



December 2019

Georgian Institute of Politics

EXPERT POLLS

Issue #10

---

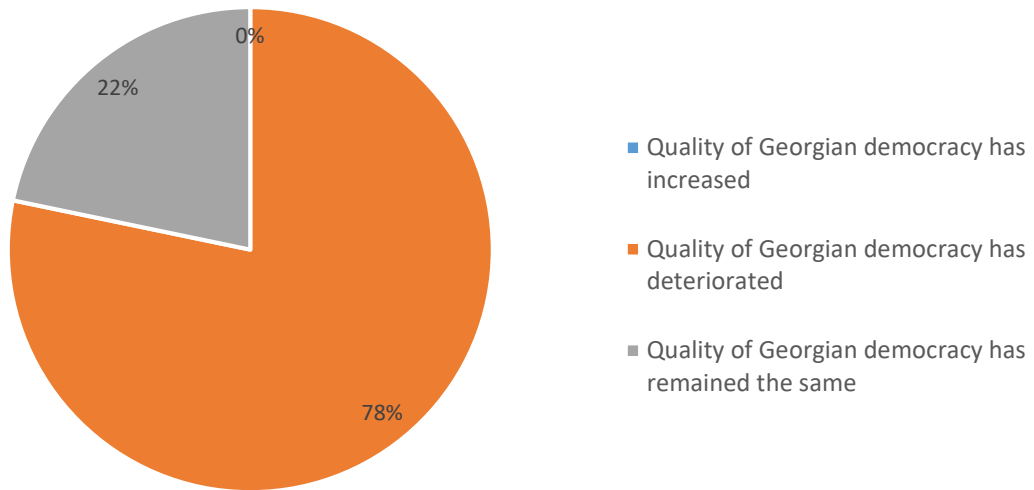
## Observers warn Georgia's democracy is deteriorating

The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) conducted its tenth expert poll from December 6 to 20. Twenty-three Georgian and international scholars and political observers answered questions about democratization and recent political dynamics in Georgia. The responses confirmed the overall negative view on Georgia's political climate. Experts also had some surprising responses in their assessments of political institutions and actors.

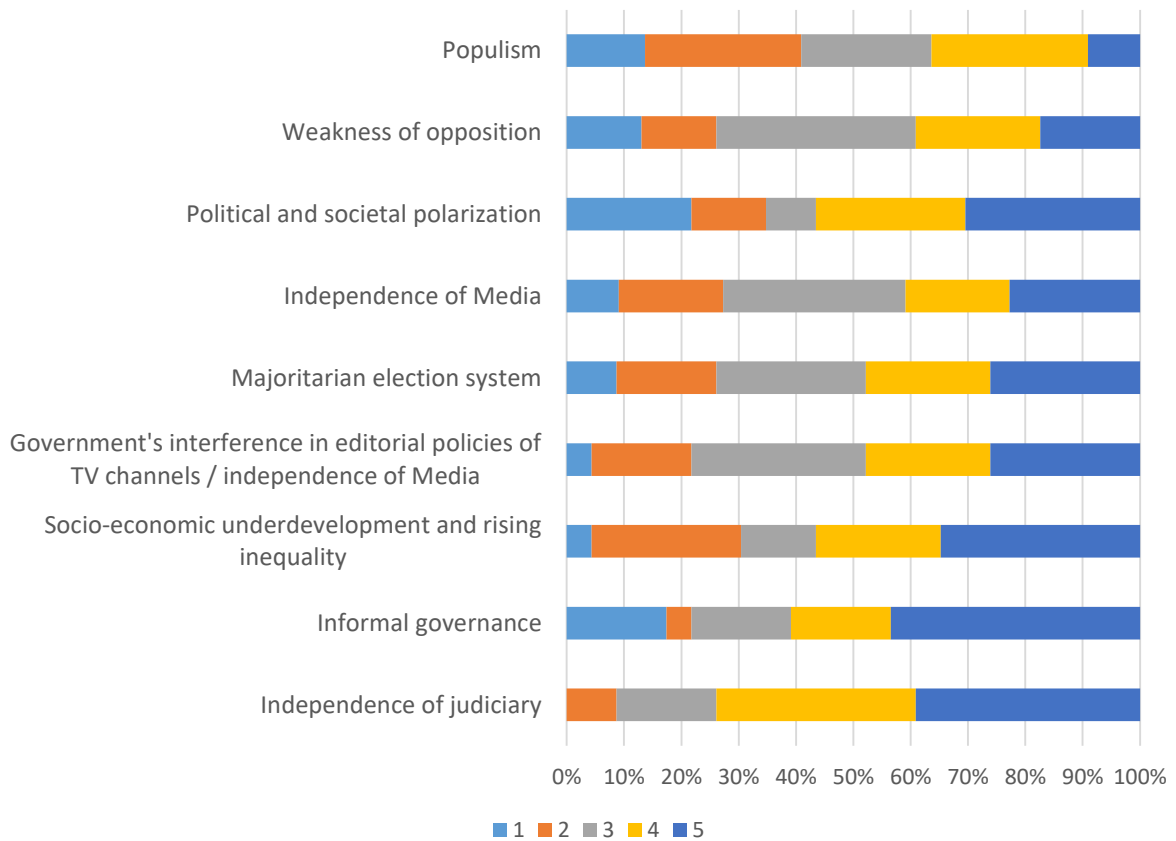
### Troubling year for Georgian democracy

