

News Release



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PENN + SCHOEN/ NDI PANAMA POLL

A Summary

Panamanians believe that their country's problems could be improved by removing strongman Gen. Manuel A. Noriega from office, saying that getting the military leader to leave Panama would be the single best way of solving that nation's current crisis.

Those views are contained in a June 24 - July 3 poll conducted by Penn + Schoen Associates in Panama in association with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

The survey found that an overwhelming majority of those polled believed Panama to be in crisis. A plurality of respondents related the country's situation to economics, saying that both Panama and their own families have suffered from a deteriorating economic panorama.

The 800-person interview poll was carried out by trained local interviewers to conduct the fieldwork. Penn + Schoen Associates, an independent public opinion survey research firm, has conducted extensive polling in Latin America, including Panama.

Most Panamanians said their country's leadership was responsible for the current crisis, with more than half singling out Noriega or his military regime for blame.

Panamanians also expressed the view that removing Noriega would improve the nation's outlook. In fact, getting the general to leave Panama was judged the best single way to solve the current imbroglio, with those polled saying the second best method would be to change Panama's government.

The Penn + Schoen/NDI poll also showed that Panamanians have yet to come together on an alternative to Noreiga's rule. No more than eight percent of the respondents agreed on a single person as the best opposition candidate. The most popular response, three-time former president Arnulfo Arias, died last month of a heart attack at the age of 87.

Most Panamanians questioned said they thought highly of the United States; the northern neighbor was the top choice of Panamanians when asked where they would choose to live. Panamanians also supported the idea that a dialogue with the United States would help solve the present crisis.

Penn + Schoen undertook an in-depth national poll of 800 Panamanian residents on political and social issues. A national, random probability sample of households in Panama was drawn. The detailed survey was conducted in person at 40 sample points throughout the country, in cities, towns and rural areas.

The questionnaire was designed in conjunction with NDI to cover a range of topics fully and fairly. The results have an overall statistical accuracy of plus or minus three percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval.

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONS

1. Economic situation

Ninety-five percent of the respondents said that Panama was in crisis. Sixteen percent said the economy, along with Noriega, were the single biggest causes of the current situation.

Most of those polled did not hold out much hope for improvement. A sizeable majority said that the economy was either getting worse (37 percent) or staying the same (35 percent). About the same number said their own

family's economic well-being was deteriorating (36 percent) or staying the same (40 percent). Only 25 percent said they thought Panama's economy was improving, and 20 percent said their own family's economic situation was getting better.

II. Political system

The people interviewed did not like General Noreiga, nor did they approve of the government he has installed. Most people appeared to be looking to the deportation of Noriega and a change in his regime as a means of resolving their problems. Twenty-two percent singled out Noriega's leaving the country, a key opposition demand; another 14 percent said they wanted a change in government.

There was, however, no clear support for an alternative party or leader. This suggests that Panama's political parties face a major task in honing their message, institution-building, and selecting candidates who inspire the confidence of Panamanian voters. When asked which institution behaved the best during the crisis, the Panamanian Catholic Church inspired the most confidence (60) percent, followed by the civic organizations (16 percent). The government received a five percent rating, while the political parties got two percent.

When asked which party had performed the best during the crisis, a near majority (49 percent) said none. No opinion ranked second with 13 percent; the Christian Democrats/PDC 10 percent, and the Pan Autentico seven percent.

The results show that Panamanians have not invested their loyalties to any great extent in a single party. The most popular political parties, the Pan Autentico and the Christian Democrats/PDC, each received only 13 percent among respondents. The government's Revolutionary Democratic party (PRD) followed with 11 percent. More than a third (37 percent) said they did not sympathize with any party, while nine percent reported to have no opinion.

Likewise the poll showed that no consensus has developed among the opposition on who should replace a Noriega-appointed stand-in in the presidency. A plurality said they either did not favor anyone (23 percent) or that they did not know who they would choose (37 percent).

III. Attitudes toward the U.S. and other countries

The people of Panama want to change their government. They realize, however, that they may need help from other countries to bring about that change. Eleven percent said they believed a dialogue with the United States was

needed. Although nine percent said that the United States was responsible for the Panamanian crisis, 75 percent blamed the current mess on internal factors in Panama.

The U.S. was also perceived as the most attractive place to live. A plurality of the respondents (27 percent) said that if they had to move to another country, they would chose the U.S. The next most popular country (22 percent) was Costa Rica, followed by Venezuela (13 percent), Mexico (seven percent) and Spain (four percent). The Soviet bloc countries were not seen as attractive: neither the Soviet Union (0 percent) nor Cuba (0 percent) inspired any interest.