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Report

Covid-19 Monitor: Wave 3

Tbilisi, Georgia

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About CRRC Georgia

CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization, which collects, analyzes and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends to strengthen social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus.

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Key Findings

Institutional Performance

- Institutional performance remains consistently high, with relatively little variation between different groups in society.

Policy approval

- The public continues to approve of most of the policies the government is implementing. The plan to open up the country to foreign tourism on July 1st has relatively little public support, by comparison to most policies.
- The vast majority of the public (89%) has benefited from subsidized utility payments and a third (34%) have benefited from debt relief.

Attitudes towards opening up and the expected length of the crisis

- The share of the public that is more concerned about the economic costs of the shutdown is increasing. This sentiment is increasingly common outside Tbilisi, where it had been relatively low a week prior.

Agriculture

- Most farmers have been able to engage in normal agricultural activities during the last month.

Practices

- One third of the country left home to socialize in the week prior to the survey, a 13 percentage point increase since the first wave of the survey.

Information security

- Most of the public reports they have encountered fake news, with only 27% reporting they have not.
- The share of the public believing common pieces of misinformation has not changed significantly during the past two weeks.
- A test of whether government, doctors, or the simple provision of information change attitudes more or less effectively, suggests no effect.

Introduction

Covid-19 has led to wide ranging changes in societies around the world. The response in Georgia has been particularly effective to date. In order to provide the Government of Georgia and the international community with an evidence base to support decision making, CRRC Georgia is conducting the Covid-19 Monitoring Project. The project is supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Tbilisi. Within the project CRRC will carry out six nationally representative telephone surveys focused on knowledge, attitudes, and practices surrounding the crisis. This document provides the results of the second wave of the survey.

The survey was conducted over cell phone between May 14 and 17. The results are nationally representative, with a margin of error of 3%. Overall 1,053 individuals responded to the survey. The minimum response rate was 38.6%. Respondents were selected using random digit dialing to ensure that a representative sample was taken. The data was then weighted to population characteristics using census data. The details of the survey methodology are provided in Annex 1 of this report.

The data analysis below uses frequencies and cross tabulations. Cross tabulations provide differences between different groups and a chi-square test or t-test is used to test for statistical significance of apparent differences. Tests for differences between the following groups were conducted within the study:

- Settlement types (Tbilisi, other urban, rural);
- Age groups (18-34, 35-54, 55+);
- Education levels (Secondary or vocational, tertiary);
- Sex (Male versus female);

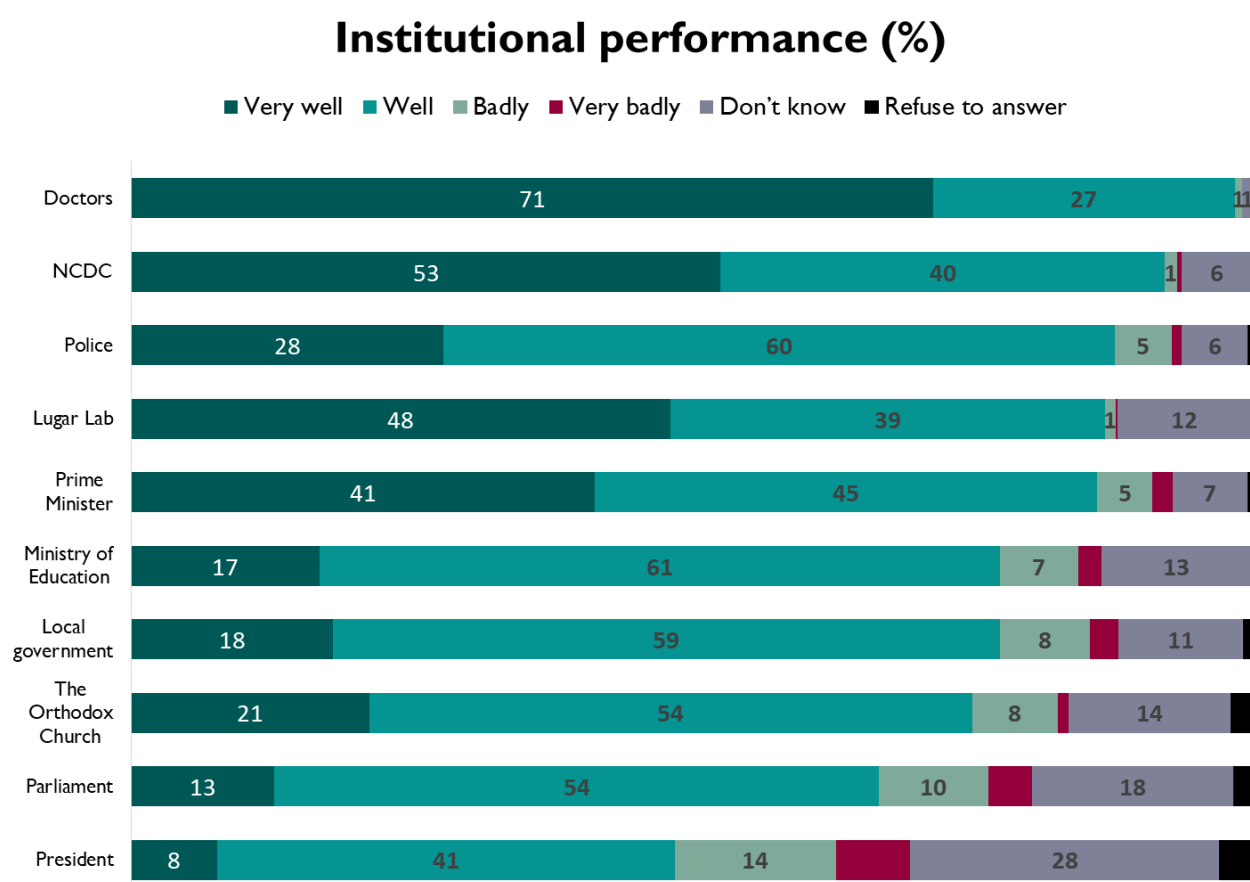
In some cases, the sum of percentages presented does not equal 100%. This stems from rounding error.

