

An aerial photograph of a city street in Tbilisi, Georgia. The street is lined with buildings, including a large white building on the left and several multi-story buildings on the right. A green field is visible in the center of the street. The image is overlaid with a dark blue gradient at the bottom.

Photo credit: On the Garages

# A POLICY AGENDA FOR TBILISI: WHAT VOTERS WANT

Tbilisi, Georgia  
2021

# A policy agenda for Tbilisi: What voters want

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## KEY FINDINGS

This report provides an overview of the issues voters in Tbilisi care about most, using data from a survey including 2951 residents of the city conducted between August 10 and September 5. The survey's key findings are as follows:

### Largest priorities

- The public's largest priority is employment, followed by traffic, public transportation, and air pollution;
- Poorer families are more likely to prioritize employment and public transportation;

### Housing issues

- The public tends to be satisfied with their utilities infrastructure;
- The public is relatively unsatisfied with their building's appearance, the state of their yards, and parking at their building;
- Poorer households tend to report more issues with their homes.

### Mobility and transport

- The public tends to think that the situation around public transportation has improved in recent years;
- However, there is a strong partisan divide, with GD supporters significantly more likely to think that public transportation and transport system more broadly have improved in recent years;
- The public supports the development of public transportation infrastructure at the expense of developing car related infrastructure;
- The introduction of bus lanes into the city in recent years has widespread support.

### Land development and recreational space;

- The public is highly supportive of the city taking a greater role in the development of land in the city;
- The public tends to support the development of recreational areas to the extent that a majority would support the city in buying back properties sold for private development.

## INTRODUCTION

On October 2, 2021, local elections were held in Georgia, with Georgian Dream winning 47% of the vote. In Tbilisi, the incumbent mayor, Kakha Kaladze, received 45% of the vote, and the United National Movement candidate, Nika Melia, received 34% of the vote. Given that none of the candidates received over 50% of the vote, a second round runoff election will be held in the coming month.

A wide range of observers criticized how the parties campaigned, noting that substantive debate over issues of governance was lacking during the elections. In support of changing this for the second round of elections, this report provides a description of what voters in Tbilisi want.

Broadly speaking, this report covers attitudes towards:

- Mobility and transport
- Land development and recreational space
- General urban issues

These topics were selected given the significant public debates surrounding these issues in recent years in addition to the most recent Tbilisi Government's policy actions surrounding them.

The survey was conducted between August 10 and September 5. The survey includes 2951 respondents. The theoretical margin of error does not exceed 1.8%. The minimum AAPOR response rate was 14.1%.<sup>1</sup> The report below uses a mix of descriptive and inferential statistics to describe the Tbilisi public's views on the issues.

This report proceeds as follows. The next section provides an overview of the study's methodology. Findings are presented in the following chapter. This includes sections on a) mobility and transport; b) land development and recreational space; and c) housing and neighborhood related issues. The report finishes with conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Association for Public Opinion Research's response rate formulas were used to calculate this response rate. More information on this calculation is available here: [https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR\\_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/Response-Rate-Calculator-4-0-Clean-18-May-2016.xlsx](https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/MainSiteFiles/Response-Rate-Calculator-4-0-Clean-18-May-2016.xlsx)

## METHODOLOGY

To address the research themes described above, this research made use of a survey representative of the Tbilisi public. This section describes the methodology used to collect and analyze the data.

### Data collection

The survey was conducted between August 10 and September 5. The survey includes 2951 respondents. The margin of error does not exceed 1.8%. The minimum response rate was 14%. Following data collection, 10% of interviews were back checked. The survey was administered using the computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method. The sample was done using random digit dialing of cell phone numbers in Georgia. The interviews were conducted in Georgian. The data is weighted to be representative of Tbilisi.

### Data analysis

The report below uses a mix of descriptive and inferential statistics to understand the Tbilisi public's views on the issues. With regard to descriptive statistics, the data analysis uses a mixture of frequencies, means, and medians to describe the prevalence of different attitudes. The study uses multivariate regression analysis to understand how attitudes vary between different groups. Unless otherwise noted, the regression analysis controls for the following respondent characteristics:

- Age group (18-34, 35-54, 55+);
- Sex;
- Employed or not;
- Education level (Tertiary education or not);
- IDP status;
- Wealth (A simple additive index of durable goods);
- Ethnicity (Minority or not);
- Party preference (Georgian Dream, Opposition, Don't know/ Refuse to answer/ No party).

For regression analysis, the results presented below should be interpreted as controlling for other factors, how likely someone in a given group is more or less likely to report a given attitude.

The study's data and questionnaire are available from [caucasusbarometer.org](http://caucasusbarometer.org).

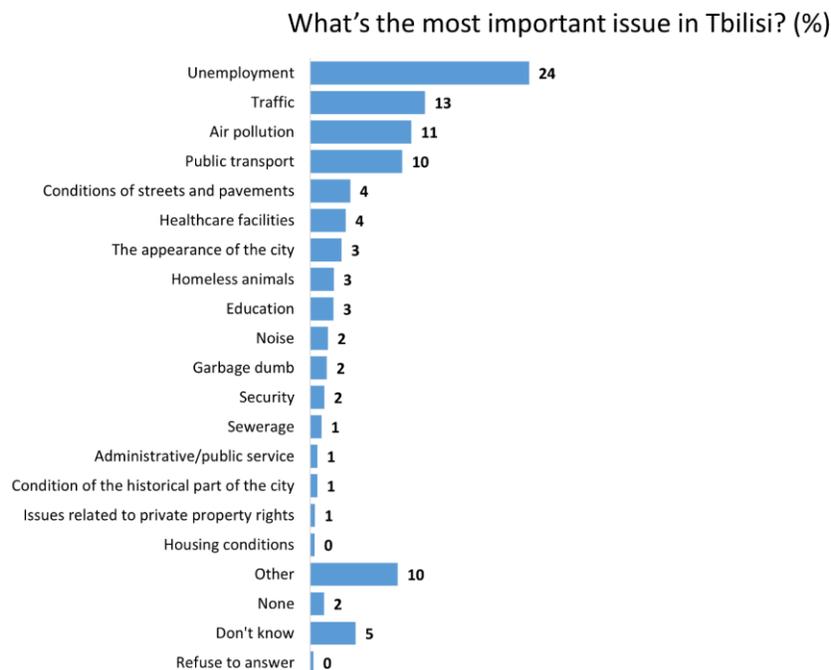
## FINDINGS

The data suggest that people are primarily concerned with unemployment, traffic, air pollution, and public transport. In terms of housing, people are most satisfied with electricity and gas infrastructure and least satisfied with parking at their buildings, and the conditions of their yards and building appearances. People tend towards thinking that the situation around public transportation and transportation is getting better though. The public also increasingly wants to see more green spaces, even to the extent that they think the city should purchase back developments to ensure sufficient recreational areas in the city.

