

Anecdotal Evidence Survey



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Anecdotal Evidence Survey

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Introduction

This is the second survey conducted by Media Development Foundation (MDF) to study the impact of disinformation and conspiracy theories on public perceptions and to identify conspiracy theories that are most widespread among population. The survey also aimed at studying public attitudes towards selected foreign policy issues as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, including vaccination.

The survey rests on the **anecdotal evidence** method, applying evidence collected in an informal manner and relying heavily on personal experience.¹ There is a big difference between anecdotal evidence and **scientific evidence**. Scientific evidence is based on systematic observation, measurement, and experimentation and can be independently verified or proved by anyone using scientific methods.

Anecdotal evidence is a claim that an event/story is true or false based on isolated examples of someone's personal experience. As it relies on personal experience, anecdotal evidence, in contrast to scientific evidence, cannot be independently verified.

When people strongly believe their own views, they tend to prove them only with the information that supports those views. This phenomenon, in the searching of information, is also called “predisposition.”

Anecdotal evidence is everywhere in our daily lives and it can come from any person we meet – a family member, neighbor, cashier at a store, hairdresser, taxi driver, etc.

¹ Daniel Reisberg, *The Science of Perception and Memory: A Pragmatic Guide for the Justice System*, 2014, Oxford University Press, p. 22 <http://bit.ly/39KXnep>

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Methodology

Survey issues. In addition to open questions aimed at identifying widespread fake news, respondents were also asked structured questions in four areas: 1. Physical safety; 2. Country's security; 3. Individual safety; 4. Social and economic protection.

Table 1. Topics of questions

Physical safety	Country's security	Individual safety	Social and economic protection
1. Biological sabotage/ viruses/vaccines	1. Which country poses a threat to Georgia?	1. Who obligates us to admit migrants?	1. Was an individual more protected during the Soviet Union than now?
2. Threat of war	2. What is the Treaty of Kars about?	2. What obligations does the West impose on us?	2. Is the European market more profitable for Georgia than the Russian market?

The survey covered 79 respondents who were interviewed face-to-face in four regions of Georgia in August.

Table 2. Number of respondents by cities

City	#
Kutaisi	20
Zugdidi	19
Ozurgeti	20
Marneuli	20
Sum	79

The survey was conducted in three age groups: 18-35, 36-55, 55+. Respondents from all the three age groups were selected so as to represent a mix of employed (in private and public sectors) and unemployed individuals.

Key findings

Some of the trends identified through the survey are common in regions. Shared conspiracy theories about the Treaty of Kars, attitudes towards social and physical safety in the Soviet Union, views about Russia's historical interest towards Georgia and media consumption were all identified in this survey as well as in the previous survey (conducted in Telavi, Kvareli, Khulo, Batumi, Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Gori, Tserovani).

I. Physical safety. Respondents proved to be most susceptible to conspiracy theories about viruses and epidemics. They named five anecdotal evidence:

- Viruses are man-made in labs;
- Vaccines are dangerous for health and have many side effects;
- Coronavirus is a man-made virus/biological weapon;
- Coronavirus does not exist/its existence is exaggerated/it is an ordinary flu;
- Activity of the Lugar Lab is suspicious; it is run by external actors.

A change in attitudes towards the Lugar Lab has been observed, which can be explained by an important role played by the lab during the coronavirus pandemics as well as enhanced visibility of the Lab. The number of respondents who considered the activity of the Lugar Lab suspicious comprised only six (7.5%).

II. Territorial security (*the Treaty of Kars*). The conspiracy theory that the Treaty of Kars expires and Georgia will lose Adjara was convincing for 17 respondents (18.9%). Much like in the previous survey, this conspiracy theory was believed by a representative of public service and teachers.

III. Individual safety

- ***Threat of assimilation.*** Relatively fewer respondents (7; 8.8%) believe that the European Union/the West obligates us to admit migrants.
- ***Threat of losing identity.*** Only few respondents (3) believe that the West demands from Georgia that it legalize same-sex marriage and change values.

IV. Social and economic protection

Soviet Union vs. freedom. In their answers to a question: Was an individual more protected during the Soviet Union than now? respondents, in some cases, went beyond economic topics to discuss civil rights and safety issues. In the opinion of a segment of respondents:

1. In the USSR, the law was respected whereas today, people have much freedom;
2. During the USSR, the country was secure, there were no wars;
3. The USSR was more protected in social and economic terms.

Russian market vs. European market. Like in the previous survey, the attitude towards the European market was more skeptical than towards the Russian market for two reasons:

1. Europe and America are far away while the Russian market is near and familiar;
2. The Russian market is simpler.

Messages that respondents considered least trustworthy

The least trustworthy for the respondents were popular myths about the country's security and individual safety. Similar to the previous survey, they supported their opinions with the following arguments:

- Russia had historical/geopolitical interest towards Georgia well before NATO was created;

- Russia fears that Georgia's integration into NATO/deployment of US military base in Georgia will impede the Russian occupation;

Media consumption habits

- Although quite a number of respondents (31) were not able to recall a particular piece of fake news, they said that they heard fake stories.
- The majority of respondents spoke about emotionally exaggerated and conflicting coverage of coronavirus issue.
- Like in the previous survey, the majority of young respondents named social network as a source of fake news and emphasized a personal responsibility in sharing fake news.
- Thirteen respondents recalled sharing fake news due to lack of information or in the state of anxiety. Ten of them deleted the posts after learning that the information was fake while three, after deleting the post, informed other users that they unintentionally shared the fake news.
- Fifteen respondents said they share information only after verifying it, filtering and reading the primary source.

