



July 2018

Georgian Institute of Politics

EXPERT POLLS

Issue #7

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## **Do experts and public think differently? – Comparing expert and public opinions on important political issues**

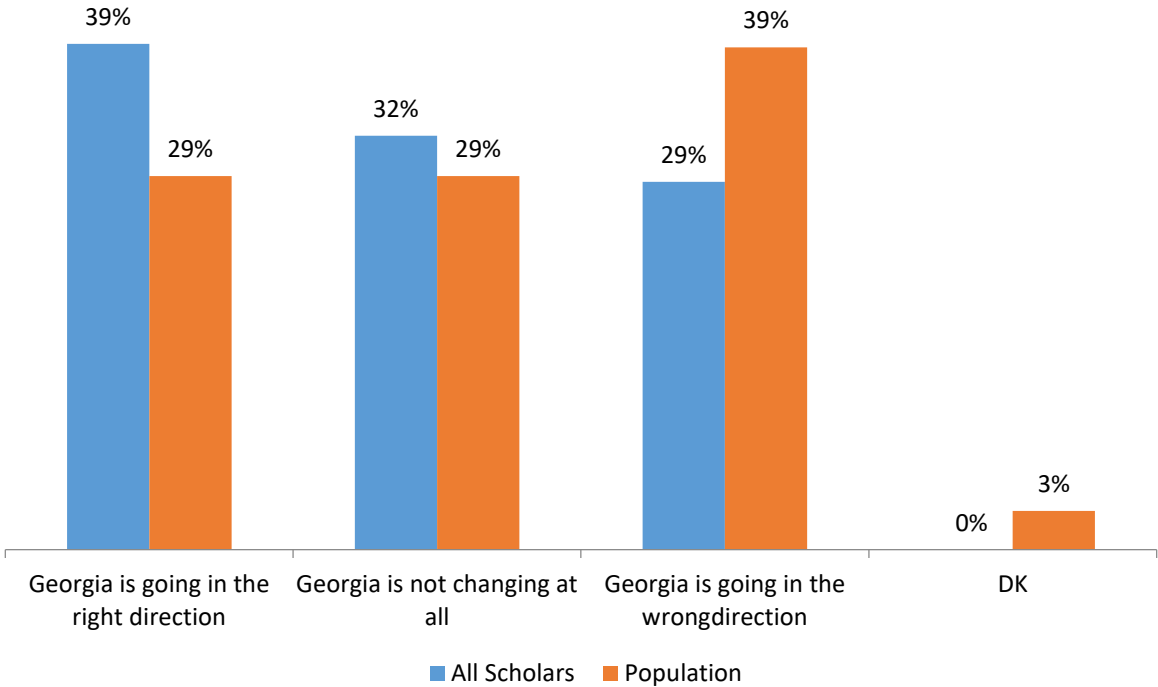
The seventh expert poll conducted by the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) explores the extent that the opinions of the expert community, both domestic and international, differ from the perceptions of the Georgian public. The survey collected responses from 28 renowned Georgian and foreign experts and scholars who are actively researching and studying Georgian domestic and foreign policy. In order to compare the expert respondents' answers to the views of the general public, the questions in the survey were partly taken from the public surveys commissioned by the NDI and the IRI.

We can draw several conclusions from the survey: overall, the scholars and the general population seem to have similar views on many domestic and foreign policy issues. Yet there are also significant differences in the assessment of certain domestic institutions as well as the foreign policy performance of the Georgian government. On balance, scholars and experts seem to be more critical of the performance of a number of institutions but assess the foreign policy of the Georgian government more positively than the wider population.

