

## Citizen perspectives on Georgia's pre-election environment

### Introduction

The October 1st parliamentary elections constitute the first peaceful transfer of power in Georgia's history, with the Georgian Dream coalition gaining a majority of the seats in parliament at the expense of the United National Movement. Moreover, they have radically redefined the political playing field in the run-up to the presidential elections of 2013.

With so much at stake, the elections were heavily contested and called for intensive monitoring by local and international watchdogs to ensure a free and fair election process. The pre-election period is here of particular interest, as monitoring reports of previous years have consistently shown a relatively large number of procedural shortcomings and incidents occurring in this period. While there is international monitoring of the pre-election environment, it is substantially less intensive than the monitoring of Election Day itself. Also, citizens, who are most exposed to the campaign environment in their district and are the ultimate beneficiaries of a fair pre-election process, have few opportunities to be involved.

The Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) and the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) sought to change this by empowering citizens to contribute to a fair and transparent pre-election environment by monitoring the pre-election environment in their district. They therefore selected 300 citizens across 10 districts to monitor the pre-election environment in their area and submit weekly monitoring reports. These reports were collected using innovative SMS technology and displayed online on interactive maps, in dynamic graphs and tables.

CRRC and CIPDD aimed to achieve three specific objectives:

1. Increasing citizen participation in monitoring the run-up of the elections, through selecting 300 respondents for monitoring the pre-election environment in their district and submitting weekly survey responses about their observations.
2. Contributing to a better understanding of the pre-election process from the perspective of citizens, through providing in-depth community-driven data on the pre-election conditions in 10 districts.
3. Piloting the use of innovative and powerful SMS technology that allows citizens to submit weekly questionnaires by SMS, and to prepare it for future elections in Georgia and potentially other locations.

For this citizen-monitoring project, which is the first of its kind to be implemented for any election in the South Caucasus, CRRC and CIPDD piloted innovative online and SMS tools and prepared them for potential use in future election-monitoring efforts. For future elections, these tools could enhance citizen engagement with the elections, provide incentives for all actors to comply with established rules, and could also inform the broader public on ongoing developments, so that they can articulate their responses on better evidence than otherwise would be available.

## Methodology

### *Selection of citizen respondents*

For this project, CRRC's district supervisors selected 300 citizen monitors across ten different districts of Georgia, to provide a good overview of contestable districts. For each district, the participant base consisted of three equally sized groups of respondents who self-identify as either pro-government, pro-opposition or undecided. CRRC and CIPDD selected these three distinct groups in each district with the aim of assessing how different groups would respond throughout the pre-election period. Through collecting weekly reports from a dedicated group of citizen monitors, the organisations collected structured baseline data that allowed them to compare eventual results against the data from the first weeks. The aggregation of all opposition supporters in a single group was solely done for the purpose of facilitating easier community engagement and coordination, and does not imply that all opposition voters and parties share similar views and can be perceived of as a united block. The chosen project approach - tracking change over time with already committed groups - is the same approach that would be used for focus groups, or panel surveys in which one tracks change over time.

### *Selection of districts*

From Georgia's 73 election districts, ten districts were selected that featured in previous CRRC research, allowing the project team to compare the outcomes of this project with previously collected, in-depth data about those districts. The ten selected districts are: Batumi, Gori, Kobuleti, Kutaisi, Poti, Rustavi, Tbilisi/Gldani, Tbilisi/Saburtalo, Telavi and Zugdidi. It is important to note that these districts are not representative for the whole of Georgia, and the 30 citizen respondents per district are also not fully representative of that district's population. The aim of this pilot project is not to provide a fully representative overview of the pre-election process in Georgia, but rather to provide an insight into how the situation in these ten districts develops over time.

### *Monitoring period*

The citizen monitors reported their observations throughout the seven last weeks of the pre-election period, from 13 August to 30 September (week 33 to 39). Week 33 was chosen as the starting point for our in-depth reporting, as this was the week in which the Central Election Commission announced the final list of election contestants, allowing us to produce a definitive questionnaire.

