

Policy Recommendations on Preventing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka

Based on Virtual Discussions with
University Undergraduates of Sri Lanka.



Centre for Policy Alternatives

Policy Recommendations

On

Preventing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka

Based on Virtual Discussions with
University Undergraduates of Sri Lanka.



Capacity Building and Outreach Unit
Centre for Policy Alternatives

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Policy Recommendations On Preventing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka Current Status and Potential Measures

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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.

No. 6/5, Layards Road, Colombo 5, Sri Lanka

Tel: +9411 2081384, +94112081385, +94112081386

Fax: +9411 2081388 Email: info@cpalanka.org

Web: www.cpalanka.org

Email: info@cpalanka.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/cpasl

Twitter: @cpasl

Contents

Foreword	5
Comment on the Discussion Paper	7
Towards Effective Social Policies for Addressing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka	9
Comment on the Discussion Paper	13
Background	15
1. Executive Summary	17
1.1. Push and Pull Factors of Violent Extremism	17
1.2 Key Recommendations	20
2. Introduction	25
3. Objectives of the Discussion Series	27
4. Methodology	29
5. Key Issues, Legislative Framework and the Recommendations	33
6. Conclusion	47

Foreword

Violent extremism, especially amongst youth has persisted all over the world, carrying with it the potential to destroy the socio-political, cultural and economic fabric of societies in a trail of death and destruction. Sri Lanka has been no stranger to all of this. From the 1970s at least, there have been violent upheavals in both the north and south of the country highlighting the urgent need for peace and reconciliation amongst all the peoples of Sri Lanka.

One feature of all this stands out and that is the frustration of the youth to be heard, to be taken seriously and brought into the discussion of public policy-making as a key stakeholder. The alienation and anomie of the youth of our land has to be dealt with without fear or favour or else we will continue to be a country not at peace with itself.

CPA welcomes the focus of the UNDP on this issue and hopes that the views of youth that we have elicited will not be ignored or cast aside. Rather, that their insight will be given the serious consideration it warrants and serve as a key ingredient to the peace, prosperity and reconciliation we all desire and deserve.

Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu

Executive Director
Centre for Policy Alternatives

Comment on the Discussion Paper

Preventing violent extremism is a commitment and obligation under the principles and values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. In the case of Sri Lanka, for measures preventing violent extremism to be effective and sustainable and not merely policies, legislation and strategies are important. These largely require implementation and pragmatic recommendations. The latter should be given top priority and must be firmly based on the pluralistic and diverse characteristics of the country.

A number of policies and programs currently function in Sri Lanka with the view to fostering peace, tolerance and reconciliation and towards preventing violent extremism. A number of commissions have been appointed in the past to make recommendations in this regard after many years of negative experiences of violent extremism. These are however not implemented in full due to a variety of reasons – narrow political interests, lack of coherence in said policy programs, and the fact that some have failed to address ground realities. The sheer need is thus identified to put forward workable and pragmatic policy actions to prevent violent extremism which continue to devastate this country including safeguarding its biggest strengths which are pluralism and diversity.

This policy document prepared by the Center for Policy Alternatives gives directions for action oriented engagement to fight violent extremism through policies, institutions and legal reforms -which is vitally important in the post –war context of Sri Lanka.

Non-implementation and policy failure continue to remain an intrinsic part of Sri Lanka's policy discourse. If policies continue to remain mere policies, we will not be able to reap the intended outcomes of those policies.

Proper implementation therefore is a crucial element to make a meaningful impact out of such proposed policies.

Dr. Ramasamy Ramesh

Senior Lecturer
Department of Political Science
University of Peradeniya

Towards Effective Social Policies for Addressing Violent Extremism in Sri Lanka

What is violent extremism?

Violent Extremism(VE) is terminology that became popular globally among analysts and development agencies in the aftermath of 9/11. This is because the US led ‘war against terror’ informed primarily by security perspectives proved to be unsuccessful in responding to the root causes of the problem. It has increasingly been realized that counterterrorism and securitization approaches alone cannot address the larger problem of violent extremism. Even though terrorism and VE are sometimes used interchangeably in literature, the term VE has increasingly become analytically more viable and politically correct in that it captures possible motivations for violence that call for interventions designed to eliminate the underlying causes of extremist violence. Thus the term VE has some genealogical connections with violence triggered by Islamic extremism, even though currently it is used in a broader sense to cover all forms of violence connected with extremism of one kind or another, whether religious, political or of any other kind.

As in most other concepts in social sciences there is no universally accepted definition of violent extremism. Perhaps the most widely used definition is the one proposed by USAID. It defines violent extremism as “advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives” (USAID, 2011). In other words, this is violence justified in the eyes of protagonists of violence because it is triggered by a hard-core ideology that justifies violence as the only available means of achieving certain social, economic and political objectives of the protagonists. How to delineate extremism has also posed problems as what appears to be extremist to some may not necessarily be extremist to others. In this context, two necessary attributes of violent extremism have been identified. First, glorifying the supremacy of and preoccupation with the challenges to one’s own group or faith. Second, defying diversity and the notion of an inclusive society. These essential characteristics of VE stress its rupture with democratic principles such as acceptance of diversity and universal human rights.

Some commentators have pointed out that all extremism does not necessarily produce violence and all violence is not associated with extremism. However, Schmid (2014) makes the point that engaging with non-violent Islamic extremists is as bad as engaging with violent Islamist extremists from the angle of promoting democracy in Islamic societies. On the other hand, violence associated with organized crime such as narco-terrorism is generally not triggered by any extremist ideologies as such. What is important is when we use the term VE, we recognize the interpenetration of violence and an extremist ideology that legitimize each other in ways that produce a hard core of dedicated people often willing to dedicate their lives on behalf of their ideology or faith.

Despite various reservations about the concept of VE, it has caught on due to the persistence of extremist violence in many forms in an increasingly interconnected world where war on terrorism has failed to contain this violence in a sustainable manner.

Sri Lanka's Record of Violent Extremism

Sri Lanka's experience with VE predates the contemporary use of the term. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) uprising of 1971 was the first instance of organized VE in post-independence Sri Lanka. This was a clear instance of VE as defined in the earlier section as anti-state violence committed by a group of youth rebels from within the majority Sinhala community was justified in their eyes through a particular reading of Marxism, colonialism, class struggle and love for the nation (*deshapremaya*) and the like. This campaign was ruthlessly repressed by the left-oriented state at the time with no serious concern whatsoever about understanding what caused this uprising and what could be done to prevent such thing from happening in future. In consequence within two decades, a second JVP uprising by a group of disgruntled Sinhala youth essentially with a similar ideological orientation to the previous insurrection emerged from 1987 onwards causing large scale disruption of the political and social order. The presence of IPKF in Sri Lanka was an additional new trigger mobilized by the rebels to invoke patriotic (*deshapremi*) violence against the state. This time the state repression of the JVP spearheaded by a right-oriented ruling party was even more violent and brutal in many instances. In this instance, there were some state-initiated efforts at understanding the root causes of the youth rebellion through the appointment of a national youth commission and implementation of some of the policy recommendations. However, the implementation of the policies advocated by the NYC was piecemeal, without regular follow-up and serious review of the changing circumstances.

