

CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY GEORGIA

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Abstract

The author analyzes the results of the four stages of victimization surveys and Unified Crime Reports prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia in 2010-2013. The results of victimization surveys and statistics reports related to indexes and structure of crime became important after the parliamentary elections held in October 1, 2012, resulted by defeating of the ruling political party “National Movement” which was in power for the last 9 years. The new coalition “Georgian Dream”, headed by the billionaire B. Ivanishvili, radically changed political climate and announced the acceleration of democratization of the country and adopted the legislation decriminalization policy. According the new policy, the government of the country carried out the general amnesty, and released more than 60% of all prisoners from the custody. Such policy became the object of serious criticism from the part of the oppositions and some experts. They have expressed concerns about the criminal situation and decreasing level of security in the country predicted anarchy and disorganizations. This article is an attempt to assess the real situation in Georgia and the level of real threat to stability posed by criminality.

Keywords: Criminalization; Victimization; Registered Crime; Personal Safety; Security; Public Opinion

Introduction

Georgia is a small developing country with a population of about 4.5 million people and a gross national income (GNI) per capita of US\$ 3,136.⁴³ Over the past eight years Georgia undertook significant economic, social and governance reforms resulting, inter alia, in progress in reducing corruption, crime rates and in developing a more favorable environment for business. Sound fiscal and monetary policies supported by structural reforms supportive of supply-side dynamics also contributed to foster economic growth particularly in larger cities. Despite shocks caused by the 2008 conflict with Russia and the following global economic downturn and a sharp decrease of the foreign investments, Georgia was capable to recuperate macroeconomic stability and to recover progressively.

The October parliamentary elections marked the first democratic transfer of power in the country's history; the elections were widely recognized by election observation organizations as the most free and fair ever in Georgia. The program of the new governing Georgian Dream Coalition "for Strong, United Georgia" reaffirms stability-oriented macroeconomic policy as a dominant medium term objective. The program also emphasizes efficiency, transparency and accountability of public finances and reaffirmed commitments to further public finance reforms.

⁴³ Nationals Statistics Office of Georgia (2011). The 2012 UN HDI shows a GNI per capita of USD 5,005 (purchasing power parity terms).

Background of the problem

October's Georgian parliamentary elections brought about the nation's first peaceful transfer of power. Amidst political uncertainty, the country faces serious economic legal and governance problems. A particularly serious problem for the new government becomes the decriminalization of criminal laws and reduces the number of inmates in Georgia's prisons.

The number of prisoners dramatically rose as a result of the policy of "zero tolerance" pursued by President M. Saakashvili. Thus, in the period from 2004 to 2012, the number of inmates in Georgia's prisons grew from 11000 to 24079, and reached the average 570 persons per 100,000 populations.⁴⁴ It was the highest level of prisoners in Europe after the Russian Federation.

After the parliamentary election in October 2012, the number of prisoners has reduced by more than half for the last one year mainly because of enforcement of the broad amnesty. In January of 2013, the number was reduced to 13,170 and in February it was 11,107, by the data of the Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia.

After the amnesty, the opposition party and some experts declared that the amnesty would cause a serious increase in crime and a general rise in crime of Georgia, other experts have refuted these forecasts.

For an objective analysis of the crime situation in Georgia, the author has analyzed official data on the number of recorded crimes and the results of victimization studies conducted in 2010 – 2013.

One of the most reliable sources of information of registered crimes can be found among the statistics maintained by law enforcement bodies, such as the police.

Three factors generally influence the number of registered crimes recorded by police officials:

- 1) The existence of a criminal code,
- 2) How effectively the population reports crime to the authorities, and
- 3) The desire and capabilities of police to react and investigate reported crimes.⁴⁵

In general, as a country becomes more developed; a greater tendency exists in reporting crime to responsible authorities, and data is better maintained on the crime rate, per 100,000 citizens. However, official figures are not the sole indicator of the level of crime in any given country. Statistical data is additionally provided and supported by the findings of surveys, interviews and studies. Survey results are useful in determining the efficiency of law enforcement bodies, crime prevention and improvement of measures for fight against crime.

