VALUES IN CRISIS

VALUES UNDER THE IMPRINT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MALDIVES

Values in Crisis Survey (Wave 1)
Summary Report

This project is co-funded by the European Union

THE MALDIVES NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

UNDP

RESEARCH TEAM

AMINATH RIYAZ	THE MALDIVES NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
SHEENA MOOSA	THE MALDIVES NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
RAHEEMA ABDUL RAHEEM	THE MALDIVES NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
HAWWA SHIUNA MUSTHAFA	THE MALDIVES NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

EDITORIAL TEAM

FATHIMATH YUMNU SHAREEF	UNDP MALDIVES
YASMEEN RASHEED	UNDP MALDIVES
AMINATH IBRAHIM	UNDP MALDIVES
MAILEE OSTEN-TAN	UNDP BANGKOK REGIONAL HUB

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

ISMAIL ASHWAD

PARTNERS

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The Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic is the most significant health crisis the world has collectively witnessed in recent decades. From the onset of the pandemic, many governments - including the Government of the Maldives - enforced limitations on citizen's mobility and essentially shut down public life. These became known as periods of 'lockdown'. Restrictive measures such as these or declarations of 'states of emergency' had in the past been limited to times of war and unrest. Pandemic containment measures, while necessary to impede the spread of the virus, were highly disruptive to societies. In anticipation of an economic recession as a byproduct of these restrictions, governments provided stimulus mechanisms and aid packages at an unprecedented scale.

Nevertheless, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has also opened up rare opportunities. One such opportunity is in the study of how citizens' moral values may change during times of crises.

The Values in Crisis Survey (VICS) was first initiated in Germany and the UK with the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. The survey questionnaire is originally an instrument developed in English by Prof. Christian Welzel, Prof. Klaus Boehnke, Prof. Jan Delhey, Dr. Franziska Deutsch, Dr. Jan Eichhorn, & Prof. Ulrich Kühnen.[1] The purpose of this survey was to gauge the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on an individual's moral values and social orientations. VICS provides a mechanism through which social cohesion, solidarity within communities, and trust in public institutions can be analyzed. If a shift is identified, then the survey also measures the scale and direction of these changes. A survey of this nature was commissioned in the Maldives by UNDP and the Maldives National University, with the support of the European Union. The VICS is designed as a panel study that surveys the same people at different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Wave 1: Amidst the Crisis (in the middle of the pandemic)
Wave 2: End at Sight (shortly after the pandemic ceases)
Wave 3: After Recovery (when things return to normal)

Wave 1 of the survey was carried out as an online questionnaire from 25 May to 3 June 2020. This time frame corresponded with the sixth week of lockdown in the Greater Male' area and the restriction of movement between islands across the country. The sample used for the VICS is a multi-clustered **representative random sample** from **urban** and **rural** communities of the Maldives, stratified into gender and age groups. A total of 1179 prospective participants were contacted and invited to participate. A **response rate of 87%** was achieved with **1026** completed usable questionnaires collected (433 from urban clusters and 593 from the rural clusters).

This report summarizes the key findings from Wave 1 of VICS in the Maldives. The descriptive statistics of all survey questions can be found at the project web-page of The Maldives National University.

[1]More information here: https://wapor.org/values-in-crisis-a-crisis-of-values-moral-values-under-the-imprint-of-the-corona-pandemic/

COVID-19 IN THE MALDIVES

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted societies all over the world, including in the Maldives. At the time of the development of this report, the number of COVID-19 cases in the Maldives continues to rise. Since the first reported case in early March 2020, the virus has consistently threatened the health of the country's population of approximately 507,660 citizens, including 100,000 migrant workers (World Bank, 2020).

The government of the Maldives introduced early preventative interventions (Suzana et al., 2020) and enforced measures to control the spread of the virus including closing the country's borders, restricting island to island travel, and closing schools and offices (MED 2020; Moosa & Usman, 2020). However, lockdown measures have been gradually eased since July 2020. The government continues to lessen restrictive measures through ensuring contact tracing and mandating face masks to be worn by all in public places, while continuing to uphold restrictions on large gatherings and partial curfews in the Greater Male' area.

The closure of the country's borders crippled the Maldivian tourism sector and continues to adversely impact employment throughout the country (MED 2020). With a significant proportion of the population depending on the tourism sector for their livelihoods, about 8000 of the local population were left without a job at the onset of the pandemic (World Bank 2020). The fear of the spread of COVID-19, coupled with financial uncertainties, is also believed to be responsible for higher levels of mental distress across the country.

