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EXPERT POLLS

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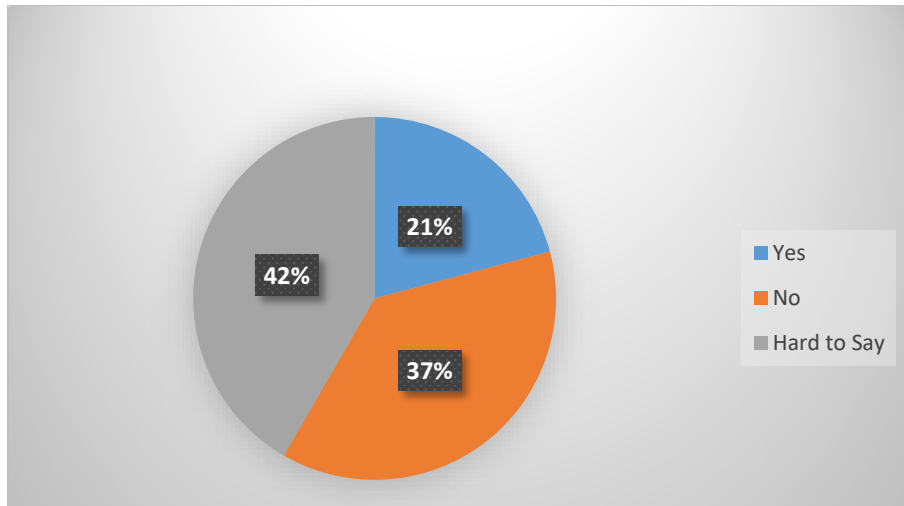
Experts Assess Recent Events, Divided About the Possibility of Snap Elections

The Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) conducted its fifteenth Expert Poll during July 7 to 17. Twenty-seven Georgian and international scholars and political observers replied to questions about the recent political events and the upcoming local elections in Georgia. The observers seem to be divided on key political issues, their opinions being split on the questions as to whether the Georgian Dream (GD) is likely to win sufficient votes in the upcoming local elections to avoid having to call snap elections, and whether Giorgi Gakharia and his party are independent political actors. On the other hand, a large majority of respondents hold the government responsible for the violence during the Pride Parade on July 5th, 2021.

Experts on Upcoming Local Elections

The GIP asked the experts about a key aspect of the upcoming local elections – whether the GD will manage to win 43% of the votes and thus be able to avoid snap elections (Figure 1). The experts and scholars surveyed provided diverging opinions: 21% of the respondents said that GD would reach this figure, while 37% answered in the negative. (Figure 1). The largest number of respondents (42%) answered the question with the response that it was “hard to say” (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Do you believe that the Georgian Dream will manage to receive 43% of votes in the local elections and thus avoid snap elections?



The experts' opinions were also divided on the question of whether Giorgi Gakharia's political party is a Bidzina Ivanishvili satellite or if it is an independent player. Of the experts surveyed, 24% think it is Bidzina Ivanishvili's project while 40% think it is not affiliated with Ivanishvili (figure 2). 36% of the respondents were undecided and answered with "hard to say" (figure 2). To the question of who would "suffer most in a competition with Giorgi Gakharia's political party", 60% of the respondents surveyed said it would be Georgian Dream (figure 3). Only 8% believed that the United National Movement (UNM) would suffer most, and 32% said it would be "other opposition parties" (figure 3).

Figure 2: Do you think that Giorgi Gakharia's party is Bidzina Ivanishvili's satellite political project?

