Tracking Coexistence: Understanding Perceptions of the Religious 'Other'

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by

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Introduction

What does one religious community think of 'the other'? What are the social, economic, cultural, and other factors that influence and shape one group's views of the religious 'other'? In what circumstances may groups be willing to pursue coexistence? How do schooling, friends, community, access to the media, and travel, shape perceptions of 'the other'? Under what conditions may communities be willing to resolve differences through dialogue rather than through violence? These are some questions this study explores.

This study generates some preliminary findings on how different communities perceive religious tolerance and coexistence. By presenting different life scenarios and talking to 1,000 respondents in four multi-religious areas in Sri Lanka, the study seeks to enhance our understanding of inter-group and intra-group relations in Sri Lanka. The broader and more ambitious goal is to use these findings to help design laws, policies, and social interventions that can eliminate, or at least reduce, religiously motivated violence of all kinds, and promote respect for and tolerance of 'the other'.

These findings are presented as preliminary findings, with the limitations that the methodology used generated. It is a modest first attempt at developing a nuanced understanding of inter-group and intra-group relations in Sri Lanka. It was conceptualized as the first of many such surveys, that will attempt to capture 'perceptions of "the other"' across a longer period of time. This will enable us to understand the impact that economic, social, and political events have on inter-group and intra-group dynamics, and what lessons this holds for interventions by the state and civil society.

Limitations and challenges

This study tackles an extremely sensitive subject that has far-reaching repercussions on all citizens of this country. The heightened awareness of 'the other' in the post-Easter attacks[1] context was particularly challenging for the rolling out of this study, and it is possible that perceptions may have drastically shifted following the tragedy. While this study did not use any technique to do distinguish the impact of the Easter attacks from other factors, few questions were asked to learn their opinion on it.

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1   Ethno-religious tensions escalated after the Easter attacks on churches and hotels by Islamic suicide bombers that took place on 21 April 2019.

The study collected data through a quantitative survey, and therefore the respondents were limited to the options provided in the questionnaire. The research was carried out during a period of heavy surveillance, and the ethical implications of carrying out this survey had to be handled with special care. It is also possible that some of the respondents may have provided politically correct answers, instead of their genuine opinions. However, the structured nature of a quantitative survey tool makes it impossible to probe deeper into such possible issues. Challenges in operationalizing the survey also made it necessary to give up on a random sampling strategy in selecting respondents. For example, it was important to build respondent confidence to participate in the survey by working closely with sub-national contacts of the research team to make the survey environment safe and secure for them, as well as for the enumerators.

The study acknowledges that the factors that influence a person's perceptions of 'the other' are complex, nuanced, interconnected, context-variant, and cannot be isolated into different baskets. As such, two individuals with the same level of education and socio-economic status may hold completely different perceptions of 'the other'. Possible factors that may be associated with perceptions were identified based on past research, expert input, and empirical evidence. However, it is entirely possible that for some individuals, none of these identified factors may be applicable, and non-quantifiable illogical factors may play a significant role in influencing people's perceptions. These findings, then, must be assessed by taking into account these variables.

Questionnaire and Sampling Framework

The perception of one human being towards another is subjective, complex, and fluid, which means they can take different values, intensities, and sizes in different circumstances. Capturing such a complex phenomenon in a quantitative questionnaire has been a particularly challenging exercise. In fact, we flag this to be an important limitation to be borne in mind when reading the rest of this paper. Having said that, we were also encouraged by the fact that there is a large body of studies that investigate into qualitative concepts using quantitative methodologies.[2] Given the inherently limited scope in the type of responses that participants can provide in this kind of survey, we relied on several methods to capture respondents' perception as descriptively, comprehensively, and as objectively

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2   See for example, the World Happiness Index

as possible. These included score cards, scenarios in which respondents can agree to statements that are measured on a Likert scale, and Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQs).
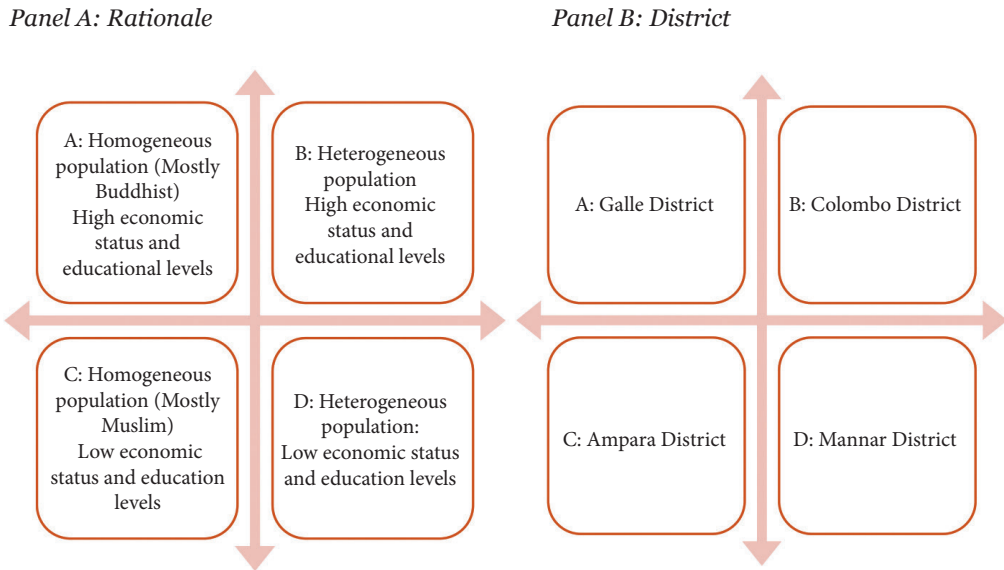
The second half of the questionnaire was aimed at understanding the numerous factors that impact on, condition, and shape a person's perception of another human being. These factors, straddling different dimensions of a person's life, were conceptualized as personal, interpersonal, and societal, ranging from one's age, education level, and their employment, to interpersonal factors such as family relations, friends and peers, and interactions with them, to societal factors such as the recollection of and awareness of incidents of violence unfolding locally and internationally over the recent years.

The draft questionnaire went through eight rounds of revisions, incorporating feedback from experts on the subject, both locally and internationally, as well as specialists in the social sciences and quantitative research methods. The different viewpoints both on the topic as well as practicalities of collecting robust information, particularly given the rather sensitive nature of the research problem being investigated, were particularly useful in strengthening the questionnaire. Upon finalization, the questionnaire went through a round of pre-piloting and piloting after which the practical difficulties enumerators faced while conducting interviews were addressed. The two-day training of enumerators and the piloting of the questionnaire afterwards were a useful way of 'testing the water' before rolling out the survey in full. The translations into Tamil and Sinhala were strengthened, and where relevant, questions were reworded, removed, and simplified to ensure good quality data collection.

The starting point of the sampling framework was determining the size of the sample to be surveyed, feasible under the given time and resource constraints. A total of 1,000 participants were agreed upon. Although, we would have preferred to use a stratified random sampling method for sample selection because it ensures a more accurate representation of the larger population, some considerations led to the selection of a quota sampling method. Firstly, as a first in what would hopefully develop into a long-term periodic survey, we wanted this survey to be more of an exploratory nature. Secondly, given that this study is a survey of perceptions, we believed that similar-size sub samples would be more useful for inter-group comparisons, and perceived as more equitable, given the sensitive nature of the topic being investigated. Accordingly, 200 respondents

each were allocated for the five religious groups being studied – Buddhist, Hindu, Muslims (used instead of Islamic for its synonymity with ethnicity, and the ease of reference), Roman Catholics, and non-Roman Catholic Christians.

Figure 1: District selection for data collection

Panel A: Rationale

Panel B: District

A: Homogeneous population (Mostly Buddhist) High economic status and educational levels	B: Heterogeneous population High economic status and educational levels
C: Homogeneous population (Mostly Muslim) Low economic status and education levels	D: Heterogeneous population: Low economic status and education levels

A: Galle District	B: Colombo District
C: Ampara District	D: Mannar District

Next, in choosing the locations in which to roll out the survey, the objective was to identify a cross section of the country in terms of its socio-economic conditions and ethno-religious make up. Following an analysis of available macroeconomic data, four districts were selected. Given that the ethno-religious tensions in post-conflict Sri Lanka have mostly been between Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims, these two religious identities were chosen for the two quadrants on homogeneous identities (namely, A and C). A quota of 250 respondents each was allocated to each district. Next, an equal split between men and women was specified.

The data collection took place over a period of three months from July to September 2019. The raw data was cleaned and transferred to excel format, and the data analysis was carried out using the STATA statistical package.

Overview of the Sample

This section provides an overview of the sample in terms of their individual and household demographics, education, socio-economic status, employment status etc. We begin by looking at the individual characteristics of the respondents.

The distribution of the sample across age and sex is presented in Figure 2 below. The largest share of respondents is recorded in age categories 30-39 and 50-59 for both men and women while the lowest share comes from the oldest age group in the sample.

Figure 2: Distribution of the sample by age group and sex
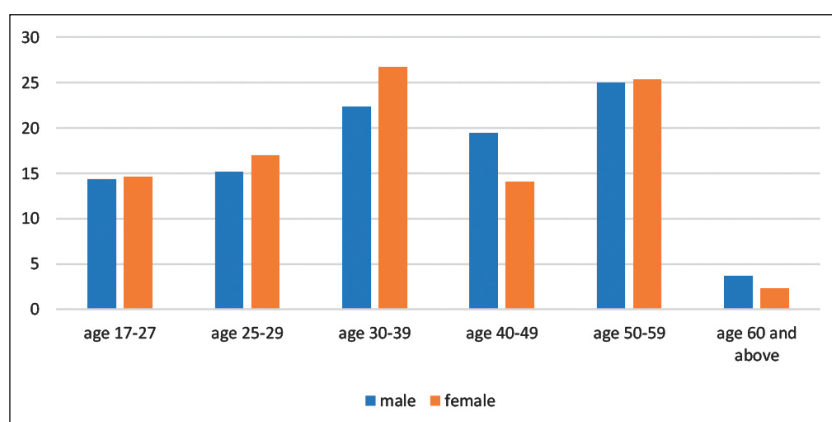
Source: Data collected from the perceptions survey carried out by ICES during the period July-September 2019[3]

All respondents consider themselves to be belonging to a religion, and a large majority of them (97.5 per cent) consider themselves to be religious. A little over half of the sample observe their religion daily, while a little over 20 per cent engage in religious activities weekly. On the other hand, about 15 per cent of the respondents observe their religion only on special occasions, while less than a tenth of the sample rarely engage in religious observances.

The large majority of the respondents (close to 70 per cent) are married, while a little over a fourth of them are single. The remainder consists of individuals who are widowed (1.4 per cent), separated (1.4 per cent) and divorced (0.9 per cent). The educational attainments of the sample appear to be stronger than the national averages.[4] Over one-fifth of the population has completed their G.C.E. Ordinary Level and close to half of the sample has an educational level beyond O/L. There are no significant gender disparities in educational attainments in the sample as a whole. However, some nuances do surface when data is disaggregated by both gender and religious identity.

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3   This will be the source of data for all the graphs that follow.
4   The percentage share of population estimated in the Household Income and Expenditure Survey is for individuals aged five and above, in comparison to aged 17 and above in this sample.

Figure 3: Educational attainments of respondent

Panel A: Male
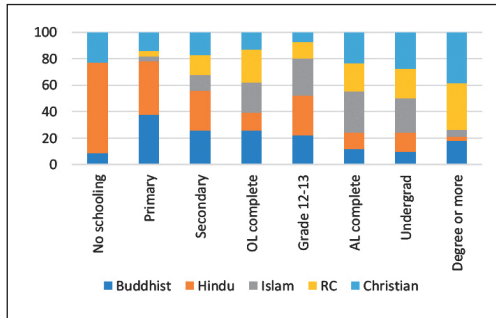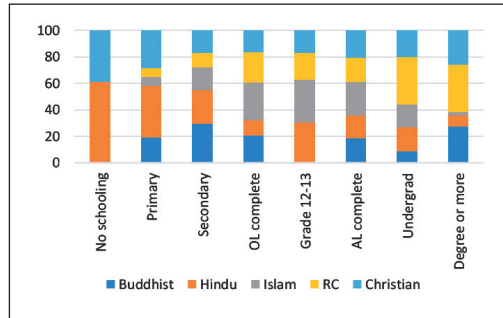

Panel B: Female

For both men and women, lower educational attainments are more pronounced among Hindus. Their share is much less in the higher educational categories, particularly among men. On the other hand, Roman Catholic and Other Christian respondents – both men and women – dominate the higher education attainments. Some insight into the better education levels among these two communities can be drawn from information pertaining to the financial affluence of households, as measured by a household index[5] and per capita household expenditure.

> Roman Catholic and Other Christians are the most educated. Hindu respondents have the lowest educational attainments.

Figure 4: Household prosperity as measured by per capita expenditure and household index

Panel A: Per capita expenditure (LKR)
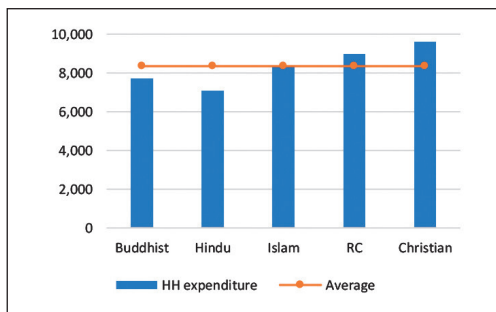
Panel B: Household index

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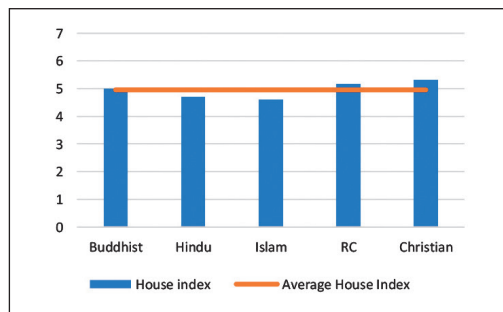
5   Household index is calculated based on the amenities available to the household. These include electricity, tap water, telephone, internet, computer, cable TV and mobile phones. The index value ranges from a maximum of 7 to a minimum of 0. A higher index value implies greater prosperity.

As panel A of Figure 3 above clearly shows, the poorest households as measured by household per capita expenditure are reported in the Hindu community while the richest come from Non-Roman Catholic Christian and Roman Catholic households. Panel B presents the household index, which generally mirrors the household expenditure trends for all households but Muslims. This is because they tend to own less of televisions and internet facilities, possibly due to the aversion among some Muslim sects to the use such devices and services. On average, the households have about five of these amenities. In terms of house ownership, only about three-fourths of Hindu respondents own the house they live in, compared to over four-fifths of Non-Roman Catholic Christians and nearly 90 per cent of Roman Catholics who own the house they live in. However, it is Muslims among all religious groups that are most likely to legally own the house (93.5 per cent) and Buddhists, the least likely to own their current houses (73 per cent).

Figure 5: Ownership of vehicle
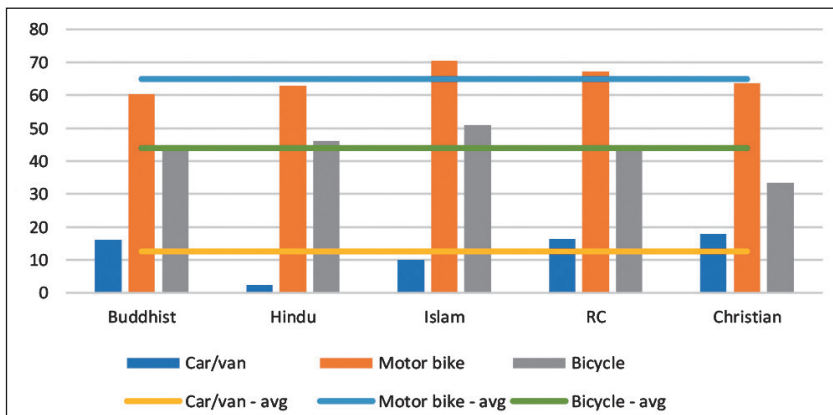
We also look at the ownership of transport mediums as another measure of household affluence. As seen in Figure 5 above, a total 179 (or nearly 18 per cent) households do not own any of the enumerated vehicles. In other households, the least owned medium of transportation is a car or van. On average, only about 13 per cent of the households own a car or van. More Non-Roman Catholic Christian, Roman Catholic, and Buddhist households tend to have a car or a van compared to the sample average, while Hindus are the least likely to own one.

Motor bicycles are the most popular mechanized transportation for households, and on average about 65 per cent of the households own one. The share of

households that own a motor bicycle is above average among Muslims and Roman Catholics, and is the lowest among Buddhists. The simplest form of transportation, the bicycle, is owned on average by about 44 per cent of households. This share is higher among Muslims and Hindus. The ownership of a bicycle is lowest among Non-Roman Catholic Christian households.

In terms of the household demographics, Muslim respondents tend to come from younger families in that they have the highest share of individuals aged below 18 living in the households. The share of older household members (60 years or more) is highest among Non-Roman Catholic Christians, but is closely followed by Muslims. Only 22 households have members with disabilities. Of them, a third are reported from Muslim households.

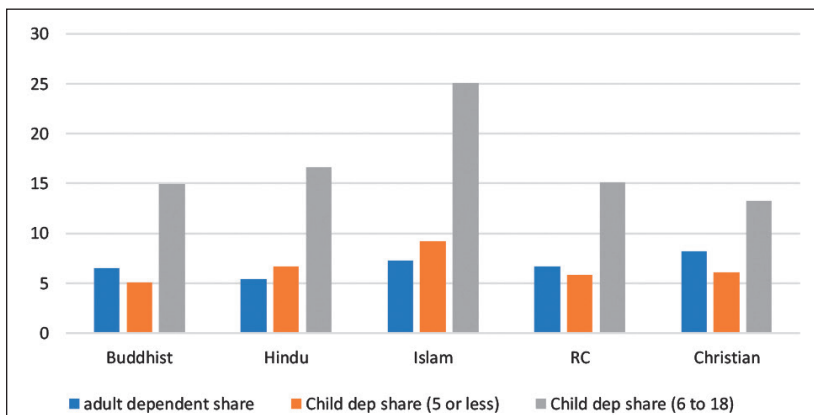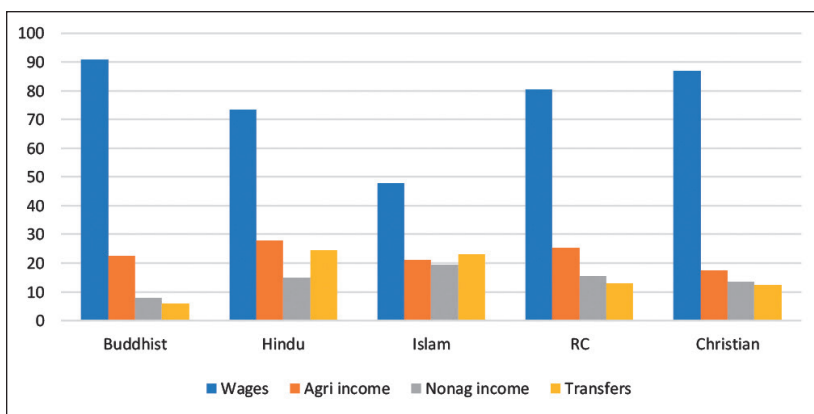Figure 6: Household demographics

Figure 7: Sources of household income

We now turn to household income. The large majority of households, irrespective of their religious background, draw income from wage work. The share, however, is lowest for the Muslim community. Agricultural income is the second most common source of income for all households except among the Muslim respondents, and its share is highest among the Hindu and Roman Catholic households. Muslim households are more likely to draw income from non-agricultural income generating activities, while transfer income[6] is highest among Hindus. The high share of transfer income among the Hindu households, coupled with their low per capita household expenditure, suggests that for these households the transfer income most likely consists of welfare receipts from the government. On the other hand, given that Muslim households have a much higher per capita expenditure level, their transfer income is likely to be in the form of remittances from family elsewhere in the country and abroad, rather than state welfare payments.

> Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics come from the richest households as reflected in the per capita household expenditure and the ownership of household vehicles. Hindu respondents are among the poorest.

Next, we look at the economic activities of respondents. Close to three-fourths of the sample participate in the country's labour force – 60.4 per cent of them are engaged in paid work while the remaining 13.3 per cent of the sample is currently unemployed and actively looking for work. Gendered variations are noteworthy here. Nearly 83 per cent of the male respondents are employed while another 6 per cent are unemployed and looking for work, and thus the male labour force participation is at 89 per cent. In comparison, only 39 per cent of women are employed, and another 20 per cent are unemployed, resulting in a female labour force participation of only 59 per cent, but above a national average of 39.9 per cent. Household activities make up the usual activity of close to one-third of women in the sample.

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6   A transfer payment (such as Samurdhi, disability payment or remittances from abroad) is a one-way payment where the receiver does not provide goods or services in return for the payment

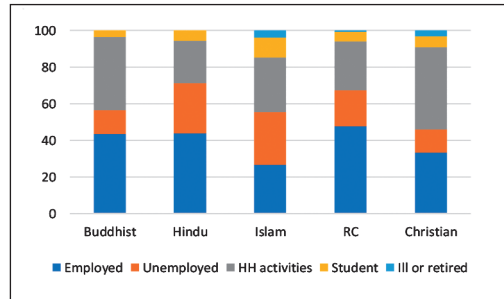*Figure 8: Usual activity among respondents*
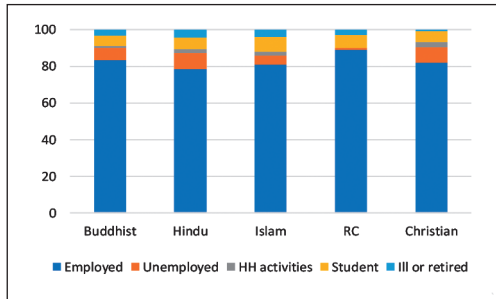
Panel A: Male   *Panel B: Female*


The gendered breakdown of usual activities of the respondents shows that among men, the highest share of employed individuals is reported from Roman Catholics, while the highest share of unemployment is among Hindus and Non-Roman Catholic Christians. The largest share of economically inactive male respondents is reported among Muslims, and the lowest, among Non-Roman Catholic Christians.

The largest share of employed women is Roman Catholic and the smallest is Muslim. On the other hand, the highest share of unemployed women is also Muslim. Overall, the highest share of the economically active population comes from the Hindu community, at 71 per cent. Conversely, the lowest economic participation is reported among Non-Roman Catholic Christian women (45.8 per cent). The highest proportion of women engaged only in household work is also recorded from the same community. Overall, the economically inactive share of women is highest among Non-Roman Catholic Christians, who appear to be financially better-off than other groups, as measured by per capita expenditure and the household index.

General Perceptions

In this section, we look at the broad perceptions respondents holds about their own and those that are not. To do so, we have enumerated a list of adjectives which respondents can identify different religious groups with. This was designed to be administered as a 'rapid fire' round of questions in order to limit respondents' overthinking and providing what they may perceive to be politically correct answers. The objective was to investigate how people perceive the others, almost instinctively. The findings are presented below for all the religious groups surveyed.

Figure 9: Share of respondents on positive perceptions on Buddhists
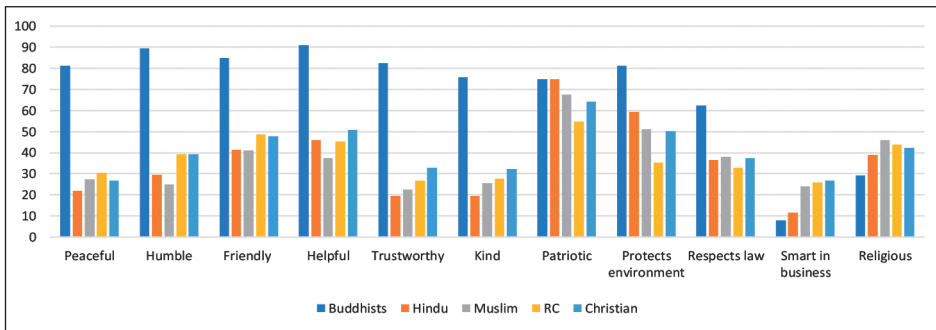
By and large, Buddhists appear to hold themselves in high esteem. A large majority of them consider themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, kind, patriotic, protective of the environment, and respectful of the law. However, a significantly lower share of non-Buddhists respondents seem to associate Buddhists with these characteristics. Among non-Buddhists, more Roman Catholics and Other Christians, compared to Muslims and Hindus, agree that Buddhists are peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, and kind. Hindus make up the lowest share of respondents who agree that Buddhists are peaceful, trustworthy or kind, and Muslims, the lowest share of respondents who believe that Buddhists are humble. More non-Buddhists than Buddhists themselves consider Buddhists to be smart in business and religious.