### Most important issue in community

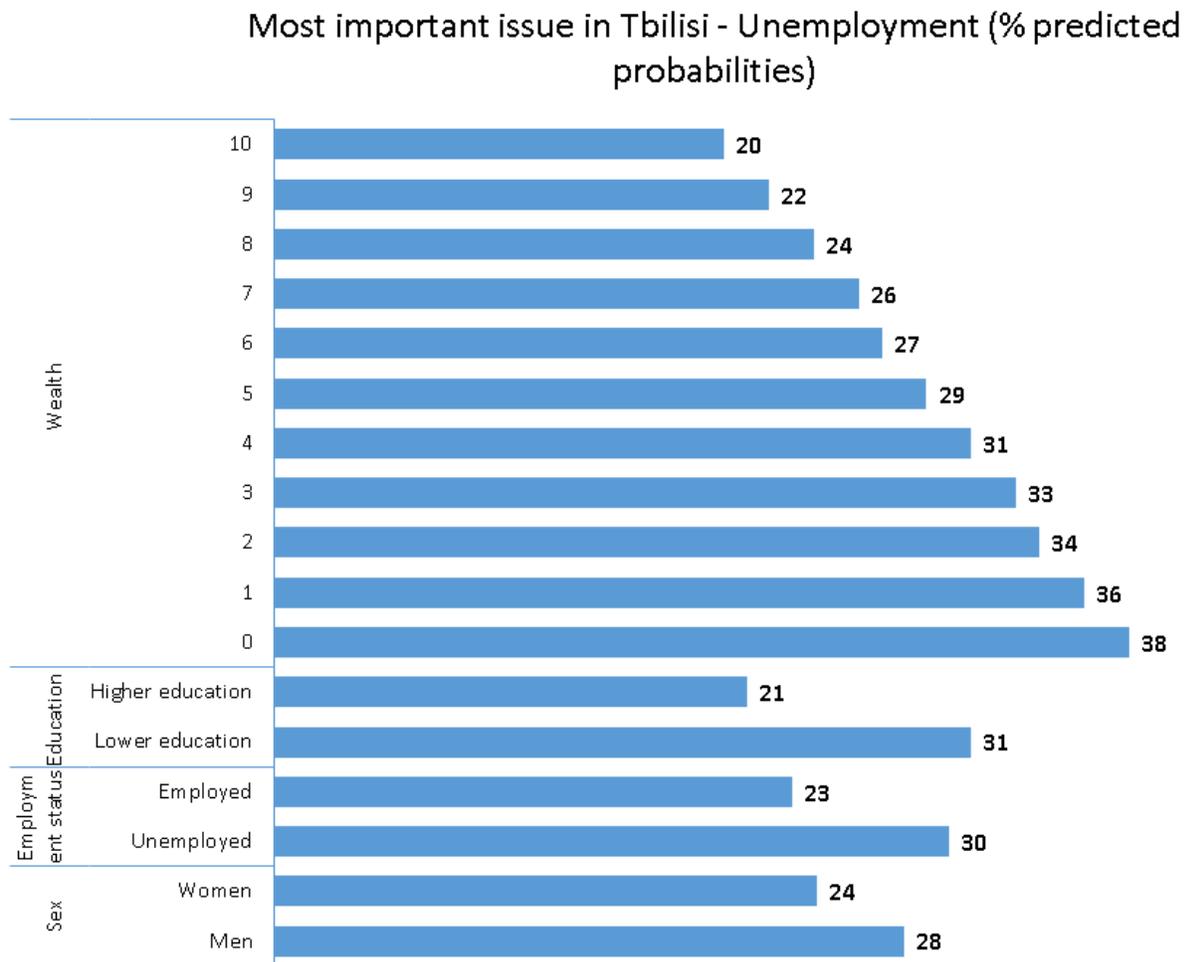
In terms of issues to prioritize, the data indicate that the public most commonly name unemployment, traffic, air pollution, and public transport. Other individual issues were named by 4% or fewer of the public.

*Figure 1: Most important issues in community*



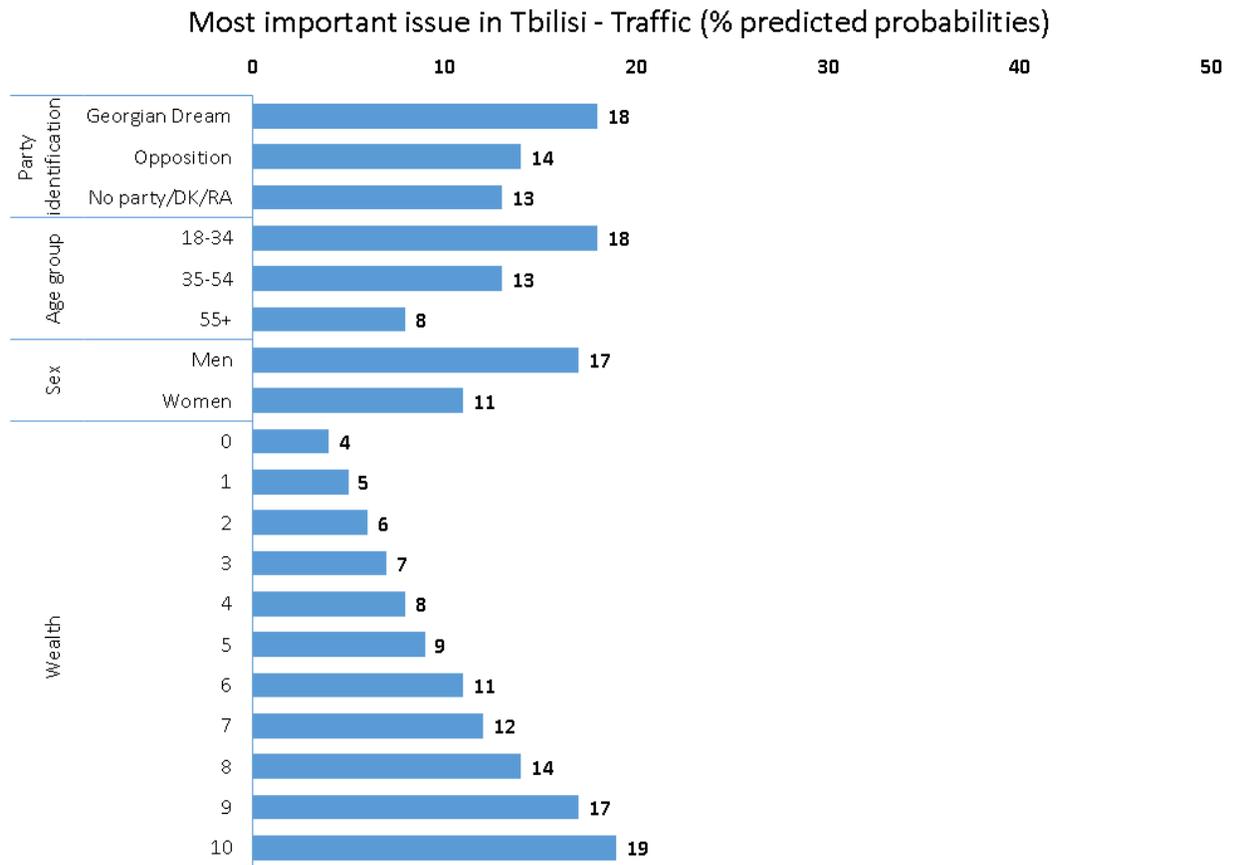
The data suggest that naming employment as the most important issue varies by a number of characteristics. People with lower levels of wealth are more likely to name employment as a key issue than people with higher levels of wealth. Unemployed people, those without higher education, and men also prioritize unemployment.

