

Who Reports Crime? Citizen Engagement with the Police in Russia and Georgia

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Abstract

What factors affect citizens' engagement with the state? We explore this question through a study of victims' and bystanders' willingness to report crimes to the police, using data from survey experiments conducted in Russia and Georgia. We find that citizens' willingness to report in both countries is strongly influenced by the nature of the crime, but not generally by instruments that the state might use to encourage greater reporting. Our results recommend scepticism about the ability of governments to easily engineer citizens' engagement with the state.

GOVERNMENTS OFTEN DEPEND ON CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT with the state to perform core functions, including revenue extraction, national defence, and the preservation of social order (Weber 1978; North 1990; Tilly 2005). Rather than bearing the expense of universally assessing and enforcing tax obligations, states assume that many citizens will report their income honestly (Levi 1988). To avoid the costs of establishing and administering conscription, governments often operate volunteer armies (Mulligan & Shleifer 2005). Instead of monitoring everyone at all times, states rely on citizens to obey the law and maintain social order even when the possibility of punishment by the state is remote (McCubbins & Schwartz 1984; Tyler 1990; Ellickson 1991).

Prior research suggests that states that rely on cooperation to tax, conscript, and monitor their citizens have significant advantages over those that do not (North 1981; Levi 1988; Root 1994; Mulligan & Shleifer 2005; Gehlbach 2008; Besley & Persson 2011). There is less consensus, however, on the particular determinants of such cooperation. When are citizens most likely to engage with the state? To what extent does cooperation depend on incentives provided by state authorities and on the broader institutional environment?

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We address these questions through a study of a central form of engagement: the willingness of citizens to report crimes to the police. A citizen's decision to inform the police of crimes they have witnessed or experienced is a critical juncture in the criminal justice process. As Tyler observes, 'crime and problems of community disorder are difficult to solve without the active involvement of community residents' (Tyler 2012, p. 77). Absent such participation, states are often forced into more resource-intensive strategies of proactive enforcement and surveillance. Yet cross-country studies of crime victimisation suggest a widespread failure of citizens to cooperate with the police in this way. As many as half of all crimes in industrialised countries go unreported (Bouten *et al.* 2002; Torrente *et al.* 2017), with higher rates in many developing and transition countries (Estienne & Morabito 2016). The stakes involved in solving this problem are high: beyond the impact on everyday welfare, a failure to provide basic law and order can depress economic activity and raise questions about the quality of governance, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (Brinks 2007; North *et al.* 2009). Other consequences of non-reporting include the misallocation of police resources due to inaccurate crime information and the inability of crime victims to access needed services and protect themselves from future victimisation (Ranapurwala *et al.* 2016).

We use a series of survey experiments to identify determinants of citizens' propensity to report crimes to the police. In line with the existing literature, we examine factors having to do with the crime itself (its severity and the stakes involved); we also focus on variables infrequently explored but important for many developing and transition countries. We ask, for example, whether citizens are more or less likely to report crimes to the police when the perpetrator is in fact a police officer—a situation that involves both cooperating with the state and holding the state accountable for its actions. Additionally, we explore the impact of various institutional factors: the ease and anonymity of reporting, appeals to social norms, and the provision of financial incentives. These factors are more under the control of the state than the characteristics of the crime, the victim, and the bystander, which are the focus of much prior work.

Our survey experiments are situated in two post-Soviet states, Russia and Georgia, that share a number of institutional features. In both countries, any decision to cooperate with the state is freighted with meaning, given the Soviet legacy of using citizens as informants. This is especially true of the behaviour that we study: providing information to law enforcement, which in the recent past would have been associated at least as much with regime survival as public order. More generally, Russia and Georgia share a common history of communist rule and the subsequent transition from state socialism during the 1990s.

At the same time, there are important differences between Russia and Georgia, including in their histories of police reform and cultures of reporting. In Russia, the public remains wary of a police force that displays predatory behaviour towards the citizens it is supposed to protect, whereas in Georgia, there is widespread public approval of a police force that underwent deep reforms in the mid-2000s. At the same time, various observational studies suggest that Georgians are generally less likely to report crimes to the police than are citizens of other postcommunist countries, including Russia. Our goal is not necessarily to explain these differences in levels of cooperation with the police, which may have deep roots beyond the focus of our study. We are, however, attentive to

the possibility that institutional and cultural variation may be reflected in differences in the effects of treatments manipulated in our survey experiments.

In fact, and somewhat against our expectations, we find few systematic cross-country differences in treatment effects. In both countries, a key determinant of citizen engagement with the police is the severity of the crime. In contrast, instruments that are more under the direct control of the state generally have a negligible impact on stated willingness to report crimes to the police—this notwithstanding a successful history of police reform in one of the two countries we examine. The sole exception to this general conclusion is that citizens in both Russia and Georgia appear far more likely to report crimes when guaranteed anonymity, a mechanism that in principle is available to state authorities. As we discuss below, this finding contrasts sharply with results from observational data from countries in other political environments, reinforcing the value of our research design and setting.

Our essay makes two broad contributions to the existing literature. First, a rich and vast body of work, which we summarise below, has attempted to identify demographic and contextual covariates of the decision to report a crime. Most of these studies are based on observational data, raising the possibility that unobserved factors drive observed correlations. Our study, in contrast, randomly assigns contextual variables across respondents to measure their influence on reporting behaviour. Relative to other experimental methods, our approach comes with obvious trade-offs. On the one hand, we cannot directly test the assumption that respondents would behave in practice as they state that they would in response to survey questions. On the other hand, we are able to explore contextual variables (such as the perpetrator and severity of a crime) that could not be easily or ethically manipulated in a field experiment.¹

Second, existing studies of crime reporting have been mostly conducted in democratic and wealthy countries with relatively good legal and law-enforcement institutions.² Our research setting of Russia and Georgia allows us to extend this work to more weakly institutionalised environments. In so doing, we broaden the focus of existing work to include variables such as whether the crime is committed by a police officer, which may be more relevant in countries with a history of weak rule of law.

The continuing relevance of this study is underlined by slow but ongoing processes of reform in the post-Soviet region. As countries throughout the region propose and implement various police reform programmes (Marat 2018; Trochev & Slade 2019), they each must confront the quandary of how to encourage cooperation from the public in reporting and investigating crime. Our findings suggest that, while the state may try to

¹A small experimental literature on crime reporting generally focuses on instruments different from those we explore. See Lasley and Palombo (1995), Goudriaan and Nieuwbeerta (2007), Aviram and Persinger (2012), Kivivuori *et al.* (2012), Tolsma *et al.* (2012), and Buckley *et al.* (2016).

²For exceptions, see Birkbeck *et al.* (1993), who compare the United States and Venezuela; Bennett and Wiegand (1994) on Belize; Zhang *et al.* (2007) on China; Tankebe (2009) on Ghana; Sheu and Chiu (2012) on Taiwan; Kochev *et al.* (2013) on Trinidad and Tobago; Sidebottom (2015) on Malawi; Buckley *et al.* (2016) on Russia; Boateng (2018) on Ghana; and Gingerich and Oliveros (2018) on Costa Rica. Also see Estienne and Morabito (2016), who use ICVS data to look at determinants of reporting robbery and assault in 23 developing and transition countries.

introduce various reforms that could encourage reporting, thereby boosting police efficacy, cooperation from the public is not so easily gained.

