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**TO THE POLLING STATION**

# PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2015 PRE ELECTION OPINION POLL

TOP LINE REPORT



CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES

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மாற்றுக் கொள்கைகளுக்கான நிலையம்

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is an independent, non-partisan organisation that focuses primarily on issues of governance and conflict resolution. Formed in 1996 in the firm belief that the vital contribution of civil society to the public policy debate is in need of strengthening, CPA is committed to programmes of research and advocacy through which public policy is critiqued, alternatives identified and disseminated.

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*Making Social Research Count*

Social Indicator (SI) is the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) and was established in September 1999, filling a longstanding vacuum for a permanent, professional and independent polling facility in Sri Lanka on social and political issues. Driven by the strong belief that polling is an instrument that empowers democracy, SI has been conducting polls on a large range of socio-economic and political issues since its inception.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Leaving aside the period of elections, 14.5% of Sri Lankans say that they have a great deal of interest in politics and public affairs in general while almost 50% say that they have some interest. 34.6% say that they have no interest at all.
- A majority of Sri Lankans (86.9%) believe that their vote can make a difference in the outcome of an election, with 47.9% saying that they strongly agree. The agreement that their vote can make a difference is highest among the Sinhalese (89.9%) and lowest in the Tamil community (74.6%).
- The top three sources of information where Sri Lankans get their election related information from are television (44.4%), radio (18%) and newspapers (15.8%).
- The three most watched television channels are Hiru (20.1%), ITN (20%) and Sirasa (16.8%), preferred radio stations are Hiru FM (23.4%), Sirasa FM (17%) and Sooriyan FM (13.9%) and three most read newspapers are Lankadeepa (46.8%), Virakesari (13.9%) and Divaina (7.6%).
- From a list of key issues in Sri Lanka that are also being discussed during this election campaign period, cost of living (32.2%), job opportunities (12.9%) and education (9.8%) are the top three issues that Sri Lankans consider most important.
- For the Sinhalese community the three most important issues are cost of living (34%), job opportunities (12.4%) and security (10.9%). For the Tamil, Up Country Tamil and Muslim communities the important issues in order are cost of living, education and job opportunities.
- When selecting their candidate, the three most important characteristics Sri Lankans consider to be important are that the candidate is educated, that they are not corrupt and their leadership qualities.
- Sri Lankans remain hopeful that the 2015 Presidential election will be free and fair with 40.3% saying that it will be free and fair and 21.5% saying it may be free and fair. Only 12.7% of Sri Lankans don't think it will be free and fair while 25.6% said that they don't know.

- Almost 50% of Sri Lankans believe that a Presidential election is necessary at this juncture while 29.7% don't think it is necessary. From the four main ethnic communities, 67.5% from the Up Country Tamil community, 62.5% from the Muslim community, 47.1% from the Sinhalese community and 46% from the Tamil community think that a Presidential election is necessary.
- When asked if the Constitution should limit a President to serving a maximum of two terms in office irrespective of their popularity, 48.4% of Sri Lankans agreed that it should be limited to two terms, with 24.8% saying that they strongly agree.
- Majority of the Muslim community (70.1%) agree that it should be limited to two terms with almost 50% stating that they strongly agree. Only 43.6% from the Sinhalese community agree with limiting a President to serving a maximum of two terms.
- 39.9% of Sri Lankans are in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency in Sri Lanka while 30.9% said that they don't know and 29.3% said that they are not in favour.
- It is mostly the Sinhalese community that is not in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency. 35.6% said that they are not in favour while only 8.4% from the Tamil community, 14.3% from the Up Country Tamil and 9.2% from the Muslim community said the same.
- From a Provincial breakdown, the highest support for abolishing Executive Presidency comes from the Eastern (60.1%) and Northern (57.1%) Provinces. Those not in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency are mainly from the Sabaragamuwa (53.1%) and Western (36.9%) Provinces.

