

Exploring Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Georgia: Trends and Policy Implications

Mestvirishvili, Natia; Mestvirishvili, Maia

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Mestvirishvili, N., & Mestvirishvili, M. (2018). Exploring Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Georgia: Trends and Policy Implications. *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 102, 2-6. <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000254660>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

CRRC's Caucasus Barometer Survey: Introductory Notes

In 2004, the newly established Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) ambitiously attempted to survey the populations of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and learn about people's assessments of social and political developments in their respective countries. The *Caucasus Barometer* project, implemented with initial core funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, proved to be extremely successful. Comparable longitudinal survey data collected from 2008 to 2017—the only data of its kind—and respective documentation are available for researchers and for the general public.

The *Caucasus Barometer* (CB) story is rich and extensive. Part of it will be told in an upcoming publication entitled, "In the Caucasus we count: Highlights of CRRC's *Caucasus Barometer* findings," which thoroughly analyzes select aspects of the CB data. The present issue of the *Caucasus Analytical Digest* is the first concise compilation of short articles based on the most recent CB 2017 findings. The survey fieldwork occurred between September 22 and October 10, 2017. A representative sample of 2,379 respondents was interviewed nationwide (with the exception of the occupied territories).

Datasets of all waves of the *Caucasus Barometer* survey can be accessed at <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/downloads/>.

Exploring Public Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Georgia: Trends and Policy Implications

By Natia Mestvirishvili (International Centre for Migration Policy Development) and

Maia Mestvirishvili (Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University)

Abstract

Public attitudes towards immigrants are becoming an increasingly important issue in many countries and are not always positive. In Georgia, CRRC's Caucasus Barometer survey data show that public attitudes towards immigrants remain quite ambivalent. The changes in reported attitudes between 2015 and 2017 are not necessarily positive. Negative attitudes towards immigrants are more widespread among those who have not had personal contact with immigrants, thus supporting the 'contact hypothesis.' The empirical evidence also supports the economic self-interest theory, with higher shares of people living in better-off households reporting positive attitudes towards immigrants in Georgia.

Context: Increased Immigration to Georgia

Numerous studies show that immigrants, if they are well integrated into the receiving society, are not a threat but rather an opportunity for the development of the host countries. It is widely believed that their integration can strengthen international migration's positive effect as an "engine for social action, dynamism, and fundamental wealth." (Rodriguez-Garcia 2010, 267) Therefore, the integration of immigrants is a high priority on many developed countries' policy agendas.

Immigration to Georgia is a relatively new trend, with limited academic and policy work conducted in this field. In the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia was a country of

emigration; however, recent statistical data demonstrate that Georgia is becoming a country of transit and immigration as well. The number of immigrants in Georgia can, however, only be estimated through fragmented sources that do not always provide a complete and reliable picture.

Georgia's current immigration regulations (Parliament of Georgia 2014) are quite liberal and do not require immigrants from more than 100 countries who come to Georgia for a period of up to 12 months to apply for residence permits or otherwise register. To legally stay in Georgia for prolonged periods of time, immigrants can simply leave the country once a year and immediately return.

Estimates of different immigrant populations were collected in the 2017 Migration Profile of Georgia. (State Commission on Migration Issues 2017) The United Nations estimated migrant stocks in the country to be 168,802, equal to 4.5% of the total population in 2015. A total of 70,508 residence permits were issued between 2012 and 2016, most of them to citizens of Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Armenia, Ukraine, India, China and Iran. The highest number of residence permits issued over the last five years were work residence permits (32,783) issued mostly to Turkish (24% of the total number), Chinese (22%), Indian (13%) and Iranian (9%) nationals.

In recent years, the number of educational immigrants in Georgia has increased significantly. In 2013, Georgian higher education institutions hosted 4,177 foreign students, while 2016 statistics provided by the country's Ministry of Education and Science report a number of foreign students that exceeds 9,000, with students coming from 87 countries.