I. Total data

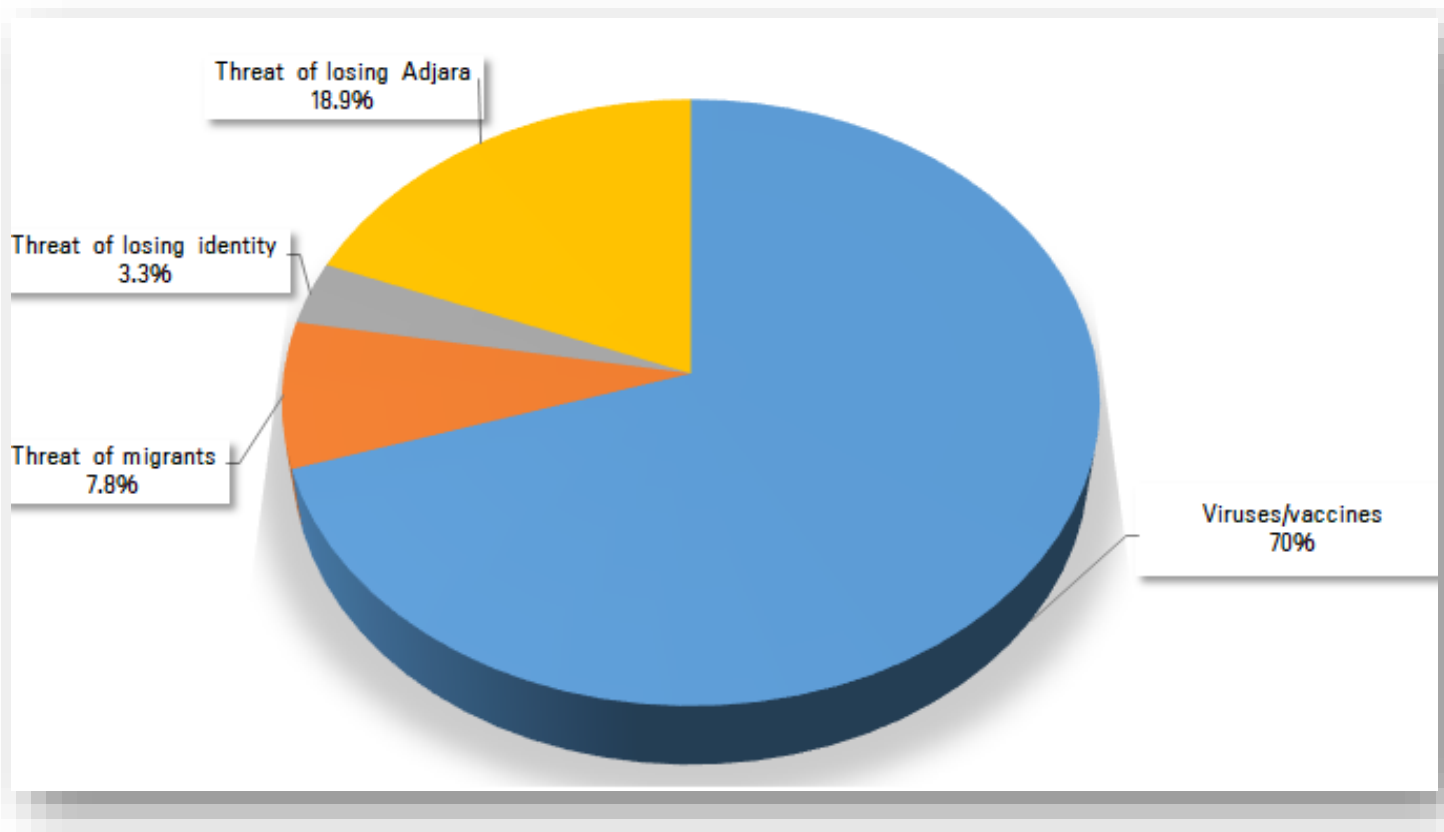


1.1. Anecdotal evidence that seems trustworthy to respondents

Talking about four main topics of the survey, such as 1. Physical safety; 2. Country's security; 3. Individual safety; 4. Social and economic protection, respondents recalled various conspiracy theories which they considered trustworthy and due to lack of evidence, may be qualified as anecdotal evidence. However, the respondents who shared anecdotal evidence was not many. Most frequently respondents recalled anecdotal evidence concerning health care.

- Most trustworthy for a segment of respondents (63; 70%) were conspiracy theories about health care and specifically, viruses and vaccines. A segment of respondents believes that viruses are manufactured in labs while vaccines are harmful for health.
- The number of those respondents believing that the term of Treaty of Kars expires and as a result, Georgia will lose Adjara stood at 17 (18.9%).
- Seven respondents (7.8%) believed that the EU/West obligates us to admit migrants.
- Only three (3.3%) of the respondents believed that the West demanded that we tolerate LGBT community and legalize same-sex marriage.

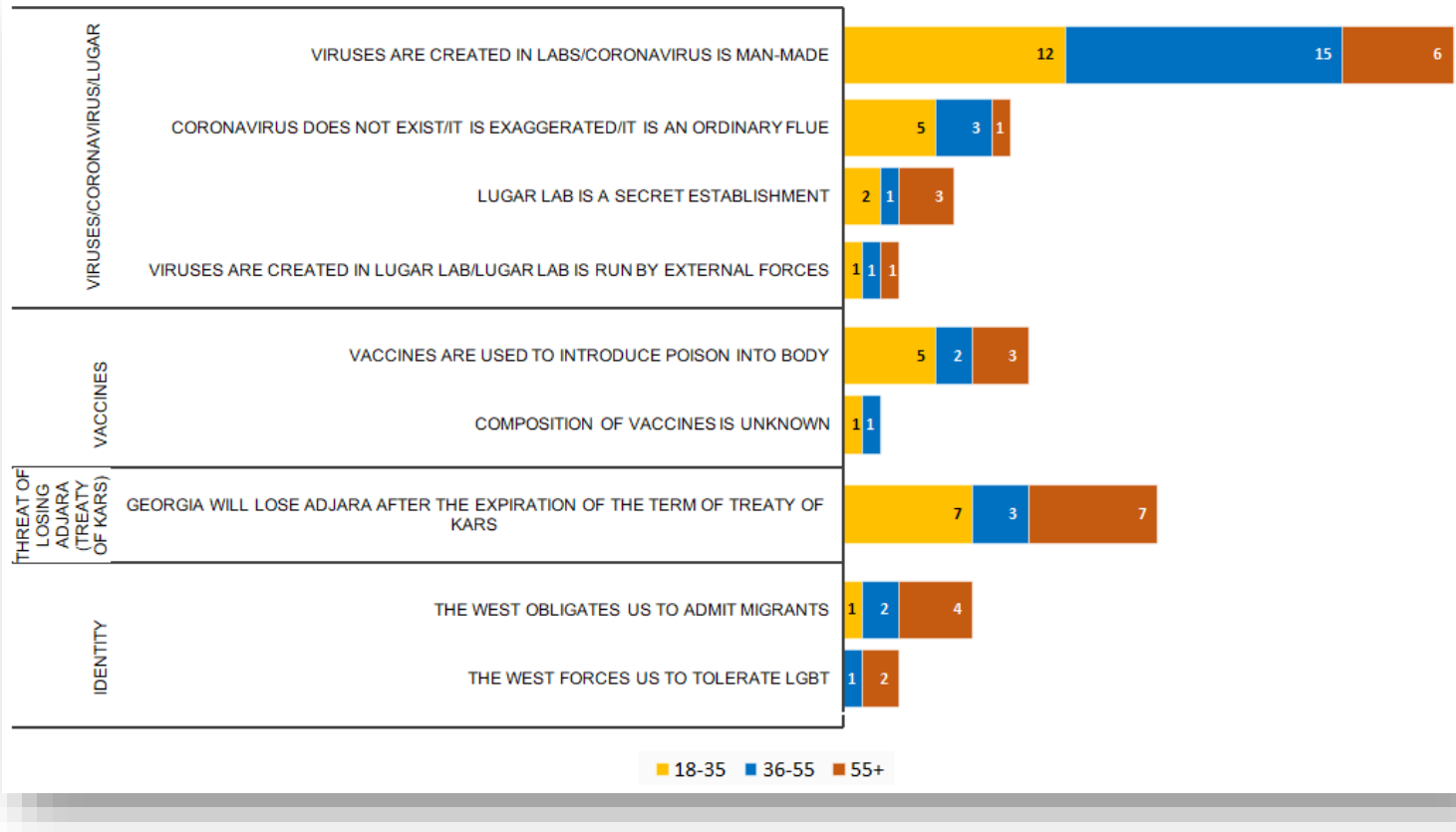
Chart 1. Anecdotal evidence recalled by respondents



The chart below details anecdotal evidence recalled by respondents during the interviews. Two opinions were identified with regard to the coronavirus:

1. Coronavirus does not exist; threat is overblown;
2. Coronavirus is a biological weapon.

Chart 2. Anecdotal evidence named by respondents, by age groups and topics.



1.2. Information that is considered fake by respondents

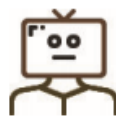
Apart from naming those conspiracy theories that respondents considered trustworthy, the respondents were asked to recall various fake news circulating in public domain.

The majority of respondents (31) was unable to recall a particular fake story, but noted that they had heard many fake stories. Eleven respondents cited statistics on Covid-19 morbidity/mortality and the second wave of coronavirus as examples of fake information. They believed that the data was inflated. The remaining respondents recalled the total of 33 fake stories of which 25 concerned health, namely, the coronavirus, pseudo-treatments and vaccines, two stories were about foreign policy while the rest were about various topics.

Topic	Fake story recalled by respondents
Coronavirus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BCG vaccine protects against coronavirus; ● Coronavirus can cause impotence; ● Coronavirus does not exist; ● Coronavirus is man-made/biological weapon/spread deliberately; ● Coronavirus was created in Lugar Lab; ● Thermal screening is hazardous; ● Empty coffins were buried in Europe.
Pseudo-treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Drinking vodka can help treat COVID-19; ● Eating garlic can help treat COVID-19.
Vaccines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● People will be subject to compulsory vaccination; ● The aim of vaccine is depopulation; ● Vaccines are used to imbed chips in people.
Response of the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Numbers of infected people are artificially inflated in the run up to the election; ● The government pays money to indicate the coronavirus as a cause of death; ● The government provides a GEL 200 assistance to divorced people.
Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Georgia started the war in 2008; ● Russia is the country of shared religion.
Various	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fake concerts of famous performers; ● Vanga's prophesies; ● North Korea won the World Cup.

Respondents said that fake news were spread for various aims: to promote a webpage, media outlet, boost ratings, receive income, blackmail, or increase polarization. One respondent even said that the spread of disinformation about the Lugar Lab was in the interest of Russia.

