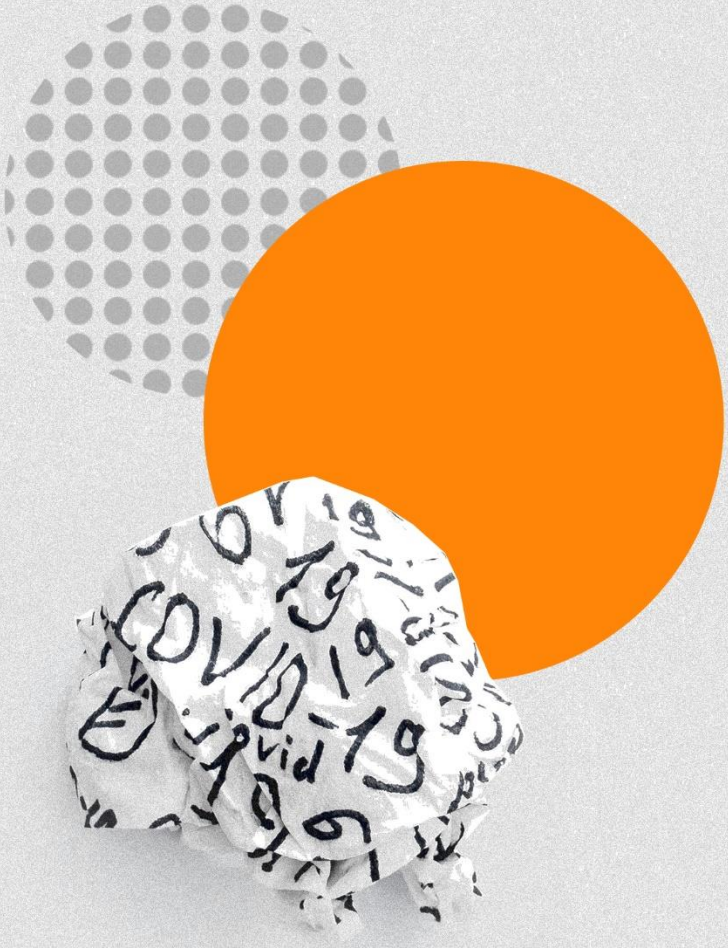

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC OPINION ON THE CORONAVIRUS

2020

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC OPINION ON THE CORONAVIRUS IN GEORGIA

Acknowledgements: CRRC-Georgia would like to thank the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their financial support of this study.

Disclaimer: The views expressed within this document should in no way be taken to represent the views of the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tbilisi, or any affiliated entity. The views expressed herein represent the views of the authors alone.

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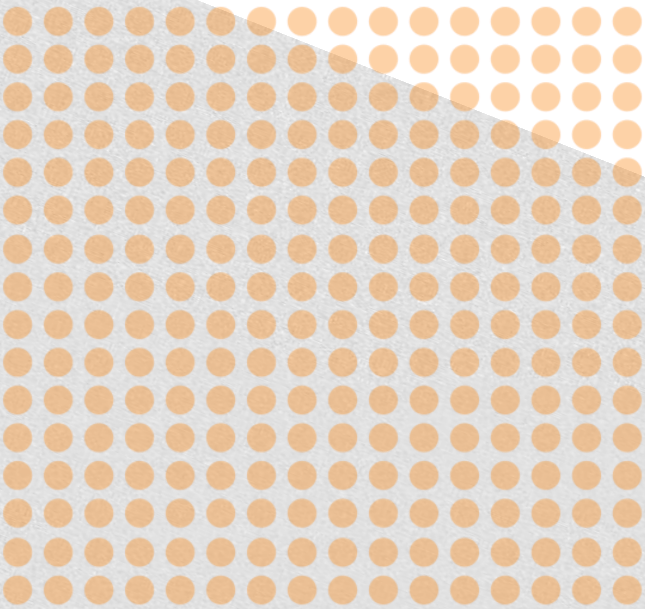


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Covid-19 crisis has had wide ranging implications and impacts for the world. These range from how economies work (or don't) to how people socialize. As a result of the crisis, policy makers had to make a wide range of decisions on closing down businesses to imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement. In support of enabling informed decision making, CRRC Georgia conducted six waves of data collection between late April and early June, with the financial support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tbilisi.

The surveys had a wide ranging set of questions, with each wave including both questions repeated from previous waves of the survey as well as new questions focused on specific issues. Each wave of the survey contained questions on attitudes towards newly implemented policies, institutional performance, behavior, and the economy. Individual waves of the survey also contained questions on disinformation, democracy, the education system, religion and gender related issues. The surveys were conducted in Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian. Each wave had approximately 1000 respondents and a margin of error of between 3.0 and 3.1%. The results are weighted to the 2014 census.

The data and analysis presented in the report leads to a wide ranging set of conclusions. These can broadly be considered as focused on attitudes, behavior, well-being, and expectations for the future.

When it comes to **attitudes towards public policy**, the data indicate that the vast majority of the public supported the vast majority of the policies which the government implemented during the crisis. This likely reflects the high level of compliance the policies appear to have had during the crisis. The least supported policies asked about during the six waves were restricting sales of some products online (44% approved), starting international tourism from July 1 (55% approved), and increasing penalties for violation of emergency rules (59% approved). By comparison, the vast majority of the public approved of most other policies (in the realm of 80% or higher approval).

In light of the high level of approval of public policy during this period, it is unsurprising that there was also a **high level of approval of institutional performance** during the crisis in terms of both Corona-specific performance and general institutional performance. Compared with November/December 2019, Giorgi Gakharia's approval rating roughly tripled. So

too did the approval ratings of parliament and the President. Notably, the Church's institutional performance rating also increased during this period. However, its performance is no longer higher than every other institution in the country. In the last survey conducted in this study, the Church's approval rating was sixth out of nine institutions asked about.

Even though the public supported the vast majority of the government's policies and approved of governmental performance, **people favored opening up the economy** over ensuring the epidemiological situation was under control during the crisis. This was particularly common in Tbilisi when the question was first asked, but soon spread throughout the country.

The study also found an increase in the share of people that **support democracy as an ideal** form of government and think that Georgia is a democracy. Yet, people hold inconsistent attitudes towards democracy and tend to think that it is acceptable for unelected individuals to control the government in times of crisis so long as they are effective at doing so.

The data also indicate the presence of meaningful amounts of **misinformation** in Georgia related to Covid 19 as well as vaccines. For instance, the study found that 9% of people (over 300,000 Georgians) believe that Covid 19 is related to 5G infrastructure. At the same time, most of the public believes that they have encountered a piece of misinformation during the crisis.

With regard to **vaccines,** the data indicate wide-scale misinformation and skepticism. Moreover, this skepticism is linked to whether or not someone would be interested in getting a vaccine if one were available, suggesting a clear need for vaccine education programming in Georgia.

Regarding **practices**, the data indicate that while people socialized outside the home relatively little in early May, by early June a majority of people were leaving home to socialize. Men and young people were particularly likely to go out to socialize throughout this period, suggesting that if another outbreak occurs messaging should focus on encouraging these groups to stay home.

One of the largest controversies of the outbreak was the Georgian Orthodox Church's response, and specifically hosting the **Easter Liturgy** in person and the use of a single Communion Spoon. The data indicate that only 4% of the public attended Easter Liturgy in the current year, down from 44% the year prior. Orthodox Christians also tend to disapprove of the Church's policy on the Communion Spoon.

The data show that Georgians experienced clear **economic pain** during the crisis. Reported median household incomes halved during the crisis.[1] The share of households reporting no income increased from around 1% prior to the crisis to 13% during it. Approximately half of the employed population lost a job. However, there are signs of recovery, with half of those that lost a job reporting that they had since started working again at the start of June. People with lower levels of education were more likely to report both job losses and lower household income during the crisis, suggesting that those who were worse off were disproportionately affected by the crisis.

During the crisis, **food insecurity** also rose. While half of the public reported they never had a problem buying the food they and their families needed prior to the crisis, over half the public reported experiencing at least some issue during the crisis. The frequency with which people experienced food insecurity also increased during the crisis. Women and those with lower levels of education (a proxy for economic well-being) were more likely to report food insecurity.

Looking forward, the data indicate that large shares of the public do not intend on doing many of the things they did before the crisis as often such as shopping and going to restaurants. Moreover, consumer sentiment is low, indicating that while the economy is recovering it will likely remain weak for some time to come. At the same time, only a minority of people expect a second outbreak of the virus. If a second wave of the virus were to occur, people would generally support re-imposing a wide variety of restrictions. Yet, they would be less supportive than during the crisis. This indicates that compliance could be a larger concern than during the first outbreak if a second wave of the virus comes to Georgia.

[1] Among those who responded to questions about pre- and during crisis incomes, which varied from 67-79% of respondents depending on the wave of survey.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid 19 outbreak has shook the world, and Georgia too has experienced wide ranging challenges as a result. From efforts to contain the spread of the virus to policy aimed at dampening the economic pain of the virus, policy makers have been presented with numerous decisions. In support of informing these efforts, CRRC Georgia conducted six surveys between late April and early June, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tbilisi. The results were presented on a weekly basis to stakeholders in the Government of Georgia, international organizations, diplomats, and NGOs working on the crisis.

The surveys covered a wide range of subjects. A set of core questions about institutional performance and approval of newly introduced policies were asked on each wave of the survey to track changes in public opinion. Each survey also included questions on the economic situation and a number of practices. Aside from these blocks, a set of new questions were introduced on a weekly basis to explore specific sets of issues in depth. Topics included religion, education policy, disinformation, gender, and democracy. The data and survey questionnaires are available in full at caucasusbaromter.org.

The surveys were conducted using random digit dialing and administered in Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian. The results were then weighted. The surveys had between 992 and 1095 respondents in total. The theoretical margin of error was between 3.0% and 3.1% for each wave.

This report summarizes the findings of these surveys. In the next section of the report, the study's methodology is presented. The findings follow. The findings section is broken down into four broad sections. The first focuses on attitudes, including towards institutional performance and policy, disinformation, democracy, and vaccines. The second section looks at behavior during the crisis surrounding a number of general activities as well as religion specifically. The third section provides data on well-being, focusing on the economic impacts of the crisis. The final findings section provides data on expectations, focusing on a potential second wave of the virus. The report ends with conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

This study includes six waves of data collection, conducted between late April and early June, with each survey conducted weekly. Data is primarily analyzed using descriptive statistics. This section of the report provides an overview of the data collection methods, data characteristics, and approach to data analysis.

Data collection

To collect nationally representative data, CRRC Georgia used random digit dialing (RDD) of cell phones. Data collection took place on a weekly basis, with fieldwork generally taking place between Thursday and Monday of each week. A tenth of interviews were back-checked to ensure the quality of the interviews conducted. The survey was conducted in Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian. The response rate, achieved sample size, theoretical margin of error, and fieldwork dates are provided in the table below.

Survey Wave	Fieldwork dates	Sample size	Margin of Error	Minimum Response Rate[2]
1	April 29 - May 3	992	3.1%	42.1%
2	May 7 - May 10	1037	3.0%	40.5%
3	May 14 - May 17	1053	3.0%	38.6%
4	May 21 - May 23	1002	3.1%	38.8%
5	May 28 - May 31	1036	3.0%	35.1%
6	June 4 - June 6	1095	3.0%	37.0%

The survey included questions in each wave on two core blocks about institutional performance assessments and policy approval. The prevalence of a number of behaviors such as hoarding were also measured on all survey waves. Each wave of the survey also contained

[2] According to the standards of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) minimum response rate is the ratio of the number of complete interviews and all interview attempts. This excludes non-existing phone numbers dialed as a part of the RDD process.

data on economic circumstances. However, the specific focus of the economic questions varied from wave to wave, with data collected on consumer sentiment, employment, incomes, and food security in multiple though not every wave.

Given the constantly changing nature of the crisis, the survey contained new question blocks on each wave in addition to the core questions. In the first wave of the survey, this included attitudes towards and behavior surrounding the Georgian Orthodox Church and its response to the crisis. The second wave of the survey included a number of questions about general education policy. The third focused on the prevalence of misinformation. The fourth wave included a number of questions of higher education policy. The fifth looked at democracy. The final wave of the survey included questions on the future of the virus.

Data Analysis

The data presented in this report is primarily analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and cross tabulations. Results are weighted using demographic information from the 2014 Georgian National Census. Weights adjust for respondents' gender, age, ethnic identity, education, and residence. This helps balance the proportions of those groups which might be underrepresented in the raw data.

To test for significance between different groups, chi-square tests are generally used, with statistically significant differences between groups reported at the $p<0.05$ level. The report also makes occasional use of regression analysis. In such cases, greater depth is provided in footnotes on the specific analysis.

FINDINGS

This section of the report presents the findings of the study. In the first section, data on attitudes is presented, including a wide variety of subjects. The subsequent section provides information about people's behavior during the crisis, including a number of different practices and religion during the crisis. The following section looks at well-being, including economic losses, food security, and subjective well-being. The final section provides data on expectations about the economy and the future of the virus.

Attitudes

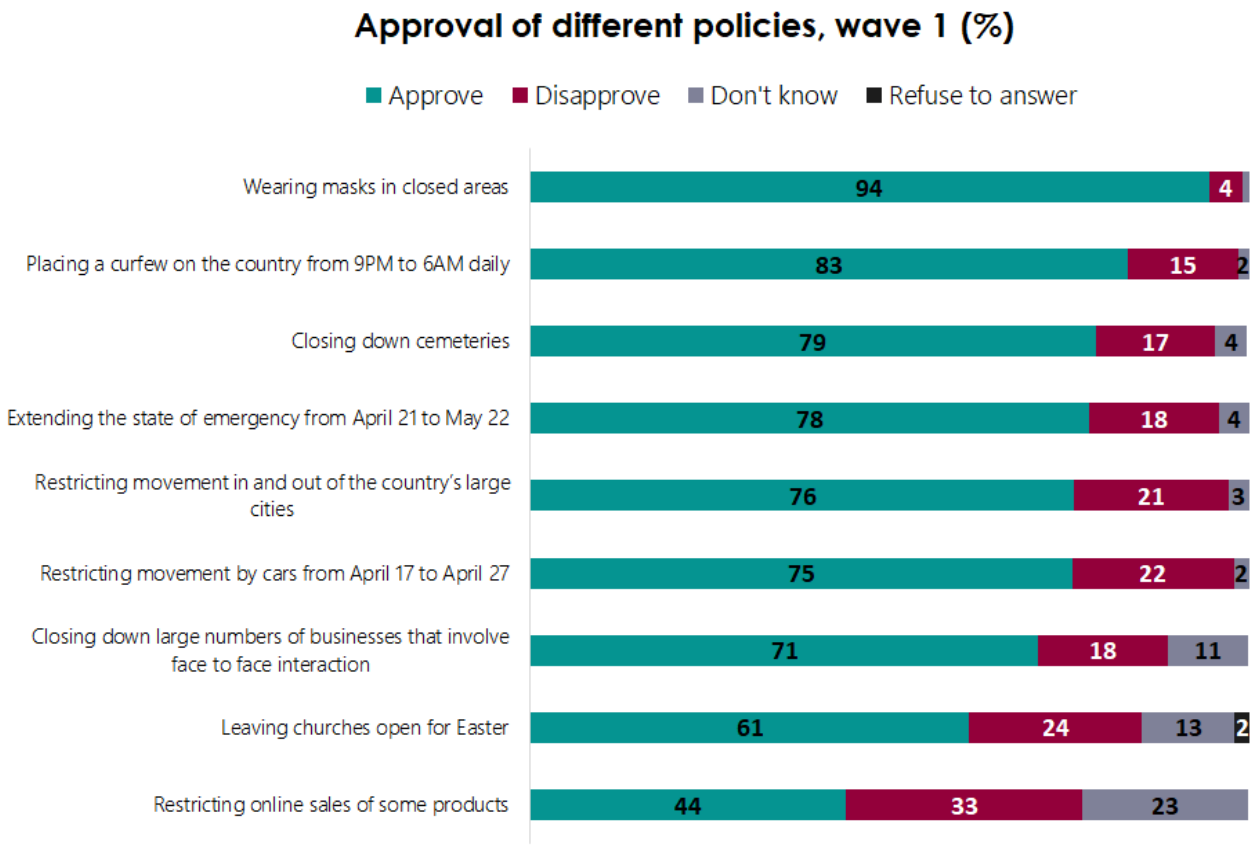
This section provides a broad overview of attitudes during the crisis. It first looks at attitudes towards a large number of specific policies and how these vary between different demographic groups. Thereafter, the section provides an overview of institutional performance assessments. It then proceeds to discuss the prevalence of misinformation, attitudes towards democracy, and vaccines.

Policy

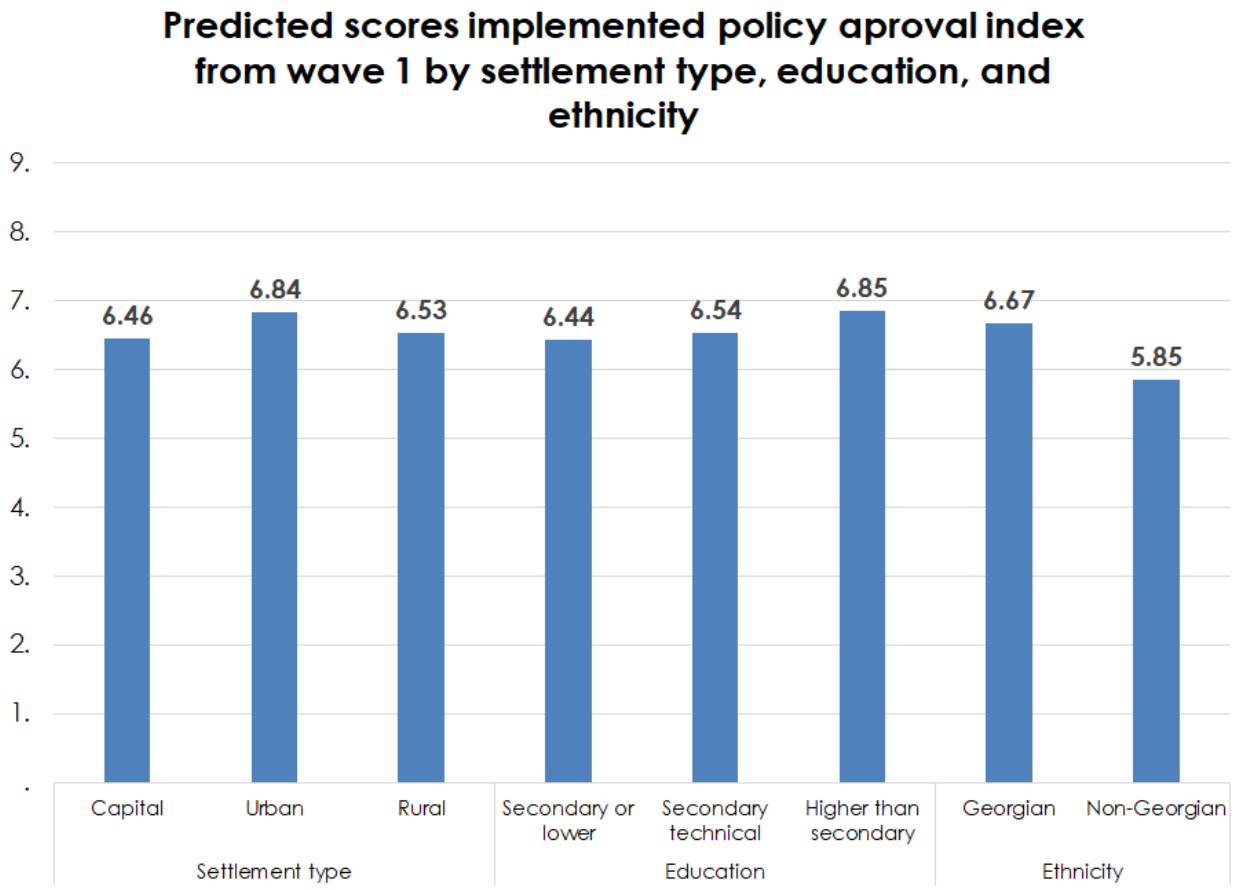
During the COVID-19 outbreak the government implemented a large number of policies. Georgians for the most part were supportive of measures that authorities enacted that were aimed at containing the spread of the virus as well as attempting to diminish its economic impact. Besides actually enforced policies, the study also explored attitudes toward a number of possible or hypothetical ones. Such policies generate mixed support.

Implemented policies

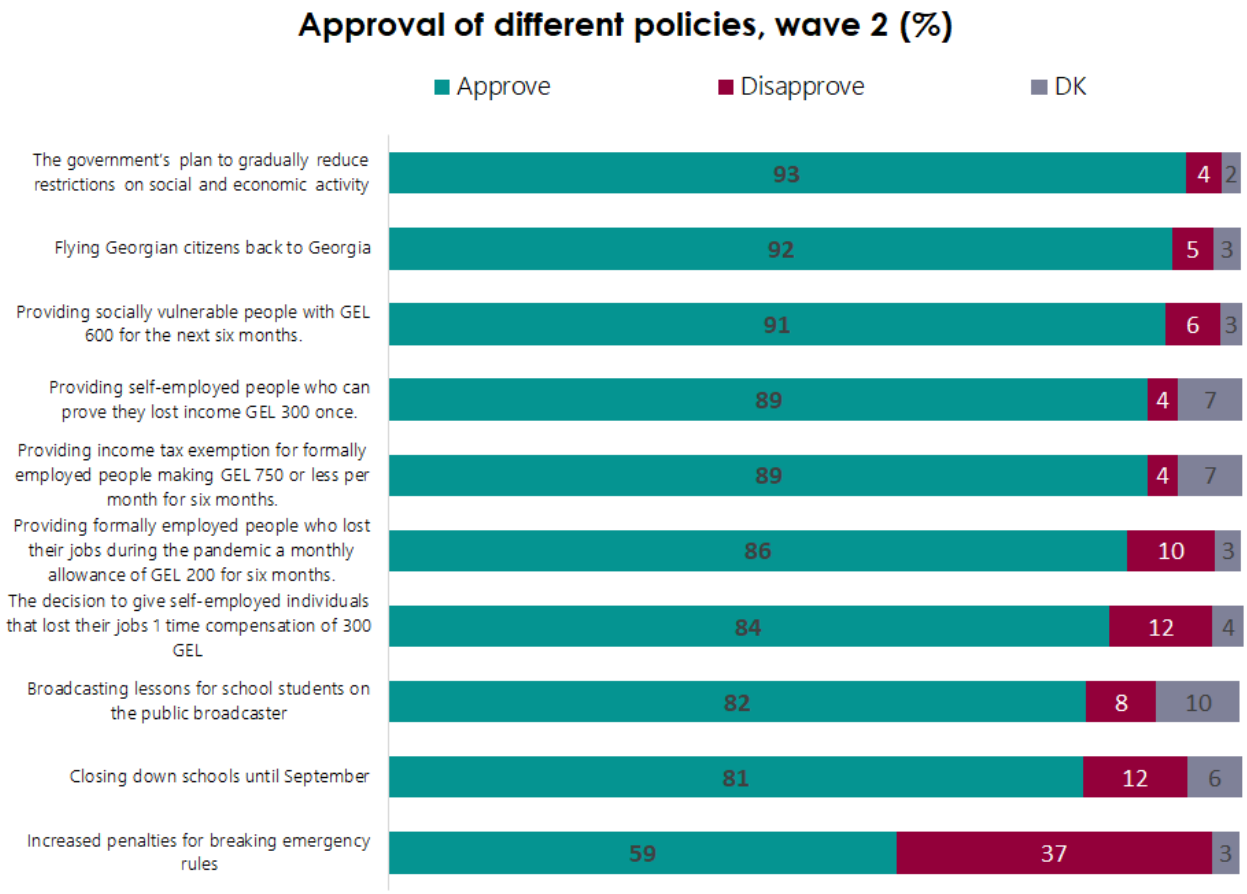
The first wave of the study captured the period between April 29 and May 3. At that stage, the state of emergency, curfew, and closing of the majority of non-essential business were already implemented. A majority of the restrictions were positively evaluated. The least supported policy was the restriction of online sales of some products (mostly household appliances). Another policy with relatively weak support was allowing churches to be open during the Easter celebrations.



