

# ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE RESEARCH



# Anecdotal Evidence Research

## Researchers:

Irakli Iagorashvili (Telavi), Nika Gurin (Kvareli), Giorgi Rizhvadze (Khulo), Giorgi Bolkvadze (Batumi), Lusine Pichikyan (Akhalkalaki), Nato Inasaridze (Akhaltsikhe), Mariam Topchishvili (Gori), Teona Babutsidze (Tserovani)

## Questionnaire, methodology:

Tamar Kintsurashvili, Sopo Gelava

## Editor:

Tamar Kintsurashvili

*The present survey was prepared within the framework of the U.S. Embassy-supported project “Media Literacy Youth Lab for Responsible Media Consumption.” The opinions expressed in the document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi.*

## Introduction

Anecdotal evidence is evidence collected in an informal manner and relying heavily on personal experience<sup>1</sup>. There is a big difference between anecdotal evidence and scientific evidence. Scientific evidence is based on findings from systematic observations, measurement and experimentation and any person can independently verify or confirm it using the scientific method.

Anecdotal evidence proves based on personal experience and isolated examples whether this or that development or story is true or false. Since personal experience is the key basis for anecdotal evidence, unlike scientific evidence, it cannot be verified independently.

When people strongly believe that their opinions are true, they refer only to that information which further confirms their beliefs. It is called “predisposition” in the process of information searching.

We come across anecdotal evidence in our everyday life and any person we meet can be its source: a family member, neighbor, local shop cashier, hairdresser, taxi driver, etc.

The purpose of this research was to study the impact of disinformation and conspiracy theories on public perceptions and to analyze which anecdotal evidence is spread in the society regarding the West. The survey also aimed to study public attitudes towards some foreign policy issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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>

Contents

Methodology.....5

Key findings.....6

1. Common data.....7

1.1. Anecdotal evidence perceived by respondents as credible.....7

1.2. Information perceived by respondents as false.....8

2. Data by topics.....9

2.1. Physical security.....9

2.2. Territorial security.....13

2.3. Individual security.....15

2.4. Socio-economic security.....16

## Methodology

**Research issues.** Besides open-ended questions regarding the identification of spread of fake news, we also asked respondents structured questions in four directions: **1. Physical security; 2. Territorial security; 3. Individual security; and 4. Socio-economic security.**

**Table 1. Topics of questions**

Physical security	Territorial security	Individual security	Socio-economic security
1. Biological sabotage/viruses	1. Which country poses a threat to Georgia?	1. Who obliges us to accept migrants?	1. When was a citizen protected better - during the Soviet period or today?
2. Fear of war	2. What does the Treaty of Kars envisage?	2. What is the obligation imposed by the West on us?	2. Which market is more profitable – European or Russian?

The study was conducted through face-to-face interviews with 139 respondents in four regions of Georgia during July-August.

**Table 2. Number of respondents by cities**

Regions	Cities	#
Samtskhe-Javakheti	Akhalkalaki	17
	Akhaltzikhe	18
Adjara	Khulo	19
	Batumi	17
Kakheti	Kvareli	18
	Telavi	19
Shida Kartli	Gori	16
	Tserovani	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>139</b>

The interviews were conducted among three age groups: 18-35, 36-55, 55+. Both employed (private and public sectors) and unemployed respondents were selected from all the three age groups.

## Key findings

The study has revealed the following tendencies:

1. **Physical security.** Respondents proved to be most vulnerable to the conspiracy theories related to viruses and epidemics, during which they named six anecdotal evidence:
  1. Viruses/epidemics are spread with the purpose of seizing the territories/annihilating the population;
  2. Viruses/epidemics are spread from the Lugal Lab;
  3. Viruses/epidemics are spread through butterflies, flowers, fruits, trucks;
  4. Viruses/epidemics are brought from Turkey;
  5. Pharmaceutical companies, including Turkish ones, are interested in spreading viruses/epidemics;
  6. Georgia is used as a proving ground for drug testing.
2. **Territorial security (the Treaty of Kars).** 28 respondents (19.4%) believe that Georgia will lose Adjara as soon as the validity period for the Treaty of Kars expires. This conspiracy theory in certain cases proved credible for public servant, as well as historian.
3. **Individual security**
  - **A threat of assimilation.** 25 respondents (17.4%) believe that the European Union/the West obliges us to accept migrants.
  - **A threat of losing identity.** 20 respondents (13.9%) believe that the West obliges us to legalize same-sex marriage and change our values.
4. **Socio-economic security**

**Soviet Union vs. Freedom.** Respondents' answers to the question whether people were more protected during the Soviet period or today went beyond socio-economic issues, in some cases, and covered civil rights and security issues as well. Some respondents, including young people, believe that:

  1. The USSR was more protected from socio-economic point of view.
  2. The USSR was more secure, and the law was observed.
  3. Though human rights were not protected in the USSR, the environment was safe.
  4. Equality was ensured in the USSR.

**Russian market vs. European market.** When comparing Russian and European markets, respondents, who are skeptical towards European market, cited two reasons behind their skepticism:

1. Europe and the United States are far away, and Russian market is close and familiar.
2. Russian market is simpler.

### Information perceived by respondents as false

- Most of the fake news and disinformation messages (18) named by respondents were about Russia and Russian-occupied territories (Abkhazia, Samachablo) or a threat of possible resumption of hostilities.
- 11 fake news stories were named regarding Georgian media, including part of them was about exaggeration in news coverage by Rustavi 2 TV<sup>2</sup>.
- 10 respondents named fake news related to the Lugal Lab, vaccines and epidemics.
- 7 respondents named a threat of losing the territories, with 5 – referring to the conspiracy theories about the Treaty of Kars.

### Messages perceived by respondents as less credible

Respondents, who believe that it is absurd to provoke Russia by shouting NATO, substantiate their opinion with the following arguments:

1. Russia had been invading Georgia before the North Atlantic Alliance was founded.
2. An example of the Baltic States shows that the existence of NATO member states near the border with Russia does not mean provoking a war.
3. Russia is afraid of the fact that in case of Georgia's NATO membership, it will no longer be able to continue its creeping occupation.

### Media consumption habits

- Most respondents (74) failed to recollect concrete fake stories but noted that they have heard a lot of fake news.
- Most respondents focused on the information chaos created today, causing mistrust towards any types of information.
- Part of respondents stressed that the spread of fake news is connected with Russia's goals aimed to demonize the West, on the one hand, and to create favorable disposition towards Russia, on the other.

---

<sup>2</sup> The survey reflects the data for spring, when Rustavi 2 TV's pro-opposition editorial policy was not changed yet.

- Young respondents who realize the necessity of verifying fake news focused on their own share of responsibility, whereas respondents from older age groups said that they evaluate information based on their own experience.

