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EXPERT POLLS

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## Observers see GD ahead, multiparty parliament

The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) conducted its thirteenth expert poll from September 14-20. Fifty Georgian and international political observers answered questions about the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia. As the aggregate results indicate, the majority of Georgian and international experts see the Georgian Dream (GD) party significantly ahead of others and expect a more multiparty parliament. The experts also believe that elections should not be postponed despite recent spike in Covid-19 cases.

### About the respondents

The data provided below refers to a political assessment of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia. The GIP's respondents are political observers, scholars and experts, who focus on political, social and economic developments in Georgia. Of 50 experts asked, 27 were foreigners and 23 were Georgians. The corridor of expectations aggregates what 75% of experts expect, removing 12.5% of outliers on either end. In previous elections, this approach has proven remarkably accurate in forecasting the overall results.

### Covid-19 and elections

GIP asked experts about the implications of Covid-19 pandemics for upcoming elections. Particularly, the respondents were asked about ways to ensure the democratic quality of elections, considering the limited presence of international observers amid Covid-19. The experts mentioned a number of techniques to mitigate absence of international observers including "video monitoring", "live stream counting", "innovative tools of citizen monitoring (through smartphone apps)", "more media around the poll area" and "statistical modeling of election fraud." Several experts mentioned the importance of domestic watchdogs who should

be very active to mitigate the absence of international monitors. Some respondents also raised the possibility for the ODIHR to contract “local credible monitors” or “involve foreign residents” in election observation.

The GIP also asked the experts about the possibility of postponement of elections. 63 percent of respondents said that elections should take place due date even if the spread of Covid-19 accelerates. Only 37 percent supported the idea of postponing the elections for a few months. Moreover, both Georgian (70 percent) and international (58 percent) experts think that elections should take place due date. In a previous April/May survey foreign experts had been more inclined towards election postponement.

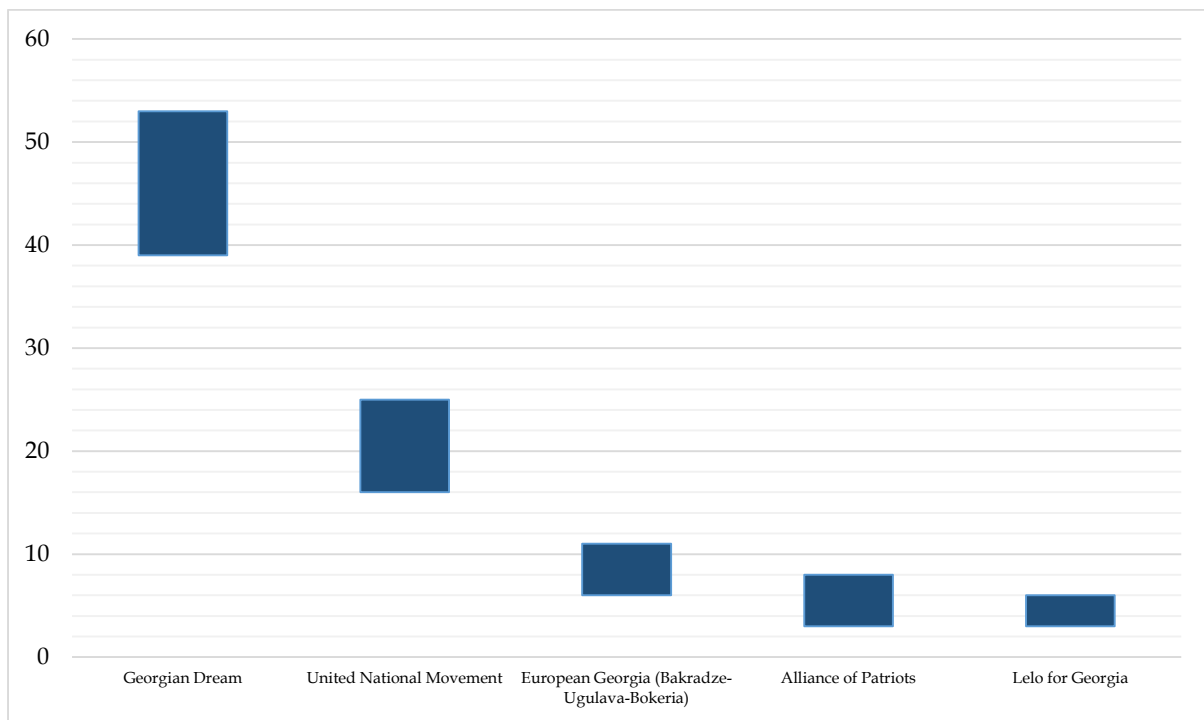
## **Who could win the upcoming parliamentary election?**

