



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Sri Lanka: Minority religious groups

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Contents

Executive summary	4
Assessment	5
About the assessment	5
1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals	5
1.1 Credibility.....	5
1.2 Exclusion	6
2. Convention reason(s)	6
3. Risk from state actors.....	6
3.1 Overview.....	6
3.2 Risk to Christians from state actors.....	7
3.3 Risk to Muslims from state actors.....	8
3.4 Risk to Hindus from state actors.....	9
3.5 Risk from non-state actors: overview	9
3.6 Risk to Christians from non-state actors	10
3.7 Risk to Muslims from non-state actors	11
3.8 Risk to Hindus from non-state actors	11
4. Protection	11
5. Internal relocation	12
6. Certification	13
Country information	14
About the country information	14
7. Religious demography.....	14
7.1 Population sizes.....	14
7.2 Breakdown by ethnicity/geographical location	14
7.3 Christians.....	16
7.4 Muslims	16
7.5 Hindus	17
8. Legal context	17
8.1 Constitution	17
8.2 Penal code	18
8.3 Registration of religious groups	20
8.4 Education and religious teaching.....	22
8.5 Proselytising and conversion.....	22
8.6 Other Islamic legal restrictions	23
9. Religious minorities participation in the political sphere.....	23

10. State treatment	24
10.1 Overview.....	24
10.2 Christians.....	27
10.3 Muslims	32
10.1 Hindus	35
10.1 State reaction to the Easter 2019 bombings.....	36
11. Land disputes and religious sites.....	37
12. Societal treatment.....	41
12.1 Overview.....	41
12.2 Social media and online abuse.....	42
12.3 Christians.....	44
12.4 Muslims	46
12.5 Hindus	49
12.6 Buddhist nationalism.....	49
13. Interfaith marriages.....	50
14. Criminal justice system effectiveness and avenues of redress.....	51
14.1 Judicial system.....	51
14.2 Police effectiveness	52
14.3 Complaints procedures.....	54
14.4 Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka (HRCSL).....	54
14.5 National Police Commission (NPC).....	56
15. Freedom of movement	56
15.1 Internal migration	56
Research methodology.....	58
Terms of Reference.....	59
Bibliography	61
Sources cited	61
Sources consulted but not cited	64
Version control and feedback.....	65
Feedback to the Home Office.....	65
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information.....	65

Executive summary

Sri Lanka is a majority Buddhist country. Religious minorities account for just under 30% (6.5 million people) of the 21.9 million population. Hindus make up roughly 12.6% of the population, Muslims 9.7% and Christians 7.4%.

The Constitution and Penal Code protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of a person's faith. The law recognises the 4 religions of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, although article 9 of the Constitution affirms that Buddhism occupies the 'foremost place' and that it is the duty of the state to protect the teaching of the Buddha.

Christians, Hindus and Muslims are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state and/or non-state actors on the basis of their religion. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state is unlikely to obtain protection. In general, the state is willing and able to offer effective protection to a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor. This is because Sri Lanka takes reasonable steps to prevent the persecution by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and a person is generally able to access the protection.

Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk. A person is likely to be able to internally relocate to escape persecution or serious harm by a rogue state and/or non-state actors.

Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

[Back to Contents](#)

Assessment

Section updated: 24 February 2025

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the [country information](#), refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of whether, **in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by state and/or non-state actors because the person belongs to a minority religious group.
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- if a claim is refused, it is likely to be certified as ‘clearly unfounded’ under [section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002](#).

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

[Back to Contents](#)

1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

- 1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check (see [Biometric data-sharing process \(Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process\)](#)).
- 1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person’s claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

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[Back to Contents](#)

1.2 Exclusion

- 1.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.
- 1.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).
- 1.2.3 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection](#) and the instruction on [Restricted Leave](#).

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[Back to Contents](#)

2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed religion.
- 2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.
- 2.1.3 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

3. Risk from state actors

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1 Christians, Hindus and Muslims are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from the state. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.2 Religion, language, and ethnicity are closely linked, and it can be difficult to categorize incidents of harassment or discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. Since most Hindus are of Tamil ethnicity, decision makers must also consider this when assessing risk and must refer to the country policy and information note on [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#).
- 3.1.3 Sri Lanka is a majority Buddhist country. Religious minorities account for just under 30% of the population (6.5 million people) (see [Religious demography](#)).
- 3.1.4 The Constitution and Penal Code protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of a person's faith. The law recognises the 4 religions of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. However, article 9

of the Constitution affirms that Buddhism occupies the ‘foremost place’ in the country and that it is the duty of the state to protect the teaching of the Buddha. The right to propagate or proselytise religion is not protected under the constitution, confirmed by The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka in 2017 (see [Constitution, Penal code](#) and [Proselytising and conversion](#)).

- 3.1.5 There is no registration requirement for central religious bodies of the 4 recognised religions. New religious groups, including groups affiliated with the 4 recognised religions, must register with the government to obtain permission for certain activities. A 2022 circular issued by the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs requires new religious centres, places of worship, prayer centres and any establishment where collective worship takes place, to register. Whilst the 2022 circular only applies to new places of worship, local authorities in some areas have sought to retroactively apply this requirement to existing places of worship (see [Registration of religious groups](#)).
- 3.1.6 It is compulsory for all primary and secondary schools to teach religious studies, which includes teaching on all 4 of the state-recognised religions. Religious communities are also free to run schools and classes to teach their religions. Whilst religious schools operated by the Buddhist community receive state funding, those run by religious minorities are privately funded (see [Education and religious teaching](#)).
- 3.1.7 Land belonging to Muslims and Hindus has been expropriated by the government’s Department of Archaeology and Ministry of Defence’s Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management’s mandate to identify cultural sites across the country and use the land for the construction of Buddhist sites (see [Land disputes](#)).
- 3.1.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.2 Risk to Christians from state actors

- 3.2.1 According to the 2012 census there were roughly 1.6 million Christians across Sri Lanka, including in all major cities. More than 80% of Sri Lankan Christians are Roman Catholics. Larger Christian communities can be found in the Western, Eastern, Northern and North-Western provinces (see Religious demography- [Christians](#)).
- 3.2.2 Some Christian groups have reported instances of harassment and attempts to restrict the expression of their faith by the police and local authorities, particularly through increased requirements for Christian groups to register with the government. Christian groups have reported experiencing difficulties in complying with registration requirements due to inconsistent instructions. This treatment is not sufficiently serious individually or cumulatively to amount to persecution or serious harm. In some cases, where disputes between Christian and Buddhists groups in the community arise, officials often side with the majority religious community in the area and rule against Christians (see State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Christians](#)).

- 3.2.3 There is limited data on the number of incidents of discrimination or violence against Christians. According to Verité Research, an independent think tank, during the period of November 2022 to October 2023 there were 63 recorded incidences of violence against Christians. Thirty (49%) of the recorded incidences involved state officials as the key perpetrator. Verité Research noted that a single incident may involve more than one type of harm but stated that 34 of the incidences involved threats, intimidation or coercion and 33 involved the least severe form of violence which included discriminatory action or practices. Puttalam district in the north-west was the region where the highest number of incidences occurred 29% (18 incidences) of which 14 incidences were reported to be by state officials. The primary target was identified as Christian clergy/pastors. It should be noted the reported incidences cover a wide spectrum of treatment, much of which is unlikely to meet the high threshold of persecution or serious harm. Additionally, the low number of incidences (30) should be considered in the context of a population of 1.6 million Christians throughout Sri Lanka (see State treatment of religious minorities [Treatment of Christians](#)).
- 3.2.4 There is no information in the sources about the representation of Christians in parliament. There are reports that Christians experience discrimination in public school admissions. Christianity is not offered in some schools as a subject, often due to a lack of Christian teachers (see [Religious minorities participation in the political sphere](#) and State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Christians](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.3 Risk to Muslims from state actors

- 3.3.1 According to the 2012 census there were roughly 2.1 million Muslims in Sri Lanka. Almost all are Sunni, with fewer than 3,000 Shi'a, and a small number following the Sufi tradition. Muslims live throughout Sri Lanka with larger communities located in the Eastern Provinces (Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee), Northern provinces (Mannar) and Northwestern provinces (Puttalam) (see Religious demography- [Muslims](#)).
- 3.3.2 Muslims reported that they faced official discrimination, harassment and were unfairly targeted by the police after the 2019 Easter Sunday terrorist attacks (perpetrated by a Muslim extremist group). However, the sources indicate the state pressure experienced by the Muslim community has since subsided and in general Muslims are able to practise their faith freely. Some Muslims, particularly those previously detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), families of those detained under PTA and their legal reps, community activists and those who engage with representatives of the international community, do continue to be monitored by the state (see State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Muslims](#)).
- 3.3.3 During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government was criticised following a mandatory order to cremate any person who had died from the virus, thereby denying Muslims who had died from Covid the Islamic tradition of burying the dead; a move that was perceived as discriminatory. The government reversed the policy in February 2021, issued a formal apology in July 2024 and approved the drafting of new legislation allowing families to choose

between burial and cremation based on personal or religious preferences (see State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Muslims](#)).

- 3.3.4 Muslim political parties represent the community's interests in parliament (see [Religious minorities participation in the political sphere](#)).
- 3.3.5 Official discrimination occurs at a local level in some areas with some Muslims experiencing difficulties in public sector employment and allocation of livelihood support programs, for example in the Eastern Province by the Tamil local government. In land disputes between Tamils and Muslims local government officials regularly side with (Hindu majority) Tamils in these areas. In June 2024 government officials withheld the exam results of 70 Muslim women for wearing head coverings during their exams, the exam results were later released (see State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Muslims](#))

[Back to Contents](#)

3.4 Risk to Hindus from state actors

- 3.4.1 Hindus (12.6% of the population), who are mainly Tamils present in the Northern, Eastern, Central, Sabragamuwa and Uva provinces. They form a large majority in the north. Hindus can generally practise their faith freely throughout Sri Lanka, even in areas where Hinduism is not the main faith (see Religious demography- [Hindus and State treatment - Hindus](#))
- 3.4.2 Almost all Hindus in Sri Lanka are Tamils (although a small number of Tamils practice other religions). For claims by Tamils, decision makers must refer to the country policy and information note on [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#) for information on the treatment of Tamils.
- 3.4.3 Tamil political parties have reported increased attacks and vandalism against Hindu temples and damage to statues, by the authorities and nationalist Buddhist clergy, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces (see State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Hindus](#) and [Land disputes](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.5 Risk from non-state actors: overview

- 3.5.1 Christians, Hindus, and Muslims are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.5.2 There were instances of inter-communal tensions related to land disputes, mostly concentrated in the north and east (see State treatment of religious minorities- [Land disputes](#)).
- 3.5.3 Hindu nationalist groups use hate speech against Christian and Muslim communities in the north and advocate for non-conversion laws. Social media has played a part in the spread of misconceptions and misinformation particularly regarding anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiment. Data gathered by Hashtag Generation, a non-profit organisation focused on issues affecting young people and minorities in Sri Lanka, showed that from 470 posts of harmful speech against religious groups, posted from November 2022 to October 2023, 60% (282) of the posts were aimed at

Christians, 29% (136 posts) were aimed at Muslims and 8% (37 posts) were aimed at Hindus. 163 (35%) of the 470 posts analysed were produced by fake accounts, meaning further information on the perpetrators, including whether they were state or non-state actors, their beliefs and religious affiliation is difficult to ascertain (see [Social media and online abuse](#)).

- 3.5.4 The Peace Council of Sri Lanka created inter-religious reconciliation committees in 2010 following the end of civil war. These district-level committees consist of religious and civic leaders and laypersons from different faith traditions and ethnicities (see Societal treatment of religious minorities- [Overview](#)).
- 3.5.5 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.6 Risk to Christians from non-state actors

- 3.6.1 Christians continue to report harassment and attacks against them and their places of worship. According to Verité Research, there were 63 reported instances of violence between November 2022-October 2023, a slight decrease from those reported in 2021-2022. Figures have remained under 76 incidents per year for the 4 years preceding October 2023. Of the 63 reported instances, 14 (22%) involved identifiable individuals (individuals or groups including but not limited to residents and workers in the locality) and 11 (17%) involved Buddhist clergy as the perpetrators. Verité Research noted that a single incident may involve more than one type of harm but stated that 34 of the incidences involved threats, intimidation, or coercion and 33 involved the least severe form of violence which included discriminatory action or practices. Violence covers a wide spectrum of treatment, much of which is unlikely to meet the high threshold of persecution or serious harm. Additionally, the low number of reported incidences (63) should be considered against a population of 1.6 million Christians throughout Sri Lanka (see Societal treatment- [Christians](#) and State treatment of religious minorities- [Treatment of Christians](#)).
- 3.6.2 Attacks against Christians typically involve physical and verbal threats against pastors, the disruption of services and demands for closure of churches. Christians in rural areas were reported to face a higher risk of intimidation, discrimination and violence than those in urban areas. One of the factors driving intolerance towards Christians is fear of expansion via proselytization and accusations against evangelical Christians groups of forced conversions. Evangelical Christian groups are not as well established as other Christian groups and actively proselytise, which can attract attention and cause friction (see Societal treatment of religious minorities - [Christians](#)).
- 3.6.3 There has also been a rise in online hate speech directed at Christians including posts calling for violence against churches and pastors and posts spreading disinformation (see Societal treatment of religious minorities - [Christians](#)).
- 3.6.4 There have been no reports of significant violent events perpetrated by Muslims against Christians since the Easter Bombings carried out by Muslim extremists in 2019. In-country Christian sources informed DFAT in 2023 they

did not consider Muslims a threat to their community (see Societal treatment of religious minorities - [Christians](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.7 Risk to Muslims from non-state actors

- 3.7.1 Negative perceptions of, and violence against Muslims, increased immediately after the Easter 2019 bombings, where the Islamic State affiliated group National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) targeted Christians and killed at least 253 people and injured approximately 500 at churches and hotels across Sri Lanka. In the months following, there was an increase in physical attacks on Muslims, boycotts of Muslim businesses and property damage. People are reluctant to employ or associate with those who have previously been arrested under the PTA (see Societal treatment of religious minorities- [Muslims](#)).
- 3.7.2 In recent years Muslims have been the victims of hate speech and disinformation, spread both online and in the media, regarding perceived growth in the Muslim population, their wealth, and purported links to terrorism (see Societal treatment of religious minorities- [Muslims](#)).
- 3.7.3 There has been a rise in Buddhist Nationalist groups, formed with the purpose of protecting the Sinhalese and Buddhist identity from the 'globalisation' of religious and ethnic minorities. Following its inception in 2012, a leading Buddhist Nationalist group; Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), launched an anti-Muslim campaign which sought to spread misinformation about the Muslim community to incite hatred and violence against them. The group continues to use hate speech on social media platforms to create religious and ethnic tensions against the Muslim community (see [Buddhist Nationalism](#)).
- 3.7.4 Muslims who marry outside of their faith may experience social stigma from within their own Muslim community (see [Interfaith marriages](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

3.8 Risk to Hindus from non-state actors

- 3.8.1 In sources consulted there is little information on the societal treatment of Hindus. Buddhist monks claiming Hindu archaeological sites, particularly in the Northern and Eastern provinces, as Buddhist sites can create religious tension. Hindus are a target of online and social media abuse, though to a lesser extent than Muslim and Christian minorities (see [Land disputes](#)).
- 3.8.2 Almost all Hindus in Sri Lanka are Tamils (although a small number of Tamils practice other religions). For claims by Tamils, decision makers must refer to the country policy and information note on [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#) for information on the treatment of Tamils.