## 1. OVERALL DATA

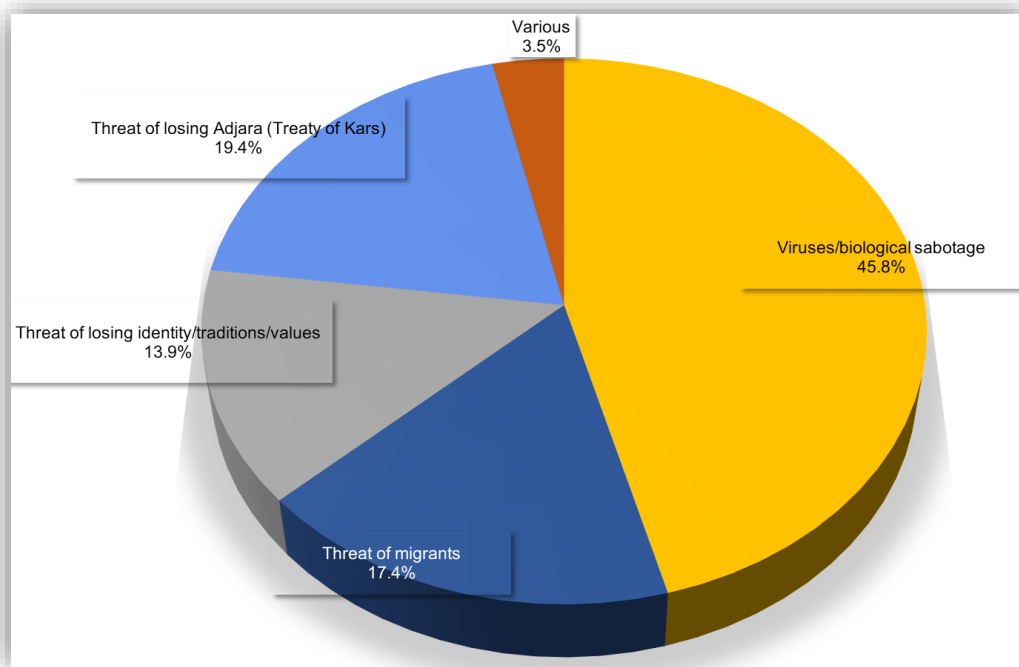


### 1.1. Anecdotal evidence perceived by respondents as credible

Speaking about the four main topics outlined in the survey, including 1. Physical security; 2. Territorial security; 3. Threat of assimilation; and 4. Socio-economic security, respondents named various conspiracy theories that they considered credible and that can be perceived as anecdotal evidence due to lack of evidence. In particular:

- The conspiracy theories, according to which viruses are spread artificially, whereas biological warfare and various agents are tested on us, proved most credible for part of respondents (45.8%, 66%, respectively)
- 28 people among surveyed respondents (19.4%) believe that Georgia will lose Adjara as soon as the validity period for the Treaty of Kars expires<sup>3</sup>.
- 25 respondents (17.4%) believe that the European Union/the West obliges us to accept migrants.
- 20 respondents (13.9%) believe that the West obliges us to legalize same-sex marriage and change our values.

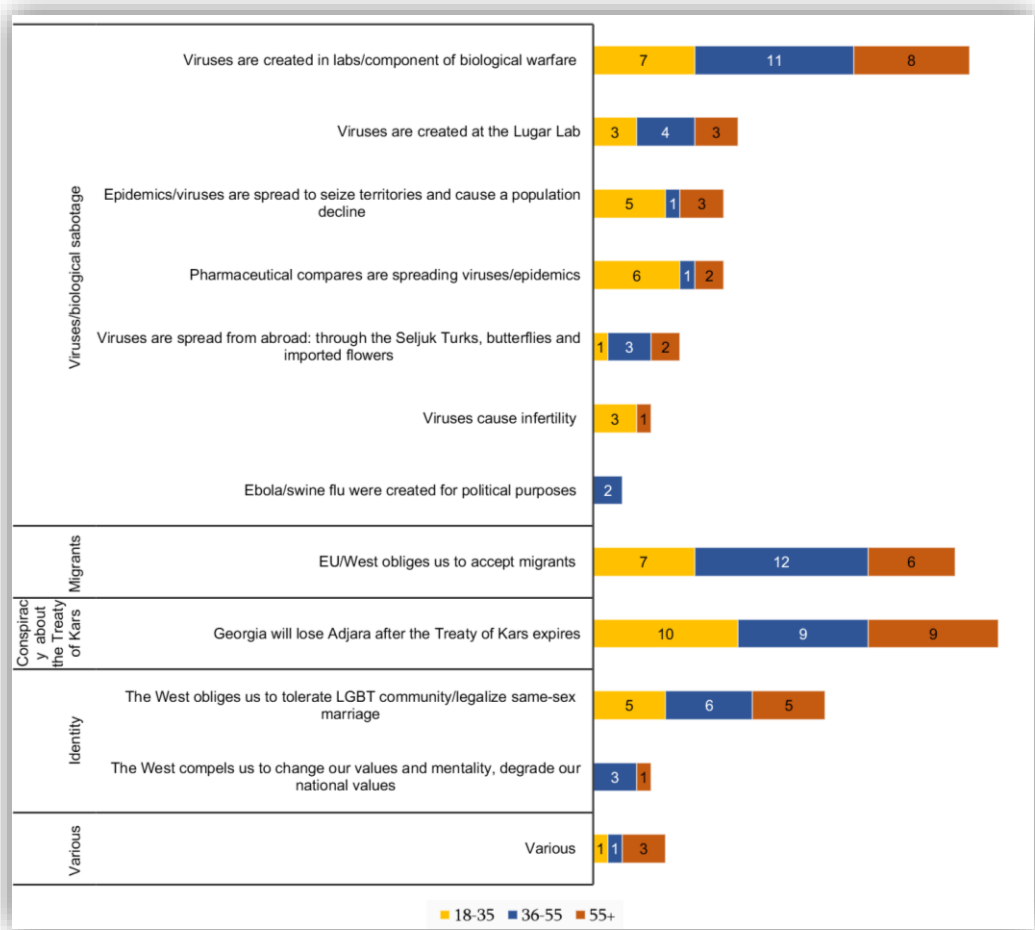
**Chart 1. Anecdotal evidence named by respondents**



The chart below clearly shows anecdotal evidence named by respondents during interviews. Speaking about viruses and biological threats, respondents focused on the threats of creation of viruses in labs and biological warfare, as well as the possibility of spreading viruses from abroad through the Seljuk Turks, butterflies and imported flowers.

<sup>3</sup> The Treaty of Kars was signed between Turkey, Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic and Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in the city of Kars on October 13, 1921. Under the treaty, Turkey handed over a part of Adjara, including the city of Batumi, as well as the city of Gyumri to the Soviet Union, receiving Kars, Artvin and Ardahan in exchange. <http://mythdetector.ge/ka/myth/dezinformatsia-potshi-natos-samkhedro-bazis-shesadzlo-gakhsnis-da-qarsis-khelshekrulebis>

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



1.2. Information perceived by respondents as false

Besides the conspiracy theories named by respondents on various topics, which they consider credible, we also asked them to name various fake news spread publicly.