*NOTE: The high number of responses for the answer category 'don't know/not sure' for questions that deal directly with the upcoming election or key issues being discussed, such as abolishing Executive Presidency needs to be taken into consideration when reading this report.*

# INTRODUCTION

The next Presidential election in Sri Lanka is due to be held on the 8th of January 2015, where for the first time in Sri Lanka, the incumbent President is seeking a third term in office. This election is between two main candidates - incumbent President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Maithripala Sirisena, who was the General Secretary of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the Minister of Health until November 2014 when he announced his candidacy as the opposition coalition's common candidate.

Social Indicator, the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives has conducted election opinion polls since the Presidential election in 1999. Election opinion polls are an opportunity to identify factors associated with citizens' attitudes towards politics and governance and can serve as a mechanism to inform both civil society and political parties with better understanding of what voters require and expect of candidates and parties in handling the nation's ongoing issues. They also empower communities to voice their needs and aspirations while informing the candidates, their respective parties and influential groups to shape their manifestos and future national strategies.

Election polls are popular mainly due to its capacity to predict results. However, the objective of this poll was not to forecast election results but was focused on informing candidates and parties on the issues that citizens are concerned about and what their opinions are on key topics that are being discussed during the campaign period.

# METHODOLOGY

This island wide opinion poll was conducted in all 25 districts of Sri Lanka. Using a structured questionnaire, face to face interviews were conducted with a sample of 2000 respondents, out of which 1999 interviews were considered as complete interviews.

## ***Sampling and fieldwork***

In this poll, Social Indicator (SI) used a multi stage stratified random sampling technique. The sample size was determined in order to produce results within a 2% error margin at 95% confidence level and to make necessary disaggregation for the analysis intended. A sample of 2000 respondents spread across all districts using the Population Proportionate Sampling (PPS) method was polled. Ethnic proportions were accounted for. Electorates were chosen as the strata to distribute the sample and polling booths within each electorate were chosen randomly. Within each polling booth the starting point was selected from the 2008 voter registry whilst the respondents were selected randomly using the right hand rule and last birth date method. Within each polling booth, a maximum of 15 respondents were interviewed.

When allocating samples in the Northern Province, SI adhered to a slightly different method due to the difficulty in terms accessibility and obtaining current data for a sound sample frame. As with the rest of the country, the sample was stratified across electorates and within each electorate polling booths were selected randomly. The respondents in the Northern Province from each polling booth were selected using the snowball method. Fieldwork for the entire poll was conducted from 10 - 20 December 2014.

## ***Training of Field Researchers***

A total of 65 Field Researchers conducted the fieldwork for this poll. The Field Researchers consisted of both male and female enumerators from three ethnic communities – Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim. Prior to starting fieldwork, they were given comprehensive training on the poll, the survey instrument and field techniques. In order to guarantee the quality of field research, SI deployed a group of Supervisors to conduct quality control processes during and after fieldwork - such as back-checks, spot-checks and accompanied visits to ensure the quality of the data collected.

