# Unpacking Coexistence: Inter-Group Perceptions of the Religious 'Other'



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by

## Ranmini Vithanagama

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# *Acknowledgements*

This is the second study that ICES has undertaken on perceptions of the 'religious other'. The first survey was conducted in 2019, with a sample size of 1,000 respondents from Ampara, Galle, Colombo, and Mannar. This report is based on an expanded quantitative sample of 2,000 respondents from nine districts covering the Western, Central, Southern, Eastern, Northern and Uva provinces and an additional qualitative data collection component covering Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Batticaloa, and Jaffna districts.

Globally, there has been an increasing use of barometers and surveys of this nature, especially in the sphere of reconciliation. In several parts of the world, civil society has used household surveys to gather empirical data to track perceptions, attitudes, social behaviour, and personal experiences, and to map trends and patterns, in different political and social contexts. These surveys have helped build an understanding of inter-group relations and have been used by policy makers, practitioners, academia, and others, to drive policy change and social interventions. This 'perceptions study' by ICES is different from some of the reconciliation barometers that have been employed elsewhere, in that here the focus has been mainly on ethno-religious relations in Sri Lanka. It builds on the work that ICES has previously been doing on inter-religious relations and peaceful coexistence. We hope these findings will help shape policy, enhance our common understanding of inter-group relations, and provide guidance for interventions by the state and civil society.

Mario Gomez
*Executive Director*

# *Executive summary*

Although the fundamental tenets of all religious teachings are rooted in ideals of love, respect, and compassion towards one another, religion, ironically has always been a root cause of faction, violence and war in world history. In Sri Lanka too, recent history has been marked with several episodes of ethno-religiously charged violence, which motivated the International Centre for Ethnic Studies to initiate this periodic study. ICES conducted its first assessment of the perceptions of 'the religious other' in 2020/21, administering a quantitative survey questionnaire to a sample size of 1000 respondents from four districts. This report is based on the second round of the assessment of perceptions, using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative sample consists of 2000 Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic Christian respondents drawn randomly from Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Ampara and Badulla districts. A purposive sample of 42 respondents was selected from Colombo, Galle, Kandy, and Jaffna districts to collect life histories on education and employment. The analysis is predominantly descriptive in nature.

The findings show that while almost all respondents have a religious identity, and the vast majority consider themselves to be religious, it does not preclude them from being respectful towards other religious teachings, practices, and people of other religions. More importantly, religiosity for most respondents transcends rituals and worship into more profound qualities such as doing no harm to others, engaging in good deeds, and living peacefully with others, all of which support religious coexistence. Furthermore, religion is a private affair to almost all respondents and does not interfere with their interactions and activities in the public sphere. Nearly all respondents, for the most part, are rational in their recurrent and strategic decisions; religious considerations, by and large, do not have a significant impact on their decisions. Nonetheless, while most respondents tend to see themselves in a positive light, they see fewer of such positive attributes among 'the other'. Similarly, most respondents are less self-critical of their own potential shortcomings, but seem to notice negative attributes among 'the other'. Some of these perceptions appear to be stemming from people's own experiences of discrimination and marginalisation. For the most part however, the exposure respondents have had to individuals and communities from religious backgrounds that are different to their own, at home, among friends, in school, at university, in

the community or at the workplace appear to influence how these perceptions are formed. Respondents' awareness about other religious teachings, cultures, values and practices also tend to influence such perceptions.

All respondents recognise the importance of religious coexistence in a diverse society such as Sri Lanka, although their definitions vary in depth and breadth. The importance of keeping politics and religion separate at the macro level comes out strongly as a precursor for promoting religious coexistence in the country. They are also insightful to recognise the importance of strengthening intra- and inter-religious interactions for promoting religious coexistence, as religion can be easily used to manipulate communities who are ignorant about each other. Reflecting on these findings leads to a few important takeaways for policy and programmatic realms. The first is the importance of leaving religion outside the public sphere, be it politics, governance, or the formal institutional framework. The second is the benefit of promoting opportunities to promote values of religious pluralism and coexistence. While people can learn to coexist at any age, values of respect, understanding and appreciation of what is different to the familiar are best learned at a young age. Promoting multi-ethnic and multi-religious school systems is a much-needed structural change in this regard, while more short-term measures can be undertaken to promote and strengthen inter- and intra-religious dialogue and interactions.

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# Introduction

Coexistence and tolerance are critical for the sustenance and growth of an ethno-religiously diverse society, such as Sri Lanka. There are many examples from the past and recent history of the country where suspicion, intolerance, and a lack of understanding of communities that are different to one's own have resulted in serious unrest and violence. So, what does one religious community think of 'the other'? What factors influence and shape one community's perceptions of the other? How do one's social networks and interactions influence someone's tolerance of the other? What are the deep-rooted values that might drive communities apart or bring them together? What can be adjusted and tweaked in the real world to promote religious coexistence? These are some of the questions we attempt to explore in this study.

In 2021, the International Centre for Ethnic Studies conducted its first-ever survey on this topic using data from a sample of 1,000 respondents from four districts, with the intention of eventually developing it into a periodic survey. The present study expands on the first survey in terms of (1) research methodology (2) geographic coverage and (3) number of respondents. Firstly, we collect, present, and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. Secondly, we expand our geographic coverage to eight (from four) districts. Thirdly, we survey a total of 2,000 respondents using a quantitative questionnaire and conduct in-depth interviews with 42 respondents. We expect the information presented in this survey to help us understand the inter-group and intra-group perceptions of each other, and what insights they hold for informing interventions by the state and civil society to strengthen religious coexistence and tolerance of the 'other'.

## Survey questionnaire, qualitative interview guide, and the sampling framework

The perceptions of one human being towards another are subjective, dynamic, and complex, and might result from beliefs, thoughts, and convictions which also might be in a constant state of change. As such, the depth and intensity of these perceptions are likely to change as the underlying circumstances evolve, grow, and change. Perceptions of another that are publicly acknowledged might also be very

different from what one truly feels internally, as people may refrain from voicing opinions and thoughts that are not socially desirable.

Thus, capturing a complex phenomenon such as a person's perceptions towards another human being using a quantitative tool can be particularly tricky. However, there is a sizeable body of empirical research that investigates highly qualitative concepts (such as happiness and subjective well-being) using quantitative survey methods. There is also a growing body of work that attempts to quantify perceptions of human coexistence. The questionnaire we developed for the quantitative portion of this report is informed and guided by such empirical research tools. Insights and lessons from our 2021 survey on the topic also helped strengthen how the questions were formulated and structured in this particular questionnaire.

We recognise that social desirability bias can be quite problematic in surveys that investigate sensitive topics such as perceptions of 'other' individuals and communities. Respondents might provide what they consider to be socially desirable and politically correct answers, instead of what they really believe, to portray themselves in a favourable light. To counter such social desirability biases, we developed questions of various structures – some eliciting responses on a Likert scale, some binary responses, and others providing a list of options to choose from. We also took measures to ask questions about similar issues using two different methods to minimize the possibility of respondents providing politically correct answers. We designed several questions that would allow us to build a profile of the respondent based on his/her own individual characteristics, household characteristics, as well as the connection to the outside world through family, relatives, friends, peers, and community, and the use of media and social media in order to unpack the associations between these factors and their perceptions of 'the other'. While the quantitative analysis presented in this chapter is largely limited to a descriptive one that delineates patterns of perceptions among different religious communities, this demographic and socioeconomic data about respondents also allow for possibly a more technical and robust analysis as an annex to this report, at a later stage.

Our survey instrument employed several schedules of questions to examine respondents' perceptions about 'the other'. Some questions were designed as statements about respondents' perceptions of their own religion, religiosity, and

worldview, and how they influence and shape their interactions with and attitudes towards individuals who come from different religious backgrounds, their beliefs and worldviews. The degree to which they agree or disagree with each of the enumerated statements is assumed to reveal their willingness to coexistence and acceptance of 'the other'. We also included a section with a number of scenarios involving day-to-day interactions, short-term decisions, and decisions with long-term implications to understand how important the ethno-religious identity of 'the other' was in these situations. The choice of scenarios was informed by the findings and experiences of previous work on religious coexistence undertaken by ICES.

In a separate section, we enumerated several attributes and asked respondents which of the five ethno-religious groups they identified these attributes with. We included both positive and negative attributes. As we did not attempt to define these attributes, we recognise that respondents assign them to different religious groups, based on what each attribute means to them. This schedule was designed as a rapid-fire round of questions which would allow respondents to answer swiftly, thereby helping minimise the social desirability bias in their responses. Additionally, we explored respondents' exposure to religions other than their own through friends, school, or community. In addition, we included questions about their own experiences of discrimination based on their own religious identity, as well as their opinions on religious extremism and radicalisation. The questionnaire retained many questions from the first survey. However, in addition to improving such questions further, we also incorporated a few new schedules, especially on assessing one's own religiosity, by adapting a simpler version of the Centrality of the Religiosity Scale by Huber and Huber (2012).

The draft questionnaire went through a rigorous review process which comprised six rounds of revisions. The final version of the questionnaire benefitted from the feedback and inputs from colleagues at ICES, local and international experts on the subject, and specialists in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The multidisciplinary viewpoints were particularly helpful for us to think carefully about the practical issues of navigating this sensitive topic through a structured set of questions and taking measures such as wording and sequencing questions to elicit genuine, rather than socially desirable and therefore biased, responses from interviewees. Upon finalisation, the questionnaire was vetted for ethical implications by an Ethical Review Committee appointed for the project. The minor

suggestions made by the ERC were addressed prior to being translated into Sinhala and English. A two-day enumerator training was conducted, along with a pre-pilot and pilot survey of the questionnaire, following which the questionnaire was further improved prior to the survey being rolled out.

We carried out the survey in the districts of Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Ampara and Badulla. The selection of these districts was underpinned by the ethno-religious diversities in the population as well as the differences in income, poverty, and regional economic conditions. The resource availability allowed us to double the sample size from our first survey to a little over 2000. Each district was assigned an equal quote (approximately 11 percent) of the sample. This sample was designed to be broadly representative of the ethno-religious composition of each district (Table 1). We randomly sampled 26 DS divisions from each district, and 22 GN divisions, from each DS division. In each GN division, a random sample of respondents aged over 18 were selected for the survey, until the allocated quota was fulfilled. The overall sample comprised 41 percent Buddhists, 28 percent Hindus, 17 percent Muslims, 7 percent Roman Catholics and 6 percent non-RC Christians. The data collection took place over a period of three months from July to October 2022. The final cleaned data was analysed on the STATA statistical package.

*Table 1: Population by religion (2012 Census)*

| | **Buddhist** | **Hindu** | **Muslim** | **Roman Catholic (RC)** | **Non-RC Christian** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colombo | 70.2 | 8.0 | 11.8 | 7.0 | 2.9 |
| Kandy | 73.4 | 9.7 | 14.3 | 1.6 | 0.9 |
| Galle | 93.9 | 1.5 | 3.7 | 0.4 | 0.5 |
| Jaffna | 0.4 | 82.8 | 0.4 | 12.9 | 3.5 |
| Trincomalee | 26.2 | 25.9 | 42.0 | 3.8 | 2.0 |
| Batticaloa | 1.2 | 64.4 | 25.5 | 4.6 | 4.3 |
| Mannar | 1.8 | 24.1 | 16.6 | 52.6 | 4.8 |
| Ampara | 38.7 | 15.8 | 43.4 | 1.2 | 0.9 |
| Badulla | 72.6 | 19.3 | 5.8 | 1.5 | 0.8 |
| Average | 42.0 | 27.9 | 18.2 | 9.5 | 2.3 |

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2020)

The inherent rigidity of a structured questionnaire, the close-ended nature of questions, and the a priori list of choices that usually accompany such questions obviously limit the respondents' ability to express themselves freely, especially on a topic that is quite complex. As such, in this second and improved survey of perceptions, we decided to also incorporate a qualitative data collection component that would allow us to capture a more nuanced understanding of people's perceptions of the 'other'. Our interview guide consists of a number of open-ended questions through which life histories were explored in relation to education and workplace, from a purposively selected sample of 45 respondents. A total of 24 life histories on education were collected from Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Batticaloa, and Jaffna districts from both undergraduates and graduates who are currently employed. In addition, 21 life histories on livelihoods were collected from Colombo, Galle, Kandy, and Jaffna districts, which were sub-samples of the eight districts in which the quantitative questionnaire was administered.

The interview guides consisted of two parts. The first portion of the interview consisted of questions about key events and milestones related to respondents' education or livelihoods, and a mapping of their social networks. The second half of the interview guide explored respondents' perceptions about individuals and groups of different religions, interactions with them, and their own ideas of religious coexistence and tolerance.

The issue of social desirability bias was also a concern for qualitative interviews. In order to avoid or limit such biases, we adopted a life histories approach to data collection that would allow the researchers to make the respondents comfortable with them, and gradually build a rapport with the respondents, before posing critical questions on their perceptions of 'the other'. The questions were constructed carefully to be neutral so as not to provoke socially desirable responses. The pre-field work training with the qualitative data collectors also focused on identifying word choices and patterns of expression that would help detect biased responses. The researchers were also trained to probe further into and/or return to responses that they felt were inauthentic or outliers to the tone and flow of the overall conversation. These strategies, along with the assurance to respondents of the anonymity of their identities, helped minimise the risk of social desirability bias in the qualitative data.

## Limitations of the study

Before proceeding to the analysis of data, we want to highlight a few limitations that the reader should bear in mind. The first relates to the sensitive nature of the topic being researched. Religious coexistence is an extremely sensitive and an uncomfortable topic to open up about, more so using quantitative research methods than qualitative interviews. While we have taken all measures to make the questionnaire and the fieldwork as robust as possible, we recognise that there might be some socially desirable responses as opposed to what respondent really think of 'other' individuals and communities.

We also acknowledge that factors that shape, inform and influence a person's perception of the 'other' are complex, nuanced, and might change from context to context and even person to person. Perceptions of the 'other' are hardly generated in a vacuum. Nor are they linearly associated with the demographic, household, employment, or educational characteristics of persons. Two persons with similar educational levels and employment status have completely different perceptions of 'other' individuals and communities. Thus, it is entirely possible that none of the observed factors might be relevant to how some people perceive the 'other'. Instead, non-quantifiable and illogical factors might be significant drivers of how people form opinions and perceptions about the 'other'. Some of the patterns we observe in the quantitative data that appear to be counterintuitive could be precisely due to these unobserved and non-measurable sentiments of respondents.

The quantitative data analysis we undertake in this study is limited only to a descriptive statistics analysis. We do not undertake any econometric modelling and do not attempt to make associational or causal linkages between variables. Instead, we merely present and discuss the descriptive trends and patterns. We must also caution the reader that the findings of the qualitative analysis are context-specific and cannot be generalised, as is typically the case with qualitative information. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis provides an opportunity to unpack and analyse the trends and patterns observed in the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data.

# Part I. Quantitative data

# 1. Profile of the respondents

## 1.1 Individual characteristics

The sample of respondents consists of 56 percent women and 44 percent men. The mean age of the respondents is 37 years for both groups. A little over two thirds of the sample is married, while about 28 percent is single. The majority of the sample (about 57 percent) have not completed their GCE Advanced Level qualification. About 64 percent of the sample is gainfully employed while 8 percent of the respondents were unemployed and actively looking for work at the time of the data collection. A little below a fifth of the sample is engaged in household work only. Of them about 96 percent are women. Table 2 summarises the individual characteristics of respondents from the five sub-samples.

*Table 2: Individual characteristics of the respondents*

|  | Buddhist % | Hindu % | Muslim % | RC % | Non-RC Christian % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 38.6 | 35.6 | 37.9 | 36.0 | 37.0 |
| Gender |  |  |  |  |  |
| Female | 58.4 | 60.9 | 46.5 | 51.0 | 55.9 |
| Male | 41.6 | 39.1 | 53.5 | 49.0 | 44.1 |
| Education |  |  |  |  |  |
| No schooling | 4.1 | 3.5 | 4.8 | 2.0 | 1.7 |
| Primary | 10.3 | 9.3 | 13.0 | 9.4 | 3.4 |
| Grades 6-9 | 18.0 | 18.4 | 15.9 | 12.8 | 6.8 |
| Grades 9-11 | 15.0 | 13.3 | 13.0 | 9.4 | 10.2 |
| Completed OL | 14.5 | 10.7 | 11.9 | 14.1 | 13.6 |
| Grades 12-13 | 18.1 | 13.9 | 11.9 | 19.5 | 31.4 |
| Completed AL | 7.1 | 15.6 | 11.3 | 16.1 | 13.6 |
| Above AL | 12.8 | 15.3 | 18.1 | 16.8 | 19.5 |
| Usual activity |  |  |  |  |  |
| Employed | 62.3 | 59.8 | 74.5 | 65.8 | 63.6 |
| Unemployed | 9.1 | 9.3 | 6.8 | 5.4 | 5.9 |
| Economically inactive | 46.8 | 49.5 | 32.3 | 39.6 | 42.3 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

Close to 70 percent of the sample that is employed work in the service sector, while about 18 percent and 11 percent work in the industry and agriculture sectors, respectively. About two thirds of the employed sub-sample have permanent jobs, while a little over a quarter of them are employed in temporary jobs. Only about 6 percent of the employed respondents work casual jobs. Most of them are either government employees (33 percent), private sector employees (25 percent), or own account workers (27 percent). Close to half of the employed earn a monthly income in the range of LKR 25,000-50,000. About 28 percent earn a monthly income of between LKR 50,000-100,000, while a little over 16 percent have a monthly income of only about LKR 25,000 or less. The characteristics related to employment and income of those who are employed are as follows (Table 3).

*Table 3: Employment and income characteristics of employed respondents*

| | Buddhist | Hindu | Muslim | RC | Non-RC Christian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sector (%) | | | | | |
| Agriculture | 9.5 | 12.7 | 11.4 | 18.4 | 13.3 |
| Industry | 13.0 | 18.9 | 33.1 | 16.3 | 8.0 |
| Services | 77.4 | 68.3 | 55.5 | 65.3 | 78.7 |
| Tenure (%) | | | | | |
| Permanent | 57.3 | 67.8 | 75.8 | 81.6 | 72.0 |
| Temporary | 36.7 | 26.3 | 15.2 | 17.4 | 25.3 |
| Casual | 6.0 | 5.9 | 9.1 | 1.0 | 2.7 |
| Status (%) | | | | | |
| Govt employee | 23.9 | 40.8 | 33.7 | 43.9 | 36.0 |
| Pvt sector employee | 31.8 | 24.6 | 11.0 | 23.5 | 34.7 |
| Own-account worker | 24.9 | 21.3 | 40.9 | 21.4 | 24.0 |
| Other status | 19.4 | 13.3 | 14.4 | 11.2 | 5.3 |
| Monthly income (LKR) | | | | | |
| <25,000 | 16.3 | 22.1 | 13.6 | 16.2 | 7.8 |
| 25,000-50,000 | 46.4 | 57.9 | 47.2 | 45.5 | 48.1 |
| 50,000-100,000 | 30.3 | 18.3 | 33.2 | 33.3 | 40.3 |
| >100,000 | 5.1 | 0.9 | 5.3 | 4.0 | 3.9 |
| Prefer not to say | 2.1 | 0.9 | 0.8 | 1.0 | - |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## 1.2 Household characteristics

The average household size of the respondent is about 4 members, and this is roughly the same across all denominations. However, the age group-wise composition of the households shows Muslim households are characterised by a higher share of children aged below 5 (35 percent; overall average 29 percent), and between 5 and 17 percent (63 percent; overall average 51 percent) compared to other households. On the other hand, the share of household members aged 60 or more is highest in Buddhist households (41 percent; overall average 32 percent). This share is lowest in Muslim households (15 percent).

On average, over three-fourths of the households earn income from wage work, but this share is lower among Muslim households (61 percent). Income from agriculture is more common among Buddhist and Hindu households. Non-agricultural income sources are more common among Muslim households (39 percent) than the sample as a whole (24 percent). Transfer incomes from family or relatives living in Sri Lanka or abroad, and the government (such as Samurdhi, and disability pay) are more prevalent among Hindu households than other households.

The large majority of respondents from all denominations live in a house owned by their household. The asset ownership patterns suggest that Muslim households tend to own less communication infrastructure compared to the sample as a whole. Only a small proportion of Hindu and Muslim households own a car or van.

*Table 4: Household expenditure, assets, and infrastructure*

|  | **Buddhist** | **Hindu** | **Muslim** | **RC** | **Non-RC Christian** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| HH exp. (LKR) | 48,165.7 | 48,038.0 | 51,427.8 | 58,865.8 | 57,822.0 |
| Own house | 94.8 | 89.6 | 89.2 | 88.6 | 83.1 |
| Telephone | 44.4 | 65.1 | 44.8 | 76.5 | 47.5 |
| Smart phone | 97.6 | 91.8 | 88.7 | 92.6 | 96.6 |
| Computer | 52.5 | 45.8 | 33.1 | 62.4 | 54.2 |
| Internet | 74.7 | 66.1 | 59.5 | 81.2 | 71.2 |
| Cable TV | 59.9 | 70.2 | 40.8 | 84.6 | 53.4 |
| Car/van | 23.6 | 7.7 | 9.1 | 19.5 | 13.6 |
| Motorcycle | 63.0 | 67.0 | 62.0 | 76.5 | 83.1 |

| Bicycle | 40.6 | 68.2 | 62.9 | 64.4 | 66.9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trishaw | 25.9 | 18.4 | 14.2 | 14.8 | 15.3 |
| Safe drinking water | 97.7 | 92.5 | 97.5 | 93.3 | 95.8 |
| Own toilet | 98.5 | 97.5 | 99.4 | 98.7 | 97.5 |
| Electricity | 99.5 | 98.6 | 99.4 | 98.7 | 100.0 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

A little over a third of the respondents live in mostly Buddhist neighbourhoods, while about a quarter of them lives in mostly Hindu neighbourhoods. A little over 15 percent of the respondents live in mostly Muslim areas. About 11 percent and 13 percent of the respondents respectively live in Roman Catholic and non-Roman Catholic (non-RC) Christian neighbourhoods.

# 2. Respondent's community

## 2.1 Family and relatives

Nearly all respondents come from families where both parents are from the same religion. 99 percent of Muslims, 98 percent of Buddhists and Hindus and 97 percent of Roman Catholics have parents of the same religion. In contrast, about 21 percent of the respondents from the non-RC Christian group have parents who are from different religious backgrounds.

In the sub-sample of married respondents, 99 percent of Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, and 96 percent of Roman Catholics have a spouse of the same faith. In contrast, about 15 percent of non-RC Christians are married to partners of a faith different to their own. In the sub-sample of respondents with children, 98 percent of Buddhists, 99 percent of Hindus and Muslims, 96 percent of non-RC Christians, and 95 percent of Roman Catholics share the same faith as their children. Thus, by and large, the nuclear family units of respondents from all groups appear to be rather homogenous in terms of the religion followed. Only non-RC Christians in the sample appear to have some diversity in terms of the faiths followed by the immediate family.

There is more diversity within the extended family across all groups (Figure 1: Panel A). However, only about 11 percent of Muslims have extended family or close relatives in a religion other than their own. Only about a fourth of Buddhists have extended family from other religions. In contrast, close to 50 percent of Roman Catholics, a little over 52 percent of Hindus, and as many as 83 percent of non-RC Christians have extended family and relatives from religions other than their own. The large majority of Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians have family friends who belong to religions other than the respondents' own (Figure 1: Panel B). In comparison, only about 36 percent of Muslims have family friends from religions other than their own.

*Figure 1: Extended family and family friends from religions different to the respondents' own*

Panel A: Extended family

Panel B: Family friends
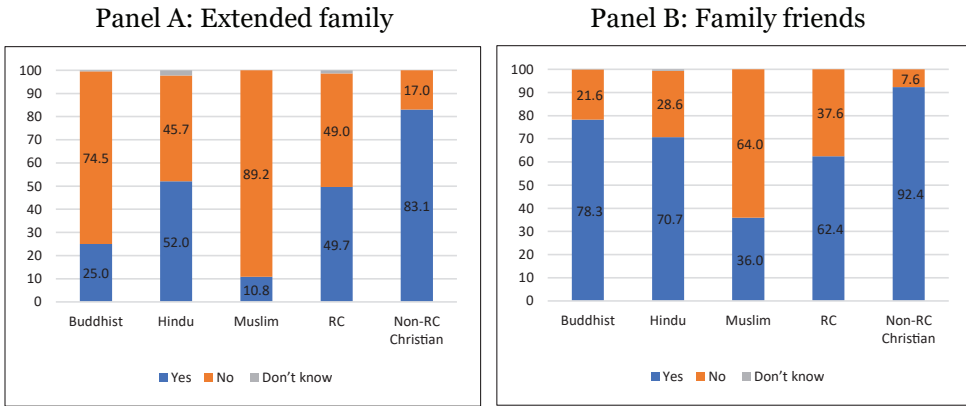


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## 2.2 School

Most respondents from all religions have been to schools with both boys and girls (Figure 2). However, this share is somewhat lower among Roman Catholics and Muslims, than Hindus, Buddhists, and non-RC Christians. Most Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Roman Catholics have attended schools where the popular religious identity of the school is the same as their own (Figure 3: Panel A). This share is particularly high among Buddhists (95 percent). Less than 50 percent of non-RC Christians have attended schools with the same religious identity as their own.

*Figure 2: Type of school by student gender*
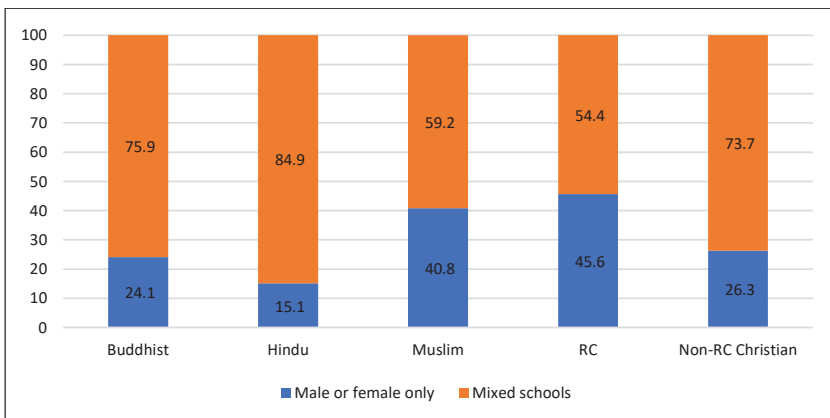


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

A little over a fifth of non-RC Christians have attended Catholic schools, and about 18 percent have attended Hindu schools. More Hindus and Roman Catholics than others have attended secular schools with no strong religious identity. The student majority of the school respondents have attended mirrors the popular religious identity of the school (Figure 3: Panel B). Nearly all Buddhists appear to have attended schools where the student majority are Buddhists. This share is relatively less among non-Buddhists. Non-RC Christians appear to have attended the schools with the greatest diversity in terms of students' religion.

