



Voting in Hate

A study of hate speech on
Facebook surrounding Sri
Lanka's Parliamentary
Election of 2015

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The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is an independent, non-partisan organisation that focuses primarily on issues of governance and conflict resolution. Formed in 1996 in the firm belief that the vital contribution of civil society to the public policy debate is in need of strengthening, CPA is committed to programmes of research and advocacy through which public policy is critiqued, alternatives identified and disseminated.

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Introduction

This study is the third in a series of critical briefs by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) on social media discourse in Sri Lanka, particularly around dangerous and hate speech. The report 'Liking Violence: A Study of Hate Speech on Facebook in Sri Lanka' published in September 2014¹ was the first publication looking at this issue; followed by 'Saving Sunil: A study of dangerous speech around Facebook page dedicated to Sgt. Sunil Rathnayake' published in October 2015².

The General Election in August 2015 saw the strategic use of social media as a tool for political campaigning and election related activity in Sri Lanka, with Facebook emerging as the most used social media platform used by candidates and political parties³. Visible also was the phenomenon of supporters, friends and detractors of candidates openly posting material online via Facebook, in addition to the candidates themselves. The relatively greater freedom of expression found in social media as opposed to traditional media proved to be a double edged sword in that it also opened the door to individuals posting negative, defamatory and objectionable material targeting candidates and rival political parties. This included accounts and pages on Facebook set up for different purposes, which had previously posted or featured hate material targeting various minorities or groups. These accounts, groups and pages afforded a ready-made following of members who were arguably receptive to hate speech thinly veiled as political content. This phenomenon of existing Facebook groups, pre-dating the General Election, being appropriated for party political campaigning and propaganda couched in hate speech is a new development in Sri Lankan social media and politics.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine and document the adoption of groups, accounts and pages on Facebook, with a propensity to produce and promote hate or dangerous speech, for election related political campaigning.
2. To examine the nature and extent of hate speech content used for political activity in the sample, including motives linking primary and secondary targets.
3. To determine what lessons Sri Lanka can learn from this experience and what recommendations or actions if any can be adopted in future; by the state, the Elections Commission, Political parties and candidates.

Methodology

Data gathering and analysis was carried out on 11 Facebook pages known to post hate content. These pages and accounts were examined to ascertain the extent to which they were appropriated to disseminate online hate speech content related to the election, specific politicians and partisan politics. The duration of the monitoring was a period of 4 weeks prior to the General Election of 2015 - from 17th July 2015 to 17th August 2015.

The selection of pages was based on the level of hate speech content, firstly among the 20 pages monitored in the 2014 'Liking Violence' study by CPA. This selection was considered primarily with the view of maintaining a thread of continuity in CPA's overall study of online hate loci. Seven out of

¹ <http://www.cpalanka.org/liking-violence-a-study-of-hate-speech-on-Facebook-in-sri-lanka/>

² <http://www.cpalanka.org/saving-sunil-a-study-of-dangerous-speech-around-a-facebook-page-dedicated-to-sgt-sunil-rathnayake/>

³ Sri Lanka Parliamentary election 2015 – How did social media make a difference? - <http://groundviews.org/2015/09/03/sri-lanka-parliamentary-election-2015-how-did-social-media-make-a-difference/>

the 20 Facebook pages included in the 2014 study remain active, containing relevant content for the present study, and were hence included in this study.

Four other Facebook pages (No. 8 through 11 below) were selected based on their high content of hate speech, and links (such as cross posting) with other pages included in the study.

The 11 selected Facebook pages are:

1. Sinhala Buddhist, <https://web.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/>
2. International Ministry of Buddha Sasana, <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalBuddhistCouncil>
3. We are Sinhala, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/%E0%B6%85%E0%B6%B4%E0%B7%92-%E0%B7%83%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%82%E0%B7%84%E0%B6%BD-We-are-Sinhala/163806990380402>
4. Sinhala Ravaya Jathika Sanvidhanaya (National organization of *Sinhala Ravaya*), <https://www.facebook.com/SinhalaRavaya>
Helaya (Sri Lankan), <https://www.facebook.com/Helaya.SriLanka?fref=pb>
6. Soorya Wanshaye Sinhalaya (Sinhalese descendants of the son), <https://www.facebook.com/official.sinhalaya?ref=stream>
7. Chara purusha, (Spy), <https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha?ref=stream>
8. Hadawathinma Laankikai - Hamba virodhee Peramuna (Sri Lankan from the heart – Anti-Muslim front), https://www.facebook.com/Hambavirodhaperamuna?fref=nf&hc_location=ufi
9. Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist force/army), <https://web.facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena/?ref=profile>
10. Sinhalaya Sinhalaya (Sinhalese of the Sinhala land), <https://www.facebook.com/sinhalaya.sinhalaya.3?fref=ts>
11. Hambayage Niruvatha (Nakedness of the Muslim), <https://www.facebook.com/pages/%E0%B7%84%E0%B6%B8%E0%B7%8A%E0%B6%B6%E0%B6%BA%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%8A%E0%B6%9C%E0%B7%9A-%E0%B6%B1%E0%B7%92%E0%B6%BB%E0%B7%94%E0%B7%80%E0%B6%AD/650805758345724>

NOTE: The above Facebook page (number 11) last accessed on 14th January 2016, has since been taken down or visible only to a selected group.

Posts and comments with content relevant to the study were captured and translated in to English.

Several Facebook (FB) pages included in the study carried election related hate content during the weeks prior to the election but took down this content, both posts as well as comments, just before or soon after the day of the election. For example, the International Ministry of Buddha Sasana (International Buddhist Council) page took down all posts during the period 28th July – 28th August 2015. This posed a challenge for the study where material was taken down before it could be archived. Hence the posts and comments captured and examined in this study are a representation of the hate material posted on these pages.

While critical examination and study of online hate speech is relatively young, various tools and guidelines for identifying and analyzing hate speech have been developed. William Warner and Julia Hirschberg⁴ developed the use of software systems to identify hate speech target groups by classification, based on categories of targets (such as anti-women, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim). Another framework adopted by some ongoing comparative studies on hate speech is critical discourse analysis (CDA). These and other guidelines or methods may be adopted for further detailed study.

The framework applied in analyzing hate speech and dangerous speech in this study are the guidelines formulated by political scientist Prof. Susan Benesch who is a leading global expert and thinker on countering online hate speech⁵. Benesch's hypothesis has been applied in several studies such as the Umati Project in Kenya to identify hate speech and dangerous speech. It was also the framework for CPA's previous studies 'Liking Violence: A Study of Hate Speech on Facebook in Sri Lanka' and 'Saving Sunil: A study of dangerous speech around Facebook page dedicated to Sgt. Sunil Rathnayake', published in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

Scope of study

Facebook is the preferred social media platform among Sri Lankans⁶ with a membership of over 3.1 million account holders.⁷ A recent survey and report published by the Centre for Policy Alternatives on the 'Consumption and Perceptions of Mainstream and Social Media in the Western Province', reveals that 51.1% of youth go online for news while Facebook specifically emerges the most popular source of news for youth aged between 18-24 years⁸. Not surprisingly it also emerged the preferred choice for online election campaigning. The 2015 General Election was one of the most crucial and keenly fought elections in recent Sri Lankan history, saw political parties and candidates venturing in to new methods and mediums of campaigning, including online engagement, primarily via Facebook and also on Twitter. The front runners of the two main political parties Ranil Wickremesinghe of the United National Party (UNP), leading the United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG) and Mahinda Rajapaksa of the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) both maintained, amongst other social media profiles, official Facebook and Twitter accounts. While they and several other candidates maintained Facebook pages as platforms for online campaigning and party political propaganda, what is notable for this study is the large volume of non-candidates who posted election and party political content on existing Facebook pages, attracting comments and

⁴ Detecting hate speech on the worldwide web, William Warner and Julia Hirschberg - www.aclweb.org/anthology/W12-2103

⁵ Prof. Benesch is the founder of the Dangerous Speech Project which studies the spread of speech that incites people to violence – while protecting freedom of expression teaches International Human Rights at the American University and also serves as the Everett Fellow in Genocide Prevention at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁶ Nalaka Gunawardene - <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2015/05/10/making-a-change-using-social-media/>

⁷ Facebook statistics

⁸ Consumption and Perceptions of Mainstream and Social Media in the Western Province : published 28th January 2016 : <http://www.cpalanka.org/full-report-consumption-and-perceptions-of-mainstream-and-social-media-in-the-western-province/>

dialogue from their members/followers. This segment of social media discourses contained hate speech in the guise of political propaganda aimed at the existing group members/followers.

Hate speech content on social media such as Facebook is difficult to monitor or control since, as we have repeatedly pointed out in previous studies, much of it is in the Sinhala language (often also written utilizing the English alphabet) and hence remain undetected by domain or app owners and their automated filtering and monitoring mechanisms (which are designed to weed out or warn about hate speech or offensive content in the English language).

As indicated in the previous chapter, some of the Facebook pages included in this study took down or deleted offensive content posted on their pages just prior to the election date or soon after. Some have taken down all comments by members. This could also be a strategy by the page owners, to avoid long-term legal, social or political repercussions on account of the content produced, disseminated and featured. This also limits the scope of analyzing the total volume of hate content which was online prior to the election, and its scope or depth of influence in the electoral process and beyond.

