

Peace in Sri Lanka:
From Symbols to Substance

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About this poll

The research for this poll was carried out by the staff of Social Indicator of Colombo in collaboration with Dr. Colin Irwin from the Institute of Irish Studies at the University of Liverpool who developed the peace polls method as part of the successful Northern Ireland peace process. The Questions were collected during a month of interviews undertaken by the research team in February and March 2008. The Survey work was completed between March and May 2008 and included a random sample of 1,700 people from all parts of Sri Lanka with the exception of the Northern Province. It should be noted that the analysis below is based on results in which the 'don't knows' have been statistically removed to improve the clarity of presentation. However the full results (including 'don't knows') are available at the project website <http://www.peacepolls.org> along with a more detailed explanation of the methodology.

Introduction

Hopefully the conflict in Sri Lanka is reaching its end game. Like so many other conflicts that end might not come cleanly, without more painful, tragic twists. Perhaps because previous public opinion polls on this topic have not always addressed the more complex constitutional issues or most sensitive human concerns they have not always been able to say where the most critical failures of the Sri Lanka peace process might lie. Hopefully this peace poll makes some real progress on tackling these decisive issues and thus points the way to some workable solutions. The solutions however are clouded in much public rhetoric and ignorance. Those who understand them, in all communities, embrace them while those who do not understand them, who cling onto the symbols of constitutionality in the absence of substance, continue to find refuge in the on going war. We are told that the truth sets us free and this poll clearly demonstrates that in the case of Sri Lanka truth and understanding can both hasten and strengthen the prospects for a durable peace. Banishing ignorance and making an informed electorate active partners for peace would seem to be the best way forward. Perhaps it always was. The substance of constitutional reform is overwhelmingly acceptable to the vast majority of the people of Sri Lanka. It is only the symbols that are rejected across the community divide.

The Problems

One of the reasons why peace polls so actively seek to ask difficult questions on sometimes complex and sensitive topics is because the questions are not written by the research team as such but by representatives from the different communities involved in the ongoing conflict. It is their perspective of the 'problems' and 'solutions' that lay at the heart of the conflict that is challenged. But if someone does not know the answer to a question or do not want to answer their position is respected. On the other hand all those who wish to express their views on the wide range of issues tested are equally free to do so. Thus no one is disenfranchised and everyone can see what everyone else thinks on each and every matter raised. We will start with the 'problems'.

A random sample of the people of Sri Lanka (excluding the Northern Province) were asked which of 51 different problems given to our research team they considered to be 'Very significant', 'Significant', 'Of some significance', 'Of little significance' or 'Of no significance at all'. Table 1 lists the results for the Sinhala community, Table 2 Tamil, Table 3 Up-Country Tamil and Table 4 Muslim. 'The ongoing war' comes in first at 73% significant on the Tamil problem list followed by 'escalating violence in the last 2 years' second at 72% and 'violence over the past 30 years' third at 59% 'very significant'. This item is fourth on the Sinhala list at 41% 'very significant', fifth on the Up-Country Tamil list at 74% and first on the Muslim list at 69% 'very significant'.

So everyone can agree that the top problem for Sri Lanka, in one form or another, is the violence of war. But when it comes to causes and blame there is much disagreement. First and second for the Sinhala are 'the continued violence of the LTTE' at 60% 'very significant' and 'abuse of human rights by the LTTE' at 59% (down at 29th and 24th on the Tamil list) while the Tamil place 'discrimination after independence' fourth on their list at 56% 'very significant' and 'the failure of successive governments to find a political solution' fifth at 53% (down to 34th and 16th on the Sinhala list). So there is not much agreement here and this creates yet another problem. Without recognition of the harm one community has or is doing to the other the prospects for reconciliation remain a distant hope. Problems at the very top of each community's list have to be addressed by the 'other' community if peace is to be achieved. How can this be done, what are the 'solutions' and what are the political risks for those wishing to move forward on a peace building agenda?

Table 1. The ‘problems’ faced by the people of Sri Lanka from the Sinhala perspective

