

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2005

PRE - ELECTION OPINION POLL



Introduction

The Presidential Elections 2005 is a crucial event for all Sri Lankans.

In this context, Social Indicator, the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives has conducted a pre-election opinion poll to understand Lankan voter behaviour on the eve of this election. The objective of the study is not to predict 'the winner' or 'the loser' in the race, but rather to unearth actual Sri Lankan voter perceptions, aspirations and attitudes and thereby contribute to the current political discourse.

This survey was conducted among 1200 randomly selected respondents in 22 Districts across the country in areas controlled by the Sri Lankan Government.

The Districts of Mullaitivu, Killinochchi and Mannar are completely excluded in this survey. It should be noted that the survey does not represent the opinion of Tamils in the District of Trincomalee as Social Indicator was unable to conduct field work among the Tamil community due to the tense situation that prevailed at that time.

A structured questionnaire was administered using the face-to-face interviewing technique and 45 field researchers comprising of three communities of both genders were involved in the field data collection process. Data collection for the opinion poll took place during the period of October 19-22, 2005. The findings of the survey are subject to an error margin of +/-3% at the national level. This survey is entirely self-funded by The Social Indicator-Centre for Policy Alternatives.



Voter Attitudes: 2005

In the 2005 Presidential Election there are 13 candidates of which two of whom are considered to be the major contenders. The survey reveals that there is a close race between them. Hence, this report will focus only on these two candidates. However, it should be noted that, 15.2% voters are undecided as to their choice of candidate while 10% are not ready to reveal their choice. Figure 2 reveals the extent to which the April 2004 General Election vote according to party affiliation will be translated into votes at the 2005 Presidential Election. In the case of the two main candidates and their respective parties, an equal percentage (7%) of voters choose the opposing candidate.

Fig 1: Undecided voters and voters who do not want to reveal their candidate - Ethnicity

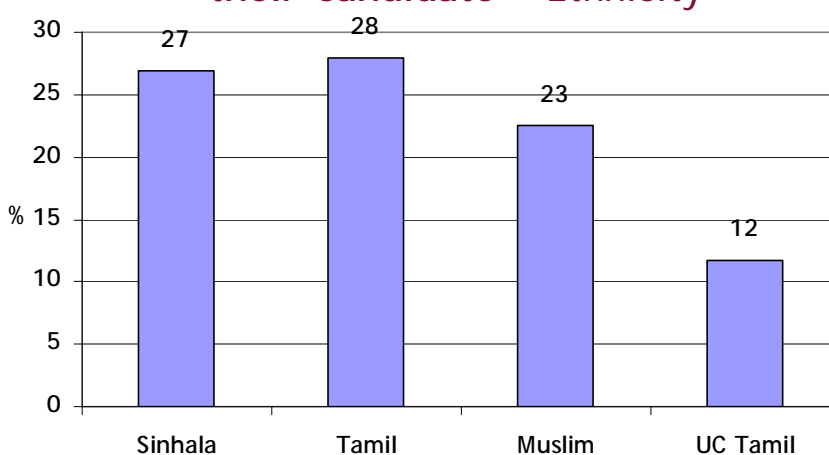
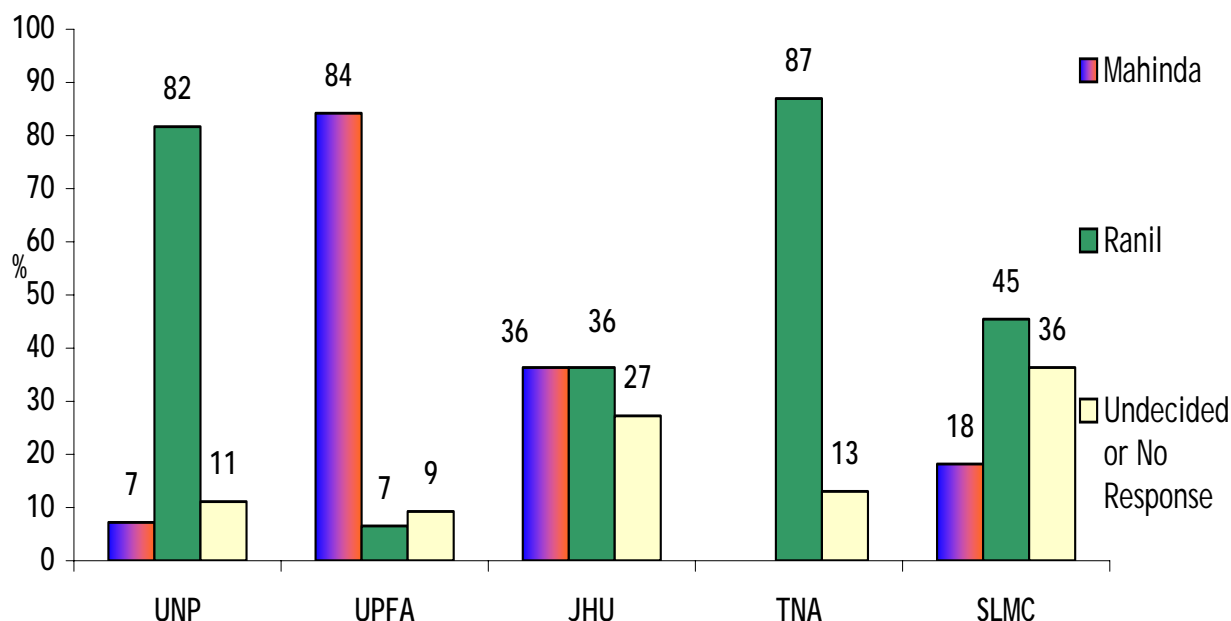


Fig 2: 2005 Voter Preferences by 2004 General Elections party profile of voters



Qualities and Characteristics Required for Presidency

Voters want the leader of the country to possess a set of multiple qualities and characteristics. However, different social groups place differing degrees of importance on specific characteristics. In the survey, we asked respondents the degree of importance they place on 'education', 'family background', 'ethnicity', 'religion', 'honesty', 'leadership' and 'experience' of the candidate.