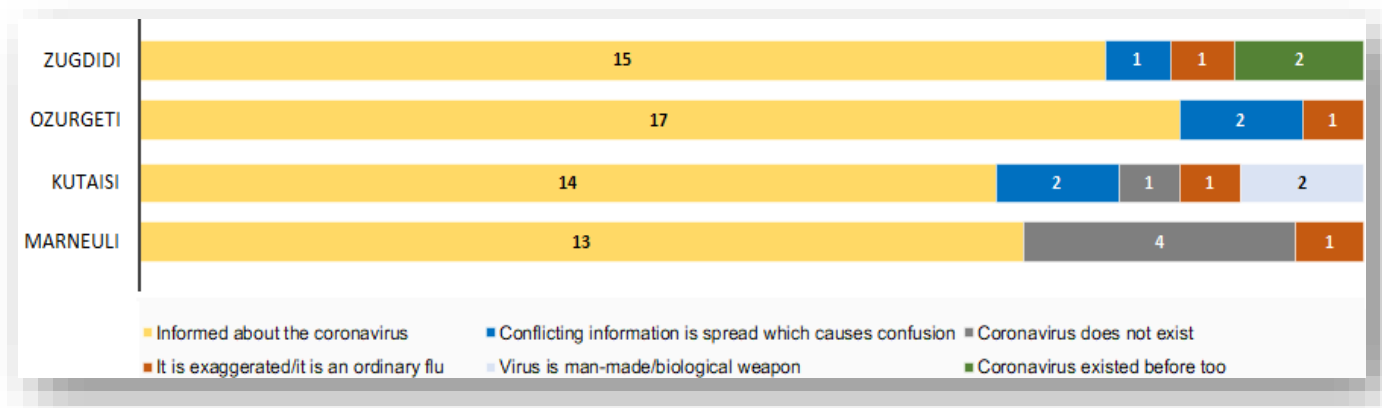
II. Data by topics



2.1. Physical safety

Respondents proved most susceptible to fears about physical safety due to viruses and epidemics. These fears largely related to the coronavirus pandemic, origin of viruses and vaccines. The majority of respondents obtained information about the coronavirus from media; they, as a rule, named symptoms, recommendations on how to protect oneself against the virus, and China as the place where the virus originated. A segment of respondents noted the spread of conflicting information about the coronavirus, causing confusion and fear among population. Only seven of 79 respondents were skeptical about the existence of the virus, some of whom believed that the issue was exaggerated. The highest number of those who did not believe in the existence of the coronavirus was from Marneuli (5).

Chart 3. What do you know about the coronavirus?



Although the majority of respondents were informed about the coronavirus, they still expressed skepticism about the vaccine against the virus. Out of 79 respondents, 36 would take the vaccine authorized by the World Health Organization to protect their own and others' health. Six respondents expressed caution, noting that the vaccine created at this stage was new and they would take a decision whether to take it or not only after a thorough consideration.

As many as 37 respondents would not take the vaccine. The majority of them explained this choice by anecdotal evidence and conspiracy theories, while some of them cited religious and financial factors as well as a fear of needles. Only one respondent would not take the vaccine due to health condition.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They want to introduce other viruses into a body through the vaccine ● Vaccine cannot be trusted /it is dangerous ● Vaccine is poison to a body and ruins health ● Much rumors circulate about the vaccine ● Coronavirus does not exist ● No one knows whether the vaccine will be of any help ● I am healthy and do not need the vaccine ● All must contract the coronavirus and therefore, there is no need for the vaccine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking vaccine conflicts with my religious belief ● Coronavirus vaccine will be expensive ● I have a fear of needles ● It is an ordinary flu and vaccine is not necessary ● Chips are imbedded in a body through the vaccine ● Vaccines are ineffective ● I have not had the coronavirus and therefore, do not need the vaccine ● I am allergic and cannot take the vaccine |
|--|--|

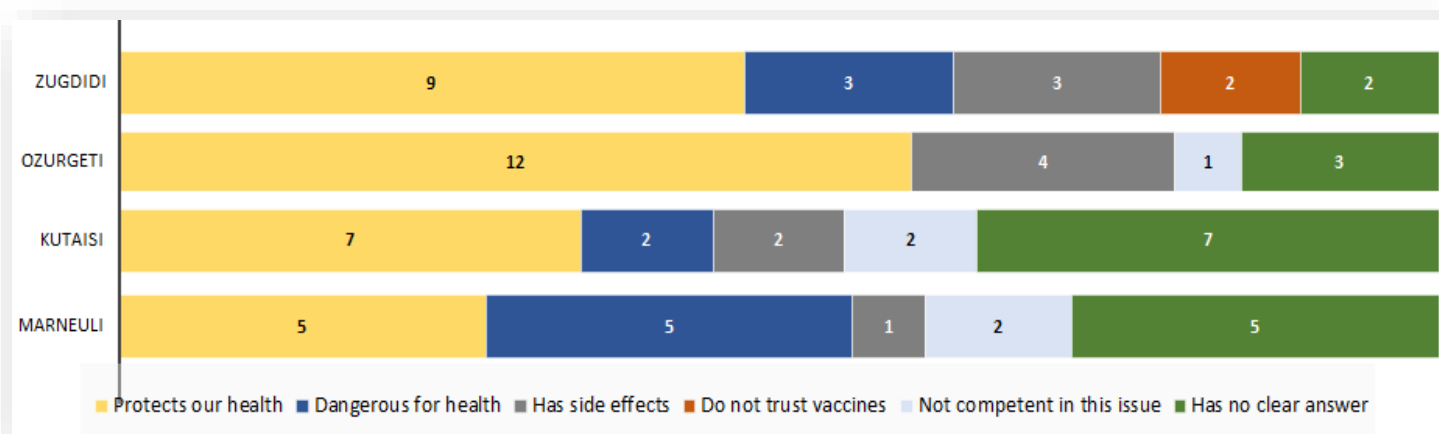
When citing the Christianity as a cause against taking the vaccine, the reference was made to a priest too:

Self-employed from Kutaisi (33-year-old woman): “By no means, I look at it from the perspective of Christianity and can provide many arguments; I cannot take the vaccine, nor [do I allow the vaccination of] my family members... From what I’ve heard from my priest, learned as I go to church, and from what I’ve read from the Bible, I have my opinion.”

A question also concerned the effectiveness of the vaccine. The majority (43) believed that despite possible side effects or separate exceptions, vaccines protected people against various infections. Twenty-two respondents did not have a clear answer to that question.

Private sector employee from Zugdidi (31-year-old woman): “I will not take the coronavirus vaccine because I do not trust vaccines, not only that against the coronavirus, but all vaccines, in general. I am not sure that I will not get worse after taking the coronavirus vaccine and then, it will make no difference for me whether I find myself in a hospital because of the coronavirus or something else, for example, muscle atrophy.”

Chart 4. Attitudes towards vaccines.



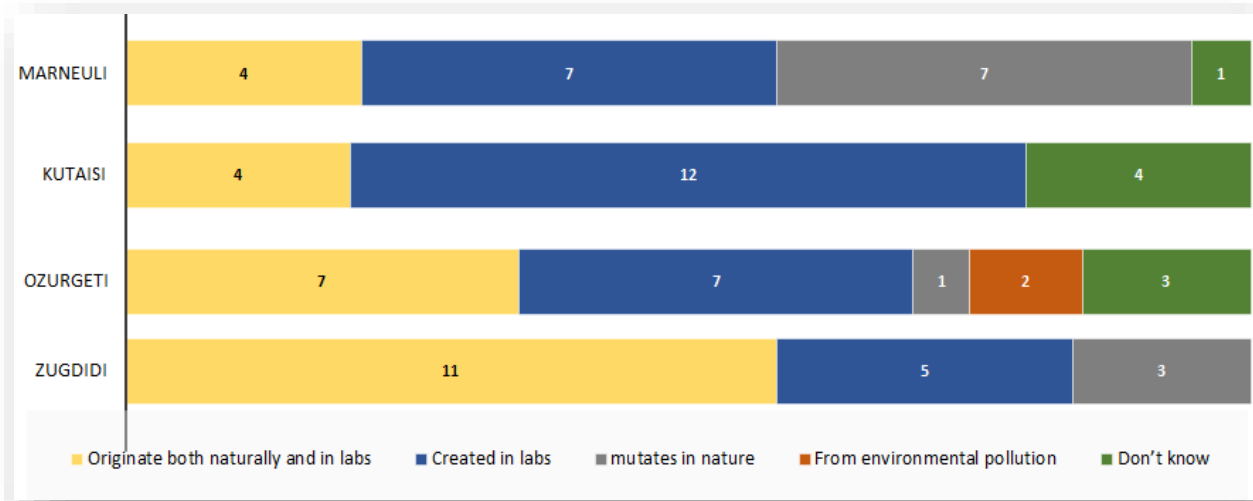
To a question as to what was a cause of viruses/epidemics, 26 respondents said that viruses originated naturally as well as created in labs. This response was not prompted by conspiracy theories. A segment of respondents believed that the work on viruses, infections and various bacteria in labs was necessary for the public health. The number of those who thought that viruses were artificially created in labs comprised 31. Four of them believed that the coronavirus was man-made. Another four respondents believed in interests of large states behind the creation of viruses. For example, a city council employee from Ozurgeti said that large countries created viruses in labs to run small countries. A teacher from Ozurgeti did not rule out that viruses were created in underground secret labs while another teacher from Kutaisi did not rule out that Freemasons were behind viruses.