	Sinhala	Very Significant
1st	The continued violence of the LTTE	60%
2nd	Abuse of Human Rights by the LTTE	59%
3rd	Fragmentation of the island into ‘cleared’ and ‘un-cleared’ areas	43%
4th	Violence over the past 30 years	41%
5th	Corrupt politicians	40%
6th	The ongoing war	37%
7th	Escalating violence in the last 2 years	31%
8th	The LTTE can only be weakened by war	30%
9th	Vested interests in ongoing conflict	30%
10th	Politicisation of the public service	29%
11th	Failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice	28%
12th	Proliferation of armed paramilitary forces	24%
13th	Public Institutions corrupted for political purposes	23%
14th	International NGOs operating in Sri Lanka	23%
15th	Increasing number of IDPs	22%
16th	The failure of successive governments to find a political solution	21%
17th	Inflation	21%
18th	Failure to implement 13 th Amendment	20%
19th	Failure to provide Sri Lankan Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	20%
20th	The British Colonialism	19%
21st	Politicians frequently changing party	18%
22nd	The decline of the economy	17%
23rd	Lack of free and fair elections including manipulation	17%
24th	Polarisation of civil society	17%
25th	Non-productive Peace Secretariat	16%
26th	Devolution of power to North and East will lead to the break up of Sri Lanka	16%
27th	Unemployment	15%
28th	A defeated LTTE will give rise to new armed groups	15%
29th	Failure to protect historic Buddhist sites in the North and East	14%
30th	Failure to implement 17 th Amendment	13%
31st	Failure to provide Muslims with a constitutional solution to their problems	13%
32nd	Abuse of Human Rights by Paramilitary groups associated with government forces	12%
33rd	Failure to implement language rights	12%
34th	Discrimination after independence	12%
35th	Abuse of Human Rights by the Armed forces	11%
36th	Abuse of Human Rights by the Police	11%
37th	Upcountry Tamils do not own their own homes	10%
38th	Heightened ethnic polarisation in politics and life	9%
39th	Increasing number of refugees leaving Sri Lanka	9%
40th	Disproportionate power exercised by JVP and JHU	9%
41st	Failure to protect historic Hindu sites	8%
42nd	The Police do not provide a police service for the public	8%
43rd	Government leadership dependent on JVP and JHU	7%
44th	State control over media	7%
45th	Lack of basic health care	6%
46th	Failure to provide Upcountry Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	5%
47th	State aided colonization and change of demographics	4%
48th	The Police are predominately Sinhalese	4%
49th	Dominance of Sinhalese in public sector employment	4%
50th	All Tamils being treated like terrorists by the security forces	3%
51st	The Armed forces are predominately Sinhalese	2%

Table 2. The ‘problems’ faced by the people of Sri Lanka from the Tamil perspective

Tamil	Very Significant
1st The ongoing war	73%
2nd Escalating violence in the last 2 years	72%
3rd Violence over the past 30 years	59%
4th Discrimination after independence	56%
5th The failure of successive governments to find a political solution	53%
6th Abuse of Human Rights by the Police	52%
7th Abuse of Human Rights by Paramilitary groups associated with government forces	52%
8th Failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice	52%
9th Abuse of Human Rights by the Armed forces	51%
10th Government leadership dependent on JVP and JHU	51%
11th Non-productive Peace Secretariat	50%
12th Vested interests in ongoing conflict	48%
13th All Tamils being treated like terrorists by the security forces	48%
14th Lack of free and fair elections including manipulation	47%
15th State control over media	47%
16th Dominance of Sinhalese in public sector employment	46%
17th Heightened ethnic polarisation in politics and life	45%
18th Failure to implement language rights	44%
19th Politicisation of the public service	43%
20th Disproportionate power exercised by JVP and JHU	43%
21st Unemployment	41%
22nd Public Institutions corrupted for political purposes	40%
23rd Failure to provide Sri Lankan Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	40%
24th Abuse of Human Rights by the LTTE	39%
25th The Armed forces are predominately Sinhalese	38%
26th Corrupt politicians	38%
27th The Police are predominately Sinhalese	37%
28th The decline of the economy	36%
29th The continued violence of the LTTE	36%
30th Polarisation of civil society	35%
31st State aided colonization and change of demographics	31%
32nd Increasing number of IDPs	31%
33rd The Police do not provide a police service for the public	31%
34th Inflation	30%
35th Upcountry Tamils do not own their own homes	29%
36th Failure to protect historic Hindu sites	29%
37th Proliferation of armed paramilitary forces	28%
38th Fragmentation of the island into ‘cleared’ and ‘un-cleared’ areas	28%
39th Politicians frequently changing party	27%
40th Devolution of power to North and East will lead to the break up of Sri Lanka	25%
41st Failure to implement 13 th Amendment	24%
42nd Increasing number of refugees leaving Sri Lanka	24%
43rd The LTTE can only be weakened by war	23%
44th Lack of basic health care	19%
45th A defeated LTTE will give rise to new armed groups	17%
46th Failure to implement 17 th Amendment	15%
47th Failure to provide Upcountry Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	15%
48th The British Colonialism	13%
49th Failure to protect historic Buddhist sites in the North and East	12%
50th International NGOs operating in Sri Lanka	9%
51st Failure to provide Muslims with a constitutional solution to their problems	8%

Table 3. The ‘problems’ faced by the people of Sri Lanka from the Up-Country Tamil perspective

