



## **ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS TOWARD THE NATION AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **7.0 Introduction**

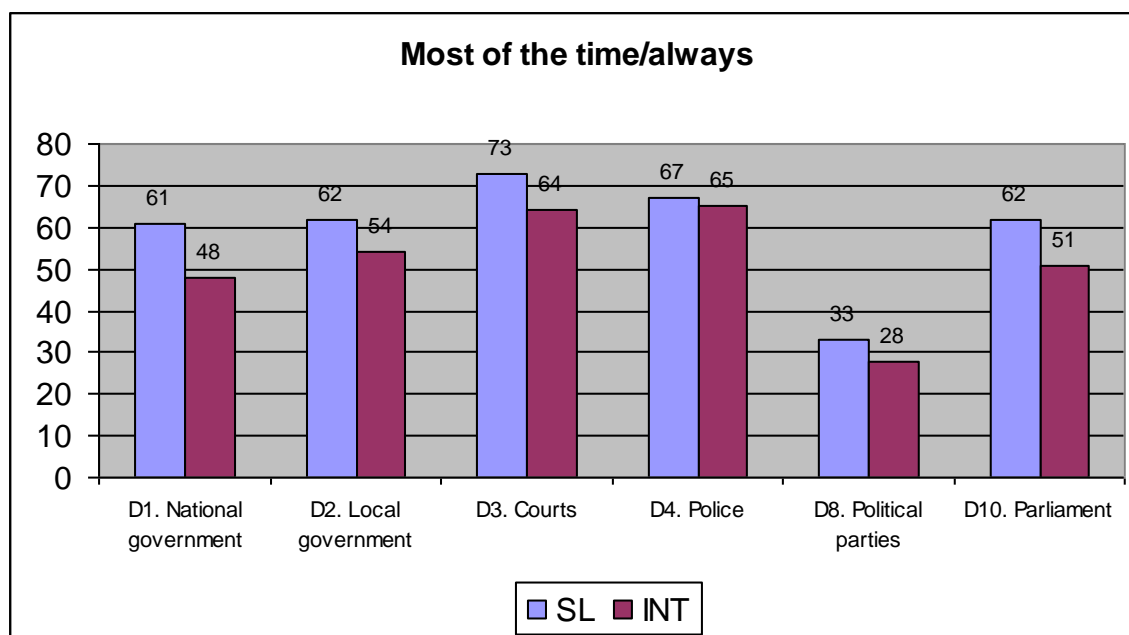
The international CIVED study probed the attitudes, values and beliefs of students in all three major domains of the study, i) democracy and democratic institutions, ii) national identity and iii) social cohesion and diversity. This chapter focuses on the attitudes of students pertaining to two of the domains – democracy and democratic institutions and, national identity. The attitudes pertaining to the third domain – social cohesion and diversity are presented and analyzed in chapter 8. Students’ trust in government-related institutions, support or alienation – touching more specifically on national feeling and attachment to the country and its political symbols, students’ attitudes toward the country as reflected in their attitudes on international relations are presented and analyzed in this chapter.

### **7.1 Trust in government-related institutions**

Research about democracy and democratic institutions emphasizes the extent to which students trust political institutions, believe that citizens can influence government decisions, and possess political tolerance. The Sri Lanka National Youth Survey (2000) probed the political attitudes and beliefs of a sample of youth, and in this sample, .. percent were students in the age group .... . The level of political trust reported by respondents in the CESL study is discussed relative to comparable data from the CIVED study and the NYS (2000).

A six-item scale measured 9<sup>th</sup> graders' trust in a variety of government-related institutions, in the CIVED study. Table 7.1 and Graph 7 .1 show the percentage responses of students in the CESL and the international sample reporting their trust in these institutions. Responses of the National

Youth Survey (2000) sample indicating their trust in some of the institutions is given in Table 7.2 and Graph 7.2.