The majority of Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians have had the opportunity at school to celebrate religious events of other faiths (Figure 4: Panel A). This share is particularly high among Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians. However, only less than a third of Muslims have had this opportunity at school. The majority of respondents from all religions have also had the opportunity to learn from teachers different from their own faiths (Figure 4: Panel B). This share, however, is comparatively lower among Buddhists (52 percent). The majority of non-RC Christians, Hindus, and Roman Catholics have also had the opportunity to learn about other religions and practices, at school (Figure 4: Panel C). In contrast, only about 34 percent of Muslims and about 35 percent of Buddhists have had this opportunity at school.
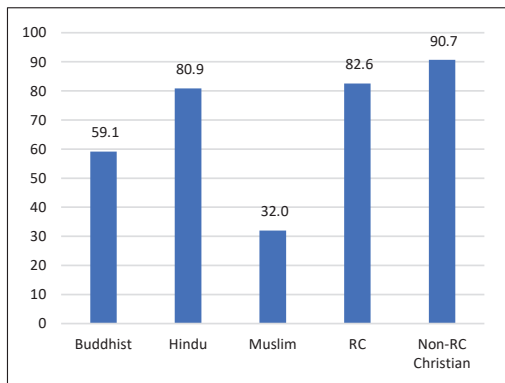
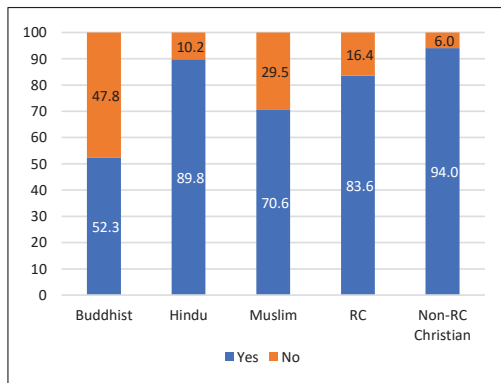*Figure 3: Religious characteristics of the school*
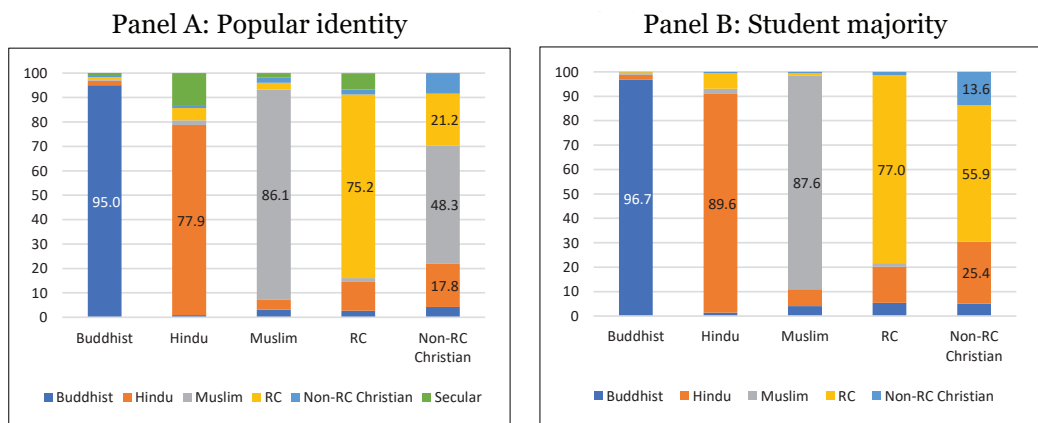


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

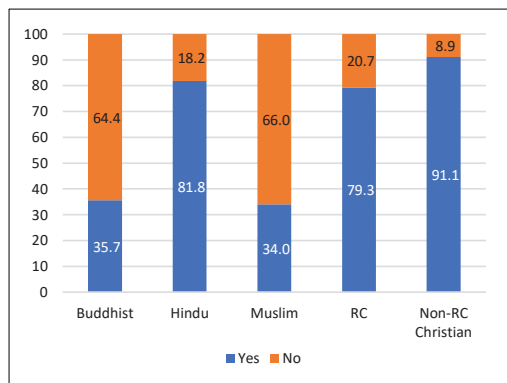## *Figure 4: Exposure to other religions and practices*

Panel A: Celebrated events of different religions

Panel B: Learned from teachers of other faiths

Panel C: Had opportunity learn about other religions and practices

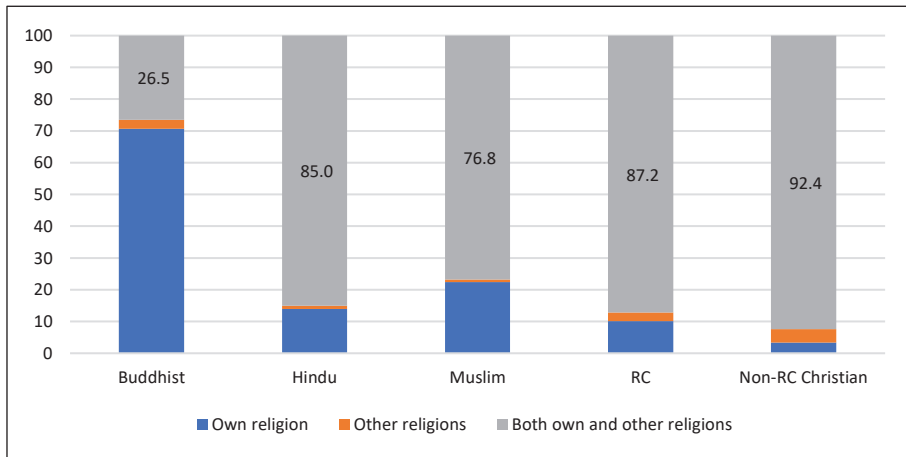Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## 2.3 Friends, peers, and community

The majority of respondents from all groups have friends from different religions at this stage in their lives (Table 5). This share is somewhat lower among Buddhists (78 percent) and Muslims (80 percent) than Hindus, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians. All non-RC Christians tend to have friends from religions other than their own. While the majority of respondents have also had friends from different religions when they were in school, this share is particularly low among Muslims (53 percent) and Buddhists (62 percent). A similar pattern is also observed in relation to colleagues among employed respondents. The majority of respondents, except for non-RC Christians, live with neighbours who are from religions other than their own. However, this share is notably low among Muslims (29 percent) and Hindus (38 percent).

*Table 5: Social networks of religions other than respondents' own*

|  | **Buddhist** | **Hindu** | **Muslim** | **RC** | **Non-RC Christian** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Friends from different religions now | 77.6 | 89.0 | 80.1 | 88.1 | 100.0 |
| Friends from different religions when schooling | 62.4 | 92.7 | 52.7 | 85.2 | 100.0 |
| Colleagues from different religions, if employed | 60.6 | 75.7 | 59.1 | 74.3 | 85.7 |
| Neighbours from different religions | 44.1 | 38.2 | 28.8 | 43.7 | 91.7 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 5: Religious identity of the majority of friends*



Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

The large majority of friends among Buddhists consist of those from their own religion (Figure 5). Only a little over a quarter of Buddhist respondents have friends from both own and other religions. In contrast, the majority of non-Buddhists have roughly similar shares of friends from their own faith and others. Not many respondents across all religions have friends who are predominantly from other religions.

Most respondents have lived in their current Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions all their lives. The large majority have been there at least for over 5 years (Figure 6: Panel A.) The large majority of respondents among Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims,

and Roman Catholics live in an area where the ethno-religious majority are the same as themselves. This share is low among non-RC Christians. The large majority of them live in areas where the majority are Roman Catholics or Hindus (Figure 6: Panel B).

*Figure 6: Community of respondent[1]*

Panel A: Length of residence in the GN

Panel B: Ethno-religious composition of the GN
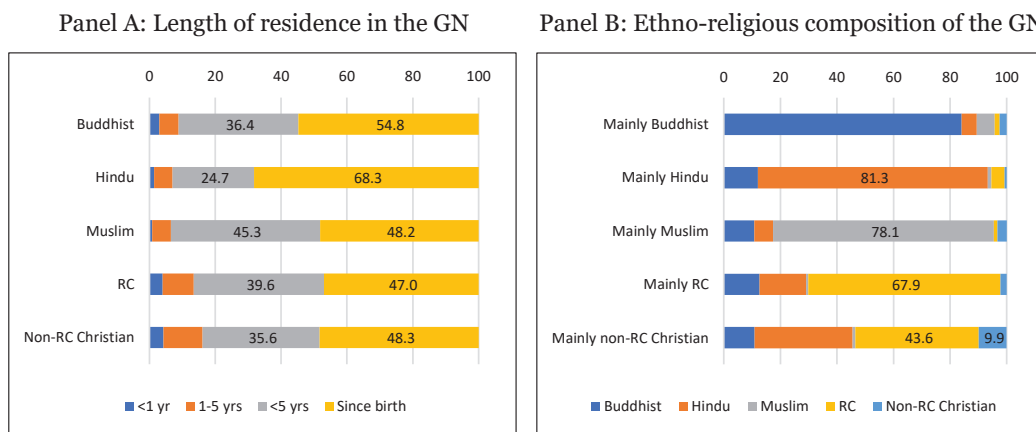


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 7: Involvement in the community*
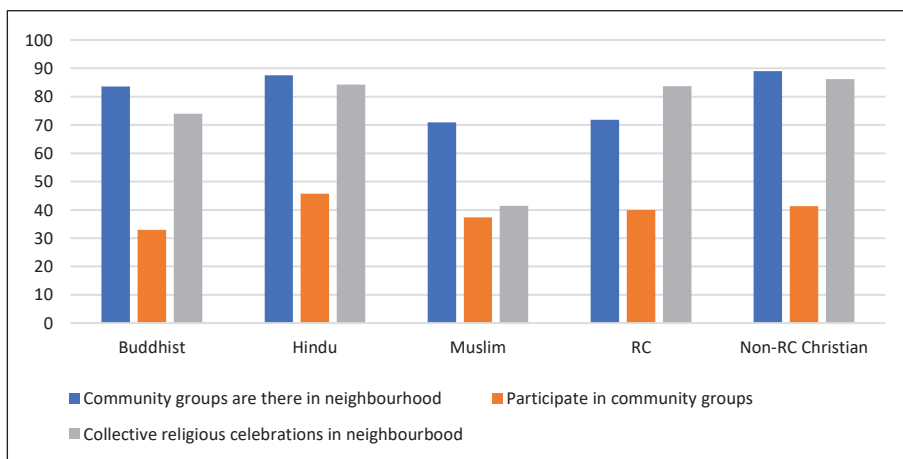


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

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[1]     About 6 percent of the respondents do not have an idea about the ethnoreligious majority in their GN division. The analysed data excludes such respondents.

While most respondents know about community groups in their neighbourhoods, only a smaller proportion of them tend to participate in such groups (Figure 7). This is observed commonly for all groups. By and large, non-Muslims are aware of community groups that organise collective religious celebrations. In comparison, relatively fewer Muslims are aware of community groups that have collective religious celebrations.

# 3. Respondent's use of media and social media

Television appears to be the most commonly used source of information among both traditional and social media sources. However, this share is comparatively lower among Muslims as it is to be expected given the lower ownership of televisions among Muslim households compared to non-Muslim ones. The use of radio is less common than television across all groups, but more Muslims compared to non-Muslims use the radio as a media source. Across all groups, among traditional media, newspapers are the least common source of information.

E-newspapers are more common than traditional newspapers among Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians. Among non-traditional sources, only a relatively small portion seems to rely on gossip websites for information. This share is, however, somewhat higher among Buddhists than non-Buddhists.

Among the enumerated social media sources, WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube appear to be the most popular platforms for information. In fact, WhatsApp appears to be the most popular source among Muslims, across all the enumerated sources. Viber is also a commonly used platform among Roman Catholics, Hindus and non-RC Christians. Relatively lower proportions of respondents use IMO, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok as sources of information.

## 3.1 Sources of media and social media

*Figure 8: Sources of media and social media used*
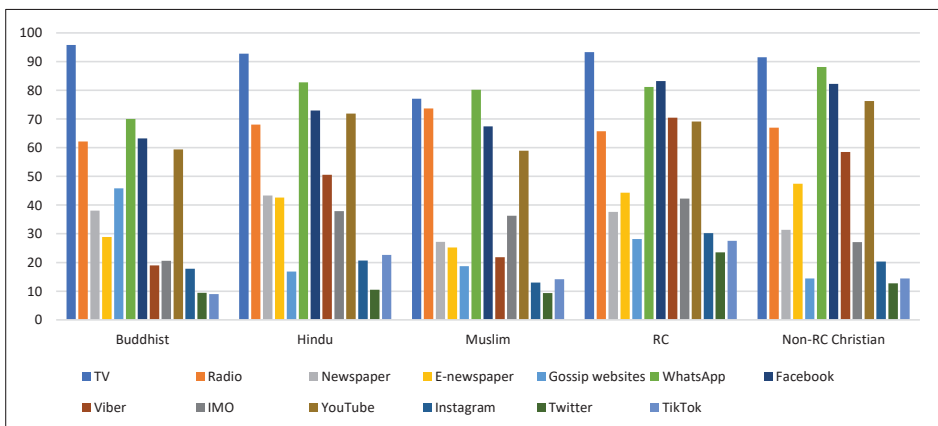


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

The preferred sources of news updates are somewhat different across the five groups (Figure 9). The large majority of Buddhists prefer television. Similar preferences are echoed by non-RC Christians. A greater proportion of non-RC Christians than Buddhists prefer other sources. Only about 22 percent of Muslims choose television as the preferred source for news updates. In contrast, about a third of Muslims prefer Facebook as a source of news updates. About 28 percent of Hindus also prefer Facebook for news updates. A fewer share of Hindus and Roman Catholics, compared to about 28 percent of Muslims, prefer WhatsApp. About 14 percent of Roman Catholics choose YouTube as a preferred source of news updates, compared to none from other groups.

*Figure 9: Preferred sources of news updates*
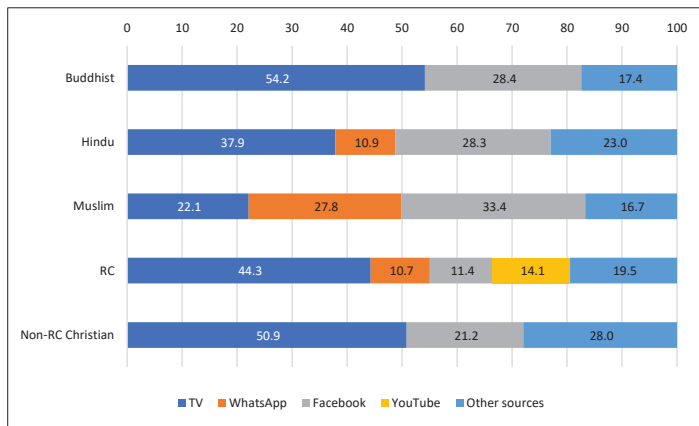


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## 3.2   Use of social media
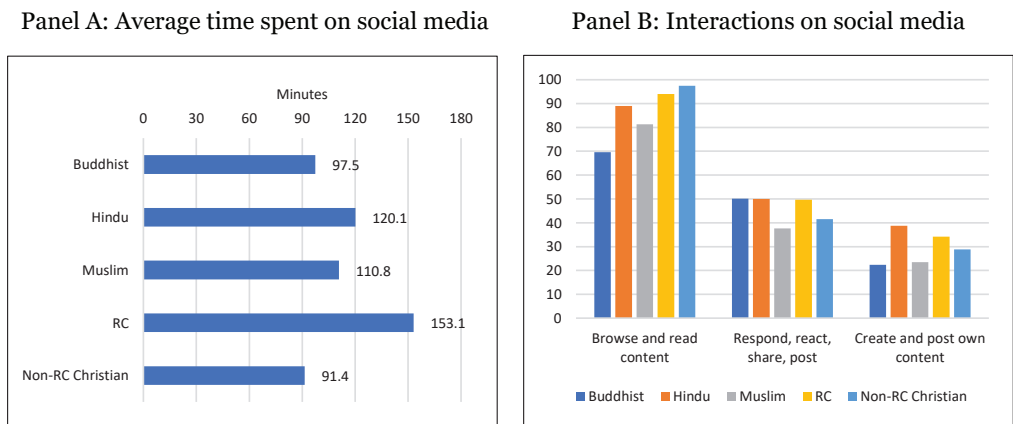
*Figure 10: Engagement on social media*

Panel A: Average time spent on social media          Panel B: Interactions on social media



Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

Non-RC Christians and Buddhists spend the least amount of time on social media (Figure 10: Panel A). They spend a little over 1.5 hours on social media a day. Muslims on average spend a little below 2 hours while Hindus spend about 2 hours on social media. Roman Catholics, on average, spend the most amount of time on social media. They spend about 2.5 hours on social media a day. However, irrespective of the time spent on social media, clearly most respondents across all religions by and large only browse and read content (Figure 10: Panel B). Relatively less Muslims compared to non-Muslims engage in social media by way of responding or reacting to posts or sharing posts. Not many respondents create and post their own content, and this share is particularly low among Buddhists and Muslims. In all, Muslims appear to be the least engaged with social media although they prefer to rely on such sources for information.

In the rest of this report, we explore the perceptions of the respondents of the religious 'other' across several topics.

# 4. Perceptions about own religiosity

All respondents consider themselves to be belonging to a religion. The majority of them (41 percent) identify themselves as Buddhists. About 28 percent identify themselves as Hindus, 17 percent as Muslims, 7 percent as Roman Catholics and 5 percent as NRC Christians. Only about 3 percent of the respondents are currently following a religion different to that they were born into.

Irrespective of the religious denomination they subscribe to, the large majority of the respondents (about 96 percent) consider themselves to be religious persons. About three-fourths of the sample observe religious practices daily, while about 12 percent tend to do so only on special occasions.

- Daily observance of religion is most prevalent among Muslims and Hindus, and is lowest among Buddhists. They also make up the highest share among those who hardly engage in worship.

- A much higher share of women (85 percent) than men (63 percent) tend to engage in religious worship daily, irrespective of what religion they follow.

- Furthermore, the share of respondents who engage in religious practice daily is highest in the oldest age group (50 or more) across all denominations.

*Figure 11: Frequency of worship, by denomination*
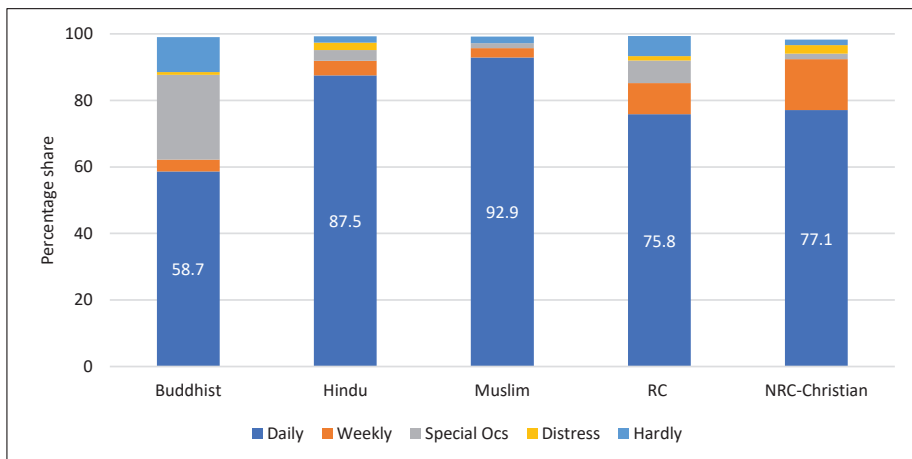


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

For the majority of the respondents, being 'religious' means doing no harm to others (70 percent) and living a peaceful life (64 percent). In comparison, much fewer respondents associate religiosity with observing religious rituals on special days (39 percent), or reading religious scripture and developing knowledge (39 percent). The data disaggregated by denomination however shows some nuanced patterns of how religiosity is interpreted.

- More Muslims and non-RC Christians, than Buddhists, Hindus, and Roman Catholics consider living according to the prescribed ways of life as one interpretation of religiosity.
- Reading religious text and developing knowledge of the scripture, and doing good deeds for a better afterlife, tend to be perceived as part of religiosity more among Muslims, compared to respondents from other denominations.

*Figure 12: Interpretations of being 'religious', by respondent's religion*
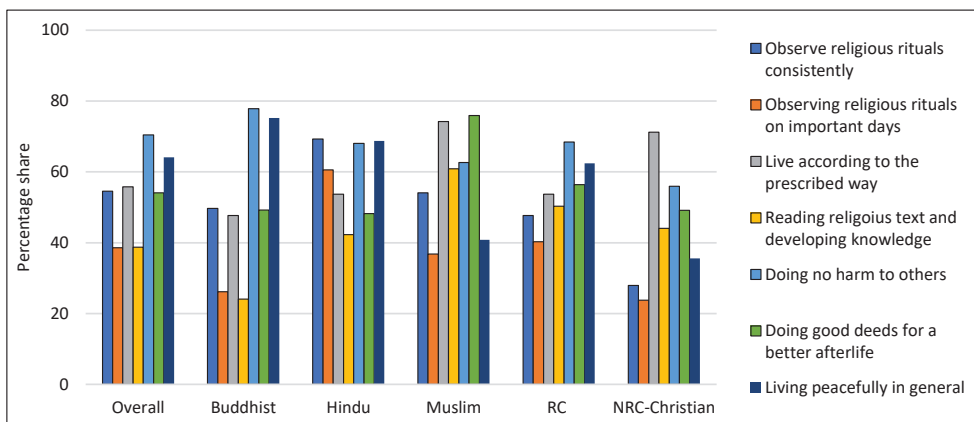


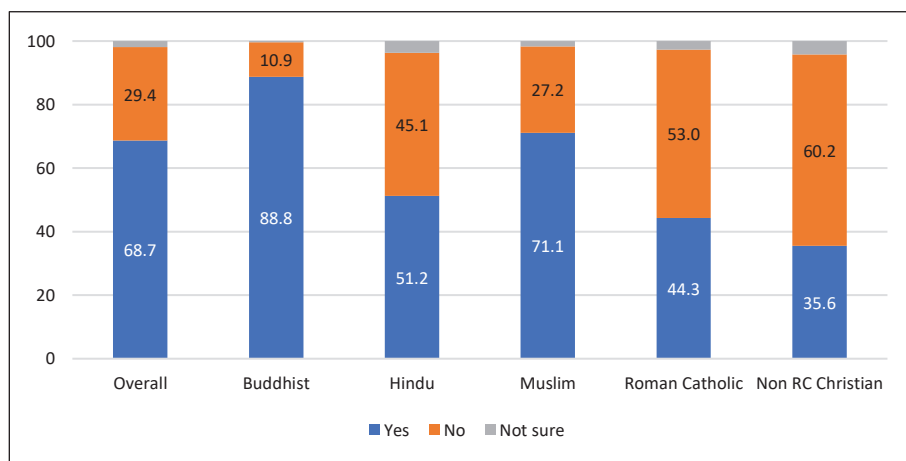Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

Only about 9 percent of all respondents have been on religious pilgrimages overseas. Of them, the majority are Muslims (18 percent) and non-RC Christians (15 percent). About 11 percent of Roman Catholics have also travelled on overseas pilgrimages. This share is lower among Hindus (9 percent) and is lowest among Buddhists (5 percent).

# 5. Perceptions about the country situation on religious co-existence

## 5.1 Is Sri Lanka essentially a Buddhist country?

The large majority of the overall sample (68.7 percent) believe Sri Lanka is essentially a Buddhist country, while 29.4 percent do not believe that is so. The percentage unsure is negligible (1.9 percent). Most Buddhists (89 percent) consider Sri Lanka to be an essentially Buddhist country. About 71 percent of Muslims and 51 percent of Hindus also believe this to be true. In comparison, only about 44 percent and 36 percent of Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians respectively believe Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. More Christians (4.2 percent) and Hindus (3.7 percent) than others are not sure whether Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country or not.
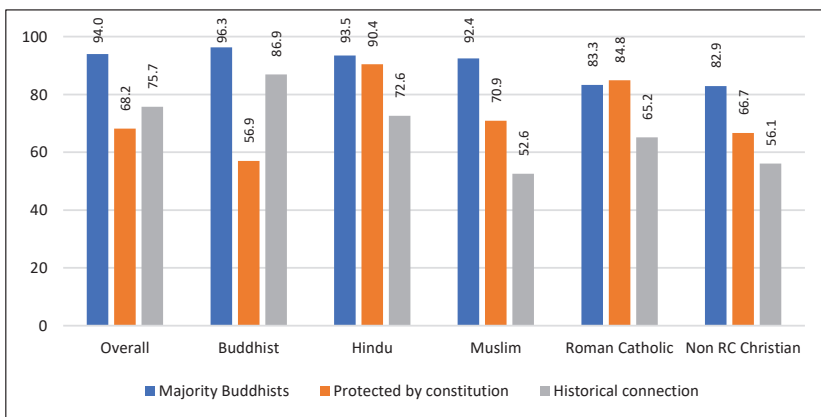
*Figure 13: Perceptions of whether Sri Lanka is essentially a Buddhist country*



Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

**Why do you think Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country?**

*Figure 14: Perceptions of why Sri Lanka is essentially a Buddhist country*



Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

The large majority of the respondents who perceive Sri Lanka to be a Buddhist country think so because the majority of Sri Lankans are Buddhists. The historical connection of the country to Buddhism also shapes the perceptions about 75 percent of the sub-sample. The constitutional protection of Buddhism also encourages a little over two-thirds of the respondents to believe that Sri Lanka is essentially a Buddhist country. These patterns are somewhat more nuanced when disaggregated by respondents' religion. For example, although over 90 percent of Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims think of Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country because the majority of its people is Buddhist, much less Muslims and Hindus than Buddhists think Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country because of its historical connection to Buddhism. A much higher proportion of non-Buddhists than Buddhists consider Sri Lanka to be a Buddhist country because of the constitutional priority bestowed on Buddhism. In fact, among Roman Catholics, this appears to be the most likely reason that underpins their perception of Sri Lanka as an essentially Buddhist country.

Next, we presented the respondents with a series of statements and measured the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 where respondents strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree. Figure 15 to Figure 24 present the proportion of respondents by religion who agree, disagree, or are neutral to each of these statements.

*Figure 15: Religion tends to divide communities in Sri Lanka now more than 10 years go*
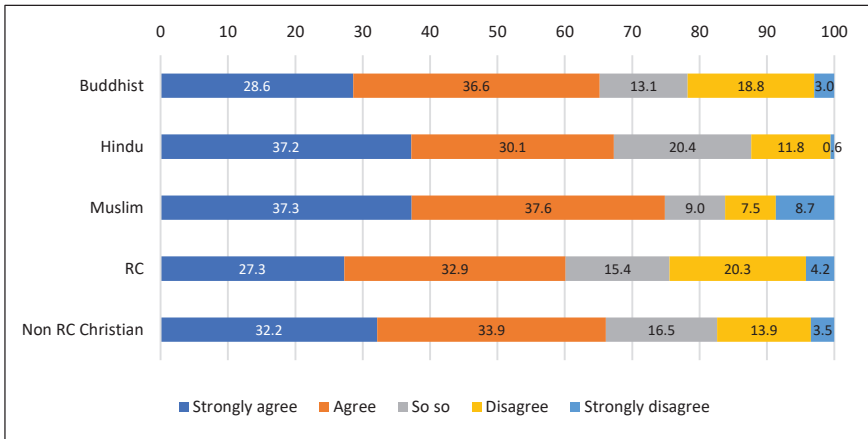


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- The large majority of respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that religion is a more significant marker of division now compared to 10 years ago.
- More than a third of Hindu and Muslim respondents strongly agree with this view.
- Close to 25 percent of Roman Catholics disagree or disagree that religion is a stronger marker of social division compared to 10 years ago.
- The proportion of those who strongly disagree with this statement is highest among Muslims.

*Figure 16: Religion has always been a marker of division in Sri Lanka*
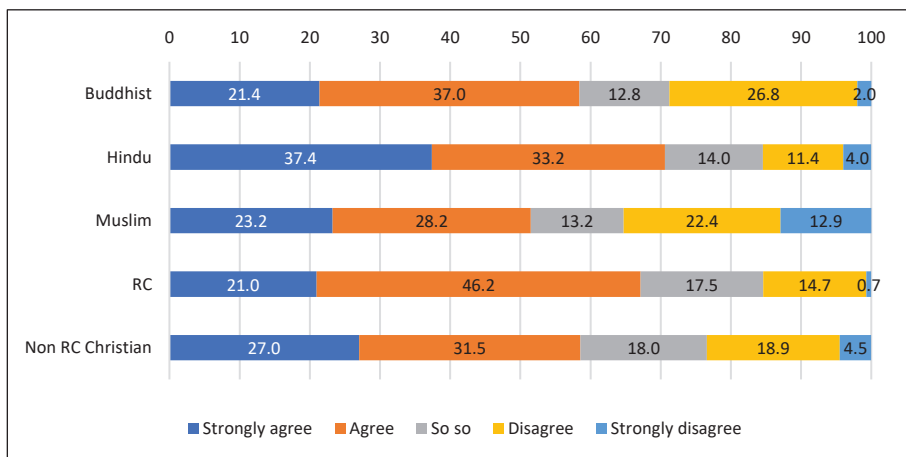


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- About 71 percent of the Hindu respondents strongly agree or agree that religion has always been a marker of social segregation in Sri Lanka. In fact, the proportion that strongly agrees with this is significantly higher among Hindus than non-Hindu respondents.

- Only a little over a half of Muslims concur with this position. In fact, about 35 percent of Muslims disagree or strongly disagree that religion has always been a marker of division.