[Back to Contents](#)

4. Protection

- 4.1.1 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state is unlikely to obtain protection.
- 4.1.2 In general, the state is willing and able to offer effective protection to a

person who has a well-founded fear of persecution from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor. This is because Sri Lanka takes reasonable steps to prevent the persecution by operating an effective legal system for the detection, prosecution and punishment of acts constituting persecution and a person is generally able to access the protection.

- 4.1.3 Although the Supreme Court ruled in 2003 that the authorities are constitutionally only required to protect Buddhism, the law also states that any racial or religious hatred that encourages discrimination, hostility, or violence a criminal offence (see [Constitution](#)).
- 4.1.4 Authorities sometimes fail to address tensions and violence instigated towards religious minorities, particularly by Buddhist monks and Buddhist nationalist groups. There are, however, examples of the criminal justice system protecting religious minorities. In April 2024 the High Court in Colombo sentenced Buddhist nationalist group Bodu Bala Sena (BBS)'s general secretary to 4 years imprisonment for anti-Muslim comments made in 2016. Although the comments did not lead to direct violence, those and other instances of anti-Muslim rhetoric from BBS, has fuelled religious intolerance (see [Buddhist nationalism](#) and Societal treatment- [Muslims](#))
- 4.1.5 A presidential panel of inquiry appointed by then-President Sirisena after the 2019 Easter bombings found him guilty of his failure to prevent the attacks. In January 2023, in response to a petition filed by the Roman Catholic Church, the Supreme Court found that Sirisena and four senior security officials were guilty of negligence and ordered compensation to be paid to the victims and their families, with payments completed in 2024 (see [State reaction to the Easter 2019 bombings](#) and [Christians](#)).
- 4.1.6 The law provides for an independent judiciary and the right to a fair and public trial, and this was generally enforced. There are a number of avenues of redress against police and judicial misconduct, including the Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka (HRCSL) and the National Police Commission (NPC). Both organisations have branches across the country, which are available to all Sri Lankans. The HRCSL accepts complaints from the public as well as initiating its own investigations and has jurisdiction to investigate human rights violations. (see [General complaints procedures](#), [Human rights Commission Sri Lanka \(HRCSL\)](#) and [National Police Commission \(NPC\)](#)).
- 4.1.7 For claims by Tamils, decision makers must refer to the country policy and information note, [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#).
- 4.1.8 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#) [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 A person is likely to be able to internally relocate to escape persecution or serious harm by a rogue state and/or non-state actors.

- 5.1.3 This is because in general, there are parts of Sri Lanka where it will be reasonable to expect a person from a minority religious group to relocate.
- 5.1.4 Sri Lanka is a densely populated country. There are several major cities with populations over 100,000 including Colombo, Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia and Moratuwa. The Constitution of Sri Lanka provides for freedom of movement for all Sri Lankan citizens, no official restrictions apply to internal relocation and people are reported to relocate freely (see [Freedom of movement](#)).
- 5.1.5 Christians live throughout Sri Lanka and likely to be able, dependent on their personal circumstances, relocate to other Christian-populated areas. There are sizeable Christian groups residing in the Western, Eastern, Northern and Northwestern provinces. There are indications that urban areas are more tolerant of Christians than rural ones (see Religious demography- [Christians](#)).
- 5.1.6 Muslims form a plurality in the Eastern Province, and there are sizable Muslim populations in the Eastern provinces (Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee), Northern provinces (Mannar) and Northwestern provinces (Puttalam) (see Religious demography- [Muslims](#)).
- 5.1.7 Hindus are also located throughout Sri Lanka and, dependent on their personal circumstances, have the option to relocate to another highly populated Hindu area. Hindus constitute the majority in the Northern province and retain a significant presence in the Eastern province. Hindus also constitute a large presence in the Central, Sabaragamuwa, and Uva provinces (see Religious demography- [Hindus](#)).
- 5.1.8 For claims by Tamils, decision makers must refer to the country policy and information note on [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#) for information on the treatment of Tamils.
- 5.1.9 For further guidance on considering internal relocation and factors to be taken into account see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

6. Certification

- 6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated, and analysed in line with the [research methodology](#). It provides the evidence base for the assessment which, as stated in the [About the assessment](#), is the guide to the current objective conditions.

The structure and content follow a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **19 February 2025**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

[Back to Contents](#)

7. Religious demography

7.1 Population sizes

7.1.1 The US State Department, in their 2023 report on International Religious Freedom (the USSD 2023 IRF report), covering the period from January to December 2023, detailed an estimated population of 21.9 million in Sri Lanka mid-2023. The source provided a breakdown of religious groups using data from the 2012 census stating that 70.2% (15.4 million) were estimated to be Buddhist, 12.6% (2.8 million) Hindu, 9.7% (2.1 million) Muslim, and 7.4% (1.6 million) Christian¹.

[Back to Contents](#)

7.2 Breakdown by ethnicity/geographical location

7.2.1 Minority Rights Group, an international NGO 'working with ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and indigenous peoples worldwide', noted in a 2018 update that: 'There is a strong overlap between religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka, with most of the Buddhist majority estimated in the 2012 Census belonging to the Sinhalese population. Similarly, most of the Hindu and Christian minorities are Tamil. The Muslim community is made up primarily of Sri Lankan Moors, Malays and smaller religious groups. Other religious minorities, including Parsis and Baha'i, are also present in the country in smaller numbers.'²

7.2.2 The Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Country Information Report – Sri Lanka, dated 2 May 2024 (DFAT report 2024), based on public and non-publicly available sources including on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a number of sources, noted that: 'Religion

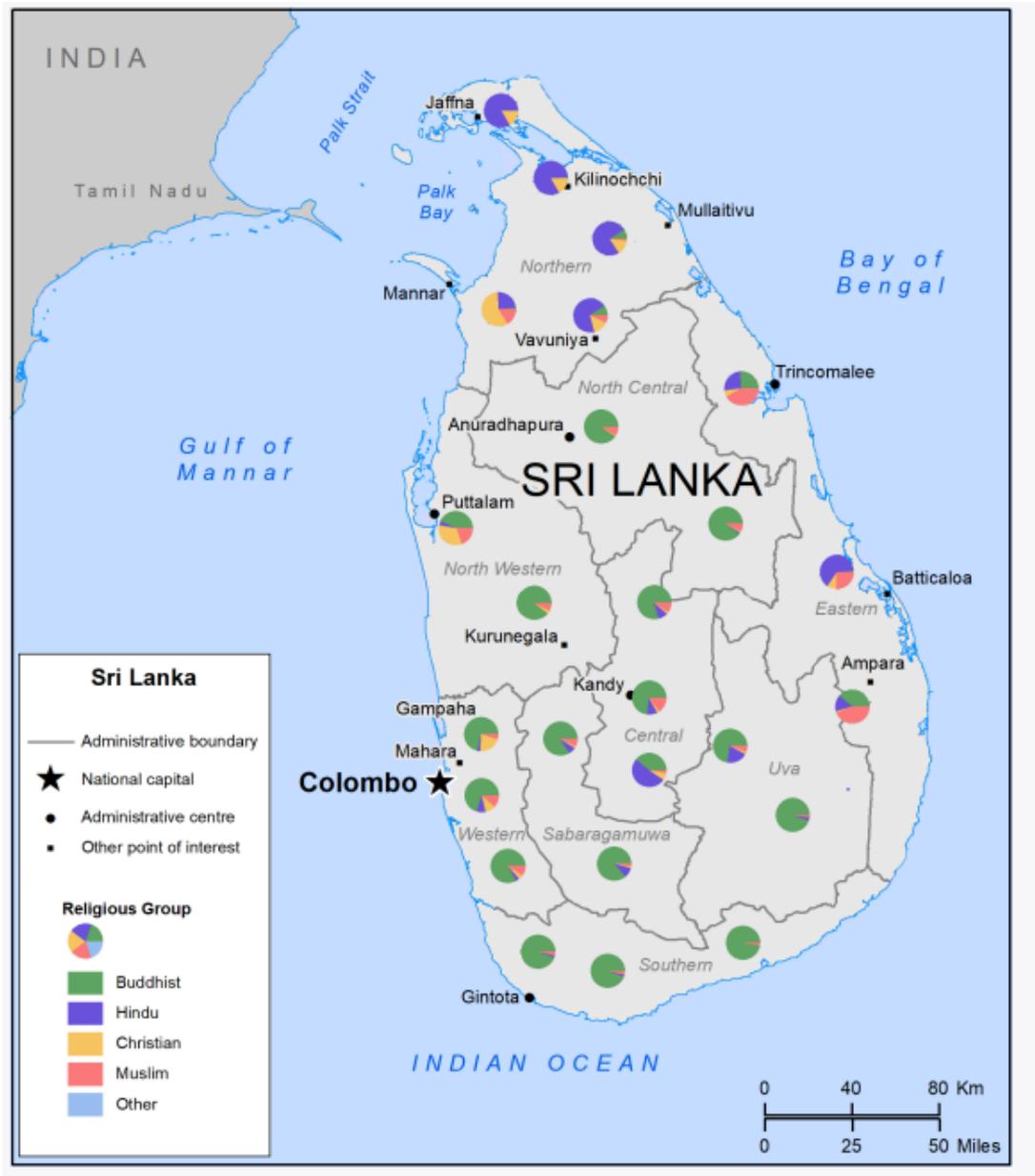
¹ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

² Minority Rights Group, [Sri Lanka](#), updated March 2018

plays an important role in society and correlates closely with ethnicity: most Sinhalese are Buddhist, and most Tamils are Hindu. A minority of Sinhalese and Tamils belong to the Christian faith. Muslims are considered a separate ethnic and religious group.³

7.2.3 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted: ‘According to census data, the Theravada Buddhist community, which makes up nearly all the country’s Buddhists, is the majority population in the Central, North-Central, Northwestern, Sabaragamuwa, Southern, Uva, and Western Provinces.’⁴

7.2.4 The DFAT in its Country Information Report – Sri Lanka dated 23 December 2021 (DFAT report 2021) included a map showing the geographical breakdown of religious groups in Sri Lanka⁵:



³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.21), 2 May 2024

⁴ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁵ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (page 1), 23 December 2021

7.3 Christians

7.3.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'More than 80 per cent of Sri Lankan Christians are Roman Catholic. Other sizeable denominations include Anglican (the Church of Ceylon), Assembly of God, Baptist, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), the Dutch Reformed Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodist and Pentecostal. Membership of evangelical groups is small but growing. The Christian community comprises both Sinhalese and Tamils. Christians live countrywide and all major cities have a visible Christian presence. Larger Christian communities are located in the Western, Eastern, Northern and North-Western provinces.'⁶

7.3.2 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

'Christians reside throughout the country but have a larger presence in the Eastern, Northern, Northwestern, and Western Provinces, and a smaller presence in Sabaragamuwa and Uva Provinces.

'... According to government statistics, an estimated 81 percent of Christians are Roman Catholic. Other Christian groups include the Church of Ceylon (Anglican), the Dutch Reformed Church, Methodists, Baptists, the Assembly of God, Pentecostals, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Christian evangelical and nondenominational Protestant groups have grown in recent years, but there are no reliable estimates of their numbers. According to the government, their membership remains low compared with the larger Christian community.'⁷

7.4 Muslims

7.4.1 Minority Rights Group noted:

'A significant proportion of Muslims (includes Sri Lankan Moors, Malays and other smaller religious sects like Bhoras and Khojas) live in the north and east, particularly the latter, where they constitute about a third of the population. The remaining Muslim community is dispersed throughout the urban centres of Sri Lanka. Muslims are also divided between mainly agriculturists living in the east, and traders who are dispersed across the island. Muslims speak both Tamil and Sinhalese depending on the area they live in.'⁸

7.4.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'Muslims live throughout Sri Lanka, including in Colombo and Kandy, with larger communities located in the east (Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee), north (Mannar) and northwest (Puttalam). Muslims form the single largest religious community in the Eastern Province. Nearly all Sri Lankan Muslims (98 per cent) are Sunni. There is a small Shi'a community, comprising mostly Dawoodi Bohras (fewer than 3,000 people), the majority of whom live in

⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.40), 2 May 2024

⁷ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁸ Minority Rights Group, [Sri Lanka](#), updated March 2018

Colombo. A small number of Muslims follow the Sufi tradition. Muslims predominantly speak Tamil as their first language.⁹

7.4.3 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘Muslims are legally recognized as a separate ethnoreligious group, rather than as Tamil or Sinhalese. Within the Muslim community there are several communities, ranging from the majority Tamil-speaking Moors to Malays (whose ancestry traces to Java) and to the Memons and Bohras, who have Indian roots tracing back to Mumbai and Gujarat ... Muslims form a plurality in the Eastern Province, and there are sizable Muslim populations in the Central, North-Central, Northwestern, Sabaragamuwa, Uva, and Western Provinces. ... Most Muslims are Sunni, with small Ahmadi and Shia minorities, the latter mostly comprised of Dawoodi Bohras.’¹⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

7.5 Hindus

7.5.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted: ‘Hindus are concentrated in the Northern and Eastern provinces, although they live throughout the country. Hindus form an overwhelming majority in the north, and are the second largest religious group in the east (after Muslims).’¹¹

7.5.2 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted: ‘Tamils, mainly Hindu with a significant Christian minority (see also [Christians](#)), constitute the majority in the Northern Province and represent the second largest group, after Muslims, in the Eastern Province ... Tamils of Indian origin, who refer to themselves as Upcountry or Hill Country Tamils, are mostly Hindu and identify themselves as a distinctive ethnic group; they have a large presence in the Central, Sabaragamuwa, and Uva Provinces.’¹²

[Back to Contents](#)

8. Legal context

8.1 Constitution

8.1.1 The USSD 2023 IRF report stated that the Constitution provides for freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to change religion, and that the law recognises Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. However, whilst it respects the rights of religious minorities, the law places Buddhism ahead of the country’s other religious faiths, committing the government to protecting it under a [2003 Supreme Court ruling](#)¹³.

8.1.2 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted: ‘According to a 2003 Supreme Court ruling, the state is constitutionally required to protect only Buddhism; other religions do not have the same right to state protection.’¹⁴

8.1.3 The constitution outlines the following articles concerning religious freedom:

⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.30), 2 May 2024

¹⁰ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

¹¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.48), 2 May 2024

¹² USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

¹³ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

¹⁴ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

- ‘Article 9: The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha Sasana [the teaching of the Buddha], while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Articles 10 and 14(1)(e).
- ‘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
- ‘Article 12(2): No citizen shall be discriminated against on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any such grounds.

Provided that it shall be lawful to require a person to acquire within a reasonable time sufficient knowledge of any language as a qualification for any employment or office in the Public, Judicial or Local Government Service or in the service of any public corporation, where such knowledge is reasonably necessary for the discharge of the duties of such employment or office:

Provided further that it shall be lawful to require a person to have sufficient knowledge of any language as a qualification for any such employment of office where no function of that employment or office can be discharged otherwise than with a knowledge of that language.

