VALUES IN CRISIS

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

Values in Crisis Survey (Wave 1)
Summary Report

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THE MALDIVES NATIONAL
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UNDP

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UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in nearly 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

The Maldives National University (MNU) is a state-funded university catering to more than half the tertiary population of the Maldives. The MNU strives to perform and be acknowledged as the outstanding academic institution of the nation and one of the finest in the region with a mission to create, discover, preserve, and disseminate knowledge necessary to enhance the lives and livelihoods of people and essential for the cultural, social, and economic development of the society so that this nation shall remain free and Islamic forever.

CONTENTS

The Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic is beyond doubt the most dramatic social crisis the world has witnessed post World War II. The pandemic is of a global scale, progressing at a rapid speed and severely restricting the daily lives of billions of people around the world. Governments all over the world, including the Maldives enforced limitations on people's mobility that literally shut down public life from the onset of the pandemic. These include restrictive measures such as curfews that are only known from states of emergency from times of war and unrest. All of this creates a dramatically disruptive situation. The general sense of disruption is further strengthened by other exceptional government actions. To buffer the expected economic recession, governments enacted stimulus mechanisms and aid packages, the scale and spread of which is unprecedented.

Against this backdrop, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic offers a truly unique opportunity—a natural experiment indeed—to study how people's moral values change during times of crises. In the face of lacking evidence, we cannot take it for granted that the glacial stability of values observed in normal times will continue throughout the pandemic.

The Values in Crisis Survey (VICS) was first initiated in Germany and the UK with the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. The purpose of the survey is to gauge the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on individual's values. VICS, among other things, studies social cohesion, solidarity within the community, and trust in public institutions, with an overarching purpose of analyzing whether the coronavirus pandemic impacts moral values and social orientations, and if it does, how massive these changes are and in which direction it moves. Accordingly, the VICS is designed as a panel study that surveys the same people throughout the 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 in the Maldives as an as an online survey questionnaire from 25 May to 3 June 2020, which was the sixth week of lockdown of Greater Male' area and enforced movement restrictions 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).

The descriptive statistics of all survey questions can be found at the project web-page of The Maldives National University.

COVID-19 IN THE MALDIVES

COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted societies all over the world to a large extent, and it is not any different in the Maldives. At the time of the survey, the number of COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the Maldives since its first reported case in early March 2020, threatening the health of the country's population of 507,660 which includes 100,000 migrant workers (World Bank, 2020). The government of the Maldives had taken early preventative interventions (Suzana et al., 2020) and restrictive measures to control the spread of the virus including closing the country's borders, to restricting island to island travels and closing down schools and other offices (MED 2020; Moosa & Usman, 2020). However, the lockdown measures have been gradually eased from July 2020 onwards, and now the government continues with the less restrictive measures such as contact tracing, mandating face masks for everyone while in public places, while continuing restrictions on large gatherings, and partial curfews in the greater Male' area.

Following the closure of the country border, the COVID-19 pandemic crippled the Maldivian tourism sector and thereby continues to have an adverse impact on employment throughout the country (MED 2020). About 8000 of the local population were left without a job at the onset of the pandemic (World Bank 2020) with a significant proportion of the population depending on the tourism sector for their livelihood. Coupled with the financial uncertainties, the fear of the unprecedented spread of COVID-19 is believed to have brought certain mental distress as well.