Fig 3: Characteristics of the Candidate

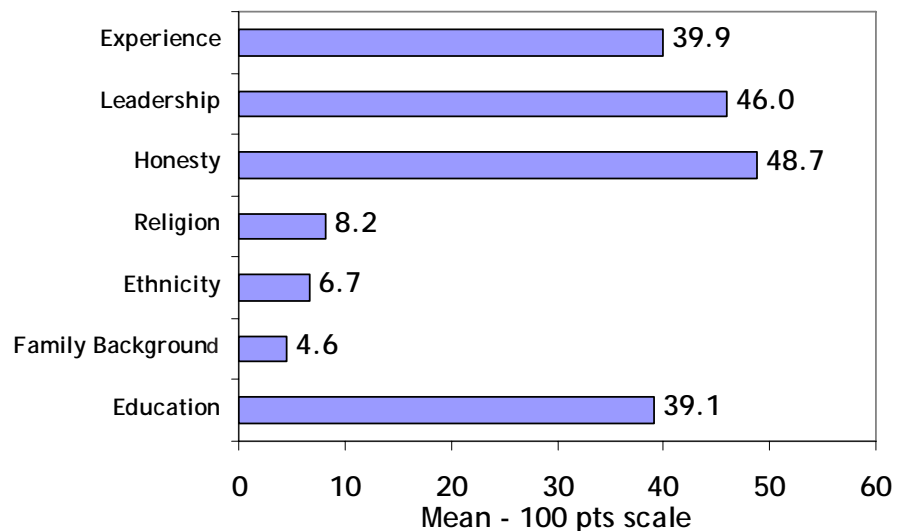


Fig 4: Characteristics of the Candidate - Ethnicity

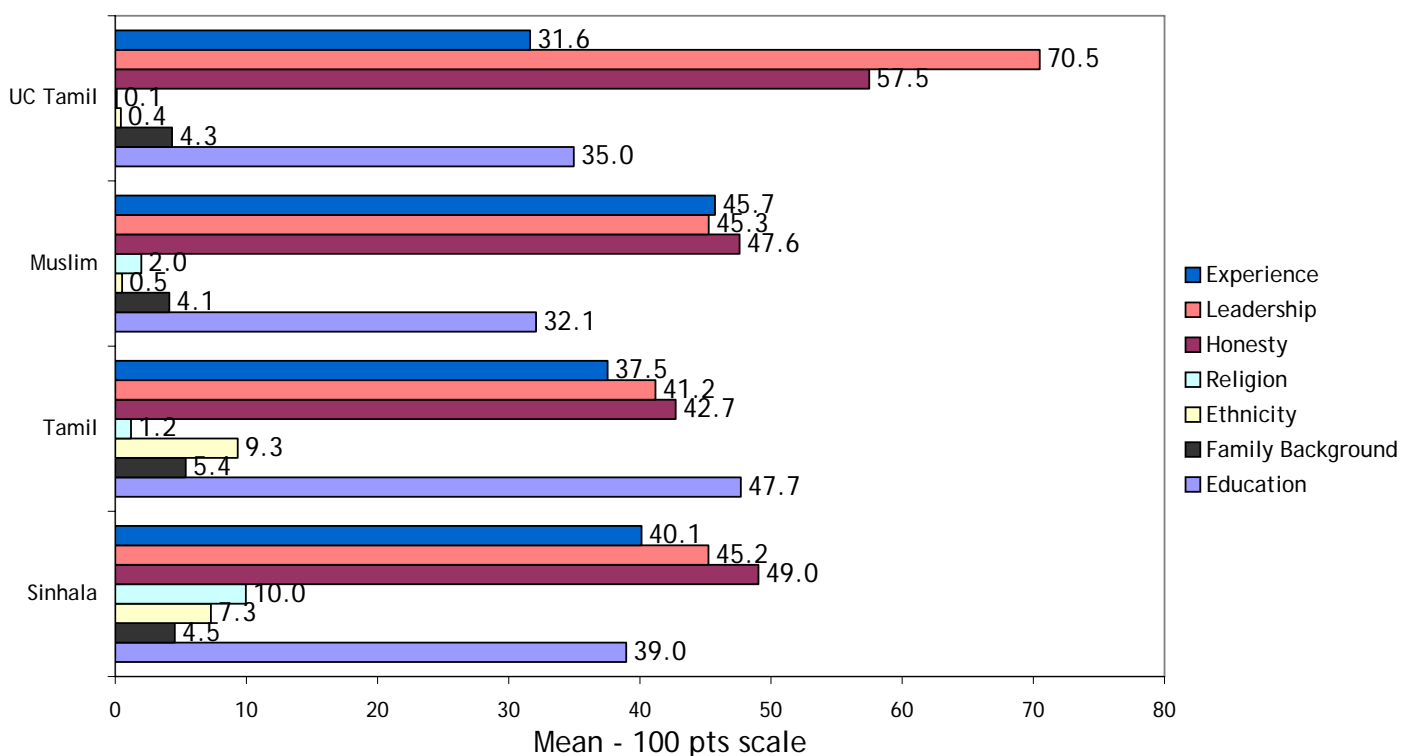


Fig 5: Characteristics of the Candidate - Urban / Rural

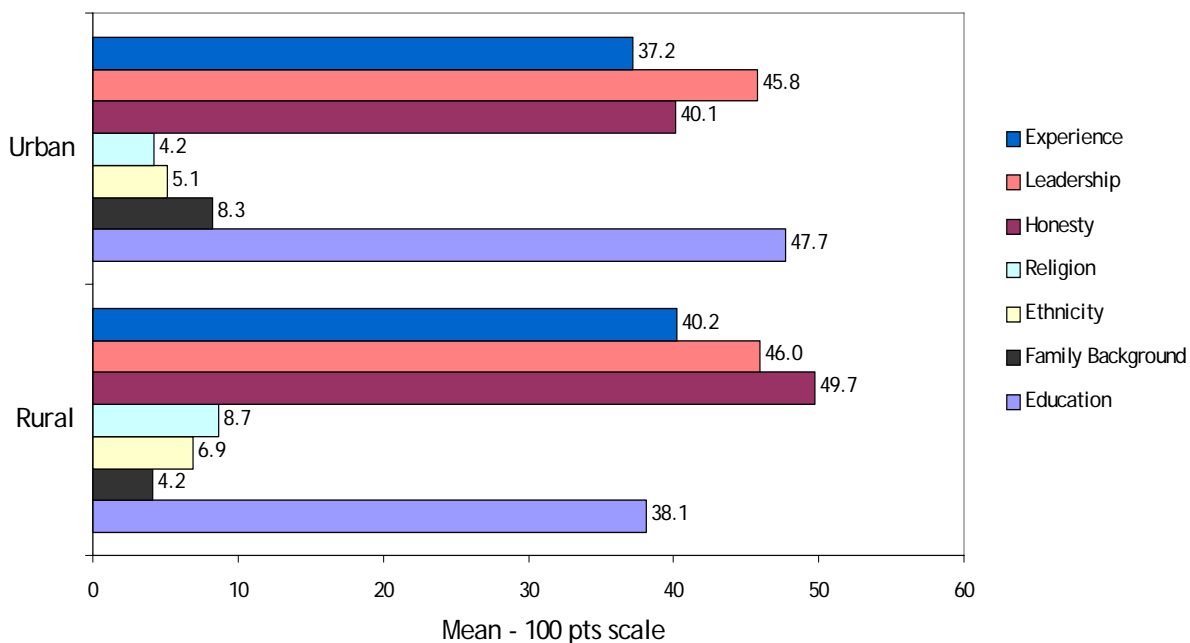


Fig 6: Characteristics of the Candidate - Gender

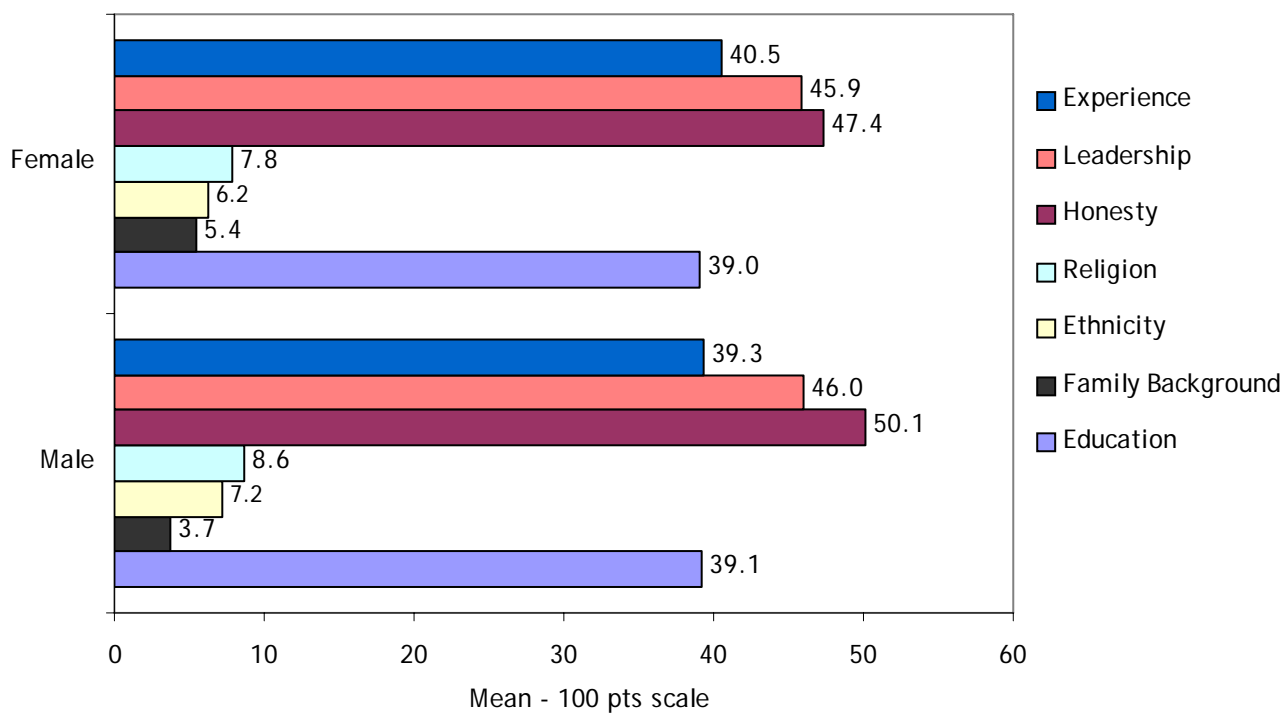
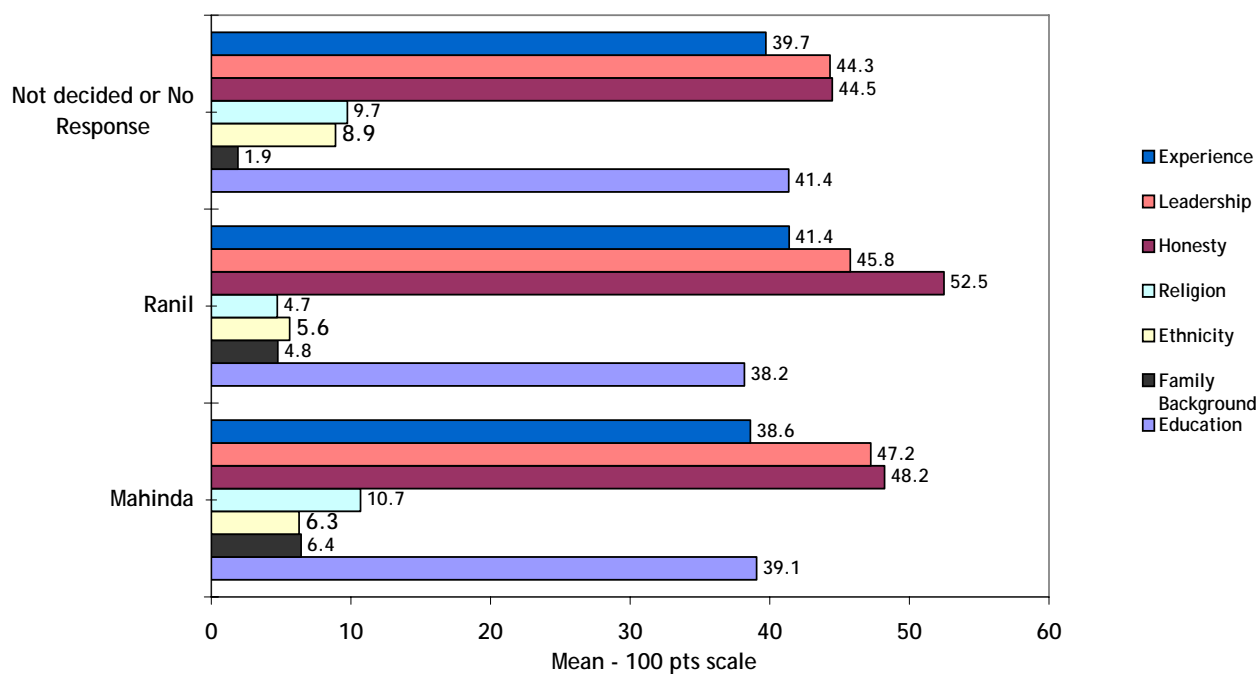