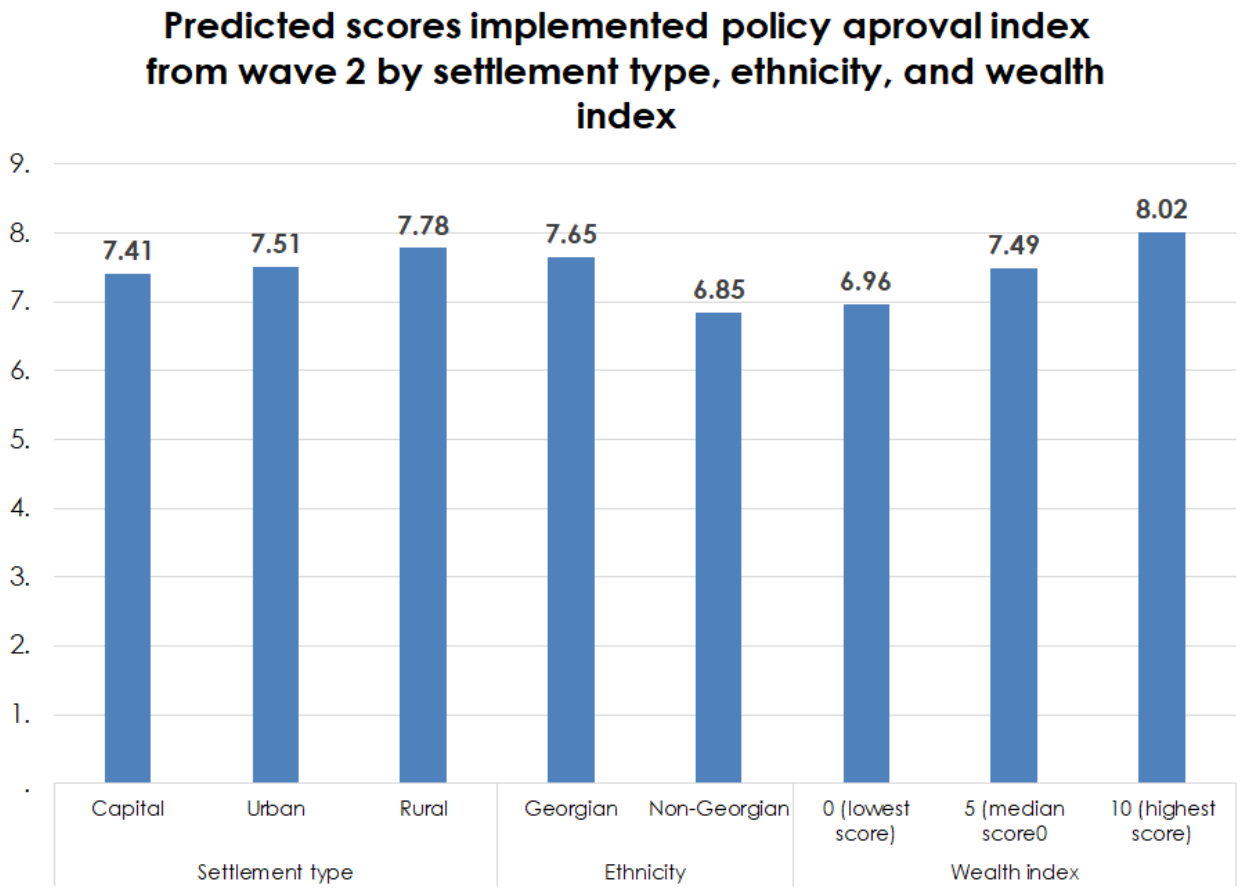
While the majority approved of the above policies, support varied among different groups. A policy support index was constructed, where 9 indicates support for all the above measures and 0 none of these policy actions. An ordinary least squares regression suggests ethnic minorities were less supportive of government policy. Similarly, those living in Tbilisi and without higher education were less supportive, holding other factors constant.



The second wave of the study conducted during May 7 - May 10 again indicated overwhelming approval of most governmental actions in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. An absolute majority supported the plan to gradually reduce restrictions on social and economic activities as well as provision of targeted monetary incentives to the socially vulnerable. Increasing penalties for breaking state of emergency rules was less widely supported, but still a majority (59%) approved.

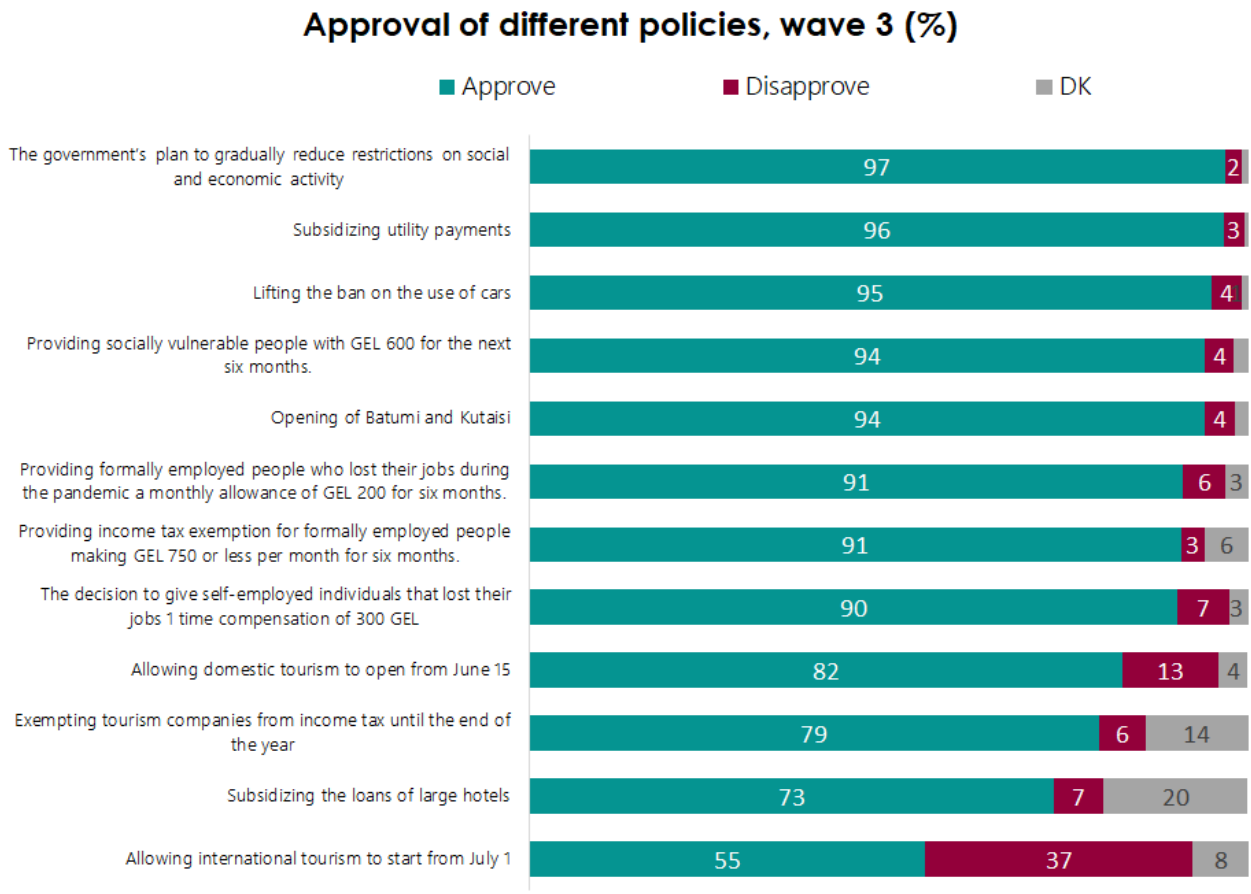


An index was made from the above question, measured on scale from 0 to 9 as done with the Wave 1 data. A regression analysis suggests that those living in rural areas, ethnic Georgians, and wealthier people tended to approve of government policy more.

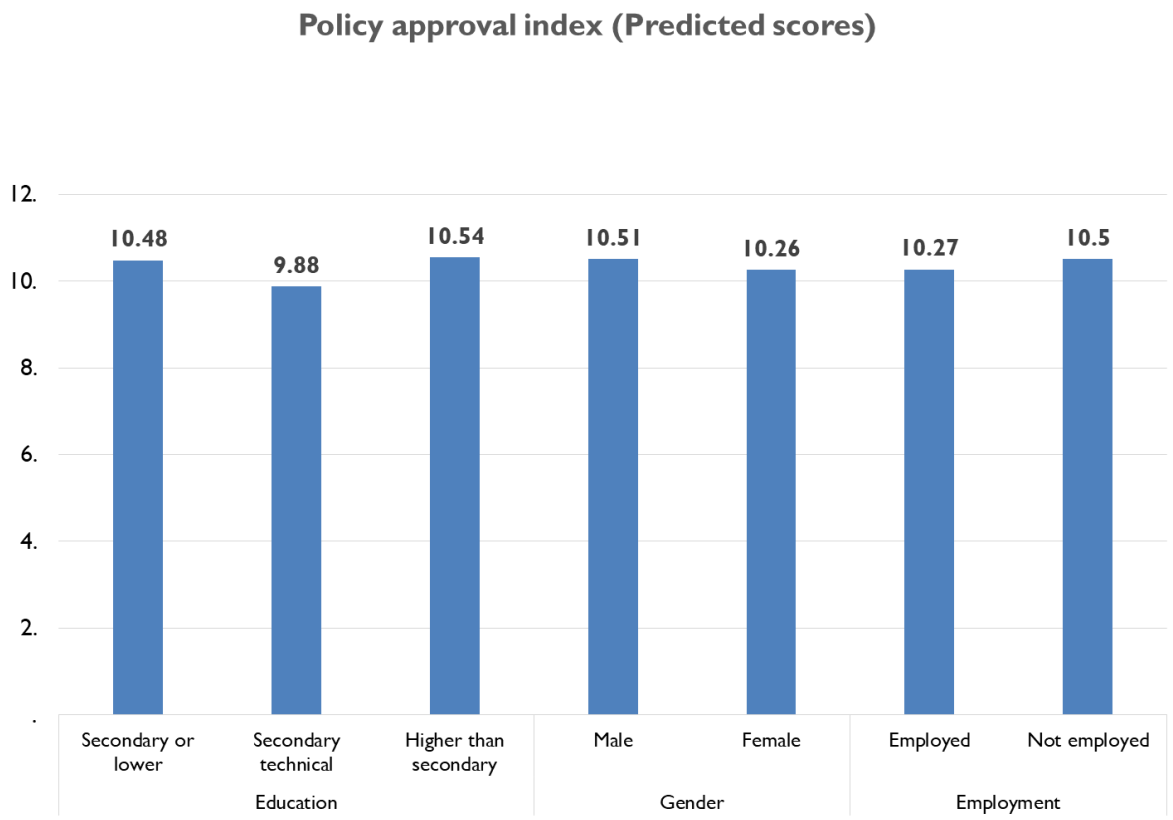


The tendency of supporting government policy continued the following week (May 14 - May 17). More than 90% supported monetary aid for vulnerable groups and subsidizing utility payments. Relatively few approved of support for the tourism industry. The announcement that international tourism would be allowed from July 1 was least supported.[3]

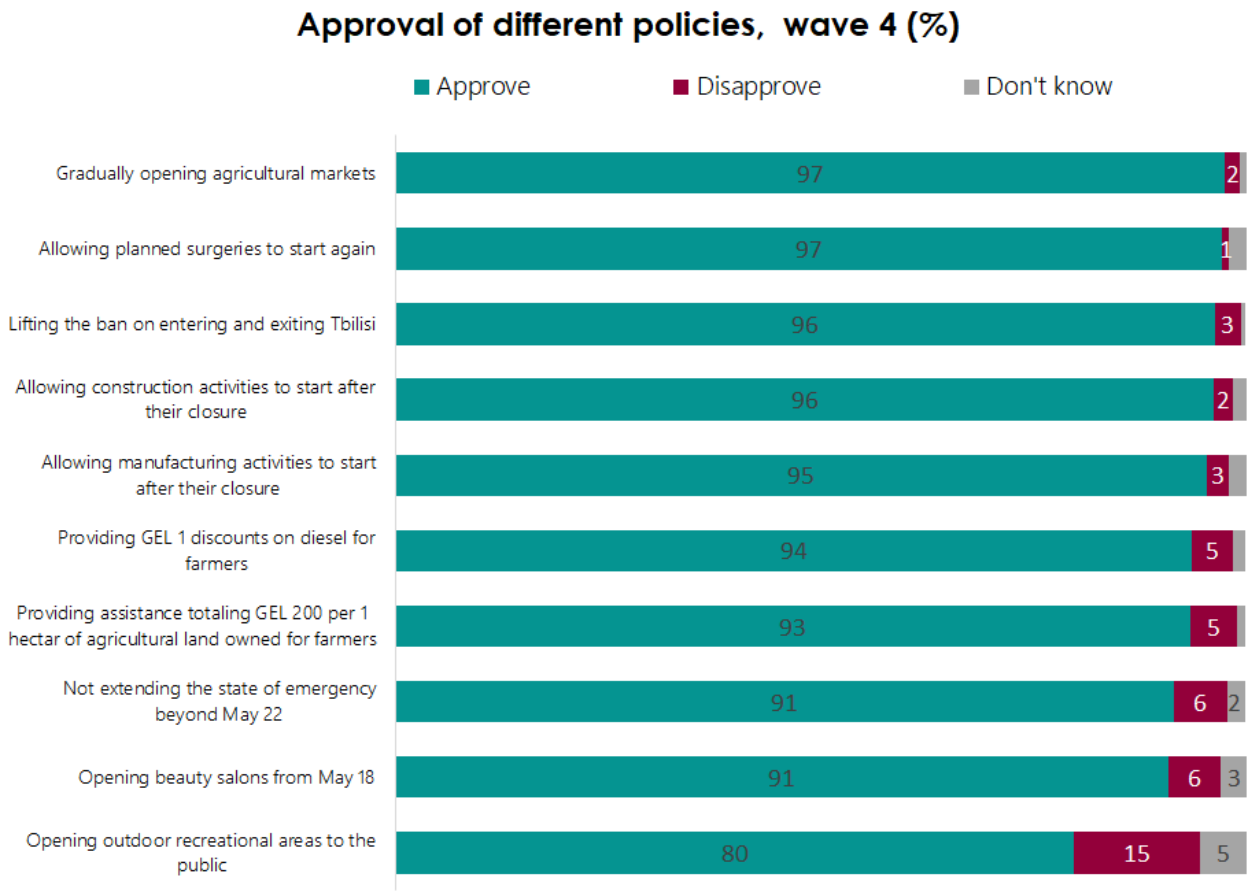
3 Eventually, the government decided not to open borders for international tourists on July 1. At the time the question was asked, July 1 was still government policy.



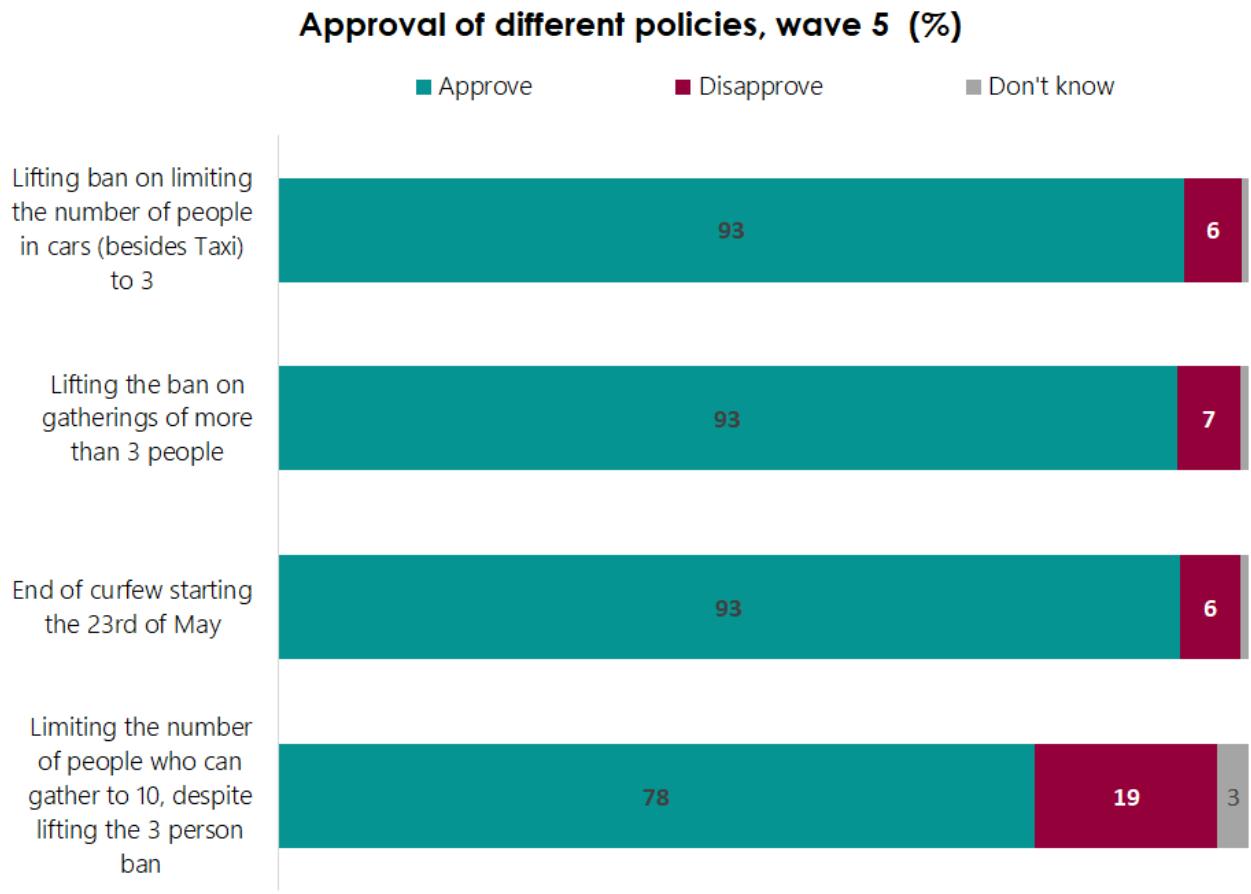
An index of attitudes towards the above policies was created where 12 means support of all policies and 0 none. A regression model suggests no significant differences between settlement types and ethnicity. However, those with higher education were more approving compared to those with lower education levels. Holding all other factors constant, men and unemployed people were more likely to support policy. While statistically different, the size of differences are relatively small.



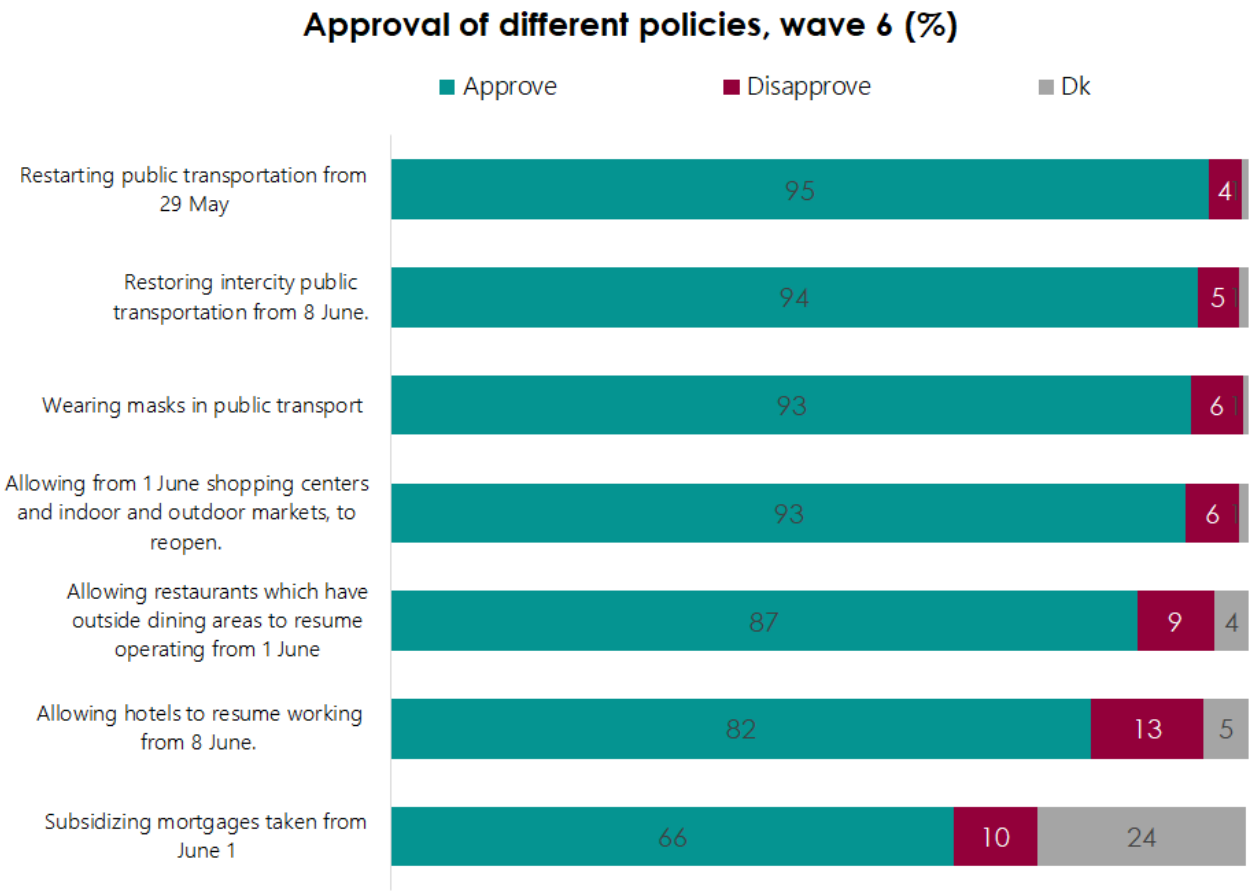
The fourth wave of survey (conducted from May 21 to May 23) coincided with the easing of restrictions on economic activities and the opening of a number of previously closed businesses. Government also continued introducing subsidies for different parts of the population. The Georgian public almost unanimously supported those decisions. Out of ten different policies asked about on this wave of the survey nine were approved of by 90% of the population or more. Attitudes towards an index of the policies asked about on this wave only varied with education level: those with higher levels of education were slightly more supportive of government policy.



The fifth wave covered the period from May 28 to May 31. This period saw a continuation of further lifting of bans on a number of restrictions associated with freedom of movement. Over 90% of the public approved of the end of the curfew from the 23rd of May, lifting the ban on the three person limit on gatherings and in transport (besides taxis). Relatively few (78%) supported the continued ban on gathers of 10 people in public places. There were no significant differences between different demographic groups on approval of these policies.



The last wave of the COVID-19 monitor took place from June 4 to June 6. During the period, the government continued lifting bans on a number of economic activities and introduced new economic packages to back industries experiencing specific challenges as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Restoring both municipal (95%) and intercity (94%) public transportation were the most welcomed policies at that time. Wearing masks while using public transport also had the support of more than 90% of the public. An absolute majority also approved of opening shopping centers, markets, and restaurants. The government plan to subsidize mortgages was relatively less popular (66%). Overall, there were no significant differences across different demographic groups on approval of policies.



Overall, the government's policies had the support of most of Georgian society. A majority supported all policies, besides restricting online sales of some products.

Opinions regarding hypothetical policy measures

Experts and government also discussed a number of policies that were not implemented. When a policy was publically under consideration, but not yet implemented at the time of question creation, the survey asked about it as a hypothetical.

