NBP. Nauka, bezbednost, policija
Published by
University of Criminal Investigation and Police Studies
2026, Vol. 31, Issue 3, pp.
https://doi.org/10.5937/nabepo31-66647
Original Scientific Paper

Strategic Resilience and Holistic Security Policy in Georgia: EU and NATO Frameworks Under Russian Pressure

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Submitted: 2026-04-20 • Accepted: 2026-09-22 • Published: 2026-09-30

Abstract: Ensuring national security presents a major challenge for Georgia, a post-Soviet state, amid a volatile geopolitical landscape. This article examines strategic resilience as a framework for a comprehensive and holistic security strategy. It reviews core resilience concepts and models, situating them within Georgia's context of Russian aggression, hybrid threats, political polarisation, and emerging risks, including cyberattacks and disinformation. Using qualitative methods, including analysis of Georgia's National Security Concept, threat assessments, and NATO and European Union resilience frameworks, along with ten expert interviews, the study assesses how well Georgia aligns with Euro-Atlantic resilience standards. Special focus is given to NATO's seven baseline requirements for civilian preparedness and EU governance principles related to depolarisation and cyber cooperation. The findings reveal that, while Georgia aligns with EU and NATO resilience principles, implementation remains gradual and scattered. Major gaps remain in civic preparedness, public–private coordination, depolarisation, and cyber capacity. The study suggests that establishing a National Resilience Strategy aligned with NATO benchmarks and supported by EU governance and cyber cooperation mechanisms could enhance both national security and Georgia's path toward Euro-Atlantic integration. The article provides policy-relevant insights for decision-makers and adds to the academic literature on resilience in transitional democracies.

Keywords: strategic resilience, holistic security approach, hybrid threats, national security, Georgia.

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eISSN 2620-0406

INTRODUCTION

Security in the twenty-first century is shaped less by isolated threats than by the convergence of geopolitical competition, technological disruption, and increasingly complex societal vulnerabilities. Against this background, strategic resilience has become a key component of contemporary national security, emphasising the ability of states and societies to absorb shocks, maintain critical functions, adapt to changing conditions, and recover from crises. This broader understanding of resilience is particularly relevant in an environment characterised by interstate conflict, hybrid and asymmetric warfare, cyber threats, natural disasters, and pandemics (Hanson, 2021; Bargués & Morillas, 2021; Helm, 2015).

For Georgia, resilience is especially critical. Its geopolitical stance in the South Caucasus – bordered by Russia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan – creates a precarious security situation. The ongoing Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, along with persistent hybrid tactics, weakens Georgia's sovereignty and hinders its Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Internally, ethnic diversity, economic vulnerabilities, and political polarisation increase vulnerability to external and internal risks. The 2008 Russo-Georgian war exposed the weaknesses in existing security frameworks and underscored the need for a multidimensional approach to national security centred on resilience (Safaryan et al., 2026).

However, strategic resilience is not only about military or economic strength. It also involves the capacity to maintain essential functions under stress, to involve society in crisis response, and to balance immediate reactions with long-term sustainability. For small and medium-sized countries like Georgia, which are limited in resources and lack NATO's collective defence assurances, resilience provides an alternative approach to ensuring stability, governance continuity, and societal protection (Kakachia, 2022).

This article addresses an empirical gap in the literature. Although resilience and total defence are widely discussed internationally, their application to the Georgian context remains underexplored. The study addresses this gap through document analysis, including national security strategies, threat assessments, and international frameworks, combined with expert interviews with current and former decision-makers. In doing so, it brings practical policy insights into the academic discussion of strategic resilience in Georgia.

The article is organised into three parts. The first explores the foundations of strategic resilience, its main features, theoretical bases, and relevant models, stressing the importance of a comprehensive approach. The second examines Georgia's specific threats, comparing traditional security strategies with resilience-based frameworks and incorporating expert viewpoints. The third evaluates the applicability of resilience strategies, including those of NATO and the EU, for Georgia, highlighting institutional gaps and proposing actionable steps toward developing a National Resilience Strategy.

By blending theory, empirical data, and international best practices, this article demonstrates that resilience for Georgia should be a whole-of-society, holistic strategy – viewed both as a crucial national security measure and as a means to deepen Euro-Atlantic ties.

Recent scholarship increasingly treats resilience not as a broad governance metaphor but as a security-governance concept centred on adaptation, civilian preparedness, institutional continuity, and responses to hybrid coercion. In EU-focused research, resilience is closely linked to democratic institutions and societal trust, while NATO-oriented studies emphasise civilian preparedness and adaptation to hybrid threats (Bargués, 2023; Beau-

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mont, 2024; Mészáros, 2025). Building on this literature, the article examines how these principles translate into Georgia's security context and where gaps remain between formal alignment and practical implementation.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research aims to study the characteristics of Georgia's strategic resilience and its relationship to a holistic security approach. Considering the stated goal, the following research objectives have been formulated: Exploring strategic resilience approaches and models; Analysis and assessment of national security challenges and threats in Georgia; Analysis of the relevance of strategic resilience to Georgia; Identifying ways to strengthen strategic resilience and studying national resilience best practices and their relationship with Georgia. Depending on the aim and objectives of the research, two research questions are formed: RQ1: How is strategic resilience institutionalised and implemented in Georgia, and what factors explain the gap between formal commitments and operational capacity? RQ2: To what extent does a holistic security approach explain the strengths and limitations of Georgia's strategic resilience under Russian pressure and within the context of Euro-Atlantic integration?