Figure 2: Unemployment as most important issue in community by social and demographic characteristics



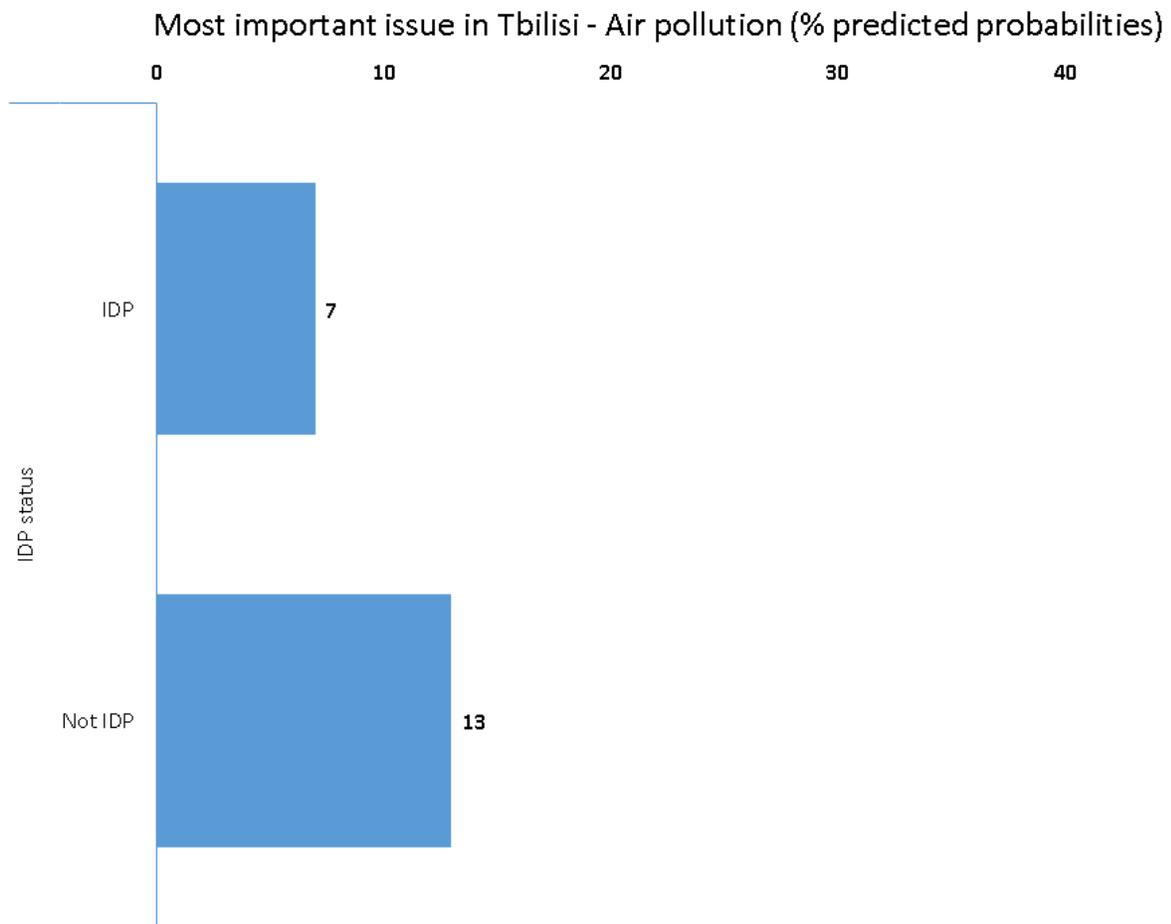
Whether or not someone named traffic as the most important issue also varied by a number of social and demographic variables. Men were more likely to name traffic than women. Younger people named traffic more than older people. The wealthiest households also named traffic more often than poorer households. Georgian Dream supporters were slightly more likely to mention traffic as well, compared to those that do not support Georgian Dream.

Figure 3: Traffic as most important issue in community by social and demographic characteristics



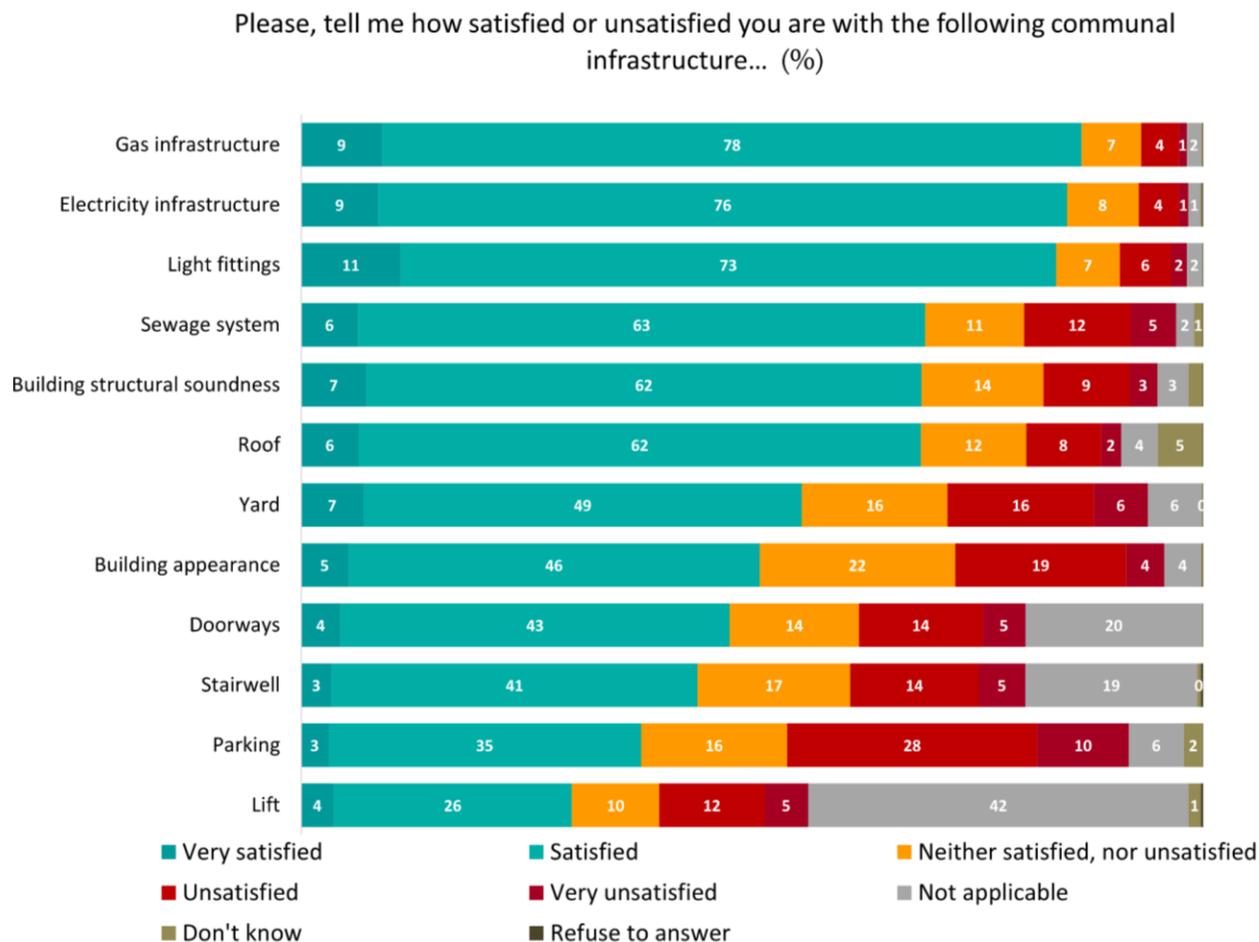
IDPs were significantly less likely to view air pollution as a key issue, controlling for other factors. No other differences between groups were identified on these issues.

