

Attitudes and perceptions towards Georgia in **Russia**

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Contents

	List Of Graphs And Tables	4
	Glossary	5
	Executive Summary	6
01	Introduction	10
02	Methodology	11
03	Views From Russia	13
	3.1. Attitudes Of Russians Toward Georgia And Georgians; The Image Of Georgia In Russia	13
	3.2. Domestic Policies Of Georgia	18
	3.3. Sources Of Information About Georgia	21
	3.4. Domestic Situation In Russia - Main Challenges	28
	3.5. Russian-Georgian Relations And The Foreign Politics Of Georgia	28
	3.6. Territorial Conflicts - Awareness And Attitudes	37
	3.6.1. Conflict In Abkhazia	37
	3.6.2. Conflict In South Ossetia	41
	3.6.3. Comparison Of Views On The Conflicts In Abkhazia And South Ossetia	44
	3.7. North Caucasus - Knowledge And Attitudes	47
	3.8. Similarities And Differences Between Georgians And North Caucasians	59
04	Conclusions	66
	Annexes	
	Annex 1: About Cessi	68
	Annex 2: Sample Performance - Comparison Of Survey Data And Official Statistics	69
	Annex 3: Cross-Tabulations	70

List Of Graphs And Tables

Graph 3.1.1. Attitudes of Russians toward the state of Georgia and Georgian residents	19
Graph 3.1.2. Attitudes of Russians toward different countries and their residents	20
Graph 3.1.3. Attitudes toward the state of Georgia and its residents among different groups	21
Graph 3.2.1. The direction in which Georgia is currently developing – Russian national sample	24
Graph 3.2.2. The direction in which Georgia is currently developing – opinion of different social groups	25
Graph 3.2.3. Main issues and threats facing Georgia	26
Graph 3.3.1. How well Russian respondents are informed about the situation in Georgia	28
Graph 3.3.2. Main sources of information about the situation in Georgia	29
Graph 3.3.3. Main sources of information about the situation in Georgia for different groups	29
Graph 3.3.4. The kind of information about Georgia people in Russia receive from the news in recent times	30
Graph 3.3.5. Character of information about Georgia received by people in Russia	31
Graph 3.3.6. Visiting Georgia and attitudes toward Georgia and Georgians	32
Graph 3.4.1. What are the main challenges or threats facing Russia today?	34
Graph 3.5.1. Current relations between Russia and Georgia – national sample	35
Graph 3.5.2. Main obstacles/challenges hindering Russian-Georgian relations	36
Graph 3.5.3. Impact of economic/trade ties and tourism on Russian-Georgian relations	37
Graph 3.5.4. Attitudes of different groups towards Georgia's aspiration to become a member of the EU/NATO	40
Graph 3.6.1. The status of Abkhazia now and 10 years from now – national sample	43
Graph 3.6.2. The direction in which Abkhazia is currently developing – national sample	44
Graph 3.6.3. Government financial support to Abkhazia – national sample	46
Graph 3.6.4. The status of South Ossetia now and 10 years from now – national sample	47
Graph 3.6.5. The direction in which South Ossetia is currently developing – national sample	48
Graph 3.6.6. Attitude toward government financial support from Russia to South Ossetia	50
Graph 3.6.7. The status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia now – opinion of different groups	50
Graph 3.6.8. The direction in which Abkhazia and South Ossetia are currently developing	51
Graph 3.6.9. The status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia 10 years from now – opinion of different groups	52
Graph 3.7.1. The direction in which Abkhazia is currently developing – opinion of North Caucasians	61
Graph 3.7.2. The direction in which South Ossetia is currently developing – opinion of North Caucasians	63
Graph 3.8.1. Which of the Russian republics in the North Caucasus is the friendliest with Georgia?	65
Graph 3.8.2. How similar or different are the people in the North Caucasus and Georgia?	66
Graph 3.8.3. Which North Caucasian republics are most similar to Georgia?	67
Graph 3.8.4. Similarities and differences between the residents of the North Caucasus and Georgia	67
<hr/>	
Table 3.3.1. Communication with Georgia – national sample	31
Table 3.5.1. Would you like to visit Georgia?	39
Table 3.7.1. Attitudes toward Georgian residents in the North Caucasus	53
Table 3.7.2. Attitude toward the state of Georgia in the North Caucasus	53
Table 3.7.3. How well-informed are you about the situation in Georgia? – North Caucasians	54
Table 3.7.4. Information and communication with Georgia among North Caucasians	55
Table 3.7.5. The direction in which Georgia is currently developing – opinion of North Caucasians	55
Table 3.7.6. Main issues and threats facing Georgia – opinion of North Caucasians	56
Table 3.7.7. Attitude towards Georgia's aspiration to become a member of the European Union and NATO - opinion of North Caucasians	57
Table 3.7.8. Current relations between Russia and Georgia – opinion of North Caucasians	58
Table 3.7.9. The status of Abkhazia now and 10 years from now – opinion of North Caucasians	60
Table 3.7.10. The status of South Ossetia now and 10 years from now – opinion of North Caucasians	63
Table 3.8.1. Which republic of the North Caucasus is most friendly with Georgia - opinion of North Caucasians	68
Table 3.8.2. How similar or different are the residents of Georgia and the residents of your republic? – residents of the North Caucasus	69
Table 3.8.3. Similarities and differences between Georgia and North Caucasian republics – residents of the North Caucasus	70

Glossary

CATI -

Computerized telephone interviews

COVID 19 -

the respiratory disease caused by coronavirus infection (SARS CoV 2), which spread throughout the world and became a pandemic in 2020-2021.

EU -

European Union

NATO -

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

USA -

United States of America

RF -

Russian Federation

TV -

Television

FO -

Federal Okrug of Russia, the official administrative unit of the Russian Federation uniting several subjects of the federation into a larger unit.

DK/RA -

Answer categories Do not know/ Refuse to answer in the telephone survey

Data presentation. Data on margins are presented in total percentages, and rounding is done to the nearest integer. If in questions with single answers the sum deviates from 100%, the category with a max / min tenths was changed. If a category is mentioned by less than 0,5% of respondents, 0% is shown in the graph or table.

The analysis of telephone survey data described in the Report is conducted by several subgroups: age groups and settlement type.

Age groups: 18-34, 35-54, 55 years old and over.

Settlement type where the respondents reside:

“Large cities” – cities with a population size of 1 mln residents or more

“Medium size cities” – cities with a population size of 100 to 999 thousand

“Small towns and rural” – urban settlements with a population size less than 100 thousand and rural areas.

Executive Summary

A study of the public opinions of the Russian and Georgian population was conducted to obtain knowledge of their attitudes and opinions on mutual relations, internal and external problems, and the image of these countries. The project was initiated by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, FES) and implemented by the Georgian Foundation of Strategic and International Studies in Georgia and the Institute for Comparative Social Research (CESSI, head of the project – Dr. Anna V. Andreenkova) in Russia.

The study included an analysis of the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of people living in Russia on the following topics:

- Public opinion about Georgian citizens and the Georgian State;
- Attitudes and opinions about the domestic policies of Georgia;
- Sources of information about Georgia;
- Attitudes toward Russian foreign and domestic policies;
- Evaluation of Russian-Georgian relations;
- Awareness and opinions about territorial conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia);
- Opinion of the residents in Russian North Caucasian republics about Russian-Georgian relations.

Two research methods were used in this project. A telephone survey of the general population of Russia was undertaken based on a representative probability random sample of the population over 18 years old with an effective sample size of 1506 interviews in 8 federal okrugs. Boost interviews were conducted in 5 North Caucasian republics – Dagestan, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania, and Ingushetia. There were about 300 respondents in each republic, accounting for 1513 interviews in total. The survey was conducted from February 10 to March 6, 2021. To enrich the quantitative data with deeper information about the reasoning, motivation, and underlying ideas of respondents, 8 focus groups were conducted online with representatives of the populations of different socio-demographic groups and regions.

Main Findings:

- The attitudes of the Russian public toward Georgia are structured around four dimensions: a) attitudes towards Georgians as a nation, Georgian people; b) attitudes towards Georgia as a tourist destination; c) Georgia as a part of common history within the USSR; d) attitudes towards current politics of Georgia and the modern State of Georgia. The assessments and opinions about these aspects were not unidirectional – they were mainly positive for the first three points and mainly negative for the last point. The generalized image of Georgia in Russia can be characterized as multi-dimensional and controversial.
- The image of the residents of Georgia in Russia is very positive. The range of associations with Georgians includes hospitality, friendliness, sociability, joy, positive character, humanity, warm attitudes, independence, and dignity. Negative aspects are rare. Impressions about Georgia as a tourist destination are also mostly positive. Because of the common history of Russia and Georgia, many decades of life in the USSR are perceived as the basis for closeness

and understanding. On the contrary, modern Georgian policy is perceived negatively as anti-Russian, hostile and aggressive.

- Even if positive aspects of Georgia's image prevail, Georgia is not considered a priority in international relations for Russia. Respondents evaluate it as a rather distant issue. The Russian public views Georgia as not a very significant player in the global international arena or the post-Soviet region. Thus, interest in Georgia among the Russian public is relatively low.

According to the survey, about half of the respondents in the national sample evaluated their feelings toward the Georgian State and residents of Georgia as neutral (49% and 51%, respectively). Slightly less than 15% of Russians have a negative opinion of Georgia and its residents. More than one-third of respondents (38%) have positive attitudes toward the residents of Georgia, and 30% feel the same way about the Georgian State. In different regions of Russia, attitudes toward Georgia and Georgians are rather similar. A somewhat more favorable opinion about Georgia can be found in the North Caucasus.

- The information Russian people receive about life in Georgia and current events there is very limited - both because of the low interest of the Russian public in Georgia and the lack of information about this country in the media. Information about contemporary life in Georgia is mainly based on travel sources, rumors and news about major political events, such as elections, a change of government, or crisis situations.
- The survey revealed that only 14% of the respondents believed that they were sufficiently well informed about the current affairs of Georgia. More than a half of survey participants admitted that they only know a little about modern Georgia, and 27% admitted that they know nothing at all. A total of 56% of respondents admitted to having regular contact with residents of Georgia in the last decade. Frequent contact with Georgians are maintained by 11% of Russians, and 5% visited Georgia personally in recent years. Among those who have been to Georgia in recent years, 52% have a positive attitude towards it, compared to 29% who have not been in this country.
- A total of 51% of respondents could not answer a general question about the direction in which Georgia is developing today, while 27% considered its direction mainly wrong, and 21% considered it to be mainly right. Slightly less than two-thirds of the survey participants were aware of specific challenges or threats facing Georgia today. Economic and social challenges were named as top priorities in Georgia's national agenda by 30% of respondents, Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts by 25% of respondents, and issues of public health, COVID and medical care by 19% of respondents.
- The survey showed significant differences in attitudes towards Georgia and the image of Georgia among the older and younger generations of Russia. The attitude of the younger generation is generally more positive, but interest in Georgia's domestic and foreign affairs, and politics of the country is rather low and mostly limited to touristic aspects. Older generations are more ambiguous in their opinions about Georgia, but their interest in and knowledge about various aspects of life in Georgia is higher, and their perception of Georgia is more emotional. Emotions related to Georgia are mixed from very positive (romantic memories, admiration of nature and culture, hospitality, and warmth of people) to very negative (resentment, indignation and misunderstanding). Indifference is not a common feeling toward Georgia among the older generation of Russians. People in the older age group are more likely to

make an effort to understand the position of Georgia and look at the situation from different angles. People of the younger generation more often think about Georgia from the point of view of Russian interest only, and to take a more pragmatic and utilitarian approach to the relationship between the two countries.

- The opinion of Russian respondents on the state of current bilateral relations is not consolidated or united. Only 6% of survey participants believe that these relations are very friendly, while 43% think they are rather friendly, and the remaining respondents assess them as hostile (34% as rather hostile and 4% as very hostile).
- Respondents in focus groups characterizing Russian-Georgian relations as “cool” or not too warm attributed this evaluation to Georgia’s pro-Western policy and its aspiration to keep a distance from Russia. Only a few participants in focus groups associated the deterioration of relations between the two countries with the conflicts around Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or with Russian policy toward neighboring countries.
- The awareness of the Russian public about the causes and course of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the role of different countries in these conflicts is very limited. Some focus group participants were unaware of these conflicts at all, confused South and North Ossetia, or could not recall the region where Abkhazia is located.
- Better informed respondents support one of three different positions: a) the approval of Russian involvement and aid provided to Abkhazia and South Ossetia; b) disagreement with Russia’s policy in this region as a violation of international agreements and the sovereignty of another country; c) advocating a policy of “non-involvement”, and distancing from any external conflicts. The supporters of the second position were in minority in all focus groups.

People approving the Russian role in the conflict believe that the improvement of Russian-Georgian relations can be based on recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Georgia or by conducting a national referendum. Those who disagree with Russia’s position in these conflicts see a way out in the return of these territories to Georgia. Supporters of non-involvement proposed to concentrate on internal national problems, giving priority to economic goals and improving the living standards of Russian citizens.

- Information that people in Russia receive about the state of affairs in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in recent years is infrequent and fragmented. As a result, these conflicts are perceived as distant and not very salient. The likelihood that the two territories are returned to Georgia, in the opinion of Russian respondents, is very low. Only 4% believe that Abkhazia will return to Georgia in the future. The share of those who foresee the independent status of Abkhazia in the future is also not very large - 16%. Most Russian respondents assumed that Abkhazia will either remain the same quasi-independent state as it is now or will become part of Russia.
- The similarities and differences between residents of the North Caucasus and residents of Georgia are not obvious for the majority of Russian survey participants. Some people pay attention to similarities and some to differences. Both sides refer to culture, traditions and habits as the main sources of both similarities and differences. According to the focus groups, although Russians outside the Caucasian region are not well aware or informed about North Caucasians and their lifestyle, most respondents recognize the socio-cultural and national diversity of this region and the specific national identity of ethnic groups in the Caucasus. As a result, Russians are not inclined to treat all North Caucasians as the same. North Caucasians

themselves are also not ready to admit either clear similarities or clear differences with the residents of Georgia. Regional identity within the North Caucasus (“we are Caucasians”, “southern peoples”, “highlanders”) and citizen identity with the Russian Federation are both important for people of the North Caucasus.

- The opinion of respondents in the North Caucasus and in other parts of Russia about the role of North Caucasians in improving relations and resolving conflicts between Russia and Georgia is not well-formed. Respondents tend to support policies for improving relations between Russia and Georgia, and the general idea of becoming the mediator for finding compromises and solutions. Interest in Russian-Georgian relations and foreign policy issues in general, however, is very low among the North Caucasian population and this is not their priority. A common or consolidated opinion on the reasons and possible ways of resolving the situation around conflict territories is not formed in the North Caucasus. Respondents assessed the likelihood of resolving these conflicts in the near future as very low. The majority of respondents in the North Caucasus do not associate the future of the conflict territories with Georgia. The active position of the mass population of these republics is that resolving the conflicts between Russia and Georgia is not likely.

1. Introduction

Relations between Russia and Georgia are rather complicated today, and the national interests and political course of these countries do not always coincide. Until now, there has been little empirical data of how relations between Russia and Georgia are perceived by the populations of these countries that would be comparable.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which works both in Russia and Georgia, initiated a research project aimed at finding out the public opinion of the residents of the two countries on key aspects of Russian-Georgian relations. In particular:

- Image of Russia and Russians among the Georgian population and Georgia and Georgians among the Russian population;
- Attitudes of people to the domestic policies of the two countries;
- Sources of information about the countries;
- Evaluation of current Russian-Georgian relations;
- Awareness and attitudes of territorial conflicts.

In Russia, the study was conducted from February-March 2021. It includes a public opinion survey conducted on a representative telephone sample from the general population of Russia 18 years old and over, as well as the population of 5 North Caucasian republics. The total sample size is 3019 effective interviews. The standard sampling error is +/-2.6% for the national sample and +/-5.1% for the sample in each of the republics. Additionally, the study included 8 focus groups using the online method, with participants from different socio-demographic and geographic groups.

The next section describes the research methodology. The following chapters present the results of the study on different aspects - the attitude of Russians towards Georgia and its inhabitants, the awareness and attitudes of Russians to the domestic politics of Georgia, sources of information about Georgia, views on Russian domestic challenges, opinions about current Russian-Georgian relations, attitudes toward the foreign policy of Georgia, territorial conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and a more detailed discussion of the views of the inhabitants of the North Caucasus. The report contains the general conclusions and appendix with cross-tabulations.

2. Methodology

The survey was designed to solve the following research tasks:

1. To define the place of Georgia in the mental map of the Russian public in comparison with other neighboring countries – the subjective distance between countries, differences in the attitude toward Georgian residents and the state of Georgia, the criteria of these attitudes;
2. To reveal the sources of information about Georgia used by Russian public to measure the importance of non-government sources of information including personal contacts, personal impressions, travels; to measure the awareness about the inner and foreign affairs of Georgia among the Russian population;
3. To study the views and opinions of the Russian public on current relations between Russia and Georgia, views on the reasons and consequences of the situation for both countries, attitudes toward pro-Western policies of Georgia, its aspiration to join the EU and the NATO;
4. To evaluate the level of awareness and the sources of information on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, attitudes and views on the reasons for these conflicts and the role of different actors, the current status of these territories, and possible ways to resolve these conflicts;
5. To study the views of the Russian population on the similarities and differences between residents of the North and South Caucasus, as well as the actual and potential role of North Caucasian people in building friendly relations between Russia and Georgia.

To implement these tasks, a telephone survey was conducted on a probability random sample of the Russian population 18 years old and over (national sample) with a sample size of 1506 interviews in 8 federal okrugs of Russia. In addition, about 300 interviews were conducted in each of the 5 republics of the North Caucasus – Dagestan, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia-Alania, and Ingushetia – 1513 interviews in total. The dates of the interviews were February 10 to March 6, 2021.

Sample. The sample universe covered in the survey is the general population of Russia and the five republics, 18 years old and over, who own and use either a mobile or landline phone. The approximate proportion of the population excluded from the telephone dual-frame survey is about 6%. A mixed sample was used that was based on mobile and landline telephone numbers (75% mobile and 25% landline phone numbers) selected by random digit dialing (RDD) from a fixed list of all mobile and stationary operators in Russia proportionate to the density of numbers in each prefix.

The questionnaire for the survey was developed by the team of The Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC). The adaptation of the questionnaire to Russia and the pretest of the questionnaire were both conducted by CESSI. All interviews were conducted using the CATI computer program for telephone interviews in the Russian language.

Focus groups. To enrich the quantitative data with deeper information about the reasoning, motivation and underlying ideas of respondents, 8 focus groups were conducted in online format (ZOOM platform) with representatives from the general population of different socio-demographic groups and regions. Participants were divided into two age groups: a younger group (18-44 years old) and an older group (45 years old and over) residing in different types of settlements – the largest cities of Russia, middle-size cities, smaller towns, and rural areas. Each group included representatives from different regions of Russia. Two focus groups were conducted with residents from the North Caucasian republics.

REGION/ GEOGRAPHY	Younger age (18-44 years)	Older age (45 years and over)
Residents of the largest cities of Russia (1 mln residents and above)	Group 1	Group 2
Residents of middle-size cities (250-500 th residents, centers of regions)	Group 3	Group 4
Residents of smaller settlements	Group 5	Group 6
Residents of North Caucasian republics	Group 7	Group 8
TOTAL	4	4

Criteria for the selection of group participants included a mixture of age, gender and education in each group. Each group included participants with different socio-economic status, different professions (people having professional interests in politics – journalists, researchers, government officials, employees, and activists of NGOs were not eligible). All group participants were interested in politics, following political news, and exchanging views with other people about politics. The group participants were not informed about the topic of the study (Georgia) in advance. No special knowledge of Georgia or Georgian politics was required.

Group discussions were moderated by CESSI professional moderators and researchers. Each group discussion lasted for about 2 hours. All groups were video and audio recorded for further analysis. Transcripts in the original interview language were prepared later. The scenario for group discussions (moderator’s guide) was prepared by CESSI on the basis of CRRC materials and with consultations from experts from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

3. Views from Russia

This section presents the results of the study on the attitudes of Russians towards Georgia and its residents, Georgian politics, sources of information about Georgia, challenges and threats facing Russia today, an evaluation of Russian-Georgian relations, and attitudes toward the territorial conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

3.1. Attitudes of Russians toward Georgia and Georgians; the image of Georgia in Russia

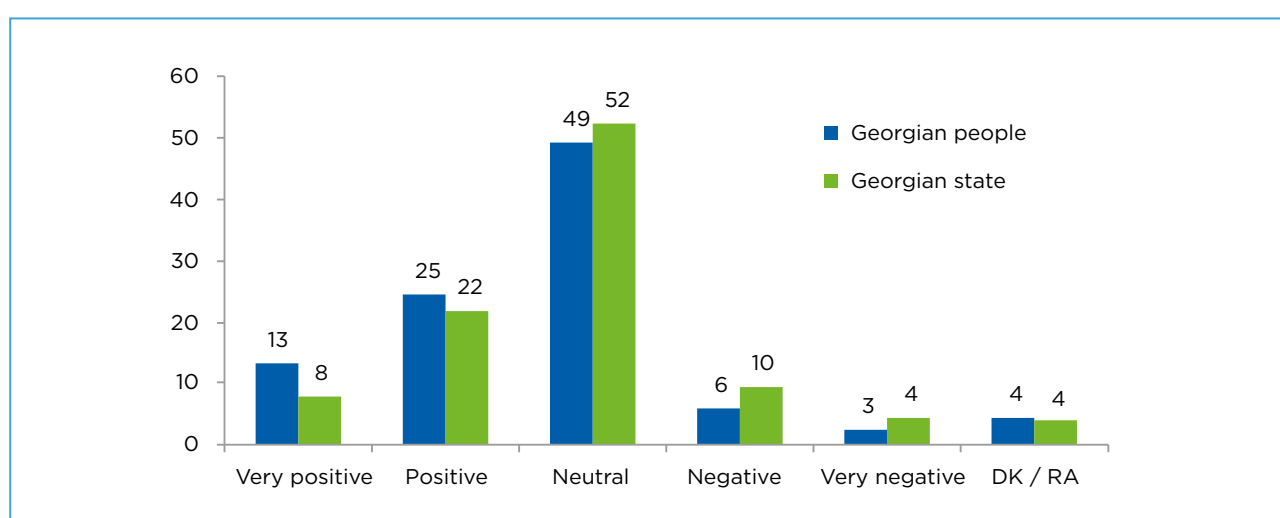
The attitudes of the Russian population toward Georgia and Georgian residents range from neutral to positive.

Only a small share of the respondents in Russia (3-4%) have a strong negative opinion about Georgia and the residents of Georgia, and a moderately negative opinion is also not very widespread (6-10%). About half of the respondents in the national sample evaluated their feelings toward the Georgian state and the residents of Georgia as neutral. More than one-third of respondents (38%) have positive attitudes toward the residents of Georgia, and 30% feel the same way about the Georgian state.

Survey participants are more positive toward the residents of Georgia than toward the Georgian state, although the difference is not dramatic.

Graph 3.1.1. Attitudes of Russians toward the state of Georgia and Georgian residents (%).

Base: national sample

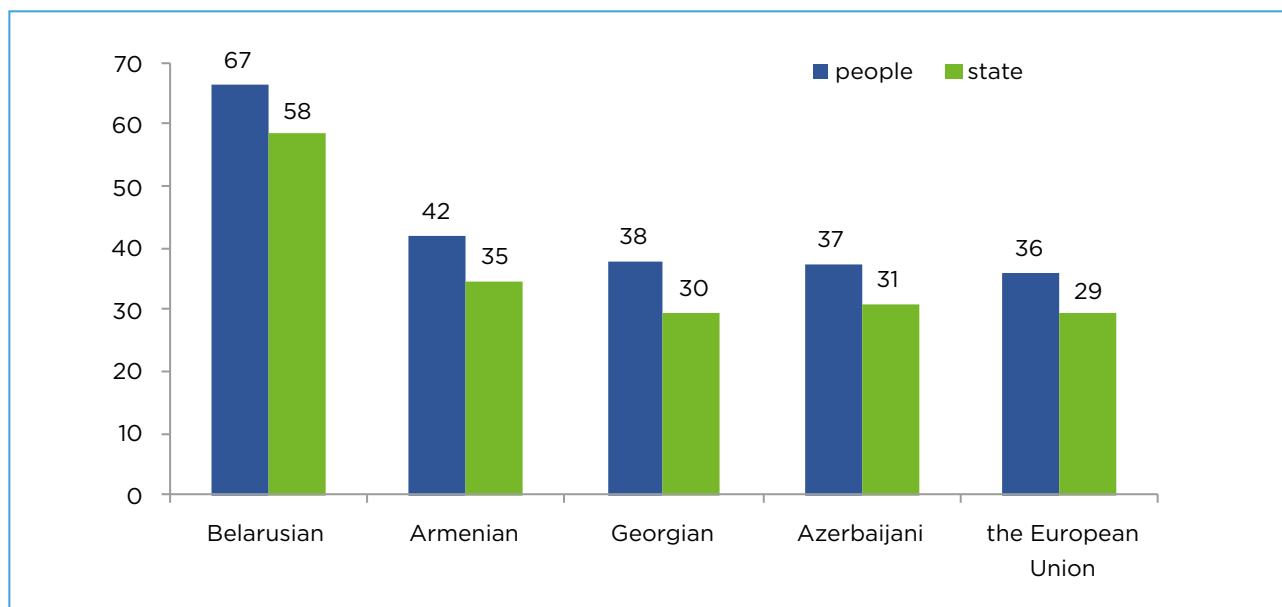


The opinion of Russians about Georgia is rather similar to their opinion about other countries of the South Caucasus – Armenia and Azerbaijan. All three South Caucasian countries are perceived generally positive, but with prevailing neutral feelings, some caution or indifference. It is very different from the attitude of Russians, for example, toward Belarus, about which the majority of Russian survey participants feel very positively.

The opinion about country's residents was consistently better than the opinion about the states – the difference is 7-9% on average in a positive direction.

Graph 3.1.2. Attitudes of Russians toward different countries and their residents (%).