*Figure 10: Share of respondents on negative perceptions on Buddhists*
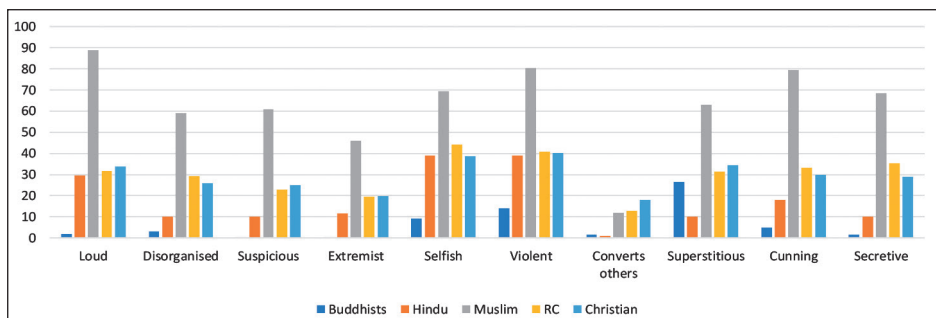
A sweepingly large majority of Buddhists do not see themselves as loud, disorganized, suspicious, extremist, looking to convert others, cunning, or secretive. A little below a tenth and a little over a tenth of Buddhists do associate themselves with selfishness and violence, respectively. A little over a fourth of

the Buddhists also believe the group to be superstitious. Among non-Buddhists, Muslims make up the largest share of respondents who consider Buddhists to be loud, disorganized, suspicious, extremist, selfish, violent, superstitious, cunning, and secretive. In comparison, less Hindu respondents associate Buddhists with these negative adjectives. Overall, many non-Buddhists share the perception that Buddhists are selfish and violent. More Non-Roman Catholic Christians than respondents from other religions believe Buddhists try to convert others.

> Many Buddhists consider themselves to be humble and helpful. Many non-Buddhists perceive Buddhists to be loud and violent.

Figure 11: Share of respondents on positive perceptions on Hindus
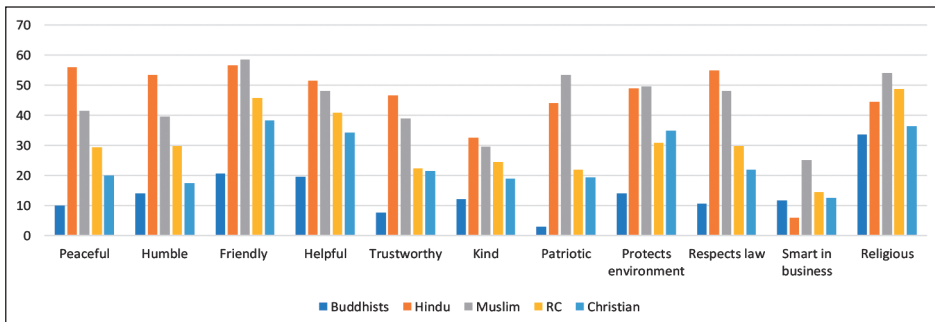
Moving on to the Hindu cohort, a first observation is that their assessment of their own positive attributes, is less blatant than that of Buddhists. Granted they do hold themselves in high esteem, but the diversion between the share of Hindus themselves and non-Hindus who associate this group with each positive trait is much less compared to the diversion we saw in the analysis of positive perceptions on Buddhists. Moreover, more Muslims than Hindus themselves consider the latter to be friendly, patriotic, environmentally conscious, smart in business, and religious. In fact, a sizeable share of Muslims, compared to the other non-Hindu groups, associate positive perceptions with Hindus. The share of respondents who agree with these positive traits is particularly less among Buddhists. More Roman Catholics and Other Christians see positive traits in Hindus compared to Buddhists.

*Figure 12: Share of respondents on negative perceptions on Hindus*
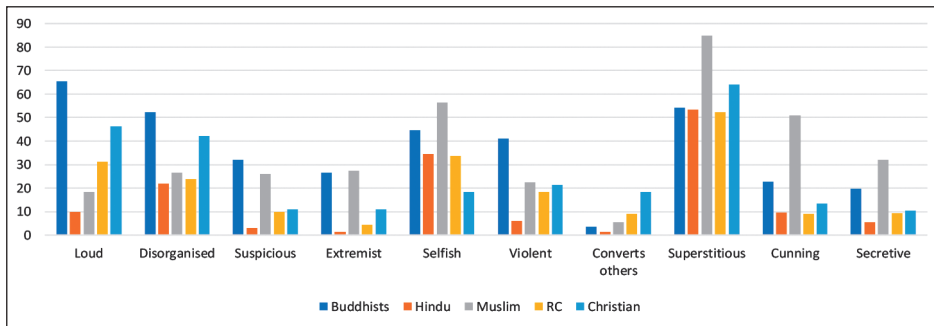
On the negative front, a sizeable share of Hindus agrees that they are superstitious and selfish. This is also the most commonly held negative perception for Hindus, among the non-Hindu respondents. Among those who consider Hindus to be extremist, selfish, superstitious, cunning, and secretive, the share of Muslims is highest. Among those who consider Hindus to be loud, disorganized, and suspicious, Buddhists take the lead. The share of Roman Catholics and Other Christians who believe Hindus to be suspicious, extremist, looking to convert others, cunning, or secretive is quite small. However, they are more likely to agree that Hindus are loud, disorganized, selfish, violent, and superstitious.

> Many Hindu respondents consider themselves to be peaceful and friendly. A sizeable share of Muslims concurs. Hindus themselves and many non-Hindus perceive Hindus to be superstitious.

Next, we look at the positive perceptions on Muslims. More Muslims than others believe they embody the enumerated positive traits. Less than a half of Muslim respondents themselves associate their own identity with kindness and environmental consciousness. The large majority of them believe themselves to be smart in business, religious, peaceful, humble, friendly, and helpful. Relatively less Muslims associate the traits of trustworthiness, patriotism, and respect for the law with themselves. Among non-Muslims, the majority believes Muslims to be smart in business and religious, and this share is relatively higher mong Buddhists and Non-Roman Catholic Christians compared to Roman Catholics and Hindus. More Hindus than Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians consider Muslims to have the enumerated positive traits, except in relation to business savviness and religiosity. By and large, only a very small share of non-Muslim respondents believes Muslims are peaceful, humble, or trustworthy. Only a small minority of Buddhists consider Muslims to be patriotic or respectful of the law.

Figure 13: Share of respondents on positive perceptions on Muslims
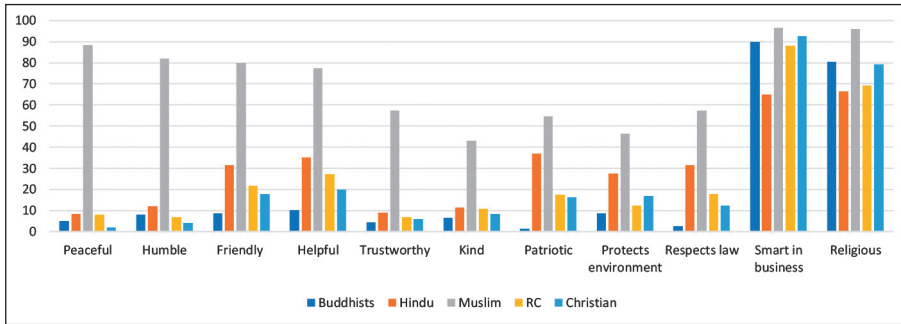
Moving onto the negative perceptions, a large majority of non-Muslims agree that they perceive Muslims as extremist. A large majority of Roman Catholics and Other Christians also associate Muslims with being loud, disorganised, violent, suspicious, cunning, and secretive. Significantly more Roman Catholics and Other Christians compared to Buddhists and Hindus also believe Muslims are selfish and trying to convert others into their faith. A little over two-thirds among the Muslim respondents associate selfishness with their ethno-religious group, and close to two-fifths, with them being cunning. By and large, after Muslims, Hindus make up the lowest share of respondents agreeing with the negative perceptions enumerated in relation to Muslims.

> Many Muslim respondents believe they are peaceful, but a large majority of non-Muslims disagree. More Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics than Buddhists perceive Muslims to be extremist.
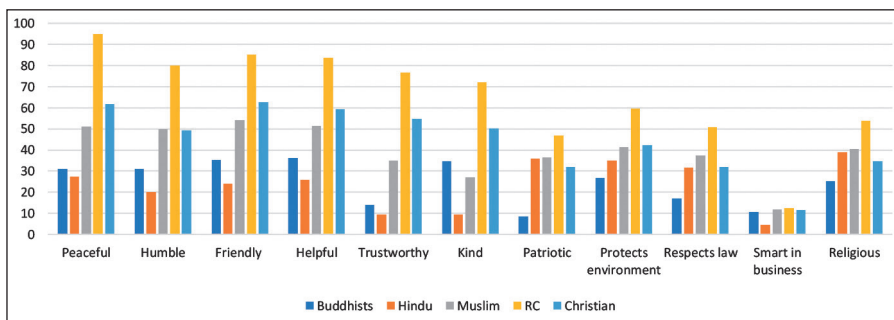
*Figure 14: Share of respondents on negative perceptions on Muslims*
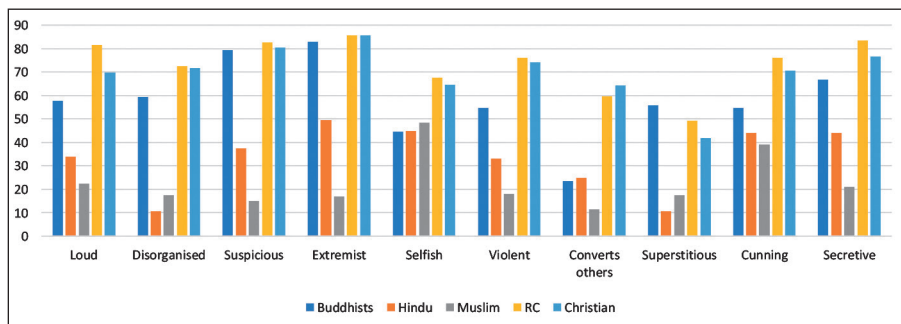
We now turn to positive and negative perceptions on Roman Catholics held by the respondents. As was seen with other groups, more Roman Catholics than non-Roman Catholics associate themselves with the positive traits. Over 90 per cent of the Roman Catholics believe themselves to be peaceful. Commonly, a very few of the respondents across all ethno-religious groups agree that they are smart in business. Only a small share of Buddhists considers Roman Catholics to be patriotic, while very few Hindu respondents consider this group to be trustworthy or kind. By and large, among non-Roman Catholics, the share of those who associate the enumerated positive qualities with Roman Catholics is higher among Christians and Muslims, and lowest among Hindus.

Figure 15: Share of respondents on positive perceptions on Roman Catholics


The findings on the negative perceptions are insightful. Only a very small share of respondents across all groups consider Roman Catholics to be extremist, suspicious, disorganized, or loud. Moreover, very few Buddhists think of Roman Catholics as violent, cunning, or secretive. About half of the Buddhist respondents and a little more than that of Muslims believe Roman Catholics to be converting others. A relatively large share of Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Hindus also shares the same perception. A sizeable share of Muslims and Hindus also believes this group to be selfish. Importantly, about a fourth of the Roman Catholics also see themselves as selfish. Overall, the share of Muslims and Hindus represented across all categories of negative traits is larger than the other groups.

Figure 16: Share of respondents on negative perceptions on Roman Catholics
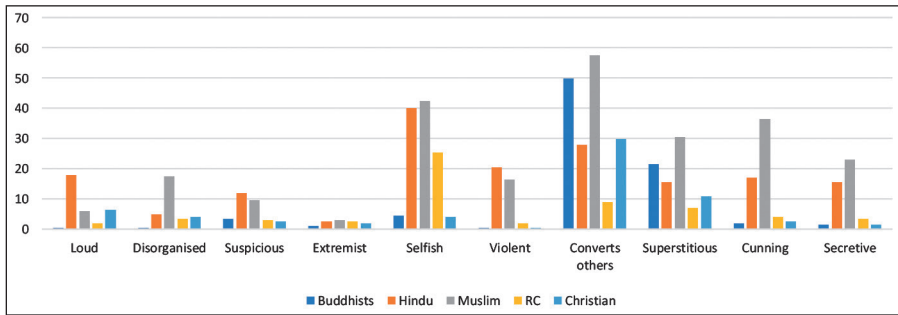
Turning to Non-Roman Catholic Christians, a large majority of them believe themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, and kind. Across all groups, there are very few respondents who agree that Non-Roman Catholic Christians are smart in business. Buddhists, Muslims, and Roman Catholics mostly agree that Non-Roman Catholic Christians are peaceful, friendly, helpful, and kind. More Muslims compared to other non-Christians also think of Non-Roman Catholic Christians as humble. Buddhists make up the lowest share of respondents who think of Non-Roman Catholic Christians as patriotic, environmentally conscious, respectful of the law, or religious. More Roman Catholics than all other groups think of Non-Roman Catholic Christians as religious. By and large relatively less Hindu respondents think of Non-Roman Catholic Christians as humble, trustworthy, and kind.

Figure 17: Share of respondents on positive perceptions on Christians
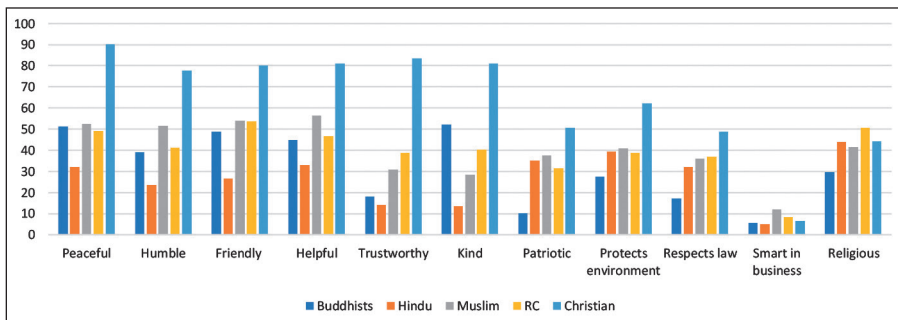
On the negative front, the most agreed upon perception is that Non-Roman Catholic Christians tend to convert others into their faith. While a very large share of Buddhist respondents identifies Non-Roman Catholic Christians with

this perception, a sizeable share of Hindus, Muslims, and Roman Catholics also shares the same perspective. In fact, the share of respondents among Non-Roman Catholic Christians is highest in relation to this perception. Very few respondents consider Non-Roman Catholic Christians to be disorganised, suspicious, extremist, or violent. More Muslims than other groups consider them to be selfish, superstitious, cunning, and secretive. A relatively sizeable share of Hindu respondents considers Non-Roman Catholic Christians to be loud, selfish, and superstitious. By and large the share of Muslims and Hindus is higher in all enumerated negative characteristics except in relation to religious conversion. The shares are relatively more benign among Buddhists across all categories except with reference to conversions and superstition.

Figure 18: Share of respondents on negative perceptions on Christians
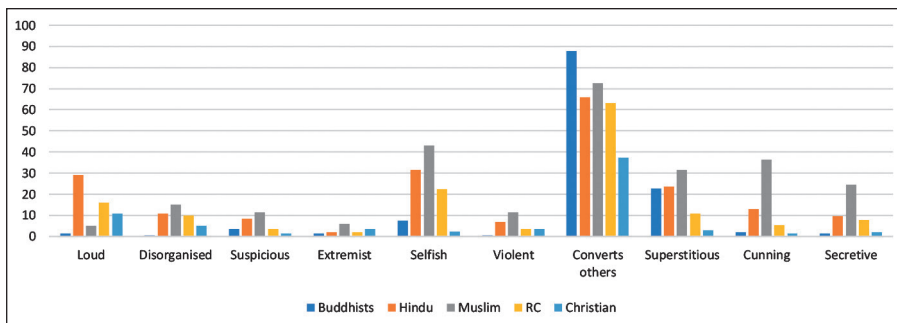
Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics are perceived as converting people to their own religion. Not many other negative perceptions are ascribed to them.

The above analysis brings to light some important insights. Firstly, a common theme that binds all respondents is how they hold their own identity in a very positive light, and how they do not see the negative traits associated with their identity that others do. Thus, from their own perspective, to a greater extent, respondents from all religions embody the positive traits that are necessary for ethno-religious coexistence. But this sentiment is largely not mirrored by others. This diversion and disparity between what respondents think of their own religious identity, and what others think of it, allude to the underlying misunderstandings, misconceptions, misinformation, fears, and myths that people hold against 'the other'.

Secondly, the underlying tensions and misconceptions between different ethno-religious groups are clearly reflected in these general perceptions. While Buddhists like to think of themselves as kind and patriotic, non-Buddhists find them to be loud, selfish, and violent. Hindus consider themselves to be religious, but many non-Hindu respondents associate the group with being superstitious. Muslims believe themselves to be peaceful and religious, but non-Muslims associate them with extremist and secretive traits. Most Roman Catholics and Other Christians do not consider themselves to be converting others into their faith, but a large majority of non-Roman Catholic and non-Christian respondents seem to think that they do.

Thirdly, there are some respondents across all religions who can look at their own identity self-critically. Not many Buddhists agree that they are smart in business, or that they are religious. In fact, more non-Buddhists attribute these traits to Buddhists, than the Buddhists themselves. Some Buddhists also agree that they associate Buddhist identity with violence and superstition. Similarly, not many Hindu respondents identify themselves as kind or business savvy. A sizeable share of Hindu respondents also attributes selfishness and superstition to their identity. Similarly, at least a half of the Muslim respondents do not associate the positive traits of kindness, patriotism, or environmental consciousness with their identity, and a considerable share of them agrees that characteristics of being cunning and selfish resonate with their identity. Roman Catholics and Other Christians also do not identify themselves with the trait of business acumen. However, a sizeable share of respondents associates their identity with selfishness.

> Generally, respondents are biased towards their own religious groups. They tend to see more good in themselves than the others do. But there is also a sizeable share among all groups who can look at themselves self-critically, and accept their own negative attributes.

Willingness to Coexist

In this section, we look at the respondents' willingness to coexist in a religiously heterogenous community. The survey enumerated seven scenarios, ranging from daily consumption decisions such as buying cooked food and groceries to more strategic choices such as the purchase of land.

Scenario 1: Buying meals

The large majority of respondents buy food for household consumption. Only 7 per cent claim not to purchase food. Thirteen respondents do not know the religious identity of the shop from which where they usually buy food, while another 18 respondents purchase food from shops of all religious identities. The large majority of respondents purchase food from Buddhist hotels and eateries (37.5 per cent), while a little over a fourth of the sample buy from Muslim shops, and a little over a fifth buy from Hindu shops. The most important factors that the respondents take into consideration in deciding from where to purchase food are the hygiene condition of the hotel, the taste of food, and how healthy the food is, irrespective of their religious background. Price is of secondary importance, although Muslim respondents appear to be more sensitive to prices than respondents from other religious backgrounds.

The religion of the ownership/management of the shop is considered very important in the food purchase decision by a fourth of the respondents. A little over a fifth consider it to be an important factor. Thus, slightly less than half of the sample is sensitive to the religious identity of the shop from which they buy their food. On the other hand, about a fifth are neutral to the religious identity of the shop and a fourth do not consider the religious identity of the shop to be an important determinant for their food purchase decision.

The religion-disaggregated information shows that over four-fifths of Muslim respondents consider the religious identity of the shop ownership to be important in their purchase decisions. Given the specifications of food preparation and consumption that Muslims adhere to (e.g., Halal), it stands to reason that Muslim respondents pay attention to the religious identity of the shop. Operationally, it may be easier for them to make food purchases from Muslim shops who are more likely to adhere to the religious stipulations of food preparation than others.

Over 50 per cent of the Buddhist respondents also consider the religious identity of the shop's management. There too, religiously motivated food considerations such as avoiding certain meat items might be at play. However, Hindu respondents, who might be more averse to the consumption of non-vegetarian food and therefore have greater food restrictions appear to be the least sensitive to the religious identity of the food shop owners.

Figure 19: Share of respondents who agree or strongly agree that the religion of the food shop is important to their purchase decision
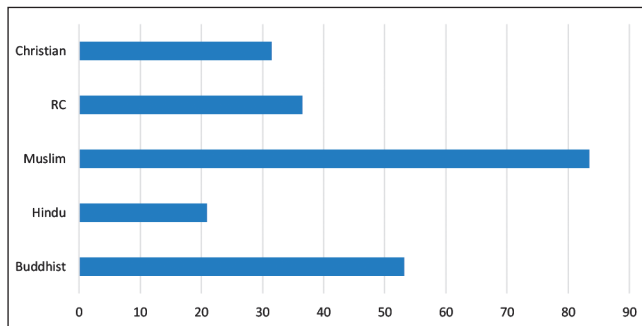
To understand the ethno-religious preferences of respondents of the restaurants and hotels from which they purchase food, and how they may have changed over the recent years, the survey included a question on the preferred ethnic identity of the restaurant ownership. The question is applicable if respondents considered the ethnic identity of the restaurant ownership to be a very important factor in their purchase decision. Among such respondents, Buddhists and Muslims tend to prefer purchasing food from hotels and restaurants of their own ethno-religious backgrounds. Muslim shops are also highly preferred by Hindu, Roman Catholic and Other Christian respondents.

Compared to two years ago, there seems to be a slight decline in the preference towards Muslim restaurants among the Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics and Other Christians. Among Muslims, there is a decline in the preference towards food outlets from all non-Muslim ethnic origins. It is also the Muslim respondents who are most intensely biased towards hotels of their own ethno-religious identity, compared to all other respondents.

Figure 20: Preference of religious identity of the food shop (Now vs. two years ago)[7]
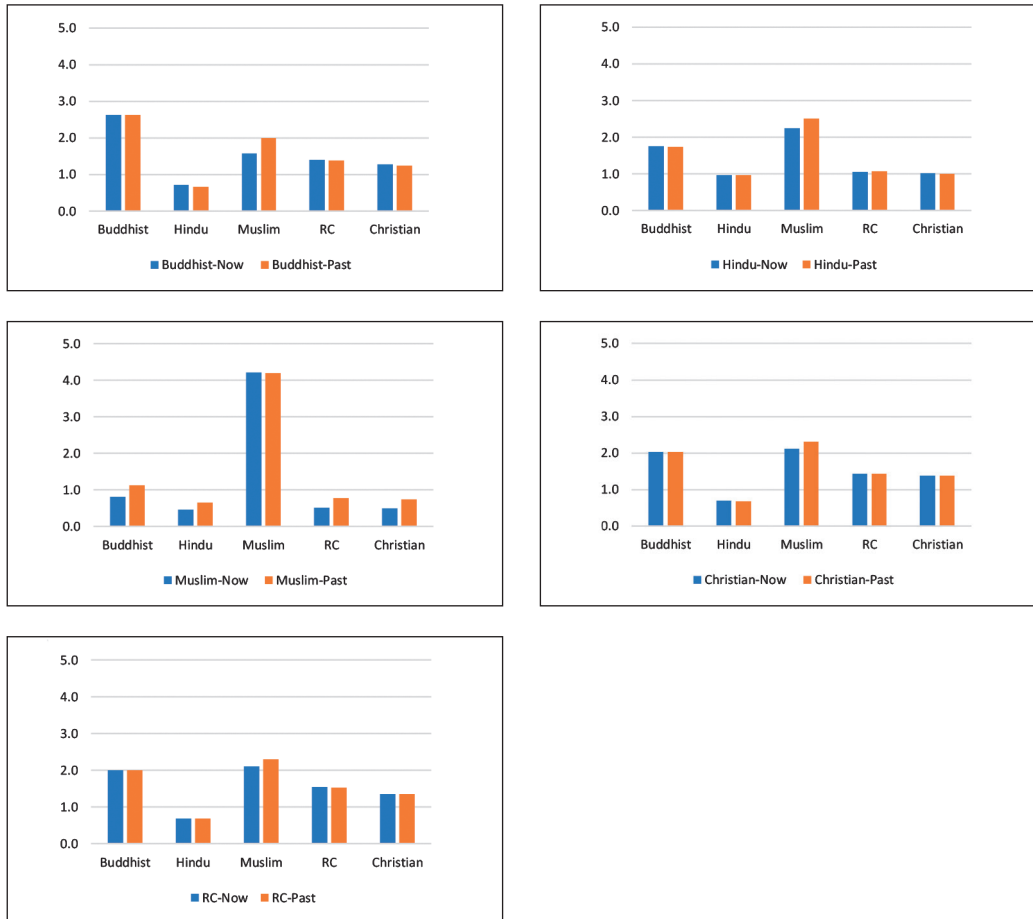
Most respondents do not consider the ethno-religious identity of the eatery or hotel from which they purchase cooked food to be important. However, among those who do, Muslims are more sensitive to the identity of the shop than others.

Scenario 2: Buying groceries

Of the total of 976 respondents who have answered this question, 11 respondents do not know the ethno-religious origin of their regular grocery shop, and 106 or 10.9 per cent of the respondents purchase groceries from shops of all religious origins. A little over two-fifths of the respondents purchase groceries from

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7   5= Highly prefer 4= Prefer 3 = Indifferent 2 = Don't prefer 1 = Don't prefer at all; this scale applies to all graphs that measure preference, unless otherwise stated

Buddhist shops. Just over a fifth of the respondents buy from Hindu shops, and slightly over a tenth buy from Muslim shops. Less than 10 per cent and only 1 per cent buy from Roman Catholic and Other Christian shops respectively. The prices and the quality of the goods appear to be the most important factors in determining where respondents purchase their groceries. Muslim respondents are the most sensitive to prices, while Roman Catholic respondents are the most sensitive to the quality of groceries.

Convenience, the variety of choices available, and the service quality appear to be of secondary importance. The importance of the religious identity of the grocery ownership is rather mixed. Only a little below a fourth consider the religious background of the grocery to be an important criterion. The large majority are neutral or do not consider the ethno-religious identity to be of any importance in their selection of the grocery shops. Buddhists, compared to respondents of all other ethno-religious identities, tend to be the most sensitive to the religious identity of the grocery shop in their purchase decision.