The respondents were first asked about the state of Georgia's democratic development in 2019. The pundits' answers were pessimistic. Seventy-eight percent of surveyed experts said that "quality of Georgian democracy has deteriorated." Only 22 percent believe that it remained the same (figure 1). None of the surveyed 23 experts thought the quality of democracy increased in Georgia in 2019. The experts were also asked to assess the main challenges to Georgia's democratic consolidation (figure 2). The top two challenges were identified as the independence of the judiciary and informal governance, followed closely by socio-economic underdevelopment and inequality (figure 2). At the other end, populism was identified as the least significant challenge for Georgia's democratic development (figure 2). The experts also listed the weakness of the opposition and political polarization as less significant challenges (figure 2).

**Figure 1: In your opinion, how has the quality of democracy in Georgia changed in 2019?**



**Figure 2: Georgia experiences many problems in terms of democratic development. On a scale of 1 (least severe) to 5 (most severe) please assess the severity of the following challenges to Georgia's democratic consolidation**



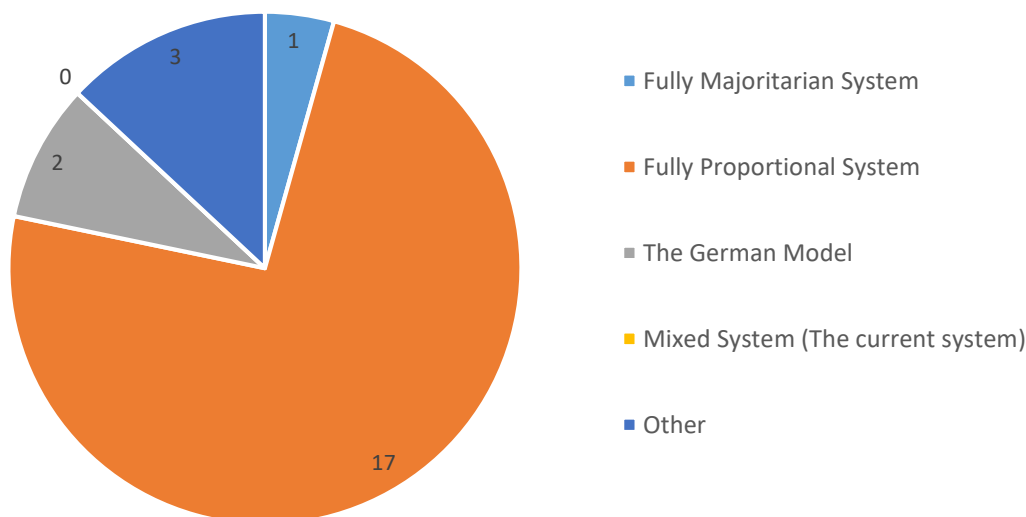
## Experts favor fully proportional system

Considering the significance of the issue, experts were also asked about electoral reform and the most suitable electoral system for Georgia. Seventy-four percent of surveyed pundits said a fully proportional system would be the best option for Georgia's democratic development, while nine percent supported the German model (figure 3). The current election system received no votes from the experts (figure 3).

