

## CHAPTER 4

### STUDENTS' CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP AND GOVERNMENT

#### 4.0 Introduction

Civic education entails education that raises citizen awareness that empowers them to participate in the political process, and that includes all segments of the society, including those that are often excluded from the political arena. Healthy Action (n.d.), defines civic education as “the process of educating citizens on their rights, duties and responsibilities to empower and motivate them to identify what areas of the political and governance processes they can effectively participate in; what they can do to influence political outcomes and thereby improve the quality of governance at both local and national levels.” Civic education has great potential to instil within citizens key values and behaviors to promote the presence and emergence of democracy in countries all over the world. Moreover, civic education is an important vehicle through which citizens may gain the skills and tools to achieve a country where “democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people.” (Abraham Lincoln).

In the IEA civic education study, the attributes students think strengthens democracy, the attributes of good citizenship for adults, and the responsibilities of the government, were measured. Some questions about the principles or pivotal ideas of democracy were formulated with right and wrong answers, for the test. Questions were also included in test items on citizenship - on citizens' rights in particular, and, on some aspects of government. Questions were formulated with more comprehensive coverage of all three aspects, in Part Three of the student questionnaire.

This chapter presents and analyzes the responses of students to items measuring their concepts of democracy, citizenship and government, included in Part Three of the student questionnaire in 2017. A direct comparison between the student responses in 2007 and 2003 study is not possible as in the 2003 study the option given in the questionnaire as “don't know” has been disregarded in the final calculation. Further, since the main

database of the 2003 study is not available comparisons had to be done with the printed data. However, where possible the trend in student responses both in the 2003 study as well as the CIVEd International 1998 will be compared.

#### 4.1 Concept of Democracy

In the CIVED study, a measure of the concept of democracy was designed using a rating scale without designated correct or incorrect answers, having consulted the theoretical and research literature to identify the elements that should be included. Items were written to cover several contrasting models of democracy - a generic or rule of law model, a liberalism model, a pluralism model, a participation model, a communitarian model, a social welfare model and an elitism model. The items were phrased in a way that would enable ascertaining whether respondents believed that a given situation or condition would be good or bad for democracy. This formulation allowed the inclusion of items concerning threats to democracy (e.g. political corruption) as well as positive factors (e.g. free elections). In Part IV of the student questionnaire, section A is on Democracy and it lists 23 items for students to indicate 'what is good and what is bad for democracy.

Table 4.1 displays students' responses to these 23 items.

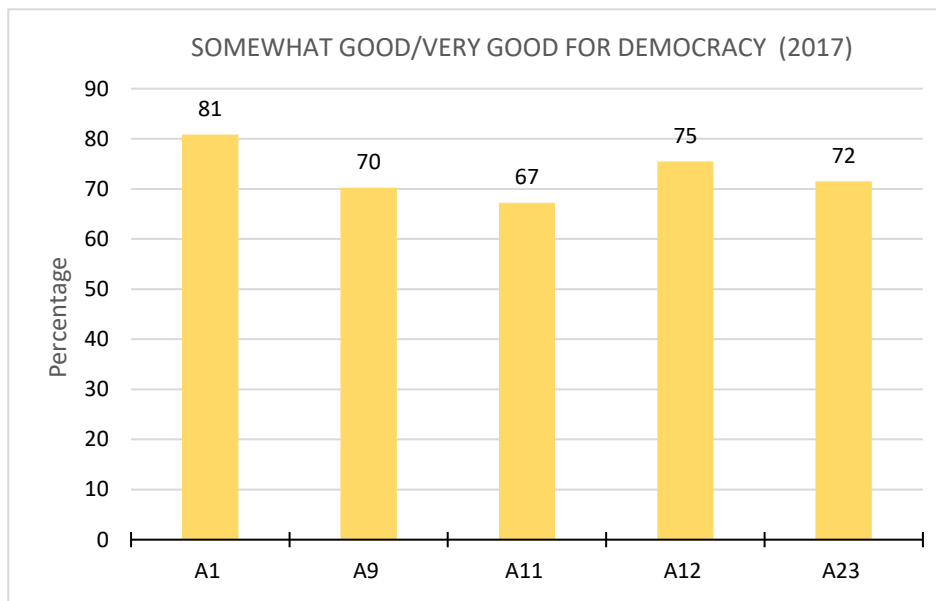
**Table 4.1: Percentage ratings by students for topics, in combined response categories in 2017**

