

CONFIDENCE IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE INDEX

TOPLINE REPORT

Centre for Policy Alternatives
Social Indicator
March 2024



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INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared by Social Indicator (SI), the survey research arm of the Centre for Policy Alternatives on the findings of the Confidence in Democratic Governance Index (Wave 5). The current government continues with economic and policy reforms in order to overcome the economic crisis. Although it is not the average citizens who are responsible for the crisis, they have to bear the brunt of the process that the government has taken to resolve it. Against such a backdrop, the poll was designed to capture the public sentiments on the country's current state of governance.

The poll focuses on key demands that were mooted in the political discourse at the time, the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act and Online Safety Bill, measures taken by the government in relation to Easter Sunday attacks, awareness and perception on Malaiyaha Tamil Community, regulation of Election Expenditure Act, absence of local government authority and provincial councils, perception of IMF suggested policy changes/structural reforms, public opinion on provincial council system, and the perception of level of corruption.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was carried amongst a random sample of 1350 individuals selected from the four main ethnic communities (Sinhala, Tamil, Malayaha Tamil, and Muslim) using a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews were conducted using face-to-face interview technique and a total of 80 field enumerators (male and female) were employed for the data collection. The sample was selected using a multi-staged stratified random sampling technique in order to capture ethnic and regional diversity of the population. Therefore the survey captures the opinion of both men and women living in urban and rural localities in all 25 districts. Fieldwork for the survey was carried out between the 6th and 23rd of November 2023. The data set was weighted to reflect the actual district and ethnic proportion of the population. The data set was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public perception on key demands mooted by various segments of the society at the time the survey was conducted

- An overwhelming majority (over 94%) of Sri Lankans support all key demands mooted by various segments of society. Hence, they express agreement to the proposal that ‘all politicians should be audited, and their unaccounted wealth should be confiscated by the state’. They also agree with the proposal that ‘the elections should be held on time’, and that ‘those who are responsible for the economic crisis should be held accountable’. Further, they also support the proposal that ‘all politicians including the President, should disclose their assets’.
- A marginally higher percentage of younger population (97.3%) believe that politicians should be held accountable compared to the older population (94.2%). However, almost a similar percentage of the young and older populace agree that the elections should be held on time.

Public Opinion on the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act

- Over half of the Sri Lankans (61.5%) are not aware of the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act, which was gazetted on the 15th of September 2023.
- The lack of awareness is seen across both age categories with over half of the Sri Lankans indicating lack of awareness.
- Of those who are aware of the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act (38.5%), a majority (72.6%) disapprove of it.
- When asked to provide reasons for disapproval, respondents provided various reasons. Of all the reasons forwarded, the most prominent is, that those who are in power will misuse this for their benefit (85.1%). The next emphasized reason is that it will negatively affect the human rights of the people (72.5%). The fact that the ‘existing law is sufficient, and hence there is no need for new laws at this time’ is emphasized as the third highest reason (31.2%).

Public Opinion on the proposed Online Safety Bill

- A majority (71.6%) are not aware of the proposed Online Safety Bill that was gazzeted on the 18th of September 2023.
- The lack of awareness of the proposed Online Safety Bill is reflected across both age categories. However, this lack of awareness is marginally high amongst the older population (above 30 years) compared to the younger population (between 18-29 years).
- Of the 28.4% who are aware of the proposed Online Safety Bill, a majority (71.1%) disapproves of it.
- When asked to provide reasons for disapproval, respondents provided various reasons. Of all the reasons forwarded, the most prominent is that those who are in power will misuse it for their own benefit (82.5%). The next highlighted reason is that this will negatively affect the human rights of the people (77.5%). The fact that this 'may limit/mitigate the expression of alternative political opinion' is expressed as the third highest reason for disapproval (43.2%).

Perception on measures taken by the government with regard to Easter Sunday Attacks

- An overwhelming majority (89.6%) of Sri Lankans are dissatisfied with the measures taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to investigate and make those who are responsible, accountable for the Easter Sunday Attacks.
- This dissatisfaction is seen across all main ethnic communities with a majority expressing discontent.
- The dissatisfaction is comparatively higher amongst the Buddhist and Christian community as opposed to the other religious groups (Muslims and Hindus).
- The dissatisfaction is also seen across both age categories with marginally higher percentage of younger population (18-29 years) expressing discontent.
- The respondents were asked about their opinion on diverse views expressed by different parties regarding the investigations into the Easter Sunday Attacks. Of those, 34.4% of the Sri Lankans believe that there should be an international investigation into the incident while 32.8% emphasize that there should be an internal investigation with international monitors. Another 21.8% believe only an internal investigation is sufficient.
- Those who believe that there should be an international investigation into the incident or an internal investigation with international monitors are marginally high amongst the minority communities (Tamil, Malaiyaha Tamil and Muslim).
- Those who believe that there should be an international investigation into the incident is relatively high amongst the Christian community (RC & Non-RC) with over half of them expressing their support to this statement. Also, nearly half

of the Muslim community (46.9%) believe that there should be an international investigation. On the contrary, the Buddhists and the Hindus seem to demonstrate a mixed opinion. They are divided between the fact that there should be an international investigation and an internal investigation with international monitors.

Malaiyaha Tamil Community

- Over half of the Sri Lankans (53.7%) are aware that it has been 200 years since the first group of Malaiyaha Tamil Community was brought into Sri Lanka to work in the tea and rubber estates.
- This awareness is significantly high amongst minority communities, with more than 75% of the Tamil and Malaiyaha Tamil Community recording awareness. Likewise, over 60% of the Muslim community also affirm its awareness of this fact. Notably, a half (52%) of the Sinhala community claim that they are not aware of the fact that it has been 200 years since the first group of Malaiyaha Tamil Community was brought into Sri Lanka to work on the tea and rubber estates.
- This awareness is markedly high amongst the adult population (above 30 years) as opposed to the younger age group (18-29 years).
- When asked about the extent to which they support the fact that these Malaiyaha Tamil Community who has been living in estates for generations should be provided with a plot of land and a decent house of their own, with legal ownership, instead of line rooms, over half of the Sri Lankans (65.5%) state that they support this demand to a great extent. Another 25.4% of the Sri Lankans state they support the demand to a certain extent.
- The support for the demand of providing land ownership to Malaiyaha Tamil Community who live in 'line rooms' is significantly high amongst all ethnic groups with an overwhelming majority expressing their support. However, the percentage of minority communities who support this demand is comparatively high when compared to the Sinhala community.

Regulation of Election Expenditure Act

- The respondents were asked about their opinion regarding the spending on election campaigns. For that, an overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans (91.6%) stated that there should be limits on the amount of money a candidate could spend on election campaigns.
- An overwhelming majority of Sri Lankans across both age categories believe that there should be limits on the amount of money a candidate can spend on election campaigns.

- A significant 78.5% of the Sri Lankans were not aware of the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act that was passed in the parliament on the 19th of January 2023, to regulate the expenditure incurred by recognized political parties, independent groups, and candidates at every election.
- This lack of awareness is seen across both age categories though the unawareness is marginally high amongst the younger population (18-29 years) compared to the older populace (above 30 years).
- Over half of the Sri Lankans (61.1%) believe that this new Regulation of Election Expenditure Act will control large-scale expenditures incurred by recognized political parties, independent groups, and candidates. Another 36.2% believe that it will not control the election expenditure at all.

Absence of Functioning Local Government Authorities and Provincial Councils

- When asked about the extent to which the absence of functioning local authorities has affected them and their families, over half of the Sri Lankans (51.6%) stated that it has no effect on them.
- Those who believe that the absence of functioning local authorities has affected them, and their families is higher amongst the urban population as opposed to half of the rural population (53.5%) who believes that it has no effect on them.
- When asked about the extent to which the absence of functioning Provincial Councils affected them and their families, over half of the Sri Lankans (53.7%) stated that it has no effect on them.
- Those who believe that the absence of functioning Provincial Councils has affected them, and their families is higher amongst the Urban population as opposed to half of the Rural population (55.7%) who believes that it has no effect on them.

Perceptions on IMF's suggested policy changes/structural reforms

- Over half of the Sri Lankans (60.2%) claim that they are aware that the IMF has suggested some policy changes/ structural reforms to Sri Lanka based on a recently conducted governance diagnostic exercise to provide financial assistance to overcome the economic crisis.
- This awareness is relatively high amongst the younger population (18-29 years) compared to the older population (above 30 years). Likewise, the awareness is high amongst the rural population (62.3%) as opposed to the urban population (50.6%).
- Nearly 70% of the Sri Lankans believe that these policy changes/ structural reforms suggested by IMF are important for Sri Lanka to overcome the current economic crisis.
- This viewpoint is reflected across both age categories as well as urban rural localities.

Public Opinion on Provincial Council System

- When asked about their opinion on the Provincial Council System, 30.7% of the Sri Lankans state that the current provincial council system should be continued while 27.8% state that it should be abolished.
- The Sinhala community demonstrates a mixed opinion with a considerable 32.9% asserting that the current provincial council system should be abolished while another 30.3% stating that it should be continued. As for the Muslim community, nearly half (45%) holds the view that the current provincial council system should be continued. Nevertheless, a considerable percentage of Tamil (46.8%) and the Malaiyaha Tamil community (40.4%) state that the current provincial council system should be continued with additional powers to the provincial council.
- The opinion across both age categories seems to be divided between support for the continuation of the Provincial Council system and its abolition. However, the support for the continuation of the current Provincial Council system is relatively high amongst the older population (above 30 years) as opposed to the younger population (18-29 years). Besides, a considerable percentage of younger population (21%) support the viewpoint that the Provincial Council system should be continued with additional powers to the Provincial Councils.
- A similar viewpoint is also reflected across urban rural localities where both the rural and urban population express a divided opinion. However, a considerable percentage of rural population (32.6%) express support for the continuation of the provincial councils as opposed to the 21.2% of urban population who support the idea.
- When asked about whether they agree or disagree with the statement “The Central Government should implement the already devolved land powers to the Provincial Council”, nearly half of the Sri Lankans (47.2%) agree with the statement.
- A majority of Sinhala (45.1%), Tamil (64.9%) and Malaiyaha Tamil (57.9%) communities’ express agreement to the statement. However, a majority of the Muslim community (48.4%) express disagreement with the statement.
- The agreement to the statement is seen across both age categories with nearly half of the Sri Lankans indicating their consensus.

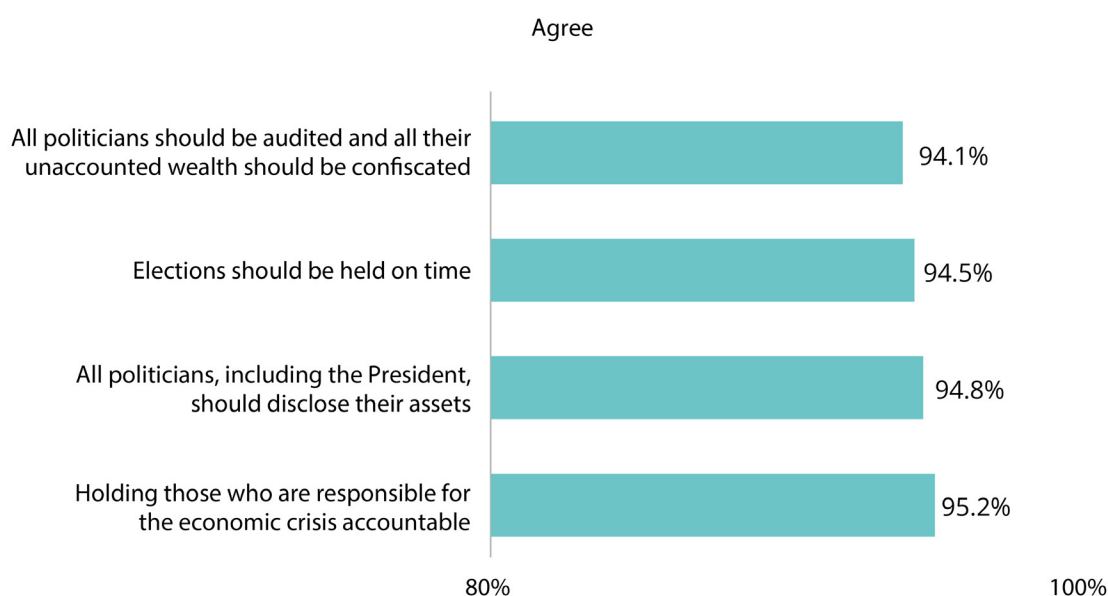
Perception on level of corruption

- When asked about whether the level of corruption in the country has increased or decreased compared to the period prior to the economic crisis, a majority of the Sri Lankans (87.2%) state that it has increased.
- This viewpoint is held across both age categories and in both urban and rural areas.

