

# Contemporary Attitudes and Beliefs in Transdnjestria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: A Preliminary Analysis of Survey Data

**John O'Loughlin**, University of Colorado-Boulder ([johno@colorado.edu](mailto:johno@colorado.edu))

**Vladimir Kolossov**, Russian Academy Sciences, Moscow ([vladimirkolossov@gmail.com](mailto:vladimirkolossov@gmail.com))

**Gerard Toal**, Virginia Tech, School of Public and International Affairs ([toalg@vt.edu](mailto:toalg@vt.edu))

Presentation at the Kennan Institute, Washington DC, April 26, 2010

Article to appear in **Post-Soviet Affairs**, Vol. 26, no. 3, August 2010

**Acknowledgements:** This research project is funded by National Science Foundation grant no. 0827016. We thank Alexei Grazhdankin, Levada Center, Moscow and Viktoria Remmler, Levada Center, Krasnodar for managing the complex survey in Abkhazia. We also acknowledge the hundreds of state officials, students and professors, and members of social-political organizations who met with us about this project in Tiraspol, Chisinau, Tskhinval(i) and Sukhum(i). We appreciate the help of survey respondents in Abkhazia and in ongoing surveys in Transdnjestria, Moldova, South Ossetia, Georgia and Kosovo. Frank Witmer, University of Colorado, prepared the maps for this presentation.

PLEASE DO NOT REPRODUCE OR QUOTE WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE AUTHORS

© Quasi-State Project 2010

## Location of “De facto” States in Study



## Unrecognized “de facto” states

are secessionist regions that have established internal territorial sovereignty but lack widespread recognition & legitimacy as states in the international system.

# “De facto” States (TMR, Abkhazia, S Ossetia) Compared

## Similarities

- Similar origins: counter-mobilization to nationalizing projects
- Similar unreconized status for majority of international community
- Similar in external accusations of domestic ‘illegality’
- Similar relative state-building successes
- Russian sphere of influence: therefore, symbolic objects (“pawns”) in geopolitics for other countries

## Differences

- Historical polities with different status in Soviet times.
- Different titular regional embeddedness.
- Different histories/geographies of wartime violence.
- Different return/property legacies.
- Different patron-client relationships.
- Different border contexts

## Aims of the Unrecognized “de facto” States Project :

1. What geopolitical conditions produce partly-recognized - states?
2. How do partly and unrecognized ‘de facto’ states endure?
3. How successful are the ‘de facto’ states in state-making and negotiating complex national relations?
4. What is the impact of the Kosovo precedent on the legitimacy of the Russian-backed Eurasian “de facto” -states

### Survey Data:

- **Surveys:** Representative samples (500 in South Ossetia, 1000 in Moldova, TMR, Abkhazia, Kosovo and 1600 in Georgia) with approx. 130 questions in each (more than 85% of the questions standardized across 6 samples)
- **Categories of Questions on the Questionnaire:**

Socio-demographic/wellbeing	Identities
Internal legitimacy/state-building	Mobility and Connectedness
Group relations and inter-group attitudes	Geopolitical knowledge
External relations	Place and culture meanings

## Public Opinion Survey in Abkhazia, late-March-early April 2010

1000 respondents; 1463 contacts (68% response rate); margin of error 4% in 53 locations

Exact proportionate distribution by Sukhum(i) city and the *rayoni* within Abkhazia: in Russian with translation help in Gal(i) district (predominantly Georgian/Mingrelian)

### Composition of the survey respondents:

Ethnic (national) group	Ratio in the sample
Abkhaz	42.5%
Armenians	18.5%
Russians	10.4%
Georgians	12.5%
Mingrelians	7.4%
Georgian and Mingrelian	4.3%
Other	3.4%
Mixed	0.2%
Don't know/Hard to say	0.8%

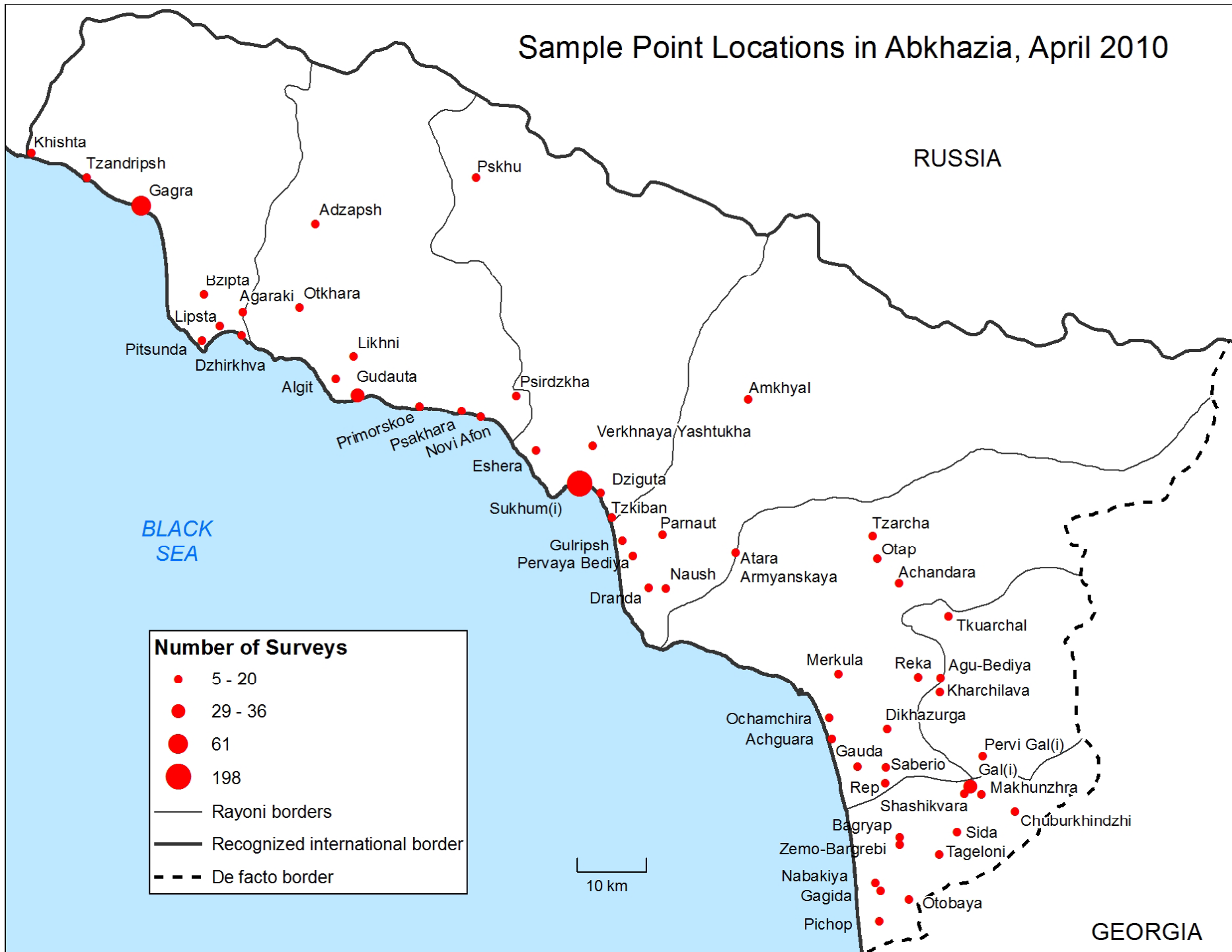
Dropped 70 surveys for this presentation because of interviewers doubts about honesty of responses (26) and mixed –"hard to say" nationality answer (44)

Georgian on slides = those who self-classified as Georgian, Georgian & Mingrelian, and Mingrelian

## ***Distribution of the sample by city and rayoni in Abkhazia***

<b>Region &amp; Type of settlement</b>	<b>Official 2003 census data</b>	<b>Corrected data</b>	<b>% of Population</b>	<b>Sample distribution</b>
<b>ABKHAZIA</b>	<b>215567</b>	<b>225567</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>Gagra rayon</b>	<b>36691</b>	<b>36691</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Gadauta rayon</b>	<b>35930</b>	<b>30275</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>Sukhum(i) rayon</b>	<b>11895</b>	<b>11895</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Sukhum(i) city</b>	<b>44690</b>	<b>44690</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Gulrypsh rayon</b>	<b>17477</b>	<b>17477</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Ochamchira rayon</b>	<b>24972</b>	<b>21788</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Tkuarchal rayon</b>	<b>14735</b>	<b>18843</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Gal(i) rayon</b>	<b>29177</b>	<b>43908</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>194</b>

