

Giorgi Meladze\* Mariam Lortkipanidze\*\* Malkhaz Nakashidze\*\*\*  
Lasha Shainidze\*\*\*\* Giorgi Chitidze\*\*\*\*\*

# COMMUNITY POLICING REFORM IN POST-SOVIET GEORGIA: DECODING THE PERSISTENT CHALLENGES THROUGH SOVIET LEGACIES

## ABSTRACT

Police reform has always been on the reform agenda in independent post-soviet Georgia. Still, after the “Rose Revolution”, the reform gained momentum and was promoted to top priorities. The police suffered a significant lack of trust during Shevardnadze’s presidency due to the association of that institution with corruption, violence, and organized crime, police. One should also consider the heavy influences of the Soviet period on the culture of policing.

Supporters of reform have always stressed the importance of transforming totalitarian police into a democratic institution, and various experiences have been examined to address the challenge. This article looks at the community police reform carried out in 2017 as one of the features of democratic policing and conceptualizes the essential characteristics of the reform.

It has been argued that political actors, lack of finances, lack of a professional cadre, and so forth could have helped the effective implementation of the reforms. This study argues that Soviet legacies could also potentially affect the establishment of democratic policing in Georgia, and one should not overlook this factor when dealing with the subject. While our study does not assess the actual impacts of these legacies, it introduces legacy arguments. It suggests considering it as a fac-

---

\* Associate Professor of Law, Ilia State University.

\*\* Public Policy analyst, Constitutional Law Researcher.

\*\*\* Jean Monnet Professor in Law, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University.

\*\*\*\* LL.M. Student, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

\*\*\*\*\* Visiting Professor of Law, Ilia State University

tor that might impede the progression toward democratic policing. Furthermore, ongoing police reform initiatives may only be effective if designers address the legacy argument.

**Keywords:** Community policing, democratic policing, police reform in Georgia, Soviet legacy

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of policing can be traced back to the Romans. They inherited the term “politeia” from the Greeks, which ultimately became the Latin “politia.”<sup>1</sup> This term originated from the Greek word “polis,” signifying the city. The modern English words “politics” and “policy” find their roots in this term. In the early Middle Ages, various authorities competed to control different aspects of urban life, including the streets and markets, and protect life and property. It was only in the reign of Francis I in France (1494-1547) that a recognizable modern police force began to take shape.

As Foucault argues, while looking at the history of the police, it was not a public authority with comprehensive policing powers. Foucault’s analysis of policing and pastoralism underscores the interplay between state authority and the governance of the population. In Foucault’s view, pastoralism—a mode of governance that characterizes not only spiritual authorities but also social workers and therapists—strengthens the state’s control over individuals, particularly those considered at risk. This dynamic relationship between pastoralism and the exercise of police power reflects the evolving nature of state authority.<sup>2</sup>

In the eighteenth century, we witnessed a pivotal transformation in policing, particularly in Prussia. Economic, social, and military policies influenced the development of policing. Reforms initiated by Frederick William of Prussia and his successors laid the groundwork for the emergence of a comprehensive police state. The establishment of the “Polizeistaat” aimed at three central purposes: the protection of the population, the welfare of the state and its citizens, and the improvement of society. This context created a tightly organized and rigorously administered state that could fulfil these diverse needs. The first Polizeistaat was dedicated to strengthening the state’s hold on its citizens and fostering societal well-being.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Brian Chapman, *Police State, Key Concepts in Political Science* (Pall Mall Press, 1970; University of Michigan, October 13, 2008)

2 Mariana Valverde, “Police, Sovereignty, and Law: Foucaultian Reflections,” in Markus D. Dubber and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Police and the Liberal State* (Redwood City, CA, 2008; online ed., Stanford Scholarship Online, June 20, 2013).