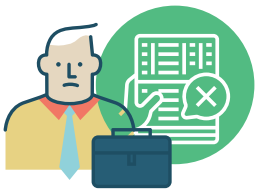
Against this background, this Values in Crisis Survey explores the socioeconomic experiences, social value orientations, and various attitudes of Maldivian society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SOCIOECONOMIC EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MALDIVES

The pandemic profoundly impacted the way people work in the Maldives, with potential implications for employees' health, well-being, and social perceptions.

HEALTH AND ECONOMIC EXPERIENCE

At the early stages of the pandemic in May 2020, the findings of VICS show that the fear of the pandemic - and how this would potentially create adverse economic and health impacts - were felt more significantly than its actual impact. As per the findings, many people were psychologically affected by the crisis. There also was a significant association with psychological well-being and importance given to religion such that more importance given to religion corresponded to a higher well-being score.



7% lost their job

14% had to close their business

2% had to move to part time jobs

28% moved to work from home

3% received income support (aid package)

57% did not go to work as before

31% spent more time in childcare responsibilities

Participants were given a set of economic experiences and asked whether they were affected by these scenarios during the crisis to date.

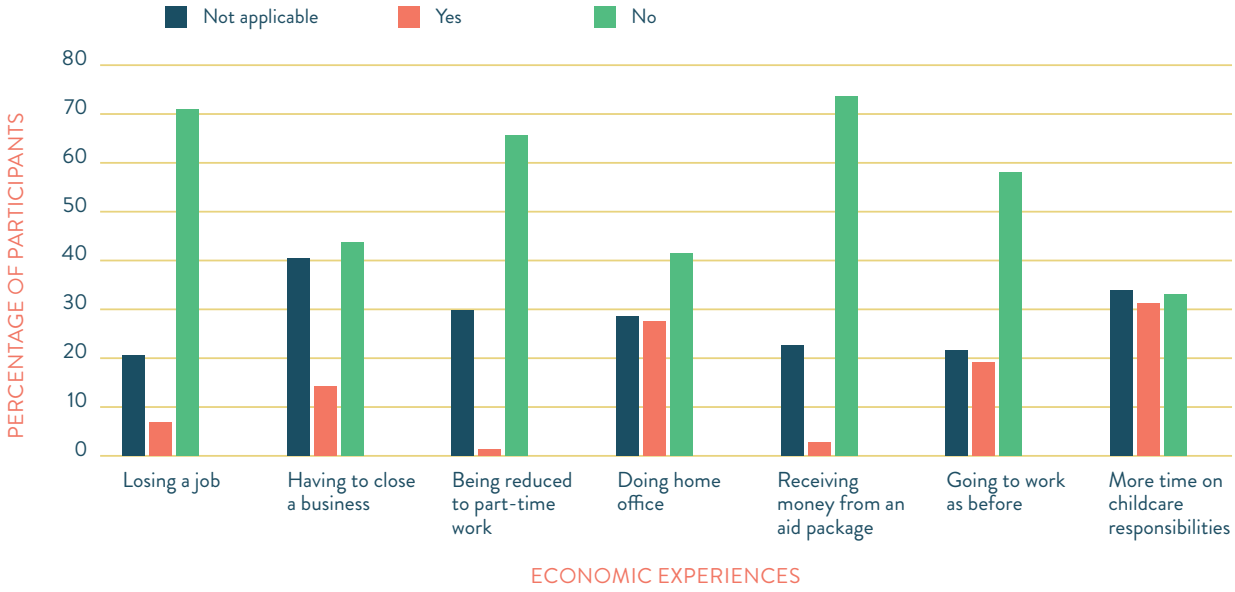


Figure 1. Economic experience in the time of the pandemic

87% reported fear of suffering from an economic recession

54% reported as being very afraid

33% reported as being quite afraid

Participants were asked how afraid they were for themselves or their loved ones due to an economic recession following the coronavirus crisis.

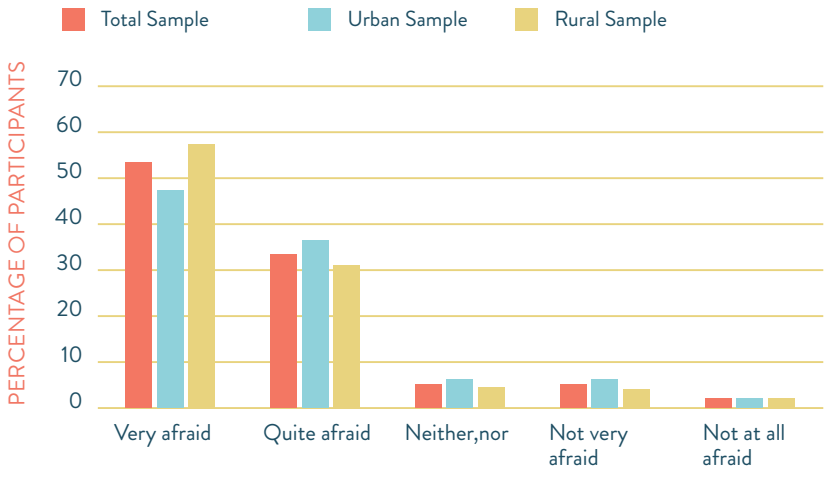


Figure 2. Fear of suffering from an economic recession following the corona crisis

