

Attitudes and perceptions towards Russia in **GEORGIA**

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GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Tbilisi 2021**

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Glossary

ABL

the Administrative Boundary Line

CATI

Computer assisted telephone interviewing

Covid-19 -

The global pandemic of coronavirus disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

Cross tabulations -

Data tables presenting the relationship between two or more variables.

CRRC-Georgia -

Caucasus Research Resource Center - Georgia

EU -

European Union

FES -

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

FG -

Focus group

GFSIS -

Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies

IDP -

Internally displaced person

NATO -

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

USA -

United States of America

TV -

Television

Executive Summary

This report presents attitudes and perceptions towards Russia in Georgia. Studies analyzing knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of people living in Georgia towards Russia-related issues are quite rare. To provide an understanding of these issues, CRRC Georgia conducted a mixed methods study. This included a quantitative survey using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) as well as qualitative online focus group discussions. Both were conducted in February 2021. Overall, 1851 telephone interviews were carried out with the adult population of Georgia, excluding the occupied territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In addition, 24 focus groups were conducted in 12 locations. The focus groups were conducted independently with 18- to 44-year-olds and individuals 45 and over in Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani languages.

Main findings:

- About half of the population (52%) is positively disposed towards Russian people, while 39% report a neutral attitude, and only 7% a negative view. Focus group discussions show that positive attitudes are mostly related to personal or professional ties, mutual affection between Georgian and Russian people, and experiences of close ties in the past. Neutral attitudes are mostly built on the belief that people differ in every nation, while negative attitudes are mostly associated with views of the Russian state, stemming from the belief that the state reflects the people;
- People aged 55 and over are more positively disposed towards Russian people compared to other age groups (18-34 and 35-54). Focus group participants also observed the age differences, arguing that without the experience of personal ties with Russians, younger people living in Georgia judge Russians the way they judge the state, knowing only violence, war, and occupation from Russia;
- Roughly half of the population has a negative attitude towards the Russian state. This varies by settlement type, with negative attitudes being most common in Tbilisi (59%), followed by other urban areas (46%), and rural settlements (36%);
- Slightly more than half of the population (56%) think that Russia is developing mainly in the wrong direction, while almost one third is uncertain about the direction Russia is developing in. Only 10% believe that Russia is going in the right direction. Focus group participants argue that Russia is not capable of catching up with the contemporary world, given its tense relations with the West. Those who think Russia is a developed country in many regards, criticize it for a poor state of democracy and aggressive foreign policy;
- The Georgian public considers a) external issues and international conflicts/sanctions (bad relations with neighbouring countries and the West), b) human rights and democracy, and c) economic and social issues to be the top three issues facing Russia today. Focus group participants also noted a number of issues Russia faces, including a) lack of freedom of speech, b) disinformation about Georgia spread through Russian media, c) oppression of the opposition, d) the division of Russian society between Putin's sympathizers and opponents, and e) severe poverty outside Russia's large cities;

- A large share of the Georgian population (61%) report they are informed about developments in the Russian Federation to some extent (including 41% saying they are “little informed”), while a bit more than a third is not informed at all. Young people are slightly less informed on developments in the Russian Federation compared to older individuals. Being “fully” or “quite” informed is somewhat more common among people in Tbilisi (25%) compared to individuals in rural settlements (16%). Focus group participants mostly felt informed about ongoing events in Russia, and report following developments in Russia due to their significant effects on Georgia;
- The most popular sources of information for those reporting they are informed on developments in the Russian Federation are television (69%) and social networks (37%). Focus group participants also mention these as their main sources of information. Although family members, friends, relatives, and colleagues living in Russia are named as sources of information by only 12% of the public, focus group participants find them to be one of the most reliable sources of information;
- The most common type of information people report receiving about Russia is about threats from the Russian Federation and Abkhazia and South Ossetia related topics (40%), followed by Russian foreign (36%), and internal politics (27%). The majority of the informed population (59%) find the information they receive to be mainly negative, with only 15% finding it to be mainly positive;
- People living in Georgia think that the main challenges and threats facing Georgia at the moment are economic and social issues (57%), the occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (41%), related violations of territorial integrity (32%), and healthcare (including COVID-19) (26%). Focus group discussions confirm these attitudes, with many participants bringing up issues related to unemployment, low wages and difficulties finding a “proper” job. Occupied territories as well as the “creeping occupation” from Russia were frequently mentioned during focus group discussions, as well as issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- A large majority of Georgians¹ (80%) report positive attitudes (very positive and rather positive than negative) towards becoming a member of the EU. A large share of Georgians (74%) also have a positive attitude towards becoming a member of NATO. Younger people and people living in the capital generally have more positive attitudes towards Euro-Atlantic integration compared to older generations and rural residents. However, even in the latter groups, the majority (70% or more) are positive about integration.
- Focus group discussions show that the EU and NATO are seen as solutions to Georgia’s problems, offering freedom, democracy, economic stability, higher education (EU) as well as security and protection from Russia (NATO). Those having neutral or negative attitudes explain their views through a sense of neglect from the west. In addition, some do not want to irritate Russia through NATO membership. Others identify with an isolationist position independent of large political actors;
- The majority of Georgians (74%) think that relations between Georgian and Russian states are hostile. The major obstacles that hinder good and neighborly relations between Georgia and Russia include Russia’s occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (60%), followed by Moscow’s

¹ Throughout the report the word ‘Georgians’ is used to refer to people living in Georgia, not ethnic Georgians.

intention to return Georgia into its sphere of influence (30%). Focus group participants spoke about similar issues in addition to the creeping occupation and constant feeling of insecurity due to Russia's expansionist politics not only towards Georgia but towards other post-Soviet states as well;

- Focus group participants are sceptical about the improvement of relations between the two countries unless Russia stops the occupation of Georgian territories, and tend to talk more about the steps Georgia should take to neutralize or decrease the Russian threat. Some believe that Euro-Atlantic integration is the only solution, while others argue that giving up Georgia's intention to integrate with Euro-Atlantic structures is necessary for Georgia's safety as well as for the return of the occupied territories;
- A majority is optimistic about the potential of tourism to improve relations between people (84%) and about the potential of economic and trade relations (75%) improving relations between states. Among focus group participants, proponents of the opinion that economic and trade ties can improve relations between the two countries point to the past. They argue that when there was more trade, the relations were better. Opponents argue that trade ties with a country as unpredictable as Russia, which can embargo Georgian goods at any time as it has done before, has no potential for improving relations. Moreover, opponents suggest that trade is less important than the occupied territories;
- A majority of the Georgian population say that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are parts of Georgia (75% and 71%, respectively), while slightly less believe that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be a part of Georgia after ten years (61% and 62%, respectively). Compared to younger people, people aged 35 and older and people living in the capital are more likely to consider the breakaway regions part of Georgia. Focus group participants state that Russia provoked and manages the conflict between Georgia and these regions;
- A majority of the population believe that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are developing mainly in the wrong direction (68% and 69%, respectively). Qualitative data suggests people view the situations in both regions as dreadful. A frequent claim is that Russian influence and propaganda is pushing people living there towards Russia, forcing them to speak Russian and making them economically dependent.
- Some focus group participants claim that people living in the breakaway regions do not want to be part of Russia, but would rather be independent. Further, they believe that the link between Georgians and people living in the occupied territories can be re-established. In contrast, others claim that the link with people in the breakaway regions is lost, that they would like to be part of Russia, and that they like the support they receive from the north. Focus group participants also claim that the new generation, compared to the older one, has more negative attitudes towards Georgians and that with time the connection that Georgians had with the regions is disappearing;
- A plurality does not support Russia's provision of financial assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (44% and 45%, respectively). Older (35+) age groups and capital residents are more likely to be against Russian financing of the breakaway regions compared to younger people (18-34) and people living outside Tbilisi. Many focus group participants are also against this idea, arguing that Russia is buying the regions and spreading its influence there. According to them, funding the regions is not a nice gesture from Russia, but rather a political step towards ownership of the territories. However, some study participants think that someone should

take care of the people living in the occupied territories, and since Russia took them, it also has a responsibility for people's well-being there;

- Almost half of the Georgian population (46%) could not name a Russian republic in the North Caucasus which they consider to be friendliest to Georgia. One fifth claim none of the republics are friendly. Findings from qualitative data reflects these results, as many have practically no information about most of the Russian republics in the North Caucasus. Those who have some level of awareness about the North Caucasus name people from Ingushetia as friendliest. However, people are most aware of Chechnya. People's attitudes tend to be split towards Chechnya, with positive attitudes towards Chechens and negative attitudes towards the Chechen government's role as a servant to Russia;
- Forty-three percent think that people in the Russian republics in the North Caucasus and Georgia are similar, while 39% believe they are different. Those who think that people are similar in the North Caucasus republics and Georgia (43%) name the following factors that make them similar: culture, customs, traditions and/or values (58%), the character of the people (47%), and worldviews (8%).
- Those who think that people are different in the republics (39%), most frequently also say that people differ by culture, customs, traditions, and/or values (55%), followed by religion (40%), the character of people (26%), and worldviews (20%). Similarly, the opinion of the focus groups participants were split. While some claimed to be similar in terms of appearance, traditions, customs, origin, genetics, values, being manly and brave; others see the main difference in aspirations towards the Western world. In addition, focus group participants suggested that aside from religion, people in the North Caucasus are firmly in the Russian world, while Georgia is striving to become part of Europe and shares its values;
- Focus group participants highlight that it is not in the interest of Russia to have calm, peaceful, or independent and free republics in the Caucasus. They argue Russia constantly interferes in the region to create new conflicts and tensions in the North as well as South Caucasus to keep the region under its influence. According to the respondents, ordinary people, unfortunately, have no say or power to settle the conflict between each other or other republics and states in the region.

1. Introduction

The Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (Rondeli Foundation) in cooperation and with the support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) South Caucasus Office has commissioned a CRRC empirical study on the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of Georgian citizens towards Russia with a special focus on the North Caucasus.

The parallel study, consequently with the same goals, was also carried out in Russia in order to reveal the attitudes and the perceptions of citizens of the Russian Federation towards Georgia. Both empirical studies used the identical methodology that included a quantitative survey using computer assisted telephone interviewing as well as qualitative focus group discussions. Identical questionnaires were developed and streamlined through the joint consultation process of the Georgian and Russian sides with the close engagement of the FES South Caucasus and Moscow offices. The FES Russia has identified the Institute for Comparative Social Research (CESSI) as a local partner.

The goal of both studies was to better understand public knowledge, attitudes and perceptions vis-à-vis the research topics as they exist in each country and between different age groups.

The data collection carried out by CRRC aimed at providing the data and analysis on the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of people living in Georgia on the following topics:

- Russians and Russian politics;
- Domestic policy of Russia;
- Sources of information about Russia;
- Domestic and foreign policy of Georgia;
- Russia-Georgia relations;
- The conflict regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia);
- Russian republics in the North Caucasus.

The study was carried out in February 2021. The survey is nationally representative for the adult population, excluding the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with 1851 respondents overall. The average margin of error is 1.46%. The qualitative component of the study included 24 focus group discussions, which were carried out in 12 locations.

This report proceeds as follows. The next section provides the study's methodology. The subsequent section provides the study findings and is broken down into seven subsections focusing on 1) attitudes towards Russian people and the Russian state, 2) knowledge and perceptions of Russia's domestic policy, 3) sources of information about Russia, 4) Georgia's domestic and foreign policy, 5) the public's perspectives on relations between Georgia and Russia, 6) knowledge and perceptions of Georgia's conflict regions, and 7) attitudes towards the North Caucasus. The report ends with the study's main conclusions.

2. Methodology

To address the above-described research topics, CRRC-Georgia carried out a mixed methods study, including a survey and focus groups. The survey was conducted using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) in Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani between February 9th and 16th, 2021. Sampling was conducted using simple random sampling with random digit dialling.

The survey included 1851 interviews. The data is representative for adult population of Georgia, excluding the occupied territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The survey is also representative of the capital, other urban areas, and rural settlements. The average margin of error is 1.46%. The data presented in the report is weighted and analyzed by settlement type (Capital; urban; rural) and age group (18-34; 35-54; 55+). Frequency tables and cross-tabulations that are not given in the main text, are presented in Annex 1.

The qualitative component of the study included 24 focus group discussions, which were carried out between February 8 and 23, 2021 in twelve locations. These include:

1. Tbilisi (urban)
2. Villages in Shida Kartli near the South Ossetia administrative boundary line (rural; e.g., Ditsi, Niqozi, Adzvi)
3. Zugdidi (urban)
4. Villages in Samegrelo near the Abkhazia administrative boundary line (rural; e.g., Tkaia, Rukhi, Orsantia)
5. Batumi (urban)
6. Villages in Adjara (rural)
7. Kutaisi (urban)
8. Villages in Imereti (rural)
9. Telavi (urban)
10. Villages in Kakheti (rural)
11. Samtskhe-Javakheti (rural and urban; ethnic Armenian minority)
12. Kvemo Kartli (rural and urban; ethnic Azerbaijani minority)

Of the twelve locations, five were urban areas, five - rural areas, and two were ethnic minority locations (a mix of rural and urban areas)s. In each location, two FGs were conducted: one with participants aged 18-44 (group 1) and one with participants aged 45 and older (group 2). The focus groups were conducted using the Zoom video conferencing system.

A summary table of the FG participants is provided in Annex 2.

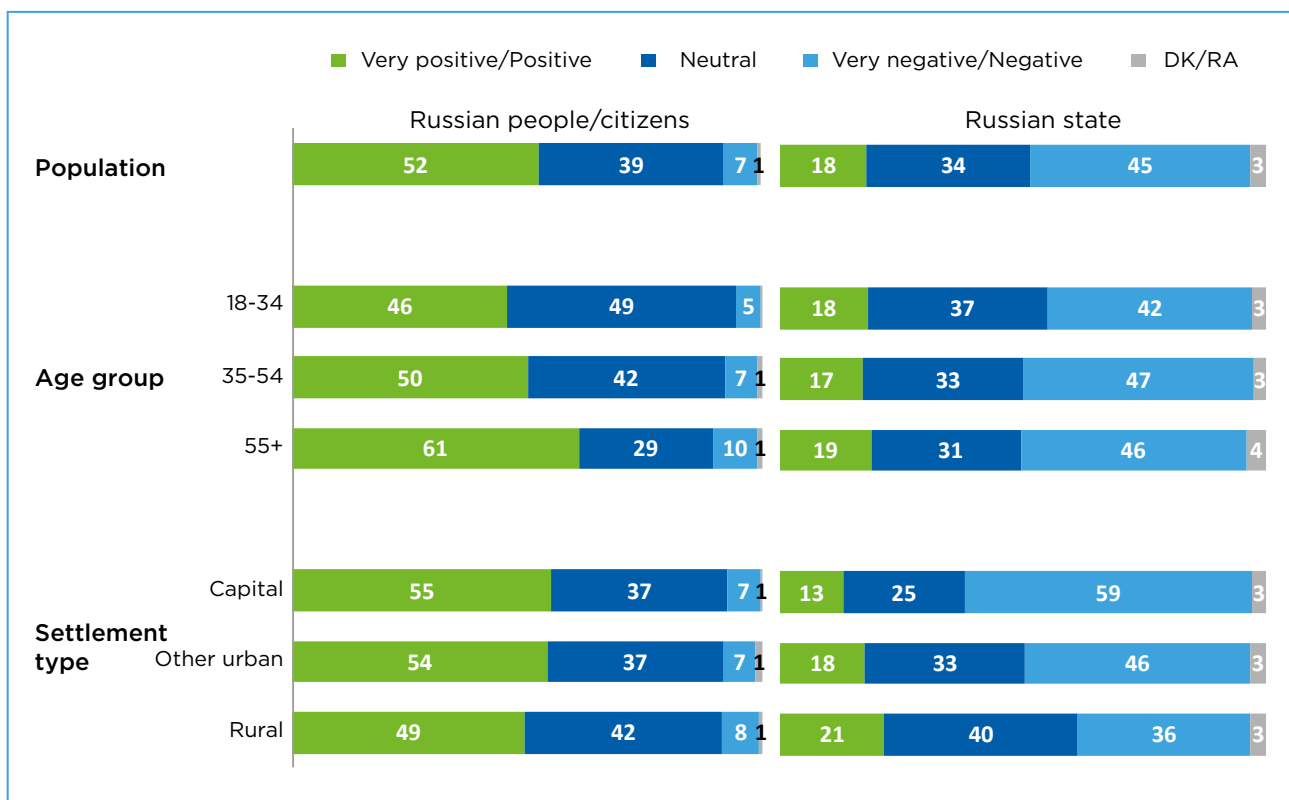
3. Views from Georgia

This section presents findings on 1) Russians and Russian politics; 2) views on Russian domestic policy; 3) sources of information about Russia; 4) Georgia's domestic and foreign policy; 5) Russia-Georgia relations; 6) the conflict regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia); and 7) the North Caucasus. Each of these topics are presented in sub-sections, which include quantitative and qualitative data as well as a summary of the main findings at the end of each section.

3.1. Russians and Russian politics

The Georgian public's attitudes towards Russian people and the Russian state and politics differ markedly. While a half of the population (52%) report positive attitudes towards Russian people, a sixth (18%) of Georgians feel the same way towards the Russian Federation.

Figure 1: Attitudes towards Russians and Russia (%)



The focus group discussions show a similar pattern. Participants argued that people cannot be judged for their state's actions. Nonetheless, some hold a similar attitude towards Russia and Russians, arguing that the state reflects the people. Still, most attitudes were neutral or positive, with few reporting a negative attitude towards Russian people. In contrast, most view the Russian state in an overwhelmingly negative light. This view is well expressed in the following quote:

"I have quite a neutral attitude considering the tourists who come here that I have interactions with hold quite positive [attitudes] towards our country. Russia is an occupier, that is for sure, but we should differentiate between the state and the people (Female, 29, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Adjara)".

Neutral attitudes are mostly based on the belief that people vary in every nation, that there are good and bad people everywhere, and that it is hard to judge an entire nationality. Respondents with such beliefs mostly hold similarly neutral attitudes towards other nationalities.

Positive attitudes towards Russians are often based on personal or professional ties. Those having Russian relatives, friends, and acquaintances and those who regularly interact with Russian tourists often report positive attitudes or even affection for Russians. Attitudes are especially positive among participants who experienced life in the Soviet Union and have had close ties with Russians. Mutual affection seems an important factor. Participants often reported positive attitudes based on the observation that the majority of the Russian tourists they see are very fond of Georgia and Georgians and excited by Georgian hospitality. The high number of Russian tourists that come to Georgia indicates a positive attitude towards Georgia, according to focus group participants. This attitude was more common in locations with tourism businesses. Together with mutual affection, mutual dissatisfaction with Russian authorities also seems to play a role. Respondents that reported positive attitudes often highlighted that family and friends in Russia as well as Russian tourists visiting Georgia are dissatisfied with Russian politics.

"I have a positive attitude as I have close interactions with Russian tourists because of my job. There is a lot of disinformation in their country, but when they come here they see a completely different picture. They do not want hostility between us, agree with us that occupied territories should be returned to Georgia, and want us to have warm relations (Male, 18-44, secondary education, ethnic Georgian, Batumi)".

Negative attitudes towards Russian people often stem from negative attitudes towards the Russian state, based on a belief that people make politics. While interaction with Russian tourists more often generates positive attitudes, sometimes it fosters negative attitudes as well. Some argue that Russian tourists still hold a Soviet mentality, still consider Georgia to be Russia's province, and look down on Georgians. Some argue that welcoming people from a hostile country with open arms is not morally justifiable. Despite these views, people do not report being aggressive towards Russians.