- ‘Article 12(3): No person shall, on the grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex or any one such grounds, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to shops, public restaurants, hotels, places of public entertainment and places of public worship of his own religion.
- ‘Article 14(1)(e): Every citizen is entitled to the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice or teaching.
- ‘Article 27(6): The State shall ensure equality of opportunity to citizens, so that no citizen shall suffer any disability on the ground of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion or occupation.’¹⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

8.2 Penal code

8.2.1 The Sri Lankan Penal Code outlines offences related to religion:

- ‘Article 290: Whoever destroys, damages, or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class persons, with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of insult the any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage, or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

¹⁵ [The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka](#)

- ‘Article 290A: Whoever does any act, in or upon, or in the vicinity of, any place of worship or any object which is held sacred with intent to or in veneration by any class of persons, with the intention wounding the religious feelings of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such act as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
- ‘Article 291: Whoever voluntarily causes disturbance to any assembly lawfully engaged in the performance of religious worship or religious ceremonies shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
- ‘Article 291A: Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person, or makes any gesture in the sight of that person, or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
- ‘Article 291B: Whoever, with the deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of persons, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.
- ‘Article 292: Whoever with the intention of wounding the feelings of any person, or of insulting the religion of any person, or with the knowledge that the feelings of any person are likely to be wounded, or that the religion of any person is likely to be insulted thereby, commits any trespass in any place of worship or on any place of sepulture or any place set apart for the performance of funeral rites, or as a depository for the remains of the dead, or offers any indignity to any human corpse, or causes disturbance to any persons assembled for the performance of funeral ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.’¹⁶

8.2.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘It is a criminal offence to insult a religion, promote religious hatred or attack a place of worship. The Wickremesinghe Government has sought to crack down on perceived threats to religious harmony, including under the International Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act No.56 (2007) (ICCPR Act). This law prohibits religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. Offences under the ICCPR Act are non-bailable for a period of 14 days and carry a maximum prison sentence of 10 years. Critics say the ICCPR Act is being used as a de facto anti-blasphemy law, particularly against people who denigrate Buddhism. In August 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief assessed that the ICCPR Act was “not fully compatible” with Article 19 of the International

¹⁶ [Sri Lankan Penal Code](#), 1885

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as it does not guarantee freedom of expression. In May 2023, a Sinhalese Buddhist stand-up comedian, Natasha Edirisooriya, was arrested on charges of inciting religious hatred, following a performance in which she allegedly disparaged the Buddha. Edirisooriya was granted strict bail in July 2023, following multiple applications, and faced ongoing legal processes under the ICCPR Act and Penal Code at the time of publication.¹⁷

8.2.3 The USCIRF’s June 2024 update on Sri Lanka referred to the arrest of a standup comedian in May 2023 on charges of insulting Buddhism:

‘The ICCPR Act also functionally serves as a blasphemy law in Sri Lanka. In May 2023, Sri Lankan authorities arrested standup comedian Nathasha Edirisooriya on charges of insulting Buddhism during a comedy show. She was released on bail in July 2023. Following Edirisooriya’s arrest, Minister Wickramanayake said he intended to submit a draft bill to prevent distortion of religion, arguing that no individual has the right to offend any religion. President Wickremesinghe additionally called for the establishment of a special police unit to combat “religious disharmony.”¹⁸

8.2.4 The same report stated: ‘In May 2024, Sri Lanka’s Human Rights Commission (HRCSL) expressed concern regarding the “misapplication” of the ICCPR Act in the arrest of four individuals in Trincomalee. On May 12, four Tamils were arrested for allegedly violating a temporary order by holding a commemoration event at a Hindu temple. The HRCSL determined that such acts did not constitute the advocacy of national or religious hatred.’¹⁹

8.2.5 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘The law considers any racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence to be a criminal offense, including through spoken word, written word, and signs or other visible representation that cause religious disharmony. Lower courts normally do not approve release on bail for such offenses, with bail possible only through appeal to a higher court. The offenses carry a punishment of imprisonment for five to 20 years, depending on which law or laws are applied.

‘... Civil society groups said that during the year the government used the ICCPR Act to curtail freedom of expression and to arrest persons on charges of threatening religious harmony and inciting religious hatred.’²⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

8.3 Registration of religious groups

8.3.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted: ‘The Ministry of Buddha Sasana, Cultural and Religious Affairs oversees religious activity. Places of worship must be registered with the authorities, and official permission must be obtained to construct a new place of worship.’²¹

¹⁷ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.25), 2 May 2024

¹⁸ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

¹⁹ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

²⁰ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

²¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.22), 2 May 2024

8.3.2 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘The law recognizes four religions: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. There is no registration requirement for central religious bodies of these four groups. New religious groups, including groups affiliated with the four recognized religions, must register with the government to obtain approval to construct new places of worship, sponsor religious worker (missionary) visas and immigration permits, operate schools, and apply for subsidies for religious education. Religious groups may also seek incorporation by an act of parliament, which requires a simple majority and affords religious groups state recognition.’²²

8.3.3 The USCIRF Country update on Sri Lanka published in June 2024 noted:

‘... religious minorities continue to face challenges in registering their places of worship. Registration requirements are discussed in three circulars issued by the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs in 2008, 2011, and 2022. The 2008 circular requires all religious groups to obtain permission to register when constructing new places of worship. A 2011 circular further mandated that the construction of new places of worship requires approval by the relevant ministry (i.e., Ministry of Christian Affairs, Ministry of Hindu Affairs, or Ministry of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs). In 2018, the ministry ruled that such requirements only apply to the construction of Buddhist religious sites. A 2022 circular supersedes previous circulars and dictates that new religious centers, places of worship, prayer centers, or any establishments engaging in collective worship must register. Although the 2022 circular applies only to new places of worship, reports suggest that local authorities have attempted to retroactively enforce the circular to existing places of worship. As a result, religious minorities, including Christians, continue to report harassment from local authorities for failing to register churches.’²³

8.3.4 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a Christian advocacy organisation which states that it works to defend, uphold and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief²⁴, noted in its general briefing on Sri Lanka that:

‘Registration of places of worship continues to be a challenge particularly for Christian churches. To date, there is no law requiring registration, but the Ministry of Buddhasasana and regional state bodies continue to demand proof of registration with, or approval from, the Ministry of Buddhasasana, for churches to function. This has resulted in several churches having to shut down. In addition, regional state bodies have also demanded that churches obtain approval from a purported Sasanarakshaka Balamandalaya (roughly translated as a “power force protecting the Sasana”, which typically comprises Buddhist monks.’²⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

²² USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

²³ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

²⁴ CSW, [About us](#), no date

²⁵ CSW, [General Briefing: Sri Lanka](#), 25 November 2024

8.4 Education and religious teaching

8.4.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘Sri Lanka recognises religious holidays for Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Religion is a compulsory subject at public and private primary and secondary schools. Students can choose to study Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam or Christianity, subject to a quorum of 15 students. Where a quorum does not exist, a student must study another religion. Religious communities are free to operate schools and classes teaching their religion. The government funds religious schools by the Buddhist community; those run by religious minorities are privately funded.’²⁶

8.4.2 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘Religion is a compulsory subject at the primary and secondary levels in public and private schools. Parents may elect to have their children study Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Christianity, provided enough demand (at least 15 students) exists within the school for the chosen subject. Students may not opt out of religious instruction even if instruction in their religion of choice is not available, or if they do not choose any religion. All schools teaching the Sri Lankan Ordinary Level syllabus, including private schools founded by religious organizations, must use the Ministry of Education curriculum on religion, which covers the four main religions and is compulsory for the General Certificate Education Ordinary Level exams (equivalent to U.S. grade 10). International schools not following the Sri Lankan Ordinary Level syllabus are not required to teach religious studies.

‘... Although religious education remained compulsory in state-funded schools, not all schools had sufficient resources to teach all four recognized religions, and according to civil society groups, some students were required to study religions other than their own. Government schools frequently experienced a shortage of teachers, sometimes requiring available teachers to teach the curriculum of a faith different from their own. Religious schools continued to receive state funding for facilities and personnel and operated under the purview of the central government or the provincial education ministry.’²⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

8.5 Proselytising and conversion

8.5.1 Under the 2003 Supreme Court ruling the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka decided that the propagation and spreading of a religion other than Buddhism would impair the existence of Buddhism or the Buddha Sasana Registration²⁸.

8.5.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘The right to religious conversion is enshrined in the constitution, which protects the freedom to adopt a religion of one’s choice. In-country sources told DFAT that religious conversion happened, more so among Sinhalese

²⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.23), 2 May 2024

²⁷ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

²⁸ [S.C. Special Determination No.19/2003\) while respecting the rights of the other religions](#)

and Tamils than Muslims (it is reportedly rare for a Muslim to change their religion). In country sources reported that, should a Muslim adopt another religion, they would face a high risk of ostracisation from their family and the broader Muslim community. According to in-country sources, the Roman Catholic Church (the largest Christian denomination in Sri Lanka) had lost a significant number of followers to smaller, primarily evangelical Christian denominations.²⁹

- 8.5.3 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted: ‘... no fundamental right to proselytize exists or is protected under the constitution. In 2017, the Supreme Court determined the right to propagate one’s religion is not protected by the constitution.’³⁰

[Back to Contents](#)

8.6 Other Islamic legal restrictions

- 8.6.1 The USCIRF Country update on Sri Lanka published in June 2024 noted: ‘Based on Shari’a and Islamic legal practice, Sri Lanka’s Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (MMDA) governs marriage, divorce, and other family law matters for all Muslim Sri Lankans. It is distinct from the 1907 Sri Lankan (General) Marriage Registration Ordinance (GMRO), which is applicable to all Sri Lankan citizens, except Muslims who marry within the faith. The MMDA establishes a tax-funded Muslim judge (Quazi) court system, including a Board of Quazis and an Advisory Board. A 2019 report from the United Nations (UN) special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief indicates that there is no option for Muslim couples to opt out of the MMDA. While the Sri Lankan cabinet approved a proposal in 2021 permitting Muslims the option to get married under the GMRO, the status of this proposal remains unclear, suggesting that as of 2024, Muslim couples can only marry under the MMDA. Muslims marrying partners of a different religion, however, can register under the GMRO.’³¹

[Back to Contents](#)

9. Religious minorities participation in the political sphere

- 9.1.1 Freedom House (FH), a US-based non-governmental organisation that monitors freedom and democracy across the world, in their Freedom in the World 2024 report, covering events in 2023, noted that: ‘Several parties explicitly represent the interests of ethnic and religious minority groups ... Muslim voters have ... faced intimidation, limiting their ability to participate in the political process.’³²
- 9.1.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted: ‘Muslims are active in business, industry, the civil service and politics. Some have attained significant wealth and senior positions in government (including current Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Sabry) and the judiciary (current Supreme Court Justice A.H.M.D. Nawaz). Muslim political parties represent the community’s interests in parliament. The Muslim community

²⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.24), 2 May 2024

³⁰ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

³¹ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

³² Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

operates madrassas, although these have come under scrutiny following the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks perpetrated by individuals from Kattankudy, a Muslim town near Batticaloa, in April 2019.³³

- 9.1.3 There was no information in the sources consulted regarding Christian and Hindu representation in the political sphere (see [Bibliography](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

10. State treatment

10.1 Overview

- 10.1.1 In its concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka, the Human Rights Committee stated:

‘While noting that the Constitution recognizes Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, the Committee notes with concern that Buddhism continues to be granted “the foremost place” under its article 9. It is concerned about continuing ethno-religious hostility targeting religious minority groups and about persisting discrimination, violence, hate speech and misinformation, on- and offline, and incitement to hatred and violence against such groups. It is also concerned about reports of discrimination and attacks on places of worship of religious minorities... The Committee is concerned that the State party’s Constitution subjects the right to freedoms of peaceful assembly and association to additional restrictions pertaining to racial and religious harmony, which is utilized to target ethnic and religious minorities and restrict their freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. It notes with concern the use of excessive force in dispersing peaceful assemblies, the application of counter-terrorism legislation against protestors and the lack of effective investigations and prosecutions in these cases. It is concerned about onerous requirements for the registration of non-governmental organizations and frequent denials of requests from organizations working on politically sensitive issues. It also regrets allegations of harassment and surveillance of members of civil society by the police and intelligence services...’³⁴

- 10.1.2 In October 2023 UN experts released a statement on the ATA: ‘The law provided for freedom of association but imposed restrictions on NGOs and criminalized association with or membership in banned organizations. Religious organizations, including Muslim and Christian groups, reported incidents of intimidation. During the year, civil society reported allegations of monitoring, surveillance, intimidation, and harassment of civil society organizations, religious organizations, human rights defenders, and families of victims of rights violations.’³⁵

- 10.1.3 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report Sri Lanka, covering the period of 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, published in March 2024 noted that: ‘Buddhist monks (known as the Sangha) have historically enjoyed significant state patronage, including being consulted on major political decisions by elected representatives. The prominence afforded to Buddhist monks on issues of government policy by the previous president

³³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.30), 2 May 2024

³⁴ HRC, [Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Sri Lanka](#), 26 April 2023

³⁵ USSD, [‘2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices’](#), 22 April 2024

has been reduced. However, Buddhist monks continue to be influential and vocal on important national policy issues.³⁶

10.1.4 Freedom House's Freedom in the World report 2024 noted: 'In Northern and Eastern provinces, the Archaeology Department prevents Hindus and Muslims from worshiping at sites deemed to be of archeological significance, though no restrictions are placed on Buddhists.'³⁷

10.1.5 The same report stated: '...religious minorities are vulnerable to violence and mistreatment by security forces and Sinhalese Buddhist extremists.'³⁸

10.1.6 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2024 annual report, covering events in 2023, noted:

'In 2023, religious freedom conditions in Sri Lanka continued to decline. Throughout the year, the government continued to harass and threaten religious minorities and at times deny them access to their places of worship. ... The government also used discriminatory legislation to target, monitor, and detain religious minorities. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) has been criticized for its broad powers to search, arrest, and detain individuals, particularly Muslim citizens, following the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks. Independent experts at the United Nations (UN) and human rights groups expressed concern over a new terrorism bill, stating that it fails to address flaws in existing legislation, including a vague definition of terrorism and limited judicial oversight. Throughout 2023, the Sri Lankan government shrank religious freedom by continuing to arbitrarily detain individuals under the PTA and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act. Enacted in 2007, the ICCPR Act is designed to incorporate the international treaty into law, but authorities widely use it to restrict religious freedom and limit freedom of expression.

'... In several instances, authorities failed to address tensions and violence instigated by Buddhist monks towards religious minorities.'³⁹

10.1.7 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

'Some representatives of minority religious communities and NGOs stated they believed the government viewed the Muslim community as a threat to cultural, land, and population hegemony of the majority Sinhalese Buddhist community, the Christian community as responsible for inducing unethical conversions in the country, and the Hindu community as encroaching on Buddhist archaeological sites.

'... Some civil society critics and lawyers said the 2022 circular mandating registration for all places of worship and outlining requirements for construction and maintenance of religious places was not based on existing law and thus was unconstitutional. The NCEASL and other civil society representatives said the government used the regulation to unfairly target minority places of worship.

³⁶ BTI, [BTI 2024 Sri Lanka Country Report](#), March 2024

³⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

³⁸ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

³⁹ USCIRF, [2024 Annual Report- Sri Lanka](#), May 2024

‘... According to civil society groups, members of the CID, military intelligence, local police stations, the Terrorism Investigation Department, the army, and the navy surveilled minority religious groups. In many cases, officers were dressed in civilian clothing and did not provide identification ... Civil society representatives said that police and intelligence services used “national security,” “disturbance of the peace,” and “criminal trespass and intimidation” as pretexts to harass and intimidate members of minority religious groups. They said that in some cases, law enforcement officers acted in concert with local residents or members of the Buddhist clergy.

