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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

International Republican Institute (IRI) has released the public opinion poll results according to which 'sustained support' for the government's management of COVID-19 as well as "persistent anxiety over the economy are motivating citizens to go to the polls on October 31."

The polls say that if the elections were held this Sunday, the ruling Georgian Dream party would be the first choice for 33% of voters and second choice for 3% of voters. Most of the voters remain undecided.

The poll revealed that if parliamentary elections were held this Sunday, 36% would vote for the ruling Georgian Dream party, the United National Movement has the highest rating among opposition parties - 15%, European Georgia and Giorgi Vashadze's party Strategy Builder enjoy the support of 4% of the population, Alliance of Patriots - 4% for each, Labor Party - 3%, 2% would vote for Aleko Elisashvili's Civic Movement/Citizens, Lelo for Georgia, and 2%- Girchi, 3% said none, while 23% said do not know/did not answer.

According to the poll, 90% of respondents say they intend to vote in the 2020 parliamentary elections. Specifically, 74% say they will most likely run in the election. 16% even say they are likely to vote. 4% of respondents say they are unlikely to run in the election. And 5% are more likely to abstain from voting.

72% of respondents said the party's economic policy would most likely determine their vote in the upcoming polls, while 56% said healthcare and security policy, 17% said education policy, while the vision for judicial reform was named by 13%. Foreign policy was named by 10% (respondents could name two answers to the question).

33% of respondents said personalities of candidates in a specific political party will be the most important factor in determining their vote, followed by past performance/track record - with 23% and candidate party

## IRI polls: 72% of respondents will vote based on the party's economic policy



► Irakli Kobakhidze.

affiliation - 15%. Platform/program/promises were named by 14%.

Responding to the question of whether they are familiar with the election programs of the parties and candidates running in their cities/districts/villages, 7% of respondents said they are familiar, 35% are somewhat familiar, 25% said somewhat unfamiliar, while 26% are unfamiliar.

44% of respondents said the parliamentary majority should appoint the next Prime Minister, 36% said the parliamentary multi-party coalition should do so, 20% don't know.

As for the country's direction, 54% said Georgia is going in the wrong direction (down from 68% in October) and 35% said it goes in the right direction, up from 22% in October. Younger generations (aged 19-29) are more prone to name right direction (39% - right direction, 50% says the wrong direction), as opposed to those above 50 (33% - right direc-

tion, 56% - wrong direction). 11% are very satisfied with the state of democracy in the country (9% in October 2019), 40% are somewhat satisfied (33% in Oct 2019), 25% are somewhat unsatisfied (27% in October 2019), 19% are very unsatisfied (24% in Oct'19). Respondents above 50 are less satisfied with the level of democracy in the country compared to the younger generations.

Reckoning increased proportional representation in the 150-member Parliament (from 77 to 120), 17% said the change will very positively affect the democratic development of the country, 38% said somewhat positively, 12% responded somewhat negatively, 6% said very negatively. 27% provided no answer/don't know.

When asked to cite the government's main accomplishments, the fight against COVID-19 topped the list (22%), with healthcare reform following in second place (12%).

37% said they are very satisfied with the government's response to COVID-19, 45% said somewhat satisfied, 11% and 6% are somewhat unsatisfied and very unsatisfied, respectively.

As for the government's response to the economic consequences of COVID, 15% are very satisfied, 40% are somewhat satisfied, 24% are somewhat unsatisfied and 19% are very unsatisfied. The poll shows that rural residents tend to be more satisfied with the government's efforts to address the economic consequences of the pandemic, as opposed to Tbilisites.

Unemployment remained the most important issue affecting towns and villages, with 25% of citizens ranking it first. On a household level, unemployment was also cited as a top concern, with 31% of Georgians naming it as the most important problem.

Unemployment, economic situation, and false promises were named as the biggest failures of the incumbent government, with 10%, 9%, and 9% respectively, followed by an increase in crime, named by 6%. 9% said the GD gov't has no failures, while 25% did not answer.

Speaking of local town/village problems, 25% named unemployment, 12% said drinking water, 7% said the economy, while 5% said roads and ecology, each.

In regards to most important household problems, 31% said unemployment, 15% said the economy, 8% said poverty, 6% said low salaries.

"I do not know the IRI and NDI surveys, I know the CRRC and IPM surveys that are not only contradictory to reality but also each other. When one company says 27% and the other- 60%..." Kobakhidze said, adding that CRRC and IPM are not the organizations that will provide the right information to important partners.

"When any research organization claims that it cannot understand from more than 27% of respondents, who they support, such an organization can be considered outright selfless," he said, noting that he knows the research very well.

According to the Speaker of the Parliament Archil Talakvadze, the research, the results of which have been processed without allocation, does not reflect the full picture of the support of the groups who refrained from responding.