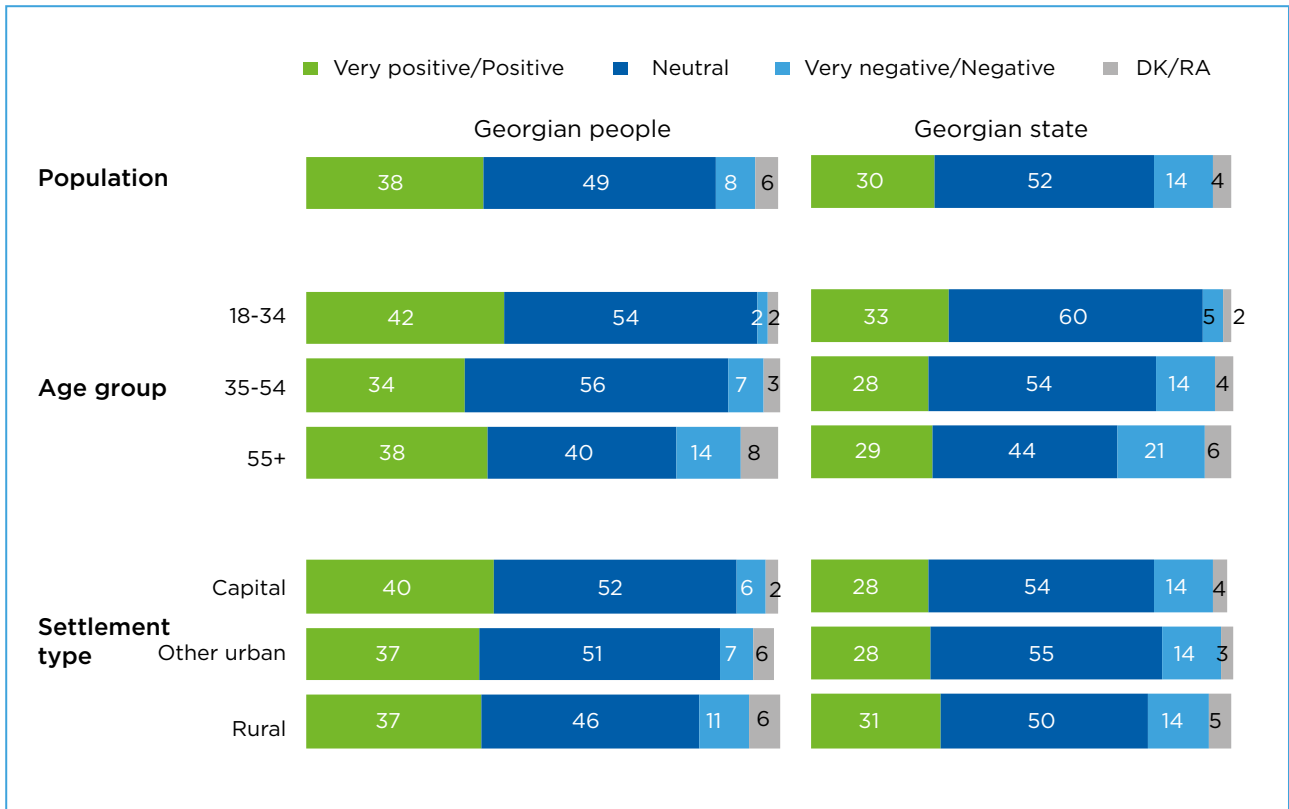
Base: national sample, % of positive attitudes



Attitudes toward Georgians in large Russian cities are slightly more positive, while in medium and small cities they are more neutral or indifferent, although the differences in opinions are not very large.

Attitudes toward Georgia in different regions of the Russian Federation are rather similar. Respondents in the North Caucasus were more positive toward Georgia and Georgians than in other parts of Russia – more than half of the respondents there expressed “very” or “rather” positive feelings. People in the Far East were also slightly more positive toward Georgia than in other places (41%). The differences between other regions of Russia in their feelings about Georgia are small, with a 2-3% margin.

Graph 3.1.3. Attitudes toward the state of Georgia and its residents among different groups (%).



Age differences in attitudes toward Georgia. Differences in the perception of Georgia and Georgians among younger and older generations of Russians are quite significant. The proportion of people with positive attitudes toward Georgia and its residents is higher among the younger generation under 35 years old than among people of older age groups.

Young Russians think more positively about residents of Georgia than about the state of Georgia, and the difference is significant – with 42% and 33%, respectively. A large share of young Russian respondents are either neutral or indifferent toward Georgia and its residents.

The attitudes of people in the older generation (55 years and older) toward residents of Georgia is more complex: the share of neutral-minded or indifferent Russians in this group is less than in other generations. More than a third (38%) have a positive attitude toward residents of Georgia, while 14% think negatively about it. Attitudes toward the state of Georgia among the older generation of Russians are even more and controversial: 29% of them have positive views and 21% have negative views.

Reasons and motivations for positive and negative attitudes toward Georgia and its residents – results of focus groups. Based on focus groups, positive or negative attitudes toward Georgia depend on factors that are taken into account in the assessment. Respondents who expressed a negative attitude towards Georgia based their opinion on the geopolitical interests of Russia and the foreign policies of the two countries. Respondents with a positive attitude towards Georgia paid more attention to other aspects – the general attractiveness of the country for tourism (climate, natural beauty, attractions, and cuisine), qualities of the people, national character (hospitality, friendliness), and common history.

The appeal to emotional or personal factors – memories of youth, warm human relations, personal experience visiting Georgia, friends, and acquaintances – is more typical for people of the older generation. Young Russians usually base their opinions on their experience visiting the country and feedback from other tourists, but they rely less on personal communication with people from Georgia and have less personal ties.

The image of Georgia and Georgians among respondents of the older generation is formed on the basis of memories or ideas from the Soviet past. Younger respondents who did not live in the USSR still often repeat or retranslate the opinions and information they receive from their parents. They generally support prevailing stereotypes about Georgia and only sometimes re-consider their opinion about Georgia on the basis of its current tourist image.

“Earlier I have heard about Georgians as hospitable people in the Caucasus. Even among other Caucasian nations Georgians were perceived as an especially cool nation. But it was a long time ago!” (woman, under 35 years old from a middle-size city in the north-west of Russia, higher education)

Main associations with Georgia are related to Georgian wine and Georgian cuisine, good human relations – hospitality, warm human relations, holidays and a beautiful landscape.

“The people of Georgia have good cuisine, friendliness, they will always welcome you, feed you well, and invite you to their table. It is a fairy-tale place in my mind.” (man, under 35 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in Volga region, higher education)

This image of Georgia was formed in Russia during the Soviet era, and stereotypes (mostly positive) and image perceptions persist to these days. Only a few group participants were aware of details, specific facts about the country, about its pre-Soviet or modern history.

“My views are based on the impressions from the Soviet past. I know that it is a rich, hospitable country – a lot of wine, grapes, sun, and sea. They used to have great ski resorts. But then the country had bad times. I would say it is a contradiction for me. They had a great start when we were together, and now... I would just shrug. The country is pounding – how it is, what it is – no answers.” (woman, 65 years old from Moscow, higher education)

Georgia is not a subject of special interest or close attention for the majority of Russian respondents. It is considered as one of the many neighboring countries – not very close and not too important for Russia.

Most information about Georgia that Russian respondents receive is related to political news, foreign policies and actions, relations with Russia, and a few significant events in domestic life (national elections, conflicts). Information about the current situation in Georgia is also sometimes received from the stories of relatives and acquaintances who have visited Georgia as tourists. While political news is mostly negative or problematic, personal stories are mostly positive.

“In general it is a country of great culture that has lived through many historical events. They are also Orthodox – the closest to us by religion. But in politics they are very far and separate from us now” (man of 63 years old from Yekaterinburg, higher education).

Celebrities from Georgia or with Georgian ancestors make a certain contribution to the positive image of Georgia and Georgians, although their general influence on the image of modern Georgia is not very strong. Focus group participants named such people as Nikolai Tsiskaridze, Valery Meladze, Tamara Gverdtsiteli, and Eteri Tutberidze among respected and famous people of Georgian origin. For respondents of the older generation, Vakhtang Kikabidze in the role of Mimino, from the film of the same name by Georgy Danelia represents a “face of Georgia”. Although the attitude towards famous residents of Georgia is positive, it does not directly contribute to the image of modern Georgia and is attributed mostly to the past and former close ties within the USSR.

Group participants believe that there is a large gap between Georgians of the older generation and the new generation. The attitude toward the Georgians of the older, Soviet generation is very positive. Many of the best qualities are attributed to them, such as friendliness, warmth, intelligence, and sociability. Georgian youth, however, are often criticized for losing traditional openness and hospitality. The young generation of Georgians is described as pragmatic, even greedy or mercenary, having low culture and education, “spoiled” or corrupted by Western culture, oriented toward the West, imitating Western people, having hostile attitudes towards Russia, and unwilling to speak in the Russian language.

“Georgians of my generation are a nation with an open heart. They are ready to welcome a stranger, to communicate, to wine and dine. The young generation is different. There is really a zombie process going on.” (woman, about 50 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the Urals, incomplete higher education)

“My brother and his wife had a vacation in Georgia. He says they have such strange young people there! They wear piercings, they are making fun, they are allowed to do everything they like. They can stand on the street and smoke, being 16 years old, and no one will approach them, not a policeman, no one. They have such debauchery there!” (man, under 25 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the South of Russia, secondary professional education)

Many respondents explain the negative attitudes toward modern Georgia by referring to the negative attitude of Georgians towards Russia, or their russophobia. Respondents who believe that the residents of Georgia are hostile towards Russia and the Russians are inclined to suspect insincerity and self-interest behind hospitality.

“There is a lot of russophobia in Georgia because of Saakashvili’s policy. People are divided into those who lived during the USSR - the older generation; those who remember what it was, and into the younger generation, many of whom don’t know the Russian language. Anyway, there is Russophobia. There is a good attitude towards tourists, but that may be misleading. If one digs deeper, there will be more problems. The older generation, those who lived in the USSR, are more loyal and understand that Georgia should stay friends with Russia.” (man, under 45 years old from a small town in the Volga region, secondary professional education)

“In my opinion, they have got a consumer attitude towards our country. They show a nice picture to tourists and squeeze money from them, but they are not interested and do not otherwise need us.” (woman, under 35 years old from a small town in the Volga region, higher education)

“I have traveled to Georgia many times, when it was possible, and am convinced now that Georgians would lie to live at the expense of Russians. They do it with pleasure if there is such a chance. Yes, they are open and hospitable, but only when they are interested in gaining a profit.” (woman, about 50 years old from a small town in the South of Russia, secondary professional education)

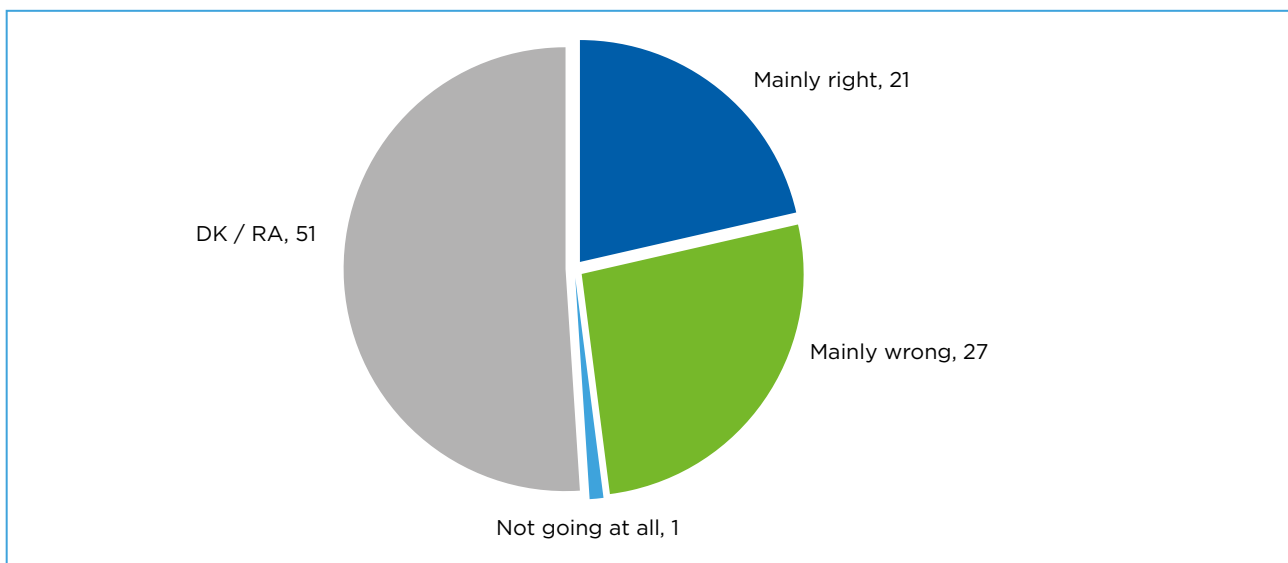
Main findings:

- About half of Russian respondents have a neutral attitude towards the residents of Georgia and the state of Georgia. A strongly negative opinion of Georgia and Georgians is supported by 3-4% of respondents, while moderately negative opinions are held by another 6-10%. Positive views on Georgians were expressed by 38% of Russians, and 30% feel the same about the state of Georgia.
- Young people in Russia are more positive about Georgia than the older generation. However, the share of neutral and indifferent people among the younger group is higher. The opinion of older people was divided - some of them have a positive attitude towards Georgia, and some have a negative attitude (29% and 22%, respectively).
- Residents of large cities have a slightly more positive attitude towards Georgians, while people in medium-size and small towns and villages feel neutral or different more frequently, although the differences are not significant.

3.2. Domestic policies of Georgia

Awareness about contemporary life in Georgia, domestic affairs, and the country's policies among the Russian public is very limited. More than half of the respondents could not answer the general question of whether Georgia is developing in the right or wrong direction. The opinions of another half of respondents who could answer this question were divided: 27% considered the direction of Georgia's development to be wrong, and 21% considered it to be right.

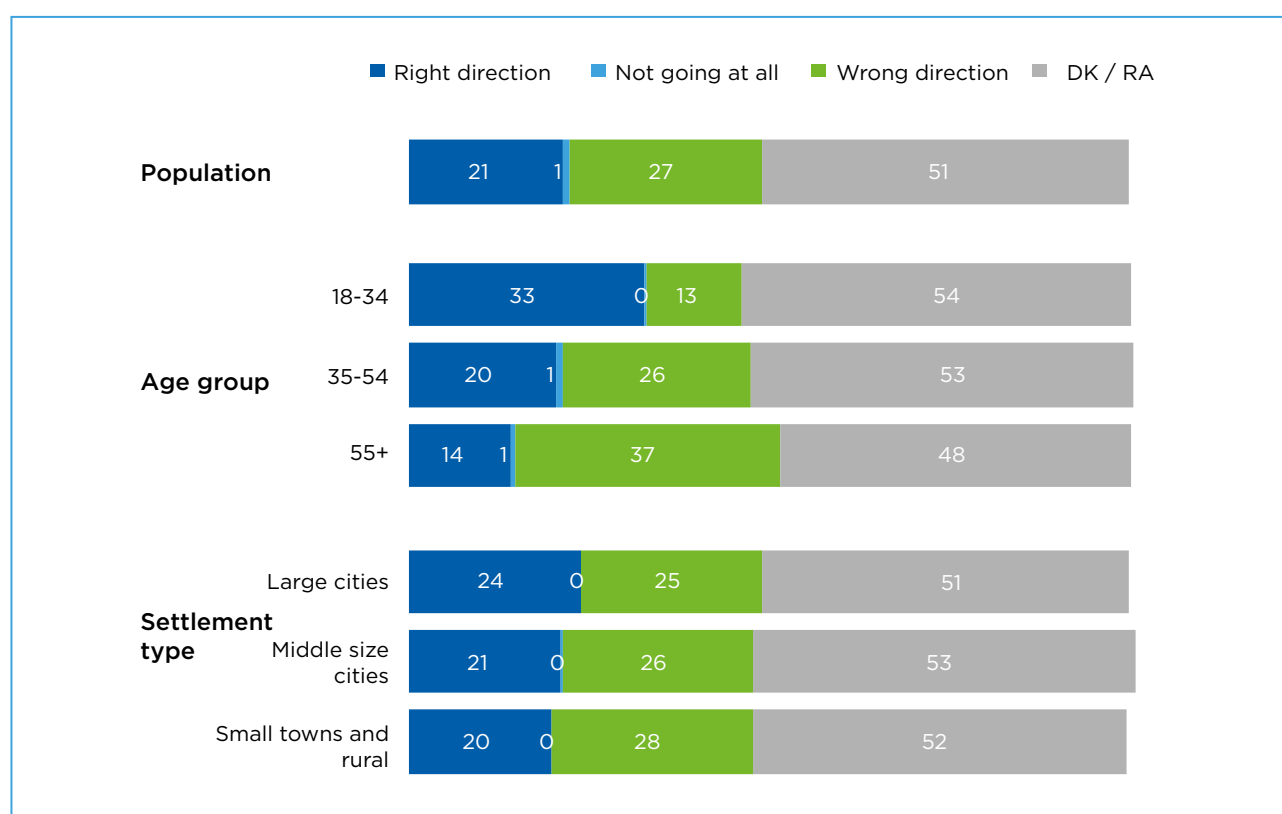
Graph 3.2.1. The direction in which Georgia is currently developing – Russian national sample (%).



Russian respondents of the youngest and the oldest generations have different opinions about the current development of Georgia. Although general awareness of the internal affairs of Georgia and its general direction of development is low among all age groups, young respondents from 18-34 years old view the country more positively. Three times more people assessed the direction of Georgia as right than as wrong in this age group. In the older age group, the ratio is the opposite. Respondents who are middle-aged were split almost equally on this issue.

Slightly less than two-thirds of the respondents in Russia were able to name specific problems, challenges or tasks that Georgia now faces. About one-third of survey participants believe that these are economic and social problems, one-quarter named problems with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and one-fifth of respondents named problems with public health, COVID and medical care.

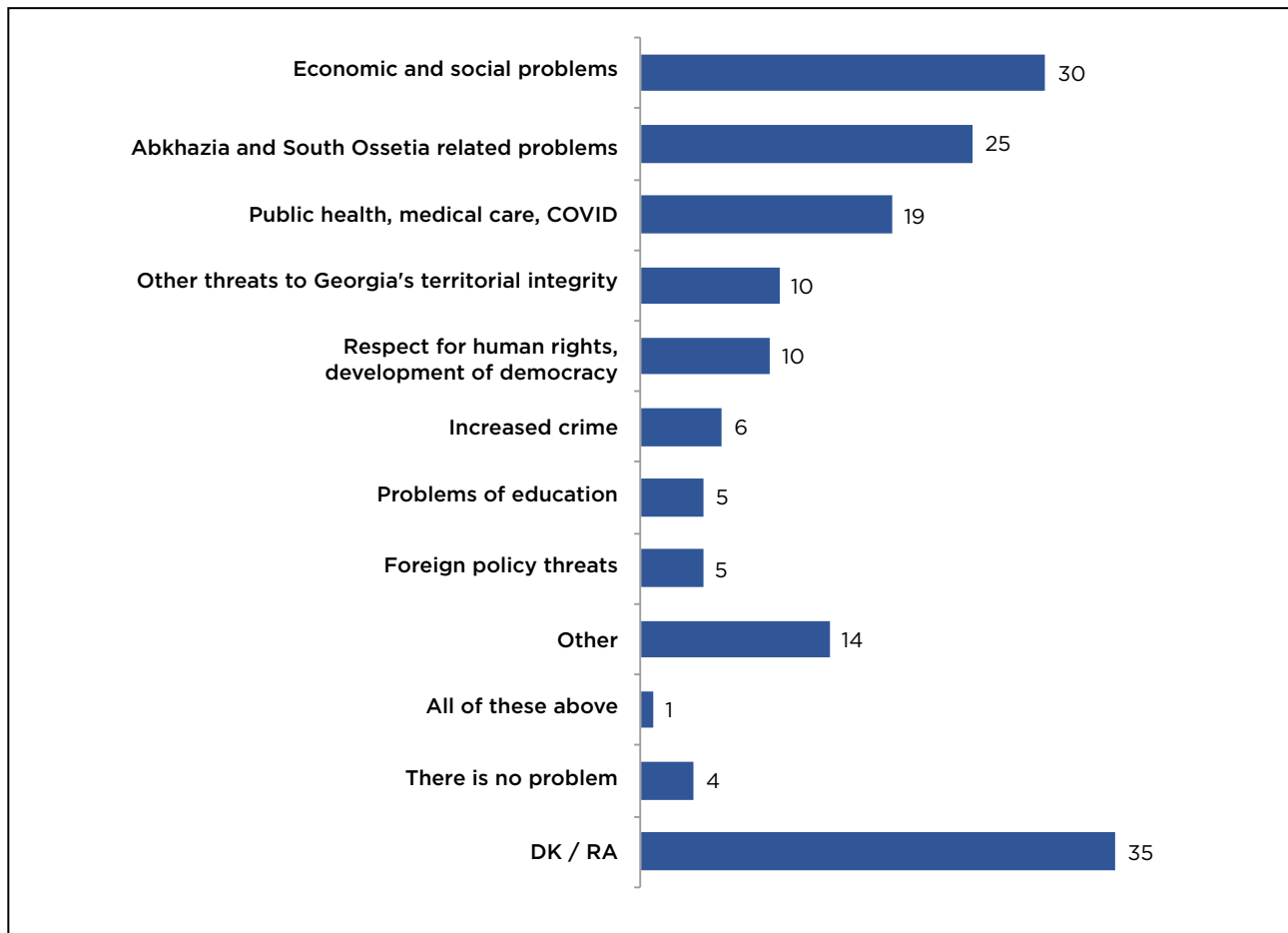
Graph 3.2.2. The direction in which Georgia is currently developing – opinion of different social groups (%).



The main challenges and threats facing Georgia today are economic and social issues and territorial conflicts. Two-thirds of respondents in Russia mentioned these issues among the top three in the Georgian national agenda. The second place is occupied by the issues of public health, COVID and medical care.

Graph 3.2.3. Main issues and threats facing Georgia (%).

Base: national sample, up to 3 answers



Focus groups showed that the opinions of the Russian people about the domestic affairs in Georgia are largely based on guesses, parallels with other countries, and the general logic of the region's development, rather than on specific facts or information about the life of the country.

"All countries of the post-Soviet territory experience difficulties, except 1-2 countries – Azerbaijan is on a good level, and maybe Turkmenistan. Of course, all of them have similar problems, which are related to the beginning of the 1990s, and Georgia is not an exception – unemployment, destroyed economy, low wages, bad communal services. But Georgia is experiencing these problems in a painless way or with minimal losses when compared to Russians." (man, over 55 years old from Kabardino-Balkaria, incomplete higher education)

"They have definitely not made progress, I think. Progress means growth. And what is the origin of growth? Cooperation with neighboring countries. If there are well-established contacts with a large country that can consume a lot of goods, then growth can be expected. But the relations now are closed and drowned out, including tourist flows. That's why there is most likely a regression there" (woman, about 30 years old from a middle-size city in the north-west of Russia, higher education)

The most well-known fact about the domestic affairs of Georgia mentioned by respondents during the focus groups is the fight with corruption initiated by former President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili.

Respondents believe that these efforts and policies were successful and assess it as a great achievement and a good example for other countries.

“I know only about a few unrelated facts. I have heard that Saakashvili struck a serious blow to the grassroots of corruption. Bribes to drivers for violations of the rules on the road are not acceptable anymore, and this is a plus. Georgia is now in a very high position in the Ease of Doing Business ranking. But on the other hand, I’ve heard that the economic situation is not very good there. The conflict in Abkhazia and Ossetia is over, money from the West stopped coming to the country, and economic ties with Russia have collapsed, though new industries and sales markets have not appeared. Therefore, the economic situation is getting worse there.” (man, about 25 years old from St. Petersburg, higher education)

Some group participants mentioned that Georgia has made significant progress in the development of democracy, has built effective and accountable state institutions, civil liberties, and developed a civil culture at a higher level than Russia.

“Georgia is much more advanced in democracy than Russia. They undergo a change of power, while we are just now starting to understand its importance. Their people go out and participate in meetings, and this brings some advantages. They still live worse than us, but they’ve got more pro-European development.” (man, 60 years old from a small town in Krasnodar region, higher education)

On the whole, Russian respondents do not have a full or clear picture of the life or situation in Georgia today. Their knowledge, information and impressions are fragmented, contradictory and often based on unreliable sources or memories.

