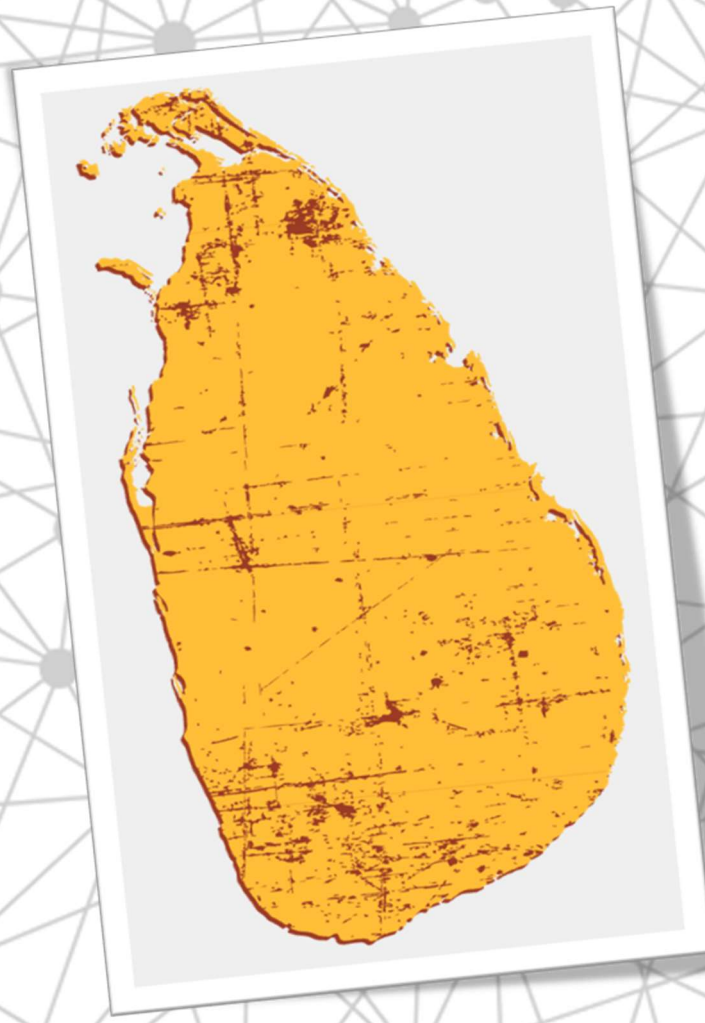


DEMOCRACY AND RECONCILIATION IN SRI LANKA



TOPLINE REPORT

Centre for Policy Alternatives | Social Indicator
March 2024

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Introduction

This topline report presents the findings of Democracy and Reconciliation Survey carried out in January 2024. The poll captures public sentiments on several core areas related to democracy and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. In doing so, the study aims to provide a platform to the general public to voice their opinion reflecting their standpoint in the overarching democracy and reconciliation discourse. In turn, the study aims to be a valuable apparatus to assist the policy makers in aligning their decisions with values, expectations and preferences of the larger population. This report discusses the public opinion on ethnic relationships, safeguards in the social and political realms that are in place for the minority protection, trust and tolerance within ethnic groups, trust in institutions and democracy as well as opinion on constitutional reforms.

This survey was conducted by Social Indicator, CPA's survey research arm which has been conducting public opinion polls since 1999 on a wide range of socio-political issues in Sri Lanka. The survey team consisted of Dr. Pradeep Peiris, Rangani Ranasinghe, M. Krishnamoorthy, and Ishara Jayarathne. Social Indicator would like to thank Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu and Bhavani Fonseka for their support in the study and the Global Initiative for Justice Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) for funding this survey.

Methodology

The survey was carried out through face-to-face interviews utilizing a semi-structured questionnaire amongst a sample of 1350 individuals selected from the four main ethnic communities - Sinhala, Tamil, Malayaha Tamil, and Muslim - across 25 districts. The sample locations are selected using a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation of men and women residing in both rural and urban localities. The fieldwork was conducted between the 4th and 22nd of January 2024 employing 73 field enumerators (male and female) who belong to the four main ethnic communities. The final data set was weighted to reflect the actual district and ethnic proportion of the population and was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Executive Summary

Support for Democracy

- A majority of Sri Lankans (76.7%) agree with the statement that “Democracy is preferable to any other form of government”. This is seen across all ethnic communities, age groups and genders.

Trust in Institutions

- Sri Lankans level of trust is considerably low with regards to the institutions that play a role in the governance of the Country which includes the parliament (22.4%), political parties (19.0%), national government (40.1%) and provincial government (45.5%). However, the level of trust in institutions such as courts (79.2%), army (84.5%) and police (66.9%) are considerably high with a large majority expressing their trust in these institutions.

Progress on Reconciliation

- A majority of Sri Lankans (62.1%) are not satisfied with the current government’s progress on addressing reconciliation in the post-war Sri Lanka. This dissatisfaction is seen across all key ethnic communities, age groups and genders.

Power Devolution

- Nearly half of the Sri Lankans (44.7%) express agreement with the statement that “It is ok to decentralize certain powers, but the powers of the central government should not be reduced”. Another 35.6% of the Sri Lankan’s express agreement with the statement that “Power needs to be devolved to the provincial councils while reducing the power of the central government”. Those who hold the viewpoint that the power should be devolved to the provincial government while reducing the power of the centre is fairly high amongst the Tamil (53.1%) community in comparison to Sinhala (33.4%), Malayaha Tamil (32.6%) and Muslim (34.5%) communities. In contrast, half of the Sinhala community are of the opinion that it is ok to decentralise certain powers, but without reducing the powers of the centre.

Secular Constitution

- Almost half of the Sri Lankans (52%) express agreement with the statement that “In order to maintain every citizen’s right to equality, no religion should be given the foremost place in the constitution.” Another 42.2% express agreement with the statement that “It is okay for the majority religion to be given the foremost place in the constitution.” Those who are of the opinion that no religion should be given the foremost place in the constitution to maintain citizen’s right to equality, is considerably high amongst the minority communities (Tamil, Malaiyaha Tamil & Muslim) compared to the Sinhala community. In contrast, nearly half of the Sinhala community are of the opinion that it is okay for the majority religion to be given the foremost place in the constitution. This opinion expressed mostly by the older population (above 30 yrs).

Awareness & Perception on Constitutional Reforms

- Sri Lankans have a moderate awareness of the ongoing Constitutional reform process in Sri Lanka, which is reflected from nearly half of the Sri Lankans (42.9%) expressing awareness. Among those, the awareness is considerably high amongst the Tamil (56.3%) and the Malaiyaha Tamil (69.8%) communities as opposed to the Sinhala (40.4%) and Muslim (35.7%) communities.
- A majority of Sri Lankans (72.3%) express agreement with the statement that “the Constitution should be changed based on recommendations made by an all-party committee to produce a political solution to country’s ethnic problem.” This viewpoint is seen across all main ethnic communities, age groups and gender.
- Half of the Sri Lankans (52.3%) believe that they need a new constitution while nearly 40% believe that the current constitution should continue with some changes. This viewpoint is seen across half of the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities. However, half of the Malaiyaha Tamil community are of the opinion that the current constitution should continue with some changes.

Minority - Majority Relationships

- The survey participants were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement “People often treat me differently because of my ethnicity”. Over half of the Sri Lankans expressed disagreement with the statement. This disagreement is reasonably high amongst the Sinhala (70.3%) and Muslim (78.6%) communities as opposed to the Tamil (56.3%) and Malaiyaha Tamil (47.6%) communities.

- When asked how often they interact with someone from a different ethnicity, nearly half of the Sri Lankans (48%) stated that they 'often' interact with people belonging to other ethnicities. This viewpoint is relatively high amongst the Malayaha Tamil and Muslim communities. Approximately 30% of the Sinhala and Tamil community state that they 'rarely' interact with people from other ethnicities. Those who 'often' interact with other ethnicities is relatively high amongst the male population in comparison to the female population.
- When asked about the level of knowledge they have about the other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, over half of the Sri Lankans (57%) stated that they have some knowledge. This opinion is seen across all main ethnic groups, age groups and genders.
- The survey participants were asked about the freedom they have, to practice their own religion within the community they live in. An overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans (95.6%) responded in the affirmative stating that they can practice their religion without any restriction. This opinion is seen across all main ethnic, religious and age groups as well as genders. Nevertheless, 3.7% of the Sri Lankans stated that they can practice their religion but with some restrictions.

Social Trust

- The survey participants were asked about the extent to which they trust their neighbour, relative and various ethnicities to seek personal assistance. A majority revealed that they would trust their neighbour (86%) or a relative (91.2%) to request help in a given situation. Further, a significant percentage of Sri Lankans state that they would trust someone from Sinhala (85.4%), Tamil (69.3%), and Muslim (64.1) communities to seek assistance. However, those who prefer to seek assistance from the Sinhala community is relatively high compared to those who prefer to seek assistance from Tamil and Muslim communities. Looking across the main ethnic communities, an overwhelming majority of each ethnic group prefers to seek assistance from their own ethnic community.

Political Safeguards for Minorities

- An overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans (90.9%) express agreement with the statement that “The rights of minority groups should be protected even if the majority in the area do not agree”. This viewpoint is shared across all the main ethnic communities, age groups and genders.
- A majority of Sri Lankans (79.5%) agree with the statement that “Each ethnic group should have the right to elect a certain number of members to the Parliament”. This opinion is seen across all ethnic communities

though agreement is relatively low amongst the Sinhala community compared to other ethnic communities.

- The Sri Lankans express mixed opinion when asked about the role of religion in the Constitution. A 30% of Sri Lankans state that the Constitution of Sri Lanka should protect the freedom of religion as a fundamental right while another nearly 30% state that only Buddhism should be given a special place in the Sri Lankan constitution, with assurance of religious freedom to all. Further, another nearly 20% state that Sri Lanka's constitution should have no mention of religion, except to guarantee the freedom of religion to all.
- Those who believe that Sri Lanka's constitution should have no mention of religion, except to guarantee the freedom of religion to all, is considerably high amongst the minority ethnic communities (Tamil, Malayaha Tamil & Muslim). The Sinhala community on the other hand express mixed opinion.

Language of the National Anthem

- When asked about their level of agreement with the statement "The National Anthem should be sung in Sinhala and Tamil", 60% of the Sri Lankans express agreement, while slightly over 30% express disagreement. Those who feel that the national anthem should be sung in both languages are substantially high amongst the minority communities. On the contrary, the Sinhala community seems to be divided in their opinion. Those who express agreement with the statement is also relatively high amongst the younger age group (18 -29yrs).

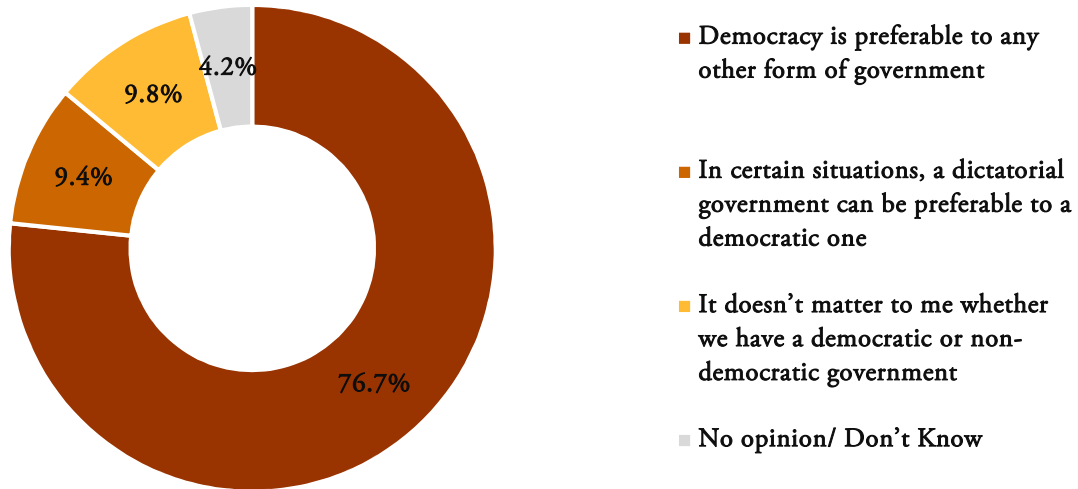
Freedom to Remember

- Nearly half of the Sri Lankans (47.8%) express agreement with the statement that "All ethnic groups should have the freedom to remember those who died due to the 30 year-long war subject to government-imposed conditions on the right to remember". Another nearly half of the Sri Lankans (47.2%) express agreement with the statement that "All ethnic groups should be given the freedom to remember those who died as a result of the 30 year-long war".
- Those who express agreement with the statement that "All ethnic groups should be given the freedom to remember those who died as a result of the 30 year-long war" is significantly high amongst the Tamil (76.8%) and Malayaha Tamil (67.4%) communities and relatively high amongst the younger population (18-29yrs). On the other hand, the Sinhala opinion is divided between the two statements.

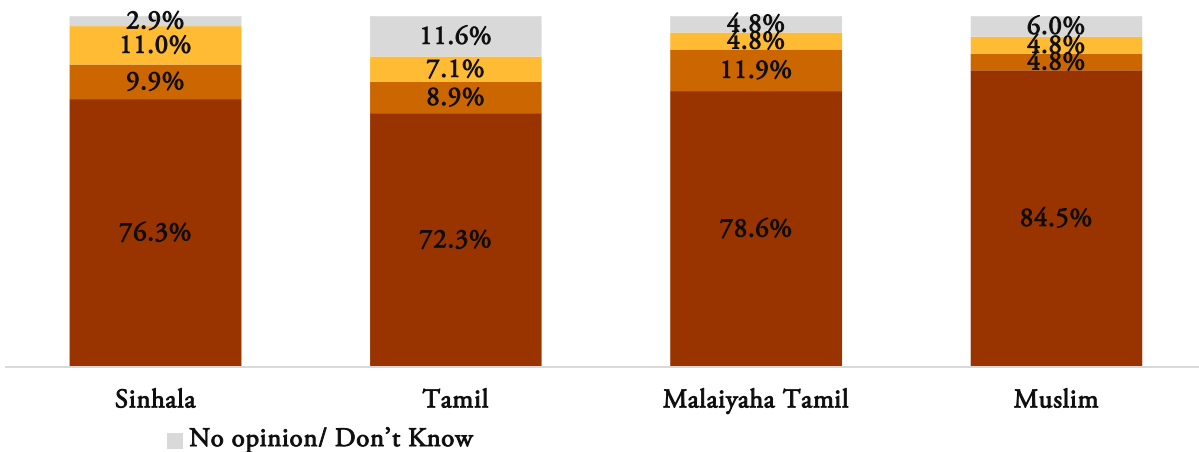
FINDINGS

Support for Democracy

Graph 01: Support for Democracy by National

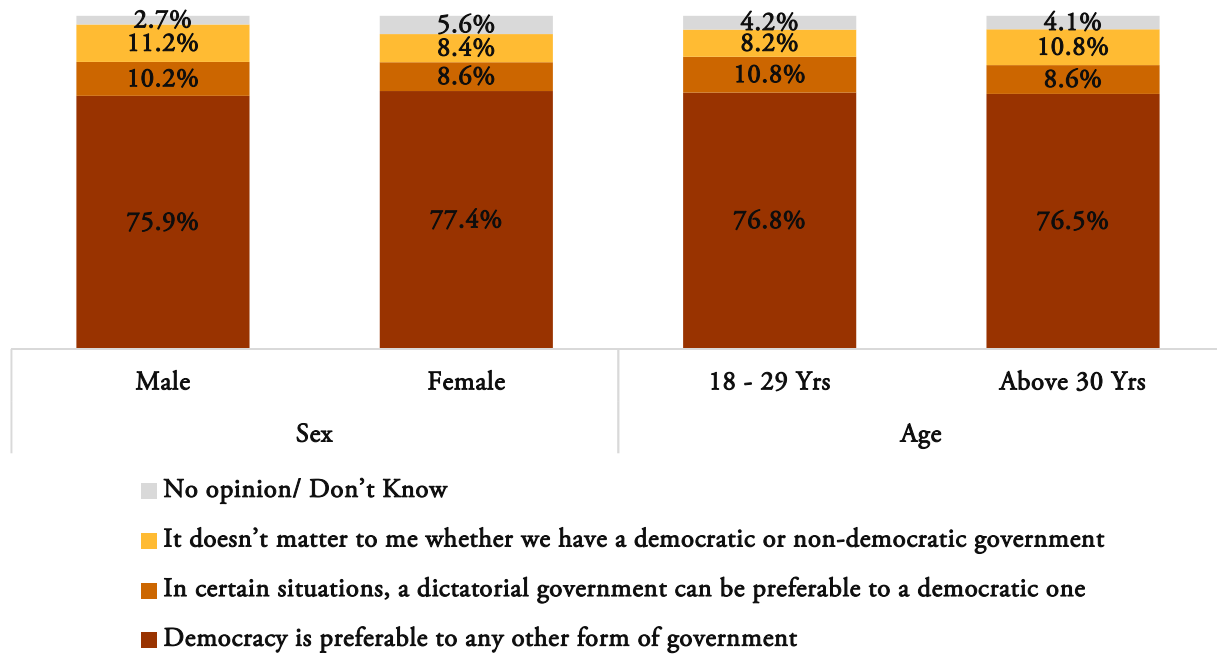


Graph 02: Support for Democracy by Ethnicity



- No opinion/ Don't Know
- It doesn't matter to me whether we have a democratic or non-democratic government
- In certain situations, a dictatorial government can be preferable to a democratic one
- Democracy is preferable to any other form of government