The LTTE uprising from 1980s mainly engaged Tamil youth from northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. It was VE in the sense that Tamil youth were trained, armed, and indoctrinated

within an ideology of national liberation centred around the idea of Tamil Eelam. A strong ideology of martyrdom legitimized violence against the Sri Lankan state, identified as an occupying force and a hegemonic structure shaped by a Sinhala Buddhist ideology that excluded all minorities. On the other hand, the LTTE had its own hegemonic ideas about the Tamil state as reflected in the expulsion of Muslims and Sinhalese in different waves of ethnic cleansing practiced by the armed Tamil groups. The state repression against the LTTE used lessons learnt in the armed suppression of two JVP uprisings in the South, but it deployed a Sinhala Buddhist ideology of preserving the integrity of the Sinhala nation to recruit soldiers, train them and mobilize them in fighting the LTTE and eliminate them through a brutal final phase of the war justified by the Sri Lankan state and strongly condemned by liberal thinkers, LTTE sympathizers and many sections of the international community. As for long-term response, the state identified and implemented programs for the rehabilitation of LTTE fighters arrested by the state, but no serious effort has been made to undertake a program of reconciliation and peace building in post-war Sri Lanka along the lines suggested by many observers and state appointed official commissions of enquiry such as LLRC. In this context the notion of VE itself may be flawed to some extent in so far as it only considers organized and ideologically-driven violence against the state by non-state actors to the exclusion of state-initiated violence targeting rebels from the North and the South also mobilizing a hegemonic and exclusionary ideology and a related national security framework. This may, however, be countered by the idea that the state has the monopoly of violence irrespective of how and against whom such violence is mobilized by the state in given circumstances.

There are some common features in the three anti-state uprisings reviewed in the previous paragraphs.

First, all three of them are youth rebellions led by fully and partially employed or unemployed youth who did not see a future for them given the prevailing education systems, recruitment policies for employment in public and private sectors, systems of governance and discriminatory practices in society and polity. This is a key point that emerges from available academic studies, government-initiated enquiries as well as the consultations with university undergraduates carried out as part of the current policy initiative.

Second, the rebel movements deployed a variety of strategies to identify and recruit the disaffected young population. They included social, class, ethnicity, caste, gender, and a history of victimhood. Both JVP and LTTE used these criteria strategically to identify victims of structural marginalization and develop an ideology of liberation seemingly of an inclusive nature. While there is no data about the age and gender distribution of members of the two JVP uprisings and the LTTE, the 15 to 35 age group and unmarried people appear to be the primary constituency of these movements. Young women were

also recruited by each of these organizations with their number and active engagement increasing in each successive rebel movement.

Third, the recruits were separated from their families and peer groups in society at large and mobilized as part of a fulltime force not exposed to any social values, ideas, and any liberal views from outside the organizations. These movements were total institutions in the sense that Erving Goffman used the term and prevented the impact of family, religious institutions, educational establishments, and organizations such as youth clubs, sport activities and cultural engagements and the like. The separation from their families and normal peer groups enabled the rebel organizations to foster a one-track mind among their members and get them completely absorbed in the campaign of VE as the only way out of the seemingly uncorrectable system of which they were a part.

Fourth, counter insurgency, armed repression and law enforcement were the predominant strategies adopted by the Sri Lanka state in their response to these movements. This strategy may have worked in the short run but the fact that these three radical movements came one after the other gives a strong indication that repression is certainly not a viable remedy for VE in the long run. This in turn brings us to the whole question of social policies to be adopted for prevention of VE among the youth constituency in Sri Lanka.

What is presented in this document is a general policy landscape for addressing the needs of youth. The relevant policy domains include education, employment, youth affairs, governance, cultural activities and peace and reconciliation. Various interventions in these domains may be necessary in order to prevent a possible tendency for VE among youth. As of now we do not have all the data necessary to identify or advocate one policy against another in terms of preventing VE. In any case consultation with only one group of youth in the country using digital media due to the current COVID-19 situation in the country may not be sufficient to explore youth concerns and views that should be addressed in a comprehensive manner in order to prevent the recurrence of another episode of violent youth extremism. However, a useful beginning has been made towards developing an evidence-based strategy for prevention of violent extremism by youth and hopefully this will be a sound platform to initiate a dialogue among all stakeholders concerned including the youth themselves.

Kalinga Tudor Silva

Professor Emeritus, Sociology
University of Peradeniya

Comment on the Discussion Paper

This is a report on youth insights and policy recommendations needed to mitigate the devastating consequences of violent extremism. This report results from a series of wide-ranging, open dialogues with university undergraduates who represent one of the critical segments of the youth community in this country.

Discussions were originally planned with the youth of two national-level universities in Sri Lanka. However, we decided to obtain the analyses, critiques, and decisive suggestions and recommendations of the scholars of ten universities simply because of the timely value of the subject matter. We strongly believe that this effort will mark the beginning of a long-term national discourse to address issues connected to violent extremism.

We can indeed be pleased with the broad vision shown by the university undergraduates on a complex subject such as violent extremism and in this country. They highlighted critical policy positions which had been overlooked by even policymakers mandated to formulate policies in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres for over decades.

Although these youngsters are geographically diverse in Sri Lanka they have looked at issues from a national perspective with a Sri Lankan identity as a whole, when giving their proposals. Therefore, we urge policymakers, decision-makers, and scholars to realistically look at the views and suggestions contained in this report. We also invite them to proactively make use of the youth potential of this country to get their contribution to decision-making.

We appreciate the flexibility shown by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) representatives in carrying out this task and would like to express our gratitude for their contribution and feedback. The support and contribution of Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Prof. Tudor Silva, and Dr. Ramasamy Ramesh are greatly appreciated. We would also like to thank CPA colleagues who have contributed and assisted in many ways. We would also like to thank all the faculty members of the respective universities and the entire youth community for their comments and support in conducting this series of discussions, making the content more compelling.

We strongly believe that the issues raised by this report will not be limited to publication only but will be translated into action by policymakers, relevant parliamentary committee members, and other stakeholders to resolve issues arising out of the absence of a consensus in a post-war context.

Lionel Guruge
Senior Researcher
Centre for Policy Alternatives

Background

Violent Extremism (VE) refers to the use of violence in line with an ideological commitment to achieve political, religious or social goals. Violent activities can be carried out by individuals or groups based on a range of beliefs or ideologies. Violent Extremism has become a serious concern across the world, and while a diverse range of initiatives attempt globally to prevent or counter violent extremism (P/CVE), it continues nevertheless to wreak detrimental effects on the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres of society on a large scale. An extreme example of violent extremism combined with religious fundamentalism can be considered the crisis unfolding in Afghanistan, among numerous other examples across the globe. Unfortunately, in Sri Lanka in spite of the experiences over many years with the effects of violent extremism, steps preventing or countering violent extremism have remained neglected and overlooked. Creating a societal discourse and creating adequate and appropriate space to express wide-ranging opinions freely can be considered an integral aspect of an overall solution to prevent violent extremism. Therefore, this discussion paper provides such a space for a broader discussion on the dynamics of violent extremism and potential preventive measures.

Decision-makers have not tested the potential capacity of youth in finding solutions to violent extremism. Youth perspectives on preventing violent extremism and fostering respect for diversity in Sri Lanka, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural country, remain valid. The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) conducted this discussion series with a selected group of university undergraduates to gather different perspectives of the youth cohort of the country and thus encapsulate their perceptions on and recommendations for the prevention of violent extremism.