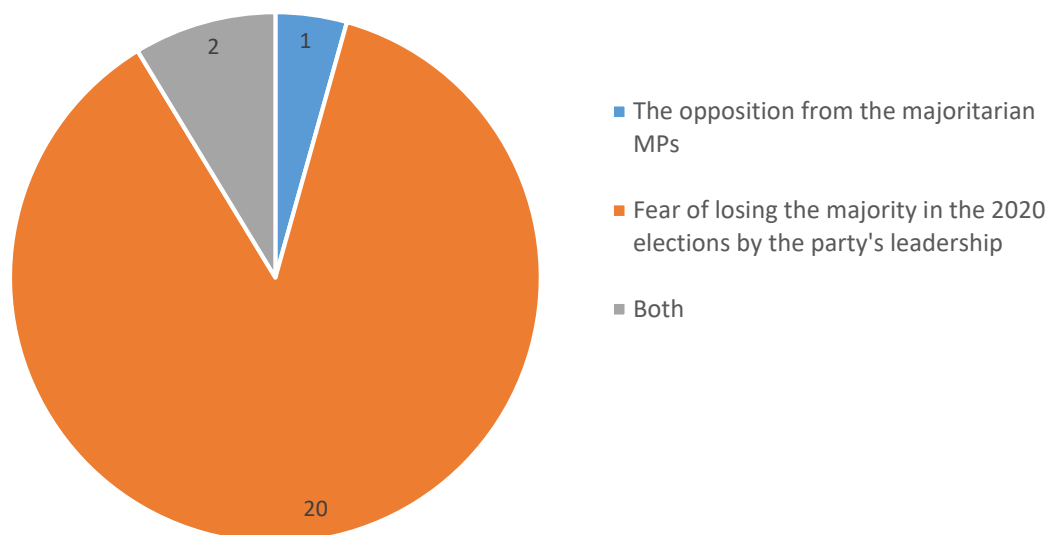
Experts were also asked about why the ruling party did not follow through with the promised electoral reform. A significant majority of respondents (87 percent) said that the GD's "fear of losing the majority in the 2020 elections" was the main reason why the reform failed in the Georgian parliament (figure 4). Only one expert out of 23 shared the official reason provided by the ruling party, i.e. that the reform failed due to opposition from the majoritarian MPs (figure 4). The remaining two experts argued that both issues – majoritarian opposition and government's fear of losing the elections – played a role (figure 4).

Finally, respondents were asked about the implications of the failed electoral reform for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and its pro-Western foreign policy. Sixty-five percent of surveyed experts believe that "Georgia's relations with the West and its prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration will be affected negatively," while 35 percent said it would not have much impact on Georgia's relations with the West (figure 5).