Graph 03: Support for Democracy by National by Sex & Age



Trust in Institutions

Graph 04: Trust in Institutions by National

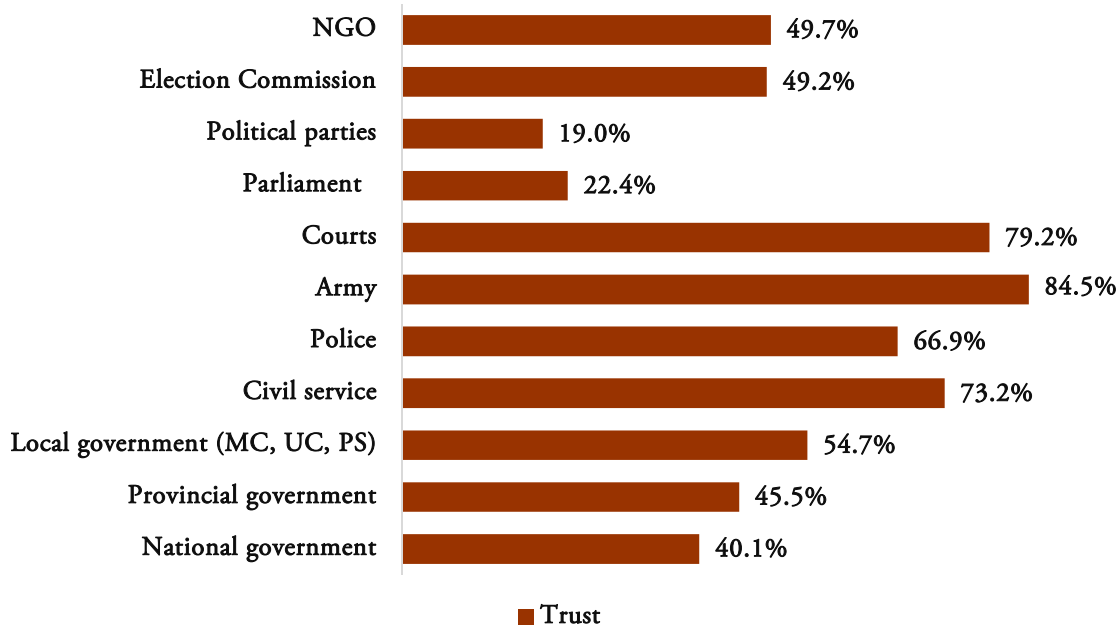
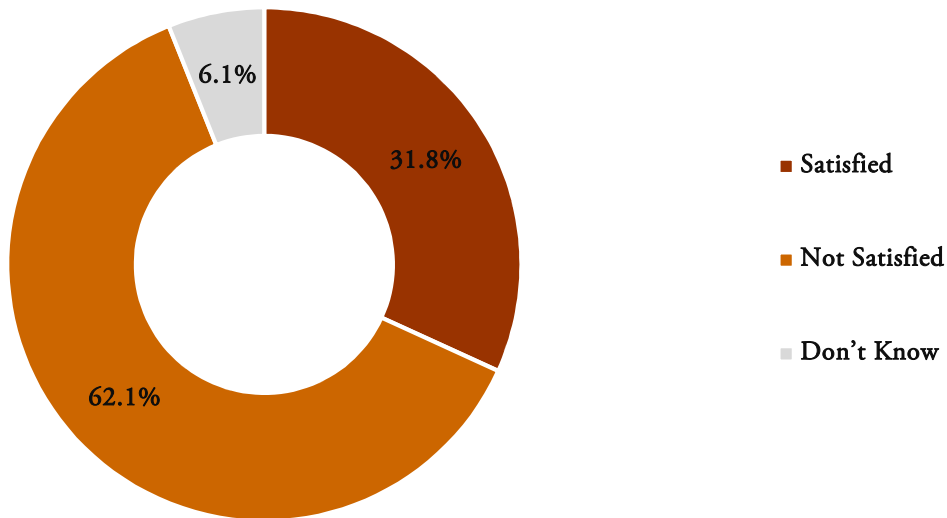


Table 01: Trust in Institutions by Ethnicity

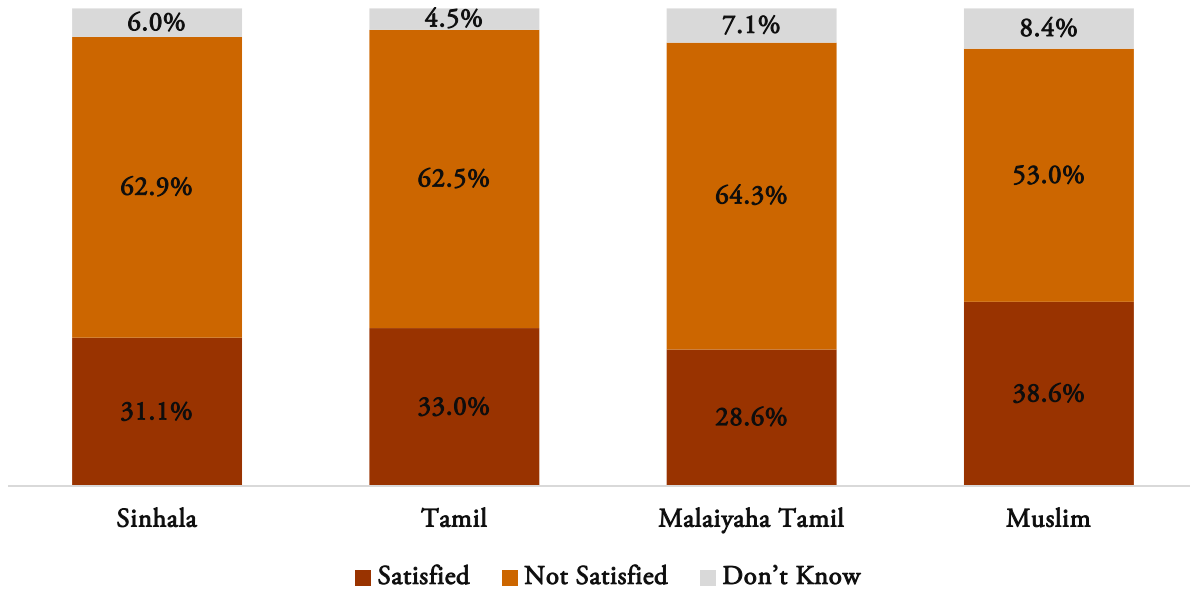
	Sinhala	Tamil	Malaiyaha Tamil	Muslim
National government	35.2%	57.1%	67.4%	51.2%
Provincial government	40.9%	63.4%	67.4%	54.8%
Local government (MC, UC, PS)	50.0%	71.4%	69.0%	69.9%
Civil service	71.6%	84.8%	76.7%	70.2%
Police	66.5%	72.3%	71.4%	60.7%
Army	90.9%	62.5%	69.8%	61.4%
Courts	78.2%	87.6%	90.5%	72.6%
Parliament	13.8%	56.3%	58.1%	41.0%
Political parties	13.1%	42.9%	42.9%	31.3%
Election Commission	46.0%	64.3%	76.2%	45.8%
NGO	44.6%	69.6%	78.6%	57.1%

Progress on Reconciliation

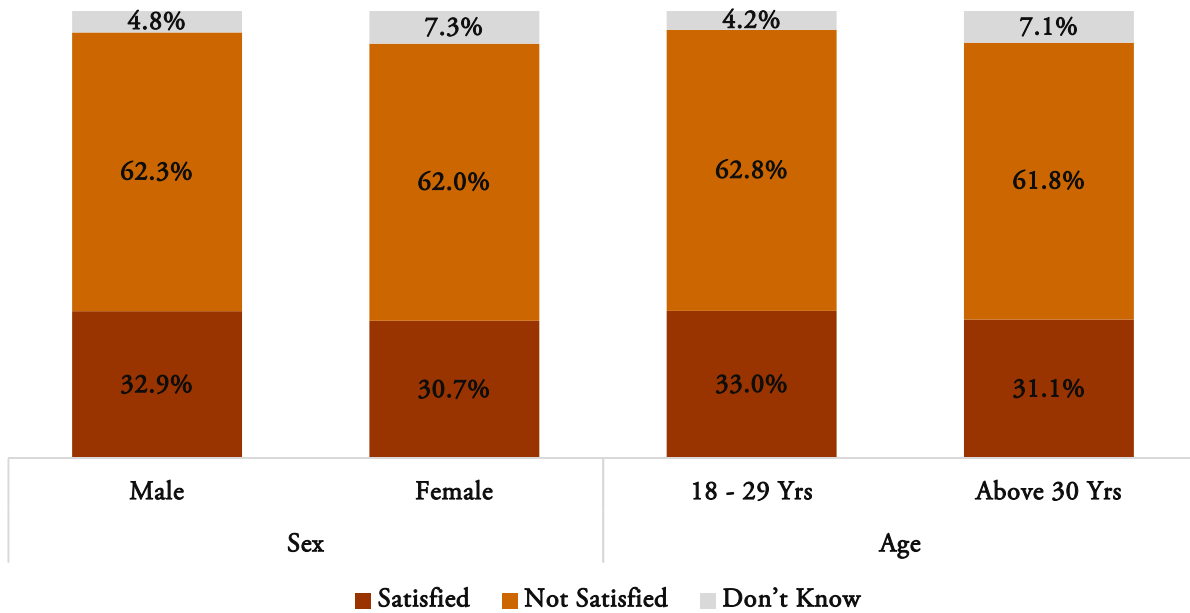
Graph 05: Satisfaction on the Progress in Addressing Reconciliation by National



Graph 06: Satisfaction on the Progress in Addressing Reconciliation by Ethnicity

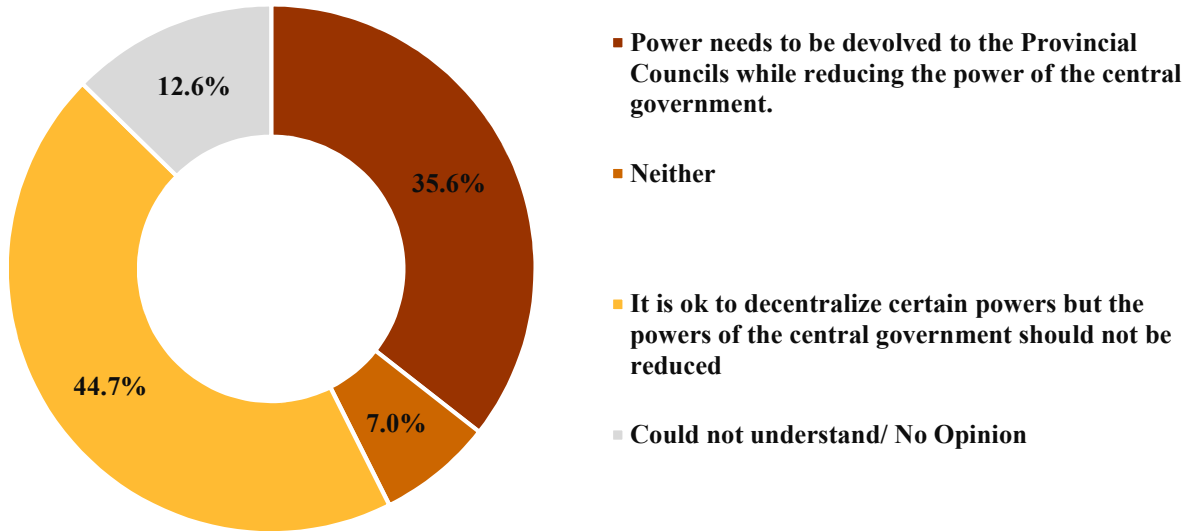


Graph 07: Satisfaction on the Progress in Addressing Reconciliation by Sex and Age

