

SUMMARY FINDING AND OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEY ON ARAGALAYA: SEPTEMBER 2022

Centre for Policy Alternatives - Social Indicator



INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is struggling to come out of the worst economic and political crisis in its post-independence history. Unwise economic policies of successive governments that ruled the country since independence, large scale corruption of the Rajapaksa regime since 2006, and extremely problematic economic decisions of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa led the country to default on its loans in April 2022. Due to the lack of foreign reserves, importation of fuel, cooking gas, fertiliser, medicine, and many other essential items has been restricted, resulting in serious shortages. Amidst widespread anger over the sorry state of the country, people got down on the streets demanding a 'system change' including the resignation of the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government that was mainly responsible for the crisis. On 14th July Gotabaya Rajapaksa submitted his resignation after fleeing the county under the pressure of waves of protest campaigns of young men and women independent of political party lines. On the 20th of August, Parliament elected Ranil Wickremesinghe to fill the vacant Presidential position. Since assuming office as the country's eighth Executive President, Wickremesinghe gave priority to negotiate with the IMF and the creditors in addition to consolidating his parliamentary support. He continues to undermine the demands of the protestors and employ all the available constitutional provisions to crackdown on the youth who demand a change in the country's political system. It is in this backdrop that Social Indicator, the survey arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, ventured into an island-wide survey to capture public attitudes towards the protestors and their demands.

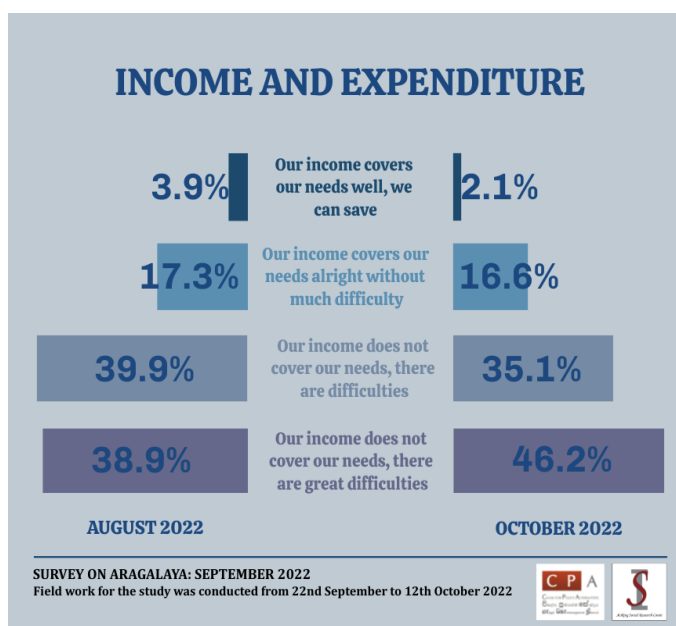
METHODOLOGY

Study on Aragalaya was carried out using a semi-structured questionnaire with 1000 sample respondents from the four main ethnic communities (Sinhala, Tamil, Up Country Tamil, and Muslim). The sample distribution captured men and women from both urban and rural localities in all 25 districts. A multi-staged random stratified sampling technique was used to select the sample locations, and the respondents were selected using a random sampling technique. Field work for the national poll was conducted during 22nd September to 12th October 2022. The dataset was weighted in order to reflect the actual district and ethnic proportion of the population. The data set was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

FINDINGS

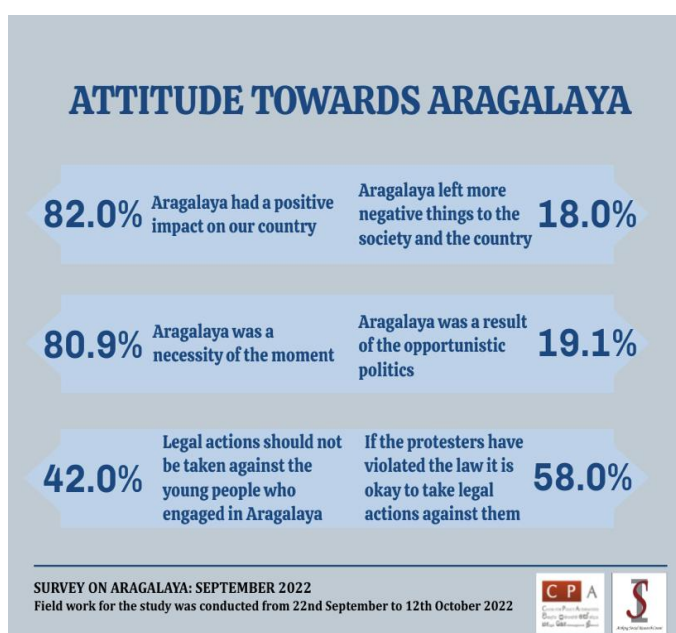
Income and expenditure

According to the survey findings in the month of October, economic sufferings of Sri Lankans still continue. A significant majority (around 82%) say that they live with difficulties and that their income does not cover their needs. Half of them (46%) claim that they live with great difficulties. However, 19% claim that their economic conditions are okay in the midst of this economic and political turmoil. In terms of locality, these difficulties are comparatively higher among the people who live outside of the Municipal Council areas.