3 Brian Chapman, *Police State, Key Concepts in Political Science* (Pall Mall Press, 1970; University of Michigan,

In the twentieth century, it became evident that policing was a highly complex job. Scholars and legal experts recognized the extensive discretion exercised by police officers, raising concerns about the arbitrary nature of their actions. The Efforts targeted to regulate police discretion through various means, including court rulings, legislative action, and civilian oversight boards. However, it gradually became apparent that the unpredictable and diverse challenges police officers face demand a more nuanced approach beyond a mere set of rules.<sup>4</sup>

The historical divisions in policing, often rooted in the state's structure, have profoundly impacted the development of policing models. High policing, typically associated with centralized state authority and aristocratic rule, favoured top-down control and strict enforcement of laws and regulations. In contrast, low policing embraced more community-oriented and decentralized methods of maintaining order. The historical tension between these approaches has influenced the evolution of policing models and their societal roles.<sup>5</sup>

Applying the concept of democratic policing to the Georgian reality must be taken in context. Reforming the police in the post-Soviet context is a formidable challenge.<sup>6</sup> While Georgia aspires to craft a modern law enforcement apparatus that embraces democratic principles, the echoes of the Soviet past loom large within the "club" of post-Soviet republics; Georgia was recognized and still maintains the reputation of a nation actively endeavouring to adopt democratic principles amidst the complex tapestry of its historical inheritances. Georgia's progression from the remnants of its Soviet past to a period characterized by regained independence highlights the crucial arena in which reform attempts are being fought to establish democratic policing, a fundamental battleground for reform initiatives.

The civil war, internal territorial conflicts, rampant corruption, and organized crime play a role when one looks at Georgia's law enforcement apparatus in the 90's. The severe crisis of residents' security coming from informal actors was fueled by dysfunctional and criminal police officers. The challenge of the reform was immense, and the post-civil war government had to navigate between the interests of the criminal gangs and the goal of state-building.

We understand the complicated dynamics at play, and it will be impossible to address all the complexity of the subject in this brief work. Therefore, we focus on community police reform ("sazogadoebaze orientirebuli politsia"), an integral component of broader democratic policing reform

---

October 13, 2008)

4 Liqun Cao, Lanying Huang, and Ivan Sun, "From Authoritarian Policing to Democratic Policing: A Case Study of Taiwan," *Policing and Society* (2015).

5 Brian Chapman, *Police State, Key Concepts in Political Science* (Pall Mall Press, 1970; University of Michigan, October 13, 2008)

6 Erica Marat, "Reforming the Police in Post-Soviet States: Georgia and Kyrgyzstan" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, November 2013).

efforts. To fully comprehend this reform's challenges, it is essential to acknowledge the historical legacies that have moulded Georgia's law enforcement landscape.

The reform of community policing has long been on the agenda. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia underscores crime prevention as a principal priority, as articulated in the legal framework outlined in the Police Law of Georgia. The Association Agreement (A.A.) between Georgia and the European Union also mandates the commitment to effective crime prevention. Finally, the European Commission actively oversees and evaluates the implementation of the Crime Prevention Obligation as part of the post-entry monitoring process for visa-free travel with the European Union.

The Ministry's pursuit of a community-oriented approach commenced in 2005 with establishing the District Patrol Inspector Division within the Patrol Police Department. Patrol inspectors, operating nationwide, adhered to functions and duties aligned with international standards, emphasizing public engagement and crime prevention as outlined in the Standard Operating Procedures.

In 2006, the district inspector's service transitioned to the criminal police. Subsequently, due to resource constraints, the Office of District Inspectors underwent functional changes, incorporating operational and investigative responsibilities. Consequently, the district inspector service faced challenges establishing cooperation mechanisms between the community and the police and integrating COP principles such as partnership and trust-building.

In 2007, when the government initiated its reform project in cooperation with the OSCE, several attempts were made to strengthen crime prevention mechanisms by introducing community policing. However, the steps the reform initiators took did not extend beyond training conducted for the police officers, a public information campaign and a public education campaign—which were also limited in scope. It was within this prism that community policing was viewed and, as we argue, remains understood within the government circles.

Decree No. 215 of the Minister of Interior in 2017<sup>7</sup> suggested the need for more complex reform to meet the goals of democratic policing. The community policing concept paper was adopted to establish legal grounds for further reform.<sup>8</sup> Following the concept paper, the government proposed several models for further consideration, but it was not until 2018 that the government introduced another approach. The reform of 2017 replaced existing district police officers with “the Community Police Officers” (“Martlcesrigis opitseri”).

This brief analysis aims to make a scholarly contribution to understanding the problems and possibilities that Georgia encounters in its pursuit of democratic policing. This article benefits from the authors' personal experiences of work with Georgia law enforcement institutions and their field observations. In the following sections, we will review the theoretical foundations of democratic

---

7 Concept of Community Oriented Policing, adopted by decree #275 of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, 2017.