Figure 21: Share of respondents who strongly agree or agree that the religion of the shop is important to the grocery-purchase decision
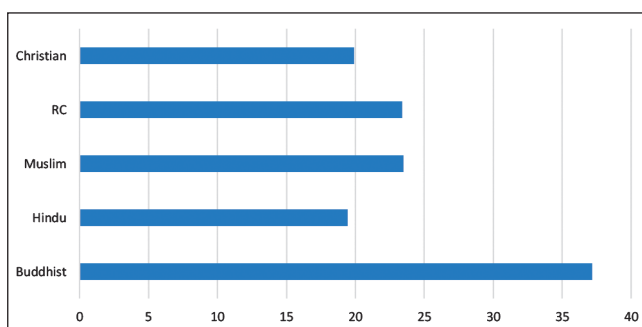
Of all respondents who consider the religious identities of the shops they buy groceries from, the majority prefer grocery shops of Muslim identity, irrespective of their own religious background. On the other hand, the majority Muslim respondents tend to purchase groceries from Non-Roman Catholic Christian grocery shops. Looking at the change in ethno-religious preferences across two years, Muslim respondents' preferences seem to have undergone the largest variations. They are now less likely to prefer Buddhist and Hindu grocery shops, and somewhat perplexingly, grocery shops of their own religious identity. The

preference towards Buddhist grocery shops is broadly similar across all other respondents and does not seem to have changed significantly. Hindu and Muslim grocery shops are preferred the most by Buddhists, and the preference appears to remain intact longitudinally. Data is not available for the preference of grocery shops of Roman Catholic identity.

On the other hand, the share of respondents who do not prefer Muslim grocery shops is significantly high compared to shops of other religious backgrounds, and this share has increased now notably compared to two years ago. The sentiment is much less pronounced for grocery shops from other religious backgrounds.

Figure 22: Preference of religious identity of grocery shop (Now vs. two years ago)
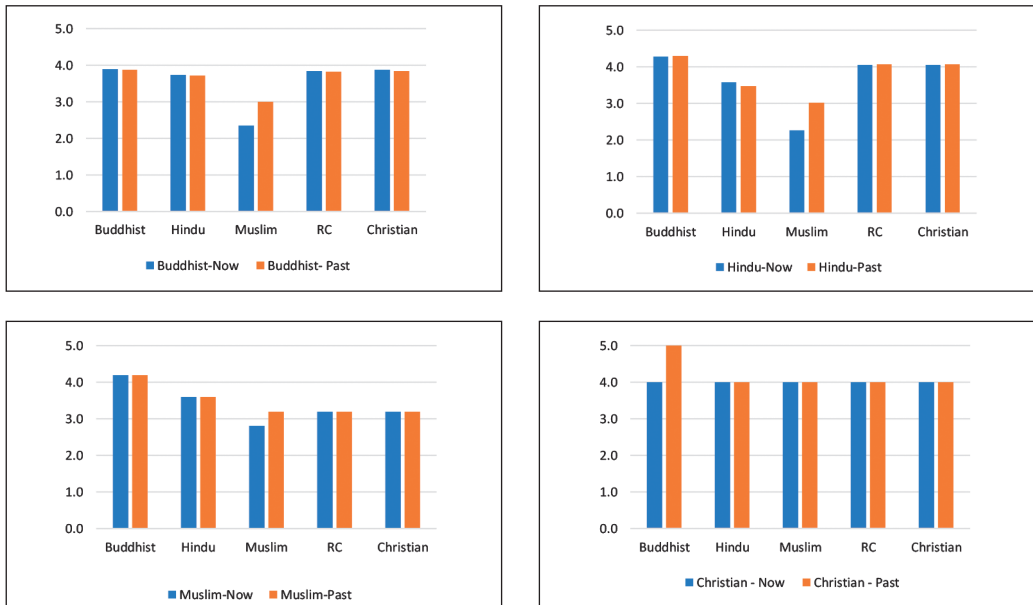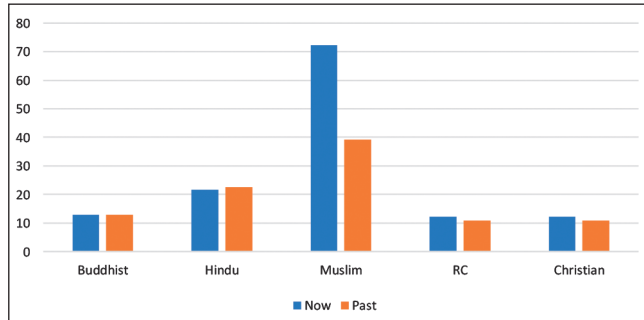
*Figure 23: Share of respondents who least prefer a grocery shop of a given religious identity*

Most respondents do not think about the ethno-religious identity of the grocery shop from which they make purchases. However, among those who do, Buddhists are more sensitive to the identity of the shop than others. Muslim grocery shops have become more unpopular over the recent years.

Scenario 3: Purchasing a plot of land

In this question, the respondents were provided with several characteristics that are likely to be important in the purchase decision of a plot of residential land for the respondent and his/her family, and asked to rank the importance of these factors to them. The large majority of respondents considered factors such as the proximity to hospitals and healthcare, schools, the place of work, market place and other services to be the most important considerations in a land-purchase decision. The ethno-religious composition of the neighbourhood was considered important by a lesser share, and even less considered proximity to relatives to be an important factor in the decision to buy a land.

A disaggregation of those who consider the ethno-religious background of the area by their own religious identity shows that by and large Buddhists are the most sensitive to the religious background of their neighbourhood, and the Hindus the least.

Figure 24: Share of respondents who strongly agree or agree that the dominant religion of the neighbourhood is important to a land-purchase decision
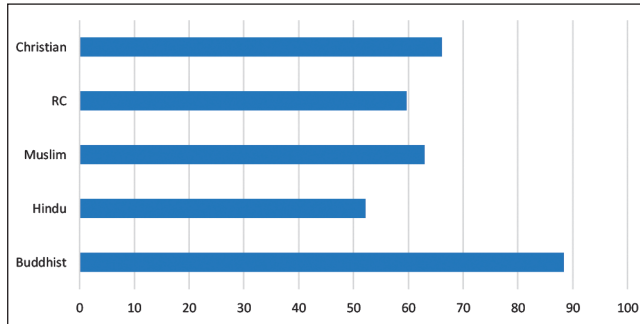
The data shows that there are no large changes in preferences in the present compared to two years ago, among respondents who considered ethno-religious composition of the area in which they were to potentially purchase a land. Clearly, such respondents prefer to buy land where people of their own religious backgrounds live in, and this is true across all religions. Roman Catholics are more open to living in Non-Roman Catholic Christian neighbourhoods, and Non-Roman Catholic Christians in Roman Catholic neighbourhoods, compared to respondents of other religious origins. Muslims are the least open to living in an area that is not of their own identity. Hindus follow closely. Buddhists are the least open to living in Muslim neighbourhoods.

Figure 25: Preference of religious identity in the area in the decision to purchase
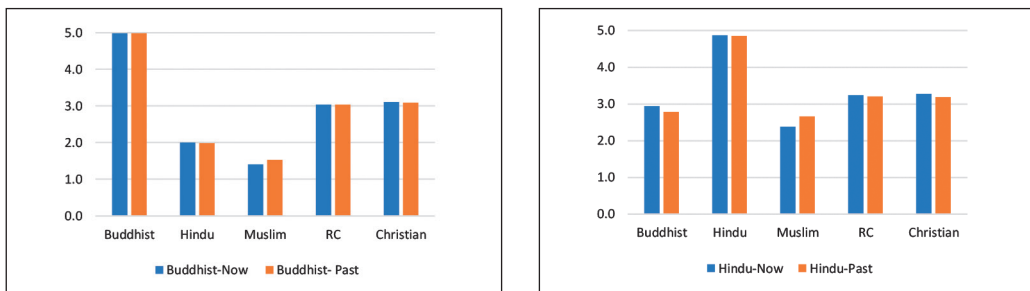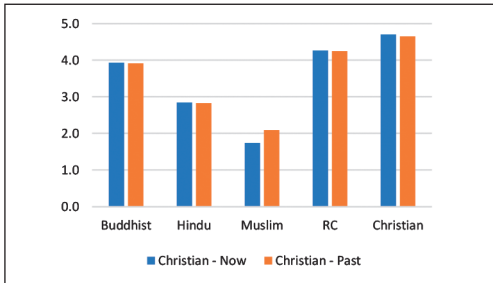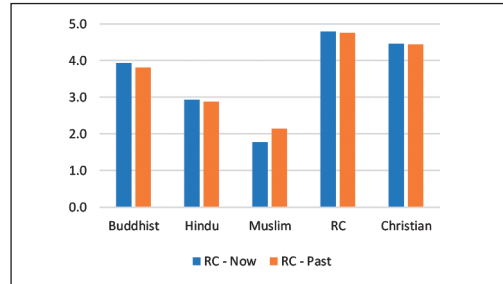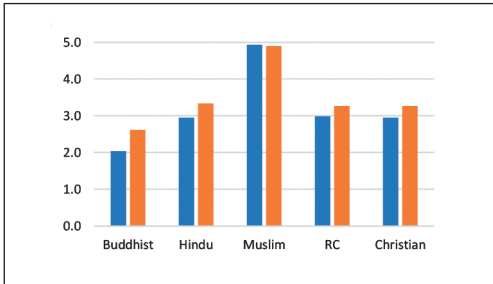
Scenario 4: Channeling a doctor

Of the 979 respondents that answered this question, a little over two-fifths go to a Buddhist doctor usually for a non-critical illness. A little below a fifth go to a Hindu doctor and about 14 per cent go to Muslim doctors. A little below a tenth of the respondents go to a Roman Catholic doctor and very few go to a Non-Roman Catholic Christian doctor. A total of 21 respondents said that they do not have a doctor that they usually go to for a non-critical illness. About 13 per cent respondents go to doctors of all ethno-religious backgrounds. Of them over 50 per cent are Muslims. A small minority does not know the religious background of the doctor.

The critical factors for the choice of doctors are the expertise of the doctor, how friendly the doctor is, and the channeling fee. The distance to the doctor from home is also relatively important. The doctor's religion and gender are of much less significance compared to the more critical factors such as expertise and approachability. Only a little over a fifth of respondents consider the doctor's religious background to be of importance in the choice of their doctor.

Of the respondents that do, the large majority are Buddhists. Over 35 per cent of Buddhist respondents consider the doctor's religion to be an important factor in deciding whom to consult for non-critical illnesses. The Muslim respondents are the least likely to consider the religion to be an important factor in the choice of a doctor.

Figure 26: Share of respondents who strongly agree or agree that the religion of the doctor is important for non-critical health issues
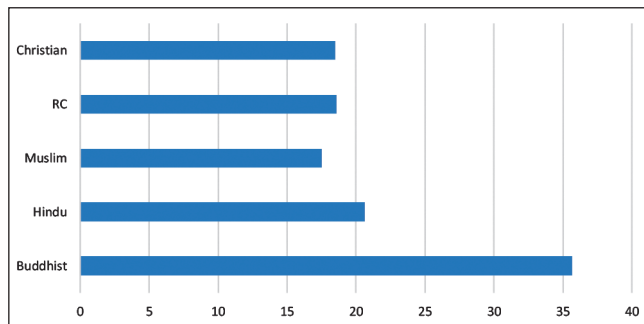
Respondents who have chosen the religion to be an important selection criterion for the choice of a doctor prefer a doctor from their own ethno-religious background. This holds across all religious identities, and over time. Roman Catholics are largely indifferent between doctors of their own religion and those of the Non-Roman Catholic Christian faiths. Muslims tend to prefer doctors of other religious backgrounds the least, and this has deteriorated further compared to two years ago. Another notable pattern is that Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians are more likely to prefer a Hindu doctor now compared to two years ago. Buddhists are less likely to prefer a Muslim doctor now compared to two years ago, but the decline in preference is marginal.

Figure 27: Preference of the religious identity of the doctor (Now vs. two years ago)
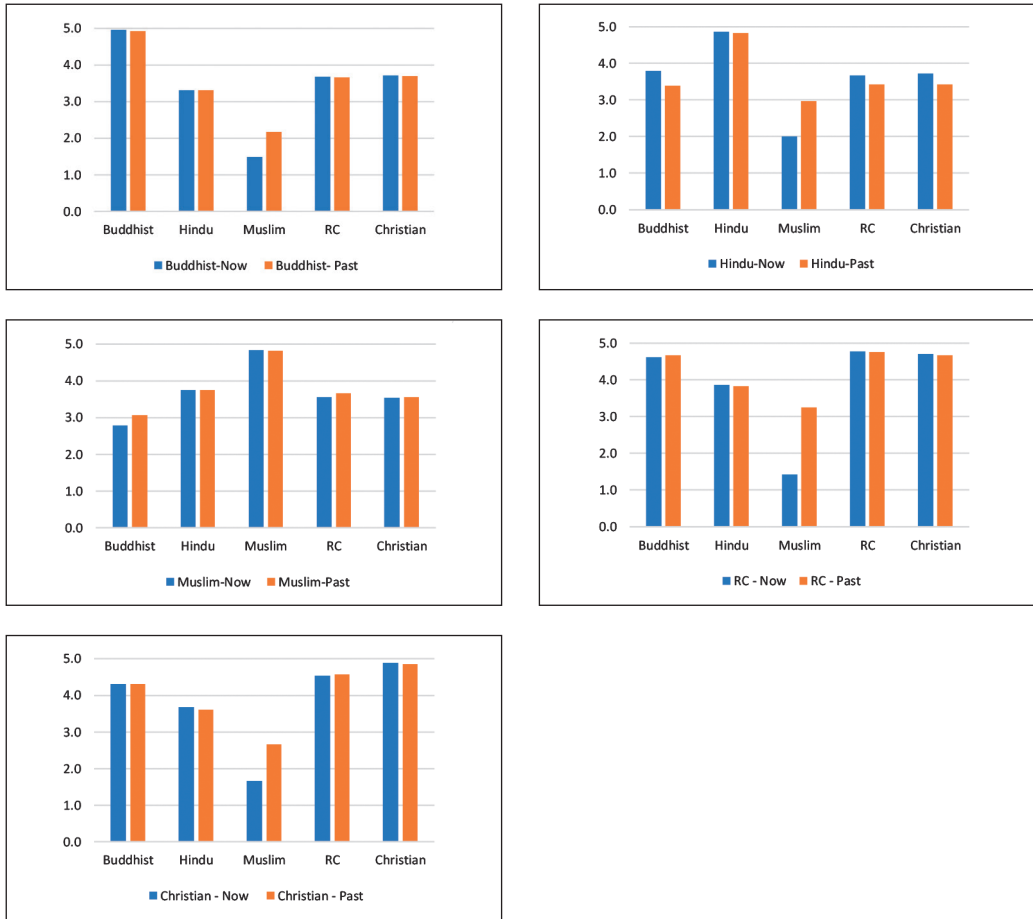

Most respondents do not think of the ethno-religious identity of the doctor they consult for non-critical illnesses. However, among those who do, Buddhists are more sensitive to the identity of the doctor than others.

Scenario 5: Shopping for clothes

Of the 991 respondents who answered this question, slightly over two-fifths purchase from Buddhist clothing shops, while 34 per cent go to Muslim shops. Another 11 per cent buy from clothing shops of Hindu religious background. Very few go to Roman Catholic or Other Christian shops. A little less than a tenth of the respondents buy clothes from shops of all religious backgrounds.

The important factors in deciding where to shop for clothes are the prices of the clothes, the trendiness and fashion, and the durability of clothes. Factors such as the range of clothing available and the popularity of the shops are of secondary importance. Religion is important only for a little over a fourth of the respondents.

Figure 28: Share of respondents who strongly agree or agree that the religion of the shop ownership is important to for clothing-purchase decision
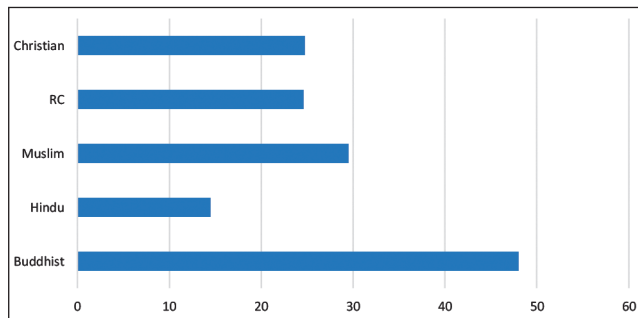
Again, Buddhist respondents are the most sensitive toward the religious identity of the clothing shop. Hindus are the least sensitive. Upon disaggregation by the respondents' religion, a familiar trend of partiality to one's own religious identity emerges. Only the Roman Catholics and Other Christians defy this pattern. Roman Catholics tend to prefer Non-Roman Catholic Christian shops and vice versa in their clothing purchase decisions. Muslim respondents are least likely to buy from Buddhist, Hindu, Roman Catholic, or Other Christian shops, and the low preference appears to have declined further now compared to two years ago. Respondents from other ethno-religious identities are less likely to prefer to buy from Muslim clothing shops, and this preference has declined somewhat now compared to two years ago. More Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians prefer buying from Hindu shops now compared to two years ago.

Figure 29: Preference of the religious identity of clothing shop (Now vs. two years ago)
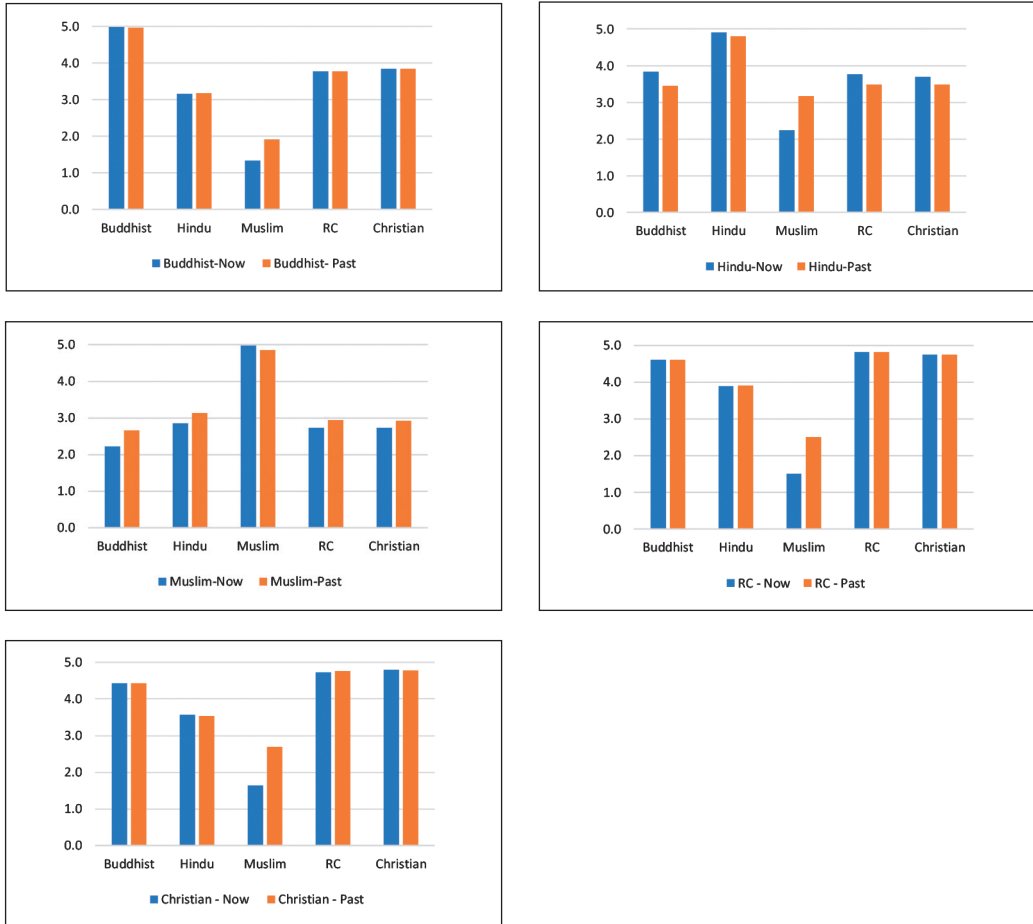
Most respondents do not think of the ethno-religious identity of the shop where they buy clothes from. However, among those who do, Buddhists are more sensitive to the identity of the shop than others. Respondents who consider the religious identity of the shop to be important tend to buy clothes from shops of their own community.

Scenario 6: Travel

In relation to travel, the respondents were asked if they ever feared for their safety to travel in or pass by a city that was occupied by the majority of a given religious community. The same question was also asked with specific reference to the present time. A little over two-fifths of respondents agreed that there have been times they have felt nervous during the past. However, only 37 per cent of

the respondents feel nervous in such a situation now. Over half of the respondents have responded that they have not had and do not now have any safety concerns, travelling in or passing by an area occupied by a particular religious majority.

The information disaggregated by respondents' religion shows that Buddhists are the most likely to have felt unsafe travelling in the past, and are closely followed by Muslims and Non-Roman Catholic Christians. All respondents feel safer now. However, Roman Catholics are the least likely to feel unsafe now, and their feeling of security appears to have improved the most dramatically, compared to respondents from other religious backgrounds. Non-Roman Catholic Christians continue to feel unsafe, while Hindus have always felt safe, travelling in an area largely populated by a particular community.

Figure 30: Share of respondents who feel unsafe travelling in an area populated by one large community
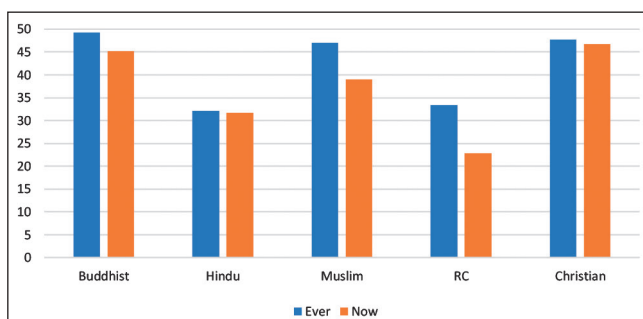

Expectedly, respondents are more likely to feel comfortable travelling in an area populated by their own community. This appears to be most pronounced for Buddhists. Hindus are now more comfortable, but Muslims feel less comfortable travelling in a Buddhist community. Overall, Muslims and Hindus appear to be less comfortable in Buddhist majority areas compared to Roman Catholics and Other Christians.

On the other hand, only Buddhists seem to find it more uncomfortable to travel in a Hindu area now, compared to two years ago. Again, among non-Hindu respondents, Roman Catholics and Other Christians are the least uncomfortable in a Hindu-majority area. In a Muslim context, more Buddhists are now comfortable than they were two years ago. Hindus are the most comfortable in this context, after Muslims themselves. Buddhists and Hindus appear to feel safe

in Roman Catholic and Other Christian contexts. By and large, Muslims are the most likely to feel uncomfortable in a non-Muslim setting.

Figure 31: Degree of comfort of respondents when travelling, based on the religious identity of the majority of the residents of the area (Now vs. two years ago)
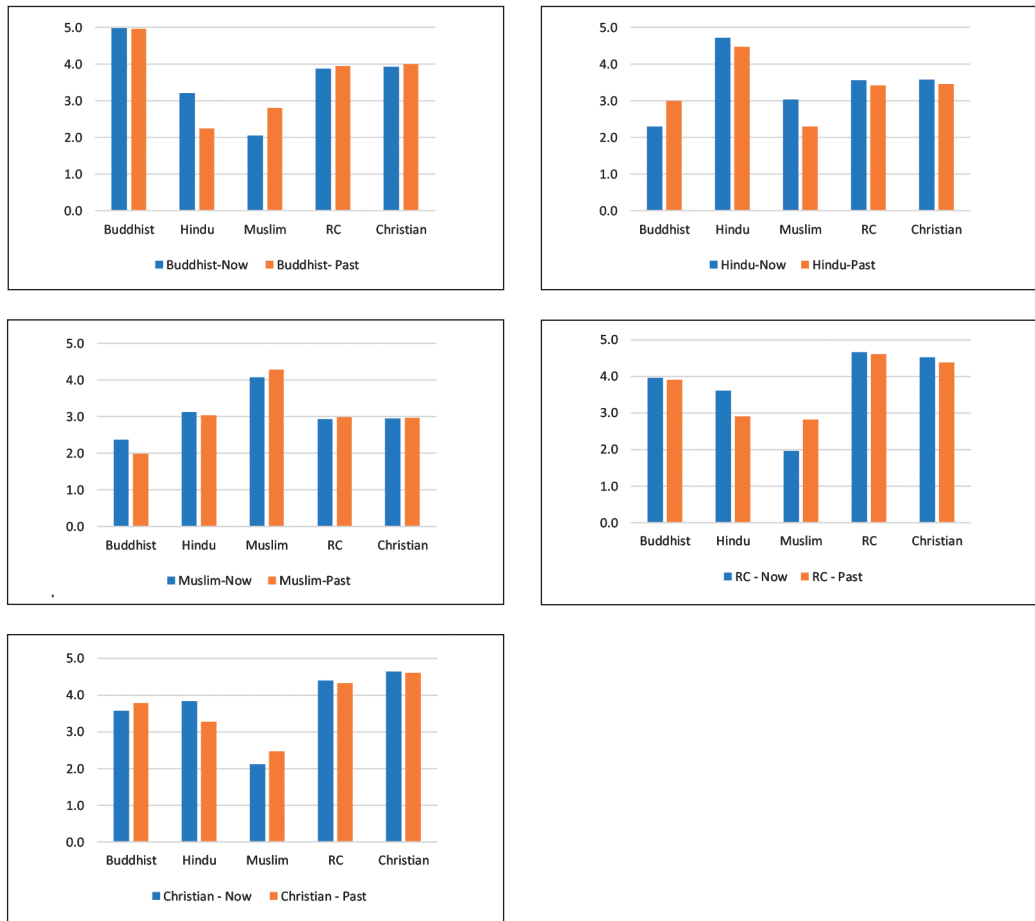

Most respondents feel safer travelling in Sri Lanka now compared to the past. However, they tend to feel safer when travelling in areas of their own community.

