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**“RESPONSE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES TO MASS PROTESTS IN
THE POST-SOVIET SPACE: POLICING STRATEGIES ACROSS BELARUS,
GEORGIA, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE”**

Written by:

Student of the 4th year of study
Specialisation 291 “International
Relations, Social Communications
and Regional Studies”

Bevziuk Daria Romanivna

Academic Supervisor:

Mridula Ghosh

PhD, Senior Lecturer

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INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, old communist or satellite regimes were destroyed and a proliferation of new ones took place. They were very often labelled democratic, probably because of the hope pinned on democratisation efforts of some leaders. In spite being called “defective” or “nascent” democracies by the West, these were competitive authoritarian systems, whose democratisation dependent on their ties to the West, the robustness of governmental institutions, and the configurations of their ruling elite (Levitsky, Way, 2010, PP. 14-15) . Another important factors in transition to democracy was the navigation of the quadruple transition (Kuzio, 2002, p. 172) that involved the post-communist overhaul of state institutions, economic restructuring, fostering a national identity, and getting rid of legacies of the Soviet era. Obviously, the sphere with the most incremental changes was law enforcement - police or militia continued to function like private security entities or suppressors of civil unrest. Very often the police acted as a primary unlawful tool of suppression utilised by the state against opposition, either targeting individuals or mass protests. As a result, their involvement in suppressing protests was taken for granted and never put under question, as if the unlawful police behaviour and complete subordination to the state authority is adequate even in hybrid regimes. Subsequently, in political science academia the factors shaping the response of the riot police to mass protests were not sufficiently explored. The topicality of this paper, hence, stems from, first, the disregarded importance of the police`s behaviour and its formative components and, second, truncated knowledge of what makes riot police either side or repress mass protests and how this determines the success of mass uprisings.

Furthermore, within the political science academia, there is a lack of investigation of how police become integrated in neopatrimonial power networks, what roles they play in different regimes and different historical contexts, and what strategies they use during policing mass protests. By unveiling how police, its peculiarities and functions are related to prevailing power structures, this paper aims to offer a view on how policing, shaped by

certain historical legacies and the structure of political regimes, functions across different post-Soviet regimes.

Flowing from this, the primary objective of this work is to determine the factors influencing unlawful police behaviour during mass protests in Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine and to examine the various degrees of police violence in these countries.

For achieving this set of objectives the following tasks are established:

1. Examining the historical trajectories of the four countries' regimes after the collapse of the USSR in the context of the rule of law;
2. Developing theoretical frameworks that explain the politics of dissent through different approaches;
3. Developing theoretical constructs that connect policing strategies, state legitimacy, and explore how policing practices are interconnected with legitimacy of the both government and mass protests;
4. Comparing and contrasting the responses of law enforcement agencies during mass protests in Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine with a focus of their strategies, tactics and outcomes;
5. Exploring the impact of various policing strategies deployed during mass protests on civil liberties, state of democracy and underlying regime dynamics;
6. Pointing out the factors shaping violent police behaviour during mass protests.
7. Overviewing the continuity of police cultures and its interdependence with the reforms in the four countries.

The object of the research is police engagement in suppressing mass protests in Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine.

The subject of the research is police configurations within hybrid authoritarian regimes of the four countries and their policing styles in suppressing mass dissent.

The research methods used are case study and theory of police repression by Earl, Soule & McCarthy.

The literature used in the research covers theoretical works pertaining to conceptualisations of hybrid authoritarian regimes, post-communist transitions, and Soviet legacies (e.g. Kotkin, Way, Levitsky, Kuzio). It also contains theoretical bases on the four approaches of categorising mass protests and politics of dissent, comprising four different schools and lenses - aggregate-psychological approach, relative deprivation, value-consensus theory, and political conflict (Gurr, Skocpol, Tilly). Additionally, I have utilised the works of Earl and Soule and Earl, Soule and McCarthy in two different paradigms - shaping the police response to mass protests and explaining the aggressive behaviour of riot police to mass unrest, respectively. The remaining literature can be consumed under the category of historical precisely because it provides a broad overview of the political and social processes in the four countries of the time and offers the complexity of the socio-political dynamics on the ground.

1. CONCEPTUALISING REGIMES, MASS PROTESTS, AND POLICE

1.1. “Flawed democracies in transition” or “autocracies by necessity”: characterising regimes and their post-soviet trajectories

Before diving into descriptions and categorisations of political regimes, we should have an understanding of what constitutes a political regime and its elements. In this paper, the definition coined by Schmitter and Karl will be the primary framework. According to them, a regime is a mix of patterns that determine the tools people use to attain roles at public offices, exclusions of participating actors, the instruments used by these actors to get access, and the principles followed in the formulation of decisions that bear public authority (Schmitter, Karl, 1991, p. 4). But this definition obviously has its limitations. One visible drawback is its accentuation of the procedural, formal and legal aspects which might sometimes overlook the informal power dynamics and respective impacts on the functioning of the regime, its stability and vulnerability to external threats. (Alvarez, Cheibub et al., 1996, PP. 18-20). Still, I made a decision to use this definition since it stands out for its comprehensive integration of institutional arrangements, strategic behaviour, and decision-making patterns. However, it is still crucial to take a look at the three main schools of regime classifications: the normative, institutional, and behavioural traditions.

The normative tradition uses a set of normative principles connected with democratic ideals as primary tools of categorisation of political regimes. In this tradition, a lot of attention goes to the prevailing standards and notion defining a legitimate political system (Carr, 2020, PP. 2-3). Most central is probably the emphasis on the ideals shaping democratic governance, which is made up of concepts of sovereignty, rule of law, pluralism, due and fair conduct of elections, peaceful power transfer mechanisms and others. These same criteria are deployed to make a distinction and substantively tell apart democratic and authoritarian regimes (Markowski, 2015, PP. 39-41). Moreover, the normative tradition often extracts insights from classical democratic theory, tracing back its origin to thinkers like Aristotle (Mulgan, 1990, PP. 15-16), Rousseau (Putterman,

2003, PP. 459-460), and Locke (Faulkner, 2001, p. 10), who examined the advantages of the inclusive efficient participatory governance (Habermas, 1994, PP. 8-9).

However, the normative approach has certain practical limitations which primarily stem from its inability to be applied universally across very different and diverse contexts. It is clear that, despite having something in common, ideals constituting legitimacy are not the same in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, which makes it impossible to be used without significant changes and introduction of context-sensitive analytical tools (Bowman, 2022, PP. 182-184). Apart from it, the tradition also often suffers from criticism accusing it of the reductionist analytical modes and creating a very subjective and truncated picture of democracy (Frega, 2017, PP. 6-7).

The institutional tradition, in its turn, focuses mostly on the more observable aspects of the regime - its formal structures, mechanisms of interaction deployed by them, and institutional arrangements in a given system (Jones, O'Donnell, 2017, PP. 86-87). This approach shifts the main emphasis of its analysis on the design and fabric of the institutional setting and internal configurations of institutions since they are shaping the regime (Kaiser, 1997, PP. 422-423). The institutional tradition will look at the model of power distribution (whether it is proportional or asymmetrical) (Bogason, 2004, PP. 20-21), system of checks and balances, dispersion of authority and responsibilities between the three branches, all regulated by legal and constitutional arrangements (De Mosquito, Morrow et al., 1999, p. 794). The main criteria for classifying and comparing regimes are, therefore, whether they are absolute or constitutional monarchies, presidential or parliamentary republics, have a highly institutionalised political landscape or not (Linz, 2000, p. 68). For instance, parliamentary systems are often considered less prone to authoritarianism because they have a fusion of executive and legislative powers with the prime minister representative of the majority party (Kaiser, p. 425). In contrast, presidential systems have separate legislative and executive branches, making them more inclined toward a strong leader model who can abuse power and violate the delicate balance established simply because there is more room and incentive for it in legal terms (Ganghof, 2021, PP. 17-18). This tradition was chosen in this paper because it most fully

captures the changes and regime dynamics in the post-Soviet context by giving a unified base of comparison and a tracker of pace of post-communist reforms.

The behavioural tradition, unlike two previous, diverges from a focus on formal structures and technicalities of the regimes and looks mainly at the actions and behaviour of political actors, be they elites or parliamentarians. This approach looks at the observable conduct of political elites, elite-controlled institutions and examines the agency, strategies and tactics, patterns and trends and deploys them for making cross-regimes comparisons and categorisations (Terence Kelly, 2012, PP. 68-69). Central for the behavioural tradition is the detailed analysis of who exercises the power, how they exercise it, what the decision and policy making processes looks like, how conflicts emerge and get settled (Terence Kelly, 2012, p. 100). For instance, instead of focusing on studying the constitution and legal acts in authoritarian regimes or analysing the political culture and prevailing social values, this tradition will use an actor-centred perspective and examine the behaviour of different oligarchic cliques, their influence on decision making, their proximity to the government, control over governmental bodies (Acemoglu, 2016, PP. 35-36). Whereas in pluralistic democracies, on the other hand, it will look at competitive political participation and actions of multiple actors that exert influence over policy outcomes by means of negotiation, compromise (Plattner, 2010, p. 85). However, the tradition has serious challenges in interpreting political behaviour that is not observable and where there is a lack of data about political actors. For instance, this tradition will certainly not be suitable for countries like China or Russia where outside observers know very little about the lives, actions and motives of primary political actors, whether they are bunker-based or just acting and working in the shadows. And, moreover it severely overlooks the impact of institutional arrangements and frameworks on the political landscape and its formation, thus leaving aside a very potent factor in regime formation.

For research in the post-Soviet context, the institutional tradition is most suitable because it allows us to track the evolution of changes in institutions and institutional cultures that they form. It also creates a broad base for comparative research making it

possible to contrast and compare varied governance structures. Of course, it, to some extent, overlooks the informal dynamics and informal power structures that are very important in the post-Soviet space, but, against the backdrop where it provides a framework for comparative analysis and comprehensive understanding of specific institutional arrangements, this flaw can be fixed and supplemented by making the tradition more susceptible to informal influence in politics and attention to how social norms impact actual governance.

1.2 Post-soviet regime trajectories

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its repercussions had a profound impact on the political post-communist landscapes of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The dissolution of the USSR acted as a trigger for change, determining and influencing subsequent power dynamics and processes of regime formations with hard-to-eliminate soviet legacies (Kotkin, Beissinger, 2014, PP. 15 - 16). Hence, when the Union fell apart, there were many new independent states whose regime trajectories were hugely impacted not only by the collapse itself, but also their own lingering historical legacies, political cultures influenced by them and prevailing social moods of the day (Ghosh, 1996, p. 3).

The transformation that the successor states undertook can be broadly subsumed under three groups - radical reformers, intermediate reformers, and non-reformers (Aslund, 2002, p. 121). This categorisation, despite simplifying the present complexities and contextual peculiarities, offers a way of examining and comprehending different post-communist trajectories. The radical reformers—Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, the Baltics, Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan—essentially led the way forward precisely because they embraced radical and all-encompassing reforms in both political and economic sectors. These countries stood out because they wanted to achieve fast democratisation and economic growth driven by market principles (Aslund, Boone et al., 1996, p. 219). In contrast, the intermediate reformers—Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan—because of their choices, had to deal with the challenge of maintaining the balance between implementing some reforms and preserving

past legacies and former practices. They painstakingly struggled with this and the discrepancy between nostalgia and need and want for new reforms, which, as a result, led to partial success of reforms (Aslund, 2002, p. 123). Meanwhile, the non-reformers—Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Uzbekistan—decided to continue to cling to authoritarian patterns and practices and staunchly resisted implementation of any comprehensive changes. By deciding to remain on the sidelines and create serious obstacles for all-encompassing reforms, they thwarted their countries' transition to democracy and market economy (Aslund, 2002, p. 123).