Most of the respondents (74) failed to recollect concrete fake stories but noted that they have heard a lot of them; nine respondents noted that media cannot be trusted at all, because all media outlets are lying; three respondents said that they do not have enough time to verify; three more respondents noted that they will not be able to verify and only one respondent said that people should themselves explore the difference between a lie and a truth.

Other respondents (60) recollected a total of 65 fake news and disinformation messages, most of which (18) were related to Russia and Russian-occupied territories (Abkhazia, Samachablo) or a threat of possible resumption of hostilities. 11 fake news stories were named in respect of Georgian media, including part of them was about exaggeration in news coverage by Rustavi 2 TV<sup>4</sup>. 10 respondents named fake news related to the Lugar Lab, vaccines and epidemics. Seven respondents named a threat of losing the territories, with 5 – referring to the conspiracy theories about the Treaty of Kars, according to which Georgia will lose Adjara and the latter will join Turkey as soon as the validity period for the Treaty of Kars, signed in 1921, expires in 2021. Five fake news were named regarding the political parties, as well as five fake news concerning the deaths of Georgian singer Vakhtang (Buba) Kikabidze, French actor Alain Delon, ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili and other famous people. Only three respondents named a threat of losing identity and assimilation as a fake and manipulative message. Fake news concerning politicians mainly targeted

<sup>4</sup> The survey reflects the data for spring, when Rustavi 2 TV’s pro-opposition editorial policy was not changed yet.

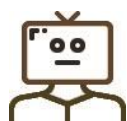


Georgian Dream leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili (“Ivanishvili has appropriated the sea”) and National Movement leader, Mikheil Saakashvili (“Saakashvili’s wife is involved in organ trade”).

**Table 1. Fake news topics named by respondents**

Fake news topics	Number
Fake news/assessments related to Russia, occupied territories	18
Fake news related to Georgian media	11
Conspiracy theories related to the Lugar Lab, vaccines and epidemics	10
Fake news related to the threat of losing territories	7
Fake news related to political parties/politicians	5
Fake news related to the deaths of famous people	5
Fake news related to the loss of identity/assimilation	3
Various	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>

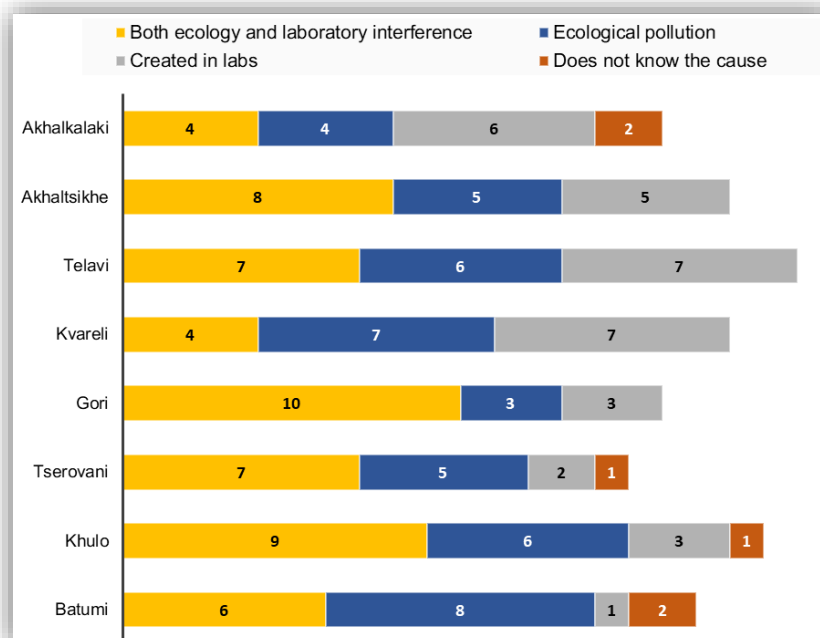
## 2. DATA BY TOPICS



### 2.1. Physical security

Respondents proved to be most vulnerable to the fears of physical threats caused by viruses and epidemics. Asked what causes viruses/epidemics, most of the respondents (55) cited environmental pollution as well as laboratory interference as the reason. They meant creation of viruses in labs. 44 respondents named environmental pollution, whereas 34 respondents strongly believe that viruses are created in labs. Moreover, six respondents said that they are not aware of the causes. Number of respondents who cited environmental pollution and creation of viruses in labs as the reason behind spreading viruses was highest in Gori (10) and Khulo (9). Number of respondents who cited creation of viruses in labs as the reason behind spreading viruses/epidemics was highest in Kakheti (7-7) and Akhalkalaki (6).

**Chart 3. What causes viruses/epidemics?**



Frequently, teachers also consider conspiracy theories about viruses credible. One of the respondents from Gori even noted that she had information about creation of viruses in labs from the school:

**Student, Gori (woman, 20):** "... The teacher of biology used to tell me that they [viruses] are created in labs."

Asked what causes viruses/epidemics, part of respondents named six conspiracy theories:

1. Viruses/epidemics are spread with the purpose of seizing the territories/annihilating the population;
2. Viruses/epidemics are spread from the Lugar Lab;
3. Viruses/epidemics are spread through butterflies, flowers, fruits, trucks;
4. Viruses/epidemics are brought from Turkey;
5. Pharmaceutical companies, including Turkish ones, are interested in spreading viruses/epidemics;
6. Georgia is used as a proving ground for drug testing.

It is worth noting that mainly respondents from Akhalkalaki named a threat of spreading viruses through butterflies.