SQ_ Part IV_ A		Very bad/ somewhat bad	Somewhat good/ very good	Don't know/ not relevant
A1	When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, that is	13	81	6
A2	When differences in income and wealth between the rich and the poor are small, that is	43	37	20
A3	When political leaders in power give jobs in the government to members of their family, that is	68	23	9
A4	When newspapers are free of all state control, that is	34	54	12
A5	When private businesses have no restrictions from government, that is	55	30	15
A6	When one company owns all the newspapers, that is	58	28	14
A7	When people demand their political and social rights, that is	27	59	14

SQ_ Part IV_ A		Very bad/ somewhat bad	Somewhat good/ very good	Don't know/ not relevant
A8	When people who are critical of the government are forbidden from speaking at public meetings, that is	62	23	15
A9	When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely, that is	22	70	8
A10	When courts and judges are influenced by politicians, that is	65	20	15
A11	When many different organizations are available for people who wish to belong to them, that is	19	67	14
A12	When young people have an obligation to participate in activities to benefit society, that is	13	75	11
A13	When a minimum income is assured for everyone, that is	55	34	11
A14	When political parties have different opinions on important issues, that is	53	31	17
A15	When people participate in political parties in order to influence government, that is	58	31	11
A16	When laws that women claim are unfair to them are changed, that is	47	41	12
A17	When all the television stations present the same opinion about politics, that is	56	31	13
A18	When people refuse to obey a law that violates human rights, that is	42	46	12
A19	When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend ethnic groups, that is	50	35	15
A20	When wealthy business people have more influence on government than others, that is	66	20	14
A21	When government leaders are trusted without question, that is	52	31	16
A22	When people peacefully protest against a law they believe to be unjust, that is	34	54	12
A23	People living in any part of the country should have the opportunity to transact official business in their language if it is one of the national languages	16	72	13

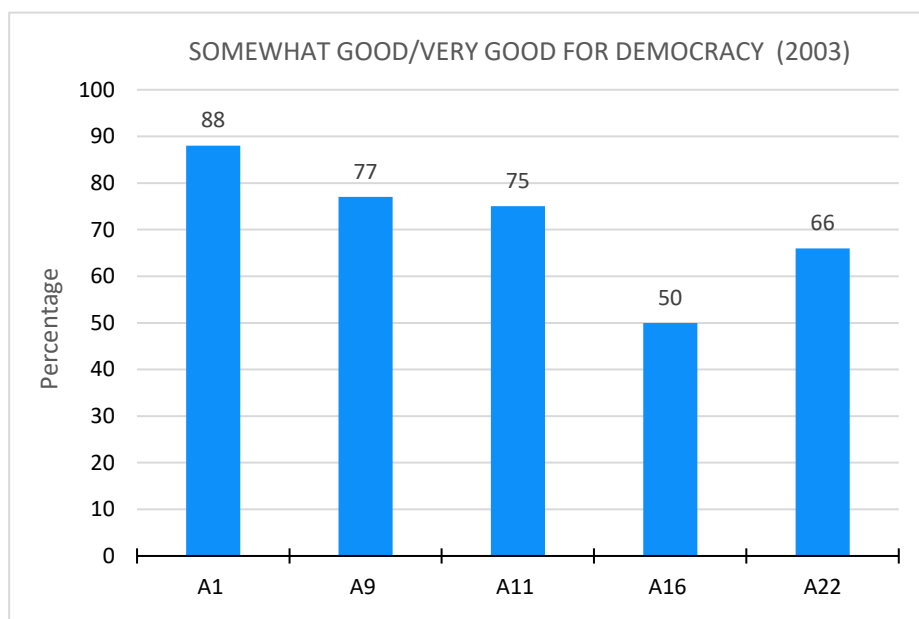
The highest percentage of student responses to what is good for democracy is A1 'when everyone has the freedom to express their opinions freely.

The Fig. 4.1 displays the students' five highest percentage responses to these statements as good for democracy in 2017. However, when these responses are considered in Table 4.1 there is also a percentage of students' even though very much less who think that they are bad for democracy and another percentage who do not know or consider them as not relevant for democracy.



**Fig. 4.1: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) students on rights of citizens - 2017**

The Fig. 4.2 displays the students' highest percentage responses to these statements as good for democracy in 2003.