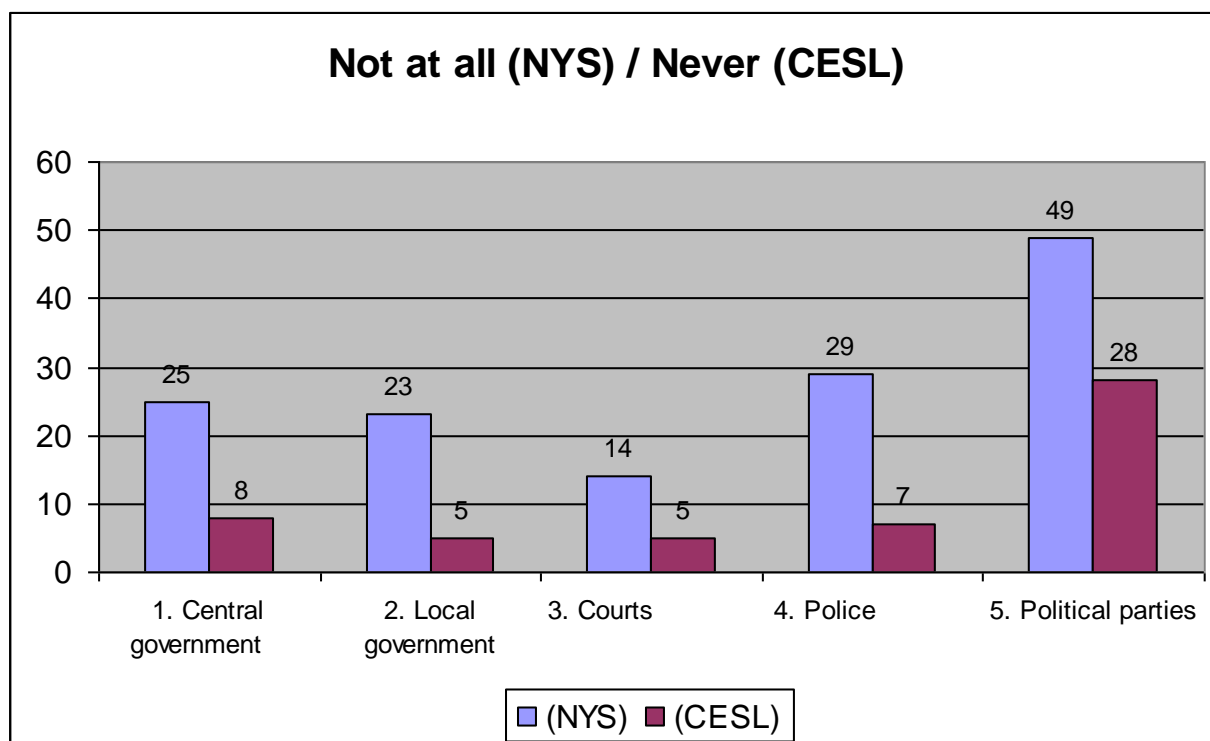
**Graph 7.1: Percentage responses of SL and INT students indicating trust in Institutions**

In general, a higher percentage of SL students, relative to INT students (Graph 7.1) have indicated trust in all institutions listed in this scale, with the Courts and Police having a slight edge over the institutions of governance, the Parliament, National and Local government.

**Table 7.1: Percentage responses of SL and INT students indicating trust in Institutions**

Section D: Trust in Institutions How much of the time can you trust these government - related institutions?	Never/ only some of the time		Most of the time/ always	
	SL	INT	SL	INT
D1. National government	39	52	61	48
D2. Local government	38	46	62	54
D3. Courts	27	36	73	64
D4. Police	33	35	67	65
D8. Political parties	67	72	33	28
D10. Parliament	38	49	62	51

As they grow older, more Sri Lankan youth seem to lose trust in institutions (Graph 7.2) than they do at fourteen years of age, as indicated by a comparison of the responses in the two categories 'never' (CESL) and 'not at all' (NYS), in Table 7.2. In all institutions listed other than political parties, over 93 percent of the CESL sample have indicated trust - 'some of the time/most of the time/always', whereas for political parties, the response in the same composite category is 72 percent.



