



RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS: DISRUPTIONS AND DISTRACTIONS

(November 2021 - October 2022)

Cover image taken after the 2018 Digana riots courtesy of the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL).

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For over two decades, the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) of NCEASL has monitored and documented incidents of violence, intimidation and discrimination against Sri Lanka's Christian community. The aim of the RLC is to advance religious liberty for all Sri Lankans through advocacy and lobbying, research and documentation and training and education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ethno-religious violence against minority faith groups is an entrenched issue that has persisted in Sri Lanka irrespective of the changes to Sri Lanka's socio-political and economic context. This study examines key trends in religiously motivated violence against Christians between November 2021 and October 2022. Based on data collated by the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL), a total of 75 incidents of violence against Christians were analysed. Additionally, there was limited data available on violence against Muslims and Hindus which is set out in Annexure 2.

The analysis of anti-Christian violence is presented in four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of violence targeting Christians by mapping out the most prevalent types of harm, key perpetrators and the primary targets of violence. Chapter 2 examines the disruptions and distractions to the upward momentum of violence against Christians, while Chapter 3 examines the role of the state and the Buddhist clergy in perpetrating violence. Chapter 4 provides a breakdown of the district-level patterns of violence against Christians.

There were three key observations that emerged from the evaluated data:

1. As observed in past studies, an evaluation of anti-Christian violence between November 2021 and October 2022 points to there being disruptions and distractions that reduced the frequency of violence. These disruptions and distractions, that reduced the frequency of violence, were observed primarily in the months of June and July 2022, in the form of a national convergence around the *aragalaya*, the restrictions to mobility (caused by severe fuel shortages and the imposition of police curfews), and changes to Sri Lanka's political leadership (formal definition of the terms disruptions and distractions are in page 16).
2. An evaluation of district-level violence showed that the violence that took place within the current period under review was more spread out in comparison to the previous period under review. Between November 2021 and October 2022, violence against Christians was observed in 17 of the 25 administrative districts in Sri Lanka. By contrast, previously between October 2020 and October 2021, anti-Christian violence was observed only in 12 of the 25 administrative districts in Sri Lanka (Verité Research, 2022a).¹

3. The district-level evaluation of anti-Christian violence further revealed that three districts—Kalutara (13), Anuradhapura (10) and Mannar (seven)—recorded the highest number of incidents. The districts of Kalutara and Anuradhapura both have similar religious compositions. Buddhists are the religious majority in Kalutara (83 percent of the population) and Anuradhapura (90 percent of the population). Roman Catholic Christians (identified as Roman Catholics in the census) make up three percent of the population in Kalutara and 0.7 percent of the population in Anuradhapura, while non-Roman Catholic Christians (identified simply as Christians in the census) comprise only 0.7 percent of the population in Kalutara and 0.4 percent of the population in Anuradhapura. The violence in

Kalutara was mainly led by Buddhist monks (six incidents) and state officials (six incidents), while violence in Anuradhapura was mainly led by state officials (seven incidents) and other identifiable individuals (five incidents). Meanwhile, Roman Catholic Christians are the religious majority in Mannar (52 percent), with non-Roman Catholic Christians comprising just four percent of the population. The violence in Mannar was led by state officials (five incidents) and other identifiable individuals (two incidents).

Overall, the trends and patterns identified through this study provide greater insights into the violence against Christians in Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

Ethno-religious violence has been a longstanding issue in Sri Lanka. Violence motivated along ethno-religious lines has endured in Sri Lanka irrespective of the changes to the country's political, social and economic landscapes. In 2022, Sri Lanka witnessed a wave of democratic public protests (commonly referred to as the *aragalaya* - which means, the people's struggle) opposing the government at the time. Despite the national convergence and inclusivity in the *aragalaya*, ethno-religious violence persisted both during and after the period of the *aragalaya*.

This study explores ethno-religious violence targeting minority faith groups for the period November 2021 to October 2022. Furthermore, it builds on previous trend analyses of religious violence conducted by Verité Research. This study is presented in four chapters and takes place within the specific socio-political context of the period under review.

The first chapter presents an overview of the incidents of violence targeting Christians. In particular, the chapter will expand on the types of harm, the key perpetrators and victims of anti-Christian violence. The second chapter will examine the temporary disruptions

and distractions that affected the increasing pattern of violence against Christians. Accordingly, this chapter attempts to make sense of these disruptions and distractions by contextualising the anti-Christian violence in relation to the *aragalaya*, restrictions to mobility and the changes to Sri Lanka's political leadership. Chapter three sheds light on the role and actions of the state, other identifiable individuals and the members of the Buddhist clergy. Meanwhile, the fourth chapter explores the breakdown of district-level violence. The study concludes by noting key observations on the patterns of violence against Christians.

This study adopted the classification system developed by Verité Research in 2014 to evaluate types of harm, primary targets, key perpetrators and the state's response to the incidents (see Annexure 1 for the complete methodology used in this study). Each incident of violence was recorded and verified by NCEASL. The current study does not feature a separate analysis on the violence and discrimination directed at the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, similar to the previous study, Annexure 2 provides a brief description on the underlying narratives propelling violence and discrimination against these groups.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT (NOVEMBER 2021 – OCTOBER 2022)

Over the past year, the Sri Lankan government has come under severe public scrutiny. In particular, the government of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa came under criticism for its mismanagement of the economy. The government's economic policies were criticised for being 'short-sighted and unsustainable' as they resulted in depleted foreign reserves and shortages of essential goods (Verité Research, 2021a).²

The forex crisis and the shortages of essential items and services, including 13-hour-long daily power outages, led to a sense of public anger, frustration and hopelessness towards the government. This growing public frustration galvanised support for a wave of democratic public protests across the island commencing in March 2022 (Verité Research, 2022b).³

The public protests, commonly known by the Sinhala term *aragalaya* (the people's struggle), primarily called for the immediate resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and members of the Rajapaksa family from all positions of state power, followed by immediate change in political leadership. Concurrently, protesters carried slogans rejecting all political parties (Verité Research, 2022b).⁴

The *aragalaya*, which had emerged within the above context, was characterised by the diversity and inclusivity it demonstrated. The public protests mobilised support from different segments of society, including all ethnic and religious communities, social classes, professionals and private sector entities. Since April 2022, the GotaGoGama (Gota-Go-Village/GGG), a protest site at Galle Face Green, drew unanimous commendation for having displayed sense of unity and harmony by celebrating the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, Easter Sunday and the daily Ramadan breaking of fast, and singing the national anthem in both Sinhala and Tamil languages at the protest site (Verité Research, 2022c).⁵ The *aragalaya* also drew attention for the commemoration of various events, which were previously subjected to criticism. For instance, the commemoration of the bereaved from the armed conflict by protesters across different segments of the society received significant traction both on mainstream and social media (Srinivasan, 2022a).⁶

Although the *aragalaya* was seen as a mark of interracial solidarity within the capital of Sri Lanka, the same was not observed in some areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka. For instance, Tamil

communities living in the North and East, who continue to grieve alleged war crimes of the Rajapaksa government such as forced disappearances during the armed conflict, were seen protesting less frequently than those in Colombo (Arulthas, 2022; Ellis-Petersen, 2022; Marsh, 2022).⁷

The *aragalaya* was also a frequent target of state sponsored violence. In April 2022, police violence at a protest site in Rambukkanna led to the death of a protester and injuries to several other protesters. At the protest site, the police reportedly used live ammunition to disperse the protesters, which resulted in the death and injuries to protesters (Verité Research, 2022c).⁸ On 9 May, an attack on MynaGoGama (Myna-Go-Village/MGG) a protest site near Temple Trees and GotaGoGama (Gota-Go-Village/GGG) was carried out by a group of supporters associated with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. On the same day Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned (Verité Research, 2022d).⁹ The attack on the protesters triggered a wave of violence across the country that resulted in the deaths of nine people, including the death of SLPP MP Amarakeerthi Athukorala, injured 219 people and caused extensive property damage to the residences and businesses of government MPs (Dhar, 2022; Farzan, 2022).¹⁰ Soon afterwards, MP Ranil Wickremesinghe, the former prime minister of the yahapaalana government, was sworn in as prime minister (Wipulasena, 2022).¹¹

In July 2022, the *aragalaya* movement culminated in Colombo with the 'Ratama Colombata' (whole country to Colombo) protest. The July protest prompted Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee to the Maldives and led to his subsequent resignation (Fraser, 2022; Jayasinghe, 2022; Srinivasan 2022).¹² Rajapaksa's resignation led to Prime Minister Wickremesinghe being appointed as interim president (Pathi et al., 2022).¹³ On July 20, Wickremesinghe was elected as the eighth executive president of Sri Lanka by a majority vote of the members of parliament ("Hon. Ranil Wickremesinghe elected", 2022; Srinivasan, 2022b).¹⁴

Immediately following Wickremesinghe's ascendancy to the presidency, human rights organisations condemned the government's 'aggressive crackdowns' on protesters (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022; Pathirana, 2022).¹⁵ In August 2022, Wickremesinghe issued detention orders on protesters under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) (Verité Research, 2022e).¹⁶ The PTA has long been considered a 'draconian' piece of legislation that has been used in Sri Lanka for over 40 years for prolonged arbitrary detention, to target religious and ethnic minorities and curtail political dissent (Amnesty International, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2022).¹⁷

Despite the unifying aspects of the *aragalaya*, ethno-religious tensions continued to persist elsewhere in the country. For example, in June 2022, tensions re-erupted at a contested sacred site in Kurunthumalai/Kurundimale between the Tamil locals and politicians of the area and the Buddhist monks, officials from the Archaeology Department and the Sri Lankan military. In the past, the sacred site has been contested by the Buddhists and Hindus. While court orders were initially given to stop construction, this judgement was later reversed ("Court orders removal", 2022; Gunasekara, 2022).¹⁸

In April 2022, the Ministry of Buddha Sasana, Religious Affairs and Cultural Affairs issued a circular to the effect that new places of worship, religious centres or prayer centres must register with the respective divisional secretaries for approval from the ministry (Ministry of Buddha Sasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, 2022).¹⁹ Organisations promoting the rights of Christians such as the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) have criticised the circular as infringing the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion and right to manifest religious beliefs (World Evangelical Alliance, Asia Evangelical Alliance, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2022).²⁰

In September 2022, the Wickremesinghe-led government came under heavy criticism for tabling the

Bureau of Rehabilitation Bill.²¹ The proposed bill envisions the widening of the pre-existing powers of the bureau to ‘rehabilitate ex-combatants, members of violent extremist groups and any other group of persons who requests treatment and rehabilitation or is required by law to be provided with treatment and rehabilitation.’ Criticisms on the bill emerged over the concerns that the bill can be used to detain individuals from a broad range of groups, including those who advocate for social and democratic rights (including the right of freedom of religion or belief)(Perera, 2022; Satkunanathan, 2022).²²

Criticisms also re-emerged about successive governments’ inability to identify the perpetrators behind the Easter Sunday attacks. In July 2022, President Wickremesinghe called for a full-scale probe into the bombings and stated that he would enlist the help of the British Police. However, the Sri Lankan Catholic Church rejected this as an attempt to use the Easter Sunday bombings for political gain (“Sri Lanka Catholic church rejects”, 2022).²³ Against this backdrop, human rights organisations—including the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)—have raised concerns

over the country’s ethno-religious majoritarianism and human rights violations.²⁴ For instance, in October 2022, a report released by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called upon the government to address the underlying causes of the country’s economic crisis, impunity for human rights violations and economic crimes (Situation of Human Rights in Sri Lanka, 2022; Sri Lanka: New government urged, 2022).²⁵

In the past year, there have also been tensions between different Christian denominations in Sri Lanka. In particular, the proselytizing of mainline Christian groups (such as the Roman Catholics) by non-mainline Christian groups (sometimes loosely referred to as “evangelical groups”) has been a recurrent theme of contestation. As observed by scholars in the past, these tensions have usually not been violent in nature (Gunatilleke, 2015).²⁶

It is in this socio-political context that the study analyses the prevalence of religiously motivated violence against Christians, Muslims and Hindus from November 2021 to October 2022.

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF VIOLENCE

Christians in Sri Lanka continue to be targeted in incidents of religiously motivated violence. Although the findings of this study are limited to the period of November 2021 to October 2022, they add to the trends and patterns of religious violence against Christians that have been explored through previous studies by Verité Research. Similar to the previous studies by Verité Research (2020; 2021b; 2022a), this study uses the same classification systems to evaluate the nature of violence (see table below; refer Annexure 1 for a detailed description).²⁷ This section will provide a brief overview of the violence against Christians that took place during the period under review.

A total of 75 incidents of violence aimed at Christians were identified during this time period. This figure is a slight increase from the 72 incidents of violence that were analysed in the previous study for the period October 2020 to October 2021 (Verité Research, 2022a).²⁸

Table 1 | Categorisation of severity of violence or harm

Severity of violence or harm	Description
Most severe forms of violence	Carrying out physical violence against persons
Severe forms of violence	Violence involving property damage
Borderline severe forms of violence	Includes threats, intimidation or coercion. This type of violence generally does not include physical violence or damage to property and is generally low in intensity. In extreme cases, this type of violence may lead to more severe forms of violence
Least severe forms of violence	Includes discriminatory action or practices

As depicted in Figure 1, the most frequent and main type of harm (violence targeting Christians) is the least severe forms of violence. Least severe forms of violence include discriminatory action or practices, which occurred in 54 instances during the period under review. There were 22 instances of borderline severe forms of violence, which include threats, intimidation and coercion. Notably, this study observed a 52 percent

reduction in incidents that include threats, intimidation and coercion in comparison to the October 2020 - October 2021 period (from 46 incidents to 22 incidents) (Verité Research, 2022a).²⁹ Meanwhile, as observed in

the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), incidents involving the most severe forms of violence (physical violence) and severe forms of violence (property damage) remained low.³⁰

Figure 1 | Distribution of the types of harm

*A single incident could feature more than one type of harm. Therefore, the total amount calculated within each type of harm may exceed the total number of incidents.



