



ALBANIA

CITIZEN ATTITUDES ABOUT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Key Findings of an April 2005 Public Opinion Survey

May 9 2005

Disclaimer: The poll is based upon a scientific sample. Its findings are statistically representative of the opinions of the Albanian public. The views reported herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

INTRODUCTION

In North America and Western Europe, political parties, media outlets and civil society organizations conduct public opinion surveys in order to test the public's attitudes regarding topical issues of the day. Political parties and civil society groups use survey results to develop plans to communicate with citizens. In this context, public opinion surveys are not used to predict the outcome of elections. **As such, this poll reflects a 'snap shot' of citizen views in mid-April. It should not be seen as a prediction the outcome of July's parliamentary elections.**

The following report is a presentation and analysis of key findings from a survey of public opinion in Albania conducted in April. This survey is the property of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). Prism Research, a polling firm established in Australia in 1996 with offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania conducted the fieldwork. Prism Research clientele includes numerous multinational, international and domestic organizations including NDI.

NDI/Albania's purpose in producing this survey is to assist political parties in Albania to improve their capacity to understand and respond to citizen interests. The survey is part of a clean elections/anti corruption program conducted by the Democracy and Governance in Albania Consortium, which includes, NDI, IREX, and Partners for Democratic Change. The DGA program is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Between April 19 and 27, 1,251 respondents over the age of 18 in Albania participated in face-to-face interviews designed to measure their attitudes regarding current policy concerns, including opinions about the economy, job growth, infrastructure challenges, corruption and the political situation. The sample was selected at random and is evenly distributed in geographical terms. It was based upon the most updated census of voter registration database data in each of Albania's 12 districts.

The margin of error on a sample of 1,251 is +/- 3 per cent.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most Important Concern: Economy, Infrastructure and Poverty

The main issue in the minds of voters is the economy. When respondents were asked to name the most important issue that they face, 54 percent identified the economy, 39 percent infrastructure, and 38 percent poverty. On the economy, the issues of highest concern to citizens are a lack of jobs (60 percent), low salaries (41 percent), and high taxes (32 percent). Respondents blame corruption (65 percent), government bureaucracy (38 percent), and high taxes (28 percent) for the lack of job creation. In terms of infrastructure, respondents identify electricity, water and roads as the most important priorities. Demographically, the economy is more important to respondents in the south (60 percent) compared to the north (47 percent). It is also of greater concern to those in urban areas (61 percent) compared to those in rural areas (46 percent). Not surprisingly, those in lower socio-economic groups and the unemployed rank the economy as more important than the employed and those more comfortable.

Corruption

Asked to identify responsibility for current levels of corruption, the judiciary and political leaders are considered most responsible at 75 and 73 percent, respectively. Students (84 percent), those looking for a job (85 percent), and those living in the north (82 percent) judge the judiciary most harshly, while pensioners and those over 51 years old (67 and 69 percent, respectively) are less severe. Those in urban areas (77 percent) and four-fifths of unemployed respondents are more likely to consider political leaders highly responsible for corruption when compared to only two-thirds of pensioners, housewives, and those in rural areas. Many of these same respondents identified personal financial interests (63 percent) and lust for power (59 percent) as issues that motivate politicians, while only 16 percent believed that community interests motivate a politician's decisions. When respondents were asked which measures they thought would combat corruption successfully, punishing offenders, effective monitoring, and new legislation were widely supported. But, fewer than half of all respondents (45 percent) thought letting citizens see government budgets to monitor spending would be an effective way to reduce corruption.

Free and Fair Elections

When asked about potential threats to fairness of the upcoming parliamentary elections, respondents said that concern over the inaccuracy of the voter lists was the most important issue (66 percent), followed by concern over potential irregularities in counting the votes (60 percent) and the zone boundaries and police interference (41 percent each). More than half of all respondents (54 percent) thought the Government punished communities that voted against it. When asked whom they trusted to monitor elections, the International Community enjoyed the confidence of

57 percent of respondents, followed closely by the Central Elections Commission at 47 percent and domestic election monitors at 44 percent. Only one in six (16 percent) thought that political parties could be trusted to monitor the process.

Voter Intention

Asked for whom they would vote if elections were conducted this week in Albania, nearly one-third of respondents (32 percent) were undecided or gave no answer. Among decided voters, 42 percent said they would vote for the Democratic Party (DP), 34 percent for the Socialist Party (SP), 11 percent for the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), and 4 percent for the Movement for National Development (MND). When respondents were asked to express their opinions about political leaders, neither of the two highest ranking individuals were leaders of a political party, i.e., Edi Rama at 67 percent and Prof. Dr. Rexhep Meidani at 54 percent.