Until 2004, unbiased statistical data concerning the dynamics and level of crime in Georgia was not available. It has been widely reported domestically and internationally that corrupt and unprofessional law enforcement bodies used various measures in their attempts to conceal the actual number of crimes committed. They even blocked and/or impeded the official registration of committed crimes. As a result, the number of crimes registered by the MIA (for example 17,397 crimes were registered in 2003). However, in reality this number failed to reflect the existing situation at the time (see table 1).

The approaches towards official registration of reported crime substantially changed in 2004. As a result, the performance of law enforcement bodies in terms of detecting and investigating crimes substantially improved, which is clearly reflected in statistical data.

The number of registered crimes in 2006 was 62283, which is a three-fold increase in the crime rate since 2003 (see table 1). The overall registered crime rate peaked in 2006-

⁴⁴ Geostat, Composition of GDP, 2012.

⁴⁵ F. Adler, G.M. Mueller, W. Laufer (2007) – Criminology and Criminal Justice System. Six Edition Part 1. 1 Understanding Criminology, Chapter 2 Counting Crime and Measuring Criminal Behavior

2007, and then started decreasing. Consequently, the reflected drop as found herein is deemed as the direct result of an actual decrease of the crime rate in the society.

Table 1. Registered crimes by MIA

Type of Crimes	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	17397	24856	43266	62283	54746	44644	35945	34739	32261	31999
Among them:										
Aggravated crime	10326	17833	24320	29249	13158	13028	11093	9987	9016	8994
Attempted and premeditated murder	499	538	697	666	741	653	494	418	336	354
Intentional bodily harm	253	371	368	271	157	200	134	126	94	132
Rape	52	62	141	167	156	100	84	82	78	77
Armed robbery	556	1316	2087	2751	1208	2684	700	398	261	311
Robbery	1013	1733	1925	2160	1615	2684	958	638	485	555
Theft	5593	10634	16256	27657	18587	14814	11473	11371	11383	12111
Categories										
Burglary	1785	1887	2998	3523	2684	2347	1860	1552	1381	1298
Car theft	388	260	292	611	307	267	154	117	86	77
Theft of Livestock	-	-	-	783	527	544	417	417	476	399
Fraud	483	543	674	2395	2222	1844	1761	1326	1326	1299
Illegal production, acquisition, keeping and etc. of drugs.	1945	1941	2074	3542	8493	8699	6336	5465	3776	3654
Hooliganism	487	706	1314	1208	858	724	524	435	455	401
Juvenile delinquency	617	557	755	997	674	759	575	543	533	502

Note: Not all registered crimes are included in the above table.

As the analysis of registered crimes MIA for the period January-March 2013 shows, the crime rate in spite of a broad amnesty to criminals increased slightly for certain types of crimes, which include theft and drug addiction. At the same time in other crimes like murder and fraud have been reported some decrease in crime rates. This indicates that despite the claims of oppositions and a number of experts, the country managed to avoid the uncontrolled growth of crime in 2013.

Table 2. Recorded and Detected Specific Crime in Georgia 2012-2013 (January-March)

Crime	2012			2013			Number/%	
	Recorded crime	Detected crime	Detection %	Recorded crime	Detected crime	Detection %	+/_	+/_
Homicid	37	28	76%	30	28	93%	-7	-18%
Attempt of Homicid	84	72	86%	52	48	92%	-32	-38%
Assault	35	21	60%	40	30	75%	+5	+14%
Rape	27	9	33%	27	12	44%	0	0%
Theft	3875	928	24%	4886	1495	31%	+1011	+26%
Car theft	30	29		29	26			
Robbery	139	75	54%	187	97	52%	+48	+34%
Armed Robbery	95	49	51.58%	192	101	53%	+97	+102%
Fraud	780	168	22%	393	66	17%	-387	-50%
Drug Crime	1275	938	73.57%	2212	1522	68.81%	+937	+73%

The dynamics of victimization in Georgia (1992-2013)

In discussing the problem of victimization in Georgia, it is necessary to conduct comparative analysis of the level of victimisation during different periods of the country's development. A victimization survey was conducted by GORBI in 1992 and 1996, and 2010-

2013. This experience gives us the opportunity to draw a clearer picture of both personal and HH crimes, and their associated dynamics.⁴⁶

The following table shows that the victimization level in 2013 for almost every crime dropped in comparison with 1992 and 1996, and this marked reduction has been between 5 – 15 times in scale (figures are over a period of five years).