As illustrated in Figure 2, most incidents of violence were identified to have been committed by state officials, followed by other identifiable individuals (these perpetrators were all individuals that are local or can be identified, excluding state officials, members of the clergy and political figures) and then by members of

the Buddhist clergy. In comparison to the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), there is a 43 percent increase in the number of instances where other identifiable individuals have been identified as key perpetrators of violence against Christians (23 incidents to 33 incidents).

Figure 2 | Distribution of key perpetrators of violence against Christians

*A single incident could feature more than one key perpetrator. Therefore, the total key perpetrators calculated may exceed the total number of incidents.

**Other identifiable individuals are individuals that are local or can be identified, excluding state officials, members of the clergy, and political figures.

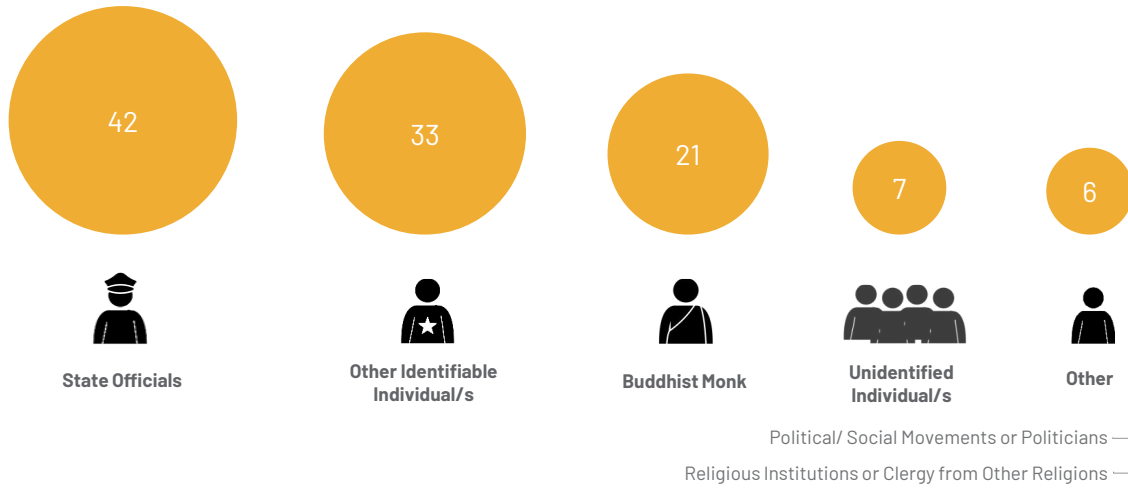


Figure 3 | Distribution of primary targets of violence against Christians

*A single incident could feature more than one primary target. Therefore, the total primary targets calculated may exceed the total number of incidents.

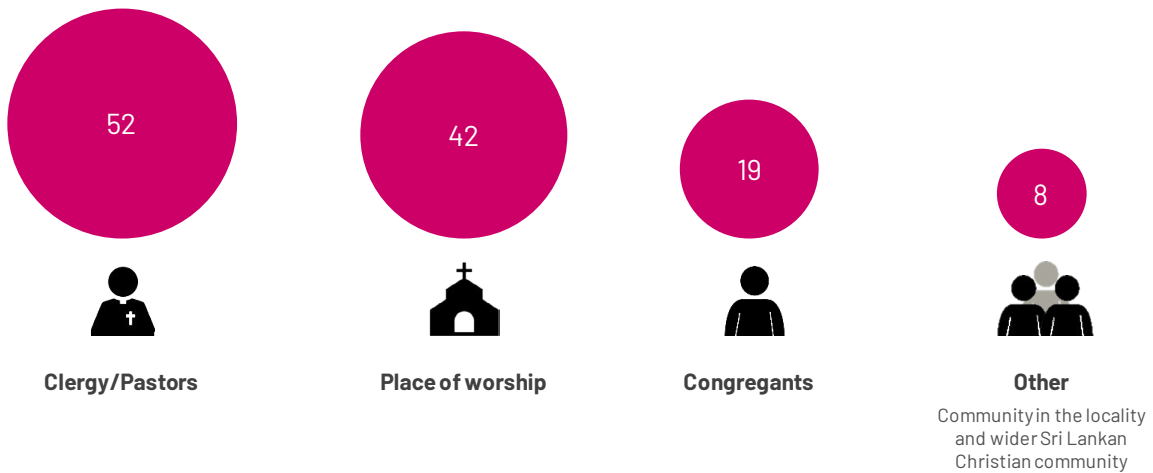


Figure 3 depicts that the primary targets in incidents of violence against Christians between November 2021 and October 2022 were predominantly members of the Christian clergy, followed by Christian places of worship. These findings remain consistent with the findings of the previous study conducted by Verité Research

(2022a).³¹ Accordingly, as depicted in Figure 4, members of the Christian clergy faced two main types of violence, which included borderline severe (threats, intimidation and coercion) and least severe (discriminatory action or practices) forms of violence.

Figure 4 | Primary targets by main types of harm

*A single incident could feature more than one primary target

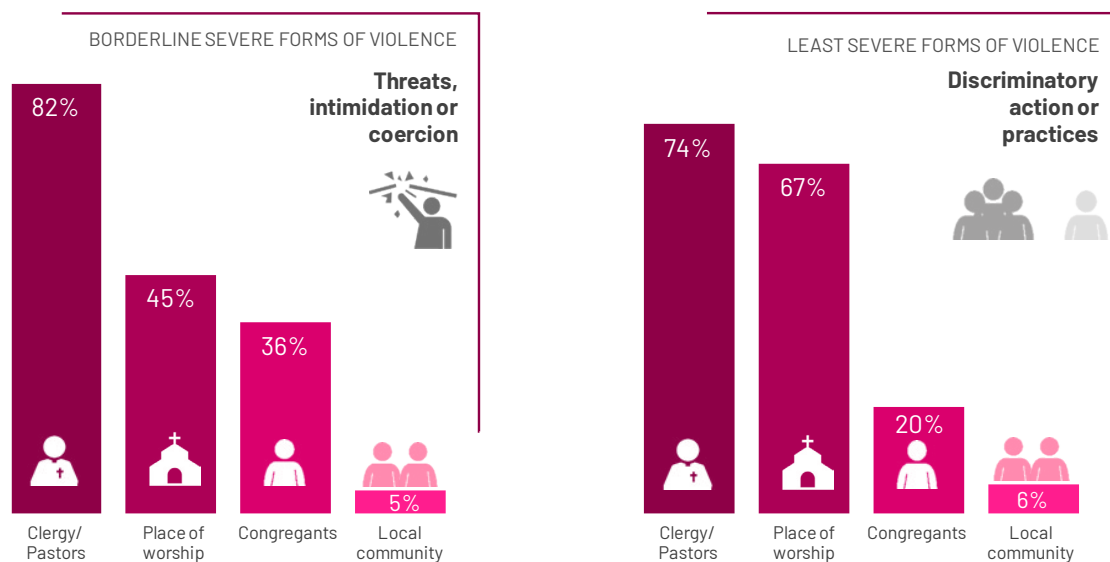


Figure 4 also shows that despite the overall reduction in the number of incidents that included threats, intimidation and coercion, 82 percent of incidents that included this form of harm appeared to be directed at the Christian clergy. Furthermore, an assessment of the qualitative data provided by NCEASL revealed that there were many incidents where perpetrators would threaten or coerce the Christian clergy to cease worship activities. For example, in an incident in Ranala, Colombo, the police demanded that a pastor cease all religious activities including a Christmas service. Consistent with the findings of the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), the findings of this analysis support the underlying assumption that threatening or coercing the religious authority (clergy) could cease/discourage Christian activities in the locality.³² This assumption is further supported by the fact that the Christian clergy are typically viewed as the representative authority of the Christian faith in a locality.

There were also many incidents where Christian clergy were targeted together with churches. For example, they were questioned on the legality of their places of worship and on whether they had obtained necessary permissions to renovate or build new constructions around the church. In four incidents the legality of the place of worship was questioned with regards to circulars. Two of these incidents involved the April 2022 circular released by the Ministry of Buddha Sasana, Religious Affairs and Cultural Affairs. Additionally, churches alone were subject to discriminatory action, which manifested in the form of protests or petitions demanding the cessation of worship activities. As noted in the previous study by Verité Research (2022a), the data suggests that discriminatory acts are generally carried out against the tangible symbols of Christian presence (places of worship) in addition to the main representative authority (Christian clergy).³³

1.2 GENDER AND INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS

The current study introduced an additional classification of incidents, which allowed for further analysis of incidents in respect to the gender of the (1) victims and (2) perpetrators of violence against Christians.

The gender of the primary target (victim) was documented in 68 percent of the incidents, while the gender of the primary target could not be reasonably identified in 32 percent of the incidents. Of the incidents that specified the gender of the primary target, 78 percent were male while 27 percent were female. The majority of the primary targets were male pastors while only five of the primary targets were female pastors. There were three female congregants and a pastor's wife who were also targeted.

The gender of the perpetrators was largely unknown or unspecified in the incident reports collated by NCEASL. There were only 10 instances where the gender of the perpetrator was identified as male. Of the 10 male perpetrators, nine were Buddhist monks.

Notably, the inability to identify the gender of most primary targets and perpetrators has cast limitations on the analysis. It has restricted the ability to uncover statistical relationships between gender and the incidents of religious violence against Christians.

CHAPTER 2:

VIOLENCE OVER THE YEARS: DISRUPTIONS AND DISTRACTIONS

In previous studies conducted by Verité Research, any event that led to a decrease in the overall number of incidents of anti-Christian violence were described as disruptions. However, the current period under review saw multiple events or situations which either prevented potential perpetrators from engaging in violence against Christians or diverted their attention to more pressing concerns. Therefore, this study attempts to categorise these events or situations as either a disruption to or a distraction from the pattern of increasing violence against Christians.

A disruption is defined as the occurrence of extraordinary logistical barriers that prevent potential perpetrators from engaging in religiously motivated violence. For instance, the impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns on anti-Christian violence, which was explored in the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), was viewed as a disruption to the pattern of increasing violence against Christians.³⁴ Notably, the lockdowns restricted the mobility of perpetrators, which most

likely impacted potential perpetrators' ability to engage in violence.

A distraction is defined as the occurrence of events or situations that tend to have an extraordinary impact in diverting attention of potential perpetrators from engaging in religiously motivated violence. For example, the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a) explored the connection between anti-Christian violence and the national elections.³⁵ The connection between lower incidence of anti-Christian violence at ground level, and the occurrence of national elections suggests that the latter can be viewed as a distraction or distracting event that most likely diverted the attention of potential perpetrators (Verité Research, 2022a).³⁶

The overlap between these disruptions and distractions and the reduction in the number of incidents of anti-Christian violence during certain months in the period under review are further explored below.

Figure 5 | Number of incidents of violence against Christians by year (January 2010 to October 2022)

*This figure is a year-by-year comparison. 2022 data only consists of data up to October 2022

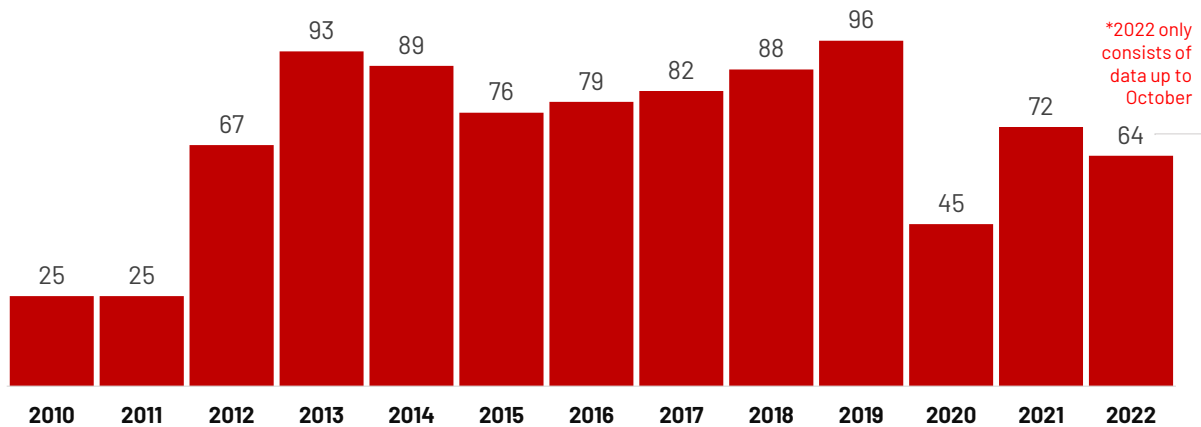


Figure 5 is a year-by-year comparison of the total number of incidents for each year (from January to December). In the case of the year 2022, the total number of incidents is from January 2022 to October 2022.

Figure 5 illustrates a pattern of increasing number of religiously motivated incidents of violence against Christians from 2010 to 2022. However, this consistent pattern of upward momentum appears to encounter certain disruptions and distractions, which are either sporadic or cyclic in nature, especially during the year 2020.

The first distraction explored in the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a) was between national elections and the reduction of incidents of anti-Christian violence. The data suggested that there was a risk of violence regaining momentum after national elections are conducted. This pattern appears to be cyclic in nature as it tends to follow the election cycles. For example, this may be seen when comparing the pre-2015 data with the 2015 data, as both a presidential and parliamentary election were held in 2015.

The second disruption explored in the study was between the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions to the regular pattern of increasing ground-level violence (Verité Research, 2022a).³⁷ Although, the COVID-19 outbreak was sporadic in nature, its effect on the violence against Christians was studied during recurring 'peak' and 'off-peak' COVID-19 outbreaks over the last two years. The pandemic restricted people's mobility and made personal safety and health a priority. The restrictions in movement brought about by COVID-19 related regulations appeared to have curbed perpetrators' potential to regularly carry out incidents of religiously motivated violence. The violence appeared to regain momentum soon after travel restrictions were not strictly enforced or/were lifted.