Against this background, the Values in Crisis Survey explores the socioeconomic experiences and social value orientations of Maldivian society during the COVID-19 pandemic which is summarized below. It also captures a snapshot of the values and attitudes of Maldivian society on varying aspects.
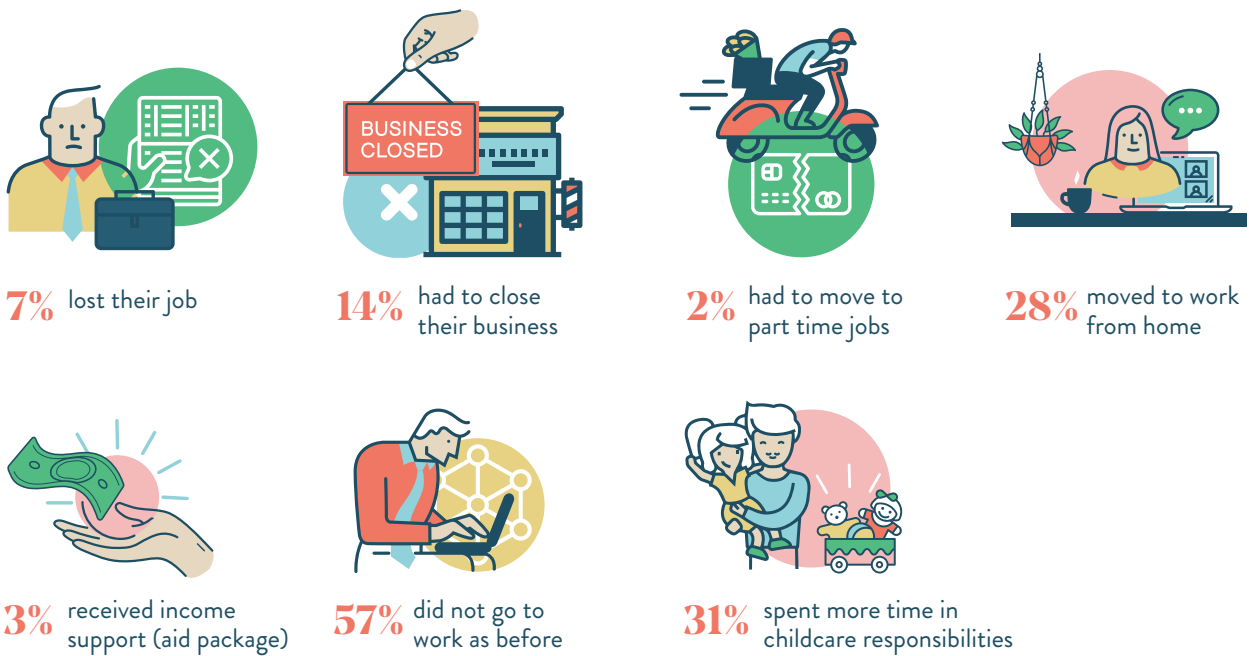
SOCIOECONOMIC EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MALDIVES

The health and economic experiences during the pandemic, no doubt, impacted profoundly the way people work, with potential implications for employees' health, well-being, and general perceptions overall.

VALUES IN CRISIS SURVEY (WAVE 1)

HEALTH AND ECONOMIC EXPERIENCE

At this early stage of the pandemic in May 2020, the findings of VICS show that the fear of the pandemic and its possible adverse economic and health impact were felt significantly more than the actual impact. People were psychologically affected by the crisis and there was a significant association with psychological well-being and importance given to religion, with more importance given to religion associated with 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