Accordingly, this study is not a comprehensive exposition of online hate speech surrounding politics and elections. It focuses on the appropriation of a selection of existing Facebook pages known to disseminate hate content for party political partisan and election oriented hate speech. While the pages under review contain hate speech in general, an attempt was made to distinguish hate speech content that was politically motivated; given the proximity to the election. While some hate content was clearly politically motivated, some hate content posted was more general, targeting a particular community or group such as Muslims or women. The challenge therein was identifying hate content with overtly racial, religious or gender based slurs, which nevertheless were politically motivated or targeted a particular candidate or political party.

NOTE: Posts and comments which are offensive and amount to hate speech or dangerous speech are reproduced in this report purely for research purposes and in no way meant to condone or publicize such views or to insult or cause pain of mind to victims of such attacks.

TARGETS AND PRODUCERS OF HATE SPEECH

PRODUCERS

As noted in the ‘Saving Sunil’ report⁹, profiling producers of online hate speech is hampered by the lack of verifiable data, due to the proliferation of fake accounts and fake identities. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some assumptions in profiling producers, based on available data and analysis of page and member samples.

As evident in the content and pages studied in this report, a very high percentage of hate content is posted in the Sinhala language, with comments in Sinhala produced using the English alphabet. More than 41% of Sri Lanka’s Facebook users are youth between 18-24 years.¹⁰ This together with accessible data on member pages such as photographs, interests, euphemisms and language used

⁹ <http://www.cpalanka.org/saving-sunil-a-study-of-dangerous-speech-around-a-facebook-page-dedicated-to-sgt-sunil-rathnayake/>

¹⁰ According to Socialbakers data - <http://roar.lk/five-unconventional-social-media-trends-sri-lanka/>

indicate that the key followers and producers of hate content are youth. There is no evidence to suggest direct posts or comments by candidates themselves to malign opponents.

Targets

The scope of this study is specific to election related and party political hate speech. Hence the primary targets of hate speech within the Facebook pages under review are political leaders, candidates and political parties. Given this context of the study, the primary targets of hate speech are political candidates from the United National Party (UNP), Muslim, Christian and female candidates. The Tamil community and the gay community are targeted to a lesser degree. These categories are drawn broadly since there is clear overlap of the categories of targets and none are mutually exclusive. For example, a target may be a member of the UNP and a woman; or a member of the UNP and a Muslim; or a member of the UNP, a woman and perceived to be sympathetic to Muslims.

Political candidates and the United National Party

Hate speech in the guise of political speech focused mainly on the UNP as well as candidates contesting under the UNP led United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG). Individual candidates including the Prime Minister are targeted viciously, citing both political views and actions as well as personal lives such as religious affiliation or ethnicity. Conspiracy theories tying the UNP and minority parties flag imminent resurgence of pro-LTTE powers as well as a rise of Muslim separatism. Most Facebook pages warned members not to vote for the UNP, citing the UNP's coalition with the Tamil National Alliance and the All Ceylon Muslim Congress as a threat to the well-being of Sinhalese and Buddhism.

බදුර්දින්, සාලි, හකීම් මේ ඔක්කොම බලාගෙන ඉන්නේ සිත්හල අයිටි කෙලින්න අද
UNP එක මුස්ලිම් පක්ෂවල අතකොලුවක් වෙලා ඉවරයි හෙට UNP එක ISIS එක්
අතකොලුවක් වන එක නොඅනුමානයි !!!



Translation:

'Baduridin, Saly, Hakeem are all waiting to finish us Sinhalese. Today the UNP has become the servant of the Muslim parties. Tomorrow the UNP will become the servant of ISIS for sure!'

Graphic text:

'Voting for the UNP is voting for the Muslim Congress chum. All the extremists are in their list.'

Link¹¹

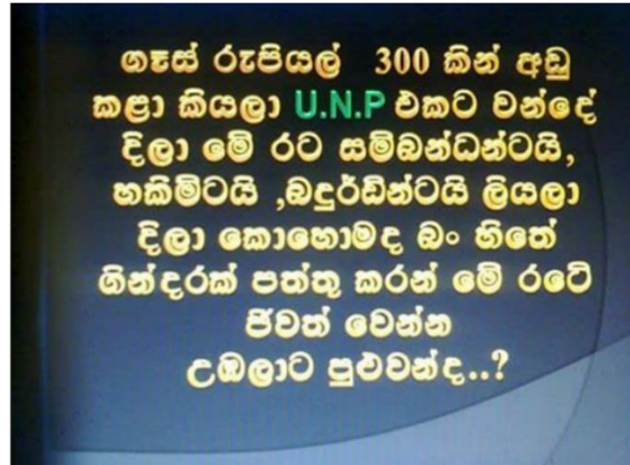
¹¹

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/874705242622440/?type=3>

Translation:

'How can you live with peace in your heart if you hand over this country to Sambanthan, Hakeem and Badurdeen by voting for the UNP in gratitude for reducing the price of gas by 300 rupees?'

Link¹²



Translation:

'Are there Sinhalese in the UNP who will vote for these outcasts who barked loud against the Bodu Bala Sena?'

(Pictured L to R) Rajitha Senanayake, Palitha Thawarapperuma, Mangala Samaraweera, Mjibar Rahuman, Rauf Hakeem, Rishad Badurdeen

Link¹³

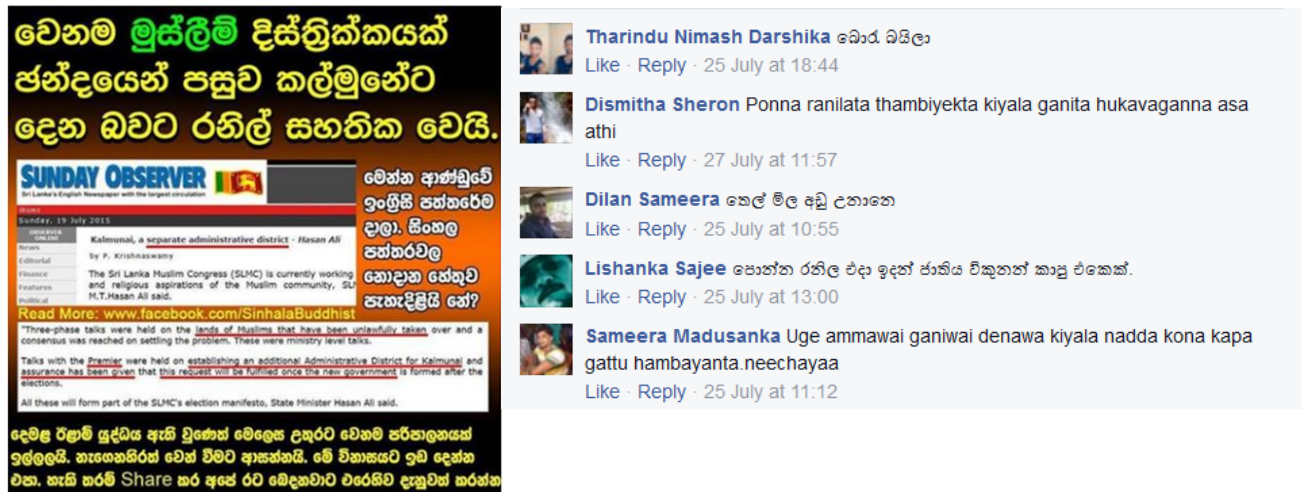
¹²

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/867102976716000/?type=3>

¹³

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/876902379069393/?type=3>

Example of comments to post below (post reviewed in detail on page 26)



**වෙනම මුස්ලිම් දිස්ත්‍රික්කයක්
ජන්දයෙන් පසුව කල්මුනේට
දෙන බවට රනිල් සහතික වෙයි.**

SUNDAY OBSERVER
Sri Lanka's English Newspaper with the largest circulation
Sunday, 19 July 2015
Kalmunai, a separate administrative district - Hasan Ali
by P. Krishnaswamy
The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) is currently working and religious aspirations of the Muslim community, SLMC, H.T. Hasan Ali said.
Read More: www.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist
Three-phase talks were held on the lands of Muslims that have been unlawfully taken over and a consensus was reached on settling the problem. These were ministry level talks.
Talks with the Premier were held on establishing an additional Administrative District for Kalmunai and assurance has been given that this request will be fulfilled once the new government is formed after the elections.
All these will form part of the SLMC's election manifesto, State Minister Hasan Ali said.

**මෙන්න ආණ්ඩුවේ
ඉංග්‍රීසි පත්තරේම
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පත්තරවල
නොදන්නා හේතුව
සැකැස්මයි නේ?**

**දෙමළ ඊළාම් යුද්ධය ඇති වූයේ මෙලෙස උතුරට වෙනම පරිපාලනයක්
ඉල්ලූයි. නැතහොත් වෙන් වීමට ආසන්නයි. මේ විනාසයට ඉඩ දෙන්න
වන. හැකි කරමි Share කර ඇපේ රට බෙදනවාට වරෙයිව දැකුවත් කරන්න**

Tharindu Nimash Darshika බොරු බයිලා
Like · Reply · 25 July at 18:44

Dismitha Sheron Ponna ranilata thambiyekta kiyala ganita hukavaganna asa
athi
Like · Reply · 27 July at 11:57

Dilan Sameera කෙල් මිල අඩු උනානෙ
Like · Reply · 25 July at 10:55

Lishanka Sajee පොත්ත රනිල් එදා ඉදන් ජාතිය විකුනන් කාපු එකෙක්.
Like · Reply · 25 July at 13:00

Sameera Madusanka Uge ammayai ganiwai denawa kiyala nadda kona kapa
gattu hambayanta. neechayaa
Like · Reply · 25 July at 11:12

Translation of post heading:

Ranil promises a separate Muslim administrative district after the elections’.

