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LANGUAGES

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States 'not run by people's will'

Sixty-five percent of citizens across the world do not think their country is governed by the will of the people, a poll commissioned by the BBC suggests.

The Gallup International Voice of the People 2005 poll questioned more than 50,000 people in 68 states for the BBC World Service survey about power.

Only in Scandinavia and South Africa do the majority believe that they are ruled according to their wishes.

But 47% thought elections in their countries were free and fair.

The figure is 55% for the US and Canada and up to 82% in EU countries - but just 24% in West Africa.

About a third of those asked thought more power should go to writers and academics.

A quarter felt more should go to religious leaders - who are also seen as the most trusted group.

A fifth of those asked thought military, business leaders and journalists should be given more power.

Other key findings include:

- Family exerts the greatest single influence on people

Sixty-one percent said a partner or family member has most influenced decisions about their life in the past year.

In Mexico, the figure is 88%. The lowest rating for family influence comes from North America (35%), where people report a wider range of influences, especially religious leaders (12%).

- There is a wide gap between the developed and developing world on the degree to which people feel they can control their lives

Least control is felt in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region and the former Soviet bloc.

The highest scores are in Latin America (65%), followed by Canada and the US (62%) and Europe (53%).

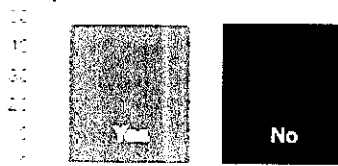
- National identity is still

GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS

Is your country governed by the will of the people? Global response



Are your elections free and fair?



Selection of facts and figures from the global survey

OPEN At-a-glance

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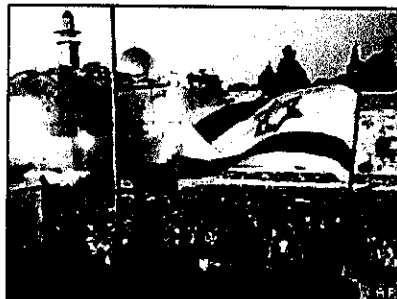


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The ceremonial rite of passage for a young girl in Colombia

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strong


Nationality was used by a third of those surveyed to 'define' themselves. About a fifth chose religion.

The sense of nationality is strongest in Latin America (54%).

Religion gained the highest scores in Africa (56%), followed by the US and Canada (32%).



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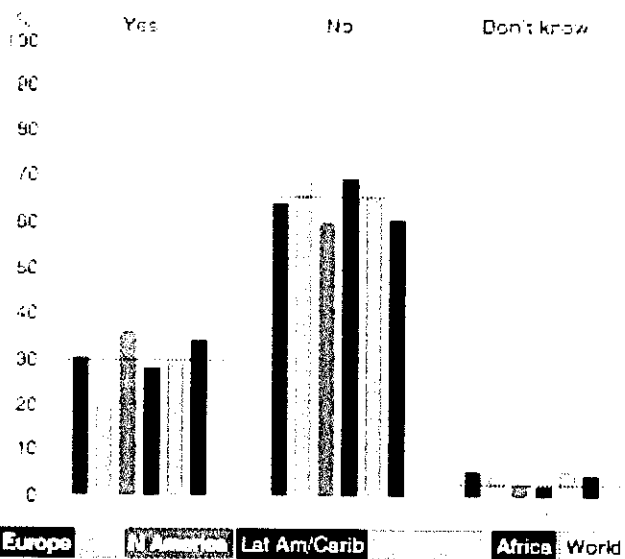
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BBC NEWS

At-a-glance: Who runs your world?

Is your country governed by the will of the people?



Will of the people?

A BBC poll of global opinion of where the power lies suggests widespread disillusionment with how governments represent their people.

Less than a third believe their views are properly reflected, according to Gallup International's Voice of the People survey.

Click on the numbers below to see more of the findings.

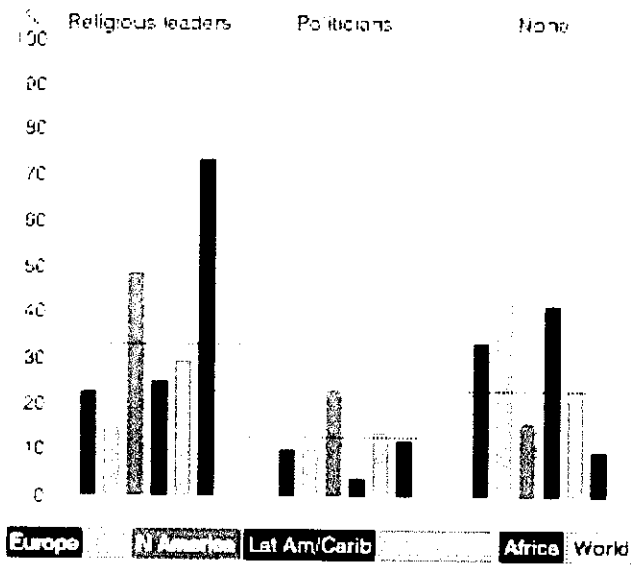
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At-a-glance: Who runs your world?