8 *Ibid.*

policing and the concept of community policing. We will also delve into the specific reform initiatives that Georgia has undertaken in its pursuit of democratic policing. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current challenges and opportunities, we will review the recent community officer reform in Georgia alongside the potential Soviet legacies that could impact the implementation of these reforms.

## THE METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the present study has been elaborated by the main aim of the research, which is to understand whether the Soviet legacy argument receives recognition in academic literature, policy framework or the law when one looks at policing institutions and specifically at community policy reform. We have selected this specific institution based on a historical argument — a particular model of community involvement with police institutions was practised in the Soviet Union and continued after its collapse in the 90s and since then. For this reason, the present study looks at the dynamics of reform.

The study is based on desk research. It looks at academic articles, policy papers and legal regulations to understand various features of community policing reform in Georgia. It analyzes it within the framework of the “legacy Matrix” (explained below) developed based on the works of Brian D. Taylor.<sup>9</sup>

The legacy argument presents a complex symbiosis of values, experiences, and practices which deserve closer examination within the Georgian context—we understand that this article has limits and cannot grasp the whole picture—but we would like to present the study more as a departure point. There is a critical lack of publicly available data when one speaks of law enforcement institutions. This lack of data affects our study as well and limits its scope. However, the article is still an innovation for the Georgian context, as it attempts to explore this argument, which researchers of police reform in Georgia have largely ignored. We intend to enrich the debate by introducing this element.

---

9 Brian D. Taylor, “From Police State to Police State? Legacies and Law Enforcement in Russia,” in *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 128–51.

## ON LEGACY ARGUMENT

Jason Wittenberg defines legacies as outcomes resulting from “critical junctures,” periods of significant political upheaval that establish new forms of politics.<sup>10</sup> These legacies are not merely remnants of the past but represent durable causal relationships that endure even without their original causes.<sup>11</sup> However, the burden of proof for legacy arguments is higher when some institutional practices are relatively common in various functional areas, such as law enforcement. For instance, the division between “high” (political) and “low” (criminal) police, which has characterized both Georgian and Soviet police for over a century, is not unique to these contexts but is instead a common feature in policing worldwide. Therefore, the behaviour and organization of law enforcement cannot be solely attributed to their Russian or post-Communist origins but rather to the inherent nature of police work.<sup>12</sup>

Rasma Karklins points out that a concrete Soviet legacy is the ability of officials to employ their investigative and judicial powers to intimidate citizens and political rivals.<sup>13</sup> The theory was applied to Russia’s post-soviet experience by Taylor. Taylor underscores the significance of Communist, Soviet, and even colonial legacies of Russian rule, emphasizing that these legacies continue to shape law enforcement practices in post-communist nations.<sup>14</sup>

These legacies, deeply rooted in the past, persist in the present and influence the behaviour of law enforcement agencies, argues Taylor. The following features can be outlined as the main characteristics of the post-Soviet legacy of the policy:

Culture of Obedience to the State – Soviet-era law enforcement agencies prioritized serving the state and political demands over serving citizens. This culture of obedience to the state, rather than to the rule of law and citizen rights, can persist and influence the behaviour of current law enforcement officials. It may hinder their ability to adapt to democratic norms, prioritizing protecting citizens’ rights and freedoms over state interests.

---

10 Jason Wittenberg, “Conceptualizing Historical Legacies,” *East European Politics and Societies* 29, no. 2 (2015): 366–378

11 Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin, *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia, and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

12 Peter Andreas and Ethan Nadelmann, *Policing the Globe: Criminalization and Crime Control in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

13 Rasma Karklins, “Typology of Post-Communist Corruption,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 49, no. 4 (July/August 2002): 22–32.

14 Brian D. Taylor, “From Police State to Police State? Legacies and Law Enforcement in Russia,” in *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 128–51.

**Lack of Accountability** – The Soviet system had a limited system of accountability, as law enforcement agencies often acted with impunity, mainly when serving the political interests of the regime. This lack of accountability can continue to affect the behaviour of law enforcement agencies in Georgia, making it challenging to establish transparent and accountable policing practices.

**Political Interference** in the Soviet system, law enforcement agencies were instrumentalized for political purposes, including the suppression of political dissent. This legacy of political Interference in law enforcement can undermine the independence of policing in Georgia. Political pressures on law enforcement agencies can persist and hinder their ability to act impartially and protect the rule of law.

