

Centre for Policy Alternatives



Search our site

Mailing List

Would you like to be on our mailing list?

If so, please send an e-mail to info@cpalanka.org with the word 'subscribe' in the subject header and we will send you bulletins issued by CPA.

SOCIAL INDICATOR SURVEY ON ELECTION ISSUES

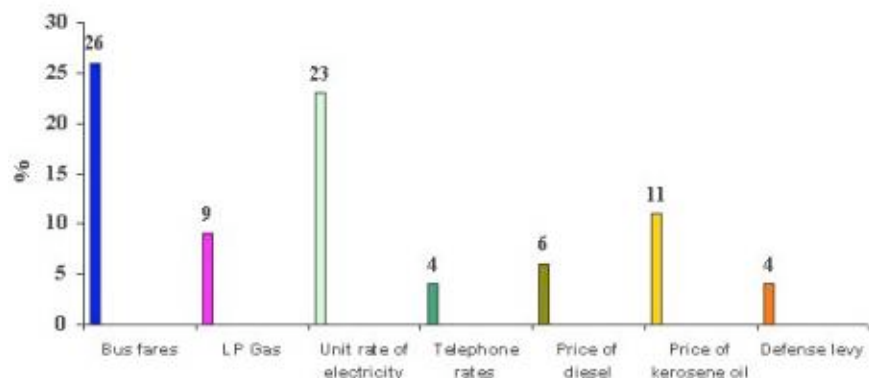
Public expresses views on Ethnic Conflict and forthcoming General Elections

In the context of the forthcoming general elections, there appears to be no dearth of opinions and theories as to what is best for the people of this country. Accordingly, Social Indicator, a private research organisation, embarked on a survey of 18 districts including some areas close to the zone of armed conflict, to assess the current situation of the Sri Lankan public, and gauge their views on what they feel is best for their future. The survey results show that compared to 27% of the population who believe that their quality of life has improved over the past five years and an equal number who claim that nothing has changed, 43% feel their quality of life has worsened over the past five years. There are mixed feelings about future expectations of quality of life, with 21% expecting it to improve in the next five years, 25% expecting it to get worse, 9% believing that nothing will change, and 39% being uncertain. Those between the ages of 18 and 24 have a more optimistic view of their quality of life than any other age category, with 36% expecting it to improve in the next five years. 34% of those between 46 and 51 years - the highest among any age group - expect their quality of life to worsen in the next few years.

Cost of Living

With regard to recent changes in pricing policy announced by the government, the increase in bus fares and increase in the unit rate of electricity are the most significant changes that affect the general public. While 51% believe that the hike in the cost of living is due to increased military spending, 28% blame it on poor economic management (*See Graph 1*). 46% think the increase in military spending justifies the increase in the cost of living, compared with 29% who say it does not.

Which of the following price increases affect you the most?