<p>1. Viruses/epidemics are created and spread with the purpose of seizing the territories/annihilating the population;</p>	<p><b>Teacher, Batumi (woman, 28):</b> "...They are created, I would say, by representatives of that nation, which wants to seize the Georgian territories."</p> <p><b>Sociologist, Tserovani (woman, 26):</b> "It may even be a deliberate action, because number of population has increased so much on the earth."</p> <p><b>Driver/craftsman, Kvareli (man, 57):</b> "They create [the viruses] to achieve a population decline."</p> <p><b>Psychologist, Batumi (22):</b> "They have genetic laboratories in the countries, which do not want Georgians to grow."</p> <p><b>NGO employee, Batumi (man, 24):</b> "Viruses are part of globalization, which are spread at other locations. It first emerged when America was discovered, when they brought syphilis."</p> <p><b>Teacher, Kvareli (woman, 35):</b> "They spread [viruses] mainly in Asian countries, where the population is growing dramatically, or they may have certain interests towards the population. But Georgian population is so small that I do not think they will use this method of fighting against us."</p> <p><b>Engineering technologist, Akhalkalaki (man, 55):</b> "There are countries that have special labs where special viruses are created in order to cause harm to any country so that there is no need to use any weapon or other means against that country."</p> <p><b>Bank employee, Gori (man, 36):</b> "There are a lot of viruses created in labs for political purposes, among them, for example, Ebola or various H1N1 viruses spread throughout the world."</p>
<p>2. Viruses/epidemics are spread from the Lugar Lab</p>	<p><b>Reseller, Kvareli (woman, 35):</b> "They say that there is an underground lab somewhere in Ponichala and they create [viruses] there... what is their interest? They simply want to annihilate people, destroy Georgia and reduce number of people."</p> <p><b>Unemployed, Kvareli (woman, 52):</b> "People have become very feeble due to living in poverty... And something spread from the Lugar Lab from time to time largely promotes it... It is done deliberately to destruct and annihilate Georgia."</p> <p><b>Librarian, Telavi (woman, 47):</b> "I have read a lot of information [about the Lugar Lab]... and I do not want to believe that Georgian people should suffer from the virus created in Georgia."</p>
<p>3. Viruses/epidemics are spread through flowers, fruits, trucks</p>	<p><b>Accountant, Akhalkalaki (woman, 40):</b> "For example, when they released those butterflies here, what did it mean? People were covering their faces with hands, because they were releasing butterflies from boxes. Where is the guarantee that they do not spread viruses through those butterflies, or it is not an experiment on people?"</p> <p><b>Hairdresser, Akhalkalaki (woman, 35):</b> "For example, it was reported recently that viruses are spread through using butterflies."</p> <p><b>Postwoman, Akhalkalaki (woman, 40):</b> "For example, this year we had a butterfly invasion. It was very strange and therefore, we think that they were brought deliberately to spread viruses among people and cause certain diseases."</p> <p><b>Taxi driver, Batumi (man, 25):</b> "Even the fruit imported from abroad can become the reason; a lot of other things, even tourists."</p> <p><b>Student, Batumi (man, 20):</b> "...Some people say that they were brought by sea and others claim that they were brought by trucks. So, there are various versions."</p>

<p><b>4. Viruses/epidemics are brought from Turkey</b></p>	<p><b>Unemployed, Telavi (woman, 71):</b> “They are created in labs and then deliberately brought... I suppose that they are brought from Turkey.”</p> <p><b>Teacher, Kvareli (woman, 49):</b> “It is the result of opening the borders and allowing the Seljuk Turks in.”</p> <p><b>Financier, Tserovani (man, 26):</b> “Brown marmorated stink bug was also brought artificially and it can be explained by the fact that compared to Turkish market, nut business gained popularity in Georgia... So, it created the precondition for Georgian market to prevail over the Turkish market and this is what happened next.”</p> <p><b>Public servant, Kvareli (woman, 35):</b> “They are created artificially to cause harm to businesses of those people, who have grown nut plantations and so on. Brown marmorated stink bug has destroyed them, has not it?”</p>
<p><b>5. Pharmaceutical companies, including Turkish ones, are interested in spreading viruses/epidemics</b></p>	<p><b>Philologist, Khulo (woman, 42):</b> “They were importing medicines from Turkey for vaccination. So, it arouses doubts whether it has been created artificially to enrich certain business people.”</p> <p><b>Teacher, Kvareli (woman, 67):</b> “As far as we learn from social networks and other sources... it is the mechanism used by pharmacological mafia, who try to sell as much medicine as possible and to gain as much as possible.”</p> <p><b>Public servant, Kvareli (woman, 35):</b> “I think that swine flu has also been created artificially to sell their medicines.”</p> <p><b>Lawyer, Akhaltsikhe (woman, 50):</b> “I still think that they are created artificially, because the spread of virus is preceded by the spread of information about possible outbreak of this virus. And about two weeks after the spread of information, hospitals have to accept the increased number of infected people, who are then prescribed certain expensive medicines.”</p>
<p><b>6. Georgia is used as a proving ground for drug testing</b></p>	<p><b>Craftsman, Telavi (man, 38):</b> “The countries like Georgia are called the third category countries. So, they test everything on our people to see whether they are suitable for further use. This is my point of view and I believe that’s true.”</p> <p><b>NGO representative, Tserovani (woman, 23):</b> “For example, the programs on Hepatitis C elimination - initially, they are testing drugs and you are part of this experiment. The program on Hepatitis C vaccination was part of this experiment in our country; they actually provided us with free vaccines, but they did it for their own purposes in order to further treat this disease.”</p> <p><b>Economist, Akhalkalaki (woman, 53):</b> “They are carrying out experiments on people”.</p>

Respondents proved less vulnerable to the threat of war. Asked whether we are provoking Russia by frequently shouting NATO, a great majority of respondents (90) answered that shouting NATO will not lead to the war and that Russia has its own interests in the region. Only 31 out of 139 respondents believe that Georgia’s integration into NATO is equal to provoking Russia. Fewer respondents think that both Russia and the West have their own interests (7) and that Georgia benefits much by its relations with Russia (6). Only five respondents had no answer to the question. Number of respondents who believe that NATO means provoking Russia was highest in Khulo (7), Akhalkalaki (6) and Kvareli (5).

**Chart 4. Do we provoke Russia by frequently shouting NATO?**



Those respondents, who believe that it is absurd to provoke Russia by shouting NATO, substantiate their opinion with the following arguments:

1. Russia had been invading Georgia before the North Atlantic Alliance was founded.
2. An example of the Baltic States shows that the existence of NATO member states near the border with Russia does not mean provoking a war.
3. Russia is afraid of the fact that in case of Georgia's NATO membership, it will no longer be able to continue its creeping occupation.

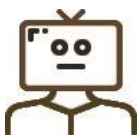
1. Russia had been invading Georgia before NATO was founded.	<p><b>Teacher, Telavi (woman, 47):</b> "There had been no NATO, but we know very well how Russia was treating us."</p> <p><b>Teacher, Kvareli (woman, 67):</b> "Russia sees no problem in any calls. It is basically a syndrome of an invader, who does not want to lose control over the territories which previously belonged to the Soviet Union."</p>
2. An example of the Baltic States shows that the existence of NATO member states near the border with Russia does not mean provoking a war.	<b>Biologist, Tserovani (woman, 48):</b> "No, I do not think that we are provoking Russia with NATO, because we have an example of the Baltic States... They were part of the Soviet space, but still they quit the Soviet Union and became NATO members... And these territories are located near their [Russian] border; no, it is simply a far-fetched issue."
3. Russia is afraid of the fact that in case of Georgia's NATO membership, it will no longer be able to continue its creeping occupation.	<b>Sociologist, Tserovani (woman, 26):</b> "It [Russia] sees no problem in such calls. It actually fears that if we join NATO... Russia will no longer be able to continue its creeping occupation."

Small part of respondents who believed that Georgia is provoking Russia, named the following arguments:

1. We are provoking Russia by shouting NATO.
2. We are provoking Russia by swearing at Putin.
3. Georgia becomes the victim of confrontation between two superpowers – the United States and Russia - and we'd better choose neutrality.