The participants were given a set of economic experiences and asked whether or not it happened to them during the crisis to date.
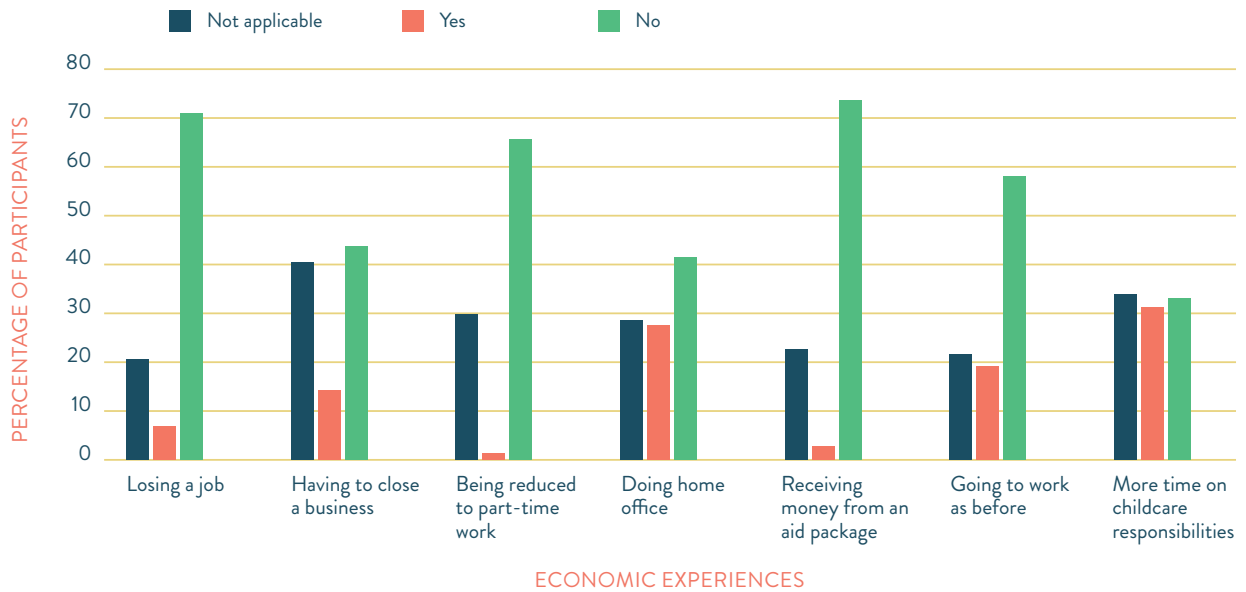

Legend: Not applicable | Yes | No

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS

ECONOMIC EXPERIENCES

Categories: Losing a job | Having to close a business | Being reduced to part-time work | Doing home office | Receiving money from an aid package | Going to work as before | More time on childcare responsibilities

Figure 1. Economic experience in the time of the pandemic

87% reported fear of suffering from an economic recession

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

54% reported as being very afraid

33% reported as being quite afraid

Legend: Total Sample | Urban Sample | Rural Sample

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS

Categories: Very afraid | Quite afraid | Neither,nor | Not very afraid | Not at all afraid
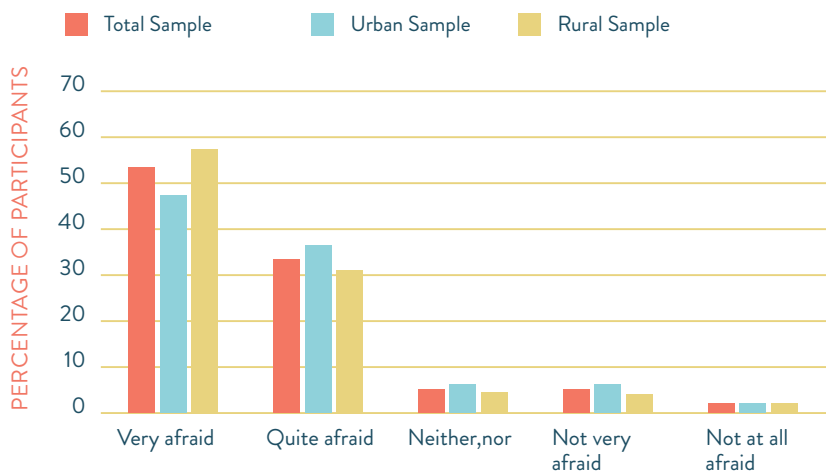
LEVEL OF FEAR FOR OWN OR LOVED ONES SUFFERING FROM AN ECONOMIC RECESSION FOLLOWING THE CORONA CRISIS

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

PERCEPTION ON THE REALITY OF THE PANDEMIC

While the majority of the participants (88%) believed the pandemic to be a reality and not a hoax, it is also significant that 1 in 11 people believe various information on social media that depict the pandemic to be a hoax and those who believe in hoax stories are more from the rural community. The difference between the urban and rural communities in their belief in the reality of the pandemic could be because the community spread of the virus was in the urban capital and not in any of the rural islands at the time (WHO 2020; Moosa et al 2020). These findings highlight the importance of information dissemination and awareness of the pandemic situation.

