Tbilisi (Orlando 2001, pp. 10–11, Schneider and Schneider 2003, 160).

The NSIC also brought experience from Sicily to Georgia before the Rose Revolution and produced policy recommendations on cultural and educational change to generate respect for the law in 2003 (Godson *et al.* 2003). Furthermore, directly after the Rose Revolution, in 2004, the new Saakashvili administration, was further exposed to the Italian example of crime fighting when the EU sent a year-long mission of legal experts and criminal justice practitioners to advise the Georgian Government on the overhaul of the justice system at all levels. Known as EU JUST THEMIS, this was the first time the EU had conducted such a project, the second time coming later in Kosovo. According to those involved in the mission, then prosecutor general Zurab Adeishvili was impressed by his Italian counterparts and sent Georgian prosecutors and policy-makers to Sicily to learn about their experience with confiscating mafia property and anti-mafia legislation (I-13; Basilaia 2004).

Below, I will discuss the new anti-mafia legislation, the reform of the police and prisons, renewed trust in law enforcement and the grassroots 'culture of lawfulness'

campaign that centred on educational reform. The argument followed here suggests that firstly, the speed and nature of the legislation itself were effective in not allowing the thieves-in-law to adapt. Secondly, the police reform and general anti-corruption drive within the state and political circles cut-off the possibility of continuing patron-client relations between organised crime and the state, as had been done in the past. Thirdly, educational reforms have been important in drying up the potential recruitment pool to the thieves' world.

Anti-mafia legislation

On 20 December, 2005, Saakashvili signed into force the Law on Organised Crime and Racket. This introduced slang terms, such as *kanonieri qurdebi* [thief-in-law], *obshchak* [criminal communal fund], *garcheva* [criminal dispute resolution], *skhodka* [thieves' meeting] and *qurduli samkaro* [thieves' world] that had been used for decades in the Soviet camps into Georgian criminal law. This law, article 223 of the criminal code, states (Prosecution Service of Georgia 2006): '1. membership of the thieves' world [*qurduli samkaro*] is punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term of 5 to 8 years . . . 2. Being a thief-in-law is punishable by deprivation of liberty for a term of 7 to 10 years'.

The thieves' world is defined as a group of people who act on special orders defined/recognised by them with the aim of gaining profit through intimidation, threats, force, the promise of silence or criminal dispute resolution, that seeks the involvement of juveniles and encourages criminal acts by others. A member of this world is someone who recognises the criminal authorities and seeks to achieve the goals of the thieves' world. 'Criminal handling' or dispute resolution is the settlement of a dispute between two or more parties by a member of the thieves' world that can employ threats, force and intimidation. Finally, a thief-in-law is defined as a member of the thieves' world who administers this world and organises activities in accordance with the rules recognised by the members (Prosecution Service of Georgia 2006, p. 12). Therefore, the prosecution of a thief-in-law is not only based on simply the fact of someone carrying the title but, in principle at least, also on the commission of actions such as organising or issuing directives for criminal acts.

Furthermore, article 37 of the code of criminal procedure states the right of the prosecutor to request the confiscation of property if there is reason to believe that the property was obtained through a racket or through membership of the thieves' world (Prosecution Service of Georgia 2006, p. 13). This is considered one of the most important pillars of the anti-mafia legislation as it is, in principle, designed to take away the material base of organised criminals (I-4; I-12). Along with these developments, plea bargaining was also introduced into the legal system in 2004 initially as a lever to uncover high-level cases of corruption and also as an opportunity for the accused to pay embezzled funds back to the state in return for lighter sentences. It has also been used in the attack on the thieves-in-law (I-3).

The speed of the legislation caught the thieves-in-law that were left in Georgia by surprise; they were seemingly unaware of the content of the legislation and the danger that admitting to their status could be used against them in court (I-11). The thieves' own code of honour dictated that to deny one's status was a serious breach that could be sanctioned by expulsion from the fraternity. In adapting to this unique piece of legislation, it is believed that the thieves-in-law have now relaxed their own

rules and can refuse to answer whether they are a thief-in-law or not (Prosecution Service of Georgia 2006, p. 14).