Up-Country Tamil		Very Significant
1st	Escalating violence in the last 2 years	79%
2nd	Failure to implement language rights	78%
3rd	Abuse of Human Rights by the Police	75%
4th	Abuse of Human Rights by the Armed forces	74%
5th	Violence over the past 30 years	74%
6th	Corrupt politicians	73%
7th	All Tamils being treated like terrorists by the security forces	71%
8th	The ongoing war	68%
9th	Failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice	67%
10th	Failure to provide Sri Lankan Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	66%
11th	Non-productive Peace Secretariat	66%
12th	Dominance of Sinhalese in public sector employment	65%
13th	Vested interests in ongoing conflict	63%
14th	Heightened ethnic polarisation in politics and life	62%
15th	The Armed forces are predominately Sinhalese	60%
16th	Abuse of Human Rights by Paramilitary groups associated with government forces	59%
17th	The failure of successive governments to find a political solution	59%
18th	Polarisation of civil society	58%
19th	The Police are predominately Sinhalese	57%
20th	Abuse of Human Rights by the LTTE	57%
21st	Public Institutions corrupted for political purposes	57%
22nd	Politicians frequently changing party	57%
23rd	Discrimination after independence	56%
24th	Upcountry Tamils do not own their own homes	55%
25th	The Police do not provide a police service for the public	54%
26th	Politicisation of the public service	53%
27th	Government leadership dependent on JVP and JHU	53%
28th	The decline of the economy	52%
29th	Disproportionate power exercised by JVP and JHU	52%
30th	State control over media	51%
31st	Failure to provide Upcountry Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	49%
32nd	The continued violence of the LTTE	45%
33rd	Lack of free and fair elections including manipulation	45%
34th	Failure to implement 13 th Amendment	44%
35th	Increasing number of IDPs	43%
36th	Fragmentation of the island into ‘cleared’ and ‘un-cleared’ areas	43%
37th	Increasing number of refugees leaving Sri Lanka	42%
38th	Lack of basic health care	40%
39th	Devolution of power to North and East will lead to the break up of Sri Lanka	40%
40th	Unemployment	39%
41st	State aided colonization and change of demographics	38%
42nd	Inflation	38%
43rd	Failure to implement 17 th Amendment	36%
44th	Proliferation of armed paramilitary forces	34%
45th	International NGOs operating in Sri Lanka	30%
46th	The LTTE can only be weakened by war	29%
47th	Failure to protect historic Hindu sites	28%
48th	A defeated LTTE will give rise to new armed groups	26%
49th	The British Colonialism	23%
50th	Failure to provide Muslims with a constitutional solution to their problems	22%
51st	Failure to protect historic Buddhist sites in the North and East	10%

Table 4. The ‘problems’ faced by the people of Sri Lanka from the Muslim perspective

Muslim	Very Significant
1st Violence over the past 30 years	69%
2nd Escalating violence in the last 2 years	66%
3rd The ongoing war	64%
4th The continued violence of the LTTE	54%
5th Failure to implement language rights	51%
6th Abuse of Human Rights by Paramilitary groups associated with government forces	47%
7th Disproportionate power exercised by JVP and JHU	47%
8th Abuse of Human Rights by the LTTE	45%
9th Government leadership dependent on JVP and JHU	45%
10th Abuse of Human Rights by the Armed forces	44%
11th Abuse of Human Rights by the Police	44%
12th Failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice	44%
13th Inflation	43%
14th All Tamils being treated like terrorists by the security forces	43%
15th Failure to provide Muslims with a constitutional solution to their problems	42%
16th Corrupt politicians	42%
17th Discrimination after independence	40%
18th The Police are predominately Sinhalese	39%
19th The decline of the economy	38%
20th Proliferation of armed paramilitary forces	38%
21st Dominance of Sinhalese in public sector employment	38%
22nd Fragmentation of the island into ‘cleared’ and ‘un-cleared’ areas	38%
23rd State aided colonization and change of demographics	36%
24th Politicisation of the public service	35%
25th Non-productive Peace Secretariat	35%
26th Failure to provide Sri Lankan Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	34%
27th Unemployment	33%
28th Heightened ethnic polarisation in politics and life	32%
29th The failure of successive governments to find a political solution	32%
30th Lack of basic health care	32%
31st Increasing number of IDPs	31%
32nd Public Institutions corrupted for political purposes	31%
33rd Lack of free and fair elections including manipulation	31%
34th Failure to implement 13 th Amendment	31%
35th The Police do not provide a police service for the public	31%
36th State control over media	31%
37th The Armed forces are predominately Sinhalese	30%
38th Polarisation of civil society	30%
39th Failure to implement 17 th Amendment	29%
40th The LTTE can only be weakened by war	28%
41st Vested interests in ongoing conflict	28%
42nd Politicians frequently changing party	28%
43rd Increasing number of refugees leaving Sri Lanka	27%
44th A defeated LTTE will give rise to new armed groups	23%
45th Upcountry Tamils do not own their own homes	21%
46th The British Colonialism	20%
47th Devolution of power to North and East will lead to the break up of Sri Lanka	20%
48th Failure to protect historic Buddhist sites in the North and East	18%
49th Failure to protect historic Hindu sites	16%
50th Failure to provide Upcountry Tamils with a constitutional solution to their problems	16%
51st International NGOs operating in Sri Lanka	12%