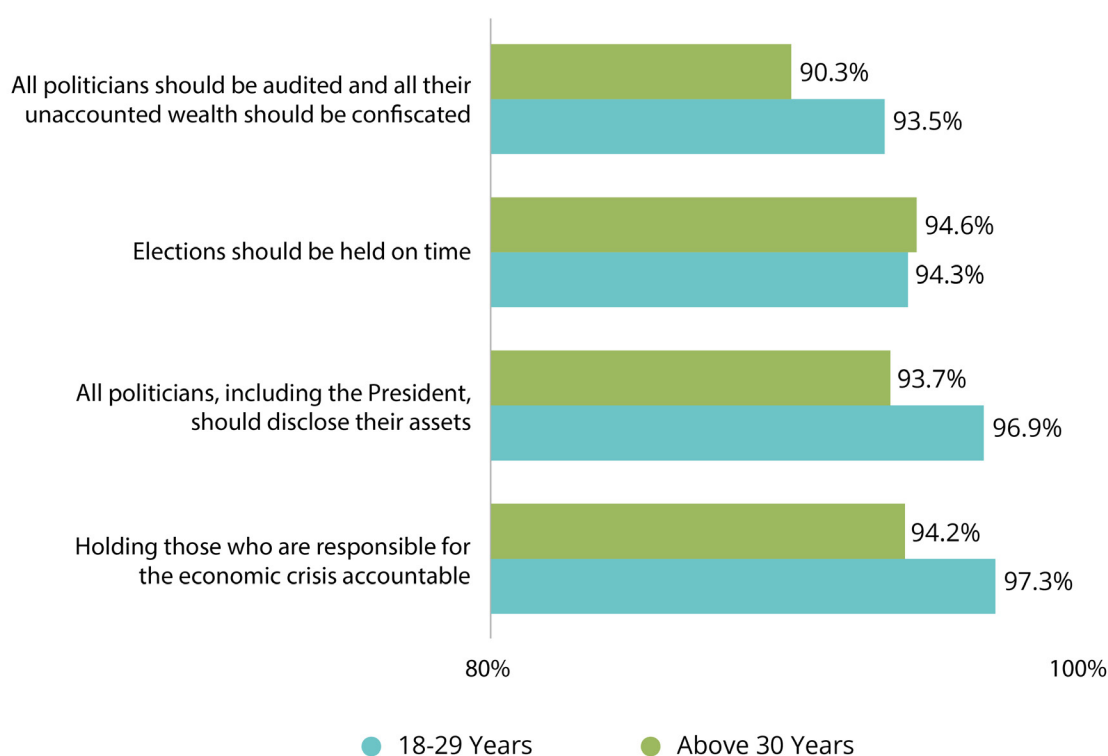
FINDINGS

Public perception on key demands mooted by various segments of the society at the time the survey was conducted

Graph 01: Perception on key demands

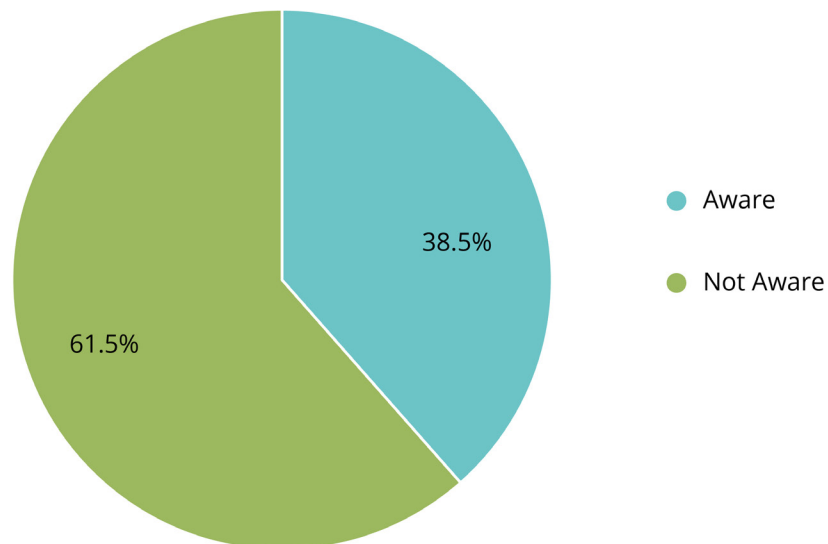


Graph 02: Perception on key demands by Age

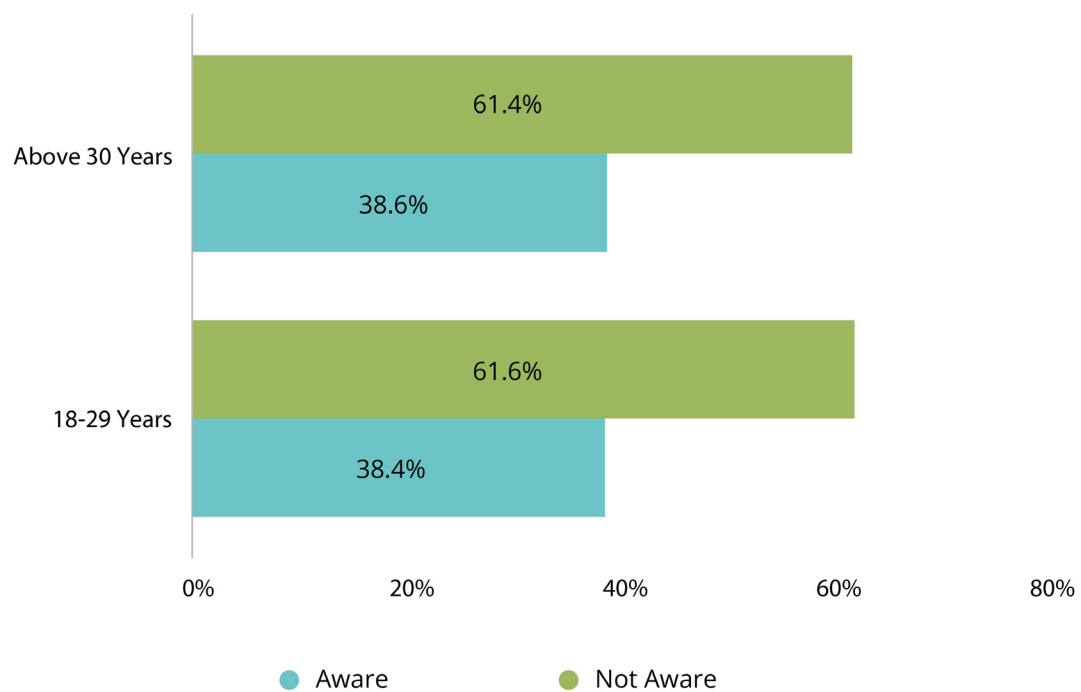


Opinion on the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act

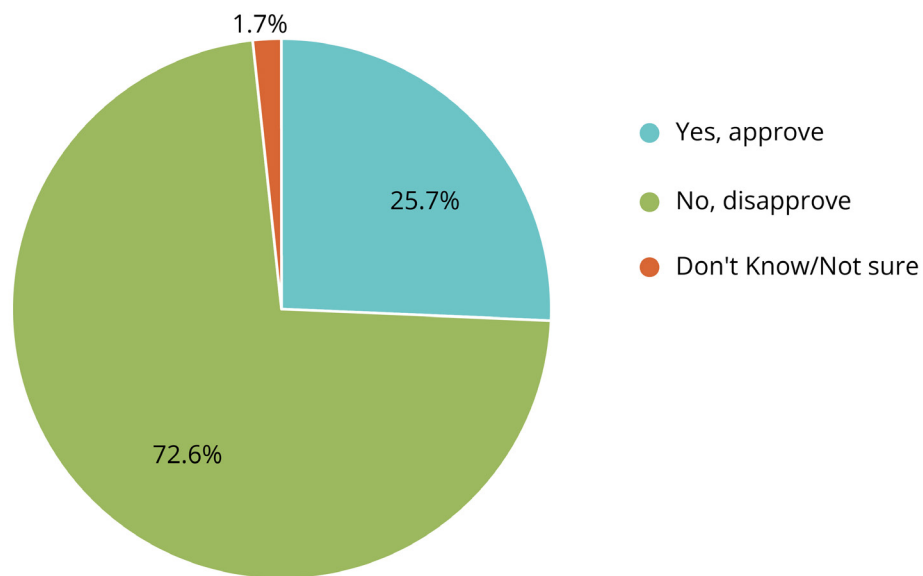
Graph 03: Awareness of proposed Anti-Terrorism Act



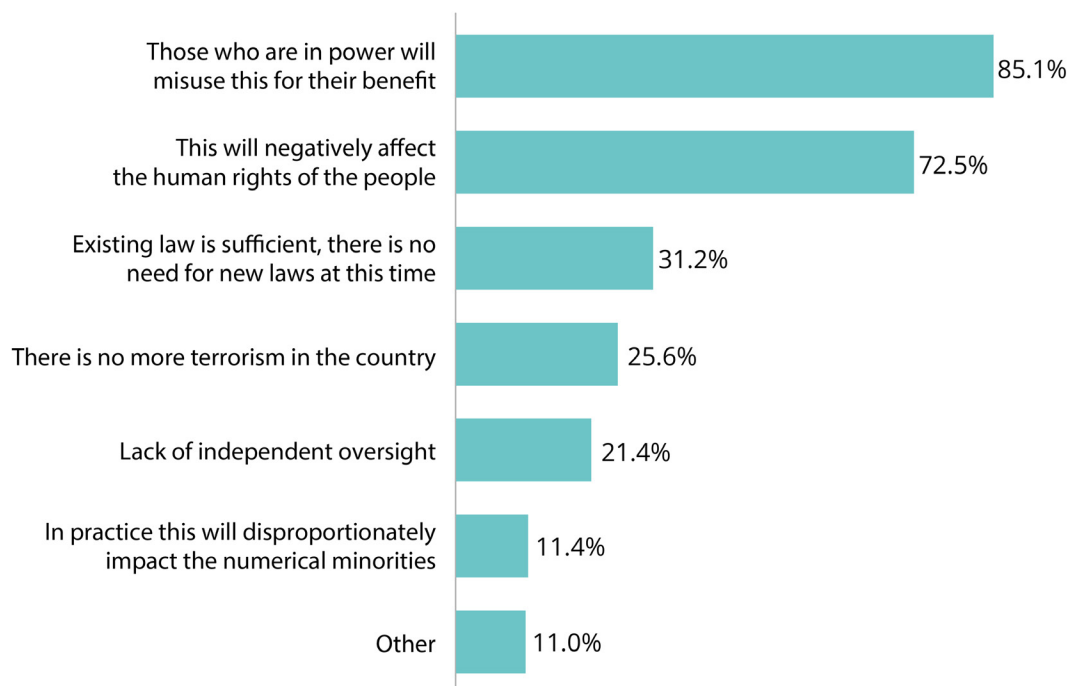
Graph 04: Awareness on proposed Anti-Terrorism Act by Age



Graph 05: Approval of the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act

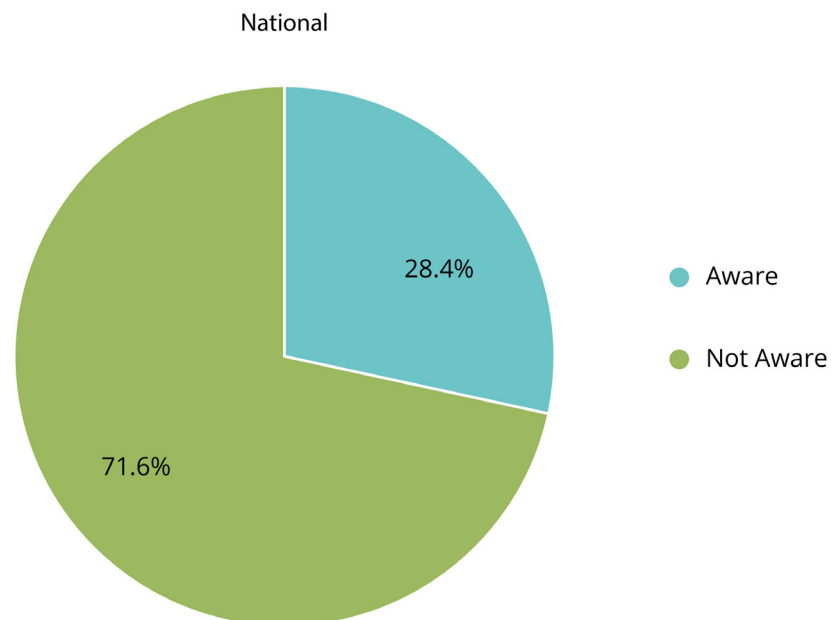


Graph 06: Reason for disapproval of the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act