PERCEPTION ON SOLIDARITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Majority of the participants perceived most people in the country as having 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 people reported more solidarity than hostility during these trying times. Solidarity in the case of an emergency specially involves getting together to form 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

Participants were asked how properly they think most people in the country are behaving under the imprint of the crisis.
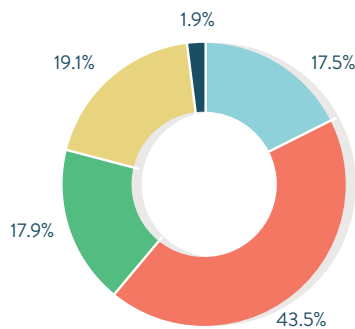
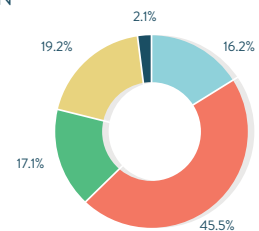**43%** quite improper

18% very improper

HOW PROPERLY DO YOU THINK MOST PEOPLE IN OUR COUNTRY ARE BEHAVING UNDER THE IMPRINT OF THE CORONA CRISIS?

- Very Improper
- Quite Improper
- Neither, Nor
- Quite Proper
- Very Proper

1.9%
19.1%
17.5%
17.9%
43.5%

URBAN
2.1%
19.2%
16.2%
17.1%
45.5%

RURAL
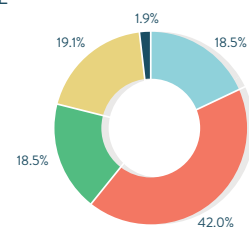1.9%
19.1%
18.5%
18.5%
42.0%

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 these days, whether they experience more solidarity than usual or whether they experience more hostility. Ranked from 1 (more hostility) to 7 (more solidarity).
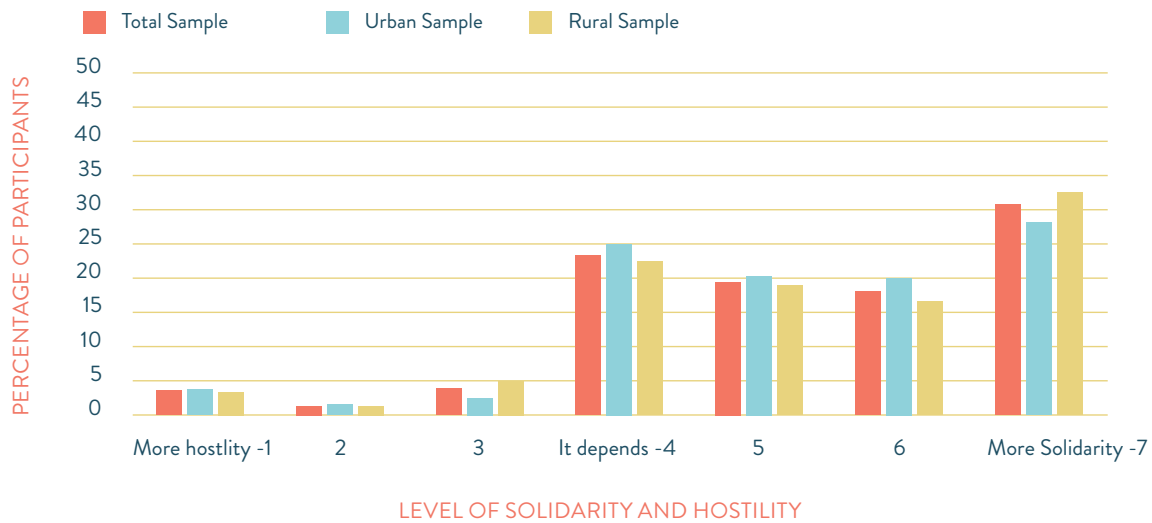

LEVEL OF SOLIDARITY AND HOSTILITY

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

UNDERSTANDING VALUES AND ATTITUDES OF THE MALDIVIAN SOCIETY – A SNAPSHOT

*VALUES IN CRISIS SURVEY (WAVE 1)*

GENDER EQUALITY

More than half (60%) of the participants either strongly agree or agree that men make better political leaders than women. It was observed that this perception is higher among the rural community participants. Additionally, those who disagree with the gender bias included more females and younger aged participants.