## Scenario 7: Day-to-day interactions

The final scenario looks at the day-to-day interactions of respondents with people in society in general. This encapsulates a diverse range of activities, and is more general than the earlier scenarios. The respondents were asked if they were

comfortable interacting with people from different ethno-religious backgrounds. The majority (48.3 per cent) have answered they were not equally comfortable interacting with individuals from different religious background, while 47.2 per cent considered themselves to be equally comfortable. Of those who do not feel comfortable, the majority are Non-Roman Catholic Christians, and are closely followed by Buddhists. Hindu respondents appear to be the least uncomfortable interacting with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds.

Figure 32: Share of respondents who do not feel comfortable interacting with people of different religions
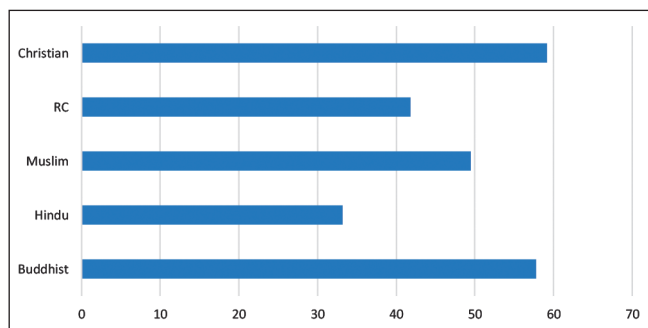
Figure 33: Preference of religious identity of community for daily interaction
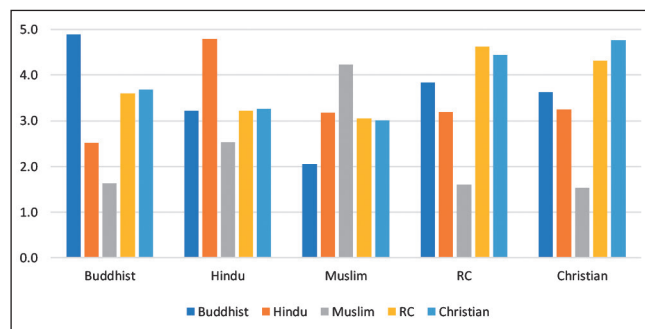
Next, looking at the same data, now disaggregated by religion, it can be seen that respondents are most comfortable with people from their own religious backgrounds. But this appears to be the most pronounced among Buddhists, Hindus, and Non-Roman Catholic Christians. Muslims are the least likely to feel comfortable interacting with individuals outside their religious background. Hindu respondents are less comfortable with Buddhists compared to other non-Hindu individuals. Buddhists are least comfortable with Muslims, and are

more likely to feel comfortable with Roman Catholics or Other Christians than Hindus. Roman Catholics and Other Christians appear to get on well. Both these groups feel more comfortable with Buddhists than Hindus and Muslims, in daily interactions.

Non-Roman Catholic Christians are the most uncomfortable interacting with those outside their own background. Non-Muslims prefer interacting with Muslims the least. Muslims prefer interacting with Buddhists the least.

Key takeaways from the Scenario Analysis

The seven scenarios discussed above provide some useful insights in relation to people's willingness to coexist. By and large, people do not pay attention to ethnicity as an important factor in any of these scenarios, and in fact have a more logical and rational reasoning behind the choices they make, or are likely to make. Moreover, most respondents are comfortable living in a diverse community, as reflected in scenarios 6 and 7.

However, the sensitivity to ethno-religious identity of 'the other' is not completely absent, indicating that there are varying degrees of willingness to accept 'the other'. As seen in Figure 34 below, respondents are the most sensitive to the issue of ethnicity in strategic and long-term choices such as the purchase of land. There is some degree of sensitivity to eating food from outside, understandably due to guidelines on food preparation and consumption in different religions. The same reasoning can be extended to the decision of purchasing clothes, given the cultural differences embedded in the religious values (such as modest clothing for Muslim women, colourful clothing for Tamil women etc.).

Figure 34: Share of respondents who are sensitive to ethno-religious identity in different scenarios
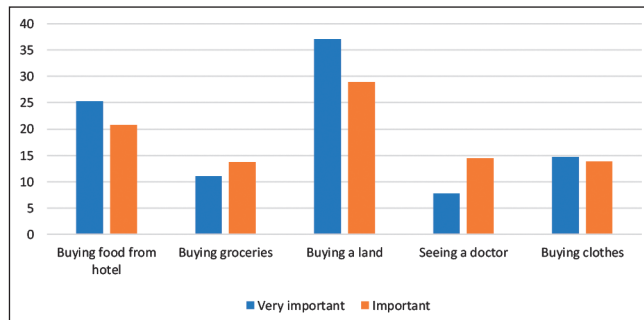
However, where ethnicity has been cited by respondents as an important factor in their decisions, or on their comfort or discomfort in living in a religiously diverse context, clear patterns can be delineated. Firstly, more Buddhists than non-Buddhists are sensitive to the ethno-religious aspect of a decision, except in the decision to buy food from outside. A large number of Non-Roman Catholic Christians also find it unsafe to travel outside their community. They also find it more difficult to interact with people from other religions, closely followed by Buddhists.

Secondly, these respondents prefer interacting with those from their own religious background. However, this tendency is strongest among Muslims. Buddhists and Muslims appear to be more sensitive to the ethno-religious identity among each other, in comparison to others. Roman Catholics and Other Christians are relatively less sensitive to the differences between each other, compared to respondents from other religions. Hindu respondents appear to be the most secular in their perception of the other.

Most respondents who are sensitive to the others' ethno-religious identity, prefer their own to interact with, on a daily basis. But generally, Muslims appear to be the most secular. However, they prefer Buddhists the least and vice versa. Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians like interacting with Muslims the least. Buddhists are more comfortable with Roman Catholics and Other Christians than Hindus and vice versa. However, this could be due to difficulties in communication due to the language barrier, and not necessarily due to a different perception towards Hindus.

## Perceptions in relation to national security and sovereignty

Next, we collected information on the extent to which respondents agree on a series of statements in relation to Sri Lanka's national security and sovereignty. These statements include both positive and negative sentiments about all the religious identities surveyed. Figures 35 below presents the findings on the positive statements.

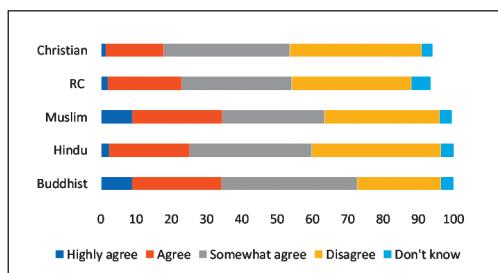*Figure 35: Extent of agreement in relation to positive statements on national security and sovereignty*

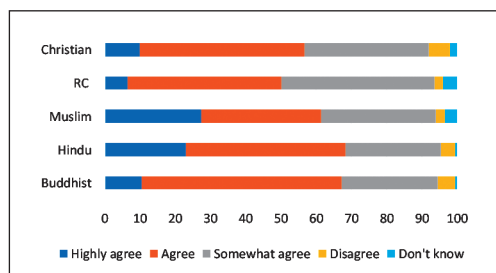*Many people in Sri Lanka believe in one Sri Lankan Identity*
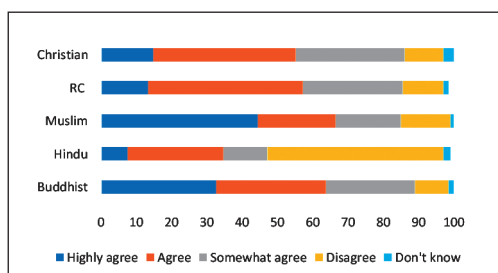
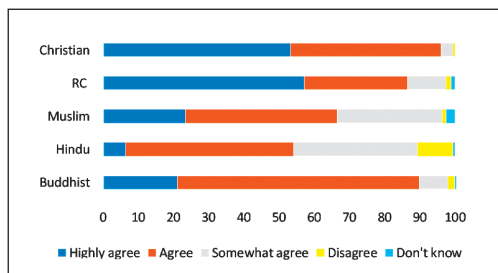*Most Buddhists accommodate minorities in Sri Lanka*
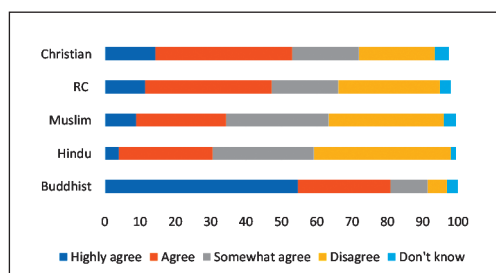
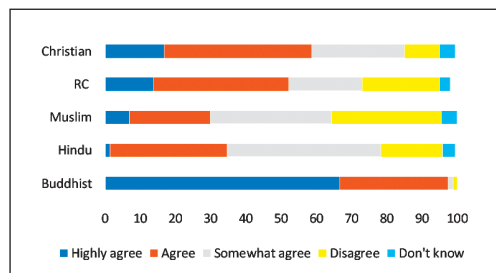*Most Muslims in Sri Lanka are a peaceful community*

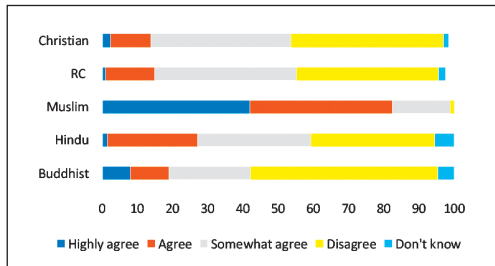*Most Hindus in Sri Lanka live with others peacefully*

Most Non-Roman Catholic Christians coexist with other religious communities
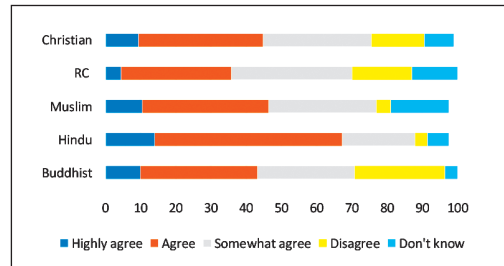

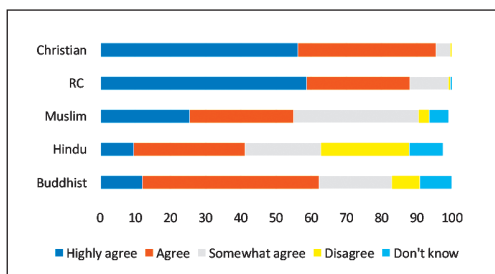*Most Buddhists respect other religions*

Most Muslims coexist with other religious communities

Hindus share common traditions with Buddhists

Non-Roman Catholic Christians support the well-being of other communities

The large majority of respondents believe that most of the people in Sri Lanka believe in one national identity. Over 60 per cent of Buddhists and Muslims strongly agree or agree with this statement, while over 50 per cent of Roman Catholics and Other Christians also share this sentiment. However, only about 35 per cent of the Hindu respondents agree with this statement. Close to half of the Hindu respondents disagree that most Sri Lankans believe in one national identity. Buddhists disagree the least with this statement compared to non-Buddhists.

Expectedly, four-fifths of the Buddhist respondents agree that most Buddhists respect and accommodate minorities in Sri Lanka. This perception is varied among non-Buddhists, however. A little over a half of Non-Roman Catholic Christians and a little less than a half of Roman Catholics also agree that most Buddhists are respectful towards minorities in Sri Lanka. However, only 30 per cent of the Hindu respondents and 34 per cent of the Muslim respondents share this perception. They make up the most of those respondents who disagree with, or are neutral to, this idea.

The responses to the view that most Muslims in Sri Lanka are a peaceful community are insightful. Firstly, of those who strongly agree or agree with this

sentiment, the large majority are Muslims (expectedly) and Buddhists. Less than a fifth of the Non-Roman Catholic Christians, only a little over a fifth of the Roman Catholics strongly agree or agree with the sentiment, and only a fourth of Hindus share this sentiment. Buddhists make up the majority of those who are neutral to this statement, and the lowest share among respondents who disagree with this statement. Respondents from Non-Roman Catholic Christian, Hindu, and Roman Catholic backgrounds make up the biggest share of those who disagree that most Muslims in Sri Lanka are peaceful. Most of the Muslim respondents themselves are either neutral to or in disagreement with the notion that most Muslims are a peaceful community.

The same sentiment, with reference to the Hindu community, is much more uniform across all religions; at least 50 per cent of respondents from all religious backgrounds agree that most Hindus in Sri Lanka are a peaceful community. Outside its own community, Buddhists hold this perception the most, followed by Muslims. Interestingly, more Muslims than Hindus themselves, strongly agree that most Hindus are a peaceful community. Among those that disagree with this sentiment, the majority are Non-Roman Catholic Christians.

A large majority of respondents are in agreement with the perception that Non-Roman Catholic Christians coexist with other religious communities. Almost all of the Non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents, and more Buddhists than Roman Catholics, either strongly agree or agree with this statement. Hindus agree with this statement the least.

Nearly all Buddhist respondents strongly agree or agree with the perception that most Buddhists respect other religions. However, the sentiment is varied among non-Buddhists. Non-Roman Catholic Christians agree the most with this sentiment among the latter cohort, followed by Roman Catholics. Less Muslims and Hindus agree with this sentiment. In fact, most of the Hindu respondents are neutral to this sentiment. Among those who disagree with this statement, the majority are Muslims.

While 82 per cent of Muslim respondents agree or strongly agree with the idea that most Muslims coexist with other religious communities, most respondents from all other religious backgrounds tend to disagree. Over half of the Buddhist respondents disagree with this perception, while a little over two-fifths of Roman Catholics and two-fifths of Other Christians disagree that most Muslims coexist

with others. Roman Catholics and Other Christians also make up the most of those who are neutral to this statement. Interestingly however, among non-Muslims, Buddhists make up the largest majority of those who strongly agree that most Muslims coexist with other religious communities.

More Hindus than Buddhists agree with the notion that Buddhists and Hindus share common traditions. In fact, more Muslims and Non-Roman Catholic Christians also agree with this statement compared to Buddhists. Roman Catholics are largely neutral to the idea, while Buddhists make up the majority of those who disagree with this statement.

Nearly all of Non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents and the large majority of Roman Catholics strongly agree or agree that Non-Roman Catholic Christians support the well-being of the other communities. Over 60 per cent of Buddhists and about 55 per cent Muslims also agree or strongly agree with this idea. However, while most of the Hindu respondents do agree with this statement, they also make up the largest cohort among those that disagree with this statement.

Figure 36: Extent of agreement in relation to negative statements on national security and sovereignty
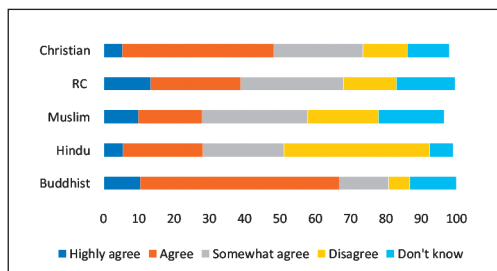
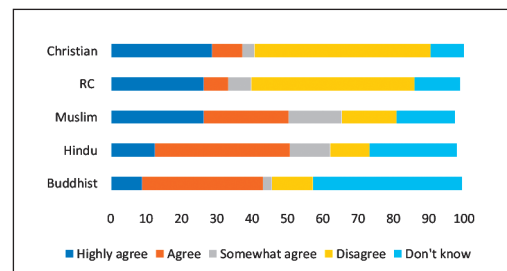*Some Buddhists think they own the country*
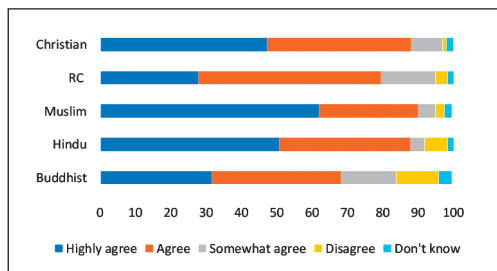
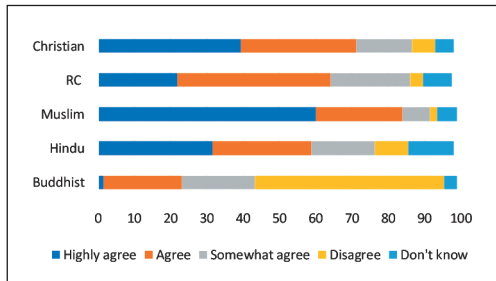*Some Muslims want Sri Lanka to be an Islamic state*
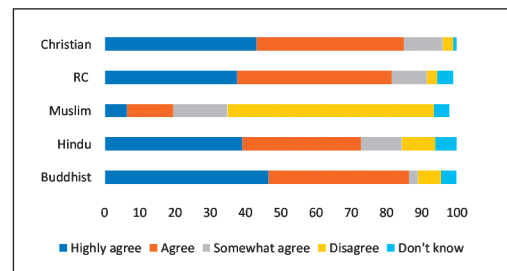
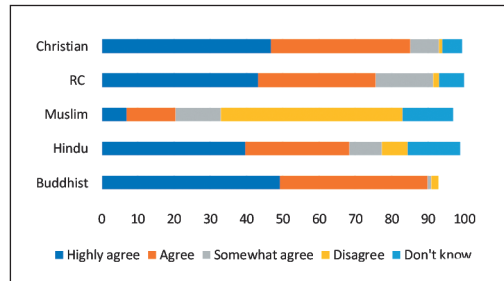*Some Hindus do not appreciate the peace in Sri Lanka now*

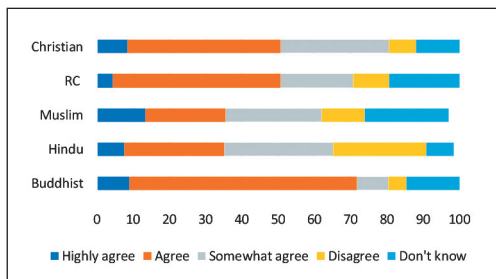*Non Roman-Catholic Christians have not supported the armed conflict*

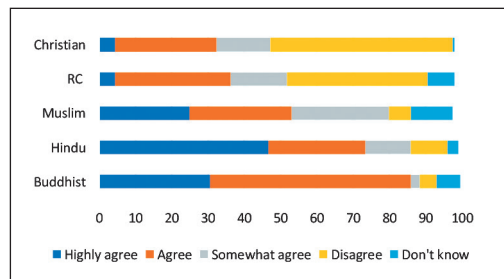*Some Buddhist monks have been extremist and violent to minorities*

Highly agree ■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

Some Muslims in Sri Lanka are supporters of international Islamic extremism and terrorism

Highly agree ■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

Some Hindus in Sri Lanka still believe in separatism

Highly agree ■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

Non Roman-Catholic Christians try to convert Buddhists and Hindus

Highly agree ■ Agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know

Next, we turn to the results on perceptions for the negative statements with reference to different religions, presented in Figure 36 above. The majority of all respondents, including Buddhists themselves, agree with the statement that some Buddhists think they own Sri Lanka. In fact, 90 per cent of Muslims, and a little less than that of the Non-Roman Catholic Christian and the Hindu respondents strongly agree with this idea. A little less than four-fifths of the Non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents also echo the sentiment. Interestingly, a little over two thirds of the Buddhists also believe so.

Most non-Muslim respondents agree or strongly agree with the view that some Muslims want Sri Lanka to be an Islamic state. The large majority that holds this view consists of Buddhists, followed by Non-Roman-Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics. Among non-Muslims, more Hindu respondents than those from other religions are neutral or disagree with this statement.

Slightly over two-thirds of the Buddhist respondents agree or strongly agree that some Hindus do not appreciate the peace in the country. But others' perceptions differ. Less than a half of Non-Roman Catholic Christians and less than two-fifths of Roman Catholics believe this to be the case. Interestingly, a little over a fourth of the Hindu respondents themselves agree with this statement. Half of

the Muslim respondents are either neutral to or disagree with this perception. More Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists agree or strongly agree that Non-Roman Catholic Christians have not supported the armed conflict, while less Roman Catholics and Other Christians agree with this idea. A sizeable share of respondents from all religious backgrounds (from close to a tenth of Non-Roman Catholic Christians to a little over two-fifths of Buddhists) do not have an idea about Non-Roman Catholic Christians' support for the armed conflict to hold a perception.

A large majority of Muslim respondents, followed by Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics, agree or strongly agree that some Buddhist monks have become extremists and violent to the minorities. In comparison, less Hindu respondents believe so, even though over half of all non-Buddhist respondents agree that this idea is true. Over half of the Buddhists disagree with this statement, However, a little below a fourth of them do agree on the violence and extremism of monks.

The idea that some Muslims support international 'Islamic' extremism and terrorism is also widely held to be true by most non-Muslim respondents. As many as about 90 per cent of Buddhists, 85 per cent of Non-Roman Catholic Christians, and 75 per cent of Roman Catholics agree or strongly agree with this statement. Less Hindus, on the other hand, seem to hold on to this view. Only a fifth of the Muslims believe this to be true.

Over 70 per cent of the Buddhists agree or strongly agree with the statement that some Hindus in Sri Lanka still believe in separatism. A little over half of Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics also believe so. A little below two-fifths of Muslims and Hindus themselves agree with this idea. Moreover, Hindu respondents are largely neutral to this perception than in disagreement with it.

The large majority of Buddhists believe that Non-Roman Catholic Christians try to convert Buddhists and Hindus. Close to three-fourths of the Hindu respondents also agree or strongly agree with this, while a little over half of the Muslims also echo the view. Non-Roman Catholic Christians disagree with this idea the most. Interestingly however, 32 per cent of them agree that this is true, while 36 per cent of Roman Catholics are also in agreement with the statement.

## Key takeaways from Perceptions on National Security

The 17 statements studied above – nine positive and eight negative – present some useful results. Firstly, it is encouraging to see that respondents from all ethnicities are able to think self-critically. Although overall, the respondents' answers appear to be biased towards their own communities, there are respondents who seem to hold on to more secular, accommodative, and self-critical perceptions. For example, a little below a fourth of Buddhist respondents agree that some Buddhist monks are violent and extremist, while a fifth of Muslim respondents agree that some Muslims support international Islamic extremism. However, the reflection of feelings of insecurity, mistrust, and misinformation is also evident in the respondents' perceptions. Generally, Buddhists tend to hold on to negative perceptions of 'the other' the most. The negative perceptions towards Muslims is strongest among Buddhist respondents, and similarly towards Buddhists is strongest among Muslim respondents. Hindu respondents appear to be the most secular, and most capable of getting along with others. They also seem to get on well with Muslims, while they appear to have some tensions with the Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics. However, it is also clear that most respondents find coexistence hardest with Muslims, while many of them also hold onto beliefs of extremism and terrorism in relation to Muslims.

## Rituals, Celebrations and Sites of Religious Worship

In this section, we look at people's tolerance of and appreciation for the practices and rituals, celebrations and holy sites of other religions. Figure 37 presents the findings of the responses to statements regarding the tolerance of others' religious practices. They include pirith chanted on loudspeakers, call for prayers from the mosque, the use of loudspeakers during church festivals and kovils during their celebrations. The important factor here is that the celebrations are not contained to the place of worship, and spillover to the public sphere due to the use of loudspeakers.

Figure 37: Level of agreement on religious practices (that spill over to the public sphere)
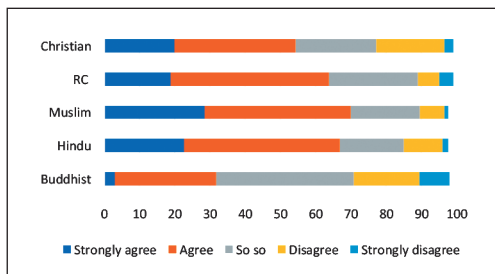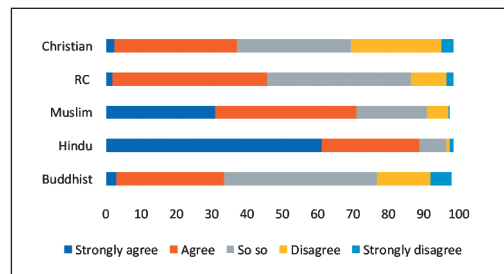
Ok to hear pirith on loudspeaker
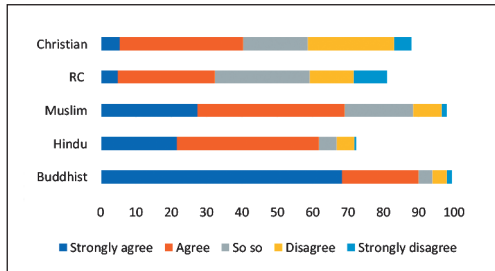
Ok to hear call for prayers 5 times a day
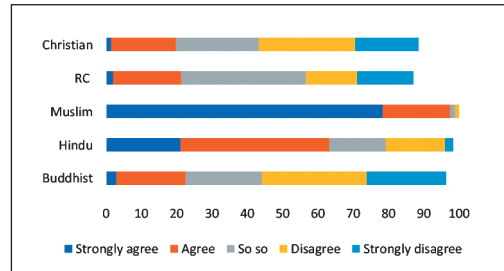
Ok to hear week-long use of loudspeakers during church festivals

Ok to hear loudspeakers during kovil celebrations

By and large, respondents are tolerant of or indifferent to the practices that bring about auditory externalities. However, clearly, they are biased towards the practices of their own religions. Buddhists are comfortable listening to Pirith on loudspeaker, while Muslims are comfortable with the call for prayers. Similarly, Hindu respondents agree that they accommodate the chants over loudspeakers. Interestingly however, more Hindus and Muslims do not mind the use of loudspeakers during church festivals compared to the Roman Catholics and Other Christians themselves. The least tolerant of the church festival sounds are the Buddhists, followed by Non-Roman Catholic Christians. Buddhists are less open to the sound spillovers from mosques, and are more neutral from the sounds generated by churches and kovils. But an important point to be factored here is the frequency of the noise generation. Mosques are the most likely to create sound on a regular and frequent basis compared to Buddhist temples, Hindu kovils or churches. Therefore, the aversion to the call for prayers might have more to do with the frequency of it, rather than an ethno-religious subtext.

