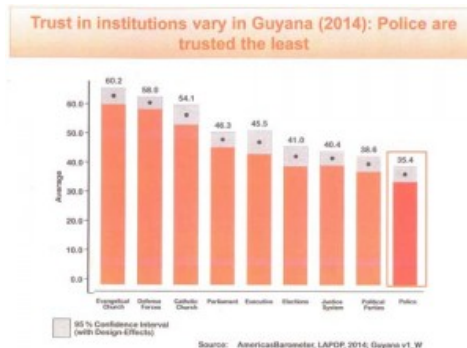


Politics blamed for lack of trust in Police Force

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- but Brumell disagrees that Guyana situation is worse than rest of Caribbean

By Dale Andrews



The revelation that the Guyana Police Force is the least trusted by citizens of this
<http://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2015/03/08/politics-blamed-for-lack-of-trust-in-police-force/>

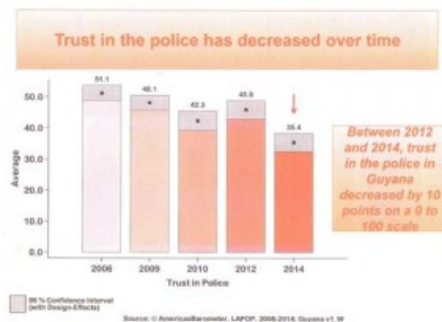
country is not

surprising at all; at least not to one former Police Commissioner and a current high ranking police official, who both agree that political considerations have a lot to do with the situation.

But former Commissioner of Police, Leroy Brumell, does not believe that the situation in Guyana is worse than those in some other Caribbean countries.

Last week's revelation, through the Americas Barometer Survey, that Guyana's police ranked behind others in regional volatile societies such as Jamaica and Trinidad in terms of public trust, might be a true reflection of the reality of Guyanese society.

The survey, which was conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), is in keeping with the Caribbean Human Development Report 2102, which had highlighted that in terms of confidence in their police forces, Guyanese are rated behind Trinidad and



Tobago among the seven Caribbean territories surveyed.

According to the LAPOP survey, on a scale of zero to 100, trust in the Guyana Police Force decreased by 10 points between 2012 and 2014.

"I don't know what criteria they used to come up with their findings...but I don't think that the Force is the worst among Caribbean countries," Brumell told this newspaper in an invited comment.

Brumell was at the helm of the Force, when according to the survey, public trust bucked a downward trend and showed a three and a half point increase from the previous documented period of 2010.

That period, according to LAPOP's Elizabeth Zechmeister, might have been the honeymoon stage which followed the 2011 General and Regional Elections.

However, the downward trend recommenced after that and reached its lowest point when Brumell retired last year.

In fact, for the period under review, the lack of trust in the police showed a peak in 2006, the year the late Henry Greene took over the Guyana Police Force and the year Bharrat Jagdeo was re-elected to office for a second consecutive full term, and when Clement Rohee was appointed Home Affairs Minister.

"We criticize ourselves a lot. But we had more good times than bad times," Brumell said.

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. She said LAPOP attempted to understand the reasoning behind it. She explained that 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.

But Brumell, while not going into details, pointed to some political considerations for the decline.

His view was supported by a current serving senior officer, who strongly believes that political interference has put a dent in the trust among officers themselves.

The officer said that he is not surprised by the findings of the report, since it is reflective of the corruption in the Force which is directly related to public trust.

Of course corruption must not only be seen in a financial sense but also as increasingly affecting the professionalism of members of the Police Force.

This state of affairs can be attributed to officials in authority who claim that their concerns are centered on policy decisions, since their very actions speak to direct involvement in placements and other happenings in the Police Force.

"We must not only talk about corruption, about people taking bribe on the road and that people don't trust the police and they don't want to go to the station to make a report because they won't get satisfaction; let's deal with the bigger issue."

The officer, who did not want to be identified, said that the political interference has over the years resulted in declining trust and respect that officers have for each other.

He reasoned that some officers are so bent on pleasing the political masters that professionalism is being thrown on the sacrificial altar.

"Let's start from inside first. The trust and respect is eroding daily and that is a direct result of the interference and the situation is not getting better," the officer stated.

However, there appears to be some light at the end of the tunnel according to the officer.

He said that it is evident that the present leadership of the force is very strong on certain issues that could lead to a return of some amount of professionalism.

"This present administration is fighting for the restoration of much needed professionalism, which in my opinion was eroded significantly during the last tenures."

He pointed to a recent matter where a foreign national breached the law of this country and attempts were made by a particular official to subvert the prosecution processes.

However, the move was strongly resisted by the Force's hierarchy.

These things, he said, need to be told so that some amount of trust for the police could return.

In 2012, the Caribbean Human Development Report showed that 53 percent of persons polled in Guyana indicated that they have some amount

of confidence in the police to control crime while only six percent said they have a great deal of confidence. Significantly, according to that report, Jamaicans who have been experiencing one of the highest murder rates in the region, have a high level of confidence in their lawmen, coming second only to Barbadians. Suriname, St. Lucia and Antigua were the other countries that were part of that survey. The inaugural Caribbean human development report was the subject of a three-day discussion among regional journalists and representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). During the discussions, it was observed that much consideration needs to be given to the low confidence regional citizens have in their security and judicial systems. This view was expressed by Jamaican Professor Anthony Harriot during his presentation to journalists on the subject. This was also supported by prominent regional media practitioner Wesley Gibbings, who noted that “declining confidence in the criminal justice system results in declining confidence in other state systems.” Meanwhile the LAPOP survey showed Political parties and the justice system also were among the least trusted institutions in Guyana.

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