Which of the following do you trust?



Trust

Politicians fare especially badly when it comes to trust.

Religious leaders are most trusted in Africa and North America, but the poll suggests a degree of general cynicism towards anyone in authority.

Journalists and business bosses also enjoy limited support.

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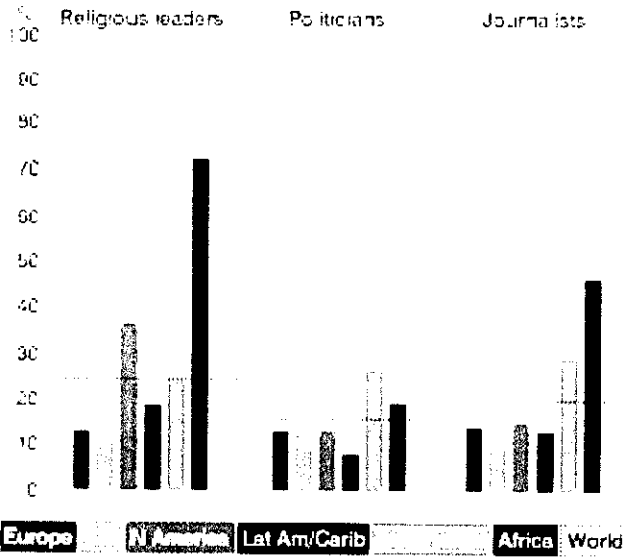
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At-a-glance: Who runs your world?

Who would you like to give more power to in your country?



Power

There also seems to be a reluctance to bestow more power on anyone.

Globally writers and academics are seen as the best bet, and sports stars, musicians and film stars the worst.

But only 16% would give politicians more power.

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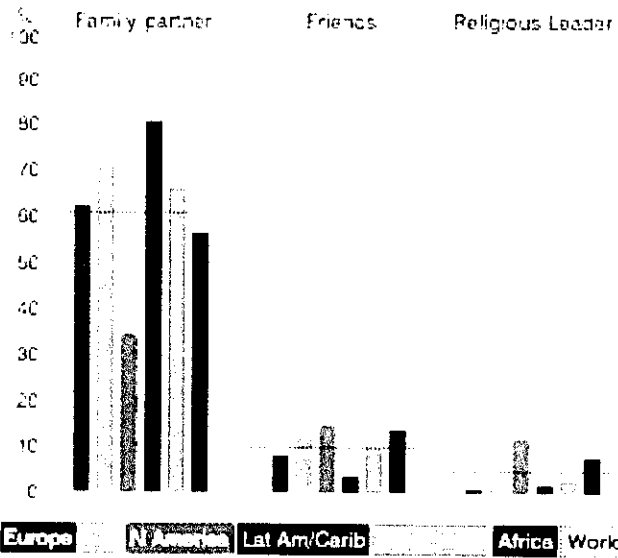
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At-a-glance: Who runs your world?

Who has had most influence on your decisions in past year?



Influence

Worldwide, the family remains influential, though in North America friends and religious leaders are not far behind.

In fact, in the US the number who say a soldier or policeman has had the most influence over life decisions is well above the global average.

Religious leaders also enjoy some influence in West Africa.

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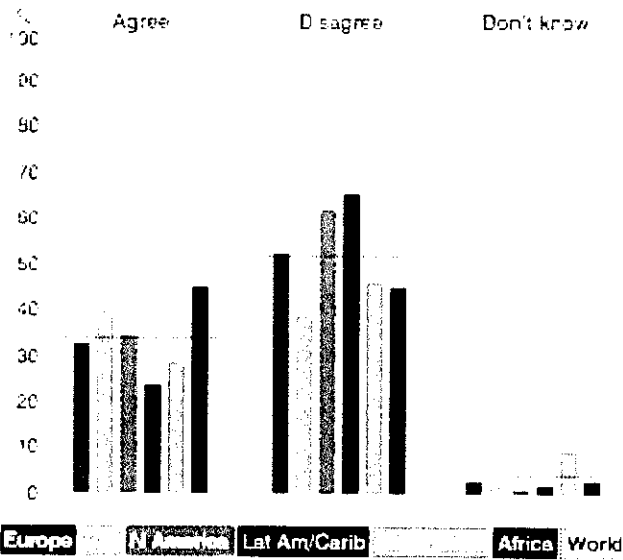
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BBC NEWS

At-a-glance: Who runs your world?

There is very little I can do to change my life



Destiny in your hands?

More than half the world believe they can affect their own lives, according to the survey.

Latin and North Americans and northern and western Europeans appear the most optimistic.

East Africans are generally twice as optimistic as their West African counterparts.