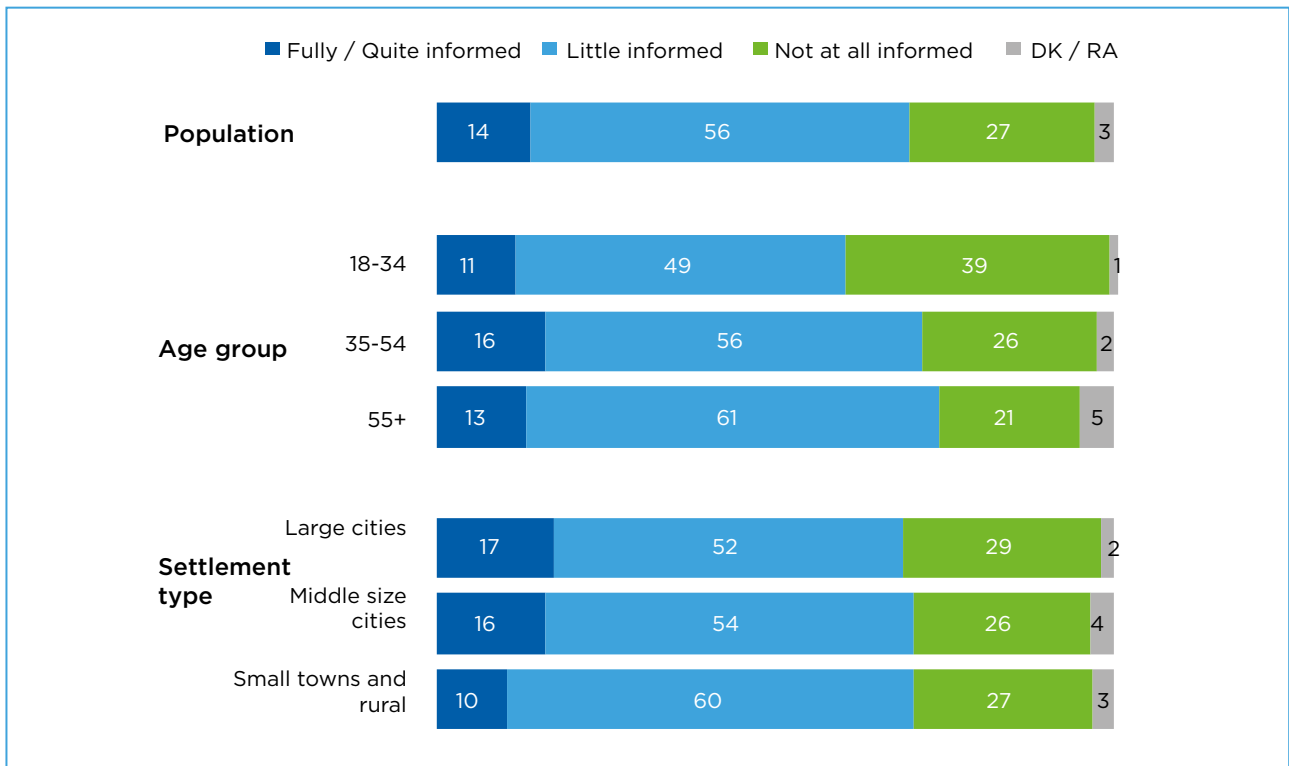
Main findings:

- More than half of the respondents could not assess whether Georgia is developing in the right or wrong direction. The opinion of the remaining respondents was divided: 27% considered the direction of Georgia’s development to be wrong, and 21% considered it to be right.
- Russian respondents perceive the issues and challenges facing Georgia today as very similar to the challenges facing Russia. The top issues on the national agenda for Russia are economic and social challenges (mentioned as one of the top three priorities by 44% of respondents), the second – health and medical care challenges (31%), and the third – foreign policy and international conflicts.
- In the opinion of Russians, the main challenges facing Georgia are economic and social problems, as well as territorial conflicts and threats to the territorial integrity of Georgia (at least one of these issues were named by 47% of respondents).

3.3. Sources of information about Georgia

The awareness of respondents in the national Russian sample about the current situation in Georgia and what is happening in the country is very low. Only 14% of respondents believed that they were sufficiently well-informed about the affairs of Georgia today. More than half of survey participants admitted that they know only a little about modern Georgia, and 27% admitted that they know nothing at all.

Graph 3.3.1. How well Russian respondents are informed about the situation in Georgia (%).

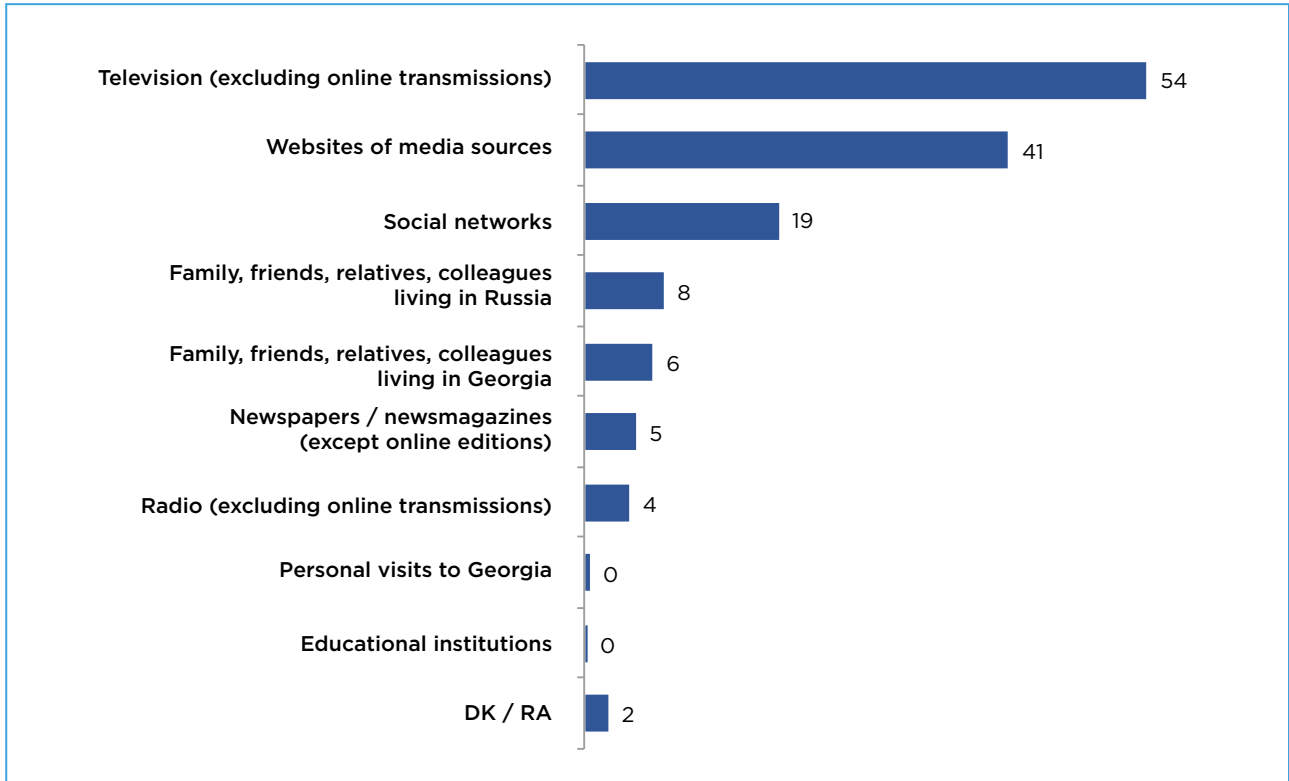


Residents of large and medium-sized cities consider themselves to be more informed about Georgia than residents of small towns and rural settlements.

The main source of information about life in Georgia for Russian people is television - more than half of the respondents receive the largest part of information about Georgia from TV programs. The second most important source is internet versions of traditional media. The role of non-specialized personal sources of information, such as social networks or direct information from other people is much smaller – 12% of all respondents refer to social networks for information about Georgia, while 5% get information from family and friends within Russia, and 4% get information from people from Georgia. More than 40% of respondents did not get any information about Georgia in recent times.

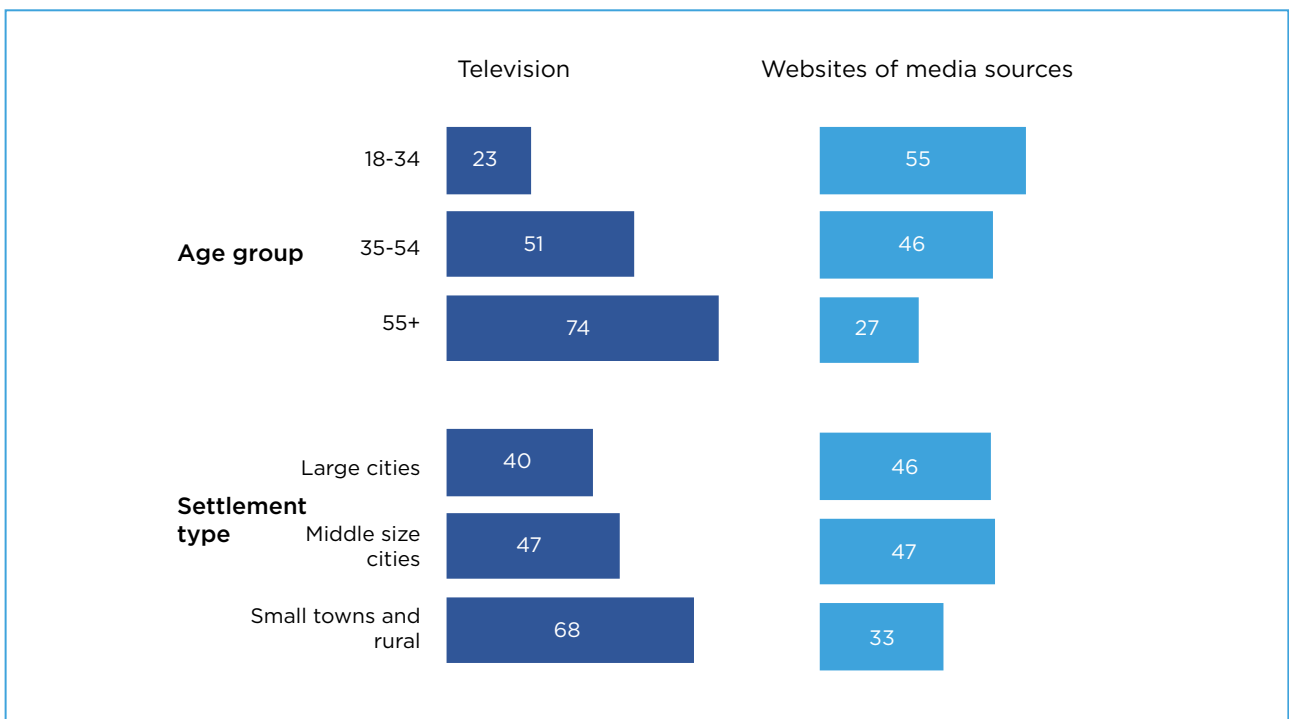
Graph 3.3.2. Main sources of information about the situation in Georgia (%).

Base: % of those who get at least some information about Georgia



For people older than 35 years, traditional mass media is the main source of information about Georgia, and often even the only source. Young people use a broader range of sources – social media along with traditional media. But even taking into account the higher variety of sources, the general awareness of young Russians about Georgia is even lower than among people of the older generations.

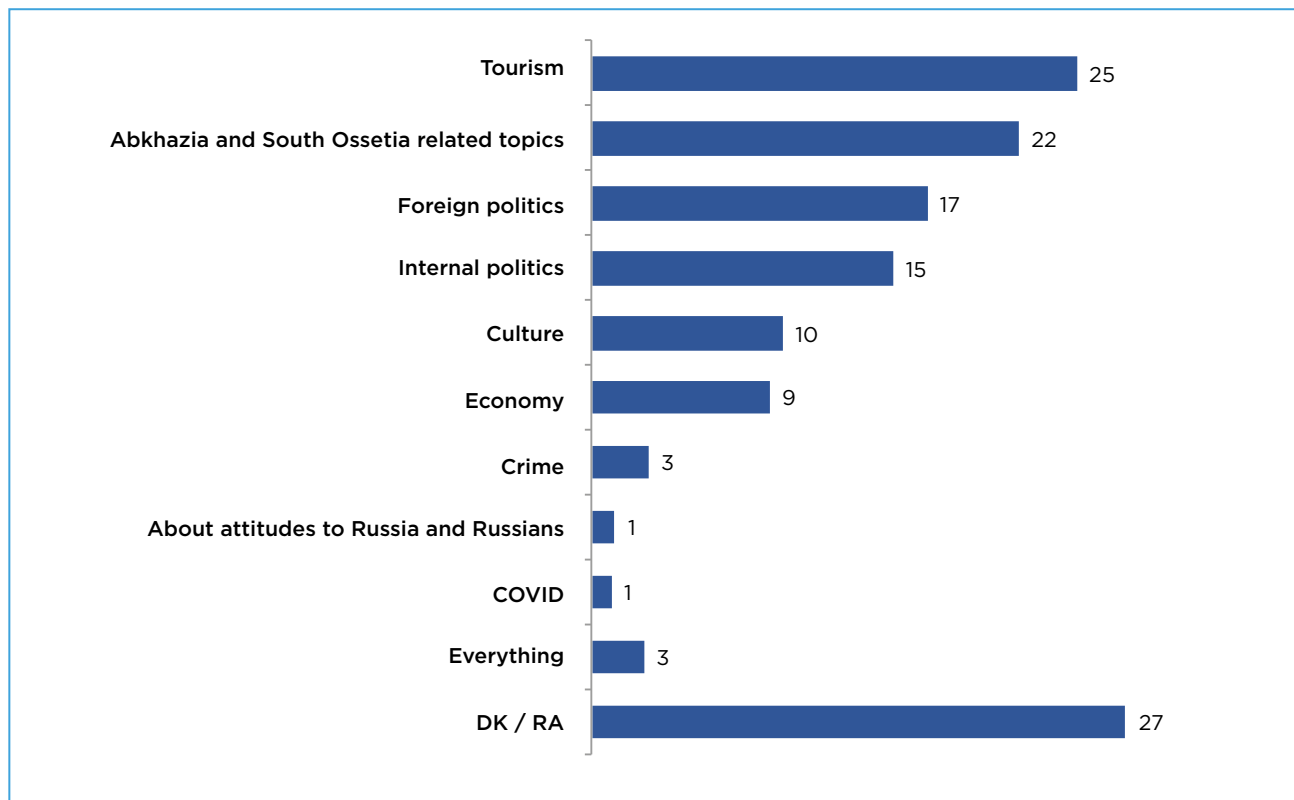
Graph 3.3.3. Main sources of information on the situation in Georgia for different groups (%).



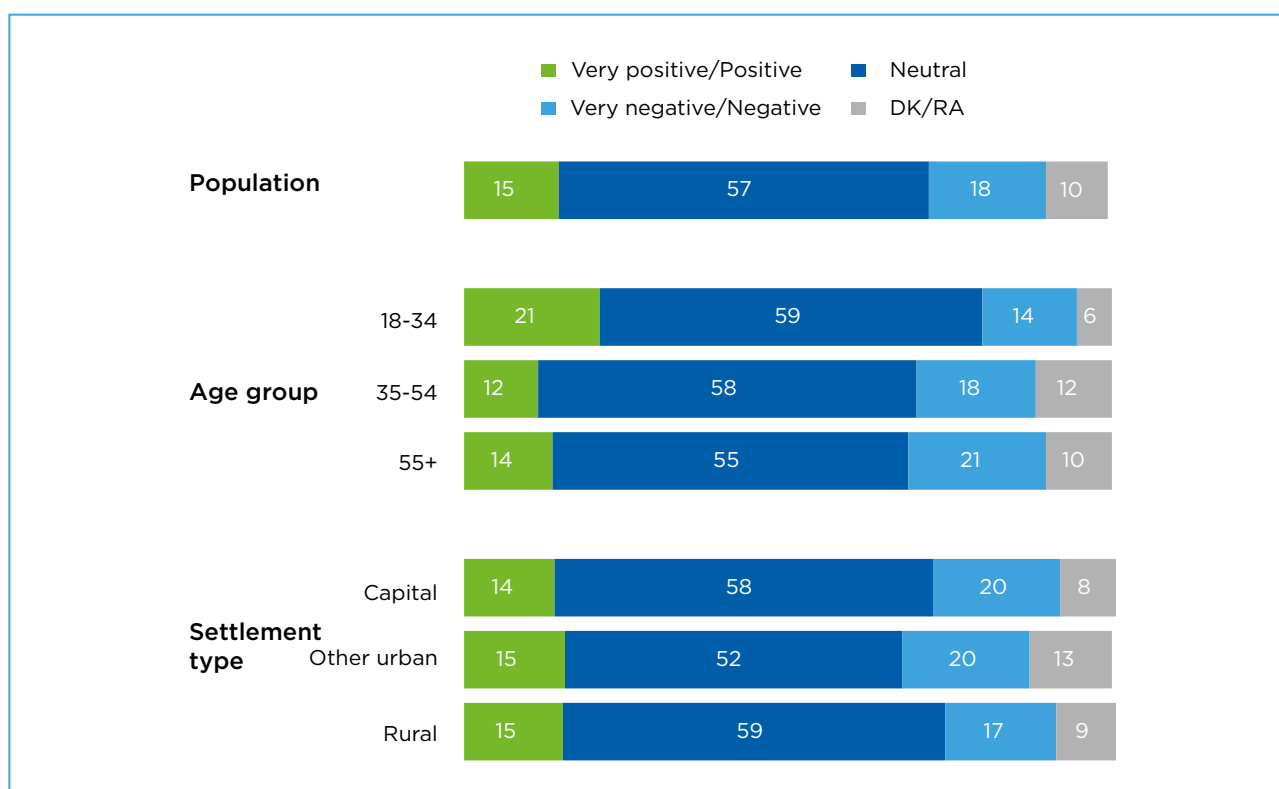
The information that people in Russia receive about Georgia in recent years is mostly tourism information. Tourism information is followed by topics related to Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and international relations in general. Information about the domestic affairs of the country, its culture, economy, and way of life is much less common.

Graph 3.3.4. The kind of information about Georgia people in Russia receive from news in recent times (%).

Base: % from those who receive at least some information about Georgia



Most Russians who receive at least some information about Georgia do not believe it has any definite positive or negative character. Most of the respondents think that they receive neutral information. The share of those who believe that the information they receive is mostly negative or positive is almost the same, with a slight trend in a negative direction (19% and 15%, respectively).

Graph 3.3.5. Character of information about Georgia received by people in Russia (%).

Personal communication with residents of Georgia is not uncommon for Russian people, although these contacts are not intense or constant. More than half of respondents communicated with residents of Georgia at least sometimes in the last 10 years (56%). Frequent contacts with Georgians are maintained by 11% of Russians. Communication is more frequent and intense among people of the youngest and the oldest age groups, and among residents of large and medium-sized cities.

In the national Russian sample, 5% of respondents have visited Georgia over the past 10 years. Visitors to Georgia were mainly young people (8% of respondents younger than 25 years old visited Georgia in recent years) or residents of large cities (8% compared to 2% in small towns or rural areas). People of the older generation, residents of small towns, and those living in rural areas visited Georgia much less often.

Table 3.3.1. Communication with Georgia - national sample (%).

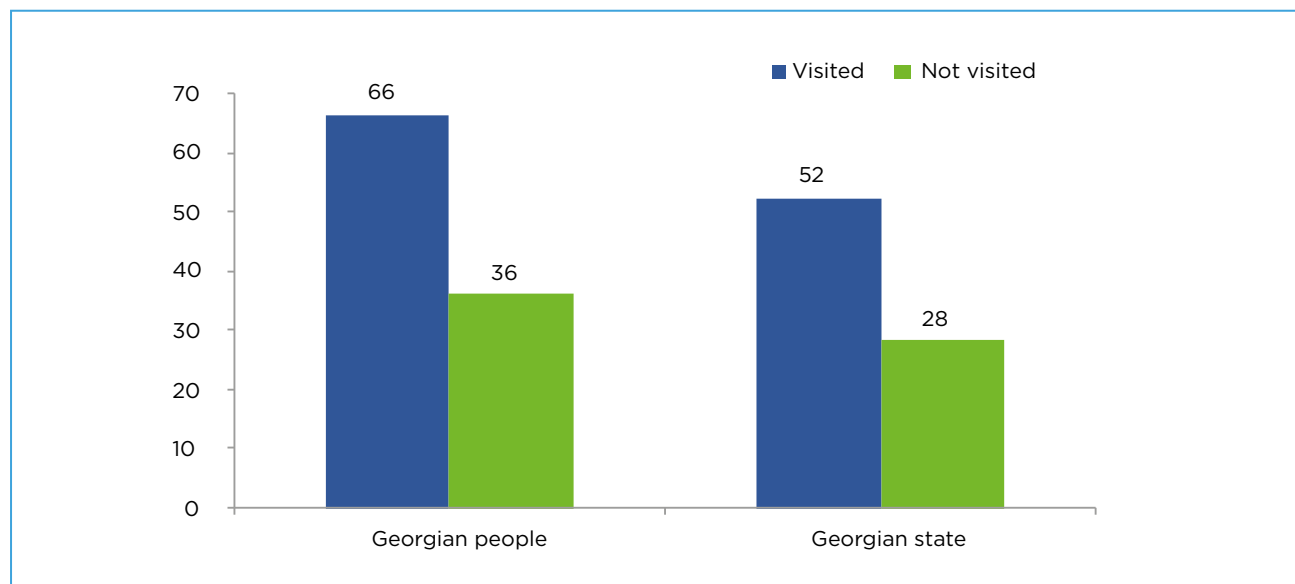
Question: How often have you communicated with Georgia in the last 10 years? Have you visited Georgia in the last 10 years?

	Very often	Not often	A few times	Never or DK/RA	Have you been to Georgia in the past 10 years?
TOTAL	11%	23%	22%	44%	5%
Age					
18-34	11%	25%	29%	35%	8%
35-54	14%	25%	23%	38%	6%
55 years and over	7%	19%	18%	56%	3%
Urbanization					
Large cities	11%	24%	28%	37%	8%
Middle size cities	11%	26%	24%	39%	7%
Small towns and rural areas	10%	20%	17%	53%	2%

Personal visits to Georgia correlate positively with a favorable opinion of the country. Among those who have been to Georgia in recent years, 52% have a positive attitude towards it, compared with 29% of those who have not been to the country. There are far fewer people with neutral-indifferent views among visitors to Georgia than among non-visitors (29% and 54%, respectively). However, the direction of causal relations is not obvious. Personal visits to Georgia may contribute to a more positive attitude toward the country, but the opposite can also be true. Regardless of causality, **personal travel to Georgia is related to building and maintaining positive attitudes toward the country.**

Graph 3.3.6. Visiting Georgia and attitudes toward Georgia and Georgians (%).

Base: % of those who have positive views about Georgia



Focus groups confirmed that the awareness of Russian respondents about contemporary life and affairs in Georgia is rather low. In recent years, Georgia has not been an important news item for the media. In general, traditional media tend to report information only about extraordinary and often negative events, conflicts, or problems. Russian respondents believe that there are very few analytical materials, and information about ordinary life in Georgia that is not related to any catastrophic event or conflict. The same is true for many other countries.

“I get some information about neighbors (ex-republics) from our news when I watch it, such as the “60 minutes” program on channel 2 [RTR]. Georgia is almost entirely absent in my information field.” (woman, 55 years old from a small town in the Pskov region, higher education)

“I have not seen news about Georgia for a long time. The recent news was about their presidential or parliament elections, which were long ago. I have also heard that they had some protests. I have almost not heard about them since that time.” (man, about 25 years old from St. Petersburg, higher education)

“There is not much information on Georgia. That is probably good. Usually, a lot of news means that something bad is going on.” (woman, 23 years old from Samara, higher education)

“I didn’t hear anything about Georgia recently. Georgia fell out of the lens of events after they elected the new President – the Western henchman of French descent, the woman who followed the West. I don’t hear anything significant now.” (woman, 65 years old from Moscow, higher education)

Due to a lack of information and news about Georgia, some Russian respondents get the impression that in principle, few events take place in Georgia, and that the country lives in isolation. Respondents provide few informational reasons.

“There is little information about it. The country is very calm, it doesn’t provoke negative news, conflict situations, and it doesn’t interfere with anybody. I know that there are tours to Georgia. My acquaintances and friends who have been there tell me about great nature, beauty, and the friendliness of its people. But generally, there is very little information about it. They are separated in some way, I think.” (woman, about 35 years old from a middle-sized city in central Russia, higher education)

In focus groups, almost none of the respondents spontaneously mentioned any territorial conflicts between Georgia and Russia or problems around Abkhazia or South Ossetia. These topics now occupy a small place in the daily news and have receded into the background in political debates and Russian public opinion.

A special information section provides tourist programs and materials about different countries. This type of material attracts a lot of attention, especially among young Russians. These materials are usually positive about Georgia, and present the country in the most positive and attractive light. Negative information is usually related only to some travel restrictions, visas and transport issues.

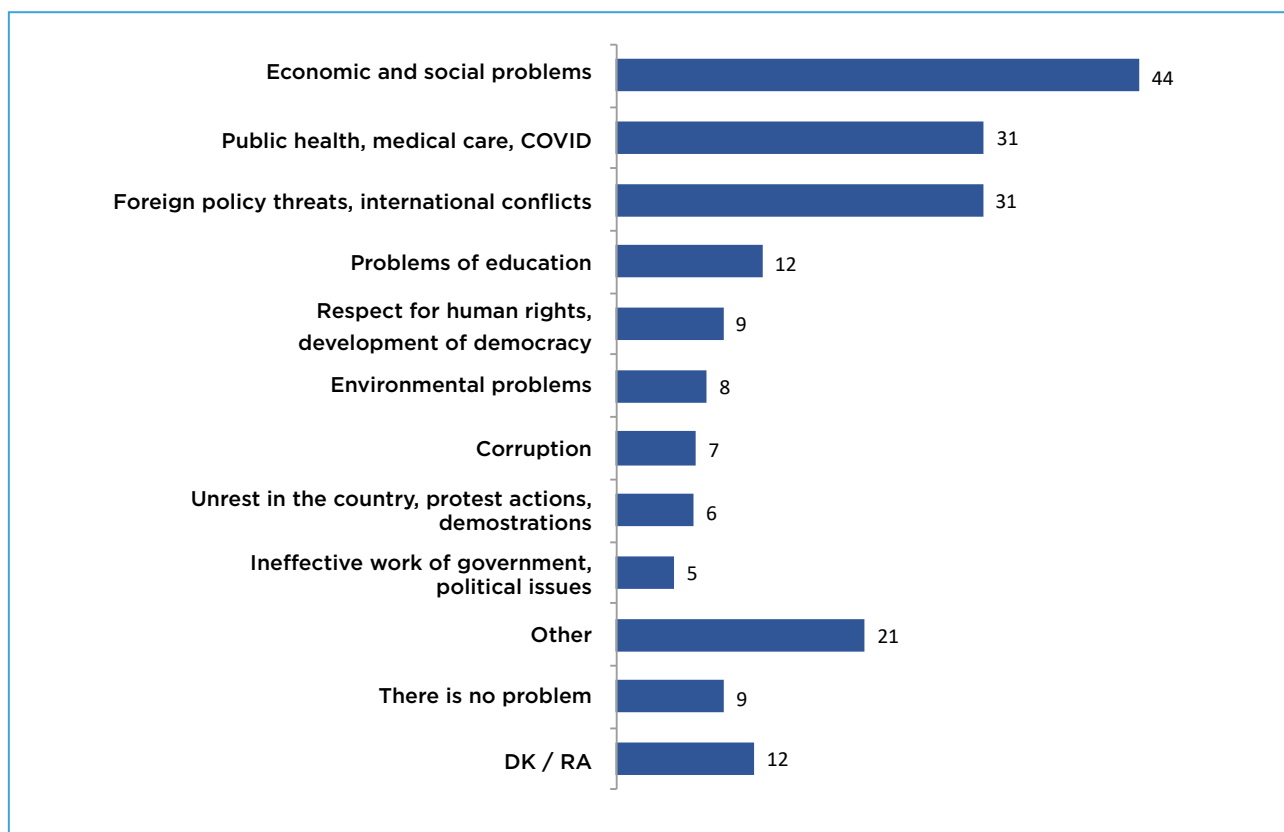
Main findings:

- The awareness of Russians about the current situation in Georgia and what is happening in this country today is very low. Just 14% of respondents believe that they are sufficiently well-informed about affairs in today’s Georgia. More than half of Russians know about modern Georgia only a little, and 27% know nothing at all.
- More than 40% of respondents have not received any information about Georgia recently. The main source of information about the domestic affairs and policies of Georgia for Russians is the traditional media (television and Internet versions of traditional media). Information from personal sources, such as from social networks or from people they know is used by 19% of the respondents.
- Different generations of Russians receive information about Georgia from different sources. People over 55 years old receive information mostly from television, while middle-aged people receive information from both television and online channels, and young people mostly use online information.
- The main type of information that people recently received about Georgia is tourism news and touristic reviews. The second topic in the news is the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as international relations in general. Most of those who have recently received at least some information about Georgia believed that this information was not colored positively or negatively, but neutral. A total of 19% think that the information they received was more often negative, and 15% believe that it was mostly positive.