**Fig. 4.2: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) students on rights of citizens - 2003**

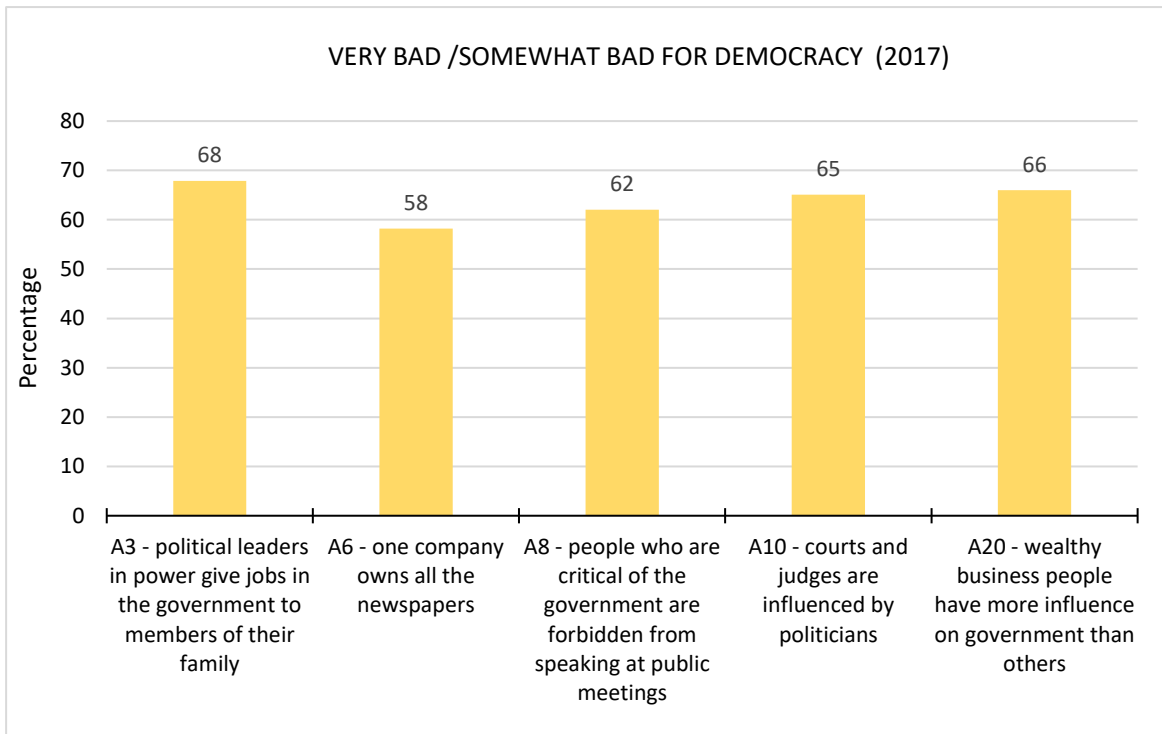
Three of the items for which SL students have shown the highest percentage agreement are similar in 2003 and 2017 even though the percentages differ. These are also items for which there is high consensus across countries\*, in the CIVED study - that it is good for democracy when citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely (A9), and, when many different organizations are available for people who wish to join them (A11).

The average respondent in the CIVED sample believes that the attribute in A1 is good for democracy, but it is an item that has received 'moderate' consensus\*; in the SL sample, 77 percent agree that when everyone has the right to express their opinions freely, it is good for democracy. The response of SL respondents to item A16 is equally divided between the two composite response categories in both 2003 and 2017. Likewise, the international mean for this item is in the 'mixed' range, meaning that some country means are in the 'good for democracy' range and some, in the 'bad for democracy' range. In 2017 it is a positive sign that more students consider A12 and A 23 as good for democracy. In general, the response pattern of SL respondents compares well with comparable responses of the international CIVED sample.