**Hierarchical Structure** – The Soviet-era law enforcement agencies had a highly hierarchical structure emphasizing central control and authority. This centralized structure may hinder the decentralization and community-oriented policing approaches often associated with democratic policing. It can lead to a need for more responsiveness to local needs and priorities.

**Legacy of Intimidation** – Soviet law enforcement agencies used their investigative and judicial powers to intimidate citizens and political rivals. This legacy of intimidation can discourage citizens from engaging with law enforcement, reporting crimes, or cooperating with the police. It can also undermine community trust and cooperation, essential for effective democratic policing.

**Cultural Legacies of Secrecy** – The Soviet KGB’s culture of secrecy and surveillance can persist within law enforcement agencies, making transparency and accountability challenging. This culture can lead to a reluctance to share information with the public and civil society, hindering efforts to build trust and openness in the police force.

**Resistance to Change** – Bureaucracies often have a natural resistance to change. Law enforcement agencies with deep-rooted Soviet legacies may resist reforms to transform them into democratic policing institutions. Resistance from within the ranks can slow down or impede progress toward democratic policing.

In addition, high rates of violence on the job by police officers are also typical in post-Soviet states. This violence is often reciprocated by an aggressive and hostile civilian population that believes the police regularly employ brutality against suspects.<sup>15</sup> Both police and citizens have valid fears of violence. The public’s distrust of the police is perpetuated by the perception that the police are representatives of the state who can persecute ordinary citizens, demand bribes, and protect the actual criminals. This mutual distrust engenders cycles of violence and further erodes the relationship between the police and the public they serve.<sup>16</sup>

---

15 Erica Marat, “Conclusions: Transforming Post-Soviet Police,” in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018)

16 Erica Marat, “Conclusions: Transforming Post-Soviet Police,” in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018)

The research uses the abovementioned matrix to initiate debate on key aspects of police reform and attempts to propose several parallels between the Soviet system and current reforms. Once again, the study has a mission to capture only part of the picture. Instead, it invites researchers to investigate the argument and apply it to multiple areas of police reform. The brief historical introduction and concept overview below will guide us to better understand the place and value of community policing within a more extensive police system.

## THE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRATIC POLICING AND COMMUNITY POLICING

A significant division between democratic policing and undemocratic policing marks contemporary policing. Democratic policing emphasizes self-government, individual autonomy, and the rule of law. It embodies the principles of engagement, cooperation, and deliberation, thus aligning with democratic ideals. In contrast, undemocratic policing is characterized by autocratic control exerted by the state over its citizens, limiting individual freedoms and rights.<sup>17</sup>

Below, we will list a few elements deemed integral to democratic policing.<sup>18</sup>:

*Protection of Individual Rights* – In a democratic society, the protection of individual rights is paramount. Community policing places a strong emphasis on respecting individual rights while maintaining order. It ensures that law enforcement activities are conducted within the bounds of the law and societal norms.

*Citizen Participation* – Democratic policing encourages active participation in shaping law enforcement policies and practices. Community policing provides a platform for community members to actively participate in the decision-making process actively, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of policing efforts.

*Empowerment of Communities* – Empowering communities to address their unique security concerns aligns with the principles of self-government and individual autonomy, which are central to democratic policing. By involving the community in identifying problems and developing solutions, community policing promotes a sense of ownership and responsibility for public safety.

---

17 Liqun Cao, Lanying Huang, and Ivan Sun, "From Authoritarian Policing to Democratic Policing: A Case Study of Taiwan," *Policing and Society* (2015).

18 Christopher E. Stone and Heather H. Ward, "Democratic Policing: A Framework for Action," *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy* 10, no. 1 (2000): 11-45.



Community policing is an element of democratic policing and is a philosophy and approach to law enforcement that redefines the role of the police within society. It shifts the focus from a purely law enforcement perspective to one that strongly emphasizes building positive relationships with the community. In this model, the police and the community work together to identify and address security concerns, thus promoting shared responsibility and cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Police in democratic settings are expected to uphold the rule of law and ensure that law enforcement activities align with societal norms and values. This role necessitates a symbiotic relationship between the police and the community, where the police cooperate with the public to maintain order while safeguarding individual rights.<sup>20</sup>

Looking at the historical set of community policing experiences,<sup>21</sup> One can distil several core principles and practices, such as:<sup>22</sup>

*Problem Solving* – Rather than reacting to crimes after they occur, community policing encourages proactive problem-solving. Police officers, in collaboration with community members, identify underlying issues and work together to develop sustainable solutions.

