



An Opinion Poll On Peace



Peace Confidence Index (PCI)

Social Indicator

March 2002

While many studies have been conducted on various aspects of this conflict, none have attempted to capture the changes in public perception over a period of time. The lack of such a study 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 Project, Sri Lanka (GISP), will be conducted bi-monthly to gauge the impact of local and international political developments on public attitudes towards the peace process.



Executive Summary

of Poll Conducted from 12th to 18th March 2002

OBJECTIVE

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

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.

SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out using a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews amongst a 1,387 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 (IDPs) 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.

Six waves of the PCI study were conducted in May, June, September and November 2001 and January 2002. The latest wave, the results of which are in this publication, was conducted in March 2002. The results of these six waves offer us data for a comparative study on changing public opinion regarding key issues, ranging from perceptions of war and peace to the proscription of the LTTE. The results are subject to a 3% margin of error.



KEY NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS INFORMING THE OPINION POLL

- President expresses concern over reports that the LTTE is continuing the large scale forced recruitment of children despite the cessation of hostilities and plans for peace negotiations.
- The Vavuniya - Trincomalee road and the A9 highway to Killinochchi reopened.
- European Union & Singapore express their willingness to support large scale rehabilitation work in the NE & development in Sri Lanka in the event of a peaceful solution.
- The nation assured by the Power & Energy Minister of a definite solution to the power crisis within the next two months.
- During a visit to Singapore the Prime Minister said that initial 'talks on talks' with the LTTE would commence by March or April 2002 with Norwegian facilitation
- Defence budget cut.
- Signing of the Ceasefire Agreement between the Government & the LTTE. The Agreement is welcomed by India, USA, UK and Japan as well as the Maha Sangha, religious & society leaders.
- Members of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) to monitor the Ceasefire Agreement between the Government & LTTE arrive in Sri Lanka.
- Prime Minister declares that a referendum will be held to obtain the consent of the nation on the agreement reached following talks with the LTTE.
- Sinhala Jathika Sangamaya & National Joint Committee of Sri Lanka file a writ application in the Court of Appeal against the Government-LTTE signed Ceasefire Agreement.
- President at odds with the Government over the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement.
- More than 100 well known world personalities, headed by Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, express their collective support for peace in Sri Lanka.
- Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) claims the Ceasefire Agreement will enable the LTTE to gain international recognition for Tamil Eelam.
- In Parliament the Prime Minister says that the agreement was a ceasefire agreement & not aimed at arriving at a final political solution and the forces will be kept on alert in the north and east.
- Government removes travel restrictions to Tamils travelling from Vavuniya to Colombo and vice versa.
- LTTE prepares to open political offices in areas controlled by the Sri Lankan Army (Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mannar & Amparai).



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- Reports of the LTTE charging civilians in the Vanni a 30% tax on goods sent by the Government despite the Ceasefire Agreement.
 - US Embassy urges the LTTE to honour the Ceasefire Agreement and claims to have received credible reports that the LTTE was engaging in activities that could jeopardize the agreement.
 - Prime Minister expected to visit Washington DC soon for talks on the peace process with President Bush.
 - Prime Minister visits Jaffna and meets with US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, also visiting Jaffna.
 - The US will consider de-proscribing the LTTE based on its commitment to the peace process and giving up its demands for a separate state.
 - LTTE leader issues a strict warning to his followers that violators of the Ceasefire Agreement will be severely punished.
 - Train services between Colombo & Valachchenai commence.
 - JVP launches a massive sit-in protest against the Ceasefire Agreement.
 - Anton Balasingham expected to arrive in Sri Lanka at the end of March.



SELECTED FINDINGS

- While the perception of peace meaning ethnic harmony shows an increase from 46.1% in November 2001 to 54.1% in March 2002, the perception of peace as feeling safe shows a decline from 18.3% in January 2002 to 9.8% in March 2002.
- The perception that war is a means of achieving peace continues its steady decline from 16.8% in June 2001 to 2.7% in March 2002.
- The findings in March 2002 indicate an increase in optimism that peace will come about soon in Sri Lanka - up from 10.6% in June 2001 to 24.8% in March 2002. This increase in optimism is predominantly amongst the Tamils and Muslims.
- A significant increase in optimism can be observed amongst the Tamils who feel that peace will come about soon to Sri Lanka (5.9% in September 2001 to 67.8% in March 2002).
- For a majority of Sri Lankans the root causes of the war are communal politics (33.4%) and discrimination against Tamils (26%).
- In March 2002 a majority of Sri Lankans feel the war can be ended and peace brought about in Sri Lanka through peace talks (85%) rather than through war (8.7%). The confidence in peace talks continues to increase from 59.1% in May 2001, while confidence in a war effort establishing peace has declined.
- In the March 2002 poll, 53.7% perceive that total victory cannot be achieved by either party in this war - a view that has increased from 49.3% in January 2002 and exists largely amongst the Muslims (69.2%) and Tamils (69.8%).
- Overall the opinion that the Government is committed to find peace through negotiations continues to rise in March 2002 (61.8%) in comparison to it remaining relatively static in September 2001 (43.8%) and November 2001 (44%).
- Although from September 2001 to March 2002 the opinion that the Government is committed to bring about peace through negotiations has increased amongst the Sinhalese (46.4% to 57.3%), Tamils (23.3% to 79.9%) and Up-country Tamils (64.9% to 92.3%), a sharp decrease in the same is detected amongst the Muslims (86% to 70.1%).
- There is a striking increase in the belief that the LTTE is committed to bringing about peace through talks - from 9.8% in November 2001 to 27.3% in March 2002. Only 19.3% amongst the Sinhalese share this view, though this is an increase from 13.4% in January 2002.
- 44.6% of Sri Lankans believe that the Government would go in for talks as a result of its commitment to peace, which is the predominant view held amongst the Up-country Tamils (55.6%) and Sinhalese (45.1%).
- The findings indicate a further rise from 64.2% in January 2002 to 67.7% in March 2002 in the view that the Government should declare a ceasefire for peace talks.
- 79.9% of Sri Lankans feel that both parties should declare a ceasefire through a mutual agreement, indicating a continued support for a bilateral ceasefire.
- In March 2002 49.7% of Sri Lankans are against the deproscription of the LTTE to