Figure 4: Air pollution as most important issue in community by social and demographic characteristics



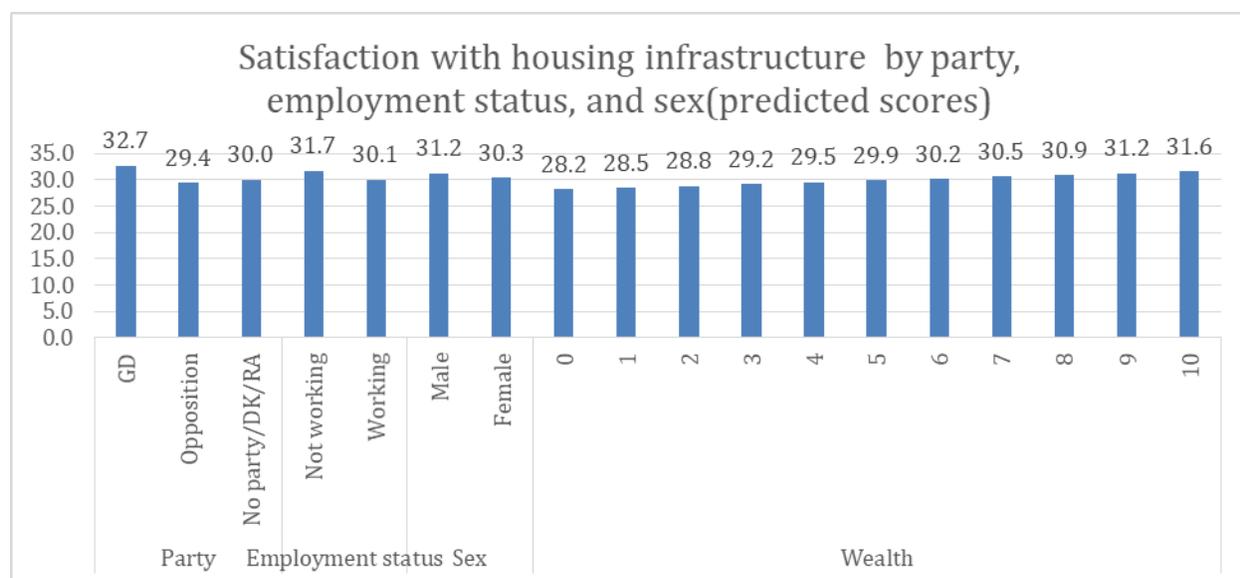
Aside from the above, respondents were asked about the most important issues in their building. The data indicate that people are most satisfied with light fittings, and gas and electricity infrastructure. They were least satisfied with parking, building appearances, and their yards.

Figure 5: Satisfaction with housing infrastructure



To provide an overview of the above data, a simple additive index was constructed from the above questions that varies from 0 to 48, with zero meaning full dissatisfaction with all of the above communal infrastructure and 48 meaning full satisfaction. The mean of the index was 30.4 and the median 32. The data indicates that men, unemployed people, supporters of the Georgian Dream party, and people living in wealthier households are most satisfied, while women, employed people, supporters of the opposition, people who did not identify a party they support, and people living in poorer households are least satisfied with their communal infrastructure.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with housing infrastructure by social and demographic characteristics



## Mobility and transport

Past surveys have consistently shown that traffic, parking, and air pollution are all significant concerns for the residents of Tbilisi.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the city government has taken numerous policy actions in recent years related to transportation and mobility policy. To understand views related to this, the survey asked a wide range of questions about people's views of transportation policy in Tbilisi.

The data indicate that people tend (45%) to think the situation surrounding car traffic is becoming better in recent years. A third believe it has gotten worse (34%) and roughly a fifth think it has not changed (18%).

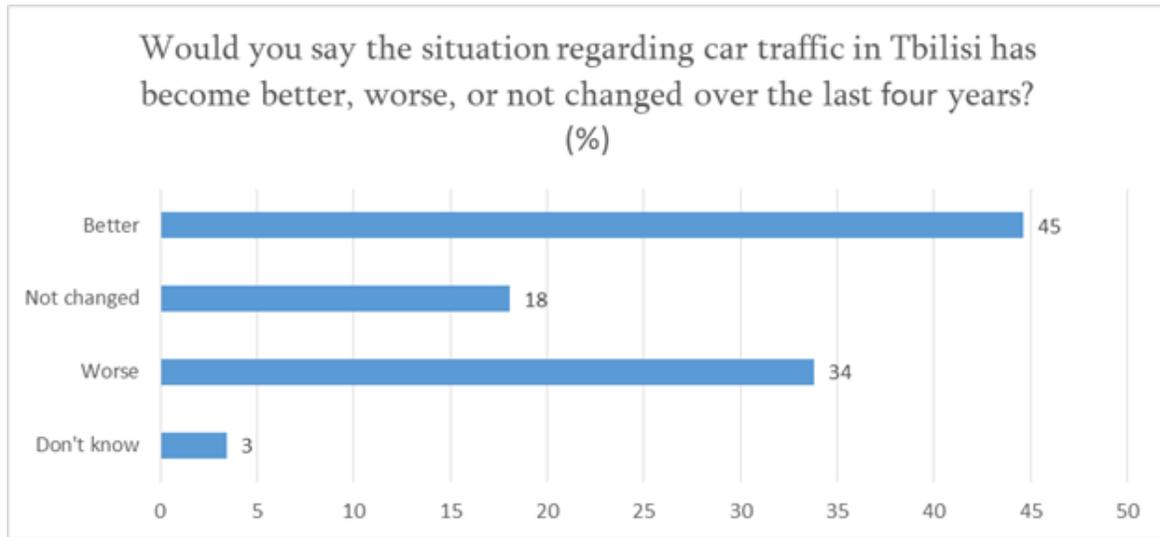
<sup>2</sup> For instance, see CRRC and NDI 2021, available at:

