

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – November 17, 2014

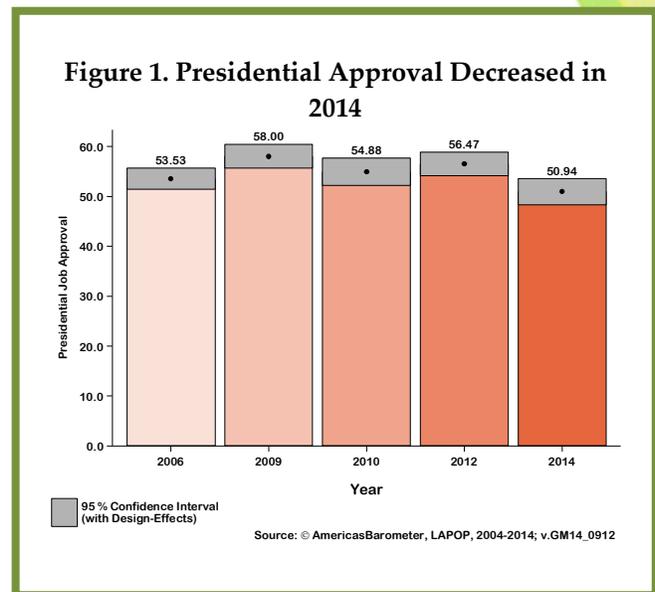
President Disbands the Legislature amid Declining Citizen Evaluations in Guyana

By J. Daniel Montalvo, Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, and Mitchell A. Seligson (Vanderbilt University)

Facing a vote of no-confidence from the opposition in the National Assembly, Guyana's President Donald Ramotar applied a little-known constitutional provision on November 10, to temporarily disband the Guyanese legislature, the *New York Times* reported. President Ramotar, who has held office since the re-election of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in November 2011, claimed that he had no choice but to resort to this constitutional tool in order to protect the economy from what he called "political gamesmanship." *Time Magazine* on-line reports that Mr. Ramotar accused the opposition of intending to "end the life of the 10th parliament with immediate effect, dashing all hopes for urgent attention to issues relating to economic growth, social services and, the holding of local government elections..." However, members of the opposition in the legislature, "who have a one seat majority," accused the President of acting in a way that is detrimental to the Guyanese democratic political system.

In this *Topical Brief*¹, we document that these developments in Guyana occur at a time of a decline in citizens' rates of approval of the President's job performance, a deterioration of

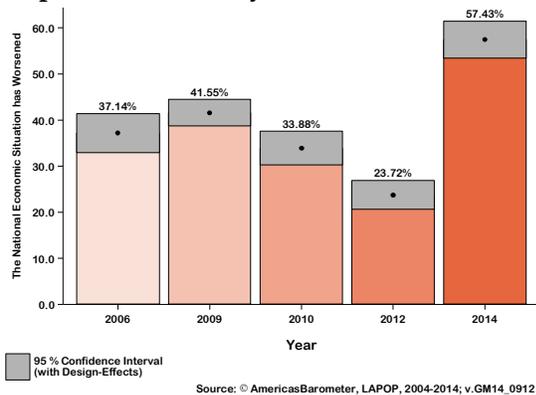
¹ Funding for the 2014 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and Vanderbilt University. This *Topical Brief* report is solely produced by LAPOP and the opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the point of view of the United States Agency for International Development, or any other supporting agency.



the perception of the national economic situation, and a decrease of trust in the parliament. Our measures of public opinion come from LAPOP's AmericasBarometer survey of Guyana, 2006-2014². Even though citizen ratings of these institutions and the political system as a whole have been relatively stable over time (around 50 out of 100 possible points), our data reveal that the political outlook for the Guyanese regime suffered a moderate but general reversal in legitimacy levels in 2014.

² Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

Figure 2. Over Half of the Guyanese Population Reports the Economy Has Worsened in 2014



Each year of survey, we ask respondents the following question: “Speaking in general of the current administration, how would you rate the job performance of President [Name]? Very good (100); Good (75); Neither good nor bad (fair) (50); Bad (25); Very bad (0)” (M1, recoded). Figure 1 documents that mean values on this presidential job approval measure increased after 2006 and then held constant until 2012. In 2014, however, the average decreased around 6 points on the 0-100 scale, in comparison to the previous survey year.