Link¹⁴

Translation of comments:

Tharindu Nimash Darshika: ‘All lies’

Dismitha Sheron: ‘Faggot Ranil must be wanting his wife to be f----d by a Muslim’.

Dilan Sameera: ‘The price of fuel was reduced, right’.

Lishanka Sajee: ‘Faggot Ranil has always sold out the country’.

Sameera Madushanka: ‘Doesn’t it say that he is giving his wife and mother to those Muslims who cut their end’.

Links to comments¹⁵

¹⁴

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3>

¹⁵ Tharindu Nimash Darshika

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3&comment_id=865717436854554&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Dismitha Sheron

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3&comment_id=866586113434353&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R8%22%7D

Dilan Sameera

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3&comment_id=865588493534115&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R7%22%7D

Lishanka Sajee

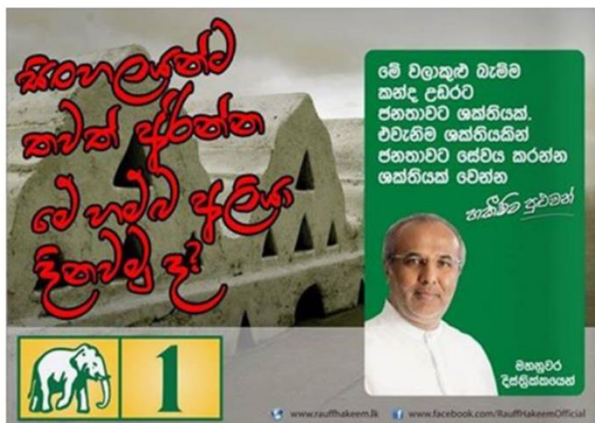
https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3&comment_id=865612506865047&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R6%22%7D

Sameera Madushanka

Muslim political candidates

A perusal of the Facebook pages under review reveals a prevalence of hate speech targeting Muslims. It's unsurprising therefore that election related hate speech also targeted Muslim politicians and the Muslim community. Politicians and candidates from the UNFVG including the All Ceylon Muslim Congress are individually targeted. While the speech itself identifies and targets individuals by name, underlying Islamophobia based on fear and anger at the perceived expansion of Muslim influence and culture both in Sri Lanka and worldwide is evident. Local events such as the Kettarama cricket stadium clash between Sinhala and Muslim spectators, local murders as well as disturbing imagery of brutal killings of humans and animals in other countries are posted as warnings of the spread of ISIS inspired Islam and Muslim political power. Derogatory terms such as 'hambaya' and 'thambiya' are often used.

සිංහල සුළඟට අසුවෙලා විලාකුලක් වගේ ඇතට ගහගෙන ගිහිල්ලා මහ වීඳුදට කඩාගෙන වැටෙන හැටි බලාගෙන ඉඳපල්ලා



Translation:

'Watch and wait while (the) Sinhala are caught up in the wind like a cloud, blown far away and fall in to the sea'.

Graphic text

'Shall we vote for this Muslim elephant so that Sinhalese can be f---d some more?'

Link¹⁶

[https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?ty](https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3&comment_id=865591750200456&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R5%22%7D)

¹⁶

[https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/876247742468190/?ty](https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/876247742468190/?type=3)



Translation:

'Muslims then – "I will wash your feet, do your laundry, just give me a place to say. That is all I ask my lord".

Muslims now – "We insist on having a part of the country".'

Link¹⁷

Translation:

'Allah's brave children parading the streets with severed heads in hand. The non-teaching of Islam'

Link¹⁸



Christian political candidates

Hate speech targeting individual politicians from the UNP who are Christians brand them as aliens and a threat to the existence of Buddhism. Posts and comments examined elsewhere in this report highlights the emphatic view that a non-Buddhist cannot be elected to the high office of Prime Minister. It is noteworthy that some posts (most of it taken down immediately post-election) targeted non-Christian politicians, falsely identifying them as Christians.

¹⁷

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865059876920310/?type=3>

¹⁸

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/876247742468190/?type=3&comment_id=876521885774109&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R2%22%7D



Translation:

'Are you a breed of outcasts to betray the country to the murderers of Soma Thero?

The American Christian fundamentalist murderers in sheep's clothing who issued the death warrant on Soma Thero. – Jehovah's witnesses, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventist, Born again, Jesus alive, People's church.

Bernadine Rosy Ramanayake - (Born again, Jesus alive) main doer in Sri Lanka

Pastor Eran Wickramaratne - (UNP Treasurer) Leader of the Assembly of God gang in Sri Lanka

John Amarathunga - (Minister of Police who facilitated Police help for fundamentalists to hunt Buddhists during 2001-2004)

If governance of the country is handed over to them, Sinhala Buddhists will be doomed

Will we allow them to build their kingdom of God over the dead body of Soma Thero whom they killed?

May lightning strike (destroy) your future generations for every vote you cast for them.'

Link¹⁹

NOTE: This post has since been taken down.

Women

A lesser volume of hate speech targeting women was noted. However, the posts targeting female candidates from the UNP elicit disturbing responses suggesting physical or sexual violence.

The post -

¹⁹ https://www.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/photos_stream

එක සිත්හලයෙක්ට රෙද්දක් ඇදගෙන ගිහින් UNP එකට වන්දේ දෙන්න පුළුවන්ද...?
ආගමට ජාතියට වඩා පක්ෂේ ලොකු කර ගන්න අවජාතකයෙක්වනම් පුළුවන් වෙයි



Translation:

'Can a single Sinhalese vote for the UNP without shame? Only a bastard who considers the party more important than race and religion will do that.'

Rosy Senanayake says "Sri Lanka cannot be developed until Sinhala Buddhist mentality is removed"

'Wake up Sinhalese – this is our final chance'

Link²⁰

Comments –

Dil Perera Meki kawuru kiyalada dan ne hithan inne.
Like · Reply · 7 August at 22:46

Chandra Chandra අම්ම.වයි දුවවයි.දෙන්නවම්.
එකට තියල.අර වැඩෙනමයි.
ඉස්සර වෙලාම කරන්න
තියෙන්නෙ.
Like · Reply · 9 August at 00:07

Asiri Nuwan
මේ ප්‍රචණ්ඩ කාන්තා විමුක්තිවාදී ගැහැනක
කරන රෝසි සෙනානායකගේ දියණියයි

රෝසි මහත්මිය නම් දියණියත්ව හරි මහට
ගන්න බැරුව රට හඳුන්වා ගනවා
Like · Reply · 2 · 7 August at 23:00

Tharindu Dananjaya badu wesiyek koheda yana....

Jayalath Priyantha meki bible kariyak
Like · Reply · 30 August at 12:11

Translation:

Dil Perera 'Wonder who she thinks she is'

Chandra 'First of all must keep both mother and daughter together and do that (implies sexual act) to them'

Asiri Nuwan 'This is the daughter of Rosy Senanayake who talks of women's rights. She cannot even correct her daughter but tries to correct the country'

Tharindu Dananjaya 'Useless prostitute'

Jayantha Priyantha 'She is a Bible-woman (Christian)'

Links to comments²¹

²⁰

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/872320282860936/?type=3>

²¹ Dil Perera

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/872320282860936/?type=3&comment_id=872331942859770&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Chandra

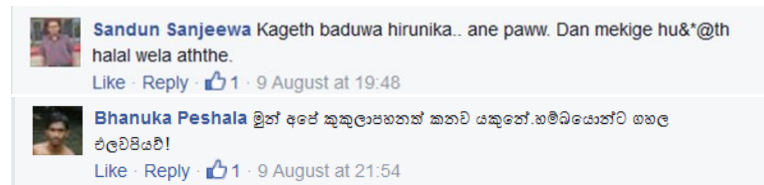
https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/872320282860936/?type=3&comment_id=872906769468954&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Translation:

'Hirunika becomes halal

Crescent moon and star atop the lamp, the cock bird which adorned the lamp is served on the table. The population of Colombo who cast more preferential votes for her than for Udaya Gammanpila – what have you to say now?'

Link²²



Sandun Sanjeewa *'Hirunika is everybody's toy. Poor girl, now her genitals also must be halal'*

Bhanuka Peshala *'These devils are destroying our traditional lamp. The Muslims (derogatory term) should be beaten and chased away'*

Links to comments ²³

Asiri Nuwan

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/872320282860936/?type=3&comment_id=872337082859256&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Tharindu Dananjaya

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/872320282860936/?type=3&comment_id=872507159508915&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Jayalath Priyantha

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/872320282860936/?type=3&comment_id=885113051581659&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R3%22%7D

²²

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/873313506094947/?type=3>

²³ Bhanuka Peshala

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/873313506094947/?type=3&comment_id=873368876089410&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R0%22%7D

Sandun Sanjeewa

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/873313506094947/?type=3&comment_id=873329369426694&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D

Tamil community

Posts and comments fanning hatred and suspicion of the Tamil political leaders as champions of separatism.



Translation:

'Fulfill the historic duty of Tamils – Support Maithree, Ranil and the TNA, says Global Tamil Forum.