### ***Data Processing and analysis***

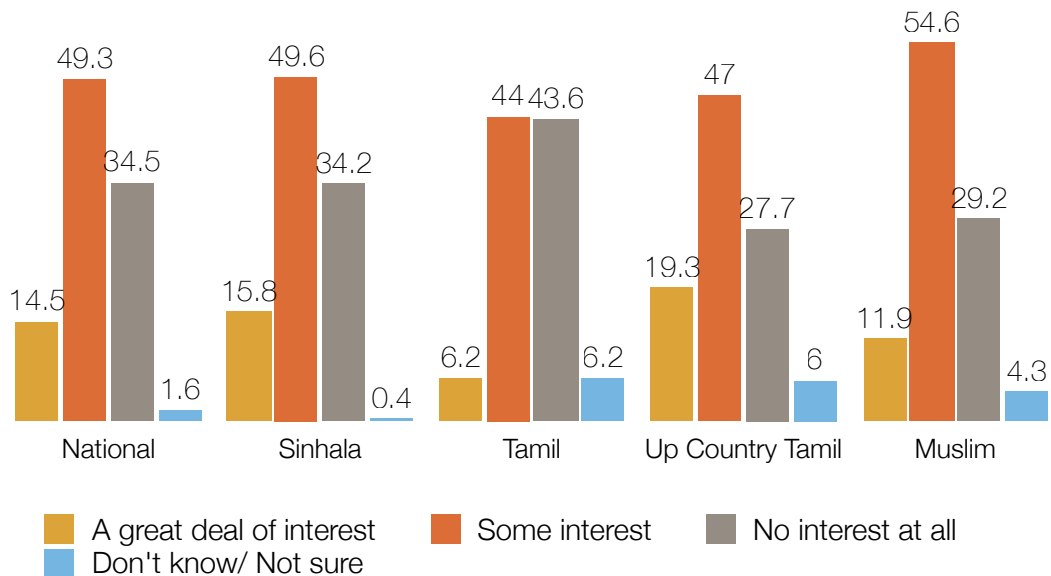
All the completed questionnaires were sent to a team who have been trained to scrutinise and check questionnaires before being keyed into the computers. After scrutiny they were keyed into a computer database using a data entry interface. The dataset was further cleaned by the Data Processing team before it was sent for data analysis. Before starting the analysis process, the dataset was weighted using the 2012 Census data in order to reflect actual geographical and ethnic proportions in the survey data set. The dataset was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 17.0, a specialised statistical tool widely used by social researchers the world over.

# **SURVEY RESULTS**



Leaving aside the period of elections, 14.5% of Sri Lankans say that they have a great deal of interest in politics and public affairs in general while almost 50% say that they have some interest. 34.6% say that they have no interest at all.

**Graph 1: Leaving aside the period of elections, how much interest would you say you have in politics and public affairs in general? (%)**



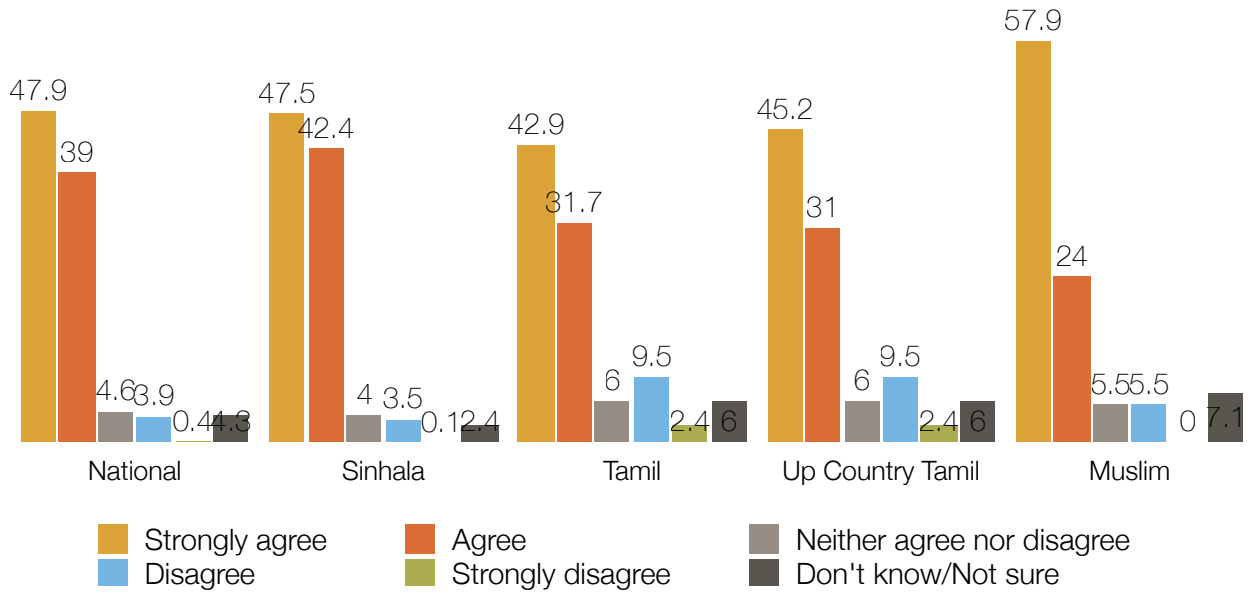
The top three sources of information where Sri Lankans get their election related information from are television (44.4%), radio (18%) and newspapers (15.8%). The three most watched television channels are Hiru (20.1%), ITN (20%) and Sirasa (16.8%), preferred radio stations are Hiru FM (23.4%), Sirasa FM (17%) and Sooriyan FM (13.9%) and three most read newspapers are Lankadeepa (46.8%), Virakesari (13.9%) and Divaina (7.6%).

