

MALDIVES

Study of an Ocean Conservation Charity

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1. Introduction

Background & Purpose of Survey

- The Maldives recently announced a regulatory shift, ending its 15-year ban on shark fishing as of November 2025. This decision, aimed at boosting economic opportunities for local communities, comes after years of the nation being recognized globally as a shark sanctuary and a leader in marine tourism and conservation. The policy change has generated active public debate, with many stakeholders expressing both economic hopes and environmental concerns.
- In this context, the current survey was conducted to understand public opinions and awareness regarding the importance of sharks to Maldivian ecosystems, tourism, and jobs—especially in light of the new regulations. The survey collected perspectives from a diverse and representative cross-section of the Maldives population, including citizens and foreign residents, spanning regions, age groups, education levels, and occupations. The key objective is to provide evidence-based insights to inform national dialogues on marine conservation and sustainable policy, ensuring that future decisions reflect the voices and priorities of all stakeholders across the Maldives.

Shark Fishing Rule Change Summary

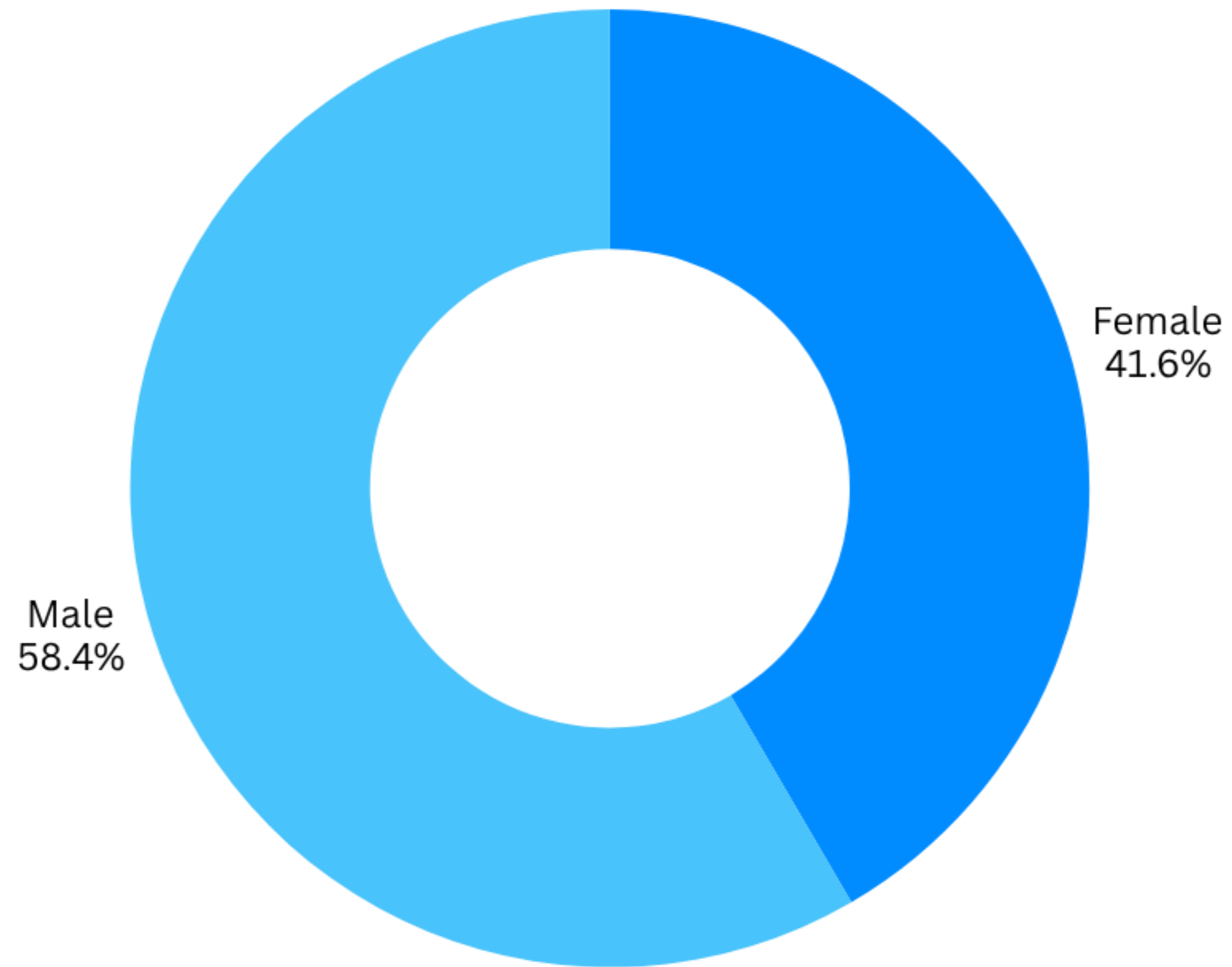
- In August 2025, the Maldives government announced it would lift its 15-year ban on shark fishing, specifically reopening the gulper shark fishery starting in November. The ban, implemented in 2010, had made Maldivian waters a renowned global shark sanctuary and contributed significantly to the nation's eco-tourism identity. The policy change is aimed at creating new income opportunities for local fishing communities following economic pressures, with government officials stating the fishery will operate under a new management plan. However, the decision has sparked widespread debate, with marine scientists and conservation groups warning that resuming shark fishing risks harming endangered shark populations, undermining decades of conservation progress, and potentially impacting the tourism sector that depends on healthy marine life. The final regulatory details are still being developed, and public discussion continues about balancing economic interests with environmental stewardship.

2. Survey Methodology

- **Target Audience:** Identify both Maldivian citizens and foreign residents to capture a holistic view of opinions and experiences.
- **Target Sample:** 1000
- **Age Eligibility:** >18 years
- **Sampling Strategy:** Used a stratified sampling method to ensure balanced participation across age groups, genders, education levels, and regions (urban vs. rural, various atolls, main urban centers).
- **Data Collection:** Online Survey
- **Questionnaire Design:** Develop the survey instrument to cover key themes: demographic background, awareness of environmental policies, attitudes toward conservation, and perceived responsibilities.
- **Confidentiality and Ethics:** Ensured all participation is voluntary and anonymous, with data protection in line with international research standards.
- **Analysis Plan:** Predefine analytic frameworks to aggregate and compare responses by demographic and regional groupings, supporting robust, actionable insights for stakeholders.