Even though the Sinhalese might not remember this, Tamil tigers are still rooting for Elam.

Share with everyone'.

Link²⁴

Translation:

'Tamil National Alliance ready to divide country. Federal system promised.

Says they will only support a party which agrees to a federal system. Which means those who form a national government with the Tamil National Alliance are willing to give a part of the country (to them).

Understand the danger. Do not give victory to traitors who divide the Sinhala voters and divide the country. Share and inform others'.

Link²⁵

Defining variables

²⁴ <https://web.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/photos/pb.151742781933.-2207520000.1452680128./10153550705266934/?type=3&theater>

²⁵ <https://web.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/photos/a.10150264663426934.380286.151742781933/10153548780271934/?type=3>



The dangerousness of a particular speech is concomitant to five variables which affect the intensity of the speech. Prof. Benesch has identified the five variables as the speaker, the audience, the speech itself, social and historical context in which the speech is disseminated, and the mode of dissemination.²⁶

The Speaker

The key element is the influence or power the speaker wields over the audience. Such authority may be derived from a legitimate office such as national, religious or community leadership position or it may be derived from an unconventional or illegal source. A speaker who is able to influence his audience is far more likely to succeed inciting them to action, even violence. In the instance of the present study, the voice of Buddhist religious leaders lends credibility and importance to a cause. Given the Sri Lankan social context where the endorsement of Buddhist clergy is significant in clothing any endeavor with legitimacy, it is not surprising that the voices of Buddhist clergy, particularly those engaged in political activism such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) are found in the Facebook pages under review.

Other examples include posts with sayings attributed to respected personalities such as Anagarika Dharmapala who was a Buddhist revivalist and one of the founders of non-violent Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism as well as world leaders. (See examples on following pages).

Video posts of speeches made by candidates who are members of the Buddhist clergy, extolling their brand of nationalism are found in several Facebook pages under review. Similarly, graphics containing images of Buddhist clergy are also used in posts. While the speech itself may not contain explicit hate rhetoric, it does lend credence to the cause expounded by the Facebook page and serves to legitimize hate content posted as comments in response to the administrator's post and elsewhere on the page.

Example: Video posted on Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) Facebook page titled, '*Bodu Bala Peramuna on behalf of the owners of Sri Lanka*'; of Ven. Galaboda Aththe Gnanasara Thero (political wing of the BBS), "*We are the owners of Sri Lanka, we are not mere citizens...*"

Link²⁷



²⁶ <http://www.worldpolicy.org/sites/default/files/Dangerous%20Speech%20Guidelines%20Benesch%20January%202012.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena/videos/966729476680413/>



Translation:

'Ven. Gnanasara and other Bodu Bala Sena candidates must be in Parliament in order to safeguard the rights of Buddhists'.

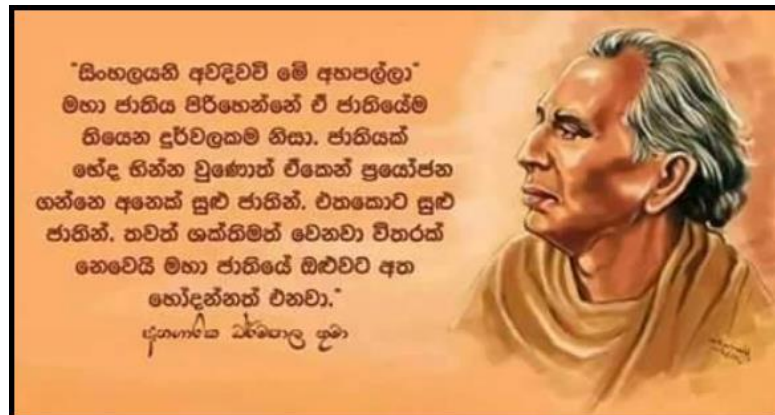
Link²⁸

Translation:

'Wake up Sinhalese and listen; the majority race diminishes because of its own weaknesses. When there is discord and disunity within the race, the minorities benefit from it. Not only will they become stronger, but they will dominate the majority race'.

Anagarika Dharmapala

Link²⁹



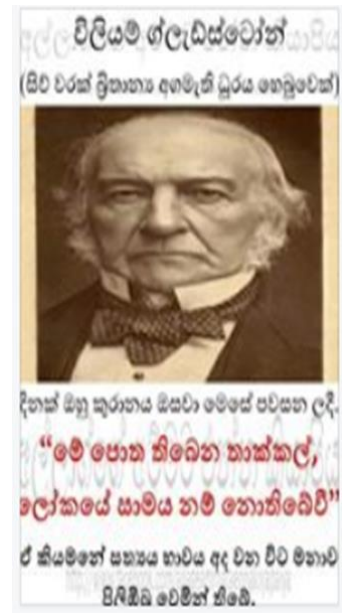
Translation:

'William Gladstone (4 times Prime Minister of Great Britain).

One day he lifted up a Quran and said, "As long as this book exists there cannot be peace in the world".

The truth of this statement is evident today.'

Link³⁰



²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/official.sinhalaya/photos/a.110492455790512.16689.108109526028805/440951279411293/?type=3>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/878840245542273/?type=3&permPage=1>

³⁰ https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865059876920310/?type=3&comment_id=865552926871005&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

The Audience

The speaker promotes the grievances and fears of the audience, amplifying them with clever rhetoric, where the audience feels vulnerable to imminent attack by the supposed aggressor. Several key factors influence the reaction of the audience, such as if the audience is likely to react in violence? Is the audience harbouring pre-existing fear or resentment against the supposed aggressor?



Image text translation:

'Ranil has signed an agreement to give a Muslim administrative area.

Then – (image of Rauf Hakeem leader of the SLMC shaking hands with LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran).

Now – (image of Ranil Wickremesinghe and Rauf Hakeem together at an election rally).

Think before you vote!

What will happen to the country if thy come to power?

Link ³¹

මහා මැතිවරණයේ එක්සත් ජාතික පක්ෂ බලය ලබාගත හොත් වෙනම මුස්ලිම් පරිපාලන දිස්ත්‍රික්කයක් ලබාදීමට එජාපයේ නායක රනිල් වික්‍රමසිංහ මහතා එකඟ වූ බව මුස්ලිම් කොන්ග්‍රසයේ හසන් අලි අවධාරණය කරයි.
හසන් අලි පසුගිය ඉරිදා Sunday Observer පුවත් පතට කල ප්‍රකාශය සම්බන්ධයෙන් අප විශේෂ වාර්තාකරු කල විමසීමකදී ඔහු අනාවරණය කර ඇත්තේ ශ්‍රී ලංකා මුස්ලිම් කොන්ග්‍රසය හා එක්සත් ජාතික පක්ෂ නායකයා අතර ඒ සම්බන්ධයෙන් වූ පිටු 4කින් යුත් එකඟතා ලියවිල්ලකටද අත්සන් තබා ඇති බවයි.
ශ්‍රී ලංකා මුස්ලිම් කොන්ග්‍රසය සහ එජාපය අතර අත්සන් තැබූ අවබෝධතා ගිවිසුමටද එය ඇතුළත් කර ඇති බවත් පසුගිය රජයත් මෙන් නොව අගෝස්තු 17න් පසුව පත්වෙන රනිල් වික්‍රමසිංහ ප්‍රමුඛ රජය මෙම ඉල්ලීම් වලට මුල් තැන දෙමින් කටයුතු කරන බවත් ඔහු වැඩි දුරටත් අදහස් දක්වමින් කියා තිබේ.

උපුටා ගැනීම - <http://www.lankanewsweb.today/archives/4247>

Translation:

'Hasan Ali of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) reveals that UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has already agreed to grant a Muslim administrative area, if the UNP wins the General Election. Hasan Ali also revealed to our special correspondent who queried the statement Mr. Ali made to the Sunday Observer, that the SLMC and the UNP leader have signed a 4 page agreement on the matter. He revealed that this agreement is part of the memorandum of understanding between the two parties. Further, he stated that unlike the previous government, the post August 17th government of Ranil Wickremesinghe will give priority to these demands'.

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/718897261569988/?type=3>

Another relevant factor is whether audience has access to alternate sources of information? As noted in CPA's 'Saving Sunil' Report, members of similar online social media communities who rely solely on such sites for news and information "are less likely to be exposed to or accept views contrary to their own".³²

ISIS ත්‍රස්තවාදී සමග සම්බන්ධතාවයක් ගොඩනඟා ගෙන ඇති බව ඔක්කු සේවා අනාවරණය කර තිබූ ඉවත් සේවා රාජ්‍ය අමාත්‍යවරයා ලෙස කටයුතු කර වර්තමානයේ ජනාධිපති මෛත්‍රීපාල සිරිසේන මහතාගේ නීති කටයුතු පිළිබඳ උපදේශක ලෙස කටයුතු කරන ජනාධිපති නීතිඥ ගයිසර් මුස්තාපා ISIS ත්‍රස්තවාදී සමග ඉතා සමීප සම්බන්ධතාවයක් ඇති බවට මේ LNW ඔක්කු සේවා අනාවරණය කර තිබේ. මේ වනවිටත් ISIS ත්‍රස්තවාදී සමග සම්බන්ධතාවයන් පවත්වන පුද්ගලයන් සම්බන්ධයෙන් රහස් පොලිසියේ විශේෂ විමර්ෂණ කණ්ඩායමද මේ වනවිට ලැබී තිබෙන තොරතුරු ඔස්සේ පරීක්ෂා... [See More](#)



Translation:

It has been revealed by LNW spy service that State Minister of Aviation Services and currently legal advisor to President Sirisena President's Counsel Faizer Mustapha has close links with ISIS. Investigations by a special unit of the Police are continuing. The first ever ISIS member of Sri Lankan origin who died in an air raid in Syria was sent to Pakistan by Faizer Mustapha to pursue a degree. He has sent 5 other Muslim men overseas. Prior to the Presidential Election, other Muslim leaders, former President Rajapaksa and the Defense Secretary became suspicious of his conduct and initiated an investigation. It was during this

time that Faizer Mustapha joined the UNP to usher in 'yahapalanaya' (good governance). Extract from - <http://www.lankanewsweb.today/archives/4258>.'