City council employee from Ozurgeti (29-year-old woman): “Russia, America, Japan, China – mainly large countries that have enough power to manage that and to run small peoples and small countries and to shut us away or force us to do something. Mainly large countries are initiators of that.”

Teacher from Ozurgeti (32-year-old woman): “I still think it is man-made. I know there are myths about underground labs, although I do not want to believe it, remains of labs were discovered during the excavations after the [collapse of] Soviet Union. I do not want to believe that these labs exist to the detriment of human health; I want to believe that these viruses are created only for the aim of combatting other viruses. Lack of control may lead us to a situation when those artificial viruses are used against us.”

Teacher from Kutaisi (24-year-old woman): “It depends on a virus, I think; the majority of them, perhaps, originates naturally, but when it concerns a crime committed by Freemasons, viruses may be invented artificially.”

Chart 5. What is a cause of viruses?



Attitudes of respondents towards the Lugar Lab and the origin of viruses were mixed. The majority of respondents (50) believed that the role of Lugar Lab in diagnosing the coronavirus and combatting the pandemic was rather important. There were respondents that thought that viruses were artificially created in labs.

A private company employee from Ozurgeti (34-year-old woman): “I have seen them working in the field, chasing after mites or rodents or something like that. Although I have not witnessed that first hand, I have heard from a reliable source, more precisely, a person who did that himself and I trust that person. I have seen a person who arrives in Ozurgeti twice a month to take [samples of] used water from collectors and analyze it whether it contains something dangerous; no one is happy about wading sewerage pipes for nothing unless they do something important.”

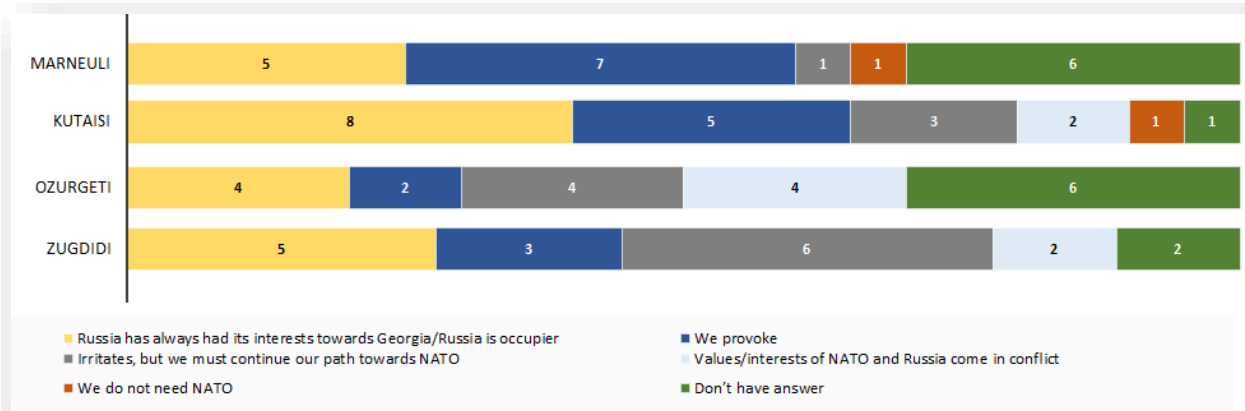
Twelve respondents could not answer the question. Four respondents had heard nothing about the Lab. All the four were from Marneuli. The total of nine respondents expressed suspicions about the Lugar Lab:

<p>1. Lab activity is kept secret/we know nothing what's going on in there/it is suspicious</p>	<p>Unemployed from Kutaisi (62-year-old man): “The Lugar Lab, you have mentioned, was created by communists and it was the lab set up during the communist regime and by the way, it is a very significant lab, but I do not know what’s going on in there, I am not competent in that. If you ask me about any item in this store I am now, I will tell you where you can find, for example, napkins, but I cannot say anything about the Lab.”</p> <p>Agriculture worker from Kutaisi (33-year-old woman): “More often I tend to think that it [Lugar activity] is a lie, it seems to contain more lie, I do not believe it.”</p> <p>Librarian from Kutaisi (32-year-old woman): “I see benefit of few separate individuals; why Lugar and not any other ordinary country?”</p>
<p>2. Hazardous substances are kept there</p>	<p>Artisan from Zugdidi (57-year-old man): “Many beneficial things can be done for the country in that Lab. However, it has a secret aspect too. As said on the social network, this Lab stores hazardous substances which US and Russia cannot agree on between each other.”</p>

3. Viruses are created there	Entrepreneur from Ozurgeti (47-year-old man): “Just minutes ago, I told you about the Lugar Lab that viruses are created in such labs... I know for sure that viruses are created in such labs; that’s true, we all know that.”
4. It is run by external actors	<p>Teacher from Marneuli (26-year-old man): “This Lab is not free itself. This Lab receives orders from an entity, that’s how it operates.”</p> <p>Vegetable salesperson from Marneuli (60-year-old man): “They say, Americans have opened a lab here. I cannot claim what is the purpose of this lab. There are talks that [trials are carried out] on people... don’t know... a person may easily fall into a trap.”</p>

Respondents were less susceptible to the threat of war. To the question whether by frequent references to NATO, Georgia can provoke Russia, 22 respondents said that war could not be caused by frequent references to NATO and that Russia had its own interests in the region. Some of these respondents also recalled historical interests of Russia towards Georgia since those times when NATO did not exist at all. Fourteen respondents out of 79 have believed that although Russia really got irritated about Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration, Georgia must not back off and must pursue its Euro-Atlantic aspiration. According to eight respondents, values/interests of NATO come into conflict with those of Russia. Some 17 respondents believed that the integration into NATO was tantamount to provoking Russia. Only two respondents said that Georgia no longer needed NATO while one said that Georgia would never be admitted to NATO. This question was not answered by 15 respondents. The highest number of those respondents who thought that NATO meant provoking Russia was from Marneuli (7) and Kutaisi (5).

Chart 6. Do we provoke Russia by frequent references to NATO?



Those respondents who do not think that references to NATO provoke Russia, substantiate their opinion with the following arguments:

1. Russia occupied Georgia well before NATO was created;
2. Russia does not want to lose Georgia as part of its sphere of influence;
3. Russia fears that in case of Georgia’s accession to NATO, it will not able to move occupation lines deep into the Georgia-controlled territory.

<p>1. Russia occupied Georgia well before NATO was created</p>	<p>Unemployed person from Kutaisi (48-year-old man): “In 1918 and 1921, Georgia did not belong to anyone, but they [Russia] still invaded and occupied it, didn’t they? It does not mean at all that Russia has invaded because we side with European Union, that is a lie; Russia has always had its imperial ambitions and will have them in future too.”</p> <p>City council member from Marneuli (40-year-old man): “There was no NATO in 1921, but Russia invaded [Georgia] and took away our freedom.”</p> <p>Student from Kutaisi (20-year-old woman): “It has been four centuries that Russia has serious problems with us, but I cannot recall an objective reason of that; therefore, let’s not take this step because Russia will get irritated, or let’s put on these hats in order not to irritate Russia [is not the right approach]... we should understand once and for all that we are an independent state.”</p>
<p>2. Russia does not want to lose Georgia as part of its sphere of influence</p>	<p>Insurance company employee from Marneuli (24-year-old man): “Georgia’s integration into NATO, into the EU does not play into hands of Russia. This irritates Russia and Russia itself provokes Georgia. For example, it acted so against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine in 2014. In other words, Russia does not want the countries in its neighborhood to integrate into NATO.”</p> <p>Nurse from Ozurgeti (63-year-old woman): “Russia gets irritated because it does not want to lose its grip on those countries which it forcefully made its allies during the Soviet Union; Russia wants to subordinate those countries and keep them in its orbit.”</p> <p>Entrepreneur from Ozurgeti (31-year-old woman): “We were part of Russia at one time and as Russia does not want to let Belarus and other post-Soviet countries go, so it does not want to let us go; nor does it want US bases to be deployed near its borders.”</p>
<p>3. Russia fears that in case of Georgia’s accession to NATO, it will not be able to move occupation lines deep into the Georgia-controlled territory</p>	<p>Teacher from Zugdidi (60-year-old woman): “Russia is the occupier and has seized our territories and even has been moving borders deeper into Georgia-controlled territory. Thus, Georgia having a strong supporter is not in Russia’s interest.”</p> <p>Agriculture worker from Ozurgeti (65-year-old woman): “Relationship with NATO and the EU is a protection for Georgia. When you are under their observation, that is a sort of protection for Georgia.”</p> <p>Private sector employee from Zugdidi (31-year-old woman): “Russian Empire rests on slavery, it neither wants to develop itself nor to have developed [countries] around it; therefore, these references [to NATO] may really irritate it, but I hope that we will anyway continue our path towards NATO.”</p>

Another segment of respondents, who believed that Georgia provoked Russia, offered the following arguments:

1. By referencing to NATO, we provoke Russia;
2. Historically, Russia saved us;
3. We do not need either Russia or the West.