<https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2021ge/codebook/> ;

CRRC and NDI 2020, available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/na2020ge>, and

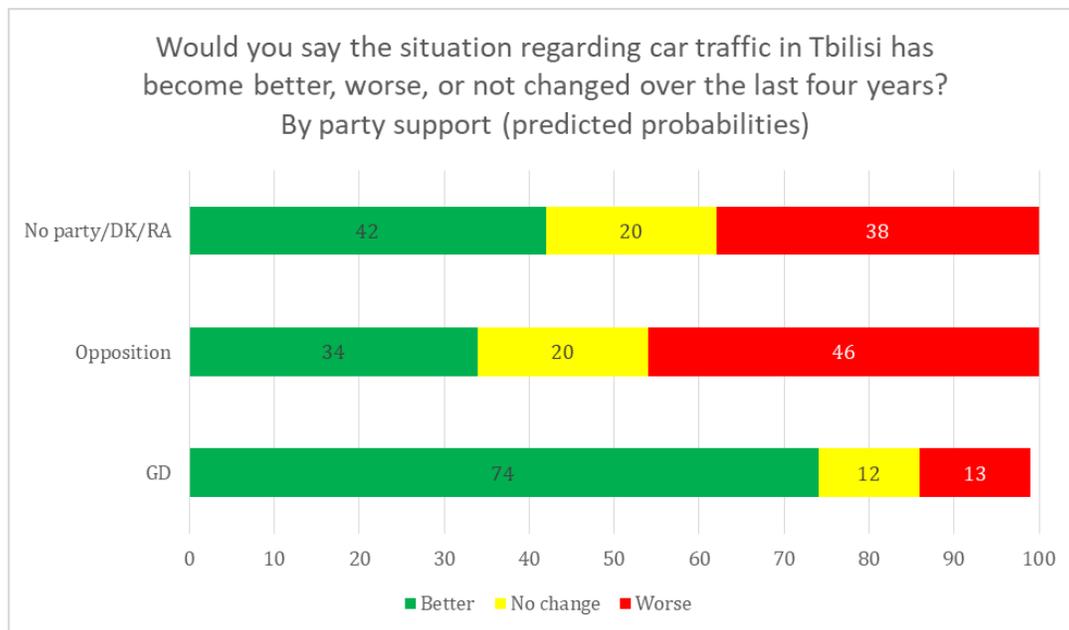
CRRC and NDI 2018, available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2018ge/>

Figure 7: Has car traffic in Tbilisi become better, worse, or not changed over the last four years?



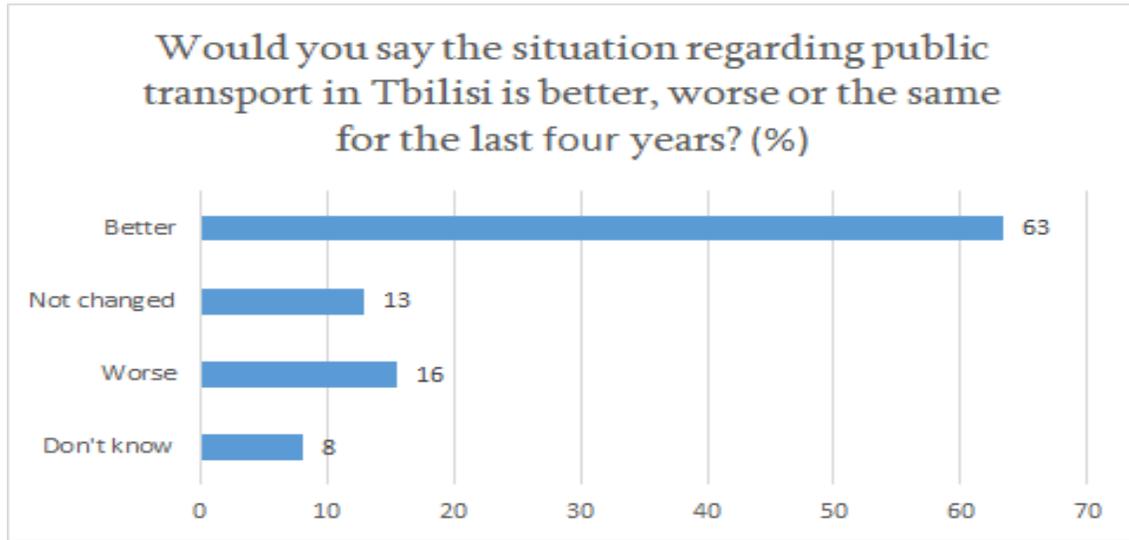
This issue is particularly partisan, with the only significant predictor of people’s views on the issue being party support. Georgian Dream supporters in particular believe that the situation around car traffic has increased significantly more often than supporters of the opposition, and those that did not report being close to any party in particular.

Figure 8: Has car traffic in Tbilisi become better, worse, or not changed over the last four years by party support



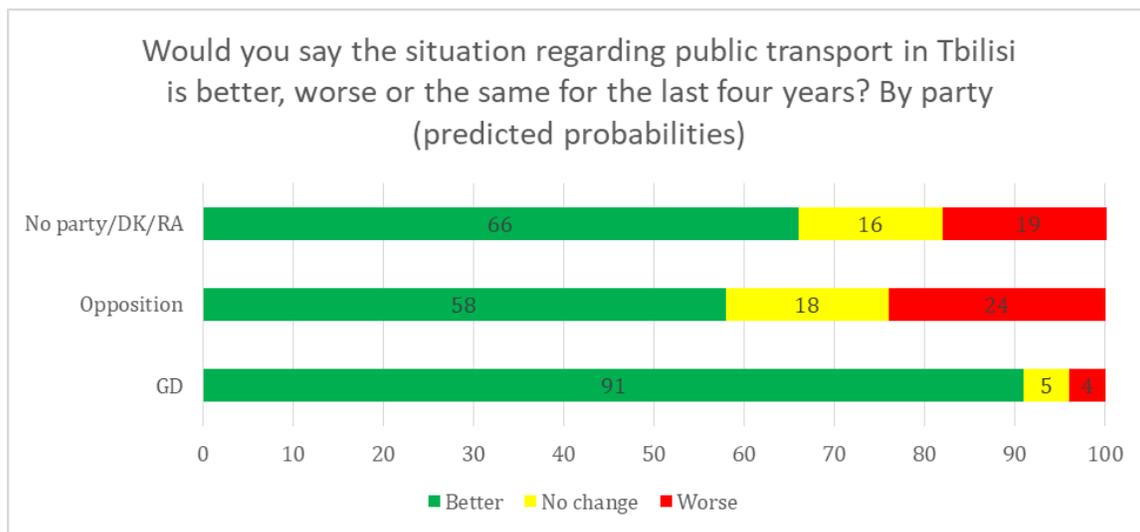
Attitudes are more positive as relates public transport. A majority (63%) think the situation is becoming better in recent years. Relatively few think the situation has gotten worse (16%) or nothing has changed (13%).