This document proceeds as follows. In the next section, the results of the survey are presented, first discussing public opinion on institutional performance of different institutions in the crisis. In the subsequent section, attitudes towards policy responses are discussed. Next, attitudes towards opening up the economy and the anticipated length of the crisis are discussed. Thereafter, agriculture and practices is discussed. The final findings section provides attitudes on information security and misinformation related themes. In Annex to the report, the study methodology is provided.

Institutional Performance

The country's medical and political authorities continue to have positive performance assessments. These estimates have varied only slightly, declining slightly in the previous wave of the survey and rebounding slightly to their previous levels for most institutions in the current wave of the survey.

The only substantively large change that has taken place over the last week is that performance assessments in the church have increased. In the first wave of the study, 64% reported the church was performing very well or well on Coronavirus related issues. By contrast, in the most recent wave of the survey, 75% reported they were performing very well or well. Aside from this change, attitudes towards institutional performance remain similar to previous waves of the survey.

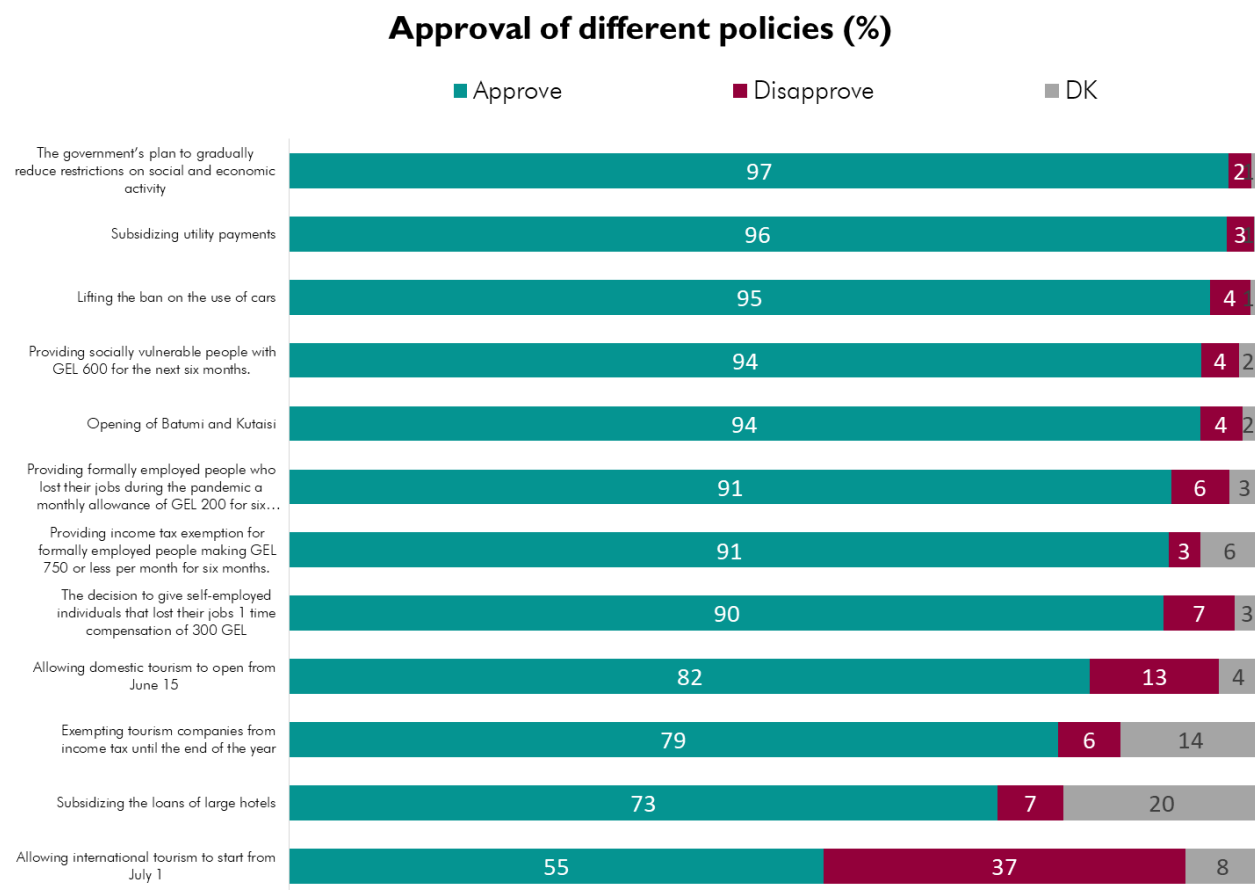


Overall performance assessments vary relatively little when broken down by age, settlement type, sex, and education level. Hence, the data for these are not presented, but are available upon request.

Policy approval

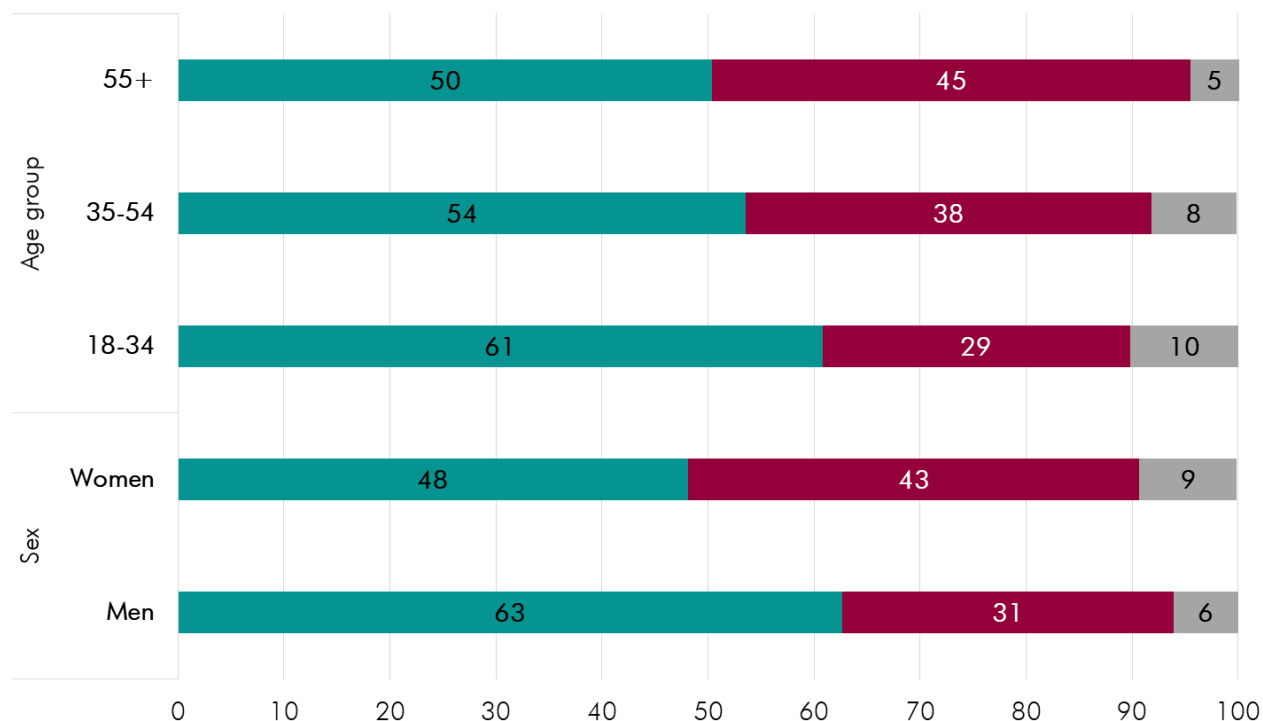
The Government of Georgia has taken numerous measures to attempt to mitigate the economic harm of the crisis in recent weeks. In this regard, the survey asked respondents about their approval of different measures the government implemented. The data suggest a high level of approval generally, with several exceptions.

The data indicate that a majority of the population support all of the policies asked about on the survey. However, there is relatively low support for the start of international tourism, with a third (37%) of the public reporting they disapprove of the policy. Subsidizing the loans of large hotels and exempting companies from income tax until the end of the year is also approved of by a relatively small share of the population. These policies have relatively high levels of uncertainty surrounding them rather than active disapproval.



When it comes to opening up for international tourism, older people and men are more supportive, while women and younger people are less so. There are no significant differences between people in different settlement types or between education levels.