PERCEPTION ON THE REALITY OF THE PANDEMIC

While the majority of participants (88%) believed the pandemic to be a lived reality, it is also significant that 1 in 11 people believed that the various information on social media about the pandemic to be a hoax. Those who believed in hoaxes that challenged how real the pandemic was were more often from rural communities. This discrepancy between the urban and rural communities could be due to the fact that the spread of the virus was largely in the urban capital and not in any of the rural islands at the time of questioning (WHO 2020; Moosa et al 2020). These findings highlight the importance of information dissemination relating to the pandemic.

PERCEPTION ON SOLIDARITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

The majority of the participants relayed that they felt that most people in the country were exercising quite improper (43%) or very improper (18%) behavior under the imprint of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, upon reflecting on their own experiences and encounters, most participants reported a greater sense of solidarity than hostility. Solidarity in times of emergency involves forming a social identity in a common crisis (Drury, 2018). Therefore, it is inevitable that people may construct a common social identity during a crisis (Norris & Alegria, 2008).

61% perceived most people as having improper behavior

43% quite improper

18% very improper

Participants were asked how properly they thought most people in the country behaved under the imprint of the crisis.

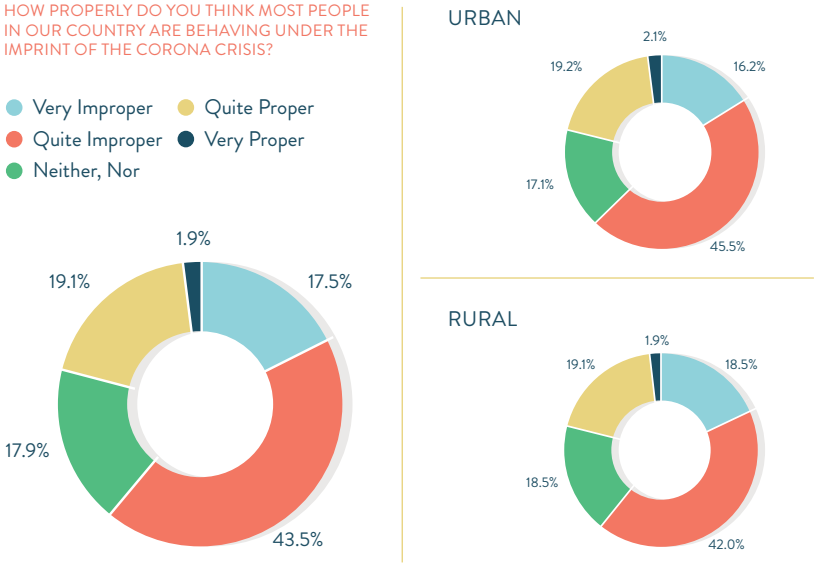


Figure 3. Perception on the behaviour of most people

31% experienced more solidarity

Slightly more people from the rural clusters experienced more solidarity compared to urban population

Participants were asked, considering their encounters with other people, whether they experienced a greater sense of solidarity than usual, or whether they experienced a greater sense of hostility. Ranked from 1 (more hostility) to 7 (more solidarity).