Fig 7: Characteristics of the Candidate - Candidates they will vote for



People were asked to indicate the degree of importance they place on each of the above characteristics on a 100 point scale. The survey found that in general, voters place 'honesty' (48.7 points) as the most important characteristics, followed by 'leadership' (45.9 points), 'experience' (39.9 points) and 'education' (39.1 points). It is interesting to note however, that there's a divergence of these rankings based on the ethnicity of voters. Sinhala and Muslim voters place the same order of importance by opting for the 'Honesty', 'Experience', 'Leadership', 'Education' pattern. In comparison, the Tamil voter places highest importance on "Education" followed by Honesty, Leadership and Experience. The

Up Country Tamil voter however, chooses 'Leadership' as the most important characteristic followed by 'Honesty', 'Education', 'Experience' pattern.

The survey finds that the Rural Sri Lankan places highest importance on 'Honesty' followed by 'Leadership', 'Experience' and 'Education'. In contrast, Urban Sri Lankan places the highest importance on 'Education', followed by 'Leadership', 'Honesty' and 'Experience'.

Voters below 36 yrs say 'Honesty' is the most important quality. For voters above 36 yrs, what matters most is 'Leadership'.

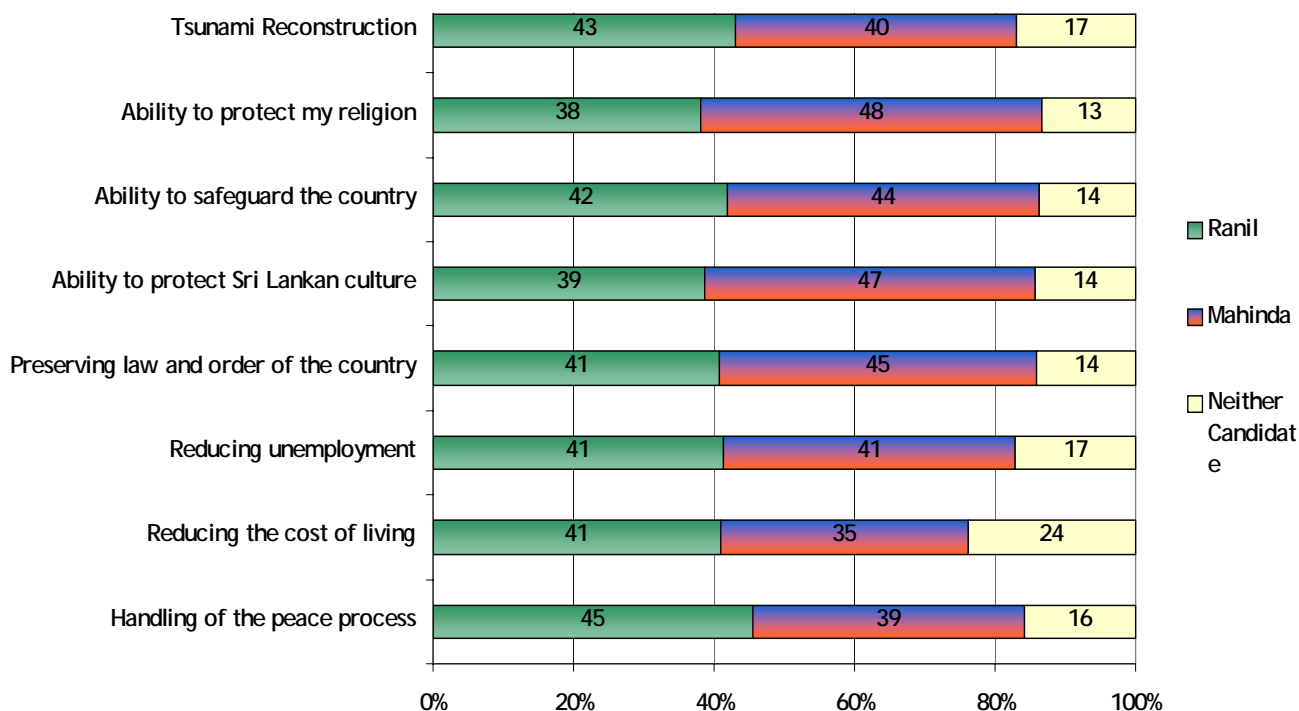
When looking at the preferences of the voters who revealed the

identity of the candidate whom they will be voting for in the upcoming Presidential elections, the Mahinda voters say that leader should primarily be 'Honest', followed by 'Leadership', 'Education' and 'Experience'. Ranil voters also say a leader should primarily be 'Honest', followed by 'Leadership', but differ with the order of the rest by choosing 'Experience' and 'Education' thereafter.

Voters who have decided to vote for Ranil place a slightly higher degree of importance on 'Honesty' (52.5 points) in comparison to Mahinda voters (48.2 points).

Who Handles Issues Best?

Fig 8: Best candidate to handle key issues



Irrespective of who wins the Presidential Elections 2005, there are key issues that need to be addressed. Therefore, this survey attempts to evaluate the public opinion on each candidate's ability to handle the issues of the Peace Process, Cost of Living (CoL), Unemployment, Preserveing Law and Order, Protecting Sri Lankan Culture, Safeguarding the Country, Protecting one's Religion, and Reconstructing Tsunami affected areas within a short period of time.

It is interesting that Sri Lankans believe that Ranil is more capable of handling the Peace Process, able to reduce Cost of Living and

reconstruct Tsunami affected areas within a short period of time. On the other hand voters state that Mahinda is more capable of preserving law and order, protecting Sri Lankan culture, safeguarding the country, and protecting one's religion.

Interestingly, people extend equal confidence to Ranil and Mahinda for their ability to reduce unemployment while 17.2% believe none of them would be able to reduce the Unemployment.

From an ethnic perspective, interestingly, the Sinhala community places higher confidence in Mahinda than Ranil in handling all the above issues.

Analysed further, on issues that Ranil leads nationally, Mahinda leads by above 10 percentage points within the Sinhala community while on issues that Mahinda himself leads nationally, Ranil falls behind by approximately 20 percentage points within the Sinhala community.

Voters from Tamil, Muslim and Up Country Tamil communities place a greater degree of trust in Ranil's ability to handle above issues. While Tamil and Up Country Tamil communities overwhelmingly support Ranil on all issues, the Muslim community too places a greater degree of confidence in Ranil's ability. In terms of the ability to protect one's religion,