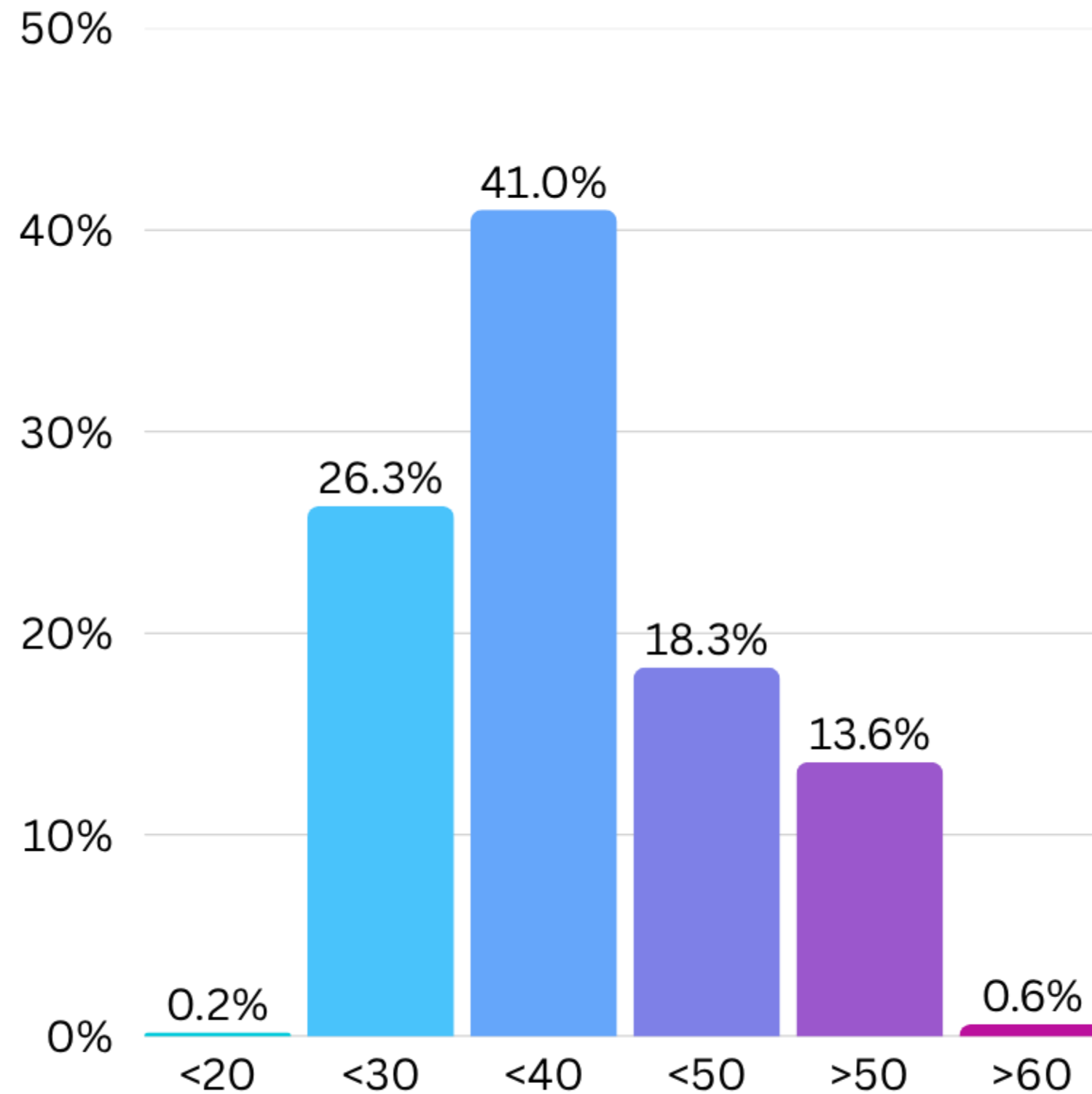
3. DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW

D1. Gender



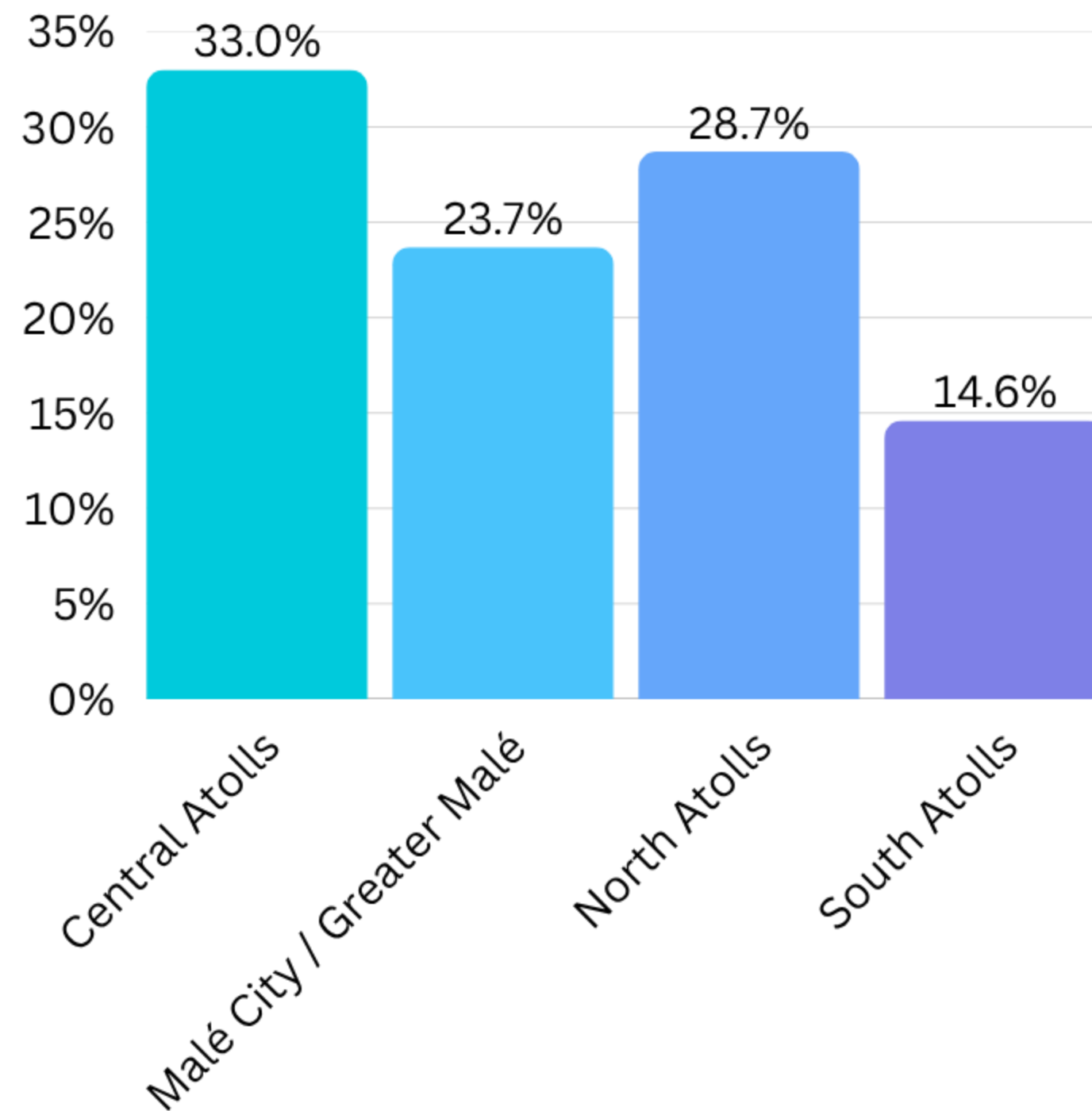
- The survey respondent breakdown—58.4% male and 41.6% female—closely reflects national demographics, as recent Maldives data shows around 62% males and 38% females in the population. This is influenced by factors such as immigration and employment patterns in the islands. In the context of environmental research, this balanced sampling ensures that insights represent major population groups and can inform effective awareness and policy discussions. The survey helps capture genuine cross-section perspectives on environmental issues, aligning with the study’s purpose to reflect public perception for future policy and outreach.

D2. Age



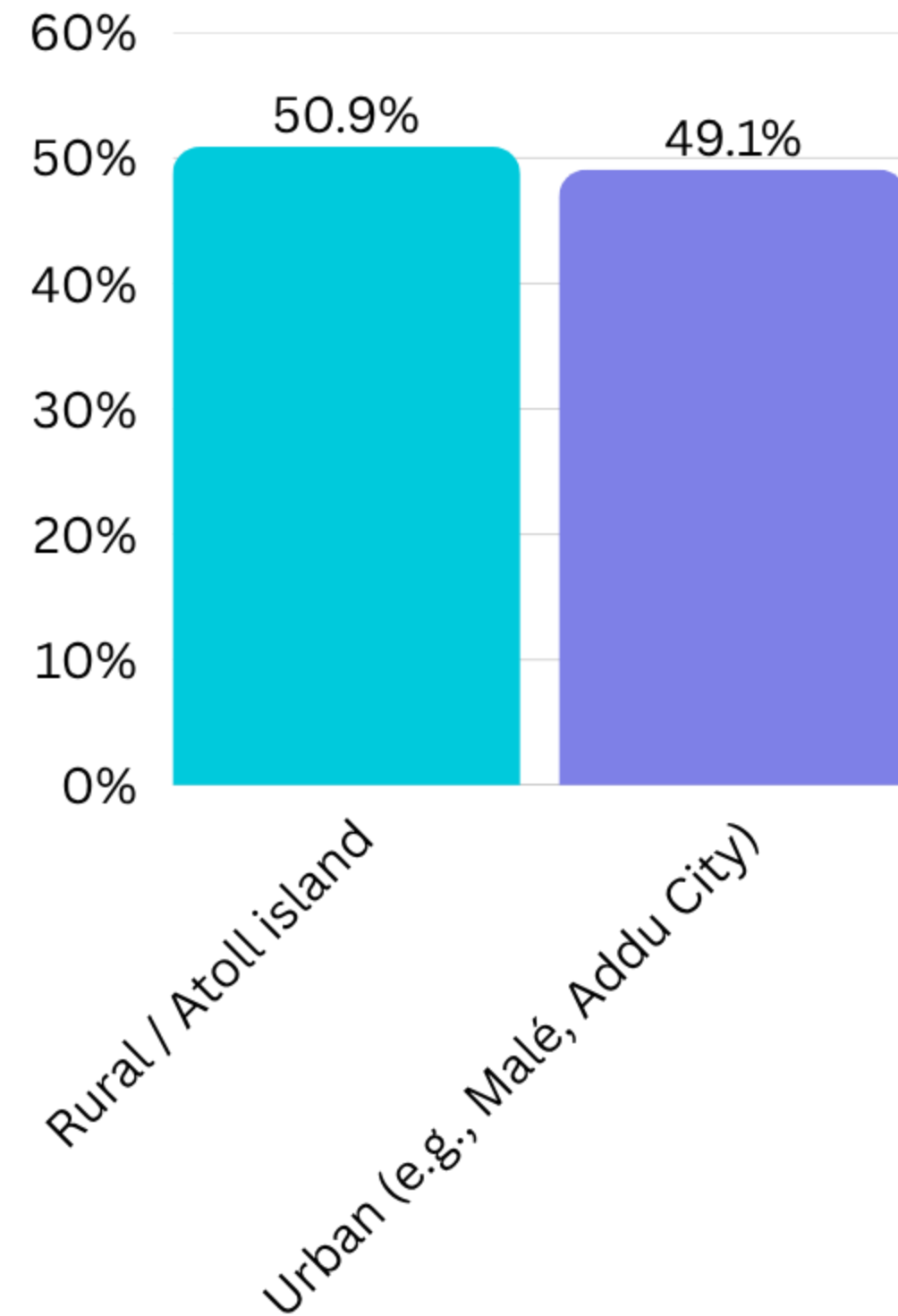
- The survey's age distribution reveals a representative, working-age sample aligned with national demographics in the Maldives (median age: 32.7). Among 1,000 respondents, 26.3% are under 30, 41.0% are in their 30s, and 18.3% are in their 40s. This mirrors the country's young, economically active population, ensuring the most socially and environmentally engaged age segments are heard.
- By reflecting the nation's age structure so closely, the survey delivers credible, practical insights for shaping environmental policy and awareness campaigns. The strong representation of working-age adults gives policymakers actionable feedback from those most involved in the Maldives' development, conservation, and daily life.
- This strong working-age representation provides valuable signals and actionable input for those shaping future strategies.

