

Key Findings: Political Weather Analysis, June 2015

Editors' Note:

The SSA's Political Weather Analysis (PWA) aimed to provide a snapshot of the positions and opinions shared by Sri Lankans on political developments that had taken place in the country. This PWA was a survey conducted among 1,500 households across all the electoral districts in the country. The survey was conducted during the first week of June 2015, with the participation of about 80 highly trained field researchers. The respondents for the survey were randomly selected, and interviews were conducted using the face to face interview technique, with the help of a structured questionnaire. The key findings of this survey, carried out two months prior to the General Election of 2015, point to the early enthusiasm and belief in the promise of the Yahapalana project. These findings are shared here to provide the reader an empirical view of how Sri Lankans viewed the early promise of January 8th. As to whether the levels of optimism about the new regime is still the same more than a year after this study was conducted is very much an open question. The full PWA Report is available online at <http://ssalanka.org/sri-lanka-political-weather-analysis-june-2015/>

- When asked to assess their family's economic situation compared to one year ago, 37.5% of the respondents say that it has improved, while 38% claim that it has remained unchanged. The positive evaluation of the family's economic condition is markedly higher among the minority ethnic communities.
- Almost half of the participants, when thinking of the country's current political environment, feel that they are more free compared to last year. Another 37% believe that there is no difference in this regard. However, only 9% of the participants state that they feel less free in the current political environment compared to one year ago. While a majority of Sinhalese feel that there is no change in the status quo, an overwhelming number of minority ethnic communities (Tamil 82%, Muslim 68%, Up-Country Tamil 72%) state that the political environment today allows them more freedom, compared to a year ago.
- In general, a majority express their satisfaction with the performance of the present government, under President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. However, one third of the respondents state that they are dissatisfied. While overwhelming numbers of the minority ethnic communities express their satisfaction (Tamil 83%, Muslim 87%, Up-Country Tamil 84%) with the performance of the present government with regard to development, the Sinhala community expresses mixed reactions, with 42% claiming to be satisfied, and 46% claiming they are dissatisfied.
- Interestingly, the survey indicates that 71% of the respondents are unaware of arguably the most significant achievement of the Maithripala Sirisena government, which was to pass the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. This lack of awareness is higher among the Sinhala community (79%) compared to minority communities, while more Tamils seem to have developed an awareness (28%).
- Those who claim to be aware of the 19th Amendment seem to have noticed the limits imposed on the President, such as the limit to the number of terms an individual can hold the office of President, the limit to the duration of the term of the office of the President, and the reduction of presidential immunity. In addition, 13% who are aware of the 19th Amendment mention the establishment of Independent Commissions as a feature of this constitutional change.

- 75% of those who were aware of the passage of the 19th Amendment believe that it will have a positive impact on the future of the country. An overwhelming majority of all ethnic groups who are aware of the passage of the 19th Amendment share this positive view. However, 9.1% of the respondents believe it will have a negative impact on the future of the country. This opinion is mainly entertained by the Sinhala community.
- When asked to comment on the level of media freedom in the country compared to one year ago, 60% of the respondents claimed that the situation has improved, and that there is greater media freedom today. While 50% of Sinhalese respondents hold this positive view, the percentage of minorities who are of this view is significantly higher (Tamil 79%, Muslim 69%, Up-Country Tamil 80%).
- According to the survey findings, 43% of the respondents claim that there has been a certain decline in the cost of living when compared to a year ago, while another 25% claim that the cost of living in the country has remained unchanged. This figure is markedly higher among the minority communities with 66% of Tamils, 57% of Muslims and 52% of Up-Country Tamils reporting a favourable change over the last year. However, only 35% of the Sinhala respondents hold a similar view.
- The survey indicates that 20% of all respondents believe that there has been a movement in a positive direction in terms of infrastructure development, with a further 28% claiming that the status quo has remained unchanged in this regard. 31% report that when compared with the situation a year ago, they cannot be satisfied with the level of infrastructure development currently taking place. It appears that a sizable number of the minority ethnic communities (53% of Tamils, 35% of Muslims and 27% Up-Country Tamils) believe that there is greater infrastructure development today rather than a year ago, while only 10% of Sinhalese share this view.
- Almost 50% of the respondents report that the Rule of Law in the country has taken a positive turn compared to the previous year, while another 25% claim that there has been no change in the situation. While 41% Sinhalese note this improvement in the Rule of Law, more than 50% of all minority communities (Tamil 71%, Muslim 58%, Up-Country Tamil 56%) share the same view.
- 40% of the respondents claim that Sri Lanka's Foreign Relations have improved compared to one year ago. However, 33% claim that they are unaware of the country's foreign relations. Interestingly, only 33% of Sinhalese subscribe to this view, while 55% of Tamils, 44% of Muslims and 53% of Up-Country Tamils make this positive claim.
- Regardless of ethnicity, 49% of respondents are of the belief that the interests of their particular *ethnicity* is better served now compared to one year ago. Another 27% claim that the situation remains unchanged in this regard. However, only 33% of Sinhalese feel that the interests of their community are served now compared to a year ago, whereas a very significant percentage of minority participants (Tamils 79%, Muslims 79% , Up-Country Tamils 61%) opine that their interests are protected now compared to the previous year. Mention must also be made of the fact that 35% of Sinhalese feel that the situation is unchanged.
- A similar view may be observed in relation to the respondents' stance regarding the extent to which the interests of their particular *religious* communities have been ensured today compared to a year ago. 51% of the participants stated that they felt that the interests of their religious group had been served over the past year. 29% state that things are unchanged, while only 37% of Buddhists state that the interests of their religious community are better ensured today. A much higher proportion of respondents among the minority religious communities (68% of Hindus, 80% of Muslims, 57% of Catholics and 65% of Christians) feel the same way.
- A reasonable portion of the population (41%) states that the well-being of the Army is in better hands today compared to one year ago, while 22% feel that nothing has changed. There is no significant difference in this view across ethnic communities, as the data indicates that 41% of Sinhalese, 35% of Tamils, 43% of Muslims and 39% of Up-Country Tamils share this opinion.
- When asked whether relationships between ethnic communities will improve under Maithripala Sirisena's presidency, 68% were hopeful it would, while 15% claim that things will remain the same in future. This optimism is not shared in equal measure among the Sinhala community (42%) as compared to minority communities (Tamil 74%, Muslim 84%, Up-Country Tamil 87%).
- As per the survey findings, 84% of the participants agree that the government should intervene more to ensure minority rights. While 79% (which is the lowest percentage) of the Sinhalese respondents are of this view, 90% of the Tamil community, 89% of the Muslim community and 88% of the Up-Country Tamil community feel the same way.
- Similarly, 90% of the respondents agree that the government needs to do more to ensure livelihood security for war-affected individuals in the North and East of the country. There is very little difference to be observed among ethnic communities on this issue with 89% of Sinhala, 90% Tamils and 89% Muslims and 97% Up-Country Tamil expressing their agreement.
- When asked whether they agree with the statement "After the conclusion of the war, the interests of the Sinhala community have been ignored", a very small number of participants (16%) agree, while 68% of the respondents disagree. Interestingly, it is the Sinhala community (71%) who indicate the highest degree of disagreement with the suggestion that their interests are being undermined after the war.