The essay proceeds as follows. In the next section, we summarise the existing literature, identifying a number of factors that may influence citizens' willingness to report crimes to the police. Following this, we describe our data. We then discuss the design of our four survey experiments and our results. In the final section, we offer concluding thoughts.

Motivations for engaging with the police

When might a crime victim or a witness to a crime decide to contact the police? In the tradition of economic analyses of crime and punishment (Becker & Landes 1974), scholars have explored numerous factors that might influence reporting. Here we focus on two broad categories of factors that we can manipulate using survey experiments. The first group of variables examines features of the crime, such as its severity and the identity of the perpetrator, whereas the second focuses on institutional factors, including the presence of financial incentives, the ease of reporting, the possibility of anonymous reporting, and the presence of social norms.³

Features of the crime

The severity of the crime may be a prime motivator for reporting.⁴ In fact, studies that use observational data from international crime-victim surveys typically find that the most common reason given for not reporting is that the crime is not serious enough to do so (Skogan 1984; Carcach 1997; Bureau of Justice Statistics 2003; Goudriaan *et al.* 2004; van Kesteren & van Dijk 2010). That said, perceptions of severity can be quite individual. In the case of theft of a family heirloom, for example, there may be a strong emotional attachment to the item, which can increase the perceived severity of the crime beyond that implied by the item's material value (Bowles *et al.* 2009). Severity can also

³There is a vast literature on determinants of crime reporting; for overviews, see Skogan (1984), Tarling and Morris (2010), and Xie and Baumer (2019). Among the many considerations that we do not examine are victim or witness characteristics; community features, such as the location of the crime or local crime rates; the belief that information about the crime is useful; citizens' past experiences with crime, crime reporting, or the police (Conaway & Lohr 1994; Goudriaan *et al.* 2004); the psychological costs of reporting (for example, self-blame and social stigma in cases of sexual violence); and the possibility of recovering property or compensation from an insurance company (not a common scenario in our research setting). We also do not engage with the impact of victim/witness perceptions of police legitimacy, procedural justice, trust in the police (Tyler 1990; Sunshine & Tyler 2003), or corruption (Soares 2004). Instead, the experimental design we employ in this essay allows us to focus on concrete crime-related and institutional factors driving engagement with the police rather than demographic and attitudinal determinants of crime reporting, which are more often the focus in existing observational literature.

⁴The number of offenders as well as relations between the victim and the perpetrator may shape perceptions of severity (Block 1974; Lynch & Danner 1993). In particular, if offenders are friends, neighbours, or family members, the victim may attempt to solve the problem on her own rather than involving the police (Felson *et al.* 1999). Looking beyond immediate relations, crime victims may be afraid of retaliation by the perpetrator or anticipate being intimidated into not participating in the criminal justice process.

be measured in terms of violence, and indeed, various studies find that respondents are more likely to report violent crimes (Skogan 1984).

Features specific to the perpetrator of the crime may also shape incentives to report. One such characteristic, largely ignored in the literature (perhaps because most studies of crime reporting take place in well-institutionalised settings), is whether the perpetrator is himself an officer of the state. In countries with weak institutions, police officers often use their authority to break the law as well as to enforce it (Ivkovic 2005; Brinks 2007; Gerber & Mendelson 2008). Citizens of such countries who report crimes committed by the police to the police may bear a direct cost of reprisal.⁵ Anticipating this threat, victims or witnesses may be reluctant to report, thus failing both to cooperate with the state and to hold the state accountable for its actions. This is particularly true for those who may have directly witnessed police violence (Gingerich & Oliveros 2018). Further, fear of retaliation may also be greater in countries where the police generate additional income by selling information about criminal investigations (Taylor 2011). Alternatively, and not mutually exclusively, potential reporters may expect that the police will fail to act on reports of crimes committed by one of their own, or otherwise abuse their powers in the investigation process for personal gain (Semukhina 2016).

Institutional context

While features of the crime and perpetrator may be important, reporting rates may also depend on the nature of formal institutions. Among these is the institution of the police, as previously discussed in the context of police officers who commit crimes. Generalising from this particular scenario, citizens who believe that the police are ineffective, incompetent, or corrupt may not bother reporting a crime. In cross-national surveys, Skogan (1984) and Estienne and Morabito (2016) find that such perceptions are less important predictors of reporting than the seriousness of the crime, though others conclude that perceptions of police effectiveness matter more for reporting some crimes than for others (Goudriaan *et al.* 2004; Boateng 2018) or when perceptions of effectiveness are particularly high or low (Torrente *et al.* 2017). Citizens may also be more motivated to report if the police are viewed as legitimate, as when police procedure is judged to be fair (Sunshine & Tyler 2003).

Other features of the institutional environment may also play a role. In principle, monetary rewards may encourage victims and bystanders to report crimes.⁶ On the other hand, such rewards may have the perverse effect of externalising intrinsic motivations, making it less likely that citizens will report crimes to the police (Bickman & Helwig 1979).⁷ Payment for information may also make citizens feel like police informants rather than good citizens. Research that has examined reward mechanisms in more strongly

⁵Although fear of retaliation is rarely mentioned in crime-victim surveys as a reason for not reporting, we do not know how or if that relates to bystanders' decisions (van Kesteren & van Dijk 2010).

⁶See, for example, the recommendations of the National Crime Prevention Council, available at: <https://www.ncpc.org/resources/home-neighborhood-safety/strategies/strategy-crime-tip-rewards/>, accessed 26 October 2020.

⁷This view is similar to that of Titmuss (1970), who argues that paying people to donate blood would reduce the supply of blood.

institutionalised settings has found mixed results, reinforcing the value of examining this policy mechanism (Challinger 2004).

Because the decision to cooperate is not costless, one might expect reporting to be less likely when the costs of doing so are high. Typically, the largest such cost is the opportunity cost of time spent reporting a crime to the police. This includes the time needed to go to the police station or phone the police to file a report, which in turn depends on the time spent by the police officer taking the report.⁸ If the case does go forward, additional time may be spent during the investigation process and at trial. Beyond the opportunity cost of time spent, there is also the emotional cost that may come with a long and drawn-out process or, for the victim, the process of reliving the crime each time it is described. In multiple other contexts, time and emotional costs are cited as primary reasons for not pursuing a claim in civil court (Felstiner *et al.* 1980–1981; Engel 2005; Hendley 2010), and it seems plausible that these factors would also play a role in criminal cases.

Some of the costs described here may be lower if reporting can be done anonymously. Programmes that use anonymity to encourage crime reporting are employed widely, but there is still much to learn about their effectiveness. Although the existing literature suggests that anonymous reporting plays little role in encouraging crime reporting (Bickman & Helwig 1979; Tolsma *et al.* 2012), the observational nature of such studies and their focus on developed democracies leave open the possibility of an effect with our research design and setting.⁹

Finally, informal institutions such as social norms may influence reporting rates. A crime victim or witness may feel a sense of civic duty that compels them to cooperate; they may report the crime because they hope that others would do the same in their position or because they do not want the same thing to happen to others. Indeed, respondents in (observational) studies of crime-victim reporting in wealthy democratic countries often attribute their behaviour to a feeling of civic duty, broadly conceived (Smith & Maness 1976; Goudriaan *et al.* 2004; Tarling & Morris 2010).