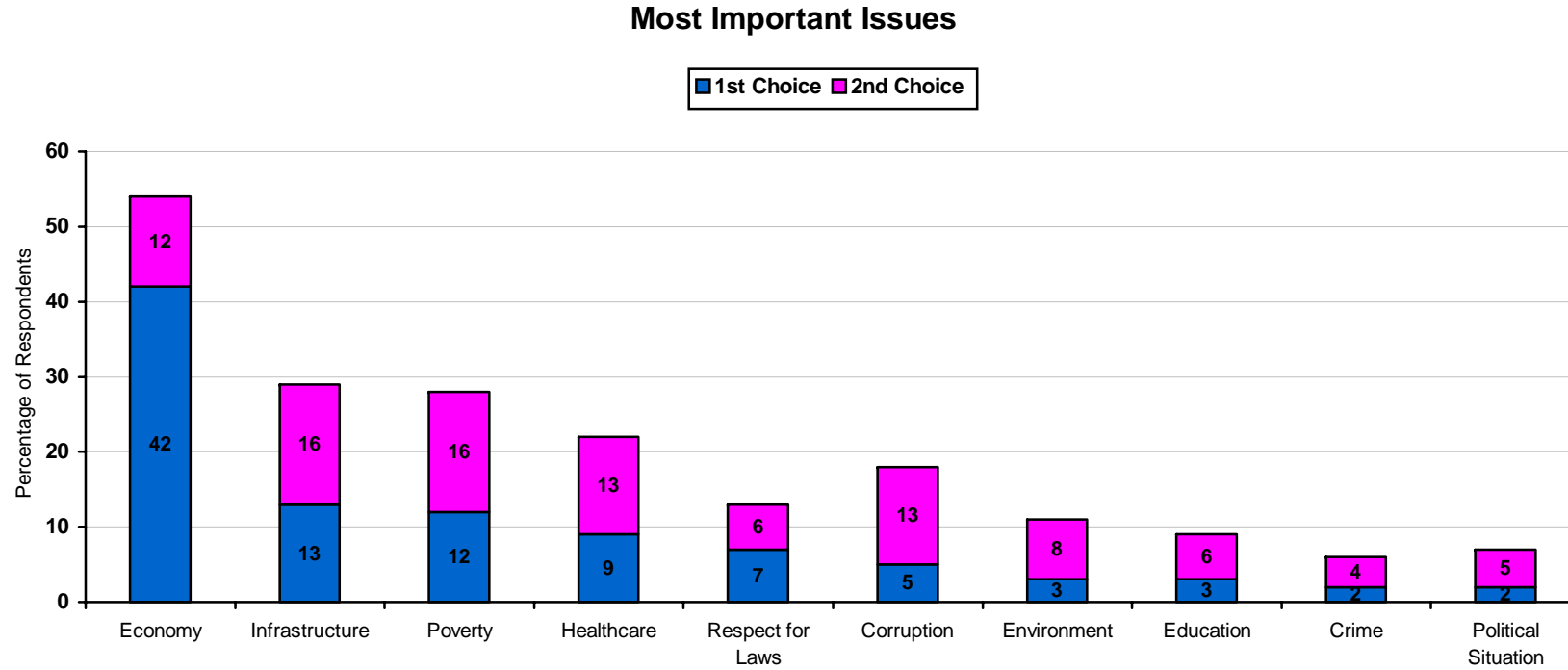
Demographic Divisions

The main demographic factor that divides opinion in Albania appears to be geographic. In particular, those living in the Southern districts of Vlore, Gjirokastrë, Korçë, Fier and Berat are noticeably more distant from government and more interested in being left alone to conduct their affairs. Residents in the Northern districts of Shkodër, Diber, Lezhë and Kukës also express this independent spirit – although less often. Respondents in Central districts (Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan) have a greater understanding for the role of central and local government and more confidence in its institutions. Northerners exhibit more dependence on assistance provided by the International Community and the Government, expressing relatively more concern about issues on which the government and international assistance agencies intervene, e.g., roads, public transport, and support to farmers.

Another noticeable demographic division is between urban and rural residents. Those living in urban areas are more pessimistic about the economy (56 percent) versus 50 percent in rural areas, which explains why the economy is also more important to urban residents at 48 percent compared to 35 percent for rural residents. At the same time, urban residents are more open to free trade (at 61 percent versus 47 percent for rural residents) and three times more concerned about air quality than those in rural areas.

Other random demographic differences are also noticed among students, and pensioners and homemakers. The latter two groups demonstrate a degree of isolation from society and its reform processes, while the former are aware of the modernizing priorities in Albania and experiences in the rest of Europe.

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES



More than half of respondents choose the economy as the first or second most important issue that they currently face, followed by infrastructure and poverty.

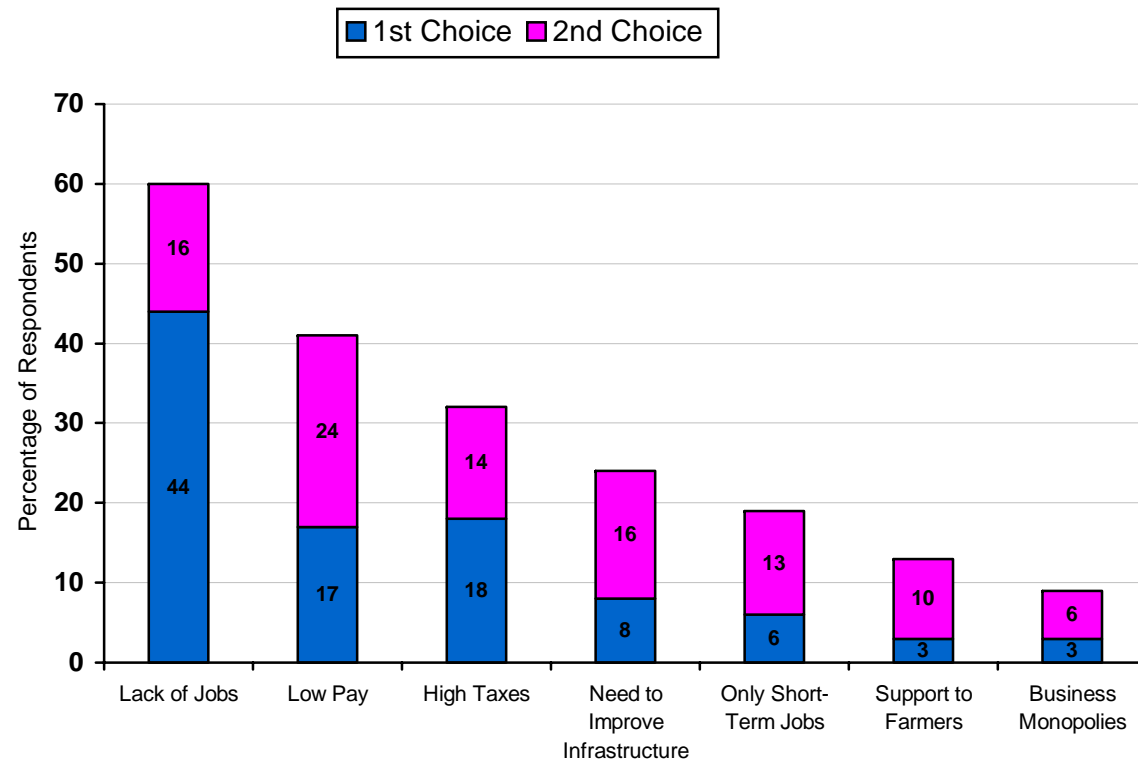
On average, 23 percent of respondents believe that DP is the party that can best address these issues above, while 20 percent identify SP. A full 36 percent on average cannot identify a party who would be best at addressing the issue or believe that no party can address the issues of concern.

SPECIFIC ECONOMIC CONCERN

Unemployed respondents are much more concerned about the lack of jobs, but even those with jobs worry more about the temporary nature of their employment. These responses demonstrate a degree of uncertainty about the future.

High taxes are a concern to those in the South, while the North and rural areas place more emphasis on agricultural support and infrastructure. Those residing both in the Northern and Central districts are concerned about infrastructure improvements.