Similarly, in the current period under review, reductions in the incidents of anti-Christian violence can be observed in certain months, as seen in Figure 6. This may be attributed to certain disruptions and distractions that occurred within the time period: (1) the *aragalaya* and (2) the effects of the economic crisis. This phenomenon is further explored below.

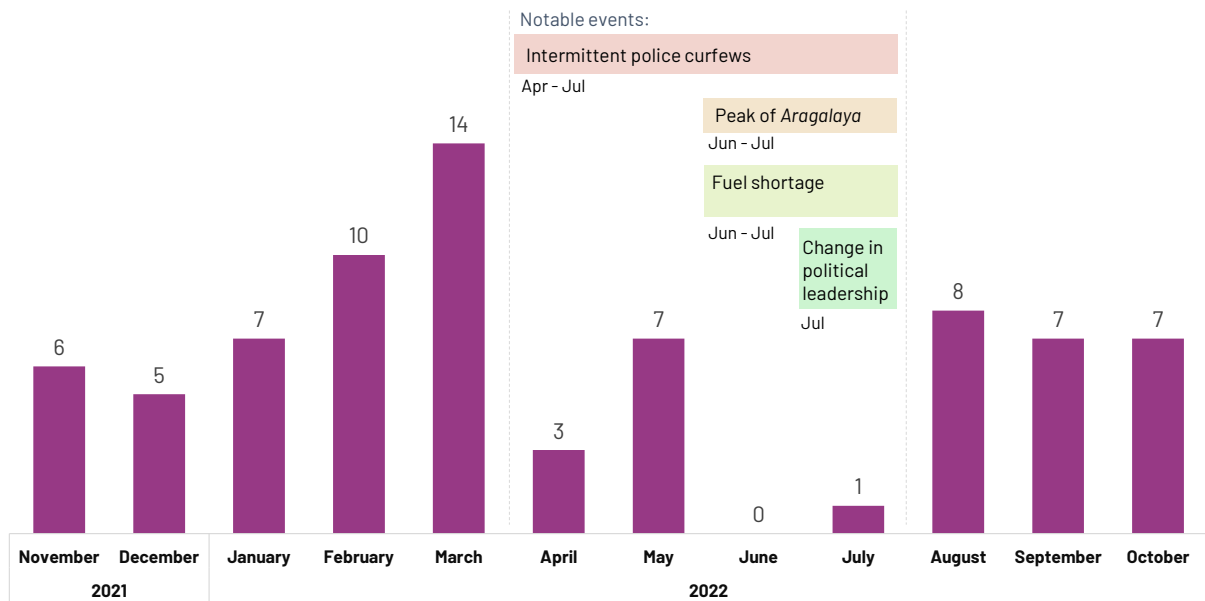
2.1 DISRUPTIONS AND DISTRACTIONS DURING NOVEMBER 2021 – OCTOBER 2022

Figure 6 shows the monthly distribution of incidents of violence for the current period under review. The figure illustrates that the incidents of violence rose in frequency in March, with 14 incidents. Six of these incidents were linked to an event in Amalgama, Galle, which spanned several days. The event involved around 600 people including nearly 60 Buddhist monks forcibly

entering a church and threatening the pastor to cease all religious activities and shut down the church. The mob later assaulted a Christian congregant at the church premises. This single event, which spanned several days, comprised of a series of incidents each featuring an identifiable type of harm (refer Annexure 1 for the detailed methodology).

Figure 6 | Total Incidents of violence by month (November 2021 to October 2022)

*This is a month-by-month comparison of the period under review



Despite the perceived inclusivity and national convergence of the *aragalaya*, ethno-religious violence persisted even alongside the peak of the movement last year. However, as depicted in Figure 6, violence targeting Christians dropped drastically during the months of June and July. The drop in incidents of violence appears to suggest a connection between sporadic disruptions and distractions that occurred during this timeline and

the reduction in ground-level anti-Christian violence. These disruptions and distractions are characterised as sporadic in nature due to its irregular and sudden occurrence, unlike cyclic distractions such as national elections which occur periodically. These distractions and disruptions to the increasing pattern of anti-Christian violence are explored in detail below.

DISTRACTIONS FROM THE PATTERN OF INCREASING ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE

1. National convergence of the *aragalaya*

The *aragalaya*, as mentioned earlier, was a wave of democratic protests that began in March 2022 to voice the anger of the public over the economic mismanagement, and political leadership of the country. Although it commenced in late March 2022, the protests reached a crescendo towards the months of June and July (refer socio-political context section for more details) (“Protesters continue to occupy”, 2022).³⁸ The *aragalaya* was praised for its collective participation of citizens irrespective of race, religion or social class. It was also attended and led by members of clergy from diverse religious backgrounds. For instance, during Ramadan celebrations at GGG, Muslim protesters were seen breaking fast alongside their Christian, Hindu and Buddhist counterparts in a peaceful display of unity. This brief period (and public display) of ethno-religious harmony appears to have acted as a distraction from the regular pattern of anti-Christian violence, most likely contributing to the reduction of incidents of religious violence in the months of June and July.

2. Change in political leadership

As explored above, national elections appear to play a role in distracting perpetrators and thereby interrupt increasing pattern of incidents of religious violence.³⁹ Although the appointment of President Ranil Wickremesinghe in July last year did not take place following a traditional national-level election, this period of heightened political instability could have acted as a distraction from engaging in anti-Christian violence. Thus, this distracting event appears to have contributed to a decrease in the number of incidents of anti-Christian violence. Accordingly, Figure 6 illustrates the decrease in the number of incidents in the months of heightened political instability and changes in the

political leadership (June and July) followed by an uptick in the number of incidents in August.

DISRUPTIONS TO THE PATTERN OF INCREASING ANTI-CHRISTIAN VIOLENCE

1. Police curfews following the *aragalaya*

In the months of April, May and July, the government imposed a police curfew in an attempt to quell the *aragalaya* (Farzan, 2022; “Sri Lanka police impose”, 2022).⁴⁰ Some of these curfews were island-wide, while some were imposed only in specific areas. Previous studies by Verité Research (2020, 2022a) observed that anti-Christian violence was generally perpetrated by individuals residing in the same locality as the primary target.⁴¹ It was further established that mobility was a necessary condition to carry out acts of religious violence. Thus, the restrictions to mobility of the perpetrators may have caused a disruption in anti-Christian violence, which resulted in a reduced number of incidents in certain months in the period under review.

2. Temporary fuel shortage resulting from the prevailing economic crisis

Economists widely consider the prevailing economic crisis as the worst in Sri Lanka’s post-independent history, with record high inflation, power outages and shortage of essential goods including fuel, food and medicines. In June 2022, the economic crisis led to a severe fuel shortage within the country, with many people having to wait in long fuel queues for days (Kurukulasuriya, 2022).⁴² This fuel shortage resulted in restricting the mobility of people across the country. Thus, the restriction in movement brought about by the fuel crisis appears to have acted as a temporary disruption to the increasing pattern of anti-Christian violence (Verité Research, 2022f), especially in the month of July.⁴³

CHAPTER 3: UNCOVERING THE PERPETRATORS

3.1 THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The Sri Lankan government's obligation in relation to upholding the right of Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB) is twofold. First, the state has a duty to protect the right of religious freedom of all its citizens against any infringement by third parties. Second, the state has the duty to respect the right of its citizens to exercise their FORB. To this end the state—through both local and international legal frameworks—is afforded broad legal powers to hold perpetrators accountable and to shield ethno-religious groups from being targeted on religious grounds.

3.1.1 Negative state bias: An inherent characteristic in anti-Christian violence?

Similar to the previous periods under review, state officials (including police officers) continued to be identified as the perpetrators in a significant proportion (56 percent) of the total incidents of violence against Christians.

Thus, the findings of this analysis reaffirm the entrenched pattern of the state's 'negative bias' towards the Christian community, irrespective of changes in government or political leadership. As explored in

previous studies by Verité Research (2021b, 2022a), negative bias against Christians can be understood to stem from (1) the state's privilege to wield authority in a formal capacity, which allows it to act with impunity and (2) the entrenched view that the majority Sinhala-Buddhist state needs protection from perceived threats from minority groups.⁴⁴

Therefore, this persistent pattern of negative state bias also raises a deeper concern over the systemic nature of religious violence against Christians.

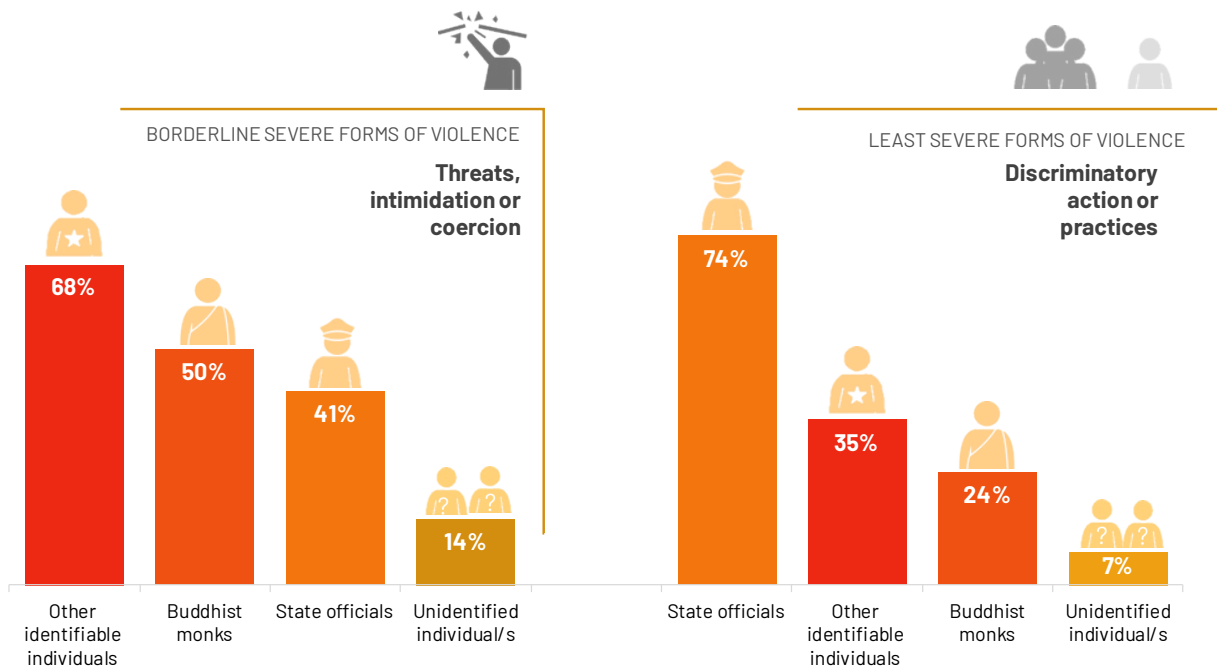
3.1.2 Negative state bias: State sanctioned discrimination?

In the period reviewed previously (October 2020 – October 2021), state officials (including the police) were identified to be primarily responsible for perpetrating borderline severe (threats, intimidation and coercion) and least severe forms of violence (discriminatory action or practices). However, in the current period under review, state officials were primarily responsible for least severe forms of violence (discriminatory action or practices) which constituted 74 percent, as seen in Figure 7.

Some incidents of discriminatory action or practices led by state officials included falsely accusing pastors of not being a registered member of the Christian clergy, refusing to accept pastors' credentials even when the relevant documents of proof were produced and joining Buddhist monks in questioning the legality of a place of worship.

The data also points to a marked reduction in the state's involvement in borderline severe forms of violence (threats, intimidation and coercion) compared to the previous study. In the previous study, state officials (alone or together with other perpetrators) were responsible for 79 percent of threats, intimidation and coercion against Christians, but it had dropped to 41 percent in the current period under review.

Figure 7 | Key perpetrators by main types of harm



*A single incident could feature more than one perpetrator

3.1.3 Negative state bias: Negative policing

This section analyses the responses of the police in relation to: (I) the two main types of harm; (II) the three main primary targets; (III) the three main perpetrators identified in the period under review. The nature of police action is assessed using the system of categorisation in Table 2 (see Annexure 1 for the complete methodology).

Out of the incidents for which there is a police response recorded, the figures support the narrative of the state's continued negative bias and antipathy towards protecting the religious freedom of Christians. These were especially evident in instances where the police actively or tacitly enabled acts of violence against the Christians.

Table 2 | Categorisation of the nature of police responses to incidents of religious violence against Christians

Nature of police action	Description
Actively negative	The police actively or tacitly displayed support towards/were involved in the perpetration of violence against Christians
Tacitly negative	The police were present during an incident of violence and did not act on behalf of the victim/s
Actively positive	The police were present during an incident of violence and acted on behalf of the victim/s
Passively positive	The police took follow-up action after an incident of violence had occurred
Absent/unknown	The nature of police action was not documented or not available at the time of conducting the study

I. How did the police respond to the two main types of violence?

Figures 8 and 9 summarise the nature of police action in terms of the two main types of violence identified in the period under review.

Accordingly, active and tacit negative police action (actively or tacitly involved, and present and inactive) was recorded in 41 percent of borderline severe forms of violence (threats, intimidation and coercion) and of an equal percentage in least severe forms of violence (discriminatory action or practices). Additionally, actively positive police action (present and intervened) in response to incidents of discriminatory action or practices against Christians was recorded in less than 10 percent of the incidents. These figures highlight that the police were generally supportive of less severe forms of violence against Christians.

However, some positive developments can be observed in relation to police responses to incidents of borderline severe forms of violence (threats, intimidation and coercion). For instance, in comparison to last year's study (Verité Research, 2022a), the data shows a reduction in negative police action in relation to threats, intimidation and coercion (from 54 percent to 41 percent).⁴⁵ Additionally, in comparison to last year's study (Verité Research, 2022a), there is a slight increase in the intervention rates of the police in relation to incidents involving threats, intimidation and coercion.⁴⁶ Of such incidents, the police also positively and actively responded (was present and intervened) in 18 percent of those incidents (a slight increase from seven percent to 18 percent), and passively responded (intervened after the incident) in 18 percent of those incidents (an increase from zero percent to 18 percent).