*Figure 17: Religion is a frequent cause of tension between communities in Sri Lanka now*
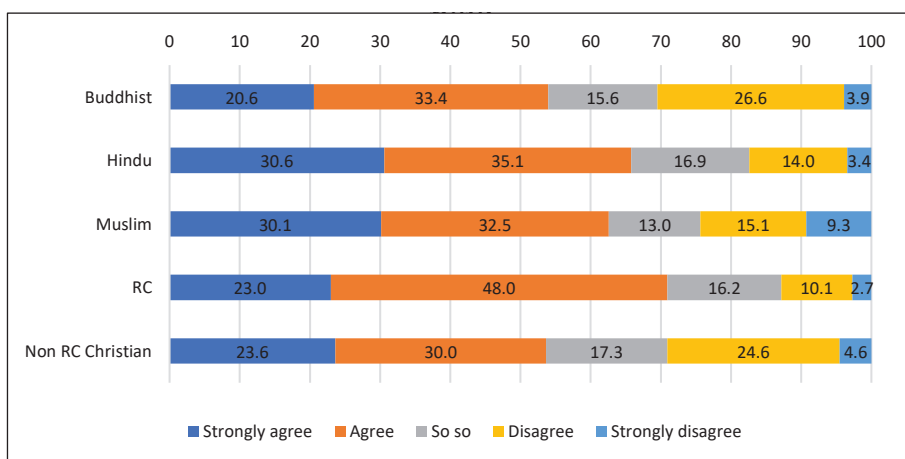


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- About 71 percent of the Roman Catholics strongly agree or agree that religion is a frequent cause of tension among communities in Sri Lanka now. About two-thirds of the Hindus also share this view.

- The proportion that disagrees or strongly disagrees with this perception is highest among Buddhists and non-RC Christians.

- More Muslims (9 percent) than non-Muslims strongly disagree with this perception.

*Figure 18: Religious diversity has enriched the Sri Lankan Society*
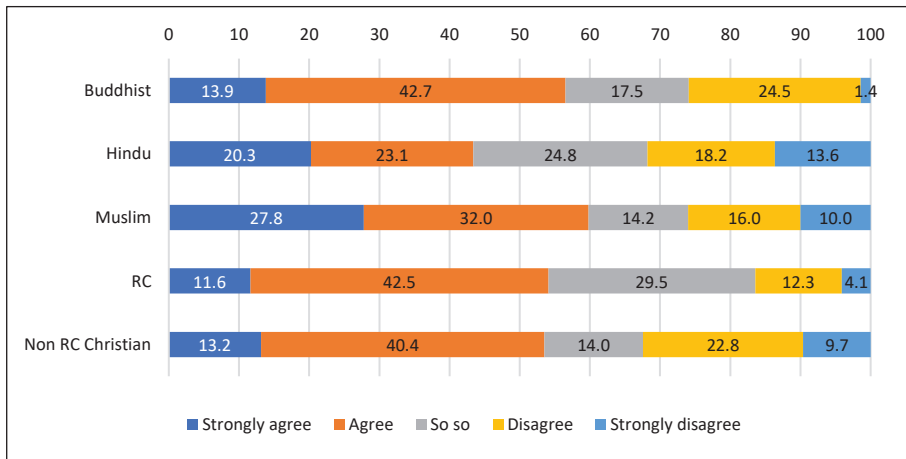


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- The majority of Muslims, Buddhists, Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians strongly agree or agree that religious diversity has enriched the society in Sri Lanka.

- Only about 46 percent of Hindu respondents agree with this position. In fact, about 14 percent of the Hindu respondents strongly disagree with this perception.

- About a third of non-RC Christians and a little over a quarter of Muslim respondents also disagree or strongly disagree that religious diversity has enriched the local society.

*Figure 19: Politicians in Sri Lanka use religion to further their causes*
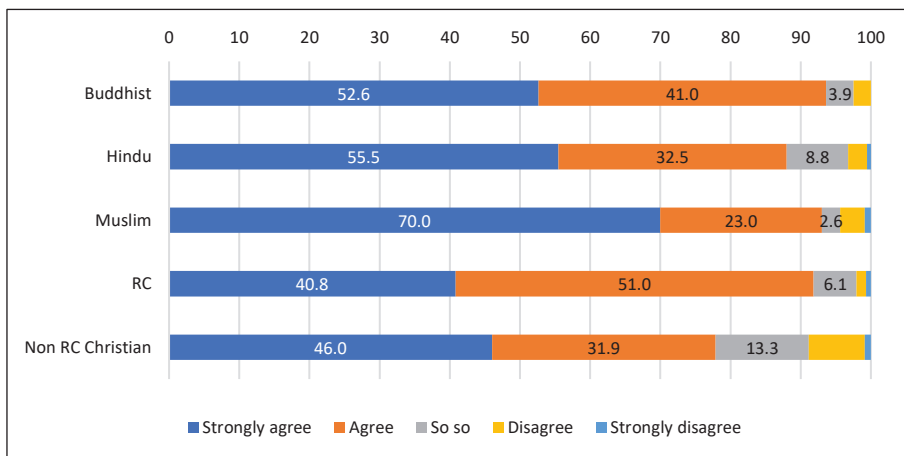


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- The large majority of respondents from all religions tend to agree or strongly agree that politicians manipulate religion to further their causes. The proportion of respondents who strongly agree with this statement is as high as 70 percent. Over 50 percent of Hindus and Buddhists also strongly agree.

- Relatively less non-RC Christians seem to agree or strongly agree with this statement. In fact, about 9 percent of them disagree or strongly disagree with this perception.

*Figure 20: All religions in Sri Lanka have a level-playing field*
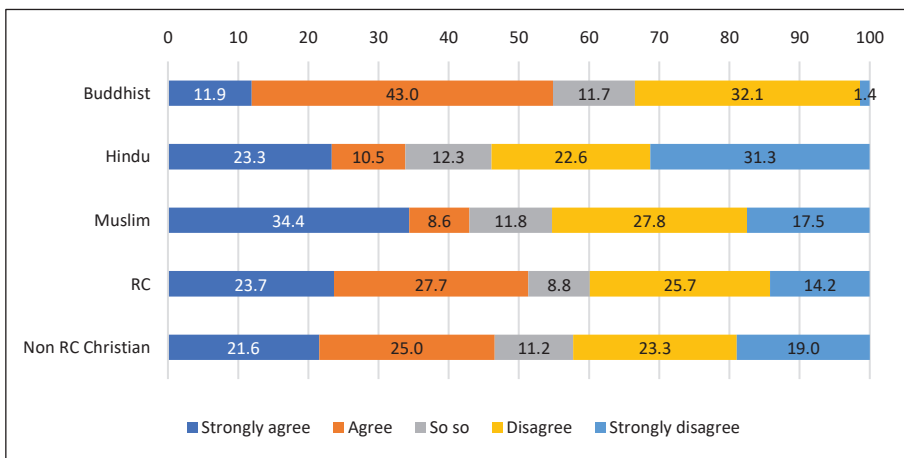


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- About 55 percent of Buddhist respondents strongly agree or agree that all religions have a level-playing field in the country. A little over half of the Roman Catholics also share this opinion.

- However, much less Hindus and Muslims appear to agree with this statement. Close to a third of the Hindu respondents strongly disagree that all religions have a level-playing field in Sri Lanka. In fact, about 54 percent disagree or strongly disagree with this stance.

- By and large, more non-Buddhists than Buddhists tend to agree with this statement.

*Figure 21: The constitution gives Buddhism an unfair advantage over other religions*
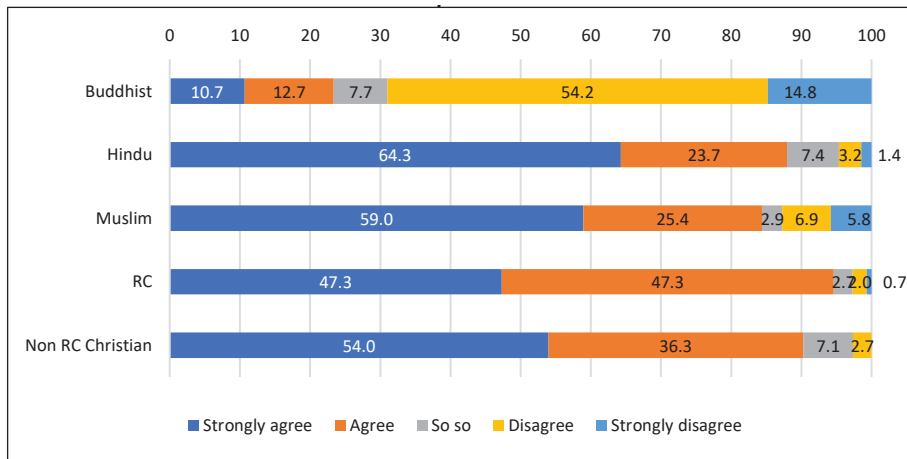


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- There is a clear division of opinions between Buddhists and non-Buddhists in relation to whether the constitutional protection of Buddhism gives the religion an unfair advantage.

- About 69 percent of the Buddhists disagree or strongly disagree that the Sri Lankan constitution gives an unfair advantage towards Buddhism. However, a little over a tenth of Buddhists tend to strongly agree that the constitutional commitment towards the supremacy of Buddhism gives the religion an unfair advantage.

- The large majority from all other religions ten to strongly agree with this perception. This share is as high as 64 percent among Hindus and 59 percent among Muslims.

*Figure 22: Religion is increasingly becoming a more important feature in Sri Lanka's public life*
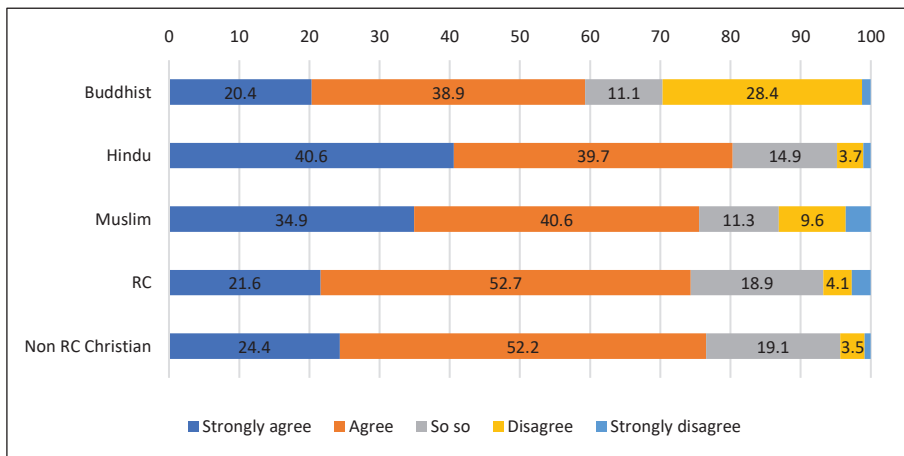


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

About 80 percent of the Hindus and about 75 percent of the Muslims strongly agree or agree that religion is becoming an important feature in the country's public life. In comparison only about 60 percent of the Buddhists believe this to be the case. In fact, about 30 percent of Buddhists disagree or strongly disagree that religion is becoming and important feature in Sri Lanka's public life.

Much less respondents from other religions disagree with this statement.

*Figure 23: Government does not understand the difference between organised religion and living life according to religion*
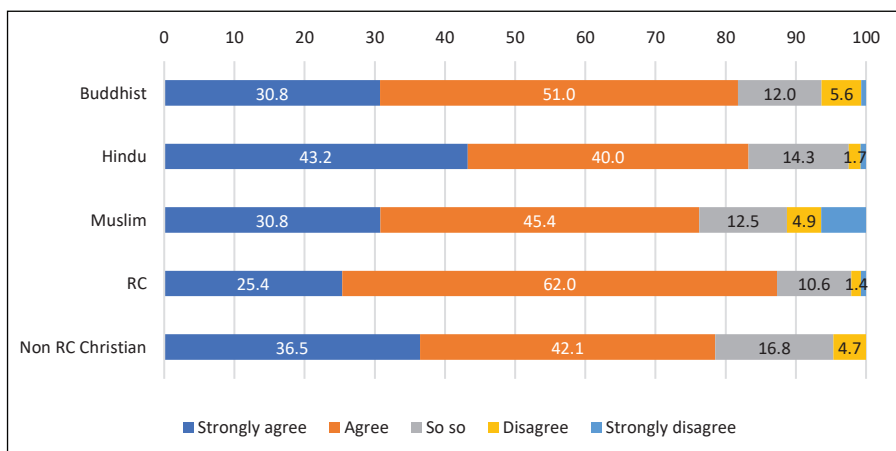


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- A large majority of respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that the government does not understand the difference between organised religion and living life according to one's religious beliefs and values.
- As many as 43 percent of the Hindus strongly agree with this statement.

*Figure 24: Religious radicalisation and extremism are a threat to a peaceful Sri Lanka*
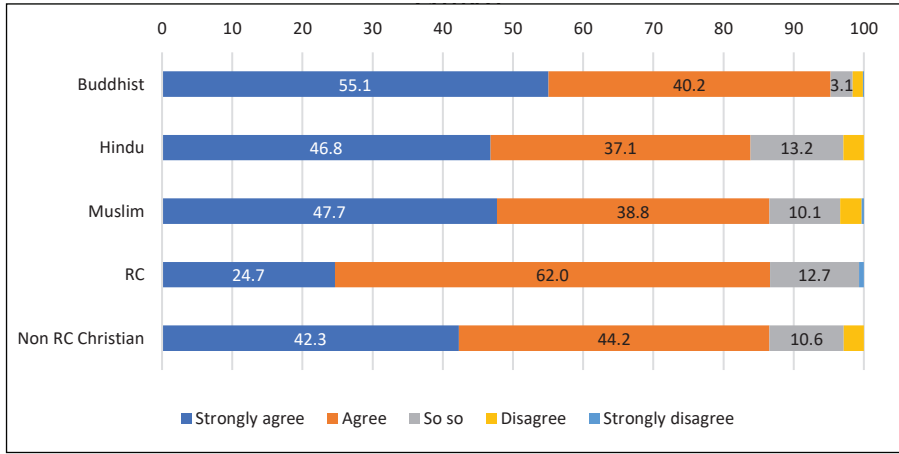


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Over 80 percent of the respondents from all religions agree or strongly agree that religious extremism is a threat to peace in the country.
- About 55 percent of Buddhists strongly agree with this statement. The majority of Hindu, Muslim, and non-RC Christians also strongly agree.

# 6. Living in a religiously diverse society

## 6.1 Awareness about other religions and beliefs

We gathered some information about how exposed respondents are to the ways of other religions and world views that are different from their own. Figure 25 presents an overview of whether respondents have some basic idea about different religions, including their own.

*Figure 25: Has a basic knowledge about religions*
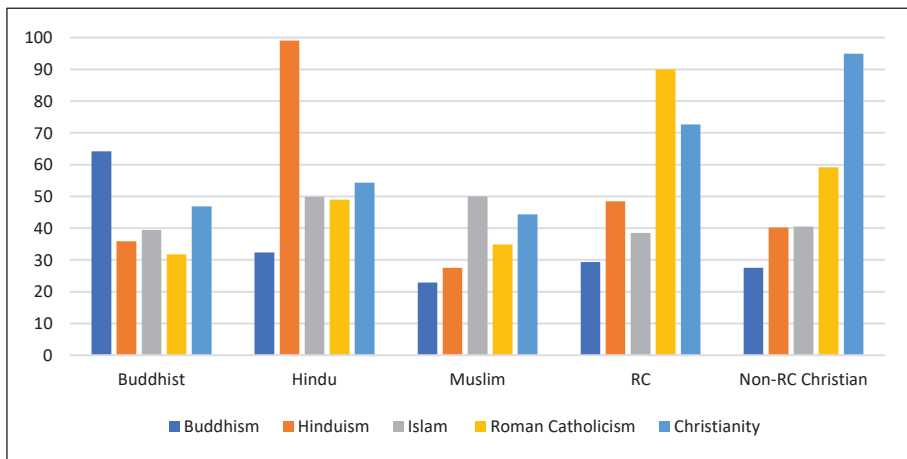


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- A common pattern permeating all groups is that they tend to know more about their own religion than about other religions.
- A very high proportion of Hindu, non-RC Christians, and Roman Catholics consider they know some basic facts about their own religion.
- A smaller share of Buddhists and Muslims have some basic knowledge of other religions.
- A small proportion of non-Buddhists appear to have some basic knowledge of Buddhism compared to other religions that aren't their own. For example, more Hindus seem to have a basic knowledge of Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Christianity than Buddhism.

*Figure 26: Have visited places of worship*
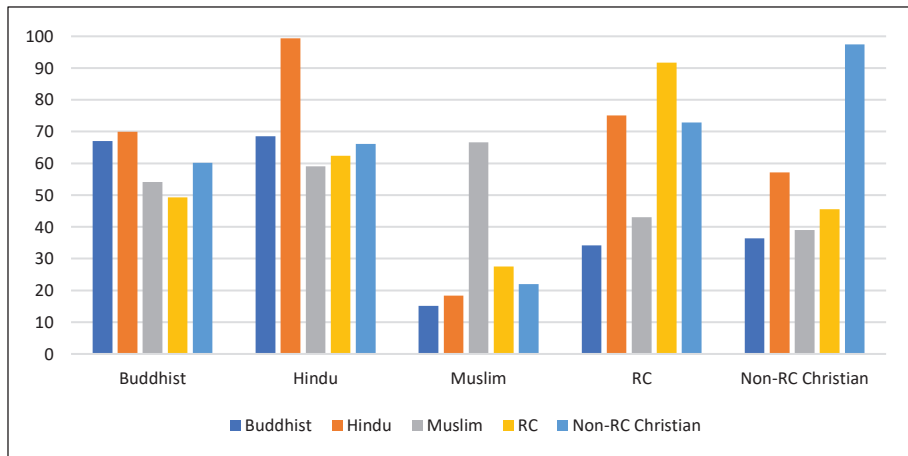


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- As earlier, we observe that the percentage of respondents that have visited places of worship is typically highest for places of their own faith.

- Interestingly, however, it appears that the proportion of Buddhists that have visited places of Hindu worship is slightly higher than places of Buddhist worship.

- A large proportion of Hindu respondents have visited places of Buddhist worship.

- Among Muslims, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians, only a comparatively small proportion have visited Buddhist places of worship.

- Overall, Muslims appear to have the least exposure to places of worship of other faiths.

## 6.2  Level of involvement in a multi-religious society

We presented a series of statements to explore respondents' attitude towards living in a multi-religious society. The extent of agreement with each of the statement ranges from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Figure 27 to Figure 30 below graph the observations.

*Figure 27: People of my faith should invite others to visit my places of worship*
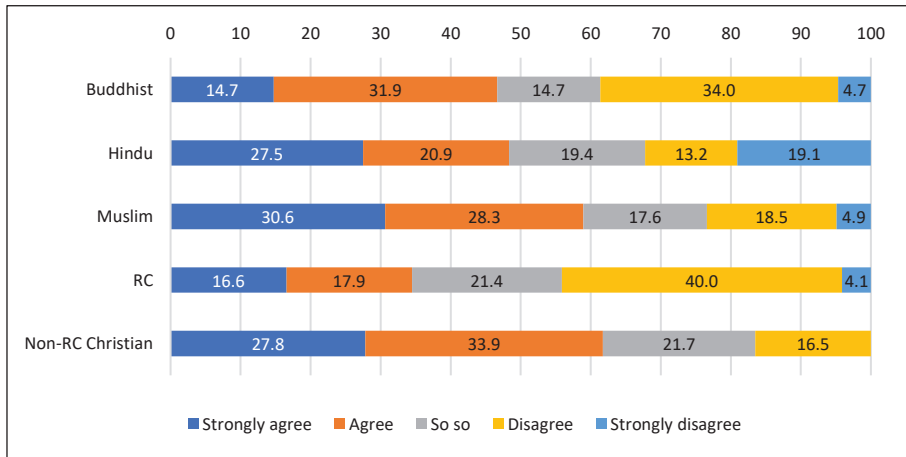
- Close to 60 percent of Muslims strongly agree or agree that their community must invite others to visit their places of worship. A little over 60 percent of non-RC Christians also share the same sentiment.
- In comparison, only a little over a third of Roman Catholics agree with this statement. In fact, about 44 percent of them disagree or strongly disagree that they should invite people of other faiths to visit their places of worship.
- About 38 percent of Buddhists and 32 percent of Hindus also share a similar perception.

*Figure 28: People of my faith should be willing to participate in multi-faith events*
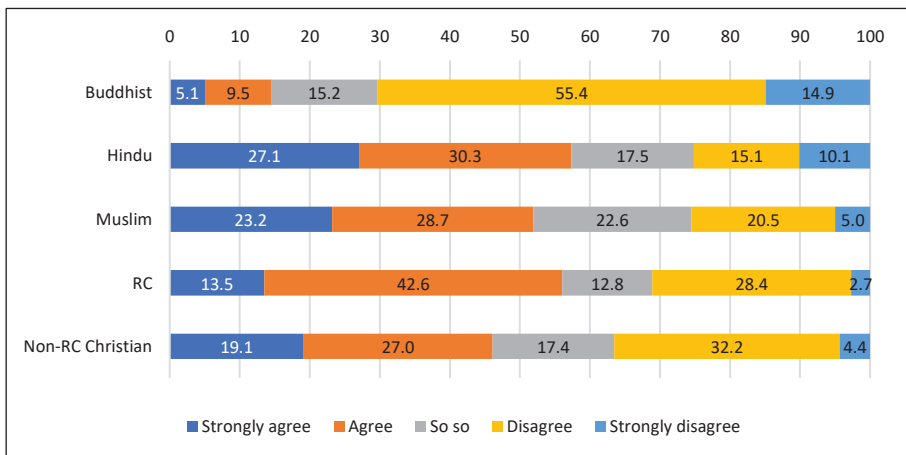
- A strikingly large proportion (over 70 percent) of Buddhists disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that Buddhists should be willing to participate in multi-faith events.

- In contrast, the majority of Hindus (57 percent), Roman Catholics (56 percent) and Muslims (52 percent) strongly agree or agree that people of their faith should participate in multi-faith events.

- However, a sizeable proportion of respondents from all faiths tend to disagree with this perception, although this share is much less among non-Buddhists.

*Figure 29: People of my faith who attend events of other faith are at risk spiritually*
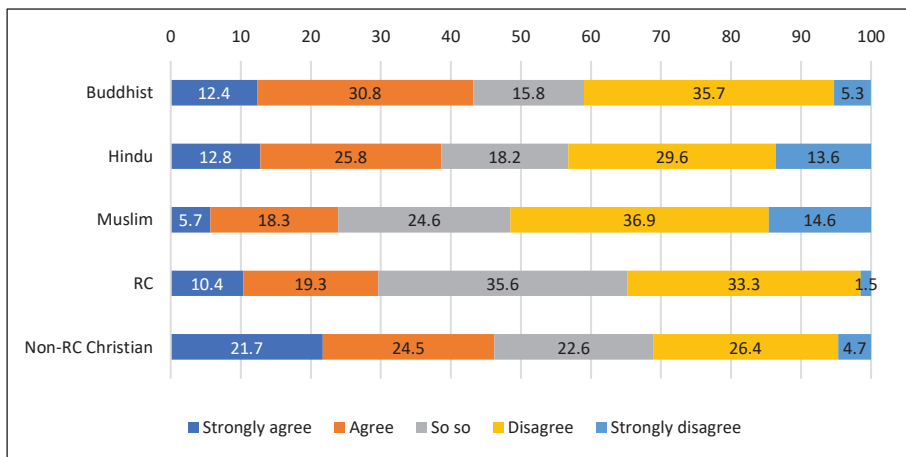


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- The majority (52 percent) of Muslims disagree or strongly disagree that Muslims who attend events of other religions are at a risk spiritually. About a quarter of them are neutral.

- Among Buddhists, the proportions of respondents who disagree and agree with this statement is about roughly equal.

- The majority of Roman Catholics are neutral to the idea. However, among non-RC Christians, the majority (46 percent) are of the view that they are at the risk of spiritual deterioration if they were to attend events of other religions.

*Figure 30: I don't need others to share my faith for me to be able to get on with them*
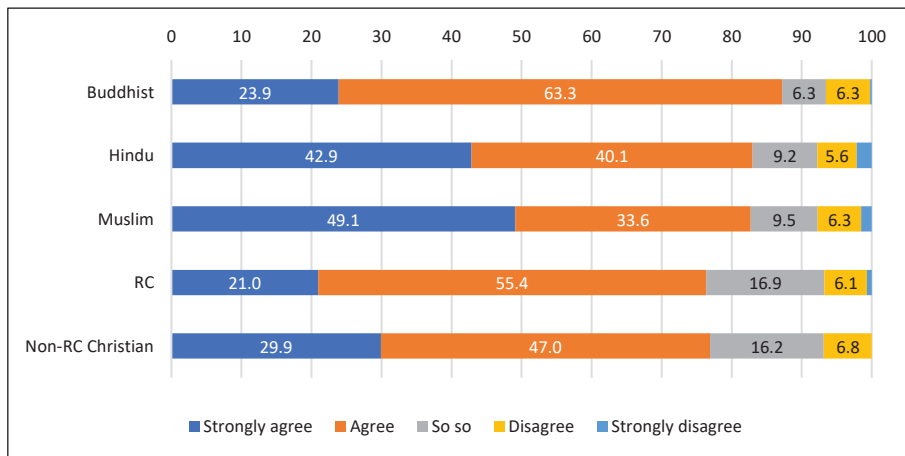


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Clearly, the large majority of respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree with the idea that they do not need the other person to be of the same faith as them in order to be able to get along.

- About half of the Muslim respondents strongly agree with this view.

- About 16 percent of Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians appear to be neutral to this idea, compared to lower proportions with neutral views from other religions.

- The share of respondents that disagree or strongly disagree is quite insignificant.

## 6.3  Experiences of hostility and discrimination

- The large majority of respondents from all religions disagree or strongly disagree that they have faced discrimination due to their religious identity across all the enumerated situations.

- The share of Buddhists that strongly disagree, disagree, or are neutral to the view that they tend to face discrimination due to their religious identity is negligible.

- In contrast, the responses among non-Buddhist respondents are more nuanced.

- About 30 percent of Muslims strongly agree or agree that they tend to be discriminated in accessing government services due to their religion. About 15 percent of Hindus 14 percent of non-RC Christians and 10 percent of Roman Catholics also share similar views on accessing government services.

- About 27 percent of Muslims and 13 percent of Hindus feel discriminated in accessing public health services. In contrast, only about 8 percent of Muslims feel discriminated in accessing private healthcare services.

- About 14 percent of Muslims strongly agree or agree that they feel discriminated in accessing public transport, while about 11 percent of them also feel discriminated in accessing private transport services.

- As many as 39 percent of Muslims and about 17 percent Hindus strongly agree or agree that they tend to be discriminated by the police. About 32 percent of Muslims and about 17 percent of Hindus feel similarly about the Army.

- About 19 percent of non-RC Christians strongly agree or agree that they are discriminated in their community due to their faith. About 14 percent of Muslims also feel this way. About 17 percent of non-RC Christians also feel discriminated in their neighbourhood.