Approval of international tourism starting July 1 by age and sex(%)



To understand which groups are more and less supportive of the government's policies overall, a simple additive index was created. The index gives one point to a respondent for each policy they approve of and zero otherwise. The average score on the index is 10.4 out of 12. There is relatively little difference between the different groups in terms of attitudes, with the only statistically significant difference being that people who have higher education approve of 0.3 policies more on average.

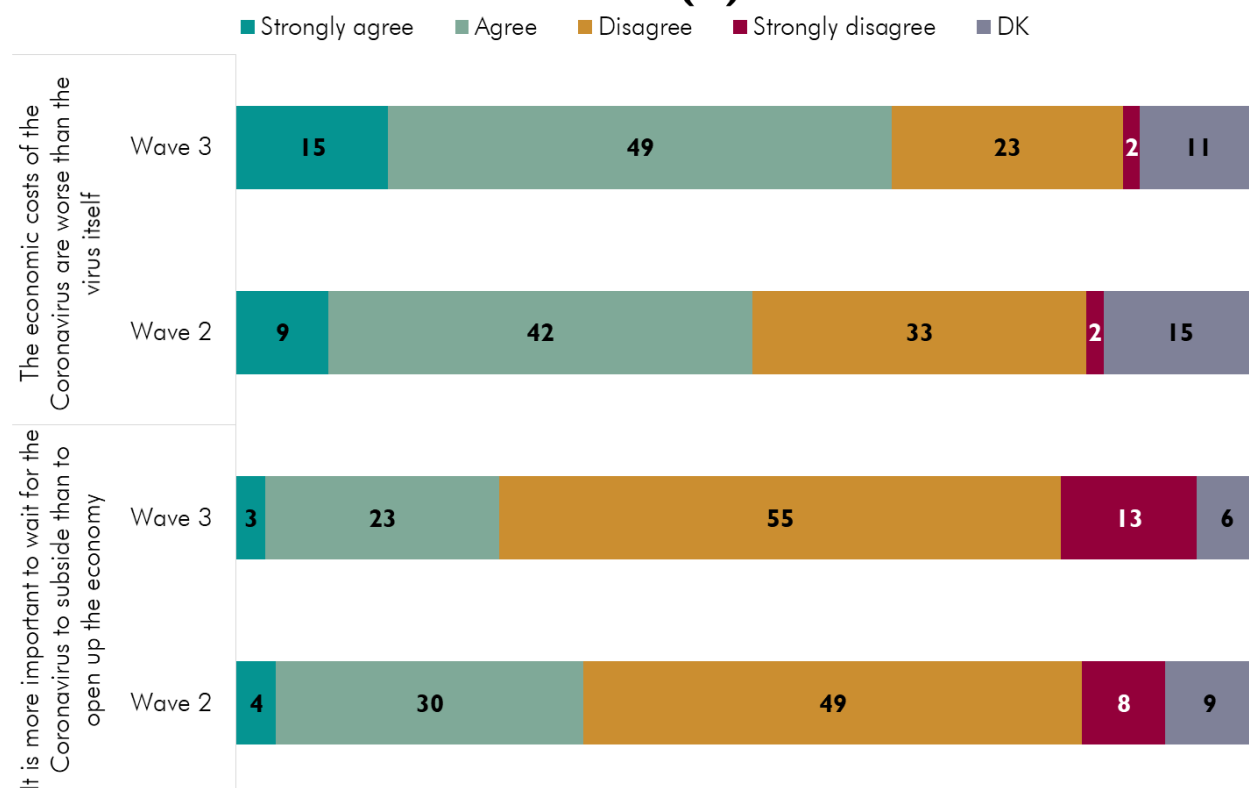
Aside from asking about the above policies, the survey also asked about whether people had received subsidies on utility payments and whether they benefited from debt relief. Most of the public (89%) reports they have received subsidies on utility payments. A third (34%) report they have benefited from relief on loan payments.

Attitudes towards opening up the economy and length of the crisis

The last wave of this study showed that the population tends towards viewing the economic harm of the crisis as worse than the virus itself, particularly in Tbilisi. In this regard, there was widespread support for the gradual opening up of the economy. This wave of the study asked the same questions as in the previous wave of the study. The results of the third wave suggest that the public continues to be anxious for the re-opening of the economy.