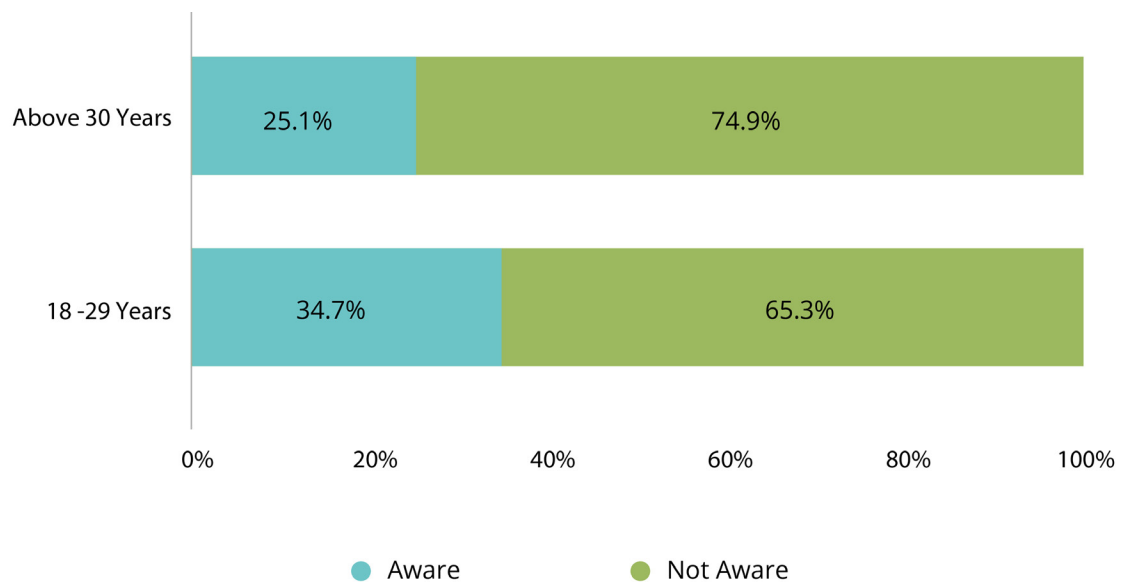


Public Opinion on the proposed Online Safety Bill

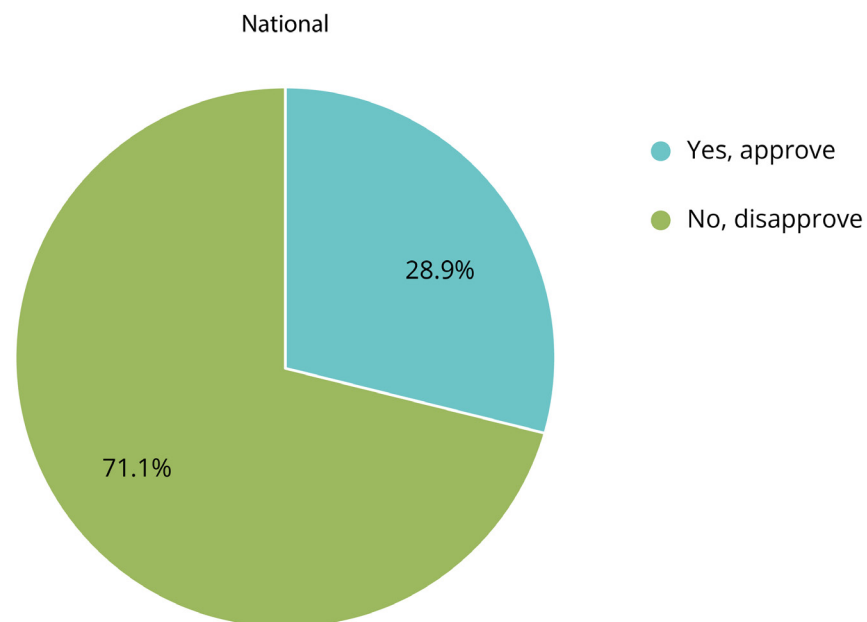
Graph 07: Awareness of the proposed Online Safety Bill



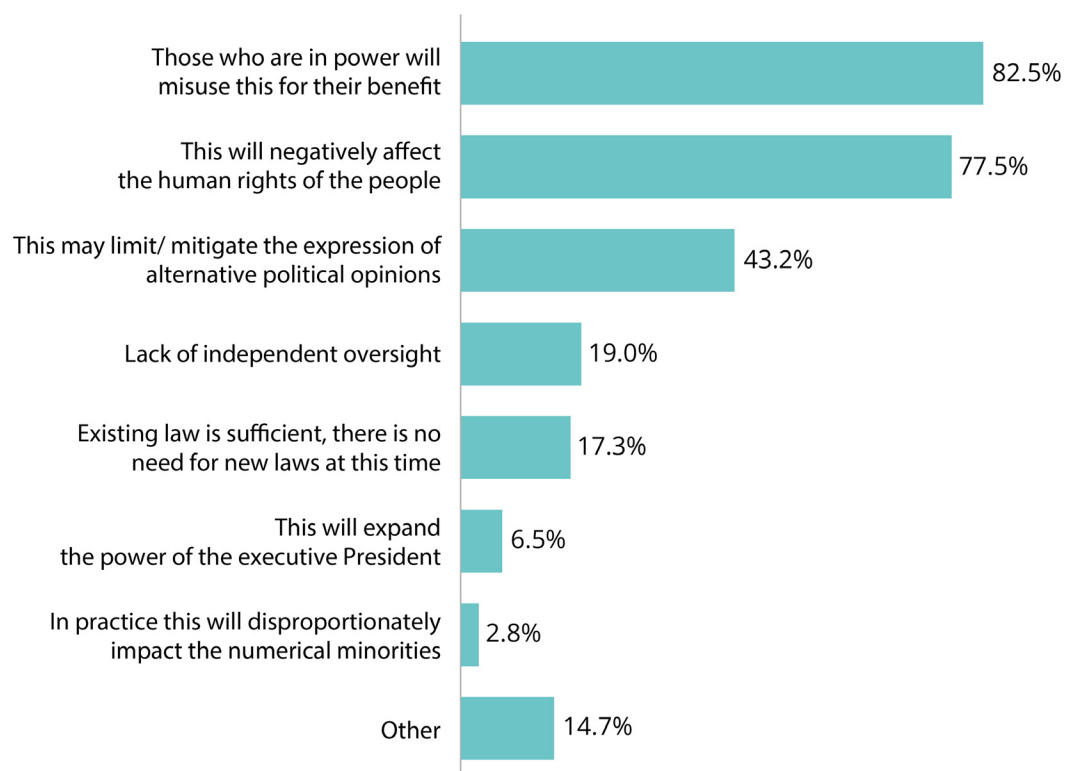
Graph 08: Awareness of the proposed Online Safety Bill by Age



Graph 09: Approval of the proposed Online Safety Bill

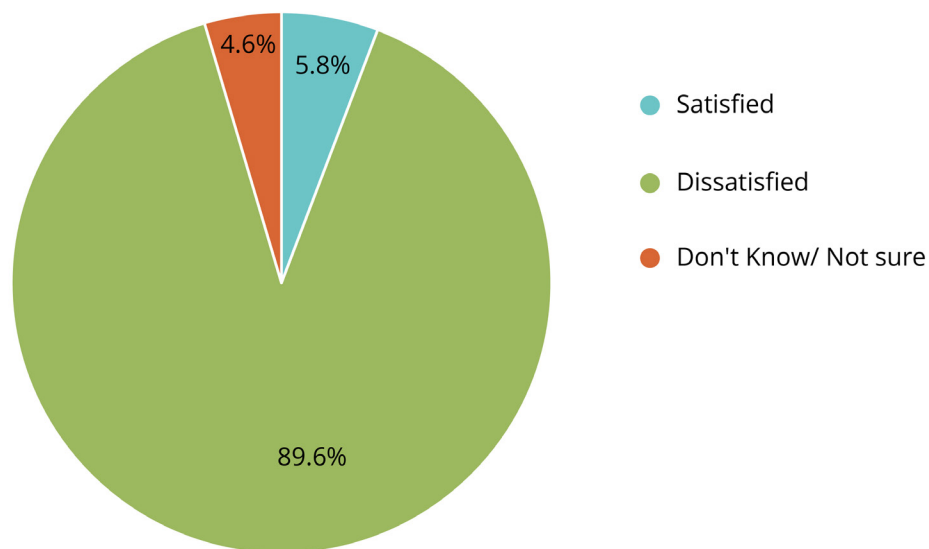


Graph 10: Reason for disapproval of the proposed Online Safety Bill



Perception on measures taken by the government with regard to Easter Sunday Attacks

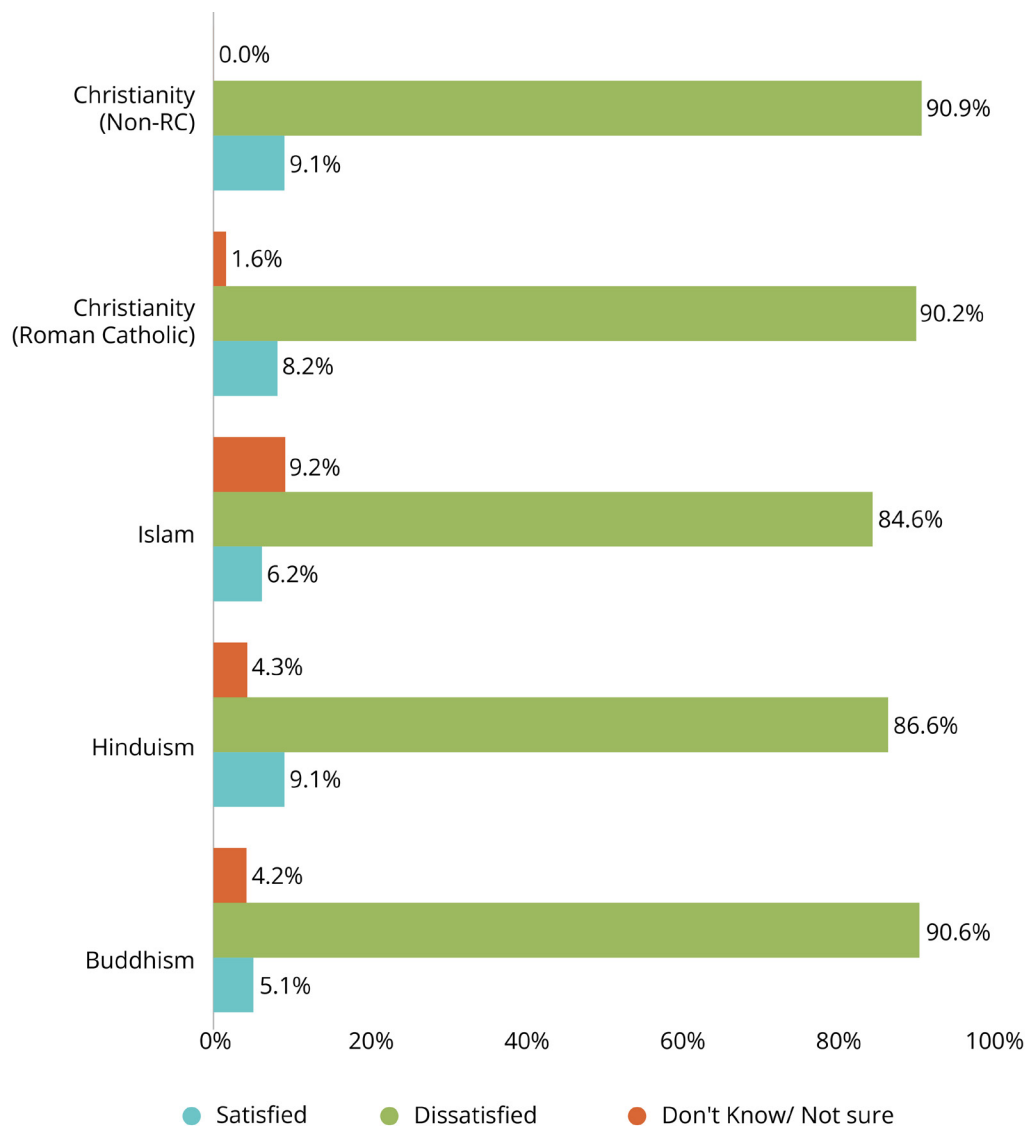
Graph 11: Perception on measures taken by the government with regard to Easter Sunday Attacks



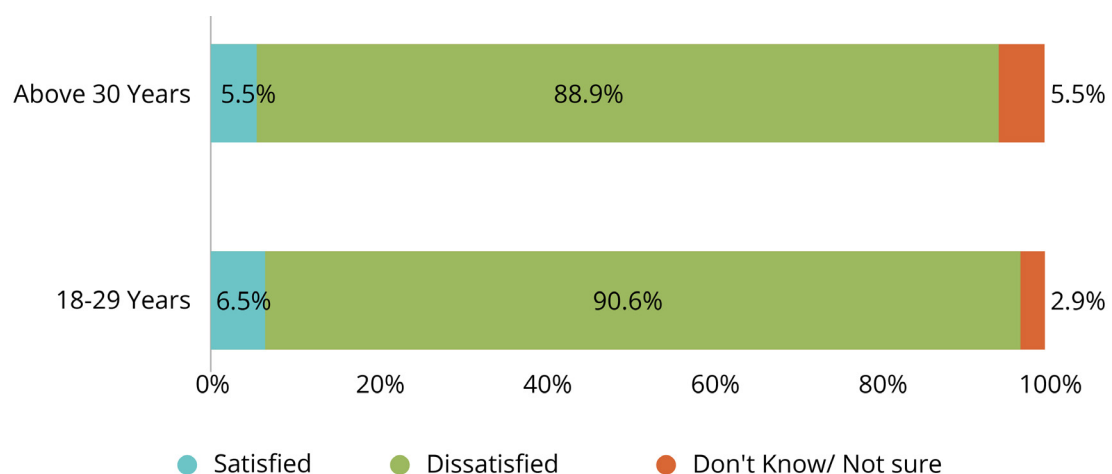
Graph 12: Perception on measures taken by the government with regard to Easter Sunday Attacks by Ethnicity