60% agreed men make better political leaders

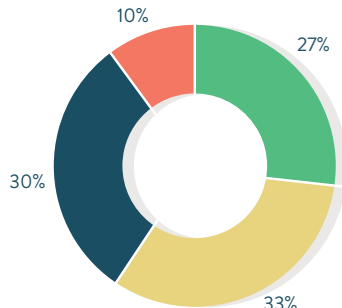Participants were asked whether they perceive men to be better political leaders than women.
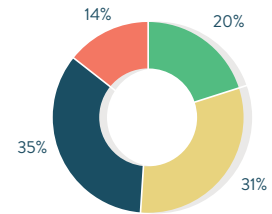
ON THE WHOLE, MEN MAKE BETTER POLITICAL LEADERS THAN WOMEN DO. [ALL PARTICIPANTS]

● Strongly Agree   ● Disagree
● Agree   ● Strongly Disagree
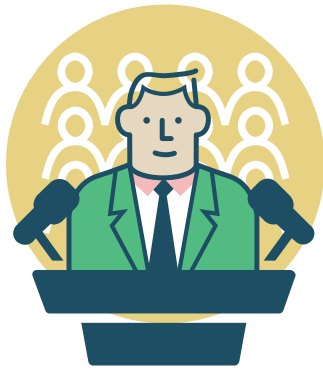
27% strongly agree

33% agree

URBAN

14%   20%
35%   31%

10%   27%
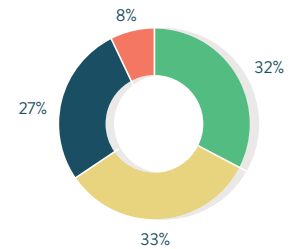30%   33%

RURAL

8%   32%
27%   33%

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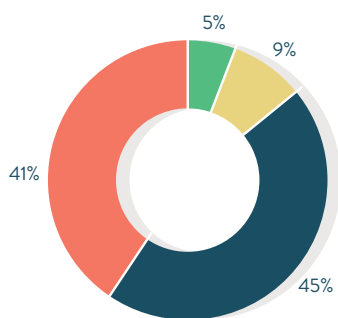
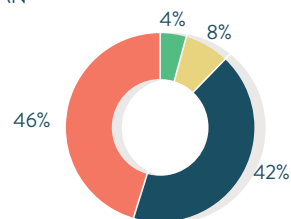Participants were asked whether they perceive university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.

41% strongly disagree

45% disagree

A UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR A BOY THAN FOR A GIRL (ALL PARTICIPANTS)

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5%
9%
41%
45%

URBAN
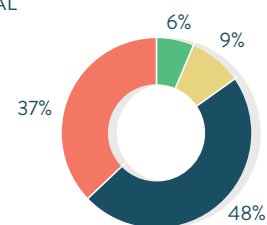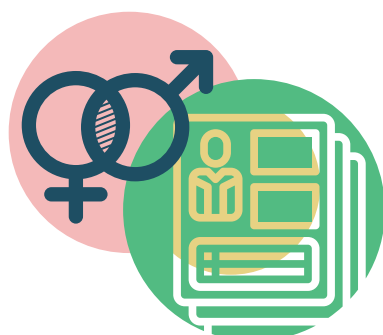
4%
8%
46%
42%

RURAL

6%
9%
37%
48%

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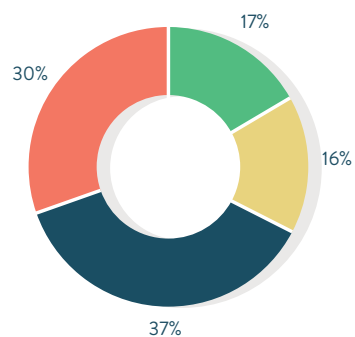
Participants were asked whether they perceive men should have more right to a job than women when jobs are scarce.