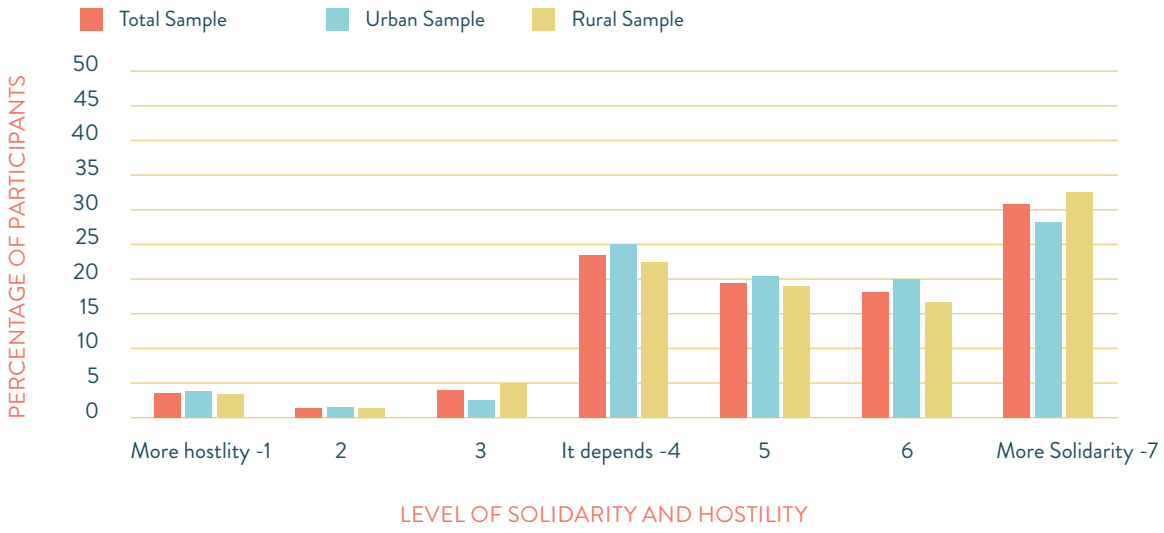


Figure 4. Perceptions of solidarity versus hostility in encounters with people these days

UNDERSTANDING VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE MALDIVIAN SOCIETY – A SNAPSHOT

GENDER EQUALITY

More than half (60%) of the participants either strongly agreed or agreed that men made better political leaders than women. It was observed that this perception was higher among participants from rural communities. In addition, those who disagreed with this gender bias were more likely to be women and younger participants. When questioned on the importance of education, a significant percentage (86%) of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that a university education is more important for a boy than for a girl. Additionally, a majority of 67% of the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce.

60% agreed men make better political leaders

27% strongly agree

33% agree

Participants were asked whether they perceive men to be better political leaders than women.

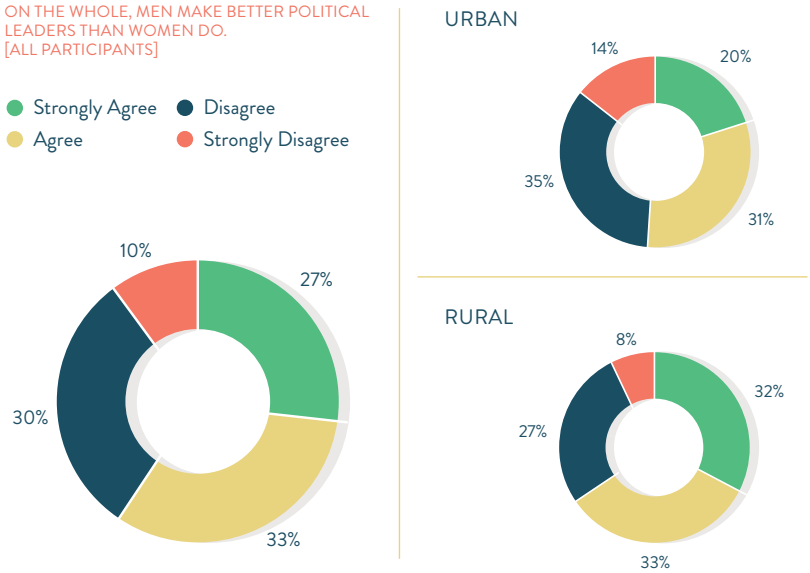


Figure 5. Perception on whether men make better political leaders than women

86% disagreed that university education is more important for a boy than for a girl

41% strongly disagree

45% disagree

Participants were asked whether they perceive university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.

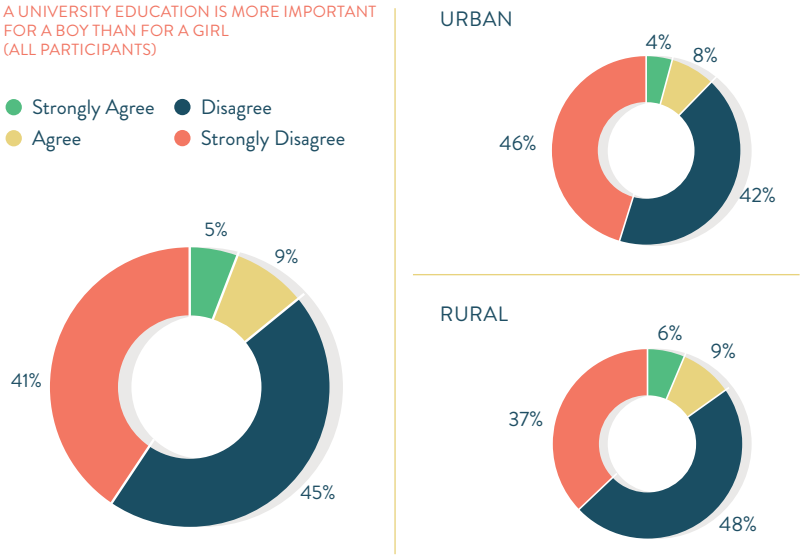
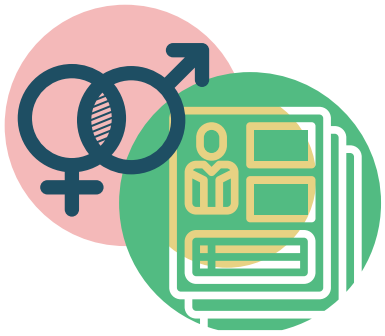