Figure 9: Has public transportation in Tbilisi become better, worse, or not changed over the last four years?



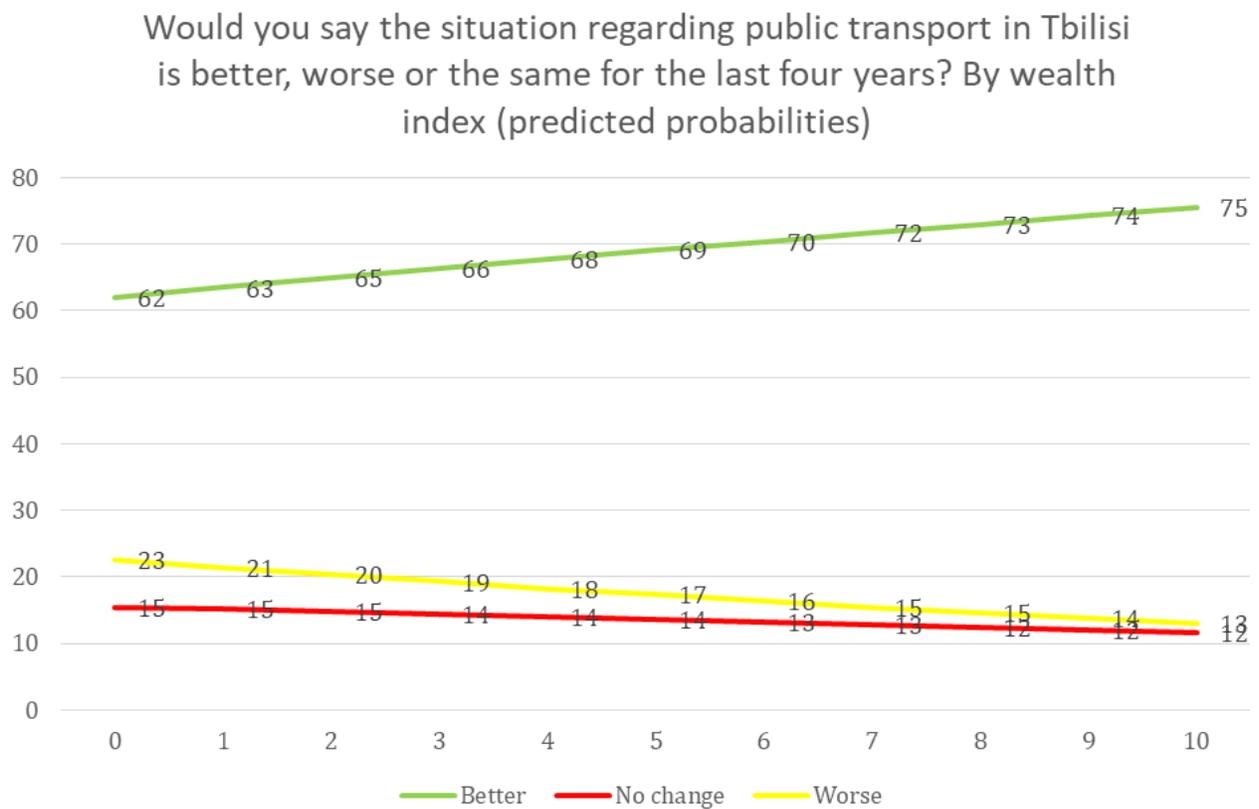
The data show that again views of how public transport has changed are a highly partisan issue. Controlling for other factors, a Georgian Dream supporter had a 91% chance of reporting the situation has improved compared with a 58% chance among supporters of the opposition.

Figure 10: Has public transportation in Tbilisi become better, worse, or not changed over the last four years by party support



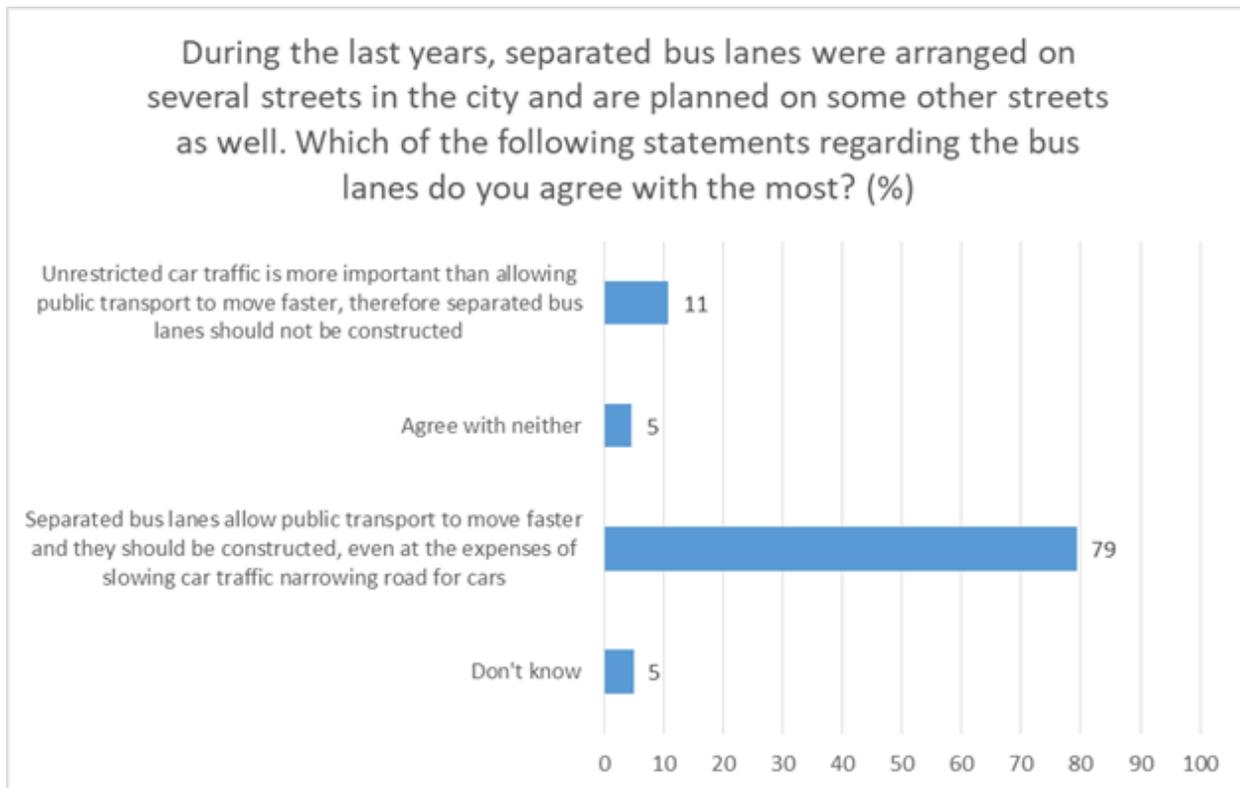
Aside from partisanship, wealthier voters had significantly more positive views. Individuals in the poorest households had a 62% chance of viewing public transportation as having improved. An individual in the wealthiest group of households had a 75% chance of reporting public transportation had improved.