Georgia is also host to a growing number of asylum seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders. In 2016, there were 414 refugees and 1,099 individuals with humanitarian status, which far exceeds the numbers for 2014—297 and 145, respectively. (State Commission on Migration Issues 2017)

Thus, the available sources confirm that immigration is an increasing trend in Georgia that must be properly addressed. Protecting migrants' rights, ensuring immigrants' successful integration into society, and facilitating the peaceful cohabitation of people representing various religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds are among the main goals anchoring Georgia's Migration Strategy 2016–2020 (State Commission on Migration Issues 2015), which was developed by the State Commission on Migration Issues. Since integration is a two-way process of mutual accommodation that requires commitment from both host and migrant communities, understanding public opinion in the receiving society is integral to the policymaking process.

Reported Attitudes Towards Immigrants in Georgia, 2015–2017

Globally, public attitudes towards immigrants are not always positive — especially in traditional societies. There is limited research addressing this topic in Georgia, but the existing studies and several anti-immigrant demonstrations in past years suggest that the local population's attitude towards foreigners is hardly welcoming. (Petraia 2017)

The CRRC's Caucasus Barometer survey (CB) has attempted to measure the population's attitudes towards immigrants in 2015 and 2017. Slight changes have been

documented during this period. Namely, the share of people who reported neutral attitudes towards foreigners coming to Georgia and staying here for more than 3 months¹ decreased from 61% to 52%, while the share of those who characterize their attitudes towards immigrants as bad or very bad increased from 5% to 16% (Table 1), and there were no observable changes in the frequency of reported positive attitudes. These findings might indicate that the population of Georgia is starting to develop more defined attitudes towards immigrants.

Table 1: How would you characterize your attitude towards the foreigners who come to Georgia and stay here for longer than 3 months? (%)

	2015	2017
Very bad	1	5
Bad	4	11
Neutral	61	52
Good	20	25
Very good	4	4
Don't know	9	3

Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2015, 2017, Georgia

While the reported attitudes towards immigrants do not vary by gender, age does appear to make a difference. Young people in Georgia (those between the ages of 18 and 35) tend to have more positive attitudes towards immigrants than do their older compatriots.

Importantly, CB 2017 data show that a significant share of Georgia's population (70%) report never having had any form of contact with immigrants. Only 21% of the population reports rarely having contact with immigrants, and 8% reports having personal contact with them often. This finding could be explained by the relatively small number of immigrants in Georgia, but it could also indicate that those who immigrate to Georgia remain quite isolated and have minimal contact with the host community. Regardless, this finding strongly suggests that perceptions of immigrants in Georgia are largely based on information that people obtain from sources other than their own experiences.

Who Tends To Be More Welcoming Towards Immigrants in Georgia?

The two main theoretical approaches explaining public attitudes towards immigrants stem from the disci-

¹ Immigrants were operationalized in the questionnaire as "foreigners who come to Georgia and stay here for longer than 3 months." In this article, the term "immigrants" is most commonly used instead.

plines of psychology and economics. The first approach is based on the ‘contact hypothesis,’ which stipulates that interaction with an out-group can be positive and can also lead to friendship between the representatives of the two groups under certain conditions, such as the equal status of the groups, a lack of competition, joint work to achieve common goals and personally knowing each other. (Allport 1954) Later research demonstrated that contact between the representatives of two groups, even when it did not fulfil every precondition, still reduces inter-group prejudice. (Pettigrew/Tropp 2006) Thus, the contact hypothesis remains one of the ‘most durable ideas in the sociology of racial and ethnic relations.’ (Ellison/Powers 1994, 385)

The second theoretical approach emphasizes the primary role of economic self-interest in explaining anti-immigrant attitudes. (Fetzer 2000) Economic self-interest theory states that public attitudes towards immigrants are derived from people’s narrow, material self-interest and suggests that economically disadvantaged individuals are more likely to express anti-immigrant attitudes compared to others who are economically better off, as the former are afraid that their financial well-being may be negatively affected by immigrants. (Hjerm 2001, Verbeck et al. 2002) Some scholars even suggest that economic interest may be the main source of increased opposition to immigrants in developed countries. (Espenshade/Hempstead 1996, Raijman et al. 2003)

With these two theories in mind, a preliminary analysis of CB 2017 data is presented below. The findings show that people who report frequent or even rare personal contact with immigrants tend to have a better attitude towards them, thus confirming the contact hypothesis (Table 2).