**Graph 7.2: Percentage responses in the categories: Not at all/Never**

**Table 7.2: Percentage responses of NYS (2000) sample indicating trust in government-related institutions**

How much trust do you have in the following institutions?	Great deal (NYS)	Somewhat (NYS)	Not at all (NYS)	Never (CESL)
1. Central government	11	65	25	08
2. Local government	08	68	23	05
3. Courts	37	49	14	05
4. Police	14	57	29	07
5. Political parties	04	47	49	28

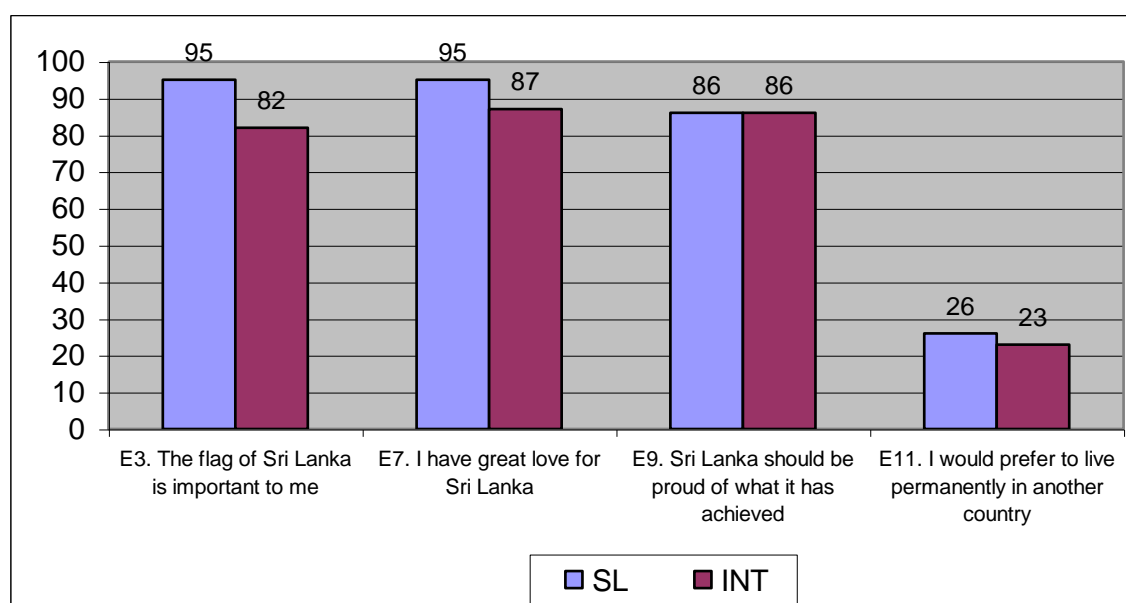
Source: n. 1836 (NYS)

In synthesis, the CIVED study reports that “fourteen year-olds across countries are moderately trusting of their government institutions, Courts and the Police are trusted the most, followed by

national and local governments. In contrast, political parties are trusted very little” (p.92). The findings in the present study conform to the same pattern.

## 7.2 Attitudes toward national identity

The international CIVED study measured students' attitudes toward national identity through a four-item scale, E3, E7, E9 and, E11 (negative). The responses of students to a number of items in this section on ‘Our Country’ indicate their attitudes toward the nation – such as patriotism, loyalty and sense of pride. Graph 7.3 and Table 7.3 present the responses of the two student samples to the four items in the scale on national identity; Table 7.3 also shows the response percentages of the student sample in the CESL study to 4 other items in Section E.