The first wave asked about whether people would approve of a policy under which citizens would have to tell the government in order to leave home. This policy was proposed if the country reached 2000 infected cases.[4] Support for notifying authorities before leaving the house was moderate. Equal shares of society supported (43%) and did not support (43%) the proposition. A further 14% were uncertain. A logistic

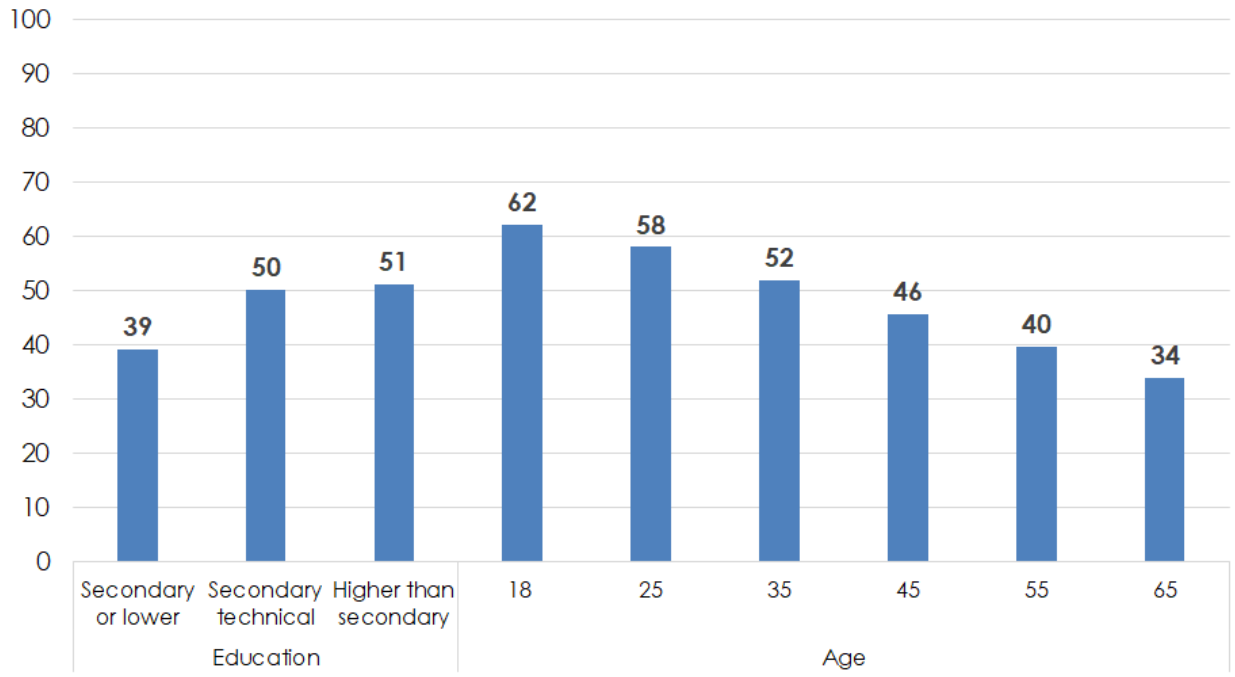
[4] This policy was proposed by the Minister of Health on April 15th. For a video of the announcement, see here.

regression suggests that the idea was least supported in Tbilisi (34%), while in other urban (45%) and rural (48%) areas people were more likely to approve of the policy proposal. Differences were not significant between other socio-demographic groups.

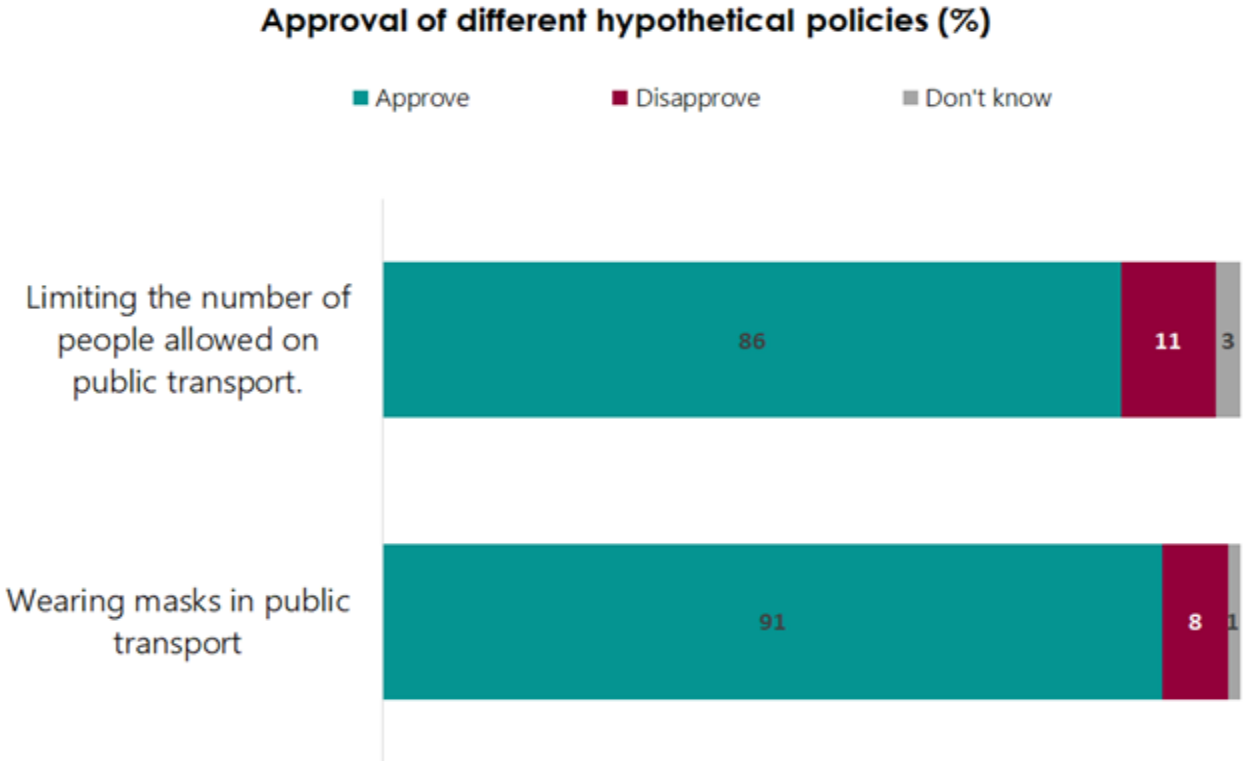
Another set of hypothetical policies was investigated during the 4th wave of the study. The study asked whether Georgians supported provision of aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in support of the Covid-19 crisis and usage of a contact tracing application on mobile phones. While support for the two breakaway regions was high (90%) attitudes toward the contact tracing application was mixed. The data suggest that 45% of people would approve of usage of a mobile application for tracing COVID-19 contacts. A third of the public (33%) reported uncertainty regarding this proposal.

While there were no significant differences between socio-demographic groups when it comes to attitudes towards providing aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, attitudes toward a contact tracing application differed. A logistic regression shows that those with higher education and young people were more likely to support the use of a contact tracing application.

Predicted probabilities of approval of using a mobile application for tracing COVID-19 contacts by settlement type and age



During the development of the questionnaire for the fifth wave of the study, wearing masks in public transport and limiting the number of people allowed on public transport were potential though not confirmed policies. Hence, the survey asked about them as hypotheticals. The results showed that most were supportive of these ideas: 91% of the public supported wearing masks in public transport and 86% said they would support limiting the number of people allowed on public transport. When comparing different groups no significant differences were found.

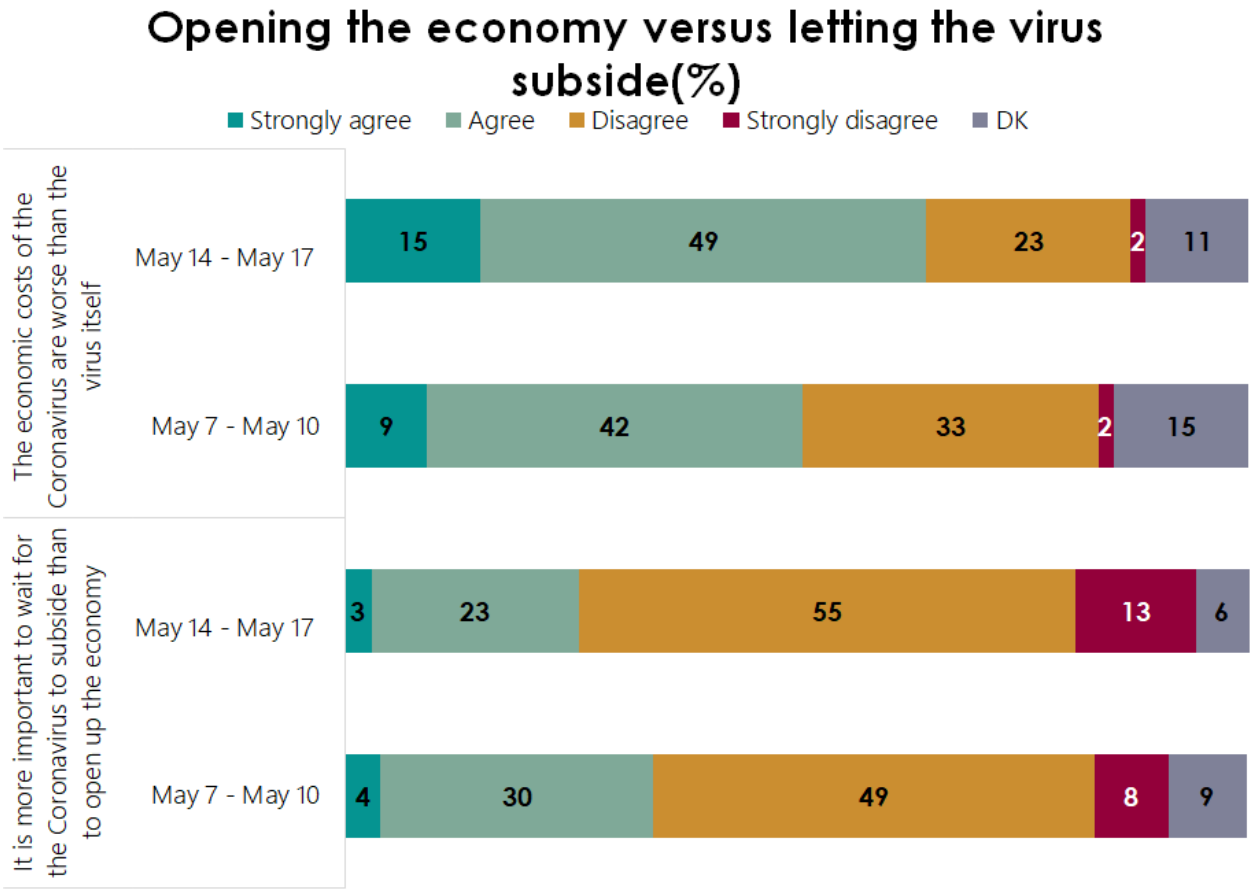


Overall, people were supportive of the hypothetical governmental policies asked about, though there was less support for the use of a contact tracing application.

Tradeoffs on opening versus staying closed

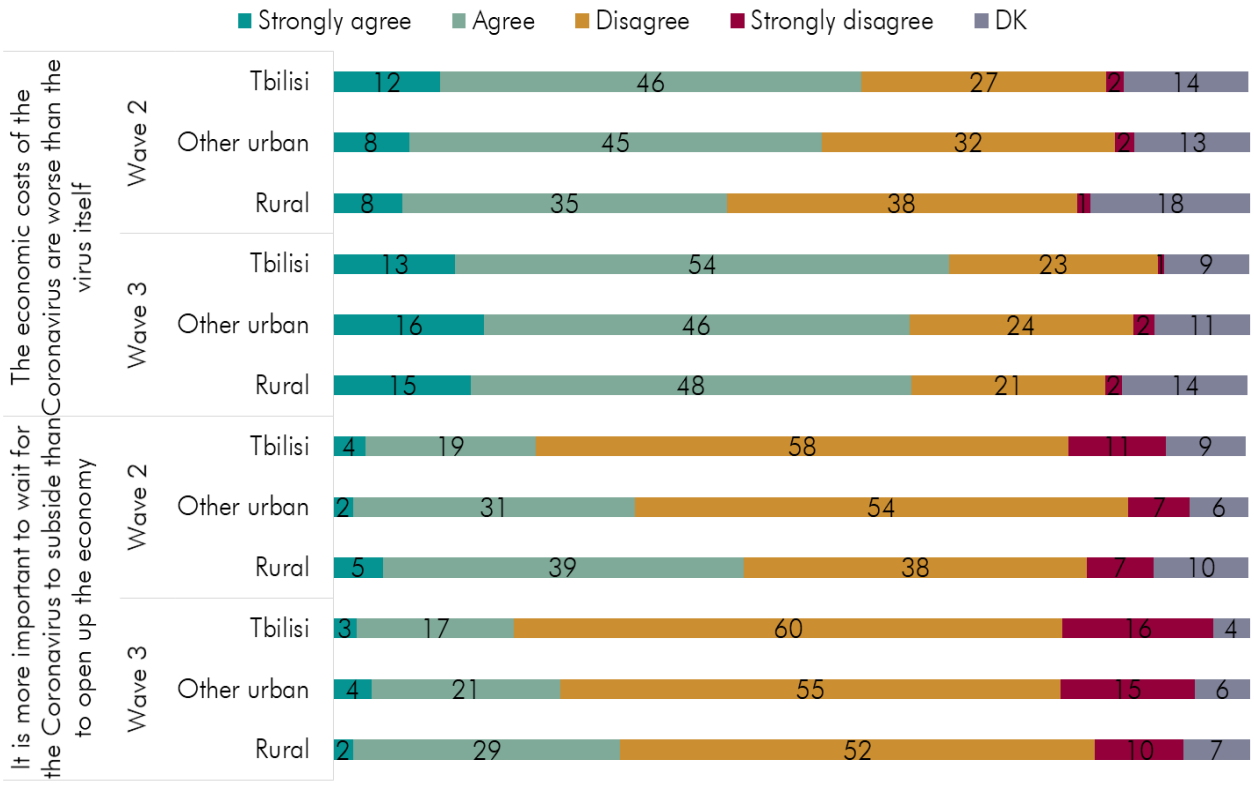
While the measures Georgian authorities imposed were effective in prevention of COVID-19, questions regarding the economic consequences of the crises became more important as the crisis wore on. During the second and third waves of the study, people were asked about their views of the trade-offs associated with preventing the spread of COVID-19 and the opening of the economy. The data suggest that people gradually became more worried about the economic consequences of the pandemic.

The number of those who agreed that the economic cost of the virus were worse than the virus itself increased by 13 percentage points between two waves of the study from 51% to 64%. At the same time, the share agreeing with the statement that waiting for the virus to subside is more important than opening the economy declined from 34% to 26% during the same period.

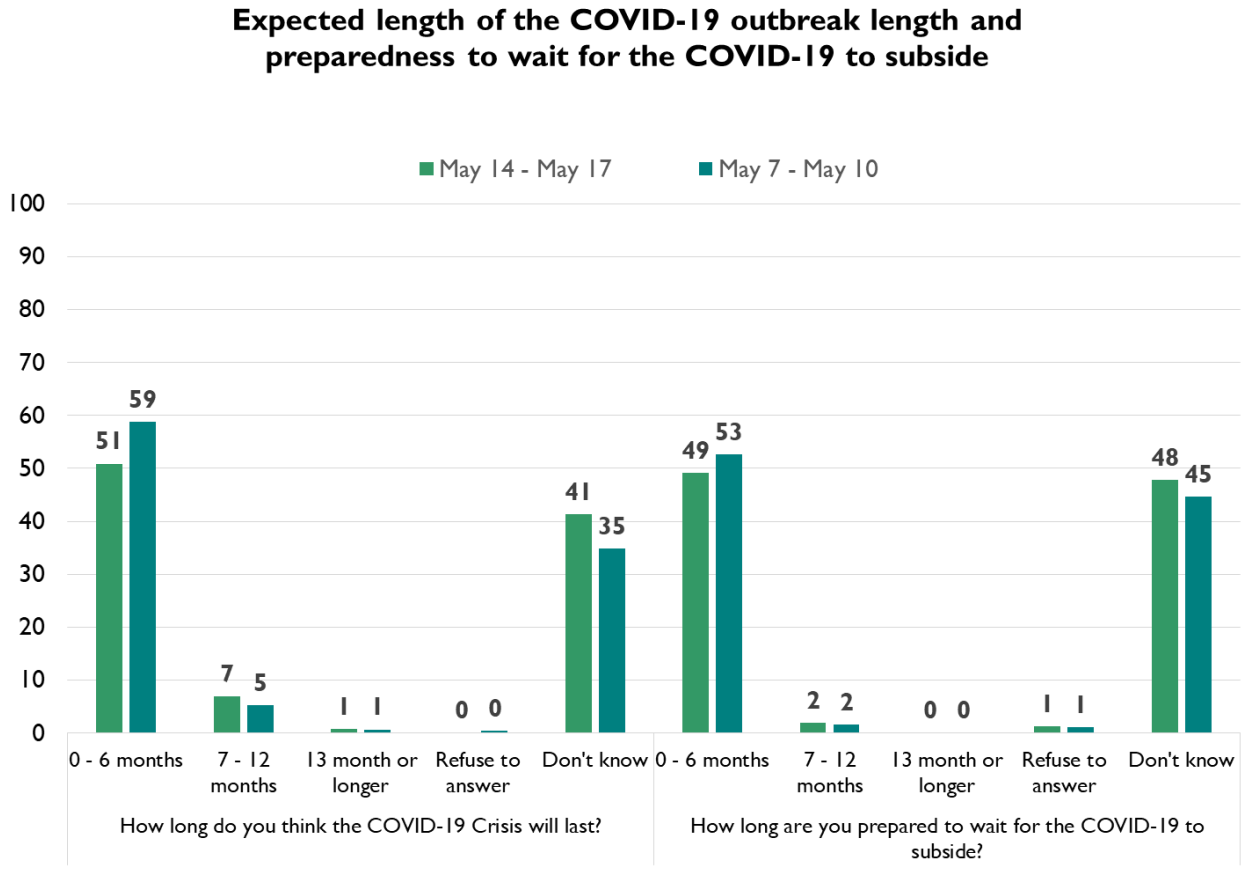


People in Tbilisi were more likely to favor opening the economy in both waves of the survey. The difference between settlement types however became smaller in the third wave of the survey on the statement about the economy. A similar pattern is at play when it comes to the statement about the importance of waiting for the virus to subside to open up the economy. People in Tbilisi were more strongly against waiting in both waves of the survey, however the difference became smaller in the third wave of the survey.

Attitudes towards the economy and virus by settlement type(%)



Attitudes towards the economic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak and people's willingness to tolerate restrictions might be expected to be associated with their perceptions of how long the crisis could last and willingness to wait to go back to normal life. To explore this hypothesis, respondents were asked how long they were willing to wait as well as how long they thought the crisis would last. The data indicate that there were high levels of uncertainty over how long the COVID-19 crisis would last and how long people were prepared to wait for COVID-19 to subside. Among those, who named a specific time period, the absolute majority expected that the crisis would last no longer than 6 months. They generally reported a similar amount of time that they were prepared to wait out the crisis. In the data collected between May 7 and 10, the average time people expected the COVID-19 crisis to last was 3.1 months (median 2 months), and the average time they were willing to wait was 1.9 months (median 1 month). In the subsequent wave, the same figures stood at 3.6 months (median 2) and 1.9 months (median 1 months).



Starting from late May, the government started easing restrictions and Georgia started gradually returning to pre-crisis conditions. During the last wave of the study people were asked about the pace of lifting restrictions. The majority (72%) reported that the pace was right. Smaller shares reported it was too fast (11%) or too slow (12%).

Overall, during the study period people were uncertain about how long the crisis would last. Yet, they also tended to favor opening up the economy over waiting for the virus to dissipate. Still, the public is generally satisfied with the pace of lifting restrictions.

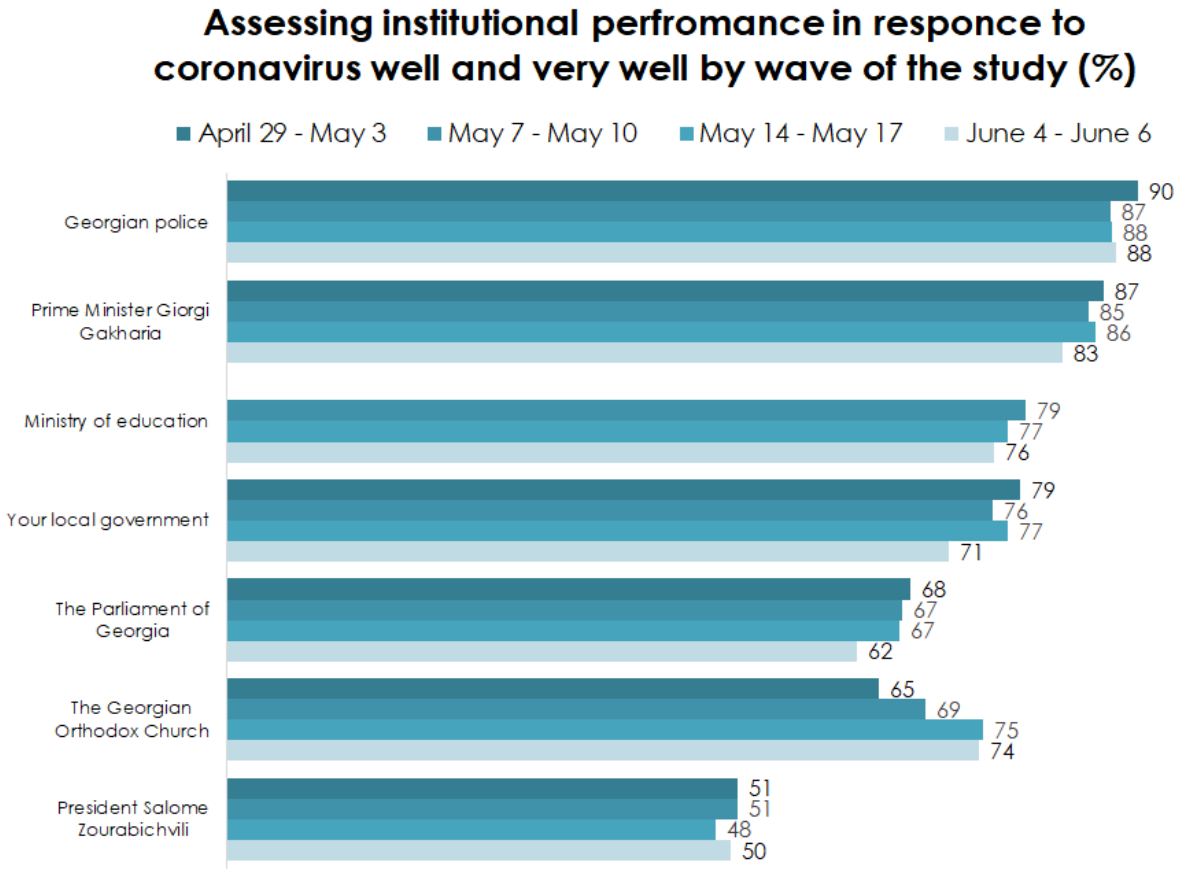
Institutions

The extraordinary measures taken due to the COVID-19 outbreak had an impact on the general assessment of public institutions, with a clear rallying around the flag effect. The study results showed that institutions' performance assessments generally benefited from the COVID-19 crisis. They experienced rapid and large increases in trust and approval ratings compared to the pre-crisis period. The public was satisfied with corona-specific as well as the general performance of institutions. The most positive appraisals were directed toward

medical institutions. The executive government and Prime Minister also received high assessments. This trend remained unchanged for all six waves of the study, with minor variation.