The policy led to the imprisonment of around 40 thieves-in-law as many more fled the country. ‘Associates’ or ‘members of the thieves’ world’ were also arrested. As early as April 2006, the general prosecutor was declaring that there was ‘not one thief-in-law left in freedom’ (Lenta 2006). The tacit contract between the thieves-in-law and the state established prior to 2003 had been broken by the passing and implementation of the new laws. The state was no longer facilitating or tolerating the thieves-in-law but using out-and-out repressive tactics based on the coercive apparatus of the criminal justice system. One analyst summarises that: ‘Georgian “thieves-in-law” are, without exception, either serving their sentences in the Georgian prisons or fugitives in other countries. They failed to weather the anti-criminal policies of the Georgian Government and lost their image as ‘untouchables’. Moreover they lost their long-standing control and influence in the prisons’ (Kukhianidze 2009, p. 228–229).

These apparent successes do need some qualification regarding the implementation of policies. For example, while confiscation of property is appealing as it adds an extra source of revenue for the state budget, ‘it is important that seizure provisions are framed in such a way as to prevent the law-enforcement community behaving effectively as bounty hunters’ (Hill 2006, p. 154). In Georgia, some suspect the overriding need to find money to start rebuilding the state was the primary motive of the criminal justice reforms. According to Areshidze (2007, p. 215), the confiscation of property and the demand for all embezzled money to be paid back to the state was used as a pretext for extortion: ‘the government was terrorizing its own citizens . . . this tactic was not very different from a mobster’. There have been concerns about the use of illegal wiretapping by police, the lack of proper evidence against thieves-in-law and their associates in court, and the conditions that these actors are kept in prison.

This suggests that while anti-mafia policies work in transparent and accountable police forces in Europe and America once they are transferred to still relatively opaque post-Soviet institutions, equipping them with extraordinary powers, worrying developments can occur in the implementation stage. However, from the Georgian security sector’s point of view, the ability to side-step apparently annoying procedural requirements or ignore internationally prescribed norms might also be seen as adding to the effectiveness of attacking allegedly dangerous criminals who have no recourse to question their treatment.

Police and prison reform

In remaking the relationship between the state and the thieves-in-law, perhaps the biggest obstacle was the problem of corruption in criminal justice institutions and the high regard that some police held the thieves-in-law in. As the Prosecution Service of Georgia (2006, p. 14) stated: ‘the most difficult problem was the influence of the criminal authorities over the law enforcement structures. In recent years there were even incidents when a thief-in-law was threatening the officers of the criminal investigation department with dismissal from office’. Reforming the police and the prisons was therefore a high priority. Reforms began as early as 2004 and were carried out with international assistance from Europe and America (Boda and

Kakachia 2006). The main structural changes were within the Ministry of the Interior. Overall the Ministry was reduced in size from 40,000 employees to round 17,000 (Hiscock 2006). Police were asked to re-apply for their jobs and as a consequence around 15,000 were fired or removed themselves from their positions; this was over half the nation's police (Kukhianidze 2006). In place of the old police, new people were brought in by means of a competitive recruitment system. The police now number 14,500 with a police to civilian ratio of 1:324. At the time of the Rose Revolution, this ratio had been 1:78 (Kupatadze *et al.* 2007, p. 94).

The police were given new uniforms and their salaries raised. A new police academy was set up. The old anti-organised crime and terrorism unit was reinvented and re-staffed as the Special Operations Department (SOD) with responsibility for investigating organised crime and the thieves-in-law. The infamous Soviet era institution of the Traffic Police who had numbered some 2700 men and had acted as highway robbers throughout the country was disbanded (Kukhianidze 2006). 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 six-week training programme was created to verse new recruits in criminal law and the criminal procedural code as well as administrative and physical training (Khinitibidze 2006).⁴

There have been significant gains made due to these reforms. Favourable attitudes to the police increased from a pre-reform 49 per cent in June 2004 to 77 per cent in October 2005 (International Republican Institute 2005). Figures which show trust in the police tend to decrease however for those who have actually used the police services (Bonvin 2006). Still, these figures are more in line with Western Europe and higher than the Central and Eastern Europe area which has a median 34 per cent satisfaction level with the police (Caprini and Marenin 2005). Figures for 2010 show that, excluding the church, the police is the third most trusted institution after the army and the president (Caucasus Research Resource Centers 2010). Similarly, subjective feelings of insecurity have decreased since 2000 and perceived levels of corruption are much lower: 80 per cent thought the police corrupt in 2000 compared to just 24.6 per cent in 2006 (Bonvin 2006). The results have been positive, 'what has been done so far gives a basis to suggest that [reform of the law enforcement system] will bring about the normalisation of the criminogenic situation in the country' (Kukhianidze 2006).