Figure 11: Has public transportation in Tbilisi become better, worse, or not changed over the last four years by wealth



The survey also asked about the bus lanes that were introduced in a number of areas of Tbilisi. The data indicates that people tend towards supporting the bus lanes at the expense of slowing cars. While 79% support bus lanes at the expense of car traffic slowing, 11% prefer unrestricted car traffic.

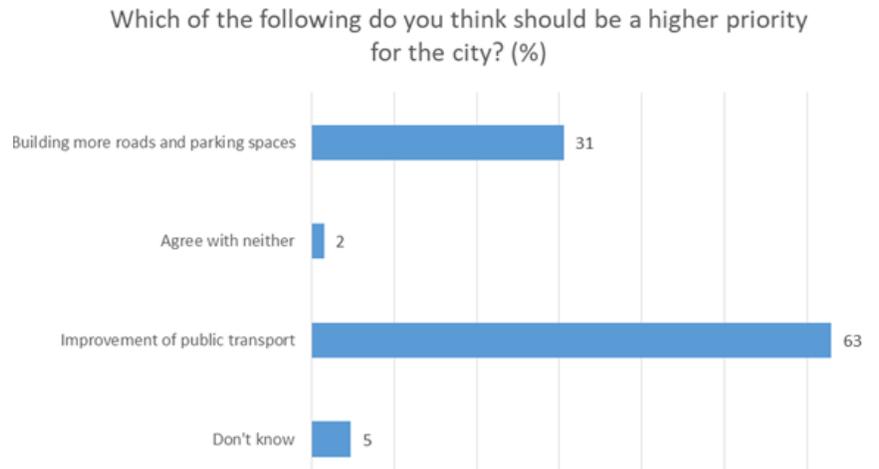
Figure 12: Support for bus lanes



The data suggest that men and car owners are significantly less supportive of separated bus lanes. Men are seven percentage points less supportive, controlling for other factors. Car owners are nine points less supportive of bus lanes, controlling for other factors.

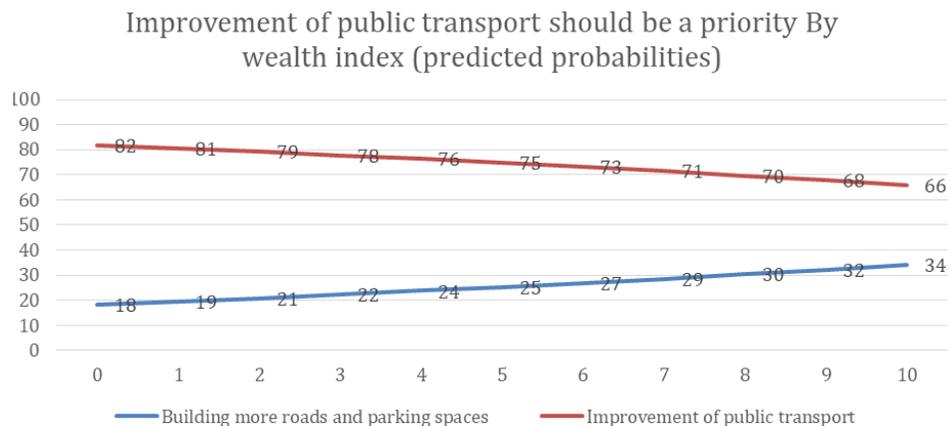
Finally, respondents were asked about whether the city should prioritize public transit or car related infrastructure. The data suggest that 63% think the city should focus on improvement of public transportation, while 31% think that parking spaces and expanding roads should be the priority.

Figure 13: Support for public transportation or car infrastructure



The data suggest that prioritizing road construction is more common among those that did not report a party closest to them, car owners, younger people, men, and poorer people. GD supporters were seven points less likely than people who did not name a party as a more important priority. Car owners were 11 points more likely to view road construction as a priority. Younger people (18-34) were 13 points more likely to report road construction should be prioritized than older people (55+). Women were 10 points less likely to report road construction should take precedence over public transportation infrastructure. People in the poorest households were 16 points less likely to name public transportation infrastructure compared to people in well-off households.

