

Public Opinion of Institutional Performance in Galapagos

Hugo Barber¹ & Pablo Ospina²

¹ Datanálisis

² Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the evolving public image of the principal institutions of the province. It is based primarily on a survey taken in March 2008 (Table 1) and on results from meetings with four focus groups¹ on the three most populated islands. First we review the components of institutional image (positive vs. negative), then evaluate recent changes by island, and finally present comparisons showing the evolution of institutional images over the last decade.

Table 1. Dates and numbers of surveys.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2006	2008
Month completed	July	October	September	January	November 2000	June	March
Total No. Surveys	377	427	582	553	573	442	487
Isabela	102	109	160	150	151	102	104
San Cristóbal	147	158	209	203	213	147	185
Santa Cruz	128	160	213	200	209	193	198
Standard Error	±5.2	±4.8	±4.1	±4.3	±4.2	±4.7	±4.5

Sources: Falconí (2002: 53); Barber & Ospina (2006) and Opinion Survey of March 2008.

Image in 2008

As in previous years, the survey investigated the subjective "perception" of Galapagos residents towards institutions in the province in terms of their credibility, honesty, efficiency, concern for the community, and acceptance of citizen participation in institutional decisions. While studies of confidence in institutions in continental Ecuador have used a different methodology and are not totally comparable with the Galapagos study, they do show that there is a general lack of confidence in political institutions in the country.

In practically all cases there are more people with a negative perception of the institutions than with a positive perception. This is also evident in all

¹ A focus group is a type of collective interview, generally with a group of people with relatively homogeneous social characteristics. The four focus groups that were used in this study had a range of five to nine people; the length of the interview ranged from two to three hours.

of the focus groups, with a lack of confidence in the work of the institutions most dominant. Only the municipalities and the provincial government received a net positive result regarding "concern for the community" and "acceptance of citizen participation." In all other cases, there are more people who think that the institutions are dishonest, lack credibility, use their resources poorly, are not concerned for the community, and do not accept citizen participation in their decision-making (Table 2). In the case of the institutions

that are primarily dedicated to conservation (which, according to the responses of a number of the people surveyed, includes the governor's office), the negative view is reinforced by the perception that they have significant economic capacity. This perception was confirmed through the qualitative analysis in focus groups in the three islands, where participants considered the conservation organizations as the "richest" but the least interested in helping the community and doing their job.

Table 2. Public image of selected institutions* in Galapagos, March 2008 (%).

	Governor's Office	Provincial Government	CDF	INGALA	Municipalities	GNPS	Navy	None	U/NR
Credible	19.7	24.4	28.1	25.7	33.0	26.2	25.9	24.8	11.7
Not credible	39.6	36.6	32.4	41.6	34.7	40.4	34.2	8.8	22.3
Does its work well	13.8	22.9	28.0	21.5	31.2	24.0	26.0	20.1	15.4
Does its work poorly	32.4	26.8	24.3	36.1	26.0	36.2	24.3	8.6	29.8
Honest	11.9	15.9	17.5	14.7	18.5	12.5	17.0	35.1	24.8
Dishonest	38.2	35.2	33.9	37.7	36.1	39.2	33.1	10.3	38.3
Concerned about the community	23.7	41.1	20.3	25.0	58.9	21.7	19.1	14.9	8.0
Not concerned about the community	26.1	19.5	31.3	25.5	17.4	33.4	28.3	12.3	32.2
Has significant economic capacity	19.0	19.3	43.6	27.7	29.2	64.9	16.6	3.5	12.1
Has limited economic capacity	17.1	20.1	16.3	18.8	27.4	7.2	27.5	10.5	29.7
Efficient use of resources	8.2	18.7	14.5	9.3	23.9	14.5	12.0	22.9	27.7
Poor use of resources	28.7	26.0	26.9	29.9	25.1	36.9	24.8	4.5	44.4
Involves citizens in decision-making	19.1	26.3	10.0	16.6	41.2	11.2	7.2	22.0	17.0
Does not involve citizens in decision-making	27.7	21.1	31.6	30.1	20.0	35.4	33.9	5.7	39.9

U/NR= Unknown/No response

Note: Data weighted according to the population of each island. For a comparison with data from 2006, see Galapagos Report 2006-2007, p. 92

* Acronyms: CDF = Charles Darwin Foundation; INGALA = National Institute of Galapagos; GNPS = Galapagos National Park Service.

The most drastic decline in the public image of all of the institutions occurred in Isabela (Table 3). In 2006 Isabela had the highest opinions of all of the institutions with the exception of the Charles Darwin Foundation (CDF), but in 2008 the image of public institutions in Isabela is lower than the average in almost all cases. In San Cristóbal, the images of the development institutions (National Institute of Galapagos – INGALA, provincial government, and municipalities) are above average, while the images of the “conservation” institutions are below average. In Santa Cruz, public opinion towards con-

servation institutions appears increasingly similar to that in San Cristóbal. In both cases, as the favorable view towards “conservation” institutions declines, the favorable perception of “development” institutions increases. The qualitative analysis of these perceptions tends to confirm that although the perceptions are negative for all of the institutions, there is a marked difference between the image of the larger and seemingly more distant conservation institutions and the weaker but more accessible local institutions that promote development.

Table 3. Institutional image index, 2006-2008, by island (%).