<p>1. By referencing to NATO we provoke Russia</p>	<p>Unemployed from Kutaisi (62-year-old man): “[By repeating] NATO, NATO we irritate Russia. Russia takes efforts not to allow us to integrate into NATO, As the Georgian saying goes, a close neighbor is better than a distant relative; that’s how things are. Yes, NATO is good but we do not want now to sour our relations with Russia.”</p> <p>Artisan from Ozurgeti (36-year-old man): “Firstly, we should not make references to NATO at all. We have been referencing to it for so long now and none of the countries agrees to our [NATO] membership. That’s because, until Russia gives its consent, we will not join NATO, as it depends on Russia.”</p>
<p>2. Historically, Russia saved us</p>	<p>Teacher from Kutaisi (59-year-old woman): “My dear, when they say terrible things about Russia, I cannot believe it because I was brought up always believing that it was our elderly brother and we could not have survived without it; it protected and saved us.”</p> <p>Owner of restaurant from Marneuli (50-year-old man): “Russia founded Georgia. If a state founded by Russia wants to join NATO, will that not be irritating for Russia?”</p>
<p>3. We do not need either Russia or the West</p>	<p>Private sector employee from Kutaisi: (31-year-old man): “From the times immemorial Georgia was an independent state and always prosperous from Nicopsis to Derbent, at the times of rule of Queen Tamar and always. We do not need either NATO or Russia; we are Georgian people and should stand shoulder to shoulder. Until love prevails in Georgia, the country will be prosperous and united.”</p> <p>Entrepreneur from Ozurgeti (47-year-old man): “It will make not much difference for Georgia if inscriptions in Russian are erased and replaced with inscriptions in English.”</p>

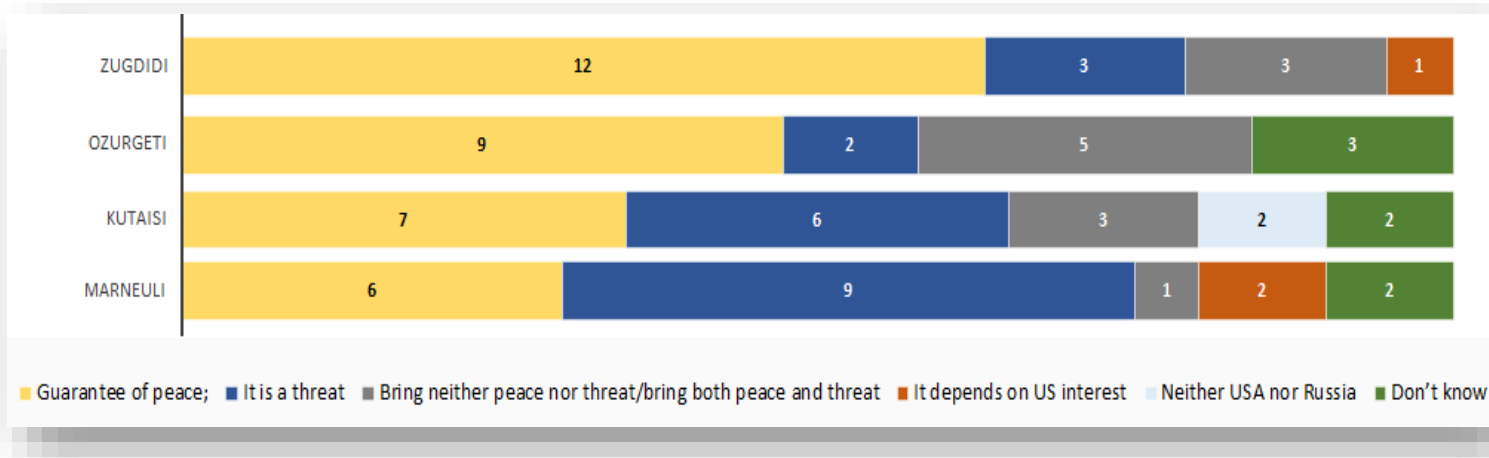
The picture was similar in case of answers to a question whether a potential US military base would be a guarantee of peace/stability. The majority of respondents (34) saw a US base as a guarantee of the country’s security, whereas 20 respondents associated it with threats. Eleven respondents were ambivalent about it, saying that the base could be a guarantee of peace but also may pose threats. Those who feared the base, mentioned Russia, saying that Russia would not allow a US base in Georgia. Only two respondents did not want to see either US or Russian base. One respondent even recalled a tragic death of Maria Kaczynska and Lech Kaczynski and said that Russia was so strong that even US base could not stop it.

Those who believed that the US base would bring stability and peace to the country, said that the USA would stop further Russian occupation.

Teacher from Marneuli (28-year-old man): “I think that it poses no threat that the USA is our friend, quite the contrary, since our neighboring country Russia is the occupier, the US base will protect us.”

Self-employed person from Zugdidi (37-year-old woman): “The USA will protect its people and allies in every territory. That’s why I think that the US base here will be a guarantee of peace.”

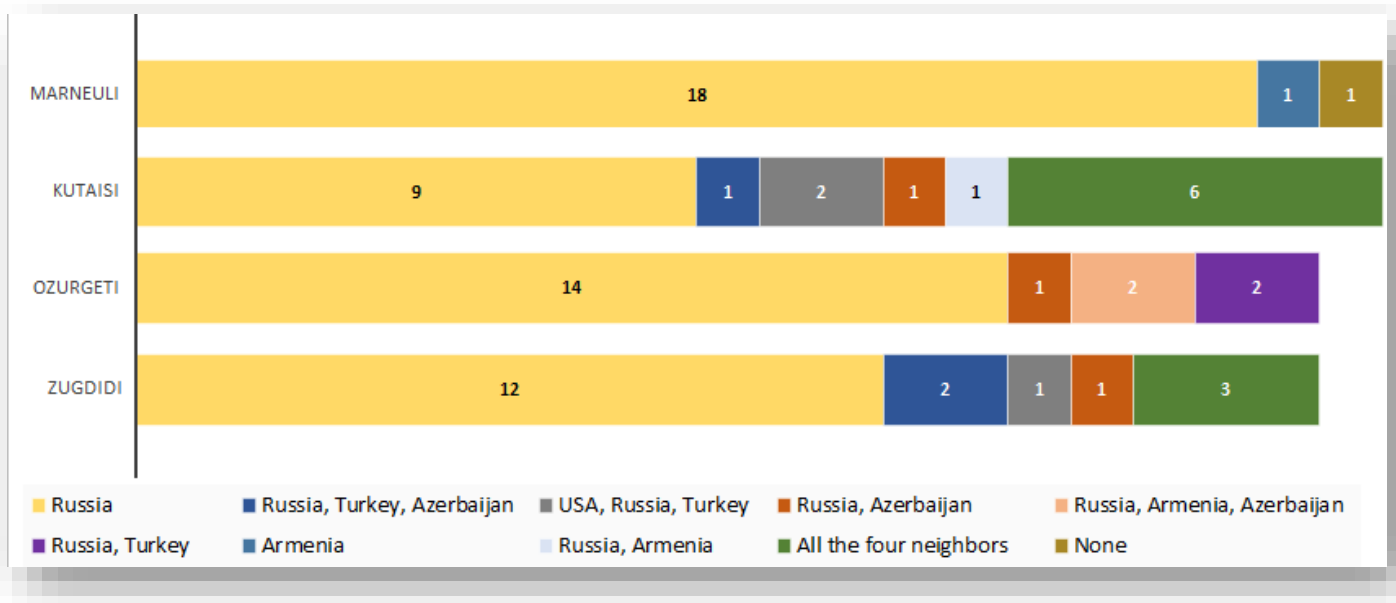
Chart 7: Attitudes towards a US military base in Georgia



2.2. Security of the country

In response to a question as to which country violates Georgia’s borders most severely, the majority of respondents (53) named Russia. At the same time, as Chart 8 shows, Russia is named along with all other neighbors in the list of threats. Nine respondents think that Georgia’s borders are endangered by all the four neighbors (Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia). Three respondents regard the USA as a threat, alongside Russia, to Georgia’s borders. As the chart shows, the highest number of respondents among those who considered Russia a threat was from Marneuli (18) while among those who considered all the four neighbors as a threat, the highest number was from Kutaisi (6).