The Solutions

Security

Fortunately when it comes to peace making there is a great deal of agreement between the different communities. With regards to security everyone interviewed was asked to indicate which of 23 different options they considered to be ‘essential’, ‘desirable’, ‘acceptable’, ‘tolerable’ or ‘unacceptable’ for the future peace and stability of Sri Lanka. Table 5 lists these options in order of priority. For all the people of Sri Lanka (excluding the Northern Province) the top three solutions are ‘all the people of Sri Lanka must come together through their representatives to solve the problem’ at 87% ‘essential or desirable’ followed by ‘the political leadership representing all stakeholders must come together to solve the problem’ at 85% and ‘reform the police and eliminate corruption’ third at 79% ‘essential or desirable’. Significantly the level of ‘unacceptable’ never rises above 3% in any community (Sinhala, Tamil, Up-Country Tamil, Muslim) for these options so the need for action to be taken on these issues is strong, unanimous and almost totally unopposed.

‘Bring all IDPs under total civilian control’ is fourth at 71% ‘essential or desirable’ followed by ‘more inclusive and effective Peace Secretariat’ at 65% ‘essential or desirable’ although a minority of the Sinhala community oppose this suggestion at 22% ‘unacceptable’. The next priority is the protection of Buddhist and Hindu sites sixth and seventh at 62% and 61% (no significant difference). Eventually at eight on this list comes ‘defeat the LTTE by military means alone’ (58% essential or desirable but 65% of the Tamil community consider this option ‘unacceptable’) followed by ‘restart the peace process’ ninth at 56% and ‘the government should also negotiate with the LTTE’ also at 56% ‘essential or desirable’ although a minority of the Sinhala community (37%) consider this option ‘unacceptable’. ‘Stop the war’ is eleventh at 55%.

The consensus seems to be this. Everyone wants their respective politicians to work harder to find a solution to the problem. There is little significant resistance to all efforts in this regard from any community but a majority of the Sinhala community still want a military solution pursued at this time although they also want this done in parallel with a more inclusive peace process.

Table 5. Security solutions

National (Excl. N. Province)		Essential or Desirable	National Un-acceptable	Sinhala Un-acceptable	Tamil Un-acceptable	Up-Country Tamil Un-acceptable	Muslim Unacceptable
1	All the people of Sri Lanka must come together through their representatives to solve the problem	87%	3%	3%	3%	1%	1%
2	The political leadership representing all stakeholders must come together to solve the problem	85%	3%	3%	0%	0%	3%
3	Reform the Police and eliminate corruption	79%	3%	3%	3%	1%	3%
4	Bring <u>all</u> IDPs under total civilian control	71%	7%	10%	2%	0%	4%
5	More inclusive and effective Peace Secretariat	65%	14%	22%	2%	0%	3%
6	Adequate safeguards to protect Buddhist Monuments in North and East	62%	7%	5%	12%	7%	16%
7	Adequate safeguards to protect Hindu sites	61%	8%	6%	12%	6%	18%
8	Defeat the LTTE by military means alone	58%	23%	7%	65%	79%	48%
9	Restart the peace process	56%	24%	38%	0%	0%	2%
10	The government should also negotiate with the LTTE	56%	25%	37%	2%	1%	5%
11	Stop the war	55%	29%	45%	0%	0%	1%
12	Weaken the LTTE and then put forward a political solution	54%	22%	10%	57%	77%	31%
13	Ethnic balance in the police and armed services	52%	14%	22%	3%	0%	4%
14	The government should negotiate with elected Tamil representatives	45%	34%	52%	3%	10%	7%
15	International body to oversee security and welfare of Northern Muslims	43%	35%	56%	14%	12%	3%
16	Stop state colonization	42%	29%	46%	5%	5%	10%
17	Muslim and Tamil regiments for selected tasks in Northern and Eastern Provinces	39%	36%	56%	7%	12%	9%
18	The government should negotiate with ex-Tamil militants	38%	38%	58%	12%	17%	11%
19	Take effective steps to gradually reduce and eliminate all High Security Zones	35%	43%	65%	2%	2%	9%
20	Have military and political solutions run in parallel	34%	38%	36%	46%	69%	27%
21	Use political and economic incentives to transform the LTTE and find a settlement	32%	45%	64%	11%	20%	22%
22	Place a political solution on the table and if no LTTE response then use military means	28%	36%	32%	40%	74%	28%
23	Place a political solution on the table and if no LTTE response isolate them politically	20%	45%	47%	41%	76%	25%

Human Rights

The results for the human rights question are very reassuring and should be welcomed in all sections of Sri Lankan society. There would be little point in asking people if they do or do not support international standards for human rights. Most people do. So a more difficult and perhaps sensitive question was asked. 'To achieve its objectives the LTTE should be allowed to: attack civilians; use torture; undertake extra-judicial killings; launch suicide attacks; recruit child soldiers; arbitrarily arrest and detain; deny rights to a fair public trial; deny freedom of speech, press, assembly; deny freedom of movement.' Similarly everyone was also asked: 'To achieve its objectives the government's forces, police and associated paramilitaries should be allowed to etc. etc. but substituting 'abuse emergency powers' for 'launch suicide attacks'.