Accordingly, the basis for this discussion paper is a series of virtual discussions held with undergraduates of 09 universities across Sri Lanka on the topic of *finding solutions to prevent violent extremism in Sri Lanka*. The Capacity Building and Outreach Thematic Group of the CPA, in collaboration with academics of respective universities, facilitated these discussions, creating an unrestricted space for undergraduates in the universities of north, south, east, west, and the center of the country to express their opinions.

This is not an exhaustive analysis on the issue of “Preventing Violent Extremism” but a compilation of views of university undergraduates representing the youth of the country on the topic of violent extremism, and is expected to be a paper that contributes to the ongoing debate on combating violent extremism in Sri Lanka.

1. Executive Summary

This section provides an overall summary of the critical trends concerning the “push” and “pull” factors of Violent Extremism (VE). It then proposes vital interventions to address the root causes of violent extremism constructively and presents the preventive measures proposed by the consulted university undergraduates, an important segment of the youth of Sri Lanka.

1.1 Push and Pull Factors of Violent Extremism

The overarching “push factors” of violent extremism include, but are not limited to, inequality, discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, persecution, the denial of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, or the protracted perception among communities of deprivation of their freedom of right to life with dignity. In addition to the above, unemployment, poor and unaccountable governance, corruption, and ethno - religious - centric politics all remain push factors in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, too, the issue of violent extremism and the adversarial nature thereof have been visible over decades in various forms. The socio-political context in the recent past has shown evidence-based realities that reiterate the sheer need for solutions to prevent violent extremism within the country. Further, literature concerning violent extremism demonstrates that the youth cohort of the country has a great deal of connectivity with both “pull” and “push” factors of violent extremism, resulting particularly in being “victims” on the one hand and “perpetrators” on the other. At the same time, any form of violent extremism inevitably harms society overall with a particularly negative impact on women, children and the more marginalised areas of society.

The discussion series uncovered certain pull factors which attract young people in communities towards violent extremism. Factors which draw include a sense of assurance of protecting from discriminations and marginalization; creation of opportunities for a fair hearing; provision of hope of relief for people who faced injustices; a feeling of protection; providing support for people who are economically desperate due to disparity in resource

allocation; and the overarching issue of politicization of the public service system. In this context, the attraction of youth towards ideologies of violent extremism and their similar setups have become the basis for pull factors through which people tend to become involved in violent, extremist activities.

Furthermore, political apathy has been tolerated leading to a lack of proactive steps to revitalize the mutual trust, confidence and respect amongst the communities in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural and social landscape of the country. Authorities should take short, medium, and long-term measures with a systematic collaboration and the support of religious leaders and other concerned parties to regenerate trust and confidence among communities towards preventing a potential re-emergence of violent extremism. Therefore, this paper presents the key recommendations that emerged from these discussions. This discussion note invites adequate attention of the respective policy-making and administrative authorities to its findings. It further expects that the relevant decision-makers will use these recommendations to seek sustainable solutions for preventing violent extremism and ensuring the well being of all communities. Notably, the trend of the overwhelming majority of views is on the lines of preventing violent extremism rather than focusing on measures related to countering it.

Societal and Individual Factors in Violent Extremism

PUSH Factors



Inequality



Discrimination



Exclusion



Denial of Civil, Political,
Economic, Social &
Cultural Rights



Poor Governance,
Corruption in the
Public Sector

PULL Factors



Sense of assurance of
protecting from
discriminations



Guarantee of defending
from
marginalization



Anticipation of fair
hearing and feeling of
protection



Hope of relief for
injustices and Illusion of
bringing peace



Economic support for people
in poverty and Peer pressure
that promotes violence

1.2 Key Recommendations

Short Term

- The current constitutional reform process should give greater attention to ensure constitutional safeguards that protect and promote historical, cultural multiplicity, fostering equal constitutional guarantees to all religions and cultural values.
- Currently there is an absence of common identity in Sri Lanka due to entrenched ethno-religious polarization so that there is a crucial need in the post-war context to create a common identity among all segments of this country.
- Robust measures are needed to effectively implement ongoing civic education subjects in schools – there appear to be some flaws in teaching methods so that the expected outcomes have not been met so far. Therefore, effective monitoring, assessment and follow up are needed to make a meaningful change through civic education which is an important subject to nurture a culture of respect for human rights, democracy, diversity, pluralism and peace.
- The government should take necessary action to strengthen the independent functioning of state bureaucrats, law enforcement authorities, and the judiciary. The authorities should review, redefine and resolve the age-old social exclusion and the intentional or unintentional structural discrimination in institutional frameworks at all levels towards preventing violent extremism. Accordingly, public institutions and officials should uphold the key principles of the quality of government such as impartiality, fairness, equality before law and accountability in exercising public power and taking decisions that affect citizens of this country: Such a mindset should be inculcated among public officials.
- Authorities should pay careful attention to the composition of specific public institutions that are mandated to take decisions affecting the multi-cultural sentimentalities of people. They should arrange space for equal opportunities for representing and holding decision-making positions in such institutions. The current public bureaucracy does not mirror the actual demographic composition of this country so that there is a need to make bureaucracy more representative. Furthermore minority representation in civil service should not be symbolic, rather it should be active and provide for proportionate representation which will increase the legitimacy over government decisions and increase trust in government on the part of minorities.

- All concerned and mandated state institutions should take necessary actions to implement the Official Language Policy effectively and facilitate and coordinate its implementation to achieve peace and harmony as envisaged.
- There is no proper mechanism in place to effectively regulate social media which currently provides substantial avenues for promoting violent extremism so that there is an urgent need to address this shortfall.

Medium Term

- The ongoing debate and the discourse on constitutional reforms in the country should pay serious attention to establishing an independent "National Reconciliation Commission." Such an independent commission should have its mandate to receive grievances connected to reconciliation matters, including but not limited to social cohesion, co-existence, and incidents of violent extremism. It should inquire about such concerns and provide remedies as appropriate.
- The Ministry of Education should initiate a program to inculcate the significance of embracing religions' genuine and spiritual meanings. For example, every child should have the opportunity to use 30% of the time from 'subject of religion' to learn about other religions.
- Primary and secondary education sector reforms are needed to include appropriate subjects or integrations into an existing subject/s that will build the knowledge and understanding of diverse ethnic and religious cultures. Such reforming of the school curriculum will inculcate respect towards values of diversity and dissent. Most importantly, there is a definite need to foster the study of comparative religion at schools to impart basic understanding of the different religions of Sri Lanka. This will eradicate skepticism and misunderstandings over other religions and their practices – an area which remains a veritable hotbed for violent extremism in Sri Lanka from recent times.
- The University Grants Commission and other institutions mandated for higher education should revisit their visions, missions, and objectives to explicitly entrench the missing aspect of 'creating knowledge leaders who are passionate about the country's national harmony and social co-existence' as an integral element of their institutional deliverables.
- Sri Lanka's trilingual policy for schools must be implemented nation-wide for primary, secondary and tertiary education levels; including in religiously segregated schools.

