

# Public Opinion on Reconciliation in Sri Lanka

Center for Policy Alternatives – Social Indicator  
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## Introduction

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This report presents key findings of the survey on reconciliation conducted by Social Indicator (SI), the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA). The poll was designed to capture the current public opinion on matters related to themes of democracy and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The survey findings on economic and educational growth prospects, safety and security, political interactions, as well as view on political and religious leaderships are discussed in this brief report.

The year 2024 marks the 15th anniversary of the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Since the war ended in 2009, the successive governments claim that they have been working on achieving reconciliation amongst war-affected communities. In addition to the government efforts, civil society too is engaged in many initiatives in promoting reconciliation and bringing lasting peace to the island. It is in this context, CPA - SI ventured into this poll to examine how far the country has progressed in achieving reconciliation amongst communities who have suffered for over 30 years due to the ethnic conflict. Since reconciliation is still an unfinished job, this survey will underpin the honest efforts of the policy makers and various stakeholders who believe in the importance of achieving lasting peace and reconciliation.

## Methodology

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A total of 1372 individuals belonging to the four main ethnic communities - Sinhala, Tamil, Malayiyaha Tamil, and Muslim - across 25 districts participated in this survey. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered amongst the respondents who were chosen using a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique. The fieldwork was conducted between 19th February and 13th March 2024 employing 74 field enumerators (male and female) who belong to the four main ethnic communities. Upon completion of data collection process, the data set was weighted to reflect the actual district and ethnic proportion of the population. The data set was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## Summary of Key Findings

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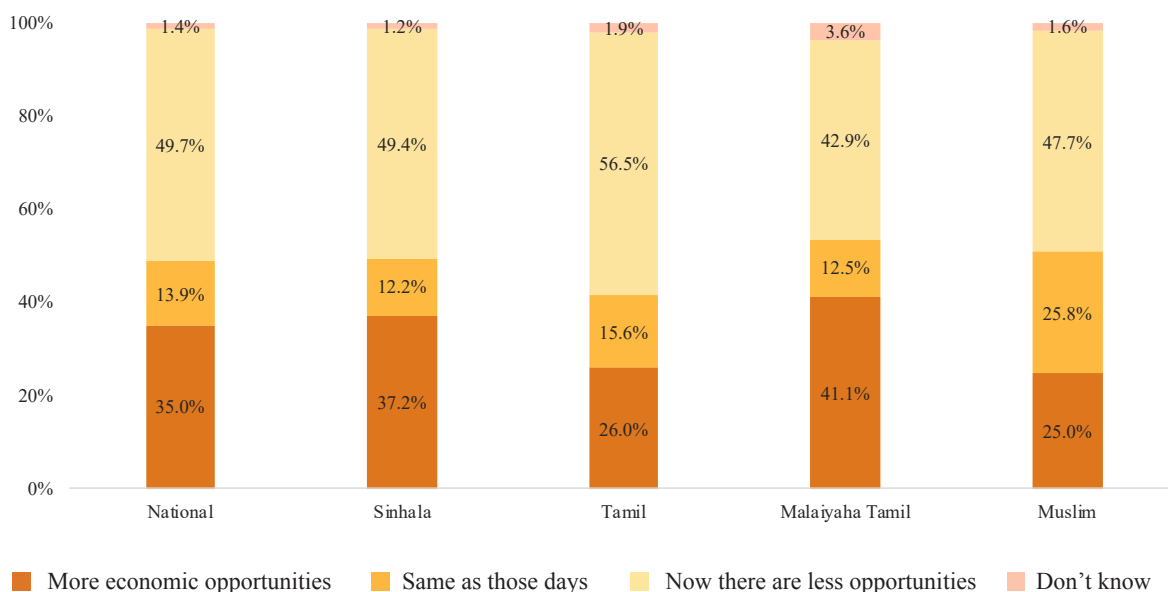
The survey findings demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans belonging to all ethnic groups state that they feel safe to engage in their routine work, practice their religions, and attend to their economic activities. Similarly, all ethnic groups currently subscribe to the idea that all ethnic groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka. This resonates especially amongst the men and women who experienced war as young adults. Despite optimism towards reconciliation, the survey indicates that ethnic communities believe they have unequal access to economic opportunities. Though people express positive assessment about the material improvement on the ground, they express deep skepticism towards their national political leadership and to a certain extent national cultural leadership – religious leadership.

## Key Findings

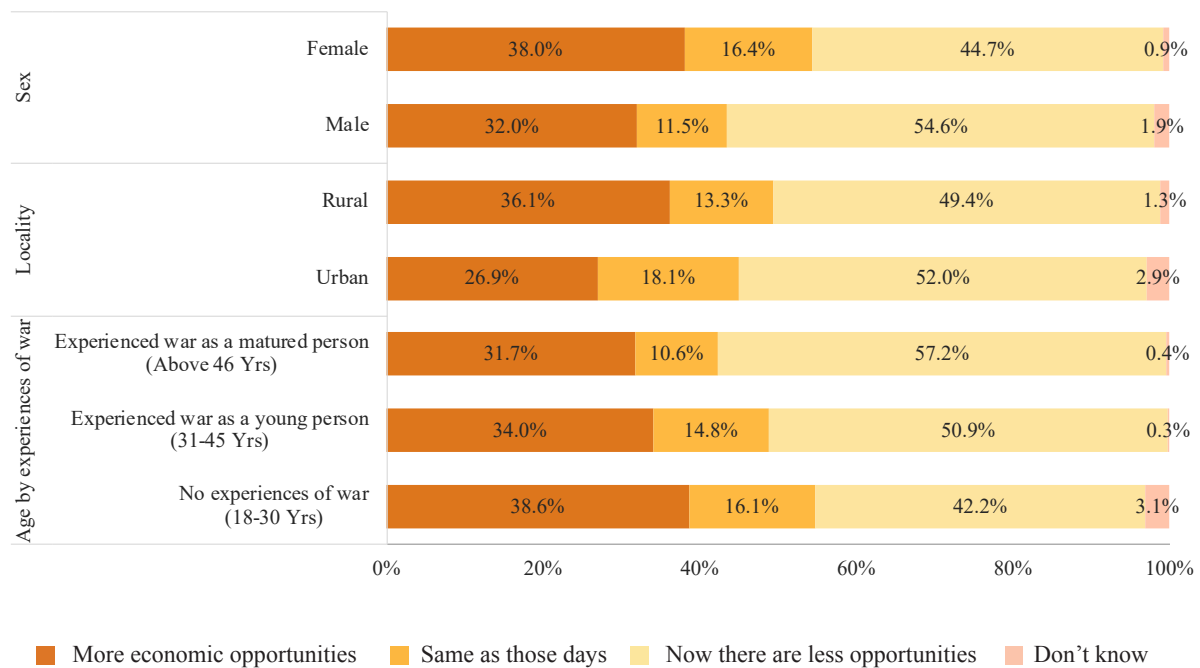
### Opportunities for economic activity

Contrary to the common wisdom, almost half of the Sri Lankans feel that the economic opportunities have reduced compared to 15 years ago. Despite all infrastructure development and increased mobility since the ending of war, it is interesting to note that more than half of the Sri Lankans do not recognize the improvement in economic opportunities. The fact that this opinion is shared by the Tamil community more than the rest of the ethnic groups aggravates the puzzle further. Almost 56% of the Tamil community, 49% of the Sinhala community and 47% of the Muslim community state that they are experiencing less opportunities now than 15 years ago. As the graph 2 depicts, this opinion that presently people are experiencing less economic opportunities than 15 years ago is high amongst the individual who experience the war as young adults (currently in 31 to 45 years and 46 and above age brackets) and mature persons. Also, more urban Sri Lankans and male citizens feel the same compared to their rural and female counterparts. (Refer Graphs 01 & 02)