Two qualitative methods were employed in the study: document analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs). In both cases, the selection was made through non-probability purposive sampling. The interview component consisted of ten semi-structured interviews conducted in November–December 2025. Respondents were sampled based on predefined competence criteria. For current and former decision-makers or security-sector personnel, inclusion required at least 5 years of professional experience in a relevant state, security, defence, crisis management, or public policy structure. For expert respondents, inclusion required at least a master's degree and a minimum of 5 years of professional experience in a field directly related to national security, strategic resilience, civil preparedness, cyber and information security, Euro-Atlantic integration, crisis management, or public governance. For respondents selected primarily as academic experts, additional attention was paid to research productivity, including at least three relevant academic publications or policy-oriented research outputs during the previous five years. These criteria were used to ensure that interviewees could comment not merely as observers of public debate but as professionally competent sources with institutional knowledge, analytical expertise, or practical experience relevant to the study's research questions.

The respondent group included two high-ranking decision-makers, former senior personnel from the security sector, and independent experts from academia, policy research, civil defence, cyber and information security, EU/NATO-related governance, and public-sector crisis response. This composition was intended to capture both institutional memory within the state system and perspectives from external experts in the academic and policy communities. Expert respondents were selected based on their visibility in the field, scientific productivity, professional experience, and demonstrated engagement with the topics examined in the article. Decision-makers and former security-sector respondents were selected because their institutional memory and professional roles enabled them to assess how resilience-related policies were formulated, implemented, and constrained from within the system.

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The interviews were not treated as a substitute for documentary evidence or statistical data. Rather, they were used as interpretive evidence to clarify how policy actors and specialists understand the practical implementation of resilience, the causes of institutional fragmentation, the limits of existing security frameworks, and the obstacles to operationalising EU and NATO-related standards in the Georgian context. Interview evidence was triangulated with strategic documents, policy frameworks, and relevant scholarly literature. Where respondents made claims about broader social attitudes, institutional gaps, or legal shortcomings, these claims were treated as expert interpretations and considered credible only when they corresponded with documentary evidence, existing literature, or repeated patterns across interviews.

The interview guide was organised around several thematic clusters: Georgia's main security threats following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; the relevance and limitations of the 2011 National Security Concept and more recent strategic documents; the role of Russian pressure, occupation, hybrid threats, and disinformation; civic preparedness and civil defence capacity; cyber and information resilience; public–private cooperation in critical infrastructure protection; the applicability of NATO's seven baseline requirements and EU governance recommendations to Georgia; the causes of fragmented implementation; and the institutional, legal, and educational reforms required for a National Resilience Strategy.

Given the political sensitivity of national security, Russian pressure, and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation, all respondents were anonymised and referred to by functional codes rather than by name. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and consented to participate in anonymised form. Anonymization was used to protect the respondents from possible political or professional risks and to allow them to speak more freely about sensitive institutional and security-related issues. The study therefore reports only general professional categories and areas of expertise, rather than personal identifiers.

The interview material and documents were analysed through qualitative thematic analysis. First, the material was read and organised around the article's core themes: strategic resilience, holistic security, civil preparedness, cyber and information resilience, public–private cooperation, Euro-Atlantic standards, political polarisation, and institutional fragmentation. Second, recurring patterns across interviews were compared with documentary evidence and relevant scholarly literature. This made it possible to distinguish between individual expert opinion and findings supported by multiple sources. The analysis therefore relied on methodological triangulation rather than on interview testimony alone.

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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS, MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND MODELS OF STRATEGIC RESILIENCE

There is no single, universal definition of resilience in either international or academic contexts. The concept is multifaceted, spanning disciplines such as ecology, engineering, psychology, and the social sciences. Its meaning varies depending on the field and the analytical context in which it is used. In this article, resilience is understood within the field of national security and is approached through a holistic security perspective. Strategic

resilience in security studies refers to a state's or institution's capacity to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover from complex threats while maintaining core functions and supporting long-term stability (Golverdi, 2018). This understanding is consistent with recent scholarship arguing that resilience has become embedded in NATO's broader adaptation to hybrid threats and post-2022 deterrence thinking (Beaumont, 2024).

NATO, which has made resilience a key security principle, defines it in terms of readiness, resistance, and rapid recovery from shocks and disruptions. While resilience remains primarily a national responsibility, strengthening it also enhances the collective strength of the Alliance. NATO emphasises civil preparedness, including the protection of critical infrastructure, contingency planning, and regular exercises for effective crisis management (North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], 2022). This is particularly relevant for Georgia, which seeks closer Euro-Atlantic integration but does not benefit from NATO's collective-defence guarantees.

The rising importance of resilience is also linked to debates on securitisation and de-securitisation, which shape both academic and policy discussions (Bourbeau & Vuori, 2015). Securitisation, according to the Copenhagen School, occurs when state actors frame issues as existential threats requiring extraordinary measures beyond everyday politics (Buzan et al., 1998). De-securitisation, by contrast, moves issues back into the realm of regular politics and focuses on sustainable solutions (Aradau, 2004). Strategic resilience combines elements of both approaches: it recognises the urgency of threat assessment and resource mobilisation, while also emphasising long-term governance, institutional learning, and systemic problem-solving.