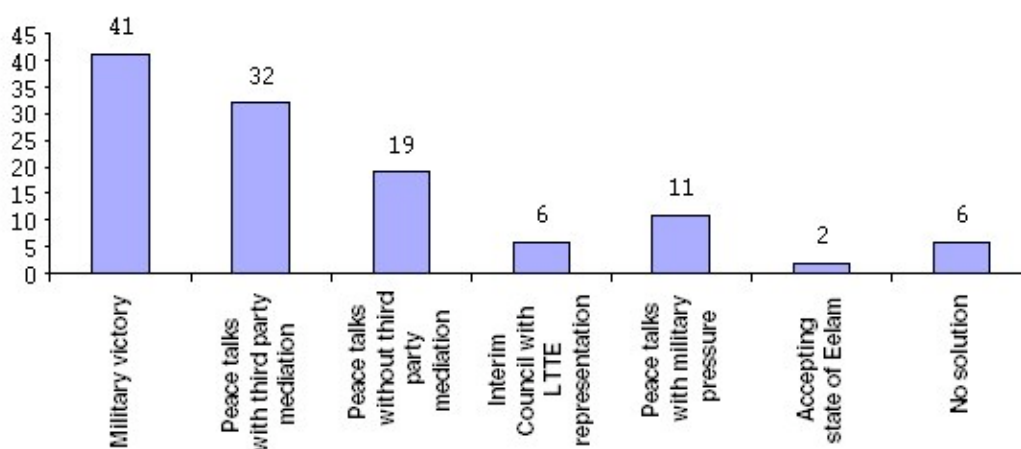
War Footing

Regarding the government's decision to place the country on a war-footing, 41% consider it a bad policy compared with 21% who think it is a positive decision, while 9% say it makes no difference and 19% say they do not know what to make of it.

Ethnic Conflict & Conflict Resolution

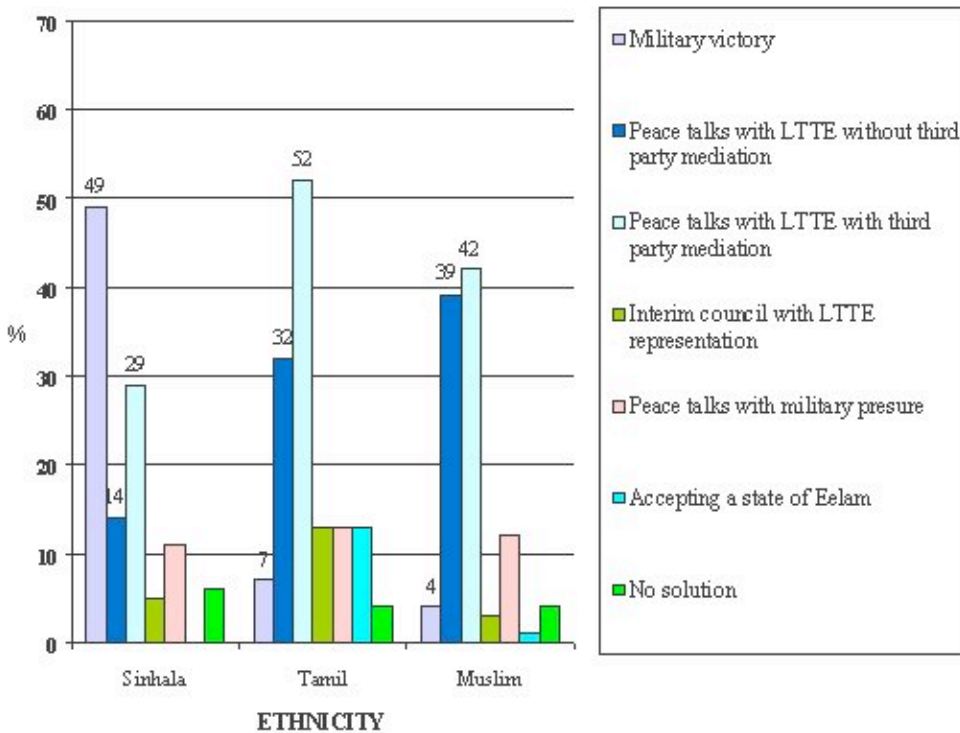
32% of the Sri Lankan public believes that the most effective solution to the ethnic conflict is peace talks with the LTTE with third party mediation. A further 19% feel that peace talks with the LTTE but without third party mediation is the best solution to the ethnic conflict. With or without mediation, an overall 51% of the population place more confidence in a negotiated settlement as opposed to 41% who believe that the most effective solution is a military victory. Another 11% opt for a combination of peace talks along with military pressure, while 6% have no hope for any solution at all (See Graph 2).

Which of the following solutions will end the North-East conflict



These figures, however, are more meaningful in the light of the variance of opinion on this topic between ethnic communities and the proximity of respondents to the military front lines. While 49% of Sinhalese claim a military victory would prove the most effective solution to the ethnic conflict, the majority of Tamils and Muslims opt for peace talks, with or without third party mediation (See Graph 3). Those closest to the war-front are less inclined towards a military solution in comparison to those living in areas further removed from the war-front.