Image text translation:

'Maithree's advisor Faizer Mustapha supplies youth to ISIS – Secret police reveals.

Think before you vote!

What will happen to our country if they come to power?'

Link³³

Exception: Out of a total 14 responses from members to the post below, just 2 comments by members indicate information gained from other sources and reject the post content as false information.

³² <http://www.cpalanka.org/saving-sunil-a-study-of-dangerous-speech-around-a-facebook-page-dedicated-to-sgt-sunil-rathnayake/>

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/718893998236981/?type=3>



Translation:

(Image text) 'Who sent four Tigers to assassinate Mahinda?
White van and four Tigers held by Mirihana police'

Translation:

'A white van circling Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa's house has been taken in to custody by the Mirihana police. There were 4 Tiger members who have not been rehabilitated inside the van which had false number plates used in Tiger controlled areas. This was revealed by Gotabhaya Rajapaksa at Udaya Gammanpila's election campaign commencement ceremony.

Who is attempting to assassinate Mahinda Rajapaksa, in fear of the growing support of people surrounding him?

Is it not a repulsive act – to attempt killing a beloved leader of the people to gain power, rather than attempt to win people's votes and gain power in a fair manner?'

Link³⁴

³⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/717943244998723/?type=3>



Dinesh Indika³⁵

'You dick, watch the News before you post rubbish. Those inside the van were an army Major and his squad of three. Mahinda's own white van'.

Nimantha Wijesinghe³⁶

'Ha you fools, are you saying the army officers who were inside the van are Tigers?'

Content of the speech

Speech which can be understood by the audience as a call to action or violence. Often such speech dehumanizes the target or indicates that the audience is in danger of attacks from the target. Such rhetoric may contain phrases or words (images too – on visual media) with loaded meaning, understood by the speaker and the audience, which rouses loathing and hatred against the target (victims of hate speech).

Translation:

'Remain asleep you scum while your country, your religion and your race are eliminated. Remember, it won't be long before you will also become halal'.

Link³⁷



³⁵

https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/717943244998723/?type=3&comment_id=718369008289480&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R0%22%7D

³⁶

https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/717943244998723/?type=3&comment_id=718482158278165&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D

³⁷

<https://web.facebook.com/Hambavirodhaperamuna/photos/a.1603891496554176.1073741829.1602951669981492/1627624800847512/?type=3>

*NOTE: We have blurred the very disturbing images of the dead youth in graphic below.

The incident was reported in several local media, stating that two youth from the same family were killed in a local restaurant, when employees attacked them following an argument.³⁸



කසර ලෙස පහර දී කප කොටා මරා දමා තිබූ වැලිමඩා සිංහලයින් දෙදෙනා.
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Translation:

(Clockwise from left) 'For the intelligent inquiry of Sinhalese. The murder of Sinhalese in Welimada. The time has come for you to get emotional for the sake of Sinhalese'

'Look at the manner in which the two Sinhalese have been brutally murdered in Welimada with their throats cut in the Halal way. Sinhalese, we need justice and compensation for the blood of these two Sinhala youth'.

Link³⁹

Socio-historical context

The social and or historical context of the relationship between the groups, reasons for conflict or hurt or suspicion – real or not - can act as a trigger which can be harnessed to incite violence. The checkered relationships between Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious groups point to deep rooted suspicions, hurts and conflicts fueled by myriad reasons. The targeting of Muslim, Christian and Tamil candidates in the Facebook pages under review can be traced back to these complex historical and social factors.

³⁸ <http://www.itnnews.lk/local-news/two-killed-in-welimada-brawl/>

³⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Helaya.SriLanka/posts/810498302380403>

The horrific effects of 30 years of war and attacks by the LTTE targeting civilians remain unhealed wounds in the Sinhala psyche. Any inkling of a resurrecting the LTTE or a return to war can act as triggers of fear and anger against the Tamil community. The heightening of anti-Muslim sentiments during the recent past fueled by ultra nationalist groups⁴⁰, the Grandpass (2013) and Aluthgama (2014) Sinhala-Muslim riots, the Kettarama cricket stadium incident (2015) plus the global trend of Islamophobia driven by the Middle East crisis and the rise of the Islamic State In Syria (ISIS) terror movement have contributed to heightened tension and the cementing of perceived fault lines between the communities. Similarly, the rise of ultra-Buddhist nationalism and anti-Christian sentiment, labeling Christians as non-nationals has created tension, fear and physical violence against Christians and Christian churches⁴¹.



Translation:

*'Give separate governance to the North
Give separate governance to the East,
Give your vote to the UNP.'*

'The beginning of disaster'

(Image shows Mr. Rishad Badurdeen of the SLMC on left; LTTE emblem and map depicting separation of the North and East, on right).

Link⁴²

⁴⁰ <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/17/world/asia/sri-lanka-bodu-bala-sena-profile/>

⁴¹ Incident reports and briefs issued by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka : www.nceasl.org/

⁴²

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/876957819063849/?type=3>



Translation:

'If they did so much in 100 days, how much more will they do in 5 years?

- *Rs. 6000 million loss from fraud concerning Central Bank*
- *Removed high security zones in the North*
- *Sea Tiger women's leader released from custody*
- *Tiger intelligence female leader released from custody*
- *Stopped all development activity*
- *Promised a Muslim administrative area*
- *Organized events to bring Tamil diaspora to Sri Lanka*
- *National Anthem made two anthems*
- *Imprisoned war heroes*


'They've only just begun to effect change'

Link⁴³

⁴³

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/868704646555833/?type=3>

Comments posted on Sinhala Buddhist Facebook page.



Rani De Silva Ahanna! Sinhala buddhagame janathawate August 17
thiranamarthake dinayak.

Lankawe janagahanaye (dept: of census)
Buddhist 70.1%
Hindu 12.6 %
Muslim 9.7 %
Christian 7.6%

Northern Tamils estates Tamils, Muslims, Christians will vote for Christian
UNP Ranil.


Sinhala buddhists are divided with no religious loyalty listening and giving
their loyalty to Christian UNP Ranil. Buddhist monks like Ratana and Sobitha
are working for the Christian UNP Ranil against Buddhism and Sinhala
Buddhist Rajapakse.

Disgraceful - Sinhala Buddhist are taken for a ride as always.

Sinhala Buddhist are a majority in Sri Lanka therefore the Prime Minister
should be a Sinhala Buddhist. Take an example from other democratic
countries where the Prime Minister is from the majority religion and at start of
parliament sittings Christian prayers are conducted.

UNP Ranil is guilty of many crimes against Sri Lanka (giving weapons and
signing accords with the LTTE) and heinous crimes against its people with
the Batalande murders.

Sinhala Buddhist Unite and vote for a Sinhala Prime Minister Mahinda
Rajapaksa - ape nayakaya Mahinda dinawamu.

Like · Reply ·  27 · 5 August at 12:12

Link⁴⁴

⁴⁴

https://web.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/videos/10153565978086934/?comment_id=10153565999351934&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

A comment posted by the administrator of *Hambayage Niruwatha* Facebook page.



Translation:

'There is in this country a race called 'multi-religious bastards' who have strayed from their Sinhala identity and are reborn as a mixed breed.'

Link⁴⁵

Mode of transmission

The method of disseminating information can significantly affect the influence of the message over the audience. Social media therefore is an immensely potent vehicle for carrying hate content since it allows instant access to thousands, across oceans and borders. It is also very often the only or primary source of information or news accessed by young people. Facebook is the most popular social media in Sri Lanka, with over 3.1 million users.⁴⁶

CHARACTERISTICS OF HATE SPEECH

Hate speech shares certain discernable characteristics, many of which can be identified within the content under review.

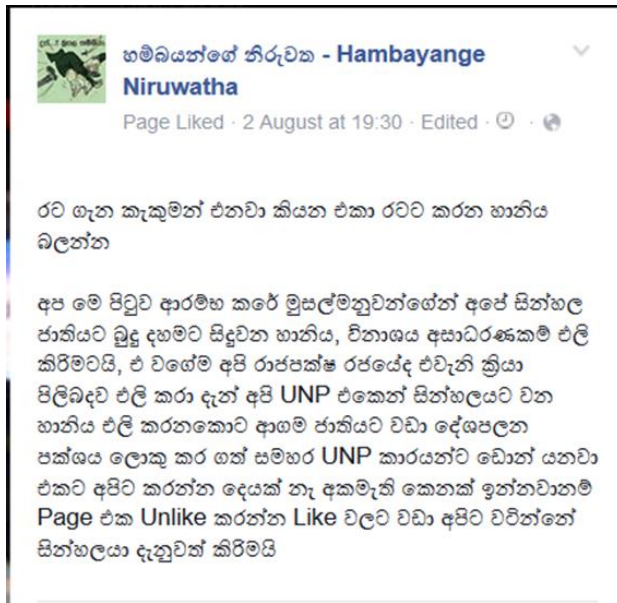
Education

Positioning of the Facebook group as a source of credible information, as opposed to other media which have failed to reveal the truth. The group assumes the role of an educator, championing the cause for which they seek to consolidate support among members and attract new members.