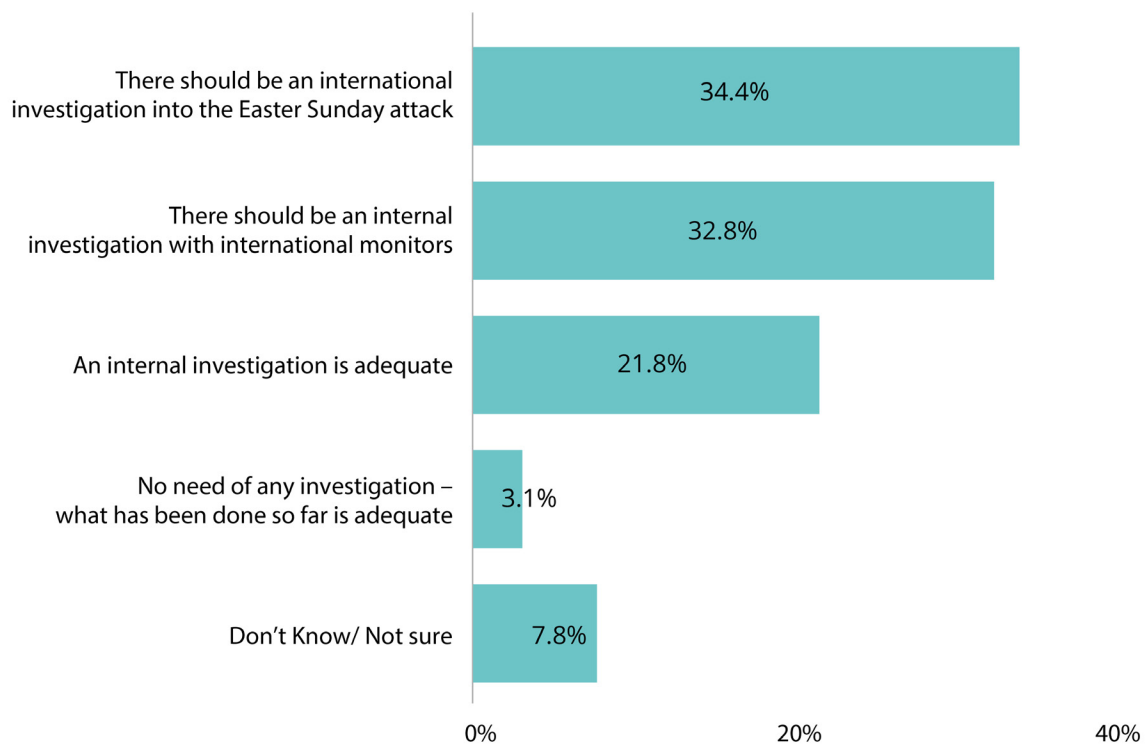
Graph 13: Perception on measures taken by the government with regard to Easter Sunday Attacks by Religion



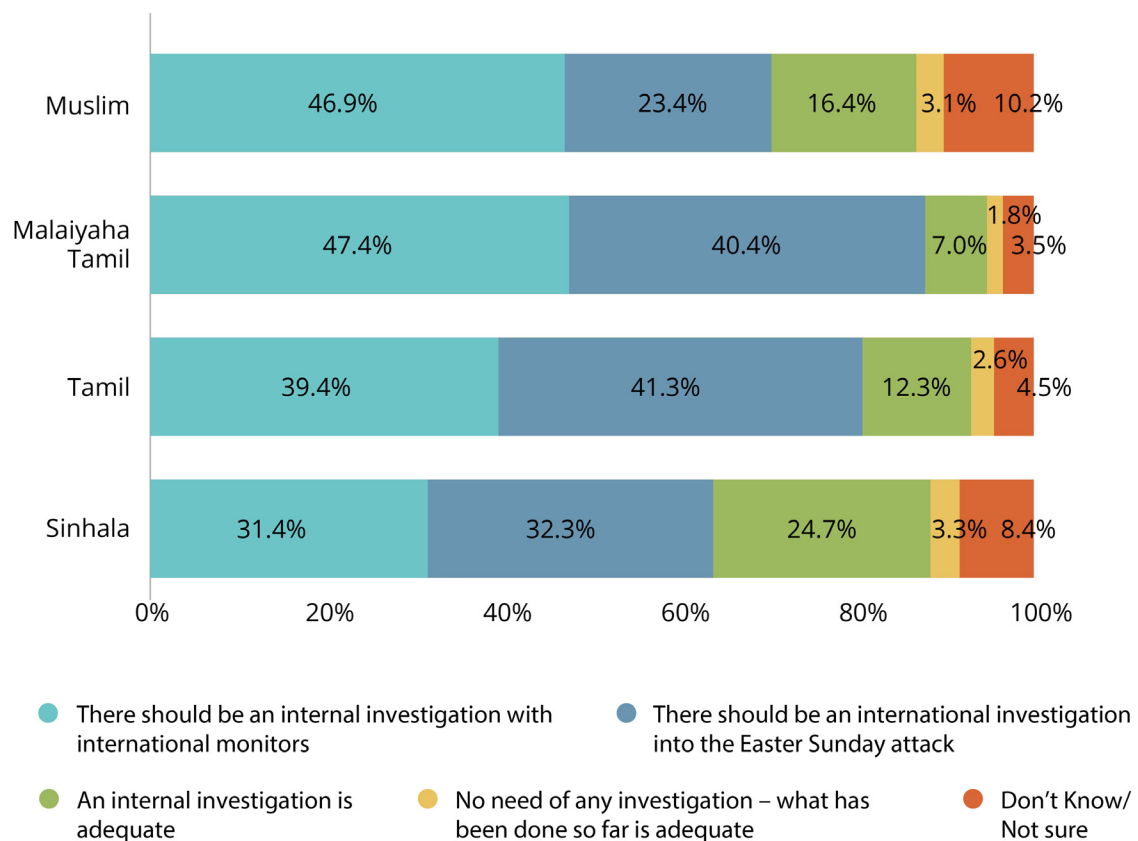
Graph 14: Perception on measures taken by the government with regard to Easter Sunday Attacks by Age



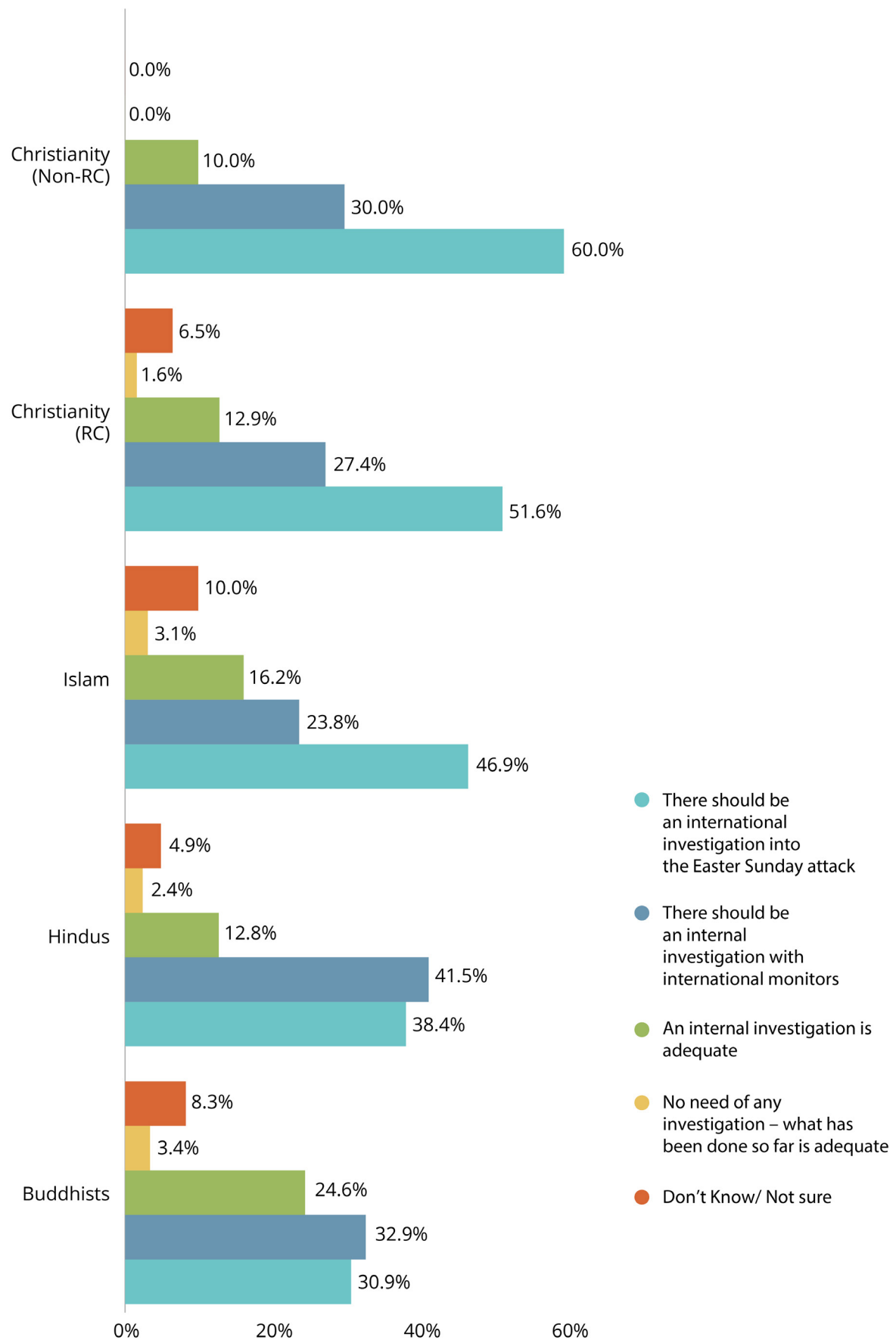
Graph 15: Perception on investigations into Easter Sunday Attacks



Graph 16: Perception on International Involvement into Easter Sunday Attack by Ethnicity

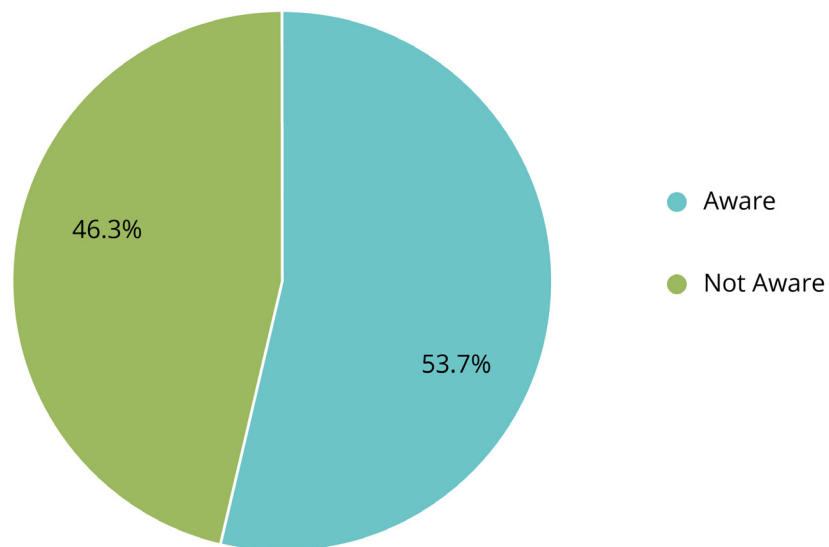


Graph 17: Perception on International Involvement into Easter Sunday Attack by Religion

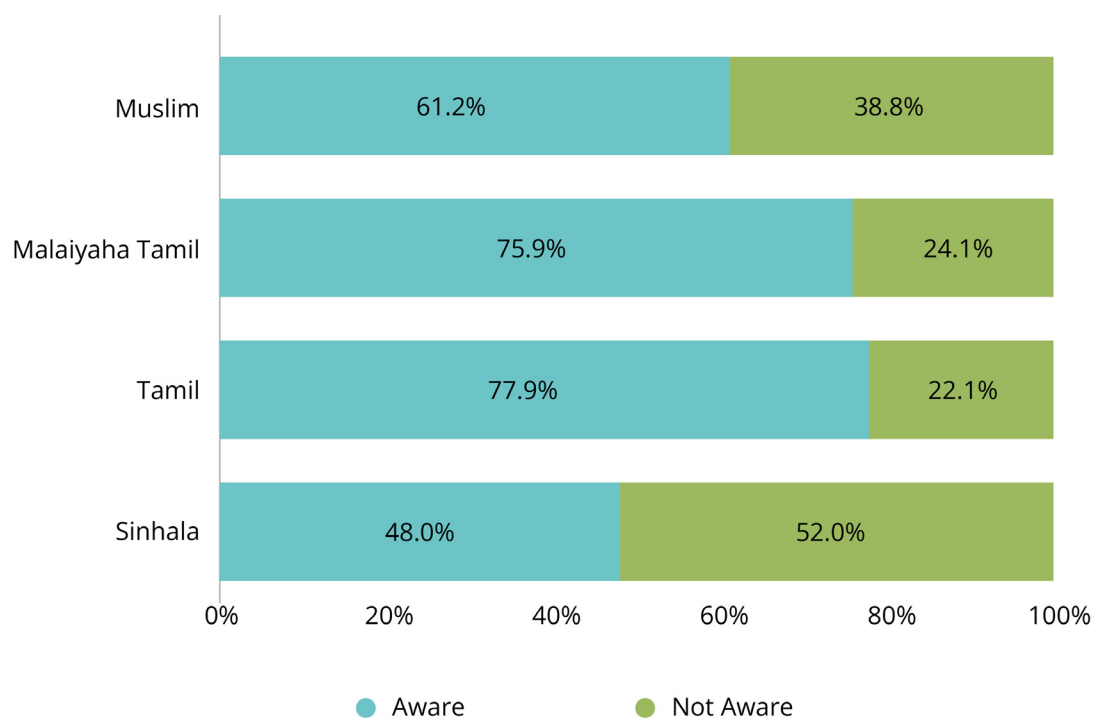


Malaiyaha Tamil

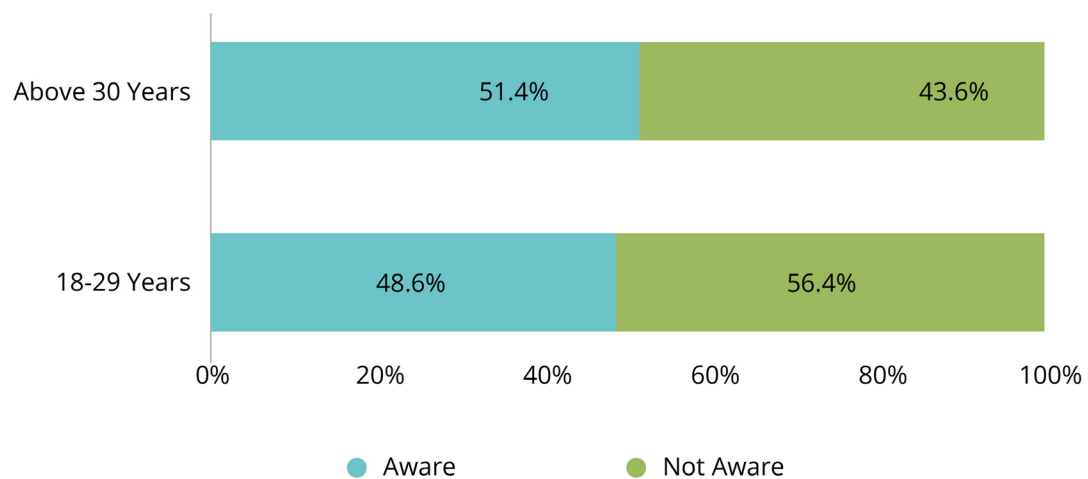
Graph 18: Awareness of 200 years of the Malaiyaha Tamil community