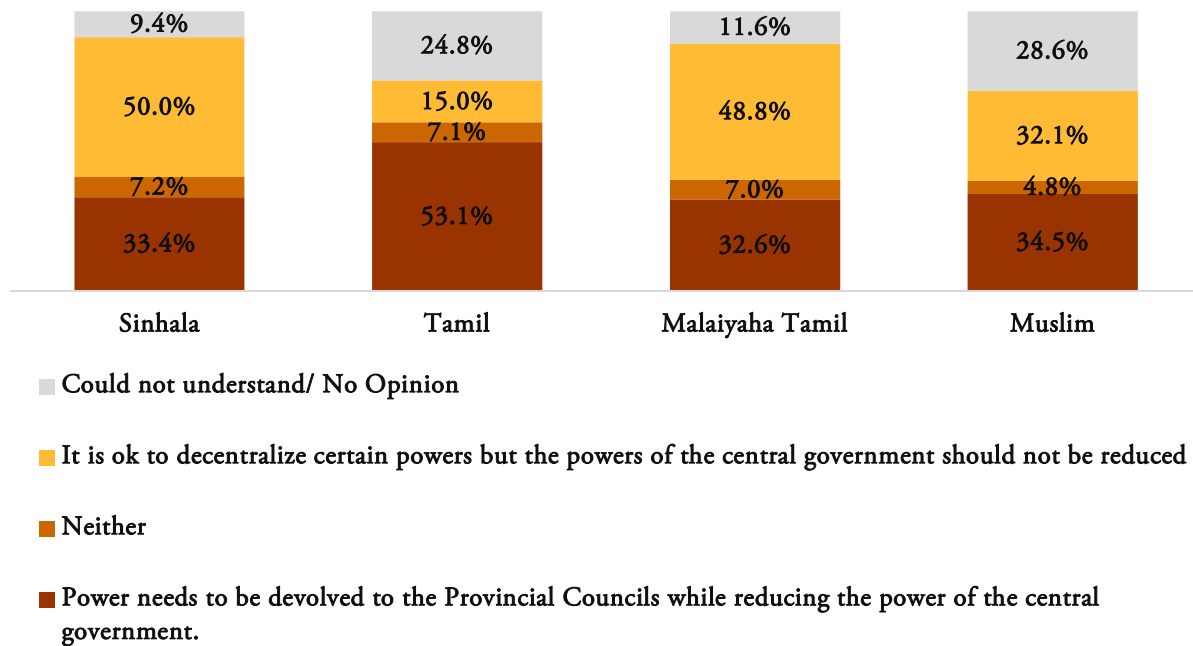


Power Devolution

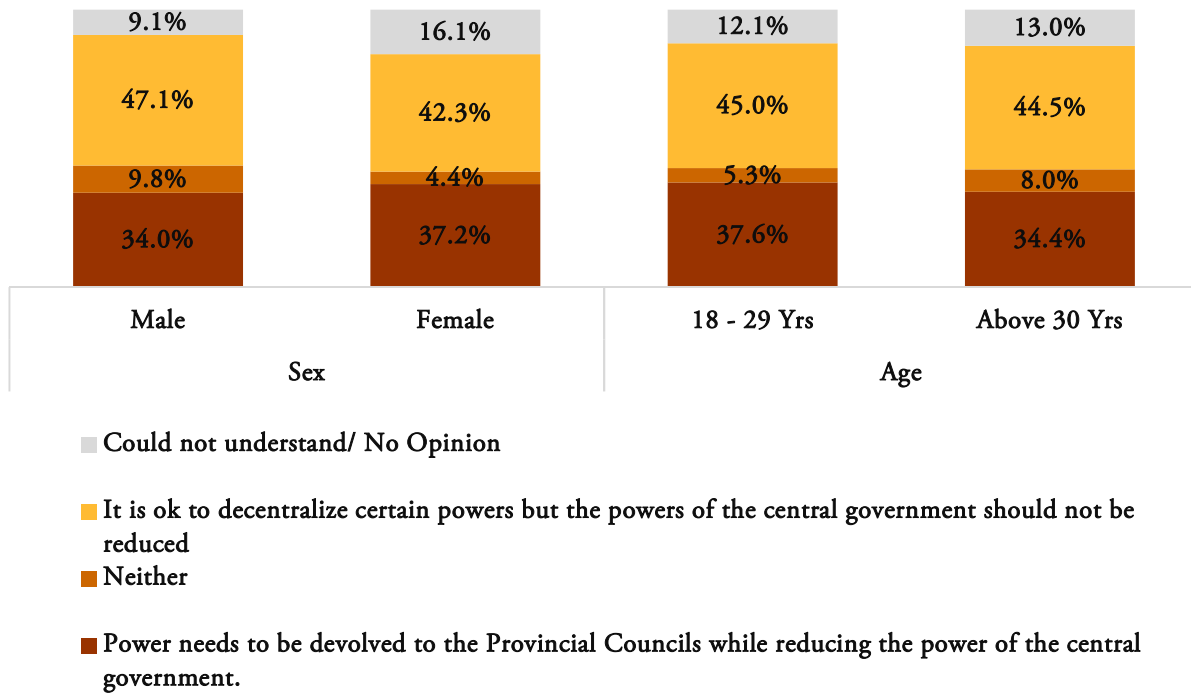
Graph 08: Support for power devolution to the Provincial Council by National



Graph 09: Support for power devolution to the Provincial Council by Ethnicity

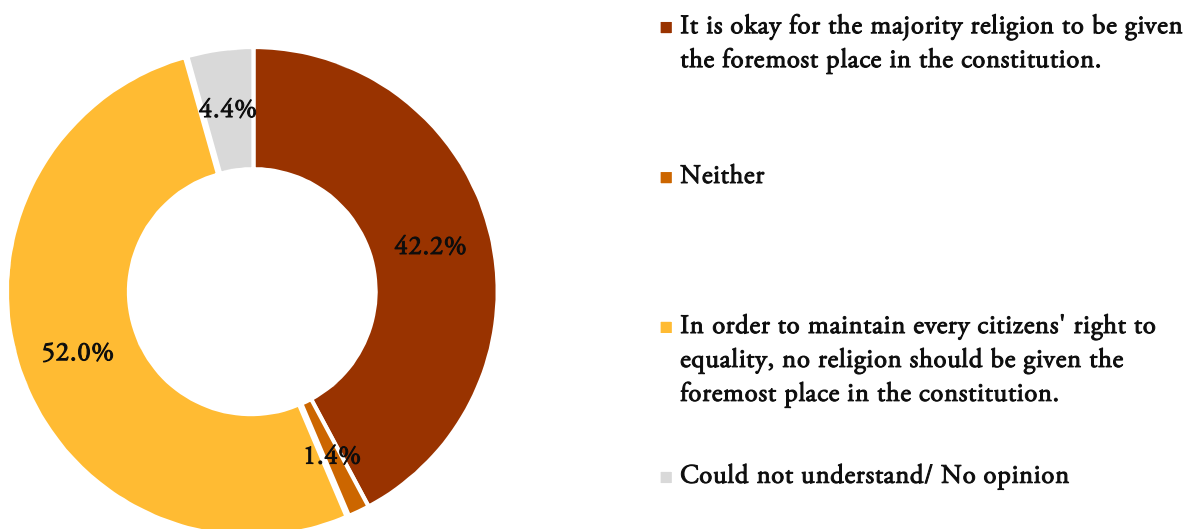


Graph 10: Support for power devolution to the Provincial Council by Sex and Age

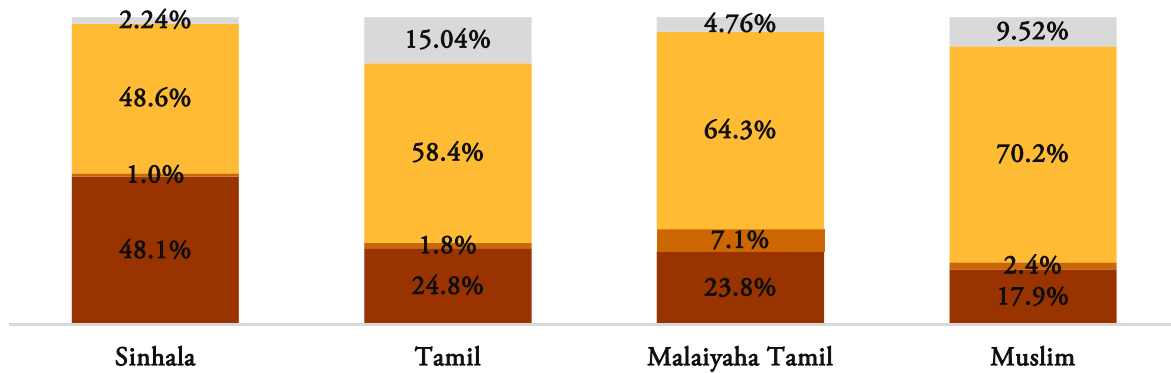


Secular Constitution

Graph 11: Support for role of religion in the Constitution by National

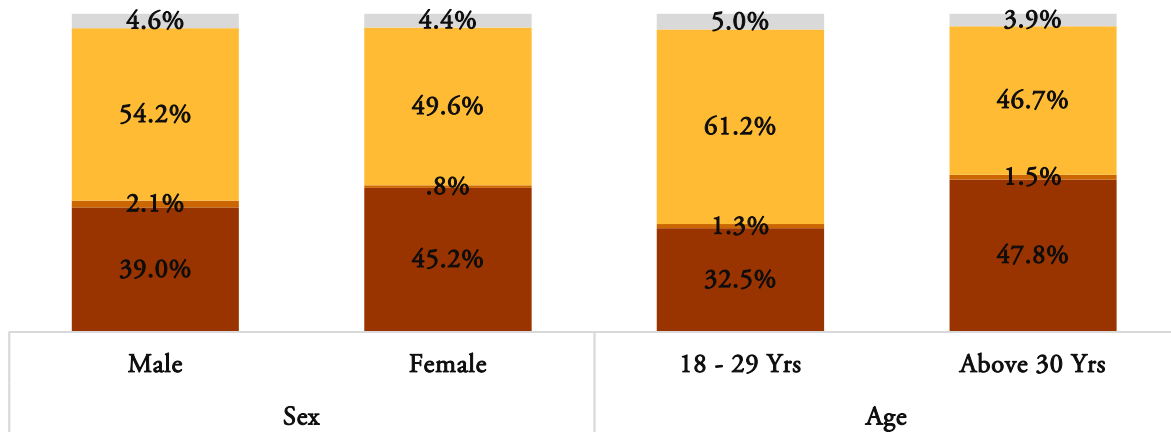


Graph 12: Support for role of religion in the Constitution by Ethnicity



- Could not understand/ No opinion
- In order to maintain every citizens' right to equality, no religion should be given the foremost place in the constitution.
- Neither
- It is okay for the majority religion to be given the foremost place in the constitution.

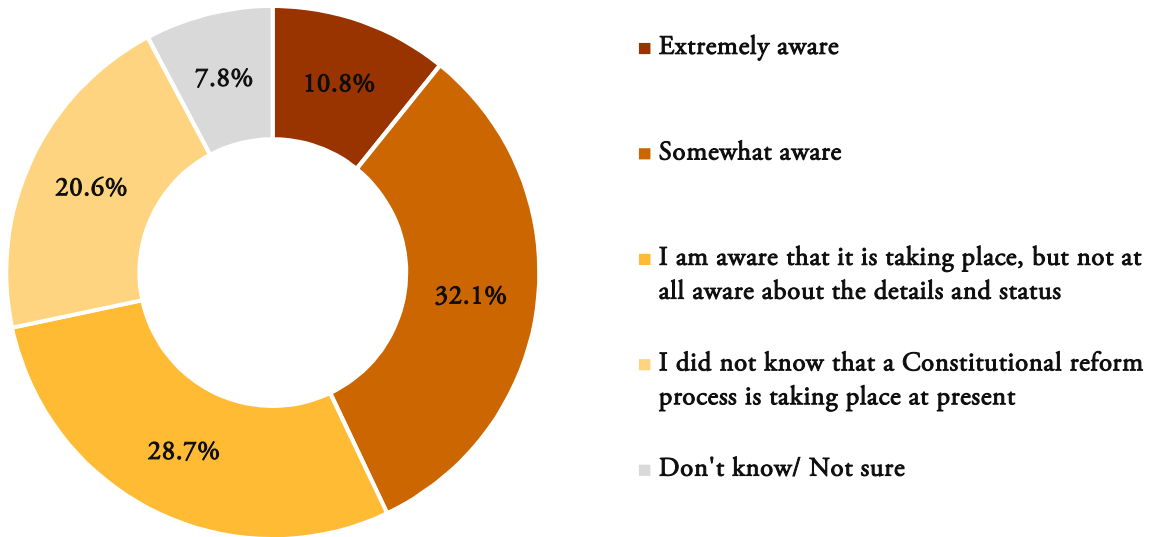
Graph 13: Support for role of religion in the Constitution by Sex and Age



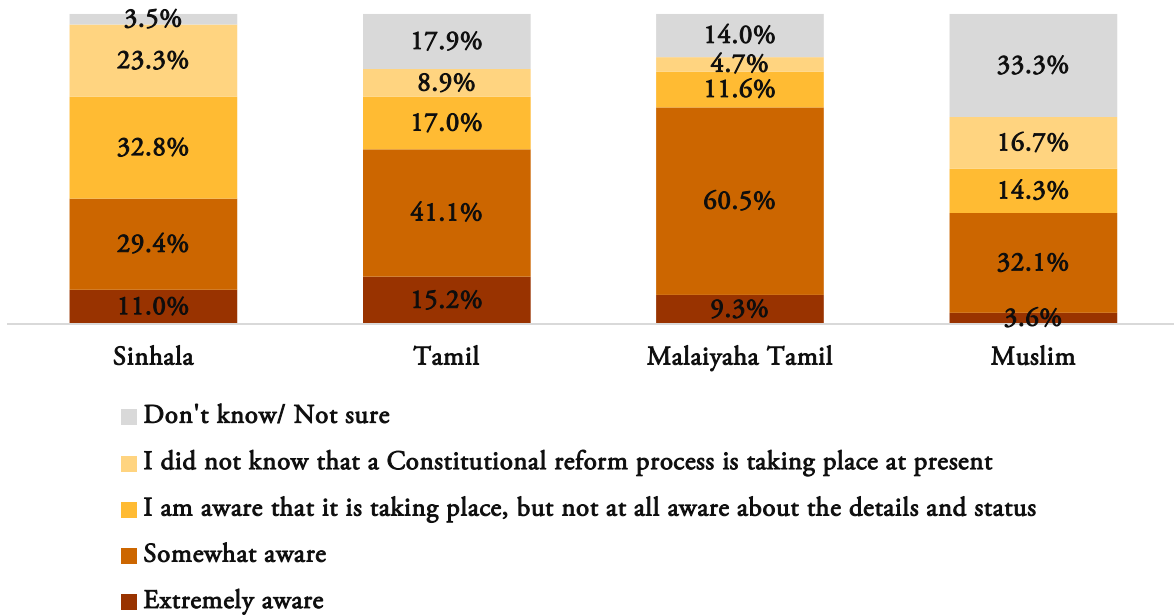
- Could not understand/ No opinion
- In order to maintain every citizens' right to equality, no religion should be given the foremost place in the constitution.
- Neither
- It is okay for the majority religion to be given the foremost place in the constitution.

