

# The IDB-funded survey speaks volumes – part 1

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This week, the nation's leading newspaper, The Nassau Guardian, reported a relatively small part of the survey results that emanated from a massive research project that was conducted by Vanderbilt University and funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The survey results were as interesting – and illuminating – as they were instructive about many aspects of Bahamian society.

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Therefore this week, we would like to Consider this... what did this survey reveal about Bahamian impressions and perceptions of the society in which we live?

## Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)

The Bahamas survey results, a miniscule portion of which were published last week, were officially compiled by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). LAPOP, a leader in the development, implementation, and analysis of public opinion surveys, pioneered studies of democratic values of Costa Rica in the 1970s, a time when much of Latin America was entrenched in authoritarian and repressive regimes that restricted rudimentary democratic principles including public opinion surveys.

LAPOP's scope and size significantly grew as Latin America gradually embraced democratic principles and institutions and today LAPOP conducts public opinion surveys in almost every Latin American country, the United States, Canada and the Caribbean.

As its website explains: "LAPOP prides itself in employing rigorous methodology, employing carefully designed stratified and clustered national samples, dozens of pretests for each new questionnaire module introduced, the widespread use of handheld computers to collect the data, extensive training of interviewers by LAPOP faculty and staff, and free on-line access to all of our data. External evaluations of LAPOP have called its surveys 'state of the art'."

AmericasBarometer, which is housed at Vanderbilt University, is the best-known and most expansive regional survey produced by LAPOP and measures democratic values and behaviors in the Americas using national samples of voting-age adults.

In 2014, AmericasBarometer surveys covered 28 countries across the Americas. At that time, they received permission from our government to include The Bahamas for the first time since AmericasBarometer's inception.

## The Bahamas survey fundamentals

The Bahamas survey was conducted between June 17, 2014 and October 7, 2014 and presented the extraordinarily revealing perceptions of 3,429 persons who were questioned by Public Domain, a national market research and public opinion research firm that has conducted numerous polls on a wide cross-section of topics regarding local social, consumer and political behavior.

This survey posed questions to 3,429 persons on the major islands of The Bahamas, including 2,511 persons (73.2 percent of the total polled) on New Providence, 522 persons (15.2 percent) on Grand Bahama Island and 396 persons (11.5 percent) on Abaco, Andros, Eleuthera and Exuma and the Cays.

The survey was fairly equally divided between the sexes and comprised of 49.6 percent male and 50.4

percent female participants. The survey included individuals who were born as early as 1920 and as late as 1996, which means that the oldest participant was 94 years old and the youngest was 18 years of age. Approximately 60 percent of survey participants were between the ages of 18 and 41, and another 30 percent were between ages 42 and 60.

The interviews were as short as 20.58 minutes, with the longest interview lasting 192 minutes.

With few exceptions, the survey included a reasonably proportionate distribution of the percentage of persons from each of the constituencies of all the islands that were surveyed.

Of the participants interviewed, 3,303, or 96.3 percent, were either citizens or permanent residents of The Bahamas; 126 or 3.7 percent were not.

In all, 89.8 percent of the persons surveyed indicated that English was their mother tongue, and 88.5 percent of the participants were from urban areas, while 11.5 percent came from rural areas.

The survey has a sampling error of  $\pm 1.8$  percent. We believe that the demographic distribution and large sample size are sufficiently valid to persuade one to conclude that this is a statistically sound survey which generally represents reliable perceptions of the population taken as a whole.

## Survey topics

The survey addressed numerous qualitative topics involving participants' perceptions of the quality of life issues, performance of the government, the legislature, the judiciary, the economy, the police, crime and punishment as well as the delivery of public health services and attitudes about our educational institutions. In addition, there were extensive questions regarding religion, same sex marriage, personal experience with victimization, bribery, spousal abuse and corporal punishment, as well as attitudes about the presence of gangs and gun ownership in our culture.

## Survey results

This week, we will start our series on this landmark survey by reviewing a few of the survey results relating to quality of life issues, governance and the economy.

### Quality of life issues

Participants of the survey were questioned about their life satisfaction. Interestingly, 42.7 percent responded that they were very satisfied and another 46.3 percent were somewhat satisfied. A relatively low percentage, just 7.7 percent and 1.7 percent respectively, indicated that they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied.

When asked about the most serious problems facing our society, survey participants responded that the most serious issues included crime (39.4 percent), unemployment (10.6 percent), bad government (8.9 percent), corruption (8 percent), migration (5.3 percent), the economy (4.9 percent), violence (3.4 percent) and politicians (3 percent). There were two dozen other issues that received very low percentage ratings.

### Governance and politics

On a rating scale ranging from one to seven, with one representing a position with which the participant "strongly disagrees" and seven being "strongly agrees", they were asked whether "Democracy is a better form of government than other forms of government". In all, 66.2 percent of participants responded with a rating of seven or higher, indicating a major preference for democratic forms of government by Bahamians.

This closely aligns with the survey results addressing whether participants were satisfied with our democracy. 77 percent were either very satisfied or satisfied, while 19.9 percent were dissatisfied and 3.1 percent were very dissatisfied.

Seventy-six percent of the participants indicated that they were registered to vote while 22 percent indicated that they were not, while 75 percent indicated that they voted in the last elections and 25 percent responded that they had not.

Of those polled, 38.5 percent indicated that they identified with a political party while 61.5 percent indicated that they did not. Of those who indicated that they identified with a political party, 47 percent identified themselves as supporters of the Progressive Liberal Party, 39.5 percent with the Free National Movement and 13.2 percent with the Democratic National Alliance.

When asked how they would participate in the next general election, 24.5 percent indicated that they would not vote, 27.2 percent said that they would vote for the incumbent candidate or party and 45.8 percent responded that they would vote for a candidate or party other than the current administration.

Nine and a half percent of the survey respondents indicated that they believe that Prime Minister is doing a very good job, 37.4 percent that he is doing a good job, for a combined positive approval rating of 47 percent, compared with 32.2 percent who responded that he is doing neither a good nor bad job. 11.3 percent responded that he is doing a bad job and 9.6 percent indicated that he is doing a very bad job.

## **The economy**

When it comes to the economy, those surveyed were asked about both the national economy and their own personal economic status. As regards the national picture, 11.8 percent thought it was better than 12 months before, 41.6 percent thought it was the same and 46.6 percent thought it was worse. Meanwhile, 17.5 percent said their own personal economic situation was better than it had been 12 months before being surveyed, 51 percent said it was the same and 31.6 percent said it had worsened.

## **Conclusion**

In the next few weeks, we will examine other portions of this very enlightening – and in many aspects surprising – look at the way Bahamians feel about many issues. For the first time, through this survey, we are able to hear from the bedrock of the Bahamian society, those who do not call talk shows, vent their frustrations in print or otherwise make their rather negative views known to one and all.

With this survey, we now have a picture of those Bahamians who form the silent majority, the people whose efforts keep the nation, the community and the family on an even keel and whose hands on the tiller will navigate this ship through troubled waters and safely into the port called “the future”.

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