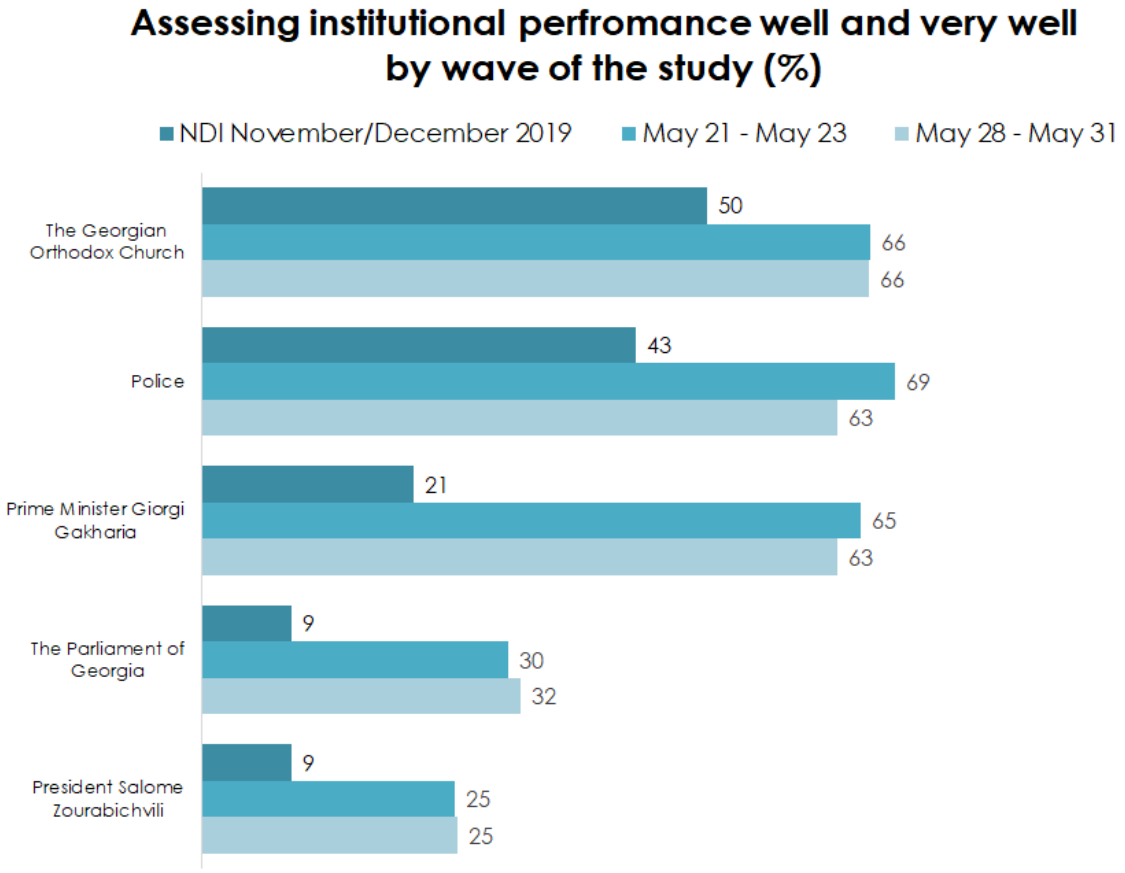
Public Institutions

During the study period, most institutions had consistently high approval in terms of Corona specific performance. The Georgian Orthodox Church is something of an exception in this regard. The first wave of data collection was conducted shortly after Easter. The Church had relatively low Corona related performance assessments at the start of the study. However, after the Easter celebration, the subsequent waves indicated a rise in approval of the Church's performance in response to coronavirus.



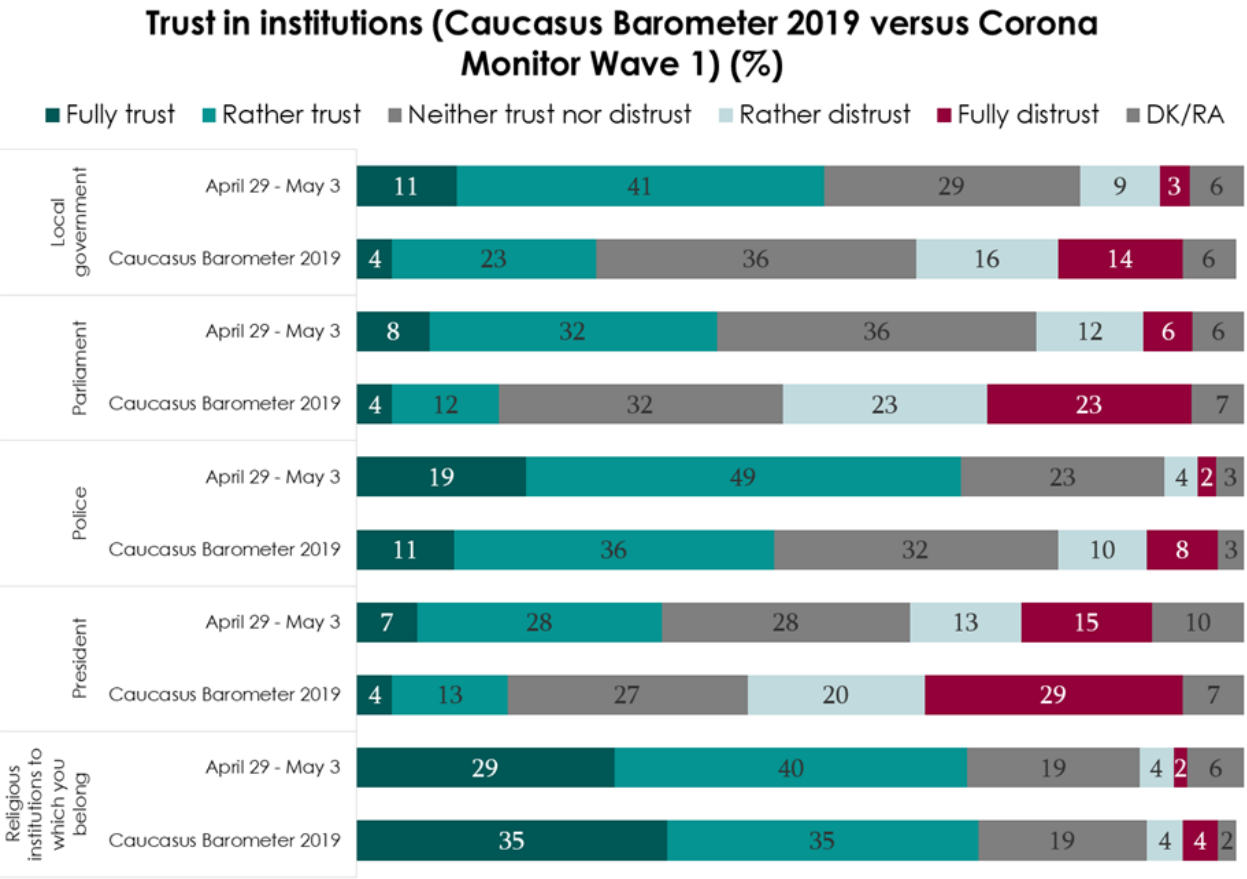
The study also asked about general rather than Corona specific assessments of performance. The results suggest a rallying around the flag effect. All key public institutions had an increase in positive evaluations of their performance compared to the pre-coronavirus period. Even the least approved of institutions experienced large gains in performance approval. The

President and Georgian parliament saw 16 and 21 percentage point increases in positive assessments. The most drastic changes were associated with attitudes towards the Prime Minister's performance: only 21% of the public evaluated Giorgi Gakharia's performance positively in November/December 2019. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the number rose to 65% in the fourth wave of this study.



The trends observed in terms of performance evaluations were similar to the trends in trust. Comparison of COVID-19 monitor data with the 2019 Caucasus Barometer[5] illustrates that trust in the parliament, president, police, and local government has increased substantially. The only institutions that did not show higher levels of trust were religious institutions.

[5] Like the NDI survey data, the 2019 Caucasus Barometer Survey was also conducted using face to face interviewing. Hence, there also is a degree of unmeasurable error in the comparison of the two modes, because of the difference in administration of the survey.

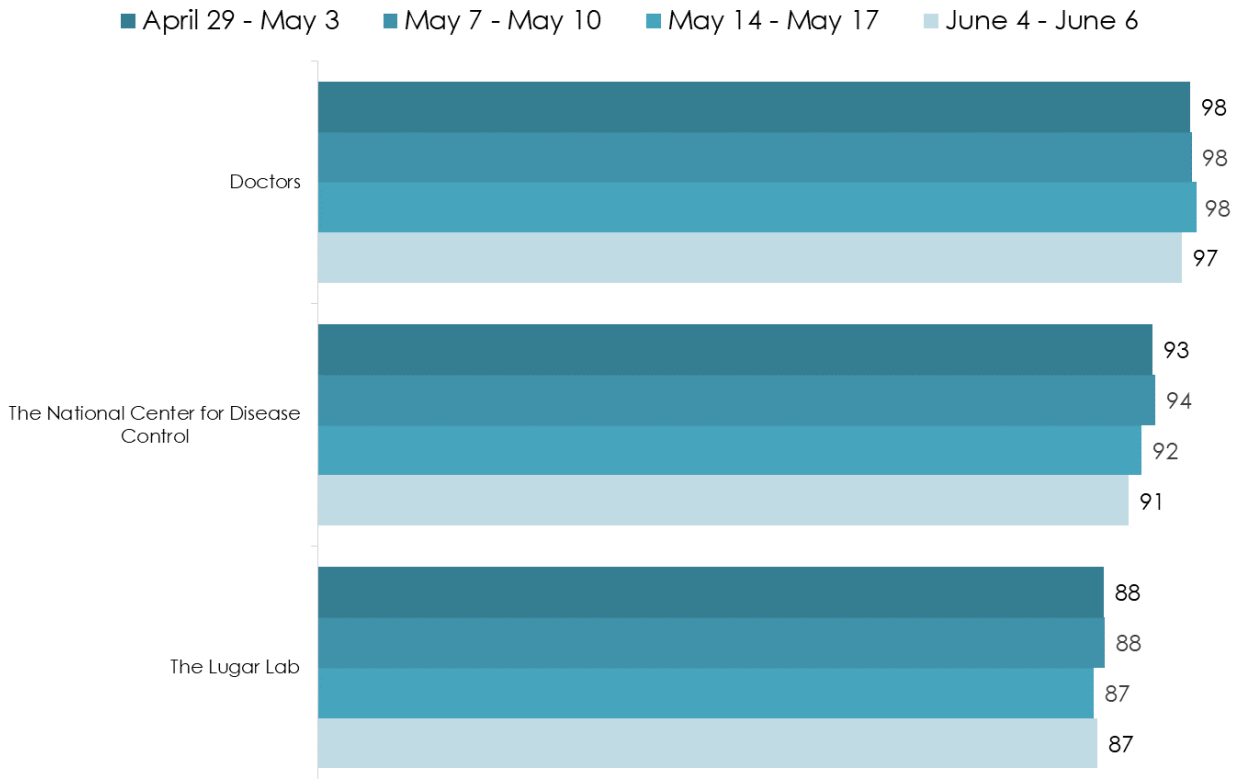


Medical Institutions

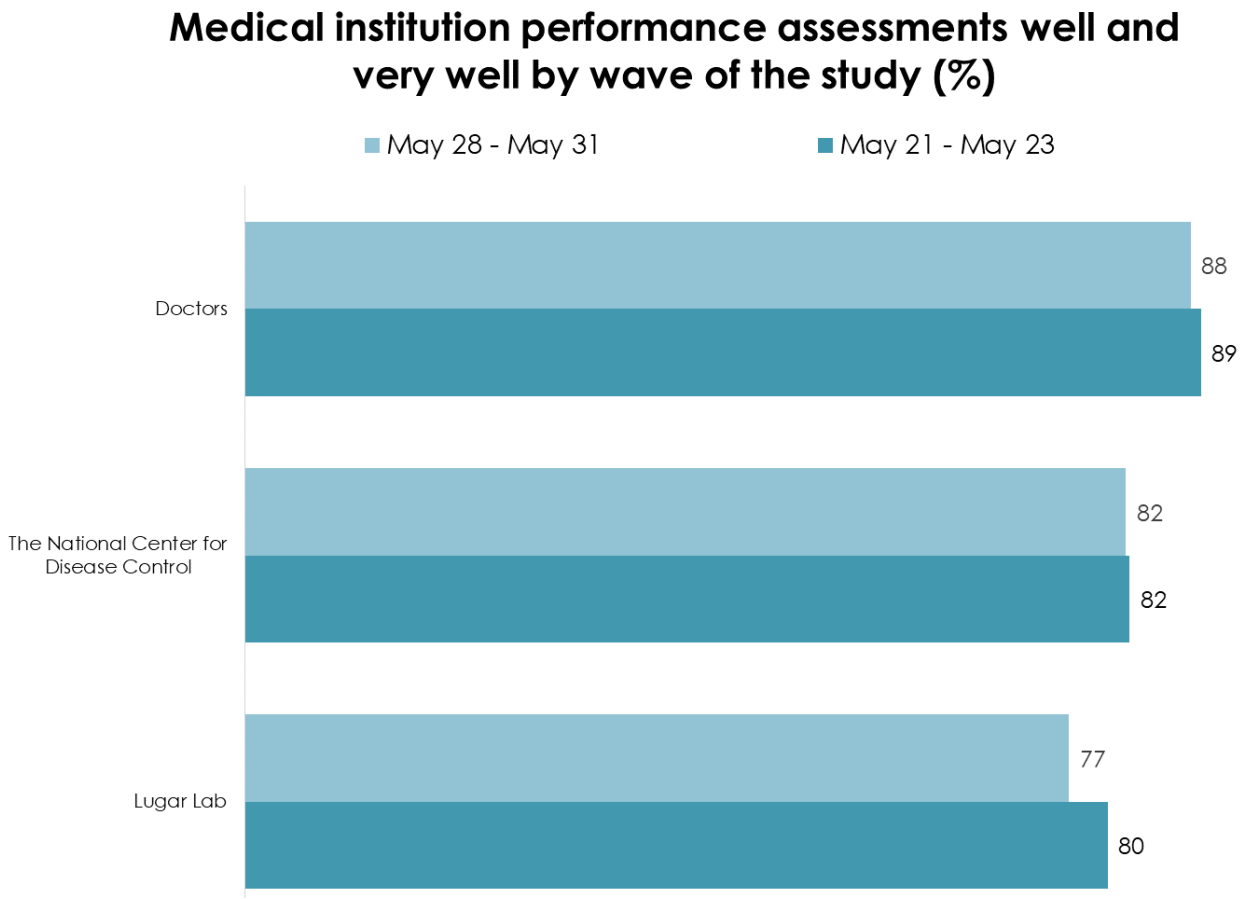
The COVID-19 monitor survey also asked about performance evaluations and trust in medical institutions. Medical institutions enjoyed very high approval levels. More members of the public even approve of the performance of the Lugar Lab, a regular target of misinformation and conspiracy theories,[6] than the Georgian Orthodox Church.

[6] See: https://oc-media.org/features/analysis-who-is-afraid-of-the-lugar-centre/

Medical institution performance assessments related to Coronavirus well and very well by wave of the study (%)

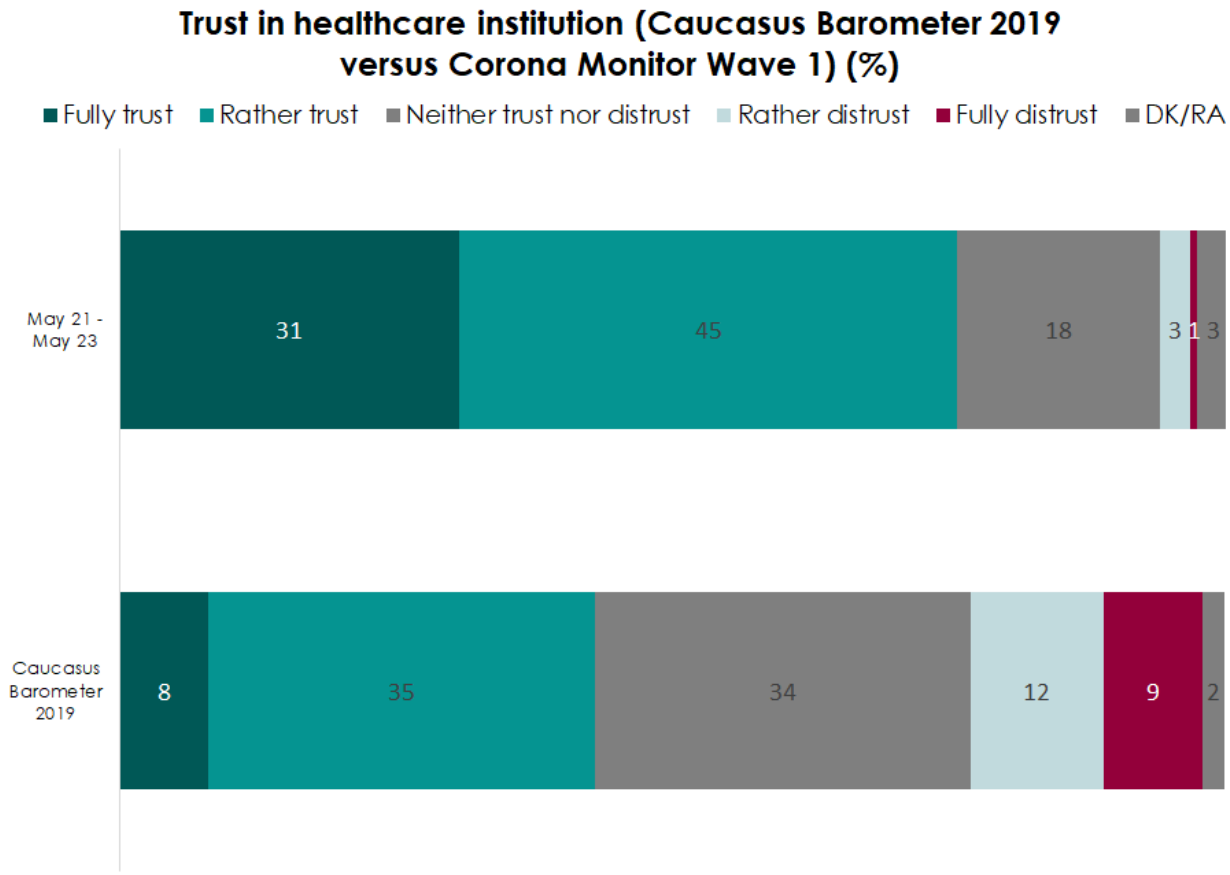


The towering levels of approvals were observed not only regarding coronavirus specific performance, but also when assessing the general performance of medical institutions. Between waves, there was little change in attitudes.



Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Georgian healthcare system was one of the most trusted institutions, with 45% of Georgians reporting some level of trust in it, according to 2019 Caucasus Barometer data.[7] Trust after the coronavirus outbreak increased to 76% of the public reporting at least some trust. Only 4% reported distrust compared with 21% prior to the crisis.

[7] See: https://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2020/04/who-trusts-healthcare-system-in-georgia.html



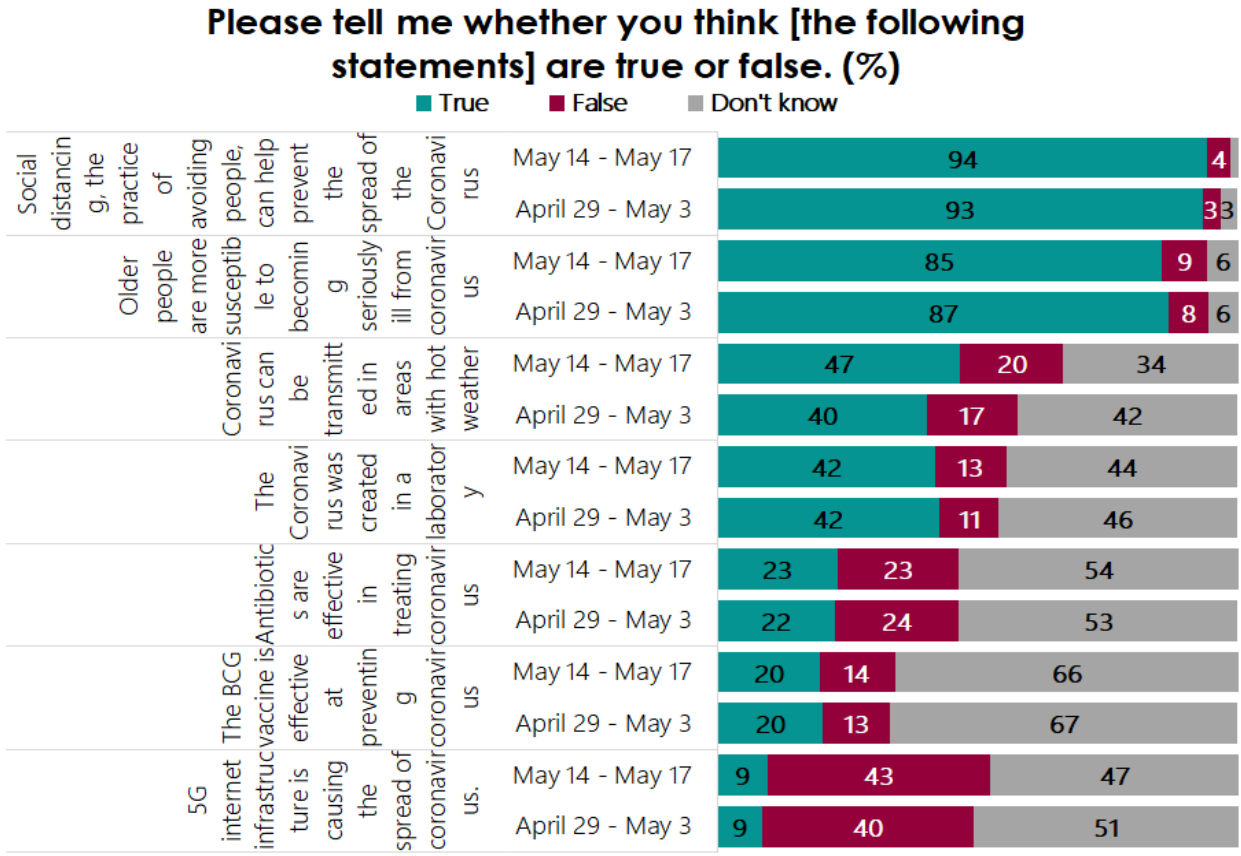
Georgian society was generally satisfied with governmental actions responding to coronavirus. Even those institutions that usually have low levels of support have gained approval and trust. The popular trust and appraisal of medical institutions is striking, with near unanimous approval of doctors, the NCDC and the Lugar Lab.

Misinformation

The spread of coronavirus generated a number of conspiracy theories and fake news stories that globally affected societal attitudes, responses, and behavior. This study asked seven true and false questions about prevention and treatment of Coronavirus in two waves of the survey. The findings of both waves are nearly identical and indicate high levels of uncertainty as well as the presence of misinformation.