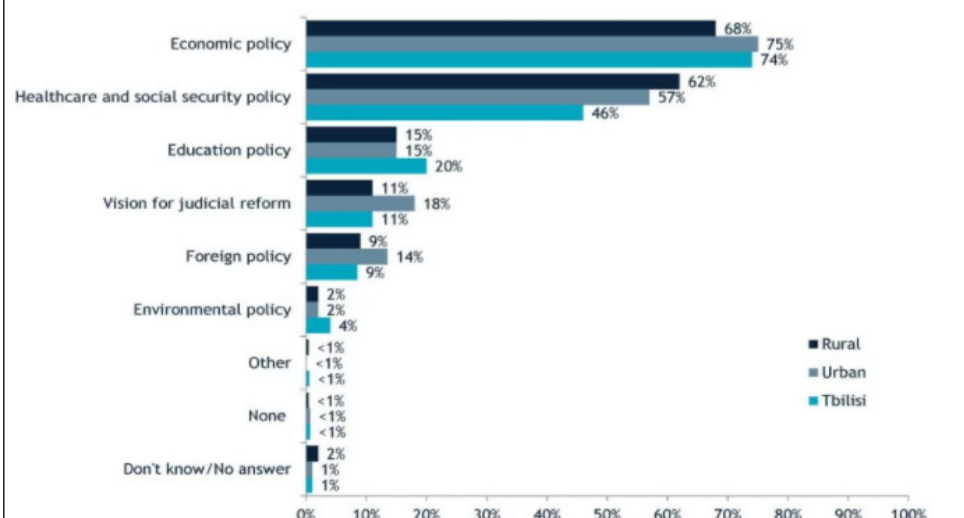
"I recommend you to look at the studies where a full-fledged analysis is given, including the allocation method used, it shows that we have a percentage higher than 56%," Talakvadze said.

Fieldwork for the IRI survey was conducted by the Institute of Polling and Marketing (IPM) from 4th August to 21st August 2020. Data was collected using a multistage probability sampling method through in-person, in-home interviews. The sample consists of 1,500 Georgians aged 18 and older and eligible to vote. The response rate was 75%. The margin of error does not exceed 2.5%.

The survey was coordinated by Dr. Rasa Alisauskiene, through public and marketing (market) research firm Baltic Surveys / The Gallup Organization, through face-to-face interviews with IRI's Center for Insights in Survey Research at respondents' homes. The study was funded by USAID.

### Which component of a party's pre-election program will most likely determine your vote in the upcoming parliamentary elections?

(Respondents permitted to supply two answers, disaggregated by settlement)



► IRI interviewed 1,500 Georgian citizens for the polls.

# Facebook launches a fact-checking program in Georgia with its partners

THE REPRESENTATIVES OF FACEBOOK TALK ABOUT THEIR NEW PROJECT DURING THE VIDEO CONFERENCE WITH GEORGIAN JOURNALISTS.

BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

According to the representatives of Facebook, as a part of the campaign against misinformation, Facebook cooperates with several fact-checking portals around the world. These organizations review the accuracy of the content, evaluate it, and then share that information with Facebook.

Facebook will launch a similar program in Georgia in partnership with Fact Check Georgia and Myth Detector. According to Facebook, Myth Detector, as well as Fact Check Georgia, is certified by the International Fact-Finding Network.

Pages and accounts that periodically attempt to share false information will automatically be limited in their ability to monetize and place ads.

The principle of operation is as follows: If a user considers any Facebook post or news item suspicious, it is necessary to inform Facebook about it and select the appropriate field. The Myth Detector and Fact Check discuss the accuracy of questionable content, evaluate it, and then share this information with Facebook. The information they assess as fake will be posted at the bottom of the Facebook news feed. This will significantly reduce the spread of false information and also, reduce the number of users who may be misinformed.

Additionally, Facebook will mark posts assessed as false information by the Fact-Finding Portal. By doing this, users will be able to pick out if the post they see or want to share is true.

“We are glad that as a result of cooperation with Fact Check Georgia and Myth Detector, we will launch a fact-checking program in Georgia. We take the fight against misinformation quite seriously. Therefore,

## INTERNATIONAL FACT-CHECKING NETWORK @ Poynter.

► Myth Detector as well as Fact Check Georgia is certified by the International Fact-Checking Network.

we are constantly working and trying to find ways to prevent the spread of false information on our platform,” said Sophie Ayers, Facebook’s Strategic Partnership Development Manager.

According to the representatives of the social network, the mentioned program is part of the

strategy against Facebook disinformation. The strategy serves to establish the authenticity of the news and improve its quality. Under the strategy, Facebook cancels accounts and removes content that violates company-set standards or advertising policies. As a result, the chances of spreading false information

and non-authentic content are reduced.

“Since its inception in 2013, Fact Check Georgia has been working to reduce the spread of misinformation and the spread of truth in the information space. Partnering with Facebook is an excellent opportunity to make our work much more effective.

Most importantly, this partnership allows us to have access to thousands of Facebook users who may be victims of misinformation. It should be noted that our partnership in Georgia took place a few months before the parliamentary elections, which will help minimize the viral spread of misinformation on social media and, consequently, the democratic basis of elections won’t be threatened by false rumors,” said Paata Gaprindashvili, the founder of Fact Check Georgia.