- The government should take necessary action to evaluate the socio-economic and psychological impact, and cost of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act and regulations thereunder and abolish the implementation of inappropriate provisions so as to foster national cohesion and co-existence.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sports should appoint an independent committee to assess and evaluate the processes and performances of the proposed and agreed policy proposals in the National Youth Policy. Accordingly, it should design a Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism with sufficient infrastructure and embedded accountability of designated officials to implement recommendations. Currently, there is no youth quota for political participation in elected bodies so measures should be taken to enhance political participation of youth. This enables them to raise their voice in policy making forums and thereby contribute to the policy making process to address issues encountered by youth in different parts of the country. At present, there remains a huge grievance, agony and desperation in relation to the lack of space for political participation which can potentially be harmful in the future unless a meaningful solution is found.
- A gendered approach to Preventing Violent Extremism should be adopted by key stakeholders in implementing actionable policies and programs that inspire youth leadership. Namely, access to economic opportunities and equitable distribution of resources are fundamental to alleviating ethnic grievances and inter-ethnic rivalries. The Central Government should adopt such an approach in its 2030 vision for sustainable development.

Long Term

- The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Education Commission, should review the slow progress of implementing national education policies and strategize for effective implementation with necessary revisions.
- Authorities should strengthen the institutional framework of the Official Language Commission with provincial-level branches and convert it to an independent commission. Such an independent commission should have a clear mandate with enforceable powers to hold officials who are not complying with the implementation of the language policy accountable. The commission should consist of members from all communities.

- The authorities should review the impact of unaccountable media behavior in the past and its consequences on national harmony with specific attention to violent extremism. Further, authorities should take steps to expand the Sri Lanka Press Council mandate into an "Independent Media Commission" with the mandate and enforceable powers to ensure the fundamental right of freedom of expression and an accountable media culture in Sri Lanka.
- Implementation of substantial recommendations made by the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in relation to peace and reconciliation.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sports should put in place policies to foster youth volunteerism across the country which will bring many favorable outcomes such as youth gaining a sense of ownership in society and of their country and shaping their attitudes and behavior in a productive manner. For this purpose, there is a need to review youth policies adopted in the post war context, such as the Sri Lanka Youth Parliament (SLYP) (2010), the National Youth Policy (2014), and acts which govern some youth related programs and institutions including the National Youth Social Innovation Challenge (2017). Volunteer components are missing in these existing structures.
- Key stakeholders on Preventing Violent Extremism in the Sri Lankan context must also make a shift in addressing the roots and causes of violent extremism rather than an approach such as countering terrorism.

Participants of the Discussion Series

251 Participants
from
10 Universities

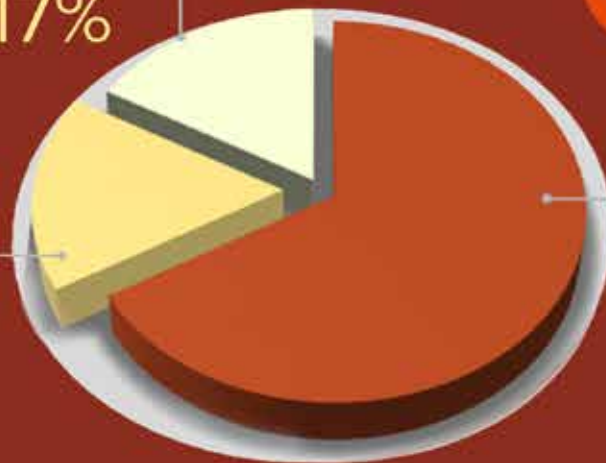


Male
109
43%



Female
142
57%

Tamil
42
17%



Muslim
42
17%

Sinhala
167
66%



2. Introduction

The people of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious, and multicultural nation of Sri Lanka had the privilege of exercising universal suffrage as one of the earliest nations to do so in Asia. They also experienced several milestone insurgencies marked by violence, which emerged due to a diverse range of issues, including (but not limited to) the failure of successive governments to address the aspirations and issues of a multicultural society. Violent Extremism (VE) in Sri Lanka, therefore, goes back decades.

Notorious instances of violent extremism that historically had a detrimental impact across the country include the youth uprising in 1971, which manifested a clear paradigm shift from radicalization to violent extremism. Additionally, the ethnic riots that occurred in 1983 led to a prolonged conflict that continued for three decades, involving violent extremism. The later stage of the 1980s also witnessed violent extremism, which manifested at a much higher intensity in the southern part of the country. In addition, there have been other more recent instances where violent extremism has emerged and led to detrimental effects, including (but not limited to) harm to people, property, economic stability, social cohesion, and the peace of the country. Therefore, more effective institutional reforms are essential in many relevant areas as part of broader national consensus towards preventing and countering violent extremism in Sri Lanka.

Need for Institutional Reforms

Suggested Institutional Mechanisms

Functions

The ongoing debate and the discourse on Constitutional reforms in the country should pay serious attention to establishing an independent "National Reconciliation Commission".

It should be mandated to receive grievances connected to reconciliation matters, including but not limited to social cohesion, co-existence, and incidents of violent extremism; inquire about such concerns and provide remedies as appropriate.

Ministry of Youth and Sports should appoint an "Independent Evaluation Committee" to assess and evaluate the processes and performances of the proposed and agreed policy propositions in the National Youth Policy.

It should design a monitoring and evaluation mechanism with sufficient infrastructure and embedded accountability of designated officials to implement recommendations.

Converting the present Official Language Commission into an "Independent Official Language Commission".

It should have a clear mandate with enforceable powers to hold officials who are not complying with the implementation of the language policy accountable. The commission should consist members from all communities.

Expand the Sri Lanka Press Council mandate into an "Independent Media Commission".

It should have the mandate and enforceable powers to ensure the fundamental right of freedom of expression and create an accountable media culture in Sri Lanka.

3. Objectives of the Discussion Series

- To identify how the sample of the country's youth perceive the status of social cohesion and co-existence.
- To identify the core issues and challenges concerning the root causes of "Violent Extremism" in Sri Lanka.
- To unveil the suggestions and recommendations about the prevention of violent extremism in Sri Lanka.
- To create a societal discourse of the potential means of preventing violent extremism and thus convince the policymakers and concerned stakeholders about the need for reforms and action.

Paradox of Policy Positions & Objectives



Testimonies of Unfulfilled Realities



Description

Objective number 3.3 of the **National Youth Policy** reiterates the need for 'Instilling a sense of social responsibility and social cohesion among young people while recognizing and respecting diversities of ethnicity, culture, religion, language and life styles in the country'.

Office for **National Unity and Reconciliation** (ONUR) was established for "Formulation of programmes to ensure reconciliation that builds up awareness, peace and unity among all communities and make recommendations to the Government and follow up".

Chapter 6. Key strategy areas and policy intervention of the National Youth Policy states "to strengthen and promote extra-curricular activities in educational institutions; identify and promote regional and local recreational opportunities such as outdoor activities, sports, and opportunities to enhance creativity; establish institutions to promote diverse arts and cultural activities; and compulsory extra-curricular activities at schools".

Opinions of the University Undergraduates

The lack of long-term strategies with a solid and well-resourced institutional setup in promoting effective interreligious, interethnic, and intercultural exchanges and interactions is a significant impediment in preventing violent extremism.