Fig 9: Best candidate to handle the Peace Process

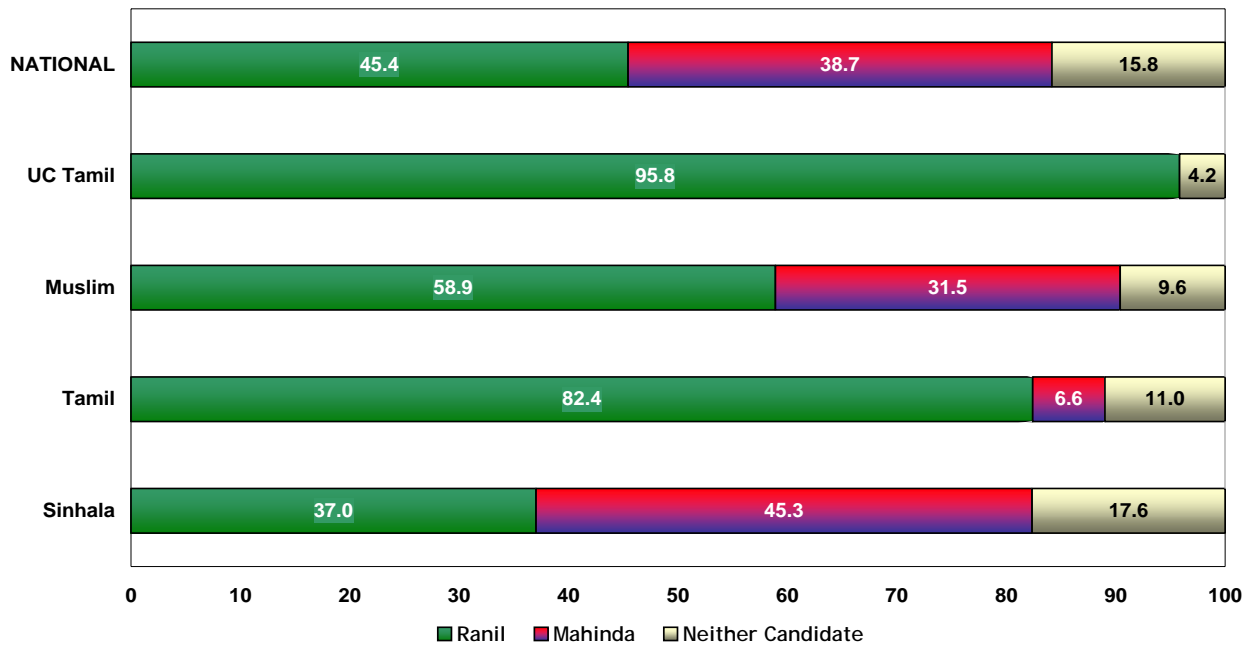


Fig 10: Best candidate to handle the Cost of Living

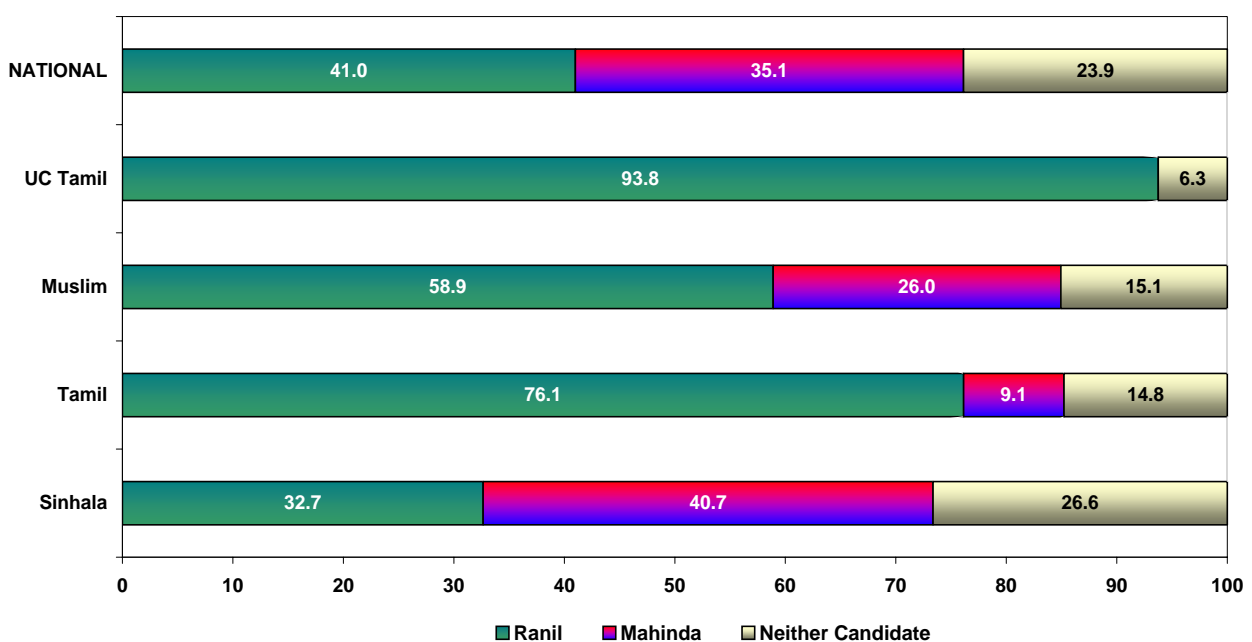


Fig 11: Best candidate to handle Unemployment

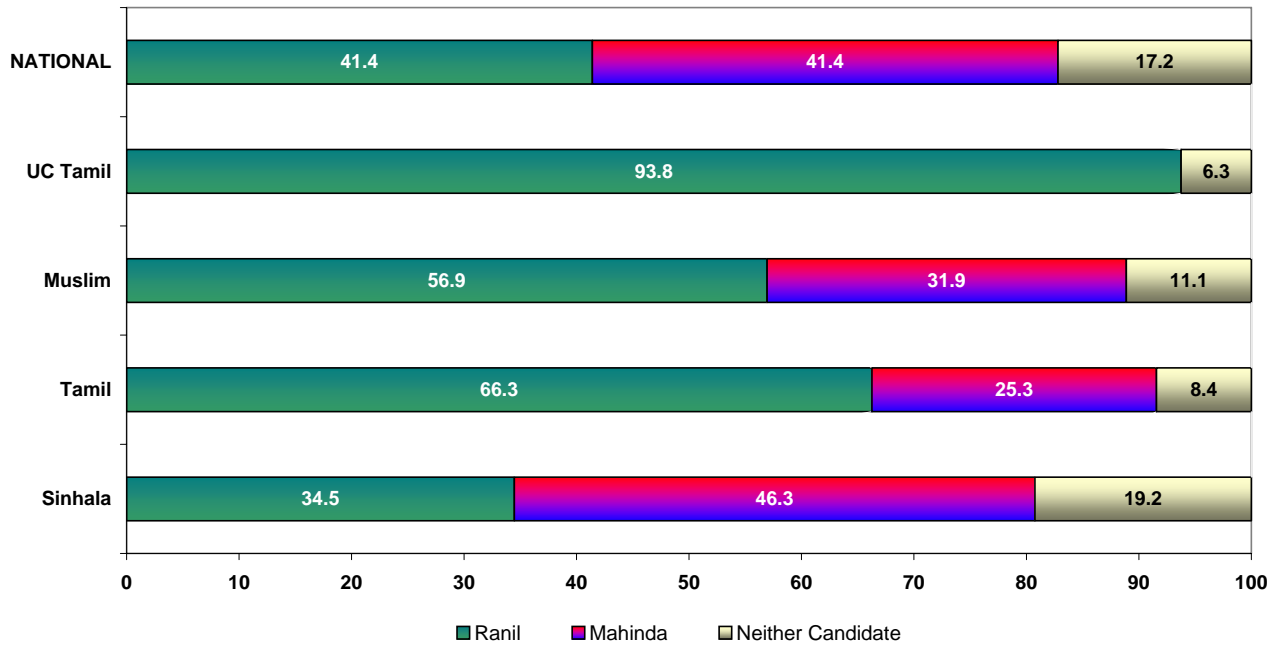


Fig 12: Best candidate to Preserve Law and Order

