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## Survey reveals global dissatisfaction

By Paul Reynolds  
World Affairs correspondent, BBC News  
website

**I do not find it surprising that the main result of a survey of world public opinion suggests that only 30% of people feel that their country is governed by the will of the people.**

This in my view indicates a healthy disrespect for governments in those countries which are governed reasonably well and an understandable lack of trust in those which are not.

Take the two trends together and you have a global picture showing a gap between the governors and the governed.

So what else is new?

What is new these days perhaps is that more people around the world can actually express an honest opinion.

### **Fewer fake referendums**

It would have been an even worse sign if the results had been otherwise. We do not want any of those referendums in totalitarian and dictatorial countries which regularly showed over 90% government approval and, in Saddam Hussein's case, over 100%.

Some examples of the levels of dissatisfaction with modern government: 65% in Western Europe, 73% in Eastern and Central Europe (worrying that post-communist governments have not done that well), 60% in North America, 61% in Africa, 65% in Asia-Pacific, 69% in Latin America.

It is obviously an uneasy time for governments worldwide.

Only in Scandinavia, South Africa and Israel did citizens think their countries were governed in line with popular demands.

But, with exceptions, of which al-Qaeda is an example, it is not generally a revolutionary era.

Perhaps governments should take heed, in this quiet time, of the underlying problems. Otherwise discontent might grow.

## **Contradictions**

It is one of the quirks of these surveys that some results are a bit contradictory. They suggest that world citizens, who decisively dislike their governments it seems, are evenly divided on whether those same governments were elected freely and fairly.

Of those polled, 47% said elections were free and fair and 48% said they were not. In some countries - the UK for example - you find 70% of people saying the elections were OK, but 66% saying the government is not by the will of the people.

Of such contradictions one might say, as Churchill noted: "Democracy is the worst system of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

The survey is an annual trawl through world opinion by Gallup International (a not-for-profit association registered in Switzerland) called "Voice of the People".

It was undertaken in 68 countries, though there are some major gaps. China is not included and the Arab world is notably absent apart from Egypt.

The reason for this is that the survey is paid for by Gallup International's clients, including the BBC. Many however are commercial and they presumably do not think that China is as yet a promising market.

To my personal regret, they have also left out the English-speaking Caribbean. The islands there might have upped the count of satisfied citizens.

(Update: Meril James, Secretary General of Gallup International has since sent me this explanation of the gaps in coverage: "The reason that China and the Arab countries are not included is that we need (but do not often get) official permission to ask questions in these countries. Caribbean Islands are not included because we do not have a member company there.")

## **Religious leaders**

At this time of religious fervour in some parts of the world, it is worth looking at whether religious leaders are trusted and whether people think they should get more power.

It turns out that they come top of the global list of trusted groups, scoring mostly strongly in south-east Asia, Africa and North America.

In south-east Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) the poll suggests they have a high trust rating of 68%, in Africa a huge 74% and in North America a sturdy 49%.

In happily governed Scandinavia by contrast, religious leaders are most trusted by only 12%.

Muslims and Protestants are most likely to trust their religious leaders and to want to give them more power.

### **Intellectuals win**

However, religious leaders do not come top of the global list of groups which should have more power.

One of the curiosities of the survey is that "intellectuals" (defined as writers, academics etc) do best here. They win with a global figure of 35%, religious leaders come second at 25%, military, business and journalists are all on 20% and politicians are way behind.

**Nationalism still counts - it is the defining factor of identity for 32% of those surveyed globally**

Only in some areas do a majority of those asked think that religious figures should have more power - narrowly in North America (what happened to the separation of church and state?), more heavily in south-east Asia and overwhelmingly in Africa. Perhaps the last figure reflects the unhappiness expressed by Africans (apart from South Africans) about their governments.

And nationalism still counts. It is the defining factor of identity for 32% of those surveyed globally, with religion in second place.

But religion is the most important factor for people in South Asia and parts of Africa.

### **Journalists**

I was a bit disappointed that journalists were not included in the definition of intellectuals but one has to take comfort that in some parts of the world (west Africa, south-east Asia) journalists are rather admired! Not, however, in the UK - where journalists fall behind even politicians...

Military and police leaders do well in North America and western Europe, very well in orderly Scandinavia and unsurprisingly badly in Latin America and Africa, reflections presumably of the record of military dictatorships in those continents.

In fact, the whole survey is rather unsurprising, nowhere more so than in the finding that it is family which most influences people's decisions.

In that we are all much alike.

*Paul.Reynolds-INTERNET@bbc.co.uk*

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