3.4. Domestic situation in Russia - main challenges

The top national agenda in Russia is occupied by domestic issues and challenges, in the opinion of the majority of respondents. A total of 44% of them named economic and social problems as top issues, while 31% named challenges associated with COVID, 12% named issues about education, and about 10% named political problems and governance (human rights, development of democracy, corruption, political instability and protests, low efficiency of governing). Foreign policy issues and challenges were included in the top national agenda less often, by 31% of respondents.

Graph 3.4.1. What are the main challenges or threats facing Russia today? (%).

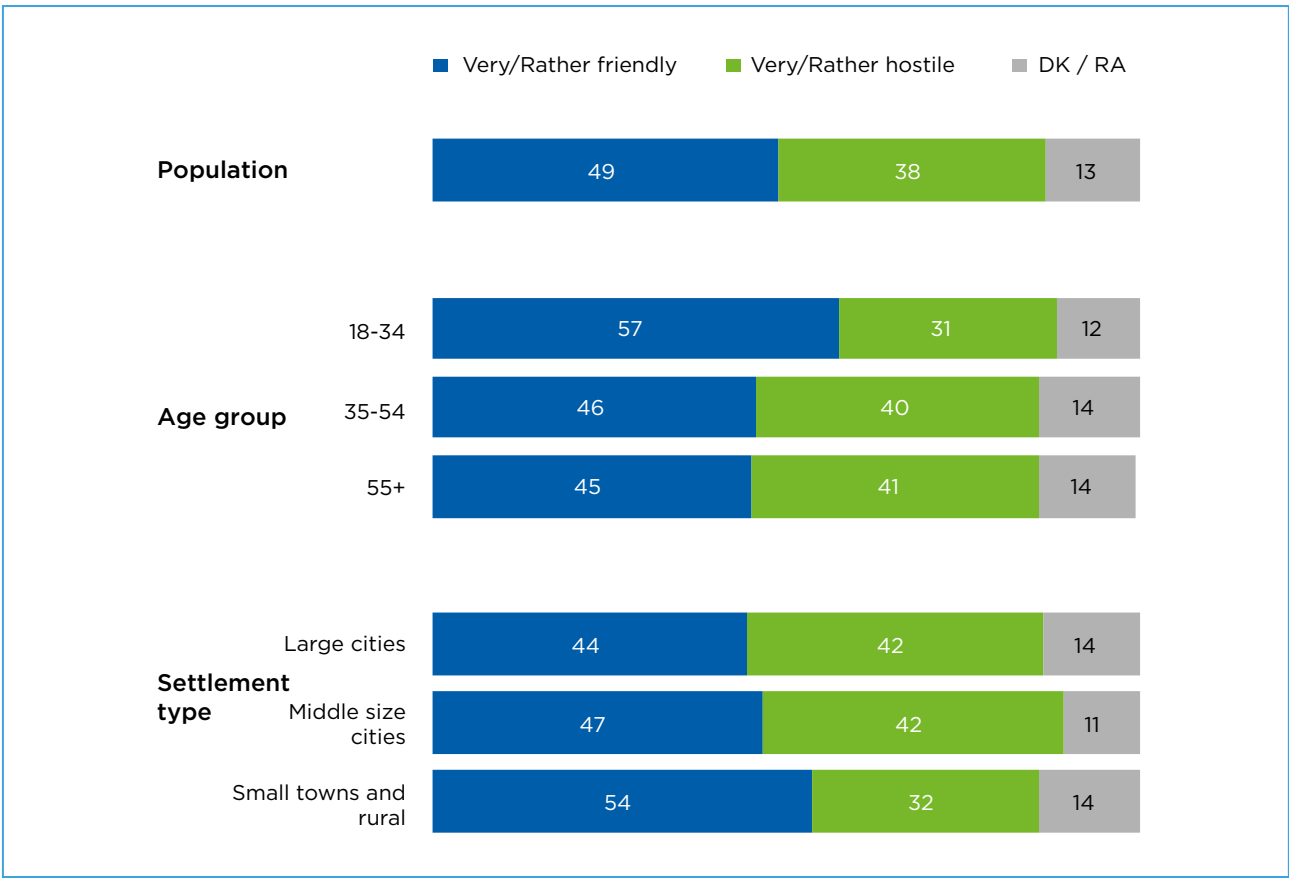


The top national challenges and threats facing Russia are similar to the challenges Russian respondents see in Georgia. The top two threats for both countries are economic and social issues, and issues of public health, health care provision, and COVID.

3.5. Russian-Georgian relations and the foreign politics of Georgia

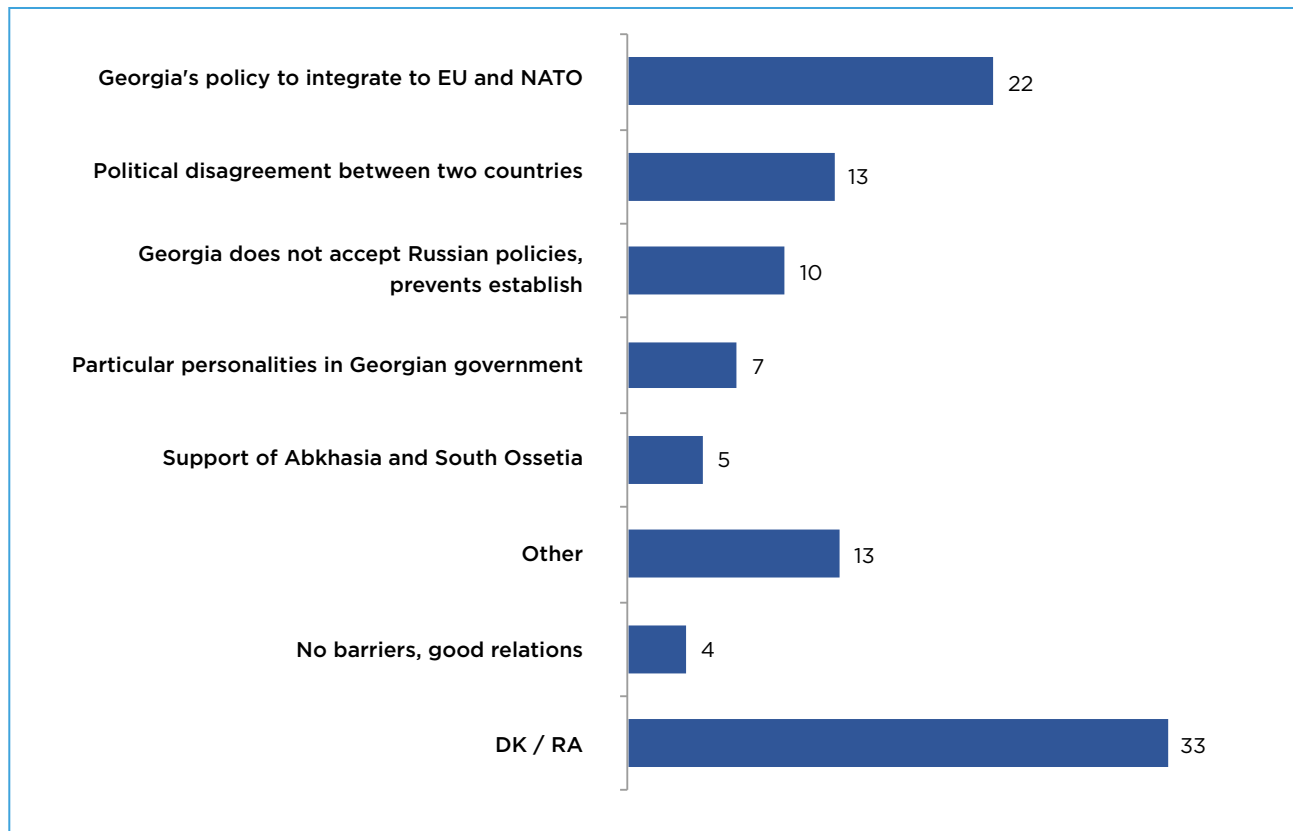
Russian respondents assessed the current relations between Russia and Georgia very differently. Only 6% of survey participants believe that these relations are very friendly and 43% think that they are more friendly than hostile. Slightly more than a third of respondents (34%) consider relations to be rather hostile, and few respondents consider them very hostile (4%).

Graph 3.5.1. Current relations between Russia and Georgia – national sample (%).



Young Russian respondents tend to believe that relations between Russia and Georgia are friendly. More than the half of respondents younger than 35 years old held this opinion. Middle-aged and older Russians are divided in their opinions - some believe that the relationship is friendly, but some believe that it is hostile.

A significant proportion of Russians (about a third) do not see any definite obstacles to the establishment of good-neighborly relations between Russia and Georgia. Among those who named such obstacles, 22% named Georgia’s policy of integration with the EU and the NATO countries as the top barrier to better relations. Another barrier refers to general political disagreements between the two countries on different issues. The third barrier is concerned with Georgia’s anti-Russian policies, the lack of will for closer relations, and Georgia’s intention to keep a distance from Russia. Only a small proportion of respondents blamed particular Russian policies, actions, or particular Russian leaders for harm to Russian-Georgian relations.

Graph 3.5.2. Main obstacles/challenges hindering Russian-Georgian relations (%).*Base: national sample, up to 2 answers*

Most respondents in Russia do not have any doubt that the development of economic and trade ties between Russia and Georgia contributes to stronger and improved relations between the two countries. More than 80% of respondents agreed with this statement.

More than half of Russians strongly believe in the positive impact of tourism development on relations between the two countries, and another 31% generally agree with its positive impact.

Graph 3.5.3. Impact of economic/trade ties and tourism on Russian-Georgian relations (%).

Questions: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the development of economic and trade relations/ tourism between Russia and Georgia contributes to the improvement of relations between residents of Georgia and Russia?



During focus groups, respondents characterized the current Russian-Georgian interstate relations as “cool” or “problematic”. The reasons for such cooling of relations, however, are not clear to many respondents.

“It seems to me that Georgia holds a neutral position towards Russia. I don’t remember any conflict with Georgia.” (woman, 36 years old from Moscow region, higher education)

“It seems to me that Georgia has broken all relations with Russia in a one-sided way. They had some conflicts of interest with Russia... Maybe I understand it in the wrong way, but it seems to me that Georgia has broken political relations with Russia.” (woman, 32 years old from Kaliningrad, higher education)

Some group participants attributed the lack of friendliness in Russian-Georgian relations to the pro-Western policies of Georgia. Some respondents believed that Georgia serves as a tool for promoting the interests of Western countries as opposed to Russian interests. Another barrier to better relations in the opinion of respondents is the direction of Georgian foreign policy. Georgia is seeking to join a stronger and more economically developed side to receive higher dividends. Only a few participants in the group discussions link the problems in Russian-Georgian relations with territorial conflicts, such as the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

“I think, there is nothing that our government can do. Georgia accepted Western policy already, and they will follow it, while the West is against us.” (man, 40 years old from Yekaterinburg, secondary professional education)

“Russia needs to be point of attraction for other countries as Georgia. Russia is not the point of attraction at this moment – there is no successful state building, no living standards, and no rational usage of natural resources. We have nothing to offer to Georgia. They don’t need us. And one should not take offense and say that they are not pro-Russian. Why should they be pro-Russian? What for?” (man, under 25 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the south of Russia, secondary professional education)

Participants of focus groups were rather pessimistic, not only regarding current Russian-Georgian relations, but also the immediate future of these relations. Respondents with different political and ideological views agreed that significant changes in the nature or volume of these relations in the next 10 years are not very likely.

Respondents who looked at relations between Russia and Georgia through the prism of the global confrontation between Russia and the West and the threat to Russia from Western countries also do not expect a softening of this confrontation in the near future.

“Our Minister of Foreign Affairs says that Russia is ready to break relations with Europe, while Georgia does things with an eye on Europe often, so there will hardly be improvements with such a policy, I think.” (man, over 60 years old from Samara, higher education)

Respondents, who attributed problems in Russian-Georgian relations to the insufficient internal liberalization of Russia, asymmetrical, paternalistic policy of Russia toward other countries, or wrong territorial policy also do not expect significant changes in the near future.

“What Russia did recently – the capture of foreign territories – that is of course a crime. If we steal someone else’s territory, then this is theft. This will change if the government ever changes. But this forecast is very distant.” (man, over 60 years old from Yekaterinburg, higher education)

Some optimism about the prospects for inter-country relations is based on an argument of economic efficacy, primarily that it is beneficial for Georgia to maintain trade and economic ties with Russia, as well as a benefit for Russia to have unhindered transport links with its southern neighbor.

“If more adequate young people will take power in Georgia, then they at least won’t break relations to gain economic profit – which is the tourist flow, goods and money relations. It is easier for them to export goods to us, than over the ocean.” (woman, 23 years old from Samara, higher education)

For people of the older generation, the moral and ethical aspect of relations between the two countries is very important - relations should have a non-economic component, be based on mutual interests, sympathy, loyalty, and in no way resemble a donor-recipient relationship.

“Good relations are not that I’ve got a wallet, so you make friends with me and I will pay you for it. It happens with many republics now: we forgive debts, lend again, they beat us on the cheek, and we turn the other cheek. It doesn’t have to be; this is not friendship” (woman about 50 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the Urals, incomplete higher education).

Despite the difference in worldview and the evaluation of current Russian-Georgian relations, many respondents dreamed of a “warming” of these relations and admitted that it depends on the position of Russians to a large extent. Some supporters of Russia’s tough policy towards other countries also agreed that Russia is not a very attractive center for other countries.

“Everyone thinks in terms of profit politically, while Russia can’t offer anything good at the moment, so there is no sense for Georgia to integrate into Russia. If Russia becomes a large, great, strong country, then relations will improve in a natural way. With all my respect to Georgians, Georgia is a small country that will never be self-sufficient. It will gravitate either to the European Union or to the US.” (man, about 25 years old from St. Petersburg, higher education)

“We are not attractive to anybody, thanks to our leadership. That is a problem.” (man, under 25 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the South of Russia, secondary professional education)

“If people will see that there is a planned, purposeful, full-fledged development, and not such a mess, which is the current moment, then all republics or the majority of republics will turn their faces toward us. They are closer to us than to the West spiritually, historically, and the ties have not been broken completely, thanks to God.” (man, 45 years old from a small town in the Urals, higher education)

In the opinion of some respondents, only a change in Russian foreign policy may help improve relations with neighboring countries. These policies include strengthening the domestic economy, building more healthy social relations within the country, developing a more effective and prosperous society and state, and also abandoning the role of “world policeman”, or not becoming involved with conflicts outside the Russian Federation.

“The government of Russia should turn to its people first of all. When they will turn to their people, then others will turn to us as well.” (woman, about 50 years old from a small town in Central Russia, higher education)

Despite many difficulties between the two countries, Russian respondents believe that Georgia is a desirable destination for tourism – 27% of them would like to visit Georgia in the nearest future. Georgia is **one of the most attractive travel destinations** among other neighboring countries (along with Belarus – 21%).

Young and middle-aged people would like to visit Georgia the most. Differences between generations may be due more to physical and economic opportunities for travel in general, rather than attitudes towards Georgia.

Table 3.5.1. Would you like to visit Georgia? (%).

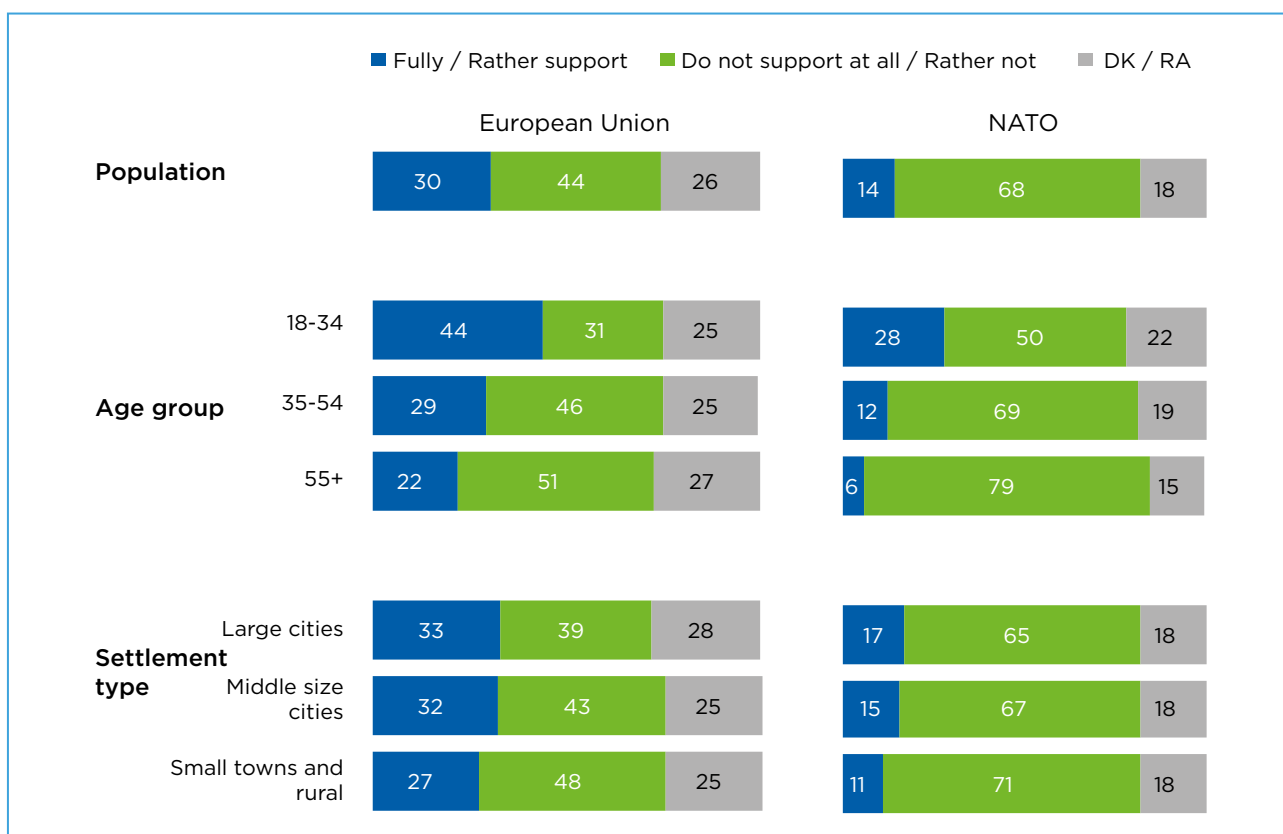
	Yes
TOTAL	27%
Age	
18-34	31%
35-54	34%
55 years and over	18%
Urbanization	
Large cities	31%
Middle size cities	31%
Small towns and rural areas	22%

The majority of Russians are strongly against the aspiration of Georgia to join NATO. This idea was supported by 14% of Russians, and 68% were against it.

The attitude of the Russian public toward the aspiration of Georgia to join the EU is less strong and unidirectional. Slightly less than a third of respondents supported it, while 44% were against it, and 26% were indifferent or had no opinion on this matter.

Younger and older generations of Russians have different opinions about Georgia’s aspiration to join the EU or NATO. The idea of joining the EU is perceived more positively than the idea of joining NATO by all generations. Regarding the EU, the proportion of young Russians who support it is larger than those who are against it. The distribution of opinions among the older generation is reversed.

Graph 3.5.4. Attitudes of different groups towards Georgia's aspiration to become a member of the EU/NATO (%).



Focus groups revealed that the main concerns related to Georgia’s accession to the EU are associated with the fact that Western countries will impose an unfriendly policy towards Russia regarding Georgia, use Georgia against Russia, or become an obstacle to improving relations between the countries.

“If they enter the European Union and follow their laws, then our relations will change. Examples of other countries confirm it. Czechoslovakia used to be our friend, and now the Czech Republic supports the decisions of the Hague Court against Russia - they follow the West both in political and legal terms. This is what will happen with Georgia, as well.” (man, over 60 years old from Yekaterinburg, higher education)

“This will be an additional headache, because they will be used to annoy us again and again.” (woman, over 60 years old from Moscow, higher education)

Joining NATO, according to opponents of this step, will impose an additional threat to Russia's national security, contribute to the further growth of tension between countries, and stimulate a new round of the arms race.

"It will have a negative influence if they enter NATO. NATO had surrounded Russia in fact, and this doesn't give us the possibility to develop in a free way. All forces and means of Russia have to be spent on defense; that is bad." (man, over 60 years old from Dagestan, higher education)

The negative reaction to Georgia's aspiration to join the EU or NATO is explained not only by the negative consequences of this step for Russia, but also by concerns about the independence and wellbeing of Georgia. Respondents referred to the experience of Baltic countries, as well as the agrarian countries of Southern Europe, who lost more than they gained economically from joining the EU. Some respondents also predicted the loss of economic and political independence, as well as the loss of identity and uniqueness as a consequence of joining the EU.

"It will be much worse for the Georgians, I think. They will follow the path of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, where a lot of restrictions on their local products were introduced but no access to new markets was opened. Georgia is an agricultural country, and eventually, they will have nowhere to sell." (man, about 25 years old from St. Petersburg, higher education)

"No Georgian problems will be solved if they join NATO or other countries. It will be a satellite country with few resources. The only thing that is of interest to NATO for Georgia is the deployment of weapons. The country will be used to solve NATO's problems and interests. The problems of Georgia will not be addressed." (woman, about 50 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the Urals, incomplete higher education)

"NATO is interested in them for military bases deployment. The NATO countries' interests will prevail first of all - move rocket bases closer (to Russia)." (man, over 60 years old from Samara, higher education)

Differences in opinion about Georgia joining the EU or NATO among Russian respondents are determined by political orientation (pro-democratic, liberal or pro-Soviet, conservative), attitudes toward Russia's current political course and political leadership, as well as general views on a model for the future relations of Russia with neighboring post-Soviet countries.

Supporters of Georgia's European integration presented three different arguments. One argument is related to the idea that European support for countries on the border of Russia. The spread of European values among neighboring countries can affect the liberalization and democratization of life inside Russia, and also restrain aggressive steps or the general forceful orientation of the country's foreign policy.

"It will have a positive impact on Russia. The more countries are united by European values, the more likely it will bring Russia to its senses. For Georgia, of course, this is a blessing. It means development for the country when it joins Europe. The less Russia can harm this country, spoil it, and corrupt it, the better for this country." (man, 46 years old from Moscow, higher education)

Another line of reasoning is related to giving priority to domestic policy in the national agenda, or to solving internal problems to strengthen the economic position of Russia and increase its attractiveness among other countries. In the opinion of these respondents, too much emphasis on foreign policy distracts Russia from its main tasks and dissipates resources.

“If we look at any country in Europe that is a member of the European Union or NATO, how much does it influence economic ties or the wellbeing of Russian people? Not at all! If Georgia will be a member of NATO or the European Union, it will be a strong country on the southern border of Russia. Russia should feed and take care of its own people first of all, but not provide rockets or arms. Then people will be more united and defend the country.” (man, over 55 years old from Kabardino-Balkaria, incomplete higher education)

The third argument refers to the need for a new policy in building relations between the republics of the former USSR. According to some respondents, Russia needs to abandon the idea of re-integration with the former USSR republics or establishing too close cooperation with them, but instead build these relations on a more pragmatic basis.