D3. Region/Place of Residence



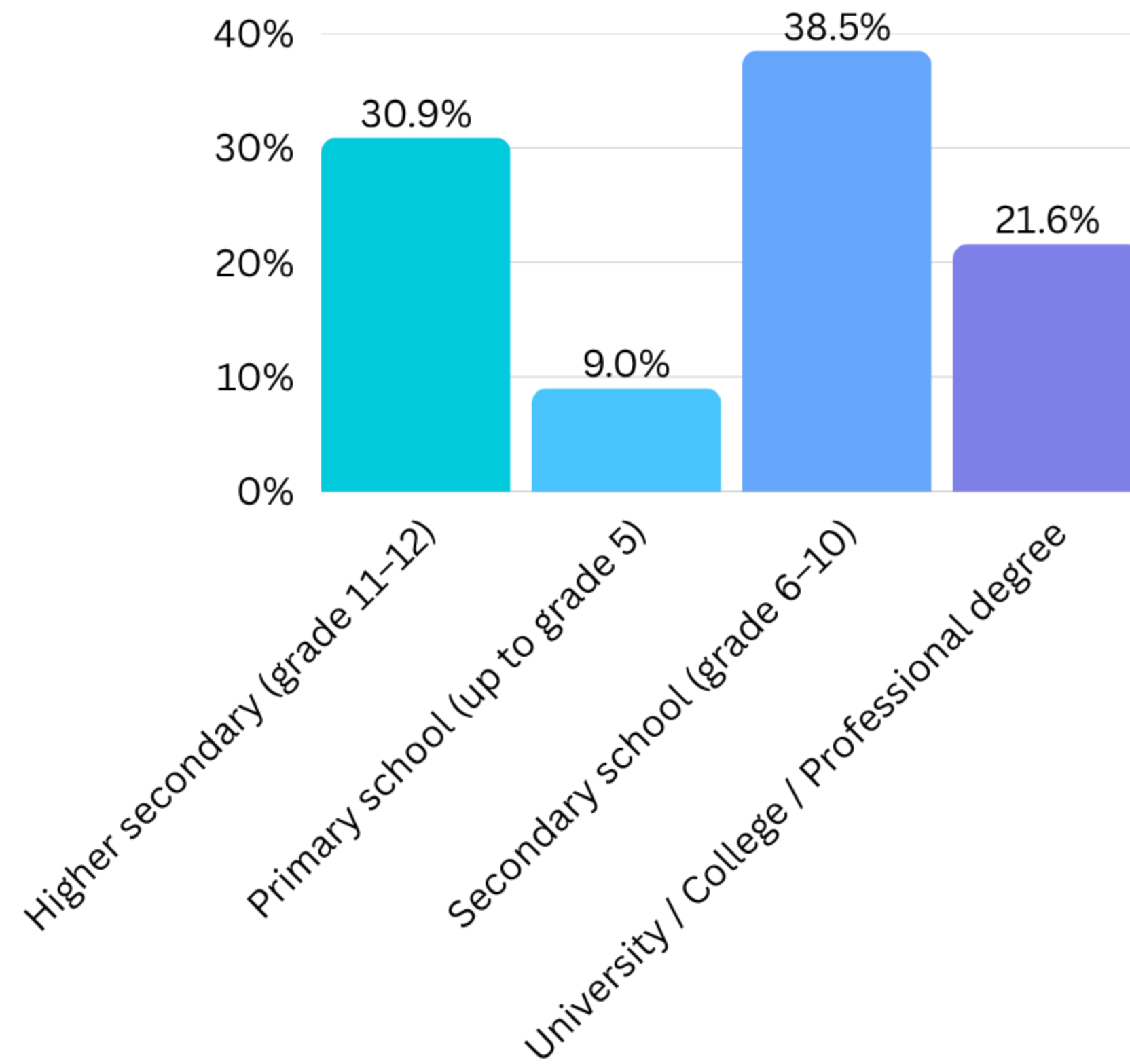
- The respondent distribution spans the key regions of the Maldives: Central Atolls (33%), North Atolls (28.7%), Male City/Greater Male (23.7%), and South Atolls (14.6%). This provides wide geographic coverage, with the majority of inputs coming from the Central and North Atolls—which matches national trends, as much of the population resides in these zones and Male City serves as the country’s main urban center.
- By ensuring input from diverse and representative regions, the survey fulfills its purpose—gathering broad-based opinions on environmental issues. The regional mix signals that findings will capture the views of those both in urban hubs and distributed island communities, offering well-rounded perspectives for policy and awareness building.