It was vital to distance the police from the thieves-in-law and to create trust in government security structures. The question is one of faith and confidence in the new police to deliver; 'as long as the Georgian police fail to inspire trust, the thieves may well retain some of their past influence' (DiPuppo 2006). Thus, the Interior Minister at the time of the new legislation, Gia Baramidze, threatened police chiefs of any region that still had thieves-in-law operating in it with the sack (ESI 2010). Symbolism was also an important element in this. Baramidze's successor, Vano Merabishvili proclaimed at the beginning of the campaign against the thieves-in-law that, 'we will confiscate from all thieves-in-law the palaces they built with their dirty money, and put police stations in their place' (Shonia 2007). New police stations in the big, former houses of thieves-in-law now dominate the districts of Georgia's towns.

The police reform precluded individual thieves-in-law from maintaining patron-client relations to protect themselves from the new wave of attack by the central

government. With the corrupt officers gone, the safety buffer that had protected the thieves was removed. Similarly, the penitentiary department adopted reforms along the lines of the police reform, removing the once tight relationship between the prison administration and the thieves-in-law. Some prisons had an 80 per cent turnover of staff and salaries were raised 200–300 per cent (I-10). In January 2006, a process of removing thieves-in-law from the rest of the prison population began. The Georgian government now holds thieves-in-law in a separate prison, no. 7, in Tbilisi, with much curtailed rights to visits, phone calls and mail. These measures appear to be copies of article 41 bis of the Italian penal code. All prison governors that had relations with the thieves-in-law previously were dismissed (Prison Service of Georgia 2006, p. 13). A rigorous recruitment process was implemented. As one prison governor put it: ‘Before [thieves-in-law] could get anything in, drugs, women, phones, it was all possible the prison was absolutely corrupt. Now, we are talking, fresh bedclothes, fruit, tea, juice, nothing else, you won’t get anything into this prison now’ (I-8). The combination of harsh legislation to put the thieves-in-law in prison, isolate them once there and break all beneficial ties with previous patrons was ‘a double act – stop them in prison and outside it’ (I-1).

Educational reform

The ‘culture of lawfulness’ campaign began before the Rose Revolution in 2000, though many of the policies were only carried through after the revolution. It included the involvement of an internationally active NGO, the NSIC based in Washington DC, and many of the elements of the campaign had been tried and tested in other countries previously, specifically in Sicily. Following the Sicilian model, ‘educating for legality’ was eventually introduced into the curriculum (Schneider and Schneider 2003, p. 265). As part of a new ‘Safe Schools’ policy, mainly American-inspired and run by Project Harmony, a prominent US NGO, Georgian schools from 2008 onwards started teaching a civic education course, including a module on the effects of organised crime and the thieves’ world, and engagement with law enforcement personnel through in-school seminars. The teaching involves promoting the principles of citizenship, encouraging tolerance, non-violence and respect for the law. The NSIC also recommended viewings of the film adaptation of William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and the Mafioso-turned-pentiti story told in the Hollywood film *Goodfellas* (Godson *et al.* 2003, p. 26).

Respondents, including headmasters and students from schools in Kutaisi that had previously graduated renowned thieves-in-law, and representatives of the Ministry of Education suggested that these programmes have been positively received and positive normative orientations towards the thieves-in-law uprooted to some degree. One academic believes that this ‘change is not psychological so much as behavioural . . . they [schoolchildren] have the same attitudes but the incentives are no longer to act in line with those attitudes. There is no incentive now to be a thief. You won’t achieve anything with it . . . Schoolkids are the quickest in understanding what they want from life, what is fashionable and what is not. Now, they have pressure to study to achieve something’ (I-2).

The educational reform should also be seen as part of the state’s renegotiation of its relationship with the thieves-in-law. A central element of the thief-in-law code of honour had always been the attraction of youth to their way of life. As one

respondent put it: ‘the main goal for the thieves? Maintaining a legacy’ (I-1). The state then had to give some alternative to this and mobilise bias against the thieves’ way of life. It is one of the wheels of Orlando’s cart without which the thieves-in-law could still maintain a hold as ideal type criminals being persecuted by a fundamentally unjust state. Thus, as well as repressing the mafia through the use of coercive state machinery, it was necessary to dry up the potential recruiting pool and bring over the youth to the side of the state and the law – a process which is still ongoing.