The gap between radical and intermediate reformers stems from the difference in specific economic blueprints and tangential ideological concepts that shaped their transition processes. The radical reformers, exemplified by Poland's Balcerowicz program in 1988, otherwise known as the “shock therapy”, followed a comprehensive change which was different from the traditional Washington Consensus model (Aslund, 2009, p. 9). While the reform plan was obviously inspired by it, the authentic Polish program was tailored to the context-specific needs of Poland. The reform blueprint wanted to achieve not just economic stabilisation, but also a comprehensive overhaul inspired by Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance by advocating for drastic changes (Hunter, Ryan, 2008, PP. 193-195). On the contrary, the intermediate reformers decided to adopt a more nuanced and unequivocal approach to reforms. By getting inspiration from the Hungarian and Chinese reforms, they preferred gradualism to any shocks and drastic changes. They demonstrated a very strong reluctance towards shock therapy practices and leaned more a step-by-step transition towards a market economy and democracy (Kuzio, 2010, PP. 153-155).

The ideological division was also very impactful in the post-communist transition process. Radical reformers viewed a post-communist transition as a risky endeavour with an imminent chance of failure, while the gradualists seriously downplayed these risks. This disparity between the two diverging attitudes influences different trends in the establishment of a market economy. While reformers wanted its normalisation, “gradual” rent seekers employed market and state failures to gain a personal profit. This sparked off

a surge of new entrepreneurs, who later will become known as oligarchs. Non-reformers, unlike their two counterparts, made a decision to uphold an authoritarian status quo, showing strong resistance to any changes whatsoever. Their entrenched commitment to autocratic practices seriously obstructed the establishment of democratic institutions and impeded market-driven economic reforms (Aslund, 2002 , p. 67).

The path of different post-communist regimes, as can be concluded, was significantly shaped by the timing and scale of undertaken reforms, dependent significantly on the synchronicity and comprehensiveness of reforms. The simultaneous implementation of the quadruple transition, comprising democratisation, marketisation, state institution-building, and fostering civic nationhood, was the most reliable framework for fostering democratic consolidation (Kuzio, 2001, p. 174). The triple transition leaves out fostering a national identity and is considered to be less effective. However, it is worth noting that while the quadruple transition, encompassing the aspect of civic nation-building (Kuzio, 2001, p. 169), played a pivotal role in contexts where nation-building was essential, certain contexts might emphasise a triple transition—excluding civic nationhood—where this aspect is not regarded an urgent priority (Gelman, 2015, p. 44). This synchronisation of the reforms in all sectors proved vital in strengthening democratic governance during periods of transition. Combination of democratisation efforts together with market reforms, fortification of resilient state institutions, and cultivation of a cohesive national identity were instrumental in constructing the endurance of democratic regimes.

Moreover, the empirical landscape challenges the idea that hybrid regimes naturally move and evolve towards democracy. Post-Cold War realities have clearly demonstrated the diversity of paths that countries can take in their regime developments. Specifically, those countries that have robust linkages to the West had a higher likelihood of successfully moving toward democracy, while regimes that had limited ties relied primarily on the governmental organisations for democratisation (Way, Levitsky, 2010, p. 22). Factors that influence the cooperation with the West in this case can be different and stretch from historical and geopolitical to socio-economic ones. Strong linkages are

often the result of historical ties, geopolitical alignment, history of shared democratic values, and willingness on the part of the West to maintain these close ties; economic interdependence also plays an important role. Conversely, weaker linkages can result from historical divergences, long-standing geopolitical tensions, economic isolation or minimal trade relations, and a lack of alignment with Western values. The stability or volatility of the post-communist regimes was also to a large extent dependent on the organisational coherence and strength of state structures (Way, Levitsky, 2010, p. 16). However, sometimes it was the case that well-organised governance structures turned out to be a linchpin of authoritarian regimes. Hence, despite periods of instability, such regimes rarely could fully implement their transition to democracy.

Ukraine:

In 2013, when the Ukrainian government decided to do a pro-Russian turn and back down from signing an association agreement with the EU, many Ukrainians saw this as a betrayal of their West-centred interests and aspirations (Ritter, 2017, p. 193). The government's decision sparked off widespread discontent, and people were ready to mobilise against the authoritarian regime. On November 21, Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayem made on his Facebook a post (Nayem, 2014), encouraging people to take to the streets and show that they have enough agency to overrule the decision which contradicts their pro-European values. A wave of protests started in diasporas (Düvell & Lapshyna, 2015) and across all parts of Ukraine. From December, the protests became more intensified as more people joined, including students, activists, and opposition politicians. Demonstrators set up tents and barricades on Maidan Square, creating a temporary makeshift camp. On December 1, the Berkut, fearing the provocations on the side of the people, launched a violent crackdown, using batons, tear gas, and rubber bullets to disperse the protestants. The brutal police actions fueled public anger and pushed more people to join the protests. In a nutshell, the clashes with the police followed which led to first casualties and deaths (Euromaidan Press, 2016).

In late 2013, Ukraine's political regime and overall setup was an entrenched hybrid regime (Ekman, 2009, PP. 8 -10). President Viktor Yanukovich created a system which had inherent neopatrimonialism and personalised informal power networks (Pitcher, Moran et. al, 2009, PP. 129 - 131). The rule of oligarchs was omnipresent, perhaps an inheritance from the Kuchma times. Yanukovich's time in office also could demonstrate a captured state model - a governing structure in which state institutions are subverted to serve the interests of cronies or a group of elites who are either loyal or need to be constantly pleased by treats from the centre (Fazekas & Tóth, 2016, PP. 321 - 322). Oligarchs had pervasive channels of influence over policy making processes. Also, Yanukovich's regime obviously reflected characteristics of competitive authoritarianism (Way & Levitsky, 2010, p. 16), a system that allowed some electoral competition but constrained the opposition and real plurality of the participatory process (Shirah, 2016, p. 472). This created a facade of democracy and masked the regime` s true authoritarian core, where various undemocratic practices were used by the rulers to maintain their grip on power. Yanukovich's administration constantly oscillated between commitments to democratic principles and the pursuit of centralising as much powers as possible by various undemocratic tactics.

The real centralisation of power that went unmasked was centred around a set of oligarchs such as Akmetov, Firtash, Kaufman, Novinskii, and others (Lankina, T., & Libman, 2019, p. 131). This setup facilitated the fusion of economic and political spheres, and a new patronage system was created where loyalty and influence were traded in this elite circle (Pollock, 1937, p. 29). Yanukovich's governance moved toward what political theorists define as oligarchic consolidation, which is a system where a group of influential people holds disproportionate control over state resources and has a serious impact on decision-making (Chakraborty, S., & Dabla-Norris, 2006, PP. 29 - 31). This situation not only marginalised diverse inputs into governance processes but also created an environment that was conducive to institutionalised endemic corruption (Ghosh, 1996, p. 39). Also, such hybrid regimes have to find a brittle balance between selective repression,

co-opting strategies and preserving the regime's authority, which obviously proved very hard for the Yanukovich regime.

Yanukovich's administration also deliberately controlled the media, using the strategy of media capture (Besley, T., & Prat, 2006, PP. 721 - 722). It implied constraining freedom of speech for media and journalists and distorting the process of information dissemination, skewing this process in favour of the regime. This erosion of media pluralism, expectedly, entrenched a pro-Russian and pro-regim media hegemony (Altheide, 1984, p. 481 - 483) that silences other critical voices. The regime also systematically eroded judicial independence by strategic judge appointments and interventions in high-profile cases, making the judiciary an instrument of political control. This weakened the system of checks and balances and made it very hard to see clear separations of power between different branches. The late 2013 also witnessed a shift in foreign policy, a so-called geopolitical recalibration. This recalibration was a deliberate shift of moving away from the European Union and rejection the association agreement in favour of making close and friendly ties with Russia (Diuk, 2014, PP. 9 - 11).

This foreign policy shift sparked identity-based cleavages, which to some extent facilitated the appearance of social divisions and splits into pro-Russian and pro-European camps. The decision to move away from the EU and lean towards Russia was viewed as a normative divergence, a step away from the expected pro-European trajectory and alignment with Western norms and values (Shveda & Park, 2015, PP. 87 - 88). This divergence sparked off disillusionment among segments of society hoping for European integration, contributing to a sense of widespread discontent (Piper, 2013). The pursuit of closer ties with Russia strained relations with the EU, prompting geopolitical dilemmas over aligning with either the Eastern or Western spheres of influence.

Belarus:

In 2020, Belarus experienced another presidential election with allegations of fraud because of the long-standing rule of President Alexander Lukashenka (BBC, 2020). As

part of their response to accusations of electoral manipulation, Belarusians took to the streets, demanding fair elections and an end to the authoritarian Lukashenka rule (Krawatzek & Sasse, 2021). As the protests became more widespread, activists, independent journalists, and opposition figures joined the demonstrations. They protested in public spaces like Independence Square in Minsk, made makeshift camps and opposed with different means the perceived injustice. The authorities reacted with a heavy-handed crackdown and used riot police and security forces to disperse the crowds (Hurst, 2020). The aggressive tactics used by the government only escalated tensions and social outrage and drew more anti-regime citizens to join the protests. The ensuing confrontations between protesters and riot police resulted in casualties, increasing the gravity of the situation (Harding, 2020).

Belarus at the time was stuck in a system of harsh authoritarianism, much worse than those present in Ukraine (Shraibman, 2018). This regime closely resembled a neopatrimonial model, where state institutions functioned with informal power networks, which eroded the institutional legitimacy and created a culture of patronage (Shykhutsina, 2021, pp. 4 - 8). Lukashenka's administration could also be called a captured state because there also was the subversion of institutions to cater to the interests of cliques of cronies. Belarus's political landscape in 2020 also was a competitive authoritarian system (Hall, 2022, p. 12), which permitted a certain degree of electoral competition while severely constraining the real right to participate in elections and run for public offices (France 24, 2020). Electoral malpractices in Belarus were so courageous for the international audience that they became emblematic of the regime's real nature and non-existence of freedom neither to run for office nor to vote (Clark, 2020, p. 2). These practices clearly represent a systematic effort on the part of the incumbent government to undermine vitality of the civil society, kill any potential position and recreate the reality of "1984" by Orwell (Silitsky, Balmaceda et al., 2009, p. 27). Vote rigging, falsification, and intimidation tactics of course were costly and difficult to implement, but they were still necessary, as well as the elections themselves, to create a means to legitimise the regime's grip on power (Birch, 2011, PP. 14 - 15). Belarus has also had a complex relationship

with Russia and clearly hostile relations with the Western world. Lukashenka's regime, from its inception, has always maintained friendly relations with Russia because it corresponded to the interests of both states - the hegemon and the satellite (Bosse, 2021, p. 206). Belarus has, for instance, for a long time benefited from subsidised Russian energy while aligning itself with Moscow on regional security issues (Masters, 2021). The regime was also very hostile and inimical to the West because it had severe disagreements on human rights issues and because the West saw the omnipresence of Russian influence in the country, constant interventions in internal affairs and desire to integrate the country into the orbit of the so-called Russian world. Therefore, this scepticism towards the West has made Belarus adopt a policy of alleged strategic autonomy, where it ostensibly tries to balance its relations with Russia and engagement with the West on its own terms and conditions (Hopkins, 2023). This policy was, of course, a blatant lie and a mere manipulation to ensure regular Western cash flows into the country and maintain at least some kind of posture on the international arena (Ferris, 2021).

Georgia:

In 2003, Georgia experienced a comprehensive change in its political landscape because the widely known Rose Revolution and subsequent regime change took place. This social outcry occurred because there was massive discontent by electoral falsifications, omnipotent government corruption, and general opposition to the authoritarian nature of the Shevarnadze regime (Radio Liberty, 2013). Georgians took to the streets in different urban centres and decided to employ peaceful civil disobedience tactics to express their opposition to the president and call for his resignation or even threaten the overthrow (CNN, 2003). In its turn, the governmental response was swift - they sent security forces officers to monitor and, if necessary, quell the protests. The measures used during suppressing these protests ranged from curfew impositions to use of tear gas and water cannons (however, with no beatings) (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

The regime in Georgia during 2003 is best characterised as a hybrid system that had some elements of democracy with certain authoritarian features. During Shevardnadze's rule, state institutions were seriously co-opted in order to make them serve and satisfy the interests of the government and its cronies (Kandelaki, 2006).