The results for these questions are given in Table 6 for the Sinhala and Tamil communities. The average opposition to such human rights abuses across both communities is about 99% 'unacceptable'. Only 4% of Tamils consider 'launch suicide attacks' 'tolerable' (0% 'essential', 0% 'desirable' and 0% 'acceptable'). Similarly only 3% of Sinhalese consider the 'abuse of emergency powers' 'tolerable' (0% 'essential', 0% 'desirable' and 2% 'acceptable'). Human rights abuses of these kind inevitably lead to great bitterness and even a desire for revenge. The people of Sri Lanka clearly understand this reality and therefore strongly oppose all aspects of what is sometimes referred to as 'dirty war'.

Table 6. Sinhala and Tamil views of human rights abuses.

To achieve its objectives the LTTE should be allowed to:

Sinhala	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Attack civilians	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Use torture	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Undertake extra-judicial killings	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Launch suicide attacks	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Recruit Child Soldiers	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Arbitrarily arrest and detention	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Deny rights to a fair public trial	0%	0%	1%	1%	98%
Deny freedom of speech, press, assembly	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Deny freedom of movement	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%

To achieve its objectives the government's forces, police and associated paramilitaries should be allowed to:

Sinhala	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Attack civilians	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
Use torture	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Undertake extra-judicial killings	0%	0%	0%	1%	99%
Abuse emergency powers	0%	0%	2%	3%	95%
Recruit Child Soldiers	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Arbitrarily arrest and detention	0%	0%	1%	6%	93%
Deny rights to a fair public trial	0%	0%	0%	2%	97%
Deny freedom of speech, press, assembly	0%	0%	0%	4%	95%
Deny freedom of movement	0%	0%	7%	7%	86%

To achieve its objectives the LTTE should be allowed to:

Tamil	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Attack civilians	0%	0%	0%	3%	97%
Use torture	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Undertake extra-judicial killings	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Launch suicide attacks	0%	0%	0%	4%	96%
Recruit Child Soldiers	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Arbitrarily arrest and detention	0%	0%	2%	0%	98%
Deny rights to a fair public trial	0%	0%	0%	4%	96%
Deny freedom of speech, press, assembly	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
Deny freedom of movement	0%	0%	0%	6%	94%

To achieve its objectives the government's forces, police and associated paramilitaries should be allowed to:

Tamil	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Attack civilians	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Use torture	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Undertake extra-judicial killings	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Abuse emergency powers	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
Recruit Child Soldiers	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Arbitrarily arrest and detention	0%	0%	2%	2%	97%
Deny rights to a fair public trial	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%
Deny freedom of speech, press, assembly	0%	0%	0%	3%	97%
Deny freedom of movement	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%

Discrimination

Problems of discrimination all too frequently lay at the heart of many ethnic conflicts. Fortunately people, with very few exceptions, have a natural understanding of the need for social justice as clearly demonstrated by the people of Sri Lanka. ‘Effective steps to ensure balanced access to university education’ comes in at the top of the discrimination solutions list at 77% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’. On average only 5% consider this proposal ‘unacceptable’ (Table 7). ‘Effective steps to ensure balanced recruitment in the civil service at all levels’ is second at 75% and ‘distribute the resources of the state on a per capita basis’ is third at 72% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’. There is a little resistance to these proposals from the Sinhala community at 12% and 13% ‘unacceptable’ respectively but this resistance rises to 27% ‘unacceptable’ for ‘redistribute state lands in proportion to the population’ and 34% ‘unacceptable’ for ‘ensure full implementation of Tamil as an official language’. However this particular policy is first at the very top of the Tamil list at 83% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ so it needs to be implemented but the Tamil community should do whatever they can to both understand and allow for Sinhala concerns in this regard.