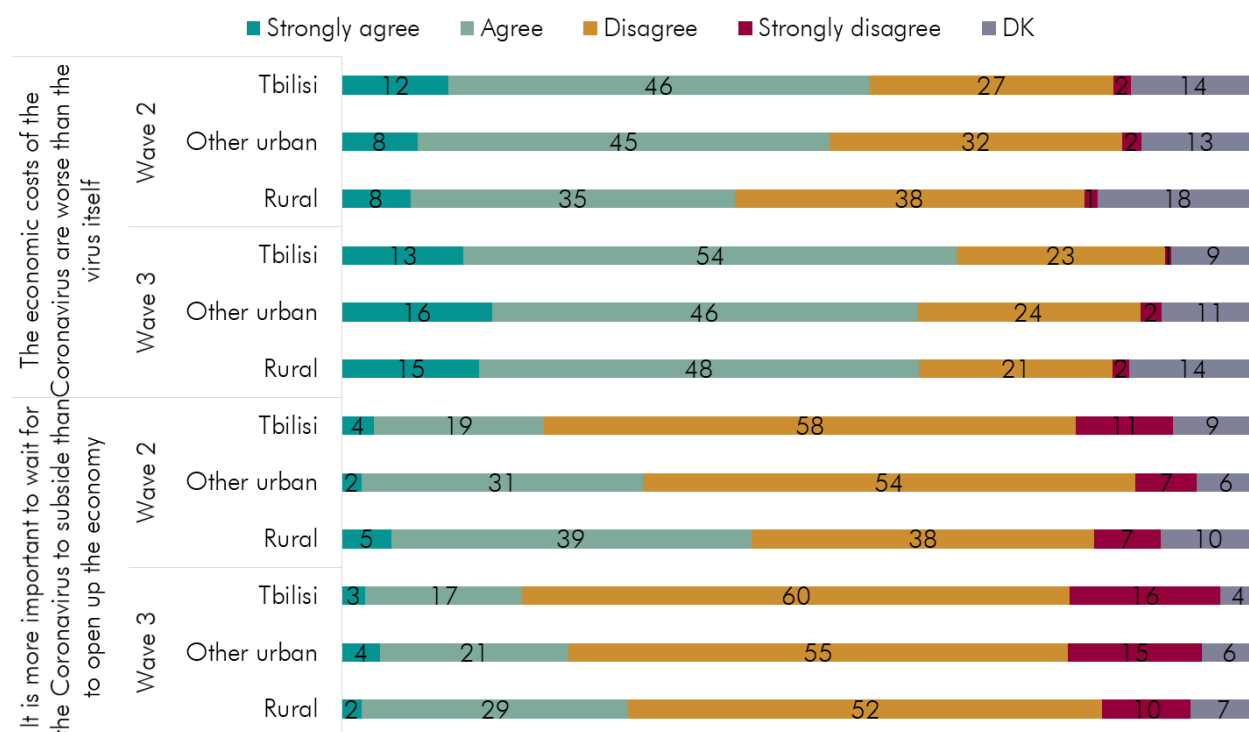
When it comes to opening up the economy, the share of people reporting that the economic costs of the virus are worse than the virus and the share that disagree with the idea that waiting for the virus to subside is more important than opening up the economy has increased. A week prior to the current survey, 51% agreed with the statement that the economic costs are worse than the virus. This week, 64% agree with this statement. The share agreeing with the statement that waiting for the virus to subside is more important than opening the economy has declined from 34% to 26%.

Opening the economy versus letting the virus subside(%)



Sentiments in Tbilisi continues to be strongest in terms of thinking the economic costs are worse than the virus and disagreeing with the sentiment that it is more important to wait for the Coronavirus to subside. Yet, the data suggest that rural areas are starting to resemble Tbilisi in terms of attitudes on these questions. In rural areas, 45% disagreed with the idea that it was more important to wait to open up in the last wave of the survey, while in this wave 62% disagreed with this statement.

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



Aside from the above, the survey also asked respondents how long they thought the crisis would last as well as how long they were prepared to wait until going back to normal life as in the previous wave of the study. Uncertainty remains high, with 41% of the public uncertain how long the crisis will last and 48% uncertain in how long they are willing to wait for normal life to return. The data indicate that the average time people expect to wait is 3.6 months (median 2 months) and the average time they are willing to wait is 1.9 months (median 1 months). Most people are willing to wait as long as they expect the crisis to last (63%). The remainder of people are willing to wait a longer amount of time (9%) or unwilling to wait as long as they think the crisis is going to last (28%). These figures have not changed significantly during the last week. As in the past week, young people report less willingness to wait.

Agriculture

The issues of food security and ability to engage in agriculture have come up numerous times since the start of the crisis. To further understand the impacts on agriculture, the study asked a number of questions about agricultural practices. The results suggest that agriculture has been hampered for a relatively minor share of the public during the month prior to the survey..

Overall, 46% of respondents report that at least one household member is engaged in agriculture. Among these households 89% report they were able to engage in normal activities and 11% report they were unable to. Among those that were hampered in conducting agricultural activities, the main reasons were

restrictions on travel and the concomitant inability to transport inputs and outputs. Given the small share of respondents responding to this question (and thus high margin of error), percentages are not presented. When asked whether they think their harvests will be better, worse, or about the same as last year, farmers 27% think it will be better, 34% the same, 12% worse, and 27% are uncertain.

Practices

The study also looked at a number of behaviors that were also asked on the first and second wave of the survey. The data suggest that people are increasingly engaged in a number of activities since the first wave of the study was conducted.