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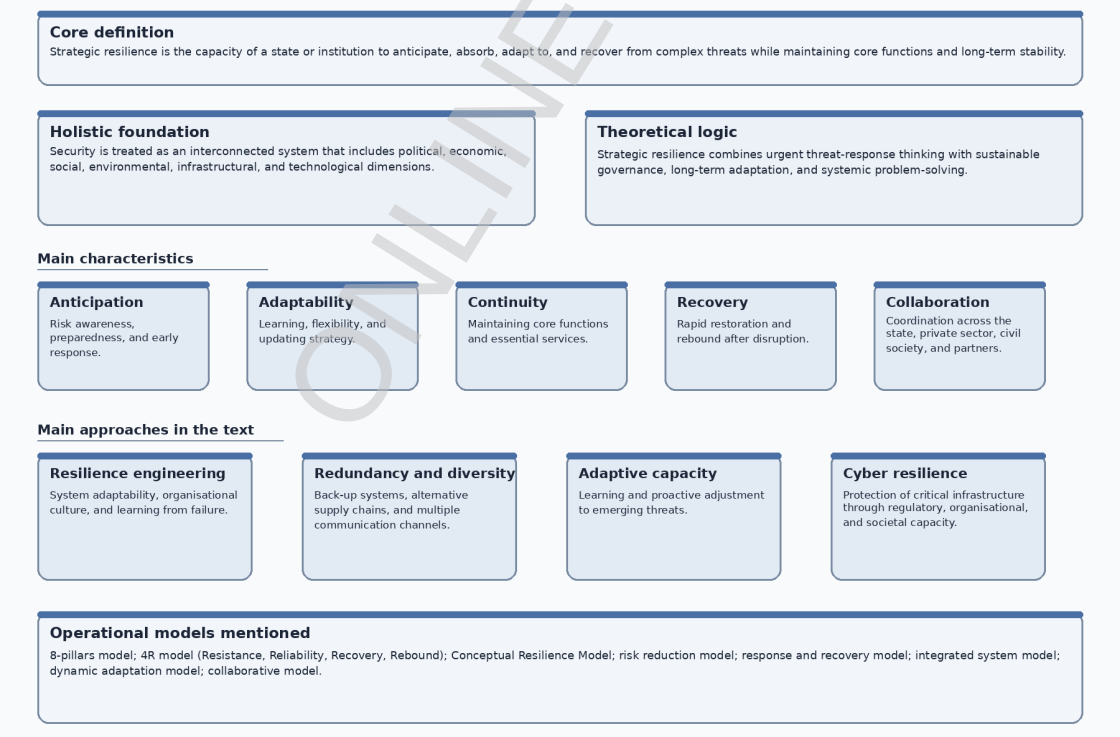


Figure 1. *Conceptual Foundations, Main Characteristics and Models of Strategic Resiliance*

This synthesis introduces the concept of holism. A holistic approach to resilience views security as an interconnected system that includes economic, social, environmental, infrastructural, technological, and political components, which must be understood collectively rather than separately (Sajeva, 2010). Holism emphasises inclusiveness, adaptability, and integration, ensuring that resilience policies address both immediate shocks and long-term vulnerabilities (Hardy, 2014). It also requires cross-sector collaboration among the government, private sector, civil society, and international partners (Rijamampianina & Carmichael, 2005).

Strategic resilience therefore involves not only strong defences but also continuous learning, adaptation, and sustainable governance. Local knowledge and community engagement are important because they build trust, awareness, and social capital, all of which are essential for resilience. Investments in sustainable infrastructure, such as transportation, healthcare, communications, and energy systems, help ensure that essential services remain operational during crises and recover quickly afterwards. Promoting a resilience culture through education and public awareness, where individuals, officials, and organisations learn about risk assessment, emergency planning, and adaptive thinking, is equally important (Ungar, 2008).

Within this broader literature, three analytical elements are especially relevant for the Georgian case. First, the holistic or whole-of-society approach helps assess whether national security is treated only as a military matter or as a broader system involving civic preparedness, public trust, cyber capacity, information resilience, public–private cooperation, and institutional coordination. Second, the 4R model – resistance, reliability, recovery, and rebound – provides a way to evaluate whether a security system can withstand disruption, maintain essential functions, restore capacity after a shock, and adapt in ways that reduce future vulnerability (Bruneau et al., 2003). Third, adaptive capacity highlights the ability of institutions to learn from crises, update strategies, coordinate across sectors, and translate lessons into durable policy mechanisms (Fazey et al., 2007).

These elements are complemented by specific resilience approaches that are directly applicable to Georgia. The resilience engineering approach stresses systemic adaptability, organisational culture, and learning from failures in order to anticipate risks and recover efficiently (Steen & Aven, 2011). The redundancy and diversity principle highlights the importance of backup systems, alternative supply chains, and multiple communication channels to maintain continuity under stress. More recent literature also places cyber resilience at the core of holistic security. Rather than treating cybersecurity as a narrow technical field, current EU-oriented studies conceptualise cyber resilience as a regulatory, organisational, and societal capacity connecting critical infrastructure protection, vulnerability coordination, and legal coherence across sectors (Tasheva & Kunkel, 2022; Ruohonen & Timmers, 2025; Szpor, 2026).

For the purposes of this article, these approaches are not treated as a broad list of disconnected models, but as analytical tools for assessing Georgia's strategic resilience. The holistic approach is used to examine whether Georgia's security system integrates military, civic, cyber, institutional, and societal dimensions. The 4R model is used to assess whether Georgia's resilience is limited to recognising threats or whether it also includes mechanisms for continuity, recovery, and institutional improvement. Adaptive capacity is used to evaluate whether lessons from the 2008 war, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's full-

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scale invasion of Ukraine, and cyber and hybrid threats have been translated into updated strategies, legal frameworks, public–private cooperation, and civic preparedness.