Of course, not all social norms encourage reporting. In many cultures, there is a stigma that accompanies cooperation with the police, including reporting crimes (Ruback *et al.* 1999). This may be particularly true in the post-Soviet context, where there is a long history of the state's using citizens as informants (Kelly 2005).¹⁰ That said, even residents of post-authoritarian states may share a desire for basic law and order, which is difficult to achieve without some cooperation with the police.¹¹ Our focus on

⁸In a survey-experimental design set in the Netherlands, Tolsma *et al.* (2012) find that changing the accessibility of the police and the reporting method does not make much difference in stated willingness to report, whereas reducing the time spent reporting does. Lasley and Palombo (1995), in turn, find in a lab experiment that being able to use the internet rather than the telephone encourages more reporting.

⁹See Gingerich and Oliveros (2018) who advocate for this policy change in Costa Rica.

¹⁰That said, informers sometimes served to hold state officials, including enterprise managers, accountable for their actions; see Lampert (1985).

¹¹Using data from a survey of Moscow residents, McCarthy (2014) documents strong support for local patrol officers (*uchastkovyi*) who would be responsible for addressing crimes like those described in our vignettes.

non-political crimes may thus minimise the impact of Soviet legacies on the incentive to report.

Research setting

Our research settings are Russia and Georgia, two postcommunist countries that share a number of similarities yet have pursued markedly different policies of police reform. Russia and Georgia emerged from the socialist period with similar policing organisations and histories of institutional change. Police forces in both countries were seen as ineffective and corrupt, and they were generally distrusted in the early postcommunist years (Taylor 2006). Both countries experienced a period of institutional collapse following the breakup of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, and both pursued the standard set of postcommunist reforms such as liberalisation and privatisation (Papava 2005).

At the same time, the two countries differ in obvious ways, such as their economic scale, industrial structure, and integration into the global economy. In addition, and notwithstanding the general tendency of state socialism to generate informal practices to solve everyday problems (Bunce 1999; Ledeneva 2006; Burakova 2011; Kakachia & O'Shea 2012; Light 2013a), Georgia had a larger second economy and an arguably stronger reliance on informal institutions during the Soviet period (Mars & Altman 1983).¹² These practices, as well as numerous other historical and cultural factors that are beyond our control, may affect general tendencies to cooperate with the police. We are much less interested in accounting for any differences in these baseline levels than in how subjects respond to the treatment conditions in each country.

More importantly for our study, Russia and Georgia also engaged in markedly different strategies of police reform in the decade prior to our survey, with potentially important consequences for citizens' willingness to engage with the police. After the Rose Revolution in 2003, President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia swiftly introduced wide-ranging and deep reforms of nearly the entire Georgian police system, with the goal of eradicating systemic corruption.

The police force was downsized and police officers were dismissed *en masse*, including almost all traffic police officers; according to Light, 'of the approximately 25,000 employees serving in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, some 16,000 were dismissed within two years of the Rose Revolution' (Light 2013a, p. 7). There was also significant structural reorganisation, with the police limited to tasks that focused on enforcing laws while their previous authority to issue passports and registration documents was moved to a newly created civilian agency. Finally, the reform significantly increased police salaries and instituted new training programmes and competitive entry requirements. The police now earn substantially more than the average wage in Georgia, and the status of the profession has increased (Kakachia & O'Shea 2012; Light 2013a).

¹²Already during Soviet times, the Georgian economy was notorious for its vast informal sector and its many networks of political patronage, greased by corruption and associated practices' (Kupatadze 2018, p. 5).

The results of Georgia's reform were impressive. Low-level bribery, which was previously commonplace, has virtually disappeared; links between the police and organised crime were largely eliminated; major crime has declined. For the average Georgian citizen at the time of our survey in 2013, the police had become a dependable, effective force that they trusted and could call on in times of need (Kakachia & O'Shea 2012; IRI 2013; Light 2013a). Residents also ranked the police highly for their readiness to help and their ability to fight crime (Bonvin 2006).¹³

Meanwhile, Russia's police reforms have been limited both in scope and in impact on real-world police operations and police–society interactions. The most recent reform effort in 2011 involved renaming the police, introducing new behaviour codes for personnel, reducing the size of the force by 22% through a recertification process, and raising the salaries of those who remained (Solomon 2014; Taylor 2014). In addition, the local police are now required to hold quarterly meetings with the public.

These reforms appear to have had little impact on citizen–police relations or the efficacy of the police in preventing and fighting crime. Police work remains a low-status job, and there has been little effort to professionalise the force, as in Georgia, through stricter training requirements or a more competitive entrance exam (Taylor 2014). Problems with corruption, abuse, and the commercialisation of police functions remain rampant; despite rhetoric to the contrary, there appears to be little political will to address these issues (Gilinsky 2011; Kosals & Dubova 2012; Taubina 2012; Solomon 2014). The mandatory quarterly meetings with the public, if they happen at all, are usually formal affairs (for example, an accounting of local crime statistics) that afford little opportunity for dialogue with citizens. Finally, the slimming-down process appears to have increased corruption, created personnel shortages, and driven out many good police officers.¹⁴ Although trust in the police has increased somewhat in recent years, the police remain mostly unreformed in their everyday practices and patterns of behaviour (McCarthy 2015; Levada Centre 2017, 2018; Paneyakh *et al.* 2018).

These contrasting experiences with police reform are reflected in very different attitudes towards the police. In the surveys we describe below, conducted in 2012 and 2013, we asked respondents in Russia and Georgia to assess the degree to which they trust the police in their country on a five-point scale. The mean response in Russia was 2.9 ($SD = 1.0$), compared to 3.9 in Georgia ($SD = 1.0$). Other contemporaneous surveys conducted in these countries provide such telling figures as 86% favourability ratings for the police in Georgia (IRI 2013) and 34% satisfaction with and trust in local police in Russia (Levada Centre 2012).

Somewhat paradoxically, crime reporting has historically been lower in Georgia than in Russia, even after Saakashvili's reforms. Although the data are not fully comparable, various rounds of the International Crime Victim Surveys (ICVS) suggest that Georgians are among

¹³Recent research has revealed a more mixed record of the Georgian police reform programme, as concerns about high-level corruption, lack of civilian oversight, abuse of detainees, violent crackdowns on protests, and overzealous enforcement of drug laws have driven down trust in the police (Lehmbruch & Sanikidze 2014; Asatiani & Coalson 2015; Nasuti 2016; Fuller 2018; di Puppò 2019). According to a 2018 public opinion poll, favourable opinion of the police had fallen from a high of 90% in 2012 to 50% (IRI 2018).

¹⁴Glava Fonda "Obshchestvennyi verdikt": Pereattestatsiya lishila politsiyu luchshikh sotrudnikov', 25 April 2012, available at: http://publicverdict.org/topics/lib_experts/10214.html, accessed 26 October 2020.

the least likely to report crimes among respondents in 12 democratic and postcommunist countries (van Dijk 2012, Table 5). Data from the 1992, 1996, 2010, and 2011 rounds of the ICVS suggest a reporting rate of roughly 40–48% for burglary in Georgia, compared to 61–63% in Russia in 1992 and 1996 (Zvekic 1996, Table 5; Van Dijk & Chanturia 2012). In a similar survey that we conducted in 2011 with Moscow residents, 60% of respondents who had experienced a crime stated that they had reported it to the police.¹⁵ Again, however, our main goal is not to explain baseline levels of reporting between Russia and Georgia, but to explore differences in response to our experimental treatments.