There has been a 13 percentage point in people reporting socializing, roughly equivalent to 400,000 additional adults socializing weekly compared to two weeks ago. In total, 14% of people have gone to someone's house to socialize and 29% have gone somewhere else to socialize. In the first wave of the survey, the same figures stood at 9% and 15%. One in five (20%) reported doing one or the other. In the second wave, the shares stood at 9% and 21%, with 24% reporting either. In total, 33% of people reported moving somewhere to socialize in the third wave of the survey. Men (39%) and younger people (41%) report going to socialize at higher rates than others.

The study also asked about whether people were purchasing more food and supplies than normal. Overall, 12% report they have. This is down from the previous wave of the survey, in which 19% reported the same.

In terms of economic activity, the data suggest that 2% of people got a new job and 8% started working again after having lost a job.

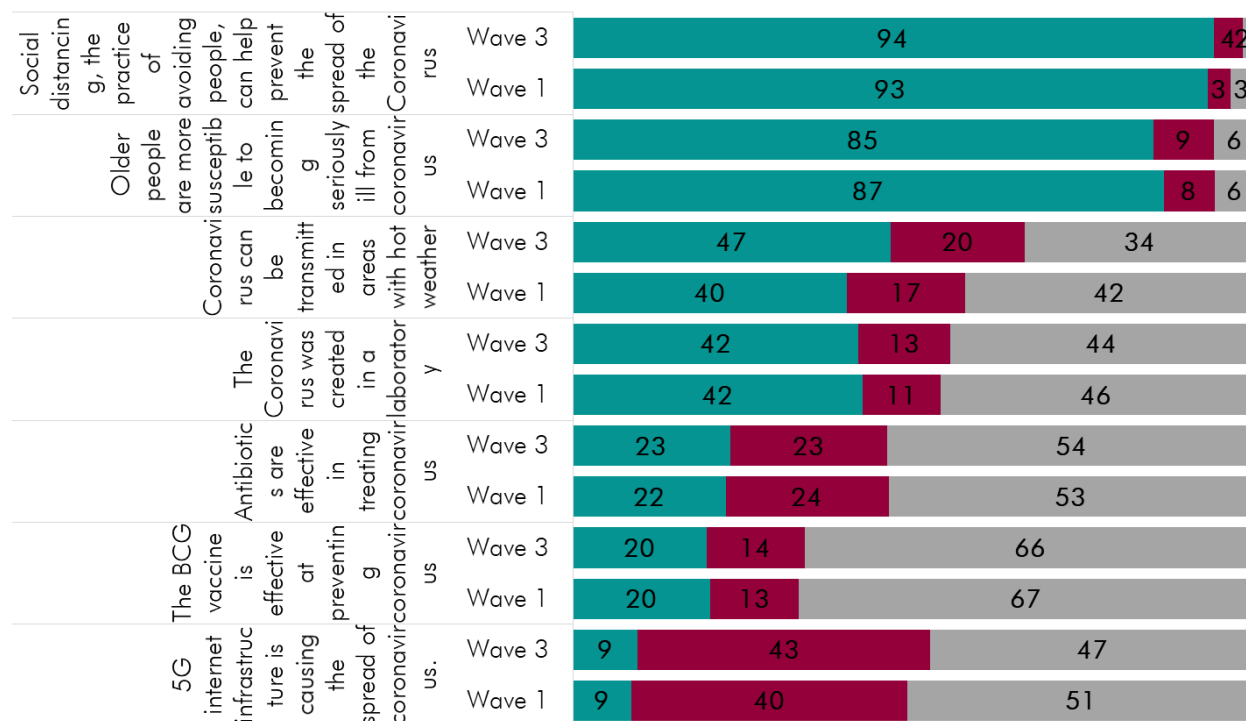
Information security

The discourse on propaganda in Georgia is hard to miss, and Facebook removed at least one far-right Facebook page, which was attempting to spread misinformation about Coronavirus in Georgia.¹ In this regard, it is important to understand the prevalence of misinformation surrounding the virus in the country. Data from this wave of the study suggests that belief in a number of pieces of misinformation has risen in Georgia since the first wave of this study.

This and the first wave of the study asked respondents whether they thought ten statements were true/false. Since the first wave of the study, the shares of the public believing all of the statements asked about has not changed significantly.

