

IRI Kazakhstan Index

Social Indicators

In general while the population remains highly optimistic about the direction of the country, the survey clearly shows that voters are increasingly pessimistic about the economy.

A majority of voters feel the country is headed in the right direction (72 percent right track; 14 percent wrong track). This represents a five percent increase in those responding that the country was headed in the right direction and a four percent drop in those responding that the country was headed in the wrong direction when compared to IRI's August 2008 poll.

A majority of voters say that their personal economic situation has worsened or remained the same in the past year (21 percent improved; 33 percent worsened; 43 percent remained the same). When compared to the August 2008 IRI poll, this represents a three point drop in the number who indicate that their situation improved and an increase of two percent in the number saying it has worsened.

Kazakhs are increasingly pessimistic about their economic future. Thirty-three percent report that they feel the economy will get better over the next year (down 11 percent), while 23 percent feel it will get worse (up six percent) and another 32 percent feel that it will be about the same; 10 percent said that they did not know.

Issues and Attitudes

Driving the current pessimistic attitudes about the economy are the issues facing the country. Inflation and price increases, unemployment and possibility of losing a job and low standard of living are the issues identified by respondents as the most serious problems facing the country and these issues are generally long-term structural issues that require years to resolve.

Top issues identified by respondents were inflation and price increases (35 percent), unemployment and possibility of losing a job (21 percent), and low standard of living (13 percent).

The government's performance ratings, particularly on these issue areas, remain relatively low. The government's performance received its worst ratings on reducing poverty with 55 percent rating it poor, followed by employment and housing at 47 percent, and inflation and fighting corruption at 41 percent. Of all the issues addressed, availability of electricity and national security were the most positive with 57 percent and 52 percent approving of the government's performance respectively.

More than seven of every 10 survey respondents (72 percent) rate the government's handling of the problems caused by the global financial crises as fair or poor, while 22 percent rate its handling as good or excellent.

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While price increases continue to dominate the list of the most important problems, IRI has witnessed a decrease in the intensity of these issues. Ninety percent of voters expressed that they are concerned about high prices. This figure indicates a five percent decrease from IRI's August 2008 poll. When voters were asked who they blamed for high prices, 27 percent blamed the government for lack of a coherent economic plan and another 26 percent blamed merchants for being greedy and charging more than necessary; 14 percent said that no one is to blame and 13 percent cited corruption.

Corruption continues to be a major cause of concern and is recognized by the government as a serious challenge and a threat to Kazakhstan's economic growth and political stability. A plurality of voters (46 percent) say that the level of corruption has remained the same when compared to a few years ago, while 31 percent say the situation has gotten better and 14 percent say the situation has gotten worse. Seventy-four percent of respondents agreed that bribery is a usual part of doing business in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhs are optimistic that the current leadership is capable of significantly reducing the level of corruption. When asked if they felt that the current leadership was capable of reducing corruption, 52 percent replied yes and 26 percent replied no.

IRI's poll probed voters' perceptions about the levels of corruption among various institutions. The institutions that received the worst ratings were the customs service and universities with 69 percent citing high levels of corruption, followed by courts at 62 percent. Of all the institutions tested, the Office of the President and foreign companies were rated as the least corrupt with only 29 percent and 31 percent citing a high level of corruption respectively.

Elections

More than eight of every 10 respondents to the survey (81 percent) express their intention to participate in parliamentary elections if they were to be held next week. This represents a three percent decrease in those saying they were likely to vote when compared to the August poll.

For those respondents who are unlikely to participate (14 percent of this sample), the primary reason reported for not participating is general disbelief that voting will result in any change. Twenty-six percent claim that there is no use in casting a vote, nine percent claim that there is no one for whom they would vote and seven percent said that they had no motivation.

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When respondents were asked if elections held under President Nursultan Nazarbaev would be free and fair, 67 percent said yes and 12 percent responded no.

Respondents were also asked if they would support a hypothetical united opposition alliance. Seventeen percent replied yes, 33 percent replied maybe and 27 percent replied no.

Other Issues

When asked to agree or disagree with a statement regarding the potential outcome of establishing democracy in Kazakhstan; specifically whether democracy will force the government to improve its efforts in creating jobs and growing the economy and whether democratic reforms will increase the ability of authorities to combat corruption, 60 percent of respondents expect that these outcomes will occur as a result of increased democracy in Kazakhstan.

Since Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan was banned in 2005, its successor, Alga People's Party (DCK), has been unable to obtain registration with the Ministry of Justice. Today the party functions with a unique legal status of a political party "in the process of state registration." Voters were asked if they believed it was wrong for the government to deny legal status to a major opposition party. Thirty-six percent said that it was wrong, while 19 percent said it was not. A large percentage (45 percent) said they did not know or could not respond.

Voters were asked how many people are afraid to openly express their political views. Almost one-fourth (24 percent) said that a majority are afraid, while another 32 percent said many are afraid. Only 12 percent said that no one in the country is afraid to speak out politically.

Voters were also asked a question regarding religious extremism. When asked if they agreed or disagreed that this was a serious problem, 47 percent replied that they agreed, down six percent from the August 2008 poll.

Finally, respondents expressed a desire for the further development of the Kazakh language; 70 percent agreed that the government should implement more policies that promote the Kazakh language.

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