



## Taking the Pulse Series, Part 1... PUBLIC TRUST

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(Contribution from Lawrence Lachmansingh, David Singh & Kojo Parris)

For nearly a decade, Saint Stanislaus College alumni Lawrence Lachmansingh, David Singh & Kojo Parris have been exchanging views around their enduringly common interest: Guyana.

In embracing differences of opinions, our interactions continue to be robust, respectful and empathic. Perhaps the quality of our exchanges comes from our bonding at our alma mater, but we have also come to recognise that our differences are opportunities for growth. More recently, we have begun to realise that our commitment to fact-based argumentation is a key reason we are able to argue passionately but with civility, and almost always arrive at a wiser conclusion than we began with.

We have therefore decided to model three pieces of analysis on the above experience at a national level, where much of the important discourse often inflames passions with little reference to the facts at hand. These pieces will be focused on the issues of trust, corruption and violence. We will strive to offer zero 'answers', while presenting the data in accessible, dispassionate, maybe even boring, prose.

We certainly cannot claim to have conclusively resolved any of the challenges Guyana faces, but we hope to contribute towards the forging of a wider, more comprehensive and trusting consensus on some key issues. Indeed, we know that to create policy, rigorous assessment of existing data and contextualising within a regional and global environment would be required.

If this effort proves fruitful in stirring fact-based public argumentation we will consider similar pieces in the future.

To assist us, we have tapped the University of Vanderbilt's Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). This survey of public opinion has been conducted in Guyana since 2006 and is perhaps the only such comprehensive dataset available. We consider that it is sufficiently objective to be used widely and without any serious challenge to its credibility. The dataset is available free of charge at The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), [www.LapopSurveys.org](http://www.LapopSurveys.org). We thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

We have worked also with an analyst from Corruption Watch in South Africa, unconnected to our part of the world, to analyse the data.

For those who wish to share their thoughts on these pieces, we may be reached via e-mail at [3Guyanese@gmail.com](mailto:3Guyanese@gmail.com).

Finally, we debated postponing this series until after the May 11 elections. Since these pieces do not impact on any particular political party, we agreed to move forward now.

THERE are three current systems of our democracy that are the subject of much attention: the national police, the justice system, and the national legislature. The Guyana Elections Commission, the national agency that serves as the chief steward of our electoral process has also received some attention and most recently, the media has reported that the Chair of the Commission expressed concern over the seeming distrust that people may have in its work.

We examine data from the LAPOP Survey to assess changes in trust in National Police, the Justice System,

the National Legislature, and Elections over the period 2006 to 2014. In the survey, the public was asked to assess the level of trust in the respective public institutions on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing "not at all", and 7 representing "a lot". The consolidated table is presented below, with an illustration of part of the results in graphical form. Our main points follow.

Firstly, more people surveyed have no trust in the national police compared with any of the other institutions reviewed, except for trust in Elections in 2006. The percentage of those surveyed who have no trust in the national police more than doubled from 2006 to 2014, moving from 13.9% in 2006 to 32.7% in 2014. "No trust" in the Justice System has also more than doubled from 9% in 2006 to 22.6% in 2014.

and increase in percentage of “high trust” (scores 6-7), improved in 2012. However, the gains in 2012 were totally reversed and substantially worsened in 2014 compared to any other year surveyed.

Only in regard to Elections, was lack of trust relatively close between 2006 and 2014 (26.2% and 27.7% respectively).

These initial findings and a more detailed analysis of the data would have us ask:

1. Have we truly lost the gains in trust we made in 2012, by 2014?
2. Flagging public trust in these important pillars cannot be a strong foundation for cementing our democracy, as we approach our 50th Jubilee Year. What will it take to retrieve the level of trust we enjoyed less than a decade ago or even better it?
3. Can we continue to experience this downward trend in trust without reaching a tipping point, and lose all the gains that we have made since we became a nation?

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