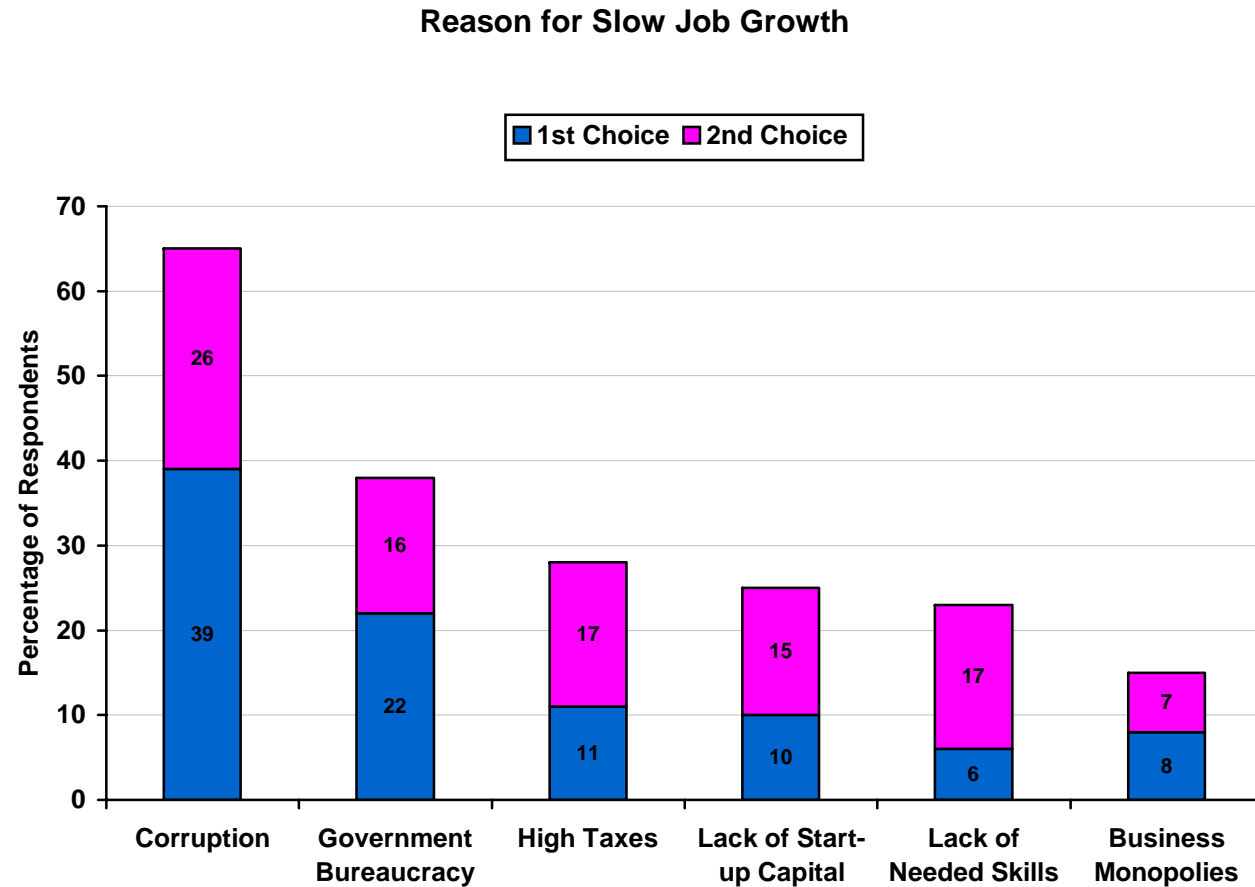
Most Important Economic Concern



REASON FOR SLOW JOB GROWTH

Almost two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) identified corruption as either the first or second most responsible cause for slow job growth, followed by government bureaucracy at 38 percent.

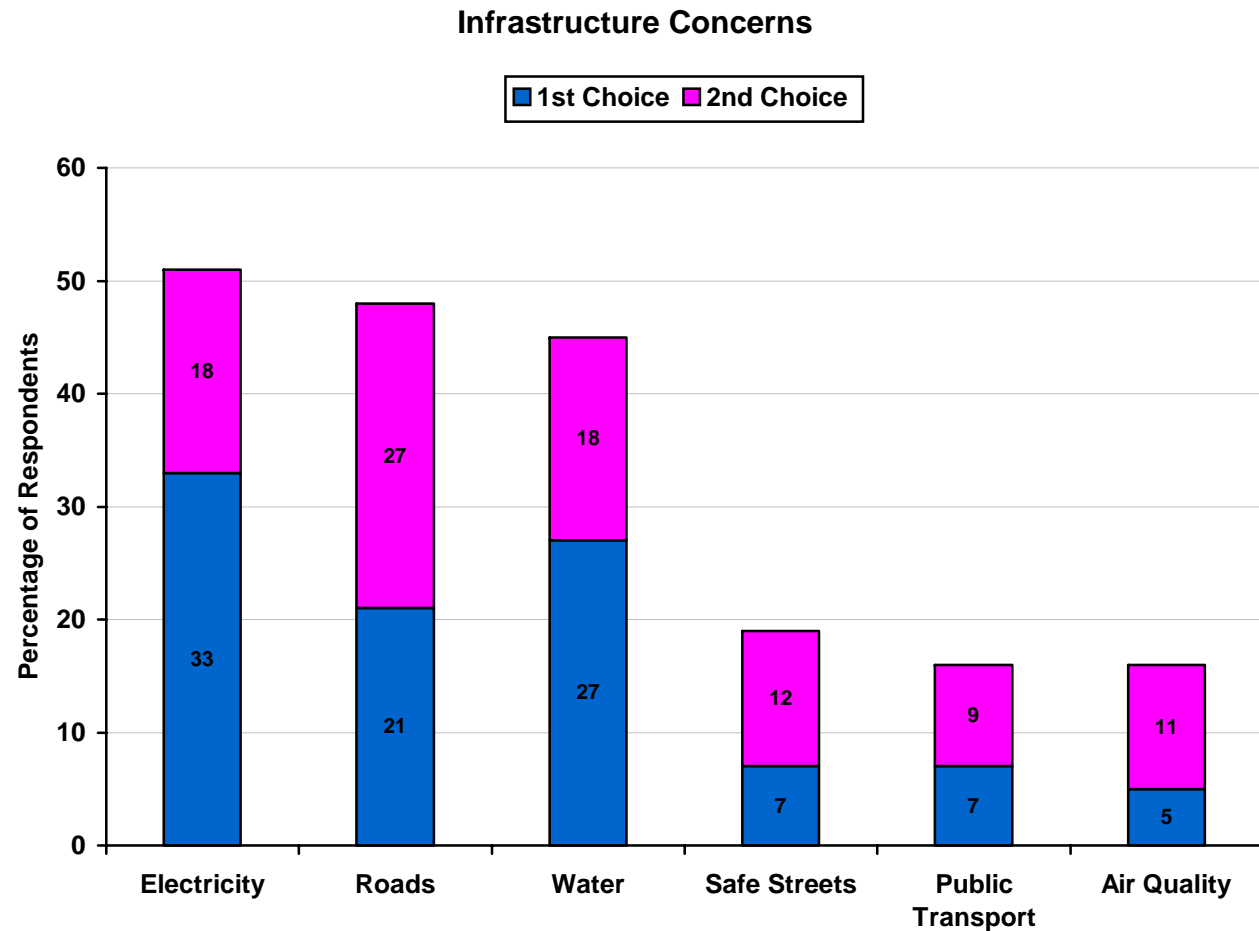
19 percent of students identify the 'lack of appropriate skills' as responsible for slow job growth, while pensioners (32 percent) and those living in Southern districts (28 percent) are more likely to blame government bureaucracy. Nonetheless, as a first response, corruption is considered the most responsible by Northerners (41 percent) and Southerners (35 percent).



