

CHAPTER 5

CURRENT AND EXPECTED ACTIVITIES RELATED TO POLITICS

5.0 Introduction

Evidence suggests that political socialization and civic engagement are behaviours gained in adolescence to acquire knowledge, abilities and attitudes that may lead to later adult community participation (Wade and Saxe, 1996). Previous research also indicates that students who participate in community and political activities, or in extra-curricular activities related to civic issues while in secondary school, are more likely than non-participating peers to be community and political activists as adults (Damico, Damico, and Conway, 1998).

A prerequisite of responsible participation is political interest and the search for information. The CIVED study examined students' political interest and exposure to political news, and students' expected participation in political activities. This chapter examines activities related to politics that SL students currently engage in, as well as the political actions they expect to engage in as adults. It examines students' involvement in discussions of national and international politics, followed by their use of various media to obtain information about civic and political issues. This chapter concludes by looking at the activities related to politics that students expect to engage in as adults.

5.1 Participation in discussions on national and international politics

In introducing the Common General Paper in the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) examination, civic related outcomes such as increased awareness, familiarity and participation of students in the discourse on national and international politics were anticipated. Research shows that participation in political discussions in the home increases the likelihood that adolescents will be informed about and accept civic responsibilities. Further a relationship between participation in discussions at home and students' anticipation of being politically active adults also could be seen. Additionally, there is some indication that participation in discussions and adolescent expectations of

political activity predict later participation (Miller and Kimmel, 1997) and that frequent discussion of current events in school enhances students' civic knowledge (Niemi and Junn, 1998).

In Section L (Political Action 1) of the student questionnaire, students were queried on the extent to which they engage in discussions on what is happening in national politics. Students responses in 2017 in the two combined categories Never/Rarely and Sometimes/Often, in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Percentage of SL students reporting how often they have discussions about national or international politics in 2017

Political Action: how often do students have	Never/ Rarely	Sometimes/ Often	Don't know
L1 - discussions on what is happening in national politics with peers	38	56	6
L2 - discussions on what is happening in national politics with parents and other adults	27	65	8
L3 - discussions on what is happening in national politics with teachers	42	50	8
L4 - discussions on what is happening in international politics with peers	52	40	8
L5 - discussions on what is happening in international politics with parents and other adults	41	50	8
L6 - discussions on what is happening in international politics with teachers	51	39	9

According to Table 5.1 majority of the students tends to discuss national politics with their parents, peers or teachers in that order of preference. On the other hand contradictory to expectation a fewer percentage claim that they discuss international politics with their teachers. There is also 6-9% of students who are not certain of the answer to these statements. In 2003 also some students may have claimed that they do not know the answer.

Table 5.2 indicates the responses of students in 2003.

Table 5.2: Percentage of SL students reporting how often they have discussions about national or international politics in 2003

Section L: Political Action How often do students have	Never/Rarely	Sometimes/ Often
L1 - discussions on what is happening in national politics with peers	40	60
L2 - discussions on what is happening in national politics with parents and other adults	32	68
L3 - discussions on what is happening in national politics with teachers	54	46
L4 - discussions on what is happening in international politics with peers	47	53
L5 - discussions on what is happening in international politics with parents and other adults	41	59
L6 - discussions on what is happening in international politics with teachers	52	48

The statement that largest percentage of students who has answered negatively is L3 that is discussion on what is happening in national politics with teachers. In contrast, in 2017 there is a higher percentage that claim that they do discuss national politics with teachers. On the other hand, in both years more than 50% claim that they never/rarely discuss international politics with teachers.

Fig. 5.1 indicates the comparison between students' responses in 2003 and 2017.