‘... Because religion, language, and ethnicity are closely linked, it was difficult to categorize most incidents of harassment or discrimination as being solely based on religious identity.’⁴⁰

10.1.8 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘Sri Lanka has a history of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence between religions. This tradition has become strained by the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in April 2019 and the emergence of Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups. Religious minorities can sometimes face threats and intimidation that restrict their ability to worship freely, especially in rural areas. ... According to in-country sources, local officials and police (who are predominantly Buddhist) were biased against religious minorities and invariably sided against them in disputes.’⁴¹

10.1.9 The USCIRF Country update published in June 2024 stated: ‘Five years after the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, the Sri Lankan government continues to utilize security concerns to target religious minorities, including through the use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act.’⁴²

10.1.10 The same report noted:

‘In 2023, the Sri Lankan government published the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) to replace the existing PTA. The proposed ATA expands on the provisions established under the PTA, including criminalizing “other offenses associated with Terrorism,” and applies to “any person who commits an offense ... whether within or outside the territorial limits of Sri Lanka.” Offenses that fall under this definition of terrorism include “propagating war or advocating national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.” Such broad definitions of terrorism allow for wide interpretation of who can be accused of terrorism and subjected to arrest.’⁴³

10.1.11 The CSW November 2024 briefing stated:

‘The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) gives security forces sweeping powers to arrest and imprison suspects. This has led to several fundamental rights abuses including torture, arbitrary arrest and detention and repression of free speech. Several members of the Muslim minority community continue

⁴⁰ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁴¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.26), 2 May 2024

⁴² USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

⁴³ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

to be held in indefinite detention, having been arrested after the 2019 Easter Sunday Bombings, and it has also been used as a justification for the arrests of human rights lawyers and others who have criticised the government, including Hejaaz Hizbullah and poet Anhaf Jazeem...

‘Surveillance, intimidation, and detention of religious minorities continued in 2023, under the premise of national security concerns. As of August 2023, 21 detainees were on remand under the PTA, and 25 individuals were serving prison terms on terrorism charges. In April, three detainees, who had been held in pretrial detention for 14 years, were released after determining that their confessions had been coerced. In June 2024, human rights organisations and international lawyer associations expressed concerns about witness intimidation and coercion in PTA trials, specifically Hejaaz Hizbullah, who was detained for 20 months before being charged and ultimately granted bail in 2022.’⁴⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

10.2 Christians

10.2.1 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report 2024 noted: ‘The Roman Catholic clergy has criticized the government for perceived faults in the official investigation into the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which had targeted three Christian churches.’⁴⁵

10.2.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘...In December 2023, a high-profile evangelical pastor, Jerome Fernando, was arrested under the ICCPR Act for a sermon in which he is reported to have disparaged Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Pastor Fernando was bailed in January 2024.

‘... In-country sources told DFAT the definition of a place of worship had expanded since 2019, to the extent that bible study classes had to be registered with the authorities, to the detriment of Christians’ ability to worship freely. In-country sources said these registration requirements were not enforced as vigorously against Buddhists. In-country sources also reported discrimination against Christians in public school admissions, and that Christianity was not offered as a subject in some schools, particularly in rural areas (ostensibly due to a lack of Christian teachers).

‘According to in-country sources, Buddhist officials were biased against religious minorities and, where Christians were involved in religious disputes with Buddhists (e.g. in relation to the legality of a place of worship or permission to renovate an existing place of worship), officials invariably ruled against Christians. In country sources also reported that complaints filed by Christians for breaches of their right to freedom of religion were sometimes not investigated further, which deterred some Christians from reporting disputes to the police.

‘In January 2023, in response to a fundamental rights petition filed by the Roman Catholic Church, the Supreme Court found that then-President Sirisena and four senior security officials were guilty of negligence in failing

⁴⁴ CSW, [General Briefing: Sri Lanka](#), 25 November 2024

⁴⁵ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

to prevent the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks. The Supreme Court ordered Sirisena and the security officials to pay compensation from their personal funds for violating the basic rights of the victims and their families.⁴⁶ [In August 2024 it was reported that Sirisena had settled the compensation owed to the victims and their families⁴⁷].

10.2.3 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘Analysts studying incidents of violence against Christians said that in some cases, state officials sided with those who demanded that Christians cease activities in “Buddhist villages” or obtain permission from the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs to conduct worship activities. The NCEASL agreed with the analysts’ findings, reporting that evangelical Christian groups continued to report that police and local government officials were complicit in the harassment of religious minorities and their places of worship and often sided with the majority religious community in the area...

‘Some Christian groups said that government officials deemed Christian places of worship unauthorized or illegal if they failed to produce proof of registration and threatened them with legal action if they did not register. If the groups tried to register, however, they said the registration process continued indefinitely without resolution. For example, one church reported it had been trying unsuccessfully to register for decades. Christian groups reported that they experienced difficulties in complying with registration requirements, in part because instructions were inconsistent and not transparent. Without the consent of the local community or the local Buddhist temple, local councils often did not approve the construction of new religious buildings. Church leaders said they repeatedly appealed to local government officials and the Ministry of Buddhasasana for assistance, with limited success. Instead, unregistered Christian groups stated they continued to incorporate as commercial trusts, legal societies, or NGOs but without formal government recognition as religious groups. Nondenominational churches said they faced restrictions on holding meetings or constructing new places of worship.

‘According to a local NGO report, government officials, police, and intelligence services frequently requested Christian groups show proof of registration of their place of worship and provide information on the leadership of the organization, the composition of the congregation, and religious rituals.

‘... Jehovah’s Witnesses reported that some religious groups present in the country for decades still found it difficult to register and be recognized as a Christian religion. Jehovah’s Witnesses said they had been present and active in the country for more than a century and reported more than 7,000 members. Despite multiple meetings with the Ministry of Buddhasasana and the Department of Christian Affairs in 2020 and 2021, they said they did not receive clear guidelines regarding registration and, as an unregistered religious group, did not receive the same rights and privileges as registered

⁴⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.41,3.44 - 3.46), 2 May 2024

⁴⁷ The Hindu, [Easter Sunday bombings: Former Sri Lankan President Maithripala ...](#), 21 August 2024

religious groups. A 2023 report released by a religious group said the approval process for construction permits for places of worship lacked transparency and consistency resulting in abuse and discrimination against some religious groups, including minority religious groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses. The report said the 2022 circular had no provision for applicants to submit complaints or appeals.

'... According to members of Christian groups, local authorities sometimes demanded their groups stop worship activities or relocate their places of worship outside the local jurisdiction, ostensibly to maintain community peace.'⁴⁸

- 10.2.4 The USCIRF Country update on Sri Lanka published in June 2024 noted: 'In March 2024, Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious, and Cultural Affairs Vidura Wickramanayake stated that all religious institutions, regardless of faith, will need to be registered, noting that some religious institutions "cause religious disharmony." He announced plans to raid unregistered places of worship, including those of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.'⁴⁹
- 10.2.5 Verité Research, an independent think tank that provides strategic analysis for Asia in the areas of economics, politics, law and media⁵⁰, published a report 'Trend analysis of violence against Christians in Sri Lanka' in 2024. Verite Research based their findings on data from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL). CPIT were unable to locate the NCEASL statistics used by Verité Research on the NCEASL website. NCEASL based their data on details provided to them by primary sources although the incidences may not reflect all the incidences that occurred, only those that were reported to NCEASL and verified through their network or regional offices. Verité did not independently verify the data they used from NCEASL and there is no indication of the number of individuals involved in each incident. Verité noted that their analysis included: '... a broad definition of violence that includes physical violence (physical assault and property damage), non-physical violence (threats, coercion, intimidation and hate speech) and systemic violence (discriminatory actions or practices).' A full breakdown of each category can be found on page 36 of the report⁵¹.
- 10.2.6 The graph below, using data contained in the Verité Research report 'Trend analysis of violence against Christians in Sri Lanka', shows the number of reported incidences of violence against Christians (by state and non-state actors) from September 2019 to October 2023⁵².

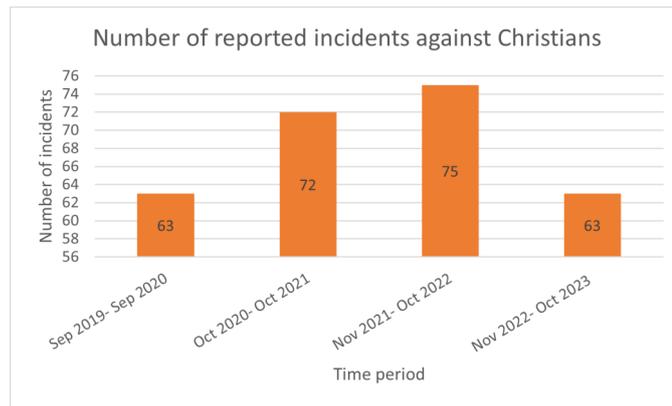
⁴⁸ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁴⁹ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

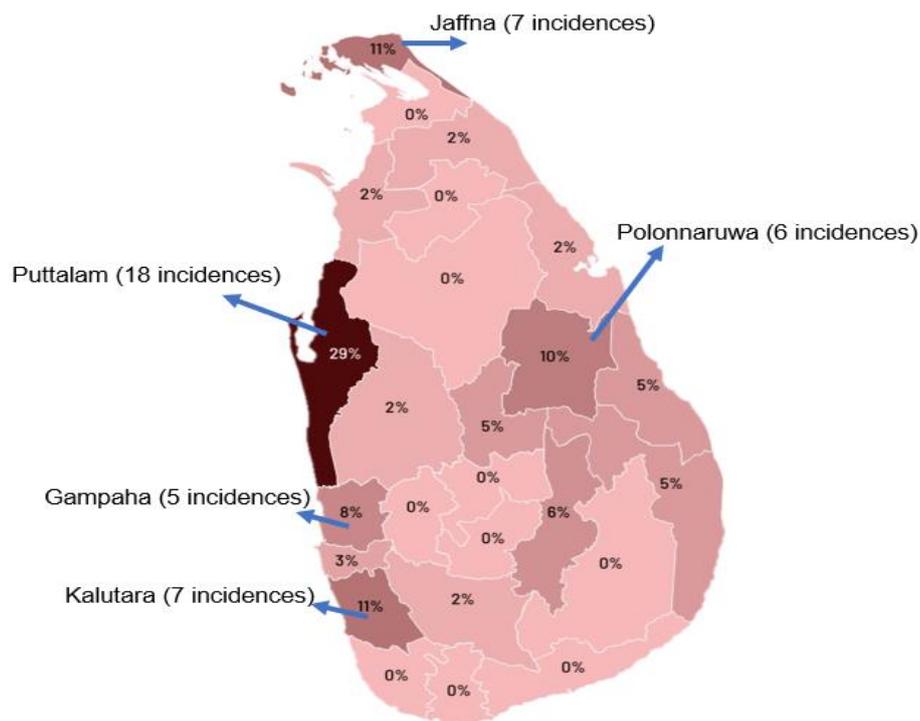
⁵⁰ Verité Research, [About Us](#), no date

⁵¹ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 35), 2024

⁵² Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024



10.2.7 Verité Research produced the map below in their report which shows the distribution of the 63 incidences of violence against Christians by state and non-state actors which occurred between November 2022 and October 2023⁵³. CPIT have included additional information to the map to show the 5 districts where the highest number of incidences occurred during the time period and the number of incidences that occurred.



10.2.8 Verité Research noted that: ‘... the most frequently encountered forms of violence against Christians are those classified as borderline severe, such as threats, intimidation or coercion, which occurred in 34 instances recorded during the review period. There were 33 instances of least severe forms of violence recorded, which included discriminatory actions or practices.’⁵⁴

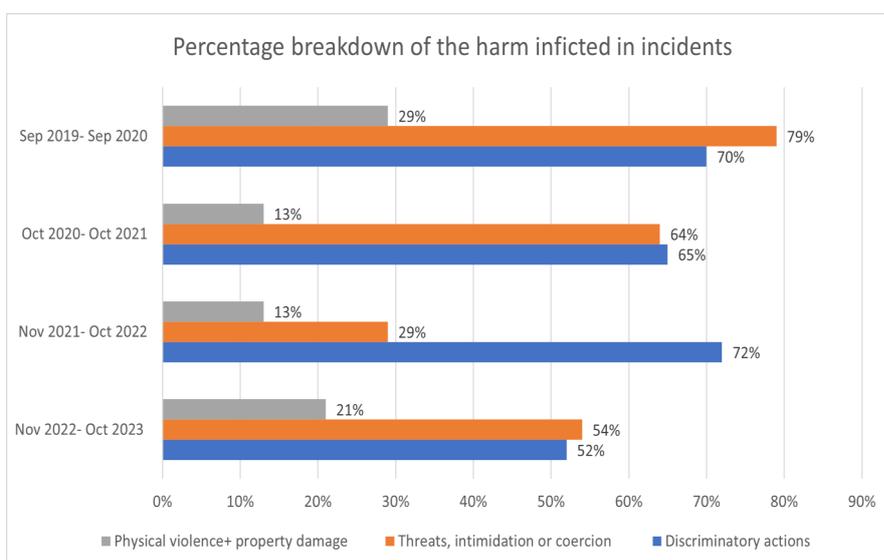
⁵³ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 14), 2024

⁵⁴ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 14), 2024

10.2.9 Verité Research also noted that:

'In most incidents in Puttalam and Kalutara, the key perpetrators were state officials (nine and four instances, respectively) ... The data indicated differing patterns in the two districts as to the primary target of the violence. In Puttalam (in 14 out of 18) and in Jaffna (in three out of seven), the Christian clergy/pastors could be identified as the primary targets, whereas in Kalutara in six out of seven instances, the place of worship was the primary target.'⁵⁵

10.2.10 CPIT have used the data contained in the Verité Research report to produce the graph below showing the percentage breakdown of the harm inflicted by state and non-state actors in the reported incidences (as above). Verité Research note that each incidence may involve multiple types of harm which is why the percentages total more than 100 for each time period⁵⁶.



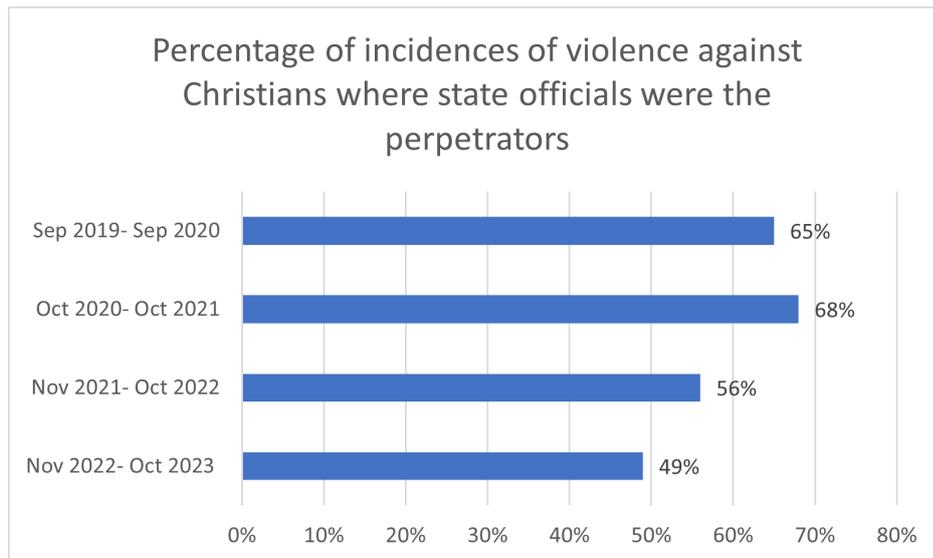
10.2.11 CPIT have used the data contained in the Verité Research report to produce the graph below showing the percentage of incidences of violence against Christians that involved the state as a key perpetrator⁵⁷. See also the section on Societal treatment of religious minorities - [Christians](#) for details of other perpetrators involved in recorded incidences. Please note when considering the percentages in this graph and the one in the section on societal treatment, each incidence may involve multiple perpetrators and as such the percentages may total more than 100 for each time period⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 26), 2024

⁵⁶ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024

⁵⁷ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024

⁵⁸ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024



[Back to Contents](#)

10.3 Muslims

10.3.1 In March 2021 Public Security Minister Sarath Weeraskara signed a cabinet paper to ban the wearing of the burqa and niqab due to ‘national security concerns’⁵⁹. The proposal was due to be sent to the Attorney General’s Department to be approved by parliament to become law. However, at the time of writing no draft legislation was put forward and there is no ban in effect^{60 61 62 63} (see sources consulted in the [Bibliography](#)).