Methodology

To understand the impact of institutional and crime-related factors on willingness to report crime to the police, we conducted surveys of the general population in both Russia and Georgia to explore the determinants of citizen engagement with the police. This empirical approach offers substantial strengths, even as we also acknowledge its limitations. Survey experiments such as those we conducted in Russia and Georgia allow us to manipulate the empirical context in ways that would be unethical in a field experiment and impractical otherwise. The method also allows us to precisely control the composition of our survey samples, the treatments being delivered, and the measurement of outcomes. Such conditions are difficult to satisfy, for example, in settings characterised by natural experiments, though the latter may offer the advantage of studying real-world outcomes. Our approach also stands in contrast to more qualitative work, with the typical trade-off between inference from a large sample and the rich ethnographic detail that can be obtained from more targeted inquiries. While we seek to obtain an accurate, comprehensive view of the forest, much work remains to be done on examining the trees.

Within Russia, we hired the Levada Centre, a leading polling firm based in Moscow, to conduct a nationally representative survey of 1,601 adult residents of Russia in late 2012. After having previously piloted three of the survey experiments that we describe below in a Moscow-only survey in late 2011, we added a series of questions to the firm's monthly nationally representative survey of the population, known as the Courier (*Kur'er*), which took place from 10–20 December.¹⁶ The survey includes 128 sampling points drawn from 46 of Russia's 83 regions. The Courier uses a four-stage stratified sample with strata at the level of community, electoral district, household, and individual. Interviewers spoke with respondents face-to-face at their homes. Only one respondent per household was selected for participation in the survey, with quotas for gender-age and gender-education. The response rate of those who were contacted was 48%, for a final sample of 1,601 respondents. Twenty percent of those who took part in the survey were telephoned to

¹⁵The figures for all types of crime reporting in the ICVS for Russian and Georgia are much lower than those for more established democracies, see *International Crime Victim Survey*, available at: <http://wp.unil.ch/icvs>, accessed 29 October 2020. For further estimates from survey data of crime-reporting rates in Russia, see http://publicverdict.org/articles_images/11491_59458_index1113.pdf, accessed 26 October 2020.

¹⁶Although there are subtle differences in question wording, the results from this pilot survey are qualitatively similar to those that we report below (Buckley *et al.* 2016).

check the accuracy of their responses as reported by the interviewers. With this sample design, the margin of error in the survey is less than 3%.

We subsequently contracted with the All-Russia Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) to put an identical survey in the field in Georgia in mid-2013.¹⁷ The utmost effort was taken to ensure that the survey questionnaire, sampling methodology, and survey implementation process in Georgia matched those in Russia to the greatest degree possible. To verify the accuracy of the Georgian questionnaire, we translated the survey instrument from Russian into Georgian and then back into Russian. A nationally representative sample of 1,601 adults from 40 sampling points was interviewed between 2 and 19 June 2013. Of these sampling points, 20 were in urban centres and 20 were in rural areas. As Russian is still widely spoken in some Georgian regions, we offered our respondents the choice of having the survey administered in either Russian or Georgian. Survey implementation included standard monitoring and control procedures, including repeat control visits to 15% of households. Of the individuals contacted and requested to participate in the survey, 30% assented and were successfully interviewed.

To check for egregious administrative error, we conducted balance tests on the 11 covariates used in the regressions reported above. Figures A5 and A6 in the [online Appendix](#) report results for Russia and Georgia, respectively. In both countries, the number of significant results is approximately what we would expect by chance: 11 out of 132 *p*-values significant at 0.10 in the Russian sample, nine out of 132 in the Georgian sample. Relative to the Russian survey, there were unexpectedly high rates of item non-response for the potentially sensitive survey experiments in Georgia. To check that this was not the consequence of some failure in survey implementation, we worked with VTsIOM to verify that proper interview procedures were taken and that the data were recorded correctly. Our results are unchanged when controlling for demographic characteristics that may be correlated with non-response, as shown in Tables A1–A4 as well as when we replace missing values through multiple imputation.

Within each survey, we embedded four survey experiments that manipulated contextual and institutional variables that may influence reporting a crime to the police; the pre-translation wording of the experiments was identical in the two surveys (other than a currency difference, which we describe below). Randomised assignment of treatment in these survey experiments allows us to identify the impact of specific variables on the probability of reporting a crime to the police, independent of other variables discussed in the literature.

In each of the four experiments, we provided vignettes that placed citizens in hypothetical scenarios; for obvious reasons, it is usually impractical to directly test citizens' reactions to such events.¹⁸ Three of the four experiments ask our respondents to put themselves in the shoes of a bystander witnessing a crime, the fourth asks respondents to put themselves in the shoes of a victim.

¹⁷Bidding procedures mandated by Russian law (the Georgian survey was bid in Russia, where our funding was located) prevented us from choosing the same survey firm for both countries.

¹⁸One study in the United States did so. Bickman and Helwig (1979) first surveyed subjects about the likelihood they would report shoplifting and then staged multiple instances of shoplifting at a supermarket to see if intent matched behaviour. It did: 78% of those who said they would report did so, whereas most of those who said they would not, did not.

*Survey experiments and results**Experiment 1*

In the first question, we vary the severity of the crime and the identity of the perpetrator, as follows:

Survey experiment 1

Treatments:

1. Suppose you saw a police officer taking a wallet and mobile phone from a drunk person lying near a bus stop.
2. Suppose you saw a police officer beating a defenceless person.
3. Suppose you saw someone taking a wallet and mobile phone from a drunk person lying near a bus stop.
4. Suppose you saw someone beating a defenceless person.

Would you report this to the police?

Responses: certainly not; probably not; maybe, maybe not; probably; certainly

We anticipate that most respondents, regardless of country, would view beating a defenceless person as a more severe crime than theft, potentially increasing the benefits from reporting it (for example, public safety is increased if a violent offender is taken off the street). With respect to the identity of the offender, the costs of cooperation may be higher if reporting on a police officer, as a police officer may have greater ability to retaliate. Negative perceptions of the police—that they protect their own, rather than protecting the public—also imply that there may be a higher perceived likelihood that the offence will go uninvestigated or unpunished, thereby lowering the willingness to report because it would be seen as a waste of time with little chance of a successful resolution.

Our results from the first survey experiment are strongly consistent with the first of these predictions. As shown in [Table 1](#), which, for each country, averages across all possible responses (on a five-point scale) for each of the four treatment groups, citizens in both Russia and Georgia are significantly more likely to report a crime that involves beating a defenceless person. (In the online Appendix, we provide the full distribution of responses to this and the subsequent survey experiments for each of the various experimental groups.) In contrast, there is only limited evidence in support of the second prediction. Russian respondents who receive the ‘beating’ treatment are significantly less likely to say that they would report a crime perpetrated by a police officer than by a stranger, but there is no significant difference for those who receive the ‘stealing’ treatment, and no difference for either group among Georgian respondents.

