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**GEORGIANS VOTE IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS WITHOUT MAJOR INCIDENT
FOLLOWING CAMPAIGN LACKING EVEN COMPETITION,
NDI DELEGATION FINDS**

TBILISI – Election Day progressed without incident in most of the country, and Georgian voters, poll workers, party activists, and candidates demonstrated their commitment to democracy by participating peacefully. The legislative and electoral framework mostly conforms to international standards and conducive to the conduct of democratic elections. The National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) observers reported that the precincts observed opened on time or with minor delays, generally following the prescribed rules. Polling procedures were generally followed throughout the day and in most observed Precinct Election Commissions (PEC), the counting process was reported to be generally calm and orderly. However, NDI observers also reported several cases of serious procedural violations, errors, and delays resulting from lack of officials’ understanding of the procedures, as well as instances of involvement of self-declared party-affiliated observers in the count.

Domestic observers reported that the voting process was conducted without significant violations in the majority of polling stations across Georgia, although they noted a concentration of incidents in Marneuli and a controversial practice of copying the identity data of those who voted. Following initial reports of their losses, opposition parties expressed distrust of the election results.

“The parties’ response to the elections perpetuates the polarization already at play in the country’s political landscape,” said NDI. “We call upon political parties to document any grievances and complaints and seek redress through established legal complaint mechanisms. We hope that the Central Election Commission and other election administration bodies will work to swiftly address the reported irregularities and complaints in a timely manner to build trust in the process.”

Throughout the campaign period, the Central Election Commission (CEC) fulfilled its administrative responsibilities, carrying out its duties in a timely, efficient, and transparent manner. Observers reported a good-faith effort to improve the capacity of officials at lower levels of the commission. Civil society organizations were active, monitoring the process, filing complaints, and suggesting improvements. During the campaign, the most significant complaint from parties and domestic observer groups reported to NDI observers was the alleged misuse of administrative resources. This is an entrenched problem in Georgia that predates the current government.

The elections followed a campaign largely devoid of meaningful competition, outside Tbilisi. The playing field was uneven, with the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) receiving approximately 90 percent of all campaign

donations and enjoying ample media visibility, including coverage of government achievements and events. In contrast, opposition parties faced a lack of resources and significantly lower visibility and reach. This imbalance, combined with a lack of extensive policy messages and debates in most of the country, hindered a real contest of ideas and values. The outcome was widely viewed as a foregone conclusion by many contestants and civil society organizations.

Women's underrepresentation in the political process continues to be a problem in Georgia. Women made up approximately 37 percent of proportional, 16.5 percent of majoritarian, and 13.5 percent of mayoral candidates. GD nominated only two women mayoral candidates in 64 constituencies, while United National Movement (UNM), European Georgia (EG), and Alliance of Patriots (AoP) nominated seven candidates each.

According to preliminary results as of 11:00 am on October 22, GD won 55.65 percent of the proportional vote, up from 50.82 percent in 2014. The party swept most of the majoritarian seats in sakrebulo (local council) races. UNM, EG, and AoP, passed the four percent threshold in proportional races for sakrebulos. In the mayoral races, GD won in the first round in four out of five self-governing cities, including Tbilisi, and 53 out of 59 self-governing municipalities. Six runoffs, all of which include the participation of Georgian Dream candidates, will take place in November. While results are still being tallied for many of the sakrebulo races, only one woman successfully secured a mayoral position.

With these preliminary results, Georgia appears to have reinforced governance marked by one party's dominance at all levels of elected office. This has characterized successive Georgian governments since independence and poses a challenge to democratic governance going forward.

“With the further consolidation of power in one party, prospects for vibrant and pluralistic democracy are at risk,” said NDI. “The responsibility, of course, lies with country's leaders to create an environment that promotes a genuinely inclusive governing processes and strengthens democratic checks and balances.”

The preliminary statement is offered by the NDI election observer delegation to Georgia's October 21, 2017 local government elections. The delegation included observers from five countries and was led by Karl Inderfurth, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State; Per Eklund, former EU Ambassador to Georgia; Margaret Curran, former MP for the UK Labour Party; Rhine McLin, former mayor of Dayton, Ohio; Nina Jankowicz, democracy, governance, and communications specialist; Aleksandra Kuratko-Pani, independent elections and parliamentary development expert; Donald Brownlee, campaign manager for fifth-term Virginia Congressman Gerald Connolly; Melissa Muscio, Program Director, NDI; Ebru Agduk, Deputy Director, NDI-Turkey; and Laura Thornton, NDI Global Associate and Senior Director of the Institute's office in Tbilisi. This delegation joined 12 NDI long-term observers and two analysts who focused on election administration and disinformation, as well as NDI's July [pre-election assessment mission](#).

In Tbilisi, the delegation met with party representatives, government and election officials, as well as representatives of civil society, the media, and the international community. After briefings in Tbilisi, teams of observers were deployed to locations around the country, where they met with local electoral authorities, party and media representatives, and domestic election monitors to assess the electoral environment. On Election Day, the NDI observers visited over 100 polling stations for the opening, voting, closing, and counting processes in their assigned regions.

The Institute noted that today's statement is preliminary, pointing out that official results tabulation is not complete and there may be complaints to be resolved. With limited runoffs, NDI will continue to monitor the process and issue further reports as appropriate.

The NDI observer mission conducted its activities in a nonpartisan, professional manner, in accordance with Georgian law and the [Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation](#). NDI remained in close contact with Georgian domestic monitoring groups and other international observer delegations throughout the electoral period. The observation delegation is supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

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