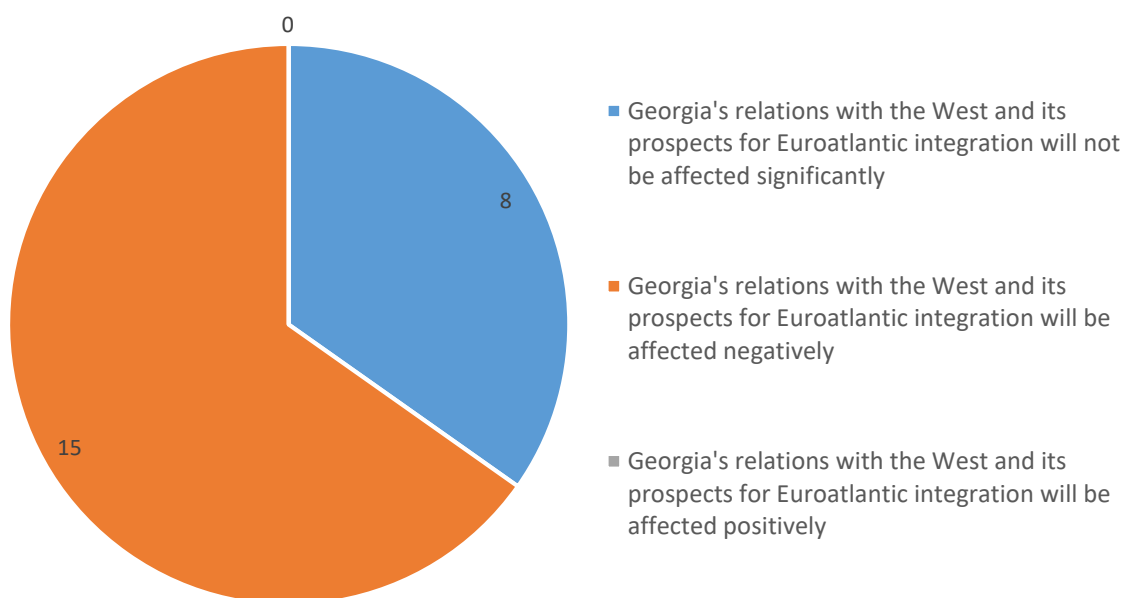
**Figure 3: In your opinion, which would be the best election system for Georgia's democratic development?**



**Figure 4: In your opinion, what is the real reason for the ruling party's failure to live up to its promise to introduce the proportional electoral system?**



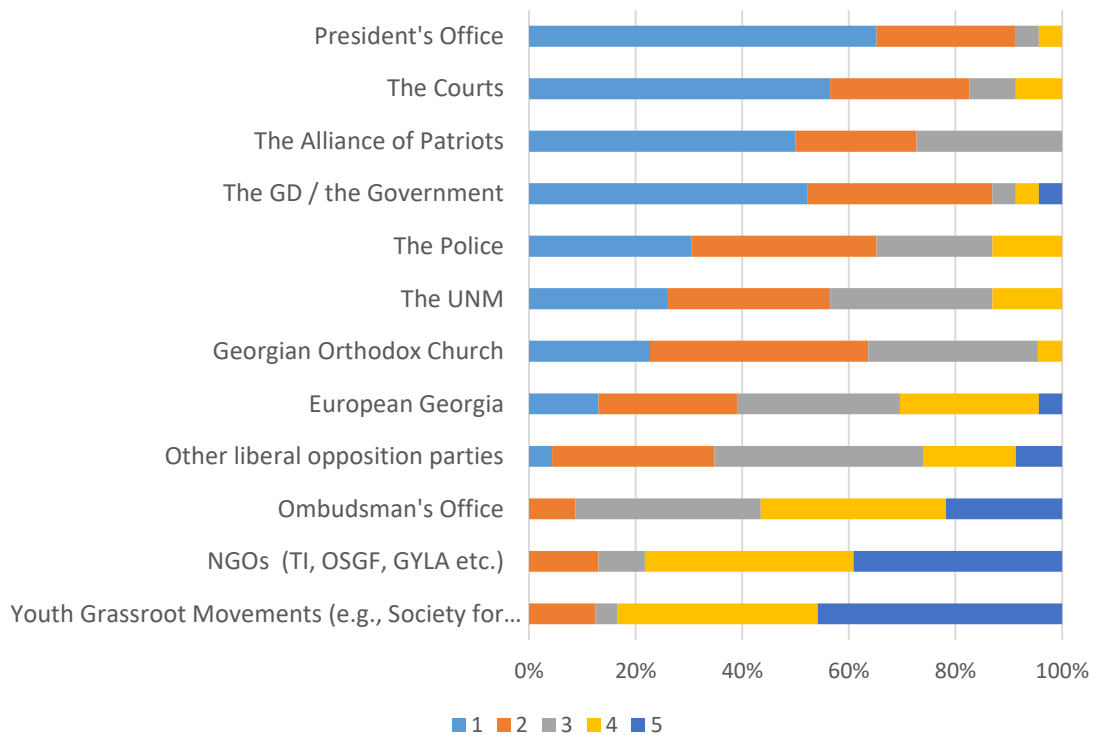
**Figure 5: In your opinion how will the recent events (GD's backtracking from electoral promise) impact Georgia's prospects for European integration?**