Given differences in the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of police reform in Russia and Georgia we might expect to find differences across the two countries. What do the data say? [Table 1](#) reveals two sizable cross-country differences: averaging across all four treatment groups, respondents in Georgia are less likely to report crimes to the police, and the severity of the crime (beating relative to petty theft) matters somewhat less in Georgia than in Russia. To formally test for the significance of these differences, we pool the Russia and Georgia samples and reproduce the 2×2 tables reported above in a regression framework. [Figure 1](#) illustrates the resulting coefficient estimates. On average, the baseline response is a full half-point lower in Georgia than in Russia (2.84 compared to 3.37 on a five-point scale), and the difference in the magnitude of the ‘beating’ treatment between the two countries is significantly different from zero.

TABLE 1
DIFFERENCE-IN-MEANS RESULTS FROM RUSSIA AND GEORGIA: CRIME SEVERITY AND PERPETRATOR IDENTITY

	Russia			Georgia		
	<i>Police officer</i>	<i>Stranger</i>	<i>Difference in means</i>	<i>Police officer</i>	<i>Stranger</i>	<i>Difference in means</i>
Stealing	3.28 (1.18)	3.37 (1.14)	0.09 (0.09)	2.79 (1.51)	2.84 (1.42)	0.05 (0.12)
Beating	3.78 (1.10)	4.01 (0.98)	0.23*** (0.08)	3.10 (1.49)	3.09 (1.45)	-0.01 (0.12)
Difference in means	0.50*** (0.08)	0.64*** (0.08)	0.73*** (0.08)	0.32*** (0.12)	0.26*** (0.11)	0.30*** (0.12)

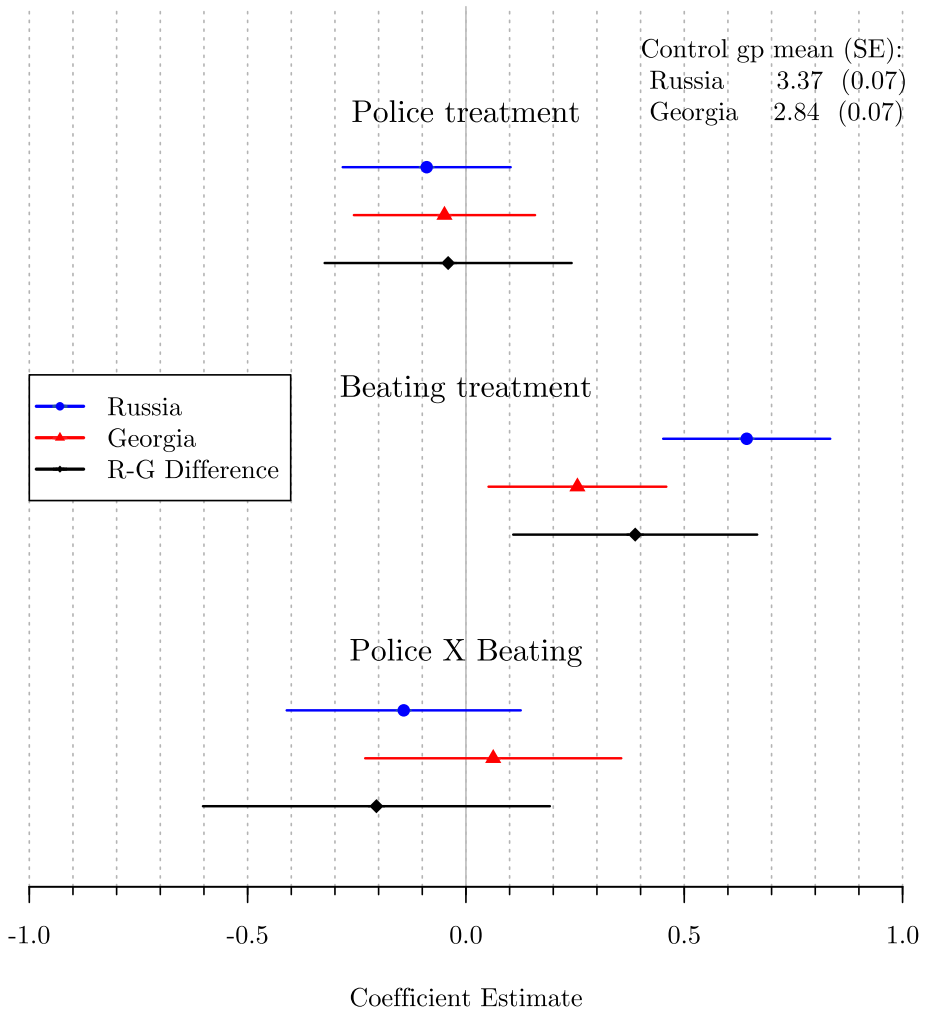


FIGURE 1. COEFFICIENT PLOTS OF SURVEY EXPERIMENT RESULTS: CRIME SEVERITY AND PERPETRATOR IDENTITY

As we show below, the difference in baseline responses between Russians and Georgians on their propensity to report generally holds across all of our four survey experiments. Further, as we demonstrate in the online Appendix, the estimated difference is largely unaffected by controlling for demographic characteristics, which are distributed somewhat differently across the two samples, or by accounting for differences across countries in the willingness of various subgroups to report.¹⁹ Although surprising, given

¹⁹In principle, young respondents in Georgia but not in Russia might be disproportionately inclined to report crimes to the police, given that young Georgians but not young Russians have experienced good policing for most of their adult lives. In practice, as shown in Tables A1–A4 in the online Appendix, there is no significant interaction between age and country for any of our four survey experiments.

differences in police reform in the two countries, the greater willingness of Russians to report crimes is consistent with other survey evidence from the two countries, as discussed above, and may reflect underlying cultural characteristics not captured by our demographic controls. These results suggest that even where police reforms have been effective, as in Georgia, it may be difficult to quickly engineer high levels of engagement with the police. For the remainder of the essay, we focus on the effects of our various experiments in each country.

Experiment 2

In the second survey experiment, we vary the identity of the offender and the anonymity of reporting, as follows:

Survey experiment 2

Treatments:

1. If you knew about a crime committed by a police officer, and if it was not necessary to leave your personal information to report this crime ...
2. If you knew about a crime committed by a police officer, and if it was necessary to leave your personal information to report this crime ...
3. If you knew about a crime committed by a stranger, and if it was not necessary to leave your personal information to report this crime ...
4. If you knew about a crime committed by a stranger, and if it was necessary to leave your personal information to report this crime ...

... would you report it to the police?

Responses: certainly not; probably not; maybe, maybe not; probably; certainly

One oft-discussed way to promote crime reporting is to promise witnesses some degree of anonymity should they turn to the police. For respondents who fear reprisals or the social costs of reporting, anonymous reporting may give them sufficient confidence to come forward. Thus, we expect that citizens would be more willing to engage with the police if they were not required to provide personal information when reporting a crime, unless there was some sort of benefit to them (for example, a reward) for being identifiable. For reasons just discussed, we also anticipate that the costs of reporting would be greater when a crime is committed by a police officer rather than a stranger, though this may be attenuated when anonymous reporting is allowed. Anonymous reporting is not currently allowed under Russian law (and thus not possible to explore through a field experiment), which requires name and passport information to file an official crime report, though it is possible this is unknown to many respondents. In Georgia, anonymous reporting of crimes is allowed, though this is a recent change, so knowledge of the possibility may be limited (Light 2013b).

