

IRI survey reveals 61% of respondents want to see new parties in upcoming elections

By NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

The International Republican Institute (IRI Georgia) survey, which was published on August 2, was conducted during the period of 15-30 June 2021 by the IRI Center for Studies and Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organization representative, the fieldwork was carried out by IPM.

Data was collected using a stratified multistage random sampling method through face-to-face interviews. The sample included 1,500 respondents with voting rights and age. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, and settlement size. The margin of error is +/- 2.5%; the response rate - 74%. The study became possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development.

According to a newest survey, 60% of respondents believe that the United States is the most important political partner for Georgia, 56% consider the EU to be Georgia's most important political partner, 32% say that it's Ukraine, 11% - Russia, Turkey - 10%, Armenia - 5%, China - 4%, Iran - 1%, None of the countries - 3%.

When asked which countries pose a political threat to Georgia, 79% answered that Russia is a threat to the country. To the question - do you support the future dialogue with Russia, 56% fully support, 22% partially support, 9% partially oppose, 11% categorically oppose, 3% have no answer.

However, when asked which countries are the most important economic part-



According to the IRI poll, if local elections were held next week, 26% of respondents would vote for the Georgian Dream, 14% for the National Movement, and 9% for the Party for Georgia.

ners for Georgia, 44% said that the EU; The United States has the same percentage - 44%.

Another question was - how do you assess the current government's attempt

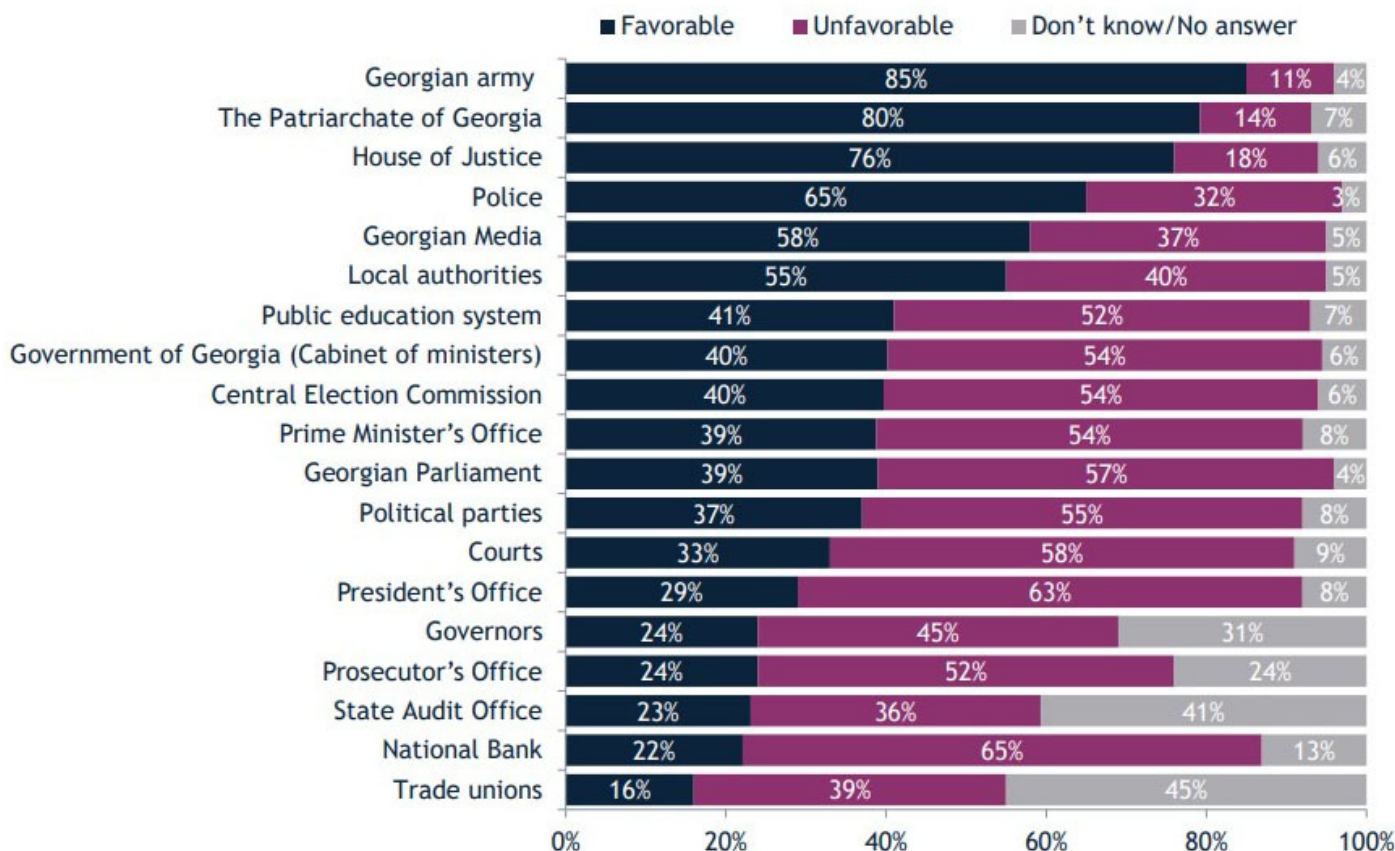
to normalize Georgia's relations with Russia - in total, 23% of respondents assessed it positively. These attempts are categorically unacceptable to 70% of respondents.