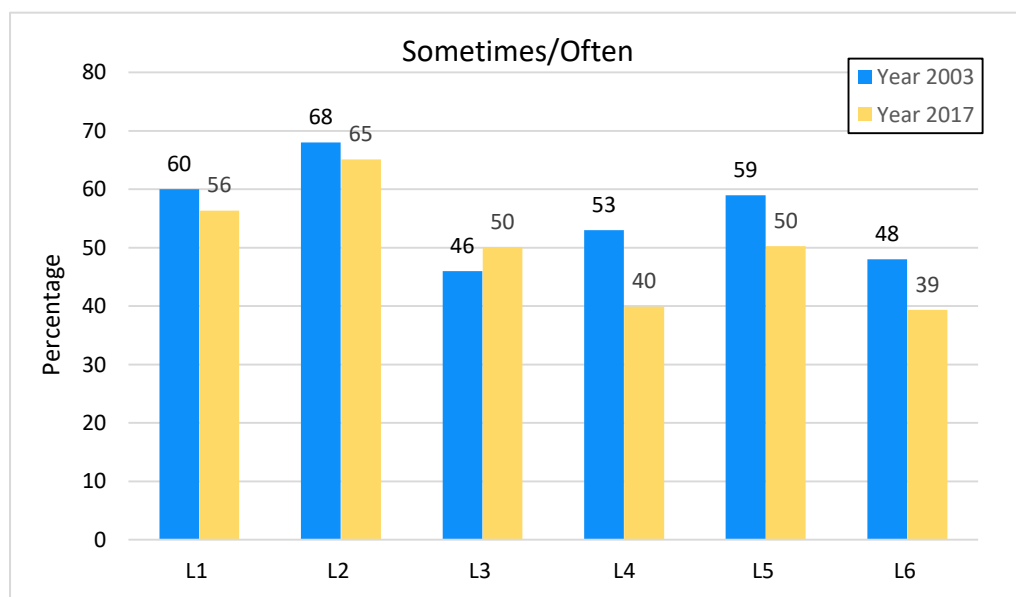


Fig. 5.1: Percentage of students reporting that they sometimes/often have discussions about national or international politics (2003 & 2017)

Overall, in both studies SL students were more likely to discuss national politics with parents/family members and peers than with teachers. Students very rarely seem to discuss international politics with teachers. Interest in national politics is more than in international politics.

5.2 Media exposure to current civic issues

The means through which students and young adolescents obtain information about civic issues and politics have implications for the development of their political attitudes and perceptions about the political behavior of adults. In particular, research highlights the importance of recognizing the influence of the mass media, especially television, in shaping students' political roles and civic understanding (Ehman, 1980; Hepburn, 1998). In this age of information overload, television and other media have become either more important than or equally important as schools in creating political knowledge and awareness.

In response to items on media use, in Section L in the student questionnaire, the students indicated the frequency of reading articles in the newspapers and listening to news broadcasts on radio and television. The findings are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 frequency of reading articles in the newspapers and listening to news broadcasts on radio and television in 2017

Table 5.3: Percentage responses of SL students reporting frequency of media use, on what is happening in national and international politics in 2017

Political Action: how often do students	Never/ Rarely	Sometimes/ Often	Don't know
L7 - read articles in the newspapers about what is happening in this country	28	67	5
L8 - read articles in the newspapers about what is happening in other countries	31	64	5
L9 - listen to news broadcasts on television	14	80	7
L10 - listen to news broadcasts on radio	26	66	8

According to Table 5.3 it could be seen that as research findings in other countries have indicated, in Sri Lanka also majority of the students are influenced by television.

In comparison to 2003, in 2017 the same trend can be seen.

Table 5.4: Percentage responses of SL students reporting frequency of media use, on what is happening in national and international politics in 2003

Section L: Political Action How often do students	Never/ Rarely	Sometimes/ Often
L7 - read articles in the newspapers about what is happening in this country	17	83
L8 - read articles in the newspapers about what is happening in other countries	21	79
L9 - listen to news broadcasts on television	13	87
L10 - listen to news broadcasts on radio	16	84