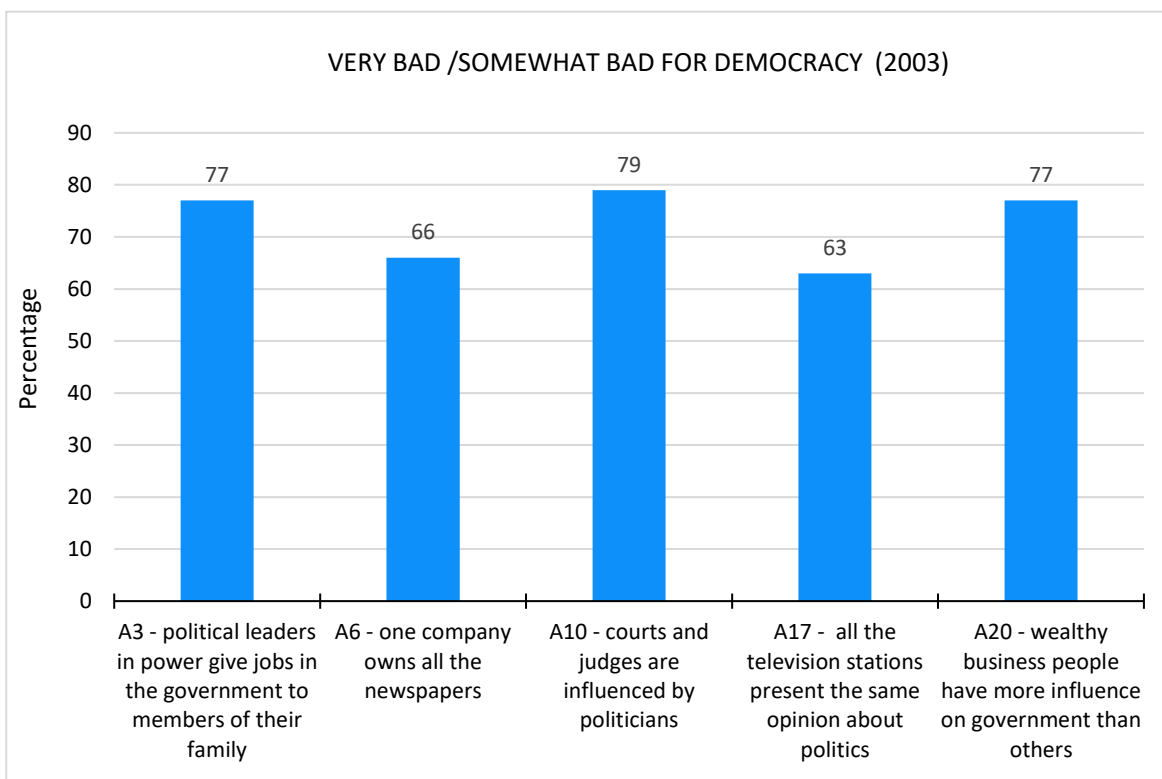
*\*In the CIVED study items were classified into three categories, 'high level of consensus', 'moderate consensus' and, 'lack of consensus', according to the range, from the highest to the lowest country mean; less than .70, .70-1.00, greater than 1.00 respectively. Means of 3.00-3.99 are interpreted as indicating that the average respondent believes that the attribute is good for democracy, means between 2.00 and 2.99 are classified as 'mixed' (usually meaning that some country means are in the 'good for democracy' range and some in the 'bad for democracy' range). Means between 1.00 and 1.99 are interpreted as indicating that the average respondent believes that the attribute is 'bad for democracy' (p73).*

As Table 4.1 indicates there were both positive and negative statements in the students' questionnaire.

Fig. 4.3 and Fig. 4.4 display the students' highest responses in 2003 and 2017 to the negative influences on Democracy.



**Fig. 4.3: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) students on negative influences - 2017**



**Fig. 4.4: Response percentages of Sri Lankan (SL) students on negative influences - 2003**

The comparison shows that four of the items in this scale have strong consensus across the two years. Further there is also agreement across countries, referring to attributes that the respondents judge to be bad for democracy - A6, A10, A20; monopoly newspaper ownership, political influence in the judicial sphere, and special influence by the wealthy on the government. The international means for the two items A3 and A17 are in the 'mixed' range, indicating that some country means are in the 'good for democracy' range and some, in the 'bad for democracy' range. The responses of SL students indicate that for all 5 items, there is agreement that the attributes are bad for democracy.

## **4.2 Concept of Citizenship**

The dimensions of citizenship and ways to create the qualities of good citizen in young people were central concerns in the CIVED Phase I case studies. One sub domain of the democracy and democratic institutions domain focuses on citizenship. When questions were formulated with right and wrong answers (Part I) citizens' rights were included whereas the concepts scale focuses attention on responsibilities. In this section the concern is on the concept of good citizen for adults that young people actually have. Confirmatory factor analysis (in the international CIVED study) revealed two factors; the importance of conventional citizenship (six items) and importance of social-movement-related citizenship (four items) - the term 'social movements' refers to non-partisan mainstream groups acting in communities.