D4. Area Type



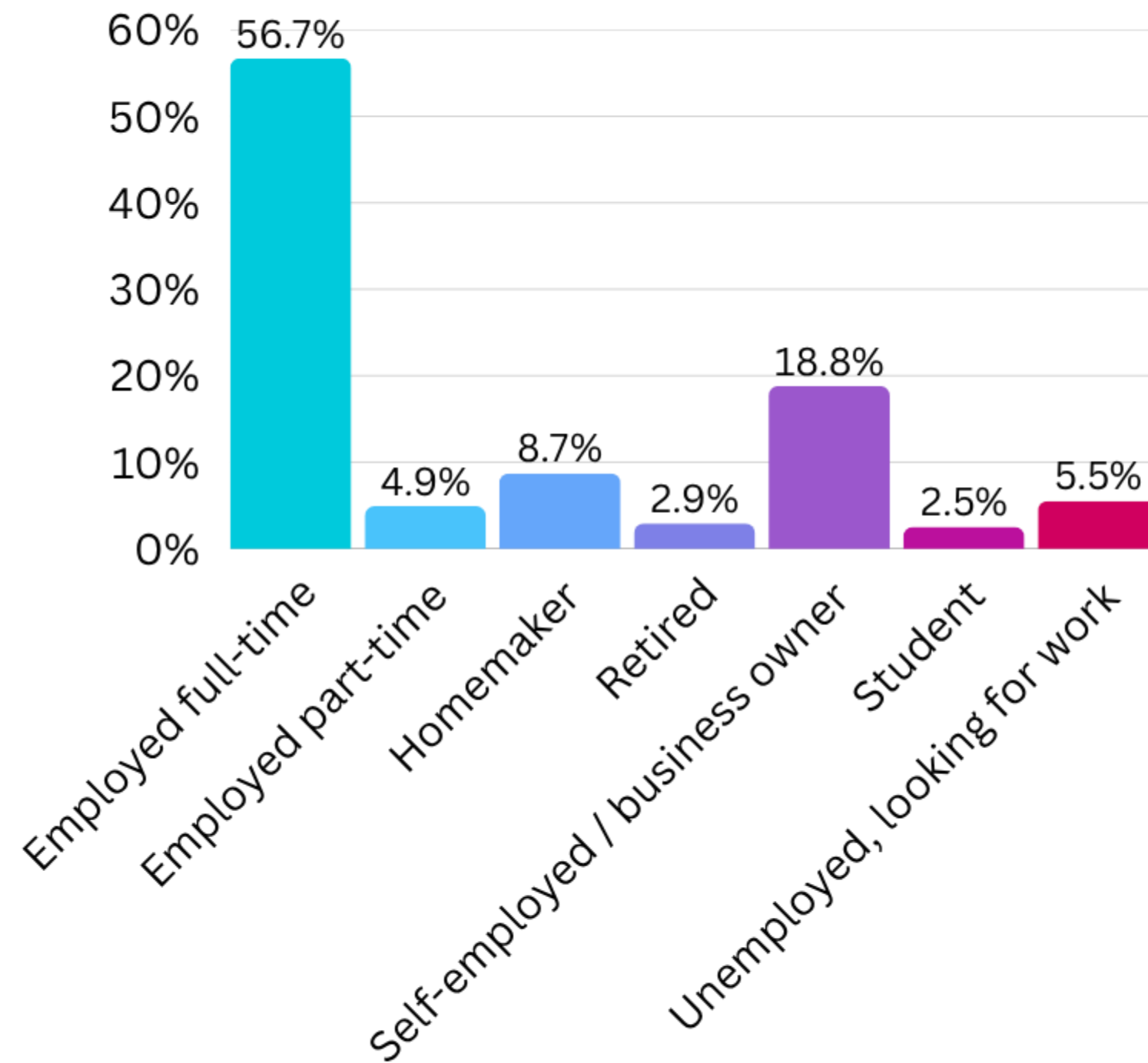
- The survey sample is almost evenly split between rural (Atoll Island) and urban (Male, Addu City) residents—50.9% and 49.1% respectively. This closely tracks the Maldives’ national profile, where roughly 57% of the population resides in rural areas (atolls and islands) and over 40% in urban centers. Such balanced representation is ideal for the survey’s purpose: capturing environmental perspectives across both established city hubs and diverse island communities. This enables the research to reflect authentic public sentiment and strengthens the foundation for broadly shared, effective policy recommendations.

D5. Education Level



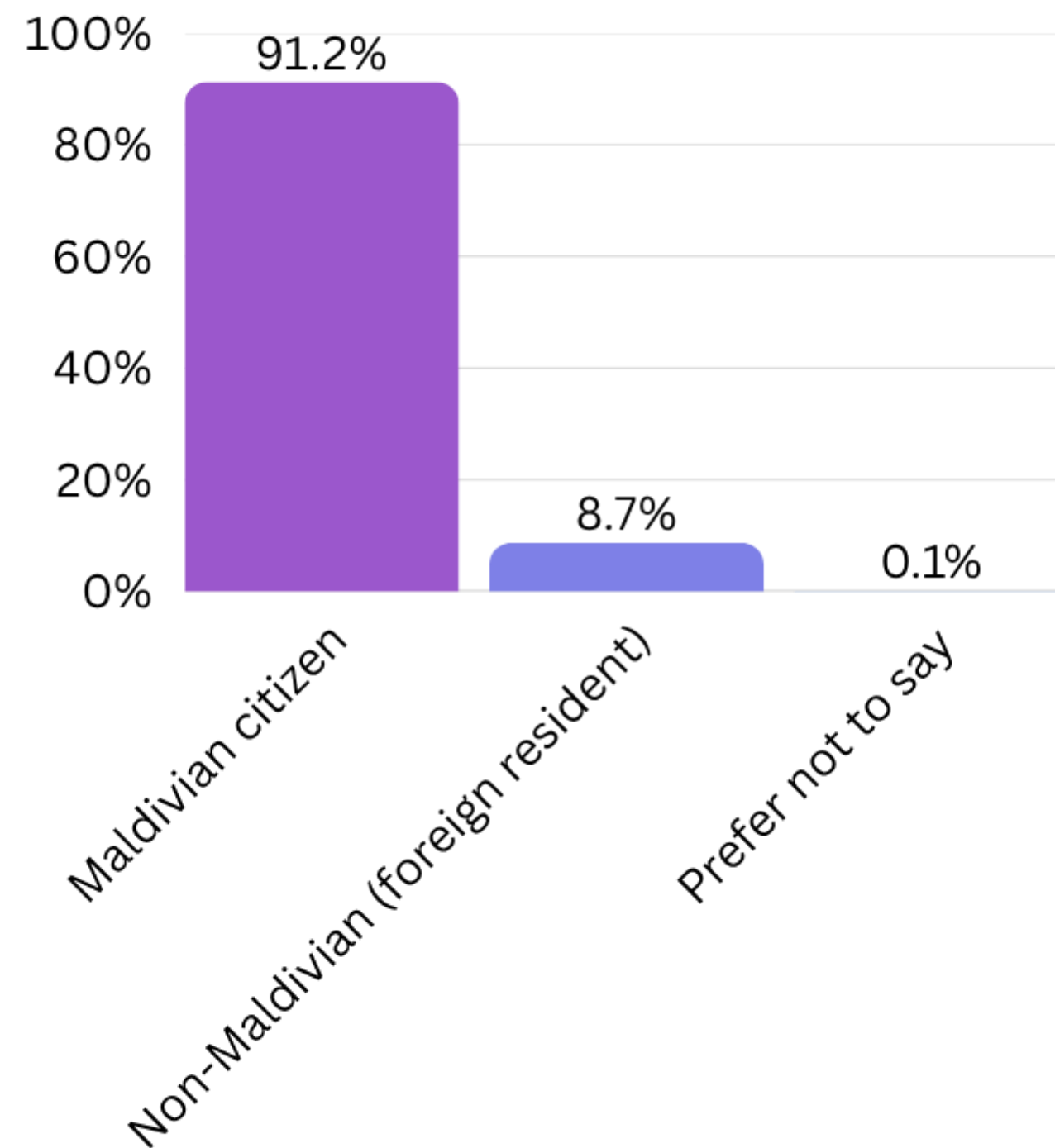
- The sample's range of educational backgrounds reinforces both the rigor and real-world relevance of the findings. Survey respondents exhibit a strong educational profile: 38.5% completed secondary school (grades 6–10), 30.9% achieved higher secondary (grades 11–12), and 21.6% hold university or professional degrees, with only 9% having primary education as their highest level. This mirrors national educational achievements, with secondary completion rates nearing 99% and tertiary enrollment close to 50% in the Maldives. The sample's broad educational range ensures the survey captures informed perspectives, strengthening the credibility and utility of its insights for shaping environmental research and policy.