The great Georgian crime decline

Georgian policy-makers had followed Orlando’s anti-mafia strategy closely. The educational reform was a direct attack on the reputation of the thieves-in-law and their popularity amongst young people. The new criminal legislation was exceptionally direct, identifying the thieves-in-law by name, criminalising and stigmatising the status itself. The removal of corrupt police and prison officers deflated the safety buffer that had once protected individual thieves-in-law from state attack. The speed and simultaneity of the reforms left little room for manoeuvre:

I don’t think the thieves-in-law really understood what was going on or the extent of the changes that were being brought in. They didn’t get the legislation, we talked to them when they were arrested and . . . it was clear to us that they thought that normal service would be resumed, but the conditions and the way they are kept now is fundamentally different, they are being shown disrespect and it all happened too quickly for them to respond. (I-11)

Contrary to other countries such as Italy then, Georgian organised crime failed to successfully respond or resist state attack. But the Georgian anti-mafia policy was only part of a wider agenda which placed crime at the centre of the Rose Revolutionaries’ reform project. With reformed, slick and efficient police, prosecutors, courts and prisons equipped to handle increasing caseloads, Saakashvili, an American-educated lawyer who had studied law in New York in the 1990s, was able to introduce a policy of zero tolerance for minor crimes in 2006. He stated that ‘I am announcing a new draft law with zero tolerance for petty crimes . . . There will be no probation sentences . . . Everyone who commits these crimes will go to prison’ (President’s Office of Georgia 2006).

This policy was realised practically through mandatory custodial sentencing, three-strikes laws for drug offences, and an amazingly low acquittal rate of 0.1 per cent (Transparency International Georgia 2010, p. 13). The courts became rubber stamps for the prosecutor’s office, processing over 20,000 cases a year by 2007. The courts are roundly distrusted (CRRC 2010) and widely seen as politically dependent. A system of plea-bargaining was introduced into this unreformed court system in 2004, which, according to a report by Transparency International Georgia (2010), is the mechanism that allows the courts to handle such a massively increased caseload as well as negotiating huge amounts of money from individuals into state coffers (Areshidze 2007).⁵ The gains to the Georgian Government budget from plea bargains and the confiscation of assets as part of anti-mafia legislation mean that many prisoners paid for the new or revamped prisons they sit in today.

Indeed, the state has channelled those funds into a massive expansion of the penal estate since 2004. The prison population increased at a staggering rate between 2003 and 2010. From some 6000 inmates under Shevardnadze, this figure currently (2011) stands at over 24,000 – a 300 per cent increase. For comparison, the USA, far and away the world frontrunner in imprisonment, also oversaw a 300 per cent increase in the prison population, but only over the course of 20 years – 1980–2000 (Beckett and Western 2001). Along with the USA, only three countries in the world incarcerate more of their citizens proportionately than Georgia in the present day (International Centre for Prison Studies 2010).⁶