The article therefore explains Georgia's resilience gap not simply as a lack of awareness, but as the result of several interacting causal factors. First, political polarisation weakens the possibility of long-term cross-party agreement on security reforms and makes resilience policy vulnerable to electoral cycles and partisan contestation. Second, weak interagency coordination prevents separate sectoral initiatives in cyber security, civil defence, crisis management, public communication, and Euro-Atlantic integration from becoming part of one coherent national framework. Third, the delayed renewal of strategic documents produces a gap between the rapidly changing security environment and the formal policy architecture through which the state responds to it. Fourth, civic preparedness remains underdeveloped because resilience has not been systematically embedded in education, public awareness, local governance, and routine crisis exercises. Finally, Georgia's reliance on EU and NATO standards creates useful external benchmarks, but these benchmarks do not automatically generate implementation unless they are translated into binding domestic mandates, institutional responsibilities, timelines, and measurable indicators (Khuroshvili, 2025).

This framework allows the article to move beyond description and to explain why Georgia's resilience remains partial, fragmented, and unevenly institutionalised. The problem is not simply that Georgia lacks relevant concepts or international models. Rather, the challenge is that resilience-related ideas are dispersed across different sectors, institutions, and policy documents without being consolidated into a coherent national resilience framework. In this context, strategic resilience is not only a technical or military matter, but a political and societal process requiring leadership, institutional coordination, public trust, civic preparedness, and measurable implementation mechanisms.

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STRATEGIC RESILIENCE: CHALLENGES AND THREATS TO GEORGIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

At the societal level, modern resilience research emphasises civic readiness, effective public communication, and coordinated efforts across society. Recent findings indicate that disaster education, civil protection training, and well-structured interactions between citizens and defence agencies enhance a nation's ability to absorb shocks and withstand strategic pressures during times of increased insecurity (Lacher, 2024; Grzebalska & Kosnac, 2025; Nikkari & Kuivasniem, 2025). Additionally, analyses of Georgia's total defence discourse highlight that civic preparedness and cross-sector collaboration remain underdeveloped, despite the rising importance of hybrid threats and civil defence frameworks (Kutateladze, 2025).

Georgia's national security policy development started in the early 2000s. In 2004, Parliament tasked the National Security Council with developing a national security concept, which was approved in 2005 as Georgia's first comprehensive document outlining the country's national interests, values, and a vision for secure development. In 2007, a presidential decree instructed the Ministry of Defence to prepare a Threat Assessment Document, classified as a state secret. The 2008 Russian–Georgian War revealed weak-

nesses in this framework, including poor interagency coordination and ineffective collective response mechanisms. These issues led to reforms, including the modernisation of the National Security Concept, new institutional roles, and a more unified framework outlined in the 2011 National Security Concept.

While the 2011 National Security Concept remains a key reference for understanding Georgia's security perspective after 2008, it is no longer sufficient on its own to evaluate the country's current resilience landscape. The document outlines core values, national interests, threats, risks, challenges, and guiding security policy principles, serving as a fundamental reference (Ministry of Defence of Georgia, 2011). However, since its adoption, the strategic environment has evolved significantly. Events such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, rising cyber and information threats, the politicisation of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and the emphasis on whole-of-society preparedness have broadened the scope of national security beyond traditional notions of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military defence. Consequently, this analysis considers the 2011 Concept as a foundational reference rather than the sole empirical basis.

Recent Georgian strategic documents indicate an evolving recognition by the state of new vulnerability areas, although these are not yet part of a comprehensive National Resilience Strategy. The 2021–2024 National Cyber Security Strategy of Georgia is particularly significant. Approved by the government in 2021, it highlights threats such as cyberwar, information campaigns, cyberespionage, state-backed cyberattacks, and cybercrime, particularly targeting critical infrastructure (Government of Georgia, 2021). The strategy also links Georgia's cyber weaknesses to external hostile actors and emphasises the importance of safeguarding governmental institutions, society, critical infrastructure, and the country's international reputation. This approach expands the security focus beyond traditional defence, establishing cyberspace, information security, public awareness, and infrastructure resilience as essential components of national security.

This strategy offers a more practical understanding of resilience compared to the 2011 Concept. Its aims include fostering a cyber culture and increasing public awareness, enhancing cyber-governance frameworks, establishing mechanisms for quick detection and reporting of cyber incidents, and promoting cooperation between the public and private sectors (Government of Georgia, 2021). These priorities are highly relevant to this article because they highlight that resilience relies not only on military readiness but also on institutional coordination, social awareness, information security, and the capacity of both state and non-state actors to address technological and hybrid threats collectively.

The Cyber Security Strategy of Georgia's Ministry of Defence for 2021–2024 offers a targeted sector update. While its institutional scope is more limited, it is analytically important because it links defence readiness to cyber resilience. It outlines cyber-security development in defence through three interconnected areas: people, process, and technology. The strategy sets three main priorities: developing human capital, institutionalising cyber-security processes and enhancing governance, and ensuring technological sustainability (Ministry of Defence of Georgia, 2021). It also highlights that cyber threats are utilised in hybrid warfare for sabotage, espionage, and psychological operations, stressing the need to strengthen cyber-security capabilities to align more closely with NATO and EU standards (Ministry

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of Defence of Georgia, 2021). This indicates a shift towards viewing resilience in Georgia's defence sector as a systemic capacity rather than merely a technical issue.

The Whole of Nation Approach (WoNA) initiative is significant because it signals a shift in Georgia's approach to national security planning. Moving away from traditional, state-centred methods, WoNA involves not only government agencies but also civil society, the security community, experts, academics, and the media in shaping the national security vision (Georgian Strategic Analysis Centre, n.d.). Its goals include creating a clear security vision for Georgia, setting out objectives, establishing implementation strategies, sharing this vision with international partners, and developing a comprehensive security document with an action plan (Georgian Strategic Analysis Centre, n.d.). This is relevant because it reflects an acknowledgement at the policy level that a broader, more inclusive, whole-of-society approach to security is necessary, even though it has yet to produce a fully institutionalised National Resilience Strategy.