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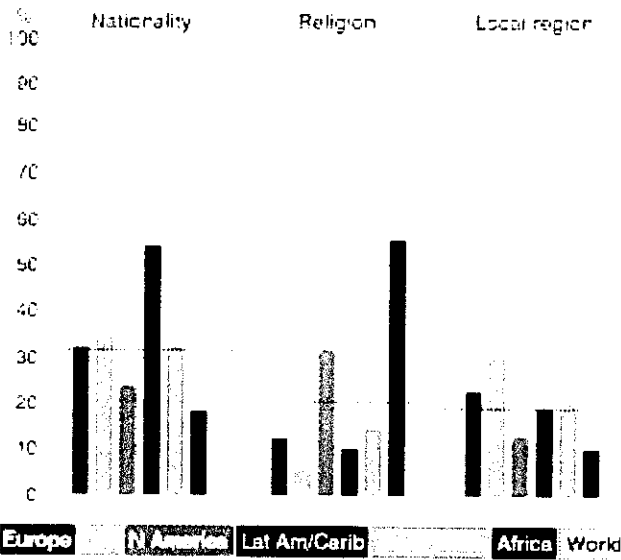
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BBC NEWS

At-a-glance: Who runs your world?

Which is most important to you?



Identity

National identity and religion are the two defining elements for most people, the poll suggests.

Nationality is considered particularly important in Latin America, South East Asia and East Africa; religion in West Africa and North America.

Polls carried out between May and August 2005.

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WHO runs your WORLD?



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It's your world but who's in charge?



By Robin Lustig
BBC News

Robin Lustig launches his five-part Looking for Democracy series, visiting five contrasting countries, as part of the BBC's Who Runs Your World? season.

Consider these words: democracy, freedom, reform. No politician's speech these days seems to be complete without them.

They are words that create a nice warm feeling inside, encompassing what are held to be universal aspirations that bind together the villager in Uganda with the peasant in Cambodia, the computer software designer in California with the coal-miner in Ukraine.

But do they mean any more than that? Is what we mean by democracy even close to what the citizen-scholars of ancient Greece meant when they first used the word?

They meant that every single citizen should take part in decision-making, not that fewer than half of them should turn out to choose representatives to do the job for them.

And what about "freedom"? Free from what, free to do what? Is freedom from hunger more important than freedom of expression?

And then, of course, there is that all-purpose notion of "reform". What is it, other than any change of which we approve?

Your reformist in Ukraine could be my fundamentalist in Saudi Arabia. Reform, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

The 18th Century Franco-Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously wrote: "Man is born free but everywhere is in chains."

The American founding fathers, in their Declaration of Independence in 1776, wrote: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Exporting freedom

The passion for freedom, or liberty, underpins all modern political discourse. So how free are we in this complex, frightening 21st Century world? Are democracy and freedom the same thing?

Who is really in charge of the way we live - are we still in chains, or are we now freer than we have ever



“ When the Martian knocks on our door and asks to be taken to our leader, where should we go? Who really runs our world? ”

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Who runs your world?



been to enjoy our inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

If some of us enjoy more of these freedoms than others, if in some countries we have thrown off our chains, whereas in others they have not, then can the free help to unshackle the un-free?

In an era of globalisation, of free trade, is freedom exportable, like digital cameras and cheap cotton T-shirts?



“ Is freedom exportable, like digital cameras and cheap cotton T-shirts? ”

"It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world," said US President George Bush.

In other words, the US will encourage democracy far beyond its borders - and the reason is self-interest.

"The survival of liberty in our land," said Mr Bush, "increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands."

By and large, people yearn for the same things, wherever they are. They want a roof over their heads, food for their family and an education for their children.

And if they can have all that, they want that other, more intangible, thing that we know as freedom. But of course there is no such thing as absolute freedom.

If we live in a developed democracy, we are constrained by laws, enacted by lawmakers whom we have elected.

Those who live in a dictatorship are constrained by more restrictive laws, enacted by people they did not elect - who are themselves beyond the reach of any law.

New force

So who really runs this world of ours? Is it governments, or corporations, or powerful lobby groups, interested only in furthering their own interests?

Or is it a complex web of inter-locking players, who sometimes share power and sometimes struggle for it, leaving us, as citizens, feeling powerless to influence the decisions they take?

Is there a new democratic force developing with the emergence of new forms of mass communication such as the mobile phone, the internet and weblogs?

Are they now more powerful determinants of our wealth and our prospects than our families, governments and religious leaders who think they control our destinies? Would the revolutions of Ukraine and Georgia have succeeded without them?



Are new forms of mass communication empowering more people?

To President Bush, freedom and democracy march hand in hand. But, as the writer Fareed Zakaria points out in his book "The Future of Freedom" there is more to this democracy/freedom business than just elections.


"For people in the West," he writes, "democracy means liberal democracy: a political system marked not only by free and fair elections but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property.

"But this bundle of freedoms has nothing intrinsically to do with democracy and the two have not always gone together, even in the West."

It may well be true, as Churchill observed back in 1947, that "democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

But when the Martian knocks on our door and asks to be taken to our leader, where should we go? Who really runs our world?

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