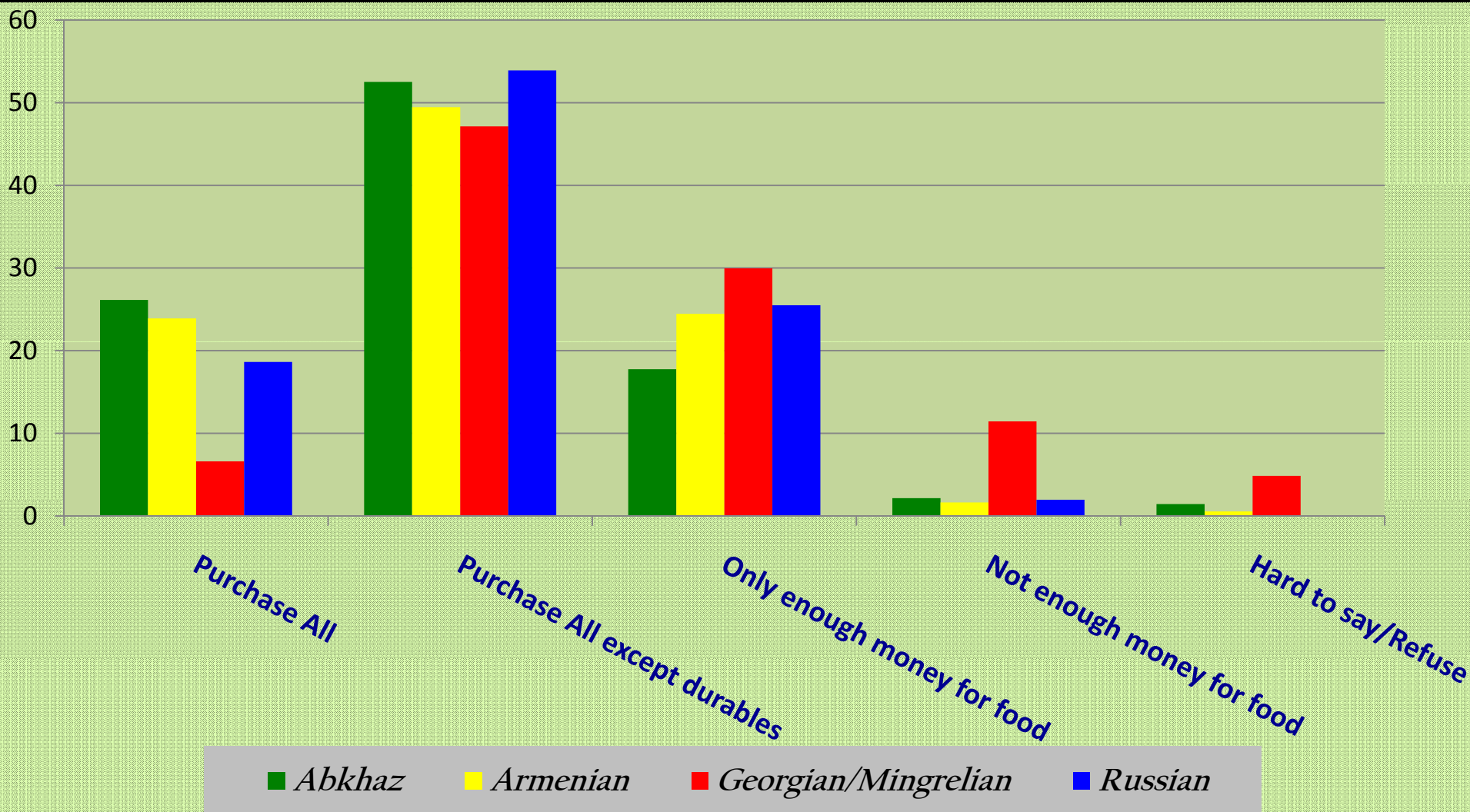
# Sample Point Locations in Abkhazia, April 2010



Khishta, Tzandripsh, Gagra, Adzapsh, Pskhu, Bzipta, Agaraki, Otkhara, Lipsta, Pitsunda, Dzhirkhva, Likhni, Gudauta, Algut, Primorskoe, Psakhara, Novi Afon, Psirdzkha, Eshera, Sukhum(i), Dziguta, Tzkiban, Parnaut, Verkhnyaya Yashtukha, Amkhyal, Gulripsh, Pervaya Bediya, Naush, Atara Armyanskaya, Dranda, Tzarcha, Otap, Achandara, Merkula, Reka, Agu-Bediya, Kharchilava, Tkuarchal, Dikhazurga, Pervi Gal(i), Gal(i), Makhunzhra, Ochamchira, Achguara, Gauda, Saberio, Rep, Shashikvara, Chuburkhindzhi, Bagryap, Zemo-Bargrebi, Nabakiya, Gagida, Pichop, Sida, Tageloni, Otobaya



# Standard of Living Question: Purchasing Power – Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality

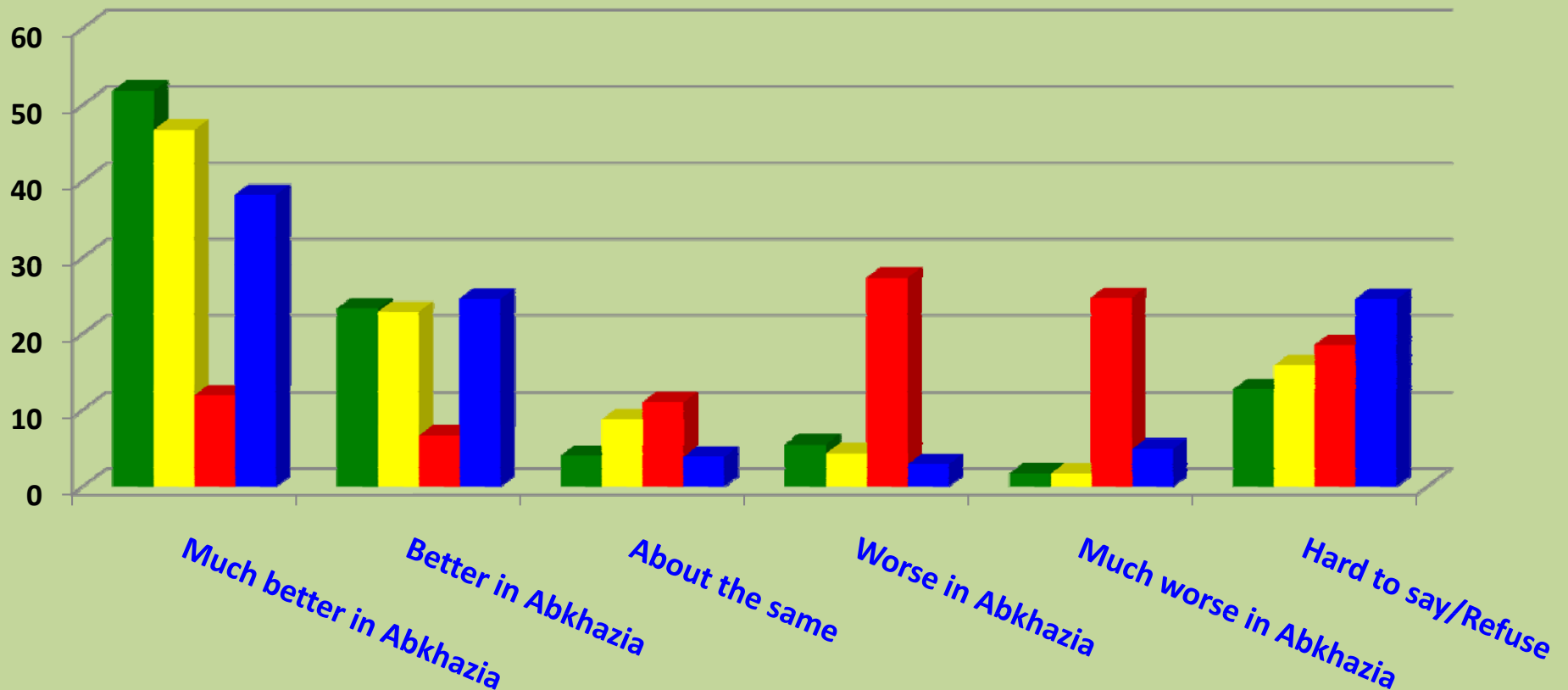


**Q. Look at the card and say how you would rate your family's income level?**

**1. We can purchase all that we need, 2. We can purchase all we need except for durable goods, 3. We have enough money only for food, 4. We do not have enough money to provide food, 8 Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer.**  
N = 930 in 57 locations.