Georgia's Foreign Policy Strategy for 2019–2022 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2019) emphasises the importance of Euro-Atlantic integration and external alignment as key components of its resilience agenda. Developed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in close collaboration with Georgian diplomatic missions, government agencies, members of Parliament, and civil society, the document highlights that resilience extends beyond domestic governance to encompass Georgia's broader foreign policy goals. The strategy links Euro-Atlantic integration, cooperation with Western partners, and the enhancement of Georgia's international credibility to resilience-building efforts. However, a challenge arises when domestic political polarisation and institutional fragmentation hinder implementation (Gigauri & Dundua, 2024), meaning that formal foreign-policy alignment alone may not ensure operational resilience.

Overall, these documents show that Georgia's resilience efforts have advanced beyond the 2011 Concept, but progress is still fragmented and sector-specific. Cybersecurity strategies have been shaped by national and defence sectors; whole-of-society approaches are evident in the WoNA process; and foreign-policy planning reflects Euro-Atlantic priorities. However, these components remain scattered across various documents and institutions. They do not constitute a unified, comprehensive National Resilience Strategy with defined mandates, benchmarks, coordination mechanisms, deadlines, and measurable indicators. This is why Georgia's resilience is somewhat developed but lacks full institutionalisation: the country recognises the need for a broader approach but has yet to formalise that into a cohesive national resilience framework.

The following analysis therefore examines how these documented vulnerabilities are reflected in respondents' opinions of Russia-related threats, civic preparedness, and emerging cyber risks.

Russia remains a central concern for Georgia's security. Respondents agree that the Concept accurately recognises Russia's goals: to hinder Georgia's democratic progress and prevent its integration with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. One interviewee stated, "The change in Georgia's foreign policy course is naturally one of the components of Russia's foreign policy; it will do everything to ensure that Georgia does not achieve its goal of European integration" (Respondent 2). Others link Russia's refusal to permit international monitoring in occupied regions to covert militarisation and infrastructure development (Respondent 5). Experts emphasise that these deployments are not only military but also

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serve as psychological tools to incite unrest, foster scepticism toward Western integration, and create a sense of existential threat (Respondents 3, 8).

Another ongoing challenge, also present in the 2011 Concept, is civic integration. Paragraph 17 emphasises the inclusion of ethnic minorities in public life. However, as Respondents 9 and 10 point out, over a decade later, the issue has evolved beyond language barriers due to migration, foreign property purchases, and polarised attitudes. One respondent noted, "society is polarised, there is no unified strategy of behaviour in the country, and civilians do not know how to act in an extreme situation" (Respondent 10). While the Concept advocates using education as a civic integration tool, experts argue that education alone is insufficient. Broader measures like civil defence training and practical crisis response instructions are needed but currently lacking. This gap is linked to a wider critique of Georgia's reliance on traditional security, which emphasises state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and military readiness (Buzan, 1991). Although the conventional paradigm treats interstate threats as primary and promotes deterrence through military strength, it increasingly fails to address Georgia's complex security environment. Critics, Aradau et al. (2008), note that focusing narrowly on military security neglects non-state and non-military threats, including cyberattacks, terrorism, environmental risks, and pandemics. Respondents echoed this view, with one emphasising that "total defence depends on the effective organisation and management of all available assets, but civic awareness is missing; without societal readiness, military defence cannot succeed" (Respondent 6). Another added that "without gradual legislative changes and reforms in civil defence, resource allocation will remain ad hoc, leaving the country unprepared for existential threats" (Respondents 9, 10). The lack of civic preparedness is especially problematic in Georgia. One expert said: "There is no readiness to introduce civic education programmes that raise awareness of defence or behaviour in extreme situations" (Respondent 6). This gap undermines the concept of total defence, which presupposes a unified government approach integrating military, civil defence, and international cooperation (Order N141). Here, resilience encompasses not only military strength but also societal resilience, where civilians can contribute to national security during crises. Globalisation and technological advances further challenge the traditional model. As Buzan (1991) and Galtung (1976) observed, global interdependence renders security threats transnational, as climate change, pandemics, and economic crises transcend borders. Respondents also highlighted the technological dimension, noting that cyber threats pose a new generation of risks that traditional military indicators cannot measure. "Cyber space has no limits… obtaining personal data and its dissemination can cause greater damage than traditional military equipment," explained Respondents 3, 4, and 6. This underscores the urgent need to develop cyber resilience as part of Georgia's strategic resilience, an area almost absent from the country's traditional military-focused doctrine.

The IDIs confirm Georgia faces a dual challenge: ongoing geopolitical threats from Russia and a quickly changing security environment driven by social vulnerabilities, civic divide, and emerging technological risks. Respondents highlighted that, while traditional security remains relevant for deterring military threats, it should be part of a broader resilience-focused strategy. This strategy would integrate total defence with civic education, risk management, and new institutions for cyber, environmental, and social security. One expert (Expert 3) also stressed the importance of stronger cooperation with EU mecha-

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nisms, noting resilience should extend beyond national efforts to include Georgia's integration into European security frameworks.