SPECIFIC INFRASTRUCTURE CONCERNS

Respondents identified electricity, water and roads as the most important infrastructural issues.

The choice differs regionally with those living in the South and North most concerned about electricity (59 and 55 percent, respectively), while those in the Center are most concerned about roads at 50 percent. For those in the South, the second most important concern is water at 56 percent, while it is roads for those living in the North (53 percent). Also, those living in rural areas are more likely to choose public transport as an important infrastructural concern.



ATTITUDE ABOUT POLICY REFORMS

The survey attempted to ascertain Albanians' opinions about future political and economic developments, especially those related to the processes of regional development and EU integration that any party in government or opposition will face. To begin with, 57 percent of respondents believe that the political situation is headed in the wrong direction, while 53 percent think that the economic situation is headed in the wrong direction. Asked to choose which statement best represented their opinion on several economic reform issues, respondents answered as follows:

TAXATION	
Cutting taxes would be good because then people would be able to decide by themselves how to spend money in the most effective way.	51%
Cutting taxes is a bad idea because it would mean less money for infrastructure, healthcare and schools.	40%
Don't know/Can't decide/No answer	10%

FREE TRADE	
Free trade is good for Albania's accession to the EU, and it should not be restricted.	54%
Free trade hurts Albanian farmers, and it needs to be restricted.	37%
Don't know/Can't decide/No answer	9%

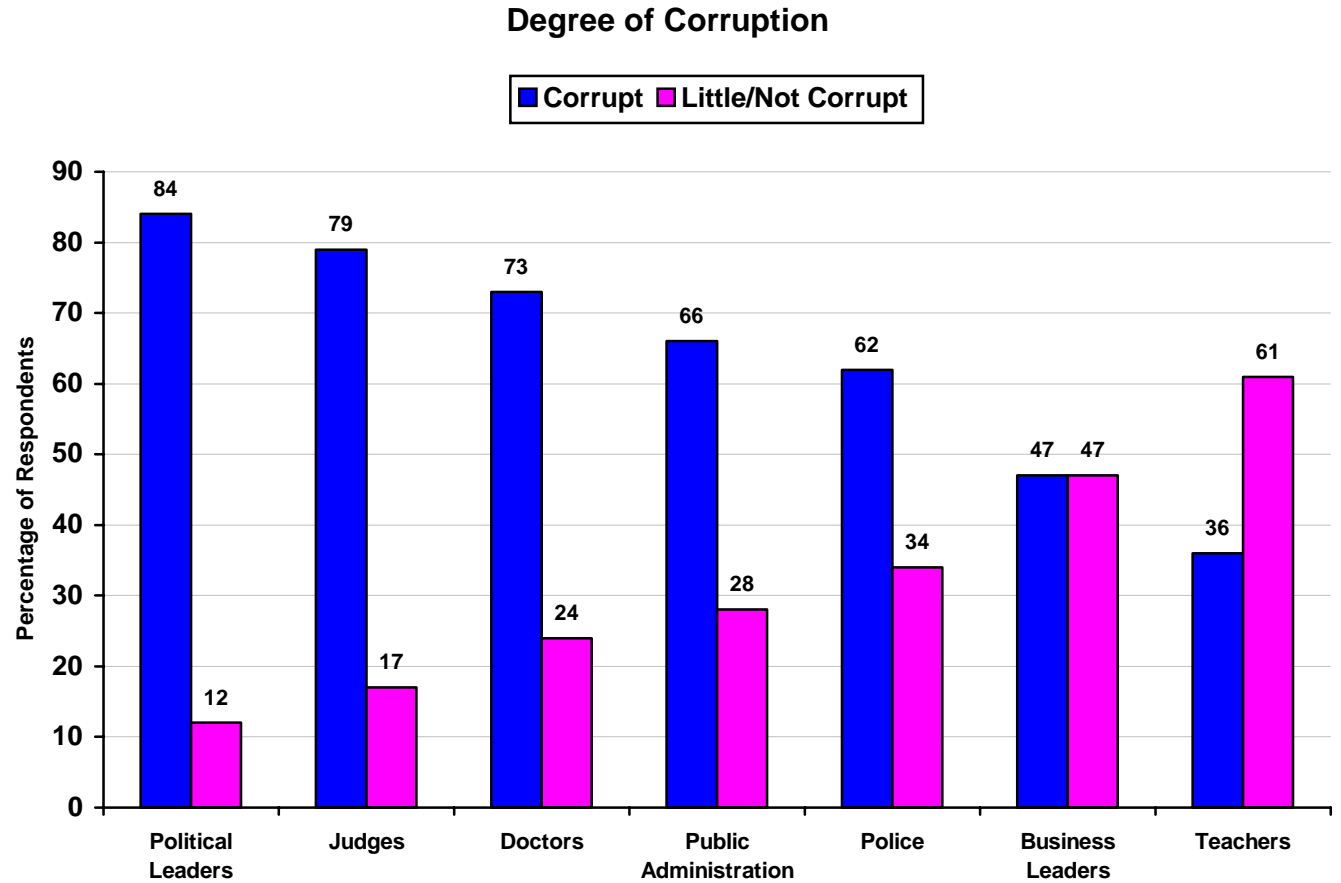
JOB CREATION	
The government should create jobs for people.	71%
People need to take the initiative and start a business in order to create jobs.	25%
Don't know/Can't decide/No answer	4%

Respondents appear to believe that a major role of government is to create jobs. At the same time, a majority do demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit or a belief that they could spend money more wisely than the government. Furthermore, a majority of respondents understand that the current goal is European integration and are willing to adopt reforms necessary for entry.

CORRUPTION

To what degree are people in the following professions corrupt?

Respondents living in the Southern districts are more likely to judge business leaders and public administration harshly, while they are less likely to suspect doctors of corruption. Also, rural residents are more likely to assess police as corrupt than those living in urban areas.