Chart 8. Which country poses a threat to Georgia’s borders?



A segment of respondents who apart from Russia, named Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan as a threat, mentioned historical traumas, including the issue of Davit Gareji. With regard to Armenia, respondents recalled the war in

Abkhazia and the influence of Armenia on the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Apart from physical safety, one respondent also noted economic interests of Turkey in Adjara.

Teacher from Zugdidi (38-year-old woman): “A question is whether we have borders or not. The primary threat is Russia which also provokes other countries. Davit Gareji and Adjara is an enormous pain and they are not safe.”

Artisan from Kutaisi (40-year-old man): “Russia is not as much [a threat] as Armenia, starting from the time of [war in] Abkhazia and encouraged by Russia.”

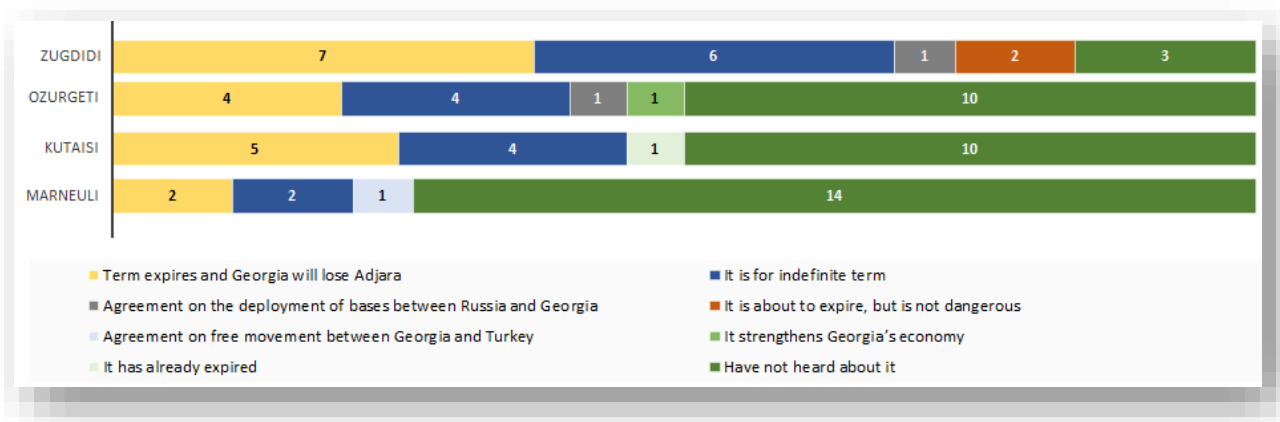
Historian from Kutaisi (63-year-old woman): “They fiercely argue over Davit Gareji with us, claiming that it belongs to them; or let’s take Armenia, it continues to grab and grab, using with sweet, cordial words. Years ago, I attended a conference in Armenia. At that conference, they presented a map of Armenia in 12th century, when Georgia was stretched from Nicopsis to Derbent, but the borders on that map almost reached Tbilisi. Thus, it [Armenia] has always had claims on Meskheta and Javakheti, especially the population there; this is also a result of Russian policy.”

Vegetable salesperson from Marneuli (60-year-old man): “It is the Armenian nationalism that [makes them] say that actually Georgian land in Akhalkalaki belongs to them.”

Public servant from Ozurgeti (39-year-old man): “Russia is [a threat] but no less [threat is] Turkey. If it is not openly moving [its borders] deeper [into the Georgian territory], it gradually invades it by numerous economic levers and whatnot.”

Within the scope of the survey, we find out how susceptible respondents are to conspiracy theories about the Treaty of Kars, whereby the term of the agreement expires in 2021, after which Russia will no longer be a guarantor of territorial integrity of Georgia and Turkey will reclaim Adjara. We asked respondents what they heard about the Treaty of Kars. Some 37 respondents have heard nothing about the treaty while 17 respondents have heard that the treaty expires, enabling Turkey to intervene in Georgia and seize its territories. Only 16 respondents were informed about this issue. Various versions were also offered about the Treaty of Kars: two respondents said that the Treaty of Kars was signed between Russia and Georgia to regulate the deployment of Russian bases in Georgia; one respondent considered it an agreement regulating free movement between Georgia and Turkey. One respondent also said that the treaty had already expired. As Chart 9 shows, the highest number of those who believe the conspiracy theory about the expiry of term are from Zugdidi (7) and Kutaisi (5).

Chart 9. What have you heard about the Treaty of Kars?



One should note that the conspiracy theory that the Treaty of Kars expires in 2021 is convincing for an employee of public service as well as teachers.

Teacher from Zugdidi (38-year-old woman): “I have heard that the treaty contains many dubious provisions and I think that it looks like the Treaty of Georgievsk.”

Teacher from Kutaisi (59-year-old woman): “Something was redistributed under the Treaty of Kars, wasn’t it? They blame Stalin for everything... Territories were redistributed incorrectly under that treaty... Turkey has always longed for Adjara, that’s a fact.”

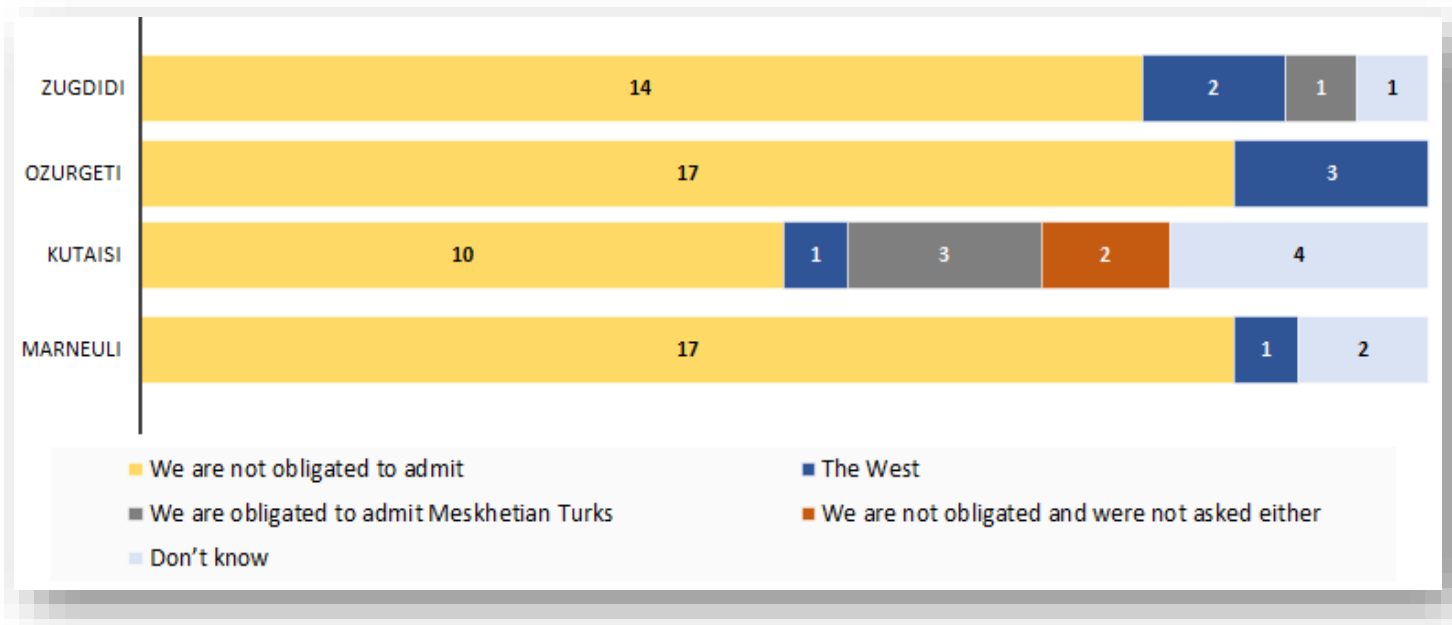
Employee of Public Service Hall from Marneuli (28-year-old man): “In 2020-21 this treaty expires... Now debates are about how to renew and extend it.”