After Buddhists, the Muslims are the most comfortable to hear pirith on loudspeakers, followed by Hindu respondents. In contrast, Roman Catholics are the least comfortable hearing pirith on loudspeakers, as reflected in the higher

percentages of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. The strongest resistance is reported from Non-Roman Catholic Christians.

After Muslims, Hindus are the most comfortable hearing the mosques' call to prayers. Only about a fifth of respondents from other religions seem to be comfortable with the call to prayers. The resistance is strongest among Buddhists, followed by Roman Catholics and Other Christians.

After Hindus, Muslims are the most accommodative of the celebratory sounds coming from a kovil, followed by Roman Catholics and Other Christians. The large majority of Buddhists are indifferent to the celebrations, while a greater share of Non-Roman Catholic Christians than respondents from other religions dislike hearing the sounds coming from a kovil.

Moving onto other ways in which people experience and interact with each other's religions, we look at four statements – how respondents enjoy the food unique to different ethno-religious groups, extreme religious practices such as animal sacrifices among Muslims, similar practices among Hindus, and having people from different religions visit one's own place of worship. The responses are presented in Figure 38 below.

Figure 38: Level of agreement on religious practices (other than the sound spillovers)
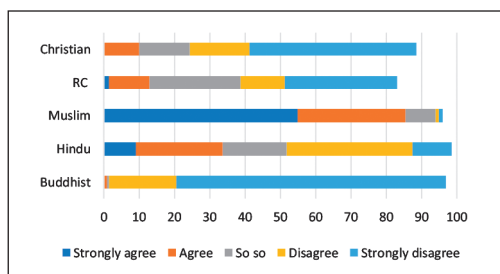
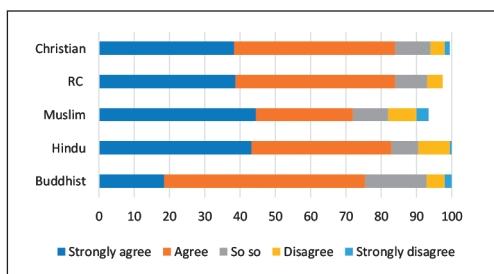*Enjoy traditional foods of different religions*
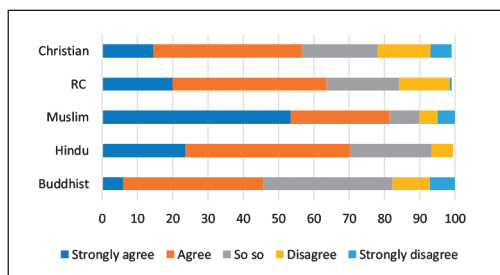
Ok with animal sacrifices during Haj
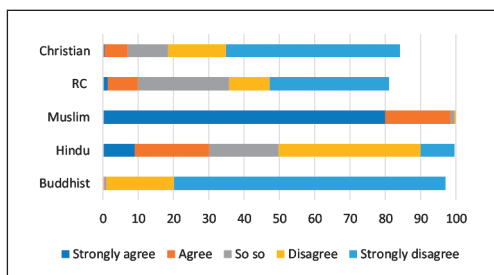
Ok with animal sacrifices in Hindu temples

Ok with visitors from other religions visiting my place of worship


44

Over half of the respondents in all religions (except Buddhists) are happy to enjoy traditional foods prepared by people of different faiths during festival times. Muslims enjoy this the most, followed by Hindus and Roman Catholics. Among those neutral to the idea, the largest majority are Buddhists. Although many Non-Roman Catholic Christians enjoy different types of food from different religions, there are many who do not enjoy it. In fact, among those who do not enjoy such foods, the largest majority is reported among Non-Roman Catholic Christians, followed closely by Buddhists.

In relation to animal sacrifices, Muslims support this act the most irrespective of whether it is done in a kovil or a mosque. In contrast, most Hindu respondents either disagree or strongly agree with this act irrespective of where it takes place. Nearly all Buddhists disagree with the animal sacrifices while more Non-Roman Catholic Christians than Roman Catholics also disagree. Among those that are indifferent to this act, the largest share of respondents is Roman Catholic. Respondents from all religions like to entertain visitors from other faiths in their pace of worship. Non-Roman Catholic Christians are the most in favour of this idea, followed by Roman Catholics and Hindus. While most Buddhists are in favour of the idea, there is a significant percentage who are neutral, compared to respondents from other religions. Muslims and Hindus account for the highest share of respondents who disagree with this idea.

Next, we look at how respondents celebrate important and holy events of different religions. More specifically, we look at Vesak (of Buddhists), Thai Pongal (of Hindus), Christmas (of Roman Catholics and Other Christians) and Ramazan (of Muslims). The expectation here is not that respondents participate in the religious aspect of the festival. Rather, the objective was to understand to what extent people from different religions come together to celebrate the social aspects of these festivals – such as making Vesak lanterns or putting up lights, Christmas trees and carols, making kolam and participating in the preparation of Pongal rice or enjoying kanji, and watalappam, and participating in breaking fast ceremonies. Figure 39 below summarises the findings.

Figure 39: Share of respondents who participate in religious festivals
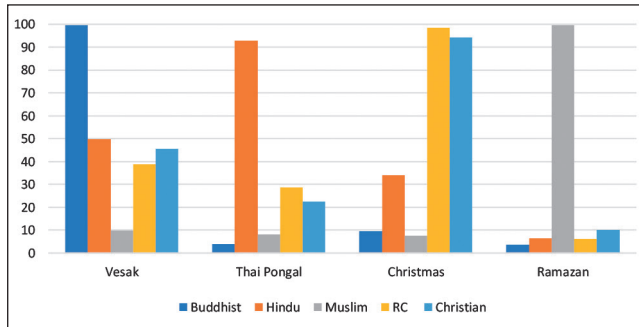
Unsurprisingly, nearly all respondents celebrate their own festivals, although this share is slightly lower among Hindus in relation to Thai Pongal. Similarly, less Non-Roman Catholic Christians celebrate Christmas than Roman Catholics. Buddhists celebrate Christmas the most from non-Buddhist festivals. A few also celebrate Thai Pongal and Ramazan. Vesak is the largest religious celebration among non-Buddhists. Generally, Muslims participate the least in non-Muslim religious celebrations, but some participate in Thai Pongal and Christmas celebrations too. The reverse is also true – less non-Muslims participate in Muslim celebrations. But overall, Hindu, Roman Catholic and Other Christian respondents seem to participate in other religious festivals more than Muslims and Buddhists.

Vesak is the most celebrated festival. Only a very few non-Muslims participate in Ramazan celebrations. Only a few Buddhists participate in non-Buddhist religious celebrations.

Next, we look at people's willingness to visit popular places of worship of different religions. As earlier, this is not necessarily from a religious perspective. A person may be open to visiting a place of worship out of respect, a curiosity to see, a desire to learn, or in support of someone for whom such sacred places have a spiritual meaning. The findings are graphed in Figure 40 below.
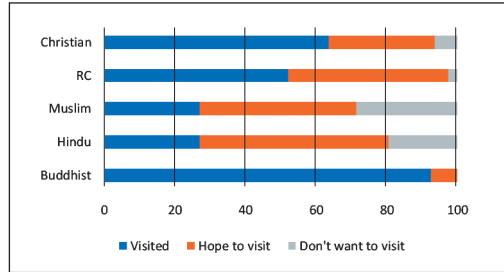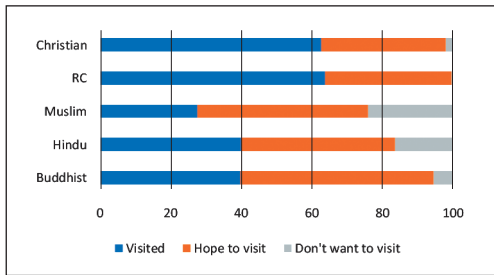
Figure 40: Intention to visit religious sites

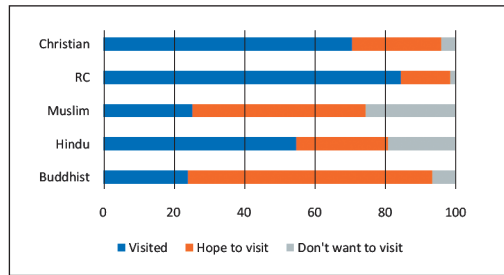*Temple of the Tooth Relic (Buddhist)*
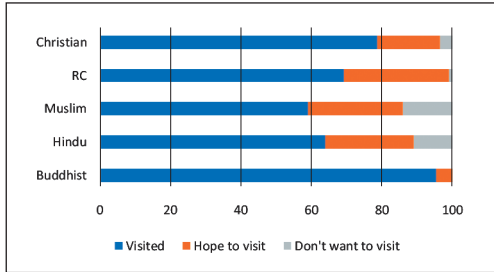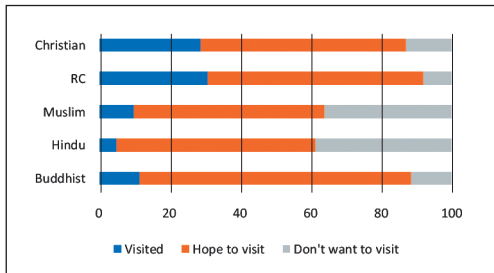

Sri Maha Bodhiya (Buddhist)
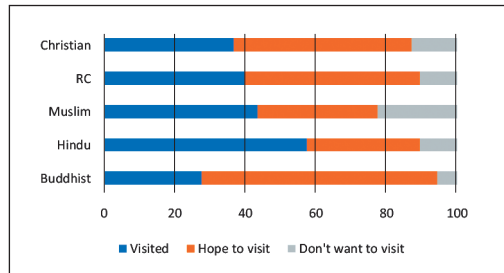

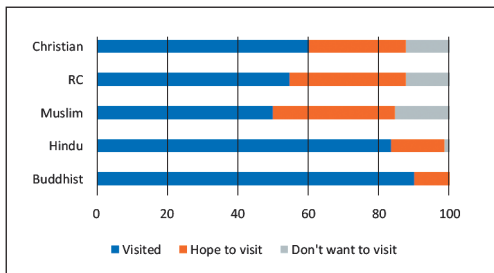*Madu Church (Roman Catholic)*

Kochchikade Church (Roman Catholic)
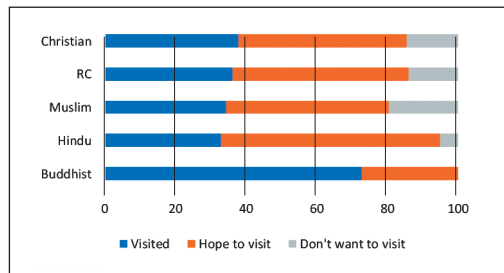

Dutch Reformed Church (Christian)
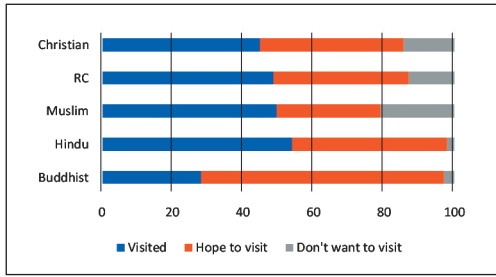

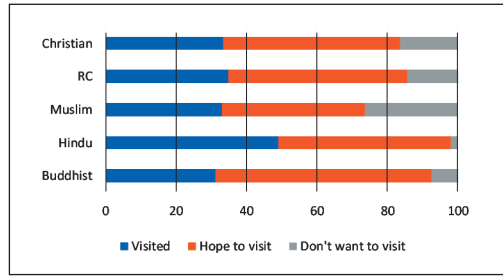*Koneshwaram Temple (Hindu)*

Kataragama (Multi-religious)

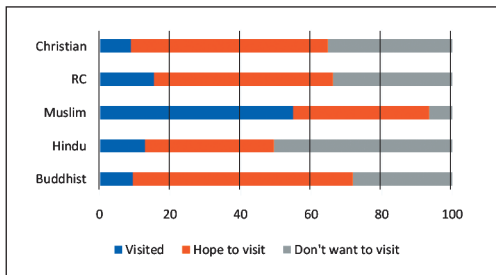
Sri Pada (Predominantly Buddhist)
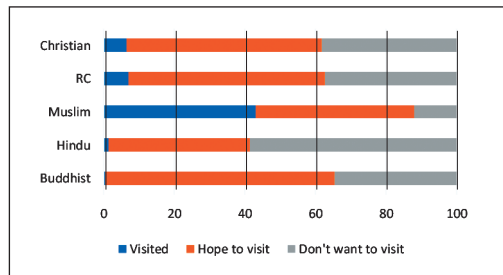
Nallur Temple (Hindu)

Thirukethiswaram Temple (Hindu)

Red Mosque (Muslim)

Jailani Shrine (Muslim)

Clearly, respondents have visited or are likely to visit their own places of worship more than the others. At the same time, however, most respondents have either visited or are hoping to visit most of the places of religious significance, across all religions. The most popular place of worship to have been visited by respondents of all religions in the Temple of the Tooth Relic. More non-Buddhist respondents are open to visiting the Temple of the Tooth Relic compared to the Sri Maha Bodhiya. The most visited non-Buddhist site, among Buddhists is the Madu Church.

By and large, Muslim respondents are the least open to visiting religious sites outside their own religion. They are least likely to visit the Dutch Reformed Church in Kalpitiya. A notable share of Hindu respondents also appear to be relatively less open to visiting places of worship outside their religion. They are the least likely to visit the Jailani Shrine and the Red Mosque. There is also a significant share of non-Muslims who do not want to visit Muslim places of worship. More Buddhists are more open to visiting Hindu places of worship, compared to other non-Hindu respondents. Roman Catholics and Other Christians are more open to visiting Buddhist places of worship, after their own. They are also open to visiting Hindu places of worship.

Key takeaways from Perceptions on Rituals, Celebrations and Sites of Worship

The preceding discussion tackled perceptions in relation to the more outward aspects of religions in the form of practices, celebrations, and iconic sites of religious value. The findings, once again show, not surprisingly, individuals' biases towards what is their own. Yet, encouragingly, the majority of the respondents accept, tolerate, and celebrate others' religions in one way or another. It can be understood from the analysis that one's own religious teachings may influence people on the extent to which they experience and tolerate that of the others. For example, while most respondents, irrespective of their religion, enjoy foods prepared for other religious festivals, and like to welcome those of other religions into their own places of worship, less Buddhists accept animal sacrifices, most likely because killing animals is against Buddhist teachings. Similarly, the secular nature of Hindu religious values makes Hindu respondents more open-minded about others' ways of life. The closed and reclusive nature of Muslim festivals (compared to say, Christmas or Vesak which involves an element of celebration) likely makes it difficult to be enjoyed communally. This could also be why most people are open to visiting non-Muslim places of worship, compared to Muslim mosques. Moreover, people are likely to visit places of worship for their historical value or a love for travel than due to reasons rooted in any form of religiosity.
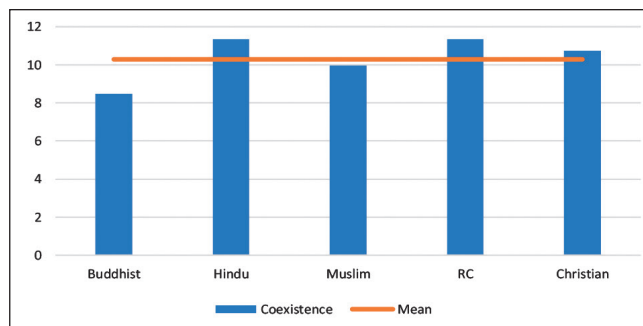
Coexistence Index

In the preceding section, we have looked at how respondents take into consideration the ethno-religious backgrounds of 'the other' in different situations – day to day activities, strategic decisions, celebrations, and rituals, everyday 'public' religious practices and places of worship. In this section, we attempt to unpack the association of these perceptions with a person's family, friends and society, media and other external influences. To do so, we have constructed a coexistence index using the scenarios discussed above. We have left out the perception with reference to safety in relation to travel because the perception of safety cannot be reasonably approximated with the willingness to coexist.

1. How important is the ethno-religious identity of the restaurant?
2. How important is the ethno-religious identity of the grocery shop?
3. How important is the ethno-religious identity of the area to the decision of a land purchase?
4. How important is the ethno-religious identity of the doctor for treatment of a non-critical illness ?
5. How important is the ethno-religious identity of the clothing shop?
6. Is the respondent comfortable in dealing with people from all ethno-religious backgrounds?

Questions 1-5 take a highest value of 4 if the response is 'Not important at all' and a lowest value of 0 if the response is 'Very important'. Question 6 assigns a value of 1 if the respondent is comfortable in dealing with people from ethno-religious backgrounds different to their own, and 0 otherwise. Thus, the coexistence index ranges from a highest of 21 (highest willingness to coexist) to a lowest of 0. Figure 41 below summarises the findings of the perception index. The index value ranges from 0 to 21 and takes a mean value of 10.3. When separated by religions, at a score of 8.5, Buddhists have the lowest willingness to coexist. The perception index is second-lowest for Muslims, at 10.0. Non-Roman Catholic Christians, Roman Catholics, and Hindus have a higher coexistence index compared to the average. At a score of 11.4, the Hindu cohort reports the highest level of willingness to coexist, as measured by our index.

Figure 41: Coexistence Index by religious identity of respondents


Next, we measure how the coexistence index performs in relation to an individual's demographic, household, and educational characteristics. As seen in Panel A of Figure 42 below, men have a greater willingness to coexist compared to

women among Hindu, Roman Catholic, and Other Christian respondents. The index values are nearly on par among Muslim women and men. On the other hand, more Buddhist women than men have a greater tolerance of 'the other'. Overall however, both Buddhist men and women have the lowest willingness to coexist, across all groups. Among male respondents, Hindus show the highest willingness to coexist while among female respondents, Roman Catholics do, closely followed by Hindus.

Panel B presents the performance of the coexistence index across different age groups. It is clear again that Buddhists score the lowest across all age categories, and it is troubling to note that the index value is lowest in the younger age groups (aged 39 or less). The willingness to coexist appears to be particularly low in advanced age cohorts in all religions. Among the younger age groups (less than 39) Hindu and Roman Catholic respondents exhibit greater tolerance levels compared to respondents from other religious backgrounds. Hindu respondents report the highest index value in the age 17-24 and 50-59 categories while Roman Catholics score highest in the age 30-39 category. Muslim respondents score highest in the age 40-49 category, and notably the highest index value for Buddhists is also recorded in the same age category.[8]

Figure 42: Coexistence index by gender and age group of respondents

Panel A: By gender
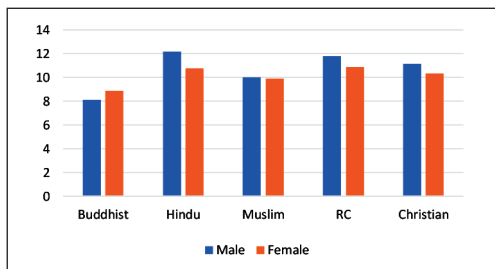
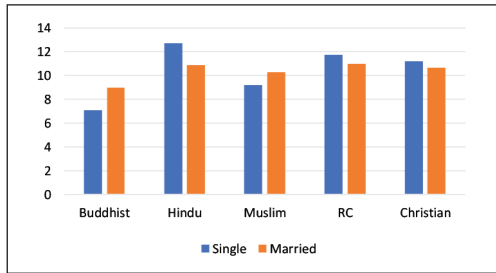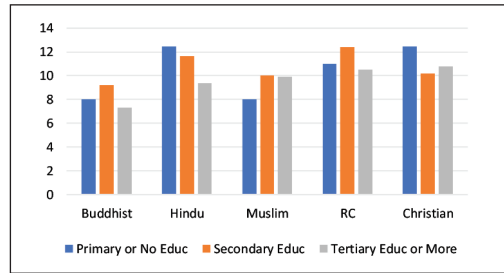*Panel B: by age group*

_____
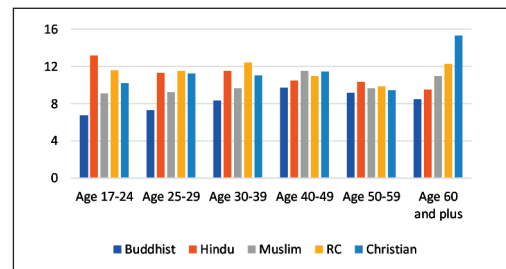
8 The number of observations is too small for some categories when grouped by religion, gender and age group for a meaningful analysis. Therefore, the interaction effect of gender and age group is not discussed here.

Figure 43: Coexistence index by marital status and education of respondents

Panel A: By marital status

Panel B: By education

As Panel A in Figure 43 above shows, the lowest coexistence index score is reported among single Buddhist respondents, and the highest among single Hindu respondents. The lowest coexistence score is reported among Buddhists in the married cohort too. Among Hindus, Roman Catholics and Other Christians, more single respondents than those married appear to be more tolerant of 'the other', although this difference is most pronounced among the Hindus. Among Buddhist respondents, married individuals seem to have a greater tolerance of 'the other' than those single.

Moving onto Panel B of Figure 43, it is concerning that the more educated respondents score lower on the coexistence index. Only Muslim respondents score higher at the highest education level compared to primary or no education. Notably, the willingness to coexistence is highest (across all educational attainment categories for all religions) among Hindu and Non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents with no education or only primary education. For Buddhists, Muslims, and Roman Catholics, this score improves when the respondents have had a secondary education. Among Hindus, however, the coexistence score clearly drops with greater educational attainments.

> The coexistence index score is lower among respondents aged 39 or less. Educational attainments show mixed associations with the coexistence index. Except among Muslims, high educational attainments are associated with a lower index value.

Next, we look at a person's usual activities and their association with the coexistence index. For that, we have divided the respondents into two categories, namely those economically active and inactive. The economically active group

are either employed or are actively looking for employment (unemployed) while the inactive group includes individuals who are engaged in household work only, students, retired and the ill and disabled.

As Figure 44 below shows, in general people who are economically inactive have a higher tolerance level of 'the other' and this holds true for all religious groups except Non-Roman Catholic Christians. The difference, however, is much smaller among Muslims compared to among Buddhist, Hindu and Roman Catholic groups. The tolerance levels are highest among Hindu respondents for both groups. Again, Buddhists score the lowest on the coexistence index for both the economically active and inactive groups, and the scores are notably below the sample average. The second lowest score belongs to Muslims, and appears to be slightly below the sample average.

*Figure 44: Coexistence index by status of economic activity*
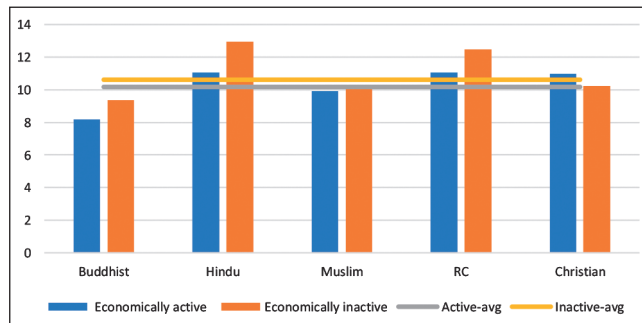
Next, we look at the possible association between a person's international exposure and their tolerance of 'the other'. To do so, we included a question on the respondents travels abroad, and enumerated several possible reasons for such travel. The findings are presented in Figure 45 below.

Figure 45: Share of respondents that have travelled abroad and reasons for travel

Panel A: has travelled abroad
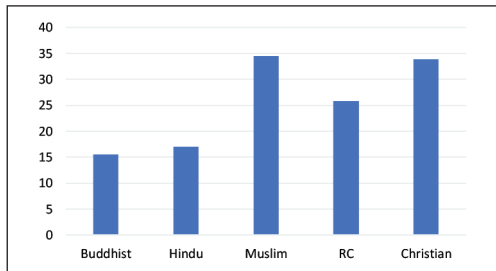
Panel B: reason for travel
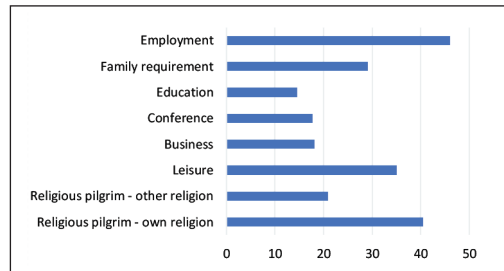
As Panel A above shows, a little over one-third of the Muslim and Non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents and a little over one-fourth of Roman Catholics have travelled abroad. Most of the Buddhists and Hindus have not travelled abroad. Panel B which disaggregates the purpose of travel shows that the most common reason for travel is employment, followed by one's own religious pilgrimages and leisure. In Figure 46 below, we look at these most cited reasons for travel, by the respondents' religion.

Evidently, Muslims have travelled mostly on pilgrimages, while nearly half of them have also travelled for work. Only slightly over a fifth of Muslims have travelled for leisure and recreation. Hindu respondents take the lead in travel for employment, followed by Buddhists. Roman Catholics and Other Christians have travelled much less for employment purposes. On the other hand, they make up the largest share of respondents that have travelled for leisure.