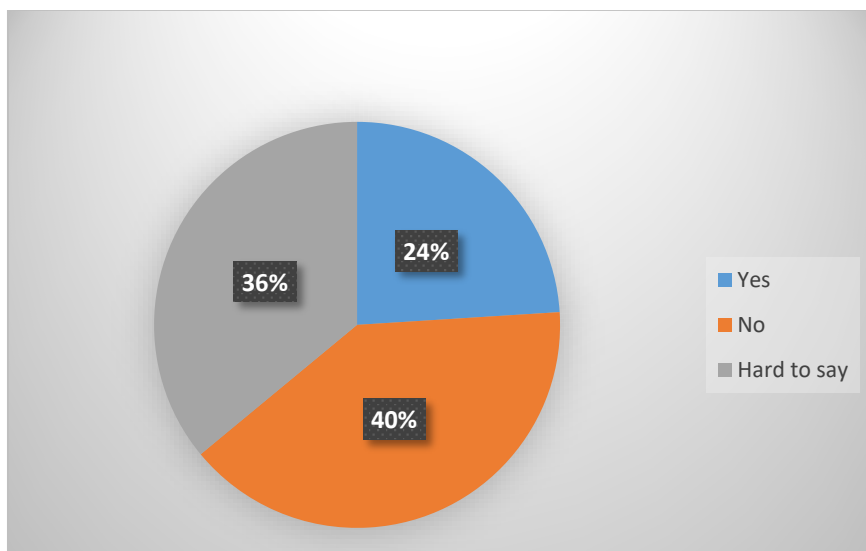
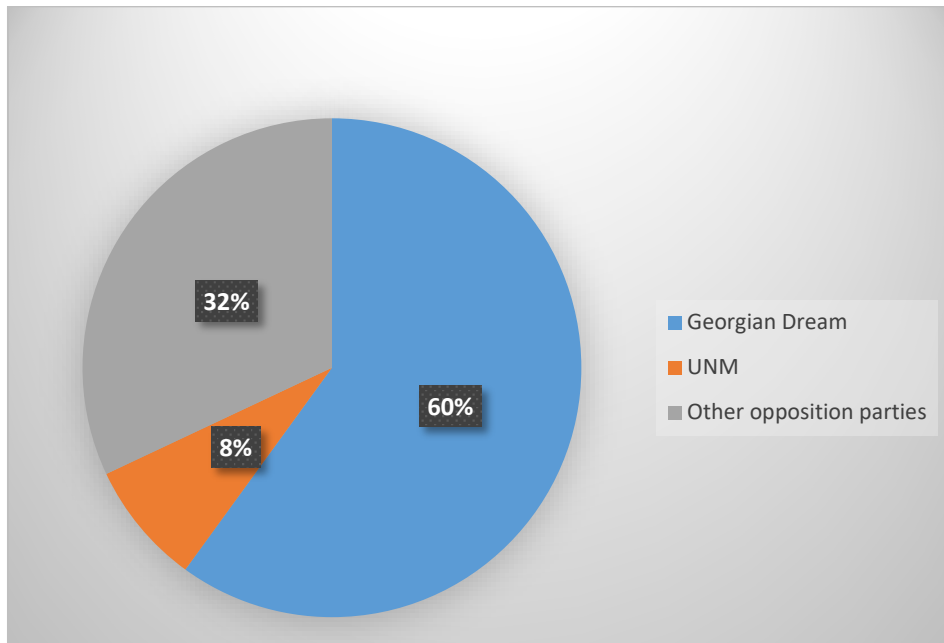


Figure 3: In your opinion, who will suffer most in competition with Giorgi Gakharia's political party?



The experts were also asked to predict the electoral performance of Giorgi Gakharia’s newly established party as well as the newly re-arranged far-right camp of the Georgian party spectrum. It seems that political observers do not expect a good electoral performance from either of them (figures 4 and 5): 69% of the experts surveyed expect Giorgi Gakharia’s party to receive “less than 10% of the votes” in the upcoming local elections, and 27% think that the party will receive “between 10% and 20% of the votes”(figure 4). Similarly, 84% of the respondents expect the right-wing and far-right parties to receive “less than 10%”(combined) while 16% think that these parties will receive “between 10% and 20% of the votes” (combined) (figure 5).