Figure 8 | Police responses to borderline severe forms of violence

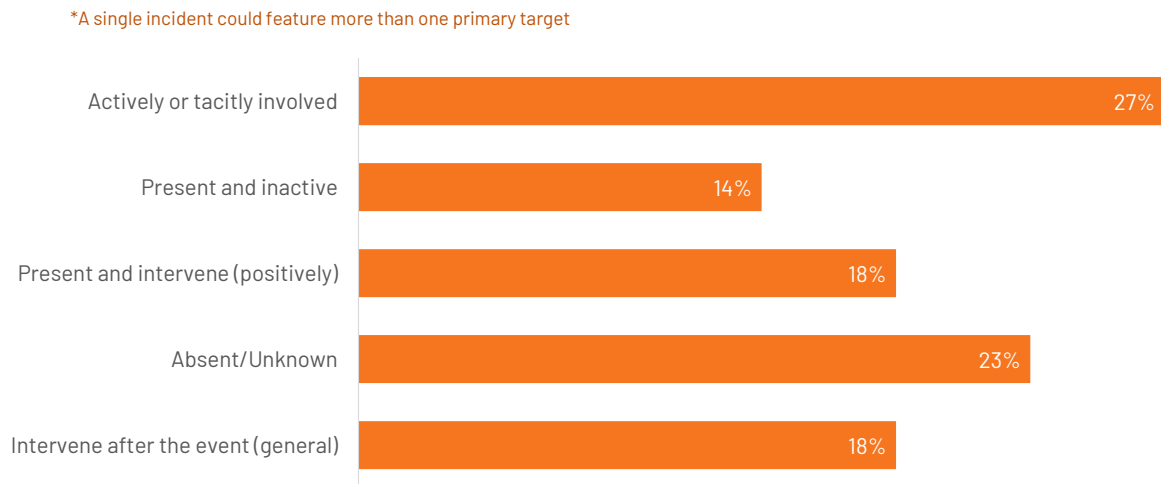
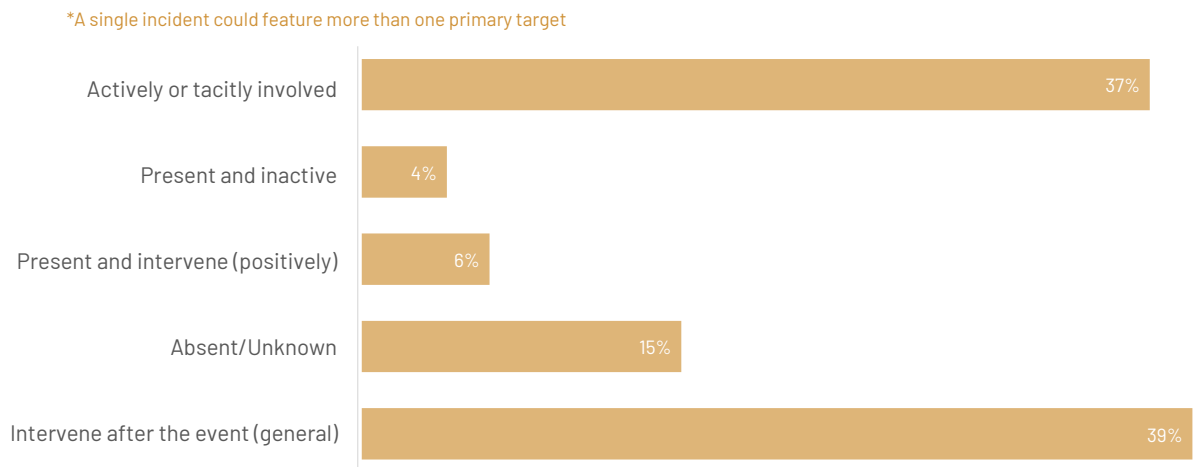


Figure 9 | Police responses to least severe forms of violence



II. Main primary targets: How did the police respond?

Figure 10 presents the data on police action in relation to the three main primary targets – churches, Christian clergy and congregants.

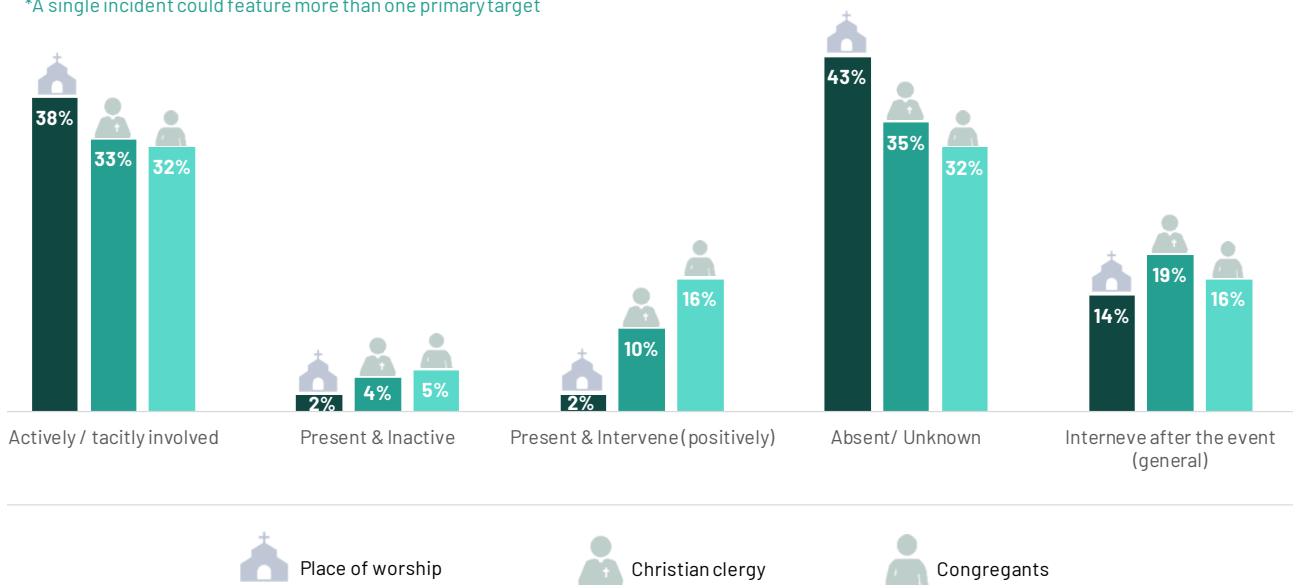
Active and tacit negative police action (actively or tacitly involved and present and inactive) was recorded in 40 percent of incidents of violence targeting churches and in 37 percent of violent acts against members of the Christian clergy and congregants. The data reveals a change in the focal subjects of negative police action from the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a).⁴⁷ For instance, last year’s study noted that negative police action was recorded predominantly in incidents

targeting Christian congregants, followed by Christian clergy and churches.

Similar to last year (Verité Research, 2022a), actively positive police action (present and intervened) during incidents of religious violence against the two primary targets was low.⁴⁸ Although, passive positive police action (intervened after the incident) was higher than active police action, post-incident intervention action was largely limited to commencing an investigation. This finding corresponds with findings from previous years as available data does not record any incident where perpetrators were held accountable for their acts of violence against the primary targets.

Figure 10 | Primary targets by police response

*A single incident could feature more than one primary target



III. Main perpetrator groups: How did the police respond?

Figure 11 depicts data on police action in relation to the three main perpetrators of violence against Christians in the period under review – state officials, Buddhist clergy and other identifiable individuals. The figure

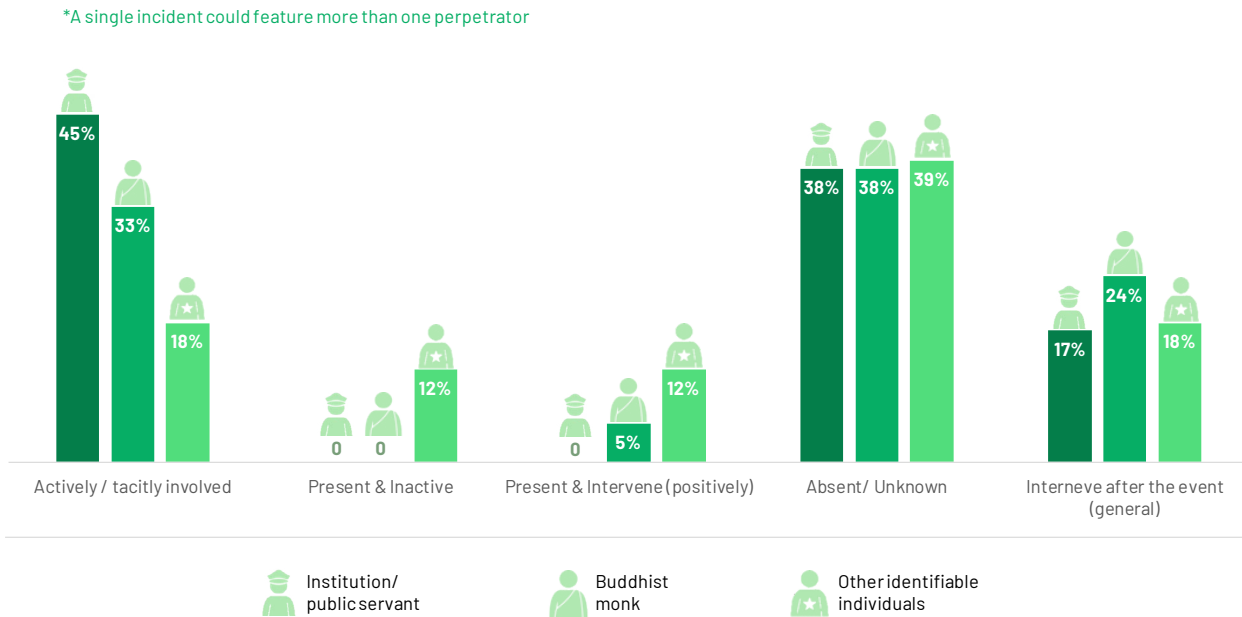
demonstrates that the police were more likely to be actively or tacitly supportive of the violence carried out by fellow state officials (45 percent) and Buddhist monks (33 percent) in comparison to the violence carried out by other identifiable individuals (18 percent).

Similar to the findings of the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), police responses in the period under review appear to suggest that they are more likely to take some actively positive action when perpetrators do not command a high level of authority to challenge police action.⁴⁹ This assumption is reinforced by the active intervention rates of the police in incidents that involved violence committed by other identifiable individuals in comparison with incidents which involved Buddhist monks or a fellow state official. Accordingly, there is a slightly higher proportion of actively positive police action (present and intervened) recorded for incidents of violence committed by other identifiable individuals. By contrast, the police only took similar action in five percent of incidents led by Buddhist

monks and in zero percent of incidents led by fellow state officials.

In contrast to the findings of the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), police responses in the period under review note an increase in passively positive police action (intervention after the event), especially in relation to incidents committed by state officials (from zero percent to 17 percent) and Buddhist monks (from zero percent to 24 percent).⁵⁰ Despite this increase in post-incident intervention which primarily involved filing complaints and commencing investigations, there is no available records of any positive tangible outcomes following police intervention.

Figure 11 | Key perpetrators by police response



3.2 THE ROLE OF OTHER IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS

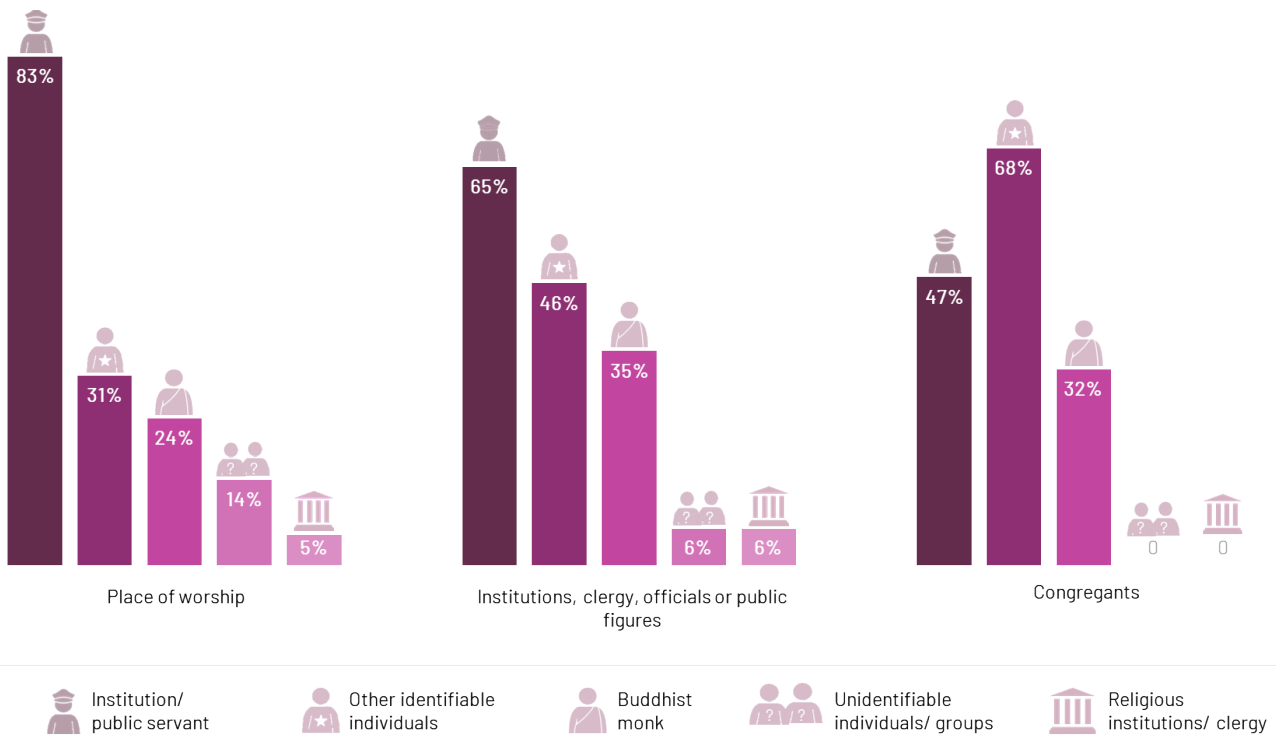
During the period under review, there were 33 instances where other identifiable individuals were observed to be the perpetrators of anti-Christian violence. This is a 43 percent increase from the previous period under review (from 23 instances to 33 instances) (Verité Research, 2022a).⁵¹ Other identifiable individuals were usually residents or those living in the locality of the primary target, excluding state officials, members of the clergy and political figures (see Annexure 1).

likely to target congregants (68 percent) as opposed to state officials who tend to target churches and/or clergy more often.