D6. Employment Status



- More than half of the surveyed Maldivians (56.7%) are employed full-time—consistent with national labor trends showing a strong service sector and high workforce participation. Students make up 18.8%, demonstrating robust youth engagement—key for long-term environmental awareness. Smaller shares are part-time workers (4.9%), homemakers (8.7%), business owners (2.9%), retirees (2.5%), and those seeking work (3.5%).
- This diverse employment profile reflects the Maldives' evolving economy and supports the survey's goal: collecting broad-based, relevant public input for environmental policy and outreach. The mix of employed, students, and other roles ensures insights and recommendations will echo everyday realities across the islands.

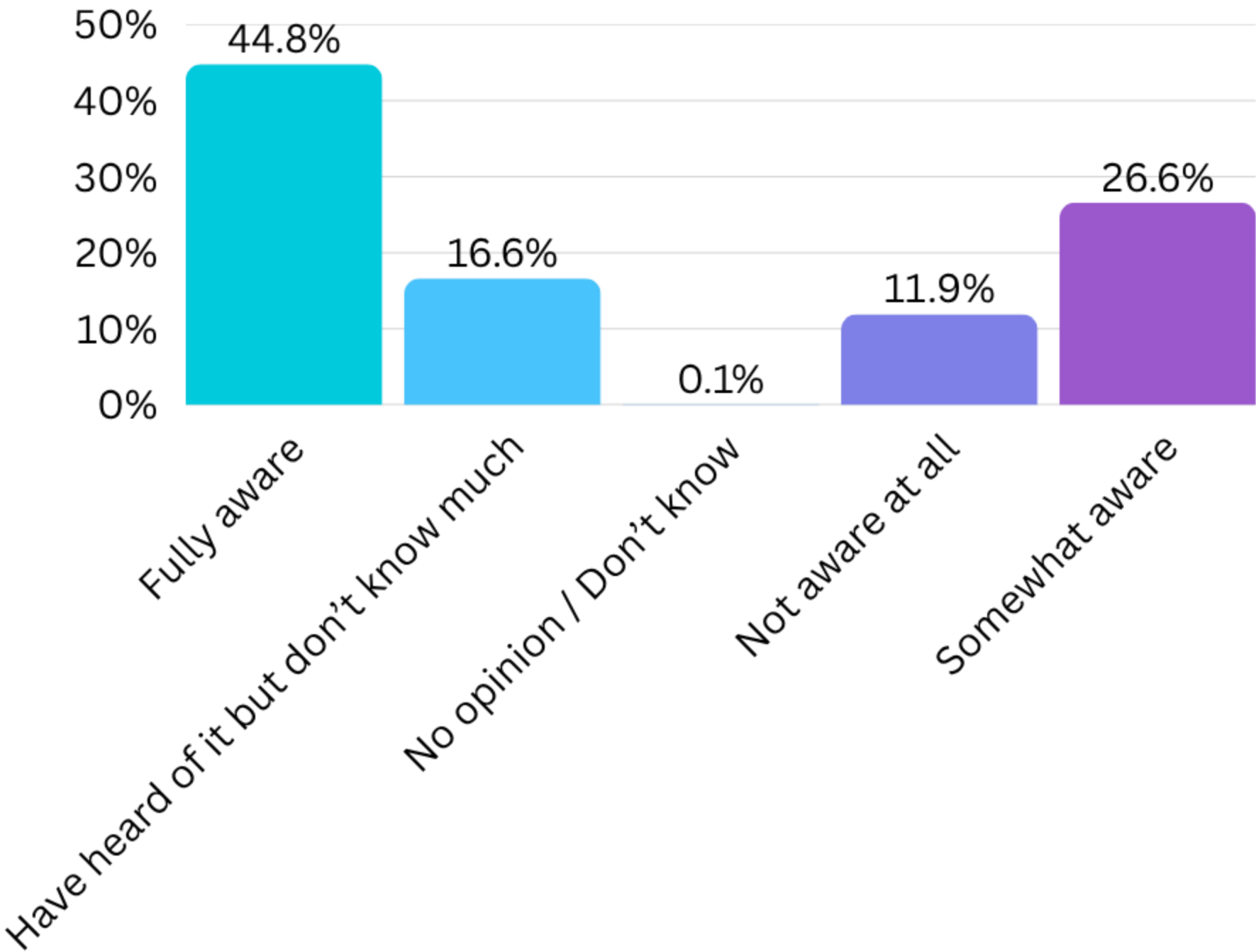
D7. Citizenship



- The survey features 91.2% Maldivian citizens, 8.7% foreign residents, and a negligible share preferring not to answer. This harmonic ratio aligns well with national population trends, where Maldivians form the vast majority and foreign residents contribute notably, particularly in the workforce. Capturing both citizens' and foreign residents' perspectives supports the survey's core intent: providing authentic, inclusive feedback for environmental policy discussions and public awareness in the Maldives.