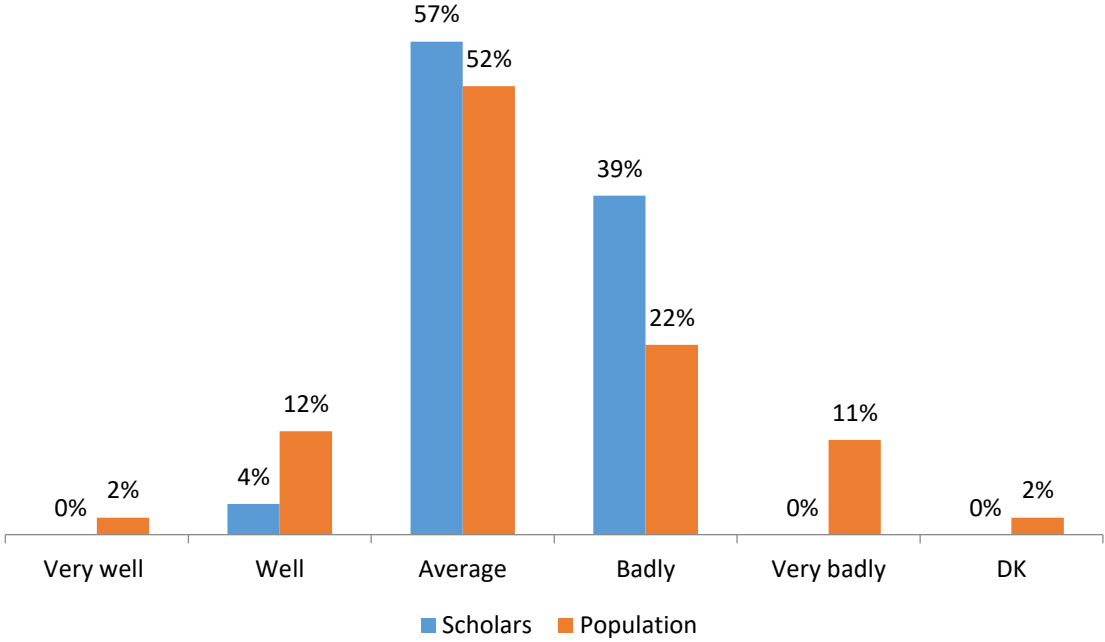
### General Issues

The first part of the survey asked general questions about Georgia’s development and the overall performance of the Georgian government. Particularly, we asked three questions: the direction in which the country is moving (graph 1); the performance of the current government (graph 2); and the government’s crisis management capabilities (graph 3). On balance, there is not a large gap between how scholars and the general population assess the overall situation in Georgia. The population is a bit more skeptical about Georgia’s current development (39% negative answers compared to 29% in the expert survey (graph 1). The wider public is a little more optimistic when it comes to the assessment of the performance of the current government, however: 14% of respondents from the general public assesses it positively, compared with 4% of all scholars, and 33% of population thinks the government performs badly or very badly compared to 39% of scholars (graph 3). We also specifically asked the scholars to evaluate the government’s crisis managements capabilities. The overall assessment was very negative (graph 3). More than half of the respondents think the government responds to crises poorly; only 11% rated it positively (graph 3). It is worth noting that Georgian experts are more positive than international experts on this issue: 65% of international experts gave the government a bad or very bad mark (graph 3).

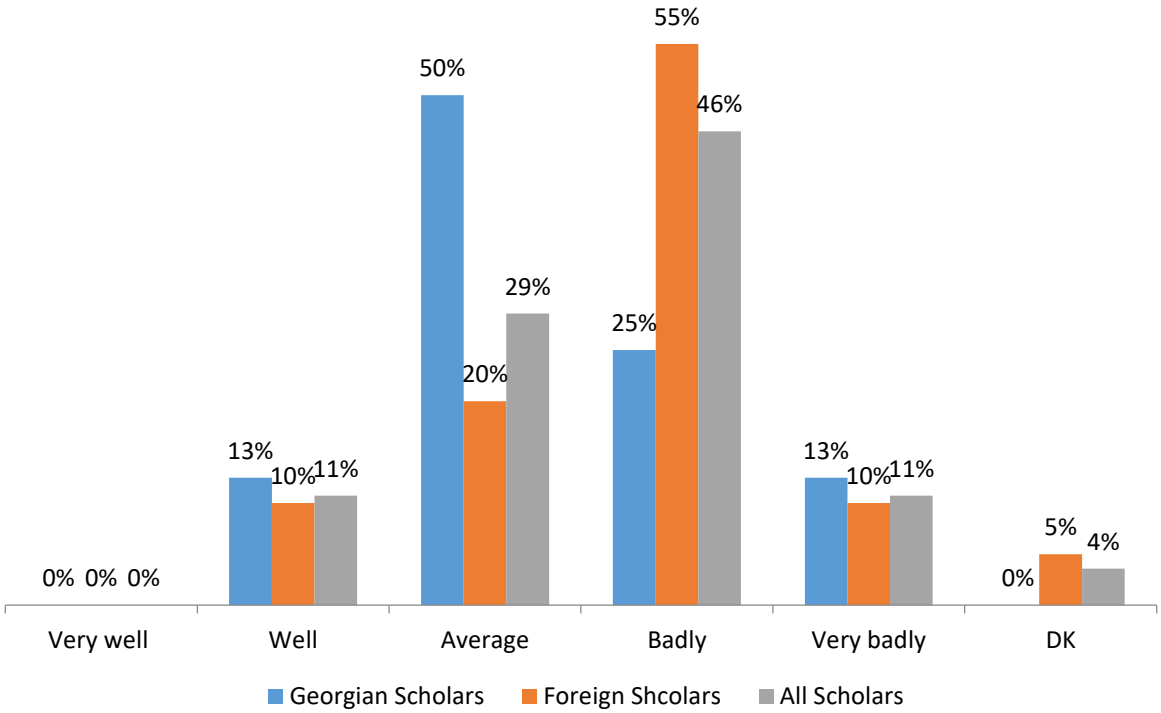
Graph 1: In which direction is Georgia going?