When asked about Georgia's foreign policy course, 32% think that it is only pro-European and Western; 52% answered that they are pro-Western, but by maintaining relations with Russia; 6% - pro-Russian, but maintaining relations with the EU and the West; 3% - only pro-Russian.

68% of respondents fully support Georgia's integration into the European Union, 15% partially support it. Overall, rapprochement with the EU is acceptable for 83%. In total, only 11% of respondents are against EU membership. A total of 77% of respondents support NATO membership and 17% don't.

As for the internal political situation,

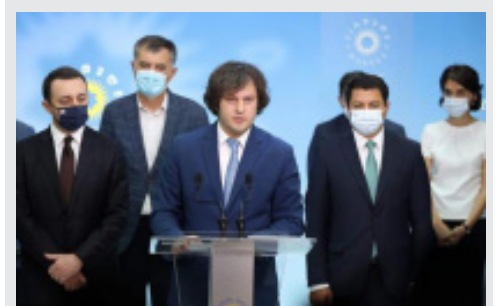
Now I am going to read out the names of some Georgian institutions and organizations. Please tell me your opinion about the work of each of these institutions:*



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Opinion & Analysis

Georgian Dream annuls Charles Michel agreement



FULL STORY ON Page 2

Georgian Dream annuls Charles Michel agreement

By MALKHAZ MATSABERIDZE

On July 28, the Georgian Dream took an unexpected step for many - the party left the April 19 agreement, the document which the President of the Council of Europe, Charles Michel developed after a long process negotiating the two sides.

The agreement was annulled 100 days after signing. This move by the current Georgian government has created a new political reality, to which an urgent response is needed from the opposition and the Western friends involved in the agreement.

The April 19 agreement was a solution to the six-month political crisis that erupted in Georgia after the 2020 parliamentary elections. By signing this document, the Georgian Dream once again gained the trust of its Western friends and introduced the boycotted opposition into parliament.

The April 19 agreement was a 'road map' that was supposed to correct the undemocratic shortcomings of Georgia's political system and make way for the country's potential EU membership.

This document was primarily intended to establish democratic standards for the conduct of elections and to establish an independent judiciary. It was clear that this posed a threat to an authoritarian system imitating democracy.

The first steps towards the implementation of the April 19 agreement have received serious criticism from the opposition and Western friends. The opposition criticized the Amnesty Law, prepared by Georgian Dream,



which also applied to perpetrators of the June 20 violence. As for the continuation of the process of appointing judges before the start of the reform of the judiciary, it was not approved by the Western friends either.

The opposition criticized the Georgian Dream for failing to properly implement the April 19 agreement, but somehow the issue was not properly addressed. The key point for them in the April 19 agreement was that the local self-government elections scheduled for the fall would serve as a referendum - if the Georgian Dream failed to get 43% of the proportional vote, then early parliamentary elections would be called in 2022.

In the snap elections, the opposition predicted victory and the replacement of the Georgian

Dream with a coalition government. Recently, one of the main questions has been whether the Georgian Dream would have collected this 43% in the local self-government elections. According to experts, precisely because, according to various preliminary polls, the party could not collect this number of votes, it decided to cancel the April 19 agreement and blame it on the opposition, in particular, the UNM.

Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairman of the Georgian Dream, also said that with the cancellation of the April 19 agreement, the country would return to 'constitutional mode' and, if they wished, would hold snap elections if the opposition expressed a desire for 'constructive cooperation.'

A week before this decision, at an international conference in

Batumi, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili assured Charles Michel, who had arrived there, of the party's commitment to the agreement reached. When and how was the decision to withdraw from the April 19 agreement made? It has been made clear that Bidzina Ivanishvili is the only important decision-maker in the Georgian Dream.