This essentially meant that the mechanisms of allegedly democratic governance were captured and utilised to generate a benefit for a group of pro-regime oligarchs, which created the system where corruption, coercion, and the rich few could thrive (Rescheto & Pahlke, 2023). The regime also could be called competitive authoritarian because it had elections but they had a striking resemblance to election-like events rather than real openings of windows of political opportunity (Civil Georgia, 2023).

The most important features of the Shevardnadze regime were centralisation of power and very selective rule of law (Mitchell, 2013, p.1). Well-connected people shamelessly used their access to power to acquire some personal gains, which very frequently entailed the manipulation of state resources and creating “tamed” groups in the parliament (Tudoroiu, 2007, PP. 320-322). The aforementioned crony setup created a skewed playing field, where few privileged enjoyed benefits and constrained fair competition (Mitchell, 2004, PP. 344-345). It goes without saying that these people were fully protected by the state and enjoyed complete impunity. The problem with power centralisation, in its turn, was that it marginalised other government bodies and completely sidelined the role of civil society in decision making. As a result, actors who could have helped to maintain at least some checks and balances were alienated (Lynch, 2006, PP. 3-6). The country also followed a foreign policy agenda which was ostensibly primarily directed at cultivating stronger ties with the West rather than with Russia. This meant ensuring Western support in such fields as security and regional security, economic development, and NATO and EU membership (Cornell, 2007, PP. 1-4). Navigating relations with Russia against this backdrop was challenging. Georgia had difficulties maintaining normal relations with Russia taking into account the conflicts and disputes over Abkhazia and South Osetia. The support which Russia gave to the separatists did not go unnoticed and worsened bilateral relations. Georgian policymakers, therefore, had to strike a balance, involving certain partial cooperation with Russia and having close ties

with the West (Al Jazeera, 2006). This dual approach aimed to protect Georgia's sovereignty and security interests while hoping to achieve integration in Western institutions for broader international support and legitimacy.

Russia:

The Bolotnaya Square protests in Russia took place in a Kremlin-centred though allegedly decentralised and federal democratic system (The Moscow Times, 2021). This centralised authority mainly stemmed from the institution of the president that worked as the main locus of power and exerted substantial influence over legislative and judicial branches (Parfitt, 2012). The parliament often worked in tandem with the executive branch, sometimes displaying a scarily high level of compliance with any policy line or agenda the centre dictates (Bigg, 2011). Furthermore, the media was almost completely monopolised with a lot of state-controlled or state-sponsored channels that spread aggressive anti-Western propaganda. This played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of the West and desire to integrate there and constrained the popularisations of alternative perspective and critical voices, reinforcing the monopoly on the truth (Freedom House, 2016). Overall, this consolidation of power was instrumental in strengthening the authoritarian nature of the regime and was supposed to protect it from external and internal threats by making it popular. Russian autocratic leader experienced three major kinds of challenges - weak institutions, the necessity of trade-offs between elites and population, and high costs of repression (Hinsey, 2013, PP. 129-130). The institutional issue is certainly the least problematic since it merely means once the autocrat starts weakening state institutions with the aim of power maximisation and eradication of potential (or real) rivals, these institutions will not be capable of securing their safety and secure "exit" via rule of law. However, what proves to be much more onerous is the maintenance of a subtle balance in distributing benefits to Putin's cronies and Russian society. The moment the distribution is disrupted, curtailed, or severely skewed, Putin's almighty position is in peril because of the high likelihood of either an elite coup or massive protests (Gerber & Mendelson, 2008, p. 12-13). Equivalently, the Russian president also puts himself at risk when resorting to the use of sticks rather than carrots

because it puts under threat his, though partially bogus, popularity and requires considerable wherewithal for the army to do their job. Thus, the danger of a substantial public backlash and the high price for keeping the loyal and strong coercive apparatus explains why even tyrannical Putin preferred propaganda, manipulating elections, and delivering foreign policy victories to explicit Stalinist repression (Rutland, 1994, PP. 7-8). In addition, the regime also created its own patronage systems which were supposed to incentivise loyalty and allegiance by distributing access to resources, giving away influential positions, and ensuring their safety (Hansen, 2017, pp. 16-17). Thus, patronage engendered a system of cronyism, where allegiance to the Putin` clique was rewarded and was used to further confide the power of the single leader and make as much elite as possible dependent on him (Markus, 2017, p. 29).

1.3 Transgressive politics of dissent: state configuration, relative deprivation, and ideational drivers of mass protests

Big protests are always the result of the decision of many people and groups to come together, formulate a certain agenda and demand its implementation, be it regime change and increase in pensions. These events normally begin when people are unhappy with how things are, whether this has a direct connection with the government or not, and they do not feel that what they have is good compared with others. Figuring out what causes these big movements, therefore, will help us to see not just what is on the surface, but also what underlying layers of motivation are deep down in society. This chapter is all about exploring the reasons behind these protests and revolutions. It looks at how different factors get combined and make people take action. It focuses on four main ideas about why these things happen, trying to understand them better (Skocpol, 1994, p. 100).

Aggregate-psychological approach:

The aggregate-psychological theory is one of the most popular theoretical frameworks in the field. It has become so significant because it puts a strong emphasis on

trying to unveil the role of a wide array of individual psychological factors in mass mobilisation (Geschwender, 1967, PP. 128-129). Its popularity stems from its attempt to describe and make clear the connection between personal grievances, people's emotions, and the propensity for participation in large-scale dissent.

The theory states that the aggregation of different psychological elements—emotions, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes—in different segments of a society plays an important role in galvanising collective action. Emotions, particularly grievances and dissatisfaction, are the potent catalysts for societal mobilisation (Skocpol, 1994, p. 101). For instance, constant feelings of frustration or profound injustice can become shared within a certain social stratum, especially if it is related to socio-economic issues, and create a shared collective consciousness. The theory also suggests that this creates solidarity among people that can transcend and overlook other intra-group differences (Eckstein, 1965, PP. 141-142). This convergence of strong negative emotions generates a force that is capable of propelling individuals to challenge the existing social, political, or economic order. Moreover, emotions can also travel in society, reinforcing the idea of contagious perceptions and sentiments and creating a spillover effect (Gurr, 1970, PP. 30-32).

The primary construct of this theory is that discontent is the main driver and root cause of any violent conflicts or mass protests. Discontent, in this context, means dissatisfaction or disillusionment prevailing within a society. This dissatisfaction can stem from various sources: economic disparities, political marginalisation, social injustices, or cultural alienation. It embodies the collective frustration which is a byproduct of unmet expectations, inequalities, or the sense of being systematically disadvantaged (Gurr, 1970, p. 85). One of its theoretical strengths is the examination of the emotional undercurrents in societies where mass mobilisation occurs (Gurr, 1970, p. 162). It recognises that human behaviour is not only guided by rational calculations or institutional directives but is very much influenced by emotional responses to social conditions. However, its heavy reliance on emotions as the primary driving force oversimplifies the role and impact of other crucial factors causing social unrest. The

extreme emphasis on emotions strongly sidelined structural, political or economic dissent determinants, disregarding their obvious importance. This restricted lens can hinder the theory's capacity to account for the variegated reasons and causes of mass protests.

Relative deprivation

According to this approach, when people think they are not receiving what they rightfully deserve or what they should especially when compared to others, they experience a sense of relative deprivation, which fuels further their grievances and catalyses collective action (Gurney, Tierney, 1982, p. 36). It recognises that people's discontent can be not only the reasons for the real lack of material resources or poverty, but can stem from the sense of injustice and unfair treatment when compared against other cases (Geschwender, 1967, p. 130). Relative deprivation comprises both material and non-material aspects (Gurr, 1970, p. 25).

The theory highlights the often ignored fact - individuals evaluate their own conditions not in isolation but in comparison to others, thus creating a reference point. When they feel a substantial gap between their current state and what they think they should have, a sense of relative deprivation is created. The sense of relative disadvantage, whether in terms of income, social status, opportunities, can fuel grievances and motivate collective action. But relative deprivation does not hinge on any absolute measures of material well-being. Even people in a relatively good condition may feel aggrieved if they feel disparities between their situation and that of others (Skocpol, 1994, p. 156). Overall, the approach gained traction because it was able to explain why social movements and collective actions can so often arise in diverse socio-economic contexts, in rich countries and in poor, among low-income or well-to-do layers. It sheds light on how perceptions of inequality, regardless of some fixed objective measures, can catalyze social mobilisation.

Value-consensus theory:

The value-consensus theory provides a framework which helps to understand the dynamics of social change. Here, systemic crises are crucial moments that challenge the

established value consensus in a society (Skocpol, 1994, p. 105). These crises start when the prevailing and dominant values and norms become out of sync or become inadequate in addressing current challenges. This creates a discordance between social expectations and the real capacity of existing values to guide people or society as a whole in times of trouble.

During these periods, revolutionary ideologies often become popular because they capitalise on this discordance by offering alternative sets of values. They give new frameworks, narratives, or visions that resonate with people who are deeply disillusioned by the crisis (Smelser, 1972, p. 81). Moreover, revolutionary ideologies not only criticise current values but also propose the norms that align with the evolving needs and wants of society. They often appeal to segments of the population who feel disenfranchised or marginalised by the existing value consensus, and give them a sense of purpose and direction (Chalmers, 1966, p. 124). In this context, the value-consensus theory helps to illuminate how disruptions in the prevailing value environment can act as triggers for social transformation.

Political conflict perspective:

The political conflict perspective offers a comprehensive view of social change, focusing on organised conflicts between various groups striving to achieve specific political goals (Skocpol, 1994, p. 108). Organised conflicts within this perspective are not haphazard eruptions but purposeful, structured actions orchestrated by groups driven by distinct political agendas. These groups, ranging from social movements to interest groups, political parties, or factions within institutions, strategically mobilise to advocate for their interests or ideologies (Oberschall, 1978, p. 297).

These conflicts are deeply rooted in the pursuit of political objectives. They involve concerted efforts by organised groups to challenge existing power structures, influence policymaking, or alter social norms. Such conflicts manifest in multifaceted ways, from grassroots activism to formal political channels, all aiming to achieve tangible political

outcomes (Tilly, 1988, p. 45). Moreover, these organised conflicts serve as catalysts for broad societal discussions and debates, fueling discourse on crucial issues and highlighting the diversity of interests and ideologies within a society. They create pressure points that often result in negotiations, compromises, or policy adjustments, influencing the direction of governance and societal transformations. These conflicts often reflect the power struggles and dynamics among different organised groups. They play a crucial role in shaping the evolution of institutional frameworks, governance models, and public policies, thereby contributing significantly to the trajectory of societal change.

1.4 Governance, monopolised violence, and legitimacy: contextualising the police, modes of policing, and use of force

At the heart of the discourse on law enforcement there are concepts of monopolised violence and legitimacy of such. The concept of monopoly on violence transcends the use of physical force and extends into the sphere of authority and control (Acemoglu et al., 2013, p. 6). In any governance structures, the police are supposed to be the custodians of this monopolised violence, using power and force not just because they can but with a noble aim of shaping a certain social order (Worden & McLean, 2017, p. 44). To fully understand the dynamics at play, we must first understand that the governance concept is not that simple. Governance is not simply a sum of mechanisms for decision making, but also means the broader notion of power and authority (Newburn & Reiner, 2012, pp. 272-274). A critical look will show that the legitimacy of the police is not solely derived from legal frameworks but is also and necessarily tied to the perceived fairness and justness of their exercise of authority (Tyler, 2004, p. 87).