**Table 1: What are your top three sources where you get most of your information from with regard to the upcoming elections?**

Television (44.4%)	Radio (18%)	Newspapers (15.8%)
Hiru - 20.1%	Hiru FM - 23.4%	Lankadeepa - 46.8%
ITN - 20%	Sirasa FM - 17%	Virakesari - 13.9%
Sirasa - 16.8%	Sooriyan FM - 13.9%	Divaina - 7.6%

A majority of Sri Lankans (86.9%) believe that their vote can make a difference in the outcome of an election, with 47.9% saying that they strongly agree. The agreement that their vote can make a difference is highest among the Sinhalese (89.9%) and lowest in the Tamil community (74.6%).

**Graph 2: Your vote can make a difference in the outcome of an election (%)**



From a list of key issues in Sri Lanka that are also being discussed during this election campaign period, cost of living (32.2%), job opportunities (12.9%) and education (9.8%) are the top three issues that Sri Lankans consider most important. Other issues included in this list were health care (8.8%), security (9.6%), infrastructure (7.5%), crime (2.9%), corruption (6.4%), poverty (7.5%) and abolishing Executive Presidency (1.5%).

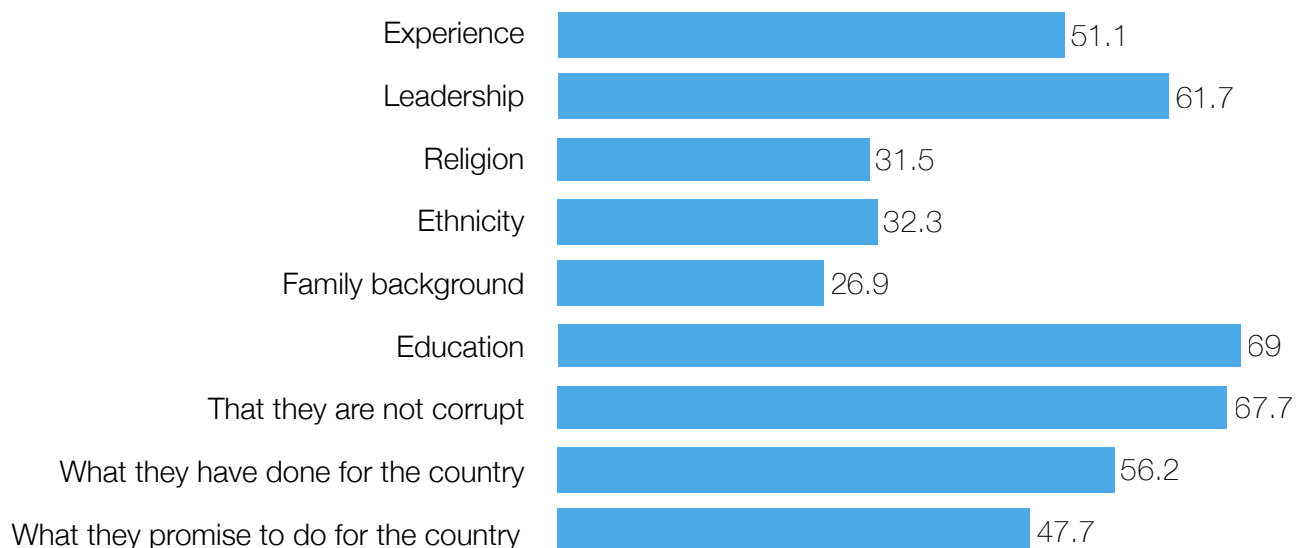
From an ethnic perspective, for the Sinhalese community the three most important issues are cost of living (34%), job opportunities (12.4%) and security (10.9%). For the Tamil, Up Country Tamil and Muslim communities the important issues in order are cost of living, education and job opportunities.