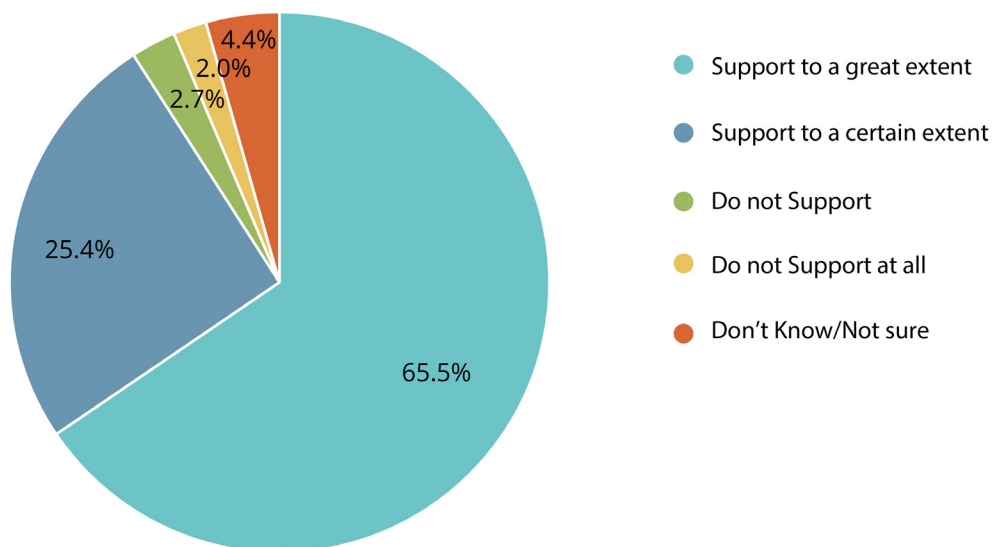
Graph 19: Awareness of 200 years of the Malaiyaha Tamil community by Ethnicity



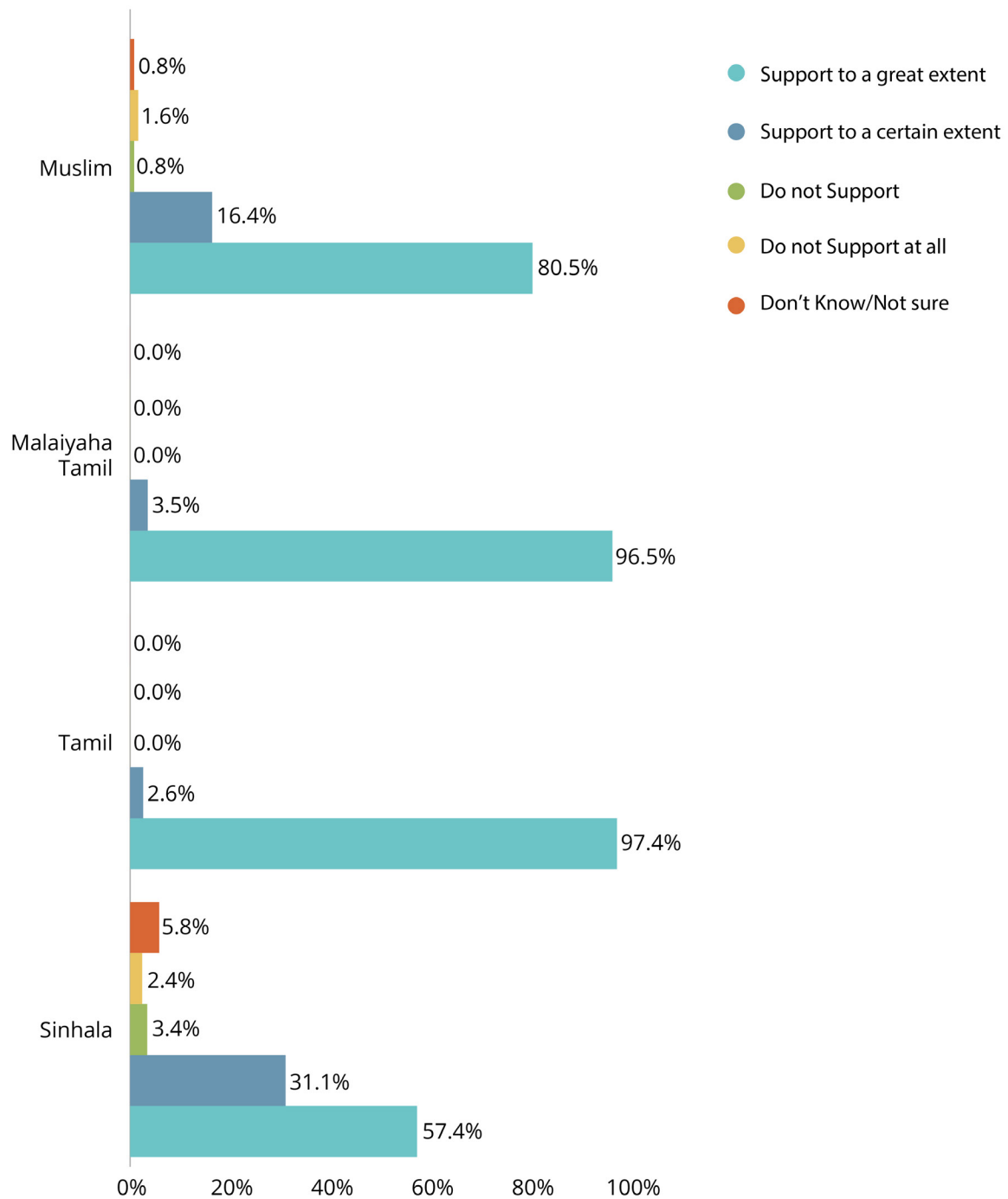
Graph 20: Awareness of 200 years of the Malaiyaha Tamil community by Age



Graph 21: Support for demand providing land ownership to Malaiyaha Tamil community who lives in line rooms

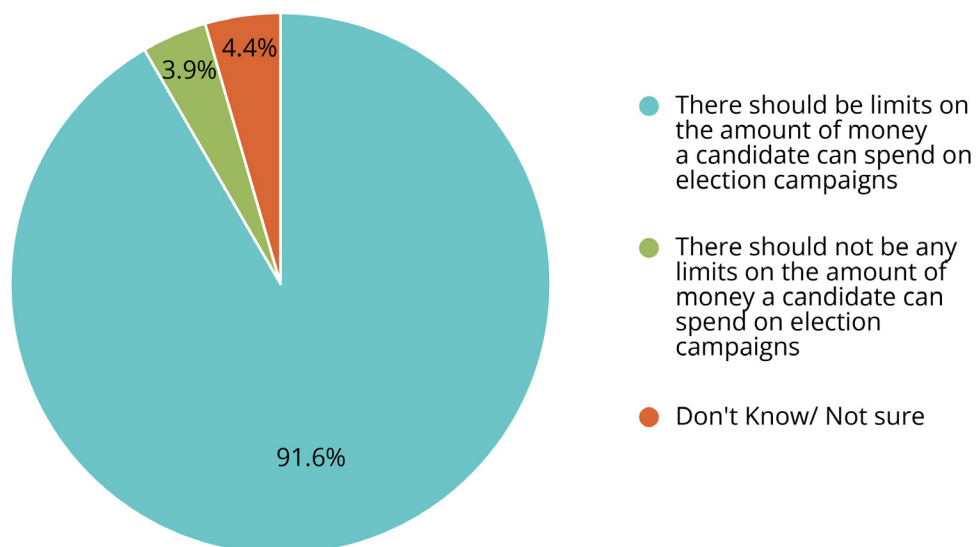


Graph 22: Support for demand providing land ownership to Malaiyaha Tamil community who lives in line rooms by Ethnicity

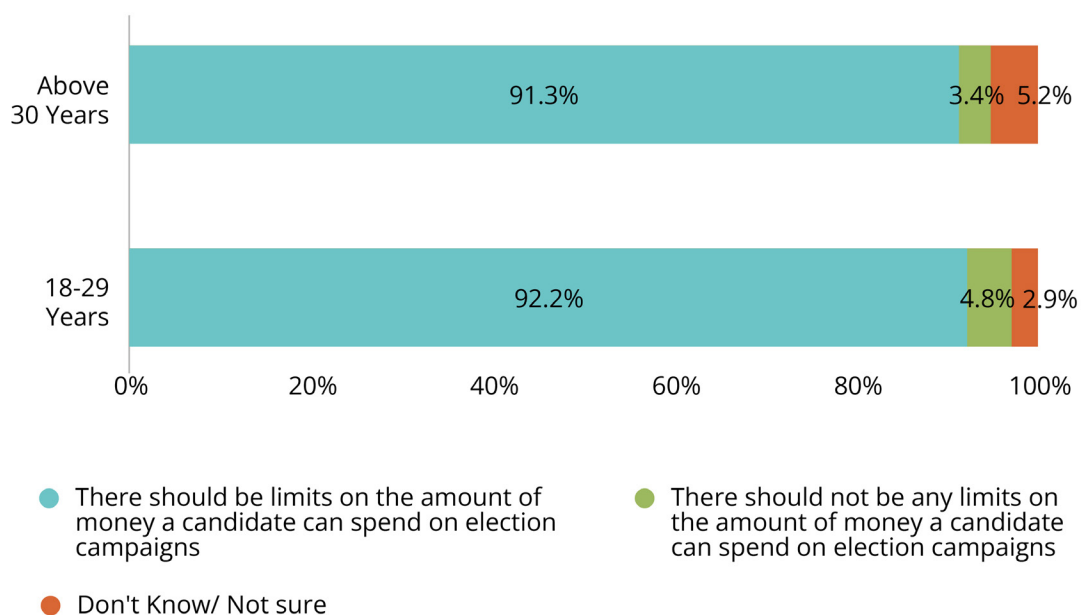


Regulation of Election Expenditure Act

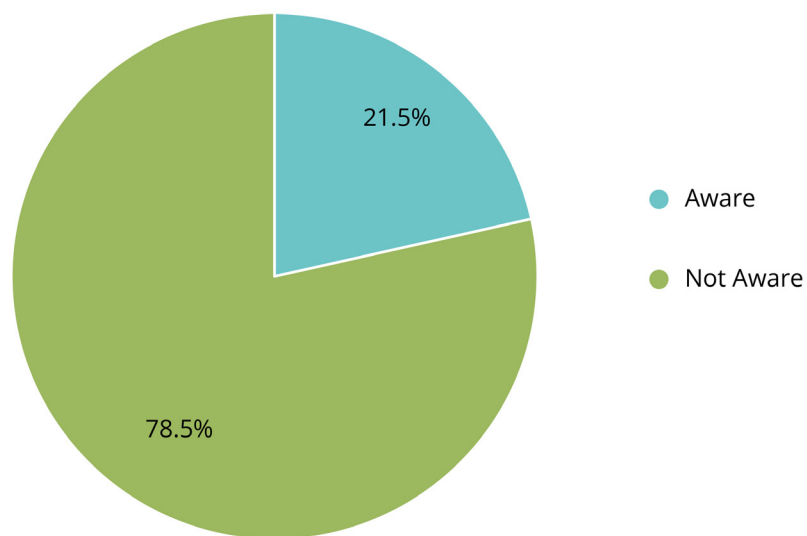
Graph 23: Public Opinion on spending on the Election Campaign



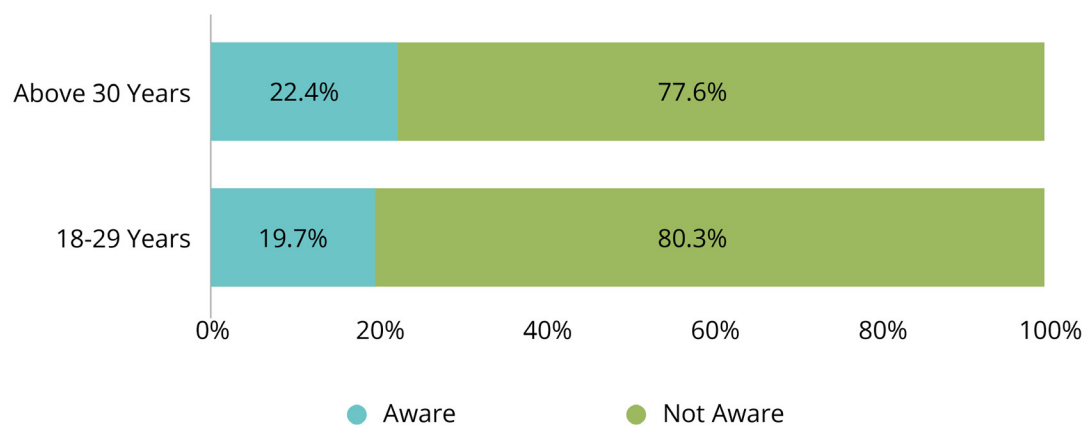
Graph 24: Public Opinion on spending on the Election Campaign by Age



