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NDI Poll: In the Face of an Infodemic, Georgians Trust NCDC and Other Official Information Sources

TBILISI - Poll results released today by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and CRRC-Georgia show that most Georgians are concerned about the quality of information around the COVID-19 pandemic, but confident in their own ability to see through false narratives. They credit the government and public health experts with managing the crisis effectively, and turn to them for reliable information.

“Swift and evidence-based government action on COVID-19 has built public trust on these issues,” said NDI Director for Eurasia Programs Laura Jewett. “This confidence, in turn, is an invaluable resource in building resilience to the disinformation surrounding the disease. It will be important to continue investing in evidence-based policies as well as effective communications. By working to understand who is most vulnerable to disinformation, government and public health officials can direct their resources most effectively.”

A large majority of Georgians believes that at least some of the information circulating about COVID-19 is false; most (60 percent) feel confident they can distinguish what is true and what is not. Indeed, when presented with some prevalent disinformation narratives, significant numbers of Georgians disagreed with the statements, such as that the EU has abandoned its members (54 percent disagree), the Richard Lugar Public Center for Public Health Research (Lugar Lab) develops biological weapons against Russia (60 percent disagree), and 5G is linked to the spread of COVID-19 (45 percent disagree). Of importance, however, is that while few Georgians believe these statements, roughly a third don't know whether they are true or false, pointing to disinformation's ability to confuse.

The Lugar Lab, a prominent target of disinformation, received an overwhelmingly positive assessment, with 66 percent saying it has prevented the spread of COVID-19 in Georgia. Similarly, despite disinformation aimed at undermining support for transatlantic alliances, Georgians remain steadfast in their support for the country's EU and NATO goals, with support for membership at 76 and 69 percent, respectively.

When it comes to trusted sources of information on the virus, most Georgians turn to the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) (90 percent) and the Government of Georgia (85 percent). Journalists (73 percent), local government (66 percent trust), and religious leaders or the church (61 percent trust) are

also trusted sources. Notably, 19 percent of Georgians said that they do not receive information about the COVID-19 pandemic from their local government.

Georgians say they get their news on COVID-19 primarily from television (84 percent), social media (41 percent), and friends, family and colleagues (26 percent). When asked how they determine whether information on Facebook related to COVID-19 is true or false, 61 percent of those who receive news about COVID-19 from social media, point to the source or media channel, whereas a plurality, 37 percent, relies on their instincts.

According to the survey results, three quarters of Georgians (73 percent) believe the country's relatively low rate of infections and spread is due to steps taken by the government and doctors, while 17 percent say it's mostly due to Georgians' genetics and religion.

Looking ahead, 80 percent of citizens remain concerned that they or their family members will get infected with the virus. Despite this concern, close to half of Georgians (46 percent) say they would not get a COVID-19 vaccine if one were available (38 percent would). Focus group results demonstrated that while Georgians are generally not against vaccines, they listed a number of concerns, including "it will depend on the origin of the vaccine," "it will take time (at least a year) to be sure it's safe," and "it won't be necessary if pandemic is no longer a danger."

NDI surveys public opinion to help Georgian stakeholders diagnose and address issues of public concern by providing accurate, unbiased and statistically sound data. This poll aims to capture the most relevant information to foster the development of responsive policies and governance. A wide range of leaders from across the political spectrum has reported that the polls are important to their work and encourage continued polling. The results reflect data collected between June 26-30, through telephone interviews with a nationwide representative sample of Georgia's adult population, excluding occupied territories, that included 1,550 completed interviews. The average margin of error is +/- 2 percent. Respondents were selected using the random-digit-dial method.

NDI's survey work is funded by UK aid from the British people.

This poll was carried out by CRRC Georgia.

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CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization with a mission to promote evidence based debates on policy issues by providing reliable, up-to-date and accessible data and analysis. More information is available at <http://www.crrc.ge>