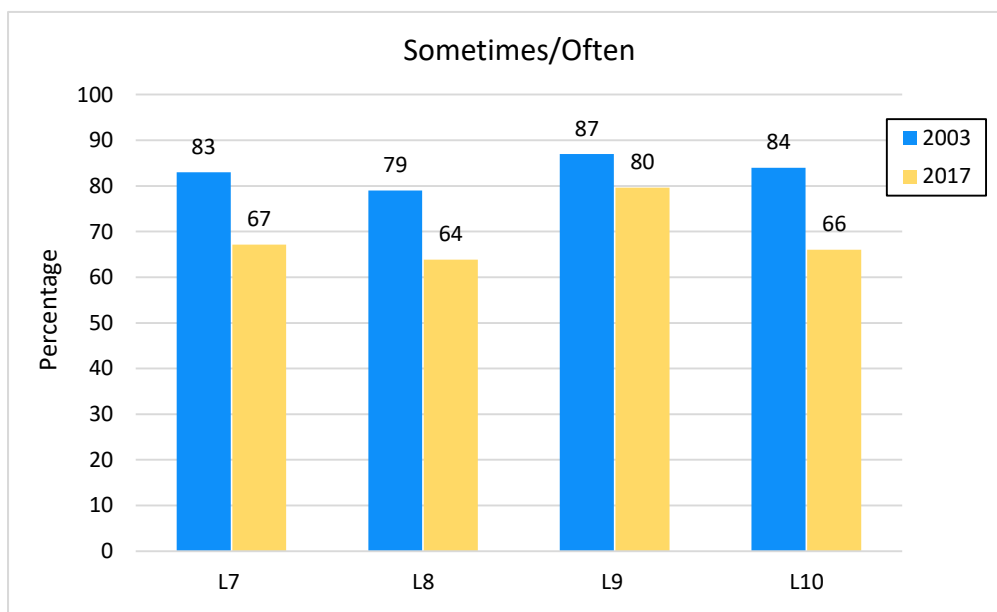


Fig. 5.2: Comparison of student responses regarding media use - 2003 & 2017

Most students in this sample would have a radio at home, and have access to television, even if not in their own home. The radio and television channels in SL broadcast many programmes on politics, and most adults in the country tune into these programs. Apparently, 14 year olds in this sample participate in viewing and listening to these programs, in the course of which discussions ensue with parents and family members. In the CIVED study it is reported that in all countries students watch more television news broadcasts than they read newspapers or listen to radio news broadcasts, about what is happening in national and international politics. A similar pattern is noted in the responses

of SL students in the CESL sample in both 2003 and 2017. In 2017 there is a drop in student responses to all categories of media. Yet the highest percentage of responses is to listen to news broadcast on television.

5.3 Expected participatory political actions

A scale comprising of three items - join a political party, write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns, be a candidate for election - measured students' expected participatory political action. In addition to the three items in this 'conventional participation' scale, two other items - vote in national elections and, get information about candidates before voting in national elections, were included in the questionnaire. The percentage of students who reported that they probably or certainly expected to engage in each of these activities as an adult, is presented in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Percentage of students reporting expected participation in various political activities as adults in 2017

SQ_ Section M: Political Action 2	I will certainly not do this/ probably not do this	I will probably do this/ certainly do this	Don't know
M8 - Vote in national elections	25	67	9
M9 - Get information about candidates before voting in an election	22	67	11
M10 - Join a political party	53	34	13
M11 - Be a candidate for election	52	33	15
M13 - Write letter to the newspapers about social or political concerns	38	45	17

According to Table 5.5 majority of the students in 2017 do not expect to engage in participatory political action as adults. That is, they do not wish to Join a political party, be a candidate for elections or write letters to the newspapers. In the current political context in Sri Lanka such responses are understandable.

On the other hand, majority of the students claim that they will Vote in national elections, get information about candidates before voting in an election. Table 5.6 indicate students' responses in 2003.

Table 5.6: Percentage of students reporting expected participation in various political activities as adults in 2003

Section M: Political Action 2	I will certainly not do this/ probably not do this	I will probably do this/certainly do this
1. Vote in national elections	24	76
2. Get information about candidates before voting in an election	23	77
3. Join a political party	60	40
4. Write letter to the newspapers about social or political concerns	43	57
5. Be a candidate for election	60	40

Compared to 2017, in 2003 also majority of the students did not intended to be a candidate or join a political party. However, 57% has claimed that they will write letters to the newspaper about social or political concerns. The shift in student responses from 2003 to 2017 indicates the loss in faith in the public media today in Sri Lanka.

The majority of the students in all countries does not intend to participate in the three actions in the conventional scale, according to their responses to the CIVED student questionnaire. Similarly, the majority of SL students responses both in 2003 and 2007 indicate that they do not expect to join a party or be a candidate for election, but 57 percent of respondents had indicated in 2003 that they expect to write letters to the newspapers about social or political concerns. Joining a political party and being a candidate for election are the two actions that only 30 - 40 percent of the SL respondents expect to engage in. Voting in national elections is by far the most preferred future political activity of students in the international study. In the CESL study, students also expect to get information about candidates before voting in an election.