Even though, in accordance with the economic self-interest theory, one would expect employed individuals with higher income to report more positive attitudes towards immigrants, the data show no clear pattern among those who report being employed or those who report a relatively higher personal income. Self-assessments of a household’s economic situation, in contrast, seem to be positively associated with attitudes towards immigrants. Higher shares of people living in better-off households report positive attitudes towards immigrants (Table 3 overleaf). This is in line with the economic self-interest theory.

Concluding Remarks and Policy Implications

CB 2017 data show that despite the significant financial, social and cultural benefits that immigrants can bring to Georgia, public attitudes towards immigrants remain quite ambivalent. Most people have not had any

Table 2: Have you had any contact with foreigners in Georgia who have stayed here for longer than 3 months? By How would you characterize your attitude towards the foreigners who come to Georgia and stay here for longer than 3 months? (%)

Contact with immigrants:	Attitude towards immigrants:		
	Bad or Very bad	Neutral	Good or Very good
I have often been in contact with [immigrants]	9	43	48
I have rarely been in contact with [immigrants]	8	51	40
I have never been in contact with [immigrants]	19	53	24
National average:	16	52	29

Note: Distribution of answers “Don’t know” and “Refuse to answer” is not shown in Table 2.

Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2017, Georgia.

direct contact with foreigners living in Georgia, which might drive misperceptions and negative attitudes. In fact, negative attitudes towards immigrants are more widespread among those who report no personal contact with immigrants. This finding supports the ‘contact hypothesis’ and suggests that anti-immigrant attitudes in Georgia may not be derived from actual negative experiences but rather from a lack of experience with immigrants. This paper also identifies that, in line with the economic self-interest theory, people living in households of different perceived well-being report different attitudes towards immigrants.

These findings offer several policy implications. They strongly suggest that integration policy should target both immigrants and the local population. While encouraging immigrants to make efforts to integrate through various mechanisms (such as language courses or vocational training) is vital, targeting the local population and challenging the existing anti-immigrant attitudes through strategic informational campaigns are also crucial. Therefore, it is imperative to create diverse opportunities for interaction between immigrants and locals in a myriad of settings, including socio-cultural, educational, and business spheres.

See overleaf for information about the authors and bibliography.

Table 3: Which of the following statements best describes the current economic situation of your household? By How would you characterize your attitude towards the foreigners who come to Georgia and stay here for longer than 3 months? (%)

HHs' economic situation:	Attitude towards immigrants:		
	Bad or Very bad	Neutral	Good or Very good
Money is not enough for food	20	50	27
Money is enough for food only, but not for clothes	16	55	25
Money is enough for food and clothes, but not enough for expensive durables	15	53	29
We can afford to buy some expensive durables / anything we need*	12	46	39
National average:	16	52	29

* Originally, this question had five answer options, with the fifth being "We can afford to buy anything we need". However, since only 3% of Georgia's population fell under this category, we merged them with those who answered, "We can afford to buy some expensive durables" (10% of the population).

Note: Distribution of answers "Don't know" and "Refuse to answer" is not shown in Table 3.

Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2017, Georgia.

About the Authors

Dr. *Natia Mestvirishvili* is a researcher at the analytical unit of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), ENIGMMA project and a Non-resident Senior Fellow at CRRC Georgia. Natia earned a PhD in psychology from Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. She holds an M.Sc. in Social Research from the University of Edinburgh (UK) and an M.A. in Global Development and Social Justice from St. John's University (US). Natia's research interests involve identity and value changes and migrants' integration.

Dr. *Maia Mestvirishvili* is Associate Professor at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. From 2006–2011, she received research and academic scholarships at the Universities of Columbia (USA), Berkeley (USA) and Leuven (Belgium). She also received research grants from the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN) and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Her major research interests are social identities, stigma and coping, moral judgement and religious attitudes. Dr. Mestvirishvili is the author of several international conference papers and journal articles.