Figure 6. Perception on whether university education is more important for boys than girls

67% disagreed that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women



30% strongly disagree

37% disagree

Participants were asked whether they thought that men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce.

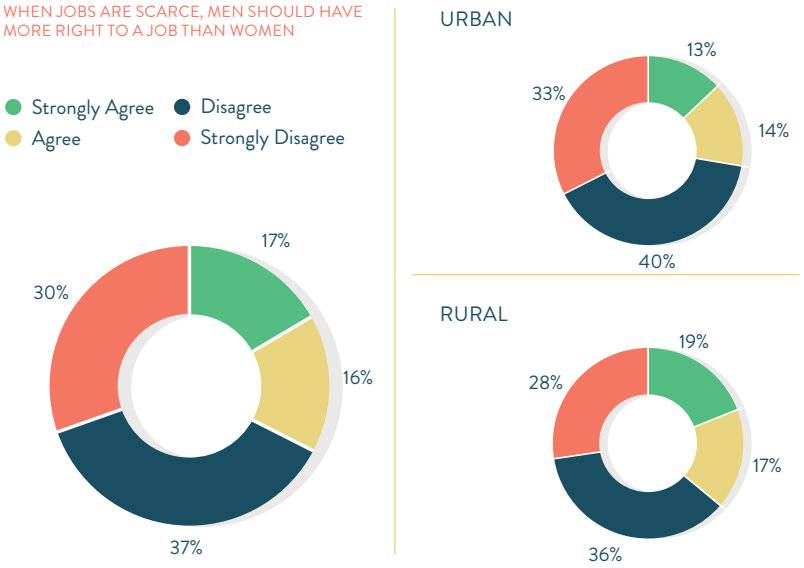


Figure 7. Perception on whether men should have more right to a job than women

PATRIOTISM AND NATIONAL GOALS

Overall, most of the participants (87%) were proud to be a citizen of the Maldives. However, significant discrepancies were seen between urban and rural population with more urban participants indicating negative sentiments around citizenship.

87% stated as being proud to be a citizen of the Maldives

57% very proud

30% proud

Participants were asked to rank how proud they felt to be a citizen of the Maldives.