**Graph 01:** How do you assess the *economic opportunities* available to the people in your village compared to 15 years ago – by National and Ethnicity

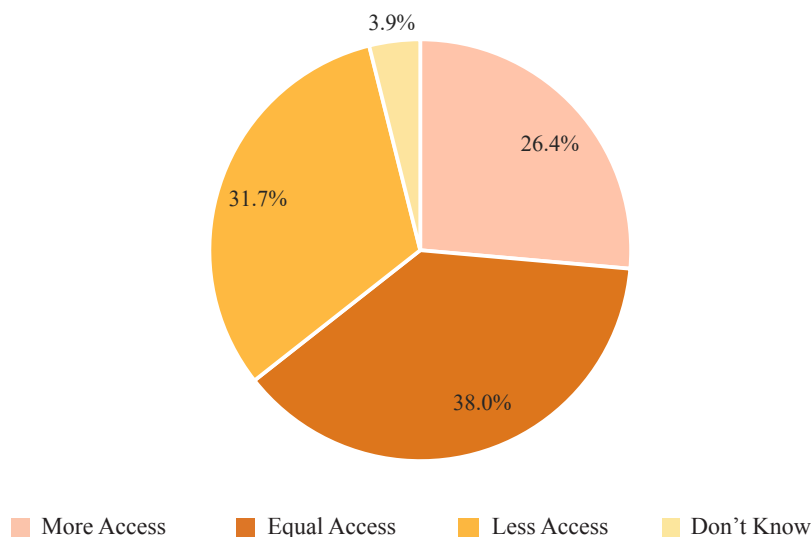


**Graph 02:** How do you assess the economic opportunities available to the people in your village compared to 15 years ago – by Age, Locality and Sex

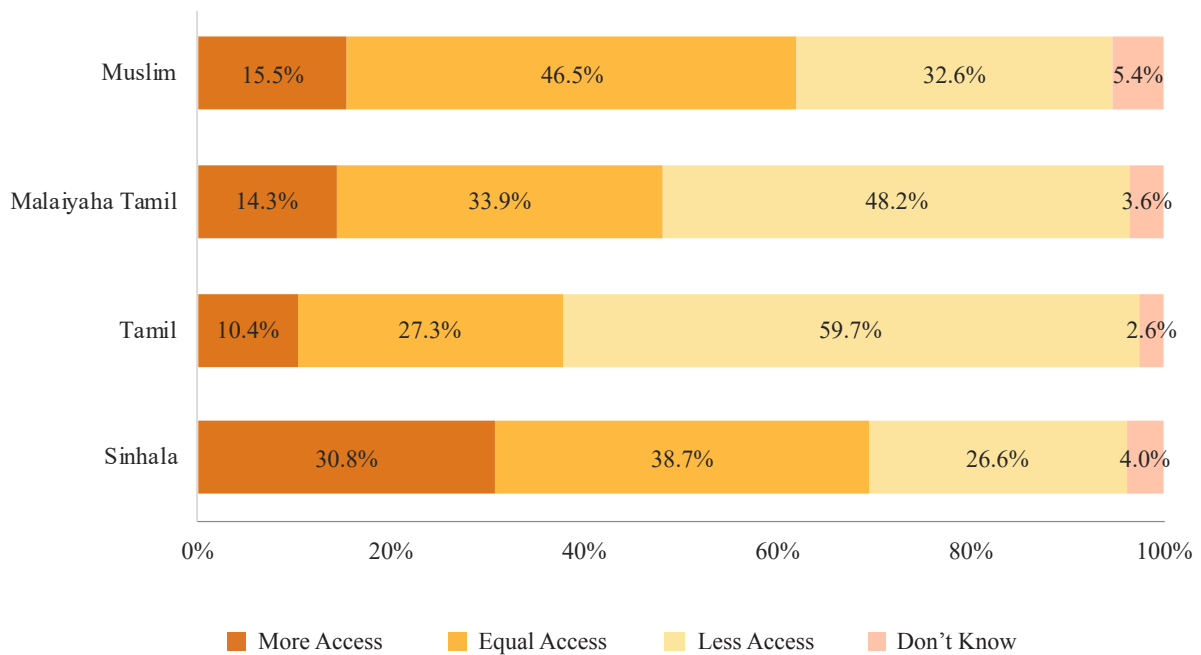


Having asked about individual experience, the survey went on to inquire how people think of access to economic opportunities for their own ethnic community in comparison to other communities. Tamil and Malaiyaha Tamil communities clearly indicate that they have comparatively less access to economic opportunities. The majority of the Sinhala and Muslim communities feel that their communities enjoy either more or equal access to economic opportunities as much as the other ethnic groups. (Refer Graphs 03 & 04)

**Graph 03:** How do you assess the access to economic opportunities available in your area to your ethnic community compared to other ethnic communities – by National

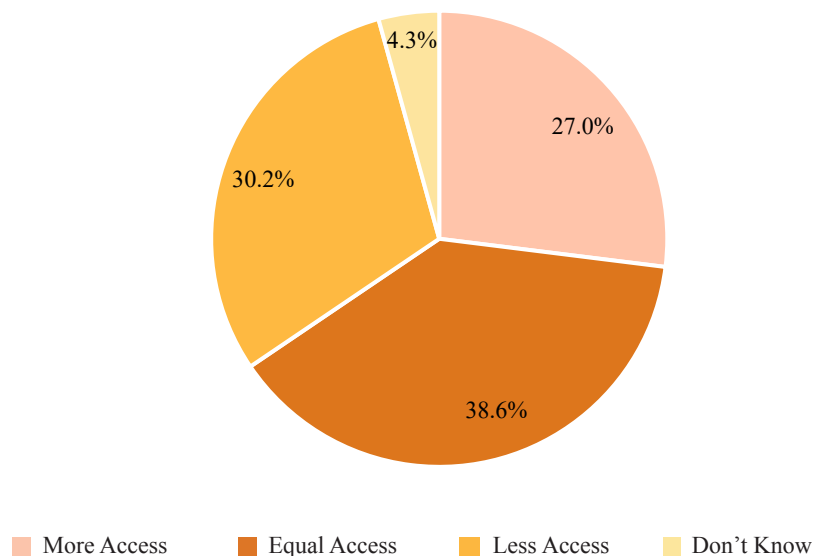


**Graph 04:** How do you assess the access to economic opportunities available in your area to your ethnic community compared to other ethnic communities – by Ethnicity