2.3. Individual safety

The majority of respondents (58) do not think that Georgia has an obligation to admit migrants whereas seven believe that the West imposes such obligation on the country. Also, four respondents (three from Kutaisi and one from Zugdidi) named the obligation to accept “Meskhetian Turks” under which they must mean the obligation assumed by the Georgian government to repatriate Meskhs deported in the 1940s by the Stalin regime. Seven respondents could not answer this question.

Chart 10. Who obligates us to admit migrants?



The following attitudes have been identified towards migrants:

1. Migration of Georgians to Europe is acceptable, but Asians must not come to Georgia.
2. Admittance of migrants is a prerequisite for the membership of the European Union.
3. Migrants are more appreciated than Georgians.
4. Sale of Georgian land is unacceptable.
5. It conflicts with the Georgian identity.

<p>1. Migration of Georgians to Europe is acceptable, but Asians must not come to Georgia</p>	<p>Librarian from Kutaisi (32-year-old woman): “Since the age of 15, dear, I spent my life in emigration and I know full well what migration means. My family lives in migration to the date and these are the people sacrificing themselves for the welfare of the homeland and families... When we see so many Chinese here, have we been asked whether they are welcome.”</p>
<p>2. Admittance of migrants is a prerequisite for the membership of the European Union</p>	<p>Artisan from Zugdidi (36-year-old man): “If we want the EU and Western values, [Georgia] must admit migrants, but for me the admittance is unacceptable.”</p> <p>Unemployed from Zugdidi (59-year-old woman): “If you are a member of the EU country or NATO you have an obligation to give shelter to migrants.”</p>
<p>3. Migrants are more appreciated than Georgians</p>	<p>Nurse from Ozurgeti (68-years-old woman): “They should first take care of people of Georgia and then admit migrants. They create all the conditions for them [migrants]... That migrant is more appreciated in our country that a citizen of Georgia... One woman beat four Indians or Arabs and that woman, a mother of four, was arrested and sent to prison. Why? Because she defender herself and beat those people. They deserved beating.</p>
<p>4. Sale of Georgian land is unacceptable.</p>	<p>Teacher from Kutaisi (59-year-old woman): “Yes, we are admitting them, i.e. the state allows to admit those people and I think this is wrong; giving Georgian land to someone, be it in exchange for money or not, is unacceptable.</p>
<p>5. It conflicts with the Georgian identity</p>	<p>Unemployed from Kutaisi (62-year-old man): “We are people of different mentality, people wearing chokha, we are Caucasians, we highly respect women, women highly respect men... In Tbilisi, the Rustaveli avenue, also other streets have been occupied by Arabs, Iranians, Persians. They opened restaurants and I do not want to say what else, you know it full well what they have opened, how they do that. Give it a try and see whether you will be permitted [to open a facility].”</p>

Some of those respondents who think that the West does not obligate us to admit migrants, think that this is a two-way process – Georgians emigrate to other countries while foreigners immigrate to Georgia and this is not a component of international or interstate agreements. Another segment of respondents believed that if an individual had the right to reside in a country, no one should restrict it, while others underlined the contribution of migrants to the country’s economy.

Teacher from Zugdidi (33-year-old woman): “Considering it from the perspective of globalization, much like other countries give shelter to Georgians so should we accept migrants from other countries. This happens naturally, not under coercion. It is not a correct action by the country to close borders to a particular country.”

Private sector employee from Zugdidi (24-year-old woman): “No one forces us to accept migrants in Georgia. I think, their stay in Georgia contributes to the economic development of the country.”

Unemployed from Marneuli (78-year-old man): “Who can compel us? They are citizens of various countries. If they have a permit to come here, they can come. Who can say anything against that?”

We additionally asked respondents about obligations imposed on Georgia by the West. Some 28 respondents named improvement of human rights, strengthening of democracy and introduction of high agricultural standards.

One respondent emphasized the EU’s role in maintaining cultural authenticity. However, they also said that those were recommendations from the EU, not obligations.

Unemployed from Zugdidi (28-year-old man): “The West offers broader opportunities to fulfill the obligations and promote details of our cultural that distinguish us from other countries to the world and to preserve the authenticity of culture.”

Private sector employee from Zugdidi (56-year-old woman): “The West imposes many such obligations that we should have had anyway, for example, with regard to manufacturing products. We fall short of standards in many areas. For example, I am mulling over exporting bay leaves (or dairy products, honey) to Europe. However, one can hardly find even a single enterprise in the country that would meet the standards.”

Insurance company employee from Marneuli (24-year-old man): “The West imposes obligations for the development of the country, advancement of democracy on the bases of particular agreements, for example, the Association Agreement. This is also one of the plans of the country to develop and eventually become a member of the EU and NATO.”

Private sector employee from Ozurgeti (34-year-old woman): “It imposes because it also needs a healthy and proper environment in its neighborhood and among allies, not a country that is poor and needs constant assistance.”

Only three respondents thought that the West imposes homosexuality; one said that the EU wanted to strip us of our identity and another said that the West obligates us to cede the occupied territories.

<p>1. Fights against identity</p>	<p>Private sector employee from Ozurgeti (68-year-old woman): “It is a terrible tragedy that they ruin everything in education, ruin [everything] Georgian and Georgian language. Is it commendable when your name in your country is written in English first, and then, in Georgian?! You must have your identity and especially when one of 14 scripts in the world is Georgian, why should a foreign language be dominant? Georgian language must be in Georgia.”</p>
<p>2. Imposes homosexuality</p>	<p>Artisan from Kutaisi (62-year-old man): “These lesbians here, who they force us [to tolerate], they would not have been so many; they want to hold a gay pride.”</p> <p>Private sector employee from Zugdidi (41-year-old man): “Georgia has always been tolerant and advocating it [homosexuality] is like pushing against an open door. But a person of untraditional sexual orientation must not insist that it is normal and it must be legalized.”</p> <p>Unemployed from Marneuli (78-year-old man): “We are people of the Caucasus, not Europeans... Things like same-sex marriage and such laws are unacceptable to us.”</p>
<p>3. Interferes in our sovereignty</p>	<p>Hairdresser from Marneuli (26-year-old man): “Deputy [US] Ambassador came here to control the elections. Why? Georgia must control it itself.”</p>
<p>4. Forces us to cede the occupied territories</p>	<p>Artisan from Kutaisi (40-year-old man): “There were also talks that if you want to be independent and want me to defend you, you must recognize that occupied territories are no longer yours, because a war is not in their interest. To defend you, you must have territories clearly specified that this [territory] belongs to Abkhazia and that [territory] belongs to Georgia.”</p>



2.4. Social and economic protection

To find out how protected citizens feel themselves in social and economic sense, two questions were put to the respondents:

1. Was an individual more protected during the Soviet Union than now??
2. Is the European market more profitable for Georgia than the Russian market?

Answers to the first question about the Soviet Union went beyond the topic of socioeconomic protection, as respondents talked more about the protection against external threats.

The following messages were identified on this topic:

1. The law was strictly observed in the USSR whereas it is excess freedom today;
2. The country was safer in the USSR as there were no wars;
3. The USSR was better protected in social and economic terms.