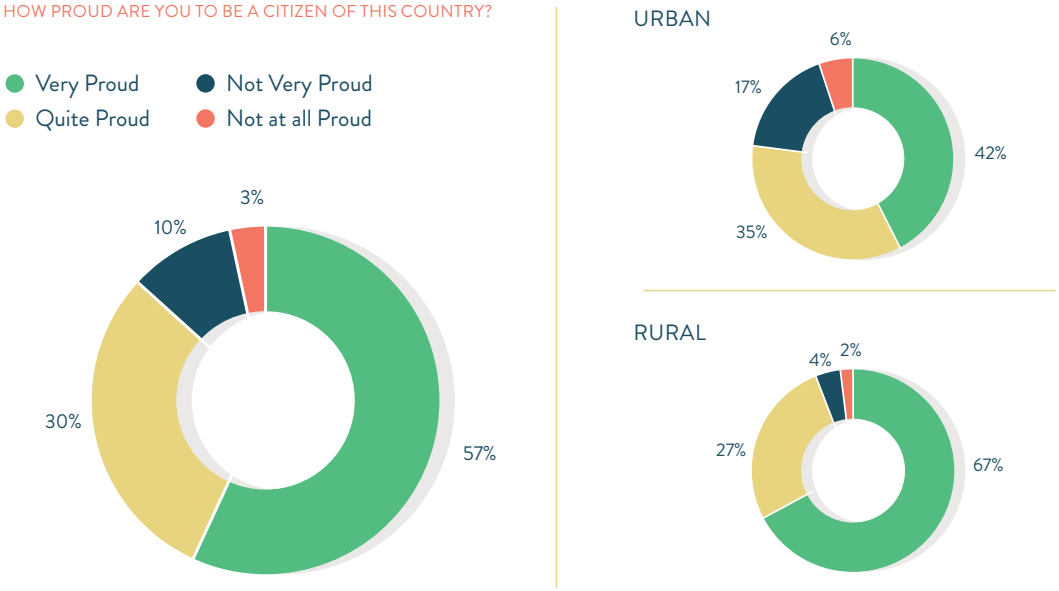


Figure 8. Perception of proudness being a Maldivian citizen

Among a list of four idealistic national priorities, majority of the participants (77% urban and 84% rural respondents) rated 'maintaining order in the nation' as the most important goal and 'combating inflation' as the second most important goal. Based on the responses, 'protecting freedom of speech' was identified as the third important goal.

The majority of the participants selected maintaining order in the nation as the **most important goal**

Fighting rising prices was selected as the **second most important goal**

Protecting freedom of speech was identified as the **third most important goal**

Participants were given a list of 4 idealistic national priorities and were asked to select the most important and the second most important goals for the country for the next 10 years based on their personal views.

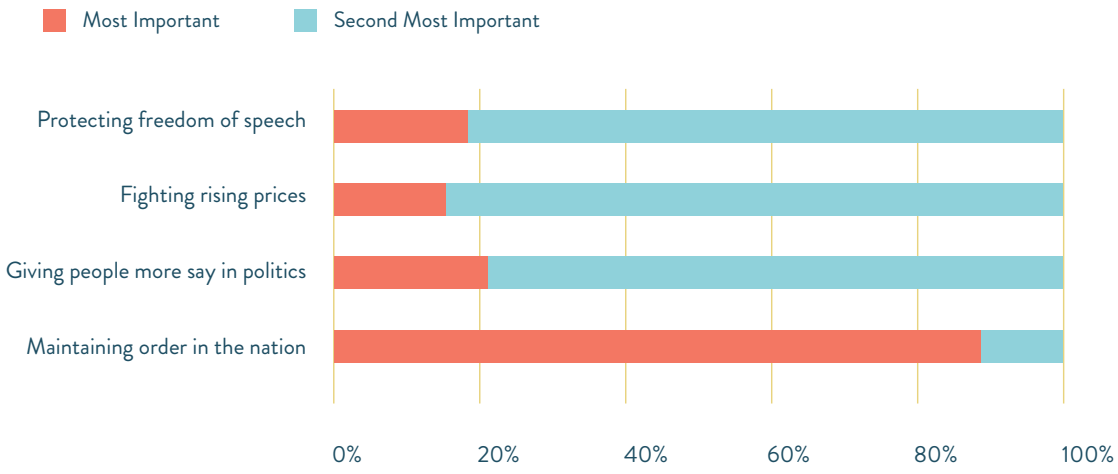


Figure 9. Personal views on the two most important goals for the country

MIGRANT WORKERS AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Participants were asked how they feel about people from other countries coming to the Maldives and were asked what the government should do about foreign immigrants. The choices provided were: (1) let anyone come who wants to, (2) let people come as long as there are jobs available, (3) place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here, (4) prohibit people coming here from other countries.

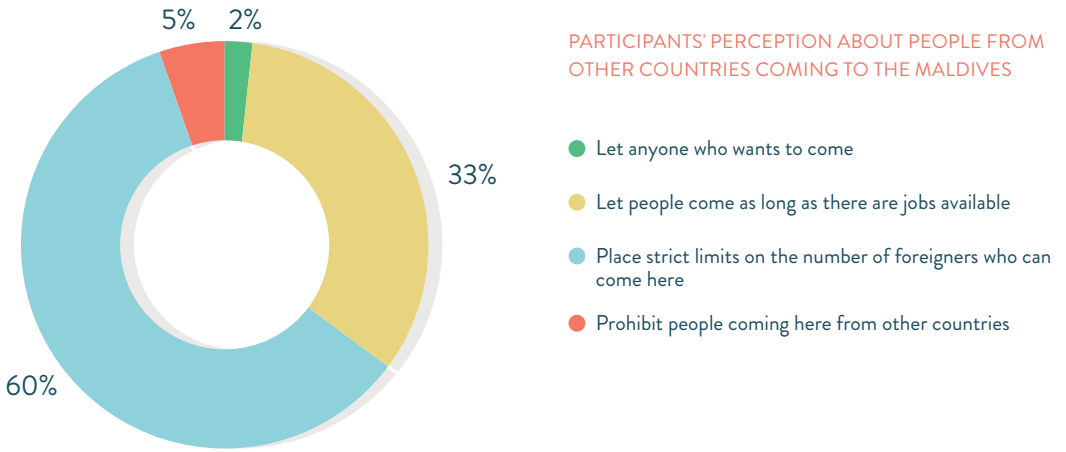


Figure 10. Perceptions about migrants

Participants of the VICS were asked how they felt about people from other countries (migrants) coming to the Maldives; 60% expressed that there should be strict limits on the number of migrants while one-third (33%) of the participants felt that migrants should be allowed to come as long as there are jobs.