### *Questionnaire content*

The project made use of a 10-question weekly questionnaire, including questions about the visibility of parties' campaigns, the number and type of incidents witnessed and the perceived fairness of the pre-election procedures. To see the full questionnaire, please visit <http://myelva.com/files/questionnaire.pdf>. Please note that the codes shown in the right hand column of the questionnaire serve to assist citizens in submitting their reports by SMS (see further explanation below). The questionnaire was developed by CRRC with input from Georgia-based election monitoring organisations.

### *Questionnaire methodology*

Throughout the seven weeks leading up to the parliamentary elections, the citizen monitors filled out a weekly questionnaire about the pre-election conditions in their district. For carrying out this questionnaire, an innovative methodology was used that allows respondents to submit their questionnaires by SMS instead of pen and paper. Each week, the participants submitted their answers by text message to a central phone number, using

a set of predefined codes that allowed them to fit the entire questionnaire into a single text message (see the questionnaire for the code system used). CIPDD and CRRC carried out ten regional trainings to familiarise the citizen monitors with this SMS questionnaire format. This SMS methodology allows for swift, effective and relatively inexpensive data collection. Comparable face-to-face surveys take a longer time to process, in many cases only offering information weeks after events are over. A key advantage of the SMS methodology is that it allows citizens to flag up potential incidents as they occur, making this information immediately accessible to election stakeholders.

## Outcomes of the weekly pre-election monitoring

Insights provided by 300 citizen monitors throughout ten election districts

### 1. Campaign visibility

To assess which political party or bloc was most visible in each district, the citizen monitors reported every week which parties' street rallies or campaigns they witnessed in their district, which parties or blocs came to their door to promote themselves, and which party was most widely advertised in their districts through campaign posters, flyers and billboards.

#### 1.1 Visibility of different parties and blocs

**Of all parties, UNM's campaign was most visible.** Per week, more than one third of the citizen respondents (34%) witnessed a UNM street rally in their district, while 20% of the respondents was visited by a door-to-door UNM promoter (see Figure 1). The second most visible political bloc was the Georgian Dream coalition (GD), whose street rallies and door-to-door campaigns reached an average of respectively 27 and 12 per cent of all respondents per week. Other parties were significantly less visible throughout the districts, with the Christian-Democratic Movement's campaigns and door-to-door actions witnessed by 7 and 2 percent of the respondents per week, whereas no other party reached reach more than 2% of the citizen monitors.

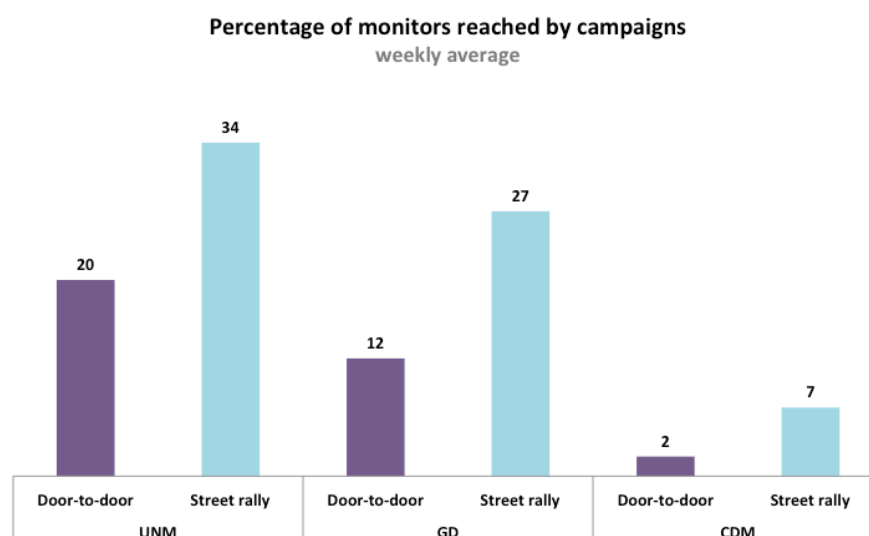


Figure 1: Percentage of citizen monitors reached by campaigns

Throughout the ten districts, **UNM was also most strongly advertised through printed campaign materials** such as flyers, posters and billboard placards. An absolute majority of the citizen monitors (55%) reported that UNM was most widely advertised in their district, followed at a considerable distance by the Georgian Dream coalition and the Christian-Democratic Movement, whose printed campaigns were deemed the most visible by 16% and 5% of the respondents, respectively. Like their street rallies, other parties' printed campaigns failed to make a strong impact, with only 3% of the citizen respondents perceiving their campaigns to be most dominant. Per week, an average of 21% of the respondents did not know which party's campaign was most pre-eminent in their district. Besides these partisan campaigns, neutral voter education campaigns implemented by local and international civil society also managed to reach a sizeable audience, as an average of 11% of the respondents per week witnessed such a campaign.