1. We are provoking Russia by shouting NATO.	<p><b>Teacher, Khulo (woman, 49):</b> "I think we are provoking. I do not support Georgia's losing of its independence... but it is still necessary to maintain normal neighborly relations with a neighboring country."</p> <p><b>Housewife, Khulo (woman, 56):</b> "I think, we had very good relations with Russia previously and what irritates Russia today is that we choose the United States and NATO".</p>
2. We are provoking Russia by swearing at Putin.	<p><b>Teacher, Khulo (45, women):</b> "Using swear words publicly is not good. Even the fact, when Gabunia<sup>5</sup> went out and swore publicly; I do not welcome such things; but everyone knows that Russia is an occupier and our sworn enemy."</p> <p><b>Student, Kvareli (woman, 20):</b> "Many things are happening in Georgia that may irritate Russia. For example, swearing during live broadcast, also what happened during Misha [ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili], when he swore at Putin and so on. Such things really irritate Russia."</p> <p><b>School pupil, Gori (boy, 18):</b> "Russia has other problems, but it is unacceptable to treat Russia in a way, like Giorgi Gabunia did recently, when he swore at Putin."</p>
3. Georgia becomes the victim of confrontation between two superpowers – the United States and Russia - and we'd better choose neutrality.	<p><b>Historian, Tserovani (woman, 33):</b> "In fact, it is the Russian-American war, but they do not admit it and we are crushed between the two states. We, a small country, apparently prefer neutrality."</p> <p><b>Driver and craftsman, Kvareli (man, 57):</b> "Georgia is the richest country; the United States is moving towards Georgia and the Russians do not give them this right. So, we will be crushed between the two states."</p> <p><b>NGO representative, Batumi (man, 24):</b> "It would be better if we were a neutral country... and disarmament would be better, because neither our, nor the U.S. armament will help us stop Russia."</p> <p><b>Teacher, Akhaltsikhe (woman, 55):</b> "Both Russia and the West know well the benefits of such calls. Simply, people are crushed between."</p>

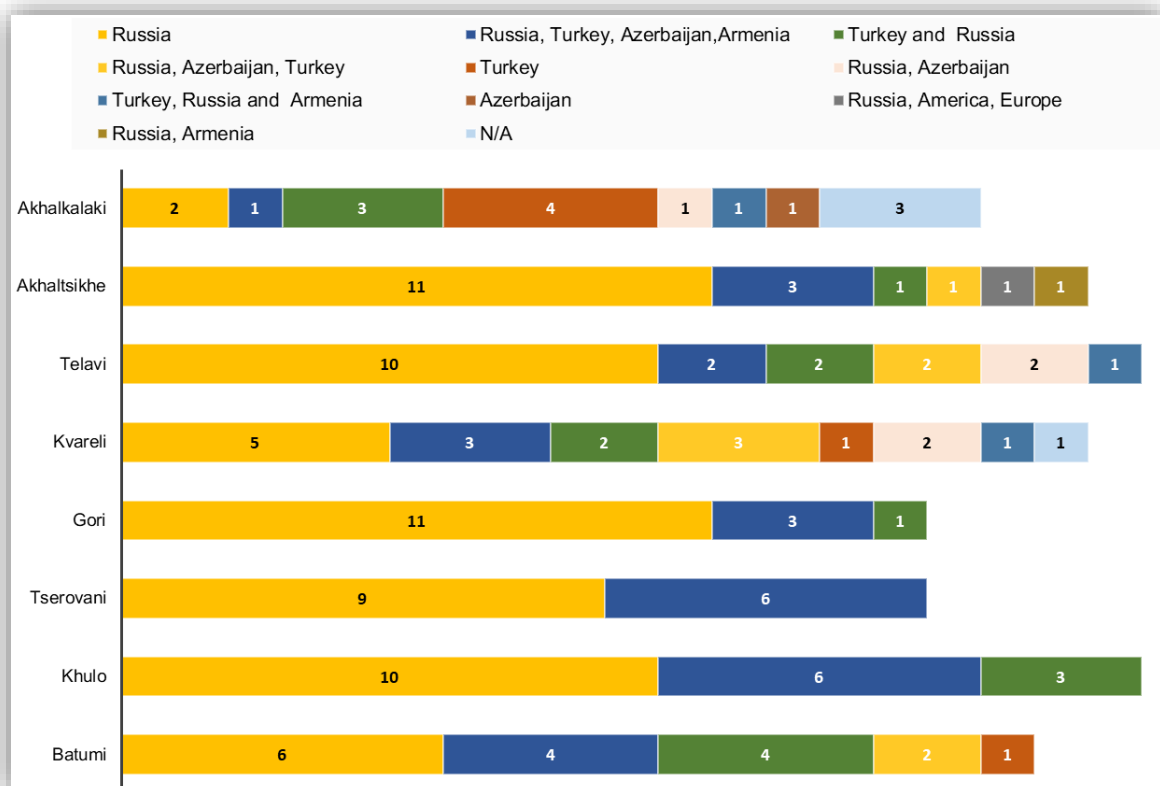
<sup>5</sup> Giorgi Gabunia, Rustavi TV 2 host, used swear words against Russian President Vladimir Putin during live broadcast.



## 2.2. Territorial security

Asked which country poses a threat to Georgian borders, most respondents (64) openly named Russia. Moreover, as chart 5 shows, Russia is featuring among all other neighboring countries in the list of threats. 28 out of 139 respondents noted that all the four neighbors (Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Armenia) pose a threat to Georgian borders. Six respondents named Turkey as a threat and only one respondent named Azerbaijan. Moreover, the both countries were featuring in the list of threats along with other neighbors. One respondent named Europe and the United States, along with Russia, as a threat to Georgian borders. Six respondents had no answer to this question. As the chart shows, only few respondents named Russia (2) and Turkey (4) as a threat in Akhalkalaki; number of respondents who named only Russia as a threat is highest is Akhaltsikhe (11), Gori (11), Telavi (10) and Kvareli (10). Number of respondents who named all the four neighbors as a threat is highest in Khulo (6) and Tserovani (6).

**Chart 5. Which country poses a threat to Georgian borders?**



Those respondents, who named Russia as the only threat to Georgian borders, focused on the fact that both the incumbent Russian government and the opposition have imperialistic attitudes.

**Teacher, Telavi (woman, 67):** “Russia is an imperialistic state. I just read yesterday that [Alexei] Navalny, President Putin’s opposition, also states that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are independent states; so, it does not matter to us. Generally, Russia is an invader.”

Part of respondents focused on historical enmity, claiming that all neighbors have been hostile to Georgia since ancient times:

**Private sector employee, Batumi (woman, 48):** “Our neighboring countries had always been hostile to Georgia since ancient times.”