10.3.2 The US State Department (USSD) in their 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices noted:

‘In 2020 and 2021, the government arrested five prominent Muslims, Rishad Bathiudeen, Riyaj Bathiudeen, Azath Salley, Ahnaf Jazeem, and Hejaaz Hizbullah, for alleged involvement in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings and indicted three of them on speech-related offenses under the PTA. Advocates on behalf of these individuals claimed the government had been unable to produce credible evidence of their alleged connections to terrorist activity and filed fundamental rights petitions at the Supreme Court to free them, although proceedings were delayed for months. By the end of 2021, three were released on bail and one was acquitted, and the last prominent Muslim, Hejaaz Hizbullah, was released in February 2022. As of the end of December, only Hejaaz Hizbullah’s case remained pending as the High Court acquitted two individuals in 2022 and Muslim poet Ahnaf Jazeem on December 12.’⁶⁴

10.3.3 The same report stated: ‘Authorities restricted hate speech, including insults to religion or religious beliefs, through a police ordinance and the penal

⁵⁹ CSOH, [Gendered Islamophobia and the Struggle for Muslim Women’s ...](#), 28 December 2024

⁶⁰ Justice for All, [Government Moves Forward With Burqa And Niqab Ban](#), 1 June 2021

⁶¹ Al Jazeera, [Sri Lanka cabinet approves proposed ban on burqas in public](#), 28 April 2021

⁶² USSD, [2021 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 2 June 2022

⁶³ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁶⁴ USSD, [‘2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices’](#), 22 April 2024

code... Restrictions on hate speech were applied selectively, with hate speech against Muslims more tolerated than against other groups.’⁶⁵

10.3.4 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘Muslims report they have been unfairly targeted since the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in April 2019, including in the form of large-scale arrests under the PTA and other official practices perceived as discriminatory. A State of Emergency imposed immediately following the attacks prohibiting clothing covering one’s face in public was widely understood to target the Muslim community. According to media reports at the time, some shops, hospitals, courts and universities prevented women wearing the hijab (which does not cover the face) from entering their premises.

‘... In-country sources told DFAT that Muslims previously arrested under the PTA but since released, and the families of those who remain in detention, were monitored by the state and shunned by the Muslim community.

‘... In-country Muslim sources reported that the most acute pressures experienced by their community following the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks had subsided, and that Muslims were now generally able to practise their faith freely. However, in-country Muslims also reported that they continued to experience harassment, intimidation and disinformation, and said the threat of arrest under the PTA was used to threaten the community, particularly Muslims in Kattankudy. In-country Muslim sources in the Eastern Province reported that they continued to experience official discrimination, including in the allocation of livelihood support programs by (Tamil) local government officials in Batticaloa and in public sector employment. They also reported that, in land disputes between Tamils and Muslims, local government officials invariably sided with Tamils. Muslims reported that a requirement introduced in March 2021 for all imported Islamic religious textbooks (including the Quran) to be vetted by the Ministry of Defence for extremist content prior to release was discriminatory, on the basis the requirement did not apply to other religions.

‘In-country Muslim sources reported ongoing monitoring, including for signs of extremism. Those that face the highest risk of monitoring included: the families of people in detention for suspected terrorism offences under the PTA and their legal representatives; people previously arrested under the PTA but since released; community activists, particularly those that engage with representatives of the international community; and organisations that receive funding from Islamic countries. Monitoring can take the form of telephone calls, visits and physical surveillance. In-country Muslim sources told DFAT that mosques and madrassas were monitored by the State Intelligence Service (SIS) and the TID.’⁶⁶

10.3.5 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘Muslim NGOs and organizations continued to report police harassment and surveillance of their activities since the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. Muslim families of the PTA prisoners arrested in connection with the attack and those who were released on bail reported continued harassment,

⁶⁵ USSD, [‘2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices’](#), 22 April 2024

⁶⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.32, 3.34-3.36), 2 May 2024

including regular telephone calls and visits by government security forces to ask about their activities.

'... Muslim civil society representatives said that young persons involved in social work and the parents and relatives of those detained under the PTA were the main targets of state surveillance.

'... The government continued to require all imported Islamic religious books, including the Quran, to undergo review before being released as part of what the Ministry of Defense said was a counterterrorism measure to screen for extremist content. Some Muslim community members said the process discouraged the importation of Islamic religious books.'⁶⁷

10.3.6 Human Rights Watch noted in an article from June 2024 that:

'Government officials in Sri Lanka are withholding exam results from 70 Muslim women and girls because their head coverings allegedly covered their ears while they took their exams. The decision violates the students' right to freedom of religion and further entrenches discrimination widely experienced by Muslims in Sri Lanka.'⁶⁸ On 8 July 2024 the Department of Examinations and the University Grants Commission told the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) that the exam results had been released⁶⁹.

10.3.7 The same Human Rights Watch article noted:

'... Sri Lanka has repeatedly imposed regulations that discriminate against the country's Muslim minority in recent years. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the government banned the burial of people said to have died with the virus, causing immense distress to bereaved Muslim families whose religion prohibits cremation. There have been repeated incidents of anti-Muslim violence, provoked or exacerbated by false claims promoted with impunity by officials and government supporters.'⁷⁰

10.3.8 The Daily Reporter, a media website associated with Right to Life Human Rights Center who are a civil society organization who promote fundamental human rights through legal and financial assistance⁷¹, noted in July 2024 that '...the Sri Lankan government has issued a formal apology for its controversial "cremations only" policy enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic... The apology is seen as a progressive move, acknowledging past wrongs and reinforcing the need for policies rooted in science and respect for religious and cultural practices.'⁷²

10.3.9 The Daily FT, a national daily business paper⁷³, noted that: 'In a significant move, the Cabinet of Ministers on Monday [22 July 2024] approved making a public apology to communities affected by the compulsory cremation policy enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic and instructed Legal Draftsman to prepare a Bill for the introduction of new burial law...allowing families to

⁶⁷ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁶⁸ HRW, [Sri Lanka Blocks Exam Results over Muslim Head Coverings](#), 26 June 2024

⁶⁹ Daily FT, [Withholding AL results of Muslim students over head coverings – HRCSL...](#), 13 July 2024

⁷⁰ HRW, [Sri Lanka Blocks Exam Results over Muslim Head Coverings](#), 26 June 2024

⁷¹ Right to Life Human Rights Centre, [Right to Life Media Advocacy Network](#), no date

⁷² Daily Reporter, [Sri Lanka Government's Apology... Cremations: A Progressive Move](#), 24 July 2024

⁷³ Daily FT, [Sri Lanka's only business publication](#), no date

choose between burial and cremation based on personal or religious preferences, aiming to ensure such conflicts do not arise in future health crises...'⁷⁴

10.3.10 The UN Human Rights Council report on the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka, published in August 2024 noted that:

'On 22 July 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers decided to extend an apology on behalf of the Government from all the communities affected as a consequence of mandatory cremation policy enacted during the COVID-19 and to prepare a draft law on burial or cremation of dead bodies on religious discretion. The mandatory cremation caused immense suffering to mourning Muslim families and a huge financial burden for poor families, particularly daily wagers who could not afford a cremation fee. Another recent example of a regulation discriminating against the Muslim minority is withholding of exam results from 70 Muslim students in Trincomalee in June 2024 for appearing at an advanced-level exam wearing a hijab or headscarf.'⁷⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

10.1 Hindus

10.1.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'In-country sources told DFAT the Department of Archaeology routinely sided with Buddhists in disputes over archaeological sites in the north-east traditionally claimed by Hindus, and permitted the construction of Buddhist structures on these sites ... DFAT assesses that Hindus can practise their faith freely, including in areas where they do not form a majority, and are generally not at risk of violence or discrimination on the basis of their religion.'⁷⁶

10.1.2 Human Rights Watch noted in an article from March 2024 that:

'Eight Tamil Hindu worshippers arrested by Sri Lankan police while engaging in festival rituals last week were detained for more than 10 days and allegedly abused. A magistrate released them on March 19.

'In recent years, Sri Lankan government authorities and nationalist Sinhala Buddhist monks have been targeting Hindu as well as Muslim religious sites in the country's north and east in violation of the right to freedom of religion and belief, among other basic rights.

'The eight were arrested at the Veddukkunaari temple near Vavuniya, a Hindu shrine that Buddhist monks, backed by the government's Department of Archaeology, say is an ancient Buddhist site. It is one of numerous temple sites in northeastern Sri Lanka claimed by nationalist Buddhist monks, frequently with the support of government agencies and the security forces.

'The Vavuniya magistrates court had earlier ruled that the rituals for the festival of Shivaratri, the principal festival day of the god Shiva, could go ahead at Veddukkunaari. However, on the evening of March 8, police arrived and assaulted worshippers, including an opposition member of parliament.

⁷⁴ Daily FT, [Government apologises for compulsory COVID-19 cremations: plans new...](#), 24 July 2024

⁷⁵ UN HRC, [Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka](#) (page 11), 22 August 2024

⁷⁶ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.48 & 3.49), 2 May 2024

Rights activists told Human Rights Watch the detainees said they were beaten in custody, for which the court requested a medical report, and their families denied access to them for the first three days. On March 19, the authorities' allegations were dismissed at their third court appearance.⁷⁷

- 10.1.3 See also [Land disputes](#) and the country policy and information note on [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#) for further information on the treatment of Tamils (of whom a majority are of the Hindu faith).

[Back to Contents](#)

10.1 State reaction to the Easter 2019 bombings

- 10.1.1 On 21 April 2019 (Easter Sunday), suicide bombers from militant group National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ) affiliated with Islamic State killed at least 253 people and injured approximately 500 at churches and hotels across Sri Lanka, in an attack targeting Christians⁷⁸.

- 10.1.2 For more information see the archived CPIN Sri Lanka: Religious Minorities, August 2021 available on [Ecoi.net](#).

- 10.1.3 The New Indian Express, an online and print newspaper publishing national Indian news and international news⁷⁹, noted in 2023 that:

'Former Sri Lanka President Maithripala Sirisena on Tuesday apologised to the country's minority Catholic community for the devastating 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed over 270 people, including 11 Indians, saying that the carnage took place without his knowledge. ... The bombings triggered a political storm as then President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe were blamed for their inability to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence being made available. "I say sorry to the Catholic community for something done by others," Sirisena said while addressing the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) press briefing here. Sirisena's apology came after Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on January 12 ordered him to pay SLR 100 million [£271,289⁸⁰] as compensation to the victims.'⁸¹

- 10.1.4 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'Around 2,300 people (mostly Muslim) were arrested in connection to the Easter Sunday attacks for suspected terrorism offences under the PTA, some on the basis of limited or tenuous evidence. Most have been released. In-country sources estimated that 115 remained in jail without charge in April 2023, although numbers are difficult to verify. In 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief reported that many Muslims arrested under the PTA struggled to secure legal representation, including by Muslim lawyers fearing reprisals. According to in-country sources, lawyers and families had limited access to PTA detainees and, where visits were granted, may be subjected to strip searches.'⁸²

- 10.1.5 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

⁷⁷ HRW, [Sri Lankan Authorities Detain Hindu Worshippers](#), 19 March 2024

⁷⁸ BBC, [Sri Lanka attacks: What we know about the Easter bombings](#), 28 April 2019

⁷⁹ The New Indian Express, [about-us](#), no date

⁸⁰ Xe.com, [100,000,000 LKR to GBP](#), 29 January 2025

⁸¹ The New Indian Express, [Sri Lanka's ex-President Sirisena apologises for ...](#), 31 January 2023

⁸² DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.33), 2 May 2024

‘According to police, 2,299 individuals were arrested in the aftermath of the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks that targeted Christian churches and luxury hotels, killing 268 persons, including 46 foreign citizens, and injuring more than 500. In August 2021, the Attorney General’s Department indicted 25 individuals, charging them with direct involvement in the Easter Sunday attacks. The trials began on October 10 [2023] and remained in session at year’s end. According to civil society groups, as of year’s end, approximately 31 Muslim individuals suspected in the attacks remained in custody, including the 25 who were indicted. The others were detained in prolonged pretrial detention under the PTA, some for more than three years.’⁸³ At the time of writing there was no update on the trials (see sources consulted in the [Bibliography](#)).

10.1.6 The Daily FT noted in November 2024 that:

‘The Supreme Court has overturned the previous acquittal of former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Pujith Jayasundara and former Defence Secretary Hemasiri Fernando in relation to the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, ordering the Colombo High Court Trial-at-Bar to proceed with the trial and require the accused to present their defence. The ruling, delivered by a five-judge Supreme Court bench ... was in response to appeals filed by the Attorney General.

‘The appeals challenged the acquittal decision made on 18 February 2022 when the High Court Trial-at-Bar ... ruled that the prosecution evidence was insufficient to establish the offences, leading to the release of Jayasundara and Fernando without defence testimonies. ... The Supreme Court’s judgement emphasised that, given the seriousness of the case, it was improper for the High Court to acquit the defendants without hearing their defence. The court said that there were sufficient grounds for the High Court to continue the trial and directed it to recall the accused to present their side.’⁸⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

11. Land disputes and religious sites

11.1.1 Groundviews, a citizen journalism site based in Sri Lanka focused on governance and human rights⁸⁵, noted in an article published in February 2024 that: ‘In recent years, inter-communal tensions between the Sinhala and Tamil communities, mostly concentrated in the North and East, have been manifesting in the form of issues related to religious sites. As the Nedunkeni community grappled with this incident, conversations about other archaeological and religious sites continued to brew, bringing to light another hotspot – the Kurundi archaeological site in Thannimuruppu in Mullaitivu’⁸⁶

11.1.2 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report 2024 noted:

‘Following the end of the civil war in 2009, the military presence in the Tamil-populated areas of the north and east increased. Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s

⁸³ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

⁸⁴ Daily FT, [SC orders trial continuation for ex-IGP and Defence Secretary in ...](#), 6 November 2024

⁸⁵ Groundviews, [About](#), no date

⁸⁶ Groundviews, [How Social Media is Fuelling Sri Lanka’s Ethnoreligious Issues](#), 5 February 2024

creation of the Presidential Task Force for Archeological Heritage Management in Eastern Province in 2020 led to concerns that the government would employ the military to back claims pertaining to Buddhist heritage, to further change the region's demographics.