Figure 4: In your opinion, how successful will Giorgi Gakharia's political party be in the upcoming local elections?

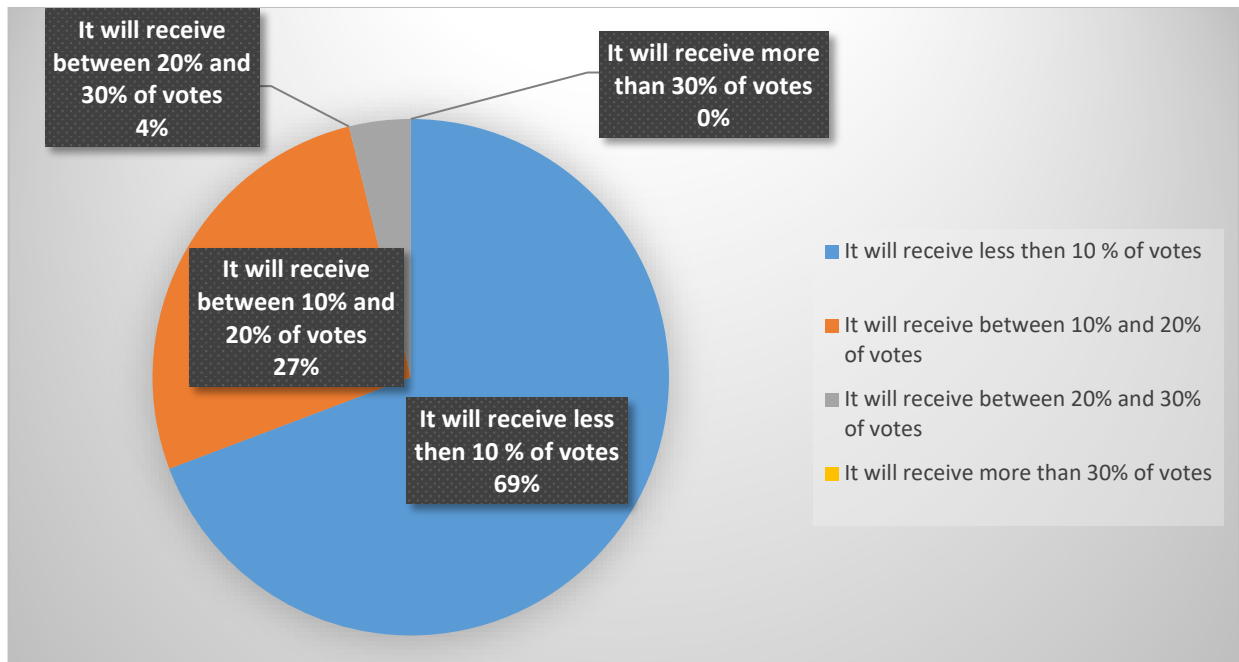
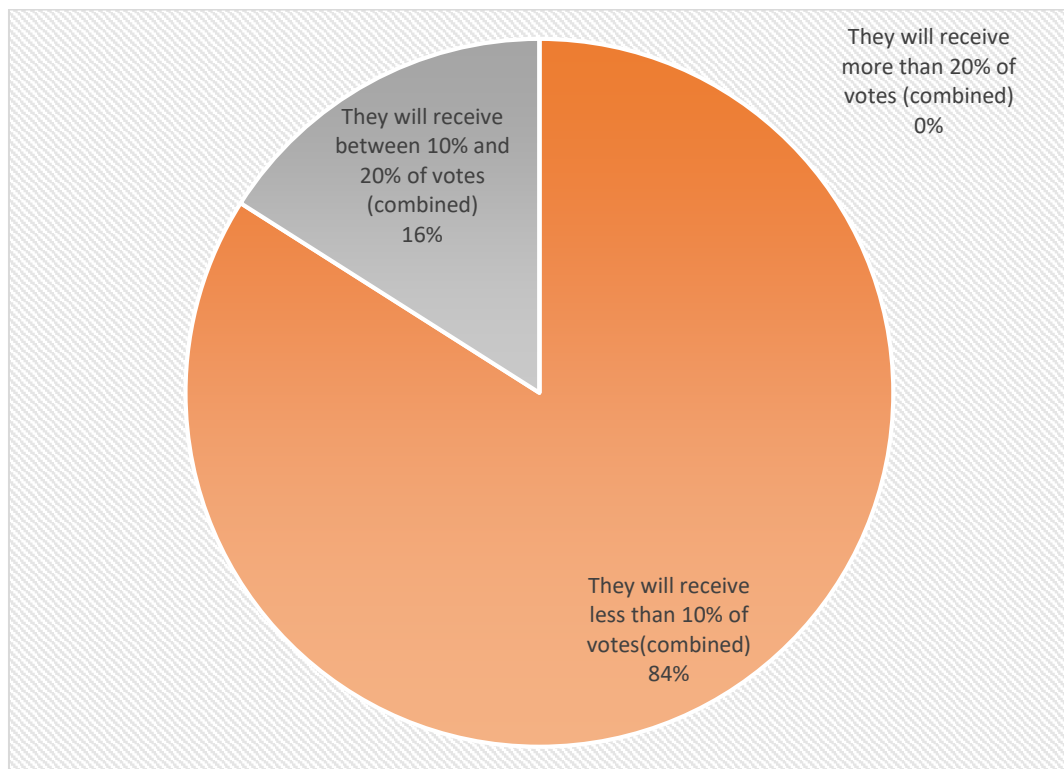


