

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that the ethnic conflict and war has taken a heavy toll on the Sri Lankan public. While endless studies have been conducted on various aspects of this conflict, none of these studies have attempted to capture the movement and changes in public perception over a period of time. The lack of such a repetitive study which could help capture the changing trends in public opinion, particularly towards the ongoing peace process, was identified as a significant void by **Social Indicator (SI), the social research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)**. The Peace Confidence Index study (PCI) seeks to fill this lacuna. The study, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) under the Governance and Institutional Strengthening Programme, Sri Lanka (GISP), will be conducted bi-monthly to gauge the impact of local and international political developments on public attitudes toward the peace process.

SCOPE

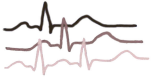
The purpose of this study is two-fold. One is to develop a numeric indicator representing the level of public confidence in the peace process using a set of standardised questions which will remain unchanged with each passing wave. The other is to use a set of questions related to recent social, economic and political developments, which by definition will change from one wave to another, in order to gauge public opinion in terms of the level of confidence in the peace process.

Such information, when collected over a period of time, will provide civil society and policy makers a useful barometer of the opinions of the Sri Lankan polity, and ensure that the collective opinions of the masses are given due importance and incorporated into the policy debate.

METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out using a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews amongst a 1,200 respondent sample distributed throughout 17 administrative districts. Care has been taken to reflect the actual ethnographic makeup of the country in the respondent sample other than the 3 districts in which opinion was not surveyed. In addition, SI surveys the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and border village communities, given the importance of ascertaining the opinions of those directly affected by the on-going war. Furthermore, a structured questionnaire was used in the gathering of information from the respondents.

The entirety of the Northern province, barring the welfare centres in Vavuniya, is not covered in the survey due to inaccessibility as well as problems of logistics related to the on-going war. Areas with a high-concentration of Tamils, like Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai could not

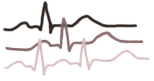


be fully covered.

Four waves of the PCI study were conducted in May, June, September and November of 2001. The results of these four waves offer us data for a comparative study on changing public opinion regarding key issues, ranging from the perception of war and peace to the proscription of the LTTE and the 2001 General Election. The results are subject to a 3% margin of error.

KEY NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE RUN UP TO THE OPINION POLL

- Lawyers for Lake House inform the Supreme Court that Lake House will not abide by the guidelines for reporting sent by the Elections Commissioner.
- The TULF headed alliance of Tamil Parties says the only way to solve the problems of the Tamil people is to accept their right to self-determination and recognise the LTTE as the sole representative in negotiations.
- Minister of Foreign Affairs Lakshman Kadirgamar, supporting peace talks, says that the country's ethnic problem can only be solved through an honest attempt made locally.
- The United National Party in its election manifesto has proposed an interim council as a remedy to the problem in the northeast.
- Power cuts lifted.
- Canada and the United Kingdom list LTTE as a terrorist organization and freeze funds.
- The JVP supports People's Alliance (PA) allegations about link between the UNP and the LTTE.
- The United States continues its bombing of Afghanistan.
- Escalation of election related violence reported in the media.



SELECTED FINDINGS

- The November wave reveals that a large majority (71.3%) cannot identify a time-frame for the onset of peace in Sri Lanka. It is also significant that 8.2% of Sinhalese, 13.7% of Tamils, 19.3% of Muslims and 16.5% of Up-country Tamils believe that there will never be peace in Sri Lanka. While a growing pessimism over the onset of peace is evident from May to November, it is also disturbing that the proportion of those who do not know and cannot tell when peace will dawn in Sri Lanka shows a steady growth.
- This study reveals that in November, 69.3% think that both parties should declare a ceasefire through mutual agreement - thus, the support for a bi-lateral ceasefire is high in November.
- What is also important is that when asked on how we can have peace in Sri Lanka, 71.9% express their confidence in peace talks. Placed in context, the uncertainty surrounding the onset of peace has to be juxtaposed with a very high percentage of those who believe in peace talks.
- 84.9% in the Tamil community believe peace to be the most important issue the new government should address.
- Reminiscent of 45.9% of those polled in September identifying the Cost of Living as the most important issue in the country, 51.8% in November identify the Cost of Living as an issue that would concern them when casting their vote. On the whole, voter concerns are equally divided between issues related to the economy and issues related to the ongoing ethnic conflict.
- 33.6% state that the election campaign has not informed them at all of the way to peace.
- Asked to what extent the election campaign influenced their attitude towards how peace can be achieved, 33.9% say that the campaign has no part to play in the shaping of their attitude. However, 32.1% also say that the election campaign is, to some extent, influential in the moulding of their attitude on how peace can be achieved.
- When asked what impact the new government would have on the peace process, 59.1% say they are unsure what the impact would be.
- Of those who agree that there is a close relationship between war, election violence and malpractice, the greatest number (32.6% nationally) believe it is on account of official security used as private armies and thugs.
- 74.8% believe that the freezing of LTTE bank accounts by the United States and the United Kingdom would have a positive effect on the peace process in Sri Lanka.
- Asked as to what kind of impact an interim administration would have on the peace process, 50.2% believe that it would have a negative impact.
- Asked as to what kind of impact the stance of the JVP on negotiations with the LTTE would have on the peace process (with the JVP agreeing to negotiations only if the LTTE gives up the demand for a separate Tamil Eelam), 43.9% say that it would have a positive effect.