Table 3 - Level of Victimization in Georgia 1992 – 2013

	Last 5 yrs.	Last year	Last 5 yrs.	Last year	Last 5 yrs.	Last year		Last 5 yrs.	Last year	Last 5 yrs.	Last year
	1992		2010		2011			2012		2013	
Car theft	15.4	6.3	1.1	0.1	0.4	0.0		0.4	0.1	0.9	0
Theft from and out of car	31.1	10.8	7.27	2.2	3.6	0.9		3.0	0.9		
Car vandalism	14.5	4.1	1.7	0.8	0.9	0.5		1.2	0.5		
Burglary	9.9	2.5	2.7	0.5	2.2	0.5		1.6	0.3	1.3	0.4
Attempted burglary	8.2	2.1	1.2	0.1	0.7	0.1		0.5	0.1		
Robbery/armed robbery	5.8	1.8	0.6	0.2	0.4	0.2		0.2	0.00	0.6	0.1
Theft of other personal property	13.4	3.5	2.1	0.8	1.0	0.2		0.9	0.2	0.6	0.3
Assault/threat*	5.3	0.6	1.1	0.18	1.1	0.5		1.0	0.4	0.2	0.0

The following table reflects the victimization level, ranging from the crime of theft from inside and outside of a car in 1992 (31.1%) compared to 2012 (3%), which is a ten-fold decrease.

In observing the pattern of crime levels in the years noted, the percentage of several types of crimes when compared to 1992 significantly decreased. For example, in 1992, 6.3% of car owners declared in the last year that their car was either stolen or driven without their permission. Compared with 1996, this figure decreased to the level of 3.3%, and in 2010, only 0.02% of car owners indicated that they had suffered from this type of crime in the last year.

In addition, the survey in 2011 did not reveal a single instance of car theft in the preceding year. However, according to the survey in 2012, 0.1% among car owners “last year: were victims of car theft.

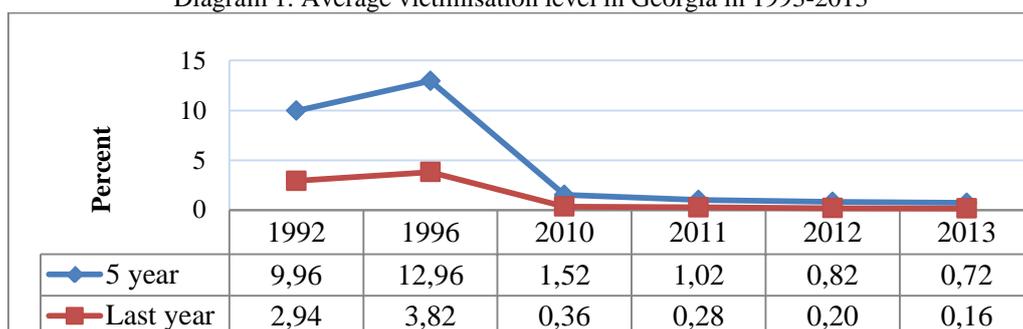
The level of victimization according to various types of theft in 1992 was 3.5% and in 1996 - 6.5%, which was almost a two-fold increase. Last year, victimization was 0.2%, which is 32.5 times less.

The same ratios are maintained for the following five year periods: 1988-1992; 1992-1996, and 2006-2010 – the level of victimization in 2007-2011 in comparison to the 1990’s, which is 5-10 times lower comparing to crime rate in 90s.