'Military personnel and Buddhist monks have been implicated in forcing Tamil residents from their land in the north and east. In September 2023, a senior Tamil judge in Northern Province, who faced death threats for upholding court orders against the Archaeology Department's attempts to build a Buddhist temple on a Hindu site, resigned and fled the country.'⁸⁷

11.1.3 The USCIRF 2024 annual report noted:

'During the year, the Department of Archeology, in coordination with Buddhist clergy and local authorities, continued to expropriate land from Hindus and Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces for the construction of Buddhist sites. In March, Buddhist monks, representatives from the Department of Archeology, and Sri Lankan security forces attempted to install a Buddhist statue in Trincomalee, threatening to shoot Tamil and Muslim protesters if they disrupted the process... Under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Department of Archeology collaborated with the Ministry of Defense's Task Force for Archeological Heritage Management to identify cultural sites across the country. In the Northern and Eastern provinces, authorities have used this mandate to expropriate Hindu and Muslim land for the construction of Buddhist sites. In 2023, Tamil political parties reported increased attacks and vandalism against Hindu temples and damage to statues. A 2023 report identified 37 cases in the north and east in which the Department of Archeology attempted to construct Buddhist temples on Tamil land, despite the lack of Buddhist populations in those locations. Human rights groups additionally report as many as 68 instances of land disputes in Batticaloa, as of September 2023. In July, President Wickremesinghe instructed officials to prioritize and expedite the construction of Buddhist temples and cultural sites, including the Anuradhapura Sacred Site Development Plan and Maha Viharaya Development Plan in the Northern Province. In his remarks, Wickremesinghe identified Sri Lanka as a "Buddhist nation," and emphasized the "national importance" of completing the Maha Viharaya (temple). According to civil society organizations, police and military personnel fail to address land disputes or to intervene in instances of tension between Buddhist clergy and religious minorities.'⁸⁸

11.1.4 A Human Rights Watch article from July 2024 noted that:

'Sri Lankan authorities are conducting a campaign to deny Hindus and other religious minorities access to places of worship and other property and redesignate locations as Buddhist sites... Government agencies, including the Department of Archaeology, the military, and police, have taken part in a concerted strategy assailing the culture and practices of religious minorities. They are promoting majority Sinhalese Buddhist settlement in Sri Lanka's north and east to the detriment of the predominantly Tamil and Muslim

⁸⁷ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

⁸⁸ USCIRF, [2024 Annual Report- Sri Lanka](#), May 2024

populations' rights to property and religious freedom.

'Since the Sri Lankan government defeated the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009 after a brutal 26-year civil war, military forces and security agencies deployed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces have carried out intrusive surveillance of activist groups, suppressed dissent, and increasingly violated the right to freedom of religion. A pattern has emerged at temples throughout the north and east in which the authorities, along with nationalist Buddhist clergy, have damaged or removed Hindu idols and threatened, attacked or arrested worshippers to deny them access. They have also targeted Tamil and Muslim properties in land grabs.

'... The campaign to redesignate Tamil Hindu temples as Buddhist sites gathered speed in 2020 when then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa established the Presidential Task Force for Archaeological Heritage Management in the Eastern Province, composed of senior security officers and nationalist Buddhist monks. Although the task force is no longer active, the policy continues under Rajapaksa's successor, President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

'Wickremesinghe has publicly quarreled with archaeology officials and pledged to address Tamil grievances, but his administration has done little or nothing to reduce or reverse violations.

'Activists estimate that the government's Department of Archaeology has surveyed about 600 Hindu temples in the Eastern Province, a frequent prelude to Buddhist clergy and security forces denying access to Hindu worshippers. Several temples in the Northern Province have been similarly affected, as well as the property of Muslim communities. Other agencies, including the Forest and Wildlife Departments, often act in concert with monks, security forces, and the Department of Archaeology to redesignate and deny access to lands.'⁸⁹

11.1.5 The UN Human Rights Council report on the situation of human rights in Sri Lanka, published in August 2024 noted that:

'Conflicts concerning contested claims of archeological remains have exacerbated ethno-religious tensions, impacting people's livelihoods. These grievances are at times overlaid with religious dynamics, impacting on minority communities' rights to religious worship and participation in cultural life. In March 2024, eight [Hindu] devotees were arrested when participating in Shivaratri festival rituals at a contested site Veddukkunaari temple, Vavuniya. [they were later released⁹⁰]

'In one such dispute at Kurunthur Malai in Mullaitivu, a judge who ordered the removal of new constructions at the religious site claimed by both Hindu and Buddhist worshippers and subsequently found the Director-General of the Archeological Department in contempt of court, resigned in September 2023 claiming threats to his life. The Government noted that legal proceedings in this case are ongoing and that both communities conduct

⁸⁹ HRW, [Sri Lanka: Authorities Target Religious Minorities](#), 28 July 2024

⁹⁰ HRW, [Sri Lankan Authorities Detain Hindu Worshippers](#), 19 March 2024

religious activities at the site.⁹¹

11.1.6 A September 2024 report by the Oakland Institute stated:

‘Six predominantly Tamil and Muslim populated Divisional Secretary (DS) Divisions within Trincomalee have been subjected to intensive land grabbing. As a result, Sinhalese now constitute 27 percent of Trincomalee’s total population and occupy 36 percent of the district’s total land area. The Kuchchaveli DS Division, which geographically connects the Northern and Eastern Provinces, has undergone the worst dispossession during the past ten years. At least 41,164 acres of land have been expropriated in the Division – comprising over 50 percent of the total land area. This has been in part carried out under the guise of “development” projects that settle Sinhalese peasants in Tamil areas – a process known as Sinhalization. Attempts to merge some territory of the Kuchchaveli DS Division – including traditional Tamil villages – with the Sinhalese dominant Anuradhapura District, are also being advanced. Sinhalization goes hand in hand with Buddhization – the expansion of viharas (Buddhist temples) in predominantly Hindu and Muslim areas to facilitate demographic change. Over 26 viharas have been constructed on 3,887 acres of expropriated land in Kuchchaveli DS Division alone. Several of these temples have been declared “Historically Important Sacred Sites” by the government through gazette notifications. While Buddhist monks are allowed to build viharas and monasteries, the temples of ancient gods worshipped by the Tamils in these areas have been destroyed, or visits are prohibited.’⁹²

11.1.7 A Verité Research report analysed ‘harmful speech’ content on online platforms using data gathered by Hashtag Generation (a non-profit organisation focused on issues affecting young people and minorities in Sri Lanka⁹³). They note that: ‘Contestations over religious sites, for instance, have heightened ethno-religious conflicts between Sinhala Buddhist communities and Tamil Hindu communities ... , and 16 out of 20 posts where Hindus were targets of organised advocacy of violence online were in fact in relation to contested religious sites. Hence, online platforms mirror similar patterns of on-ground violence of religious discrimination of Hindus.’⁹⁴

11.1.8 Human Rights Watch’s annual world report covering events in 2024 stated:

‘Government agencies continued to appropriate Hindu and Muslim religious sites and lands occupied by Tamil and Muslim communities, on a variety of pretexts, in some cases to convert them into Buddhist temples. In particular, the government’s Department of Archaeology identified longstanding Hindu temples as ancient Buddhist sites, and the army constructed Buddhist monuments at Hindu temples while Hindu worshippers were denied access.’⁹⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

⁹¹ UN HRC, [Situation of human rights in Sri Lanka](#) (page 9), 27 August 2024

⁹² The Oakland Institute, [Trincomalee Under Siege: Land Grabs Target the ...](#), 12 September 2024

⁹³ Hashtag Generation, [About Us](#), no date

⁹⁴ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 33), 2024

⁹⁵ HRW, [World Report 2025 - Sri Lanka](#), 16 January 2025

12. Societal treatment

12.1 Overview

- 12.1.1 The Pew Research Center, a non-partisan fact tank that conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research⁹⁶, noted in a report on Buddhism, Islam and Religious Pluralism in South and Southeast Asia published in September 2023 noted that: ‘95% of Sri Lankan Buddhists say being Buddhist is important to be truly Sri Lankan – including 87% who say Buddhism is very important to be a true Sri Lankan ... 45% of Sri Lankan Buddhists say Islam is incompatible with Sri Lankan values ...’⁹⁷
- 12.1.2 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report 2024 noted: ‘While anti-Muslim riots have taken place in the past, relatively little interreligious conflict was reported in 2023.’⁹⁸
- 12.1.3 The BTI 2024 Country Report Sri Lanka noted that, ‘... Sri Lanka continues to be a deeply divided society marred by ethnoreligious and linguistic tensions. Many of the ethnoreligious-linguistic fault lines, especially between the Sinhala-speaking Sinhala Buddhist majority and the Tamil-speaking Sri Lankan Tamil minority, which led to a 30-year civil war, continue to be a source of conflict even after the armed conflict ended in May 2009.’⁹⁹
- 12.1.4 The DFAT report 2024 noted: ‘According to in-country sources, Hindu nationalist groups, including Shiv Senai, Rudra Sena and Ravana Sena, promoted hate speech against Christian and Muslim communities in the north and advocated for non-conversion laws.’¹⁰⁰
- 12.1.5 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:
- ‘Religious minority groups reported incidents of violence by members of local majority religious communities and said that state officials often supported those responsible ...
- ‘... Religious rights advocates continued to say that across all religious groups, traditional leaders charged with adjudication of religious law were poorly or completely untrained and issued inconsistent or arbitrary judgments.
- ‘... Civil society organizations continued efforts to strengthen the ability of religious and community leaders to lead peacebuilding activities through district-level interreligious reconciliation committees consisting of religious and civic leaders and laypersons from different faith traditions and ethnicities. The NGO National Peace Council of Sri Lanka created the committees in 2010 following the end of the civil war between the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese majority and the primarily Hindu and Christian Tamil minority.’¹⁰¹

[Back to Contents](#)

⁹⁶ Pew Research, [About Pew Research Center](#), no date

⁹⁷ Pew Research, [Religious landscape and change in South and Southeast Asia](#), 12 September 2023

⁹⁸ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

⁹⁹ BTI, [BTI 2024 Sri Lanka Country Report](#), March 2024

¹⁰⁰ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.48), 2 May 2024

¹⁰¹ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

12.2 Social media and online abuse

12.2.1 Groundviews, noted in an article published in February 2024 that:

'The online discussion on controversy surrounding Kurundi [archaeological site] gained momentum in June 2023 with a viral video capturing a tense exchange between President Ranil Wickremesinghe and the Director General of Archaeology, Professor Anura Manatunga ... The video exacerbated existing tensions between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindu communities resulting in harmful narratives on social media that blended violent extremism, calls for exclusion and disinformation. Calls to rally against the site's alleged declaration as a Hindu Kovil on August 18, 2023 – a falsehood – spread widely on social media. Amassing significant attention on various platforms such posts could have potentially led to mass social unrest as happened in the 2018 anti-Muslim riots. The heightened attention also led to confrontations at the site during Pongal celebrations with videos depicting heated clashes and anti-Tamil sentiments.

'... There are striking parallels between the land disputes in the Eastern Province and the conflicts over archaeological and religious sites in the North and East. These issues may serve as proxies to obstruct reconciliation efforts with social media potentially being used as a catalyst to propagate the majoritarian narrative. These localised conflicts have escalated into national level debates, largely through social media channels, fuelling nationalist narratives and exacerbating communal tensions. The active involvement of prominent political and religious figures was another mirrored pattern, which effectively contributed to the buildup of these issues over the years and also solidified the elements of a formula that resulted in national level social unrest.'¹⁰²

12.2.2 Hashtag Generation noted in an article from March 2024 that:

'Although Sinhalese nationalism has traditionally been more prominent, with pro-Sinhala organizations making their presence felt, over the past year Hashtag Generation has noted the emergence of Hindutva organizations in the North and East. Simultaneously, social media content, pages, and accounts promoting Hinduism, along with expressions of negative and at times extremist sentiments towards other religions, have become increasingly visible in the region, particularly targeting Christian movements on various platforms since 2021.'¹⁰³

12.2.3 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'Online hate speech and disinformation, particularly against Islam, is prevalent ... In-country sources reported a rise in online hate speech, including calls for violence against churches and pastors, and disinformation (for example, some social media posts accused Christians of co-opting the Aragalaya protests).'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Groundviews, [How Social Media is Fuelling Sri Lanka's Ethnoreligious Issues](#), 5 February 2024

¹⁰³ Hashtag Generation, [Rising Hindutva Influence: Social Media Divide in ...](#), 27 March 2024

¹⁰⁴ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.26, 3.38 & 3.41), 2 May 2024

- 12.2.4 The USCIRF 2024 annual report noted: ‘In recent years, anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiment has proliferated primarily online and through social media platforms and has been more prominent in the north and east.’¹⁰⁵
- 12.2.5 A Verité Research report analysed ‘harmful speech’ content on online platforms using data gathered by Hashtag Generation. They note that:
- ‘The study analysed 470 posts of harmful speech against prominent religions in Sri Lanka found on online platforms from November 2022 to October 2023. Of these posts, 85% were Sinhala language posts and 11% were Tamil language posts a significant concentration of this content was found on Facebook, accounting for 86% of the total, followed by 9% on TikTok and 5% on YouTube. The finding that the majority of the content is found on Facebook could be attributable to the fact that the majority of social media users are on Facebook (Datareportal, February 2023). Notably, 69% of the harmful content manifested in the form of visual media, particularly pictures, including memes and posts ...
- ‘... The data indicates that individual users were responsible for generating 50% of the posts sharing harmful speech, amounting to 233 posts. Additionally, 163 posts representing 35% of the total were attributed to content produced by fake accounts ... Analysis of the targets of this harmful speech content revealed that the overwhelming majority (60%) of the content was aimed at Christians. This was followed by content targeting Muslims (29%), Hindus (8%) and Buddhists (3%). The data revealed a clear pattern of religiously motivated violence against minority groups ...
- ‘... Hate speech – ... a predominant proportion (69%) of recorded hate speech specifically targeted Christians, demonstrating a significant prejudice towards this group.
- ‘Organised advocacy of violence – When considering organised advocacy of violence, Hindus face a distinctly higher likelihood of being targets of organised advocacy of violence. This suggests a level of premeditation and coordination in the violence directed at this group, which may be indicative of deeper-seated ethno-religious conflicts between the Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu communities.
- ‘... Harassment – Similar to hate speech, a disproportionate focus on Christians was also evident in instances of harassment, where they constituted the majority of the victims, accounting 55% of such posts. Analysis of posts categorised as harassment also revealed Muslims being targeted more frequently. This trend may indicate societal or cultural biases that make this group more prone to frequent harassment online, though less vulnerable to more structured forms of hostility. Most of these posts of online harassment concerned women. As observed in previous studies, Muslim women in particular have been targets of religious discrimination due to their dress code/attire. This type of harassment is thought to be compelled by the perspective of Muslim “cultural peculiarities” that exists within certain sections of society. This viewpoint reinforces the belief that specific Islamic customs, laws and practices are “at odds with the customs of the Sinhala Buddhists” (Siddiqui, 2019). A similar basis for violence/harmful speech

¹⁰⁵ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

against Muslims could be observed on online platforms as well.¹⁰⁶

12.2.6 CSW noted in November 2024 that:

‘Social media in Sri Lanka has a big influence on the spread of misconceptions and misinformation surrounding religious minorities. For many, Facebook has become a dominant platform for ethno-nationalist groups. During the 2020 parliamentary election, online anti-Muslim propaganda was aimed at Muslim candidates.

‘Human rights groups continued to report authorities monitoring expression on social media. In November 2023, however, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court determined that Section 3 of the Sri Lanka’s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Act of 2007 should not be interpreted as criminalising blasphemy, including in online contexts. It cited the case of Ramzy Razik, a Muslim man who was detained for five months without charges in 2020 for writing a Facebook post expressing his views of challenges faced by Muslim communities.’¹⁰⁷

[Back to Contents](#)

12.3 Christians

12.3.1 Humanist International, an international NGO who campaign on humanist issues¹⁰⁸, noted in their report on Freedom of Thought published in December 2023 that: ‘Tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian minority—particularly evangelical Christian groups, which are accused of forced conversions—sporadically flare into attacks on churches and individuals by Buddhist extremists.’¹⁰⁹

12.3.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘Attacks targeting Christians primarily involve physical and verbal threats against pastors and their congregations; disruption of worship services; and demands for closure of churches. Attacks predominantly target evangelical groups, which are less established and actively proselytise. Buddhists are the main perpetrators, followed by Hindus and, to a lesser extent, Catholics (the proselytisation of Catholics by evangelical groups is a growing point of friction). In one incident, in March 2022, several hundred Buddhists entered church premises during a service in Galle District (Southern Province) and threatened to kill the pastor if he did not close the church (one congregant was reportedly injured); no arrests were reported. Muslim extremists carried out coordinated suicide bombings against three Christian churches (two Catholic, one Protestant) in Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa during Easter Sunday services on 21 April 2019. DFAT is not aware of more recent significant incidents of violence or visible hostility against Christians perpetrated by Muslims. In-country Christian sources told DFAT they did not consider Muslims a threat to their community.