Table 7. Discrimination solutions

National (Excl. N. Province)		Essential or Desirable	National Un-acceptable	Sinhala Un-acceptable	Tamil Un-acceptable	Up-Country Tamil Un-acceptable	Muslim Unacceptable
1	Effective steps to ensure balanced access to university education	77%	5%	5%	8%	3%	6%
2	Effective steps to ensure balanced recruitment in the civil service at all levels	75%	8%	12%	2%	1%	2%
3	Distribute the resources of the state on a per capita basis	72%	10%	13%	6%	6%	2%
4	Affirmative action for rehabilitation and reconstruction	66%	5%	7%	2%	3%	3%
5	Affirmative action to redress all aspects of discrimination against Upcountry Tamils	63%	6%	9%	0%	0%	2%
6	Redistribute state lands in proportion to the population	61%	16%	27%	0%	1%	2%
7	Affirmative action to provide Upcountry Tamils with ownership of their own homes	61%	9%	12%	2%	1%	8%
8	Equality Commission to monitor all Government policies and distribution of resources	58%	8%	11%	0%	3%	2%
9	Ensure full implementation of Tamil as an official language	55%	21%	34%	0%	0%	2%

Good Governance

When it comes to good governance the desire for reform is even stronger and more universally acceptable than it is for policies to deal with discrimination (Table 8). ‘Depoliticise the public service’ comes in at the top of this list at 82% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ followed by ‘effective institutions to combat corruption’ at 78%, then ‘independent media’ at 76% and ‘reform of the criminal justice system’ at 74% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’. Levels of resistance to these policies average at an insignificant 3% ‘unacceptable’ across the different communities. However a ‘policy to protect natural resources of the country’ at 70% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ is met with 15% ‘unacceptable’ in the Sinhala community, 8% for Muslims and 7% for Tamils. Clearly, a small cross section of Sri Lankan society are very strong ‘free marketers’.

The one policy that does meet with a genuine lack of support is the suggestion that the ‘appointment of Supreme Court Judges and other high posts should be made by the President at his own discretion’. It comes in last on this list at only 38% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ (28% ‘unacceptable’) while the alternative policy of ‘appointments of Supreme Court Judges and other high posts should be made on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council established by Parliament’ enjoys wide support of 68% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ and just 12% ‘unacceptable’.

Table 8. Good governance solutions

National (Excl. N. Province)		Essential or Desirable	National Un-acceptable	Sinhala Un-acceptable	Tamil Un-acceptable	Up-Country Tamil Un-acceptable	Muslim Unacceptable
1	Depoliticise the public service	82%	3%	2%	3%	5%	5%
2	Effective institutions to combat corruption	78%	2%	1%	6%	1%	5%
3	Independent media	76%	3%	3%	6%	1%	4%
4	Reform of the criminal justice system	74%	3%	4%	5%	1%	0%
5	Policy to protect natural resources of the country	70%	13%	15%	7%	6%	8%
6	Strict budgetary control of state institutions	68%	5%	5%	2%	2%	7%
7	Right to information except for matters of national security	68%	8%	10%	2%	9%	4%
8	Appointments of Supreme Court Judges and other high posts should be made on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council established by Parliament	63%	12%	11%	14%	14%	13%
9	Restrictions on MPs crossing over	59%	15%	16%	13%	14%	14%
10	Oversight committees for all Ministries with meetings open to the media	59%	7%	8%	4%	2%	11%
11	Right to information at all times	59%	12%	16%	3%	2%	8%
12	Appointments of Supreme Court Judges and other high posts should be made by the President at his own discretion	38%	28%	31%	21%	26%	28%

Constitutional Reform

A solution to the problem of Sri Lanka's constitution has been tackled in two very different ways in an effort to find an answer to this most difficult of questions. Firstly all those interviewed were asked to express their views on the various elements of a possible constitution and then secondly as a combined series of constitutional 'packages'. Table 9 lists the 27 constitutional elements tested against public opinion and at first sight the result looks to be a bit of a constitutional surprise with the popularly thought of Sinhala option of 'Sri Lanka should be a Unitary state' first at 82% 'essential' or 'desirable' (8% 'unacceptable' overall and 37% 'unacceptable' for Tamils) and the popularly thought of Tamil option of 'two completely separate independent states' last (that is 27th.) at only 9% 'essential' or 'desirable' and 80% 'unacceptable' overall rising to 90% for the Sinhala and falling to 31% 'unacceptable' for the Tamils. Clearly a significant percentage of Tamils (31% of this sample) reject the two state solution and want a unitary state. So what is the war about, why is it on going, why haven't the politicians been able to find a solution to the constitutional problem? We must dig a little deeper to find the answer.

Second on the list of priorities is 'give equal status to all religious groups' at 80% 'essential' or desirable' and only 5% 'unacceptable' overall followed by 'archaeological sites and monuments of National importance should be placed under the control of the Central Government' at 66% 'essential' or 'desirable' and only 9% 'unacceptable' overall. After this comes full implementation of the 13th. and 17th. Amendments at 60% and 59% 'essential' or 'desirable' respectively with resistance to these proposals highest in the Tamil sample at 32% 'unacceptable'. But this is not a 'deal breaker'. Levels of 'unacceptable' have to rise above 50% to do that. Additionally, when the specifics of these Amendments are examined more closely such as 'clearly define the powers of the Centre and the Provinces' the level of resistance drops to 10% overall and 0% for Tamils. Similarly 'devolution with the same powers for all Provinces' is only 11% 'unacceptable' overall and just 2% for Tamils. And so on and so on and when the very simple option of 'no devolution' at all is tested as a possible solution for Sri Lanka then 50% of those sampled consider this suggestion 'unacceptable'. So when people say they want a unitary state (and most people do) they are not rejecting devolution they are only rejecting 'two completely separate independent states' and even a significant percentage of Tamils do not want that.