Awareness & Perception on Constitutional Reforms

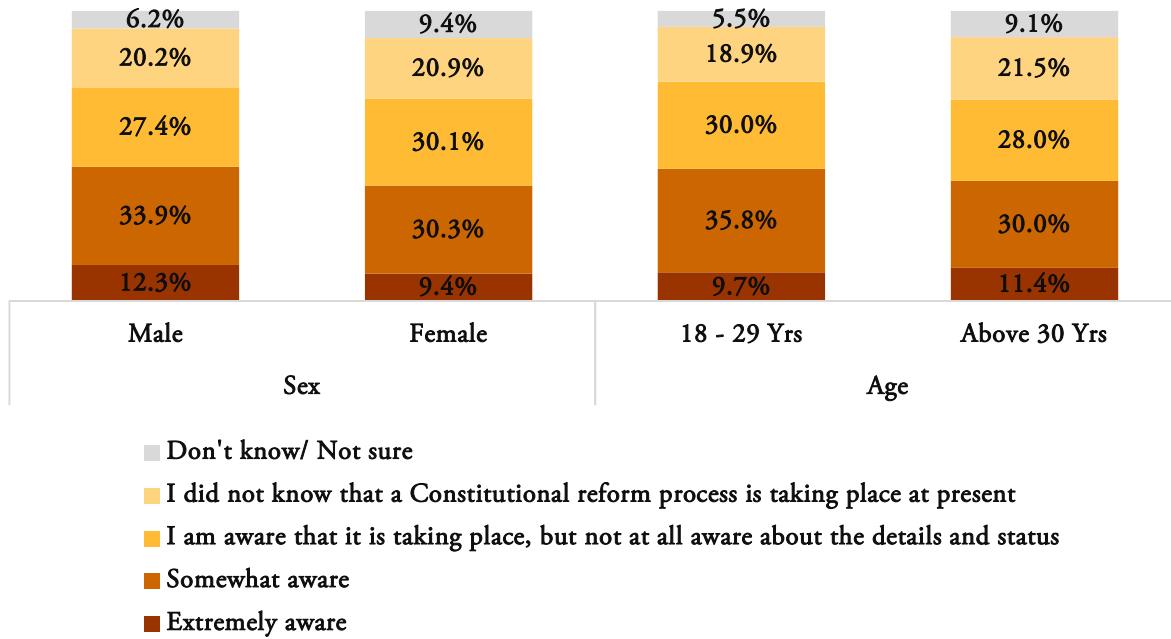
Graph 14: Awareness on Constitutional Reforms by National



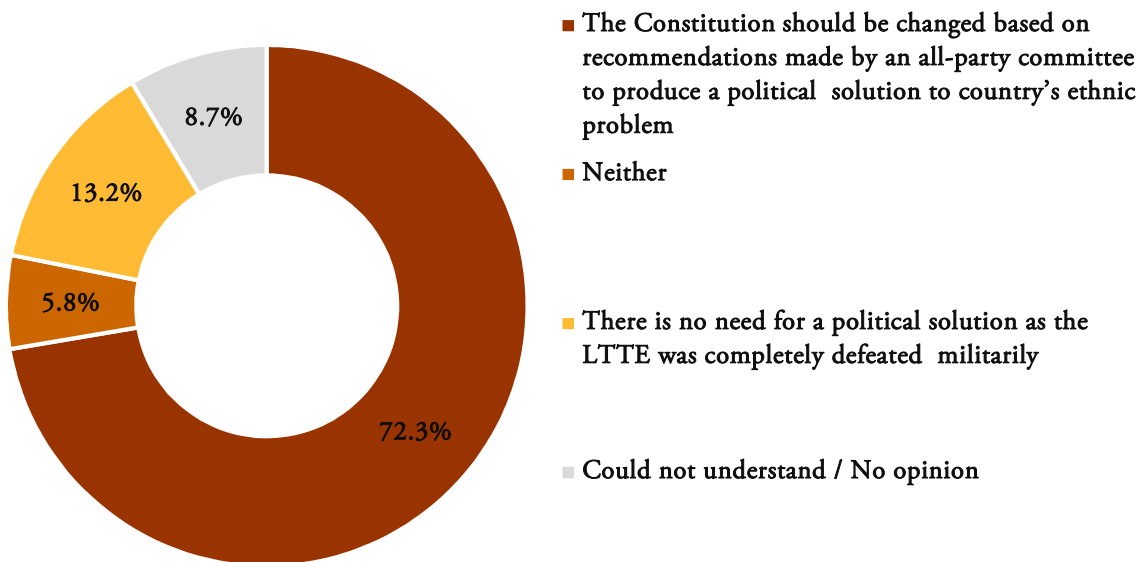
Graph 15: Awareness on Constitutional Reforms by Ethnicity



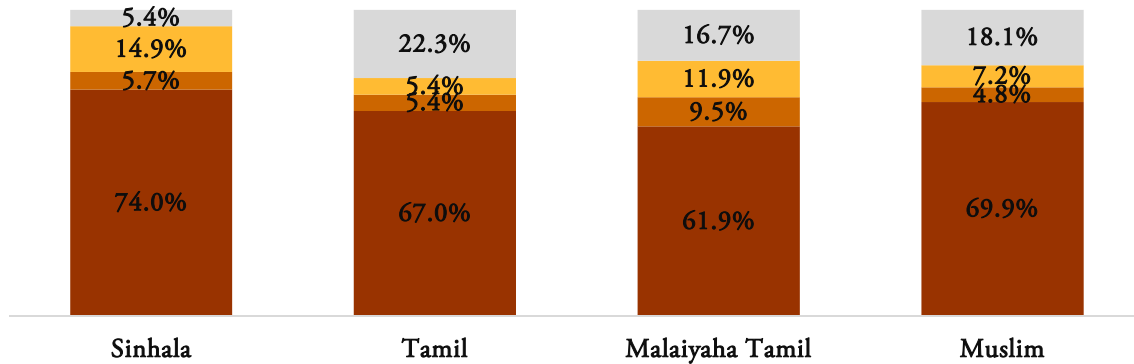
Graph 16: Awareness on Constitutional Reforms by Sex and Age



Graph 17: Perception on a Political Solution by National

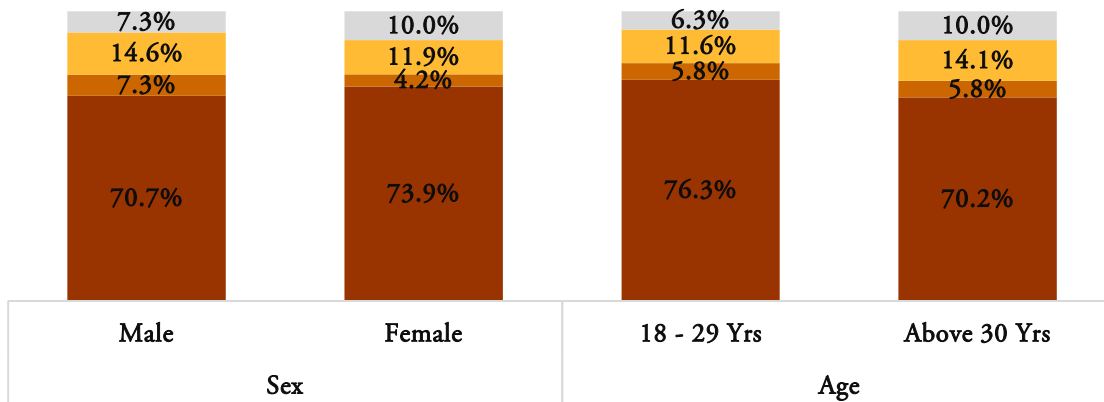


Graph 18: Perception on a Political Solution by Ethnicity



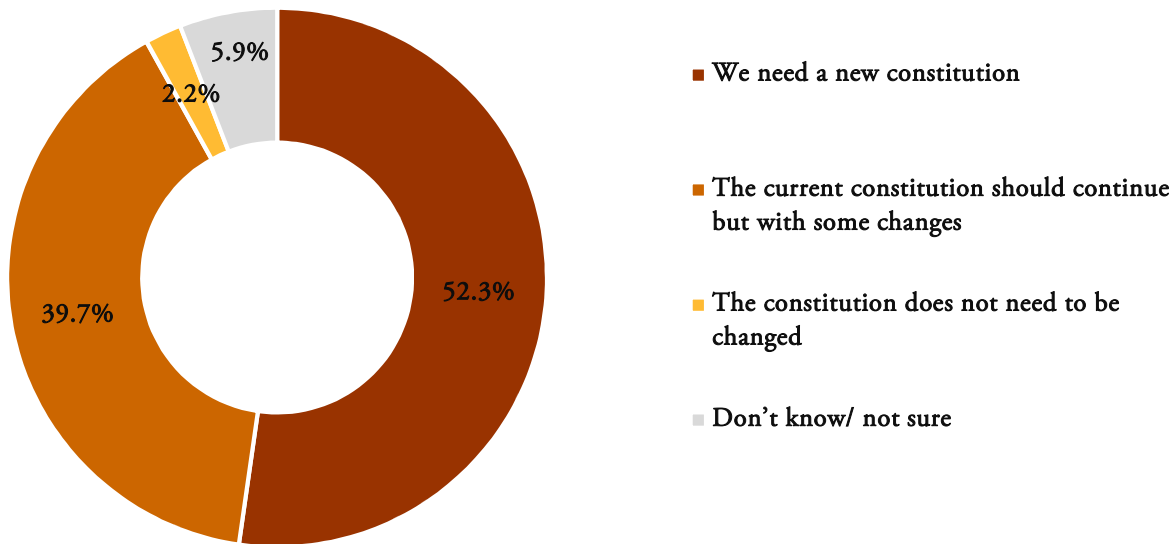
- Could not understand / No opinion
- There is no need for a political solution as the LTTE was completely defeated militarily
- Neither
- The Constitution should be changed based on recommendations made by an all-party committee to produce a political solution to country's ethnic problem

Graph 19: Perception on a Political Solution by Sex & Age

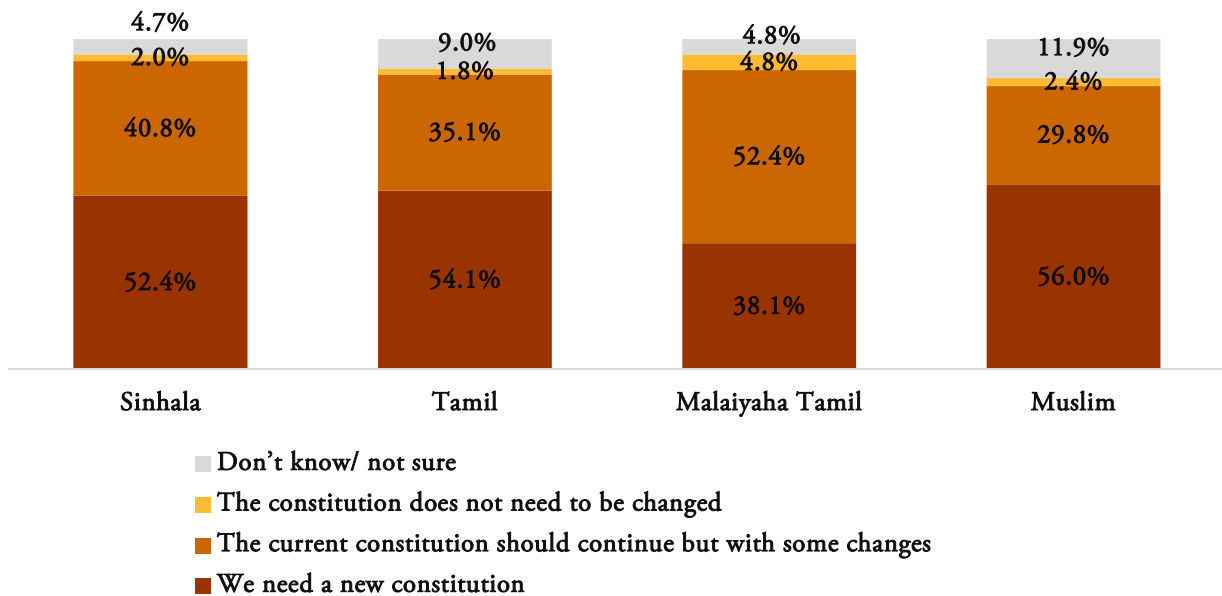


- Could not understand / No opinion
- There is no need for a political solution as the LTTE was completely defeated militarily
- Neither
- The Constitution should be changed based on recommendations made by an all-party committee to produce a political solution to country's ethnic problem

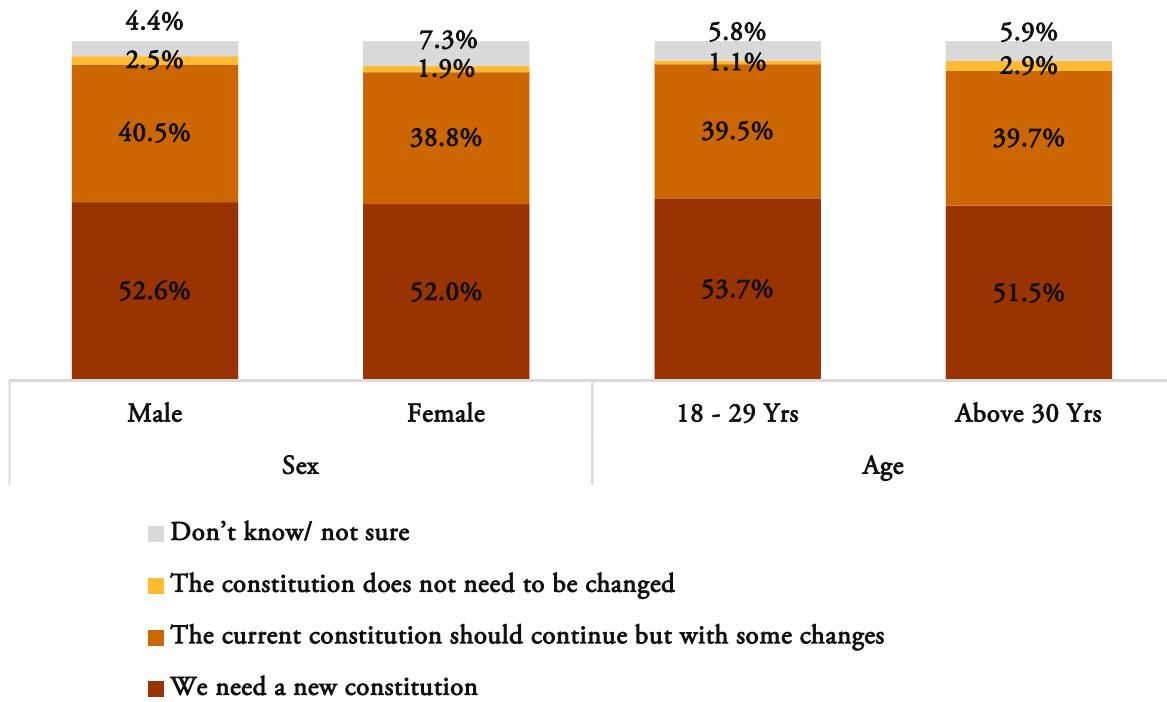
Graph 20: Support for Constitutional Reforms by National