The survey also inquired about how people think of access to economic opportunities for their own religious community in comparison to other religious communities. While Buddhists feel that their communities either have more or equal access to economic opportunities as much as other religious groups, minority religious communities seem to indicate that they have less access to economic opportunities in comparison to other religious communities. (Refer Graph 05 & Table 01)

**Graph 05:** How do you assess the access to economic opportunities available in your area to your religious community compared to other religious communities – By National



**Table 01:** How do you assess the access to economic opportunities available in your area to your religious community compared to other religious communities – by Religion

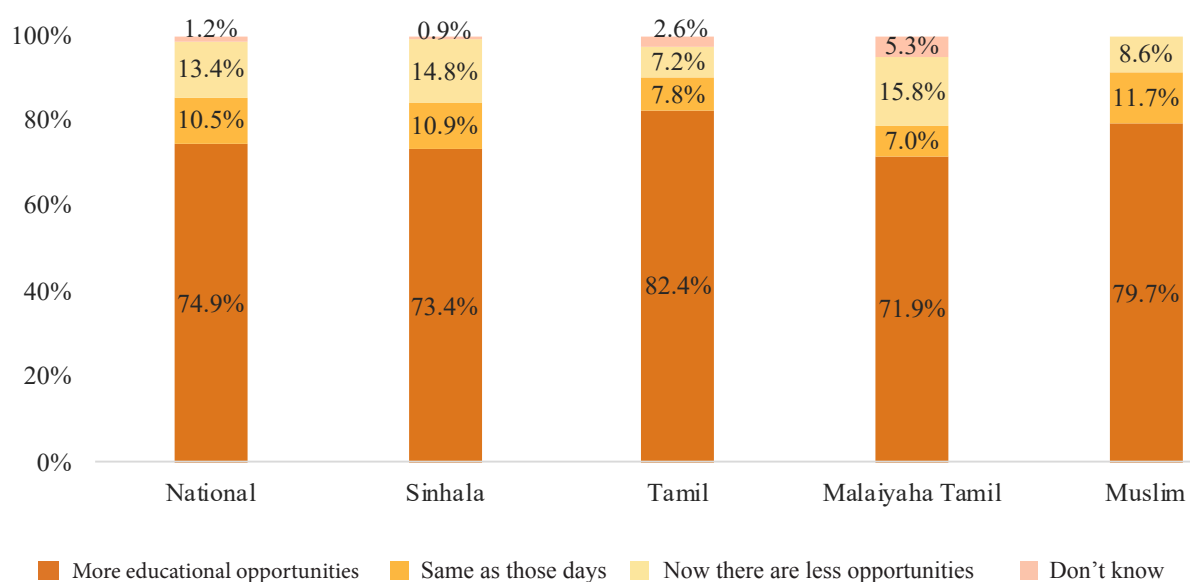
	Buddhism	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity (RC)	Christianity (Non RC)
More Access	31.6%	8.6%	14.2%	35.7%	36.4%
Equal Access	38.7%	33.3%	46.5%	38.1%	18.2%
Less Access	25.3%	54.3%	33.9%	26.2%	45.5%
Don't Know	4.4%	3.8%	5.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Base	1004	186	127	42	11*

\*Base is too small

## Opportunities for education

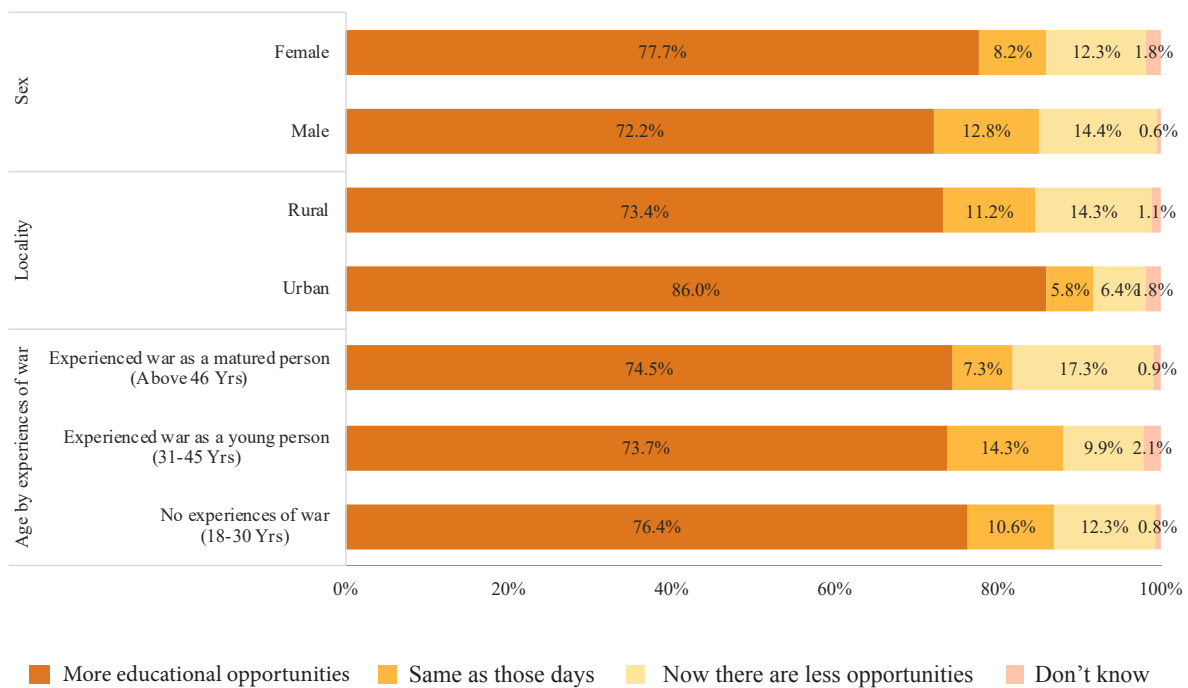
The survey findings show that war end has clearly improved access to educational opportunities of all ethnic groups. This opinion is shared amongst men and women, people from different localities and those who are in different age brackets. (Refer Graphs 06 & 07)

**Graph 06:** How do you assess the educational opportunities available to the people in your village compared to 15 years ago – by National and Ethnicity