Over 50 per cent of Roman Catholics have also travelled abroad on pilgrimages. The lowest share of respondents that have travelled for religious reasons are reported from among Hindus. They have also travelled the least for leisure. Both Buddhists and Hindus in fact share similar travel characteristics. They have travelled more for employment than for religious worship, and the least on leisure.

Figure 46: Share of respondents travelling as pilgrims, for work, or leisure
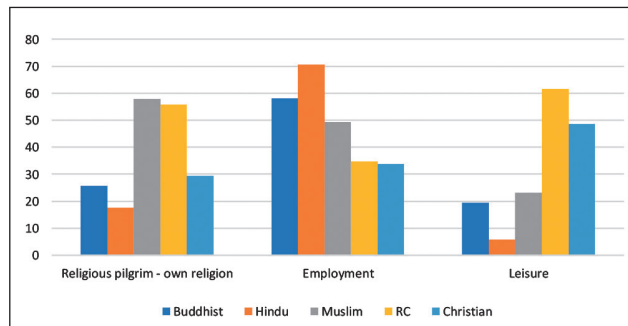
Next we turn to the association between the coexistence index and a respondent's travel. However, we look for the association only between the index and whether an individual has travelled abroad or not (and not at the reasons).

*Figure 47: Coexistence index by whether respondent has travelled abroad or not*
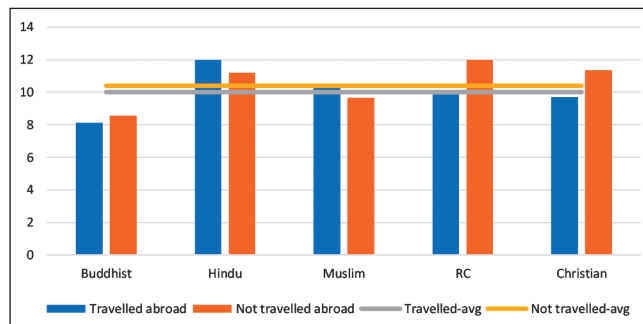
On average the score is slightly higher among respondents who have not travelled abroad, compared to those who have. This looks somewhat counterintuitive, because greater exposure to the world possibly results in a more secular and balanced world view. However, at the religious-group level, the coexistence indexes among Muslims and Hindus conform to this hypothesis. The difference in score among travellers and non-travellers is rather small among Buddhists. Some explanation for the non-conformist pattern among Roman Catholics and Other Christians can be drawn from their purpose of travel. Both groups have travelled on religious pilgrimages more than for work. Thus, it could be that these individuals' religiosity makes them more rigid in their tolerance of others.

More Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics have travelled for leisure, while more Hindus have travelled for work. The coexistence index score is higher among respondents who have not travelled abroad.

Household situation and family dynamics

In this section, we look at the associations between the respondents' family dynamics and the estimated coexistence index. We begin by looking at the religious orientation of the parents. Firstly, the large majority of respondents (95 per cent) have parents who belong to the same religion (from before being married). Of the 5 per cent who have parents from two different religions, the large majority are Non-Roman Catholic Christians (20 respondents) and Roman Catholics (14 respondents). Only 4 Buddhist respondents, 8 Hindu respondents and 3 Muslim respondents have parents from different religions. However, the extended families of respondents tend to be less homogeneous in terms of their religious backgrounds. Nearly half of the sample have relatives that come from a religion that is not the respondents' own.

Figure 48: Share of respondents who have extended family from different religions
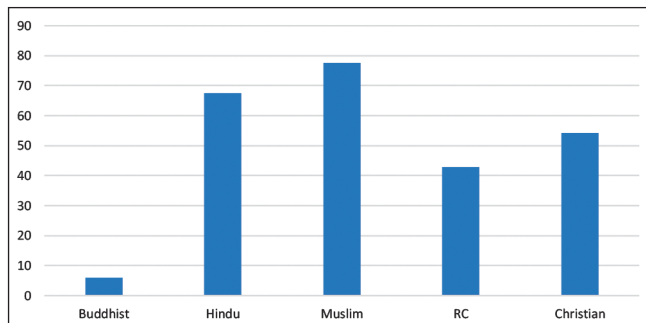
The decomposition of such households that have extended family from different religions is rather insightful. Somewhat counterintuitively, the majority of Muslim respondents have relatives from other religions, followed by Hindus. More Non-Roman Catholic Christians than Roman Catholics also have relatives from different religions. In contrast, only a little over 5 per cent of Buddhists have relatives from other faiths.

Figure 49: Coexistence index by the religious diversity of the extended family
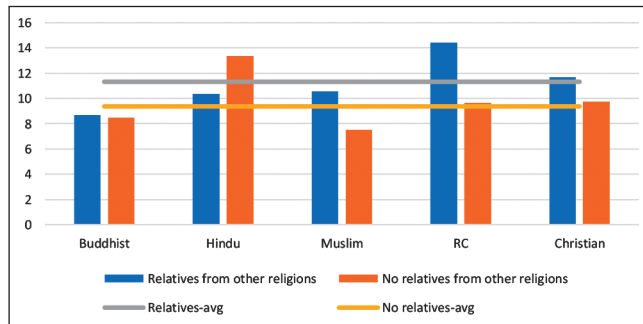

As expected, respondents that come from extended families with diverse religious backgrounds score higher on the coexistence index. This holds for respondents from all religions, except the Hindus. Moreover, while the difference in the coexistence score is more pronounced among Roman Catholics, Muslims, and Non-Roman Catholic Christians, it is rather miniscule among Buddhists. The coexistence scores for Hindu respondents are somewhat baffling. While a sizeable share of them come from extended families of different religions (Figure 48 above), they are less inclined to be tolerant of 'the other' than those without exposure to a diverse group of relatives. But, Hindu respondents without relatives from other religions score the highest in that larger group. Buddhists score poorly in both groups compared to the sample averages, followed by Muslims. Furthermore, Muslims with no relatives from other religions have the lowest overall coexistence index, among all categories.

Generally, when respondents come from multi-religious families, they score higher on the coexistence index.

Unlike with relatives, respondents have greater exposure to other religions through their family friends. As seen in Figure 50 below, over half of the respondents from all religious backgrounds have family and friends from other faiths, and this share is as high as 97 per cent for Non-Roman Catholic Christians and 93 per cent for Roman Catholics. About three-fourths of Muslim and Sinhala respondents and a little less than that of Hindu respondents also have friends from other religions.

Figure 50: Share of respondents with family friends from other religions
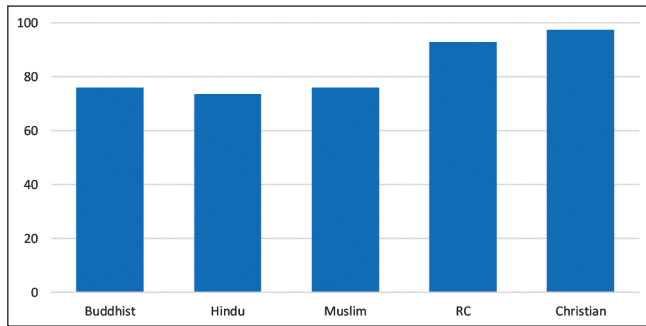
Although Buddhists have the lowest score for both homogeneous and diverse family friend groups, the difference in the index values makes sense; the greater the exposure one has to family friends from other religions, the more likely they are to be tolerant of 'the other'. This also holds true for Muslims. It is also noteworthy, that these are also the two groups that consistently score below Hindus in the coexistence index – Roman Catholics and Other Christians – in nearly all variables explored thus far. The scores are nearly the same among Non-Roman Catholic Christians for both types of respondents – with and without friends from other religions. The change in the index among Roman Catholics and Hindus is somewhat puzzling. Both groups score a higher index value where their family friends are from their own religious background, although the difference is much more pronounced among Roman Catholics.

Figure 51: Coexistence index by the religious diversity of family friends
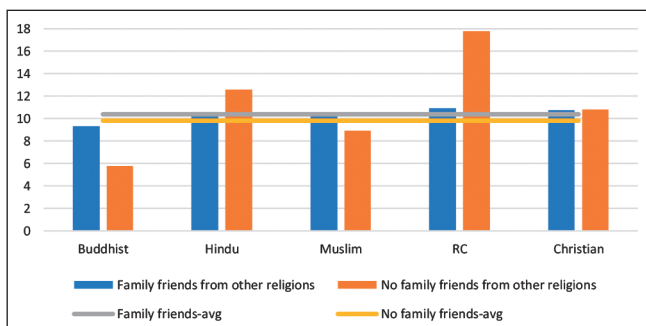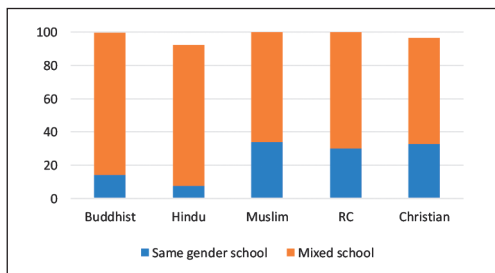
School and own friends

As a social institution, a school plays an important role in individuals from a young age to instill, reinforce, or challenge and debunk existing societal values, norms, and ideologies. Schools also provide a social space for individuals from a young age to interact with others from socioeconomic backgrounds different to their own. As a result, schools can have a significant impact on how a person learns to tolerate, accept, and respect what is not one's own values, beliefs or practices. Therefore, in this section we look at the kind of impact the respondents' schools may have had on their perceptions of 'the other', by exploring the association between several school-related variables and the respondents' coexistence index scores.

Figure 52: Share of respondents and coexistence index by type of school of respondents

*Panel A: School type, all respondents*   *Panel B: School type by respondents' religion*
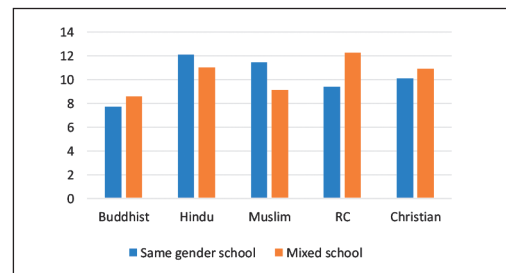
Panel A above shows the split between respondents who have attended same gender schools (boys only and girls only) and mixed schools. More Muslims, Non-Roman Catholic Christians, and Roman Catholics have attended same-gender schools compared to Hindus and Buddhists. On Panel B, we present the coexistence score of respondents by the type of school they attended and their religious background. Roman Catholics, Other Christians, and Buddhists indicate a similar pattern, where respondents score higher on the index where they have attended mixed schools compared to same-gender schools. The difference however is largest for Roman Catholics. Conversely, Hindu and Muslim respondents who have attended same gender schools have a higher coexistence score compared to those who have attended mixed schools, and the gap is wider among Muslims. Overall, the highest coexistence score is reported among Roman Catholics who attended mixed schools, and the lowest among Buddhists who attended same gender schools.

Next we look at the religious identity of the school in relation to the coexistence index. Recall that the sample consists of equal proportions of respondents from the five religions being surveyed. However, as seen in Figure 53 below, a little over two-fifths of the respondents have attended Buddhist schools. Thus, more non-Buddhists have attended Buddhist schools, than Buddhists have attended schools of other religious identities. These non-Buddhists are mainly Roman Catholics and Other Christians, followed by Hindus and Muslims. Roman Catholic schools are the second most attended school category. Among non-Roman Catholics, more Non-Roman Catholic Christians, Hindus, and Muslims have attended Roman Catholic schools than Buddhists.

Figure 53: Religious identity of school
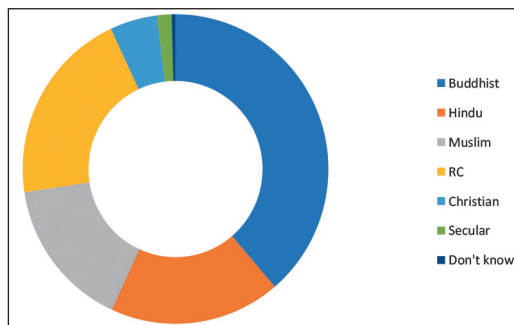
Moving onto the behaviour of the coexistence index, Panel A of Figure 54 below shows that irrespective of the respondents' own religious identity, those who have attended Buddhist schools have scored lowest on the coexistence index. The respondents who have scored highest are from Roman Catholic schools. Other Christian schools were not taken into consideration here due to the low number of observations. The second lowest coexistence score is reported from respondents who attended Muslim schools. Panel B is an expanded version of Panel A, in which we now look at the respondents' own religious identity as well.

Figure 54: Coexistence index by religious identity of school

Panel A: Of school
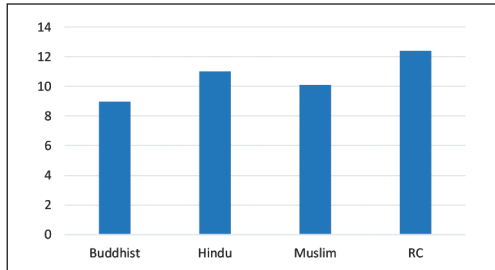
Panel B: Of school and respondent
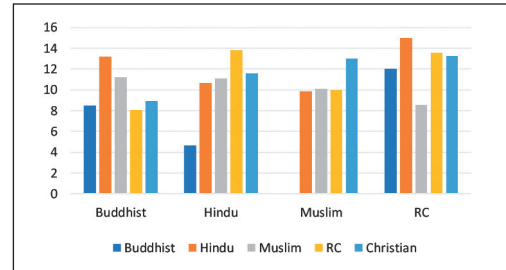
Overall, the lowest score is reported from Buddhist respondents who have attended Hindu schools. However, it has to be noted that only five respondents fall into this category, and therefore the information should be interpreted with caution. Looking at Buddhist and Roman Catholic schools which are the most attended types of schools, the differences in perception index scores are telling. Buddhists who have attended Roman Catholic schools have scored almost 50 per cent more than Buddhists who have attended Buddhist schools. In fact, the coexistence index among Buddhists and Hindus is highest where they have attended Roman Catholic schools. Roman Catholics themselves and Other Christians also score higher if they have attended Roman Catholic schools, compared to Buddhist schools.

However, in contrast, Muslims who have attended Buddhist schools are likely to score higher on the coexistence index, compared to Muslims who have attended Roman Catholic Schools. Also, interestingly, the coexistence score among Muslim is highest where they have attended Hindu schools. This is also true for Roman Catholics.

> Respondents who have attended Buddhist schools score the lowest in the coexistence index.

Now we look at the childhood friendships of respondents. The first column in Figure 55 below shows the share of respondents who have had childhood friends from other religions, by the religious identity of the school. The second column shows the share of respondents who have had friends from other religions, by the religious identity of the respondent. Using either characterization, the majority of

respondents have had friends from other religions, although this share is highest among Roman Catholics and Other Christians. The lowest is among Muslims. By the school's religious identity, less respondents who have attended Muslim schools seem to have had friends from other religious backgrounds, compared to those who have attended non-Muslim schools. By the respondent's own identity, this share is lowest among Buddhists. In other words, Buddhists have had less friends from other religions growing up, compared to non-Buddhists in the sample.

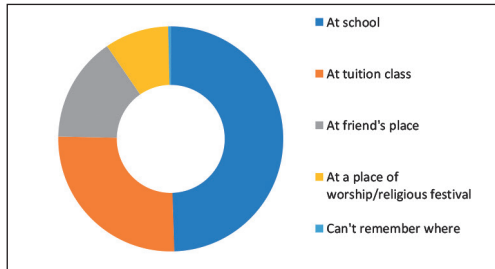*Figure 55: Share of respondents with friends from other religions when schooling*
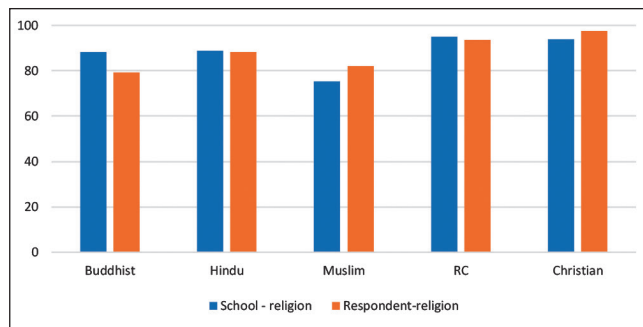
To understand where such childhood friendships might have been formed, we turn to Panel A of Figure 56 below. Clearly, schools are the most common contexts in which the childhood friendships have been formed, followed by tuition classes. Thus, educational spaces are an important environment in which respondents have made friendships during their young age. Since schools dominate the spaces of friendship formation, in Panel B, we look at the friendships formed in school; more specifically, the share of respondents from each religion who have made friends with someone outside their own religion. Most of the respondents from all religions have formed inter-religious friendships at school, although this share is lowest among Buddhists. Compared to 72 per cent of Buddhists, over 90 per cent of Roman Catholics and Other Christians have formed friendships with those outside their religion in school.

Figure 56: Context in which childhood friendships are formed and the share of respondents for friendships formed at school, by religion

Panel A: context of friendship

Panel B: share of respondents, school friendship
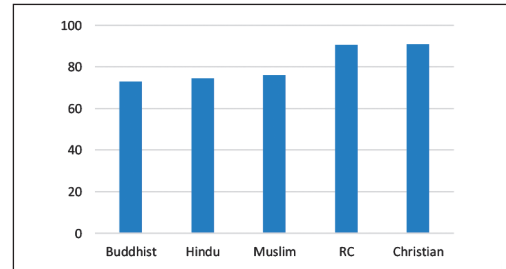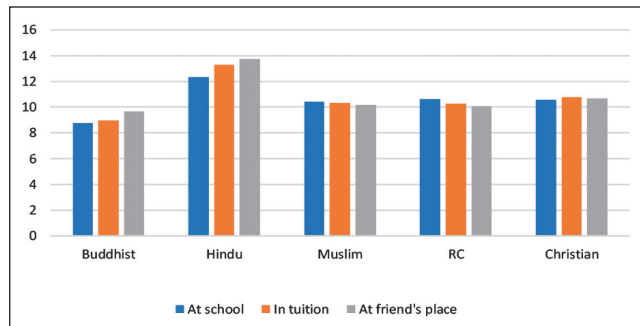

Figure 57: Coexistence index by where friendship was formed


In Figure 57 above, we look at the score of the coexistence index depending on where respondents have formed friendships with children from religions other than their own, when they were young. We only look at school, tuition class, and friends' household because the number of observations are too small for disaggregated analysis for the remaining two categories (Panel A of Figure 56 above).

The coexistence index rises monotonically from school to friend's place among Buddhists and Hindus. In other words, respondents have scored higher where friendships have been formed at a friend's place as opposed to in school or tuition class. The reverse is true among Muslims and Roman Catholics, although the differences in the indices are more subtle. Among Non-Roman Catholic Christians the score of the index is rather indifferent to where friendships are formed. Recall that the coexistence score associated with attending a Buddhist school is the lowest among all types of schools. In that context, it then stands to

reason that Buddhists score discernably more on the coexistence index where friendships have been formed outside school. Nonetheless, they still score lowest across all categories for all groups of respondents.

A learning environment opens up space for exposing young children into religions and cultures of others not only through their peers, but also through their educators. It makes sense to assume that teachers can have an impact on shaping a young child's perception towards 'the other'. Thus, we have incorporated a question which seeks to understand whether the respondent has had the opportunity to learn from a teacher from a faith different to his/her own at school. The responses are graphed in Figure 58 below. Over 90 per cent of Roman Catholics and Other Christians, over 80 per cent of Muslims, and over three-fourths of Hindus have had this opportunity. In contrast, only about a third of Buddhists recall that they have had the opportunity to learn from a teacher of another religion.

*Figure 58: Share of respondents who recall having learnt from a teacher of another religion*
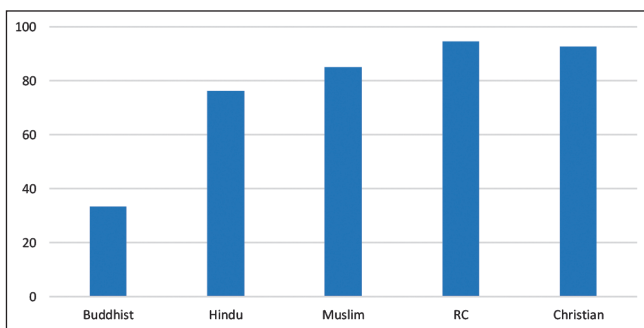
Figure 59: Coexistence index by whether respondent has learned or not from a teacher of another religion
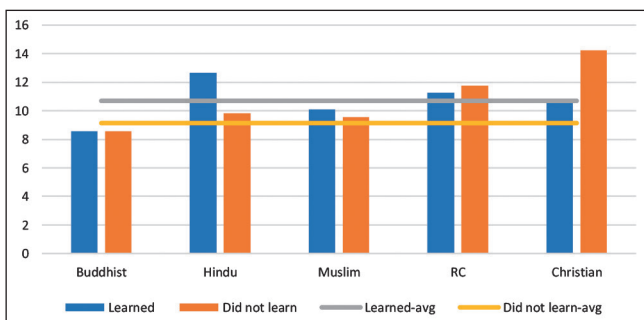
In Figure 59, we look at the possible associations between the coexistence index, and whether a respondent learnt or did not learn from a teacher from a religion different to their own. Buddhists score lower among all groups for both categories, although those who have learnt from a non-Buddhist teacher score marginally higher than those who have not. This pattern also holds for Muslims and Hindus, and the difference is most pronounced among the latter. Among Roman Catholics and Other Christians, the coexistence index is higher where respondents have not learned from a teacher from another religion, and as to why this could be so, is puzzling.

Figure 60: Share of respondents who had opportunity to learn about other cultures, by respondent's religion
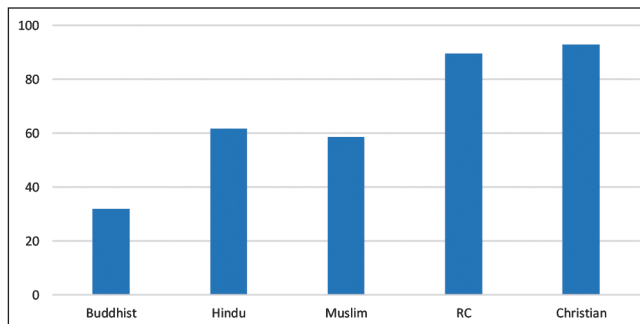
Figure 61: Share of respondents who had opportunity to learn about other cultures, by the school's religious identity
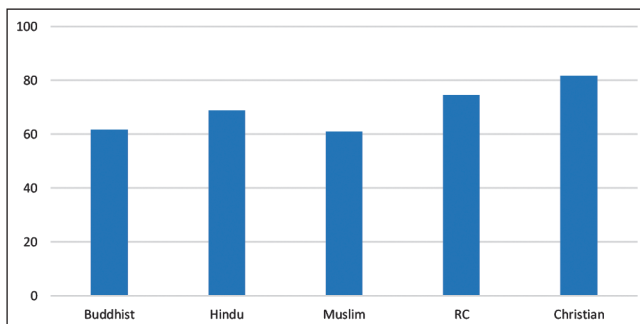

Next, we turn to the respondents' exposure to other religious and cultural practices. Note that in Figure 60, we look at the share of respondents based on respondent's own religion, irrespective of the religious identity of the school. In Figure 61, we measure the share of respondents based on only on the religious identity of

the school the respondents attended. Either way, Buddhists and Muslims are the least likely to have experienced other cultures in school. Respondent who have attended Muslim and Buddhist schools have had the lowest exposure to other religions. On the other hand, irrespective where respondents have gone to school, less than a third of Buddhists have experienced other cultures in school, compared to over 50 per cent of respondents in all other faiths. The highest share again is reported among Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics.

Figure 62 which presents the coexistence index values by groups that experienced other cultures at school and that did not, shows mixed patterns. One would expect a greater exposure to other cultures would make individuals more receptive of 'the other'. This assumption is validated for the sample as a whole as well as for the sub-groups of Buddhists and Hindus, although the difference is more pronounced among Hindus. Among Muslims, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians, the score is higher among individuals who have not had the opportunity to experience other cultures at school. Nevertheless, their coexistence scores are above average for both categories.

Figure 62: Coexistence index by whether respondents had exposure to other religions in school or not
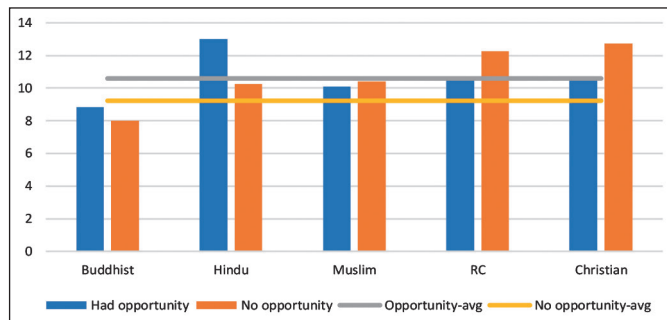
> Buddhist respondents who have had the opportunity to learn about other religions in school score higher on the coexistence index compared to those who have not had such an opportunity.

Community

In this section, we look at the respondents' locality and its possible associations with their perceptions of the other. We begin by looking at how long respondents

have been living in the area of their residence. Most respondents have been living in their localities for a long time. Over half of the Roman Catholic and Hindu respondents have been living in the same community since birth and well over four-fifths of respondents from all religions have been living there for over five years. Hindu respondents have moved the least over the last three years, compared to non-Hindu respondents. Only 5 per cent of them have been living in their residence at the time of data collection for less than 3 years.