INSTITUTION	ISABELA		CRISTÓBAL		SANTA CRUZ		TOTAL	
	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008
Governor's Office		15.4		14.3		17.1		16.1
Provincial Government	25.5	15.1	23	37.0	15.9	20.1	18.3	24.9
CDF	24.8	15.2	19	17.4	29.3	21.6	26.3	19.7
INGALA	20.6	19.9	12.9	19.0	14	18.5	14.1	18.8
Municipalities	43.3	38.8	28.9	35.0	27.7	33.5	28.9	34.5
GNPS	32.4	17.5	15.3	15.9	21.2	19.8	20.3	18.4
Navy		19.7		22.1		15.4		17.9

Source: Opinion surveys from June 2006 and March 2008.

Notes:

- The index is constructed as a simple average of favorable opinions with respect to credibility, efficient use of resources, honesty, concern for the community, doing its work well, and acceptance of citizen participation in decision-making.
- Data weighted according to the population of each island.
- The index does not include the variable on economic capacity because it is value-neutral.

Trends

In terms of public perception, conservation institutions had their best moment from 1997 to 1999, when a combination of political and social forces led to the approval of the Special Law for Galapagos. By 2001, however, favorable opinions declined for all institutions, in some cases abruptly. In the case of the Galapagos National Park Service (GNPS) and the CDF, public perception is once again approaching the critical 2001 level (Table 4, Figure 1). The

municipalities have the most stable image over time. INGALA has not yet recovered from the decline in 2001, although its image has begun to improve. The provincial government also appears to have recuperated although it has not yet achieved its highest level recorded in 1999 and 2000 (Figure 1). The general trend is toward a modest improvement in institutional image of those institutions that promote socioeconomic “development” and a decline in the image of those institutions involved in “conservation.”

Table 4. Positive index of institutional image, 1998 - 2008 (%).

Year Month	Governor's Office	Provincial Government	CDF	INGALA	Municipalities	GNPS	Navy
1997 Aug.		22	33	30	27	36	
1998 Oct.		23	37	28	27	44	
1999 Sept.	16	42	39	31	27	48	
2000 Dec.	11	34	28	29	35	30	
2001 Nov.	9	23	12	18	33	16	
2006 June		18	29	14	27	21	
2008 March	16	25	22	19	33	20	20

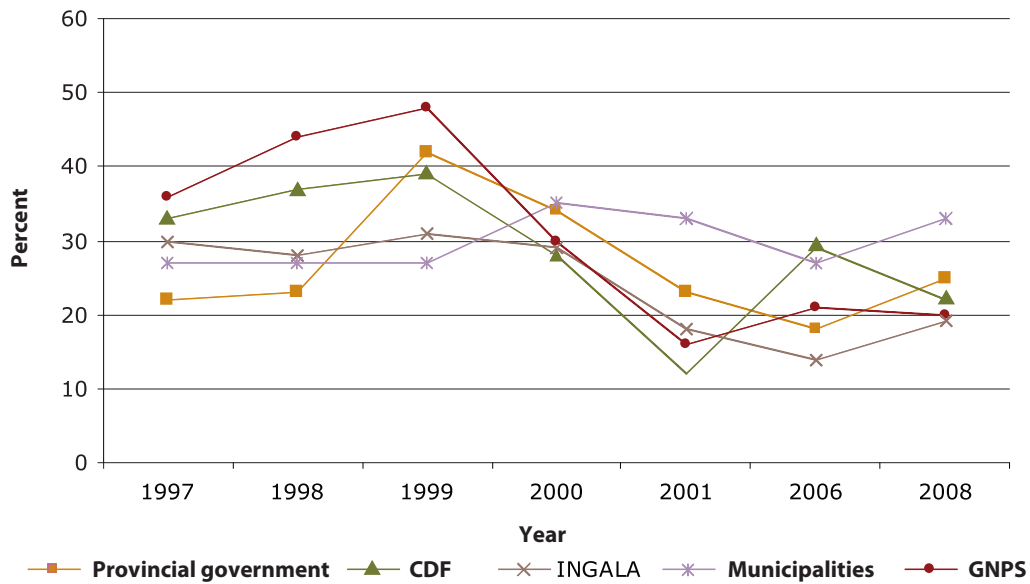


Figure 1. Index of positive institutional image, 1998 - 2008 (%).

Sources: For 1997 – 2001, Falconí (2002:57); for 2006 y 2008, Opinion Survey of June 2006 and March 2008.

Notes:

- The index is constructed as a simple average of the favorable opinions with respect to credibility, efficient use of resources, honesty, concern for the community, and doing their work well.
- Data weighted according to the population of each island.
- To make the indices comparable, the average for 2006 and 2008 does not include the additional variable about involving citizen participation in decision-making (for this reason, the values in this figure do not coincide with the values in Table 2).
- The index does not include the variable on economic capacity because it is value-neutral.

It is difficult to explain the reasons for these trends. What can be suggested, based on other studies in Galapagos (Ospina 2006; Grenier 2007), is that 11 years ago, negotiations surrounding the Special Law for Galapagos created high expectations among the local population that changes in attitudes and policies related to conservation in the islands would benefit Galapagos residents. It is possible that the current poor perception of conservation organizations is due to the fact that these expectations were never fully met. The same could be applicable to the case of INGALA, which was a key component of the institutional framework

created in 1998. During this same period, the enactment of the Special Law increased the budgets of the municipalities through the so-called "15% Law," which has increased their capacity to carry out public works. In addition, the 1998 Constitution gave the municipalities the opportunity to assume various additional responsibilities above and beyond those assigned by the Law of Municipal Government. It is possible that the combination of increased budget and a broader mandate has helped these institutions to maintain a stable public image.