⁴⁶ Short description of survey methodology. A public opinion surveys was conducted in 2010 -2013. The survey was completed using a multi-stage national representative sampling. The respondents represented all of Georgia with the exception of the breakaway territories (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). Only those aged 16 years and older were included as respondents. The first and second waves of the survey were conducted with PAPI (Paper Assisted Personal Interview) and this third wave with CAPI (Computer assisted Personal Interview) methodology. A total of 9,000 respondents were interviewed as part of 2010-2012 surveys and in 2013 only 1,000 respondents. This sample was weighted during the data analysis stage, based on geographic representation and demographic parameters, in order to best reflect the proportional distribution of the sampling.

* In the survey of 2010 -2011 in Georgia the question for assaults and threats are asked separately. The figures in the table are combined.

Diagram 1. Average victimisation level in Georgia in 1993-2013



Great differences in data have a scientific explanation and are related to many objective and subjective factors that are not within the scope of this research.

Perception of personal safety

“The positive perception of safety leads to behaviours that reduce the risk of victimisation for vulnerable groups within society, and as it is widely acknowledged, fear of crime can result in serious curtailment of everyday activities, lost opportunity, and a reduction in the quality of life”.⁴⁷

“If fear becomes extreme and residents retreat from going out into public spaces, the result may be a gradual decline in the character of communities which, in turn, can lead to increased disorder and a higher level of crime”.⁴⁸ Overall, the vast majority of Georgians are not worried about becoming a victim at their place of residence (home), in local areas or somewhere in the country as a whole. The analysis of questions concerning worry of being victimized (2013 Crime and Security Survey) demonstrated this positive trend. If we compare the latest results to 2010/2012 Crime and Security Survey, we observe the following: In 2013, a majority of respondents were “not worried at all” about being physically attacked over the preceding 12 months, or about a family member/person or close associate being physically attacked or falling victim to a burglary 63,9%- 66,5%. In 2012, the number of respondents who were also “not worried at all” over the proceeding 12 months about being physically attacked, about a family member/person or close associate being physically attacked or falling victim to burglary was on the same level (74.7%-76.1%). The number of respondents who were worried of becoming victim of such cases in 2013 were 2.7% - 3.3% and in 2010 - 2.7% - 4.8%.

Table 4. Fear about victimization in Georgia 2011-2013

2011	Not worried at all	Not very worried	Not worried	Fairly worried	Very worried	Worried
Worried about being physically attacked	75.8%	20.6%	96.4%	2.70%	0.40%	3.10%
Worried about family member/person close being physically attacked	73.5%	22.4%	95.9%	2.70%	0.20%	2.90%
Worried about burglary	75.5%	20.5%	96.0%	3.10%	0.60%	3.70%

⁴⁷ Johnson, H. (2005) Crime Victimization in Australia: key results of the 2004 International Crime Victimization Survey. Research and public policy series, no. 64: Canberra, Australian Institute of Criminology

⁴⁸ Skogan, W. (1986) Methodological Issues in the Measurement of Victimization. In Tonry, M. and Morris, N. (eds) Crime and Justice: A Review of Research. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

2012	Not worried at all	Not very worried	Not worried	Fairly worried	Very worried	Worried
Worried about being physically attacked	76.13%	21.89%	98.02%	1.48%	0.10%	1.58%
Worried about family member/person close being physically attacked	74.78%	22.19%	96.97%	2.08%	0.29%	2.37%
Worried about burglary	74.71%	22.36%	97.07%	2.38%	0.19%	2.58%

2013	Not worried at all	Not very worried	Not worried	Fairly worried	Very worried	Worried
Worried about being physically attacked	66,5%	29,9%	96,4%	3,3%	0,0%	3,3%
Worried about family member/person close being physically attacked	63,9%	31,9%	95,8%	3,5%	0,1%	3,6%
Worried about burglary	67,1%	29,4%	96,5%	2,7%	0,4%	3,1%

Combined “not worried at all” and “not very worried” categories are combined in the “not worried” column and “fairly worried” and “very worried” in the “worried” column. Do not know answers are not included in the table; they are also not treated as system missing cases.