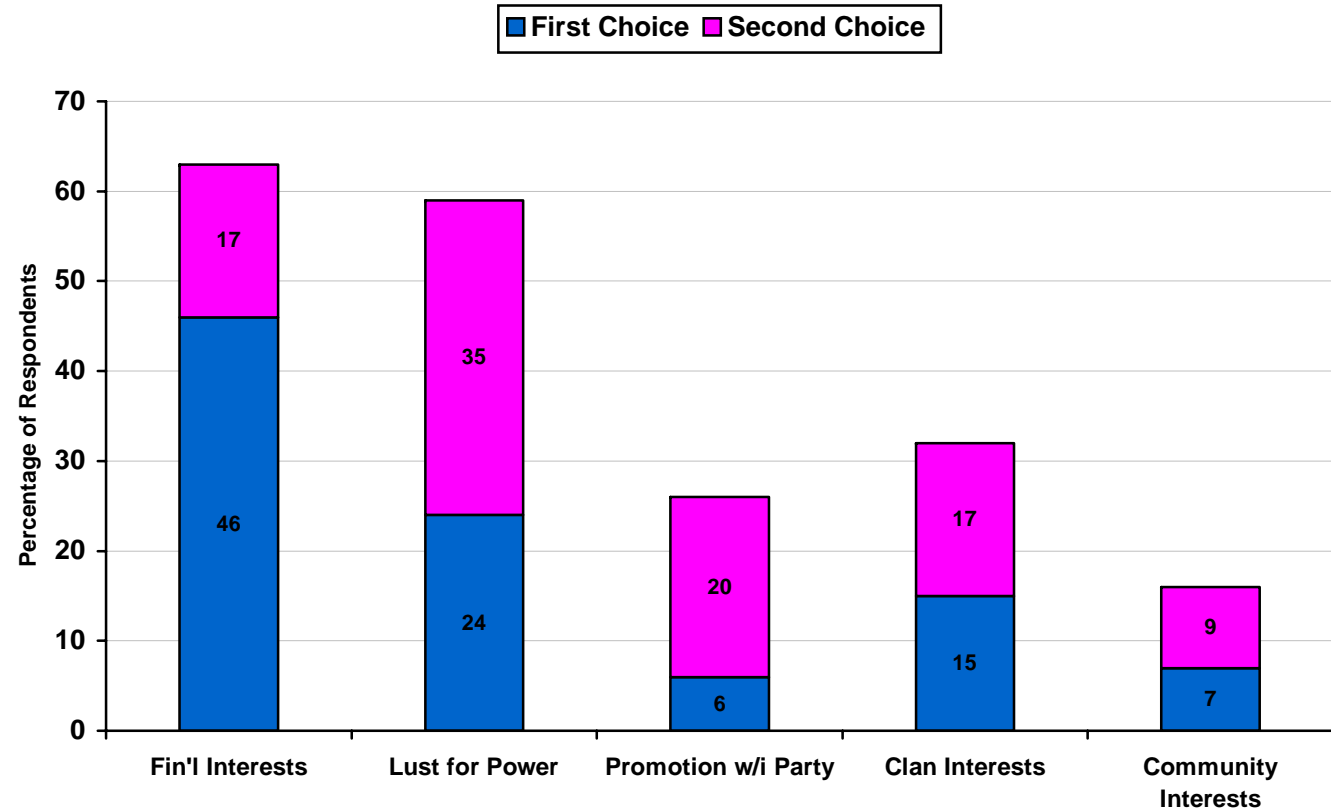


The survey also asked to what degree judges, political leaders, government workers, police and businessmen were responsible for the current level of corruption.

Respondents assess all groups to be at least 50 percent responsible and up to 75 percent responsible for corruption with the exception of businessmen who are considered to be only 46 percent responsible for corruption. Like the graph on the previous page, judges at 75 percent and political leaders at 73 percent are considered among the most responsible.

Given the general disdain for political leaders, it is interesting that almost two-thirds of respondents believe that politicians are motivated by personal financial interests. Almost as many believe that politicians are motivated by a lust for power. Only one in six believe that politicians are motivated by community interests.

Politicians' Motivations



Remedies for Corruption

Which of the following measures would be effective in reducing corruption?

REMEDY	Effective	Not Effective	Don't Know/No Answer
Audit government spending and bring cases of corruption to trial.	71%	21%	7%
Create units within state institutions to monitor and eliminate corruption.	64%	28%	8%
Create laws that protect and reward those who report cases of corruption in their workplace.	56%	36%	9%
Encourage people to stop paying bribes.	50%	41%	9%
Let NGOs and the media see government budgets and monitor spending.	45%	45%	10%

In all cases, those living in the Southern districts judge each of these measures to be more effective than ‘all respondents,’ while those in the Center are more sceptical about punishing people, monitoring corruption, and new legislation. Those living in the Northern districts are sceptical about punishing people.

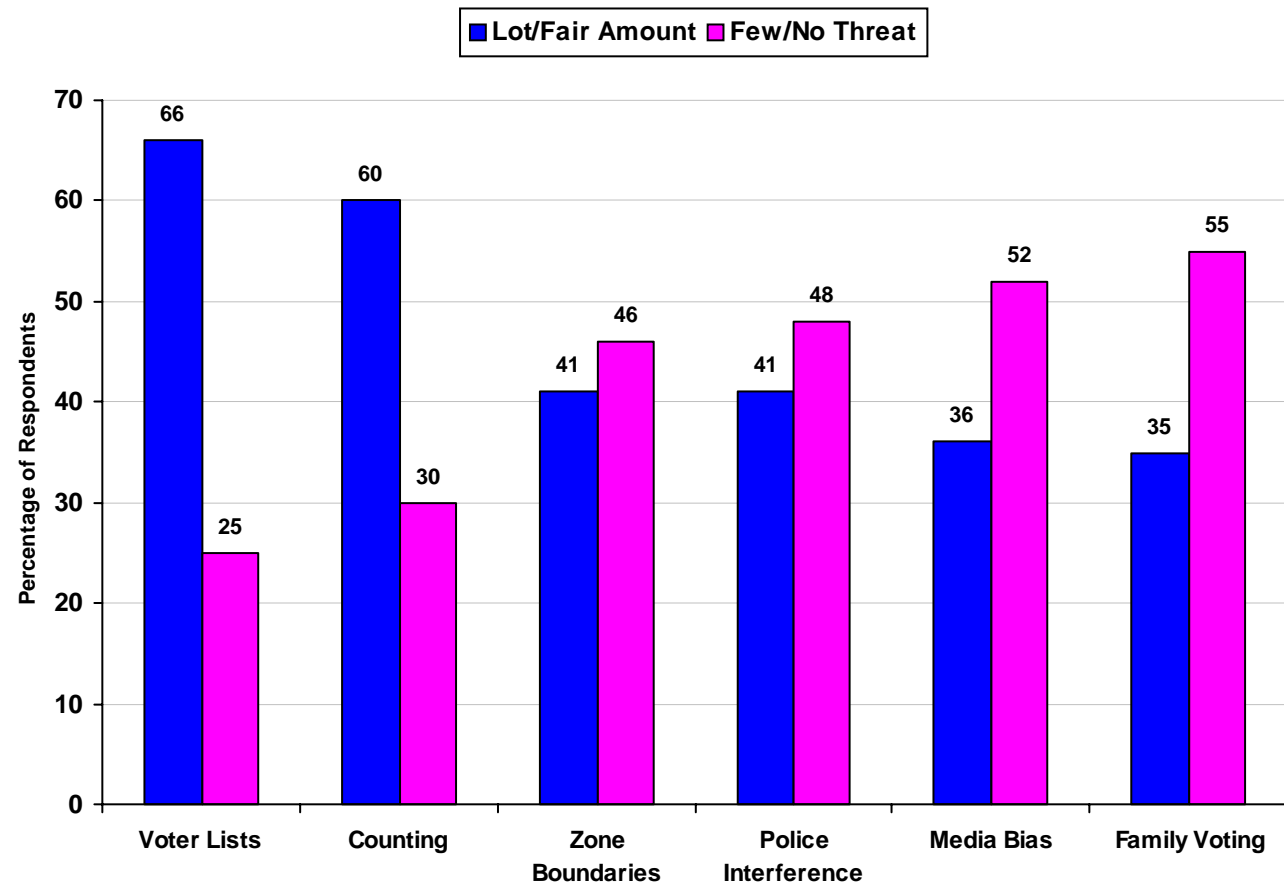
FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