We also asked experts to assess the electoral chances of political parties and aggregated the results in a form of the *corridor of expectations*. According to surveyed experts (figure 1), the ruling GD party is seen ahead in total vote share (39-53 percent) in the proportional part of the upcoming parliamentary elections which accounts for 80 percent of seats, as of today. Both Georgian and foreign experts shared this view. Compared to expert polls ahead of the 2016 parliamentary election, the GD has consolidated its leading position vis-à-vis other parties. It is uncertain though whether it will be enough to form a government without a coalition. Among opposition parties, pundits expect the UNM to receive the most votes between 16 and 25 percent (figure 1). The UNM is followed by European Georgia who is expected to receive between 6 and 12, according to surveyed respondents (figure 1). Alliance of Patriots are expected to get between 3 and 8 percent and Lelo between 3 and 6 percent.

That said, the experts themselves highlighted significant uncertainty with regards to predicting results in mid-September. Less than 20 percent said they had full confidence (5 out of 5) in their forecast, and average confidence was 3,3 out of 5. Given that many voters appear undecided, according to August surveys, the vote results – especially for smaller parties – may still fall outside the corridor of expectations. In previous rounds of expert polls, last-minute events – such as the implosion of a party around a funding scandal -- had a discernible impact. The recent exponential growth of Covid-19 cases and increasing death toll may have a significant impact on election outcomes in 2020.

Finally, we also asked about the voter turnout in the upcoming elections. Georgian and foreign respondents provided almost identical estimates: 59,43 and 57,72 percent respectively.

**Figure 1: Corridor of Expectations - Parliamentary Elections 2020**



**Poll results: “Corridor of Expectations”**

- Georgian Dream 39-53%
- United National Movement 16-25%
- European Georgia 6-11%
- Alliance of Patriots 3-8%
- Lelo for Georgia 3-6%

In the aggregate estimates for smaller parties, Giorgi Vashadze - Strategy Aghmashenebeli may reach 5%, the Labour Party 4%, Girchi, Aleko Elisashvili’s ‘Citizens’ and Nino Burjanadze’s United Georgia-Democratic Movement had the upper ceiling of expectation at 3% each.

**Suggestions and recommendations**

In the second part of the survey, the GIP asked the respondents a few open-end questions about the conduct of upcoming parliamentary elections and how opposition and ruling countries could improve their election strategies.

For opposition parties, the most frequently mentioned recommendation was the need for UNM to distance from Mikhail Saakashvili. The experts also advised the opposition parties to join forces against the GD as “lack of unity” would probably cost them elections. Opposition parties “should also focus less on sweeping promising and allegations, and more on concrete policies, broken down in a way that voters can understand them.” Abstract posturing of opposition

parties as “savers of Georgia” and lack of more convincing alternative policies coupled and “exhaustion from decades of struggling with socio-economic problems” leaves “no strong will for change among the electorate.”

The ruling party was advised “to participate in debates on all TV stations that invite them.” “Keeping Covid-19 under control” and “avoiding last-minute mistakes” would be also important for the GD to capitalize on its successful management of pandemic. Covid-19-related negative developments, especially “a spike in COVID-19 deaths” could have a negative impact on GD’s success in elections. Overall, many experts still expect the GD to win in the upcoming elections mostly due to the weakness of opposition and presence of “zero appealing alternatives”. Also many, predominantly Georgian, experts deplored “effective use of administrative resources” by the GD and advise the ruling party to adhere to democratic standards and not to steal votes on election day.

Finally, all parties were advised to play by democratic rules: to “improve the quality of communication,” not to “discredit the political competitor,” “improve the quality of the political debate”, “get rid of populist promises”, “strengthen internal party democracy”, “work on political programs with citizens in-between elections”. Last but not least, serious thought should be given to “COVID-19 safety measures for campaigning \*and\* at election precincts on voting day.” Some respondents argued in favor of “online voting” to ensure citizens’ safety at election day. On a potentially positive side, the respondents expect next parliament to be “more pluralistic” which would increase chances to have “coalitional government”.

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**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.

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