*Community Engagement* – Community policing places a premium on engaging with the community. Police officers foster open communication, attend community meetings, and actively seek input from residents. This engagement helps tailor law enforcement strategies to meet each community's needs and concerns.

*Decentralization of Decision-Making* – In community policing, decision-making is decentralized. Police officers are encouraged to use discretion in addressing local issues rather than rigidly adhering to centralized rules and regulations. This allows for a more customized and community-oriented approach.

While community policing aligns with democratic policing principles, its successful implementation is not without challenges. These challenges can include resistance to change within law enforcement agencies, a lack of training, and the need for cultural and organizational shifts. Furthermore, effective community engagement can be challenging in diverse communities, and trust-building may require time and sustained effort.<sup>23</sup> Within such a complex reality, we must look at community policing reform in Georgia.

---

19 Jerome H. Skolnick and David H. Bayley, "Theme and Variation in Community Policing," *Crime and Justice* 10 (1988): 1–37

20 Bonnie Bucqueroux and Robert Trojanowicz, *Community Policing: How to Get Started (United States: Elsevier Science, 1998)*.

21 Liqun Cao, Lanying Huang, and Ivan Sun, "From Authoritarian Policing to Democratic Policing: A Case Study of Taiwan," *Policing and Society* (2015).

22 Peter K. Manning, "Community Policing," *American Journal of Police* Vol. III, No. II (1984).

23 Jerome H. Skolnick and David H. Bayley, "Theme and Variation in Community Policing," *Crime and Justice* 10 (1988): 1–37

## COMMUNITY POLICE REFORM IN GEORGIA

In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, the post-Soviet states embarked on ambitious journeys of transformation in various facets of their societies. For Georgia, reforming the police force became a focal point to shed the relics of a bygone era and align law enforcement with democratic principles. Police reform in post-Soviet states typically seeks one of three outcomes: dismantling oppressive institutions, establishing control over unruly elements born from economic collapse, and entrusting society with policing the police.<sup>24</sup>

The dissolution of the USSR left some post-Soviet states grappling with an unregulated element that challenged the state's authority. Insurgent groups, corrupt officials, and organized criminal entities had risen amid economic transition chaos.<sup>25</sup> In these cases, police reform is not only about revamping the police but also about eliminating the connections between state actors and these criminal elements, many of which were forged during the waning years of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, post-Soviet states frequently need help to strike a balance between better equipping the police, improving services, and respecting human rights. There often needs to be more connection between the government's strategic plans, international community recommendations, and the needs and expectations of the public.<sup>26</sup> The international community often pressures these states to address human rights issues.

One key aspect of police reform in the post-Soviet context was to disband institutions used by former political leaderships to suppress dissent and protect their interests. The police force, often employed as a punitive instrument of oppression, was expected to transition to a more transparent, accountable, and public-serving entity.<sup>27</sup>

In countries like the Czech Republic and the Baltic states, the Communist-era security police were abolished, collaborators were banned from high government positions, and the process of lustration was implemented more rigorously. Other Central and Eastern European countries dismantled the old secret police and created new entities.<sup>28</sup>

---

24 Erica Marat, "Conclusions: Transforming Post-Soviet Police," in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018)

25 Erica Marat, "Conclusions: Transforming Post-Soviet Police," in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018)

26 Erica Marat, "Conclusions: Transforming Post-Soviet Police," in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018)

27 Erica Marat, "Conclusions: Transforming Post-Soviet Police," in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018)

28 Ibid.

Similarly to the other cases mentioned above, the history of policing in Georgia is marked by a series of ambitious reforms dismantling oppressive institutions and establishing control over unruly elements born from economic collapse, all aimed at transforming the law enforcement apparatus into a force that serves and protects the interests of the people.<sup>29</sup>

A new Community Officer was officially presented to the public as part of system renewal reforms. The roles and duties of these officers included the establishment of close cooperation with the community and focusing on crime prevention. The new unit was designed to gradually replace the previous district inspectors and transfer all low policing functions from the criminal police.