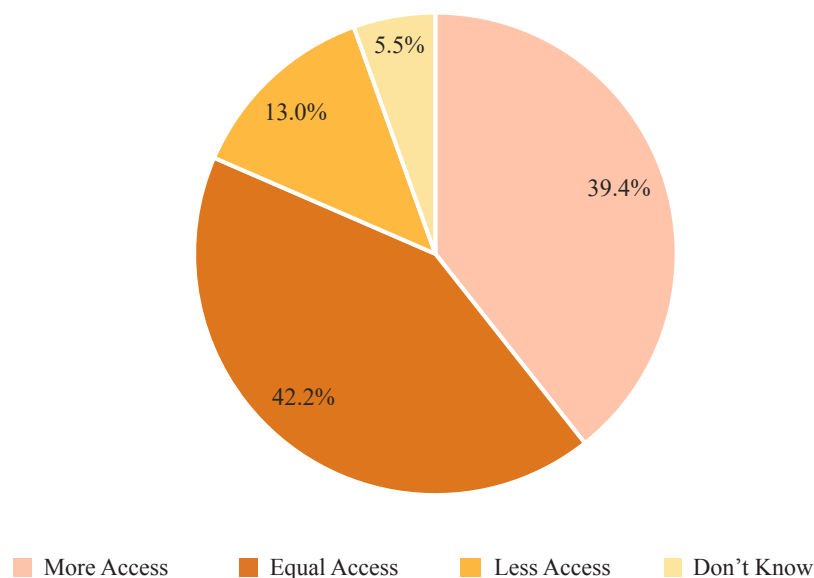


**Graph 07:** How do you assess the educational opportunities available to the people in your village compared to 15 years ago – by Age, Locality and Sex

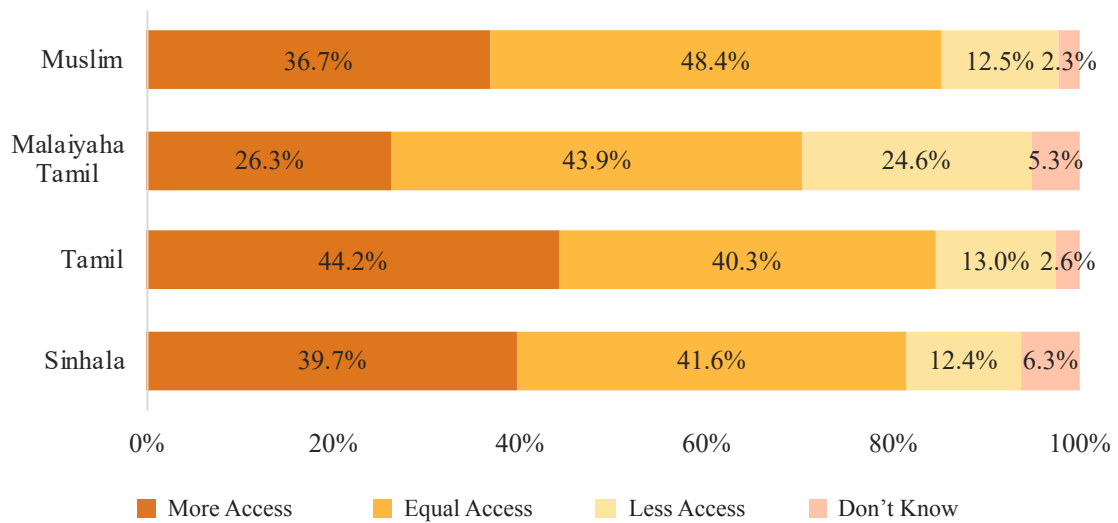


When people were asked to evaluate the access to education of their own ethnic community compared to other ethnic communities, except for Malayha Tamil community, an overwhelming majority of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities feel that their communities enjoy either more or equal access compared to other ethnic communities. (Refer Graphs 08 & 09)

**Graph 08:** How do you assess the access to educational opportunities available in your area to your ethnic community compared to other ethnic communities – By National

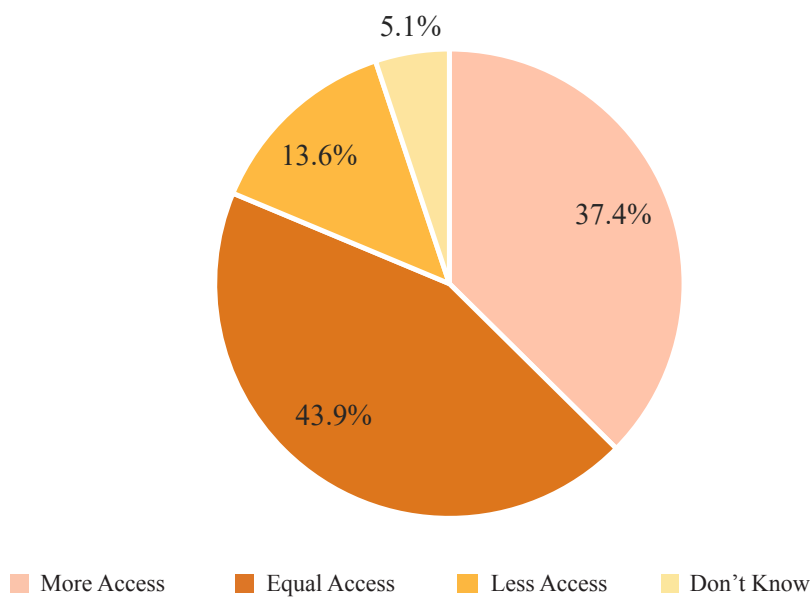


**Graph 09:** How do you assess the access to educational opportunities available in your area to your ethnic community compared to other ethnic communities – by Ethnicity



When asked people to evaluate the access to education of their own religious community compared to other religious communities, an overwhelming majority of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims feel that their communities enjoy either more or equal access compared to other religious communities. (Refer Graph 10 & Table 02)

**Graph 10:** How do you assess the access to educational opportunities available in your area to your religious community compared to other religious communities



**Table 02:** How do you assess the access to educational opportunities available in your area to your religious community compared to other religious communities – by Religion

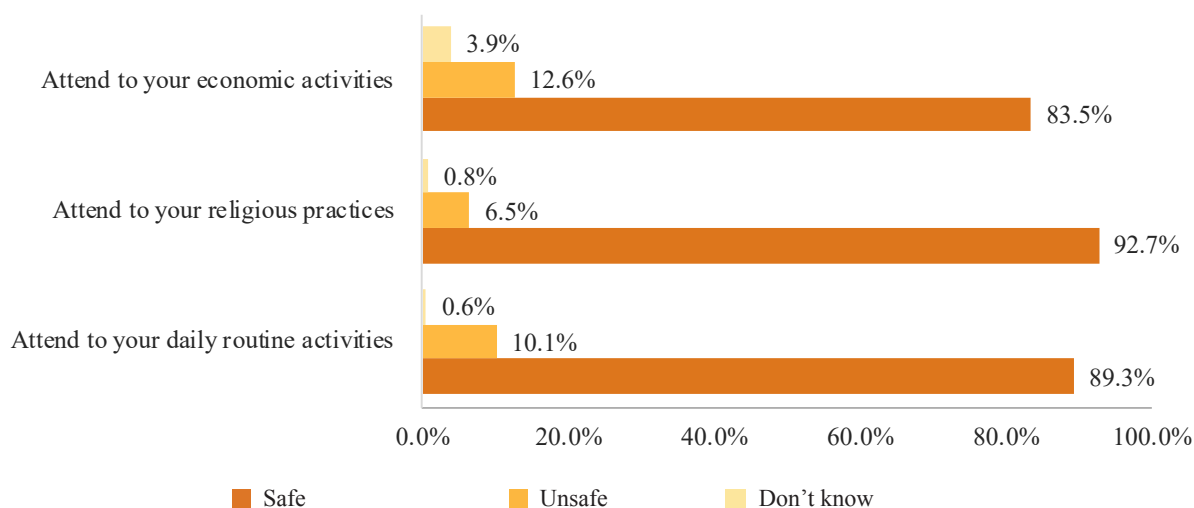
	Buddhism	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity (RC)	Christianity (Non-RC)
More Access	37.5%	37.6%	35.2%	37.2%	40.0%
Equal Access	44.0%	40.3%	49.2%	37.2%	60.0%
Less Access	12.5%	18.3%	13.3%	25.6%	0.0%
Don't Know	6.0%	3.8%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Base	1004	186	128	43	10*