### 1.2 Influence of political preference on perception

**Citizen's perception of the campaign environment was influenced significantly by their political preference:** whereas government supporters systematically reported to witness more UNM campaign activities (i.e. a higher number of UNM street rallies, door-to-door actions and printed publications) than opposition supporters did, the latter reported a significantly higher number of Georgian Dream rallies.<sup>1</sup> Citizens who were still undecided on their political preference however were not more likely to witness one or the other campaign. Also, citizens' political preference did not affect how often they reported a non-partisan voter education campaign. These outcomes indicate that citizens are either more likely to consciously perceive or remember political expressions in line with their own convictions, or that they are embedded in social networks that are closely linked to certain parties, and in which more attention is invested in the activities of these parties. These questions constitute interesting material for follow-up research.

### 1.3 Geographic spread and local predominance

**The total number of political campaigns carried out per district varies greatly.** Whereas in the district with most campaign activity, Rustavi, more than half of the participants reported witnessing at least one street rally and at least one door-to-door action per week (63 and 54 per cent, respectively), the district of Saburtalo, which reports the lowest level of campaign activity, reports less than half of that, with 31 per cent of the participants per week reporting a street rally and 27 per cent reporting a door-to-door campaign.

As the campaigns of UNM and GD were much more visible than those of other parties, it is worthwhile to assess in which districts their campaigns were most visible, so that we can ascertain to which degree this might have had an effect on the election outcome in those districts, and whether there is a correlation with other factors such as the perceived tenseness of the pre-election environment and the perceived fairness of the process (see respective paragraphs below).

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<sup>1</sup> UNM rallies witnessed by 41% of the government supporters, 30% of the undecided voters and 36% of the opposition supporters. 25% of government supporters visited by a UNM door-to-door promoter, versus 22% of the undecided voters and 17% of the opposition supporters. GD rallies witnessed by 24% of the government supporters, 27% of the undecided voters and 29% of the opposition supporters. 11% of government supporters visited by a UNM door-to-door promoter, versus 9% of the undecided voters and 15% of the opposition supporters.

District	Street rally witnessed	Visited by a door-to-door campaigner
1. Rustavi	63 %	54 %
2. Telavi	71 %	45 %
3. Tbilisi/Gldani	68 %	39 %
4. Kutaisi	76 %	24 %
5. Zugdidi	59 %	33 %
6. Poti	56 %	31 %
7. Kobuleti	47 %	30 %
8. Batumi	50 %	23 %
9. Gori	49 %	20 %
10. Tbilisi/Saburtalo	31 %	27 %
Average	57 %	33 %

Table 1: Percentage of citizen monitors who watched a political campaign in their district, average per week. Districts ranked by level of campaign activity, from high to low.

Throughout the districts, UNM and GD's campaigns reached the largest audience. However, **there are marked differences in the geographic influence of both parties and their local predominance.** Whereas UNM's street rallies and door-to-door actions dominated the streets in Telavi, Kutaisi and Gldani (see Table 2), GD's campaign was dominant in Rustavi, Poti and Kobuleti (see Table 3).<sup>2</sup> **In districts where UNM's campaign was most visible, such as the three aforementioned locations, the perceived fairness of the pre-election process was significantly lower than in other districts.** For other parties' campaigns, there is no such correlation. For a further discussion, see paragraph 4.