**Table 2: Please rank three issues from the following according to your order of importance - Province**

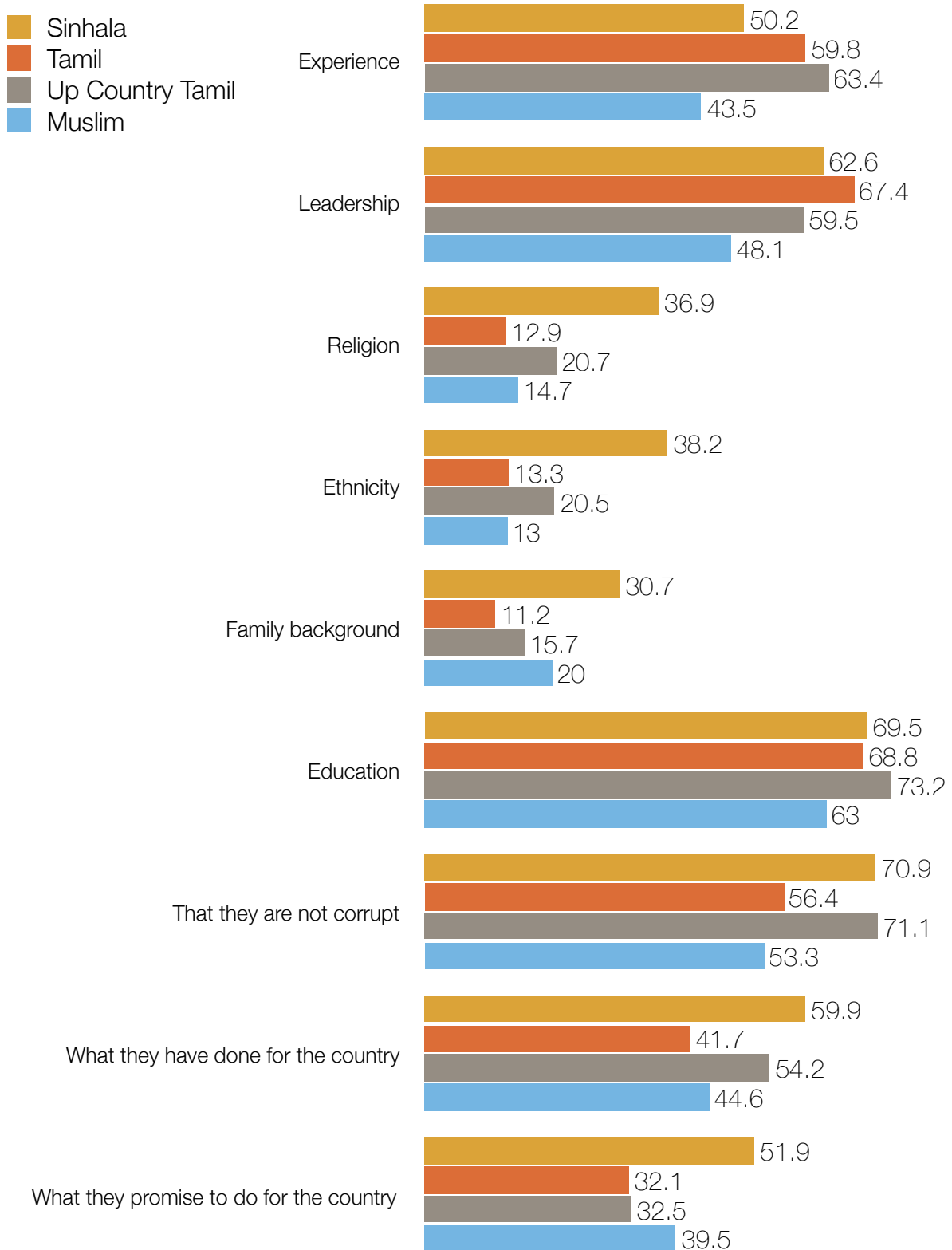
<b>Western</b>	Cost of living - 31.9%	Security - 12.1%	Education - 10.6%
<b>Central</b>	Cost of living - 33.6%	Job opportunities - 13%	Health care - 10.4%
<b>Southern</b>	Cost of living - 37.8%	Corruption - 18.5%	Job opportunities - 12.2%
<b>Northern</b>	Cost of living - 25.1%	Job opportunities - 18.5%	Education - 16.6%
<b>Eastern</b>	Cost of living - 27.4%	Education - 18.6%	Job opportunities - 14.2%
<b>North Western</b>	Cost of living - 34.7%	Job opportunities - 20.8%	Health care - 15.6%
<b>North Central</b>	Cost of living - 28.7%	Security - 14.8%	Corruption - 11.3%
<b>Uva</b>	Cost of living - 37.8%	Infrastructure - 15.1%	Poverty - 13.3%
<b>Sabaragamuwa</b>	Cost of living - 28.2%	Security - 20.3%	Health care - 13.3%