The concept of citizenship was measured by two scales: an 'importance of conventional citizenship' scale and an 'importance of social movement-related scale'. Students were given a list of activities, attitudes and actions on each scale and asked to report how important they believed each one was for explaining what a good citizen is or does.

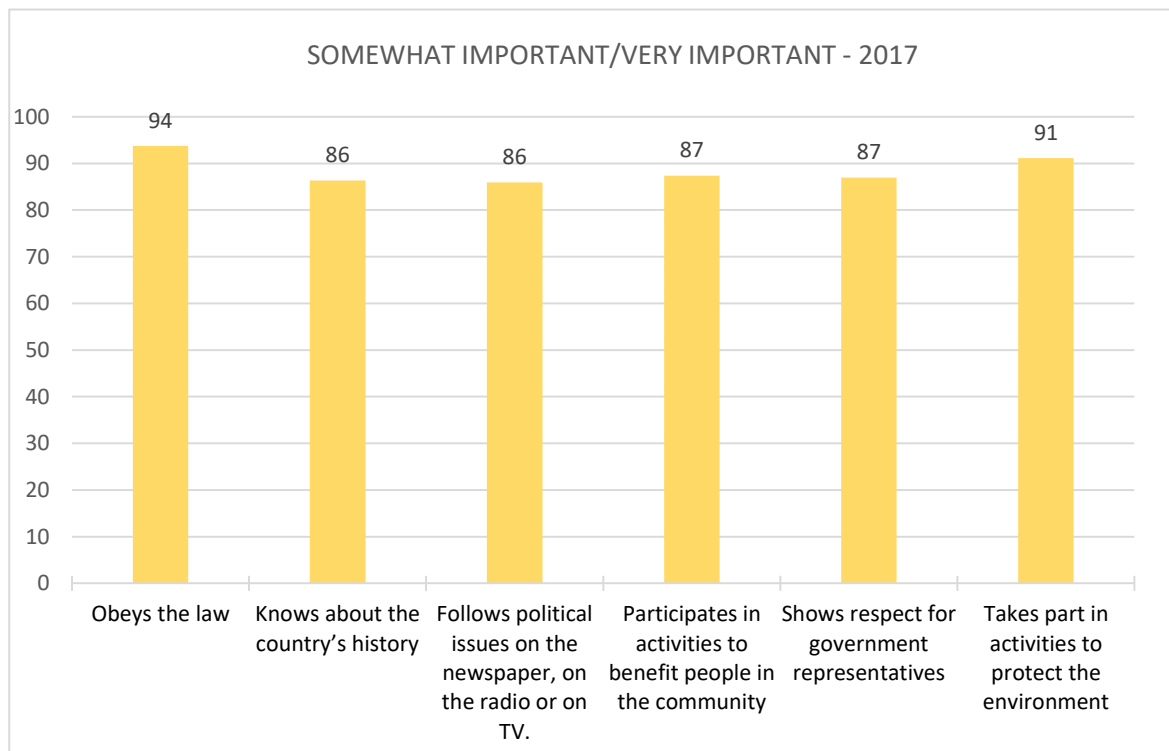
### **4.2.1 Importance of Conventional Citizenship**

As Table 4.2 indicates most students considered 'obeying the law' 'Taking part in activities to protect the environment' and 'participating in activities to benefit people in the community' as the three most important factors in being a good citizen in 2017.

**Table 4.2: Factors in being a good citizen**

Good Citizens	Not important/ somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important/ very important	Don't know/ not relevant
B1 - Obeys the law	5	94	2
B6 - Knows about the country's history	6	86	7
B8 - Follows political issues on the newspaper, on the radio or on TV.	9	86	6
B9 - Participates in activities to benefit people in the community	7	87	5
B10 - Shows respect for government representatives	7	87	6
B13 - Takes part in activities to protect the environment	5	91	4