Graph 21: Support for Constitutional Reforms by Ethnicity

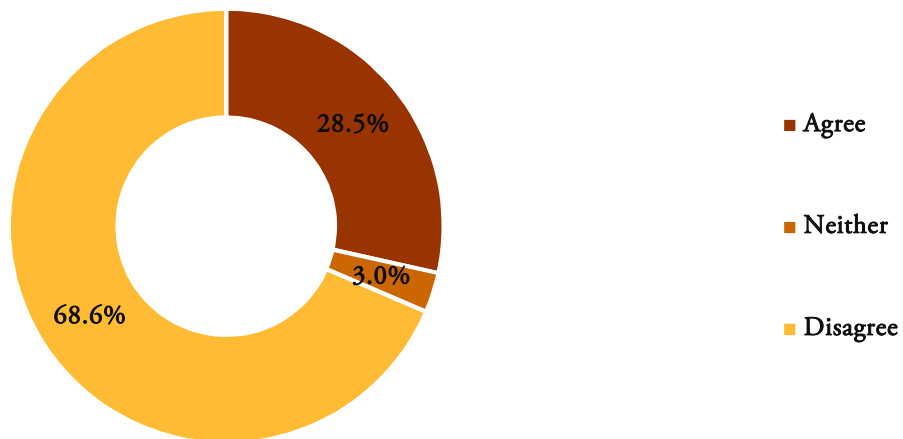


Graph 22: Support for Constitutional Reforms by Sex and Age

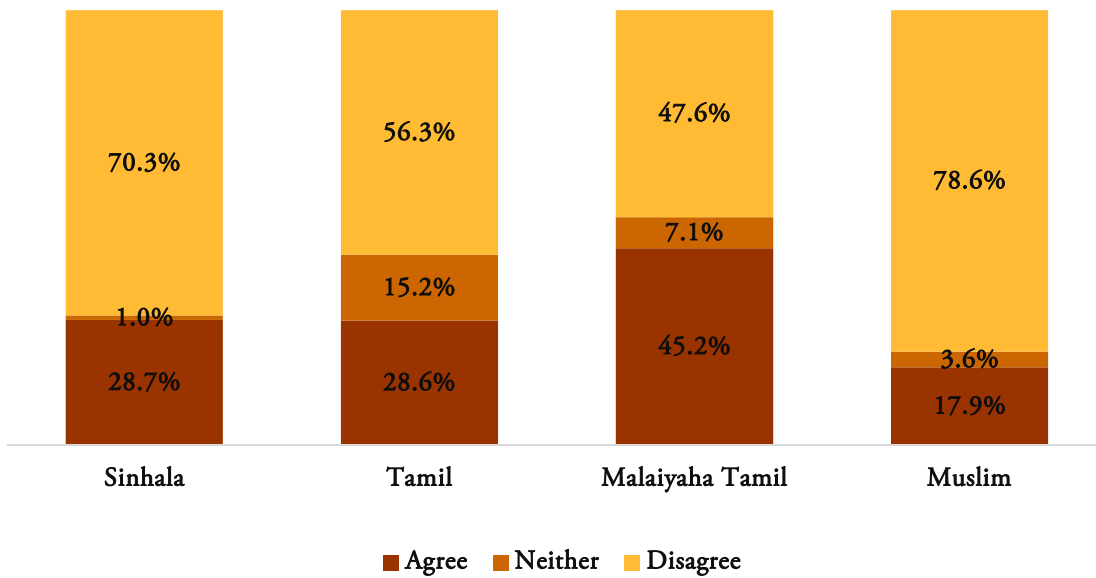


Minority - Majority Relationships

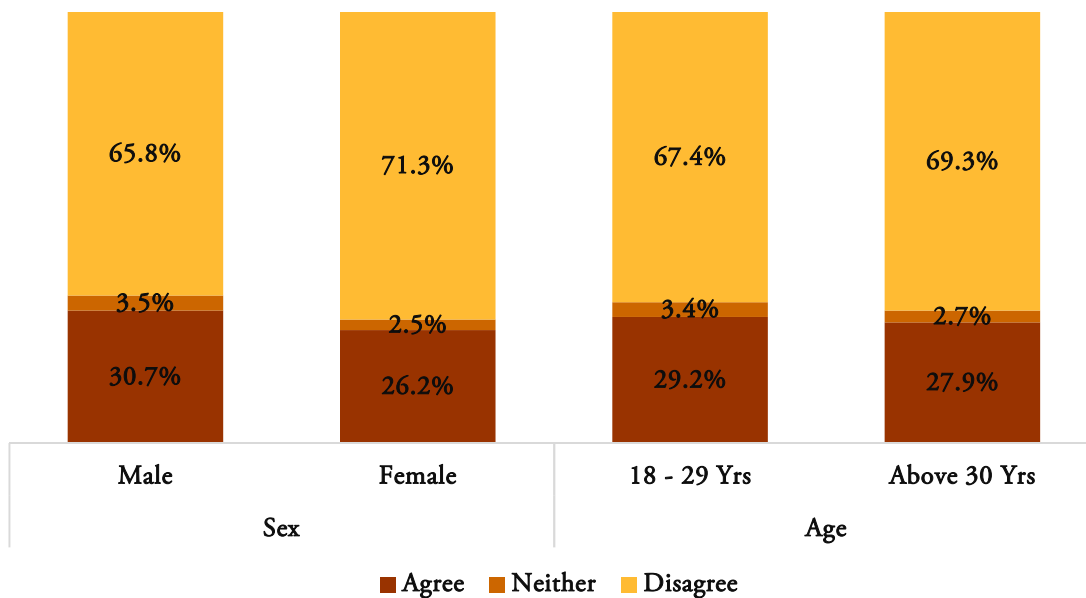
Graph 23: "People often treat me differently because of my ethnicity" - National



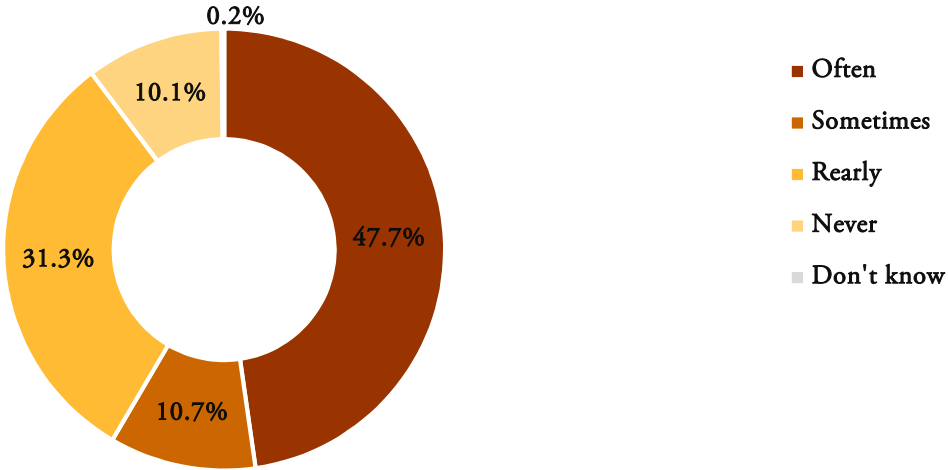
Graph 24: “People often treat me differently because of my ethnicity” by Ethnicity



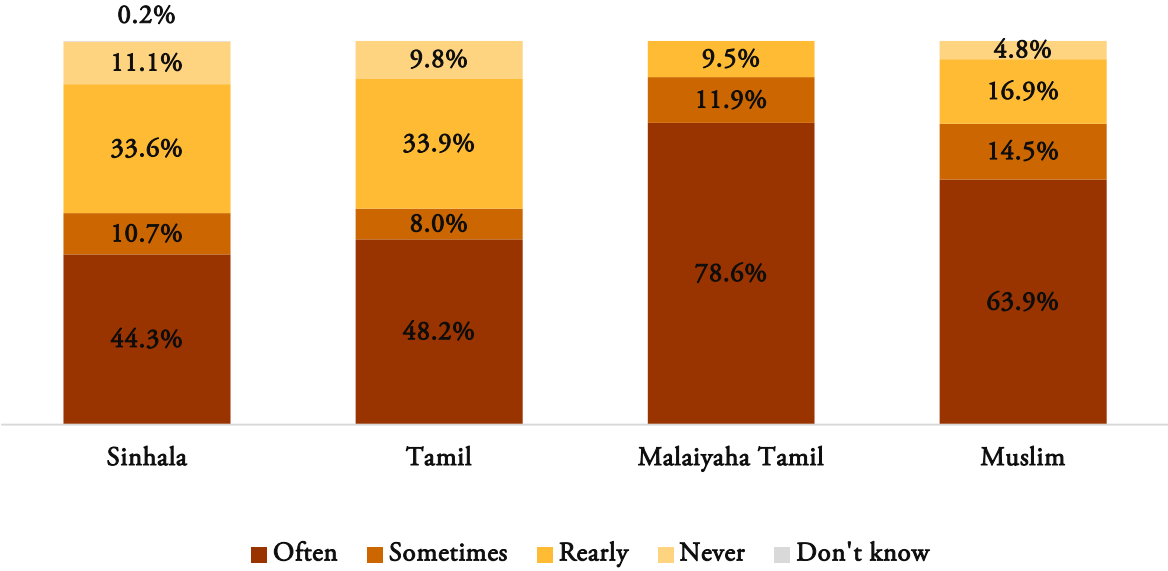
Graph 25: “People often treat me differently because of my ethnicity” by Sex and Age



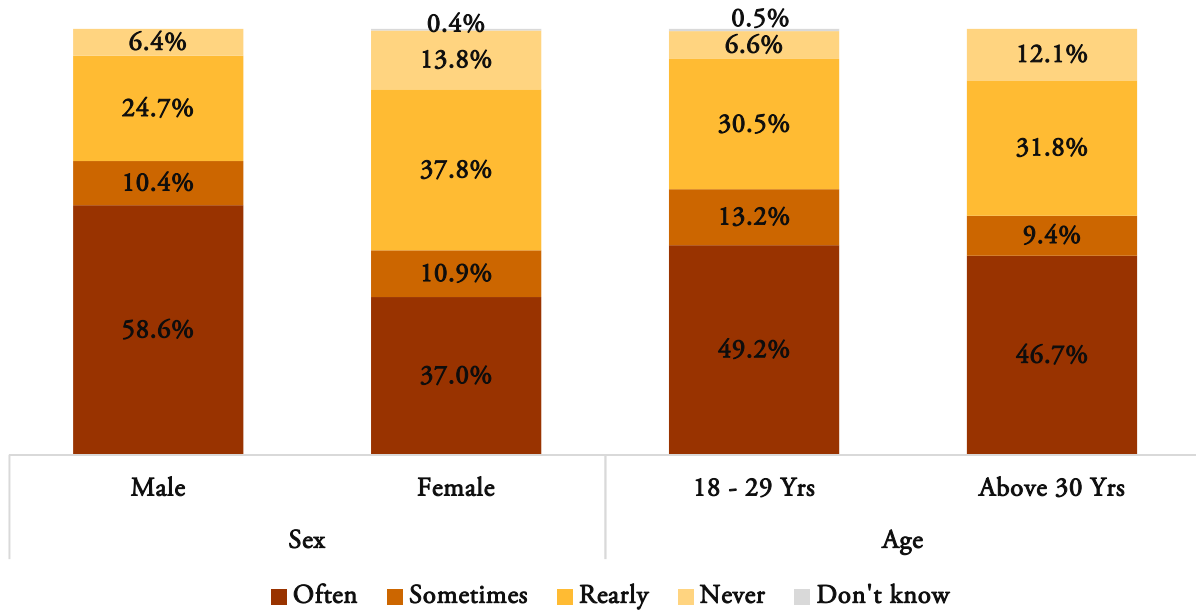
Graph 26: How often would you say that you interact with someone who is of a different ethnicity to you? - National



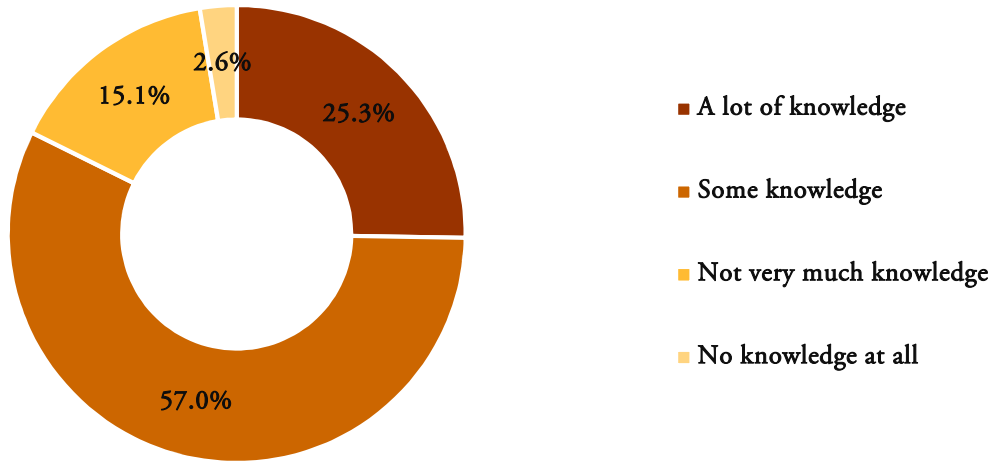
Graph 27: How often would you say that you interact with someone who is of a different ethnicity to you? by Ethnicity



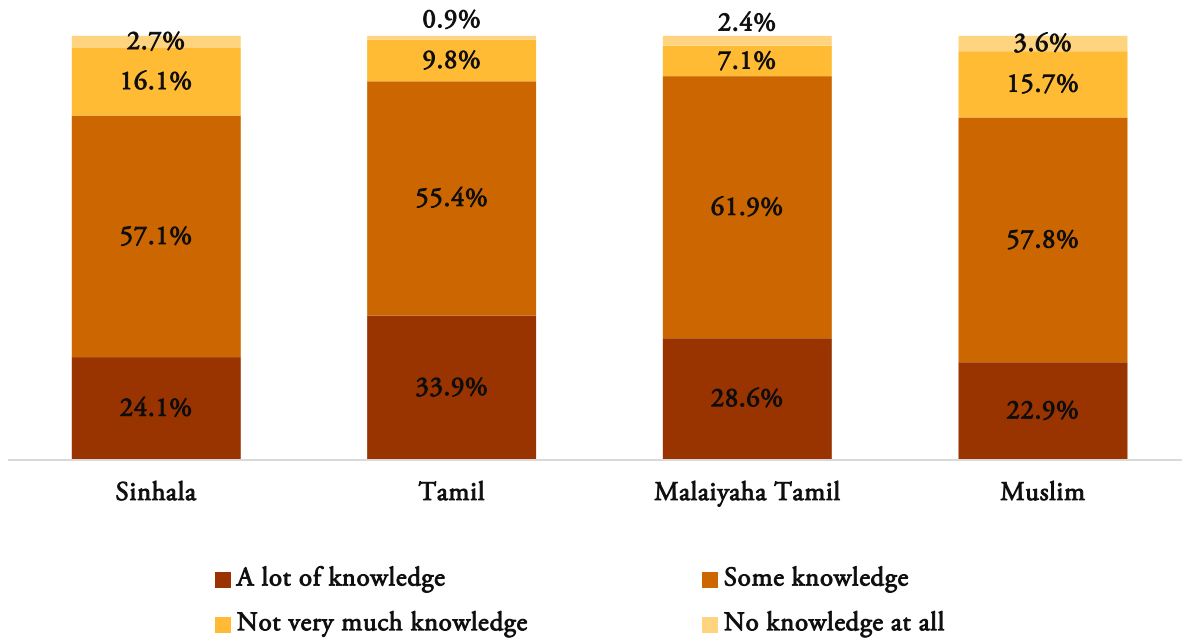
Graph 28: How often would you say that you interact with someone who is of a different ethnicity to you? by Sex and Age



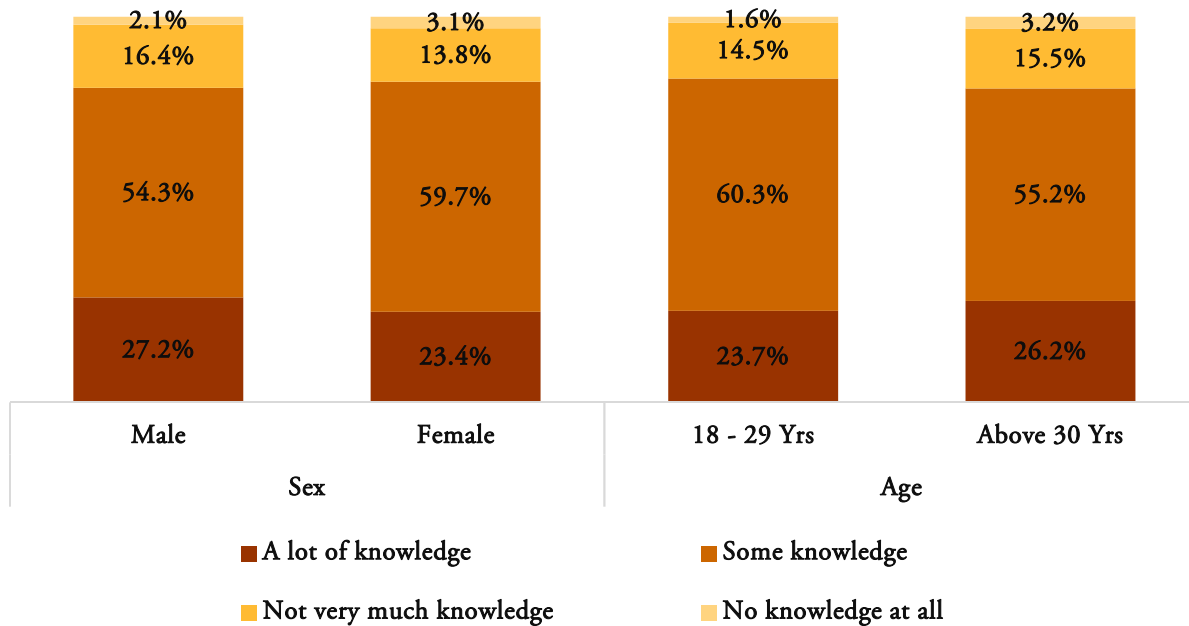
Graph 29: How much knowledge do you feel you have about other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka? - National



