72, Park Street, Colombo 2, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94 11 231 4041/2/3/5   Fax: +94 11 231 4040

e-mail: info@ihp.lk   web: www.ihp.lk   twitter: @ihplk

PRESS RELEASE

Economic crisis results in growing public disaffection with all politicians, but President Rajapaksa worst affected

The current economic crisis is resulting in widespread public disapproval of all politicians. Public liking of politicians in both government and opposition has fallen to its lowest levels in the Institute for Health Policy (IHP) SLOTS opinion survey. Worst affected is President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose personal favourability ratings have slumped from a high +50 during the August-September 2021 lockdown to -80 in April 2022.

The IHP SLOTS poll has been tracking favourability of politicians and selected institutions since September 2021. From then until January 2022, President Rajapaksa maintained high favourability ratings with the public. In contrast Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa's favourability ratings were often negative. But in the last two months this has all changed. The President's favourability ratings have cratered.

President Rajapaksa's net favourability fell from +20 during February to below -80 during the first three weeks of April, meaning that for every member of the public who has a favourable opinion about him, there are now nine others who say they have an unfavourable opinion. This decline in favourability has been faster and more extensive than most other politicians. During March-April, the President's favourability rating (-40) fell below those of both Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa (-33) and Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa (-26).

The largest declines in the President's favourability have been amongst the poor, women, urban and Sinhala adults. Amongst the poorest one third of Sri Lankans, the President has much more negative favourability ratings (-63) than Sajith Premadasa whose ratings are only modestly negative (-6). In the case of women, the President has lost the edge in favourability that he long enjoyed over Sajith Premadasa.

Women view both unfavourably now, but the President (-42) more than the Opposition Leader (-27). Opposition Leader Premadasa's more modest decline in favourability was less concentrated, although his favourability with women also fell significantly, albeit less than the President.

The drop in favourability has affected all politicians, including Dr Sudarshini Fernandopulle, previously the most popular minister in the SLOTS survey. Favourability ratings also declined for UNP leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe, and even more for JVP leader, Anura Dissanayake.

In contrast, favourability ratings of state institutions and other organizations, including Ministry of Health, the armed forces, and the GMOA have declined little. Indicating that the public disapproval is specifically of politicians.

Dr. Rannan-Eliya, Executive Director, IHP, commented that the high levels of public dislike of all politicians implies that no single political party today currently enjoys the public's confidence for resolving the crisis. He added that it points to the need for fresh thinking by the political establishment on how to formulate and communicate a package of measures that will have consent from different parts of society, particularly the poor, and how to provide the leadership needed to sustain the painful measures that will be needed over the coming months.

IHP's Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS) is a telephone survey that interviews nationally representative samples of the public every day, asking questions about everyday life and their opinions. 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. Scores range from +100 (everyone has a favourable view) to -100 (everyone has an unfavourable view). IHP adjusts survey responses to ensure the reported estimates are representative of the overall population in relation to gender, age, income level, ethnicity, sector, province, and how people voted in the 2019 Presidential Election. The favourability findings are based on interviews with 4,603 adults between September 2021 and 24 April 2022.

Full reports available from ihp.lk

Institute for Health Policy, April 2022, "SLOTS Favourability Ratings: Methodology for tracking public favourability", SLOTS Report #2022-03.

Institute for Health Policy, April 2022, "Economic crisis results in growing public disaffection with politicians, but particularly with President Rajapaksa", SLOTS Report #2022-04.

About IHP

IHP is an independent, non-partisan research centre based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The SLOTS lead investigator is Dr Ravi Rannan-Eliya of IHP, who trained in public opinion polling at Harvard University and has conducted numerous surveys over three decades.

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