Large shares of the public are unaware of a number of facts around the virus and a number of fallacies about the Coronavirus are prevalent in society. For instance, in both waves, around 42% reported believing in the fact that Coronavirus was created in a laboratory. A majority are uncertain about whether antibiotics

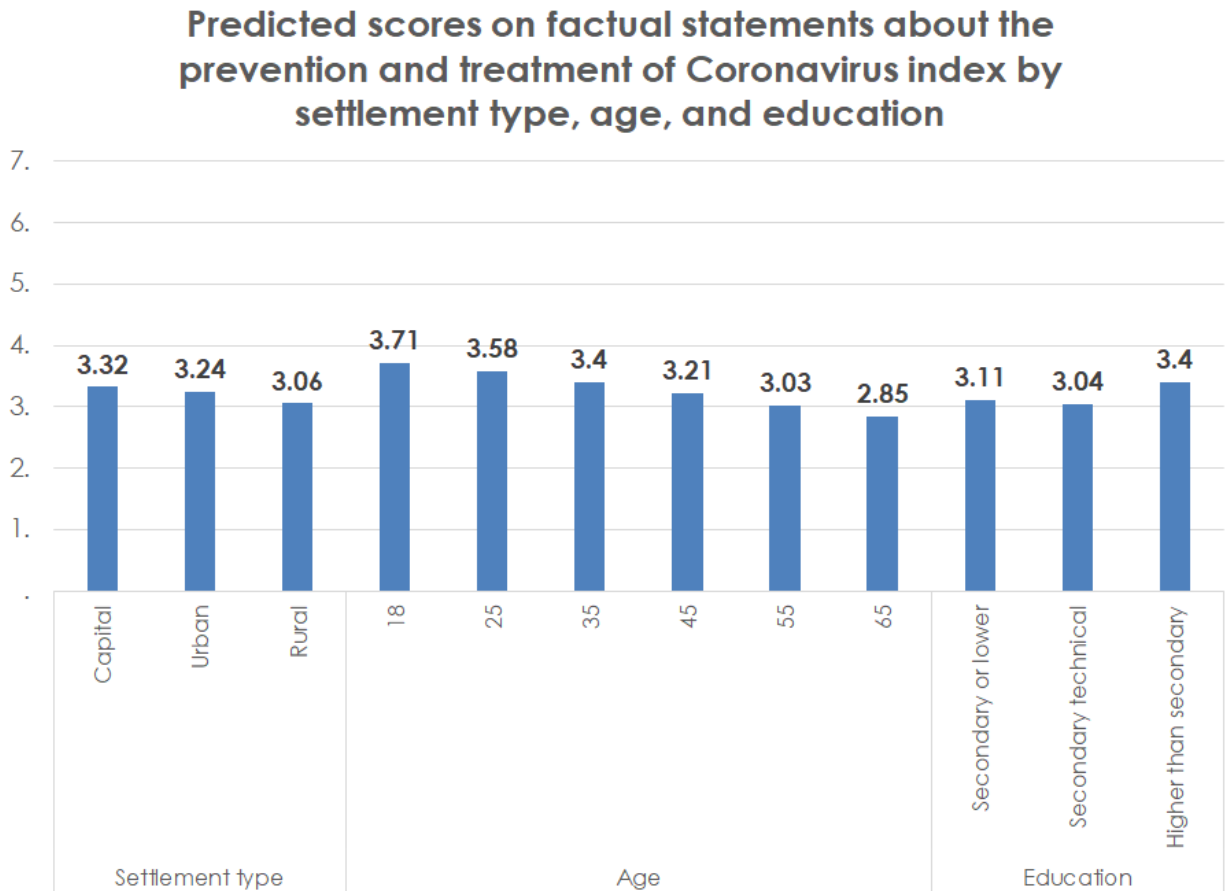
are effective at treating the virus, and nearly a quarter of the population agree with the idea that antibiotics are effective at treating the virus. A fifth think that the BCG vaccine is effective against the Coronavirus. A relatively small, but still important share of the public (9%) thinks that 5G internet infrastructure is causing the spread of the virus. There are only two exceptions from above described patterns. Most know about the positive role of social distancing in preventing the spread of the virus and that older people are more susceptible to becoming seriously ill from the virus.



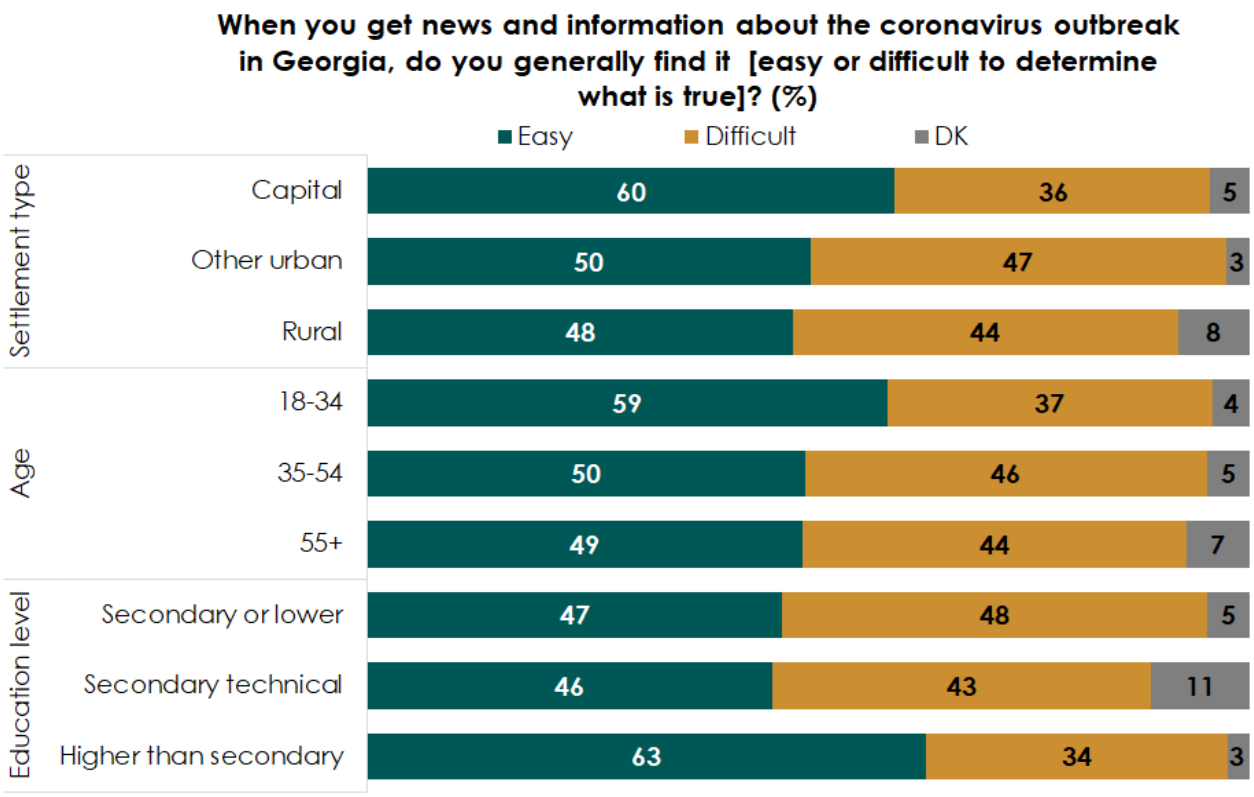
An index of the above questions was constructed with 0 indicating no correct answers to the above questions and 7 meaning only correct answers.[8] A regression suggests settlement type,

[8] The answer qualified as correct if the respondent said the following statements were true: "Social distancing can help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus"; "Coronavirus can be transmitted in areas with hot weather"; "Older people are more susceptible to becoming seriously ill from COVID-19". The answer was qualified as correct if the respondent answered "FALSE" the following statements: "The Coronavirus was created in a laboratory"; "Antibiotics are effective in treating coronavirus"; "5G internet infrastructure is causing the spread of coronavirus", and "The BCG vaccine is effective at preventing coronavirus". Don't know and refusal to answer the question counted as 0 points.

age, and education are associated with higher levels of knowledge. Young people and those with higher education have higher index scores. Those living in rural areas have lower scores on the index. Although these differences are statistically significant, they are substantively small.



People followed the news closely during the crisis. Most people reported following the news related to COVID-19 either very closely (35%) or closely (44%). The most common sources of information were news programs on Georgian TV channels, social media, and friends, neighbors, and family members. Many found it difficult (42%) to determine what was true and false in the media. Those living in rural areas, older people, and those without higher education reported higher levels of difficulty in understanding what was true and not.



A significant portion of the public thinks that the information they hear about the coronavirus outbreak in Georgia is made up. One in eleven (9%) report that they have encountered a lot of fake information, a third thinks they have encountered some (30%), and a fifth (21%) not much. Only a quarter (27%) thinks that none of the information they have seen is made up. Those who report encountering fake news, report that the most widespread type of misinformation was news related to the details of the virus (36%), magnitude of risk (21%), and events and actions surrounding COVID-19 (21%).

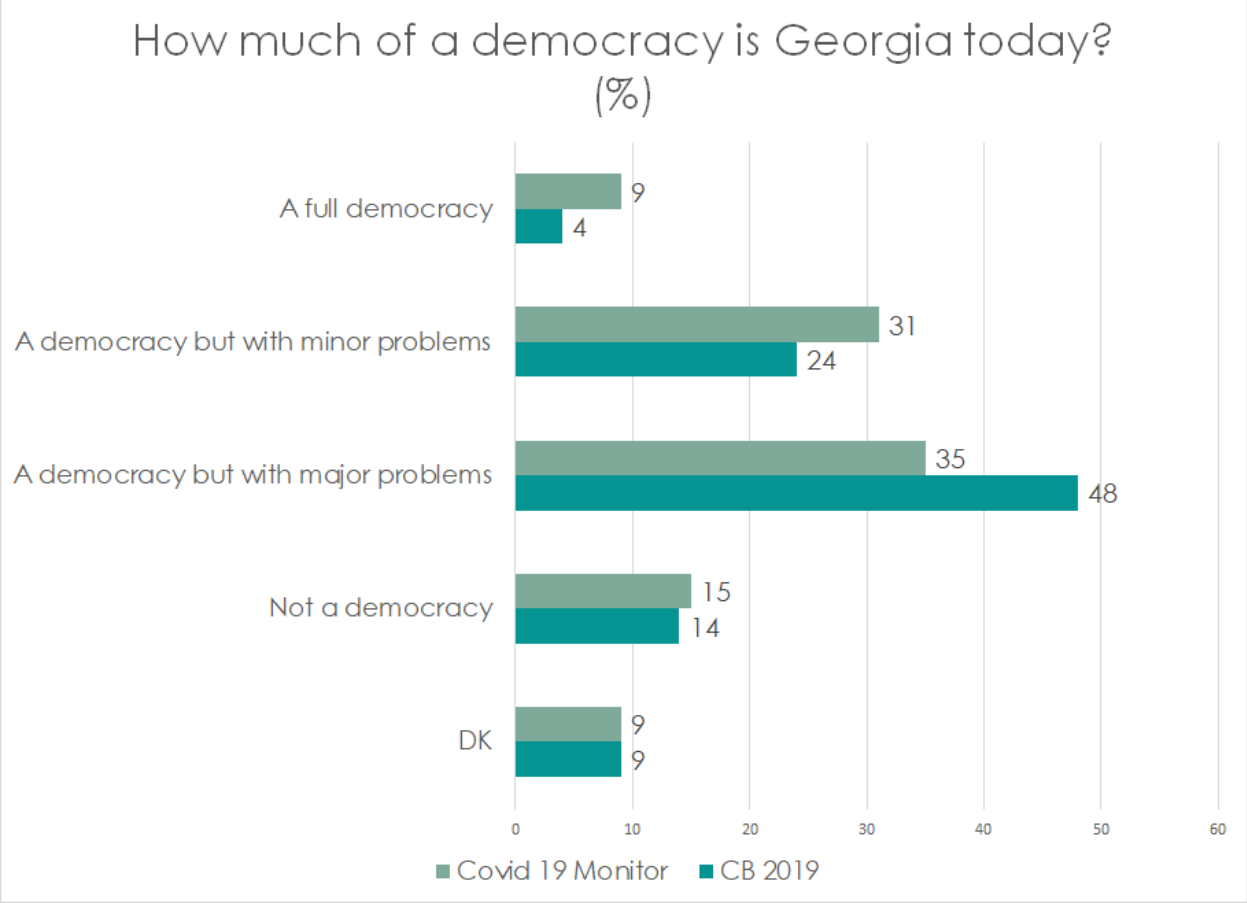
Perceptions and knowledge of COVID-19 and its outbreak in Georgian are mixed. There are significant portions of the public that have misinformation or report uncertainty over the facts. Most people followed the news closely, but still a significant share either thinks that it is difficult to differentiate fake news from what's real. In turn, a large share of the public thinks they have encountered fake news.

Democracy

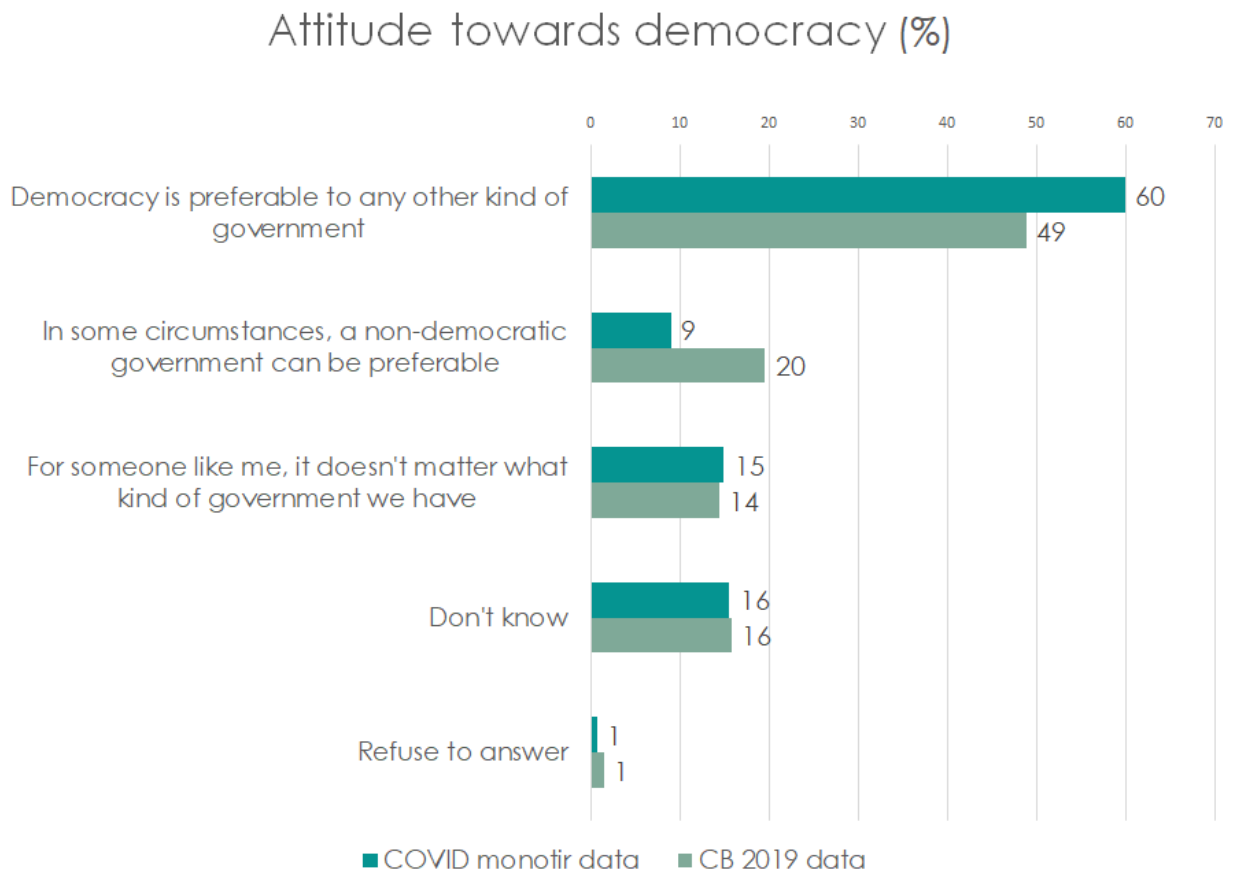
The outbreak of COVID-19 led to a conversation on democracy and its efficacy in dealing with crises. This study looked at these issues and

tracked changes in attitudes towards democracy before and after the crisis. The data indicate that while there has been increased support for democracy, there is ambiguous attitudes towards less than democratic governance.

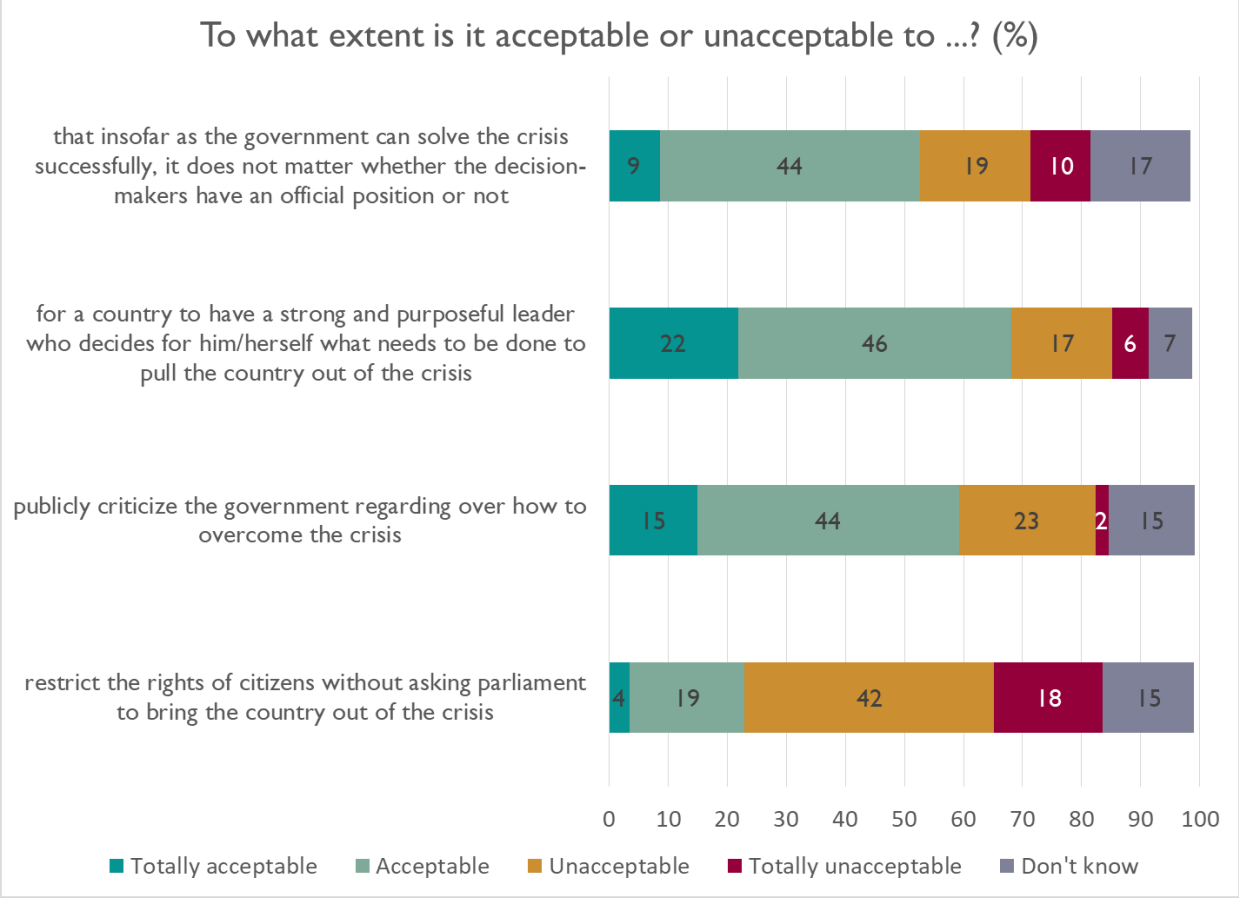
Compared with prior to the crisis, the public is more likely to think Georgia's democracy is on firmer ground. Almost half the public thought Georgia was a democracy with minor problems prior to the crisis, while 35% report the same today. There have been corresponding increases in the shares reporting that Georgia is a democracy but with minor problems and a full democracy.



Similarly, preference for democracy over any other type of government increased during this period. Compared to the pre-coronavirus period, the number of those who think that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government increased by 11 percentage points. That difference mostly comes from a decrease in the share reporting that "In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable."



Compared to prior to the COVID-19 period, evaluations of preferences for democracy have increased. Yet, whether people have a clear understanding of what democracy means is an open question. Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statements on the chart below.



The results are somewhat inconsistent with clearly pro-democratic views. On the one hand, people are generally opposed to the restriction of rights of citizens without asking parliament and tend to think it is acceptable to criticize government over how they are overcoming the crisis. On the other hand, they also think it does not matter whether there is informal governance and think it is acceptable to have a strong and purposeful leader who decides what needs to be done by themselves.

Vaccines

A vaccine is generally accepted as one of the best forms of disease control. Although it is unclear whether a vaccine will emerge for Covid 19, if one does it would enable the country and world to return to a greater semblance of pre-Covid normalcy. Yet, for vaccines to be effective, people have to get them. The fifth and sixth wave of surveys asked questions about attitudes towards vaccines and people's interest in receiving them. The results suggest that Georgia has a serious problem with vaccine related sentiment.

For a vaccine to enable a return to normal life, people must get them. Yet, the data from the study indicate many would not want a vaccine for Covid 19 if available. On the fifth wave of the survey, 42% reported they would want a vaccine for Covid-19 if available in six months, 43% reported they would not, and a further 15% were uncertain. The main reason people cited was that the vaccine would not be thoroughly tested six months from now (40%).

To understand whether this issue was driving the relatively low rate of interest in vaccines, the sixth wave of the study asked respondents whether they would want the vaccine if it was available two years from now. Responses to this question were statistically indistinguishable from the responses to the question about getting a vaccine if available six months from now (38% would want the vaccine, 43% would not, and 18% were uncertain).

The reasons people listed for not wanting to be vaccinated aside from the vaccine not being thoroughly enough tested six months from now suggest that anti-vaccine sentiments are also at play. Other commonly mentioned responses included vaccines create larger health problems for those that receive them than the benefit (14%), and vaccines are not effective (11%). A third of people (31%) not interested in receiving vaccines reported another response. Most of these people reported that they do not trust vaccines, think their immune system is strong enough to deal with the virus, or that Coronavirus is an exaggerated threat. Aside from these, some more conspiratorial responses were present, with several respondents reporting that vaccines would be used to insert microchips in them.

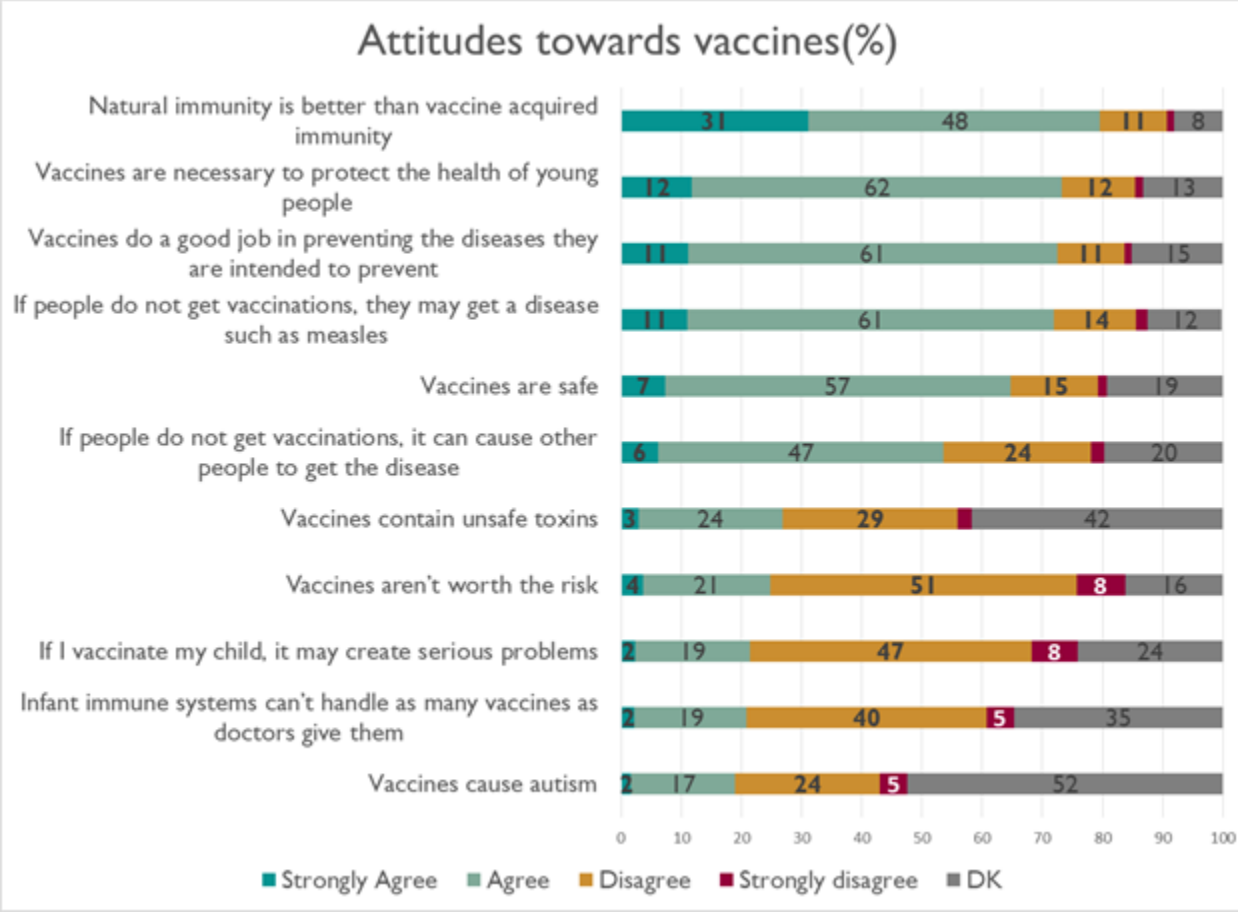
The above suggests that anti-vaccine sentiment underlays the relatively low level of interest in getting a vaccine. Data on attitudes towards vaccines support this conjecture. Attitudes towards vaccines in Georgia tend towards being more positive than negative. Yet, there are also important proportions of the population that are uncertain about or have negative attitudes toward vaccines.

