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Sri Lankans continue to hold unfavourable views of all political party leaders

SLOTS polling shows public maintains unfavourable and worsening views of all, although President Wickremasinghe had the least negative ratings in November

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FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES

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About the IHP Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey

The IHP Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS) was launched in August 2021 to track public experience and opinion during the recovery from COVID-19. It has now been extended to track public perceptions during the economic crisis. It is run by the Institute for Health Policy (IHP), which is an independent, non-partisan research centre based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The SLOTS lead investigator is Dr Ravi Rannan-Eliya of IHP, who was trained in public opinion polling at Harvard University, and who has conducted numerous opinion surveys over three decades.

SLOTS interviews representative samples of Sri Lankan adults daily by telephone to gather their current views and situation. All interviews include a core set of common questions, with additional rotating sets of other questions that examine issues of topical importance. The survey is made possible by the generous funding support of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, UK National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), and others. The survey has an omnibus design, and the Institute welcomes sponsorship to continue the survey, to add new questions, or to undertake tailored analyses of the data. Potential sponsors should contact the Institute for further details.

SLOTS respondents consist of a mix of respondents reached by random digit dialling of mobile numbers, and others coming from a national panel of respondents who have agreed to be re-interviewed, and who were previously recruited using random selection. As with any survey, bias can arise from the sampling design and non-response, which means that respondents are not representative of the underlying population. To adjust for this, unless otherwise noted, all reported estimates and analyses use data that have been weighted to ensure that they are representative of the national adult population. This weighting process uses propensity weighting and iterative proportional fitting (raking) to match the national population according to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic ranking, sector, and geographical location.

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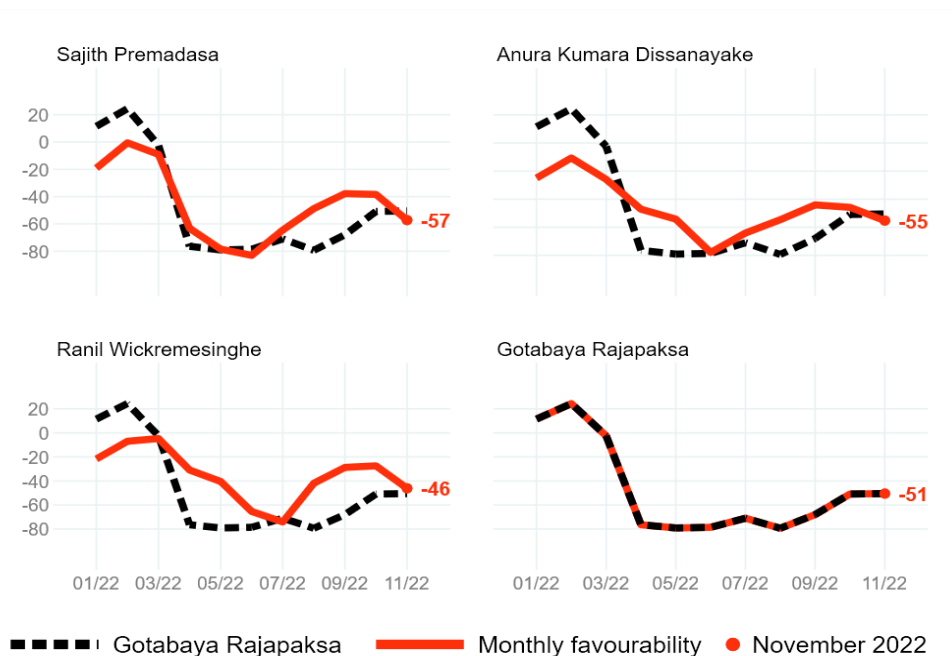
SLOTS polling shows public maintains unfavourable and worsening views of all, although President Wickremasinghe had the least negative ratings in November

The latest Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS) polling shows that the public continue to have deeply unfavourable views of all major political party leaders. President Ranil Wickremasinghe, leader of the UNP, has the least negative favourability ratings, although by a small margin. The past three months have seen a fresh decline in favourability for most, giving back some modest gains since August.

In November, President Wickremasinghe was viewed unfavourably by a net 46% of Sri Lankans, but this was still marginally better than other party leaders. Opposition Leader and SJB leader Sajith Premadasa had a net negative rating of 57%, not significantly different to that of AK Dissanayake, NPP and JVP leader, who had a net negative rating of 55%. Ironically, there is some evidence that Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ratings have started to recover from the deep lows they maintained for most of the year, with his favourability rating recovering to a net negative 51% in November.

Trends in net favourability of party leaders by month, Jan.–Nov. 2022

% having a favourable view minus those having a negative view

Institute for Health Policy Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey

Survey of 7,806 adults, interviewed by telephone during Sep. 2021–Dec. 2022. Monthly estimates based on pooling data from the preceding and subsequent months, and are adjusted for age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sector, and province to match the national population. **Dashed line shows favourability ratings for Gotabaya Rajapaksa as reference in all charts.**

SLOTS has been tracking favourability of leading politicians daily since August 2021.[1] Through the end of 2021, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, leader of the SLPP, maintained an edge in favourability over Opposition Leader, Sajith Premadasa, although some ministers maintained even better favourability ratings, particularly Ministers Ali Sabry and Dr Sudarshini Fernandopulle. But the economic and political crisis that hit at the start of the year collapsed President Rajapaksa's favourability and dragged down the favourability ratings of all politicians we track, with the public expressing unfavourable views of all by April 2022.[2] From June, the favourability of the other party leaders began to recover but remained deeply negative through October, after which the latest interviews suggest the public is becoming more negative in their views.

Ranil Wickremasinghe maintained modestly more negative ratings than Sajith Premadasa through the end of 2021, but since the current crisis hit and following his election as President, his ratings have generally been slightly less negative. However, public views of both of them appear to have become more negative since September 2022.

How IHP tracks favourability

IHP's Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS) is a telephone survey that interviews nationally representative samples of the public every day. SLOTS tracks favourability by asking respondents if they have a favourable or unfavourable opinion of a public figure or institution: net favourability being the average of the positive and negative responses. The question that SLOTS uses is a standard one used in similar surveys around the world. Scores range from +100 (everyone has a favourable view) to -100 (everyone has an unfavourable view). This is more an indicator of general sentiment about politicians than how people will vote, something that SLOTS tracks separately. For example, United States President Bill Clinton's favourability ratings slid in his second term following personal scandals and impeachment, but his political support and job approval were lifted by a booming economy.

In our context, where public opinion polls are rare, asking this question plus questions about voting is challenging as many people refuse to answer, and particularly those who support the opposition. To control for this, we adjust our data not only to make the responses representative of the overall population in relation to characteristics such as gender, age, income level, ethnicity, and province, but also to match how people voted in the 2019 Presidential Election.

Notes

[1] Institute for Health Policy, April 2022, "SLOTS Favourability Ratings: Methodology for tracking public favourability", SLOTS Report #2022-03. Available at: https://www.ihp.lk/publications/docs/SLOTSReport202203.pdf.

[2] Institute for Health Policy, April 2022, "Economic crisis results in growing public disaffection with politicians, but particularly with President Rajapaksa", SLOTS Report #2022-03. Available at: https://www.ihp.lk/publications/docs/SLOTSReport202204.pdf.