‘In-country sources reported that Christians in rural areas faced a higher risk of intimidation, discrimination and violence than those in urban areas, and

¹⁰⁶ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 27), 2024

¹⁰⁷ CSW, [General Briefing: Sri Lanka](#), 25 November 2024

¹⁰⁸ Humanists International, [About](#), no date

¹⁰⁹ Humanists International, [The Freedom of Thought Report 2023](#), 14 December 2023

that this risk was most pronounced against smaller, non-Catholic denominations. Catholics were well-established and faced little risk, particularly in urban areas.¹¹⁰

12.3.3 The USSD 2023 IRF report noted:

‘During the year, the NCEASL stated it documented 43 anti-Christian cases of intimidation of and violence against pastors and their congregations, obstruction of worship services, discriminatory actions, and attacks on churches, compared with 80 cases in 2022. Of these, 17 involved threats, intimidation, or coercion, and 14 were discriminatory actions or practices. According to the NCEASL, in cases of intimidation or attacks by Buddhist groups, sometimes led or instigated by Buddhist monks, on Christian churches, police often said the pastors were to blame for holding worship services and accused the pastors of breaching the peace. Of nine incidents involving property damage or destruction, one was related to hate campaigns or propaganda, and two involved physical violence.’¹¹¹

12.3.4 The same report stated: ‘In many of the incidents, the NCEASL said police or other officials played a role, and, in cases of intimidation or attacks by Buddhist groups on Christian churches, the NCEASL reported that police often said the pastors were to blame.’¹¹²

12.3.5 The USCIRF Country update on Sri Lanka published in June 2024 noted: ‘Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka reports that Christians in rural areas, particularly small Protestant denominations, are at greater risk of intimidation and violence. Pastors from such areas report that Buddhist monks and Hindu nationalists have called for churches to cease religious activities.’¹¹³

12.3.6 CPIT have used the Verité Research report ‘Trend analysis of violence against Christians in Sri Lanka’ to produce the table below showing the number of reported incidences of violence against Christians from September 2019 to October 2023, this includes state and non-state actors. Verité Research did not break down how many instances related specifically to non-state actors as they noted that a single incidence may feature more than one key perpetrator ¹¹⁴.

Time period	Number of reported incidences
Sep 2019 - Sep 2020	63
Oct 2020 - Oct 2021	72
Nov 2021 - Oct 2022	75
Nov 2022 - Oct 2023	63

12.3.7 CPIT have used the data contained in the Verité Research report to produce the graph below showing the percentage of incidences of violence against

¹¹⁰ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.42 & 3.43), 2 May 2024

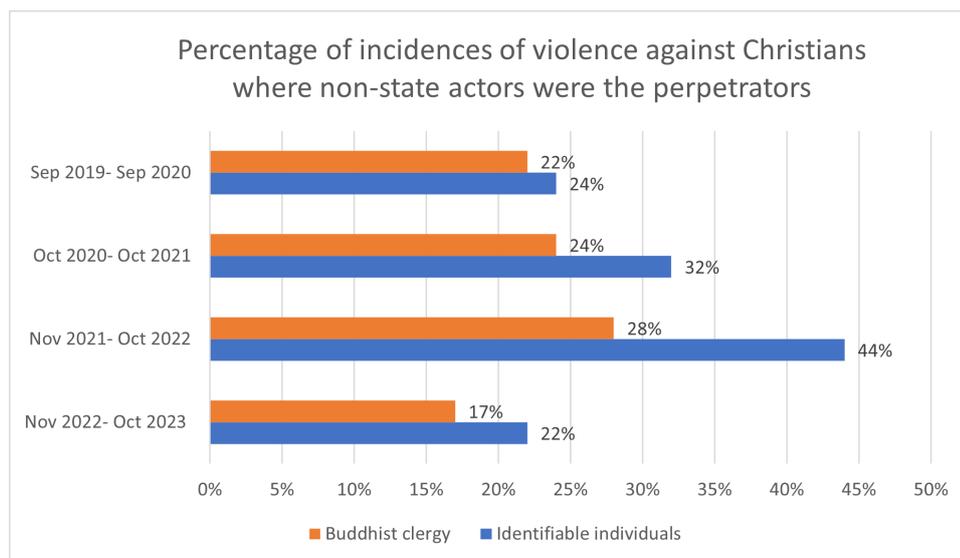
¹¹¹ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

¹¹² USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom](#), 26 June 2024

¹¹³ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

¹¹⁴ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024

Christians that involved non-state actors as a perpetrator¹¹⁵. Non-state actors include identifiable individuals (Verité describe identifiable individuals as ‘individuals or groups including but not limited to residents and workers in the locality, excluding state officials, members of the clergy and political figures¹¹⁶), people from the local community and members of the Buddhist clergy. See also the section on State treatment of religious minorities - [Treatment of Christians](#) for details of state perpetrators involved in recorded incidences. Please note when considering the percentages in this graph and the one in the section on state treatment, that each incidence may involve multiple perpetrators and as such the percentages may total more than 100 for each time period¹¹⁷.



- 12.3.8 CSW noted in their General Briefing on Sri Lanka that: ‘One of the factors driving intolerance towards Christians is fear of expansion via proselytism. Similar to the narratives surrounding the fear of the expansion of the Muslim population, Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists perceive proselytism as a threat to their dominance.’¹¹⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

12.4 Muslims

- 12.4.1 Freedom House’s Freedom in the World report 2024 noted: ‘Some women face gender-based disadvantages regarding inheritance under the customary laws of their ethnic or religious group, and Muslims reportedly encounter discrimination in property transactions.’¹¹⁹

- 12.4.2 Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2024 Country Report Sri Lanka, covering the period of 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2023, published in March 2024 noted that:

‘Anti-Muslim sentiment, which permeated popular discourse in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, continues to linger. ... the dominant political

¹¹⁵ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024

¹¹⁶ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 37), 2024

¹¹⁷ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 15), 2024

¹¹⁸ CSW, [General Briefing: Sri Lanka](#), 25 November 2024

¹¹⁹ Freedom House, [Freedom in the World 2024](#), 29 February 2024

view among the Sinhalese majority is that the Sinhala-Buddhist identity is inextricable from the national identity. Aggressive rhetoric by some Buddhist nationalists against Muslim and Christian minorities has continued during the review period.

‘... In the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks, hundreds of Muslims were arrested and many remain in custody without charge. The government made some cosmetic changes to the PTA during the review period, which have failed to address the main problems with the act.’¹²⁰

12.4.3 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘Tensions between Muslims and Buddhists have increased since the end of the civil war in 2009, and there have been sporadic episodes of violence between the two groups. In February 2018, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists conducted arson attacks against Muslim-owned residences, shops and a mosque in Ampara, triggered by rumours a Muslim restaurant was mixing “sterilisation drugs” in its food to make Sinhalese women infertile. Further clashes followed in March 2018 in Kandy, following reports of an assault of a Sinhalese man by a group of Muslims; in response, the government imposed a 10-day State of Emergency. DFAT is not aware of more recent incidents of this kind.

‘... The State of Emergency lapsed on 22 August 2019. In-country sources reported that anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence increased in the wake of these attacks: Muslims were assaulted and denied access to transport, Muslim businesses and homes were attacked by mobs, and Muslim businesses were boycotted in a campaign orchestrated by Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups...

‘... In-country Muslim sources reported that people were reluctant to associate with or employ Muslims previously arrested under the PTA, for fear of attracting adverse state attention. In some instances, such Muslims and their families were completely rejected by their communities as terrorists.

‘... The Muslim community remains the frequent subject of online hate speech and disinformation, including with respect to its perceived population growth, wealth and links to terrorism. NGOs documented incidents of threats, discrimination and violence against the community in 2022 and 2023, including property damage and propaganda. Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups, particularly the BBS, continue to target Muslims, especially through hate speech. In-country sources reported that state protection from these groups was inadequate.’¹²¹

12.4.4 The same report stated: ‘NGOs documented incidents of threats, discrimination and violence against the community in 2022 and 2023, including property damage and propaganda. Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups, particularly the BBS, continue to target Muslims, especially through hate speech. In-country sources reported that state protection from these

¹²⁰ BTI, [BTI 2024 Sri Lanka Country Report](#), March 2024

¹²¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraphs 3.31-2, 3.34 and 3.38), 2 May 2024

groups was inadequate.¹²²

12.4.5 The USCIRF Country update on Sri Lanka published in June 2024 noted:

‘Anti-Muslim sentiment proliferated by Buddhist nationalist groups has also been on the rise in recent years. From November 2022 to October 2023, for example, NCEASL recorded 12 incidents of intolerance against Sri Lankan Muslims, including several instances of Muslims students ordered to remove their hijabs. In April 2024, Colombo’s High Court sentenced Galagodaatthe Gnanasara Thera, the general secretary of Sri Lanka’s leading anti-Muslim campaign group, Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), to four years in jail for anti-Muslim comments he made in 2016. Previous reporting suggests the monk had expressed intolerance against Muslims on other occasions, including criticism related to the hijab, halal and ritualistic food, alleged forced conversion of Buddhists to Islam, and tropes like high birth rate among Muslims. While his 2016 comments did not directly incite violence, activists claim that Thera’s hateful rhetoric has contributed to a climate of increasing intolerance—and at times attacks—against religious minorities, including communal violence against Muslims in March 2018.’¹²³

12.4.6 In relation to the apology by Cabinet Ministers for the compulsory cremation policy the Daily Reporter noted that: ‘Social media responses have been largely supportive, with many viewing the apology as a necessary step towards healing and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.’¹²⁴

12.4.7 CSW noted in their general briefing that:

‘Many Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists fear a rapid rise in the Muslim population, which would turn them into the dominant ethno-religious group. These tensions were further exacerbated after the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, in which over 250 people were killed in an attack perpetrated by a little-known local Islamist group called National Towheed Jamath (NTJ).

‘The attacks led to anti-Muslim violence in Northwestern province and the Gamapal district. Nationalist Sinhala-Buddhist mobs attacked Muslim homes, mosques and businesses in apparent retaliation for the bombings, resulting in the death of one person. In some cases, police and security officials have been accused of being complicit in these attacks and refusing to intervene.’¹²⁵

12.4.8 In January 2025, the BBC reported that:

‘A hardline Sri Lankan monk who is a close ally of ousted former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, has been sentenced to nine months in prison for insulting Islam and inciting religious hatred. Galagodaatte Gnanasara was convicted on Thursday for the remarks, which date back to 2016. Sri Lanka rarely convicts Buddhist monks, but this marks the second time that Gnanasara, who has repeatedly been accused of hate crimes and anti-Muslim violence, has been jailed. The sentence, handed down by the Colombo Magistrate's Court, comes after a presidential pardon he received

¹²² DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.38), 2 May 2024

¹²³ USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

¹²⁴ Daily Reporter, [Sri Lanka Government's Apology... Cremations: A Progressive Move](#), 24 July 2024

¹²⁵ CSW, [General Briefing: Sri Lanka](#), 25 November 2024

in 2019 for a six-year sentence related to intimidation and contempt of court. Gnanasara was arrested in December for remarks he made during a 2016 media conference, where he made several derogatory remarks against Islam. On Thursday [9th January], the court said that all citizens, regardless of religion, are entitled to the freedom of belief under the Constitution.’¹²⁶

12.4.9 See also [Buddhist Nationalism](#) and [Easter 2019 extremist bombings](#)

[Back to Contents](#)

12.5 Hindus

12.5.1 The Verité Research report noted that: ‘Between November 2022 and October 2023, NCEASL recorded 23 cases of violence targeting Hindus.’¹²⁷ Eleven of the incidences were regarding contestation over religious sites, the remaining 12 were related to violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Hindus. The majority (5) of the 12 cases were related to damage done to temples¹²⁸

12.5.2 The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2024 annual report, covering events in 2023, noted: ‘In August, a Buddhist monk led approximately 50 Sinhala men armed with knives and swords to intimidate journalists and an interfaith group in Batticaloa. The group harassed a Hindu priest, two Catholic priests, and one Muslim scholar, and attacked the Hindu priest.’¹²⁹

12.5.3 See also [Land disputes](#) and the country policy and information note on [Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism](#) for further information on the treatment of Tamils (of whom a majority are of the Hindu faith).

12.5.4 There was no further information regarding societal treatment of Hindus in sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

12.6 Buddhist nationalism

12.6.1 The UN SR report 2020 noted that:

‘The Special Rapporteur has ... observed the tendency of some Buddhist religious leaders to instigate hatred and division among the population in Sri Lanka by invoking nationalist sentiments among people by politicizing ethnic and religious identity. Similarly, political parties have used ethno-nationalistic rhetoric in Sri Lanka, using the popularity of the “Sinha Le” as a powerful tool to mobilize the public ...

‘In 2012, Bodu Bala Sena, a Sinhalese Buddhist organization was created. It became influential within a short time and received much media attention. It claimed to have been created to protect the Sinhalese and Buddhism and to draw attention to the threats allegedly faced by the Sinhalese race in the face of globalization, flagging that they might become a “global minority”. The organization alleged that there was a growing international Islamic presence in the country and that the Muslim population’s expansion posed a

¹²⁶ BBC, [Controversial Buddhist monk jailed for insulting Islam](#), 10 January 2025

¹²⁷ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 46), 2024

¹²⁸ Verité Research, [Trend Analysis of Violence Against Christians](#) (page 46-54), 2024

¹²⁹ USCIRF, [2024 Annual Report- Sri Lanka](#), May 2024

threat to the Sinhalese community's status as the country's majority. It also instilled fear among the Sinhalese population by referring to the possible domination by some 60 million Tamils in southern India. Bodu Bala Sena managed to heighten the polarization of the communities through identity politics ...

'Moreover, Bodu Bala Sena launched a vigorous anti-Muslim campaign and spread inaccurate information to incite hatred against Muslims. For example, at a public meeting in Kandy on 17 March 2013, a spokesperson for the organization stated that the Qur'an ordered Muslims to spit three times on meals offered to non-Muslims. While on 12 April 2014, the General Secretary of Bodu Bala Sena falsely attributed to the Qur'an the concept that "Thaqiya" allowed Muslims to defraud people of other faiths and acquire properties and wealth of non-Muslims by cheating them.'¹³⁰

12.6.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups operate in Sri Lanka. Examples include Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), Sinha Le ('Lion's Blood'), Sinhala Ravaya ('Sinhalese Roar') and Mahason Balakaya. The BBS is the most prominent of these groups; founded in 2012, it has engaged in acts of violence and hate speech, primarily against Muslims, whom it associates with terrorism, but also against Christians. In October 2022, an arrest warrant was issued for BBS leader Gnanasara Thero after he failed to appear in court to answer charges of hate speech against Muslims (he remained free at the time of publication). BBS and other Sinhala Buddhist nationalist groups remain active and, according to in-country sources, continued to target religious minorities with relative impunity.'¹³¹

12.6.3 The USCIRF Country update on Sri Lanka published in June 2024 noted:

'Academics and civil society members in Sri Lanka have expressed concern about increasing Hindu and Buddhist nationalist sentiment in recent years affecting both the Christian and Muslim communities. According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Hashtag Generation, nationalist groups particularly target Muslims with hate speech. Several Hindu and Buddhist nationalist groups operate in the country, including the Siv Senai, Rudra Sena, and Ravana Sena.'¹³²

[Back to Contents](#)

13. Interfaith marriages

13.1.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'There is no official data on the incidence of inter-faith marriage in Sri Lanka. State, rather than religious, law governs most mixed marriages. According to in-country sources, inter-faith marriages were more common in the south than the north-east, and more likely to be tolerated in urban areas and by middle-class people.