Addressing community officers at the launch event, Giorgi Gakharia, then Georgia's minister of internal affairs, said: "Today is a significant day for us. As you are aware, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has been proceeding with a Systemic Upgrade reform for a year already, and you are the first real practical step to implementing this reform. Your function—taking care of our citizens—is the most important thing."<sup>30</sup>

The minister introduced a new directive, Order N275 from the Ministry of the Interior, dated May 25, 2017, which approved the Community Oriented Policing Concept. This approach considered crime prevention as integrating policing strategies and measures distinct from traditional methods. Instead, it focused on reducing crime through various initiatives, citing the introduction of Community Oriented Policing as a tool towards this end. The concept explicitly asserted that relying solely on the fear of police response to deter crime impeded the establishment of trust-based relationships between society and law enforcement. To address this issue, the concept proposed developing a strategy for planning preventive measures that law enforcement should adhere to. It also suggested organizational changes within the Patrol Police Department, including creating a new unit responsible for implementing Community Oriented Policing elements. Staffed with more autonomous officers, this unit aimed to replace district inspectors. While the concept was commendable for proposing a normative framework for preventive measures, it fell short in delineating the police's competencies in crime prevention. Consequently, the police retained its repressive role, focusing on societal control, which hampered the potential for constructive relationships between the police and the public.<sup>31</sup>

The COP concept is based on the following approaches:

Cooperation – Effective Cooperation within the Law Enforcement Community and Other Structures is crucial for ensuring public safety, given the interdependence between the police and the

---

29 Erica Marat, "Georgia: Refurbishment versus Reform," in *The Politics of Police Reform: Society against the State in Post-Soviet Countries* (New York, 2018; online ed., Oxford Academic, March 22, 2018).

30 Amy Jones, "Community Policing Begins in Tbilisi," *Georgia Today*, December 5, 2018, <http://gtarchive.georgiatoday.ge/news/13562/Community-Policing-Begins-in-Tbilisi>.

31 *Prevention of Crime (Risk Related to Police Control)*, Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), 2017.

community. The collaboration aims to formulate an approach to problem-solving and enhance trust in the police within society.

**Organizational arrangement** – Organizational restructuring entails systematic decentralization, granting “front-line” officers greater autonomy in the decision-making process for addressing specific issues. This administrative decentralization diminishes bureaucratic hindrances in decision-making, enhances accountability at lower managerial levels, and facilitates a more accurate reflection of the problems and needs of the population.

**Problem-oriented policing** – Problem-oriented policing involves the mobilization of police resources based on the principle of minor geographical divisions. Utilizing the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment), this approach identifies societal problems and needs, leading to the development of effective response strategies.

Therefore, the fundamental principles of the COP concept are outlined as follows:

- The implementation of police functions should rely mainly on cooperation rather than coercion.
- The police should be perceived as a component of society rather than a repressive institution overseeing it.
- The police, in collaboration with other state agencies, must contribute to determining the population’s needs.
- Police activities should be adaptable to the needs of society.
- The police must deliver quality services and be accountable for the services provided.

Improved Communication and Cooperation Mechanisms are suggested for the police to initiate dialogue with the community by encouraging public engagement and organizing meetings between the police and community representatives. Addressing the identified issues through the mentioned cooperation involves coordinating efforts among various agencies, organizations, and media outlets. To facilitate this, the creation of an inter-agency working group is essential. This group ensures effective interaction among involved agencies and the proper distribution of responsibilities to promote seamless cooperation.

Georgia’s COP concept rightly emphasizes the importance of cooperation within the law enforcement community and other structures. Acknowledging the interdependence between the police and the community is a strength, as it recognizes that ensuring public safety requires collaborative efforts. The focus on organizational restructuring through systematic decentralization is a positive aspect. Granting greater autonomy to “front-line” officers fosters a more responsive decision-making process and addresses specific issues effectively. This can lead to improved accountability and a better understanding of community problems and needs. The incorporation of problem-oriented policing, emphasizing minor geographical divisions and the SARA model, demonstrates a commitment to understanding and addressing specific issues in a targeted manner. This approach can enhance the effectiveness of police resources and response strategies.

