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Who Wants to Emigrate from Georgia?

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Abstract

Using CRRC-Georgia's Caucasus Barometer 2015 survey results, this article examines the characteristics of people who want to leave Georgia for a certain period of time and examines whether and how they differ from those who do not want to leave the country. Specifically, it examines the (democratic) values of Georgians interested in emigration and their attitudes towards foreigners and foreign institutions. The analysis shows that compared to others, those who want to leave Georgia to live somewhere else for a certain period of time are more open to democratic values and more tolerant; generally have a more positive attitude of and are more open to foreigners; exhibit stronger support for Western institutions (NATO and the EU); and have more positive opinions on the visa liberalization process.

People who travel substantially are thought to be more open-minded towards and tolerant of different people and opinions. As Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." People who travel get out of their shell, explore different viewpoints and see the world from a different perspective, while people who do not travel see the world through a narrow lens. However, how, if at all, are people who desire to travel different from those who do not want to travel? Are potential emigrants also more likely to be open-minded and tolerant?

According to CRRC-Georgia's Caucasus Barometer (CB) 2015 survey, only 11% of Georgians say they would leave Georgia permanently to live somewhere else if they had the opportunity, but the share of those who say "Yes" to the question "If you had a chance, would you leave Georgia for a certain period of time to live somewhere else" is much higher, at 51%. **Who are the people who want to leave the country for a certain period of time and how are they different from those who do not want to leave?** What are their attitudes and perceptions, and how, if at all, do they differ from those who are not interested in temporary migration?

According to the findings of the CB 2015 survey, Georgians who want to emigrate to another country for a certain period of time, (1) generally have a more positive attitude towards democracy; (2) are more tolerant of and more open to foreigners; (3) show stronger support for Western institutions; and (4) have more positive perceptions of the visa liberalization process, which is currently a subject of debate in Georgia.

Demographics

Considering first the demographic characteristics of these two groups, CB findings show that the share of those who want to leave the country for a certain period of time is higher among men (58%) than among women (44%). Moreover, age is a significant indicator of temporary emigration, as 70% of young people between

the ages of 18 and 35 want to leave the country temporarily in contrast to older age groups of 36 to 55 (55%) and 56 or older (24%).

Willingness to leave the country relates to the data on the employment status of the respondents. When comparing Georgians willing to migrate with those who are not, clear differences can be observed. Fifty-nine per cent of Georgians who want to migrate are not working (of those individuals, 33% say they are unemployed, 14% say their primary activity is being a housewife and therefore not working, 8% are retired and not working and 5% are students and not working). In contrast, 69% of those who do not want to migrate do not work, of whom 36% are retired and therefore not working, 20% are unemployed, 13% are housewives and only 1% are students and not working. The data also confirm that being young is an indicator of a willingness to travel abroad for a shorter period of time.

In terms of residential status, people living in Tbilisi and other urban areas tend to be more open to travel (55% and 54%, respectively) than are residents of rural settlements (46%).

Knowledge and Skills

The survey findings revealed that those who want to emigrate have more knowledge of foreign languages. Seventy-six per cent of those who want to go abroad for a certain period of time report having advanced or intermediate knowledge of Russian, while this share is lower (65%) among those who do not want to travel. While 49% of those willing to temporarily emigrate say they have no basic knowledge of English, this percentage is substantially higher (71%) among those who do not want to travel. In addition, one-fourth of those who want to migrate know another foreign language, while this share is lower (18%) among those who do not want to migrate.

Georgian citizens who want to travel abroad also have a higher level of computer skills. While the majority

(63%) of them have some level of knowledge (beginner, intermediate or advanced) of computers, only one-third (33%) of those who do not want to travel reported having any knowledge. Consequently, those who are eager to travel, use the internet much more frequently (48% use it every day) than do those who do not wish to travel (22%).

Democratic Values and Perception of Democracy

The findings also reveal that those who are open to travel support democratic values more than those who do not want to leave the country. More than half (54%) of the former group say that democracy is preferable to any other type of government, while 41% of those reluctant to travel said the same. Furthermore, those who want to travel view the state somewhat differently from those unwilling to travel: They regard the government more like an employee than like a parent that should take care of its citizens. Forty-seven per cent of those willing to travel agree with the following statement: “the government is like an employee and that people should be the bosses who control the government”, while only 35% of those unwilling to travel state the same.

The CB 2015 data reveal that the share of Georgians who think that people should participate in protest actions against the government, as this shows the government that the people are in charge, is slightly higher among those willing to travel (60%) than among those who are not willing to travel (54%).

People who want to temporarily emigrate evaluate the current state of democracy in Georgia slightly differently from those who do not. While more than half (52%) of the former group say that Georgia is a democracy with major problems, the same view is shared only by 41% of the latter group. In addition, the share of people who do not know how to evaluate the current state of democracy in Georgia is higher among the latter group (22% compared to 8%).

Those willing to travel also have a slightly higher share of people (56% vs. 50%) who believe that the court system in Georgia favours some citizens over others, rather than treating all citizens equally. Therefore, those who want to travel are more in favour of democracy but are simultaneously more sceptical of the state of democracy in Georgia at present.