30% strongly disagree

37% disagree

WHEN JOBS ARE SCARCE, MEN SHOULD HAVE MORE RIGHT TO A JOB THAN WOMEN

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17%
16%
30%
37%

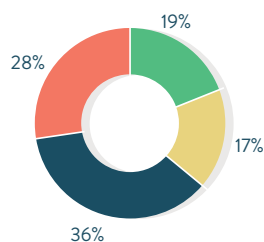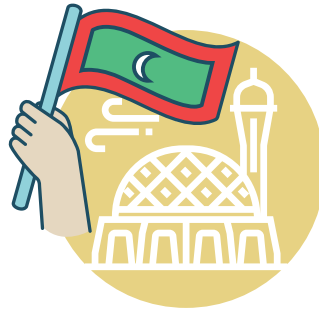URBAN

13%
14%
33%
40%

RURAL

19%
17%
28%
36%

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 of citizenship.

87% stated as being proud to be a citizen of the Maldives
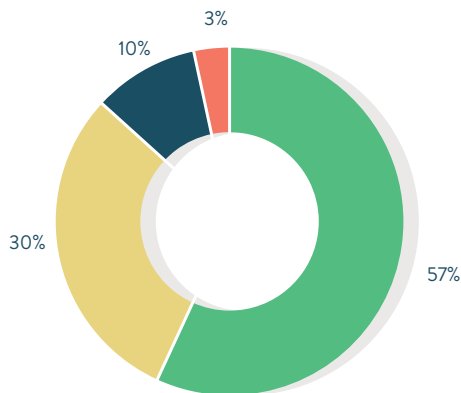
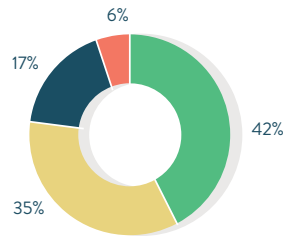**57%** very proud

30% proud

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

HOW PROUD ARE YOU TO BE A CITIZEN OF THIS COUNTRY?

- ● Very Proud
- ● Quite Proud
- ● Not Very Proud
- ● Not at all Proud

URBAN

6%
17%
42%
35%

3%
10%
57%
30%

RURAL

4% 2%
27%
67%
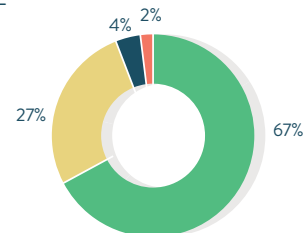
Figure 8. Perception of proudness being a Maldivian citizen

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 combatting 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 individual priority.

Most Important   Second Most Important

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

MIGRANT WORKERS AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

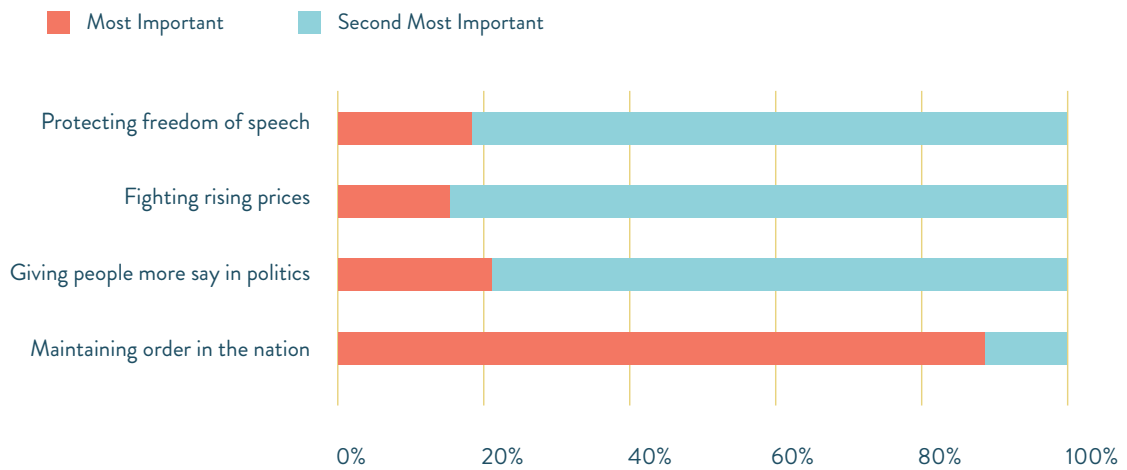Participants were asked how they feel about people from other countries coming to the Maldives; and sought their opinion on what the government should do about foreign immigrants. The choices that were provided include: (1) let anyone come who wants to, (2) let people come as long as there are jobs available,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