Respondents were given a list of characteristics and were asked to rate from 1 - 100 about how important those characteristics are when selecting their candidate. Considering that a rating of 75% or more means that that particular characteristic is of importance to respondents, the findings presented below are only of those who rated 75% and above for each item. Looking at the findings, the highest rated three characteristics are education (69%), that they are not corrupt (67.7%) and leadership (61.7%).

**Graph 3 : Please rate from 1 - 100 how important the following characteristics are when selecting your candidate (Figures are for those who rated 75% or more) - National (%)**

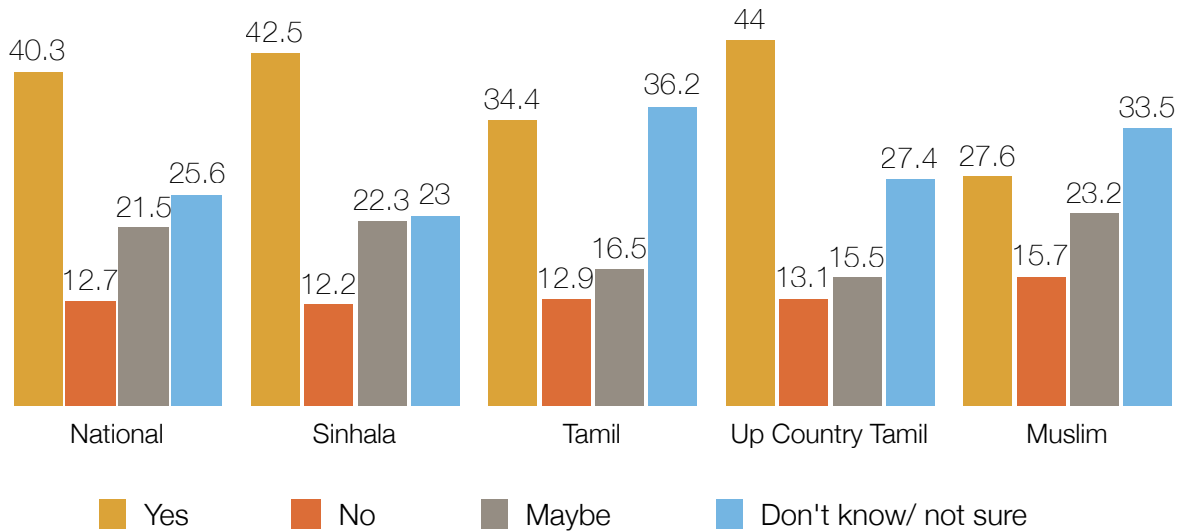


**Graph 4: Please rate from 1 - 100 how important the following characteristics are when selecting your candidate (Figures are for those who rated 75% or more) - Ethnic (%)**