"Russia's politics have not changed despite system changes, and the main designers of politics are people. Any authority is based on popular order. Thus, Russians have the same attitude towards us, as their politics towards Georgia, and I cannot have a positive attitude towards them, although I do not mean ethnic Russians who are citizens of Georgia and live in Georgia (Male, 24, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kakheti)".

Both survey data and focus group discussions show that attitudes towards Russian people differ by age. People aged 55 and older are more positively disposed towards Russian people (61%) compared to people 34-55 (50%), and younger people (46%). Neutral attitudes are most common among those aged 18-34 (49%), followed by those aged 35-54 (42%), with older people least likely to have neutral views (29%). Few (10% or less) report negative attitudes in any of the age groups. Slight differences are found across settlement types as well, with people in Tbilisi reporting positive attitudes slightly more often (55%) compared to rural settlers (49%).

While focus group participants from both urban and rural areas observe mostly neutral or positive attitudes in their surroundings, in their neighbourhoods or settlements as a whole, participants believed age was an important factor for attitudes. People of all ages argued that attitudes are more negative among young people who were raised in the times of the current occupation and tense relations between the two countries than among older generations who remember good neighbourly relations between Georgia and Russia. Older people argued that a lack of personal relationships with Russians makes it difficult for young people to differentiate between people and politics. Younger participants noted how often they hear older people speaking positively about Russians, how often they travelled to Russia, and how they miss it. Older respondents barely mentioned anything about missing Russia, but some stated they remember the times when there was more travel and interaction, with relations based on mutual respect. They also highlighted that there were many friendships, which are uncommon among younger people according to participants.

“Considering we are neighbours, we should deepen relationships and make them better. People can make anything happen. Politics is one thing, but people’s power is boundless. My generation feels that way, but the younger generation feel differently. They don’t speak Russian either, and can’t imagine any kind of relationship with Russians. We, the older generation, have more nostalgic sentiments, to set politics aside (Female, 50, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo)”.

Even though attitudes towards state and people are different, if the relationship between Russia and Georgia does not change, participants believe it will affect people’s attitudes. Participants highlight that young people in both countries have grown up seeing and hearing only the other’s hatred.

“However much we differentiate between the state and the people, they are interconnected, and if Russia does not change its approach towards us, if the politics does not change, it will be reflected on attitudes towards people as well. The new generation there is growing up thinking that we are the enemy, while it is the other way round (Male, 52, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Batumi)”.

While little differences were found with regards to attitudes towards the Russian state between different age groups, differences are notable across settlement types. Those living in the capital seem to be most negatively disposed towards the Russian Federation, with a majority (59%) reporting negative attitudes, a fourth (25%) reporting neutral views, and 13% reporting positive attitudes. About half (46%) of those living in other urban settlements are negatively disposed, with around a third reporting a neutral view. Compared to urban areas, negative attitudes are less common (36%) among those living in rural areas (Figure 1).

Focus group participants also report overwhelmingly negative attitude towards the Russian state and politics. This attitude is mostly related to the historical experience of Russia’s expansionist and imperialist politics, including the occupation of Georgian territories. Participants argue that:

- Russia is historically an enemy to Georgia;
- Russia is an aggressor that started a war with Georgia three times in the past century;
- Russia never wanted Georgia to be an independent country;
- Russia still sees Georgia as one of its guberniyas;
- Russia occupies not only 20% of Georgian territory, but also the territories of other countries in the region as well.

Based on these views, participants argue that people are not and will never be able to feel secure in Georgia because of the Russian threat. Participants noted that Russia represents a threat not only for Georgia and other countries in the region, but also for the rest of the world, with international organizations and courts being unable to influence events, especially in the post-Soviet space.

“This is how I see Russian politics: the form of government has been changing in Russia, but the mentality of government stayed the same. Russia occupied us three times during the past century... and even though it calls itself a Republic, it is essentially the same as it was during the Tsarist and later during the Soviet periods, still occupying us... countries that Russia puts its eyes on see nothing but degradation (Male, 20, Student, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)”.

Russian chauvinism was mentioned by some of the focus group participants regardless of whether respondents had positive or negative dispositions towards Russian people. Especially some of the older people who have had close interactions with Russians noted this issue. They tended to see chauvinism as a characteristic trait of Russian political thinking, leading, in turn, to expansionist policies.

The issue of shared religion also came up when discussing attitudes towards Russia and its politics. Several respondents argued that Georgia should drop the idea of partnership with Russia based on the shared Orthodox Christian religion. Experience shows that this has done no good for Georgia and that Russia remained an occupier despite shared religion.

“I lived in Russia for 25 years... There’s good and bad in both the Georgian and Russian nations... I recently visited Moscow again. Relationships do not seem to be perfect, but in everyday life, the friendly relations between Georgians and Russians remain the same. Otherwise, deep inside every Russian was, is, and will be a chauvinist. I think this is just a disease of big nations... We still tend to see Russians as our Orthodox brothers. We cannot adequately assess reality. (Male, 55, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)”.

While ethnic Georgians participating in focus groups report overwhelmingly negative attitudes towards the Russian state and politics, ethnic minorities have more diverse attitudes, with some reporting negative attitudes associated with Russia’s occupation of Georgian territories, and some holding more positive attitudes, arguing that Russia is trying to keep stability in the region. Positive attitudes are sometimes based on experiences of family members who live in a better economic situation in Russia compared to those remaining in Georgia.

“Russia managed to avoid a huge civil war and saved lives... I like that it is keeping stability in the region, in the Caucasus... Russia is developing in a positive direction very quickly... I like Putin’s politics. It moves Russia towards development (Male, 70, higher education, ethnic Azerbaijani, Kvemo Kartli)”.

For the majority of Georgians (54%), the language of communication with Russian people is Russian. Russian is the most common language of communication in all age groups and settlement types with slight variations. While people aged 35 and older report almost the same patterns of language use, almost never using English as a language of communication, people aged 18-34 communicate in English slightly more often with Russians. In rural areas less people report communicating in Russian, because less people have any communication with Russian people compared to the capital and other urban areas. Overall, one third (33%) of Georgians report not having any communications with Russian people (Table 1).

Table 1. In which language do you usually communicate with Russian people? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
In Russian	45%	58%	58%	64%	58%	44%	54%
In English	7%	1%	0%	5%	3%	1%	2%
It depends	12%	7%	5%	7%	5%	10%	8%
In other language	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
In Georgian	4%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%
I never communicate with Russians	32%	31%	36%	22%	32%	42%	33%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Refuse to answer	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Focus group discussions also show that Russian is the most common language of communication among Russians and Georgians, especially among those who have interactions with Russian tourists. Some focus group participants felt communication in English is better to avoid the occupier's language. Some, on the contrary, find it important to know Russian for communication with tourists from Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

"If we look at it from the perspective of the tourism industry, knowing Russian is necessary. In 2019, before the COVID-19 outbreak, the majority of tourists were from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, [and] from post-Soviet countries, and their language of communication is Russian (Male, 23, higher education/student, ethnic Georgian, Imereti)".

Russian tourists are sometimes also found to be aggressive towards Georgians not speaking Russian, because they expect Georgians to speak their language.

"Lots of Russian tourists buy wine from my family winery, and we communicate mainly in Russian. It is obvious they are satisfied. Where else would a host talk to you in your language in a foreign country? Who will talk to a Georgian visitor in Georgian in a foreign country? Maybe lots of tourists do not say it out loud, but I often hear how aggressive Russian tourists are towards Georgians who do not speak Russian (Female, 34, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kakheti)".

When discussing the language of communication, Russians living in Georgia also came up. Participants highlighted that generations of Russians have lived in Georgia without being able to speak Georgian.

Sometimes it leaves the impression that they put no effort into learning Georgian, because they know Georgians will speak Russian to them. Some respondents objected to this. Despite knowing Russian, they try to avoid speaking Russian, because they think it is necessary for people of other ethnicities who live here for generations to learn Georgian.

“Generations of Russians live in Georgia and still are not able to say a word in Georgian. I have quite negative attitude towards this and try not to speak Russian with them, this is our country and they should be speaking our language. This is not a new problem, generations might pass and they still do not learn Georgian, sometimes I feel like many do it on purpose (Male, 22, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Adjara)”.

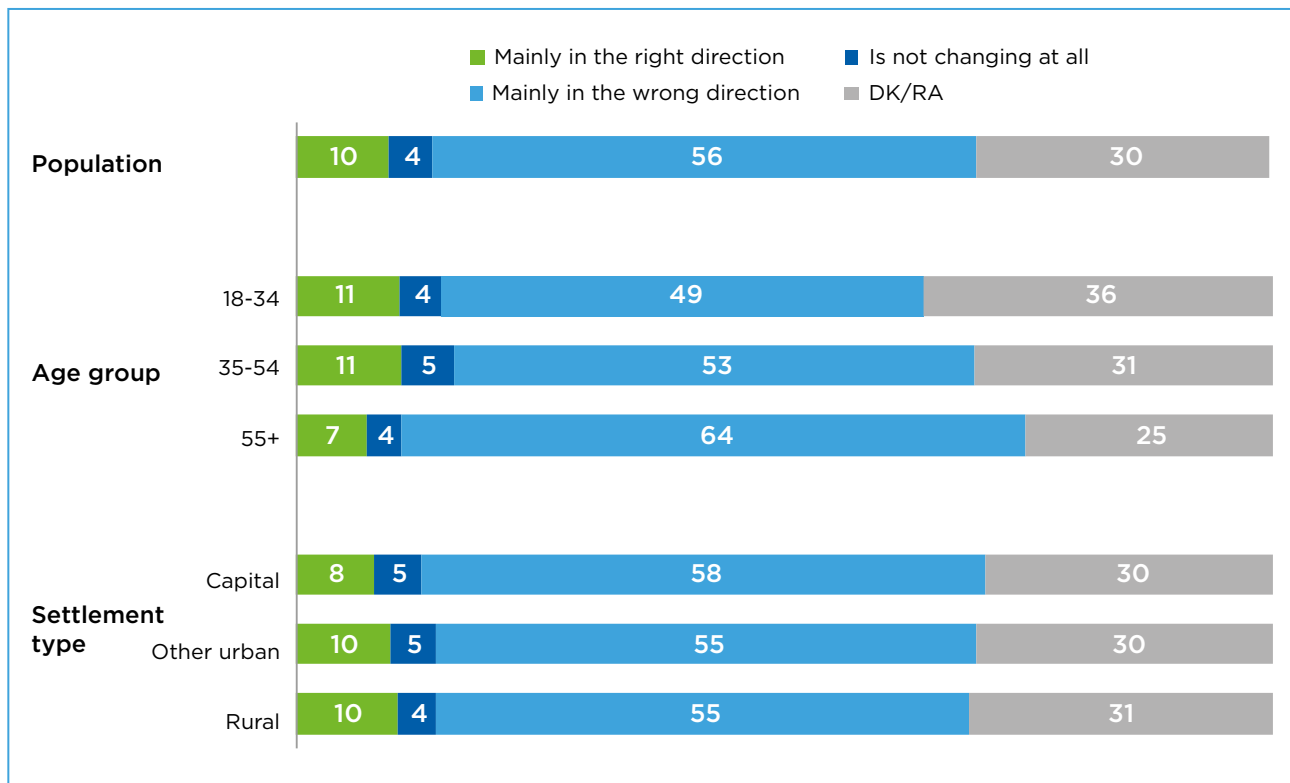
Main findings:

- Half of the population (52%) is positively disposed towards Russian people, while 39% report neutral views, and only 7% are negatively disposed. Focus group discussions show that positive attitudes are mostly related to personal or professional ties, mutual affections between Georgian and Russian people, and experiences of past close ties between people.
- Neutral attitudes are mostly built on the belief that people can be good or bad in any country, while negative attitudes are mostly associated with attitudes towards the Russian state, stemming from the belief that the state reflects people;
- People aged 55 and older are more positively disposed towards Russian people compared to other age groups. Focus group participants have also noticed the age differences, arguing that lacking the experience of personal ties with Russians, young people judge Russians for their government and associate Russians with violence, war, and occupation;
- While people tend to be negative or neutral towards the Russian state, attitudes vary between settlement types. Negative attitudes are most common among Tbilisians relative to people in other urban areas and rural settlements;
- The most popular language of communication with Russians for the majority of people living in Georgia is Russian. A third report having no communication with Russians.

3.2. Domestic policy of Russia

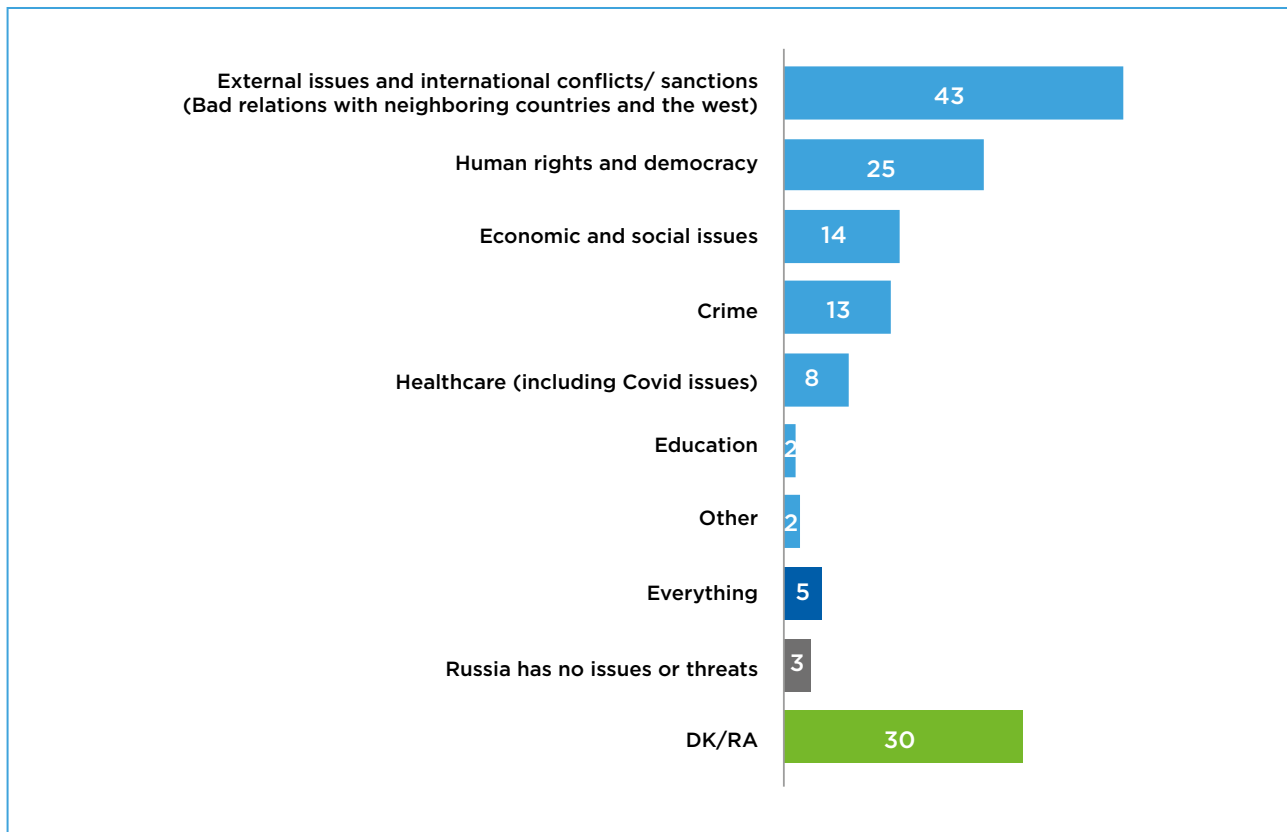
Perceptions of Russia's domestic policy was one of the major issues asked about in the survey and discussed during focus groups. The survey data shows that more than half of the population (56%) think Russia is developing mainly in the wrong direction, with only 10% believing it is developing in the right direction. A third (30%) of the population were unable to assess the matter. Such perceptions predominate among all age groups and in all settlement types, although people aged 55 and older have more certain views, with only a quarter reporting they do not know in which direction Russia is developing. Younger Georgians (aged 18-34) were more likely to report they did not know whether Russia is developing in the right or wrong direction.

Figure 2: Which direction is Russia currently developing in? (%)



When it comes to the main challenges or threats that Russia is facing at the moment, Georgians most commonly (43%) name external issues and international conflicts/sanctions (bad relations with neighboring countries and the West), followed by human rights and democracy (25%), economic and social issues (14%), crime (13%), and healthcare (8%). Only 3% of Georgians think that Russia has no issues or threats (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Main issues or threats Russia is currently facing (%)



Note: Multiple answers were allowed. Accordingly, total response percentages exceed 100%.

Issues named do not change notably across age groups and settlement type, although people in Tbilisi name human rights and democracy as main issues more often (33%) compared to Georgians living in other urban and rural areas (24% and 20%, respectively) (Table 2).

Table 2. In your opinion, what are the main issues or threats facing Russia at the moment? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
External issues and international conflicts/ sanctions (Bad relations with neighboring countries and the west)	45%	43%	40%	46%	44%	40%	43%
Human rights and democracy	24%	29%	22%	33%	24%	20%	25%
Economy and social issues	11%	15%	17%	17%	15%	12%	14%
Crime	13%	14%	13%	16%	14%	12%	13%
Healthcare (including Covid issues)	10%	7%	7%	6%	10%	8%	8%
Education	3%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	2%
Environment protection	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Other	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Everything	4%	5%	4%	5%	5%	4%	5%
Russia has no issues or threats	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	3%
Don't know	29%	28%	30%	26%	26%	33%	29%
Refuse to answer	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Information on and perceptions of the current situation in Russia were quite diverse among focus group participants. Some argue that nothing changes in Russia: that it is not developing, that it is a totalitarian government keeping its people in terror and fear, and that it is not even trying to keep up with the contemporary world. People often noted Russia's tense relations with the West, and the frequent sanctions against it. As one respondent noted, "I think Russian people even lost the ability to protest... Russia has taken a very wrong direction, because it is not developing at all, not developing spiritually, not developing democratically. They are kept in communist times and cannot move on" (Female, 49, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi).

Some believe Russia is highly developed in many ways, mentioning developments in technologies, military, economy, culture, etc. Nevertheless, people who notice certain developments in Russia and see it as a powerful state in many ways, criticize Russia's state of democracy, as well as internal and foreign policy, using phrases such as "Russia has very negative politics", "Russia faces political challenges", "the only issue there is the freedom of speech", "challenges to democracy remain", "if it was democratic, it could be a leading country", "freedom-loving people do not like such politics", "there are little reforms", and "Russia is an occupier".

With regard to politics, a number of issues around non-democratic rule, human rights abuses, and violations of freedom of speech were discussed. Respondents state that Russia is a monarchy, an authoritarian state that does not respect its citizens, and cannot catch up with contemporary developments in the world. The absence of a free media was often mentioned, with respondents stating that there is an informational vacuum in the country because the already limited number of opposition TV channels are oppressed. Democratic culture is weak and those who criticize or oppose the authorities are also oppressed. Respondents argue that democratic processes will take years to develop in Russia, given the current state of affairs. They also think that Russian media spreads disinformation about Georgia, often stating that Georgia started the war in 2008 and spreading negative stereotypes about Georgians: "From what I can see from the outside, Russia has a dictatorship. Freedom of expression is limited. People are told how to think, not having a right to express own opinions. The same is [true] for media, and we can see that from TV as well" (Female, 33, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Batumi).