When it comes to positive attitudes, most in Georgia agree that vaccines are necessary to protect the health of young people (74%) and vaccines do a good job in preventing the diseases they are intended to prevent (72%). Most people also agree with a number of other statements about the importance or protective qualities of vaccines.

Yet, even on these statements, important shares of the public are either uncertain or disagree. One in seven (14%) disagree with the statement that vaccines are necessary to protect the health

of young people and another one in seven (13%) are uncertain.

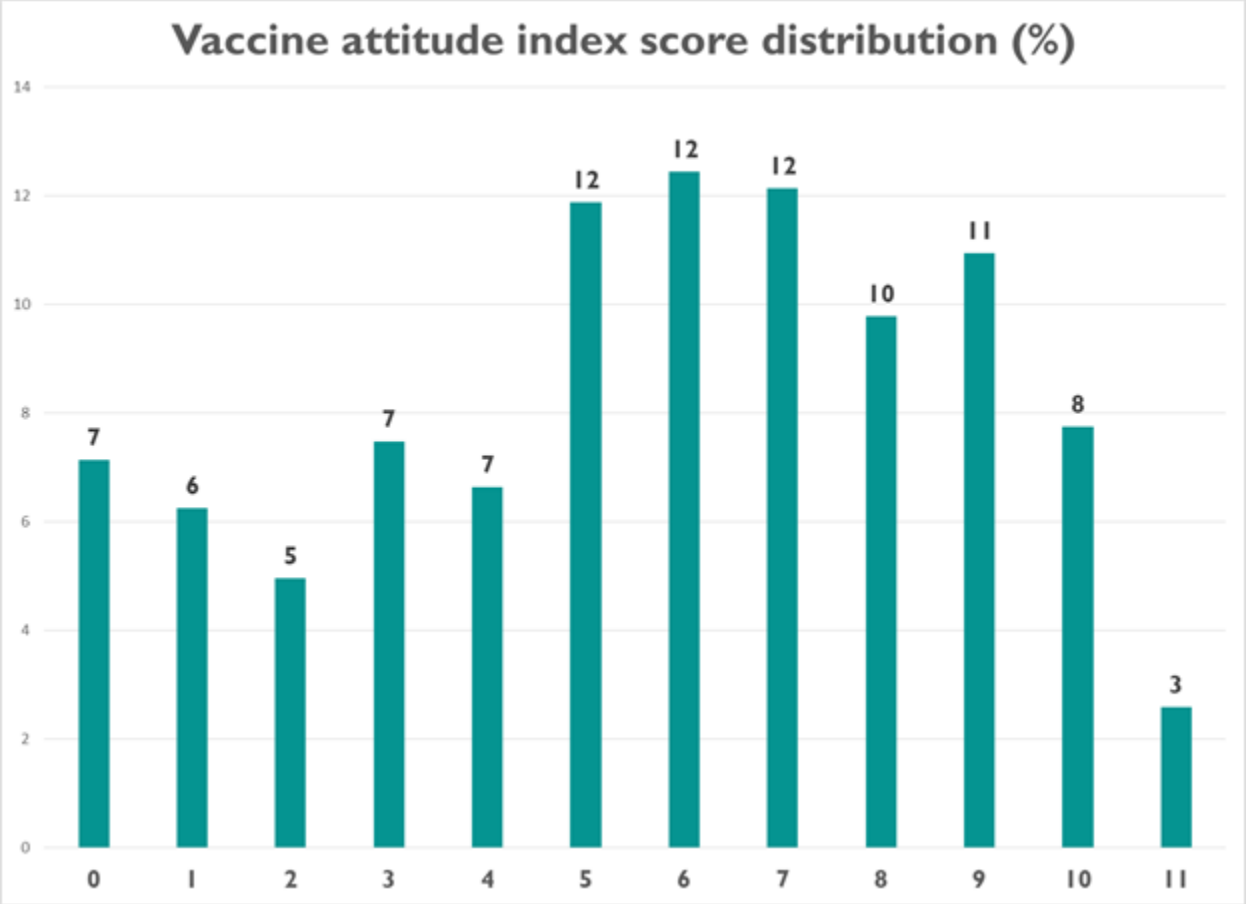
Important shares also think that vaccines are dangerous in one way or another or are uncertain about the issue. One in five (19%) think vaccines cause autism and half the public (52%) is uncertain. A quarter think vaccines contain unsafe toxins (27%), with 42% reporting they are uncertain. A quarter also think that they are not worth the risk (25%), with a further 16% uncertain on the matter.



To put these numbers in perspective, about one in ten Americans think that vaccines cause autism. Anti-vaccine sentiment is considered a public health problem in the United States. Given the more widespread belief in misinformation on vaccines in Georgia, the country has a clear problem with anti-vaccine sentiment.

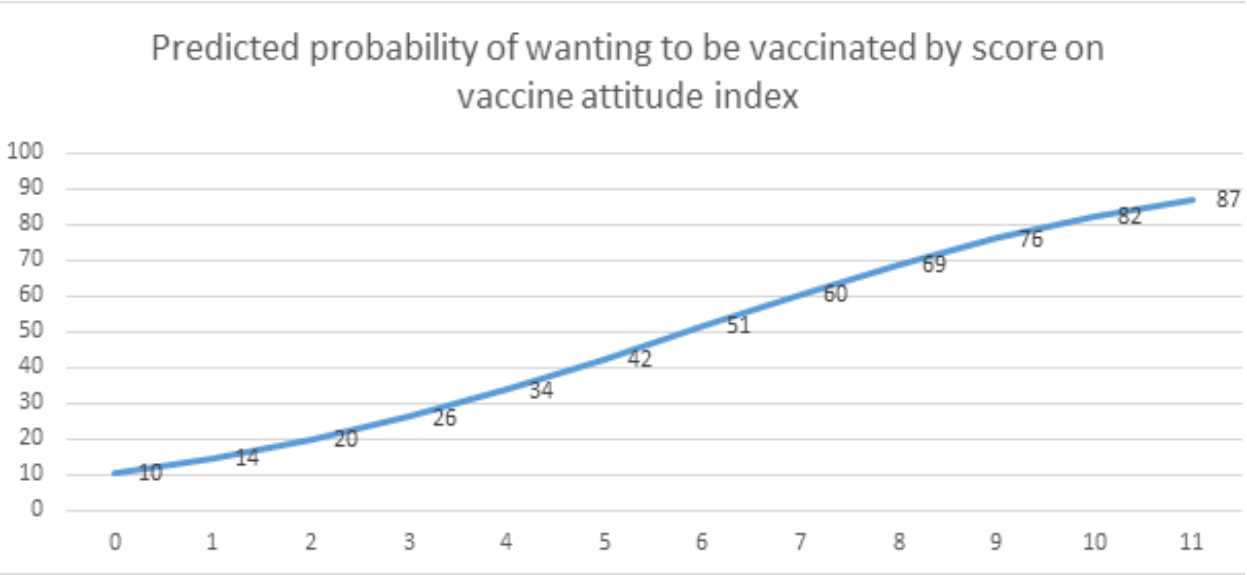
The above data was merged into a simple additive index. The index varies from 0, meaning entirely uncertain or negative about vaccines to 11, meaning holds only positive views about

vaccines. The average score was 5.7 and the median score was 6. The distribution of scores is provided in the chart below. About half of the population has more negative/uncertain views than positive about vaccines (scores 0-5) and about half has more positive/certain than negative views (scores 6-11). No matter the tendencies, the data suggests that the vast majority of people in the country have at least some doubts or a negative attitude towards vaccines.



The index is strongly correlated with interest in getting a Covid 19 vaccine if one were available in six months. A person who has entirely uncertain or negative attitudes towards vaccines has a 10% chance of wanting to receive a vaccination, while someone who has a completely positive attitude towards vaccines has an 87% chance of wanting to receive a vaccine, controlling for age, sex, education level, whether or not the person lives in a household with minors, and settlement type. Beyond attitudes towards vaccines, women are 25 percentage points less likely to want a vaccine than men, controlling for other factors. People in

Tbilisi are 10 percentage points less likely to want a vaccine than people in other urban areas and 13 percentage points less likely to want a vaccine than people in rural areas, controlling for other factors.



Behavior

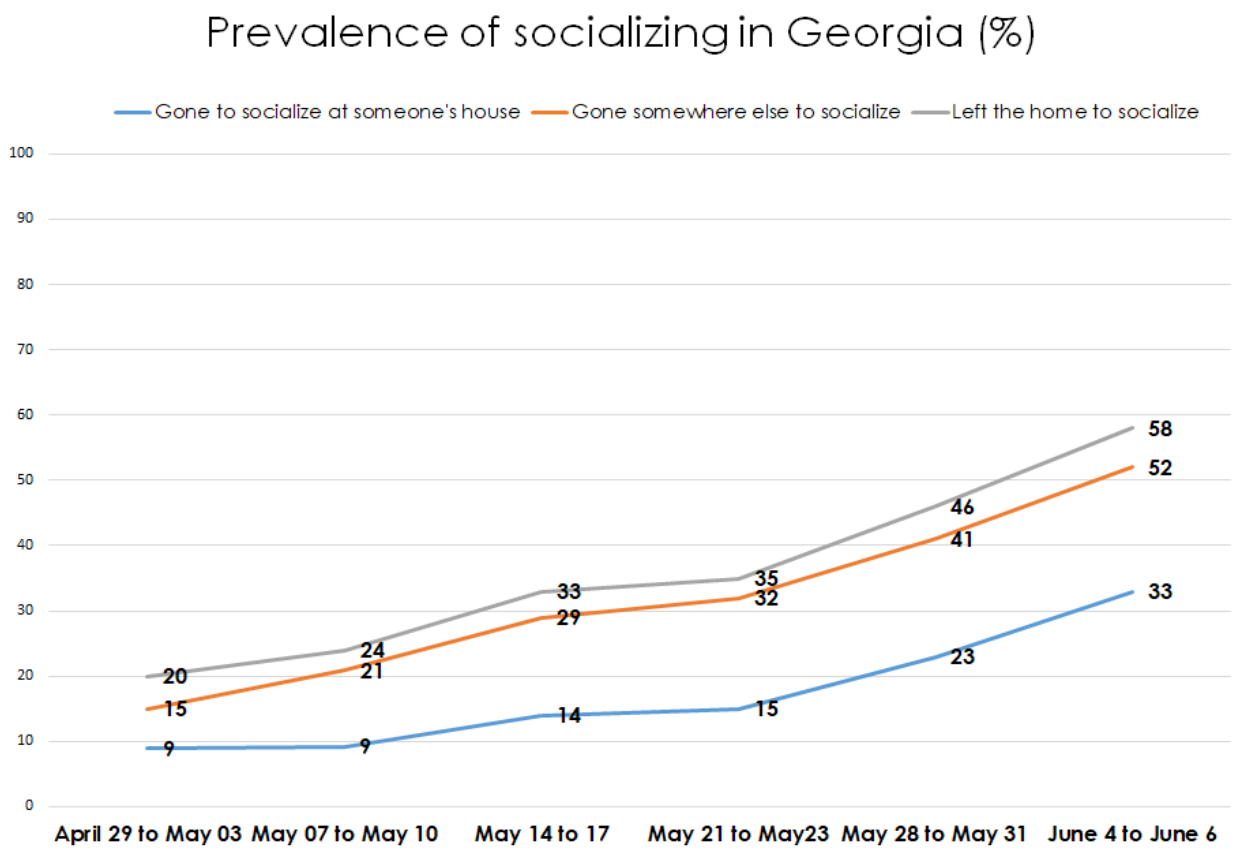
Covid-19 has changed numerous behaviors, and measures aimed at preventing it have come into conflict with a large number of traditions. In support of understanding behavior and practices around the virus, the study asked about people's activities in the week prior to being interviewed. In addition, given the controversial nature of the Church's actions in the lead up to Easter, the study also explored what people did and how they thought about the Church's practices. Findings related to these issues are provided below.

Practices

A key component of the spread of the virus is people's behavior. In this regard, social distancing has been a critical component of efforts to reduce the spread of the virus around the world. This had in turn led to changing practices, such as greater amounts of working from home, as well as challenges in accessing services such as medical care. This section of the report provides an overview of a number of practices and challenges associated with the virus.

Socializing

To understand the level of socializing in Georgia, the survey asked whether people were going to other people's homes as well as going to some other place to socialize. The results show that while at the start of May, a relatively small minority of the population was leaving the home to socialize, by early June most people were socializing outside the home. The increases in socializing coincide with important events. For instance, curfew was lifted on May 23. The following week, the share of people engaged in social activities increased from 35% to 46% of the population. As more restrictions were lifted in the subsequent week, there was an increase from 46% of the population to 58% that reported leaving home to socialize.



The above behavior was consistently more common among men than women and younger people than older people. Aside from this gender difference, those with higher levels of education began to socialize more outside the home than those with lower levels of education from mid-May.

	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	Lower level of education	Higher education
April 29 to May 03	27	13	29	18	13	19	22
May 07 to May 10	30	19	30	25	17	23	26
May 14 to 17	39	27	41	34	24	32	35
May 21 to May23	45	27	44	38	24	32	41
May 28 to May 31	55	38	52	49	36	42	52
June 4 to June 6	70	48	70	64	41	56	63

Seeking medical care

The first two waves of the survey asked respondents about whether they sought out medical care or were unable to access it in the first two waves of the study. Overall, 7% in both waves sought medical care. In the first wave of the study, 13% were unable to access medical care and in the second 15% reported the same. In terms of inability to access medical care, there are no substantively large differences between men and women, different settlement types, age groups, or education levels.

Working

Aside from health and economic consequences (described in the next section of the report), the crisis has changed how work is done for many. This is reflected in the data, with 12% and 11% reporting they worked from home in the first and second wave of the surveys respectively. Working from home was predominantly reported among those with at least some higher education. While only 5% of those with less than higher education reported working from home in both the first and second wave of the study, 27% and 24% of those with higher education reported the same.

Hoarding

During the crisis, large lines at grocery stores, particularly at the start of the crisis, were common. Indeed, the government made multiple announcements about the sufficient supply of food in the country and highlighted the lack of need to stock up on supplies. Still, many in Georgia did. In an omnibus survey CRRC Georgia conducted in early April, 61% of the public reported that they had stocked up on more supplies than normal in the last week. This behavior had declined by early May and continued to decline over the course of the crisis. In the first week of May, 22% reported they had stocked up on additional supplies. In the subsequent weeks, 19%, 12%, 9%, and 9% reported stocking up. During the first week of June, only 6% of the public reported hoarding goods.

Religion

Much of the conversation surrounding the Covid-19 outbreak in Georgia focused on the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church during the start of the crisis. To understand public opinion on the issue, the first wave of the survey included questions on whether respondents attended Easter liturgy and attitudes towards the use of the communion spoon in the church.

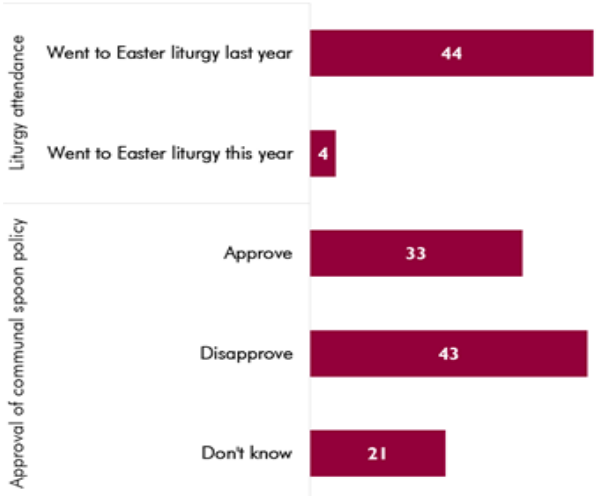
In terms of church attendance, only 4% of Orthodox Christians reported attending church on Easter this year. This compares to 44% who reported that they went to church on Easter last year. That is to say that attendance was reportedly, approximately 9% of what it was in 2019.

Following Easter, a number of groups highlighted the lack of a spike in Covid 19 cases. The above finding sheds some light on the lack of an increase in cases following Easter.

Further analysis of the above questions suggests that younger people were a bit more likely to go to church (7% of 18-34 year olds) than older people (1% people over 55).

When it comes to approval of the use of a communal spoon, 33% of Orthodox Christians approved of the communal spoon policy, 43% disapproved, and 21% were uncertain. Older people (55+) are more disapproving of the policy (51%) than younger people (39%).

Attidues towards the communal spoon and Easter liturgy attendance(%)



The above is in a context wherein the church's relative approval compared to other institutions in the country declined during the crisis, as described above.

Well-being

The key secondary impact of the crisis was the economic downturn the world is experiencing. Georgia has been hit as well, with a 13.5% decline in GDP, year on year in May.[9] This has translated into declines in the public's economic well-being. Aside from the economic costs, the crisis has also impacted individuals' subjective well-being. This section of the report demonstrates the economic and food security costs of the crisis on the public and describes indicators of subjective well-being.

Economic losses

The study measured two key economic variables including household income and whether or not someone had lost a job or started working during the Corona crisis. The data indicates that around half of households lost income at some point during the crisis, and half of those who had been employed also lost a job. However, the share of almost half of those that had lost a job had started working again by the start of June.

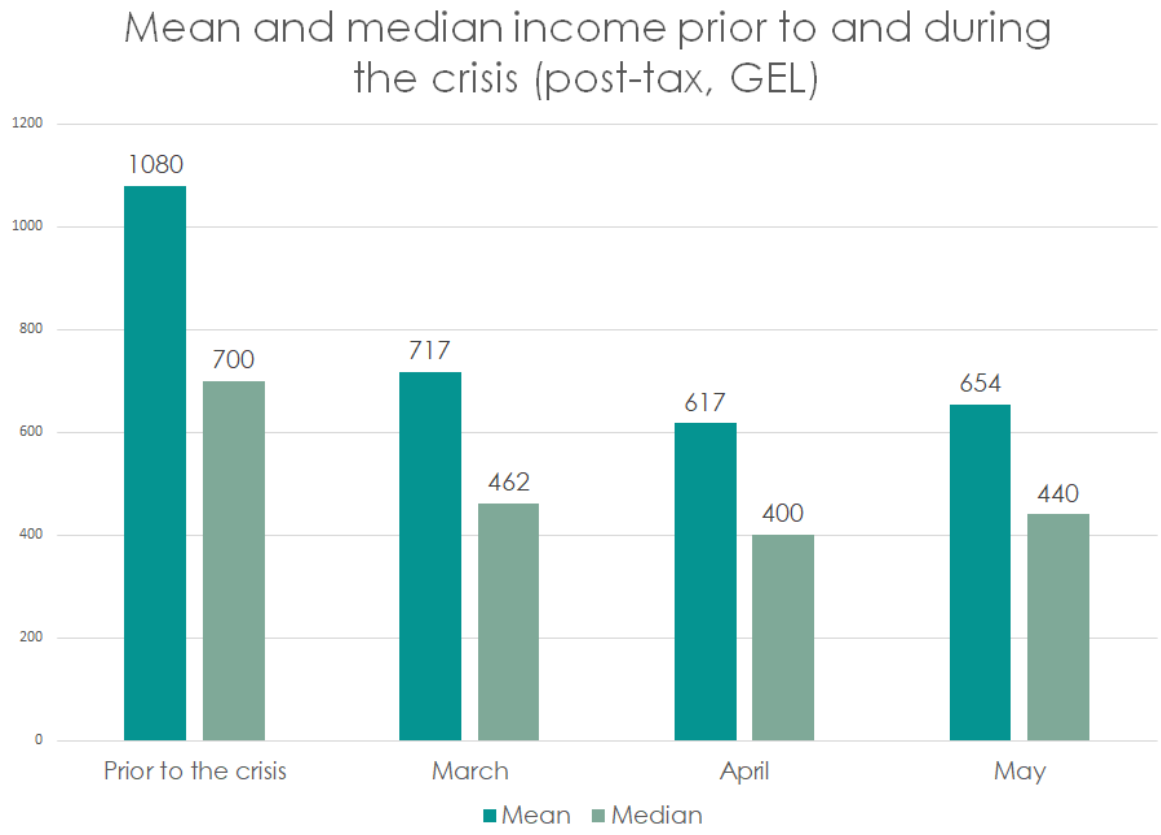
To understand the situation around employment, the survey asked respondents in the fifth and sixth waves whether or not they had a) stopped working at any point during the crisis and b) if so, whether they had returned to work. The data for the fifth and sixth waves is statistically similar and therefore merged for the analysis in this paragraph. It indicates that 28% of the public lost a job during the crisis. When taking into account the number of individuals employed prior to the crisis according to Geostat, 49% of the public that had been working lost their job during the crisis.

While up to half of the employed population lost their job during the crisis, half of those that have lost their job had also started working again at the start of June. Given that most, though not all, businesses have re-started operations, the recovery has likely further progressed in the last month and a half.

While there has been clear progress and there are signs of recovery, the data also paint a stark picture of the economic pain experienced during the crisis. Prior to the crisis, the mean reported income for households after taxes was GEL 1080 (median GEL 700) on the sixth wave of the survey (among the 67% of respondents that replied to the question). In May, the average reported income was GEL 654 (median 440) on the sixth wave of the survey (among the 69% of respondents that responded to the question). On the 1st wave of the survey, households were asked about their income in March and April. The

[9] https://civil.ge/archives/357762

average was GEL 717 (median GEL 462) in March (among the 77% of respondents that replied to the question) and GEL 617 (median GEL 400) in April (among the 73% of respondents that replied to the question).



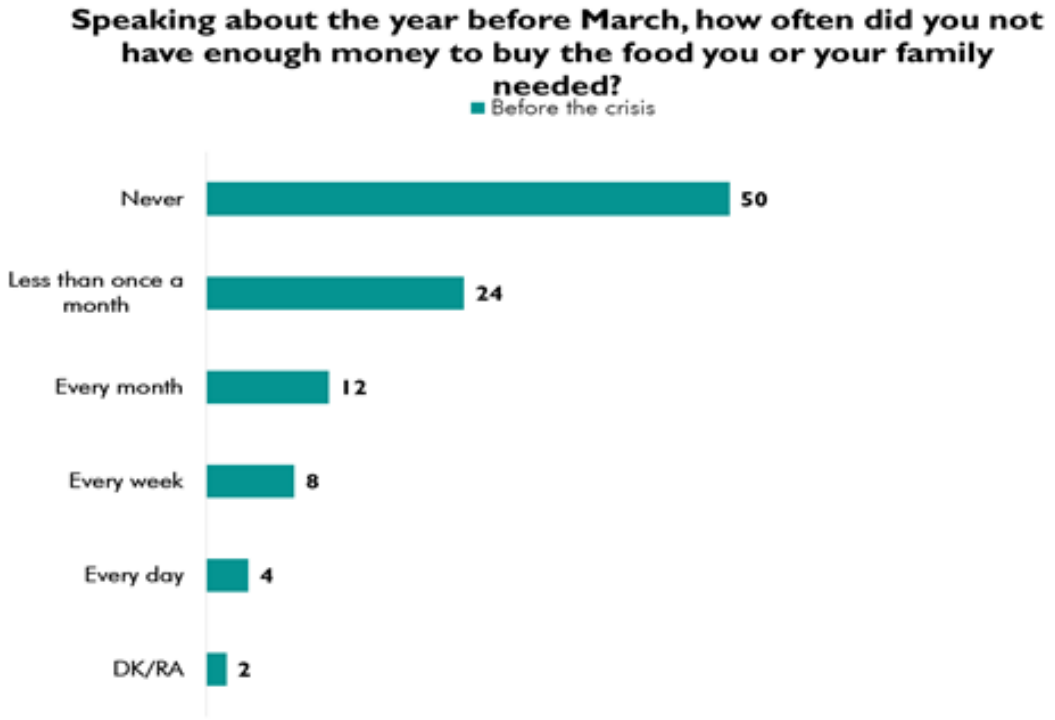
In the sixth wave of the survey, 1% of households reported having no income prior to the crisis, and 13% did in May. In April and March, 14% and 10% of households reported the same on the first wave of the survey. Aside from an increase in the number of households reporting no income, there was a widespread increase in reports of lower incomes. The data suggest that 45% of households had lower incomes in May compared with prior to the crisis (among the 65% of respondents that responded to questions about their income before the crisis and in May).