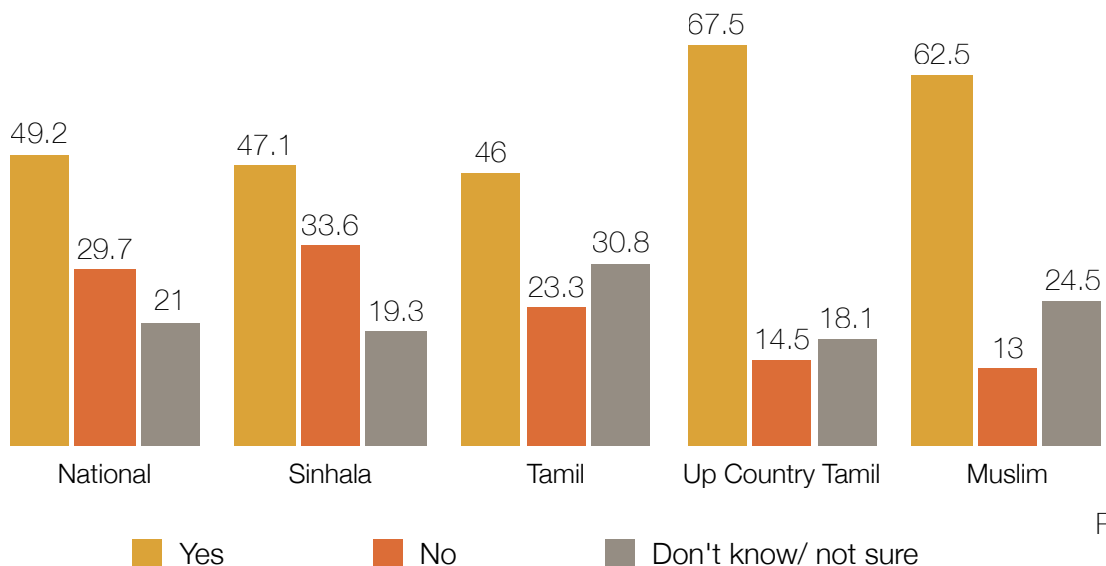
Sri Lankans remain hopeful that the 2015 Presidential election will be free and fair with 40.3% saying that it will be free and fair and 21.5% saying it may be free and fair. Only 12.7% of Sri Lankans don't think it will be free and fair while 25.6% said that they don't know.