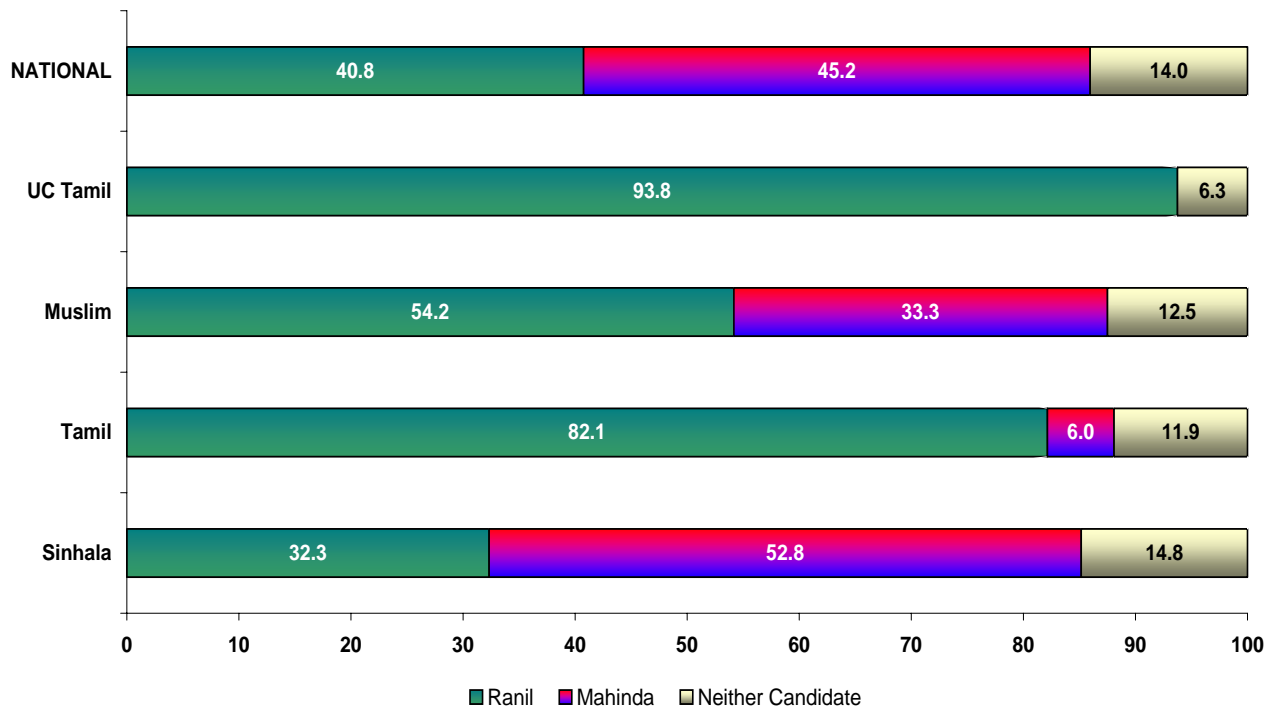


Fig 13: Best candidate to Protect Sri Lankan Culture

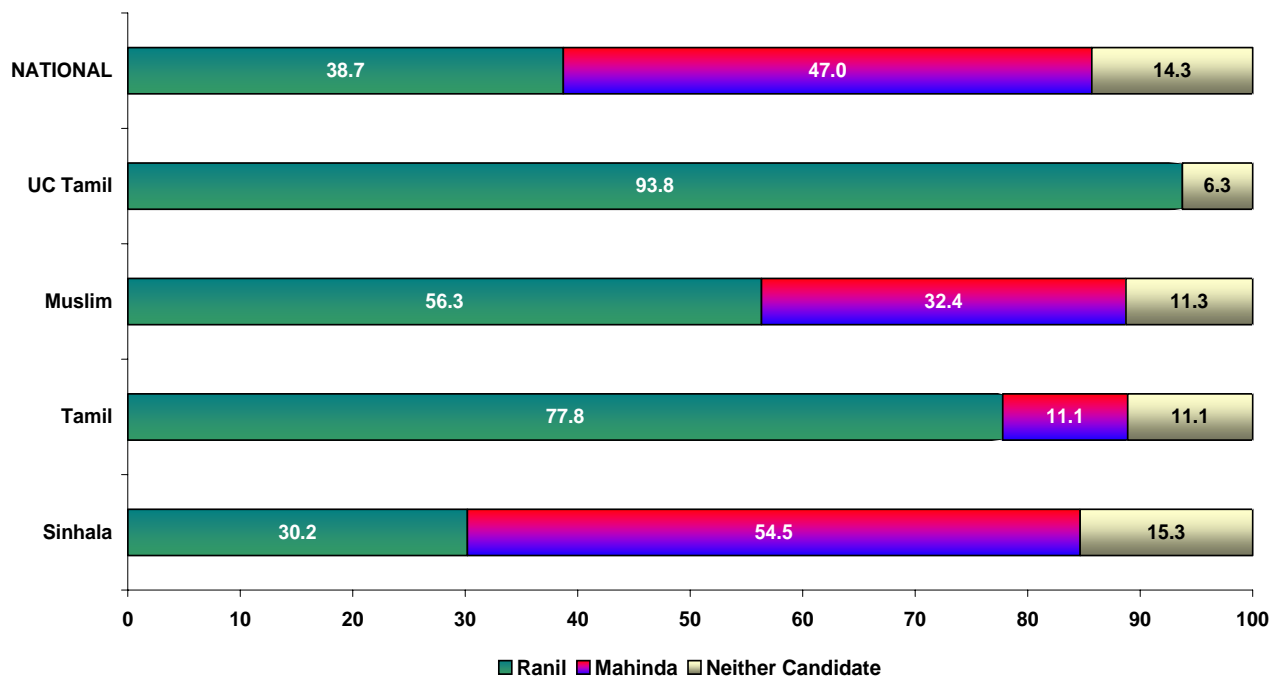


Fig 14: Best candidate to Safeguard the Country

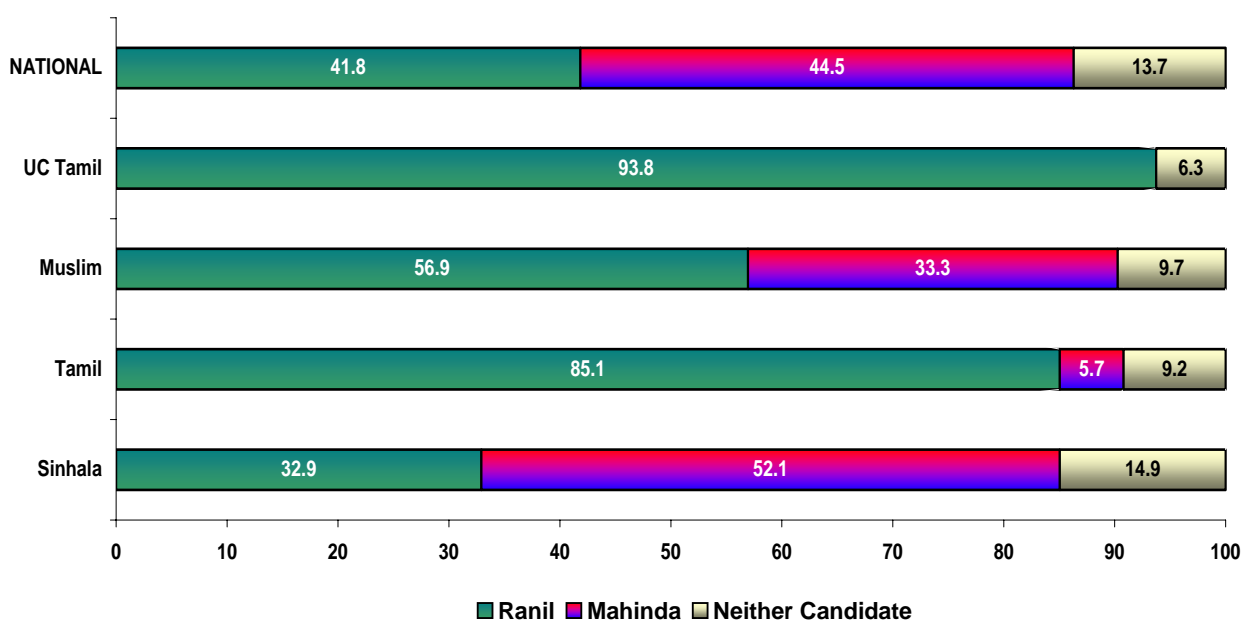
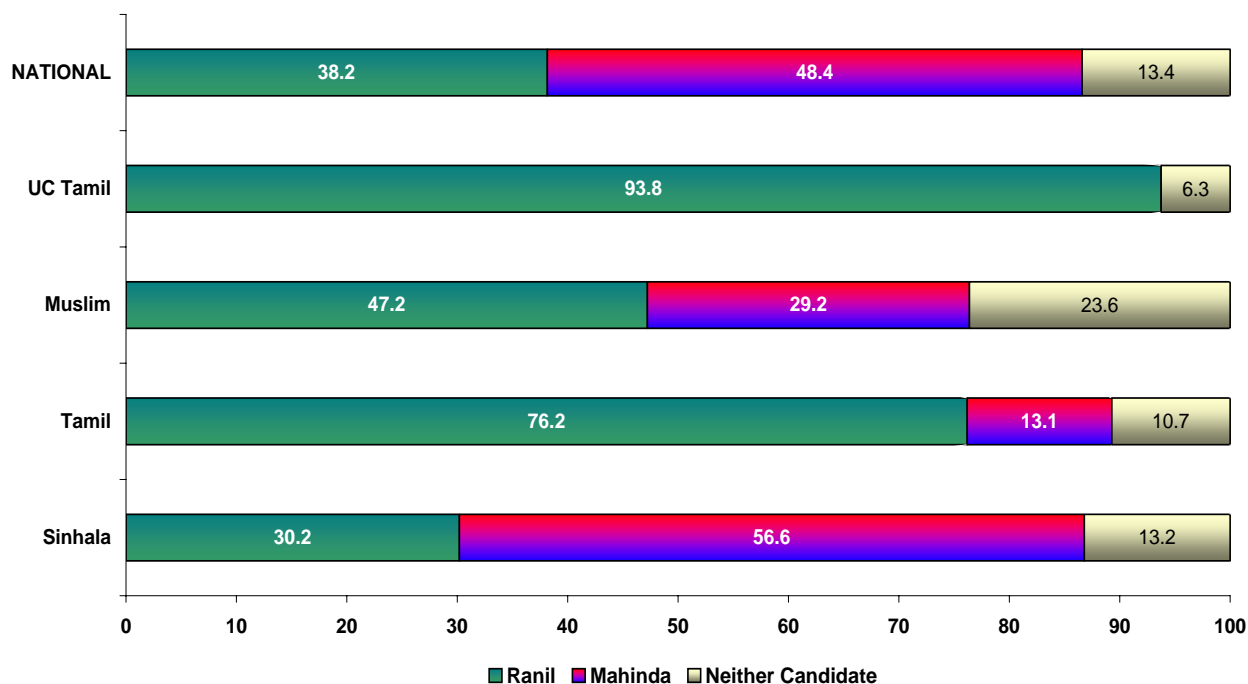


Fig 15: Best candidate to Protect 'My Religion'