To understand which groups were more or less likely to have lost incomes as a result of the crisis, respondents were coded into two groups – lower income now compared to before the crisis and not lower for the sixth wave of the survey. The results suggest that people in urban areas and those with lower levels of education (and thus likely poorer households even before the crisis) are more likely to have lower incomes as a result of the crisis.

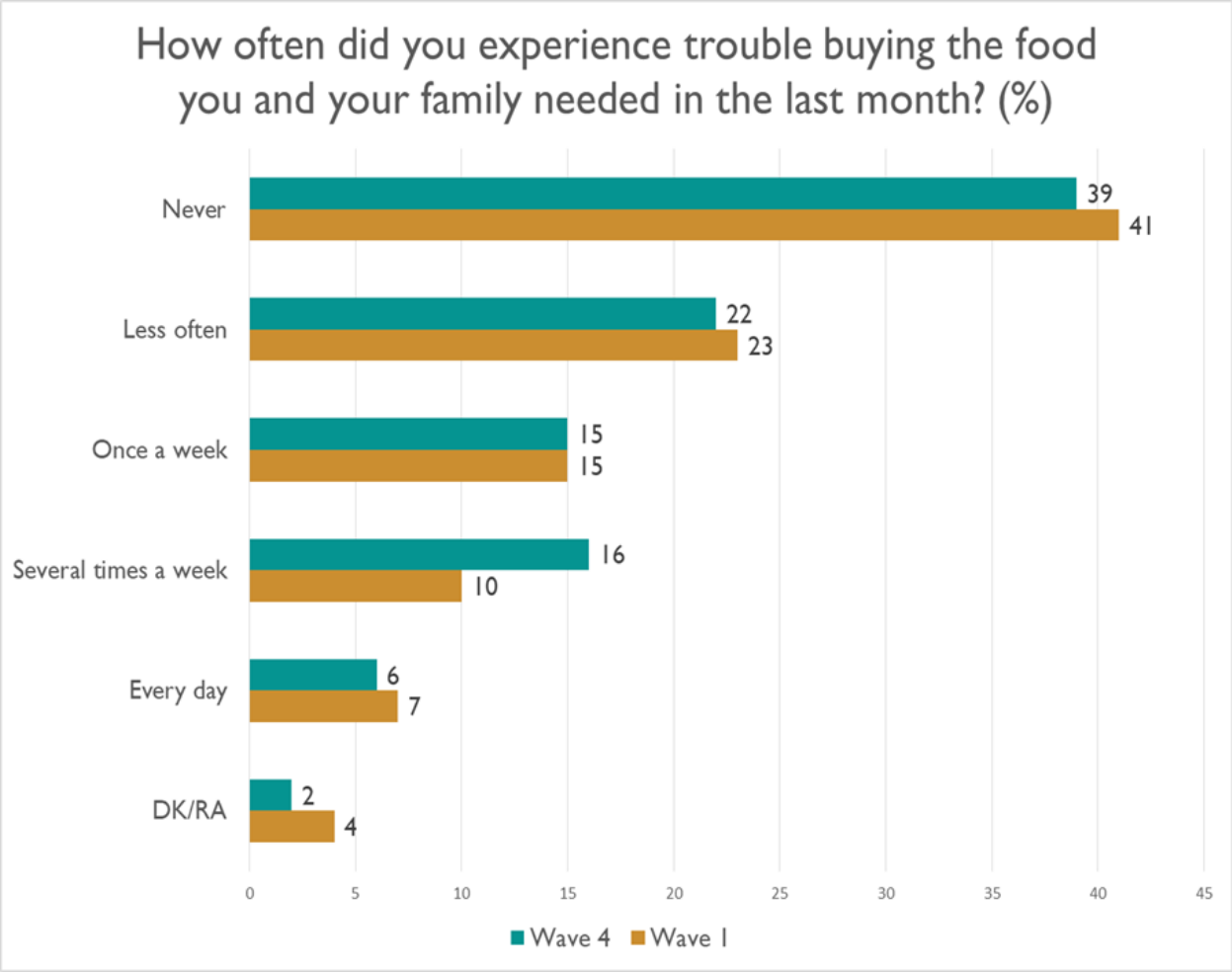
Food security

One of the most important results of the economic crisis has been an uptick in food insecurity. Data collected within the project suggest that a majority of the public experienced at least some issue with food security during the crisis and that this did not change between the first and fourth waves of the study.

Respondents were asked how often they had issues with food security prior to the crisis in the first wave of the survey. The data on experiences prior to the crisis suggested that 50% of the country never lacked money to get enough food. Only 12% of families had problems weekly.



By comparison, 39% and 41% reported never having an issue with food security in the month prior to the first and fourth waves of the survey, respectively. In this regard, at least 9% of the country began experiencing food insecurity during the crisis, roughly 330,000 people that had not experienced it prior to the crisis. The degree of food insecurity also appears to have increased. While 12% of people reported not having enough money for food at least daily or weekly prior to the crisis, 37% and 32% reported the same during the fourth and first wave of the surveys.

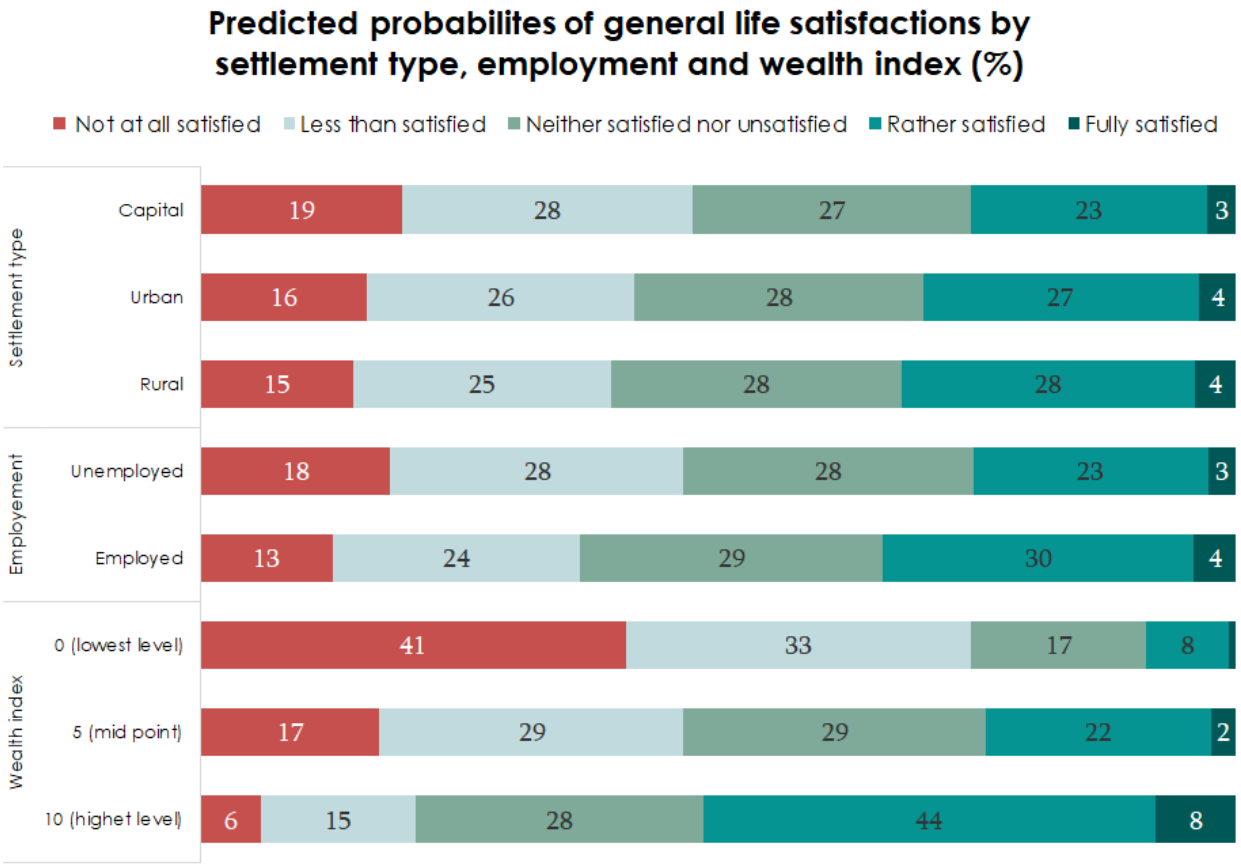


Women, people with lower levels of education, older people, and those outside Tbilisi were more likely to report some level of food insecurity, when the above data is analyzed together. While 38% of women reported never experiencing food insecurity, 44% of men did. A majority of people with higher education (55%) never experienced food insecurity, compared with only 33% of people with lower levels of education. People of different age groups reported never experiencing any food insecurity at equal rates. However, people 18-35 reported lower degrees of food insecurity. For instance, 28% of young people chose the less often option compared with 22% of 35-54 year olds and 19% of 55+ year olds.

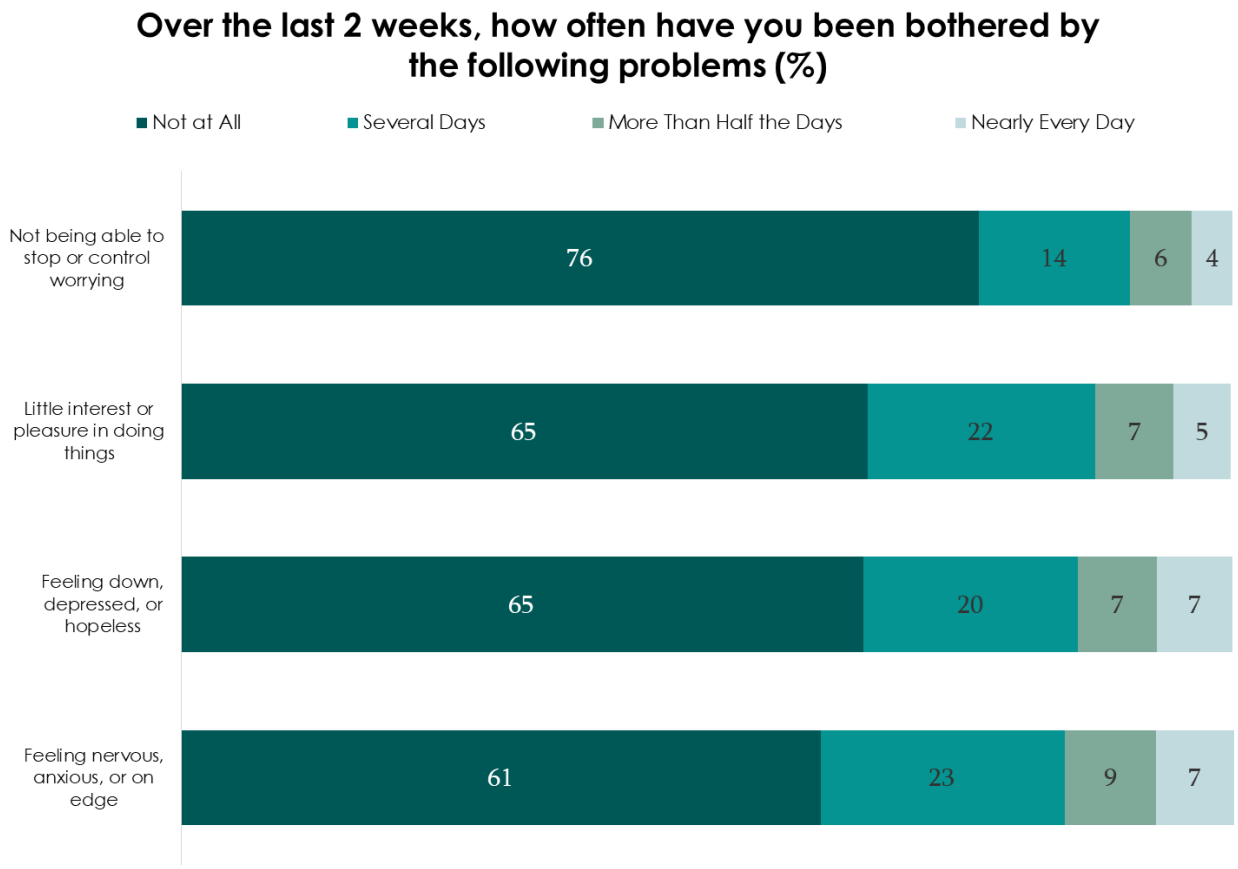
Subjective well-being

Aside from the economic consequences described above, there were widespread concerns during the crisis about the social and psychological consequences of the crisis, particularly given the relative isolation experienced during lockdown.

When it comes to overall satisfaction with life, the plurality (42%) reported that they were not satisfied with it, 28% reported moderate satisfaction, and only 29% reported being satisfied with life. An ordered logistic regression model suggests that those living in rural areas, employed people, and wealthier people are more likely to be satisfied. Men and women, those with different levels of education, different age groups, and different ethnicities report similar levels of satisfaction.

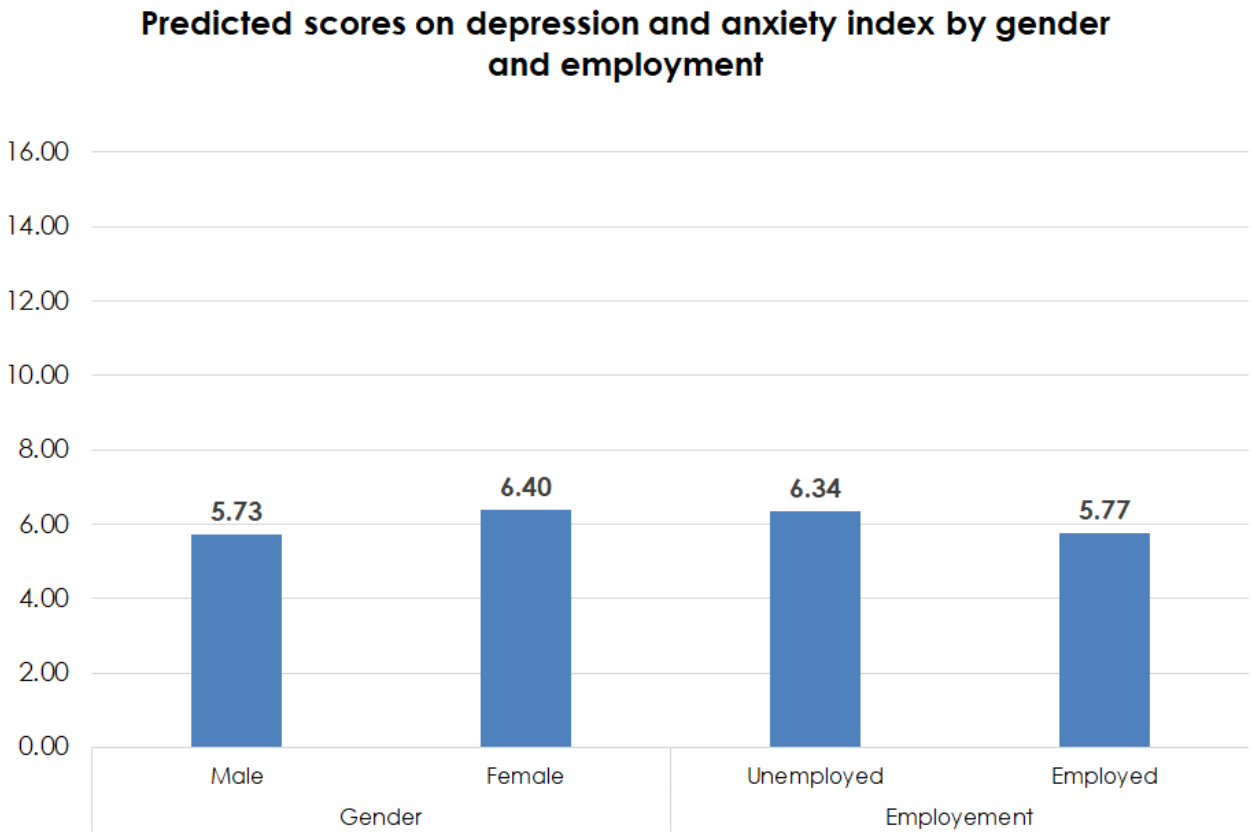


To explore the possible implications of current events on psychological conditions, the last wave of the study asked four questions on anxiety and depression. At least a quarter of Georgians reported that they had experienced such problems in the two weeks prior to the survey. The most widespread type of issue was feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge (39%) for at least several days. The least reported issue was not being able to stop or control worrying (24%).

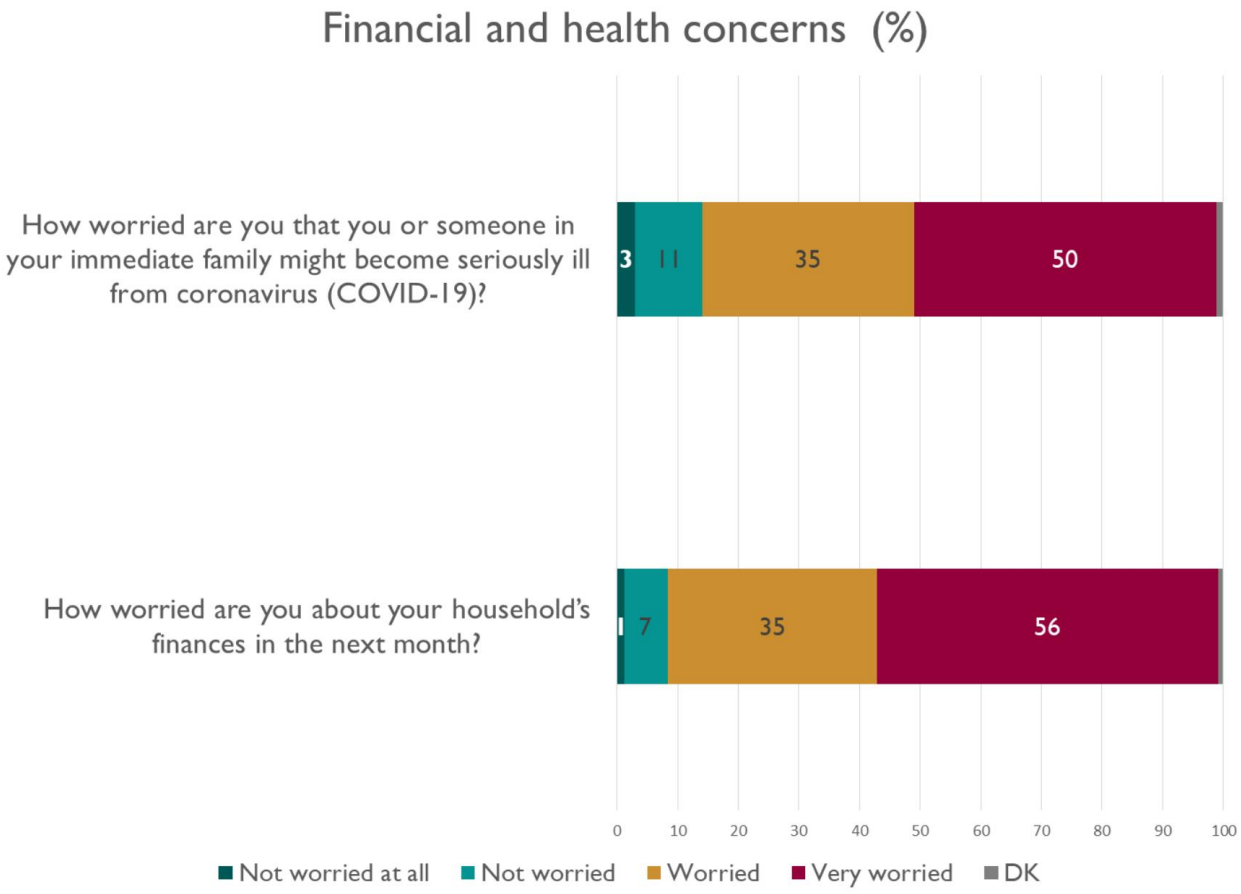


Further exploration of the topic shows that some groups were more likely to worry than others. A simple additive index was constructed from the above statements, where 1 indicates the lowest possible self-reported level of anxiety and depression, while 16 stands for the highest level.

The average score on the index was 6.1. A regression model suggests that women and the unemployed were more likely to express higher levels of anxiety. Differences were not significant for other groups.



Besides overall satisfaction with life and self-reported psychological conditions, the study also investigated the public's perceptions regarding financial and other health related issues. Most (91%) households were worried about their finances and 85% were worried about their household's financial situation in the next month. Those numbers re-affirm the above findings showing widespread economic hardship.


Financial and health concerns (%)
How worried are you that you or someone in your immediate family might become seriously ill from coronavirus (COVID-19)?
3
11
35
50
How worried are you about your household's finances in the next month?
7
35
56
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Not worried at all
Not worried
Worried
Very worried
DK

Expectations

At the time of writing, the situation in Georgia appears to be stable. The government has removed most restrictions on activity. As the previous section shows, the economy has been improving compared to the lowest points experienced so far. Yet, a second wave of the virus could emerge. In support of understanding expectations moving forward, this section of the report provides data on consumer sentiment, people's views on the future of the virus, and the results of a social norming experiment.

Consumer sentiment

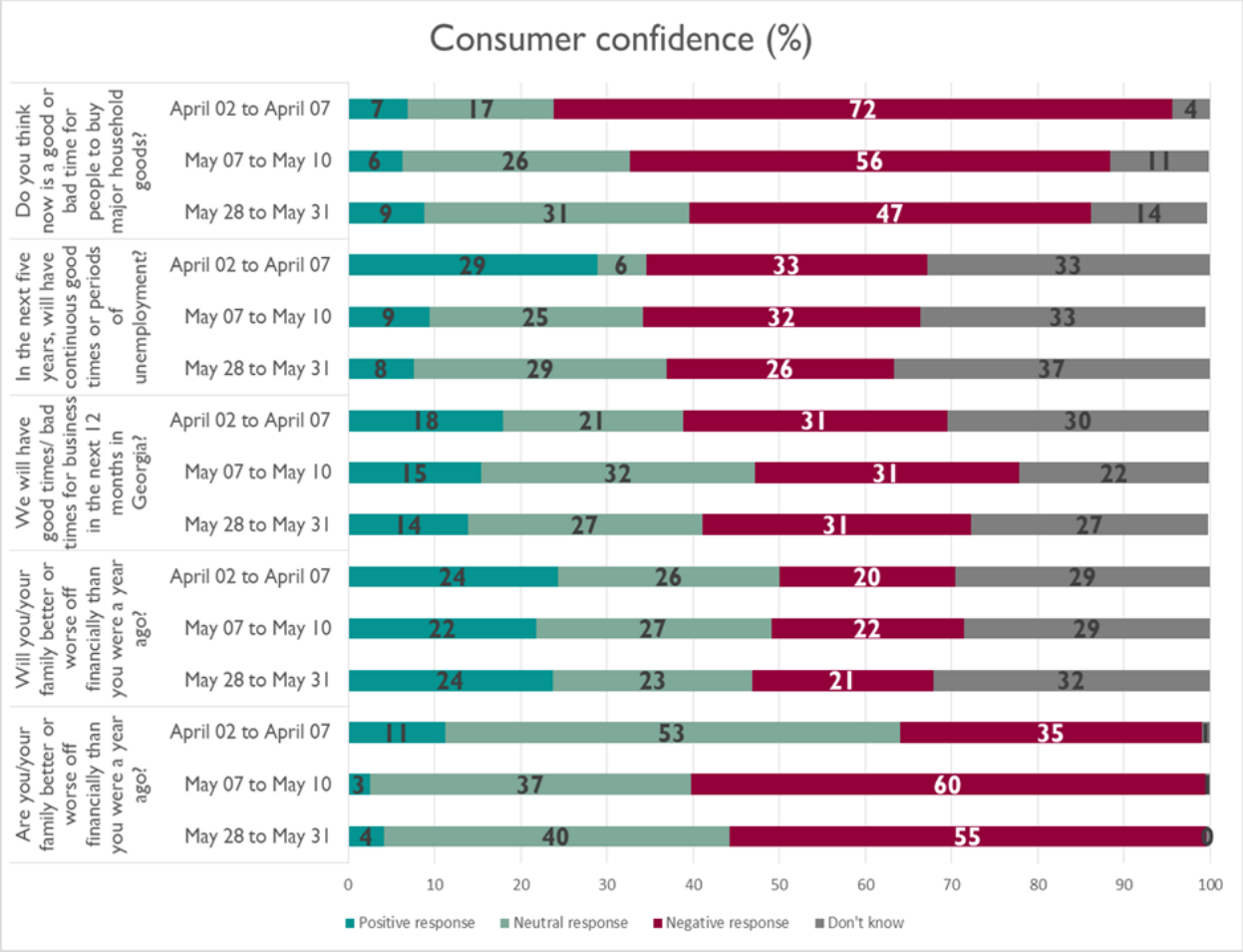
Consumer sentiment is generally considered a leading economic indicator in the sense that it provides a glimpse at the future of consumer economic activity. The data provide a mix of grim and hopeful signs at the same time.