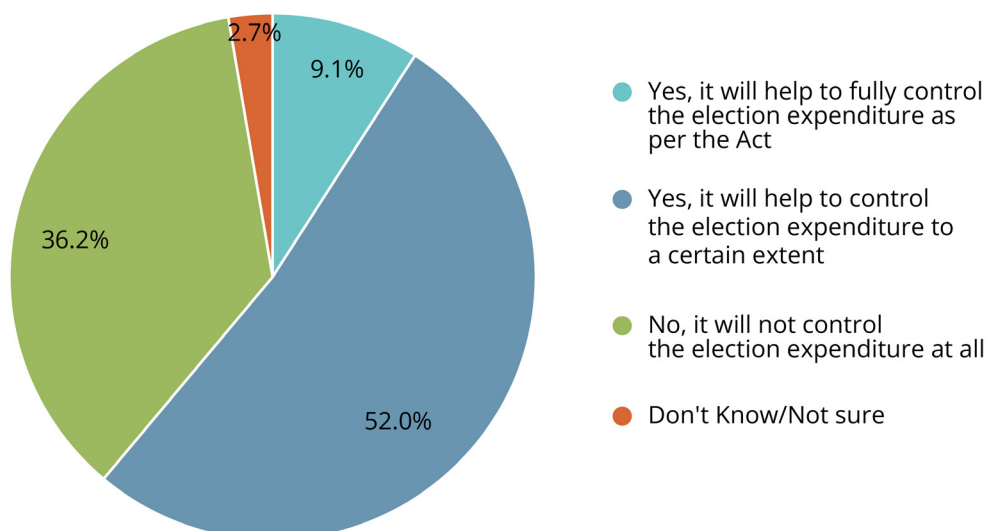
Graph 25: Awareness on the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act



Graph 26: Awareness on the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act by Age

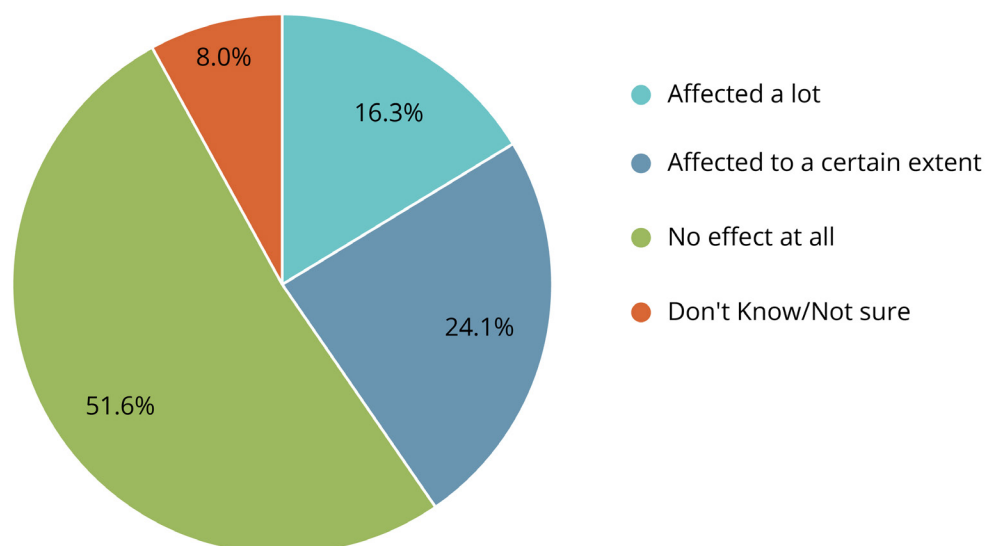


Graph 27: Perception on the Regulation of Election Expenditure Act

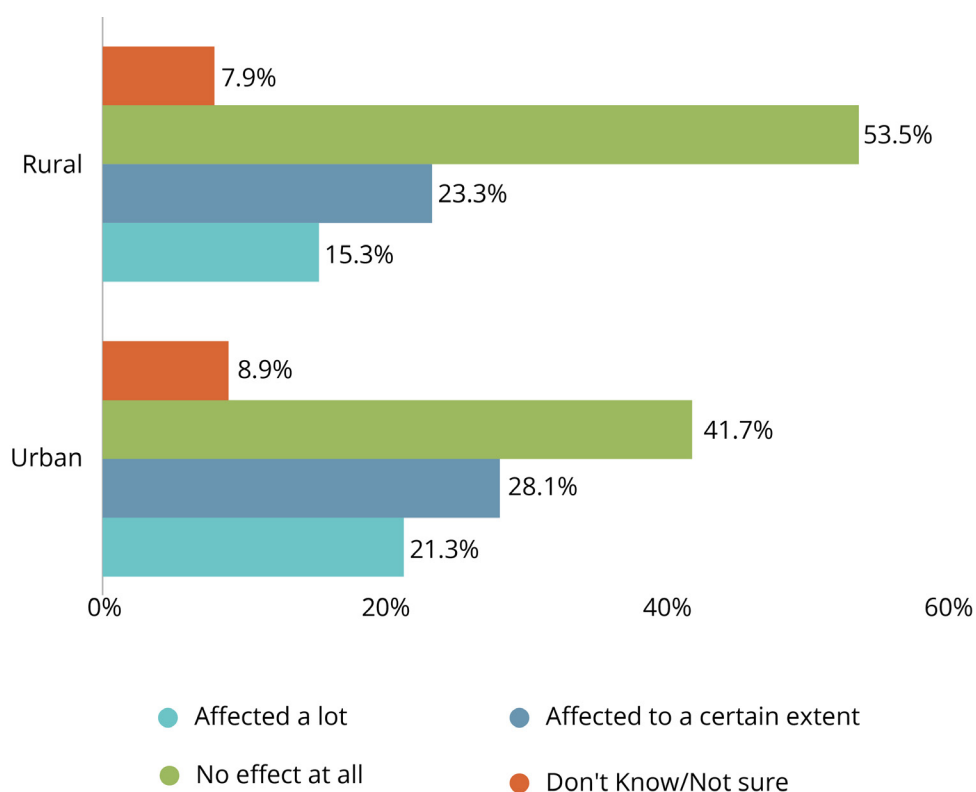


Absence of Functioning Local Government Authorities and Provincial Councils

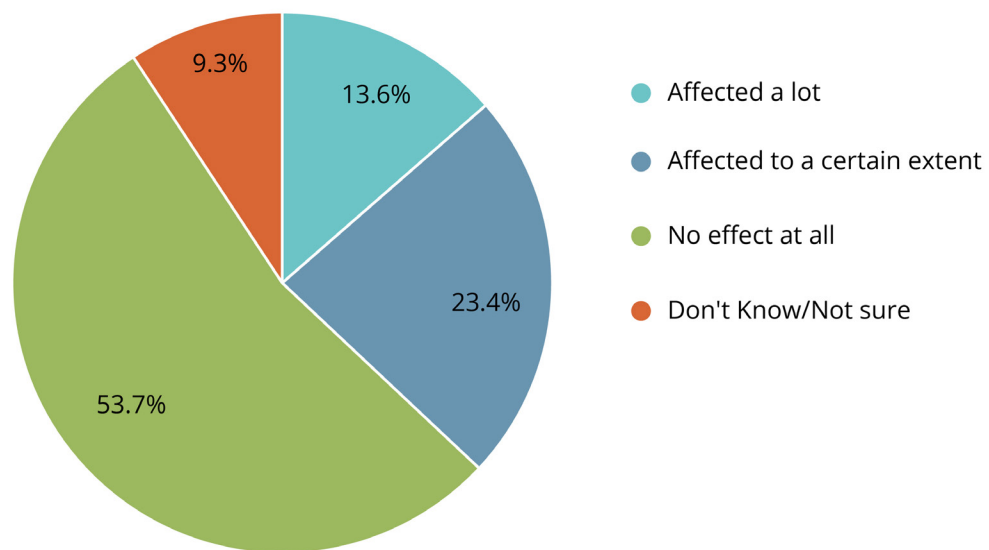
Graph 28: Impact of absence of functioning local authorities on people



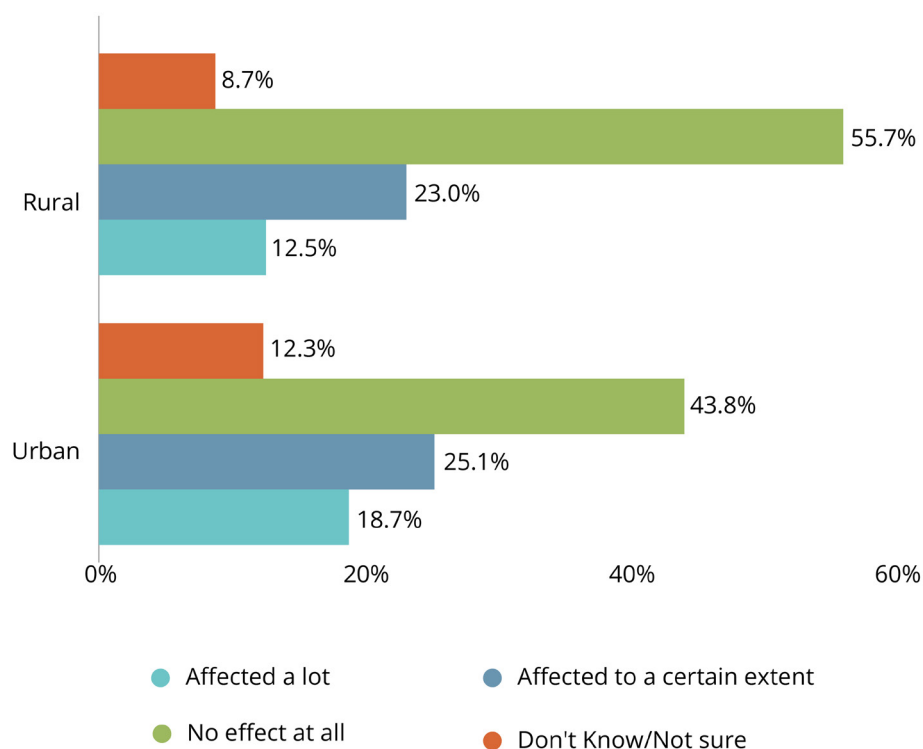
Graph 29: Impact of absence of functioning local authorities on people by Locality



Graph 30: Impact of absence of functioning Provincial councils on people

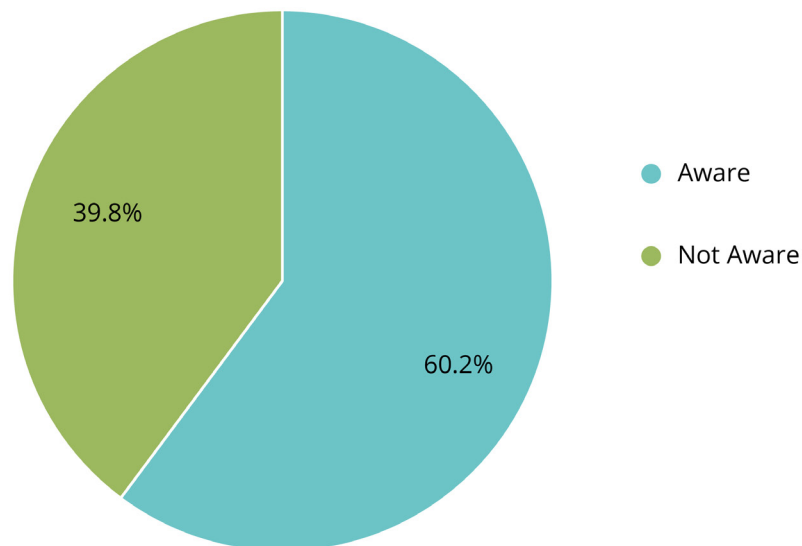


Graph 31: Impact of absence of functioning Provincial councils on people by Locality