Bibliography

- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Ellison, C.G. and Powers, D.A. (1994). The contact hypothesis and racial attitudes among black Americans. *Social Science Quarterly*, 75(2), pp. 385–400.
- Espenshade, T.J. and Hempstead, K. (1996). Contemporary American attitudes toward US immigration. *International Migration Review*, 30(2), pp. 535–570.
- Fetzer, J.S. (2000). Economic self-interest or cultural marginality? Anti-immigration sentiment and nativist political movements in France, Germany and the USA. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26(1), pp. 5–23.
- Hjern, M. (2001). Education, xenophobia and nationalism: a comparative analysis. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 27(1), pp. 37–60.
- Parliament of Georgia. (2014). *Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons*. Available at: <<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2278806>> [Accessed 31 Jan. 2018].
- Petraia, L. (2017). Who was in and who was out in Tbilisi's far-right March of Georgians [Analysis]. *OC Media*, [online]. Available at: <<http://oc-media.org/who-was-in-and-who-was-out-in-tbilisi-far-right-march-of-georgians-analysis/>> [Accessed 31 Jan. 2018].
- Pettigrew, T.F. and Tropp, L.R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), pp. 751–783.

- Rajzman, R., Semyonov, M. and Schmidt, P. (2003). Do foreigners deserve rights? Determinants of public views towards foreigners in Germany and Israel. *European Sociological Review*, 19(4), pp. 379–392.
- Rodriguez-Garcia, D. (2010). Beyond Assimilation and Multiculturalism: A Critical Review of the debate on Managing Diversity. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 11(3), pp. 251–271.
- State Commission on Migration Issues. (2015). *Migration Strategy of Georgia 2016–2020*. Available at: <http://migration.commission.ge/files/migration_strategy_2016-2020_eng_final_-_amended.pdf> [Accessed 31 Jan. 2018].
- State Commission on Migration Issues. (2017). *2017 Migration Profile of Georgia*. Available at: <http://migration.commission.ge/files/migration_profile_2017_eng_final_.pdf> [Accessed 19 Mar. 2018].
- Verbeek, G., Scheepers, P. and Felling, A. (2002). Attitudes and behavioural intentions towards ethnic minorities: An empirical test of several theoretical explanations for the Dutch case, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(2), pp. 197–219.

Population's Attitudes Towards Georgia's Foreign Policy Choices in Times of Uncertainty

By David Sichinava (CRRC-Georgia)

Abstract

This article explores key characteristics of people's attitudes towards Georgia's foreign policy choices and the factors that most likely predict these attitudes. While the support for NATO and/or European Union membership clearly represents a pro-Western orientation, the support for membership in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union also needs to be analyzed. In addition to discussing the factors that might explain people's support, the article looks at how the population of Georgia feels about the country's hypothetical neutral status.

Introduction

The idea of Georgia becoming a member of the European Union and NATO has been almost unanimously endorsed by key Georgian political parties and by the national government. Meanwhile, recent opinion polls indicate growing neutral or skeptical sentiments of the population towards the country's pro-Western aspirations. Based on the data from the 2017 wave of the CRRC's Caucasus Barometer survey, this article discusses the population's attitudes towards Georgia's foreign policy choices and the factors that are most likely behind them.

Georgia's foreign policy orientation remains at the very heart of the policy debate in Georgia. However, this issue is less salient for ordinary people. Polls show that Georgia's potential membership in NATO or in the European Union is not the issue that people worry about most, while unemployment and poverty are almost exclusively named as the most important issues the country faces¹. Nevertheless, the majority of the population of Georgia has keenly supported the country's

leanings towards the West.² However, little is known about how specific groups of the population feel about the country's foreign policy orientation or about the factors that statistically predict people's foreign policy preferences in Georgia.

How Do People Feel About Political Unions?

The population remains positively disposed towards the country's Western-oriented foreign policy (see Figure 1 on p. 9). While 41% would support Georgia's NATO membership, this share is twice the share of those who are against it. Membership in the European Union is supported by almost half of the population, while it is opposed by only 14%. A much smaller share is keen to support the country's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union led by the Russian Federation—only one fifth, while twice as many oppose the idea.

Over time, however, people in Georgia have become less supportive of the country's membership in any union. The proportion of those who back the country's NATO

1 <<http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/IMPISS1/>>

2 <<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=16868>>