The significant trust deficit between communities and existing institutional frameworks increases the sense of exclusion and divisiveness. The lack of non-politicized institutional safeguard to address roots and elements of discontent impedes national cohesion and unity.

The lack of efforts to effectively use youth insights, their analysis on development, arts and sports skills to revitalize the multi-ethnic and religious collaborations is one of the core challenges in the country's multicultural social context and can potentially lead to social mobilization towards violent extremism.

4. Methodology

A series of virtual discussions were held with selected undergraduates of national-level universities on the topic of preventing violent extremism in Sri Lanka.

A team of researchers of the Capacity Building and Outreach Thematic Group of the CPA facilitated each discussion. Participants for these virtual discussions represented different ethnicities and religions and ensured fair gender representation of the participants.

The research team documented the discussion points and subsequently analysed the qualitative information gathered to articulate the realities faced by the youth of this country in regard to the present day potential for violent extremism, with its many negative impacts on all communities of the country and the nation as a whole.

This paper will also look into the existing formal structures within the governance system, and the Constitutional and other statutory provisions that have a definite or certain degree of bearing on equality, equity, non-discrimination, and prevention of violent extremism.

Categorization of Key Issues

Key Issues	Emphasized by the University Undergraduates									
	Colombo	Eastern	Jaffna	Kelaniya	Peradeniya ^a	Rajarata	Ruhuna	Sabaragamuwa	South Eastern	Sri Japura
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
6	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

(cont.)

Key Issues	Emphasized by the University Undergraduates									
	Colombo	Eastern	Jaffna	Kelaniya	Peradeniya	Rajarata	Ruhuna	Sabaragam uwa	South Eastern	Sri J'pura
11	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓
12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓

5. Key Issues, Legislative Framework and the Recommendations

Key Issues	Existing Constitutional, Legislative & Administrative Frameworks	Key Recommendations	Institutional/Stakeholder Responsibility
<p>The lack of equal respect and sense of protection to people of different religions and the absence of inclusive identity for all ethnic and religious groups leads to the reemergence of potential roots for violent extremism.</p> <p>The politicization of religious institutions leads to ethnic and religious divisiveness. It is an unfortunate outcome of the continuation of the implementation of policies and practices with no due recognition of the value of equality and equity of communities of a multi-religious and multicultural society.</p>	<p>Constitution, Chapter III, Fundamental Rights</p> <p>Article 10. Every Person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.</p>	<p>While emphasizing the significance of respecting the identities and freedoms of communities representing multi-ethnic and diverse religious backgrounds, greater attitudinal transformation is needed to identify people as ‘Sri Lankan.’</p> <p>The current constitutional reform process should give greater attention to ensure provisions that protect and promote historical, and cultural diversity, fostering equal constitutional guarantees to all religions, ethnicities and cultural values.</p> <p>An initiative should be introduced to inculcate the significance of embracing the genuine and spiritual meanings of religions to counter any extremist misrepresentations. In addition, the respect for diversity has been an accepted cross-cutting benchmark, as opposed to a factor that leads to the division of communities due to being closely connected with political agendas.</p>	<p>The government, executive, legislature, and judiciary have the core responsibility for protecting and promoting the fundamental rights of citizens.</p> <p>Civil society at large has the oversight responsibility and should carry out regular monitoring, including advocating in situations of violation of fundamental rights of citizens.</p>
<p>Core Focus: Fundamental Rights, Official Language Policy, Laws & International Instruments</p>			

<p>The politicization of law enforcement leads to undermining the independence of the rule of law and diminishes the public trust in law enforcement authorities.</p> <p>State decisions that lead to intentional or inadvertent discrimination continue to create a perception undermining equal protection under the law for all communities in a multi-cultural society.</p>	<p>Constitution, Chapter III, Fundamental Rights</p> <p>Article 12. (1) All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law.</p> <p>(2) No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any one of such grounds.</p>	<p>There is a definite need for attitudinal transformation among varied stakeholders, including but not limited to the policymakers, civil society actors, academia, media (Mainstream and Social), religious leaders, the youth, and citizens at large; to embrace unity and exclude racial or religious divisiveness.</p>	
		<p>The Government should take necessary action to strengthen the independent functioning of state bureaucrats, law enforcement authorities, and the judiciary. Accordingly, the authorities should review, redefine and resolve the long-tasted social exclusion and the intentional or unintentional structural discrimination in the institutional frameworks at all levels in preventing violent extremism.</p> <p>Further, legislators, without undermining any of the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights, should formulate necessary legislation to curtail potential of violent extremism and criminalize the acts that promote violent extremism and detrimental to social cohesion and</p>	<p>The government, executive, legislature, and judiciary have the core responsibility to protect and promote the fundamental rights of citizens.</p> <p>Civil society at large has the oversight responsibility and should carry out regular monitoring, including advocacy in situations of violation of fundamental rights of citizens.</p>

<p>The authorities do not effectively and meaningfully implement the Official Language Policy (OLP) enshrined in the Constitution.</p> <p>Lack of opportunities for interaction among multi-ethnic societies due to the poor implementation of</p>	<p>Constitution, Chapter IV, Language</p> <p>Article 18. (As amended by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution)</p> <p>(1) Official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala</p>	<p>All concerned and mandated state institutions should take necessary actions to implement the Official Language Policy effectively. Mandated institutions should facilitate and coordinate the implementation of the Official</p>	<p>national harmony. Such legislative frameworks should enable people who become victims of violent extremism to seek legal remedies.</p> <p>Authorities should pay careful attention to the composition of specific public institutions that are mandated to take decisions affecting the multi-cultural sentimentalities of people. Therefore, the recruitments to such institutions (including but not limited to, the Department of Archaeology, the Museum, Department of National Archives, Departments of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian Religious Affairs, Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, Central Cultural Fund, National Film Corporation and Official Language Commission) should demonstrate the space for equal opportunities for representing and holding decision making positions.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Public Services, Provincial Councils and Local Government. Department of Official Languages Official Languages Commission</p>
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<p>Constitutional and other legislative provisions, increasing suspicion and distrust among communities. Thus, the core issue of lack of short, medium, and long-term strategy and an action plan for implementing official language policy has a greater bearing as a root cause of violent extremism.</p>	<p>(2) Tamil shall also be an official language.</p> <p>Article 19. The National Languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil.</p> <p>As per the 16th Amendment to the Constitution, Article 21 (Media of Instruction); Article 22 (Languages of Administration); Article 23 (Language of Legislation); and Article 24 (Languages of the Courts) further enshrined the language rights through wide-ranging legally binding provisions.</p>	<p>Language Policy to achieve peace and harmony.</p> <p>Further, the Official Language Commission should take proactive action to recommend principles of policy relating to the use of Official Languages, and to monitor and supervise the compliance with the provisions contained in Chapter IV of the Constitution; promote the appreciation of the Official Languages and the acceptance, maintenance, and continuance of their status, equality, and right of use.</p> <p>Authorities should strengthen the institutional framework of the Official Language Commission by converting it to an independent commission. Such an independent commission should have a clear mandate with enforceable powers to hold officials who are not complying with the implementation of the language policy accountable.</p>	<p>National Institute of Language Education and Training</p> <p>All Chief Official Language Implementing Officers (COLIOs) and Official Language Implementing Officers (OLIOs) of public institutions.</p>
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	<p>Constitutionally guaranteed Official Language Policy complemented by Public Administration Circular No: 18/2009</p> <p>“It has been decided by the Government to set out in a Gazette Notification the responsibilities of the Chief Official Languages Implementation Officer and the Official Languages Implementation Officer for the purpose of giving effect to the Official Languages Policy.”</p>	<p>Further, authorities should establish provincial-level Official Language Commissions.</p>	
<p>The potential abuse of legislation like the Prevention of Terrorism Act and related regulations fuels the underlying causes of violent extremism, which can alienate people within and between communities and have immediate and lasting consequences on national harmony.</p> <p>In addition, lack of assessment of socio-economic and psychological impact and cost on fundamental rights and freedoms of people, their families, society at large, and the integrity of the legal system and the rule of law is an area of concern in preventing violent extremism.</p>	<p>Regulations made under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act No. 48 of 1979; Extraordinary Gazette Notification No. 2218/68 - dated March 12, 2021, cited as the ‘Prevention of Terrorism (De-radicalization from holding violent extremist religious ideology) Regulations No. 01 of 2021’ issued by the President whereby any person who surrenders or is taken into custody on suspicion of being a person who by words either spoken or intended to be read or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise, causes or intends to cause commission</p>	<p>Authorities must take steps to act on the formulation, enforcement, and enforcement of laws, regulations, executive orders, and other administrative or statutory provisions affecting the legal frameworks of areas such as violence, extremist activities, prevention of terrorism, protests, and demonstrations, as an integral part of the reforms of the overall legislative system. Such action should include a full analysis of the fundamental rights and freedoms affected by those provisions and followed by a broader social discourse and consideration of opinions.</p>	<p>The executive branch of the government, Law makers, policy advisory institutions, Attorney General’s Department, law enforcement authorities and the judiciary.</p>