Voter lists continue to be a significant concern to respondents as in previous elections, as are counting irregularities.

At the same time, an average of 10 percent of respondents has no opinion about whether these issues might threaten free and fair elections.

Those living in the Southern and Northern districts think that the government is more likely to penalize the interests of communities that vote against it at 63 and 60 percent, respectively, while only 44 percent of those in Central regions express this concern. In addition, rural voters at 58 percent are more likely to fear retribution than urban voters at 51 percent.

Threats to Free and Fair Elections

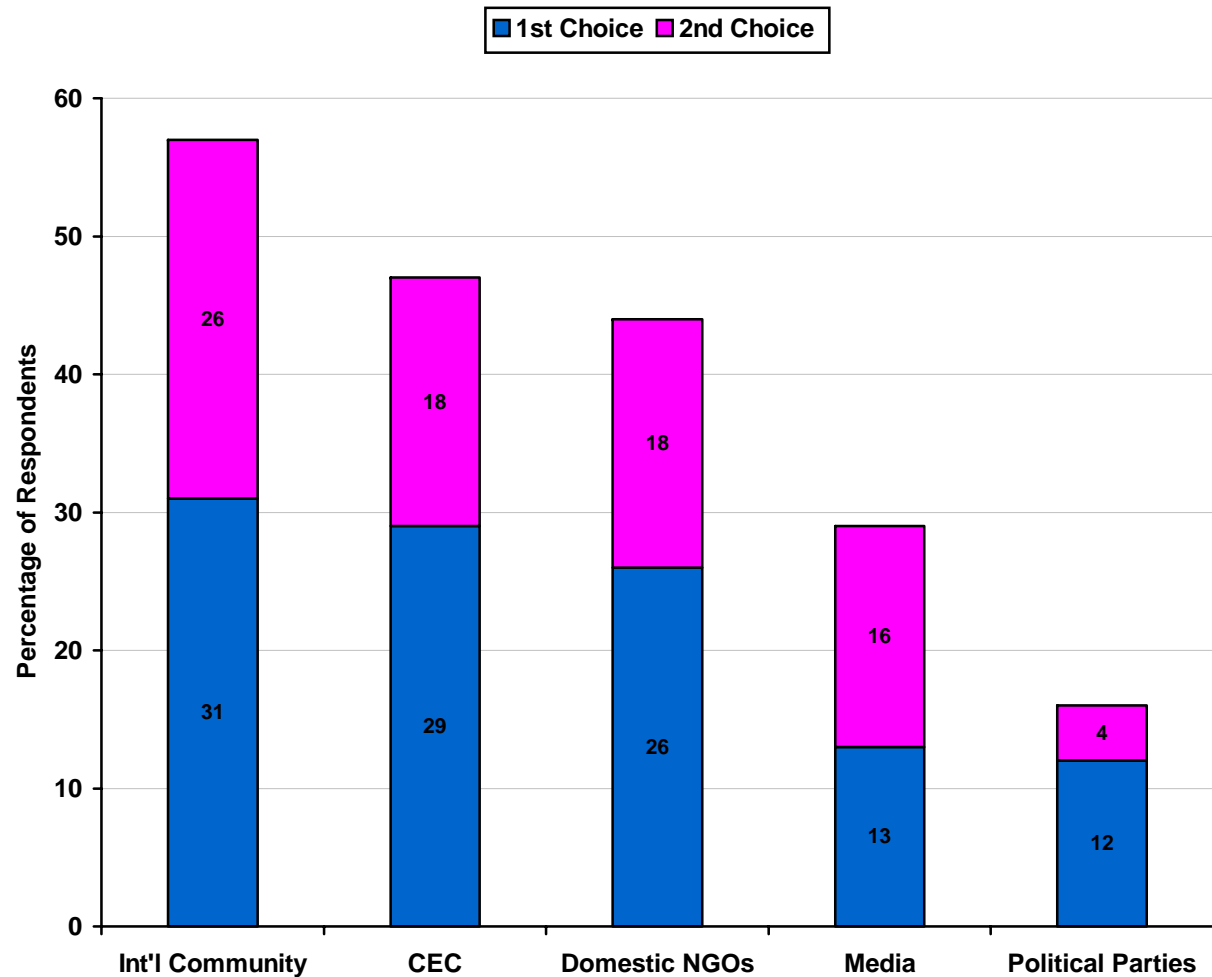


Trust in Election Monitoring:

Respondents living in Northern districts are more likely to choose the International Community as their first choice, while those in Southern districts are more likely to choose domestic monitors as those they most trust to monitor the election processes. In addition, as first and second choices, students are more likely to identify the media than any other demographic group.

Source for Current Affairs: Almost two-thirds of respondents identify national television as their main source of information on current affairs, followed by local television at 17 percent, meaning that only two out of 10 are informed by sources other than television. In fact, less than 1 percent learn about current affairs from local political leaders and less than 4 percent by family members.