What explains this decline? At the theoretical level, some of it could be due to the normal popularity erosion that most newly-elected presidents face after the “honeymoon effect” has worn off. The 2012 survey in Guyana took place only two months after Mr. Ramotar had been appointed. Nonetheless, this decrease could also be due to more structural factors, such as popular perception of economic performance, citizens sensing that the government may not be able to successfully negotiate agreements with opposition members in the parliament, or a broader public perception of a government inability to satisfy citizen demands.

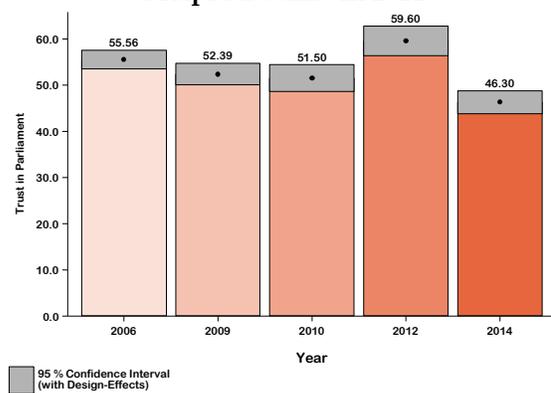
Looking at the objective data, however, we find that Guyana is a middle-income country,³ whose economy seems to be faring well: national GDP grew at an average rate of 5.1%

³ Guyana’s 2013 GDP per capita (PPP) is \$8,500, according to the CIA’s World Factbook.

percent over the last three years and its inflation rate was, on average, 3.2% (CIA Factbook). However, citizen perceptions tell us a radically different story. When asked “Do you think that the country’s current economic situation is better than, the same as or worse than it was 12 months ago?” (SOCT2), 57% of respondents reported that the economy worsened in 2014. As Figure 2 illustrates, this percentage almost *tripled* since 2012, with these negative evaluations reaching by far their highest level in 2014 compared to recent years.

Are these depressed economic evaluations the result of a recent shock in the real economy or a product of politics? Even though we are unable to provide a more nuanced answer in this short report, we can note that trust in the parliament has also decreased more than 13 points on a 0-100 scale between 2012 and 2014. Figure 3 shows the results of the question: “To what extent do you trust the Parliament? Not at all (0), A lot (100) (B13, recoded). Thus, we find that the current political upheaval in Guyana goes hand-in-hand with broad and increasing citizen dissatisfaction with Guyanese political institutions and what they are delivering.

Figure 3. Trust in the Guyanese Parliament Experienced a Sharp Increase in 2012 Followed by a Rapid Decline in 2014



What will the future bring? In the 2010-2014 AmericasBarometer surveys of Guyana we also asked about citizen support for the shuttering

of the legislature by the president in times of crisis.⁴ Across all years, fewer than 9% of Guyanese respondents expressed that such a maneuver would be justifiable. Thus, we conclude by noting that there is little reason to believe that the Guyanese public is likely to take recent events as a palliative to their brewing dissatisfaction.

References

"Guyana: Legislature Is Suspended," *New York Times*, November 11, 2014.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/world/americas/guyana-legislature-is-suspended.html?module=Search&mabReward=relbias%3Ar%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22RI%3A14%22%7D&r=0>

"President of Guyana Disbands Parliament," *Time*, November 11, 2014.

<http://time.com/3577442/president-guyana-disbands-parliament-south-america/>

"Guyana" *The CIA World Factbook*, November 11, 2014.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gy.html>

Dr. J. Daniel Montalvo is Program Manager of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). He can be reached at daniel.montalvo@vanderbilt.edu.

Dr. Elizabeth J. Zechmeister is Director of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and Associate Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. She can be reached at liz.zechmeister@vanderbilt.edu.

Dr. Mitchell A. Seligson is Founder and Senior Advisor of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and Centennial Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. He can be reached at mitchell.a.seligson@vanderbilt.edu.

The 2014 AmericasBarometer dataset will be available on December 1, 2014. Full results of the AmericasBarometer surveys in Guyana and the additional 27 countries surveyed in the region can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The full data sets are available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.

⁴ JC15A. Do you believe that when the country is facing very difficult times it is justifiable for the president of the country to close the Parliament and govern without Parliament?