“I think it is Georgia's choice whose support to seek. I don't think that they will decide to unite with Russia once again. But they also don't have an idea to unite with the European Union, or to be dissolved there. The Georgian's mentality is that they are independent and proud-spirited. That's why Georgia remains an independent state. They don't need such a patron as Russia now, because it is a weak patron. I think that they try to rely on their own forces.” (woman, 23 years old from Samara, higher education)

Main findings:

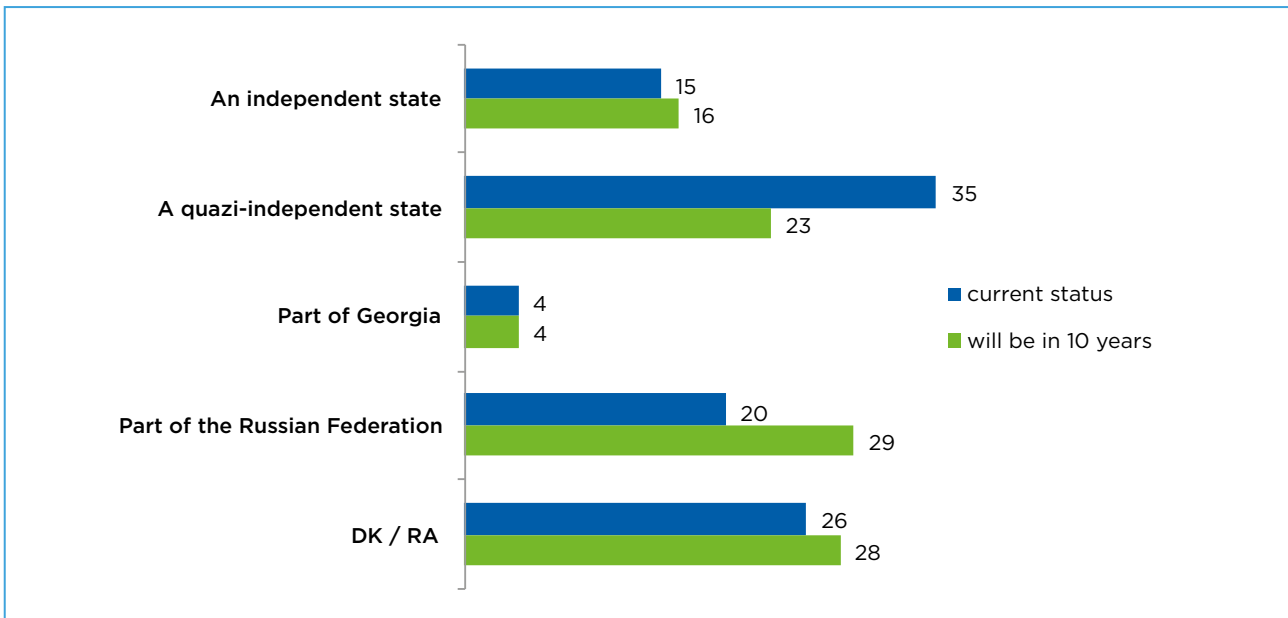
- The opinion of Russian respondents about the current state of Russian-Georgian relations is not united. Some respondents think these relations are friendly – 6% think they are very friendly and 43% think they are rather friendly. Other Russians evaluated these relations as hostile (38%).
- A significant part of Russian respondents (about one-third) do not see any definite obstacle to the improvement of Russian-Georgian relations. Among those who could name such obstacles, the majority referred to Georgia's aspirations to join the EU and NATO, or to other Georgian political decisions. Only a small proportion of Russians mentioned the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts among the main issues preventing the improvement of Russian-Georgian relations.
- The majority of Russians have a very negative attitude toward the aspiration of Georgia to join NATO, with 68% of respondents against it and 14% in favor of it. The opinion about Georgia's intention to join the EU is more positive than the idea of joining NATO among respondents of all generations, although the proportion of older people who disapprove of this idea is higher than those who support it. Among young Russian respondents, the proportion of those who support the aspiration of Georgia to join the EU exceeds the proportion of those who oppose it.
- Despite political difficulties, Georgia is a desirable tourist destination for Russian people. More than one-fourth of the respondents would like to visit Georgia in the future. Georgia is one of the most attractive travel destinations for Russians among all neighboring countries.

3.6. Territorial conflicts – awareness and attitudes

3.6.1. Conflict in Abkhazia

The perceptions of Russians about the current political status of Abkhazia are rather vague and uncertain. One-fourth of respondents could not answer the question about the status of Abkhazia at all. Slightly more than one-third of respondents considered Abkhazia as a quasi-independent state, and 20% believed that it is a part of Russia. Only 15% of respondents characterized Abkhazia as a truly independent state.

Graph 3.6.1. The status of Abkhazia now and 10 years from now – national sample (%).



Young Russian respondents experienced the greatest difficulty determining the current political status of Abkhazia. No other fundamental differences in the opinions of people of different generations about the situation in Abkhazia were found.

The majority of Russian respondents do not foresee any significant changes in the future status of Abkhazia. Only 4% believe that Abkhazia will return to Georgia in the future. The share of those who foresee independent status for Abkhazia in the future is also not very large, and equals 16%. Most Russian respondents assumed that Abkhazia will either remain the same quasi-independent state as it is now or that it will become part of Russia (Graph 3.6.1).

When discussing the current status of Abkhazia, many respondents understand that this territory is only formally an independent state, but in fact, depends to a large extent on Russian support. Some respondents see the reason for this situation as the unwillingness of other countries to recognize the territory's aspiration for independence, or in the economic insolvency of this territory.

[What is the current political status of Abkhazia? How independent is this territory?]

"The status is formal independence." (man, 62 years old from Moscow region, higher education)

"I agree." (woman, 60 years old from Stavropol, secondary education).

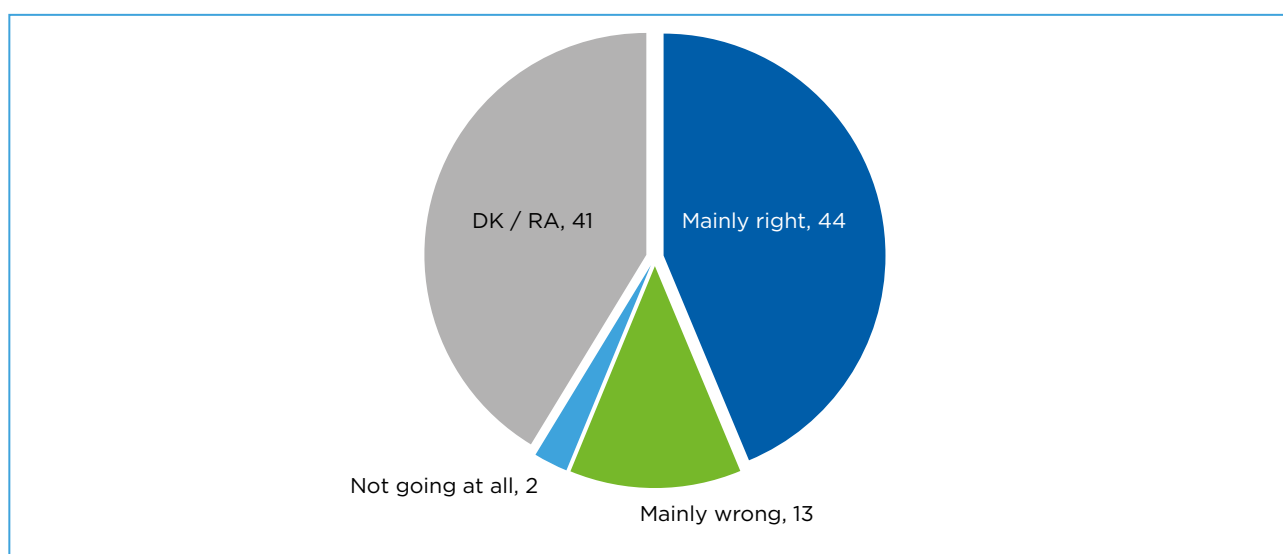
"Absolutely formal. And it lives off subsidies from Russia. Their pensions are paid by Russia. They have the right to have real estate in Russia, while Russians don't have the right to buy real estate

there. Russians have no rights in Abkhazia at all. And Abkhazians suck two mothers – Russia and Georgia.” (man, 59 years old from Vologda, higher education)

“This independence is formal, I think, because Abkhazia can’t survive without Russia’s help. Everything is very abandoned and destroyed there; there is some kind of desolation. Some residents are grateful that there is influence and help from Russia, and some are very negative - not only to Russians, but also to tourists in general. Therefore, they have independence and they have no independence.” (woman, 29 years old from a small town in the Saratov region, higher education)

Domestic affairs in Abkhazia. Only about half of the survey participants had an opinion about the direction in which Abkhazia is currently developing. The largest part of the other half believes that this direction is right.

Graph 3.6.2. The direction in which Abkhazia is currently developing – national sample (%).



According to the results of focus groups, people of the middle and older generations know more about the conflict around Abkhazia than young people. Some young respondents even had never heard about this conflict prior to the group discussions. The main attitude of the group participants to the conflict around Abkhazia is ignorance or indifference.

Those who have an opinion explain it as a fight for the independence of Abkhazians from the Georgian state, the unwillingness of Georgia to accept the independence of another nation, and a lack of will to compromise on both sides. The role of Russia in this conflict is unclear for many respondents. They were mostly unaware of it or believed that Russia acted as a mediator, or a peacemaker to settle the conflict near its border.

“Georgia has a border with Abkhazia if I am not mistaken; that means they’ve had some conflict and people died. There was some controversial point either on the border or on border territory, and then it was turned around so that Russia allegedly entered Georgia. Frankly speaking, I don’t know [what the current political status of Abkhazia is]. I didn’t go deep into it.” (woman, 32 years old from Kaliningrad, higher education)

Respondents from large cities were better informed about the conflict, its causes and participants than respondents from small towns and rural settlements.

[What have you heard about the Abkhazia conflict?]

“Some very general things.” (woman, 29 years old from a small town in Saratov region, higher education)

“Never heard of it.” (woman, 25 years old from a small town in the Moscow region, higher education)

“I’ve heard that Abkhazia asked for independence, and Russia helped by sending troops. There was a genocide of the Abkhaz by the Georgians. People were killed. Russia worked took advantage of the situation after they fired on our peacekeepers.” (woman, 32 years old from a small town in Yekaterinburg region, higher education)

“I know only from my acquaintances’ words and I’ve heard in the news, that the borders were closed. Abkhazia was banned. For their part, they have now closed the border with Georgia.” (woman, 25 years old from small town in the Saratov region, incomplete higher education)

In focus groups, the attitudes of those who knew more about the conflict were very diverse. Some respondents supported Russia’s policy in the Abkhazian conflict, explaining it by national interest, issues of border security and peacekeeping, as well as by humanitarian reasons – to assist the people of Abkhazia who lack any other support.

“My attitude towards Georgians and Abkhaz people are similar. I realize that they’ve got a problem in between them, which was settled in a military way twice in recent decades – in 2008 and 1993. As for our country’s role in this conflict, I think that it is significant, if not decisive. Do I have a positive attitude to it? Yes, positive, as I am a citizen of Russia.” (man, about 25 years old from St. Petersburg, higher education)

Some focus group participants criticized the position and policy of Russia towards Abkhazia and described it as a violation of international law and norms, international agreements, and as a threat to the sovereignty of Georgia.

“Russia took advantage of the situation, which of course already existed. But we took advantage of this for our purposes, and this is someone else’s territory; this is an entrance into someone else’s territory. One can’t steal, I believe this is the first commandment.” (man over 60 years old from Yekaterinburg, higher education)

Other focus group participants supported the general policy of non-involvement in the affairs of neighboring countries and foreign conflicts (“two sides are fighting, and the third is not to interfere”).

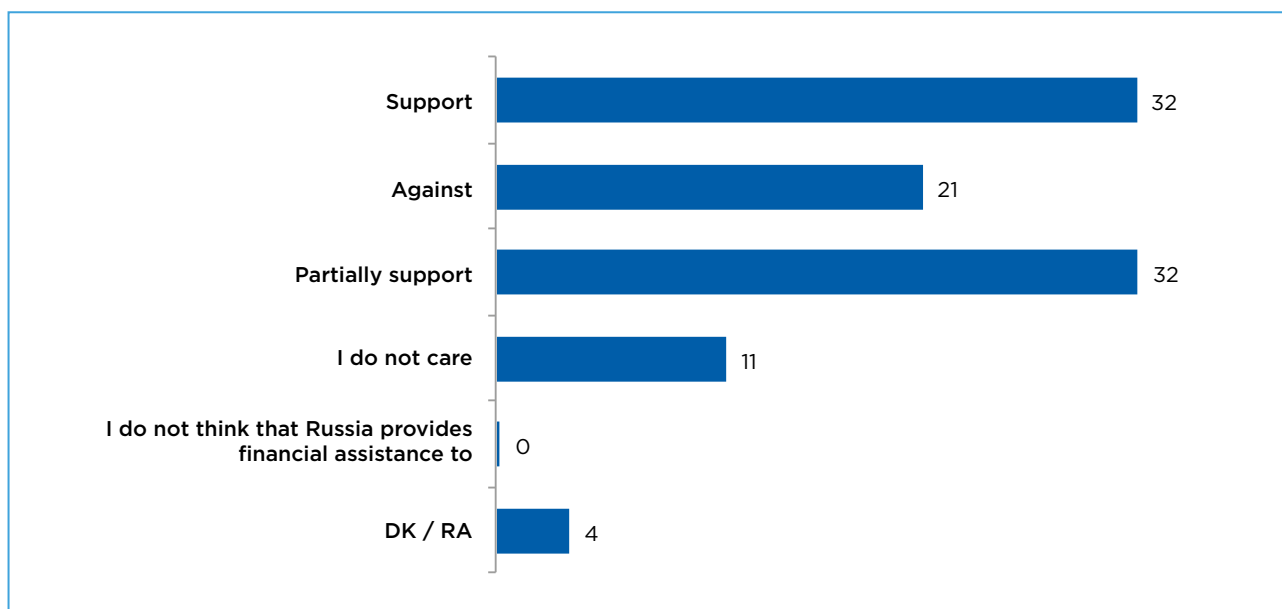
“For example, two neighbors are quarreling, and the third is interfering. Those two could settle everything themselves, but the third interfered – that’s all, there is a storm there. One is not to enter somebody’s sleigh, as people say.” (woman about 60 years old from Ingushetia, secondary education)

“In my opinion, Russia should at most play the role of arbitrator, but not side with one or the other in these interethnic conflicts. We should be above the situation and kick both of them in the head, if necessary. If necessary, sit them down at the negotiating table, let them agree, and resolve the issue.” (man under 25 years old from a city of 1 mln residents in the South of Russia, secondary professional education)

Financial aid to Abkhazia from Russia. Most Russian respondents in the quantitative survey generally supported the provision of financial aid to Abkhazia at the government level.

Graph 3.6.3. Government financial support to Abkhazia – national sample (%).

Question: What is your opinion about Russia providing financial support to Abkhazia at the government level?



Financial aid from Russia is viewed positively by many respondents based on two main arguments: the preservation of peace at the border areas and humanitarian assistance.

“If we will not help them, then the border will move closer to us tomorrow. And let the fire be further from my house, than at my home’s entrance.” (woman, over 60 years old from Moscow, higher education)

“What will happen if they separate, e.g. Abkhazia Republic and South Ossetia Republic will be recognized, if they become independent and live by themselves, what will happen there? If they are not under Russia’s influence, they will immediately become under Turkey’s influence, or even Iran’s, God forbid!” (man, 45 years old from a small town in the Urals, higher education)

“This is right from a humanitarian point of view. They are trapped in such conditions, and they are unrecognized. Who will help them? Georgia will not help them. Who else? The EU will not help either.” (man, about 60 years old from a small town in Volga region, higher education)

Among those who do not support financial aid from Russia to Abkhazia, international law and intervention in the inner affairs of other countries were mentioned very rarely. The main reasons provided were a negative attitude toward such aid. Respondents specifically mentioned low efficiency and the misuse of resources.

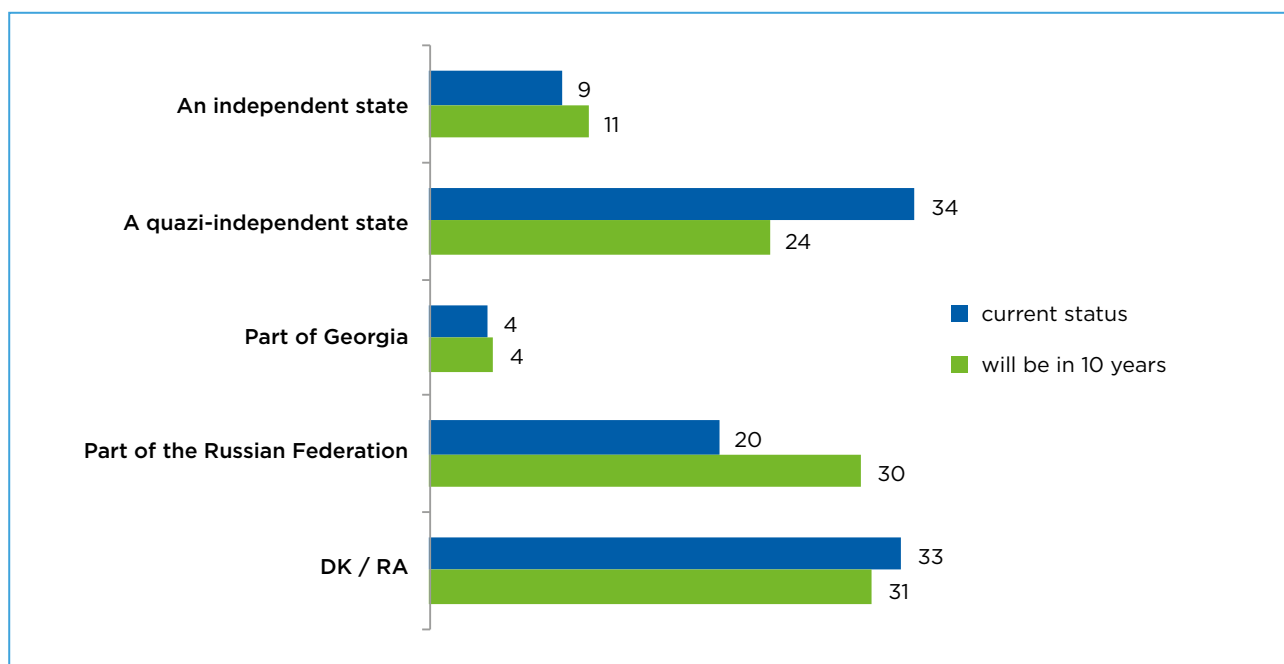
“This republic is mostly gangster; a lot of money is laundered there. I read a forensic review about this. Colossal money is being supplied there, Russia is investing, but money is not going to the development of the country. Health care is disastrous, judging by the hospital I saw when I was there. The huge money that Russia spends on maintaining this satellite is going nowhere.” (man, over 60 years old from Yekaterinburg, higher education)

“Our country is kind. We helped everybody, taking a piece from ourselves.” (woman, 60 years old from Stavropol, secondary education)

3.6.2. Conflict in South Ossetia

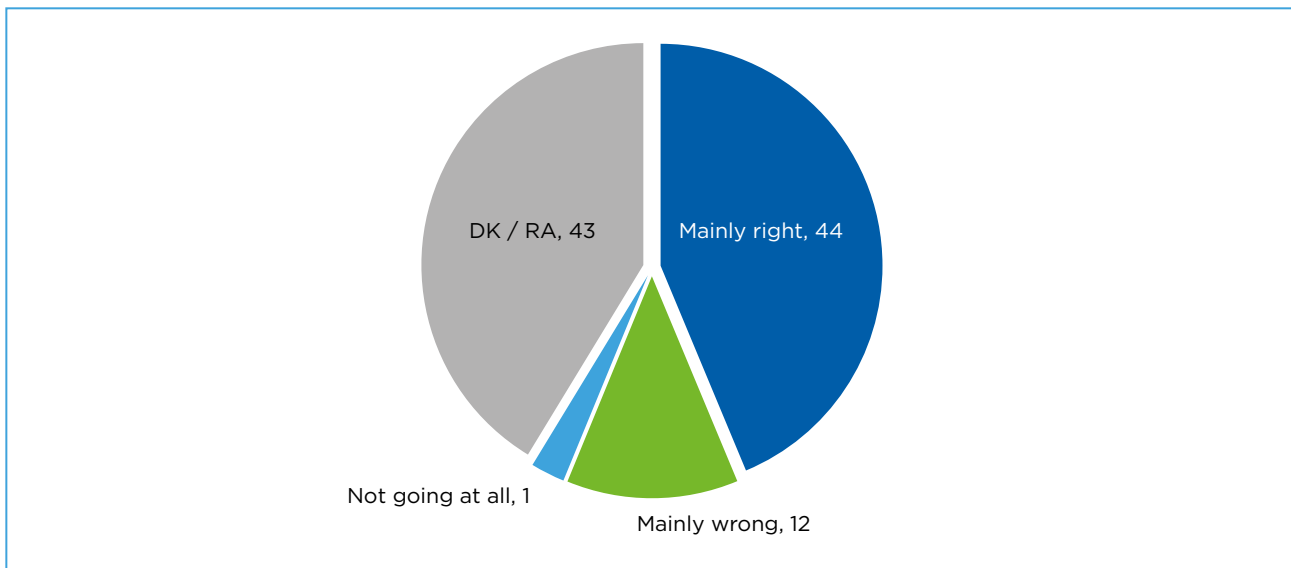
The perception of Russian respondents on the current political status of South Ossetia is even more uncertain than that of Abkhazia. Almost a third of the respondents could not answer this question at all. About one-third of respondents considered South Ossetia to be only a formally independent state, while 20% called this region a part of Russia. Only 9% of respondents believe that South Ossetia is a truly independent state.

Graph 3.6.4. The status of South Ossetia now and 10 years from now – national sample (%).



Survey participants had a clearer view of the future of South Ossetia than of the future of Abkhazia. About 30% of Russians believe that in 10 years, South Ossetia will become part of Russia. About one-fourth of respondents (24%) expected that it will remain in its current status of quasi-independence. The return of this territory to Georgia is considered very unlikely (only 4% believe this), as well as the transformation of South Ossetia into a completely independent state (11%) (see Graph 3.6.4).

Domestic affairs in South Ossetia. As in the case of Abkhazia, only about half of respondents have an opinion about the direction in which South Ossetia is developing now - and most of them believe that this direction is right.

Graph 3.6.5. The direction in which South Ossetia is currently developing – national sample.

Focus groups confirmed that the perception of the situation with respect to Abkhazia and South Ossetia among Russians is similar. There is very little information about these conflicts and about life in these territories in recent years. They rarely appear in the news.

[What do you know and what is your attitude towards the conflict around South Ossetia?]

“Do they have any conflict going on?” (man, 30 years old from Stavropol, higher education)

“They should have had some, not now, but a few years ago.” (man, 29 years old from Saratov, higher education)

“They have constant conflicts there. Confrontations all the time, they find out something constantly, and want to grab more. I don’t remember anything about now, but I heard that three years ago, there was some military action, conquering territory.” (woman, 36 years old from the Moscow region, higher education)

[Whose territory was it? Who conquered and which territory?]

“They wanted to invade North Ossetia, in my mind.” (man, 30 years old from Stavropol, higher education)

For survey participants, the causes of conflicts are internal problems between South Ossetians and the Georgian state. The role of Russia is mainly related to the resolution of an already overdue and erupted conflict.

“Georgia behaved in 1991-92 in the situation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the way it didn’t want to be treated by the Soviet Union: like a micro-empire, the same as the one they were complaining about. While they tried to keep Abkhazians and Ossetians the same way, but even worse, instead of negotiating with them.” (man, 46 years old from Rostov-on-Don, secondary professional education)

Russian respondents were somewhat better informed about the conflict in Abkhazia than about the conflict in South Ossetia. Awareness about the latter conflict is very vague and uncertain. Many group participants found it difficult to recall what kind of conflict it is and who is involved. Some respondents did not distinguish North Ossetia from South Ossetia.

Sources of information about Abkhazia are different – such as official media and the exchange of personal impressions of people who visited Abkhazia, as well as knowledge about products from Abkhazia (tangerines and other fruits). Sources of information about South Ossetia are much more limited. Trips to the territory are rare, personal information is scarce, so people rely primarily on information from mass media, and South Ossetia is not often in the news.

In South Ossetia, many respondents blame Georgia as the initiator of the military stage of the conflict. A significant role was played by the time of the outbreak of hostilities - August 2008 - the summer holiday period and the start of the Summer Olympics in Beijing. These circumstances exacerbate the perception of the conflict and serve as another reason for accusing Georgia.

“There were Olympic Games at the time everything happened. This is nonsense to do such things during the Olympic Games. And at first, they accused Russia of shooting there. But in fact, everything was tough on the other side.” (man, about 60 years old from a medium-size city in the Volga region, higher education)

In the opinion of some focus group participants, South and North Ossetia are artificially divided but an historically united ethnic community. In this regard, Russia’s involvement is seen by the respondents as more justified than in the case of Abkhazia, and some of them consider the “reunification” of South and North Ossetia to be a natural and fair outcome.

“These are Ossetian people, separated by Roki tunnel. North Ossetia is behind the Roki tunnel, and is part of Russia, and on the other side is South Ossetia. But this is one nation. It has a Soviet past with Georgia. Stalin annexed it at that time.” (man, about 60 years old from a medium-sized city in Central Russia, higher education)

Some respondents who are more aware, more interested, and better informed about this topic, have a very different position on reasons, initiators and resolutions.

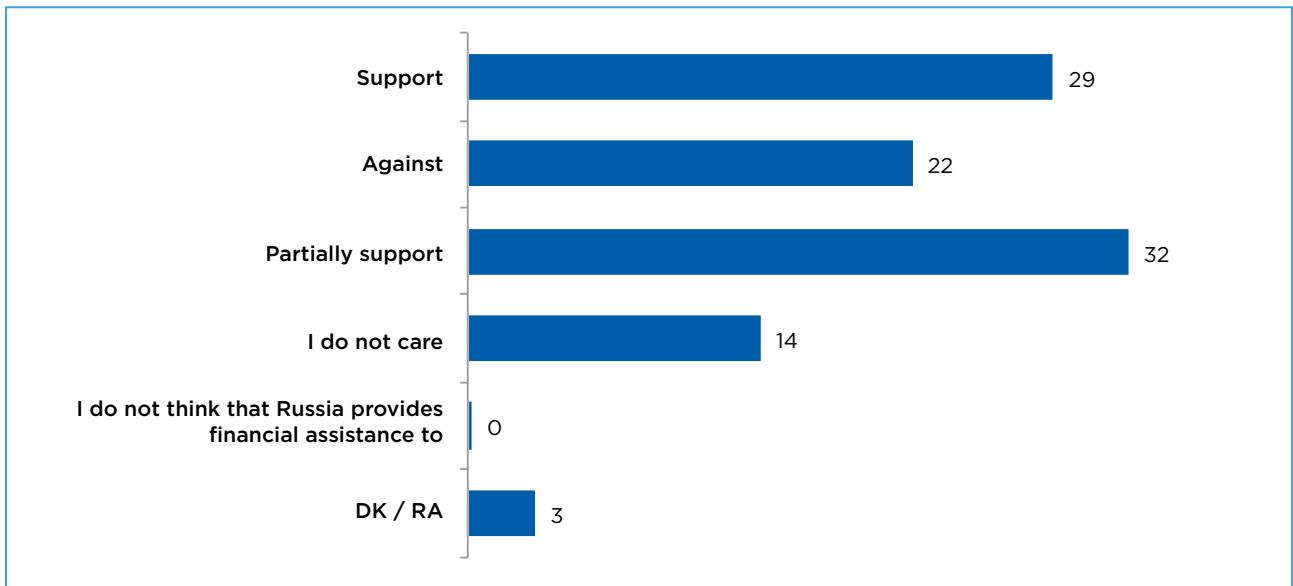
“The current South Ossetia is an ex-territory of Georgia. It used to be named Samachablo principality. There were just 2-3 villages with Ossetians in the 1920s. There was a time when they were provided with territory and accommodated there. Of course, they increased in population and became stronger with the help of their northern neighbor, and a separatist mood appeared. That’s how South Ossetia appeared. This is an original territory of Georgia, and it would be indecent, even from Ossetians.” (man, over 55 years old from Kabardino-Balkaria, incomplete higher education)

Almost no group participants had a clear view or opinion about the national interests of Russia in this region and preferable policies toward these territories.