Graph 2: How would you rate the performance of the current government?



Graph 3: How do you evaluate Georgian government's crisis managements capabilities?



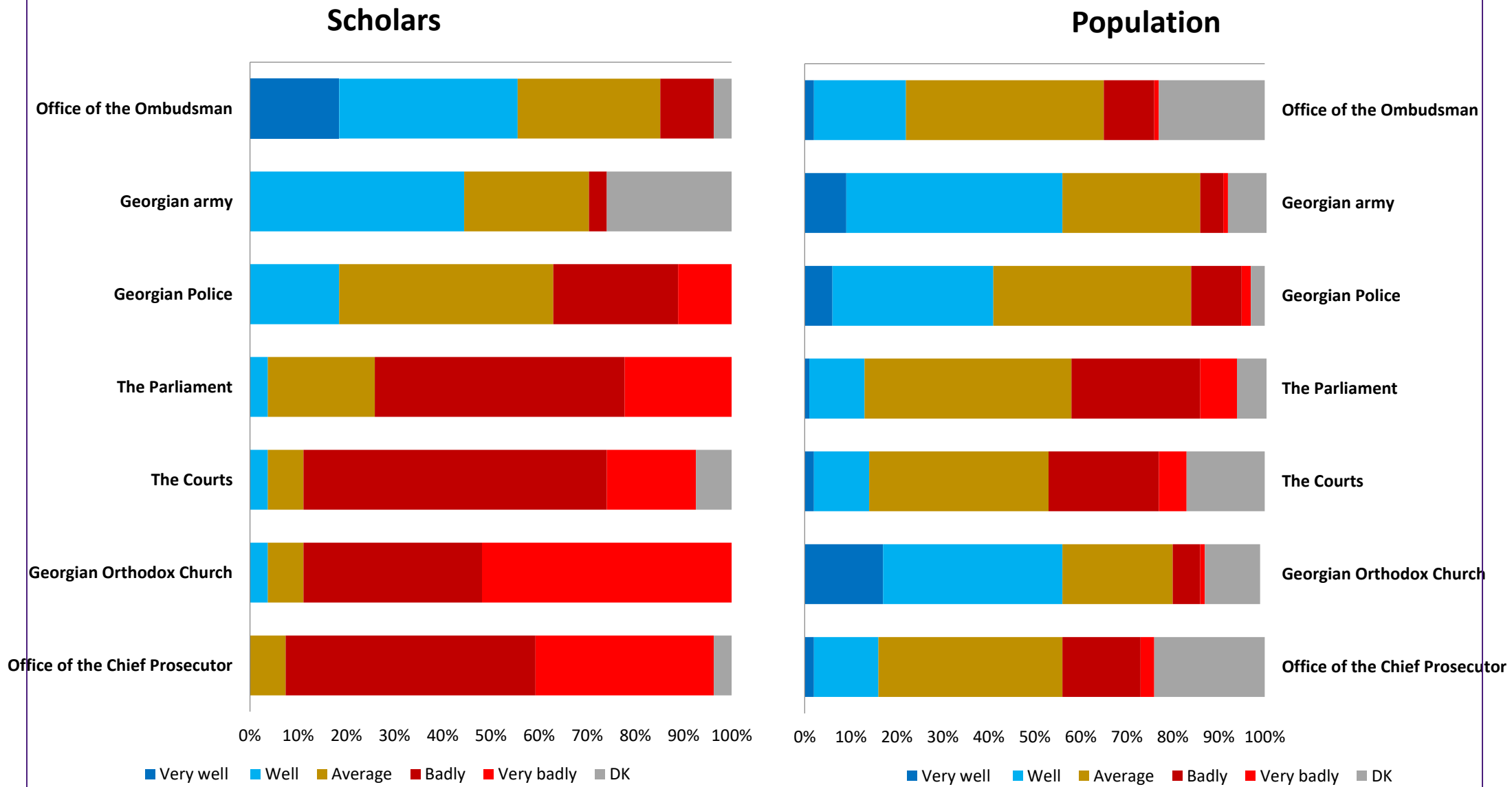
## **Institutions and Policy Areas**

Next, we asked the scholars to rate the performance of specific institutions and policy areas (graphs 4, 5 and 6). Here, we have a similar picture: the general population is more skeptical of the overall situation in specific policy areas but views the government's performance in those and other areas more positively. The differences between the opinions of experts and the general public become more striking when we compare the specific areas. Perhaps the most noticeable difference is the assessment of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). The GOC regularly scores well in public surveys. In the NDI survey of March 2018, the GOC was rated second only to the Georgian Army (Graph 4). These results directly contradict the views expressed by experts: scholars and pundits ranked GOC second to the bottom (graph 4); only the prosecutor's office was ranked lower. Other differences are also noticeable: experts and scholars rated the office of the ombudsman the