Overall, the documents and expert insights show that Georgia's strategic resilience faces three main challenges: geopolitical and hybrid threats from Russia; internal issues with civic integration and societal readiness; and neglect of new risks like cyber threats and global dependencies. Overcoming these requires shifting from a narrow, traditional view to a comprehensive resilience approach, where national security depends not only on defence but also on civic preparedness, institutional flexibility, and international partnerships.

FROM CONCEPT TO PRACTICE: SHAPING GEORGIA'S NATIONAL RESILIENCE

Building a resilient national system is a complex, long-term task, but it is vital for Georgia's stability, security, and progress. Strategic resilience, as a policy, is based on a National Resilience Strategy that enhances the country's capacity to address various threats – military, political, economic, social, technological, and environmental – while protecting citizens and ensuring the continuity of essential functions (Kakachia, 2022). For a small country outside NATO's collective defence and still strengthening ties with the EU, this is not optional; it is a matter of survival. Simultaneously, EU resilience discussions increasingly focus on hybrid-threat response and institutional cooperation, emphasising the need to connect national preparedness with broader Euro-Atlantic frameworks (Mészáros, 2025; Anagnostakis, 2025).

Georgia faces layered risks that interact with and worsen one another. Expert interviews and key documents identify three risk levels – diffuse, global, and local – each requiring different but coordinated policy measures. Diffuse risks, like pandemics, natural disasters, and uncontrolled migration, have no single source. "Such risks cross borders and scales; even large states struggled during COVID-19. Georgia initially reacted swiftly, reorganising services and setting up hotlines – an example of institutional learning under pressure," said one expert (Respondent 1). At the global level, the primary threat is from the Russian Federation, military occupation, hybrid tactics, cyber attacks, and influence campaigns affecting education, religion, and information spheres. "Post-2022 migration changed local dynamics: some Russians started businesses and employed locals, irritating parts of society; symbols and counter-symbols in public spaces could provoke even if individuals reject the Kremlin's rule," noted another (Respondent 4). A third commented: "No high-profile ethnic conflicts yet, but society remains sensitive" (Respondent 7). The local level is vulnerable to factors that intensify global threats, including poverty, inequality, politicisation, social polarisation, and informality in decision-making. "External actors benefit from polarisation. The EU recommends depolarisation; without a basic social consensus, public support for policy declines," stressed one expert (Respondent 8). Others highlighted that cooperation among political rivals is not betrayal but a necessity for pursuing EU reforms in the national interest (Respondents 2, 5, 9).

This broader outlook is particularly important for Georgia and the Black Sea region at large. Recent regional studies highlight that Russian aggression since 2022 has increased the significance of hybrid threats, strategic transit security, and societal defence. Conse-

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quently, resilience has become not just a governance concern but also a geopolitical necessity for partner countries like Georgia (Otkhozoria, 2025; Kutateladze, 2025).

NATO's resilience guidance serves as a vital reference. The Alliance emphasises civilian preparedness, such as maintaining government continuity, ensuring uninterrupted essential services, and garnering societal support for the armed forces, alongside military capabilities (NATO, 2022). It outlines seven practical benchmarks: ongoing governance; reliable energy supply; capacity to handle large-scale migration; secure food and water resources; resilient communications; dependable transportation; and effective healthcare crisis management. The guidance presumes extensive public–private sector coordination, given that neoliberal reforms have privatised much critical infrastructure (Berziņa & Christie, 2022). One interviewee highlighted Georgia's strategic advantage: "Following NATO 's baseline makes us less vulnerable, enhances credibility, boosts regional transit roles, and signals investment potential" (Respondent 7). However, others warned against outright copying: "Effective practices like Finland 's Comprehensive Security depend on high media literacy, social trust, and non-polarised cooperation; our information space is vulnerable to propaganda, and polarisation hampers cross-sector collaboration" (Respondent 8). A second expert echoed this concern: "Without addressing polarisation and trust issues, the private sector will hesitate to support resilience efforts" (Respondent 10). The takeaway is clear: NATO's framework provides a foundation; local sociopolitical realities determine how much weight it can bear in terms of capacity.

Interviews clarified the link between total defence and national resilience. One expert explained: "Total defence is narrower and military-focused, mobilising society and resources mainly for armed conflict – while national resilience is broader, encompassing prevention and recovery from military, political, and economic shocks" (Respondent 3). Another added: "Georgia has taken steps aligned with total defence – education cooperation, awareness activities, a revamped reserve – but without a formal National Resilience Strategy, these efforts remain fragmented" (Respondent 6). A third highlighted their complementarity rather than opposition: "Neither concept excludes the other; together, they strengthen the state" (Respondent 8). This suggests that Georgia's immediate approach should involve formalising scattered initiatives into a unified strategic framework while continuing defence-focused reforms. Moving from identifying issues to developing policy, both documents and interviews highlight four key areas for implementing a Georgian National Resilience Strategy: legislative and institutional governance, political governance, public–private governance, and societal governance – each with unique challenges and opportunities.

Recent research on EU-NATO relations indicates that effective counter-hybrid strategies rely more on institutional complementarity than on isolated sectoral actions. This is especially important for Georgia, where its resilience efforts depend on domestic reforms, NATO-focused civil preparedness, and stronger operational ties with the EU's emerging cyber and hybrid threat tools (Anagnostakis, 2025; Beaumont, 2024; Mészáros, 2025).