The notion of legitimacy, therefore, is a linchpin in the contextualisation of the police in any governance structures. Legitimacy here is not a static construct but a dynamic force which is influenced by different historical, cultural, and socio-political factors. The idea with police legitimacy is that they act as mediators between the state and

society, and their legitimacy is shaped by the balance between respecting the rule of law and respecting human rights (Worden & McLean, 2017, p. 179). The erosion of this legitimacy always creates a challenge to the very fabric of governance because it violates the social contract between citizens and the state. Police, of course, are responsible for maintaining law and order by being allowed to monopolise violence, but this power of theirs should be used lawfully (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003, p. 515). The concept of 'legitimate coercion' is coined, in which the exercise of force is not only lawful but is perceived as just by the governed people (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003, PP. 516-518.)

First, examining the police as a tool of repression in authoritarian regimes, where the concept of legitimate coercion is not applicable and workable, uncovers a new dimension of their role (Reisig, 2010, PP. 6-8). In these contexts, the police become instruments of state control that suppress opposition and dissent and function to maintain the incumbent power structure and protect it from the threat either from within or outside. The monopolisation of violence is necessary, therefore, not only to enforce laws but also to quell opposition (Larkins, 2013, PP. 561-563). The legitimacy of the police in this scenario is derived from their loyalty to the ruling regime, which is a deviation when compared with the notion of legitimacy grounded in citizen consent (Worden & McLean, 2017, PP. 19-21). Conversely, in liberal democracies, the police have a more complex role of both protectors of public order and guarantors of human rights. Here, legitimacy is expectedly dependent on adherence to the rule of law by the police, the presence of due process, and respect of the police for civil liberties (Hinnes, 2006, PP. 236-237). The delicate balance between maintaining order and protecting individual freedoms becomes a crucial aspect, and the legitimacy of the police becomes tied to their ability to navigate this challenge (Kak, 1962, PP. 6-8). The impact of their success is profound because it influences citizens' trust in institutions and the overall stability of democratic governance (Loader, 2006, PP. 206-207).

The interplay of the legitimacy and police actions can be most clearly observed by looking at the different policing strategies during mass protests. Such a classification

allows not only to get acquainted with a spectrum of policing tactics, but also draw conclusions about interdependence of the use of certain strategies by the police and regimes they operate in. For instance, excessive violence in response to peaceful protests will never be possible in consolidated democracies, but will be commonplace in authoritarian regimes. On the contrary, violent response to violent protests might be characteristic of the police in democratic regimes as well, subsuming them under cross-regime normalcy. Using the classification model offered by Soule and Earl, we can discern five distinctive categories representing a police response to protest events (Earl & Soule, 2006, p. 152).

- 1) Within the paradigm of the "Do Nothing" approach, police take the stance of deliberate restraint and follow the principle of nonintervention during public protests. This category is essentially a conscious decision to minimise police involvement and potential for any violence. Officers acknowledge the presence of the protest, but they purposefully do not take any action just observing rather than actively participating. Officers here function as passive spectators to the demonstration. This passive stance allows them to escalate the situation. The "Do Nothing" approach acknowledges the legitimacy of the protest while deciding to form a non-confrontational response.
- 2) The "Nothing to See Here" approach is another kind of restraint - strategic. Police, despite recognising the potential for some unlawful acts on the part of the protesters, purposefully choose limited action. Unlike the "Do Nothing" model, where police merely observe, here, officers actively acknowledge certain transgressions but choose to downplay their response. The rationale behind is connected with a calculated effort to mitigate the risk of upsurging violence. By

taking this approach, police want to balance between the need to carry out their functions and maintain the public order and the danger of causing any escalation.

- 3) The "Legal Eagles" is a transition to a more proactive and assertive police response. The focus here is on mitigating the actions of protestors who are seen by the police as posing threat to public order or the peaceful nature of the demonstrations. Here different strategies can be used: one notable strategy is the imposition of sanctions that can range from warnings and fines to more severe legal consequences, such as detention. By targeting individuals that are viewed as most potentially threatening, the aim of the police is to deter such behaviour and maintain order.
- 4) The "Dirty Harry" approach is, on the contrary, a deliberate escalation of conflict between police and protestors. It is a very confrontational stance which can entail the use of force, hand-to-hand conflict and even the deployment of weapons. Escalation to a "Dirty Harry" strategy is a serious shift from the calculated and strategic responses mentioned before. The emphasis here is on immediate and forceful action and a desire to regain control of the situation and actively suppress any action from the protestors. This approach can be employed as an overreaction to threats to public safety, during attempts to disperse large crowds, or cases where some of the protestors are thought to pose a very high risk to order. Hence, the goal is not only to quell the unrest but send the message about the degree of authority and impunity of the police.
- 5) The concluding category, characterised as "Calling All Cars," is the most complex and multilayered approach from all. It aims to both suppress the unrest and isolate some third parties from involvement in the confrontation. This may include the simultaneous use of force, including crowd control measures and arrests, and preventive measures such as establishment of barriers to create physical separation.

Police adopting this approach know that a one-size-fits-all solution is insufficient in the context of protests where dynamics change very rapidly.

To delve deeper into the policing phenomenon, it is also important to pay attention to the political regime of a given state. The political environment is a very strong determinant of police behaviour during mass protests (Levitsky, Way, 2010, PP. 14-15). Notably, competitive authoritarian regimes are one of the most conducive to the development of authoritarian police practices and culture according to della Porta and Fillieule (della Porta, Fillieule, 2004, p. 223). They outline three most important state-centred factors shaping the police culture : a) centralisation of the police; b) militarisation; and c) accountability. Centralisation refers to the model of distribution of authority between the centre and other police units, the extent to which local offices can have autonomy and some degree of independence in decision-making. Militarisation means the extent of the police dependence on the defence ministry and its integration in military structures, but it can also show the tendency to adopt military-like structures and practices. Accountability addresses the mechanisms that exist to ensure that the police remain transparent, responsible, and answerable to the public (e.g. special courts dedicated to police crimes, the power of the judiciary to hold officers accountable.) The causality between these factors and the authoritarian regimes in the four analysed countries are obvious. Centralisation is very connected to the regime's overarching control, creating room for a more direct influence on law enforcement. Militarisation is symptomatic of the regime's inclination to be able to turn to a more coercive and authoritative approach in policing. Accountability or, to be more precise, its absence, showcases the regime's efforts to shield the police from any oversight, thus creating an environment where transparency and responsibility are fully compromised.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS - RIOT POLICE AND POLICE CULTURES

2.1 Toolkit for examining the response of the riot police to the four cases of mass protests

Constructing or even finding theoretical frameworks offering insight into the behaviour of the riot police during mass protests is unsurprisingly difficult. Perhaps, one part of the answer to the question is that it is logical that the police, as an indispensable part of the state apparatus, will obey the orders of the incumbent regime to disperse the protests. In this paper, I argue that the complete obedience of the police during forming a response to mass protests is not self-evident and should not be assumed. It is critical to examine each and every case separately, place it into the right context, and determine what factors made the police behave the way they did. For instance, during the Arab Spring and the start of the decay of Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, the low support of the dictator by his armed forces was very surprising in the West and, in fact, unexpected since the classical logic broke up - in neopatrimonial regimes, armies are loyal to the incumbent rulers when used as instruments of dissent suppression. However, taking a closer look at the internal level of the ruler's corruption, absence of previous political involvement, conscription or drafting to the army, and degree of protests' representativeness all pointed at the fact that there would be large-scale defections on the side of the army, leading to the collapse of the regime. Making evidence-based as opposed to assumption-based predictions is, therefore, crucial for policy making. The second reason explaining the difficulty is partially connected with the first - miniscule amount of literature on the topic. Indubitably, there are inherent theoretical problems - it is hard to theorise on the behaviour of the police during protests since the phenomenon of the violent protests suppression is most often found in autocracies and, oftentimes, in these countries the functions of the riot police are carried out by the army. But the amount of literature available is explained by the absence of mass interest in the topic, attaching to it only marginal importance. I consider these views as unjustifiable since outcomes of many revolutions hinge upon the response of law enforcement agencies - take the Tiananmen, Maidan, Rose Revolution,

or Iranian feminist protests. Investigating the topic of police behaviour better makes it possible to, first, formulate evidence-based predictions and draw a map of possible outcomes and, second, find the cracks within authoritarian regimes through which democratisation and humanisation can go through.

The lens I will be using for the analyses are constituted by the three main approaches: elite-centred, police-centred, and people-centred. For the first one, the theory laid out by Earl, Soule & McCarthy will be deployed (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 586), which stipulates that aggressive or “hard” policing styles are adopted when regimes feel threatened by the events on the streets. The idea is that, the more threatened the incumbent elites feel, the more repression they order. This angle of analysis also looks at the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of the protest - that is, what factors and features about them make the elites feel more or less threatened (e.g. magnitude, saturation, slogans, cooperation with other segments of the civil society, international support). The second, police-focused prism by Earl, Soule & McCarthy, holds that the nature of the history of previous political involvement is crucial in determining the response of the riot police to ensuing protests (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 588). If the riot police was known for brutality, had an institutional memory of violent repression against even peaceful protests and underwent no radical reforms in structure or form, no deviations from the previously observed behaviour should be expected. To enforce the idea of path dependency, in each case I provide a history of previous political involvement (if there was any) to investigate whether the past activities are likely to have lingering legacies in the modern day developments. The third approach offered by Mansley, people-centred, states that the degree of legitimacy attributed to the protests by the police are a very strong factor in shaping their response to the events (Mansley, 2013, p. 50). If the police regard the protests as illegitimate, they will be likely to use violence and repression to “restore order” and “bring back stability” to the regime. On the contrary, if the police see the protests as just and relevant, it is unlikely that the first instrument will be repression. This can be observed by the number of defections and sympathising with the people - if there are

many defections or outright refusals to carry out the order, protests are seen as lawful, if not - protests are violently dispersed.

As can be concluded from the previous sections of this work, policing does not appear out of the blue in any country. It has a lingering history of different overlapping legacies and a culture of continuity of certain practices, violence and conduct in general. This section is aimed at unveiling the peculiarities of the four countries' policing cultures and providing policy recommendations for the respective police reforms, while also offering an examination of the reforms in the police sector that had already been conducted. To generalise our findings, we use the theoretical lens coined by Weitzer which lays out a two-sided model of policing - functionalist versus divided society (Gerber & Mendelson, p. 4, 2008). The functionalist model stipulates that police conform to the principles of the rule of law, do not abuse power, are not corrupt, and enforce the law without violence; this is characteristic of well-developed democracies (Gerber & Mendelson, p. 6, 2008). The divided society model states that police are subjected to the interests of the ruling incumbent elites and/or representatives of informal power holders (e.g. oligarchs), are not accountable and can exercise violence and use repression against minorities, rebelling groups or political opposition (Gerber & Mendelson, PP. 7-8, 2008).