Next, in terms of the religious composition of the residents in the Grama Niladhari (GN) division (based on respondents' own guess/estimation), most respondents live in areas that are predominantly Buddhist (Figure 64). Nearly equal shares of respondents live in Hindu and Muslim areas. More respondents live in Roman Catholic areas than in Other Christian areas, while 7 per cent of the respondents are not aware the religious majority in their GN division.

Figure 63: Share of respondents by duration of residence in community
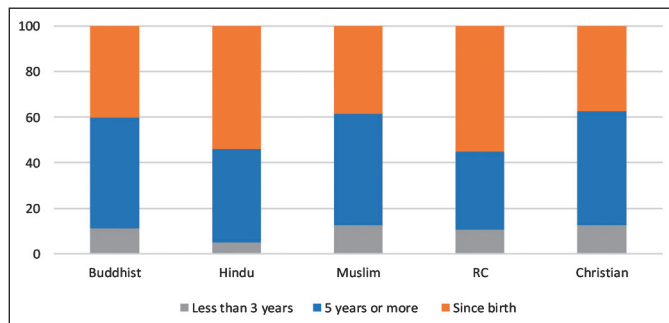
Figure 64: Share of respondents by predominant religion of GN division
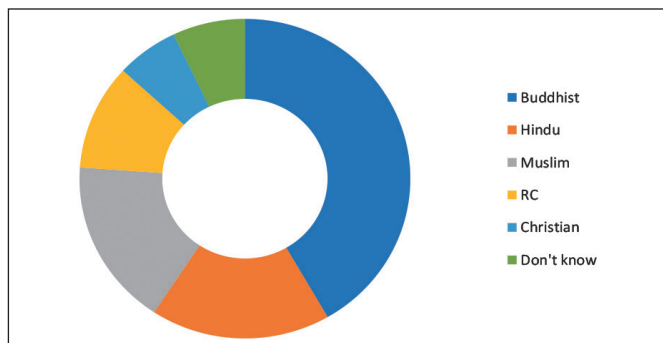
To understand any possible association between the religious composition of the respondents' area of residence and the coexistence index, we look at the overall

perception index depending on the religious majority of the area, as well as the perception index disaggregated both by the religious identity of the area as well as the respondent. The results are presented in Figure 65.

As Panel A below shows, respondents score lowest in the coexistence index if they live in a Buddhist-majority area. The second lowest score is reported among respondents living in Muslim-majority areas, closely followed by those living in Hindu-majority areas. The index is higher among respondents living in Roman Catholic or Other Christian majority areas, although the score is much higher for the former.

Panel B shows patterns in the coexistence index that are telling. Firstly, the coexistence score is lowest among Buddhists living in Buddhist-majority GN divisions. Secondly, their coexistence score is much higher if they live in non-Buddhist majority areas (although none are living in Roman Catholic-majority areas). This pattern also holds true in the case of Hindu respondents. They score the least in the coexistence index when they live in their own areas, and score higher if resident in non-Hindu areas. This pattern does not necessarily hold for Muslims, but interestingly, they score higher in the coexistence index if they live in Buddhist-majority or Non-Roman Catholic Christian-majority areas as opposed to their own areas. But their score is lower if resident in Roman Catholic-majority areas. Roman Catholics and Other Christians on the other hand defy these patterns. They score higher in the coexistence index if they live in their own areas, and less in non-Roman Catholic and non-Christian areas. The scores are lowest if they reside in Buddhist-majority areas.

Figure 65: Coexistence index by area of residence, and area of residence by respondents' religion

Panel A: By area of residence
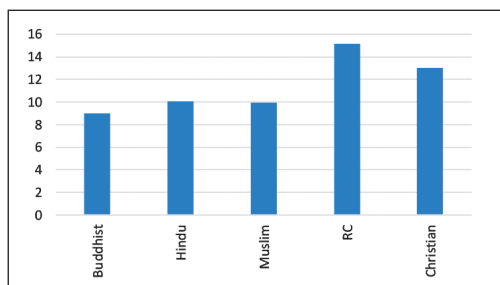
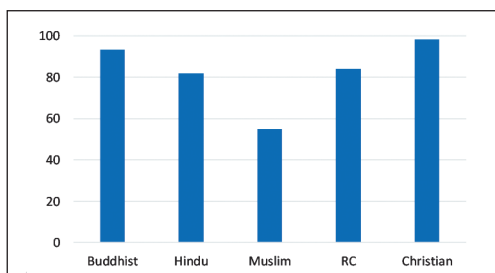*Panel B: By area of residence and respondent's religion*
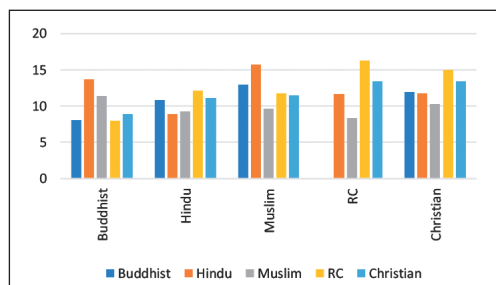
Residing in a Buddhist area is associated with a low coexistence index, and in a Roman Catholic or Christian area, with a higher index value. Buddhists living in non-Buddhist areas score higher on the coexistence index, compared to Buddhists living in Buddhist communities. Muslims living in Buddhist communities have the highest coexistence index among Muslims living in all areas.

Figure 66 and 67 present features of coexistence in the respondents' community to see if they can be useful in understanding the coexistence scores of each group. Panel A shows the share of respondents who have taken part in collective celebrations in their villages/lane, by the religious identity of the village/lane. For example, nearly all of the respondents living in Non-Roman Catholic Christian villages/lanes have participated in a communal celebration of religious events, while only a little over half of the respondents living in Muslim neighbourhoods have done so. Clearly, non-Muslim communal celebrations are more common than Muslim celebrations.

Panel B shows the percentage of respondents who celebrate events of a religion that is not followed by the majority of the residents in that community. The most celebrated are Buddhist festivals by non-Buddhists. The least celebrated are Muslim religious events by non-Muslims. Hindu religious events are celebrated slightly more than Non-Roman Catholic Christian and Roman Catholic religious events. Recall that Buddhists tend to score higher on the coexistence index if they live in non-Buddhist areas. Greater community engagement with non-Buddhists in celebrations such as these may partly explain this higher coexistence score among such Buddhist respondents.

Figure 66: Share of respondents that celebrate religious events by the religion of the lane

Panel A: Lane's dominant religion   *Panel B: Lane's non-dominant religion*
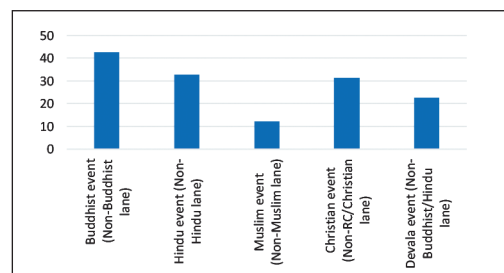
Next, we move on to the respondents' participation in community groups in their areas of residence. These include youth groups, friendship groups, religious discussion groups etc. About 71 per cent of the respondents are aware of such groups in their communities, but only about 60 per cent of the respondents are actually part of such groups. Over half of Buddhist respondents, a little below a half of Muslim respondents, and about two-fifths of Roman Catholic and Other Christian respondents are involved in these community groups.

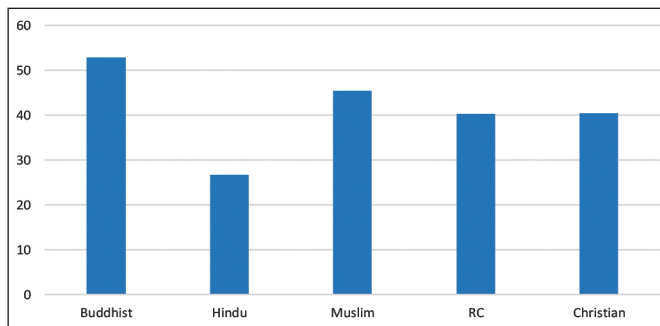*Figure 67: Share of respondents that participate in community groups*

Figure 68 below plots the coexistence index against respondents' participation in community groups. The scores are mixed; where respondents are members, the coexistence score is higher for Hindus and Muslims, and the reverse is true for others. Overall, those who do not participate in such societies and groups score higher in the coexistence index, although the difference is rather small between the two groups. A wider-than-average difference is reported only among Muslim respondents. Furthermore, among all categories, the coexistence index is lowest among Muslim respondents who participate in community groups in their area.

Figure 68: Coexistence index by respondents' participation in community groups
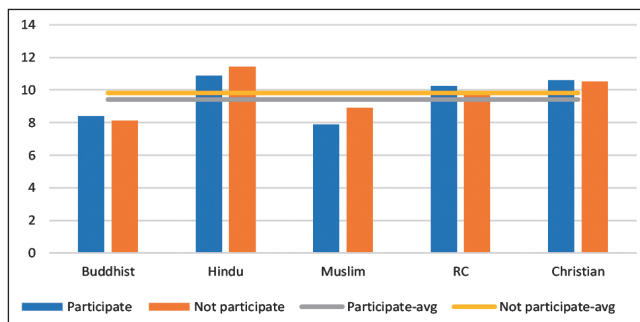
Next we move onto the respondents' friend portfolio (Recall that the preceding discussion on friends focused exclusively on friends during school days). Overall, as seen in Panel A of Figure 69 below, a large majority of respondents have friends from childhood or from the current workplace. About a fifth of respondents have friends from school. Neighbourhood friends also make up a little below a fifth.

Figure 69: Share of respondents by the origin of friendships

*Panel A: Overall*
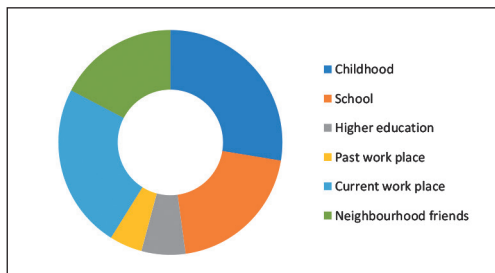
Panel B: By respondents' religion
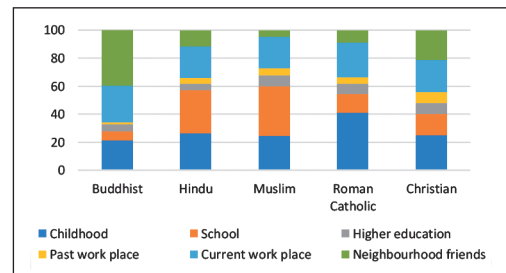
In Panel B, where this information is disaggregated by respondents' religion, some deviations from the sample average can be seen. Buddhists are most likely to have neighbourhood friends, while childhood friends make up the largest share for Roman Catholics. More Muslim and Hindu respondents are likely to have friends from school compared to Non-Roman Catholic Christians, Roman Catholics, or Buddhists. All respondents have friendships formed at the current workplace, although this share is highest among Buddhists. Non-Roman Catholic Christians have the highest share of friends from past workplaces, although this share is fairly insignificant for respondents of all religious backgrounds. This is also the case with friends from higher education institutions. Childhood and school years are an important period in the formation of friendships across all groups, excluding Buddhists. However, this is true for Buddhists too if neighbourhood friendships have been formed during their younger years.

An important follow-up inquiry is the religious orientation of these friends. Panels A and B in Figure 70 below presents this information. In the sample as a whole (Panel A), the majority of the respondents' friends are Buddhists, followed by Hindus, Muslims and Roman Catholics respectively. A small percentage of respondents do not know the religious background of their friends. In Panel B, this information is presented by the respondents' own religion. The majority of friends are from the respondents' own religions, except among Non-Roman

Catholic Christians, who have more Buddhist friends than friends from their own faith. Buddhists have the lowest religious diversity of friends, and nearly all their friends are Buddhist. The diversity is a little more pronounced among both Hindus and Muslims. Roman Catholics have a sizeable share of Buddhist friends, outside friends of their own faith. Non-Muslim respondents tend to have little to no Muslim friends, while Muslims have Buddhist, Hindu, and a few Roman Catholic friends. Among those who do not know the religious background of their friends, the majority are Muslims.

Figure 70: Share of respondents by friends' religion

Panel A: Overall
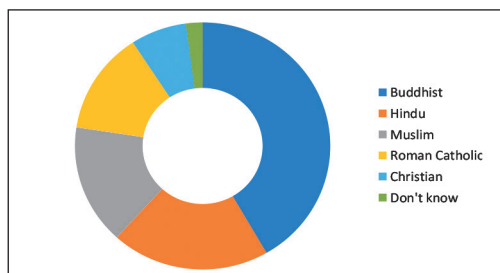
Panel B: By respondents' religion
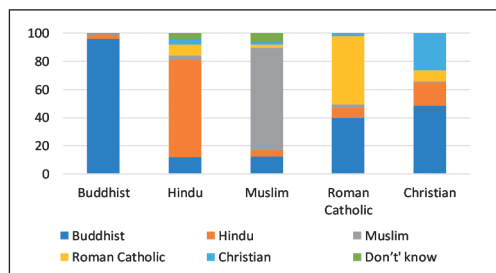
Arguably, peers and friends can have an important effect on how respondents form their own perceptions towards 'the other'. To explore this, we included one question with several statements in relation to the April 2019 Eastern attacks – some secular and some extreme. We asked our respondents to choose to what extent they think their friends would agree with these statements. The percentage share of respondents who strongly agree or agree with each of the statements is summarized in Figure 71.

Figure 71: Share of friends who the respondent believes agrees or strongly agrees with each statement
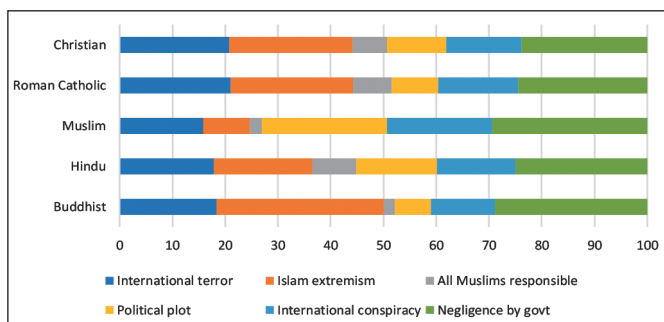
In the sample as a whole, the most commonly viewed perception in relation to the Easter attacks is that it was a result of the negligence of the government. This holds true also when disaggregated by respondents' religion, except among Buddhists, where the most common perception of friends (according to the respondents) is that the event was a product of Islamic extremism. Interestingly however, less friends of Buddhists compared to those of Muslims agree with the extreme idea that all Muslims are responsible for the attack. This extreme view is shared more strongly among Hindus, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians. Among those whose friends believe the attack was part of a political plot, the majority are Muslims. Fewer friends of Buddhists compared to non-Buddhists believe the attack to be part of an international conspiracy. Despite the variation in views, it must be noted that only a small percentage of respondents believe that their friends hold on to sweeping generalizations such as that all Muslims are responsible for attacks.

Figure 72: Coexistence index by friends' religion

Panel A: Own religion
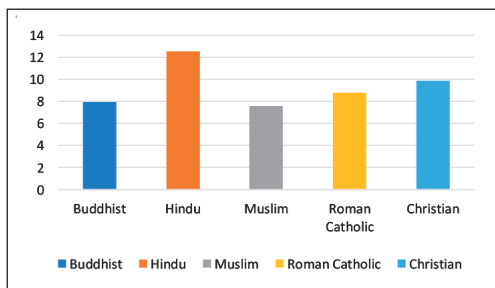
Panel B: Other religions
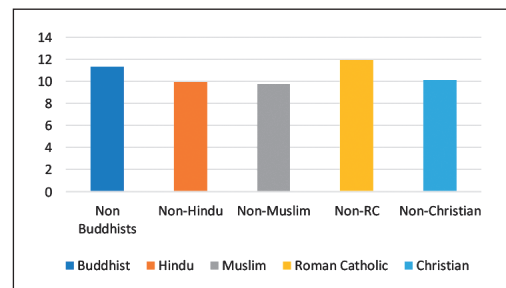
Next, we turn to the coexistence index in relation to the religious identity of the majority of friends of the respondents, presented in Figure 72 above. In Panel A, we have graphed the coexistence index in relation to respondents' friends from their own religions, and in Panel B, in relation to friends from other religions. The results are telling. Overall, the coexistence index is higher across all respondents (except for Hindus) in Panel B, which plots friends from different faiths. The improvement in the index from Panel A (mono-religious) to Panel B (multi-religious) is smaller for Non-Roman Catholic Christians compared to the Buddhist, Muslim, and Roman Catholic groups. The jump in the index from homogenous to heterogenous groups of friends is highest among Buddhists. In both cohorts, Muslim respondents score the lowest in the coexistence index.

> Having friends from religions different to one's own is by and large associated with a higher coexistence index score.

Exposure to Media

The growth and expansion in media, especially with the proliferation of social media platforms, has had its many perks, but has also given a virtual space in which to practice hate speech, violence, and cyber bullying, from the safety of one's own private desks. Additionally, it is also used as a space to spread rumours and gossip with little to no social responsibility. This is also the case in Sri Lanka. In fact, the shutting down of social media was viewed as one essential step in controlling some of the ethno-religious eruptions in the very recent past, by the government at the time. In this context, we believe it is important to understand the kind of exposure the respondents in our sample have to traditional media as well as the more novel social media outlets – both as an audience as well as active participants. To begin with, we measure the number of media outlets a respondent uses for news and information on a daily basis.

Panel A in Figure 73 shows the average share of respondents that uses each media outlet, and in Panel B we present the same information by age group. The mean age of the group is approximately 39 and we use it to break the sample into two groups – aged 39 or less and aged over 39. As seen in Panel A below, by and large the conventional media outlets such as television and radio dominate media outlets. Twitter appears to be the least used platform. Older respondents listen to the radio and read the newspaper more than the younger group (Panel B). The more visual media seem to appeal to the younger group. They are also much more likely to use electronic media platforms, although even amongst them, the television is the number one source of news. Of the less conventional modes, Facebook and WhatsApp, followed by YouTube, are more dominant over the others that have been enumerated.

Figure 73: Use of media

Panel A: Overall
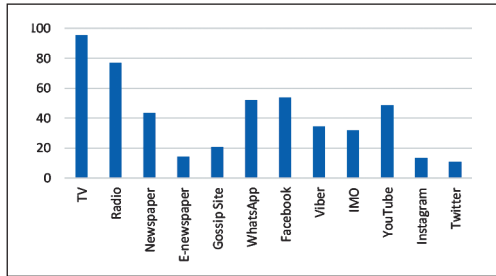
*Panel B: Age 39 or less and above 39*
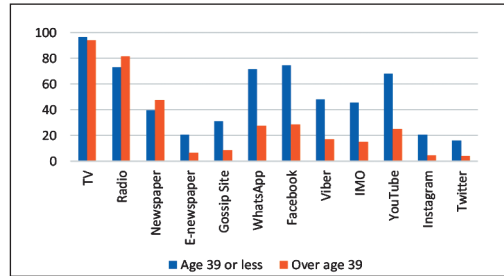
Moving onto the use of media by the religious orientation of respondents, we present the information separately for traditional methods (TV, radio, and newspaper) and for more modern ones. As Panel A (Figure 74) shows, there are no major differences in the usage patterns of traditional media. More respondents prefer television and radio respectively, over newspapers. However, Hindu respondents prefer newspapers the least compared to other groups, while, radio seems to be less frequently used among Roman Catholics compared to other groups. More Roman Catholics use newspapers compared to all other groups. However, they seem to prefer the television a lot more than both the radio and the newspaper compared to other groups.

Figure 74: Use of media by respondents' religion

*Panel A: Traditional*
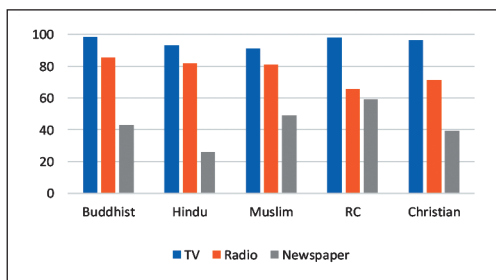
Panel B: Modern
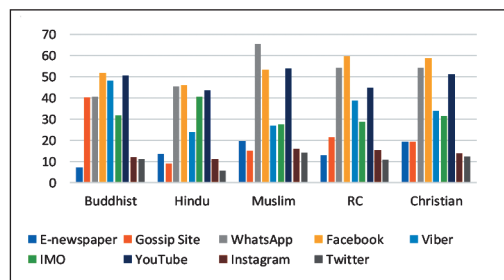
Political factors

Of the modern and technology driven media platforms, E-newspapers, Twitter, and Instagram appear to be the least used across all religious groups. Gossip sites and Viber are particularly popular among Buddhists, and IMO is popular among

Hindus. WhatsApp is the most widely used among Muslims. In general, both Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube are widely popular across all ethnic groups.

We also have collected information on the amount of time respondents spend on these media platforms on a daily basis. On average, a person spends about 3 hours and 27 minutes on media and social media; an individual older than 39 years of age spends about 3 hours on media platforms while those aged 39 or less spend about 3 hours and 48 minutes on them. Figure 75 below presents the findings by the respondents' religion. As shown in Panel A, Buddhists spend the least amount of time on media, while Muslims spend the most. Looking at the two age groups in Panel B, the greater usage of media among Muslims is driven by younger Muslim respondents compared to the older cohort. In fact, their usage is generally on par with non-Muslims of the same age cohort. But among the younger group, Muslim respondents tend to be spending the most amount of time on social media, on average. The time spent on media is lowest for both age groups among Buddhists.

*Figure 75: Average time spent on media platforms daily*

Panel A: Overall
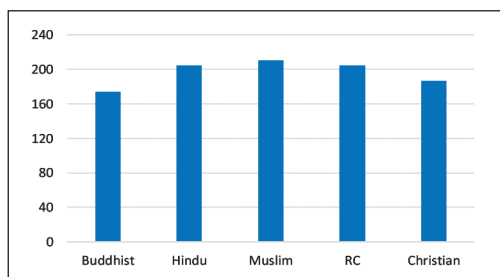
Panel B: Age 39 or less and above 39
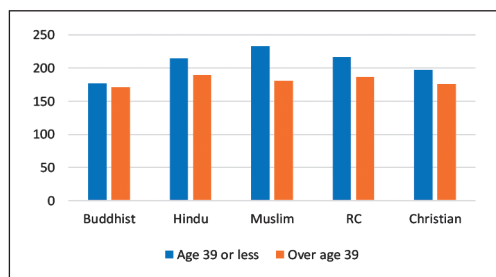
In the light of this information, we now turn to the association between the coexistence index and the usage of social media. We have chosen newspapers and radio from the conventional media because the number of observations is small for people who do not use television. We choose Facebook and WhatsApp amongst the non-conventional media platforms. The results are presented in Figures 76 and 77.

Figure 76: Coexistence index by conventional media use

Panel A: Newspaper
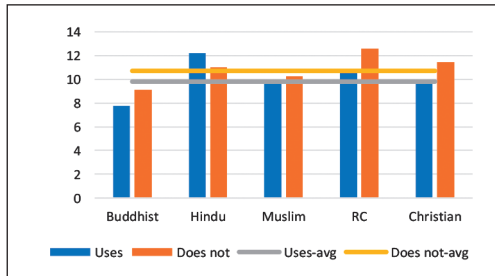
Panel B: Radio
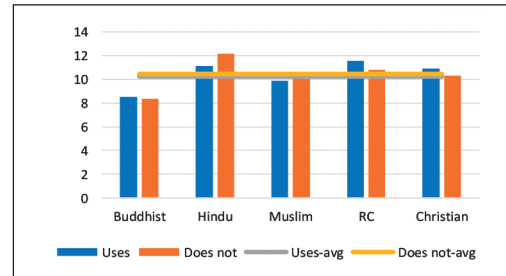
Looking at the sample averages, those who do not use newspapers or radio tend to score higher on the coexistence index, although the difference is negligible in relation to radio. It is also difficult to glean any expressive patterns. All respondents except Hindus who do not read newspapers score higher on the coexistence score, although the difference is less pronounced among Muslims. The results are more mixed in Panel B. The scores are higher among those who do not listen to the radio among Hindu and Muslim respondents, and the reverse is true for Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians. In both situations, the lowest score belongs to Buddhists.

Again, although in general those who do not use these platforms score higher on the coexistence index compared to those who do, the difference is minute (Figure 77). Facebook users tend to score more on the coexistence index across all groups except Hindus for whom the reverse is true. On the other hand, Buddhists, Roman Catholics, and Other Christians score higher on the coexistence index if they use WhatsApp, while Hindus and Muslims score higher if they do not.

Figure 77: Coexistence index by social media use

Panel A: Facebook
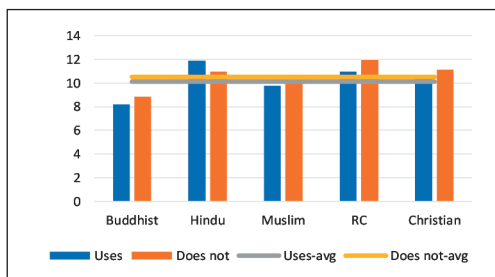
Panel B: WhatsApp
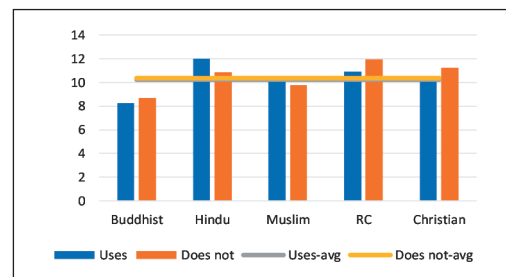
Next, we look at the coexistence index scores in relation to the amount of time respondents spend on social media. As seen in Panel A of Figure 78 below, there is a weak negative relationship between the time spent on media and the coexistence index. Those who spend less than 90 minutes a day score slightly over both other groups. However, once disaggregated by the religious groups, only the Hindu, Muslim, and Non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents conform to this trend. The pattern is mixed among Buddhists, while the coexistence score is positively associated with the time spent on media for Roman Catholics.