\*Base is too small

## Feeling of Security/ Insecurity

People are finally feeling safe to attend to their daily routine activities, religious practices and economic activities, and this is reflected across all ethnic groups with the overwhelming majority expressing that they feel safe to engage in these activities. (Refer Graph 11 & Tables 03, 04, 05)

**Graph 11:** Feeling safe to attend to daily routine activities, religious practices, and economic activities



**Table 03:** Feeling safe to attend to daily routine activities – By Ethnicity

	Sinhala	Tamil	Malaiyaha Tamil	Muslim
Safe	89.0%	89.0%	91.2%	91.3%
Unsafe	10.9%	9.1%	7.0%	7.1%
Don't know	0.2%	1.9%	1.8%	1.6%
Base	1032	154	57	127

**Table 04:** *Feeling safe to attend to your religious practices – By Religion*

	Buddhism	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity (RC)	Christianity (Non RC)
Safe	92.8%	91.4%	94.5%	92.9%	80.0%
Unsafe	6.6%	6.5%	3.9%	7.1%	20.0%
Don't know	0.6%	2.2%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Base	1003	186	128	42	10*

\*Base is too small

**Table 05:** *Feeling safe to attend to your economic activities – By Ethnicity*

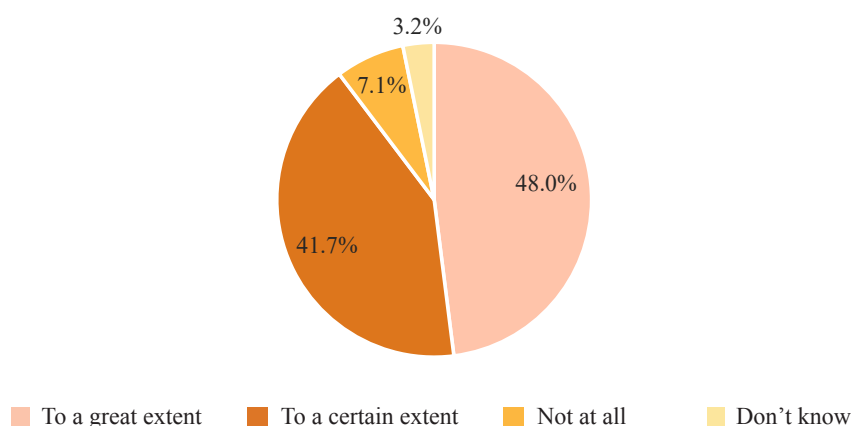
	Sinhala	Tamil	Malaiyaha Tamil	Muslim
Safe	83.6%	79.1%	80.7%	88.3%
Unsafe	12.7%	15.7%	15.8%	7.0%
Don't know	3.7%	5.2%	3.5%	4.7%
Base	1032	153	57	128

## Political Interaction

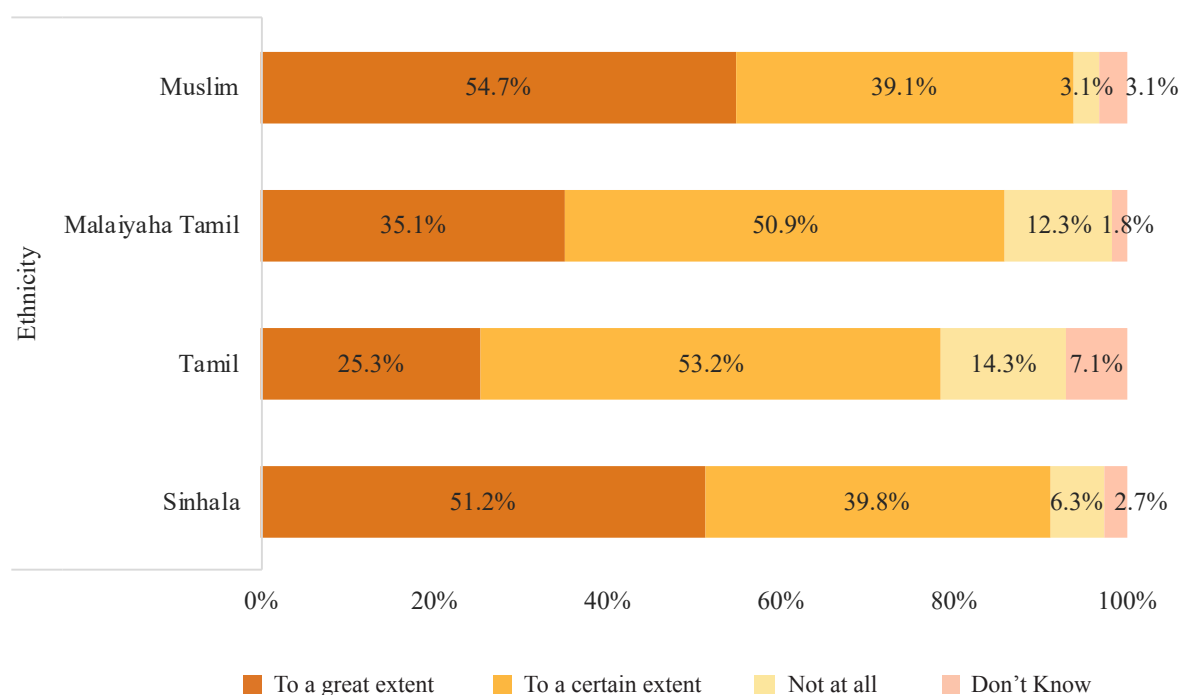
An overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans think that all ethnic groups (89.7%) and religious groups (89.6%) can live peacefully in Sri Lanka. This viewpoint is seen across all main ethnic communities. (Refer Graph 12)

An overwhelming majority of all ethnic groups feels either to a great extent or to a certain extent all ethnic groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka. However, one must notice the 14% of Tamil and 12% of Malaiyaha Tamil community who felt that all ethnic communities cannot live peacefully in Sri Lanka at all. Sri Lankans who experienced war as young adults, after 15 years since the end of war, compared to their old and younger counterparts, believe to a great extent that all ethnic groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka. (Refer Graphs 12 & 13)