¹³⁰ UN HRC, '[...Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief...](#)' para 63-64, 28 February 2020

¹³¹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.27), 2 May 2024

¹³² USCIRF, [Country Update: Sri Lanka](#), June 2024

‘Sri Lankans are encouraged to marry from within their own religious communities, and some families may disapprove of inter-faith marriage. Inter-faith marriage, where it occurs, does not generally result in ostracisation of mixed couples and their children. In-country sources reported that Muslims who married outside of their faith were more likely to experience social stigma within their community than Buddhists, Hindus and Christians who did likewise.

‘DFAT is not aware of official discrimination against people of mixed marriage and their children, including in relation to employment and education.’¹³³

[Back to Contents](#)

14. Criminal justice system effectiveness and avenues of redress

14.1 Judicial system

14.1.1 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted:

‘The law provided for an independent judiciary, but the government sometimes did not respect judicial independence and impartiality. In 2022, parliament passed an amendment to the constitution that removed the president’s sole discretion for appointing judges of superior courts and reestablished a constitutional council to play a role in nominations and approvals of presidential appointments to oversight commissions, the superior courts, and key executive branch appointments. The constitution and law provided for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.’¹³⁴

14.1.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘The Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority and final appellate court in Sri Lanka. The Court of Appeal is the second highest authority, followed by provincial-level High Courts and lower courts, including magistrates’ courts for criminal cases and district courts for civil cases. The Supreme Court and Court of Appeal are based in Colombo. Tamils and other ethnic minorities are under-represented as judges and other court officers. The judiciary has a record of independence, particularly at higher levels. In-country sources told DFAT that corruption could theoretically occur, particularly at lower court levels, but said judges generally were honest, fair and impartial.

‘The legal system allows victims of harm or mistreatment to seek protection and redress from the state, including through fundamental rights petitions lodged directly with the Supreme Court. While people are free to submit fundamental rights petitions, the need to travel to Colombo can make it impractical and financially prohibitive for those in more remote areas.

‘Courts are located countrywide. The Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that every person accused before a criminal court and every aggrieved person has the right to be represented in court by a lawyer...

¹³³ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 3.50- 3.52), 2 May 2024

¹³⁴ USSD, [‘2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices’](#), 22 April 2024

'... In-country sources told DFAT the legal system as highly inefficient. By some estimates, Sri Lankan criminal courts have a backlog of 40,000 cases; in extreme circumstances, cases can take up to 15 years to reach trial (as of 31 December 2022, 65 per cent of prisoners were awaiting trial).'¹³⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

14.2 Police effectiveness

14.2.1 OSAC, a public-private partnership between the US Departments of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) and security professionals from the US organizations operating abroad¹³⁶, noted in their Sri Lanka country security report, published in April 2024 that:

'The Sri Lanka Police Service (SLP) falls under the Defense Ministry. The SLP is composed of approximately 60 functional divisions. The primary divisions and their purposes are as follows:

- Inspector General of Police: The senior-most police official.
- Senior Deputy Inspectors General: One S/DIG is assigned to each of nine "ranges" to serve as the senior law enforcement official for each province.
- Criminal Investigation Division (CID): Serious and complex criminal investigations, has countrywide jurisdiction and oversees Terrorism Investigation Division (TID).
- Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB): Illicit narcotics investigations and demand reduction activities.
- Special Task Force (STF): Elite police paramilitary unit, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, protective security, special weapons and tactics.
- Special Protection Range - President's Security Division / Prime Minister Security Division / Ministerial Security Division/ Judicial Security Division / Diplomatic Security Division; each specializes in protective duties.

'Sri Lanka's security agencies have been accused of human rights abuses. For example, human rights organizations allege that law enforcement uses the discredited Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to commit prolonged arbitrary detention and torture. The PTA allows law enforcement to arrest anyone, without a warrant, for unspecified "unlawful activities" and to detain suspects for up to 18 months without producing them before a court.

'Emergency services personnel answer the phone 24 hours a day, but police responsiveness may vary due to limited resources. Although there are allegations of corruption and politicization of security services, the Sri Lanka Police Service (SLPS) is becoming increasingly professional, particularly in its specialized units. However, police officers often lack resources and training, especially at the lower ranks. Police do not always speak English well, and the Embassy gets occasional reports of police attempting to bribe citizens for alleged minor traffic offenses. Response time varies and can be

¹³⁵ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 5.14- 5.17), 2 May 2024

¹³⁶ OSAC, [About Us](#), no date

lengthy depending on the type of incident; response to traffic-related incidents can be inefficient.¹³⁷

14.2.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘Sri Lanka Police are responsible for enforcing criminal law and maintaining law and order inside Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka Police has approximately 90,000 members, plus an additional 11,000-strong Special Task Force. The latter is responsible for counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations, in coordination with the military. Women account for a growing proportion of the police force, possibly up to 10 to 15 per cent according to in-country sources, with ongoing efforts to recruit more. Some women serve in senior positions, including at the rank of Deputy Inspector General. In-country sources reported that the police were under-resourced, more so following the economic crisis in 2022, and that most officers were not trained in modern police procedures or had access to equipment to undertake advanced scientific methods of investigation.

‘Like the military, most members of the police, including in Tamil-populated areas, are Sinhalese. Police recruitment is done at the national level, and officers rotate throughout the country during their careers. Most police officers in the north-east do not speak Tamil. There are ongoing efforts to recruit Tamil speakers, albeit with limited success. Police basic training is conducted in Sinhala, limiting accessibility to most Tamil speakers. Social stigma is also reportedly attached to Tamils working as police officers. In-country sources told DFAT that growing numbers of Tamil youth in the north were keen to join the police but were discouraged by their families and communities due to lingering distrust. Caste can be another consideration, as Tamil police officers reportedly come from lower castes. In-country sources estimated 20 per cent of police officers in the north were Tamil.

‘According to in-country sources, individual police officers routinely solicited bribes (otherwise referred to as ‘commissions’) to supplement their incomes. It is reportedly common for people to pay bribes to avoid fines for traffic misdemeanours. Bribes are also reportedly solicited at security checkpoints in the north-east. In-country sources reported that people were known to pay the police to close criminal cases against them. They said criminals in the north, including those involved in the drug trade, received protection from the police, which deterred people from reporting criminal activity or seeking police protection. According to some in-country sources, the police and navy were involved in the drug trade in the north-east. DFAT is unable to verify this claim.

‘According to in-country sources, the police were reluctant to investigate complaints involving state actors, including the military. In-country sources reported the police force was subject to political pressure and interference and, where this was resisted, officers had, at times, been reassigned to new roles. High-profile officers who investigated alleged crimes involving the military, police or Rajapaksa family have in the past been harassed or forced to flee the country.

¹³⁷ OSAC, [Sri Lanka Country Security Report](#), 17 April 2024

‘People who face threats as a result of personal disputes, or who are targeted by criminal groups for extortion, can seek protection from the police and pursue remedies through the legal system if a law has been broken. In practice, there may be a reluctance to do so should the aggressor hold a position of influence and have state connections, due to fears of retribution.

‘Notwithstanding resource challenges, the police force is capable of maintaining law and order and providing protection to its citizens ..., [but] resourcing remains an ongoing challenge. Corruption can occur by individual, usually low-ranking officers. Efforts are being made to eradicate corruption as part of the current government’s broader anti-corruption drive.’¹³⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

14.3 Complaints procedures

14.3.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘The legal system allows victims of harm or mistreatment to seek protection and redress from the state, including through fundamental rights petitions lodged directly with the Supreme Court. While people are free to submit fundamental rights petitions, the need to travel to Colombo can make it impractical and financially prohibitive for those in more remote areas.

‘... The [Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka] HRCSL and the [International Committee of the Red Cross] ICRC have the right to access any place of detention and category of prisoner, including those held for terrorism offences, and to speak privately with detainees. The HRCSL can make unannounced visits. Judges also make prison visits. Inmates can submit complaints to visiting judges and the HRCSL during their visits. Prisons have internal complaint mechanisms, although prisoners generally lack confidence in them.’¹³⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

14.4 Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka (HRCSL)

14.4.1 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

‘The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) was established in 1996 with a mandate to: investigate alleged violations of constitutionally-enshrined fundamental rights; advise and assist the government in formulating laws and policies that protect fundamental rights and comply with international human rights standards; and promote human rights awareness. Commissioners are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council for three-year terms, and may be reappointed. The current chair, former Supreme Court Justice L.T.B. Dehideniya, was appointed in July 2023. In addition to its head office in Colombo, the HRCSL operates 10 regional offices across the country, including in the north-east. The HRCSL accepts complaints from the public and may also self-initiate investigations. It does not have prosecutorial powers. In November 2021, the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)

¹³⁸ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 5.7- 5.9 and 5.11- 5.13), 2 May 2024

¹³⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 5.15 and 5.30), 2 May 2024

downgraded the HRCSL's accreditation to 'B' status (partially compliant), citing concerns over government interference, including in the appointment of commissioners. It previously held an 'A' rating.

'The HRCSL received 9,219 complaints in 2022, the last year for which data is available. The most common complaint received by the HRCSL in 2022 related to reported violations of personal liberty (2,228 complaints), including arbitrary arrest and detention (919 complaints) and physical and/or mental torture (560). The second most common complaint (1,863) related to reported inaction by government entities, of which 1,267 related to the police. The third highest category of complaint was in relation to employment (1,730).

'The credibility and impartiality of the HRCSL has improved since [Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions] GANHRI's most recent assessment in November 2021. DFAT notes the HRCSL's countrywide presence and assesses it is accessible to all Sri Lankans, and some people are more comfortable filing complaints with the HRCSL than the police. Resourcing remains an ongoing challenge for the HRCSL.'¹⁴⁰

14.4.2 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted:

'From January 2022 to August 2023, the HRCSL documented 560 complaints of torture. In response to allegations of torture, the HRCSL carried out routine visits to detention centers and established a Rapid Response Unit to conduct immediate visits and inquiries.

'... The HRCSL had jurisdiction to investigate human rights violations. The HRCSL consisted of five commissioners and had divisions for investigations, education, monitoring and review, and administration and finance. The HRCSL accepted complaints from the public and could also initiate investigations. After an allegation was proven to the satisfaction of the commission, the HRCSL could recommend financial compensation for victims, refer the case for administrative disciplinary action or to the attorney general for prosecution, or both. If the government did not follow an HRCSL request for evidence, the HRCSL could summon witnesses from the government to explain its action. If the HRCSL found the government had not complied with its request, the HRCSL could refer the case to the High Court for prosecution for contempt, an offense punishable by imprisonment or fine. By statute the HRCSL had wide powers and resources and could not be called as a witness in any court of law or be sued for matters relating to its official duties. Rights groups assessed the HRCSL did not operate independent of and without interference from the government.'¹⁴¹

14.4.3 Contact details for the HRCSL [Head office](#), [Regional offices](#) and [Sub offices](#) can be found on their website¹⁴²

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁴⁰ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 5.23- 5.25), 2 May 2024

¹⁴¹ USSD, '[2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)', 22 April 2024

¹⁴² HRCSL, [Home](#), no date

14.5 National Police Commission (NPC)

14.5.1 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted:

'On August 16 [2023], the National Police Commission issued new procedures to record and investigate complaints against police officers. The procedures outlined the commission's authority to appoint independent investigations into complaints and the inspector general of police's obligation to hold police officers and stations accountable to respond in a timely manner to investigations. The procedures also required that all complainants be informed of the outcome of any investigation into their complaint.'¹⁴³

14.5.2 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'Avenues exist for the public to submit complaints about alleged police corruption or other misconduct, including directly to: officers-in-charge at local stations; the National Police Commission (NPC, established in 2015 with a mandate to protect the public from unlawful action and/or inaction by the police); CIABOC; and the HRCSL. Complaints can also be lodged online, through the Sri Lanka Police website. The NPC received over 9,200 complaints against the police, including for alleged unlawful arrest, false charges, assault, torture and abuse of power, between 2017 and 2022. DFAT understands there has been a notable increase in police officers being arrested for corruption and abuse of power.'¹⁴⁴

14.5.3 Contact details for the [NPC](#) can be found on their website¹⁴⁵.

[Back to Contents](#)

15. Freedom of movement

15.1 Internal migration

15.1.1 Sri Lanka has a total area of 65,610 sq km¹⁴⁶. There are several major cities with populations over 100,000 including Colombo, Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte, Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia and Moratuwa¹⁴⁷.

15.1.2 The USSD 2023 human rights report noted: 'The law provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights. Human rights organizations described military presence, including numerous military checkpoints, in the north and east as part of government security efforts and to prevent drug trafficking.'¹⁴⁸

15.1.3 The DFAT report 2024 noted:

'The constitution provides for freedom of movement for all Sri Lankan citizens. There are no official barriers to internal relocation, and people relocate freely. Large numbers have moved to Colombo from other parts of the country, including the north-east, for economic reasons. Access to government services is available to those who internally relocate through

¹⁴³ USSD, '[2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)', 22 April 2024

¹⁴⁴ DFAT, '[Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#)' (paragraph 5.10), 2 May 2024

¹⁴⁵ NPC, '[National Police Commission](#)', no date

¹⁴⁶ CIA World Factbook, '[Sri Lanka](#)', last updated 12 February 2025

¹⁴⁷ World Atlas, '[Biggest Cities In Sri Lanka](#)', no date

¹⁴⁸ USSD, '[2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)', 22 April 2024

their village-level government office (grama niladhari).

‘While no official barriers to internal relocation exist, practical obstacles such as a lack of financial resources, language barriers, or absence of family connections, can limit people’s options, and disproportionately impacts the poor. Continued military occupation of private land and difficulties establishing land title can also complicate internal relocation, particularly in the north.

‘Sri Lankan security forces maintain effective control throughout the country, and people are unlikely to be able to relocate internally with anonymity. The military, intelligence and police maintain a high level of awareness of returned IDPs to the north-east. Levels of monitoring have reduced, although some people have reported their movements continue to be observed.

‘Authorities retain comprehensive countrywide ‘stop’ and ‘watch’ lists of those suspected of involvement in terrorist activities or serious criminal offences. People on either list will be unable to avoid adverse attention from the security forces.’¹⁴⁹

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁴⁹ DFAT, [Country Information Report Sri Lanka](#) (paragraph 5.31- 5.34), 2 May 2024

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual](#), 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Terms of Reference

The 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the [country information](#).

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Religious demography
 - Population sizes
 - Breakdown by ethnicity/geographical location
 - Christians
 - Muslims
 - Hindus
- Legal context
 - Constitution
 - Penal code
 - Registration of religious groups
 - Education and religious teaching
 - Proselytising and conversion
 - Ban of Burkas and religious face coverings
 - Other Islamic legal restrictions
- Religious minorities participation in the political sphere
- State treatment of religious minorities
 - Overview
 - Police treatment of Christians
 - Judicial treatment of Christians
 - Police treatment of Muslims
 - Judicial treatment of Muslims
 - COVID-19 pandemic
 - State treatment of Hindus
- Societal treatment of religious minorities
 - Overview
 - Social media and online abuse
 - Christians
 - Muslims
 - Easter 2019 extremist bombings
 - Hindus

- Interfaith marriages
- Buddhist nationalism
- Criminal justice system effectiveness and avenues of redress
 - General police effectiveness
 - General complaints procedures
 - Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka (HRCSL)
 - National Police Commission (NPC)
- Internal relocation
 - Freedom of movement

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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Updated country information

[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)

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[Back to Contents](#)