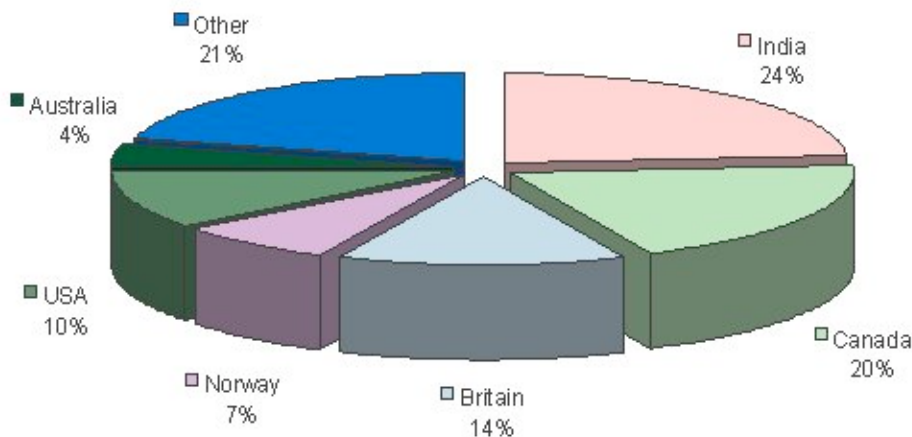
Which of the following solutions will end the North-East conflict



Ethnic Conflict - External Factors

42% of the public believes that some foreign governments are sympathetic towards the Sri Lankan government, while 58% believe that certain foreign governments are sympathetic towards the LTTE. Based on ethnic community, 61% of Sinhalese, 42% of Tamils and 41% of Muslims believe that foreign governments are sympathetic towards the LTTE. Of those who believe that foreign governments are sympathetic towards the LTTE, 24% name India, 20% Canada, 14% Britain, 10% the United States and 7% Norway as the specific governments viewed as sympathetic towards the LTTE (See Graph 4).

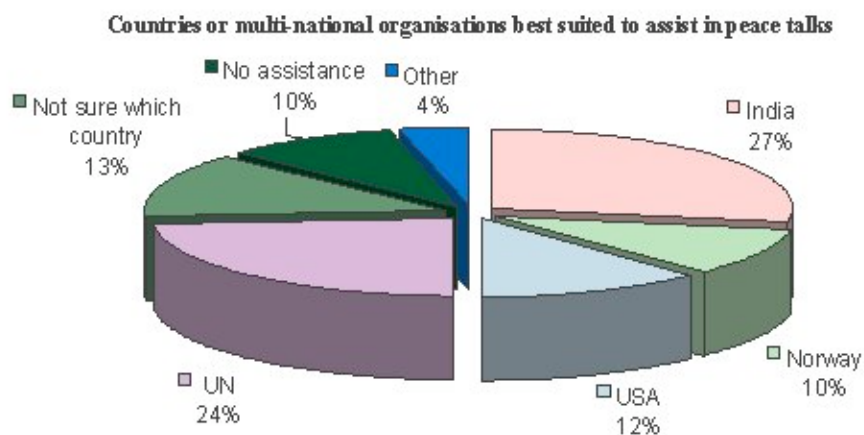
Countries thought to be sympathetic towards the LTTE



An overwhelming majority (83%) believes that this sympathy allows the LTTE to collect funds from various sources within those countries. However, while 89% of Sinhalese believe this sympathy contributes towards the LTTE's funding, only 37% of Tamils and 46% of Muslims share this view.

