

Int'l survey shows Guyana gov't not listening to its people

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

A recent poll coming out of the United States has shown that amongst more than 1,500 Guyanese, the country ranks very low in whether people believe that leaders are interested in what they think.

The international Americas Barometer survey was conducted by the Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and interviewed 1,558 Guyanese in 2014.

According to the survey, the perception that those who govern are interested in what the people think has steadily dropped over the years and Guyana was ranked very low amongst the Americas.

According to Elizabeth Zechmeister of LAPOP, the public held decreasingly low levels of external efficacy. She explained that the term focused on how people believed the government was listening to its citizens. Zechmeister, during a reveal of the findings, showed that external efficacy dropped from 38.2 to 30.7 between 2012 and 2014.

Guyana was only ranked higher than Belize and Colombia.

Zechmeister said too, that the feelings of external efficacy vary by region and ethnicity. She said those living in the interior and Indo-Guyanese were most likely to say that the government is interested in them.

Furthermore, 1 in 4 Guyanese who took part in interviews answered that politics was the most serious problem in Guyana. These persons represented 25.6% of respondents. Security was ranked slightly above politics at 27%. The economy was deemed the most serious issue at 31.5%.

Zechmeister said the survey showed that the percentage of persons who deemed politics as the most serious issue increased from less than 15% in 2006 and 2009 to more than 25% in 2014.

Meanwhile, trust in core political institutions has declined. Zechmeister showed that, between 2012 and 2014, trust in the executive, the legislature and the parliament had declined in Guyana.

Respondents were asked three questions; firstly, to what extent they trusted the parliament. Secondly, to what extent they trusted the President and finally to what extent they trusted the political parties.

For all three of the areas, trust decreased dramatically in 2014. From 2006 to 2014, political parties were less trusted than the Parliament and the President.

However, the survey also showed that young people have more trust in political parties than the older age demographic.

"We found that interesting because young people are sometimes cynical. In this case, they seem to be more on balance with optimism than others," Zechmeister said.

Furthermore, the survey showed that satisfaction with democracy had held steady until it declined in 2014.

From 2006 to 2012, the survey showed that, on a scale of 0 to 100, satisfaction with democracy had ranked above 43. However, this satisfaction dropped to 39.9 in 2014.

Guyanese's satisfaction with democracy also varied by age, region, and ethnicity, Zechmeister said.

By age, those between 18 and 25 were more satisfied with the democracy than the older cohorts. Those in the greater Georgetown area were also the most dissatisfied; this figure ranked at 27.47. Persons from Regions 2, 5, and 6 were ranked the most satisfied with a figure of 46.03.

Further, Afro-Guyanese were the most dissatisfied ethnic group; this group registered a satisfaction ranking of 28.5 while Indo-Guyanese indicated satisfaction of 48.1. Those who identified themselves as 'other' ranked at 39.6.

LAPOP is the premier academic institution carrying out surveys of public opinion in the Americas. LAPOP has over 30 years of experience. The Americas Barometer was established in 2004 to regularly conduct surveys on democratic values and behaviours in the Americas. The survey focuses on at least 1,500 voting aged persons in each country.

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