District	UNM street rally	UNM door-to-door promoter	GD street rally	GD door-to-door promoter
1. Telavi	49 %	34 %	36 %	5 %
2. Kutaisi	64 %	14 %	18 %	7 %
3. Gldani	44 %	30 %	25 %	3 %

Table 2: Top three districts in which GD street rallies and door-to-door campaigns are dominant

District	GD street rally	GD door-to-door promoter	UNM street rally	UNM door-to-door promoter
1. Rustavi	49 %	23 %	21 %	31 %
2. Poti	39 %	20 %	22 %	11 %
3. Kobuleti	33 %	16 %	20 %	12 %

Table 3: Top three districts in which GD street rallies and door-to-door campaigns are dominant

Besides the street campaigns, both political blocs also carried out extensive printed campaigns through distributing campaign posters, flyers and billboard placards. **UNM was widely recognised to be most widely advertised through printed materials, in every single district.** UNM's printed campaign was dominant in all districts, but was perceived to be most

<sup>2</sup> The Christian-Democratic Movement was strongest in Kutaisi, Gldani and Rustavi, but never reached more than 19% of the citizen monitors.

dominant in Saburtalo, Telavi and Gldani, by respectively 76, 75 and 74 per cent of the citizen monitors.<sup>3</sup> The Georgian Dream’s printed campaign was less visible in all districts, but was most often perceived to be dominant in Rustavi (40% of citizens), Poti (27%) and Kutaisi (24%).

Traditionally, UNM receives most of its support from non-urban areas. This is also apparent in the vote results it obtained in the ten urban districts included in this project. Even in the three districts where its campaign was strongest (Telavi, Kutaisi and Gldani), Georgian Dream coalition won a larger share of both the majoritarian and party list vote.

#### 1.4 Attendance of street rallies

Of all districts, public participation in the political campaigns was strongest in Telavi, Kutaisi and Kobuleti, where an average of respectively 16, 16 and 13 per cent of the citizen respondents took part in a rally in any given week. The average participation rate per week for all districts combined was 10%, with two of the lowest scores being reported in Tbilisi (8% in Gldani, 3% in Saburtalo, see Table 4).

District	Participation in rally
1. Telavi	16 %
2. Kutaisi	16 %
3. Kobuleti	13 %
4. Rustavi	11 %
5. Poti	10 %
6. Zugdidi	9 %
7. Batumi	8 %
8. Tbilisi/Gldani	8 %
9. Gori	6 %
10. Tbilisi/Saburtalo	3 %
<b>Average</b>	<b>10%</b>

Table 4: percentage of citizen monitors participating in a rally, per week

As the citizen reports demonstrate, **there is a strong correlation between citizens’ political preference and their level of campaign participation.** Whereas opposition supporters on average were much more likely to participate in a rally of their party (45%) than government supporters (30%), undecided voters generally displayed the most apathetic attitude towards campaigns in their districts, with only 15% attending a rally. It is also important to note that, however unfair or tense the pre-election environment was rated in the districts (see appropriate paragraphs below), it seems like there was still sufficient space for public campaigning for different parties, as the campaign participation rate throughout the districts remained largely unaffected by the varying levels of fairness and tenseness.

<sup>3</sup> Citizens are asked to indicate which party is most widely advertised through campaign posters, flyers and billboard placards in their district. Only one answer is allowed.

## 2. Incidents and violations

Historically, the pre-election period in Georgia has shown a significant number of shortcomings and violations. Throughout the seven weeks before the 2012 elections, the citizen monitors reported 284 incidents:

Type of incident	Nr of times witnessed
1. Verbal aggression between supporters of different political parties	119
2. People being offered a financial or material reward for supporting a specific party or bloc	61
3. Government officials asking the citizen respondent about his or her voting preference	47
4. Fights or violent clashes between supporters of different parties or blocs	34
5. Intimidation of citizens by government officials or the police	10
6. Employers asking the citizen respondent about his or her voting preference	9
7. Fights or violent clashes between campaigners and the police	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>

Table 5: Witnessed types of incidents, ranked from highest to lowest frequency

### 2.1 Influence of political preference

Again, citizens' political preference has a decisive impact on their perception of the pre-election environment. **Different voter groups reported significantly different numbers and types of incidents in their district:** whereas government supporters more often indicate not to have witnessed any incidents at all in a given week<sup>4</sup>, opposition supporters report significantly more often to witness the following incidents:

- citizens being offered a financial or material reward for supporting a political party
- verbal aggression between supporters of different parties or blocs
- intimidation by government officials or the police
- officials asking the citizen monitors about their voting preference

Regardless of political preference, citizen monitors who were alert to political campaigns and reported more campaigns than average also reported more incidents.