<p>1. The law was strictly observed in the USSR whereas it is excess freedom today</p>	<p>Self-employed in agriculture from Kutaisi (33-year-old woman): “I do not know what protected means but there were some limits... But the law was strictly observed whereas people do whatever they want now, nothing is tabooed and the situation is unruly, people do not obey the law.”</p> <p>Private sector employee from Ozurgeti (48-year-old woman): “Everything was the same back then – crime, antagonism, but it was not manifested, shown on TV... It was better [protected] back then; you know why? People had some fear.”</p> <p>Entrepreneur from Ozurgeti (47-year-old man): “Everyone knew that if they harmed another person, they would be punished for that. Today, impunity is too widespread.”</p>
<p>2. The country was safer in the USSR as there were no wars</p>	<p>Self-employed in agriculture from Ozurgeti (65-year-old woman): “At modern times there were many wars in Georgia – the Abkhaz war which took lives of very many Georgians... These wars cost Georgia lives of many soldiers... Talking about the physical safety, that was the sacrifice of Georgia.”</p> <p>Artisan from Kutaisi (40-year-old man): “We seem to be independent, in reality we have Armenians on one side, Azeris on the other side side and Russians on yet another side, all willing to get something from you and this is not the independence and freedom; this is not called – cannot be called independence and freedom.”</p> <p>Unemployed from Ozurgeti (59-year-old woman): “I, as a person of Soviet period, was not affected by such wars; the country was better protected, but now it is a bit difficult.”</p> <p>Teacher from Marneuli (44-year-old man): “Nationalism was not an issue. They lived well and, of course, it was peace in the Soviet period.”</p>
<p>3. The USSR was better protected in social and economic terms</p>	<p>Nurse from Ozurgeti (68-year-old woman): “First of all, an individual must be protected against everything and provided with everything – must not be hungry, must not be thirsty and a Georgian must not have to beg. Beggars must not be looking for food in garbage bins and must not eat food from there. I lived during the Soviet Union and never saw a beggar back then.”</p>

Respondents who mainly focused about inequality and infringement of human rights in the Soviet Union and criticized the Soviet Union were mainly from older age groups. Young respondents focused more on new opportunities, freedom of information and religion.

<p>1. Human rights were infringed in the Soviet Union</p>	<p>Artisan from Zugdidi (57-year-old man): “An individual was not protected in the Soviet Union at all. People’s lives worth nothing. Even execution could be a formality; they did not have private property while other rights were restricted. I think that people, today, have more rights and are more protected.”</p> <p>Private sector employee from Zugdidi (56-year-old woman): “Freedom of speech and in general, [human] rights are better protected today. During the Soviet Union, people were confined within limits and were not allowed even to go beyond it and if they did, they would be necessarily punished.”</p>
<p>2. Opportunities/freedom are greater today than in the USSR</p>	<p>Self-employed from Zugdidi (56-year-old woman): “The life was entirely different during the Soviet Union. We were shut away and could not travel to other countries. Today, people have greater degree of freedom and I think that they are more protected today.”</p> <p>Librarian from Kutaisi (32-year-old woman): “Opportunities are way greater... Any sort of alternative is available today and such opportunities were definitely absent during the Soviet Union.”</p> <p>Unemployed from Kutaisi (22-year-old woman): “We have a greater degree of freedom, for example, we can dye eggs red and, just to bring a simple example, go to church.”</p> <p>Unemployed from Zugdidi (19-year-old woman): “We should emphasize the fact that today, people can get larger amount of information, the environment is more democratic, awareness is higher than during the Soviet Union.”</p>

As regards the profitability of the markets, the majority of respondents (38) considered the European market more profitable than the Russian market. The majority of those respondents who thought the Russian market was more advantageous (32), were from Marneuli (14).

When comparing the Russian and the European markets, proponents of the Russian market justified their position by citing two main reasons:

1. Europe and America are far away while the Russian market is close and familiar;
2. Russian market is simpler than European.

<p>1. Europe and America are far away while the Russian market is close and familiar</p>	<p>Nurse from Ozurgeti (68-year-old woman): “True, it [Russia] is the enemy, but until you take [goods] to Europe, how many procedures you have to undertake?! Should it not be shorter to take it to your neighbor? Should I not sell cucumbers or whatnot faster to my neighbor? Instead of taking there [Europe], I prefer to give it to it [Russia].”</p> <p>Restaurant owner from Marneuli (50-year-old man): “To go to Europe, a person needs three thousand, four thousand, five thousand laris while you need only 50 lari to get to Russia. Take a taxi, travel and once you go past Tskhinvali you are in Russia.”</p>
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	Unemployed from Zugdidi (59-year-old woman): “Knowledge of the language and familiar experience of the market make it easier to take our goods to the Russian market.”
2. Russian market is simpler than European.	<p>Self-employed from Kutaisi (71-year-old man): “It is easy for us to enter [the Russian market]; we cannot enter the European market with our products because they are not refined, including by look. Since Russia today is a relatively less developed country, we can take our undeveloped products there.”</p> <p>Unemployed from Zugdidi (38-year-old woman): “The European market has tougher requirements and the produce of farmers cannot meet them yet. Therefore, the Russian market is more profitable for farmers today. It is easier for them to sell on the Russian market.”</p>

Those who emphasized the advantages of the European market, named several reasons:

1. Dependence on the Russian market worsened the quality of Georgian products;
2. The European market offers a possibility to develop;
3. The European market is financially more profitable;
4. Russia is not a reliable partner.

1. Dependence on the Russian market worsened the quality of Georgian products	Teacher from Kutaisi (53-year-old woman): “Our wine is falsified; our tea became falsified because Russia accepted any product while Europe is oriented on quality.”
2. The European market offers a possibility to develop	<p>Artisan from Zugdidi (36-year-old man): “European standards force farmers to develop and improve their own products.”</p> <p>Student from Zugdidi (20-year-old woman): “There are standards that we have to meet and this nudges us to produce quality products.”</p> <p>Private sector employee from Zugdidi (31-year-old woman): “One can sell any rubbish in Russia while Europe does not need rubbish. Consequently, producing rubbish is a regress while development comes with standards and civilized approaches.”</p>
3. The European market is financially more profitable	<p>Public servant from Zugdidi (32-year-old man): “Even quantitatively, the European market is a 800-million-strong market, while the Russia market is only 150-million-strong.”</p> <p>Self-employed from Zugdidi (28-year-old man): “The European market is larger and more profitable for our products.”</p>
4. Russia is not a reliable partner	Teacher from Zugdidi (60-year-old woman): “We do not have reliable negotiations with Russia in the area of trade and that’s why the European market is better.”

III. Media consumption habits

A segment of respondents focused on information chaos and contradictory information spread about the coronavirus. According to them, this flow of unverified information caused confusion among the population.

Nurse from Zugdidi (68-year-old woman): “One channel says one thing, another says something different and people can’t make heads or tails out of that. Viewers of one channel say one thing whereas viewers of another say something different and they conflict one another... Which of the two one should believe?! When one says that it is white whereas another claims that it is black, which one is correct?! If I am a farmer relying on TV, which TV channel should I trust?”

As an example of disinformation about the coronavirus, four respondents cited a report aired on the Mtavari Arkhi, claiming that Marneuli population was paid GEL 10 000 to allow the government to indicate the coronavirus as the cause of death.

Respondents emphasized the frequency of false information about the coronavirus and said that they refrain from sharing information and trusted only official sources.

Respondents also mentioned an emotional factor, saying that they themselves shared false information on a vulnerable issue.

Student from Zugdidi (20-year-old woman): “I tried as much as possible to refrain. I did not share the information if I was not sure that it was correct.”

Private sector employee from Zugdidi (56-year-old woman): “During the pandemic, I treat information with a higher degree of caution and am cautious about sharing it. I tried to share only the information published on official webpages.”

Employee of Public Service Hall from Marneuli (28-year-old man): “I did not pay meticulous attention. Guided by emotions, I have also shared some information, but after seeking additional information, found out that it was wide of the mark.”

Private sector employee from Zugdidi (41-year-old woman): “Scientists do not fully understand the virus either, because it is not investigated yet and therefore, false information starts circulating as a result of opinions existing in society.”

Teacher from Marneuli (28-year-old man): “I attended relevant trainings, workshop and I am quite informed about the ways how false information spreads and how to combat them in order to prevent the spread of incorrect, false information. Therefore, I am cautious in receiving and sharing information.”

Self-employed in agriculture from Ozurgeti (56-year-old woman): “I try as much as possible to distinguish false information from true and I do not like providing false information to anyone else.”

More frequently, respondents saw political aims and economic benefit behind the spread of false information. One respondent also named lack of competence as a cause of the spread of false information.

Unemployed from Zugdidi (19-year-old woman): “I, of course, know concrete persons who spread false information. Perhaps, the aim was to threaten even more people.”

Hairdresser from Marneuli (28-year-old man): “To promote their websites, they spread such stories that muster more views.”

Entrepreneur from Ozurgeti (47-year-old man): “It is spread, perhaps, because people who lack education and competence in this sphere analyze this or that issue and that’s where it is spread from.”

Unemployed from Kutaisi (48-year-old man): “It is driven by political aims; all speak in accordance with their political opinions and perhaps, they want to discriminate one another.”