*Figure 31: Accessing government services*
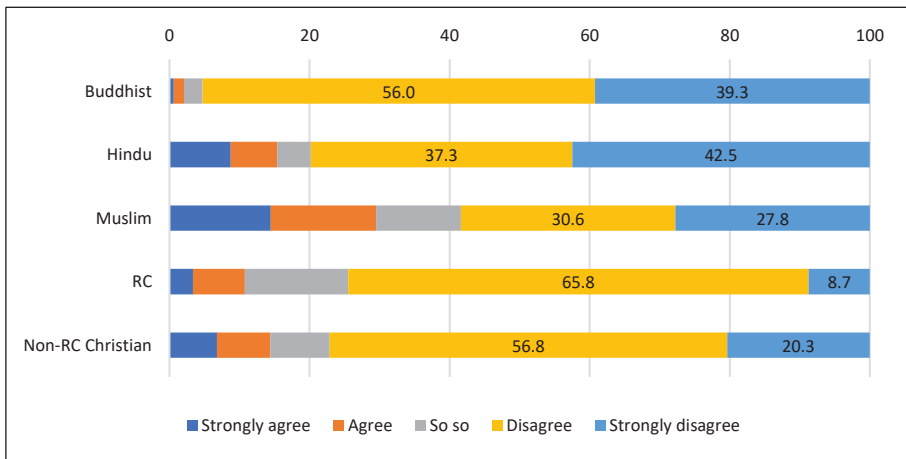


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 32: Accessing public health services*
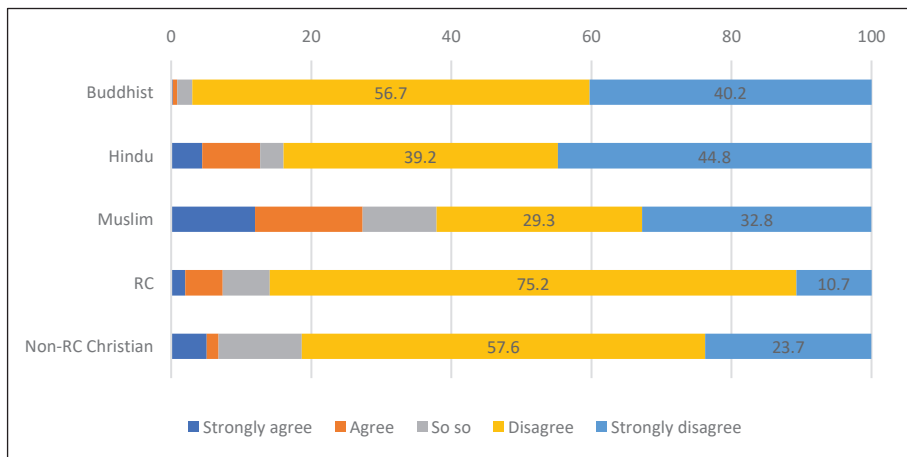


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 33: Accessing private healthcare services*
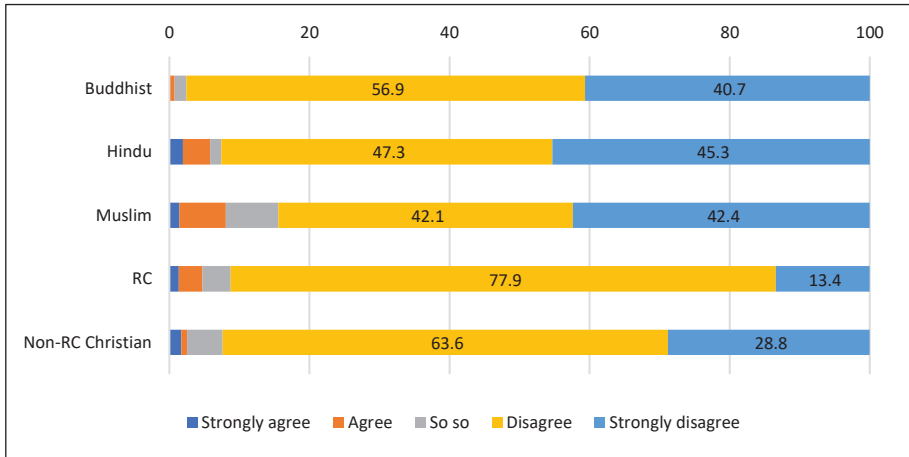
*Figure 34: Using public transport*
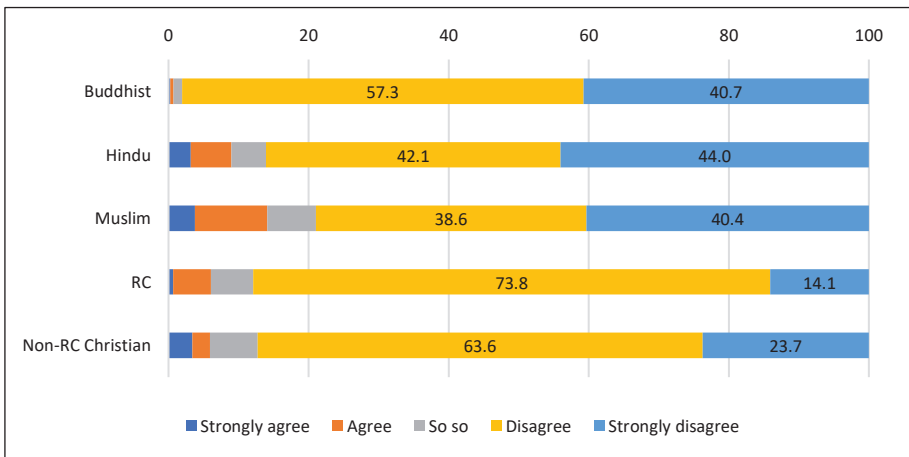
*Figure 35: Using private transport services*
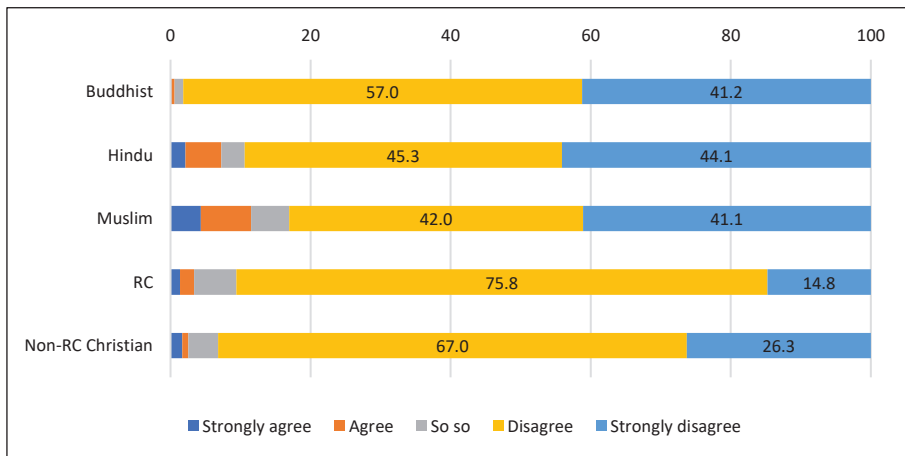


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 36: By the police*
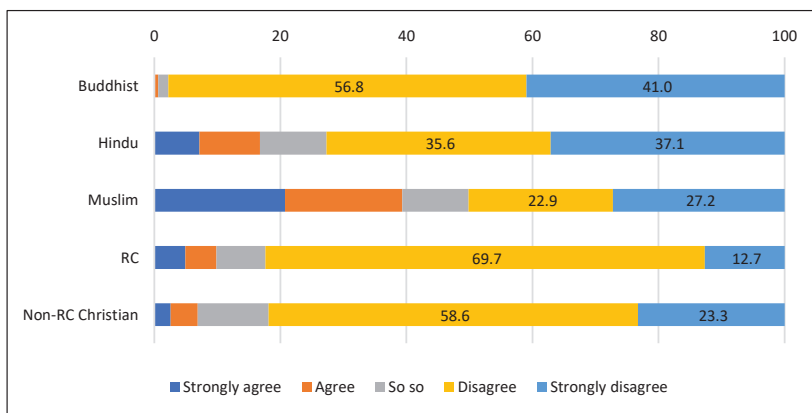


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 37: By the army*
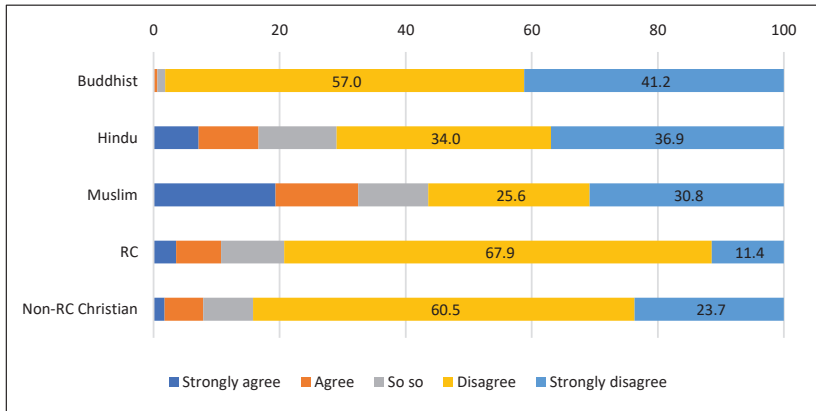


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 38: By the community*
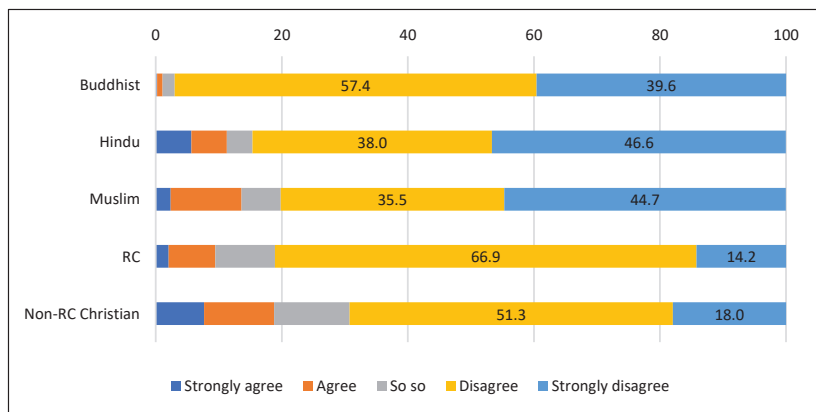


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 39: In the neighbourhood*
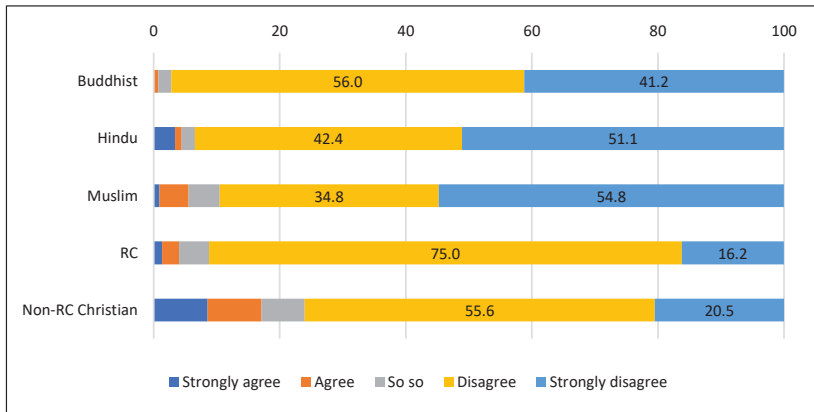


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

# 7. Perceptions about 'the other'

## 7.1 Collaboration

*Figure 40: Willing to start business with a person of another faith, as long as they are trustworthy*
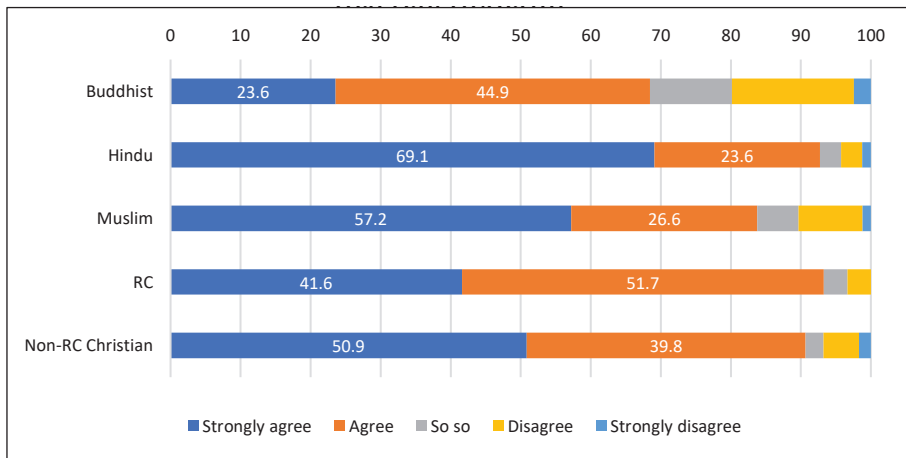


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Most of the respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that they are willing to start a business with a person of faith different to their own, if they are trustworthy persons.

- However, this proportion is lowest among Buddhists (68 percent) compared to 80 percent or more among non-Buddhists.

- As many as 67 percent of Hindus, 57 percent of Muslims and 51 percent of non-RC Christians strongly agree that the religion of a potential business partner does not matter as long as they are trustworthy.

- The proportion that disagrees or strongly disagrees with this idea is about 19 percent among Buddhists. About 10 percent of Muslims also tend to disagree.

*Figure 41: Willing to join a protest with a person of another faith for a cause I believe in*
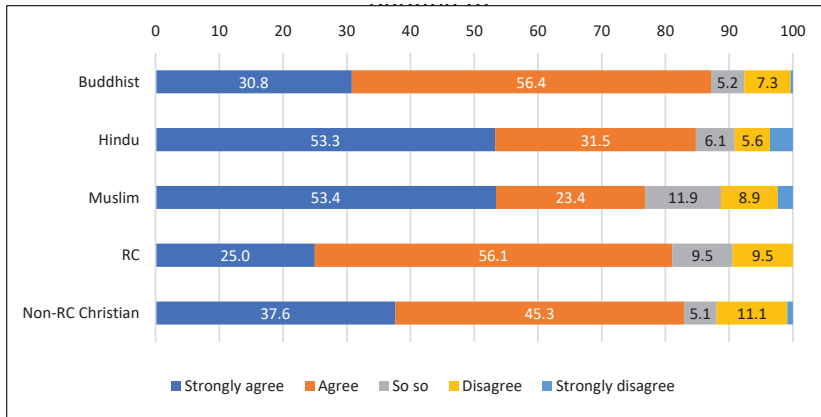


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- 75 percent or more respondents of all religions strongly agree or agree that they are willing to join a protest with a person of a different faith, if the underlying case is something they also believe in.

- The proportion that strongly agrees or agrees with this sentiment is highest among Buddhists (87 percent) and Hindus (85 percent). Relatively less Muslims (76 percent) share this opinion.

- About 18 percent of Roman Catholics disagree or strongly disagree that they will join a protest with a non-Roman Catholic, even if they believed in the cause.

*Figure 42: Willing to defend someone of another faith against injustice*
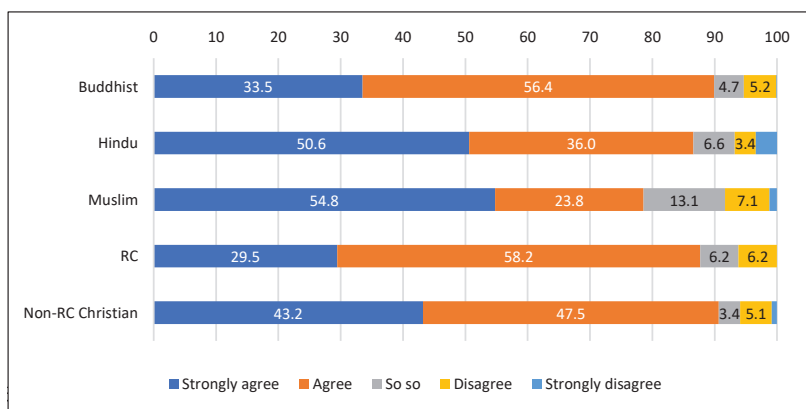


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- The large majority of respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that they are willing to defend someone of a religion other than their own, in the face of injustice.

- About 55 percent of Muslims and 51 percent of Hindus strongly agree with this view.

## 7.2 Personal values

- The large majority of respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that they are comfortable getting along with people from other religions. The share that strongly agrees is as high as 53 percent among Muslims. This share is lowest among Buddhists. About 10 percent of Buddhists disagree or strongly disagree with this position.

- Most respondents from all religions also agree or strongly agree that people should have a right to their own beliefs, although the share of Buddhists with this stance is somewhat lower compared to non-Buddhists.

- Over 90 percent of respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that they can respect good people, irrespective what religion they belong to.

- Most respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that there is a set of norms and values that should be followed by everybody, irrespective of what religion they belong to. Slightly less than 80 percent of Buddhists and well over 90 percent of non-Buddhists share this view.

*Figure 43: Comfortable getting along with people with different values*
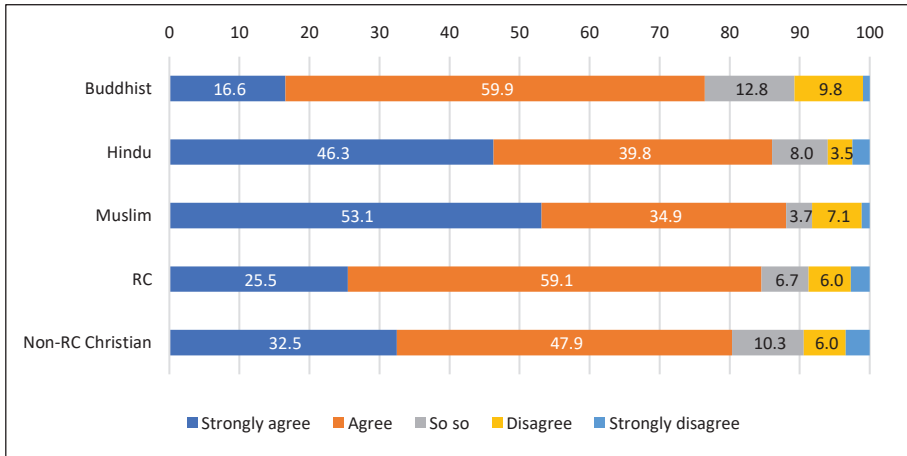


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 44: Everyone should have a right to their own beliefs*
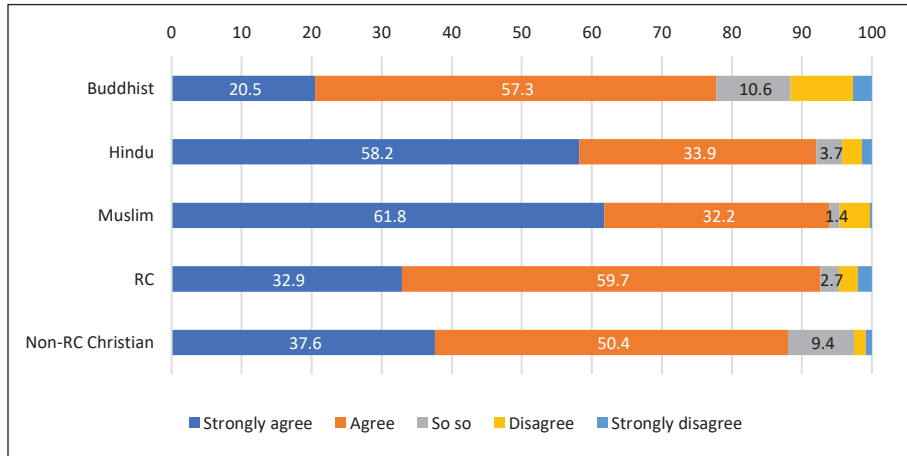


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 45: Respect good human beings, irrespective of faith*
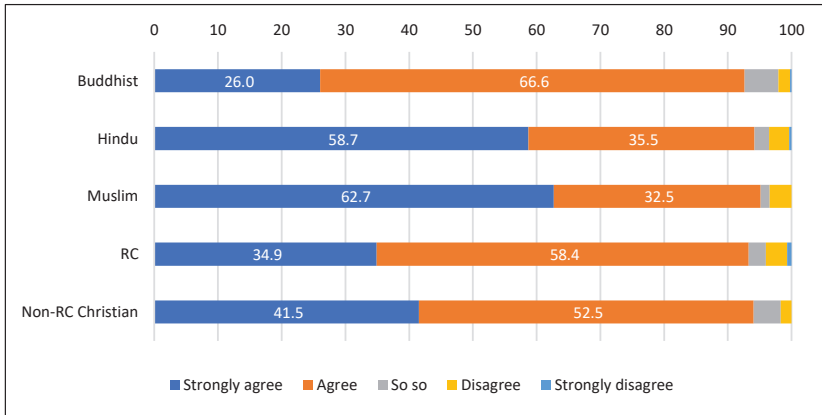


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 46: There are norms and values common to everybody*
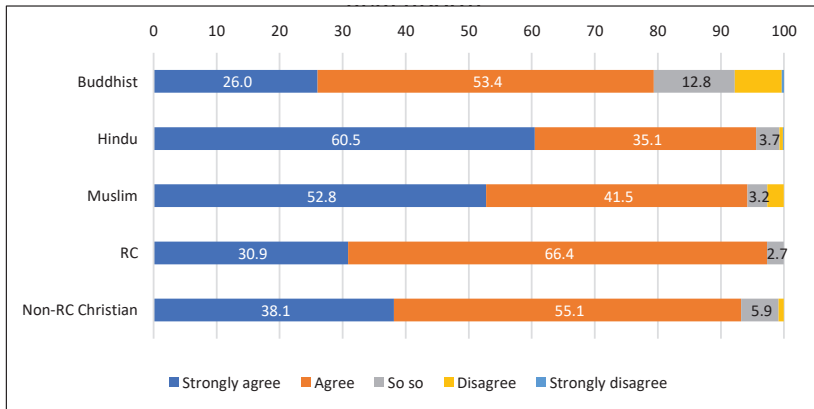


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 47: Live strictly according to my religion*
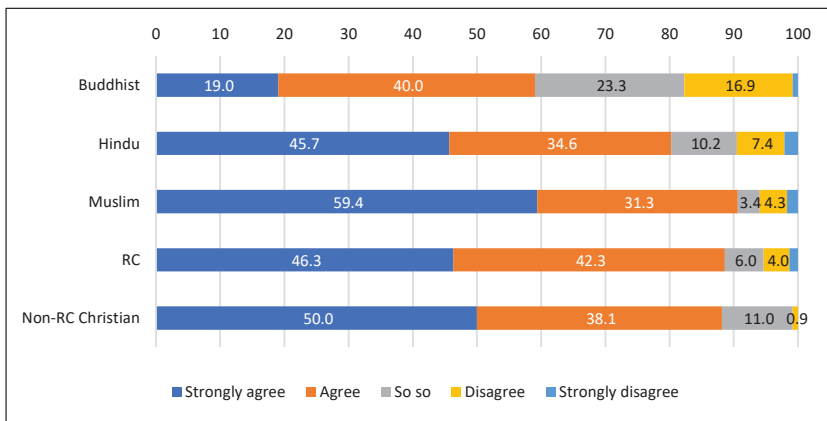


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 48: Believe my religion is the only correct one*
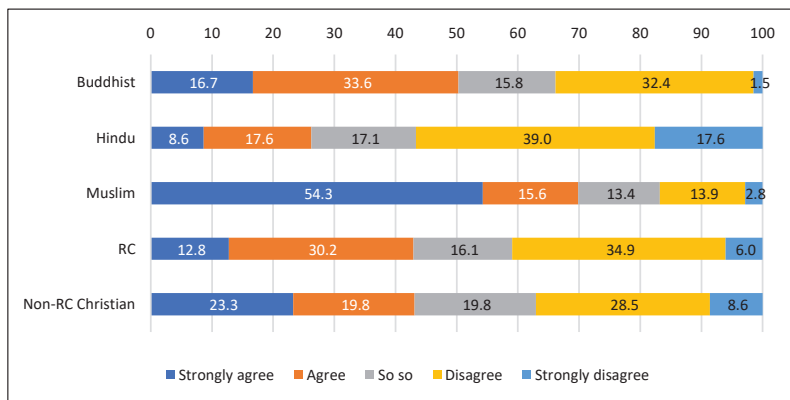


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 49: Only my religion will lead to truth*



| | Strongly agree | Agree | So so | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buddhist | 12.6 | 29.5 | 14.9 | 40.7 | 2.4 |
| Hindu | 10.4 | 13.6 | 22.0 | 37.8 | 16.2 |
| Muslim | 52.6 | 24.3 | 11.1 | 8.9 | 3.1 |
| RC | 18.1 | 20.1 | 19.5 | 38.3 | 4.0 |
| Non-RC Christian | 23.7 | 21.1 | 9.7 | 40.4 | 5.3 |
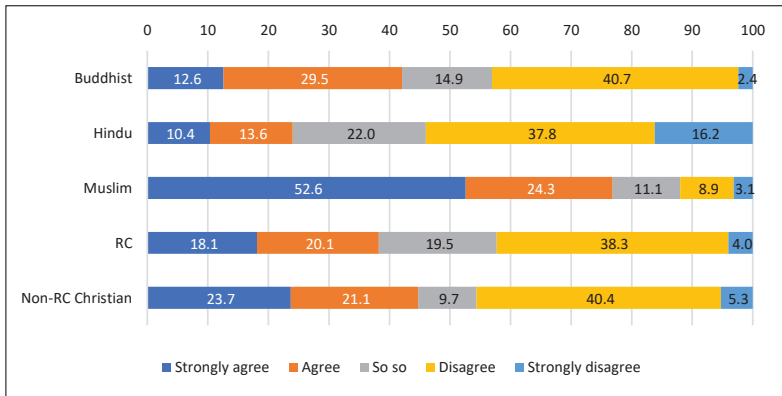
Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 50: Like to live in a society in which everyone's worldview is the same as mine*



| | Strongly agree | Agree | So so | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buddhist | 39.6 | 51.3 | 6.8 | 2.3 | |
| Hindu | 32.5 | 35.6 | 12.4 | 14.2 | 5.3 |
| Muslim | 35.5 | 34.9 | 12.2 | 12.8 | 4.6 |
| RC | 27.7 | 37.2 | 16.9 | 18.2 | |
| Non-RC Christian | 25.6 | 40.2 | 12.8 | 20.5 | 0.9 |
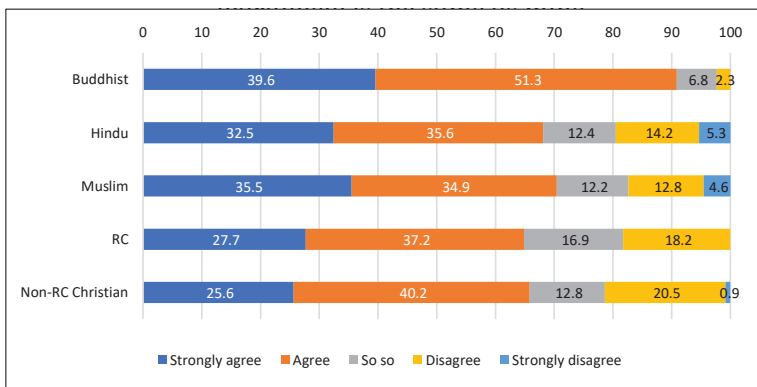
Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Most Muslims, Roman Catholics and Christians strongly agree or agree that they live strictly according to the values and guidelines of their religion. Close to 60 percent of Muslims strongly agree with this statement. In comparison, only about 60 percent of Buddhists tend to concur with this view. In fact, about 23 percent of Buddhists are neutral to this view.

- About 70 percent of Muslims strongly agree or agree that they believe that their religion and worldview are the only correct one. In fact, 54 percent of Muslims strongly agree with this statement. In comparison, only about 26 percent of Hindus and 43 percent of Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians hold this stance.

- About 76 percent of Muslims strongly agree or agree that only their religion will lead people to the truth. In fact, 53 percent of them strongly agree with this perception. In comparison, only 24 percent of Hindus and 38 percent of Roman Catholics identify with this statement.

- Most respondents strongly agree or agree with the idea of living in a society that shares the same worldviews and approaches to life as themselves. However, this share is particularly high among Buddhists (91 percent) than non-Buddhists (70 percent or less).

**Scenarios**

**Decisions about purchasing cooked food from outside**

We looked at eight criteria respondents might pay attention to in their decisions about whether they purchase cooked food to eat. Most respondents pay attention to factors such as the cleanliness of the eatery, the taste and quality of food, health factors and price (Table 1). The location of the hotel also appears to be a factor most respondents take into account. Slightly over half of the sample take into consideration religious considerations about food preparation.

*Table 6: Factors considered when purchasing cooked food from outside (overall sample)*

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Hygiene and cleanliness | 99.4 |
| Taste and quality | 99.0 |
| Location of eatery/hotel | 76.0 |
| Price of food | 92.8 |
| Health considerations | 97.7 |
| Religious considerations about food preparation | 54.7 |
| Ethno-religious identity of ownership/management/staff | 30.5 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

More Hindus and Muslims compared to the other groups take into consideration the religious factors about food preparation. Slightly more Buddhists than Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians also tend to consider the religious aspects of food preparation. This stands to reason given the dietary restrictions and guidelines

that Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist communities tend to follow, which are informed by their religious and cultural practices. Only about 31 percent of the sample consider the ethno-religious identity of the shop to be an important consideration in purchasing cooked food. More Muslims than non-Muslims seem to be sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the shop where they buy cooked food from.