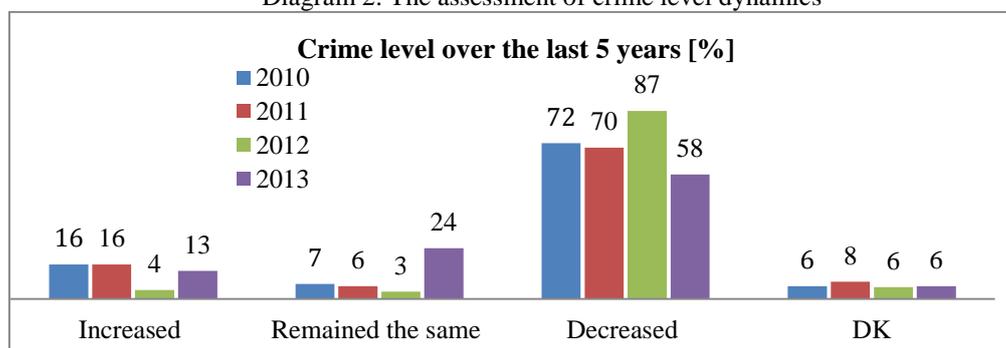
Among those who declared that they try to avoid certain places because it is not safe, 76 were females and 26 were males. They were mainly from 21-30 and 16-20 age groups; mainly residing in urban areas and in Tbilisi.

These results suggest that after a long lasting anomy, there is a steady process of improvement in interaction within Georgian society. Constitutional rights of citizens are actually being protected and they are ensured the protection of their right to life, health and private property. The decrease in trust of mutual assistance is probably linked to the difficult economic situation, especially when financial assistance is expected from a third person.

Assesment of general criminal conditions in Georgia

The survey of 2010-2013 showed that 70% - 87% think that the level of crime was reduced; the number of those who believe that the level of crime increased fell from 16% to 4%, and the number of those who think that crime remained the same fell as well, from 7% to 3%.

Diagram 2. The assessment of crime level dynamics

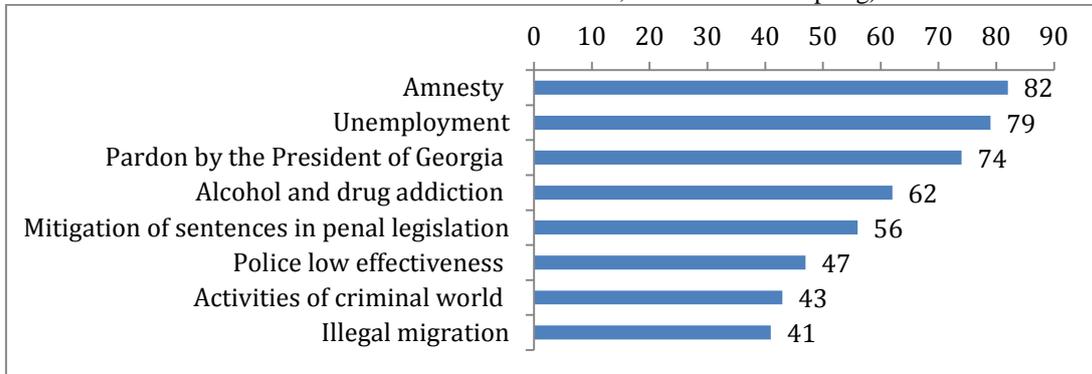


When considering the reasons why crime rates have decreased, in 2010-2012 respondents primarily mention the following:

1. The result of judiciary reforms - proper performance of law enforcement - 58%-82%;
2. Effective performance of a reformed judiciary system 7%-18%;
3. Appropriate criminal law policy 9%-12%;

4. Effective measures taken in combating against of the “thieves in law” 30%-37%;
5. Overcoming corruption in the state government 11%-12%;
6. Improvement of economical conditions 2%-5%.

