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Contact

In Tbilisi: Diana Chachua

dchachua@ndi.org, +995 577 77 96 39

In Washington, D.C.: Toyin Awesu

tawesu@ndi.org, +1 202 728-5500

NDI Poll: Georgians Losing Faith in their Country's Democracy, but Report Enthusiastic Participation in Last Election

TBILISI – Poll results released today by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and CRRC Georgia show 92 percent of Georgians assert that living in a democracy is important, and a majority believes a western-style democracy is best for the country. However, only 43 percent believe Georgia is currently a democracy, and 46 percent do not. This lack of belief in Georgian democracy is at its highest since 2013. The results are worst in Tbilisi, with 53 percent saying Georgia is not a democracy, and among older citizens, also 53 percent. Georgians also do not believe they have significant influence over their country's decisions, with 36 percent saying they have no say in decisions, and 14 percent believing that they have a lot of say.

Georgians nevertheless reported their active and enthusiastic participation in the recent presidential election. 69 percent of Georgians said that they voted in the first round and 76 percent in the second round, although the reported turnout was smaller in Tbilisi and among younger people (age 18-34). Most said that they were enthusiastic about their choice in both rounds, and voted for someone, rather than against, with 66 percent saying they voted for someone, and 29 against, in the first round, and 62 percent for someone and 33 against someone in the second round.

Georgians' evaluation of the election process was mixed. Respondents reported that the polling stations were mostly well ordered and officials prepared, the process was not intimidating, and the CEC performed well or average, 41 percent and 34 percent, respectively. However, almost a third (30 percent) reported that they were not confident in the final count. Georgians also overwhelming (85 percent) want to continue to directly elect their president.

“While Georgians believe democracy is best for the country and actively participated in the last election, more people believe the country is not a democracy than at any time over the last five years”, said Laura Thornton, global associate and senior director. “This points to an urgent need to rebuild trust in the country's democratic institutions and processes and consider ways to enhance citizen involvement.”

Public evaluation of government performance is mixed, with half assessing it as bad and 44 percent saying good, with more negative assessments in Tbilisi (60 percent). Parliament has a worse evaluation, with 71 percent reporting that the body is dominated by political bickering, 55 percent saying it has failed to put forward important policies, 57 percent believing it is poorly organized and inefficient, and 63 percent saying

it fails to investigate important matters. Georgians also do not see their MPs as qualified, working hard for the country, behaving in an ethical manner, or being inclusive. Only 28 percent can name their majoritarian representative.

Parties also suffer from low public approval, and only 13 percent believe parties represent the interests of citizens. Rather, Georgians report that parties serve their own interests or the interests of their donors and leaders. 27 percent say that Georgian Dream (GD) party is closest to them, followed by United National Movement (UNM) at 12 percent, and European Georgia (EG) and Alliance of Patriots (AoP) both at three percent. 52 percent say they are undecided about how they would vote in an election tomorrow. In a future vote, GD had 24 percent, UNM 11, and AoP three.

A plurality of Georgians believe there is some corruption in all government structures (state institutions, police, local government, prosecutor's office, courts, parliament, ministries, and political parties). In all bodies, the majority points to nepotism as the main type of corruption.

“If Georgia wants to restore faith in the belief that the country is a democracy, it needs to start addressing the low approval of its representative bodies,” said Thornton. “For years our polls have shown that there is no progress on the top national issues of concern -- employment, poverty, prices -- and parties and parliament must do better to address these problems and implement solutions.”

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 have reported that the polls are important to their work and encourage continued polling. The results reflect data collected from December 6-20, 2018, through face-to-face interviews with a nationwide representative sample of Georgia's adult population, excluding occupied territories, that included 2,205 completed interviews. The average margin of error is +/- 2.1 percent.

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This poll was carried out by CRRC Georgia.

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NDI is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. More information is available at www.ndi.org.

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>