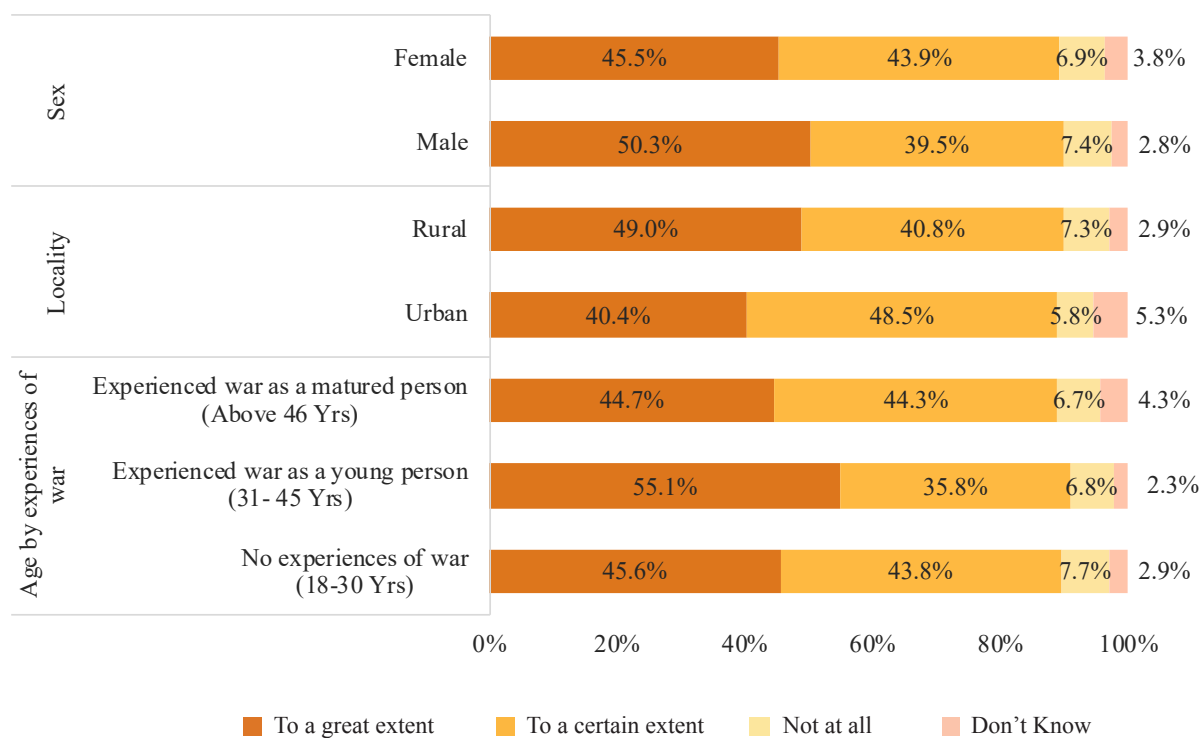
**Graph 12:** *To what extent do you think that all ethnic groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka*



**Graph 13:** To what extent do you think that all ethnic groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka – By Ethnicity

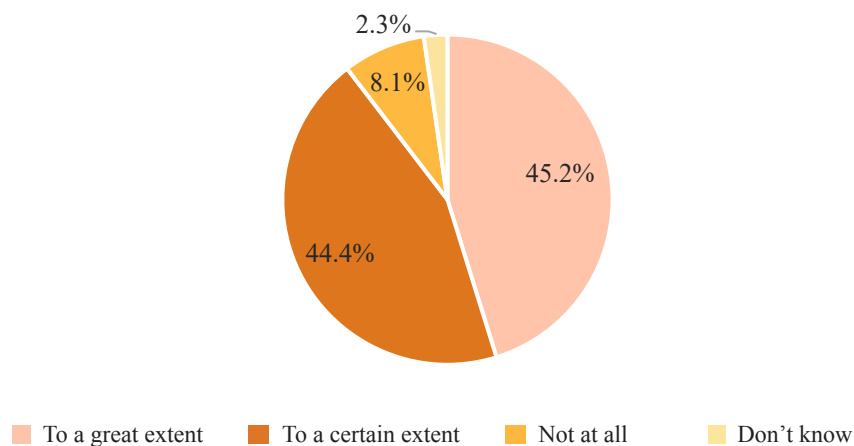


**Graph 14:** To what extent do you think that all ethnic groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka – By Age, Locality and Sex



An overwhelming majority of all religious groups feels either to a great extent or to a certain extent all religious groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka. Similar sentiments were also expressed by almost half of the Hindu community. Sri Lankans who experienced war as young adults, after 15 years since the end of war, compared to their old and younger counterparts, believe to a great extent that all religious groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka. (Refer Graph 15 & 16 and Table 06)

**Graph 15:** To what extent do you think that all religious groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka

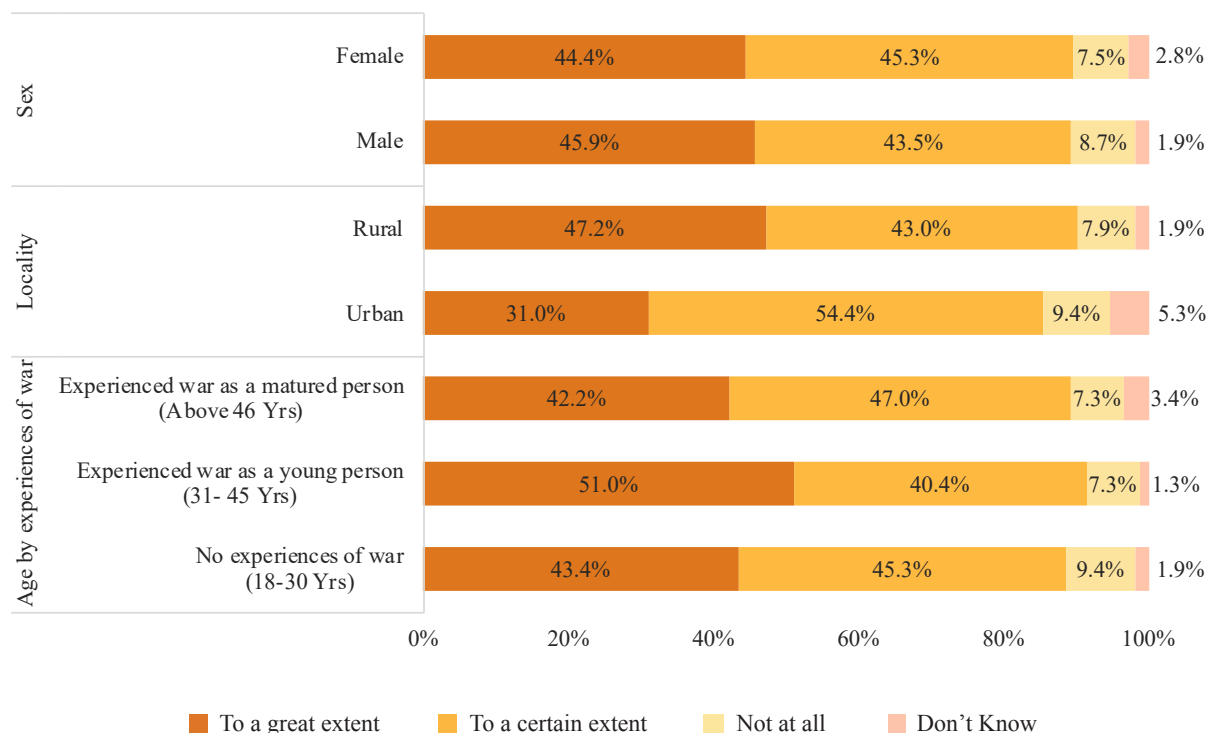


**Table 06:** To what extent do you think that all religious groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka – By Religion