There are diverse opinions about the attitudes of Russian people towards Russian politics. Those aware of recent protests in Russia argue Russian people are tired and dissatisfied with the authorities and the way politics is done. Others argue that Russians are satisfied with Putin and Russia's chauvinistic politics. In this regard, Russian society's low awareness and the persistence of the Soviet mentality are also mentioned. Some respondents argued that while Putin's expansionist policy might be negative for its neighbors, including Georgia, Russians should like the policy, and Putin, because of it.

"Today we are witnessing political protests in Russia, society is tired of living the way they were made to live until this day. Protest is apparent. People cannot stay silent anymore, and are taking to the streets en masse... Maybe we need more information on exactly what they are dissatisfied with but one thing is clear. They are dissatisfied with Putin. Not only by his politics of attempting to colonize us, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, [and the] Central Asian republics, but his domestic politics as well. Not only freedom of expression is violated. There is an oligarchic rule. Ordinary people are not able to accumulate wealth (Male, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)".

Contrasting statements are made with regard to the economic situation as well. Some state that Russia is too vast and immense to know how people live there. Some participants assessed matters relative to Georgia, stating that Russians are better off than Georgians. Others state that while some large cities prosper economically, generally there is severe poverty in Russia.

“The Russian state and people have a lot of problems. In terms of social politics, the situation is severe. Of course, rich and poor are everywhere, but in general the social situation is very heavy, and the authorities do not seem to care for the people. One thing is to be an aggressor and occupier. Another is to have such a careless attitude towards your own people... The Russian population is probably in a worse social and economic environment than large shares of the Georgian population (Female, 42, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kakheti)”.

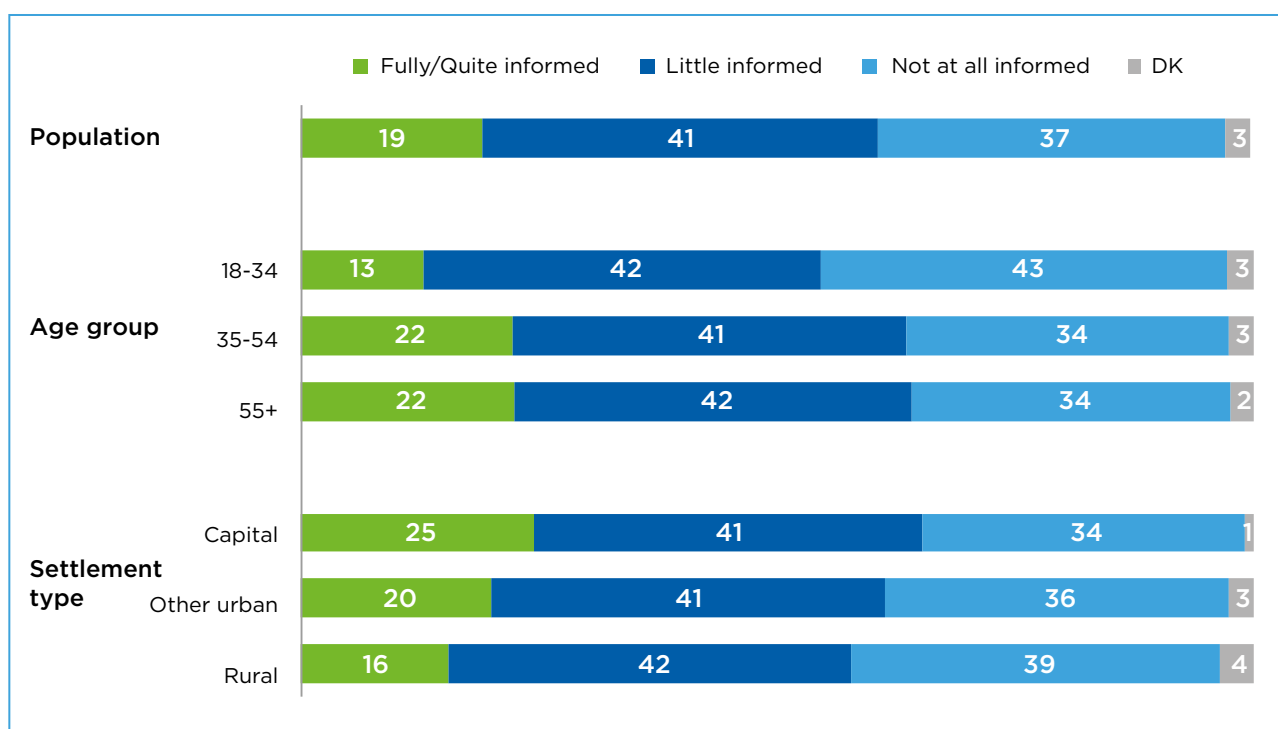
Main findings:

- More than half of the population think that Russia is developing mainly in the wrong direction, while one third cannot determine the direction Russia is developing in. One in ten believe that Russia is going in the right direction, with no differences across settlement types. Focus group participants argue that Russia is not capable of catching up with the contemporary world, having tense relations with the West. Those who find Russia to be a developed country in many regards, still criticize it for its poor state of democracy and aggressive foreign policy.
- The Georgian public consider the top three challenges facing Russia today to be external issues, human rights and democracy, and economic and social issues. Focus group participants also talked about domestic and foreign issues Russia faces, and emphasized freedom of speech and disinformation about Georgia, oppression of the opposition, and the division of Russian society between Putin’s sympathizers and opposition, as well as severe poverty outside Russia’s big cities.

3.3. Sources of information

A little over a third of the population (37%) reports not being informed on developments in the Russian Federation. This is in line with the findings discussed above that approximately a third (30%) of Georgians are not able to assess the direction Russia is developing in or to name a major issue Russia faces today. Most people (41%) state they have only a little information on developments in the Russian Federation, while only around a fifth (19%) state they are fully or quite informed (Figure 4).

Slight differences are found across age groups and settlement types. Younger people (18-34) report to be fully or quite informed a bit less frequently (13%) and report not to be informed at all more frequently (43%) compared to 35-54 year olds (22% and 34%, respectively) and older people (22% and 34%, respectively) (Figure 4). Being informed on developments in the Russian Federation is more common among people in Tbilisi (25%), than individuals in other urban (20%) or rural (16%) areas.

Figure 4: How informed are you about the developments in the Russian Federation? (%)

Among those who report being informed on developments in the Russian Federation to at least some extent (61%), the most popular information source is television (excluding online transmissions) (69%), followed by social networks (37%), websites of media sources (14%), family members, friends, relatives, or colleagues living in Russia (12%), and family members, friends, relatives, or colleagues living in Georgia (6%). Few consume print media and radio (Table 3).

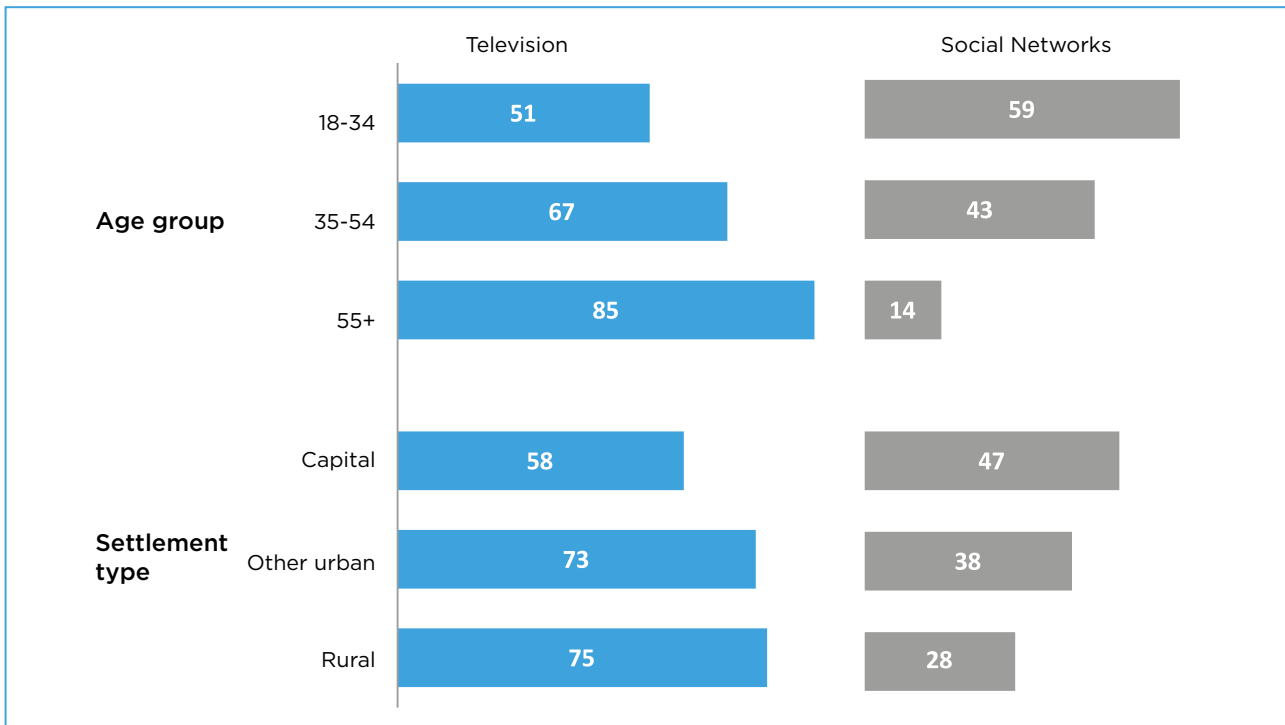
Table 3. What is/are your main source(s) of information regarding the developments/ongoing events in the Russian Federation? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Television (excluding online transmissions)	51%	67%	85%	58%	73%	75%	69%
Social networks	59%	43%	14%	47%	38%	28%	37%
Websites of media sources	21%	16%	6%	20%	11%	11%	14%
Family members, friends, relatives in Russia	8%	15%	13%	14%	10%	12%	12%
Family members, friends, relatives in Georgia	7%	6%	6%	5%	4%	8%	6%
Newspapers/Newsmagazines (except online)	1%	1%	4%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Radio (excluding online transmissions)	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
Educational institutions	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Don't know	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Refuse to answer	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%

* The question was asked those who said that they are fully informed, quite informed or little informed about the developments in Russian Federation - 61%

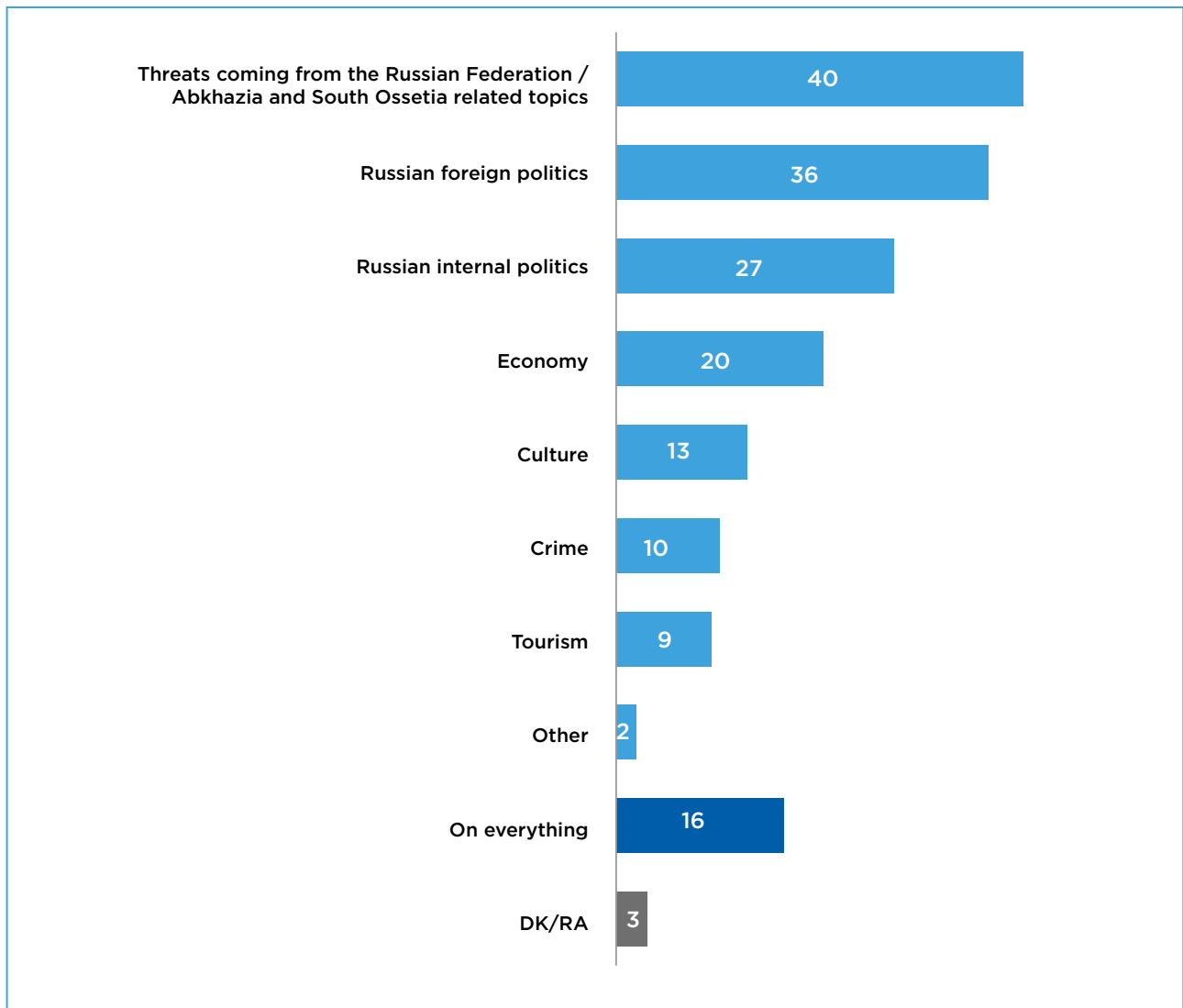
Preferred sources of information on the Russian Federation vary considerably across age groups and settlement types. While the consumption of television is the most frequently named source of information, it is more common among older people. In contrast, younger people name social networks more frequently than older people. More than half of the informed public living in capital (58%) name television as a source of information on developments in Russia, while television has even more consumers in other urban (73%) and rural settlements (75%). Receiving information through social networks is most common in the capital, followed by other urban (38%) and rural areas (28%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Main sources of information on the Russian Federation by age and settlement type (%)



Note: Multiple answers were allowed on the survey. Accordingly, total response percentages exceed 100%. The two most frequently named answers are shown in the figure. Percentages are calculated from the 61% of those who say that they are fully informed, quite informed, or little informed about the developments in Russian Federation.

Those who report being informed about developments in the Russian Federation, most frequently receive information about threats coming from the Russian Federation and/or Abkhazia and South Ossetia related topics (40%). This is followed by Russian foreign politics (36%), Russian internal politics (27%), economics (20%), culture (13%), crime (10%), and tourism (9%). At the same time, 16% claim to receive information on everything (Figure 6).

Figure 6: What kind of information do you usually receive related to the Russian Federation? (%)

Note: Multiple answers were allowed. Accordingly, total response percentages exceed 100%. Percentages are calculated from 61% of those who say that they are fully informed, quite informed, or little informed about the developments in the Russian Federation.

The information people receive does not vary across age groups, although some slight differences are present between settlement types. Capital residents seem to be slightly more informed (43%) about Russia's foreign politics compared to other urban (35%) areas and rural settlements (32%). Similarly, people from Tbilisi are more likely to report they are informed (32%) about Russia's domestic politics compared to inhabitants of rural areas (23%). Information on other issues seem to be more or less equally accessed by people living in all types of settlements (Table 4).

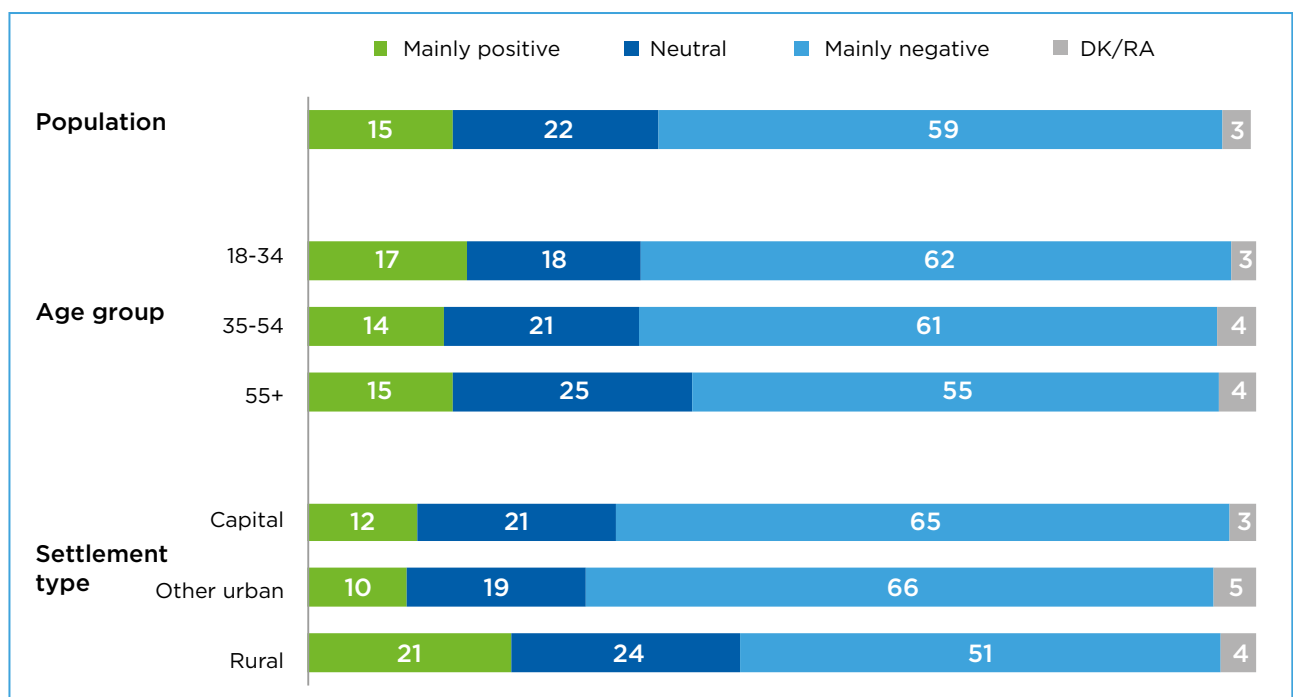
Table 4. Please tell me, what kind of information do you usually receive related to the Russian Federation? Is it information on (%) ...

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Threats coming from Russian Federation/ Abkhazia and South Ossetia related topics	38%	43%	38%	41%	41%	38%	40%
Russian foreign politics	34%	36%	39%	43%	35%	32%	36%
Russian internal politics	27%	27%	27%	32%	29%	23%	27%
Economy	21%	20%	19%	18%	22%	21%	20%
Culture	12%	14%	12%	16%	9%	12%	13%
Crime	13%	9%	9%	13%	10%	8%	10%
Tourism	9%	11%	8%	13%	8%	7%	9%
Other	0%	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%
On everything	14%	15%	19%	17%	16%	16%	16%
Don't know	3%	2%	3%	0%	3%	4%	2%
Refuse to answer	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%

* The question was asked those who said that they are fully informed, quite informed or little informed about the developments in Russian Federation - 61%

A big part of the population (59%) perceive the information they receive about the Russian Federation as mainly negative, while 15% perceive it as mainly positive. A bit more than a fifth find the information they receive to be neutral (Figure 7). Although the majority of people in all age groups and settlement types perceive the information as negative, there are some differences between groups. Young people (62%) and those 35-54 (61%) find that the information they receive is negative more often than people aged 55 and older (55%). Differences are more notable across settlement types, with more people in rural areas reporting that the information they receive is positive (21%) and fewer reporting it is negative (51%), compared to people in the capital (12% and 65%, respectively) and other urban areas (10% and 66%, respectively) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Is the information you receive on the Russian Federation mainly positive or negative? (%)



Note: Percentages are calculated from the 61% of those who say that they are fully informed, quite informed, or little informed about developments in the Russian Federation.