**Graph 5: Do you think the 2015 Presidential Election will be free and fair? (%)**



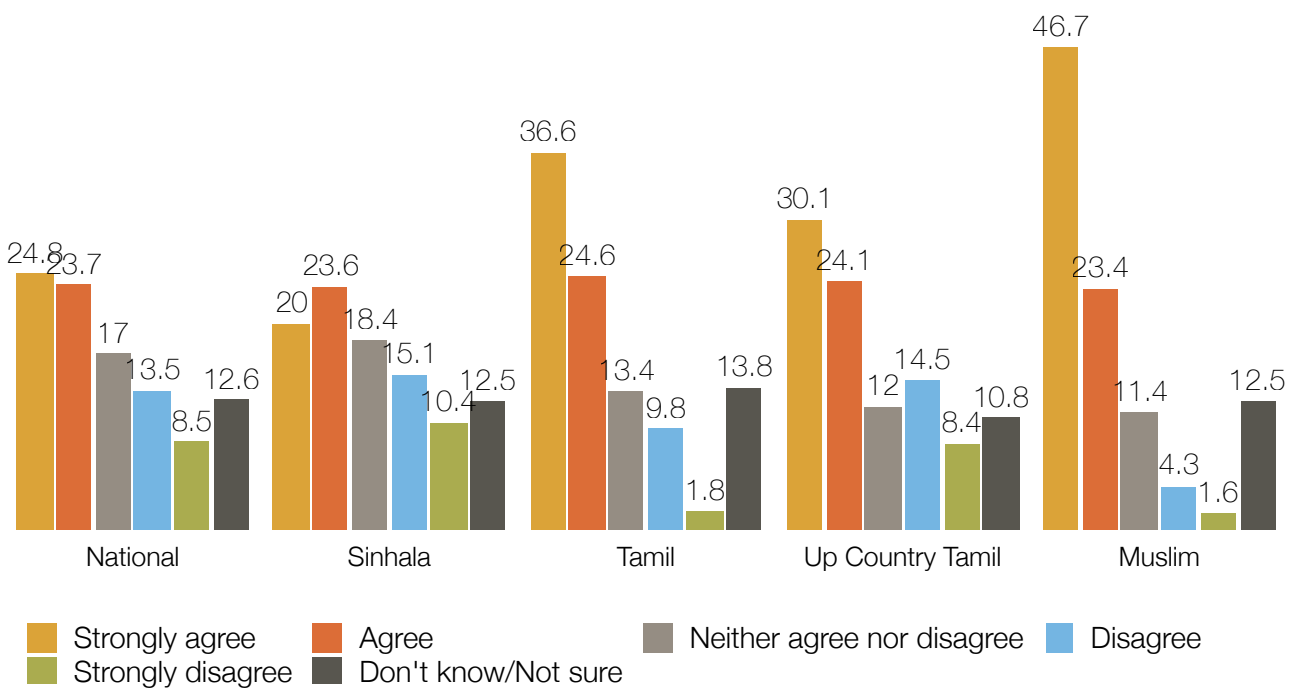
Almost 50% of Sri Lankans believe that a Presidential election is necessary at this juncture while 29.7% don't think it is necessary. From the four main ethnic communities, 67.5% from the Up Country Tamil community, 62.5% from the Muslim community, 47.1% from the Sinhalese community and 46% from the Tamil community think that a Presidential election is necessary.

**Graph 6: Do you think a Presidential Election is necessary at this juncture? (%)**



When asked if the Constitution should limit a President to serving a maximum of two terms in office irrespective of their popularity, 48.4% of Sri Lankans agreed that it should be limited to two terms, with 24.8% saying that they strongly agree. Majority of the Muslim community (70.1%) agree that it should be limited to two terms with almost 50% stating that they strongly agree. Only 43.6% from the Sinhalese community agree with limiting a President to serving a maximum of two terms.

**Graph 7: The Constitution should limit a President to serving a maximum of two terms in office irrespective of their popularity (%)**



39.9% of Sri Lankans are in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency in Sri Lanka while 30.9% said that they don't know and 29.3% said that they are not in favour. When asked what abolishing Executive Presidency means for Sri Lanka, 18.4% of Sri Lankans said that it means that the President's powers are reduced. 27% said that they didn't know, 16.7% did not answer the question while 32.4% gave answers that were not relevant.

From an ethnic perspective, it is mostly the Sinhalese community that is not in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency. 35.6% said that they are not in favour while only 8.4% from the Tamil community, 14.3% from the Up Country Tamil and 9.2% from the Muslim community that said the same. (See Graph 8)

From a Provincial breakdown, the highest support for abolishing Executive Presidency comes from the Eastern (60.1%) and Northern (57.1%) Provinces. Those not in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency are mainly from the Sabaragamuwa (53.1%) and Western (36.9%) Provinces.

**Graph 8: Are you in favour of abolishing Executive Presidency in Sri Lanka? (%)**