Tolerance of Other Nations

Apart from supporting more democratic values, Georgians willing to travel abroad are more tolerant of and open to foreigners. Thirty-one per cent of Georgians who want to travel abroad report having a good or very good attitude towards foreigners, while this share is lower

(18%) among those who do not want to travel. Furthermore, the share of people who responded that foreigners who come to live in Georgia would contribute to the economic development of the country is higher among those who want to travel (25%) than among those who do not want to leave the country (18%).

The former group has a larger share of people who say they have a close relative currently living abroad (76% vs. 58%). In addition, 62% of those willing to travel have a close friend currently living abroad, while this share is much lower among those not willing to travel (36%). The connections with people who are residing abroad could raise a person's motivation to travel abroad and could contribute to being open to foreigners.

Further findings from the CB 2015 data also confirmed that people who want to migrate temporarily to another country are more tolerant of and open to foreigners, as well as other ethnic groups. When asked if they approve or disapprove of doing business with different nationalities and ethnic groups, the share of Georgians who approve is higher among those who want to emigrate than among those who do not. This finding is true for all ethnic groups asked about the subject during the survey. For example, 82% of those who want to emigrate temporarily say they approve doing business with Ukrainians, while this percentage is lower among those who do not want to emigrate (67%). For further differences between the two groups concerning other ethnic groups, please see Table 1 on p. 14.

Compared to openness to doing business with different ethnic groups, the share of those Georgians who approve of women of their nationality marrying representatives of other ethnic groups or nationalities is significantly lower. However, similar to the previous question, the share of those who approve of marriage with other nationalities or ethnic groups is still higher among those who want to emigrate temporarily, compared to those who do not wish to do so. For example, the share of those who approve of woman marrying Ukrainians is higher among those willing to emigrate (55%) than among those who do not wish to leave the country (40%). These differences are also significant in regard to other ethnic groups and nationalities (see Table 2 on p. 15).

Attitudes Towards Western Institutions and Visa Liberalization

Apart from supporting more democratic values and being more open to foreigners, Georgians willing to travel abroad also show stronger support for Western institutions. According to the CB 2015 findings, 45% of those who want to emigrate temporarily say they support (sum of “fully support” and “somewhat support”) Georgia's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organi-

zation (NATO). In contrast, only 30% of those who do not want to emigrate temporarily support this membership. Similarly, while over half (52%) of Georgians who want to emigrate temporarily say that they support (sum of “fully support” and “somewhat support”) Georgia’s membership in the European Union (EU), this share is much lower (31%) among those Georgians who do not want to emigrate temporarily.

Regarding support for the country’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Community, 40% of Georgians willing to travel abroad say that they would not support (sum of “would not support at all” and “would rather not support”) such membership. In contrast, only 29% of those not willing to travel would not support (sum of “would not support at all” and “would rather not support”) Georgia’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Community.

Finally, those Georgians who are willing to travel have more positive attitudes of the visa liberalization process, which is currently a subject of debate in Georgia, as the government of Georgia is working on this issue with the EU. Forty-three per cent who wish to temporarily immigrate to another country agree with

the statement that the successful completion of the visa liberalization process will benefit ordinary people living in Georgia. In contrast, only 22% of those not interested in leaving the country state the same.

To summarize the findings obtained through CRRC-Georgia’s survey CB 2015, men, young people and people living in urban areas tend to be more open to leaving the country for a certain period of time compared with women, older people and those living in rural areas. Moreover, when comparing those who are eager to travel abroad for a certain period of time with those who do not want to travel, the former tend to be more supportive of democratic values, more tolerant of and open to different ethnic groups, more supportive of Western institutions, and more interested in the visa liberalization process. In addition, they report having higher levels of knowledge of foreign languages and computer skills and use the internet more frequently. Although the study cannot determine the direction of causality between travel and tolerance, the belief that people who travel become tolerant may be challenged by the assumption that people willing to travel are already more likely to be broadminded and open to Western values.

About the Author

Tamar Khoshtaria is a researcher at CRRC-Georgia, where she has worked since 2009. Tamar is also a PhD student at Tbilisi State University, where she teaches quantitative and qualitative research methods. She holds a B.A. and an M.A. in Social Science from Tbilisi State University. During her M.A., she was awarded a scholarship and studied at Humboldt-University Berlin for one year, where she conducted qualitative research in family sociology. Her research interests are the values of young people, social and religious issues and intercultural comparisons.

Table 1: Approval of Doing Business with... (%)

	Wants to emigrate temporarily	Does not want to emigrate temporarily
Ukrainians	82	67
Russians	81	69
Americans	77	61
Azerbaijanis living in Georgia	74	66
Armenians living in Georgia	73	62
Italians	72	58
Abkhazians	71	61
Azerbaijanis	69	63
Jews	69	57
Ossetians	68	59
Armenians	64	54
Turks	64	58
Iranians	59	53
Kurds, Yezidis	56	49

Source: CRRC 2015 Caucasus Barometer Survey

Table 2: Approval of Women Marrying... (%)

	Wants to emigrate temporarily	Does not want to emigrate temporarily
Ukrainians	55	40
Russians	54	41
Italians	49	34
Americans	49	35
Abkhazians	49	33
Armenians living in Georgia	44	35
Ossetians	43	33
Armenians	40	32
Jews	37	27
Azerbaijanis living in Georgia	37	33
Azerbaijanis	33	31
Turks	29	25
Iranians	28	23
Kurds, Yezidis	27	21

Source: CRRC 2015 Caucasus Barometer Survey