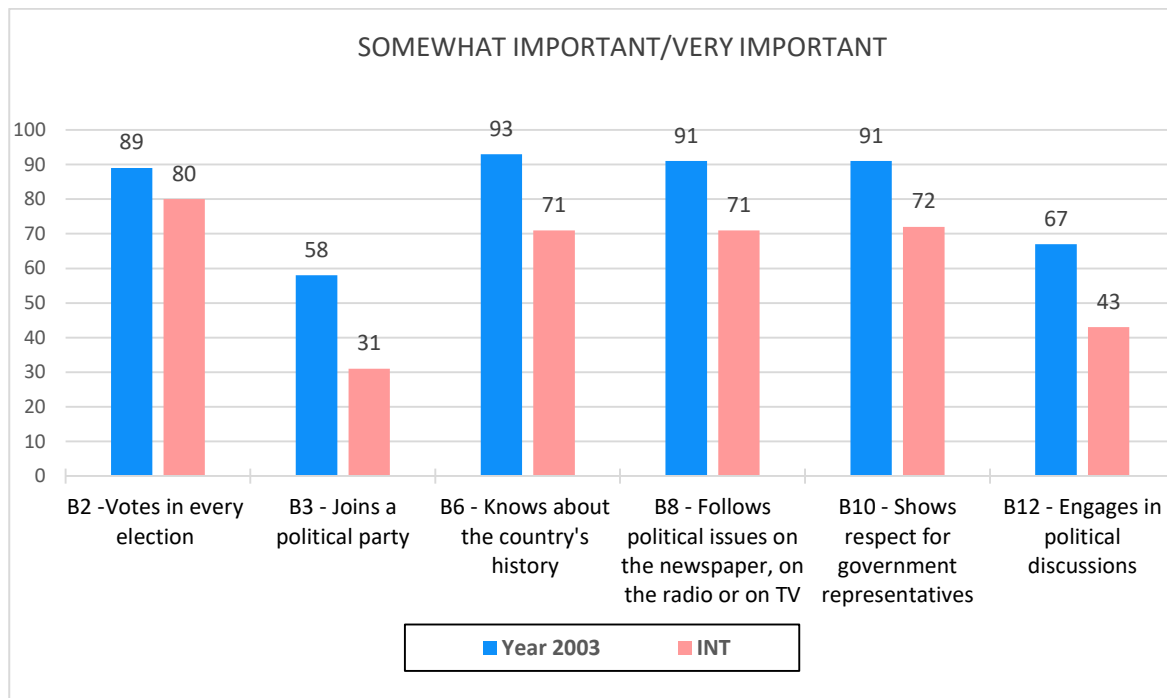
It is significant that even though 86 percent of students think that knowing about the country's history is important there are 7% of students who claim that they are not sure or this statement is irrelevant.



**Fig. 4.5: Factors in being a good citizen**



In contrast to 2017, in 2003 the first three choices of importance have been ‘knows about the country’s history, shows respect for government representatives and follows political issues on the newspaper, on the radio or on TV. Country’s present political situation appears to influence the students’ choices. Their respect for government representatives have diminished. On the other hand, students have realized the need to obey the law and to protect the environment.



**Fig. 4.6: Response percentages of SL and INT students indicating whether various behaviors are somewhat important/very important, to be good citizens – (2003)**

#### 4.2.2 Importance of Social movement-related citizenship

A three-item scale measures the concept of social movement-related citizenship. To all three items in this scale the response by students is over 80 percent, indicating that in their perception, participation in these social movement-related activities is important for good citizenship. Human rights, Environment and Community service are three areas of concern currently being focused on intensively in schools, and in the larger society. Students have demonstrated their awareness of the importance of these concerns for good citizenship.

**Table 4.3: Participation in social-movement related activities is important or unimportant for good citizenship – 2003 & 2017**

Good Citizens	Not important/ somewhat unimportant		Somewhat important/ important	
	2003	2017	2003	2017
B9 - Participates in activities to benefit people in the community	7	7	93	87
B11 - Takes part in activities promoting human rights	8	9	92	81
B13 - Takes part in activities to protect the environment	6	5	94	91

When responses to the two scales on the concept of citizenship are considered in synthesis, in the CIVED study, across countries, the items relating to participation in social movement groups were more likely to be endorsed as important for citizenship than conventional citizenship activities. For example, 80 percent or more have responded in the combined category ‘somewhat important/very important’ to only 4 of the 10 items in the two scales, of which only one, voting in every election, is a conventional citizenship activity. Over 80 percent SL students, on the contrary, have responded to 8 of the 10 activities in the combined category ‘somewhat important/very important’, which includes 4 of the activities in the conventional citizenship scale and, all 4 items in the social movement related citizenship scale. To the two items, joining a political party and engaging in political discussions, the INT students’ responses in the combined category ‘somewhat important/very important’ are in the minority whereas the SL student responses remain in the majority.