Our second survey experiment retains the police officer/stranger contrast but manipulates the anonymity of reporting rather than the nature of the crime. As Table 2 illustrates, in both Russia and Georgia, respondents who are told that it is not necessary to leave personal information to report a crime are far more likely to say that they would do so than those who are told that reporting is not anonymous. Looking across the full distribution of responses, the anonymity treatment produces an increase of 11.1 percentage points (in Russia) and 4.5 percentage points (in Georgia) in the percent of individuals who say that

TABLE 2
 DIFFERENCE-IN-MEANS RESULTS FROM RUSSIA AND GEORGIA: ANONYMITY OF REPORTING AND PERPETRATOR IDENTITY

	Russia			Georgia		
	Police officer	Stranger	Difference in means	Police officer	Stranger	Difference in means
Anonymous	3.65 (1.20)	3.67 (1.16)	0.01 (0.08)	2.77 (1.49)	2.74 (1.39)	-0.04 (0.12)
Not anonymous	3.23 (1.30)	3.27 (1.19)	0.04 (0.10)	2.64 (1.39)	2.44 (1.36)	-0.20* (0.11)
Difference in means	-0.43*** (0.09)	-0.40*** (0.09)	-0.39*** (0.09)	-0.14 (0.11)	-0.30*** (0.11)	-0.33*** (0.12)

they would ‘certainly’ cooperate with the police. In addition, we find that Georgians are more likely to report crimes that have been committed by a police officer than by a stranger, a difference that is statistically significant when reporting is not anonymous but not when it is. In Russia, in turn, the identity of the perpetrator makes no discernible difference in the willingness to report, in contrast to the (weak) effect of the ‘police officer’ treatment in Experiment 1.

Figure 2 illustrates that there is no significant interaction between anonymity of reporting and whether the perpetrator of the crime is a police officer in either country, counter to our

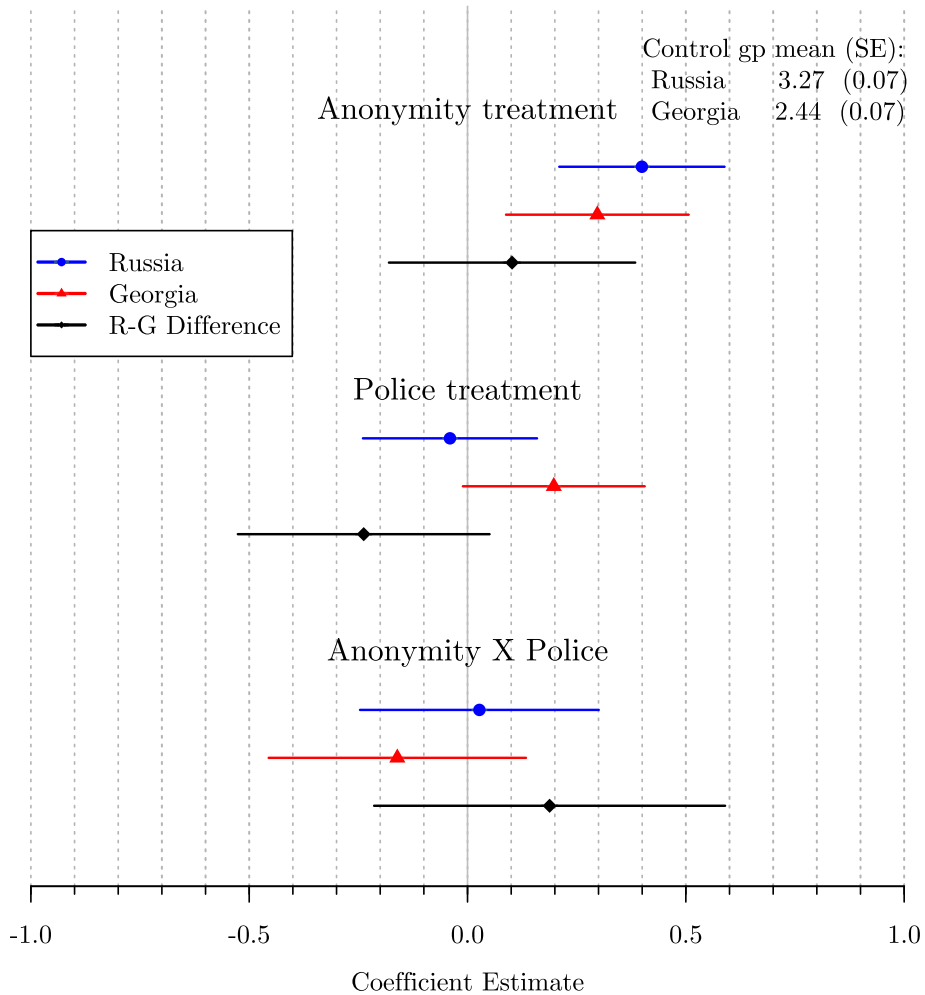


FIGURE 2. COEFFICIENT PLOTS OF SURVEY EXPERIMENT RESULTS: ANONYMITY AND PERPETRATOR IDENTITY

speculation that anonymity of reporting would attenuate fear of reporting on a police officer. Finally, notwithstanding the somewhat different patterns of responses in Georgia and Russia, there are no statistically significant cross-country differences in responses to our experimental treatments.

Experiment 3

In the third experiment, we investigate the impact of two other institutional variables under the state's control, as follows:

Survey experiment 3

Treatments:

1. If you knew about a crime that had been committed ...
2. Many people consider it their civic duty to report to the police if they have information about a crime that has been committed. If you knew about a crime that had been committed ...
3. Imagine that there is a reward of 100,000 rubles (5,000 lari) for information leading to arrest of a criminal. If you possessed such information ...
4. Many people consider it their civic duty to report to the police if they have information about a crime that has been committed. Imagine that there is a reward of 100,000 rubles (5,000 lari) for information leading to arrest of a criminal. If you possessed such information ...

... would you report it to the police?

Responses: certainly not; probably not; maybe, maybe not; probably; certainly

Despite the relatively high value of the reward for reporting—similar to that in a programme discussed by the Russian Interior Ministry in 2012 and implemented in 2018 (Igorev 2012; Rubnikovich & Barinov 2018), and roughly equivalent to four times the average monthly wage in Russia or six times the average monthly wage in Georgia at the time of our survey—it is possible that perceptions of police corruption or inefficiency could render the reward ineffective. As discussed above, a further interesting question is whether material rewards crowd out intrinsic motivations, which for this question would imply that individuals would be less likely to report to the police in scenario 4 than in scenario 2. We do not have strong prior expectations about cross-country differences in the effect of the 'civic duty' treatment.