60% felt there should be strict limits on the number of people who can come here

5% expressed the need for prohibition on immigrants

33% felt people from other countries should be allowed to come as long as there are jobs available

2% felt there should be no restrictions at all

Participants were asked whether they thought ethnic diversity erodes social cohesion or whether ethnic diversity enriches social life. Participants were asked to rank between 1 (erodes social cohesion) to 10 (enriches social life).

TOTAL SAMPLE - VIEWS ON ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL LIFE

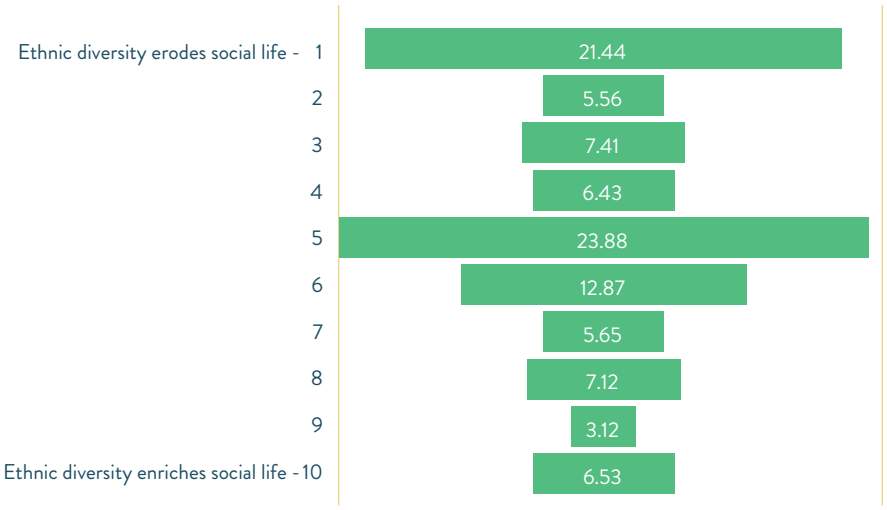


Figure 11. Perception on ethnic diversity and social life

The overall perception of participants of VICS shows a significant negative attitude towards ethnic diversity with 21% stating that ethnic diversity erodes social cohesion.

21% stated ethnic diversity erodes social cohesion

7% believed ethnic diversity enriches social life

SOCIAL VALUE ORIENTATIONS OF MALDIVIAN SOCIETY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Social value orientations (SVO) determine how people judge situations and how they behave in a social setting. The predominant SVO of provides meaning to the attitudes and behaviors of a society particularly regarding family, institutions, development, and democracy (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013; Welzel & Alvarez, 2014; Alemán & Woods, 2016). In the case of the Maldives, this small island nation does not show a strong polarization of values but instead leans towards prosocial value orientations. However, the Maldivian society appears not to hold particularly strong orientation, with scores for the SVOs clustering towards the middle of the scale.

OPENNESS VS. CONSERVATION

The findings of the VICS identified urban-rural, age, and gender as determinants of the value orientations when it came to openness versus conservation. Openness here relates to "independence of thought, action, and feelings and readiness for change" while conservation signifies "order, self-restriction and resistance to change" (Schwartz, 2012, p.8).

Gender and Age: When comparing men to women, the former skewed towards openness to a greater degree than latter. Similarly, participants of younger age groups were more likely to lean towards openness than older age groups.

Urban- Rural: Changes in value orientations occur with transformation and development of societies and economies. People tend to adjust their value orientations according to life-changing events and opportunities available in their environment (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Bardi et al., 2009).

In the Maldives, urbanization is often associated with changes in family structures towards nuclear families (Moosa, 2019). Existing literature suggests nuclear

families tend to favor openness more in comparison to extended families (Kusdil & Kagitcibasi, 2000). While this proposes that urban population in the Maldives should score higher in openness comparatively, the reality as indicated by the VICS findings is slightly different, with rural population weighing more towards openness as compared to the urban population.

A plausible explanation for this could be that Maldivian society is to a large extent mobile. Residents of urban areas, particularly the capital, are mostly temporary for the purpose of education and employment (Hasan & Hynds, 2014), and they maintain kinship relationships with family residing in their home islands. This in turn can contribute to the maintenance of values developed during life stages.