In line with the finding that a majority of the population report being informed about developments in Russian Federation to a certain extent, focus group participants also report interest in the situation in Russia. They highlight that it is a neighbouring country, and what happens there affects Georgia as well. They highlight that the influence is both political and economic, as Georgia is dependent on the Russian market. However, they suggest that if the political situation does not change, the economy alone will not improve the situation.

“It is very important to know what is going on in Russia because it has a direct impact on us. If democratic processes start there, maybe we will be saved as well, have a chance to breathe freely if they change something, if they change their attitude (Female, 47, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Imereti)”.

TV and news agencies on social media are named the most common sources of information on Russia, as well as on relations between Russia and Georgia. Respondents name both Georgian and Russian, as well as English language sources, such as the BBC and CNN among others, as sources of information. Georgian sources seem to be more commonly consumed, and most watch TV. Ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijani report they receive information in Russian or in their own languages.

Although the survey showed that only 12% of population receives information on the Russian Federation from acquaintances living in Russia, focus group participants named acquaintances living in Russia as one of the most trusted sources of information. People who are willing to criticize Russia are particularly trusted, as participants suggested they would be scared to discuss these issues on social media due to the surveillance threat.

Considering the challenges to freedom of information in Russia today, the Russian media is not trustworthy to many participants. Some also consider Georgian media to be subjective to a certain extent, while others consider it trustworthy, especially in comparison to Russian media. Therefore, for some, social media is a better source of information on developments in Russia.

“TV, press, everything is monopolized in Russia. The only source where truth is written is the internet. But, how we really know what is going on there is from the information we get from the 800,000 Georgians living there of which a lot are our relatives and friends... information is coming from Russian colleagues and friends as well (Male, 55, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)”.

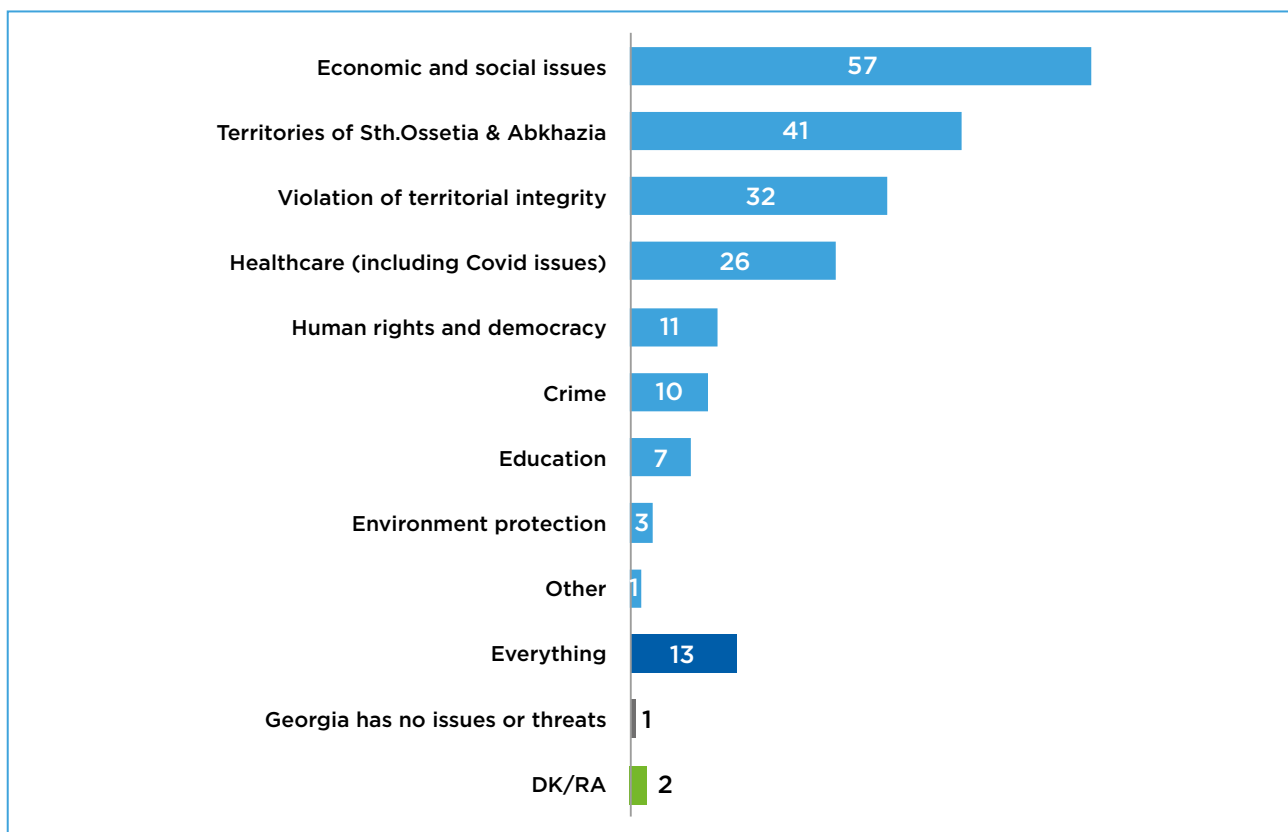
Main findings:

- A majority of the Georgian population (61%) reports being informed about developments in the Russian Federation to at least some extent. Young people are slightly less informed on developments in Russia compared to older age groups. Being “fully” or “quite” informed is slightly more common among people in Tbilisi (25%) compared to people in rural areas (16%). Focus group participants mostly report they are quite informed about ongoing events in Russia, believing that developments in Russia affect Georgia immensely.
- The most popular sources of information for those reporting to be informed on developments in the Russian Federation are television (69%) and social networks (37%). Focus group participants also mention these two as major sources. They argue that while Russian media is politicized, Georgian media is quite subjective as well. Although family members, friends, relatives, and colleagues living in Russia are named as sources of information by only 12% of the public, focus group participants find them to be one of the most reliable sources of information.
- For those who report being informed about ongoing events in the Russian Federation, information about threats coming from the Russian Federation and related to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (40%) are most common. These are followed by Russian foreign (36%) and internal politics (27%). The majority of the informed population (59%) find the information they receive to be mainly negative, with 15% finding it to be mainly positive.

3.4. Domestic and Foreign Policy of Georgia

Respondents were asked to name the main challenges or threats that Georgia is facing at the moment. The most popular responses among people living in Georgia were economic and social issues (57%), the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia / occupation (41%), and further violation of territorial integrity (32%). Healthcare, including COVID-19 related issues (26%), human rights and democracy (11%), crime (10%), and education (7%) followed. Approximately 13% believe Georgia is facing all of the issues asked about (Figure 8).

Figure 8: The main issues or threats facing Georgia (%)



Note: Multiple answers were allowed. Accordingly, total response percentages exceed 100%. The answer options were read out to the respondents.

The data show small differences between different age groups and people living in different settlements. Compared to young people, more people over 35 report the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia/ Occupation are the main issue facing Georgia (43% compared to 36%). In rural areas, healthcare issues are mentioned by 29%, while 18% reported the same in the capital. In addition, 11% of Tbilisi residents mentioned education, while 5% of rural residents claimed the same (Table 5).

Table 5. In your opinion, what are the main issues or threats facing Georgia at the moment? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Economy and social issues	57%	58%	57%	57%	57%	57%	57%
Territories of South Ossetia & Abkhazia	36%	43%	43%	40%	39%	43%	41%
Violation of territorial integrity	30%	32%	34%	35%	30%	31%	32%
Healthcare (including Covid issues)	26%	26%	25%	18%	27%	29%	26%
Human rights and democracy	12%	10%	10%	13%	10%	10%	11%
Crime	12%	10%	8%	8%	11%	10%	10%
Education	9%	8%	5%	11%	8%	5%	7%
Environment protection	2%	5%	1%	3%	4%	2%	3%
Other	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%
Everything	15%	13%	11%	15%	15%	11%	13%
Georgia has no issues or threats	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Don't know	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Refuse to answer	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Qualitative data provides a similar picture. FG participants considered economic problems, unemployment, and low wages as among the main domestic issues. Participants also talked about nepotism and difficulties in finding a proper job that pays well. These economic problems also cause emigration, according to participants.

Another frequently named issue was Russia, both as a general issue as well as related to Russian occupation. In addition, some focus group participants mentioned disinformation, constant anti-western propaganda from Russia, and an unstable political will to go against Russia's political interference in Georgia. Some respondents say that Georgian politics' attitude towards Russia has become too soft and should become stricter.

Focus group participants say that the constant struggle between the government and the opposition is a massive problem for the country, as supporters of the different political parties are becoming aggressive towards each other: "Internal relations, the hostility towards one another is a big threat, which needs to be resolved, and the country and people should be united" (Female, 64, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo, village bordering Abkhazia).

The pandemic and lack of vaccines in the country was named frequently.² Some respondents also talked about the lack of democracy, lack of professionalism, low levels of education, the biased court system, and the lack of rule of law.

Several ethnic Armenian respondents also brought up issues related to the Davit Gareji Monastery. One stated:

"Of course, the situation regarding the [Davit Gareji] Monastery is very intense. It is important for Azerbaijanis and they are not going to compromise. For us Georgians, the Monastery is also very

² The FGs were conducted in February 2021, when the vaccination had not yet started in the country.

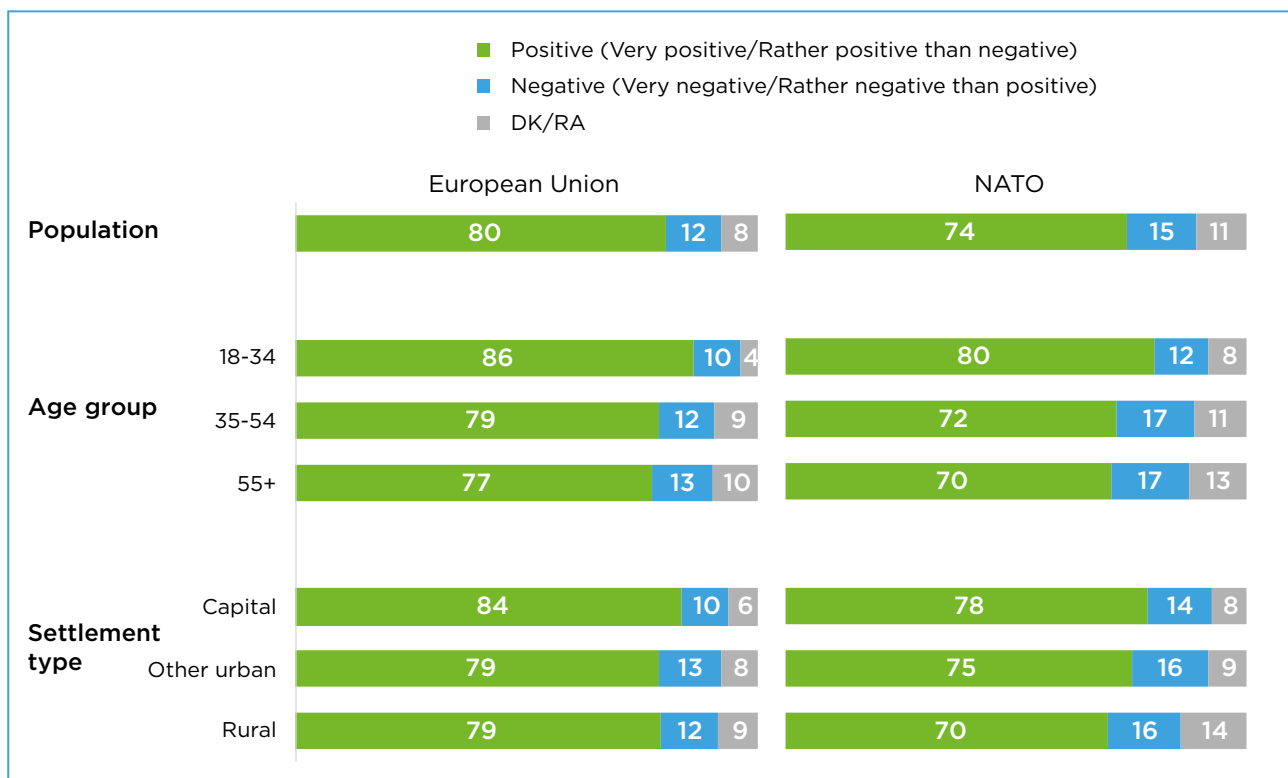
valuable and historically significant. So, Georgia does not want to give up, and the situation might escalate. Both sides are fighting for their interests and we don't know what will happen (Female, 33, higher education/student, ethnic Armenian, Samtskhe Javakheti)".

Turning to the foreign policy of Georgia, the respondents were asked to assess their attitudes towards Georgia's aspiration/desire to become a member of the European Union and NATO. The majority of Georgians report a positive attitude (very positive and more positive than negative) towards becoming a member of the EU and NATO (80% and 74%, respectively) (Figure 9).

Age is associated with attitudes towards becoming a member of the EU and NATO. Younger people aged 18 to 34 assess the aspiration more positively than the older age groups. However, the share of those having positive attitudes is still high among all age groups (Figure 9).

Slight differences are also present between urban and rural areas. Tbilisi residents (84%) are slightly more positive about EU membership than people in other urban areas (79%) and people living in rural areas (79%). People living in Tbilisi (78%) and other urban areas (75%) have more positive attitudes towards becoming NATO members compared to people living in rural areas (70%). Slightly more rural residents (14%) are uncertain compared to people in the capital and other urban residents (8% and 9%, respectively) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Interest in joining the European Union and NATO (%)



During the focus groups, attitudes were more or less consistent between age groups and settlements. In most cases, participants claimed to be big supporters of the European Union and NATO. They see the EU and NATO as solutions to Georgia's problems. Respondents claim that by joining the unions, Georgia will become a better place, with one respondent stating: "We would live in a world with completely different standards. It will have a very positive impact on us. We will have more freedom, more democracy, and more opportunities for our children to receive education" (Female, 49, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi).

Also, participants argue international cooperation and support is very important for Georgia to stand on its feet and fight against Russia's aggression.

"I would like to add that international support is important for us, because a small country like ours has no other leverage to deal with this monster [Russia], and economic strengthening is very important for Georgia to seize the European market. Georgia would improve its products and become more competitive and less dependent on Russia (Female, 25, higher education/student, ethnic Georgian, Telavi)".

Focus groups participants mentioned that the EU is trying to help Georgia economically. If Georgia became part of the EU, some think that the economic situation would improve. However, some respondents felt that the economic situation would worsen as the EU has many regulations and Georgia's economy would face difficulties following them. As one respondent stated:

"I do not support the membership in the EU, but rather associate membership in the EU, as they have many socialist regulations for the economy that are disastrous for a developing country like ours... for starting business it will be a disaster. Therefore, associate membership and expanding the relations is the best solution. We need to share European values, which are based on freedom (Male, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)".

There were a few respondents who claimed European Union membership was unacceptable and a threat to Georgian traditions and values. As one respondent stated:

"If we move towards liberalization, I think that the Georgian nation, breed, genes will disappear...We will lose 'Georgianness'. Maybe Russia is irritated because we keep calling for the EU and NATO? Maybe negotiations with Russia would be more effective if we didn't strive towards the West? (Female, 45+, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo)".

There were also several cases when respondents supported relations with the EU but not NATO, as they did not want to irritate Russia. A respondent stated, "I am also against joining NATO, because there is a [military] base near our village in Jandar, and it creates many threats. But I would like to join the EU for education and politics" (Male, 22, higher education, ethnic Azerbaijani, Kvemo Kartli).

The overall assessment of NATO is very positive. Focus group participants claim that membership in NATO will bring security, protect the country, and will prevent aggression from Russia. For many participants, NATO is the only instrument to fight against Russia's occupation. However, participants also highlight that it is NATO's decision whether or not it will accept Georgia: "We should join NATO in order to fight against Russia's aggression. But it is up to NATO and not us to decide. They will let us join whenever they think it is time, as it happened with Turkey" (Male, 32, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Telavi).

Some participants think that NATO is not accepting Georgia, because it does not want conflict with Russia. In addition, there were several respondents who claimed that we should not try to become NATO members as this will irritate Russia. They argue that since joining NATO is not scheduled in the near future, Georgians should consider Russia's attitude towards the issue as they will always be a neighbour.

"In order to settle things between Georgia and Russia, we should not join NATO or the US. It is essential that we have good relations with the neighbors, and Europe was always against the U.S.S.R., wanted to have it under its influence. For 75 years we were part of Russia. Was it a bad life? No, it was a good one (Male, 45+, ethnic Azerbaijani, Kvemo Kartli)".

There are also some respondents who do not have negative attitude towards the EU and NATO, but think that membership would not be helpful when it comes to Russia and that people in Georgia should take care of themselves. As a participant stated:

“If we do not take care of ourselves, neither Europe, nor NATO or Russia will save us...We should have good relations with Europe and Russia, but we should not act based on their interests. We are oppressed, and we should not be a chess board for the bigger countries (Male, 51, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Batumi)”.

Some respondents also mentioned that it is not enough that the West is outraged, and they suggested that the West should take stronger actions to stop Russia. One respondent stated, “If these dominant countries [and unions] did not help us until now, what will change in the future? We will only hear phrases like we are ‘outraged’, ‘we are alarmed’” (Female, 40, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi).

Ethnic minorities have rather neutral attitudes towards NATO and the EU, as they claim to have no information. However, there were also some positive attitudes among ethnic Armenians.

“I probably have a rather positive attitude, because if Georgia becomes part of the EU, it will be more developed and stronger and it will feel more protected. There are many opportunities in the EU. People will come and go to the EU countries, and this will have a positive effect. I don’t have much information, but I think it won’t be bad for sure (Female, 25, secondary education, ethnic Armenian, Samtskhe Javakheti)”.