When it comes to positive signs, the data is clearest on the purchase of durable goods. For instance, between early April and late May the share of people who thought it was a bad time to purchase durable goods declined from 72% to 47%. Although negative sentiment declined, positive sentiment did not increase on this indicator. Rather, uncertainty increased as did neutral responses.

On other indicators, the data is more clearly ambivalent or negative. For example, when it comes to whether or not the respondent and their families are better or worse off today than a year ago, the share reporting that they were worse off increased from 35% in early April to 60% in early May. The share slightly recovered to 55%, however, in late May. Still, the share reporting they were better off declined in May from early April.

The future outlook also declined during this period. While in early April, 29% of respondents thought that the next five years would bring good times economically, only 8% did by the end of May. This decline though was reflected in increased neutral rather than negative responses.

On the other questions within the consumer sentiment index, the data did not change dramatically during the fieldwork period.

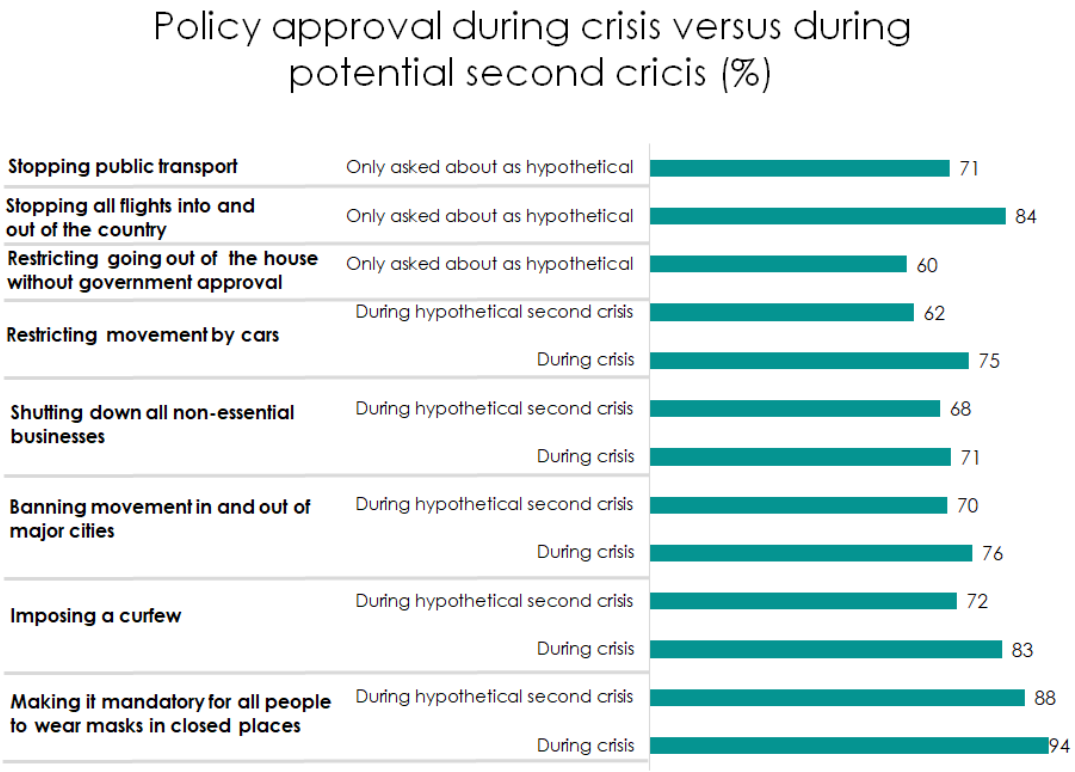


Attitudes towards the future

At present, Georgia has largely opened up and the virus has subsided from peak levels (though remains a threat). Many experts are concerned that a second wave of the virus will emerge in the fall. If this were to happen, it would likely result in the return of various restrictions on activity. Aside from asking about views of restrictions on activity, the study also asked about whether or not people intended to do various activities more, less, or about the same as prior to the crisis. The results suggest that implementing a second lockdown is likely to be more difficult and that the economy is likely to suffer from reduced consumption in the long term.

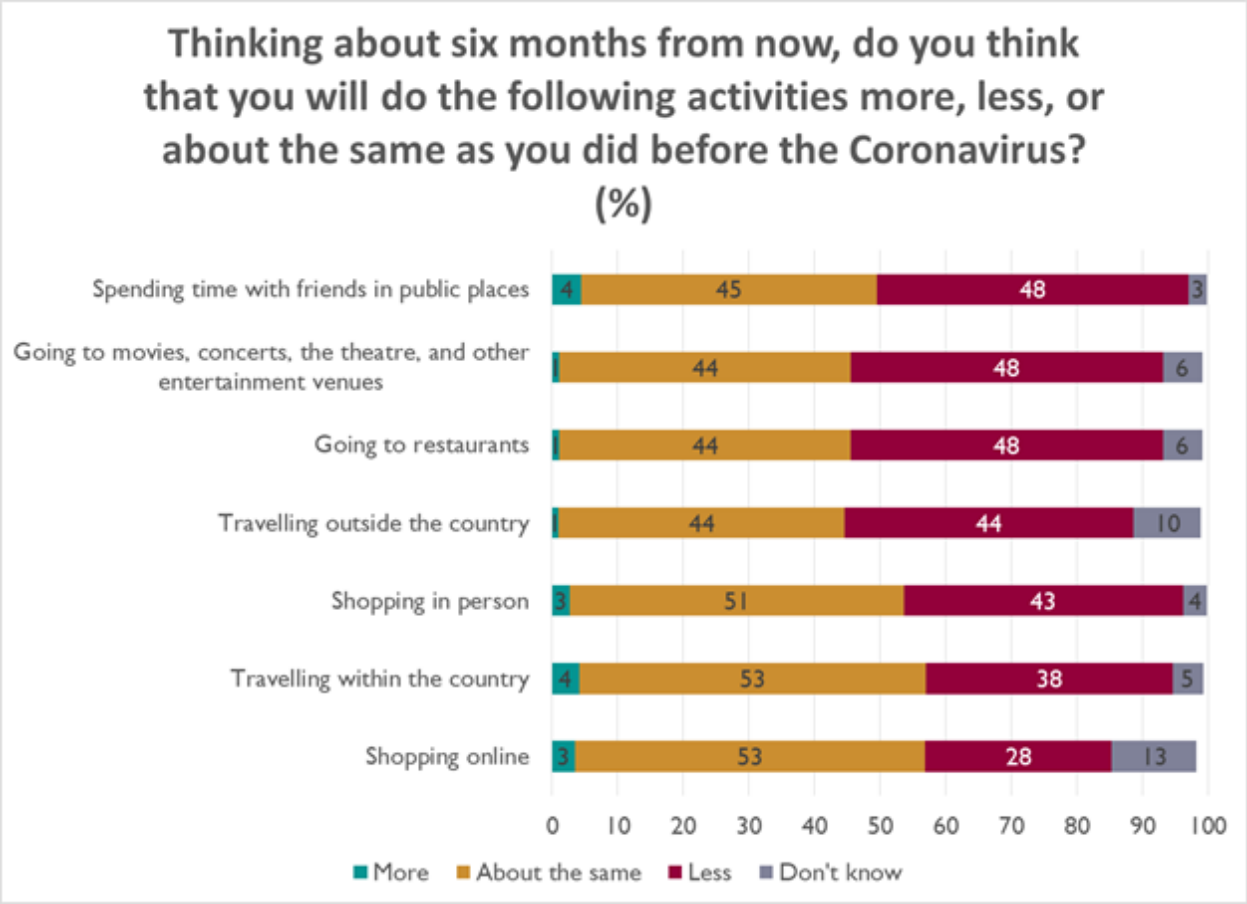
Respondents were asked whether they thought that there would be a second wave of the virus. Only 27% of the public anticipate a second wave of the virus, though 29% are uncertain. The remaining 44% think there will not be a second outbreak.

The survey asked respondents whether or not they would approve of a number of measures that were implemented during the current crisis if a second outbreak were to occur in the fall. The data suggest that most people would be supportive of these policies. However, the levels of support are lower relative to policy support during the current crisis. Compared to the 94% that reported they support wearing masks in closed spaces in the first wave of this survey, 88% said they would in the case of a second outbreak. Similarly, while 83% supported implementing a curfew during the crisis, 72% said they would in the case of another outbreak.



A simple additive index of the above questions was created to see who would be more and less supportive of taking the above measures in the case of a second outbreak and broken down by demographic group. The average score on the above index is 5.8 out of 8. The data suggest that there are no meaningful differences between groups.

Respondents were also asked whether they would engage in a number of activities more or less frequently in the coming six months, compared with prior to the crisis. The data to indicate a lower or the same level of activity compared with prior to the crisis.



The above questions were made into a simple additive index, with respondents receiving 1 point for each activity they report they would do less often and then broken down by demographic characteristics. The only significant difference is between women and men, with women reporting they would engage in 0.6 less activities on average than men.

Social norming

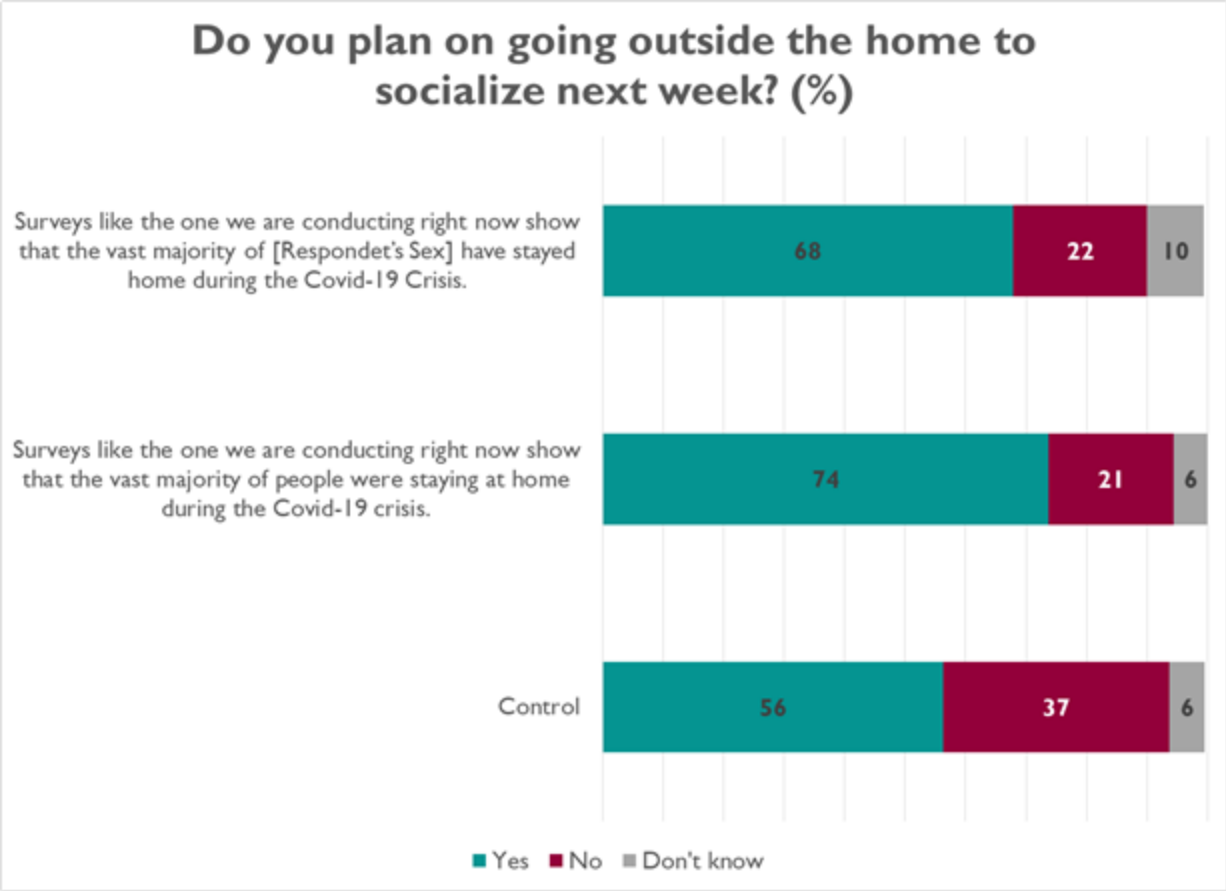
From informing the public about restrictions to how to wash one's hands, communications have been integral to response. Behavioral science has been an important part of those communications during the crisis around the world. One behavioral science tool that reasonably could be expected to lead to more effective compliance with Covid 19 restrictions is social norming. Social norming informs the public about what most people are doing. This has been shown to lead to significant increases in pro-social behavior among previously non-compliant individuals in a wide variety of

locations.[10] The current study tested this tool. In contrast to expectations, social norming led to weaker prosocial intentions.

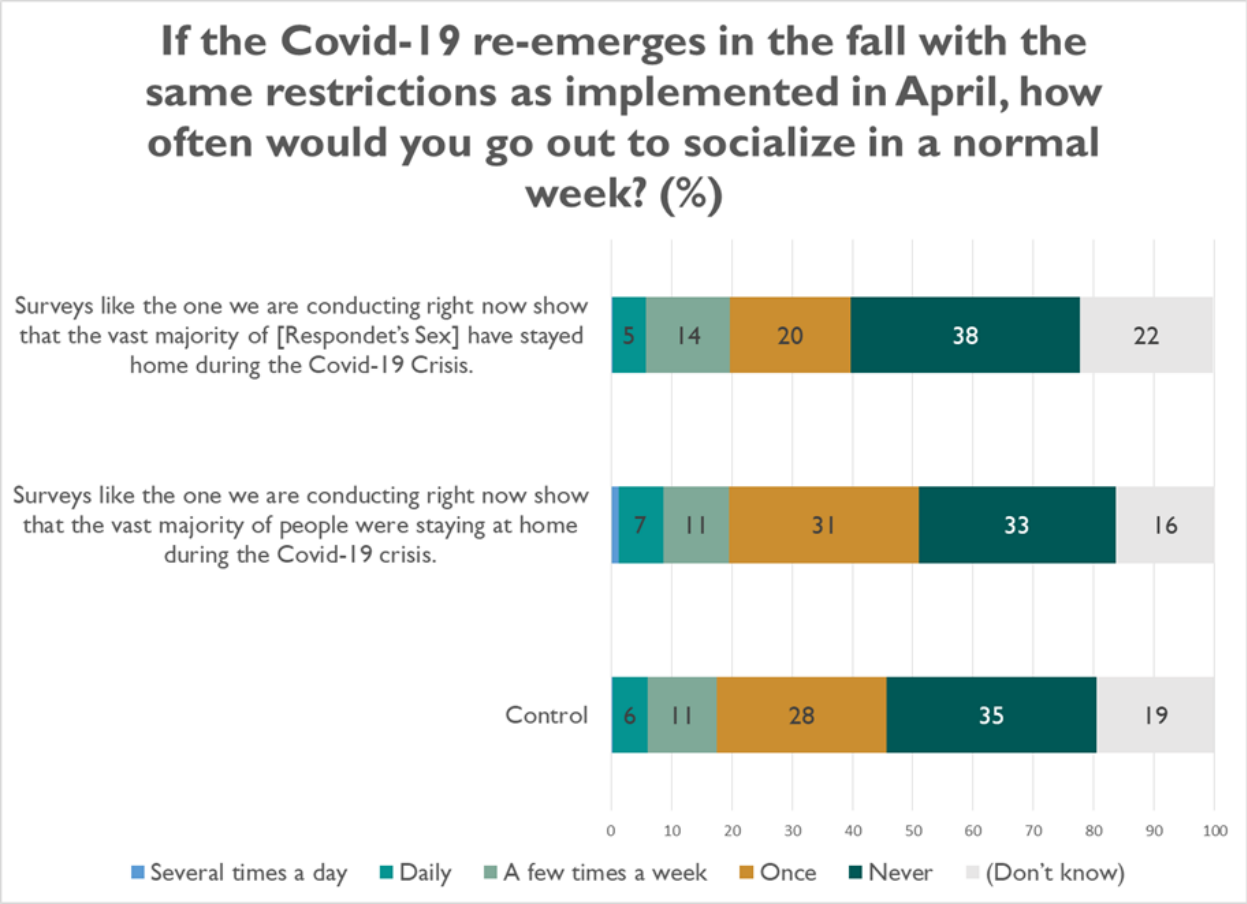
The study specifically attempted to test whether or not social norming could encourage people to stay at home. Respondents were told that either the majority of people stayed home during the crisis or that the majority of people of their gender stayed home during the crisis (both of which were true, according to past waves of the survey). A third group was not told anything. Respondents were then asked whether or not they planned on going outside the home to socialize next week and how often they would go out to socialize if the same restrictions as were implemented in April and May were implemented again this fall.

The data indicate that social norming is not effective on average at decreasing an individual's intention to socialize next week. Instead, social norming actually appears to have the opposite effect: people who were told either piece of information about people staying home had statistically significant and substantively large impacts on people's intentions to socialize next week. People who received the social norming treatment were 17 percentage points more likely to report they planned on socializing next week, and people who received the gendered social norming treatment were 12 percentage points more likely to report they would go out to socialize next week. The treatment did not have any statistically significant effects on different social or demographic groups separately from the overall effect.

[10] For example, see https://tarc.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/businessschool/documents/centres/tarc/publications/discussionpapers/Social_norms_and_tax_compliance_May_14.pdf. Also see http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/693361497392827604/Tax-report-EN-05-www.pdf



The treatment was not statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level for the second question on the hypothetical situation about this fall. For each treatment, about a third of the public reported they would not go out. About a fifth reported they do not know how often they would go out. The remainder reported they would go out daily, a few times a week, or once a week.


If the Covid-19 re-emerges in the fall with the same restrictions as implemented in April, how often would you go out to socialize in a normal week? (%)
Surveys like the one we are conducting right now show that the vast majority of [Respondet's Sex] have stayed home during the Covid-19 Crisis.
5
14
20
38
22
Surveys like the one we are conducting right now show that the vast majority of people were staying at home during the Covid-19 crisis.
7
11
31
33
16
Control
6
11
28
35
19
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Several times a day
Daily
A few times a week
Once
Never
(Don't know)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Georgia has experienced numerous challenges along with the rest of the world during the Covid 19 crisis. The above report reflects this, providing a wide range of findings. In turn, these lead to the following conclusions about attitudes, behavior, well-being, and the future of the virus.

Georgian society had generally positive attitudes towards the government's response to the Covid-19 crisis. The public approved of the vast majority of the government's policies during the crisis. Besides the government ban of online sales of some products over the course of several weeks, a majority of the public approved of all policies asked about within this study. This includes the more severe among them such as imposing the curfew, limiting freedom of movement and public gatherings, and temporarily closing down non-essential business.

Reflecting the above, every governmental institution asked about during the survey enjoyed a very high performance rating and trust. Compared to other studies conducted in the pre-COVID-19 period, institutional performance and trust increased substantially. Medical institutions were particularly highly approved of, with doctors receiving a positive performance assessment from 98% of the public.

While the governmental approach to dealing with the negative consequences was generally supported, people tended toward thinking it was important to open up the economy than to keep closed to decrease the chances of the virus's spread. Most Georgians saw the economic costs of the Coronavirus response as worse than the virus itself in the third week of this study. Such attitudes were particularly common in Tbilisi. In addition, the number of people who preferred to wait for coronavirus to subside before restarting the economy also declined between the second and third weeks of the study.

Disinformation spread during the crisis in Georgia, as the data presented in this report suggest. For instance, 9% of Georgians report that 5G infrastructure is connected to the spread of the virus. In this regard, 42% of Georgians report that generally it is hard to determine what is true than false in the news and most people reported encountering what they believed to be fake news about Covid 19 during the crisis. A majority of Georgians reported encountering some piece of news that they believed to be fake during the crisis.

Although attitudes towards vaccine likely pre-date the crisis, the study suggests the

widespread belief in disinformation related to them in Georgian society. If a vaccine were available, it is accepted that wide-spread vaccination would be the best tool to prevent the virus's spread. Yet, many in Georgia would not want to get a vaccine if one were available 6 months or 2 years from now. Belief in anti-vaccine misinformation (such as the belief which 19% of Georgians hold that vaccines cause Autism) is strongly connected to disinterest in being vaccinated. In this regard, vaccination awareness is strongly needed.

Aside from the health and economic concerns created stemming from the virus, some feared that governments would take the crisis as an opportunity to become more authoritarian. Yet, in Georgia, both the preference for democracy over any other type of government and general evaluation of Georgia as a democracy increased compared to pre-COVID-19 studies. At the same time, the data also indicate support for non-democratic means of governance when asked about directly rather than as abstract support for democracy. This indicates the public holds inconsistent views on the issue.

Besides attitudes, the study also tracked changes in behavior. Compared to the first wave of the study in late April/ early May when only 20% reported leaving the house to socialize, during the first week of June the number increased to 58% of the public. Young people and men were more likely to leave their homes for this purpose, suggesting the need for communications to target this group in the case of a second outbreak of the virus.

Religious practice was a controversial component of the crisis. In this regard, the data show that the Georgian Orthodox Church was one of the exceptions from the general trend of increased institutional trust. Besides attitudes towards the church, people reported altering their religious practice, with only 4% of society attending church on Easter compared to 44% in 2019. Attitudes also tended towards being negative towards the use of a common spoon for communion.

Besides attitudes and behavior, the crises had large-scale impacts on the well-being of Georgians. About half of Georgians who had a job prior to the crisis lost it at some point during the Covid outbreak. However, by early June, half of those who reported losing a job at some point had started working again. Regardless of whether a household lost a job, household incomes declined by roughly half during the crisis. At the end of May, household incomes had yet to fully recover. Aside from these direct indicators of economic harm, the study also indicates that consumer sentiment is low at present.

The decline in incomes is reflected in increased food insecurity. While half the public reported never experiencing food insecurity prior to the crisis, around 60% of Georgians reported experiencing at least some issue buying food during the crisis. Moreover, the frequency at which people experienced food insecurity increased during the crisis. Women, those with less than higher education, older people, and those living outside Tbilisi experienced greater challenges in this regard.

Looking forward, less than a third of the public (27%) anticipate a re-emergence of COVID-19. If a second wave does emerge, however, policy is likely to be more difficult to implement. Support for many policies asked about in the study would be lower if a second wave of the virus was to occur.