	Buddhism	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity (RC)	Christianity (Non-RC)
To a great extent	50.3%	24.7%	46.9%	9.3%	36.4%
To a certain extent	41.1%	53.8%	46.9%	76.7%	36.4%
Not at all	7.1%	15.6%	3.1%	9.3%	27.3%
Don't Know	1.5%	5.9%	3.1%	4.7%	0.0%
Base	1003	186	128	43	11*

\*Base is too small

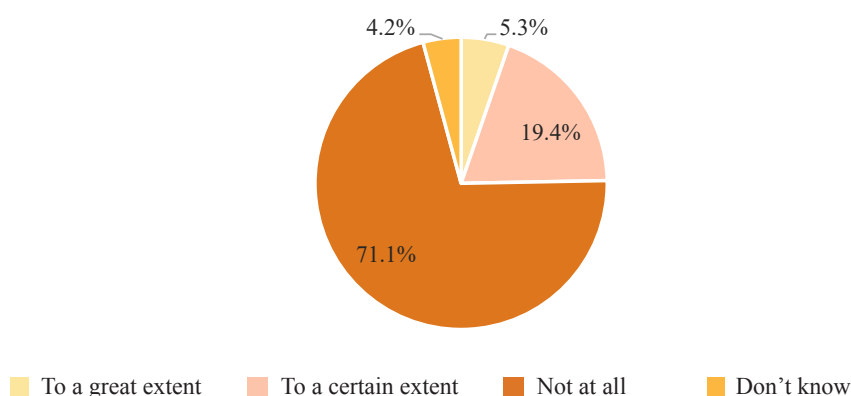
**Graph 16:** To what extent do you think that all religious groups can live peacefully in Sri Lanka – By Age, Locality and Sex



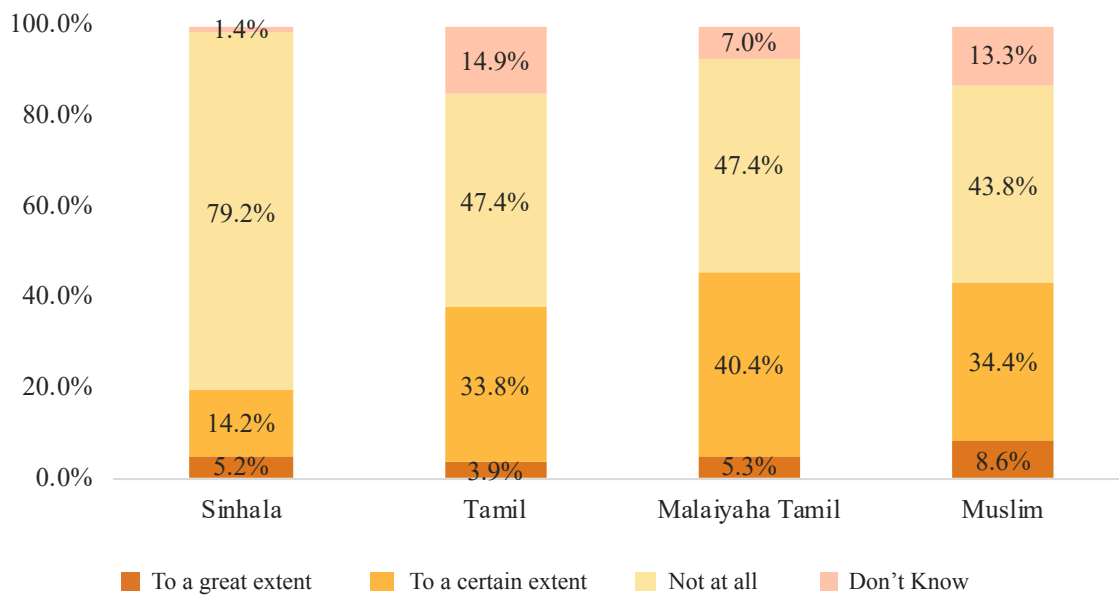
### Opinion on Political Leadership

The survey attempted to assess the public opinion on the performance of the political leadership and their commitment to achieving peace in Sri Lanka. The findings show there is a strong skepticism amongst all ethnic communities, especially amongst the Sinhalese on the national level political leadership’s commitment towards peace. About 70% of Sri Lankans think that their national-level political leaders do not genuinely commit to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans. Interestingly this viewpoint is shared across people of all age brackets, from different localities and men and women equally. (Refer Graphs 17, 18, 19)

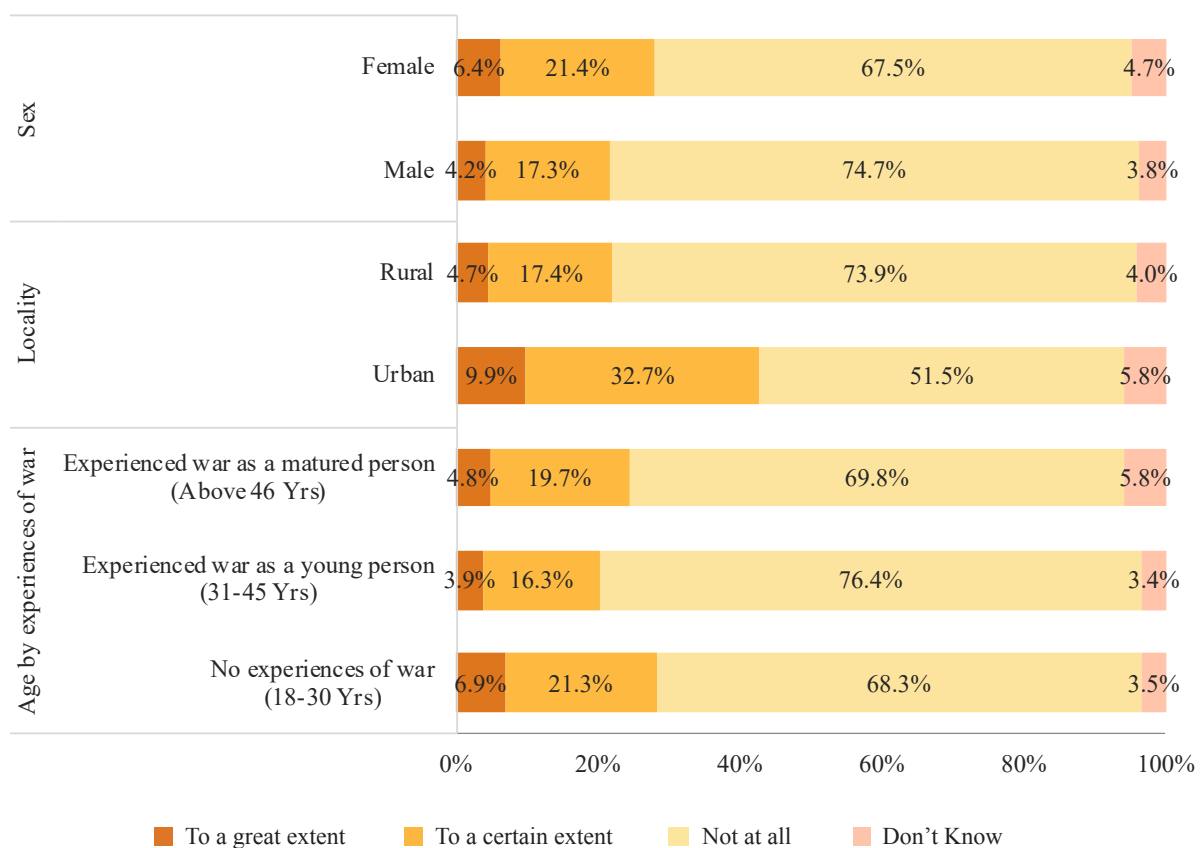
**Graph 17:** To what extent do you think our national-level political leaders genuinely perform to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans- By National