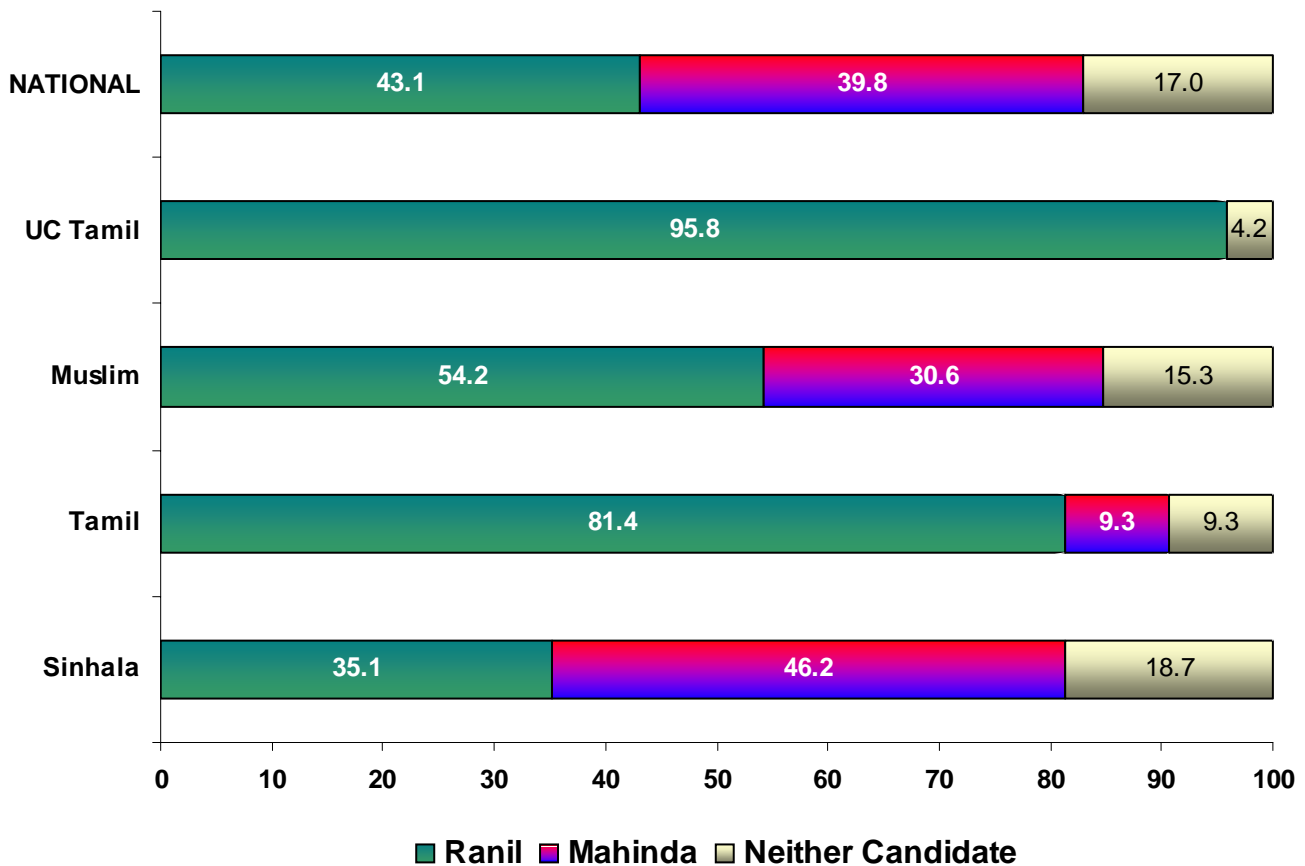
Muslim community places 16% more confidence in Ranil than Mahinda though they place more than a 20% higher confidence in Ranil's ability on all other issues. It is interesting to see the variations in the confidence of men and women in the candidate's ability to handle issues. More men place slightly higher confidence in Ranil's ability to handle the peace process, reduce unemployment and safeguard the country. In contrast women place higher confidence on these issues in Mahinda than Ranil.

Though the Roman Catholic community is only about 5% of the population, they consist of members from both Sinhala and Tamil communities. Therefore the opinion of Roman Catholics is not a reflection of mere 'ethnic group based' thinking. By the time the fieldwork for this survey was concluded (October 22, 2005), the Roman Catholic opinion was divided on who can handle issues better. They place their confidence in Mahinda's ability on all issues

(except ability to reduce unemployment) including safeguarding their religion. Obviously, when it comes to trusting the candidates, Sri Lankans who have already decided on their choice of candidate (Mahinda Vs. Ranil), do not fail to overwhelmingly place their trust in their candidate of choice.

The voters who have 'not decided' on their choice of candidates and who simply did not wish to reveal their choice, believe more in

Fig 16: Best candidate to handle the Tsunami Reconstruction

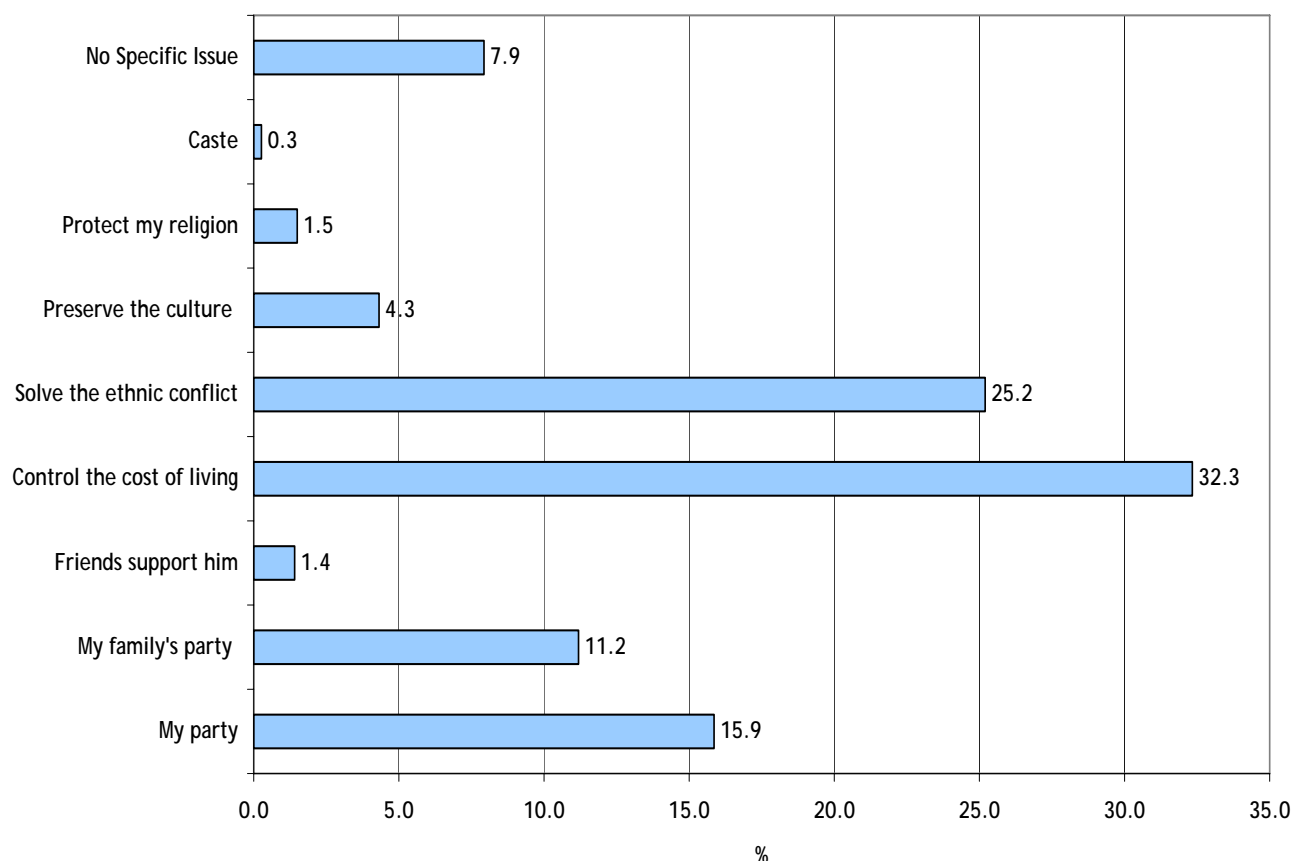


Ranil's ability than Mahinda's for handling the peace process, reducing the cost of living, and reconstruct the Tsunami affected areas within a short period of time. However, on the issues of preserving law and order, ability to protect Sri Lankan culture and ability to protect their religion, they place their confidence in Mahinda.

It is interesting to note that the opinion of the first time voters also follows the same pattern of the average Sri Lankan voter's attitudes in terms of the candidates ability to handle issues.

Issues that matter most

Fig 17: What issues matter most to you?



For 32.3% Sri Lankan voters, the most important issue when selecting their candidate is his ability to control the cost of living. The survey also finds that one fourth of the voters consider the most important issues to be the ethnic conflict. 15.9% choose their candidates on party allegiance, while 11.2% do so on family tradition. Interestingly, 7.9% of the voters say that they will vote for a particular candidate but say that they cannot 'think of a particular reason for choosing him'. However, only 4.3% would vote for the person who is best in

preserving the culture of our society. The majority of the Muslim community (41.9%) and the Sinhala community (33.9%) have decided to vote for the candidate who will best control the cost of living. While a significant majority of the Tamil community choose their candidate based on his ability to solve the ethnic conflict, Up Country Tamils give equal importance to the ability to solve the ethnic conflict and to control the cost of living. Interestingly, no Tamil voter appears to pick a candidate based purely on the voter's own party loyalty.

The issue of solving the ethnic conflict matters highly to the Tamil community while it is of least importance to the Sinhala community. 18.4% of the Sinhala community, 17.6% Up Country Tamil community and 5.4% Muslim community select their candidate based on party loyalty.