For example, in an incident that took place in Kalutara, about seven monks and 40 villagers physically assaulted two congregants attending a worship service held at another congregant’s house. It was also observed that other identifiable individuals often acted together with either Buddhist monks or state officials. For instance, in an incident that took place in Kandy, a group of 10 villagers along with a Buddhist monk demanded that a pastor stop services since the village was a “Buddhist village”. As shown in previous studies, these incidents were typically localised and did not occur at a national level.

Figure 7 shows that other identifiable individuals were the most involved in carrying out borderline severe forms of violence (threats, intimidation and coercion) as opposed to least severe forms of violence (discriminatory action or practices). Meanwhile, as seen in Figure 12, other identifiable individuals were also more

Figure 12 | Key perpetrators by primary targets



A single incident could feature more than one perpetrator

3.3 THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST MONKS

There were 21 incidents where Buddhist monks were identified as perpetrators of anti-Christian violence in the period under review. This figure is a slight increase from the 17 incidents identified in the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a).⁵² Figure 7 shows that Buddhist monks were more involved in carrying out acts of threats and intimidation as opposed to discriminatory action.

The incident reports suggest that Buddhist monks were often accompanied by a mob, usually comprised of local villagers. For example, in an incident that took place in Bulathsinhala, Kalutara, about 60 villagers and three Buddhist monks surrounded a pastor and his family and demanded to know if the pastor was involved in forced conversions. As observed in past studies (Verité Research, 2014), Buddhist monks often provide leadership to others in violence against Christians.⁵³ This type of incident could range from two laypersons following a monk to a group of monks leading hundreds of villagers.

The present data shows that this monk-mob phenomenon continues to persist.

Figure 11 demonstrates that the nature of police action was actively negative (actively or tacitly involved) 33 percent of the time in the cases where Buddhist monks were involved as perpetrators, while the police were only actively negative in 18 percent of the time in cases where other identifiable individuals were involved. This response by the police further signifies the 'Buddhist monastic exceptionalism' or the exceptional position and impunity provided to the Buddhist clergy by state authorities, which was explored in previous studies.

It is also noteworthy that despite the national convergence and the ethno-religious harmony displayed by different religious leaders in the *aragalaya*, the data suggests that some Buddhist monks continued to be the perpetrators in religiously motivated violence against Christians.

CHAPTER 4: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF VIOLENCE

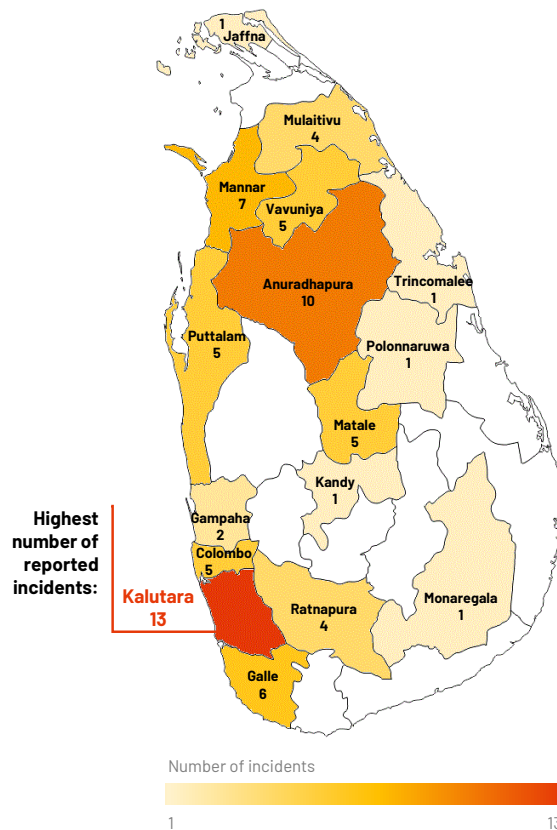
Violence against Christians was recorded in 17 of the 25 administrative districts in Sri Lanka. By contrast, the previous period reviewed recorded anti-Christian violence in 12 of the 25 administrative districts – with Kalutara recording the highest number of incidents (20), followed by Colombo (17). The data thus demonstrates that anti-Christian violence in the current period under review is more widespread in comparison to the previous period (Verité Research, 2022a).⁵⁴ In the current period, Kalutara continued to feature the highest number of incidents of violence against Christians (13), followed by Anuradhapura (10) and Mannar (seven).

The number of incidents recorded in the Kalutara District has dropped since the last reporting period.

However, Kalutara continues to be featured as the hotspot with the most incidents of violence in both the 2021 (20 incidents) and 2022 (13 incidents) periods. Kalutara had also been featured among the top two districts with the highest number of incidents in 2017 (18 incidents) and 2020 (10 incidents).

By contrast, in the past two periods under review (October 2020 to October 2021 and September 2019 to September 2020) the districts of Anuradhapura and Mannar had not recorded any incidents of violence. Only between the years 2015 and 2019 were there four recorded incidents of violence from the Mannar District, while there were 20 and seven incidents recorded during the periods of 2010 to 2014 and 2015 to 2019 in Anuradhapura respectively (Verité Research, 2020).⁵⁵

Figure 13 | District-level breakdown of incidents of violence for the period under review (November 2021 – October 2022)



I. Demographic characteristics of Kalutara, Anuradhapura and Mannar

This section draws demographic comparisons between the districts of Kalutara, Anuradhapura and Mannar.

According to the latest available data from the Department of Census and Statistics (the last census was held in 2012), Kalutara is a district comprising of a majority Buddhist population (83 percent), with Hindu and Muslim populations of three and nine percent respectively, and Roman Catholic Christians (identified as Roman Catholic in the census) and non-Roman Catholic Christian (identified simply as Christian in the census) populations of three and 0.7 percent respectively (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).⁵⁶

Similarly, Anuradhapura is a district composed of a predominantly Buddhist population (90 percent) with a Hindu and Muslim population of 0.3 percent and eight percent respectively. It also has a Roman Catholic Christian population of 0.7 percent and a non-Roman Catholic Christian population of 0.4 percent (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).⁵⁷

By contrast, Mannar is a district comprised of a majority Roman Catholic Christian population (52 percent), with a non-Roman Catholic Christian of four percent. Only 1.8 percent of the population in the district are Buddhists, while Muslims and Hindus comprise 16 percent and 24 percent of the population respectively (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012).⁵⁸

Not all incidents of violence documented by NCEASL captured the religious identities of the perpetrators. Out of all the incidents of violence recorded in Kalutara, only six of the incidents had recorded the religious identity of the perpetrator as Buddhist, while only two incidents had recorded the perpetrator's religion as Buddhist in Anuradhapura. Similarly, in Mannar not all incidents had recorded the religious identity of the perpetrators, with the exception of one Roman Catholic Christian perpetrator and one Hindu perpetrator.

As noted in the previous study (Verité Research, 2022a), the identification of the majority community as the offending party (or perpetrator) in some cases can be taken as being indicative of the majority community in that geographic area having a greater tendency to carry out violence against the minorities in the area.⁵⁹

II. Patterns of violence in Kalutara, Anuradhapura and Mannar

Certain similarities were observed when evaluating the types of harm between the three hotspot districts of anti-Christian violence (Kalutara, Anuradhapura and Mannar). Christians in all three districts were

predominantly subjected to discriminatory action or practices – with Kalutara recording nine incidents, and Anuradhapura and Mannar recording eight and five incidents respectively.

Meanwhile, in the Kalutara and Anuradhapura Districts the Christian clergy (Kalutara 11, Anuradhapura eight) were largely targeted, while Christian places of worship were predominantly subjected to anti-Christian violence in the district of Mannar.

However, the data indicates differing patterns in relation to key perpetrators of anti-Christian violence in the three districts. Buddhist monks (six), followed by state officials (six) were the actors responsible for most incidents of violence in Kalutara. Meanwhile, in Anuradhapura, state officials (seven) and other identifiable individuals (five) were predominantly responsible. In Mannar, state officials (five), followed by other identifiable individuals (two) and a Roman Catholic priest (one) were identified as the top-most actors perpetrating anti-Christian violence.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to identify key trends and patterns concerning religiously motivated violence directed at Christians, Muslims and Hindus between November 2021 and October 2022. In total, the study examined 75 incidents of violence directed at Christians during the period under review. The findings of the present study reinforce past trends and patterns that were identified in previous studies conducted by Verité Research and contributed to shedding light on new patterns discernible from the data collated by NCEASL.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of anti-Christian violence and the different types of harm that persisted. This chapter notes that the upward momentum of violence explored in previous studies has continued.

Chapter 2 identifies certain events that may have influenced the decrease in the incidents of violence in certain months during the period under review and classifies them as either disruptions or distractions from the increasing pattern of anti-Christian violence. Disruptions are the occurrence of extraordinary logistical barriers that prevent potential perpetrators from engaging in religiously motivated violence, while distractions are occurrence of events or situations that tend to have an extraordinary impact in diverting attention of potential perpetrators in religiously motivated

violence. The chapter contextualises these disruptions and distractions by drawing connections to the *aragalaya* and the economic crisis. It was also noted that despite the national convergence inclusivity seen within the *aragalaya*, ethno-religious violence persisted during the period under review.

Chapter 3 examines the role of the key perpetrators of anti-Christian violence. The study reveals that state officials, other identifiable individuals and members of the Buddhist clergy were the ones largely involved in perpetrating violence against the Christians. The study identifies that state officials were key perpetrators in more than 50 percent of the incidents. As such, this chapter highlights the entrenched pattern of the state's negative bias towards the Christian community. Negative bias against Christians can be understood to stem from (1) the state's privilege to wield authority in a formal capacity which allows it to act with impunity, and (2) the entrenched view that the majority Sinhala-Buddhist state needs protection from perceived threats from minority groups. The slight increase in the Buddhist clergy's involvement in perpetrating violence was explored through the lens of 'Buddhist monastic exceptionalism'. Meanwhile, the study also explored the increase in the violence perpetrated by other identifiable individuals.

Chapter 4 examines the geographical distribution of violence by mapping out the district-level breakdown of the violence directed at Christians. During the period under review, Kalutara (13 incidents), Anuradhapura (10 incidents) and Mannar (7 incidents) were identified as the three districts with the highest number of incidents of anti-Christian violence. The chapter further notes that unlike in the previous period under review, violence was more widespread and occurred in 17 of the 25 administrative districts.

ANNEXURES:

ANNEXURE 1: VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS: METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study was created by Verité Research in 2013 and has since undergone slight revisions. This report adopts a very similar methodology to the previous report *Patterns and Risks of Religious Violence Against Christians* (October 2020 – October 2021), with the addition of a new gender component. The methodology is explained below.

DEFINITIONS AND PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY

The study adopts a broad definition of violence that includes physical violence (physical assault and property damage), non-physical violence (threats, coercion, intimidation and hate speech) and structural violence (discriminatory action or practices) (Gunatileke, 2018).⁶⁰ Verité's previous study also classified these types of violence into severe forms of violence and non-severe forms of violence.

Similarly, the study broadly focuses on 'ethno-religious' violence as opposed to 'religious' violence by considering the features that are specific to the Sri Lankan context. Distinctions between ethnicity and religion are often blurred in Sri Lanka as these

identity categories tend to overlap. Thus, examining ethno-religious violence, which captures both identity categories, may offer richer insights into the entrenched nature of violence aimed at minority groups.

The study undertakes a primarily quantitative analysis of incidents of violence targeting Christians based on the data compiled by NCEASL. Each incident documented by NCEASL was based on the details provided by primary sources and then verified through NCEASL's networks and/or its regional offices (where applicable). The incident report compiled by NCEASL may not be an exhaustive list that reflects the total number of incidents during the period under review. In line with Verité's previous studies on religious violence, Verité has undertaken data coding and cleaning. Verité has not verified NCEASL's primary data through third party sources.

NCEASL adopted the same measures to document episodes of violence against Muslims and Hindus. Similar to the data on anti-Christian violence, the incidents pertaining to violence against Muslims and Hindus may not reflect the total number of incidents against these groups. The study noted a significantly lesser number of incidents documented on anti-Muslim and anti-Hindu violence in comparison to the higher

degree of anti-Christian violence documented by NCEASL. Thus, owing to limitations in the documented data, the study provides only a brief description of the violence documented against Muslims and Hindus in Annexure 2.

DATA CODING

INCIDENT AND INCIDENT ID

The current study maintains the previous study's reference to each event as an 'incident'. Each individual incident was given a unique ID based on the date mentioned in the incident reports provided by NCEASL.

An incident is a single data point. For a religiously motivated act of violence to qualify as an 'incident', the data should be sufficient to ascertain that the type of harm falls under one of the categories listed below. In some instances, NCEASL's incident reports documented a series of related incidents occurring at different times in the same area. These incidents were classified as separate incidents provided that each incident constituted an identifiable type of harm.

TYPE OF HARM

Definitions for the types of harm are listed below. An incident that did not fit any of the five types of harm was not classified as an 'incident'. A single incident may have more than one type of harm or violence.