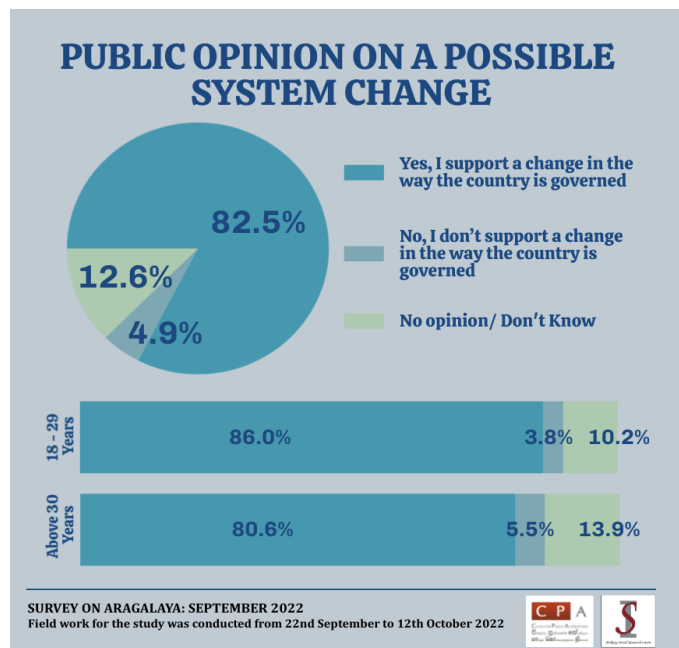
Attitude towards Aragalaya

In the backdrop of the government's persistent campaign to undermine the *Aragalaya* movement and those who participated in it, the survey examined the public opinion on the *Aragalaya* and also on the accusations made against *Aragalaya*. It indicates that still, an overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans continue to express positive opinions on *Aragalaya*. On a national level, 82% believe that the *Aragalaya* had a positive impact in the country while almost an equal percentage believes that the *Aragalaya* was a necessity of the moment. Interestingly, 42% of Sri Lankans are denouncing the legal actions against the youth who engaged in *Aragalaya*. However, 58% are in agreement that legal actions should be taken if the protestors have violated the law. Further, in terms of age categories, the survey highlights that the support for *Aragalaya* is slightly higher among young people (less than 30 years).



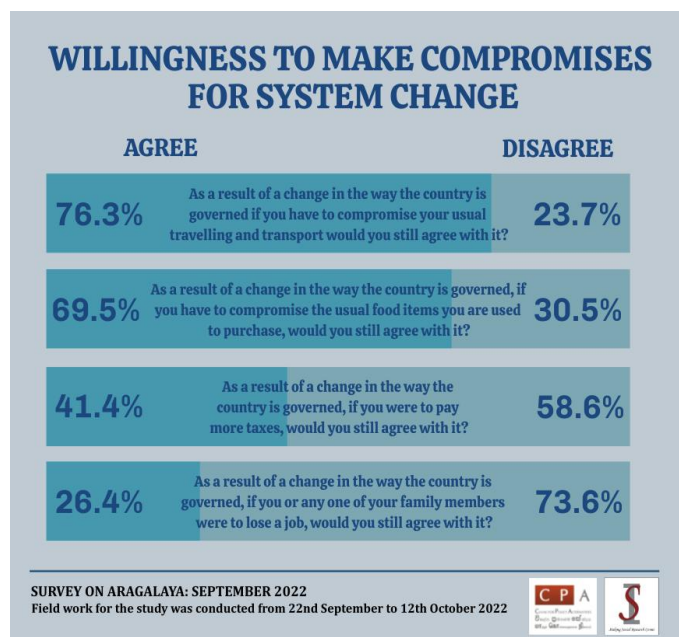
Public opinion on a possible system change

Although the appointment of Ranil Wickremesinghe as the 8th Executive President of Sri Lanka normalised the country’s politics to a great extent, the survey findings reveal that people have not given up their demand for a change in the country’s political system. A significant proportion (82%) state that they support a change in the way the country is governed. It is evident that it is mostly the youth who believe so.