Graph 7.3: Percentage responses of SL and INT students indicating attitudes toward country

Table 7.3: Percentage responses of SL and INT students indicating attitudes toward country

Section E: Our Country	Strongly disagree/ disagree		Agree/ strongly agree		Sum
	SL	INT	SL	INT	
[Four item Scale on national identity]					SL/I NT
E3. The flag of this country is important to me	05	18	95	82	100
E7. I have great love for this country	05	13	95	87	100
E9. This country should be proud of what it has achieved	14	14	86	86	100
E11. I would prefer to live permanently in another country	74	77	26	23	100

Section E: Our Country	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Agree/ strongly agree	Sum
	SL	SL	SL
E10. The national anthem of Sri Lanka is important to me	05	95	100
E6. There is little to be proud of in Sri Lanka's history	70	30	100
E5. Sri Lanka should be respected by other countries for what it	13	87	100
E8. People should support their country even if they think their country is doing something wrong	34	66	100

...we have accomplished

People should support their country...

In the CESL study, two of the items in the national identity scale - E3 and E7 have received the highest positive responses from students. In indicating the same high percentage response of 95 percent to item E10, students have considered the national anthem as equally important to them as the national flag. By 74 and 70 percent disagreement with the two negatively worded items E11 and E6 respectively, students indicate that they neither prefer to live in another country, nor lack pride in Sri Lanka's history. On the contrary, 86 percent take pride in what Sri Lanka has achieved, and 87 percent believe that other countries should respect Sri Lanka for what it has accomplished, as indicated in their responses to items E9 and E5 respectively.

Similarly, in synthesizing the findings pertaining to student attitudes in this domain, the CIVED study states that “in almost all the participating countries the average young person seems to have a sense of trust or attachment either to the country as a political community or to government institutions (or both)” and, a positive sense of national identity. This statement (p. 92) applies equally to the student sample in the CESL study.

### 7.3 Attitudes toward international relations

The attitudes of students toward international relations and the degree to which they think their country should be influenced by other countries is measured by four items. The responses of the student sample in the CESL study are presented in Table 7.4.

**Table 7.4: Percentage responses of CESL students indicating attitudes toward international relations**

<b>Section E: Our Country</b>	<b>Strongly disagree/ disagree</b>	<b>Agree/ strongly agree</b>	<b>Sum</b>
International relations	SL	SL	SL
E1. To help protect jobs in Sri Lanka we should buy products made in Sri Lanka	22	78	100
E2. We should prevent other countries from trying to influence political decisions in Sri Lanka	31	69	100
E4. We should always be alert and stop threats from other countries to Sri Lanka's political independence	09	91	100
E12. We should stop outsiders from influencing Sri Lanka's traditions and culture	13	87	100

A strong national feeling is reflected in their responses to these four statements, with response percentages ranging from 69 to 91. The vast majority of students are in agreement that threats from other countries to the country's political independence, traditions and culture in particular should be averted, more than a third of the students that other countries should be prevented from influencing Sri Lanka's political decisions. Likewise, pro-active patriotism comes through in their response to item E1, that Sri Lankans should buy products made in Sri Lanka, to protect jobs.

## **7.4 Summary**

To gauge the attitudes of students' in two of the domains – democracy and democratic institutions and, national identity, responses to items dealing with their trust in government-related institutions and attitudes toward the nation and international relations were solicited.

The trust indicated by students in the CESL sample relative to comparable data from the CIVED study and, the NYS indicate that, a higher percentage of SL students have indicated trust in the government-related institutions listed. As summarized in the CIVED study, fourteen year-olds across countries including Sri Lanka are moderately trusting of their government institutions, Courts and the Police are trusted the most, followed by national and local governments. In contrast, political parties are trusted very little. As they grow older, more Sri Lankan youth seem to lose some of the trust in institutions than they indicate, at fourteen years of age.

In almost all the participating countries, including Sri Lanka, the average young person seems to have a sense of trust or attachment either to the country as a political community or to

government institutions or both and, a positive sense of national identity. A higher percentage of Sri Lankan students, relative to the international sample, have responded positively to most items in the scales on national identity and, international relations. A strong national feeling and a proactive patriotic stance is reflected in the positive responses of SL students to items in the scale on international relations. Given the trend in the country for young adults in particular to seek greener pastures elsewhere, and the degree of disillusionment evident among citizens in general the attitudes of fourteen-year olds are promising and signal hopes for the future.