<p>Lack of implementation of existing legal and policy provisions through which the state's commitment to adhere to international instruments such as ICCPR guarantees civil and political rights of people has been legalized.</p> <p>The gap of implementing relevant laws that support promoting social harmony and curtailing violent extremism is a common phenomenon in the country context. This inevitably provides space for perpetrators to trigger acts of violent extremism with no regard for the harmful consequences to society at large.</p>	<p>of acts of violence or religious, racial or communal disharmony or feelings of ill will or hostility between different communities or racial or religious groups; may be referred to a rehabilitation programme in terms of the provisions of these regulations.</p>	<p>The government should take necessary action to evaluate the socio-economic and psychological impact and cost of such legislation and abolish the implementation of inappropriate provisions towards fostering national cohesion and co-existence.</p>	
<p>Lack of implementation of existing legal and policy provisions through which the state's commitment to adhere to international instruments such as ICCPR guarantees civil and political rights of people has been legalized.</p> <p>The gap of implementing relevant laws that support promoting social harmony and curtailing violent extremism is a common phenomenon in the country context. This inevitably provides space for perpetrators to trigger acts of violent extremism with no regard for the harmful consequences to society at large.</p>	<p>Section 3 (1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act, No. 56 Of 2007 stipulates "No person shall propagate war or advocate national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Further, subsections (2) and (3) of Section 3 criminalizes who commits such acts of subsection (1) and impose punishments respectively.</p>	<p>Law enforcement authorities should implement existing legal provisions that promote non-discrimination and prohibit acts that incite towards discrimination and violence.</p>	<p>Law enforcement authorities and the judiciary of the country.</p>

<p>Lack of enforcement of provisions in the constitution guaranteeing against discrimination.</p> <p>Continued disregard for and lack of affirmative action to protect and promote social and cultural rights in a multicultural society.</p>	<p>Article 2 (2) of Part II of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that "Each state to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."</p>	<p>Mandated state institutions should guarantee that people representing multicultural backgrounds equally enjoy their social and cultural rights without discrimination.</p>	<p>Law enforcement authorities, public institutions and judiciary of the country.</p>
<p>Core Focus: Primary, Secondary & Higher Education</p>			
<p>The primary and secondary education system does not include strategic frameworks that build the knowledge and understanding of the country's multicultural demography.</p> <p>Further, the reform processes of the curriculum have not adequately included the potential of students and teachers in primary and secondary education in building national cohesion and unity by promoting respect towards values of diversity and dissent.</p> <p>Lack of proper orientation for teachers on the policy positions,</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education is primarily responsible for the country's education policy and its practical implementation.</p> <p>The National Institute of Education (NIE), Sri Lanka, is mandated to provide leadership for the development of general education with equity and relevance in pluralistic society by ensuring capacity building of educational managers, teacher educators and teachers, design and develop school curricular and conduct policy research on education as per the provisions of National Institute of Education Act No. 28 of 1985.</p>	<p>Primary and secondary education sector reforms are needed to include appropriate subjects or integrations into an existing subject/s that will build the knowledge and understanding of diverse ethnic and religious cultures. Thus, such reforming of the school curriculum will inculcate respect towards values of diversity and dissent.</p> <p>Further, any such reform process should include comprehensive assessment and review of the existing regular subjects of the existing curriculum and extra-curricular activities, including arts, sports, recreation, and leisure,</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education in close collaboration with the National Institute of Education (NIE).</p> <p>The Ministry of Education in close collaboration with National Education Commission to revisit bottlenecks in implementing proposals for a national policy on general education in Sri Lanka, 2016 through which it has reiterated "The achievement of National Cohesion, National Integrity and National Unity" as its first national goal.</p>

<p>strategies, action plans that promote social cohesion and eliminate potential root causes for violent extremism identified as a significant lacuna. The adverse impact of ethnic and religion-centric ideologies of teachers is an area of issue that education authorities have not adequately addressed.</p>	<p>The National Education Commission established under the National Education Commission Act No. 19, 1991 with its mandate to provide recommendations to the President, on educational policy in all aspects, with a view to, ensuring continuity in educational policy and enabling the education system to respond to changing needs in society.</p>	<p>and ensure the establishment of implementable action plans that truly promote qualities such as sharing, building trust, confidence, self-esteem, generosity, and creativity.</p> <p>The authorities should establish an annual “National Multicultural School Program” for schools at national and provincial levels. Such an initiative should be designed and launched with careful analysis and consultation with concerned parties to promote tolerance and intercultural awareness and understanding that builds a just and inclusive society. <i>For example, every child should have the opportunity to use 30% of the time from ‘subject of religion’ to learn about other religions.</i></p> <p>Authorities should look into the need for the state’s intervention with a stronger political will to formulate strategies for a more significant attitudinal change across the board of the education system.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Education Commission, should review the slow progress of implementing national education policies and strategize for effective</p>	
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<p>The effects of ethnic and religious ideologies on the attitude of the teaching staff of universities and vocational training institutes, diploma institutes, and colleges established in the country's higher education sector are often detrimental to social cohesion.</p> <p>The consequences of such antagonistic viewpoints that could directly affect the reconciliation and coexistence of a multicultural society are further exacerbated by the lack of a proper strategic plan of action, within and outside the respective course contents, that promotes the mutual understanding of the ethnic, religious and cultural identities of the youth in higher education institutions.</p>		<p>implementation with necessary revisions. Authorities should strengthen the institutional capacity, independence, and mandate of the National Education Commission. Its mandate should not be limited to advising the President but expand to other relevant institutions in the education sector.</p>	
<p>The Ministry of Higher Education and affiliated institutional frameworks, such as the University Grant Commission and the National Education Commission, have the necessary institutional mandates to enrich the quality of 'social aspect of triple bottom line' of the leavers of higher educational institutes.</p> <p>Additionally, as per the provisions of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Act, No. 20 of 1990, the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission has the power of policy formulation, planning, quality assurance, coordination, and development of tertiary and vocational education in the country.</p>	<p>Authorities should carry out a comprehensive review of the current higher education system in line with the National Policy Proposals' objectives on Higher Education in Sri Lanka-2019' submitted by the National Education Commission. Higher educational authorities should take immediate action to introduce necessary and innovative approaches to establish and implement programs that promote "social awareness and sensitivity to values of diversity, pluralism, social harmony and human solidarity to mold democratic and responsible citizenship" in higher educational institutions.</p> <p>The University Grants Commission and other mandated institutions for higher education should revisit their</p>		<p>The Ministry of Higher Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, National Education Commission, Vocational Education Commission, University Grant Commission, and establishments mandated for other higher education institutions.</p>