# Standard of Living Question: Comparing the economic situation in Georgia and Abkhazia? Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality



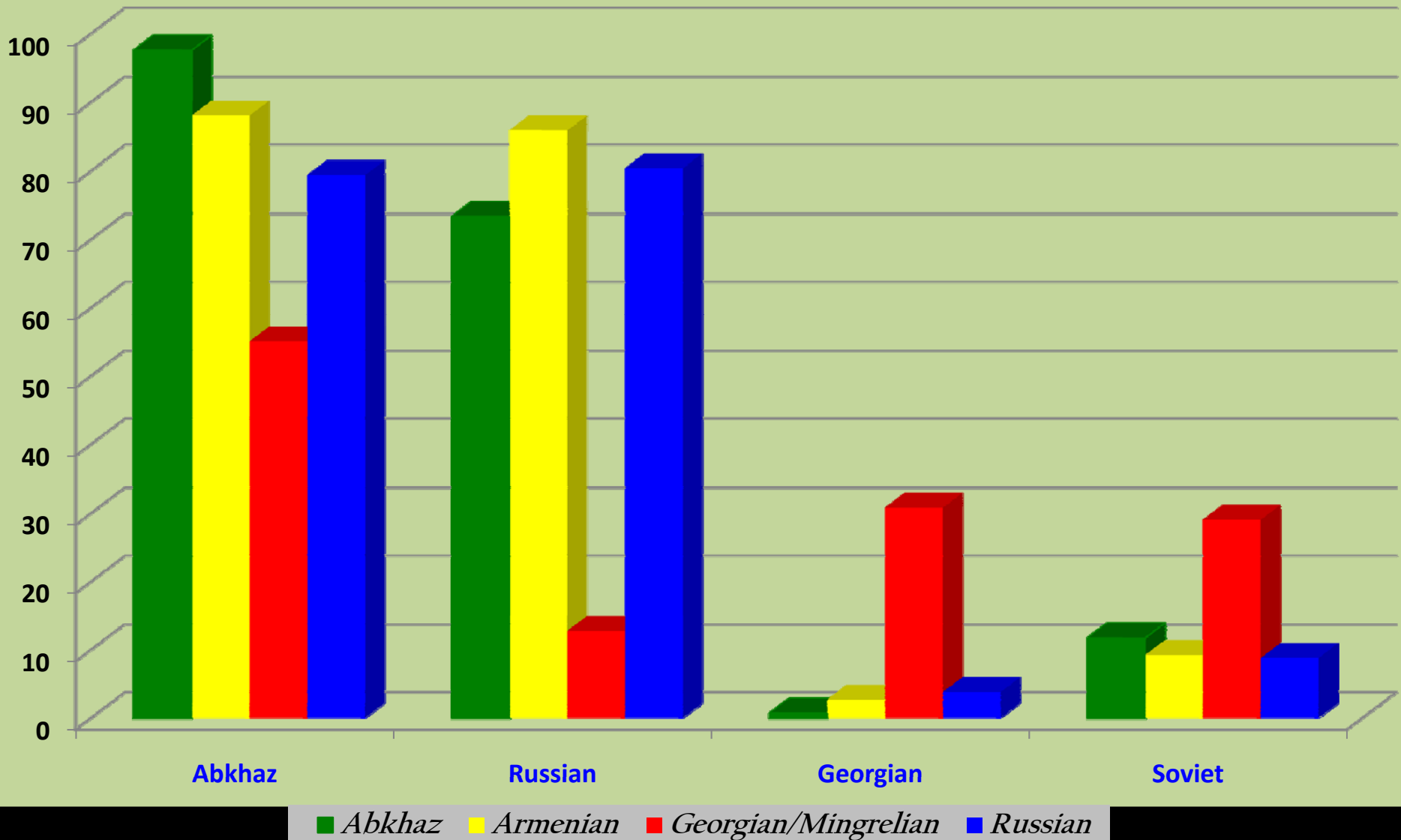
■ Abkhaz ■ Armenian ■ Georgian/Mingrelian ■ Russian

**Q. How do you compare the economic situation in Abkhazia and Georgia?**

1. It's much better in Abkhazia than in Georgia,
  2. It's better in Abkhazia than in Georgia,
  3. It's about the same,
  4. It's worse in Abkhazia than in Georgia,
  5. It's much worse in Abkhazia than in Georgia,
  8. Difficult to say,
  10. Refuse to answer.
- N= 930 in 57 locations.

# Identity Question

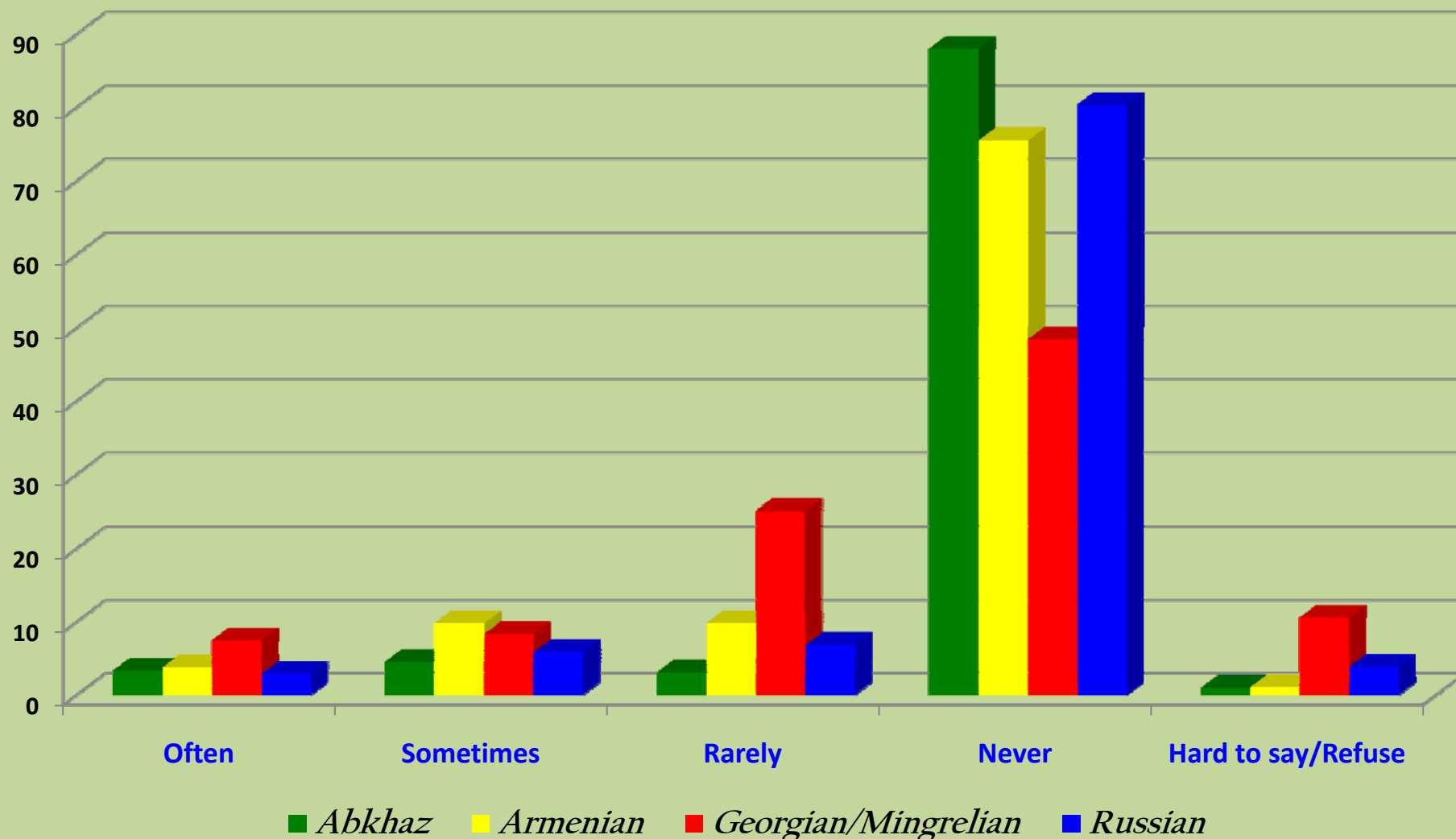
## Passport Ownership – Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality



Q. Which passports do you have ? 1. Abkhaz (yes/no), 2. Russian (yes/no), 3. Georgian (yes/no), 4. Armenian (yes/no), Soviet (yes/no, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations

## Identity Question

### Feelings of Discrimination– Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality

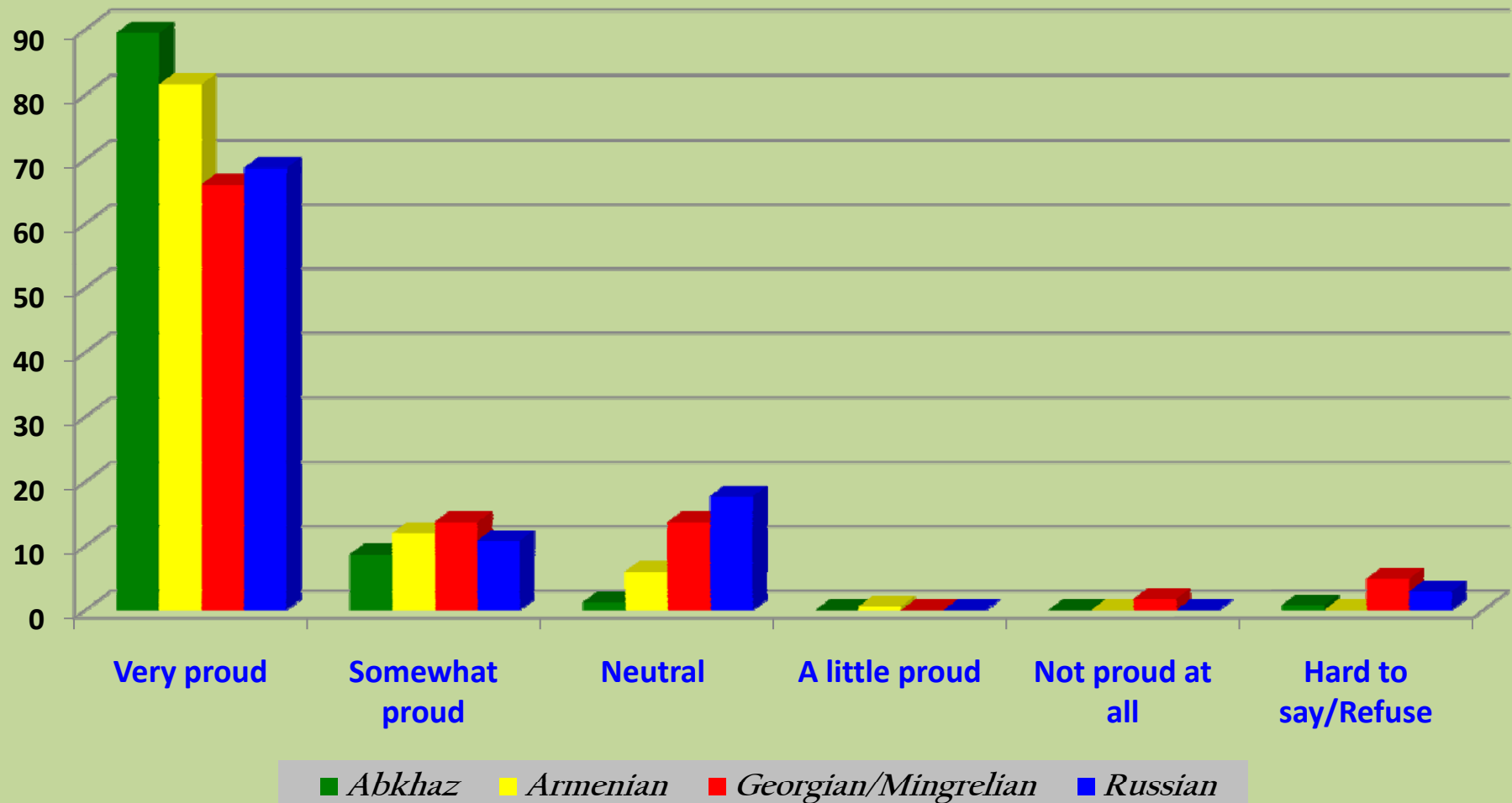


Q. Here where you currently live, during the past year, have you been discriminated against because of your nationality or religion? 1. Yes, often, 2. Yes, sometimes, 3. Rarely, 4. Never, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.

# Identity Question

## Pride in the Ethnic Group (Nation)

### Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality

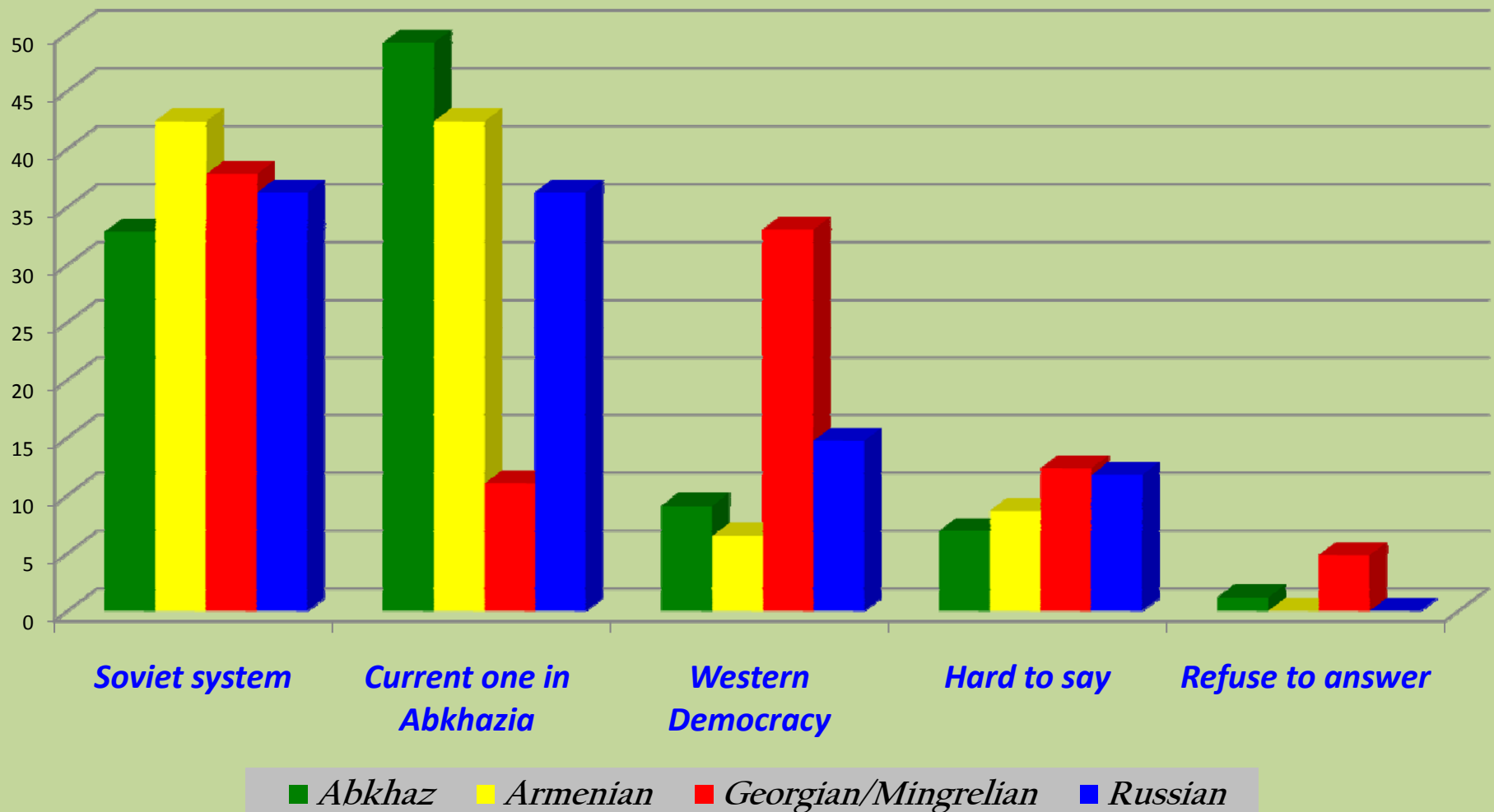


Q. To what extent do you feel proud to be a member of your ethnic group, your people?

1. Very proud, 2. Somewhat proud, 3. I am neutral about this question, 4. A little proud, 5. No pride at all, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.

# State-building Question:

## Best political system? Abkhazia Sample April 2010 –% by Nationality



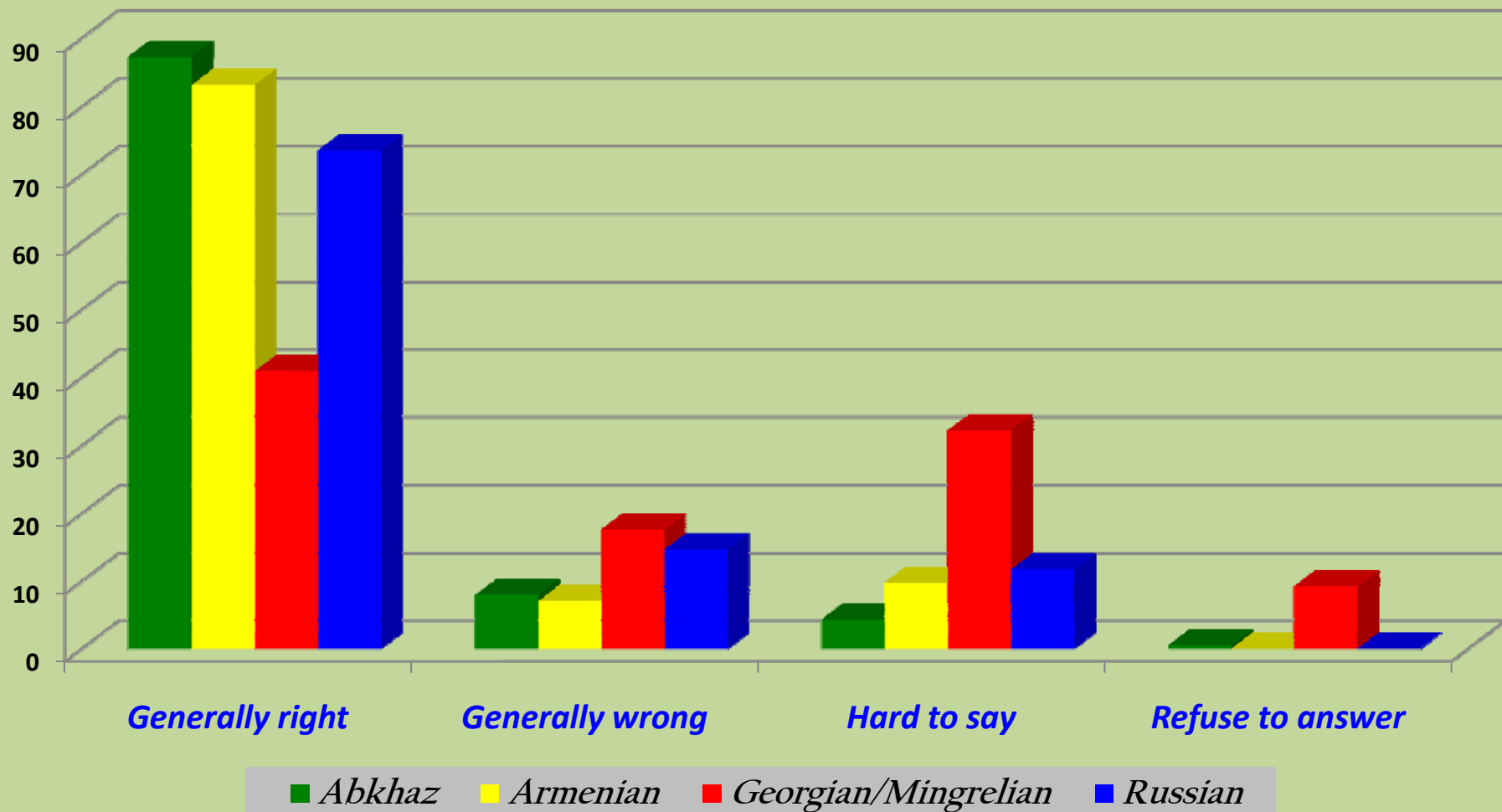
Q. Which political system do you think is better?

