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July 26, 2017

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NDI POLL: LOW AWARENESS OF AND APPROVAL FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE CHANGES; AVERAGE ASSESSMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

TBILISI – Poll results released today by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and CRRC Georgia show public opinion on the most important reform facing the country, a new constitution. Only 32 percent of Georgians reported that they were aware of the process to change the constitution, and of those few who were aware, the majority (59 percent) reports they do not have enough information about the changes. Only 2 percent participated in parliament’s public meetings. Further, a mere 6 percent of those who are aware of the new constitution say the changes reflect the people’s opinions, 47 percent say partially reflect, and 32 percent report “not at all.”

“It seems evident that more time, deliberations, and research are needed on changes to the country’s most significant document, when so few are aware or have been consulted,” said Laura Thornton, NDI senior director. “Parliament would be well-advised to go back to the drawing table and create an inclusive process to consider constitutional changes that ensures broad public participation and input.”

Half of Georgians (52 percent) were aware of the new legislation revoking the status of seven self-governing cities and merging them with the municipalities, while 44 percent were unaware. The majority of citizens (59 percent) disapproves of the merging of these cities and having them governed by one body, and only 16 percent approve. Further, half believe it will have a negative impact on the country (45 percent) while only 11 percent see a positive impact.

“The poll shows that the criticism from civil society, opposition political parties, and the President’s office of the changes in local government legislation is backed up by the public, with extremely few citizens evaluating this legislation positively,” Said Thornton. “Again, the parliament should consider further debates and study of these important changes and avoid the rush to press ahead with such an unpopular policy ahead of the elections.”

Half of Georgians evaluate the performance of both the national government and local institutions as average. The national government received only a 10 percent favorable ranking, while local government is at 16 percent positive performance assessment. A majority believes there is a lack of professionalism in local government, and a plurality of respondents agrees that there is nepotism and corruption in local government, with a higher negative assessment in Tbilisi. While few people have interacted with local government institutions, the majority of those who have reports that they were treated with respect and that officials were competent. Top national issues of concern remain jobs, poverty, territorial integrity, rising prices/inflation, and healthcare,

while leading local issues are roads, environment, water, gas, and traffic. In Tbilisi, the leading concern is pollution.

“Georgians’ evaluation of both national and local government is average, with Tbilisi citizens offering a more negative assessment, particularly of the professionalism, nepotism, and corruption in local bodies, said Thornton. “These findings are critical as we head into a local election, and candidates should develop strategies to address these shortcomings and offer solutions, and parties should select their nominations carefully.”

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 June 18 to July 9, through face-to-face interviews with a nationwide representative sample of Georgia’s adult population, excluding occupied territories, that included 2,261 completed interviews. The average margin of error is +/- 2,2 percent.

NDI’s survey work is funded with UK aid from the British people and carried out by the 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>