

Int'l survey shows Guyana's police least trusted in entire region

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An international survey conducted amongst more than 1,500 Guyanese has shown that the Guyana Police



Elizabeth Zechmeister of the
Latin American Public Opinion
Project (LAPOP)

Force is the least trusted police in the entire Americas region. The level of distrust was also highest amongst Afro-Guyanese. The AmericasBarometer survey was conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) which conducts surveys in more than 20 countries, including all of North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean.

At a forum held by the US Embassy yesterday, Elizabeth Zechmeister of LAPOP revealed the findings of some areas of the survey. During her presentation, Zechmeister focused on the confidence in institutions which provided justice and the rule of law.

According to the survey, confidence in judicial institutions and the police have declined sharply between 2012 and 2014. Further, the police force was indicated as the least trusted institution. Above it were political parties, the justice system, and elections. Zechmeister noted that, in other parts of the Americas, trust in police ranks ranked comparatively high.

Across the region, the police force was the third trusted institution behind the Defence Forces and the Catholic Church. However, Guyana had the lowest level of trust in the police of the region; on a scale of 0 to 100, Guyana ranked a trust level of 35.3. The survey also showed that countries such as Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Bolivia ranked just above Guyana. The neighbouring twin-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago ranked several spots above Guyana, while Jamaica too was a few spots ahead.

However, Zechmeister emphasised that the trend was not a new one. According to interviews carried out since 2006, Guyana's trust in its police has been steadily declining. She noted that Guyana's trust in its police had never been high to begin with and had never reached the levels indicated by many other interviewed countries.

In 2006, trust in the police had been recorded at 51.1. This dropped in 2009 to 48.1 and again in 2010 to 42.3. The trend changed slightly with an increase in 2012 to 45.8. However, Zechmeister opined that this increase might have been the "honeymoon stage" which followed the 2011 general and regional elections.

The trend returned on course in 2014 when Guyanese's trust fell to 35.4.

Furthermore, while trust in the police declined across all ethnic groups, the drop was most seen amongst those identifying themselves as Afro-Guyanese. In 2012, trust amongst Afro-Guyanese had been ranked at 41.5. This dropped in 2014 to 24.3.

Amongst Indo-Guyanese, trust dropped from 51.3 in 2012 to 41.49 in 2014. Those who identified themselves as 'other' saw the smallest drop from 44.11 in 2012 to 37.06 in 2014.

Zechmeister opined that the trend was an alarming one and said LAPOP attempted to understand the reasoning behind it. She explained the organisation considered crime victimization along with bribe solicitations as possible reasons. However, these options were ruled out as the survey showed that these issues had improved over the years.

The organisation then considered police responsiveness as a possibility and sought the views of respondents in determining the role this factor played.

"We wondered if police responsiveness could explain some of the trends that we were seeing," Zechmeister explained.

She said persons were asked a new question on how long they believed the police would take to respond to an in-progress burglary. She said the respondents were given a number of options, the fastest response time being under 10 minutes while the slowest was in excess of 3 hours. Zechmeister shared that a significant number of persons indicated that the police would take more than 3 hours to respond. She further said a quarter of the population indicated times of more than an hour, but less than three. Only 4% of persons said the police would respond in less than 10 minutes.

She admitted that the non-showing of the police was offered up as an answer by many persons though it had not been presented as an option. These respondents represented 11.6%, she said.

"They just offered; we didn't give them this as an option. They said none of our options worked for them, because the police would never come," she said.

Zechmeister continued, "The thing that really stood out to us was the decrease in trust in the judicial system, but particularly in the police. It is uncommon to see that type of sharp decline across all dimensions of the judicial system...and there is something going on here that is causing significant decline in trust in the police," she said.

She went on, "We're worried about that for a lot of reasons. For one, we worry that what's driving it is probably not good. We also worry because we know when people are victims of a crime the likelihood of them picking up the phone and calling the police depends a lot on their trust in the police. So, if you want people to engage the police and call the police, you need them to trust the police; it is troublesome."

Zechmeister expressed hope that the survey's findings will be used to inform new policies to attend to problem areas and would not instead be "left on the shelf to catch dust".

The findings of the survey come days after this newspaper reported instances of police abuse, including an attack of social activist Francis Bailey. Earlier this week, Bailey reported that he was being abused by the police after he recorded and published a video of young men rolling

marijuana cigarettes on the hood of a police vehicle.

According to Bryan Hunt, Chargé d' Affaires of the US Embassy, LAPOP is the premier academic institution carrying out surveys of public opinion in the Americas. LAPOP has over 30 years of experience. The AmericasBarometer was established in 2004 to regularly conduct surveys on democratic values and behaviours in the Americas.

The AmericasBarometer survey is carried out every 2 years and in 2014 more than 50,000 persons were interviewed.