highest and very negatively assessed the performance of the parliament, the courts and the prosecutor's office (graph 4), which is quite different than the rankings assigned by the general population. The only institutions that received relatively high scores in both surveys were the Georgian army and the police (graph 4).

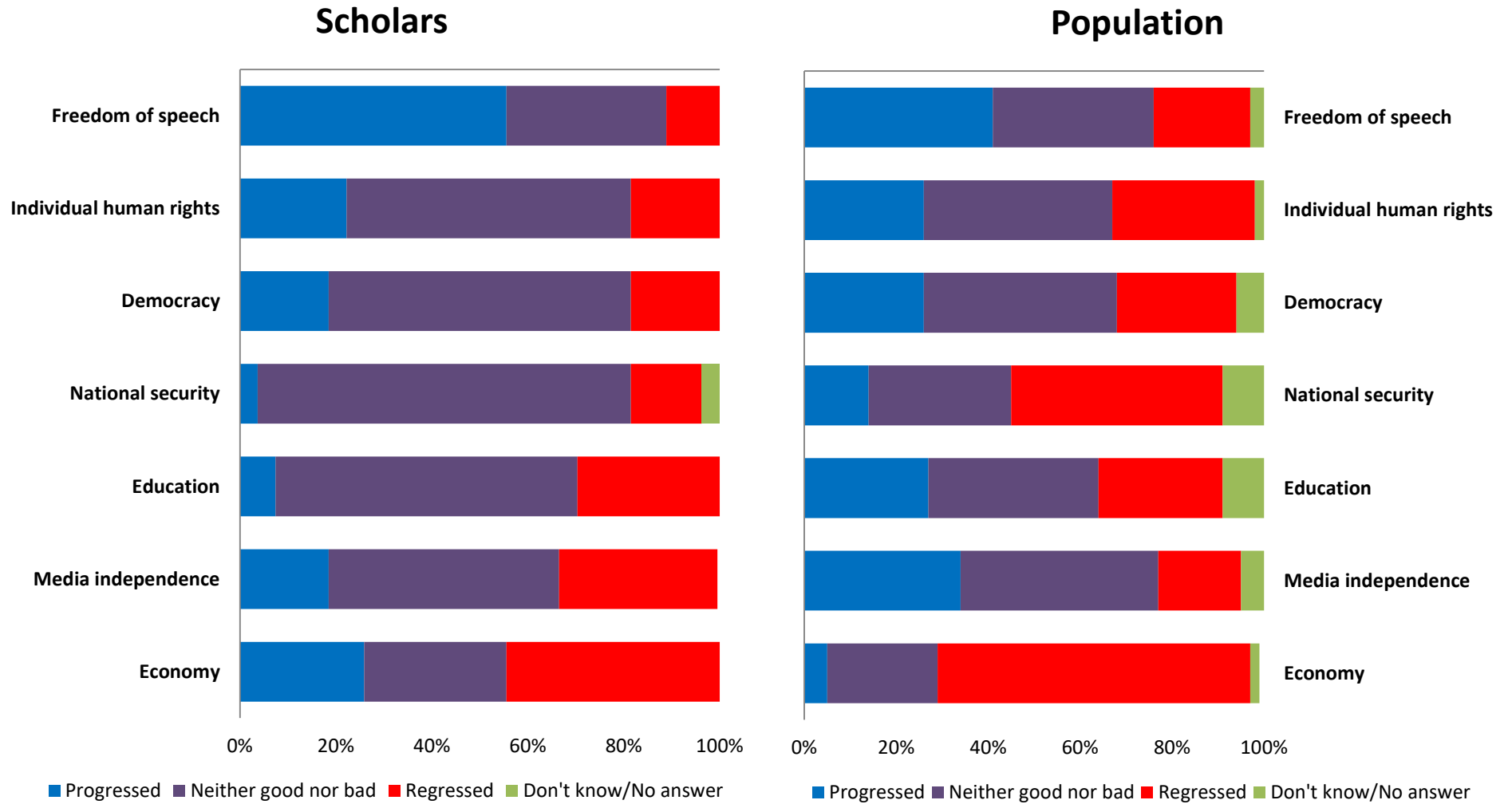
When it comes to recent developments in specific policy areas, on balance, experts and scholars have more optimistic views than the population (graph 5). In terms of differences, two policy areas stand out: national security and economy. Economy is rated as the most problematic area by both experts and the general population, however only 44% of experts think the economic situation has worsened, compared to 68% of respondents in the general population surveys. The difference is also noticeable in the area of national security: 78% of experts view the situation in the area of national security as neither good nor bad and only 15% think that it has deteriorated (graph 5) over the past four years. In contrast, almost half of the respondents (46%) of the recent NDI public survey believe that national security has deteriorated in Georgia (graph 5).

