

PRESS RELEASE

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JVP Support Surges with the Collapse of the Economy and the Gotabaya Presidency

IHP releases for first time results from its daily polling of voting intention

The Institute for Health Policy (IHP) for the first time released today results from its tracking of voting intention in Sri Lanka, which it has done as part of the Sri Lanka Opinion Tracker Survey (SLOTS). SLOTS has been interviewing Sri Lankans every day since August 2021 asking how people would vote in a potential Presidential Election and in a possible General Election

Electoral support for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa began to collapse in January 2022 as consumer confidence started to plummet and the economic crisis began to hit. By March, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa was running neck-to-neck with President Rajapaksa in a hypothetical two-way contest for the Presidency, but he took a clear lead from June as the Aragalaya filled the streets.

But support for Sajith Premadasa has been soft. His favourability ratings were falling together with the President's, and by May both had net negative favourability ratings of below -70.

Dr Rannan-Eliya, Executive Director of IHP, commented that "The public may have voted Sajith in as President, but it appears more out of rejection of Gotabaya than a positive embrace of him and the SJB."

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's and Sajith Premadasa's negative favourability ratings reflects a wider rejection of all politicians. The favourability of all politicians that SLOTS tracks fell into negative territory as well, whilst favourability of institutions such as the health ministry, GMOA and the military have held up. Only a few politicians, such as Dr Sudarshini Fernandopulle, today retain a positive rating in the SLOTS tracking.

SLOTS tracking of how people would vote in a General Election provides other evidence of soft support for the SJB and Sajith Premadasa. Many disaffected Gotabaya/SLPP voters were not willing in SLOTS interviews to commit to any opposition party, and those who did split between the SJB/UNP and the JVP/NPP. Whilst the SLOTS polling indicates that the SJB might have won a General Election in March to April, from April to June SLOTS polling estimates that public support was divided between all three—the SLPP/SLFP, SJB/UNP and the JVP/NPP.

From June, as street protests made President Gotabaya's position untenable, leading to his resignation, support for the NPP/JVP surged with the number of undecided SLOTS respondents declining, indicating many were finally deciding. The NPP/JVP took a clear lead.

In SLOTS polling from 1 April to July 14 the NPP/JVP averaged 42% in the General Election tracker of voting intent, compared with 32% for the SJB/UNP and 18% for the SLPP/SLFP. And the NPP/JVP leader, AK Dissanayake, averaged 41% in the Presidential Election tracker in a three-way contest against Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Sajith Premadasa. Interviews since then point to increasing NPP/JVP support with the possibility that they would win majorities in Presidential and General Elections held today.

Analysis of the SLOTS data indicates that the surge in NPP/JVP is driven by it doing better than the SJB/UNP in taking disaffected Gotabaya/SLPP voters, plus doing better amongst Sinhala and middle-income and better-off voters.

Dr Rannan-Eliya commented that “The biggest unknown is what Sajith Premadasa and the SJB do. Can they work out why they have failed to win over the disaffected Gotabaya/SLPP voter and to capitalize on the collapse of the SLPP? and will they be able to come up with a new agenda that resonates better with the public?”

Full report available from ihp.lk

Institute for Health Policy, August 2022, “JVP Support Surges with the Collapse of the Economy and the Gotabaya Presidency”, SLOTS Report #2022-08:
<https://www.ihp.lk/publications/docs/SLOTSReport202208.pdf>

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 who has conducted numerous surveys over three decades.

Methodology

SLOTS combines data from a national sample of adults (ages 18 and over) reached by random digit dialling of mobile numbers, and others coming from a national panel of respondents who were previously recruited through random selection. The SLOTS is made possible by funding support from the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust and others in Sri Lanka, but the sponsors play no role in the study design, and analysis and interpretation of findings. Interested parties can contact IHP for more detailed data and results, or to add questions to the SLOTS survey.