⁴⁵

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/876902379069393/?type=3&comment_id=876905132402451&reply_comment_id=876906419068989&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

⁴⁶ Facebook statistics



Translation:

'Look at the damage done to the country by those who claim to love the country!'

We began this page to reveal the unfair treatment and damage done to our Sinhala race and Buddhism by Muslims. Similarly, we revealed such actions by the Rajapakse government. Now when we reveal the harm done to Sinhalese by the UNP, some people to whom politics is more important than race and religion are getting angry. We cannot help that. If anyone is unhappy, they can 'unlike' our page. Educating the Sinhalese is more important to us than 'likes'.

Link⁴⁷

In the following example, the group draws on an established newspaper 'Sunday Observer' for legitimacy and assumes the role of educator of the Sinhala speaking community.



Translation:

'Ranil promises a separate Muslim District after elections.

Here is the story from the government's own English newspaper. The reason for not putting it in Sinhala newspapers is clear isn't it?

The Tamil Eelam war was the result of a request for a separate Tamil administration in the north. Separation of the east is imminent. Do not allow this disaster to happen. Share this message and educate others against the division of our country'.

Link ⁴⁸

⁴⁷

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/869690756457222/?type=3>

⁴⁸

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/865587033534261/?type=3>

Denialism

A feature of denialism is where a version of a story is highlighted and other facts are totally ignored or dismissed as exaggerations and lies, tailoring a version which best serves the group's cause. Often this exercise is steeped in bias.

The extent to which a group can succeed as a trustworthy source of information depends largely on the audience and their exposure to other sources of information. The following post already examined under sub-heading 'Audience' in this report (see page 19 for detailed translation of post and comments) is a noteworthy example where the post content sensationalizes a version of an incident, ignoring other relevant facts. It is interesting to note that the post has not been taken down even after two members pointed out the fallacy of the story.



Translation:

(Image text) 'Who sent four Tigers to assassinate Mahinda? White van and four Tigers held by Mirihana police'

Link⁴⁹

Building group solidarity

Online hate speech mongers employ an array of methods to cultivate and build group solidarity. Uniting a group of followers to believe in and promote the cause of the group is imperative to their survival. Rallying members to unite for a common cause is often achieved through calls to unite against a common enemy. This is usually achieved quite successfully by rousing national, racial or religious fervor. The portrayal of those vulnerable within the group (such as children or women) as victims is also a powerful tool in building group solidarity.

⁴⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/717943244998723/?type=3>



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Translation:

'Who are you?

A true citizen of this country

or a traitor?'

'Think a little... America, Norway and India became close to our country after January 8th and now interfering in this general election.

Did they help when we were fighting LTTE terrorists for 30 years? Or did they support the LTTE terrorists and stand with them?

Did they ever help another country to develop? Or did they cunningly exploit them?

We trust you are intelligent to understand this. When the economic giants of the world were our friends and our country was heading towards development, they created instability to dislodge the government which was taking our country forward.

Attempts to haul our war heroes before war crimes tribunals... Who is helping them to do

these things?

Is it not the power hungry, money hungry illegitimate generation of this country who are mesmerized by dollars?

This is a re-creation of the 1815 betrayal of our country.

So, will you be a traitor who licks the dollars of the West? Will you be a fool who believes the mountain of lies created by the power of their dollars against our country?

Or will you be a true Sri Lankan who loves his country? It is your decision.'

Link to graphic and text above ⁵⁰

⁵⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.293316877461364.67497.293305950795790/721147764678271/?type=3>

Hero narrative

Hate groups provide members space and opportunity not only to express their views, but also to bolster their self-image as protectors of the cause. Identifying with hero status encourages membership and furthers the cause of the group.

Example of post reposted as a comment, in the context of winning the election.



Translation:

'Ready to die but not ready to lose

I am a Sinhala Buddhist.'

Link ⁵¹

Example of a comment -



Translation:

'I stand with Bodu Bala Sena

The blessed king who protects Buddhism... took on the role of a leader for the Sinhalese...this angered the wild elephants... Let Bodu Bala Sena emerge victorious, bringing those wild elephants to their knees.

Bodu Bala Sena.'

Link ⁵²

⁵¹

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/868085943284370/?type=3&comment_id=912845605475070&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

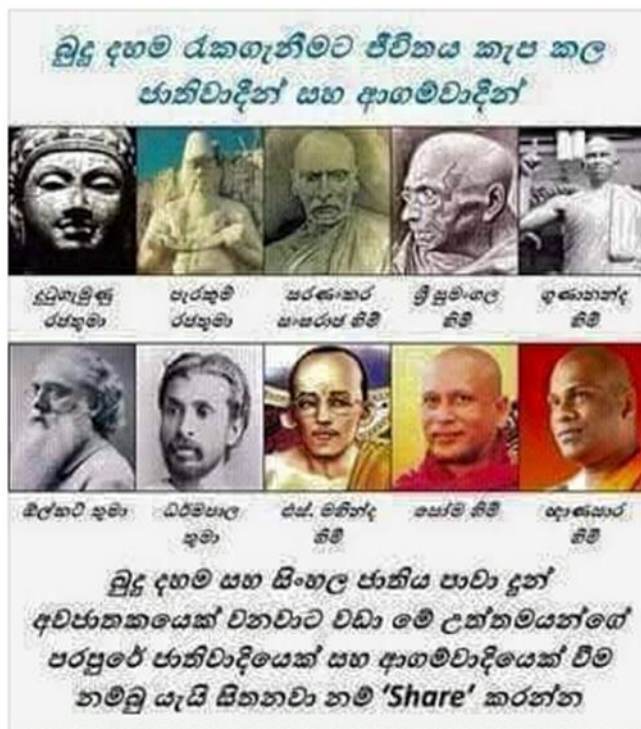
⁵²

https://web.facebook.com/OfficialBoduBalaSena/videos/968446696508691/?comment_id=969868109699883&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Nationalism

The portrayal of themselves as defenders of the nation against others who are portrayed as enemies of the group is a common characteristic of hate groups. Identifying with national heroes and equating present day proponents of the cause with national heroes such as ancient kings, religious leaders and scholars. Ethnicity, religion and racial undertones are common in sentiments of nationalism expressed by hate groups.

In the following example, Ven. Galaboda Aththe Gnanasara Thero, Secretary General of the Bodu Bala Sena and candidate contesting under their political arm, the *Bodu Bala Peramuna* is equated with national heroes.



Translation:

'Racists and religious extremists who dedicated their lives to protect Buddhism.

King Dutugemunu, King Parakum, Ven. Saranankara Sangaraja Thero, Ven. Sri Sumangala Thero, Ven. Gunananda Thero, Henry Olcott, Anagarika Dharmapala, Ven. S. Mahinda Thero, Ven. Soma Thero, Ven. Ghanasara Thero

'Share' this if you believe that it is better to be a racist and a religious bigot like these esteemed persons rather than be a bastard who betrays the Sinhalese and Buddhism.'

Link ⁵³

⁵³

<https://web.facebook.com/Hambavirodhaperamuna/photos/a.1603891496554176.1073741829.1602951669981492/1627624744180851/?type=3>

In the context of anti-minority hate mongering where voting for ethnic or religious minority candidates or political parties which embrace minorities is considered an anti-Sinhalese treacherous act, the following post with a graphic depicting ancient Sri Lankan kings waging war, evokes Sinhala nationalist sentiments.



Translation:

'For over 2500 years we have fought on behalf of this island.

That is because this island is the only place the Sinhalese have! If we lose this island, we are no more, hence we will continue to fight!'

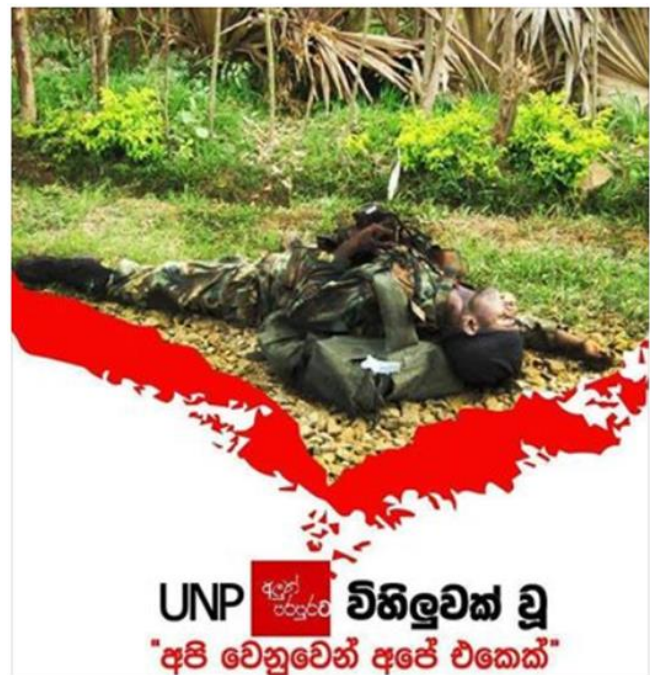
Link ⁵⁴

A post depicting a fallen soldier and the text suggest a lack of patriotism and betrayal of war heroes by the UNP.