### 2.2 Geographic spread

**The geographic spread of incidents varies strongly,** with the district with most reported incidents, Telavi, reporting ten times more incidents than the district with the lowest number of incidents, Rustavi (71 and 7 incidents, respectively – see Table 6).

Of the reported types of incidents, several have a significant impact on the perceived tenseness of the pre-election environment. Physical fights and verbal aggression between supporters of different parties contribute significantly to the sense of tenseness in a district, as well as the issuing of financial or material bribes, and attempts by officials to intimidate voters. On a personal level, **many voters indicated to find “my employer asking me about my voting preference” and “government officials asking me about my voting preference” to be the most concerning incident.**

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<sup>4</sup> 92% in comparison with 85% for undecided and 82% for pro-opposition

District	Financial material reward	Clash between supporters and police	Clash between supporters	Verbal aggression between supporters	Intimidation by government officials	Officials asking about pol. preference	Employers asking about pol. preference	Total
1. Telavi	20		17	15	4	13	2	71
2. Kobuleti	20		2	10	2	7	2	43
3. Batumi	9			18		11		38
4. Gldani	1		3	22		11	1	38
5. Kutaisi	6		8	9	1			24
6. Poti		3	4	14		1	1	23
7. Gori	3	1		12	3	2		21
8. Zugdidi				12				12
9. Saburtalo	1			3			3	7
10. Rustavi	1			4		2		7
Average	61	4	34	119	10	47	9	284

Table 6: Incidents per district. Districts are ranked from highest occurrence of incidents to lowest.

There is no direct relation between the overall campaign activity within a district and the number of witnessed incidents. In this respect, it is specifically noteworthy that the district with the highest campaign activity, Rustavi, also reported the lowest number of incidents. Also, the local predominance of parties in particular districts has not had a significant influence on the type of incidents being reported in that district.

### 2.3 Development of incidents over time

From mid-August to mid-September, the weekly number of incidents throughout the districts increased at a subtle but steady pace (see Figure 2). **This increase became however more pronounced in the week of 17-23 September, following the breaking of the prison abuse scandal on September 18<sup>th</sup>.** Although this week saw an increase in most types of incidents, the spike in the number of reports about verbal aggression between supporters is most apparent. This initial upsurge is only temporary however, as the last week before the elections shows a return to the average number of incidents reported before the prison scandal.

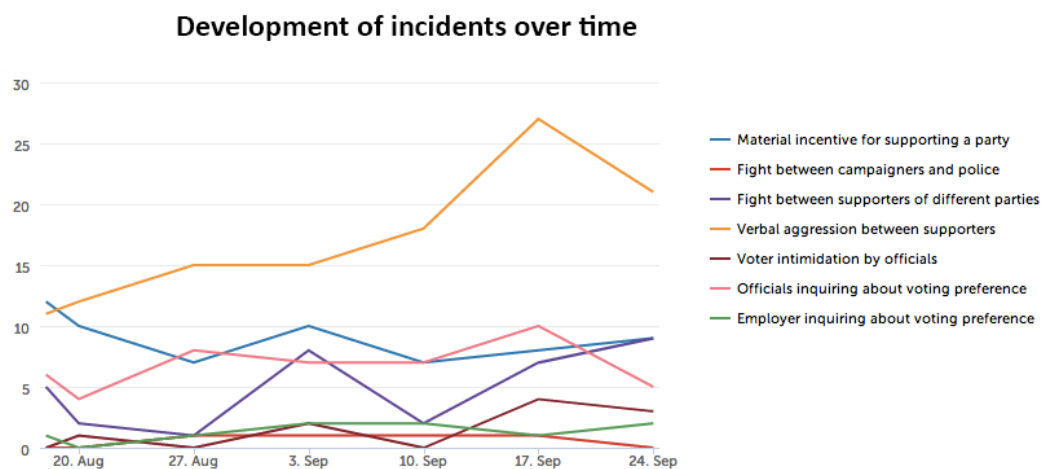


Figure 2: Development of incidents over time



## 2.4 Correlation between pre-election and Election Day incidents

Although the typical types of public incidents occurring during the pre-election period are not necessarily directly related to the violations committed within the walls of the polling stations on Election Day, one would expect that districts with many pre-election incidents are also more likely to exhibit significant shortcomings of the Election Day procedure. This assumption is however not corroborated by the citizen reports. While comparing the Election Day incident reports per district from electionsportal.ge with the incident reports submitted by the citizen monitors, this correlation appears to be absent (see Figure 3).