*Figure 51: Proportion of respondents that look at ethno-religious variables in purchasing cooked food*

Panel A: Religious considerations in food preparation

Panel B: Ethno-religious identity of shop
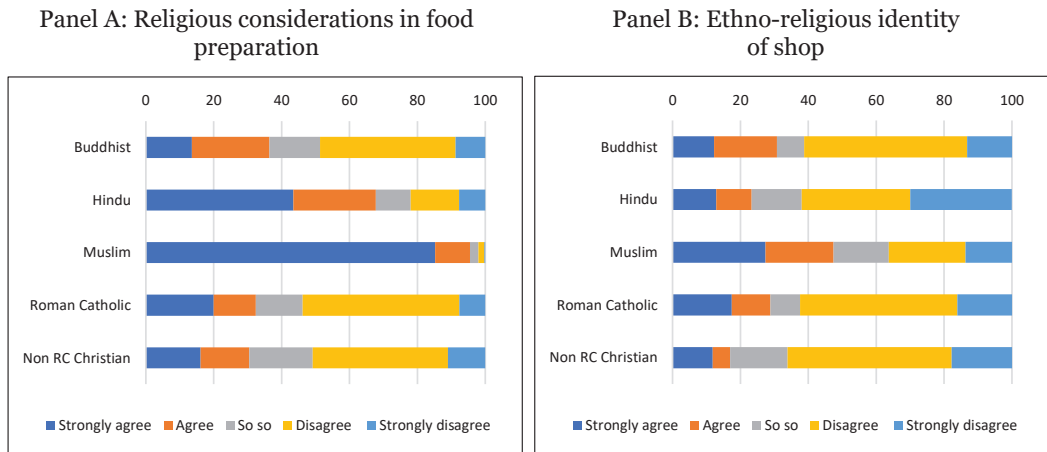


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## Decisions about purchasing groceries and daily household needs

We enumerated seven specific criteria that respondents might take into consideration when deciding from where to buy groceries and other daily household necessities. The large majority of the sample are sensitive to price-related variables, the variety of options available, the level of customer service as well as the convenience of location. Only a little over a third of the sample take into account religious considerations about grocery purchases and a little less than a fifth is sensitive to the ethnoreligious identity of the shop.

*Table 7: Factors considered when purchasing groceries and day-to-day necessities*

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Price, discounts and offers | 96.7 |
| Collection, range and variety of items available | 91.4 |
| Convenience of location, parking and lack of crowd | 79.1 |
| Customer service | 88.7 |
| Religious considerations about grocery purchases | 34.3 |
| Ethno-religious identity of ownership/management/staff | 18.0 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

More Muslims than non-Muslims take into consideration religious factors in their decisions about grocery purchases. This could be also related to the dietary laws and guidelines that more Muslims than non-Muslims tend to follow. Personal preferences informed by religious values (e.g., avoiding purchasing from butchers) could also play a role for all respondents. While most of the respondents from all groups disagree or strongly disagree that the ethno-religious identity of the grocery shop matters to them, more Muslims and Roman Catholics than non-Muslims tend to strongly agree or agree that it is a factor they consider when deciding on where to buy their groceries from.

*Figure 52: Proportion of respondents that look at ethno-religious variables when purchasing groceries*



Panel A: Religious considerations in grocery purchases

Panel B: Ethno-religious identity of shop
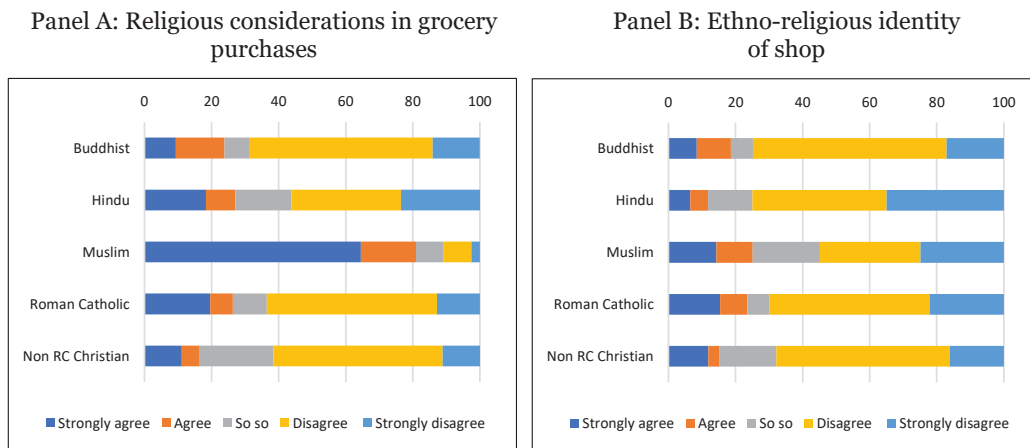
Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## Decisions about clothe purchases

A large majority of the respondents make decisions about where to purchase clothes looking at a rational set of criteria. The quality and durability of clothes, the range of clothes available, the trendiness and quality, and the convenience of location are important parameters for most respondents. A little over two thirds of the respondents also take into consideration prices, discounts, and loyalty programmes offered by clothing shops. In comparison, only a little over a third think of religious considerations as important to where they decide to buy their clothes from. Less than a fifth think of the ethnoreligious identity of the shop to be an important factor.

*Table 8: Factors considered when purchasing clothes*

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Range of fashion products offered | 88.7 |
| Trendiness and fashion | 87.0 |
| Quality and durability | 98.0 |
| Prices, discounts, and loyalty measures | 68.6 |
| Convenience of location | 78.4 |
| Religious considerations about clothing purchases | 36.5 |
| Ethno-religious iidentity of the ownership/management/staff | 18.1 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

The majority of Muslims strongly agree or agree that religious considerations are an important factor in making decisions about where to buy clothes. More Buddhists compared to Hindus, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians also concur, although this share is much less compared to Muslims. The ethno-religious identity of the shop matters to about a fifth of Buddhists, Muslims and Roman Catholics. However, it is not a concern for the large majority of respondents across all religions.

*Figure 53: Proportion of respondents that look at ethno-religious variables when purchasing clothes*

Panel A: Religious considerations in clothes purchases

Panel B: Ethno-religious identity of shop
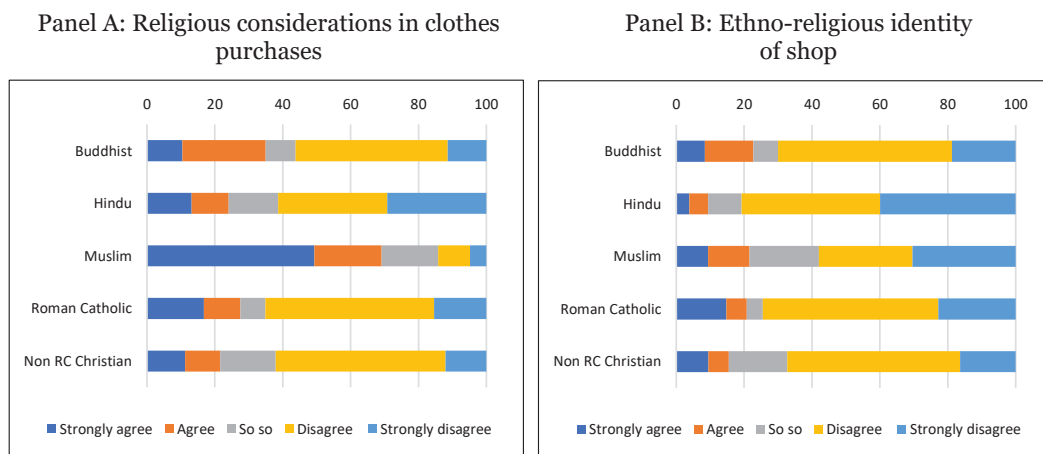


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## Renting a house for self and family

Nearly all respondents consider expenses such as rent, key money, and other contractual details, the space and compatibility with one's own requirements, the safety of the neighbourhood, security, and convenience of location are critical when choosing a house to rent for themselves and their families. Observe, however, that over half of the respondents are also sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood. About a third is also sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the landlord.

*Table 9: Factors considered when looking for a house to rent*

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Rent, key money, and contractual details | 99.0 |
| Space and compatibility with requirements | 99.3 |
| Convenience of location | 98.5 |
| Peaceful and safe neighbourhood | 99.0 |
| Personal safety and security | 98.6 |
| Ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood | 53.4 |
| Ethno-religious identity of the landlord | 33.8 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

The religious identity of the neighbourhood is a fairly important consideration for respondents from all groups. At least a fifth of all respondents strongly agree that the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood is an important consideration for them when deciding to rent a house for themselves and their families. More Buddhists compared to non-Buddhists are sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood. In comparison, much less Hindus and Muslims consider this to be an important deterministic factor. The majority of respondents from all groups tend to disagree or strongly disagree that the ethno-religious identity of the landlord is an important criterion for them. However, at least a third of respondents from all sub-groups also consider it to be a rather important consideration.

*Figure 54: Proportion of respondents that look at ethno-religious variables when looking for a house to rent*
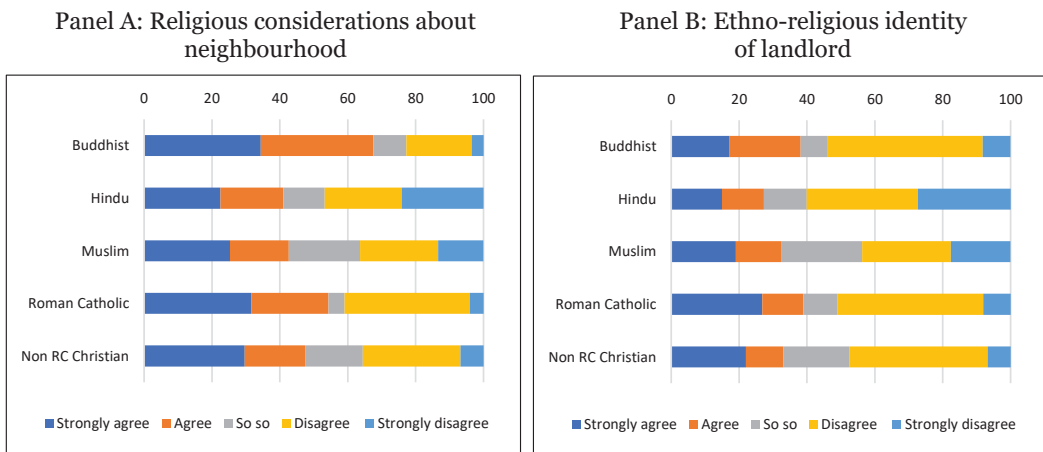


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

**Renting out own house**

We also look at the other end of the transaction where we ask the respondents possible factors they would consider if they were to rent out their own house to an outsider. Of the enumerated criteria, the background information about the potential tenant appears to be important for the large majority of the sample. Personal recommendations, and the tenant's family dynamics also appear to be important factors. A large majority also considers the tenants' employment and education to be an important criterion, as these factors might reflect social status, character, and other insights about the tenants. A sizeable share of respondents also

seem to consider the ethnicity and religion of a potential tenant as an important factor to be considered when renting out a house.

*Table 10: Factors considered when renting out own house*

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Tenant's family situation (married, kids, pets etc) | 78.3 |
| Background information about tenant | 95.0 |
| Personal recommendation from contacts | 83.2 |
| Tenants' employment and education details | 64.2 |
| Ethno-religious identity of the tenant | 42.4 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

A little over 50 percent of Roman Catholics consider the ethno-religious identity of the potential tenant to be an important criterion when deciding whom to give their own house on rent. This proportion is relatively lower among non-Roman Catholics. Overall, this seems to be an important consideration for Roman Catholics, non-RC Christians and Buddhists compared to Muslims and Hindus. More Muslims than non-Muslims are neutral. About half of the Hindu respondents disagree or strongly disagree that the ethno-religious identity of a potential tenant is a key factor in deciding whether to rent a house to someone.

*Figure 55: Proportion of respondents that look at ethno-religious variables when renting out own house*
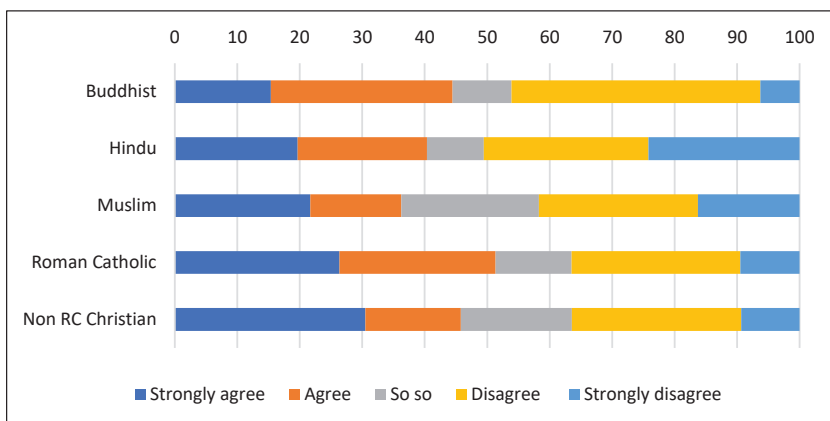


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## Purchasing a plot of land

We enumerated seven specific criteria that might influence a respondent's decision to purchase a piece of residential land as a home for his/her family. Nearly all respondents consider that a respectable location is an important factor. Easy access to services, schools, and place of employment are also relevant criteria for the selection of a land. For a little over two-thirds of the sample, the proximity to family and relatives is important when choosing a piece of land to build a house. Over half of the sample also believe that the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood is a deciding factor. Slightly less than a third of the sample also takes into consideration the ethno-religious identity of the seller of the land.

*Table 11: Factors considered when purchasing a piece of land to build a house*

| Factor | % |
|---|---|
| Respectable location/neighbourhood | 99.3 |
| Easy access to schools | 94.3 |
| Easy access to place of work | 92.7 |
| Easy access to services (healthcare, supermarkets, public services) | 95.4 |
| Close proximity to other family members and relatives | 68.1 |
| Ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood | 55.2 |
| Ethno-religious identity of the person selling the land | 32.3 |

Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

Over two-thirds of Buddhists consider the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood to be an important consideration when deciding about a purchase of a plot of residential land. Less non-Buddhists compared to Buddhists seem to be sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood where respondents might potentially buy some residential land. However, close to 60 percent of Roman Catholics and slightly less than half of non-RC Christians also seem to give weight to the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood. Hindus and Muslims appear to be much less sensitive in comparison. A lesser proportion of respondents strongly agree or agree that the ethno-religious identity of the seller of land is important, compared to the proportion of respondents sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood. More Roman Catholics and Buddhists seem to consider the ethno-religious identity of the seller to be important than the other groups.

*Figure 56: Proportion of respondents that look at ethno-religious variables when looking for residential land*

Panel A: Ethno-religious identity of neighbourhood

Panel B: Ethno-religious identity of seller
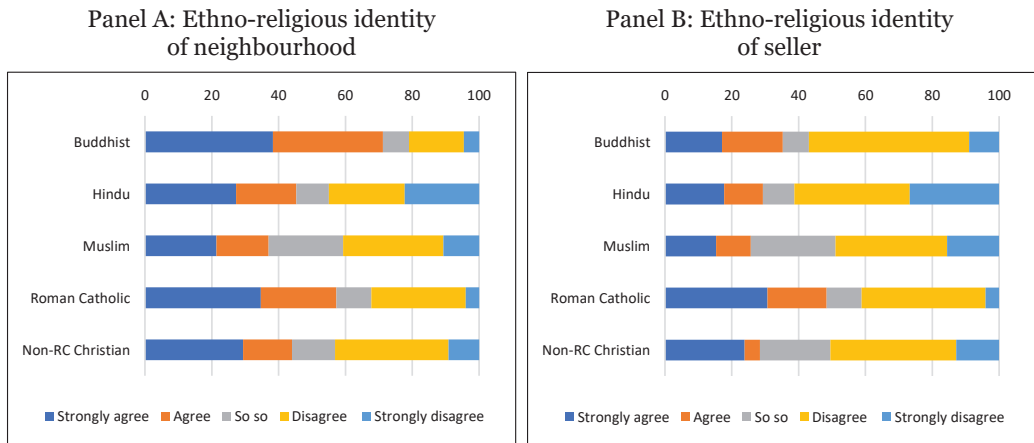


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

# 8. Perceived attributes and characteristics of 'the other'

## About Buddhists

*Figure 57: Positive attributes of Buddhists*
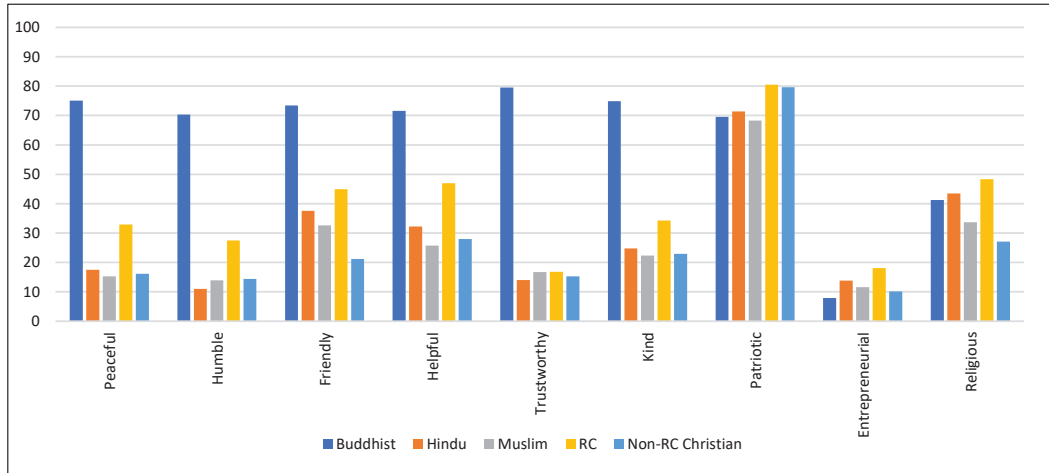


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 58: Negative attributes of Buddhists*
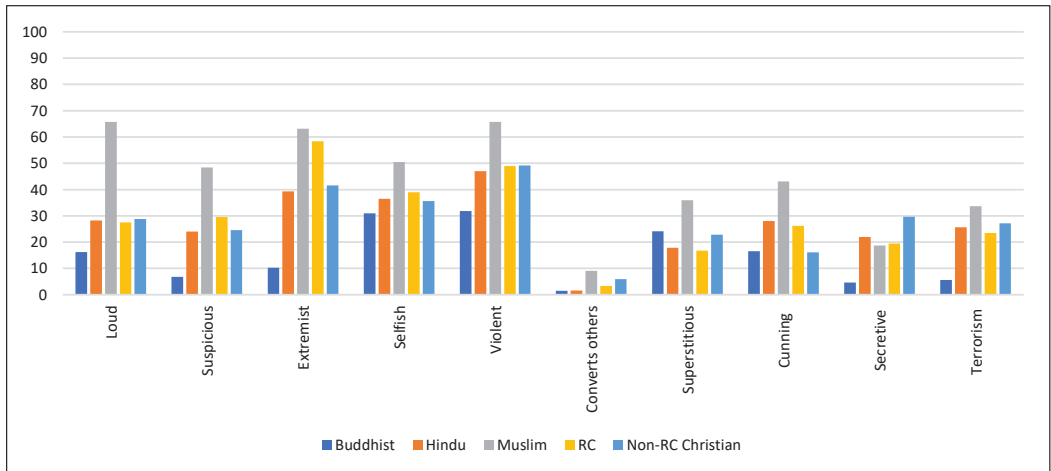


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Most Buddhists assign the majority of the positive attributes to themselves. A large majority of Buddhists consider themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, kind, and patriotic. Not many Buddhists consider themselves to be religious, and only a very few Buddhists consider enterprise as an attribute they would apply to themselves.

- Interestingly however, much less non-Buddhists seem to associate most of these positive attributes with Buddhists. For example, a less than a fifth of non-Buddhist respondents would associate trustworthiness with Buddhists.

- More Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians appear to associate positive attributes with Buddhists than Hindus and Muslims.

- On the other hand, a much lower proportion of Buddhists seem to assign the enumerated negative attributes to themselves, while a comparatively much higher proportion of non-Buddhists identify Buddhists with these negative attributes.

- By and large, more Muslims than Hindus, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians appear to associate negative attributes with Buddhists. Over 60 percent of Muslims associate the attributes of loudness, violence, and extremism with Buddhists. Significantly more Muslims than non-Muslims also associate cunningness and suspiciousness with Buddhists.

## About Hindus

- Most Hindus assign the majority of the enumerated positive attributes to themselves. A large majority of Hindus consider themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, kind and religious. Relatively less Hindus consider themselves to be patriotic, and only a very few Hindus consider entrepreneurship as an attribute they would apply to themselves.

- In contrast, however, fewer non-Hindus seem to associate most of these positive attributes with Hindus.

- More Roman Catholics, compared to other non-Hindu respondents, also assign these positive attributes to Hindus. For example, about 60 percent of Roman Catholics consider Hindus to be helpful and friendly. Only a small proportion of Buddhists seem to associate positive attributes to Hindus.

*Figure 59: Positive attributes of Hindus*
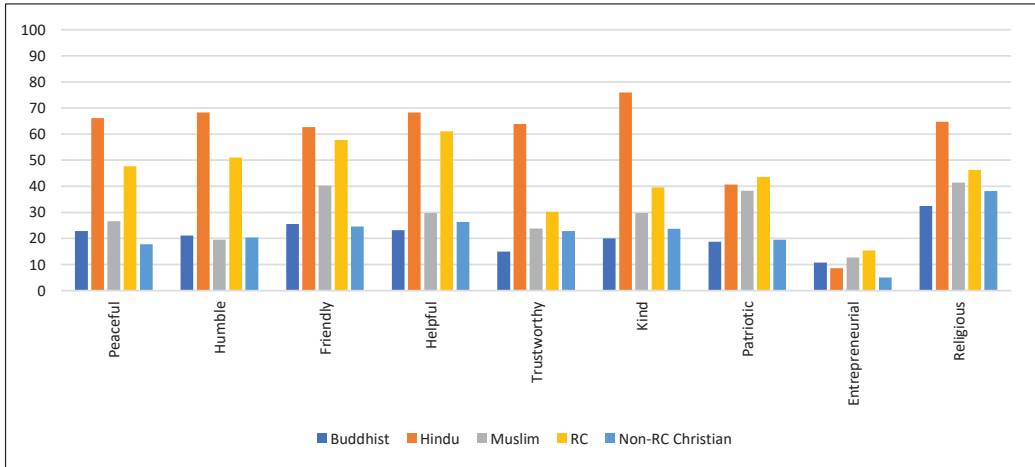


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 60: Negative attributes of Hindus*
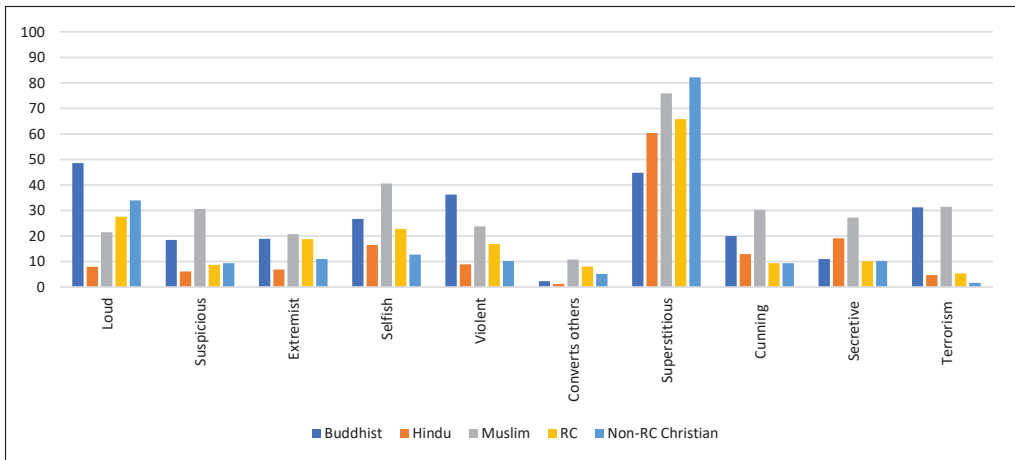


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- A much lower proportion of Hindus seem to assign the enumerated negative attributes to themselves, while a comparatively higher proportion of non-Hindus identify Hindus with these negative attributes.

- The most negative characteristics widely associated with Hindus by both they themselves and non-Hindu respondents is superstition.
- By and large, more Buddhists and Muslims, compared to Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians appear to associate negative attributes with Hindus.

**About Muslims**

*Figure 61: Positive attributes of Muslims*
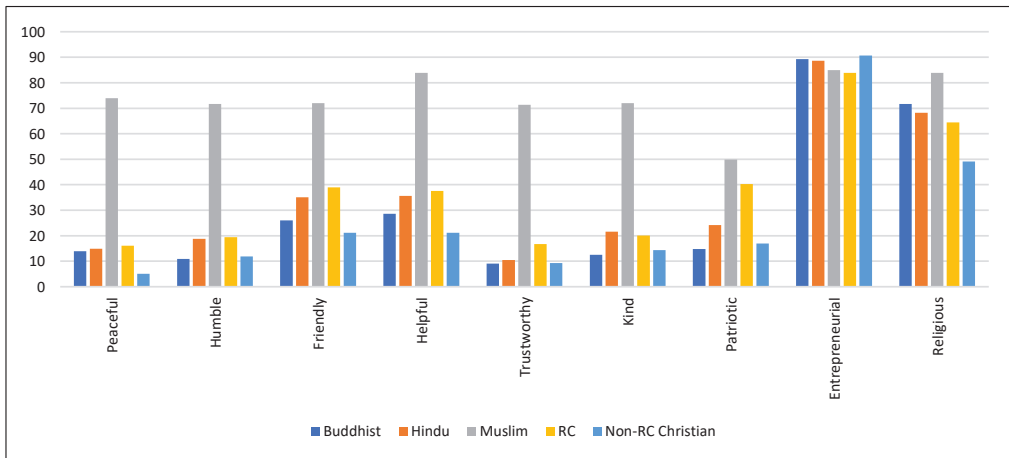


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 62: Negative attributes of Muslims*
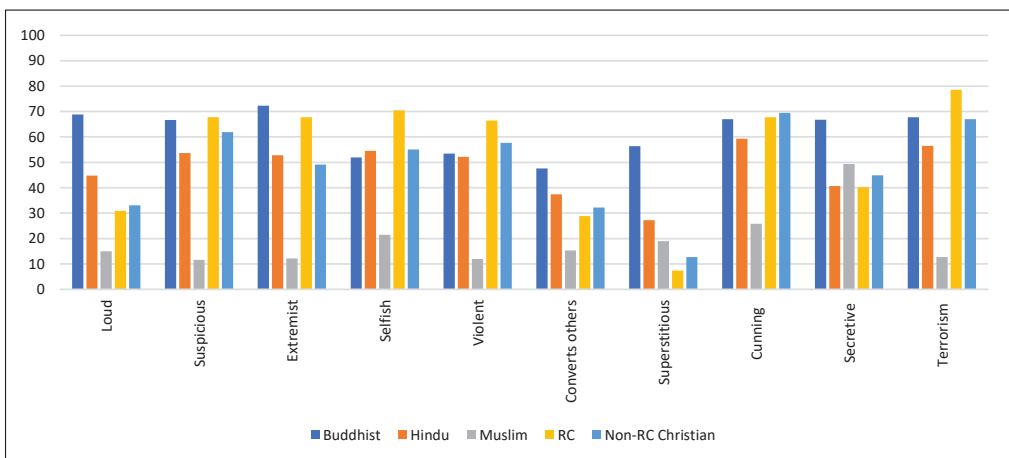


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Most Muslims assign all of the enumerated positive attributes to themselves. A large majority of Muslims consider themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, kind, entrepreneurial and religious.

- Only about 50 percent of Muslims think of themselves as patriotic, although this share is still much higher compared to the share of non-Muslims who assign this attribute to Muslims.

- There is fairly even and high consensus among all groups that Muslims are entrepreneurial and that they are religious.

- Most Muslims do not identify themselves with the enumerated negative attributes. In contrast, 50 percent or more of non-Muslims associate several negative attributes to Muslims.

- A large proportion of Buddhists, Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians compared to Hindus associate many of the enumerated negative characteristics with Muslims.