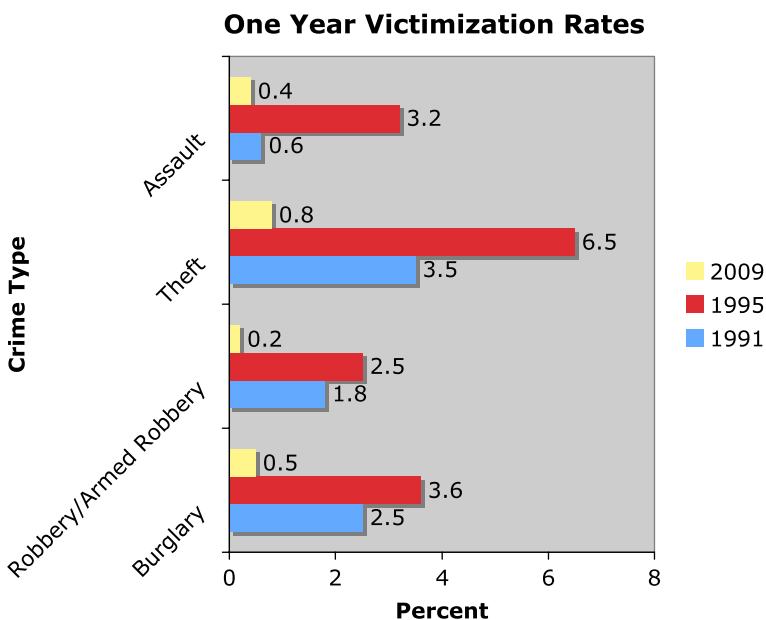
Zero tolerance and mass incarceration was clearly predicated on a particular view of the offender, firstly as an operative of an alternative ‘state within a state’ – the thieves’ world – and as a rational actor, influenced merely by the threat of punishment and beyond rehabilitation: for example, in 2006 Saakashvili talked of ‘cleaning our streets of this rubbish’ (Slade 2007). Since 2009, under pressure from the EU, this rhetoric has been toned down. A juvenile diversion programme has been set up to reduce the number of young people behind bars and the probation service has been expanded. The numbers in the probation system however currently serve to highlight the incredible efficiency of the prosecution services and the number of people passing through the courts in Georgia. There are some 37,000 probationers as of July 2011 with an average of 308 probationers per probation officer (GeoStat 2011).

These policies are incredibly expensive. The Penitentiary Department budget for 2007 alone stands at roughly 0.5 per cent of total GDP for that year (Government of Georgia 2007, Ministry of Finance 2007). This figure stood at just 0.1 per cent in 2004, despite the fact that GDP grew at impressive rates between 2004 and 2007 hitting 10 per cent. Total spending on public security, not including defence, almost caught up with spending on social protection in 2007 (Ministry of Finance 2007). Yet, effective police, politically dependent courts and mass imprisonment have had an effect on both crime rates and self-reported levels of victimisation. Indeed, Georgia has witnessed its own ‘great crime decline’ in the last few years.

Crime rates can only be compared over time from 2006 when a new system of registering crime was introduced. Since that year crime has declined year on year. Between 2006 and 2010, all registered crime has decreased 54 per cent, while particularly serious crime has gone down 66 per cent (Ministry of Internal Affairs 2010). These figures clearly have limitations given that Georgians still rarely report crimes to the police (GORBI 2010). However, the spectacular decrease in crime appears to be corroborated by a victimisation survey carried out by a Georgian polling company and Dutch victimologists in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice. Compared to the other ICVS surveys conducted in Georgia, Georgians have experienced a huge decline in criminal victimisation (see Graph 2 below) to the extent that Georgia now appears to be one of the safest places not only in the post-Soviet space but also in Europe (GORBI 2010).

As can be seen from the graph below, there were significant changes in victimisation across the four crime types covered here, rising particularly in the mid 1990s. However, victimisation levels in 2009 showed a significant drop to below 1991 levels.

Unfortunately, no victimisation surveys were carried out between 1996 and 2010 and the registration of crime and changes to the police make crime rates before 2006



Graph 2. Showing one-year victimisation rates across time in Georgia.
 Source: ICVS (1998) and GORBI (2010).

practically useless. It is therefore very difficult to know what exactly is driving the Georgian crime decline. Of those Georgians that reported the perception of declining crime in 2010, the two main reasons given for this decline were the improved performance of law enforcement (54 per cent) and the effective methods against the thieves-in-law (34 per cent) (GORBI 2010). Certainly, drops in crime are often attributed to the successful fight against individuals who professionally engage in crime – mafias and organised crime groups. Other factors criminologists invoke are better policing, increased imprisonment, improving economic indicators, shifts in demography, immigration variation and changes in urban environments.

There is neither the space nor the reliable data to plot changes in such variables with crime rates in Georgia. However, the professionalisation of the police and the use of new technologies such as wiretaps, CCTV and ID cards, appears an important factor in explaining the crime drop off as does the sudden and extreme rise in the prison population facilitated by massive investment in prison building and the still politically dependent court system that processes some 20,000 cases a year (Supreme Court of Georgia 2011).

The benefits from reduced crime are offset by the social cost of such repressive policies. In its pursuit of serious criminals and the destruction of organised crime, zero tolerance tears apart families and communities and diverts needed funds from social programmes. The prison system has limited rehabilitation programmes, and with harsh sentences for petty crimes, warehousing people in prison appears to simply displace the crime problem into the future. Meanwhile, despite recent positive assessments, the police continue to become embroiled in scandals, from murder to excessive force in dealing with protests and clear signs that they remain politicised.