The differences in perception among Urban and Rural Sri Lankans emerge again when it comes to the candidates' abilities on selected key issues. When comparing the criteria on which they would select their candidate

Fig 18: Issues considered when choosing the candidate - Ethnicity

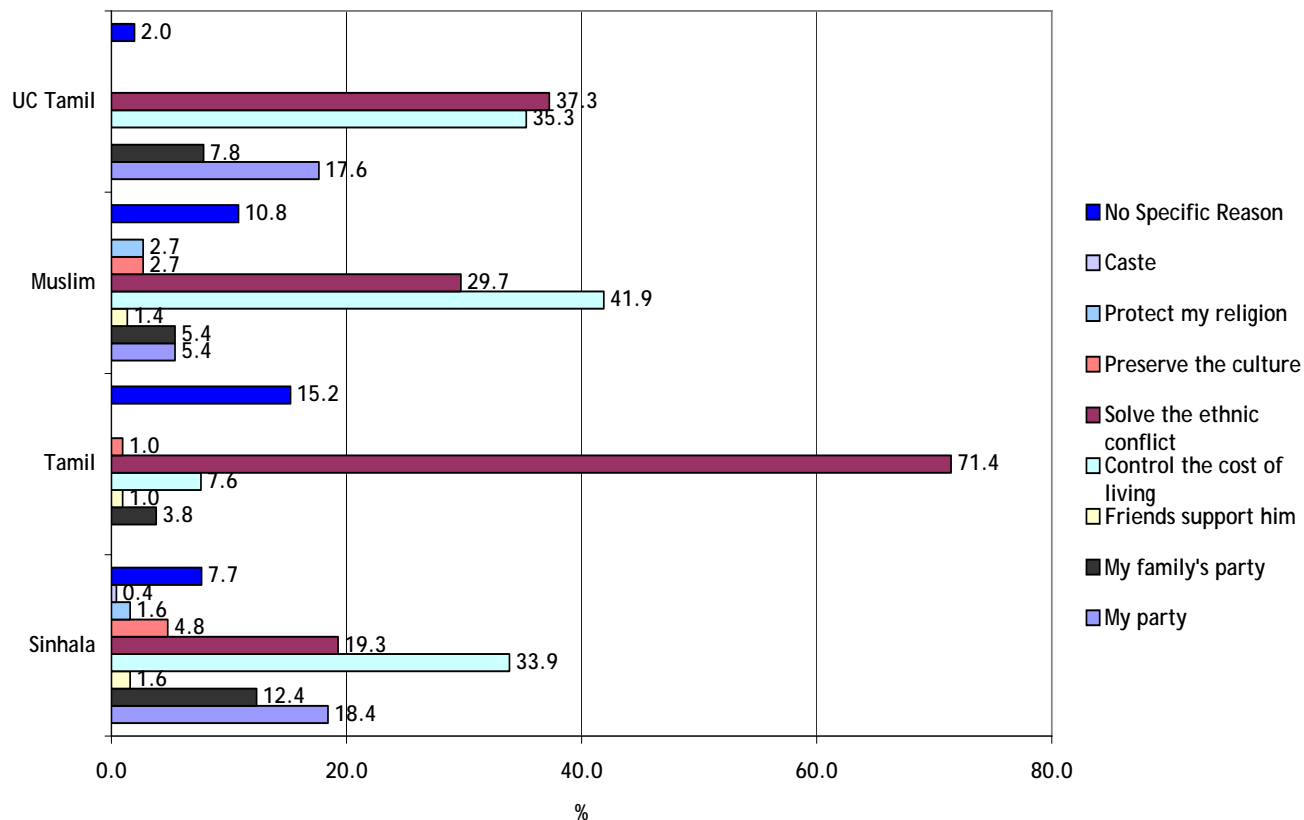


Fig 19: Issues considered when choosing the candidate - Gender

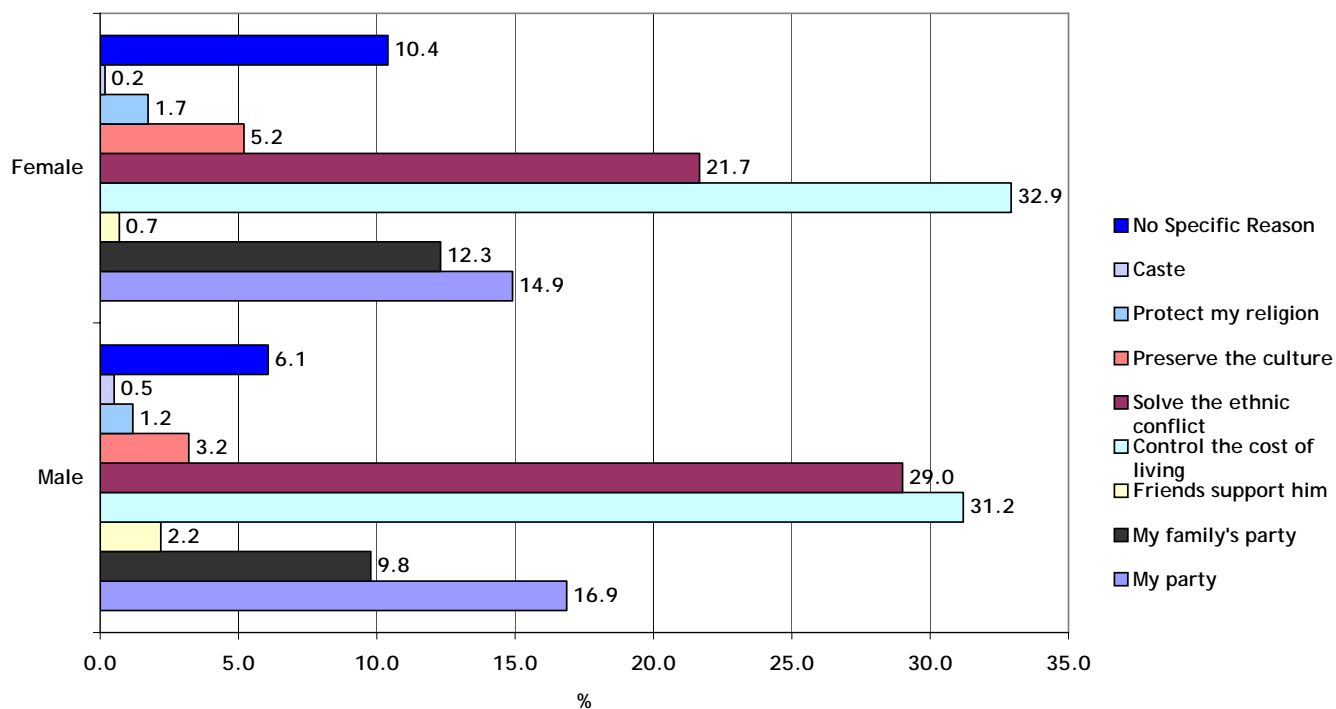
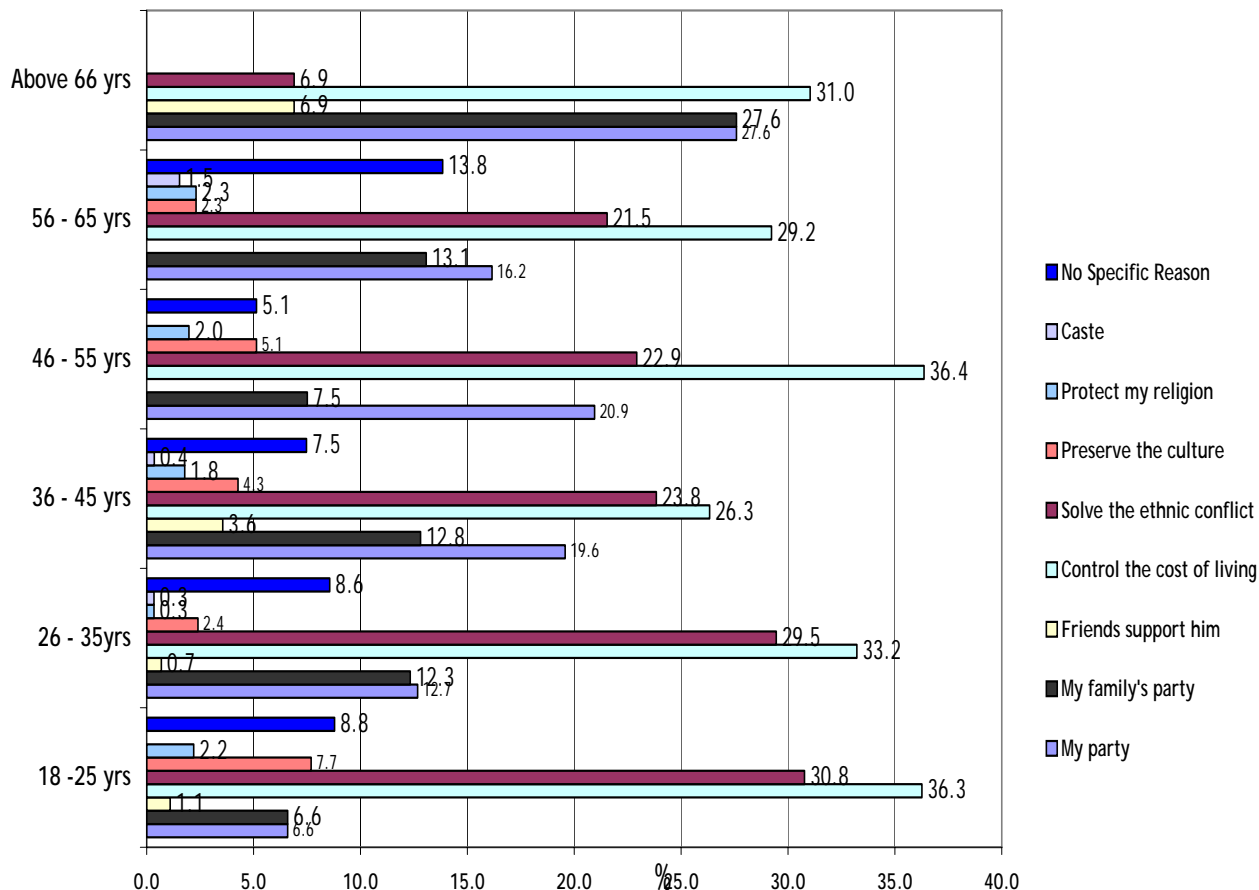