**About Roman Catholics**

*Figure 63: Positive attributes of Roman Catholics*
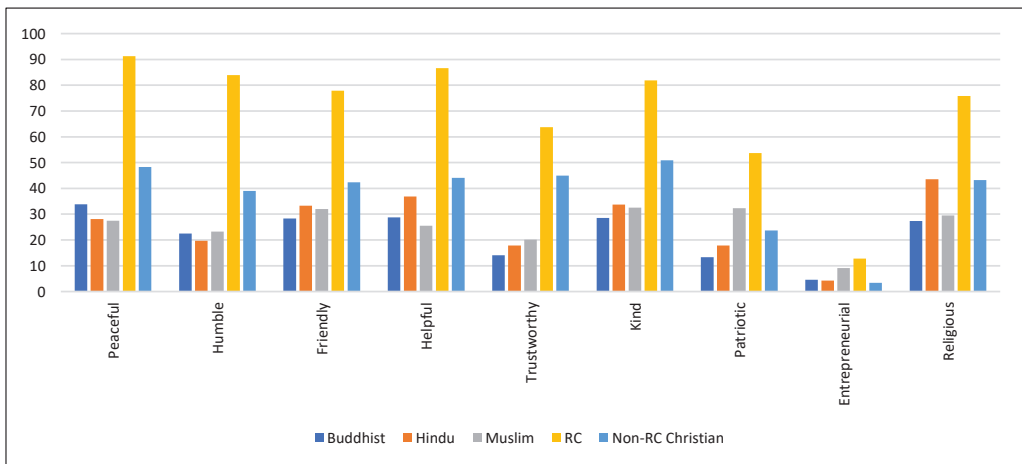


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 64: Negative attributes of Roman Catholics*
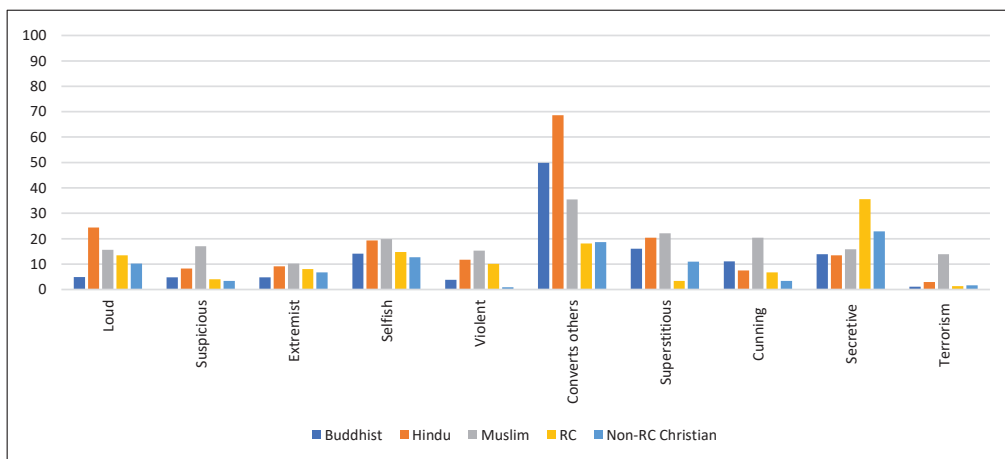


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Most Roman Catholics assign all of the enumerated positive attributes to themselves. A large majority of Roman Catholics consider themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, kind, and religious.

- There appears to be consensus among Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics that entrepreneurship is not an attribute that comes to mind about Roman Catholics.

- Relatively more non-RC Christians than other non-Roman Catholic respondents also associate most of the enumerated positive attributes with Roman Catholics.

- Only a small proportion of Roman Catholics identify themselves with the enumerated negative attributes. Only a relatively smaller share of non-Roman Catholics also identity Roman Catholics with negative attributes such as being loud, suspicious, extremist, cunning or being associated with terrorism.

- About 70 percent of Hindus and close to half of Buddhists think of Roman Catholics as a group that attempts to convert people from other faiths into theirs. A little over a third of Muslims also share this perception.

## About non-RC Christians

*Figure 65: Positive attributes of non-RC Christians*
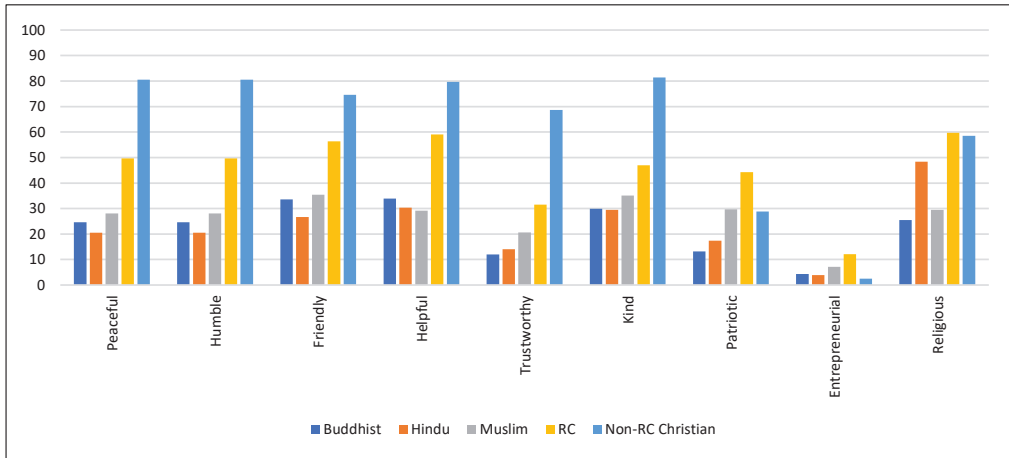


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 66: Negative attributes of non-RC Christians*
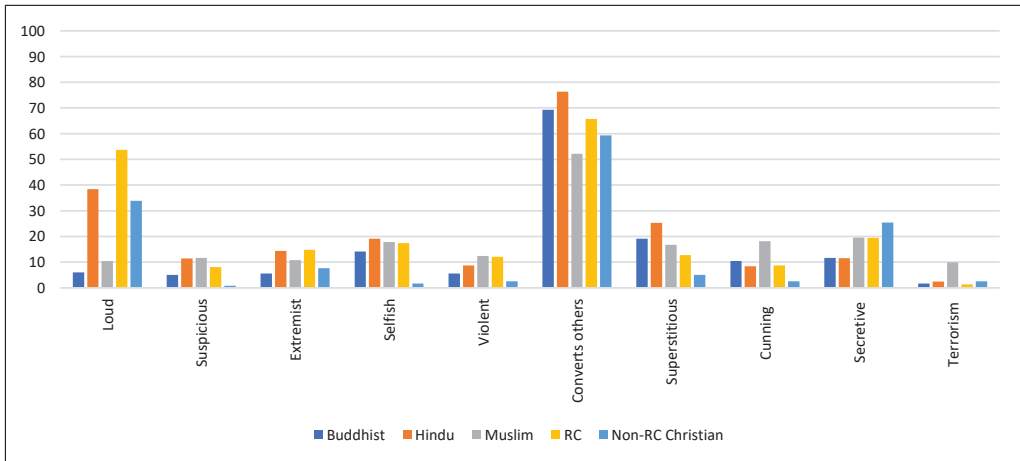


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Most non-RC Christians associate the majority of the enumerated positive attributes to themselves. A large majority of non-RC Christians consider themselves to be peaceful, humble, friendly, helpful, trustworthy, and kind. Not as many non-RC Christians associate religiosity and patriotism with themselves.

- Among non-RC Christians, Roman Catholics seem to associate many of the enumerated positive attributes with non-RC Christians more than Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims.

- There is consensus among both non-RC Christians and others that entrepreneurship is not a trait they associate with non-RC Christians.

- Only a small proportion of non-RC Christians associate with the characteristics of being suspicious, extremist, selfish, violent, superstitious or terrorism. More non-RC Christians themselves, compared to the other groups, associate the attribute of secretiveness with themselves.

- There is consensus among all groups, including the non-RC Christians themselves, that this sub-group comes to mind when thinking about converting people following other faiths into theirs.

# 9. Religious extremism

## 9.1 Factors contributing to religious extremism

*Figure 67: Underlying reasons for religious extremism*
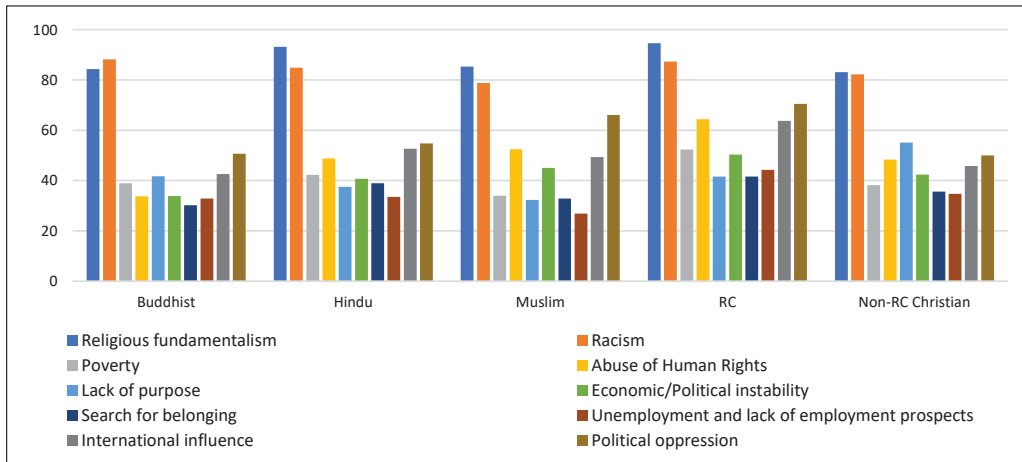


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Overall, there is consensus among respondents about the enumerated factors that might be catalysing and promoting religious extremism and radicalisation.

- For example, the large majority of respondents from all religions consider religious fundamentalism and poverty as drivers of religious extremism. More than half of the respondents from all religions also think of political oppression as another factor that drives religious extremism. However, more Roman Catholics and Muslims compared to other groups consider this to be a driver of extremism and violence.

- Only a relatively smaller proportion of respondents consider that an individual's search for belonging or the lack of employment opportunities or unemployment as a potential contributor to extremism and radicalisation.

- 40 percent or more of non-Buddhists perceive economic and political instability to also drive religious extremism. Close to half of Hindus and over half of Muslims and Roman Catholics also consider the abuse of human rights to contribute to religious extremism.

## 9.2 Promoting and countering extremist views

*Figure 68: Persons likely to espouse intolerance and extremist views*
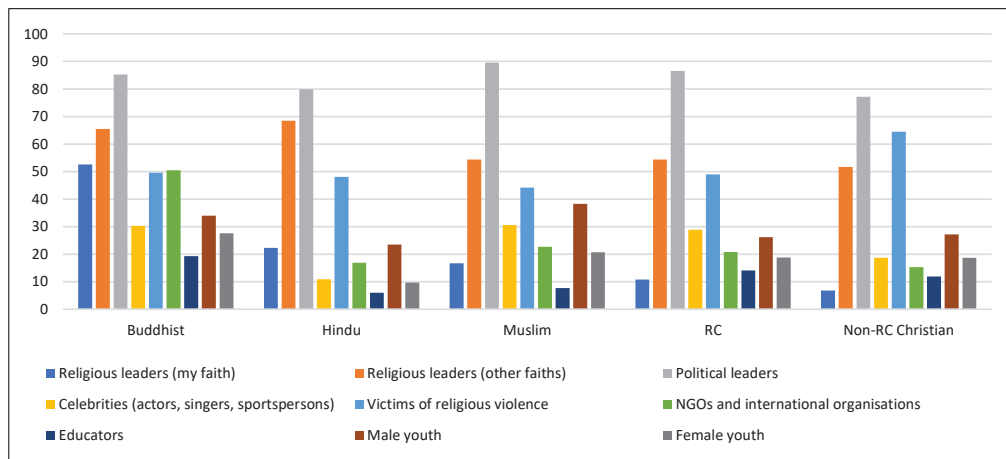


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Commonly, the majority from all sub-groups of respondents consider political leaders as promoting and espousing extremist views and intolerance.

- A large proportion of respondents also consider religious leaders of other faiths as promoting and encouraging extremist opinions.

- Over 50 percent of Buddhists recognise that their own religious leaders promote extremist religious views. A much fewer share of respondents from other groups consider their religious leaders as promoting such extremist views.

- A sizeable proportion of respondents from all religions also think of victims of religious violence as those who would espouse extremist views.

*Figure 69: Persons most capable of promoting religious coexistence and harmony*
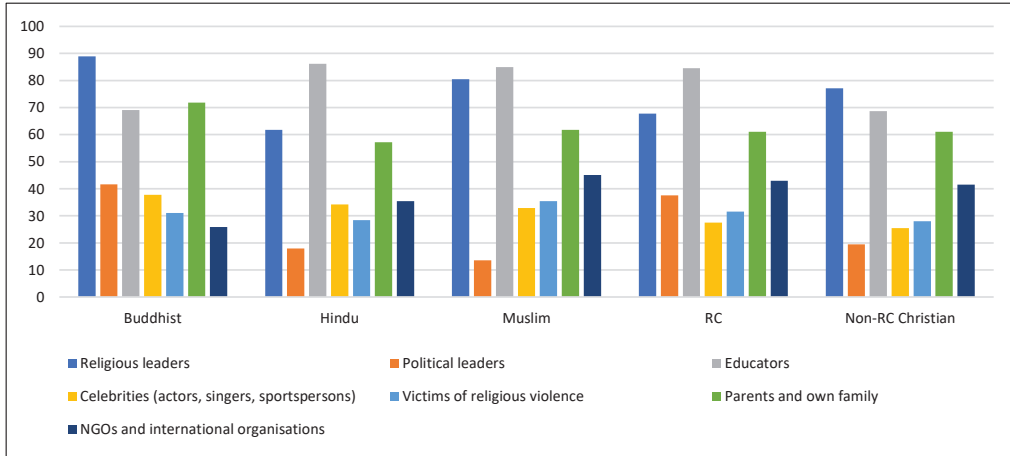


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- Although religious leaders are largely perceived to promote extremist views, many respondents also recognise that they can play a reconciliatory role and promote religious coexistence and harmony. About 90 percent of Buddhists and 80 percent of Muslims consider religious leaders to be good agents of promoting religious coexistence.

- The majority of respondents from all sub-groups also recognise educators (schools and school teachers) as a resource for promoting coexistence and harmony.

- Most respondents from all religions also recognise that own family and parents can be agents of promoting religious coexistence and harmony.

- Although about 42 percent of Buddhists and 38 percent of Roman Catholics consider political leaders as potential resource persons for promoting coexistence, these sentiments are shared by a much lower proportion of Hindus and Muslims.

# 10. Political landscape and religious extremism

## 10.1 Perceptions about the government's treatment towards respondent's own community

- A strikingly large majority of Muslims, compared to non-Muslims, perceive that the government does not treat their community well. In fact, about 42 percent believe that the government is openly discriminating against them.

- About 57 percent of Hindus take a neutral position, while about a third perceives that the government does not treat their community well.

- About 50 percent of Buddhists and Roman Catholics also perceive that the government does not treat their communities well.

- However, about 18 percent of Buddhists consider that the government treats their community very well or well. This share is as less than 2 percent among Muslims.

- Most of Roman Catholics and Christians and about a third of Buddhists feel neutral about how the government treats their communities.

*Figure 70: Perceptions of treatment by government towards people of respondents' faith[2]*
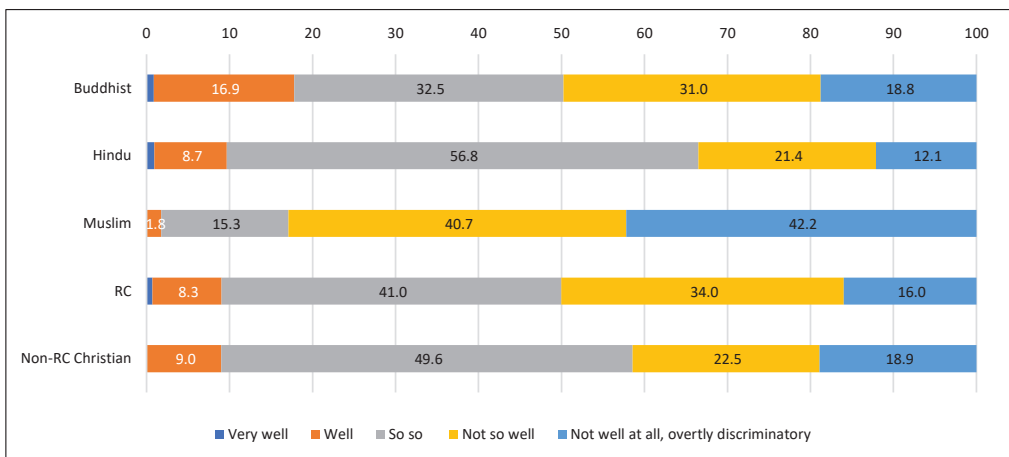


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

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[2]   We provided an option for respondents not to answer if they preferred so. About 4.5 percent of the sample refused to answer this question.

## 10.2   Perceptions about religious extremism and political agenda

- The large majority of respondents from all religions disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that the government has taken enough measures to counter religious extremism in Sri Lanka (Figure 71).

- In fact, about 45 percent of Muslims and about 37 percent of Hindus strongly disagree with this statement.

- On the other hand, however, about 19 percent of Muslims strongly agree or agree that the government has in fact taken enough measures to counter religious extremism.

- There is consensus among respondents from all religions that religion, politics, and the government should be kept separate from each other (Figure 72).

- As many as 61 percent of Hindus and 54 percent of Muslims strongly agree with this view. Close to 50 percent of Buddhists also strongly agree with this view.

- Most respondents from all religions strongly agree or agree that religious extremism and violence are part of the political agenda (Figure 73).

- This share is about 80 percent or more among Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims, but is comparatively lower among Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians.

*Figure 71: Govt. has taken enough measures to counter religious extremism*
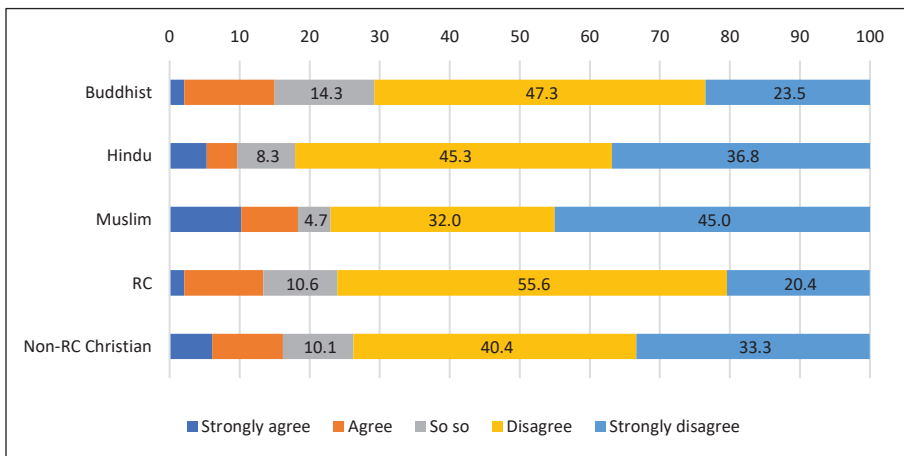


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 72: Politics, govt. and religion should be kept separate*
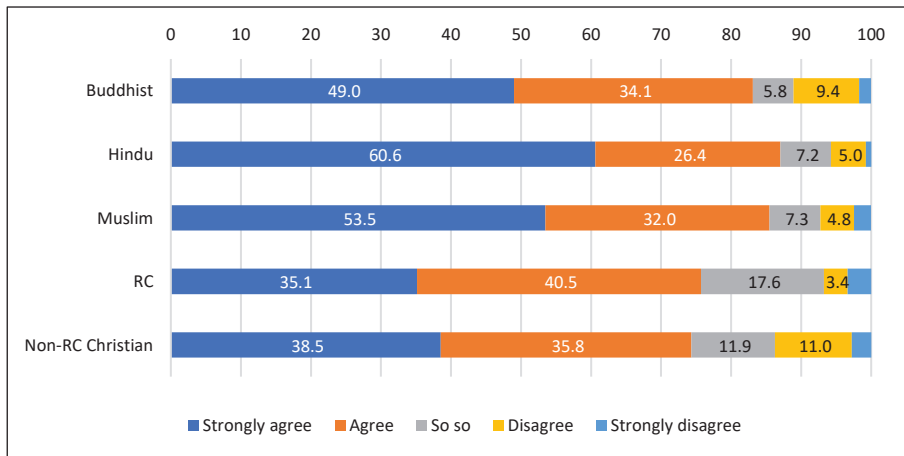


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 73: Extremism and violence are part of the political agenda*
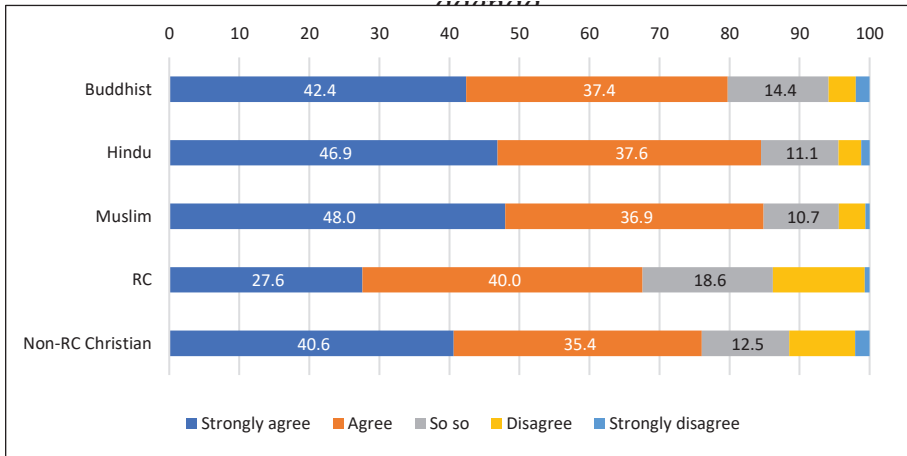


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

## Perceptions about human rights

*Figure 74: Interpretation of human rights*
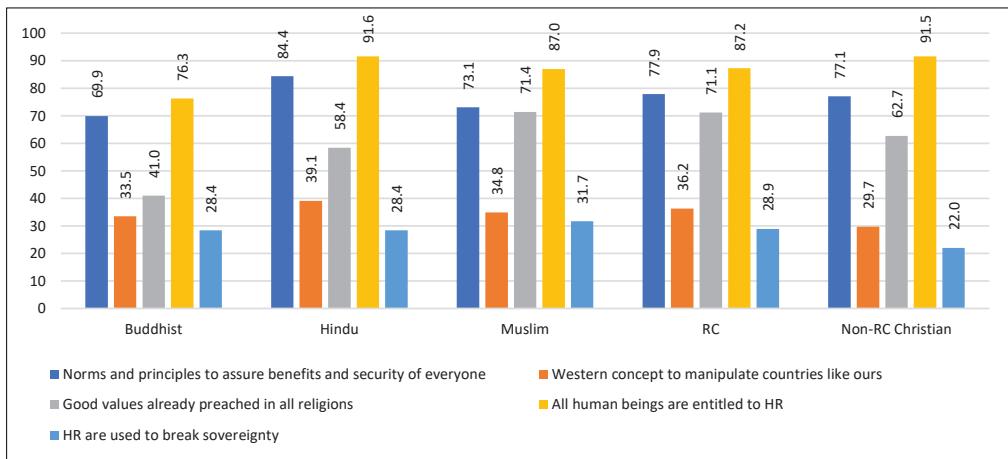


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

- The majority of respondents recognise human rights as a set of guiding norms and principles that have been put in place to safeguard everyone.
- Most of them also recognise that all human beings are entitled to human rights. This share is particularly high among Hindus and non-RC Christians.

- Only a relatively smaller share of respondents believes human rights to be a concept used by powerful countries and international agencies to break the sovereignty of poorer countries.

# 11. Perceptions about the (ab)use of social media

- The majority of respondents from all religions agree or strongly agree that the increased use of social media has contributed significantly to creating extremist ideas in the society (Figure 75). This share, however, is lower among Hindus than non-Hindus.

- The share of respondents that disagrees or strongly disagrees with this position is highest among Buddhists (17 percent) compared to non-Buddhists.

- Over half of the respondents from all religions agree or strongly disagree that certain TV channels promote and fuel ideas of religious extremism, more than social media does (Figure 76). This share is as high as 85 percent among Muslims.

- About a fourth of Hindus disagree or strongly disagree with this position. About a fifth of Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians also disagree.

- The majority of Muslims, Roman Catholics, and non-RC Christians agree or strongly agree that it is easier to spread violence and hatred towards people from other communities on social media. (Figure 77).

- Less Buddhists and Hindus seem to agree with this position. In fact, a little over 50 percent of Buddhists and close to 40 percent of Hindus disagree or strongly disagree with this position.

- However, most respondents from all religions concur that social media can cause small and isolated events to become national issues (Figure 78). This share is highest among Buddhists (87 percent).

- Over two thirds of Muslims and similar shares of Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians strongly agree or agree that religious minorities often tend to be bullied and abused in social media (Figure 79). Only about 46 percent of Hindus agree with this idea.

- In contrast, a little over half of Buddhists disagree or strongly disagree that minorities tend to be bullied and abused on social media.

- Close to two thirds of Muslims strongly agree or agree that their community is portrayed mostly negatively in social media (Figure 80). Much less proportions of non-Muslims believe this to be the case.

- Over 77 percent of Buddhists disagree or strongly disagree that their community is negatively portrayed in social media. A little less than half of Hindus also disagree or strongly disagree.
- A sizeable share of non-Buddhists compared to Buddhists are neutral to this idea.