1. *Property damage or destruction* – unlawful forced entry (unlawful forced entry that does not result in property damage will be classified under threats, intimidation or coercion), vandalism or any other form of attack on the property of an individual, institution or group.
2. *Physical violence* – violence against person/s of any form including but not limited to forcible restraint, assault, rape, abduction and murder.
3. *Hate speech* – hate speech broadly encompasses any kind of communication that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to the protected characteristics of a person or a group.⁶¹ In the context of this report, hate speech includes any printed material, meeting, rally or media campaign which expresses messages to attack or incites feelings against a religion, religious practices, religious symbolism, places of worship, religious community or followers of a religion based on their religious affiliation.
4. *Threats, intimidation or coercion* – includes any verbal threats, phone calls or direct encounters that do not result in violent acts against persons or property but where there is a threat of force or a forcing of person/s to perform any action against their will. This type of harm includes threatening or coercing Christians to cease worship activities. This type of harm may also encompass incidents involving surveillance or monitoring the primary target/s in a manner that is aimed at intimidating the primary target/s.
5. *Discriminatory action or practices* – any form of discrimination on religious grounds, including but not limited to denying or limiting services, denying or limiting access through differential treatment in an isolated case or a sustained policy/practice of differential treatment. Actions in this category are not limited to state actors but apply to any of the key perpetrator categories listed.

Verité Research's studies have, on occasion, used alternative classification systems to analyse the above forms of harm. The current study uses two classifications to refer to the above types of harm. The first classification

system is based on the intensity of violence. Incidents involving high intensity include physical violence and property damage. Incidents involving low intensity include threats, intimidation, coercion, discriminatory action or practices and other incidents involving non-severe forms of violence. The second classification system is based on the severity of harm or violence. There are four sub-categories to assess the severity of violence: most severe form of violence (physical violence); severe form of violence (property damage); borderline severe forms of violence (threats, coercion or intimidation); least severe forms of violence (discriminatory action or practices).

KEY PERPETRATORS

Perpetrators were classified from the given list of primary actors as identified by NCEASL incident reports. A single incident may have more than one type of perpetrator.

1. **a.** *Political/social movement or politicians* – refers to all groups that identify themselves by a name or political figures who are not holding any government office at the time of being involved in an event.
 - b.** *Political/social movement comprising Buddhist monks or led by a Buddhist monk*
2. *Unidentified individual or group* – when the affiliations of perpetrators are unclear or unstated.
3. *Institution or public servant (state officials)* – only used when the institution or person in question has a legal affiliation to the state, and includes elected individuals holding public office (e.g., state-run school, government administrator, minister).
4. **a.** *Religious institution or clergy (individuals from other faith groups linked to religious institutions)* – refers to a member of a religious order, a place of worship or a religious institution (e.g., religious education institute, welfare institution affiliated to a religion), but excludes clergy formally associated with a social/political movement, which is captured above. This category also excludes members of the Buddhist clergy as they are documented in a separate category.
 - b.** *Buddhist monk* – refers to a member of the Buddhist clergy. Violence perpetrated by members of the Buddhist clergy are coded separately due to two reasons: (i) several incidents of religiously motivated violence against minority faith groups, especially post-war, have been perpetrated by certain members of the Buddhist clergy; (ii) NCEASL's incident reports have documented many episodes involving Buddhist monks. Past reports for NCEASL such as *Silent Suppression: Restrictions on Religious Freedoms of Christians 1994 - 2014* and *Inaction and Impunity: Incidents of Religious Violence Targeting Christians, Muslims and Hindus 2015 - 2019* have thus included a separate analysis of Buddhist monks' involvement in incidents of violence.
5. *Commercial interest group or private sector firm* – refers to a formally registered private commercial entity (e.g., a company registered under the Companies Act of Sri Lanka), business association or any other entity involved in any form of commercial activity or acting as a space for promoting commercial activity.
6. *Other identifiable individual/s or group in the locality* – this includes identifiable individuals or groups including but not limited to residents and workers in the locality, excluding state officials, members of the clergy and political figures.

PERPETRATORS' RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

This category was used if the group or individual either self-identified or had an unambiguously identifiable religious affiliation, otherwise classified as 'unknown'.

PERPETRATORS' ETHNIC AFFILIATION

This category was used if the group or individual either self-identified or had an unambiguously identifiable ethnic affiliation, otherwise classified as 'unknown'.

PRIMARY TARGETS

This section refers to the main target in the recorded incident. The six categories represent the broader classifications of potential targets and more than one may be entered for a given event.

1. *Individual/s (church members/congregants)* – could include an individual or a group of individuals not specified in any of the other categories of primary targets, e.g., a Christian church worker or the church congregation (not inclusive of Christian clergy, who are documented separately). Attacks on an individual's property (not used for worship activities) are also documented under this category.
2. *Local community* – could include, for example, all the Christian households in the village or a sect of Christians who are targeted.
3. *Place of worship* – could be a church or the location/house where prayer meetings are held.
4. *Business* – could be a Christian-owned enterprise.
5. *Wider community* – could be used particularly in events when many or all categories may be targeted en masse or Christians targeted at a national level.

6. *Institutions, clergy, officials or public figures* – could be a pastor, a Christian organisation or any other Christian public figure. In the current report, this category only included Christian religious leaders. As such, all references to Christian religious leaders, pastors and Christian clergy are relevant to this category.

POLICE ACTION IN RELATION TO THE INCIDENT

1. *Actively/tacitly involved* – if the police play any role actively or tacitly in perpetrating the incident. This type of active or tacit involvement can include: direct involvement; supporting perpetrators by endorsing their actions; refusing to engage in official duties when notified after an incident has occurred. This type of police action is also referred to as *actively negative*.
2. *Present and inactive* – if the police are present and allow the religious persecution to continue without intervention. This type of police action is also referred to as *passively negative*.
3. *Present and intervene* – if the police are present and intervene in the defence of the primary target/s. This type of police action is also referred to as *actively positive*.
4. *Absent/unknown* – if there is no mention of police action during the incident or if the action is not discernible in the incident report.
5. *Intervene after the incident* – if the police are called or approached after the incident and if some follow-up action is taken. This type of police action is also referred to as *passively positive*.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS' ACTION IN RELATION TO THE INCIDENT

A government official could be any employee of the state excluding the police, e.g., an official from the divisional secretariat, grama niladhari etc.

1. *Actively/tacitly involved* – if a government official plays any role actively or tacitly in perpetrating the incident. This type of active or tacit involvement can include: direct involvement; supporting perpetrators by endorsing their actions; refusing to engage in official duties when notified after an incident has occurred.
2. *Present and inactive* – if a government official is present and allows the religious persecution to continue without intervening.
3. *Present and intervene* – if a government official is present and intervenes in the defence of the primary target/s.
4. *Absent/unknown* – if there is no mention of a government official's actions at an event or if the action is not discernible in the incident report.
5. *Intervene after the incident* – if a government official is called or approached after the event and some follow-up action is taken.

LEGALITY OF THE PLACE OF WORSHIP

The question of the legality of a place of worship was classified for all events occurring after the Ministry of Buddha Sasana issued a circular in 2008 calling for such places to be registered.

1. *Legality questioned without reference to legislation or circular* – legality of place of worship is questioned without reference to legislation or circular.
2. *Legality questioned with reference to legislation or circular* – legality of place of worship is questioned with reference to legislation or circular.
3. *Clarification sought* – if the legality of the place of worship is questioned and if asked to show proof of authorisation. Generally, the circular is not referenced when proof of authorisation is requested.
4. *Deemed illegal/unauthorised* – a place of worship was deemed illegal if a public official e.g., a policeman, claimed that the pastor could not continue his worship services at a church or prayer meeting without the necessary documentation from the Ministry of Buddha Sasana.

GENDER

This component was added to analyse the gender of the perpetrators as well as the primary targets of the incidents of violence.

1. *Male* – the perpetrator or primary target was identified in the incident as he. In the incidents where the perpetrator was identified as a Buddhist monk, the gender was also denoted as he.
2. *Female* – the perpetrator or primary target was identified in the incident as she.
3. *Other* – the perpetrator or primary target was identified to be transgendered or gender neutral.
4. *Absent/unknown* – if there is no mention of the gender identity of the primary target or perpetrator in the incident.

ANNEXURE 2: INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST MUSLIMS AND HINDUS

This section of the study analyses incidents of violence targeting Muslims and Hindus from November 2021 to October 2022. NCEASL adopted the same methodology and data collection methods to monitor violence against Muslims and Hindus. However, it is still in the process of expanding its networks to

monitor violence against both religious groups more rigorously. Therefore, the data collected for these two groups is significantly less than the data collected for anti-Christian violence and may not be fully representative of the acts of violence carried out against these groups.

2.1 VIOLENCE AGAINST MUSLIMS

A total of 14 incidents of violence against Muslims were documented by NCEASL from November 2021 to October 2022. The following tables provide a brief description of these incidents and Verité Research has provided the underlying narratives for these incidents where applicable. The incidents of violence against Muslims in the

period under review were similar in nature to those that occurred during the previous years. Therefore, they are analysed under the same narratives as in the past reports (Verité Research, 2020; 2021b; 2022a).⁶²

Figure 14 | Underlying narrative: Muslim cultural peculiarities

Cultural peculiarities: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims

In the period under review, documented incidents of violence against Muslims involved discriminatory action faced by Muslims at their workplaces (see details below).

These types of actions can be explored through the underlying narrative/perception related to Muslim 'cultural peculiarities' that exist within certain segments of society. This perception advances the idea that certain Islamic customs, laws and practices are 'at odds with the customs of the Sinhala Buddhists', and discourages cultural assimilation (Siddiqui, 2019).⁶³ The perception that Muslims do not comply with local culture and laws has led to Muslim attire, especially those of Muslim women, coming under increased scrutiny.

Cultural peculiarities: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims

In the past, the distinct dress code of Muslim women has made them a target of anti-Muslim violence and has led them to be discriminated against at educational and medical establishments and denied state service (Mihlar, n.d).⁶⁴ For example, the ban on face veils in the aftermath of the Easter Sunday attacks was widely considered a discriminatory measure imposed by the government (“Sri Lanka cabinet approves”, 2021).⁶⁵

The following incidents documented by NCEASL suggest that the narrative regarding Muslim ‘cultural peculiarities’ continues to persist and acts as a basis to justify anti-Muslim violence.

Incident no.	Date and location	Description
1	2 February 2022 Trincomalee	<p>Teacher assaulted at school:</p> <p>A Muslim teacher of Shanmuga Hindu Ladies College was assaulted. Although the teacher was appointed to this school in 2018, she was denied permission to work at the school on the grounds that she wore an abhaya, a garment worn by Muslim women. After filing a complaint with the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL), she received a letter of reinstatement from the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>However, once she returned to the school, a protest was staged at the school against her, and her neck was squeezed by a person in the crowd. This led to her being hospitalised for two days. This incident was said to have triggered ethno-religious tensions among Tamils and Muslims in the area.</p>
2	12 March 2022 Trincomalee	<p>The assaulted teacher’s mediation notice sent to the wrong address:</p> <p>The case which was scheduled for 16 March at the Court of Appeal was postponed. It was claimed that the Trincomalee Police directed the case to the Trincomalee mediation board commission to reach an agreement. The assaulted teacher opposed this move. It was alleged that the board sent the summons to the wrong address to divert proceedings on the grounds that the teacher had ignored the summons and failed to appear. The sessions were conducted in March in her absence.</p> <p>It was claimed that officials intended to dismiss the complaint on the grounds that the assaulted party did not attend the second session either. It was claimed that the officials of the mediation board were trying to support the principal of Shanmuga Hindu Ladies College.</p> <p>The investigation unit of the Ministry of Education allegedly failed to expedite measures to investigate the complaint. It was further claimed that the authorities and the Ministry of Education were trying to imply that the assaulted teacher was guilty of a crime and declare that a peaceful settlement had been reached. The teacher was temporarily transferred to Zahira School, Trincomalee.</p>

Cultural peculiarities: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
3	4 April 2022 Trincomalee	Assaulted teacher transferred to another school in Trincomalee: The teacher was transferred to St. Joseph's College, Trincomalee. The transfer was granted under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. She assumed duties as a teacher at St. Joseph's College on 4 April 2022. She went to the new school only after submitting a letter of dissatisfaction to the Ministry of Education, in which she explained that the transfer was against her wishes. She was given a permanent transfer while the court's verdict is pending.
	4 August 2022 Trincomalee	Principal released on bail: A case was filed against the principal of Trincomalee Shanmuga Hindu Ladies College, in the Trincomalee Magistrate's Court for dereliction of duty. The principal was released on two personal bails of Rs. 250,000 each by an order issued by the Trincomalee Magistrate's Court on 4 August.