While 38% claim that the LTTE's survival is dependent on financial support from abroad, this is, once again, an opinion that is not shared by all ethnic communities in equal measure. 43% of Sinhalese, compared to 9% and 16% of Tamils and Muslims respectively, believe the LTTE depend on this financial support for its survival, while 52% of Tamils and 30% of Muslims claim they are uncertain about this. Further, while the majority of those close to the military front line are unsure about making such a claim, 40% of those in other areas are able to state a definite belief that the LTTE depend on financial support from abroad for its survival.

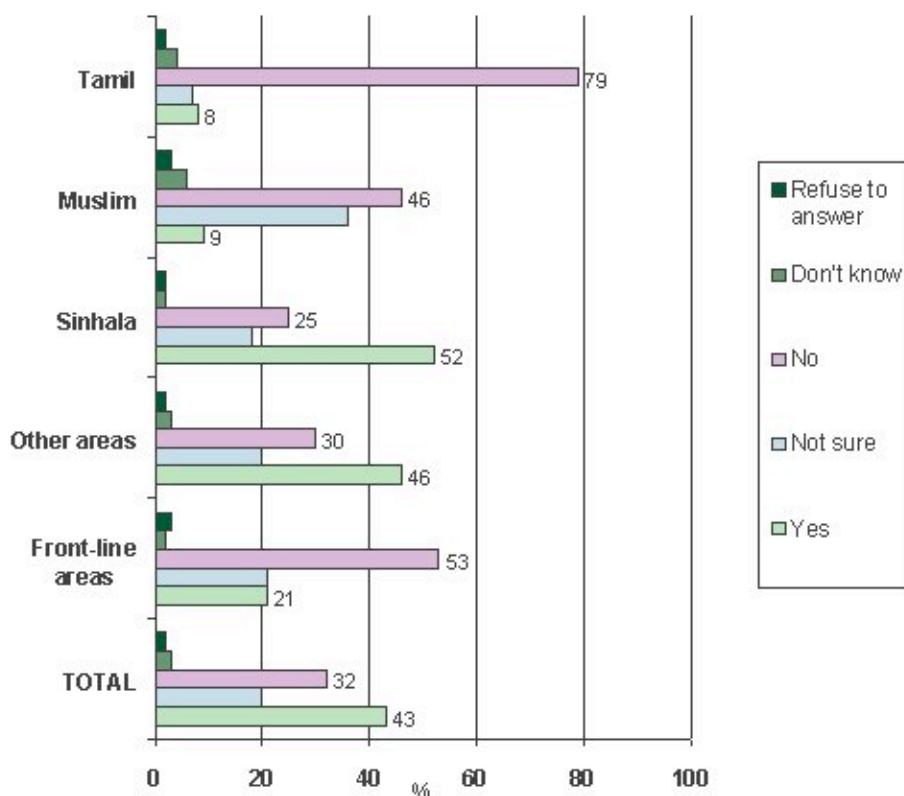
While India is considered the country that is overall most sympathetic towards the LTTE, it is also the country selected by 27% as the external actor (i.e. country or international organisation) most suited to assist in peace talks. The UN runs a close second at 24%, followed by 12% identifying the US and 10% Norway (See Graph 5).



Conscription

When asked if the public is likely to support conscription if introduced by the government, 43% claim they will support it, compared to 32% who claim they will not. This is an opposing view to that of those in the areas close to the zone of armed conflict, 53% of whom state that they will not support such a law, compared to 21% who say they will. Favouring conscription is not evidenced within the Muslim and Tamil communities. Although 52% of Sinhalese say they will support a law regarding conscription, 49% of Muslims and an overwhelming 79% of Tamils say they will not (See Graph 6). While 45% of those in rural areas say they will favour conscription if introduced by the government as opposed to 31% who say they will not, 40% of those in urban areas are against the introduction of conscription as opposed to 29% who are in favour.

If the government introduces a law stating that all citizens within a particular age group should join the armed forces/police, will you support this law?