*Figure 75: Social media has contributed to creating extremist ideas*
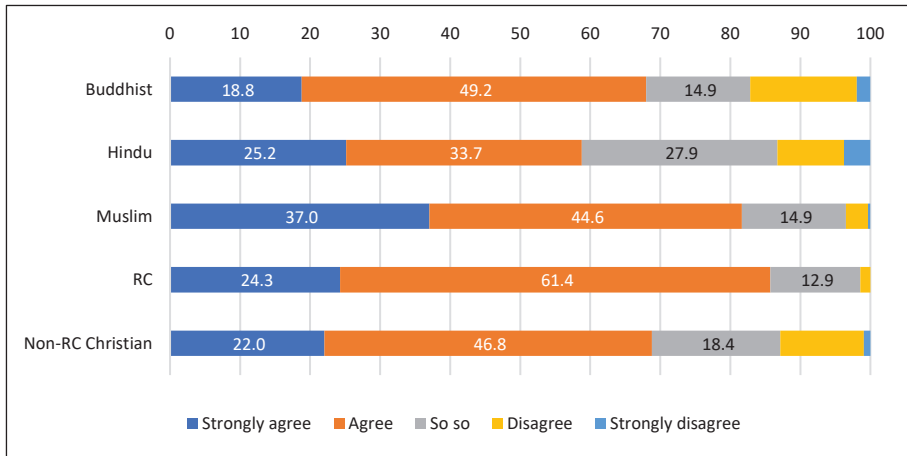


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 76: Some TV channels promote extremism more than social media*
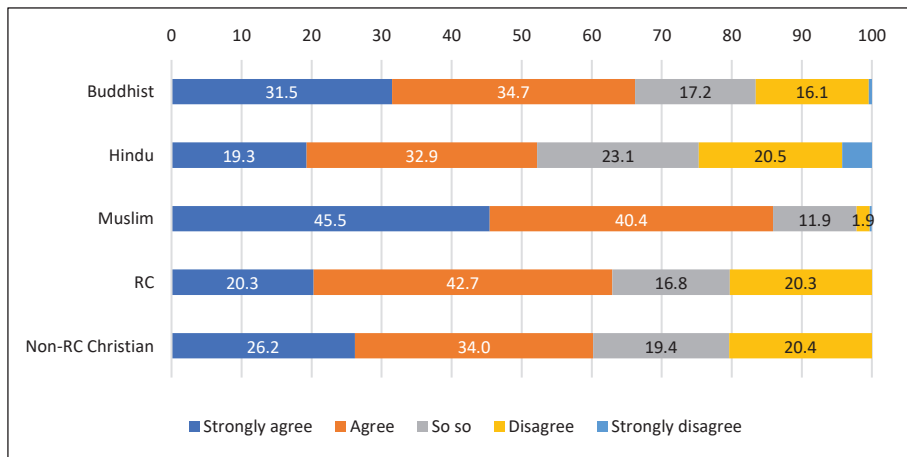


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 77: Social media makes it easier to spread hate*
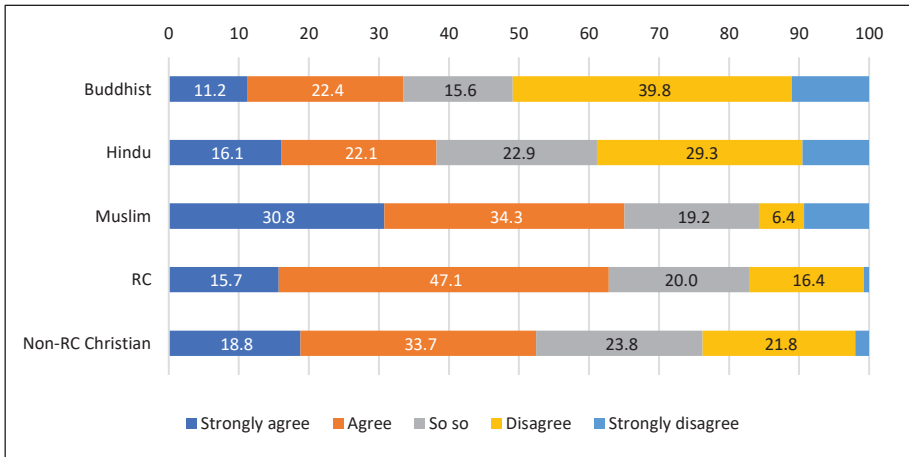


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 78: Social media makes small events national ones*
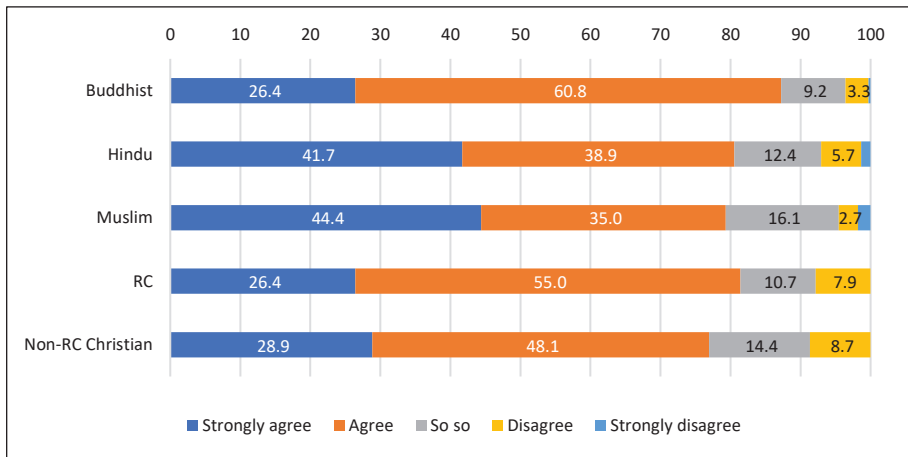


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 79: Religious minorities are bullied in social media*
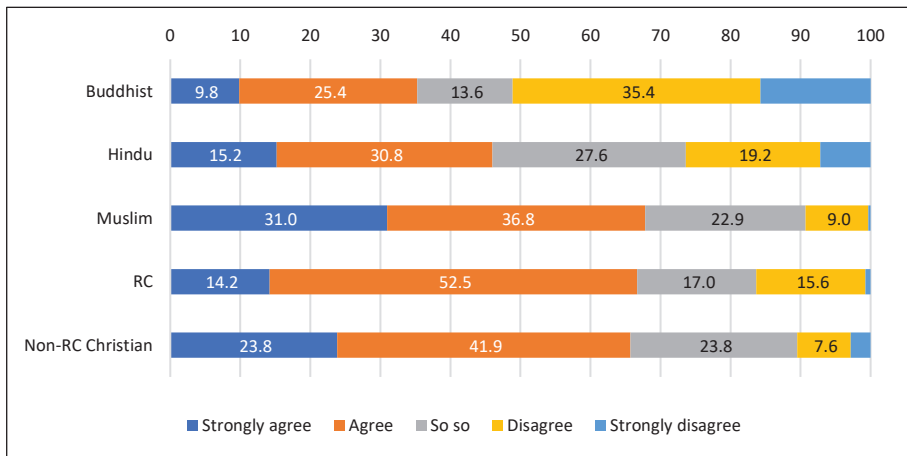


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

*Figure 80: My community is portrayed most negatively on social media*
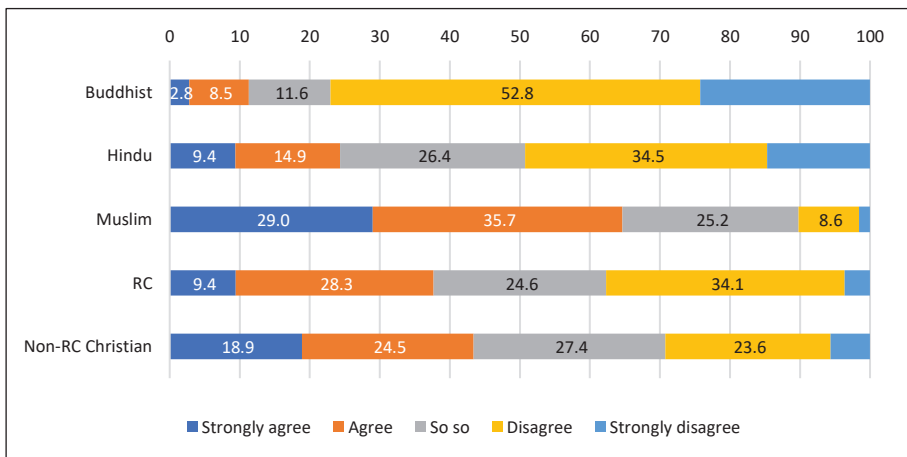


Source: Religious coexistence survey data, 2022

# 12. Summary of quantitative analysis

Since Part I of this report has covered a lot of ground of the respondents' perceptions across several dimensions, we summarise the key takeaways here:

- *All respondents consider themselves to be belonging to a religion and nearly all of them consider themselves to be religious.* But what constitutes religiosity tends to vary among the sub-groups of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Roman Catholics and Christians. The majority of respondents from all religions agree that doing no harm to others, doing good deeds for the benefit of the afterlife, and living peacefully with others as aspects of being religious.

- *While most Buddhists consider Sri Lanka to be an essentially Buddhist country, comparatively less non-Buddhists concur with this perception.* Most non-Buddhists also believe that all religions do not have a level playing field in Sri Lanka. They also believe that the Sri Lankan constitution provides an unfair advantage to Buddhism. In contrast, most Buddhists believe that there is a level playing field for all religions in Sri Lanka, and disagree that the constitution unduly favours Buddhism.

- *The large majority of respondents from all sub-groups agree that religion is a marker of social division in Sri Lanka and that politicians use religion to advance their agenda.* More Muslims than non-Muslims consider religion to have become a prominent marker of social division over the past decades, but most Hindus believe this has always been the case. Many respondents from all sub-groups agree that religion is a tool politicians use to their advantage, and that most politicians do not understand the difference between organised religion and a person simply observing religion.

- A sweeping majority of all respondents also agree that religious extremism and radicalisation is a threat to a peaceful society. Although many respondents agree that religious diversity has contributed to the richness of the Sri Lankan culture, this share is relatively lower among Hindus.

- *Most respondents have not had much exposure to religions other than their own, but they are able to hold secular views about the validity and truth of their own religions.* Moreover, the vast majority of respondents from all religions are willing to collaborate with people from religions other than their own, whether it is to start a business venture, fight for a common cause, or defend a person who has been treated unfairly.

- *However, not all respondents are open to inviting people of other religions to their own events or going to events that are of religions other than their own.* This rigidity is particularly marked among Buddhists. Muslims on the other hand appear to be quite open to these exchanges. Yet, most respondents from all religions concur that they should work with people of other religions on social projects and political issues.

- *Most respondents resonate with positive qualities, but do not typically associate the negative characteristics with their religious group.* Yet, many of the positive characteristics that respondents from a given religion see in themselves, are not perceived by respondents from other religions. Thus, there is a clear mismatch of perceived positive and negative qualities among one's own group and how others perceive this group. However, some respondents do have the insight to be self-critical and recognise negative characteristics of them.

- *Most Buddhists have not experienced discrimination based on their ethno-religious identity compared to non-Buddhists.* However, a discernibly higher proportion of Muslims and Hindus believe they have been discriminated against on the basis of their ethno-religious identity particularly by the army and the police. A large majority of Muslims also do not feel that their community is treated well by the government. Many non-RC Christians have felt discriminated against due to their ethno-religious identity in their own community and the neighbourhood.

- *Ethno-religious considerations do not play a significant role in most day-to-day decisions, but respondents are sensitive to such considerations when taking strategic decisions with long-term implications.* A relatively sizeable proportion of respondents tend to be sensitive to the ethno-religious identity of the neighbourhood when renting a home or buying residential land. However, the identity of the landlord, seller or tenant per se is not a significant consideration for most respondents.

- *Most respondents consider religious fundamentalism and racism as the main factors driving religious extremism and violence in the country.* A sizeable proportion of respondents also consider international influence and political oppression as catalysts of religious extremism. However, not many respondents consider economic issues such as poverty, or lack of employment opportunities as contributors to extremism.

- *Most respondents agree that religious leaders tend to instigate religious violence but can also be agents for religious coexistence.* The majority of respondents recognise educators and their own families and parents as agents of promoting religious coexistence. The vast majority of respondents agree that politicians use religion for their own agenda and that the government has not taken enough measures to counter religious extremism. Most respondents also concur that religion, government and politics should be kept separate from each other.

- *Most respondents have positive perceptions about human rights.* They recognise it is an important set of norms and values that benefit all human beings, and that everyone is entitled to human rights.

- *Most respondents agree that social media has contributed to instigating religious extremism in the country.* Many agree that the increased use of social media has made it easier for people to express extremist ideas. Many also believe that social media brings isolated incidents of violence into national prominence. More non-Buddhists compared to Buddhists feel that they tend to be discriminated against in social media. A large majority of Muslims also feel that their community is portrayed negatively in social media.

# Part II. Quantitative data

# 13. Life histories - education

The qualitative component of the survey probed into the ways in which educational and work environments might shape perceptions of 'the other'. A total of 24 interviews were conducted with 12 male and 12 female university students from Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Batticaloa, and Jaffna who are currently undergraduates in local universities or have passed out recently. Of the sample, 8 were Buddhists, 6 Hindus, 3 Muslims, 3 Roman Catholics, and 4 Christians. The salient themes emerging from the analysis of educational life histories are presented and discussed below.

University life is happy and carefree, irrespective of the respondents' ethno-religious identity. Almost all students characterise their life as undergraduates happy, free, and independent. Many in fact characterise university days as the happiest in their lives so far. Entering university has marked a milestone in their lives in many ways. Many of the respondents have worked hard towards qualifying to gain admission to university. The following quotes elaborate on how important getting into university was for them:

> *"I had very high hopes of getting into university. I worked very hard for it. It is on my third attempt that I qualified to enter university." (Female, 25, Buddhist)*

> *"Once I completed the OLs, I started the ALs with the clear objective of getting into university. Once I got through the ALs, I decided that I will definitely go to university." (Male, 24, Roman Catholic)*

As such, getting into university, especially if it is their most preferred one, is perceived as a privilege, a significant achievement, and a tribute to parents and teachers. One respondent elaborated:

> *"From what I had heard, I imagined that campus was a different beautiful world. Also from my perspective, getting into university is a great privilege. I believed that a person with a degree would have good job prospects and more importantly it would make my parents very happy and proud. All*

*these reasons motivated me to get into university. None of my siblings got into university so my parents had a lot of hopes on me." (Female, 26, Buddhist)*

It is also the first time, the majority of the respondents have lived away from home, lived independently, and importantly, made decisions on their own. Most respondents appear to enjoy this freedom and being responsible for their own lives, although some have had reservations about how they would be able to manage without parents and away from home. Only one respondent characterised his university experience as more sad than happy, although all respondents agreed that material comforts as university students were much less compared to what they enjoyed at home. All respondents also recognise that a university degree is important for creating better employment opportunities and social outcomes for them.

University is a large, dynamic, and heterogeneous society, unlike school... All respondents commonly characterise school as a place with structure, discipline and guidance, supervision, and handholding from teachers and parents. School children are by and large from their own area of residence, typically of the same gender, and for the most part, from the same ethno-religious background as the respondent. This is especially true in the case of Sinhala Buddhist respondents. However, in university, all respondents have had the opportunity to meet students from different, socioeconomic, geographic, and ethno-religious backgrounds. The lack of structure in knowledge delivery, compared to school, in that no one would monitor and punish students for missing lectures, or not submitting assignments on time, has inculcated in them a sense of independence and self-discipline. But a strong network of friends would support each other with lectures notes and assignments. The following quotes elaborate on these observations:

*"In university, students are given more autonomy over their education and are expected to take ownership of their learning. Additionally, the university environment is more diverse and inclusive, providing opportunities to interact with people from different backgrounds and cultures." (Female, 23, Buddhist)*

> *"[University] gave us the opportunity to study and share ideas in a diverse society. It made us understand each other better and be considerate. We also learnt to be* open-minded and embrace difference wholeheartedly." (Male, 25, Muslim)

> *"We had very limited relationships at school. We knew very little about the world. We did not have big goals also back then. But after coming to university, we got to know a lot about the world. We met people from different social backgrounds." (Female, 23, Hindu)*

> *"In terms of school education, I had only Muslim friends there. Within a narrow circle we formed our friends and continued education there." (Female, 29, Muslim)*

One respondent pointed out that while at school she used to be rather selfish with her textbooks and notes, in the university she strived to become "a selfless and helpful friend" sharing her notes as much as she could, with her friends. Thus, university has given them access not just to better economic opportunities, but a greater understanding of society and rich experiences of interacting with individuals who are different to themselves in many ways, including their ethno-religious identity.

It is also clear that university has been instrumental in helping some respondents mature into adults, as explained in the following quote:

> *"It must be said that the university gave us maturity. It is not like school. It was the university that taught us that we should change our attitudes, perceptions, and qualities. Not only that, but how to interact with people and how to manage things professionally. University taught not only academic things but we also learned that life is complicated, and there are a lot more than exams in life to pass." (Tamil, 28, Christian)*

University is also a space where religion is not a relevant or important factor. All respondents pointed out that religion is not an important factor inside university and is irrelevant to the usual activities of a university. In fact, one respondent pointed out that he does not even know the ethno-religious background of his

batchmates, but that they get on very well with each other. Another respondent explained:

> *"There is this one lecturer – a Tamil lecturer, but she is one of the nicest lecturers I have met in university. She takes care of us and if we have problems, she helps us a lot." (Female, 22, Buddhist).*

While individually, respondents' religiosity appears to be at different degrees, it was clear that religion had nothing to do with them as university students. One respondent explained:

> *"Religion is not important for what we do at university, because education is not based on religion. However, in their own personal work/life, religion can be important to students." (Female, 23, Hindu)*

The common goal is to pursue a good education. Religion might be an avenue for stress release, solace and peace of mind for students, but it remains very much a personal factor. For example, several respondents explained that they practised rituals of their own faith for blessings and to bring peace of mind to themselves before exams. This is more of a habit for most respondents, and not something that they have acquired after they entered university.

> *"Religion is important to me personally. But I don't think religion is an important topic in the university as a whole. Religion is a personal choice and opinion; everyone should have the freedom to one. Because all of us students have come to university to learn, I don't think religion is an important thing there." (Female, 23, Buddhist)*

Friendship is a key aspect of university life. As nearly all respondents have moved away from home a relatively long distance to enter university, friendships appear to be a very important social network for students. While all students consider their parents, siblings, and relatives, and in some cases, school teachers to be the most important of their social networks, friendships seem to be important for sustaining themselves as university students. Many respondents have experiences of sharing food, notes, and the ups and downs of university life with friends. It is clear that friends are the main source of emotional support for the difficult experiences

respondents have faced at university. Many respondents shared experiences of friends taking care of them when they were ill, especially in the hostel, helping them emotionally over the breakup of love affairs, in conflict situations, and in one case coping with the death of a batch mate. For one respondent, friendship was the reason that changed his feelings towards university life:

> *"I got into university because my family pressured me into it. A few times in the first few months, I tried to quit, but my family kept pushing me to continue my studies. So, I decided to hang in there. Like everyone else, I was not happy at university in the first year. I regretted coming to university. But over time, I made friends at university and then I actually started to like the university." (Male, 27, Roman Catholic)*

For most respondents, however, their closest friends are from the same ethno-religious background as themselves. Only one Hindu respondent had very close friends who were not from her own ethno-religious identity. This is especially true in the case of Sinhala respondents.

> *"I have many Buddhist friends. I don't have Muslim or Hindu friends in the university. Also, my friends are from different parts of the country." (Male, 24, Roman Catholic).*

> *"Almost all my friends – both boys and girls – are Sinhala. They come from different parts of the country. I have one friend who is a Christian. The others are Buddhist." (Female, 25, Buddhist)*

> *"Most of my close friends are Sinhala and one of them is from my village. But all others are from different parts of the country. There is one Muslim girl and a few boys." (Female, 26, Buddhist)*

While there is diversity among friends in the form of gender and geography, by and large respondents tend to have close friends from their own ethno-religious backgrounds. However, it is quite evident from the interviews that students from all ethno-religious groups are cordial towards each other, help each other in their studies, work well in groups and even share food in groups. Some respondents

pointed out that language is a barrier to connecting with students who speak Tamil or Sinhala only.

> *"There are difficulties in exchanging ideas due to language barriers. But otherwise,* students get along very well." (Male, 23, Buddhist)

> *"I am the only Tamil in our group, but everyone is very close to me and does not make me feel it [that I am Tamil]. Because my Sinhala is very good, I can have relationships with everyone without a problem. But because of the language barrier, Tamil students from far away like Jaffna have had difficulty building close relations with Sinhala students. Other than that, students get on very well." (Female, 23, Hindu)*

University provides a solid platform for religious pluralism and coexistence. Irrespective of which university the respondents have attended, they all point out that there is religious coexistence in the university. Many respondents attribute this to the fact that religion plays no role in academics whatsoever.

> *"There is good coexistence in the university. No one is discriminated against based on where they come from or their ethnicity or religion. Religion or other factors play no role in forming friendships. There are big groups of friends at university who are from diverse backgrounds." (Female, 26, Buddhist)*

> *"I have a similar relationship with groups from all religious backgrounds. Religion has no connection whatsoever to our relationships. We are all here for the purpose of getting a good education. I don't even know the religion of some of my friends." (Male, 24, Roman Catholic)*

While friendships might not run very deep with students from other ethnoreligious backgrounds due to differences in culture, language, and belief systems, that does not stop students from treating each other respectfully, as illustrated in the following quotes:

> *"Students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds get on very well and coexist in the university. There have been no problems based on ethnicity or*

*religion. But I don't think there are close connections/relationships between students from different ethnicities. They smile when they meet, but that is about it. They usually keep to themselves and their own groups." (Female, 25, Buddhist)*

*"Everyone is harmonious. We rarely see a religious or ethnic fight. Nobody comments openly about another person's religion. People accept others for who they are, share their food, help each other, and maintain good friendships. They avoid ideas on stereotypes and prejudices and show a willingness to compromise and collaborate, respecting every individual." (Male 25, Muslim)*

Extracurricular activities provide a good platform for strengthening cooperation among students from diverse ethnoreligious backgrounds. Almost all the respondents have been involved in organising and/or participating in at least one extracurricular activity at university. These activities range from field trips, batch trips and protests to religious, cultural, music and art festivals, freshers' night, and sports meets. A common theme permeating all interviews is how the process of organising such events often brings together students from diverse ethnoreligious backgrounds and allows for friendships to form and strengthen.

*"When I was studying in the third year, we went on a field trip; we all enjoyed it a lot as none of us was looked at through our cultures and languages. I got to interact with many people." (Female, 28, Christian)*

Importantly, many students have helped organise or taken part in celebrations of religious festivals such as Pirith ceremonies, alms givings, and free food stalls (dansel) for Vesak, Christmas, Thai Pongal, Ramazan and Deevali. Many respondents have pointed out that not only have they enjoyed the cultural aspect of these celebrations, but such experiences have been good opportunities for them to learn about other religious celebrations and practices as well as to strengthen their friendships with students from different ethno-religious groups. Food is an important aspect of these festivals that many respondents have fond recollections of. The festivals also afforded students a break from their academic life and an opportunity to create memories with friends.

*"... these [events] are seen as important because they are expressions of cultural identity. And these festivals pave the way for the people of other cultures to know the particular culture and it helps everyone to work together." (Male, 27, Hindu)*

*"Religious events are usually celebrated outside university. Thaipongal festival is held in a kovil. Hindu students organise it. We are invited. We also go to Ramazan festivals. I have also been to the Christmas mass. These events are new experiences for me. Most students go to Ramazan and Thai Pongal festivals because of the food. And because the food served is also quite different from what I am used to, that is also a new experience." (Male, 23, Buddhist)*

However, one respondent expressed concerns that while Christians did not attempt to give much prominence to their religions by organising events from their faiths, Buddhists attempted to give prominence to their worship. She explained:

*"...the Buddhists were always striving to promote their religion by paying more attention to religious worship activities. Neither Christians nor Hindus give that much importance. In a liturgy, Buddhists think that the prayers of their religion should come first. So there seems to be a division here." (Female, 28, Christian)*

While respondents have witnessed conflict at university, none of them is based on ethno-religious factors. Most conflicts are based on differences in ideologies and opinions between competing student unions, and such tensions are particularly prominent during student elections. Often, students from senior batches, student union officials, and in some instances the academic and non-academic staff might be involved in resolving such conflicts.

Religion and religiosity are a personal choice. All respondents share the opinion that religion is a personal matter and it should be so. Moreover, what religion means to them is broadly similar – many respondents recognise religion as a set of principles to live by, a mechanism to guide them towards happiness and peace of mind, and to become good human beings. Perceptions of their own religiosity

ranged widely among respondents from all ethnoreligious backgrounds. While religion was part of their core identity among some respondents, for some, religion was a very important part of their lives. Others considered themselves religious because they believed they engaged in more religious practices and rituals than a non-religious person would. A few respondents claimed that they did the bare minimum rituals of their faiths. Two respondents considered themselves to be non-religious. The following quotes elaborate on the varying degrees of religiosity of the respondents:

*"I value my religion. I am the same as other religious people. I love my religion very much. Religion is very important to me... I have paid covenants to various Hindu temples for my academic development and for me to rise in my personal life. After I successfully completed my university education, I went to the temple and fulfilled my prayer and every time I was successful, I was paying the covenant that I prayed for." (Male, 27, Hindu)*

*"I consider myself a religious person, I try my best to understand and follow my religion properly. It plays a significant role in my life. Religion for me provides a lot of emotional stability and peace. It gives hope and strength. I try my best to adhere to the principles of my religion, for example by following a proper dress code, developing good morals and ethics and praying five times." (Male, 25, Muslim)*

*"I am a Buddhist. But I am not someone who observes religious rituals frequently or goes to the temple frequently. I engage in religious rituals when necessary. I think religion is important to some extent." (Male, 25, Buddhist)*

*"In my case, the religion is not important. I love the theory of Periyar. There are no answers to the question of Periyar in religion. So, I'm not a religious man. All religions are produced by human beings... I have no trust in God. I'll trust only me. If I try, I can win... without trying anything, how can we trust God?" (Female, 24, Hindu)*

*"My father is Christian and my mother is Hindu, but I never follow any religious rituals since I do not believe in that concept." (Male, 36, Hindu by birth)*

Many respondents have visited other places of worship, but not necessarily to perform rituals. There are divergent patterns emerging in respondents' experiences of visiting religious places that are not their own, and their participation in rituals of other faiths. While some respondents who perceive themselves to be very religious and faithful to the teachings of their own religion are still comfortable visiting other places of worship and participating in practices and rituals of worship. A few respondents tend to visit places of worship of other religions, particularly with friends, but do not partake in rituals and practices. Some respondents do not visit other places of worship because they consider it to be prohibited in their religion, or a sign of disrespect for their religion.

*"Actually, I have respect for all other religions. But as a Muslim, we do not normally go to other religious places or their rituals, because it is prohibited (Haram) in our religion." (Female, 29, Muslim)*

Thus, the common theme emerging from all interviews is that while subscribing to a religious view and practising religion, the extent of religiosity one feels towards one's own faith and whether one visits other places of worship are personal choices they make; it is not a reflection of one's tolerance of religious practices and beliefs that are not their own. Many respondents point out that they respect all religions and recognise that all religions guide people to become better human beings. For example, one respondent explained:

*"Many religions emphasise good values such as hard work, discipline, compassion, and perseverance, which can be beneficial in academic pursuits and personal growth.... Religion is [also] different among us [friends], but we have always respected each other's beliefs and practices. It has never been a source of conflict or tension in our friendship." (Female, 23, Buddhist)*

Coexistence appears to be more of an emotion than a concept. The interpretation of coexistence as a concept differs from respondent to respondent. While some

respondents had a very detailed understanding of coexistence, others had simpler definitions of the concept.

> *"Coexistence is living harmoniously. Respecting others and protecting one's own identity is central here. Also not engaging in disruptive behaviours on purpose and helping and protecting others unconditionally when needed can be identified as coexistence."* (Female, 26, Buddhist)

> *"When we say coexistence, it is mandatory for all of us to give respect to all religious matters. When others attack our religion, it is a good thing to raise our voice against them, but we should not come forward in such a way as to harm the faith of others. The good thing about coexistence is that everyone should be equal and happy. Respecting all human beings equally and giving them their due status and honour is seen as a fundamental aspect of society."* (Female, 28 Christian)

> *"Co-existence is a good thing which means all people live together without any partiality among them, especially without the cultural difference."* (Female, 29, Muslim)

> *"Coexistence means that everyone must live together without avoiding anyone. Togetherness is very important."* (Female, 23, Roman Catholic)

> *"What I understand about coexistence is that when everyone lives together in the same place, for example, two communities live in harmony with each other."* (Male, 36, Hindu by birth)

The crux of these diverse interpretations is that coexistence is about living harmoniously, respectful, and tolerant of each other's differences. In other words, all interpretations envelop ideas of mutual respect, harmony, equality, happiness, and honour. Thus, it appears that coexistence is more of an emotion that people feel, or an abstract and intangible idea which they recognise when they see it. To elaborate, while some respondents could not elaborate on their understanding of the concept of coexistence, they spoke quite eloquently on the follow-up question about their views on the level of coexistence at the university.

*"Actually, there is coexistence [in the university]. If there are any celebrations, all students will participate in these celebrations. There are no religious or racial issues. For example, Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists also come for Thai Pongal celebrations." (Female, 24, Hindu)*

*"No one is discriminated against based on caste and religion at the university. All are treated as students. All religions are given equal importance. All religious festivals are observed in the university so; all other students also get an opportunity* to participate in them. So, coexistence is more common in university than in other places." (Male, 27, Hindu)

*"In our university there are Tamils and Muslims in addition to Sinhalese. They do very well in university. I have never heard of situations where anyone has been discriminated against based on race or religion." (Male, 23, Buddhist)*

Respondents believe that the vast majority of people in Sri Lanka want to live in harmony. Clearly, all respondents believe that the majority of the general public (which some respondents quantified as 99 percent) want to live in harmony with everyone. As one respondent reasoned, nobody wants their peaceful lives to be disrupted by conflict. However, one respondent reasoned that there was no real coexistence in Sri Lanka, making the important distinction between superficial and real coexistence. She explained:

*"I think that there is no [real] religious coexistence in Sri Lanka...Our society never allowed a Hindu to marry a Muslim or vice versa or with people from other religions. I'm sure my family also will consider the religion when I get married. In this condition, we can't think about religious coexistence." (Female, 23, Roman Catholic)*

However, most respondents recognise that religion is increasingly being used to manipulate the public. Many respondents believe that politicians abuse religion to advance their political agenda, and to create divisions among ethnoreligious groups. For example, one respondent explained:

*"People like to coexist, but the politicians don't let people coexist. The main reasons for religious conflict are politicians and land invasion. Most of the politicians try to build Buddhist temples. My opinion is the politicians are the reason for the conflicts." (Female, 24, Hindu)*

*"...politicians create divisions between religions and want to do politics by presenting themselves as religious politicians. Politics in Sri Lanka is popular because religion is prominently placed, so always having religious issues at the front and centre is favourable for politicians." (Female, 28, Christian)*

Several respondents pointed out that religious leaders also tend to instigate violence. Several respondents also explained that religious extremists tend to promote violence to achieve their own personal objectives. A lack of understanding about religions that are not one's own might also lead to a lack of willingness to coexist. Several respondents argued that even when tensions erupt for reasons other than religion, eventually such conflicts are made to look like ethnoreligious conflicts. The following quotes illustrate these points:

*"People don't dislike coexisting. From what I know, there have not been terrible religious conflicts in Sri Lanka. Although there have been some minor incidents, they were instigated by a very small share of religious extremists. They also carried out these conflicts with ulterior motives." (Female, 23, Hindu)*

*"99 percent of Sri Lankas are willing to coexist. But there are one or two people who create problems between religions for their advantage. Some priests and especially politicians are guilty of this. Because of their narrow objectives, there might be religious conflicts at times." (Male, 25, Buddhist)*

*"All people want to live together but religious institutions hinder this. Religious institutions and religious leaders are less likely to advocate for coexistence." (Male, 36, Hindu by birth)*

*"The main reason for any unwillingness to coexist is that there is no mutual understanding about religions. If we take the Bible, Quran, or Bhagwat Geetha, they all speak of love. But most of the people… they don't understand this. This is the main reason. Most people don't know about other religions. This is the reason for other conflicts also." (Female, 23, Roman Catholic)*

*"Most people in Sri Lanka want to coexist. Conflicts based on religion in Sri Lanka are quite rare. Even they usually are not based on reasons other than religion. However, if the parties to the conflict are from two religions, it ends up as a religious conflict. Like this, religious conflicts happen without any real relevance to the religion. Some people piggyback on religion to solve their problems – like politicians." (Female, 22, Buddhist)*

Removing religion from politics and creating awareness about all religions were among the most cited suggestions for promoting coexistence. Most respondents recognise that religion is often used as a tool to divide communities to help narrow political agendas. Therefore, they recognise that religion should be kept separate from politics. On the other hand, it is also important for people to know about other religions so that religion cannot be misused by different groups for ulterior motives. This can be achieved by teaching school children about all religions and creating opportunities for children and adults to participate in festivals and celebrations of all religions. Other suggestions included creating awareness among people about religious fundamentalist groups that spread misinformation, and recognising that religion is a personal choice and no religion is superior to the other.