Compared to the results of the public opinion surveys, the scholars who participated in the survey also have a more negative perception of corruption in the government and central and local government structures (graph 6): 82% of experts think that corruption is a problem in the central government, compared to 44% of the general population (graph 6). The picture is more striking when it comes to corruption in local government structures. Almost all surveyed experts believe corruption exists at the local level (graph 6) but they are slightly more optimistic when it comes to public services: 61% of experts and 51% of the general public do not believe corruption exists in public services (graph 6).

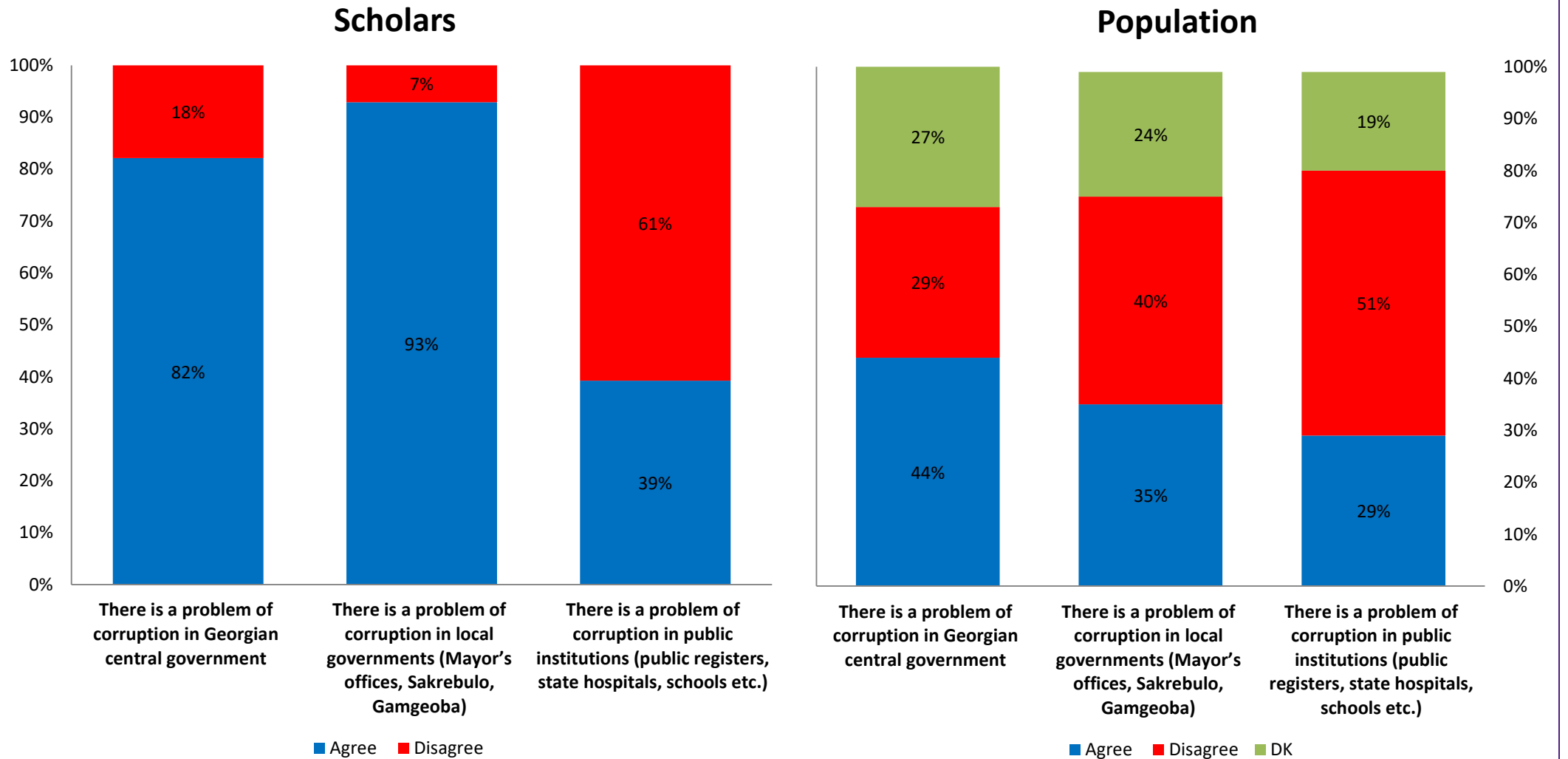
Graph 4: How would you rate the performance of:



Graph 5: How do you feel about the direction of each of the following issues over the past four years?



