

RANGOON—In an *Irrawaddy* survey involving more than 500 people in Rangoon, nearly half said they do not intend to vote in the upcoming election if the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), does not contest it.



*The Irrawaddy* recently asked 520 Rangoon residents, both men and women, between the ages of 20 and 70, if they will vote in the election, even without the participation of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD. Two hundred and fifty-two persons (48 percent) said they did not want to, while 198 persons (38 percent) said they will vote even if the NLD does not participate. The remaining 70 declined to answer or said they had not yet made up their minds.

"I only support the NLD," said a 54-year-old construction engineer. "I voted for the NLD in the last election in 1990. If the NLD doesn't compete in this year's election, I won't have any party to vote for. I am not going to cast my ballot."

A 30-year-old woman said that she will not vote in an election without an NLD presence as she knows Suu Kyi's party alone. She said that she does not know any other party and is not interested in them.

"The election will be meaningless without the NLD," said a student from the Government Technical College. "All other parties contesting the election consist of people favorable to the regime. So, I am not going to vote."

A majority of those who said they will not vote without the NLD participating thought the party had made the right decision in not registering for the election. Some said they had made the decision not to vote as a means of boycott, because they respect the NLD viewpoint and decision.

"I don't think the election will be successful if many people, like us, do not vote," said a 28-year-old taxi driver. "People need to join hands and they shouldn't go to the polling station."

Those who said they will still cast their ballots in the election, with or without NLD participation, had different reasons for doing so, according to our survey.

“As a civil servant I have no choice but to vote. I won't be happy if the NLD doesn't compete in election and I will have to choose another suitable party and vote for it, but not the USDA [Union Solidarity and Development Association],” said a 53-year-old office worker.

He added that the regime will force civil servants and military personnel to vote in the election, and could also arrange to mark their ballots the way it wanted.

“If I don't go to vote, the authorities will get the chance to use my ballot,” a female trader said. “I can't let that happen, so I must vote.”

“We should vote because it is our right,” said a teacher in his 60s. “We must express our opinion. Also, [the election] authorities will convert our votes into theirs if we don't use them. I have thought about this and that's why I believe we should all vote.”

Most of those in favor of voting despite the NLD absence said they do not favor the opposition party decision not to register. Many said that people should vote in the election because during the 2008 constitutional referendum the election authorities had transformed unused ballot papers and advanced voting ballots into “Yes” votes.

A 40-year-old businessman told *The Irrawaddy* he has yet to think about whether he will cast his ballot in the coming election, as there will be no NLD candidate. He said that he will make his decision based on the political situation at that time.

“The political situation is changing all the time,” said an elderly man. “It will keep changing, so I can't say yet if I am going to vote.”

He said he believes the NLD was right not to register for the election, but that he was also concerned that NLD members would be driven out of politics due to the dissolution of the party, which would be a great loss for the people of Burma.

“The NLD is the party that was elected by the people,” said a retired headmistress. “I don't like the way the NLD members made the decision not to register for the election by themselves. I think they didn't pay attention to public opinion. People want the NLD to contest the election and they will vote for them. The NLD would surely win again if genuine elections were held.”