Financial aid to South Ossetia from the Russian government. As in the case of Abkhazia, the majority of Russian respondents generally support the provision of financial aid to South Ossetia from government sources.

Graph 3.6.6. Attitude toward government financial support from Russia to South Ossetia (%).

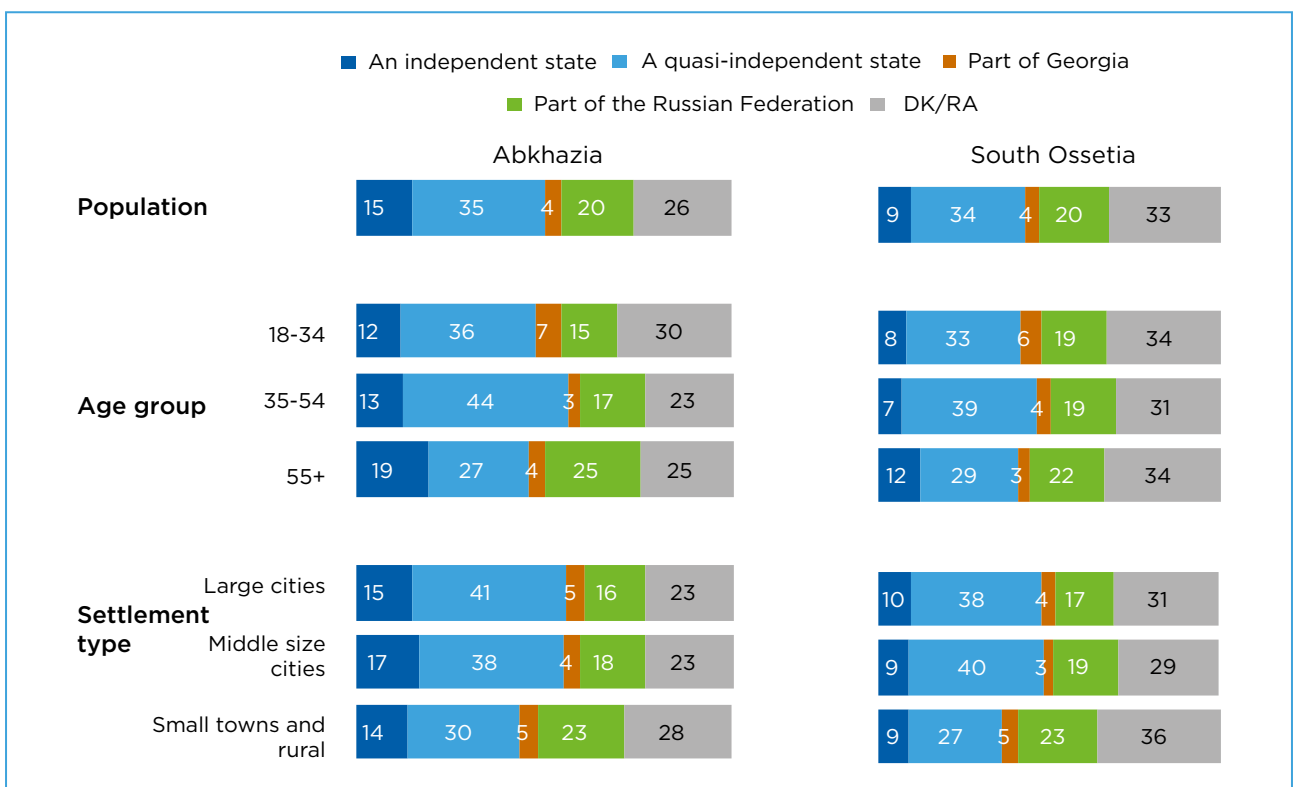
Question: What is your opinion about Russia providing financial support to South Ossetia at the government level?



3.6.3. Comparison of views on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

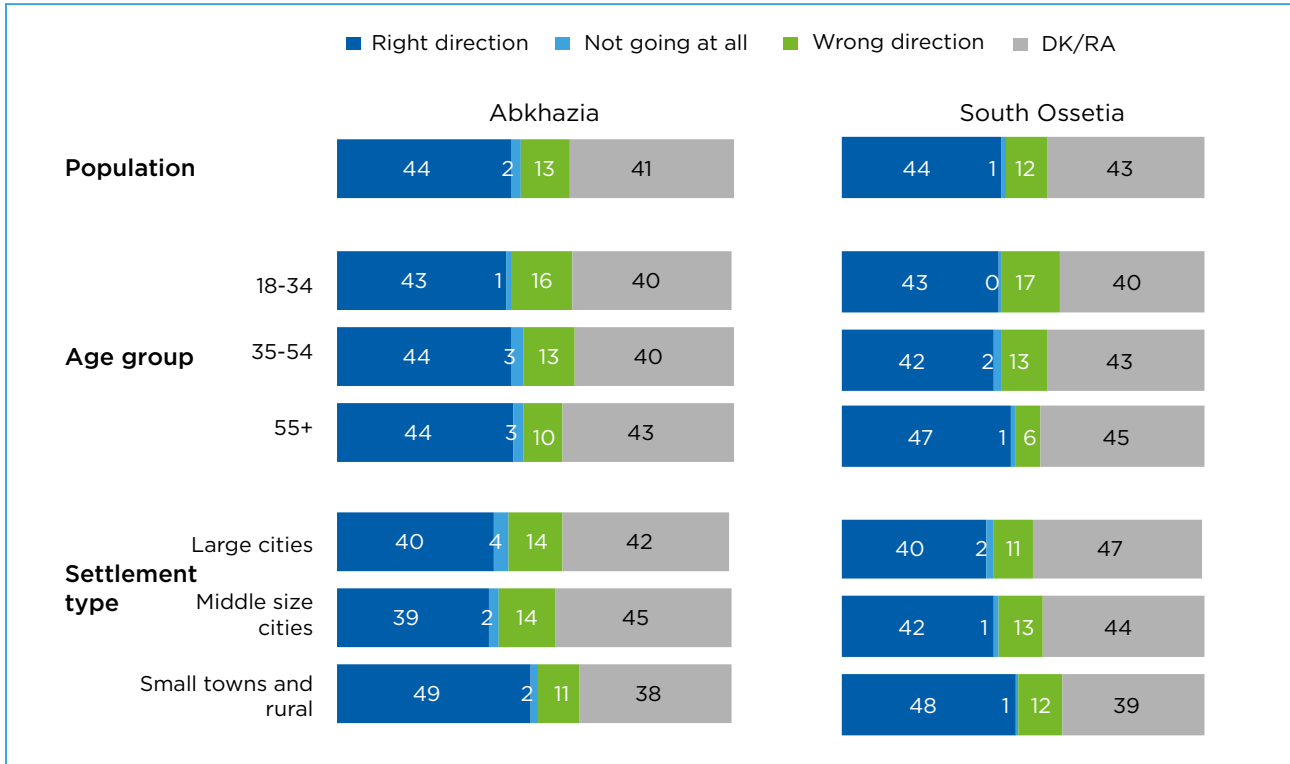
Russian respondents were less aware of the situation in South Ossetia than the situation in Abkhazia: 33% of respondents found it difficult to assess the status of South Ossetia, while 26% found it difficult to assess the situation of Abkhazia. In other aspects, the opinion of Russians about the status of these two territories was similar.

Graph 3.6.7. The status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia now - opinion of different groups (%).



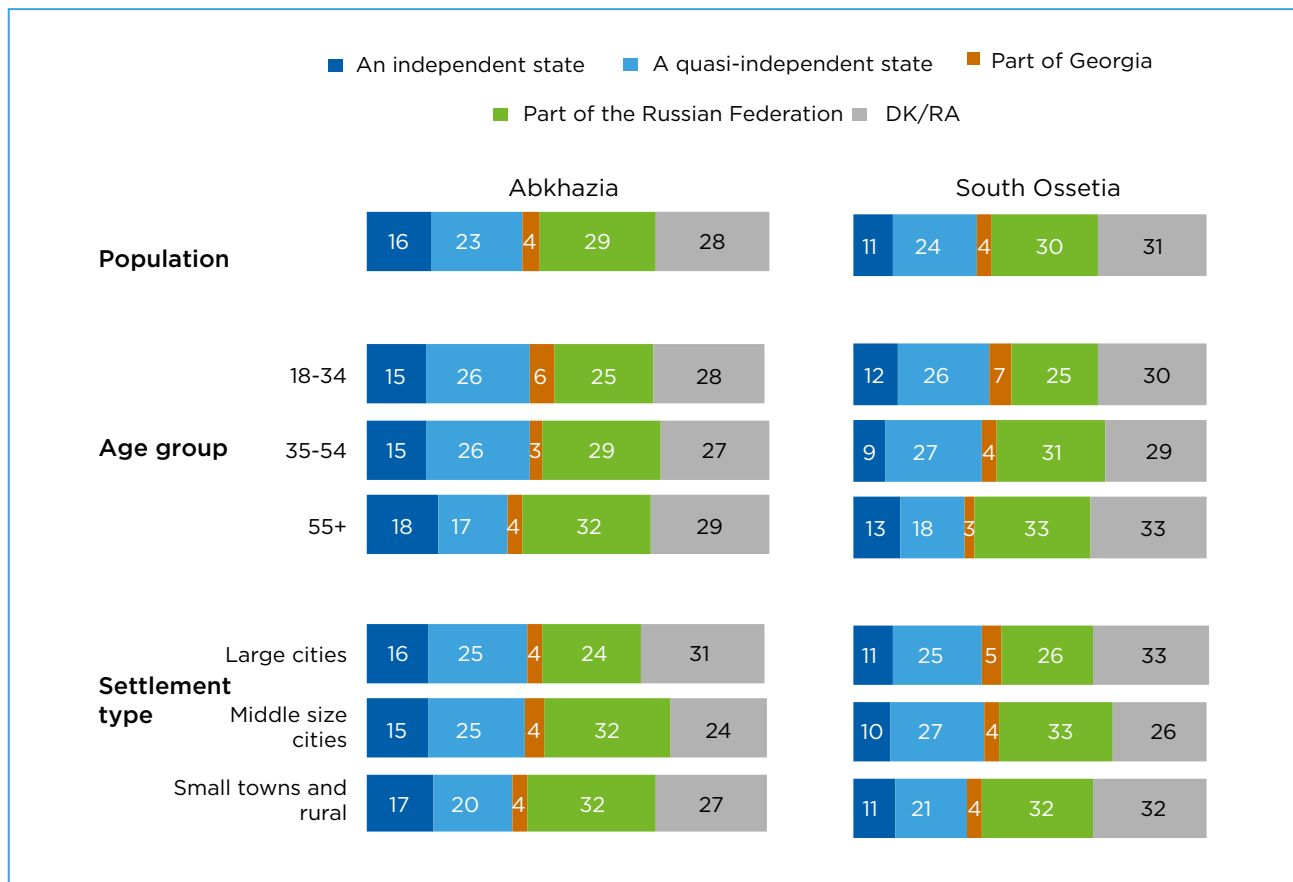
The evaluation of the current development of Abkhazia and South Ossetia among Russian respondents is very similar. A significant part of respondents had no opinion on this issue at all. The rest believed that these territories are moving in the right direction.

Graph 3.6.8. The direction in which both Abkhazia and South Ossetia are currently developing (%).



The composition of opinions in Russia about the future of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is very similar. Slightly less than one-third of respondents believe that these territories will join Russia in the next 10 years. About one-fourth predict the status quo, or the same quasi-independent status as now. Real independence is expected by 16% of respondents for Abkhazia and 11% for South Ossetia. Differences in opinions between generations on these issues are small. Geographical differences are also statistically insignificant.

Graph 3.6.9. The status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia 10 years from now – opinion of different groups (%).



Main findings:

- The Russian public treats the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as very similar. Awareness about the state of affairs in Abkhazia is slightly higher than in South Ossetia. About one-third of respondents do not have any opinion about the current status of South Ossetia, and one-fourth of respondents don't have an opinion about the current status of Abkhazia. Slightly more than one-third of respondents think that these territories are quasi-independent, while one-fifth believe that they are part of Russia. A smaller proportion of Russian respondents believe that they are truly independent – 16% think this way about Abkhazia and 10% think this way about South Ossetia.
- The majority of those who have formed an opinion about the situation in these territories believe that they are developing in the right direction.
- Most Russians do not expect any significant change in the future status of Abkhazia or South Ossetia in the next 10 years. Only 4% think that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will return to Georgia. The share of those who believe in the independent status of these territories in the future is small – 15% for Abkhazia and 11% for South Ossetia. About a quarter of Russians believe that these territories will remain the same quasi-independent states as they are now, and about 30% expect them to become part of Russia.

3.7. North Caucasus – knowledge and attitudes

Attitudes toward Georgia in the North Caucasus

In the republics of the North Caucasus, the attitude towards Georgia and the people of Georgia is much better than the average in Russia. In a national sample, about half of respondents were neutral or indifferent toward Georgia, while in the republics of the North Caucasus the proportion of “indifferent” people is much smaller – from a quarter to one-third in different republics.

The most positive attitude towards residents of Georgia is in Chechnya and Ingushetia - more than 60% of respondents in these republics have a positive attitude towards the residents of Georgia. About half of respondents were favorable toward Georgia in Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia.

Table 3.7.1. Attitudes toward Georgian residents in the North Caucasus (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, % “very positive” and “rather positive”

	Total Russia	Dagestan	Ingushetia	Kabardino-Balkaria	Chechnya	North Ossetia-Alania
TOTAL	38%	51%	61%	50%	63%	47%
Age						
18-34	42%	45%	61%	57%	61%	52%
35-54	34%	55%	56%	48%	64%	45%
55 years and over	38%	55%	66%	46%	66%	46%
Urbanization						
Large cities	40%	55%				
Middle size cities	37%	42%	72%	50%	74%	48%
Small towns and rural areas	36%	51%	57%	51%	60%	47%

In the republics of the North Caucasus, the differences in attitudes toward the residents of Georgia and the Georgian state is smaller than in Russia overall. These differences are almost negligible in Dagestan and Chechnya, and somewhat larger in Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. The only exception is North Ossetia, where 47% of respondents expressed positive feelings toward residents of Georgia, and only 38% expressed positive feelings toward the Georgian state.

Table 3.7.2. Attitude toward the state of Georgia in the North Caucasus (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, % “very positive” and “rather positive”

	Total Russia	Dagestan	Ingushetia	Kabardino-Balkaria	Chechnya	North Ossetia-Alania
TOTAL	30%	49%	56%	44%	61%	38%
Age						
18-34	33%	47%	60%	49%	58%	46%
35-54	28%	49%	49%	43%	62%	33%
55 years and over	29%	53%	60%	40%	67%	36%
Urbanization						
Large cities	29%	57%				
Middle size cities	28%	39%	63%	44%	64%	39%
Small towns and rural areas	31%	47%	54%	44%	60%	38%

In the republics of the North Caucasus, age differences in attitudes toward the residents of Georgia were found in Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia. In these republics, young people reported slightly more positive feelings toward residents of Georgia than people of older ages. In Dagestan and Chechnya, the situation is reversed.

Focus group participants from North Caucasian republics often named Georgia among the closest countries to Russia. Georgia is located very close to Russia in their mental map. In other parts of Russia, almost no one allocated Georgia the same closeness to Russia in their mental map.

Awareness about the domestic affairs of Georgia in North Caucasian republics. Despite the generally positive attitude toward Georgia in North Caucasian republics, the subjective assessment of awareness about the situation of Georgia is rather low and only slightly higher than the average Russian margin. A total of 13% across the five republics think they are fully or quite informed about it.

“The only thing I know about Georgia is their national dishes because I love to cook. But in other respects, I am not interested in it, frankly speaking.” (woman, 31 years old from Chechnya, higher education)

Awareness of the situation in Georgia is the highest in North Ossetia, but even there informed people constitute the minority - 26% are fully or quite informed (tab. 3.7.3). Residents of Ingushetia also feel somewhat more informed about Georgia than people in other republics (17% are fully or quite informed).

Table 3.7.3. How well-informed are you about the situation in Georgia? – North Caucasians (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, % fully or quite informed

	Total Russia	Dagestan	Ingushetia	Kabardino-Balkaria	Chechnya	North Ossetia-Alania
TOTAL	14%	11%	17%	13%	9%	26%
Age						
18-34	11%	7%	22%	9%	7%	25%
35-54	16%	11%	14%	11%	12%	31%
55 years and over	13%	19%	14%	19%	10%	23%
Urbanization						
Large cities	17%	12%				
Middle size cities	16%	11%	23%	17%	12%	25%
Small towns and rural areas	10%	11%	15%	11%	8%	27%

The main source of information about the situation and events in Georgia for residents of the North Caucasian republics as well as for the Russian public overall is the traditional media. But unlike other regions of Russia, personal communication plays an important role in informing North Caucasians about Georgia. Personal communication as a source of information is especially important in North Ossetia – a third of respondents receive information about Georgia in this way.

Table 3.7.4. Information and communication with Georgia among North Caucasians (%).

	Dagestan	Ingushetia	Kabardino-Balkaria	Chechnya	North Ossetia-Alania
Sources of information					
Traditional mass media	73%	64%	75%	73%	70%
Social networks	22%	26%	19%	22%	18%
Personal communication	15%	21%	21%	27%	36%
Other sources	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%
DK/ RA	4%	11%	6%	7%	4%
Personal communication in past 10 years					
Very often	9%	9%	10%	7%	31%
Communicated, but not often	13%	19%	19%	13%	24%
Only few times	25%	25%	19%	16%	16%
Never or DK/ RA	53%	47%	52%	64%	29%
Have you been to Georgia					
Yes	8%	6%	7%	7%	15%

Personal contacts with residents of Georgia are the most frequent and intense in North Ossetia, where 72% of survey participants reported that they communicate with residents of Georgia at least occasionally, and 31% communicate very often. Among survey participants in North Ossetia, 15% have visited Georgia personally in the last 10 years.

Residents of other republics of the North Caucasus communicate with residents of Georgia much less often. Despite territorial proximity, **the frequency of contact between residents of Georgia and the North Caucasus republics is only slightly higher** than in other regions of Russia.

Attitudes toward Georgian foreign policies in the North Caucasus

Among the five republics of North Caucasus included in the survey, only in North Ossetia did the majority of respondents have an opinion about the direction of Georgia's development, but they tended to evaluate the direction of Georgia's development as more negative than positive. In Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan, the evaluation of Georgia's path is similar to the average for Russia. Residents of Ingushetia and Chechnya rated the direction chosen by Georgia as right more often than wrong.

Table 3.7.5. The direction in which Georgia is currently developing - opinion of North Caucasians (%).

	Right direction	Wrong direction	DK/ RA
Total Russia	21%	27%	52%
Republics			
Kabardino-Balkaria	22%	26%	52%
Dagestan	25%	20%	55%
Ingushetia	34%	12%	54%
North Ossetia-Alania	23%	38%	39%
Chechnya	35%	8%	57%

The opinion of residents of the North Caucasian republics about the current challenges and threats facing Georgia today is very similar to the opinion of respondents in Russia overall. The list of main challenges is led by economic and social problems, followed by territorial conflicts involving Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and then problems with public health and medical assistance.

“Under Soviet rule, Georgia used to be a very strong, powerful state with developed industry and culture. Then people who do not want to live in peace and goodness took power. They turned away from the people and keep them in fear. People are offended by the authorities, they cannot communicate freely, meet with others, show their culture, or have free trade. People are living in poverty, but the authorities do not care about it.” (man, 66 years old from Dagestan, higher education)

Table 3.7.6. Main issues and threats facing Georgia - opinion of North Caucasians (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, up to 3 answers

	Economic and social problems	Abkhazia and South Ossetia related problems	Public health, medical care, COVID	Other threats to Georgia's territorial integrity	Respect for human rights, democracy	Increased crime
Total Russia	30%	25%	19%	10%	10%	6%
Republics						
Kabardino-Balkaria	27%	14%	16%	5%	12%	3%
Dagestan	26%	17%	20%	7%	7%	5%
Ingushetia	26%	23%	28%	10%	10%	5%
North Ossetia-Alania	32%	23%	20%	9%	11%	6%
Chechnya	18%	16%	16%	7%	6%	3%

The aspiration of Georgia to join the EU is perceived differently in the North Caucasian republics. In North Ossetia, the proportion of those opposing this idea is two times larger than the proportion of supporters (49% against and 26% in favor). In Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya, support for Georgia joining the EU is slightly higher than the Russian average, but it does not prevail in any of these republics (maximum of 42% in Chechnya). Residents of Kabardino-Balkaria are very close to the Russian average in their views on this issue (31% support Georgia joining the EU and 43% are against it).

The attitude toward **Georgia to join NATO** in North Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation is generally negative, as in other regions of Russia. A total of 57% are against it and 18% on average are in favor of it across the five republics. A somewhat more positive attitude toward this issue is found among residents of Chechnya, but even there the proportion of supporters is in the minority (24% in favor and 46% against).

Table 3.7.7. Attitude towards Georgia's aspiration to become a member of the European Union and NATO – opinion of North Caucasians (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, % of very positive or rather positive

	Total Russia	Dagestan	Ingushetia	Kabardino-Balkaria	Chechnya	North Ossetia-Alania
Georgia entering the EU						
TOTAL	30%	39%	38%	31%	42%	26%
Age						
18-34	44%	52%	42%	46%	47%	42%
35-54	29%	33%	36%	26%	37%	19%
55 years and over	22%	25%	34%	20%	41%	20%
Urbanization						
Large cities	33%	40%				
Middle size cities	32%	22%	28%	36%	40%	28%
Small towns and rural areas	27%	41%	41%	28%	42%	25%
Georgia entering NATO						
TOTAL	14%	18%	20%	15%	24%	12%
Age						
18-34	28%	32%	29%	27%	30%	24%
35-54	12%	15%	16%	11%	18%	9%
55 years and over	6%	2%	9%	7%	22%	2%
Urbanization						
Large cities	17%	18%				
Middle size cities	15%	20%	16%	23%	27%	14%
Small towns and rural areas	11%	18%	21%	12%	24%	9%

In general, many residents of the North Caucasus are rather indifferent about the idea of Georgia joining the EU. Opinions on this issue were not formed among an average of 30% of respondents across the five republics regarding the EU, and 24% regarding Georgia joining NATO.

[Have you heard about Georgia's plans to join the European Union?]

"I think I have heard something about it." (woman, 43 years old from Kabardino-Balkaria, secondary education)

"They already joined the European Union, didn't they?" (man, 32 years old from Ingushetia, higher education)

Respondents from the five North Caucasian republics assessed the state of Russian-Georgian relations more positively than respondents in other regions of Russia. The exception is North Ossetia, where the opinion of respondents is very close to the Russian average. Residents of Ingushetia and Dagestan tend to rate Russian-Georgian relations more positively than in other regions of Russia.

Young respondents in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia have much more positive views of Russian-Georgian relations than people of older generations. In Chechnya, older respondents are more likely to assess relations between Russia and Georgia positively.

Table 3.7.8. Current relations between Russia and Georgia – opinion of North Caucasians (%).

	Total Russia		Dagestan		Ingushetia		Kabardino-Balkaria		Chechnya		North Ossetia-Alania	
	friendly	hostile	friendly	hostile	friendly	hostile	friendly	hostile	friendly	hostile	friendly	hostile
TOTAL	49%	38%	66%	19%	69%	17%	59%	24%	60%	19%	51%	37%
Age												
18-34	57%	31%	70%	12%	85%	9%	73%	13%	55%	21%	56%	37%
35-54	46%	40%	62%	26%	60%	23%	50%	31%	62%	17%	47%	36%
55 years and over	46%	41%	66%	20%	56%	22%	54%	28%	66%	16%	49%	36%
Urbanization												
Large cities	44%	42%	63%	24%								
Middle size cities	47%	42%	60%	22%	76%	14%	56%	27%	66%	18%	49%	37%
Small towns and rural areas	54%	32%	68%	17%	67%	18%	60%	23%	58%	19%	52%	37%

Focus group participants from North Caucasian republics generally tend to consider Russian-Georgian relations as equal and mutually beneficial. They were more optimistic about the prospects of these relations than people in other Russian regions.

“I think Russia gains from supporting a good relationship with Georgia. It is even more profitable for Georgia to have friendly relations with Russia, because our ties were established a long time ago. But temporarily they are spoiled by some people in power. This should not influence the relations between people of one nation with people from the other nation. People always stay for peace, for good, and for friendship.” (man, over 60 years old from Dagestan, higher education)

“I think that Georgia is a very good neighbor and reliable neighbor. The most important is not to intervene in their internal affairs. And I mean not just Russia, but other countries as well.” (man, about 55 years old from Chechnya, incomplete higher education)

Attitudes toward the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the North Caucasus

The evaluation of the current situation in Abkhazia differs between North Caucasian republics. One-fourth of respondents in North Ossetia believe that Abkhazia is a fully independent state now – more than in any other region of the Russian Federation. More than one-third of respondents in Dagestan mentioned that Abkhazia is a part of Russia. In Ingushetia, the largest proportion of those who could not say anything about the current status of Abkhazia was 39%.

In focus groups, many participants were either not aware or were poorly aware of the Abkhazian conflict, the reasons for it, and the role of Russia in the conflict.

[Please, tell me, what do you know about the conflict in Abkhazia?]