By canceling the agreement on April 19, the Georgian Dream insulted Charles Michel and Georgia's Western partners, who made great efforts to reach this agreement and attached great importance to its implementation.

Representatives of the opposition in Georgia spoke about the inevitability of imposing sanctions from the West. It was also said that the cancellation of the

April 19 agreement is tantamount to Yanukovich's refusal to sign a partnership agreement with the European Union in Ukraine. Consequently, the current Georgian government has abandoned its Western orientation and opened the way to Russia.

The first statements of the opposition showed that the decision of the ruling party was unexpected for them. Some believe that the opposition, which entered parliament based on the April 19 agreement, should leave the parliament immediately, while others believe that they should boycott the local self-government elections. According to some, Western friends should be given time to return the Georgian Dream to the format of the agreement. The main thing is that the decision of the opposition is not made on an emotional basis and its main part is being able to act together. Local elections will still be held and some opposition parties will still participate in it, which means that a boycott is not the right move.

However, it is also a reality that the elections will not end in a constructive mode. The attack on the media, which started on July 5, started with the raid of unprecedented media and the financial audit of Mtavari Arkhi.

Attacks and violence on the media have become a 'public protest' and the government has distanced itself from these facts, while representatives of the Georgian Dream themselves consider the critical media to be a 'political force' acting at the behest of the opposition. Political polarization is deepening as expected before the upcoming elections.

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62% of respondents think that the country is going in the wrong direction, while 26% think the country is heading in the right direction. 45% are satisfied with the current degree of democracy in Georgia, 51% do not share this statement. When asked how they would assess the current mood of the Georgian population, the answers were distributed as follows: Optimistic - 54% of respondents; Neutral - 34%; Pessimistic - 9%.

Polls mostly focused on up-

coming elections: 75% of respondents plan to vote in local elections in October 2021. 6% have already decided not to go to the polls and will not vote - they are critical of the election and say they do not trust the election process, the election is not important to them, no party or candidate deserves support.

61% of respondents say they want to see new political parties and 31% are satisfied with the existing political choice. Respondents were also asked whether they agree or disagree with the following sentence: "Is it healthy for a Georgian democracy to have many parties in power?" - 51% strongly agree, 26% partially agree, 9% partially disagree, 8% strongly disagree.

According to an IRI survey, 51% are in favor of early elections, while 37% don't see the

need for early parliamentary elections.

IRI also asked respondents which party they would vote for if the October local elections were held next week.

The answers were distributed as follows: "Georgian Dream" has 26% support, followed by "National Movement" with 14%; Gakharia's For Georgia - 9%, Natelashvili's Labor Party - 3%, Japaridze's Girchi, Vashadze's Strategy Builder, Lelo, Patriots Alliance and Aleko Elisashvili "Citizens" have 2-2% support.

Levan Vasadze's party, European Georgia, Ana Dolidze's party, Elene Khoshtaria movement and Girchi have 1-1%. 1% - other parties. 5% of respondents wouldn't vote for any party, the answer to the question "I do not know" was given by 20%, and 7% refused to an-

swer.

Meanwhile, 30% of respondents would not vote for the National Movement under any circumstances, 24% wouldn't vote for the Georgian Dream, 10% - Girchi and the Patriots Alliance.

14% of respondents are confident that the next elections will be held in a free and fair environment, 38% believe that it is likely to be so, 25% think that it will not be free and fair, 13% categorically rule out that the next elections in October will be free and fair, 9% have no answer to the question or no answer.

As for the rating of Public figures, 88% of respondents like Patriarch Ilia II very much, Kakha Kaladze, the mayor of the capital and the mayoral candidate of the Georgian Dream, has the rating of 58% of the respondents very much, and Giorgi

Gakharia, and Former Prime Minister and Chairman of the Party for Georgia, is very much liked by 56% of respondents. Next comes current PM Irakli Gharibashvili with the rating of 40%, followed by Nika Melia, the chairman of the United National Movement and the party's Tbilisi mayoral candidate with 39%.

According to an IRI survey, 54% of the respondents are satisfied with the activities of the Tbilisi Mayor and 43% are dissatisfied.

Given the current epidemic situation in the country, it's important that the number of Georgian citizens who oppose the COVID-19 vaccine is increasing - 45% of citizens say they will not get the vaccine. This figure has increased by 6 points compared to the February 2021 survey.

Weather

Wednesday, August 4

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 36°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 21°C

Thursday, August 5

Day ☀️ Clear
High: 37°C

Night 🌙 Clear
Low: 21°C

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