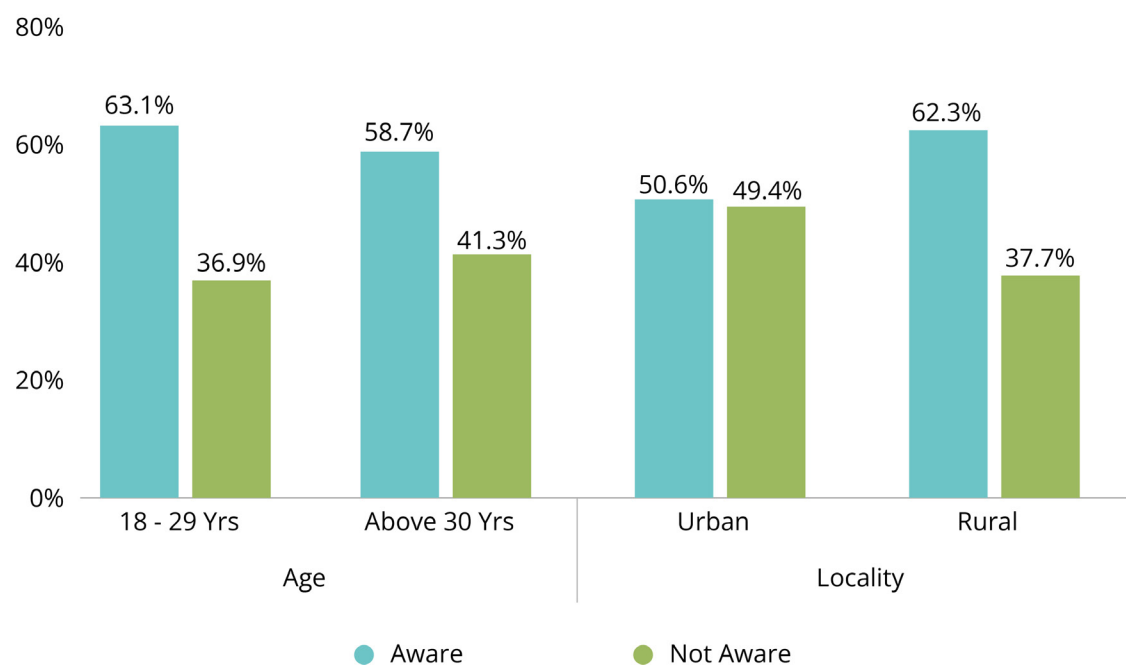


Perceptions on IMF's suggested policy changes/structural reforms

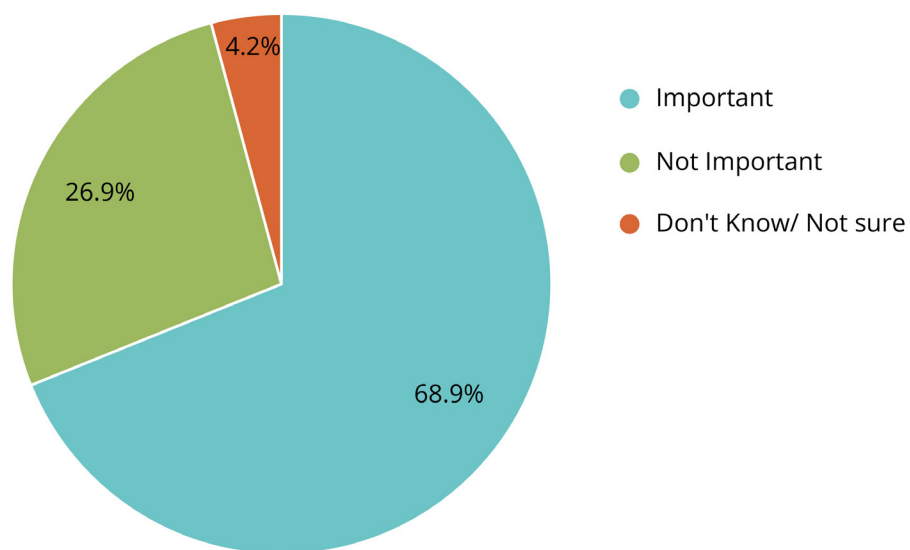
Graph 32: Awareness on IMF's suggested policy changes/structural reforms



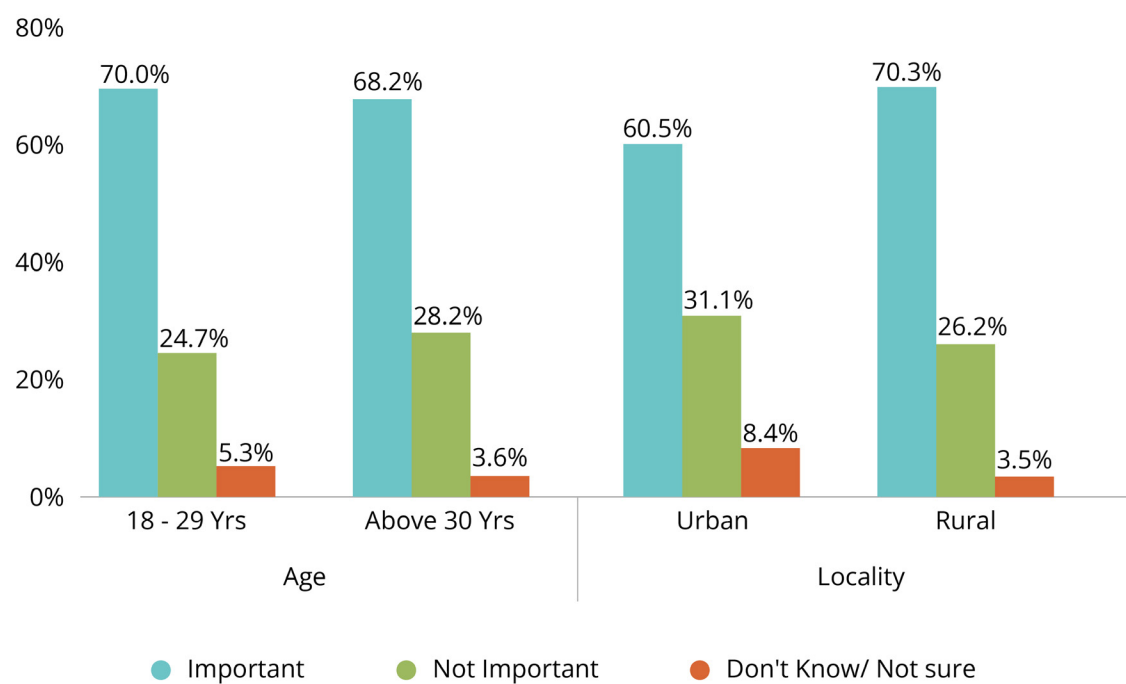
Graph 33: Awareness on IMF's suggested policy changes/structural reforms by Age and Locality



Graph 34: Perception on IMF's suggested policy changes/structural reforms

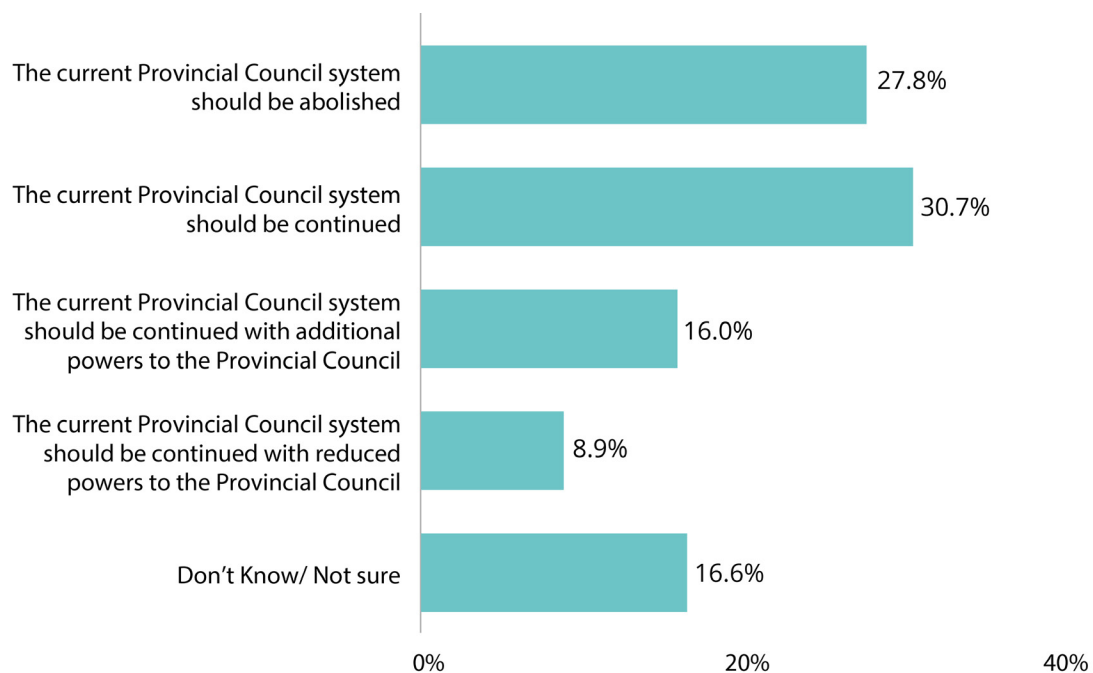


Graph 35: Perception on IMF's suggested policy changes/structural reforms by Age and Locality

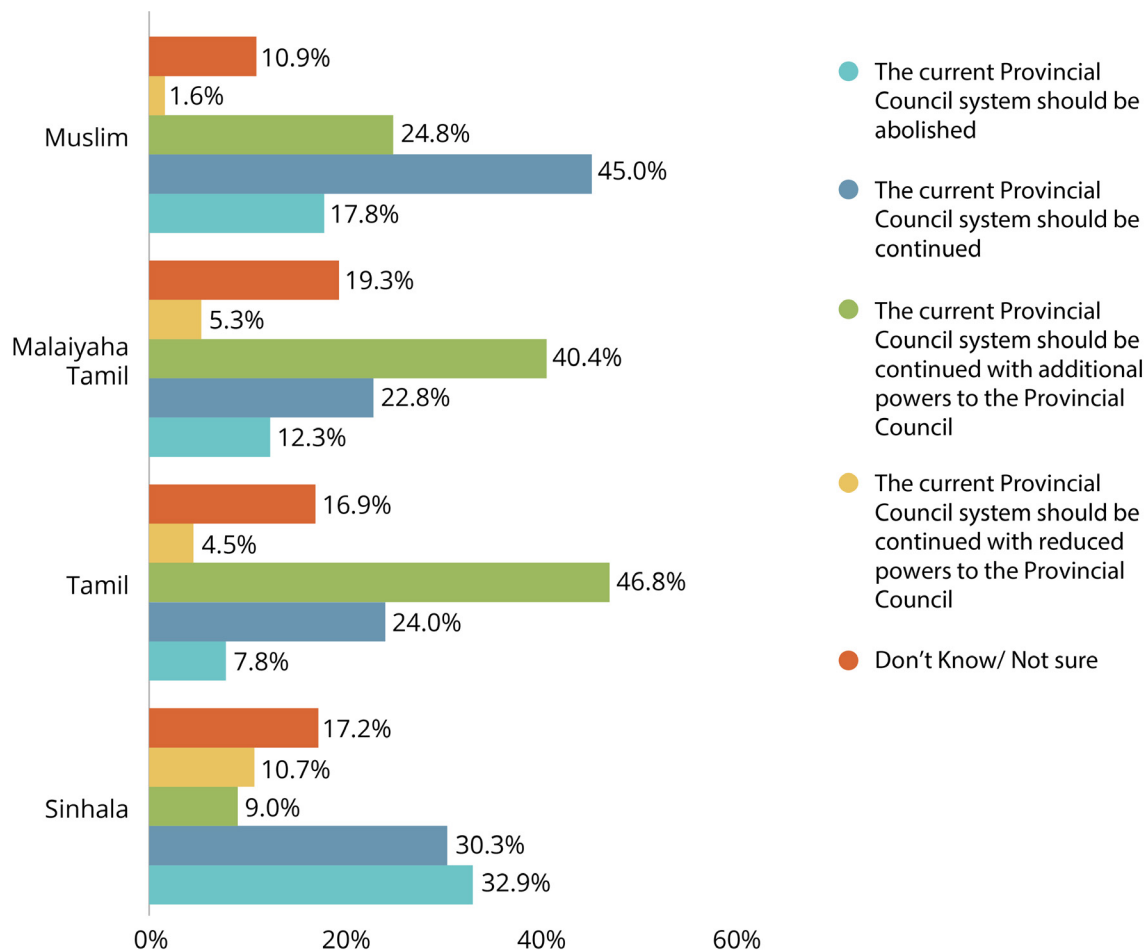


Public Opinion on Provincial Council System

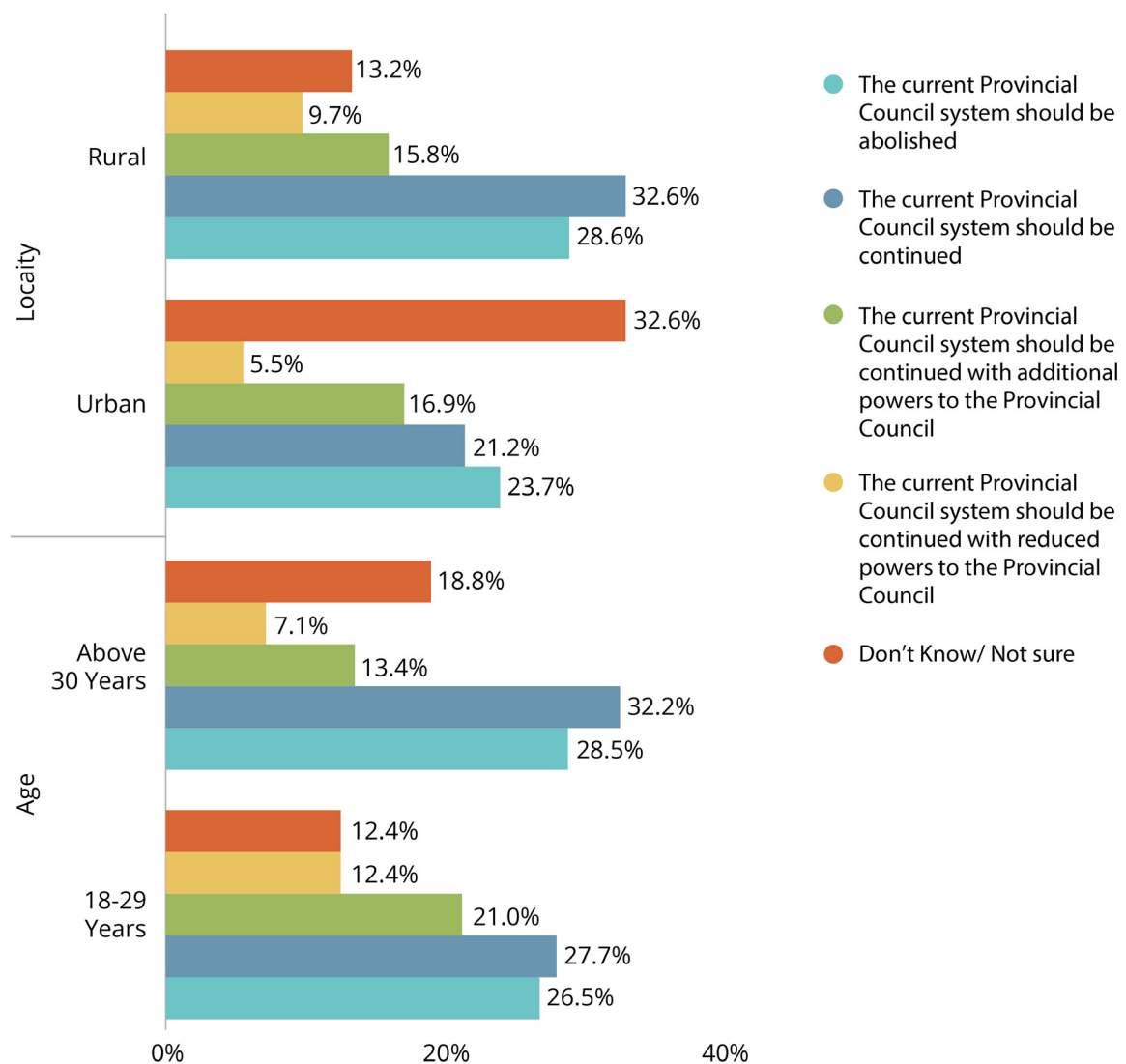
Graph 36: Public Opinion on Provincial Council System



