# Impact of Majoritarianism in Sri Lanka

## What is the issue?

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The ongoing anti-Muslim violence reflects the long existing trend of ethnic politics and majoritarian triumphalism.

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## How did the Muslim political consciousness evolve?

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- According to the 2011 Census, Muslims are slightly more than 9% of Sri Lanka’s around 20 million population.
- On the other hand, Sinhala Buddhists comprises of 75% and Tamils 11%.
- The language of Sri Lanka’s Muslims is Tamil.
- The majority of Muslims still live in the East which was part of the LTTE’s (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) vision of Tamil separate State.
- Until 1990, the Muslims believed they had common cause with Tamil political aspirations.
- But in 1990, the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF) made departure from Sri Lanka.
- It led to a newly resurgent LTTE, which drove out nearly 100,000 Muslims.
- These Muslims moved from their northern citadel of Jaffna and other parts of northern Sri Lanka.
- The eviction took place overnight and people left behind their houses, lands, shops, and possessions.
- They became a new set of internally displaced people in Sri Lanka’s conflict.

- That was when the Sri Lankan Muslim found a new political consciousness.
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## How did Buddhist-Muslim hatred evolve?

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- Within a decade of its formation, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress was seen by Sinhala political parties as a “kingmaker” party.
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- It won seats in Parliament from the predominantly Muslim areas and the community was in the thick of national politics.
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- It has always sided with the ruling party, and is even now part of the coalition government.
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- Once the war against the LTTE was over, it was almost as if Sinhala-Buddhist extremism needed a new enemy.
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- Muslims have emerged as that enemy.
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- The rise of Islamist terrorism provided a convenient handle with which to demonise the community.
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- Sri Lanka’s Buddhist extremism has found an ally in Myanmar’s hardline Buddhist monks.
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- Both countries practise the Theravada variant of Buddhism.
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- Extremist Buddhists in Sri Lanka have clearly taken inspiration from the anti-Rohingya movement in Myanmar.
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## What happened with the change of government?

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- The majoritarian sentiments were encouraged by the previous Mahinda Rajapakse regime.
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- Since then, certain sectarian groups which openly profess hatred for Muslims as well as Christians emerged.

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- Rajapakse’s defeat in the presidential election led to a de-escalation of Buddhist-Muslim tensions.
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- But the incidents began occurring again towards the end of 2016.
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- The Muslims, who were displaced from northern Sri Lanka during the war, began going back to reclaim their lands in villages.
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- Around the same time, the Buddhist outfits began a campaign against the arrival of a group of Rohingya in Colombo.
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- The Rohingya group had been taken into custody by the Navy after they attempted to land on the Sri Lankan coast.
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- They were ordered to be kept in the safehouse under UN protection.
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- A Buddhist monk led an attack on a UN-maintained safehouse for the Rohingya in Colombo.
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- The group that attacked the safehouse alleged that Rohingya had killed Buddhists in Myanmar.
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- The clash between Buddhists and Muslims took serious turns.
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## What is the larger concern in Sri Lanka?

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- The current violent situation in Sri Lanka is seen as a direct outcome of majoritarianism among Sinhala Buddhist majority.
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- In all, the ongoing violence in Sri Lanka is more an echo of post-war Sinhala triumphalism.
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**Source: The Hindu, Indian Express**

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