Figure 78: Coexistence index by time spent on media

Panel A: Overall
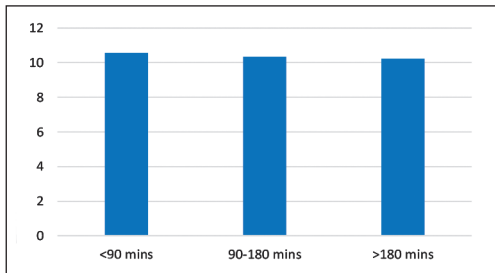
Panel B: By religion
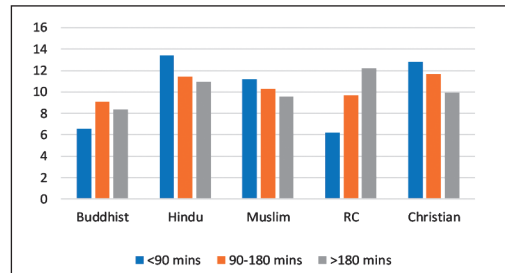
Now we move on to the social media consumption among the respondents and its possible association with the coexistence index. Two-thirds of respondents aged 39 or less consider themselves to be active on social media. In contrast, only about a fourth of respondents over the age of 39 are active social media users. When disaggregated by the religion of respondents, close to four-fifths of Buddhists in the younger age group consider themselves to be active social media users. The lowest share in this category is recorded among Hindu respondents. In the older age group, Hindus and Buddhists have the lowest shares of active social media users, while the highest is recorded among Muslims. A sizeable share of Roman Catholics and Hindus from the older age cohort (relative to Buddhists and Hindus) is also active on social media.
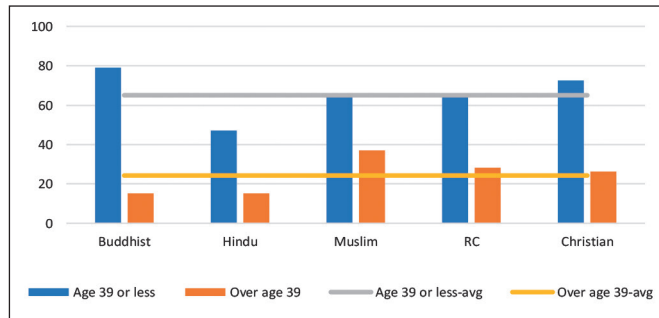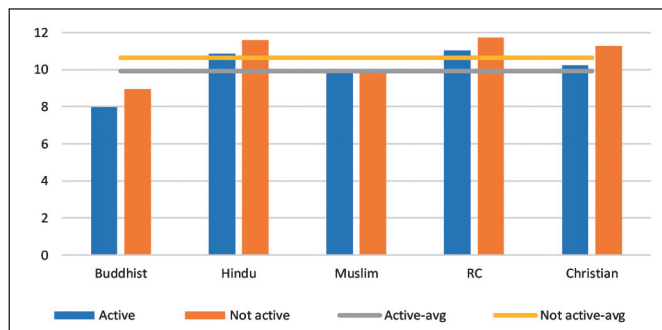
Figure 79: Activity on social media

Figure 80: Coexistence index by activity on social media

The coexistence index's changes are uniform across all groups except among Muslims in relation to whether a respondent is active on social media or not. Among Muslims, the score is broadly the same irrespective of whether one is active or not on social media. As a whole, the coexistence index is higher for those who do not actively use social media.

By and large, respondents that are not active on social media tend to score higher on the coexistence index.

Next we turn to the respondents' consumption of international news. Only a little less than a fifth of the sample watches or reads international news. Separated by the religion of respondents, many of the consumers of international news are Muslim, Non-Roman Catholic Christian, and Roman Catholic. The smallest share of respondents that watch international news is reported from among Buddhists.

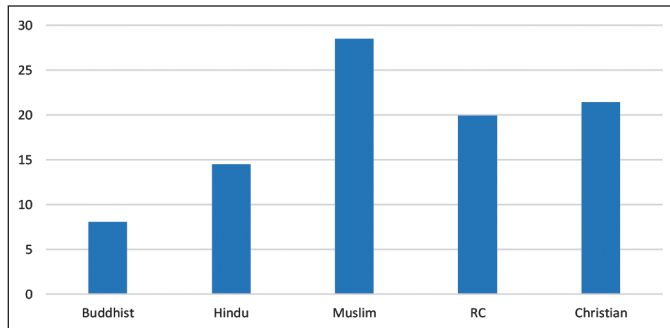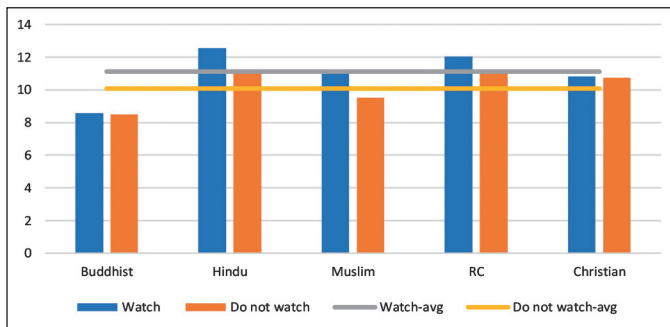*Figure 81: Share of respondents who watch international news*

Figure 82: Coexistence index by whether respondent watches international news or not

The pattern of a higher score for those who watch news is consistent across all groups, even though the differences in the index values is rather muted among Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Buddhists. The difference is widest among Muslims, closely followed by Hindus. Overall the coexistence index is highest among Hindu respondents who watch international news, and lowest among Buddhists who do not watch international news.

Political views

The impact of the political situation of the country on ethno-religious coexistence cannot be ignored in an effort to unpack people's willingness to coexist. This is because a political system influences issues such as nepotism, corruption, impunity, corruption, and efficiency of the institutional framework which in turn affects different people in different ways. However, given the ethical considerations of the topic, we resorted to exploring people's beliefs about the

improvement or deterioration in different public domains without making any reference to political parties. Figure 73 presents the results for the sample as a whole, and Figure 74, by religion.

Figure 83: Beliefs if situation has improved or worsened
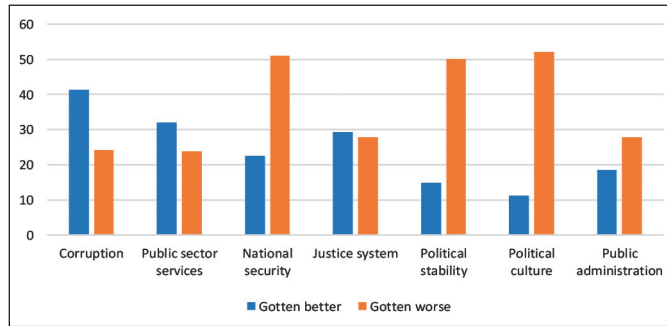
Overall, more respondents believe that corruption has lessened and that public sector services have improved. The same is true for the justice system although a sizeable share also considers it has worsened. A large majority of respondents believe that the political culture, national security, and political stability have worsened. Moreover, there are more people who believe that the public administration has worsened, compared to those who believe it has gotten better.

Figure 84: Beliefs if situation has improved or worsened, by religion
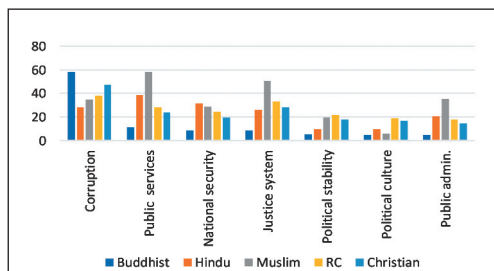
Panel A: Improved   *Panel B: Worsened*
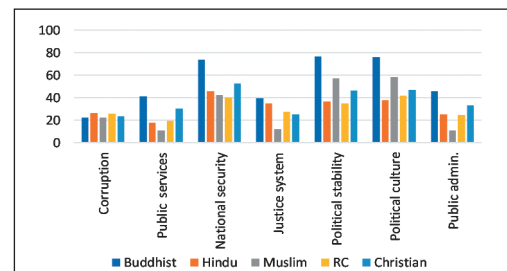
Upon disaggregation of this information by the respondents' religion in Figure 84, broadly, the same trends emerge. More Buddhists compared to non-Buddhists believe that corruption has gotten better, while more Muslims compared to non-Muslims believe that public services have improved. Very few Buddhists compared to other groups believe that the national security, the

justice system, the political stability and culture or the public administration have improved. Muslims have a more upbeat view on the justice system and public services. Relatively more Roman Catholics and Other Christians also believe that corruption, pubic services, and the justice system has improved. A large share of Buddhists and Muslims agree that the political culture and stability have worsened.

Next, we look at a possible association between these perceptions and the coexistence index. In Panel A, with reference to corruption, a consistent pattern can be discerned. A higher coexistence index value is associated with neutral perceptions. However, no such pattern can be assembled from the data in Panel B with reference to the justice system.

Figure 85: Coexistence index by respondents' view on corruption and justice system in the country

Panel A: Corruption
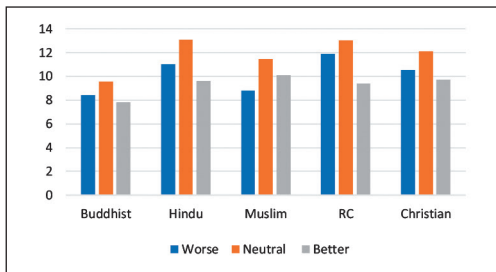
Panel B: Justice system
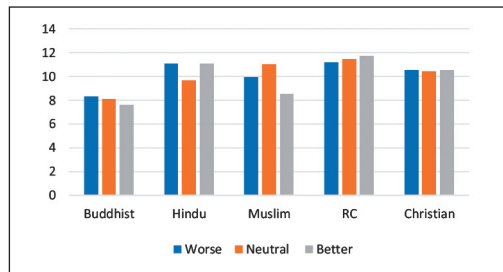
Ethno-religiously charged incidents

The recent years were marked with numerous ethno-religiously charged upheavals both locally and internationally. It is reasonable to assume that such incidents play an important role in shaping people's perceptions of 'the other'. As most respondents use media for a significant portion of the day, it is important to understand how much awareness and recollection they have of these incidents of violence in the recent past, both at home and internationally.

Figure 86: Share of respondents aware of ethno-religious upheavals

Panel A: Local
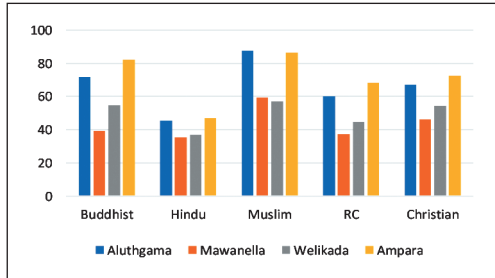
Panel B: International
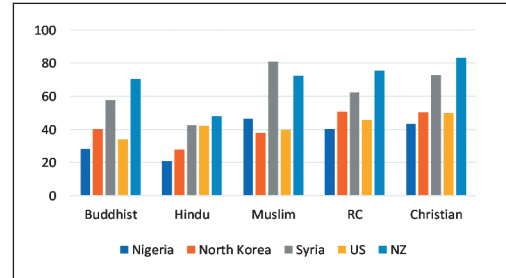
Panel A of Figure 86 above presents the findings for local incidents, and Panel B for international incidents. By and large, there is a greater awareness of what has happened in the country than outside. Consistently more respondents of all ethnicities are aware of the Aluthgama[9] and Ampara[10] incidents compared to tensions in Mawanella[11] or the prison riots in Welikada[12], possibly because the incidents in Aluthgama and Ampara were quite recent. The Muslim respondents are the most aware of these incidents across all groups. The lowest awareness level is reported among the Hindu respondents.

In the international scenario, most known tensions are the war in Syria, Iraq, and the Christchurch attack in New Zealand. Less Hindus and Buddhists are aware of the bombings in Nigeria. By and large, the awareness levels of international incidents are higher among Roman Catholics, Other Christians, and Muslims compared to Buddhists and Hindus, possibly because of their greater likelihood to watch international news.

Moving on to how the recollection or awareness of these incidents are associated with the perceptions of people, we have chosen two widely-known events each from the local and international contexts. Figures 87 and 88 below presents the information.

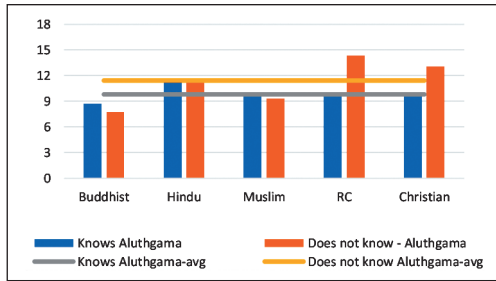9   Anti-Muslim riots that took place in June, 2014
10   Anti-Muslim riots that took place in February, 2018
11   Anti-Muslim riots that took place in May, 2001
12   That took place on 9 November 2012

Figure 87: Coexistence index by awareness of local incidents of violence

Panel A: Aluthgama

Panel B: Ampara
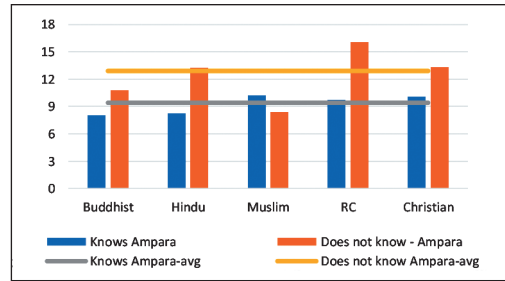
Figure 88: Coexistence index by awareness of international incidents of violence

Panel A: Syria
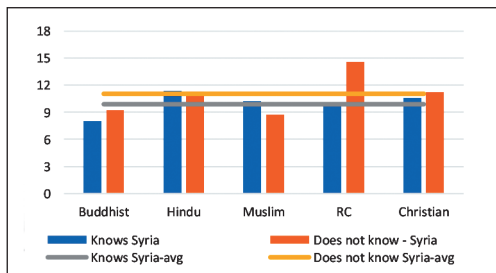
Panel B: New Zealand
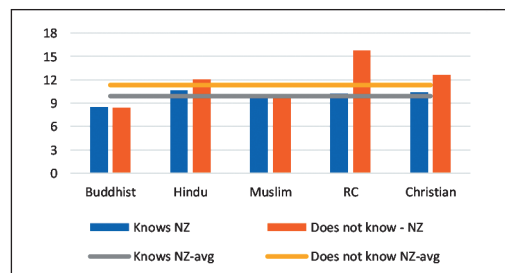
In the sample as a whole, irrespective of whether the incident of violence took place in Sri Lanka or elsewhere, the perception index is higher among people who are unaware of the incident. Looking at different sub-groups in the sample, by and large this trend holds true for all but Muslim (and to some extent Buddhist) respondents. The overall pattern of a higher score among those ignorant of acts of violence is consistent and robust for Roman Catholics and Other Christians, although the gap is more pronounced among the former. Among Muslims, clearly, the coexistence score is lower among those who are aware about the incidents, compared to those who are not. The trends among Buddhists are not particularly meaningful.

In general, respondents who are not aware of incidents of racial and religious violence score higher on the coexistence index. However, these patterns fail to hold across all five groups. Muslims score more if they are aware of the incidents, while Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics score more if they are unaware of such incidents.

84

Understandings about Human Rights

Finally, we look at people's own interpretation of the concept of human rights in order to understand how it may reflect on their willingness to coexist with 'the other'. We have enumerated a range of positive and negative views on the concept of human rights, so that the respondents can choose with which they identify the idea. Figure 89 presents the picture, by respondents' religion.

Figure 89: Share of respondents who agree with different interpretations of Human Rights
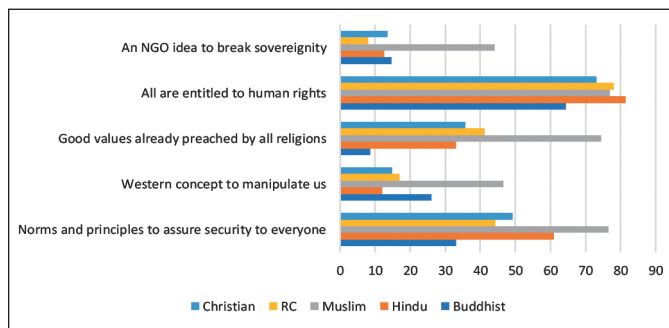
Overall, most respondents agree that all human beings are entitled to human rights. The least popular notion of human rights is that it is an NGO concept to break a country's sovereignty, although a significant share of Muslim respondents compared to non-Muslims uphold that view. Relatively less also identify it as a western concept used to manipulate countries like Sri Lanka, although again more Muslims seem to hold that view compared to non-Muslims. More Buddhists, compared to Hindu, Roman Catholic, and Other Christian respondents also believe human rights as a western manipulative concept. A large majority of Muslims believe human rights embody the good teachings of all religions, while the share of Buddhists who think so is lower compared to all other groups. This is also true in relation to the idea that human rights are a set of norms and principles to assure everyone's safety. Less Buddhists compared to all other groups, also think that human rights are everyone's rights.

The coexistence index in relation to these different views of human rights shows that overall, those who have more positive ideas of human rights have a higher score on the coexistence index, than those who have more a negative

understanding of human rights (Panel A of Figure 90). The score is lowest among people who consider human rights to be a western concept that is used to manipulate other countries. Moving along to the scores by respondents' religion, we notice that these patterns are less straightforward. The coexistence index among Non-Roman Catholic Christians concur with the overall trend, while those of Roman Catholics also follow a similar pattern although in their case the score is lower if respondents believe human rights to be an NGO idea than a manipulative concept used by Western countries. The coexistence score is highest among Hindus in all scenarios, although as with the overall situation, it is highest when human rights are viewed as good values. No notable changes in the index can be seen among Muslims across all four views of human rights. Among Buddhists the score is highest where the view is that human rights are principles to protect everyone, and lowest when it is seen as an NGO idea. In fact, Buddhist who view human rights as an NGO concept score lowest across all groups and all interpretations of human rights.

Figure 90: Coexistence index by view of Human Rights

Panel A: Overall
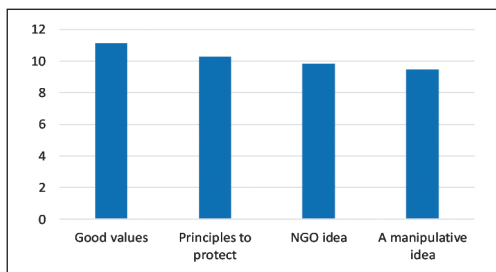
Panel B: By religion
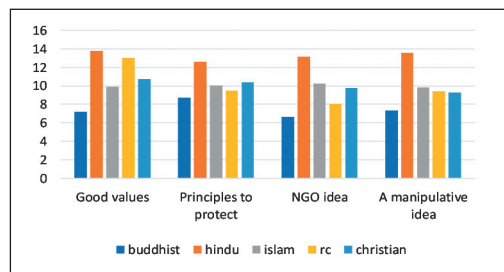
Conclusions

The end of the armed-conflict in Sri Lanka did not bring to an end its latent ethno-religious tensions. Instead, from time to time, there have been outbursts of ethno-religious violence in Sri Lanka, conflicts between the Sinhala Buddhists and Muslims being the most notorious among them. Against this backdrop, this study was undertaken to investigate people's perceptions of, and their willingness to coexist with 'the other'. The study was also designed to understand what kind of individual, household, social and broader macro level characteristics are likely associated with different perceptions people hold of 'the other'. An index was constructed to measure the willingness to coexist, and to unpack how different variables that shape people's perceptions are associated with this index. While we understand the restrictive nature the quantitative methodology of the study used to explore a complex, nuanced, and subjective phenomenon, we think the survey brings out important empirical findings that are useful for strengthening the discourse on ethno-religious coexistence in Sri Lanka, and for the development of policy and social interventions. We also expect these findings to provide impetus for further research on the subject matter.

Evidently, the large majority of respondents in the sample are logical and rational economic agents. For most of them, day to day consumption decisions, as well as more strategic decisions (purchase of land in this situation), are predicated on reasonable and analytical considerations. Even where respondents may factor in ethnicity as a variable in their decisions, it is very possible that a logical and practical thought process precedes this consideration, rather than an oversimplified rejection of 'the other'. Another binding commonality among the respondents is how a large majority of them think positively of themselves, but do not see the others in the same light. Similarly, most of the respondents do not see in themselves the negative traits that others ascribe to them.

None of the patterns and trends discussed in the preceding sections hold consistently for all five groups of respondents. That is not to say that these inconsistent patterns are not insightful. For example, generally people with higher educational attainments score lower on the coexistence index, compared to those with primary education only. Younger groups score less than more mature groups; respondents who are less active on social media fare better on the coexistence index; respondents who have been to non-Buddhist schools

score more than the others; so do respondents with more neutral political views; respondents with friends from religions other than their own; and among respondents who live in a community in which the majority of the residents are not from their own religion.

These patterns bring out issues that are of use in different policy domains. For example, how can education and the educational institution framework be geared to promote coexistence? How can the cyber legal framework be strengthened to ensure that youth are protected from unchecked exposure to social media content? How can ethno-religious diversity be promoted in the workplace? These questions are not new; and finding answers to these questions are outside the scope of the study. However, this empirical analysis reiterates the need to addressing the structural weaknesses that fuel ethno-religious misconceptions and tensions in Sri Lanka.

The study also highlights the importance of exposure to heterogeneous social contexts in becoming sensitized to 'the others'. Clearly, Buddhists lack this opportunity the most. By virtue of being the ethno-religious majority, they have limited opportunities to interact with those outside their own cluster. Much information can be drawn from the preceding analysis to support this hypothesis. As children, they tend to attend Buddhist schools, which in turn have the least tendency to celebrate other religions. They are more likely to have Buddhist friends and relatives, learn from Buddhist teachers, and live in a Buddhist community, compared to non-Buddhists who are more likely to interact with those outside their own ethno-religious groups. Having navigated much of their life in an ethno-religiously homogeneous community, it stands to reason that Buddhists may not know much about the other. This hypothesis possibly explains at least in part why they score so low on the coexistence index, and appear to be rather rigid in their perception of 'others'.

The same reasoning may hold for many Muslim respondents who also miss out on the opportunity to mingle with 'others' due to institutionally or self-imposed seclusive practices and the values of some Muslim sects. In fact, although the tensions between Muslims and Sinhala Buddhists are the most obvious and has resulted in the most outbursts of recent violence, the analysis shows that it is not just Buddhists, but also other non-Muslims who have strained relations with Muslims. In fact, although Buddhists may have risen to notoriety because of

perceived extreme views on Muslims, the preceding analysis actually shows that Non-Roman Catholic Christians in particular and Roman Catholics also share some of the same sentiments as Buddhists in relation to Muslims. That Hindu and Muslim respondents are largely more accommodative of each other also bears witness to how familiarity may breed a greater willingness to coexist. For these two groups, the Tamil language is most likely to be a bridging factor, that may not be available to Buddhists, Non-Roman Catholic Christians, and Roman Catholics to connect with Muslims (and Hindus).

In the analysis, Hindu, Non-Roman Catholic Christian, and Roman Catholic respondents appear to be the most open to coexistence. To fully appreciate the implication of this observation, a brief analysis of the respondents' socio-economic context is important. Firstly, these respondents tend to come from different socio-economic backgrounds. By all measures we have looked at, Hindu respondents belong to the poorest households and have the lowest educational attainments, while Non-Roman Catholic Christians and Roman Catholics come from more affluent socio-economic backgrounds and have high educational qualifications. Their experiences of travel, consumption of news and information, their friends and community are also quite different from each other. Yet, by and large they all score consistently high on the coexistence index compared to Buddhists and Muslims. Granted they may consider themselves to be able to get on less well better with one community compared to another, but generally, the more secular perceptions that they seem to embody are indicative of some necessary circumstances for coexistence. Firstly, they are not a majority and, therefore (unlike Buddhists) are more likely to have to associated with others. Secondly, their religious ideologies are broadly more secular than that of Muslims (for example in relation to mobility, employment, use of media) which gives them more opportunities (than Muslims) to mix and mingle with 'others'.

Overall, this perceptions survey shows the fluidity of people's willingness to coexist, and how it varies with different factors across different ethno-religious groups; and how perceptions change from one context to another. However, the findings also point to the importance of creating opportunities for children from a young age to associate with diverse ethno-religious groups of people as a possible essential starting point in fostering and strengthening coexistence and tolerance in Sri Lanka.

Tracking Coexistence:

Understanding Perceptions of the Religious 'Other'

This study is based on an analysis of people's perceptions of the 'religious other'. The data was collected at the end of 2019 by interviewing 1,000 respondents in four multi-religious districts: Ampara, Colombo, Galle and Mannar. The sample consisted of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Roman Catholics in equal proportions.

The study generates some preliminary findings on how different communities perceive religious tolerance and coexistence. By presenting different life scenarios and talking to 1,000 men and women of different age groups from four areas reflecting the diverse religious composition in Sri Lanka, the study seeks to enhance our understanding of inter-group and intra-group relations in Sri Lanka, as the country struggles to build social harmony and religious cohesion. The study seeks to influence law, policy and social interventions, that can eliminate or least reduce, religiously motivated violence, and promote respect for and tolerance of 'the other'.

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