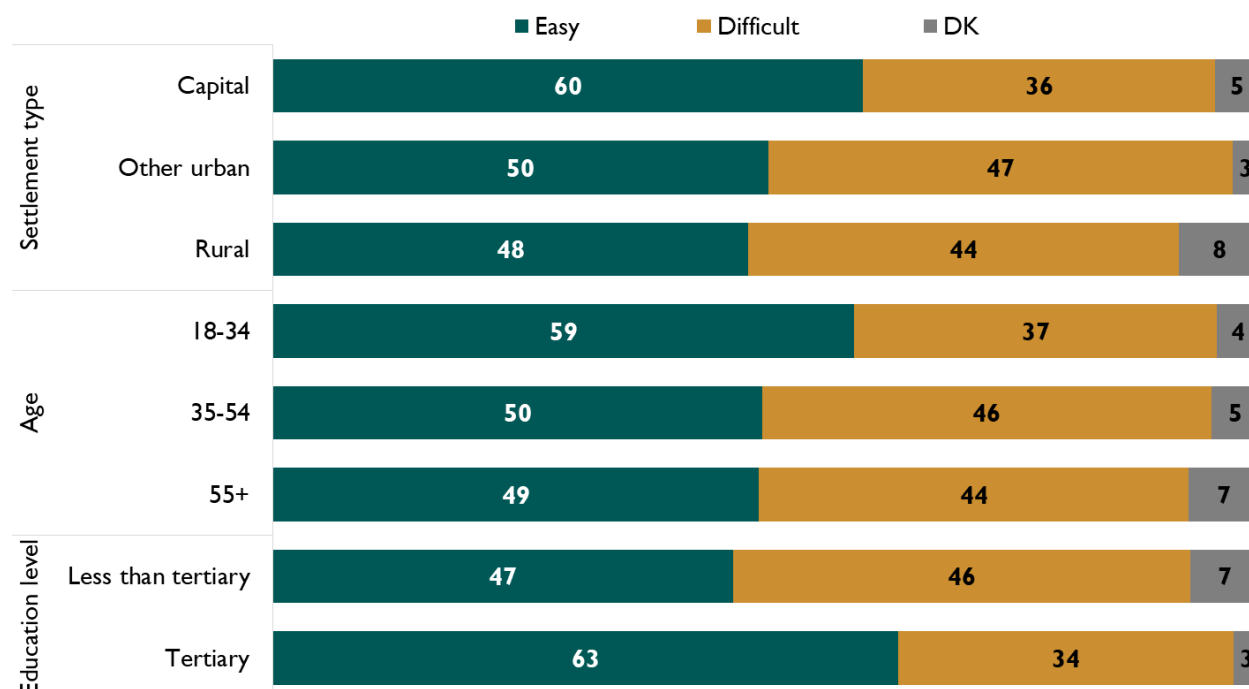
¹ <https://civil.ge/archives/349503>

Please tell me whether you think [the following statements] are true or false. (%)



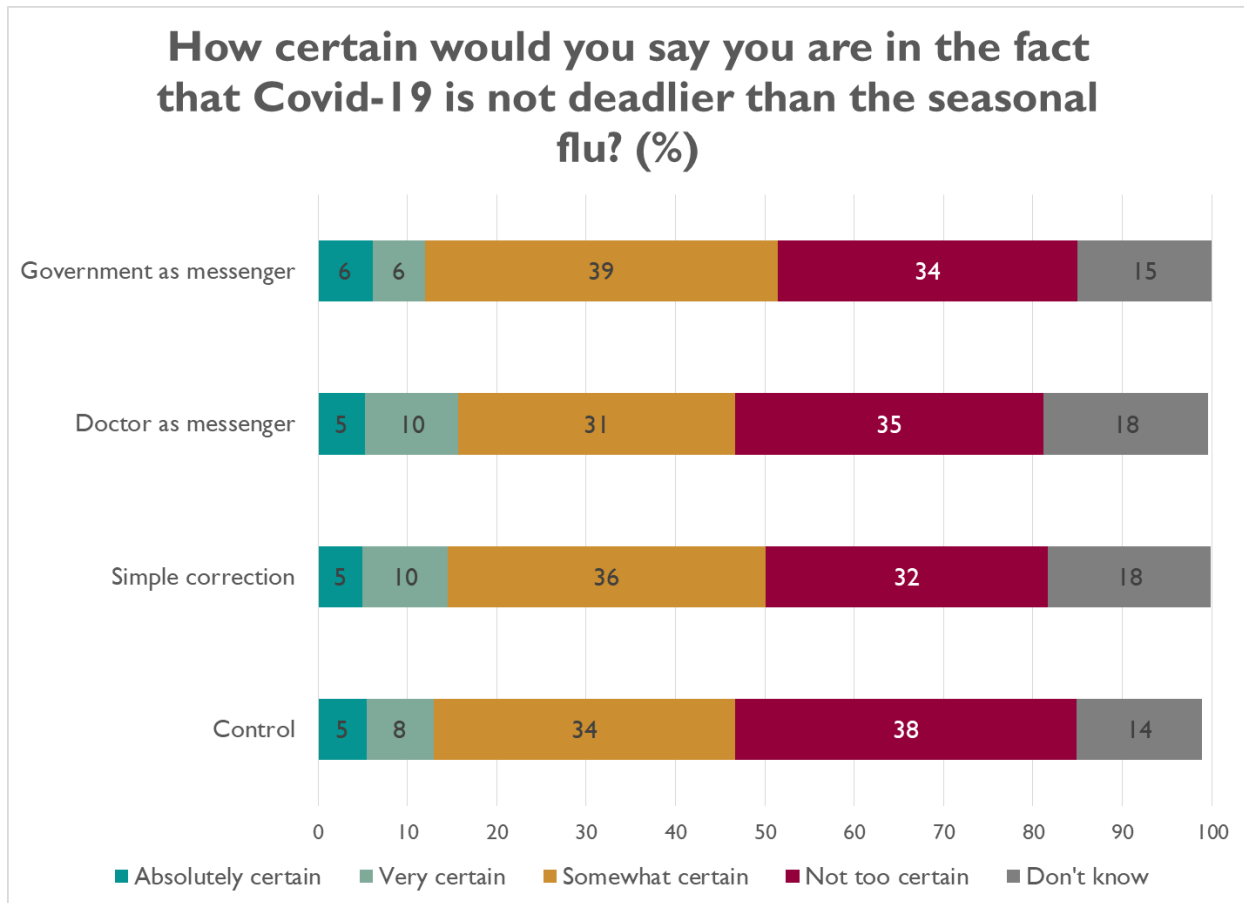
The study also asked about how closely people were following the news around the virus, whether people find it easy or difficult to understand what is true, and how often people think they get news that appears to be made up. Most people are following the news either very closely (35%) or closely (44%). The public is split though on whether they find it easy or difficult to understand what is true (52% easy, 42% difficult, and 5% don't know). People in Tbilisi, younger people, and people with higher levels of education report finding it easier to understand what is true than people outside the capital, older people, and people without tertiary education