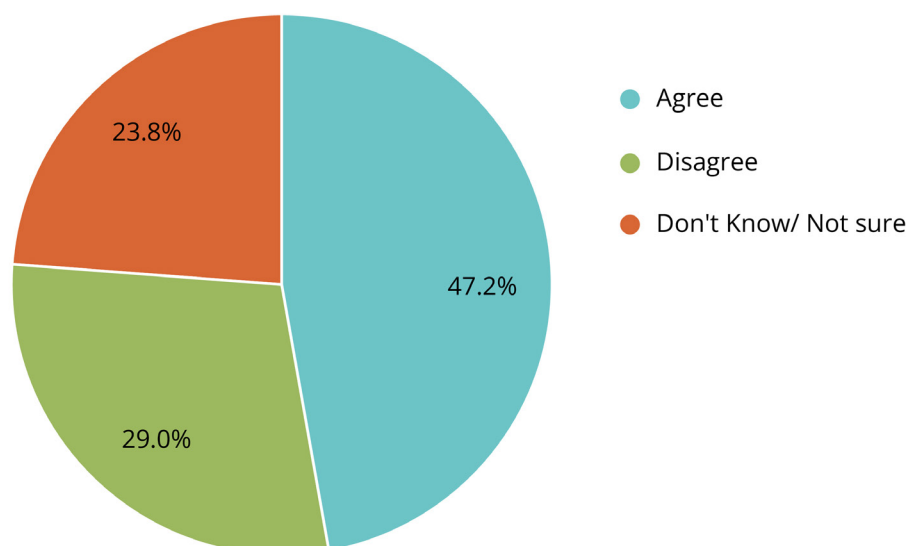
Graph 37: Public Opinion on Provincial Council System by Ethnicity



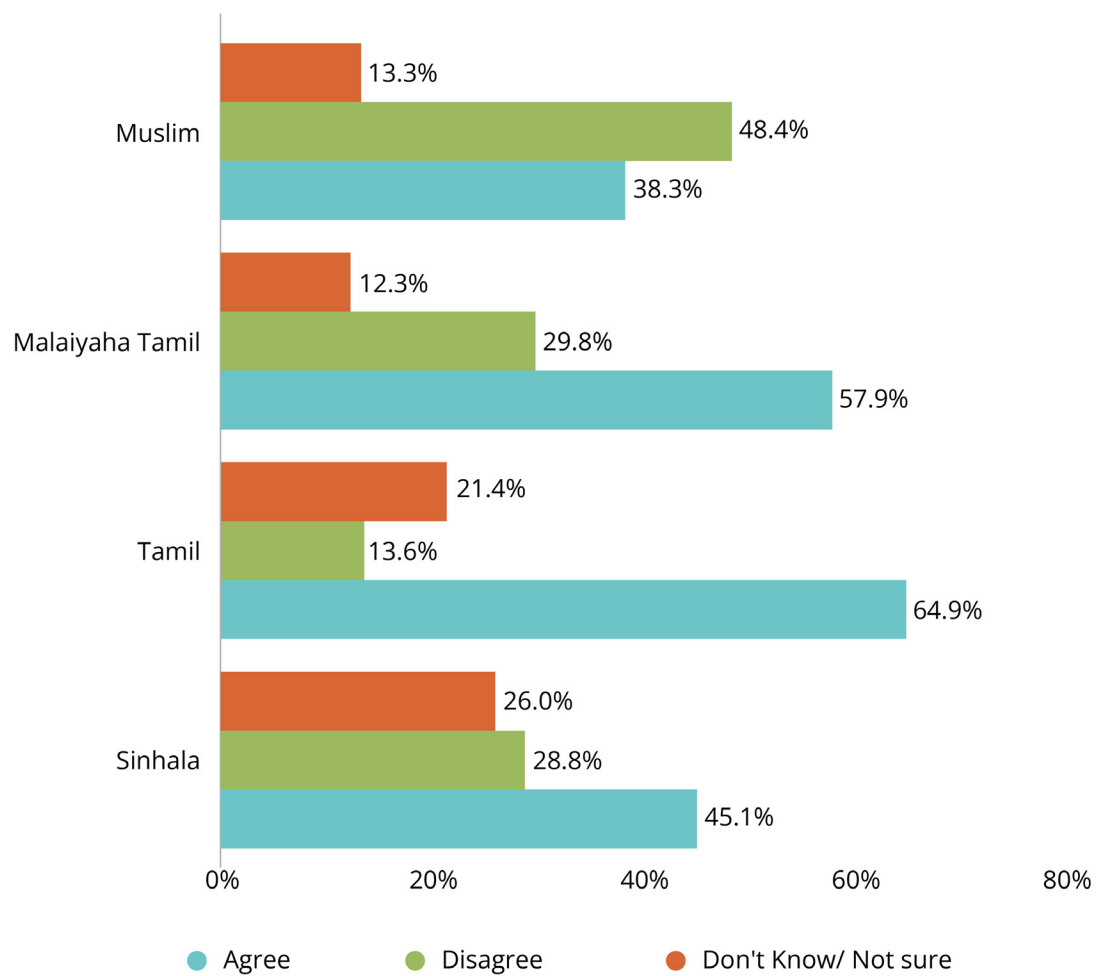
Graph 38: Public Opinion on Provincial Council System by Age and Locality



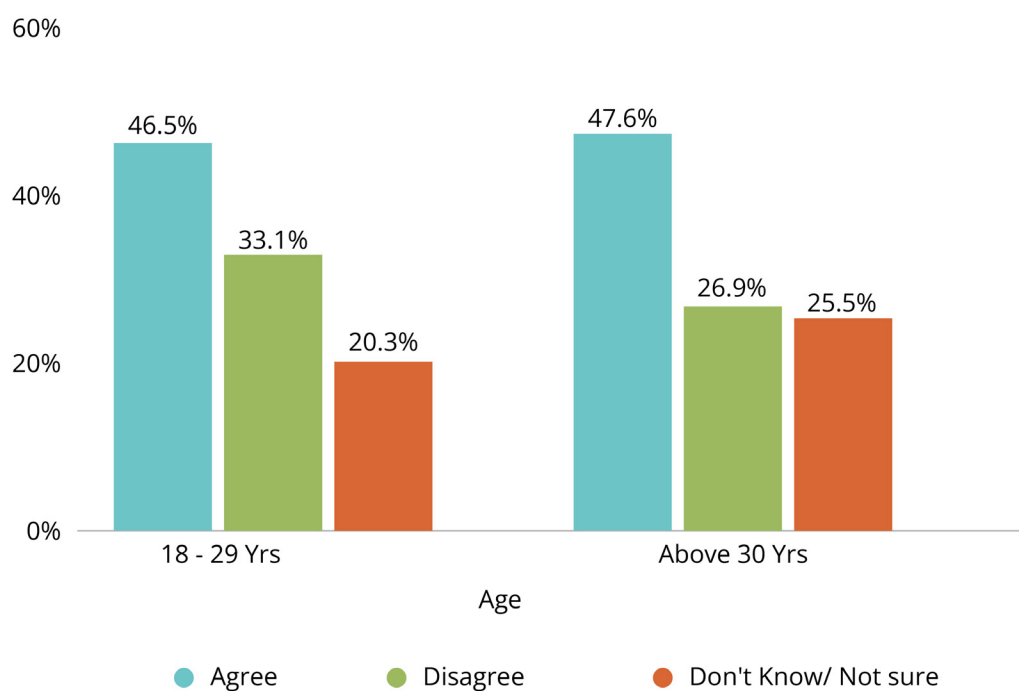
Graph 39: Agreement to implement land power to Provincial Council



Graph 40: Agreement to implement land power to Provincial Council by Ethnicity

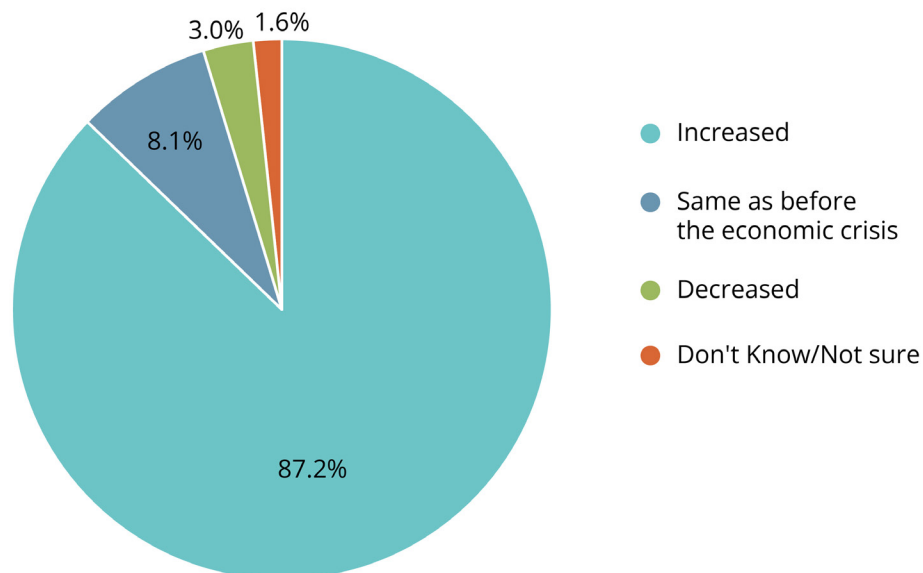


Graph 41: Agreement to implement land power to Provincial Council by Age

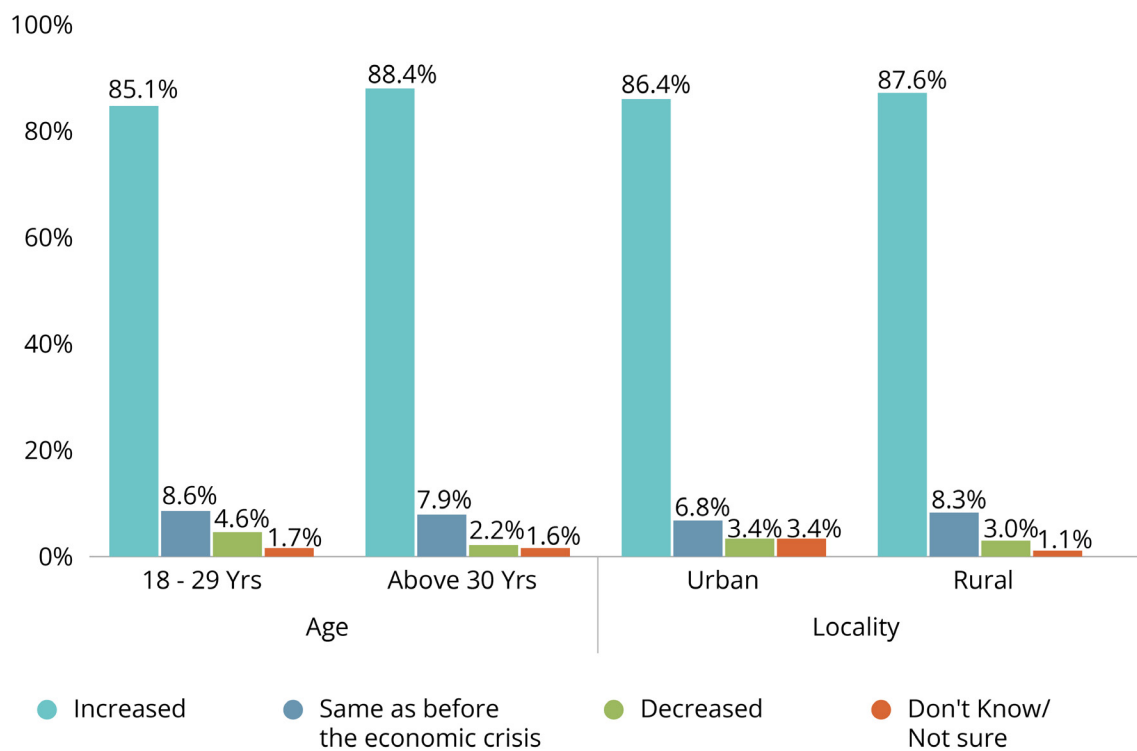


Perception on level of corruption

Graph 42: Perception on level of corruption



Graph 43: Perception on level of corruption by Age and Locality



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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