2.2 Continuity of police cultures and its interdependence with reforms

Russia:

In the case of Russia, police or, to be more precise, militsiia, seem to follow the second model (Gerasimenko, 2023). However, primarily because of its corruption, the police culture in Russia is subsumed under the third category not mentioned above - the so-called predatory policing, which is different from the divided society model in the following aspects: 1) police utilise both violence and corruption as leverages of power; 2) police can be used by the elites for political gains, but police mostly advance their own interests and seek their own rent (Gerber & Mendelson, PP. 5-8, 2008). These conclusions were reached by looking at the history of militsiia formation in Russia. First, it is highly

centralised with a clear hierarchy and power pinnacle in Moscow (Stephenson, 2023). It traces back its emergence to the Soviet times where militsiia were under strict centralised control, echoing the ideas of della Porta and Soule (della Porta, Fillieule, 2004, p. 223). Directives and overall administration worked the top-down way. The militsiia also played an important role in maintaining social order using sometimes heavy-handed methods and was tasked with suppressing dissent and ensuring ideological conformity (McCarthy & Malinkin, 2015). Lastly, it was notorious for its intrusive surveillance tactics. In spite of the attempts to reform the police in the 1960s and carry out massive professionalisation and democratisation, the lingering violent legacies bounced back, especially after the collapse of the USSR, when levels of organised crime skyrocketed (Galeotti, 2020). At the same time, it was clear that the new Russian militsiia were simply ill-equipped to deal with massive crime networks and rapidly growing violence; new reforms were needed and huge sums of money invested. The government, in its turn, decided not to take the logical course of action and invest in militsiia's modernisation and followed the old Soviet style - aggressively demanding progress without investments (Novikova & Taubina, 2012). They put pressure "from above" on the federal levels and expected high levels of clear-ups, which pushed the police to use inhumane violent methods to deliver the results. Altogether, the track record of the militsiia for human rights was poor - widespread instances of brutality, torture, and abuse often went unchecked, as there were few mechanisms in place to hold officers accountable for their actions (Taylor, 2011, p. 3). The corruption element, most likely also stemming from the Soviet legacies, was omnipresent. The militsiia demanded bribes for resolving crimes or even getting engaged altogether, but the main profit came from its role as an alleged security firm - it protected organised crime groups and received money in return for this security umbrella (Ivković, p. 597, 2003). The case of the predatory policing demonstrates that, first, political, economic, and administrative reforms after the collapse of the USSR were not implemented in a due fashion, leaving the Soviet legacies room to transform and prosper. Also, it illustrates that, apart from incremental reforms, there was a problem with a civil society and its role in enforcing the rule of law or at least making attempts to defend itself against the prevailing injustices.

Probably, to make up for its shortcoming in reforming, the tenure of Medvedev was marked by the infamous police reform, which was most known for the renaming - from militia to police. In essence, this was similar to renaming Leningrad to St. Petersburg - promising but inconsequential; huge hopes were pinned on the effort to bring about serious changes and transform the police from a notoriously corrupt and violent institution into the guardian of the public order (Jonsson, 2010). Some positive aspects were proposed - sacking people in favour of increasing salaries. Advantages of the reform also included the potential to improve public trust in law enforcement by making the institution more transparent and accountable. The proposed salary increases and the removal of corrupt elements were seen by the people as very positive steps in creating a more efficient police (Galeotti, 2010). However, the backdrop it was happening against was grim - Medvedev introduced extreme centralisation and retaking power from regional and local offices. Amusingly, despite being a federal state, Russia somehow managed to make it as centralised as it puts under question the whole federal aspect. The extreme centralisation of power under the reform raised concerns about the erosion of regional autonomy and the concentration of power in the hands of the federal government (Mishina, 2012). The reform also did not introduce any overhaul-like substantial changes that were greatly needed and failed to adequately address the root causes of police misconduct. The simple change of labels did not really eradicate Soviet legacies in Russian law enforcement agencies.

Though it is fair to recognise that Russia underwent certain changes - from the communist state to a new authoritarian regime, and from a centrally planned economy to a market one, its institutions were hardly touched by reforms. The exploration of the Soviet legacies in the Russian case is really important since it sheds the light on present day developments and explains why things function the way they do. When the Soviet Union was dismantled, Russian police were expected to transform itself from the KGB to some new entities. The decision was made to split the former KGB into five entities, but leave the Ministry of Internal Affairs virtually unchanged (Light, Mota Prado & Wang, p. 219, 2015). Among the lingering legacies, therefore, we can point out: 1) high level of militarisation of troops - more than 200.000 people; 2) great degree of centralisation; 3)

divergence between political and criminal police; 4) weak legal consciousness and low-quality training. All these legacies seem to persist because there is not a real push factor for reforms - it will suffice for the government to make cosmetic changes and carry out symbolic changing of the guard from the old militsiia and new politsiya. Consequently, the Russian police is corrupt and authoritarian because it is underreformed and constituted by different communist administrative and political legacies (Light, Mota Prado & Wang, p. 225, 2015). Apart from the communist legacies, there are dangerous patterns emerging from them. For instance, high degrees of centralisation led to regional captures of police offices by the governors. This, in fact, enables them to recreate schemes that were widely present in the 1990s and essentially entailed the creation of a regional predatory actor who can be used as a protector of racketters and criminalised business groups. Also, because of compartmentalisation, there is tense rivalry between different MVD institutions - more elite ones and less prestigious because credits and awards always go to the intelligence community and spies (Light, Mota Prado & Wang, p. 223, 2015). This, combined with its Soviet heritage, allows us to conclude that a regime change accompanied with a package of comprehensive reforms can rescue the police from a very desperate condition they are facing.

Belarus:

Examining the landscape of Belarusian law enforcement is important for understanding historical legacies and present-day challenges (Ash, 2020). The Belarusian police force is even more underreformed than the Russian and is, therefore, much more heavily influenced by its Soviet past (ISans, 2020). Similar to its Russian counterpart, the Belarusian police resemble the divided society model (Gerber & Mendelson, p. 4, 2008). While they are legally and formally tasked with maintaining law and order, police omnipresently violate this prescription and regard their main task the service to the elites. Of course, it raises questions about impartiality and accountability (CPJ, 2021). Instances of police misconduct often go unchecked, contributing to the erosion of the institution of accountability and destroying remnants of public trust. Efforts at reform in Belarus have been met with scepticism (Nevedomskaya, 2021). Though the militarisation of law

enforcement, centralised authority, and lack of accountability emphasise the urgent need for comprehensive reform (MediaZona, 2020), no major efforts to undertake and implement it were present (Zochowski, 2020). One of the most pervasive problems in the Belarusian police force is corruption. Bribery and extortion are ubiquitous among officers, which not only damages the reputation of law enforcement but also compromises its ability to effectively carry out the legally assigned job (Walker, 2020).. Additionally, instances of abuse of power are very common with instances of police brutality, excessive use of force, and arbitrary arrests (Тимаров, 2010) that are essentially gross human rights violations. Without adequate accountability mechanisms created, officers will always feel capable of coming out unscathed of any crime. The politicisation of the police only exacerbates these issues (Українська кримінальна, 2021). Rather than upholding the rule of law, officers follow the principle of protecting the regime and loyal elites, completely compromising its impartiality. Furthermore, the heavy militarisation of the police contributes to a view of law enforcement as a somewhat occupying force rather than as protectors of the community and society as a whole. Inadequate training and lack of any due resources only complicate these issues (Amnesty International, 2020). Officers often do not have any proper training in human rights, conflict resolution, and community policing techniques. Additionally, the police force suffers from a shortage of resources, such as even outdated equipment and insufficient staffing levels, which constraints its ability to effectively serve (Radio Liberty, 2021). Overall, the absence of meaningful reforms in the Belarusian police force led to a systemic breakdown of trust, accountability, and professionalism.

Ukraine:

The Ukrainian context of the development of police was different from that of Russia and Belarus. Indubitably, Ukrainians police system was also characterised by lingering Soviet legacies, lack of accountability, and sporadic violence and misconduct. They exceeded the given mandate and often ignored the law instead of guarding it (Шумак, 2022). Apart from it, of course, police and law enforcement were often subjugated to the ruling elites in Kyiv as well as regional ones, which makes a case for a

divided society policing model. Local, regional and national-level oligarchs were extremely interested in exploiting the police for safeguarding their own interests (Гнап, 2010). This was all taking place against the backdrop of the miniscule rule of law and boneless system of accountability which could not impose on the police a system of checks and balances (Шрамович, 2020). However, what definitely made the Ukrainian case stand out was the reaction of the civil society to police violence and brutal violations of human rights with outright abuses that, police hoped, would go unchecked. One of the most illustrative examples can be the nationwide protesting campaign “No to police state” in 2010 (DW, 2010). The "No Police State" Campaign emerged across Ukraine following the death of 20-year-old student Ihor Indylo at the Shevchenkivskyi district police department in Kyiv. The incident sparked off nationwide outrage and pushed civil society to act (TCH, 2010). The campaign, hence, was a response to the glaring injustice, impunity and unchecked police brutality toward citizens. Citizens mobilised in protests, rallies, and advocacy efforts to demand accountability for Indylo's death and tried to push for systemic reforms. Key objectives of the campaign were addressing police impunity, advocacy for justice and fir court hearings for victims of police violence, and promotion of transparency and accountability as main cornerstones in the police (Коношевич, 2010). Another example of the actions of the vibrant civil society was the protests in Vradiivka in 2013, just two years before the massive overhaul of the police started. The protests in Vradiivka, which took place from June 30 to July 3, 2013, were a response to a harrowing incident involving Irina Krashkova, a resident of the town (BBC, 2013). Krashkova was reportedly subjected to a group rape and a murder attempt. She accused two police officers, Dmytro Polishchuk and Yevhen Dryzhak, as well as a local taxi driver of perpetrating this assault (Денисова, 2013). In reaction to this outrageous crime perpetrated by the police, the community in Vradiivka erupted in protest (Швецъ, 2013). The demonstrations underscored deep-seated concerns about the safety and security of residents and raised questions about the effectiveness of law enforcement in protecting citizens from such egregious crimes, if any whatsoever (Козлюк, 2017). Contrary to Russia and Belarus, Ukrainian citizens actively reacted to the misconduct on the part of the police and expressed their concerns at the absence of the rule of law.

Another factor which made the Ukrainian path different was the partial orientation to the West and pressure to reform the law enforcement from the European partners. The EU was an additional push factor to carry out the police reform for Ukraine, and the process started in 2015 (Kokhan, 2020). Unlike Russia, Ukraine, despite also changing the name to *politsia*, wanted the reform to be comprehensive and intolerant toward the remnants of the Soviet administrative system and legal loopholes it engendered. Hence, the Ukrainian government decided and was advised to follow the Georgian police model who had previously successfully installed a new system of social partnership policing (Pehlman, 2022). This essentially implied transforming the police from a politicised, partially militarised body into an administrative institution that will be primarily tasked with providing services to the citizens, not decriminalisation. Another important trigger for these changes became the events of the Euromaidan where police violence culminated and people became outraged, marking a break with a corrupt authoritarian police (Baiduk, 2021).

But how to make sense of what ensued after promises to bring about drastic changes? Independent researcher Cornelius Friesendorf categorised the reforms of the time as institutional bricolage, which mixed Soviet and new institutional practices (Friesendorf, 2017, p. 2). He argued that reforms were incremental because they did not uproot the engraved Soviet institutional traditions and because there were informal institutional legacies from the Soviet times which are hard to change. Also, there was widespread resistance to reforms because it meant sacking people and bringing in a lot of new and unexpected things (Friesendorf, 2017, PP. 5-6). Apart from these factors, he pointed out the difficult economic conditions which slowed down the pace of reforms. Police did not have enough money to re-equip themselves because budget finances were distributed elsewhere to address more pressing problems and because even dependence on Western finances did not mean stable cash flows into the country (Костюк, 2017). More importantly, the stumbling block that was hard to eliminate was the massive presence of old-school police officers in the system. The Ukrainian government simply could not fire or get rid of them because it took some time for universities and specialised

colleges to produce new cadres (Baiduk, 2021). However, amidst these challenges, there have been notable positive changes in the Ukrainian police force following the reform efforts. Despite the entrenched Soviet institutional traditions and resistance to change, gradual improvements took place anyway. One significant outcome has been the professionalisation of the police force, with better training programs and a bigger emphasis on modern policing techniques (Мамка, 2018). Additionally, there was a visible improvement in public trust and these changes, although incremental, create a promising trajectory towards a more transparent, efficient, and citizen-oriented law enforcement system in Ukraine (Крапивін, 2023).

