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The IDB-funded survey speaks volumes, pt. 3

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“Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it. They say a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but it’s not one half so bad as a lot of ignorance.”
– Terry Pratchett

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Over the last two weeks, we reviewed several topics that were included in the survey results that emanated from a massive research project that was officially sanctioned by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) under the supervision of Vanderbilt University and funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The survey was conducted between June 17, 2014 and October 7, 2014 by Public Domain, a Bahamian market research and public opinion research firm.

In part one of this series, we summarized the methodology and the demographics employed by this survey. This study constituted the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken in The Bahamas, both in terms of its sample size of 3,429 persons and scope of topics covered. We also briefly reviewed the survey results related to quality of life issues, governance, politics and the economy.

Last week in part two, we reviewed the survey results related to crime and punishment, the police, and the use of physical discipline in the home.

In this concluding installment in this series, we will continue our review of some of the survey results and Consider this... what did this survey reveal about Bahamians’ impressions and perceptions about the judiciary, attitudes about our educational institutions, the delivery of public health services and religion?

The judicial system

Last week we noted that in light of the plethora of print, broadcast and social media that pervade the public square regarding crime in The Bahamas, it actually appears that the fear of crime is more accurately descriptive of our attitude towards crime. This is also reflected in the responses to the question related to confidence that the judiciary will punish the guilty. Only 14.9 percent had a lot of confidence that the guilty would be punished, while 40.4 percent expressed some confidence, 26 percent had little confidence and 18.8 percent had no confidence that the judiciary would punish the guilty.

Those statistics are particularly instructive in light of the responses concerning whether our courts guaranty a fair trial. On a scale of one to seven, with one representing “not at all” and seven representing “a lot”, survey participants gave the following responses: 5.1 percent gave the possibility of a fair trial a rating of one (“not at all” likely), while 14.4 percent expressed a rating of seven (“a lot of confidence that the courts guaranty a fair trial”). A cumulative rating of 15.2 percent provided a rating between two and three, while 45.6 percent rated the guaranty of a fair trial between five and six. In short, a majority of the respondents (60 percent) felt that our courts guaranty a fair trial.

There is a strong correlation between respondents’ “trust in the judicial system” and their perceptions of a fair trial guaranty. While 7.8 percent indicated that they have no trust in the judicial system, 14.8 percent expressed “a lot of confidence”. A majority of the respondents (55.7 percent) expressed trust in the judicial system. This is very close to the 60 percent who felt that there was a guaranty of a fair trial, although it should be noted that there was a significant number of 40 percent who possessed just “some confidence” that the judiciary would punish the guilty.

Educational institutions

Despite the consistent commentary about the disappointingly low national grade average of “D”, most respondents (68.7 percent) were satisfied with public schools. Nine point two percent were very satisfied, while just 22.1 percent were either dissatisfied (17.6 percent) or very dissatisfied (4.5 percent) with our public schools.

Public health services

The respondents gave high marks to another frequently criticized sector: the public health system. Most respondents (71.1 percent) expressed satisfaction with the public health system. Ten point nine percent were very satisfied and 60.2 percent were satisfied while only 20.3 percent were dissatisfied and just 8.5 percent very dissatisfied with the public health system.

Religion

An overwhelming majority (86.1 percent) of respondents felt that religion was important, with 63.7 percent expressing that it was “very important” and 22.4 percent indicating that religion was “rather important”. Seven point five percent opined that religion is “not very important”, while 6.4 percent expressing the view that religion is “not at all important”.

Twenty-five point two percent of those surveyed indicated that they are Catholic, 25.1 percent described themselves as “Protestant, mainline Protestant or Protestant non-evangelical” and 38.8 percent were “evangelical and Protestant”.

The profession of faith or religious denominational identification aligns with the responses to same-sex marriage. Regarding the question about the approval of same-sex couples’ right to marry, an overwhelming 74.5 percent strongly disapproved while just 2.8 percent strongly approved. 50.2 percent of respondents did not approve of homosexuals’ right to run for office.

Overall commentary regarding the survey

While there were some persons who responded to this series on the IDB-funded survey with reservations about the accuracy and authenticity of the results, the following should be noted:

1. This survey represents the largest study ever undertaken in The Bahamas on such a broad range of issues regarding what we think of ourselves, our society and our institutions.
2. Identical questions were included in the LAPOP survey that is performed for 28 countries in the Americas, including the United States and Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean.
3. The survey was not conducted by the IDB; it was funded by the IDB but was actually performed by the well-trained and experienced staff of Public Domain, which is Bahamian-owned and situated here.
4. The survey was supervised by AmericasBarometer, which is housed at Vanderbilt University.
5. The survey included 3,429 persons which is approximately 3.5 times the usual 990 which is considered a valid sample size for The Bahamas by international, established survey criteria.
6. The survey was national in scope.
7. The survey had a sampling error of + or - 1.8 percent which represents a very high confidence level. Most polls and surveys have a sampling error margin of three percent, much higher than was applied in this survey.
8. The Bahamas government should be commended for agreeing to have this survey conducted because it reflects a plethora of perceptions from a wide cross-section of the local population on a wide range of topics.
9. The IDB should be publically thanked for funding this enlightening study.

The benefits

There are enormous benefits that will accrue to The Bahamas from this survey. First, it establishes a baseline for future analytical research about our society and its institutions. Secondly, this survey allows us to compare ourselves to other countries in which the survey was conducted. Finally, it provides a basis for more in-depth study and analysis of our society. Such further study can be facilitated by The College of The Bahamas and other public or private sector institutions that are interested in studying how we see ourselves and how we compare to the community of nations that has conducted similar surveys.

Conclusion

As noted by M’wale Rahming, president of Public Domain: “We were pleased to work with the IDB and Vanderbilt University on the LAPOP project. Social research is the most rewarding and valuable research that we do and for the government to embrace a project that aims to evaluate the quality of life that Bahamians enjoy is particularly encouraging. The sheer amount of data involved will keep researchers and analysts busy for a long time.”

There has been a lot of discussion in the public square about the need to prepare a national development

plan for the nation. For far too long, there has been scant information about data that can be used to inform public policy. This survey provides an excellent platform from which to launch further examinations about ourselves and our institutions.

The most effective manner of supplanting ignorance with informed data about ourselves is to systematically and methodically pry deeply beneath the strata of superficiality with which we have become too accustomed to cloaking ourselves.

As aptly stated by Terry Pratchett: “Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it. They say a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but it’s not one half so bad as a lot of ignorance.”

And, as we observed in an earlier installment of this series, a very clear picture is emerging of those Bahamians who form the silent majority, the people whose steadfast efforts keep the nation, the community and the family on course and whose hands on the tiller will ensure that this ship makes it through troubled waters and safely arrives at a vibrant and secure future.

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