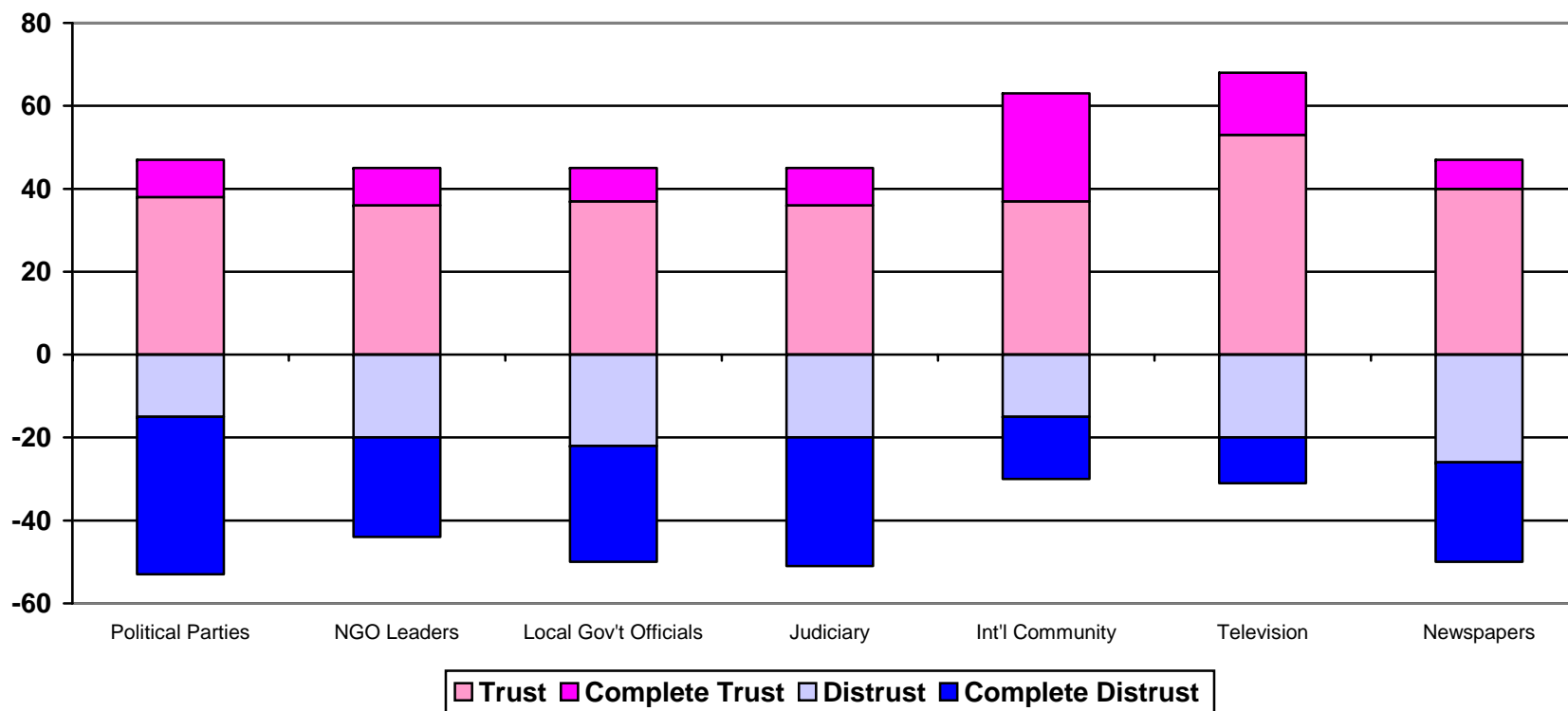
Whom Do You Trust Most to Monitor the Election Processes?



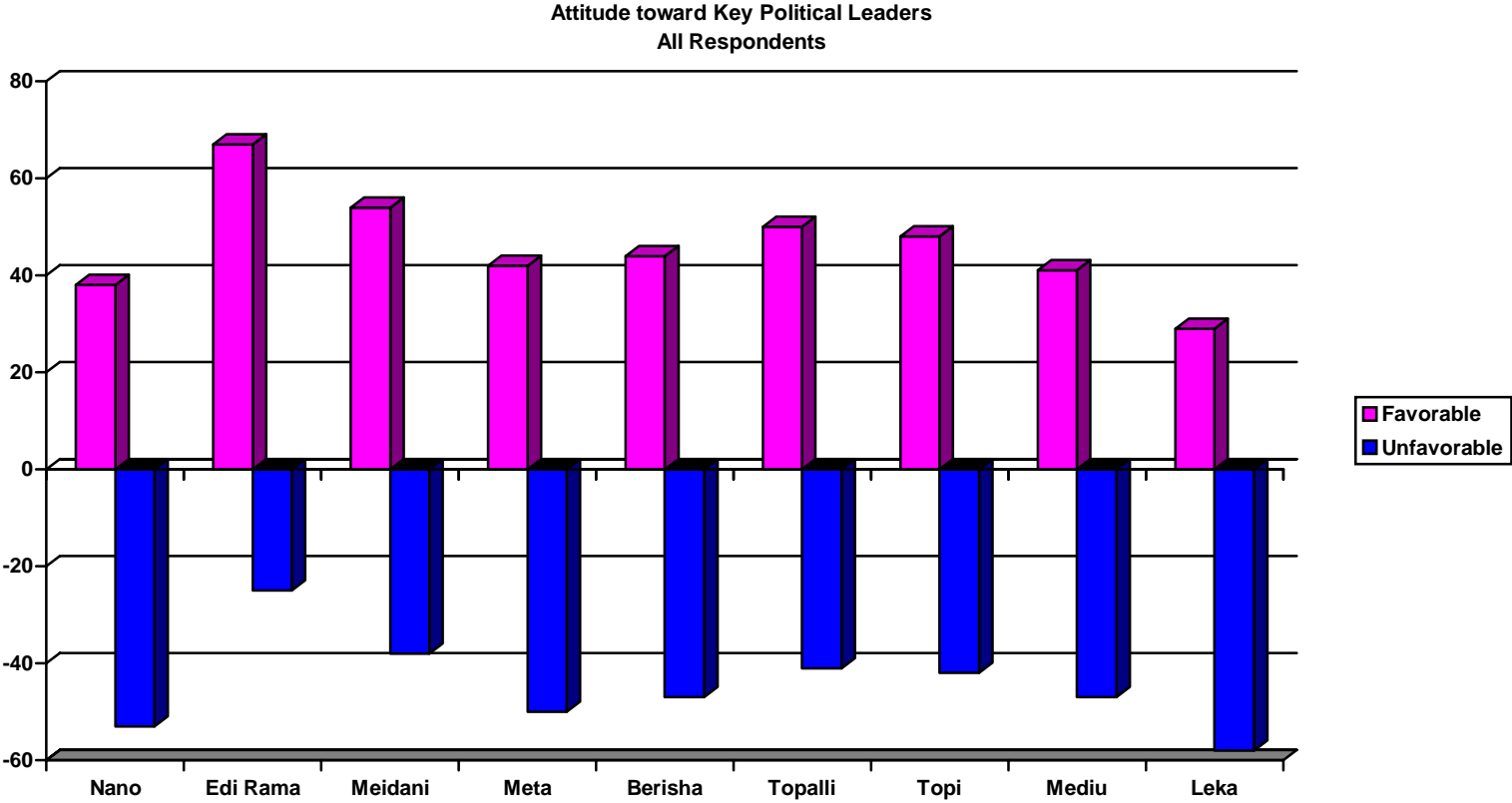
TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Respondents were asked how much they trusted the following institutions. Television and the International Community are among the most trusted, with the International Community enjoying the highest levels of complete trust. Political parties, NGO leaders, local government officials, the judiciary and newspapers all enjoy less than 50 percent trust.