Table 5. Reason for crime increase since the last parliamentary elections in October 2012 in Georgia (those who consider that the crime is increased, 30% of total sampling)*



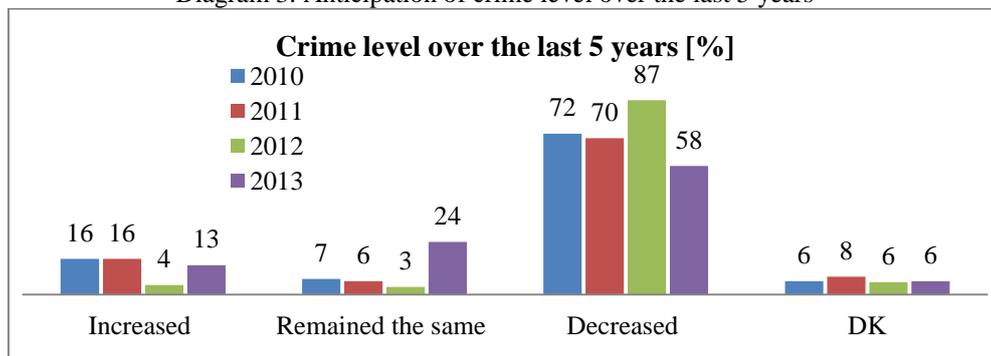
*The findings for “Most important” and “important” are combining

The following reasons were named by the respondents for increased in the rate of crime in since the last parliamentary elections in October 2012:

1. Amnesty of 60% total criminals in Georgian prisons in November-December 2012 - 82%;
2. Economic instability and the current financial crisis – increased unemployment 73%-79% (in 2011 was 73.3%);
3. Pardon of the President of Georgia 2013 – 74%
4. Increase of drug and alcohol usage 62%;
5. Mitigation of sentences in penal legislation 56%;
6. Parenting problems – poor parenting skills 10.9% (in 2011 - 11.1%);
7. The gaps in the performance of law enforcement bodies - lack of professionalism in law enforcement bodies 47%
8. Illegal migration 41%.

The respondents are optimistic about future trends in fighting crime. According to survey of 2010-2012, 45% - 68% respondents believe that the level of crime will decrease. The number of respondents who think that the crime level will increase has fallen from 8% to 2%; 31% - 36% of respondents said that they “do not know”.

Diagram 3. Anticipation of crime level over the last 5 years



The following data was obtained from the question: what crime prevention measures have you heard about? The majority of respondents (56.7%) named broadcasting of TV commercials and analytical programs; less than half (40.2%) mentioned special rehabilitation and re-socialization programs being developed by Georgian Orthodox Church for drug users; just every fourth (25.7%) respondent mentioned meetings at schools, and other educational

institutions in support of legal literacy and crime prevention; 7.5% named meetings with the district police inspector; creating billboards about specific crimes (i.e., against trafficking or drugs) was also mentioned by 10.6%; a limited number of respondents, 6.2%, named the distribution of leaflets and brochures in the struggle against specific crimes. Every fifth (21.2%) respondent hasn't heard about any crime prevention measures.

Main findings and Conclusions

1. In the last decade, Georgia was characterized by volatility and fluctuations in the crime rate, structure, and distribution, which is reflected in all the main statistical figures (of crime rate, all registered crimes by MIA, convicted persons, prisoners and probationers).
2. Since the 2003, the fight against crime has become a state priority, gaining a systematic character that is reflected in the decrease of crime indexes and the stabilization of crime conditions.
3. Neither the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, and the parliamentary election in 2012, nor political or economic tension and amnesty have influenced the crime level and tendencies. The results of all four waves of the Crime and Security survey shows a decrease in every statistical representation of crime level, stabilization and a drastic improvement of the crime situation.
4. According to the survey results from 2010-2013, citizens have gained a more optimistic attitude toward the crime situation in Georgia. For the last three years, the number of respondents who believe that the crime rate has dropped increased. Meanwhile, the number of respondents who believe that the crime level has risen decreased. The number of those respondents who believe that the crime level has remained the same has decreased as well.
5. According to the surveys in 2010-2013, respondents less worried about being physically attached personally or worried about family member or about burglary

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