5%   2%

PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION ABOUT PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES COMING TO THE MALDIVES

33%

- ● Let anyone who wants to come
- ● Let people come as long as there are jobs available
- ● Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here
- ● Prohibit people coming here from other countries

60%
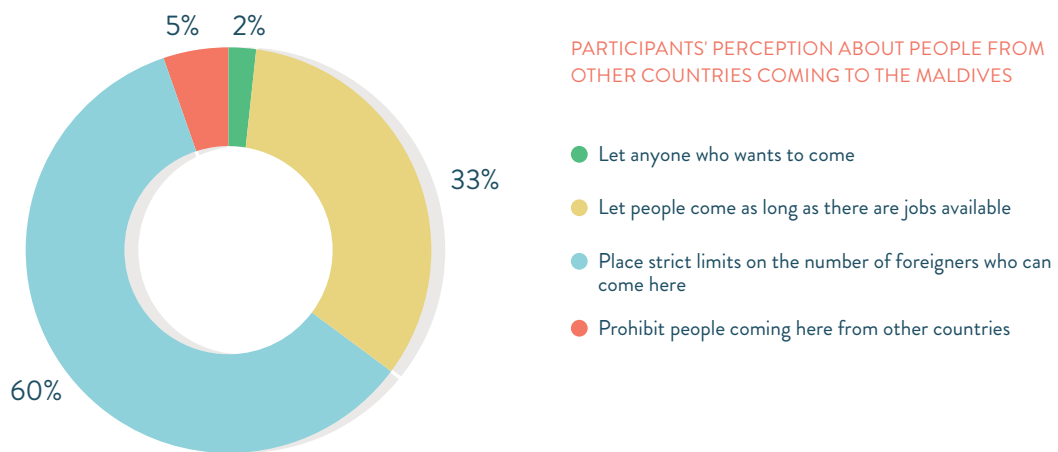
Figure 10. Perceptions about migrants

Participants of the VICS were asked how they feel about people from other countries (migrants) coming to the Maldives, out of which 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 perceive 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

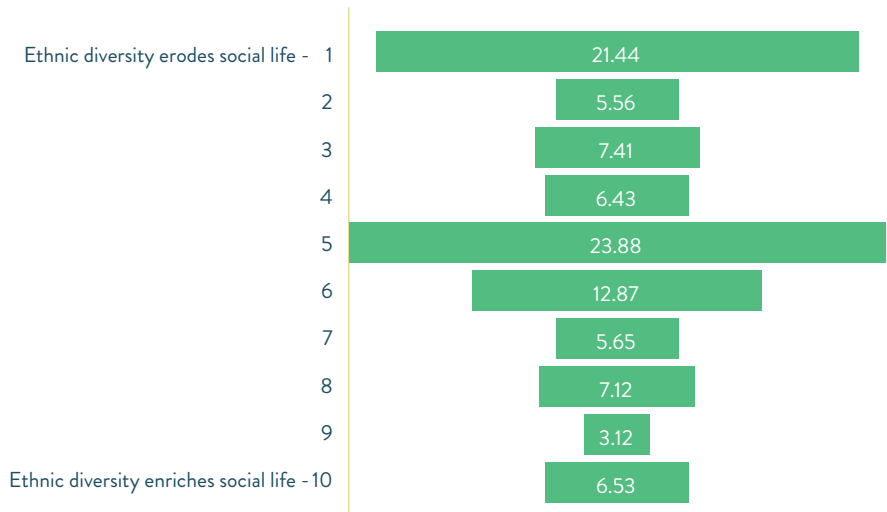|	
Ethnic diversity erodes social life - 1	21.44
2	5.56
3	7.41
4	6.43
5	23.88
6	12.87
7	5.65
8	7.12
9	3.12
Ethnic diversity enriches social life - 10	6.53

