

Georgia: Big lead for the ruling camp's candidate in the run up to elections for mayor of Tbilisi

On 11 May, Georgian television released the results of an opinion poll for the elections to mayor of Tbilisi, planned for 30 May. According to the published data, the highest support (57%) is enjoyed by Gigi Ugulava, the candidate of the ruling party, who has held that office since 2005. The most popular opposition candidate, Irakli Alasania, can count on a mere 7% of the vote. The poll results confirm the Georgian opposition's weak position and its poor chances of a good result in the upcoming elections.

This poll of the candidates' popularity is part of the national opinion polls carried out by an American organisation, the National Democratic Institute (NDI). In contrast to the rest of the results, the mayoral poll was not published in advance. Its release on public television was generally perceived as an act intended to strengthen Ugulava. However, the opposition did not question the results. Apart from pre-election sentiments, the NDI's polls also revealed a definite lack of support for the talks with the Russian government undertaken in recent months by some opposition politicians (around 60% of respondents were opposed), as well as high support for integration with NATO (26% of respondents 'fully support' it, 36% 'support it to some degree').

The direct elections for mayor of Tbilisi should have been an opportunity for the opposition to define itself more clearly on the Georgian political scene, but the poll results indicate that the likelihood of this is limited. It seems that despite reservations about the policy of president Mikheil Saakashvili and his entourage, the Georgian public appreciates the improvement which the country has made since 2003, and both the capital and the provinces will support the ruling camp. <MMat>