“Do you mean Nagorny Karabakh?” (woman, 31 years old from Chechnya, higher education)

“I’ve heard something a long time ago. It is an independent republic now, I think. [How did it become independent?] I do not remember how. I was a school pupil in those times and I did not go deep into this history. There was something about Ossetia, if I am not mistaken. But maybe I am wrong.” (man, 30 years old from Dagestan, secondary education)

“I am not good in these affairs either, but I’ve heard that it used to be a territory of Georgia, and Russia and Georgia were struggling for this territory. Georgia wanted to keep it, and Russia wanted to take it.” (man, 32 years old from Ingushetia, higher education)

“Yes, I have heard about it. It seems to be some territory of Georgia, or something. Now it is in an uncertain position, maybe their independence is supported by Russia, but my knowledge is very vague.” (woman, 43 years old from Ingushetia, secondary education)

The reason for the conflict in the opinion of those who have heard about it is attributed to the aspiration of Abkhazians to gain independence.

“They are probably looking for more land. They would like to seize Abkhazia, therefore there are hostile relations between them. [Do you mean Georgians would like to seize Abkhazia?] Perhaps. I think so.” (woman, around 60 years old, Dagestan, medium prof. education)

“Abkhazia is looking for sovereignty, and would like to gain independence.” (man, 60 years old, high education)

Among those who know about the conflict, special attention was given to the participation of Chechen military groups in the battles.

“I have heard that an important role in the Abkhaz war was played by our Caucasians – Chechens.” (man, 32 years old from Ingushetia, higher education)

It was not easy for respondents to assess the current status of Abkhazia, since they did not have a clear idea of the judicial or factual status of it, but emphasized that this territory seeks independence from Georgia, and Russia provides help in this direction.

“Abkhazia is an independent, self-governing state. Certainly, with support from the outside, in any case. Russia recognized it as an independent state” (man, 30 years old, Dagestan, secondary education)

“It seems to be a former territory of Georgia, or something. They are in an uncertain situation, and their sovereignty is supported by Russia. My knowledge is very vague about this issue.” (woman, 40 years old, Ingushetia, secondary education)



Table 3.7.9. The status of Abkhazia now and 10 years from now - opinion of North Caucasians

ABKHAZIA TODAY IS...					
	Fully independent state	A quasi-independent state	Part of Georgia	Part of the Russian Federation	DK/ RA
Total Russia	15%	35%	4%	20%	26%
Republics					
Kabardino-Balkaria	14%	28%	5%	27%	26%
Dagestan	9%	22%	6%	35%	28%
Ingushetia	7%	31%	9%	14%	39%
North Ossetia-Alania	25%	21%	5%	23%	26%
Chechnya	14%	18%	6%	20%	42%
ABKHAZIA IN 10 YEARS					
Total Russia	16%	23%	4%	29%	28%
Republics					
Kabardino-Balkaria	17%	16%	2%	41%	24%
Dagestan	12%	18%	5%	40%	25%
Ingushetia	13%	13%	8%	18%	48%
North Ossetia-Alania	18%	11%	3%	40%	28%
Chechnya	15%	9%	7%	25%	44%

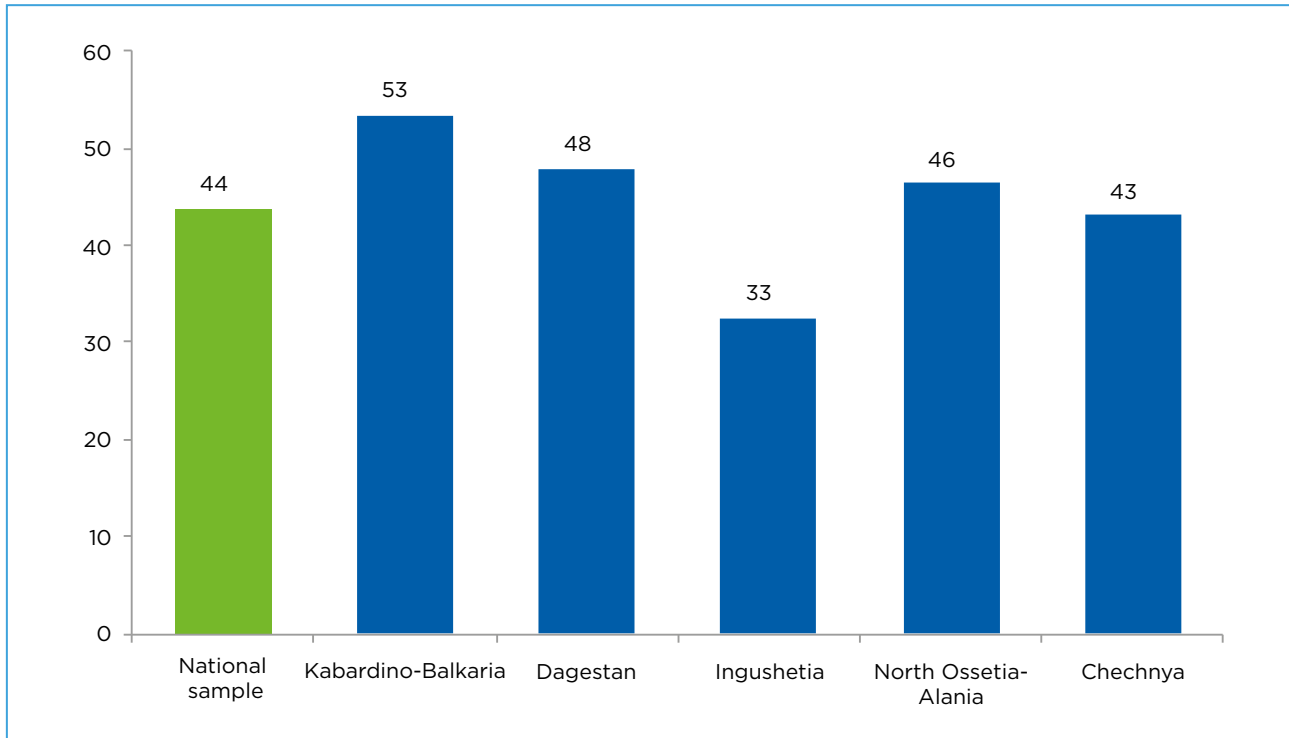
Residents of the North Caucasian republics differ in their **views on the direction** in which Abkhazia is developing. The most favorable opinion about the direction of development is in Kabardino-Balkaria, where the opinion is more positive than in other regions of the Russian Federation. The opinions of the residents of Dagestan, North Ossetia and Chechnya are very close to the Russian average.

“I know that it is possible to visit Abkhazia without a transborder passport. Russia interacts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia well. And Russia takes responsibility for it - if it is attacked or if something else happens unexpectedly, then Russia will provide help.” (woman 23 years old from Dagestan, higher education)

The greatest doubts about the path of the development of Abkhazia were found among respondents in Ingushetia, where more than half of respondents could not rate the direction of the current development in Abkhazia, and 33% stated that Abkhazia is moving in the right direction.

Graph 3.7.1. The direction in which Abkhazia is currently developing - opinion of North Caucasians (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, % right direction



About 40% of the residents of Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan and North Ossetia expect that in the future, Abkhazia will become a part of Russia, which is higher than in other regions (29%). About half of the respondents in Ingushetia and Chechnya hesitated to express their opinion about the future of Abkhazia. Only a small part of respondents in all republics expected the return of Abkhazia to Georgia - from 2% in Kabardino-Balkaria to 8% in Ingushetia.

Focus groups showed that the **awareness of North Caucasian residents about the conflict in South Ossetia** is very low - lower than about Abkhazia. Only a few participants in focus groups from this region had an opinion about this conflict and its causes (note that North Ossetia was not included in focus group discussions, because their opinions may differ from other parts of the North Caucasus and should not be mixed with those from other regions).

"I know about Ossetia - I went there to stay in the hospital, but nothing more than that." (woman, 31 years old from Chechnya, higher education)

"There is the same thing as with Abkhazia. Russia recognized them in 2008. Their currency is the ruble there, I think." (man, 30 years old from Dagestan, secondary education)

"I don't know about South Ossetia, but I know about North Ossetia. I know Vladikavkaz, that they are located very close to the Chechen Republic." (man, 18 years old from Chechnya, secondary education)

"I know only about the 2008 military action in South Ossetia. People of South Ossetia were harmed a lot in 2008, during the war between Georgia and Ossetia. I remember being on vacation with children from South Ossetia. They had such an awful bombing that it was not possible to live there. They lost their houses and they were put into different refugee camps." (woman, 23 years old from Dagestan, higher education)

“I also have not been there, but my female neighbor is Ossetian. She told that there was an attack on the village in South Ossetia; there was something with Ossetians. [And who attacked them?] Georgians, I think. I didn’t listen attentively. But she talked about it with such pain, that they [Georgians] killed the whole village – everyone. I did not ask when it was. My knowledge is very vague. I cannot say anything more about South Ossetia.” (woman, 43 years old from Kabardino-Balkaria, secondary education)

“Unfortunately, I know very little about South Ossetia. I’ve heard that there was a conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia, and that Chechen military forces fought in South Ossetia on Russia’s side, but I don’t know how it ended.” (man, 32 years old from Ingushetia, higher education)

“I do not know at all – how it was fought, between whom. Nothing.” (woman, 43 years old from Ingushetia, secondary education)

A few respondents from the North Caucasus who were more informed and more involved in political debates criticized the position of Russia in Russian-Georgian conflicts, and expressed a negative opinion about the involvement of Russia in the Georgian conflict with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They were better informed about the importance of territorial conflicts for Russian-Georgian relations than respondents in other parts of Russia. However, a rather large part of group participants knew very little about these conflicts and had not formed an opinion about them.

“As far as I know about the Ingush tragedy of 1992, immigrants from South Ossetia committed atrocities in the Prigorodny District. Therefore, I have an unambiguous attitude, both political and in relation to these people.” (man, about 60 years old, Kabardino-Balkaria, higher education)

“I have a negative view on the role of Russia, because this is a territory of Georgia. Russia has recognized the state sovereignty of Georgia within its borders, and no one has the right to violate it. If the current government in Ossetia declares that they want to join Russia, they must do so in the manner prescribed by law. They need to appeal to Georgian authorities and resolve this issue with government permission through referendum.” (man, over 60 years old, Dagestan, higher education)

When assessing the current political status of South Ossetia, residents of North Caucasian republics, more often than people in other regions of Russia, noted that this territory is part of Russia. A rather large proportion of respondents in these republics as well as in other regions of Russia described South Ossetia as quasi-independent. This opinion is less often expressed in Chechnya, where 17% of respondents described South Ossetia as a truly independent state.

“Unfortunately, I know little about South Ossetia. I heard that yes, there was a conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia, and that Chechen units fought in South Ossetia on the side of Russia, but I do not know how it ended.” (male, about 30 years old, Ingushetia, higher education)

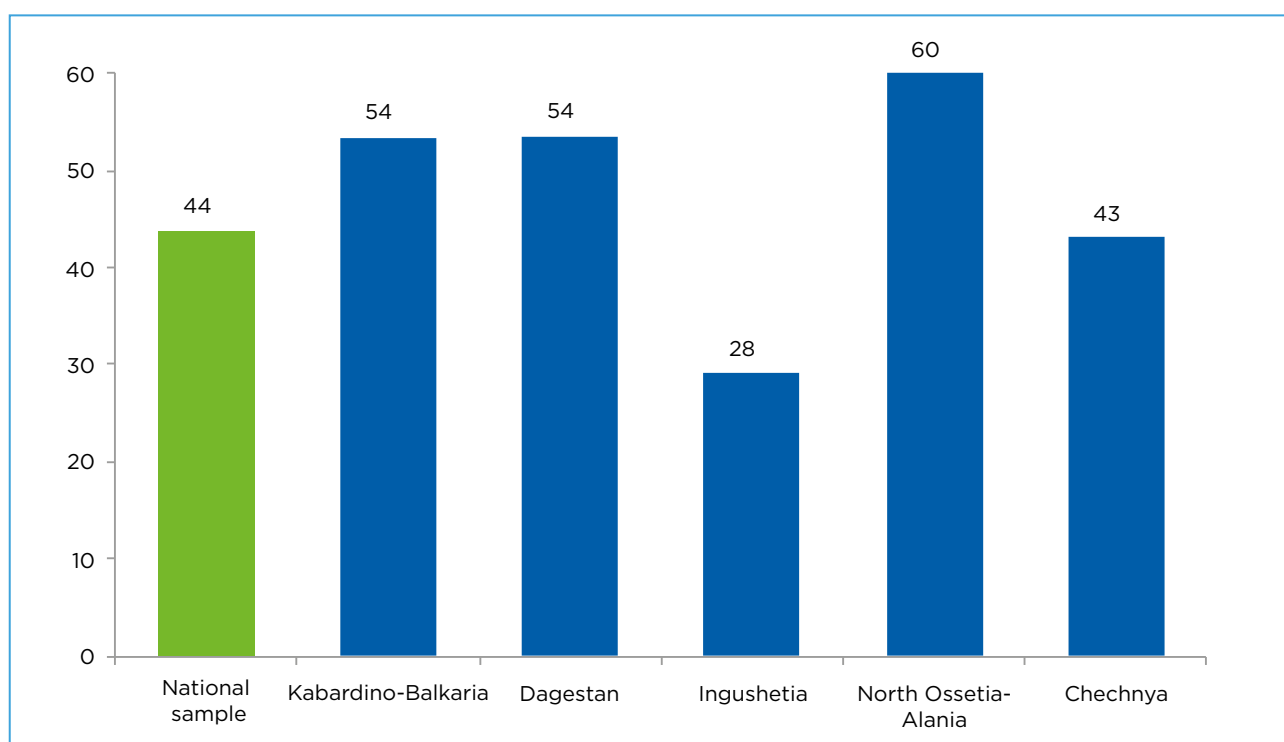
Table 3.7.10. The status of South Ossetia now and 10 years from now - opinion of North Caucasians

SOUTH OSSETIA TODAY IS...					
	Fully independent state	A quasi-independent state	Part of Georgia	Part of the Russian Federation	DK/ RA
Total Russia	9%	34%	4%	20%	33%
Republics					
Kabardino-Balkaria	9%	32%	3%	32%	24%
Dagestan	6%	26%	6%	36%	26%
Ingushetia	4%	38%	4%	27%	27%
North Ossetia-Alania	14%	38%	4%	32%	12%
Chechnya	17%	18%	4%	30%	31%
SOUTH OSSETIA IN 10 YEARS					
Total Russia	11%	24%	4%	30%	31%
Republics					
Kabardino-Balkaria	9%	16%	4%	47%	24%
Dagestan	7%	16%	6%	47%	24%
Ingushetia	3%	15%	9%	30%	43%
North Ossetia-Alania	10%	16%	2%	54%	18%
Chechnya	11%	9%	5%	36%	39%

More than half of the respondents in Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan and 60% in North Ossetia believe that South Ossetia is developing in the right direction, which is significantly more than in other parts of Russia. In Chechnya, about 40% of respondents adhere to this opinion, but the majority of respondents could not assess the direction of development of this territory in general. In Ingushetia, 28% of respondents believe that South Ossetia is moving in the right direction, and another 26% believe that it is moving in the wrong direction (in other republics, only about 10% of respondents share the latter view).

Graph 3.7.2. The direction in which South Ossetia is currently developing - opinion of North Caucasians (%).

Base: North Caucasian boost sample, % right direction



In the opinion about half of the respondents in Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan and North Ossetia, **the future of South Ossetia** is related to joining Russia. Respondents in Ingushetia and Chechnya share this opinion much less often. Most of them do not see any certainty in the future of South Ossetia and could not answer this question.

Some group participants expressed the opinion that residents of the North Caucasus could successfully resolve many issues and contribute to better relations with Georgians by themselves, using their traditional methods and mechanisms. Then the North Caucasus could serve as a mediator in establishing more friendly relations between Georgia and Russia. But these opinions were more the exception than the rule.

“Highlanders were always skillful in solving problems from ancient times, including international and ethnic problems, and always have been successful in solving them without the involvement of third parties. Aksakals (elderly respected people) came together and solved problems. I think Russia could establish good relations with Georgia with the help of the North Caucasians. Even if Georgia became part of NATO, there would be no negative emotions from Georgia towards Russia, because their brothers live in Russia.” (man, over 55 years old from Kabardino-Balkaria, incomplete higher education)

Main findings:

- The attitude towards Georgia and the people of Georgia in the republics of the North Caucasus is more positive than the average in Russia. The share of those who have an “indifferent” or a “neutral” view on Georgia ranges from one-quarter to one-third of respondents. The most positive attitude towards residents of Georgia is in Chechnya and Ingushetia, where more than 60% of respondents have positive feelings toward Georgians.
- The main source of information about life in Georgia for residents of the North Caucasus as well as for Russians in general is traditional media. In this region, personal communication plays a more important role in getting information about Georgia than in other parts of Russia, especially in North Ossetia. The frequency of personal contact between residents of the North Caucasus and residents of Georgia, however, is only slightly higher than in other regions of Russia.
- Attitudes to the domestic policies and issues of Georgia as well as evaluations of the development direction of this country in Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia are very similar to other regions of Russia. Residents of Ingushetia and Chechnya assessed the development of Georgia more positively than people in other regions. North Caucasians have a more positive attitude towards the aspiration of Georgia to join the EU than people in other regions of Russia, except for North Ossetia. The attitude toward Georgia’s aspiration to join NATO is strongly negative. The most tolerant view toward Georgia joining NATO was in Chechnya, but even there only a minority approved of it.
- The most shared view on the current status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the North Caucasus is that these territories are quasi-independent or part of Russia. Residents of North Ossetia tend to look at the current status of these territories as truly independent more often than people in other republics: about one-quarter of the respondents think this way about Abkhazia and 14% about South Ossetia.

- A large part of respondents in Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan and North Ossetia expect that Abkhazia and South Ossetia will become part of Russia in the future more often than in other Russian regions. The proportion of those who expect the return of Abkhazia to Georgia is rather small - from 2% in Kabardino-Balkaria to 8% in Ingushetia.

3.8. Similarities and differences between Georgians and North Caucasians

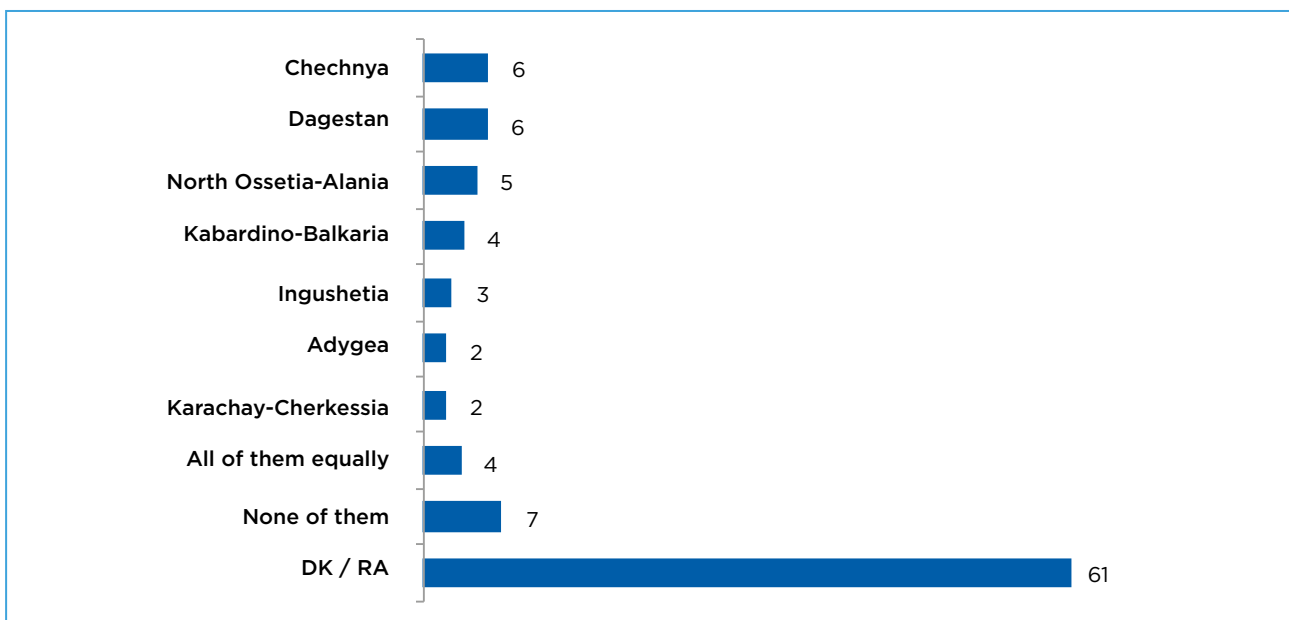
View from Russia

When assessing the relations between Georgia and the republics of the North Caucasus, the majority of Russian respondents were unable to answer the question of which republic is most friendly towards Georgia. These difficulties are related to a lack of information about the situation in Georgia, opinions and expectations about the situation, and also doubt that any republic within the Russian Federation can have an independent position or a policy toward a foreign country.

Among those who named a particular republic, Chechnya, Dagestan, and North Ossetia were mentioned with an almost equal frequency, followed by Kabardino-Balkaria and even less often by Ingushetia, Adygea, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia. Generally, Russians **do not have a definite or consolidated view of the special relations between republics of the North Caucasus and Georgia.**

Graph 3.8.1. Which of the Russian republics in the North Caucasus is the friendliest with Georgia? (%)

Base: national sample



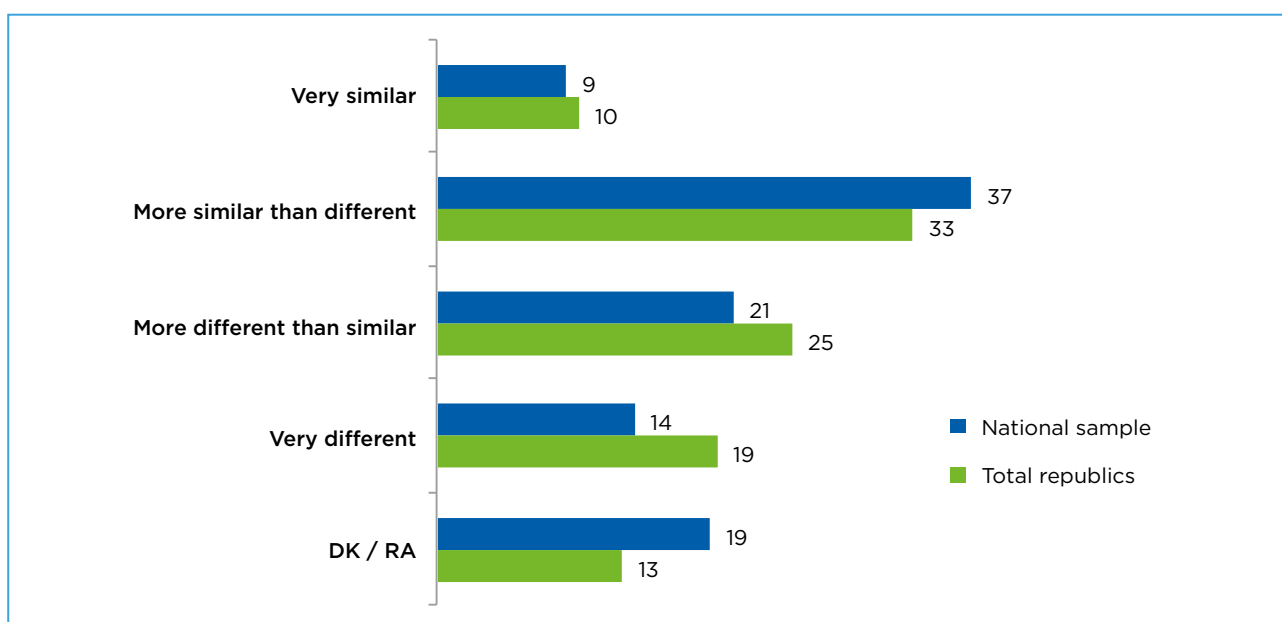
Participants of focus groups from different Russian regions including the North Caucasus had serious doubts and feel strange about evaluating the relations of a particular republic/region of Russia and a foreign country. They think foreign policy and relations with other countries are built at the federal level, and not at the level of the constituent entities of the federation.

“How can different regions of one country have a better relationship with another country? Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria - all of them are one country, and we should talk about the country as a whole.” (man, 30 years old from Dagestan, secondary school education)

Many Russian respondents had difficulties answering the question about similarities and differences between residents of the North Caucasian republics and residents of Georgia – about 20% of them could not answer this question. Respondents were divided into two groups with different opinions: 46% state that there are more similarities and 35% see more differences. The distribution of opinions in Russia overall and in the five North Caucasian republics on this issue is rather similar. A total of 43% of respondents think that there are more similarities and 44% think that there are more differences.

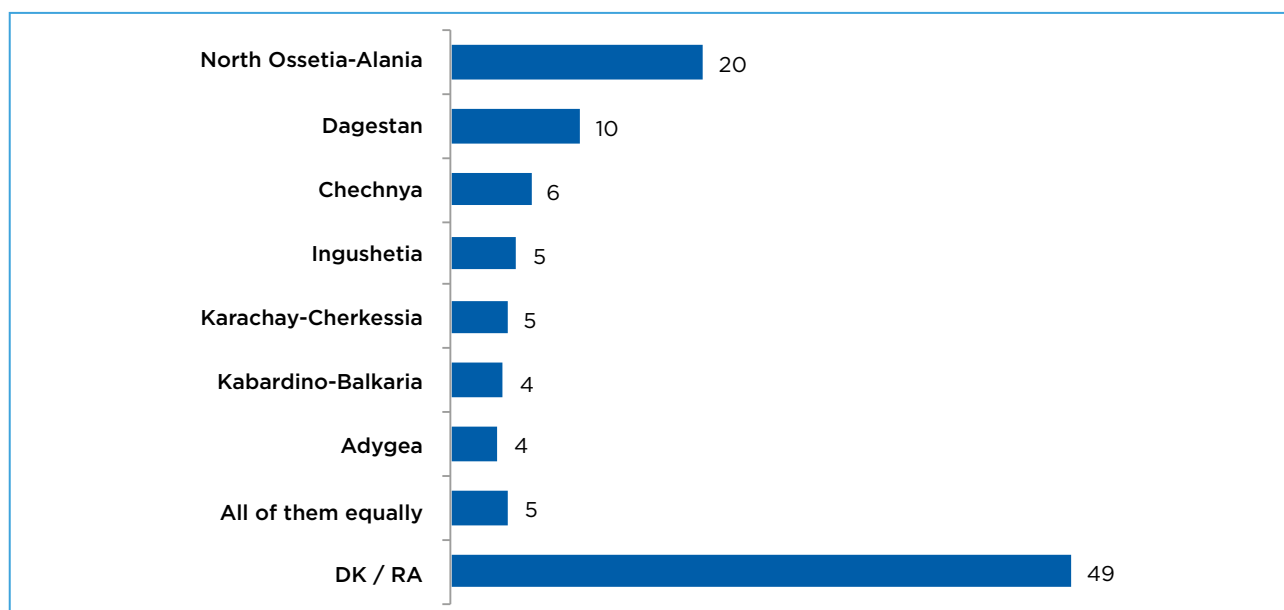
Graph 3.8.2. How similar or different are the people in the North Caucasus and Georgia? (%)

Base: national sample



In the opinion of residents of different Russian regions, the residents of Georgia are the most similar to residents of North Ossetia. A total of 20% of Russian respondents think that way. Dagestan was also named as similar to Georgia more often than other republics – the second after North Ossetia.