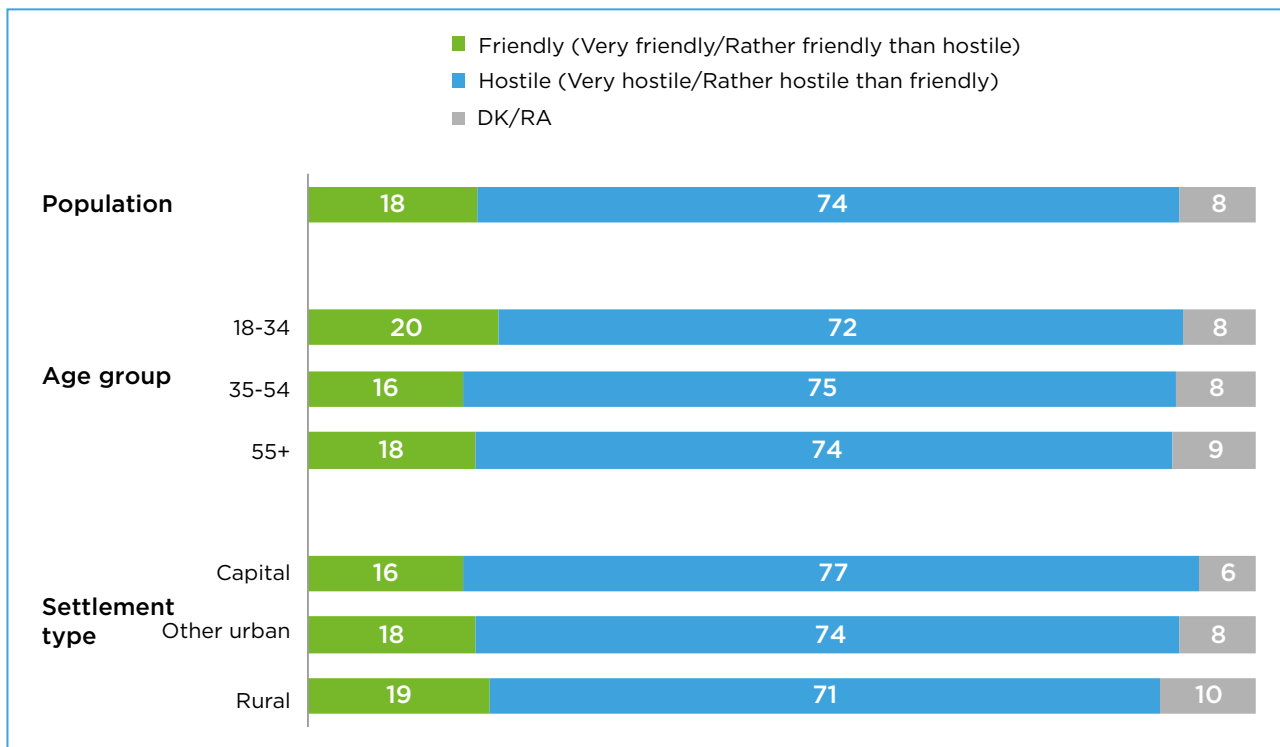
Main findings:

- People living in Georgia think that the main challenges and threats facing Georgia at the moment are economic and social issues (57%), followed by South Ossetia and Abkhazia / occupation (41%), further violation of territorial integrity (32%), and healthcare (26%).
- Focus group discussions confirm these attitudes, with many participants bringing up issues related to unemployment, low wages, and difficulties finding a “proper” job. The occupied territories as well as “creeping occupation” from Russia were also frequently mentioned during the focus group discussions. Issues related to the pandemic were also mentioned;
- A large majority of Georgians (80%) report positive attitudes (very positive and more positive than negative attitudes) towards becoming a member of the EU. A large share of Georgians (74%) also have a positive attitude towards becoming a member of NATO.
- Younger people and those living in the capital have more positive attitudes in terms of EU and NATO compared to older people and rural residents. However, even in these groups, the majority (70% or more) hold a positive attitude. FG discussions show that the EU and NATO are seen as the main solutions to Georgia’s problems, offering freedom, democracy, economic stability, better education (EU) as well as security and protection from Russia (NATO).
- Those having neutral or negative attitudes explain this through their impression that the West is neglecting Georgia. In addition, some do not want to irritate Russia through attempting to become a NATO member, while others prefer Georgians taking care of themselves and not being dependent on larger institutions.

3.5. Russia-Georgia Relations

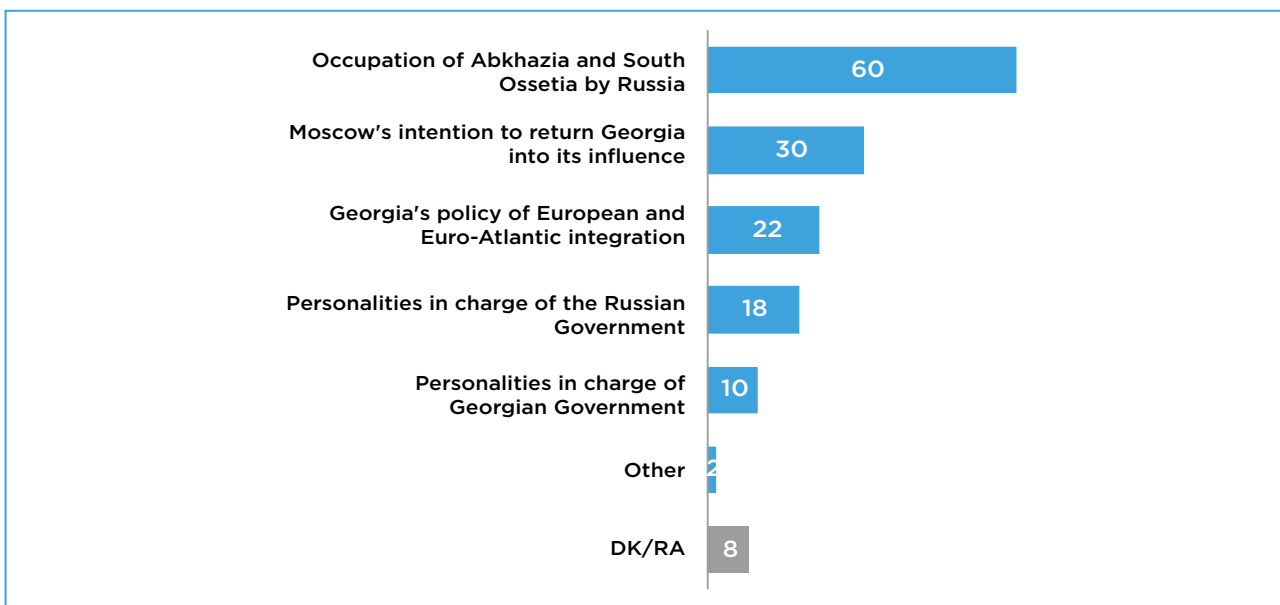
A majority of Georgians (74%) think that relations between the Georgian and Russian states are hostile, while 18% think that the relations are friendly. A small share of the population (8%) is unable to determine whether relations are friendly or hostile (Figure 10). Slightly more of those living in the capital (77%) find relations hostile compared to those living in rural areas (71%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Relations between the Georgian and Russian states (%)



The most frequently named obstacle to good relations in the public’s view is the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (60%), followed by Moscow’s intention to return Georgia into its sphere of influence (30%), Georgia’s policy of European and Euro-Atlantic integration (22%), personalities in charge of the Russian Government (18%), and personalities in charge of the Georgian Government (10%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: The main obstacles to good relations between Georgia and Russia (%)



Note: Multiple answers were allowed. Accordingly, total response percentages exceed 100%.

When naming the main obstacles and challenges, no notable differences are found across age groups or settlement types (Table 6).

Table 6. Could you list the main obstacles/challenges hindering good and neighborly relations between Georgian and Russian states? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia	59%	59%	60%	61%	62%	58%	60%
Moscow's intention to return Georgia into its influence	28%	34%	28%	33%	29%	29%	30%
Georgia's policy of European and Euro-Atlantic integration	20%	22%	22%	21%	20%	23%	22%
Personalities in charge of the Russian Government	16%	18%	19%	19%	18%	16%	18%
Personalities in charge of Georgian Government	8%	8%	12%	12%	8%	9%	10%
Other	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%	1%	2%
There are no obstacles/ There are normalized/good relations	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	9%	5%	8%	5%	7%	9%	7%
Refuse to answer	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%

The qualitative findings resemble the quantitative. Respondents state that the relationships between Russia and Georgia are tense in large part due to Russia's imperialist politics. The occupation of Georgian territories and creeping occupation are mentioned most frequently as a reason for tense relations. The creeping occupation, Russia's imperialist politics in the region, and historical experience also give participants a constant feeling of insecurity. Respondents spoke about how together with the creeping occupation, Georgian citizens are kidnapped and abused. Some argue that Georgians are very ignorant of the problem, while others argue that the consequences of Russian aggression will not be easily forgotten.

"We all know about the creeping occupation: that they just come and set fences up as if it was their own yard, absolutely not interested in what we think. And we keep silent, not having any leverage, not doing anything. Sometimes I don't understand anymore how we can be so indifferent towards all that is happening to us (Female, 38, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo)".

The lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries was also noted. Considering the current political situation, neither Russia nor Georgia seems ready to restore relations, making no feasible steps to improve the relations.

Generally, respondents seem to be quite sceptical about improving relations with Russia due to the historical experience and consequent distrust. Some respondents are willing to overcome the political tension and restore good neighbourly relations with Russia due to their affection for Russian people and culture, although only on the premise of de-occupation. Others argue that Russia's approach to Georgia will never change, and after de-occupation, Georgia should cut all ties with Russia.

"It is generally impossible to have any kind of relationship with a country that is not interested in keeping good neighbourly relations with anyone, doing anything, and destroying everything on its way to reach its imperialist goals. That is why I think our major goal is to return the occupied territories, and then cut all ties with Russia (Male, 20, higher education/student, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)".

Some argue that Russia seeks to restore the Soviet Union and dominate the region. Russia has always acted with the principle of divide and rule, and redistributed lands among countries in the Caucasus to destabilize the region, respondents argue. As a result, the countries and people of the region fight each other.

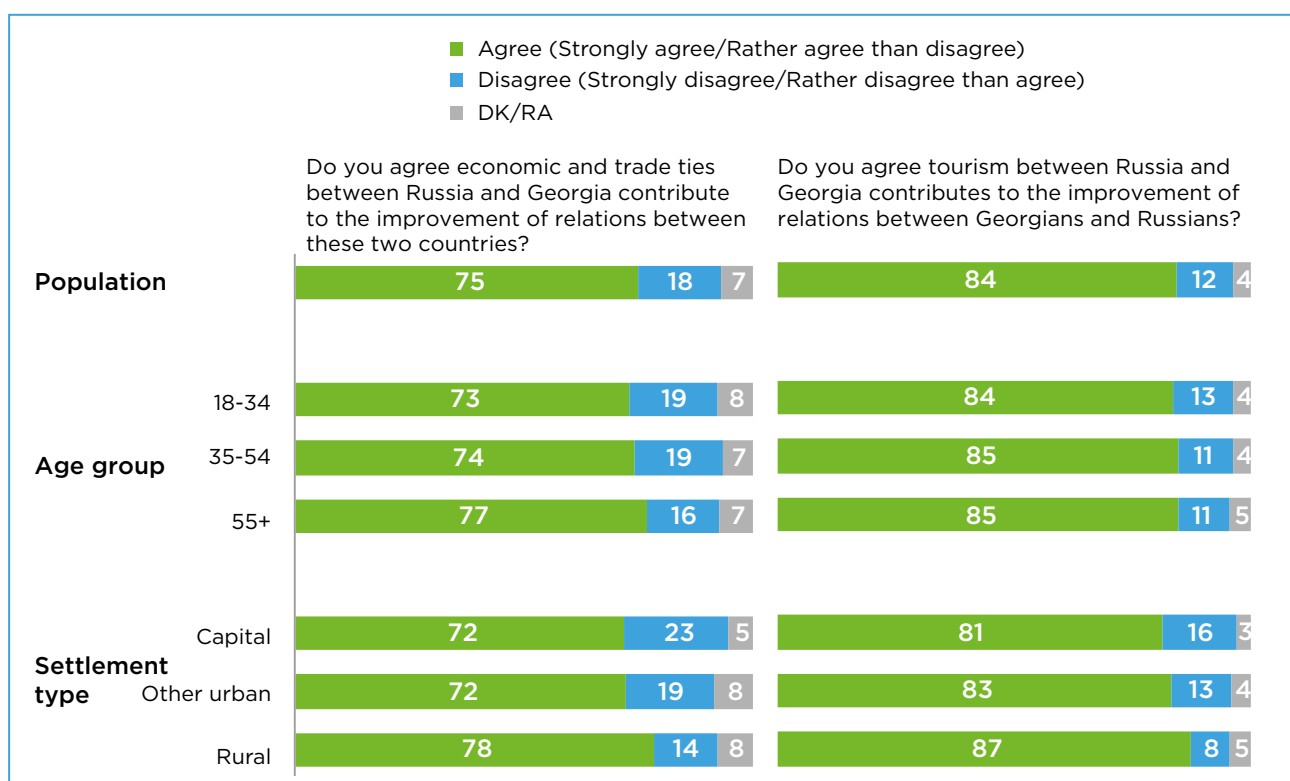
“I think Russia put kind of grenades in the Caucasus. [It] distributed lands among neighbours so that it can activate those grenades any time... Before Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, [and] Abkhaz were getting along fine, but Russia put them against each other to have a dispute, to get where we are now... (Female, 64, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo)”.

While ethnic Georgian respondents are unified around the issue of Russian occupation and its role in Georgian-Russian relations, opinions differ among ethnic minorities. Some blame Russia and some Georgia for the occupation, stating that Georgia should not have allowed Russia to occupy its territories. In the Azerbaijani focus groups, respondents argued that the negative relations between the two countries is Georgia’s fault, and that it was people from those territories that asked Russia for help. If Georgia was good enough, they would not want independence. It has also been mentioned that while Georgians call it occupation, Abkhazia is actually trying to have a sovereign state. Thus, the participants argued that Georgia should try to improve relations with Russia so that people have opportunity to travel and trade.

“I don’t think that Russia is to blame for the relationship between Georgia and Russia. Occupation of Georgian territories is a result of Georgia’s politics... Abkhaz, Ossetians asked Russia for help. If Georgia was good why would they want to leave... I don’t think Russia occupied Abkhazia to integrate it. Abkhazia has its president. They are just using Russia’s money... They are trying to have their sovereign country and Russia gave them that freedom (Male, 70, higher education, ethnic Azerbaijani, Kvemo Kartli)”.

A majority of people living in Georgia believe that economic and trade ties contribute to the improvement of relations between the Georgian and Russian states (75%), while tourism between Georgia and Russia contributes to the improvement of relations between Georgian and Russian people (84%) (Figure 12). There are no differences between age groups on views of the above, but attitudes do vary by settlement. Slightly more rural people agree that economic ties would benefit relations.

Figure 12: Contribution of tourism and economic/trade ties to improving relations (%)



Opinions on a potential improvement of relations between Russia and Georgia through economic and trade ties seem to be mixed among focus group participants. Some believe that it can play a positive role, as in previous times when there was more trade and the relations between people were better. Others do not think the economic relations can change anything when Russian politics are so unpredictable. In this regard, they recall the embargos on Georgian goods. Further they believe that trade should not be placed above political interests with regards to the occupied territories.

“Trade with Russia used to be two, three times more extensive when relations were normal with Russia than it is today. Thus, it is obvious that when you are tied to a country economically, it has impact on stabilizing relations between countries, because economics is the major driving force in developing country structures (Male, 23, higher education/student, ethnic Georgian, Imereti)”.

Those believing in the potential of economic relations recall the Ergneti Market³ as a good example of public diplomacy. Trade is argued to have almost facilitated reconciliation, and relations worsened after it was closed down. The same is argued about trade with Russia. If economic relations were strong, it would facilitate the normalization of relations between the two countries, according to the respondents.

“The Ergneti Market and Enguri Dam were two pearls of the Georgian-Russian relationship that had started reconciliation before 2004... What I know about Ergneti Marke is that Russians and Georgians, Ossetians and Georgians were on good terms. There was movement, economic, and cultural exchange. People felt free until politics did not break the bridge down... Relationships with Ossetians were tense, but there was the Market. There was people’s diplomacy. Trade moved people closer and moving around the border was not an issue (Male, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli)”.

Some are also sceptical of this position. They argue that while trade relations generally have positive potential, economic relations cannot change relations with Russia when it uses trade as a tool for political leverage. Russia is argued to pose a military threat, being able to use military force or embargo Georgian goods at any time. They point to the many examples of Russia doing this. People also mentioned trade involving strategically important infrastructure or industries with foreigners as dangerous, especially with Russians. Some argued for a ban.

Although ethnic Georgian respondents mentioned the importance of economic relations with Russia, ethnic Armenians placed more emphasis on it. They argued that they speak Russian better than Georgian and find it easier to find work in Russia and emphasized it as relates seasonal work. They highlighted the importance of remittances for their community, and thus the importance of economic relations with Russia. Highlighted that Georgian citizens of Armenian ethnicity have to receive Armenian citizenship first to gain access to the Russian job market. They reported that around 80% of Samtskhe-Javakheti’s population depends on remittances from seasonal work in Russia. Thus, it should be in Georgia’s interest to facilitate workforce mobility. Apart from economic exchange, ethnic Armenian participants reported that Georgia should soften its approach to Russia and seek out visa free travel to Russia for Georgian citizens. When Russian citizens have easy entry to Georgia, Georgians should also be able to visit relatives in Russia without resource and time consuming visa procedures. If there was free movement between Russia and Georgia, people would have the opportunity to go and work in a neighbouring country to improve their economic well-being.

“A majority of the population from Samtskhe-Javakheti travel to Russia for seasonal work. This is impossible with a Georgian passport, so they must reject Georgian citizenship and become

3 The Ergneti Market was a market in the village Ergneti. Georgians and Ossetians traded in this area between 1991-2004.

citizens of Armenia or Russia to be able to travel and work there. This is very difficult for us. No one is willing to reject Georgian citizenship... If we had the same relationship with Russia as we have with Europe and would be able to travel without a visa there too... I am not sure about the situation in the rest of Georgia, but 80% of Samtskhe-Javakheti's population from Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, [and] Ninotsminda depends on Russia and remittances from there. This money flows back to Georgia, so it should be in Georgia's interest to make the visa process easier and start economic relations... And this is not only about seasonal jobs, we all have relatives there, not being able to join them in joy or sorrow due to visa procedures (Female, 35, higher education, ethnic Armenian, Samtskhe-Javakheti)".

Generally, participants are sceptical about improvement of relations between the two countries and tend to believe that the relationship between Russia and Georgia depends mostly on Russia and its decisions. Unless Russia decides on de-occupation and respects Georgia as a sovereign country, Georgia can do little to change the state of affairs in the view of focus group participants. Thus, when talking about steps that Georgia should take, respondents talk more about what Georgia should do to neutralize or decrease the Russian threat rather than what to do in order to improve relations.

To defend its interests and survive the Russian threat, Georgia should seek to increase international pressure on Russia or to increase partnership with and seek to integrate in international organizations according to participants. When talking about international pressure, respondents mentioned the European Union, NATO, and other international organizations, as well as large countries such as the USA and Germany. With regards to integration in Western structures, respondents argued that Georgia should develop and strengthen democratically to be an attractive partner for international organizations and seek to lobby for its own interests. If the West does not intervene, Russia will always seek to have instability in Georgia as it is scared to have NATO forces at its borders.

"The leverage for survival is integration with organizations that will protect us as a state. Nowadays there are Western structures we can consider as such. Strengthening relationships with the EU and NATO is our only guarantee to survive. If we survive, then we can think of whether we can have a relationship with our neighbour (Male, 24, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kakheti)".

Some respondents talked about the need for negotiations and the inevitability of compromise from both the Georgian and Russian sides. They argue that no one will be able to facilitate relations if Russia and Georgia do not find some way to talk. A few respondents said condemning Russia just because it is not a democracy is not right. They argue that there is no truly democratic country in the world and human rights are abused everywhere. When speaking about a potential compromise, participants usually specify rejecting integration into NATO, and therefore the rejection of deployment of NATO forces in Georgia. In such cases, there was an argument about Georgia having nothing left to compromise, or that even if Georgia compromises, Russia will still try to dominate and will not change its mind about the occupied territories. Thus, while some respondents find integration into Western structures a defence against Russia, others argue that it is necessary to not integrate to gain the return of the occupied territories.