Trust in Institutions



ATTITUDE TOWARD KEY POLITICAL LEADERS



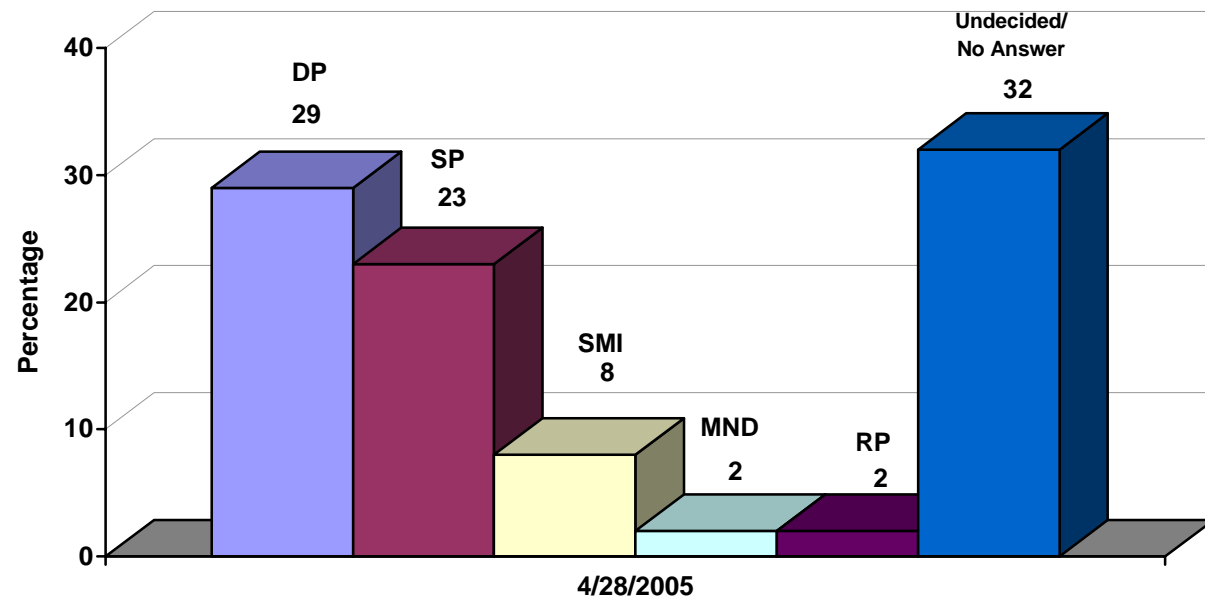
VOTE INTENTION

“If general elections in Albania were to be conducted this week, for which party would you probably vote?”

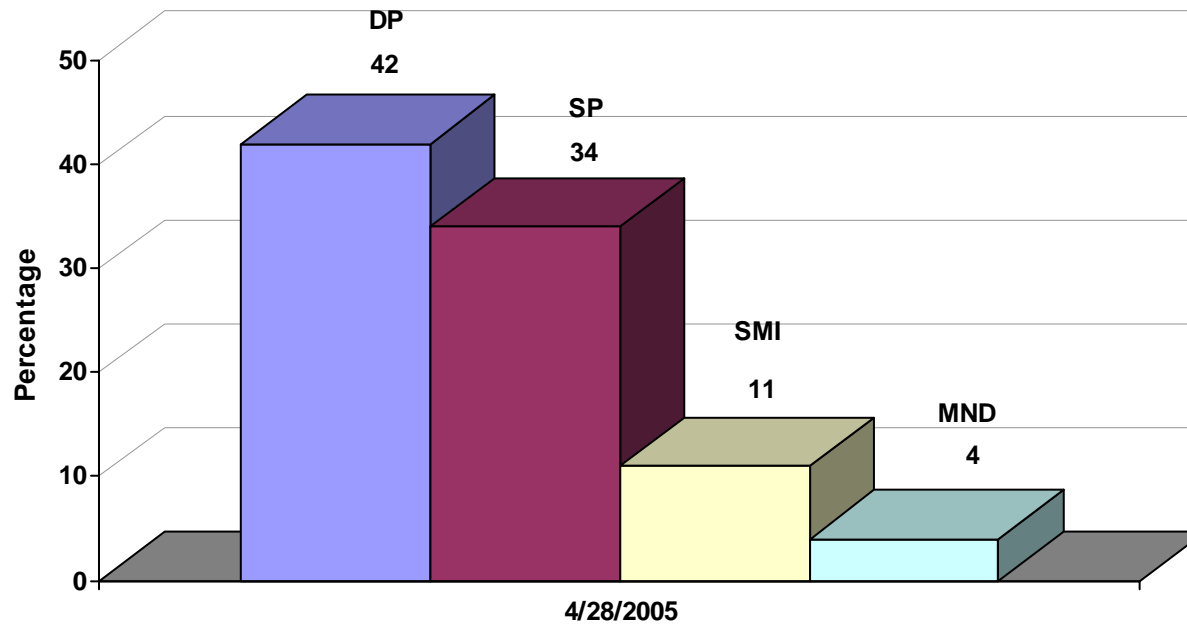
Urban voters are more inclined towards DP, SMI and MND, while SP retains a slight lead in rural areas and among pensioners. While weaker with pensioners, the DP has an edge among the unemployed.

Democratic Party (DP), Socialist Party (SP), Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), Movement for National Development (MND), Republican Party (RP)
All other parties received less than 2 percent of support among respondents sampled.
Undecided/No answer includes those who answered “don’t know,” “can’t decide,” “no answer,” and “don’t want to answer.”

All Respondents



Decided Voters Only*



Democratic Party (DP); Socialist Party (SP); Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI); Movement for National Development (MND); Republican Party (RP); Social Democratic Party (SDP); Human Rights Union Party (HRUP)

* **Decided Voters:** In the world of public opinion polling, it is said that, on election day, the ‘undecideds’ and ‘no answers’ will make choices in equal proportion to those who have currently decided. Thus, pollsters will distribute the undecided respondents and those not answering proportionally among the parties and show the results for decided voters only.