However, the impressively decreasing perception of corruption amongst the public and the glowing statistics on trust in the police certainly boosted the government's standing: after providing electricity and smoother roads, the police reform was the aspect Georgians were happiest with in government performance in 2005 (International Republican Institute 2005). On the other hand, however, as a Penal Reform International survey (2009) shows, mass incarceration is not popular. Georgian society does not currently support the size of the prison population, 82 per cent of those surveyed in 2009 supports a reduction in numbers incarcerated (Penal Reform International 2009).

People have often taken out their frustrations in the streets in the last few years, protesting the levels of incarceration and extraordinary powers zero tolerance has given to the police (Slade 2007). In November 2007, protests fuelled in large part by the government's criminal justice policies were violently broken up. Emboldened, a coalition of opposition parties took again to the streets in the spring of 2008 and in 2009 after the August 2008 war with Russia, demanding Saakashvili's resignation and new elections. In 2009, the protests borrowed heavily from penal symbolism: protestors slept out in numbered 'cells' that blocked roads throughout Tbilisi; a popular opposition figure locked himself up in a room and maintained a live streaming broadcast from his 'cell'; and opposition leaders, often using slang borrowed from the thieves' world, promised to overthrow the government and open the gates of the prisons.

The 2009 protests have been linked to the thieves-in-law. An investigation has been started in Austria into allegations that Georgian organised crime groups were using Austria as a base to operate in and fund the demonstrations in 2009 (Crawford 2010). On top of this, the Mukhrovani army base mutiny against the government in May 2009 was also linked to funding from thieves-in-law in exile. As well as Moscow, Georgian thieves-in-law have moved to Spain, Austria, Greece and France where Georgian gangsters in groups often headed by thieves-in-law have been the subject of large-scale, continent-wide, sting operations (BBC 2010, Oxford Analytica Ltd 2010). The Georgian Government has attempted to have many of its thievish compatriots deported back to Georgia to face charges of membership of the thieves' world and some requests have been successful. Whether the figure of the thief-in-law is now a folk devil to be used by the government whenever its security is threatened or whether the return of the thieves' world does indeed represent a significant threat is debatable.

Conclusion: governing through crime Georgian style

The wide-ranging and truly revolutionary use of criminal justice reform to attempt to re-shape the institutions of the Georgian state and the behaviour and normative orientations of Georgian society is one of the Rose Revolution's most evident and controversial consequences. The predominance of informal providers of security, such as the thieves-in-law, in society is gone. The ties between the state and professional criminals have been broken. Instead, the Georgian Government has introduced a new mode of governance into the country – governing through crime (Simon 2007), where this means a relentless focus on criminal justice, a concentration on the discourse of crime, and the solving of policy problems in unrelated spheres through criminal justice logics.

The sustainability of the Georgian model of governing through crime is still in question. The system is, ultimately, built on penal excess and courts cowed by the prosecutor's office and police, both of which are still politicised and interdependent on the current ruling authorities. In this sense, the Rose Revolution has failed to create truly independent bodies of law enforcement and a system of justice that would survive a change in power. Moreover, it is not clear that the social and financial cost of mass imprisonment is not just storing up problems for the future. Aid from other countries has dried up since the 2008 war, privatisation receipts have tailed off, GDP growth has slowed, and unemployment and poverty levels have not been addressed in any systematic way. In such a climate, governing through crime might simply prove unaffordable. On the other hand, privatising some police functions and prisons is one answer to this conundrum – a process that, if it does occur, should be carefully regulated by the state.

Regardless of these issues, the reforms that make up governing through crime Georgian-style are being showcased internationally. Delegations from Kyrgyzstan study the police reforms, from Azerbaijan – school security reforms. Georgian politicians fly into prestigious conferences on the rule of law in Sweden to describe 'how Georgia did it'; Ministry of Interior officials travel to Central America to share experience; the World Bank is complying papers on Georgia's reforms to assess their transferability to the Arab spring in North Africa. In Russia, reports about the incorruptibility of the Georgian police and the blow to organised crime sit uncomfortably at a time when Russians find themselves increasingly scandalised by the behaviour of the police there. With public anger rising and the Anti-Organised Crime Department disbanded since 2008, President Dmitri Medvedev has attempted to set police reform in motion, an attempt that looks like a half-baked imitation of the type of cleansing of law enforcement conducted in Georgia.