commence negotiations. The overall percentage of Sri Lankans against the deproscription of the LTTE declined further from 56.3% in January 2002.

- In March 2002 just over half the Sri Lankan population (56.5%) continues to approve the Government's decision to lift the restrictions on certain essential items, including food and medicine, to the Vanni as a prelude to peace talks.
- 74.9% of the population do not identify the Tamil community and the LTTE as one. 40.3% of the Tamils identify the Tamil community and the LTTE as one, an increase from 24.3% in January 2002. From September 2001 to March 2002, there is an increase in opinion amongst the Sinhalese (70.7% to 80.6%) who do not identify the Tamil community and the LTTE as one.
- In March 2002 the findings reveal a slight decrease (57.3%, down from 61.9% in January 2002) in the opinion that a LTTE cadre is an enemy, as opposed to the steady increase from June 2001 to January 2002. The view that an LTTE cadre portrays an enemy exists largely amongst the Sinhalese.
- A majority (82.6%) continues to express their approval of the Government and the LTTE going in for peace talks.
- On the other hand, the high rate of disapproval amongst Sri Lankans of the Government and the LTTE engaging in peace talks whilst fighting continues in March 2002 (69.5%), with a slight increase from 65.9% in January 2002.
- When asked in March 2002 who should be involved in negotiations only 21.6% feel that it should be only between the Government and the LTTE, a figure which has fallen considerably since January 2002 (33.9%).
- In March 2002, 32.5% and 20.9% of Sri Lankans feel that an international third party's involvement is both necessary and will add a positive impact to bring about a solution to the north east war, but these figures have declined since January 2002, for which the figures were 35.8% and 28.9% respectively.
- Of the 81.4% of the Sri Lankans aware of Norway, most approve of the assistance given by them to the Sri Lankan peace process. This high rate of approval exists chiefly amongst the Up-country Tamils (85.7%), Tamils (89.9%) and Muslims (65.8%), rather than the Sinhalese, amongst whom only 43.3% are of the same view. It should also be noted that amongst the Muslims and Up-country Tamils, the approval ratings have considerably dropped from January 2002 - from 80.3% to 65.8% and 95.9% to 85.7% respectively.
- In March 2002, the motivation for people to join the armed forces continues to be economic hardship (70.2%) and the need to defend the motherland (64.5%) rather than revenge (2.2%).
- In contrast 46.3% in March 2002, an increase from 27.2% in January 2002, feel that people are forced to join the LTTE.
- Overall 32.5% of those who are aware of the signing of the ceasefire agreement approve of this agreement because they feel an end to the war is necessary for people to live in peace.



- A majority (63.9%) believe the media reports of the controversy over the levels of consultation between the President and the Prime Minister over the ceasefire agreement, a viewpoint shared amongst 79.2% of Tamils and 65.1% of Sinhalese.
- 53.5% of Sri Lankans who believe such reports suggest that such a predicament can be overcome in the future if there is a formal agreement between the President and the Prime Minister about the peace process and signing agreements.
- 71.4% Sri Lankans believe the media reports of the LTTE engaging in child conscription. Furthermore more than 86.2% of the population believe in the reports of the LTTE engaging in child conscription believe that it will have a negative impact on the peace process.
- 63.1% Sri Lankans are aware of the Government's plans to establish coal power stations as a solution to the current power crisis. 76.8% approve the establishment of coal power stations in Sri Lanka as a solution to the current power crisis in Sri Lanka.

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Social Indicator (SI) is an independent social research organisation, which conducts polls on socio-economic and political issues.

Operating under the Board of Directors of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), SI came to life in September 1999, and filled a longstanding vacuum for a permanent, professional and independent polling facility in Sri Lanka.

Polling is an instrument of empowerment, a means by which the silent majority of the public can express their opinions on issues affecting them. Our mission is to conduct surveys on key social issues, thereby providing a means through which public opinion can influence the public policy debate.



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