Georgia:

Police reforms in Georgia were similar to the Ukrainian case in the sense that they were also a direct aftermath of the revolution and political “changing of the guard”. Whereas in Georgia the trigger was the Rose Revolution and comprehensive regime change, in Ukraine the same is applicable to the Revolution of Dignity and reforms that ensued in 2015, classified as a “big bang approach” (Saakashvili, 2020). In Georgia, the reforming efforts should be seen as part of a broader attempt to reduce corruption and politicisation of internal ministry structures. The new government and elites, headed by Saakashvili, were genuinely interested in reestablishing control over the police and recreating a transparent system of accountability (O’Shea, p. 389, 2022). Also, the police during Shevardnadze’s tenures Georgian police functioned as a protector of regional gangs and organised crime networks, which closely resembles the three aforementioned cases (O’Shea, p. 390, 2022). This was solved by reducing the number of personnel - thousands of police officers with previous ties to corrupt offices lost their jobs, paving the way for new policemen (Muqbil, 2021). Another important change was the transformation of the Security Ministry and Internal Affairs Ministry into one, thus eradicating the remnant of the Soviet legacy (Ахметели, 2010). Georgia also succeeded in changing the police culture and at least mostly destroying predatory policing (Kakachia & O’Shea, p. 4, 2012). One of the key strategies employed was the complete overhaul of the police force. This process aimed to weed out corrupt and unqualified officers while allowing for the

recruitment of new, more professional personnel (Kakachia & O'Shea, p. 7, 2012). Moreover, salaries for law enforcement officers were increased to reduce the temptation to engage in corruption, which really did help to decrease the reliance on bribes. Another crucial aspect of the reform was the introduction of technology in police procedures (Osmanov, p. 8, 2020). This included the implementation of electronic systems for issuing fines and recording traffic violations that were expected to reduce chances for bribery. The government also took steps to ensure accountability and transparency - independent oversight bodies were established to investigate complaints of police misconduct, ensuring that officers were held accountable for their actions and not involved in organised crime networks (Буракова, 2014). An important fact is that, contrary to other countries's cases, the system was centralised. This was carried out by the Georgian government to decrease corruption and local and regional affiliations with patronage networks protecting racketeers (Osmanov, PP. 10-12, 2020). The centralisation move greatly decreased levels of corruption and created a more coherent system of financial hierarchy (Варченко, 2014). The centralisation process also to a large extent contributed to state building efforts after years of decay under Shevarnadze (Купатадзе, 2017). But of course only centralisation would not have brought the all-encompassing changes we have seen: a lot of credit should go to the efforts to create a democratic institutional ethos and responsiveness to public needs as a replacement of the old divided society model. The Saakashvili reform team fully recognised the need to create a new institutional culture and reorient police to respect citizens. Overall reorganisation of the police culture, together with infusion of new cadres and implementation of meritocratic service principles, facilitated the creation of a responsible, not repressive, public institution.

3. LOYAL WATCHDOGS: GUNNING DOWN PROTESTS IN BELARUS, GEORGIA, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE

3.1 Extensive system of curtailment: policing of extensive anti-regime protests in Lukashenka's Belarus in 2020-2021

To study the protests dynamics, I find it mandatory to devise a certain timeline, making it possible to navigate the events of the protests. The protests cycle, which started in May 2020 and ended in February 2021 (Kozenko, 2021), will be divided into five main phases, explored in greater detail in ensuing paragraphs.

- 1) *May 2020 - August 2020* - the first wave of protests started as a response to the Central Election Commission's rejection of Tikhanovsky's candidacy registration (Hopkins, 2021). On the streets, people started using the slogan "Long live Belarus", Tikhanovsky was detained at the end of May (Melnichuk, 2020). Viktor Barbariko was detained the next month, protests galvanised (Melnichuk, 2020). First violent clashes with the OMON were to follow. By the time July arrived, the Central Election Commission once again refused to register Valerii Tsepka. He left the country not wanting to follow the fate of his predecessors (The Baltic Times, 2021).
- 2) *Election Day - August 12* - crowds began gathering at polling stations to scrutinise vote count protocols. Expectedly, Lukashenko secured a victory, adding to the mass social dissatisfaction (Bernstein, 2022). Protests became large-scale and involved the deployment of tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets. Thousands of peaceful protesters were detained (BBC, 2020). Suspicious vehicles were seized (Meduza, 2020). Law enforcement escalated their response by employing live ammunition in service weapons. People started building encampments and barricades to protect themselves. (Lysovska, 2020). First person got killed during the dispersal. OMON went through central streets and started arresting innocent people. (Europeiska Pravda, 2020).

- 3) *Second half of August - September* - Following the declaration of a nationwide strike (BBC, 2020), three marches—the "March for Freedom" (Moskalkov, 2020), the "March for New Belarus" (Berezhansky, 2020), and the "March of Peace and Independence" (Ukr.Net, 2020)—took place. Lukashenka appointed a new government (BBC, 2022). A meeting between Lukashenka and Putin occurred in Sochi, and Russia extended a \$1.5 billion credit to Belarus (Soldatkin, 2020). The European Parliament passed a resolution rejecting Lukashenka as the legitimate president, urging stringent sanctions against him and cronies (Meduza, 2020). The riot police continued beating the protesters and carrying out aggressive assaults (Hunkel, 2020).
- 4) *October - December* - On October 4, a protest named the "March for the Release of Political Prisoners" unfolded in Minsk and various other cities (Radio Svoboda, 2020). People who had been previously detained reported cruel treatment by the police officers and unprovoked violence against them (United Nations Human Rights, 2020). No criminal cases have been initiated regarding these incidents (StopKor, 2020). Lukashenka declared the protests a terrorist threat (Barron's, 2020). Protests were still taking place every day (Meduza, 2020).
- 5) *December - February 2021* - Tikhanovskaya has introduced the "Unified Crime Registration Book" platform, intended to gather evidence of arrests, torture, and beatings committed by Belarusian law enforcement officers (Kobets, 2020). But, on February 11, the head of the KGB, Ivan Tertel, declared a stabilised situation in Belarus, with protests subsiding (Wilson Center, 2023).

Before starting with the explanation of the police behaviour during the protests, it is necessary to provide additional background information on the history of the OMON unit. OMON constitutes a specialised unit working under the Interior Ministry and traces its origins back to 1988. The unit's formation coincides with the establishment of the initial 19 special purpose militia units across all of the Soviet Union (Security Distillery,

2021). On November 22, 1988, stemming from an uptick in severe crimes Minsk witnessed the establishment of its first special purpose militia unit (Applebaum, 2022). Therefore, it was obvious from the start that the unit was heavily militarised and intended to be used as an instrument of repression against “dangerous” groups. According to the testimony of one of the former officers, people like him, who served in the army, either turned to the side of crime or joined the police. Since its inception - in the late 80s and early 90s, according to him, the OMON was largely composed of the former “Afghans” - men who had combat experience during the Afghan war (Melnichuk, 2020). They played a significant role in shaping the unit's "code of honour." While they were pretty stern, they allegedly did not endorse cruelty.

However, when a very massive anti-regime protest took place - “Dziady” - in the autumn of 1988, the police did not seem very tolerant and the myth about the “Afghan” ethos was debunked. The Dziady protest was organised to commemorate the memory of political repression victims (Bekum, 2021). The event was taking place on the day marking the fiftieth anniversary of the execution of a significant number of Belarusian intellectuals - it had an obvious anti-communist and anti-stalinist tone to it. The plan was that people should assemble at the Kuropaty burial site. However, communist authorities were very much against this idea and expressed it openly that they might use force to disperse people (McCormack, 2021). Despite the police attempts to stop the rally, between two and four thousand individuals succeeded in their journey to Kurapaty on October 30. En route to Kurapaty activists again encountered police officers with water cannons. They tried to violently disband the crowd (Goujon, 2008). The dispersal, beating, and arrest of individuals took place.

However, during one the wave of the mass anti-Russian protests in 1996 - so-called “Minsk Spring” - a protest named “Chernobyl Way” took place, where the riot police used violence against the protesters (Kordyk). In 1996, over fifty thousand people took to the streets to commemorate the memory of the victims of the tragedy and call for some system of justice to be established. The scale of the protests pushed authorities to allow police to use force, breaking a seven-year moratorium on such actions (Melnichuk, 2018). Violent clashes followed between the protesters, who defended themselves with bare

hands (Bekum, 2021). The event marked the commencement of a new wave of arrests targeting social activists.

Taking into account the history of previous police-protesters interactions, sky-high levels of violence against the people, and the lingering Soviet legacy of the OMON's creation, I argue that the aggressive style of policing was adopted as a result of national elites seeing the weakness of civil society and not feeling threatened enough (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 586). The main idea behind this concept is that the elites risk their public reputation during suppressing protests, hence, they only tend to suppress protests which are likely to give in to the pressure. To get a better understanding of what exactly constitutes a weak protest movement, I shall utilise two perspectives offered by Gamson - "weakness-from-within" and "weakness-from-without" (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 588). The internal weakness here refers to the inability to survive or go through long-term intensive periods of repression from the riot police. In contrast to strong protests movements, weak ones lack the ability to preserve cohesion and go on with the street activities undisturbed; in other ways, both structural conditions and internal ingenuity combined with resources allow for creation of survival mechanisms. In the case of the Belarus protests of 2020, the protests were weak because of the presence of the following factors: a) protests were sporadic and they did not have a continuous location - there was a wave of unrest, but it was extremely uneven and unstable in terms of persistent physical presence and "contagiousness", protests were characterised by constant fluctuations and outbursts of activity as opposed to something more systematised; b) the anti-regime protests were primarily an urban phenomenon, centred around Minsk, and even if they had some reach in peripheral and/or rural areas, its representation was virtually solely urban population of one city; c) no real threat to legitimacy because of the low magnitude and scale; d) demonstrated willingness to end the unrest in negotiations or at least accepting some concessions; e) too weak a position of the opposition leaders whom people accepted as their leaders, who did not have a single agreed-upon line of behaviour toward the incumbent regime - the approach was somewhere in between protesting until the overthrow of Lukashenka and waiting for him to implement desirable political changes; f) insufficient international support for the civil society and increasing

pressure on the regime from Russia; g) omnipresence of moderates and groups who did not set the collapse of the regime as their imminent aim. An external weakness of the protests lay in the fact that outside actors also play a crucial role in the ability of the protests to survive repression and help them to become more sustainable. The role of outside actors is oftentimes attributed to NGOs, independent journalists, and other civil society watchdogs who could proactively react to the episodes of repression and mobilise additional domestic support as well as garner international backing. As can be seen, the Belarusian case was not characterised by the active response from the domestic actors of civil society and did not put up sufficient opposition to the regime to produce a real tangible threat for elites. These aspects combined, the movement can justifiably be subsumed under the category of weak.

Second, I assert that choosing assertive policing was a very expected decision, considering the OMON's previous instances of brutality directed against protesters (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 587). The most important aspects of the violent policing of protests characteristic of the OMON are: a) authorisation for use of aggression against even low-scale and peaceful manifestations; b) disproportionately “hard” measures in response to uneventful activism; c) green light for the armed assault on the people - OMON officers were allowed to use firearms to protect themselves or “neutralise” extremist individuals. These traits make up the OMON's institutional memory, which plays a role in shaping a certain shared consciousness in the police force. Officers collectively recall instances and cases where force led to the achievement of desired outcome, and this is how an idea that an aggressive approach is not only acceptable but also effective is formed. Also, the absence of effective restraint mechanisms is a problem.. Apart from it, it is crucial to highlight that there is a specific terms used for describing the behaviour patterns and convictions of the “old-school” Belarusian as well as Russian police officers - “siloviki”, or men of force (Smirnov, 2022). They are the backbone of authoritarian regimes in the two countries and serve as the main bulwark against anti-regime threats. Therefore, they represent a serious threat due to their entrenched position within security apparatuses. Their reliance on coercion and force creates a climate of fear

and repression (Taylor, 2017, p. 56). This unchecked authority constructs a cycle of violence that cannot be reversed.