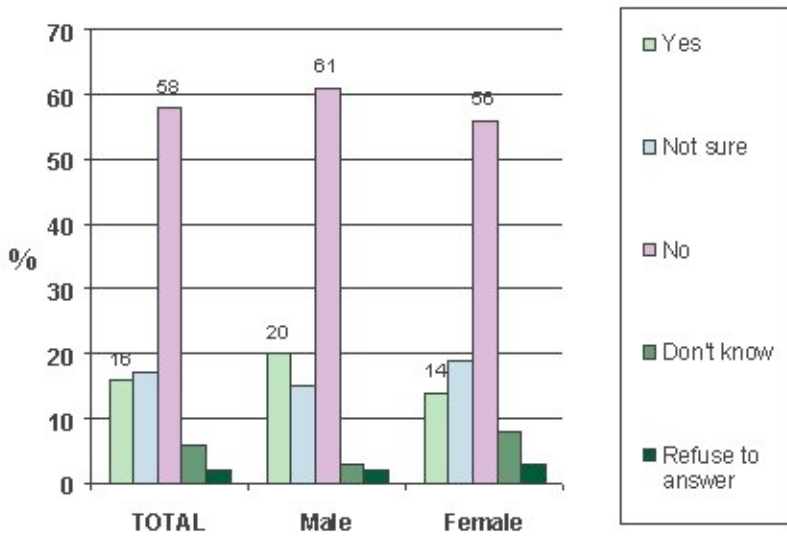
Constitutional Reforms

Surveyed in the wake of the debate over the proposed new constitution, 43% state that there was not enough public participation in the drafting of the proposed constitution. Only 11% think there was sufficient participation, while 45% are uncertain.

Conduct of politicians

A majority of those surveyed (58%) disapprove of MPs crossing over from one party to another, as opposed to 16% who do not have a problem with it (*See Graph 7*). When asked if it was important for politicians to be honest in their financial dealings, 63% were uncertain, while 16% refused to answer the question. Only 10% state that politicians should be financially honest, and 11% say it is not important for politicians to do so.

Do you agree with Members of Parliament crossing over from one party to another?

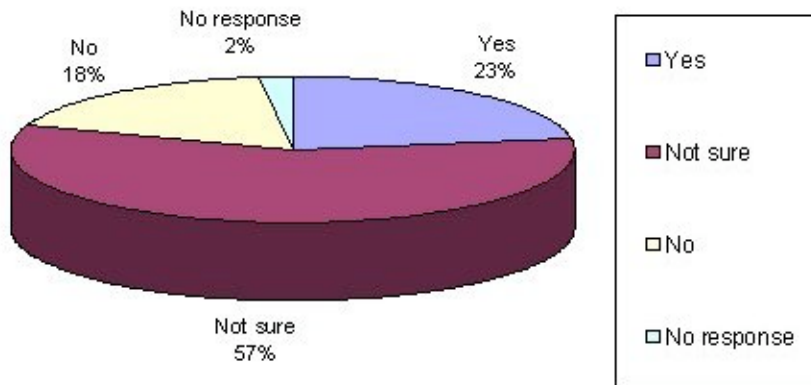


Elections - corruption and malpractice

Of the 922 respondents willing to disclose whether or not they will vote at the forthcoming general elections, 95% say they will definitely vote, while 4% are as yet undecided, and only 1% state they will not be casting their vote.