		<p>visions, missions, and objectives to explicitly entrench the missing aspect of 'creating knowledge leaders who are passionate about the country's national harmony and social co-existence as an integral element of their institutional deliverables.</p>	
Core Focus: National Youth Policy & UN Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security			
<p>Unsatisfactory perception of equal treatment and fair opportunities in youth forums (E.g. Youth Parliament)</p> <p>The lack of a national-level forum through which innovative solution-oriented views and suggestions of youth can be presented and considered towards preventing violent extremism.</p> <p>The lack of avenues for effective, systematic, and meaningful participation of youth in the policy-making processes.</p> <p>The absence of unbiased and equal opportunities to represent such forums and a genuine political will to adopt inclusive policy formulation processes within an acceptable institutional mechanism.</p>	<p>Chapter 6. Key strategy areas and policy intervention of the national youth policy elaborates the sheer need for immediate policy interventions to address social exclusion and discrimination. The proposal for establishing and implementing the 'Youth Ombudsman' is inclusive in this policy while it reiterates the need for creating better opportunities and spaces for meaningful participation of the youth at national levels.</p> <p>"UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security"</p> <p>"Urges Members States to facilitate an inclusive and enabling environment in which youth actors, including youth from different backgrounds, are recognized and</p>	<p>The Ministry of Youth and Sports should appoint an independent committee to assess and evaluate the processes and performances of the proposed and agreed policy propositions in the National Youth Policy. Accordingly, design a Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism with sufficient infrastructure and embedded accountability of designated officials to implement recommendations.</p> <p>The Ministry of Youth and Sports should maintain close collaborations with higher educational institutes, student unions, and other youth social forums and explore all potential opportunities to engage with youth in creating meaningful strategies and implementing policy positions and programs aimed at,</p>	<p>The Ministry of Youth and Sports.</p>

	<p>provided with adequate support to implement violence prevention activities and support social cohesion.”</p>	<p>inter alia, national cohesion, and social coexistence.</p>	
<p>Under the cabinet Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Youth Services Council has; act in a manner constantly promoting multicultural understanding and goodwill among youth as an organization that consists of different cultures” as one of its values.</p> <p>Lack of efforts to effectively harness youth insights, their analysis on development, and skills in arts and sports to revitalize multiethnic and religious collaborations..</p> <p>Ample space available for the socialization of artistically constructed extremist ideologies (E.g.: through films, tele-dramas, songs) that favor one community while being detrimental to another.</p> <p>Lack of long-term strategies with a solid and well-resourced institutional setup in promoting effective interreligious, interethnic, and intercultural exchanges and interactions..</p>	<p>National Youth Policy - 2014</p> <p>Objective number 3.3 of the National Youth Policy reiterates the need for ‘Instilling a sense of social responsibility and social cohesion among young people while recognizing and respecting diversities of ethnicity, culture, religion, language and life styles in the country’.</p> <p>It further elaborates its aims to promote understanding among young people on issues of difference and diversity; multiple histories and traditions of Sri Lankan society; universal values of inclusiveness and tolerance; respect for spiritual and ethical values; a culture of non-violence and peaceful resolution of conflicts both inter-personal and inter-community.</p> <p>Chapter 6. Key strategy areas and policy intervention of the national youth policy elaborates the plans for Peace and Reconciliation. It</p>	<p>Ministry of Youth and Sports should work in collaboration with the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs and affiliated institutions to prioritize the effective use of skills of youth in arts, sports, culture and innovation ensuring a transformation of attitudes of suspicion and disengagement among communities.</p> <p>The Ministry of Youth and Sports should develop long-term strategies with a solid and well-resourced institutional setup in promoting effective interreligious, interethnic, and intercultural exchanges and interactions with objectives of preventing violent extremism and fostering reconciliation.</p> <p>The Ministry of Youth and Sports should appoint an independent committee to assess and evaluate the processes and performances of the proposed and agreed policy proposals in the National Youth Policy. Accordingly, to design</p>	<p>The Ministry of Youth and Sports.</p> <p>The Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Mass Media, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and all other relevant public institutions.</p> <p>Civil society and the donor community should invest more in inclusive programs and policy interventions. The active and meaningful participation, representation, decision-making opportunities are equally accessible and available to the youth cohort of the country. Additionally, it should continue its advocacy efforts to convince the policymakers and implementers of the indispensability of the youth inclusive governance approach.</p>

	<p>underscores the need for policy interventions to strengthen and promote extra-curricular activities in educational institutions; identify and promote regional and local recreational opportunities such as outdoor activities, sports, and opportunities to enhance creativity; establish institutions to promote diverse arts and cultural activities; and compulsory extra-curricular activities at schools.</p>	<p>a Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism with sufficient infrastructure and a mechanism for ensuring accountability of designated officials to implement recommendations.</p> <p>The Ministry of Youth should have a national strategy and a plan of action to disengage youth from political and social discourses derived from ethnic and religion-centric extreme ideologies and treat them as messengers of sharing history and culture, demystifying the chronic issue of mistrust and ambiguity among different communities.</p>	
Core Focus: Institutional framework for Social Cohesion and Reconciliation			
<p>Ideologies around ethnicity and religion play a decisive role in the emergence of violent extremism.</p> <p>Youth tend to be easily attracted towards violent extremism if a forum is not available where their issues, challenges and grievances can be channelled to decision makers for genuine consideration. When they do not have sufficient opportunity for fair hearing too, that can lead to VE.</p> <p>The significant trust deficit between communities and existing</p>	<p>Gazette No 1945/41 dated 18.12.2015, wherein affairs of national reconciliation are entrusted with the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) under the Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation. However, by the Extraordinary Gazette dated 09th August 2020, the ONUR came within the purview of the Ministry of Justice.</p> <p>This institutional arrangement was established for "Making recommendations to the Government on measures to be</p>	<p>The ongoing debate and the discourse on Constitutional reforms in the country should pay serious attention to establishing an independent "National Reconciliation Commission." Such an independent commission should be mandated to receive grievances connected to reconciliation matters, including but not limited to social cohesion, co-existence, and incidents of violent extremism, and inquire about such concerns and provide remedies as appropriate.</p>	<p>The government should take necessary action to establish such an independent body as part of the constitutional reform process.</p> <p>Civil society is responsible for showcasing the consequences of violent extremism and its irreparable cost in social, economic, and political spheres and thus is in a position to actively advocate for a long-lasting independent intuitional framework that provides solutions.</p>