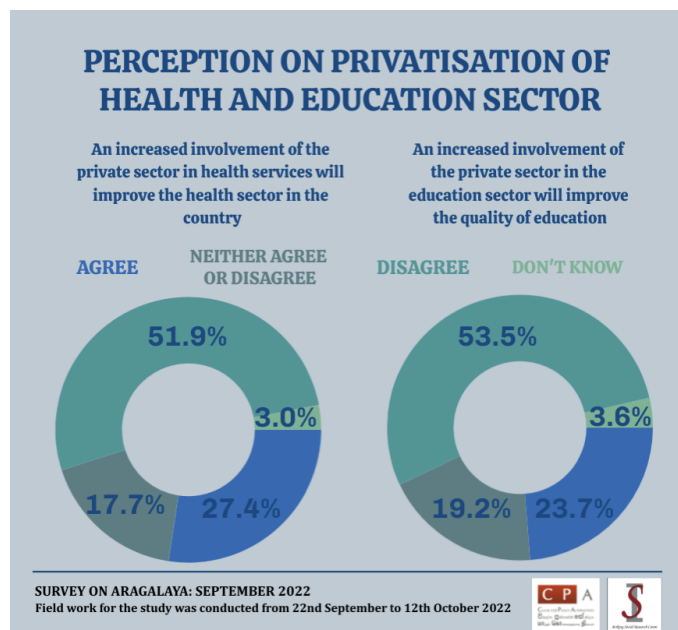
Willingness to make compromises for system change

In order to examine how seriously the citizens support a change in the way the country is governed the respondents were asked to indicate whether they are agreeable to make compromises for the sake of a system change such as a) If they were to compromise their usual travelling and transportation, b) If they were to comprise the usual food items that they used to purchase, c) If they were to pay more taxes, and if the respondent or one of his/her family members were to lose a job. The findings of the survey reveal that as the compromises for a system change gets harsher the support declines. For example, a considerable proportion (76%) express their agreement to support a system change even if they were to compromise their usual travelling or the mode of transportation. Close to 70% state that they would comprise the usual food items that they used to purchase. This support declines drastically if they were to pay more taxes (41%). Only a little more than a quarter of Sri Lankans (26%) still agree to support a system change even if the respondent or any of his/ her family members were to lose a job. Interestingly, this attitude doesn't change by the age of the respondent.



Perception on privatisation of health and education sector

Under the current economic reform discourse, privatisation seems to have been presented as a panacea. The current Wickremesinghe government openly advocates the privatisation of state institutions, ostensibly to cut the government expenses. The survey examines the public agreement/disagreement towards privatisation of two most important sectors - health and education. The survey result shows that it is only a minor proportion of Sri Lankans (27% and 24%) who agree with the proposal to privatise the health and education sector in order to improve its quality. It is noticeable that more than half of the Sri Lankans express their disagreement. Although there is no strong difference between the young and the old on the privatisation of these two sectors there is slightly higher support among young people for privatisation.



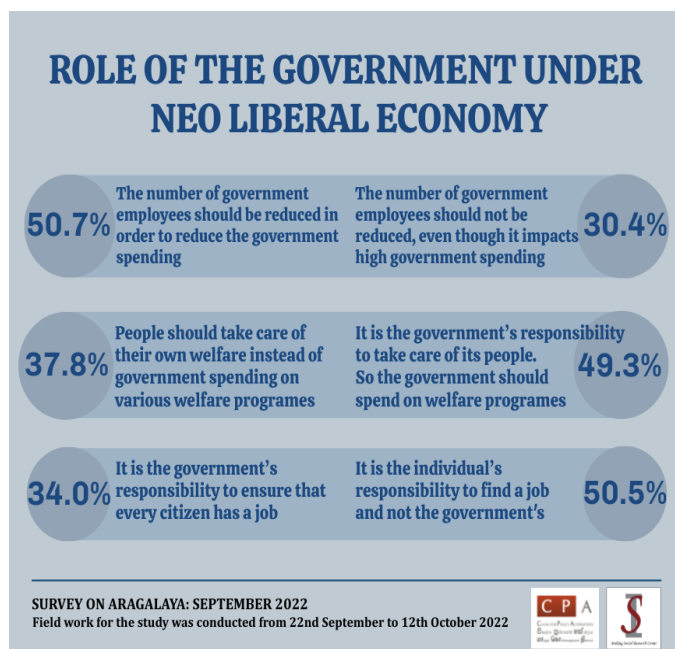
Perception on privatising the economy

The survey further examines the public opinion on matters that indicate Sri Lankans attitudes towards Neo Liberal reforms that have received new impetus in the backdrop of the current economic crisis. Findings indicate that the majority of the citizens support policies such as allowing foreign countries to invest in the country (60%) and not restricting a person's earning capacity (63%). However, in line with the findings, people are not in agreement with shrinking the government sector. For example, a little more than half of the Sri Lankans (52%) state that the government corporations should not be privatised as it is necessary for the country's development.



Role of the government under Neo liberal economy

Under the current economic reform discourse, Neo-liberalists advocate downsizing the government workforce, slicing welfare spending and freeing the government from the responsibility of providing jobs. According to the study, more people are convinced with these Neo liberal rational, particularly with regard to the state sector jobs and government taking responsibility as a job provider. However, about half of the people are of the belief that it is the government's responsibility to take care of the people and that the government should spend on welfare programs. In general, young Sri Lankans (less than 30 years old) seem to be slightly more convinced about the Neo liberal proposals.



END.

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.