1. Soviet one (before the 1990s),
  2. Current system in Abkhazia,
  3. Democracy like in Western countries,
  - 4 Other,
  8. Difficult to say,
  9. Refuse to answer.
- N= 930 in 57 locations.

# State-building Question

## Direction of the Country – Right or Wrong

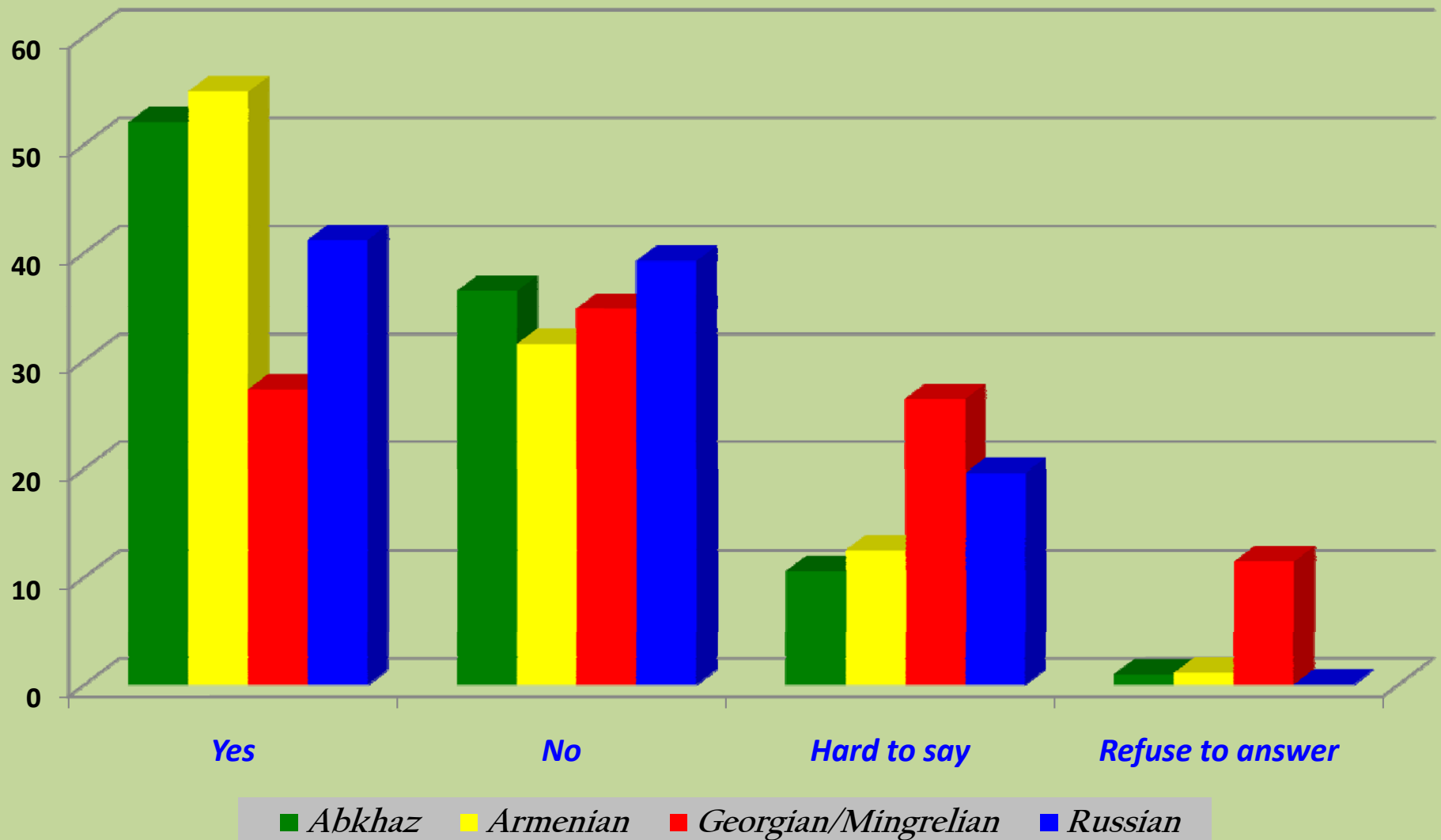
Abkhazia Sample April 2010 - % by Nationality



Q. In your opinion, are things in the country moving in the right or the wrong direction? 1. Generally in the right direction, 2 Generally in the wrong direction 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.

# State-building Question

## Trust the Police? - Abkhazia Sample April 2010 % by Nationality



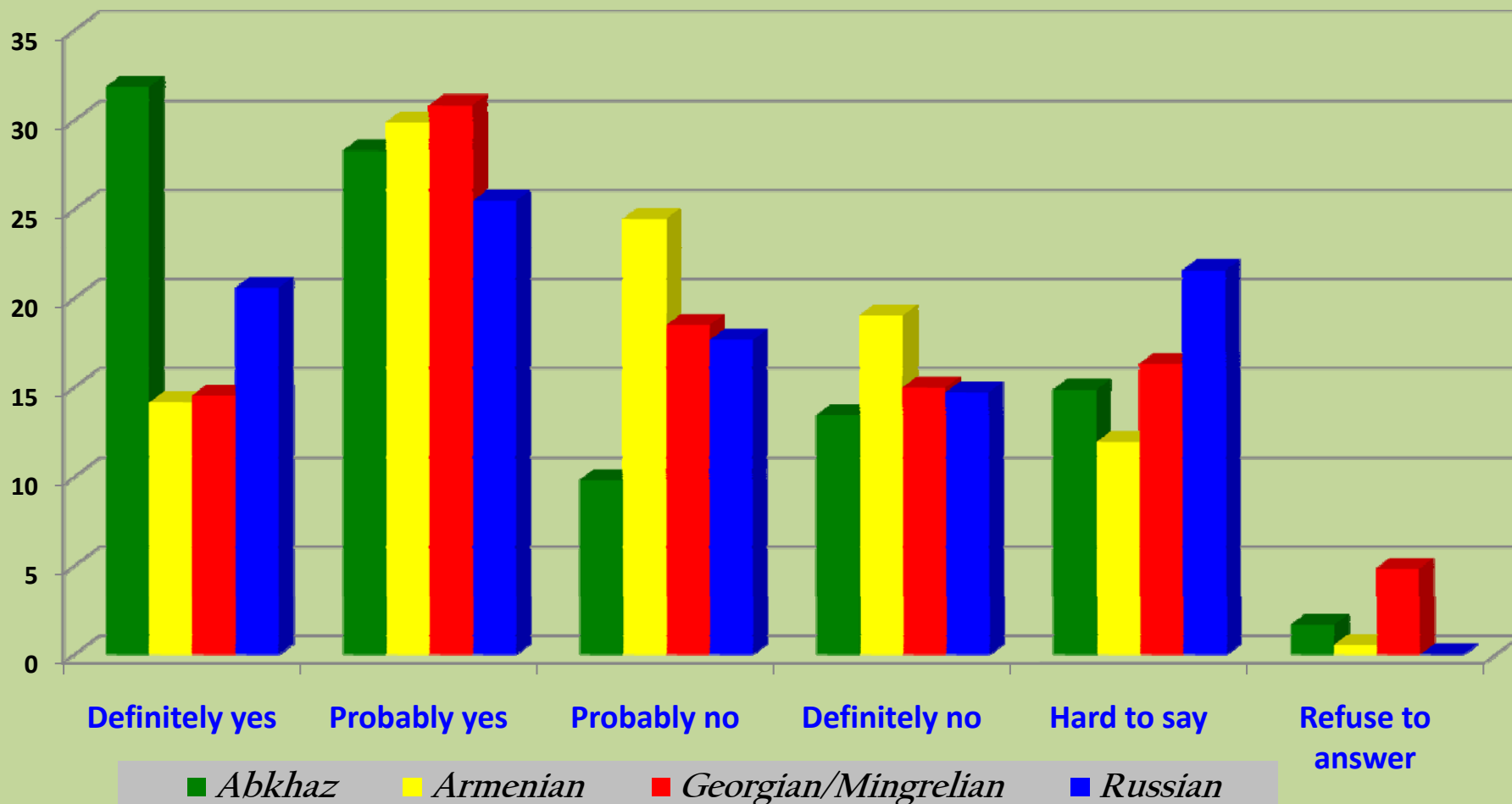
Q. Could you say whether or not you trust the Abkhaz police?