<p>institutional frameworks increases the sense of exclusion and divisiveness among communities.</p> <p>The lack of non-politicized institutional safeguard to address roots and elements of discontent in conjunction with push and pull factors as drivers towards violent extremism, is a significant impediment to national cohesion and unity.</p>	<p>taken to resolve issues causing stress and conflicts existed among different communities and implementation of such measures and follow up” and “Formulation of programmes to ensure reconciliation that builds up awareness, peace and unity among all communities and make recommendations to the Government and follow up” .</p>	<p>Such action will be essential for better governance of multicultural society and communities to be better protected against violent extremism.</p> <p>Such an independent commission should be given enforceable powers that facilitate effective, efficient, and meaningful functioning.</p>	
Core Focus: Mainstream and Social Media			
<p>The unaccountable reporting and unethical behavior of mainstream media and social media through which misinformation circulates too fast, particularly in the latter, and misinformation and disinformation are particularly connected to and derived from extreme ethnic or religious ideologies to create violent extremism almost instantaneously.</p> <p>During elections in particular there is extensive and unregulated use of media. Politicians use Social Media to ignite people's emotions and cause divisions using ethnic and religion centric ideologies for their political agendas.</p>	<p>Sri Lanka Press Council Law, No.5 of 1973 of The National State Assembly - 27th February, 1973</p> <p>The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka - No. 162/5A - Wednesday, October 14, 1981</p> <p>The Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL) has issued different gazette notifications through which it has tried to streamline the media during election times. ECSL has made such regulation [under section 104(5)(A)] and to ensure the adherence of political parties and candidates to minimum standards of ethics, which entails a certain degree</p>	<p>The authorities should review the impact of unaccountable media behavior in the past and its consequences on national harmony with specific attention to violent extremism. Further, the Ministry of Mass Media, jointly with the Sri Lanka Press Council, should collaborate with other concerned parties and design a “National Media Policy Preventing Violent Extremism.”</p> <p>The Ministry of Mass Media should review the effectiveness of implementing the Sri Lanka Press Council Law No. 5 of 1973 of the National State Assembly in line with the emerging socio-political trends at present.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Mass Media, Sri Lanka Press Council, Election Commission of Sri Lanka and other concerned public institutions.</p> <p>Civil society has a crucial role in investing in more research to find evidence-based data and information that proves the socio-political and economic damage of unaccountable media behavior, its impact on violent extremism, and its specific implications on the social cohesion and co-existence of a multicultural society and therefore should advocate policymakers and implementers for reforms.</p>

<p>Even though social media is a vast and challenging area to regulate its use, especially during elections, the spread of such violent extremist sentiments in such a way as to provoke the sensitivities of communities of different ethnic and religious backgrounds for petty political agendas is still a continuing and unresolved issue.</p>	<p>of regulatory effort on, inter alia, 'hate speech or speech prejudicial to national harmony.'</p>	<p>Further, authorities should take steps to expand the Sri Lanka Press Council mandate into an "Independent Media Commission" with the mandate and enforceable powers to ensure the fundamental right of freedom of expression and an accountable media culture in Sri Lanka.</p> <p>While recognizing the vital role of social media as a means to right to freedom of expression of society at large, authorities should take actions to regulate the publishing of violent extremist sentiments, hate speech, and other forms of expressions that are maliciously insulting human instincts provoking the communities of different ethnic and religious backgrounds for petty political and other agendas.</p>	
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6. Conclusion

No single or specific motive can explain why people become violent extremists or why violent extremism affects Sri Lankan society, and a number of complex factors are found in the case of the global situation too. However, a diverse range of views emerged during the series of online discussions conducted during the first half of 2021 with local university undergraduates who categorically suggested that there are certain "push" and "pull" factors connected to violent extremism in Sri Lanka.

Constitutionally enshrined fundamental rights guarantee, among other things, the right to equality, freedom from torture, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of speech, assembly, association, occupation, and movement, all of which provide a better platform for social cohesion, co-existence and unity within diversity. With the lack of meaningful implementation of those with a commitment for genuine facilitation to realize such rights, serious underlying issues may influence people to become violent extremists and would cause repercussions if not addressed immediately.

Exclusive ethno-nationalism and faith-based ideologies incite people, youth in particular, and often have tremendous potential to lead to violent extremism. Given the pivotal role and high level of responsibility of social and political leadership in ensuring social cohesion and co-existence in a multi-ethnic society, politicians, political associates, faith leaders, and celebrities who stand against ethnonationalism and faith-based ideologies will be helpful in combating violent extremism.

The education system needs an exclusive review of its strategic plans, failures, challenges, and areas for improvement regarding effective contribution to realizing a long-lasting behavioral transformation of the younger generation. Such transformation needs, however, to be founded upon a socio-political culture that promotes and respects diversity, social cohesion, and co-existence, enabling the prevention of root causes of violent extremism within a multicultural society like Sri Lanka.

Both mainstream and social media play a decisive role in a context where the latter has fragmented the conventional forms of social interactions and human interfaces in

the current digital era. Therefore, innovative approaches should be conceptualized, designed, and implemented to keep human connectivity alive. Social media reduces the media's ability to mislead people with misinformation and disinformation towards violent extremism. Implementation of a strong well-designed Code of Ethics is strongly suggested for all forms of media to discourage the dissemination of information that could trigger violence. Instead, the media should promote discourses to which wider viewership and audiences from diverse ethnic and religious groups have equal access. This can engage them in non-violent, well-moderated conversations on social, economic, cultural, and political issues handled constructively. The issue of extensive and unregulated use of all forms of media, particularly social media, to normalise hate speech, particularly during election periods, should immediately be addressed. This has an inevitable potential to trigger drivers for violent extremism.

Constitutionally guaranteed language rights as stipulated under Chapter IV of the Constitution and the Thirteenth and the Sixteenth Amendments, respectively, confirms that Sinhala and Tamil are both Official and National languages of Sri Lanka to be implemented meaningfully and achieve the envisaged outcomes with its full spirit. However, the language barrier, its implications on equal opportunities and discrimination are push factors for violent extremism. Therefore, the need to adapt the originally envisaged objectives of the Constitutional recognition of Sinhala and Tamil languages as official and national languages, has become an utmost priority in revitalizing social cohesion and co-existence. This helps people from different ethnic and religious groups live in harmony and prevent violent extremism through non-violent means.


Violent extremism is an issue that requires serious consideration of some of the most fundamental social and cultural practices in Sri Lankan society. It is essential to understand the implications of the decreasing faith of the people in vital public institutions such as the executive, the legislature, law enforcement, state bureaucracy, and the judiciary, and the injustice caused by the politicization of the rule of law.

In conclusion, a multi-faceted social and political transformation is essential to prevent future resurgence of violent extremism. To this end, a stronger political will is essential to support the citizens' civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights.

The task of rectifying politically-driven ethnic and religion-centric suspicion of communities requires immediate and lasting strategies that address the identified challenges of policy and practice.

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