## New political actor claims the prize of the best performer

Finally, the experts were also asked to assess the performance of the main political actors and institutions during recent political crisis in Georgia (figure 6). Interestingly, although the ruling GD party and the government was the main trigger for the June and November crisis in Georgia, they still have a better image among the experts than a few other political actors, including the court, president’s office and the party of the Alliance of Patriots. The president’s office, although not a real powerbroker in Georgia’s political system, received the worst assessment both among Georgian and the international experts –and firmly occupies the last place in the ranking (figure 6). Among the opposition parties, the European Georgia received more positive assessments than the UNM, which many experts assessed poorly, placing it in seventh place, between the police and the church (figure 6). Finally, the surveyed experts assessed the role of relatively new, but rapidly rising, actors in Georgia’s political landscape: the young grassroots movements, which include groups that have been organizing various protest actions since this summer, such as “Society for Spreading Freedom” and “Sirtskhvilia” (“Shame”). The youth grassroots movements slightly outperformed the traditional NGOs, which have been fulfilling the democratic watchdog function for quite some time. Next to the two civil actors, the ombudsman’s office also received many positive votes, putting it at third place.

*Figure 6: Recently Georgia has been witnessing the multiple political crisis (the June protests, the November protests). On a scale of 1 (worst) to 5 (best) please rate the performance of each of the following political actors/institutions during these crisis*



## Suggestions and recommendations

Experts were also asked for suggestions and recommendations for the opposition parties, the government and the international community. For the political opposition, a near majority of respondents recommended that they join forces and create a coalition for the next elections, especially to “remove suicidal competition among parties in majoritarian districts.” Other recommendations included conducting more positive election campaigns; getting rid of old faces; more intensive cooperation with the international community; more work with the electorate—especially in the regions; selecting charismatic, trustworthy leader; and developing a common strategy between the parties.

Respondents were also asked specifically about “Lelo,” a new political player in Georgia’s polarized political field. The opinions of experts were quite divided. A slight majority of surveyed respondents said that “Lelo” might have a chance to become a third force in Georgia’s party politics if they manage to win over the electorate to their vision. But some experts, both Georgian and international, also argued that the long-term outlook for “Lelo” is not good due to the high degree of polarization in the country and the fact that the party’s founders earned their fortunes in the banking sector, in addition to other factors.

The experts also provided some suggestions for the ruling party, including reforming the electoral system; preparing to move into the opposition; ensuring a peaceful power transition through elections; and working on restoring public trust in the party. Some recommendations also included ceasing to demonize the opposition and avoiding “falling into a hole between the West and Russia.”

Finally, the experts were also asked about the role of the international community and civil society in Georgia’s democratic development. Many experts, both Georgian and international, argued that the West should go beyond statements like “expressing concern” and adopt a tougher line on Georgia. According to some responses, the West’s approach should also include sanctions—or at least the threat of them—in case of evidence of election manipulation or other anti-democratic practices. On the other hand, the West should also support political dialogue between the government and opposition, and work to avoid further radicalization and polarization of Georgian politics.

**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. 10, Georgian Institute of Politics, December 2019.

© Georgian Institute of Politics, 2019

Tel: +995 599 99 02 12

Email: [info@gip.ge](mailto:info@gip.ge)

[www.gip.ge](http://www.gip.ge)