"I definitely cannot say about the state that did this to us that it is not an occupier, but something should be done to end this fighting, to restore the diplomatic relations... I think it is possible. We should do everything. Both of us should compromise, so that we move towards reconciliation... I meet a lot of people in the village, during feast, in public transport, everyone thinks the same... This tension cannot go on for long. We live near the border, and don't even know what to expect... (Male, 54, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli)".

Some respondents felt that Georgia has a soft approach to Russia. They argued that history has shown that good-faith relations with Russia never brought any good to Georgia: despite attempts to have friendly relations, Georgia ended up with occupied territories. Thus, such attempts will do no good for the country, and Russia will do what it always does. Therefore, instead of being afraid of irritating Russia, Georgia should always express its position, be it through military force or diplomacy. Several also believe in a military solution, but they understand that it is unrealistic for Georgia to defeat Russia militarily. Some argue that Russia is a large and strong state, with a strong military. Therefore, threats from Georgia will not accomplish anything. They argue a soft power and diplomatic approach is necessary. Several respondents mentioned that they felt involving the Patriarchate of Georgia in peace talks would be important to achieve an effective outcome.

“I don’t think a peaceful approach is the right way... if we keep peace, smile or embrace Russia, it will still do the same. That is why we should say what we have to say, be it through war, fight or diplomacy... and not to think that it is better to keep silent not to irritate Russia, so that it does not shoot us... We should strengthen our military. What would you say if your fellow citizen is shot? Let it be that way, we cannot do anything anyway? I prefer if my fellow citizen dies fighting rather than in inaction... Georgians were always warriors, have never given up a crumb of land (Male, 37, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Imereti)”.

While some respondents argue that Putin’s removal from power will improve relations between Russia and Georgia, others argue that a change in government will change nothing for Georgia if Putin’s successor will be a “second Putin”. Thus, unless a progressive leader replaces Putin, Georgia will not be able to have normalized relations with Russia. Regarding this issue, a number of respondents reflected on ongoing events in Russia. They viewed Navalny as a strong opposition to Putin. Still, even if Navalny replaces Putin, they believe this will not change the occupation issue for Georgia given that Navalny has a similar attitude towards territorial issues according to respondents. Some argue that Russian public opinion supports imperialist policies. Therefore, whoever replaces Putin will have to share those attitudes. These participants argued that not even generational change will move this issue, because Russian people have always had imperialist aspirations.

“I don’t see a potential for change in Russia. Maybe the opposition is making things easier for us, but considering the position of the opposition leader towards our occupied territories, it is hard to say anything will change... Russia will continue the occupation of our territories (Male, 20, higher education/student, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)”.

Respondents named several historical periods that they felt determined the current relations between Georgia and Russia. Most commonly, respondents mentioned the end of the 1980s through the beginning of the 1990s, including the events of April 9th, 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia’s declaration of independence, and the 1992-1993 War in Abkhazia. The Treaty of Georgievsk, signed in the 18th century, was mentioned frequently as well. Some mentioned the 2008 August War, as well as the Red Army invasion of Georgia in 1921.

“Russia showed its true face to us three times. All these times, we have been headed towards Europe. Starting from the 18th century when the Treaty of Georgievsk was signed and we allowed Russia to make us slaves, to the beginning of the past century after we gained independence and were becoming an integral part of Europe that Russia did not forgive us, and for the third time in the beginning of 2000s when we wanted to get our territories back... We have no guarantee it will not happen a fourth time. That is why any kind of negotiations are meaningless... three presidents visited Russia, we got neglected all three times (Male, 50, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi)”.

Similar to the discussions about the potential of economic and trade ties, there are diverse opinions regarding the potential role of the Georgian diaspora in Russia. Many respondents said they have Georgian friends, relatives, and acquaintances living in Russia. Although some participants base their judgment of the diaspora on personal experiences and stories from friends and relatives, others make hypothetical arguments.

Those who believe in the potential of the diaspora to settle relations between Russia and Georgia, see it in different ways. Some respondents argue the diaspora cannot have a large effect, but can play a role in public diplomacy through changing attitudes among friends and through reaching out to local politicians. In this way, they might reach people who have a platform to voice their concerns. This is something that might take years but has the potential to have a real impact.

“I believe [the diaspora] can play a huge role. Maybe not on a big scale, but you know the snowball principle. They can start from a small scale, in their settlements, cities, surroundings of friends, and then move to a bigger scale. Try to reach political figures or activists who can openly express their opinions... I don't expect this to happen today, tomorrow, in one or two years but maybe in 10-15 years it can bear fruit (Female, 29, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Adjara)”.

Those who are sceptical about the potential and role of the Georgian diaspora in Russia argue that Russia is not a democratic country and does not respect ethnic minorities. Therefore, anyone that tries to voice concerns is under threat of oppression. Putin's personal hatred towards Georgians was also mentioned.

Respondents mentioned a number of historical figures, such as Stalin, Georgian celebrities, and business people currently working in Russia. They said that not all Georgians seek to defend the interests of Georgians. Another argument is that Georgians in Russia can do nothing about the political situation, just as Georgians in Georgia can do nothing about it.

“Some of you mentioned the role of diasporas. In many countries, the diaspora definitely has an impact, but we are talking about the Georgian diaspora in Russia, the commander-in-chief of which hates Georgians. If we had the same diaspora in the US as we have in Russia, it might have some influence, because it's a democratic country, but not in Russia where even Armenia's strong diaspora turned out to be helpless as we saw from recent events (Male, 47, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Batumi)”.

The impact of Georgian authorities on the Georgian diaspora in Russia was also mentioned. Participants argued that Georgian authorities impose limitations on the diaspora. These beliefs are poorly argued by the respondents, based on a belief that the currently tense situation between the two countries is favourable for Georgian authorities. With regards to political intervention with diaspora issues, respondents mention Mikheil Saakashvili's attempt to help establish a diaspora organization, which respondents say was headed by criminals who used it for personal gain.

People argue that while the Georgian diaspora cannot play a direct political role, it can change stereotypes about Georgians created through Russian propaganda. Some believe that if the Georgian diaspora manages to develop organizationally around a common goal, as the Armenian diaspora does, it will have the potential to lobby for Georgia's interests.

“The fact is, we have a different diaspora in Russia. Georgians have serious businesses there, while Georgians in Italy, Greece, etc., work as housemaids. The money flowing from Georgians in Russia is an important investment for Georgia, while in other countries there might be more Georgians (Male, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli)”.

Main findings:

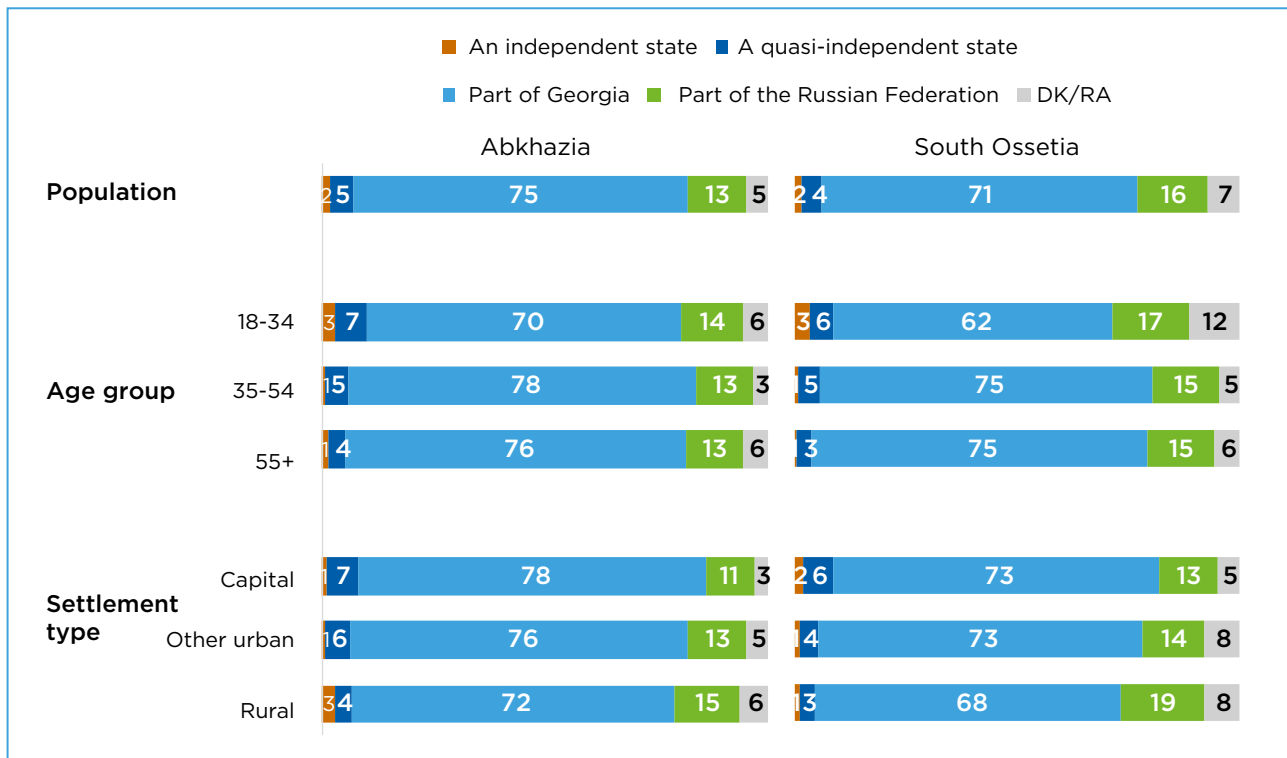
- The majority of Georgians (74%) think that relations between the Georgian and Russian states are hostile. Georgians most commonly name the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (60%), followed by Moscow’s intention to return Georgia into its sphere of influence (30%) as the major obstacles that hinder the relations between the Georgian and Russian states. Focus group participants talk about similar issues, with the addition of creeping occupation and a constant feeling of insecurity due to Russia’s expansionist policies not only towards Georgia, but towards other post-Soviet states as well.
- Focus group participants are sceptical about the improvement of relations between the two countries, unless Russia stops the occupation of Georgian territories. They tend to talk more about the steps Georgia should take to neutralize or decrease the Russian threat. In this regard, some believe that Euro-Atlantic integration is the only solution, while others argue that integration with Euro-Atlantic structures is a threat.
- A majority are optimistic about the potential of tourism in improving relations between people (84%), and about the potential of economic and trade relations (75%) in improving the relations between states.
- Proponents of the opinion that economic and trade ties can improve relations between the two countries point to the past arguing that when there was more trade, the relations were better. Opponents also rely on the past arguing that Russia can embargo Georgian goods at any time. They argue that the occupied territories are more important than trade.
- Focus group participants from Samtskhe-Javakheti, on the other hand, find the normalization of relations between Georgia and Russia crucial, arguing that their economic well-being is highly dependent on circular migration to Russia for the purposes of seasonal employment.

3.6. Conflict regions - knowledge and attitudes

3.6.1 Current situation in the conflict regions

The survey asked respondents about Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A majority of Georgians (75%) say that Abkhazia is part of Georgia. Thirteen percent consider Abkhazia to be part of Russia. A further 5% think that Abkhazia is a quasi-independent state (Figure 13). Younger people (70%) were slightly less likely to say Abkhazia is part of Georgia than older people (35-54 year olds: 78% 54+: 76%). Tbilisi (78%) and other urban residents (76%) claim Abkhazia is part of Georgia slightly more than people living in rural settlements (72%) (Figure 13).

The picture is similar when it comes to South Ossetia. A majority of Georgians (71%) say that South Ossetia is a part of Georgia. Sixteen percent consider South Ossetia part of Russia, while 4% think South Ossetia is a quasi-independent state (Figure 13). As with attitudes towards Abkhazia, older people (75%) consider South Ossetia to be part of Georgia more than younger people (18-34: 62%). There is relatively little difference between settlement types on this question (Figure 13).

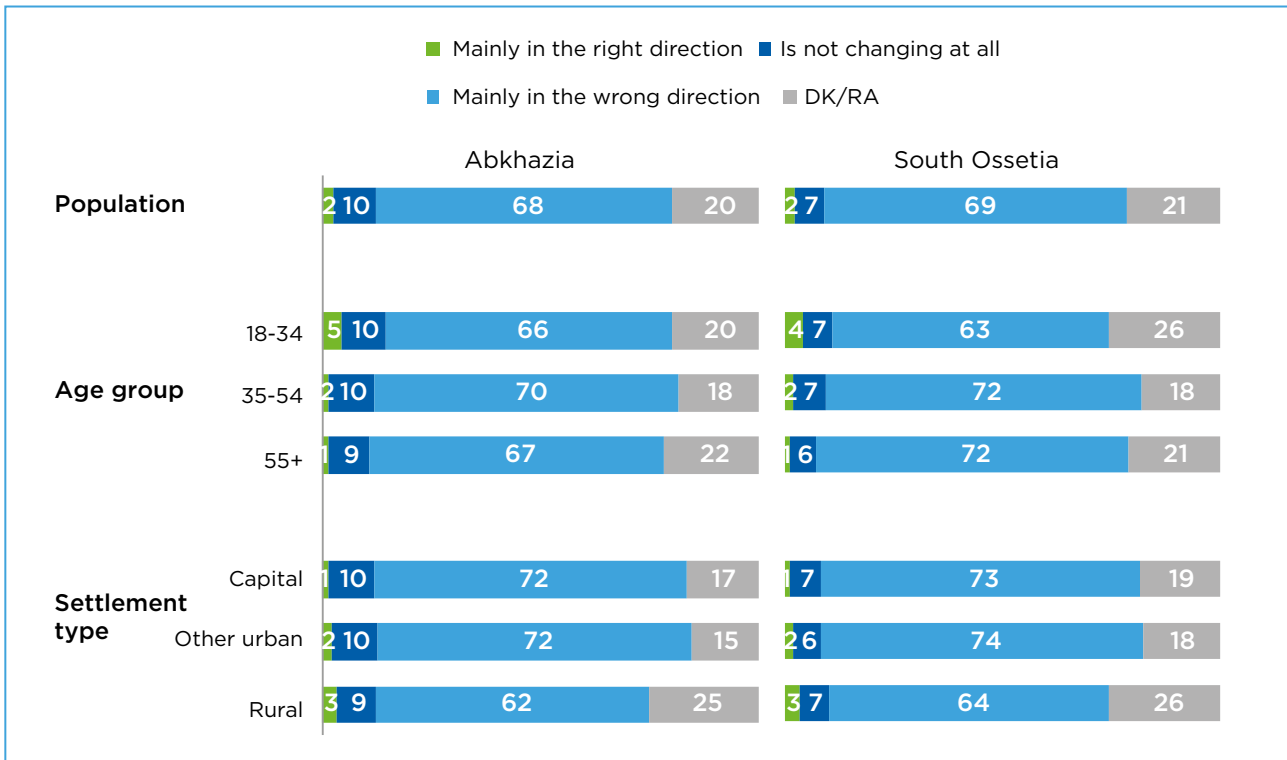
Figure 13: The status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (%)

During the survey respondents were also asked about the direction in which Abkhazia and South Ossetia are developing. A majority of Georgians think that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are developing mainly in the wrong direction (68% and 69%, respectively). In addition, one-fifth of the population does not know how Abkhazia and South Ossetia are developing (20% and 21%, respectively). Only 10% of people think that Abkhazia is not changing at all, and 7% report the same about South Ossetia (Figure 14).

No significant differences were observed among age groups, however, views differ by settlement type. More people living in the capital (72%) and other urban areas (72%) think Abkhazia is developing in the wrong direction than people in rural areas (62%). Additionally, more rural residents (25%) do not know how to assess Abkhazia's development compared to people living in the capital (17%) or other urban areas (15%) (Figure 14).

Respondents' views differ by age group and settlement type when assessing South Ossetia's development. A smaller share of younger Georgians (18-34) (63%) think that South Ossetia is developing mainly in the wrong direction compared to older age groups (72%) (Figure 14). Also, more people living in the capital (73%) and other urban areas (74%) think that South Ossetia is developing mainly in the wrong direction than people living in rural areas (64%). People living in rural areas (26%) do not know how to assess South Ossetia's development more often than people living in the capital (19%) or other urban areas (18%) (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Direction of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's Development (%)



The qualitative findings from the focus groups confirm the quantitative data, with most of the participants claiming Abkhazia and South Ossetia are part of Georgia and that both are in a very bad state. Generally, participants seemed to have more information about the situation in Abkhazia than in South Ossetia with the exception of people living in the villages near the South Ossetian administrative borderline.

During the focus groups, most participants agreed that Russia provoked and managed the conflicts between Georgia and its breakaway regions. They feel that there was no war between Georgia and the regions, but rather Georgia and Russia. As one respondent stated, “In Abkhazia, as well as in Samachablo, everything that has been broken [between us], is because of the third party between us, because of the big country, that wants to be everyone’s boss” (Female, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Telavi).

Abkhazia

For most focus group participants, Abkhazia is part of Georgia and Abkhazians are Georgians. Overall, the respondents evaluate the situation in Abkhazia negatively, claiming that the situation there is very bad. One participant stated:

“Maybe for tourists everything is arranged, but the situation is very intense. My brother was there three years ago, and he said that military personnel go with machine guns on the streets and that there are a lot of thefts and that the situation is pretty bad (Female, 24, secondary education, ethnic Georgian, Batumi)”.

The economic conditions are difficult and some claim that people in Abkhazia regret choosing Russia. Many claim that the situation has not changed much since the 1990s and that crime is as problematic

there as in Georgia during the 90s.

“What I know from a friend who has relatives in Abkhazia and who was there 2-3 years ago, after 17 years [without being there], is that the situation there is like it was here in the 90s. Theft, robbery is common. They don’t pay taxes, and you can manage everything by paying a bribe (Female, 45+, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)”.

In addition, some respondents claim that the government there does not help the citizens and that especially during the pandemic the people do not know who to turn to. They report that many people have come to Georgia to seek medical help. According to the participants, the healthcare system was bad before the pandemic and many sought treatment in Georgia.

“I also know that the medical situation is bad. It has been bad before [Covid] and many patients used to come here to seek help. There were Abkhazian people who brought their child for treatment and rented an apartment in my neighbourhood, and I know from them that the situation is horrible in Abkhazia (Female, 53, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi)”.

Focus group participants also talked about Russian influence and propaganda in Abkhazia and claim that young people only speak Russian and cannot speak Abkhazian. They believe that Russia spreads propaganda against Georgia, which makes reuniting with them practically impossible.

“In Abkhazia, there is the influence of Russia. Children and the young generation do not speak Abkhazian, but are becoming Russian. Georgia is regarded as a cruel nation as a result of the Russian propaganda and reconciliation with them is out of question (Male, 32, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Telavi)”.

Russians did everything in the past so that people in Abkhazia hate Georgia, according to participants. One participant went so far as to claim that Russians impersonated Georgians and committed war crimes in Abkhazia:

“During the war in Abkhazia, Russian people did this, that there was a group who claimed to be Georgians. They fought, they went into the families, raped, killed, shot people, but in the name of Georgian soldiers, and that is why Abkhazians hate us so much, because this group spoke Georgian and did all this on behalf of Georgians. I know that from a friend who fought in Abkhazia (Male, 42, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)”.

Some participants also recalled their childhood, when they used to visit Abkhazia and play in the yard. Russian was also often spoken in the region at that time. A respondent stated, “I learned Russian in Abkhazia as a child, because I was forced to. When ten Georgian children were playing in the yard, among them were also Megrelian children... and when two Russian children joined to play, we had to play in Russian” (Female, 43, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi).

Some participants mention that they have friends or acquaintances who are IDPs from Abkhazia that cannot go back to their homes, as others are living there now. Some respondents are optimistic about Abkhaz people. They claim that they have heard that Abkhaz people take care of the houses that previously belonged to Georgians to maintain them and keep others away.