Some finer points of devolution were also tested. For example the suggestion that the Centre could control the powers of the Provinces (the Centre could take them back) was 'unacceptable' to 36% of Tamils while the suggestion that the powers of the Provinces should be protected (the Centre could not take them back) was 'unacceptable' to 38% of the Sinhala. Clearly something can be negotiated here. However when the option of a 'federation without the right to leave' gets tested then the level of 'unacceptable' for the Sinhala jumps to 75%. Arguably, however, a federation without a right to leave can also be a unitary state and devolved Provinces can be part of a federation! What is being accepted here is the substance of devolution and the only thing that is being rejected are the symbols of federalism.

Table 9. Solutions for Constitutional reform

National (Excl. N. Province)		Essential or Desirable	National Un-acceptable	Sinhala Un-acceptable	Tamil Un-acceptable	Up-Country Tamil Un-acceptable	Muslim Unacceptable
1	Sri Lanka should be a Unitary state	82%	8%	2%	37%	25%	11%
2	Give equal status to all religious groups	80%	5%	7%	0%	1%	0%
3	Archaeological sites and monuments of National importance should be placed under the control of the Central Government	66%	9%	8%	8%	5%	16%
4	Fully implement the 13 th Amendment	60%	14%	11%	32%	23%	8%
5	Fully implement the 17 th Amendment	59%	16%	13%	32%	25%	12%
6	Clearly define the powers of the Centre and the Provinces	58%	10%	15%	0%	4%	4%
7	Devolution with the same powers for all Provinces	58%	11%	16%	2%	5%	4%
8	Right to return for Northern Muslims	58%	10%	11%	14%	14%	1%
9	Give a special status to Buddhism	52%	26%	13%	50%	64%	50%
10	Fully implement Interim Report of APRC	50%	18%	16%	27%	26%	14%
11	Power sharing at Centre, Provincial and local levels	41%	18%	21%	12%	11%	9%
12	Reintroduce Section 29 of the Soulbury/Independence Constitution to protect citizens against all forms of ethnic and religious discrimination	40%	28%	42%	6%	13%	32%
13	Allow the Centre to control the powers of the Provinces (the Centre can take them back)	39%	19%	13%	36%	29%	28%
14	Devolution with different powers for different Provinces	35%	34%	43%	11%	18%	24%
15	Return to pre 87 status of the Constitution	34%	32%	27%	32%	64%	45%
16	Protection of the powers of the Provinces from the Centre (the Centre can not take them back)	31%	28%	38%	7%	22%	11%
17	The North and East should be one province	30%	43%	53%	13%	9%	42%
18	Establish enclaves for all major ethnic minorities in a Province	30%	47%	64%	12%	22%	21%
19	Create an Autonomous Unit for Upcountry Tamils in the Central Province	30%	55%	86%	10%	11%	20%
20	Create an Autonomous Unit for Muslims in the East	29%	57%	84%	18%	24%	11%
21	Sri Lanka should be a Federal state	24%	53%	77%	13%	24%	17%
22	No devolution	22%	50%	49%	60%	73%	39%
23	A federation but with the right to leave	20%	61%	79%	21%	31%	58%
24	Redraw the borders to reduce the number of Provinces	19%	54%	61%	25%	25%	60%
25	A federation without the right to leave	18%	59%	75%	32%	24%	53%
26	Two states in a loose union like Europe	15%	56%	69%	6%	14%	57%
27	Two completely separate independent states	9%	80%	90%	31%	40%	80%

A Constitutional Package

Testing constitutional packages produces a similar result with 95% of the Sinhala community rejecting ‘Two States’ as ‘unacceptable’ while only 31% reject ‘Enhanced Devolution’ as ‘unacceptable’ (Table 10). This option, the professed agenda of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) is acceptable to a majority of the Sinhala (8% ‘essential’, 12% ‘desirable’, 46% ‘acceptable’ and 3% ‘tolerable’).