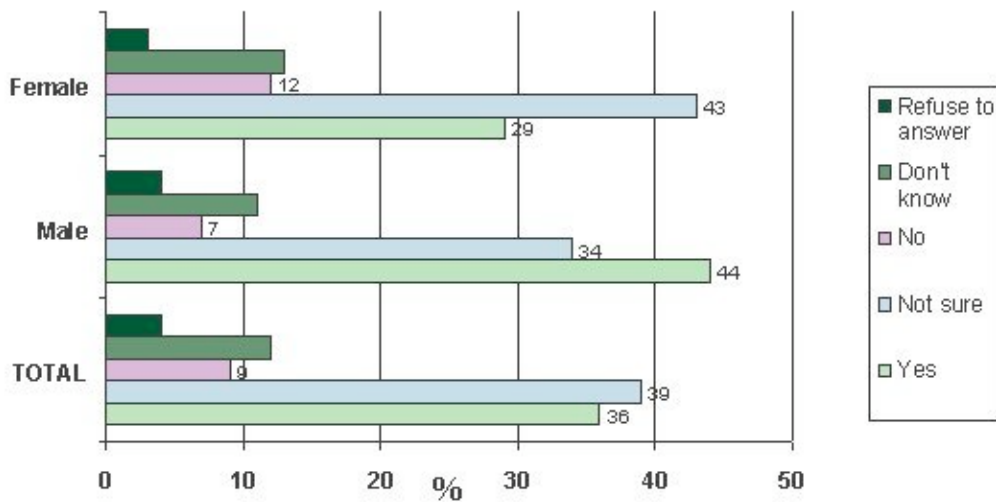
Expectations for a free and fair election do not seem to be high. Only 23% expect the forthcoming elections to be free and fair, lower than the 27% who thought the 1999 presidential elections were conducted freely and fairly. While 25% think the 1999 presidential elections were not free and fair and 25% are not sure, 18% do not expect the coming elections to be free and fair and 59% are uncertain (See Graph 8).

Do you think the general elections will be free and fair?



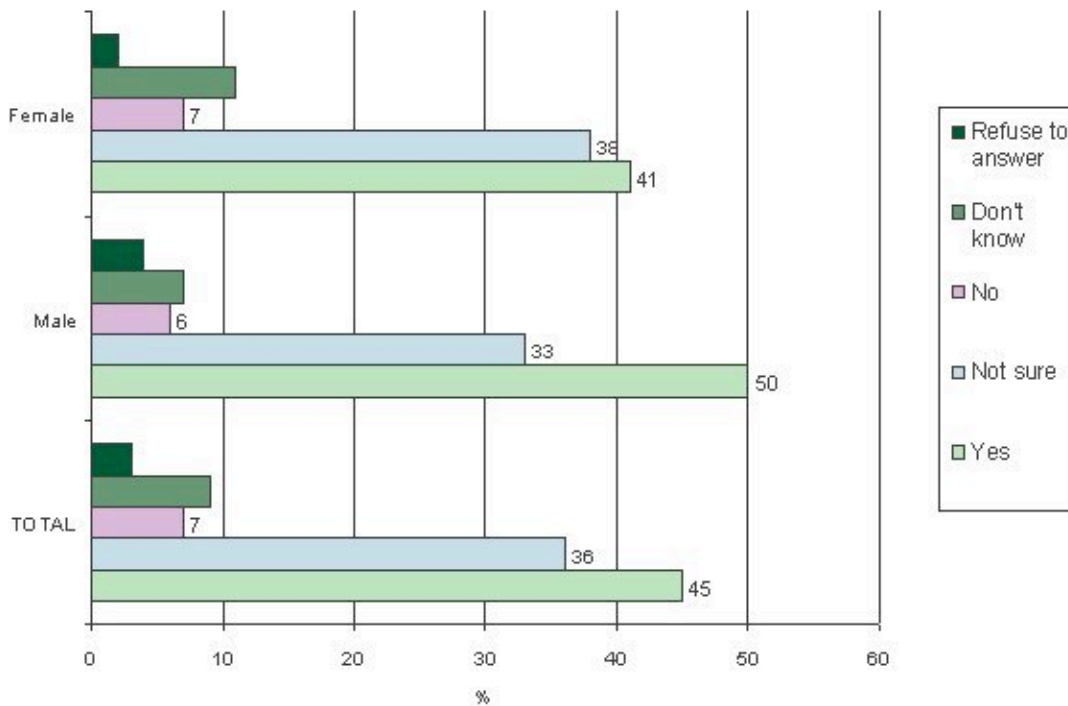
Continuing in this vein, only a mere 9% expect the elections to be free of corruption and malpractice, while 36% say there will be corruption and malpractice and 50% are uncertain (See Graph 9).