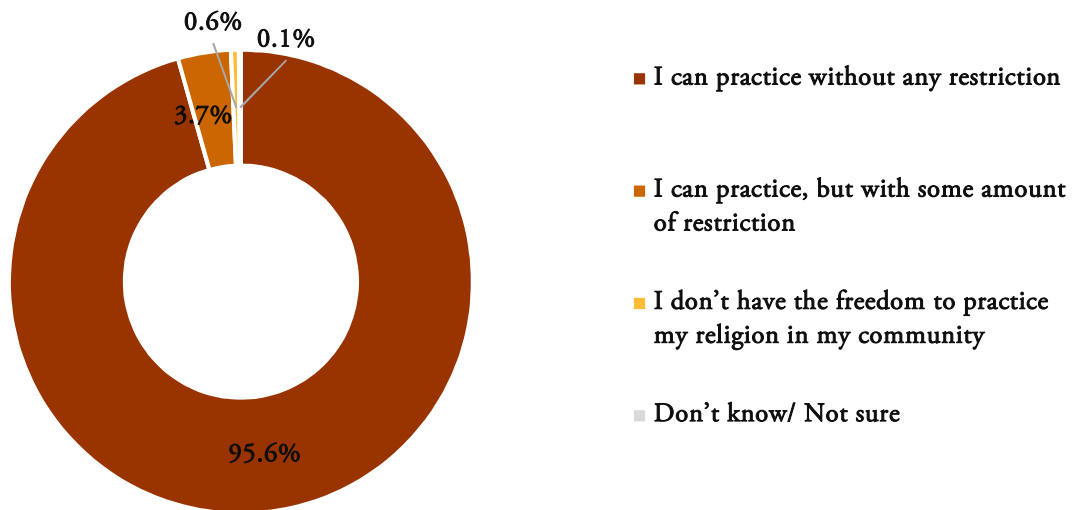
Graph 30: How much knowledge do you feel you have about other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka? by Ethnicity



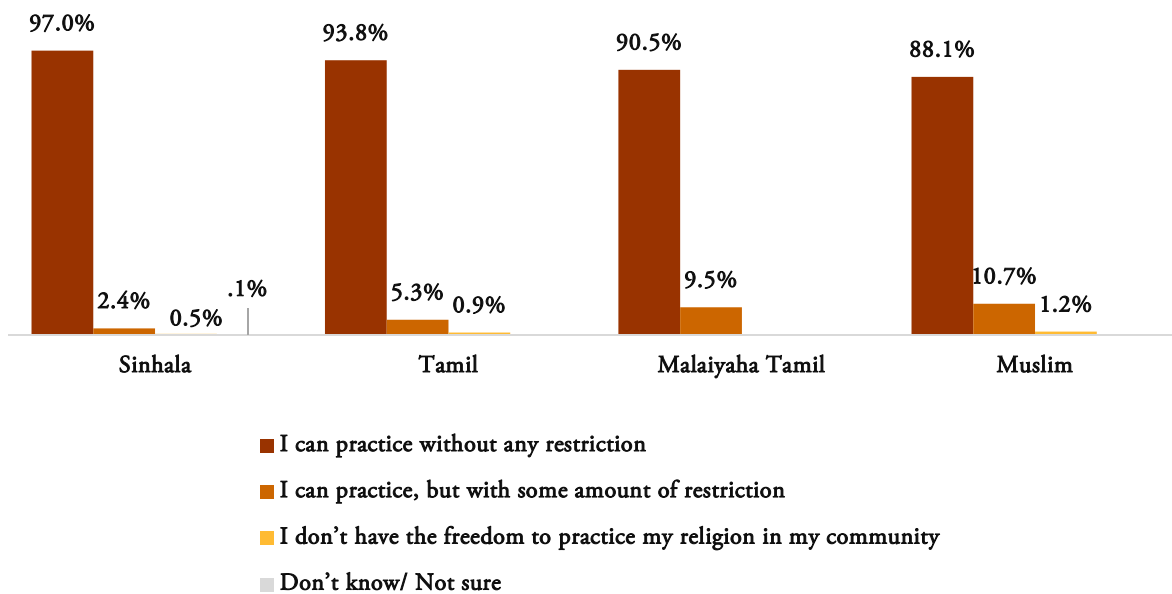
Graph 31: How much knowledge do you feel you have about other ethnic groups in Sri Lanka? by Sex and Age



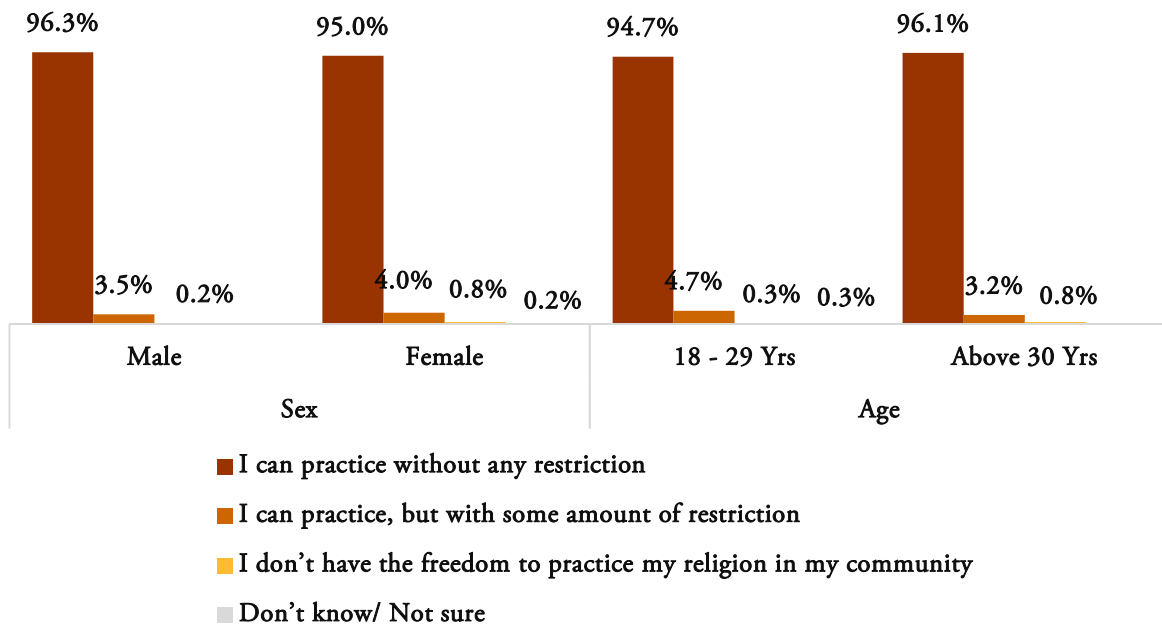
Graph 32: How free do you think you are to practice your religion in your community? -National



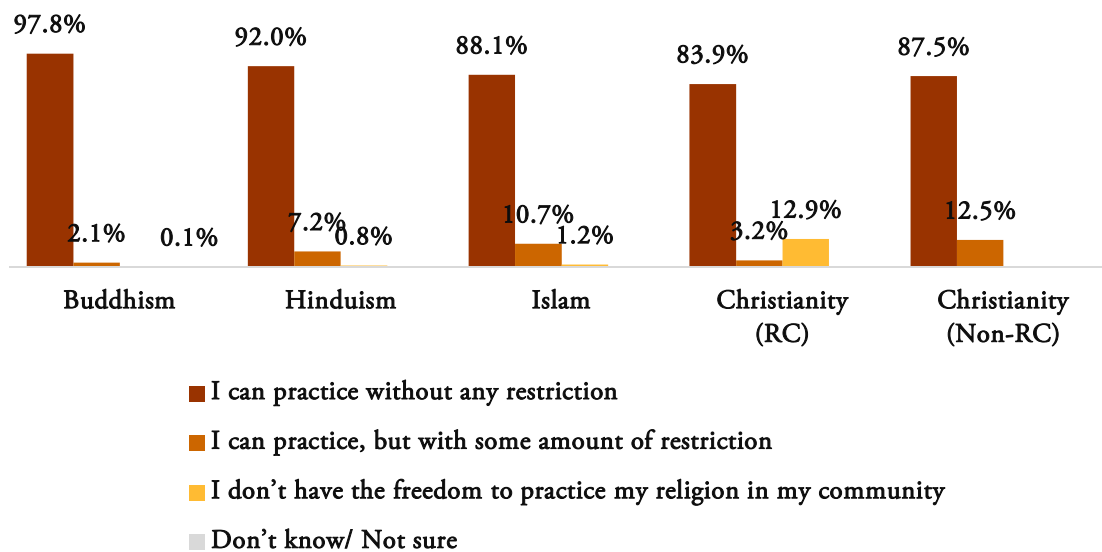
Graph 33: How free do you think you are to practice your religion in your community? by Ethnicity



Graph 34: How free do you think you are to practice your religion? by Sex and Age

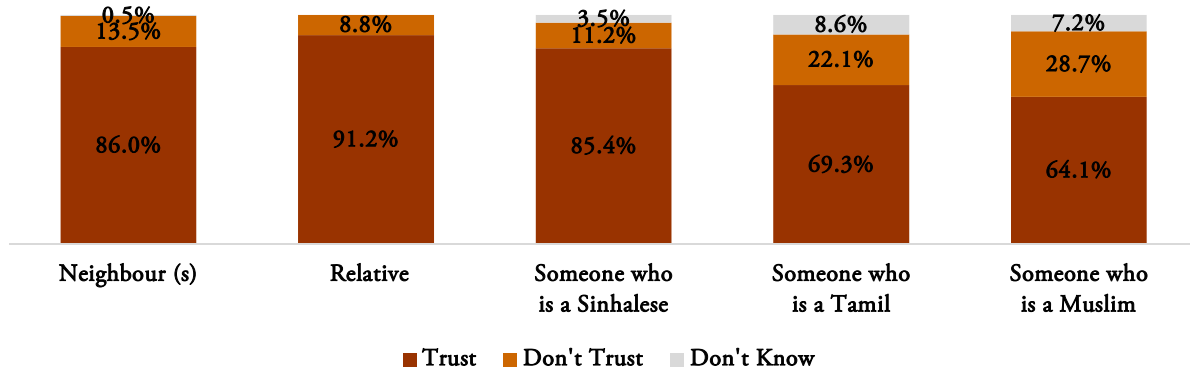


Graph 35: How free do you think you are to practice your religion in your community? by Religion

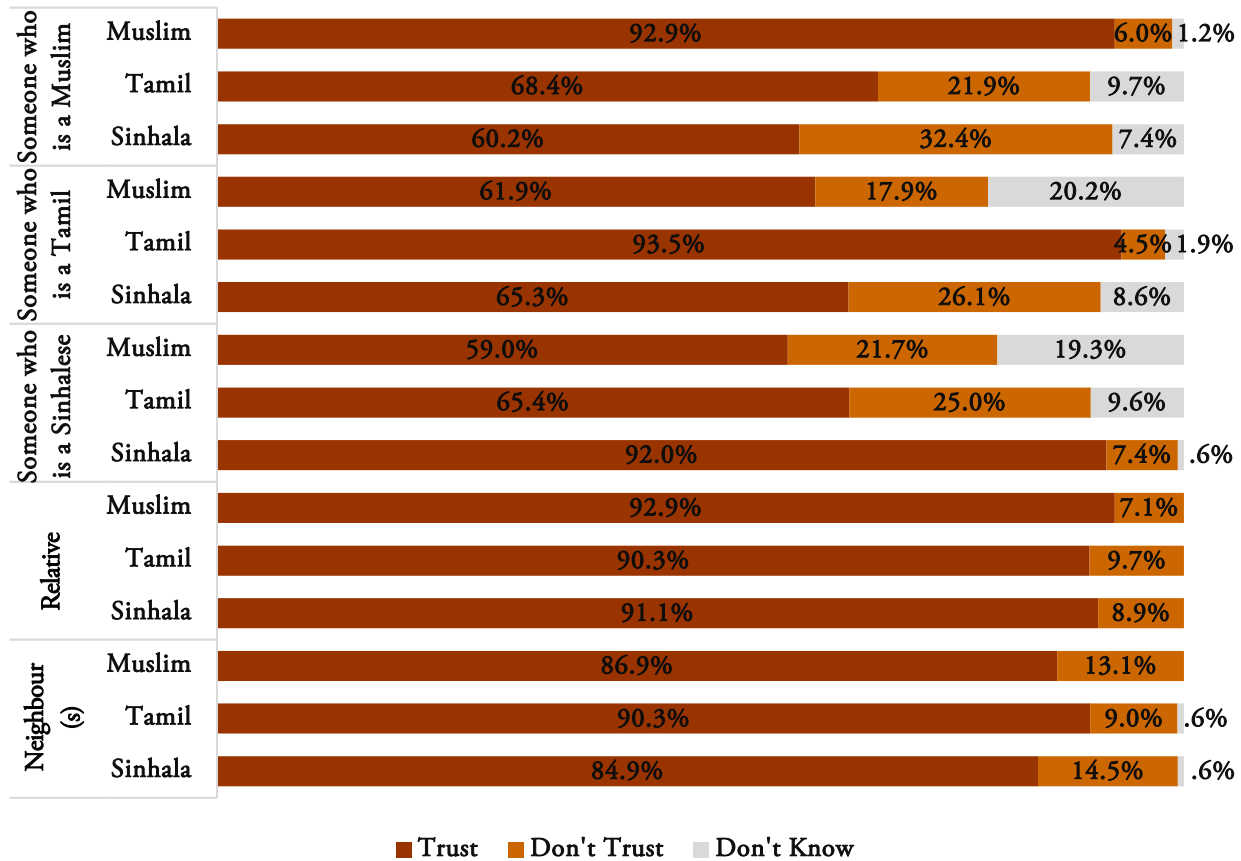


Social Trust

Graph 36: If you were to seek personal assistance from someone, to what extent would you trust the following persons? - by National

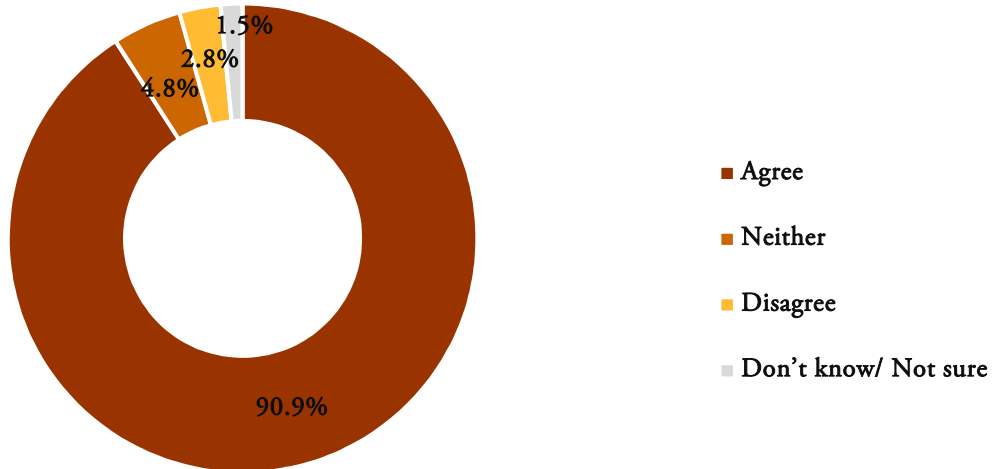


Graph 37: If you were to seek personal assistance from someone, to what extent would you trust the following persons? - by Ethnicity

