

Forty-four percent of respondents to an Irrawaddy survey say the NLD should not participate in the election, while 39 percent said it should.

A survey of Rangoon residents conducted by *The Irrawaddy* indicates that voters are divided on whether Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), should contest this year's general election.

Our team in Rangoon questioned 374 eligible voters, including civil servants, who are not affiliated to any political party. Two hundred men and women in the 20-40 age group were surveyed, while 174 were over 40.



In response to the question: "Should the NLD participate in the election?" 166 people out of 374— over 44 percent—said the NLD should not, while 146 respondents—39 percent—said it should.

Sixty-two respondents did not want to answer the question, with many saying they did not want to put additional pressure on the opposition party.

"Contesting the election means that the NLD is accepting the 2008 constitution," said a teacher. "The party must understand that, for the sake of the people, it should not accept the constitution. I believe the NLD should not compete in the election. The party still represents the will of the people."

A 35-year-old engineer said that he did not think the NLD should register for the election because the party has called for, through its Shwegondaing Declaration, the military regime to

conduct a review of the Constitution. He said if the NLD decided to take part in the election, it would be annulling its own declaration, which would in turn affect the party's reputation.

“The NLD has to expel Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners from the party in order to compete, so I don't think it should register for the election. It should not accept those conditions,” said a graduate student.

“The NLD cannot contest the election freely, so it should not take part.” said a woman in her 20s.

“The NLD cannot win the election, so it is better that it stays out of it,” said a civil servant.

Of the respondents who said that the NLD should not participate, the most common reason given was because the party was being forced to expel its leader and other political prisoners. The second most common reason was that the Constitution is unacceptable.

However, others favored the NLD participating in the election.

“The NLD has to contest the election in order to maintain its status as a political party. Otherwise it will be dissolved, resulting in greater difficulties for the democracy movement,” a 40-year old IT technician said.

“I think the NLD should register for the election,” said a retired headmaster. “People are on the party's side. If the NLD is dissolved, people will be left without hope. I think the party should consider that.”

Of those respondents who favored the NLD's participating in the election, the most common reasons given were related to the party maintaining its status within the political arena.

Those who declined to answer generally said they would accept the party's decision whatever it may be.

“The NLD is now in the middle of a crisis. We will let the party members decide by themselves and we will support their decision. They are our leaders,” said a 47-year-old female market trader.

“Our collective view may put pressure on the NLD. That's why we should not answer the survey,” said a retired army officer in his 70s. “We have to respect the decision made by the NLD members.”

The NLD has announced that it will hold a ballot among its members on March 29 on whether to compete in the general election or not.

Led by Suu Kyi, the NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 election, but was never allowed to take power by the military junta.