Third, the explanation for the aggressive behaviour of the OMON during the anti-regime protests can be explained by how the officers themselves viewed the events - as legitimate or illegitimate, lawful or unlawful, threatening or, on the contrary, promising (Mansley, 2013, p. 50). The primary concept within this explanatory paradigm is that it is hard for police to suppress the protests which they see as legitimate and where there is room for them to sympathise with the people; on the contrary, the riot police can easily start violently dispersing the protests which they see as threatening and which they are politically (in some cases, also ethnically or religiously) alienated from. Indubitably, it is an arduous task to measure the degree of legitimacy of the protests within the police structures in countries like Belarus, where social polls are not conducted and there is no data social scientists can trust. However, there is an alternative way to prove the extent of legitimacy the OMON attributed to the events - number of defections and breaking of the oath of allegiance, widespread refusals to carry out the established tasks. Throughout the whole trajectory of the events, not a single defection was recorded (as long as any sources can be trusted on the account); even if there were, they were so miniscule that they did not manage to gain any public coverage and remained unnoticed. Hence, it can be deduced that one of the very important factors shaping the response of the OMON to the events of 2020 was that the officers saw the protests as a direct threat to the regime, stability, and to themselves, and, therefore, saw no obstructions to exercising force and violently suppressing them.

3.2 Siding with people: police contribution to trumping autocracy during the Rose Revolution in 2003

The Rose Revolution began in late 2003, with huge hopes for big changes pinned onto it (Pahlke & Rescheto, 2023). The revolution itself marked the climax of growing

discontent and was the beginning of the many shifts in the political system. The roots of the Rose Revolution can be traced to the dissatisfaction of the Georgian society that culminated under the rule of Eduard Shevardnadze (Crosby, 2018). The leadership of the former Soviet Foreign Minister, infamous for his large-scale corruption, electoral malpractices and voter fraud, increasing poverty, was distrusted by the people. The culmination of their grievances occurred during the parliamentary elections of November 2, 2003 (Bibilashvili, 2023).

Massive demonstrations started in Tbilisi on November 4. The events were also marked by a creation of the unified protests centre to better coordinate the actions of the people. (Huff Post, 2017). Shevardnadze's party allegedly won the parliamentary elections; in response to this, Saakashvili encouraged people to take to the streets and take matters into their own hands (Istorychna Pravda, 2009). On November 13, Saakashvili said that Shevardnadze had to resign and protests were the only way to push him to do so. Pressure from widespread protests and constant protesting in front of the parliament compelled Shevardnadze to resign on November 23 (Lynch, 2006, p. 26). This resignation was a transformative moment in Georgian politics, paving the way for the peaceful transfer of power.

The rose was a symbol of the protests because it symbolises simultaneously purity and change, and this is very emblematic of the protests nature - transformative yet peaceful (International Crisis Group, 2004). The magnitude of the protests was awe-inspiring, with tens of thousands people participating. The nature of the demonstrations was sustained since they spanned several weeks, which highlighted the dedication of the anti-regime opposition forces. Slogans such as "Georgia without Shevardnadze" and "We want fair elections" were used as observable expressions of public sentiment (Bumaga, 2023). Undoubtedly, the most astonishing feature of the protests was their non-violent

character - people threw roses at the police instead of making any provocations or resorting to violent measures (Kavkazskiy Uzel, 2023). Though the revolution lasted less than a month and was very intense, the riot police did not respond with violence to the protesters. Police chose to beat or scare activists only on rare occasions, no massive arrests took place. The landmark episode highlighting the reluctance on the part of the police to turn against the people was the occupation of the administrative buildings by the protesters with no resistance from the police (Bumaga, 2023).

Since the Georgian case deviates from the three others because it was not characterised by police violence and brutal dispersals of the protests, another angle of analysing the protest dynamics should be adopted. It can be argued that the soft policing style was adopted because the protests were very strong and ubiquitous and their repression was extremely costly (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 583). The popularity of the Shevardnadze regime was so low and the prospect of the regime change so obvious it was no longer a prospect but a near future, police likely regarded the violent repression as a sure way to self-destruction. They certainly feared not getting amnesty under the new regime, and rightly so, and avoided having any direct confrontation with the people who were bent on overthrowing the incumbent rulers (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2023). Since the protests had neither internal nor external weaknesses, it is clear that the riot police avoided attacking them and conducting direct assaults on peaceful gatherings. Also, pro-regime elites agreed to negotiate and were very divided, mostly preparing for a comprehensive refurbishment in a new regime, so they also thought it was best to let the protests achieve their aim and not mess with the politics in the streets.

The fact that the Georgian riot police refrained from using harsh violence during protests played a crucial role in influencing their behaviour during the Rose Revolution (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 587). This reluctance to use aggressive tactics had a profound impact on the dynamics between law enforcement and protesters, and created a climate of law enforcement restraint. It likely deterred protesters from resorting to extreme measures because they saw the willingness of the police to work out a peaceful

resolution rather than be stuck with the imminent possibility of confrontation. Also, the restraint of the Georgian riot police in previous protests contributed to a positive public perception of them.

The third factor explaining the behaviour of the police can be the degree of legitimacy that they attributed to the protests (Mansley, 2013, p. 50). Citizens were dissatisfied with the flaws of the regime such as corruption, poverty, and authoritarian practices (Antelava, 2003). The police, in spite of being an integral part of the coercive apparatus, could not remain indifferent to the sentiment of the protests which deeply resonated with them as with other ordinary citizens (Frontline, 2014). The unpopularity of the regime likely had an impact on the police's view of the protests, since they themselves could have shared the sentiment of the events. This recognition of legitimacy softened the police response to the demonstrations, as they could easily see themselves support and align with the aspirations of the plain people and could associate with them more than with those of the authoritarian regime.

3.3 Sporadic revitalisation: civil society in temporary revolt against Putin-Medvedev dalliance in 2011-2012

Thirteen years ago, thanks to omnipresent fraud and electoral violations, "United Russia" secured its parliamentary victory with almost half of the votes (Radio Svoboda, 2011). The equivocal and unfair nature of the success of Putin's party pushed citizens to take to the streets. The protests were predominantly localised in big urban centres - the lion's share of action was concentrated in Moscow and its surrounding areas, proving the "four Russias" theory (Zubarevich, 2012). The protest's potential was with big cities and an educated and young population, not vice versa. The most important events of the so-called "Bolotnaya" revolution took place in December in various locations in Moscow - Christie Prudy, Sakharov Avenue, and Bolotnaya Square itself. During this period, the police were not perceived as adversaries (Meduza, 2021). Opposition members and protesters themselves even showed some hospitality by serving tea and giving food to police officers (Ivanova, 2022). However, the focus here is not on the protests in general,

but on the "March of One Million" in May 2012, specifically because, this time, there was police brutality and violent dispersion of the crowds (BBC, 2012). This protest, among the largest in the whole episode, entailed real sentences for people and criminal cases (Zilgalov, 2012). This final outburst of protest activity was triggered by the presidential elections and another victory of Putin (BBC, 2011).

Events on May 6 were taking place in the following way: in the Bolotnaya square the mechanism of so-called checkpoints was enforced by the police to regulate the flow of people who were constantly pouring in. (Radio Svoboda, 2017). The place got very crowded because people kept coming and pushing on those who were not able to go through the checkpoints and simply leave. (BBC, 2016). First clashes with the police started because people wearing black masks from the crowd started throwing stones at them and somebody from the crowd even fired a gun, though probably in the air. (Freedom House, 2016). In response, the police used force (Lally, 2013). The police were equipped with weapons not permitted for use in mass events, such as the 43-mm GM-24 grenade launchers (European Human Rights Advocacy Centre, 2016). The main opposition leaders, such as Sergei Udaltsov, Boris Nemtsov, and Alexei Navalny, were unable to breach the police blockade to support the people and come to the square (Human Rights World, 2012). They started their own local protests in the other area of the downtown. Police started pushing people who tried to break their "defence lines" by putting people to the ground (Barry & Schwirtz, 2012). At one point, the cordon of the police collapsed; they started dispersing the crowds (Yaffa, 2014). Hundreds of people were brutally beaten, injured and arrested. This protest laid bare the nature of the capital's police and marked the initiation of the well-known "tightening of the screws" process (The Financial Times, 2013).

The case of the Bolotnaya square protest is really interesting because previous instances of the police behaviour were much more peaceful. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the changing views in the Kremlin, which did not take the protests seriously until the presidential elections and regarded them as a prolonged game doomed to fail (Tsvetkova,

2012). However, with May something has changed for the incumbent government which, according to Putin's words, felt personally offended by the massive anti-regime rallies, which could have pushed them to command the violent dispersal of the protests at any cost (Asia News, 2013). Therefore, similarly to the Euromaidan revolution, I contend that the choice made in favour of the aggressive policing approach was made based on the entrenched elites feeling threatened and delegitimised (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 583). The Kremlin experienced serious apprehension in May 2012 because of a set of specific factors. Firstly, it was the substantial and stable turnout and persistence of the demonstrations, especially during the "March of the Millions". Secondly, the diverse demographics of the protesters - protesters ranged from the very rich to lower middle class, from the old to the young, which was very much indicative of the wideness of the regime's dissatisfaction in big cities. Thirdly, the emergence of charismatic opposition figures, including Alexei Navalny, according to the incumbent government view, posed a direct challenge to the current establishment. Lastly, the Kremlin's perceived inability to address the grievances and engage in meaningful dialogue with the opposition heightened concerns, as the protests showcased a resilient and increasingly coordinated movement that demanded political change.

I also argue that the OMON's conduct during the protests in May 2012 was influenced by their history of brutality, creating a strong determinant for their behaviour (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 587). The unit's past actions were characterised by a strong and lingering pattern of excessive force, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation tactics directed against people. The OMON's reputation for using physical force in the past was a backdrop for their future actions, which partially explains why the protesters were so fearful about them. Also, the unit's track record of limited accountability for human rights abuses and complete impunity further encouraged them to use whatever methods they regarded as useful and effective. Also, the phenomenon of siloviki, as in the aforementioned Belarusian case, played an important role in violent suppression of the protests because officers' power went unchecked by the centre and they used violence as a sole means of dispersal.

Thirdly, I assert that the riot police reacted this way because they did not see the protests as legitimate (Mansley, 2013, p. 50). The OMON's failure to fraternise with the people during the May 2012 protests is indicative of the fact that they viewed the events as illegitimate. Fraternisation between law enforcement and protesters often takes place when police see the grievances expressed as legitimate. In this case, the lack of such recognition suggests that the police regarded it adequate to use force against the people. Furthermore, the presence of paid provocations toward the police intensified the OMON's sentiment. Therefore, the absence of fraternisation are clear indicators of the OMON's perception of the protests as lacking legitimacy, which influenced their aggressive response.

3.4. Large-scale leaderless resistance and the Heavenly Hundred: Berkut versus the Euromaidan in 2013-2014

To provide the most comprehensive and yet simultaneously concise overview of the course of the protests, I shall use the chronological classification offered by the Euromaidan Press, which essentially divides the Revolution into eight main phases. This choice was made because this classification system encompasses the Maidan events from the student protests to the ouster of Yanukovich, creates an exhaustive picture of the Maidan gaining traction and becoming unpeaceful, and places rights emphases throughout the four-month period.

- 1) Phase 1 (November 21 - December 1) - Student-led protests in response to the refusal to sign the association agreement with the EU. First unprovoked assaults on the protesters by the Bekut took place.
- 2) Phase 2 (December 1 - January 16) - Protesters began living in encampments on the Independence Square, the protests acquired a distinct pro-European orientation. The resistance became leaderless - the people rejected Klitchko, Tyahnybok, and Yatseniuk as their delegates in the Rada. The government

jointly with the Interior Ministry started sending titushky to the Maidan, who were paid to interfere with the riot police and provoke aggression. A new form of resistance was created - Automaidan.