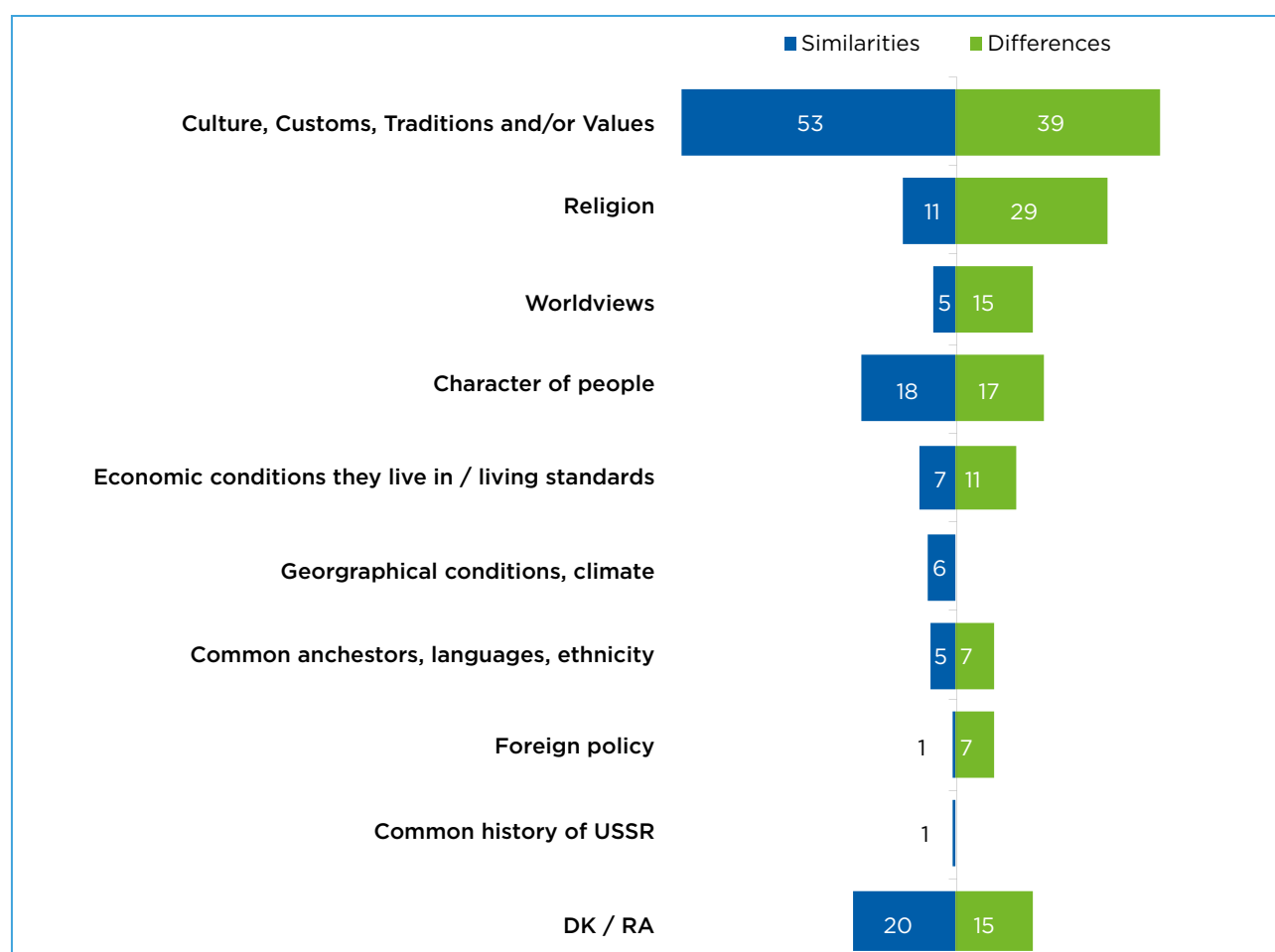
Graph 3.8.3. Which North Caucasian republics are most similar to Georgia? (%).



Those respondents who think residents of Georgia and residents of North Caucasian republics are similar see these similarities in culture, traditions, way of life, and the values of people. About half of respondents named one of these aspects of similarity. Such aspects as national character, religion, or living conditions – economic, geographic, or climatic, were named much less often.

Graph 3.8.4. Similarities and differences between the residents of the North Caucasus and Georgia (%).

Base: national sample, left – % of those who see mostly similarities, right – % of those who think there are more differences



The main differences between Georgia and the North Caucasian republics are also attributed to culture, traditions and values. Respondents also named religion, national character and worldviews as dividing factors.

Focus groups revealed that for many Russian respondents, both Georgia and the republics of North Caucasus are very little-known regions, or terra incognita. Group participants admitted their inability to understand and make judgments about relations, conflicts and problems within the “Caucasian knot”.

Opinions and knowledge of respondents about the similarities and differences between residents of the North and South Caucasus and the possible influence of the Russian North Caucasus on building more friendly and constructive relations between Russia and Georgia are not well formed or consolidated. During focus groups, respondents expressed the opinion that Caucasian ethnic groups are very similar in physical appearance and some behavioral aspects, but looking deeper these groups are very diverse, distinguished and unique.

Group participants have serious doubts that North Caucasians may have a major impact on Russian-Georgian relations at the federal level. Skeptical views on the role of North Caucasians in building relations with Georgia is based on the argument that differences between Russia and Georgia are related to “big politics”, and that ordinary people in both countries (as well as ordinary people in any country in the world) are hostages in the political games of their elites and have very little influence.

View from the North Caucasus

About 40% of respondents in North Ossetia, Chechnya and Kabardino-Balkaria do not believe that any of the North Caucasian republics are particularly close to Georgia. In Dagestan, this opinion is shared by 31% of respondents, while in Ingushetia it is shared by only 15%.

Overall, in the five republics, the following regions were mostly mentioned as having especially friendly relations with Georgia: Dagestan (16%), Chechnya (11%) and North Ossetia (10%).

When assessing which republics of the North Caucasus are closest to Georgia, residents of Ingushetia named their own republics most often (51%). In other republics, less than 30% of respondents mentioned such special relations with Georgia, with the lowest figure in Kabardino-Balkaria (20%).

Table 3.8.1. Which republic of the North Caucasus is most friendly to Georgia - opinion of North Caucasians (%).

	Kabardino-Balkaria	Dagestan	Ingushetia	North Ossetia-Alania	Chechnya
Respondents named their own republic	20%	30%	51%	28%	27%
Other republic is named	25%	25%	16%	24%	24%
All republics	13%	14%	18%	11%	10%
None or DK/ RA	42%	31%	15%	37%	39%

In focus groups, opinions of people on this issue were also divided. Some respondents believed that the republics of the North Caucasus are more closely related to Georgia than other regions of Russia. The arguments were both cultural similarities and territorial proximity/climate. Other respondents did not see any special ties with Georgia in the republics of the North Caucasus, apart from transport ties and close proximity, uniting this region with other parts of South Russia.

“People from the North Caucasian FO get along better with each other than with someone from Novosibirsk”. (man, about 25 years old, Dagestan, higher education)

“Of course, the North Caucasus is closer to Georgia than Chelyabinsk or Yekaterinburg. Ossetia is closest to them; it has borders with Georgia”. (woman, about 60 years old, Ingushetia, secondary education)

“I would not say that it is closer than others. Both the Stavropol region and Krasnodar region are connected. Especially in recent times when the automotive connection is important, and a lot of people go there. I don't think that Chechnya or Dagestan is closer. I don't think that anyone is closer”. (man, about 60 years old, Chechnya, incomplete higher education)

Opinions of respondents from the North Caucasus on their similarities and differences with residents of Georgia are very different and divided into two camps. The highest amount of similarities with Georgia were mentioned by respondents in North Ossetia - more than half of respondents stated that there are more similarities than differences between residents of their republics and Georgians. Most different from Georgians in their own opinion are people in Chechnya - 44% of them see more differences and 31% see more similarities with Georgians. In the other three republics, the proportion of those who see more differences or more similarities is rather close.

In focus groups, the similarities between these groups were explained by territorial proximity, common traits of national character, temperament, mentality, traditions, and lifestyle.

“Honestly, I don't know what to say. There is something in common. Maybe our mentality. These nationalities are similar, probably”. (woman, about 30 years old, Chechnya, higher education)

“I think Georgians have similarities with all Caucasian peoples - culture in the first place. All specific things related to Georgia can also be found in the republics of the North Caucasus. Differences? Only linguistic”. (man, over 60 years old, Dagestan, higher education)

“Our customs, traditions - almost all is the same. There is a small difference of religion. The rest is the same”. (man, about 60 years old, Chechnya, incomplete higher education)

Table 3.8.2. How similar or different are the residents of Georgia and residents of your republic? - residents of North Caucasus (%).

	TOTAL RUSSIA	Total of 5 republics	Kabardino-Balkaria	Dagestan	Ingushetia	North Ossetia-Alania	Chechnya
Very similar	9%	10%	7%	9%	13%	14%	11%
More similar than different	37%	33%	33%	37%	34%	39%	20%
More different than similar	21%	25%	26%	25%	30%	19%	23%
Very different	14%	19%	22%	19%	17%	19%	21%
DK/ RA	19%	13%	12%	10%	6%	9%	25%

In all North Caucasian republics, both similarities and differences are related to culture, traditions, habits and/or values.

More than 60% of those who see more similarities in all republics mentioned culture, traditions and habits as **the main aspects that are similar**. Other similarities are also often attributed to national character (more than 30% mentioned it in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya, and slightly more than 20% mentioned this in Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia).

Differences are also attributed to culture, traditions and habits (they were mentioned by about 50% of those who see more differences than similarities in North Ossetia and Chechnya, and about 40% in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria), as well as religion and general worldviews. More than 50% of those who see more differences than similarities mentioned religion as the main difference in Ingushetia and Chechnya, 40% in Dagestan, and 28% in Kabardino-Balkaria. Differences in worldviews were named most often in Dagestan (22%) and North Ossetia (19%) and less often in Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechnya (around 10%).

Table 3.8.3. Similarities and differences between Georgia and North Caucasian republics - residents of the North Caucasus (%).

Base: boost sample in North Caucasian republics, left - % of those who see mostly similarities, right - % of those who think there are more differences

	Dagestan		Ingushetia		Kabardino-Balkaria		Chechnya		North Ossetia-Alania	
	similar	different	similar	different	similar	different	similar	different	similar	different
Culture, Customs, Traditions and/or Values	66%	44%	67%	39%	65%	43%	69%	51%	68%	55%
Religion	10%	40%	4%	56%	3%	28%	3%	53%	19%	3%
Worldviews	7%	22%	5%	10%	7%	13%	2%	10%	13%	19%
Character of people	31%	17%	35%	10%	23%	17%	34%	14%	21%	17%
Economic conditions they live in/ living standards	5%	8%	4%	5%	11%	8%	6%	9%	10%	12%
Geographical conditions, climate	4%	1%	2%		3%		1%		1%	1%
Common ancestors, languages, ethnicity	6%	7%	9%	5%	8%	7%	13%	5%	11%	13%
Other	1%	4%	3%	1%	2%	3%		2%	1%	6%
DK/ RA	11%	14%	8%	13%	12%	26%	4%	14%	9%	12%

According to the telephone survey, the opinions of respondents on similarities and differences between residents of the North Caucasus and Georgia were divided both within these republics and in other regions of Russia. The range of opinions, arguments, and examples in favor and against these positions was broader in focus groups with people from the North Caucasus than residents of other parts of Russia.

Despite many similarities between people in the North Caucasus and Georgia, group participants pay more attention and give priority to their citizenship and state identity than to intra-regional solidarity in the Caucasus region.

Main findings:

- Most of the respondents in Russia have difficulty answering whether there are more differences or more similarities between residents of the North Caucasian republics and Georgians: 19% could not answer this question. The opinions of other respondents were divided: 46% believe that there are more similarities, and 35% believe that there are more differences.
- The national sample of Russians and residents of the five North Caucasian republics on this issue revealed that they are very similar and divided in almost equal parts (43% think there are more similarities and 44% think there are more differences). Respondents from all parts of Russia believe that most similarities are among people of Georgia and North Ossetians (20% of respondents). The next republic mentioned as most similar to Georgia is Dagestan.
- Respondents in different regions of Russia and North Caucasian republics attributed the main similarities between residents of Georgia and North Caucasians to the culture, traditions, lifestyle, and worldviews of people. More than half of those who see more similarities named these aspects. National character and religion were mentioned as second among the similarities, and living conditions, such as economic, geographic and climatic, were mentioned third. Those who see more differences also attributed these differences to culture, traditions and values. Religion was mentioned second among key differences, followed by national character and the worldviews of people.
- The opinions of North Caucasians on their similarity or difference with Georgians are controversial. Residents of North Ossetia mentioned similarities more frequently: more than half of North Ossetian respondents believe that there are more similarities than differences between their nations. Differences were mentioned most frequently by residents of Chechnya: 44% of Chechen respondents see more differences, while 31% see more similarities with Georgians. In other three republics, the share of those who see more differences or more similarities are roughly equal.

4. Conclusions

This report explored the results of the survey on the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of Georgia among the population of Russia and the boost sample of North Caucasian republics. Specifically, the report addressed the image of Georgia as a state, as well as the image of Georgians, the attitudes of Russians toward the domestic and inner policies of Georgia, the territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and obstacles hindering the normalization of relations between the two countries. The data and analysis presented in the previous sections leads to the following conclusions:

- The attitudes of the Russian population toward Georgia and Georgian residents range from neutral to positive. The opinion of Russians about Georgia is rather similar to their opinion about the other countries of the South Caucasus – Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russian respondents were more positive toward the residents of Georgia than toward the Georgian state, although the difference is not dramatic.
- Russian respondents tend to evaluate Georgians of older and younger generations differently: the older generation is perceived more positively, and the younger generation is accused of being spoiled by Western culture, pragmatism, and hostile attitudes toward Russia. Participants of focus groups explained their negative attitudes toward modern Georgia by the negative attitude of Georgians towards Russia.
- One of the key problems in the perception of Georgia in Russia is the relatively low awareness of people about the situation in this country. Most of the information Russian people have about Georgia is obtained from television, where information about Georgia in recent times is very limited. Young Russians mainly rely on social media and other online sources, but they are interested in information on tourism and attractions in Georgia more than any other topic.
- More than half of the respondents could not answer the question of whether Georgia is developing in the right or wrong direction. Slightly less than two-thirds of Russian respondents were able to name specific problems, challenges or tasks that Georgia faces.
- The aspiration of Georgia to join NATO is perceived very negatively by the majority of the Russian public. The attitude toward the idea of Georgia joining the EU is more accepted, although it is also more negative than positive.
- The opinion of Russian respondents about the current status of Russian-Georgian relations was divided – about half of them evaluated these relations as positive or friendly and 38% as hostile. The rest of the respondents did not have an opinion. Some respondents mention that cooling relations with Georgia is a result of the pro-Western policy of Georgia. Only a few group participants associated these reasons with territorial conflicts.

- The opinion of Russians about the current political status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is very uncertain and not consolidated. Only a minority of respondents believe that these territories are truly independent, while a larger part of respondents characterize them as quasi-independent or even as a part of Russia. Reasons for these conflicts are attributed to the aspiration of Abkhazians and Ossetians to gain independence, as well as a lack of will from both sides to compromise. The role of Russia in this conflict is unclear for many respondents. Most respondents in Russia do not expect any substantial changes to the status of these territories in the future. The return of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia is considered very unlikely, as is the transformation of them into completely independent states.
- In the republics of the North Caucasus, the attitude towards Georgia and the people of Georgia is better than the average in Russia. The most positive attitude towards residents of Georgia is in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Awareness of the domestic and foreign policy of Georgia in all five North Caucasian republics, however, is as low as in other regions of Russia. The frequency of personal contact between residents of Georgia and republics of the North Caucasus is only slightly higher than in other regions of Russia, except for North Ossetia, where these contacts are much higher.
- Only a small proportion of respondents in Russia believe that any North Caucasian republic has especially friendly relations with Georgia. The position of all subjects of the federation on foreign affairs seems to be united in the opinion of Russian survey participants.
- Similarities or differences between residents of the North Caucasus and Georgia are not obvious for people in Russia. Respondents in the North Caucasus were divided almost equally in their views on prevailing similarities or differences with Georgians, with the exclusion of Chechnya, where 44% see more differences and 31% see more similarities with people from Georgia. Both similarities and differences between Georgians and North Caucasians are viewed as mostly related to culture, traditions and habits.

Annexes

Annex 1: About CESSI

- CESSI (the Institute for comparative social research) is an independent research center with more than 30-years' experience collecting and analyzing social information – social surveys, public opinion polls, and marketing research in Russia and other post-Soviet countries (www.cessi.ru). Since being established in March 1989, CESSI has implemented more than 4000 research projects that include about 2 million interviews in different countries. CESSI's offices are in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Kyiv.
- CESSI provides survey data and analysis for domestic and international organizations, government and public programs, NGOs, professional industry associations, mass media, and academia. CESSI specializes in complex research projects based on rigorous scientifically based research methodology and high-quality standards.
- During all years of its history, CESSI maintains close ties with the largest academic research centers and international survey organizations across the world. CESSI scholars are well-known scientists and experts in the methodology of survey research, comparative surveys, questionnaire design and translation, methodological aspects of studying life values and attitudes, constructing social indicators, and also in the different social science fields – political sociology, social stratification research, sociology of professions, and many others.
- CESSI cooperates with the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Higher School of Economics, and many other Russian academic institutions. CESSI is involved in research projects with leading international research organizations - GESIS (Germany), FORS (Switzerland), City University London (UK), Maryland University (USA), University of Notre Dame (USA), Iowa University (USA), Pew Research Center (USA), etc. The results of this cooperation are the implementation of important sociological research on life values, labor values, adaptive professional strategies in times of modernization, studies of entrepreneurship and issues of professional education, labor and professional activities and promotion.
- CESSI has won plenty of international and Russian scientific competitions for significant social studies, It has received more than 20 grants of Russian scientific funds in the past 15 years. Since 2006, CESSI has worked on the largest and the most reputable European comparative project in Europe – European Social Survey (ESS). ESS is currently the leading platform for developing comparative research methods in the social sciences in general and in different aspects of comparative survey methodology (the materials of the study are located at project sites www.europeansocialsurvey.org and www.ess-ru.ru).

Annex 2: Sample Performance – Comparison of Survey Data and Official Statistics

Table. Comparison of survey data and state statistical data for the national sample

	OFFICIAL POPULATION DATA (Goskomstat, 2020)	SAMPLE DATA (before weights)		SAMPLE DATA (after National weight 1)
	% of population 18+	Number of interviews	% of total sample	% of total sample
Federal okrug				
North-West	10%	153	10%	10%
Central	28%	382	25%	28%
Volga	20%	285	19%	20%
South	11%	149	10%	11%
North Caucasus	6%	118	8%	6%
Urals	8%	133	9%	8%
Siberia	12%	214	14%	11%
Far East	5%	72	5%	5%
TOTAL	100%	1506	100%	100%
Type of settlement				
Urban	75%	1159	77%	77%
Rural	25%	347	23%	23%
Level of urbanity in a place of residents				
Cities with a population of 1 mln and over	23%	363	24%	24%
Cities with a population of 250-999 th	18%	312	21%	21%
Smaller towns	33%	484	32%	32%
Rural	25%	347	23%	23%
Gender				
Male	45%	697	46%	45%
Female	55%	809	54%	55%
Age				
18-24	8%	114	8%	8%
25-34	19%	268	18%	19%
35-44	20%	298	20%	19%
45-54	16%	258	17%	17%
55-64	18%	274	18%	18%
65 and over	19%	294	19%	19%

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

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Economic and social problems	28	30	31	34	29	27	30
Respect for human rights, development of democracy	11	10	9	9	8	11	10
Public health, medical care, COVID	21	19	16	17	20	20	19
Problems of education	8	4	3	5	5	4	5
Increased crime	8	7	4	6	7	6	6
Foreign policy threats	1	5	7	4	6	5	5
Abkhazia and South Ossetia related problems	23	27	23	25	23	25	25
Other threats to Georgia's territorial integrity	11	11	9	13	11	8	10
All of the above	0	1	2	1	1	1	1
There is no problem	4	3	4	3	4	5	4
Other issues or challenges	12	14	15	12	16	14	14
Refuse to answer	1	0	1	1	2	0	1
Do not know	38	31	34	35	33	34	34

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

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Economic and social problems	46	44	44	47	44	42	44
Respect for human rights, development of democracy	13	8	7	10	7	9	9
Public health, medical care, COVID	29	33	30	27	34	33	31
Environmental problems	8	7	8	7	10	8	8
Problems of education	15	12	10	15	12	10	12
Foreign policy threats	19	25	45	29	33	32	31
Unrest in the country, protest actions, demonstrations, meetings	5	5	9	6	7	6	6
Corruption	9	7	5	8	8	5	7
Ineffective work of government, political issues	4	5	5	6	5	4	5
Other issues or challenges	9	10	8	8	7	11	9
There is no problem	21	21	20	20	23	20	21
Refuse to answer	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Do not know	15	12	8	13	9	12	11

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

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Very similar	7	9	11	7	9	10	9
More similar than different	39	38	34	38	32	39	37
More different than similar	25	20	18	22	24	18	21
Very different	14	14	14	13	15	14	14
Refuse to answer	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Do not know	15	19	22	19	19	19	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

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

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Culture, Customs, Traditions and/or Values	59	51	51	54	56	51	53
Religion	10	11	10	12	11	9	11
Worldviews	6	2	6	6	3	4	5
Character of people	14	21	18	18	22	17	18
Economic conditions they live in/ living standards	6	8	8	9	5	7	7
Geographical conditions, climate	2	5	8	7	7	4	6
Common ancestors, languages, ethnicity	7	6	3	6	2	6	5
Other	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Refuse to answer	0	1	1	1	1	0	1
Do not know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

* The question was asked to those who said that people in the North Caucasus and Georgia are very similar or more similar than different - 46%

13. What is/are your main source(s) of information regarding developments/ongoing events in Georgia? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Television (excluding online transmissions)	23	51	74	40	47	68	54
Newspapers/Newsmagazines (except online editions)	1	3	9	5	3	6	5
Radio (excluding online transmissions)	1	2	8	6	2	3	4
Websites of media sources	55	46	27	46	47	33	41
Social networks	34	19	9	22	19	16	19
Educational institutions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family, Friends, relatives, colleagues living in Russia	8	9	6	10	8	6	8
Family, Friends, relatives, colleagues living in Georgia	7	8	5	9	10	3	6
Personal visits to Georgia	0	0	1	1	1	0	0
Refuse to answer	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Do not know	2	1	2	3	1	1	2

* The question was asked to those who said that they are fully informed, quite informed or little informed about developments in Georgia - 70%

14. Please tell me, what kind of information do you usually receive related to Georgia? Is it information on ...

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Economy	7	10	9	11	11	7	9
Tourism	28	28	20	24	31	23	25
Culture	11	10	8	11	9	9	10
Crime	3	2	3	1	4	3	3
Internal politics	17	14	16	19	17	12	15
Foreign politics	13	16	20	18	21	15	17
Abkhazia and South Ossetia	21	23	21	21	21	23	22
Other	4	1	2	2	2	2	2
Everything	1	3	3	5	1	2	3
Refuse to answer	0	1	2	1	1	2	1
Do not know	21	24	31	24	19	31	26

* The question was asked to those who said that they are fully informed, quite informed or little informed about developments in Georgia - 70%

24. In your opinion, the relations between Georgian and Russian states currently are...? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Very friendly	8	5	6	4	6	8	6
More friendly than hostile	49	41	39	40	41	46	43
More hostile than friendly	27	37	37	38	39	29	34
Very hostile	4	3	4	4	3	3	4
Refuse to answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Do not know	12	14	14	14	11	14	13
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

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

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
Support of Abkhazia and South Ossetia	8	4	3	4	7	4	5
Georgia's policy to integrate to the EU and NATO	16	25	25	22	23	23	22
Particular personalities in the Georgian government	3	6	10	6	10	6	7
Political disagreement between the two countries	14	14	11	13	15	11	13
Georgia does not accept Russian policies	7	9	13	9	9	10	10
Other	4	4	3	4	3	4	4
No barriers, good relations	15	11	14	15	12	12	13
Refuse to answer	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Do not know	40	31	28	30	28	36	32

26. In which language do you usually communicate with Georgian people? (%)

	Age group			Settlement type			Total
	18-34	35-54	55+	Large cities	Middle size cities	Small towns and rural areas	
In Russian	64	61	44	62	61	47	55
In English	3	1	1	3	1	1	2
In Georgian	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Other language	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
I never communicate with Georgians	35	36	57	35	38	52	43
Do not know know, do not remember, refuse to answer	0	1	1	1	1	1	1