### **4.3 Concept of government**

Understanding the responsibilities of the individual and the government is fundamental to civic education. In Sri Lanka, governmental responsibility for the provision of health and education, employment generation, support for economic growth, are crucial issues on which the effectiveness of governments is assessed periodically. In this study, two scales measuring distinct concepts of governmental responsibility are included: an economy related scale and a society related scale.

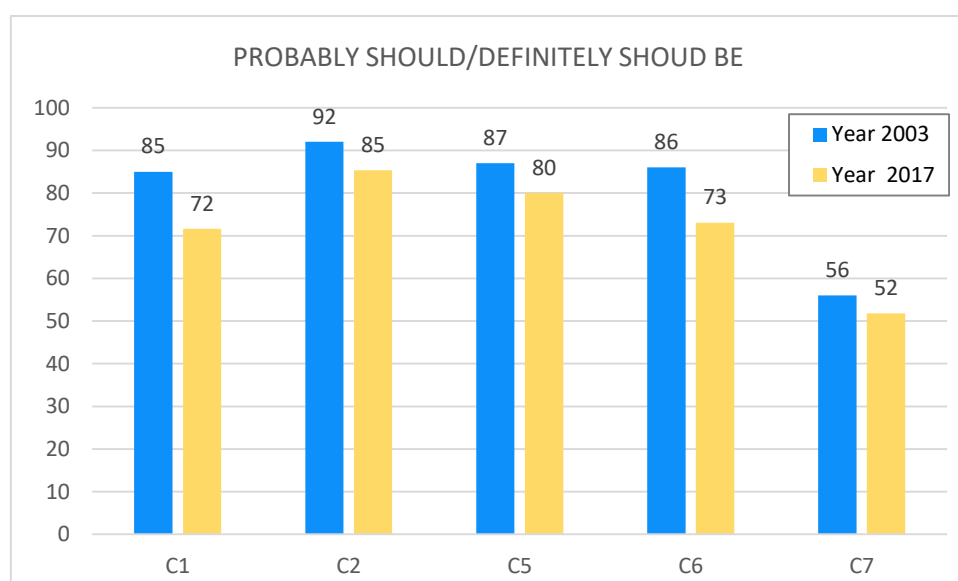
### 4.3.1 Economy-related scale

Five items make up the economy-related government responsibility scale. The total percentage responses of students in the 2017 study, in the composite response category probably should/ definitely should be the government’s responsibility are presented in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Responsibility of government and various economy related actions**

Economy related government responsibilities (SQ_Part IV_C)	Definitely should not be/ probably should not be		Probably should / definitely should be		Don't know
	2003	2017	2003	2017	2017
C1 - To guarantee a job for everyone who wants one	15	17	85	72	11
C2 - To keep prices under control	8	8	92	85	6
C5 - To provide industries with the support they need to grow	13	11	87	80	9
C6 - To provide an adequate standard of living for the unemployed	14	16	86	73	11
C 7 - To reduce differences in income and wealth among people	44	30	56	52	18

Keeping prices under control, providing industries with the support they need to grow, providing an adequate standard of living for the unemployed and, guaranteeing a job for everyone who wants one, when considered together, should be the responsibility of government as reported by over 70 percent of the students in both 2003 and 2017.



**Fig. 4.7: Various economic-related actions and the responsibility of the government - (2003 & 2017)**

As Fig. 4.7 indicates the same trend of responses has been visible in 2003 as well though the percentages are different due to disregarding the, I don't know category