The interviews identify four closely connected implementation gaps: institutional coordination, political sustainability, public–private cooperation, and civic and cyber preparedness. Respondents stressed that fragmented initiatives require clearer legal mandates and stronger interagency coordination, while political polarisation undermines the continuity of security reforms (Respondents 2, 5, 7, 9, 10). Critical infrastructure resilience also depends on closer cooperation with private operators, particularly in essential-service sec-

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tors (Respondent 1; NATO, 2022; Berziņa & Christie, 2022). At the societal level, limited civic preparedness, media literacy, and crisis communication weaken resilience, while cyber security requires stronger incident-response mechanisms, exercises, and operational cooperation with EU and NATO partners (Respondents 3, 4, 6). Taken together, these findings point to the need for a coordinated national resilience framework.

Overall, the combined evidence from policy documents and anonymised interviews shows that Georgia's resilience remains fragmented across five interconnected areas: whole-of-society preparedness, political polarisation, information resilience, legal and institutional codification, and cyber capacity. These findings indicate that NATO and EU frameworks are useful reference points, but they require domestic adaptation through institutional coordination, civic preparedness, public–private cooperation, and measurable implementation mechanisms.

EURO-ATLANTIC RESILIENCE STANDARDS AND GEORGIA'S COMPLIANCE TRAJECTORY

Georgia's strategic resilience should be assessed not only as a tool for national security but also as part of its long-standing path towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Since regaining independence, Georgia has consistently defined its security and foreign-policy orientation through closer integration with European and Euro-Atlantic structures. This orientation is not only a political preference, but also a constitutional obligation. Article 78 of the Constitution of Georgia (Republic of Georgia, 1995/2018) states that constitutional bodies, within the scope of their competences, shall take all measures to ensure Georgia's full integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Therefore, the use of EU and NATO resilience frameworks in this article should not be understood as an uncritical application of external templates. Rather, they are treated as best-practice benchmarks that correspond to Georgia's declared constitutional and strategic orientation.

At the same time, the applicability of these frameworks requires critical assessment. Georgia is not a NATO member and does not benefit from the collective defence guarantees under Article 5. Consequently, NATO's resilience standards cannot be applied to Georgia as if the country were already operating within the same security environment as an Alliance member. NATO's seven baseline requirements are useful as adaptive benchmarks for civilian preparedness, institutional continuity, and whole-of-society resilience, but they do not automatically generate security guarantees or implementation capacity. Their value for Georgia lies in helping identify practical gaps in governance, critical infrastructure protection, crisis management, civil preparedness, and public–private cooperation.

In modern security governance, NATO and the European Union regard resilience as essential for institutional trustworthiness, maintaining operations during crises, and establishing credible partnerships. For a country facing occupation, hybrid coercion, and internal polarisation, resilience serves a dual purpose: bolstering domestic stability and demonstrating alignment with Western security benchmarks. However, Euro-Atlantic alignment alone does not produce resilience unless it is translated into domestic institutions, legal mandates, implementation mechanisms, deadlines, and measurable indicators.

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The European Union increasingly defines resilience in terms of governance quality, trust in institutions, depolarisation, and readiness for hybrid threats. EU advice to Georgia has consistently highlighted depolarisation and cross-party cooperation as essential for successful reforms (Khuroshvili et al., 2024). In terms of resilience, depolarisation is more than just a democratic norm; it is a crucial security requirement. High levels of political polarisation weaken institutional coordination, impair crisis communication, and make the country more vulnerable to disinformation. Interviews for this study strongly support this view, with respondents 2, 5, 8, and 9 identifying polarisation as a key structural weakness that enhances Russian influence and hinders reform progress. As Respondent 8 stated, without at least some social consensus, resilience reforms cannot be sustained. Therefore, EU guidance on depolarisation directly supports the broader resilience framework, emphasising that social cohesion is fundamental to maintaining institutional stability under stress.

EU security frameworks put greater emphasis on handling hybrid threats, enhancing civil protection, and strengthening cyber resilience. According to interview responses, Georgia's cyber and information sectors are still underdeveloped. Respondents 3, 4, and 6 noted that cyberattacks can be just as disruptive to state functions as traditional military force. Meanwhile, Respondents 8 and 10 pointed out issues like low media literacy and susceptibility to propaganda. These insights align with EU resilience priorities, which connect institutional efficiency, crisis communication, and cyber cooperation. Although Georgia shows normative agreement with EU resilience principles, practical implementation is only partial. As Respondent 3 mentioned, closer collaboration with EU cyber agencies would turn formal alignment into real capabilities.

The political context since 2024 further demonstrates why Euro-Atlantic resilience standards must be analysed critically rather than normatively. On 28 November 2024, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced that the Georgian government would not place the opening of EU accession negotiations on the agenda until the end of 2028 and would reject EU budgetary grants during that period (Alimova, 2024). This decision primarily concerned the EU accession track rather than NATO cooperation directly, but it revealed a broader implementation problem: constitutional commitment and formal strategic alignment do not necessarily translate into consistent policy execution (Tabatadze, 2026). In resilience terms, this means that EU and NATO benchmarks can support Georgia's institutional development only if domestic political actors are willing and able to convert them into enforceable reforms, interagency coordination, civic preparedness, and measurable institutional capacity.

NATO provides the most operationalised resilience framework through its seven baseline requirements:

(1) continuity of government and essential services;
(2) resilient energy supplies;
(3) capacity to manage large-scale population movements;
(4) secure food and water resources;
(5) resilient communications systems;
(6) resilient transport systems;
(7) effective healthcare crisis management.

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NATO conceptualises resilience as civilian preparedness that underpins credible deterrence and collective defence (NATO, 2024). For Georgia, which lacks Article 5 guarantees, civilian preparedness is even more critical. However, this also means that NATO's baseline requirements should be treated as an adaptive framework for national preparedness rather than as a direct substitute for collective defence. In the Georgian case, these requirements are useful because they identify the core state and societal functions that must remain operational under pressure.