Social movement related activities

Five additional items deal with social movement activities; collect signatures for a petition, participate in a non-violent protest march or rally and, unconventional illegal forms of political behaviors such as spray-paint protest slogans on walls, block traffic as a form of protest, occupy public buildings as a form of protest. A last item deals with volunteer commitment for charity causes, collect money for a social cause. The findings are presented in Tables 5.7 and 5.8.

Table 5.7: Percentage responses indicating expected participation in social movement related activities in 2017

Section M: Political Action 2	I will certainly not do this/probably not do this	I will probably do this/certainly do this	don't know
M1 - Volunteer time to help the poor in the community	12	82	6
M2 - Collect money for a social cause	18	72	10
M3 - Collect signatures for a petition	48	31	21
M4 - Participate in a non-violent protest march or rally	41	44	15

When comparing Table 5.7 and 5.8 a similar trend can be seen. Majority of the students wish to volunteer time to help the poor in the community and collect money for a social cause.

However, in 2017 considerable percentage of students seem to be uncertain whether the last two items are considered as legal. Hence they have claimed 'don't know' rather than 'probably' or 'certainly'.

Table 5.8: Percentage responses indicating expected participation in social movement related activities in 2003

Section M: Political Action 2	I will certainly not do this/ probably not do this	I will probably do this/ certainly do this
Volunteer time to help the poor in the community	10	90
Collect money for a social cause	13	87
Collect signatures for a petition	53	47
Participate in a non-violent protest march or rally	48	52

The vast majority of students in the CESL study expected to volunteer time to help the poor and to collect money for a social cause. A majority, 52 percent would participate in a non-violent protest march. For collecting signatures for a petition, and participating in a non-violent protest march, the SL student responses approximate the CIVED student responses in a majority of countries, reported as 'neither high nor low'.

Participation in illegal activities

Students' participation in expected unconventional illegal activities are show in Table 5.9 and 5.10.

Table 5.9: Percentage responses indicating expected participation in unconventional illegal actions – 2017

Section M: Political Action 2	I will certainly not do this/probably not do this	I will probably do this/certainly do this	don't know
M5 - Spray paint protest slogans on walls	57	27	16
M6 - Block traffic as a form of protest	71	17	12
M7 - Occupy public buildings as a form of protest	68	18	15

Activities listed in Table 5.9 are common sights in Sri Lanka today. Therefore, some students appears to be confused and claim 'I don't know'. This percentage is considerably high.

However, student response trend in 2017 and 2003 are similar.

Table 5.10: Percentage responses indicating expected participation in unconventional illegal actions – 2003

Section M: Political Action 2	I will certainly not do this/probably not do this	I will probably do this/certainly do this
Spray paint protest slogans on walls	73	27
Block traffic as a form of protest	81	19
Occupy public buildings as a form of protest	80	20

According to the findings of the CIVED study, in most countries only small minorities of students intend to participate in illegal activities such as spray-painting, blocking traffic or occupying buildings. Among these three behaviors, 'spray-painting protest slogans on walls' is the relatively more preferred activity of student respondents in both the CESL and international samples.

5.4 Summary

A central goal of civic education is to prepare students to participate in the political process of their country. A prerequisite of responsible participation is political interest and the search for information. In this chapter, activities related to politics that SL students currently engage in, as well as the political actions they expect to engage in as adults were examined.

SL students are more interested in national than in international politics, and are more likely to discuss national and international politics with parents/family members and peers than with teachers.

Television is the media most used by students to obtain news, in preference to radio news broadcasts and the newspapers. In indicating trust in media, student response patterns were similar in 2003 and 2017.

Other than voting in elections, the majority of SL and INT students do not envisage more direct political participation such as contesting elections or joining a political party. However, they expect to participate in social movement activities such as volunteering time to help the poor and collect money for social causes. Few would engage in unconventional illegal activities, with 'spray painting protest slogans on walls' being the most preferred of the illegal activities listed.