Two messages were dominating among the respondents who named Turkey as a threat:

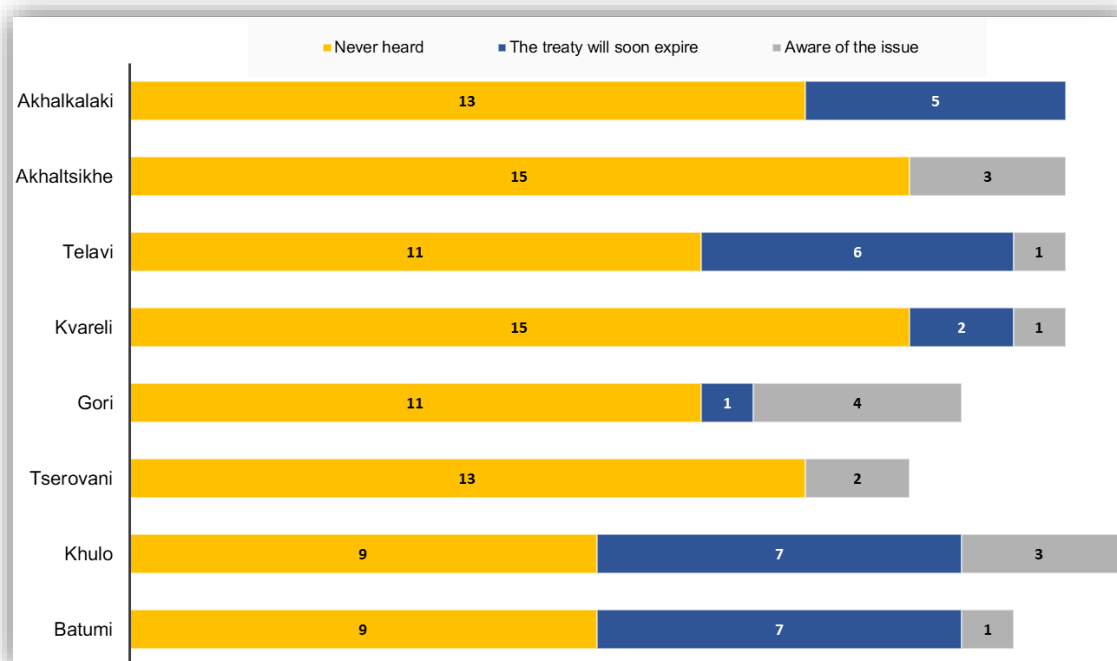
1. Russia and Turkey are equally fighting against Georgia.
2. Turkey is still dangerous due to a historical trauma.

The third threat according to which the border with Turkey is unprotected was mainly named in Akhalkalaki with cattle stealing cited as the main reason and Russian troops – as the main guarantor of border protection.

1. Russia and Turkey are equally fighting against Georgia.	<b>Unemployed, Batumi (woman, 22):</b> “Both Russia and Turkey are fighting against our borders. The borders are close and they both are fighting equally.”
2. Turkey is still dangerous due to a historical trauma.	<b>Lawyer, Akhaltsikhe (woman, 50):</b> “... As a whole, we are bordered by Turkey and those countries, with whom we had continuous wars and therefore, we still have such fears.”
3. The border with Turkey is unprotected.	<b>Accountant, Akhalkalaki (woman, 40):</b> “Do you know what creates problems? For example, when Turkish citizens steal cattle from our village.”  <b>Psychologist, Akhalkalaki (woman, 45):</b> “When the Russian base was deployed in [Akhalkalaki], the border was very protected... For example, residents of a neighboring country may steal cattle. I mean the Turkish-Georgian border.”

As part of the study, we tried to clarify how vulnerable our respondents are to the conspiracy theories related to the Treaty of Kars, according to which the validity period for the treaty expires in 2021, Russia will no longer guarantee Georgia’s territorial integrity and Turkey will regain control over Adjara. Thus, we asked them a question about what they know about the Treaty of Kars. Most of the respondents (96) said they know nothing, whereas 28 respondents noted that the treaty will soon expire, enabling Turkey to invade Georgia and seize its territories. Only 15 respondents were aware of the issue. As chart 6 shows, number of respondents who believe in expiration of the validity period is highest in Batumi and Khulo (7 respondents each), as well as Telavi (6) and Akhalkalaki (5).

**Chart 6. What do you know about the Treaty of Kars?**



It is worth noting that both a public servant and a historian believe in the conspiracy theory according to which the Treaty of Kars will expire in 2020, prompting Turkey to regain its control over Adjara.

**Public servant, Khulo (man, 32):** “Its validity will expire in 2020 and let’s see what will happen.”

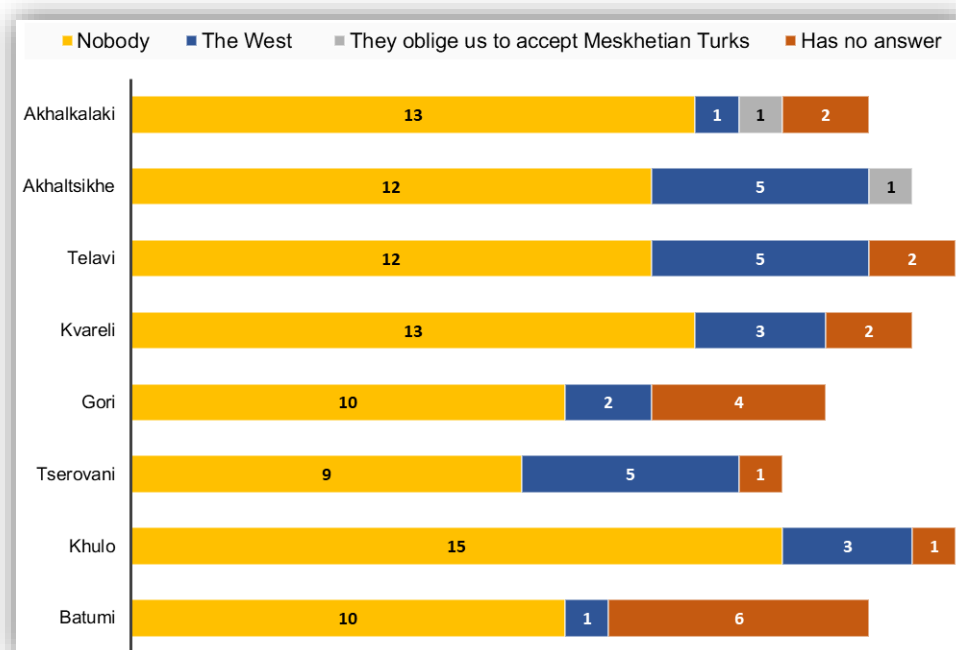
**Historian, Telavi (man, 64):** “I have heard that its expiration date is approaching and that is why I mentioned Turkey; I am concerned about it.”



## 2.3. INDIVIDUAL SECURITY

Most of the respondents (94) do not think that Georgia has an obligation to accept migrants and only 25 respondents say that the West imposes such an obligation on us. In addition, two respondents from Samtskhe-Javakheti named the obligation on accepting Meskhetian Turks – they apparently meant the obligation undertaken by the Georgian government on repatriation of Meskhetian Turks deported by Stalin's regime in the 1940s. 18 respondents had no answer to this question. According to the data by regions, number of respondents who believe that the West has imposed an obligation on accepting migrants is highest in Akhaltsikhe (5), Telavi (5) and Tserovani (5).

**Chart 7. Who obliges us to accept migrants?**



The following attitudes were revealed in respect of migrants:

1. Muslim/Chinese migrants pose a threat.
2. Europe/USA obliges us to accept migrants with the purpose of global assimilation.