Figure 11. Perception on ethnic diversity and social life

Overall perception of participants of VICS shows a significant presence of 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 behave in a social setting. Predominant SVO of a society provide meaning to the attitudes and behavior regarding family and institutions, development, and democracy (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013; Welzel & Alvarez, 2014; Alemán & Woods, 2016). In the case of the Maldives, the small island nation does not show a strong polarization of values but instead leans towards prosocial value orientations. However, the 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 on the dimension of 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).

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 a slightly different with rural population weighing more towards openness as compared to the urban population.

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

Gender and Age: When comparing men to women, the former weighed towards openness more than latter. Similarly, younger age groups weighed towards openness more than older age groups.

SELF-ENHANCEMENT VS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

The findings of the VICS identified age and gender as determinants of the value orientations on the dimension of 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 weigh more 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 compliance with the containment measures put in place by the government, 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.
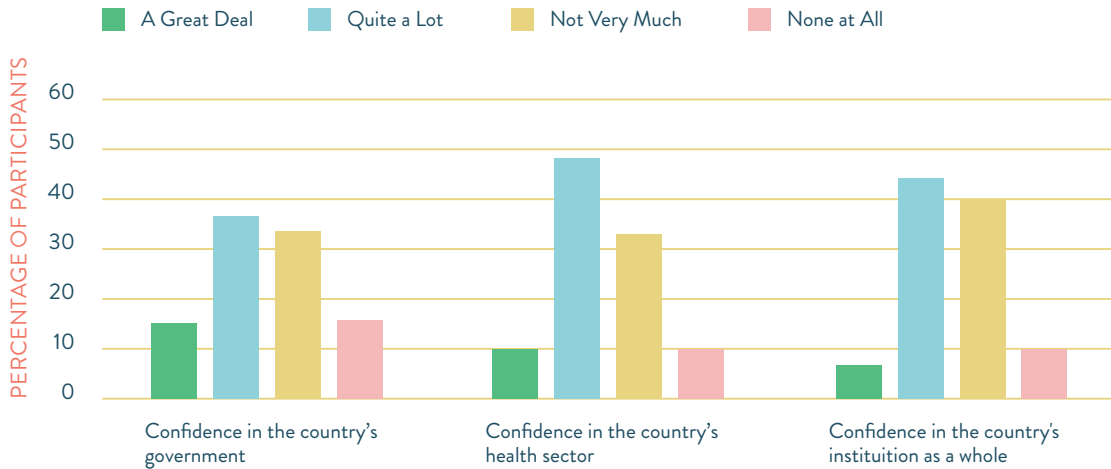

Figure 12. Confidence in the government & institutions

Among the participants of the VICS, slightly more than half either have 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 compliance with the public health measures (Moosa et al., 2020).
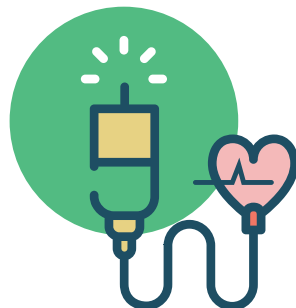
52% have a great deal of confidence in the government

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

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

48% indicated they do not have confidence in the government

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

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 publication process at the time of this report, 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.

Musthafa, H. S., Riyaz, A., Moosa, S., Abdul-Raheem, R., & Naeem, A. Z. (2020). Determinants of socioeconomic experiences during COVID-19 pandemic in the Maldives. *The Maldives National Journal of Research, 8*(2), 76-88.

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 review process]

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Drury, J. (2018). "The role of social identity processes in mass emergency behaviour: An integrative review". *European Review of Social Psychology, 29*(1), 38-81. https://doi.org/10.108 0/10463283.2018.1471948

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