Table 10. Sinhala views of various constitutional packages for Sri Lanka

Sinhala	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Two States – Two completely separate independent states of Tamil Eelam and Sri Lanka.	0%	1%	1%	3%	95%
Confederal State – Two autonomous units comprising the North-East and the rest of Sri Lanka with a minimum of functions for the joint central government.	3%	1%	3%	4%	91%
Federal State – A number of autonomous units comprising the North-East and existing provinces in the rest of Sri Lanka with a joint central government sharing power with the autonomous units.	2%	3%	7%	20%	68%
Enhanced Devolution – Full implementation of the 13 th and 17 th Amendments plus the devolution of significant powers to autonomous provinces negotiated at a peace conference.	8%	12%	46%	3%	31%
13th Amendment Devolution – Present Constitution with full implementation of the 13 th and 17 th Amendments.	37%	21%	14%	4%	24%
Unitary State – Pre 87 Constitution.	54%	18%	9%	4%	16%

The Tamil preferred option is a ‘Federal State’ at only 12% ‘unacceptable’, but this level of rejection only reaches 33% ‘unacceptable’ for the APRC ‘Enhanced Devolution’ option at 9% ‘essential’, 18% ‘desirable’, 21% ‘acceptable’ and 18% ‘tolerable’ (Table 11). Interestingly the Tamil population sampled in this poll are clearly split on the ‘Two States’ solution with 27% considering this option ‘essential’ and 40% considering it to be ‘unacceptable’. So perhaps the answer to this particular constitutional problem is for the unitary state of Sri Lanka to be a state for all of its citizens to enjoy equal rights and freedoms but, on the other hand, to be a state in which political power is shared equitably between its various Provinces and the Centre. Hopefully, in this way, the people of Sri Lanka can have the best of both worlds.

Table 11. Tamil views of various constitutional packages for Sri Lanka

Tamil	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Two States – Two completely separate independent states of Tamil Eelam and Sri Lanka.	27%	6%	13%	15%	40%
Confederal State – Two autonomous units comprising the North-East and the rest of Sri Lanka with a minimum of functions for the joint central government.	22%	30%	16%	20%	12%
Federal State – A number of autonomous units comprising the North-East and existing provinces in the rest of Sri Lanka with a joint central government sharing power with the autonomous units.	33%	21%	19%	16%	12%
Enhanced Devolution – Full implementation of the 13 th and 17 th Amendments plus the devolution of significant powers to autonomous provinces negotiated at a peace conference.	9%	18%	21%	18%	33%
13th Amendment Devolution – Present Constitution with full implementation of the 13 th and 17 th Amendments.	9%	19%	13%	22%	38%
Unitary State – Pre 87 Constitution.	3%	11%	8%	24%	54%

Implementation

This poll has already established the desire of the people for a peace process running in parallel with any ongoing war. But what more can be done in terms of implementation both domestically and internationally? Two options were tested for improving implementation of new proposals for reform in Sri Lanka. Firstly ‘the Constitutional Council should monitor the implementation of the Constitution and all its Amendments’ at 65% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ and only 5% ‘unacceptable’ across all communities. And secondly ‘establish a Constitutional Court’ at 59% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ with resistance running at only 12% ‘unacceptable’ across all communities. Clearly the people of Sri Lanka have more confidence in the Constitutional Council.

Table 12. Domestic solutions for implementation

National (Excl. N. Province)		Essential or Desirable	National Un-acceptable	Sinhala Un-acceptable	Tamil Un-acceptable	Up-Country Tamil Un-acceptable	Muslim Unacceptable
1	The Constitutional Council should monitor the implementation of the Constitution and all its Amendments	65%	5%	6%	7%	4%	3%
2	Establish a Constitutional Court	59%	12%	16%	12%	5%	3%

With regards to the international community people were asked which state and organisations should help to facilitate peace negotiations (Table 13). India came out on top over all as the most trusted international partner for such interventions at 63% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’. Given the misgivings the Sinhala community have for Norway they came in at the bottom of this list at 41% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’ but they came in at the top of the Tamil list at 85% ‘essential’ or ‘desirable’. It takes two to make peace and hopefully, when the time comes, both India and Norway will be able to use their good offices to assist in that process and it is also to be hoped that India and Norway will be able to cooperate in this regard.

Table 13. International solutions for implementation

The following states and international organisations should help to facilitate peace negotiations:

National Essential or Desirable	Sinhala Essential or Desirable	Tamil Essential or Desirable	Up-Country Tamil Essential or Desirable	Muslim Essential or Desirable
India 63%	India 54%	Norway 85%	India 96%	SAARC 78%
SAARC 60%	SAARC 53%	UN 66%	Norway 88%	India 77%
China 56%	China 50%	India 64%	Britain 84%	UN 77%
Japan 54%	Japan 45%	SAARC 58%	USA 81%	EU 72%
UN 52%	UN 38%	EU 57%	China 80%	Japan 70%
EU 48%	EU 36%	Japan 54%	Japan 80%	China 68%
Britain 45%	USA 35%	Britain 54%	UN 78%	Norway 67%
USA 45%	Britain 32%	USA 52%	SAARC 74%	Britain 56%
Norway 41%	Norway 19%	China 48%	EU 74%	USA 54%