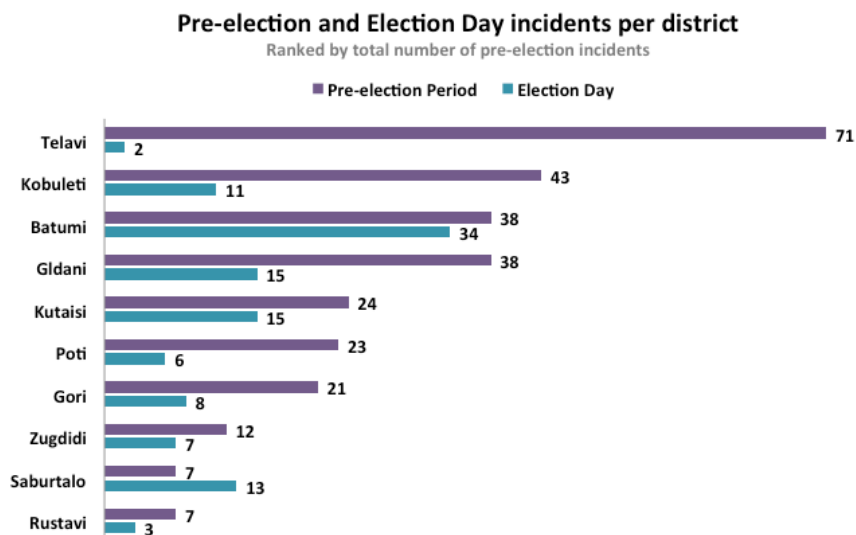


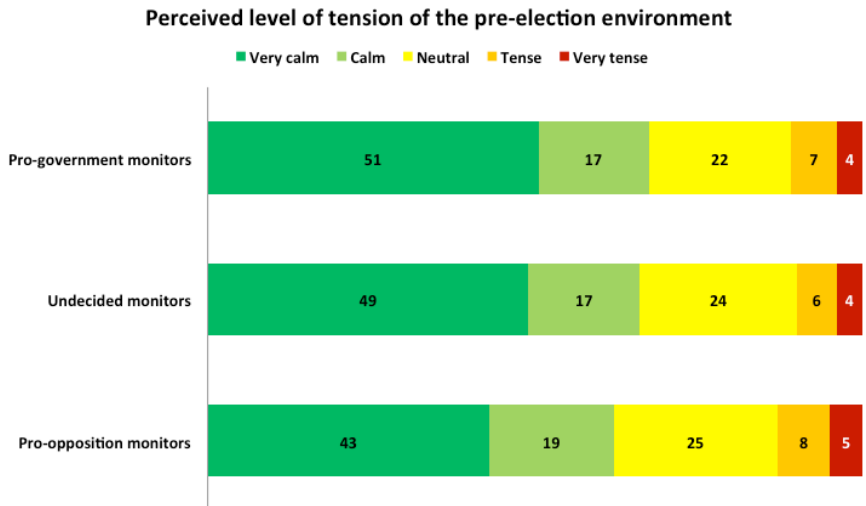
Figure 3: pre-election and Election Day incidents per district

For future election monitoring efforts, both by citizens and trained monitors, it would be useful to explore the potential correlation between pre-election and election incidents in more detail. As the types of incidents occurring during the pre-election differ markedly from election-day violations, and often involve different actors, it is possible that such a correlation is generally weak or absent. However, if the same group of monitors would report on both periods – in stead of the two different groups in this case study – a more visible correlation could potentially be exposed. This would potentially allow for a swifter detection of Election Day risk areas.

## 3. Tenseness of the pre-election environment

Throughout the ten districts, most citizens reported that the pre-election climate was calm or very calm (65%). A further 23% of the respondents answered that the climate was neither calm nor tense, whereas 12% indicated that the pre-election climate in their district was tense or very tense. Throughout the seven reporting weeks, all districts reported to be “calm” on average, except for Kobuleti, which reported a “neutral” sense of tenseness.

**Citizens’ perception of the tenseness of the pre-election environment is significantly correlated with their political preference.** In specific, a slightly higher percentage of opposition supporters perceive the situation in their district to be tense than government supporters (see Figure 4).