The conditions facilitating the reforms in Georgia were very different from Russia though of course. The United National Movement came to power with revolutionary support in a un-pacted transition which required no compromises with other parties. The government, realising that the Georgian economy offered little to compete with internationally, deliberately pursued a course of liberalisation and privatisation; for this it was necessary to absolutely ensure physical security to attract foreign direct investment. Those that came to power, moreover, had study and work experience in Europe and the USA and were willing to adopt western policies. Additionally, Georgia's enmity with Russia and the fear of Russia's hand in civil unrest further forced the hand of the government to take back control of society from alternative extra-legal governance structures and purge the power ministries. Finally, there was and is no dynamic private security sector to oppose state security reforms in Georgia.

Such a confluence of factors is rare. However, governing through crime may still become a model for others to follow in the region or after revolutions in other parts of the world. Most post-Soviet countries remain increasingly unequal societies, with decreasing capacity for welfare provision, high crime rates and fear of crime escalated by a 'bad news' media. Insecurity remains high in these countries and criminal justice institutions only partially reformed; the tension between these two facts may stimulate Georgian-style developments in the future.

Expert interviews

- I-1 Academic and Police Academy trainer. Tbilisi. 27 May 2008.
- I-2 Academic and NGO director. Tbilisi. 30 May 2008.
- I-3 Spokesman for Ministry of Interior. Tbilisi. 31 May 2008.
- I-4 Deputy Head of the Criminal Police, Minister of Interior. Tbilisi. 4 June 2008.
- I-5 Unemployed; connections with criminal 'authorities'. Tbilisi. 3 April 2009.
- I-6 Former prison governor. Tbilisi. 14 April 2009.
- I-7 Police Officer. Zugdidi. 20 April 2009
- I-8 Prison governor. Kutaisi. 28 April 2009
- I-9 Senior Criminal Investigator Anti-Organised Crime Unit, Kutaisi branch. Kutaisi. 30 April 2009.
- I-10 Advisor to the Minister for Prisons. Tbilisi. 2 June 2009.
- I-11 Former Ombudsman. Tbilisi. 4 June 2009.
- I-12 Former administrator in Prosecutor's Office. Helped draft anti-mafia legislation. Tbilisi. 5 June 2009.
- I-13 Former advisor on EU JUST THEMIS rule of law project. Tbilisi. 11 April 2011

Notes

1. AOCU-T references data from the Anti-Organised Crime Unit, Tbilisi division of the Special Operations Department, Ministry of Interior.
2. *Mkhedrioni* meaning 'horsemen' or 'knights' in Georgian, was a paramilitary group set up by a *thief*, Djaba Ioseliani and elements of the *nomenklatura*. Made up of volunteers, often juveniles, it acted in the secessionist conflicts with Abkhazia and was hostile to the thieves' traditions.
3. Orlando (2001) writes that his relationship with Georgia began when he discovered one of the first grammars of the Georgian language in a Palermo archive that had been written centuries earlier by a Palermitan monk.
4. Other attempts to create a more democratic police force include the demilitarisation of the Border Police, moving the state's Interior Troops to the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of the Interior's decentralisation with regional headquarters given more independence. Lastly, a Financial Police was also established in the Ministry of Finance. These changes occurred simultaneously with strict oversight mechanisms such as the umbrella organisation, the National Police Directorate, to prevent corrupt practices in the Patrol, Criminal and Security Police from taking root.
5. Almost 60 per cent of criminal cases were plea bargained in 2009 (Transparency International Georgia 2010, p. 11)
6. In 2010, Georgia incarcerated 538 people per 100,000 of the population, fifth in the world. This is based on calculating 24,000 prisoners by the government's population figure of 4.4 million. However, the Institute for Demography and Sociology estimates 3.8 million in the country (see The Financial 'The Demographic Future of Georgia,' 23.05.2011). This latter calculation, if correct, would mean there are 632 prisoners per 100,000 in Georgia today, making it the second biggest incarcerator in the world proportionately.

Notes on contributor

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