Translation:

'A joke for the UNP's new generation.

But to us, he is one of us, who died for us'



⁵⁴

<https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/877209195705378/?type=3>

Link ⁵⁵

Religion

Historically, religion has been a cause of war and conflict worldwide. Religion can be the cause of a hate group or a target. For example, the Facebook groups reviewed in this study were united in their cause of protecting Buddhism. The perceived religious enemies are Islam and Christianity. The faith itself, religious teaching, religious leaders, communities and individuals who prescribed to those faiths become targets of hate speech.



Translation:

'Sinhala Buddhists, is this a good Prime Minister?

Is he offering alms or giving handouts to beggars?

When non-national Ranil who does not know what Buddhism is becomes Prime Minister, will the Sinhala Buddhists attain freedom?'

Link ⁵⁶

⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/official.sinhalaya/photos/a.110492455790512.16689.108109526028805/440951992744555/?type=3>

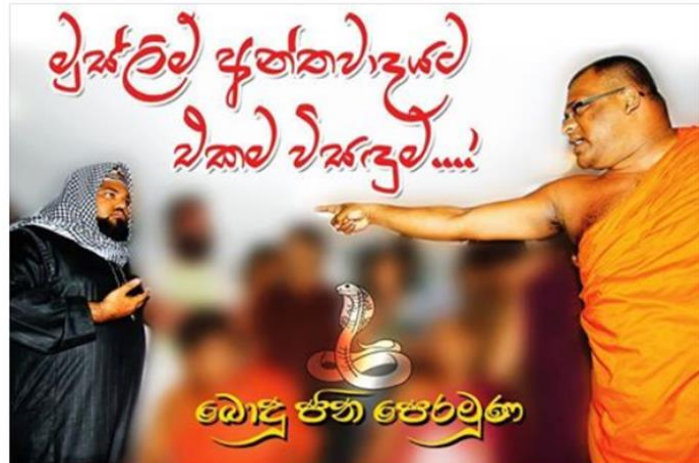
⁵⁶

<https://www.facebook.com/CharaPurusha/photos/a.677073489085699.1073741853.293305950795790/719517758174605/?type=3>

Translation:

'The only answer to radical Islam.... Bodu Bala Peramuna (Political wing of Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) contesting elections).'

Link ⁵⁷



Comments posted on Sinhala Buddhist Facebook page -

 **Ishan de Silva** I have a problem???

Ranil wickramasinghe - Theravada Buddhism
Mahinda rajapaksha (persy mahendra) - Theravada Buddhisam

Dr maitree wickramasinghe - Theravada Buddhism
Shiranthi rajapaksha - Catholic

What we should do ??

Like · Reply ·  1 · 5 August at 16:43

 **Rani De Silva** Shirani is not contesting the election. Ranil is a Born Again Christin, so is Rosy.

Like · Reply ·  1 · 5 August at 19:04

 **Rani De Silva** Sinhela Buddhist are not against Tamils, Muslims, Christians living in harmony in the country.

Sinhela Buddhist are against Tamils, Muslims, Christians trying to destroy the country and Buddhism. Do not dare touch the Sinhela Buddhist Nation of Sri... [See More](#)

Like · Reply ·  3 · 5 August at 23:07

 **Pawan Hewage** What about jvp ??

Like · Reply · 8 August at 12:55

 **Rani De Silva** If you support Mahinda Sri Lanka will be safe.

Ranil, Rosy, Mangala, Ravi and others are Born Gain Christian determine to erase Buddhism from this country. Rosy is distributing Christian books to government schools and Daham pasals.

Like · Reply ·  1 · 8 August at 13:58 · Edited

⁵⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/official.sinhalaya/photos/a.110492455790512.16689.108109526028805/440944579411963/?type=3>

Links 58



Translation:

"We knew about the IS member but did not know he was a terrorist" - Muslim priest tries to be a baby!

*We don't accept the Thawjeet Jamat
(old news)*

But united on behalf of Muslim terrorist'.

Link 59

Scare tactics

Portrayal of the race/group to be outnumbered and vulnerable to annihilation by the perceived enemy. There is a warning of imminent danger if the members do not act. The portrayal of Sinhala Buddhist as a minority in the world, under threat from Muslims and Christians.

58 Ishan De Silva

https://web.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/videos/10153565978086934/?comment_id=10153565999351934&reply_comment_id=10153566288356934&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Rani De Silva

https://www.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/videos/10153565978086934/?comment_id=10153565999351934&reply_comment_id=10153566522581934&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

Rani De Silva

https://www.facebook.com/SinhalaBuddhist/videos/10153565978086934/?comment_id=10153565999351934&reply_comment_id=10153567229116934&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R9%22%7D

59

<https://www.facebook.com/SinhalaRavaya/photos/a.826227037419330.1073741827.204869642888409/921406887901344/?type=3lv>



Translation:

' Stupid upcountry Sinhalese who dig your own graves by believing the false promises of cunning Muslims by falling for the leg of beef or packet of rice or quarter bottle of cheap liquor they give; the number one enemy of the Sinhalese Rauf Hakeem the extremist is in Kandy begging for votes from the Sinhalese.

Remember, every vote you give this Muslim (derogatory term used) will be part of the great sin of wiping the Sinhala race from this country. Don't be a part of that unpardonable sin against the nation.

Don't be one who betrays his country for a leg of beef, quarter bottle of cheap liquor and false promises.

If you a UNP supporter who does not want to vote for another party, vote for a Sinhalese'.

Link ⁶⁰

⁶⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/Helaya.SriLanka/posts/821425251287708>



Translation:

'At least now accept what we say. There is Muslim extremism in this country. We must take action before it spreads.

What you see is the fate of Sinhalese in majority Muslim areas.

If Sri Lanka becomes a majority Muslim country, the fate of the Sinhalese can only be imagined. Unfortunately that day is not too far away when the Muslims will be above you Sinhalese.

Born in Sri Lanka but supporting Pakistan.

(Background text explaining photographs)

Left – Attacking Sinhalese with stones while supporting Pakistan.

Right – Tense situation around R. Premadasa Stadium. Muslim extremists from Maligawatte attack Sinhala youth who came to watch the cricket match. Damage caused to vehicles and property.

Link ⁶¹

Othering

Hate speech highlighting differences which makes 'the other' seem strange. Stereotyping, labelling and name calling which reduces the other to being less than human. The attacks may focus not only on ethnic or religious differences but also sexual orientation or disability.

⁶¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Helaya.SriLanka/posts/811009212329312>



Translation:

'Dog

Will give its life for his master who feeds and shelters him

Muslim (derogatory term used)

Traitor to the country which feeds and shelters him. Supports another country'

Link ⁶²

Graphic text translation:



'A few records set by the founder of Islam Muhammed Nabi

- 1. Father of terrorism, first terrorist.*
- 2. World's first child molester.*
- 3. Owner of largest number of sex slaves in the world.*
- 4. Author of a book of fairy tales believed by the largest number of people in the world.*
- 5. World's greatest confidence trickster to date.'*

Link ⁶³

⁶² https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=904321282995632&id=163806990380402

⁶³

https://www.facebook.com/650805758345724/photos/a.651778761581757.1073741828.650805758345724/874292049330426/?type=3&comment_id=874358309323800&reply_comment_id=874953835930914&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D

Conclusions

The term ‘hate speech’ encompasses speech intended to intimidate, degrade and incite prejudice or even violence against a community based on their nationality, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Online hate speech alone does not amount to hate crime (physical expressions of violence) but often act as a catalyst for action - including violent expressions of hate in real space. The high volume of hate spewed out by the 11 Facebook pages reviewed in this study as well as many others did not translate in to physical manifestations of violence.

What then is the significance of election related online hate speech? Writer Nalaka Gunawardene poses⁶⁴ and answers the question “What role (if any) did social media play in the recently concluded Parliamentary (General) Election on 17 August 2015? Many are asking this question – and coming up with different answers. That is characteristic of our new reality: there is no single right answer when it comes to multi-faceted and fast-evolving phenomena like social media”. Gunawardene’s observation also applies to the role of online hate speech at the 2015 General election.

Facebook statistics show 3.1 million Sri Lankan Facebook users and research on social media usage indicates that 41% of Sri Lankan Facebook users are between the ages of 18 and 24 years⁶⁵. It can then be assumed that a high number of social media users engaging in or exposed to hate speech on Facebook are youth. According to the Department of Census and Statistics, Internet usage in Sri Lanka is highest among youth between the ages of 20 – 24 years (27%) and 25 – 29 year olds are the second highest users (25%).⁶⁶ Registered voters at the 2010 General election number 12,071,062 while registered voters at the 2015 General election number 15,044,490, indicating an increase of 20%, approximately 2.9 million new voters during the intervening period of 15 years. This number constitutes youth (between the ages of 18 – 33 years) including first time voters who were eligible electors at the 2015 General election. It is therefore probable that young voters or first time voters were exposed to online hate speech. To what degree, if any did hate speech influence young or first time voters?