**Figure 3: Correlation between political preference and perception of the level of tension in the pre-election environment**

As mentioned before, physical fights and verbal aggression between supporters of different parties contribute significantly to the sense of tenseness in a district, as well as financial or material bribes, and attempts by officials to intimidate voters.

Citizens who report a less fair pre-election environment are also more likely to report a more tense environment. On a district level however, there is counter-intuitively no significant relation between how tense the pre-election environment is perceived to be and how fair it is perceived to be. To explore why this is, more in-depth qualitative research (for instance focus groups) would be necessary.

From mid-August to mid-September, the pre-election environment in most districts was reported as “calm”, and in a few cases even as “very calm”. In the third week of September however, the breaking of the prison abuse scandal put an end to this pervasive calm. Although no single district reported a “tense” pre-election climate, in most districts the sense of tenseness increased from “calm” to “neutral” in this week. This remained the predominant sense until the elections on 1 October.

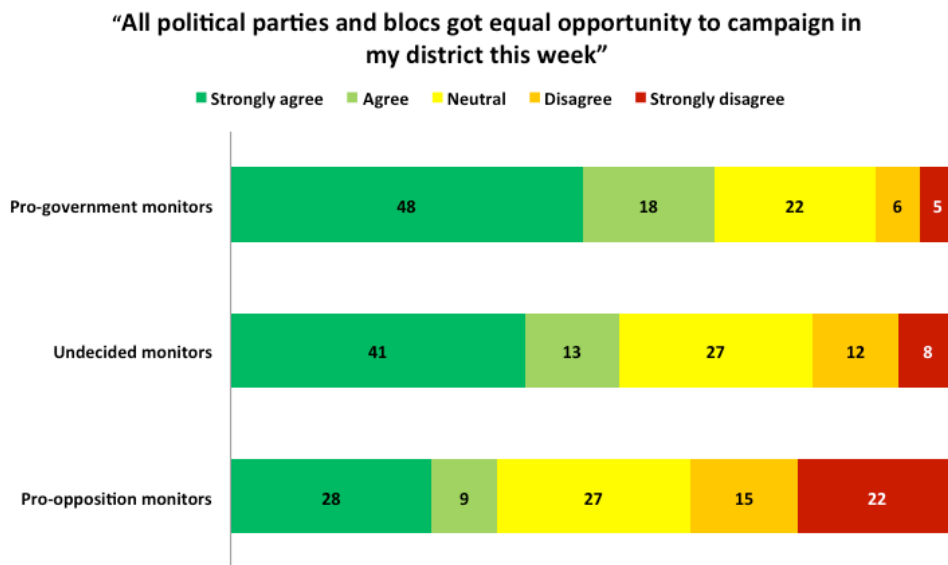
#### 4. Fairness of the pre-election process

**Most citizen monitors perceived the pre-election environment in their district to be relatively fair.** When asked to comment on the statement “all political parties and blocs got equal opportunity to campaign in my district this week”, the majority of them (52%) (strongly) agreed, whereas 25% remained neutral and 23% (strongly) disagreed. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very unfair” and 5 being “very fair”, no district scored lower than a 3,2. The highest score was reported in Rustavi, with a 4,1.<sup>5</sup> This overall degree of fairness remained stable throughout the seven-week reporting period.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, **opposition supporters rated the pre-election environment in their district much less fair than undecided voters and government supporters.** Whereas 37% of the opposition supporters rated the pre-election climate in their district as (very) unfair, only

<sup>5</sup> “all political parties and blocs got equal opportunity to campaign in my district this week”. Equal opportunities for parties to campaign (fairness)  
On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “completely unequal” and 5 being “completely equal”.

20% of the undecided voters and 11% of the government supporters did similarly (see Figure 5).



**Figure 4: "All political parties and blocs got equal opportunity to campaign in my district this week". Answers per voter group.**

As mentioned previously, in districts where UNM’s campaign was most visible, citizens rated the fairness significantly lower than in other districts. Whether this indicates that opposition forces indeed got less opportunity to campaign, or whether opposition supporters simply perceived the environment to be less fair is a question that could be explored through further qualitative, focus group-type research.

This project is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the Eurasia Partnership Foundation / CRRC and CIPDD and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