Table 3 presents results for our third survey experiment, where we manipulate appeals to civic duty and monetary rewards for reporting a crime. There is little evidence that an appeal to civic duty would affect willingness to report crimes to the police in either Russia or Georgia. Differences in means are statistically insignificant in both cases, and the overall distribution of responses is quite similar across the experimental groups. Strikingly, we find that Georgians are in fact negatively incentivised to report a crime to the police when the promise of a monetary reward is presented, as might result from material compensation crowding out intrinsic motivation. Russians, in contrast, are unmoved by the prospect of such rewards, which is consistent with the possibility, discussed above, that perceptions of police corruption or inefficiency render even sizable rewards

TABLE 3
DIFFERENCE-IN-MEANS RESULTS FROM RUSSIA AND GEORGIA: CIVIC DUTY AND MONETARY REWARD

	Russia		Georgia		<i>Difference in means</i>
	<i>No reward</i>	<i>Reward</i>	<i>No reward</i>	<i>Reward</i>	
No civic-duty frame	3.72 (1.07)	3.74 (1.12)	2.91 (1.43)	2.44 (1.38)	-0.47*** (0.11)
Civic-duty frame	3.66 (1.14)	3.68 (1.18)	2.97 (1.41)	2.49 (1.26)	-0.48*** (0.10)
Difference in means	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.08)	0.06 (0.11)	0.05 (0.10)	-0.42*** (0.10)

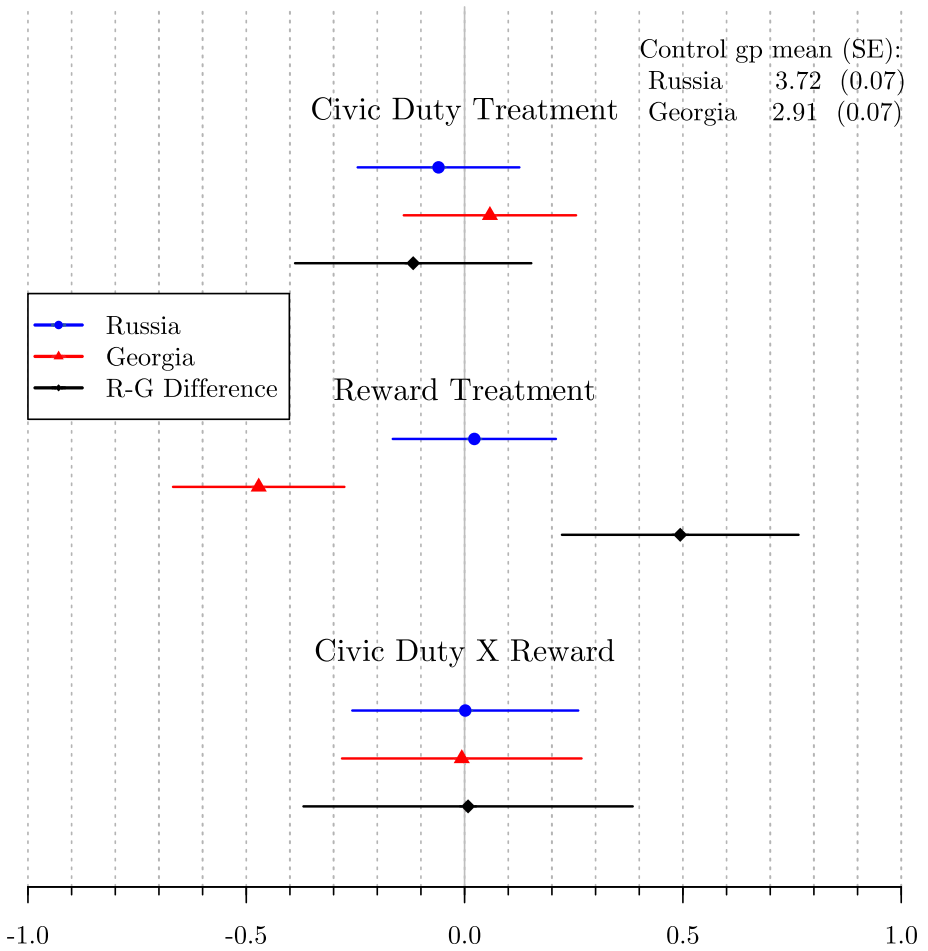


FIGURE 3. COEFFICIENT PLOTS OF SURVEY EXPERIMENT RESULTS: CIVIC DUTY AND MONETARY REWARD

ineffective. The difference between the two national responses is statistically significant, as shown by Figure 3.

Experiment 4

Our first three survey experiments focus on crime reporting by bystanders. What about when the potential cooperator is the victim? In this question, we vary the severity of the crime and the opportunity cost of time, as follows:

Survey experiment 4

Treatments:

1. Suppose some thieves broke into your apartment and stole some not very valuable items, and suppose that reporting this crime to the police would take about two hours.
2. Suppose some thieves broke into your apartment and stole some not very valuable items, and suppose that reporting this crime to the police would take about six hours.
3. Suppose some thieves broke into your apartment and stole some very valuable items, and suppose that reporting this crime to the police would take about two hours.
4. Suppose some thieves broke into your apartment and stole some very valuable items, and suppose that reporting this crime to the police would take about six hours.

Would you report this crime to the police?

Responses: certainly not; probably not; maybe, maybe not; probably; certainly

The phrasing ‘(not) very valuable’ is intended to capture both the physical and sentimental value of the stolen objects. We anticipate that respondents would be more willing to report a crime if the value of stolen objects was high, as well as if reporting the crime took only two rather than six hours. We do not have strong prior expectations about the likely interaction between these two treatments.

As [Table 4](#) demonstrates, respondents in both Russia and Georgia are far more likely to say that they would report a crime if ‘very valuable’ rather than ‘not very valuable’ items were stolen from them. [Figure A4](#) in the [online Appendix](#) illustrates that this difference is driven by a sharp increase in the percentage of respondents who say they would ‘certainly’ report the crime, with approximately 40% and 50% of Russian and Georgian respondents, respectively, who received the ‘very valuable’ treatment indicating that they would do so. The average effect of high-value theft is approximately twice as large in Georgia as in Russia.

In contrast, there is no evidence that the opportunity cost of time plays a strong role in explaining variation in engagement with the police in either country. Regardless of the severity of the crime, the results reported in [Table 4](#) indicate that individuals who are told that it would take about six hours to report a crime are no less likely to say that they would cooperate with the police than those who are told that it would take about two hours. Differences in the severity of the crime seem to matter much more than do differences in the time it takes to report it (see [Figure 4](#)).

Robustness

Our research design, in which respondents are randomly assigned to various treatment conditions, suggests that demographic characteristics are unlikely to drive our qualitative results. [Tables A1–A4](#) in the [online Appendix](#) show this to be the case. Across all four survey experiments, both the direction and magnitude of our treatment effects are robust to controlling for a host of demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, and material wealth.