The final result of the General Election 2015 marked a clear win for the UNP led UNFEGG. Many of the candidates targeted by online hate speech were elected to Parliament, including candidates from minority ethnic and religious groups. A visible exception is Ms. Rosy Senanayake who was also targeted by online hate speech. However, whether online hate speech impacted her bid to be elected to Parliament cannot be determined conclusively. The UNFEGG win itself is attributed by analysts to minority votes (Tamil and Muslim parties) and the UNFEGG did secure more minority votes than the UPFA. The content and volume of online hate speech examined show a clear pattern of targeting victims which excluded, almost totally, candidates from the UPFA. However, the UNFEGG win and the comparatively poor performance of the UPFA questions if online hate speech had any significant influence on voters. Analysis of electoral results (by District) published by the Elections Commission of Sri Lanka⁶⁷ and latest available population statistics by age and gender published by the Department of Census and Statistics⁶⁸ was carried out with cross referencing of data samples from

⁶⁴

‘Sri Lanka Parliamentary Election 2015: How did Social Media make a difference?’ : <http://groundviews.org/2015/09/03/sri-lanka-parliamentary-election-2015-how-did-social-media-make-a-difference/>

⁶⁵ Socialbakers data - <http://roar.lk/five-unconventional-social-media-trends-sri-lanka/>

⁶⁶ Computer literacy statistics 2015 (first 6 months : <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/samplesurvey/ComputerLiteracy-2015Q1-Q2-final%20.pdf>

⁶⁷ <http://52.1.201.50/web/index.php/en/parliamentary-elections-results>

⁶⁸ Census of population and housing 2012: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/page.asp?page=Population%20and%20Housing>

the Districts of Colombo, Galle, Kandy, Batticaloa and Jaffna. However, this analysis was insufficient to prove a causal link between online hate speech and voting patterns of young or first time voters and would require an in-depth social science survey.

In the present analysis, hate content and their receptacles demonstrate that what drives these hate movements is the primary objective or cause of the page – which is essentially ultra-nationalist or racist. The hate speech generated targeting a particular political party or candidate is hence a by-product of the existing biases of the Facebook group. The appropriation of these pages for party political or election related hate mongering is a temporary phenomenon, exploiting the opportunity (the election) to further the cause of the group, maximizing their effect as echo chambers for perpetuating hate.

It is noted that some posts when viewed in isolation do not amount to hate speech. However, such posts couched in humour or exaggeration can elicit hate speech comments by members. Clever manipulation of post content which feeds fear and loathing, prompting expressions of hate from members is clearly a catalyst for hate speech. Further, such posts, harmless though they may appear at first glance, when viewed in the context of the purpose or cause of the Facebook group, the tone of posts and surrounding content, are clearly hate motivators. It must be noted that online hate speech is a growing menace and with time, has the potential to influence and radicalize youth.

Lessons and Recommendations

Is the proliferation of online hate speech in Sri Lanka a slow ticking time bomb? In an article titled 'Mechanisms of political radicalization'⁶⁹ authors Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko identifies five ways in which a person or group maybe radicalized through online hate speech. As noted in the 'Liking Violence' study, and reiterated by this study, all of these are evident in Sri Lanka's online hate groups.

- Slippery Slope: Journeying from reading hateful content to creating it.
- The Power of Love: The Social and emotional bond created in belonging to a group.
- Radicalisation in Like-Minded Groups: Where over time, members are pressured to conform to the radical ideology or opinion of the group, even if an individual holds different views at the start.
- Radicalisation Under Isolation or Threat: The felt need to support a cause or group against a perceived external threat, particularly if one belongs to that group.
- Dehumanisation: Portrayal of the opponents as less than human enemies creates a sense of justice in taking any course of action against them.

The danger of youth radicalization over time is a real concern. The skilful methods utilized by extremist groups for online radicalization and recruitment of youth has led governments and society at large in many countries to seek creative counter measures⁷⁰. While it is not the intention of this report to sound alarmist or propose drastic counter measures to restrict freedom of online speech, it is prudent to take note of the negative effects of unchecked hate speech on youth and society at large where radicalization over time may mutate in to actual violence, as witnessed in Kenya and Rwanda.

⁶⁹ <http://www.brynmawr.edu/aschcenter/mccauley/webpage%20stuff/2008%20mechanisms%20rad%20McC%20Moskale.pdf>

⁷⁰ http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0SS14W20151103?utm_source=twitter

Some relevant and thought provoking statistics taken from CPA's survey on 'Consumption and Perceptions of Mainstream and Social Media in the Western Province' reveals that 61.5% of respondents would share with others content pertaining to political or social issues they read online⁷¹. The same study reveals that 37.2% of respondents are more likely to believe online content as truth if they see it first shared by a friend, rather than direct from a media website, and 51% would re-consider their opinion if they see a friend share a story they were previously reluctant to accept as truth. While these statistics are based on a survey of the Western Province, the snapshot of patterns and trends therein provide insights in to the usage and influence of social media throughout Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government of Sirisena-Wickremesinghe adopted hasty measures to combat hate speech by criminalizing hate speech. Amendments to the Penal Code to this effect were shelved in December 2015⁷² bowing to pressure from legal and human rights activists that the proposed legislation posed a real danger of being misinterpreted and misused as a tool of harassment and repression. It is a very thin line that divides political speech from hate speech. Hence legal measures need careful consideration.

The U.N. Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression Frank La Rue summing up the workshop on 'Dangerous speech online: Identification and strategies' at the Internet Global Forum 2015⁷³ stated that 'the multi-dimensional, complex nature of hate speech requires collaboration between government, platform providers and the empowerment of users to both counter hate speech and protect the vulnerable'. Counter measures, education and empowerment of users by the state and civil society as well as more diligent monitoring by platform providers are some useful measures that can be adopted in combating online hate speech; discussed in CPA's previous reports on hate speech.

With regards the specific issue of election related party political hate speech dealt with in this study, government, the Elections Commission⁷⁴, political leaders and candidates will have to bear in mind at future elections the space created online for campaigning, as much as they consider political campaigning on the ground and on traditional media.

During the 2015 General Election, the Elections Commissioner established strict guidelines for parties, candidates and the media with regard to election campaigning. His office also established election complaint centres⁷⁵ and even a mechanism for lodging complaints of election law violations via SMS⁷⁶. Establishing reporting mechanism where candidates or the general public can report online abuse and hate speech where the Elections Commission can in turn investigate and report the offending Facebook page to be shut down, by Facebook itself⁷⁷. Political parties too can be vigilant and report offending pages. However, the fact remains that often Facebook pages which promote hate are shut down only to re-emerge under a new account name, seamlessly transferring the

⁷¹ Consumption and Perceptions of Mainstream and Social Media in the Western Province : published 28th January 2016 : <http://www.cpalanka.org/full-report-consumption-and-perceptions-of-mainstream-and-social-media-in-the-western-province/>

⁷² <http://www.asianmirror.lk/news/item/13499-government-backtracks-on-amendment-to-penal-code>

⁷³ 10-13 November 2015, Joao Pessoa, Brazil.

⁷⁴ In terms of provisions under Article 104(B)5 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka, issuance of guidelines and rules regarding conduct by candidates, parties and media vests with the Elections Commission.

⁷⁵ http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Jul08_1436378394CH.php

⁷⁶ www.hirunews.lk/114923/election-complaints-via-sms-directly-to-commissioner

⁷⁷ Facebook has recently taken a tough stance against fake profiles and Facebook pages disseminating hate content such as in Germany. Ankhi Das Director of Public Policy for Facebook India speaking at the Global Internet Forum session on 'Dangerous speech online: Identification and strategies' which focused on South Asia reiterated Facebook's commitment to shut down fake accounts.

offensive content and their followers to flourish on a new page. Nevertheless, intervention of this nature can discourage hate speech mongering to some extent, sending a clear message of zero tolerance.

Establishment of two-way online communication with public by political candidates can offer a healthy alternative of online discourse where grievances can be aired in a civilized manner and the candidate will post responses. Such forums can be created on interactive social media spaces such as Facebook. Online engagement with the public is very new to politicians in Sri Lanka, with only a few setting up Facebook pages or Twitter accounts. These too have been for one-way communication, where the candidate simply shares his messages but does not engage his followers. Comments or posts amounting to hate speech or profanity can be deleted by the administrator, cultivating a positive engagement and dialogue with social media savvy youth who may yet not have fallen in to the grip of hate groups. With regard to the 2015 elections, there was no evidence of any candidates addressing the issue of hate speech – in terms of countering hate speech, on their social media accounts.

Given our turbulent history, cultivation and protection of tolerance and mutual respect between ethnic, religious and other distinct communities is a herculean task, but not impossible. 'Certain utterances achieve terrifying power, in the right context. In a climate of ethnic animosity, statements of ethnic pride are indistinguishable from insults against one's opponents. And the converse is also true: Even the most hateful or inciteful speech remains benign, if it has no audience or if its audience is firmly and explicitly determined to keep the peace'⁷⁸. Shrinking online space is not the answer; expanding the space for respectful and peaceful engagement is. It is a valuable lesson for Sri Lanka.

⁷⁸ Quote from Susan Hirsch, Hate speech and group targeted violence – the role of speech in violent conflict http://www.genocidewatch.org/images/OutsideResearch_Hate_Speech_and_Group-Targeted_Violence.pdf