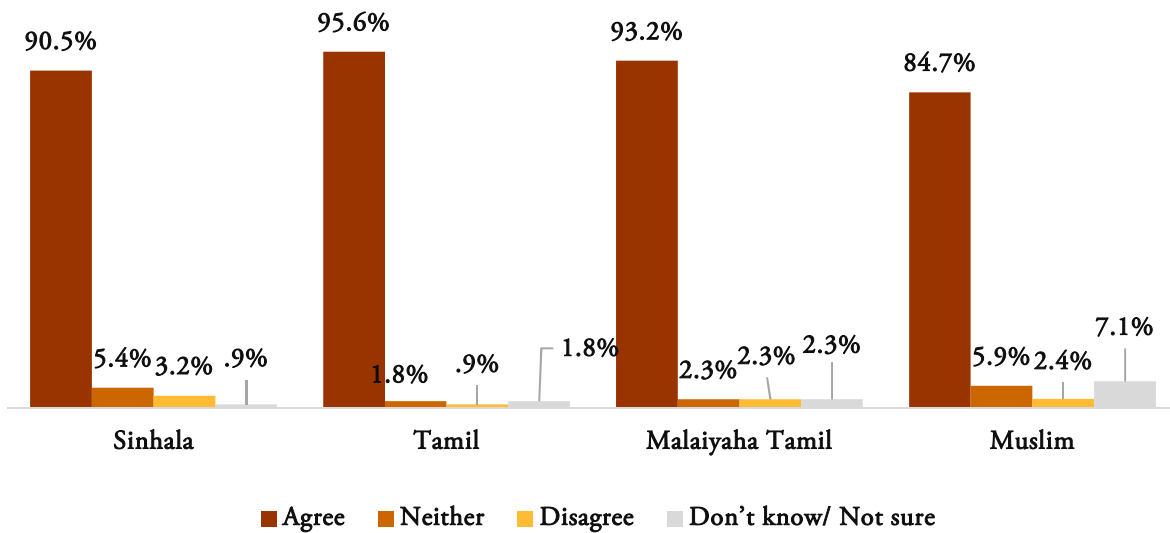


Political Safeguards for Minorities

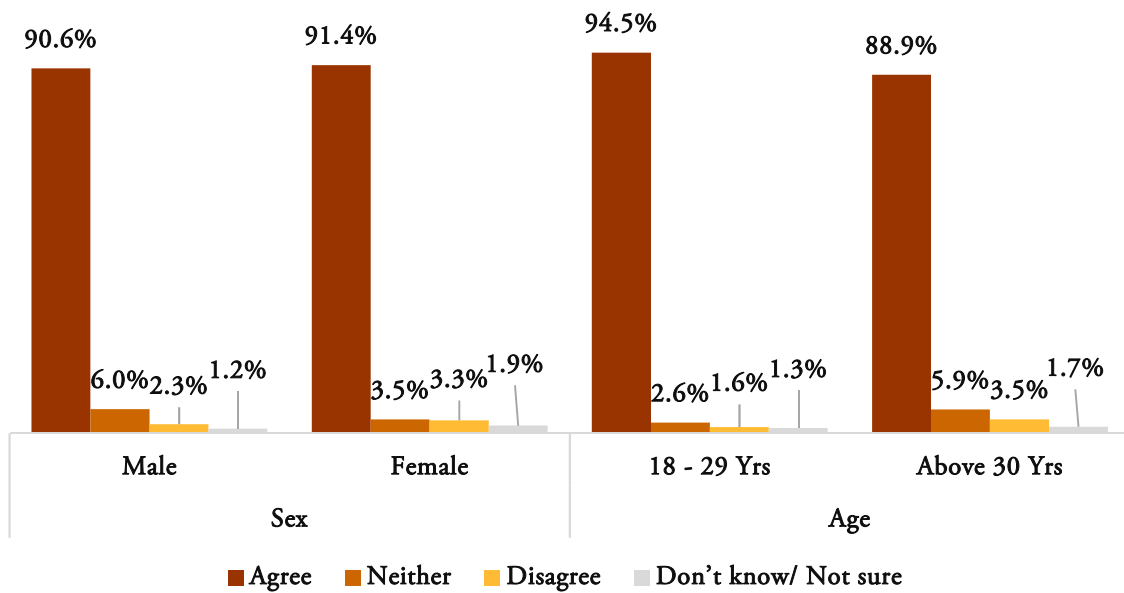
Graph 38: The rights of minority groups should be protected even if the majority in the area do not agree - by National



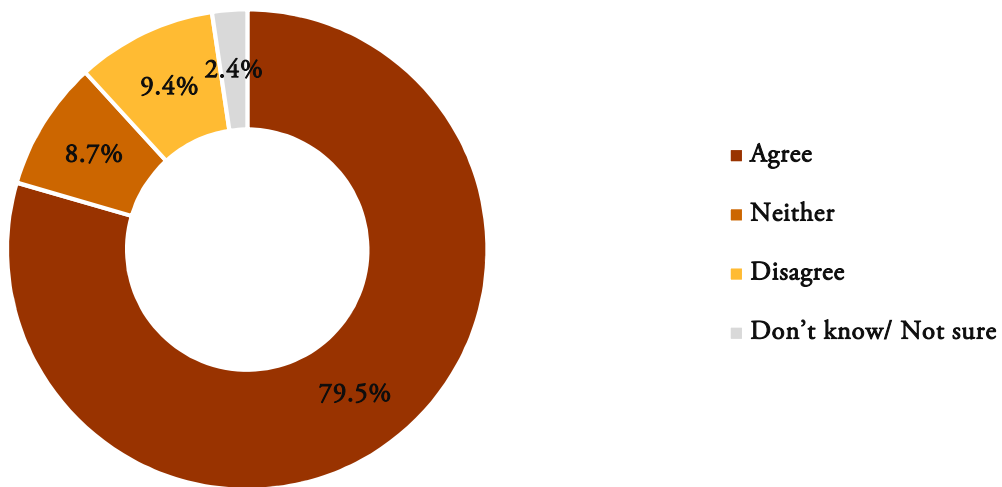
Graph 39: The rights of minority groups should be protected even if the majority in the area do not agree - by Ethnicity



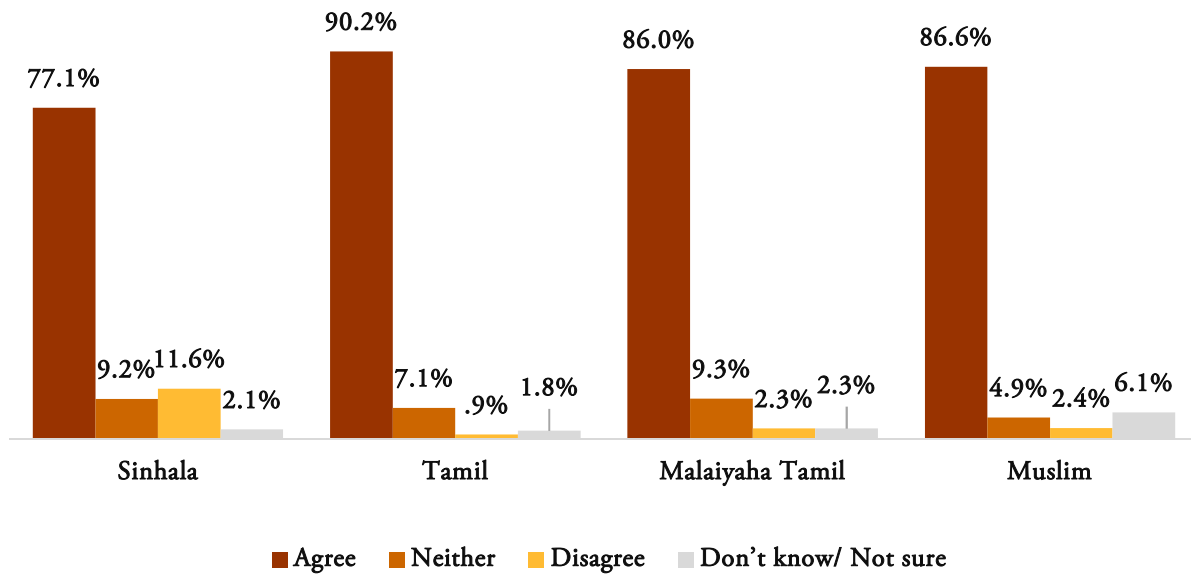
Graph 40: The rights of minority groups should be protected even if the majority in the area do not agree – by Sex and Age



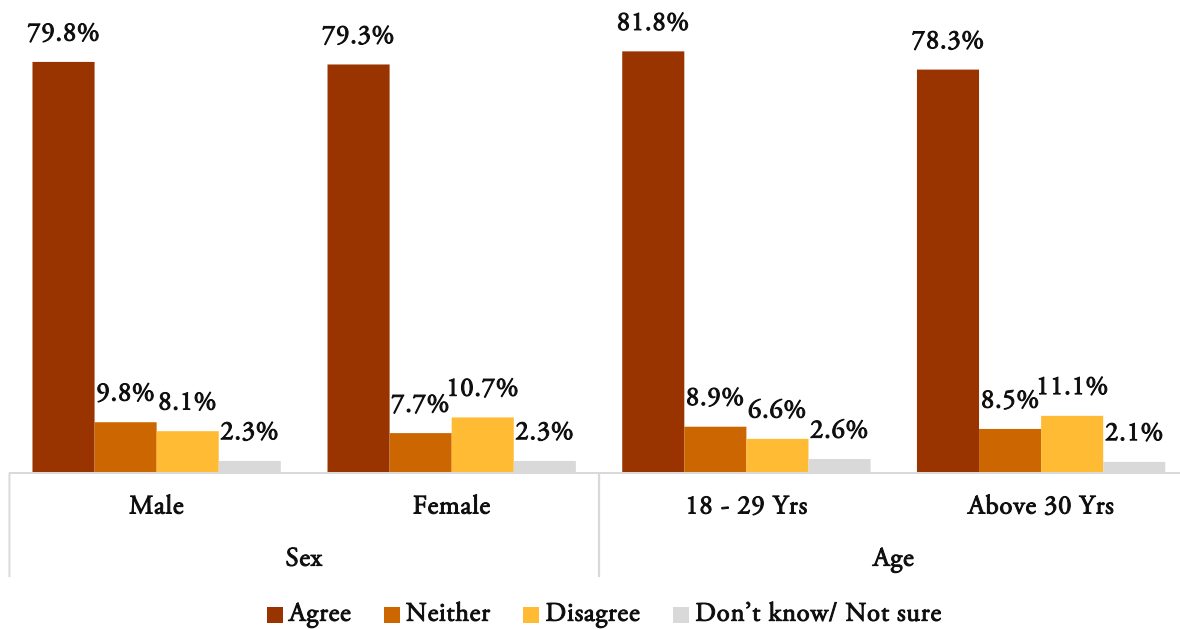
Graph 41: Each ethnic group should have the right to elect a certain number of members to the Parliament - by National



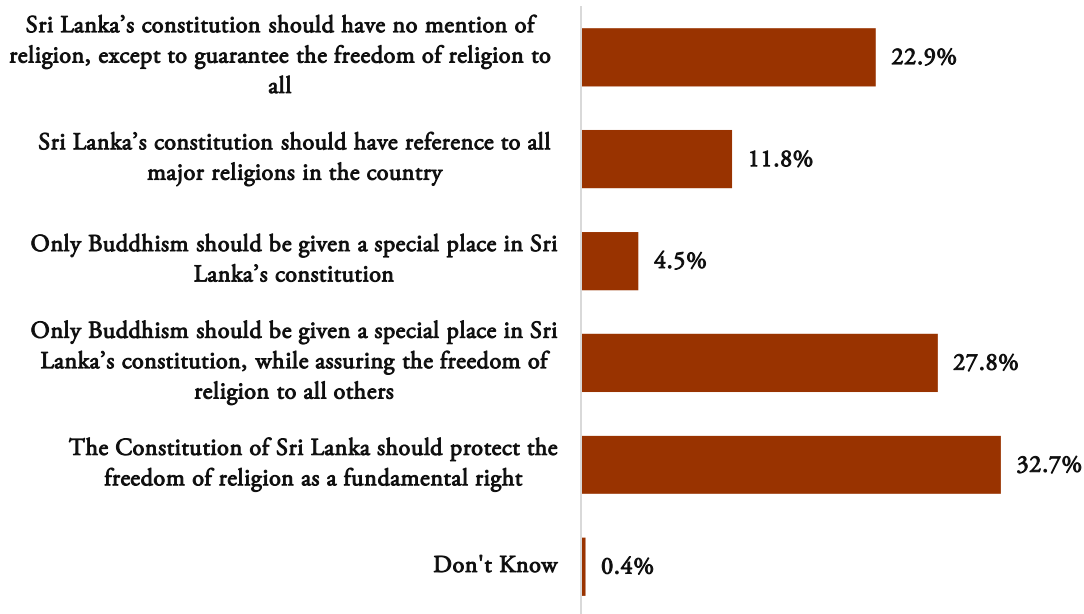
Graph 42: Each ethnic group should have the right to elect a certain number of members to the Parliament - by Ethnicity



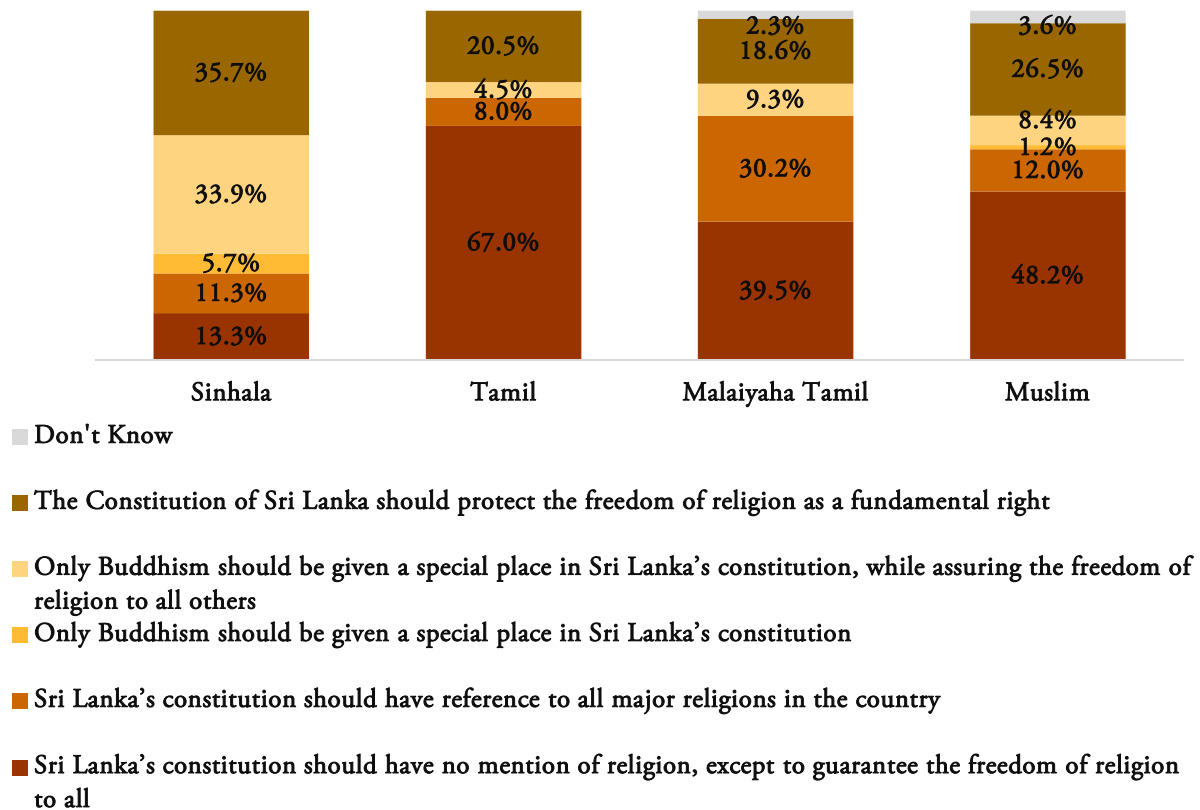
Graph 43: Each ethnic group should have the right to elect a certain number of members to the Parliament – by Sex and Age