Figure 5: In your opinion, how successful will right-wing and far-right parties be in the upcoming local elections?



Observers Hold Government Accountable for July 5 Events

The GIP also put a few open-ended questions to observers and scholars of Georgian politics. To the question of “who was to blame for the recent unrest and grave human rights violations during the planned Pride events in Tbilisi” a huge majority of the respondents surveyed mentioned the Georgian government (18 mentions), followed by the (Patriarchate of) the Georgian Orthodox Church (9 mentions) and the right-wing / extremist / nationalist groups (4 mentions).

Additionally, the experts were asked to suggest solutions “to avoid similar problems (assault on the press and LGBT community) and to guarantee that the inviolability of human rights will be better respected in future.” The majority of the respondents suggested that the state institutions should consistently and unselectively fulfill their functions (including the monopoly on violence and the protection of human rights and liberties of all groups of society). There were also some unique suggestions, such as “the need to reach societal consensus through organizing a referendum on whether Pride Parades should be held in Georgia” or that all groups and segments of society, while having their rights protected, shall “consider the cultural, mental and religious realities in the country and show the ability to compromise.” Some other ideas included “the need to reduce polarization”, “police reform”, the formation of a „coalition government”, “limiting hate speech by extremist forces” as well as “limiting the involvement of the church in the political processes.”

Furthermore, both Georgian and international experts argued that the recent unrest and human rights violations during the planned Pride events in Tbilisi will negatively affect Georgia's Euro-Atlantic prospects and its relations with the West. They will damage the image of Georgia in the West, slow down Georgia's European prospects and further minimise the already low chances of Georgia's planned EU membership bid by 2024, according to the respondents. Finally, the GIP also asked the observers what the international community should do to help Georgia solve the current political crisis. Stricter and more consistent use of political conditionality against the government, empowerment of various segments of civil society and assistance in democratic reforms dominated the responses provided by the experts surveyed. Their answers also included “the need to show neutrality between GD and UNM”, funding education projects”, “sanctions against the government”, “the financing of civil society's information activities against the hybrid war that Russia is waging”, more dialogue with the part of the population “who are against Pride but are not necessarily pro-Russian”, “refraining from taking steps which would boost euro-scepticism in Georgia and “tailoring programs to the realities on the ground.”



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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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