

# ALBANIA

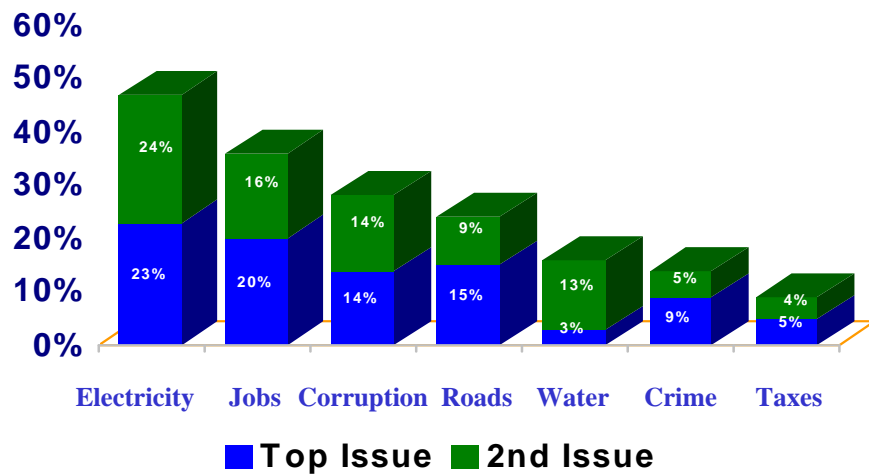
## 2007 LOCAL ELECTIONS



NDI, working in partnership with Partners for Democratic Change and IREX under a USAID funded democracy and government agreement, conducted a series of activities around the February 18, 2007 local elections in Albania. The initiative connected thousands of Albanians with the political process through televised debates and town hall meetings, and encouraged candidates to focus on issues of public concern.

In advance of the elections, NDI conducted a **PRE-ELECTION POLL** in order to better gauge and communicate to parties the issues that citizens considered to be priorities. The poll, conducted from December 15, 2006 to January 5, 2007, surveyed 2,500 residents of six of Albania's largest cities. Electricity and jobs were the issues residents cared about most.

**What would you say is the most important issue you would like your local elected officials in [YOUR CITY] to address? Second?**



**NDI 6 City Survey: Durrës, Elbasan, Korçë, Sarandë, Tiranë, Vlorë**



Vangjush Dako, a candidate for mayor of Durrës municipality, signed the pledge and said: *"My vision is to include the priorities of the interest groups and citizens in the decision making process to improve transparency of the local government."*

In collaboration with the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption (ACAC), NDI helped create and promote a **GOOD GOVERNMENT** initiative that resulted in 712 city council and mayoral candidates signing a pledge to abide by universally accepted rules of good governance if elected. The total amount of signatories was split almost evenly between candidates from the coalition of the right — with 364 — and candidates from the coalition of the left — with 348.

NDI's local civic partners in 57 communities created **COMMUNITY PLATFORMS** from questionnaires distributed to local citizens, which were presented to mayoral candidates at public events such as roundtable discussions and candidate debates organized by the DGA consortium. In addition, the community platforms played vital roles in at least three separate candidate debates organized by IREX. NDI also helped organize 27 public

events attended by, in total, 50 candidates and 1,740 citizens.

In preparation for the campaign period, NDI conducted more than 25 **TRAINING SESSIONS FOR PARTY ACTIVISTS** from Albania's major political parties. NDI trained more than 500 candidates, campaign managers and party activists on media communication, campaign strategies, and public speaking skills. In addition, 13 of 67 participants in NDI's Political Skills and Leadership Academy competed in the local elections as candidates for either city council or mayor, with nine winning their contest.



*Participants in an NDI campaign planning seminar in Tropoja in January.*

During the campaign period, NDI worked with two local organizations, ACAC and the Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA), on a **MEDIA MONITORING** initiative. As part of the effort, trained monitors analyzed how nine television stations and five newspapers chose to cover election related news stories during the campaign period. As discussed in three publicly released reports, many of Albania's major news outlets displayed at least some bias, though the coverage overall was an improvement over that of the 2005 parliamentary elections.

As part of the **ELECTION MONITORING** effort for the February 18 local elections, NDI worked with the Coalition of Domestic Observers, a consortium of eight local organizations, to train and deploy approximately 2,500 observers at polling centers and Vote Counting Centers on election day.

Observers monitored the voting process in 118 communities, including all 65 municipalities, promoting electoral transparency and fairness. Utilizing innovative technology developed by NDI, the monitors sent to and received from headquarters more than 40,000 SMS messages throughout the day to report on voter turnout and the frequency and types of incidents. On election day, the Coalition of Domestic Observers reported its findings to the public at nine press conferences throughout the day.

### **CONTINUING CHALLENGES IN ALBANIA'S DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT**

- Polarization of political debate in parliament precludes compromise and stymies reform efforts
- There remains a disconnect between elected officials and civil society, affecting the public's ability to hold leaders accountable
- Electoral reform is still necessary and a point of contention, especially concerning the issue of voter identification
- Women remain marginalized and receive little support from party leadership
- Parties must improve policy development and communication between headquarters and local branches

**In order to build upon these achievements, NDI will:**

- Work with citizen watchdog groups in the coming months to hold officials accountable to campaign pledges, including the good government pledge.
- Conduct in-depth assessments of party branches in an effort to strengthen the ties between headquarters and local representatives, with the goal of bolstering communication between citizens and party leadership.

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