TABLE 4
 DIFFERENCE-IN-MEANS RESULTS FROM RUSSIA AND GEORGIA: OPPORTUNITY COST OF TIME AND CRIME SEVERITY

	Russia			Georgia		
	Low-value robbery	High-value robbery	Difference in means	Low-value robbery	High-value robbery	Difference in means
Two hours to file report	3.50 (1.18)	3.91 (1.17)	0.41*** (0.09)	3.23 (1.48)	4.04 (1.36)	0.81*** (0.11)
Six hours to file report	3.46 (1.21)	3.91 (1.10)	0.45*** (0.08)	3.37 (1.51)	3.90 (1.35)	0.53*** (0.11)
Difference in means	-0.04 (0.09)	0.00 (0.08)	0.41*** (0.08)	0.13 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.10)	0.67*** (0.11)

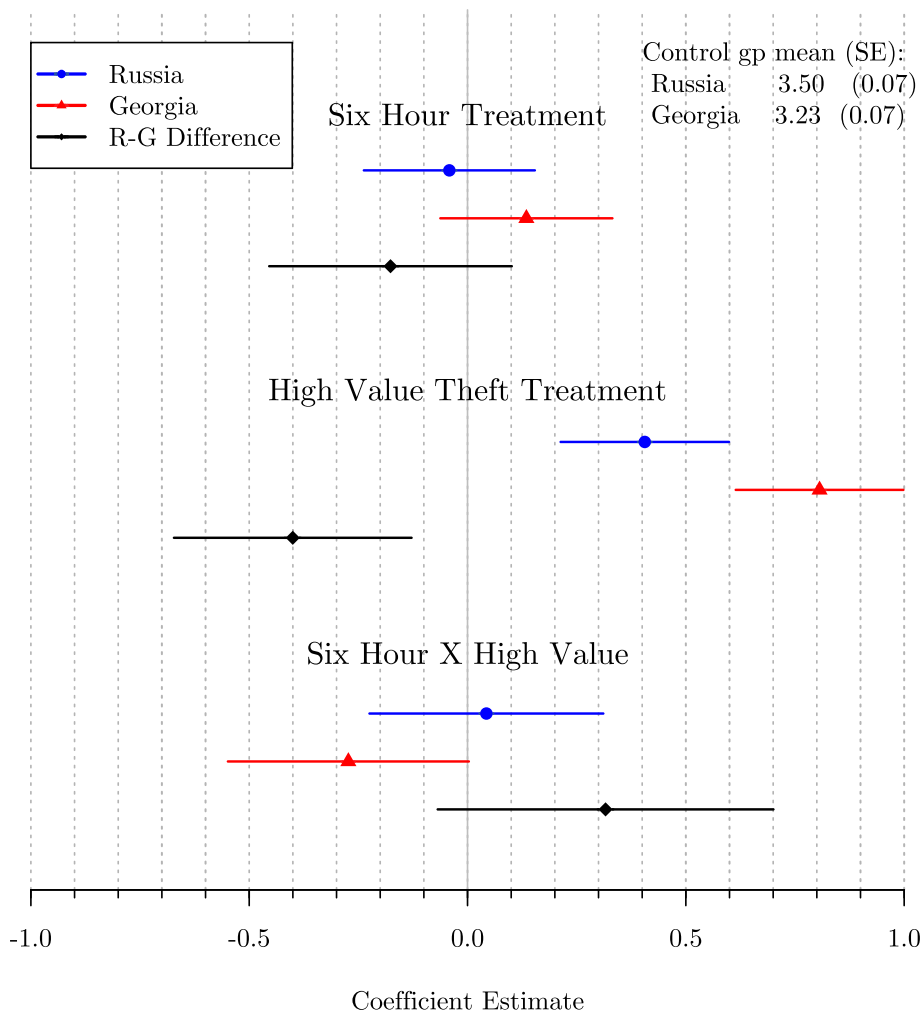


FIGURE 4. COEFFICIENT PLOTS OF SURVEY EXPERIMENT RESULTS: OPPORTUNITY COST OF TIME AND CRIME SEVERITY

One possible concern with our results is that responses could be driven by social desirability bias. In principle, for example, respondents might worry that interviewers would view them as callous if they did not say they would report the beating of a defenceless person, whereas petty theft would not provoke the same response. Although we cannot rule out such considerations completely, the framing of the civic-duty treatment in our third survey experiment ('Many people consider it their civic duty ...') seems most likely to provoke the social desirability bias, yet as shown, there is no significant effect of this treatment in either Russia or Georgia. Conversely, the anonymity

treatment in the second experiment does not seem at risk of such contamination, yet the effect of this treatment is strongly positive in both countries. Our judgment is therefore that social desirability bias is unlikely to play a major role in our findings.

Discussion and conclusions

Using survey experiments conducted in Russia in December 2012 and in Georgia in June 2013, we examine how a number of contextual and institutional factors influence the stated willingness of respondents to report crimes to the police. Our experiments paint the following picture. The severity of the crime matters significantly for whether citizens choose to engage with the police in both Russia and Georgia, as does anonymity of reporting. In contrast, the identity of the perpetrator of the crime plays a relatively small role, though we do find some evidence that Russians are less likely, and Georgians more likely, to report crimes committed by the police. Other factors discussed in the non-experimental literature—material rewards, perceptions of civic duty, and the opportunity cost of time—generally matter little, though Georgians appear to be deterred from cooperation with the police when offered a monetary reward. Finally, we find few significant differences between Russia and Georgia in the estimated effects of our treatments, notwithstanding Georgia's substantially greater progress with police reform. Indeed, Russians appear to be generally more likely to report crimes to the police than are Georgians, a finding that is consistent with earlier results from victim surveys and may also be the case today, given the absence of further reform in either country since our surveys were conducted.

Our results build on a large literature that mostly exploits observational data to identify the correlates of individuals' willingness to report crimes. As in that work, the severity of the crime emerges as a key determinant of reporting behaviour in our survey experiments. At the same time, the identity of the perpetrator has not been much emphasised in existing scholarship, and to our knowledge no previous or subsequent research has identified differences in reporting behaviour depending on whether the perpetrator was himself part of the state apparatus. Understanding how the abuse of power by the police shapes reporting behaviour should be a priority area of future research, particularly in countries without a long history of rule of law.


Most striking, however, is what does not matter for individuals' stated willingness to report crimes. Among the various factors that we study, it is generally those that might be manipulated by the state to encourage greater reporting—material rewards, appeals to civic duty, or the time required to report a crime—that show the least effect (with the caveat that monetary rewards appear to actually deter reporting among Georgian respondents).

Our findings do, however, suggest a narrow opening through which citizens might be encouraged to report crimes to the police. Given that respondents in both countries are substantially more likely to report crimes when guaranteed anonymity, greater attention might be given to ensuring that citizens who do report crimes are protected. That said, it is important to remember the pernicious role that anonymous reporting played in supporting authoritarian rule during the Soviet period in Russia and Georgia. Any debate about the reintroduction of anonymous reporting in these countries would need to

carefully weigh the benefits that we identify against the costs of more negative forms of engagement with the state.

Overall, these experimental findings reinforce a central lesson from the study of cooperation with the state in realms such as taxation and conscription. Engagement with the state is not achieved easily but, rather, is the outcome of a slowly evolving social contract between citizens and the state, an ongoing process in the majority of the world's countries, including Russia and Georgia. As other post-Soviet countries consider how best to reform their police forces, particularly those that look to Georgia's 'shock therapy' approach as a model to be emulated, our results should serve as a cautionary tale. Even where comprehensive institutional reform is feasible and largely viewed as successful in increasing institutional effectiveness and lowering corruption, as in the Georgian case, there should be no expectation that citizens' behaviour will quickly adapt to being more cooperative as a result.

Beyond these normative considerations, our work illustrates the value of using survey experiments to complement observational studies of topics such as crime reporting. Both the similarities and differences from previous work that we find are given greater credence by the knowledge that unobserved characteristics are unlikely to drive our results. At the same time, we hope that the findings we describe here open the door to future scholarship, be it qualitative, focus group-based, large-*N* observational, or experimental. The ability to easily manipulate various features of the crime and institutional context through vignettes is an additional advantage of survey experiments—one that can be profitably employed in future experimental work or built upon by scholars working with other methodologies.

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