Fig 20: Issues considered when choosing the candidate - Age



in the coming election, 45.3% of Urban voters decide based on the candidate's ability to solve the ethnic conflict while 21.4% decide based on the candidate's ability to control the cost of living. A majority of Rural voters (33.3%) assess the candidates' ability to control the cost of living while 22.2% decide on the ability to solve the ethnic conflict. More Rural than Urban voters decide based on their party loyalty or the party loyalty of their family. Although only a small percentage of Sri Lankan voters decide their

candidate based on his ability to preserve the culture, this opinion is higher with Rural voters than Urban. The voters who choose their candidate on his ability to protect their religion is high among Urban (4.3%) constituencies than Rural (1.1%) despite a very small percentage choosing this option at the national level.

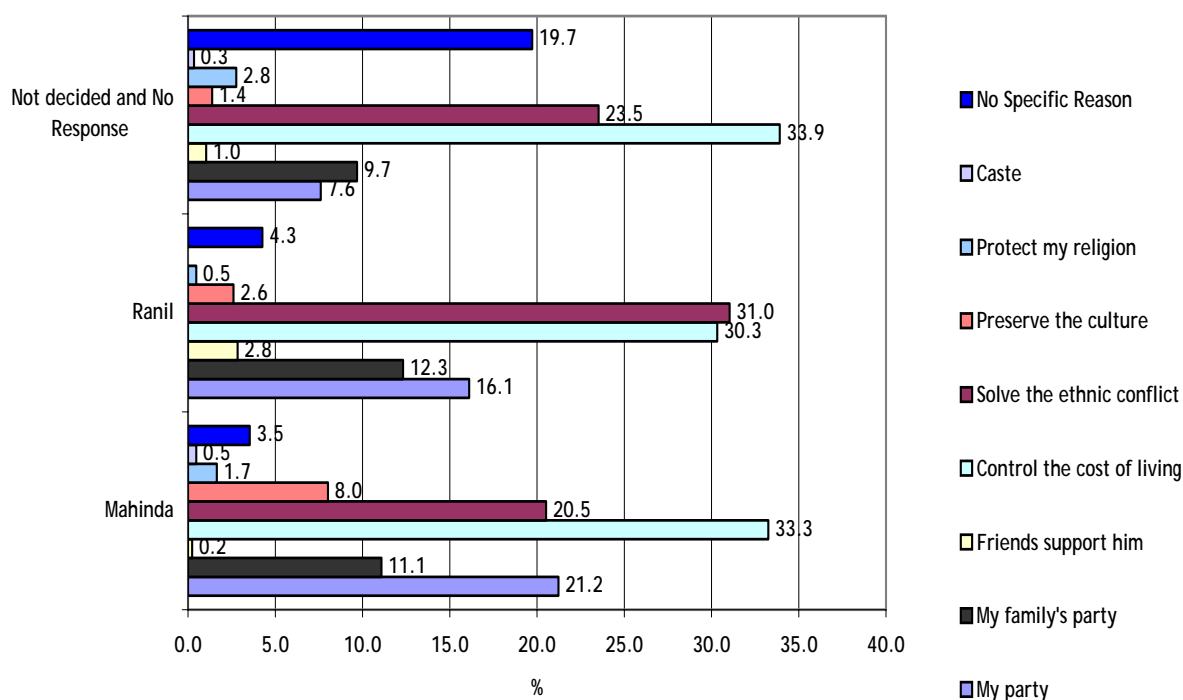
Priorities generally differ across age groups.

Majority of every age group decides on the ability to control the cost of living when choosing

the candidate. This pattern appears consistent across all age categories. The ability to solve the ethnic conflict seems to be the second highest reason for deciding on a candidate when it comes to all age groups below 65. However, this declines as the age of the voter advances. As the age of voters advances, they prefer to choose the candidate based on their party loyalty or party loyalty of the family.

When looking at the preferences of the first time voter, 36% decide on the candidate based on his

Fig 21: Issues considered when choosing the candidate - Candidate of Choice



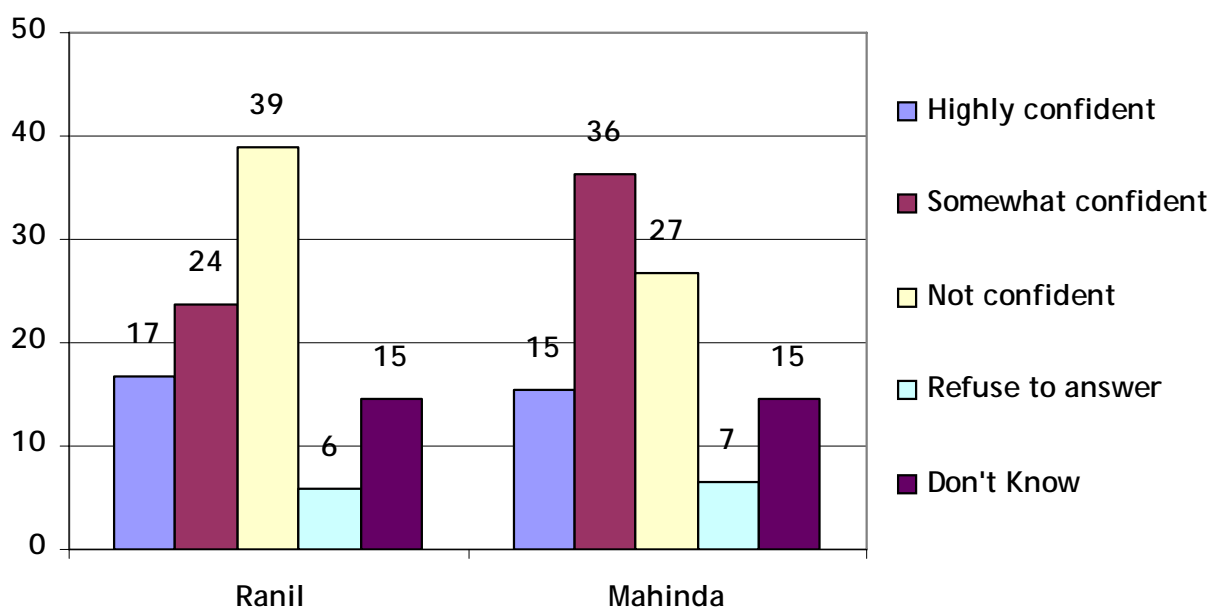
ability to control the cost of living. 32.4% decide their candidate on his ability to solve the ethnic conflict. Further, 10.3% and 7.4% say that their decision is based on one's party loyalty or party loyalty of the family. Exactly one third of the voters who decided to vote for Mahinda will vote for him due to his ability to control the cost of living. Of the voters who decided to vote for Ranil, 30.3% would do

so due to his ability in controlling the cost of living. Close to one third of voters who decided to vote for Ranil do so due to his ability to solve the ethnic conflict, whereas only 20.5% of the voters who decided to vote for Mahinda have chosen him for the same reason. It is interesting to note that people who say that they have not made up their mind on the choice of candidate indicate that they

would vote for the candidate mainly due to the ability to control the cost of living (33%), or solve the ethnic conflict (23.5%). However, of the undecided voters and voters who are unwilling to reveal the candidate of choice, 19.7% say that they cannot 'think of a particular reason.

Confidence in Manifestoes

Fig 22: Confidence in the promises given in manifestoes



Voters were asked of their awareness of the manifestoes of the two main candidates, and to what extent they are aware of the content and the degree of confidence they have in the promises given in the manifestoes. 71% of the voters are aware that the two main candidates have put forward their election manifestoes. Of the

people who are aware, 52.9% say that they are knowledgeable of Ranil's manifesto and 54.3% say they are knowledgeable of Mahinda's. Of those who are aware of the manifestoes, 41% have confidence in the promises made in Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe's manifesto while 51% have confidence in the promises made in Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse's.

Social Indicator (SI) is an independent social research organisation, which conducts polls on socio-economic and political issues. Operating under the Board of Directors of the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA), SI was established in September 1999, and filled a longstanding vacuum for a permanent, professional and independent polling facility in Sri Lanka on social and political issues.

Polling is an instrument of empowerment, a means by which the silent majority of the public can express their opinions on issues affecting them. Our mission is to conduct surveys on key social issues, thereby providing a means through which public opinion can influence the public policy debate.



Social Indicator
Centre for Policy Alternatives
105, 5th Lane,
Colombo 3,
Sri Lanka.

Tel: +9411 2370472
Fax: +9411 2370475

Email: cpapoll@diamond.lanka.net
Web: <http://www.cpalanka.org>