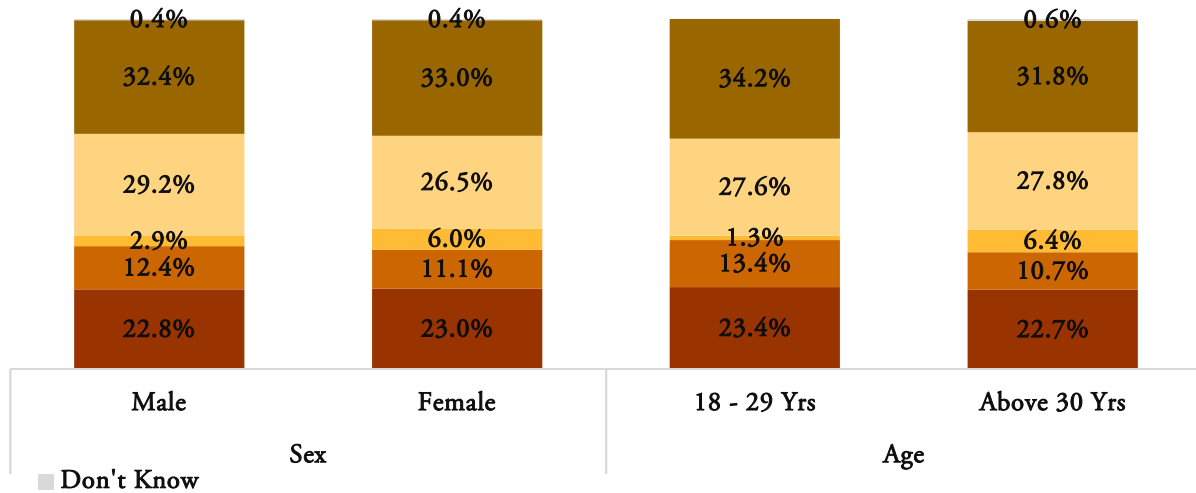
Graph 44: Role of religion in the Constitution by National



Graph 45: Role of religion in the Constitution by Ethnicity



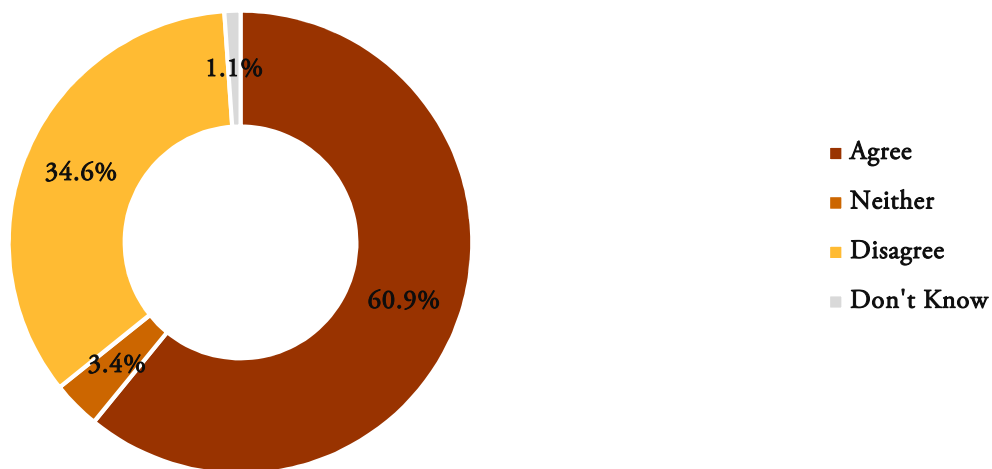
Graph 46: Role of religion in the Constitution by Sex and Age



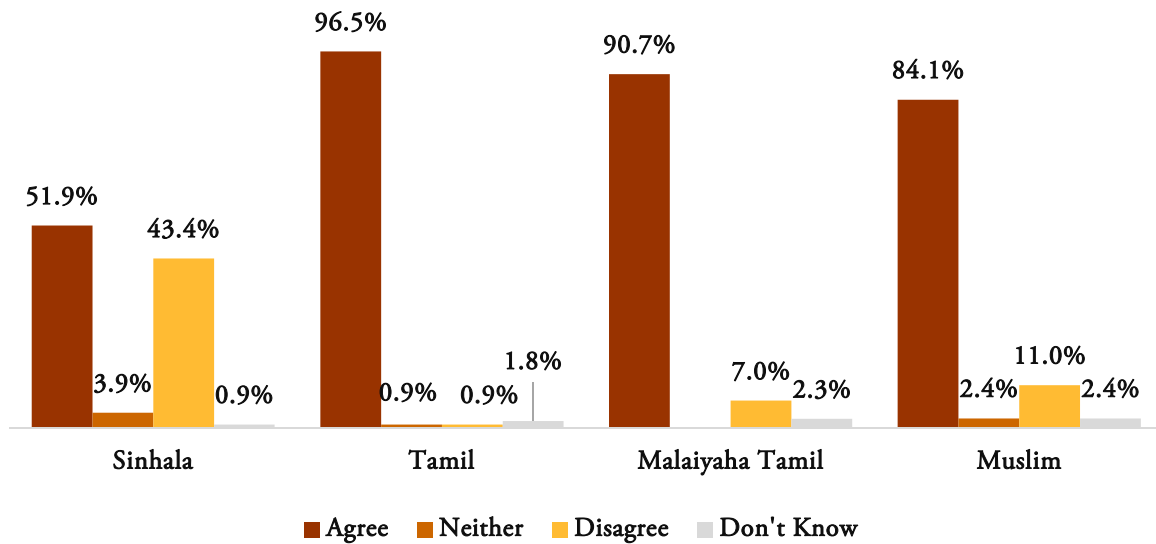
- Don't Know
- The Constitution of Sri Lanka should protect the freedom of religion as a fundamental right
- Only Buddhism should be given a special place in Sri Lanka's constitution, while assuring the freedom of religion to all others
- Only Buddhism should be given a special place in Sri Lanka's constitution
- Sri Lanka's constitution should have reference to all major religions in the country

Language of the National Anthem

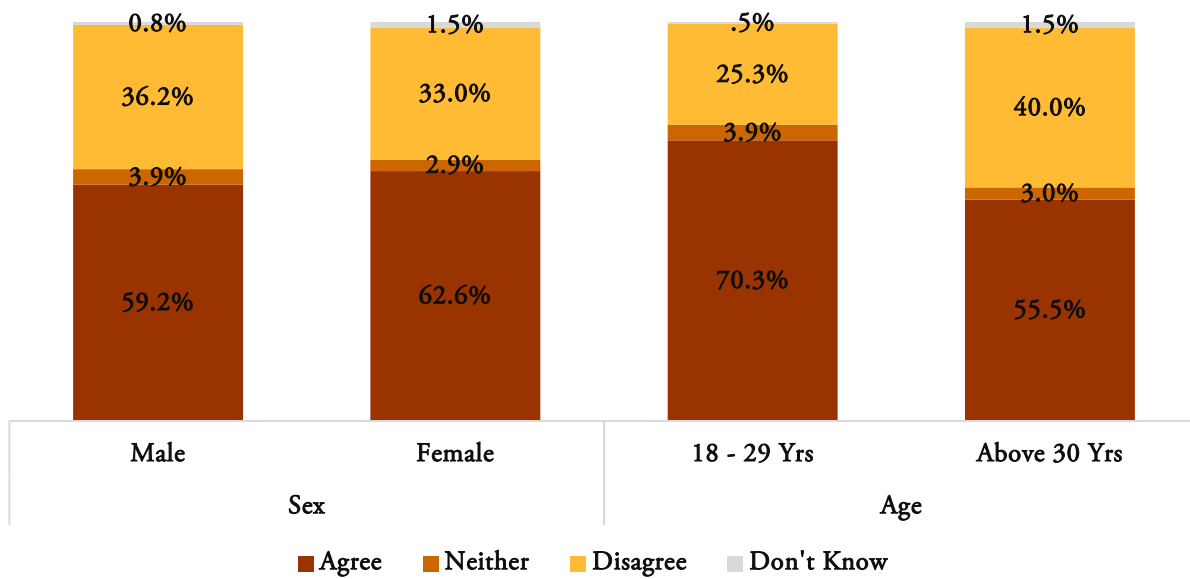
Graph 47: Support for singing the National Anthem in Sinhala and Tamil by National



Graph 48: Support for singing the National Anthem in Sinhala and Tamil by Ethnicity

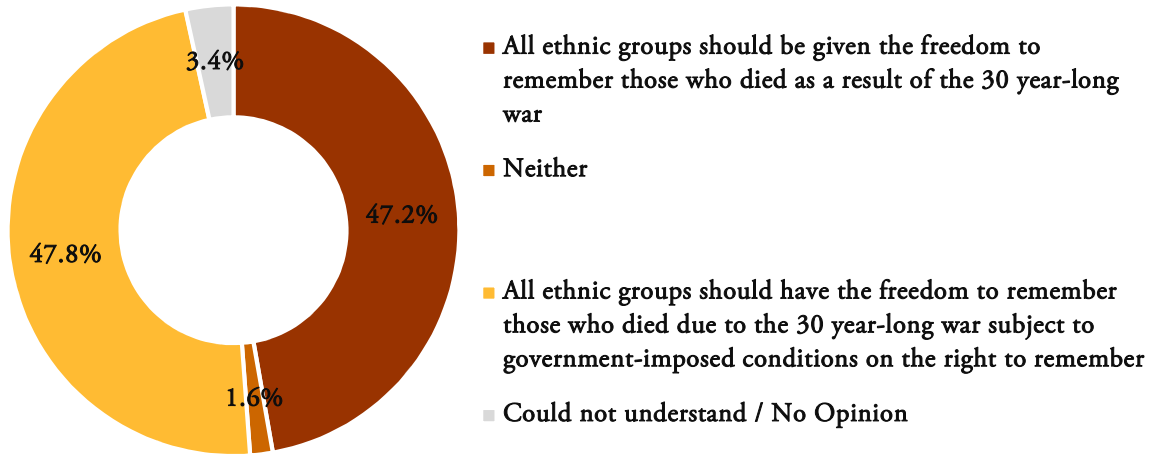


Graph 49: Support for singing the National Anthem in Sinhala and Tamil by Sex and Age

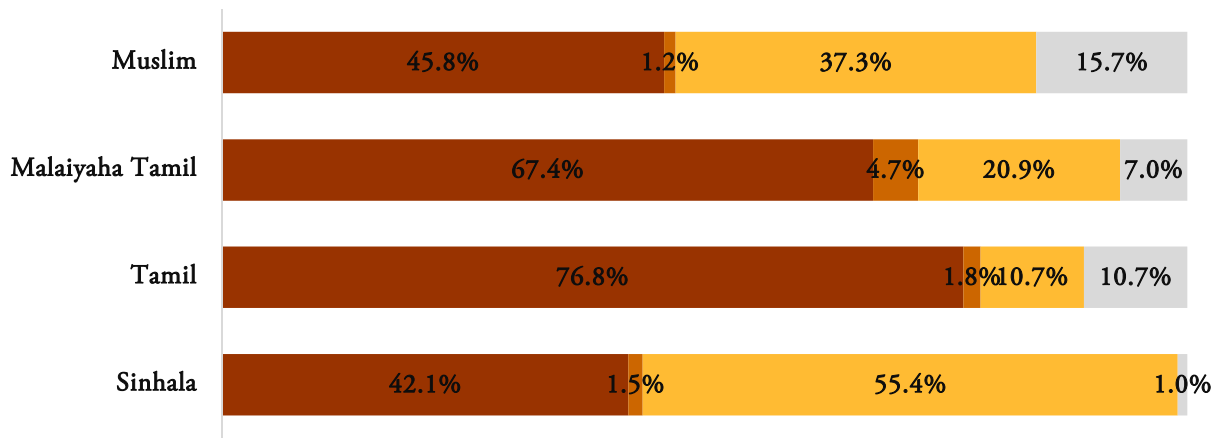


Freedom to Remember

Graph 50: Support for Freedom to Remember by National



Graph 51: Support for Freedom to Remember by Ethnicity



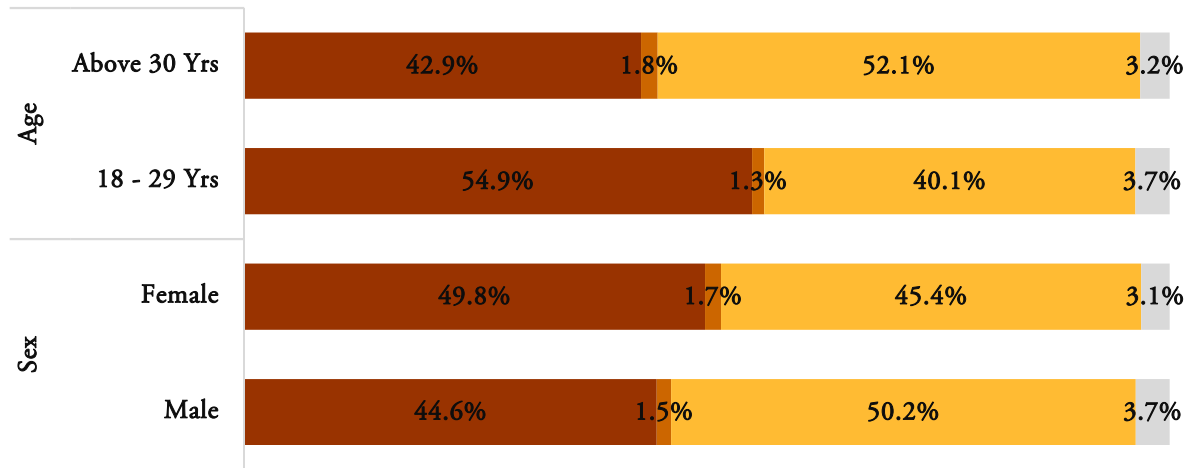
■ All ethnic groups should be given the freedom to remember those who died as a result of the 30 year-long war

■ Neither

■ All ethnic groups should have the freedom to remember those who died due to the 30 year-long war subject to government-imposed conditions on the right to remember

■ Could not understand / No Opinion

Graph 52: Support for freedom to Remember by Sex and Age



- All ethnic groups should be given the freedom to remember those who died as a result of the 30 year-long war
- Neither
- All ethnic groups should have the freedom to remember those who died due to the 30 year-long war subject to *conditions
- Could not understand / No Opinion

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

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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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