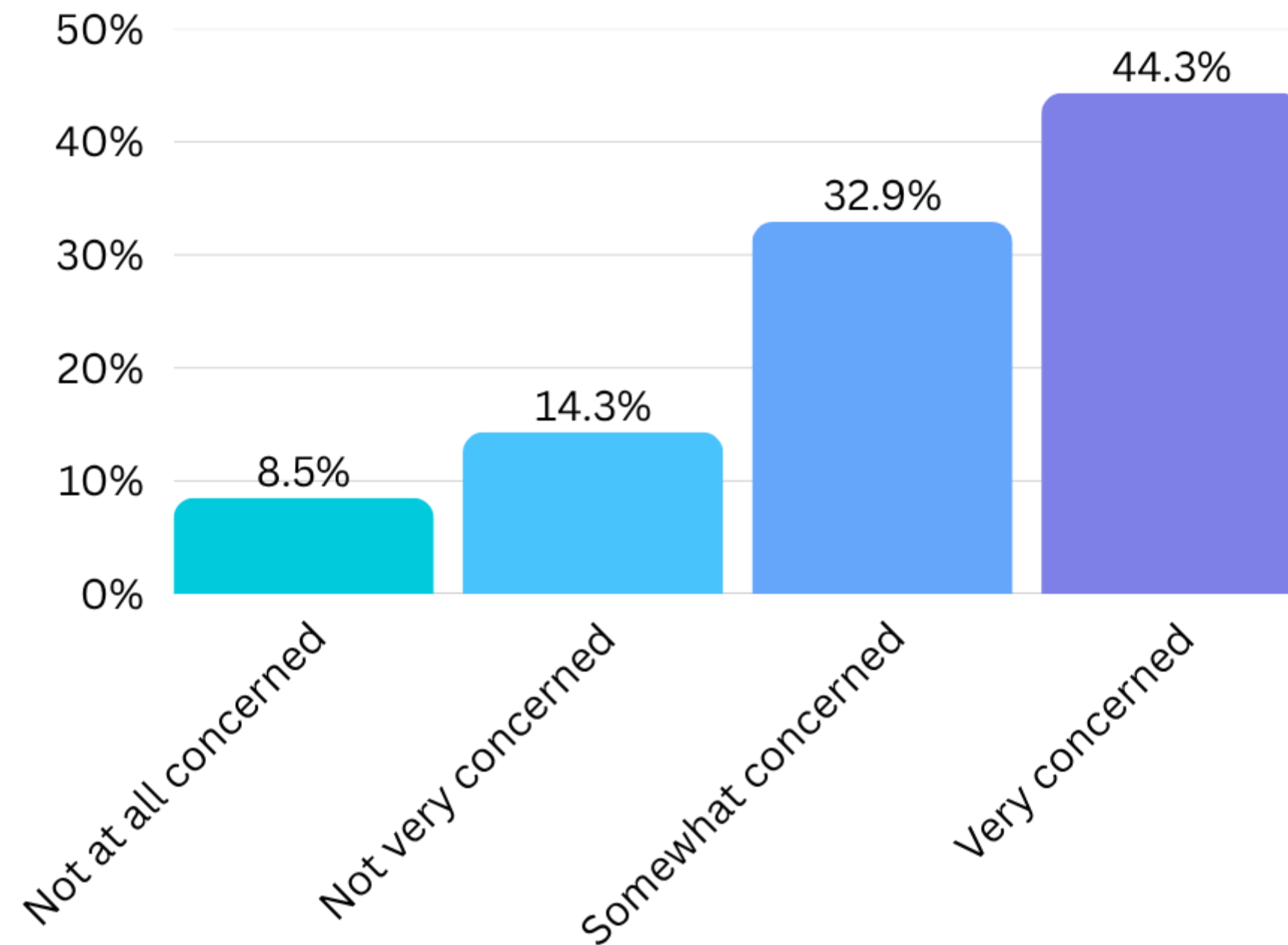
4. KEY SURVEY QUESTIONS & INSIGHTS

Q1: Did you know that the Maldives is currently one of just seventeen shark sanctuaries in the world, where shark fishing is prohibited?