According to Tamar Kintsurashvili, the founder and editor-in-chief of Myth Detector, when pluralistic platforms and democratic institutions such as the media are abused, the fact-finding platform has to inform the public.

The Media Development Foundation (MDF) created the Myth Detector, a fact-finding and myth-making platform, in 2014. This platform was created to establish the truth and inform the public and institutions about misinformation. It’s a must to be able to maintain public confidence in credible media platforms. A democratic society must be able to distinguish misinformation from the truth to make informed choices. The expansion of Facebook’s fact-checking program in Georgia is very important, especially before the parliamentary elections.

According to Sophie Ayers, today, the company continues to invest to make the fight against false information even more widespread.



► Facebook has more than 70 partners around the world working on fact-checking in 50 languages.

FRIDAY		SEPTEMBER 18	
Day		Cloudy	
		High: 28°C	
Night		Partly Cloudy	
		Low: 17°C	
SATURDAY		SEPTEMBER 19	
Day		Partly Cloudy	
		High: 27°C	
Night		partly cloudy	
		Low: 15°C	

published by **The Messenger**

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0108, Georgia

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## US Embassy allocates over \$ 500 000 for Jvari Monastery Conservation

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi announced that the Jvari Monastery preservation project was selected by Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP).

As US Ambassador to Georgia Kelly Degnan noted, the United States is proud to have the opportunity to preserve the most important monument to Georgia’s history.

“The church in Georgia plays a very important role in the history and culture of the community, and the United States is proud to be able to preserve these insignificant symbols of Georgian history,” said Degnan, who visited the project site herself.

The ongoing preservation works also funded by the US Government will now extend to cover the entire outer sandstone masonry of the building, including all 4 facades and all 8 sides of the drum, about 1200 square meters of the wall surface. The first phase of this project was funded with \$100,000 also under the AFCP program.

In 2019, the US Ambassador’s Cultural Heritage Fund provided \$ 100,000 in funding for the first phase of the project, which included a comprehensive multidisciplinary study of the Mtskheta Cross Temple building and the preparation of a conservation project based on that study. International experts were involved in the work, including Mary Kay Judy, an independent expert with the American Association for the Preservation of Architectural and Cultural Heritage. Much of the work has been completed.

In 2020, the US Ambassador’s Cultural Heritage Foundation supported the continuation of the project and allocated more than half million dollars for the second phase, which involves physical work under a prepared conservation project. This phase



► U.S. Ambassador Kelly Degnan visits Jvari Monastery. Photo: State Dept

covers 30 months (September 30th, 2020 - March 31st, 2023). The large grant will provide an additional \$506,250 for the vital preservation works, which will be done by the George Chubinashvili National Research Center.

“It is expected that conservation will no longer be necessary for the next 20 years after the conservation work is completed,” the US Embassy said in a statement.

As Ambassador Kelly Degnan noted, over the past two decades, the United States has allocated \$ 2 million to fund 20 projects in Georgia.

The Jvari Monastery is one of 3 monuments included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site entry entitled Historical Monuments of Mtskheta. The monastery overlooks the confluence of the rivers Mtkvari and Aragvi outside the historical city, around 20km north of capital Tbilisi.



► Jvari Monastery Project won Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation large grant.

## A new program to support two state hospitals in Georgia



შპს “ბათუმის რესპუბლიკური კლინიკური საავადმყოფო”  
“BATUMI REPUBLICAN CLINICAL HOSPITAL” LLC



Tbilisi, 17 September, 2020. The Czech Development Agency continues to support Georgian healthcare system by launching new instrument “Tied Financial Donation”. The first beneficiaries in Georgia are state Republican hospitals in Batumi and Rukhi, which will get Czech medical devices.

A contract was signed today on behalf of the Czech Develop-

ment Agency by the Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Tbilisi, Mr. Petr Mikyska, Mr. Irakli Gvazava Acting Director of Rukhi Republican hospital and Mr. Nugzar Janjghava, representative of Batumi Republican Hospital to lay foundation for new cooperation.

The two hospitals are newly built and started partial functioning after COVID-19 pan-

demic hit the country. However, not all the departments have necessary equipment. Recognizing the problem, the aid aims to ensure modern technologies are provided to both hospitals in order to enhance and improve services provided by them.

The new Republican Batumi hospital is designed for 170 beds. For the first time in its history, hospital will offer citizens the

service of midwifery and pediatric medical care and Czech products are designed for it. Meanwhile, Rukhi Republican hospital is designed for 220 beds and by getting new equipment; they will improve surgical and intensive care departments.

The new cooperation also involves trainings for hospitals’ staff, provided by Czech professionals, who will share their

experience and simplify the use of new technologies. The Czech Republic will continue to support both hospitals in the future.

New equipment will be delivered in two stages before the end of 2020. Total cost amounts to EUR 371 000, from which Batumi Republican hospital will get EUR 186 000 and Rukhi Republican hospital EUR 185 000.