However, while there is an acknowledgement of the need for public engagement, specific strategies to enhance public participation must be clearly outlined. Concrete methods for soliciting input, feedback, and involvement from diverse community members should be detailed for a more comprehensive COP approach. While the COP concept emphasizes accountability, specific and measurable metrics for assessing the effectiveness of police services and the level of community satisfaction are not explicitly outlined. Establishing clear indicators and assessment tools would enhance the accountability aspect. The focus on minor geographical divisions is valuable. Still, there should be a conscious effort to ensure that the identified problems encompass diverse issues affecting different population segments. Inclusivity in problem identification is crucial for addressing the entire community's needs.

Notably, until 2018, the Ministry did not systematically execute community-oriented policing activities, and the official introduction of the community police officer was presented as a product of comprehensive reforms implemented throughout the year.

With this, we must reiterate that despite reforms, using the police force for political purposes, particularly during elections or to stifle opposition, has been a recurrent theme in Georgian politics.<sup>32</sup> Rather than focusing solely on serving the public and maintaining law and order, the police have often been instrumentalized by incumbent governments to keep their hold on power. This undermines the core tenets of democratic policing, which emphasize independence from political manipulation.

One might argue that reform could not be considered complete in Georgia due to the complex transition.<sup>33</sup> The deep-rooted effect of the Soviet past and practicalities associated with the reform process, such as the need for new personnel, new knowledge, and the transformation of the political positioning of the institution.

## DEBATING THE LEGACY ARGUMENT

It has been suggested that one of the primary reasons for the failure to achieve democratic policing in Georgia is the reliance on non-democratic measures during reform initiatives. The sweeping 'big bang' reform during the Saakashvili government's tenure curtailed corruption and crime.<sup>34</sup> Yet, it did so through heavy-handed tactics, often disregarding democratic processes and human

---

32 Alexander Kupatadze, "Police Reform in Georgia," *Center for Social Sciences*, September 2012

33 Ibid.

34 Farid Osmanov, "Police Reform in Georgia," *Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford*, May 11, 2020.

rights.<sup>35</sup> The police were employed as a tool without due respect for legal safeguards and democratic checks and balances. The practice continued after the 2012 elections when Georgian Dream came to power. The political instrumentalization of the police is one of the arguments frequently mentioned by human rights advocates and political opposition.

We have briefly examined the community policing institution above, and it is evident that the document envisions an institution that closely cooperates with the community and actively engages in crime prevention. However, the effective implementation of community-oriented policing faces challenges, as evidenced by:<sup>36</sup>

1. Lack of Trust – The level of trust the population places in the police indicates the effectiveness of community-oriented policing efforts.
2. Lack of Awareness and Involvement – Challenges persist regarding public awareness and the active involvement of interested parties in community-oriented policing initiatives.
3. Absence of Proper Institutional and Legal Framework – A deficiency exists in the institutional and legal framework necessary to support and facilitate the effective implementation of community-oriented policing activities.

The use of non-democratic methods, the instrumentalization of the police for political ends, and the lack of accountability all contribute to a scenario where Georgia’s law enforcement agencies never fully embraced the democratic policing model. In the quest for democratic and participatory community policing, the need for sustained efforts to strengthen institutional integrity, accountability, and independence remains paramount for Georgia.

Democratic policing requires that the police force operates under a system of accountability to the public and civilian oversight.<sup>37</sup> Despite various reform attempts in Georgia, the police need more effective oversight mechanisms to monitor their actions. This absence of robust accountability measures allows for a lack of transparency, making it challenging to ensure democratic policing principles.

As one looks at the abovementioned reforms, it is evident that despite various efforts, the central concept of the reform, which is to be concentrated around the police institution, be locked within the police institution or be limited to reshuffling powers within the police institution, putting efforts to improve skills of the police staff or increase funding there has been little done to expand reform and include wider society. The education efforts are essential, but effective community policing also implies close cooperation with local communities. The persistent disregard for public

---

35 Farid Osmanov, “Police Reform in Georgia,” *Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford*, May 11, 2020.

36 Teona Surmava, “Public-Police Engagement: The Framework for Partnership,” 2019.

37 David H. Bayley, *Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to do and how to do it?* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, June 2001.

participation is visible in police reform. Many factors can explain it. The influence of organized crime on society and the intense networks that organized crime maintains within society have been frequently mentioned as deterrents to opening the doors to society and welcoming more participation in police matters (the authors have personal knowledge of some of the reforms and have been involved with several working groups on law enforcement reform). The resistance can also be explained by ideological narratives, where right-wing politicians are not inclined to open the system to the broader public. Or it can be a direct result of the Soviet Legacy, where the lack of accountability and secrecy was integral to the law enforcement system.