*"It is very good if everyone can be given some knowledge about the other religions in the country, other than one's own religion. It will help reduce the suspicion and lack of trust people have towards other people. This is very important for religious coexistence." (Female, 22, Buddhist)*

*"I think like in our village if people from all religions visit places of worship of other religions, and participate in their religious activities, that is a good suggestion to build coexistence. In school also, children should be taught about all religions." (Female, 23, Hindu)*

*"If people of any religion join celebrations of any religion, that would be a good way to understand other religions. And we should try to remove the idea that one's own religion is better than others." (Male, 25, Buddhist)*

*"No one should say that my religion is right and your religion is wrong. An individual can practice his/her preferred religion in the manner he/she likes and it depends on his/her likes and dislikes and the other person need not express his/her opinion." (Female, 29, Muslim)*

# 14. Life histories – workplace/livelihood

Next, we analyse the work-life histories of 11 male and 10 female respondents from Galle, Jaffna, Colombo, Batticaloa and Kandy districts. We interviewed a total of 9 Buddhist, 3 Hindu, 5 Muslim, 2 Roman Catholic and 2 non-RC Christian respondents. The respondents' livelihoods range from self-employment and small enterprises with several employees, and medium to large establishments with a staff strength of 30 or more. The key themes of coexistence that we observe in the analysis of the 21 life histories on employment are presented and discussed below.

A workplace is quite complex, with many challenges, and a diverse group of stakeholders. All livelihood activities and businesses that respondents are engaged in work for the common objective of earning profits. However, in the process, respondents grapple with many challenges, including exogenous shocks such as the Easter Attacks (2019)3 and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as difficulties in securing supplies, negotiating with suppliers, dealing with buyers, and managing employees. Most respondents reported a loss of income and assets, difficulties in honouring their debt, and paying salaries for employees due to the COVID-19 lockdown as well as the recent economic crisis. While these challenges were common to all respondents, their intensity however appears to be correlated to the type and size of the business, its adaptability to changing circumstances, and the financial affluence of the respondent as an individual, as illustrated in the following quotes:

> *"I started the sewing business in 2019. COVID started to spread about a year after I started the business. But it did not affect my business that much. I had the business at home then." (Female, 45, Buddhist).*

> *"The restaurant was closed for several months during the Covid period... as there was no business. I will never forget this time. My wife and I would prepare food at home and sell it in the neighbourhood. There was an income problem." (Male, 49, Muslim)*

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3    A series of about eight coordinated Islamic terrorist suicide bombings took place on Easter Sunday (April 21) of 2019 targeting places of Christian worship and luxury hotels. Over 300 people are estimated to have been killed in the bomb blasts, with many more left with permanent disabilities.

Hard work, sacrifice and family support are common themes permeating all work histories, irrespective of the respondents' religious background. Nearly all respondents have not had an education beyond the AL, and many of them have not engaged in other employment before starting their business activities. A few respondents have inherited their businesses from parents, while most have started business activities on their own to support their households. Irrespective of how respondents have come to own a business activity, it is clear that all of them have experienced challenges that have threatened their business and worked hard to overcome them. Long hours of work, sacrifice of family time, sleep, stress and fatigue, as well as support from spouse, siblings and parents feature consistently across the narratives of all respondents, irrespective of their ethnoreligious background.

Respondents have cordial business relationships with their clientele, suppliers, and peers. According to most respondents, ethnoreligious considerations are not important for the buyer, as long as the quality of service or the commodity is good. For example, one respondent explained:

> *"... the customers who come to me for sewing have a great relationship with me. There is excellent cooperation between them and my staff. It must be said that ethnic and religious issues have not come up so far." (Female, 41, Hindu)*

Another respondent explained how counter-productive it is to consider the ethnoreligious backgrounds of his customers. He reasoned that, if he were to sell to customers only of his own faith, he would have a very narrow customer base:

> *"I don't care about the religion of my customers. If I sell my products only to Christians, there will be no business. I don't care about the religion of the customer. No one sees traders separately as Hindu traders, Christian traders, and Muslim traders. Hindus do not buy things from only Hindus, and Christians from only Christians. I also eat at Muslim and Hindu restaurants. Hindus buy fruits from me for puja. Customers only care about the quality of the products." (Male, 45, Christian)*

*"My buyers are very important to me. The success of my business depends on them. Religion has nothing to do with how I treat my buyers. Many people think that our relationship with the buyer is over when we sell the goods to them. But I try very hard to maintain good relationships with my buyers, because they are the ones who bring me new customers."* (Male, 67, Buddhist)

Any conflicts with buyers are usually related to payments, recovery of debt, the quality of goods and services and return policies of the business, and not their ethnoreligious identity.

By and large, the relationships with suppliers and peers appear to depend significantly on mutual respect, trust, and help towards each other. Religion does not seem to have an impact on creating and maintaining relationships with suppliers or peers. The following quotes elaborate on this point:

*"When I have a lot of dressings, friends from other salons help me. If I get several bookings for weddings on the same day, I ask for help from another person who runs a salon. They are all Sinhala Buddhist women. They are also professional makeup artists. But we all work together. There is no unhealthy competition among us."* (Female, 45, Roman Catholic)

*"Everyone worked together during the Tsunami. Especially the business community and the Chamber [of Commerce] gave me a lot of support. Muslim friends as well as Tamil and Sinhala friends were there...religious leaders from all religions helped me without any hesitation at that time."* (Male, 58, Muslim)

*"My business had come to a complete standstill during the Covid pandemic. I had to pay for the goods I had purchased on credit, but I did not have the means to pay. We were planning to take a loan to repay the money or to start a roadside business, but thankfully our suppliers asked us to pay when we could. That was completely unexpected...two of these suppliers were Sinhala and the other was a Muslim. I will never forget this incident."* (Female, 55, Buddhist)

*"When we do business, we must maintain good relationships with people from different ethno-religious backgrounds. I have many Muslim and Tamil business friends. We have a very strong relationship. We have buyers and sellers from different ethnoreligious backgrounds and we all get on very well"* (Male, 55, Buddhist)

However, one respondent spoke of several experiences where the owner of the shop next door, who is a Sinhalese, was not speaking to him and even degrading him at times. He explained:

*"...the shop next to mine is also a mobile shop. Its owners are Sinhalese. They do not talk to us. The owner of that shop does not like Muslims. He is a racist. There is also competition as both shops are mobile phone shops...He often scolds us as "Muslim Thambi". My father does not engage with him. But I cannot be patient. Sometimes, I also fight with him. He often blames the Muslim community. He has so much hatred for my religion. I don't know why. We have problems only because of him."* (Male, 38, Muslim)

Relationships with employees are more dynamic, and ethnoreligious factors might add to the complexity. All the respondents acknowledge the support of their employees in running their business activities. Many of them have employees from ethnoreligious backgrounds different to their own. For the most part, it appears that employees get on very well and work congruently towards common goals. The following quotes from two respondents elaborate on how employees played a critical role in sustaining their business activities during challenging times:

*"I have staff members who are from various religions and places. About four Tamil-speaking Muslims, 23 Tamils and 4 Sinhala staff members working very hard together on our business plan to take our education courses online [from physical classes]. I saw them work day and night over the phone and in Zoom calls. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, they were working together as one to accomplish a common vision and goal".* (Male, 38, Roman Catholic)

*"I had made a significant investment in a new business. Unexpectedly, the business did not pick up as I expected. Because of Covid, my other business*

*was suffering too. I faced significant challenges paying loan instalments and paying staff salaries. My staff gave me massive support to recover from this crisis, by taking only a limited* portion of their salaries." (Male, 55, Buddhist)

However, there can be situations of competition, jealousy and misunderstandings among employees. Several respondents have discussed situations where the ethnoreligious identity of their employees has become a source of conflict between the respondents and the employees. This could be due to simple misunderstandings, but in some instances due to outright discrimination, as illustrated in the following quotes:

*"Business is bound to have problems. Conflicts mean that there are sometimes differences of opinion between employees. Two of the Tamil men who work for me are from upcountry. And one is from the Batticaloa area. Muslim workers are from Colombo, Galle, and Puttalam. In some cases, there will be territorial issues and disagreements. I will solve it as best I can. I have also dismissed some people from work…. Sometimes, Hindu employees mistakenly think that if I grant leave to Muslim employees, I am favouring them. I do not discriminate against anyone. But such problems are common. These cannot be completely stopped." (Male, 45, Muslim)*

*"There was one conflict that occurred where a Muslim colleague of mine mishandled money from the office and then during a conversation with Human Resources and Accounts, there was a religiously derogatory statement from a Sinhalese colleague to the effect that "this is what Islam teaches you". My Muslim colleagues were not happy with it and felt religion should not be pulled into this when it [the fault] is a person's character and it can't be defined by religion." (Male, 38, Roman Catholic.)*

An interesting pattern emerging from the interviews is how conflicts among employees and between employees and the employer appear to be almost non-existent among women-led businesses. It could be that the inherently small and simple nature of the business allows for stronger relationships that in turn help avoid conflict situations. For example, most female respondents only work with 2 or 3 employees, and run home-based businesses. Their relationships appear to be

friendlier and more close-knit compared to the employer-employee relations that are found in male-run businesses. For example, one respondent explained:

> *"There are times when I get angry at my assistant because I don't like when jobs are half done. But I try to carefully think and discuss such matters with her." (Female, 45, Buddhist)*

> *"I have two Muslim women and three Sinhalese women among my employees. I have a good relationship with them. They also have no problems with me [as the employer]. There is no racial or religious difference. They are united due to their understanding of each other. I also respect their religious beliefs." (Female, 41, Hindu)*

Recent ethno-religious tensions between Buddhist and Muslim groups have had negative effects on Muslim-owned businesses. It is also clear that non-Muslim respondents have not faced racially charged discrimination in conducting their business activities.

The 2019 Easter Attacks and the tensions that followed in its aftermath have had significantly negative effects on businesses owned by Muslim individuals. One respondent who runs a restaurant explained that after the Easter Attacks, Sinhala people started to boycott his restaurant because it was run by a Muslim:

> *"After the Easter attacks, no Sinhalese people came to my shop to buy food. Especially during those times, only Muslim people bought more food. In fact, even my Sinhalese friends did not come. I see this as a common thing in Sri Lanka. We as Muslims have been left out on many occasions like Covid, Easter attacks etc. My opinion is that this should change." (Male, 49, Muslim)*

Several other Muslim respondents shared similar experiences of discrimination after the Easter Attacks. One respondent explained that there was a drop in the customers coming to their shops after the bomb blasts, mainly due to the misleading lies that were spread about Muslims. However, in both situations, these discriminatory behaviours by customers were short-lived.

However, one incident of ethno-religious violence stands out, both due to its atrocity and hope for coexistence. A Muslim respondent from Kandy explained that his shop was set on fire during the height of the Buddhist-Muslim conflict in recent years. He explained that he incurred significant losses from this incident. He added:

> *"For a long time, I did not have a lot of business. I lived in extreme fear those days. But the best part of this incident is it is the Sinhala people who helped me during this time. It was also Sinhala people who set my shop on fire. It was a unique experience for me." (Male, 68, Muslim)*

Another Muslim respondent from Kandy had lived in fear of having her shop set on fire. She explained:

> *"During the conflict, a lot of shops here were set on fire. I got to know about this only when I went home in the evening. I was extremely worried those few days. We love what we have built with our sweat and hard work. We are all scared of losing what we worked for." (Female, 39, Muslim)*

How important religion is to the respondents' livelihoods is a function of their religious beliefs. The extent of religiosity varies from person to person, as was seen in the analysis of the educational life histories. While some respondents consider themselves to be extremely religious, certain other respondents believe themselves to be moderate in the way they follow their religion and rituals. A handful of respondents considered themselves to be barely religious or non-religious. These varying degrees of religiosity among respondents are illustrated in the following quotes:

> *"Yes, I am a religious person. Religion is very important to me. I have had the strength to face problems in my day-to-day life, because of God's blessing." (Male, 68, Muslim)*

> *"I consider myself to be a religious person. If we follow the path God has shown us, we can achieve a lot in life. I also think God is watching us always. If we live right, we will get good things in return. I am telling that from experience." (Female, 39, Muslim)*

*"I think I am a religious person. I don't really know what a non-religious person does. I give alms; listen to Bana sermons and Pirith chanting. I get peace of mind from engaging in these activities. I give priority to religion before I start anything. That is because religion is very important to me."* (Female, 45, Buddhist)

*"I do not consider myself a religious person .... I don't visit the church or read the Bible or even pray as I believe God is in us as human beings. I believe in humanity and it comes first for me. Religion is an important identity but believing in it is still a question for me as I am learning and finding the meaning." (Male, 38, Roman Catholic)*

While some respondents keep religion and business separate, for others, religion is an important and integral part of their livelihoods. Many respondents engage in daily religious rituals in their workplaces. These usually include praying, lighting lamps and incense, and in the case of Buddhists, making offerings of flowers to the Buddha. Some respondents do this as a habit and do not expect these practices to help their business:

*"I have not mixed my religion and work. Religion is different. Work is different. If we mix religion with work, that will create issues. I respect and believe in my religion. I have no expectation from God regarding my work. My business goes well because I believe in God with faith. Also, I believe my business is going well." (Female, 47, Buddhist)*

However, many respondents consider such rituals to be important to invoke blessings on the business and for its success. The following quotes explain this point:

*"Religion and belief in it are very important for business development. I follow exactly what is mentioned in the religion. I believe that religion is also the main reason for my career development...Tuesdays and Fridays are our fasting days, so I don't eat meat on those two days. And for my career development, I go to the temple on Fridays and perform pooja. Everyone in my family follows this practice." (Female, 41, Hindu)*

*"... religion is mandatory for my work... it is important to me...religion is an important part of life for me. I regularly perform 5 daily prayers regardless of work.* I have given that right to my employees too. I fully believe in my religion and what it says. I believe religion is the most important factor in developing my career." (Male, 49, Muslim)

*"I am a benefactor to several temples in this area. I participate in almost all festivals organised by these temples. I also organise almsgivings annually both at my workplace and at home. I also perform a pooja at Kataragama, every year. I believe these religious rituals help both my business and home." (Male, 55, Buddhist)*

Visiting places of worship of other religions is a personal choice. While some respondents avoid visiting other places of worship because it is forbidden in their religion, or find it a sign of disrespect for their own faith, other respondents might visit other places of worship for new experiences, or to build good relationships with places of worship in the community, and not necessarily to perform religious rituals. However, there are a few respondents who are comfortable learning about other religions and share their religious views. The following quotes illustrate these observations:

*"I do not perform religious rituals in places of other faiths. But I do like to go see them." (Female, 55, Buddhist)*

*"I do not engage in religious rituals of other faiths. But, I have close relations with temples, kovils and churches in the area. We help these institutions, the way we can." (Male, 58, Muslim)*

*"I go to Christian church many times. I love reading the Bible. I studied in a Christian school. So, I have faith in Christian religious ideas." (Female, 41, Hindu)*

*"I do have faith in Hinduism. Buddhism and Hinduism have a tight relationship. Therefore, I go to the Hindu temples. I go to the Kataragama once a year, regularly. I do not follow Hindu practices. I do not know about them. But I have faith in Murugan and Ganapathi." (Female, 47, Buddhist)*

Most workplaces do not tend to have religious festivals. One respondent had a logical reason for why he refrained from celebrating such events, being a small business owner. He explained:

> *"It is important to celebrate the festivals at home. But it must not be celebrated in workplaces. There is a meaning to these celebrations, and it can lead to misunderstandings among workers of different ethnic groups. Instead, I give vacation to workers during festivals, so they get to celebrate in their own homes." (Male, 51, Buddhist)*

Even when there are celebrations, these are mainly the festivals of the owner's own faith as most businesses in this sample are very small-scale, home-based activities. In fact, the only business in this sample of respondents which has 50+ employees has multiple religious festivals including Thai Pongal, Vesak, Ramazan (Iftar ceremonies), Deepavali and Christmas celebrations. Home-based or small-scale businesses however appear to give the opportunity for intimate celebrations of each other's festivals, as illustrated in the following quotes:

> *"I don't celebrate many festivals as my home is also my workplace. However, when Hindu festivals come around, I make snacks and give them to my employees to celebrate. When the Islamic festivals come, they [employees] also give us food." (Female, 41, Hindu)*

"We celebrate Vesak and New Year celebrations in the salon. We make Vesak lanterns together and hang them. We bring food to the salon for the Sinhala and Tamil New Year and celebrate." (Female, 47, Buddhist)

But as individuals, many respondents enjoy participating in festivals of others' faiths. It is clear that the type and size of the business are key variables in determining a respondent's exposure to different types of stakeholders. Larger businesses, and business activities that take place outside the home, seem to give more opportunities to interact with a diverse group of peers, suppliers, and customers than home-based livelihood activities. Moreover, in areas where there is a strong business community and more networking opportunities, as observed in Galle, respondents seem to have more opportunities to participate in festivals of other faiths. The following quotes illustrate this observation:

*"Nothing happens in my shop. But I went to my Muslim friend's home and had food during their Ramazan festival. I really appreciated their welcoming attitude. I also went to a Pongal festival of Hindu friends. My wife and I go to my children's school festivals also when they take place. I have learned about other religions and cultures by going to these festivals." (Male, 51, Buddhist)*

*"No festivals are happening in the shop. I go to my friend's festivals. I go to my friends' homes for Pongal, Deepawali and Christmas festivals. That experience is great. I like to eat Pongal. I have prepared Pongal with my friends for the Pongal festival. I have decorated a Christmas tree. These experiences are great." (Male, 38, Muslim)*

While how respondents describe coexistence varies, the essence of these definitions is almost the same. Many consider coexistence as the ability to live in harmony and peace, harmony between religions and races, absence of conflict, mutual respect, unity in diversity, and living together as one group of citizens. In effect, most respondents understand the broad idea of religious coexistence.

Many respondents believe that people are willing to coexist. Most respondents think that the large majority of Sri Lankans want to and are willing to coexist. Several of them recognised positive trends they have seen and experienced in promoting religious coexistence in Sri Lanka:

*"Religious co-existence is a very important matter. Sri Lanka is not the country we used to see. The New Sri Lanka incorporates youth ideas. Now all the youngsters are working together. They do not have ethnicity, religion, or caste-based differences. We have to follow them. Religious coexistence should come from the people's hearts. Religious coexistence is important for the development of Sri Lanka." (Male, 51, Buddhist)*

*"As people living in Galle, we can say we are very happy about coexistence here. Even though there were issues elsewhere in Sri Lanka, in Galle these things don't really take place. The main reason is that the monks from temples, priests from kovils, and the mullahs from our mosques work*

*together, very closely. Even the business community is very close-knit, Only a very small minority of extremists try to create issues." (Male, 58, Muslim)*

However, several respondents also expressed concern that although generally people are willing to coexist, the undue prominence given to ethnicity and religion in day-to-day life can be problematic in strengthening coexistence in the country. It was also clear that more non-Buddhist respondents than Buddhists expressed greater scepticism about people's willingness to coexist:

*"People like to live together in Sri Lanka. However, not all people think the same way. Some are too religious and criticize other religions. Such groups of people cause problems for everyone else. There are many religions in Sri Lanka. But people do not respect different religious beliefs. It's okay if you don't agree. But a religion should not be denigrated. This is happening in Sri Lanka. This is the main cause of many problems in Sri Lanka. Religious harmony is essential for Sri Lanka. People are identified in Sri Lanka based on religion. Problems arise when people are identified by religion." (Female, 41, Hindu)*

*"Sri Lankans like to live in unity. From the beginning, people have lived with ethnic and religious differences, even during the war. Then, clashes increased among people due to the Easter Sunday attack. But, now again a sense of unity has increased. Activities of the politicians and the racism of some people are the factors of destroying unity. Anyway, coexistence is very important for the development of the country." (Male, 38, Muslim)*

*"Most people are willing to coexist. But a section of people like it [coexistence] and one section of people don't. A section of people wants their religious culture to be the best and to prioritize it." (Female, 45, Christian)*

*"I cannot strongly say that people are willing to coexist. People like to live peacefully but I think practically people are not following it. Coexistence means being loving towards each other and living in unity. It is questionable whether Sri Lankans are acting like that really." (Female, 47, Buddhist)*

Political interferences, extremist and sectarian views and believing one religion is superior to another are the main reasons for ethnoreligious tensions. Most respondents recognise political factors as one of the main drivers of ethnoreligious misunderstandings among communities in Sri Lanka. They recognise that politicians use sensitive subjects such as religion to create vulnerability and suspicion and mobilise extremist groups to create violence to further their own causes. The following quotes illustrate the respondents' sentiments:

> *"Politicians are dividing people. People also listen to these [politicians'] stories and disgrace other religions. All people would like to live in unity but politicians are preventing it."( Female, 47, Buddhist)*

> *"Generally. Sri Lankans are very cooperative and get on easily…we are very hospitable. But a small group of people still have the power to change that… we must always remember that such small extremist groups can do harm more than the majority who are good people …Look at the percentage of terrorist groups in the world. Good and normal people who love to live peacefully have hard times." (Female, 46, Buddhist)*

> *"Ethnoreligious conflicts are rare in Sri Lanka. Even if they are based on small baseless incidents. People who instigate these incidents have ulterior motives… especially political gains. There is also a very small proportion of people who create these situations for business gains." (Male, 58, Muslim)*

Creating opportunities for people to interact with communities of other ethnoreligious backgrounds, increasing awareness about other religions, and keeping religion out of politics, is key to promoting religious coexistence in the country. Nearly all respondents point out the importance of keeping religion outside the realms of politics. However, they also understand this can realistically only be achieved by empowering the general public through knowledge and awareness about religions, cultures, and practices that are different from their own. Many respondents recognise that school is a good starting point to not only get an education about all religions, but also to learn about ethnoreligious harmony. One respondent went one step further to suggest that doing away with schools with religious identities and implementing schools without such identities is a good measure to promote religious coexistence. Additional suggestions included

empowering religious leaders to take leadership in building coexistence in the country, promoting multicultural events and celebrations at the national and community levels, taking punitive measures against perpetrators of ethnoreligious violence, and preventing the media from promoting content that can promote ethnoreligious divisions. Several respondents also pointed out that people should not assume that one religion is superior to the other because they all teach love and kindness to others. An external manifestation of this would be to stop destroying places of worship of the minorities. One respondent also pointed out the importance of creating programmes and policies at the national level that promote coexistence and eliminate biased ethnoreligious practices in the government and other institutions.

# 15.  Conclusions

This report is an exploratory exercise that attempts to understand people's perceptions of 'the other' and their willingness to coexist with communities outside their own religious identity. The report uses quantitative data from a sample of 2,000 respondents and qualitative interviews exploring the educational and work-related life histories of 42 respondents. The quantitative sample is drawn from a random sample of respondents from Colombo, Kandy, Galle, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Ampara, and Badulla districts. The proportion of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Roman Catholic and Christian religious groups was drawn in line with the district-wise ethno-religious composition. A purposive sample of 42 respondents was selected from Colombo, Kandy, Batticaloa, Galle, and Jaffna districts for the qualitative portion of the report.

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses bring out several important insights. First, the large majority of respondents consider themselves to belong to a religion and consider themselves to be religious, although the degree of religiosity varies from person to person. Being religious does not only involve performing rituals and following prescribed patterns of life, but also more profound ideas such as doing no harm to others, doing good deeds, and living peacefully with others.  Religiosity does not preclude individuals from respecting other religions and acknowledging the good teachings of all religions.

Another salient observation emerging from both sets of data is people's belief that religion is a personal choice, which should be kept separate from other dimensions of life such as education, employment, business, friendships, politics, and human interactions in general. While some respondents are open to visiting and participating in rituals in places of worship of other religions, others are happy to visit them for knowledge and experience. Some respondents do not want to visit places of worship outside their own religion, out of deference to their own religion, because it is prohibited or because they do not think it is of interest to them. The fact that it is hard to observe patterns emerging from specific ethno-religious groups corroborates the idea that these choices are personal and individualistic, and do not speak to how a community or a group perceives 'the other'.

There is some evidence both from quantitative and qualitative evidence that non-Buddhists compared to Buddhists have had more experiences of discrimination and marginalisation based on their ethnoreligious identity. It is also evident that many non-Buddhists perceive that Buddhism tends to be favoured over other religions for a number of reasons, including the fact that most Sri Lankans are Buddhists, and because it is protected by the Constitution. On the other hand, many non-Muslims perceive Muslims to be not very friendly, secretive, and keeping to their groups. Many non-Hindu respondents perceive Hindus to be superstitious, and many non-Roman Catholics and non-Christians consider Roman Catholics and non-RC Christians to be groups who try to convert others to their faith. It is clear that these perceptions and (mis)conceptions seem to have underpinned the racially and religiously charged discrimination and marginalisation that some respondents in both qualitative and qualitative samples have experienced.

All respondents have a reasonably good understanding of what coexistence is. Despite seeing differences and even weaknesses in 'the other', all respondents recognise the importance of coexistence for both strategic (such as economic development) and intrinsic reasons (living in harmony and respectful of differences). Many respondents also believe that the vast majority of the general public is willing to coexist.

It is also clear from both analyses that when religion is not given undue prominence where it is not relevant, there is strong potential for coexistence. The life histories analysis clearly shows that university, where academics have nothing to do with one's religion or ethnicity, has provided a catalytical environment for friendships and networks to grow among groups from different ethnoreligious backgrounds, and at the very least to be cordial to each other even if they were not friends. Even in the work histories, it was clear that when the ethnoreligious identities of the respondents, suppliers, buyers, or employees are not given prominence, there is room for friendship, mutual respect, and good social networks. The quantitative analysis shows that this indeed seems to be the case. By and large, respondents are rational economic agents in their day-to-day decision-making, and to some extent, even in strategic decisions. It is only in relation to the purchase of land that we observe increased sensitivity to the ethnoreligious identity of the community.

Importantly, most respondents have profoundly useful suggestions to promote religious coexistence in the country. While there is common consensus among respondents from both quantitative and qualitative samples about the importance of keeping religion separate from politics, many of them also recognise that the way to do so is to create awareness about religious coexistence and strengthen exposure of the general public to religions, rituals and festivals that are different to their own. While this can be done at any level, most respondents believe school is the best place to teach people about respect for others and living harmoniously in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. Respondents also believe that creating awareness about extremist groups is important so that people do not fall victim to false propaganda. Overall, creating more opportunities for people of different ethnoreligious communicators to come together, through policy and programmatic measures at the macro level are also ways to promote religious coexistence. Finally, and most importantly, using religion for the purpose it is intended, to become tolerant, kind, and compassionate human beings, is the most powerful way to promote religious coexistence in the country.

# Unpacking Coexistence:
# Inter-Group Perceptions of the
# Religious 'Other'

## Ranmini Vithanagama

This exploratory study uses data from a quantitative survey of 2,000 respondents and life histories collected from 42 respondents covering nine districts in Sri Lanka, to understand people's perceptions of the religious 'other'. The sample consisted of Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Roman Catholics, and non-Roman Catholic Christians in equal proportions.

This is the second study that ICES has undertaken on perceptions of the 'religious other'. The first survey was conducted in 2019, with a sample size of 1,000 respondents from Ampara, Galle, Colombo, and Mannar and published in 2020. This second report is based on an expanded sample. The report provides interesting and nuanced perspectives on how members of one religious community perceive the other. It seeks to better understand inter-group relations and to influence law, policy, and practice that can reduce religiously motivated violence and promote respect for the 'other'.

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