When you get news and information about the coronavirus outbreak in Georgia, do you generally find it [easy or difficult to determine what is true]? (%)



A majority also think that they encounter fake news. About one in ten (9%) report seeing a lot of it, a third (30%) some, a fifth (21%) not much, and a quarter (27%) none. Among those that report encountering misinformation, the most common topic was about the details of the virus. At the same time, relatively few are very confident (10%) or absolutely confident (4%) in the news that they are receiving. Still, a plurality are somewhat confident (47%), and only 31% are not too confident.

To understand the effectiveness of different actors in information correction, the study used a survey experiment. Respondents were told that some people say the Coronavirus is not deadlier than the flu. Next, respondents were told that there was a great deal of evidence that shows this is not the case, the same message but with Georgian doctors as the messenger, or the same message but with the Government of Georgia as the messenger. Respondents were then asked whether or not they thought that the Coronavirus should be managed in a similar manner to the flu. The results suggest that none of these treatments were effective on average. The results also suggest that a large share of the public believes that Covid-19 is deadlier than the flu.



Conclusions

The above data leads to a number of conclusions about institutional performance, policy approval, attitudes towards opening up, agriculture, general behavioral practices, and information security.

When it comes to institutional performance, the data suggest assessments remain high. The slight declines observed last week have largely been recovered. The one significant change since the first wave of data collection is that approval of the church's performance on Covid-19 has increased by ten percentage points.

In terms of policy, the public continues to approve of most of the policies the government is implementing. Most policies are approved of by 80% or more of the public. The plan to open up the country to foreign tourism on July 1st has relatively little public support, by comparison though, with only 55% of the public reporting support. Women and young people are less likely to support this policy. When it comes to economic support, a large share of the public reports benefiting from the utility subsidy programs (89%) and the debt relief efforts (34%).

The public is increasingly tending towards viewing the economic costs of the Coronavirus response as worse than the virus itself. While in the past wave of the survey, this attitude was most common in Tbilisi (and it still is), this sentiment is increasingly common outside Tbilisi.

The data indicate that when it comes to agriculture, most farmers have been able to engage in normal agricultural activities during the last month. Still one in ten report some issues. Nonetheless, most farmers think that either the present year crop will be similar to the last or better.

When it comes to practices, the data indicate a large increase in socializing. One third of the country left home to socialize in the week prior to the survey, a 13 percentage point increase since the first wave of the survey. This is the equivalent of 400,000 extra adults going out to socialize weekly.

With information security, a majority report that they have encountered what they believe to be fake news. Only a quarter of the public report that they have not encountered any. At the same time, the data indicate that almost identical shares of the public believe in untrue statements as during the survey two weeks prior. Tests of whether different messengers are more effective at delivering information corrections shows no significant differences.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology

The survey was a nationally-representative cell phone survey covering the adult population of Georgia (except the areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Respondents are selected using the random-digit-dial (RDD) method and were interviewed through live interviewing.

The present wave of the survey was conducted between May 14 and 17, 2020. Overall, 1,053 completed interviews were collected, with a minimum response rate of 38.6%.² Respondents were interviewed in Georgian, Armenian, Russian, or Azerbaijani.

Results are weighted. CRRG-Georgia used demographic information from the 2014 Georgian National Census for adjusting results based on respondents' gender, age, ethnic identity, education, and residence. This helps balance the proportions of those groups which might be underrepresented in the raw data. Overall, the theoretical margin of error for proportions does not exceed 3%.

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.