### 1. Muslim/Chinese migrants pose a threat.

**Librarian, Telavi (woman, 47):** "I especially do not welcome the representatives of Muslim world, Arabs, Iranians, who arrive and settle down here... Even a single inch of our land should not be sold to Muslims, Chinese, Indians and Arabs."

**Teacher, Kvareli (woman, 49):** "I am in favor of expelling all of them. It's terrible. I do not arrive in Tbilisi frequently, but I arrived last year and there was no place to walk, they all are wrapped in clothes with only eyes seen; it is impossible to distinguish whether it is a man or a woman."

**Student, Kvareli (woman, 20):** "It contains a threat because number of Georgians is declining... For example, the Chinese – there is no place for them in their homeland and therefore, they are arriving here... Before we wake up, a Chinese already has five children."

### 2. Europe/USA obliges us to accept migrants with the purpose of global assimilation.

**Nurse, Tserovani (woman, 41):** "I think, the United States compels us to accept them."  
**Unemployed, Kvareli (woman, 52):** "Europe is interested in global assimilation and I am against it. It irritates me much."

**Lawyer, Akhaltsikhe (woman, 50):** "As far as I know, an agreement has been signed recently and a certain number of migrants should arrive in Georgia, I think, people of African origin and Meskhetian Turks as well."

Those respondents, who think that the West does not oblige us to accept migrants, suppose that illegal migration is underway from Georgia and to Georgia and it is not part of any international or interstate agreements:



**Housewife, Tserovani (woman, 70):** “Like we move freely and nobody is forced to accept us, probably the same with them.”

We additionally asked respondents what are the obligations imposed by the West on Georgia. Part of them outlined the following issues:

1. Same-sex marriage and tolerance for homosexuality.
2. Revaluation of national values, rejecting traditions and identity.

<p><b>1. Same-sex marriage and tolerance for homosexuality</b></p>	<p><b>Unemployed, Kvareli (woman, 52):</b> “A certain obligation, like these LGBT people have appeared and Europe is interested in it - we should like them whether or not we want it.”</p> <p><b>Specialist in international relations, Akhalkalaki (man, 29):</b> “Yes [it obliges us], for example, LGBT rallies, which are accepted in Europe and are considered normal there; I think, it will not be normal for our society and it represents a problem.”</p> <p><b>Student, Gori (man, 21):</b> “... to be more democratic and less conservative country... In fact, it [homosexuality] really is a disease and ... they are trying to provoke it.”</p> <p><b>Craftsman, Telavi (man, 38):</b> ... “They are compelling us to do it, while even the EU member states do not do it. First of all, this homophobia and transphobia – you are forced to accept and love it, while your own traditions are not taken into consideration.”</p> <p><b>Guide, Kvareli (woman, 34):</b> “It will gradually impose its ideas on us, be it legalization of marijuana or same-sex marriage. Nobody says anything publicly so far, but it already sets its ultimatums...”</p>
<p><b>2. Revaluation of values, rejecting traditions and identity</b></p>	<p><b>Accountant, Akhalkalaki (woman, 40):</b> “Why not, they are obliging us to automatically change our thinking, mentality. Of course, they are not coming and saying openly that we should change ourselves. They create such conditions that you feel there is no place for you here.”</p> <p><b>Teacher, Khulo (woman, 49):</b> “The West, probably, obliges us to reevaluate our values and to bring them closer to European standards... It happens in itself that we are losing our national values. They demand us to resemble them and it is normal, but their progress is accompanied by huge regress, is not it so?... We are losing here something that is so valuable to us: our art, culture...”</p>

Besides young people, there were respondents from older age group who suppose that Europe, which is based on two fundamental principles – human rights and the rule of law – offers Georgia to promote and introduce these values to ensure its return to the European family, whereas the country’s democratization depends only on internal actors and nobody else will do what Georgian citizens should do themselves:

**Pensioner, Gori (man, 67):** “The rule of law is paramount in Europe, human rights protection – these are two basic principles on which Europe stands historically. So, they do not oblige us to do it, but rather tell us that we should achieve this or that through this way... They cannot come and build it instead of you.”

**Pharmacist, Khulo (man, 61):** “The West turns us around towards yet to be achieved democracy... Only shouting that I want in Europe will bring nothing. We have an obligation to keep step with democracy.”



## 2.4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC SECURITY

To clarify whether our citizens have a feeling of social-economic security, we asked them two questions:

1. When was a citizen protected better - during the Soviet period or today?
2. Which market is more profitable – European or Russian?

1. On the Soviet Union, respondents’ answers, in some cases, went beyond socio-economic issues and covered civil rights and security issues as well. A dichotomy was revealed, when on the one hand, respondents spoke about the present advantages of human rights protection, and on the other, praised the Soviet Union for its ability to protect against external threats largely due to its closed borders. It is worth noting that in some cases older people were more critical towards the Soviet Union than young people who had heard information about USSR’s socio-economic security from older people.



The following main messages were revealed on this topic:

1. The USSR was more protected from socio-economic point of view.
2. The USSR was more secure, and the law was observed.
3. Though human rights were not protected in the USSR, the environment was safe.
4. Equality was ensured in the USSR.

<p><b>The USSR was more protected from socio-economic point of view</b></p>	<p><b>Student, Telavi (woman, 19):</b> “They had everything then. I can say what I have heard: people were really protected then and they cared for the country. Now, the government thinks only of itself. Human rights were protected. Citizens did not do what they were prohibited to do.”</p> <p><b>Student, Batumi (woman, 22):</b> “Old people say that the situation was better in the Soviet Union, because there were more jobs, the environment was better and people earned their money themselves. Now, everything has changed.”</p> <p><b>Doctor, Akhalkalaki (women, 47):</b> “The situation was stable; we were confident about tomorrow; there was no unemployment; people were equal. They knew that they would get free education, free medical aid and services, jobs after graduation, as well as free apartments from the state.”</p>
<p><b>The USSR was more secure, and the law was observed</b></p>	<p><b>Student, Kvareli (woman, 20):</b> “Everything was based on the order in the Soviet Union; there were many restrictions, but ultimately you were protected. You were controlled by law. I have not lived in the Soviet Union and I cannot say... but what is happening today in terms of security, I do not feel secure now.”</p> <p><b>Private sector, Telavi (woman, 40):</b> “I think that security was better ensured then, especially as no crimes were committed... They were afraid of prisons and now there are a lot of criminals”.</p> <p><b>Unemployed, Khulo (man, 20):</b> “Those countries united in the USSR were protected ... there were few threats, because they occupied one fourth of the earth.”</p> <p><b>Librarian, Telavi (woman, 47):</b> “When we were part of the Soviet Union, we used to travel to Moscow for holidays. My parents used to go shopping to GUM [main department store in Moscow] and we felt very comfortable... Today, I have no feeling of security. I may go out and become a victim of attack. I do not feel protected at all.”</p> <p><b>Housewife, Gori (woman, 49):</b> “We mainly were under the patronage of Russia. We had good relations with Russia in that period and there were no such wars and grabbed territories then. ”</p>
<p><b>Though human rights were not protected in the USSR, the environment was safe</b></p>	<p><b>Psychologist, Batumi (woman, 22):</b> “A citizen was not protected in the Soviet Union, but the environment was safer than now... Right now, an individual may face a huge threat, but you have the right to protect yourself, while there was no freedom of speech during the Soviet period.”</p> <p><b>Journalist, Tserovani (woman, 41):</b> “Individual freedoms were not protected, but human calmness was really protected.”</p>
<p><b>Equality was ensured in the USSR</b></p>	<p><b>Accountant, Akhalkalaki (woman, 40):</b> “Since I had to live in the Soviet Union, I can say that I felt secure. Why? Because nobody asked you, whether you were Armenian, Georgian or Russian or whether you had the right to live here. When you talk about something, they may tell you that ‘it is our territory.’ When you travel to Russia, they may also tell you that ‘it is our territory, go and live for yourself.’ When you travel to Armenia, some people may tell you ‘go and live in your Georgia.’ There is no place for our people living in Georgia.”</p>