Figure 15 | Underlying narrative: Land acquisition and/or encroachment

Land acquisition and/or encroachment: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims
<p>In the period under review, NCEASL recorded incidents of Muslim land encroachment mainly enabled by state officials, mostly attached to the Archaeology Department. These incidents mainly took place between Muslims and Sinhala Buddhist groups. However, there is also a documented land grabbing incident between the Muslim and Tamil Hindu communities.</p> <p>Land disputes between the Sinhala and Muslim communities tend to be underscored by the narrative that the latter tend to acquire or encroach on lands that have historically been owned and populated by Sinhala Buddhists. However, this perception is not unique to land disputes between these two ethno-religious communities. As seen below, these perceptions are held by other ethno-religious groups as well.</p> <p>As noted above, the Archaeology Department played a key role in land grabbing incidents related to Muslims. Notably, this institution has long served as evidence of 'negative state bias' towards minority religious groups and has often been accused of taking over privately-owned land via the Sacred Spaces Act.</p> <p>The following incidents depict these narratives regarding land grabbing and land encroachment. While certain incidents may not have arisen due to ethno-religious reasons, they could take on an ethno-religious tone when the conflict between the parties intensifies.</p>

Land acquisition and/or encroachment: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
Incident no.	Date and location	Description
4	9 March 2022 Ampara	<p>Attempt made to erect a Buddha statue and build a vihara on private land:</p> <p>Buddhist monks and Sinhala youth attempted to erect a Buddha statue and build a vihara on a privately owned land in Ampara, which caused tension in the area. The chief monk of the Deeghawapi Raja Maha Vihara is reported to have led the initiative while police and soldiers dressed in civilian clothing provided security for the Buddhist monks.</p> <p>The public showed the deed of the land indicating that the site was privately owned. A protest was also held opposing the building of the vihara.</p> <p>The chairperson of the Addalaichenai Pradeshiya Sabha had stated that proper permission must be obtained from the pradeshiya sabha before commencing any construction.</p> <p>A former member of the Eastern Provincial Council had visited the site and had spoken with the Buddhist monks and had asked them not to create confusion. The provincial council member had also brought the issue to the attention of the district secretary and parliamentarians.</p> <p>Tensions had flared up once more when the Buddhist monks visited again on 13 March. A protest was held by the Muslim youth. The area where this land is located has been surveyed and some marker stones have also been planted by officials of the Department of Archaeology.</p>
	10 March 2022 Ampara	<p>The matter was brought to the attention of the Ampara District government agent (GA) and discussions were held. On 10 March, the GA visited the area and said that he had taken steps to stop the statue from being erected.</p> <p>Since 2014 there was a ban on farming in the area where almost 400 acres of land owned by Muslims are located. It was the team that came to erect the Buddha statue that prohibited farming, citing archaeological reasons, claiming that Muslims had destroyed archaeologically significant ruins.</p> <p>Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader held discussions with the director general of the Department of Archaeology regarding this matter in May. He informed the director general that the area is free of archaeological remains, and has been used for farming by Muslim communities for centuries, and that the land on which a Buddha statue was to be erected belongs to Muslims. Thereafter, steps were taken to allow farming and to stop construction of the statue.</p>

Land acquisition and/or encroachment: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
5	8 September 2022	<p>A video on a website accuses Muslims of planning to create a separate nation:</p> <p>A video was posted on the website of the International Broadcasting Corporation for Tamil (IBC Tamil) titled 'Warning: An Islamic State is Rising South of India' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1SQIBuHDhpQ).</p> <p>The video alleged that 'Muslims will occupy the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka and create a separate nation called Kizhakistan, and they have been carrying out planned land occupation and administrative repression for a long time'. The video further claimed that Muslims planned to occupy the Tamil areas in the Eastern Province, as Israel planned and occupied Palestine.</p>

Figure 16 | Underlying narrative: Contestations over religious sites

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
<p>In the period under review, incidents of anti-Muslim violence recorded by NCEASL included contestations over religious sites involving Muslim places of worship.</p> <p>Typically, contestations over religious sites often involve competing claims relating to the historic identity and the ownership of the site. As discussed in a previous study by Verité Research (2020b), these incidents are often viewed by minority ethnic groups as deliberate expressions of 'majority dominance', where the majority group asserts its majority status over contested religious sites.</p> <p>The following incidents recorded by NCEASL demonstrate the existence of this narrative in relation to Muslim places of worship. While some of these incidents have occurred in historically contested sites, other incidents have occurred in privately owned lands.</p>		
Incident no.	Date and location	Description
6	20 January 2022 Ratnapura	<p>Monk threatens to demolish mosque in Kuragala:</p> <p>A Buddhist monk, who is the founder of Nelligala International Buddhist Centre, stated to the press that the Dafthar Jailani Mosque in Kuragala, Balangoda will be forcibly demolished.</p> <p>A stupa is currently being constructed in Kuragala at a distance of 50 meters from the Jailani Mosque at a cost of millions of rupees. A member of the All-Ceylon Sufi Dargah Association and chairperson of the Colombo Dewatagaha Mosque Trustee Board, stated that steps were being taken with the support of the government to remove historic Muslim mosques and burial sites in the area for the expansion of the stupa.</p>

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
7	5 February 2022 Anuradhapura	<p>Madrassa taken over by the Archaeology Department:</p> <p>After the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, small mounds and ancient brick-shaped stones were found in a madrassa that is maintained by the administration of the Asarigama Jumma Masjid, Asarigama, Thambirigaswewa, Anuradhapura. During a siege, the army observed this and claimed it is an archaeological site and that there had been a vihara there.</p> <p>Thereafter, the divisional secretariat, the army and the Department of Archaeology erected a fence around the mounds in February this year, and nobody was permitted to enter the fenced-off area.</p>
8	20 February 2022 Dambulla	<p>Buddhist monk states that a mosque should be removed:</p> <p>Chief monk of the Rangiri Dambulla Vihara announced that the Dambulla Hairiya Mosque, which is located near the main city of Dambulla, should be removed from its current location.</p> <p>A representative of the mosque's governing body had stated that the chief monk had announced that the mosque is adjacent to the Rangiri Dambulla Vihara and that the majority of the Sinhala people want it removed from there, and since work is being carried out on developing the sacred site appropriate steps will now be taken.</p> <p>The representative of the mosque's governing body had further stated that steps were being taken to evict 22 Muslim families who had been living in the area around the mosque for many years. It was also mentioned that if steps were taken to provide land for the mosque and to relocate the Muslim families, the matter will be discussed with the council and top officials as Muslims wish to cooperate in the development of the sacred area and to avoid ethnic clashes.</p>

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
9	22 February 2022 Ratnapura	<p>Entrance arch of Dafthar Jailani Mosque demolished (Kuragala):</p> <p>The entrance minarets of the Dafthar Jailani Mosque in Kuragala, Balangoda were demolished by unidentified individuals on the night of 22 February. The next morning, the mosque manager found out that the minarets had been removed. He believes these minarets were removed in order to construct a Buddhist stupa in the Kuragala sacred area.</p> <p>Buddhists have been trying to remove the mosque's entrance since 2010 and now it has been destroyed. Many of the mosque's buildings and flagpoles have been demolished since 2013. The mosque is located in the Buddhist sacred area of Kuragala, which is also an archaeological site.</p> <p>This incident was not reported to the police. One of the board members of the masjid, commented on the incident and said they are trying to find a solution amicably.</p> <p>The chief monk who is in charge of the Kuragala sacred area, confirmed the incident. He further added that the minarets were removed as part of the Kuragala development work, and that no one was using the path on which the minarets were located. He had further stated that he had informed the mosque administration, the All-Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama and the Wakf board about a year ago that all the buildings in the area except for the mosque and the main burial site should be removed, but they had not responded.</p> <p>A group of 26 Muslim organisations have condemned the incident and called on the government to protect Muslim heritage sites.</p>
	10 March 2022	<p>The minister of justice at the time, chaired a discussion at his residence to discuss this issue. The chief monk, the chairperson and members of the board of trustees of the Kuragala mosque, representatives of the Wakf board, Thareeqa council members and lawyers attended the meeting.</p> <p>The minister stated that he would like to resolve the mosque issue in a smooth manner through dialogue, without pursuing legal action, and that he would like to resolve the matter in coordination with the Department of Archaeology, the Ministry of Buddha Sasana, the Ministry of Religious and Cultural Affairs, the Wakf board and the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs.</p> <p>The chief monk however insisted that apart from Dafthar Jailani's mosque and flagpole, the tin shed structure within the mosque premises should be removed.</p> <p>During the meeting, the minister appointed a four-member committee to look into the matter and present a complete report. The committee comprises officials from the Department of Architecture and Survey.</p>
	16 March 2022	<p>The members of the committee visited Kuragala and observed the situation and discussed the issue with the chief monk. The observations are to be reported to the minister of justice.</p>

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Muslims		
10	15 May 2022	<p>Buddhist vihara and sacred area development project ceremonially opened at Kuragala:</p> <p>On Vesak Day (15 May 2022), the Kuragala Buddhist Vihara and the sacred area development project were completed and ceremonially opened. The chief guest at the event was the army commander.</p> <p>The national Vesak Day celebrations were held at Kuragala this year. After the inauguration of the Kuragala development project on 15 May, the chief monk of the Kuragala Buddhist Vihara stated that although he is ready to renovate the Kuragala Jailani Mosque, neither the administration of the mosque nor any other Muslim party is cooperating with it. If the Muslims cooperated, he said he would be willing to demolish and renovate the tin shed used for prayers.</p> <p>He had further stated that Kuragala belongs to the Buddhists and that people of all religious backgrounds can visit or worship at the location. He had added that they can focus on developing the Jailani Mosque smoothly with the cooperation of the relevant authorities, and that Kuragala was an archaeological site with historical significance and should be preserved. He had also stated that his attempt to reach the mosque's administration and the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs was unsuccessful.</p>

Figure 17 | Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Muslims

Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Muslims		
Incident no.	Date and location	Description
11	19 February 2022	<p>The Presidential Task Force for One Country, One Law, chairperson's claim on Christian organisations and Islamic groups:</p> <p>The Presidential Task Force for One Country, One Law met with university students at the BMICH to obtain their views on establishing one law, and the task force chairperson, while speaking of the importance of creating one law, had stated that "in Sri Lanka there are over 600 Christian organisations operating to create divisions in society and there are over 100 extremist (terrorist) Islamic groups operating." This was telecast on ITN news.</p>
12	27 March 2022	<p>Muslims accused of adding contraceptives to food:</p> <p>An article was published in a blog called Tamilsudarnet, alleging that Muslims are mixing contraceptive pills in biryani and selling it to Tamils and Christians to reduce the population of Tamils and Christians.</p>

Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Muslims		
13	10 May 2022 Negombo	<p>Muslims attacked in Negombo:</p> <p>Several hotels and houses in Negombo were attacked, set on fire and looted during the island-wide violence on 9 May 2022.</p> <p>The next day, at around 6 pm, a group of people—who were not from the same area—attacked the Muslim populated Deen junction in Periyamulla, Negombo, alleging that the looters were Muslims. The group of attackers tried to turn the matter into an ethnic conflict. At the time, some property belonging to Muslims was damaged. At the Deen junction, 16 Muslim-owned shops were attacked, and vans, three-wheelers, motorcycles and bicycles were set ablaze.</p> <p>Four persons injured in the attack were taken to Negombo Hospital. Three were Muslims and one was Sinhala. Christian, Buddhist and Islamic clerics arrived at the scene and sought to restore harmony. Priests and nuns from the local churches came to the street and stopped the rioters and ensured the safety of the people in the area.</p> <p>The incident was reported to the police and complaints have been lodged at the Negombo Police Station. As of 26 June 2022, no suspects had been arrested.</p>
14	6 July 2022 Mannar	<p>Anti-conversion leaflets distributed to devotees:</p> <p>The Thiruketheeswaram Hindu Temple was reconstructed with financial support from the Indian government, and the maha kumbabhishekam was held on 6 July 2022. On this day the Rudra Sena distributed leaflets on anti-conversion—that implicated Christians and Muslims in the activity—to devotees who attended the kumbabhishekam ceremony. The founder of the World Saiva Council is reported to have provided financial support to print the leaflets</p>

2.2 VIOLENCE AGAINST HINDUS

A total of 19 incidents of violence against Hindus were documented by NCEASL between November 2021 and October 2022. This was a significant increase in documented incidents in comparison to the previous study done by Verité Research (2022a).⁶⁶ However, the underlying narratives of anti-Hindu violence remained the same.

Figure 18 | Underlying narrative: Contestations over religious sites

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Hindus		
<p>As explored in the section on anti-Muslim violence, contestations over Hindu religious sites continue to be a prominent narrative.</p> <p>Contestations over religious sites usually involve competing claims relating to the historic identity and the ownership of the site. One such notable contestation that occurred during the period under review was the contestation over Kurunthormalai, which is a religious site that is claimed by both Buddhists and Hindus (see more details below). As described above, these incidents are often viewed by minority ethnic groups as deliberate expressions of ‘majority dominance’, where the majority group asserts its majority status over contested religious sites. The following incidents recorded by NCEASL depict the manifestation of this narrative in incidents of violence against the Hindu community.</p>		
Incident no.	Date and location	Description
1	14 May 2022 Jaffna	<p>Monk threatens mayor over a tank contested by two communities:</p> <p>The Ariyakulam tank is considered to be an ancient Tamil heritage site which was built by an Aryan emperor from Tamil Nadu. There is a Buddhist vihara near the tank. Every year, the army cleans this tank during the Vesak festival and decorates it with lanterns. Last year, the Jaffna Municipal Council took over the maintenance of this tank. The Jaffna Municipal Council mayor announced at a press conference that no religious activities would be permitted in Ariyakulam, and the council passed a resolution regarding this on 2 October 2021.</p> <p>On 14 May 2022, the chief monk of the nearby vihara called the deputy mayor of the Jaffna Municipal Council seeking permission to decorate the tank with lanterns for Vesak. After he was denied permission, the monk raised his voice and threatened that he could dissolve the municipal council with his power.</p> <p>The Ariyakulam tank is a contested site with alternative narratives regarding its origin.</p>

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Hindus		
2	12 June 2022 Mullaitivu	<p>Attempts made to erect a Buddha statue in Kurunthormalai:</p> <p>Attempts were made by Buddhist monks and the army to erect a Buddha statue and to perform a Buddhist ceremony at Mullaitivu-Thannimurippu, Kurunthormalai, which is a native Tamil temple site, despite a court order given by the Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court in 2018 that no new constructions could take place. Due to protests by the locals those efforts were abandoned. A case was filed in the Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court (hearing of this case was fixed for 30 June 2022).</p> <p>Due to the insufficiency of the report provided by the Mullaitivu Police Station regarding this case, the police requested two weeks' time to provide the report. The case was refixed for 14 July 2022.</p> <p>On 14 July 2022, the Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court delivered an order in the Kurunthormalai case:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All newly built viharas, statues and buildings must be removed. 2. Devotees of Adi Shivan Iyanar Temple can continue to worship at the temple. 3. It is the police's responsibility to ensure peace in the area and submit a report to the court.
3	19 July 2022 Mullaitivu	<p>Motion filed seeking reconsideration of the order issued by court regarding Kurunthormalai:</p> <p>A motion was filed by the Mullaitivu Police, Attorney General's (AG's) Department and the Department of Archaeology on 19 July 2022, requesting that the orders passed on 14 July 2022 be reconsidered.</p> <p>The Department of Archaeology stated that the building built was not a vihara, but instead was built to preserve archaeological materials. The Mullaitivu Police and the AG's Department stated that demolishing this building would create tension between the ethnic groups.</p> <p>Thereafter the Mullaitivu magistrate visited the site at around 2 pm on 19 July 2022. It was noticed that the Hindu symbols of worship found in Kurunthormalai earlier had been removed. Following this, on 19 July 2022 the judge revised the previous order, specifying that the building constructed there could continue in the same condition, no further construction work should be carried out and the existing building should not be demolished.</p>
4	8 September 2022 Colombo	<p>An MP's speech on Kurunthormalai in parliament:</p> <p>An MP speaking in parliament stated that the site was a historical location in both the Deepavamsa and Mahavamasa and that there was no evidence of a historical Hindu temple being located at the site. He further went on to state that all should accept that Sri Lanka is a Sinhala Buddhist country.</p>