Graph 6: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?



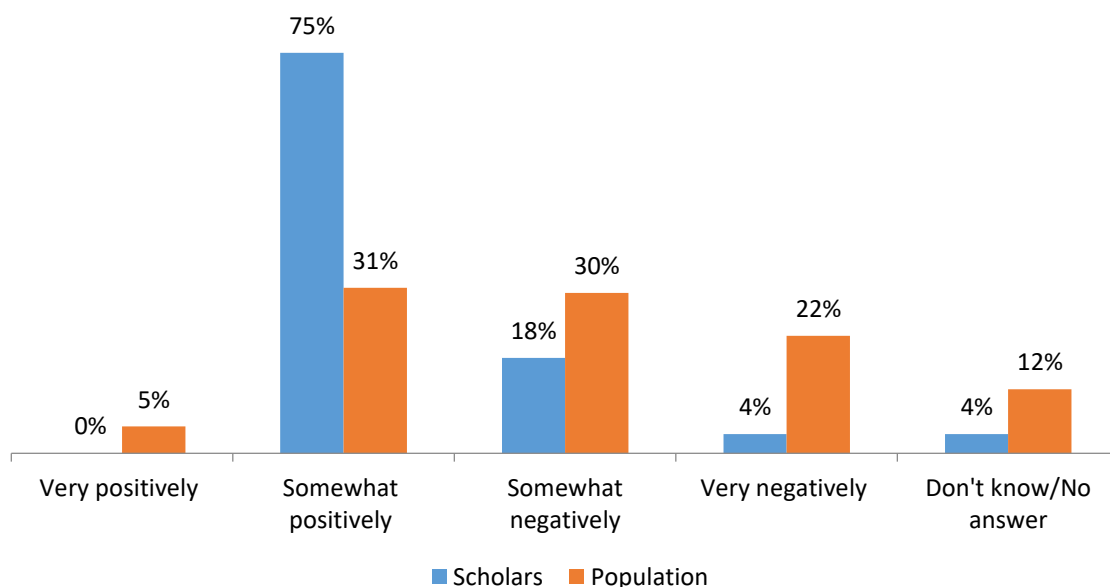
## Foreign Policy Issues

Expert opinion on foreign policy issues (graphs 7 and 8) differs significantly from that of the general population, notably in terms of relations with Russia: 75% of experts rated it positively, compared to 31% of the general population. Experts also have more optimistic expectations regarding Georgia's integration in NATO. They appear to be less concerned that Georgia's NATO membership will increase the risk of Russian aggression against Georgia or that it will lead to the establishment of foreign military bases in Georgia (graph 8). Experts also don't believe that NATO membership will force Georgia to adopt Western cultural values or that is a threat to the Georgian Orthodox church. On the other hand, however, the experts do not believe that NATO membership will result in restoring Georgia's territorial integrity (graph 8).

## Conclusion

On balance, although there are very significant differences between the opinions of experts and those of the general population in a number of areas, we cannot assume there is a very divisive gap between elite and public perceptions. The most significant differences are found in the areas of corruption and foreign policy as well as in the assessment of specific institutions' performance, e.g. the Georgian Orthodox Church and the ombudsman's office. Also, it should be noted that we excluded some sensitive identity-related issues since expert's responses would be obvious and would increase the gap between expert opinions and public sentiments.

