

Tuesday, February 25, 2014

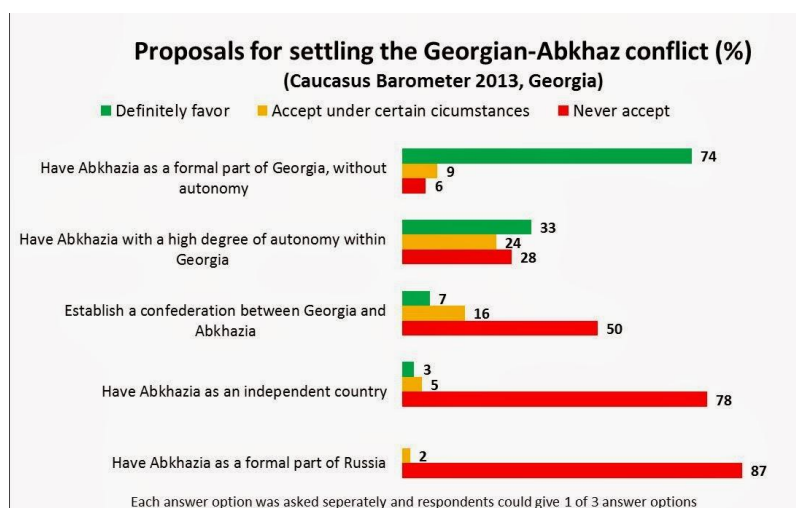
Georgia—Abkhazia

The Olympics in Sochi, Russia, took place about 30 kilometers from Russia's border with the separatist region of Abkhazia in Georgia. As a security precaution, the Russian government has temporarily moved its border 11 kilometers into Abkhazia to create a "security zone," at which travelers entering will have to show identification before proceeding to the actual border with Russia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the status of Abkhazia within Georgia has been the subject of heated debate. Russia has a strong political and military influence in Abkhazia and has been erecting fences and wires along the administrative boundary line with Georgia proper, as well as the area controlled by Abkhaz authorities. The 2013 Caucasus Barometer (CB) asks Georgians several questions concerning the status of Abkhazia and what they see as the best and most realistic solution to resolving its status.

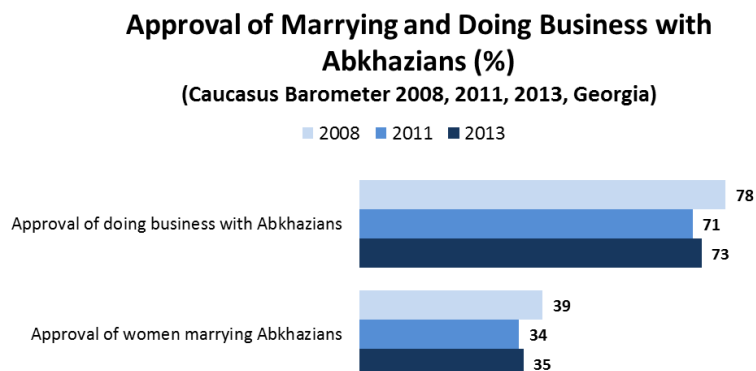


Source: The New York Times

Only 13% of Georgians think that the conflict with Abkhazia will be resolved within the next five years. 29% believe that it will be resolved in six years or more, 12% believe it will never be resolved, and 46% did not know or refused to answer. Georgians are reluctant to accord Abkhazia any form of autonomy or independence, though the Georgian government currently regards Abkhazia as an autonomous republic within Georgia. Georgians overwhelmingly support having Abkhazia as a formal part of Georgia, without autonomy (74%). 33% of Georgians definitely favor giving Abkhazia a high degree of autonomy, and 24% of Georgians are open to autonomy in Abkhazia under certain circumstances. The vast majority of Georgians say they would never accept Abkhazia as an independent country (78%) or as a formal part of Russia (87%).



On an individual level, Georgian perceptions of Abkhazians have not changed significantly in recent years. Currently, 73% of Georgians approve of doing business with Abkhazians and 35% approve of Georgian women marrying Abkhazians. Approval of doing business and marrying Abkhazians is higher among Georgians living in the capital and Georgians in the 18-35 year old age group, while acceptance is lower among Georgians living in rural areas and among older age groups.



Among Georgian citizens, ethnic Georgians are more likely to approve of women of their ethnicity marrying Abkhazians. 38% of ethnic Georgians approve, compared to 26% of ethnic Armenians and 6% of ethnic Azeris living in Georgia. Similarly, 76% of ethnic Georgians approve of doing business with Abkhazians, compared to 57% of ethnic Armenians and 45% of ethnic Azeris living in Georgia.

Overall, Georgians significantly favor maintaining the territorial integrity of Georgia, with little or no autonomy for Abkhazia, but are not optimistic about a resolution taking effect in the next few years. Ethnic Georgians also strongly approve of doing business with Abkhazians, though less so of Georgian women marrying Abkhazians.