Contestations over religious sites: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Hindus		
5	21 September 2022 Mullaitivu	<p>Police arrest people protesting the violation of the court order on Kurunthormalai, Karaithuraipattu:</p> <p>At 9 am about 100 people began protesting, asking Buddhist monks and the Archaeology Department to stop violating the court order regarding Kurunthormalai. The protest started at Kumilamunai junction and reached Kurunthormalai at 10 am where the protesters listed their reasons for the protest.</p> <p>The protesters included the village agriculture organisation, political parties, social activists and the general public. In 2018 the magistrate ordered that protection should be given only by the civil defence force and gave permission for the Hindu devotees to engage in worship.</p> <p>However, the Archaeology Department still retains the military (army) for the protection of the shrine, and the armed forces personnel do not allow Hindu devotees to engage in worship.</p>
6	13 October 2022 Mullaitivu	<p>A motion filed against protesters in Kurunthormalai, Karaithuraipattu:</p> <p>A motion was filed in the Mullaitivu Magistrate's Court alleging that the construction at Kurunthormalai has resumed. On the same day, Mullaitivu Police filed a motion against a former Northern Provincial Council member and activist regarding the demonstration held on 21 September 2022. After hearing these two motions on 13 October 2022, the Mullaitivu District magistrate stated that the case will be heard again on 27 October 2022 to issue a court order.</p>

Figure 19 | Underlying narrative: Land acquisition and/or encroachment

Land acquisition and/or encroachment: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Hindus
<p>The incident reports on land acquisition/encroachment prominently featured the term 'Buddhistisation' to describe the alleged attempts made by the state, military and the Archaeology Department to convert Hindu and/or Tamil localities.</p> <p>As explored in a previous study by Vérite Research (2020b), the terms 'Sinhalisation' and/or 'Buddhistisation' are often used as a way to express the Hindu community's 'fear and insecurity over its cultural and religious rights being under threat following the end of the war'. Certain incidents, such as the installation of Buddha statues in areas with a Tamil majority (see more details below) were perceived as such by the local community.</p>

Land acquisition and/or encroachment: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Hindus		
Incident no.	Date and location	Description
7	28 March 2022 Trincomalee	Archaeology Department attempts to list Hindu temple as archaeological site: During the 1980s, a peepal tree (Bodhi tree) was found near the Kilivetti Amman Temple. This tree was cut down by militant groups in 1981. The state intelligence service kept a close eye on the area after receiving information about the tree five to six years ago. Currently, the Department of Archaeology has contacted the Muttur Divisional Secretariat and has informed it about the need to survey the temple to list it as an archaeological site in the gazette. A group of archaeologists, Buddhist monks and army officials visited on 28 March 2022 between 8.30 am and 11.30 am. Those who live nearby protested the visit.
8	23 April 2022 Trincomalee	Hindu devotees restricted from entering place of worship: Nagammal, Lingam and Pillaiyar have been worshipped at the Rajavanthan Malai Pillaiyar Temple since 1612. Since 2018, the military and a Buddhist monk living in the area have occupied the temple and its adjacent 185 acres of farmland, calling it Buddhist land. The army and navy, led by the Buddhist monk, hid the Shiva lingam in early November 2021 and set up a vihara there. On 23 April 2022, a group of 225 people (including 85 students, teachers and mothers of the students) travelled to the foothills to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the Saiva Aranery School. The Buddhist monk, police and army tried to stop the Hindus from entering, hurling racist abuse at them and confiscating mobile phones. This hill is mentioned in the gazette as a Buddhist archaeological site. However, 185 acres of farmland surrounding the temple have been illegally occupied, claiming that they belong to a Buddhist vihara without a gazette or any other proof.
9	13 May 2022 Trincomalee	Chief monk files complaint against Hindu priest at Rajavanthan Malai: The chief monk of the Muttur Kottiyarama Mula Raja Maha Vihara filed a complaint against a Hindu priest (kurukkal) at the office of the Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) in Trincomalee, regarding the incident on 23 April 2022, alleging that the Hindu priest trespassed the lands owned by the vihara without the permission of the chief monk. He further alleged that the Hindu priest attempted to attack the monk.
10	17 May 2022 Trincomalee	ASP asks Hindu priest not to enter Hindu place of worship in Rajavanthan Malai: An investigation into the complaint lodged on 13 May 2022 took place on 17 May 2022 at the ASP's office in Trincomalee. The Hindu priest was asked by the ASP not to enter the vihara land provided by the government. The Hindu priest requested the police to ensure no one damages the Pillaiyar temple and that Hindus should be allowed to visit the temple to worship. The ASP stated that he would visit the site with police officers and the divisional secretary on 26 May 2022 and invite relevant parties for a discussion.

Land acquisition and/or encroachment: An underlying narrative used to justify the targeting of Hindus		
11	26 May 2022 Trincomalee	<p>ASP says only monk can enter place of worship:</p> <p>The chief monk of the Muttur Kottiyarama Mula Raja Maha Vihara and Hindu priests of the Rajavanthan Malai Pillaiyar Temple went to the office of the ASP in Muttur. The ASP informed the Hindu priests that they cannot visit the hill and that only the monk could go there. When the Hindu priests asked that a written restraining order be provided, it was refused. The monk responded that he didn't want to take the matter to court as he wanted to maintain ethnic harmony. The group of Hindu priests said that ethnic harmony could be achieved if the following conditions were met.</p> <p>The conditions were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There should be no interference in matters regarding the Pillaiyar temple which has been built by Hindus at the foothills. 2. Hindu religious symbols found on the hills have already been destroyed. They requested to leave the remaining symbols intact (the monk asked for three months to discuss this with other monks). 3. There should be no inciting of communal tension among Hindus, Christians and Muslims in the area. <p>The monk agreed to the first and third conditions. Thereafter both parties reconciled the matter.</p>
12	7 March 2022 Vavuniya	<p>New Buddha statue erected in Vavuniya:</p> <p>A Buddha statue was installed at the Vavuniya South (Sinhala) Divisional Secretariat premises located in the city limits of Vavuniya. Vavuniya South divisional secretary and Buddhist monks jointly dedicated the Buddha statue on 7 March 2022. The area is inhabited by a large number of Tamils and many of the officers of the divisional secretariat, including the assistant divisional secretary, are Tamil and Muslim.</p> <p>Many members of the public have questioned whether regional activities are complicit in the state's 'Buddhistisation' plans in the North. (This divisional secretariat was set up to provide services for Sinhala people).</p>

Figure 20 | Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Hindus

Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Hindus		
Incident no.	Date and location	Description
13	24 December 2021 Trincomalee	Attempt made to install a Buddha statue in a Hindu place of worship: A Buddha statue was placed by unknown persons on top of the Pillaiyar statue in the Malaiyadi Pillaiyar Temple at 64th Mile Post, Muttur, Trincomalee. In response to this, Hindu clerics and the public decided to stage a protest. The statue was removed by police before the protest began.
14	12 February 2022 Mannar	Catholic statue placed near entrance to Hindu temple: Around 6 pm a group of Catholics placed a statue of Mother Mary near the entrance of the Thiruketheeswaram Temple. The situation was notified to the government agent, divisional secretary and pradeshiya sabha treasurer, but no action was taken. A complaint was filed on 13 February 2022 at the Uylankulam Police Station by the deputy chairperson of the Thiruketheeswaram Temple administration, the deputy chairperson of the board of trustees and two members of the board of trustees. The Saiva Peravai raised the Hindu flag of Nandi (Bull) in front of the statue on 28 February 2022.
15	14 March 2022 Jaffna	Attempts made to install a Buddha statue in a Hindu temple: A couple of monks and army soldiers visited the Chulipuram Paralai Murugan Temple and told the priest of the temple that a Buddha statue would be placed inside the temple on the full moon (Poya) day on 17 March 2022.
	16 March 2022 Jaffna	The villagers and temple administration held a press conference and stated that they have decided not to allow the Buddha statue to be placed in the temple. During the press conference intelligence officers were present. Following this, the villagers and the temple administration gathered to protect the temple.

Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Hindus		
16	19 May 2022 Batticaloa	<p>Activist questioned by state officers:</p> <p>Tamil people of Thennamaravadi village were displaced in 1984 due to ethnic riots. After this, the Sinhala speaking villagers living in Singapura, which is near this village, occupied the fishing resources of Thennamaravadi. In 2010, the Tamil villagers returned to the village. Until now, there has been tension between the Sinhala and the Tamil people.</p> <p>Pongal is prepared every full moon (Poya) day by local Hindus in the Thennamaravadi village as a way of worshipping Lord Murugan. During this time porridge is also distributed in many Tamil areas for the remembrance of Mullivaikkal Day.</p> <p>However, the temple management and the local people only conducted the full moon pooja as was their usual custom, and had no connection to the remembrance of Mullivaikkal Day. Yet, upon learning about the full moon pooja two Criminal Investigation Department officers from Pulmodai Police Station in Trincomalee visited the area on 19 May 2022 and inquired details (such as who organised the pooja, where the money for the pooja was from, whether the full moon pooja had any connection to the Mullivaikkal Day) from a human rights activist who helped organise the pooja.</p>
17	4 July 2022 Mullaitivu	<p>Army stops Hindu devotees of the Vadduvakal Saptha Kannimar Temple:</p> <p>There are 237 Hindu families residing in the Vadduvakal village. After the end of the war in 2009 these families resettled in this area in 2010. A vihara and a Special Task Force (STF) camp were set up near the residences of the locals during this time. An ancient temple known as the Vadduvakal Saptha Kannimar Temple is located in this village. As part of the temple's festival, holy water (theertham) is fetched from the sea.</p> <p>The usual route villagers use to reach the sea is close to the vihara. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an alternate route was used in 2020 - 2021 to reach the beach. At 5 pm on 4 July 2022, when the devotees attempted to go to the sea via the usual route to start the temple festival, they were stopped by army personnel. The people then used the alternate route. At 10 pm, people went to the army checkpoint and asked the soldiers to vacate the checkpoint, and thereafter vandalised the checkpoint (the checkpoint was made of palmyra leaves).</p> <p>The soldiers who left the checkpoint lodged a complaint against six members of the temple administration and a former Northern Provincial Council member and activist at the Mullaitivu Police Station on 5 July 2022. During the investigation on 5 and 6 July, the police and military expressed their willingness to resolve the dispute with the villagers in a peaceful manner.</p> <p>Military officials informed the chief of the temple administration on 12 July 2022 that they would meet with the villagers and temple officials in two or three days.</p>

Other incidents involving violence, discrimination and/or derogatory statements against Hindus		
	26 July 2022 Mullaitivu	<p>A high-ranking officer and four or five army personnel visited the Vadduvakal Saptha Kannimar Temple administration. The army stated they will discontinue the checkpoint but requested ownership and control of the building that was built by the army on the temple's land. They also stated that the temple could perform poojas during the temple festival and that there would not be any disturbance.</p> <p>The building erected by the army on the temple's land was later handed over to the army by the temple administration. When people resettled in 2010, the army put up a building on the temple's land which housed seven to eight soldiers. The building has also been used as an office. It has also served as a small military checkpoint.</p> <p>On 4 July 2022, after the villagers were stopped by army personnel, the villagers damaged the fences around the building. Following this, the soldiers had left the area that night.</p>
18	14 July 2022 Trincomalee	<p>Nandi flags at the Rajavanthan Malai Pillaiyar Temple removed by unidentified persons:</p> <p>A Nandi flag (flag with the emblem of a bull) had been tied on an eight-foot-long stick on a tree where the Pillaiyar statue is located, and it could be seen from a distance. On the evening of 14 July 2022, the devotees observed that both the flag and the stick had been removed. Two more Nandi flags at the bottom had also been removed. Additionally, the sand used for the construction of the temple had been scattered and the stones around it had been removed as well. On the advice of the district secretary and Muttur divisional secretary, the land officer, grama niladhari and Road Development Authority (RDA) officials had surveyed the pieces of land and demarcated the boundaries. Those markers had also been removed.</p> <p>A complaint was lodged in this regard at Muttur Police Station on 16 July.</p>
19	5 October 2022 Trincomalee	<p>Vehicle parked on the temple's foundation stone:</p> <p>5 October is the day of the Navaratri pooja at the Muttur Manika Vinayakar Temple. Traditionally, on this day Goddess Ambigai's procession arrives at the Rajavanthan Malai Pillaiyar Temple and proceeds to the Iraiathuveli river bank for theerthotsavam. In the morning, when the procession reached Rajavanthan Malai Pillaiyar Temple, there were four to six people standing on the road and a vehicle was parked where the foundation stone of the temple had been laid near the Nandi flag and flagpole.</p> <p>The individuals were found to be suppliers who bring sand for the road construction taking place around that area by the Road Development Authority (RDA), and use that road to bring construction materials. They left the place immediately without saying a word to the devotees. The devotees worshipped and went to the river bank after the temple's priest made a complaint to the Muttur Police Station over the phone.</p>

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