- 3) Phase 3 (January 16 - January 19) - Verkhovna Rada adopts the so-called “dictatorial” laws on January 16, which include the prohibition to drive in a convoy of more than five cars, the operation of news agencies without state registration, and other authoritarian regulations.
- 4) Phase 4 (January 19 - January 27) - Following a rally, Right Sector-led protesters clashed on Hrushevskoho Street, first instances of violent protesting. Protesters were beaten and kidnapped.
- 5) Phase 5 (January 28 - February 18) - During negotiations, opposition leaders make a social contract with Euromaidan. A temporary truce is declared, Prime Minister Azarov resigns, and an amnesty law for protesters is proposed. Despite the refusal of the people to comply and leave, people leave part of the territory while retaining control of key government buildings.
- 6) Phase 6 (February 18 - February 20) - Two major deadly attacks on the people are carried out by the Berkut. More than one hundred were killed (either beaten or shot by snipers) and more than a thousand were wounded.
- 7) Phase 7 (February 22) - Another “peace plan” is proposed to the Maidan and is again rejected, people want Yanukovych to resign. Politicians from his party started resigning. Then, news stories about him fleeing the country started circulating.
- 8) Phase 8 (February 22- February 27) - Parliament forms an interim government, impeaching the absent President, reverting to the 2004 constitution, and setting new elections for May 25. Turchynov becomes Acting President, leading an interim government approved by Maidan, recognised by the international community aside from Russia.

As can be logically deduced from the above timeline, the Berkut's commanders never really wanted any negotiated management or cooperation with the protesters. This

influenced the behaviour of the plain officers, which from the very outset signalled the underlying motivation to use violence and repression as sole and primary means of dispersal, be it single attacks on journalists or beating of students. But what influenced the choice of these tactics? What factors were the driving force behind Berkut's actions? What had the most profound impact on the adopted policing style?

In this paper, I argue that, first and foremost, the “hard” policing style was a direct reaction of pro-Yanukovych elites feeling threatened by the magnitude, duration, and slogans of the Maidan (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 583). The more threatened the pro-regime elites felt, the more severe was the repression directed against the people. On the contrary, if there were signs of leniency or desire to negotiate a new political settlement, the hypothesis is that the repression should have been much weaker (della Porta & Reiter, 1996, p. 32). Amongst the primary fear-breeding factors of the Euromaidan are: a) the fact that the protests were not sporadic - people started living on the streets and protesting never ceased; b) the protests' scale along with diverse representation - Maidan was not an urban phenomenon of Kyiv, people coming from different strata from different parts of the country joined the protests to voice their dissatisfaction with the regime and its actions; c) no shown willingness to negotiate and refusal to accept opposition leaders as people's formal heads; d) persistence of the protesting activities and ensuing threat to the legitimacy - each time there was attempt to clear the Independence Square, the protesters fiercely resisted and gathered again; e) no acceptance of a pacification project could work out - the revolution explicitly called for the start of EU integration and change of the regime, no “carrots” or economic benefits could make Ukrainians go home; in other words, there were few moderate groups who could accept some “workable arrangement”, offered by the incumbent government.

Bearing this in mind, the Euromaidan also discards one popular theory of protests policing - the so-called weakness approach (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 585), which stipulates that the government will only suppress those protests that demonstrate either intrinsic or extrinsic weakness, otherwise suppression will be politically costly. The Maidan case disproves this because the protests were not characterised by internal

weakness - neither mobilisational nor in terms of resistance capacity. They were also not characterised by external weakness - civil society watchdogs supported the Maidan en masse and monitored the police actions closely, giving them full coverage. Therefore, pro-regime elites decided to continue suppressing the protests based on strategic miscalculations and alienation from the general mood of the anti-regime segments of society. The protests were promising in all senses, but, due to wishful thinking and overcoming fear of the protests' magnitude, they were seen as those that can and should be suppressed with a medium effort and at a minimised political cost.

Secondly, I argue that the choice in favour of the aggressive policing style was logical, taking into account the history of previous brutality of the Berkut against the protesters (Earl, Soule & McCarthy, 2003, p. 587). Since this was elaborated on in the previous sections, I will shed light on the milestones in the Berkut's political background : a) severe human rights transgressions - use of physical force and hand-to-hand combat techniques; b) limited accountability; c) lack of restraint and authorisation to heightened level of violence d) ethnic violence and involvement in targeting of ethnic minorities. These factors constitute the core of Berkut's institutional memory, which contributed to the crystallisation of a collective consciousness. The Berkut's background reveals a pattern where the absence of checks on the use of force encourages the tactics that escalate violence. The police, as it is said, have a memory of an elephant (Mansley, 2013, p. 51), and the pattern of human rights violations was lingering in the events of 2013-2014.

The third factor of Berkut's aggression during the events of the Euromaidan can be attributed to the legitimacy of the protests in the eyes of the riot police (Mansley, 2013, p. 50). The underlying idea is that, the more legitimate protests look to the police, the less force they use and the less likely they will be to turn to “hard” policing. Also, in case there is strong political pressure from above when the riot police see the events as legitimate, there will be observed a number of defections and high levels of fraternisation with the protesters. Another way to test this idea would be to create another hypothesis - the Berkut had mostly pro-regime, pro-Yanukovych, anti-EU, and, in some cases, pro-Russian views. Testing this is difficult in light of the little information available on the topic, but

looking at the post-maidan personal trajectories of the Berkut officers can clear things up. Evidently, if some of the officers viewed the protests as legitimate, but did not risk defection or not obeying the orders, subsequently they would not be fleeing to Russia or Belarus or engaging in any explicitly anti-Ukrainian activities. Simple factual tracing to 2014 and post-Maidan era illustrates that a lot of the officers genuinely supported the regime, viewed the Maidan as an illegitimate threat to those in power, and, moreover, opposed EU integration and favoured closer relations with Russia (Hrabska, 2017). After the war in the East and the occupation of the Crime started, a lot of the Berkut officers fled to Belarus, Russia, or the occupied peninsula. For instance, at least three people from the Mykolaiv branch of the Berkut escaped to Belarus, where they joined the ranks of OMON afterwards (Radio Svoboda, 2020). In March 2014, 35 Berkutites left the base with weapons and asked for Russian protection and citizenship (LB. ua, 2014). In 2020, during the anti-regime protests in Belarus, two Ukrainian Berkut officers were noticed violently dispersing them (Priadko, 2020). After the start of the full-scale war, more than twenty former Berkut officers were found to fight on the Russian side (Detector Media, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

As this paper draws to a close, it is evident that it has achieved significant strides in unravelling the complex dynamics of police behaviour during mass protests in the post-Soviet space. Since the paper is divided into two main parts - first one primarily theoretical and the second empirical with main findings, it would be suitable to structure the list of the accomplished objectives accordingly. In the first section of the work, it was found that only Georgia was a radical post-communist reformer, as well as Belarus was the sole non-reformer, with Russia and Ukraine belonging to the camp of moderate reformers. This significantly shaped the post-Soviet regime trajectories and inter-country differences, though all of them could be subsumed under a competitive authoritarian model. Also, a variegated theoretical toolkit was provided for the analysis of the mass protests - aggregate-psychological approach, relative deprivation approach, value-consensus approach, and political conflict approach. Another crucial revelation was that authoritarian regimes were found to be much more prone to the formation of authoritarian police structures with limited accountability, high centralisation, and high militarisation.

In the second section of the paper, I have analysed each country's case - Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine - separately to highlight the unique dynamics in every street revolution. The methodology I used, apart from the case study and policing theories, included the process tracing method - briefly studying the history of the police involvement in quelling mass protest and its incorporation into the power vertical. The case of Belarus demonstrated that the aggressive response of the OMON to the protests was a result of the national elites seeing the weakness of the civil society and feeling compelled to suppress weak signals of discontent; on the contrary, in the case of Russia, police violence was the effect of the elites feeling threatened and delegitimised. The examination of the Georgian revolution made it clear that the weak and decreasing level of police aggression against people was because of the ubiquity of the protests and their repression seen as too costly by the government. The Ukrainian case, on the contrary, illustrates that the scale, magnitude and slogans of the Maidan made the pro-Yanukovich regime deploy the most brutal methods against the demonstrators. This detailed analysis

made it possible to, first, showcase the role of the post-soviet legacies in the undemocratic functioning of the law enforcement agencies and, second, present the role of the elite perceptions during mass protests in determining the response to outbursts of mass discontent. Lastly, this paper managed to give a broad overview of the police cultures in the four countries and stipulate that the absence of comprehensive reforms in the post-Soviet space and authoritarian nature of the regime have direct causal links with either predatory policing or a divided-society model of policing.

This research paper not only gives a comprehensive analysis of police behaviour during mass protests in the post-Soviet space, but also contributes to the construction of the foundation for future much broader investigations of the interplay of authoritarianism, social mobilisation, and policing. Scholars can build on this foundation by studying in more detail specific aspects of authoritarian regimes and their impact on the formation of police cultures, exploring the mechanisms and precise reforms that are necessary to avert police authoritisation, and examine the most effective ways for eliminating police and institutional post-Soviet legacies. Additionally, further research should explore comparative perspectives and study the police across different regions and contexts, which can potentially generate vital insights for the field lacking a comparative base. This paper merely aimed to add to the already existing available data a comparative perspective and highlight the importance of democratisation, comprehensive reforms directed specifically at addressing policy persistence and stubborn post-communist institutions, and emphasise the danger of leaving the law enforcement sector underperformed, authoritarian, corrupt and inefficient.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Кваліфікаційної роботи

Тема: «Реакція правоохоронних органів на масові протести в пострадянському просторі: стратегії поліціювання в Білорусі, Грузії, Росії і Україні»

Студент: Бевзюк Дар'я Романівна

Рік навчання, факультет: ФСНСТ - 4

Науковий керівник: Гош Мрідула, доктор філософії, доцент кафедри міжнародних відносин

Рецензент:

Захищена “ _____ ” _____ 2024 р.

Короткий зміст роботи:

Ця кваліфікаційна робота присвячена висвітленню поведінки поліції і її варіації під час масових протестів у країнах пострадянського простору. Вона ставить за мету надати теоретичні рамки для концептуалізації пострадянських політичних режимів, суспільно-політичних рухів і поліціювання і застосувати їх для вивчення кейсів протестів у Білорусі 2020 року, Грузії 2003 року, Росії в 2012 році та України в 2013-2014 роках. Робота демонструє, як характер режиму, поведінка еліт, інституційна пам'ять і спадщина і бачення легітимності протестів формують реакцію поліції. Іншим важливим аспектом, що розглядається, є огляд культур поліції в чотирьох країнах і рівня реформованості поліцейських структур з моменту здобуття країнами незалежності. Робота і її зміст підкріплюють основу для подальших досліджень авторитаризму, масової мобілізації та поліцейських репресій, надаючи перспективи розуміння типів поліціювання і важливості повноцінних демократичних реформ для зменшення корупції і авторитаризму.

Ключові слова:

"Жорстке поліціювання"; хижачке поліціювання; конкурентний авторитаризм; пострадянські спадщини; силовіки.

Short summary:

This research paper is dedicated to unearthing the various actions taken by police forces during mass protests in the countries of the former USSR. Its goal is to give the theoretical frameworks for the conceptualisation of the post-Soviet political regimes, socio-political movements and police forces, and to use them to study the cases of protests in Belarus (2020), Georgia (2003), Russia (2012) and Ukraine (2013-14). This work demonstrates how the characters of regimes, the actions of the elites, institutional memory and the legacy and legitimacy of protests forms police reactions. Another important aspect which will be analysed is an overview of policing culture and the level of police reforms (from the moment of independence) in all four countries. This paper and its contents strengthen the basis for further research of authoritarianism, mass mobilisation, and police brutality, providing perspectives on understanding the types of policing and the importance of complete democratic reforms in order to lessen corruption and authoritarianism.

Key words:

“Hard policing”; predatory policing; competitive authoritarianism; post-Soviet legacies; siloviki.