Not everyone is optimistic. Some participants believe the link between Georgians and Abkhazia has been lost over time and that the new generation knows Georgians as enemies. Even though people seek medical help in Georgia, this does not change the overall situation that people in Abkhazia do not want

to have much in common with Georgians, according to some respondents:

“Young people are raised differently there. People my age and younger generations have lost contact with Georgians. They are told that Georgians are enemies and there is no connection between us anymore. Before 20 or even 12 years ago it was easier [to reconnect], but now the new generation is torn from Georgia (Male, 37, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi)”.

Respondents claim that people in Georgia would like to have more connections and relations with Abkhazia. Instead, people in these regions are trapped and only have connections with Russians. With their passports, they can only go to Russia, and the countries who recognize their independence.

The focus groups participants from the villages in Samegrelo near the administrative boundary line with Abkhazia also claim that the economic situation in Abkhazia is very bad and has worsened during the pandemic. Some respondents from this area mentioned that people in Abkhazia started to realize that they are not independent, but rather are very much dependent on Russia. They realized that they do not have the freedom they wanted and were fighting for. Some brought up examples of people trying to escape Abkhazia as well as cases of Georgians being kidnapped and taken to the other side. A common sentiment was that Abkhaz and Georgian people would have great relations if Russians had not caused the conflict.

“We live in a region where we can see everything that is going on in Akhazia. Seven/eight years ago a military town of Russian troops was built and we saw it from our village as it is only two kilometres away. We are forbidden to go to Enguri, which is at the administrative border, because kidnappings are expected every minute...We have cases when our boys/men were taken to Abkhazia, to Gali district by Russians. They were taken from our side, from our territory, and brought to the police in Gali. The Abkhazians and citizens of Gali treated them with respect in the jail and the fee they had to pay for crossing the border was paid by Abkhazians and they were sent home. All I want to say is that these boys were caught by Russians but sent home safely by Abkhaz people...we can negotiate with Abkhazians. They did not achieve what they were fighting for -freedom- and they are losing their advantages on Abkhazian territory (Male, 68, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo).”

During the focus groups, some respondents claimed that people in Abkhazia are happy with their situation: “I have a friend from Abkhazia. She lives here, but her parents are there, and I know that they like it there. They live good lives...they work, have a good income, and that’s all they care about” (Female, 29, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi).

In addition, some ethnic Armenian respondents think that the situation might be better there as Russia is stronger economically. However, few ethnic minority participants knew much about what is going on in the breakaway regions. They claim they receive no information. Their impression is that Abkhazia is part of Russia, and that they decide what will happen to the people there: “I do not know how they live. Probably not bad. As for their future, I guess everything is already decided, and they are part of Russia, and Russia decides their situation” (Male, 21, secondary education, ethnic Armenian, Samtskhe-Javakheti).

South Ossetia

Similar to Abkhazia, focus group participants mostly evaluate the situation in South Ossetia as very negative, claiming that people live in bad conditions. However, there are some differences. Some

participants claimed that in contrast to Abkhazia, people in South Ossetia have connections and tight links with North Ossetia, and therefore have better support. Also, respondents claim that people keep crossing the border more from Abkhazia, while the border to South Ossetia is closed.

“Samachablo is totally occupied and even more bad things happen there. Kidnapping is more common compared to Abkhazia and creeping occupation is also more common here [in Shida Kartli]. Megrelians go to Abkhazia and visit their relatives more or less frequently...I have also been there, and in Tskhinvali it is stricter (Female, 42, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kakheti)”.

Some respondents also mentioned that the people in South Ossetia never liked Georgians and that they want to be part of Russia.

“In South Ossetia, there are seven or eight Russian military bases. You can see their light at night from the highway...The situation is bad, because Ossetians do not like us. Back in 2006, I had been there, and the Ossetians stopped our bus, and ordinary citizens ran to us with machine guns, beat up Georgian citizens, and the population living there treated us very badly. Some were throwing stones at us... (Male, 37, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Imereti)”.

Respondents from the bordering villages in Shida Kartli had relatively more information about the situation in South Ossetia, also claiming that the situation there is bad, but that people living there still do not want to cohabit with Georgians.

“I don’t know about the situation in Abkhazia, but have very close relations with Ossetians. Our two villages are next to each other. Our yards are separated by wires. We see each other every day. They are oppressed but still don’t want to be with us. They might lie that they want to, but they don’t. It has been years like that (Male, 42, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli)”.

According to the respondents, this is especially true for the younger generation. Older people have contacts with Georgians and remember the good things. Respondents from the bordering villages in Shida Kartli say they receive information about the situation in South Ossetia directly from the people living there, via phone or directly when people from South Ossetia visit.

Respondents from the border villages state that Russians have taken over the territory, and do not allow people to speak Ossetian. Similar to Abkhazians, people from South Ossetia also used to cross the border and come to Georgia for medical help or to buy things. This also indicates that the situation in South Ossetia is bad, according to respondents. The respondents claim that there are people in South Ossetia who want to be part of Russia, while others want to be part of Georgia. This is also linked with their age according to respondents.

“I think that the younger generation does not want any relationships with us, [but] the older ones do. Because we had a common past, we were related and the older generation knows the Georgian nation, our character, and want to have relations with us more than the younger generation, who have only seen war. They have only seen the bad side because of the conflict (Female, 41, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli)”.

The respondents from the border villages near Abkhazia claim that the situation at the South Ossetia administrative boundary line is more complicated as there is no natural border, like the Enguri River.

“The situation there is different because we have a natural border here. Enguri divides us... and there, when a Russian soldier gets drunk, he crosses the border as he wishes and also kidnapping is more common and half of the houses are left on one side...In Shida Kartli, one can be arrested in their own yard... there is the open territory and creeping occupation becomes easy (Male, 36, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo)”.

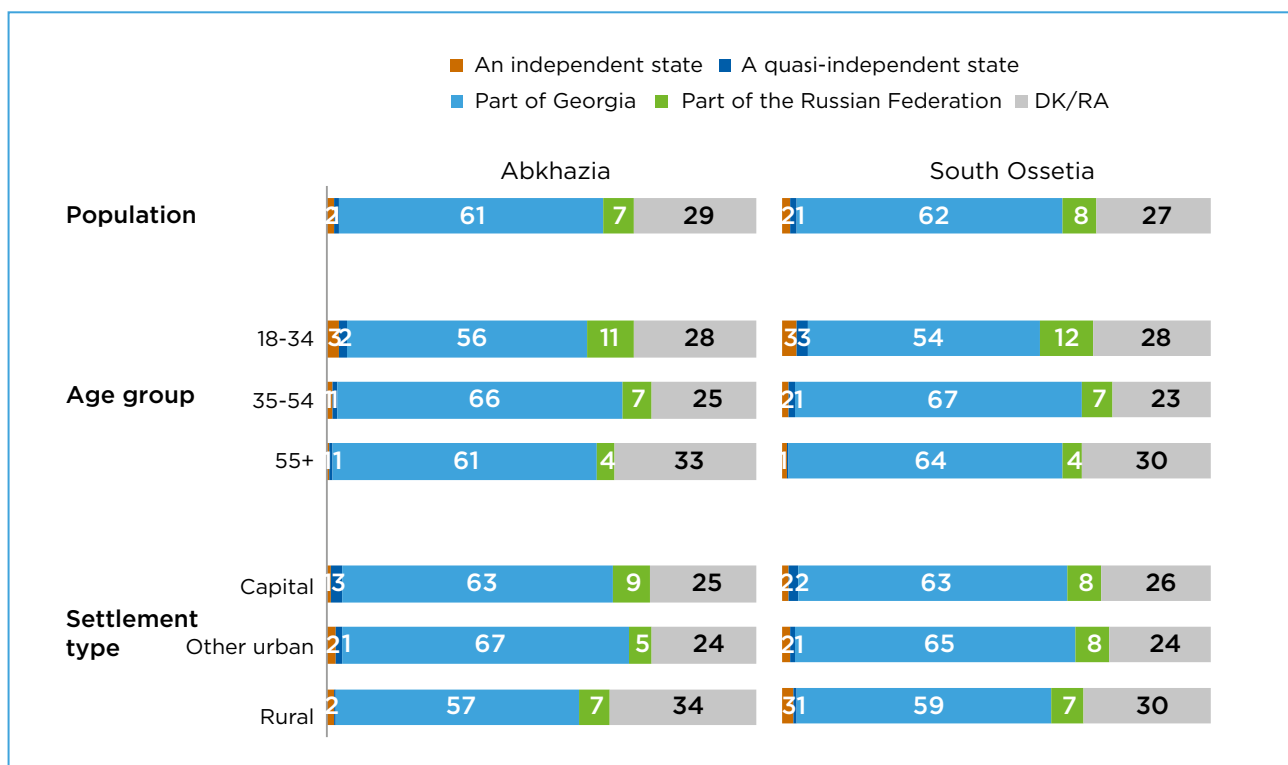
Finally, as in Abkhazia, ethnic minorities have practically no information about the situation in South Ossetia. One respondent stated, “The situation in South Ossetia is similar to Abkhazia. I have no information about it either” (Female, 33, higher education/student, ethnic Armenian, Samtskhe-Javakheti).

3.6.2 Future of the conflict regions

Respondents were asked about their opinion about the future state of conflict regions. A majority of Georgians (61%) think that Abkhazia will be a part of Georgia after ten years. Seven percent believe that it will be a part of Russia. Twenty-nine percent say that they do not know (Figure 15). There are different views among different age groups and settlements. A smaller share of younger people (56%) reports that Abkhazia will be a part of Georgia after ten years compared to people between 35 and 54 years old (66%) and people over 54 (61%). Regarding settlement type, more people living in the capital (63%) and other urban settlements (67%) report the same compared to people living in rural areas (57%) (Figure 15).

With regard to South Ossetia, a majority of Georgians (62%) believe that South Ossetia will be part of Georgia after ten years. Eight percent think that it will be a part of Russia, while more than one-fourth of the population (27%) don't know what South Ossetia's status will be after ten years (Figure 15). A smaller share of young people (54%) believe that South Ossetia will be a part of Georgia than people aged 34-55 (67%) and people over 55 (64%). Respondents' views do not differ much by settlement type.

Figure 15: Status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after ten years (%)



Focus group participants want to be optimistic about the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, saying that they would like to see these regions as part of Georgia again. However, there were also some participants in all focus groups who consider Abkhazia to be lost. According to them, Abkhazia cannot be returned with negotiations, and war with Russia is not winnable. Respondents say that Abkhazia is lost because Russia has a large influence on the people.

“Abkhazia will not be returned to us. That is just an illusion. Because the people themselves do not want to be part of us. Everyone knows that Abkhaz people do not like Georgians, and negative opinions come from that. At least I, in my life, will not witness Georgia and Abkhazia united (Male, 27, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Telavi)”.

Compared to Abkhazia, the respondents had less information and opinions about South Ossetia. However, the overall feeling was that Ossetians prefer to be with Russia, which lowers the chances of reunion. Some respondents who are ethnic Armenians stated that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be part of Russia in the future: “It is more likely that South Ossetia will become part of Russia. Citizens are given Russian passports, and it looks like they will be part of Russia probably” (Female, 61, ethnic Armenian, Samtskhe Javakheti).

Some respondents had the feeling that if Georgia was in a much better state economically, maybe people in Abkhazia and South Ossetia would want to re-unite with Georgia. According to them, Georgia must develop economically to interest Abkhazians and Ossetians to re-join Georgia. One respondent stated: “We have to build a strong state, in order to interest Abkhaz and Ossetian people. We have to show them that it is better on our side. Today Russia is giving them good pensions and they do not want to be with us” (Female, 64, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli).

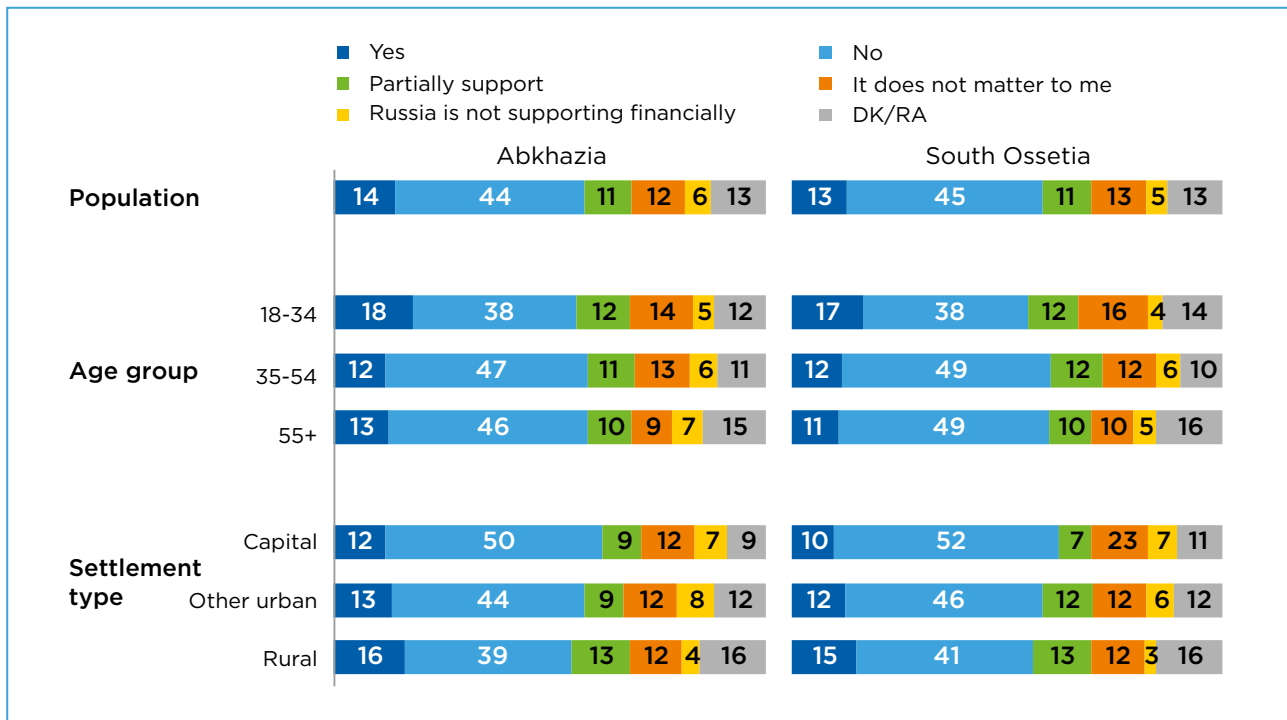
3.6.3 Russia financing the conflict regions

During the quantitative survey, respondents were asked to express their attitudes towards Russia supporting Abkhazia and South Ossetia financially from its federal budget. A plurality does not support Russia’s policy (44% and 45% for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively). Fourteen percent support the policy for Abkhazia, and 13% express the same for South Ossetia. One in nine (11%) Georgians partially support financial assistance for the regions from the federal budget of Russia. Almost the same share say that it does not matter for them whether Russia supports Abkhazia (12%) and South Ossetia (13%) financially (Figure 16).

When it comes to the financial support for Abkhazia, there are some differences between age groups and settlement types. Older people do not support Abkhazia getting financial support from Russia as often as people in the 18 to 34 age group. Half of Tbilisi residents (50%) do not support Russia’s aid, in contrast to 44% of people living in other urban areas and 39% in rural areas (Figure 16).

With Russia financing South Ossetia, there are significant differences in views by age group and settlement type. Almost half of the people between 35 and 54 (49%) and people over 54 (49%) do not support the fact that Russia is financing South Ossetia, while a smaller share of young people (38%) claim the same. As for settlement type, half of Tbilisi residents (52%), 46% of other urban areas residents, and 41% of people living in rural areas do not support the Russian Federation supporting South Ossetia financially (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Support for the Russian Federation's financial aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (%)



Qualitative findings also confirm that people in Georgia generally have negative attitude towards Russia financing Abkhazia from its federal budget, claiming that Russia does this, because it considers Abkhazia to be its territory. Respondents claim that Russia does not really develop anything in the region. Rather, it just wants to have it under its influence and use its port to have easy access to the Black Sea. Financing Abkhazia is a clever move from Russia, since it makes the region dependent on Russia, and decreases the chances of Abkhazians wanting to look towards Georgia, according to respondents.

“Russia financing Abkhazia is not initiated by kindness or compassion. It is a political move to make Abkhazia dependent on Russia. Financing means that Abkhazia is not capable of doing anything on its own. It cannot produce in [its] own state. It is very bad that they are dependent on Russia. Development is not in sight (Female, 44, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)”.

On the other hand, some respondents claimed that Russia should finance the region, because someone should take care of the people living there: “I guess since Russia occupied the territory, it should also take care of the people. I doubt that it is financing properly, since everything is destroyed there. People are left behind. I don't think Russia is taking care of them properly” (Female, 52, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Imereti).

When asked about Georgia supporting Abkhazia, a few participants were slightly offended, claiming that since people in Abkhazia do not want to be part of Georgia, they should not receive any help from Georgia. Some respondents claimed that Georgia is also financing and supporting Abkhazia. They felt that Russia should take care of the Abkhaz, since they chose to be part of Russia. However, this statement also had opponents who claimed that Georgian people are living in Abkhazia and that we should help them and continue negotiating with them.

“Maybe I am wrong, but I think that Georgia should not pay for the population’s electricity [in Abkhazia]. Neither should we beg and offer help or medical support when they are in need. Since they want Russia, they should turn to them for medical help, for education... On their pages on the internet, Abkhazians write that Georgians should be thankful that they accept our help. I would not help them anymore... maybe this way they will understand that Russia cannot offer that much kindness that we offer them? (Female, 18-44, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)”.

Focus group participants had similar attitudes towards Russia financing South Ossetia. Many have negative attitudes, claiming that Russia is interfering in Georgian politics. However, some participants also claim that the desire also comes from the residents of South Ossetia to receive Russian money, to have Russian passports, and to receive Russian pensions: “Regarding that financing and giving pensions, it was also the desire of the population to receive Russian funding. The initiative was coming from Russia of course, but the population was also trying to get Russian passports, because Russia has higher pensions” (Female, 53, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi).

Some respondents (especially at the border villages) are irritated by the fact that people in South Ossetia chose to be part of Russia. As with Abkhazia, a few respondents mentioned that since Russia occupied South Ossetia, it now has the responsibility to help people there: “Since Russia took the responsibility of the territory, it should help them of course” (Female, 64, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli).



Main findings:

- A majority of the Georgian population say that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are parts of Georgia (75% and 71%, respectively), while slightly less believe that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be a part of Georgia after ten years (61% and 62%, respectively). Compared to people aged 35 and older, relatively fewer young people consider the breakaway regions as part of Georgia.
- Focus group participants state that Russia managed and provoked the conflict.
- A majority of the population believe that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are developing mainly in the wrong direction (68% and 69%, respectively). These findings are supported by qualitative data, as participants describe the situation in both regions in stark terms. A frequent claim is that Russian influence and propaganda is pushing people living there towards Russia, forcing them to speak Russian, and making them economically dependent.
- Some focus group participants claim that people living in the breakaway regions do not like to be part of Russia, but would rather be independent. They suggest that the link between Georgians and people living there can be re-established with good relations. In contrast, others claim that the link with people in the breakaway regions is lost and they like the support they receive from Russia. Focus group participants also claim that younger people have negative attitude towards Georgians and that with time the connection that Georgians had with the regions will disappear.
- Compared to Abkhazia, the FG respondents had less information and opinions about South Ossetia. However, the overall feeling was that Ossetians prefer to be with Russia, which lowers the chances of reunion.
- A plurality does not support Russia's policy of providing financial assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (44% and 45%, respectively). More people from older (35+) age groups and the capital are against Russia financing the breakaway regions compared to younger people (18-34) and those living outside Tbilisi. Many focus group participants are also against this idea, claiming that Russia is buying the regions and spreading its influence there. According to participants, this is a political step towards ownership of the territories.
- However, about one fourth of the population supports or partially supports the Russian Federation financing Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Some focus group participants state that someone should take care of the people living in the occupied territories, and since Russia took them, it also has the responsibility to keep the people there alive.