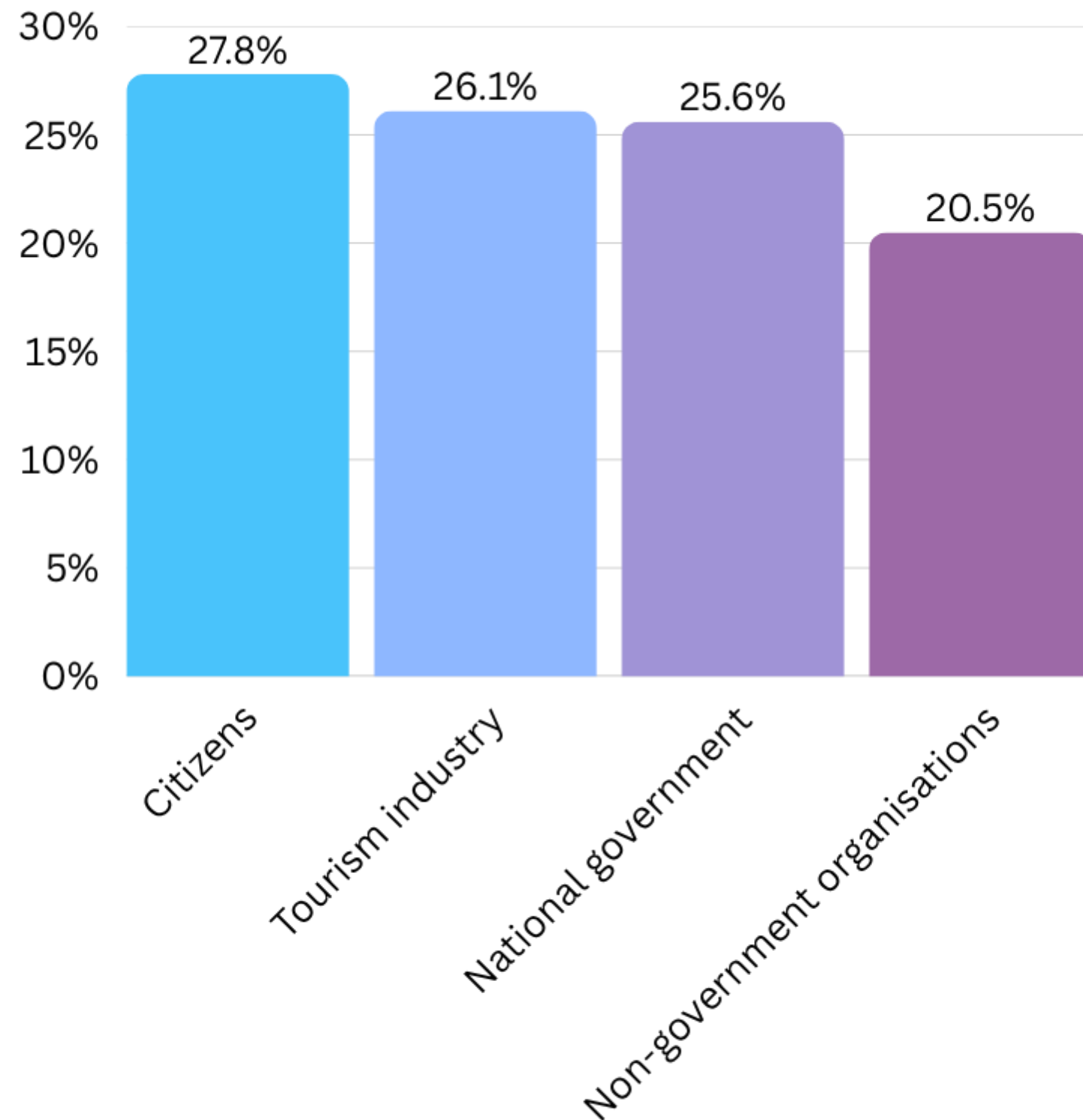
- Survey results indicate strong public awareness—44.8% are fully aware, and 26.6% are somewhat aware—that the Maldives is one of only seventeen shark sanctuaries globally, where shark fishing is prohibited. This aligns well with national outreach and education efforts, as environmental stewardship is a highly promoted public value. The widespread recognition, paired with additional groups who have heard of the shark sanctuary, confirms that conservation policies are reaching the community and supporting informed, responsible attitudes towards marine protection. These insights directly advance the survey’s goal: measuring the effectiveness of environmental awareness initiatives in the Maldives.

Q2. Sharks are vital to the Maldives' marine life, tourism and jobs. How concerned are you that new regulations allowing shark fishing could negatively impact the marine environment and the economy?



- A significant majority of survey respondents—44.3% very concerned and 32.9% somewhat concerned—express strong apprehension about the potential negative impacts of new regulations permitting shark fishing on the Maldives' marine environment and economy. Only a small fraction are not very or not at all concerned. This widespread concern reflects the Maldivian public's deep understanding of the importance of sharks for tourism, fisheries, and ecological health. The data supports the survey's objective: to capture genuine public opinion for guiding policy decisions and awareness programs related to marine conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

Q3. Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to protect and save vulnerable species such as sharks in the Maldives? Please select all that apply by order of importance.



- Survey respondents believe responsibility for protecting vulnerable species like sharks in the Maldives is broadly shared across society. Citizens (27.8%), the tourism industry (26.1%), and national government (25.6%) are seen as prime stewards, closely followed by non-government organisations (20.5%). This well-rounded perspective highlights the Maldives' collective environmental ethic and supports the survey's purpose: informing policy and public awareness by emphasising inclusive engagement among individuals, industries, and institutions for marine conservation.

Key Insights:

- Based on the consumer polling results and considering the recent context surrounding the Maldives' shark sanctuary and government policy shifts, the following overall conclusion can be drawn:
- The polling of 1,000 respondents reveals a well-informed, environmentally conscious Maldivian public with strong support for shark conservation efforts. A combined 71.4% of respondents are either fully or somewhat aware that the Maldives is among the world's select shark sanctuaries with a fishing ban, indicating that national outreach and education efforts have effectively raised public awareness about marine protection.
- Moreover, a significant majority—over 77%—expresses strong concern about lifting the shark fishing ban, reflecting widespread recognition of sharks' critical role in supporting marine biodiversity, sustainable fisheries, and tourism, which are vital to the Maldivian economy and environment.
- The perception that responsibility for protecting sharks is shared broadly among citizens, the tourism sector, the government, and NGOs highlights a collective environmental ethic. This shared stewardship mindset bodes well for collaborative conservation approaches and strengthens the foundation for effective policy implementation.
- Given the government's announced plan to lift the shark fishing ban in November 2025 under management controls—a move that has sparked domestic and international alarm—the strong public opposition reflected in this survey underscores the potential social and ecological risks associated with such regulatory changes. It further signals a pressing need for transparent dialogue, robust management plans, and heightened community engagement to balance economic livelihoods with sustainable conservation goals.
- These insights affirm that the Maldives' environmental awareness campaigns are achieving meaningful reach and resonance. They also emphasize the importance of factoring in public opinion and ecological science to guide policies that safeguard the country's marine heritage and reputation as a global shark sanctuary—a position that underpins one of its most valuable eco-tourism assets and national identities.
- This conclusion succinctly summarizes the survey findings while situating them in the broader conservation context of the Maldives as of 2025. It highlights both the success of awareness programs and the critical challenges ahead for policy and sustainable management.

Thank you

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