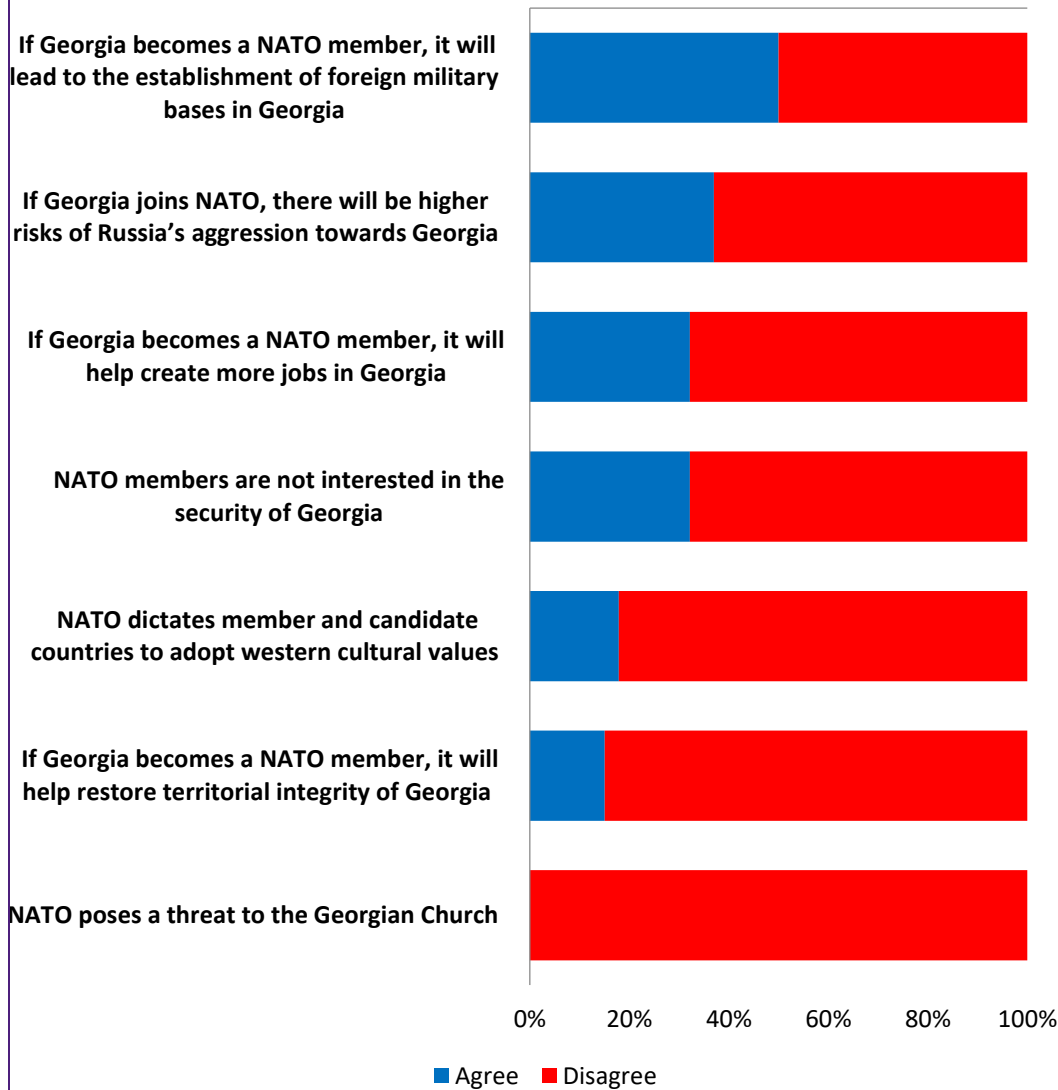
*Graph 7: How do you rate the government's handling of Georgia's relationship with Russia?*