The findings of this study suggest that Georgia demonstrates partial and incremental alignment with NATO resilience standards but lacks systematic compliance. Certain elements – such as reserve reforms, crisis-response improvements observed during COVID-19 (Respondent 1), and total defence initiatives – indicate adaptive capacity. However, the absence of a formal National Resilience Strategy results in fragmentation. Respondent 6 emphasised that without civic awareness, total defence cannot function effectively, while Respondent 10 pointed to ad hoc resource allocation and insufficient legislative consolidation. Respondent 7 viewed alignment with NATO baselines as enhancing credibility and signalling readiness for integration, yet Respondents 8 and 10 cautioned that successful implementation would require greater social trust and depolarised governance.

The interviews also clarify the relationship between total defence and national resilience. Respondent 3 distinguished between total defence and resilience, describing total defence as primarily a conflict-oriented mobilisation, whereas resilience encompasses prevention, adaptation, and recovery across military, political, economic, and technological domains. Respondent 8 stressed their complementarity. Nevertheless, without codified benchmarks and institutional coordination mechanisms aligned with NATO's baseline requirements, these concepts remain unevenly institutionalised.

Overall, the evidence suggests constitutional and normative alignment but incomplete institutional compliance with Euro-Atlantic resilience standards. Depolarisation, civic preparedness, public–private cooperation, cyber capacity, and interagency coordination remain the most significant gaps. Turning incremental reforms into structured compliance would involve adopting NATO's baseline requirements as national benchmarks, institutionalising crisis stress-testing, formalising interagency coordination, strengthening cooperation with EU cyber and hybrid-threat mechanisms, and embedding resilience obligations in domestic legal and policy frameworks.

In this context, resilience goes beyond just a technical policy; it acts as a tangible measure of Georgia's readiness for deeper Euro-Atlantic integration. Yet, Georgia's experience demonstrates that Euro-Atlantic standards work well only when tailored to domestic political and institutional conditions. Without embedding resilience into a comprehensive strategic framework, formal alignment may stay superficial, failing to develop actual capacity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: OPERATIONALISING NATIONAL RESILIENCE IN GEORGIA

Based on the empirical findings and the identified gaps in Georgia's resilience framework, the following roadmap translates the article's recommendations into concrete institutional actions and measurable indicators.

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Figure 2. *Operational Roadmap for Strengthening Georgia's Strategic Resilience*

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CONCLUSION

This research aimed to study the characteristics of Georgia's strategic resilience and its relationship with a holistic approach to national security. To achieve this, two guiding research questions were posed: What are the main characteristics of strategic resilience in Georgia? What is the relationship between strategic resilience and a holistic approach, as illustrated by Georgia?

This article's theoretical framework emphasises that strategic resilience is a holistic concept that extends beyond traditional state-centric or military security. The combined use of the holistic approach, the 4R model, and the idea of adaptive capacity illustrates that resilience involves resisting disruptions, maintaining core functions, recovering from crises, and turning lessons into institutional knowledge. In Georgia's context, resilience encompasses not just defence capabilities but also civic readiness, cyber and information security, cooperation between public and private sectors, institutional coordination, and social trust.

Regarding the first research question, the findings show that strategic resilience in Georgia is institutionalised unevenly and implemented largely through sector-specific policies and initiatives rather than through a fully integrated national framework. While resilience-related commitments are reflected in security, cyber, defence, and Euro-Atlantic policy docu-

ments, their translation into operational capacity is constrained by fragmented institutional coordination, political discontinuity, limited civic preparedness, uneven public–private cooperation, and gaps between formal commitments and implementation mechanisms.

Regarding the second research question, the analysis demonstrates that a holistic security approach provides a useful framework for explaining both the strengths and limitations of Georgia's strategic resilience. It highlights the interdependence of military, political, societal, institutional, cyber, and information dimensions of security, while also showing that external pressure and Euro-Atlantic alignment alone do not generate resilience. Their practical effect depends on domestic institutional capacity, political sustainability, societal trust, and the ability to translate international frameworks into nationally embedded and measurable arrangements.

The results indicate that while Euro-Atlantic resilience standards are pertinent for Georgia, they cannot simply replace domestic institutional efforts. NATO's seven baseline criteria and EU resilience guidelines serve as valuable benchmarks, especially in areas like civil preparedness, cyber security, governance, depolarisation, and infrastructure protection. Nevertheless, since Georgia is not a NATO member and lacks Article 5 protections, formal alignment with Euro-Atlantic structures alone does not guarantee resilience. It must be translated into national legal mandates, assigned institutional responsibilities, effective implementation mechanisms, and clear, measurable indicators.

The study therefore contributes to both policy debate and academic research. For policymakers, it identifies the central gap between Georgia's strategic orientation and its operational resilience capacity; the policy roadmap presented above translates this gap into concrete institutional actions and measurable indicators. Academically, the study contributes to resilience research by examining how global frameworks such as NATO baseline requirements, EU governance expectations, cyber-resilience standards, and total-defence ideas interact with the realities of a small post-Soviet state facing occupation, hybrid coercion, and political polarisation.

Overall, the article shows that strategic resilience in Georgia is not merely a technical, military, or administrative objective. It is a broader political and societal process that requires institutional coordination, civic preparedness, public trust, cyber and information capacity, and sustained political commitment. Georgia's resilience agenda has advanced, but it remains insufficiently consolidated. Its future effectiveness will depend on whether the country can transform declarative Euro-Atlantic alignment and sectoral reforms into an integrated, measurable, and nationally institutionalised resilience framework.

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