**Graph 18:** To what extent do you think our national-level political leaders genuinely perform to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans – by Ethnicity



**Graph 19:** To what extent do you think our national-level political leaders genuinely perform to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans – By Age, Locality and Sex

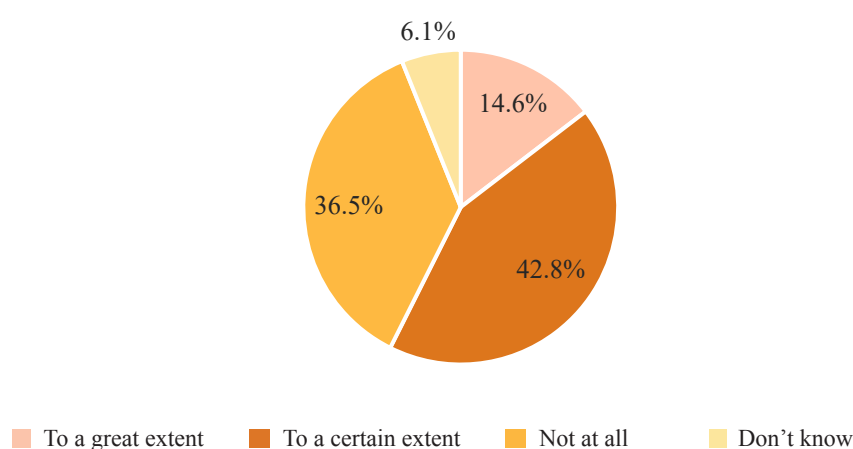




## Opinion on Religious Leadership

Compared to political leaders there is more positive appreciation towards the commitment of religious leaders in achieving peace in Sri Lanka. However, while about 58% of Sri Lankans feels that religious leaders are committed and work towards achieving peaceful life for all Sri Lankans, 36% reject that opinion. Especially the minority religious groups, believe that national level religious leaders do not work towards achieving peaceful life for all Sri Lankans. This opinion is strongly echoed amongst the people who have experienced the war as a mature person (currently 46 and above age brackets). (Refer Graphs 20 & 21 and Table 07)

**Graph 20:** *To what extent do you think our national-level religious leaders genuinely perform to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans*

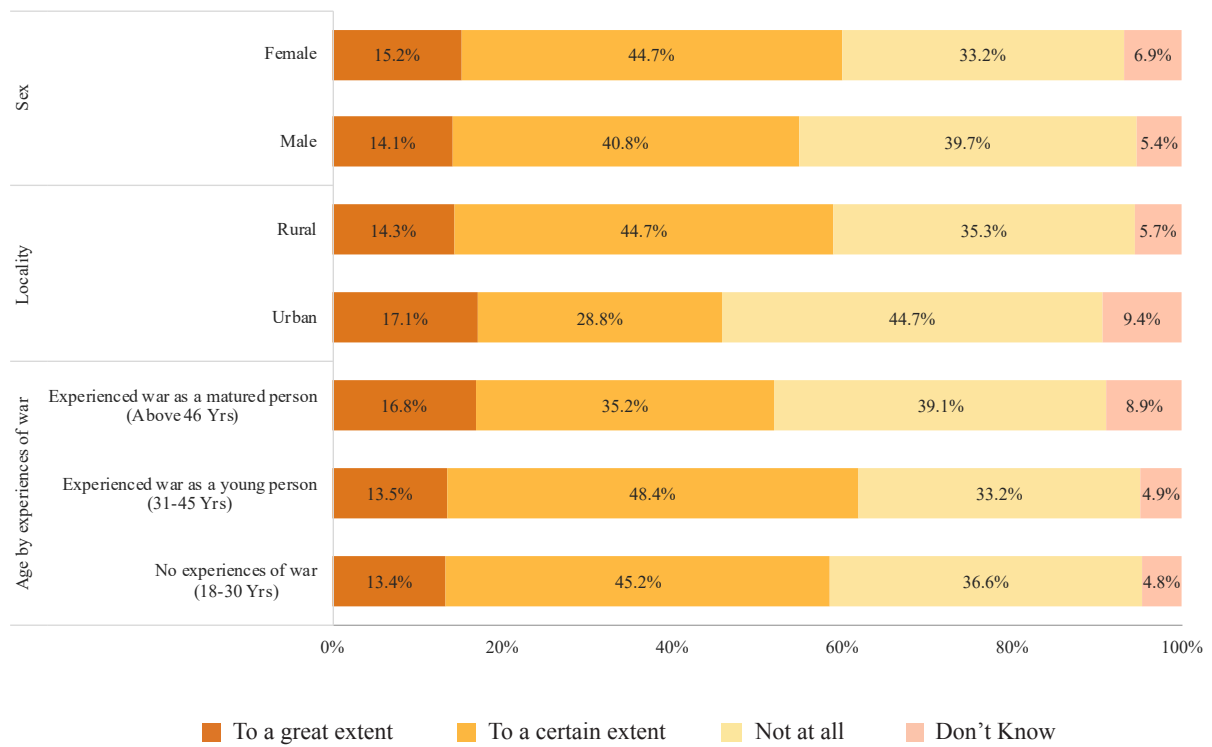


**Table 07:** *To what extent do you think our national-level religious leaders genuinely perform to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans – By Religion*

	Buddhism	Hinduism	Islam	Christianity (RC)	Christianity (Non-RC)
To a great extent	16.9%	5.9%	12.5%	4.7%	18.2%
To a certain extent	44.6%	32.8%	33.6%	74.4%	18.2%
Not at all	35.4%	44.6%	37.5%	18.6%	63.6%
Don't Know	3.1%	16.7%	16.4%	2.3%	0.0%
Base	1004	186	128	43	11*

\*Base is too small

**Graph 21:** To what extent do you think our national-level religious leaders genuinely perform to achieve a peaceful life for all Sri Lankans – By Age, Locality and Sex



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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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, and alternatives identified and disseminated.

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