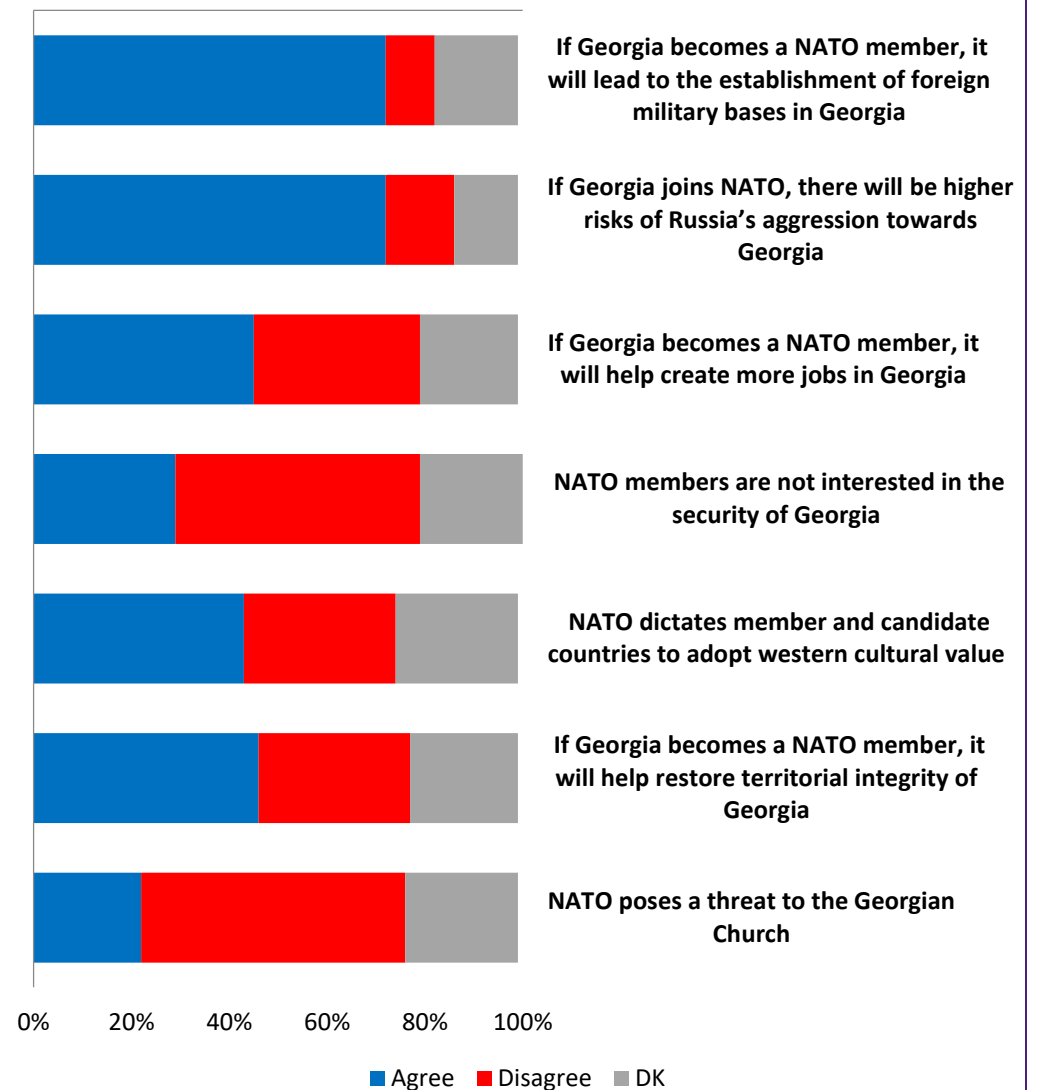


Graph 8: There are different opinions regarding Georgia's integration in NATO. Do you agree or disagree with the following?

### Scholars



### Population



## Notes:

Graph 1 ["In which direction is Georgia going?"]:

Figures for population are taken from: NDI 2018, Public attitudes in Georgia Results of March 2018 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, p.8. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_March\\_2018\\_Public%20Presentation\\_English\\_final.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf) ; accessed on July 14, 2018.

Graph 2 ["How would you rate the performance of the current government?"]:

Figures for population are taken from: NDI 2018, Public attitudes in Georgia Results of March 2018 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, p.12. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_March\\_2018\\_Public%20Presentation\\_English\\_final.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf) ; accessed on July 14, 2018.

Graph 4 ["How would you rate the performance of:"]:

Figures for population are taken from: NDI 2018, Public attitudes in Georgia Results of March 2018 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, p.54. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_March\\_2018\\_Public%20Presentation\\_English\\_final.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf) ; accessed on July 14, 2018.

Graph 5 ["How do you feel about the direction of each of the following issues during the past four years?"]:

Figures for population are taken from: IRI 2018, Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Georgia April 10-22, 2018, p.59. Available at: [http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-5-29\\_georgia\\_poll\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-5-29_georgia_poll_presentation.pdf) ; accessed on July 14, 2018.

Graph 6 ["Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?"]:

Figures for population are taken from: NDI 2018, Public attitudes in Georgia Results of March 2018 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, p.13. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_March\\_2018\\_Public%20Presentation\\_English\\_final.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf) ; accessed on July 14, 2018.

Graph 7 ["How do you rate the government's handling of Georgia's relationship with Russia?"]:

Figures for population are taken from: IRI 2018, Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Georgia April 10-22, 2018, p.34. Available at: [http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-5-29\\_georgia\\_poll\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-5-29_georgia_poll_presentation.pdf); accessed on July 14, 2018.

Graph 8 ["There are different opinions regarding Georgia's integration in NATO. Do you agree or disagree with the following?"]:

Figures for population are taken from: NDI 2018, Public attitudes in Georgia Results of March 2018 survey carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia, p.51. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_March\\_2018\\_Public%20Presentation\\_English\\_final.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_March_2018_Public%20Presentation_English_final.pdf) ; accessed on July 14, 2018.

**Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)** is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

**How to quote this document:** Expert Polls No. 7, Georgian Institute of Politics, July 2018.

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