1. Yes, 2. No, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.



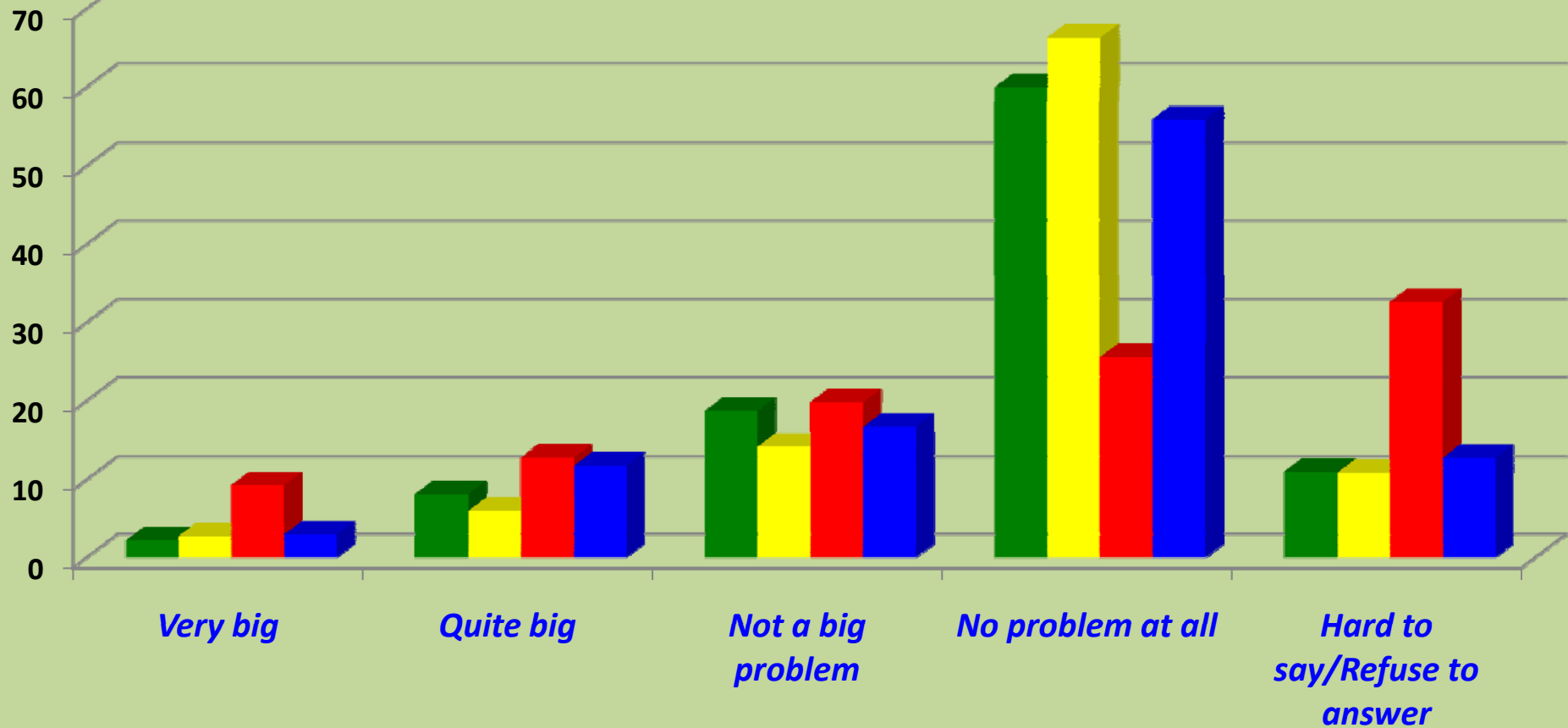
# State-building Question

Opportunity for non-Abkhaz to have well-paid jobs and significant posts? Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality



Q. What do you think: do residents of Abkhazia who are not Abkhazians have an opportunity to have well-paid jobs and to take up significant posts? 1. Definitely yes, 2. Probably yes, 3. Probably no, 4. Definitely no, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.

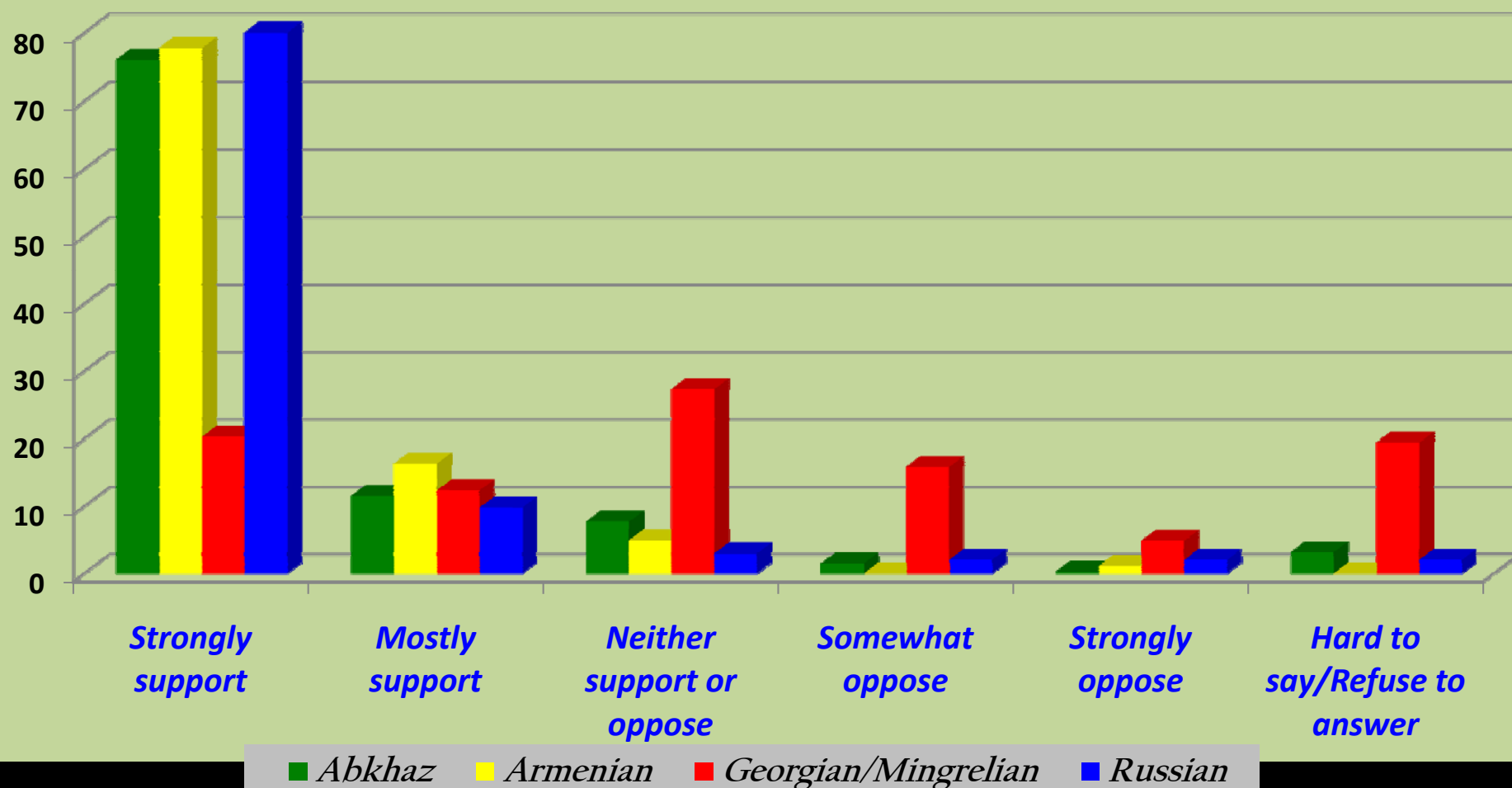
# Security/External Relations Question: Perceptions of Problem of a Renewed War with Georgia Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality



■ *Abkhaz*   ■ *Armenian*   ■ *Georgian/Mingrelian*   ■ *Russian*

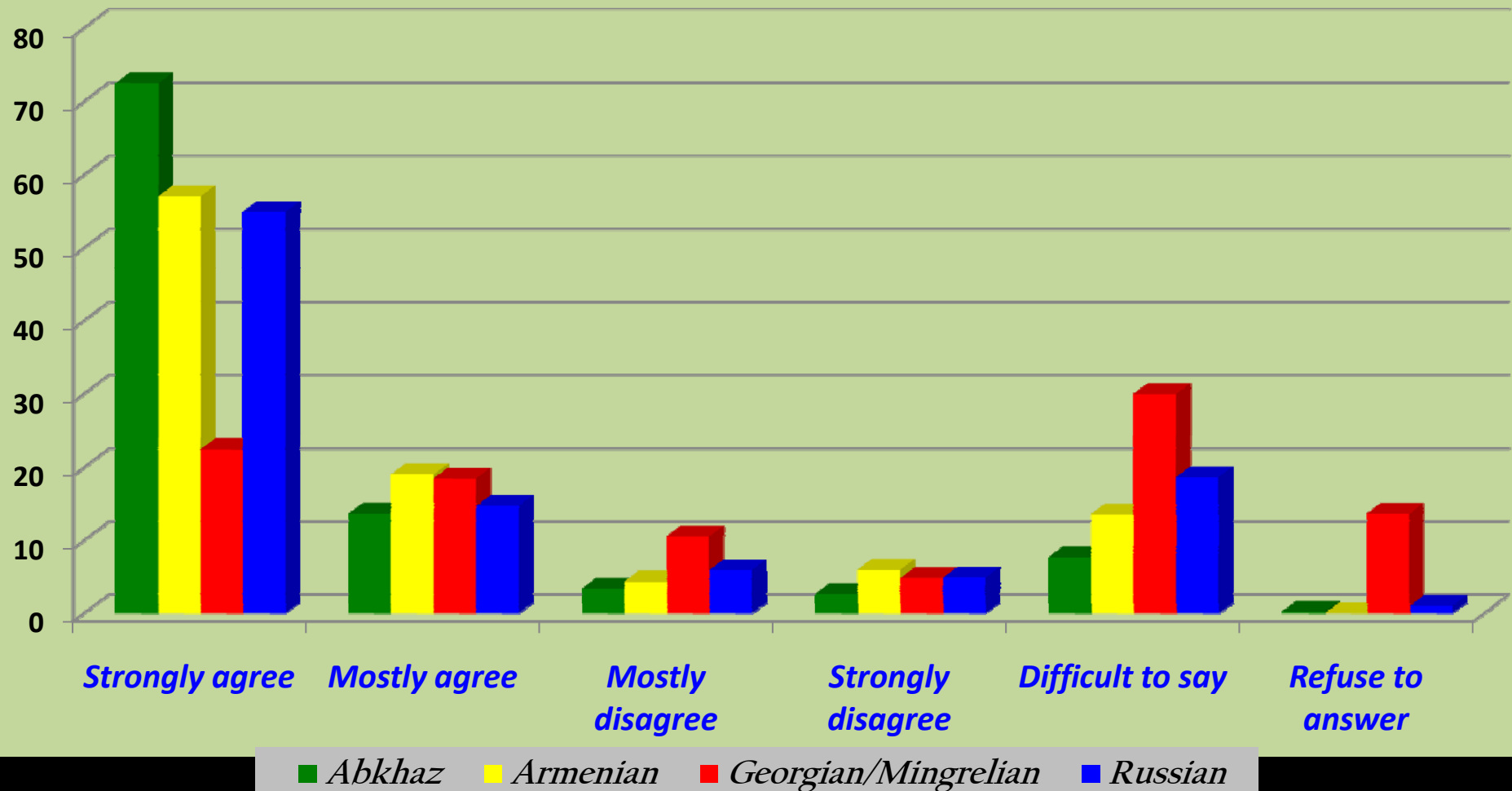
Q. In your opinion, how great a problem of a renewed war with Georgia pose now to Abkhazia? 1. Very big, 2. Quite big, 3. Not a big problem, 4 No problem at all, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations

# Security/External Relations Question: Support and opposition to new Russian military base in Abkhazia Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality



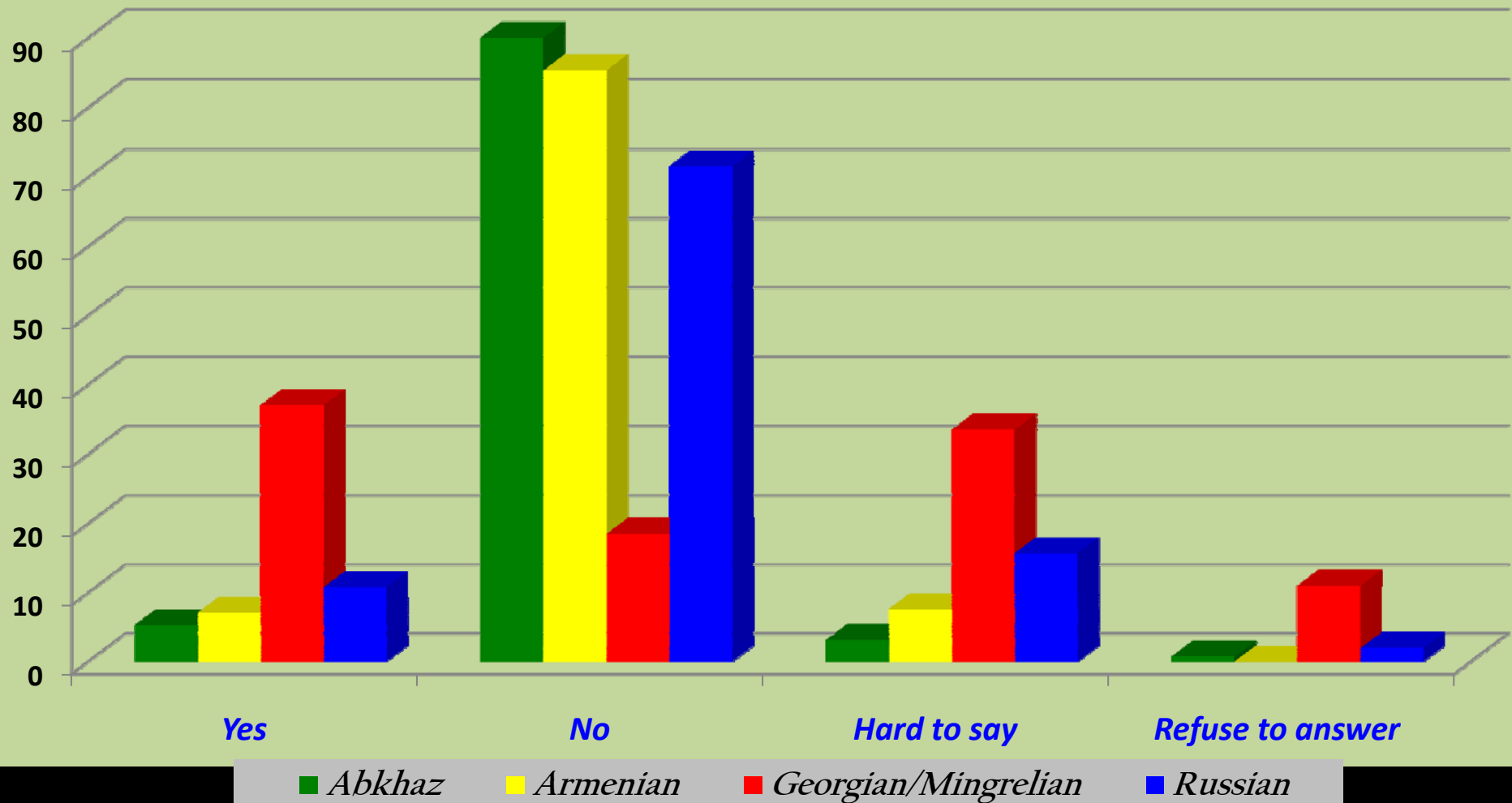
Q. The Abkhaz government has recently agreed to place a Russian military base on the Abkhazian territory. Do you support or oppose this decision? 1. Strongly support, 2. Mostly support, 3. Neither support or oppose, 4. Mostly oppose, 5. Strongly oppose, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations

# Potential for Reconciliation Question: Refuse to allow some displaced to return? Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality



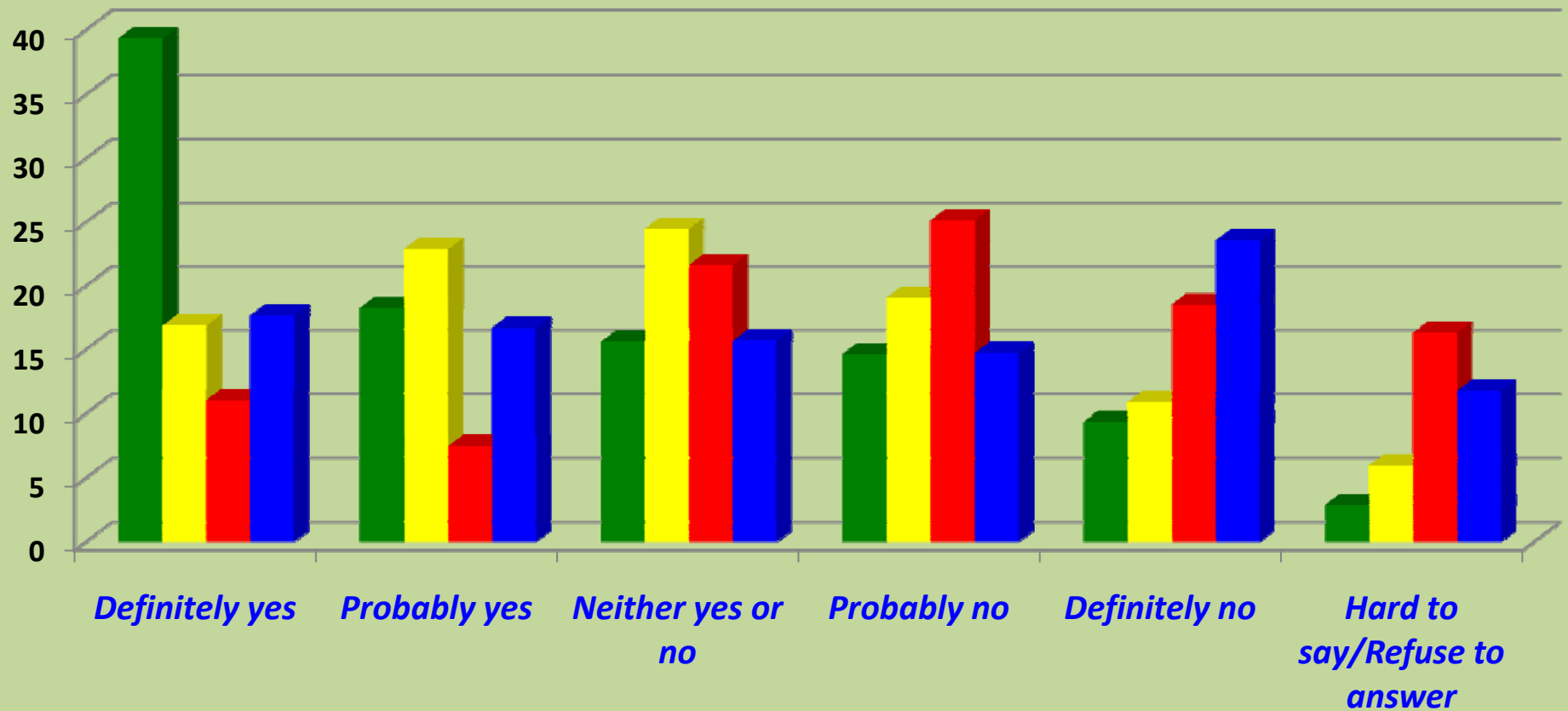
Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Among those displaced by the war, there are people who should not be allowed to come back to Abkhazia? 1. Strongly agree, 2. Mostly agree, 3. Mostly disagree, 5. Strongly disagree, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.

**Potential for Reconciliation Question:  
 Accept Return of Refugees for International Recognition of Abkhazia?  
 Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality \*\* (biggest % difference)**



**Q. Would you be willing to accept the full return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia in return for Abkhazia's recognition as a state by the West and the rest of the international community ? 1. Yes, 2. No, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.**

# Potential for Reconciliation Question: Unable to Forgive Others for Violence Committed in 1992-93? Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality

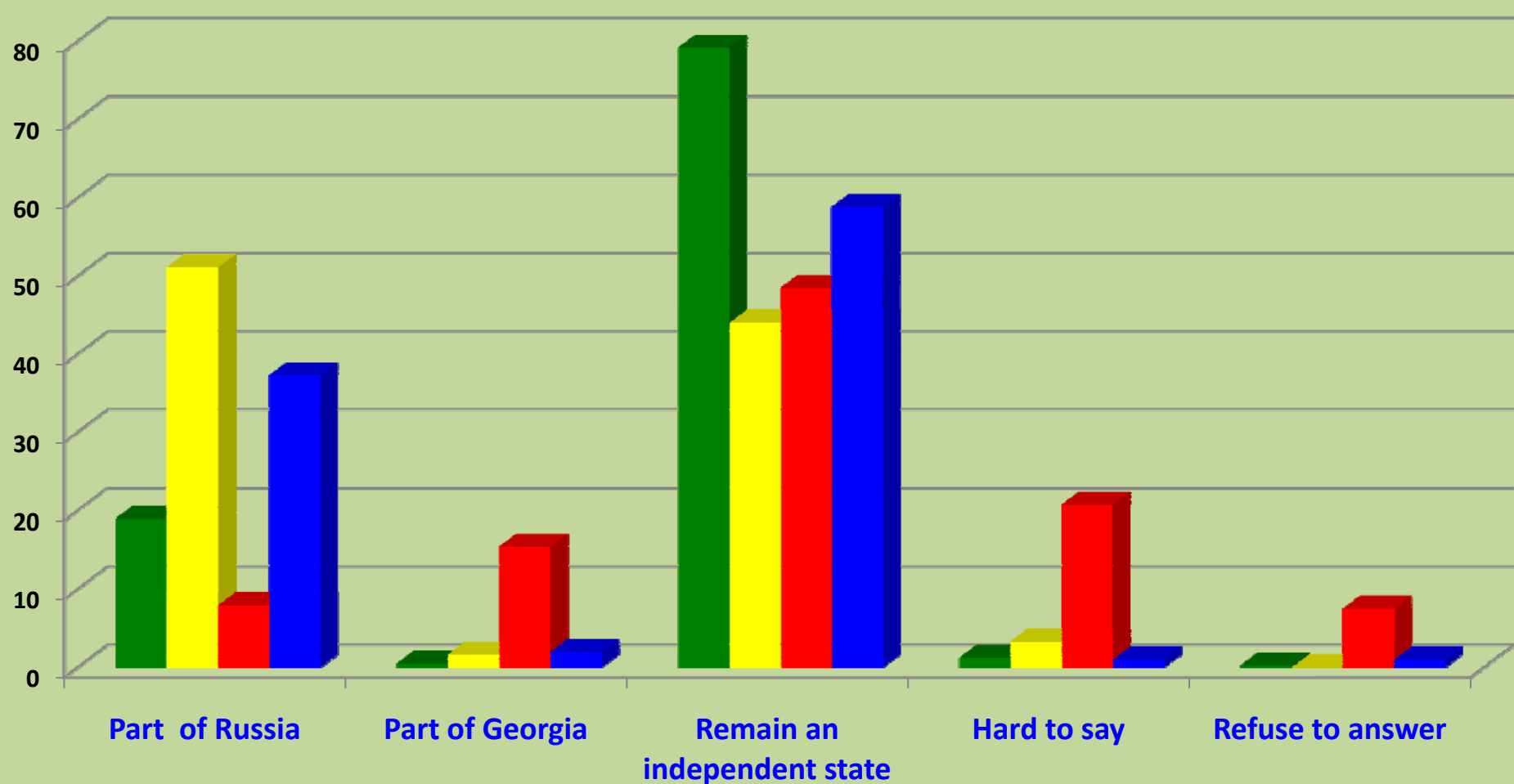


■ *Abkhaz*    
 ■ *Armenian*    
 ■ *Georgian/Mingrelian*    
 ■ *Russian*

Q. Some people are sure that they will never be able to forgive people of other nations for the violence that they conducted in 1992-1993. Do you feel the same? 1. Definitely yes, 2. Probably yes, 3. Probably no, 4. Neither yes nor no, 5. Definitely no, 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.

# Support for different possible political futures of Abkhazia

## Abkhazia Sample April 2010 – % by Nationality



■ Abkhaz   ■ *Armenian*   ■ *Georgian/Mingrelian*   ■ *Russian*

**Q.** In your opinion, what should be the future status of Abkhazia?

1. Abkhazia should be part of the Russian Federation, 2. Abkhazia should be part of Georgia, 3. Abkhazia should remain a independent state , 8. Difficult to say, 9. Refuse to answer. N= 930 in 57 locations.



# Georgians who choose “Abkhazia should remain Independent” as the political option

Are more likely to be in “excellent” or “normal” mood.

Are more likely to think that the country is heading in the “right direction.

Are more likely to think that “the current system in Abkhazia” is the best political system

Are more likely to have higher levels of “general trust”

Are more likely to say they voted for President Bagapsh (only a small number did)

Survey responses are not related to

Gender

Age

Interviewer Rating of Honesty of Responses

Purchasing Power of the Respondent

# Conclusions

The single most significant predictor of survey attitudes in Abkhazia is a person's declared nationality.

Experience of displacement is also a powerful predictor; this overlaps a great deal with Georgian nationality.....

....which overlaps with the Gal(i) district, which is a very distinctive space in Abkhazia.

Neither gender nor age (Soviet versus post-Soviet generation) are significant predictors of particular attitudes within or across nationalities.

Amongst Georgians there are consistently higher rates of "hard to say" and "refuse to answer" responses.

Abkhazia remains a divided society; the majority non-Georgian population are relatively contented and irreconcilable to Georgia and to large scale population returns.