Respondents who focused on human inequality and human rights violations in the Soviet Union mainly belonged to older age groups.

<p>There was no equality in the USSR</p>	<p><b>Teacher, Telavi (woman, 67):</b> “I myself grew up in the family living on salaries; therefore, I cannot praise the Soviet Union, because only those people lived well there who were stealing money from the State.”</p> <p><b>Biologist, Tserovani (woman, 48):</b> “The government kept people in information vacuum under conditions of so called “uravnilovka” [egalitarianism]... All people should have lived similarly, under similar rules. The State was dictating everything, even the menu... For example, Thursday was a fish day. Simply, people had a sense of stability; but do not we know about the story of Nazi Shamanauri, the story of Solzhenitsyn or Merab Kostava; do not we know about the existence of Archipelago, Gulag, lots of cases of nepotism, corruption or other harms?”</p>
<p>Human rights are better protected today than during the Soviet period</p>	<p><b>Musician, Gori (man, 46):</b> “A person did not represent anything then, just a bolt in the communist mechanism. People had no rights. Now, you have the rights. At least, you can go out on Rustaveli Avenue and pull your pants down and nobody will hold you answerable for that.”</p> <p><b>Private sector employee, Batumi (woman, 48):</b> “Human rights, freedom of speech and other things are better protected today than during the Soviet period. A lot of topics were simply tabooed.”</p> <p><b>Philologist, Khulo (woman, 50):</b> “The situation is relatively better now, because you can protect yourself and have your say. People were very oppressed then; the entire generation was oppressed because they really had no right to say anything.”</p> <p><b>Philologist, Khulo (woman, 42):</b> “Today, people are more aware about their rights and obligations and can manage themselves... For example, I wanted to acquire another profession, but my family decided that I would be a good teacher ... I could not make the same with my child. So, what I want to say is that I am the successor of communists.”</p>

When comparing Russian and European markets, respondents, who are skeptical towards European market, cited two reasons behind their skepticism:

1. Europe and the United States are far away, and Russian market is close and familiar.
2. Russian market is simpler.

<p>Europe and the United States are far away, and Russian market is close and familiar</p>	<p><b>Driver, Telavi (man, 59):</b> “I served in the army in Russia; I am a truck driver and I used to travel to Russia and backwards by truck. Now, I cannot travel to the United States. There was more work in Russia, including “otkats” [kickback payments].”</p> <p><b>Housewife, Khulo (woman, 56):</b> “Farmers always preferred Russian [market]. It was close and we could easily travel. Now, if a farmer decides to travel to the United States, he will never be able to earn enough money even for an air ticket.”</p> <p><b>Distributor, Kvareli (man, 28):</b> “Russian [market]. You will export your fruit, they are close. How can you get to Europe?”</p> <p><b>Artist, Batumi (man, 61):</b> “We cannot export anything to the United States. Russian market is acceptable for farmers.”</p> <p><b>Engineering technologist, Akhalkalaki (man, 55):</b> “Before they export goods to Europe, America or other destinations, they will rather suffer losses than gain any profits.”</p>
<p>Russian market is simpler</p>	<p><b>Student, Telavi (woman, 19):</b> “...It is more acceptable for Georgian farmers. It is easier for them to export their products to Russia.”</p> <p><b>Pensioner, Kvareli (woman, 89):</b> “Russian, because people like [alcoholic] drinks there; they can sell everything there.”</p>

However, there were some respondents who focused on the instability of Russian market.

#### Russian market is unstable

**Teacher, Telavi (woman, 47):** “We have a very bad experience and we know that Russia is an important market even for big countries, but it is an unreliable partner, especially for weak countries like Georgia, as Russia wraps up this market and economic relations in politics. Georgian farmers will improve their living standards if they gain access to European markets. And it requires much more work. We, Georgians, should learn how to produce high quality goods and I think the European market is much larger than the Russian market and what is most important, it requires the countries to produce high quality goods.”

#### Media consumption habits

Most respondents focused on the information chaos created today, causing mistrust towards any types of information.

**Historian, Tserovani (woman, 33):** “What I think is true is false and vice versa, what I think is false appears true.”

**Teacher, Kvareli (woman, 67):** “A lot of fake news stories are being spread and one cannot find the difference between main and secondary news... Today, we are facing information warfare – information vacuum, on the one hand, and terrible information warfare, on the other.”

**Teacher, Telavi (woman, 47):** “I do not claim that this is true even if I look at something with my own eyes.”

**Teacher, Khulo (woman, 49):** “One cannot rely on mass media and believe what they tell you.”

**Journalist, Tserovani (woman, 41):** “I think that all of them are fake news and I look at them doubtfully. I even perceive the truth as a lie.”

Part of respondents stressed that the spread of fake news is connected with Russia’s goals aimed to demonize the West, on the one hand, and to create favorable disposition towards Russia, on the other.

**Teacher, Telavi (woman, 47):** “Generally, any fake news serves to promote any public opinion, either negative or positive... Today, there are politicians and members of society who say that had we had no relationship with Russia and had Russia never existed we would have been in great peril. This serves the aim of making people inclined towards Russia; or, for example, when they say that if we join NATO this would be a disaster, this serves the aim of forming negative attitudes in society.”

**Specialist in international relations, Khulo (man, 25):** “This fake news aims to strengthen anti-Western sentiments in Georgia and to promote pro-Russian political forces and chauvinist attitudes.”

Young respondents who realize the necessity of verifying fake news focused on their own share of responsibility:

**School pupil, Khulo (boy, 18):** “You need to verify, because then you will tell others about it.”

Respondents from older age groups said that they evaluate information based on their own experience.

**Philologist, Khulo (woman, 42):** “We have already learned which is fake news and which is not and I guess by its headline whether it is worth reading at all.”

**Pensioner, Gori (man, 65):** “Falseness and truth have existed during the entire history of mankind... because press is free; everyone enjoys freedom of speech and expression. When you read something, you should guess whether it is true or false.”