### 4.3.2 Society-related government responsibility

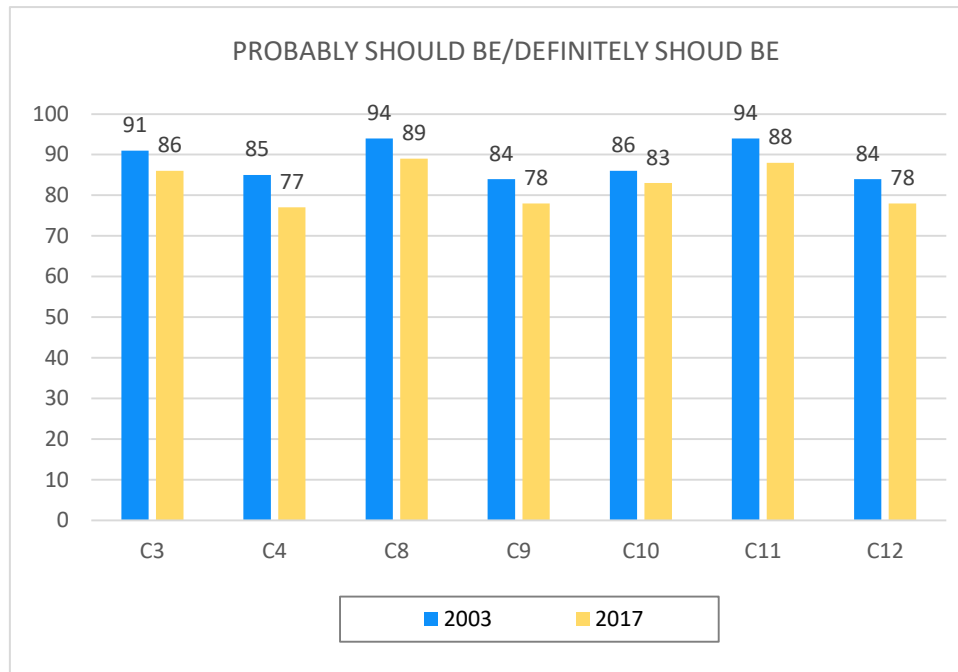
The five items that students have given the highest percentage of responses in 2017 and 2003 are listed in Table 4.5 and displayed in Fig. 4.8.

**Table 4.5: Various socially related actions and the responsibility of the government – 2003 & 2017**

Socially related government responsibilities (SQ_Part IV_C)	Definitely should not be/ probably should not be		Probably should / definitely should be		Don't know
	2003	2017	2003	2017	2017
C3 - To provide basic healthcare for everyone	9	8	91	86	5
C4 - To provide an adequate standard of living for old people	15	12	85	78	11
C8 - To provide free basic education for all	10	7	94	89	4
C9 - To ensure equal political opportunities for men and women	16	10	84	78	12
C10 - To control pollution of the environment	14	11	86	83	6
C11 - To guarantee peace and order within the country	6	6	94	88	6
C12 - To promote honesty and moral behavior among the people in the country	16	12	84	78	9

In both years the trend is the same.

The Fig. 4.8 compares student responses in 2003 and 2007.



**Fig. 4.8: Various socially-related actions and the responsibility of the government - (2003 & 2017)**

In the CIVED study, it is stated in the summary that only about 10 percent of the students say that economy and society related activities definitely should not be the government’s responsibility. In general, 14 year olds are more likely to think of societal items rather than economic items as the government’s responsibility. The items most frequently endorsed as definitely government responsibilities are ‘to guarantee order and stability within the country’, ‘to provide free basic education for all’, and ‘to provide basic healthcare for everyone’. The two least endorsed items are ‘to reduce differences in income and wealth among people’ and ‘to provide industries with the support they need to grow’. The findings in the CESL study are almost identical. There is a difference only in the least endorsed item, in the CESL study.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The findings in Chapter four, on SL students’ concepts of democracy, citizenship and government in both 2003 and 2007 are in general, compare well with findings in the CIVED study. The response pattern of SL students is in general consistent with the pattern of responses of the INT student sample, on the concepts of democracy, citizenship and government. On the concept of democracy, citizens’ freedom to express opinions, free

elections, strong civil society in the form of organizations are attributes that the sample of students in the CIVED study and the vast majority of SL students believe to be good for democracy. Likewise, attributes that are judged to be bad for democracy by strong consensus across countries, in the CIVED study, such as monopoly newspaper ownership, political influence in the judicial sphere, and special influence by the wealthy on the government are similarly judged by the SL student respondents.

On the concept of citizenship, across countries, the items relating to participation in social movement groups were more likely to be endorsed as important for citizenship than conventional citizenship activities. The findings in the two SL Civic Education studies are that both social movement related participation and conventional political activities are included in the SL students' concept of good citizenship for adults, with more importance accorded to voting than to activities that imply conflict of opinions such as joining a political party and engaging in political discussions.

On the concept of government, the findings of both the CIVED and CESL studies are very similar. Only a very small percentage of the students in both studies say that economy and society related activities definitely should not be the government's responsibility. In general, 14 year olds are more likely to think of societal items rather than economic items as the government's responsibility. In the responses of the SL students, there are signs that with the young, the concept of an open economy is gaining ground over the strongly held protectionist affiliation to the concept of welfare state.