The legacies listed above as a culture of obedience to the state, lack of accountability, Political Interference, hierarchical Structure, Legacy of Intimidation, Cultural Legacies of Secrecy, Resistance to Change, and high rates of violence on the job by police are still frequently mentioned as a shortcoming when one looks at police. But whether they affect the functioning of a community police officer “*Martltsesrigis opitseri*” remains a question that has not been asked.

The deeply entrenched hierarchical structure inherited from the Soviet era substantially impedes achieving the necessary decentralization for democratic policing in Georgia. This historical framework hampers local law enforcement units’ autonomy and fosters a centralized power dynamic that undermines the responsiveness to local community needs. Consequently, breaking free from this historical centralization becomes a formidable challenge, hindering the establishment of a democratic and community-oriented policing model in the country.

In tandem with this, the enduring Soviet legacy of a lack of accountability significantly contributes to the persistent issue of inadequate oversight mechanisms within the Georgian law enforcement system. The historical precedent of limited accountability casts a long shadow, making establishing robust oversight measures daunting. This deficiency in checks and balances creates an environment where misconduct and abuse of power can thrive unchecked, eroding the trust between the police and the public. Ultimately, the absence of effective accountability mechanisms perpetuates an opaque law enforcement system, undermining the foundational principles of democratic policing.

Furthermore, the Soviet legacy of political Interference intricately weaves into the recurrent theme of instrumentalizing the police for political purposes in Georgia. The tradition of political leaders utilizing law enforcement agencies as tools for consolidating power persists, fueled by the historical ties between the Soviet government and the police force. The lack of a clear separation between law enforcement and political interests is a stumbling block to establishing an independent and impartial police force. This persistent instrumentalization poses a direct challenge to the core tenets of democratic policing, wherein the police should operate without political manipulation, prioritizing public service and upholding the rule of law.

## CONCLUSION

After carefully researching the policy papers and legal regulations, we conclude that despite the change of government and leading figures within the institution, the main characteristic of community policing, which is public participation in decision-making, has been consistently ignored throughout every reform designed under the umbrella of community policing reform. One can look at different reasons to explain this trend, such as lack of experience, knowledge, etc. However, we would like to emphasize the influence of legacy as a factor influencing the political decision-making process, as the Soviet system lacked participatory mechanisms and replaced it with a lack of accountability and secrecy. The reason for the consistent avoidance of the reform should be searched around the legacy argument, and future research should be focused on either developing or rejecting our hypothesis.

The legacy argument, though crucial, offers only a partial explanation. It is imperative to acknowledge that law enforcement behaviour is shaped not only by historical legacies but also by the broader social and institutional environment. Universal pressures law enforcement officials face further contribute to the reality of post-Communist policing in Georgia. The current political landscape, dominated by ruling elites and limited civil society engagement, presents challenges where reform strategies risk being co-opted by political leaders. Patronage networks between law enforcement structures and politicians can impede comprehensive reform, resulting in incremental changes rather than transformative shifts.

The outcomes of policing reform efforts in Georgia, with their dual nature, raise questions about the full embrace of democratic policing principles. For a genuine realization of democratic policing, increased public participation, transparency, accountability, and political neutrality are integral components that cannot be overlooked. The current challenges underscore the need for future research to delve deeper into the legacy argument and explore whether it serves as a persistent barrier to reform or if other factors contribute to the complex landscape of law enforcement in post-communist Georgia.

Community policing, inherently a collaborative endeavour between law enforcement and the community, is a beacon of potential in realigning the philosophical foundation of policing in Georgia. The country finds itself at a crossroads, where drastic reforms are needed to rebuild public trust eroded by a history of using the police as a tool for political repression. Community forums, international expert training, exchange programs with established law enforcement agencies, school-based legal socialization programs, and other community-focused approaches emerge as vital strategies to reshape law enforcement. Through such comprehensive and community-centric initiatives, Georgia can pave the way for a policing model that maintains order and reflects the aspirations and needs of its diverse communities. This shift towards community policing should be considered an integral part of a broader democratization agenda. A depoliticized and more accountable police force is a cornerstone of a democratic society, ensuring that law enforcement serves the public impartially and upholds the principles of transparency and accountability.