Figure 14: Support for public transportation or car infrastructure by wealth

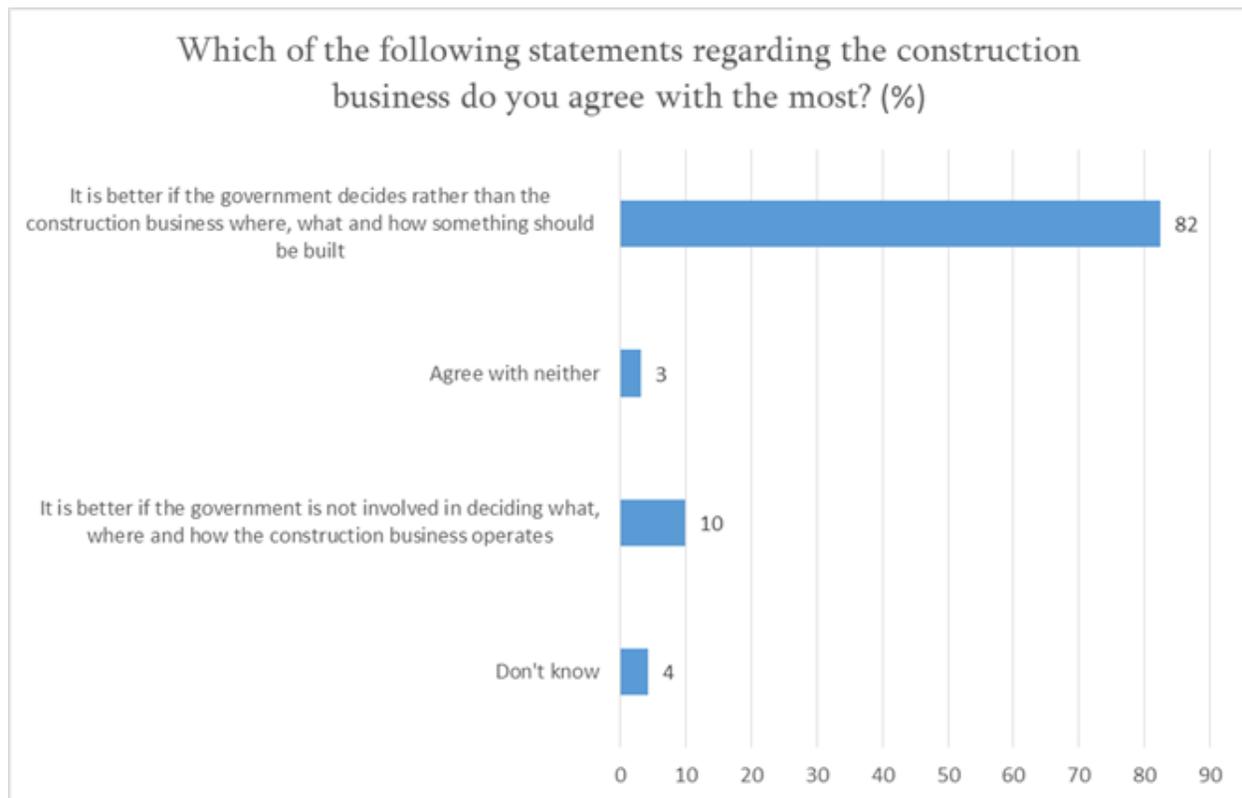


## Land development and recreational space

A second significant issue that has been widely discussed in the discourse around Tbilisi is land development and the availability of recreational space. To explore the public's views of these issues, this study asked a range of questions about the public's relative preferences for development and recreational space.

The study asked about whether the city should regulate construction more heavily, or whether it is better if the market is left largely unregulated. The results suggest that people tend to think the city should play a more active role in the city's development, with 82% thinking the government should play an active role in property development. Relatively few (10%) think that the city should let developers build as they please.

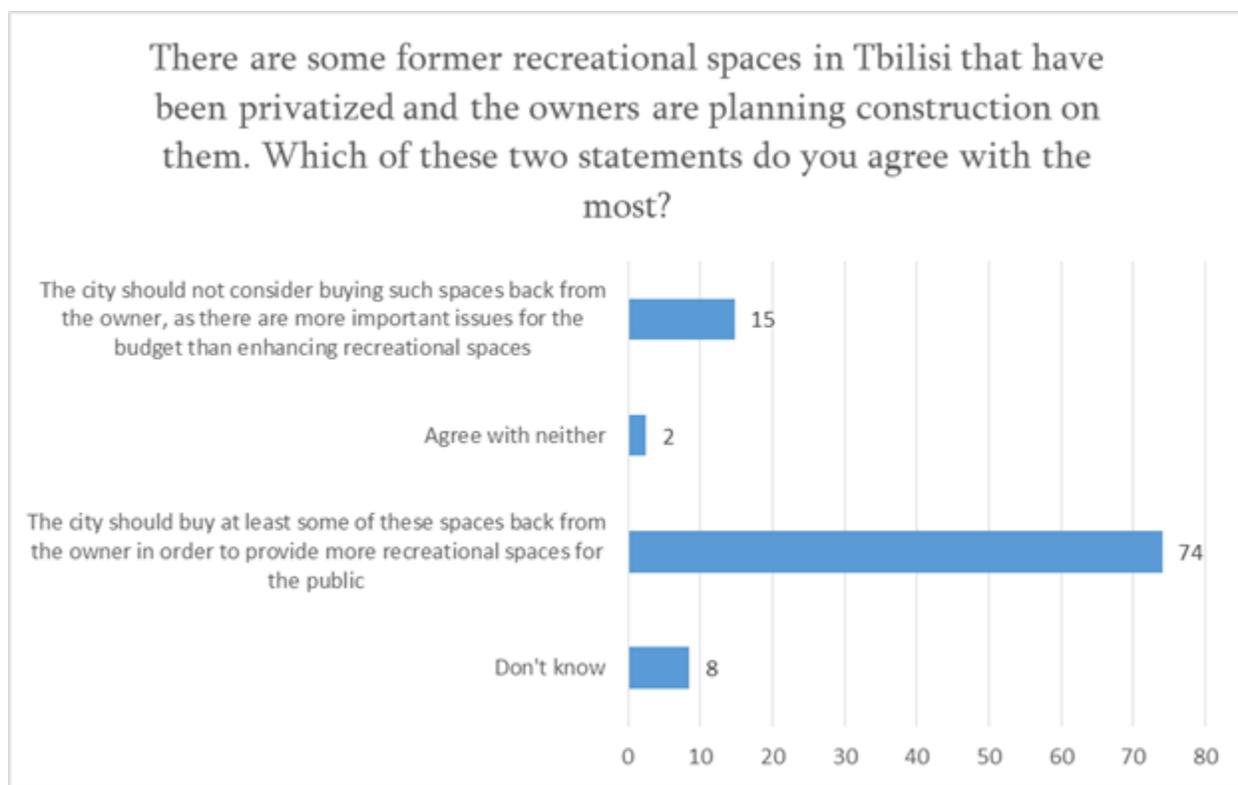
*Figure 15: Support for regulation of the construction sector*



A regression suggests that controlling for other factors, party support, age, and employment status are associated with whether or not someone supports government regulation of the sector. Opposition supporters are approximately 9-10 points less likely to support government regulation of the construction sector than supporters of the Georgian Dream, and those that did not identify a party they felt closest to. The employed were four percentage points less likely to support regulation, controlling for other factors. People between the ages of 35 and 54 were three points more likely to support regulation than older people and four points more likely to than younger people.

The study also asked participants whether they prioritized restoring some recreational areas or whether the city should allow development to continue in former recreational areas in the city. People tended to think that buying back at least some recreational spaces would be positive (74%), compared with those that thought other priorities should take precedence.

Figure 16: Support for restoring recreational areas



The view that the city should buy back some spaces was more common among older people, those with higher education, and ethnic Georgians. Older people were five percentage points more likely to agree with buying back space for parks than people aged 18-34, and four percentage points more likely to agree with buying back space for parks than people 35-54, controlling for other factors. Those with higher education were six percentage points more likely to support purchasing recreational zones back. Ethnic Georgians were eight percentage points more likely to support purchasing back some areas than ethnic minorities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The data presented above leads to a number of conclusions surrounding the issues people prioritize, housing issues, their views of mobility changes, and how recreational space should be developed in the city. This section provides a bulleted summary of key findings by subject area.

### Largest priorities

- The public's largest priority is employment, followed by traffic, public transportation, and air pollution;
- Poorer families are more likely to prioritize employment and public transportation;

### Housing issues

- The public tends to be satisfied with their utilities infrastructure;
- The public is relatively unsatisfied with their building's appearance, the state of their yards, and parking at their building;
- Poorer households tend to report more issues with their homes.

### Mobility and transport

- The public tends to think that the situation around public transportation has improved in recent years;
- However, there is a strong partisan divide, with people that are not GD supporters significantly less likely to think that public transportation and transport more broadly have improved in recent years;
- The public supports the development of public transportation infrastructure at the expense of developing car related infrastructure;
- The introduction of bus lanes into the city in recent years has widespread support.

## Land development and recreational space

- The public is highly supportive of the city taking a greater role in the development of land in the city;
- The public tends to support the development of recreational areas to the extent that a majority would support the city in buying back properties sold for private development.