Do you think corruption and malpractice will take place during the forthcoming general elections?



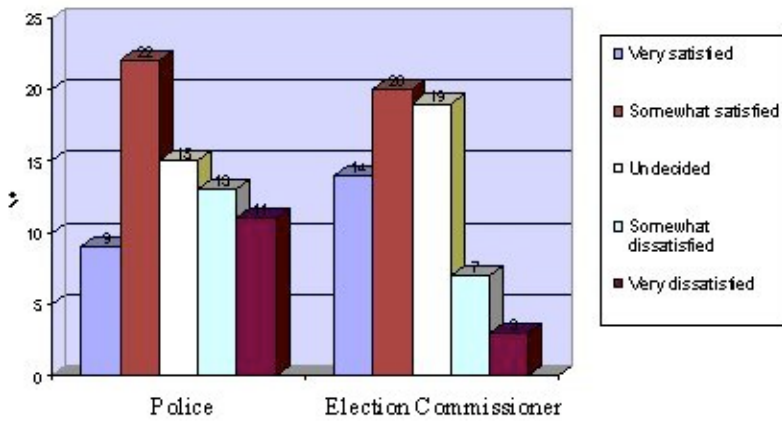
Likewise, 45% expect the occurrence of election-related violence, compared to just 7% who do not (See Graph 10).

Do you think election violence will occur during the general election period?



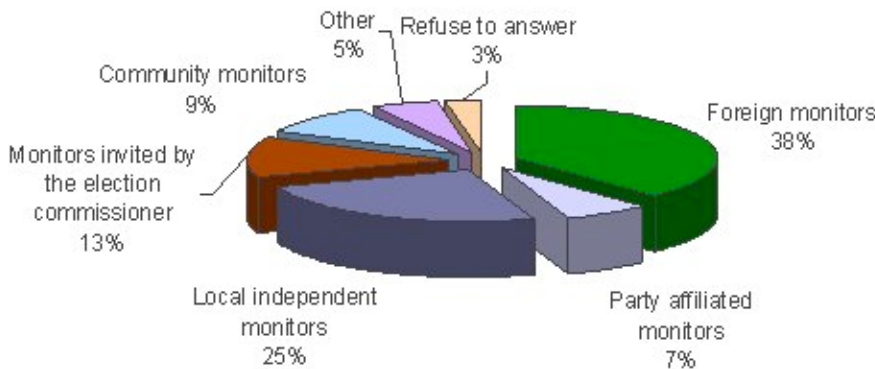
Meanwhile, 31% say they are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the performance of the Police, as opposed to 24% who are not. The performance of the Election Commissioner is also looked upon relatively favourably, with 14% saying they are very satisfied with his performance, and 20% saying they are somewhat satisfied (See Graph 11).

Satisfaction with performance of the Police and Election Commissioner



However, given the general lack of confidence in a clean election, it is not surprising that 71% believe that the elections should be monitored. 38% believe foreign observers should monitor the election, and 25% state that local, independent monitors should do the job (See Graph 12).

Who should monitor the forthcoming general elections?



The above results are findings from a recent opinion poll of 1008 respondents conducted by Social Indicator, from September 1-14, 2000. Social Indicator, the polling unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, is committed to conducting opinion polls as a means of providing a channel through which the public, especially marginalized groups can express their views. The organization is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) under the Governance and Institutional Strengthening Program, Sri Lanka, of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada. This survey was partly funded by the Sri Lanka chapter of Transparency International.

Dr. P. Saravanamuttu
Executive Director
CPA

Pradeep Peiris
Project Coordinator
Social Indicator