SELF-ENHANCEMENT VS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

The findings of the VICS identified age and gender as determinants of the value orientations when it came to self-enhancement versus self-transcendence. Self-transcendence here connects to "concern for the welfare and interests of others". On the other hand, self-enhancement implies "pursuit of one's own interests, relative success and dominance over others" (Schwartz, 2012, p.8).

It was found that men on average scored higher in self enhancement than women. Additionally, the people in the older age groups were more likely to lean towards self-transcendence compared to younger age groups.

TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

During a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, trust in institutions is of paramount importance as it is related to people's willingness to comply with government containment measures, particularly when the interventions restrict people's freedom and choice. Although the notion of trust may differ across context, trusting an institution implies that a person is confident that the institution is reliable and will act efficiently and fairly to serve the general interest (Morselli, Spini & Devos, 2015).

Participants were asked how much confidence they have in the government of the Maldives, in the country's health sector, and in the country's institutions as a whole.

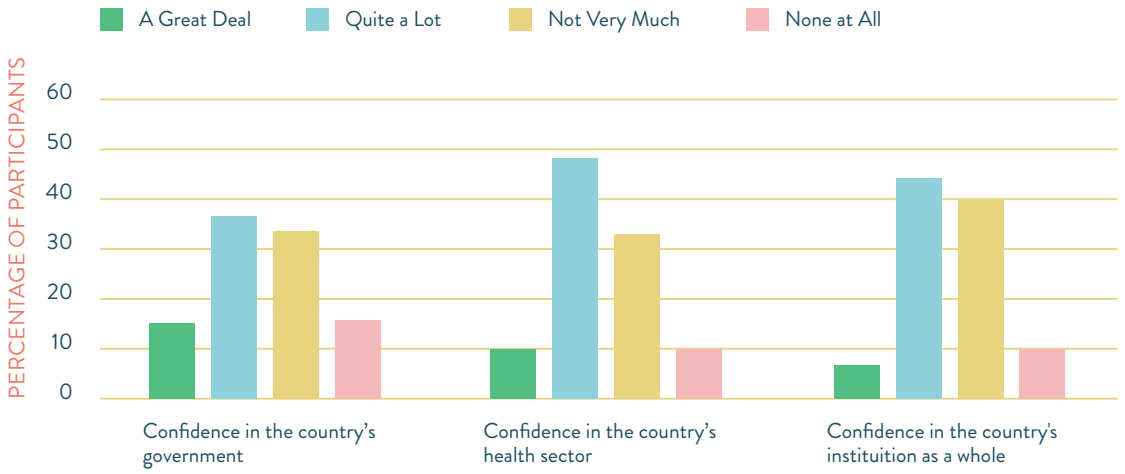


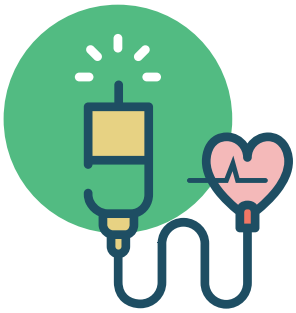
Figure 12. Confidence in the government & institutions

Among the participants of the VICS, slightly more than half either had a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the Maldivian government, health sector, and the country's institutions as a whole. There were no significant association between the SVOs and people's confidence in institutions and behavior during the crisis. However, the slight inclination towards prosocial values is likely to have aided the higher compliance with less than a tenth of the people breaching public health measures (Moosa et al., 2020).

52% have a great deal of confidence in the government

48% indicated they do not have confidence in the government

57% have a great deal of confidence in the country's health sector



43% indicated they do not have confidence in the health sector

51% have a great deal of confidence in the country's institutions

49% indicated they do not have confidence in the institutions

NOTE

Different aspects of the findings summarized in this report have been published or are in the process of being published at the time of this report's writing, as follows:

Riyaz, A. Musthafa, H. S., Abdul-Raheem, R., & Moosa, S. (2020). Survey sampling in the time of social distancing: Experiences from a quantitative research in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. *The Maldives National Journal of Research, 8*(1), 169-192.

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Moosa, S., Riyaz, A., Abdul-Raheem, R., Musthafa, H. S., & Naeem, A. Z. (2021). Social value orientations and public confidence in institutions: A young democracy under the imprint of COVID-19. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal.* [In the press]

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GENERAL AND MEDIA INQUIRIES:
registry.mv@undp.org
research@mnu.edu.mv

ADDRESS:
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME IN THE MALDIVES,
4TH FLOOR, H. AAGE (BANK OF CEYLON BUILDING),
BODUTHAKURUFAANU MAGU, MALE' 20094, MALDIVES,
PHONE: +960 3324501

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