3.7. North Caucasus - Knowledge and attitudes

The survey asked respondents about knowledge and attitudes towards the North Caucasus. When asked which North Caucasian Republic was friendliest, almost half of the Georgian population (46%) could not name one. One in five thinks that none of the republics are friendly to Georgia. Eleven percent reported Ingushetia as the friendliest, followed by Dagestan (5%), Chechnya (4%), and North Ossetia-Alania (4%). Other republics were named even more rarely (Table 7).

Table 7. Which of the Russian republics in the North Caucasus is the friendliest for Georgia, in your opinion? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Republic of Adygea	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Karachay-Cherkessia	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Kabardino-Balkaria	1%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%
North Ossetia-Alania	3%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%
Ingushetia	8%	13%	11%	15%	12%	7%	11%
Chechnya	4%	3%	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%
Republic of Dagestan	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Other	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%
All of them equally	4%	5%	8%	5%	5%	6%	6%
None of them	21%	20%	19%	19%	21%	20%	20%
Don't know	52%	45%	42%	42%	47%	48%	46%
Refuse to answer	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

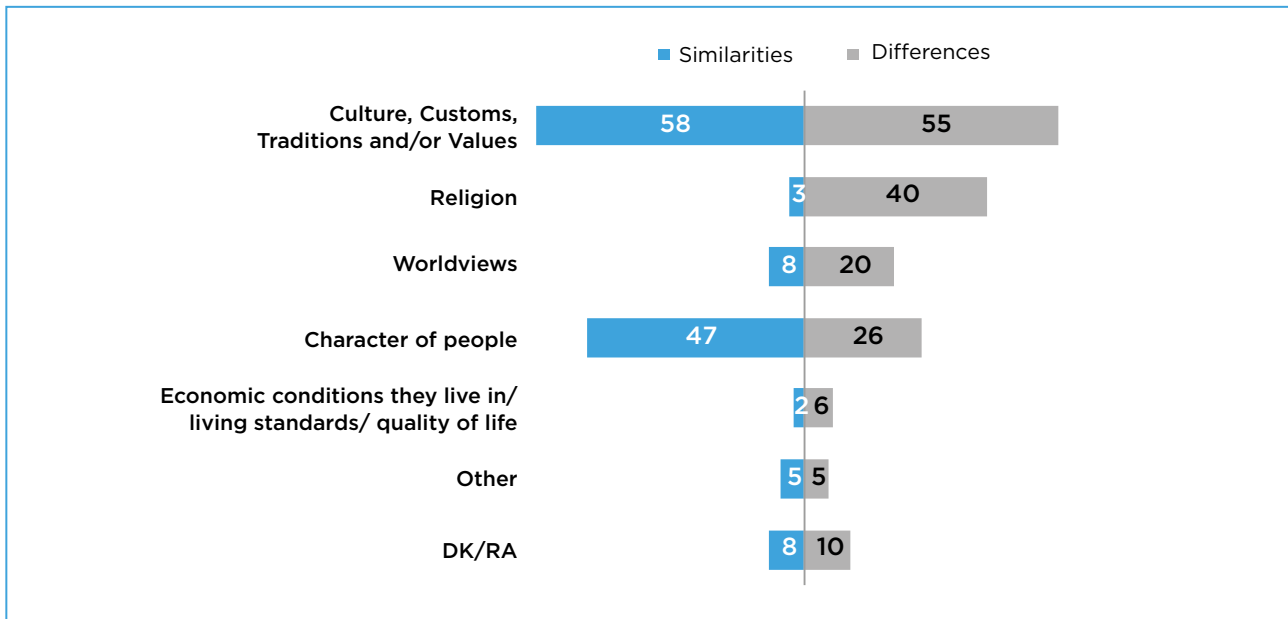
The opinion of people living in Georgia is almost equally divided when asked how similar or different people in the North Caucasus and Georgia are. Forty-three percent think they are similar (39% more similar than different; 3% very similar), while 39% think that they are different (28% more different than similar; 11% very different). Eighteen percent do not know how similar or different people in the North Caucasus and Georgia are (Table 8).

Table 8. In your opinion, how much similar or different are the people in the North Caucasus and Georgia? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Very similar	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%
More similar than different	37%	41%	39%	41%	41%	37%	39%
More different than similar	32%	26%	27%	30%	28%	27%	28%
Very different	11%	9%	12%	15%	11%	8%	11%
Don't know	18%	19%	19%	10%	18%	24%	18%
Refuse to answer	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Among those who think that people are similar in the North Caucasus republics and Georgia (43%) most consider culture, customs, traditions, and/or values (58%), and character of the people as similar (47%) (Figure 17). Those who think that people are different in the republics (39%) most frequently say that people are different in terms of culture, customs, traditions, and/or values (55%), religion (40%), as well as character of people (26%) (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Similarities and differences between the North Caucasus and Georgia (%)



Note: Multiple answers were allowed. Accordingly, total response percentages exceed 100%. The questions about similarities/differences were asked only to those respondents who said that people in Georgia and the North Caucasus are similar (43%) or different (39%).

Qualitative findings from the focus groups show a similar pattern. Many focus group participants did not know much about the North Caucasus. Those who had information claim to receive the material from television, internet, or know the information based on their university studies. Those with information said that these republics are under Russia's influence. Participants speculate that people living there do not like being under Russia's influence, but that there is not much they can do as they are afraid to go against Putin or the Kremlin.

"I know these people, not all of them, but I have spent some time with them and I can say that they are very friendly towards us. But there is a huge obstructive factor - the big bear [Russia] does not let go of them. As soon as they start thinking about freedom, Russia is starting a new conflict or plans a terrorist act against them (Male, 50, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi)".

Some participants say that people in the North Caucasus have a very positive attitude towards Georgians, but that Russia is interfering and is doing its best to create conflicts between the small countries and republics in the Caucasus:

"Russia is following the same politics towards them as it is doing with Georgia for centuries. I mean that it is using the 'divide and conquer' approach. In the South Caucasus, Russia wanted to confront Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. It was doing the same with the North Caucasus. For example, Lek [Dagestani] people were sent to Georgia to kidnap children. This was an imperialistic approach, that is what Dagestani was doing to Georgia and that Russia could help. The same was done in Chechnya, and therefore I think that the North Caucasian nations are in the same situation as us. Or even in a worse situation, because their territories are even closer to Russia and they have less chance to protest (Female, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)".

The most known republic among the focus group participants was Chechnya. According to the respondents, in Chechnya, people are afraid of Ramzan Kadyrov, a dictator that fulfils the Kremlin's instructions. However, before, when Gamsakhurdia was the president, there was a very good relation with Chechnya when it was also fighting for freedom, according to respondents.

“We realized that we have one common problem, which is Russia. In Chechnya, Russia has his own appointed and the situation there is very bad. I don't know much about them, but know that there are frequent terrorist attacks, people are killed, killed because of a different opinion or political will (Female, 43, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)”.

The most positive attitude is observed towards Ingushetia. According to respondents, they did not fight against Georgians during the Abkhazia war in 1993, while all other republics were hired or forced by Russia to participate. Some participants also pointed out that before Russia's interference, Georgia and Ingushetia had very good relations. They said that people from Khevsureti kept and took care of the homes of Ingush people when they were forcibly deported from Ingushetia in 1944 during the Soviet period. A few respondents also mentioned Dagestan. Participants from the ABL-adjacent villages with South Ossetia mentioned Kabardino-Balkaria as an unfriendly republic. They said that Balkarians are related to the Abkhaz people and would oppress Georgians.

“During the Stalin period, Ingush people were deported and Georgian and Ossetian people inhabited their houses. When they came back, they found that Georgians left everything untouched for them and that's why our relations are good, and they were the only ones not fighting against us during the Abkhazia war (Male, 55, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)”.

Respondents who had some information about the North Caucasian republics say that the people in the North Caucasus and Georgia are similar in terms of appearance, traditions, customs, origin, genetics, values, and also the aspiration to be free and independent from Russia: “We are fighters...and love freedom, but could not stand together unfortunately...” (Female, 64, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Shida Kartli). In addition, the languages are quite similar as they also use letters such as “y” (similar to “k”) and “j” (similar to “tch”), which the Europeans do not have, according to respondents. Respondents also mentioned traditional dances and traditional clothes, which are very similar. Furthermore, some participants mentioned that similar to Georgia, these nations know how to be brave and manly: “Values, traditions are similar. Manhood, attitudes, respect for women, family, traditions, and so on” (Male, 58, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Telavi). Young people in Kvemo Kartli mentioned that these republics are like Azerbaijan, as they have the same religion, Islam.

There were also respondents in all age groups and settlements who think that Georgians are very different from other Caucasian countries. They report that Georgians are more Western and European. According to these respondents, the north Caucasus republics are in the Russian domain and have chosen to be socialistic republics, like Russia. In contrast, they argue Georgia is trying to be capitalist, European country. They also point to the different religion, as they are Muslim. But religion was not brought up as a major difference between Georgians and the North Caucasian republics. Most often, it was the aspiration to become part of the West: “There is a huge difference between us and the rest of Caucasus. Mentality as well as aspirations are different. We want progress, development, their religion does not allow them such things” (Male, 50, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Tbilisi).

Most of the focus groups participants think that people in the North Caucasus cannot change anything in terms of the relations between people in Georgia and its breakaway regions. Ordinary people have no say in politics. They are economically dependent on Russia, who is using them for their interests. If Russia draws back, then the North Caucasian people will be able to settle things with each other.

“I do not think that the North Caucasians could play any role in resolving the Georgian-Abkhazian or Georgian-Ossetian conflict, because this conflict is neither Georgian-Abkhazian nor Georgian-Ossetian. This is a small continuation of the Georgian-Russian conflict. The North Caucasian nations have their own problems, which they cannot solve, because it is not in the interests of Russia's colonial government. Let's imagine that some group in Dagestan desires to participate in the Georgian-Abkhazian or Georgian-Ossetian dialogue. This will not have any perspective and

Russia's government will block this initiative and its interests are not at all warm to the relationships, but rather it wants to bring more conflict and prolong it in these relations. Therefore, I do not think that the North Caucasian nations can improve relations with our neighbouring ethnic groups (Male, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Kutaisi)".

Another respondent stated, "As long as they stay part of the Russian Federation, their role will be minimal in solving any problem" (Male, 32, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Telavi).

However, there were also some respondents who think that with negotiations and discussions, people in the North Caucasus can reach some consensus. Some respondents also mentioned the idea of the 'Caucasian institute/house', which could serve as a union for the people living in the south and north Caucasus.

"Zviad Gamsakhurdia had the idea of a common Caucasian house... unfortunately it never happened, but back then people in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, and many others had positive attitudes towards this idea. We lost that moment because of Russia, of course, but in the long-term [it could be an option] (Male, 56, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Zugdidi)".

Another respondent stated, "No republic in the Caucasus is ready for this, but the best thing would be to create this Caucasian house with an independent domestic policy and a unified foreign policy, this will be the best - the Caucasian house" (Female, 48, higher education, ethnic Georgian, Samegrelo).

Main findings:

- Almost half of the Georgian population (46%) could not name a Russian republic in the North Caucasus, when asked which they consider as friendliest to Georgia. One fifth claim none of the republics are friendliest. Findings from qualitative data reflect these results, as many have practically no information about most of the Russian republics in the North Caucasus. Those with some information name people from Ingushetia as the friendliest. People are most informed about Chechnya. However, attitudes towards it are split;
- Forty-three percent think that people in the Russian republics in the North Caucasus and Georgia are similar, while 39% believe they are different; Those who think that people are similar in the North Caucasus republics and Georgia (43%) name the following factors that make them similar: culture, customs, traditions and/or values (58%), the character of people (47%), and worldviews (8%).
- Those who think that people are different in the republics (39%), most frequently also say that people differ by culture, customs, traditions, and/or values (55%), followed by religion (40%), the character of people (26%), and worldviews (20%).
- Similarly, the opinion of the focus groups participants was split. While some claim Georgians and North Caucasians are similar in terms of appearance, traditions, customs, origins, genetics, values, and being manly and brave. The main difference reported was in terms of aspirations towards the Western world. In addition to the different religion, people in the North Caucasus are perceived as part of Russia's domain, while Georgia is striving to become part of Europe and carries its values;
- Focus group participants highlight that it is not in the interest of Russia to have calm, peaceful negotiations, as well as independent and free republics or nations in the Caucasus. Russia is constantly interfering to create new conflicts and tensions in the North as well as South Caucasus. It does this to ensure its influence. According to the respondents, ordinary people, unfortunately, have no say or power to settle the conflicts between each other.

4. Conclusions

This report explored knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions towards Russia in Georgia. Specifically, the report addressed attitudes towards Russian people and the Russian state, Georgia's internal and foreign aspirations, obstacles hindering the normalization of relations, attitudes and perceptions of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as attitudes towards the North Caucasus.

The data and analysis presented in the previous sections leads to the following conclusions.

- Attitudes towards the Russian people tend to be positive or neutral, while attitudes towards the Russian state is rather negative;
- People in Georgia mainly think that Russia is not developing in the right direction, with international conflict and sanctions as well as issues with human rights, democracy, and the economy hindering its development;
- A large share of the Georgian population report being (fully, quite or little) informed on developments in the Russian Federation, receiving their information mainly from television and social networks. The information they receive tends to be about threats from the Russian Federation, Abkhazia and South Ossetia related topics, as well as Russian foreign and internal politics, which mostly they assess as negative information;
- People living in Georgia think that the main challenges and threats facing Georgia at the moment are economic and social issues, followed by the occupation, further violations of territorial integrity, and healthcare issues, including the pandemic;
- A large majority of Georgia's population report positive attitudes towards becoming a member of the EU and NATO, as these are seen as the main solutions to Georgia's problems, offering freedom, democracy, economic stability, higher education (EU) as well as security and protection from Russia (NATO). Attitudes are more positive among young people and those in Tbilisi;
- The majority of the respondents think that relations between the Georgian and Russian states are hostile. Georgians most commonly name the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, followed by Moscow's intention to return Georgia into its sphere of influence, as the major obstacles that hinder relations between Georgia and Russia;
- Focus group participants are sceptical about the improvement of relations between the two countries unless Russia stops the occupation of Georgian territories. They tend to talk about the steps Georgia should take to neutralize or decrease the Russian threat. In this regard, some believe that Euro-Atlantic integration is the only solution, while others argue that integration is a threat;
- Many are optimistic about the potential of tourism as well as economic and trade relations to improve improving the relations between the two states. However, some argue that trade ties with an unpredictable country like Russia which can embargo Georgian goods at any time have no potential for improving relations. Moreover, they argue that the breakaway territories and the concomitant political interests are more important than trade.

- A majority of the Georgian population say that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are parts of Georgia. Yet, slightly less believe that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be a part of Georgia after ten years. Compared to people aged 35 and older, less share of young people considers the breakaway regions as part of Georgia. Focus group participants believe that Russia provoked and currently manages the conflict between Georgia and the breakaway regions;
- A majority of the population believe that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are developing mainly in the wrong direction, describing the situation in both regions as bleak. A frequent claim is that Russian influence and propaganda is pushing people living there towards the Federation, forcing them to speak Russian and making them economically dependent;
- Part of the focus group participants claim that people living in the breakaway regions do not like being part of Russia and would rather be independent. They report that the link between Georgians and people living there can be re-established. In contrast, others claim that the link with people in the breakaway regions is lost, as they would like to be part of Russia and like the support they receive from Russia. Focus group participants also claim that the new generation, compared to the older one, has negative attitude towards Georgians. With time, they argue the connection that Georgians had with the regions will disappear;
- A plurality does not support the policy of Russia of providing financial assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They claim that this is Russia's attempt to buy the regions and spread its influence there. Others think that someone should take care of the people living in the occupied territories. Since Russia took them away, it also has the responsibility to people living there;
- People living in Georgia have little information on the Russian republics in the North Caucasus, mainly being aware of Chechnya and Ingushetia, with the latter being considered relatively friendly to Georgia;
- Respondents' opinions are split regarding the similarities and differences of people in the North Caucasus and Georgia. While some participants think that people are similar in the North Caucasus Republics and Georgia in terms of culture, customs, traditions, values, character, and worldviews, others differ exactly on these points. The main difference is seen in religion and Georgians' aspirations to be a democracy which is close to the Western world;
- Focus group participants highlight that it is not in the interest of Russia to see the republics in the Caucasus settling things between each other. Russia is constantly interfering in order to raise new conflicts and tensions in the North as well as South Caucasus and meddles as the "peacekeeper", while it in fact holds the regions under its influence according to study participants.

4. What is your attitude towards Georgia's aspiration/desire to become a member of the European Union? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Very positive	46	46	46	50	48	42	46
Rather positive than negative	40	33	31	34	30	37	34
Rather negative than positive	8	8	7	5	7	9	8
Very negative	2	5	6	5	6	3	4
Don't know	4	8	9	6	8	8	7
Refuse to answer	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

5. What is your attitude towards Georgia's aspiration/desire to become a member of NATO? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Very positive	45	43	43	49	45	39	44
Rather positive than negative	34	29	28	29	30	31	30
Rather negative than positive	9	11	11	8	9	11	10
Very negative	3	6	6	6	7	4	5
Don't know	8	10	12	7	8	14	10
Refuse to answer	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

6. In your opinion, what are the similarities? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Population
	18-34	35-54	55+	Capital	Urban	Rural	
Culture, Customs, Traditions and/or Values	49	60	65	61	54	59	58
Character of people	44	47	49	49	47	47	47
Worldviews	7	8	8	10	7	6	8
Religion	5	3	1	3	4	3	3
Economic conditions they live in/ living standards	4	2	1	1	3	3	2
Other	7	4	5	6	5	5	5
Don't know	10	7	6	6	10	8	8
Refuse to answer	2	0	0	0	1	0	1

**The question was asked those who said that the people in the North Caucasus and Georgia are very similar or more similar than different - 43%*

Annex 2: Focus group participant characteristics

Number of focus groups participants by location, age group and gender.

	Group 1 (18-44)		Total Per group	Group 2 (45+)		Total Per group
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
1. Tbilisi (urban)	4	4	8	4	4	8
2. Villages in Shida Kartli near the South Ossetia border	4	4	8	4	4	8
3. Zugdidi (urban)	4	4	8	4	4	8
4. Villages in Samegrelo near the Abkhazia border	4	4	8	5	3	8
5. Batumi (urban)	4	4	8	5	3	8
6. Villages in Adjara (rural)	6	2	8	4	4	7
7. Kutaisi (urban)	4	4	8	4	4	8
8. Villages in Imereti (rural)	4	4	8	4	4	8
9. Telavi	4	4	8	4	4	8
10. Villages in Kakheti (rural)	4	4	8	5	3	8
11. Samtskhe-Javakheti (rural and urban; Armenian minority)	5	3	8	4	4	8
12. Kvemo Kartli (rural and Urban; Azerbaijani minority)	4	4	8	4	4	8
TOTAL	51	45	96	51	45	95